



Granite Speaks

To celebrate 30 years of the Maine Island Trail, members of our Granite Society (20+ years of MITA membership) were invited to submit personal stories and reflections. Here is one of our favorites!

By Tux Turkel, Member #7213

I remember standing at Winslow Park on a bluff overlooking Casco Bay, staring out at islands I knew little about. I had two young, adventurous boys, lots of backpacking gear and a canoe. And it suddenly hit me: "This is crazy. I need to get a real boat."

It was 1994. After searching the newspaper classified ads I found a guy trying to move a 15-foot Corson runabout with a 35-hp outboard before winter, so I bought it. I had no idea how to run a small boat, much less take my family safely out on the ocean.

By luck, I was in a bookstore and spotted the *Outboard Boater's Handbook: Advanced Seamanship and Practical Skills*. The cover note said outboard boats were highly evolved and capable of much more than most people realize.

"Here's a book of possibilities," it concluded.

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Monitor Skipper Michael Leonard tends to the skiff while MITA staff scout potential landing sites along the Bold Coast.

Shedding Light on Sunrise County

MITA Moves Forward on the Bold Coast

By Brian Marcaurelle, Program Director

For the first time in its 30-year history, MITA's 2018 Trail Guide and app will include more information about the Bold Coast in eastern Washington County. The decision to formally recognize the Bold Coast as part of the Maine Island Trail was approved by the Board of Trustees this fall after a recommendation by MITA's Trail Committee, following months of research, scouting, stakeholder engagement and internal discussion. With the listing of Trail sites, launch locations and boating guidelines for the Bold Coast, MITA seeks to close the largest remaining gap in the Trail and encourage safety for those who explore these waters.

Until now MITA has characterized the Bold Coast as a place with unique challenges and elevated dangers that one should leapfrog if venturing east of Machias Bay. Our recent work only fueled our appreciation for the region's uniqueness and risks. However, it also revealed a surprising amount of existing use and considerable demand for more information. After carefully weighing options, it became clear that MITA could add great value by sharing more wisdom about the Bold Coast rather than remaining silent. This winter, we will begin taking steps in that direction.

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A Summer of Discovery

As described in the last issue of *The Island Trail*, we began our Bold Coast exploration by asking two basic questions: *can* the Trail be extended in the region, and *should* it be done? Throughout 2017 we sought input from a wide range of individuals and partners while exploring the Bold Coast by foot, kayak and powerboat in a variety of conditions. Our conversations and experiences taught us a great deal, confirmed several suspicions and debunked a few misconceptions.

One of the unanticipated discoveries was that far more people were boating in these waters than we had previously thought. More than half of the roughly 160 respondents to our spring boater survey indicated that they had explored the Bold Coast by boat. Most of them were paddlers, and many had done it more than once. We encountered or accompanied several paddlers in the region this summer.

We also learned that people typically traverse the Bold Coast by blasting through in one tide cycle on the

“escalator” of strong currents offshore. Since it is only practical to travel with and not against the current here, and since MITA provided little information outside of warnings, paddlers seeking a more intimate nearshore experience were forced to search elsewhere for trip planning guidance. With no approved stopovers in the region, camping occurred wherever practical and often without permission.

Perhaps most surprising was the realization that MITA’s characterization of the Bold Coast as separate from the Trail was largely immaterial to the outside world. Given the inclusion of sites in Cobscook Bay, many people already considered the Bold Coast to be part of the Trail. It was simply a section where MITA provided insufficient information.

Reframing the Discussion

When the Trail Committee convened in August for a retreat to share and discuss our findings, we confronted the realization that, for better or worse, the Bold Coast was already part of the

Maine Island Trail. Instead of debating whether we could or should expand the Trail there, we shifted our focus to a different fundamental question: was it better for MITA to provide more or less information about the Bold Coast? Put another way, would we be elevating risk or increasing safety by adding sites and expanding the trip planning resources offered in the guidebook and app?

On this matter stakeholder feedback was understandably mixed. Some feared that providing additional information would encourage more use, potentially by under-equipped boaters. They argued that any form of promotion was unwise, given the unique boating challenges and extreme hazards. The investment of time required to independently scout out good information served as a necessary filter for those who might not be prepared to boat in these waters.

Others pointed to the number of people already boating in the area as evidence that the information is already available through other means and that people will continue to come to the Bold Coast regardless of whether or not MITA serves as a resource. They reasoned that the existing information has not been sufficiently vetted, and that the absence of sanctioned day use and overnight sites only adds to the safety risk. In their view, MITA would help improve safety by providing good information for boaters, including approved places to get off the water.

Despite differing views about how to handle it, nearly all stakeholders agreed that boating safety is not to be taken lightly on the Bold Coast. The conditions truly matter there. Good information, good judgement and good timing are crucial. This was brought into sharp focus on one of MITA’s scouting missions. What began as a beautiful day with a favorable forecast ended with a hasty retreat when the weather changed abruptly and ushered in dense fog and heavy chop without warning.



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The ocean can often humble you, but rather than providing fodder for a good story, surprises along the Bold Coast can turn into matters of life or death very quickly.

A Matter of Trust

Concerns over boater safety and improving the quality of the boating experience were the driving forces behind MITA's decision to formally acknowledge the Bold Coast as part of the Trail and to begin sharing what we've learned about it. In the end, it came down to MITA's founding philosophy of trusting people to make responsible decisions when boating on the Maine coast. Trust in others has been a hallmark of the organization

since the beginning. It is the cornerstone of the relationships between members, staff, volunteers and landowners. The Trail Committee reasoned that MITA should aim to provide as complete a resource as practicable for boaters and trust that people exhibit the same good judgement on the Bold Coast as elsewhere on the Trail.

To that end, information is now being assembled for the 2018 Trail Guide and mobile app with an initial focus on safety, launch locations and emergency egress options. Landowner permission is also being sought for day use and camping spots, with the hope of adding sites to the Trail in the years ahead.

With the decision to move forward on

the Bold Coast, we hope that MITA also moves closer to fulfilling its strategic plan goal to provide "an inspirational border-to-border recreational experience for boaters of all kinds." While our investigation into this region is complete, our commitment to the Bold Coast is only just beginning. We look forward to ongoing collaborations that will fill in information gaps, add sites to the Trail and improve the overall safety and experience of those boating in the region.

We sincerely thank all who contributed to this effort and we look forward to continued guidance from our members and partners as we advance this exciting endeavor. ☼

So You Want to Boat the Bold Coast? A Quick Look at Some Considerations

Timing & sound judgment

matter: Go only when conditions allow, and have the wisdom to stay ashore or stick to more protected waters when conditions are not right. Know that conditions can change quickly, and cannot always be predicted by forecasts or reading the skies. It is important to identify bailout options and be prepared to seek shelter, perhaps for extended periods. Pay close attention to the weather and get off the water before things turn sour. Favorable conditions may not line up with your time frame, so have a backup plan such as sheltered water paddling, hiking or biking when conditions are poor.

Experience counts: This is no place for the unprepared. Only boaters comfortable in moving water and dynamic environments, and proficient in self rescue techniques, should venture out on these waters. Tides and currents are strong and surprisingly

unpredictable here. When close to shore and traveling in the direction of the flooding or ebbing tide it is common to encounter strong back eddies or currents opposite to the overall tidal direction. These conditions can change depending on the height of the tide. Boaters should possess a good understanding of tides and currents, and be familiar with how they interact.

Proper equipment is essential:

With substantially colder water and landing conditions that are never guaranteed, boaters should be prepared with proper attire for prolonged immersion. Cell phone reception is unreliable in the region. Redundant VHF radios, emergency beacons and GPS units are considered essential items for these waters. Coast Guard response time may be longer than other areas of the coast, and there is little commercial or recreational boating activity to rely on in emergency situations.

There is safety in numbers:

Boating with other experienced and properly equipped individuals can increase safety and assist with rescues.

Do your homework: Extensive trip planning is more important here than most other sections of coast. Consider scouting areas from land before venturing out on the water, and be respectful of the concerns and limitations of landowners. Much of the Bold Coast shoreline has been conserved by Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the State of Maine and is open to the public. In addition to their websites and the MITA Trail Guide, online boating forums can provide useful trip planning information. Respect traditional uses including fishing, aquaculture and shoreline recreation, and of course, support local businesses while you are in the area.