

MHC 2014 Year-In-Review

After negotiating our hikes through the “Winter from Hell”, it was the year of the Risky, Rewarding Ravines (emphasis on the RISKY), Wonderful Waterfalls and Vast Vistas! Below, please find a summary of memorable hikes of 2014 from a few of our intrepid hike leaders. I’m sure the rest of the club joins me in thanking ALL of our hike leaders for the time they spend to plan and lead the many interesting and varied hikes we all get to enjoy throughout the year!

Memorable Hikes



Figure 1: Sages Ravine, Photo by Tony Razel

From our President, Tony Razel:

In April I led a hiking trip to Harriman State Park in New York State which included several climbs and a brief exploration of Pine Meadow Lake, a sizable but remote lake in the park. The hike included a hand-assisted climb up a steep rock formation. The brief time that we spent lunching and relaxing by the lake made me resolve to return that summer.

Three members joined me in a backpacking trip to the Second Reservoir in Harriman State Park in New York for an overnight stay. We found a nice location away from trails to establish camp. The first day, we climbed to the nearby ridge, enjoying the views from Jackie Jones Mountain and visited the ruins of an industrialist’s estate known as ORAK. The second day before we packed back out, we hiked to the Breakneck Pond, exploring its shore and the site of a closed summer camp.

I led the second annual “moon walk” in mid-July, this time on the Air Line Trail. That was a very nice hike in bright moonlight which was well attended.

Near the end of July I led a trip returning to Sages Ravine along the MA – CT border in northwestern Connecticut. It had rained heavily in the area on the previous day, and I was concerned that the weather would be an impediment. In actuality, the

previous rains had made the ravine creek quite full, running very high. That area lacks adequate trails, but the extra effort was well rewarded as the series of very high waterfalls were flowing torrentially. The trip was a success despite the bushwhacking we needed to do on very steep terrain.

We returned to the Pine Meadow Lake in Harriman State Park in NY near the end of July. We had an exhilarating climb with beautiful views, followed by exploration of the lake, finally capped with a pleasant swim in the beautiful and clear waters of nearby Lake Winoksink.



Figure 2: Sebago Lake. Photo by Tony Razel

The final backpack trip had us returning to Harriman State Park for a one-night campout. We climbed the nearby mountains and enjoyed the shores of Sebago Lake nearby.

Visiting the shuttered beach at the north end of the lake, we marveled at its former size and the variety of activities offered.

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From our Founder, John LeShane:

The “Midweek Masters” (as they have been dubbed since 2006) held 62 hikes or canoe outings (including some Fridays) in 2014. 702 folks attended with an average of 12 people per event. We averaged 6.5 miles per hike. The schedule included a good smattering of types of experiences. There were blue trail hikes (Lone Pine, Pachaug, Mohawk, Metacomet), boilups (Hurd, Mt Higby, Portland Reservoir, Cranberry Bog), rail trails (Connecticut Valley, Airline, Cromwell, Hop River), bushwhacks (Sages Ravine, Babcock Ridge, Fox Hopyard woods), canoe outings (Wangunk Meadows, Branford River, Lords Cove) and waterfalls (Campbell Falls, Sages Ravine and Dean Ravine).

Here is a list of our most notable hikes:

1/8 – Started the year with the new, enlarged Machimoodus State Park (the old Sunrise Resort was added).

1/15 – Mark Harmon, son of Bud, led us on a walk and talk through Yale University. Bud joined us, as well, after a two year absence.

3/19 – Open space shown on a town map of Haddam turned out to be the Fox Hopyard golf course. After walking a couple of fairways, we made it to the safety of the woods; in so doing, we discovered a ten foot waterfall.

3/26 – Hiked the new “Preserve” in Old Saybrook. Brian Desmond, 2014 Rookie of the Year, came on his first hike.

4/2 – Bill Korp led his first hike, an 8-miler on Southington Mt. featuring the New Britain Reservoir, the overflow, the great unconformity, and a vista from White Rock.



Figure 3: Eagle at John's house. Photo by Barb Emmons.

4/12 – Boilup in Oak Ledges overlooking the old Cranberry Bog. 23 clubbers watched as a mature Bald Eagle ate a frog while perched on a tree limb in front of John's house.

4/23 – Hiked Dean Ravine with its scenic waterfalls before climbing a steep slippery Mohawk Trail to Lookout Point on Barrack Mountain.

5/7 – Sages Ravine bushwhack. 14 members discovered Connecticut's best waterfall (confirmed by Peter Marteka, the Courant's nature writer, after we told him about it). Temporarily lost George Jafferis.

5/10 – The not-to-be boilup. A lightning storm struck as we hiked the exposed Bolton Ridge on Great Hill in Portland. We salvaged the day with pizza at the “PR”.

5/14 – Police were almost called by a disgruntled land owner when we inadvertently trespassed during a hike on the Babcock Ridge Preserve in North Stonington.

5/21 – Another scenic waterfall was discovered in the trail-less Roaring Brook Ravine near Indian Council Caves in Barkhamsted.

6/25 – One of our longest hikes in recent times: 9.5 miles on the Putnam section of the Airline Trail. As a reward, we then partook of some well-deserved beers at the new Rail Station Pub.

7/9 – Theresa Dixon hit the 800-hike mark on the Tulip Tree Trail in Vernon. We stopped to admire one of the state's tallest tulips at 134 feet beside Railroad Brook.

8/6 – Observed “March of the Hermit Crabs” as we passed tidal flats on a section of the Branford Trail.

9/13 – Hiked the Walkway Over the Hudson on a restored rail trail bridge. Listened to unique music recorded by drumming on parts of a highway bridge we crossed on the return loop.

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9/17 – A long 9-mile hike on the Lone Pine Trail loop over Bluffhead (incredible vistas) and past Myerhubers Pond.

9/20 – Boilup on Calves Island to witness the annual swallow migration.

10/8 – The Griswold Point hike ended at Joe “Stats” Halloran’s summer cottage in Old Lyme for lunch and refreshments.

10/10 - Only five clubbers experienced one of the best boilup spots we’ve ever used as the lights of Meriden twinkled below us.

10/17 – Our annual Gouveia Winery visit after discovering that the 1000-acre Tyler Mill Preserve is only two minutes away.

10/29 – 22 folks joined us on the new Slocum Mill Preserve on Roaring Brook in So. Glastonbury. Tom Ladny almost saved the day when he found an easy deer trail while the “faithful” followed John to their near death on Cotton Hollow’s steepest slope.

11/5 – Clubbers visited Connecticut’s oldest abandoned castle in the 700-acre Tarrywile Park in Danbury.



Figure 4: Castle at Tarrywile Park. Photo courtesy of Tom Wells

11/12 - 21 members enjoyed a peaceful stroll on our 2nd annual Quarry Ridge cart path walk and then indulged with dinner in the course restaurant.

12/3 – Clubbers hiked the new Paskov Preserve in East Hampton and took their hike photo in front of the newly-discovered black birch State Champion.

12/10 – Tom Wells declared “the Chatfield Trail has the best caves in Connecticut” after we found a note which talks of an initiation in the cave. 7 clubbers visited the first hydroelectric plant (now in ruins) on Chatfield Hollow Brook in the seldom-visited Forster Pond State Park.

12/17 – Another great cave and ledges were found on the Edward and Deborah Ames Preserve in Old Lyme.

12/31 – 20 members finished off the year on a rail trail in Cromwell and found an abandoned “encampment” beside a large marsh. A nearby trail directed us to a bridge to a Pine-treed island on little West Lake.

From Hike Leader, Pat Kennedy:

In January, we did the Charter Oak Greenway, the multiuse path in East Hartford and Manchester, a distance of around 8 miles. Although the path runs near I-384, we had some rural sights: a walk through an evergreen grove at Manchester Community College, a sighting of deer in a power line easement and crossing of raging Birch Mountain Brook.

On Super Bowl Sunday we got an unseasonably warm day to do a walk of the bridges between Hartford and East Hartford and the riverfront parks.

In March, Jim Cramer and I did the Airline Trail from the cranberry bog in East Hampton to Cook’s Hill Road in Lebanon, a distance of around 16 1/2 miles. Highlights were the views from the viaducts and the marsh west of Route 85.

In May, a group of us did an 8-mile stretch of the Tunxis Trail from Satan’s Kingdom to Route 219, basically going uphill. The hike took us past Ski Sundown and gave us views of Lake McDonough and the Barkhamsted Reservoir.

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Other interesting hikes included the Salmon River Trail on the opening day of fishing season, Ragged Mountain and Penwood. In October, we did Nathan Hale State Forest and then visited the farmers' market. Exploratory hikes included Creaser Park in Coventry and Tobiassen Forest and two other contiguous parcels in Tolland. Finally, Bob Bolt and I did the Crooked Brook section of the Metacomet Trail in Berlin, which included a basically rural road walk, a brook to walk alongside and a gorge to overlook, which is not what one would expect being so close to the Berlin Turnpike.

Memorable Paddles

In addition to MHC's famous hikes, those of us with a canoe or kayak met for some special outings on the water.



Figure 5: Paddle from Stonington to Watch Hill Led by Steve Crusberg. Photo by Jamie Burgess.

Bill Korp:

I led a paddle to the Bantam River. It was, in my opinion, wonderful. We (3 of us) saw numerous Great Blue Heron and 5 or 6 beaver. We had to traverse 4 or 5 beaver dams. The evening was gorgeous. I have enjoyed every paddle that I have been on.



Figure 6: Selden Neck Park Paddle and campout. Photo by Tony Razel

Tony Razel:

In May a group of us loaded food and camping equipment into our canoes and kayaks at the Deep River Town Dock and paddled across the Connecticut River, setting up camp at the Quarry Knob Campsite in the Selden Neck State Park.

The neck became an island after a flood in 1854. The first day we paddled around Selden Neck for nearly six miles, enjoying the beautiful scenery and in particular the nesting ospreys. That evening we had a campfire at which we enjoyed delicious lobster mac and cheese kindly provided by Gina Wildermuth. Socializing and a sing-along followed into the evening. The next day we packed up our equipment then had a four mile hike on the numerous trails on the island enjoying the view from the high point of the island. We also visited the remains of the quarrying operation which had been prominent on the island in the late 1800s.

Also, during the fall quarter I led short paddling trips on Moodus Reservoir and Whalebone Creek off the Connecticut River in Hadlyme. I look forward to more paddling trips next year.

John LeShane:

4/3, 4/19 – 18 clubbers canoed into the Wangunk Meadows to visit the heron rookery and its 200 nests.

7/11 – Prez Tony Razel used his new Equinox Kayak for the first time on the Branford River. We observed egrets and osprey in great stands of cattail and phragmites along the route.

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New Activities: Cross Country Skiing

Tony Razel: My first event in 2014 was a cross-country skiing trip to Winding Trails in Farmington in February. Three members joined me for an enjoyable outing on the maintained trails. We skied several miles at an enjoyable, relaxed pace, exploring the varied terrain available, even skiing off trail for a time.



Figure 7: Cross Country Skiing at Winding Trails. Photo by Chantal Foster.

Miscellaneous Tidbits:

Chantal Foster's weekly Thursday morning hike was officially added to the schedule.

Glenda Rose led 4 hikes in 2014 and looks forward to leading more in 2015.

Jack Morris created and shared GPS tracks of hikes taken by the Midweek Masters.

"Short notice" hikes have been incorporated on a trial basis.

As a point of interest, in November, Bob Bolt led a hike on the Nipmuck Trail in Northeastern Connecticut that featured a vista where there were NO visible structures; a rarity in this state!

Last but not least.....

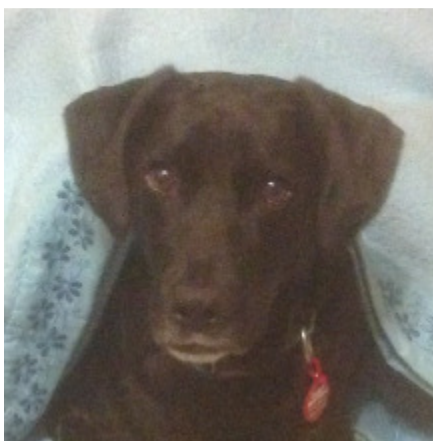


Figure 8: Trapper. Photo courtesy of Pat Kennedy

Worthy of mention, let's not forget about "The Dogs of the MHC". In addition to our hardy human members, we have some wonderful canines that are always eager to join us! So I'd like to acknowledge the hiking spirit of our regulars: Trapper, Lily, Max, Molly, Joy, Lizzie, Doxie and Sven. The unbridled joy they express should remind US how lucky we are to be able to enjoy this wonderful gift of a seemingly limitless number of trails we have within easy access.

Hike on, my friends (and canines), hike on!!!!!!!