

# Repair and Rehabilitation, Case Study: Restoration of Historic Butler Lodge

## Green Mountain Club (Vermont)

Repair and Rehabilitation National Benefit Description: Just as our communities and transportation systems are vulnerable to major damage, so are our trails and parks. All trails need maintenance, but extreme weather events as well as heavy visitor use will require additional rebuilding. Damage from wildfires and resulting erosion have also affected many miles of trails on public lands.

### *Key Terms:*

- Historic Preservation
- Logging
- National Scenic and Historic Trails
- Wilderness Stewardship

### *Project Partners:*

- Appalachian Trail Conservancy
- National Park Service
- State of Vermont Department of Forest Parks and Recreation
- University of Vermont
- *private landowners*

### *DOT Strategic Goal Alignment:*

- Infrastructure
- Safety

### *Best Practices:*

With the guidance of a preservationist, Corpsmembers on this project gained hands-on experience and training in historic preservation, including skills in historic woodworking. Corpsmembers also learned about modern construction techniques, logging, and the complexities of forest management in a remote wilderness area.

### *Background*

#### **Vermont's Long Trail System**

Known as Vermont's "footpath in the wilderness," the Long Trail System contains over 400 miles of trails and 70 backcountry campsites. The Long Trail follows the main ridge of the Green Mountains from the Massachusetts-Vermont state line to the Canadian border. Visitors to the Long Trail system enjoy rugged peaks, pristine ponds, alpine ecosystems, and hardwood forests.

Built by the Green Mountain Club (GMC) between 1910 and 1930, the Long Trail system is the oldest long-distance hiking trail in the United States. It was the inspiration for the Appalachian Trail, which coincides with the Long Trail for 100 miles in the southern third of the state.

Originally built in 1933, the Butler Lodge is a rustic cabin along the Long Trail. Green Mountain Club (GMC) volunteers rebuilt the lodge in 2000 and it now serves as a popular year-round destination shelter for thru-hikers. From May through October, GMC caretakers look after the lodge and the two miles of trail that lead to it.

Butler Lodge is a historically significant log structure and it continues to receive overnight use by casual outdoor recreationists and backpackers. GMC stewards the site through interpretative education lessons and backcountry waste management. Mt. Mansfield is the heaviest used section of Vermont's Long Trail and the cabin and trail are used by Long Trail thru-hikers, day hikers, and weekend campers. In 2016, the ridgeline count of hikers was 53,268 people in four months; during that period, Butler Lodge had 368 night-time users.

### *Project Work*

Butler Lodge restoration efforts included extensive structural restoration, waste management, historic preservation of the facilities, wilderness stewardship education, as well as maintenance of the trail that connects users to the lodge.

The GMC crew – which included four Corpsmembers and one Crew Leader – completed trail work by replacing a ladder on the Long Trail near the shelter, adding planks, and repairing drains. Structural restoration of the lodge started with the removal of the roof, which was replaced with in-kind contributions to GMC. Additionally, the two lowest sections of logs supporting the lodge were removed from the building and replaced according to National Park Service (NPS) standards for historic preservation. The porch was also replaced with a newer version that includes a steel grate to allow snow to pass through the floor as opposed to piling up against the building and contributing to future rot issues. Additionally, the door threshold and interior flooring were replaced.

Through hands-on experience and training, the crew gained skills in historic woodworking techniques, modern construction skills, and complex logistics management. Due to the remote nature and sensitive alpine mountain environment, all materials for this project – including waste and debris - were packaged for transport and removed from the site via helicopter airlift.

### **Partnerships**

The Butler Lodge project was a partnership between the Green Mountain Club, the State of Vermont Department of Forest Parks and Recreation, and the University of Vermont, who owns the land used for the airlift and a portion of the trail. The GMC provided on-the-ground work supported financially through the club's resources and state contributions. Additional funding sources included GMC membership fees, private donations, and in-kind labor donations.

GMC continues to maintain and protect of the Long Trail and works in partnership with the Green Mountain National Forest, state of Vermont, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and private land owners to offer a world-class hiking trail.

### *Challenges and Barriers*

The biggest challenges of the project were the remote location, the logistical complexity of the helicopter airlift, and the need to meet NPS historic preservation standards. These were overcome by contingency planning and thorough training of GMC Corpsmembers and their

Crew Leader. The Corpsmembers who served on the project were guided by a GMC mentor who has a long and esteemed career in historic preservation.

*For More Information*

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