

# Mattatuck Messenger



Fall  
2003

Photo taken near Tuttle Lodge by Jeff Kimble, 2003

No.15

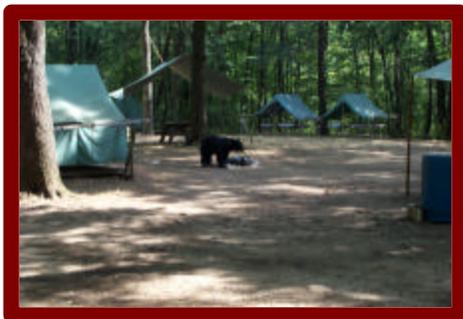
Mattatuck Messenger

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## Wild Times at Camp Mattatuck

We were sound asleep in October, 2002; about 35 of us camping in the Tobe's Well area at camp. when at 4:00AM we were rudely awakened by an extremely loud, mournful howl. A coyote was within feet of us! An unforgettable moment!

Photo by Joe Ascncao, 2002



Connecticut's wildlife is flourishing, and Camp Mattatuck is no exception. It is estimated there are over 100 black bears in Connecticut. Signs of black bears have been spotted in camp for years, and finally in August 2002 a female bear strolled through several campsites in the middle of a Saturday afternoon!

The coyote is back in great numbers. Deer are so plentiful that many people consider them a nuisance. Chris Moon saw a beautiful Red Fox behind the Dining Hall a few weeks ago. Wild turkeys are spotted on a daily basis at camp. Beavers come and go to the camp's two ponds. Raccoons and skunks are numerous, but have not become a problem because our Scouts have learned to keep a clean camp. Other animals that are less easily spotted are the bobcat and fisher. The fisher is found in the northwest corner of the state, and it is only a matter of time before it is sighted at Mattatuck.

Then there is the most controversial of all...the mountain lion. While many state residents have reported spotting them as close as Middlebury, the state's Department of Environmental Protection will not verify the cat's existence and doubts the veracity of the sightings.

## Conrad Collection on Display

During the final week of the 2003 camp season a large collection of Ken Conrad woodcarvings were on display at Camp Mattatuck. The carvings, all with a Native American theme, are on loan to the camp from the Conrad family. A display case will be made prior to the 2004 season. The work of Ken Conrad is part of the camp heritage and represents countless hours of time and tremendous skill and patience. It is an inspiration to young and old. Camp Mattatuck is very grateful to David Conrad and his family for sharing the collection with us.

Camp Mattatuck Volunteers, PO Box 257 Plymouth, CT 06782-0257

Visit our website, built and maintained by Marc Moody... <http://matwreck.org/volunteers>

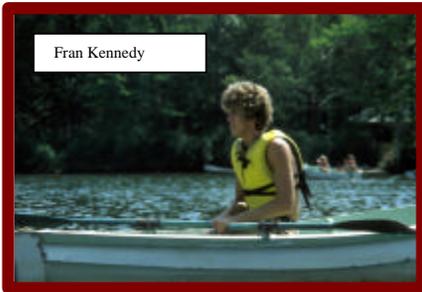
## Wooden Ships

By Dick Lorenz 10/2003

**Wooden ships on the water very free  
Easy the way you know it's supposed to be  
Silver people on the shoreline leave us be  
Very free, and easy**

D. Crosby ca. 1969

Joe and I were corresponding recently about our times at Mattatuck, and as with any conversation involving myself and Mattatuck, I eventually got around to things waterfront. Or more specifically...boats...wooden boats. And I harkened back to the last time about 6 years back, when I visited Mattatuck. I had been back east for a conference. One of those all too rare occasions when I'm back east these days, and even more startling, I had some time left over before my flight back to the west coast. So rather than kill four hours at the airport, I decided to visit a few of the old haunts. Places that I'd remembered so well from my youth 30+ years ago. And as luck would have it, Mattatuck came to my mind as I drove the car down the freeway. Could I find the right off ramp? Would I remember the turns to make in those last 3 miles? Had they changed the roads in the last 30 years to trap poor fools like myself? But my fears were groundless, as I cranked on through the entrance road in smart fashion, after only a couple wrong turns.



What did I want to see? Everything, and yet mostly the waterfront. Of course, much remains the same as I remembered it. The airport (though with markedly fewer airplanes), the entrance road (though the pavement looked a little worse for wear), the ranger's house, the parking lot. The boom gate is gone. Probably some legal types worrying about kids getting clonked over the head with that massive telephone pole. I see a new pavilion on the right where there once was only brush, and I see the volleyball court has been removed. But by and large, the basic layout remains. The dining hall is sentinel over the lake. The beaches still have sand, and the old iron tower guards that beach as it did so long ago. (I wonder if anyone still remembers who made this tower. Has it ever moved?) And of course the platforms for the beach staff tents still look the same, though I'd imagine an application of Merlin's wand would be necessary to have these be the exact same platforms I'd tread during my stint at the camp. So maybe Thomas Wolfe is not right. Maybe you can go home.

But I cross the causeway towards the campsites and view the boat racks. I want to see white wooden row boats with green trim bobbing on the lines. I want to see white wood canoes with red trim resting upside down on the racks. I'd like to see beautiful laminated wood paddles. I want to see everything I once lived as unchanged. But I am deflated. My trip on the memory train has been derailed by a technology coin on the track. I see... plastic paddles, plastic canoes, plastic "funyaks"?

Now please realize that my formative youth occurred prior to the widespread use of computers (I still have the slide rule I went through college with - in case of power loss, break glass), and prior to the web, instant messaging, cell phones (We had one phone in camp), and for that matter, prior to widespread plastic use in recreational equipment (outside of fiberglass). I stand in shocked silence for a bit trying to reconcile something in electric yellow with a natural surrounding. I do not pretend to understand the economics of running a Boy Scout camp. And in today's environment, I can understand the priorities given to watching every dollar spent.

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And wood rots. This is a fact of nature. It dries out, becomes brittle, and when it breaks, it can do so producing splinters (see "a trip to the nurse's office"). Wood does not tolerate neglect. Nor can wood be melted and poured into a mold. And when glued, the attachment may be doomed as the weak spot in the shape created. Wood cannot be created in a laboratory at some chemist's whim. Repairs are difficult to make. Preservative is necessary to make a lasting creation. And there is directionality to the structure, that forces shape, and structural considerations on working it, and on the end use. Yet in wood, there is the essence of nature, on display in all its rich form, textures, and colors. Wood promotes creativity. Not just in the shape created, but in the means used to create that shape. And the means used to preserve the shape. Wood requires work to maintain, and thereby promotes responsibility, and discipline. In return one receives this unparalleled beauty. And sounds on the lake that only originate in materials of natural origin. An integration of soul and surrounding. So I stand mute. Stunned at how progress has left me out of touch. But is my concern over the loss of wooden boats more one of the passage of time, of my growing old, or a concern that technology has left me in the dust? I don't know. Or is it the conversion of a natural setting into something that was, tortured and twisted in cracking towers and ovens, and eventually extruded in some remote factory and that will subsequently find its way into a landfill. And be extant 50,000 years from now. Dunno. But can we have just one wooden boat...for old times' sake? I leave having lost another friend that I'd thought would always wait patiently for my return. And another memory becomes just that. A memory. And quickly fades to gray.

*Note from Joe...Those wooden rowboats not only had aesthetic appeal. Despite the tender loving care required there were some practical advantages to them. Because the boats sat so low in the water, and were heavy, they were stable in a wind and were ideal for lifeguarding. Small Scouts benefited because the low profile allowed us to use shorter oars, six or six-and-one-half feet long, rather than the seven or eight foot oars required for the current aluminum boats. The heavy oars make rowing difficult for eleven-year-old boys. Do I miss the annual paint project at a Spring OA weekend? No.*

## Wood and Canvas

*By Joe LeClair*

Many evenings after dinner the pond's surface would be smooth as glass, so we'd try to be the first canoe to slice through the surface and paddle across to the "second lake". Many of the canoes were wood-and-canvas construction made by the Old Town or White Canoe Companies of Maine in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At one time the camp had a fleet of wood canoes. Light, flexible, and strong, these works of art of white cedar on water required no flotation chambers in the bow or stern.

A solo paddler would "heel" the canoe by positioning himself off-center. The boat would tip up at an angle so that the gunwale on the paddler's side almost touched the surface. Sometimes water would seep in between the inner and outer gunwales. Not only did this "heeling" make paddling extremely comfortable, bringing the paddler's hands close to the surface of the water, it allowed the canoe to ride on the sharp radius where the sides met the bottom. Riding on this small surface offered less resistance. As a result the canoe glided across the water like a dry leaf in a light breeze.

Remember gunwale pumping the wooden canoes? Balanced on the gunwales, we bent our knees to thrust the stern into the water and the bow in the air, then stood up straight to cause the keel to crash onto the surface. Repeating this precarious stunt caused the canoe to shoot across the surface, its ribs and planking rattling with each cycle.

Today these wooden canoes are gone, replaced by excellent polymer canoes that are extremely dent resistant and require almost no maintenance. These modern canoes are suitable for river or lake canoeing and are very practical for a Scout camp. They also are the best alternative to the wooden canoe in terms of quiet, responsive handling. *Note: Chris Moon reports he has three wood canoes in storage that need repair. If you would like to contribute time or money to put these boats back on the water contact Chris.*

## Preparing for Scouting at Camp Tadma

Imagine being a nine-year-old boy, hiking a narrow trail that skirts the edge of a long quiet pond. Suddenly the trail breaks out into a clearing where bamboo fishing poles are available for use. After fishing for a while, you are given a brimmed straw hat and invited on a trip across the pond on a wooden raft, a la Huck Finn. Camp Tadma, the Connecticut Rivers Council Resident Cub Scout camp, captures the imaginations of our young adventurers.

The first thing that strikes you about Camp Tadma is "this is not the camp of Babson and Horan". The dining hall is extremely loud, with staff yelling announcements, campers competing in shouting contests, and staff competing for attention. It is wild and crazy but the boys find it fun.

This jewel of a camp situated on the west side of a long narrow pond from which it gets its name just completed 25 years as a Cub Scout camp. Prior to that it was a Boy Scout camp of the Middlesex Council for over 35 years. Cubs from across Connecticut come for weekends or 4-night stays.

While Mattatuck emphasises advancement and challenge, Tadma is all about fun. The activities, geared for the age group, include an extensive handicraft program, archery, BB gun range, BMX bicycles, an Indian Village with real Teepees, and a full-scale western fort, besides the traditional swimming, boating and nature study.

The staff at Camp Tadma is outstanding. With unending enthusiasm and energy they do everything in their power to make the boys' stay in camp enjoyable.

### What's New

*News from our Camp Director, Chris Moon*

- The Waterfront Hospitality Area was such a success that a smaller version is planned for the boating side for 2004.
- During the summer, the area between the parking lot and the pine grove landscaped. Rocks and weeds were removed, culvert pipes installed, and grass planted to make the area more useful and attractive.
- A propane heater is being installed in the Dining hall kitchen so that the water can be used year round.
- A drainage pipe has been installed under the road to Barnum cabin with Jim Miller and Chris Perkins helping.
- The water heaters in the Old Directors cabin and Griffin cabin were moved into closets. We hope to rebuild the bathrooms during the winter and springs. If you're interested in helping, call Chris Moon 860-945-6970.
- The roof on Dick John's Shelter was re-shingled by Charlie Leggi, David Horan, Mark Whither, Jeromy Nelson and Troop 109.

### The Bugle

It was the final night of the 1969 camp season. At the time we still had a good number of wood-and-canvas canoes. They were chosen for the canoe rosettes because they were quiet and more closely resembled something a Native American might use.

John Theroux of the waterfront staff paddled in the stern of one of the canoes. When it came time for the rosettes to form, the stern men leaned back on the rear decks and linked arms. John was in one of the end canoes, so when the bowmen didn't get a good push-off, he had to lean and reach to grab the arm of the other end stern man as the canoes spun around to form the rosette. Wood canoes don't have floatation compartments like aluminum canoes do. With all the leaning and reaching, John's canoe dipped below the waterline and took on water over the gunwales. His bowman stayed cool and simply went from kneeling to a crouch as the canoe slowly swamped! Few in the crowd realized what happened. Once the torches were extinguished John and his partner swam the swamped canoe to shore. He was scheduled to play Taps with his bugle following the closing songs, and wanted to get in position quickly. It was not to be, however, for his bugle was gone! It was in the bottom of the pond packed in its dark green felt bag. Even in daylight it was not to be found, for the rosette was performed near one of the deeper areas of the pond, and to make things worse, 1969 was a very heavy weed year!

***Fast forward to about fifteen years later.*** While scuba diving Fran Kennedy saw something that looked like metal near the first island. Chris Moon was diving with him and was on the surface waiting for Fran to surface. As Chris looked across the water toward the boat docks, the bugle emerged from the water in Fran's uplifted hand Chris yelled, "John Theroux's bugle!" The felt case didn't make it to the surface and the mouthpiece was missing. CJ remembers, "I was a scout holding a candle on the point when that bugle was lost. I remember seeing a swamped canoe in the darkness and wondered why there was no echo of taps.

### Mo Roy Retires

"The best camp man I ever knew" is how Tom Horan described Mo Roy in December, 1998. Anyone who has worked with Mo knows why Tom felt that way. Mo is a professional Scouter whose passion for the program started as a Camp Worcoeman staff member as a teen and continues 44 years later. One of those rare professional Scouters who never left his home state, Mo worked in the Tunxis Council, Charter Oak Council, Long Rivers Council and Connecticut Rivers Council. We wish Mo a healthy and enjoyable retirement, and thank him for his dedicated service to Scouting in Connecticut.

**Mattatuck Volunteers  
Officers 2003-2005**

|                       |                        |
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Have a story to tell? Have a suggestion for a future article? Your input into this newsletter is most welcome. Contact Joe LeClair, 108 Chipper Road, Waterbury, CT 06704  
[ileclair@snet.net](mailto:ileclair@snet.net)

Visit our website, built and maintained by Marc Moody... <http://matwreck.org/volunteers>

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*News from Camp Mattatuck for:*