

The Official Newsletter of the Ashdown Community

Message from the Editor

Dear Reader,

As 2010 falls away and the first decade of the new Millennium passes into its second, we take a look back at how the various Ashdown House committees helped add color to the final months of 2010 for Ashdown residents.

Activities ranged from excursions like the Wachusett Mountain Fall Foliage Trip to indoor diversions like special Coffee Hours and Sunday Brunches. Of particular note was the Pumpkin Carving Contest, which drew one of the largest Coffee Hour crowds. This fall also saw a high level of attendance for the annual Thanksgiving Dinner, an event well-established in Ashdown tradition even before the term of the current Housemasters.

The Ashdown House Executive Committee will be recruiting more officers in the spring of 2011, so keep your eyes peeled if you are interested in opportunities to organize activities and exercise your leadership skills! You may find out more about the various committees at <http://ashdown.mit.edu/>.

Sincerely,

Liang Jie Wong

Ashdown Newsletter Officer

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Wachusett Mountain Fall Foliage Trip (Oct 23)

Dismissing the urge to sleep in on a Saturday morning, forty Ashdowners and their guests set off from Ashdown House at 9 a.m. to witness the autumnal splendor of Wachusett Mountain. The event was organized by the Ashdown Outing Committee and fully subsidized for all residents of Ashdown House.



Preparing to set off.

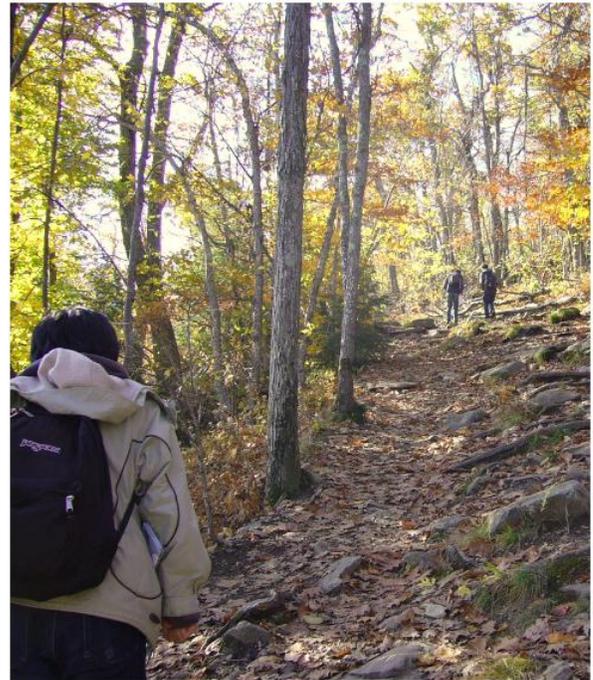
Wachusett Mountain's modest height of 2,006 feet may make it seem an unchallenging venue for hiking; indeed, most of us had gained the windswept summit by noon and were proceeding to surfeit our gazes and our photography equipment with the panoramic view. Nevertheless, a full-day's hike upon the rugged trails would easily prove a trial of physical endurance for anyone.



Lunch amid the fiery-colored foliage

To descend from the summit, we were faced with a choice of two routes: the steeper Pine Hill trail or the more circuitous Old Indian trail. My group went for the Old Indian Trail, since we had time to kill anyway.

It was about an hour-and-a-half's journey to the mountain by chartered bus. We disembarked outside the State Visitor Center. Before us rose Wachusett Mountain, a majestic spectacle in its motley garb. Outing Officer Kuang Xu held us only long enough to remind us to be back by 3 p.m. And with that, the day's adventure began.



The ascent.



Mountaintop panorama (photograph courtesy of David Chhan).

On our way down, we explored a small trail that led off from the main one and had our lunches in a leafy nook. At the foot of the mountain, Wachusett Mountain's 27th Apple Festival was in full swing; in half an afternoon we had stepped from multi-colored nature to multi-colored human revelry.

We arrived back at Ashdown House at around 4:30 p.m., tired and happy, glad for the workout and for the invaluable chance to witness the swan song of nature, an entr'acte of visual harmonics before the world becomes muted in a monochromatic winter.



At the 27th Apple Festival.



The descent (photograph courtesy of David Chhan).

Pumpkin-Carving Contest (Oct 28)

In the spirit of Halloween, the Coffee Hour Committee held a pumpkin-carving contest. The hour-long event drew almost a hundred people and produced over fifteen carved pumpkins.



Pumpkin-carvers eager to begin



Bonnie Lam and team beginning the work that would make them champions

Participants were required to register online in advance but thanks to the surplus of pumpkins, attendees of the Coffee Hour were allowed to join the contest on impulse. Each group was given a pumpkin-carving kit, which included implements to hollow out and carve the pumpkin as well as a booklet of design templates. The majority of contestants were in groups of two to five, but some chose to carve alone.



Pokémon encounters the joy of eviscerating a pumpkin



Quantum Electrodynamics-savvy pumpkin-carvers with a sense of humor



The Judging of the Pumpkins.

The most popular pumpkin was the Doraemon pumpkin by Bonnie Lam and her team, who were all fans of the time-travelling robotic cat Doraemon in the eponymous Japanese manga and anime series. Each of the champions received an AMC movie pass. Tickets to MIT's Diwali Night were awarded to the three runner-up teams. Forewarned about the short life-span of carved pumpkins, most carvers donated their pumpkins for display at the Ashdown front desk and the windows of the Hulsizer room.



Amy Gao's team and their prize-winning work of exotic art

Ashdown Thanksgiving Dinner (Nov 22)



At 6:30 pm on Monday, November 22, 2010, about 150 Ashdown residents and invited guests sat down to a lavish Thanksgiving Dinner in the Hulsizer Room. The event was organized by Housemasters Prof. Terry Orlando and Dr. Ann Orlando, with catering by Bon Appétit, the operator of MIT's House Dining Rooms.

The sumptuous spread included mixed greens, mashed potatoes, pasta, turkey stuffing and roast turkey – everything vegetarian except for the turkey – and was topped off with apple pie, pumpkin pie and ice cream. Waiters circled the tables and filled glasses from a wide selection of beverages.



A glorious spread.



Loading up.

The tradition of an annual Thanksgiving dinner was started by previous Housemasters Prof. Vernon Ingram and Beth Ingram. According to Dr. Ann Orlando, the tradition is now at least 25 years old. The services of Bon Appétit are usually engaged for the event.

All photographs in this article are courtesy of Ganeshapillai Gartheeban.



Dining and discoursing.

A Puzzling Coffee Hour (Dec 2)

As the semester neared its end and stomachs tensed throughout Ashdown House in the face of encroaching deadlines and impending exams, the Ashdown House Coffee Hour Committee decided that it was once again time to counteract the mind-boggling mysteries of schoolwork and research with a more wholesome kind of conundrum: jigsaw puzzles! Approximately 60 people turned up for the event, which had about 20 participants divided into four contending teams.



The race is on.



The heat intensifies.



Brainwork and teamwork.

Each team was given a 300-piece jigsaw puzzle to complete. It was fascinating to watch the variety jigsaw puzzle-solving teamwork tactics employed as each team scrambled to be the first to assemble its pieces. For instance, some teams worked on the entire puzzle together, while others split the team into two to work on the borders and center of the jigsaw puzzle separately.



My Vu's team pulling ahead of the others.



Victory.

The champions of the contest were My Vu and her team. Coming in a close second were Matthew Branham and his team, who completed their puzzle merely minutes behind the winning team. When asked what she thought made her team tick, My Vu said that they were in fact simply friends with no jigsaw puzzle contest experience prior to the last jigsaw puzzle contest organized by the Coffee Hour Committee in the summer, which they happened to have also won. My Vu and her team members each got a \$10 Toscanini voucher for their victory.

Citizen's Corner: Submission Guidelines

Do you have a flair for writing?

Do you have an experience you would love to share? A cause you want to speak out for? An event you would like publicized and reported?

The ears of Ashdown are thirsting to hear your story!

The "Citizen's Corner" is a section of "3am" aimed at reflecting the lives and perspectives of Ashdown residents. All Ashdown residents are invited to contribute, and all kinds of material are welcome. In the past, we have received everything from overseas exchange program stories to essays about environmentalism. We are especially keen on the views of international students comparing the way of life (in terms of culture, atmosphere, education system etc.) here to the ones they were used to.

Guidelines in a nutshell:

- Submissions should be between 100 and 1500 words.
- No politically sensitive, religiously sensitive or pornographic material.
- Pictures to accompany text are welcome.
- Email title: "3AM SUB: <title of submission>".
- Email Liang Jie Wong ("Liang") at ljwong@mit.edu.



Contact the Editor

Please direct any comments or queries about "3am" to Liang Jie Wong ("Liang") at ljwong@mit.edu
