

North Country Camps Newsletter



Coming Home from a Long Extended Trip: A Conversation with Whippoorwill's New Director, Jen Livingston



Tell us about how you got here and what you're most excited about?

North Country Camps is an important part of who I am, and like DNA it has been central to many aspects of my life. When faced with any number of decisions, my inner voice asks, "are they camp people?" or, "how would we have done this at camp?" I've been lucky to find "camp people" in educational institutions who mirrored my own values, and have also transferred my camp skills to them.

I realized recently that I missed seeing that spark of joy when kids recognize their true selves and their sense of self-worth that is borne from such realization. For that reason, I decided to return to Whippoorwill for the 2020 summer. My daughter

was going to be a Birdie and camp spoke to me as the perfect place to evaluate what's important to me and my family. In a sense, I would be returning to where it all started. Camp grew me as a leader.

I was a shy kid who dodged the halls of my independent school and was afraid to speak in class, fearful that my learning and social weaknesses would be exposed. Camp was different. The level of care, support and empathy that campers and staff develop with each other created a safety net for me to explore choices, take risks and feel comfortable facing challenges.



I felt joy for the first time among my peers and a sense of connection and purpose. Mastering skills in activity areas and learning how to live and work together in the wilderness eventually led to confidence and social competencies that carried me through the turbulence of high school. When you are on staff for multiple years you get to see firsthand that remarkable evolution that takes place from Birdie/Cubbie age to Workgrouper. It cemented the importance of camp in children's lives for me and I knew that a career in education was my best way to keep doing what I loved.

I was honored to be considered as a potential successor to Kate as Camp Whippoorwill Director. It was an ecstatic feeling! And it fit perfectly for me to come home from a long, extended trip. After a summer training with Kate and Doug, I am ready to focus on the things I love: unstructured fun, chore wheels, recognizing achievements, the garden, staff energy, singing loudly in the dining hall, putting wishes in the council fire, welcoming mud-caked campers returning from trips, s'mores on the beach, skits, Pioneer Meet, new friendships, the Farrington Cup and the list goes on. I am incredibly grateful that the Foundation (NCCF) has entrusted me to carry forward this important legacy and continue Kate's excellent work.

What do you do for fun?

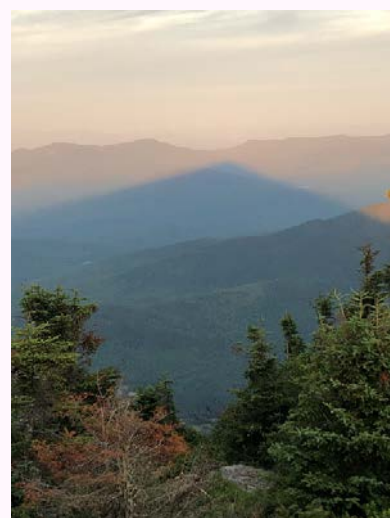
Friends suggest that I write a blog about fun things to do in Vermont because my daughter and I are constantly on the go exploring the greater Burlington area. Whether it be sampling cuisines at international cultural festivals or harvesting clay from local rivers, we are never short of things to do. We kayak and hike a lot. One of my favorite spots is Stowe Pinnacle because it's fun to hang out with the summit dogs, two golden retrievers who hike the trails daily on their own. Treasure hunting in flea markets is another hobby. When schools closed in March, I hosted a mini-camp with the neighborhood kids with all the sporting equipment, games, and craft supplies I have collected over the years. I also love to dance and am a fan of yacht rock (yep, it's a thing), funk and old-school hip hop. I am looking forward to a rainy day to dance with everyone in the barn!

What is something you would especially like to say to campers and staff?

My top priority is getting to know you really well. I have a phenomenal memory for people and their stories and that has helped me connect people with each other. I am looking forward to meeting all of you and learning more about what you love about camp, and even what you don't. I promise to use all my knowledge and passion to create a space where campers and staff can have fun and most importantly, be yourselves! A change in leadership can provoke reflection and questions about how your own camp experience may change. It's normal to feel unsettled, particularly when a longtime leader like Kate is the only director that you've known. I will not replace her or anyone else who was cherished at camp, but I can help you grow and thrive. I am a patient listener and will be a steward of the traditions and philosophy that Kate and the leaders before her have treasured. Our style and humor may be a little different but what will not change is the magic of your camp experience and the friendships that you develop.



Sunset from Birdie Beach



Sunset view from Whiteface - capturing a gorgeous mountain shadow across the valley below



2021 Alumni Weekend

At the end of the upcoming summer, we'll be hosting an Alumni Weekend at North Country Camps, from the evening of August 20th through lunch on August 22nd. It's a great opportunity to stay at camp, enjoy some activities, reconnect with old friends and make some new ones. It's also a great way for alums to introduce your families to Lincoln and Whippoorwill! And, the food is fantastic! Of course, our ability to do so will depend on conditions at the time. But for now we are being optimistic and hope to see as many of you as possible in the North Country where we can all reconnect and share our passion for NCC. We will provide more details for planning in the months ahead!

I shine best with small gatherings and would really like to get to know campers and their families so we can start building excitement and trust for the summer of 2021! I invite anyone in our camp family whether you are at Lincoln, a staff member or an alum to do the same. If you're interested in arranging a quick "zoom hang" or a phone call to say hello please email jen@northcountrycamps.com. I am excited to get to know you and talk camp!

Favorite breakfast: Eggs Benedict, unless it's Eggs Amler at camp!

Your happy place: Definitely the Augur Lake waterfront. If I feel stressed, I imagine the sun hitting my face and the feel of the cocoa matting on my back as I listen to the waves lap gently on the dock. Do you have a favorite spot at camp?

Favorite Comedian: Bill Murray in almost any movie. I am partial to *Rushmore* and *What About Bob?*

What's for dinner: I am a huge fan of Thai and Vietnamese food. I'd love to see more international theme nights at camp. Tell me about your favorite meal at camp!

Favorite Book: *Empire Falls* by Richard Russo, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston and the *Skippyjon Jones Series* by Judy Schachner are high on the list but it's hard to choose. I have over 1,500 books in my house. Let me know a few of your favorite titles to bring to camp!

Dog or Cats: I don't have pets, but I am excited to take care of the camp animals. My question back to you is: pigs, goats or chickens?

Your Superhero Power: I'd like to teleport anywhere in the world and be able to understand and speak all languages fluently.



An afternoon of mixed sailing at Whip



Commending Kate Green

When Kate arrived at camp in 1998, little did we know the incredible impact she would have. From the horse barn to the director's cabin her strong work ethic, enormous smile and warm care has shaped NCC. Campers, counselors, parents and alums have been lucky to have her as a leader, mentor and friend. We're so excited to see what Kate does next, and so grateful that wherever she goes, she is fully and inextricably part of the NCC family. The relationships Kate built at NCC and her impact on the people around her are lasting. One former camper shared that Kate always made her feel more capable than she believed she was. Another called Kate her role model of a "strong, kind, fierce woman." Another admired and appreciated how Kate made every camper feel like they were the most important kid in the world.

Kate helped our campers grow in confidence and skill. One camper shared that Kate "was eternally patient with [him] as [he] learned from her how to ride and be more confident at the stables and in life." Another former staff member and camper learned from Kate that one "can't wait for ideal conditions as those generally don't appear, so just do it!" Yet another former staff member shared that they looked to Kate as a role model of how to be a strong working mother. All agreed that in addition to the lessons they learned from her, it is Kate's humor, passion for all things camp, and small moments shared together that will stick with them.

Nancy Birdsall put it perfectly when she said that "Kate "got" what North Country Camps was about right away and that Kate's silly (and sometimes sassy) humor, her fearless sense of adventure, her determined and inexhaustible work ethic, along with her charismatic smile, brought so much to the camp community. Laughter, blood, sweat, and tears... Kate has lived it all at North Country Camps, and thankfully she will be connected forever." Kate, we wish you more than luck on your next adventures and send you off with our sincere gratitude for all you have done.

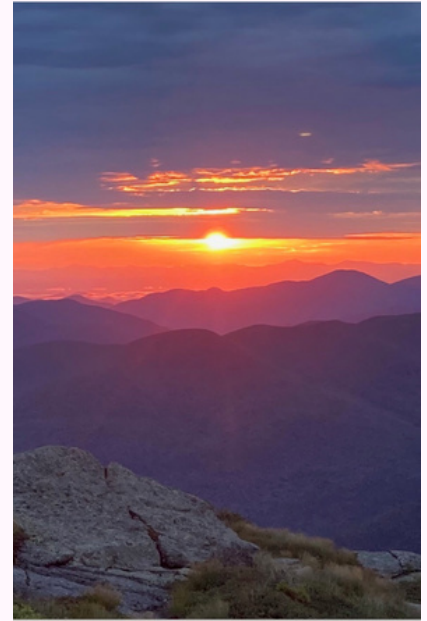


Summer of 46 Fundraiser

When it became clear we could not operate in 2020, we turned our attention to running a summer fundraiser to aid camp through this challenging time. We initially set a lofty goal to raise \$175,000. By mid-summer, we were so impressed with the response that we increased the goal to \$200,000. In the end, we raised a total of over \$204,000. The strength and commitment of our community is inspiring, especially at a time when the world is full of so much turmoil and uncertainty.

Thank you to all those who contributed. And a special thanks to the following people, who all held individual fundraisers in support of the overall Summer of 46 campaign. Check out our Summer of 46 Video [here](#).

Liz Amler	Jennifer Livingston
Nancy Gucker Birdsall	Erik Martin
Kate "Fizzy" Schneider	Barry Needleman
Doug Furman	Ruth Needleman
Kate Green	Kate Ruebenson
Pete Gucker	The Thompson Family
Megan Hegenbarth	Liz Westergaard
Matt Hickey	Workgroup '19 (Alice Cannon, James Cannon,
Meg Johnson	Ruby Citrin, Eli Cohen, Alex Olhava, Ella Yolen)



Sunrise from Algonquin

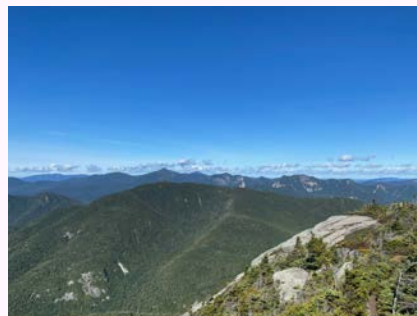
Workgroup '19's Summer Fundraiser - by Alice Cannon and Alex Olhava

This summer, six of us - Ruby Citrin, Alex Olhava, Eli Cohen, Ella Yolen, Alice Cannon, and James Cannon - went to the Adirondacks to hike for the 46er fundraiser. We had initially planned to visit each other before the pandemic. However, once presented with the opportunity to see each other and raise money for an awesome cause, we couldn't wait to help. Camp united the six of us in a really special way: we all were on the same Workgroup Backpack trip in 2019. The trip inspired us to participate in the 46er fundraiser, which in turn inspired us to plan to go back as staff members one day.

Being able to hike this summer was a truly great experience. We had a bit of bad weather, but mostly beautiful Adirondack days. Notably, the top of Algonquin was rainy and windy, but we ended that day with lots of sunshine at the Loj. We also hiked the Dix range, which offered beautiful views and perfect weather. Going down East Dix is a lot longer than it may seem, but the afternoon light gave life to our depleted spirits. However, the highlight of the summer was the Seward range, where James finished his 46er on Donaldson. All in all we had a great time, hiking and seeing each other throughout the summer, and being able to fundraise for camp was the cherry on top.



Hiking through the mist on Algonquin



View from Dix Mountain



Autumn Alumni Work Party

Our volunteer work party on October 11th was a huge success thanks to the hard work and dedication of our amazing alumni volunteers, who represented every decade from the 1960's to today. A warm and heartfelt thank you to Chris Sheller, Matt Hickey, Lauren Blum, Rory Mandl-Abramson, Lainie Oshlag, and Nancy and David Birdsall for your warmth and camaraderie on such a bitterly cold day.

Fortunately, the sun and spirits remained high throughout and we warmed up by the fire for our end-of-day cookout. We reminisced about old friends, compared notes about camp through the years and shared memories of camp meals such as Annie's pies. Working alongside each other forged new friendships and many of us left a little greener with camp love. Some of us even wore the badge of "Gucker green" paint home to prove it!



Since earlier in the week the Red Barn had been emptied for maintenance work, it was tremendously helpful to have hands on deck to return all the sailboats, canoes and kayaks. The barn was framed in golden yellow leaves and it felt special being there with camp friends. Afterwards, Doug Furman led the Lincoln alumni to clear brush around the barn and lean-to while Jen Livingston took the Whippoorwill crew to paint the craft house.

Following a pleasant lunch on Birdie Beach, alumni toured the new Whippoorwill office which faces the Lane on the south side of the Nest. Doug Furman, Tom Blaise and Dave Blaise worked tirelessly on this project over the summer. Our volunteers admired their handiwork and hung the doors so it can winter securely. The office incorporates design elements of the Nest to preserve the visual character. The cedar posts mimic the cedar trim of the Nest and there will also be split log wainscoting surrounding the L-shaped porch. While working at camp this summer, Logan Birdsall spent part of her time painting new cabin signs and we settled on the name Pharaoh Lake. The name, however, is not indicative of the Whippoorwill leadership style! The new office will be a very welcoming place for staff, campers and alumni to convene. We can't wait to get some nice Adirondack chairs and hanging plants for the summer!

We hope that you will join us for our Spring volunteer workday. Look for your invitation in the coming months!



Alumni Committee Update

The Alumni Committee launched in the fall of 2019. Committee members began by planning alumni meet-ups in various cities throughout the US and England. The first meet-up occurred in Boston on November 21, 2019. Alumni of all ages attended from Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine. Stories from both former campers and staff were told over food and drinks, and everyone enjoyed reconnecting, sharing camp memories and in some cases, meeting for the first time. In the following months other gatherings occurred in New York City and Washington DC, and more fun ensued. These meet-ups were a great success and we know everyone looked forward to them becoming annual events. Planning was moving forward for more gatherings in Vermont, California and the UK but were sadly postponed due to the pandemic.



The committee has recently regrouped and is now planning for a variety of virtual meetups in addition to other engagement projects. We'll be announcing those via social media and email.

We're excited to continue reconnecting with you all! If you have any questions or would like more information, please email the co-chairs, Ruth Needleman (ruth@northcountrycamps.com) or Liz Amler (elizabethamler@gmail.com).



2021 Ice-Out Contest

While we in the Camp community always think of Augur Lake as warm and inviting all summer long, it does freeze hard from December into April (and sometimes May), often up to 2 feet thick. You could drive a truck across it. We invite all of you to participate in the 2021 NCC Augur Lake Ice-Out Contest. Send your guess of Ice-Out Day to Doug and Jen (directors@northcountrycamps.com) by March 1, 2021. The winner(s) will receive a bag of NCC swag.



Ice Fishing on Augur Lake



Introducing New Families to Camp

Connecting with friends of current camp families is our best recruiting tool. This year, Doug and Jen will host virtual open houses on the following dates: December 6th (7pm), January 10 (4pm), January 20 (7pm), and January 31st (4pm). We had great attendance at our last open house on November 1st! If you know families who might be interested in learning about camp, please encourage them to attend one of these events. If you'd like to help host a virtual open house, please contact Jen and Doug by emailing directors@northcountrycamps.com.



2021 Staff Recruiting

Outstanding staff members make NCC summers special. We're always looking for energetic, talented counselors, section heads, trip leaders and kitchen staff. If you have friends or family members who might be interested in working at camp, please share this [link](#) with them and have them contact Jen or Doug.



NCCF Board Update

Bob Livingston stepped down from the Board in the spring. We all benefitted greatly from Bob's experience and wisdom. As one of our original members, he helped to shape the structure and direction of the NCCF. We'll miss his participation and extend our heartfelt thanks for his service.

Following Bob's departure the Board elected two new members – Rachel Willner Thompson and Ian Yurdin.

Rachel was a Whippoorwill camper from 1986 to 1990, and returned as a staff member for several years beginning in 1994. Her two eldest children are now enthusiastic campers at Lincoln. Rachel is a pediatric emergency medicine physician and assistant professor of pediatrics at Boston Medical Center & Boston University School of Medicine. In addition to her clinical role, Rachel is the Clerkship Director for pediatric medical education for the BU medical students and loves the opportunity this provides for mentoring those students who choose a career in pediatrics. Rachel holds a B.A. from Harvard College and received her M.D. from Yale University School of Medicine. She and husband Joel live in the "Charlie on the MTA" hotspot of Jamaica Plain, MA with their children Caleb, Nate & Nora.

Ian attended Lincoln from 1980-1994, first as a camper and then as a staff member. Both of his siblings (Laura and Seth) attended camp and his niece, Audrey Birzell, is currently a Whippoorwill camper. Ian works as a consultant on strategy, product creation and marketing for consumer products. An experienced alpinist and climber, Ian was appointed by the governor of Oregon to serve on an outdoor recreation task force in Oregon's Cascade Mountains and has served on several professional athletes' nonprofit boards. Ian holds a BA in political science from Lewis and Clark college in Portland, Oregon. He lives in Bend, Oregon with his wife Kristin.

The NCCF Board has been working hard through 2020 to support Kate, Doug and Jen as we all navigate through this very unusual time. Much of our work has dealt with pandemic-related issues. But we've also been focused on other tasks associated with maintaining and enhancing the vibrancy of the camp experience and our community. We're now looking ahead to 2021 and planning for an exciting, fun-filled summer at camp.

Many people have asked how 2020 affected NCC's finances. The simple answer is that we will lose money this year because we had no operating revenue to cover our fixed expenses. But we began the year in strong financial shape thanks to the funds we raised when NCCF initially began operating camp. Consequently, we were well positioned to handle this setback. Moreover, we were able to offset a portion of this year's loss in several ways. Thanks to the remarkable generosity of our community, we raised a little over \$204,000 through the Summer of 46 Fundraiser. We also received other alumni donations that were first pledged on an annual basis when the Foundation was formed. Finally, we received a CARES Act PPP Loan of just over \$114,000 (all of which we anticipate will be forgiven). In sum, although it was a challenging year financially we weathered the storm successfully and we're now planning to bounce back solidly next season.



New Whippoorwill Office before application of its "Gucker Green" wardrobe.

NCCF Board Members

Anda Adams
Emily Byrne
Betsy Ginsberg
Megan Kashner
Elaine Mizer
Barry Needleman, Chair
Brian Ruder
Rachel Willner Thompson
Kenny Widmann
Ian Yurdin



Our new members, Ian and Rachel, have jumped in to assist with specific projects. Ian is working with Jen and Doug to develop our new program for 16 year olds. Rachel will provide her medical expertise to our working group focused on planning for next summer. That group will also examine how other camps outside New York successfully operated in 2020 as well as considering approaches used in schools. Of course, nobody knows what the world will look like next summer but we're planning carefully and are confident that we will be able to operate camp in a safe, fun manner.

The Camp Slide Collection

Several years ago we embarked on an effort to digitize all the old camp slides. Pete, Bob, Nancy, Kate, Doug and others culled down over 20,000 slides to a set of around 14,000. Over this past summer those 14,000 slides were professionally scanned. They now all reside on hard drives and so we're thrilled we've been able to preserve them. During the scanning process, we discovered it's tremendous fun to look through the images and relive old camp memories. We suspect the vast majority of us have never seen most of these slides. Unfortunately, they're only loosely organized and there's no effective way to search them. Our goal in time is to remedy that situation by creating a publicly available, internet-accessible database. We hope to do this in a way that would allow anyone to access the images and help label them (identifying people, dates, locations, etc.). Eventually, the database would be searchable as more and more images are labeled through a crowdsourcing effort. Building this database, however, will take time and so we can't yet be sure when these treasures will finally be available to the whole community. But we're working hard to achieve that goal and so we ask you all to be patient. We guarantee it will be worth it!

Looking Ahead to 2021

The world seems full of uncertainty these days, however one thing we are quite sure of is that a summer at camp will be exactly what kids and young adults are wanting and needing next year! We are feeling confident that we will be able to run summer programs in 2021 and we're planning accordingly. That will mean working closely with the state Health Department and with the Health Advisory Committee of the NCCF board to make sure that we operate under the best possible protocols, according to the situation at that time. It's obviously too soon to know those details, but we are already putting a lot of thought into our 2021 plan. There's lots still to do, but we're optimistic and excited, and so we're hard at work recruiting campers and hiring staff now. Please see the sections of this newsletter on how you can help with that!

When we made the tough decision not to open camp in 2020, we promised the Workgroup that we'd have a place for them in 2021 and so we're pleased to say that the 2021 Workgroup will be a combination of the 2020 and 2021 Workgroups. In addition, we're working on a new program for NCC, which will provide 16 year olds with the opportunity to assume leadership roles at camp, earn certifications, perform community service and have challenging, educational, skill-building adventures in the Adirondacks. We're excited about creating a new place at Lincoln and Whippoorwill for these older kids. It will meet their needs while also ensuring that we preserve the foundational camp experience for all of our campers. Our goal is to develop aspects of this program through 2021 and launch it fully in 2022.

We wish you all the very best and can't wait to see you again, up at camp, as soon as we can!

Visit our website [here](#) to see fun videos about camp and other information.



Red Barn on a beautiful autumn afternoon

