



Co-leader Mark McGrath leads an Eastham Hiking Club excursion up a high dune on Thanksgiving Eve. PHOTO BY DON WILDING

on that stretch of Nauset Beach, and by the end of that hike, we're probably stretched out for a mile and a half, with them out in front," McGrath adds.

However, on this day, it's McGrath leading the way. At the Beech Forest parking lot, he starts the walk off by quoting the poem, "At Blackwater Pond," by Pulitzer-winning poet Mary Oliver of Provincetown.

After crossing over Race Point road into the woods, he relates the story of "Tin Pin Alley," where, as the story goes, trash can lids once covered the sandy road to provide easier access to a camping area. Further up the trail, he points out an elevated area that, according to the Peaked Hill Trust, is the highest point in the Cape Cod National Seashore — two feet higher than the legendary Mount Ararat.

Rabenold, 77, joined the

About the Eastham Hiking Club

The club meets at 9 a.m. at a designated area every Wednesday morning. Car-pooling options are available. In the event of heavy snow or rain, a group email canceling the hike is sent out by 7:45 a.m. on Wednesday. Upcoming hikes this month are: Dec. 9, Ryder Beach/Hopper House/Poor's Hill in Truro; Dec. 16, Great Island in Wellfleet; Dec. 23, Punkhorn in Brewster; Dec. 30, Flax Pond at Nickerson State Park, Brewster. For more information, contact Don Light at 508-247-9887 or VKLight@comcast.net, or Mark McGrath at 508-432-3775 or mark-mcgrath@verizon.net.

group in 1998. He walks alongside Patty Sandri of Harwich and Joyce Halpert of East Dennis. As the trio emerges from the woods with leaves, twigs, and thorn branches, they fondly recall some memories of Kelley, but the views and surroundings of the dunes quickly overtake their observations.

"It's always changing," marvels Halpert, who joined the group in the early 2000s. "When you look out from Snail Road now, and from

when I started, the terrain is completely different."

The group ascends a high dune, and takes in the view while McGrath surveys the landscape dotted with dune shacks. "That one's Liberty Bell," he begins, and proceeds to point out several more of the Spartan structures in another one of his "slow" moments.

"I learned something from (CCNS ranger) Nick Paradis," McGrath says. "On all of his walks, all of sudden, he says, 'For the next five minutes,

it's a John Muir moment of silence.' Nobody talks, and then he starts you down the trail, and you go out every 20 seconds so that you're alone. This is a nice place for it."

The sojourn through the sand continues down the trail, back into the woods, and briefly through a cranberry bog before emptying back on to Race Point Road.

Whether the walk is a four-miler such as this one, or one of the more rigorous treks such as the one at Pilgrim Heights and High Head in North Truro, there's no denying that there's a passion here for the unique walking experience that the wild Outer Cape offers.

"We get out of New Jersey and come up here as much as we can," says Tom McNellis, a part-time Eastham resident who was on his second EHC hike. "This is one of the reasons we come up this way."