

THE ISLAND TRAIL

NEWSLETTER OF THE MAINE ISLAND TRAIL ASSOCIATION | WINTER 2025



MITA STAFF

Megan Iverson, who served as a caretaker on Little Chebeague Island in Casco Bay last summer, keeps watch over one of the Trail's busiest islands.

CARETAKING: A LOOK BACK AND AHEAD

By Christina Hassett, Downeast Regional Stewardship Manager

Before the concept of a Maine Island Trail or accompanying Association, and certainly before any inking of a guidebook to share such a resource, someone keen to explore Maine's islands would likely have turned to Robert Duncan's "A Cruising Guide to the New England Coast". First published in 1937 and faithfully updated every 5-10 years thereafter, I like to imagine some such person in the late '80s, opening the crisp pages of their

most recent edition to this passage describing a popular Casco Bay destination:

"More than 30 assorted yachts were anchored in the cove. Many of them were rafted and on long scope so they continually drifted and fouled each other as the afternoon wore on. The cove was filled with small rubber outboards with children under 10 orbiting the mother craft while mother took Polaroid pictures, threw (CONT. PAGE 3)

IN THIS ISSUE

6

MITA gets a little bit yachty in Eggemoggin Reach

14

A new site on the Penobscot River follows a proven formula

16

Doug Welch looks back at 17 years with MITA

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Thank you to **Stu and Juli Haddon** for serving as volunteer editors for The Island Trail.

The Maine Island Trail is a 375-mile long water trail extending from border to border along the Maine coast and consisting of over 220 sites for day or overnight use.

The Maine Island Trail Association (MITA) is a nonprofit organization whose goal is to advance a model of thoughtful use and volunteer stewardship of Maine's wild islands, creating an inspiring recreational water trail that is cared for by the people who use it.

MAINE ISLAND TRAIL ASSOCIATION

100 Kensington St, 2nd Floor, Portland, ME 04103
(207) 761-8225 • info@mita.org • mita.org

f @maineislandtrail @meislandtrail

WELCOME



FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM THE TRAIL

By Ben Dougherty, Executive Director

There is a magic in the waters and the islands of the Maine coast that elicits a child-like wonder and connects us to something beyond ourselves and to each other. My two children, Mia and Finn, excitedly explored the rocky shores of Little Jewell after a night spent in the caretaker's cabin earlier this fall. It wasn't their first night spent on an island—in fact they grew up on an island for much of their childhood—but the newness of this place ignited their curiosity. They marveled at how slick the seaweed was and at the majesty of the granite slabs and wondered out loud about what creatures they would find. I am always inspired to experience these things through the eyes of my children. Having both participated in a sailing camp this summer that got them very familiar with this part of the coast, they were eager to show me around, to be the navigators as we made our way to the island and to show me the trails once we made it ashore.

As the sun set, we laid on our backs on the rocks and were mesmerized by the Tsuchinshan-ATLAS comet in clear view in the western sky. Those of us who have experienced this magic, and who have shared it with others, are hooked and feel lucky just to know that it exists.

I was fortunate enough to start my role as executive director just in time to join two Fall Cleanups and to begin to get to know many of our monitor skippers and other loyal volunteers and supporters before the season came to a close. Whether gathering six boats full of volunteers to spread out and collect trash on a dozen islands in the Stonington area or spending the day with a smaller team of volunteers on Browney Island off Beals, I was struck by the strength of the MITA community and the multitude of reasons that people feel called to support our work.

Beyond my time on the water, I happily spent much of the first six weeks with our outgoing executive director, Doug Welch. We toured the state and beyond, meeting with MITA supporters, founders (including Dorrie Getchell and her son Dave Jr.), board members, partners, and staff, past and present. We spent hours together in cars and meeting with people for walks, coffee, lunches, and breakfasts. Finally, I was able to join the MITA community as we celebrated Doug, and expressed our gratitude and reverence. Those of you who know Doug are aware of his passion for the Maine Island Trail coupled with the power of his storytelling. Throughout those six weeks Doug helped me to understand the culture of MITA, a culture that he and others cultivated and stewarded for almost two decades. That culture and the community that sustains it, is what resonates and inspires me the most as I look back on my first few months in my new role.

At MITA, we have a remarkable and deeply experienced staff and a vibrant community of volunteers and supporters who believe in the importance of what we do. I am excited for MITA's future and look forward to working with all of you to share the magic of the Trail with more people.



Ben and his kids overlooking Casco Bay from one of the towers on Jewell Island.

the backing overboard and shouted for Honey to mix another daiquiri... keep[ing] the power going to supply ice and lights so they don't have to drink in the dark while they spew exhaust and banana daiquiris into the night air. It was by far the most unpleasant and insensitive group of people I met in any place along the coast. I'm sure many of the people there were as disgusted as I was by the license a few took with what should have been a quiet and secluded refuge. Never was it more true that no man is an island."

For years, such scenes on Jewell Island, while perhaps infrequent, were part of the norm. In the '90s, when MITA became involved in the stewardship of some of the state-owned islands in the area, it was clear that Jewell was an outlier both in terms of use and, in some unfortunate cases, misuse. As MITA's fledgling organization grew, so too did calls from the public for MITA and the state to take action to rein in what many viewed as destructive and disrespectful behavior on the island, both for the sake of its visitors and the island itself. Finally in 2000, Maine's Bureau of Parks and Lands sat down with MITA to draft up a proposal for the first Casco Bay caretaker.

To be stationed on Jewell throughout the summer season, the Casco Bay caretaker would "begin a proactive, educational role interacting with island visitors on Jewell, Little Chebeague, Crow, and Little Snow Islands." While the installation of this new caretaker wasn't universally accepted by all of Jewell's visitors, by and large they were met with approval. In time, the problematic behavior displayed by some select few visitors did begin to change. As the caretaker became more of an expected presence on the island, engaging in discussions with more and more people each year, reports such as the one described by Duncan began to diminish. Now, sprinkled throughout the logbooks, one often comes across entries such as:

"Came here often in the 1970s, '80s. It was wonderful and you folks have made it better (cleaner!). Thanks."

"Awesome place! Thank you, thank you. Cocktail Cove was delightful. The trails exquisite."

"Beautiful day with west winds. Cove & campsites mostly full. Beautiful, peaceful, and restorative as always."

Well into the 2010s, the only unrealized ambition of the Casco Bay caretaker seemed to be the "Casco Bay" part. Almost immediately upon the inception of the position, the management of Jewell, its trails, campsites, and visitors became so all-encompassing that the caretaker had little if any time to check on the additional islands BPL had originally identified. Primary among them was Little Chebeague Island. Closer to the mainland, Little Chebeague beckons day users and overnight campers alike with its wide crescent beach, low-tide sand bar connecting it to Great Chebeague Island, and pleasant anchorage. As most of the early caretakers can attest, if there weren't great plumes of smoke billowing from the island as they passed by on their way to Portland for a resupply and shower, it was generally assumed that everything on the island was going swimmingly.

Meanwhile, several local historians had been sparking renewed interest in Little Chebeague by shining a light on many of the accounts of life on the island throughout its long and storied history.



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MITA has employed seasonal caretakers, like Megan, in Casco Bay since 2000.

In conjunction, volunteers had made extensive progress in opening up old roads and walkways that restored access to some of the abandoned buildings and home sites in the interior of the island. With more people interested in accessing these places and increasing camping pressure on the beach, MITA began to consider if both the island and its visitors might benefit from more active and present stewardship. And thus, the Casco Bay Caretaker became two: a Little Chebeague caretaker and a Jewell caretaker.

(CONT. PAGE 4)



MITA STAFF

Charlie Milkovits, a familiar presence on Jewell Island, has spent six seasons in the caretaker role.

In the earlier years on Little Chebeague, the caretaker, along with scores of enthusiastic volunteers, spent many hours advancing a crusade against the monoculture of bittersweet that had established itself across much of the island. Interior trails were developed and maintained, interpretive signage was installed to educate visitors about the history of the island, and an additional four campsites were established in the interior of the island to accommodate increased use and alleviate pressure on the existing beach sites. Little Chebeague will often see more day users than Jewell while Jewell tends to draw more overnight campers, with visitation numbers between the two islands over the course of a season comparable to that of some of Maine's smaller state parks.

As with Jewell, Little Chebeague is not spared its fair share of rowdy, less than considerate visitors as this summer's caretaker, Megan Iverson, can attest. However, as someone who has considerable experience in caring for some of New England's most loved public spaces, Megan says managing that kind of use is simply part of the job. In her experience, visitors to these places all arrive with their own unique backgrounds and ideas about what it means to recreate on an island, and it should be no surprise that sometimes, those ideas can be at odds with other visitors.

This past season, Megan's days were a constant balance of addressing the needs of caring for the island with the needs and hopes of its visitors. As Charlie Milkovits, who returned for his sixth season on Jewell this past summer, puts it: "in an ideal world, all Jewell would need is a landscaper." Charlie likes to think of the job as helping to manage a shared backyard. The most important thing for visitors to remember, he insists, is that these islands belong to all of us; they're here for all of us to enjoy and if we all see it that way and take on that responsibility of care during our visits, perhaps we really wouldn't need a caretaker after all.



ALICIA PULSIFER HEYBURN

Alicia Pulsifer Heyburn, right, with just a few of the many companions that accompanied her border to border journey on the Maine Island Trail over the course of four seasons.

Traipsing the Traverse

By Alicia Pulsifer Heyburn, MITA Member

Before I was old enough to operate a boat, my family made a handshake agreement to put our small island in Harpswell, called Raspberry, on the Maine Island Trail. Thus began a rewarding relationship whereby we shared our space and received assistance in caring for it.

My coming of age with MITA began when I was asked to be part of a video that filmmaker and former MITA trustee, Melissa Paly, was making. Her camera was rolling as I put my West Pointer (an 18-foot center-console wooden skiff) back on the mooring, and she asked what MITA meant to me. Without hesitation or thought, I looked toward the camera and said: "Being a member of MITA is like having a key to the coast of Maine. It opens all sorts of opportunities for adventure."

Until that point, my coastal adventures were limited to short jaunts between Harpswell's mainland and our island, or periodic trips to Holbrook's General Store for supplies. My curiosity about what lay beyond my home waters grew as I became more involved with MITA. I joined the

trail committee, and eventually the board of trustees. I had a kayak, an ocean rowing shell, the West Pointer, and another small powerboat. Although the Trail can be enjoyed in any of these vessels, I was most drawn to sea kayaking as my method for exploration.

Thanks to numerous outings with the Southern Maine Sea Kayaking Network organized through MeetUp, I gained introductions to new launch ramps, Trail sites, and people who became friends and adventure partners. I practiced wet exits with Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), took rough water courses with Pinniped Kayak, and underwent Maine Guide training with Tidal Transit. Each course made me aware of how much more there was to learn and helped me appreciate my existing skills. I started leading MeetUp paddles, offering courses for AMC, and became a Registered Maine Guide leading trips for camps, clubs, and conservation groups. Through all this, MITA was my master key, unlocking great places, partnerships, and people.

After jaunts in Merrymeeting Bay,

paddles from the Sheepscot to Muscongus, and a memorable trip from Old Quarry around Isle au Haut, I felt confident to read charts, research weather, right myself in rough seas, and pack my boat with the items necessary for multi-day trips. I was ready for a grand adventure. I decided to paddle the entire coast, known loosely as a Maine Island Trail Traverse, before the end of my term on MITA's board. I had three years to get from Kittery to Cobscook Bay.

I spent the winter of 2020-21 planning my trip, taping overlapping charts across the wall of my garage and penciling in notes from the most recent edition of the Maine Island Trail Guide. I upgraded my kayak to a carbon-kevlar Cetus LV and attended winter pool sessions organized by the Maine Association of Sea Kayak Guides and Instructors (MASKGI). I practiced calls on the marine radio, and adorned my new PFD with a whistle, a compass, sunscreen, and a strobe light. The best part was deciding on a strategy for the journey that optimized the relationships I'd made with other MITA members, skippers, staff, and island owners.

This meant that instead of going from border to border in one shot with a couple of people, I broke the trip into sections, extended numerous invitations, solicited requests for help, and set a schedule to progress east between May and October 2021.

Over the course of the traverse, I reached out to strangers for long-term parking, coerced my kids into driving shuttle vehicles, found a heart-breaking message in a bottle, saw two minke whales, got drenched by turquoise rain off of Southport, slept at a seaside construction site that at least provided a porta-potty, received a delivery of chips and beer off MDI, saw puffins at Petit Manan Light, and paddled the Bold Coast twice in calm seas. I am still unsure where the Trail actually ends!

With over 220 sites sprinkled opportunistically from New Hampshire to Canada, the Trail is less a linear route than a collection of stars to arrange into constellations of endless adventure. Each trip taught me something, tested what I thought I knew, and enriched friendships.

I was naive to think I could do this in one summer; I started in 2021 and concluded in 2024. 26 people shared the journey over 11 different sections. I'm grateful to MITA's community for what we did together!

Alicia Pulsifer Heyburn was a MITA trustee for nine years. She was the recipient of MITA's Spirit of Giving Award in 2019 and the Dave and Dorrie Getchell Spirit of MITA Award in 2023. She is part owner of Raspberry Island and the executive director of Teens to Trails.

DURING MY MAINE ISLAND TRAIL TRAVERSE, I LEARNED:

- Arranging car shuttles and overnight parking can be a tough task. **Make connections through MITA to help with your shoreside logistics!**
- The southern coast is deceptively rugged. **It's helpful to practice a good surf landing.**
- The practice of first-come, first-served camping works. **Only once was I unable to stay on the island I'd hoped for (but the backup option was even better).**
- The amount of trash on non-Trail islands can be daunting. **It is a testament to the impact that MITA's staff and volunteers have on the Trail.**
- Every piece of gear needs a consistent home in the boat for easy access. **Things can happen quickly!**
- There is no hotel in Maine with a better ocean view than a campsite along the Maine Island Trail. **Take advantage of what we have here.**



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Don't miss out. Visit mita.org/join today.

Resources. Opportunities. Knowledge. Community.

Gain access to it all for as little as **\$35** when you renew your MITA membership.

Thank you for your support!



NO

MERE



SKIFF

MITA STAFF

A true classic represents MITA at the 2024 Eggemoggin Reach Regatta

By Nick Parson, Communications Manager

When you think of MITA, the first boat that likely comes to mind is the iconic Lund SSV 18. Per Lund's website, these humble but sturdy aluminum powerboats are described as "great for walleye fishing or running to and from the camp." At MITA, they are the bedrock of our stewardship efforts on the Maine Island Trail. Given that, the appearance of an ad hoc MITA Sailing Team assembled aboard a gleaming 47' classic cutter in the 2024 Eggemoggin Reach Regatta may have turned some heads and raised some eyebrows.

Held annually in the waters of Eggemoggin Reach between Deer Isle and Brooklin, the regatta (known simply as the ERR) is a single-day sailing race that bills itself as the largest regatta for wooden boats in the world. Hosted by Brooklin Boat Yard (a wonderful MITA sponsor), Rockport Marine, and WoodenBoat, the ERR is a true pilgrimage for classic boat enthusiasts. If your boat is primarily

constructed of wood and over 24 feet in length, then you're part of the club. The yearly congregation of classic boats is breathtaking and the scenery along the race course is just as stunning, running past Campbell, Sellers, Little Hog, and Buckle Islands on the Trail.

Prowess, our entry in the race, is a 1947 Eldredge-McInnis custom cutter. It was donated to MITA a little over a year ago through our boat donation program, whereby people who wish to part with their boats may give them to MITA to sell in order to generate funding for our programming. From kayaks to cruise ships, we'll consider every boat on which we are given a lead. If we accept the boat and can sell it, then the donor is able to claim a tax deduction. Depending on the boat's value and the donor's wishes as it relates to taxes, some boats enter an arrangement where the buyer will technically charter the boat for a period of time prior to purchase. In the end, the result is the same: the



MITA STAFF

Team MITA after dropping their sails.

donors free themselves from the burden of boat ownership and receive a nice tax break, and MITA gains critical funding.

In this case, there were other benefits for MITA that were initially less obvious. The best place for a large wooden sailboat such as *Prowess* is in the water, not in a storage shed on land. This keeps the wood from drying out, which could cause leaks between the planks. With a boat as strikingly beautiful as *Prowess* on the market, the best thing to do is to show it off. You never know when a potential buyer might be passing by. (CONT. PAGE 8)



MITA STAFF

A few of the nearly 100 boats that "raced" in the grey and placid conditions of the 2024 Eggemoggin Reach Regatta.

So, our strategy with *Prowess* became clear: sail it.

And that is what we intended to do on the day of the 2024 ERR. We gathered some friends and, under the command of MITA's business engagement manager Jordi St. John (who is a licensed captain, among his other talents), *Prowess* made her way to the start line. Adorned in hot orange MITA tees, our team sailed with pride under a pair of large MITA battle flags that waved dramatically halfway up the mast.

Well, perhaps that's not entirely accurate. The flags were not exactly waving on that day. Nor were they even fluttering, if we're being honest. In truth, they were hanging limp, along with the majority of the sails within the fleet, throughout an absolutely glass-calm day without a breath of wind. What is typically a 17-mile course that begins just off Brooklin's Center Harbor and finishes in Great Cove, home of WoodenBoat, was shortened into a four-mile drifting match. The news of the course shortening was delivered over VHF by ERR race committee member (and MITA monitor skipper!) Saphrona Stetson.

For the crew of *Prowess*, whose class was the last to start, even the shortened course proved too much ground to cover in the lifeless conditions. With the promise of a cooler filled with Maine Island Trail Ale waiting back at the mooring, *Prowess* returned to its summer home in Center Harbor, where the crew enjoyed a late afternoon of swimming, sunning, and refreshments while taking full advantage of the gracious cockpit and exquisite teak decks aboard MITA's temporary flagship.

For now, *Prowess* is out of the water and in winter storage. As of this newsletter going to print, the boat remains available. If you are so fortunate as to become the next steward of *Prowess*, then you'll always be able to count on your friends at MITA whenever you need a good race crew. We'll bring the beer.

For more information on *Prowess* and MITA's boat donation program, please visit mita.org/boats.



MITA STAFF

Asa Berry, a young volunteer hailing from Gouldsboro, aboard a MITA skiff during a trap cleanup.

Asa in The Hole

By Christina Hassett, Downeast Regional Stewardship Manager

The derelict dock project had been on my “to do” list for a while and thanks to the previous winter’s storms, the project had now grown twice as large. Where there once had been just one rotting skeleton of a float, two sat; a mess of splintered boards and timbers lying in a tired heap on the shore. A volunteer group from the previous summer had already helped by removing and salvaging any of the good pressure-treated boards to serve as bog bridging on the island, and the heinous, ever-shedding blue foam had been removed and disposed of. Now all that was left was the hardest part: breaking up what remained of the unwieldy, shattered framing into moveable pieces to get it off the island. I selected some potential dates that gave me the necessary high tide to access the cove with the skiff and went about drawing up a list of supplies: chainsaw, rockbars, pry bars, hand saws, sledgehammers, sawzall, skillsaw, catspaw, and finally, hands. Many, many hands.

Given the nature of the work, I was

somewhat reluctant to list this particular workday on MITA's public signup page; I wanted to be sure people knew what they were getting into before signing up. As I scratched my head considering what groups or which local volunteers might be interested in this kind of project, an email entitled: “Group Volunteer Project Opportunity” popped into our stewardship@mita.org account. Intriguing, I thought.

The email read: “Hi! My name is Asa Berry. I am a senior attending Sumner Memorial High School in Sullivan, Maine, and am currently participating in the Alzar Rockies to Patagonia Gap Program. As part of the Alzar Gap Program, we have the opportunity to pursue a project of our choosing in our home communities with the support of the program. My idea is to organize a group of people to orchestrate an island cleanup, build/maintain/renovate campsites, or another project that would be more helpful to MITA. Let me know if this sounds good to you!”

Bingo. Not only did this seem to

be some sort of divine intervention descended from on high to solve my dock demo dilemma, but I immediately recognized the name. Asa (along with several of his classmates) had joined MITA in 2023 to assist in a massive, multi-organizational effort to remove derelict lobster traps from Outer Bar Island. Images of Asa and his friends replayed in my memory: precariously balanced on a towering pile of crushed traps atop the skiffs, disentangling unruly traps from a mess of a pile, and dragging heavy traps down across the beach, tied together one after the next, like a little busted trap locomotive. This was exactly the kind of group that I needed. I immediately reached out to Asa and after outlining the project, we set a date.

On a warm morning in late June, I met Asa along with six of his friends and classmates and their high school track coach on the shores of Moosabec Reach, all eager and ready to work. So eager, in fact, that I found myself having to pace the group.

“Does anyone need a break?”

“Are you sure you guys can carry that?”

“That’s really all the time you want for lunch?”

I heard myself asking such questions throughout the day. Despite the unforgiving heat and the physicality of the job, the joy with which Asa and his friends took to the work was undeniable.

The laughter, thoughtfulness about the task at hand, and easy teamwork that the group shared couldn’t have provided a more quintessential picture of what it looks like when community members come together to lend a hand.

In reflecting on another busy stewardship season, that day really stands out for me. It was a good example of a productive and satisfying job well done. In my four years as MITA’s Downeast regional stewardship manager, it’s been rare that, absent a workplace or organization-sponsored volunteer day, individual folks have reached out with the hopes of galvanizing a group within their community to volunteer.

Before Asa took off for Dartmouth this



CHRISTINA HASSETT

Delivering fragments of demolished dock back to the mainland using one of MITA’s skiffs.

fall, I called him up to hear more about what inspired him to focus on MITA, the islands, and community service. Besides encouragement from the Alzar Gap program, Asa told me that helping out has become a part of who he and his close friends are. He credits their coach, Adam Lord, for instilling in them a sense of teamwork. Adam taught them to see opportunities for collaboration in all aspects of life. Asa says that he is not sure he could ask for a better group of friends, and that the experiences they share “giving back” only strengthen their relationships with each other and their community.

Asa has spent the last 10 years sailing and visiting the islands around his home in Gouldsboro, just east of Mount Desert Island. He told me he sees the trash floating in the water and washing up on the shore, which motivates him to get out and do what he can. He admits: “It’s kinda fun to fill a dumpster, and see the physical manifestation of the progress made. It’s satisfying.”

Before his involvement with MITA on Outer Bar Island, Asa wasn’t aware that such an organization existed. As a nonprofit that devotes as much of its hard-earned funding as possible towards maintaining the Trail, MITA has always relied heavily on word of mouth in getting others involved. The further up the coast you go, away from Maine’s more densely populated southern coast, the harder this can be to achieve.

Despite my own periodic struggle to fill a boat with volunteers from time to time, Asa says it’s not for lack of interest. He reminds me that often “people don’t know what they don’t know” but their desire to help each other, their communities, and their environment is there. And as long as that’s the case, MITA will always be happy to provide the boat.

If you are interested in volunteering with a group of friends or community members (especially in the Downeast region!) please email stewards@mita.org.



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MITA thanks the many individuals, families, businesses, and institutions who generously supported us over the last fiscal year that concluded on September 30, 2024. We especially recognize the impact of our Trailblazers, who do so much to support MITA's mission of access and stewardship along the Maine Island Trail.

Please visit mita.org/donors if you wish to see our donor list online.

Trailblazers (\$10,000+)

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Francis & Robert Barchi
Paula & Stephen Birmingham
Scotty Folger
Mark Mason

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MITA STAFF

A volunteer from Casella, a waste management company and Compass level sponsor, gathers debris on Damariscove Island on a work day with his team.

We Mean Business

By **Jordi St. John**,
Business Engagement Manager

Volunteerism is key to the Maine Island Trail Association's ability to fulfill its mission of island access and the deliverance of the key component of environmental stewardship along the entire coast of Maine.

Many businesses lend their time and energy to support the Maine Island Trail Association. Volunteers play a crucial role in preserving the natural landscape, supporting conservation efforts, and ensuring safe, enjoyable access for everyone.

One extremely dedicated business that supports MITA both financially and through workplace volunteerism is IDEXX. IDEXX's employees have been supporting

us for 13 consecutive years, have completed a total of 88 days of service with 439 employees volunteering over 2,800 hours.

Year after year, IDEXX team members participate in Trail stewardship activities, including island cleanups, invasive plant removal, and other habitat restoration projects. Volunteers have built and cleared trails, maintained campsites, kiosks, and privies, and have helped ensure that the islands remain beautiful and accessible for future generations. Their work not only enhances the natural experience for Trail users but also helps protect the habitats of local wildlife and maintain biodiversity in these fragile coastal ecosystems.

MITA relies heavily on businesses and groups of all sizes to volunteer along the coast. One small, local business that we love to work with is GoGo Refill.

"Through our collaboration with MITA, we're not only supporting Maine's unique coastal environment but also fostering a

hands-on commitment to sustainability and conservation. Our work with MITA reflects our shared values—preserving Maine's natural beauty and promoting a cleaner, greener future."

After a large island clean-up, MITA often needs to pay to dispose of the debris that volunteers have loaded up and helped haul off the islands. Casella Waste Management is an incredible partner, supporting MITA financially as a sponsor, giving MITA discounts on dumpsters, and through Casella staff volunteer efforts. It is this kind of long-term business partnership that helps MITA succeed in our mission to care for the coast of Maine.

Looking forward, MITA hopes to continue the partnership with IDEXX, GoGo Refill, Casella, and others to inspire even more employees to connect with Maine's stunning coastal landscapes through stewardship and shared responsibility for this cherished waterway.

A Confluence of **OPPORTUNITY**

By Brian Marcaurelle, Program Director



MITA STAFF

David Thanhauser and Cloe Chunn, founders of the Penobscot River Paddling Trail, at the Joost Family Preserve on Verona Island.

ON A SUNNY SATURDAY MORNING IN LATE JULY, 15 PEOPLE CONVERGED ON THE SHORE OF VERONA ISLAND TO ESTABLISH A NEW WATER-ACCESS CAMPSITE IN A QUIET PATCH OF WOODS OVERLOOKING THE PENOBSCOT RIVER.

Over several hours they cleared tenting space, removed hazardous trees and limbs, hung signage, built a picnic table, and installed steps over the sloping bank to the water. This new camping area would become the 11th and southernmost campsite on the Penobscot River Paddling Trail (PRPF)—an approximately 100-mile

water trail along the main stem of the river linking the East Branch to Penobscot Bay. The site would also become part of the Maine Island Trail, whose tendrils in Penobscot Bay range north to Bucksport. After years of searching for a way to connect the two water trails, the elusive link had been found.

The search might still be ongoing were it not for the Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust (GPMCT), a regional land trust serving northwestern Hancock County. GPMCT was aware of the desire to tie the water trails together, and they had acquired a property on the eastern shore of Verona Island that they thought might be suitable. The 25-acre Joost Family Preserve, which protects fields, forests and shoreline habitat, included several hundred feet of frontage along the Eastern Channel of the Penobscot River. Public access to

the preserve had been available through hiking trails and picnic areas, but a recent judicial decision opened the door to new investments for public benefit.

In a 2000 lawsuit, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Maine People's Alliance took legal action against Mallinckrodt LLC, former owners of the HoltraChem plant in Orrington, for contamination of the Penobscot River. The suit claimed that decades of industrial manufacturing and mercury discharge into the river had created a significant hazard to ecological and public health. The case was settled in October 2022, with Mallinckrodt required to pay several hundred million dollars for remediation efforts, including funds for projects along the river to benefit communities and the environment. GPMCT sought and received settlement funding for natural, recreational, and educational enhancements to the Joost Family Preserve. The proposal included expanded parking, accessible trails, a gazebo, a vault toilet, interpretive signage, and a water-access campsite for use by MITA and PRPT.

Representatives from all three organizations took part in the July workday to establish the campsite. PRPT board members Cloe Chunn and David Thanhauser were among the volunteers. The Swanville couple has been the driving force of PRPT, taking



MITA STAFF

The newly installed steps on the riverbank of the Joost Family Preserve water-access site.

it from concept to reality over the past two decades. Inspired by a paddling trip on the Penobscot River in 2013, they envisioned a water trail linking riverside campsites just as the Maine Island Trail links islands along the coast. Cloe and David, like MITA's founders, built PRPT from the ground up: from its campsites, stewards, and ethics to the nonprofit apparatus needed to sustain it. With the help of a dedicated governing board and supporters, PRPT is now closing in on its goal of campsites every 10 miles along the main stem of the river. Throughout, PRPT has remained committed to elevating the

natural, cultural, and historical values of the Penobscot River and its communities.

The origins of the Maine Island Trail and the Penobscot River Paddling Trail are similar in many ways. Formed nearly 30 years apart, they are now united geographically thanks to the Joost Family Preserve. Whether boaters will choose to utilize the Joost campsite to string together an adventure across the two water trails remains to be seen. But the opportunity now exists thanks to extraordinary individual vision and leadership, and inspired organizational partnership.



MERCH THAT MATTERS

Visit the MITA Gear Shop at shop.mita.org

Every piece you purchase from the MITA Gear Shop supports our critical programming out on the islands.

Every time you proudly wear it, you're connecting those around you to MITA. We cannot begin to express our gratitude to you for that!

As a way of saying thanks, we'll give you a 10% discount by using the code **NEWSLETTER10** at checkout. Thank you so much for the support.

MITA STAFF



Doug Welch doing what he did so many times: addressing a crowd and extolling the virtues of MITA.

A Few of My MITA Stories

By Doug Welch, MITA Member and Former Executive Director

Stories factor large in the culture and lore of MITA. By definition, islands are difficult to reach, so they impart a note of adventure to every visitor. Each logbook entry from the islands tells a story—sometimes dramatic, but more often sweet and full of gratitude for the experience of setting foot on a mystical outpost from one’s everyday life.

My MITA story started at the Starbucks on Middle Street in Portland at the incredible moment when the then-chairman Tony Jessen offered me the job of executive director. I was far beyond excited.

Subsequently, I had the great fortune of having several months to travel with my predecessor, Karen Stimpson, around the state to meet MITA VIPs and donors. Those long drives provided hours of ‘windshield time’ where Karen relayed to me her stories of MITA, ranging from the serious to the hilarious. Those who know Karen know exactly what I mean.

I was very excited at my first MITA cleanup on Deer Isle, but I didn’t want my foolish exuberance to show. Before the concept of a “selfie” existed, I held up my

flip phone to try to catch an awkward, low-resolution image of myself on the island. I hadn’t realized some volunteers could see me. “Um... Would you like me to take your picture?” one of them offered. Mortifying!

My island stewardship adventure stories from 18 seasons are numerous, but I’ll never forget an epic cleanup out of Round Pond before the days of our lobster trap crusher, The Crushtacean. Along with an army of MITA and MCHT volunteers, two lobstermen carried derelict traps to the mainland in their boats in a wonderful show of partnership. We crushed the traps on the mainland using a backhoe and still managed to fill two large dumpsters.

A more notable story was chartering a Duffy lobster yacht for two weeks on the islands with my brother Greg. We explored widely, shot video, drank MIT Ale, and narrowly missed becoming headline news: “MITA Executive Director Saved After Destroying Chartered Yacht on Ledge.” But we skirted the rocks and never took our eyes off the water again.

My next grand adventure was a little less grand: a two-week solo trip down the Trail in my 17-foot Boston Whaler. The 500-mile

trip from Portland to Cross Island and back gave me a little more “water cred” and resulted in a video that aired on Maine Public Television.

Having discovered the power of amateur video on the Trail, in 2017 my brother and I built an 18-foot Annapolis Wherry rowing skiff at the WoodenBoat School and then I took it, a GoPro, and an iPhone out on the Trail for a rowing adventure. I was very proud that this video made the Maine Outdoor Film Festival that year.

In 2019 the board of trustees accepted my proposal for a six-week, island-themed sabbatical to take place in 2020. The trip began with a stop in Puerto Rico, followed by a sailboat charter with my brother in the British Virgin Islands, and then a small boat cruise of the southeastern Galapagos Islands with my wife. In my final days birdwatching in the Ecuadorian rainforest, my daughter told me on the phone that she and all her fellow students were being sent home from college. My island adventure, too, was over. I barely got out of Ecuador before lockdown and on the following Monday we declared the MITA office closed indefinitely due to COVID-19.

The trip had been life-changing for me



Doug pictured in 2007, his first of 17 years as MITA’s executive director.

because of the exciting new climates and wildlife I encountered.

The pandemic was a surreal experience for everyone, no less at MITA. From our makeshift home offices, we worried that the floor would drop out from under us financially. But 2020 held a different surprise: when told to practice social distancing, many people took to boats and islands as their recreational escape. Our membership grew unexpectedly, peaking in 2021.

In 2022 we toasted the purchase of MITA's first piece of property, a small warehouse building in Freeport. The MITA Boat Shop has become an integral part of the operation, housing our stewardship fleet as well as some smaller donated boats during the winter and providing a common location for their maintenance. It's a place of joyful activity when the monitor skippers come to town en masse to commission and decommission the fleet.

The hardest thing I ever had to do at MITA was to inform the staff at our first staff meeting of 2024 that this would be my last year at MITA. After all we have been through together, and all they have done for me, the depth of my appreciation for the MITA staff is profound. But I had come to recognize that the timely transition to a fresh leader was worth any sadness I would face.

I look back on these stories with incredible fondness for the staff, the board, the volunteers, the donors, the mission, and the islands themselves that made these memories possible. We have faced some serious challenges at MITA, but they are far outnumbered by delightful successes.

I'm thrilled to say that these will continue under the leadership of my successor, Ben Dougherty. With a six-week overlap, I got to know Ben, shared some of my stories, made some introductions, and learned how to get out of the way.

MITA enters its next chapter with all sails flying, a hardy crew, and Ben steady at the helm. As a regular MITA member (number 20621) I cannot wait to see what is in store for our wonderful organization that has so many great stories to come.



MITA STAFF

The Warren Island Dock & Dine was a great success, with exceptional weather and even better food.

We Docked, We Dined

By Kalyn Bickerman-Martens, Membership Manager

Warren is a spruce-covered, 70-acre island sandwiched between Islesboro and Seven Hundred Acre Island in Penobscot Bay, and is one of the five larger islands that comprise the archipelago that forms the Town of Islesboro.

It was named for George Warren, a farmer who lived there for six decades before selling it to an Islesboro resident for \$600 in 1861. Warren was eventually sold to the State of Maine for the sum of one dollar by Islesboro in 1958, with the condition that the land be used for recreation. In the summer of 1967, Warren was officially dedicated as a state park, an event that was celebrated by then-governor Kenneth Curtis and multiple state and town officials with a dinner that featured lobster, clams, and blueberry pie (of course).

Today, Warren Island has the distinction of being the only state-managed saltwater park that isn't accessible by car or public ferry. You'll need your own boat, a friend's

boat, or a ride on a water taxi in order to visit. Warren is a popular destination on the Maine Island Trail with 12 campsites and saw over 1,700 visitors in 2022. Warren Island State Park has been on the Trail since its inception, and has even been used by MITA in the past as a gathering place for the annual meeting.

With all of that rich history and the significance of being the only state park exclusively developed for those arriving by boat, Warren seemed like the natural choice for a summer fundraiser. We partnered with

(CONT. PAGE 18)



MITA STAFF

The spread of food that Big Tree Hospitality produced was as magnificent as it was abundant.



MITA STAFF

The group day-use area on Warren Island, the site of the inaugural Warren Island Dock & Dine, left nothing to be desired for this August fundraising event.

the Bureau of Parks and Lands to choose the perfect location to host our Warren Island Dock & Dine—the group day-use area overlooking the mooring field, opposite the shores of Spruce Island. There was a beautiful pavilion, an expansive green lawn, and it was just a short walk from the pier. We had ample seating upon numerous picnic tables, and we even hauled over a few old cornhole boards. Truly, the setting that Warren Island provided could not have been any better for an event such as this.

On the picnic front, we partnered with our good friends at Big Tree Hospitality, the James Beard Award-winning culinary talents behind the iconic Eventide Oyster Co. and The Honey Paw in Portland. Their task was to craft a menu that would not only satisfy our 100 expected guests, but also make and withstand the three-mile trip across Penobscot Bay from the dock

in Lincolnville. The afternoon before the event, the Big Tree crew loaded their ingredients and themselves into a water taxi and set off for Warren Island for an evening of camping and food prep. The looming threat of heavy downpours that weekend never materialized, and Sunday, August 11 dawned with bright sun and the promise of an exceptional day. As you can see from the photos, that promise was kept!

Families arrived either in their own vessels or were ferried across from Islesboro in MITA's boats after disembarking from the ferry, the locally familiar MV Margaret Chase Smith. Upon walking up the pier, they were greeted with donated beverages from Maine-based companies Kit NA Brewing and Green Bee Soda, as well as the aroma of grilled shishito peppers and spit-roasted porchetta. The concept of “open kitchen”

was taken to another level during the Warren Island Dock & Dine, as the Big Tree team was hard at work loading up charcuterie boards, shucking oysters, and getting our massive main-course spread ready to go. Some of our guests may have even had trouble leaving room for the massive sandwiches that were stuffed with porchetta between slices of Big Tree's homemade focaccia. The day truly exemplified the theme of “picnic in the park” that we envisioned during the early planning, long before the ground thawed.

The Warren Island Dock & Dine raised over \$6,000 to support our mission and programs, and was an undeniable success on all fronts. As the MITA team boated back to the mainland that evening, comfortably full of cuisine from a James Beard Award-winning team consumed in a stunning setting, we agreed that we could not wait to do it all over again.



MAINE ISLAND TRAIL
ASSOCIATION

2024 PHOTO CONTEST WINNER



Linda Cunningham Lighthouse Park, Swans Island

“I’m blessed that my parents moved to Swans Island almost 40 years ago. They’re part of the year-round population which totals approximately 350. They called it ‘life in the slow lane’. Back when I was in my twenties, I called it ‘life in the breakdown lane’. Now, it’s just the right speed. It’s a wonderful fishing community where people, although independent, are still interdependent and there for each other when need be. There’s one lighthouse and one general store. TIM’s, short for ‘The Island Market’, sells a gallon of milk, a snack, a meal, or WD-40. It’s a must-stop when you visit. Check if the Lobster & Marine Museum is open, too.

Visiting requires a boat ride. I drive on the ferry, but you can bike or walk on. It’s a big island. Do your research first.

Often when I go, it’s foggy, or there’s a gray-skied front moving through. If not, there are ‘dark skies.’ In the earliest moments of June 2nd, it was clear and 42 degrees. So, I sat on the cold ground in order to get the best angle of the Milky Way behind Burnt Coat Harbor Lighthouse. You don’t need a camera to see it if the conditions are right. But you might want one to get a picture. This is just one of the many beautiful places along the Maine Island Trail.”



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