



MAKING SUMMER PLANS



Greeley's Boardinghouse

It's going to be a busy summer season in the White Mountains. I read recently that campground reservations are filling up fast, as are hotels, cabin rentals, and venues like Waterville Valley for long-postponed weddings and family reunions. Sort of like the summer of 1883, when the Greeley Boardinghouse in Waterville was fully booked by the middle of April, and disappointed tourists had to be turned away. If you weren't organized, and a planner, you were out of luck.

But plans change and people cancel, so it pays not to give up. One hiking enthusiast who knew what she wanted for her summer vacation that year was Isabella Stone, a woman from Framingham, Massachusetts who had spent many summer seasons in New Hampshire with her parents. She and her close friend Marian Pychowska were early members of the Appalachian Mountain Club, established in 1876. The two kept records of their hikes and exchanged letters of advice about trails, equipment, lodging, and weather in the White Mountains.

One of the common considerations for hikers in addition to weather was smoke. The huge logging operations scattered throughout the area often generated a thick smoky haze that would move down the valleys. Marian had written Isabella about the pleasure of climbing Mt. Osceola where one could get above the smoke. "What the smoke could not hide or disfigure was the great ravine of Osceola, on whose edge we stood. Mt. Tripyramid showed its slide, about which we had heard so much discussion, from top to bottom." So, when Isabella decided to take her own trip to explore the trails leaving from Waterville, she was interested in finding a place to stay that would have clean water and clear air.

Other people had the same idea. When she first wrote to Merrill Greeley's boardinghouse in early April, she had received a cryptic reply: "Our rooms are all engaged for the summer. Can not accommodate you." But she persisted, and two weeks later learned that a family had cancelled so she would be able to get her room after all. She was ready with many questions, written out on a sheet of paper that she asked Mr. Greeley to return to her. The innkeeper replied promptly. Guests would be met by carriage at the Plymouth train depot, he told her, and brought to Waterville, for \$1.50. The boardinghouse drinking water supply is spring fed by "one of the best springs among the mountains," he writes. Could she have a spring bed with a hair mattress? Yes, they had purchased new spring beds and hair mattresses last year. Is the table supplied with oatmeal, plenty of cream, and berries? Yes. How often with fresh meat? Every day and brook trout and fresh eggs besides. And what about "drainage"? On this point, too, Mr. Greeley assures her that his sanitary facilities up to date: "The closets are earth closets, there is fresh soil put into them every morning and every other morning they are entirely cleaned out and renewed with fresh earth."

Isabella had even more questions about hiking trails. She had studied the latest maps but wanted to be prepared: "Is the Bridle path from your place through the woods to Upper Bartlett now passable for good lady walkers of AMC?" Yes. Could she go on horseback through the woods? No. "With a gentleman escort in the party would a guide be necessary?" Yes.

With these essential questions answered, we may assume that Isabella's stay in Waterville proved satisfactory. In future summers, she kept exploring further north, staying most often at the Russell House in North Woodstock, always writing letters and keeping a lively journal. In letters to Marian, she is especially dismayed by signs of encroaching civilization, like newly planned railroad lines through the mountains. The two of them wrote tirelessly, to each other, to other travelers drawn to the clean air of the high mountains, and to magazines like *Appalachia*, where many of their descriptive articles were published.

SOURCE: *Mountain Summers: Tales of hiking and exploration in the White Mountains from 1878 to 1886 as seen through the eyes of women.* Edited by Peter Rowan and June Hammond Rowan. Gorham, NH: Gulfside Press, 1995.

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