

By **ALYSSA DANDREA**  
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 Transcript

Four years. Four goals. The question is: what's next for Stephen McGreal?

McGreal, a Jaffrey resident for six years, began hiking as a social activity roughly 16 years ago. It was an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors with friends and to meet fellow hikers. But during the past four years, McGreal has far exceeded what most casual hikers have done in a lifetime and experienced some of the most remote corners of New England.

This October, McGreal completed the Northeast 115, which includes the 46 high peaks of the Adirondacks in New York and others in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, which he began tackling in 2008.

At 47-years-old, McGreal is a self-employed consultant for his company ChemOne Compliance, where he assists companies in their compliance of safety, environmental and regulatory issues. In part, his friends, who have done similar climbs, were the inspiration behind his decision to keep pushing forward and challenging himself as a hiker, he said

in an interview with the Ledger-Transcript on Oct. 25.

"Inspiration also came from the continued fitness that it provided during each step and knowing that I could and I wanted to keep it up," he said.

McGreal's journey began four years ago when he hiked all 48 4,000-foot peaks in New Hampshire. In August of 2009, he finished climbing all 67 of New England's 4,000 foot peaks, which includes five in Vermont and 14 in Maine that counted towards the Northeast 115. As he worked towards completing those 115 climbs, by September 2010 McGreal had also hiked New England's 100 highest peaks.

On some climbs, McGreal has hiked more than 20 miles, reaching summits of over 4,000 feet. He didn't see these goals all at once, he said, but rather approached each climbing list as a personal progression, and made each challenge he set for himself more difficult.

While some people avidly wake up early every morning and go to the gym, McGreal said he is not the type of person who enjoys doing that. Hiking, kayaking, biking and skiing

allow him to be outside where the overall experience level is heightened. There is nothing comparable to being out in the wilderness, he said, especially alone.

"The views from the top of the mountains are like no other", McGreal said, explaining that the wilderness allows him to reflect and "unplug" from the hustle of day-to-day life. "You are going into areas that maybe 95 percent of the public will never get to see."

In northern New Hampshire and Maine, McGreal said moose are always a highlight of his hike, especially because he has never seen one outside his mountain hikes.

"You almost can't swing a stick without seeing a moose in some areas," he said, laughing.

Although it was the comradery and his personal love of hiking that first sparked McGreal's interest in taking on more difficult goals, the health benefits of his decision were visible early on. In the course of climbing all 4,000-foot peaks in New Hampshire McGreal lost 35 pounds in 2008. In the past four years, he said he's built up his leg muscles and increased his stamina.

"It wasn't something that I was initially looking to do, but certainly hiking is a great workout for the respiratory system," he said.

McGreal does not believe the climbs have taken a toll on his body but instead views his accomplishments as more of a gradual process that started more than 16 years ago. In 2008, he said he never would have imagined his love of hiking would take him this far. But once a hiker has built up his endurance, McGreal said, desire and commitment are a continuing source of strength for future goals. Regardless of the challenge, he said he's driven to meet it and his accomplishments are proof that he can do anything he sets his mind to.

"The hiking has made me stronger physically and definitely more capable and confident on the trails and out in the wilderness," he said.

While McGreal will plan each hike in advance by checking the weather; he said it amazes him sometimes how quickly the atmosphere can change, with storm clouds forming over some mountain peaks and not others.

McGreal remembers one



Stephen McGreal of Jaffrey stands at the summit of Cannon Mountain, the sixth highest peak in the Adirondacks.

of his climbs on Cannon Mountain, which is located in the White Mountains, where the weather was a gorgeous 80 degrees, until the temperature quickly dropped to 30 and it started hailing, he said.

"It was unbelievable and you wondered where it had come from," he said.

Despite being caught in the pouring rain and a few brief blizzards, McGreal has never been seriously injured and considers himself lucky. A first aid kit, lots of water and a couple extra layers of clothing, he said, are key elements for any hike. McGreal said he will typically bring two or three liters of water, a sandwich, fruit and maybe some breakfast bars on his hike,

aware of the fact that maintaining a safe blood sugar level can be an issue for any hiker.

Now that he's hiked well over 200 individual mountain peaks, McGreal said his next goal may be to hike one of the same lists, but during the winter months.

"One of the things that everyone always asks me - and I haven't really decided yet - is what's next?" McGreal said. "Since I've had four years and four goals, what will the next four include?"

While McGreal still decides on his next adventure, he said he does know one thing for sure: "I will keep hiking. ... It's what I love to do."