

Sierra Club Service Trip: Adventure in Plymouth, Massachusetts

By Mary Ann McClenahan

I've done several trips with the Sierra Club over the years. My first trip was a canoe trip on the Current River, and I also went on a base camp trip in the high Sierras. I've been on a couple of service trips, and I enjoy these the most. I feel it's important to volunteer, give back, help improve or restore an area; it gives me a great feeling of satisfaction, and that I've made a difference. Plus, in addition to meeting a lot of interesting people from all over the country, you're working with leaders, rangers, and other local volunteers who are so happy to share their love of the area with you and are just thrilled you're volunteering your time to help.

I recently went on a service trip in the New England area called "Coast, Whales, Pilgrims, Music, and Dance: Service in Plymouth, Massachusetts" from August 12-19, 2023. Our group volunteered for Wildlands Trust, a nonprofit in southeastern Massachusetts, dedicated to permanently protecting native habitats. We did a lot of trail work and even helped put in a stone walkway at their training center which was once an old cranberry farm. Our group also did volunteer work at the camp we stayed at. I think this was the most unusual service trip because our camp, called Pinewoods, was a music camp! Yes, there was music during the day and dancing and music at night. Some other things you need to know about Pinewoods: the camp is situated between two ponds, they have lovely rustic cabins in this secluded area, and the food is made by the camp staff - it's delicious. A little more on the food at Pinewood's is that it's all made on site from scratch, fresh fruit and vegetables, fresh baked bakery goods, beef and chicken dishes and delicious vegetarian options. We had breakfast and supper at camp and made our lunches to take with us to our volunteer sites.

The week our group was there, the other campers (all musicians, singers, dancers) were there for English Country Music and Dance Week to learn new songs and dances. We would hear them practicing in the morning before we left for our volunteering work. When we got back in the afternoon, we could go for a swim, shower (plenty of nice shower houses), find a nice spot to enjoy the scenery, read, go to camp afternoon tea, or take a nap in our rustic cabins before supper.

On two of the evenings, a marine biologist came out and gave a big talk on what's happening with marine life in Cape Cod Bay and the Bay of Maine. The marine biologist, nicknamed Krill, was dedicated, knowledgeable, funny and had so much energy and compassion for what she does. Krill gave us info for their website www.necwa.org, a great nonprofit for wildlife if you want to check it out.

The other evening talk was on whales; she gave us a ton of information for our whale watching trip. Both of her talks were extremely informative, interesting, and she had lots of pictures and a table set up with many bones and other items. Yes, we saw a lot of whales on our outing on one of our days off, and there was a researcher on board taking pictures to catalog what specific

whales were there that morning. The other day off, I and several others chose to do a walking tour of Plymouth.

When we were at camp, every evening they would have a big dance in one of several huge outdoor pavilions. There was a caller like there is for square dancing, but for English Country Dance instead. The caller would tell us the history of the song and dance, then teach us the steps while the musicians played. The musical campers that weren't playing would be helping us out with the steps. It was so much fun! I don't think anyone had a problem falling asleep that week. When our week ended it was hard saying goodbye to everyone; especially to the leaders. These trips really have the best leaders because they want you to have a fun, wonderful experience about the area they care so much about.

Finally, here's a few more things to think about when planning to go on a Sierra Club trip. If possible, extend your trip a few days to check out other places of interest. I was able to visit Boston for two days before starting this Sierra trip. Get a good daypack if you don't already have one. I like ones with the water bladders because it's easier to pack in your suitcase or carry on. Not all trips require a lot of gear, but consider updating a few items (rain jacket, three season sleeping bag, tent) to the lightweight variety. Finally, make sure you are physically able to handle the trip. The trip will have a level of difficulty rated, so make sure you are in shape to handle whatever that level of difficulty is or opt for another trip. I encourage you to consider going on this or one of the many Sierra Club outings available because I know you're going to have a wonderfully memorable time! Happy trekking!