

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Winter 2010

Fun on the Pond After the First Big Freeze

by Doris Birmingham

Winter these days can be quiet on Spy Pond. Yes, the playground is still trampled by the little feet of those hardy children who convince their equally hardy parents to bring them there to swing and slide and sip hot cocoa; nature lovers stroll the path to watch the resident red-tailed hawk or to enjoy a spectacular Spy Pond sunset; and dogs and their owners frolic in Scannell Park ignoring the wind and cold. But the Pond doesn't really come alive until it freezes solid. This year that occurred during the first week of January.



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH BLUMENTHAL

Spy Pond's red-tailed hawk

On the Sunday morning after the first freeze, an ice fisherman was out early to try his luck in the cove. But he was long gone when things really started happening. Despite the small patches of open water still visible near the boat dock and Linwood Beach, dozens of intrepid skaters, shaky new learners as well as cocky experts, raced, whirled--and stumbled--everywhere on the hard-frozen center. There were pick-up hockey games using milk crates and gym sneakers for goals; also improvised iceboats, like the one that Andrew and his older daughter, Anna, devised out of a recycling bin for scooting three-year old Fiona across the ice with a hockey stick.



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

David Lees cycling on Spy Pond



PHOTO BY KAREN GROSSMAN

Greg Bullock, Jen Flint, Lucy Mendel, and Augustin Yimong get ready for action on the ice

Nearly every day, one even sees bicyclists on the ice! FSPP President, Karen Grossman, rushed out one day to chat with David on his all-terrain bike. He says he enjoys the challenge of rolling around and making turns without a serious spill. Less agile folks choose other modes of getting around: using sleds, a Radio Flyer coaster wagon, an old fashioned perambulator, ski poles and, in the case of this writer, a pair of Yak Trax.

The most unusual 'ice jocks' recently observed were the "aerofunkies," a group of men living the fantasy of piloting a plane above Spy Pond and maneuvering it to a soft landing. These grown up 'boys,' who have their own website, aerofunkies.com, more typically meet in a field to fly their Styrofoam, battery-powered toys, but frozen Spy Pond offers a vast open space where they can sharpen their skills.

Other than the attraction of the wide-open spaces, what inspires non-skaters to set out across treacherous ice on foot or on some unlikely conveyance? Perhaps it is to experience the sensation of 'walking on water' or maybe to seek out the unknown. For instance, the ice provides walkers and bikers the unique opportunity actually to explore Elizabeth Island, a pleasure available only to boaters in the summer!

As in summer, Spy Pond in the winter attracts out-of-towners. Steve and Ana-Marie from Cambridge were making their first skating excursion here because they saw a photo of some Spy Pond skaters on the Web and decided it would be more fun and less commercial than the Frog Pond on Boston Common. Matt from Watertown e-mailed the FSPP website to ask if the ice was strong enough to support him and a group of hockey buddies for a scrimmage. Jamie of Arlington brought his mother,

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Kerry, from Kennebunkport, Maine, with her two winter-loving dogs, Maisie, a St. Bernard, and Pandora, a Newfoundland puppy. The following week Greg, knowing the ice was sturdy, came from near the Pond with friends Jen, Augustin and Lucy, summoned from as far away as Natick to skirmish in spirited ice hockey 2 on 2. FSPP member, Gail McCormick, encountered Jonathan, from Billerica, who has been ice fishing on the Pond four years. He said the ice on that day was about eight inches thick. Equipped with a collapsible hut and a nifty propane heater, he and his friends find the hut quite cozy on cold days. Although he and his friend, Kenny, didn't catch any fish that day, he catches an average of five to ten fish per day and throws them all back.

In the days after the first freeze, one would have been hard-pressed to find anyone on the ice who would welcome the almost inevitable January thaw. But the Arctic cold will surely return, as will the people who enjoy winter fun on Spy Pond. And, on a windy day, we still may even be lucky enough to spot an iceboat or two.



PHOTO BY GAIL MCCORMICK

Jonathan Oliver drills through eight inches of ice

Spy Pond Winter History: The Liveliest Place in Town

by Eric Berger

Eva Balazs, in her crackling good book, *More Spy Pond Stories*, writes of the many good winters she vividly remembers on Spy Pond. Years before the skating rinks were built in town, good winters for those who loved to skate offered “long stretches of dry, cold days and little snow.” The glorious, natural ice of Spy Pond beckoned fervently, as did the wind “with which you have to play a ‘tug of war’ game.”

Is it any wonder, then, that on so many frosty holidays of yore, each gift wrapped in winter's silver beauty, “Spy Pond was the liveliest place in town”? It seemed as if everyone was on the ice. “Here you met old friends and new ones... There were mothers pushing baby carriages or pulling sleds.” Eva writes of little children riding tricycles with their pet dogs prancing in the fun, of figure skaters flashing with smoothness and grace, none better than Nancy Flynn, and of those ice fishing. She renders scenes of speed skaters along side skaters with “home-made hand-sails”, of “father and son” hockey matches, of folks maneuvering ice boats along side those flying “gaily-colored kites” over the ice, some kites soaring and others “fluttering and twisting high up in the deep blue winter sky.” Spy Pond's ice enticed cross country skiers, too.

There were even parties on the ice, like the “Calkinses ‘Moonshine Party’ in 1953, a skating fete beneath the full moon above, resplendent amongst her canopy of stars. Eva captures the thrill she felt that wintry night long ago, one of her many memories of a glistening, see your breath ice capade of togetherness - sketches brought to shimmering life in *More Spy Pond Stories*. For more about the long history of winter activities on Spy Pond, see the historic marker near the Linwood Circle.

PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM



Family Portrait with “iceboat”: Andrew, Anna, and Fiona

FSPP Accomplishments in 2009

Finances:

- Eric Baatz kept records regarding our finances. We had \$444.22 more income than expenses that were less due to online newsletter mailings minimizing postage costs.
- Dues-paying members/households numbered 111 with 30 first time contributors.
- T-shirts sold totaled 40.
- The required annual report to the state was submitted.
- Karen's application to the New England Grassroots Environmental Foundation (NEGEF) was rejected with suggestions for new application; Arlington Cultural Council (ACC) gave us \$750 toward planned summer activity day(s) this year.

Park Maintenance:

- The bulletin board was moved from inside to outside the playground; it still needs some repairs.
- The playground was resurfaced with material that doesn't attract sand wasps, paid for with CDBG and Town funds.
- Much weeding was done both by volunteers and by two young men paid with FSPP funds.
- Volunteers spread mulch supplied by DPW in the spring. Doris Birmingham and Ilse Oliveira coordinated. Volunteers included families and girls from the Germaine Lawrence School.
- Doris, Ilse and Eric Berger purchased tools for mulching and weeding
- Bill Eykamp led the pruning of excess growth, especially of false indigo, and spread some lime at Linwood Beach.
- Eric led cleanup sessions and cleared the tops of catch basins.

Outreach:

- Doris, Ilse, and Karen Grossman used phone calls and e-mails to remind members about meetings and Park events.
- Cynthia Thompson spent much time entering membership information into the database and sending acknowledgements.
- Betsy Leondar-Wright led two three hour sessions of fun children's activities in the Park.
- We had another successful Town Day booth (but more volunteers are needed).

Website:

- Fred Moses upgraded the software for our database that can be used to send emails and produce lists by interest.
- The website has information and newsletters.

Newsletter:

- Four issues were published by Eric Berger and Jamie Ciocco, now on-line.
- Ellen Robertson compiled an archive of all available newsletters and public communications since 1992, with four copies for the Library, the Historical Society, the FSPP president, and John Gearin, who edited the newsletter for many years and who will get a citation for his efforts. The current editor needs to keep these series up-to-date by adding copies of each new issue.

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

As 2010 begins, there are many reasons for me to offer thanks. I am encouraged by the increased involvement of members of the Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP). We have a stronger organization due to the new officers and chairpersons who have stepped forward to assume more responsibility in making our projects come to fruition. We are grateful to Carol R. Johnson for her informative presentation at our Annual Meeting earlier this month. Her remarks, as reported in this newsletter, and her continued interest in our beautiful Park encourage us to continue our efforts. Once again, people have contributed articles and photographs to enhance this publication. We are happy that they have chosen to devote their time to this task. As I hope you can tell, we can look to the future for Spy Pond Park with a positive outlook.

I hope that more of you will join us in all that we do to maintain, beautify, and enjoy Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park this year. I look for excellent attendance at our next meeting, March 7, 2010. Come meet your neighbors, contribute your ideas, and support us in our efforts.

Sincerely,
Karen L. Grossman
President
Friends of Spy Pond Park

FSPP Goals for 2010:

- Increase active membership, enlarge core group of volunteers
- Recruit more future officers including a future President
- Have fewer meetings (every 2 months unless needed for planning events)
- Include main topics to be discussed in notices of meetings
- At end of year do a "scorecard" on goals
- Sell more T-shirts
- File annual reports to the state
- File for Mass. tax exempt status
- Finish repairing the bulletin board
- Library display in March
- Pursue remedying path erosion
- Maintain the park
- Continue Park activities, have at least one educational activity
- Increase awareness of FSPP and Park events
- Increase use of the Pond
- Enhance website with more photos
- Enhance reporting capabilities of website
- Implement on-line dues payment
- Update and maintain database, get wrong e-mail addresses corrected

- Have Town Day booth again
- Publish newsletter four times, keep archive up-to-date
- Create archive of newspaper items about Spy Pond and Park
- Reapply for NEGEF grant, explore other grant opportunities
- Pursue getting gasoline-powered motors banned on Spy Pond. The warrant for this year's Town Meeting closes on January 22. After much discussion it was voted to adopt this goal.

Annual Meeting Presentation

by Greg Watt

Carol R. Johnson, landscape architect who designed the renovation of Spy Pond Park, joined the FSPP for their annual meeting to update members on how the landscape plan has weathered and to discuss several problem areas needing attention. (Kate Thompson, Carol's associate now retired, who has assisted the FSPP since the opening of the Park in 2006, also came to receive an honorary FSPP t-shirt.) Carol started by noting that in her 50+ years of experience she has never worked on a project where the neighborhood supported the Park with such heart and soul! Furthermore, she commended the FSPP for our diligence with weeding and our vigilance addressing graffiti.

Carol's PowerPoint presentation explicitly demonstrated the points of her discussion. Carol talked about the problems with getting the planting beds established. The trees creating shade over the beds need to be assessed, and Carol suggests that the willows may need to be pruned every two years to allow adequate sunlight to reach the growth underneath. In addition to a topping of loam, we may need to plant the existing plants more densely and then assess if other species, such as blueberry sod, are required to fill in the beds more completely. Some of the side paths have grass growing on them, and these need to be maintained and raked more frequently. In addition, the area by the historic marker may need shrubs or additional grass planted since people appear to cut through this area from the bike path to the pond.

Carol spoke at length about the erosion of the stabilized gravel, such as by the beach and where concrete abuts the compacted gravel. Some of the erosion (e.g. by the boat ramp) is probably due to plugged-up catch basins. The Town has committed to a regular cleaning schedule, but these culverts needed continued monitoring – especially after heavy rains or snow melts. Carol spoke with the manufacturer of the compacted gravel – Stabilizer Solutions <http://www.stabilizersolutions.com/> – as well as the installers, and they will inspect the site after the snow melts to assess what of the erosion is due to product or installation issues or resulted from overflow from the plugged catch basins. They have a new, glue-like product that helps the gravel bond better, and Carol will negotiate with them to repair the work for free or reduced cost. We are lucky to have an advocate with such stature and authority supporting us!

PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM



Kerry, Jason, and dogs Maisie and Pandora

The War on Phragmites

by Bill Eykamp

Looking out from Spy Pond Park at Elizabeth Island, one can see a significant stand of phragmites on the left. Often referred to as the “common reed”, these very tall plants dominate many sections of the shoreline. The largest two concentrations are in Kelwin Manor Park and on the south side of Elizabeth Island.

Many of us watched the phragmites without realizing how fast they were expanding. When a new resident observed the rapid invasion of his property, and pointed out that the Kelvin Manor infestation was growing in six feet of water, the rest of us took notice. According to the state, phragmites are devoid of redeeming virtues. The DCR states:

Common Reed (Phragmites) is a highly competitive plant that is capable of rapid growth and spread. Common Reed displaces native species, reduces biodiversity, offers little value for wildlife and chokes waterways. Once established, Phragmites can negatively impact native vegetation and wildlife. Phragmites can form very dense impenetrable monospecific stands that may exclude native vegetation and not provide ideal shelter or food for wildlife. Phragmites stems can trap sediments, causing the waterbody to become increasingly shallow.

The 2020 Spy Pond Committee brought the matter to the Town and to the Conservation Commission. Everyone agreed that “something must be done,” but that the money wasn’t there. We agreed that since the Town owns most of the problem, it would act if we could raise the money. The Town and we did. The phragmites growing in standing water were sprayed shortly before frost with a safe herbicide at a safe time.

ConCom’s order of conditions stipulated that the dead reeds must be cut and removed by spring. Volunteers were organizing for that effort when the Town said it would do it. Watch for it—trucks and cutters cruising the ice removing reeds. It ought to be a good show, especially if there is any misjudgment.

SAVE THE DATE!

by Elizabeth Karpati

On Sunday, March 21, botanist Francis Clark of the New England Wildflower Society will present a free program on lake edge management dealing with invasive plants, choosing suitable replacements, and keeping excess nutrients out of the pond. The program, sponsored by the Vision 2020 Spy Pond Committee, takes place from 2:30-5 p.m. in the Robbins Library Community Room.



PHOTO BY LORI TSURUDA

Blue heron by the SPP boat ramp checking out the fall view

Spy Pond Memories

by Herb Yood

When I was a boy, 1940's and 1950's, Spy Pond was an unofficial playground. It was a dangerous place, as we averaged about one drowning per year. Springs in the Pond varied in temperature, and the ice was mushy in places in winter, and people fell in. Once my mother and I walked around the Pond. On the Route 2 side, there used to be some granite steps. Some children were swimming off the steps. When my mother and I reached the Pond Lane side, we saw fire trucks on the far side of the Pond. Three children (I think it was) had drowned, trapped in the weeds below the surface.

I never swam in the pond as a result. My dog did, all the time. He smelled a bit swampy, but I adored him anyway. He used to try to catch ducks who would allow him to get close, but no closer.

There used to be mounds below the railroad tracks (I think it's a bike path now). We thought they were Indian burial mounds. In fact, they were relics of the 19th Century ice industry, and had been huts where the men who cut the ice for a living warmed up. A boy whose name I have forgotten found a long

curved stick there that he brought home. A neighbor, a Peabody Museum employee, brought it in, and it turned out to be a wooly mammoth tusk.

The area between Linwood Street and Pond Lane was a hobo camp. The men who stopped there were kind to a little boy, guarded by a black dog. They taught us how to hop trains and take some trips here and there. It was a different time, I guess.

Little boys did potentially dangerous things. We were under the impression that a penny left on the railroad tracks would derail a train. So, of course, we put a penny on the tracks. Fortunately, it derailed nothing, but it sure flattened a penny.

There was bamboo growing on the approach from Avon Place to the tracks, and thence to Spy Pond. We made boats out of the bamboo, and it was yet another thing that endeared Spy Pond to us. As I grew older, I played baseball endlessly on the field in front of the Arlington Boys and Girls Club. No Little League then, just pick-up games. No coaching, either, which I could have used.

One winter, I was in the old Boys' Club when one of us spotted a Great Dane trapped in a hole in the ice. I think I was

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PHOTO BY GAIL MCCORMICK



Kenny Decowski and Jonathan Oliver with their collapsible hut



PHOTO BY KAREN CROSSMAN

Chip & Frank Grueter, Alex Joseph, Derek Kenney, Don Malvo, and Rafe Bustin show off their RC airplanes

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eight at the time. We screamed and yelled and watched as that poor dog struggled to get out of the water. After a long time (I have no idea how long now), a fire truck arrived, and a firefighter crawled out on a ladder to the dog. Just as he got to the dog, the dog heaved himself out of the water, bit the firefighter and ran home. The little boys in the Boys Club cheered the dog, but not the firefighter, I'm afraid. We should have.

Leaving Spy Pond Field via Whittemore Street was a wonderful way to fall into an ambush during the winter. I remember a superb snowball fight. As boys left the Club on their way home for supper, we would try to pen them in the tunnel. One of us would man the street, and one person each would guard the sidewalk. Snowballs were the ammunition. And we could pen boys in there for quite awhile until we got hungry and headed for home ourselves at full gallop.

Anyway, I thought you might be interested. A very modest check is enclosed to thank you for getting rid (however temporarily) of the sand wasps. A marker is at the tot lot, dedicated to my father, and I do visit from time to time, and I am grateful for your care.

A Follow-up on Ice

By Bill Eykamp

Three years ago, I wrote a blurb for this newsletter on the physics of ice. 2009 saw a wonderful demonstration of how "odd" things have a rational explanation. To review: December started warm; then in mid-month we had a cold snap. The Pond south of the Island froze and thawed a few times, just making a skim. Then it snowed—a lot. The skater's nightmare: a millimeter of ice under a foot of snow. The Pond north of the Island did not freeze. Then it got really cold and windy. By Spy Pond Park, it was open water. The cove was frozen and south of the Island was frozen; except for a band around the shore, the bulk of the Pond was open water. Then, just before New Year's, the weather warmed and ice formed. This was the puzzle that got me thinking about ice formation decades ago.

The critical matter was that the wind stopped. That roaring cold wind out of the northwest was stirring the water so vigorously that it brought the deeper, warmer water constantly to the surface. It takes a very long time to cool deep water, but when the wind stopped, it took only hours for a skin to form. Once there is any ice at all, the wind can't stir things any more, and we can get a lot of ice fast. Unfortunately, it snowed on the new ice too!

Friends of Spy Pond Park next meeting at Karen Grossman's Sunday, March 7, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. 32 Hamilton Road #402

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990
email fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Park on Linwood Street off Mass. Ave. or on Lakehill off
Lake St. at the far end of the complex.

To join Friends of Spy Pond Park...

Send your annual dues (\$15 individual, \$25 household, \$5 low-income) to:
FSPP, P.O. Box 1051

Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

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For newsletter contributions, contact berkshire2@juno.com

General comments can be sent to fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Visit Our Display at the Robbins Library the month of March, 2010!

Citation

For his many dedicated years as Editor,
tirelessly soliciting content,
editing and laying out articles and photographs, and
publishing three to four newsletters annually,

the Friends of Spy Pond Park

is proud to present this

Good Citizen Award

to

John Gearin

January 10, 2010

PHOTO BY DORIS BIRMINGHAM



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