The lightning flashes and peels of thunder were getting closer and the rain was pelting down, making it hard to see the road ahead as we pedaled across a stretch of Québec highway. We seemed to be riding right into a nasty thunderstorm.

We had over-nighted in Québec, and this day, the Sunday before Labor Day, we were headed back into Vermont, fighting a ferocious headwind for 35 miles, limiting our forward speed to 8 or 9 mph. The road was nearly free of auto traffic, the terrain was flat and open, and then we began to hear the thunder, as the sky ahead rapidly darkened.

The occasion for all this excitement was a three-night, four-day tour of part of the Lake Champlain Bikeway and a section of the Route Verte No. 2 in Vermont and Québec. Unlike much of our sister state, the Champlain Islands area of Vermont is quite flat, as is the adjacent part of Québec. This was a good area to see how it felt with pannier-laden bikes on a multi-day ride; something new for us.

The four of us decided to treat ourselves by making it a “credit-card” tour. No camping! No freeze-dried dinners! No putting-up with 10 hours of darkness in a tent! Two very nice inns hosted us: one in Alburg Center, VT, for nights one and three, and the other in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. St-Jean is a small city very prettily situated on the north-flowing river that drains Lake Champlain into the St. Lawrence.

Around Concord we’re used to hills
Volunteer Spotlight: Tony Schmidt

Tony Schmidt was an avid hiker, climber, and skier before getting involved in the NH Chapter AMC, but since rejoining in 2002 his involvement has really taken off. He now leads rock & ice climbing trips and ski trips for the AMC and tries to get people out to the less-known (yet more interesting) places in the Whites. He was also instrumental in starting the AMC Gunstock telemark ski clinics and the Bedford cross country ski clinics. Tony was influential in creating the NH Chapter Ski Committee and currently serves as its co-chair with Emilie Phillips. Recently, Tony took some time to offer us some insights into his background, along with some personal observations on New Hampshire skiing.

Q: What/Who were some of the biggest influences when you started back country skiing?
A: When I lived in Wyoming, I did a fair amount of lift-serve skiing. I would notice skiers trudging along ridgelines into the backcountry and that is really what set the seed. It wasn’t until I moved back to NH that a co-worker introduced me to tele and back-country skiing. He asked me to go skiing with him and his buddies one snowy Sunday in January. Always looking for a new adventure, I took him up on it. The plan was to skin up Garfield and ski down the Garfield Trail. I rented a pair of skis from the local tele demo shop and a pair of boots that were a size and a half too small (that’s all the shop had at the time). I took the skis over to my new buddy’s workshop, he fitted them with climbing snake skins, and I was ready. It was a beautiful sunny day with a foot of new snow. While I didn’t make a single tele turn that day and I had blisters on my feet the size of Mt. Washington, it was a great day and I was hooked! I never looked back…. 

Q: How did you get your start skiing with NH Chapter?
A: I actually started my trip-leading for the NH Chapter by leading rock climbing trips for the NH Mountaineering Committee (MC). At that time, ski trips were offered by either the Excursions Committee (the hikers) or by the MC. So, as I got more involved in leading rock climbing trips with the MC, I started leading ski trips in the winter. That evolved into running telemark ski clinics to being the skiing coordinator for the MC to being the current (co)chair for the Ski Committee.

Q: How has the ski commit-
A: As with all new endeavors, the Ski Committee had humble beginnings. We started with primarily a few rock climbers who needed a diversion in the winter. Having recruited a few hike leaders who enjoyed skiing as well, we were off. Today, the majority of our trip leaders are Professional Ski Instructor of America (PSIA) certified telemark and cross country ski instructors. That means, in addition to leading ski trips into the backcountry, our ski leaders are also qualified to provide instruction.

Q: How has back country changed since you started?
A: Primarily, the evolution of the gear. While the first pair of boots I used were plastic, the first pair of boots I owned were leather. The advent of plastic boots provides a world of control not found on the old leather gear. The new bindings and new skis make it easier to navigate the woods as well, both up and down. The other aspect is the evolution of alpine touring gear and split boards (snowboards). No longer do you have to learn a new ski turn to get into the backcountry.

Q: How do you train off-season? How do you get ready pre-season?
A: For me, there is no off-season. I just move from one activity to the next. In the summer, I rock climb and hike. I also enjoy riding bicycles so I try to ride as much as I can in between and on the shoulder season. However, my “off season” passion is climbing.

Q: What is your favorite après-ski spot?
A: The AMC has often been called an eating club with a hiking disorder. Typically, our favorite après ski is wherever our boards dump us out of the trees at the end of the day... although, we have been known to frequent the Moat when on the Conway side or the Station or the Common Man when in Lincoln. But really, the haunts are too numerous to count...

Q: How would you describe the NH ski terrain?
A: NH is unique in that its terrain is diverse enough for all skill levels, from the beginner cross-country skier to expert downhill skier. The rolling hills of Bear Brook State Park offer a great introduction to travel on skis for the beginner and intermediate skier to the White Mountain trails such as the Cockey Brook loop and the Wildcat Valley trail. And for those seeking a true downhill backcountry adventure, the Whites house the glades of Mt Hale and the steep chutes of Mt. Washington’s Tuckerman Ravine. NH has it all.

Q: How can we get more information about Ski Comm events?
A: Contact Ski Committee co-chair Emilie Phillips or me at ski@amc-nh.org or check out our website at http://amc-nh.org/committee/ski/index.php.

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Winter is finally here, but have you made your plans for summer climbs on glaciated peaks? What about training for those trips? That’s where we can help! The New Hampshire Chapter is again offering two workshops in April to help you prepare for such adventures. As in prior years, we are honored to have support and sponsorship from Sterling Rope for these workshops.

The **INTRODUCTION TO GLACIER TRAVEL WORKSHOP** is a one day program designed to familiarize participants with the glaciated mountaineering environment, and the training to become a functioning member of a roped team for glacier travel. The morning starts with instructor introductions followed by group sessions covering the mountain environment, dressing for success and basic knots, together with a discussion about roped travel and the mechanics of clipping-in. Safety is continually stressed, so the fundamental climbing equipment is thoroughly reviewed, from the harness and helmets, to the ropes and knots we use.

Our instructor-led group sessions include hands-on practice for the knot-work, including working with prusic loops (which are provided). After the instructors demonstrate how we divide a rope for various team sizes (3 to 5 team members), we break into small teams for individualized team training. The remainder of the day is spent in the field learning the skills needed to function efficiently as a roped climbing team. These instructor-led teams review and practice roping-up, properly tying prusic loops, crampon and ice axe techniques, self- and team-belay, self- and team-arrest, as well as learning to ascend and descend as a team. For some participants, the rhythm of traveling smoothly as a team is an entirely new experience.

Highly anticipated by most participants is the opportunity to learn and practice self-arrest, and our training site at Gunstock Mountain provides the terrain necessary for practicing these critical skills. We also discuss, demonstrate and practice the rope handling skills you will need to know for safe glacier travel. The Gunstock ski slopes provide the perfect terrain for participants to practice all these skills, and after spending all day on the slopes, we recap the day as a group.

Our **CREVASS RESCUE WORKSHOP** is an intense two day (weekend) program that builds upon the fundamentals covered in the one-day Introduction program. Practical field experience is also acceptable. The workshop begins with instructor introductions and team assignments, along with a quick review of most of the topics covered in the group sessions in the Introduction program. This approach allows our returning participants to “warm up” to the weekend program without being overwhelmed. Each team is assigned two instructors, and with ropes, snow pickets, and rescue pulleys in hand, teams head for the slopes for a full day of training. Part of Saturday is used to re-enforce what the participants “think they know.”

We do this as a practical exercise by having the participants demonstrate properly dividing the rope and clipping-in; then the entire team must check each other to ensure they are safely prepared to start climbing. All of these fundamentals are reviewed as needed. Ascending the slope as a team re-establishes the rhythm needed to move efficiently. Instructors frequently establish a route using wands, something which helps to simulate that real world experience. We introduce a running belay, and the techniques used for safely passing your clip-in knot across the belay anchor. We also review self-arrest to re-enforce those skills. Repetition of all these skills is designed to increase confidence, and establish...
and more hills, so this was a treat! Flat roads, little traffic, views of the lake—sometimes close, sometimes not—agricultural land and smells, then the experience of crossing into a foreign country on our bikes: so much lower-key and yes, friendlier, than when an automobile is involved. Even the US Customs agents on our return were, how to put it . . . Jovial!

We parked our vehicle for a small fee at Knight Point State Park, a day-use area on Grand Isle right off the Sand Bar causeway. We just loaded-up our bikes and headed north, carrying some rain gear, some off-the-bike clothes and personal items. A nice light load, but enough to have a noticeable effect on the handling and speed of the machine.

Our Friday and Sunday stays at the Ransom Bay Inn http://www.bedandbreakfast.com/vermont-alburg-ransombayinnbedbreakfast.html were delightful. The owners, Richard and Loraine, are both culinary school graduates and turned-out excellent dinners and breakfasts. The location is a plus, right on US 2, several miles south of the border, so no detouring needed.

Saturday was a relaxed day of cycling, crossing the border and seeing new sights along Québec’s straight and lightly-trafficked roads. For most of the day the Route Verte followed small roads, until we got to the outskirts of St-Jean, when we were directed onto dedicated cycling paths on the side of the highway.

The part of Québec that we saw seemed to be miles (kilometers?) ahead of the U.S. in bike route signage and construction. Since we were unfamiliar with the area, it was great to be able to rely upon the signs to keep us off roads with heavy trucking and multiple lanes. From the motorist’s point of view, it’s probably preferable to know on which roads the majority of cyclists will be riding.

The Auberge Harris in St-Jean http://www.aubergeharris.com/anglais/interieur.html proved to be another convenient and friendly location. They too had secure indoor storage for the bikes, and they even shuttled us across the river to a restaurant and picked us up after the meal. Although the Auberge doesn’t provide dinner, there were plenty of options in the city, and the breakfast was terrific, fueling us up for the aforementioned headwind that we faced on Sunday.

We had cycled north on the west side of the Richelieu, so for a change we returned on the opposite side. The road surface seemed to be better on the west side, but in most respects the two routes were comparable.

Oh, so what did we do about the thunderstorm? When we realized we were pedaling right into it, we found a likely-looking house and porch and took refuge. The owners soon discovered us and invited us to put ourselves and the bikes in their cozy garage, and offered the use of their toilet facilities. Cyclists seem so much less threatening than four strangers jumping out of an automobile onto your property!

If you go, note that this area of Vermont and Québec is not burdened with places to obtain food or accommodation, so plan ahead.

If we had wanted to stretch our mileage, we could have continued north along the river to Chambly, on the outskirts of Montréal, and even to Sorel on the St. Lawrence. We chose to limit our cycling, especially in view of the weather predictions for the weekend. We were happy to cover over 100 miles in fair weather and foul; it was a good test of our gear and ourselves.
AMC NH Chapter Winter School

Two identical weekends to choose from: Jan 20-22 2012 or Feb 23-26 2012

These two weekend workshops offer the same instruction in winter mountain travel to backcountry skiers and snowshoers of all levels. Between the seven available classes each weekend, most every aspect of winter backcountry travel is covered. The weekend is filled with instruction, field exercises, lectures and discussions . . . plus plenty of great food to fuel you back up!

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Choose from one of the following classes for each weekend; come to one or both.

This workshop is for anyone who wants to learn and have a great time!

Both workshops begin at 7:30pm on Friday and end at 4:00pm Sunday afternoon. Cost is $135 for AMC members and $155 for non-members, and includes lodging, excellent meals, materials and instruction.

For more information and an application, visit www.amc-nh.org and register online at http://AMC_registration.ccctr.org. Or download and print the application and mail it with a business-sized SASE and your phone number to the Registrar (include a check made out to AMC NH Chapter). You must be 18 years or older to attend.

INTRO WINTER WILDERNESS TRAVEL

Instruction: snowshoeing, route finding (map and compass), mountain safety, clothing and equipment, nutrition. For individuals with some 3-season experience but limited winter experience. Anticipate snowshoeing up to 3 miles at a slow pace with some uphill grades.

INTERMEDIATE SNOWSHOEING

Instruction: mountain safety, clothing, equipment, nutrition, trip planning snowshoeing and map and compass. For individuals with some experience who would like more winter activities. Snowshoeing as much as 5 miles at a medium pace with some uphill grades.

WINTER LEADERSHIP TRAINING

This section is for those who have mastered the basics of winter hiking. Exercises in planning, organizing and expediting a trip are featured, together with an emphasis on leadership techniques and group dynamics. Additional instruction includes review of the basics including accident scene management, medical considerations and off-trail navigation. This class is also for people with the potential and desire to become trip leaders for the NH Chapter Excursions Committee. Proficiency on snowshoes is a pre-requisite.

ADVANCED WINTER WILDERNESS TRAVEL

Instruction offered in winter travel on steep terrain and above treeline. Subjects covered include snowshoeing on mountain terrain, use of crampons, dressing for extreme weather conditions, off-trail navigation and risk management. Intended for individuals interested in climbing NE mountains safely. Anticipate hiking 6+ miles at moderate/fast pace, steep terrain and significant exposure to wind.

INTRODUCTION TO WINTER BACKPACKING

For those who have mastered the basic skills of three-season backpacking. Instruction in general winter mountain safety, snowshoeing, equipment, proper campsite selection and setup, cooking, trail finding, map and compass, off-trail navigation, weather, trip planning, nutrition and emergency situations. Students will need winter clothing, a -20° or lower sleeping bag, and foam pad. Tents may be provided if needed. Group will participate in indoor lectures and evening programs, sleeping outside Friday, backpacking to a second location, camping-out Saturday night and preparing some meals outdoors.

DOWN MOUNTAIN BACKCOUNTRY SKIING

Tired of the crowded lift-served areas? Leave them behind and explore the solitude of the backcountry. This course is designed for the down mountain skier who wants to jump the gap from the lift-served area and “side” country to the backcountry. This is not a “learn to telemark” clinic; rather it offers instruction on how to apply your front-country lift served skills to the backcountry on down mountain terrain. Strategies for skiing on backcountry terrain in New England “Powdah” (less than optimum snow conditions) will be reviewed. Be prepared to spend 4 to 6 hours per day outside on skis and to ski with a pack on down mountain trails. This is not just for telemark skiers; backcountry skills and strategies for the AT skier will also be reviewed.

BACKCOUNTRY SKI TOURING 101

Want to expand your horizons beyond the golf courses and touring centers? Come learn how to explore the winter back woods on skis. We will cover how to travel efficiently on ungroomed trails over rolling terrain and how to control speed by turning and stopping on modest hills. And we will address general backcountry safety. Expect to be outdoors playing in the snow on skis for 3-4 hours each day and ski 2-4 miles. Be prepared to ski with a day pack.

INTERMEDIATE BACKCOUNTRY SKI TOURING

Ready to explore the wilderness for the day and go where you want with confidence? Spend the day in the woods to improve your skills including turning, stopping, climbing, trip planning and navigation. We’ll be outdoors for about 5 hours each day skiing and learning on varied terrain with full daypacks.

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