

# The Southeast Breeze

The Newsletter of the Southeastern Massachusetts Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club | April 2020

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Maria stops for a contemplative moment on a Mindfulness Walk. Photo by Peter Sestina

## Become part of Nature through Mindful Walking

By Maria Sestina, Hike leader

As our silent spring gently and slowly flows toward summer, the woodlands no longer resonate with the sound of our collective happy voices. While honoring suggestions that will keep all of us healthy, we can still practice mindful walking.

By slowing down, by safely walking alone, we can become more aware of the beauty that surrounds us in both the majestic and humble places. In our silence, we are granted the opportunity to hear the melody of bird song and the raucous symphony of spring peepers. We are more apt to witness the artistry of budding branch and bloom, to hear our own internal voices more clearly. We can focus on our senses by becoming part of nature rather than merely walking through it.

As we begin our walk, we might want to initially focus on what is outside of us. Take a moment to examine more closely those things that attract us along the path. With time, we might gradually start to observe inside of ourselves. We might begin taking stock of the work that needs tending to in our yards, our gardens, ourselves.

Quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think. My mind works only with my legs."

Until we are all together once again, may we all walk toward well-being and an enhanced awareness and appreciation of the bounty that is available to all of us outside our own doors.



## View from the Chair: The Wonders of Springtime

Every year the calendar flip to April brings the wonders of springtime, but COVID-19 makes this year different. Instead of being out and about soaking up the sights, sounds and fragrances of spring, we are forced into life indoors with only an occasional escape for the essentials of life or perhaps a brief stroll. Being indoors, I turned to a book recently discovered at a favorite country bookstore about the life and writings of the American naturalist John Burroughs (1837-1921), contemporary and friend of John Muir, Walt Whitman, and Theodore Roosevelt. One selection from his writings captures the wonders of springtime that we have before us.

*The migrating wild creatures, whether birds or beasts, always arrest the attention. They seem to link up animal life to the great currents of the globe. It is moving day on a continental scale. It is the call of the primal instinct to increase and multiply, suddenly setting in motion whole tribes and races. The first phoebe-bird, the first song sparrow, the first robin or bluebird in March or early April is like the first ripple of the rising tide on the shore. (The World of John Burroughs, Edward Krannz, 1993, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 126)*

Despite the cloud over this springtime, we must remember April also brings a special day for us to reflect on the natural world around us, the 22nd day of the month, Earth Day. This year Earth Day, created in 1970, is worthy of special recognition because it marks the start of the modern world wide movement to conserve the environment, started 50 years ago <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2020/>. The chapter had plans for several Earth Day commemoration events during Earth Day week which, with great disappointment, were canceled, yet another type of COVID-19 victim. Instead of participating in Earth Day, all we can do is reflect on what Earth Day means to each of us, just as John Burroughs reflected on what nature meant to him. But when this pandemic passes, we all will step outside again to resume our efforts to partake of and preserve those outdoor treasures we love, perhaps even with greater passion.

*Len*

Len Ulbricht, AMC-SEM Chapter Chair

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Claire MacDonald crosses a trench that drains water from a cranberry bog. Photos by Craig MacDonald

## **A Short Walk in the Woods Together**

**By Craig MacDonald**

The cool air is thick with moist aerosols beading the exteriors of our DWR-coated jackets as we walk, mimicking the perspiration wetting the garments' insides despite their being marketed as breathable by a famous name brand. The prevailing light rain and mist coat tree branches and send drizzles down to form droplets on limbs tipped with small red buds, bulbous drops of water hanging and teetering tentatively, finally falling under their own weight, dimpling puddles trailside below. It's 6 pm on a path through the woods that has become our daily hike in this terrible time of Covid-19. We explored the woods before, but it's a welcome rediscovery now.

It's at a time of day my wife and I customarily don't hike, in a place we had come to take for granted. Yet it's become our place of refuge. From our front porch, we walk around a long block on a paved road to the Sanctuary entrance, where a sign tells dog-walkers to leash their pets. We choose the time of day they are least likely to be sharing trails with us. We don't want to meet other people. Along the paths we are greeted by proof of an earlier presence and the colors of spring—yellow, blue, green, purple. Not daffodils or crocuses, but dog droppings neatly tied in plastic bags and piled like festive painted eggs awaiting Easter baskets. Too much to expect dogs to pack out what they brought in.

We easily exceed the AMA's daily health goal of 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, but work hard to exceed Fitbit's 10,000 step aspiration. There are seven or eight miles of trails to wander, but our late start limits time to walk. Trails are wide and flat over rolling hills and course along dammed water impoundments and trenched plumbing of active and retired cranberry bogs. Carpeted softly by prior seasons' accumulated pine needles and oak leaves, we look around with heads lifted, seeing our surroundings instead of just our feet, not worrying about the rocks and roots that grab and trip us while hiking in the Blue Hills. Silent and alone, we see and hear things otherwise missed when walking and talking in a group.

Towards the end of our walk, near the arrival of dusk, along the fringe of water features, we hear the choruses of frogs or toads in nearby bushy hummocks. Choruses repeat after pauses, as if waiting for pages to be turned in choir hymnals during Sunday morning church services. We see the deer that wave their raised white tails at us and watch them watch us as they move silently away in quiet alarm at our approach. We hear and see the chevrons of Canada geese honking and flying over our heads, coming from somewhere and heading elsewhere beyond the treetops. As darkness approaches, we head home, walking on the paved road eerily deserted of traffic.

Home to a darkened house except for a single light shining in our kitchen window, where we are removed, separate and apart, well-distanced from social contact. Except from our miniature longhaired dachshund, who excitedly coughs and sneezes in energetic tail-wagging greeting when we return and tickle her tummy upon entering our front door. Unafraid of the aerosols she spews and shares with us, awaiting the time to feel free again, the end of the next day, when it is safe to get outdoors and walk together to our nearby sanctuary in the woods, alone except for each other.



Blue sky reflected in a quiet pond.





When this visitor's bike broke down, the Ranger was there to fix it. Now she wants to be a Ranger, too! *Courtesy photo by her husband*

## Patrolling the Cape Cod Rail Trail: My summer as a DCR Ranger

An interview with Bernie Meggison, Biking Chair  
By Barbara Gaughan

I had the opportunity to catch up with Bernie Meggison, SEM Biking Chair, over E-mail and the phone to learn about his 2019 stint as a Ranger with the Massachusetts Department of Recreation and Conservation on the Cape Cod Rail Trail. Here is our conversation.

**Barbara:** How did this opportunity present itself?

**Bernie:** I have been an active advocate of the CCRT for about 20 years. In doing so, I had made friends and acquaintances with other users of the trail and trail staff. The Superintendent knew of my passion for the trail. When a position became available upon a ranger's retirement, I agreed to be considered as a person of interest. Luckily, I had the experience and qualifications.

**Barbara:** What is the job description?

**Bernie:** I patrolled the CCRT from Yarmouth to Wellfleet,

a total of 30 miles one way. It was my responsibility to ensure that our "customers" were following the rules and regulations of this multi-use path. This could include ensuring that children under the age of 16 were wearing helmets, pets were kept on a short leash of six feet or less, directing traffic at some 40+ intersections, to administering basic first aid and performing minor trail maintenance. I also offered suggestions on sightseeing, other places of interest for recreation, rest rooms and eating establishments. As a certified bicycle mechanic, I was also able to perform some basic repairs, such as assisting with flat tires and making minor adjustments. Once a week I was required to submit a report on my activities, including first aid, repairs, incidents, trail maintenance. I reported to the Chief of State Rangers in Boston and to the Nickerson State Park Supervisor.

**Barbara:** Give us an idea of a typical day.

**Bernie:** My eight-hour daily patrols typically started at 7:30 a.m. My schedule was five days/week. I worked ALL weekends for the three-month seasonal commitment. My average daily mileage was 40 miles. In moderately rainy weather, I would use a DCR truck to inspect all the parking lots, inspect the trail for rubbish/rubbish removal, and inspect for needed maintenance.

**Barbara:** Uniform?

**Bernie:** Supplied by the state, the uniform is a police grade light tan top, dark green trousers or shorts, black tee shirt and an embroidered ball cap with "Ranger" identification. The uniform sports an embossed state ranger badge and several Commonwealth of Massachusetts patches.

**Barbara:** How did the July tornadoes affect the CCRT?

**Bernie:** The July tornadoes were devastating to the trail, especially the Dennis, Harwich, and Brewster sections. Within an hour of patrolling the trail, I informed our park superintendent that there were literally hundreds of downed trees, making the trail impassable. Our superintendent, Eric Levy, informed the DCR of the extensive damage, and within hours we had resources from around the state to clean up the disaster. I saw heavy construction equipment like out of a movie. Crews worked hours and hours to get the trail back in operation. This feat was accomplished in only three days! We are still working jointly with individual towns to clean up the residual debris on the sides of the trail.

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## Ranger on the CCRT

Continued from page 4



Scouts from the Fairfield, CT, area meet their first-ever Ranger! *Courtesy photo*

### Barbara: What did you learn about CCRT ridership?

**Bernie:** This is a GREAT question! One hundred percent of our trail users are here for one reason—ENJOYMENT. I was amazed by the enthusiasm from all age groups. And their dogs. (I went through many boxes of Trader Joe's peanut flavored dog treats. Yes, I always checked with the owners before handing out a treat!) Everyone, from the very young to the very senior and every ethnicity from all around the world, was seeking and enjoying a relaxing and pleasurable experience. Nearly all expressed their appreciation for such a wonderful trail.

### Barbara: What did you learn about yourself?

**Bernie:** Gosh . . . Life is about giving and sharing; being passionate about a cause or nature; learning more about compassion for others; learning to be patient in difficult times. I guess I was like a mother hen, always looking out for my flock, our customers, every day on the job.

### Barbara: What were the most satisfying aspects of the position?

**BM:** Making people feel safe and comfortable with their experience on our Cape Cod Rail Trail and our Cape Cod. People were pleased to know that by providing a state Ranger full time, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Department of Conservation and Recreation valued their visit to our state.



### Barbara: Tell us about your bike.

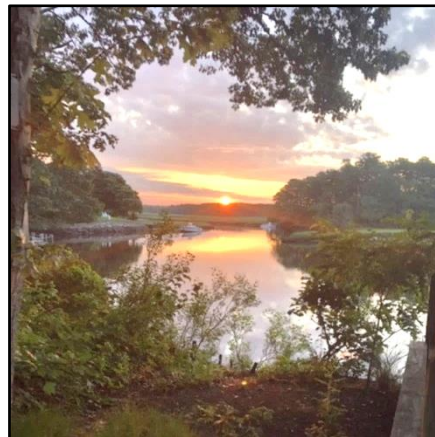
**Bernie:** It's a unique recumbent tricycle. I have some balance issues and several replacement body parts, so I am not supposed to fall. This bike allows for stability, minimizing the fall risk. It's the equivalent of a BMW 7 Series—full suspension; rack and pinion steering; disc brakes; extra storage racks for equipment, tools, first aid supplies; flashing front and rear lights; and a Shimano e-assist drive train for the long hot days of summer. This added accessory allows me to safely respond more quickly to an incident if required,



### Barbara: 2020 summer plans?

**Bernie:** Hopefully, I will once again be selected to perform the duties of State Ranger for the CCRT.

**Barbara:** May I add that IMHO Bernie is so perfectly suited to this position. He is SUCH a people person. He is SUCH an avid cyclist. In talking with him, his pride in the work, in the rail trail, in the DCR is palpable. Be sure to ask him about funny stories, cautionary tales and the people he's met from around the world with whom he is still in contact.



Sunset view from the Cape Cod Rail Trail.

Photo by Bernie Meggison

*Related photo and article on page 6*





## Long distance cyclists hit the CCRT nine months into journey

By Bernie Meggison, Biking Chair



This picture is of a beautiful couple from British Columbia. They are in their late 70s. I believe he is a retired physician, and she is a retired educator.

They started their journey nine months ago in Canada. They have been cycling all over the USA. They expect to travel about 9000-10,000 miles in about a year.

Her only demand is to have one evening per week in a hotel, and one evening dinner per week in a restaurant. They are wonderful people.

I'm so sorry I misplaced their contact info. I remember them saying they had a Facebook page about their journey. So sweet.

### COVID-19 Alert from the Four Thousand Footer Club

**Be aware the 4000 Footer committee is not accepting peaks ascended while stay-at-home orders are in effect. In other words, any ascents made before the orders are lifted will not "count." See <http://amc4000footer.org>**



## Volunteer of the Month: Bob Vogel

By George Danis, Hiking Chair

Each month the SEM recognizes one of our amazing volunteers. We are so fortunate to have people give their time, energy, and resources to make our chapter one of the best! This month the Hiking Committee recognizes long time SEM leader Bob Vogel for his numerous contributions!

While Bob has a rich and long history with SEM, his most recent efforts have included the "What the heck kind of a hike is this?" series in the Blue Hills and a year-round backpacking program that has introduced a number of SEMers to the joys of sleeping under the stars.

Bob is also a tireless trail maintainer who has inspired many others to stop and clear the trail of obstructions. In addition to leading numerous hikes, Bob is also a ready volunteer willing to share his knowledge at leader training and hiking workshops. In addition to being a presenter at these programs, Bob works tirelessly at promoting leadership training to everyone and in mentoring people who aspire to a leadership role.

Finally, in these days of stay-at-home sheltering, Bob is producing a very informative series on the history of the Blue Hills. As a chapter we spend a lot of time in the Blue Hills, and it provides a new perspective when we understand the history of the Hills through which we are walking.

Thank you, Bob, for all you do.

Bob will receive a Volunteer of the Month Certificate and a \$50 gift card.

## Earth Day Special: Endangered Species in the Blue Hills

By Joanne Newton, Conservation Chair

As I was thinking of an article to write for *The Breeze* for Earth Day, I wanted to focus on something related to the Blue Hills since so many of us love to spend time there. I decided to learn more about the Endangered Species Act, as this act was created soon after the first Earth Day as a result of the heightened sense of awareness and concern for our environment and the species of plants and animals that were at risk of extinction. I then wanted to find out if there are any animals and plants in the Blue Hills that are on the Endangered Species List.



As we know, this is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, which was first organized on April 22, 1970. Before that, there was some legislation which attempted to protect some species:

- Lacey Act of 1900 prohibited commercial hunting and interstate trade of certain animals and plants.
- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 made it illegal to hunt, capture, kill, or sell birds migrating between the United States and Canada.
- The Bald and Golden Eagle Protections Act of 1940 prohibited the taking of these eagles in any manner.
- The Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966 created a list of endangered animals and made it illegal to take any of these species on national wildlife refuges. This act was later modified in 1969 to include importing and selling of the listed species. Later, in 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibited the taking of any marine mammal in US waters.

These acts made progress in the right direction, but they were limited in scope. President Richard Nixon addressed Congress in early 1972, asking for a stronger law to protect endangered species. He stated:

"It has only been in recent years that efforts have been undertaken to list and protect those species of animals whose continued existence is in jeopardy. Starting with our national symbol, the bald eagle, we have expanded our concern over the extinction of these animals to include the present list of over 100. We have already found, however, that even the most recent act to protect endangered species, which dates only from 1969, simply does not provide the kind of management tools needed to act early enough to save a vanishing species."

The Endangered Species Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Nixon on December 28, 1973. This act had far reaching implications. *(The following information is taken from the US Fish and Wildlife Service website).* The ESA:

- defined "endangered" and "threatened."
- made plants and all invertebrates eligible for protection.
- applied broad "take" prohibitions to all endangered animal species and allowed the prohibitions to apply to threatened animal species by special regulation.
- required federal agencies to use their authorities to conserve listed species and consult on "may affect" actions.
- prohibited federal agencies from authorizing, funding, or carrying out any action that would jeopardize a listed species or destroy or modify its "critical habitat."
- made matching funds available to states with cooperative agreements.
- provided funding authority for land acquisition for foreign species and
- implemented CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) protection in the United States.

Let's get back to the Blue Hills. Are there any species on the endangered list? There are six listed as "Endangered," six in the "Threatened" category, and six in the "Special Concern" category. I will focus on the endangered species for this article and will write more about the other categories in future issues of *The Breeze*.

*Continued on page 8*





## Endangered Species *Continued from page 7*

First, “endangered” means that this species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. “Threatened” means that the species is likely to become extinct in the foreseeable future, and “special concern” means that the species has a low population and may be near extinction, but it is not legally protected by ESA.

### Endangered Species in the Blue Hills:

*Quoted from the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife website.*

#### **Gypsywort (also known as Taperleaf Water-Horehound):**

This is a perennial herb which is a non-aromatic member of the mint family. It can grow up to 18” tall but usually grows to a height of 12” in Massachusetts. It has slender, erect sparsely branching stems where the leaves are arranged on opposite sides of the stem across from each other and are widely spaced. It has small, white flowers with faint purple spots, which are clustered at the junction of the stem, and leaves forming a kind of round doughnut shape. The petals flare outward. This plant flowers from mid-July through mid-September and can be found in damp soil along small streams.



#### **Lesser Snakeroot:**

This plant is also a perennial herb, but is found in dry woodlands and barrens. It usually grows to a height of less than 2 feet in MA. The stem is hairless and may be free of branches or have a few near the upper portion of the plant. The leaves are thick and leathery in appearance and are 1–5 inches long and .75 to 2 inches wide. The flower cluster is made up of small bright white flowers. This plant blooms from August through mid-September.



#### **Lion's Foot:**

Lion's Foot is a robust perennial in the Aster family that can grow to 6 feet tall. It primarily grows in grasslands, but may be found along rocky slopes, along roadsides, and in other disturbed habitats. The stems are coarse and usually have some purple coloration; they exude a milky sap when damaged. The leaves are alternate and variable in shape with some irregular shaped lobes. The upper part of the plant is branched with flower heads arranged in small clusters near the branch tips. As with others in the Aster family, the flower head consists of tiny flowers, usually 8 to 14. The Lion's Foot flowers are yellow to cream colored. Each flower produces one dry seeded fruit with a tuft of long unbranched bristles at the top. This plant blooms from mid-August through September.



#### **Pod-grass:**

Pod-grass is an erect rush-like plant with clusters of greenish flowers, sheathing opposite leaves and a zig-zag stem. It grows in open marshlands. The stems grow to 9 to 18 inches in height. The leaves are alternate and erect and are 2 to 12 inches in length and about .1 inch in width. Pod-grass has 3 to 10 yellow-green flowers each with 3 “tepals” which are similar to petals. The fruits are .2 to .3 inches and consist of 3 diverging pods, each with 1 or 2 small black seeds. The plant blooms from May until July, but it is best to look for it from early July through September when the fruit can best be seen.



Now for the hard part for me: Ask my backpacking companions and they will tell you how much I dislike snakes. I don't even like to write about them!

*Continued on page 9*





## Blue Hills species *Continued from page 8*

### Copperhead Snake:

Copperheads get their name due to their solidly, relatively unmarked, coppery colored head, the color of which resembles an old copper coin. They have a broad, triangular-shaped head with a distinct narrowing just behind the head. The eyes have vertically elliptical (catlike) pupils. They have a series of dark brown to reddish hourglass-shaped cross bands on the body. These are narrow in the middle of the body and broad to the sides. The surrounding color of the body ranges from beige to tan. These markings continue along the body, including the tail. Young snakes are similar to adults except that the body and tip of the tail is yellow. Adult Copperheads usually grow to 24 to 36 inches in length. Males usually have longer tails and females can grow up to 4 feet long.



They can usually be found along traprock ledges with extensive rock slide below. They do like moist damp habitats. Some wintering dens are found on the fringes of swamps, reservoirs, rivers, and streams. Their summering grounds are near

wetlands, wooden swamps, marshes, or lakes. They may also inhabit fields and meadows, wet woodlands and quarries.

They do have two well-developed and enlarged venom-conducting fangs. Although the Copperhead is venomous and its bite can be painful, it is not considered life-threatening to a healthy human. The active season is from mid-April, when it starts basking on ledges during the day, through October.

### Timber Rattlesnake:

Timber rattlesnakes are large, heavy-bodied snakes in the pit viper family, as are Copperheads. As with all pit vipers, they have broad, triangular-shaped heads, with a distinct narrowing just behind the head. Color patterns are extremely variable in this species. Some are almost jet black and others are sulphur-colored yellow with brown, black, or rust-colored blotches separated by cross bands on their sides, head, and face, and they have a solid black tail. As with all rattlesnakes, this snake has a



structure at the end of its tail that makes a rattle-like sound when vibrated. The Timber Rattlesnake has 'keeled' scales, meaning that a ridge protrudes from the middle of each scale giving the skin a rough appearance. Adults are 36 to 60 inches long.

Timber Rattlesnakes are usually restricted to mountainous terrain, where there is second-growth forest with steep ledges, rock slides, and a large rodent population. They hibernate communally in underground crevices. They are sometimes found in pine barrens and wetlands and occasionally in fields. This snake resorts to striking and biting as a last resort, as it tends to be shy and nervous and will quickly seek shelter if approached.

The Timber Rattlesnake is the most critically imperiled reptile in Massachusetts. They need a high level of protection of their dens and basking areas and it is important to protect them from human access. There is a need to limit or eliminate trails on public land near these areas to protect them.

Please look for these endangered species as you hike, and if you find any, document what you find. There is an app called iNaturalist, which you can download from their website at [www.iNaturalist.org](http://www.iNaturalist.org). Just use this app to take a picture of what you are looking at and it will help identify the species in front of you. The main mission of iNaturalist is to help people connect and learn about nature. At the same time, your photos will contribute to generating scientific data on these species, which is valuable to track and gather information about them.

I can assure you, I will be like the Timber Rattlesnake, hurrying in the opposite direction if I see one, but I will be on the lookout for the plants above and hope you will also. Imagine how exciting it would be to identify one of these species! Please let us all know if you do.

## Learn about the Outdoors

By Bob Vogel, Hike Leader

I'd be the first to admit there isn't a whole lot "good" about the present situation. Since we can't hike, at least with our AMC friends, many of us are finding we have a lot of free time on our hands. There are a couple things we can do with that free time to keep from going stir crazy.

One is to focus on learning about the outdoors. Spring is right around the corner. (OK, technically, it's here but some days sure don't feel like it!) The flowers (and so-called weeds) will be sprouting. The leaves will be coming out on the trees. If you have one or more nature guides, dig them out. If not, you can order one (see below) or just use the internet. Look, really *look*, around. Don't just go for a walk. Slow down and look!

About 10 years ago I ran a series of hikes for 2 years. They were called "Discovering Nature." Every week we took our nature guides and went for a hike. We stopped and looked at *everything*. No walking right along for us; we slowed down and saw wildflowers right along the trails. Things we'd hiked right past every previous year. Every time someone saw a new flower, tree, or bush, we'd stop and (at least try to) figure out what it was. And we learned a lot! More than you would learn if you were just hiking with some expert who pointed out all the flowers. Because looking them up yourself helps make the info sink in.

And today there is also iNaturalist (website and app). The last Thursday morning hike at Eel River, which Rachel Thibeault led, we passed a bush we didn't know. I pulled up my newly installed iNaturalist app, took a photo, and it identified it for us. Great program! Plus, the pictures you take can help scientists figure out the growing ranges for the plants. So you are helping to do science while you are learning! **(If you use iNaturalist, please contact me. I have some ideas for what we could do, but need others!)**

A second thing you can do (And I am *NOT* the expert here, right Maria?) is slow down, breathe and *enjoy* the woods. Some would use the term *forest bathing*. Call it what you wish, slowing down to enjoy the woods is much different than just hiking along trying to cover a bunch of trails as quickly as you can. It's much more contemplative and relaxing. And, especially right now, that is a good thing. You can read about it in this [TIME magazine article](#) for a starter. Or just enter a Google search for it and see what you find.

Read, which is interesting, but then just **get out there**. It doesn't have to be someplace special; it will become someplace special for you.

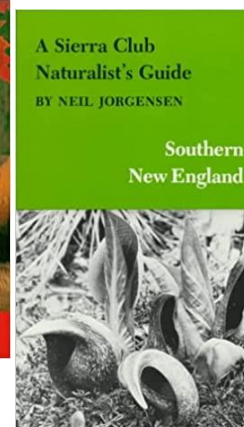
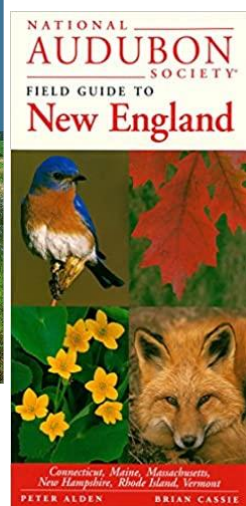
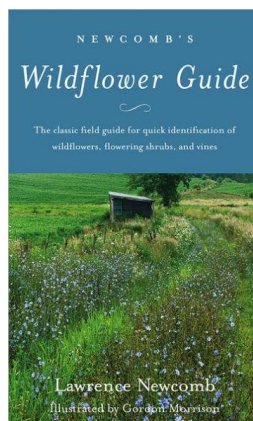
### Some books to start you on your way: to New England

[National Audubon Society Field Guide](#) is a very good place to start. Because it's focused on New England, you don't have to skim over all those things they have out west.

The [Sierra Club Naturalist's Guide to Southern New England](#) (Out of print, but available used for less than \$6) is another great book that can teach you more than you'll ever remember!

Interested in wildflowers? Try [Newcomb's Wildflower Guide](#). His approach makes it (relatively!) easy to identify wildflowers. What is the flower like, radially symmetric (like a daisy) or not? Is it a wildflower, shrub, or vine? What is the leaf shape? Questions even you can answer. Then he directs you to a page of pictures of flowers that meet your description, and you can (at least usually!) match up your flower to one of the pictures on the page.

And maybe, when we are ready to start having group hikes again, you'll be *that person* who can identify the wildflowers and trees. And generally teach all your fellow hikers about "What's out there."







The Caldera of Mount Aso in Japan shows how the collapsing walls of a volcano formed the Blue Hills 600 million years ago. *Photo from pbs.org*

## The Blue Hills: A little general history

By Bob Vogel, Hike Leader

OK, we can't go hiking together right now, but maybe we can at least use this down time to learn a little bit about the Blue Hills, so when we get back out there we know more about the place. This is just a little overview information about the park, how it was formed, etc. In the future I'll provide more information about these, and many more, subjects. Researching and writing these will give me something to do, and hopefully give you something to read to take your mind off the present situation for a few minutes.

I'm sending these out to those I think might be interested. If you or anyone else you know wants in, just [E-mail me](#) and I'll gladly add them.

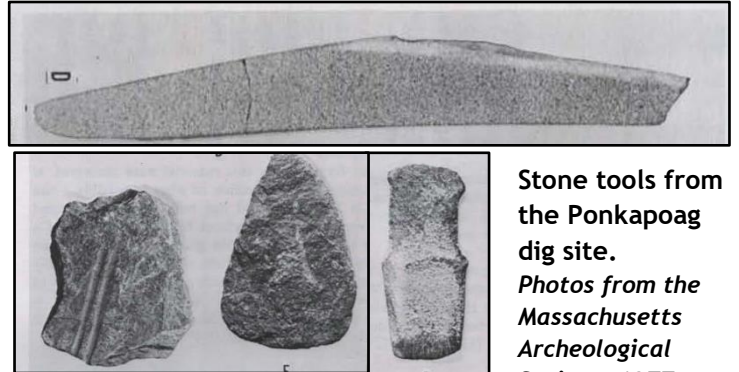
The Blue Hills is a Massachusetts State Park. It is currently managed by "DCR," the Department of Conservation and Recreation. It is 7,000 acres, broken into several sections by the roads that pass through it. It includes parts of Milton, Quincy, Braintree, Canton, Randolph, and Dedham.

The Blue Hills reservation got its start in 1893, when the Metropolitan Parks Commission purchased the lands for the start of the Blue Hills Reservation, one of the first areas set aside for public recreation. But the history of the Blue Hills goes back much, *much* further. While we are waiting to get back out hiking, I'd like to look back at some of this history, as well as look at the present.

It's difficult to know exactly what happened millions of years ago. We do have clues, and over the years people have tried to assemble those clues and create a timeline for the Blue Hills. So, let's step back in time and look at how the Blue Hills may have come to be what we know today.

"600 million years ago the Blue Hills did not look like the small hilly landscape of today, but rather a true, conical volcano like you would see on the west coast. After erupting, or rather EXPLODING, the volcano that would become the Blue Hills formed a large Caldera (cauldron-shaped crater) that further collapsed and eroded over hundreds of millions of years, leaving behind the mountainous and cobbled surface we all love today."<sup>1</sup>

So, to skip ahead a bit, let's jump to 10,000 years ago. What were the Blue Hills like then? And what was going on here? Well, we know a bit about what was going on back then, because there have been (at least) two significant archaeological digs in the Blue Hills. One near Ponkapoag Pond and the second in Fowl Meadow, near the Neponset River.



Stone tools from the Ponkapoag dig site.

*Photos from the Massachusetts Archeological Society, 1977*

Future E-mails/articles will include more details, but for now just note that 10,000 years ago people were in the Blue Hills. Not to go for a hike, but to quarry stone to make tools and projectile points. And they made lots of them, for thousands of years. Long before Rome or the pyramids of Egypt, the locals had a thriving business running in the Blue Hills. We'll come back to this later, but for now let's step forward to after 1620 and the arrival of the Mayflower. *Continued on page 12*

<sup>1</sup>[The Blue Hills: Archaeological Wonder of Epic Proportions](#). I'm going to include occasional "footnotes," but they won't be formal, really just links to sources of further info that I've drawn on. But if anything interests you, they will give a starting point for more research.



## Blue Hills history *Continued from page 11*

As Europeans moved into the area, towns, then cities such as Boston, grew up. But much of what we know as the Blue Hills was still rural for many years. Eventually large tracts of land in the area were purchased by several rich families. We will come back to some of those folks later, and you will recognize some of the names, such as Hemenway and Eustis, from hills and trails in the Blue Hills today.

Stepping forward to 1892 we have the creation of the Metropolitan Parks Commission.<sup>2</sup>

[ACTS OF 1892, CHAP. 342.]

**ACT APPOINTING METROPOLITAN PARK COMMISSIONERS FOR 1892-93.**

SECTION 1. The governor, by and with the advice and consent of the council, shall appoint three persons, to be known as the Metropolitan Park Commissioners, who shall hold their office for one year from the first day of May in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-two. Said commissioners shall consider the advisability of laying out ample open spaces for the use of the public, in the towns and cities in the vicinity of Boston, and shall have authority to make maps and plans of such spaces and to collect such other information in relation thereto as it may deem expedient, and shall report to the next general court, on or before the first Wednesday of February, a comprehensive plan for laying out, acquiring and maintaining such open spaces.

SECTION 2. Said commissioners may employ such assistants as they may deem necessary, and may expend such sums therefor and in the discharge of their duties, including the actual travelling expenses of said members, as the governor and council may determine. Said commissioners shall receive no compensation.

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon its passage.

"The Blue Hills Reservation forms a public domain of 3.953 acres. It was taken by the Metropolitan Park Commission in the autumn of 1893, a few months after the passage of the law establishing that board with the authority to lay out public open spaces in the Metropolitan Parks District. It is the largest of the several public reservations and parks in the metropolitan district, and the largest recreation ground possessed by any American city. It comprises nearly the entire range of the Blue Hills and lies within the limits of the towns of Milton and Canton, and the city of Quincy. It is a diversified tract of hills and woodland, and the greater portion of the region has a mountain-like character, which gives the reservation its distinctive charm."<sup>34</sup>

Well, this gives us a start. I hope you are interested in coming along and learning about the Blue Hills. Until next time!

<sup>2</sup> [Report of the Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners, Jan. 1896](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Bost on Parks Guide, 1898](#)



## Send us your 'Silver Linings'

By Ken Cohen, Hike Leader

Face it: Despite our reluctance to dwell on Covid-19, this catastrophe is now at the center of life in America, including all of us in AMC-SEM. Let's attack it head-on with positives, rather than avoiding it!

Please share the uplifting thoughts or positive stories you have experienced since the onset of the pandemic. Have you had a personal breakthrough, accomplished something you never seemed to have time for, learned a new skill? Tell us about your discoveries in one or two sentences or a longer account.

I believe there will be so many inspirational stories coming out of these unprecedented, tragic times. Send yours to [communicationschair@amcsem.org](mailto:communicationschair@amcsem.org) and look for Silver Linings in the *Breeze* and online.

Of course, we're all looking forward to getting back to what we like and what we know. However, I can guarantee you that, for us optimists, life will be better going forward—especially after taking a closer look at how we live day by day.

Instead of moping about no group hiking, let's talk about individual living!

**All Appalachian Mountain Club activities are canceled until June 4th. Please go to the AMC Newsroom for the most current club advisories. Be Indoors! And stay well!**



## Activities

For the most current information, [search activities online](#)

### Hiking Key:

**C4D**

Indicates distance in miles

AA .... 13+

A ..... 9-13

B ..... 5-8

C ..... less than 5

Indicates pace

1 ..... very fast

2 ..... fast

3 ..... moderate

4 ..... leisurely

Indicates terrain

A ..... very strenuous

B ..... strenuous

C ..... average

D ..... easy

Found in the description

L ..... Activity leader

CL .... Activity co-leader

FT .... First Time

NM ... New Members

AN .... Advance Notice

C ..... Conservation

## HIKING

Get your 100-mile patch! Contact [hikingchair@amcsem.org](mailto:hikingchair@amcsem.org).

Always looking for additional hike leaders! Contact [hikingchair@amcsem](mailto:hikingchair@amcsem)

**FT (NM) Thu. June 4, 11, 18, 25. Red Line the Blue Hills - Hiking, Blue Hills Reservation, Milton, MA.** Join us to hike all the trails in the Blue Hills or just enjoy a walk in the woods. Location, terrain and elevation will vary each week. Time is approximately 6-8 pm Thursday night. Register once then show-n-go when you can make it. Once you register, an E-mail will be sent to you every week telling you where to meet. This is a great way to end your day, get outside, strengthen your hiking legs and socialize with a nice group of people. This is the 15th year of the Red Line series! L Joe Keogh ([jpkeo24@gmail.com](mailto:jpkeo24@gmail.com)) L Michael Swartz (617-840-4199, [swartz@brandeis.edu](mailto:swartz@brandeis.edu)), R Sue Svelnis (781-849-9299 before 9 pm, [suesvelnis@gmail.com](mailto:suesvelnis@gmail.com))

**Sat., Jun. 13. Mt. Monadnock Without the Crowds, Jaffrey, NH.** This is the second in a new series of "Gentle Adventure" hikes designed for reasonably fit hikers in search of real challenges in the hills and mountains, but at a gentler pace. From Monadnock State Park's main parking area, we'll gradually loop our way around to Monte Rosa (one of the three main summits) via the uncrowded Parker, Lost, Farm, Cliff Walk, Thoreau, and Monte Rosa Trails. From Monte Rosa, we'll drop down and then back up on the Smith Summit Trail and to make our way up to the decidedly not-uncrowded summit of Grand Monadnock. After enjoying our lunch and (weather permitting) the expansive views on the summit, we'll work our way back down to the trailhead via the gentle Pumpelly Trail and more-challenging Red Spot Trail. While relatively long (app. 8 miles) and with several steep and rugged sections, when tackled at a moderate pace, this is nevertheless a very enjoyable hike for those with the right mindset and appropriate fitness. L Paul Miller ([paulallenmiller@verizon.net](mailto:paulallenmiller@verizon.net), Paul is an experience SEM chapter four-season hike leader.) L Emilie Bent

**(FT) (NM) Thu., Jul. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Red Line the Blue Hills, Blue Hills Reservation, Milton, MA.** See listing for Thur., June 4.

**Sat., Jul. 11-12. Overnight Trip to Mt. Eisenhower, Mt. Pierce, and Mizpah Spring, Southern Presidentials, NH.** This is the third in a new series of "Gentle Adventure" hikes designed for reasonably fit hikers in search of real challenges in the hills and mountains, but at a gentler pace. During these two days, we'll plan on hiking app. 8.5-miles and summiting two 4,000 footers. On Saturday morning, we'll meet in Crawford Notch, NH, to spot a few cars and then drive around to the nearby Edmands Trail trailhead on the Mt. Clinton Rd. We'll hike 3.3 miles (2,750 ft. elevation gain) up to treeline on the beautiful Edmands Path to the bald summit of Mt. Eisenhower for lunch and (weather permitting) to enjoy the expansive views. From "Ike," we'll follow this exposed, above-treeline section of the historic Crawford Path for a little under two miles to the Summit of Mt. Pierce. Then, we'll drop down app. 0.8-mile to the AMC Mizpah Springs Hut, where we'll enjoy our happy hour, followed by a hearty a croo-served dinner and then spend the night at the hut. Following breakfast at the hut on Sunday morning, we'll take the Mizpah Cutoff back around to the Crawford Path and then make our way back down to the cars we spotted in Crawford Notch (a little over two miles from the hut to the parking area). Trip is limited to ten participants. Participants should note that weather conditions could alter this itinerary. L Paul Miller ([paulallenmiller@verizon.net](mailto:paulallenmiller@verizon.net), Paul is an experienced four-season SEM hike leader.)

**(FT) (NM) Thu., Aug. 6, 13, 20, 27. Red Line the Blue Hills, Blue Hills Reservation, Milton, MA.** See listing for Thur., June 4.



## Activities

For the most current information, [search activities online](#)

### HIKING

**Fri., Aug. 7-9. Weekend trip to Pinkham Notch, Imp Face, and Tuckerman Ravine, Pinkham Notch, NH.** This is the fourth in a new series of "Gentle Adventures" hikes designed for reasonably fit hikers in search of real challenges in the hills and mountains, but a gentler pace. On Friday, we'll meet up at the AMC's Joe Dodge Lodge in Pinkham Notch, NH where we'll spend the next two nights. We'll plan on hiking up to nearby Square Ledge on Friday afternoon before our happy hour, followed by dinner in the dining hall. After breakfast on Saturday, we'll drive up Rte. 16 just a bit to the Imp Trail trailhead and hike up to the Imp Face on the northern leg of the Imp Trail to eat our trail lunches and (weather permitting) enjoy the expansive views of Mt. Washington, the ravines, and other Presidential peaks. After lunch, we'll continue around and follow the southern leg of the Imp Trail loop back down to Route 16 for a short jaunt up the road back to our cars and then drive back down to JDL, where we'll enjoy another dinner and spend the night. This loop is app. 6.6-mi. long with app. 2,100-ft. elevation gain and loss). Following breakfast on Sunday morning, if the group is willing, we can hike app. 2.2-mi. up the Tuckerman Ravine trail to "HoJos" (the ranger station at the base of Tuckerman Ravine) and then back down again before driving back home. Single-night options available for those who prefer. Participants should note that weather conditions could alter this itinerary. Trip is limited to ten participants. L Paul Miller (paulallenmiller@verizon.net, Paul is and experiences four-season SEM chapter hiking leader.) L Eva Das ([borsody@gmail.com](mailto:borsody@gmail.com))

**(FT) (NM) Thu., Sep. 3, 10, 17. Red Line the Blue Hills, Blue Hills Reservation, Milton, MA.** See listing for Thur., June 4.

### Coming in the Breeze in May:

"Homemade Insect Repellant" by Bill Cannon

"Stay-at-Home Fitness" by Jeannine Audet

"The Blue Hills Nike Site" by Bob Vogel

"Silver Linings" by Our AMC-SEM Members



*Happy  
Trails!*



**THE END**