

The Island Trail

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MAINE ISLAND TRAIL ASSOCIATION SUMMER 2015

L.L.Bean Buoys Maine Island Trail with \$100,000 Gift

BY DOUG WELCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In 1987, long before “public/private ventures” became trendy, the Island Institute submitted a grant proposal to the State of Maine’s

Department of Conservation (DOC) and L.L. Bean of Freeport. The idea was to create a Maine Island Trail Association, based on \$2,500 in seed money from the State and \$6,700 from L.L. Bean to be matched by the fledgling organization’s membership dues. Both the State and L.L. Bean accepted this proposal, and thus the Maine Island Trail was born. (At the time, nobody could have known that through this agreement the concept of a recreational water trail was born as well. Now, according to the American Canoe Association, there are 567 water trails in North America, and the Maine Island Trail was the first.)

The Trail was established based on the notion that visitors to the islands could be entrusted with their care. cont. on page 2

In This Issue

PADDLING WITH A PURPOSE	4
2014: FINANCIAL YEAR IN REVIEW	8
CONSERVATION IN KIND	13
UP AND COMING MITA EVENTS.....	14



Monitor Skippers are critical to carrying out MITA’s commitment to stewardship. Apprentice Monitor Skipper Tom Morris (in back), with wife Marion learning the ropes from MITA’s Brian Marcaurelle (at right) and his wife Melissa, during an island cleanup in Stonington.

Monitor Skippers: Volunteers Anchor MITA’s Stewardship Efforts

BY KEVIN LOMANGINO

After a lifetime on the water in Maine, one of Tom McKinney’s most memorable moments came a few years ago, while captaining the MITA skiff as a Monitor Skipper. While on a run to monitor seven different islands in Casco Bay, he was just north of Chebeague Island, when he spied a pair of dorsal fins on the water a few hundred feet off the bow. He slowed down and cut the engine in the hopes that he could draw the porpoises even closer.

As the fins resurfaced, the porpoises continued their slow approach, and McKinney saw that it was a mother and calf. “It still gives me a little chill up and down my spine when I think about those kinds of moments,” McKinney recalls.

‘It’s Expanded My Horizons’

McKinney is one of about 20 volunteer skippers who monitor the islands on regularly-scheduled runs during the summer, collecting data about island usage, inspecting campsites, and talking with visitors. Skippers for cleanups and other work projects has brought him to areas of Maine that he’d never even thought about visiting. “It’s expanded my horizons,” he says. “I’ve mainly been a sailor, but having access to the MITA skiffs has given me the opportunity to see some different places that I’d never get to in a sailboat.

continued on page 12

Paddling with a Purpose

MITA members make paddling Maine's coast into a mission

BY JENNIFER VAN ALLEN

Last September, MITA members Chuck Domenie and Sandra Townsend took an expedition that many just dream about: they spent nearly a month paddling from Eastport to Portland, and made a dozen stops on the Maine Island Trail along the way.

Though Domenie and Townsend are sea kayak guides, neither had traveled as far or spent as long in a kayak before. After musing about such a trip for years, they learned that Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation (ASC) needed volunteers to gather water samples to help scientists monitor marine microplastics. With that, talk turned into an itinerary.

"It was just the thing I was looking for," says Domenie, 29, who was a kayak and SUP guide at the Eastern Mountain Sports Kayak School in Rhode Island. "Scientists don't have the money to collect the data they need. But we just go out there for fun, and we can help them with that. If we don't have healthy rivers and oceans, no one is going to want to go in them," he says.

Collection was fairly simple. [See story, page 5] And they personally delivered the samples they'd collected to the researcher, Abby Barrows, in Stonington.

Though the paddlers had planned to finish at the New Hampshire border, after encountering overwhelming winds and weather while rounding Portland Head Light, they wrapped it up early.

"I didn't have any qualms about not making it to a geographic boundary we arbitrarily set before we left," Domenie says. "I got to spend 23 days on the water along the coast of Maine with a good friend, paddling on some of the nicest and roughest water I have ever been out in.

"Though it would have been nice to go the whole coast," he adds, "a trip should never truly be about the destination."

Kayak make and model: Wilderness Systems Tempest

Days on water: 23

Miles traveled: 200

Stops made: 24

Trail Sites visited: Cross, Ram, Mink, Bois Bubert, Pond, Russ, Wyer, Bar, Cuckolds, Bangs, and Cow Islands

Wildlife sightings: Seals, eagles, herons, red-throated loons, porpoise, and baby jellyfish

What did you eat? We ate like kings! We'd have pancakes for breakfast, and stews and burritos for dinner. For lunch, we'd have miniature Snickers bars and trail mix. On Russ Island, we harvested mussels from the ocean and ate them.

Logistics: The post office will hold packages for up to 30 days. So we sent supplies to post offices along our route that were located a half mile from a boat landing—Rockport and Milbridge. When we arrived, we parked our kayaks at the landing, walked to the post office, picked up our packages, sent home any supplies we didn't need, and got on our way.

Best surprise: The kindness of strangers. Maybe it's just Maine; maybe it's people in general. When people heard what we

were doing, they were so nice, letting us fill our water bottles and recharge our electronics, charging us less than the posted rate, and offering places to stay for free. One guy even drove us to buy some pizza.

Worst surprise: There was a lot of plastic out there and often in places I would not expect to see it. And not just plastic bottles; there were weird, big pieces of plastic that we ended up taking with us and using as a table for our meals.

Magic moments: On day 17, we were paddling from Rockland to Bar Island, and were on the water from 8:30 AM to sunset. As we paddled through Muscongus Bay, we were surrounded by thousands of baby jellyfish. That night on Bar Island, we sat on a tent platform, and watched an awesome sunset.

What did sampling involve? Once we got the protocol, it was pretty simple to follow. We tried to sample near wastewater treatment plants, as they don't necessarily have any filters or ways of removing the microplastics. For collection, we used one-liter plastic bottles. We just had to record the time of day, the water temperature, and the direction of the wind.



Domenie manages the Newton, Massachusetts, location of Boating in Boston, a nonprofit that works to improve water access throughout the city.



Connect with MITA Online

Stay in the know about volunteer opportunities, events, activities, and Trail news.

- **Web:** www.mita.org
- **Email Newsletter:** subscribe on our website
- **Facebook:** facebook.com/maineislandtrail
- **YouTube:** youtube.com/maineislandtrail
- **Twitter:** twitter.com/meislandtrail
- **Instagram:** [@meislandtrail](https://instagram.com/meislandtrail)



MITA Members Get Wilderness First Aid Afloat

This year, MITA hosted its first Wilderness First Aid Afloat course for members at a special discounted rate. The course was organized by Nancy Zane of Unity College and Castine Kayak Adventures. More than 15 MITA members participated, and there was plenty of interest from others who couldn't make it. Stay tuned for similar offerings next spring, and a special thanks to Nancy!

Making Expeditions into Scientific Missions

BY JENNIFER VAN ALLEN

Disheartened by water pollution on the Maine Island Trail? There's good news. Even beyond picking up litter, you can help make the waters safe, healthy, and clean for generations to come.

Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation (ASC), a nonprofit based in Bozeman, Montana, matches scientists in need of data with people heading out on recreational expeditions. Since ASC was launched four years ago, 2421 adventurers have collected data for 114 scientists. Those efforts saved conservation organizations 12,900 days in data collection, just in 2014.

"There would be no way that I could conduct this kind of research on this scale on my own," says Abby Barrows, principal investigator for ASC research on marine microplastics.

"ASC has opened up this amazing potential for collecting data, because people on expeditions are going into all these areas that most researchers don't have the ability or the funding to reach," says Barrows, who is based in Stonington.

So far, Barrows has received more than 200 samples collected by skiers, sailors, surfers, and paddlers from Greenland to New Zealand to the Antarctic Peninsula. That includes the samples collected last fall by MITA members Chuck Domenie and Sandra Townsend, as they paddled Maine's coast. (See story on Page 4.)

"Each week more samples arrive from amazing and remote locations from all over the world," says Barrows, noting that 600 more samples were en route to her office.

No formal training or scientific background is required to volunteer. Interested volunteers must fill out a form on the ASC website and go through basic training that typically involves watching a video, reading protocols, and talking with ASC staff.

"Because data integrity is so important to us, we work with scientists to design simple protocols, so there is almost no chance of error," says Emily Stifler Wolfe, ASC's marketing and outreach coordinator.

To collect data for Barrows' project, Domenie and Townsend needed just a few basic supplies: a tool to record GPS coordinates, a bottle big enough to hold one liter of water, and a Sharpie and duct tape to record the time and location of the sample collection. "I like to have people take a lot of notes about what's happening around them," says Barrows.

She has spent the last three years studying marine microplastics—pieces of plastic less than 5 millimeters in size in the ocean—that come from everything from drink bottles to cosmetics.

"ASC has opened up this amazing potential for collecting data, because people on expeditions are going into all these areas that most researchers don't have the ability or the funding to reach."

Microplastics become magnets for toxins like DDT, BPA, and pesticides, which can disrupt digestion, development, and the endocrine system in fish. And when those fish end up on our dinner plates, they become human health risks. "Then we're consuming these toxins as well," Barrows says.

She is studying the prevalence of microplastics in the ocean and how they're affecting different forms of life. "This is really important scientific research for anyone who appreciates the marine environment," she says. "Even taking one liter of water can contribute to filling this knowledge gap."

Learn more about Ms. Barrows' research, and other ASC volunteer opportunities at adventurescience.org.
