



# THE BIRCH BARK

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Rich Deering '73, Alumni & Community Director • Michael Mattson '83, Camp Director

## THE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER OF BIRCH ROCK CAMP

### REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROCK

*By Rich Deering - Alumni & Community Director '73*

**F**ifty Birch Rock Camp seasons! How lucky am I?! Seems like yesterday my 10-year-old self was rolling down the old dirt driveway, being warmly welcomed by Founders Chief and Onie Brewster, Directors Mike and Phyllis Deneault, and a phalanx of impressive counselors. Phil Goodwin, Chris Carney, Peter Haas, Hub Burton and Head Counselor David Weeks were all impeccably dressed in white pants and white and maroon-ringed BRC t-shirts. Firm handshakes. Eye-to-eye contact. Blazing smiles. Sound familiar? These were my first, indelible impressions of Birch Rock Camp in 1973. Little did I know that this was just the beginning of my lifelong camp journey.

Fast forward to 2023. Here I am, thankful to still be stewarding this great community of young gentlemen and working with an incredibly gifted team of youth professionals here on the Hillside. I am proud to promote the youth camping movement, our beloved Maine camp industry and the American Camp Association. It has been five incredible decades of camping, counseling and directing BRC, from one generation to the next.

Heading up Birch Rock has been a transformative experience for me and the camp community. With the indefatigable support of my own family, the Brewster family, our stalwart trustees, our talented staff and spectacular campers, we have achieved significant accomplishments in

the past fifty years. We've tripled our enrollment, expanded our diversity and campership giving, built new and renovated historic buildings, beautified the grounds, established an endowment, and provided an unparalleled residential camp experience for boys in Maine. Most of all, we've remained true to our core mission of championing civility and mutual support. We've succeeded in building a tight community each season by teaching one and all to *Help The Other Fellow*.

For fifty years, I've felt profoundly grateful to wake up every day and feel the pride of being a Birch Rock gentleman. As we ramp up towards our Centennial in 2026, I look forward to celebrating all things Birch Rock — the people, the history, the traditions — with each one of you!

*In the spirit of Help the Other Fellow,*



*Head Counselor Nick "Musc" Musciano and Rich Deering*



Every year as the Birch Rock summer winds to a close, camp staff has a few days to clean out the cabins and gather up the treasure trove of forgotten BRC t-shirts, Magic cards, and camping gear for Lost & Found, and prepare for the arrival of Family Campers! Families of various sizes and varying levels of familiarity with BRC head to Waterford to live the life of a Birch Rocker for a few glorious days in August. This tradition not only provides a community-building experience with adult former campers and their families, it is also an excellent way for future campers and their families to get to know Birch Rock staff, activities and traditions — as well as Jon's famous cooking!

Our family's first Family Camp experience in 2013 was just that — a chance for our 8-year-old son to check out the camp, get to know other campers and counselors and try out the fun activities. For my husband and me, it was an opportunity to get comfortable with the place and the people who would be taking care of our son for two weeks the next summer. What we didn't realize was that it was also where we would make life-long friends in the Birch Rock community! Each year (and we've attended Family Camp for 10 summers) we get to catch up with our old friends and make new ones. Our son and our daughter who attends a nearby girls camp would show us what they had learned that summer: take us sailing, show us their tennis serve, and make us a cup of pine needle tea at Campcraft.

People at home often ask why we include Family Camp in our summer plans year after year. It's easy to describe the natural beauty of the region, the joy of listening to the loons on the lake as you drift off to sleep, and the hilarity of playing Capture the Flag on the field in the evening with a group of 12-year-old boys whose skills have been honed through the camp season. It's a much needed break from our over-scheduled life at home. We can choose to sit in a chair on the deck and read a book or play card games with friends. And as I

mentioned before, there is Jon's cooking!

The summer of 2023 was another terrific Family Camp with 20 families participating. As we do every year, we created a theme for the week's activities, and this summer we chose to Celebrate the Explorer! Campers were equipped with binoculars and headlamps and encouraged to think about ways in which they could engage with the natural world. Over 70 campers ranging in age from 1 to 80 took full advantage of the Birch Rock facilities. The hardworking counselors led the younger campers in two rounds of activities each day. The Art room was popular with the younger crowd, while the older campers favored basketball and sailing. Even the rainy weather that characterized the Summer of '23 couldn't keep spirits down. The waterfront was busy each day, and campers of all ages wrapped up their days with a swim in Lake McWain, followed by Salty Snacks on the Lodge's porch.

The Lodge was hopping in the evenings with multiple card games, a long-running Magic game (I can't pretend that I understand that game), some serious jigsaw puzzling, and the enjoyable sound of a regular guitar jam session. It was a talented group of campers and staff that took to the stage for skit night with several musicians and a lot of brave improvisation. The day after skit night, families started to head home to early school starts and awaiting commitments. The excitement of a new school year is muted by the sorrow of having to leave our summer friends and Lake McWain behind.

One of the tenets of Birch Rock Camp is *Shake a Hand, Make a Friend*. Our family has been shaking hands for a decade now at BRC and our life is richer for it. As the temperature drops here in Virginia, and the leaves fall, I find myself looking forward to next August in Maine... and to Jon's Snickerdoodle cookies!

~ By Lisa Bozzelli (Cadet Quinn Castelli's mom)







I turned my eyes to the mountains overlooking the flowing river, trying to dismiss the ever growing burning sensation in my legs. Putting one foot in front of the other, it only seemed to get worse. I had done the same thing for the last four hours, and yesterday, and the day before that, and the

day before that; hiking the “Hundred Mile Wilderness” of the Appalachian Trail was beginning to feel like it would never end.

Over the first days I thought about quitting, faking sick or begging just to leave those dreaded trails. I even told my friends, “If we all agree, we can turn around right now.” But my companions remained resilient. Instead of buying into my negative energy, they made me laugh, cracking jokes about spills we took on slick boulders and our slogs through knee-high mud.

I kept going, knowing that I would be supported at every step. Slowly, I began to take some joy in my experience, realizing that I relished being outdoors with some of the closest people in my life. Instead of grimacing at every step I found myself keeping up, my spirits rising. I kept on hiking, day in and day out, and started to have fun. The physical pain no longer mattered; I pushed through.

What is more, I started to lead the group that I had previously dragged down. When a friend was flagging, I encouraged him to keep hiking with me – one step at a time. I guided the group: reading the maps, navigating our route, and keeping us on track. When I stopped for a water break, everybody stopped to drink. When I started hiking again, everyone started up.

At the end of each day, I realized that I was one step closer to the end. I focused on each stride, rather than the insurmountable challenge ahead of me.

When I finished those hundred miles, I knew some things about myself. First, that I had the inner determination to achieve any goal. And second, that people around me are influenced by my actions and attitude. When I signed up for this trip I had no idea that this hike would change me as a person. Now, these realizations have been integral to the way I approach all aspects of my life.

In my Artificial Intelligence class, I was tasked with modeling the video game Tetris. Initially, I ran into trouble as I had to determine every possible position of each piece. It felt as if I

was back on those brutal trails, that the end goal was miles away. Yet, I kept on working it out one step at a time: writing and rewriting code, consulting my teacher and classmates, and debugging infuriatingly small errors. Eventually, I finished the lab. And when I did, I felt the same flood of relief and accomplishment that I felt after those hundred miles.

I also bring that inner determination I developed on my trip to physical activities. During track races I feel tired, oxygen-deprived, and in constant pain. But I know that I can finish. In fact, I anchor my team’s relays because of my ability to push to the end. I now recognize that my mentality is picked up by younger runners. And just like on my hike, I know that if I run with a positive attitude and a smile on my face, others will follow my lead.

Every time I am faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge or problem, I think of the Maine woods. I remember how hopeless and miserable I felt at the start. I remember how I desperately wanted to go home. But most of all I remember how I worked through that pain and found a way to keep going and encourage the people around me. And that memory will guide me for the rest of my life.

*~ Aidan Singer is a freshman at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, ME.*

## JACK FLYNN DONS HIS DECADE VEST

Hailing from Cincinnati, Ohio, Jack has been a Birch Rock camper, counselor and trip leader. His passion is exploring the mountains and lakes of New England and beyond. Jack is a political science major at Colgate University; he hopes to enter law school after graduation in 2024.



## KEOKA LAKE ASSOCIATION CAMPER CUP REGATTA

"It was a lot of fun, and I felt like I was on fire when I found out I won!" exclaimed Teddy Brosnihan. This summer, Birch Rock was able to make another great showing at the Keoka Lake Association Camper Cup Regatta. Despite only getting a day or two to practice sailing a Laser, Birch Rock's lone racer Teddy Brosnihan took on the challenge. While our primary goal was to *Help the Other Fellow* and have some fun, Birch Rock's winning streak continued as Teddy brought the Camper Cup back to the Rock. Beyond his excellent performance in the regatta, Teddy's willingness to help out the other camps showcased great sportsmanship and helped strengthen our friendships within the Waterford community.

~ By Senior Counselor Jared Whichard



Camper Teddy Brosnihan and Jared Whichard



As I reflect on the variety of communities I've belonged to, hockey and soccer teams, school newspaper and volunteer groups, one stands out. The purest community I know is Birch Rock, a small boys camp in the Maine woods with the motto *Help the Other*

*Fellow*. I have been attending Birch Rock since I was nine years old, when I spent my first two weeks away from home in the Maine woods. I have joyfully returned every summer since. When I was younger, camp was a place where I could make new friends, play soccer, use a knife, build fires and have dessert at both lunch AND dinner. But as I grew older, I began to appreciate camp for different reasons.

As a younger camper, I spent my days playing sports on the field, swimming in the lake and making tea over an open fire at Campcraft. But there was one activity I dreaded — Tree

Talk. Every Sunday night, all of camp gathered down by the waterfront to discuss various topics like leadership, empathy, kindness, teamwork, etc. Every camper was expected to participate, young and old. You can see how an energetic boy may have preferred the normal evening field games like Capture the Flag or Knock Out over this reflective conversation on ethics. Over time, however, I have come to realize that this unique tradition and the camp staff that embodied these lessons have helped to make me into the community member that I am today. No matter what club or sport I'm a part of, I keep the lessons I learned at Tree Talk close to heart.

As my perspective on camp changed, so has my position. I went from being led by the funniest, coolest counselors alive, to actually being a counselor and mentor for new, younger campers. Whether I am wearing outlandish costumes to make the kids laugh on skit night, or trying to coax my camper out of his homesickness, I can draw on all of the memories from my camper years to make their experience even better than mine. That includes a healthy dose of Tree Talk, followed, thankfully, by key lime pie.

~ Quinn Castelli is a Cadet 4/C at the US Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT.



Let's commend our brave and dedicated BRC Triathletes for taking on a new course challenge just hours before departing for the season. The Triathlon began at the Leslie's swim dock across the pond with a half-mile Duck swim, followed by a 3.5 mile bike course up and down and around McWain Hill and Pride Avenue to Hidden Meadow Farm, culminating in a final foot race up steep McWain Hill Road to Birch Rock.

The whole camp turned out to cheer the competitors across the finish-line. Congratulations to Coach-Organizer Aidan Singer and our tenacious Camper-Competitors: **Chase Bassick, JC Beaver, Harry Fahey, Rowan Gallagher, Luis Galvez, Gavin Lenahan, Leland Naylor, Michael Niola, Micah Steingart and Niko Theriault!**



## MAINE WILDERNESS ADVENTURE 2023

The Birch Rock Maine Wilderness Adventurers explored the mountains, rivers, and seashores of the Pine Tree State under the masterful tutelage of Assistant Camp Director Erik Joelsson and Counselor David Colasin. A hearty congratulations to **Chase Bassick, Jamie Cluggish, Angel Flores Romero, Chad Herry, Tim Ferraina, Gavin Lenahan, Teddy McCormick and Noah Thompson** for completing the trip!

Each year a group of full-summer 15-16 year old boys emerge from the BRC Community to join MWA. The program, which runs during the second session of camp, challenges boys to backpack through some of the most difficult miles of the Appalachian Trail, canoe class III rapids on the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, rock climb in Acadia National Park and raft down class V rapids in the Penobscot River. This trip compels boys to leave their comfort zones, test their limits and work

together as a team. During these strenuous weeks, participants live out of their backpacks, carry and cook all their foods, and sleep in tents, lean-tos and hammocks each night. MWA is the most challenging adventure offered by Birch Rock Camp, and it is a rite of passage for many of our future Birch Rock leaders.





## EIGHT WHALES IN 2023

Congratulations to our phenomenal swimmers for perseverance and skill in completing Birch Rock's capstone swim — The Whale — which challenges campers to swim the circumference of McWain Pond, a distance of 5.75 miles!

**Jamie Cluggish**  
**Rainer Deise**  
**Angel Flores Romero**  
**Luis Galvez**  
**Tiernan Jones**  
**Gavin Lenahan**  
**Teddy McCormick**  
**Niko Theriault**



My Birch Rock Camp friends fell in love with my twin sister Emily when she picked me up from a long summer of swimming, climbing, and scratching mosquito bites. She loves to remind me of her popularity every year. Two years ago, she gifted me a set of customized rubber bracelets to hand out to my

friends to acknowledge her summer camp fame.

Within months of wearing this bracelet, I backpacked 100 miles of the Appalachian Trail, entered sophomore year with great friends, and my grades rose. Most importantly, around this time I genuinely became friends with my sister, instead of constantly bickering with her about, well, everything. My life was better than ever. Naturally, I associated this good fortune with the bracelet.

For about a year and a half, I didn't take the bracelet off my wrist once. I wore it during a 5.5 mile swim, to my Mimi's 75th birthday party (it didn't match my suit, according to my mom), and to bed. I didn't believe that I had the ability to manufacture my own success, and I thought that wearing the bracelet was the only way my "luck" would maintain itself. So, when the bracelet snapped one October morning before a Latin test, I freaked out. I was devastated. I even cried. In the short term, I convinced myself that I was going to fail my test, and in the long term, that my life was going to fall to pieces.

I spent the next few nights sleepless, tossing and turning over the fact that I had taken my good luck for granted. It was gone, and everything was ruined. I over-analyzed situations, telling myself

that my life was worse than before. However, the test was returned, and I aced it. If the bracelet was gone and I still got an A, then who was responsible? At this point, I began to understand that I was responsible for my own success. I have always worked hard to accomplish my goals, and I began to give myself credit for that.

Two summers ago, as a CIT at Birch Rock, I encountered a young camper with a difficult medical condition. He couldn't get wet or be very active, two things quintessential to the summer camp experience. After about a week of the same "boring" activities like art, woodshop, and nature, he came to me crying. He was upset about his limitations, and how they made him feel different. He felt like the world was against him, and it was unfair. As a nine-year-old, I can't imagine how difficult it would be to deal with this. However, he still had time left at camp, and I was determined to make it enjoyable for him. I pushed him to go for badges in the activities he could participate in. I also tried to explain to him that there was no reason that he got stuck with this condition. He didn't deserve it. I gave him special jobs like helping me give out food or bringing dishes inside. I also took him for walks and gave him a sneak peek of the kitchen. I wanted to make him feel special. Maybe even lucky.

Although I now understand that a bracelet can't control my life, luck is still a factor. I may be experiencing success in school, but I'm privileged to be given a great education. I'm thriving at camp, but only because my privilege allowed me to attend it in the first place. I've been lucky in ways that the young camper hadn't been. However, when I looked at the bracelet as the sole reason for my happiness, and when he let the misfortune of his condition get the better of him, we both failed to consider that a positive attitude can allow success in any situation. Because the camper and I took responsibility for our happiness, our lives unequivocally improved.

*- Josh Rubin is a freshman at Colby College in Waterville, ME.*



As a counselor-in-training (CIT) on an overnight hiking trip this past summer, I found myself faced with the seemingly impossible task of maintaining a safe environment for a group of rambunctious 8-year-olds in a risk-filled wilderness.

Initially, my anxiety controlled my actions and a stern talking-to was swiftly dispensed to any camper who didn't follow instructions. I quickly found, however, that this harshness only spread frustration and turmoil. As I patiently explained the justification for rules, encouraged safe practices through my own actions, and praised good behavior, the campers felt compelled to follow. I learned to monitor my emotions and lead effectively through positive reinforcement. That trip became a highlight of the summer for the kids and me.

For the last seven years, I have attended Birch Rock Camp as a camper and CIT. Being a member and leader in this community, I have embodied the camp's motto, *Help the Other Fellow*. As a CIT, I was able to spread these words in practice to new campers, reciprocating the generosity I received as a child. I have adopted Birch Rock's mantra as a guide to forming lasting relationships among my peers through shared love and respect. As a freshman at Washington University in St. Louis, I hope to pair the school motto *Per Veritatem Vis* with *Help the Other Fellow*. As a student at Wash U, I aim to serve my community with civic leadership and environmental conservation.

I share many communities: Judaism, clubs, camp and family, among others. While I love belonging to these groups, they hinge upon the need for shared aspects among their members. Whether through religion or passion, cohesion is dependent on qualities that everyone has, sometimes ones that are innate. This realization has made me cherish the unique bond I share with my summer camp, Birch Rock. No qualitative aspect unites the camp, as differences are varied and encouraged; it is simply compassion that forms the basis of the community.

The motto of Birch Rock is clear: *Help the Other Fellow*. This mantra is said frequently but is far more often put into practice. As a nervous ten-year-old first entering the camp, this generosity was an eye-opening revelation. I was welcomed by every member of the community, a lesson in how far kindness and respect go towards a group's synergy. As a counselor, I aim to provide a similar experience to every new camper. With these principles in mind, over the years I have found friends from all facets of life — from a refugee of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the son of a Coca-Cola executive. Differences in background and personality are negligible, as we form bonds based on our desire to uphold the values of Birch Rock.

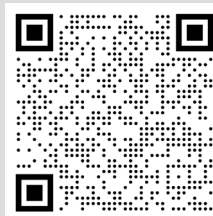
After spending multiple summers at camp, I have brought my traditions from Maine to Missouri. It was never the location that created strong solidarity at Birch Rock, but rather its ideals. I've adopted the words *Help the Other Fellow* as a guide to form lasting relationships among my peers. Birch Rock has taught me that the greatest communities are those built upon the shared love and respect of all members, as dedication must come from personal choice rather than circumstance.

*- Isaac Fenster is a freshman at Washington University in St. Louis, MO.*

## WISH LIST

*We appreciate your contributions! If you have a particular item you would like the camp to purchase for the upcoming season - here are some suggestions:*

Framed Backpacks (\$100 per)	Basketballs & Frisbees (\$25 per)
Archery Target Stands (\$200 per)	3 Four-Man Tents (\$250)
12 Dozen Tennis Balls (\$150)	Campcraft/Bushcraft Supplies (\$30 per)
New or reconditioned Laser Sailboat	Art Supplies (\$20 per)
Personal Floatation Devices (PFD) (\$25 per)	New 2-way Radios (\$300 each)
Apple Computer	



**OR** purchase something directly through our **Amazon Wishlist** - please scan our QR code using your smartphone.

***Birch Rock Camp is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation. All donations received are tax-deductible.***

Please contact us at [rich@birchrock.org](mailto:rich@birchrock.org) if you might be able to accommodate any of those wishes.

**BIRCH ROCK NOW ACCEPTS VISA/MASTERCARD and VENMO**

*Thank you!*

# BIRCH ROCK CAMP

P.O. Box 148  
Waterford, ME 04088



ACCREDITED  
CAMP

American Camping Association®



Clean & Pick Up Saturday	May 18
BRC Summer Office Opens	June 1
BRC Staff Orientation	June 16
C.I.T. Orientation	June 19
Opening - First Session / Cubs I	June 26
Cubs Camp I - End	July 6
Cubs Camp II	July 7
First Session & Cubs II - End	July 20
Opening 2nd Session	July 21
Maine Wilderness Adventure	
Cubs Camp III	
Cubs Camp III - End	August 3
BRC for Boys & MWA - End	August 13
BRC Family Camp	August 16
BRC Family Camp - End	August 20



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## It's Easy to Help BRC

- Send a tax-deductible donation to BRC.
- Promote BRC among friends, neighbors, family and colleagues.
- Refer a prospective camper to BRC by phone or email.
- Host a gathering of BRC alumni/prospects with Directors Deering and Mattson.
- Ask us about our 'Wish List' before you have your spring yard sales.
- Update your contact information via [www.birchrock.org](http://www.birchrock.org).

