

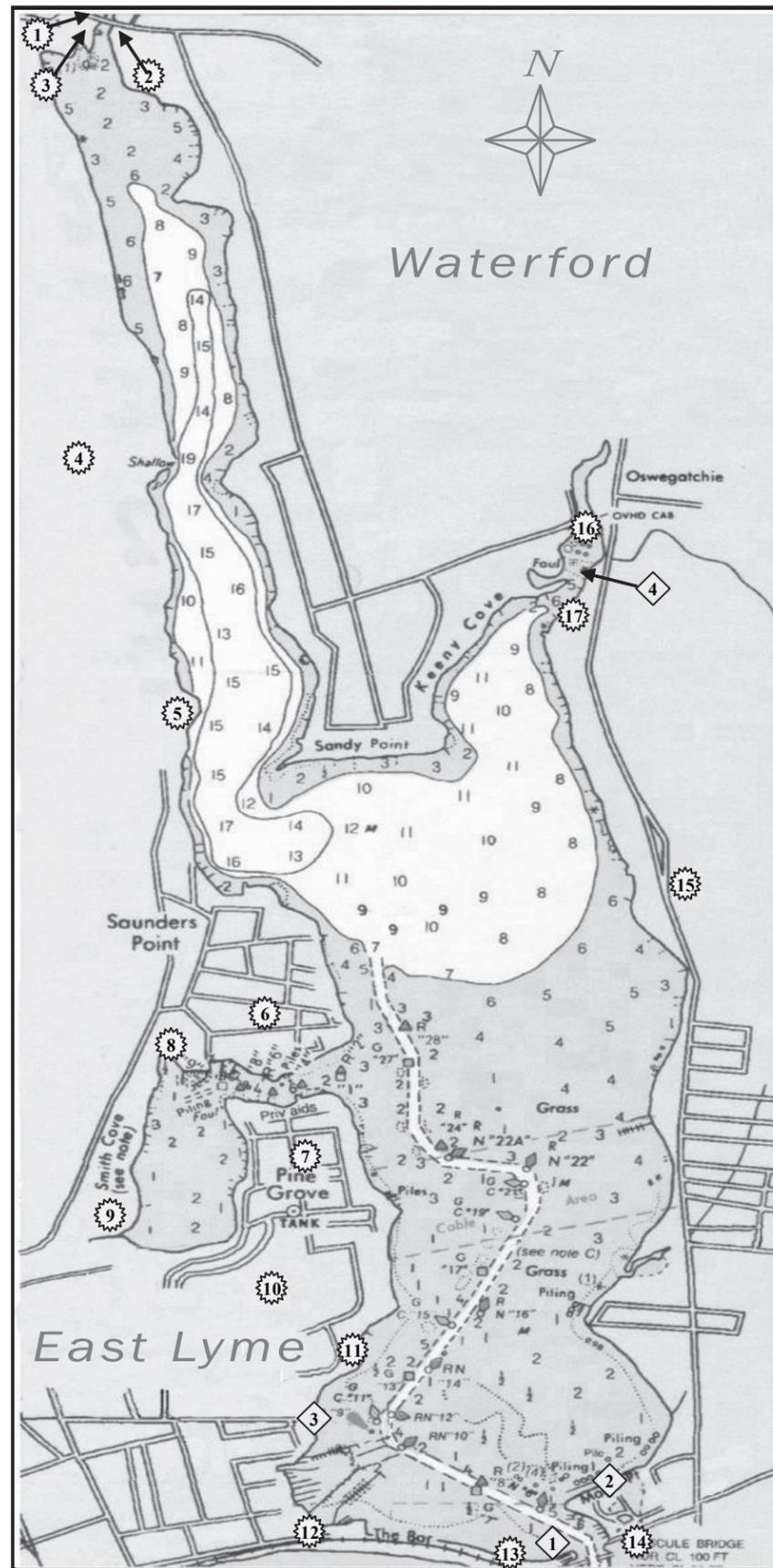
Historic Points of Interest

- 1 **Golden Spur Amusement Park** - Site of the World Famous Diving Horses (1905-1924). (See pictures of these horses diving from a 20' tower in Tri-town Foods on Rt. 161).
- 2 **Boston Post Road Bridge** - Car and Trolley Overpass (1905-1924). Trolleys ran daily from New London to the Golden Spur Amusement Park.
- 3 **Beckwith Shipyard** (Early 1800's)
- 4 **Oswegatchie Hills** (Known earlier as Sargeant's Head) - Proposed as a Nature Preserve. Possibly the last mile of undeveloped waterfront in Southern Connecticut.
- 5 **Old Quarry Dock for Barges** (1819) - Serviced a granite quarry in Oswegatchie Hills which provided granite for several famous buildings, many in New York City.
- 6 **Saunders Point** (1650) - One of the oldest points of settlement in East Lyme. Inhabited by the Nehantics for thousands of years prior to white settlers.
- 7 **Pine Grove** (1880's) - Developed by white settlers originally as a religious tent colony. Also inhabited by the Nehantics prior to white settlers.
- 8 **Old Stone House** (1815) - Built after the 1815 hurricane (On hill behind Bayreuther's Boat Yard).
- 9 **Land surrounding Smith Cove** - Many Native American relics were unearthed here.
- 10 **National Guard Camp** - Active for about 110 years.
- 11 **White Storrs House** - Site of skirmish in 1781 between the militia and local residents trading with Long Island.
- 12 **Boats Inc. Property** - Site of the home of Avery Smith, developer of Niantic Village.
- 13 **Railroad tracks** - Single-Rail track first came through Niantic in 1852.
- 14 **Site of Rope Ferry** - Operated in the Colonial Period.
- 15 **Land along east shore** - Running south from Keeny Cove almost to Rope Ferry Road was known as the "Wigwams." Tradition has it that the Nehantics wintered in the Wigwam woods. Several skeletons were washed out of the bank during different Hurricanes; four were found in 1944 as covered in The New London Evening Day on 8/30/1945.
- 16 **Trolley Trestle** (1905 - 1924) - Trolley ran between Amusement Park and New London
- 17 **Beckwith Shipyard** - Revolutionary War era

Local Events

- Kayak Regatta - Last Saturday in August each year sponsored by www.SavetheRiver-SavetheHills.org
- East Lyme Day - mid-July weekend day each year. Vendors on Main Street and fireworks display. Check the Town's website www.eltownhall.com.
- Waterford Week - a 10-day annual summer celebration in its 30th year. See www.WaterfordCT.org.

NIANTIC RIVER ESTUARY CANOE/KAYAK TRAIL



Natural History

The Nehantics

The first people who called the Niantic River area home, the Nehantics, were direct descendants of the original humans who arrived in the Americas an estimated 15,000 to 18,000 years ago. The first evidence of human life on the Niantic River dates back 12,000 years. It is generally believed that the ancestors of the Nehantics followed the mammoth, mastodon, bison, elk and other large and small game north to this region as the glaciers retreated. The "Western Nehantics," so named because they settled on the west side of the Pawcatuck River, lived in villages that dotted the landscape from there to the Connecticut River. There is evidence of substantial settlements along both sides of the Niantic River at such places as Saunders Point, Pine Grove and Mago Point. They subsisted on scallops, oysters and both hard and soft shelled clams that the women and children gathered from the Niantic River and Bay. Men caught striped bass, bluefish, tautog, sheepshead, tomcod, sturgeon and estuarine fishes. It is known that they traveled as far as Fishers and Long Islands in their dugout canoes and they caught porpoises, pilot whales, seals, black sea bass, lobsters, sandbar sharks and skates. There is also evidence that they grew corn, beans and squash and hunted wild fowl.

Shellfish and Other Sea Creatures

The Niantic River is probably best known for its Bay Scallops. After record harvests in the years between 1930 and 1950, a marked decrease prompted the Shellfish Commission to stop its scallop harvest licensing program. The exact cause of this decline is unknown. Different theories look to poor water quality, lack of eelgrass or other submerged surfaces for scallop larvae to attach to and over-harvesting of first-year scallops prior to their ability to spawn.

Other shellfish are found here also. The soft-shell clams in the sandy beaches, scarce razor clams in the bare flats, hard-shell clams in deeper water and the mussels attached to rocks and pilings join the occasional oyster to round out the shellfish crowd. Also found are: Spider and green crabs (a major predator of scallops), drills (the snails that drill holes through the shells of scallops, clams and oysters to eat them), and two species of jellyfish (red in the early Spring and a colorless species in the summer).

In addition to the fish mentioned in the Nehantic section above, winter flounder travel into the river each year to spawn. Summer flounder (fluke), sea robins, toadfish, puffers, American eels, silversides, anchovies and the occasional sea horse also call the Niantic home.

Birds

From mid-fall to early spring, Bald Eagles, which winter in the lower Connecticut River valley, periodically fly over to visit the Niantic River and give the hardy kayaker a wonderful surprise. In the Spring and Summer months, the beautiful Osprey, or Fish Hawk, can be heard singing their soft calls as they soar over the river, looking for their prey. Many other coastal fishing birds, including the majestic Great Blue Heron, White Egrets, Cormorants and the small, but spunky Kingfishers, can be found along the shores. Swans, geese, and many species of ducks also call the Niantic River home, many staying through the winter. **SAFETY NOTE: Please do not feed the birds of the Niantic River. Feeding wild birds encourages dependent behavior, changes their diet and otherwise interferes with their part in the natural food chain. Also, swans and geese can be very aggressive if approached, especially if they have young nearby. Please keep a respectful distance.**



THE NIAN TIC RIVER: A TREASURE WORTH PROTECTING

The Niantic River is a shallow marine estuary that was formed when the receding glaciers of the Wisconsin glaciation raised the sea level sufficiently to flood a low coastal valley. During the glacial period, the glaciers held enough water to lower the oceans as much as 300 feet from their current level. Most of the shoreline is made up of glacial stream deposits and till that are 10 to 80 thousand years old. Also exposed in a few places along the shore, especially along the western shoreline at the foot of the Oswegatchie Hills and the southeastern shore of Keeney Cove are crystalline rocks of the Brimfield Schist and Monson Gneiss (Goldsmith, 1967). Both of these formations are approximately 350 - 400 million years old and were metamorphosed to their current form about 280 million years ago (Aleinikoff and others, 2003; Wintch and others, 2004).

Coastal wetlands, a fragile transitional zone between marine and terrestrial environments, have significant economic and ecological value. They are the most productive ecosystems known, providing nutrients and habitats that support the entire coastal ecosystem. Most of the Nation's coastal commercial and recreational fisheries depend upon wetlands for spawning, hatching, and nursery activities. Coastal wetlands also play vital roles as habitats for wildlife, waterfowl, and migratory birds.

The Niantic River forms the political boundary between the towns of East Lyme and Waterford. Several small local streams empty into the Niantic River, the largest of which is Latimer Brook. The river has historically supported healthy populations of marine animals, like shellfish, crustaceans, and finfish. In past years, the Niantic River supported extensive eelgrass beds. Eelgrass serves as an important sanctuary for marine animal species, particularly as a refuge for the juveniles of many species.

For Further Information: Websites

Local conservation organizations

www.savetheriver-savethehills.org – Save the River-Save the Hills, Inc.
www.oswhills.org – Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, Inc.

Info on estuaries

www.estuaries.gov
www.estuarylive.org
www.coastalcleanup.org
www.longislandsoundstudy.net

www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries/
www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries/kids/
www.whatsanestuary.com
www.anep-usa.org

REFERENCES

Davis, Herb and Marilyn. 2001. The Nehantic Way a/k/a Rope Ferry Road, a history of the Nehantic Indian Trails and Camps in Waterford, the first Natives of our town. Self published (and found in the Waterford Library).

Goldsmith, Richard, 1967, Bedrock geologic map of the Niantic Quadrangle, New London County, Connecticut: U.S. Geological Survey Map GQ-575.

Kanter, Eric. 2001. The Niantic River and what YOU can do to protect it. Waterford-East Lyme Shellfish Commission.

Keegan, William F. and Kristen Noble, editors. 1999. The Archaeology of Connecticut. Storrs, CT: Bibliopola Press, UCONN Co-op.

Marshall, Nelson. 1994. The Scallop Estuary, the natural features of the Niantic River. Maryland: Th' Anchorage Publisher.

Directions

To Launch Sites from the North:

Take Route 9 South to I-95 North or take I-395 to I-95 South. Follow To Launch Sites from the East/West.

To Launch Sites from the East/West:

Take I-95 to Exit 74 for Route 161 South toward Niantic. Proceed south on Route 161 through the Village of Niantic. At traffic light at end of 161 in Niantic, turn left on Route 156 (also known as Main Street).

Choose a launch site below:

1

For Cini Park East Lyme Town Launch:

Turn left into Cini Park before crossing over the Draw Bridge over the Niantic River. Follow signs to the Cini Park Launch Ramp which is on the left. Parking is available near ramp. See Map – Diamond #1.

2

For Mago Point State Launch Site, Waterford:

Continue on Draw Bridge over Niantic River into Waterford. Take first left at traffic light onto Niantic River Road. Take left at T-section and immediate right and follow straight to the State Launch site. See Map – Diamond #2.

A SAFETY REMINDER:

When canoeing or kayaking along the Niantic River Estuary Canoe/Kayak Trail, always be aware what time high and low tide will occur. Strongest currents, both outgoing and incoming, occur half way between low and high tides: **the Channel under the rail and highway bridges carries a very rapid current at these times.** Weakest currents occur when the tides are at their highest or lowest point. Each tidal cycle (from low to high) has a duration of approximately 6 hours. Children, 11 years and under, are required by State law to wear a *Personal Floatation Device* (PFD) at all times while on a vessel although PFD usage is strongly encouraged at all times for both children and adults while on any vessel. ALL canoe and kayak users must wear a *PFD* during cold weather months between October 1 and May 30. Please take this into account when planning your expedition.

BROCHURE DESIGN and COPY: Deborah Moshier-Dunn

DIGITAL FORMATTING: Alex Parulis

COVER ART: J.H. Torrance Downes

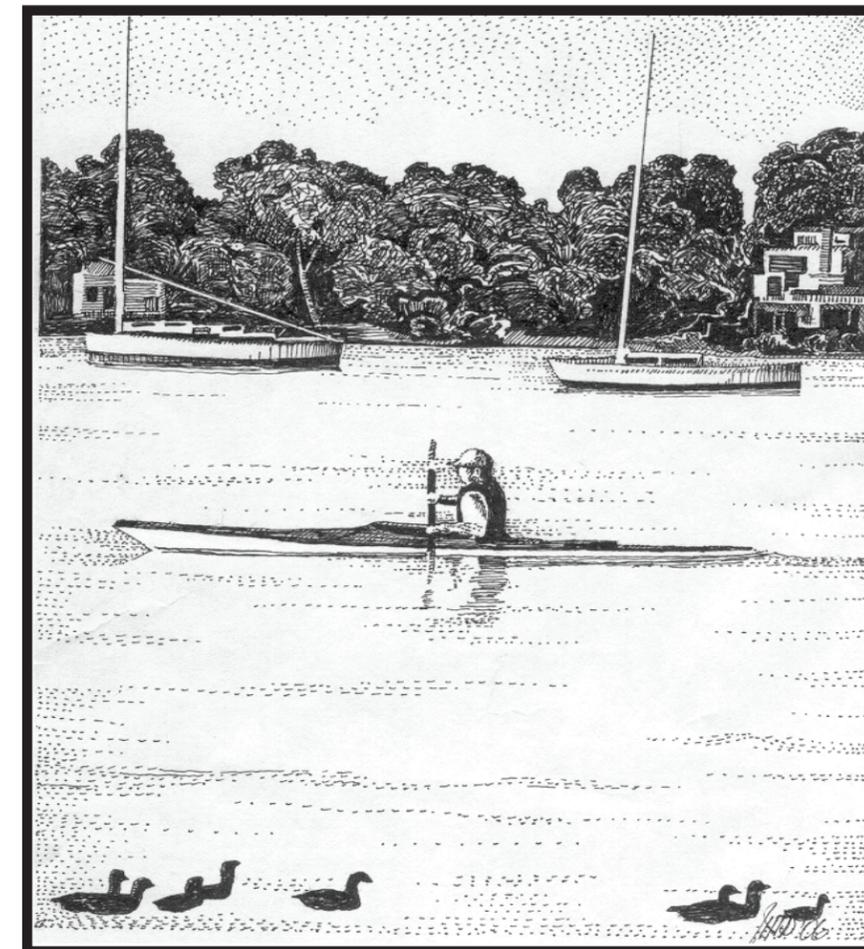
HISTORIANS/MAP: Marvin Schutt, Wilbur Beckwith &

Frank Skewes



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Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

NIANTIC RIVER ESTUARY CANOE / KAYAK TRAIL



Access Points:

1

Cini Park Launch, East Lyme

2

State Launch Area at
Mago Point, Waterford

3

East Lyme: Grand Street Launch
(Near Boats, Inc.)

4

Waterford: Kiddie Beach
(Keeney Cove)