



GIANT NEWS

Newsletter of the Sleeping Giant Park Association
Summer 2023 • Issue 130

Needed: Full-time Staffing at Connecticut's State Parks: 83 is not enough!

—by Julie Hulten, *Immediate Past President*

In late March, SGPA Hiking Coordinator Mick Martucci and I attended the Friends of Connecticut State Parks Legislative Day in Hartford. We spent four hours sharing with other Friends' groups and "waylaying" passing Capitol staff, Senators, Representatives and visitors. While our display showcased SGPA programs and initiatives, we also campaigned for improved staffing in State Parks overall. (Photo courtesy of Friends of CT State Parks)

Why is advocacy for increased State Park staffing a concern? Currently, the entire State Park full-time staff, including office personnel, numbers 83.

One way of looking at the numbers and changes over time:

Year	Full-time staff	State Park Visitors
1984	200 full-time staff	7 million
2021	83 full-time staff	17 million

(Numbers provided by Friends of Gillette Castle State Park.)

Given the increase in attendance there are clear concerns about the ability of the existing Park staff to implement critical maintenance and ensure the safety and well-being of Park visitors.

What does this mean for Sleeping State Giant Park specifically?

TWO individuals staff the Sleeping Giant Unit, responsible for NINE state parks - a total responsibility of 8,273 acres. These parks include Sleeping Giant, West Rock Ridge, Quinnipiac River State Park, Wharton Brook, and Farm River; locations range from Long Island Sound (East Haven) to the middle of the State (Lamentation Mountain in Berlin).

SGPA sent a letter to Governor Lamont in the final days of budget negotiations urging funding for 16 new full-time State Park staff hires and other improvements.

To be even more impactful, members of SGPA staffed a table on Mother's Day that garnered 220 signatures on a petition urging the Governor to take action:

To: Governor Ned Lamont
From: Visitors at Sleeping Giant State Park
Re: Support for Increased Funding for State Park Staffing and other items
Date: May 14-16, 2023

We are calling on you to support critical increases proposed in the Legislature's version of the budget, namely:

- 15 new Park Maintainers and 1 district park supervisor supported by the Passport to the Parks;
- Increased grants to municipalities and nonprofits to improve and extend recreational trails,; and
- Increased investment in repairs and accessibility improvements to State Park facilities.



Mick Martucci and Julie Hulten
Friends of State Parks on Legislative Day in Hartford, CT
—photo courtesy of Friends of CT State Parks

ELDERS ON THE GIANT

—by Melinda Tuhus, *Giant News Editor*

Jeff Borne and Chuck Maynard are friends and walking buddies (and both are members of the Sleeping Giant Park Association Board of Directors). Together, the septuagenarians earned their Giant Master bragging rights after hiking all the trails between May and September of 2022.

They almost didn't make it. Jeff says they were both put off by what he calls the Wall of Death – the section of the White trail that looms almost straight up with the Red Circle at its base.

Jeff says he was encouraged to do it by his friend Manju Prabhu, who happens to be in charge of the rebooted Giant Master program. (See more about that on page 7.) “I thought that sounded like an interesting

After two to four hours of hiking, they rewarded themselves with some coffee or a snack.

Getting back to the Wall of Death, the two friends



Jeff and Chuck
—photo submitted by Jeff Borne

decided to do a work-around, using other trails. But the Giant Master requires hikers to cover all of every trail in the park – all 32 miles of them.

Picking up the story, Chuck says they did all the trails except for that piece of the White trail. “We did the Blue trail, starting at the main parking lot, up over the Giant’s head. We met a guy coming down the Blue trail with his dog, not a small dog, and he was carrying the dog down the Head. I said to Jeff, after doing the Giant’s Head, ‘We gotta go back and do the Wall of Death.’ That was not an easy climb. I would say it was harder than the Giant’s Head, only because some of the steps we had to go up were really high, and you had to figure out how you were going to do it.”

A highlight for both of them was the vista on the White Trail, just east of the Tower Trail. “I think it’s the best view in the park; on a clear day you can see Long Island.”

Chuck concluded, “I’m glad we finished the Giant Master last year because on December 30, I had an accident in my yard and tore my quadriceps tendon, so there was no way I could do any of the trails.”

Chuck and Jeff hope others will be inspired by their late-in-life accomplishment and tackle the Giant Master program themselves.



Chuck Maynard on the ‘Wall of Death’
—photo submitted by Jeff Borne

challenge. I’d like to say I saw the park through all the trails. Chuck likes hiking and jogging and said, ‘Let’s do it!’

“It’s good to have another person,” Jeff continued. “Chuck would say, ‘Let’s go first thing on Mondays.’ If I was feeling a little lethargic, Chuck would say, ‘Let’s go out.’ We certainly enjoyed learning about the Giant. Even though the trails are all rated, even those rated easy would inevitably produce a challenge, either uphill or rough footing. We thought every trail had challenges.”

Over the Dumpling and into the Quarry -- The Dana Nature Trail.

—by Julie Hulten, *Past President*

In 2022, Sleeping Giant State Park's Nature Trail received statewide attention. The Trail was included in the eighth annual "Sky's the Limit Challenge" offered by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). The program's purpose? To challenge us to explore our wonderful State Parks. To find out more about the 2023 challenge check out the DEEP website (ct.gov/deep). Serendipitously, in the Sleeping Giant Park Associations (SGPA) archives, I found a folder labeled "Nature Trail." I was surprised to learn that the current Trail had a precursor.

In March 1934, prompted by the Mount Carmel Parent Teacher Association, A.J. Ralph, President of the Hamden Historical Society, formed a committee to

other established Nature Trails and compiled factual information with the assistance of a Miss Arnold of the Peabody Museum. Then, along the chosen route, the group placed about 70 metal labels naming trees, shrubs, flowers, and ferns. These markers supplied information and identification tips about birds, insects, and geological features that hikers might encounter. The cost of this venture was \$13.60. The Trail was subsequently named the Dana Trail in honor of Arnold Dana. Today, thanks to the trailblazing efforts of Norman Greist and Richard Elliot in the '60s, this is now part of the Red Diamond Trail.

When and why the Dana Trail was abandoned as an educational offering is unknown. In 1964,

collaborating with the SGPA, the New Haven Naturalist Club laid out today's Nature Trail. That Trail opened to the public on July 4, 1964; a "Learn-from-Nature-Trail" guide was offered for 10 cents.

Over time necessary modifications in the new Trail were made. In 1987, following the devastation caused by Hurricane Gloria, Dr. Daryll Borst updated the route and wrote the accompanying "Self-Guiding Nature Trail in Sleeping Giant State Park." This was accomplished with financial assistance provided by the Hartford National Bank and Trust Company.

Borst has reviewed and revised this route periodically,

most recently following the 2018 storms. A revision of the Nature Trail Guide reflecting the most recent changes is pending.

There is always more to learn while on the Giant. Check out the most recent Nature Guide on our website (sgpa.org)! Go explore!



A.J. Ralph and friends overlooking the Quarry
—photo from the SGPA archives

create an educational nature trail at Sleeping Giant. Local school children, especially Boy and Girl Scouts, would learn about nature while hiking.

The committee obtained approval for such a trail from the State Park Commission and the Connecticut Trails Committee. They also sought permission from Arnold Dana, then President of the Sleeping Giant Park Association (SGPA), as, for a short time, prior to turning the property over to the State, the SGPA owned the Giant's Head. Dana's reply: "The plan for a nature trail over the Sleeping Giant appeals to me heartily."

The committee chose a path, one that quite possibly had been used by workers when the Quarry was active, that wound from Mt. Carmel Avenue past the Dumpling and into the Quarry. They then investigated



Green trail marker
—photo submitted by Julie Hulten

Sharing our love – and knowledge – of the Giant

This is a note from Steve Sobolewski, who grew up hiking the Giant and who is now a science teacher at Wilton High School, to Hiking Chair Mick Martucci:

Hi Mick, I'm reaching out to you after a successful Sleeping Giant trip yesterday with my earth science class. Before the trip, we went over the history of the people of the park using what I learned from Julie Hulten's presentation at the Hamden library last year.

We also went over the geologic history of the park, using information I learned from David Sherwood's geology tour last year (and with the help of the geology

images you helped me get from Danny Brass). Finally, I incorporated what I learned from Joseph Barsky's biodiversity hike.

I just wanted to say thanks to you and the rest of the SGPA for organizing these events, which taught me the information that I was able to pass on to the students. We went up the main tower trail, branched off onto White to the prominent overlook, then headed up to the tower. We then visited the quarry base to have lunch.

They really liked applying some of the things we learned throughout the year, like identifying different rock types. They loved the views, especially from the top of the tower and the overlook on the White Trail, and as soon as they emerged from the woods to the quarry base, almost all of them emitted an audible gasp.

The students loved it and I think some will bring their families here in the future. This was my first field trip I've ever planned, and I plan on running this trip every year from now on.

There are parks closer to Wilton but I love this park and going on the guided hikes.



Wilton High School Science teacher, Steve Sobolewski and his students at the Giant
—photo submitted by Katie Lynch

My Journey Studying the Legend of Sleeping Giant

—by Pierson Clark, a fifth grader at Slate School in Hamden

Ed. Note: We appreciate Pierson's contribution to the Giant News and his enthusiasm for the Sleeping Giant. The re-telling of Native American legends by non-Native individuals is sensitive, as these stories encompass beliefs sacred to Indigenous peoples and storytelling is a sacred trust within an Indigenous community.

I was surrounded by my project books in my classroom at Slate School. I was studying Sleeping Giant. Out of the variety of books about Sleeping Giant – books about the legend, books about the Sleeping Giant Park Association (SGPA), books about the geology of the mountain, books about the Trails at Sleeping Giant State Park – it was the legend that attracted my interest. I even got to interview two people who have been on the board of the S.G.P.A., Julie Hulten and Barbara Beitch. I learned two versions of the legend, one from Julie Hulten and one

lens of the storyteller. Only the original storytellers- the Quinnipiac people- know their true story. I will share the legend I learned from Marchi's book with you.

Hobbomock was a kind, helpful stone giant, but sometimes he would get mad. He taught the Quinnipiac people how to fish and hunt. He taught them how to respect each other and the animals. He encouraged them to learn each other's languages and the languages of the animals. Everything was peaceful.

One day, while Hobbomock was away teaching in another land, the Quinnipiac people forgot how to respect the animals and each other. When Hobbomock returned, he grew very angry at the Quinnipiac people. He stomped his foot and made the long river change direction. Hobbomock left again but said he would return.

Years later, Hobbomock returned and tried to hurt the Quinnipiac people. He knocked down trees and stomped around. The Quinnipiac people summoned the good spirit, Kiehtan. They asked him to cast a spell to stop Hobbomock from hurting them. Kiehtan knew that Hobbomock would be hungry soon, and he knew that Hobbomock's favorite food was oysters, so Kiehtan cast a sleeping spell on the oysters he got from along the tidal river. When Hobbomock ate them, he fell asleep, forming the body of a sleeping giant. Hobbomock still sleeps today, but legend says that someday, he will wake up and try to punish us again.

Now that you've heard the legend, you may be able to understand why the legend attracted my interest. With the legend, Sleeping Giant is not just a mountain. The legend gives it personality. It is the story that brings the mountain to life.



On Thursday, May 25, guided by teachers Stephanie LaVecchia and Athena Shatara, seventeen enthusiastic grade 4/5 students from Cold Spring School in New Haven visited the Sleeping Giant. Organized by Hiking Program Coordinator, Mick Martucci, this visit was the culmination of the students' year-long exploration into issues of sustainability and Indigenous relationships with the land. Following a reading of Jason Marchi's book, *The Legend of Hobbomock, the Sleeping Giant*, by volunteer Julie Hulten, Park Naturalist Gail Cameron, read "Honorable Harvest" from *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer, introducing a discussion of the ways in which we can honor and respect Nature. The enthusiastic visitors then headed up the Tower Path for a picnic lunch at the Tower.

from the book, *The Legend of Hobbomock: The Sleeping Giant*, by Jason Marchi. The two legends I learned were different because they were told from two different peoples' points of view. Each story is changed as it passes through the

MORE GREEN TIME, less screen time!

On May 7, a beautiful Sunday afternoon, a small group led by Dr. Jennifer Botwick of New Haven walked silently up the Tower Path, stepped onto the Yellow Trail, and refocused their attention.

Botwick was leading participants in the practice of Shinrin Yoku, which originated in Japan and translates as “forest bathing.” No bathing in the generally understood meaning is involved, but the slow pace and pauses allow participants to “make contact with and take in the atmosphere of the forest,” she explains.

“We walk with intention on relaxation and breathing and without the use of cameras, cell phones, or conversation. As we hiked together in this sacred silence; individually and collectively we saw, heard, smelled and experienced the woods with a depth that otherwise would have been missed. A snake, an elder tree, birdsong.”

The 90 minutes included three mindful exercises of 10 minutes each, initiated and concluded by the ringing of her Tibetan bell. The first was Arrival, “a grounding exercise for people to experience themselves in the space, extending a sense of rootedness from their feet into the woods, and then accessing the experiencing of and to the roots of the trees, connecting with them; so developing a sense of oneness with self, each other and the greater forest.”

The group then hiked for another 20 minutes; the next exercise was “a deliberate notation of our senses starting with five things that we see, four things that we hear, three things that we smell, two things that we touch and one thing that we taste.”

The last exercise is what’s called the Metta prayer (also known as the compassionate or loving kindness prayer). May you be safe, May you be free, May you have ease, May you have peace, May you be free from struggling and discomfort, May you be happy.

At the end, participants broke their silence to share their experiences, all positive and meaningful. One, Kari Vecchitto, said, “This experience was very moving, surprisingly emotional. A group of nature lovers who were by all other accounts different from one another. Yet we were joined by the curiosity of this Forest Bathing. Jennifer was knowledgeable and kind as she guided us along the trail. We unplugged from technology and with great respect for Sleeping Giant we entered, heard, saw, smelled, felt and thought ourselves towards a healing feeling. We wished the same for loved ones and even for strangers and those we’ve become estranged from. That part moved me the most.”

We have no photos of this activity, since technology was left behind. We do, however, have photos of the wildflower hike that took place on April 16, led by SGPA board member Chris Fagan.

Dandelions and Pussytoes and Plantain, Oh My!

When Chris is your guide, a walk in the woods is so much more. Leading a group of about 20 people, he identified and explained the uses of plants found near the Park entrance, along the Purple, Blue, and Red Diamond trails, and into the Quarry. We saw lots of dandelions useful for tea, winemaking, salads, and steaming as vegetables. Of course, you can buy the greens in the supermarket, but you can get them for free in your [pesticide-free] yard! Japanese knotweed, the bane of Trails Crew’s existence as it is incredibly invasive, is also edible. Do you think we can eat our way to its eradication?!

Another overlooked but useful plant is the plantain. Not the banana-like fruit from Central America and the Caribbean, this is an innocuous and “everywhere” weed that, when chewed with your own saliva, is amazingly effective at killing the pain and itching of spider bites when applied to the affected area. We also saw violets, pussytoes, and one of my personal favorites, the tiny, delicate Dutchman’s breeches, so named because they look just like miniature bloomers hanging on a tiny clothesline.

—continued on page 7



Chris Fagan beholds the humble -- but beautiful and useful -- dandelion.
-photo submitted by Melinda Tuhus

MORE GREEN TIME *continued from page 6*

These ephemeral spring wildflowers, including pink Lady's slipper, Trillium, and many others found throughout the Park, don't last long. It's nice to get out and enjoy them while we can. Watch for the 2024 Spring Wildflower Hike, and join us to learn more.

Hikes!

Hiking chair Mick Martucci has organized 19 – count 'em! – hikes this year. Hikes that have already happened include the New Year's Day hike, the Winter Tracking hike, the Winter Tree Identification hike, the Spring Hikers' Hike and the Spring Introduction to Hiking the Giant. Hikes that have already happened include the New Year's Day hike, the Winter Tracking hike, the Winter Tree Identification hike, the Spring Hikers' Hike, the Spring Introduction to Hiking the Giant, and the Insect Identification Hike. Upcoming hikes include the Fall History hike on Sept. 10, the Geology hike on Sept. 17, the Biodiversity hike on Sept. 23, the Fall Foliage hike on Oct. 8, the Fall Intro hike on Oct. 15, another Forest Bathing hike on Oct. 22, the Fall Hikers' Hike on Nov. 12, and the Holiday Hike & Social on Dec. 3.

You can learn more on the program calendar on our website at sgpa.org/program-calendar, where you can register for hikes requiring registration.

**Looking for a Challenge?**

Hike all 32 miles of blazed trails at the park and become SGPA's next

GIANT MASTER

Complete the challenge to receive a certificate, Giant Master cap and be eligible to participate in the Advanced Programs, including:

4-Season GM: Hike all of the blazed trails in each of the four seasons

12-Month GM: Hike all of the blazed trails in each month of a year

Marathon GM: Hike all of the blazed trails in a single day



To learn more and complete the required registration, visit

[SGPA.org/giant-master](https://sgpa.org/giant-master)



Reboot of the Giant Master Program for 2023

—by Manju Prabhu, *Giant Master Coordinator*

Sleeping Giant State Park continues to be a popular destination for hikers. We offer a hiking program called “Giant Master” which has been very popular with both beginners and experienced hikers.

For 2023 the program has been revised and streamlined for our members. The program is now split into two categories, the base program called “Giant Master” and “Advanced Programs” which are “4-Season Giant Master,” “12-Month Giant Master” and “Marathon Giant Master.” Registration is mandatory for all programs. Only after completing the Giant Master program are hikers eligible to register for any of the advanced programs. For efficiency, paper-based correspondence has been eliminated.

Since the revised program was launched more than 55 members have registered and are enjoying the beautiful trails of the Giant.

Our hearty congratulations to new Giant Masters 2023

# 567	Jeff Stockwell	# 573	Julia Castner
# 568	Suzanne Binelli	# 574	Jennifer Reidy
# 569	Stephanie Machabee	# 575	John Hauser
# 570	Caitlin Hale	# 576	Timothy Crozier
# 571	Peter Tu	# 577	Ari Perez
# 572	Benjamin A Rosenberg		

Congratulations to new Four-Season Giant Master #60

#402 Paul Baldini (Giant master)

We regret that the names of the following people, who completed their Giant Masters in 2022, were left off of last year's Giant News listings. Congratulations to all!

# 541	Zachary Fisk	# 549	Rebecca Suchy
# 542	Marge Mullen	# 550	Matt Vallo
# 543	Laura Scheible	# 551	Rachel Sperling
# 544	Phil Birge-Liberman	# 552	Vanessa David
# 545	Kim Birge-Liberman	# 553	Stephen Sobolewsk
# 546	Wes Birge-Liberman	# 554	Christopher Shine
# 547	Norah Birge-Liberman	# 555	David J. Shine
# 548	Cindy Newman	# 556	Karl Borne

Note:

All Giant Masters are listed on the web page of the Sleeping Giant Park Association, <https://sgpa.org/giant-master-lists/>



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Dutchman's breeches
—photo submitted by Julie Hulten

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The *Giant News* is published three times a year by the Sleeping Giant Park Association, a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation, maintenance, and expansion of Sleeping Giant State Park.



Be sure to check our SGPA Facebook page or our SGPA website for updates on the Park's status. Feedback on the *Giant News* can be sent to giantnews@spga.org.



Tiger beetle
—photo submitted by Tom Granucci