

BARRY CAMP

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FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS, THIS HAS BEEN A PLACE WHERE THE LOVE AND LORE OF THE OUTDOORS IS PASSED FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT.



For four days last August, teenagers sleeping in rustic cabins on the eastern edge of the White Mountain National Forest awoke before dawn to the insistent bellowing of an air horn fondly nicknamed “Bull Moose.” Quickly on their feet and out the door, the kids began with a vigorous round of physical fitness exercises modeled on the New Hampshire police qualifying test. After breakfast, they moved on to a full day in an outdoor classroom staffed by New Hampshire Fish and Game Conservation Officers.

A NEW TRADITION BEGINS

The first-ever Junior Conservation Officer Week at Barry Conservation Camp in Berlin, N.H., added a new dimension to the outdoor learning that takes place at Barry Camp each summer. Campers learned how K-9 officers train and communicate with their dogs. They tried on SCUBA diving helmets and learned how to carry an injured person over difficult terrain. In after-dark, live-action simulated exercises, campers participated in a hiker rescue and litter carryout, surveillance of illegal fishermen, executing a search warrant on a poacher’s truck, securing evidence and interviewing suspects. They got practice in basic shooting skills, as well as navigating with map and compass.

The week was the brainchild of two Fish and Game Conservation Officers with a long, shared history. CO Glen Lucas and CO Josiah Towne were childhood neighbors who attended Barry Camp together in the late 1990s. The two men graduated from the same high school and went on to Unity College in Maine. Both were hired by Fish and Game, Lucas in 2007, and Towne the following year. Once on the job, the men made regular visits to Barry Camp to volunteer and visit with campers. It was during those visits, after repeatedly answering campers’ eager questions about what it was like being a CO, that Lucas and Towne came up with the idea of a week at Barry Camp focusing on the work of the state’s Conservation Officers.

A SACRED SPACE

The shared commitment of Lucas and Towne to Barry Camp is remarkable, but not unique. For nearly 30 years, the camp has been a sacred space, a place where the love and lore of the outdoors is passed from one generation to the next, where friendships are created, a sense of community is built, and children take the first steps toward becoming careful stewards of New Hampshire’s wild places.

The camp was born out of the vision of Charles Barry who, after 20 years as a N.H. Fish and Game Conservation Officer, was serving as the Department’s Executive Director in the 1980s when the opportunity arose to acquire the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s York Pond Fish Hatchery in Berlin for the price of one dollar. Barry said yes, with one firm condition: the deal must include a group of rustic cabins north of the hatchery that had served for many summers as a base for young men and women serving in the Youth Conservation Corps. Barry envisioned the cabins as a perfect spot for a Fish and Game youth camp, something he had long dreamed of creating.



Conservation Officers Glen Lucas and Josiah Towne inspired Jr. CO Week.

The deal was made and by 1984, York Pond Camp was up and running. Since that time, the camp has been operated by UNH Cooperative Extension 4-H in partnership with N.H. Fish and Game. 4-H hires and trains camp staff and conducts daily operations. The 4-H program also brings exceptional programming expertise – a perfect arrangement since 4-H staff are skilled at creating a positive youth development environment. The 4-H Shooting Sports Program, for example, is widely known as a top-notch vehicle for teaching safety and introducing youth to archery and firearms. Camper evaluations tell the story – time spent at the shooting ranges is a huge highlight for most campers.

The name Barry Conservation Camp dates back to 1986, when the name was changed in recognition of Charles Barry, his father Everett, and his wife Rebecca, who together served 70 years with Fish and Game. Today, the camp continues to fulfill Barry’s vision of introducing New Hampshire’s children to the wonders of outdoor life. Campers come to Barry Camp for sessions dedicated to the shooting sports, hunter education, fishing, and outdoor adventure. A four-day mini-camp introduces younger kids to the summer camp experience, and specialty weeks for older campers combine shooting sports, hiking, hunting, fishing and wilderness survival skills. Each week has a programmatic theme, but also includes a generous complement of traditional camp activities like swimming, hiking, campfire camaraderie, canoeing, fishing and archery.

“The camp works because of the amazingly skilled and dedicated staff,” says Camp Director Jamie Welch, a former camper who now teaches middle school science. “Combine this with the true magic of getting kids to unplug and to tune in to the outdoor world, and you have a recipe for success.”

INSPIRING FUTURE GENERATIONS

Sophie Worster, who attended her sixth year of camp in 2015, is in many ways a typical camper. A Loudon resident with little experience in the outdoors, Sophie first attended Barry Conservation Camp at age nine, thanks to a campership from Victory Workers 4-H Club in Pittsfield. She’s been returning ever since and has attended



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~ Sophie Worster

four sessions of Shooting Sports, and one each of Outdoor Adventure and Fishing. Sophie plans on continuing at Barry Camp every summer until she turns 18, when she hopes to return as a counselor. Asked about her favorite memories of camp, Sophie readily described one of her very first moments at Barry Camp: “The first time we went down to the range to shoot, I was so scared, but I hit the target in the bull’s-eye all five times!” She also proudly recalls being the first camper to finish a steep and slippery seven-mile hike up

and down Percy’s Peak. A girl who had never hiked, fished or shot before coming to Barry Camp, Sophie now believes that wherever life takes her, the love of the outdoors and the confidence she gained at Barry Camp will always be with her.

Like Sophie, almost half of the youth who come to Barry Camp each summer attend thanks to camperships, which are offered by sportsmen’s clubs, local conservation associations, 4-H clubs and other groups who value New Hampshire’s remarkable natural resources and want to foster a sense of stewardship in each new generation of Granite Staters. Elkins Fish and Game Club in Wilmot, the oldest continuously operating sportsmen’s club in New Hampshire, began sponsoring campers in 1993. In 2013, Elkins sent its 100th camper to Barry Conservation Camp.

“Our club is dedicated to supporting and promoting outdoor activities and to instilling in future generations a love and respect for

SUPPORT BARRY CAMP

The Barry Camp Fund exists to ensure that New Hampshire’s only true conservation camp will continue to be here to inspire future generations of conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts. Contribute online at nhwildlifeheritage.org or send your donation to the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire, P.O. Box 3993, Concord, NH 03302 (specify “Barry Camp Fund”). Learn more at wildnh.com/barrycamp.





The excitement of trying something new builds confidence and leaves lasting memories. Barry Campers in action (clockwise from above left): Days at Jr. CO Week start with a brisk morning run; Learning how to transport an injured hiker; Big fish, big smile; Shooting Sports and Hunter Education weeks offer hands-on instruction. (Center) Canoeing, hiking and other traditional camp activities round out a busy week.

wildlife and nature,” explains Mike Gelcius, current president of the club. “We enjoy and take pride in our involvement with Barry Camp.”

Elkins asks recipients of camperships to come to a club meeting before camp and return again after they have completed their experience. “The kids who attend bring back wonderful stories, but more importantly, they show pride in their accomplishments. We often hear how they tried their hand at something for the first time and didn’t realize they could do so well.”

The stories told at Elkins meetings are echoed throughout the state. Camperships provide opportunities and open doors, and a first summer at Barry Camp is often the catalyst for a lifetime passion for the outdoors.

BARRY CAMP MEMORIES

Perhaps there is no better evidence of Barry Camp’s importance to the outdoor sportsmen and women of New Hampshire than that community’s reaction to the news that the camp was closing after the 2009 season. With buildings in need of major repair and costs rising every year, Fish and Game found it was unable to continue funding the camp. After the closure was announced, however, news traveled quickly. The Belknap County Sportsmen’s Association stepped up to donate \$4,000 towards the effort, and when club president Mike Normandin put out a call for skilled volunteers and cash donations, more than 20 New Hampshire clubs enthusiastically answered. Under the supervision of Normandin and Gary Sleeper (also of the Belknap County Sportsmen), camp buildings were repaired and renovated, and a fund was established to keep the camp running into the future. By June of 2011, Barry Camp was back in service, welcoming New Hampshire’s youngest hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Start talking to people in New Hampshire about Barry Camp, and an amazing web of connections reveals itself. Avid hikers remember conquering their first mountain. Hunters recall their first time holding a rifle. Former campers proudly talk about signing up their own kids for Barry Camp, and conservation workers trace their passion for their work to the gift of a campership. And more than likely, at least one future Conservation Officer got his or her start last summer, inspired by the five N.H. Fish and Game officers who volunteered their days to make Junior Conservation Officer Week happen.

“Most kids came in thinking they wanted to become one of us,” CO Glen Lucas reports. “Maybe a few left saying, ‘Wow, I guess this is not for me.’ But many more left saying, ‘That is the most amazing job in the world and I can’t wait to do what you do!’ which makes it all worthwhile.” And the inspiration works both ways: after seeing the enthusiasm of this year’s campers, Lucas and Towne are committed to making Junior Conservation Officer Week a regular part of Barry Camp’s offerings.

Barry Camp thrives today thanks to the commitment of the hard-working 4-H staff and the many volunteers, including Hunter Education and Let’s Go Fishing instructors, who give their time and skills to camp activities. Donors to the Barry Camp Fund also play a big role in helping to keep the camp going. This wonderful community of people understands that the children of today are the conservationists of tomorrow, and that the vibrant traditions of outdoor life and conservation in New Hampshire must always be passed down from one generation to the next.



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