

Trail Mix The Newsletter of the Greenways Alliance of Rhode Island



Volume 7, No.3

Summer 2008

Bluewords:

Celebrating Water Trails in the Ocean State

The Rhode Island Blueways Alliance is creating a Blueways trail network linking Rhode Island's 1500 miles of rivers and streams and 21,000 acres of lakes and ponds to Narragansett Bay. Since 2006, we have been working together with public and private organizations to build awareness of our rich Blueways network and promote safety, conservation, recreation and economic development. The Blueways Alliance is working to present Rhode Island's water trails in the same fashion as our biking and hiking paths with well-defined, clear information for paddlers, showing put-ins, take-outs, portages and lots of additional information.

Our current activities include:

- Development of a web site (www.exploreri.org) displaying access locations. We plan to add Blueways paddling route maps.
- Trail development—the Alliance is supporting the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission's efforts to develop a new Blueways trail along the west side of Aquidneck Island.
- PaddleRI (see the calendar of PaddleRI events in this issue).

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Out of the Classroom and On the River: RiverClassroom

By Patti McAlpine

Rhode Island rivers offer many opportunities for educators and students to get outdoors, explore and learn about diverse riparian habitats. Education about rivers is key in efforts to restore and protect our rivers and Narragansett Bay. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council offers this education in the form of *RiverClassroom*.

The goal of RiverClassroom is to develop historical and environmental



Summer camp participants aboard the Blackstone River Explorer.

educational programs that are presented on board the Blackstone Valley Explorer and in classrooms throughout the Blackstone River Valley.

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Paddling the Great Swamp

By Marie Fonseca

Most Rhode Island trail books will include the Great Swamp, a state-owned Wildlife Management Area encompassing thousands of acres in South Kingstown, as a choice place to explore—and it is. But kayaking through the Great Swamp will allow you to see different areas of the Swamp; areas only accessible to those exploring by boat. So if you'd like to spend a few hours on a winding river traveling through a totally

undeveloped wildlife habitat, coming face-to-face with a wide range of flowers, foliage, birds, beavers, turtles and lots of beautiful scenery, then consider treating yourself to a day on the water in the Great Swamp.

Start your paddle just west of the URI Ryan Center on Route 138. The put-in spot is an inconspicuous fishing access point next to Taylor's Landing Country Store.

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Bluewords

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➤ **Tourism**—we are publicizing paddle tour packages like the Paddle Blackstone package available through the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and the Blackstone Valley Outfitters.

Each year, watershed groups throughout Rhode Island celebrate June, Rhode Island Rivers Month, with a variety of fun river activities. This year, groups are hosting paddling events on their rivers and on the bay with trips scheduled throughout June and into July. Come out and join us as we celebrate the launch of the Rhode Island Blueways network with PaddleRI!

The enclosed flyer gives a short description of each trip and the map shows you where each trip will take place. All the trips require pre-registration with the organizing group for the trip. The contact person for each trip is listed in the description. For additional information about these trips and other upcoming events visit ExploreRI.org

Keith Gonsalves,
RI Blueways Alliance Chair

Trail Mix is the quarterly newsletter of the Greenways Alliance of Rhode Island (GARI).

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The Swamp

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Edge yourself off the bank of the river, preferably in the early morning when the smoky clouds of fog are rising from the water and the glistening spider webs can still be seen. Make your way down the narrow passageway which twists and turns and brings you very close to sidewalls consisting of branches and briars. Overhead trees and bushes will seem to push in on you as you maneuver your way through this cave-like entryway. After paddling a little further on, you'll come to a fallen tree. Once you pass under the tree, the clear, ceiling-less expanse of the Great Swamp will lie in splendor before you.

From here, traveling with the gentle flow of the Chipuxet River, moderate paddling will get you to Worden's Pond in about two hours. The passage is wide and the current gentle. The river turns just enough that you can never see too far ahead, leaving surprises around every bend. Red-winged blackbirds sing out to you as they cling to the cattails towering over the side walls, while nesting ducks and the geese, startled to see you, swim speedily away only to greet



Beaver dams are common in The Great Swamp.

you again at the next bend of the river. Painted turtles bask on protruding logs while prehistoric-looking Great Blue Herons stretch their wings and hawks overhead search for prey.

Beavers love the Great Swamp and there are sometimes as many as four active dams in this section of the Swamp. You may need a strong arm to break through the piled, gnawed sticks and intertwined branches amassed by the beavers. But before you break through, be sure to linger for a while, since these marshy areas are active feeding grounds for Belted Kingfishers and Great Blue Herons.

After spending almost two hours in the maze of the Swamp, arriving at the open body of the thousand-acre Worden's Pond is a great feeling. Paddlers who arrive earlier in the day will be greeted by a calm lake with a mirror reflection of the sky above. Late-day paddlers are likely to face headwinds and whitecaps slapping at the sidewalls of their boats.

From here, you can paddle one mile across Worden's Pond and exit at the boat ramp, turn around and return the way you came, or continue through the second section of the Great Swamp.

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Kayakers Save The Bay



By John Martin

Kayakers come in all shapes and sizes, but there are two kinds who mean a lot when it comes to helping Save The Bay's efforts to protect Narragansett Bay and its watershed.

Our eelgrass restoration program would not be possible without the scores of volunteers who assist in harvesting and transplanting this critical underwater grass. For those unfamiliar with the process, staff and volunteer divers gather eelgrass from several of the Bay's remaining healthy eelgrass beds. On shore, other volunteers clean, sort and bundle the eelgrass shoots and pack them in coolers for transplant within 48 hours at sites where water quality will support the growth of new beds.

Eelgrass beds—sometimes referred to as the Bay's nursery—provide primary habitat for many species, including scallops and flounder.

We could not get those precious eelgrass shoots from the divers to the crews on the beach without the expert shuttle service run by our volunteer kayakers. A harvest day features a non-stop transfer from 30-50 yards offshore to our sorting teams. The kayakers keep track of the divers' bubble trails in order to be at the right place at the right time to grab mesh bags of eelgrass shoots the moment a diver surfaces. They then paddle to shore where the waiting sorters take over.

Another Save The Bay summer event that relies on kayakers is our annual Bay Swim. Around a third of our 450 swimmers last year relied on kayaker teammates to ensure their safety. This signature

event, which raises funds to support our Bay protection program, has enjoyed the enthusiastic cooperation of kayakers for four decades.

Eelgrass and Swim kayakers' awareness of the need to protect the Bay they love to paddle inspires all of us at Save The Bay. Like many of our Bay Community constituents, they are willing to work hard to contribute to our cause. That's because we share many goals when it comes to guarding the Bay's health and advocating for its future needs. We share the desire to make the Bay both environmentally robust and accessible to all who seek to enjoy its beauty.

Fields of Dreams spawned the catch phrase, "If you build it, they will come." We envision the Bay as a place

we "build" as a community. We build coalitions that press for effective Bay management, better monitoring so we can measure and analyze results, funding for wastewater infrastructure, advocating balanced use and guaranteeing accessible shorelines. The problem of excess nitrogen in the Bay is a great example of how solutions require the efforts of many—state and local leaders, regulators, businesses, homeowners and environmental advocates have all pulled together to meet this challenge. Among those who understand this best are the kayakers who give Save The Bay a helping hand. When we work together, we create a Bay we'll all come back to again and again with the confidence that it is seen as a shared resource that is treated with respect.



Save The Bay's Wenley Ferguson and volunteer Mel Fisher harvesting eelgrass. Photo by John Martin.

River Classroom

Since 1993, The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the first organization to present education programs on the river, has made their 49-passenger, Coast Guard inspected riverboat, the Explorer, available as a floating education center.

An inquiry-based program, RiverClassroom allows students to explore the river's diverse ecosystem, perform grade-appropriate water quality tests, observe and identify plants and animals, and learn about the river's eco-industrial past. Students also learn the effect human development has had on the watershed and what actions they can take to keep the river clean.

Life on the river is making a comeback. From turtles to swans, a blue heron or an osprey soaring overhead, a cormorant drying its wings from an overhanging tree branch or the once elusive fish jumping for insects, the possibilities of spotting wildlife in this riparian habitat abound. Some students see an osprey or Great Blue Heron for the first time ever while on RiverClassroom trips—a priceless experience for them and us!

"We see the RiverClassroom as a partnership where our communities and our sponsors work together to teach our young people about protecting our natural environment," said Tourism Council President Robert Billington.

Students learn about the Blackstone River's eco-industrial past as the first industrialized river and the first polluted river in America. Students look for indicators or clues that the river is getting cleaner while understanding the actions they can take to keep the river clean.

To promote educational awareness to local communities, Citizens Bank

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will once again underwrite "Free Sundays on the River" this year. On the first Sunday of each month from June to September, tours on the Explorer will be free to the public on a first-come, first-served basis. Free Sunday in October will be Sunday, October 12 to coincide with the Columbus Day Weekend and the Preserve America Blackstone Valley program Footsteps in History. More information about tours is available online at <http://www.rivertourblackstone.com/>.

We continue to work with local partners to create new programs such as the Hands-On Program conducted in partnership with the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, and the John H. Chafee National Heritage Corridor.

RiverClassroom programs are available throughout the summer months for summer camps, girl scouts, boy scouts, and community parks and recreation departments. This year we hope to hold Saturday family programs to allow families to perform water-quality tests, make observations, and explore and enjoy the river.

Our programs can be customized to meet the curriculum needs of educators. If field trip funding is an issue, several community businesses have donated or granted funds to our scholarship program. Partial scholarships are available on a need basis, and we are glad to discuss this option with you.

For more information about a RiverClassroom program aboard the Blackstone Valley Explorer, or to receive a copy of an education brochure, contact Patricia McAlpine, Blackstone River Education Coordinator, at 401-724-2200 or by email at patti@tourblackstone.com.

The swamp

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If you choose to continue, the canoe camp on the western outcropping of Worden's Pond offers a primitive resting spot before taking on the second section. After your rest, the Charles River can be picked up exiting from a cove in Worden's Pond. The river is a very sinuous, thick woodland environment and is home to numerous



Once you sit down in a kayak, nature is at eye level. Having a field guide handy will enhance your appreciation of the Great Swamp.

beaver dams, so losing the trail is a possibility. Watch for the cuttings that help mark the water trail. It's easy, in this second section, to have the feeling at some point that you are lost. Bring plenty of food and water and enjoy it.

The full Great Swamp trip takes 4-5 hours with the end point at Biscuit City Landing, not far from the railroad tracks. Before heading out, make sure you check the weather and your maps. Local outfitters provide shuttle service and can provide specific local knowledge.

The Great Swamp photos: The oar (above) by Marie Fonesca and the paddler (right) by Hugh Rushing.



Paddling as seen from the river.



GARI is able to continue our advocacy for safe and accessible trails thanks to our quarterly newsletter, *Trail Mix*, by the RI Dept. of Environmental Management. Thank the following 2008 Organizational Friends: > RI Blueways Alliance > Woonsocket

Expanding ExploreRI.org

By Meg Kerr and Bruce Hooke



The Rhode Island Blueways Alliance web site, ExploreRI.org, is designed to provide one-stop shopping on the web for information about paddling and exploring the state's water trail network. With funding from the Rhode Island Rivers Council, the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program, and the Rhode Island Foundation, the site is coming to life and now includes detailed information on 70 access sites scattered throughout the state. We hope to have comprehensive coverage of all the major river, lake, pond and salt water access sites before the end of 2008.

Since its inception, we envisioned building ExploreRI.org to include a range of information about outdoor recreational opportunities in the state—places to bike and hike, picnic areas and more. In early 2008, we were approached by the Environment Council of Rhode Island Education Fund who was interested in promoting “No Child Left Inside” programming on trails throughout the state and interested in providing

trail information on the web. We did a bit of research and discovered that some of the state's trails are available on the web (for example, the Audubon Society of RI provides downloadable trail maps on their web site <http://www.asri.org/trailmaps.htm>), but it is difficult or impossible to find information on many other trails. Although some groups might be interested in sharing trail information, many small conservation organizations do not have web sites and the technical expertise to share information on their trails on the Internet but would like to make this information available if they could find a way to do so. The Rhode Island Blueways Alliance agreed to work with the Environment Council of Rhode Island Education Fund to launch a major expansion of the ExploreRI web site to add land trails to the website.

Our goal is to expand the existing ExploreRI.org website to include statewide trailhead data, create trail maps for selected trail systems that are not currently mapped, and create a public outreach program to encourage people to get outside, introduce people to the many great places to go walking in Rhode Island and teach them how access these places

The ExploreRI.org website currently provides information on water access sites for paddling in Rhode Island and this project will expand the site to include information on walking trails. The website is built around an interactive mapping system that allows users to zoom in on any part of the state and then see icons identifying water access sites and trailheads that they can click on for more information. This information includes details such as driving landmarks, whether there is

parking at the site, and a description of what is available at the site in terms of recreational facilities and opportunities. For sites that have trail maps available on line, either on the ExploreRI.org website or elsewhere, there will be a link to the trail map. If other websites have more details on any particular location we also include links to those websites.

This project is built around the idea of partnerships. We have already reached out to partner with many organizations, including the Greenway Alliance of Rhode Island, RI DEM, the Rhode Island Land Trust Council, the AMC and others. We will work closely with these groups and with the people who manage specific trail systems on gathering the trailhead data and creating the maps. Such outreach and partnering is expected to be an ongoing aspect of this project.

Once these initial phases of the project are well underway, we will also be developing a public outreach program that will seek to get people outdoors and onto the trails. We are planning to organize regular statewide events where people would know that, on a given date and time, they could go to a particular trailhead and there would be someone there to take them on a walk on the trails at that site. This would again involve strong partnerships with local groups and landowners, but we will take the lead on organizing and publicizing the events via the website, press releases, printed materials and other methods.

For more information, or to become a Blueways volunteer, please visit www.ExploreRI.org.



There is a lovely view of the river from the kayak.



Eller Phyllis LaRiviere enjoys the sights as she kayaks through The Great Swamp.

Thanks, in part, to support of a joint grant program with the Narragansett Bay Wheelmen and funding of West Warwick Friends of the Greenway. We are grateful for their ongoing contributions to our efforts. In addition, we'd like to recognize and thank the Pawtucket River Watershed Council

Webmaster's Corner

As warmer weather finally makes an appearance in Southern New England, cabin-fever riddled folks are thinking about new adventures, and it's a good time to consider new places to bicycle.

Although there are plenty of places in Rhode Island to ride (visit GARI's website at www.rigreenways.org or RIDOT's BikeRI site at www.dot.ri.gov/bikeri for maps and information), sometimes you have to explore new territory.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation has always had good resources about paths in the Bay State and the EOT's website is even better now (find it at www.mhd.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=../common/bikes/Bikes&sid=bikes). The simple interface shows an overview of the entire state with the approximate location of bike paths. As you roll your cursor over the map, a list of paths in that area pops up. By clicking on the map and following the links in the next page, you can get specific information on the path segment.

Not all links are active, as some of the paths are clearly in the planning stages. Many links jump to non-state pages, so in many cases users are taken directly to the website of the grassroots organizations that are supporting these paths. Too many links appear to be inactive, and the EOT has some housekeeping to do with the site. Still, it is a nice presentation and provides a good launching pad for planning your next bike outing or simply doing some armchair traveling.



Urban Surprise

A Paddle through Roger Williams Park.

By Ed Mullen

Where can you paddle your kayak along four miles of coastline located in six interconnected lakes and see impressive early 20th century architecture with only a single launch?

The surprising answer is Roger Williams Park!

Roger Williams Park was built in the late 1800's by the renowned landscape architect Horace W. S. Cleveland in an area of over 430 acres of mostly marsh and bog lands. Cleveland's true genius was the utilization of the landscape that scooped out lake beds from the marsh areas and made gentle hills from the excavated material until the true beauty of this jewel of Providence was apparent.



The bandstand at Roger Williams Park.

There are two decent launch sites and either of them will allow you to follow the coastline and four miles later you will be right back where you started except

you will have paddled in six different lakes. If you choose to start your paddle from what I call Bonus Site 2, Polo Lake, Roger Williams Park North, GPS Location 41°47.23N - 071°24.89W, the following is what you will find: Polo Lake connects with Williams Lake. Along the shore of Williams Lake you will find the Seal House and the famous Japanese Gardens. The flora in this area is world renowned for its diversity and beauty. A striking wrought iron bridge lies just beyond the view of the Carousel

Village. Go under this bridge and enter Pleasure Lake, where the Queen Anne style Boathouse is sited.

Just after the boat dock you leave Pleasure Lake and enter Cunliff Lake by going under a massive granite bridge named after the famous Indian Chief, and friend of Roger Williams, Miantunnomu. Cunliff Lake is a fairly lengthy paddle, but the view of the Temple to Music makes it all worthwhile. The sight of this massive white Vermont marble Greek style monument makes it hard to believe that you are in Providence, Rhode Island. Paddle along a finger-like peninsula and enter the long narrow Elm Lake which will take you to the southern end of the park's waterways.

It is now time to head north along the eastern shore of Elm Lake. Just before you head east into Edgewood Lake, you pass by two small islands that serve as habitats for a large variety of waterfowl, including the Great Blue Heron. Edgewood Lake lies along the eastern border of the park and is marked by another granite bridge named after another Indian Chief, Caunonicus.

Once under the bridge you are back in Pleasure Lake. If you follow the north shore line you will see the monument to Marconis, the Italian inventor of wireless radio.

Along the shore and under the wrought iron bridge brings you back into Williams Lake and then under a granite bridge with the year 1889 carved into the railing and you are back where you started: Polo Lake.

This trip is a great opportunity for adventure and amazement for all ages and skill levels. Enjoy!

Photograph by Franca Cirelli. Used by permission from www.ri.gov.

Help Make Greenways in Rhode Island Happen:

Dear Kaptain Kayak,

Kaptain Kayak is filling in for Dr. Sprocket while the doctor takes a much needed rest. He will return to answer questions in the next issue of Trail Mix.

Q Dear Captain Kayak,
My wife and I moved to RI a few years ago when our children were 2 and 4, and we are now ready to get back into paddling the canoe that's been collecting dust in the garage. Can you recommend some places where it's easy to launch and load a car-topped canoe AND that the waterway is suitable for us to take our 5 and 7 year old as "middies" in our 17-footer?

Newbies Due to Babies

A Dear Newbies,
An excellent question—taking your children out paddling is a great way to introduce them to the sport, and also a wonderful way to have some quality family time. Your first step of course is to get some PFDs that will fit the children properly. While you are at it, look at the quality of your own PFDs. It could be time

for an upgrade if they too have been gathering dust for a few years.

For your first couple of trips, I recommend a small lake or pond, so that you will be able to refresh your paddling skills—and learn to compensate for the extra weight—in a situation where the wind and current are not a factor. The other plus is that when you or the kids have had enough, you can make your way back to shore quickly.

Bring along some small paddles so that your kids can be part of the crew, and not just cargo. A two minute lesson on the beach or dock will be enough to show them a forward and reverse stroke for now. Bring along some pads or cushions that you don't mind getting wet for them to sit on—having them sit up on the thwarts

is not allowed! Make sure to have plenty of sunscreen, hats, and snacks.

The RI Blueways Alliance is developing a web site displaying information on paddling around Rhode Island. To see the map, visit www.ExploreRI.org and click on "Map Search". When the Rhode Island map appears, click on the area of the state where you want to paddle and the map will zoom in. The red canoe icons show canoe access sites. When you click on the icon, you will see detailed information about the site.

A listing of boat launches run by the RI Department of Environmental Management can be found at

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/boatlnch.htm>.

For more suggestions on great local paddling sites, and other useful paddling information, check out what my friends at the Rhode Island Canoe and Kayak Association have to say on their website <http://www.ricka-flatwater.org/index.html>.

Safe Paddling, Kaptain Kayak



GARI accomplishments

Our members and supporters:

- > Cooperate with other bicycle and trails groups to support trail and greenway development and to promote bicycle safety.
- > Communicate with state department directors to encourage improved bicycle and pedestrian resources.
- > Coordinate and promote September as Rhode Island Trails and Greenways month.
- > Participate in other state and national trails and environmental support programs.

www.rigreenways.org

Summer 2008

Get on the trail:

GARI is dedicated to improving conditions for cyclists, hikers, and pedestrians and increasing the number of greenways statewide. Your membership makes this newsletter possible and enables us to continue working with state and local leaders to ensure Rhode Island has an integrated, well-maintained network of alternative transportation recreation resources.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State, Zip _____

E-mail _____

Telephone _____

Fax _____

Organization _____

Annual Membership enclosed

- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Nonprofit \$50
- Corporate \$100
- Other: _____

Please return membership form with check payable to the Greenways Alliance of Rhode Island to: GARI, 31 Stanchion Street, Jamestown, RI 02835.

Please tell me about GARI meetings by
 E-mail Regular Mail Neither

Join the Greenways Alliance of Rhode Island Today!



Connecting the DOTs

Pedestrian Bridge Nears Completion in Providence.

By Charles St. Martin

This Although not a bikeway, a vital link for non-motorized transportation is taking shape in Providence as the India Point Park Pedestrian Bridge nears completion. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) has been working to replace the original Fox Point Pedestrian Bridge for the past three years, incorporating the structure into the Iway, the relocation of I-195 in Providence. Pending weather conditions, RIDOT expects to open the new pedestrian bridge this summer.

The new pedestrian bridge will be in the same location as the old one, connecting the East Side at George M. Cohan Boulevard directly to India Point Park, spanning over I-195.

India Point Park is slated to receive numerous improvements as part of the Iway as well, including moving India Street away from the park to provide additional parking and more trees and landscaping. RIDOT will build landscaped islands to help buffer the park from traffic using the new India Street on and off ramps, which replace the existing Gano Street exits.

The new pedestrian bridge will allow those on the East Side to cross over the highway, walk through the park and onto a new linear park RIDOT plans to build on a portion of the Washington Bridge. The East Bay Bike Path originally began in Providence, at India Point

Park, and passed over a narrow, protected bike lane on the south side of the Washington Bridge. That path has been closed since May 2007 due to construction to rebuild the Washington Bridge. The reopening date of the existing path and the time frame for construction of the linear park have yet to be determined.

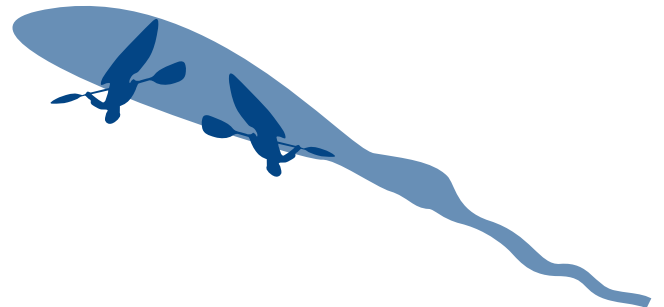
The new India Point Park Pedestrian Bridge will be a marked improvement over the old narrow structure. The new bridge is five times wider, and includes benches and raised beds for planting flowers, shrubs and small trees. The southern end of the bridge will feature a staircase and a serpentine ramp system to allow handicapped persons to use the bridge. The entire structure will be illuminated as well, making it a safer resource for those who use it.

The writer is an Information and Public Relations Specialist for the Rhode Island Department of Transportation.



Map and Calendar of Events Paddle RI

Special Pull out Section!



www.rigreenways.org

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GARI