

Featured Felines: Miscellany 1 (2010+)

(page checked July 2026)

The Summit Cats of Mount Washington Observatory (MWobs) New Hampshire, USA



Mount Washington, in the Presidential range of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, is the highest peak in the north-eastern United States at 6288 feet (1917 metres). It'

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s notorious for its erratic and often severe weather; until a few years ago it held the record for the highest recorded wind speed on Earth at 231 mph (375 km/h). The present observatory at the summit was established in 1932 and, weather permitting, is reached by the Mount Washington Auto Road. The Mount Washington Cog Railway, dating from 1869, also goes to the summit and normally runs from May through November.

Early pets

Since its opening there's nearly always been a resident pet or pets at the Observatory; they're actually the only permanent residents, as the human staff work a weekly shift system. Mostly they have been cats; dogs have been tried, but not very successfully, as the frequent shift changes mean there's no one person a dog can acknowledge as boss. In earlier times the cats kept the rodent population under control; these days there are fewer mice and there is usually just one cat, seen more as a friend and companion to the staff in what can be a remote and rather lonely outpost, especially in winter. For nearly half a century (1954 to 2002) WMTW-TV (Channel 8) operated a transmitter broadcasting from the summit, housed in a separate though connected building from the actual Observatory, and on occasion there were different cats in the two buildings. Now the transmitter has been moved elsewhere, the TV building no longer exists.

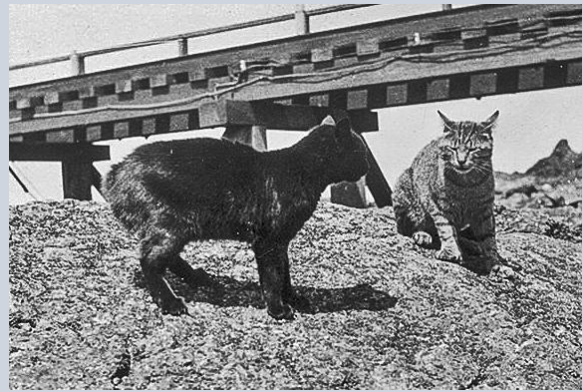
An account of 'The First Christmas at the Summit' (presumably 1932) by then-observer Alexander McKenzie mentions a cat called **Tickey**, or **Tikky**, who was the first of many; she had no tail. She had come from the AMC's (Appalachian Mountain Club) Gateshead Hut and was cared for by Sal Pagliuca, whose sleeping bag she would share. She seemed oblivious to the cold outside. One day in 1933 **Andy** showed up, unannounced; Tickey, having no tail, was fascinated by Andy's and was constantly pouncing on it. Having had enough one day he swatted her across the face; soon afterwards she walked out and was never seen again.



*The 4 recognised founders of the observatory, c. 1932, with Tickey:
(l. to r.) Alex McKenzie, Bob Monahan, Joe Dodge, Sal Pagliuca*



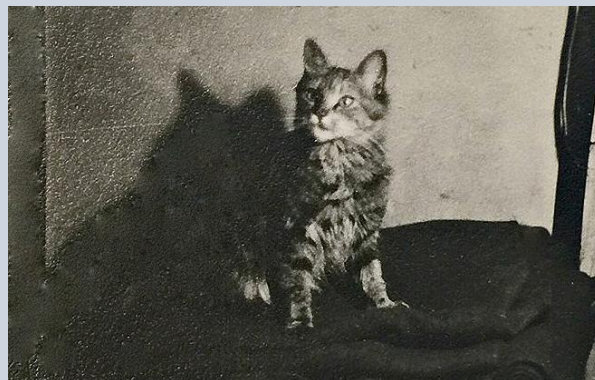
Tickey



Tickey and Andy

By 1934, the year of the 'big wind', logs record the presence of no fewer than eight felines; staff had some difficulty keeping track of them and their names! One was called **Oompha** (or Oomfa) and she had five kittens. A photo exists of the staff with one person holding a cat named **Blackie**, presumably one of the other residents. McKenzie's later account of the 'big wind' says: 'The Observatory felines all huddled near the coal stove in the late afternoon, the warmest spot in the tiny building.'

Cats were at home around the Observatory in 1934, as they are today. There were Oompha and her five kittens, along with **Ammonuisance**, visiting from the AMC's Lakes of the Clouds hut, and **Elmer**, the timid one. Elmer fathered a kitten with Ammonuisance; it was named **Linki** (that may be Linki in the photo below, but no one's sure). There were also **Manx**, a tailless cat like Tikky from the first winter atop Mount Washington, and **Java**, so named because his coat resembled coffee with cream — all kept the summit crew company. At one time there was **George**, a cat who, although well-cared for, decided there must be more to the world than the windswept summit of Mount Washington; accordingly he set off down the trail one fine summer's day and reached the Pinkham Hut near the foot. Unfortunately for him he met a lady hiker, who knew he lived at the summit, so she scooped him up and took him all the way back up. George was reported to have been furious and wouldn't 'speak' to anyone for a week!



Linki?

DFC

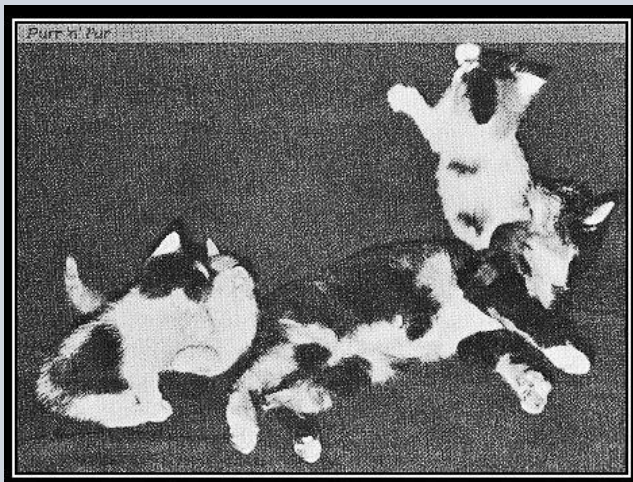
Originally named Crazy Cat, and then for a while Scamp, **DFC** was brought to the summit in about 1967 as a kitten, following an earlier but unsuccessful attempt to raise a different kitten there. She came from a vet's practice in Nashua, NH, where one of the Observers, Greg Gordon, had formerly worked when a teenager. During a later visit he made to the practice, the vet said he was looking for a home for Crazy Cat; so it was that she rode up to the summit in the Snow-cat, snuggled inside Greg's parka. Jon Lingel, another Observer at the time, relates how she came by her final name of DFC, which in the polite version stands for 'Darned Fool Cat':

'It was a dark and stormy night, with the old observatory building rumbling and shaking in the gusts. The cat made demands to the night observer (me) to go out for an adventure. Through the two inner doors, she then "pawed" as the human took a firm grip on the outer door's latch. She tensed her muscles and took a preliminary lean to port, anticipating the typical hurricane west wind on the exposed stairs leading down from the front door. This storm, however, brought hurricane east winds.

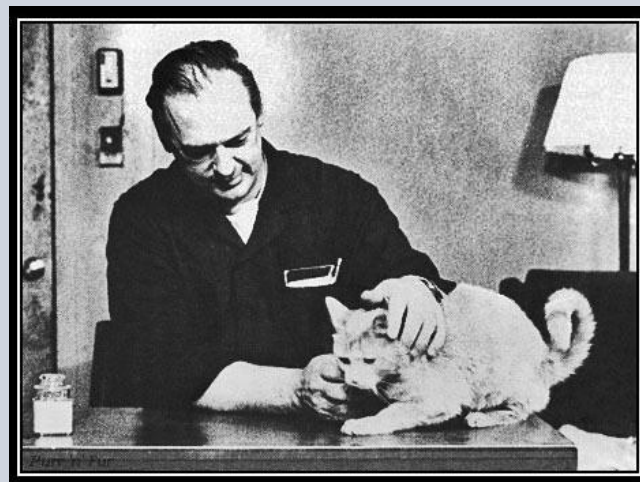
'As the human tugged the door open she bolted out and was immediately blown off the stairs into the fog, eight feet off the ground. "That's the end of the d----d f-----g cat," said the human; but, feeling remorse and concern, he suited up to see if he could rescue her. He eventually found her at the lower back door on the far side of the building. She was cold, wet, angry and humiliated — but unharmed.'

DFC was a 'polychrome' cat, with fur dappled in gold, brown, white, grey and black. She had been badly teased by her previous humans and had a tendency to take out her aggression sometimes on other people; but she was a great character, ate almost anything, was a superb huntress and had prodigious amounts of energy, being prone to wild fits of skidding across floors and through rooms. After some years on the summit she had a litter of three kittens — father unknown — born on 5 September 1970 (*below left*). Of these the ringleader was **Pushka**, a handsome ginger-and-white male with a passion for climbing things.

One foggy night DFC, who was by then pregnant again, went out and was never seen again. She couldn't have survived the winter alone and it was presumed she'd become prey to a weasel or a wildcat.



DFC and her kittens



Pushka (see below)

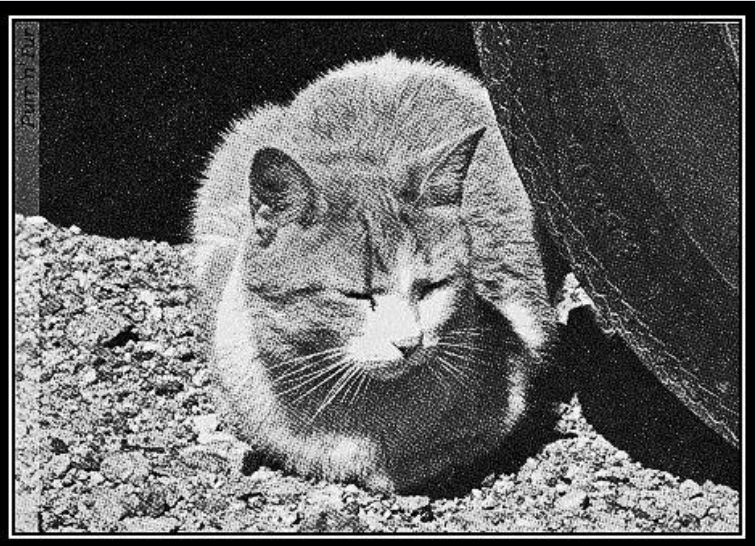
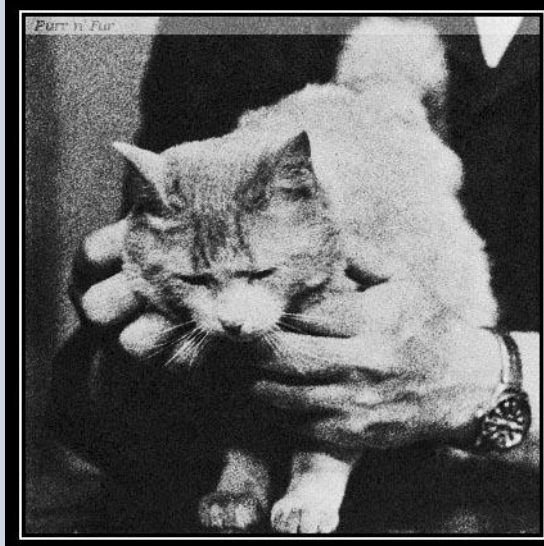
Pushka

Lee Vincent, chief engineer and cat lover, wanted to have a cat in the TV building, and the little ginger hell-raiser was his choice, so the Observatory agreed to give him Pushka. DFC's other two kittens were rehomed; that was never difficult, as kittens born on the summit were regarded in the valley as something of local celebrities! At the time the kitten had not been named; so the TV crew had the idea of featuring him on one of their regular daily bulletins (*above right*) and asking viewers for suggestions, with a prize for the winner. The enthusiastic response generated some 900 replies; after eventually whittling them down to three, **Pushka** was chosen; it means 'little cat' in the Inuit language. The winning family had three children, who had actually made the suggestion, and as their prize they and their father had a journey up to the summit in winter in the Snow-cat to meet the TV crew and the newly named mascot.

Pushka's passion for climbing led him to find a favourite warm spot on top of the TV transmitter; acrobatics were needed to reach it, but that didn't faze him. He was soon into everything; a paper-towel dispenser was a ready-made toy for hours of fun; water dripping from a tap was fascinating (until he fell into a sink full of water); and a short wooden ladder made a great scratching post. Apart

from climbing, his other passion was canned tuna, and so every autumn a case of it was brought to the summit to see him through the winter. Children, hikers, visitors and their dogs were not on Pushka's agenda, and he avoided them whenever possible. The male members of the TV crew were his humans. He loved going outside in summer, hunting and enjoying his summit kingdom; winter was a different story, though, and for his own safety he usually had to be kept in. There was one memorable occasion when he was terribly impatient for someone to go outside with him so he could apparently show them something; it turned out that he had killed a large weasel! They are fearsome animals and it was remarkable that he had managed to kill it rather than the other way round.

Pushka died of old age in August 1985 after some 15 years on the summit, and was buried deep among the rocks of the mountain that had been his home for so long.



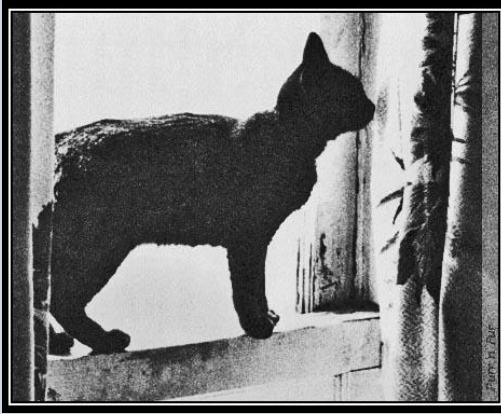
Pushka

Blackberry

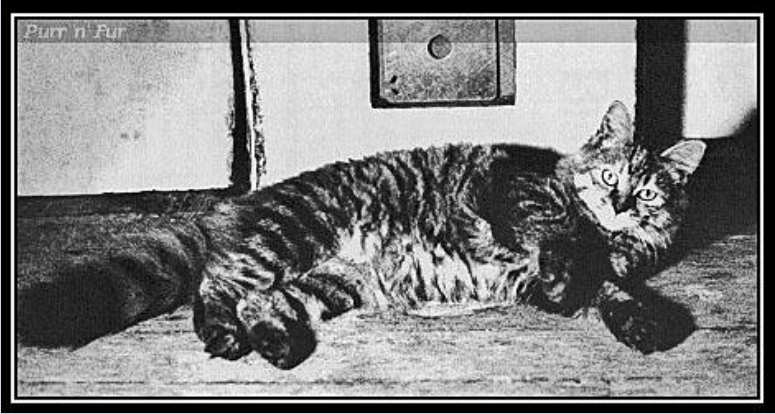
After the loss of DFC there was no cat at the Observatory itself. There had been kittens — but in summer visitors would tend to decide they were 'strays' and take them off down the mountain to give them new homes! So during 1973 one of the Observers, John Howe, brought a black, six-toed kitten that his family had reared on their farm in Jackson, NH; she was equipped with a soft leather collar that read: 'Property of the Mount Washington Observatory. Do not remove from Summit.' She found it hard to adapt to the wild weather conditions, especially the wind, but gradually she settled down — helped, of course, by TV-station cat Pushka. Though young herself, **Blackberry** was already pregnant when she arrived, and in August 1973 she gave birth to four kittens. All were rehomed in the valley when old enough.

By mid-December Blackberry had had another litter, this time of five — fathered by Pushka — in what was known as the 'stationary closet': not because of the stationery stored there, but because it was the only place that didn't move about when the wind blew! The kits were named **Strawberry**, **Blueberry**, **Raspberry**, **Boysenberry** and **Beriberi**; some were six-toed like their mother. Beriberi died soon after being born, while three of the others were rehomed when weaned.

Strawberry (so called because of the orange 'strawberry patch' on top of her head proclaiming her as Pushka's daughter) stayed as a native Observatory resident. During the fierce winter of 1973–4, despite his wishes, Pushka was not allowed out of the building; both he and Blackberry would yowl in their respective quarters, wanting to get together again. However, no one wanted her to be a perpetual mother, and neither had anyone the time to be constantly rehoming kittens, so in April 1974 Pushka made his only trip to the valley — to be neutered. Peace reigned on the summit again as he, Blackberry and their daughter Strawberry went about their lives. In summer 1974, though, Blackberry was returned to the Howe farmstead, which she had enjoyed as a kitten and where she would feel more comfortable.



Blackberry



Strawberry

Strawberry

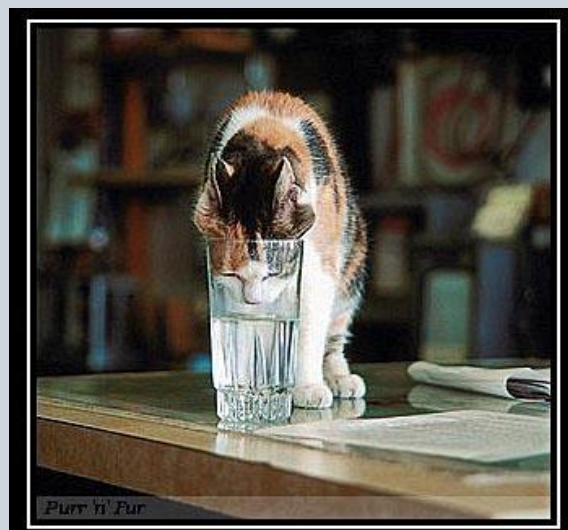
Strawberry had long, fluffy, Angora-like fur, unlike either of her parents, and a splendid tail rather like a fox's brush. Her eyes were large and amber and her whiskers black. She was playful — loved to hide in paper bags — and she was affectionate, with a deep, rumbling purr. She used to love to ride around the Observatory on Al Oxtan's shoulders, and on sunny mornings would bask by the east window.

Unfortunately Strawberry's life came to a tragic and premature end. In the Observatory basement were two 2500-gallon water tanks, filled in autumn to last through the winter. When they were cleaned in summer, dead rodent bodies would sometimes be found in them. One day Strawberry failed to come in for her dinner, and her body was eventually found floating in one of the tanks. Although they were covered with planks and plywood, she must have been over-diligent in pursuing her prey, fell in and could not get out.

*Note: Some of the above information, especially about DFC, was kindly supplied by former Observer Al Oxtan and his ex-colleagues named in the account; many thanks to them all. Much of the remainder has been summarised from Rosemary Howard Turner's 1974 book *The Mascots of Mount Washington*, published by Woodchuck Meadow Publications, West Ossipee, NH. The photos are by Edouard Racz. Tikki and Oompha are mentioned in Eric Pinder's book *Cat in the Clouds* — see link at the end of this account.*

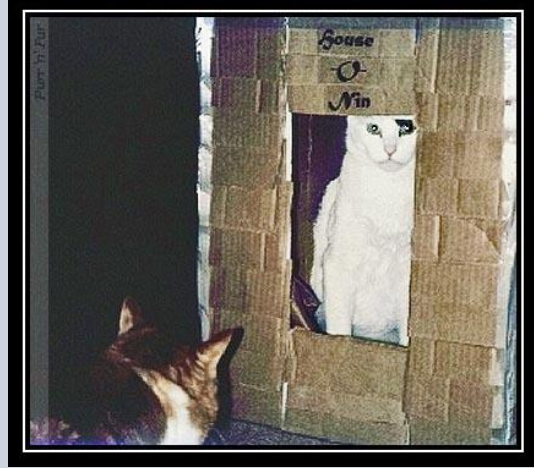
Inga and Jasper

It wasn't long after Strawberry's sad demise that she was succeeded by **Inga**, a tortoiseshell-and-white (calico), who arrived at the summit during the 1980s. She was featured on T-shirts, posters, postcards and other souvenirs sold each summer when the gift shop was open to visitors, and she became quite a media darling, including having an article about her in *Cat Fancy* magazine. Her most famous picture is one of her sitting outside covered in rime, with frosted whiskers (*below left*). Inga died in 1994, aged about 19. She was the only cat to learn how to operate the thumb latch of the Observatory front door and let herself out — but she never did learn how to close the door after her!





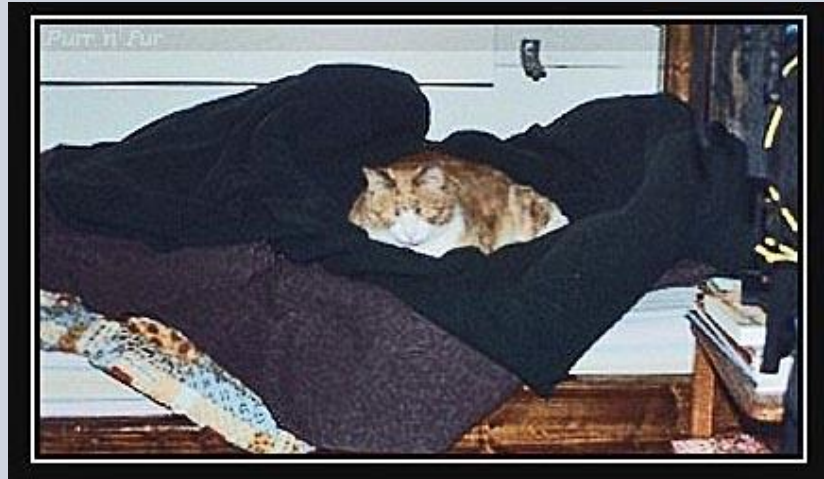
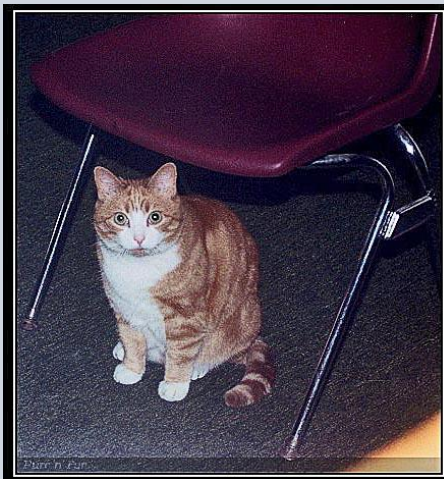
Inga



Jasper and Nin

For some ten years or more there was a second cat with Inga; he was an orange tabby called **Jasper**, but he was more retiring and didn't become so well-known, playing second fiddle, as it were, to Inga. However, he seemed to be quite a character in his own way. He liked to eat asparagus; loved having milk in his drinking bowl; would flee in terror from children, but tolerated adults picking him up as long as they carried him upside-down, on his back (he hated being held upright); and was quite a hunter. The story is told of one night when he trotted in at twilight with a dead mouse and deposited it in the doorway, then went off in search of more. By the end of the night there was a row of mice on the observation deck, sorted by size! 'He was stacking them up like cordwood,' according to one early-rising resident.

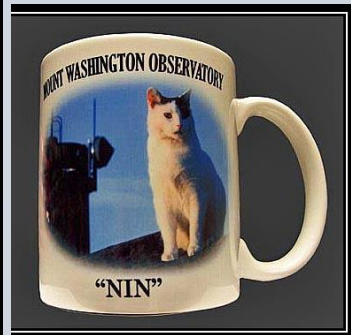
There seem to be few photos extant of this affectionate but shy and unassuming cat (*below*). For a couple of years after Inga's death he had the place to himself, but by early 1996 a new companion had arrived, a white cat with black patches called **Nin**. He had shown up as a stray at the home of one of the staff in the valley in 1995 and was named after writer Anais Nin, but that became simply 'Nin' when it was discovered he was actually male. He and Jasper co-existed for a while at the summit (*above right*), although Jasper was not particularly enamoured of the new arrival, who would steal food from his bowl. Jasper eventually retired after some 14 years on the mountain, and died in 1999.



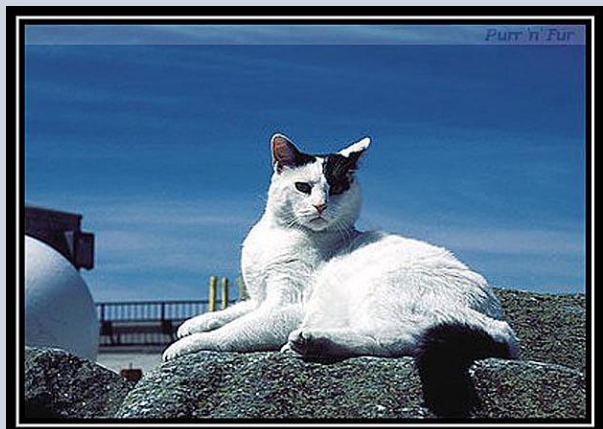
Jasper

Nin

Nin became almost as well-known as Inga had been, once he became established as sole resident cat. He was much loved by the human team and had many fans visiting him or asking about him, friends who brought toys and others who sent donations specifically for his care. A resident cat these days at the Observatory, as well as keeping the staff company, acts as a kind of ambassador to visitors, greeting them and checking around the State Park Center in summer. Nin was particularly good at seeking out tasty snacks from visitors; indeed, at one point he had to be put on a diet! He also had his image on mugs (*below right*).



In 2007 it was announced that Nin would be retiring at the end of the year. For 12 years he had watched ravens, had staring contests with a fox, hiked over boulders, purred on people's laps and patiently watched as they played Scrabble; he was getting on in years — probably 17 or 18 — which had brought some health problems, and an infection had claimed the last of his teeth. After the retirement announcement he was featured in a live broadcast from the summit by a crew from *Good morning, America*, and in fact news of his departure [spread](#) across the country — even to some foreign countries — and led to a huge increase in the observatory's internet traffic.



Nin spent his last Christmas Day at the Observatory and then on 26 December 2007 took the Sno-cat down the mountain to his new home in the valley. He went to live with Mike Pelchat and Diane Holmes, both State Park rangers, who had been long-time friends of his. They had two other cats, one older and one much younger, so Nin had to adjust to no longer being sole cat, but he settled in well and was said to be 'eating like a horse' and putting on weight. He enjoyed going for walks, and especially liked lounging on the sundeck!

Nin had just over 18 months of lazy retirement before he passed away on 14 July 2009. No one was quite sure how old he was, best guesses being between 3 and 6 when he first turned up in 1995, so he was probably at least 16 and perhaps even as much as 20 when he died. He was much missed and is fondly remembered.



Marty

When Nin's retirement was announced, it was decided to hold an election for a successor as resident summit cat. The nearby [Conway Area Humane Society](#) proposed three candidates that were in their care and they felt would be suitable. The winner was **Marty**, a black Maine Coon who gained more than half of the 8000 or so votes cast. As a youngster he had lost his home in a fire and had been in the shelter for over a year. It would be a big change in lifestyle for him when he took up his new post in January 2008.



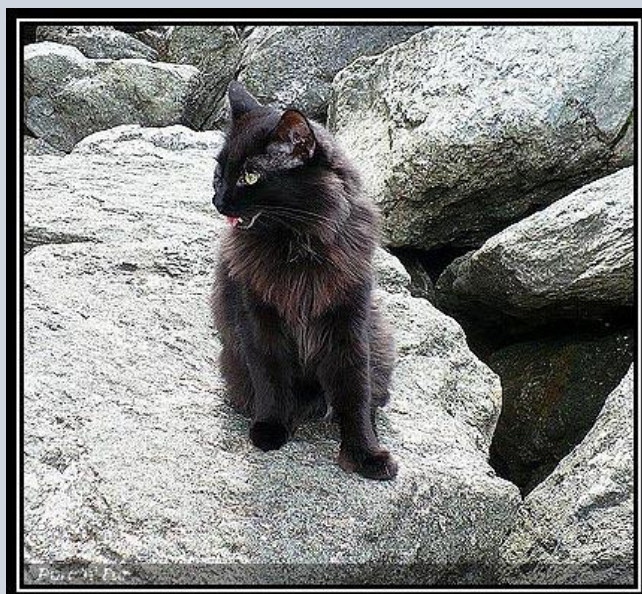
He quickly became a valued member of the community at the summit and was described as 'a little bundle of energy', more active than Nin was and very curious. Any opened drawer or cupboard had to be investigated to see what was inside, and he liked to follow staff around and see what they were doing, as well as chasing bouncy balls and 'stalking' the water cooler! In October 2008 a film crew came to the summit particularly to film Marty for Animal Planet's *Cats 101*, which was being devoted especially to Maine Coons. He behaved well and the crew reckoned he was the easiest cat to work with of those they had met.

His adventurous nature came to the fore on one September evening in 2008 when one of the staff, observer and meteorologist Brian Clark, decided to hike down to the Lake of the Clouds hut, a distance of about a mile and a half (2.5 km) to join the last guest night of the summer. As he prepared to leave, Marty was waiting by the door, making it quite clear he wanted to go out too. Despite using various ploys to get Marty to turn back, the cat insisted on following him all the way to the hut. Not wanting to leave him to his own devices, Brian put him in an attic to rest, and gave him food and water. Later in the evening he had to decide what to do, as the weather forecast for the next day was poor. Eventually he decided it would be best to go back to the observatory — so he and Marty set off again for the summit. Marty followed him faithfully, although he allowed himself to be carried part of the way, and they arrived back safely. A good long sleep was next on Marty's agenda!



During 2009 Marty had a few health problems involving trips down the mountain to the vet; one such trip was to deal with infected teeth, apparently a genetic condition to which he was prone. Ten teeth were removed and made him much more comfortable. He then resumed enjoying life to the full and keeping the mice at bay!

Note: Most of the colour photos in this account are the property of the Mount Washington Observatory, and we're very grateful for permission to use them here. The first one of Inga, covered with rime frost, was taken by Alfred Oxton, and the one of Jasper and Nin by Eric Pinder. We're also indebted to Eric for some of the information about Jasper, Inga and Nin, which has been summarised from his book *Life at the Top*, published by Hobblebush Books in 2009. Links to web pages for that and his children's book *Cat in the Clouds* are below.



Update 2020

Marty presided over matters at the summit for 12 years before succumbing to what was described as 'an unforeseen illness' in November 2020. He was 14 or 15, and would be greatly missed. However, he'd been due to retire in 2021, and so thought was already being given to finding him a worthy successor. That would probably also be a rescue cat from the local Humane Society, and was likely to happen after the 2020/21 winter. Full story and a short video of Marty are [here](#). MWOBS' own announcement of Marty's death is noted [here](#) (Nov. 2020 – archived copy) and there's also a [wonderful tribute](#) (Nov. 2020 – archived copy) with many 'new' photos, written by weather observer and staff meteorologist Ryan Knapp, who had known Marty throughout his summit life. [NY Post](#) (Nov. 2020)

New arrival

The search for Marty's successor began knowing that the new cat 'would have big paws to fill', as Marty had been much loved. Operations Manager Rebecca Scholand said. 'The summit cat is such a special part of our living environment on the summit, making it feel much more like home on our week-long shifts.' After meeting four possible feline candidates at the Conway Area Humane Society (CAHS), the observers agreed on a grey shorthair who they named **Nimbus**, after a type of grey cloud.

Nimbus hailed originally from an animal rescue organisation in Oklahoma before being transferred to CAHS. He made his journey to the Mount Washington summit on 14 April 2021 to begin his new life,

and was about a year old at the time. He's apparently a very sociable cat, who uses a wide variety of meows, chatters and purrs to keep people's attention and to express his happiness!

He celebrated his 6th birthday on 19 March 2026.



Links and further reading

- ❖ [Mount Washington Observatory](#) website – browsing reveals numerous remarkable photos taken from the mountain summit at all times of year
- ❖ Nimbus is listed at the MWObs [staff page](#) ('Resident Summit Cat')
- ❖ [Facebook](#)
- ❖ [Instagram](#)
- ❖ [YouTubeImage galleries at SmugMug](#) – browse the extraordinary and exquisite photos here, in various categories. Many of Nin, Marty and Nimbus.
- ❖ Observer and meteorologist Brian Clark worked for MWObs from 2007 to the fall of 2012, and during that time maintained a blog at AccuWeather, where hundreds of photos illustrated his posts. Many were of Marty, and some of these were from time to time condensed into the following pages; another was for Summit Cats which included shots of Nin.
[Marty Volume 1](#) | [Volume 2](#) | [Volume 3](#) | [Volume 4](#) | [Volume 5](#) | [Comic Relief](#) | [Summit Cats](#) (Nin & Marty) (*all archived copies*)
- ❖ Photos of Inga and Nin at a [Creatures of Comfort](#) observatory page (*archived copy*).
- ❖ Eric Pinder books: [Life at the Top](#) | [Cat in the Clouds](#) | [Among the Clouds](#) – see also

Eric's [Facebook](#) page

❖ Boston.com, Jul 2009: [Obituary for Nin](#) (*archived copy*).

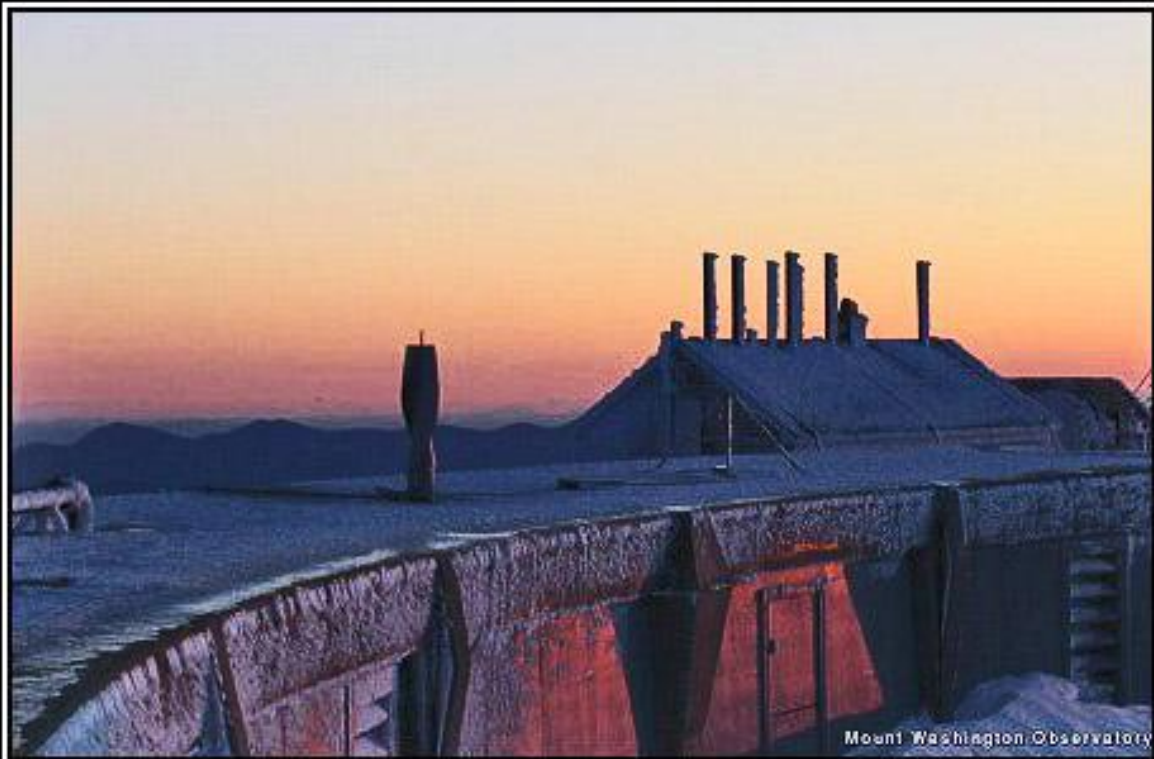
❖ Mt Washington site: [World Record Wind](#).

❖ Boston.com, Jan 2010: [Record blown away, but pride stays put](#).

Excellent article with photos of some of the early cats [here](#) (*2018 – archived copy*).

Below are a few photos of the Mount Washington Observatory in winter, a tiny sample of the stunning images taken there.





Mount Washington Observatory



Mount Washington Observatory



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