



The Cachalotter

News, Information, and Memories by and for the Members of the Camp Cachalot Alumni Association

Anniversaries Galore

This Summer We Celebrate our 10th Homecoming, 5th Wall of Fame Class, and 50 Years Since "The Fire"

Hard to believe that it's already been 10 years, but it has. On Saturday, July 12th, from noon until 5PM, we'll be holding our 10th annual Homecoming out at Cachalot. The day will begin at noon, with a cookout down by the pine grove across from Tom Cullen Field. As usual, you'll have some time to catch up with old friends and swap some camp stories over lunch. At around 1:00PM, after you've had a chance to eat, we'll have a quick update on what's been going on with the Association and some plans for the future. At 1:30pm, we'll move over to the Bill Joyce Memorial Flag Field for this year's Wall of Fame Induction Ceremony, and finally over to the waterfront to dedicate and launch a fleet of new kayaks. Once the program for the day has concluded, Cachalot will remain open until 5:00PM, to give you more time to catch up with other alums, get in a little fishing, check out the newly-completed renovation of the dining hall, or pay a visit to one of your favorite spots in camp.

Homecoming 2014 and Wall of Fame Induction

Saturday, July 12th, 2014
12:00PM through 5:00PM

Cachalot Scout Reservation
Plymouth, Massachusetts

Free admission for
members and non-members

\$5 suggested donation for lunch

Send email to
homecoming@cachalotalumni.org
or visit
www.cachalotalumni.org
for more info or to RSVP.

Our 2014 Honorees

Our fifth class of Wall of Fame inductees consists of a long-time volunteer and patriarch of a local Scouting family, a former Camping and Properties Committee chairman who was very important to the early post-fire restoration effort, and a member of the Council's Conservation and Restoration committees who had a significant impact on the restoration of Cachalot.



John B. Humphreys served as the Camping and Activities Committee Chairman for the Cachalot Council during one of the most stressful and challenging periods in Cachalot's history, from 1958 through 1966. John was an extremely dedicated and resilient man, and his name was synonymous with the restoration efforts during the period following the fire of 1964.



Dura Higgins was a 33 year volunteer at Cachalot, right up to his passing in 1987. Over that time, he made numerous and varied contributions to camp, pitching in wherever and whenever he could be helpful.

He spent many hours in conservation work at camp: cutting and maintaining nature trails, cleaning streams and beaches, clearing campsites and roads, and planting innumerable trees in the restoration effort after the fire of 1964 and long after.



Edwin Spencer was deeply involved with environmental efforts at Cachalot before, and especially after, the 1964 fire, and was an important figure in the restoration of Cachalot. After the fire, Mr. Spencer was the Council's Conservation Chairman and a member of the Restoration Committee. His work led to the Council receiving a national Conservation Award from the USDA.

Dedication of Kayak Fleet

At the beginning of our program year, the camp director approached us with a request to help expand the new, popular kayaking program at Cachalot, which didn't have nearly enough equipment to keep up with demand. We announced our project fund drive in our fall *Cachalotter* issue, and we're very pleased to be able to provide seven new kayaks, with paddles and PFDs, that will be used on the waterfront this summer.

These boats were made possible by a generous donation to the project fund by Daryl and Nancy Sylvia, in memory of their son, Jeffrey (see our *In Memoriam* section on page 8). To honor Jeff's memory, we'll be holding a "blessing of the boats" to formally dedicate them, and giving them a ceremonial launch as part of our Homecoming events. We hope that those who knew Jeff will be able to attend as we launch this new fleet in his memory.

Homecoming Details

Homecoming 2014 is a free event for members and non-members alike. Lunch is optional, with a suggested donation of \$5 to help us defray the cost.

The Wall of Fame dedication and induction ceremony will begin at or soon after 1:30PM, in the Bill Joyce Memorial Flag Field. While we'll have some seating set aside for our honorees, if you'd like to be able to sit down during the ceremony we strongly suggest bringing along a camp chair for yourself. We expect the ceremony to take about an hour. After the induction, we will be moving to the waterfront on Five Mile Pond for a brief ceremony to dedicate and launch the new fleet of kayaks. Camp will remain open until 5:00PM, for those who want to visit some of their own haunts, check out the Dining Hall renovations, or just relax.

We hope to see you there! 🐾

The Cachaletter

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The Cachaletter is the newsletter of the Camp Cachalot Alumni Association. It is published twice annually: once in the spring and once in the fall, by the Communications Committee.

Questions or other feedback related to *The Cachaletter* can be sent via email to cachaletter@cachalotalumni.org.

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Dennis J. Wilkinson, II

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The Camp Cachalot Alumni Association

The Camp Cachalot Alumni Association was founded in 2004 with the express purpose of supporting Camp Cachalot and being a social organization for the extended family of the Camp. Anyone who has ever had any involvement with Camp Cachalot, the former Moby Dick Council, or any of the predecessor camps or Councils is eligible for membership. It is a not-for-profit organization operated under the auspices of the Narragansett Council, Boy Scouts of America.

Our membership year runs from July 1st through June 30th, and all membership fees contribute directly to our endowment fund, the proceeds of which go directly towards the support of Camp Cachalot.

More information about the Alumni Association, including membership forms, back issues of *The Cachaletter*, Camp history, and online discussion forums, can be found online at our web site:

<http://www.cachalotalumni.org/>

We can also be reached via US Mail at the following address:

Camp Cachalot Alumni Association
c/o Narragansett Council, BSA
P.O. Box 14777
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The Fire and the Pitch Pine

Brian Bastarache, Association Chairman

We call it The Fire. It is a memory for some. To others, like me, it is a legend we have heard told for most of our lives. The Fire is certainly the biggest "character" in the Cachalot mythology; an event so great that it shaped the very land we love. It was 50 years ago this spring that The Fire consumed most of Cachalot. Its legacy can be seen all over the camp and within those that love it. Its legacy can be read in the Cachalot forest we call Pine Barrens.

The land that we know Cachalot had burned many times before The Fire on May 22, 1964. Cachalot lies in the middle of the second largest unbroken and undeveloped tract of Pine Barrens in the world and the largest in New England. Pine Barrens are actually a collection of associated ecosystems that occur on sandy soils deposited by glaciers that scrubbed across northern North America 10,000 years ago. This makes the Pine Barrens of the Northeast very, very young (for a forest). The Pitch Pine is dominant tree in, and icon of the Pine Barrens.

The extremely sandy soils are acidic, nutrient-poor, and predisposed to drought and therefore these dry, sunbaked forests are prone to fire. The Pitch Pine and other plants that have come to define these ecosystems have had to adapt to adverse these conditions. Many have responded by producing oils (e.g., bay berry) or resins (e.g., pitch pine) that cause them to burst into flames when set to fire. We have all seen what happens to a green Pitch Pine bough thrown into a Cachalot camp fire. Why would a plant living in a hot, dry site that is prone to burn evolve to be more flammable?

Pitch Pines cannot stop the wildfires, nor can they run from them. These plants have evolved an alternate solution and burst into flames when the inevitable fire comes to them. Their flammable leaves burn at such low temperatures that the fire often sweeps past them. Often only

Pitch Pines have evolved to use the action and fury of fire to their advantage

the leaves and twigs are lost. These will be quickly regrown after the fire. Pitch Pines are protected by thick, plate-like bark, though which needles will sprout if the branches burn. Recently denuded tree trunks are soon fuzzy with green needles. Photosynthesis, and life, carries on. Only in the hottest fires will more extensive damage occur to the barrens plants, but they have a response to such hellfire.

Many of the barrens plants reproduce most vigorously and effectively after a fire. Sunlight easily reaches the ground after a fire has burned away the vegetation and the resulting ash offers nutrient-rich fertilizer for tender seedlings. The blackened aftermath of a fire transforms into a lush, diverse, green oasis. Fire also eliminates the competition from invading species, such as White Pine. These invaders would eventually turn the Pine Barrens into something else. The Pitch Pines and other barrens plants not only thrive; but use the flames to sustain their unique community.

How Can You Be Like a Pitch Pine?

Commit to Cachalot: Declare your support for Cachalot with your Camp Cachalot Alumni Association (CCAA) membership. Support the council's efforts at Cachalot. Attend events at camp. Have you seen the remodeled dining room in the Dining Hall? Send an email or note to the council to tell them how nice it looks. (Never underestimate the power of a compliment about a job well done.)

Work Diligently: Attend CCAA events. Encourage units and youth to attend summer camp at Cachalot and use its facilities in the off-season. Don't forget about venturers and Venture Crews. Attend CCAA Beaver Day events. Volunteer to be a committee member (e.g. CCAA Events Committee).


Plan for the Future: The CCAA endowment is the lifeblood of the association. All of the money spent from the CCAA accounts is spent on camp, camp staff scholarships, and camp-related events (e.g. Homecoming). Donate to the Association project account to facilitate short-term projects and/or donate to the association endowment to support Cachalot in perpetuity. Include the Camp Cachalot Alumni Association in your estate.

"Fighting fire with fire" means something completely different to a Pitch Pine. These plants have adapted to an environment with conditions that would kill the average pansy. A Pitch Pine does not yell louder or hit harder when fighting fire with fire. A Pitch Pine uses its strengths to endure. A Pitch Pine finds the benefits of a would-be tragedy to achieve success in the face of disaster. Pitch Pines have evolved to use the action and fury of fire to their advantage and today cover the sandy hills and support unique communities of animals found nowhere else in Massachusetts, New England, and some cases, the world. What can we learn from The Fire and the Pitch Pines?

Can we learn to thrive in what others perceive to be hardships, or even disaster? Can we learn to exploit perceived disasters to generate opportunities and success? Decades ago visionaries wandered into the Plymouth Pine Barrens. They envisioned a camp in the scrub and they created Cachalot. Fifty years ago decades of hard work was turned to ash in a matter of days. Yet, just as the Pitch Pine seedlings, Cachalot rose from the ashes.

Two things make Cachalot a magical place: the beautiful and unique ecosystem that is home to rare species, and the thousands of scouts and scouters who have learned, experience, and made memories there. The Cachalot Wall of Fame honors those that have given us so much at Cachalot. It honors those that taught and/or helped make the learning possible. But it seems that even the plants of Cachalot have something to teach us. A Pitch Pine fights fire with fire in its own way. Cachalot will again face "flames" in the future.

Today Cachalot has an ally that was did not exist in 1964: The Camp Cachalot Alumni Association. Now at more than 115 registered members, the association keeps growing and getting stronger. With our roots dug deeply into the sand we will continue to grow and support Cachalot. We will help it grow. If needed, the association will be here to help it sprout from the "ashes" once again if we remain steadfast in our commitment, work diligently, and plan for the future.

If we learn from The Fire and Pitch Pines, that is. 



A fire burns near Cachalot in May of 1970, seen from the construction site of the Ranger's Residence. (Photo courtesy of the family of Armand Guilmette)

Upcoming Events and Important Dates

July 12th, 2014, 12:00PM - 5:00PM
Homecoming 2014 and
Wall of Fame Induction Ceremony
Cachalot Scout Reservation
Plymouth, MA

August 29th - September 1st, 2014
CCAA Family Camping Weekend
Cachalot Scout Reservation
Plymouth, MA

Executive Committee and Other e-Mail Contacts

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Fifty Years Since "The Big Fire" of 1964

What Did (and Didn't) Happen When Cachalot Caught Fire

We've talked about "The Big Fire" in the *Cachaletter* before, but in light of the fiftieth anniversary of the fire, and some new records that have come our way recently, it seemed like a good time to revisit it.

The fire swept through nearly all of camp, triggering the evacuation of hundreds of Scouts attending their district Camporees and causing substantial damage. In the time since, much has been said about the results of the fire, and like just about any historic event, the further removed we've gotten from the event, as stories are told and retold, the stories become larger than life, tales become exaggerated, and the perception of the event becomes distorted. In our role of trying to preserve the history and traditions of Cachalot, making an accurate record of the fire and its aftermath is of utmost importance to us.

On the following pages, we'll show you some photos from immediately after the fire, and put on our myth-busting hats for a little "Q&A" on the fire.



The burned-out area pictured here was still burning five days after the fire.



Remains of the original Cook's Cabin.



Remains of "Guilmette's Palace"



Remains of the dining hall latrine.



Burned trees in the parking area.



Ruins of the Quonset Hut.



Ruins of the Quonset Hut. The building had been used to store fuel, and exploded.



Heavily-damaged camp Jeep, which had been garaged near the Quonset Hut.



One of the many burned areas at Cachalot.



Contents of the program shelter, which was completely destroyed.



A few shelves were some of the few pieces of the commissary left after the fire.

Beginning To Rebuild

Cleanup, Construction, and Restoration



The new Trading Post being framed up, 1964.



Camp tractor driving through a burned-out area during reforestation efforts, 1966.



More progress on the new Trading Post, late 1964.



Camp tractor driving through a burned-out area during reforestation efforts, 1966.



The new Trading Post approaches completion, late 1964.



The newly-reconstructed Cooks Cabin, 1966.

Fact, Fiction, FAQs

Lets address a few of the more common questions and misconceptions about the fire.

What caused the fire? Contemporary newspaper reports were somewhat contradictory. There were clear indications of arson (evidence of lit cigarettes tied to books of matches and thrown into underbrush in Myles Standish State Forest), but there was also a large independent fire in Carver that the fires lit by arson merged with to become the fire that hit camp. It's impossible to know how much arson was a contributing factor, but it did contribute. Reviews of later news coverage so far fails to turn up any reports of arrests.

Did the fire cause any deaths? Fortunately, no, although there were a number of minor injuries such as cuts, burns, and smoke inhalation reported by the folks who fought the fire.

My ankles get dirty because of the carbon from the fire, right? Camp's water is filtered by the same carbon, too. Almost certainly not, on both counts, or, at least, not solely from the fire. Cachalot is in a pine barren, and pine barrens will have long histories with fire. The carbon in the sand around camp that stains your socks isn't just carbon, but also other organic material, and whatever carbon is there isn't the result of a single fire. Since the kettle ponds at camp are spring-fed, that material also isn't acting as a natural filter, as many assume.

What buildings were destroyed by the fire? Fewer than people (at least those who weren't around in 1964) might expect. The fire destroyed multiple latrines, the program shelter, commissary, the original cooks cabin, and the Quonset hut used as a maintenance building. The dining hall, health lodge, waterfront tower, Phillips House, original Trading Post (the "Geedunk" or "Commissioner's Corner" building today, depending on who you're asking) and 21 Club all survived. Most of the other buildings at camp weren't even built until after the fire, and most of those were made possible by the capital campaign that raised money for the restoration.

Outside of camp however, the fire destroyed over 50 cottages at Charge Pond, in Shangri-La, and at White Island Shores, along with several pieces of fire fighting equipment, including an entire engine from the town of Hansen.

You can still see the impact of the fire in the size of the trees at camp. This was true, perhaps until the mid 1980s, and in recent years this question doesn't come up quite as often as it did even five or ten years ago. If you look at historic pre-fire photos, you'll find that the forest in the 1950s actually looked quite a bit smaller and thinner than the modern forest at Cachalot, which is probably in its best shape since Cachalot opened in 1946.



Surveying an area for replanting, 1966.



Scouts move a tree to be planted during a Restoration camporee, 1972.



An Army stake-bed truck hauling trees during a Restoration event, 1972.

In Memoriam



Jeffrey S. Sylvia, 46, of Dartmouth died December 19, 2013 at St. Luke's Hospital after a long battle with kidney disease.

Born in New Bedford, the son of Daryl R. and Nancy J. (Sylvia) Sylvia, he lived in New Bedford before moving to Dartmouth 20 years ago.

Jeffrey grew up in Troop 46 New Bedford, and continued to volunteer as an adult with both Troop 46 and Troop 1 in New Bedford. He served on Cachalot's summer camp staff on multiple occasions. He was also a member of the Kiwanis Club of New Bedford. Jeffrey enjoyed model trains.

Survivors include his parents; a sister, Gina Fortin and her husband Jason of New Bedford; 2 nieces, Isabella and Baileigh; his paternal grandmother, Florabell (Vargas) Sylvia of New Bedford; and 2 aunts, Donna Fernandes and Susan Sylvia, both of New Bedford. 🇺🇸

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Interior view of the renovated dining hall, including the new tile floor, before moving the tables back in for the summer.
(Photo courtesy Karrie Dumais)

