
Walks in Norwell and Blue Hills to start off the new year

The North and South Rivers Watershed Association has been conducting New Year's Day walks for years, but those taking part in next Tuesday's healthy hike will find a new place to walk.

Behind the Scenes

"We have a tradition of promoting new places for people to go to walk," said Samantha Woods, the watershed protection group's executive director.

New Year's Day Walk

The event will take place on a recently constructed bike and walking trail created by the town of Norwell to provide a safe way of walking to town facilities by avoiding streets that lack sidewalks. Opened earlier this year, the trail connects the middle school to the high school.

Sponsored by the North and South Rivers Watershed Association

Norwell Middle School,
328 Main St.

The outing on the new trail will consist of a 1½-mile loop through town-owned land on a paved trail and boardwalks to Cushing Hill Road and back.

Tuesday, 1 p.m.

"They built a beautiful boardwalk over wetlands," Woods said.

Free; refreshments

Norwell has made a goal of encouraging young people and adults to get outdoors and walk more, Woods said. The new trail serves that goal, she said, because "there's no safe way to walk in town. There are no sidewalks."

www.nsrwa.org

Blue Hills First Day Hikes

A trail connecting Norwell's secondary schools was an ideal place to begin providing safe ways to get around on foot, said Town Planner Chris Dilorio.

Tuesday, 12:30 arrival, 1 p.m. start

"The only way to walk between the schools was the main road. Some kids in the middle school use the library at the high school, and some kids in the high school use the fields at the middle school... There's a lot of traffic on Main Street [Route 123]. It can be pretty dangerous," Dilorio said.

Houghton Pond parking lot,
840 Hillside St., Milton

Free soup at noon

About half the trail's length consists of boardwalk built over environmentally sensitive wetlands. The trail is eight feet wide, divided into two lanes for bicycle riders. The surface material allows moisture to pass through it and reduces run-off, Dilorio said. The construction cost of a little more than \$700,000 came from Community Preservation Act funds.

617-698-1802

For an organization with two local rivers in its name, the watershed association is leading a hike this year that doesn't go over or along any bodies of open water. But the land traversed is part of the watershed—a land area where all of the water underneath or draining off it goes to the same place—Woods said.

The New Year's Day Walk is a family-friendly activity open to the public. Refreshments will be provided after the

walkers return to their starting point.

"It's a nice tradition," Woods said. "We get a lot of people to come out, shake off the night before, and get a breath of fresh air."

The First Day Hikes in the Blue Hills Reservation are another popular regional tradition, often drawing more than 1,000 hikers in good weather to the 7,000-acre state park.

Tom Bender, park ranger in charge of what the state Department of Conservation and Recreation calls "a perfect way to jump start the new year," plans four hikes, three guided walks led by rangers and one self-guided walk. The self-guided path, around Houghton Pond, is the simplest.

Two factors can complicate preparations, Bender said — weather and the people count. The two are related. Good weather like last year's mild temperatures and clear skies brings out big numbers. Really cold weather keeps the numbers down.

"The worst thing that can happen is having snow on the date [of the walk] itself," Bender said. Snow means rangers have to get enough parking space cleared in time for the early afternoon hike.

Along with standard advice for winter hikes — dress in layers and wear sturdy shoes — Bender adds another caution: "Show up early and get a parking spot."

Hike preparations also include ordering 50 gallons of soup from donor Stop&Shop for the free cup of hot soup before step-off. This year it's chicken noodle.

With mild weather last year, about 1,000 people took part. The highest count, a decade ago, was 1,400. But even in the worst weather, the walk is a draw for many. A few years ago, with the temperature near zero, about 450 people came out to start the new year off with a walk in the woods, Bender said.

For the watershed association, Woods said mild weather last year drew more than a 100 people to the walk.

"It was nice, but it's a little alarming," Woods said. "Winter isn't what it used to be."

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