



Hiking the Waters ... Our Waterway "Trails"

By Steve Knauth

Essex is doubly-blessed. Not only do we have our network of Land Trust walking trails to enjoy, there's a whole world of waterways to "hike" via kayak or canoe, as well.

And, such waters. Our piece of the Connecticut River tidal marsh is among the Nature Conservancy's "Last Great Places" in the Western Hemisphere, abounding with natural wonders. If the river is not an option, then there is Mill Pond, on the upper Falls River, a fresh-water lake of rare beauty and tranquility.

The Land Trust promotes these waterways through group paddles, one of its most popular programs, says ELT Events Director Peggy Tuttle. "We usually have two or three kayak trips a year," she says. "And, we have anywhere from 20 to 30 people." The trip may include a nature talk or a water-side picnic. Many are co-sponsored by the Potapaug Audubon Society. "Going for a paddle" is turning into a Land Trust institution, combining relaxation, exercise, education and a re-connect with nature. "To be on the water and experiencing the serenity of the paddle stroke, to quietly go amidst the natural splendor is intensely rewarding," says naturalist Phil Miller, an ardent kayaker.

And so it was, at 5 pm on an August afternoon, that a mixed fleet of some 20 kayaks and canoes paddled their way into Essex harbor from the launch at the foot



of Main Street. The plan was to cover the South Cove/ Thatchbed Island preserve and neighboring waters.

Led by Miller, the group moved leisurely around the mooring field, staying close to shore, and gathering every



so often to listen to a brief nature talk. Leaving the harbor heading south, they passed the day marker off Hayden Point, making their way into Turtle Creek, part of the Nature Conservancy's Turtle Creek Preserve, where, as one participant put it, they enjoyed "the beauty of tall native grasses being washed by the late afternoon sun."

Paddling back upstream, the "hikers" circled Thatchbed Island, watching myriad birds - osprey, terns, ducks, and cormorants - in the fading light of afternoon. By 6:30, everyone was back at the launch site. "This was great. I was inspired by the very special nature of this part of the river," said one paddler. "Boy is it nice to get out on the water and see things from a different perspective. I'm hooked!"

South Cove/Thatchbed Island, with its two preserves, and its access to Turtle Creek on the open waters of the Connecticut River, is just one of Essex's "water parks". There are two others, each with their own character:

- **North Cove** - it's over a mile from the landing at Osage Trails, on Falls River Cove, to a second access point at the foot of Bushnell Street, and the waters

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between are steeped in history; here, shipyards turned out coastal vessels well into the 19th century, and Riverside cemetery is where, for 300 years, Essex residents have been laid to rest. North Cove, protected by the Great Meadow bar, is home to plentiful wildlife, both above and below the surface. Look for soaring eagles and ospreys and hordes of swans during the spring and summer. It's also a popular spot to catch a sunrise.

- **Falls River Preserve/Jean's Island** - the town's largest body of inland water, it stretches for three-quarters of a mile from Ivoryton along Main Street to the heart of Centerbrook, with industrial dams at either end. Canoe/kayak access is at Falls River Landing, on Brackett Lane, off Main Street in Ivoryton. The placid waters of Mill Pond are channeled through narrows created by the 40-acre Falls River Preserve, which has a network of walking trails. Look for tiny, scenic, Stanley Park, with its solitary granite bench overlooking the water. The river soon widens and surrounds the Jean's Island



portion of the preserve. This is a favorite place for freshwater fishermen, out after bass and perch. It's also a breeding ground and summer home for a variety of ducks, swans and other birds, including osprey and hawks.



Most of the paddles to date have been in the summer, to take advantage of the weather. But, that's changing, this year. There's a late-season paddle set for Sunday, October 3, and, led by Miller, it will cover the Falls River Cove and North Cove. Participants are slated to meet at the access point at the foot of Bushnell Street, in Essex, at 4 pm.

"We decided to do one in the fall to enjoy the foliage and migrating birds," says Tuttle. "In fact, I am looking forward to a paddle at this time of year probably more than a summer one." Land Trust President Bob Nussbaum agrees. "People always go north to see the fall foliage," he says. "But the diversity of trees and shrubs on the Falls River and around Jean's Island gives a full-color display that stands up to any place I've been."

Hiking the Waters - Equipment/Advice

When it comes to kayaks, you can spend a little or a lot. A 10-foot, roto-molded plastic, round-bottom kayak can cost around \$400. A 16.5-foot V-bottom kayak of exotic fiberglass/Kevlar composite can cost \$3,000. What's the difference? The bigger kayak, with its long, narrow, V-shaped hull, is sleeker and faster, making for efficient paddling, where you get an even, straight glide between paddle strokes. While the 10-footer may be more maneuverable in creeks and coves, it may not track as efficiently as the longer model.

The most popular type and size is the 12-14-foot, V-shaped, thermo-formed plastic kayak, which balances price and ease-of-use. This size range also comes in tandem, or two-person models, some including an additional child seat. These boats weigh 45-60 pounds



and generally range from \$1,000 to \$2,200, depending on the model. You'll also need:

- PFDs – look for a life jacket specially-cut for paddling. Prices range from \$60 and up
- Paddles – there's a wide range of prices and materials to choose from. A basic, aluminum-alloy paddle starts at under \$100. Carbon-fiber paddles with foam-filled blades can cost \$400
- Roof racks – hard foam blocks that strap onto the car top cost about \$60. So-called "black bar" racks can cost up to \$800. Look for models that "assist" in the loading, using extendable arms or air-filled pistons
- Rudders may help control the kayak, but they also add wetted surface and wake-producing "drag." Sit-on-top kayaks are also popular, offering an alternative to "sit-inside" models.

Photo Contest

Local conservation groups are inviting amateur photographers to focus on the celebrated and scenic countryside of Lyme, Old Lyme, Essex, Salem, and East Haddam and submit their photos to the Sixth Annual Amateur Photo Contest.

The Conservation/Land Trusts from each of those towns are sponsoring the contest. All amateur photographers are welcome to enter the contest regardless of which town they reside in.



Skip Broom - John G. Mitchell Award

This contest is being funded with the generous support of Lorensen Toyota, Oakley/Wing Group at Smith Barney, Evan Griswold at Coldwell Banker, Balleks Garden Center, Essex Savings, Bank, Murtha Cullina LP, and ChelseaGroton Savings Bank.

Judges will award \$100, \$50 and \$25 cash prizes for each of the following categories:

- Landscapes/Waterscapes - Plants - Wildlife - Cultural/Historic
- Any subject for Young Photographers, below age 15

In addition to the above noted prizes, a special \$100 award will be given in memory of our former judge, John G. Mitchell, for the best photograph that promotes and supports our environment and biodiversity. "As a former editor at National Geographic, John dedicated his career to writing about the environment and conservation and so the award is for the best picture reflecting that subject" explained Tony Sullivan, the conservation trusts' spokesperson.

The three independent judges are **William Burt**, a naturalist who has won acclaim for his books of wildlife photography: *Rare and Elusive Birds of North America*, *Shadowbirds*, and his recently released *Marshes: The Disappearing Edens*. **Amy Kurtz Lansing**, Curator at the Florence Griswold Museum and a Yale University doctoral candidate in the History of Art. She is also the author of *Historical Fictions: Edward Lamson Henry's Paintings of Past and Present*. **Rudy Wood-Muller**, a photographic illustrator and designer. His first large exhibition was at the New York World's Fair in 1964 and was followed by numerous other

shows, including a one-man show at the Rochester Institute of Technology. A group of his photographs have been selected to be part of the Permanent Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The deadline for submitting photographs is January 31, 2011. For questions, entry forms and a copy of the contest rules, send an e-mail to landtrustphotos@yahoo.com or visit the sponsoring land conservation trusts' websites. To see last year's winning photos, go to <http://landtrustphotos.shutterfly.com/>

Bats: Where have they gone?

The Essex Land Trust participated in a Bat conference organized by the Chester & Deep River Land Trusts in August. As part of our preparation for the event, volunteer Jonah Fidel of Essex put together a guide to New England Bats. The purpose of the conference was to raise awareness for bats particularly since over a million have been killed off by a mysterious disease known as White-Nose Syndrome (WNS). Bats play many vital roles, including the control of harmful insects that carry diseases and destroy crops and are important pollinators as well. Their loss threatens the balance of nature, plant diversity and impacts human economies. Biologist Jenny Dickson of the Connecticut DEP presented a comprehensive slide show dispelling many of the myths associated with bats while sharing information on the impact of WNS and what is being done about it. For more information, check out Bat Conservation International (www.batcon.org) or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (www.fws.gov/whitenoosesyndrome).

To download a copy of Jonah's Bat Guide, log onto www.essexlandtrust.org and check the New & Notable tab.



Jonah Fidel in front of New England Bat Guide he developed for the conference held in Chester



Canfield Family Visit

A recent visit to Essex from the Canfield Family allowed for this photo opportunity. Most of the original Canfield Meadow Woods land was acquired through donations by Mr. & Mrs. Earl Canfield in 1968, making this property one of the Land Trust's oldest. The family visit this past June commemorated the recent passing away of a dear relative.

Shared by Deep River and Essex, Canfield/Meadow Woods Nature Preserve is made up of more than 300 acres of hilly, forested land with a wide variety of terrain. Seventeen trails wind through mixed old and new growth forest, and the preserve's many rocky outcroppings are a highlight.

Parking at Dennison Rd. Canfield Meadow Woods Entrance

Those driving on Dennison Road may have noticed a new parking area has been completed making access from this location convenient and safer. The clearing was done by Bruce Glowac after which Essex Town crews then brought in loads of gravel and Bruce spread it around. Canfield

Steward Dana Hill and Al Macgregor spread the last load of gravel, planted grass, and put on the finishing touches. Kudos to all for making it happen. Just another example of volunteering at its best! See before and after shots below.



Mystery Photo

Here is one of the pillars of Essex industry in the late 19th century, a metal shop on the Falls River, where a dam, just visible, supplied the power. The home-grown firm was so successful that it abandoned the site shown here for a larger shop on the Middlesex Turnpike, where, in the first decades of the 20th century, it produced – among other things – Essex's only native automobile.

Photo Courtesy of the Essex Historical Society

Answer: It's the Tiley, Pratt & Co., on Dennison Rd., for which the neighboring Essex Land Trust preserve is named





By Steve Knauth

James Glen may be one of the Land Trust's smallest properties. But the little wooded valley on Hudson Lane off River Road, with its verdant wetlands, spreading fern beds and craggy, prominent rock ledge, packs a lot of interesting terrain into its 4.3 acres. That was brought home during a half-hour walk with Steward Brian Willis and the family dog, Shulah, one sunny Saturday morning.

Acquired through donation in 2003 from Dr. and Mrs. Raymond James, the pocket-sized park was part of the family's "back yard" as the old road bed and stone bridge abutment attest. A stream and spreading wetland run through the center, with an easy rise to the west, and a rock ledge to the east.



The property is beautifully kept and, in this, Willis is aided by assistant steward Gene Meacham and a cadre of volunteers. The trails are clear, and neat stacks of deadwood await disposal.

The stream is traversed by a newly-made raised walkway.

James Glen has three trails, each with its own character. The easy-going Blue trail, at the entrance, is a pleasure to walk, with its soft bed of leaves. Lined with deadwood, it passes through the first of the glen's several large beds of spreading fern, which cast an emerald glow in the dappled sunshine. Winding our way leisurely down to the stream, we come to the first of the new bridges, this one spanning the stream. "[ELT Head Steward] Al

Macgregor and [President] Bob Nussbaum put this in not long ago," says Willis. "It's a nice addition." Here, the Yellow trail opens to the left, beside an enormous tulip tree which dwarfs the newer growth around it, and heads north through the wetlands along an unusual, curving stone wall. "This is a relatively new trail," says Willis as we walk through knee-high ferns. "The stream, as you can see, is quiet, in August. But this whole area is full of running water in season." That's when the wetlands become the center of animal life, home to a host of amphibians, from frogs to salamanders. And tracks in the muddy banks - from deer, raccoon, perhaps fox and coyote - attest to its use as a watering hole.

Doubling back on the Yellow trail, we return to and continue our walk north on the Blue trail, following the gentle slope of an old road bed. To our right is the great ledge at James Glen, looming over the valley. The steep, arduous Red Trail branches off to ascend this pile of ancient New England stone, making a loop to return to the Blue trail. Hand rails built by volunteers assist in the climb, and the view from the top, especially in fall and winter, is worth the trip.

We bypassed the steps, this time, and turn back to the stream crossing for a rest on convenient rocks. That's when we notice how quiet James Glen is; one hears only the sounds of nature; the mysterious rustlings in the undergrowth, the sigh of wind in the trees, the song bird's trill, the woodpecker's hollow knock. "It's a very peaceful place," says Willis, giving Shulah a pat. "It has some old, large trees and a wonderful stream. It's rugged, but at the same time, it's accessible, too. A wonderful little place."



Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Sunday October 3rd 4 pm

Canoe/Kayak North Cove And Falls River

Enjoy the beautiful fall colors and migrating birds that can be viewed on this paddle, led by naturalist Phil Miller. Open to paddlers of all ages and abilities. Park at the shoreline access at the end of Bushnell St. Co-sponsored by Potapaug Audubon Society.

Sunday October 17th 4-6 pm

Volunteer Appreciation Day

At this event we welcome all the Essex Land Trust volunteers to a fun-filled affair at the Pettipaug Yacht Club. Park at Pettipaug Yacht Club. Refreshments served. Rain or shine.

Essex Land Trust offers opportunities to volunteers of all ages, interests and abilities. Let us know if you'd like to be on our volunteer roster by calling our volunteer coordinator Thea Putnam, 860-767-3231 or email at tconv@mac.com.

Saturday October 23rd 10 am

Walk Windswept Ridge

Preserve steward (and Essex Garden Club member) Augie Pampel will lead a family walk in this 30 acre property. This program is co-sponsored by Essex Garden Club. Park at the end of Windemere Way in Ivoryton.

Sunday November 14th 4 pm
at St. John's Episcopal Church, Essex

Loop Year: 365 Days On The Trail

Listen to author John Sheirer, professor at Asnuntuck Community College, talk about his year-long project to hike and care for a section of a Northern Connecticut Land Trust trail. He includes humor, fun characters he has met and other vignettes of his time on the trail. A good family outing. Refreshments served.

Thursday January 20th 2011 7 pm at Essex Library
Land Trusts and the Connecticut Legislature

David Bingham MD is president of the Salem Land Trust and co-chair of the League of Conservation Voters. He will review legislative issues of interest to land trusts just as the 2011 session is about to begin. Refreshments served.



Barbara Edwards, Barbara Macgregor and Carol MacElwee enjoying the celebration at the Volunteer Event



Harry Bird, Peggy Tuttle and Brian Willis at last year's Volunteer Event

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