

Rebuilding the Daniel Doan Trail

BY RUTH DOAN MACDOUGALL

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My father grew up in Orford, New Hampshire, a beautiful town on the Connecticut River, north of Hanover. He and his boyhood pal, Claud Sharps, explored the surrounding woods, and the second mountain he ever climbed was Smarts Mountain, when he and Claud were fifteen years old



.As he later wrote in 50 MORE HIKES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE, "We discovered the remote approach to the elongated ridge and the distant, 3,238-foot summit. Our fishing for trout in Jacobs Brook initiated exploration of an abandoned settlement in the eastern section of Orford known as Quinttown. One day we followed a dirt road past the tar-paper shacks and fields of the hermit Billy Brown. The road ended at Mousley Brook. Beyond a crude logging bridge we saw a wooden arrow on a tree. The red and white paint indicated a trail of the Dartmouth Outing Club.

Our first attempt was cut short by a downpour somewhere a mile or so up the mountainside. We retreated to a deserted logging camp for the night. Later that summer, however, we gloried in the summit, its tower, and its DOC cabin."



" How perfect that in 1993 the Dartmouth Outing Club decided to name the old trail along Mousley Brook after Dan "in recognition of Daniel Doan's efforts to stimulate interest and involvement in hiking and the out-of-doors.

He was seventy-nine and too ill to attend the July 13th dedication ceremony that the DOC held at the trailhead with family and friends and the DOC trail crew, but afterward I phoned him with the details of how Earl Jette, then the director of Dartmouth Outdoor Programs, read Dan's description of the trail in the first edition of 50 MORE HIKES IN NEW

HAMPSHIRE, and how we toasted him with sparkling cider and had a fine picnic brought by the DOC.

Dan died in September of that year. In October there was a memorial hike up Smarts, and in mist and occasional drizzle we climbed the Daniel Doan Trail, family and the friends that included his editors at Countryman Press. At the top we took shelter and ate our lunch in the old fire warden's cabin, which Dan and Claud had discovered when they first reached the summit.

Since 1993, the DOC has done maintenance work on the trail, but in recent years we realized that more was needed. I had been corresponding with Julie Clemons, Assistant Director of Outdoor Programs, and last fall she and Thane Joyal, my niece, and I agreed that we would put together a group of family and friends to tackle the project in the spring.

Thane, a lawyer, lives in Syracuse, New York, but despite her busy schedule and the distance from New Hampshire she organized magnificently the Daniel Doan Trail Maintenance Weekend for the weekend of May 19th, working out details with Julie. The project became even more urgent after a northeaster in April that damaged some trails perhaps as much as the Ice Storm of 1998 or even, some old-timers speculated, the Hurricane of 1938.



It was arranged that people who came from afar to work on Dan's trail would stay Friday and Saturday nights at Mount Moosilauke's Ravine Lodge, with meals provided, all courtesy of the DOC.

Thane forwarded Julie's instructions to everybody:

"Leader: Vicki Allen (Dartmouth '06). We will provide equipment and tools. Please have people bring their own work gloves. The trail is likely to be very very wet. Steel-toed Muck boots would be ideal if anyone has them, otherwise it's a personal decision between support/protection (leather hiking boots) and dry feet (tall rubber boots).

"People must have the USFS chainsaw certification to use a saw on our trails, so please tell folks to leave their saws at home unless they have the certification. If folks have their own axes and are comfortable with using them they are welcome to bring those.

"Here's what to do . . . in order of importance:

" 1. **Brushing**—Cutting back brush THOROUGHLY both sides of the trail, about three to five feet on either side, and cutting it to the ground. Vicki will show you. This is a place to be very aggressive so that the work lasts a while. We have loppers, machetes, bow saws, and a power brush cutter (like a weed whacker with a skill-saw blade where the string would be). If anyone has tools of this sort please encourage them to bring those too.

"2. **Blazing**—I can provide paint, brushes, jars, thinner, rags, a wire brush, and templates and instructions. Work in teams of 2—one scrapes and wirebrushes, one paints.

"3. **Cleaning of waterbars and ditches**—This is going to be tough because there are not a lot of structures on the trail, and I want to avoid the 'beaver gene' or building of structures everywhere it's wet. We have to remember that it's spring and it's not this wet all the time. So finding those vestiges of filled-in waterbars and cleaning them out, while resisting the urge to build more, is key here.

"4. **A survey of blowdown damage and a list/count of trees that need a chainsaw to cut out.** Vicki is chainsaw certified so if there are just a few she can get them. If there are a lot we will make a survey and send a crew back later. Also, a survey of puncheon that need to be replaced (there are rotten puncheon near the summit). Believe it or not a survey is really helpful."

I was relieved that Don isn't chain-saw certified so he couldn't bring his chain saw and cause me constant worry, as he does when he uses it at home. I declared that we would go as cheerleaders, not as workers, and only wave the young folks off on their mission. But we did load a pruner and a lopper into Don's pickup truck, just in case, before we set forth on Saturday morning in misty rain of the springtime variety, not the autumn mist of Dan's memorial hike.

The weather reports were ominous. The previous weekend had been gorgeous (except for blackflies), but since then we'd had days of rain,

steady, cold, sometimes downpours. Always a worrier, I had e-mailed Thane asking what she thought about Saturday's weather, and she replied, "We'll just put on rain gear and eat more."

In the pickup I'd stowed a couple of big bags of cookies and pretzels to devote to that cause.

At least today the rain wasn't steady. And the cold was keeping the blackflies at bay.

Since my childhood, there are of course changes in the routes we now take to Orford, but after you get on Route 25A in Wentworth not that much seems to have changed. Don and I passed the little beach at Baker Pond. In my youth, after a visit to my grandmother's house to which my father usually wore a tie and jacket and where lunch ended with fingerbowls, my father and mother and sister and I would stop at the pond, put on our bathing suits, and swim out, unwinding and reveling in informality.

Don and I approached Mount Cube, my father's first mountain; he had climbed it at age ten. We passed Baker Road, which leads to a Cube trailhead, and soon came to the Quinttown Road, turning left onto it. Decades after Dan and Claud had explored this area, the abandoned farms and the cellar holes they found here were the inspiration for Dan's second novel, AMOS JACKMAN. Now we drove along the dirt road beside lovely Jacobs Brook, crossed a little bridge, turned right, and crept cautiously up a hairpin turn. There before us, beyond fields, was Smarts Mountain.

The narrow road entered woods. We had feared it might be blocked by trees downed in the April northeaster, but it was clear, and we drove on to where it ends in a small parking area. Soon another four-wheel-drive vehicle came along, and we met Thomas Wheeler, who maintains the Appalachian Trail section in this area. When he had heard of this maintenance weekend, he had e-mailed Thane and generously offered to join us. He is chain-saw certified. We learned that he too is a graduate of dear old Laconia High School, Class of 1958, the class between mine and my sister's. (Penny, my sister, hadn't been able to get away this weekend from her workload of landscaping and massage therapy.)

Soon the amazing sight of a cavalcade of six cars appeared, with a variety of license plates: New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire. They all managed to squeeze into the parking area, and suddenly there were fourteen of us greeting each other. Reunions! A reunion with Thane and my grandnephew, Hamish Gibbs, age eleven (Thane's

husband, James Gibbs, couldn't be here because he, a biology professor, was in Tanzania saving an endangered species). A reunion with my stepmother, Marjorie, who had driven down from Jefferson, New Hampshire, accompanied by Darby, her Wheaten terrier, and a reunion with Amy Gumprecht, my backpacking buddy and Thane's longtime friend. We met Thane's other friends who'd come all this way to help, and we met Vicki Allen, the very capable leader.

This was going on while at the same time everybody did a version of Clark Kent in a phone booth, changing into rainproof jackets and pants and a variety of boots, in or outside cars.



The implements provided by Dartmouth were laid out, and people made choices. We gathered in a circle as Vicki explained how to use the tools. She was happy to learn that almost everybody was experienced. Then we set off down the trail.



Don and Marjorie and I went as far as the first junction and had a further reunion with Thane, talking about Dan. Then Thane hurried onward to a day of work on the trail, and we found that it was rather nice to let others do it.

Later, Thane e-mailed me that despite the weather they had accomplished much, clearing and restoring water bars along the trail and clearing the brush on the steep upper section. She added, "Folks are hoping to make it an annual event."



When I took over the hiking books after Dan's death, I added the Daniel Doan Trail to 50 HIKES IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS. (Years ago, the Smarts Mountain hike in 50 MORE had been changed from the trail along Mousley Brook to two other trails, out of Lyme Center, New Hampshire.) If you'd like to hike it someday, it's six miles round-trip, which takes about four and a half hours, not counting lunch and exploring the fire tower the way young Dan and Claud did:

"When I first saw the summit of Smarts in August 1929," Dan wrote, "the tower was a scaffolding of peeled spruce logs and poles about 30 feet high. A platform and railing accommodated the fire warden, who no longer occupied it nor scanned the forests for smoke, which he could locate on his circular map, also gone, though the table remained. A dubious-looking ladder didn't stop two 15-year-olds . . . [We went on to] 50-odd years of more adventures in the White Mountains."



Photographs by Victoria Allen and Don and Ruth MacDougall