

West Stockbridge Ponds by Canoe

By Doane Perry and Ken Kelly

Photos by Ken Kelly

West Stockbridge has four beautiful ponds interconnected by flat water streams that are a pleasure to canoe, although paddlers are cautioned that the streams may not be navigable later in the year when water levels drop. But the water level was perfect in late April. After the short carry from the parking lot, Ken Kelly and I put his canoe into Cranberry Pond from the Still Pond access on Route 41 across from the West Stockbridge Cemetery. This is part of the Flat Brook Wildlife Management Area, protected by Mass Wildlife with help from the Berkshire Natural Resources Council.

I took the bow on the way out, although we traded positions for the return trip. We waved to the fellow fishing for smallmouth bass from the shore and paddled to the southwest corner of Cranberry, where we entered the stream leading to Crane Lake. We circled the lake, past Crane Lake Camp and the ominously labeled Bat Cave dry culvert that led under the Mass Turnpike. From Crane Lake, we took another stream east toward Shaker Mill Pond. The high water helped carry us leisurely along past beaver lodges as numerous redwing blackbirds, ducks, and geese greeted our passing with alarm. Beaver slapped their tails on the water to protest our incursion.

At the bridge under Route 41 by the Mill Pond Trailer Park, we had to crawl down into the bottom of the canoe to pass under the bridge. We paddled north to a beaver dam, where we portaged onto the higher waters of Mud Ponds. The Mud Ponds are bordered by the cemeteries up a steep bluff on the west; a few houses with docks and kayaks dot the eastern shore. To the north extend impenetrable marshes, also heavy with bird life.

As we paddled back into Shaker Mill Pond, our progress south to the dam and bridge over the waterfall was blocked by a large tree that had collapsed into the pond from the shore of the trailer park. Turning around, we retraced our route, having to push our way upstream by hand on the overhead girders under the Route 41 bridge. The birds called and flew, and the beavers slapped at us all over again. The shore fisherman was still working his way around Cranberry Pond. As we loaded the canoe onto the car, we spotted a ruffed grouse rummaging in the leaves just a few yards away, unconcerned about our proximity. Seasoned birders told us later that he was probably so hopped up on testosterone with the breeding season that he could have cared less about us. But it made a terrific finish to a pristine local float trip!

[Editor's note: Ken Kelly is a retired college administrator & President of the Richmond Pond Association.]