



#507 Endowment Fund for Summit Stewardship Program

Honors Prof. Ed Ketchledge



In August of 1968, Edwin Ketchledge

finished climbing the 46 High Peaks of the Adirondacks and received his 46er number, 507. "Ketch," an extraordinarily dedicated individual, was a professor of botany at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, an active member of ADK, president of the 46ers, and a researcher very much interested in protecting the fragile high-altitude ecosystem of the High Peaks.

During the summer of 2014, two active ADK members and avid hikers who had been inspired by Prof. Ketchledge began a different kind of stewardship of the peaks. Long-term funding has been Dr. Ketchledge's Summit Stewardship Program's greatest challenge, and the #507 Fund for the Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewardship Program (<http://507fund.org/>) was created to meet this need. Proceeds will support the outdoor education, research and conservation efforts of the program, augmenting ADK's considerable contributions to the annual funding of this program, and

allowing the program to grow.

Prof. Ketchledge began studying ways to help the alpine ecosystem recover from trampling caused by hikers in 1967. His research determined that non-native sod patches could stabilize the soil, preventing further erosion and allowing the alpine plants an opportunity to grow back. The non-native species were unable to survive the harsh alpine environment, and over time the alpine species began to recover.

"Ketch's" protection of the alpine zone did not end with these studies, however. In 1989, he gathered a group of individuals from ADK, the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy (ANC), the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the Adirondack Forty-Sixers, and other interested parties to talk about creating an educational presence on the summits. Out of this meeting, the Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewardship Program was born.

The program then and today is a partnership of ADK, ANC, and DEC. Its mission is to protect New York's alpine habi-



*Ed Ketchledge
Alpine Zone sign*

By Neil Woodworth *Photographs courtesy of ADK Education archives*

tat through education, trail work, and research. During 2014, the twenty-fifth year of the program, stewards spoke with over 28,000 climbers on the summits of Mt. Marcy, Algonquin, Wright, Cascade, and Colden, reminding hikers to stay on the rocks and off of the vegetation. Stewards have reached over 378,000 people since the program began.

Just as it takes many hikers to protect the alpine zone, it takes many ADK members to help support the program. Over the past twenty-five years, ADK's cumulative contribution to the Summit Stewardship program has been more than \$800,000, including equipment, housing, training, administration, and salaries. ADK's annual funding of the program comes from member dues, member and ADK chapter donations, and donor-directed gifts. Without this generosity, the Summit Stewardship Program would not function. The #507 Fund will enable the program to continue to grow in its education, research, and conservation work.

In 2014, ADK also received funding for the Summit Stewardship Program from the Adirondack 46R Conservation Trust (\$24,000), the state Environmental Protection Fund (\$20,000) and the ADKhighpeaks Foundation (\$5,460). All of this annual funding is essential to enable ADK to continue funding the program each year.

When asked why they created the #507 Fund, Alex Radmanovich, one of its founders, said, "As members we can be very proud of the pivotal role of ADK in the success of the Summit Stewardship Program. Our club has been an unwavering supporter, managing the program since its inception twenty-six years ago and shouldering more than half of the operating cost every year since. But I believe the most important contribution is the leadership and passion ADK brings to the task. This is reflected in the extraordinary dedication, caring and professionalism of everyone associated with the program, from the program director to the staff, summer stewards, and volunteers. ADK is educating hikers, protecting

the alpine summits and training the next generation of environmental stewards."

Like the Summit Stewardship Program itself, the #507 Fund began as a small, grassroots effort with a broad base of support from organizations such as the 46ers, ADK, the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, and individuals. The #507 Fund is hosted and managed by the Adirondack Foundation of Lake Placid, an accredited community foundation. In the last three months of 2014, thanks to the generosity of donors, it grew from \$10,000 to almost \$53,000. The goal is for the fund to reach \$1 million, generating almost half of the annual operating budget, so the Summit Stewardship Program can grow and sustain its great work of protecting New York's alpine habitat.

The creation of the #507 Fund is an important milestone. ADK fully supports this initiative because it has the potential to ensure the longevity and growth of the Summit Stewardship Program. That being said, until the #507 Fund reaches a critical mass, we continue to depend on the generosity of our members and other donors for the program's annual funding requirements.

Its founders see the #507 Fund as a way of honoring Ed Ketchledge and investing in the long-term future of the alpine summits. Prof. Ketchledge's alpine protection work continues today, through the efforts of summit stewards and hikers who carefully choose to avoid stepping on alpine plants. As "Ketch" said, "What lasts, what gives worth, is the respect we show for our fellow passengers and the reverence we exhibit and practice for the landscape, which continues."

It should be remembered that as the #507 Fund grows, ADK will still greatly depend on the generosity of its members and donors to fund the annual cost of the Summit Stewardship Program. To discuss options for doing this, contact Deb Zack at 518-668-4447 x42 or deb@adk.org.



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—Ed Ketchledge