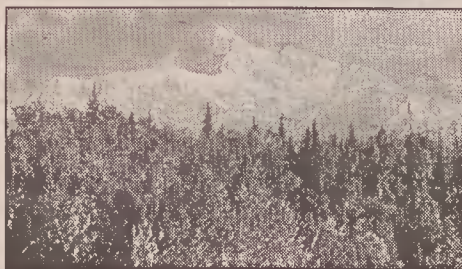


PLAYIN' IT OUT: SPORTS & MORE

A group of our own
Greensboro N.C.'s Wilderness Network of the Carolinas offers hiking trips around the Carolinas and more.

by Paul Smyre

Thirteen years ago if you were gay or lesbian, living in the Carolinas and interested in the outdoors, your opportunities were quite limited. You could join one of the mainstream organizations such as the Sierra Club or one of the local groups working on the Appalachian



WNC's previous hiking trips include exploring Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska.

Trail and have a chance to experience the wilderness that way, if you chose to.

Hiking with those groups, even the ones that were gay friendly, often left you feeling as though you didn't quite fit in — especially if the conversation turned towards spouses and children.

In 1990 in Greensboro, N.C. a group of gay men got together and organized a group that

would offer the LGBT community the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors with individuals that shared similar interests and backgrounds.

Over the last decade that group has expanded to include both men and women and reinvented itself as the Wilderness Network of the Carolinas (WNC). In the process the club has become a way for gays and lesbians to participate in outdoor activities outside the pressures of a bar.

For those who are adventurous and who like to challenge themselves, WNC offers a way to meet kindred spirits. Camping, canoeing and hiking with other enthusiasts is a wonderful bonding experience, even more so in a gay environment.

After a decade plus of growth the club has expanded the variety and range of trips available. Starting with simple day hikes in the local or state parks, the club has progressed to offering canoe trips, whitewater rafting, kayaking, skiing and backpacking, as well as an expanded once-a-year outdoor adventure.

In cooperation with other clubs, WNC has been able to sponsor activities that took members throughout North America. In the past there have been backpacking expeditions to Canada, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, and Alaska. Wilderness Network of Georgia in Atlanta, and Chiltern in Boston are just two of several clubs that have invited WNC to join them on trips or been initiated by WNC to participate in a WNC event. Some of these events are true group efforts and involve people from all over the country.

While larger and more distant excursions may sound like a challenge for some, WNC is not

designed just for brave of heart. "We all enjoy the opportunity to take off and go hike in Denali, [Alaska], but not all of us have the time or the funds to do so," says Brad Batch, past president and current newsletter editor for WNC. "So WNC makes a special effort to also include other trips several times a season, including day hikes, which anyone in normal condition can attend. We try to be an inclusive club and offer those of us who live in North Carolina some of the outdoor opportunities that are found in larger gay communities in other parts of the country."

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