First Family Outing at The Preserve
By Steve Knauth

Three thousand feet of watercourses … 114 acres of wetlands … 38 vernal pools … a 30-acre swamp … 200,000,000-year-old outcrops … the numbers of the 1,000-acre Preserve are impressive.

At the Essex Land Trust (ELT) Family Outing, held August 22, naturalists Chris Cryder and Bob Russo went behind the statistics to give attendees a more intimate look at the trust’s portion of this gem of a property. Chris Cryder, from the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, who was active in the campaign to acquire The Preserve, welcomed more than 50 people gathered around the kiosk at the newly opened parking area (one of two entry-point kiosks) off the Eversource service road for what one member called “a celebration” after years of hard work.

With walking trails only recently marked and prepared by ELT volunteers, it was easy to feel the enormous presence of Nature in The Preserve, even as the forest of trees muted the sounds of civilization. Steward Stuart Warner, along with ELT volunteers Bob Nussbaum and Myron Stacks, planned, cleared and marked two trails leading from the trailhead and they were in perfect shape for the opening.

Attendees to this event were then offered two separate walks led by naturalist Bob Russo and Steward Stuart Warner. Bob Russo’s contingent started off west, walking on shallow glacial till among rocks and boulders deposited during the last Ice Age, 12,000-14,000 years ago. Stopping next to a stone wall at one point, Russo pointed out that, where we were standing, the ice sheet here would have been 1,000 feet thick or more. The rocks left behind by the receding ice were later used to build the crisscrossing stone walls creating, in turn, a “stone-wall habitat' for chipmunks, salamanders and the black rat snake.

“Sit by a stone wall and wait … you’ll see all kinds of life emerge,” he said. Poking up from the ground throughout the park are rocky north-south ridges and outcrops that Russo said were 200 million years old or more, remnants of an old ocean bottom. Traces of Fool’s Gold, sulfur and garnet can be seen in the stone. Russo also pointed out a grove of young birch trees, tall and thin, with a few much larger Red oak trees among them. “That shows the land was logged, opened up and the birch trees moved in,” he said. “But, whoever did it left the oaks to provide shade and habitat.”

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Warner’s group took the southerly trail and followed it east through a forest of mixed trees and rolling terrain until it connected with Caleb’s Trail. This newly laid-out path is named for Caleb Penniman whose family foundation made a $100,000 contribution to honor his 8-year commitment to the preservation of The Preserve. Blazed largely by Warner and a group of volunteers, Caleb’s Trail integrates the Essex portion of the land with trails belonging to neighboring Essex Meadows. “We also took advantage of Essex Meadows’ offer to allow walkers to use some of their trails and visited the Cascade [waterfall],” said Warner. “The trees provided a welcome shade and this will certainly be a beautiful hike in the fall.”

After the 90-minute walk, the hikers gathered at the house of ELT members Tom and Barbara Muhlfelder for refreshments and a chance to talk about what they’d seen.

“I thought it was a very good turnout,” Warner said afterwards. “I think people were curious after all the years of publicity – and the lovely weather certainly helped.”

Visiting The Preserve

The Essex Land Trust has established two access points to enter The Preserve, both of which are on Ingham Hill Road, off of Route 153, Westbrook Road. Trails are still under development and trail maps will be published as soon as these are finalized. In the meantime, we encourage visitors to explore The Preserve while being mindful that trail markings are still not completed.
Completing the purchase of The Preserve at the end of April marked the beginning of what will be a lengthy and involved project: making the 1000 acres purchase ready for visitors to enjoy and explore. While Essex's 70 acres represent a manageable area for the Essex Land Trust, it has still required a great deal of work from volunteers. Led by Board Members Bob Nussbaum and Tom Rutherford, many volunteers have been working in The Preserve since late winter. The following pictures give a sense of the activity that has been taking place behind the scenes.

Bob Nussbaum helping to build trails.

Tom Rutherford installing new signage for The Preserve.

Volunteer team that installed informational kiosk.

Stuart Warner extracting test pipes originally used in evaluating development of the The Preserve.

One of the new parking lots off of Ingham Hill Road.

The newly created Caleb’s Trail connecting to Essex Meadows.
A Conservator for Life is the highest level of Essex Land Trust membership, and represents a significant commitment to the Land Trust and its mission to preserve open space in Essex. Conservators receive membership benefits for life and are exempt from future dues payments. They have the opportunity to make additional donations to land acquisition campaigns or other donations at any time they might choose. The current lifetime dues are $1,500.
Meet Myron Stacks, ELT Steward at Large

By Steve Knauth

“If you ever need any help ...”

It’s a simple little phrase, just six words – yet it’s how many of the Land Trust’s volunteers got started doing the valuable work – from trail management to envelope stuffing – that keeps the organization thriving.

It was no different for Myron Stacks, an Essex resident who’s become a big part of the new 70-acre property at The Preserve. “I went to a monthly hike,” says Stacks, 78, who moved to town about two years ago. “There’s where I met Jim Denham.” Stacks uttered the phrase and, the next thing he knew, he was asked to help to manage the new Preserve property. “That was an honor,” he says.

Over the course of the spring and summer, Stacks teamed up with Bob Nussbaum, Stuart Warner and others preparing trails at the property for the recent ELT Family Outing, which drew more than 50 people. “He is one of our most active stewards, putting in long hours laying out and clearing trails,” says Nussbaum. “He has brought to bear his extensive trail-building experience developing new trails for the Preserve.” Stacks is also playing a key role in developing the preliminary trail bike policy and interfacing with the local trail bike community.

Woodland management is nothing new for Stacks. While living in Granby, he became involved with the Holcomb Farm, a 325-acre property of field and forest that once belonged to UConn. The town was deeded the farm, which had 100 acres of tillable land, now devoted to raising vegetables for the Community Supported Agriculture program. That left 225 acres of native forest. “I was lucky enough to be chosen to manage the woodlands,” says Stacks, who also served on the board of directors. “The farm consisted of fields and native woodland which we wanted to make town-friendly,” he says. Today, 11 trails criss-cross the property, divided between two trailheads, and forming interconnected loops along field paths and wooded trails.

Volunteering to help the trust seemed natural after Stacks moved to Essex from Old Saybrook. “We’ve always liked the town,” he says. “It’s a quintessential New England town, with so much to offer – restaurants, theater, boating. It’s an ideal little town.”

Hiking Canfield Woods proved another attraction. “I was impressed with the trails from the day I set foot on them,” says Stacks. “They were well-marked and kept immaculate.”

Then he took that fateful hike, hosted by Jim Denham. “[Hands-on work] is definitely what I like,” says Stacks. “I’m out there helping to lay out trails in appropriate places. When we all agree it’s right, we clear it, mark it and pretty soon there’s a new trail to walk. It’s a good feeling.”

“I came along at the right time,” he says. “It’s a win-win for both sides. I enjoy doing the work and the Land Trust can always use another set of hands.”

(Ed. note: go to www.Holcombfarm.org to find out more about this very interesting place.)
Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!

Volunteers Needed: We have many tasks including helping plan events, sitting on committees, hospitality and greeting at events, trail maintenance, office assistance, and mailings. Please contact Judy Saunders at 860-581-8106 or judith.saunders@comcast.net.


Board Members: Jim Denham (President, Communications); Bob Nussbaum (Vice President, Development); Nancy Rambeau (Vice President, Secretary); Mike Carlucci (Treasurer); Bill Grover (Past President); Paul Greenberg (Land Acquisition); Tom Rutherford (Chief Steward); Kathryn Katz (Membership); Rob Hernandez (Programs & Events); Judy Saunders (Programs & Events, Volunteers), Joel Anik, Barbara Burgess.

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