

Hiking the Skyline

by Brian Schwarz

Brian Schwarz recounts how he tackled the rugged 10-mile Skyline Trail with some trepidation, but along the way discovered why this trail is one of the most popular destinations among hiking enthusiasts.



I have to admit, I was prepared for failure. But with each step I took, the feeling grew inside me that giving up was not an option. There was too

much riding on this after all. Alone in the woods it was just me. Well, me, the occasional squirrel or chipmunk, and a random white-tailed deer. But in my head, there were all the people along the way who have watched me progress to the point I'm at now. For me, and for them, I was not going to stop until I'd hiked that final 10th mile.

I set out from the trailhead at the Shea Rink parking lot on Willard Street in Quincy at 8:20 am, semi-well rested and with a backpack full of tasty and nutritious trail food. I took along a change of socks, some dry clothes for the end of the trail, my map of the Blue Hills Reservation and a positive state of mind.

The initial part of the walk was serene, with very little elevation gain and even still my mind was full of a thousand things that should've been left behind. My thoughts carried me

half a mile out of my way before I realized my error and back-tracked to the turn-off I'd missed. Quickly, I began my ascent to the sweeping views of Boston and the greater Massachusetts Bay area that give the trail its name.

The first hill was called Rattlesnake. The trail here wound up and around a placid vernal pool, its still waters perhaps belying a storied past as a romantic water hole dating back to the days when the native, pre-colonial Massachusetts people would come at the end of summer to prepare for winters there. The rocky, precarious descent from Rattlesnake Hill and the subsequent climb and descent of Wampatuck gave me just a taste of the scrambling I would have to do on the ten plus hills I would traverse today.

After crossing Chickatawbut Road the trail steadily rose past the Blue

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Nevermore, Well, Maybe Not The Unexpected Return of Ravens

By Sue Christensen

What do you know about ravens? Perhaps your knowledge comes secondhand through the eerily feverish poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Maybe, like me, you have met these birds out west, maybe at a national park overlook. Or, if you are lucky, you may have caught sight of them in our own backyard. Don't mistake these guys for those crows whose cawing out on the lawn at five am wakes you from your slumber.

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Photo by Benjamin M. Clock

Thank You!

We would like to thank the many artists and companies who donated to this year's silent auction:

Arthur Richmond, Bank of Canton,
Barbara Burr, Blue Hills Brewery,
Blue Hills Ski Area, Diane Chester-
Demicco, Lonnie Landrey,
Owen Hartford, Rebecca Arnoldi,
Sue Christensen,
Troy B. Thompson Photography

Fauna

(Ravens, continued from page 1)

The common raven is a much larger bird, about two feet in length, with a distinctive croaking sound along with other vocalizations. It has wings with finger-like feathers along the edge, a larger beak and wedged tail, unlike the crow. They are scavengers but will also hunt and eat insects, bird eggs, and sometimes, garbage. These intelligent birds are also soar, unlike crows.¹

The raven figures in the mythology of many people including the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest and the British. If you visit the Tower of London, you will find these birds there. The legend states that if they leave, the monarchy and tower will fall; however, evidence of them only dates back to the late 1800s!²

These birds were once exterminated because they were considered a threat to domestic animals which may explain why the descriptor, 'common', is a misnomer in this neck of the woods. They can be found here, however. In April of 2011, a nest containing six baby ravens was visited by Dr. Thomas French from the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, and Norman Smith from the Audubon Society's Blue Hill Trailside Museum. It had been constructed in a recess of an old granite quarry in the Crown Colony



Photo by Evan Lipton

Office Park in Quincy. French rappelled down to the nest and tagged the birds.³ This spring another nest was spotted in the park. In addition, a nest was found under a highway bridge in Holden and this past April, Mass Wildlife, with the help of the Department of Transportation, was able to tag the nestlings.⁴

Most recently, ravens have been seen in our own Blue Hills Reservation, specifically on Buck Hill. So if you want to see these interesting birds locally get out your boots and your camera and take a hike.

- 1 Cornell Lab of Ornithology Website, <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>
- 2 The Guardian, November 15, 2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/nov/15/britishidentity.artsandhumanities>
- 3 <http://www.tauntongazette.com/news/x1508084570/State-wildlife-official-makes-way-down-rocky-cliff-in-Quincy-to-place-ID-bands-on-six-baby-ravens>
- 4 Commonwealth Conversations Transportation Blog May 2012 <http://transportation.blog.state.ma.us/blog/2012/05/page/2/>

YES! I want to protect the Blue Hills Reservation!

I want to become a Friends of the Blue Hills member

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Please make checks payable to Friends of the Blue Hills, and mail to:
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The Friends of the Blue Hills newsletter is produced four times a year.

Editors: Sue Christensen,
Judy Jacobs,

Layout: Owen Hartford

Visit us on the web at
www.FriendsoftheBlueHills.org
or call 781-828-1805
for membership, maps and
schedule information.

PO Box 416, Milton, MA 02186

Calendar of Events

Pull and post this section of the Friends of the Blue Hills Newsletter and join us for some exciting events in the Blue Hills Reservation!

Winter 2013

▲ FBH sponsored event

DCR First Day Hikes 2013

Tuesday, January 1

Free hot & hearty soup at noon; all hikes begin at 1:00 pm
Celebrate the New Year in the Blue Hills. Warm up with a free cup of hearty soup, then stretch your legs on a variety of guided hikes suitable for all ages and abilities. A great way to jump start the year! Meet at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot. For details call 617-698-1802.

Ponkapoag Pond Ski/Hike

Sunday, Jan. 6, 10:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. Cross-country ski 6 miles, or hike 8 miles if no snow, around pond. 5 hours. Meet at Ponkapoag Golf Course. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

DCR Adult Walking Club

Saturday, January 5, 1:00 pm

Moderate walk, some hilly terrain, 3.5 miles. Meadow Road to Three Pines Trail to No Name Trail. Meet at the Donovan School at 123 Reed St. in Randolph. For details call 617-698-1802.

DCR Adult Walking Club

Sunday, January 13, 1:00 pm

Moderate walk, hilly terrain, 3.5 miles. Walk the St. Moritz green dot loop. Meet at the Shea Rink. For details call 617-698-1802.

Eastern Section Snowshoe/Hike

Saturday, January 26, 10:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. Snowshoe 6 miles over moderate terrain, or hike 7 miles in hilly areas if no snow. 5 hours. Meet at Shea Ice Rink. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Chickatawbut Section Snowshoe/Hike

Sunday, February 17, 10:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. Snowshoe 6 miles in the most remote area of the Blue Hills, or hike 7 miles in hilly areas if no snow. 5 hours. Meet at Shea Ice Rink. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Houghton Section Hike

Sunday, March 3, 10:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. 7-mile hike on a variety of trails with several views and lunch atop Buck Hill. 5.5 hours. Meet at Houghton's Pond main parking lot. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

DCR Adult Walking Club

Saturday, January 26, 1:00 pm

Moderate walk, some hilly terrain, 4 miles. Loop around Ponkapoag Pond. Meet at the Ponkapoag Golf Course parking lot. For details call 617-698-1802.

DCR Adult Walking Club

Sunday, February 3, 1:00 pm

Moderate walk, hilly terrain, 3.5 miles. Walk the green dot loop in the Great Blue Hill section via Wolcott Path. Meet at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot. For details call 617-698-1802.

DCR Adult Walking Club

Saturday, February 16 1:00 pm

Moderate walk, hilly terrain, 3 miles. Headquarters Path to Doe Hollow Path and return via Bugbee Path. Meet at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot. For details call 617-698-1802.

DCR Adult Walking Club

Sunday, February 24, 1:00 pm

Moderate walk, hilly terrain, 3 miles. Wolcott Path to Wildcat Notch and return via Halfway Path. Meet at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot. For details call 617-698-1802.

*(Hiking the Skyline
continued from page 1)*

Hills Reservoir and I was treated to some amazing changes in scenery. I climbed steadily to a young grove of aspens, before descending again to pass through some older growth oaks and maples, and up again to a grove of stumpy conifers, where I sat on a flat rock and had a mid-morning snack. The nourishment was a good idea, as I had three successive hills to climb – Nahanton, Kitchamakin, and Chickatawbut, which was topped by a fenced-in learning center with an inaccessible lookout tower, a solar panel array, and several bird houses – before making a steep descent to Randolph Road.

I set off again on a rapid ascent of Buck Hill, which it would turn out provided my favorite views of the day – a full 360 degrees from a large flat and circular top. From here I could see Wachusett and Monadnock Mountains to the northwest, Boston and the harbor to my north and east, and a large extent of the South Shore. Moving on, I descended Buck, which was in turn followed by another steep ascent to Tucker Hill. Once I'd summited Tucker, I made my way down its western slope to arrive at Hillside Street, at just past 6.5 miles, where I ate a brief lunch at a picnic table in front of the ranger's headquarters before pressing on.



From the headquarters I took the northern branch of the trail across the scenic and quite challenging Hancock, Hemenway and Wolcott Hills en route to Great Blue, and the nine-mile mark. Once there, I climbed the stone tower at Blue's summit and snapped one last shot of Boston's skyline, then continued on to the south branch trail some meters to the south.

I thought this final spur would be an easy one, since just one more hill – Houghton – is listed on the AMC map for the southern route. To my surprise, though, before reaching Houghton's summit I would have to climb two other smaller hills, each increasing

some in elevation before dropping back down into notches. (As a side note, I now refer to the hills leading up to and including Houghton as the Three Brothers. And Houghton is definitely the meanest of the three, with a final descent from his summit that's a steep and rocky pain!)

Making it safely to

the road below, I was both elated and exhausted, happy to find my friend, Khizer, waiting in a warm car with a hot cup of coffee for me. Honestly, I couldn't believe I had done it, but Khizer said he expected nothing less. All said and done, I'd hiked more than



10 miles with an elevation gain of around 2,500 feet, and I'd done it in less than seven hours! Today was an experience I will surely never forget.

Brian Schwarz is a blogger and Blue Hills hiking enthusiast. Find Brian online at hikeyhikey.blogspot.com.



Representing the Community

A Warm Welcome to Our New Board Members

Maryanne Burnes Hutchinson grew up in Milton and currently resides in Quincy with her two daughters. A practicing attorney, Maryanne is a member of the American Bar Association and a contributing editor to Black Law's Dictionary.

Rick Kesseli has been running, biking, x-country skiing and generally exploring the Blue Hills since arriving in Milton 20 years ago. Rick is currently the Chair of the Biology Department at the University of Massachusetts, Boston and conducts research projects funded through the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture that address issues concerning biodiversity, evolutionary biology of both domesticated crops and wild species and plant-microbe interactions. Within the Blue Hills, he and his students have worked on both invasive and endangered species projects. He has given interpretive walks to multiple individuals and groups over the last several years and looks forward to doing more with the many Friends of the Blue Hills interested in preserving our natural environment.

Jasmine Garani, a high school junior, is serving as the student Board member. She is already on the Board of the Model United Nations, holds a

black belt in karate and participates in iGEM, a high school science club.

Mark Snyder has been in radio for over thirty years. Snyder, a product of Curry College and Marquette University, is currently the senior vice president of Professional Marketing & Promotions Company (PMPCO) and the CEO of PMPNetwork.com, the internet's entertainment superstation, which has recorded over 175 million "hits" since its inception in 1998. His expertise in public relations, marketing and promotions dates back to his first position as Assistant Director of Public Relations and Sports Information at Curry College. Since then, Mark has handled public relations, copywriting, media placement, marketing and promotions for

over 85 clients.

Cheryl Weinstein is a retired systems development professional and has been enjoying the Blue Hills with her family for many years. She is currently a Library Trustee in Sharon, where she lives. She is also the project manager for Neighbors Against Destructive



Joining the Team Our new Board members hail from Stoughton, Milton, Sharon and Quincy and bring skills in project management, public relations, law and ecology. From left to right: Rick Kesseli, Maryanne Hutchinson, Cheryl Weinstein and Mark Snyder. (Jasmine Garani not shown.)

Development (NADD), a grassroots organization with members in southeastern Massachusetts.

Remembering Charlie Cox

We dedicated this year's Annual Celebration to the memory of Charles Spencer Cox, Jr, long-time FBH member and husband of FBH President Hilary Blocker. Our thoughts are with Charlie's family as we remember his love for the Blue Hills and enthusiasm for making sure it remains protected. We remember him successfully recruiting people to weed at Ponkapoag Pond last spring, bringing his family to Annual Meetings each year and encouraging us all to improve our efforts to protect the Blue Hills. The family is grateful for the many people who donated to FBH in Charlie's memory.



This year's Annual Celebration was dedicated to the memory of Charles S. Cox, Jr. Above: Charlie Cox and his wife, Hilary Blocker.

Blue Hills Winter Fest 2013
Tuesday February 26, 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Blue Hills Ski Area
4001 Washington St. (Rt 138), Canton
Food, Music... and You!

Staff: Executive Director: Judy Lehrer Jacobs;
Membership Coordinator: Ken Jones

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Jasmine Garani, Sharon; Jim Green, Canton;
Mark Snyder, Randolph; Denny Swensen, Canton;
Cheryl Weinstein, Sharon

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