

Completing the New Hampshire four-thousand footers* (2002–2021)

By Chris H. Rycroft

I am a professor in applied mathematics at Harvard University and I am an avid lifelong hiker. I originally grew up in the Lake District in the United Kingdom, which is the most mountainous part of England. The fourth highest mountain in England, Skiddaw, is within walking distance of my childhood home, and as a teenager I would regularly climb it, along with many other peaks in the area.

I moved to the United States in August 2002 to do a Ph.D. in mathematics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). I was pleased that one of the orientation activities for new graduate students was hike in the White Mountains, and I enthusiastically signed up. On August 31, 2002 we hiked North Kins-



Figure 1: Chris Rycroft on a hike up North Kinsman, August 31, 2002.

man (Fig. 1), and I was immediately taken with the amazing New Hampshire scenery, which was very different from what I was used to. Most of the mountains in the Lake District are treeless due to centuries of sheep grazing, and I had never experienced such expansive views of forests before.

Throughout my time at MIT from 2002–2007, I sought out opportunities to go hiking with friends, many of which were done through the MIT Outing Club who have a cabin in Rumney, NH. I climbed Mount Washington several times, did Mount Isolation via the Davis Path, and also went on a trail run to the top of Bondcliff in the pouring rain (Fig. 2(a)). I made many friends who shared my love of hiking, including Silas Alben, Vikas Anant, Emma Brunskill, Maria Hondele, Yuhua Hu,

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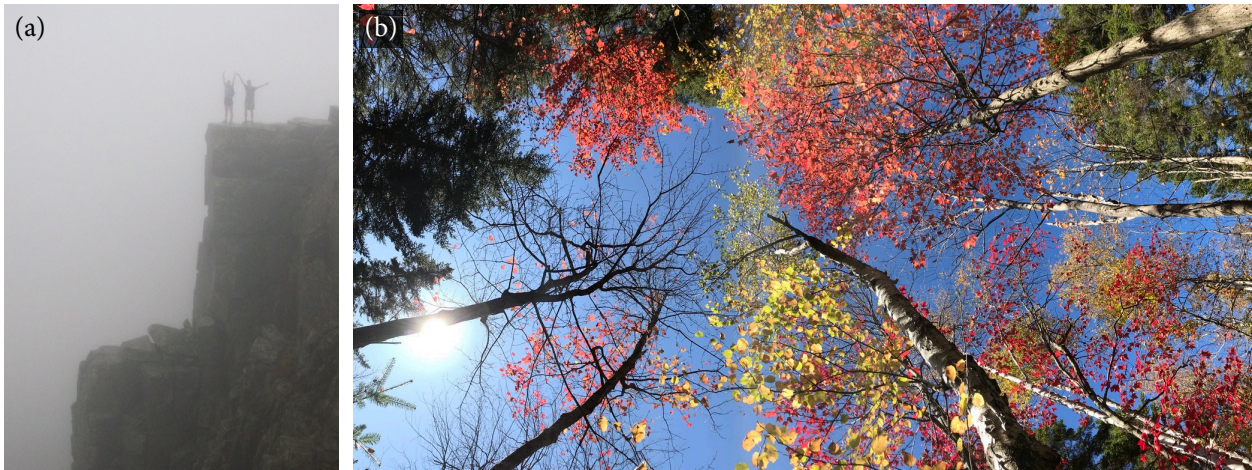


Figure 2: (a) Becky Hopkinson and Chris Rycroft on top of Bondcliff in the rain, September 13, 2003; taken by Rob Jagnow [<https://robjagnow.com/mitoc/bondcliff03>] (b) Fall foliage on the Ethan Pond Trail, October 13, 2017.

Hongshen Ma, and Kaity Ryan. During this time I became aware of the four-thousand footer list, and when planning trips I would often suggest to friends that we visit mountains we hadn't been to before.

I moved to Berkeley, California in 2007, and thus my White Mountain hiking went on hiatus. During this time in Berkeley, I met my wife Marta Gaglia—predictably, this was on a hiking trip! The two of us moved back to Boston in 2014 to start professorships, and this allowed me to continue my project to complete the four-thousand footers.

I enjoy going hiking with friends and family, but I also love hiking there by myself. My job keeps me very busy, and I cherish the times that I can visit the White Mountains and experience the peace and solitude. It is always enjoyable, whether it is a sunny day or pouring with rain. Some of my most memorable experiences include hiking the Black Angel Trail in the Wild River Wilderness and not seeing a single person, hiking Mount Hale at the peak of the fall foliage (Fig. 2(b)), and arriving at Unknown Pond in the mist and silence.

Finishing hike

My finishing hike took place on June 18, 2021 on Cannon Mountain, and I was accompanied by my wife Marta and six people from my research group. The weather was beautiful. Starting from the Lafayette Campground, we hiked up to Lonesome Lake, and then continued on the Lonesome Lake Trail to meet the Kinsman Ridge Trail. The final section of the Kinsman Ridge Trail up to the summit is very rocky and steep, and we took our time on this section. We eventually made it to the summit of Cannon Mountain, and we took some photos from the observation deck (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Group photo on Cannon Mountain, June 18, 2021. From left to right: Danyun He, Michael Emanuel, Jiayin Lu, Simone Dussi, Yue Sun, Jessi van der Hoeven, Marta Gaglia, and Chris Rycroft.

It was an emotional experience reaching the summit, and completing a nineteen-year project. I could see North Kinsman, where the project had begun, and I thought about all of the trips I took and the friends I made. It was particularly nice to share the experience with my wife and with friends from my research group. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the trip was the first time that I had seen many of them in person for over a year.

We retraced our steps and carefully descended via the Kinsman Ridge Trail. We took in a short detour to the Northeast Cannon Ball, before returning back to Lonesome Lake, which looked beautiful in the afternoon sun. I'm looking forward to many more hiking trips in the area in the years to come.