

A Talk with Carol and Ken Deal- April 2010

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Carol and Ken are the Real Deal!



For these transplanted Chicagoans, Carolina Mountain Club activities form a large part of their active retirement life style. In November 2005 they received the Distinguished Service Award from CMC for their many contributions, and each treasures a beautiful carved walking stick.

Carol and Ken Deal left busy Chicago area

careers when they moved here full time in 1997. Before retiring, Ken, a psychologist for 35 years, and Carol, a 20-year veteran of teaching 2nd grade, vacationed in the mountains of WNC in the summers, choosing Asheville as their retirement destination in the early 1990s. The beauty of the mountains and the hiking opportunities won over this couple after they had considered many other areas of the country.

Because their three children – a daughter and two sons - live in interesting areas of the US (New York State, Washington, DC, and Phoenix), Carol and Ken have ample opportunity for traveling, and grandsons ages 8, 7, and 5 are a major impetus. Outdoor activities are a part of each family visit. The New York daughter and family live in the Adirondacks where they can leave the house and be on a trail in no time. Phoenix has many hiking trails within the city and nearby. And our nation's capital draws the Deals with its museums and monuments. They enjoyed being in Washington for the January 2009 Presidential Inauguration and will be there this year to enjoy the cherry blossoms.

As for other travel, Carol and Ken took a train trip across Canada, doing a few hikes in the Banff area. They visited their daughter while she was working with the Peace Corps in Tanzania. That visit included a safari and some hiking. An armed guard with a loaded automatic rifle accompanied them on Tanzanian hikes. Apparently, herds of Cape Buffalo in the area near Mt. Meru were the reason. This experience should prepare them for hiking in our national parks under the new gun rule!

Since joining the CMC in 1993, they have been active members. They usually hike with the Wednesday group and helped schedule these hikes for several years. Ken volunteers with the Friday trail maintenance crew, and they both have gone out with the Saturday trail crew which is extending the MST. This couple must love back-breaking work because they also maintain two trails on their own – the

section of the MST from Big Ridge Overlook to Elk Pasture Gap and a section of the AT from Brown Gap to Max Patch Road. They gradually inherited the AT section from long-time maintainer Sherman Stambaugh who eased them into the job by asking them to join him on his maintenance trips.

Carol relates that “as doting grandparents, we were pleased that our two younger grandsons said that the thing they most wanted to do when they came to visit North Carolina was to help us with trail maintenance. We, of course, felt it necessary to find proper-sized tools, etc, even though we knew it would probably only be a 10-minute stint....They did insist they needed hazel hoes, rather than wimpy toys, then worked for about 45 minutes and, with their parents, dug out a substantial bit of trail.”

For several years Carol and Ken have been organizing the Cookie Hike each December. Carol says these hikes were a tradition long before they moved to WNC. Fred Chaffee, a long-time member from Hendersonville used to lead this hike from Cold Mountain Overlook to the Pisgah Inn – where lunch and cookies were spread on someone’s poncho – and back. When the Deals took it over, they moved it to Bent Creek to take advantage of the picnic tables at Lake Powhatan and for the past two years have offered a choice of a shorter or a longer hike, each rendezvousing at the picnic area. Last year’s hike was memorable for two reasons. First, it was on Sherman Stambaugh’s 89th birthday, and he led the shorter of the two hikes. And second, “high winds attacked and caused the cracking and falling of numerous branches.” The two groups quickly fled back to the trail heads after a rousing rendition of “Happy Birthday.”

The Deals have several favorite hikes – Roan Mountain, Hump Mountain, and Kitsuma Peak – but prefer a shorter drive time for most hikes. So, you may find them on the trails at Bent Creek or Montreat or in the Big Ivy area. And during wild blueberry season, you will surely see them up at Ivestor Gap. They say wild blueberries on cereal is a great way to start each day!

The Carolina Mountain Club is not their only area of interest. Since 1997 they have volunteered at Habitat for Humanity home sites and have found it an “interesting, fun, and worthwhile thing to do.”

When asked to mention anything we hadn’t discussed for this interview, they replied, “We have really enjoyed our activities with the Carolina Mountain Club, the hikes, the maintenance, and especially all the great people we’ve met through the club. It has been a huge part of the reason we’ve so much enjoyed our years in Western North Carolina.”

That sentiment is a two-way street. Their enthusiasm, friendliness, and hard work have been a great “deal” for the CMC as well!