

INFORMATION CONCERNING THE NEW ENGLAND HUNDRED HIGHEST

The primary purpose of the New England Hundred Highest Club is to promote the development of wilderness navigation skills by experienced hikers **so please do not mark routes to the trailless peaks in any manner as doing so destroys the sense of wildness and diminishes the achievement of subsequent parties and may even cause needless confusion.** The one possible exception to this rule involves the marking (with cairns where possible) of critical logging road intersections.

Please do not use the illegally constructed herd path that ascends Peak above the Nubble from the Haystack Road. It is very poorly located and will become severely eroded if it receives any substantial amount of use, causing great damage to the natural qualities of this peak. Hikers who feel compelled to use this route are requested to refrain from applying for official membership in the New England Hundred Highest Club.

Sermon: Some years ago, when plastic surveyor's tape became readily available to the public, there was a tremendous increase in the reprehensible practice of marking one's route to trailless summits with such tape. The result, since some of these tapes fall almost immediately and others last for years, was the proliferation of odds and ends of unsightly tape of various garish colors, confusing the inexperienced and infuriating the experienced with the implied insult from those hikers who think we couldn't find our way without their help, and drawing curses from everyone who had hoped to find a mountain relatively free of signs of human presence. It must be admitted that surveyor's tape is one of the ugliest and most intrusive signs of human presence and we are hopeful that this practice will not make a comeback.

The modern scourge, which has taken the place of this now mostly historical problem, is the sharing of GPS tracks, especially via internet websites, bulletin boards, chatrooms, etc. While not as obviously ugly on the ground as surveyor's tape, this practice is potentially even more damaging to the wilderness experience that many who pursue these peaks are hoping to find. Even with the descriptions given here, there is much variation in the actual experience of each hiker. Until now, for the most part, herd paths have developed only near the very top of each peak as the divergent paths are funneled together. When several groups follow a common GPS track, however, they are stomping out a herd path from the minute they leave their vehicles. In too many cases, this will inevitably damage the environment by creating erosion problems wherever the path runs along sensitive terrain. In addition, easy access to what may look like trail maps to the less experienced hiker, may artificially increase traffic to these areas, which will only accelerate the damage.

Some of those who disrespect the mountains in this manner may be laboring under the delusion that they are performing a service to other hikers, so let us make a few points in order to dispel this notion. The New England Hundred Highest Club was founded for reasons that include the promotion of map-and-compass route-finding skills. Those who mark routes or share GPS routes are depriving other hikers of the opportunity to acquire and practice these skills in a natural environment. The Four Thousand Footer Committee emphatically opposes any action that would encourage the development of unofficial marked trails or other herd paths on those peaks that are presently trailless. We regard trailless peaks as a resource, not as an obstacle to the easy completion of the official list by those who are unwilling to acquire the needed skills for trailless travel. We do not want these peaks to have trails merely to make the New England Hundred Highest easier for the less ambitious, although we will not automatically oppose well-considered and properly developed new official trails. So please do not mark your route in any manner, particularly not with surveyor's tape, and resist the impulse to share your GPS tracks with hundreds of your closest internet friends and website visitors. (In the case of peaks that have traditionally had unofficial paths, such as Big Jay and Nancy, please leave it to local hikers or to the Four Thousand Footer Committee to decide if and how they should be marked.) If you do not have sufficient

INFORMATION CONCERNING THE NEW ENGLAND HUNDRED HIGHEST

navigational skills to climb the trailless peaks with confidence, then please learn the skills, follow skilled leaders, or abandon the goal of climbing the New England Hundred Highest.

We feel very strongly about this matter and do not want the Four Thousand Footer Club to bear indirect responsibility for such damage to the natural qualities of the trailless mountains. We are prepared to recommend that the Committee take the unprecedented step of denying membership to persons known to have been habitual offenders against the principles here described. It has even been suggested that the Committee cease to recognize the Hundred Highest, or declare a moratorium of several years on credit for certain damaged peaks if that is what seems required to stop this nonsense. Please climb the mountains and enjoy them but leave them unmarked by signs of your presence so that others may enjoy them in the same or better condition than that in which you found them.

People who rely on GPS for off-trail navigation often forget that a map and compass do not require batteries to be fully operational, and they are indifferent to the vagaries of satellite reception. People who insist on following tape-lines, assuming that the person who put them up must have been headed toward the same goal – and, moreover, must have known a good way to get there – will sooner or later find themselves in the uncomfortable position of reaching the end of the tape-line without knowing exactly where they are, except that they are clearly not where they had hoped to be. GPS units will be varying degrees of useless, if batteries and satellites do not cooperate. Tape-lines and GPS tracks, like logging roads, offer the opportunity to make fairly rapid progress with the brain disengaged and the body running on auto-pilot, but if they are not going in the correct direction, or the batteries die or satellite signals are lost, then one is only following the easy path to locational bewilderment. Progress in the wrong direction is not true progress, and the most congenial route is often, sadly, not the proper one. Rely on your map and compass, keep track of where you are at all times (and even more so when you are following some sort of "ready-made" route), develop your own route-finding skills, and regard all ready-made routes with healthy skepticism.

It has come to our attention that some timid bushwhackers may have adopted what one successful Hundred Highest climber aptly called the Hansel-and-Gretel method: marking one's ascent route to be sure of getting back out safely. It should hardly need to be pointed out how foolish it is to venture off the trails with so little confidence in one's navigational skills.

INFORMATION SHEET: The committee has put together an 18-page information sheet on routes to the New England Hundred Highest; some users have sent in corrections and additions, so that this sheet is to some extent a regularly updated guide to the peaks. The information is not always as up-to-date as one might wish, however – conditions often change quickly in these regions, many of which receive little use by hikers – but it should still be useful to most people interested in climbing these peaks.

A set of USGS topo maps covering these peaks is also available [printed out from Maptech CDs].

The information sheets are available for the following, two-part price:

- (1) \$5 to cover copying and mailing costs
(plus an additional \$3 if you want a set of black-and-white maps
OR an additional \$10 if you want a set of color maps)
- (2) your trip reports to help improve the sheet.