

MCM FIRST PERSON

ROBERT BUNCH

In 2008, my wife Anne Marie and I, left Scotland for Baltimore, Maryland. My wife was training as an interventional endoscopist at Johns Hopkins. I'm a mechanical engineer, so in a bid to find work, I started to make contacts with various groups. One of these groups was the St Andrews Society. At a golfing event of theirs, I met a tall chap called Dan McQueen. During our round of golf, Dan asked if I liked hiking. I told him that in Scotland I was a keen hillwalker (Scottish for hiking). It was Dan who told me about the Mountain Club of Maryland. He invited me to come along on a thirteen-mile hike that Jim Koury was leading in Catoclin. "Sure", I said, "that sounds like fun". The evening before the hike, I was "vetted" by Jim over the phone, but excluding the confusion over the term "Hill Walking", Dan had vouched for me and I was all set.

My first year of membership flew by, as I hadn't found a job yet. Life was full of weekly hiking, scouting, and monitoring the AT corridor with Dan. A couple of years later, I met Andy Buttles as he returned to Maryland. Dan had told me about Andy and thought that we would get on well together. He was correct. I still aspire to be as hardcore as Andy when it comes to backpacking, but most of the time I can just about keep up.

Over the next fifteen years, I would canoe the boundary waters of Minnesota, hike the Inca trail in Peru, mountain bike across the San Juan mountains in Colorado (twice), and backpack throughout various states. All these adventures were with great friends and club members.

In 2020, the great plague hit and hiking was curtailed. As club hikes resumed, they were limited to ten people and were, therefore, difficult to register for. The club called for hike leaders and I decided to step up to the plate. After all, I had enjoyed following hike leaders for over a decade. Jim Koury was instrumental in training me as a leader and suggesting possible hikes. I learned that to be a good hike leader preparation is key. I developed a few "Big Dog" hikes and loved leading them with my hiking family for company.

I have so many great memories of hiking with the club. The most poignant and memorable though came in November 2022. In April of that year, I had a serious motorcycle accident that left me unable to walk for a few months and wheelchair bound. My injuries were fairly catastrophic. What I wasn't prepared for was the muscle atrophy that happens when you don't use them. Instantly, I went from a hugely active person to immobile. During my recuperation, I can't express how grateful I was for the visits and company from my friends in the club. The club is truly a second family.

As I began to walk again and regain a degree of mobility, I longed to get out on the trails. That dream became a reality that November as I was able to lead a two-mile hike in Patapsco. What was more wonderful was the outpouring of support and encouragement from the club.

My wife and I have recently relocated to Pittsburgh. I'm beginning renovations on another property and looking for a hiking club. If I find another club like the Mountain Club, I will indeed be lucky.

Thanks for the memories MCOM.

Robert Bunch

