

The First of Three Particularly Noteworthy Dartmouth Trips

By Bill Rich



I have chosen to highlight three Dartmouth trips for a variety of reasons. The first of these appears below and the others will be featured in the spring newsletter. Having learned all about alliteration at Dartmouth and probably being just a bit too clever, I call these trips **Fame**, **Fable**, and **Fail**. None of these is a garden variety, everyday trip. Each one reveals a lot about Dartmouth and the trips we take. Think about what made these trips turn out the way they did.

Fame

The Dartmouth Rugby Football Club's 1958 trip to England actually began in Shanghai in 1939 when CV Starr (remember that name?) got to know the parents of three year-old Dick Liesching. As war began to break out, the Lieschings moved back to England, and young Dick was whisked away to school in the western countryside. As he neared college age, he thought it would be fun to go to a coed school like Middlebury, but CV Starr instead steered him to Dartmouth. While the modern Dartmouth Rugby club had

been founded in 1952, Dick Liesching found it in 1955 to be quite unserious: the boys played games, but didn't practice much at all. They basically used the sport as an excuse to drink beer, and they sometimes "watered" their own playing field. Right away, Dick set several goals for the club: to become more serious, to recruit football players to play rugby, and to plan a trip to England, his

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hometown and the home of rugby. As an aside, Dick thought this would be a really cool way to get to meet the Earl of Dartmouth. So, how did it happen? In 1952, along with the founding of the rugby club, Corey Ford, a writer, humorist, outdoorsman, and member of the Columbia class of 1923, retired to Hanover. In 'Football for Fun' he wrote, "Perhaps you wonder how I came to take up rugby. Well, the fact is that rugby took up me. My home here in Hanover adjoins the college playing-fields; and so in the course of time it has been adopted as headquarters of the Dartmouth Rugby Club, an independent organization which has no home of its own. I am hailed as 'Coach' for want of a better title." The beloved Ford took in some of the players as residents, offered students access to the boxing ring in his house, and in the summer of 1958, in response to an invitation from Eddie Eagan, Chairman of the Sports Committee of the Eisenhower People-to-People program, soon found himself planning a trip to England. Requests for financial support went out, and the money began to trickle in, but it wasn't until the last minute—after several players had already gone home for Christmas—that Sigurd Larmon, president of Young & Rubicam, gave the funds to put them over the top. Finally, the plans had fallen into place. Dick Liesching's father Raymond had arranged games for the team and an itinerary was set. But, then, getting wind of these plans, the president of the British Rugby Union declared that no British team would be allowed to add a Dartmouth game to an already full schedule. Raymond Liesching called and told his son, "Don't come! There are no games!" So, the trip was off. The next day, he called again to say that he had been able to schedule one game – would they still like to come? Dick Liesching (President), John Hessler (Captain), Will Gray (Secretary), and Earl Glazier (Treasurer) then met at Corey Ford's and decided to go, even if it was for just the one game. After the first game against Haselmere (a 12-0 win), the Old Milhillian team observed that the Dartmouth players knew what they were doing and scheduled a second game - and five more matches promptly fell into place. Watching the second game, former All-England player Jerry Jenkins joined the team at halftime and told them that thereafter, he would become their coach and help them guard in lanes rather than pursue like crazy all over the field. Rather than thinking about winning, the British were more concerned that these Yanks played their game well and in the proper way. Our boys had a lot to learn: in England, you warm up in the locker room and not on the field lest it seem to be showing off, you discreetly call out "Well played, indeed" instead of the more vulgar "Hit 'em," you never cheer when an

opposing player leaves the field with an injury as it appears to be taking joy in his misery, there is a ritual where each team cheers the other off the field after a game, and you sit in a pool after a game with the other team prior to showering and then dining together with lady friends and other fans. Although they had a lot to learn, the Dartmouth boys did pretty well, winning five of their seven games. I wish I could share the stories I've learned of what happened to the celebratory scotch bought in the Shannon airport to be consumed on the way home, or the number of players allowed to go to Paris during a four-day break in the trip, or the way Al "The Tractor" Krutsch won over the Brits with his humor about his weight in stones, or that if a British player grabs you firmly by the front of your shorts you just don't exclaim that "he has grabbed me by the somethings," or the unexpected fund raising that occurred at a Pensioner's Home on the first night in England, or the fact that the Dartmouth rugby players had become the Kings of the Land in England during this trip. Oh, and that they actually DID get to meet the Earl of Dartmouth—and Field Marshall "Monty" Montgomery too. All of the players found this to be an incredibly positive experience, it was truly ground-breaking, and remains a wonderful memory. This trip, more than anything else, established the legacy for the Dartmouth Rugby Football Club that now rules the Ivy League and is a national powerhouse. There is, however, a sad footnote. When Corey Ford died in 1969 and left his estate mostly to the Rugby Club - for the purpose of building a proper clubhouse - the College dithered and resisted for an embarrassing thirty-six years. Today, the stunning Corey Ford clubhouse finally sits in the most beautiful rugby setting in the land.

The Remaining Two of Three Particularly Noteworthy Dartmouth Trips

By Bill Rich



Fable

In the summer of 1964, most of us were making plans to come to Hanover, New Hampshire and spend four years at Dartmouth College. That summer, I was enrolled at the *Goethe Institut* in southern Germany (Bavaria), but I had no idea what was happening on the Danube River not too many miles away. Like Dick Liesching (of the Dartmouth Rugby trip to England in **Fame**), Dan Dimencescu grew up in England during the War and post-war years. His father was born in Titu, Romania in 1896. Founder of the Romanian Boy Scouts in 1913, Dimitri Dimencescu joined the army in 1916 to fight the Germans. Renowned for sabotaging the Romanian oil wells and fighting Rommel's army on Mount Cosna, the senior Dimencescu was educated in the United States and became a Romanian diplomat. After the communists took over his native country, he went into exile in Morocco and then emigrated to the US in 1956. When son Dan '64 arrived in Hanover in 1961, he threw himself into the activities of the Dartmouth Outing Club and the Ledyard Canoe Club. With this love of canoeing, adventure, and trips, Dan got the idea for a Danube trip while he was out on the Connecticut River on a foggy morning. He sought out others who would have an interest in canoeing down the Danube River, behind the Iron Curtain, and in a search for his roots,

from Ulm, Germany to Romania and the Black Sea. No such trip had ever been attempted or perhaps even contemplated since the Russian takeover of Eastern Europe. His first recruits were canoe and kayak mates Bill Fitzhugh and Chris Knight. Next came the younger Dick Durrance and Dan's fraternity brother David Donnelly. Later, with nine paddlers, they needed to attend to all of the logistics: an itinerary, equipment, authorization, funding, sponsorship, and more. In the seventies, I got to know Ellis Briggs '21 quite well (Although it never occurred to me at the time that he was nearly old enough to be a member of our 1968 Commencement 50th Reunion Class). An ambassador to numerous countries, Briggs gave an introduction to the State Department which was able to pave the way for the diplomacy required for the trip. Old Town loved the idea of the trip and donated four canoes. Visas and notebooks full of paperwork were required for each of the Eastern countries—and a travel agent with activities in the East was most helpful at the eleventh hour with some of these visas. Knight and Durrance were critical as professional-level photographers with connections, and the National Geographic sponsorship came next—for them, photos are the necessity and the story is of lesser import. The final requirement for financial support came from David Donnelly's printing business family. Another \$500 is reputed to have come from two young ladies in a liquor store who were quite taken with Dave Donnelly and his story about the trip. I not sure what they were drinking, but I have been assured that the story is true! Dan Dimencescu notes that the Western Europeans they met were amazed that they were going to canoe behind the Iron Curtain—and that they were going to paddle that far! In the East, it was the most exciting thing people had ever seen, and crowds grew and grew the further down the river they went. I am told that every Eastern European country not only met the group to check their paperwork, but that local canoe clubs would also come out to greet them. For any of us who ever went behind the Iron Curtain, you know that it was very bold of the group to undertake this trip. It was ground-breaking, it was the cover story on *National Geographic*, and it was the subject of a "What's My Line" episode. As Dan Dimencescu says, "This trip was Life-Changing for all of us."

Fail

Without a doubt, this is the most difficult trip about which to write—and my title is almost certainly unfair. First of all, where and what are we talking about here? This trip was intended to trace the route pioneered by Joseph B. Tyrell in 1893 with his brother James, three Iroquois, and three Metis Indians. Starting in Black Lake, Saskatchewan, moving through vast sections of the North West Territories, the trip followed the Dubawnt River most of the way and ended in Baker Lake above the Chesterfield Inlet in the northern-most section of Hudson Bay. This route left the forested portion of the Canadian Shield and emerged above the tree line into the so-called Barrens. It ran through Dubawnt Lake which is ice-bound almost the entire year. This is hostile and unforgiving territory. The land owes you nothing. And, the water is unforgiving. Second, why is this trip important? It is important because it may be the most controversial canoe trip ever attempted in North America. Trip leader Art Moffatt '41 was an avid and experienced canoe tripper. He was an outdoorsman and a lover of nature. He had canoed numerous Canadian rivers, including the Albany River (which I ran in 1963) to James Bay, the Allagash, the Androscoggin, and the Penobscott. He ran the Albany six times, twice with Skip Pessl '55 and once with Peter Franck. Fascinated with the Dubawnt River, Art was actually in close communication with Joseph B. Tyrell about the particulars of his trip down the river in 1893, and Tyrell shared with him the details of his journal on the trip! Read that sentence again and imagine that! The only earlier recorded trip on the Dubawnt was by Samuel Hearne in 1770 (and, no, I am not going to claim that his trip was the first recorded Dartmouth Freshman Trip—although I must admit that it is tempting!). In 1955, Art recruited four Dartmouth men and one Harvard student to come with him to conquer the Dubawnt. On September 14, two of the three canoes capsized in a tumultuous rapid, and five of the six travelers were submerged in the water in freezing temperatures. Four members of the group spent nearly thirty minutes in the water. Each of those exposed either became delirious or unconscious. Skip Pessl says he has no recollection of the first two hours on land, but he understands that he and LeFavour kept hitting each other on the shore to produce body heat and keep their clothing from freezing on them. Within an hour, Art Moffatt was dead from hypothermia, Lanouette barely recovered, and it is a miracle that the others exposed didn't perish as well. It is easy to say that you shouldn't swim fully clothed in winter conditions, but

what do you do when that is where you find yourself? With this outcome, their trip became one of both tragedy and controversy. It has been the subject of withering criticism in a 1959 Sports Illustrated article, a 1996 book by George Grinnell about his experience on the trip and his critical views, a 2014 book by Skip Pessl in defense, and a detailed article by Allan Jacobs with a point-by-point defense.



The criticisms (and a response by Skip Pessl) follow: these were unseasoned paddlers (all of the young men were already seasoned or had become experienced by the time of the challenging part of the trip), that the trip had conflicted goals (yes, a secondary goal was photography and it produced what turned out to be an incredible record), that there was an inadequate stock of food (the original food delivery never arrived and the group had to try to replicate supplies at the local Hudson's Bay store – with a long delay and mixed success—but, with fishing gear and rifles, they were able to live off the land for most of the trip), that they had improper equipment (other than a few materials like nylon, they had pretty much the same equipment as the 1893 Tyrell expedition because fabrics we take for granted today had not yet been discovered), that there was a lack of attention to schedule (Moffatt used Tyrell's journal as a guide and they were close to his pace until the very end of the trip. Peter Franck did suggest a faster pace of travel, but not in a manner of heightened urgency), and finally that they resorted to running rapids

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blind in mid-September winter conditions (on the contrary, as discussed below). As it relates to their pace, Pessl notes that it was awesome and humbling, and maybe even enchanting, when they left the tree line, because the terrain became infinite and so other worldly, but they didn't fall into a trance as a result. In August, they may have taken several unwise rest days, but the biggest delays were due to weather, especially in September when they were also scouting a bad stretch of rapids and were delayed by five days. It turns out that they were overly cautious and portaged these rapids, but would actually have been able to run them without incident. When the weather turned cold, while the group still felt in control of their destiny, he remembers the concern they all shared when they had to break the ice in the milk pot. And, finally, on that fateful September 14, they saw from Tyrell's journal that there were to be two easy rapids and then a portage. Moffatt's group ran one rapid and expected a second easy one. They didn't realize at the time that the one they ran turned out to be a blending together of the two that Tyrell had noted, so when they rounded a corner in the river, they heard a deafening roar and faced a wall of white water.



Skip Pessl will never be the same after this trip. He lost a dear friend and mentor in Art Moffatt, a man he admired and learned from. It cannot be easy to see such a man full of life one moment—and then gone within an hour. He has taken this experience as a teachable moment and states firmly that this trip totally

and radically changed his life. He abandoned his plans to pursue medicine, became a pacifist like Art, and has spent his career as a geologist and his life ever since trying to find his place in nature as a human being. He is a truly kind and gentle man and has spent untold hours with me going over every difficult detail of this trip. But, he doesn't choose to crawl into a shell and shelter from risks. He also remains an enthusiastic fan of Dartmouth trips and trips in general. He wants to see people get out in the world and take chances. Of course, he notes, things don't always go as planned. But, seeking risk is an inherent feature of the human spirit. Risk is an attractive feature of being in nature. Risk builds and shapes a person.

But, Wait! There's More!

There's more. There's a lot more. But, you won't find it in this Newsletter on account of space constraints. To read all of this, you will need to go to www.dartmouth68.org and click on the "Trips" tab. Here is some of what you will find there:

Others Who Came Before Us—Several other Dartmouth Icons

The 10th Mountain Division—Why the Army turned to Dartmouth for this climbing and skiing unit

Mount Everest—Why the first American ascent turned to Dartmouth

Rich duMoulin—How he and a friend sought to break the Sea Witch speed record

Ned Gillette '67—Nearly a '68, Ned was the personification of Trips (squared)

Andy Harvard '71—A touching story of the man who ran the Outdoor Programs at Dartmouth

A Few Surprise Bonus Stories

Wick Walker—Our Modest Expert

Dave Seidman—Some moving remembrances of our classmate who was lost way too early

Does It Matter?

So, why do all of these stories and all of these people matter? And, what do they really have to do with Trips? It all matters because it has to do with the difference between merely existing and actually doing something. The difference between drifting and leading. The difference between just being present and excellence or achievement.

There are now many colleges that offer Freshman Trips, but Dartmouth accounts for more than ten percent of the students across the nation who actually go on one. Trips are at the core of what makes Dartmouth different and arguably better. More than

any other Dartmouth President, John Sloan Dickey got it. He understood and celebrated the importance of Trips and the importance of “place.” At Dartmouth, we learn from our Trips how to thrive, achieve, and lead. We learn from Trips that we can be pioneers in outdoors activities or in science or commerce or the arts. Once empowered in that way, we can go off and make music in New York or movies in LA or lead an organization anywhere.

If you want future generations to have this chance, I ask again for your gift. Call 800-228-1769 and tell them you want to give to the Class of '68 Freshman Trip Endowment. Thanks.



Dhaulagiri