

2018 Class



from left, Libby Kephart Hargrave, representing George Masa; Bill Kemsley; Ron Rosen, representing Elizabeth Levers; Bob Peoples (photo courtesy Dan Innamorato)

William Kemsley, Jr. says that he's been a hiker since he was old enough to walk. Bill was born on the eve of the Great Depression and grew up in Michigan. Bill says he loves spending as much time as possible outdoors among the trees and open sky. In 1973, Bill took a big risk. He founded Backpacker Magazine and became its first editor. Bill and the other founding editors were worried that America in the early 1970s did not contain a backpacking community large enough to support a magazine. Despite some



rough patches and changes in ownership, Backpacker is widely acknowledged today as the Bible of the backpacker community, with circulation more than 350,000.

In 1976, Bill co-founded the American Hiking Society with Jim Kern and Paul Pritchard. As the national voice for America's hikers, American Hiking Society promotes and protects foot trails, their surrounding natural areas, and the hiking experience. AHS advocates nationally for hikers and hiking trails, and works in partnership to build, maintain and protect hiking trails and their natural corridors so that current and future generations can experience the many joys and benefits of hiking and are inspired to protect this legacy. Some of AHS's programs are National Trails Day, the first Saturday in June; Hike The Hill, where hiking enthusiasts lobby members of Congress to protect and preserve trails; and the National Trails Fund.

In 1980, Bill, AHS and others promoted Hike A Nation, a national effort to promote hiking and hiking trails through a backpacking trip from California to the east coast.

At Backpacker, he published numerous articles and editorials on the Appalachian Trail. He lobbied, held meetings and testified at various hearings in Washington to pass HR 8803 in 1978, which provided \$90 million for land acquisitions to permanently preserve the Appalachian Trail.

Over the years, Bill has been a great friend of the Appalachian Trail and the other wonderful trails in our great country. You can read Bill's current work on his blog at www.williamkemsley.com

Elizabeth Levers was widely known as the "mother of the AT" in New York State. She took her first childhood hike near Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey. Her grandfather made her a tent from an old sail, so she could sleep out under the stars. This introduction led to a lifelong dedication to the outdoors. As a college student at Columbia in the 1930s, LEEvers joined the Green Mountain Club. Very quickly she learned that 'trails aren't just there, you have to put them there'. She started out by throwing aside the branches other people had cut. Over time she moved up to clearing and blazing.

Elizabeth's leadership included: president of the NY-NJ Trail Conference, Director of ATC, member of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail Advisory Committee, and Chair/Corridor Manager of the Orange-Rockland Counties' AT Management Committee. She was known for her key activity in the early land acquisition planning for the AT in New York, as well as setting the standard for AT management in the Mid-Atlantic region. She was a no-nonsense woman who literally devoted her energies 7 days a week to the AT after her retirement. When asked about her scouting of the 108-mile section in New York after land acquisition funding began, and of her personal negotiations with 150 property owners, she merely said, "It was great fun! We had a very good time."



Elizabeth Levers (front, center) and other A.T. leaders at the 1979 Biennial

When not working on trails, Ms. Levers was bursar at Columbia University, then student financial aid officer at Long Island University and New York University.

On her death in 1999, regional forester Fred Gerty remarked, "Elizabeth's memorial is the AT in New York. A tireless lady, she wandered through the woods for mile after mile working to move the AT off the roads. The permanent blazes stand as tall, strong and bright as Elizabeth's dedication." In 1979, she was recognized by President Jimmy Carter for her outstanding efforts as a trail volunteer. She was awarded honorary life member of both ATC and New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.



George Masa led a quite mysterious life. He was born Masahara Izuka in Osaka, Japan, in 1881. We know that he was educated, but exactly where is shrouded in mystery. We don't even know when he came to this country. We pick up the trail of his life in 1915, when he came to Asheville, North Carolina. By then, he had changed his name to George Masa.

Asheville was the summer vacation home of many prominent Americans. George did various odd jobs, then went to work for the prestigious Grove Park Inn, owned by entrepreneur Fred Seely. After some initial suspicion that George might be a Japanese spy, Seely took Masa under his wing. During this time, Masa taught himself photography. Although good smaller cameras were being developed, Masa preferred the large format models that were difficult to carry around. George developed a reputation as perhaps the best photographer in that part of the state, especially for outdoor photography. He became friendly with the Vanderbilts and other wealthy families.

Two more important things happened for George. He developed a passion for the outdoors, especially the remote Smoky Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee. He ran into George Kephart, who was similarly passionate about the Smokies. By the late 1920s, the Smokies were in danger of being destroyed by commercial and residential development. Congress authorized the creation of a national park in 1926, but no funds were authorized to purchase land or maintain it. Masa took a series of breathtaking photographs of the Smokies. When John D. Rockefeller, Jr., son of the oil baron, visited the Smokies, he was given several prints of Masa's photos. These had much to do with convincing Rockefeller to give \$5 million to purchase land for the park.

Masa the photographer and Kephart the travel writer formed a "dream team" to promote the Smokies. Around that same time, they learned of Benton MacKaye's dream to build a hiking trail from Georgia to Maine. Masa worked closely with MacKaye, Myron Avery, Paul Fink, and others to develop the route of the A.T. through the Smokies. Masa personally laid out the route through North Carolina, measuring it with a wheel similar to Avery's famous one. Any trail needs maintainers to keep it open. Masa helped to form the Carolina A.T. Club, which later merged into the Carolina Mountain Club. George led countless hikes and was famous for his catch phrases: "More Walk, Less Talk". "Off Your Seats, On Your Feets".

Sadly, the last few years of Masa's life were less uplifting. His best friend Kephart died in a car crash in April, 1931. The

Great Depression took a toll on his photography business. His health began to decline, probably due to a combination of losing Kephart, tuberculosis and the effects of photographic chemicals. He never recovered from a bout of influenza, and died penniless in June, 1933. Almost none of his over 6,000 photographic negatives survive; just some poor-quality prints.

Barely a year after his death, the Smokies Park was chartered by Congress. After years of lobbying by his friends and admirers, a peak in the Smokies was named Masa Knob in 1961. Fittingly, it is on the shoulder of Mount Kephart, along the Tennessee-North Carolina border close to the A.T.

People throw around the term “living legend” a lot, maybe too much. But, **Bob Peoples** is a living legend on the A.T. After retiring from the U.S. Air Force in 1988, Bob decided to devote his life to hiking trails. He initially helped to maintain the Long Trail in Vermont, a portion of which is also the A.T.

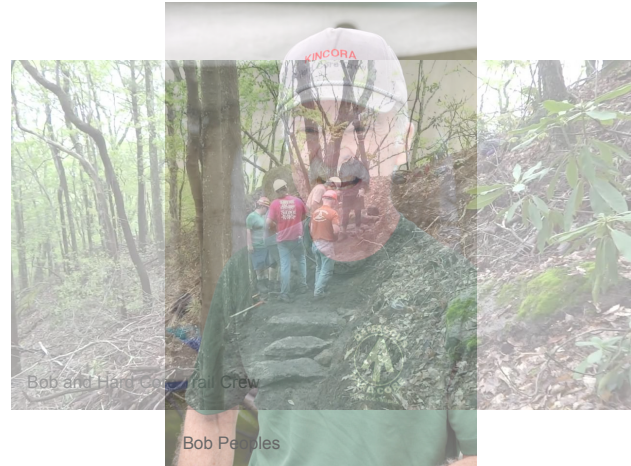
Then, in 1994, Bob and his late wife Pat purchased a cabin adjacent to the A.T. near Hampton, TN and founded the legendary Kincora Hostel. Thousands of A.T. section and thru-hikers have received Bob and Pat’s gracious hospitality there. Here’s what Scott Ourth, aka Flying Porkchop, a 2002 thru-hiker, says: “Bob Peoples is one of the finest human beings I have ever met. No single person has given more to the Appalachian Trail or the Trail community than this wonderful soul. I met him during my 2002 thruhike when I stayed at his Kincora Hostel. I watched as he learned everyone’s name and personally checked in with every hiker to make certain they were doing OK.”

Each year, immediately after the Trail Days festival in Damascus, VA, Bob leads the Hard Core crew, comprised of the current year’s class of thru-hikers. For a couple of weeks, Bob and his crew take on the most difficult and challenging trail maintenance tasks on the A.T., before they resume their adventure on the trail. Bob is perhaps the A.T.’s greatest living ambassador, inspiring young people who have experienced the Trail to give back afterwards. It is reported that Bob has over 12,000 hours volunteering with the Green Mountain and Tennessee Eastman Clubs.

Every trail maintaining organization seems to have a similar problem. They don’t have enough volunteers, and those who do volunteer are getting old. They all need to follow the example of Bob Peoples. Bob is like the pied piper of the A.T. When he asks young people to help out with trail work, they follow him.

Among Bob’s many honors, he was awarded Honorary Life Membership in both ALDHA and ATC.

Below is a slideshow of photos from the 2018 Hall of Fame Banquet. Photos courtesy Dan Innamorato & Laurie Potteiger.





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