

Welcome New Board member Denny Swenson

Denny's efforts to protect her family from Lyme disease made her realize her efforts could help protect all visitors to the Blue Hills. Here is her story.



Photo by Sue Christensen, Jamaica Plain

Denny Swenson of Milton (left), Ryan Carpenter of Canton and (not shown) Robert Mazairz of Weymouth joined the Friends of the Blue Hills Board this November.

I live surrounded by woods, in a house nestled next to the Blue Hills. About three years ago I came down with Lyme disease which my doctor luckily identified by my symptoms of a bulls-eye rash, high fevers, aching jaw, migratory joint pain and bone-deep fatigue. After taking an antibiotic, it took weeks before I could get out of bed and months before the lethargy finally lifted. Then it struck my husband twice. Finally, I began to learn that many of my neighbors have had it and in some cases are still struggling with its debilitating symptoms.

Children and the elderly are most

susceptible to the disease. As a mom of a ten-year old girl, I knew I had to do something. I began to learn as much as I could about how to reduce the risk to my family and neighbors. As a journalist by trade, I knew how to research a story, check the credibility of sources and look for corroborating evidence. I already knew the basics of personal protection, but I added to my arsenal ways to protect my property as well.

So now I pull my socks up over my pants, do routine tick-checks on my daughter, put fresh Frontline collars on my pets, sprinkle Damminix tick tubes around my yard, keep the lawn short and do what I can with stone scape around the perimeter of my yard – but I still find ticks galore. It is clear to me that these efforts, while important, will

only have little impact on the overall tick population.

As I spoke to experts, I began to understand how Lyme disease rates increase where there is an overpopulation of deer. The scientists I spoke with explained the statistics that demonstrate that when you reduce the deer population to

eight or less per square mile, Lyme disease cases can be significantly reduced in the area. The deer population in the Blue Hills is estimated at 30 deer per square mile.

When the deer population too high, not only does the incidence of Lyme disease increase, but the deer themselves become unhealthy and malnourished. The deer begin to overgraze the forest understory, leaving many of the invasive plant species but decimating native plants that the forest needs to provide habitat and food for all of the animals, including the deer. While it would be nice to believe that the deer population will naturally come down when it is too high, we know from neighboring states, like Connecticut, that deer popu-

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How do you protect yourself from Lyme disease?

Ticks come out even in the winter if there's even one warm day. Here are some ways to protect yourself all year long.

Personal protection:

- Check yourself daily for ticks. They can be as small as the period at the end of a sentence.
- When you go outside, wear long sleeved, light colored, shirts and long pants tucked into socks. This helps keep the ticks off you and makes them easier to spot.
- DEET can be used on your skin but only apply permethrin to clothing that doesn't come in contact with the skin.

Property protection:

- Keep the grass cut short.
- Remove leaf litter and brush from around your home.
- Prune low-lying brush to let in more sunlight.
- Keep woodpiles and birdfeeders off the ground and away from the house.

Zippity Do (or Don't) Da?

The proposal to build a canopy tour (or zip line) in Quincy Quarries provides few details; raises questions.

Al Endriunas of Easton was looking for a site to build a 'canopy tour' for families and youth groups. Young and old would climb into a harness attached to a wire above them and slide through the air, enjoying great views and, as he says, learning a 'story.' He sought a place that people would return to each year to experience the glide and learn more about the 'story' — something unique about the history or nature of the site.

Mr. Endriunas found what he was looking for in the Blue Hills at the Quincy Quarries. From his perspective, potential customers would love gliding over the quarries, taking in the

spectacular views of the Boston skyline, tall trees, and quiet pond. One of the main attractions would be the granite cliffs that tell the age old story of the glaciers and the relatively recent story of a booming granite industry.

You won't see design documents or even concrete proposals for the canopy tour yet. Al's proposal is still an idea that he has been discussing with the land owners: the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the City of Quincy. Quincy officials are interested in the proposal. If officials at the DCR consider the proposal a viable idea, they will ask the public to review and comment. If they then approve the project they will seek competitive bids from people like Al Endriunas and others.

How a canopy tour like the one Al is proposing would affect current visi-

tors, especially rock climbers, is uncertain. Al says his proposal is still at the conceptual stage, but says glide anchors would not interfere with current rock climbing practices. He adds that would provide amenities like bathrooms, a playground and additional parking.

Will a canopy tour in Quincy Quarries add a new attraction to the Blue Hills or an obstacle to current recreation?

"The devil is in the details," one DCR staff stated.

The Friends of the Blue Hills has some concerns about whether the zip lines would interfere with climbers, but we have not taken a position on it. What do you think? Let us know by commenting on our Facebook page or blog. Or email your thoughts to info@FriendsoftheBlueHills.com.

'Remember When...' the Blue Hills Changed My Life?

Gail Mocklin from Mansfield won first prize in the 'Remember When' Contest by receiving the most electronic votes for her favorite memory of the Blue Hills.

My favorite memory of Blue Hills is also one that is hard to think about. Last April, I went for a hike with my husband and my 7-year-old identical

twin boys. We took the red trail up to the tower. Within the first three minutes of the hike, it became apparent that my years of inactivity and unhealthy eating had more than taken their toll on me. As my husband and children ran up the hill, I lagged way behind, huffing and puffing. I was barely able to put one foot in front of the other. This is my favorite memory because it changed my life completely. That day I decided I didn't want to be a fat Mom anymore. I didn't want to be unhealthy anymore. I wanted to be able to run up the hill with my family. I vowed that day to hike that trail every single day until I could hike it like everyone else in my family. I kept my promise to myself and hiked rain or shine each day for about



a month. Since then I have enjoyed hiking the skyline trail 3-5 times a week. I've lost 23lbs and lowered my cholesterol to a healthy level. I tell everyone Blue Hills is my Stairmaster!

To read other memories, including second prize winner, Chris Riley from Milton, visit our website.

Please join us in thanking the sponsors of the 'Remember When' Contest

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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 2011

▲ FBH sponsored event

St. Moritz Winter Wonderland

Saturday, January 28 1:00 pm

The St. Moritz area of Quincy was once the home to a huge winter carnival where elite athletes would perform, and locals could recreate. Join us as we discover the interesting history of this winter wonderland and explore its remnants, including where a 60-foot long, 100-foot high ski jump once stood, on an easy hike. 2 hours. Meet at the Shea Rink parking lot at 651 Willard Street in Quincy.

Hike Beneath the Hunger Moon

Tuesday, February 7 6:00 pm

Experience the Blue Hills in a whole new light. Everything changes after dark — the trails, the trees, and the hills. Join a DCR Ranger on a moon lit hike under the Hunger Moon as we wander the trails of the Blue Hills. 2 hours. Email Raymond.f.mckinnon@state.ma.us

Winter Family Fun Safari

Saturday, February 11, 1:00 pm

Get the kids and grab your coats and hats as we explore what's happening in winter on a discovery hike around Houghton's Pond. 1.5 hours. Meet at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot at 840 Hillside Street in Milton.

Blue Hills Adult Walking Club

Sundays or Saturdays

Join the Blue Hills Adult Walking Club for exercise and a time to socialize. Walks are usually 2 to 5 miles. Call 617-698-1802, ext 3 for details.

A Big Thank You

to Everyone who Donated to the Annual Meeting's Silent Auction

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Representative Walter Timilty praises Steve Olanoff when he received this year's Jeffries Advocacy Award for the many years he dedicated to protecting the forests, views and trails of the Reservation.



John Sheehan gives Commissioner Edward Lambert the Blue Hills Leadership Award at the Annual Meeting. Over 100 people gathered to celebrate the volunteers who have worked hard to protect the Reservation in the past and salute all of us who will be continuing in the future.

Photos by Sue Christensen, Jamaica Plain

Denny Swenson

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lations can climb over 100 per square mile.

Unfortunately, there are virtually no natural predators to deer in our area. In order to bring the tick level down and the Lyme disease risk down in our

neighborhoods and for the visitors in the Blue Hills we need to bring the deer population down in our region.

We need to work as a community to educate ourselves on personal protection from ticks, as well as reduce the deer population to healthy levels – for the deer and for humans. In the Friends of Blue Hills, I now have a

community of people with whom I can work to help reduce the risk of Lyme disease for visitors to the Blue Hills and neighboring forests, and to help ensure that the forests remain healthy. I'm thrilled to be on the Friends of the Blue Hills board and look forward to working with all of you to help us solve these problems. Together.

The Blue Hills Reservation: We're In It Together...

Snowshoeing

Want to Enjoy the Reservation in Winter? Strap on Some Snowshoes!

by Steve Cobble

Getting a bit of cabin fever but not up for skiing? Even in deep snow, you can enjoy snowshoeing, and the Blue Hills is a great place to start! Here are a few pointers on how to get started.

If you're like me and have memories of wooden rawhide-laced snowshoes that needed lots of care and often slipped off your feet, welcome to the modern age. At any number of outdoor stores, you can pick up modern snowshoes that will take you anywhere. Trail or no trail, the built-in crampons bite into the slippery stuff and they are light enough to strap onto my hydra-



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tion pack if I find I don't need them. Wear layers of clothing that you can take off as needed along with insulated winter boots and toe warmers. I also recommend adding Micro-Spikes, an ingenious invention that stretches over any boot and gives instant traction on ice. These pack small and light and I now consider them a necessity on almost every winter hike when snowshoes aren't needed.

Once you're equipped and dressed, you're ready for any trail in the Blue Hills. On a typical winter day, I hike any segment of the Skyline Trail. But then again, I think climbing is the most fun, and the Blue Hills vistas are always



worth the effort. Rattlesnake Hill is challenging on a dry day and even more so in the snow. One of my favorite snow-hiking areas is Tucker Hill. Athol

Path, and/or the Green Loop, combined with some time following deer tracks, provides a good workout of at least an hour and a half. If you're feeling less energetic and prefer flatter terrain, you can always try the Ponkapoag Golf Course or hike around Houghton's Pond.

By the time you read this, with luck, we'll be knee-deep in the white stuff.

Cross Country Skiing

According to FBH members Allen Lapey of Milton and Barbara Meyer's of Medfield, the Blue Hills offers cross country skiing experiences for everyone, whether you're "a gentleman of advanced age" looking for an easy glide, or an advanced skier looking for a challenge.

For many, wintertime brings the joy of packing up snowshoes or skis and heading into the woods and fields to enjoy the hush after a snowfall.

Allen Lapey heads to Ponkapoag Golf course for its gentle terrain and open vistas. He doesn't set a course and just

heads out to enjoy the great big beautiful area of whiteness. Though he used to ski the Blue Hills proper, he now prefers the safety of a milder landscape to the more challenging area he calls Suicide Hill.

"It is a treasure."

Barbara Meyer is a bit more adventurous and will go anywhere depending on the depth of the snow. If there's plenty of snow, she'll ski along the Bouncing Brook trail. Many times she has gone

on the Braintree pass trail which disappears down a hill ending at the highway.

She says, "It's a dramatic experience, but you have to know it's coming."

The Bugbee trail is another favorite for her. The joy for her is to be in the woods and moving. Hills are also a plus. Usually she is joined by her "other half" — a friend or ski patrollers. She'll opt for snowshoeing when skiing is not an option because the trails haven't been tamped down.

YES! I want to protect the Blue Hills Reservation!

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

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Cold Blooded Snakes: Friends not Foes

Snakes are essential for healthy forests (and for helping to control Lyme disease)

By John Walsh

The mercury is falling, winter gales are rising, and balmy weather is an increasingly distant memory. Time to put on an extra blanket, turn up the thermostat and brew up a cup of hot tea before turning in for a blissful night's sleep in preparation for hiking the snow laced trails of the Blue Hills.

Your initial chilliness is quickly replaced by warmth as shivering and muscular activity release soothing waves of heat. Ahhh, the pleasures of life as a warm-blooded, technologically advanced hominid. Technically known as homeotherms, we belong to a group of organisms that are able to maintain a relatively constant internal temperature. But, how about those not so fortunate?

Cold-blooded organisms (poikilotherms) such as reptiles must rely on their management of the surrounding environment to help maintain their own internal environment. During the blistering heat of summer this may involve burrowing into the relatively cooler earth or being more active during the cooler nighttime hours. In the biting winters of in the temperate climes of Massachusetts it necessitates seeking shelter from the life-draining surface landscape.

Although the Blue Hills harbors a variety of reptiles that require such seasonal measures, two of the most intriguing involves species whose mutual existence is intertwined on several levels are the copperhead snake (*Agkistrodon contortrix*) and the timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*). The names of these two, often misunderstood, venomous snakes

typically evoke a variety of responses in people running the gamut from fascination to revulsion. The copperhead usually runs 2-3 feet in length with a copper colored head, and reddish brown body accented by characteristic dark brown hourglass shaped bands which renders it both attractive and well-camouflaged. The copperhead can be found in a wide variety of habitats where it hunts a number of different small animals including rodents. Its prey is injected with venom that attacks the circulatory system. Although painful, the bite of a copperhead is rarely life threatening to a human. In fact, one of the active ingredients, contortrostatin, of copperhead venom, is currently being investigated for possible use in controlling the growth of some cancers. In addition, these top predators can help control the rodent populations that also act as hosts of the deer tick which carries Lyme disease.

Like the copperhead, the timber rattlesnake is also a pit viper, so named in recognition of having a pair of thermosensitive pits on both sides of its triangular-shaped head. These organs make them effective nocturnal predators, preying on many of the same small animals as their copperhead cousins. Typically running from 3-5 feet, timber rattlesnakes vary considerably in color, although darker forms appear to predominate in more northerly and cooler settings. Typically reclusive and shy, these snakes readily retreat from potential danger employing their characteristic "rattle" when cornered or threatened.

In order to help survive the stresses of winter, both snakes often co-hibernate in deep clefts within rocky outcroppings. This communal denning helps both species retain essential body heat. Coupled with an already low metabolic rate and

the relatively mild temperature beneath the ground, the snakes are able to survive the winter. The snakes typically reemerge in mid-April. Timber rattlesnakes, in particular, are most vulnerable at this time as they remain lethargic as they bask on the surrounding rocks for some period of time before migrating away from their denning site. This behavior makes them especially susceptible to collection or disturbance.

While both species are widely distributed, many populations have been extirpated or are experiencing significant declines. This is particularly acute in the Northeast where both species approach their northern range limits. In Massachusetts, both species can only currently be found in the Blue Hills, east of the Connecticut River valley and the Berkshires. In recognition of their precarious state, both snakes are listed as "Endangered" under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), providing them with certain protections. The Friends of the Blue Hills is working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to help protect these and other endangered species in the Reservation.

So as you hike or ski by a rocky ledge in the Blue Hills this winter, wish the possible tenants sweet dreams as, like us, they await the return of spring's promise of life re-awakened and their return to their critical role in the ecology of the Blue Hills.



Want to see (or share) photos of the Blue Hills?
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