

KINGSTON REPORTER

Bay Farm, the end of the trail and the river

Casey Meserve

Nov. 7, 2010 | Updated Nov. 8, 2010, 7:13 a.m. ET

The last part in a series about Kingston's conservation land

The Jones River is the largest watershed in Cape Cod Bay, yet the river itself only stretches a few miles through Kingston, winding from Silver Lake through forests, uplands, wetlands and neighborhoods, under roads and railroads, before it finally widens as it sweeps between Rocky Nook and Duxbury to Kingston Bay.

At and near its mouth lie several pieces of conservation land – Mulliken's Landing, Marshall Joyce Wildlife Sanctuary, and finally, Bay Farm. It's also the end of the Bay Circuit Trail, which ends on the Duxbury side of Bay Farm.

Following the trail from its beginning in Kingston, we started at Silver Lake Sanctuary on the shores of the lake, went through a couple of neighborhoods, crossed Lake Street to the woods behind Silver Lake High School into Cranberry Watershed Preserve, Three Rivers Basin and Hathaway Preserve. From there, the trail follows Wapping Road into Sampson Park. From Sampson Park, the trail again runs over roadways, Elm Street, Main Street, Green Street to Summer Street and Maple Street before finally arriving at Landing Road. At the corner of Landing Road and River Street is one of the last parcels, Mulliken's Landing.

Kingston Town Meeting purchased 2.36-acre Mulliken's Landing in 2002 with state and federal funding. The property was named for Robert Mulliken, who served on the Conservation Commission from its formation in 1963 until 1978. In 1985, he joined the Open Space Committee and convinced the town to buy Bay Farm. He died in 2001.

Mulliken's Landing was purchased mainly for its river access. A 300-foot stone dust path heads from the parking area through wild wisteria and common reeds to the river where boaters can take their canoes and kayaks to the river, although it gets a bit swampy, particularly at high tide. However, the river is only truly accessible near high tide. This week, Conservation Agent Maureen Thomas looked over engineering proposals for building a boardwalk across the muddy trail to provide better access for boaters and to enhance the property for the public.

Mulliken's Landing has its problems, although vandals seem to have let it be for now. Most of the natural salt marsh has been taken over by the common reed *Phragmites australis*, an invasive species from Europe and Asia. Thomas guesses that construction of the Route 3 overpass next to the plot and storm-water pollution have likely contributed to the spread of the plant.

Still, the landing includes priority habitat for endangered species that live in the brackish tidal salt marsh, such as terns and the eastern box turtle. Deer tracks can be seen in the soft mud. During the spring and fall, migrating birds use the salt marsh as a resting point on their way to their summer and winter homes.

Walking east on River Street, Bay Circuit hikers walk past the Marshall Joyce Wildlife Sanctuary, which also fronts the river. Marshall Joyce, a painter who died in 1998, was known for his local seascapes and coastal scenes. He worked from his studio on River Street. Town Meeting purchased a portion of his estate in 2008, using Community Preservation funds, and established the sanctuary. The property provides a corridor for wildlife to pass overland from the forested land between Bay Farm and the river further inland.

There are a couple of ways to enter Bay Farm. From Kingston, hikers can pass between two homes on Bay Farm Road, where the town has purchased an easement, although the trail is not marked. There is also parking available just over the town line in Duxbury. Bay Farm combines 80 acres of land owned by Kingston, Duxbury and the state, and features walking trails through meadows and cedar

groves and amazing views of Kingston Bay, the Myles Standish Monument, Clark's Island, Gurnet Light, Rocky Nook and Saquish.

Duxbury went after the farm first, in 1973. It was a dairy farm for the first half of the 20th century until the late 1940s, when a group of actors purchased the land and formed the Duxbury Playhouse, a summer stock theater where plays were performed on a revolving stage until 1950. After Route 3 opened in the '60s, and the population of Duxbury and Kingston began growing, the newly formed Conservation Commission mounted a campaign to protect open space and approached the owners of Bay Farm. In 1973 the sale was finalized and 44 acres were sold to the town.

Kingston waited nearly 15 years before buying 36.75 acres of the farm 1987, and the state bought the 7.75-acre strip of land in between around the same time. The property is managed jointly through a memorandum of understanding, which does allow dogs on leashes, but no horseback riding, motor vehicles, hunting, trapping, firearms, overnight camping, fires or new trails. Despite the restrictions, the property is well used and the trails are well maintained. The property contains artifacts of an 8,000 year-old Native American site, one of the oldest in the region, as well as artifacts of its later farming history. Landowners in Duxbury were farming the site as early as 1627. In recent years, Bay Farm has become a popular park in all seasons with dog-walkers, joggers, cross-country skiers, birders and fishermen. From the outcrop of rocks called Cedar Rocks, which overlooks the mouth of the Jones River, fishermen have caught stripers and bluefish.

Hiking through the property, Thomas and her companion were struck by the differences between Bay Farm and other conservation properties in town.

“It's like the Midwest; you're surrounded by all this flat, open space,” Thomas said.

The trail leads through fields on either side of the town line, and both towns mow the fields in the fall to maintain their meadow condition. The 40 acres of meadow are an important habitat for birds, and even in late fall chirping birds were

everywhere in the bushes on either side of the grassy trail. On the Kingston side, the trail leads into a grove of cedar trees. Their trunks seemed like cathedral pillars, reaching from the depths of the earth into the sky above.

The path leads through the trees through another meadow where maple trees captured the late afternoon light in their yellow leaves and turned golden. We followed the path past the meadows, past parents walking with their children and dogs running with their owners, to the end, where the Bay Circuit Trail and the Jones River meet the sea.