Articles

A Working Vacation

Craig Ditzler

Block Island sits about 12 miles off the Rhode Island mainland in that part of the Atlantic Ocean known as Rhode Island Sound. The island’s 6,540 acres of rolling countryside are dotted with small cottages. The countryside is surrounded by high cliffs overlooking long, narrow beaches and clean ocean water. The island’s resident population is about 400. The commercial center of the island is cluttered with tourist-oriented businesses, 19th century hotels, and the island’s life line to the outside world—the ferry boat landing. In September, the Rhode Island Soil Conservation Service (SCS) soil survey party had the pleasure of spending a week in one of Block Island’s seaside hotels while mapping the island.

Party leader Dean Rector and our five-man crew reported to work at the office on Monday morning, 20 Sept. 1976. Three of the members brought their wives. We loaded two government cars and Dean’s private car with augers, spades, description kits, fishing poles, suitcases, bicycles, and cameras. Everett Stuart, the least seaworthy member of our crew, popped a couple of Dramamine pills as he and the rest of our crew drove on board the ferry boat, and we were on our way.

We checked into the Surf Hotel around noon; after a quick tour of the building and its Victorian decor, we knew that it wouldn’t be like staying at a Holiday Inn. The “His” and “Her” baths were down the hall and the one television was downstairs in the family room, where checkers, chess, and puzzles were also provided. We decided that the second-floor balcony, with its rickety rocking chairs overlooking the beach, the north end of the island, and the mainland on the horizon, would be our rendezvous point each morning before breakfast and after coming in from the field before dinner.

After signing the hotel guest register, we headed over to the Towne House Restaurant for lunch. It was owned by party member Bruce Laskey’s sister-in-law and was one of the two restaurants still open after Labor Day.

\[1\text{Soil Scientist, USDA-SCS, West Warwick, R. I.}\]