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- conduct programs of environmental observation and technical research;
- develop educational programs to advance public knowledge of the meteorology, sub-arctic environment, and natural and human history of the Mount Washington region; and,
- preserve the unique character and heritage of Mount Washington.

The Mount Washington Observatory is supported solely by the generosity of its members and supporters, and by income derived from its services. All contributions to the Mount Washington Observatory are 100% deductible for Federal Income Tax purposes.

Membership in the Observatory is open to all. Members receive: an annual subscription to *Windswept: The Quarterly Bulletin of the Mount Washington Observatory*; a 10 percent purchase discount at Observatory shops; Observatory tours; free admission to Summit Museum; first invitation to participate in Observatory programs; and an opportunity to be an Observatory volunteer. Members are encouraged to help support the Observatory, attend its Annual Meetings, and visit the Observatory, Summit Museum, and Weather Discovery Center in North Conway.

#### MEMBERSHIP DUES:

|                    |          |
|--------------------|----------|
| 231 Club           | \$275.00 |
| Summit Club        | \$125.00 |
| Family             | \$65.00  |
| Individual         | \$40.00  |
| Student (under 15) | \$30.00  |

Members will receive the four issues of *Windswept: The Quarterly Bulletin of the Mount Washington Observatory* for the year following the quarter in which they join. Please make checks payable to the Mount Washington Observatory and send to Mount Washington Observatory, P.O. Box 2310, North Conway, NH 03860-2310.

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Presidential Range from Knothole Road in Whitefield. GUY SHOREY

# The Story of Dolly Copp Campground

By Jonathan C. Chew

Though first used by campers prior to World War I, the Dolly Copp Campground has been a major recreational resource in the White Mountains since the twenties when cars came into wide useage. Interestingly, the majority of early campers were from the upper middle-class enjoying the freedom conferred by the automobile. The campground, which has become a popular base camp for hiking into the Presidential and Carter Moriah Ranges, is located on Route 16 three miles north of the Mount Washington Auto Road. It is maintained by the U.S. Forest Service, and its 177 sites comprise the largest campground in the White Mountain National Forest.



U.S. Forest Service promotional photo from the twenties.

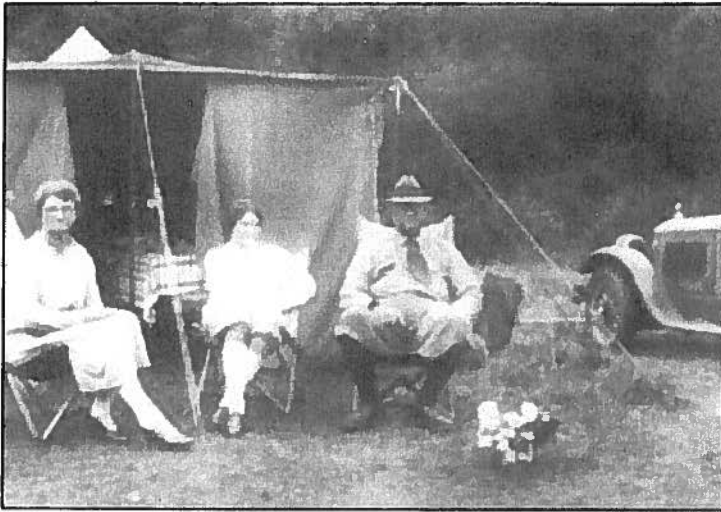
A few years after the creation of the White Mountain National Forest in 1911, farmsteads west of the Peabody River — including the historic Dolly Copp homesite — were added to the federal forest preserve. This area was already being used by campers at the time, but by 1915, camping was officially sanctioned, and the first amenities — a large fireplace and two toilets — were provided by the Forest Service. The subsequent development of the area and its many scenic lanes has a surprisingly long and intricate history.

The popularity and growth of the Dolly Copp Campground is intimately tied to early auto camping in New England. When cars first came upon the White Mountains scene after 1910, there were no organized campgrounds to accommodate them. Motorists squatted in unregulated, congenial places, such as what is now the Dolly Copp Picnic Area on Route 16. That little strip of land, on the east side of the Peabody, was all there was to the Campground in its first years.

In the twenties demand grew quickly and camping burst across a bridge that spanned the Peabody River there until 1950, into the old Copp and Culhane farms on the west bank, up against the foothills of Mount Madison. Luckily for the public, a 1916 USFS plan to carve up the two farms into upscale summer cottage sites was dropped in favor of camping only.

Overall the U.S. Forest Service is given good marks for its judgment in making wise decisions as the Campground developed. This evolution, slow and surprisingly complex, was not completed until the nineteen sixties. An early key decision came in the twenties, when the USFS decided to move all tent sites over to the west or farm side, then reserve the east bank of the Peabody and its Route 16 frontage for picnicking only. By 1935 this had been accomplished.

The late Bob Monahan, one of the founders of the Observatory, was, as a forester, very interested in the history of the campground, and kept track of use-



Peace and relaxation. 1929.

age during the late twenties. He noted that peak daily occupation in 1925 was 31 tents, and that it grew over the next three years to 55, 73, and 106 tents, the latter recorded on August 9, 1927. By then, the Forest Service was operating four other campgrounds in the White Mountains in addition to Dolly Copp.

Old photos show that around 1930 Dolly Copp presented a rough and tumble scene. There were no formal camp sites then, nor any individual parking spaces. You simply drove your car onto a field and camped. Fortunately, there were surprisingly few disputes as Ranger Benedict "packed a revolver and ruled with an iron hand." The agricultural character of the area was still predominant then — mostly open fields, very different from the scenery today after decades of filling in by greenery.

It should be no surprise that use of the campground did not diminish during the depression of the thirties, since camping was one activity that remained affordable for many lovers of the White Mountains. In fact, growing user pressure and demands for more improvements fell right in line with the aims of the Civilian Conservation Corps, created to provide useful jobs for young men who could find no other work. An organized campsite

layout and many other innovations are attributed to the CCC. Bob Monahan, who led a CCC detachment at Wild River in Gilead, Maine, wrote that many campers returned year after year, and regarded the camp as a summer home.

A 1935 "drive-thru tour" describes each landmark as it looked to an arriving camper that year. Since many of the summertime tenters in the thirties were newcomers to camping, USFS literature notified potential visitors not to expect to find beds and blankets waiting for them. Numerous literature

searches pull together a variety of quotes about the campground, including the fact that by the late thirties it was considered the most popular camping facility in New Hampshire. On an August day in 1937, 279 tents were counted along with 22 trailers for a total of 899 campers. That was about a third the population of nearby Gorham! There was even a government of sorts for the long-term campers — the Dolly Copp Campers Social and Recreational Association — which occasionally advised the Forest Service.

Typical of the interesting historical threads afforded by the campground is that of the rustic Visitor Center of log construction, dating from 1934. Today it is venerated as an historic treasure and fits in so seamlessly into the adjacent landscape that it is hard to imagine that its construction was resisted by some as

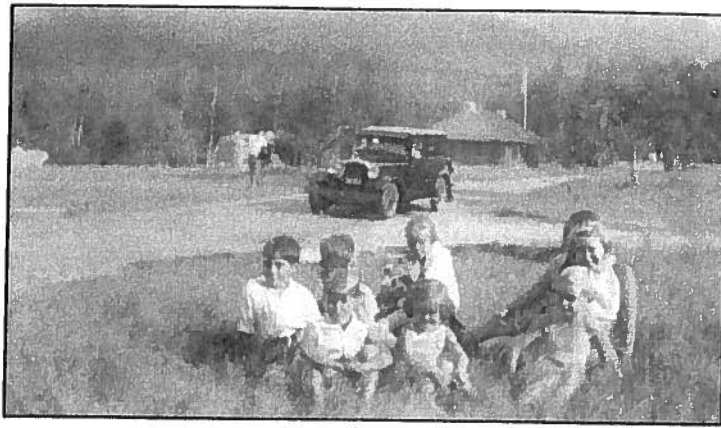


Rangers Pool. 1930.



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Happy campers. 1934.

a terrible intrusion upon bucolic camping fields.

World War II, with its gasoline rationing and its need for manpower, accomplished what the depression could not, and Dolly Copp was officially closed. Moreover, when the war ended, the new surge of campers, the need for further improvements, and the backlog of years of unperformed maintenance, created a costly problem for the Forest Service. By 1951, with the Korean war eating up the national budget, the USFS was examining its options, almost all of which involved turning over the management of the campground to a concessionaire or to some other concerned organization.

Eventually, in 1951, Dolly Copp Campground became the responsibility of the Appalachian Mountain Club under an arrangement involving for the first time a fee to campers. The arrange-

ment lasted until 1957, at which time a revitalized Forest Service resumed direct management of the campground and returned free camping to the public. Increasing demand for campsites forced the establishment of a 14-day limit on the use of a site. That, of course, effectively put an end to long-term camping, and in turn led to the demise of the Campers Association.

Early in the sixties, electricity was introduced to the campground, and several modern lavatories were installed. These were the last major improvements, though the facility continues to change in minor ways nearly every year. The expenditures associated with the modernization of Dolly Copp in the sixties, plus an expanded program schedule for campers, led to the return of the fee system. The first fee charged by the USFS in the early sixties was \$1.25 per night. Today's fees are substantially higher at \$15.00 per night, still a bargain when compared to the cost of a motel room.

Besides, the experience of living in the woods near the foot of Mount Washington is memorable. In addition to "roughing it," or simply enjoying the setting and the aroma of cooking odors as evening nears, history buffs can explore the many physical remnants and clues to the past that are sprinkled about the landscape of the campground. \*

## Subaru Raffle!

Late-breaking news at press time is the announcement that the Mount Washington Observatory will hold a fundraising raffle this summer with the grand prize of a brand new Subaru. Complete details and raffle tickets will be in the mail to all members shortly, with a stub that can be returned with your donation. New IRS regulations allow the purchase of raffle tickets as a tax-deductible donation. Only 500 tickets will be sold at a cost of \$150 each. The drawing will be held on top of Mount Washington on September 9th, 2000, at the Summit Fundraiser. Tickets can be purchased by calling 1-800-706-0432 (or locally at 356-8345), or online at [www.mountwashington.org](http://www.mountwashington.org). All proceeds, after costs, will support the ongoing scientific and educational programs of the Observatory. \*