

Staff Report of the Camp Property Manager
to Baltimore Yearly Meeting
David Hunter
October 2020

Here I sit, on the porch of the caretaker's cabin overlooking Catoctin Quaker Camp. Songbirds sing in the morning; cicada in the heat of the afternoon; and tree frogs in the evening hours. I hear the high pitched squeals of young ones as salamanders wriggle through their fingers at the edge of



the pond; the belly laughs of dads as they look on and the quiet conversations of the rest of the crew as they relax along the edge of the water. A range of tones and voices we don't always hear at camp. We have only had a few families visiting Catoctin at a time this summer and the intensity of the sounds and the joy is only a fraction of what we normally experienced at Camp. Twelve months ago. I would never have imagined myself where I am today. The nature of my work has changed remarkably, the work has become more and more challenging but, in many ways the joys have been multiplied as well.

As 2020 began we heard murmurings about a new virus somewhere in China but we were mainly focused on plans to get camp open for the spring and summer –assessing, repairing and replacing necessary equipment, cleaning and upgrading the facilities and their contents, getting multiple busses and vehicles ready, clearing trails and water testing in preparation for spring guests and summer camp. By the middle of March things had changed. The in-person Interim Meeting had been canceled and we were discussing contingencies for closing the office and starting to work from home. By March 13th the office was officially closed and Zoom and the telephones became the connections that held us together. It was becoming clear that the Yearly Meeting and the camps might be headed for some rocky times, but it was still difficult to imagine that the camping program would be impacted negatively. Ned Stowe had the courage to look into the abyss and explore what the future might look like if we were to face the most difficult of the possibilities that lay before us. We all owe him a debt of gratitude for the speed, agility and courage that he brought to meeting the difficult times that were to come. In encouraging us to looking at most difficult scenarios early in the spring, Ned prepared us, in practical and spiritual ways to make the difficult decisions that we faced. As we meet the fiscal and practical challenges that the future holds for us it will become clear how important Ned's work was to guiding us through.

We began discussing cash flow scenarios and budgets that lacked the revenue generated by camper fees. It quickly became clear that it would be prudent and necessary to postpone all capital improvement projects, equipment purchases and postpone any expenses related to opening camp and preparing for the upcoming season until we knew more about what the future held. Early in

May it became clear that we were not going to be able to host monthly meeting retreats, other group retreats, and run our camping program in the summer of 2020. And our minds turned towards how we could help the communities that we serve through our land, our campers, camp families and staff stay connected through the summer.

The Catoctin Quaker Campground



Immediately after making this difficult decision the Camping Program Committee and the Camp Property Management Committee began developing and implementing ideas to help campers, staff and camp families and the communities that we serve successfully negotiate the disappointment and grief associated with missing a summer at camp, as well as the retreats that our Monthly Meetings and Quaker schools enjoy annually on the land. As these plans took shape we were profoundly aware of the gaping hole the cancelation of camp for the summer of 2020 left in the Yearly Meeting budget.

I suggested that we consider opening as a campground. The Camp Property Management Committee then poured its energy into getting the property ready for families and other groups to come and enjoy some time together in these special places. We developed a proposal and secured the approval of the BYM trustees and opened the Catoctin Quaker Campground on June 30th.

Families or other groups which had isolated together were able to come to camp and rent a cabin with a fire pit, firewood, ropes to hang bear bags for food in the trees, and picnic table for 5 days and 5 nights at a time. Six of the 12 camper cabins were used with the idea of keeping our occupancy well below 50% of our normal summer capacity, following the regulations set by Maryland government. The bathhouse was the only shared space that was open and participants were asked to sanitize the areas which they had used after each visit and I conducted a thorough daily cleaning schedule that was put in place. I made sure that there were large barrels of water, firewood, a clean cabin, and ice in the freezer and some ice cream treats for purchase on the lodge porch each week. Overall, Friends and families came and enjoyed time to reconnect with the land, and in some cases time to grieve the loss of their time with friends at camp.

During the early part of the summer the cabins were rented from Tuesday until



Sunday each week (5 days and 5 nights) leaving about 48 hours between visitors. On average five of the six cabins were rented each week. Beginning on August 21st cabins were available for weekend rentals. It is also possible to add additional weekdays if friends desire. We will continue renting cabins through October 18th. Plenty of cabins are still available so join us if you can! Learn more at <https://bymcamps.org/summer-cabin-rentals/>. These rentals have generated over \$13,100.00 in revenue with minimal expenses as of the middle of September. This exceeds what we normally make in a year from rentals to groups other than our BYM camps.

Without the efforts of Many Friends...



The efforts of countless volunteers were critical to our success over the last 12 months. The Catoctin Quaker Campground would have never been able to open without the tireless efforts of many volunteers. The young adult Friends of College Park were critical to this effort as were Gloria Victor Dorr, Rick Honn, Gary Gillespie, Sarah Burr and the unstoppable Harry “Scotty” Scott. These tireless individuals not only got the camp ready for visitors, but helped me deliver and stack firewood at all of the cabins and move a freezer to an accessible location so that firewood and

ice could be provided to campers. Donation boxes were provided at each cabin in an effort to help raise additional revenue for the camps these volunteers love so deeply. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Linda Garrettson, and Lamar Mathew and Harry Scott for filling in as caretakers when I needed to be away from Catoctin.

A group of four recent Earlham graduates, two of which have been Catoctin campers and counselors, had planned a hiking trip to celebrate this milestone in their lives, but as the pandemic developed it became clear that their trip was not to be. Instead, they decided to come to Catoctin, camp out and volunteer to work on whatever needed to be done. They were at Catoctin for around 3 weeks and their efforts were critical to getting the Campground open. They also left several cords of firewood for next winter and removed lots of invasive species like multiflora rose, privet, and mile-a-minute from the woods at Catoctin. We all owe a big thank you to Jacob Honn, Jacob Cope and their Earlham pals for all that they accomplished at Catoctin this summer.

Other Work at Catoctin

In the fall of 2019 we had a wonderful Family Camp Weekend at Catoctin and one of the older cabins was removed and the site was cleared. We had hoped to replace this cabin in spring of 2020. Unfortunately, the Yearly Meeting determined that it would be necessary to cancel all capital improvement projects due to the pandemic and its impact on Yearly Meetings finances. We look forward to replacing this cabin before the 2021 camping season.



Other work that has been postponed includes replacing the roof on the crafts shelter and dining hall, and building a tool shed near the caretaker's cabin for safe storage of tools during the summer season at Catoctin.

Early in March we had two volunteer days when friends gathered to clear paths to the blight resistant American Chestnuts planted in 2017 and to replace several which had died. Several of these chestnuts are thriving and we look forward to the day when the once and future king of the forest returns to the

forest canopy at Catoctin. Mike Kay, county forester for Frederick, gave us accolades for the way that our forest has been managed overall, which put a spring in my step as it has been a labor of love and hard work. Groups that stay at Catoctin or just visit for the day frequently ask for tours of the land where I point out the endangered species of plants that are protected here, the various regenerative management projects, and many enjoy touring the bathhouse and seeing how the composting toilets work!

Through the fall and winter volunteers worked to remove invasive species near the entrance at Catoctin and in other locations around the camp. In April the seedlings we ordered to plant in these areas arrived right on schedule. Unfortunately the volunteers to plant them did not due to the pandemic and the cancelation of Yearly Meeting programs. Harry Scott, Jesse Miller and I took on the task of planting nearly 175 trees. They eventually were all planted and are now occupying the space once inhabited by invasive species such as multiflora rose, and privet as well as Ash trees killed by the invasive emerald ash borer. It feels great to know that gnarly, thorny weeds that contribute little to the areas ecology and wildlife are being replaced with beautiful native species that will help wildlife thrive.



Opequon

We continue to maintain the property at Opequon but we do so with the understanding that we may not be there in the long term. The Pidgeons who own the property have no interest in conveying the property to the Yearly Meeting and there are several significant problems with

running a camp at that site. We continue to do the work necessary to maintain a safe and comfortable camp, but we no longer have plans for significant improvements there.

The shower trailer and the improvements to the bathhouses undertaken before the 2019 camping season have worked out wonderfully. This spring we painted the floors in the bathhouses to complete the project and the bathhouses are looking better than they ever have.

Shiloh

Shiloh continues to thrive but the camp misses all the visitors that might have come this spring, summer and fall. In the fall of 2019 we removed one of the camper cabins in anticipation of replacing it in the spring of 2020. Unfortunately, that project had to be postponed due to financial difficulties caused by the pandemic.

Summer storms were severe this year at Shiloh and the driveways sustained some damage. Because of the pandemic we have postponed the majority of the needed repairs until 2021.

Other projects which we had planned for Shiloh such as digging a second well for water and replacing the art pavilion have been postponed until the Yearly Meetings financial position is resolved.

I urge the Camp Property Management Committee to explore various ways to offer the opportunity to the communities around Charlottesville and Harrisonburg to explore and enjoy Shiloh. The research that I've done indicates that it could be a wonderful site for retreat groups from the local universities, a research area for various university departments to study the waterways and the flora and fauna, and a gathering place for family celebrations. It is worth building relationships with groups in the Charlottesville and Harrisonburg areas to begin welcoming folks to Shiloh.

Equipment and Vehicles

Before the pandemic began putting pressure on the Yearly Meetings finances we were able to purchase two pickup trucks for the camps as well as a small tractor to be used at Catoctin. These acquisitions have worked out wonderfully. One of the pickups was donated by a local contracting company. We knew that it would need extensive work before it would be useful but the work was completed in January and the truck has proven to be a very efficient use of our funds.



The tractor that was purchased for use at Catoctin has proven to be an invaluable acquisition. It has a small bucket loader and a mowing deck. It was used extensively to get camp set up as a campground and has been effective at mowing the grass, gathering firewood, removing invasive species, moving materials and in cleaning

up neglected areas around camp. What a remarkable difference a reliable piece of equipment can make!

Before the 2021 camping season we will have buses and vans to replace and a mower will be needed at Shiloh. There will also be several pieces of kitchen equipment that need replacing at all of the camps.

Future Needs

Because of the Yearly Meetings financial position due to the pandemic many projects at the camps were postponed and the purchase of equipment that would have been needed in 2020 was delayed. In many cases the delay in meeting these expenses will be compounded in 2021 assuming we will be able to have camp. Funding this work and these equipment purchases will require more resources than we had planned on in the spring of 2021. These needs will present us with a formidable fundraising challenge, but it is a task that we can accomplish together.

Caretakers

Mike Reed continues to take meticulous care of our property at Shiloh. It is a wonderful boon to us all to have such a competent, capable and diligent resource at Shiloh!

Jesse Miller has served as a warm and welcoming presence at Catoctin since the spring of 2016. Unfortunately, this year Jesse decided that it was time for him to put aside his caretaker responsibilities. We feel fortunate that he will continue as a director at Opequon Quaker Camp.

A search committee was formed to look for a new caretaker at Catoctin and interviews were conducted. However, before a new caretaker had been hired the pandemic made it necessary for us to postpone any new hires until at least 2021. We found ourselves without a caretaker for Catoctin in the middle of April without and prospect of hiring a new one. The pandemic created a great deal of extra traffic on the mountain where Catoctin is located and it did not seem wise to have the property unattended. My wife, JoAnn, and I decided that we would volunteer to live at Catoctin late in May. We have enjoyed living here ever since, and it can be difficult to balance the maintenance needs here at Catoctin with my other responsibilities as Camp Property Manager. DOT certification for busses, zoning paperwork filing, managing the rental calendars, CPMC support have all proven challenging. It is not clear yet how long we will be able to continue living on the mountain, and it may be necessary to seek volunteers to live at Catoctin for the last few months of 2020 until a caretaker can be hired. I look forward to hiring a multi-skilled, energetic and creative caretaker that will be able to maintain and improve the land and facilities, as well as offer meaningful experiences while folks visit this sacred land.

Committee work

I remain grateful for all of the work that members of the Camp Property Management Committee do to keep the properties prepared for use throughout the seasons and the efforts we make to ensure that they are healthy, thriving natural places protected from the development and sprawl that presses on all sides. This year we have found ourselves a little short of members able to be active in the work of the committee. The new slate of committee members approved an Annual Session this summer gives us great hope. Several empty slots have been filled and we look forward to

being joined by several young adult Friends as well as becoming reunited with some past members returning to the committee. This will be a challenging year for the CPMC but we are well equipped with able Friends willing and ready to meet the challenges we face in the months to come.

Our clerk of many years will rotate off the committee and our new clerk has not yet presented themselves. However, we are confident that in the next few weeks the Spirit will prompt our new clerk to step forward. We all feel a profound debt of gratitude to Gloria Victor Dorr for her

many years of service as clerk of our committee. She has worked hard and with great success to increase volunteer participation at Family Camp Weekends and on the camp properties in general. She will be missed by us all.

Conclusion

It has been a bit of an odd summer to be at camp. Black snakes sun themselves in the entryway to the dining hall where feet, big and small, would normally drive them deep into the undergrowth. Deer graze in the fields and around the pond where most summers they would fear to tread. Black Bears wander through camp ever closer to the dumpster and the wonders within. Wildflowers like Rattlesnake Plantain, Monkeyflower, Nipplewort and Partridge Pea grow in the foot paths where they would normally not have the opportunity to blossom. The spots on the fields that are normally worn down to dirt by camper's feet are green with grass. The camp is overrun with cottontail rabbits that have not dared to venture out into the open during July and August for more than 60 years. Perhaps this summer was a well-earned year of rest and renewal for the lands the Yearly Meeting stewards. Nevertheless, one can sense these places longing to be filled with peals of laughter and joyful noise that weave their way through the trees and songs from the fire circle that animate the night. The Spirit of camp rests in the wood and in the streams and under the rocks. Let us pray that we will all be here next summer to wake the Spirit and live in its presence again.

With gratitude,

David Hunter
Camp Property Manager
Baltimore Yearly Meeting

