

Slough Pond Sojourn

It's on your bucket list, isn't it? Swimming across Slough Pond, I mean.

For many years, I had heard it whispered by local residents that Slough Pond is the best swimming water in Brewster—clean, warm, nice bottom, just the right size for a lap over and back. But like favorite fishing or clamming spots, it is a closely-guarded secret. In fact, when I finally showed up this summer and asked a swimmer if this was the best pond in Brewster for swimming, she put her forefinger to her lips and said “Shhh.”

But for those in the know (and now, alas, that means all of you), Slough is for the swimming. You don't go there to spend the day—there isn't much room onshore and not much else to do. You go for a quick cooling dip or to swim laps for exercise. Swim or float, but it's the water that is the attraction.

According to the 2003 Cape Cod Pond and Lake Atlas by the Cape Cod Commission, Slough Pond is one of the cleanest ponds in Brewster. Its 2001 sampling showed no impact (as yet) by nitrogen and phosphorus, the twin nutrients that cause algae blooms in most ponds, resulting from too many septic systems in a pond's watershed. Slough Pond had the best clarity of any Brewster pond.

In the 2011 Brewster Water Resources Management Plan, Slough Pond was one of only five ponds in Brewster that were considered “high-quality” (Greenland, Higgins, Little Cliff, Sheep and Slough Ponds). There are relatively few homes within the Slough Pond watershed; the biggest threat from nutrients entering the pond may be from road runoff on Slough Road itself, though the Town has



installed several drains on the sloping road. The Brewster Conservation Trust owns three parcels totaling two acres in the Slough Swamp, an overgrown cranberry bog across the street.

But back to our bucket list swim. You descend the roughly-split granite steps installed within this century by the Town at the one public landing. The last step is under water—it is a high-water year. Two pumpkinseed fish (with the big black spot behind the gills) fin across the golden sand to greet you in their domain. A lone swimmer has headed out across the pond, expert at the crawl stroke. You wonder if she is going to make laps. You plunge in yourself, completely invigorated on the hot July afternoon. You notice the warmer water within six inches of the surface. You know the depth of the pond is only 20 feet, making it hard to generate a truly cold bottom.

You take your time making your way across the pond. You stop for a breather halfway across. There are only a handful of small cottages on the north side of the pond, a few simple docks with non-motorized craft—Sunfish and canoes. The beach at the far end of the Pond suddenly fills with campers at Camp Mitton—a new activity time must have begun. The camp serves under-privileged youth from the Boston area.



You take another breather (you aren't used to pond laps!) on the far shore, resting on a 2.3-acre parcel donated to the BCT in 2006, the only significant part of the shore that has been

preserved. You are glad that donors still donate land and that BCT is there to safeguard it for all time.

Upon your return to the town landing (“beach” being too glorified a term, more like a road shoulder where you can spread a towel), you notice that the clientele has already turned over. A new set of swimmers has taken the place of the ones there when you left. You ask a man with a fishing rod what he hopes to take. “Well, the pond used to be full of largemouth bass, good size, 5-pounders, but there has been a lot of pressure of late. I think some fishermen are transplanting these fish to other ponds too. You can catch a northern pike. And some perch with bait. There is a deep spot between the lily pads over there that used to be good; the fish would cruise through that channel.”

There are many casual joys to be found on a Cape Cod summer day. Swim out to the middle of Slough Pond, tread slowly and spin around, taking in the green shore and the blue water. You could now strike it off your bucket list, but you won’t. Because it will stay on it and you will come again.



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