

THE MATTABESETT TRAIL

APRIL 23, 2010 to OCTOBER 24, 2011

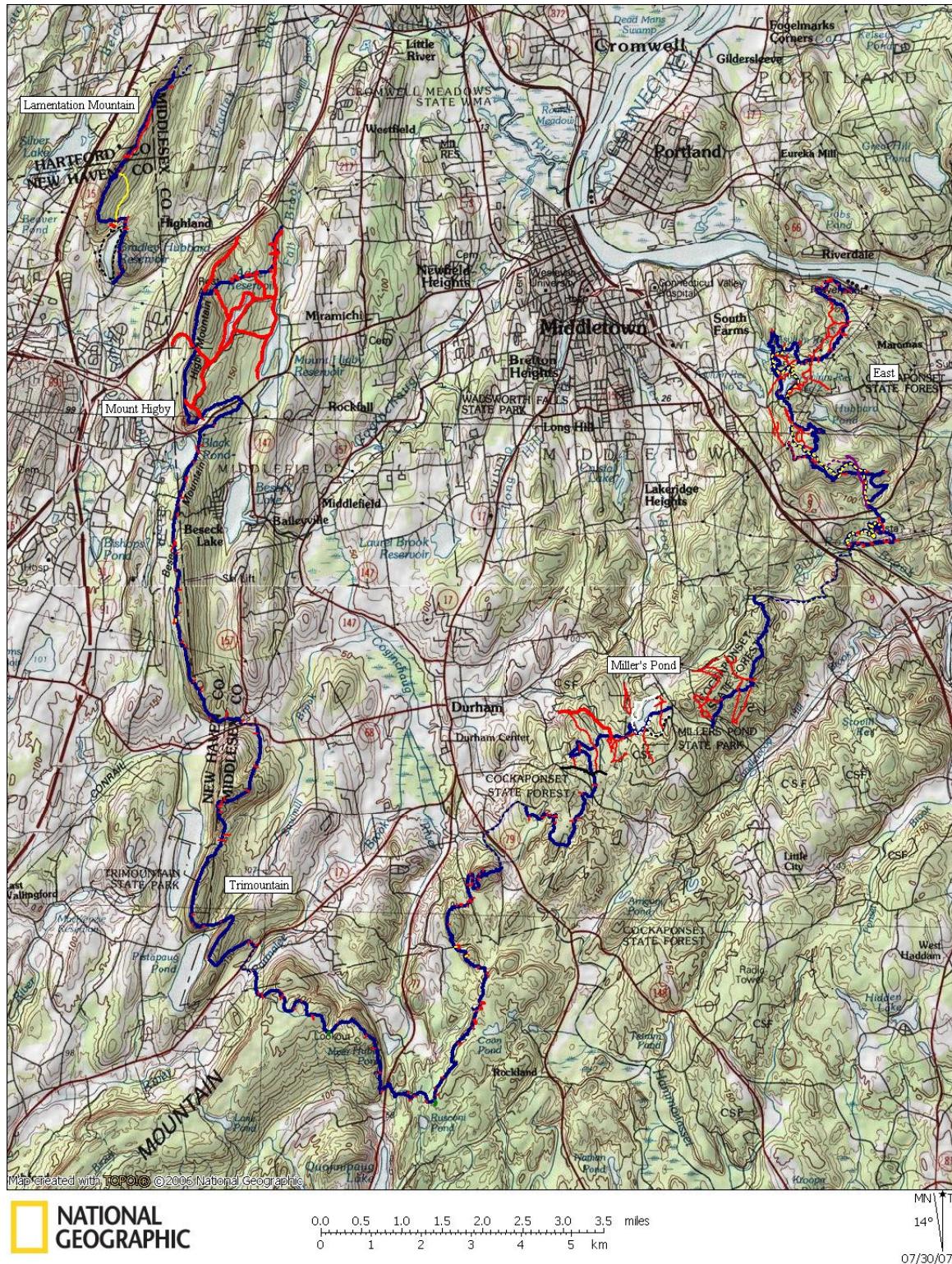
CHERRY CZUBA & BETH LAPIN

57 MILES

LOTS OF VIEWS

PLENTY OF STORIES

AND A SHARED ADVENTURE



**NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC**

April 23, 2010

We are off! We decide to skip breakfast and meet at 8:00 AM to park one car at the end of today's trip and then drive to the beginning. Being the one responsible for directions, maps, and planning this foray, I am nervous. If the parking area on River Road is in the section of road closed as a bike path, it will add two more miles to our excursion. What is the quickest way from Bear Hill Road to River Road? The questions and worries that haunt me are silly; I need to relax. I'm not being graded or judged; this is supposed to be fun.

Sure enough, our meeting is uneventful and we find a place to park on Bear Hill Road. I get in Cherry's car and we head to River Road. We have a lovely day – it's 50 degrees at 8:15 and the sun is shining. I direct us past Connecticut Valley Hospital and Riverview Hospital for Children, Cherry is ecstatic about the views of the Connecticut River; I'm off on a rant about the City of Middletown and its lack of appreciation of this amazing asset. Miles of riverfront – beautiful and undeveloped – and it's an industrial wasteland with housing projects (now removed) and mental health facilities. The recreational potential is huge; people would use this area and frequent local restaurants, if it were promoted. But we are here to hike and I will be still.

We take a curve on River Road and the steep driveway to the right is painfully familiar, although I've never been here before. The video loop of ambulance after ambulance heading up the hill a few months ago when Kleen Energy exploded runs through my head. Past that we go and find a well-marked parking area and trailhead across from the existing power plant.

I show Cherry the map and overview of today's hike. We will start here at River Road and zigzag across the hills, past several reservoirs, until we reach Bear Hill. A section of 4.9 miles, according to the trail guide. Cherry dons her hat and backpack and we are off at 8:30.

The start is easy, we are fresh and we reach the power lines in a short time. It's an active site, with heavy equipment rigging thick cables; the noise is contrary to the idea of hiking in nature. We cross and are pleased to find blue markings amidst the recently cleared areas and think we are set, but we take a false trail, with no markings. It's well trodden but we stop before we get too far and head back to the last bit of blue. Again, we head along the trail, still seeing no blue blazes, and climb a slight hill. A large rustling in a bush to the right and something moving, climbing into the sky – a Tom Turkey, with two remaining on the ground. Nice sighting but wrong trail. We bushwhack back to the power line and find blue blazes.





We are enjoying ourselves, on this beautiful day. We talk about Cherry's projects at work – manuals and curricula that she is modifying. And my new writing project. A few times, we have to backtrack but generally the trail is well marked. We cross a wet area on a high woods road and see Canada geese regally swimming, one on each side. The contrast of the blues and greens is stunning.

We pass the second power line and reach unpaved Reservoir Road and decide to take a break. It's been two hours and we've gone 2.6 miles, according to the guide. As we sit on a damp log, a golden retriever, his legs covered with mud, comes trotting from the west. His owner spots us as he ascends a small rise in the road and immediately calls the dog, turns away, and disappears below the crest. Cherry and I shrug but later we talk about his abrupt departure. "He acted as if he was doing something wrong," said Cherry. We don't resolve his odd behavior.

As we continue, the trail covers rough terrain and we scramble up and then down rocks. Just ahead is the overlook with Beseck Mountain in the distance, Asylum Reservoir #1 in the foreground and verdant spring green trees in between. We sit and snack and enjoy the amazing view. We talk about losses (Cherry's had a few major ones) and relationships. Conversation flows and all feels peaceful.



But we need to continue and we head down to cross Reservoir Road yet again and climb back up. And then down, getting slightly off and then back on the trail before crossing a shady brook. The rocks are amazing, with two-inch pieces of mica, lobes of quartz and beryl and who knows what else. We laugh and reminisce about our geologist friends who take home heavy specimens from their trips. We are threading our way up to the top of a ledge, zigzagging up and up, when a sudden noise stops us in our tracks. Up ahead, through the vegetation, I see a person. When he uprights himself, for it is a man, I see long gray hair, a scrawny face filled with unwelcoming looks. I take a breath as the man steps about six inches off the trail; it's as far as he can get because he's backed up against an outcrop. I call out, "We're ready to come through. Is that okay?" and he says yes. I realize that I am nervous; the man looks like someone from *Deliverance* and my cell phone is in my pack. Bravely I begin to walk by and notice that he has been tugging a large navy duffle bag along with him. Just before we reach him, he gives it another shove off the trail on the opposite side from where he stands. We walk quickly, trying to continue our conversation as if nothing is happening. I must be hoofing it, because, a few turns later, Cherry suggests that we

take a break. Just at that moment, we spot a nylon dome tent off the trail on top of an outcropping. It appears empty, perhaps belonging to the man we just passed. (Or, as one of my friends suggested when I told her the story, it was the tent of the person he had just raped and killed and was carrying in his duffle bag. Comforting thought, gratefully not one that was in my head when at the site.)



We continue along, cross a stream and finally are far enough away that I suggest a stop. By then, Cherry doesn't need the break. So we keep walking, thrilled as we walk alongside Asylum Reservoir #2 and then climb to a final overlook. Here amidst the trees and sky, we consider the difference of being alone and lonely, the pluses and minuses of sharing a life with someone, the need for personal time and space, and how difficult it can be to get

it. Here, we can feel it, hugging us, the whisper of balance. Trees and the sky. Rock and water. People and things. Alone and together. Introvert and extrovert.

A semblance of lunch and then our final descent to Brooks Road and through a brief stretch of woods to our parking area. Cherry lets out a yell of delight upon seeing the car. It's 12:30, four hours and 5.9 miles from our start. We agree that five miles is about right for us. We felt that we could go farther and were glad to not be doing it. We will meet here again in a month for section two.

May 13, 2010

Twenty-something years ago, I was in labor at 8:30 in the morning. But today, on this sunny, breezy day, Cherry and I are meeting to hike section #2 of the Mattabesett Trail (after eating breakfast at home). It was in the 30s when I woke up but it is reaching 50 as we start. We meet at Seven Falls (after some initial confusion about which parking lot) and drive together to Bear Hill Road where we ended our previous trip.

The trailhead is well marked, as is the remainder of the trail, which we lost only twice for brief moments. Or maybe we are getting better at this. Vegetation is lush, moist, from recent rain. Bushes loaded with green blueberries line sections of the trail, and we envision being here when the mountain laurel is in flower in a few weeks.



The trail guide promises views of Hubbard Pond along the way and overlooks from the summit of Bear Hill, but we see just a peek of ridgeline in the distance. Oaks and other vegetation obscure the view. Pegmatite outcrops boast patches of a state-endangered sandwort – a pleasure to see.

We miss the sharp turn away from the brook and have to backtrack a short distance; seeing Airport Road through the trees was a red herring. We talk along the way, about the progress of my book, a colleague from the Middle East who is now challenged to look at couples from a new perspective, this amazing weather and how lucky we are to have chosen such a great day.



precious, attractive, and special.

About two-and-a-half hours of walking and we reach Aircraft Road, four miles. We are doing well. In this southern section, we discover pink lady slippers in groups of one to five, scattered along the trail. They are stunning, varying hues of pinks to purple. I think they look



We continue on the trail, enjoying the ease of finding the trail and walking, until we lose the trail and we have to squeeze our way through rock crevices. We enjoy the glacial eratics and sit on one of the many outcrops to

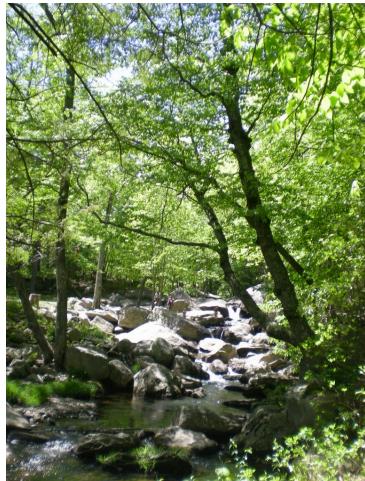
snack. The mixture of sun and shade allows for temperature regulation. We talk about redecorating and tree removal and other home ownership responsibilities.

After getting back on our way, we miss a hairpin turn that is perfectly marked, but we quickly retreat back to the mighty blue. We have learned that staying on the marked trail is the right thing to do, even when something else looks good.

We stop for lunch on a pleasant outcrop and talk about demands on our time. We both agree that we have reached an age when we can do more of what we want. Cherry has a checklist to help her decide if she should continue on a project: does it bring me energy? Am I performing service? Am I being nurtured? Am I learning new things? I really like her list and continue to think about it long after we end our hike.

We are now at a less pleasant part of the trip; in addition to crossing and walking alongside of power lines, the trail itself involves walking through areas of rock. Not on it, but through cracks and around bulging sections, much of the time looking what seems to be WAY down. Our reward is a view of turkey vultures, the rising trill of the prairie warbler, and the yellow-tipped pink corydalis flowers. We finally land along the edge and discuss how we will photograph ourselves at the promised

Middletown-Haddam boundary, marked with a metal stake, each of us representing one of the two towns. After fifteen minutes, we realize that we haven't seen the marker and are not going to, as we veer back into the woods.



Crossing the brook, we hike along until we suddenly see my silver car glistening through the trees. A family, complete with dog is playing in the Seven Falls; we pass the picnic area on the other side and are pleased with our completed second section of the trail.

September 16, 2010

We're back in the saddle again. Well, not literally, but we are back to hiking after a hiatus due to medical issues. Cherry has sufficiently recovered from retina surgery to handle the trail, although she is limited by some leg pain. Because of that, we decide to bite off our next section in three segments, with the option to stop at any point. Today we hope to cover two of the three.

The day is stunningly gorgeous: sunny, crisp, and clear. Leaves have not truly started to turn colors but there is a sense of fall in the air. We meet at Brainard Hill Road trailhead, drive one car to Millers Pond, and return to start our hike.

The trail flows beneath our feet, as we cover ground located primarily within Cockaponset State Forest. We are both glad to be moving and we arrive fairly quickly at Eagles Beak Point overlook. We can see broad landscapes to the south and east and remind ourselves how lucky we are to live in Connecticut.



We continue, chatting about life's changes, which seem as predictable as the seasons. We scoot under the power line and cross a brook, moving gradually downhill until we find ourselves already at Foot Hills Road, the end of our first segment. From here, it's less than a mile to the car. Cherry says her leg can handle it, so we continue along the peaceful country road to the parking lot. Rural residential in nature, we stroll along until we reach the car, only two hours after we started, ending segment two.

We discuss the third piece: 1.6 miles of road from Seven Falls Parking lot to Brainard Hill Road where we parked the other car. We agree to save it for another day and celebrate our return to hiking and a successful 3.2 miles.

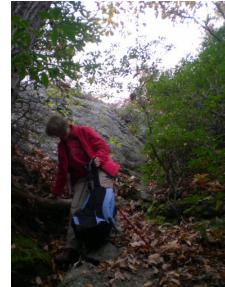
October 21, 2010

A few weeks ago, we covered the roadside section from Seven Falls to Brainard Hiill road. Today, we start our next segment on a fall day that is overcast with high clouds. Swirls of leaves cover our feet as we meet at the corner of Sand Hill and Pisgah Roads. We take the second car to Millers Pond and start out.

Our conversation flows to movies. I have just seen *My Best Friend*, a French film part of the international festival at the local library I describe the plot; a middle-aged man is challenged to find a best friend to win a bet and he struggles. We talk about challenges that men face as they pursue friendship and associated stigmas that women seem to avoid.

Cherry talks about a film, *The Wind Journeys*, in which an accordion player tries to return his instrument and is joined by a teen boy. We agree that we prefer introspective films. Later, I mention *Yesterday*, the South African film about HIV/AIDS that I saw the previous week. I tell Cherry how I am struck by *Yesterday*'s lack of judgment and her acceptance and love for her husband who has given her this disease. Before we know it, an hour has passed and we reach Bear Rock.

We sit for a break and view but not for long. Clouds mist down and we decide to head along to gain cover from the trees. We miss the descent through the steep, rocky crevice and have to turn back to find the cleft.



A short distance later, I am startled by two sheep heading towards me. A brief second later, I realize they are two standard poodles enjoying a walk with their owner. We descend to Harvey Road and continue to Higganum Road. Patches of leaves with brilliant maple reds carpet the ground and cause us to stop in admiration. We notice that mist has turned to rain but the trees overhead seem to capture most of the wet.



We plod through the forest, noting cairns framed by trees and glacial erratics, some covered with moss and ferns and large enough to house a family. Cherry describes a digital scrapbook project she has started in order to capture her bigger-than-life husband and son, both of whom have left us some years ago. She talks about a Service of Remembrance she is planning at her church to acknowledge losses such as jobs, loved ones, or one's health. I comment that it recently was the fourth anniversary of my mother's passing and that change of season into fall is particularly challenging for me.

The rain begins in earnest just as we reach Coginchaug Cave about two and a half hours after we started. We are grateful for the shelter where we sit and eat and express our gratitude for a dry place. We joke about spending the night, as the rain intensifies and we spot a pile of firewood ready to burn. But the climb up slippery rocks and leaves to the top of the cave's outcrop motivates us to move along. I check the map and it's only another 1.3 miles, half of it through the woods and the rest along a section of road until we reach our car.

It is a long 0.7 mile, as we trudge up to the top of the cave and then down, across brooks, around outcrops, near houses that tantalizingly but falsely suggest the proximity of the road. At least it's not thundering, I joke. Cherry comments that walking along the road without the shelter of trees will be drenching.

We eventually find Old Blue Hills Road and amazingly, the rain stops and the sun almost shines. We cover the last half-mile and reach our cars after a total of three and a half hours.

Grateful to sink into our dry seats, we both agree that the trail was a good balance of steep and steady and our bodies feel comfortable with the exercise. And we are ready to schedule our next escapade.

PS Within hours of returning home, the sky turns green and we are hit with a ferocious thunderstorm that includes torrential hail hammering my patio table from left and right. Inside, it is dark enough to get the cats to think it's time for dinner. And then, brilliant sunlight as the front passes.



Saturday, November 27, 2010

Today, we are ready to set out after a fun breakfast at *Me and McGee's* with some of Cherry's friends. We had hoped to hike the day before but the weather was bad.

But we are getting good at this. It doesn't take us long to figure out that we will tackle the 4.8 mile stretch from Cream Pot Road to Route 77. We park the first car at our end point. "Wow, a real parking lot!" exclaimed Cherry. It certainly is a step above any of the other places we've left cars. Cream Pot Road parking is more the norm.

We start off around ten thirty; it's a lovely but brisk morning with clear skies. We meander along the woods road, catching ourselves before we deviate too far from the blue trail. We sight Pyramid Rock and climb up, up, up to Mica Ledges. Here, the wind is ferocious and the view expansive.

After encountering a large dog and its owners, we are overrun by a group of two dozen AMC hikers. We realize that we've been spoiled by hiking during the week when the trails have been virtually empty.

Along the way, Cherry tells me about another movie, *Seven Years in Tibet*. She describes the encounter with the Dalai Lama and we talk about unusual twists that life can take.



We keep walking and enjoy reading the Madison Land Trust's educational displays about colliers and charcoal making. As we traverse the Broomstick Ledges, we stop for a snack. When we reach our second car on Route 77 just past two o'clock, we are surprised at how quickly the trip went.

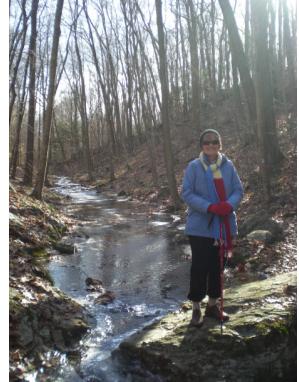
Dang, we really are getting good at this. And we mentally tallied our progress: 25.9 miles. Forty-five percent of the way. Whee-hee!

December 16, 2010

A beautiful crisp day for a short 1.9-mile stretch between Route 79 and Cream Pot Road. My car thermometer indicates 27 degrees when we begin our hike and 32 when we finish, but the air is still and the sun is strong.

Cherry and I meet at 10AM and leave a car at Cream Pot Road and then park on Pisgah Road and start off. Walking along the road, we catch up on Cherry's father and her Christmas plans. We climb into the woods and climb, a bit breathlessly and without talking for the next stretch. Up to the top of Mount Pisgah with lovely views. Then down we go, taking the short spur to a small vista near the bottom.

We walk parallel to Chalker Brook and eventually cross it in a very picturesque setting, complete with ice-covered flowing water. And up to the connector to Cream Pot Road and we're done. And we are racking up the miles, although we are just shy of 50%. Maybe January?



April 29, 2011

We couldn't have picked a better day to return to hiking on the Mattabesett Trail. The sun was shining and the air was fresh and it was Spring. Cherry's friend Bev and her dog Millie joined us this morning and we placed two cars at the ending point on Route 17 and drove to the start on Route 77. By 9:00 AM, we were ready to head off. We read the hike description and realized we were in for a challenging beginning, especially after several months of non-activity. However, we slowly climbed to the top of Bluff Head for spectacular views of Long Island Sound and Hartford.



Spring was shouting at us, with amazing displays of trout lily, spring beauty, wood anemone, rue anemone, red trillium, various violets, and early saxifrage. The rich talus slopes provided a plethora of blossoms. Not quite in flower were Dutchman's breeches, bloodroot, and false Solomon's seal. We also saw butterflies, including mourning cloaks and possibly falcate orange-tips, a rare spring butterfly that inhabits CT's traprock ridges. We all enjoyed sampling ramps (wild leeks), a great indicator of rich woods (do you know him? An old TNC joke.).

After reaching the main overlook, the rest of the hike was easy and smooth. Although accompanied by pesky black flies, the day and company were pleasant and we were all pleased to be out, especially on a Friday! We were grateful that we had postponed our event from the previous day, which had turned rainy and cool.

Our conversation ran the gamut. Sadly, since our last foray, Cherry had lost her dad. Bev was on a "staycation" for the week, which was just wrapping up. We all were pleased that we made it through this difficult winter and could put our snow shovels away.

We took a short break on a small outcrop along the trail to snack and then continued to Stagecoach Road, while crossing small brooks and passing deep ravines. We reached our cars and circled back to the start by 11:45AM. Having covered 31.6 miles to this point, we are now past the half-way point!

June 3, 2011

Today, we are hiking the first part of this section, from Route 17 to Howd Road. Since we hadn't been out in awhile and I was nursing a sore knee, we decided that two and a half miles would be sufficient. It was a lovely day; we did the usual parking of one car at the end and driving together to the beginning, and started our hike.

Our chatting was interrupted about an hour later by Cherry's surprised, "Oh, I can see my car!" We had already reached our destination and I was happy with the way my knee had responded to the ups and downs of the trail. This was immediately followed by Cherry's second surprised, "Oh, I don't have my keys!" Turns out she left them back in my car at the beginning of the trail. "I am getting old," Cherry bemoaned.

"Anyone could have done that. A twenty or thirty year old, too," I suggested. "It isn't about age." Apparently, that was the right thing to say. In deference to my knee, we chose to return to my car *via* the road. Although it added a half-mile, it was flat, compared to the topography of the trail. So, a total of five and a half miles, later, we completed the 2.5 mile leg of this section.

July 28, 2011

Today, both now newly single, we were ready for the 4.1 remaining miles, from Howd Road to Reed Gap. After a week of extreme heat and humidity, we started the day with comfortable temperatures and high clouds that kept us cool. The trail began with an immediate steep climb –no easing back into hiking. It was a lovely view of Pistapaug Pond. We covered ground by focusing our conversation about spaces left behind when partners are no more and how they are filled. Generally with miraculous, wondrous, exciting events and people, if we are open and present.



We, however, apparently were not that present, because we reached the second sharp ascent after about an hour without noticing the marker indicating that George Washington had used this route. We stopped at the base of this steep, talus trail before resolutely marching up. After reaching what we thought was the top, we saw that it continued and stopped on a large log for a rest and snack.

Forging ahead, we conquered the top; honestly, it wasn't all that steep, but it seemed to go on for a bit too long. And, honestly, we didn't see good views of New Haven and Long Island Sound. However, we were glad that the climb was over and we continued our walk. We heard trucks at Tilcon quarry and, again, before we knew it, we were walking along a power line right-of-way and could see Route 68. We were back at Cherry's car by 10:45 and back at mine on Howd Road by 11AM.

Later, calculating our progress, I emailed Cherry that we had covered 70% of the trail thus far. "WOW!!! I don't want it to end. Today was just wonderful!" was her reply.

September 5, 2011

Labor Day and we are ready to hike. Our last scheduled time was pre-empted by Hurricane Irene and we were uncertain as to the state of the trails.

Cherry and I meet at 8AM at the Athenian Diner and enjoy a hearty breakfast before heading out. We leave a car on Route 66 and then drive to Route 68 to resume our hike, which covers Beseck Ridge. The day starts sunny and in the 80s, totally pleasant walking weather and we begin at 9:10. We enjoy catching up with our lives. We had very different storm experiences and a few recent challenges related to trust. We keep stepping along, enjoying savory view compromised by subdivisions, and, by 10:30, we have reached the power lines.

The trail deviates from the expected in the next section and we spend at least 15 minutes relocating blue blazes. We are treated with the sight of several tree frogs, American toads, and even a wandering garter snake along the way, the latter of which Cherry ignored until it was safely ensconced in a rock crevice.

By 11:30 we are about half way as we cross under the abandoned Power Ridge ski lifts. It's an eerie and somewhat sad sight; large wheels and chairs, buildings and lines, all silently doing nothing. But we are less than silent, chatting up about retirement ideas such as working on trails and gathering all the volunteer opportunities in town.

Some of the ascents are steep and we stop at noon at the Black Pond overlook to snack and catch our breath. By then, dark clouds fill the sky and it's humid, which adds to our sweaty response to the climbs. The view is breathless, though, and we can identify beaver lodges and a fantasy cottage that we'd like to own. Our conversation covers topics diverse and esoteric, such as being frequency holders and community service.



It is on the ridge above Black Pond that we encounter the only other people on our hike, a young couple on their way to enjoy the view. The last mile plus, descending to Route 147, shows the most severe indication of the recent storm. Small, scattered branches make the trail almost invisible and we are grateful for dependable blue blazes. We are tired and the last stretch goes on. And on.

Finally, we reach the road and cross Route 66 to return to Cherry's car. We (somewhat self-righteously, we confess) remark that the cars zooming past us must realize that we are the ones truly celebrating Labor Day. We also comment on the rapid change – from quiet and solitude to hustle and bustle of normal life.

Cherry asks how much of the trail we have completed and I check once I sit in her car. Only 13 more miles—easily accomplished in three more forays. We agree to attempt to complete this trail by the end of 2011. “Would you want to do another,” asks Cherry. “Let’s finish this one first,” I reply. But as we discuss options, we come up with a plan to focus on one local town and hike all the open space trails in that town and see how that works. Apparently, we are enjoying ourselves.

October 3, 2011

On a cloudy and not-so-promising day, Cherry and I met at the Route 66 parking area at 8:30AM. Leaving her car there, Cherry proudly displayed her keys and we headed up to Country Club Road. Halfway there, I realized we were supposed to be bringing BOTH cars to the end point, so we could get back to the beginning. So back we went, taking a detour north on Miner Street, to bring both cars to the park and ride at Country Club Road and returning in one of them to our starting point. Finally, at 9:15AM, we began our hike. As we worked our way uphill, I noticed a man looking furtively around at the parking area. He had on work clothes and I was a bit uncomfortable, until I realized that he had stopped to 'take care of business' and was no threat to us.

We climbed the steep talus slope to the western edge of Mount Higby escarpment. Each plateau afforded pleasant views of wetlands below and Lamentation Mountain farther away. As usual, we got engrossed in our conversation, which centered around the sense of freedom that we got after resolving certain issues. Both of us had a few things that we had been fretting about and found closure, so we each had success stories to share.

The spitting rain that had dotted the windshield while we were driving back and forth to Country Club Road those several times had given way to patchy blue sky. We stopped briefly at Preston Notch, which was filled with running water. Our conversation continued, as we covered some potential workshops I might do and I discussed the positive results of a seven-week personal growth plan I had completed. Cherry talked about resolution about her issues (no, she would not retire; yes, someone she had hired to make a scrapbook returned her original photos and materials). We both agreed that life flows much better when this type of issue is resolved.

We stopped to snack at the northern end of Mount Higby and enjoyed sunshine peaking through the clouds. As we continued through the woods, we noticed blowdowns, probably as a result of Tropical Storm Irene.



Just before reaching Country Club Road, we were disgusted by the mounds of tires and metal trash on both sides of the woods road. Suddenly we heard two shrill whistles and I hazard a guess that we might be hearing blasting soon. Sure enough, loud rumbled and slight vibrations followed, as road work in the area continued.

We reflected on our remaining miles—only 8.8, about half of which will be along roads. We are optimistic about reaching our goal of finishing by the end of 2011. I noted that I hardly felt these 4.3 miles and Cherry agreed.

Stepping briskly along Country Club, we reached Cherry's car at 12:30PM, drove back to Route 66 and were on our separate ways by 12:45PM. We are both looking forward to our final mountain hike at Lamentation.



October 10, 2011

Today, Cherry and I decided to take advantage of the gorgeous weather to tackle our last remaining mountain. We met at the Route 66 parking area at 11:30am and rode in tandem to our end point on Spruce Brook Road at the northern tip of Lamentation Mountain. Since the small parking lot was full, we left Cherry's car on the next available side street. On the way there, we had driven north on Atkins Street, where I had spotted unexpected blue blazes that veered to the west into the woods. Once we were together and returning south on Atkins Street, I pointed them out to Cherry. Recalling some landowner dispute near Chauncey Peak, we decided to park on Old Farms Road East and enter the woods on Atkins Street to see where we landed. We set off at noon.

The trail was narrow and shaded for some time. We had a lovely and rich conversation about what had transpired since our last hike only a week prior. Each of us had some key changes and decisions; I had started working on a new venture and had a few tidbits to report on the romantic front. Cherry had some revelations about some of her volunteer commitments. We were startled from our talk by a spotted salamander on the trail.

At some point, we joined a more established trail and saw people who were examining a canal and tunnel that led from Crescent Lake in Giuffrida Park. That reassured me that we were heading in the right direction. As we continued, we crossed paths with a couple returning from Chauncey Peak. That led me to think we were headed in the wrong direction, but we were still on the blue trail and there had been no choices that I had noticed.

Indeed, we found ourselves at the base of a steep climb marked Chauncey Peak, so we stopped to eat lunch. We poked our way up the talus slope to astounding views of Crescent Lake. The foliage was turning, we could see the Hanging Hills in Meriden and Hartford to the north. We talked about changes, shifts in our lives. It's almost five years since my mom passed away and I listed all that had happened since that time. Cherry lost her husband six years ago, her son five. We agreed that change is just part of life and we must be open to change or we stagnate.

Along the way, we agreed to have a party when we finished our hike; we would meet at a restaurant and invite friends to join us if they wished. Our conversation was interrupted by the scarring of the landscape to the east, where traprock is being quarried, leaving tiers reminiscent of a Roman coliseum. Unfortunately, our plan to



complete our last mountain today was not to be; the trail kept heading south, which took us away from Lamentation. Having no other choice, we continued, squeezing through narrow rock steps, staying off the slippery talus trail to avoid falls, and eventually reached Guiffria Park.

As we headed, hot and tired, east along the road to return to Atkins Street, I noticed that it was not blazed blue as my map indicated. Indeed, the two miles that we covered back to the car (which we reached at 3:00pm) were no longer part of the trail, a point I discovered after returning home. Much of the distance along Country Club Road has been rerouted off the road and that was, in fact, what we picked up on Atkins Street. Apparently, to reach Lamentation Mountain, we need to continue through Guiffria Park. Next time. We are narrowing down the remaining miles, but Lamentation will be a difficult 3-4 miles. Hoping for good weather at the end of the month.

October 21, 2011

Cherry and I met at the Route 66 parking lot at 8:30AM, while the wind whipped through us, on a sunny, 50-degree morning. We were off to conquer Lamentation Mountain. We did our car shuffle and were ready to start from Gioffrida Park at 9:00AM. Each of us was a bit apprehensive, after our confusion and difficult descent at Chauncey Peak.

Even though it ha been only a short time since we last hiked, we had much to say. We started with Cherry's exciting news of being awarded the UCONN Provost Award for Excellence in Public Engagement. Cherry felt that the efficiency of her program and its international connections had helped get the recognition, and she was pleased to bring positive attention to their office.

As we hiked through the pines lining Crescent Lake, I was glad for the extra layers I had worn. The conversation turned to a contract offer I had gotten from an e-publisher for the first novel I wrote. Before long, we were at the top of the ridge and took a short spur to the edge. It would have been a beautiful view 20 years ago, before the trees grew tall. We continued along, as I talked about my upcoming high school reunion and the role I had played in compiling contact info, promoting, and organizing the event. Suddenly, we spotted two hawks (probably broad-wing) soaring overhead. It was a great day for thermals.

We reached an overlook with expansive views, north to Hartford, west to Hanging Hills. Fall colors were showing faintly this year, but the cows grazing below added to the bucolic quality of the view. Silver Lake sparkled in the sunlight. As we climbed up and down small trap rock ledges, I spotted herb robert (*Geranium robertianum*) in flower – in the fall??



We kept moving, still anticipating some difficulty. Cherry talked about a recent exposure to the term “garbage thoughts” for an judgmental, critical, or negative thoughts. It developed from a metapsychiatry developed by Dr. Thomas Hora. She gave some examples of times she'd been successful in noticing that her thoughts were “garbage” and redirecting them.



When we headed away from the cliff edge into the woods, I stopped to look at the map. It appeared that we were entering the last leg of the hike, but I didn't say anything, in case I was wrong. We continued along, and when we began to encounter junk cars, I was pretty sure we were almost at Spruce Brook Road. Cherry was appalled at the vehicles littering the woodland, particularly the stark contrast between the stunning nature views and the trash.

Moments later, we reached Spruce Brook and then our car at the Berlin Turnpike. Only one more mile! We agreed that, although it was 11:30, that we didn't want to rush to finish and cram one more thing into the morning. We scheduled the final piece for next Monday. Being adventurous, we returned to Cherrry's car by way of the Turnpike. Trusting my instincts, I turned off just as Route 15 became a highway and, lo and behold, we encountered the junction with Westfield Road and made our way directly back to Gioffrida Park. Cherry was impressed (me, too!)

October 24, 2011

Only a mile left. Who would have believed it! A year and a half later, we were ready to finish our hike on the Mattabesset Trail. It was forty degrees and cloudy, but we didn't care. We placed our cars in the right spots and headed out at 8:45AM along Country Club Road. We turned onto Bell Road and entered a delightful land trust property. A large pond, covered with ducks and a few swans, made a beautiful backdrop.

Cherry had had a weekend filled with classical music; I had gone to my fortieth high school reunion and had a blast. We crossed an outflow from the pond on an adorable painted bridge and encountered a well-worn animal trail (possum? beaver? otter?) traveling from the large pond to a smaller wetland. The area was a small oasis amidst housing. Suddenly, we were back on Atkins Street and walking north.

And then, at 9:15AM, we were done. Closure on the Mattabesset. Through several eye surgeries and personal losses (individual and relationships), we had endured to finish our 57 miles. Cherry indicated that her pants, which she had worn throughout our months of trekking, were thinning and she might have to retire them, also.

With a slight twinkle in her eye, Cherry asked if I might want to hike Cockaponsett with her.

“What part?” I wondered aloud. “It’s huge.

“All of it,” she replied with a grin.

