

## Maine Huts and Trails Leader Report

Course            ES 151 Landscapes and Their Meaning  
Trip Location    Flagstaff Hut  
Trip Date        Jan 25-26, 2019

On Jan 25, 14 students from ES 151 and 3 faculty met at 9:15 AM in the Diamond Atrium to begin an overnight adventure to Flagstaff Hut. The goals of ES 151 are twofold: to introduce students to American literature on the subject of natural landscapes, and to encourage students to achieve a greater connection to and appreciation for nature through personal experience outside. The broad themes for each week are: experiencing nature through all of the senses; topophilia, topophobia and the evolutionary theory underpinning our connections to particular landscapes; and the suite of actions that may be taken to advocate for landscape conservation and restoration, using science, persuasive writing, protest, and the legislative process. The individual final project integrates all of the above.

The students in this class are diverse—freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. They are undeclared, science, and social science majors. Half the class is male, and half is female. Most of them didn't know each other very well when they began the course.

We arrived at the Flagstaff trailhead at 11:00 AM and snowshoed into the hut under sunny, chilly, skies. For many, this was their first experience on snowshoes, and first trip to a very rural Maine landscape. We arrived at the hut by 12:15 PM. We were the only group at the hut overnight. We ate bag lunches, had free time to explore, and helped the hut staff stack wood for heat. From 3:00-5:30 we had class in the hut. Students worked in small groups and then we gathered around the woodstove for group sharing and discussion of that week's 14 readings. A highlight of this gathering was that almost every student memorized a poem of their own choosing and stood and recited it for the class. It takes nerve to complete this assignment as a young adult, and several shared in a language other than English (Chinese, Japanese, Cantonese, and French).

Students played board games for 30 minutes until dinner, after which we had an energy tour of the facility. While this was very interesting and the students were engaged, I had arranged for one of our hut-hosts, Conor, to give a presentation that he had created as a Chewonki environmental educator on the history of the Dead River dam, and the creation of the artificial Flagstaff Lake. Conor gathered us in the dining area and told us the story, with images, historical and present day maps, and lots of interesting anecdotes. It was terrific, and especially well suited to this class, as we had just talked about the history of dam creation and dam removal in the country.

At 8:45 PM we all went outside to the cove on frozen Flagstaff Lake and watched stars for about 30 minutes. The night sky was clear. Several students remarked that it was the first time they had seen the Milky Way, and we saw 3 shooting stars as well. Using a laser pointer, we were able to trace out many constellations. Most students retired to bed after that. A few went inside to play board games, and 4 students laid on their backs in the snow for another 30 minutes, enjoying the big sky, periods of silence, and time together.

In the morning we had breakfast, packed up, and left the hut by 9 AM. We snowshoed out pretty quickly, as the temperature was 2 degrees and the trails had just been groomed, making the trip very manageable. We identified the tracks of coyotes, snowshoe hares, deer, and beaver. We glimpsed a pileated woodpecker and great horned owl through the trees. We were back to Colby by 11:30 AM.

In their journals following the trip, students wrote about how much they enjoyed the Flagstaff Hut adventure. Almost everyone commented on the benefits of disconnecting from electronics in order to connect more deeply with classmates. They loved playing board games, and being able to have meaningful conversations with peers away from the pressure and pace of campus life. Several wished to share the experience with a parent, and all wanted to return at another time.

From my perspective, it was very helpful to have Prof Michael Donihue and Prof Rob Lester along on the trip to help with gear and sweep on the trip into and out of the hut. Kimberley LaPointe was very helpful making all of the logistical arrangements for rental cars, bag lunches, and communication with MHT. I appreciated the stream of email information and sled system from Prof Whitney King, and timely communication from Merrie Woodworth at MHT before and after the trip.

I enjoyed getting into Flagstaff Hut around lunchtime because it gave my students plenty of time to explore outside in daylight and also gave us almost 5 hours of active learning, between my class, the tour, the history of Flagstaff lake, and stargazing. My one suggestion, if other classes go in early, would be to give students the responsibility for ordering their own lunches *or* to request that the Colby dining hall pack meals in a way that generates less trash and doesn't include tiny Poland Springs water bottles. The lunches by Colby dining services were great tasting, but generated way more trash than necessary, and each student already had a full water bottle, making the plastic bottles unnecessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring ES 151 to Flagstaff Hut during JP 2019. Those who attended this field trip are listed on the following page.

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Susan MacKenzie

**Faculty on the Trip:**

Michael Donihue  
Rob Lester  
Susan MacKenzie

**Students on the Trip:**

Jansen Aoyama '19  
John Carhart '19  
Lucie Cunningham '20  
Joshua Goldberg '20  
Hannah Karp '20

Taro Katayama '19  
Matthew Lai '22  
Thomas LaJoie '20  
Sophie Lee '21  
Allie Moulton '21

Chris Reardon '21  
Jordyn Smith '19  
Zhiling (Lydia) Xia '22  
Jean Yuh '20