



Clyde Ballard, '63 at March Back Class of 2013

March Back Class of 2013 (8/10/09)

Following the example of our local society president Tom Morgan who joined the Class of 2008 March Back in 2004, I began training in April 2009 though hindered by the frequent inclement weather of spring and being lazy. The training culminated with a combination of hikes totaling nearly 14 miles Monday July 27 when the temperature reached nearly 100 degrees on the 3.25 mile trail around Chambers Bay Golf Links. The hobby of geocaching provided some incentive, particularly when visiting other areas.

The trip to USMA began by flying to NY and landing at the airport near White Plains on the evening of August 6. I continued the training by taking hikes of various distances Friday, Saturday, and Sunday discovering several geocaches

in such places as on Storm King and Bear Mountains. I was fortunate to have a suite at the Five Star Inn (the official West Point Army Lodging facility near the museum on the site of the former Ladycliff College in Highland Falls. This facilitated easy access to USMA and to the various forests in the area.

Final registration for the graduate participation in the March Back was Sunday afternoon on August 9th. That was quite an experience being a reunion of sorts. I had the privilege of meeting Dick Williams, Class of 1945, the event's oldest graduate participating in his 7th having marched the complete distance in all that have been open to graduates. It was a delight to have him point to a picture of his marching last year and say that he is in better condition now.

The march was divided into three sections with two 20-minute rest stops to rehydrate and refuel. The pace was manageable – about a 20-minute mile. Old grads had ample opportunities throughout the march to engage new cadets and cadre in conversation. From remarks made by our classmates, the interaction with current cadets was a highlight of the weekend.

- The first section was predominantly uphill – the grade varied from six to nine percent – and lasted about 75 minutes.

- The second section had less elevation, was evenly divided between uphill and downhill, but was considerably longer. It lasted about one hour and 45 minutes. That section ended at Round Pond.
- The third and final portion of the march was an hour-long trek to the Ski Slope on blacktop. At the Ski Slope, new cadets took off their socks, cleaned their equipment, slept, and otherwise readied themselves for the last leg into Central Post Area.

Old Grads repaired to the Ski Lodge for coffee, drinks, donuts and pastries, and a reunion with their classmates for the final leg of the march. At 1115, after all companies had arrived, the Class of '63 unfurled its banner – just as the Class of 2013 had done the night before. We posed for pictures with classmates and moved to an area just inside Washington Gate to form a Reviewing Party. We clapped and cheered as the Supe, the Comm, and the Dean led the Cadet Basic Training Regiment past us down Washington Rd. to the final reviewing stand in front of the Supe's house. Each New Cadet Company passed before us as well and was greeted with our loud huzzahs. We old grads with our 50 year affiliation Class of 1963 at the rear then moved out on the road to proudly march behind the New Cadets (now plebes) who well deserved to lead the way after successfully completing the arduous Cadet Basic Training efficiently led by USMA staff and the cadre from the classes of 2010 and 2011.

After our arrival at the Supe's house, we repaired to Arvin Gym for showers and a change into dry clothes, and then made a short walk to Ike Hall for a well-deserved lunch buffet and laudatory remarks from the Supe for our participation. Although tired and challenged, all of us were thankful for the experience and acknowledged that we enjoyed every bit from start to finish. All participants relished getting involved with cadets and many expressed a desire to get more involved in follow-on Affiliation activities in the coming months.

It was a great privilege to participate and share the experience with some of our nation's finest young men and women.