

I climbed a mountain. It wasn't the tallest mountain, not in even among the small mountains of Acadia, but it was the mountain I climbed that day, in my own company. By Thursday of our week in Acadia, I was ready for an outing of my own, a trek with no limitations but my own. I'd hiked Cadillac Mountain with the entire group, climbed to a small island peak with Shelly, shoveled gravel at Jordan pond with Kelly, and had numerous other physical and emotional experiences already that week, but it was time for my own adventure. With Leah and Katie off on a nineteen mile bike ride around the park loop road, and Kelly chauffeuring the injured Shelly back to the hospital, I was free to ascend Champlain mountain on my own terms. I'd carefully selected my trails with the help of the guidebooks, and left notes for Leah in case I did not return as expected. Then, backpack loaded with camera, food, water and the ten essentials, I got into my car and headed up Route 3 to begin to my adventure.



The guidebook said to park at the Tarn parking area, which I did. I pulled out my GPS, which I had carefully loaded with waypoints for my hike, extended my trekking poles, and headed down the road in search of the trailhead. As I walked farther and farther down the road, cars whizzing past me at breakneck speed, I became aware of the fact that there was no trailhead in sight, and my GPS indicated that I was heading in the wrong direction. I turned myself around, heading back towards the parking lot and the Tarn. Finally, having passed my car and those of other adventurers, I came upon the trailhead, which led immediately to stone steps climbing upward. I paused to take a photo to mark the

start of my hike, as well as to use my inhaler in preparation for the steps before me. As I was taking my photos, a pair of women began their ascent. They commented to me that I would soon pass them. I ensured them it was not likely, but decked out in Coolmax and GoreTex, festooned with a full regalia of hiking paraphernalia, I might have looked more imposing than my asthmatic self should rightly appear. I let them pass, and finished with my photos before packing up my camera and beginning the climb.



The Beechcroft Trail cuts into the sheer face of Champlain Mountain along Route 3 as it rises from its valley with Dorr Mountain. With each step, there are dramatic views of the road below, Dorr Mt., and off to the Atlantic Ocean in the distance. On this sparkling and crystal clear day, it seemed I could see forever. I followed the trail up towards the summit, stopping regularly to and photograph the splendor of the scenes me. The trail itself, hewn from the granite the mountain, was strewn with magnificent boulders, painstakingly re-positioned by the maintenance crews so that mere mortals like myself might be allowed to pass. (Okay, so I



really
soak in
before
face of
trail

have a flair for the dramatic.) It was a sublime experience, and too perfect to be recalled without at list a little drama.



Climbing up and up a moderately steep trail took its toll on me, and I was soon passed my numerous other hikers of all ages as I stopped for photos, or simply slowed to maintain my own steady pace. The guidebook mentioned a steep section as the trail neared the summit, and I eventually came upon smooth slabs of granite sufficiently steep that I had to stow my poles and use my arms to assist my climb. Behind me were anxious children trying to run on ahead, with resilient bodies like mine once was. Though my body was no longer quite what it was those many years ago, my spirit soared once more.

I pushed on, enthralled by even these more taxing moments in my adventure. There were large family groups on the trail with me, the children running up ahead while the parents called them back, and the grandmother with whom I chatted on the merits of trekking poles for bad knees. As the group seemed constantly to catch up with me, I finally rested myself on a large sun-warmed slab of pink granite. Munching on peanut M&Ms, I waited for

them to file past and move on. A few more M&Ms, some water, and another puff on my inhaler, and I was back on the trail again.

As I neared the summit, the trail leveled a bit, and the views grew all the more expansive. Given the number of people I saw on the trail, I shouldn't have been surprised by the crowd at the summit, but I was a bit taken aback. At least four trails lead to the summit of Champlain Mountain, including the famous Precipice Trail, which is the only trail in the park labeled as a "non-technical climbing route" rather than a hiking trail. Kelly summited via it the next day, but it



was beyond the scope of my abilities, particularly on a solo hike. Upon reaching the summit, I went in search of the summit marker. It was surrounded by people, so I waited, setting up my camera on the UltraPod so that I could take a photo of myself at the summit. When others saw me with all of my gear, they assumed that I knew what I was doing, and asked me to take photos of them. As I tried to get my shot set up, and waited for a moment clear of bystanders so that I could set the timer and jump into the frame, people kept wandering in to take photos of themselves at the marker. I thought it would never clear up, and had almost

resolved myself to taking a photo with some of these random people in the background, when it cleared out for long enough for me to make my self-portrait. After taking a couple shots, I collected my gear and moved on. The top of Champlain Mountain is pretty flat, with a large area above the treeline, open to views in all directions. I took my camera and first wandered south, towards the trail to the Bowl. There were still people there, but not quite as many. Before me stretched the Atlantic Ocean. To the west I could see to Somes Sound. As I turned eastward, my eyes traveled along Frenchman's Bay, the water so calm it appeared as mirrored glass. The Porcupine Islands rose gently in the distance, and the boats passed through. I saw a lighthouse in the distance on one of the islands in the bay. The sky was clear, the sun was bright, and the moment magic. Setting my camera up on the monopod in my trekking pole, I shot several panoramas, covering most, if not all, of the 360° views around me. Turning north, I could see Bar Harbor, and the many other facilities closer. As my view continued westward, I could see the mass of Dorr Mountain, with Cadillac just behind it. One could see figures moving atop Cadillac Mountain, just as we had done after our climb several days earlier.



I continued to shoot frame after frame, for the day was perfect and the views incredible. With the polarizer on the lens, I knew that I was creating some shots I would love, and when the film came back, I was as impressed as I had expected to be. I found a relatively quiet spot and ate my lunch, and then began a journal entry on my new PDA. I marveled at the wonder of that moment, and the joy of having a perfect snapshot in time. Alas, my PDA died shortly thereafter, and that entry was lost forever.

*gone to the mountain, the mountain comes to me
i see the mountain and that is all i see*

*da-ri kur-niserin-na, pirin zalag, pirin zalag endless mountain of cedar trees, forest of light, forest of light
da-ri kur-niserin-na, dili-du-a, dili-du endless mountain of cedar trees, i walk alone, i walk alone*

*i see the mountain, the mountain comes to me
i see the mountain and that is all i see*

- Dave Carter

From the top of Champlain Mountain that Thursday in August, I could see the world. Surrounded by people, I was in perfect solitude, at one with the sun, the wind, and the water.

As with all moments, however, this one was ephemeral. After all, I was not alone at the summit, but surrounded by people. I saw the mother who had dragged her small children up this climb with whatever gear she bothered to carry in a tiny fanny pack, and with only a small bottle of water for all of them, and when the children complained of thirst, told them that they didn't need more water and that they would have to wait until they climbed back down. I was appalled. If she wanted to be an idiot and climb unprepared without sufficient food and water, I suppose that it was her own damn fault, but



those kids had no say in the matter, I'm sure. It was a hot summer day, with the sun bearing down overhead. The ocean surrounded us in three directions, and mirrored pools of rainwater glittered in the depressions in the granite summit, but there was no source of potable water for those thirsty and hungry kids. And there were the crowds of people trying to get to the summit marker, like myself, tourists passing through on a busy August day. I too had my own agenda, which prevented me from making as much of the experience as I would have

liked. After spending at least half an hour at the summit, I realized that I was going to have to high-tail it down in order to meet Kelly on the other side of the Island for the ranger-led program for which we were registered.

Moving away from the crowds, and unable to release myself from the splendor of the views that afternoon, I started down the Bear Brook Trail, but stopped regularly to shoot more photos. I descended hurriedly, aware that I was running late. I grew more tired as I hurried, and my knees began to trouble me a bit. Several people passed me on the way down, but the most part my trip was a solitary one, crossing barren slabs of rosy granite and descending rock-strewn but well-worn trails. Too late, yet too quickly, I finally reached the trailhead of the Bear Brook Trail, which deposited me squarely onto the Park Loop Road. After replacing the walking tips on my poles, I made my way down the road towards the bridge where it crossed under Route 3. Cars rushed by as vacationers hurried to their next attraction, much like what I myself was doing, albeit at a different pace. As I walked past the Beaver Pond, I encountered some rangers who were spraying for invasive species, led by none other than Adam, the ranger who had accompanied us two days early on the volunteer crew. It was he who explained to me what they were doing, in response to my question, and I walked on feeling a greater connection to the park and the land, all for a couple hours of shoveling gravel two days prior.



I continued down the Park Loop Road, and finally reached the point where Route 6 rushed by overhead. The Park Loop Road continued into the forest towards the Sieur de Monts Spring entrance, from which one could return to Route 3 and my car. I was running quite late, however, and decided to forego the extra walk, instead climbing the crumbling earth around the bridge pilings up towards the road overhead. From there it was a short walk down the road to my car, and I rushed into town on my way to the next activity on my far-too busy schedule. I was scheduled to meet Kelly at the Beech Mountain lot, but as I drove into town, I happened to see her headed in the opposite direction, going back to the campground. We saw each other, and I turned around to find them. Pulled over on a steep side road, I learned that they had only just finished at the hospital, and Kelly was heading back because she thought that it was too late to get to the program. I told her that I was planning to try anyway, so we headed to the west side of the island, watching the time grow later and later as we drove.

We finally got there, and realized that the group had not yet left the trailhead. We got Shelly set up in a chair in the shade of a huge boulder, with food, blankets and a book. This took some time, so I eventually took off to catch the group, in the hope of being able to go back for Kelly should the need arise. She was able to join us before long, and we breathlessly tried to merge into the group to explore the "Forests of Lilliput." Technically, this program allowed one to, "Explore the fascinating world of



mosses, ferns, lichen and fungi,” but the ranger leading the trek seemed to know only about the lichens, and walked right past some of the most beautiful specimens of some of the other species without so much as a glance. His response to questions about the fungi was that he didn’t know much about them, and that he could consult his book,



but that would take a while, so perhaps it wasn’t the best idea. Feeling discouraged, I began to hang back, and we came across on our thing, making our own mystical, lush green and intensity of life away



Kelly and I shot photos of the wonderful diversity of fungi own. Several other photographers in the group did the same meaning from the lesson gone wrong. The trail itself was verdant, alive with the moist, dense from the burning sun. We walked



through boulder fields overgrown with moss and lichens, everything lush and rich from the rain that had cast a pall over the area until only a week or two before our trip. There is something supernatural about these underground worlds, fed by the dampness on the forest floor.



*then all the sky was buzzin and the ground was carpet green
and the wary children of the wood went dancin in between*

- Dave Carter

Time ran out before the trail, so the ranger turned the group around to rush back. Kelly and I decided to return at our own pace, so that we could avoid the maddening noise of a group in the forest. Though I wanted to be leisurely, she was worried about Shelly sitting in the parking lot, and hurried us along. Shelly was fine, however, having long before fallen asleep, so we bundled her and all of our gear into the cars and headed back to the campground.

Some moments appear to us, others we stumble upon in our journeys. Others, we create for ourselves, finding magic in the voids.

