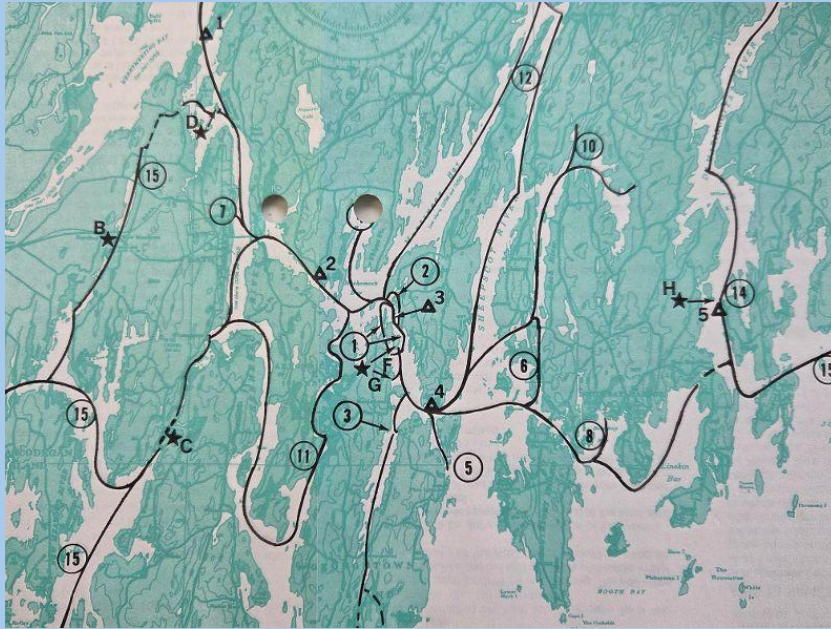


A Brief History of the Knubble Bay Camp & Beal Island Volunteer Committee

*Written by Gail Fensom for the 25th
Anniversary of the Cabin*

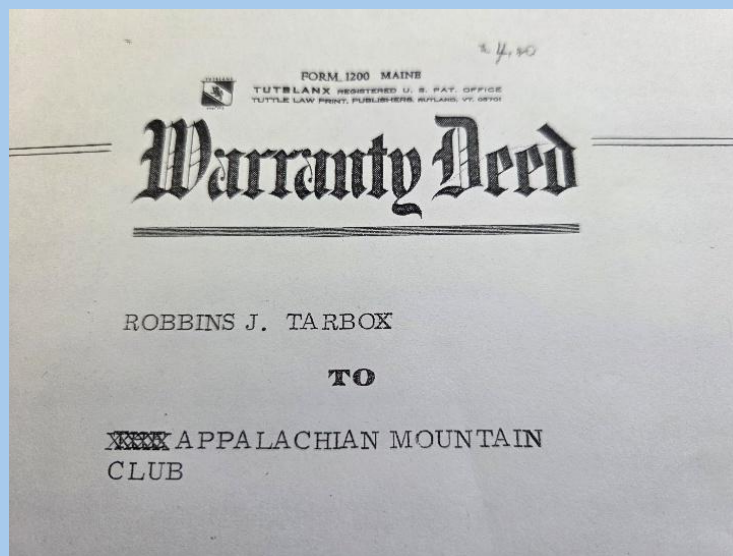


In the early 1960s folks from the Portland and Boston AMC chapters formed a Flatwater Canoeing Committee. They organized dozens of day and overnight canoe camping trips on the Maine Coast, staying on Thorne Island, Swan and Fort Islands, and Clark Cove and Sawyer Park.





The people you see here (Morrie Brinker, Betty Campbell, Mike Jacobouis, Bob Rehn, Al Layton, Peter Tandy) were in their 40s then. They had no idea that they were to become the ancestors of the Beal Island/Knubble Bay Camp Committee.



On one of those trips in 1965, some members stopped on Beal Island for lunch on their way to Five Islands and fell in love with the place. It was owned by Robbins Tarbox whose family had been in Georgetown for 100 years.

The committee set up an annual lease arrangement with him to use Beal Island for canoe trips.

But in December 1969 Tarbox got an offer from someone who wanted to establish a bird sanctuary there. He told the committee that if they didn't buy Beal in two weeks he would sell it to the birdwatcher.

At first someone on the committee offered to front the \$15,000 asking price if they could own one-third of the island. Beal's timber value alone was assessed at \$10,000. The committee alerted AMC who realized that the price was a real bargain. AMC wasn't sure

if they were going to keep it or sell it, but on December 15, 1969 they purchased Beal Island with money from AMC's Murphy Fund.

Meanwhile, AMC recognized the formation of the new Beal Island Committee, about a dozen people, who would assume operations for Beal Island.



"DOWN EAST COSTAL CANOE TRAIL

The first year they built an outhouse and worked on the two wells on the island. They planned a program of canoe camping to bring in revenue and bought canoes to rent.

By April three trails had been laid out. The Beal Island Committee put up signs saying, "No Firearms" and "Fishing Permitted," and AMC announced in the club handbook "the Club's newest property acquisition." The larger Flatwater Committee signed up for several trips on Beal. They were in business.



Problems began from the start.

Someone wrote AMC and said they were appalled that it would allow camping on a place surrounded by one of the most dangerous tidal rips on the East Coast.

Someone else said that the trails they had laid out had completely destroyed fragile club moss beds.

One rental group left a fire smoldering in the camping area. The tool shed in back of the privy was quickly stocked with stuff campers didn't want to cart home. The Georgetown selectmen were skeptical about giving a tax abatement on land that had no promise to be left in a primitive state.

Then Treasurer Morrie Brinker received a bill (\$219) for the materials to build the outhouse and informed the committee, "There is not enough money in the Beal Island Treasury to pay this."

"It was a bit of a mess," admitted the chair. "We're learning, slowly, how things should be run on the island."

AMC helped out with a small loan. The committee published thorough descriptions of surrounding water hazards and a list of "Regulations for Beal Island."



The place took off. Every weekend in the 1970 season was taken by private or committee-lead trips. Average cost for participants was \$7. By the end of the year, they had brought in \$670 and spent \$613.

They ran a “Scotch on the Rocks” weekend of Scottish dancing and a lobster bake, and held a community clam bake for residents of Georgetown to engender good feeling in the community. It was not uncommon to have 30 people for an event.

Operating programs and maintaining the island, however, posed challenges. Hundreds of man/woman hours were being spent. The committee of 13 was tired. “We need more leaders,” they complained.

“Where does AMC responsibility begin and end with an individual who doesn’t stay with the group?” one committee member asked. Poison ivy sent many folks home scratching. The committee discussed: Should the group who wrapped a canoe around a marker be responsible for its repair?

A group of girls from Camp Hiawatha in Kezar Falls spent the night at Beal without permission, and there were reports of many others, probably due to “nasty rumors” in Bath that anyone who wanted could camp on Beal for free.

Maybe committee members should take turns staying on Beal as caretakers, the committee wondered.



Nevertheless, Beal was a gem, as illustrated in this poem written in 1971:

*PLEASE TAKE ME TO BEALS ISLAND,
LEAVE ME THERE FOR A WHILE.
ALTHOUGH IT IS SECLUDED, YET
IT IS A BEAUTIFUL ISLE.*

PARK YOUR CAR AT ROBINHOOD

*AND PADDLE A BEE LINE NORTH.
THE DISTANCE IS A NAUTICAL MILE
(IT MAY BE A LITTLE SHORT).*

*JUST LEAVE ME THERE WITH NATURE,
TO WANDER ALL AROUND.
I'LL BUILD A FIRE ON THE BEACH
AND SLEEP UPON THE GROUND.*

*I BREATHE THE MORNING SCENTED BREEZE
OF SPRUCE, PINE AND FIR,
ESPECIALLY ON THE COMING TIDE
TEMPERED WITH SALTED AIR.*

*BEALS ISLAND, LIKE A WEDGE IN VEIN
HAS SPLIT THE HELLISH GATES.
WHEN THIS TRANSITION TOOK PLACE
GOD ONLY KNOWS THE DATES.*

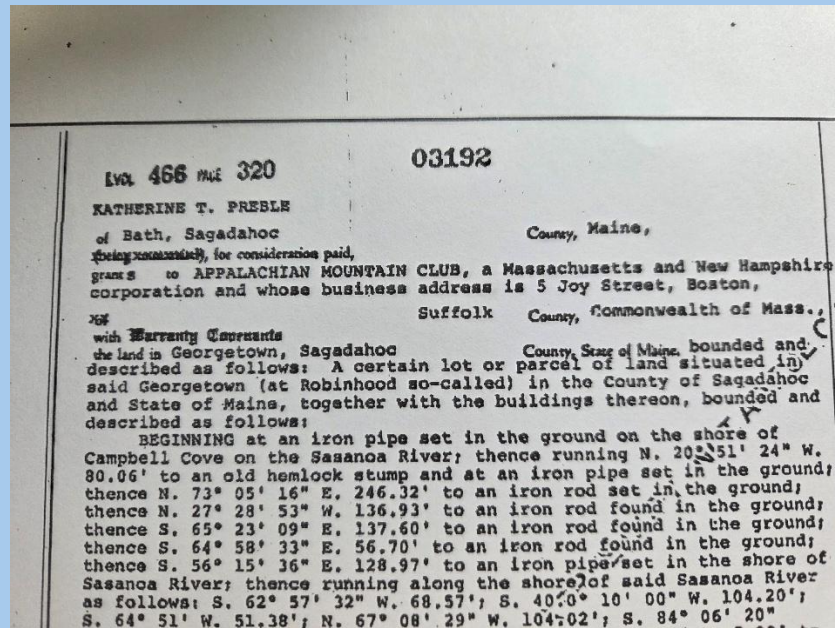
*MEMBERS SHOULD TAKE A SOLEMN PLEDGE
TO LOVE AND HAVE AND HOLD,
TO KEEP THE ISLAND PURE AND CLEAN,
AS IN THE DAYS OF OLD.*

David Alkazian wrote this poem. The committee paid him \$40 a year to park cars in his yard and launch at his mudflat in Robinhood for trips to Beal.

At a meeting in 1971, someone mused, "If for any reason his land becomes unavailable to us, we will be stuck with no convenient access to the island."

That prediction came true 4 years later when Alkazian died and his widow sold the property.

It was his death, and the parking dilemma it caused, that brought us here to this site.



The committee was desperate. It couldn't run programs on Beal without a place from which to park cars and launch.

It was this desperation that explained why they jumped on the opportunity to purchase the Preble Cottage on this site in 1977. The cost was \$21,000. Committee members put down \$1250 and AMC another \$1000. The balance would be paid in annual installments of \$4000.



As you can see, in 1977 our property extended across the ravine and mud flats to our south, now owned by the Ceceros. An old boathouse lay there.

The mud flats made it a terrible spot to launch canoes, so log-step stairs were put in near the present stairs to the beach in 1977. An ancient privy stood in the present pine grove where we now tent.

The cottage had no electricity or plumbing, and the outside well was useless because it was dry most of the time.

At first, the committee had no intention to run programs or rent the cottage, but they needed money and realized the potential of operating two facilities. They started calling themselves the Beal Island/Knubble Bay Camp Committee.

The first year rented (year-round) 104 bed nights at KBC for \$35/week.



They installed a wood stove and new stove pipe, fixed leaky windows, and painted the Preble Cottage "Old Salem Gold."

In 1978 the committee disagreed as to the electrification of KBC. Some wanted to keep it primitive, but they worked together to build a canoe rack, install bunks, a kitchen counter and sink. Renters brought in their own water, propane stoves and coolers.

They jacked up the building. One member said they needn't bother as the empty cans and liquor bottles would hold the place up. One guest looked at the crooked walls and wondered if she'd had too much to drink.



Committee members donated old pots and pans and dishes and Dave Wilson parted with his old green couch (which he said contained stories from his teen years that he dare not disclose).

1979 was an important year. AMC had serious financial problems. The committee actually loaned it \$1000 at one point.

Committee meeting minutes read, "The cost effectiveness of money invested in Beal Island and Knubble is being questioned" by AMC. AMC wanted the committee to reimburse them for the purchase of Beal Island, but \$16,000 remained to be paid for KBC, so they ignored the request.



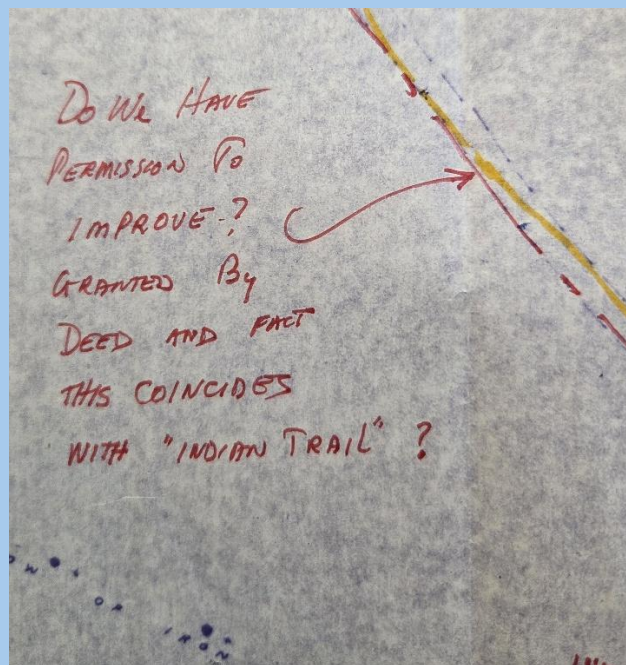
Something else occurred in 1979 that was the precursor to the "Bassette Wars." A neighbor explained that the town road, which ended at the bottom of Jewett Hill, was a real problem. The people who lived on the road, however, had devised a method to deal with it.

"It was a kind of game to see who could be 'first in' all the way with a car. Three or four of us would make it within a week of each other. When road conditions were wet, some hardy souls 'pressed onward' and made it. They left the road just a little worse than it was when they found it. The next car did the same. By the time the fourth car had made it down the Jewett Road the way was rutty and much worse than before."

Now that AMC was using the cabin, dozen of cars used the road, so the neighbors asked the committee to park at the meeting house and backpack in supplies. That wasn't sustainable, so the committee decided in 1980 to ask Georgetown to cut trees, set ditches, remove topsoil and spread gravel from the end of the town road at the bottom of the hill to the area the committee was using to park cars (250 yards).

The town manage said he'd consider it, but the committee should first get permission from the owner of the land. "This seemed simple enough," said the minutes.

As it turned out, it wasn't. For the next 16 years, the committee was embroiled in the "Bassette Wars."



When they purchased the Preble property in 1977, there was a question whether the owner had a right-of-way across Buell Bassette's land to get to the cabin. Mrs. Preble wouldn't pay the \$1000 to settle the question. AMC didn't have the money and neither did the committee, so the property was bought regardless.

For 16 years, they battled back-and-forth with Buell Bassette. Throughout, the committee was adamant that they had to get a utilities easement.

I won't go into the details. Frank can tell you anything you want to know about that.

As the years went on, the committee improved the property and brought in money.



In 1981 AMC first advertised KBC as a “self-service camp.” In 1982 the committee hoped to run winter rentals, so they studied how to purchase a wood stove that was “idiot-proof.”

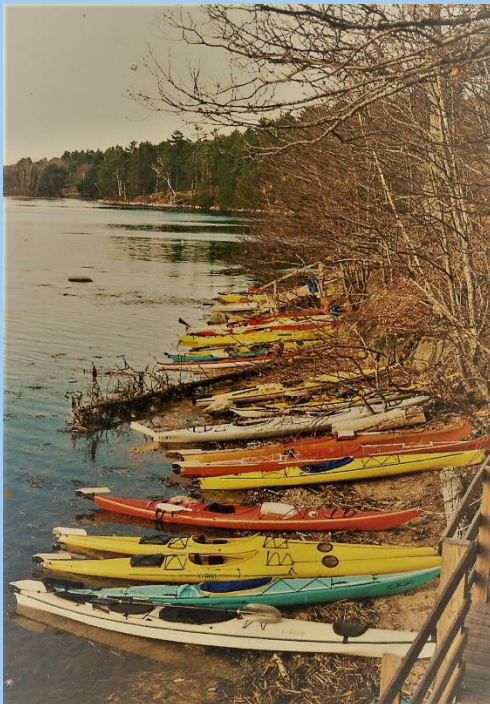
In 1984 they added a refrigerator and in 1985 they questioned whether they should install smoke alarms. Someone said that the dampness would make them go off all the time, so they decided to buy one and wait “to see what happened.”





In 1988 stairs were built down the ravine to the beach and the committee promised to design a block-and-tackle system with which to move canoes up and down. The next year they bought a propane kitchen stove and dug a new well to 125 feet.

Meanwhile, rental of Beal Island and KBC was skyrocketing.





By 1989 the committee had \$30,000 in the bank, and 10 years later, \$70,000.

More and more, they discussed replacing the old cabin. It was a money pit. Besides what some renters described as “a dead guy in the closet,” the cabin housed many more mice than people. They were operating against Maine law by not having a gray water system. Nothing could fix what was wrong with the cabin, although most found it “charming.”



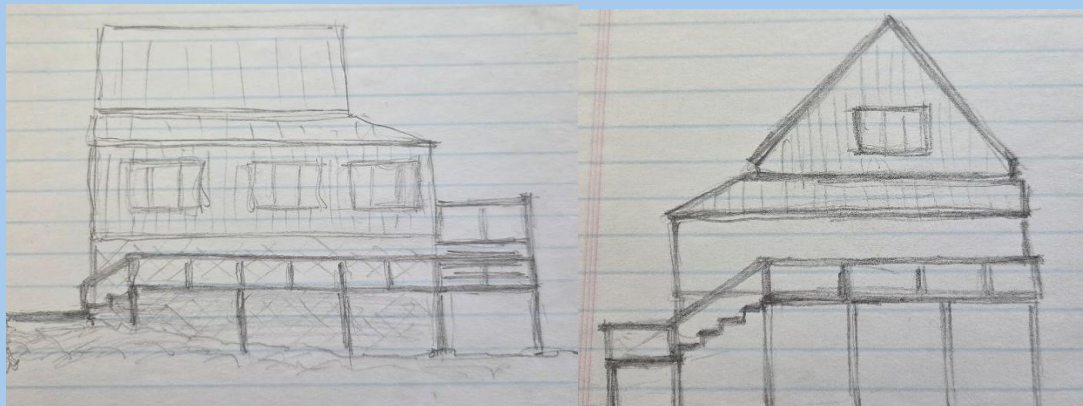
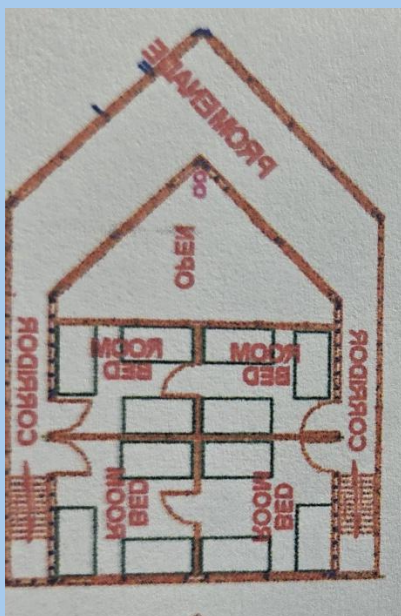
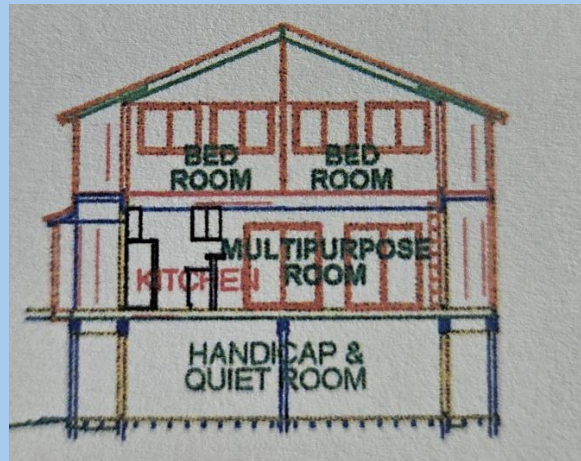
As so often happens with a group like this, the addition of new people encouraged the growth of new action. In this case, it was the addition of Al Hansen to the committee in 1988. He helped the committee replace propane lamps with solar panels (“Our observation has been that modern man is ill-equipped to cope with gas lights”).

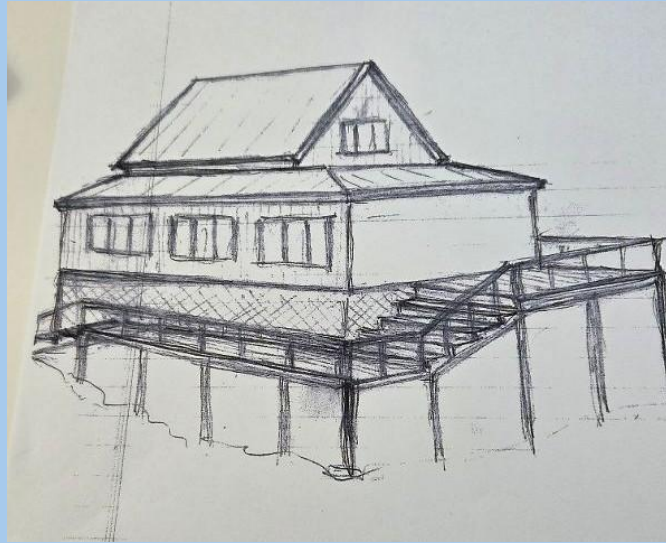
By 1990, talks were serious about building a new cabin up on the “ledge.”

But you know how we are. We talk things to death.

When I joined the committee in 1995, I noted that many members were engineer-types. My experience with engineers is that, after they have studied a problem and devised a solution, they are often hard to convince that their idea is not the best.

Here are some ideas about the new cabin.





Finally, in 2000 we decided to purchase a post-and-beam frame kit for a 24 x 24 foot structure from Shelter Institute in Woolrich for \$8000 and put up the place ourselves. We estimated the final cost at \$70,000. It would utilize solar panels, a gray water system and composting toilets.



We had the money. AMC approved the plan in May 2000 and in October a foundation was poured.

On November 25, 2000 a committee member wrote in the camp journal: "The big day has come! We have never seen Al Hansen with such a big grin nor for so long a smile. The Shelter Institute crew is here with their trailer and a big truck-mounted crane. Work started by seven a.m. and soon the floor was in, followed by the first floor timbers.

The [old] cabin was rented by a couple who were little advised of the arrival of big vehicles & 20 people, but Neal [the renter] is in apparent glory as he catwalks across the timbers. . . . As dark falls (4:25 p.m.) the las three rafters are going in."





Of course, this was just the beginning. Committee members worked steadily the next two years to make the new place rentable, and then to dismantle the Preble Cottage. We've been working ever since.











All of you here are part of the history that was laid down November 25, 2000. In your own ways you have helped build what those before us started almost 60 years ago.

I'd like to end with this. According to committee correspondence, in 2002 a committee member suggested that we place a plaque in the cabin commemorating our accomplishment. Like so many things, it never got done.

So today I would like us to hang this. It reads:

Dream – Volunteer – Build

This cabin erected by the Beal Island/Knubble Bay Camp Committee

2000

Dedicated to all those who call KBC home