



Eighth Grade Climbs Mt. Monadnock

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7 September 2010

Mountains have always held a special place in the history, religion, literature, and imagination of humanity. Whether we consider Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, Rip Van Winkle sidling up the Kaatskills for a short nap, Sir Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norgay standing atop Mt. Everest, or Emerson waxing poetically about Mt. Monadnock, mountains have intrigued, fascinated, inspired, cowed, and awed us.

With that in mind, Paul Cuffee School's eighth grade boarded a bus for Mt. Monadnock in southern New Hampshire to test themselves in an afternoon climb. The Middle School, ably run by Ms. Nell Sears, spends the first three days of school focusing on standards, expectations, and community, assisting the faculty in knowing well the students and encouraging the students to trust their faculty mentors. Through a series of conversations, activities, and challenging tasks, the middle school students come to know both their colleagues and their community well. On Friday, the third day of classes, each class steps outside the building for a field trip. The eighth graders determined to climb Mt. Monadnock, the second most climb mountain in the world—behind Mt. Fuji in Japan. More than 125,000 intrepid hikers ascend the mountain each year.

At 3,165 feet, Mount Monadnock is 2,325 feet higher than Jerimoth Peak, the highest peak in Rhode Island, and is more than 1,000 feet higher than any mountain peak within 30 miles. Majestic, Mt. Monadnock rises 2,000 feet above the surrounding landscape. Its bare, rocky, isolated summit provides impressive vistas to those who make the 2 hour climb.

We arrived just after noon, and we started with a discussion of why we were there: to step out of what is comfortable and known to us to try something that will stretch us both physically and intellectually. Clearly climbing a mountain is physically exhausting, but also, and equally important, climbing a mountain is intellectually engaging. There are roots and rocks to avoid, and there are routes and ruts to consider; which route will best lead to the top? Our 60 + eighth graders, once they passed the initial desire to run, climbed with care and puzzled through the challenges. Considering different routes, the students learned to think creatively and solve complex problems.

Several students, following Mr. Love and Mr. Hall, were able to reach the summit and enjoy the views, while many of us trundled slowly up the mountain, assisting and encouraging one another while appreciating the panoramic scenes from below 3,000 feet. As we were often reminded, the joy in the journey occurred with each step of the journey, not just reaching the top.

Tired, but reenergized, we all had reason for pride as we rode back to Providence in the late afternoon. Each one of us accomplished something that day, regardless of how high we climbed; we all learned that in a new and different environment, we can apply the skills we already have to assist us. It was a pleasant thought as we wended our way home, trying to stay one step ahead of Hurricane Earl, who was bearing down on the east coast. Fortunately for all of us, Earl proved to be more fiction than fact; climbing Mt. Monadnock, however, proved to be a worthwhile way to test self and trust one another.