

## A Remembrance of Bob Proudman

Bob Proudman's voice is my earliest recollection of the friend and mentor who became a giant in my life.

It was early June 1971 and one of my first days on the AMC Trail Crew. Steve Page announced after one of Sally May's incredible "logging camp" dinners that he was headed out to talk to Bobe from an open rise on Rt. 3 between Whitefield and Twin Mountain. Did anyone want to come along?

As a 17-year old first-yearman, I jumped at the chance to hang with the Trailmaster and several other of the older guys. Here, with the full sweep of South Twin, Galehead, Garfield, and Lafayette in the distance, was the perfect spot for a line-of-sight radio conversation. Bob was caretaking at Garfield and preparing for the construction of a wholly new shelter and tent platform site, the materials for which were soon to be flown-in by helicopter.

I recall being struck by the matter-of-fact tone of the VHF radio conversation, the same frequency used by the Hut System with the call sign KEM574. I soon saw the radio was for business, not banter. Bob's baritone voice conveyed he was on top of the complicated logistics about to unfold. So was Steve Page, showing the same grasp on our end of the radio transmission. It was my first realization that Trail Crew was going to be as much about the challenge of taking personal responsibility and "stepping-up", as it would be about the enjoyment of woods work and camaraderie.

Bob assumed critical leadership in a time of enormous change for the Trail Crew when, a year later, he became the AMC's first Club-wide Supervisor of Trails. Based at Pinkham Notch, Bob oversaw the construction of the new Hutton Lodge, and he kept a steady hand on myriad transitional tasks that would insure the success of Crew's physical and cultural shift to Pinkham.

Soon after our arrival in new quarters, I recall a formal, typed memo landed on the Trailmaster's desk from a Pinkham higher-up titled "Bees on the Lost Pond Trail", asking the Trail Crew to resolve the problem. Only Bob's patience and diplomacy, backed by resolve, kept that incident from blowing sky high. Another example early in the Pinkham days: Crew located an aging but serviceable pick-up to replace a worn-out vehicle. Pinkham brass wished to assemble a uniform vehicle fleet, and this orange-painted, surplus D.O.T. truck (we dubbed it The Pumpkin) didn't fit the organizational plan.

Bob intervened, and Trail Crew got the pick-up, but not because Bob argued Crew deserved to go its own way. Rather, he made the persuasive budgetary case that the used vehicle allowed him to stretch the Trail Crew budget, enumerating what he and the Crew could accomplish with the savings.

Bob admonished there would be no gloating around Pinkham over our "win". He took the time to explain the merits of the opposing argument for the vehicle fleet, helping us see beyond our self-interest. I truly remember thinking, now there's a life lesson from a wise man! We appreciated that peculiar orange truck all the more.

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Bob showed backbone and principle in the way he led. If a proposal cut crossways to his beliefs, he was a force to be reckoned with. He usually prevailed by demonstrating his sound reasoning and deep knowledge expressed through a convincing alternative. In a meeting of AMC volunteers, staff peers or direct reports, it wouldn't take long for heads to start nodding. That said, Bob wasn't an autocrat. He truly listened to other opinions and was glad to modify his thinking to incorporate a good idea.

Bob loved innovation and was enthusiastic about new ways to solve big challenges. Not only was he the key driver behind AMC's publication of "Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance", but many of the techniques illustrated, and in some cases introduced, were heavily influenced by Bob's encouragement and support.

Bob was quick to back a project developed with Dr. Ray Leonard, a research scientist with the U.S. Forest Service based in Durham, NH to investigate an approach we called "Bin Composting" to address overflowing pit toilets and inadequate fly-outs at some of the White's busiest shelter sites. Bob went to bat and made sure we had the resources and support to put the experimental effort in motion.

When Gentian shelter in the Mahoosucs needed replacing in 1974, Bob showed immediate enthusiasm for a proposal by Bruce Davis to build a high-quality log structure using traditional techniques and craftsmanship that would last for decades. Carlo Col came next, and the Crew's growing body of knowledge and experience building with logs led to the construction of TC's Shelburne Lodge. And of course, that "home" for the crew wouldn't be complete without Bob's personal generosity in giving the Trail Crew Association long-term easement rights to his adjacent camp.

Perhaps what we loved most about Bob was his ability to balance inspiring leadership with letting loose and having fun. Who can ever forget his wide, toothy grin and giggle? Bob could, and did, howl at the moon with the rest of us. Just as a mountain sunset, the call of a White-throat (which Bob could imitate with a whistle that fooled ornithologists), or the gurgle of a small stream near our woods campsite could prompt a wistful remark from Bob about being in that moment, and how lucky we were to be together for it.

So many interactions over the past 47 years...tough to describe just a few. We miss you, Bob! And, we'll continue to be inspired by your leadership, friendship, and devotion to trails, the Trail Crew, and the TCA.

Steve Rice  
1971-74, Trailmaster