Mattatuck Beach

By John Leyden

Have your ever been to Mattatuck Beach?

The town of Wolcott owns this beachfront property on Hitchcock Lake.

As a youth, I spent a good many summer days enjoying our beach. Year after year, it was the place to be on hot summer days. I lived with my grandparents, the Kelleys, at 443 Todd Road. It was a long walk to the beach. I believe it was close to a mile. By car, turn off Meriden Road. onto Farview Avenue and take your first right turn. It is less than thirty yards downhill to the beach. Stop for a moment and enjoy the view. You can see a good portion of the lake from Farview Avenue.

Mattatuck Beach is unique in that it is now the only public access to Hitchcock Lake. The property is fenced in and signs note that access is limited to Wolcott residents. The beach is small; less than thirty feet wide and is devoid of any amenities. There is no shade available.

So, why would you or your family want to experience Mattatuck Beach? Well, for me it has some wonderful memories. As you enter the water, you can see Turtle Rock. It is about three feet long and two feet high. Parents sit on that rock and acquaint their young with the joy of swimming. Three- and four-year-olds like to jump off turtle rock into the water. Older kids hold onto the rock to practice their flutter kick. My sister Peg named it Turtle Rock because to her, it looked like the back of a turtle just below the water line. I don't believe anyone else may have ever called it Turtle Rock.

Just beyond Turtle Rock is a light-colored, flat rock the size and shape of home plate at a baseball field. Not much excitement there, but some kids take pride in finding it year after year.

The real prize, Big Rock, lies another ten feet or so in an almost straight-line from home plate. Big Rock is a big bolder that rolled into the lake, quite possible from the Ice Age. Anyway, that's how we thought of it. It sits about three feet below the water line and it is large enough to have three or four kids stand on it at one time. I remember standing on Big Rock and waiving to get my parents attention at my accomplishment, I wonder if my mother had done the same thing, waiving to her parents when she was a youth.

I have caught a fair number of yellow perch off the left side of the beach before the swimming season got under way. They seem to really go for night crawlers. The far-right side of of the beach boundary was a fenced in picnic area with one lonely wooden picnic table sitting in the middle of the field. In all the times I have been to Mattatuck Beach, I have never seen anyone in that fenced land. I have walked the length of that fence line in the water and found crayfish and one time, a turtle that I just missed catching.

If you visit Mattatuck Beach, you will enjoy how quiet and peaceful it is. You sit there and enjoy the serenity of the spot. You may swim or simply dangle your feet in the cool water. You may eat peanut butter and jelly or tuna fish sandwiches or other treats you may have brought along with you.

You may greet a neighbor or meet a stranger. You may teach your kids to swim or take a swim yourself. The beauty of Mattatuck Beach is you do not have to do anything there. You simply enjoy yourself. There is no refreshment stand, boat rides or other entertainment. It is you, your family and maybe friends. I can't recall a time when the beach was crowded

On occasion, a heavy rain storm may cause some erosion. Rain runoff can cut a channel in the beach and make the water cloudy for a day. No real danger, but it can be disappointing if you had a beach outing planned for the day.

If you visit the beach, you may create a memory for yourself and your family. I learned to swim at Mattatuck Beach and that process began 84 years ago. I still remember some of the good times that my family enjoyed at our beach. So, consider visiting your Wolcott beach.

COMMENT:

Interesting article on Mattatuck Beach, we spent many summer days there (easy walk from Dale Ave). I recall the 3 rocks, we just knew them as "1st, 2nd and 3rd Rock". Parents would often use them as parameters to how far out kids could go depending on their age and swimming abilities. It was a big deal when you were allowed to " swim out to the 3rd rock"…you were now officially an "Big Kid." There was shade at the beach in the 50's, but I guess those trees came down. It was a great place to enjoy the summer!

There is a sad side to Mattatuck, in 1969, Bruce Russell, a classmate of ours from Lewis School through Wolcott High, passed away from injuries while swimming at the beach. I don't recall the exact circumstances (was in Germany in the Army at the time), but I believe diving off or into one of the rocks, caused his injuries. Tragically, Bruce was a Marine at the time and had just returned from a combat tour in Vietnam. Sad, he was a good guy and I think of him to this day.

Take care,

John Cavanaugh

Southbury