

Mr. Phippen's Hut

Description by Dave Roberts

During the fall of 1925, Mr. George Phippen, the owner of the top of Mt. Major, took the trouble to build this stone structure. It was intended to be a place where hikers could seek shelter from harsh weather, or perhaps spend the night in anticipation of viewing a spectacular dawn on the morrow. It was provided with a stone bench, a window to the south, and a door facing eastward. It was roofed over and contained a small wood stove to provide for the relative comfort of any persons who might wish to use it, as the door was left unlocked.

Sometime during its first winter, the fierce winter winds that blow across this completely exposed summit proved to be too much for the roof and it was blown off, ending up well down the mountainside. During the summer of 1926 Mr. Phippen built a much sturdier roof for the hut, made of successive layers of spruce poles, corrugated iron and matched boards. This roof he firmly bolted to the masonry, making sure to leave no overhang beyond the walls that might provide some purchase for the winter winds. The new roof lasted for two winters before it too was blown down the mountainside by the spring of 1928. That roof has lain on a very rocky slope several hundred yards from here since that day, and considering its flight from the hut to that site and the fact that it has experienced over 70 years of harsh mountain weather, it is still in fairly good shape. The impending Great Depression kept Mr. Phippen from attempting further repairs, and the hut seems never to have had another roof.

The stone walls of the hut kept their original integrity quite well for the next 65 years or more, until one summer in the mid 1990's, when some thoughtless soul(s) decided to entertain themselves by tearing many of the stone blocks off the walls, leaving them strewn in hapless piles at the base of the structure. On occasion, some folks more interested in restoration than destruction have tried to replace some of the blocks, but it would take rather heroic efforts to restore the hut to anything like its earlier state.

The hut still serves, in a modest way, the role Mr. Phippen had envisaged for it, as it is used during the colder months (even throughout the winter) by a few hardy folks who continue to climb the mountain even during its worst moods. On a cold day in January, when the wind may be blowing well over 30 MPH and the wind chill temperature is far below zero, a chance to gain shelter from a fierce northwest wind by hunkering down in the lee of the still relatively intact northerly wall is an advantage very much appreciated. On days such as that, anyone taking advantage of the ruins should make a mental note to be thankful for folks like George Phippen, who manage to rise above the level of selfishness and meanspiritedness to demonstrate a spirit of good will and benevolence - fortunately there are still many such among us.

Mr. Phippen's nephew, who now owns the summer camp once owned by his uncle, has remarked that his Uncle George, who purchased the mountain top in 1914 (for \$125), dearly loved the view (and the blueberries) and attempted to turn the area over to the State of New Hampshire in the early 1920's so others could benefit from it in perpetuity. Unfortunately, the state set conditions that could not be met (requiring that abutting landowners also agree to similar donations - but only one other person was willing to do so), so the project fell through. During the Depression years the land reverted to the Town of Alton for taxes. In 1956, the townspeople of Alton voted to pass the land to the state for "public park purposes". Mr. Phippen died in Alton in the summer of 1948 and is buried in the village cemetery - his hut remains, a silent tribute to a public-spirited summer resident of the Bay.