

TRASH

by Libby Treadwell, BRASS Board Member

Saturday, May 12, might be remembered as the day rain finally fell on the North Country, but to many friends of the river it was the afternoon of trash removal from the Boquet. Board Members and volunteers first gathered trash and then gathered together at the Hale House on The Branch for a Trashy Party complete with Trash Sculptures judged by artist Ted Cornell, known for his creations of Minimally Processed Found Objects.



Schelling McKinley and Brad Caldwell worked mostly from canoe, starting at the fishing access on the Elizabethtown-Wadhams road. They collected 200 pounds of garbage in bags, which does not include the items used for sculptures or the bicycle Schell took home. Most of their collection was between the two fishing access points, but the first was the worst. Included in the unweighed found objects were a bedspring and road signs. Scattered along the banks by Maple Road were (too) many plastic shopping bags apparently thrown from passing cars or washed from upstream properties and back yards during snow melt.

Selma Isil was joined at Thrall Dam by her husband Tom Oehlbeck, their children Kyle and Kurt, and seven others: Mr. & Mrs. Kirk Walter, he is the Elizabethtown School Superintendent who is also active with the Boy Scouts; Steve Sandberg, Boy Scout troop leader; Scouts Leif McKinley, Colby Sandberg and Cameron White, and Jim Carlson of Port Henry. They collected approximately 80 pounds of garbage and found among their more interesting accumulations two computer monitors, a smashed keyboard, a lamp, empty plastic shotgun shells, enough metal to make trashy mobiles, and quantities of shattered beer bottles.

Chris Maron walked The Branch behind the trailer park and NAPA store, collecting four bags weighing 100 pounds and filled mostly with bottles and cans. He regretted not being able to tote the poundage in the shopping cart that rested slightly downstream of his collection, but it was too solidly sunk into the river bed.

Alta Longware reports that she and Westport School students Adam Hainer and Dustin Marsh collected more than 150 gallons of assorted household and picnic trash at the Auclair public fishing rights access in Wadhams. Items included four gallon buckets of muddy porn magazines, an unopened box of raisin bran and many styrofoam worm containers. Topping it all off was a propane tank. Says Alta, "It must have been a fun party!" She and Adam then moved downstream to Little Falls where they gathered more than 50 gallons of beverage containers, registering some surprise that water and juice containers rivaled beer bottles in numbers. They noted, "The drinks of choice were Bud and Busch, but Labatts was a close third." Assorted debris remains from the February train crash, which could explain some of the juice and water drinkers. "Most amazing is how heavy, and jellylike, a disposable diaper becomes when it is really soaked," Alta remarks.

Anita Deming with husband John and son Roger picked up trash along Route 9N for 2.7 miles just outside of E-Town going toward Keene. Ten large bags, probably 150 lbs. from this area, included lots of paper from local purchased lunch materials (but also from Burger King and MacDonalds), bottles, telephone directories, clothing (including a "coat with an ant colony in it"), and cigarette butts ("probably 10,000," Anita says laughingly).

Laurel Sells with husband John Doyle and son Johnny found mostly metal in about 100 feet of river and bank by the new county bridge over the Boquet near Merriam's Forge and Halds Road. Although they intended to work their way down to Little Falls, two hours were spent picking up an old stove, grill parts, milk cans, and other metal and plastic.

BRASS director Robin Ulmer worked with BRASS Lab Director Dennis Kalma and member Alice Wand, AuSable River Association director Megan Murphy (who lives along the Boquet), and Leanne Zelkowitz, a National Honor Society student at the Elizabethtown-Lewis School. They started on the stretch of the Boquet behind River Run Restaurant and ended up at Split Rock Falls, removing 120 pounds of trash from behind the restaurant and another seven pounds from Split Rock Falls. Included in the restaurant garbage were many pounds of remains from clam dinners, partially filled food containers, pots, pans, dishes and a lamp. A pretty red bellied snake had bellied its way into the middle of it all. Split Rock trash was mostly the usual assortment of fast food containers, soda cans, beer bottles, but included a styrofoam cooler, a single tennis shoe, and lots of toilet paper and cigarette butts.



What to do with it all? A giant dumpster awaited the returning trash conquerors at Hale House, thanks to a donation from Serkil LLC, but first volunteers took the opportunity to survey the collections and purvey their sculpturing needs. Ted Cornell as armed with books of photographs from the Twentieth Century Exhibit at the Whitney Museum which included Junk Sculptures, a legitimate art form founded in San Francisco during the height of the Beatnik years. He offered artistic advice when needed, and awarded prizes to winner of seven categories. All prizes dealt with cleaning in one fashion or another, and Cornell gave his reasons for each award. (For example, Wind Chime's beauty lay in the lines of force going outward like an explosion and inward like a whirlpool creating a tension that made it float with a depth of elegance.)

Sculpture titles and their artists are as follows: Riverbed, (fashioned from a found bed spring) by Leif McKiley; Adrift, Cameron White; Wind Chime, Libby Treadwell; Balance, Jim Carlson, Kurt and Kyle Oehlbeck and Elizabethtown bicycling collection assistants Tim, Kyle and Ricky; AgriArt, John Doyle, Laura Sells and their son Johnny; Move Aside Benjamin Franklin Here Comes Sam Adams, Robin Ulmer and Leanne Zelkowitz; Suspension Bridge, Leif and Schell McKinley.

That discarded shopping cart? It remains on view in The Branch. We call it Embeddedness Study.