

Memorandum

Date: 26 September 2018

To: Michael Donihue and Whitney King, co-chairs of Colby College Collaboration with Maine Huts and Trails

From: Denise Bruesewitz, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies

Subject: Reflection on ES494 Maine Huts and Trails trip, Fall 2018

I was fortunate to be able to bring my students enrolled in ES494 A (Problems in Environmental Science) along with students in ES 494 B alongside the ES494 Faculty Ben Neal (ES) and Pete Countway (Bigelow) for an overnight stay to the Flagstaff Hut of Maine Huts and Trails. This is the first year we have had two sections of the Environmental Science capstone, so it was a great moment to bring both sections together for community building and creating common understandings of projects across the classes. It was also a great way for Pete Countway, Bigelow Senior Scientist, to learn more about the capstone process and to meet the Environmental Science seniors in an informal setting.

All 14 students enrolled in my class (ES494 A) were able to attend this trip, and 7 out of 10 students in ES494B (led by Ben Neal and Pete Countway) were able to join.

My goals for this trip were: 1) to work on both field data collection techniques on the shore of Flagstaff Lake, 2) for the two sections of capstone to gain a baseline understanding of the projects for each class and to interact together across the two sections and 3) for each student research team to develop a core set of principles that will establish their team dynamic for the semester of collaborative research. Finally, I wanted to ensure the students had some unscheduled time to be together away from campus to build community and have broad conversations about our projects with each other and with me, Ben and Pete. I believe that the unplugged day away from campus was an ideal opportunity for the students to commit to a plan of action for their research teams (see Appendix 2). Student reflections all illustrate the students' appreciation for the opportunity to get away from campus and spend time together in this setting, and to learn more about our work for the coming semester (see Appendix 3).

Logistically, the trip went very smoothly. The ongoing assistance of Chemistry administrative assistant Kimberley LaPointe ensured communication with the Maine Huts and Trails staff and rental of the needed vehicles. We had planned to use the Colby truck to transport students to the trailhead, but the truck battery died in the morning as I was preparing to leave. Kimberley was able to quickly organize a rental SUV from Enterprise at the last moment. I was easily able to borrow needed sleeping bags from Campus Life. It was very useful to have faculty from both sections of the capstone present, not just for the community building aspects, but also to make sure we could have faculty in place at the end of our group to ensure no students lagged behind on the trail. The ME Huts and Trails staff also were also fantastic in making sure we were well fed and had everything we needed to explore the area (life jackets, etc). We left campus at 2:30, arrived at the trailhead at 3:30 and we were to the hut by about 5:00. (Full schedule is listed in Appendix 1). We were able to make it to the hut in plenty of time for dinner and before dark, and most students took a swim in the lake right when we arrived.

This is the 2nd year I have done this trip with ES494, and generally I think we learned from last year and there is little that I would adjust moving forward. We ensured all canoers and kayakers not only had a buddy, but that others in the group knew the plan of each person and when to expect them back to the docks. I also made it a priority for the students across capstone sections to interact together, and I think that the student reflections show that they appreciated this opportunity. Surprisingly, many of the senior science and computation majors do not know each other well, so experiences like this are particularly important early in the semester of capstone when they are working so closely together.

A big thank you to Colby College, Whitney King, Michael Donihue, Kimberley LaPointe, Ryan Linehan, and the staff of Maine Huts and Trails for making our trip a success!

Appendix 1: Planning notes

ME Huts and Trails ES494 Fall 2018 Trip Planning

ME Huts and Trails (207) 265-2400

Flagstaff Hut— (207) 699-8394

Attendees:

Taro Katayama
Park Cawley
Carolyn Kwak
Emily Renkey
Monica Colmenares
Madison Maier
Kaitlin Volk
Katherine King
Eli Hanschka
Amy Andreini
Josiah Johnson
Anna Yu
Keller Leet-Otley
Olivia Antczak
Isa Berzansky
Arunika Bhatia
Sheryl Cramer
Lily Lake
Tiffany Wu
William Hirsch
Denise Bruesewitz
Thom Klepach
Roa Klepach
Isla Klepach

Ben Neal
Loren McClenachan
Sonora Neal
Oshian Neal
Pete Countway
Garrett Countway

30 Total

Itinerary:

Friday early afternoon: Denise will make sure gas is in SUVs, and get equipment loaded into vehicles

2:15-2:30 students load personal gear and gather behind Olin

2:30 sharp- leave for trailhead

4:00 arrive at trailhead for 2.2 mile walk to the hut

no later than 5:30 - arrive at hut

Evening: Quick swim, Have dinner. Discuss the research team partnership planning exercises.

Tour of hut. Time for games & conversation

Saturday morning: 7:30-8:30 Breakfast, Check out of Hut, gather all gear and bag lunches. 8:30-10:00 eDNA sampling demo with Pete and water sampling demo with Denise. 10:00-12:00 AM Recreation time (canoe, etc).

Hike to trailhead 12-2

Drive back to campus; arrive by 3:30

What students should bring:

-checklist provided by ME Huts and Trails and bathing suits

Extra items I will bring:

Paper copy of directions to trailhead for all vehicles

Copy of reservation confirmation & materials from ME Huts and Trails

First-Aid kit

Copy of trail maps for everyone- contact info on map for everyone

Extra sleeping bag

Trail snacks

Headlamps & flashlight

List of group phone numbers

Camera

Cash

Sunscreen

Insect repellent

Whistle
Tea candles
Lighter
Waterproof matches

Other safety precautions:

We will do a headcount coming in and coming out- everyone signs in and signs out of the trip

One of the faculty will be the last on the trail making sure everyone is accounted for.

Appendix 2: Reflection assignment prompt for the students

Please write about a half a page on any of the following prompts that speak to you, and include a picture on the page if possible. Please only address 1-2 of the following in your writing, and please self-edit your text before sending it along to me. If possible, it would be great to trade with another student in the class and edit each other's writing, too.

Note the picture may be used for a ME huts and trails blog post, so make sure it is something you wouldn't mind going out into the world.

Please use a first-person, active voice and start the post by briefly introducing yourself and your interests in environmental science (and/or computation).

Prompts:

What did you take away from this trip in terms of your learning about: (*address 1-2 of the following*)

- building an effective collaborative research team?
- sustainability and eco-tourism in Maine?
- Carbon budgeting of an off-the grid hut?
- Importance of planning and careful thought that goes into planning a large-scale research project such as your work on Waterville streams? (did time away from classes and other obligations help you to focus on your project)
- Importance of community and time for recreation with your fellow researchers

and finally

-were you inspired to spend more time out on the Huts and Trails system, or out in the Maine woods generally?

Appendix 3: Student reflections

09/23/18

Anna Yu

Maine Huts & Trails Trip Reflection

Visiting the Flagstaff Lake over the past weekend was definitely a highlight experience of my capstone course so far. Coming to Maine for college, I am always aware of the stunning nature and the abundant natural resources around me, but have regretted for not spending enough time

exploring more. This trip was my first time visiting a hut managed by the Maine Huts & Trails, and I was so glad to spend time with my peers and enjoy the beautiful view of western Maine.

A huge pleasure during my time at Flagstaff was being able to know people from the two science capstones. As one of the only two ES-Computation majors of my year, I felt so lost when I was first placed in a science capstone and doubted that the amount of scientific knowledge I had could sustain myself through it by any chance. But by talking to peers from both my course and the Bigelow one and watching field work demonstrations from Denise and Peter in the lake, I realized that this course would be a chance for me to learn new things and I gained the confidence that with my partner, we would make great contributions to the topic for sure. Together with my old and new friends, we had so much fun swimming, kayaking, or even just sitting by the fire. It was such a relaxing and meaningful experience for me that now I truly look forward to the rest of the semester.

William Hirsch
9/23/18

My experience at Maine Huts and Trails was therapeutic and relaxing. After a brief car ride through the rolling hills of Maine's idyllic countryside, my peers and I arrived in a gravel parking lot of the trailhead. Soon we were upon a meandering dirt trail that led through pine and birch. Passing through the forest, I took solace in its calmness and gentle scent of wood and leaves that wafted around in the faint breeze. After a little more than an hour, we stumbled upon a compound of huts and cabins that we quickly surmised was the place we were looking for. Situated not too far from the shore of Lake Flagstaff among the trees, our accommodation consisted of several tightly clustered huts with bunked beds inside. A central lodge with a dining hall, bathrooms, showers, and a reading room lay within a stone's throw of the huts. Within half an hour of arriving, we had collectively decided we were going to go swimming, and I found myself tenderly slipping into the cool yet not cold water of Flagstaff Lake. Swimming in the water as it reflected the waning light of the day felt unbelievably refreshing. After this, we enjoyed a fantastic meal in the quaint atmosphere of the lodge, which segued into a group campfire. To end the day, some friends and I laid on the rocky shore of the lake and gazed at the sparkling night sky, trying to one-up one another with shooting star counts. Sleep came easily and quickly in the warmth of the hut that night. The next day, I went paddling to the dam on the lake, a remnant of America's bygone obsession with hydroelectric power. During the paddle out and back, I found myself getting lost in the ripples of the water which seemed to wash away the stress of everyday college life. By the time I returned to the camp to go back to Colby, I was already attached to this gorgeous place and reluctant to leave. After little more than 24 hours at Maine Huts and Trails, I realized this kind of experience was why I chose to pursue studying the environment in the first place.

Monica Colmenares
September 25, 2018

ME Huts and Trails Trip Reflection

I had a wonderful time at the Maine Huts and Trails trip. It is such a good idea to get a group of students out to a beautiful place where there are no distractions. It creates the ultimate bonding experience. Hiking in together after the long car ride was something that we could talk during and a way to get to know a little more about each other.

I was glad to know that the trip was not going to be completely project-oriented. It allowed for us to better understand each other as people, and not just as students. This was important for me because, being an Environmental Computation major, I missed out on some of the class time that many of the students in our class already had together. While they came in knowing each other very well, I only knew names and a few students. This trip gave me the chance to let other people get to know me, as I'm usually more quiet in class. That being said, I did enjoy the DNA collection and water sampling that was demonstrated on the lake. The setting was ideal, and I was glad to know that the professors could bring their family along too!

I left this trip feeling more comfortable with the students in my class, and in a way, re-inspired to work on the capstone project. It reminded me that there are very real consequences to the way that we treat the earth, especially our water systems. One day lakes like this one might not be swimmable or might not be there at all. I thought that this trip was essential to our course, and that it provided an exceptional way to begin a semester of research.

Madison Maier

I didn't know about the Maine Huts and Trails until I learned our capstone would be visiting them, and my expectations were exceeded. The facilities and food were great. The dining area doubled as a great space to hang out, and we played card games at the tables and got to know each other over dinner. I liked the informal seating and how I was able to talk to different people at every meal. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to go with all the science majors, not just my capstone group. Even though Colby is a small school I still don't know everyone in my major. Flagstaff Hut was a great way to get to know the people I did know more and to meet new people. For me, a huge highlight was taking the kayaks and canoes out and being able to explore the lake. It was nice to be in a smaller group setting for a couple of hours. The other highlight was the bonfire, and sharing stories with my peers and professors. I think being outdoors and away from campus helped people in forming connections with each other, which is what I was really hoping to get out of the trip.

Keller Leet-Otley

This was my third time visiting one of the huts, but my first experience at Flagstaff Lake! This was also my first time in a hut when there wasn't snow on the ground. We were able to enjoy incredible weather; we canoed on Flagstaff Lake, explored the hiking trails, and stargazed near the magnificent Bigelow Mountains. The comfortable living arrangements were complemented by the friendly staff, who cooked us delicious and locally sourced meals. The huts are very accommodating of dietary restrictions; they had tasty vegetarian options for many of the students!

This hut provided an ideal space for large and small groups. Being a part of a large group, I found that we were able to have plenty of space to relax and to practice our field sampling techniques for our environmental science capstone projects. The dock offered room for our group to conduct research practices, while also allowing for people to disembark on canoes. Overall, this trip to Flagstaff Lake was an excellent way to bond with a group, especially with the no-screen policy. I would recommend the huts to anyone who is looking for a comfortable, yet remote site that offers incredible access to the Maine outdoors!

Katherine King
Reflection
9/20/18

Going to the Maine Huts and Trails Flagstaff Hut with our environmental science capstone group was a real treat. While we all have been seeing each other around campus for the past three years, this was a great opportunity to spend to quality time together in a beautiful setting. The campfire, wonderful meals, and the calls of the loons made this place perfect for us to connect to what motivates many of us in our science, the love of being outdoors. Sharing these experiences in a remote setting, without the distractions of technology, school work and the campus environment we are able to create bonds that will be valuable in our work this semester. We had the opportunity to chat about science, and many other things, in a leisurely way that both informed us and got us excited about each others projects. Before the trip, I didn't know that this was the first year that Colby had two environmental science capstone groups. For this reason I think it was great to have us all come together at least once to make connections that we can continue for the rest of the semester and the school year as a whole. Overall, I had a wonderful experience, and was sad to have to leave and come back to get down to business.

Josiah Johnson

It's a Saturday morning, and as the sun starts to peak over the horizon, you can feel an immense sense of calm in the cabins at Flagstaff Lake. The faint chatter of birdsong overlays the light breathing of sleepy cabinmates inside, while down by the lake the morning mist drifts softly across the crystal-clear waters. This was the portrait of my Saturday morning the third weekend of September, part of an overnight trip taken by my Environmental Science capstone class. We had driven up the previous day and hiked the 1.5 miles from the trailhead to the lodge like a small platoon on an expedition, all of us carrying our personal gear in stuffed backpacks as we marched in ones and twos down the narrow trail. The remoteness of the Flagstaff lodge is perhaps one of its greatest charms. One is lucky to get a signal out here, and despite the fact that the lodge was not explicitly a no-screen zone, there was no desire to use any electronics anyways. Doing so felt guilty. That calming, laid back atmosphere removed the distortion of the fast-paced world I typically live in, allowing me to see with a clear lens who my companions truly were, uncolored by any assignments or forced activities, and what remained was a chance to connect with those people over dinner, around the campfire, or on the hunt for aquatic plants. This semester will be one long plunge down the Capstone rabbit hole, so having the time and space to get to know the classmates who will be taking that dive with me was of immense value.

ES494 – Problems in Environmental Science
Eli Hanschka
September 24, 2018

Maine Huts & Trails Trip Reflection

I thought that our trip out to Flagstaff Hut last weekend was a phenomenal way to begin a semester of research for the Environmental Science senior capstone class. From family style meals on rustic wooden furniture, to crackling flames and laughter from campfire stories, to paddling on the clear lake, this trip provided ideal settings for getting to know both students and professors. The laid back nature of the trip seemed especially important and impactful to me. It gave a reprieve from the formality and structure of academic activities and presented a unique way to relax before the difficult semester of work ahead. I also enjoyed the scientific demonstrations about DNA collection and water sampling methods that we did out on the lake. Flagstaff Hut, nestled on the quiet wooded shores of Flagstaff Lake, was a wonderful location for this retreat. We were all able to enjoy this gem of Maine's natural beauty in the context of a class focused around problems in environmental science. It seemed fitting as well that the Capstone group studying the freshwater resource of urban streams kicked off the semester on the shores of a picturesque human-made lake. Overall, I found this time both relaxing and refreshing and I left the trip feeling calm and prepared to tackle the capstone class.

Emily Renkey
Reflection
9/22

Looking back on the other weekend, I'm really glad we had the opportunity to go to Maine Huts and Trails together as a group. Before the trip, I didn't know a lot of the people in our capstone very well and being able to spend those 24 hours away from campus was really helpful in bonding as a group and feeling more confident going into the semester. The Flagstaff Hut was beautiful and I really loved the dining room space that allowed us to both talk over a family-style dinner, and play games they had available at the hut. One of the highlights of the trip for me was the morning after we arrived when we got to spend time on the lake. We all were able to rent the canoes and paddleboards from our hut and take them down to the water. The lake is beautiful and we could see and hear the Loons nearby and really soak in one another's company, which would be harder in an on-campus environment, where there are distractions and it is harder to be fully present in the conversations you are having and the people you are with.

Carolyn Kwak

I thought that the capstone trip to ME huts and trail was definitely helpful in getting to know my fellow capstone peers! It was amazing to just get off-campus away from a familiar area and bond over card games, swimming, and good food. My favorite part was just talking by the campfire and admiring the beautiful stars. I got to spend a good amount of time with people who I have not shared long conversations with before and really get to know everybody's quirks and personalities. I feel much more comfortable being myself in front of everyone and I think that's super important in being able to fully enjoy capstone. Having fun and doing science with other science majors who love making science jokes (that my other non-ES friends won't get) is a great way to have a wholesome yet educational experience for senior seminar. I am so glad to have had this experience with capstone peers and professors!

Amy Andreini
9/19/2018

The trip to Maine Huts and Trails Flagstaff Hut was a great way to begin the semester. The Environmental Studies senior capstone is a major milestone in all ES students time at Colby and it is a semester where we spend a lot of time together. To be able to begin the semester with an off campus excursion was a great opportunity for all of us to come together and talk about our experiences during our time in the ES program and prepare for this next part. It was great to get to know everyone in the class outside of the classroom and away from Colby's campus. The Flagstaff hut is also an amazing resource that is not far from Colby but many students may not otherwise get a chance to visit it during their time at Colby. I personally really enjoyed that we did not have cell phone reception and that the hut is a screen free facility so we could eat meals together, have a campfire and spend time on the lake without the distractions of technology, which would most likely be the case in other settings. It was also a great chance to talk to students in the other capstone and hear about the projects they will be working on. Overall I think the Flagstaff trip was a great chance to learn more about some of the data collection we will be working on this semester and become stronger as a group to work well this semester.