

Student Conservation Association Participants Create New Trail

By **ALEXANDER NARINE**

Within the National Park Service, interns and volunteers have the opportunity to network and meet with each other to learn more about their schedules and plans for the summer months.

In June, students from different New York City High Schools became a part of the Student Conservation Association (SCA) to band together to create a new trail at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. The result was not just a

Amosh Newpane, a student at William C. Bryant High School in Queens, started an environmental club and connected the club to the SCA. His efforts led to club members being accepted into the SCA and gaining valuable

Rebecca Merzlyakov, and Zack Towle were candid about their time spent at Jamaica Bay. Zack said, "It was one of the best times I've ever had. We've been doing very backbreaking work - pulling out tree stumps, weeds, leveling, it's been a lot of fun. I loved it." Rebecca explains, "There was a vegetation trail thing going on, which we had to build that was filled with poison ivy. A few of us even got infected. Then we had to split up into teams and

At Jamaica Bay

make sure that nowhere along the path sloped."

Rachel Binkin, who attends Edward R. Murrow High School in Brooklyn, and Viviana Garcia, who attends Steven T. Mather High School in Manhattan, both learned to use different kinds of tools for surveying. Rachel said, "In addition to learning how to use a shovel, I also learned how to use a tripod and an XMatric." Viviana said, "I learned how to draw out what a trail would look like, how long a path would be, and how to survey using an XMatric." Alexandros Papadopolos, who currently attends William C. Bryant in Queens and is a member of the school's environmental club, has enjoyed all the work that he's done to date. He said, "We raked and dug up a lot of debris, and made a path so

them up." Justin explains the work done at the Bay, "At Jamaica Bay we're building a path for the disabled and people who have trouble walking down rocky paths. Originally it was just a bunch of weeds and tree stumps and poison ivy. Three people actually got infected. At the end we had to put a lot of sand in. It was a really good experience."

The SCA crew leaders for this project, Gabriel Cummings and Margaret Belton, exhibited their extensive leadership skills in tending to those who were infected with poison ivy and creating a congenial atmosphere that was conflict-free. Mr. Cummings, a graduate from Rutgers University in 2012 had this to say of his work. "I love being with the youth. I came back last year and



Alexander Narine

are ready to lay down the planks." Margaret Belton, a personal trainer and crew leader with the SCA, elucidates her experience. She says, "This is similar to what I've done in corporate. It's not only about motivating themselves but to guide them and to make them think for themselves. Professional behavior exhibits itself in group activities. We played games, took quizzes, and got the youth to think more professionally and to motivate their inner pride." Ms. Belton said of the work that was done, "We hacked through a jungle, and created 14 foot path, 5 feet down the middle of each side, respecting trees, creating a full 240 foot path, to be built on pressurized wood."



L-R: Imran Khan, Ryan Eng, Alexandros Papadopolos, and crew leader Margaret Belton.

new 240-foot long wood-planked trail (to be finished by the Boy Scouts) with views of the Jamaica Bay waterfront, but also a forging of friendships through challenges and teamwork.

On Wednesday, August 13th, I had the opportunity to meet and interview members of the Youth Conservation Core (a student-led arm of the SCA) who worked to extend an existing trail at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. According to its website, "The Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge—part of Gateway National Recreation Area—is one of the most significant bird sanctuaries in the Northeastern United States and one of the best places in New York City to observe migrating species. With more than 330 bird species—nearly half the species in the Northeast—sighted at the refuge over the last 25 years, it is a must-see for avian enthusiasts."

The 12 SCA participants, ranging from high school sophomores to high school graduates, each relayed their experience of what it meant to work towards a common goal.

teamwork experience. Amosh explains the work that was done at Jamaica Bay. "First was removing mug warts and weeds. Then we started hacking and digging and shoveling, and then started measuring the trail. After we pulled out all the roots, we started bringing in sand, and leveling it." Ryan Eng, a former member of the environmental club at William C. Bryant High School who will be starting college in September says, "I found out about the SCA through Amosh, and then I joined the Youth Conservation Core (YCC). That's how I got interested. I learned how to use various tools to clear a trail full of vegetation." Imran Khan, another graduate of William C. Bryant High School who will be heading to Brooklyn College in the fall to study computer science, also connected himself to the SCA through the environmental club founded by Amosh. Imran said, "We've been pulling invasive plants, and creating a new trail for the disabled. It was a long process, but we all continued going at it."

work in sections to dig out roots so the Boy Scouts could lay down the planks." Samuel Willner, 16, is a SCA member who spoke like a wise wizard, and during my observations served in the capacity of a crew leader with his sage advice and deep knowledge of all things outdoors. He says of the work that was done, "Our job was to make a trail accessible to ADA (American Disabilities Association) standards. We had to clear over 2,000 cubic feet of debris, which included stumps, root systems, really difficult stuff, to make way for the second part, which was leveling it." Geordan Dorsey and Anthony Morales, two SCA participants, had this to say of their experience. Geordan said, "We built a trail, got rid of the roots to prevent things from growing up, then we flattened the sand, and did a lot of landscaping work." Anthony, who also participated in the YCC said, "We had to level the sand, and I did a lot of wheel-barrowing to



Top to bottom, L-R: Ryan Eng, Geordan Dorsey, Rachel Binkin, Alexandros Papadopolos, Viviana Garcia, Rebecca Merzlyakov, Amosh Newpane, Justin Harris, Anthony Morales, and Zack Towle running in background: crew leader Gabriel Cummings.

that the disabled can walk on it to enjoy the view of the water and the ospreys. As a group, we worked together and grew closer as friends."

Justin Harris, a senior at Fordham Prep in the Bronx, is in his 3rd year of serving with the SCA. He says of his time with the SCA, "I found out about this through my sister who worked at the African burial grounds at Roosevelt's birthplace. It was there that she heard about the YCC. I applied and made it in, and have travelled to various parks and cleaned

this is some of my most favorite stuff to do in NYC - to get them exposed to this and to see the beauty in this." In detailing the work that had to be done, Cummings said, "We were building a 240 foot trail from scratch to meet ADA standards, that consisted of root removal, various plants, lots of poison ivy, and then grating the trail out for those who have wheelchairs, newborns, or walkers, as well as the general public. Right now there is no easy way to get views of Jamaica Bay. Now they (Boy Scouts)

The Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, which was added to the National Park System in 1972, is the only wildlife refuge in the System. It's home to an impressive assortment of native reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, over 60 species of butterflies and one of the largest inhabitants of horseshoe crabs in the Northeast. Numerous ranger-led nature treks, bird watching sessions, and seining events give visitors the chance to get up close to these amazing animals and learn about protecting them.