

MHC 2013 Year-In-Review

It was a year of ups and downs (Ragged Mountain), highs (Mt. Gridley) and lows (the demoralization of the Mt. Gridley ascent), peaks (Bear Mountain, Gridley, Chauncey Peak) and valleys (Blackledge Falls, Spruce Brook ravine), the known (Meshomasic Forest hikes) and the unknown (night hiking). But most of all, it was a year of breathtaking beauty, challenge and enjoyment of the outdoors with old and new friends. Here is a synopsis of some of the most notable MHC events of 2013:

WINTER



Photo of Blackledge Falls in Winter taken by Janet Ainsworth

Starting off the year, the club enjoyed some classic Winter hiking in addition to some of Mother Nature's challenging weather! Jeff Phelon wrote that he enjoyed hikes in the snow with a beautiful blue bird sky at Gay City on New Year's day where hikers watched an ice fisherman reel in a bass and at Hurd park where the views of the icy Connecticut River were spectacular.

John LeShane, fearless hike leader of the THE MIDWEEK MASTERS reported: The 2013 winter season was 'dampened' a bit by the two monster snowstorms, 36 inch and 25 inch accumulations respectively, forcing cancellations of a few hikes. NOTABLE HIKES: Hobo's Inn/Elmcrest Institute: Included a stop at the fanglomerate cave on Crow Hill in Portland where unemployed men often stayed just off the old Airline RR bed to jump on the passing freight trains. Then a short stroll through the old Elmcrest, the haunted old psychiatric institute in downtown Portland followed by pizza which became a regular event this snowy season (we felt the need to treat ourselves). DANIEL SCHWARTKOPF PRESERVE: Coldest hike of the year at 13 degrees. Found an abandoned still. Unfortunately there was no whiskey so we had to cope with the cold without it. FENWICK AND OLD SAYBROOK POINT: After an enjoyable (and very cheap) breakfast at the Valley View Café on the CVH campus, we drove to Old Saybrook to confront torrential rain and gale force winds. As we took refuge in the Pavillion Restaurant, ocean-size waves battered the large east facing windows. Even that did not deter us. We walked out into the rain and wind to the causeway but smartly chose not to cross it as the waves from the river surged over the road into South Cove. Still not done, sopping wet we went to Fenwick to stand on the shore of the Sound and watch the surf crash onto the beach near Kate Hepburn's old homestead. MAROMAS BOILUP: Another cold one, 0 degrees with

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the wind chill. A full moon rose over Great Hill just across the river in Portland as we sat atop the restored-to-meadow feldspar quarry. The old Leatherman was not at home when we visited his cave only 100 yards away from the campfire.

SPRING

In the Spring, our President, Tony Razel, reported: "In April several of us hiked a loop in the Bear Mountain State Park in NY which brought us some very beautiful scenery including views of valleys and distant hills as well as one all the way to NY City. There were some steep and fun climbs to attain those views. One long-time hiker remarked that he could live there happily."

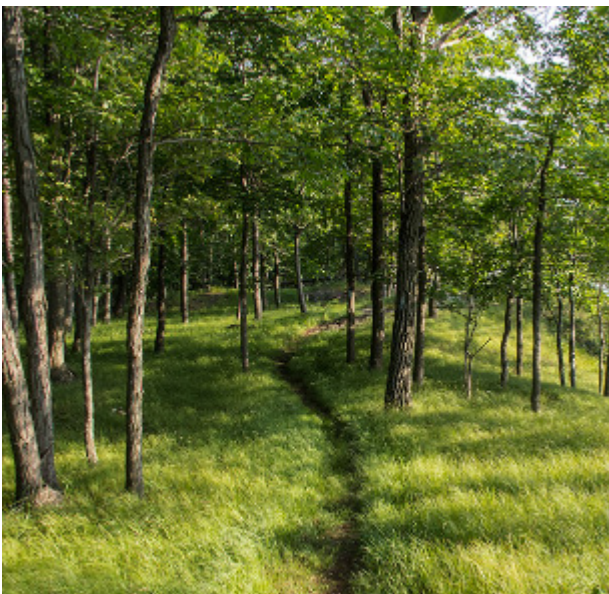
From John LeShane: **SPRUCE BROOK RAVINE AND FALLS:** One of Connecticut's premier ravines rivaling even Sages Ravine in Salisbury. It is just south of the town of Naugatuck in the state forest of the same name. **SPAR QUARRIES AND STREAMSIDE BUSHWHACKS:** In April, we bushwhacked along a branch of Hales Brook in South Glastonbury. The area, which is part of the Meshomasic Forest Landscape, is probably 1000 acres in size and is home to several old feldspar "spar" quarries. Thanks to Pat Wasserman a longtime member of the club, we were able to visit the most dramatic one.

His brother Albert, who passed away a few years ago, built his house on the top of a hill directly over the quarry whose great stone wall drops straight down over a hundred feet to the water-filled hole below. The view from the house to the west was stunning. Larry, Pat's nephew, lives in the house now and cordially invited us to sit a spell while he shared some of the history of the quarries and the area.

Photo of Spruce Brook Falls taken by Glenda M Rose



SUMMER



Trail on Mt. Higby - photo courtesy of Tom Wells

The Summer produced some very hot weather, but MHC members were undaunted. Per Jeff, his group hikes included: "Summer hikes at Valley Falls and Bolton Notch with post hike swims and a cookout party at Bolton Lake. The intrepid Bob Bolt couldn't find us on the trail but was able to find the party! And Pat Kennedy's trusty hiking dog Trapper was eager to assist with party cleanup by eating any dropped food."

One of our more interesting hikes was a "night hike" led by Tony. His August night hike at the Silvio Conte Refuge was appreciated by several hikers and panned by several others. There was a large turn-out of people willing to try it, though. Unfortunately Tony scheduled it too late in the lunar cycle, and the moon never rose far enough to be helpful. It was just very dark. But, he said that he will try again next summer, so be sure to join him then!

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Ron reported on some alternative adventures: “ There is also hiking using your arms instead of legs; paddling a canoe or kayak. In August we went to the finest sand beaches and clearest water on earth, the sand bars of the Connecticut River in South Windsor. Unfortunately, there was no spring flood for a record 2 yrs, and the sand was a little lacking but we found a crystal clear swimming hole off an island and used it to great advantage. When most people paddled off, I found a rope swing on the back of the island and bashed my knee on a tree, because the river level was so low this year. Great fun. Hoping that next year brings a good flood for more sand.”

FALL:

Fall foliage photograph courtesy of Tom Wells



Early Fall gave us some of the best hiking of the year. One of the more adventurous expeditions was a backpacking trip that Tony led. He writes: “We had five people on my backpacking trip to Harriman State Park in NY in September. I feel that it was a great first exposure to backpacking for a couple of the people on the trip who had never done it before. The park is very pretty, and we got to see interesting land forms, especially the extremely narrow passage known as the Lemon Squeezer. Viewing the sunset from atop a high rock was delightful.”

The MOST notable hike of the Fall (and possibly of the entire YEAR) was the ascent of Mt. Gridley, located outside of Salisbury Center and close to the CT/MA border. The hike was held on October 2, 2013 and to quote John LeShane, was “the bushwhack to end all bushwhacks”. Basically, Mt. Gridley is on private land and has NO trail to the top so the group had to force their way through incredibly dense Mountain Laurel followed by incredibly dense scrub oak. Needless to say, blood was shed and cursing was prevalent. The whole story is documented in the Winter 2014 issue of “Forest Passages”.

Other interesting hikes were: MOHAWK TRAIL, GOSHEN: A great hike starting in the historic grove of Cathedral Pines. LOVER’S LEAP STATE PARK, BRIDGEWATER: An interesting hike passing by some ruins of an old mill with a beautiful vista over the Housatonic River. QUARRY RIDGE Night Stroll, PORTLAND: A 5-mile walk on a golf course cart path where the group was treated to a sighting of a turkey roosting in a tree for the night.

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Hiking is good for our health, our souls and our relationships!! This year yielded TWO weddings of some MHC members!

Jeff Phelon and JoAnn Sidor were wed on July 27th.



And John Shomsky and Allison Gibeau married on November 2nd at Wadsworth Falls.



To quote Frank Sinatra, "it was a very good year"! I'm sure we are all looking forward to a new year of more hiking adventures, making new friends (or a spouse!) and enjoying all that Nature has to offer us.

Respectfully submitted by Glenda M. Rose, MHC Historian