By Sally Naser

Photo by NGPC student Haley Schultz
This past August, 16 Clarke County, Virginia high school students went on an Appalachian Trail photo assignment with National Geographic Photo Camp (NGPC). Traveling to 10 different locations per year, NGPC provides a series of community-based photography workshops to teens across the United States and abroad. In line with National Geographic’s overall mission to “inspire people to care about the planet,” the ultimate goal of NGPC is to use photography to provide young people with a dynamic learning opportunity: to explore their community and the world around them through the camera’s lens. Working in partnership with Vision Workshops, Inc. of Annapolis, Maryland, both organizations share the common goal of challenging young people to share their vision through the publication and exhibition of their photographs.

In the spirit of the cooperative partnerships that make the A.T. management system work, this particular Photo Camp would not have been possible without excellent coordination between National Geographic Photo Camp’s program director Lindsay G. McCullough, Vision Workshops’ executive director Kirsten Elstner, Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s (ATC) information services manager Laurie Potteiger, and the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC), who provided an excellent staging area for the camp at the Bears Den Trail Center, a large, cozy A.T. hostel, owned by ATC and maintained by PATC. “It was a privilege to see everyone so generously and eagerly sharing their vision, talents, and passion with a group of amazing kids. I don’t know who was more inspiring the [staff] in their different roles, or the kids, with their incredible capacity to learn and absorb, and see seemingly ordinary things in extraordinary ways,” said ATC’s Potteiger, “both the words and pictures created by the kids conveyed how deeply they had been touched and transformed by their experience. Speaking for myself, I think some of us ‘grown-ups’ were too.”

Photographic expertise was provided by Amy Toensing, along with her fiancé Matt Moyer. Both are National Geographic contributing photographers. Toensing stepped forward to lead this particular Photo Camp due in large part to her close personal connection with the A.T. She grew up in the Trail town of Hanover, New Hampshire, worked at the Pinkham Notch Visitors Center in the White Mountains during high school, and set off on an A.T. thru-hike in the spring of 1988, completing 1,850 miles with only the state of Maine left to finish the hike. “I really think [the students] were able to come out here and absorb all the sounds and smells…the way the Trail is, and really tune into people,” said Toensing.

Additional NGPC staff included Evan Wilder, digital imaging and film reviewer for National Geographic magazine. Vol-

“Generally, I do not notice the connections between nature and me, [but] when I have a camera in my hand, the connection is as clear as day.”

— NGPC student

by NGPC staff Ross Goldberg

by NGPC staff Evan Wilder

by NGPC staff Evan Wilder

by NGPC staff Greg Strosnider

by NGPC staff Ross Goldberg

by NGPC staff Evan Wilder

by NGPC staff Evan Wilder
untee teaching assistants included National Geographic's Edward Samuel and Ross Goldberg, along with Will Hirzy, a photojournalism student at the University of Missouri, Alexandra Garcia, a photojournalist for the Washington Post, and ATC boundary manager Sally Naser.

In working with the 2008–2009 NGPC themes of the environment, conservation, and youth perspectives on the natural world, the A.T., its corridor, and the surrounding northern Virginia area made an excellent subject for the students to explore through the camera's lens. More than 10,000 digital images were captured during the four-day camp that ran from August 11–14 documenting not only the natural beauty of the Trail, but also the people that enjoy hiking it, and those who work to conserve this vital resource. “I was extremely impressed with these students’ creative and enthusiastic approach to all of our activities and shooting assignments. This landscape can be very difficult to photograph even for the experienced photographer, but these students were always positive and daring, and that translated through in their images,” said NGPC’s McCullough. Students were instructed and encouraged by the NGPC staff “to get on their knees, get dirty, and climb rocks and trees,” as they explored the Trail with their cameras.

The hardest part for all involved was the final day of the camp when staff and students presented a digital slideshow of the best work produced, including behind-the-scenes images. “Looking at the Trail through the viewfinder [was] a window into a new perspective,” said participating student LeAnn Albert. The A.T. Photo Camp was an amazing experience for students, NGPC staff, PATC volunteers, ATC, and everyone from the A.T. community who passed by that week at Bears Den Trail Center. National Geographic Photo Camp, headquartered in Washington, D.C., will be featured in an exhibition in November as part of FotoWeek D.C. Images from Photo Camp 2008 will showcase youths’ perspectives on issues of conservation, the environment, and connecting to the landscape. As a domestic and international program, National Geographic Photo Camp’s exhibit will include work from Bronx, New York; Santa Monica, California; the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland; Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota; the Appalachian Trail in Virginia; Taos, New Mexico; Vinalhaven and North Haven Islands, Maine; and Costa Rica.

For more information and to view images taken by these and other students and instructors visit:

www.nationalgeographic.com/photocamp

www.visionworkshops.org

www.amytweeling.com

“it really opens your eyes to what’s out there and what is going on around us; [and] it lets us show the world who we really are through the stories that our pictures tell.”

—NGPC student

by NGPC student Avery Harden

by NGPC student Sarah Keplinger

by NGPC student Andnya Tellez

by NGPC student LeAnn Albert
very once in a blue moon a Trail project is warranted where its very scope and magnitude exceeds the capacity of our venerable volunteers and agency partners. In these cases, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) often administers a contract to accomplish the needed work. Such is the case with the crossing of Pennsylvania Route 944 in the Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club’s section in south central Pennsylvania.

Public safety remains paramount in the minds of most Trail managers, and hazardous road crossings are a consistent concern for the entire length of the Trail. The National Park Service Appalachian Trail Park Office engaged the services of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in 2003. Coupled with the knowledge of the Trail maintaining clubs, a list of highway crossings that were perceived to be dangerous was prepared; FHWA engineers conducted on-site reviews of the top 22. They looked at contributing safety factors including, sight distance, traffic volume, accident history, posted speed limit, and other relevant features at each site.

After receiving FHWA’s report, ATC’s mid-Atlantic regional director, Karen Lutz testified before the PennDOT Secretary and the Pennsylvania State Transportation Committee to garner support for the three hazardous crossings identified in that state. With the help of the Pennsylvania A.T. Management Committee, those three were prioritized and ATC began to seek funding to secure a safe crossing of Route 944.

ATC has long enjoyed a strong partnership both with Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and with the Department of Transportation; both agencies have been supportive of ATC’s efforts through their grant and other funding programs. Many of these programs provide significant funds for worthy projects but require matching funds from other sources as well as significant administrative staff time from the project sponsor, in this case ATC.

ATC applied for, and was granted a “Community Conservation Partnership Program Grant” to fund the design and engineering portion of the project. Staff drafted a request for proposals for a pedestrian underpass that adheres to the “lies lightly on the land” philosophy of Trail design and construction. The objective was to design an underpass that ensures safe passage for Trail users across the highway that sees an average of 14,000 vehicles each day yet seamlessly blends into the natural surrounding environs. After a competitive bidding process, the Harrisburg firm Herbert Rowland and Grabic (HRG) was selected and proved to be a perfect fit for this project. ATC Stewardship Council member and retired concrete industry executive Mac Taylor provided technical review assistance and support to ATC’s mid-Atlantic regional staff.

Meanwhile, regional staff applied for, and again were successful in securing, “transportation enhancement” funds from PennDOT to pay for the considerable construction costs. The FHWA provides a special source of “enhancement” funds to support projects other than traditional highway construction, including safety improvements for trail crossings. Again, following a competitive bidding process and with the support of the Cumberland County Planning Office, the highly reputable local firm Hempt Bros was selected to construct the A.T. pedestrian underpass, the first of its kind on the Trail.

The Route 944 project presented some interesting challenges. Due to the fact that it is a major commuter route for the work force headed to the state capital, engineers designed the project such that the highway would only have to be closed for one weekend, to avoid any unnecessary inconvenience to the motoring public. The partners chose Labor Day weekend, and Hempt Bros rose to the challenge by working around the clock. Site preparation, including clearing, grubbing, and excavating the underpass approaches on both sides of the roadway began a few weeks prior to the road closure.

And then the fur began to fly…
Bags covering the pre-placed “road closed” and “detour” signs were promptly removed at 7:00 p.m. when the construction crew saw cut the pavement and began excavating the highway with a track hoe. By 3:00 a.m. heavy equipment operators broke through to the opposite side and the concrete crew began setting forms for two parallel rails that would serve for sliding-eight, custom made, 20 ton, pre-cast concrete culverts into place. Rapid setting concrete was poured into the forms by 9:00 a.m. and special heating blankets were used to hasten the setting. The box culverts had been staged nearby on flatbed trailers. The interior of the culvert boxes was designed using form liners resulting in the appearance of dry laid stacked stone which will later be pigmented to resemble stone found at the site. Meanwhile, a crane was erected in the narrow roadway and the skilled operator was tasked with nimbly lifting each box off the flatbed over a fiber optic line on one side and an energized power line on the other. Disruption of the integrity of either line would have proven to be both expensive and very inconvenient. Beginning around 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, the culvert boxes were individually trucked to the site, where the rigging crew readied them for installation. Each box was gingerly lowered onto the rails then slid into place.
After all eight boxes were positioned, crews winched them together for a perfect seal, placed a water proof membrane around the entire structure, and began to carefully back-fill the hole late into Saturday night. The pavement crew began their work by mid-day Sunday. By day’s end, the roadway was re-opened.

At this writing, work remains to be done including pouring the wing walls, re-grading the approaches, and landscaping the site with native plants. Plans are being made for a ribbon cutting and more information and photos of the well orchestrated and choreographed project will be posted on ATC’s Web site. ATC anticipates that with increasingly busy highways, we may be destined for more of these types of projects to ensure the safety of Trail users.

For more information and to view a photographic timeline of the project, visit:

www.appalachiantrail.org/944project

www.hrg-inc.com/project/appalachian_trail.asp
Known to the Cherokee as Klondaghi, “Lord of the Forest,” the cougar, like the Appalachian Trail itself, is an iconic symbol of eastern wilderness. Once ranging coast to coast and across a vast 100 degrees of latitude, from northern treelines to the tip of South America, this secretive, long-tailed cat was perhaps the most widespread terrestrial mammal of the New World. Indeed, town and village names along the A.T. such as Panthersville, in Georgia, attest to the historic presence of this species here in the eastern United States.

where, after a 100 year absence, over the past decade confirmation of free-ranging wild cougars has almost become routine. These include dozens of cougars captured on automatic cameras, hit by cars, shot by hunters or landowners, or even killed in collisions with locomotives. Based on radio-telemetry and/or blood and genetic analysis, these prairie panthers and midwest mountain lions are largely dispersing from populations in the Rocky Mountains. Given the distance and gauntlet of obstacles that lie between the Rockies and the eastern U.S., it will be a long time before those hiking the A.T. can hope to see naturally recovered, self-sustaining breeding populations of this lithe and agile carnivore.

This leaves sanctioned restoration or reintroduction as the most viable cougar recovery strategy. With past successes in predator recovery, from peregrine falcons to red and gray wolves, swift foxes, and black-footed ferrets, there are numerous precedents for proactive cougar restoration. Such an effort would return a native predator to many of its historic haunts, reinvigorating an ecosystem that truly is ecologically bereft without it. While ample natural habitat for the great cat still exists, such an effort will require potentially more challenging social and political habitat to become reality. Along with advocacy groups like the Eastern Cougar Foundation, those who hike and enjoy the A.T., sensing the void of a cougar-less experience in the eastern U.S., are the very ones who—through social and political activism—can help bring this legendary cat back.

Dr. Jay Tischendorf is the director of the American Ecological Research Institute in Great Falls, Montana and president of the Eastern Cougar Foundation.

For more information visit:
www.easterncougar.org
As my boyfriend, Jake and I headed north on Interstate 95 with a U-Haul full of our modest, recently-combined belongings, despite only three months of dating, we were young and in love and determined that we could not endure the distance imposed by Jake’s job transfer. We would not allow it to stop the immovable force of our young love. Ignoring the protests of our family and friends, we packed up and headed north to New Hampshire, full of a sense of adventure and naïve excitement for what might lie ahead.

We spent our weekends getting to know each other and northern New Hampshire. We regularly packed up our dogs and gear and headed to “the Whites” to explore. I found that hiking in the White Mountains National Forest was a great antidote to the occasional pangs of homesickness and uncertainty about our impulsive decision. With miles of above-tree line hiking, the White Mountains offer some of the most spectacular vistas and hiking available on the Appalachian Trail. It was impossible to feel homesick when surrounded by those amazing and awe-inspiring vistas.

Spanning just under 800,000 acres, the White Mountain National Forest includes more than 1,200 miles of maintained hiking trails, nine miles of Alpine zone (the largest alpine area in the eastern U.S.), and 160 miles of the Appalachian Trail, winding among the peaks of the Presidential Range, the center of which is dominated by Mt. Washington, the highest mountain in the northeastern U.S.
Located on the north end of the Presidential Range in the heart of the White Mountains, Gorham, New Hampshire is a quiet, idyllic town with just under 3,000 residents and very little development. This hiker-friendly town offers many amenities for weary A.T. hikers just a couple of miles off the Trail; including a post office, town library, several B and Bs, hostels, and local restaurants and grocery stores.

Incorporated in 1836 (the name Gorham was the suggestion of a relative of the Gorham family who founded Gorham, Maine), the town had only 150 inhabitants and for years contained little more than rocky farms, a few stores and stables, and some small logging operations. The St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad (later the Grand Trunk Railway) arrived in 1851 and brought big changes to Gorham. Located halfway between Montreal, Canada and the seacoast, Gorham developed into a railroad town with a major locomotive yard and repair facility. The railroads also benefited local industries hauling freight for mills run by water power from the Androscoggin River. The railroads had a lasting impact on Gorham, bringing a booming tourism trade to this small town.

In 1861, travelers made the first trek up the Mt. Washington Auto Road, winding eight miles to the summit of the 6,288-foot mountain. Advertised as “the first man-made attraction in the United States” and dubbed “the Road to the Sky,” the road was the engineering feat of its day. In 1869, the Cog Railroad opened offering another scenic trip to the summit. Mt. Washington remains a popular tourist attraction today with the Mt. Washington Observatory weather station and museum housed on its summit.

Hikers will find plenty of off-Trail attractions in Gorham like the Moose and Wildlife Tour, which takes you along the Androscoggin River where you can spot moose and other native wildlife. Railroad buffs can visit the Gorham Railroad Station & Historical Society town museum in the old train station on Railroad Street. Visible from Dolly Copp Camp Ground and accessible from the Imp Trail, the Imp Face is a natural rock outcropping resembling its namesake.

Nearby Shelburne offers several natural tourist attractions, such as the Stone Fish built by George Emory around 1900 for an estate owned by local land baron William Kronigberg Aston, the Shelburne Birches, a beautiful reflective memorial park to honor local war veterans, and remnants of the Old Man of the Mountain, another rock outcropping said to have resembled the face of an old man.

Nine miles south of Gorham, hikers will find accommodations and information at the Appalachian Mountain Club’s Pinkham Notch Visitor Center and Joe Dodge Lodge. About 11 miles from Gorham on the east side of Mt. Washington, Tuckerman Ravine is famous for its spectacular scenery, deep snow, and challenging terrain. Thousands of motivated visitors make the six-mile roundtrip to the floor of Tuckerman Ravine yearly.

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Ten years, several dogs, and a couple of children later, the White Mountains represent some of the fondest memories of my life. I didn’t just fall in love with (my now husband) Jake in the White Mountains, I fell in love with Northern New Hampshire. It’s impossible to visit this beautiful region and not fall head over heels.