

Catamount Trail Journals

Aidan Powell's March 2021 Thru-Ski

Date: 3/4/21

Trail Sections: 1 and 2

Weather: Blue skies, windy

Trail Conditions: Fast and hard on singletrack. Vast trail was softer and granular.

Notes and memories from the day: Started after lunch with blue skies and an open mind to what was ahead. Skied the first few miles with my mom (Wendy Bratt). Quickly learned I would need an insulated water bottle and down booties (bare-feet in photo for humor). Fast going next to the reservoir despite still getting accustomed to the backpack/balance.

Photos:



Date: 3/5/21

Trail Sections: 2,3 and 4

Weather: Cloudy then clear, below freezing

Trail Conditions: Crust and granular, a few patches of leaves but generally good coverage

Notes and memories from the day: Traveled straight across Somerset which was a highlight of the day. First ever 20+ mile day on skis. Theme of this section was hydro power. Dams, pipes, power plants, power lines cover the landscape. Phenomenal little lean-to next to Grout Pond. Culinary highlight: rice cakes crumbles and figs dumped straight in the vest pocket.

Photos:



Date: 3/6/21

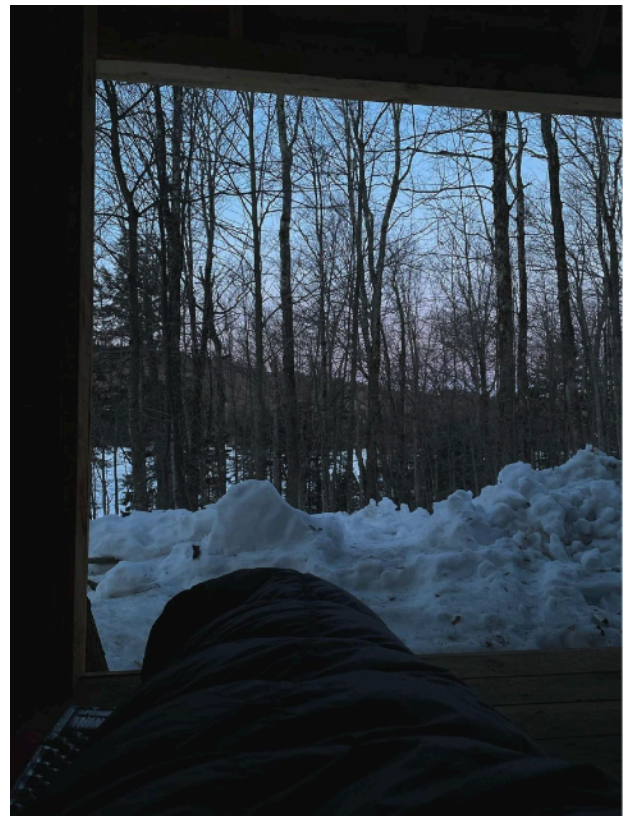
Trail Sections: 5 and 6

Weather: Warm, partly cloudy

Trail Conditions: Fast at high elevations and corn down low

Notes and memories from the day: Made good time in the morning climbing to Stratton pond. A harrowing descent back to the valley where i met up with dad for a quick lunch and a few small missed items from home. Executed a nice liner modification to relieve some pressure from my left/outside knob. Continued in a great mood until i put my foot through an undercut stream bank into knee deep water. I was fairly close to my mileage goal so found a spot to setup camp and got a solid fire going. Pulled liners out of boots to dry and got setup next to the fire only to hear a creaking noise above me coming from a big maple with a limb ready to let go. Moved everything out of its flight path and returned to find a partially melted boot liner. Then headlamp died because the external battery was too cold to charge last night. Luckily liner is salvageable and everything is more or less dry and charged now. Learned some lessons, feeling the challenge of winter travel a little extra tn.

Photos:



Date: 3/7/21

Trail Sections: 6,7, 8 and 9

Weather: Clear and above freezing

Trail Conditions: Granular, corn

Notes and memories from the day: Fantastic skiing throughout all of section 8 and 9. Section may have been my favorite section of the trip. Remote lightly traveled VAST trails and pristine forests and ponds. No cell service, fast going, new part of the state for me.

Photos:



Date: 3/8/21

Trail Sections: 9, 10 and 11

Weather: Sunshine, above freezing

Trail Conditions: Corn on crust above 2k, just corn lower down

Notes and memories from the day: John became a lawyer after joining the peace corps to avoid the Vietnam war. He's now a writer and lives in Healdville VT. I knocked on his door today in search of some electricity to charge phone and headlamp. While keeping covid safety in mind, he invited me into his home, the same his grandfather built in 1802. While things charged and dried, we ate oranges, sipped coffee and talked about the trail, his writing, money, getting pulled out of snowbanks by snowmobilers, and the difference between a village and a gore. It was my first time being surrounded by four walls in five days, and was a very nice reintroduction to heat and other humans. Thanks John! Camped in Calvin Coolidge state forest.

Photos:



Date: 3/9/21

Trail Sections: 11,12 and 13

Weather: Sunshine, above freezing

Trail Conditions: Mashed Potatoes

Notes and memories from the day: The special Happy Hollow rub on wax shed the mashed potatoes effortlessly this afternoon, which is good because more warm weather in the forecast. Constantly aware of my feet and any pressure points, blisters, moisture. Cutting liners, drying socks, and applying moleskin have become ritual. Gave my feet their first good washing since the beginning of the tour.

I've also been thinking about pace a bunch. Skiing slower and more methodically is definitely faster in the end, but why am i even trying to go fast? My style is generally to stop and give as much time as seems right to talk with people, eat well, swim in the summer. There are so many views and ideas and sections of trail in a given day that its difficult to absorb it all. I could easily ski this trail in twice the time and have a wonderful and completely different experience. I don't see myself doing too many more trips at this clip, but for 15 days i can definitely accept the challenge of it.

Photos:



Date: 3/10/21

Trail Sections: 13 and 14

Weather: Very warm and sunny

Trail Conditions: Icy singletrack in the morning, Groomed out VAST corn in afternoon

Notes and memories from the day: Terrain beginning to feel familiar, growing up in Northern VT. Difficult skiing and route finding around Chittenden reservoir before the snow softened up. First sunburn. Met trail chief of section 14 near the Inn. great skiing between the Inn and Brandon Gap (where I camped).

Photos:



Date: 3/11/21

Trail Sections: 15, 16 and 17

Weather: Shorts Weather, downright hot

Trail Conditions: Extremely heavy corn when off of VAST trail

Notes and memories from the day: Technical single track to start the day, complemented by mellow wide trails near Blueberry hill/Sugar Hill reservoir. Met Tony at Blueberry Hill inn. Swim near Rikert's in Middlebury. Lovely skiing despite deep slush in the late afternoon near Cobb Hill singletrack. 30 mile day (longest day on skis to date), skied into the night. Slept in Pete's garage, charged electronics.

Photos:



Date: 3/12/21

Trail Sections: 17, 18 and 19

Weather: 50+ degrees

Trail Conditions: Deep slush, bare ground in parts of the Mad River Valley

Notes and memories from the day: And the rivers are going wild today. The snowpack took a huge hit from the last few 50f+ degree days. After crossing Lincoln gap this morning, the trail makes a long, minimally traveled singletrack traverse above Warren. The slush was deeper than i've ever experienced; A couple massive faceplants (buried shoulder deep) and some very sketchy stream crossings had/have me wondering what the next week is going to look like. Luckily home field advantage is in full effect. Met up with mom near Sugarbush for a sunny parking lot lunch and moral boost. Currently in Camels Hump State Forest and it feels great to know i'll be hitting my home section of trail tomorrow, the same stretch where i first cooked up the idea to combine a fundraiser for Unlikely Riders with a thru ski of the CT.

Photos:



Date: 3/13/21

Trail Sections: 19 and 20

Weather: Below freezing, mostly blue skies

Trail Conditions: 3" of fresh on crust, south facing low elevations are still almost completely bare

Notes and memories from the day: Fast snow and remote, technical skiing made for a great day. Home trails. Harrowing descent down to Camels Hump rd. Only night with four walls and heat. Skied 15 minutes off trail to my homemade tiny house (on Happy Hollow Rd).

Photos:



Date: 3/14/21

Trail Sections: 21, 22 and 23

Weather: Below freezing, cloudy, some wind

Trail Conditions: Bare down low, 6+ inches at elevation

Notes and memories from the day: 1: Climbed from the Winooski (300') to the highest point of the CT (3000') in one continuous go this morning. Approaching the summit tracks dwindled and disappeared, leaving my sense of safety on high alert as i broke trail alone on one of the most difficult to access sections. Appreciative of the reliability of the blue diamonds that denote the trail. Unexpected pow turns on the descent toward Stowe. The dropped knee to dropped pole ratio greatly improved today. A good day for old friends and meeting new folks. Joanna supporting the i89 traverse and sharing tea in the morning. Joy and Jim dropping some quality trail magic in the valley. Met @bccrikelli on the morning climb, sharing conversation and learning more about the history and details of this terrain as we shooshed uphill. Capped off by Clara coming in strong sharing a wicked dinner with all the details including ciders and LC chocolates. Descending from Nebraska valley I ran into Aaron Rice - a guru of the uphill and vermont skier i've looked up to ever since following his 2.5 million vertical feet skied in a single year. Super cool coincidence to run into him and his partner and chat for a bit. Good to be properly in northern VT; hoping for the lower elevation snowpack to hold out for a couple more days!

Photos:



Date: 3/15/21

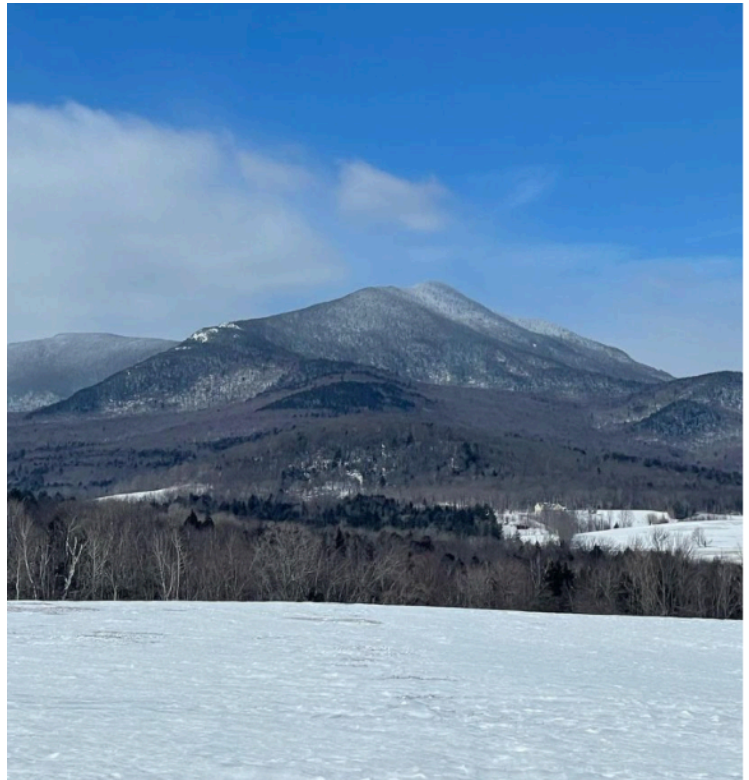
Trail Sections: 23, 24 and 25

Weather: Around freezing, clear, windy

Trail Conditions: Just barely enough snow in the rt 100 corridor. Dust on crust in Stowe and Elmore

Notes and memories from the day: Stopped into Edson Hill xc ski center for a break from the wind, treated like royalty. Good skiing on the west side of rt 100 working north through fields and trails. Exceptional views around Elmore Mountain Rd.

Photos:



Date: 3/16/21

Trail Sections: 25, 26 and 27

Weather: Partly Cloudy, 30s

Trail Conditions: 3"-6" of lightly wind buffed powder on top of last weeks hardened slush. Still a very solid base up here too, unlike Morrisville and Elmore where i just barely made it through.

Notes and memories from the day: Met up last minute with friend and Elmore resident Chris Jolly for a 7:15am coffee fill up. Chris helped us prepare for our across country bike tour in 2016 and gave us tons of great info and ideas back then. Today he supported both ends of the day securing a camp spot near Craftsbury. Skiing today was remote, especially the section from green river res to craftsbury. Beautiful mixed age and mixed species NEK terrain. These are the days when it's tough to be solo/knowning that every decision has to be right; a challenge i enjoy to a degree, but also wears me down. Best food: homemade chili from the Elmore General Store.

Photos:



Date: 3/17/21

Trail Sections: 27, 28 and 29

Weather: 50s and 60s, bluebird skies

Trail Conditions: 2" of corn on crust, nice compacted groomers on xc and VAST trails

Notes and memories from the day: A later start than normal to recuperate a little extra from yesterday. On skis by 8:30, met Todd Hardie in Craftsbury to share breakfast on the front porch of the general store and ski the first mile together. The sun was out and so was the sunscreen, learning from last weeks burnt nostrils. I left a food bag at the Lowell elementary school two weeks ago, handing it off to a teacher and hoping for the best. I called ahead before arriving there this evening. The bag had survived and acquired its own cardboard box and a big piece of paper with my name on, all resting outside the main entrance! Another example of the many people required to make this kind of traverse happen. Tonight is likely my last night on the trail with quebec just around the corner. Found a flat enough spot next to a stream and looking north through a young maple/birch forest at 1500'.

Photos:



Date: 3/18/21

Trail Sections: 29, 30 and 31

Weather: Foggy and drizzling in the morning, warm and cloudy in the afternoon

Trail Conditions: Fast in the morning, slow mashed potatoes over Jay pass

Notes and memories from the day: So appreciative to all the friends and family that have put energy toward this goal with me, i've really felt it. Today was a battle getting over Jay pass, around 15 open river crossings to navigate and progressively slower snow. But a few miles outside the town of Jay i rounded a corner to see a piece of paper with my name and a bag, hung from a tree next to the trail. A note of congratulations and a can of [@citizencider](#) from an anonymous local who has been following along. Mom and dad joined for the last 1/2 mile to the official border monument where a small celebration ensued. Been a wild two weeks on skis with a whole lot of good people and landscapes. Appreciating a shower and warm soup a little extra tn.

Photos:

