

Malevolent Maine

Episode 8: Camp Redfern

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

INTRO

A tall, thin cryptid that haunts the woods around Newry. A missing doctor who may not be as missing as he seems. And a race of fish-people that prowl Maine's waterways. These are some of the stories we're working on for future episodes. At Malevolent Maine we love things that go bump in the night, but we also like being able to keep the lights on. We're able to continue making this show from the generous contributions of listeners like you. If you'd like to donate to Malevolent Maine, please visit our patreon site at patreon.com/malevolentmaine. There you'll find different levels of contributions you can make, and once you do, you'll have access to early episodes as well as exclusive content like our side-story, *The Black Tarot*, the story of a mysterious hand of freakish tarot cards that arrives unannounced. Again, that's patreon.com/malevolentmaine. Thank you.

The birds chirp high in the trees. The sun is hot on your skin. You can hear the sound of kids splashing in the water not far away. It's your second week at summer camp and so far things have been going amazing. You've had new experiences and made new friends. In fact, you've been buddied up with - hey, where did your buddy go? You could have sworn they were just here. How could they just disappear?

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.
But... what was that?

Happy summer, MMers. Right now, we're in the middle of another great Maine summer - the temperatures are up, the black flies are gone, and the lakes and beaches are crowded with people swimming, splashing, and having a good time.

It's just about the opposite of anything malevolent.

For many, memories of summer's past are tightly connected with one particular rite of pre-teen passage - summer camp. Like many of our listeners, we spent many summers in our past at one of over 125 summer camps in our state. Every year thousands of kids hike, canoe, craft, and play at summer camps from Kittery to Fort Kent.

Campers learn valuable skills - how to start a fire, how to weave a friendship bracelet, how to shoot a bow and arrow - and have many firsts at these camps: first time away from home for an extended period, first scary stories around a campfire, even first summer crush.

Summer camps are a way of life for many young kids, not just in Maine but all across the world.

Today's story is about Camp Redfern. If you're from Maine you've probably heard the stories, usually told late at night, sometimes with a flashlight tucked up under your chin.

At its peak, from 1972 to 1990, Camp Redfern was one of the most popular camps in the state. Located on the shores of Black Lake in the town of Porter, Camp Redfern has special memories for hundreds of kids. Unfortunately, it also has a dark secret.

From 1981 to 1989, a camper went missing under mysterious circumstances each year.

But let's back up a bit.

Camp Redfern, located on 150 beautiful acres on Black Lake, was home to a beachfront equipped with swimming area and boat launch for canoes, a dingin hall that could seat all two hundred campers plus staff and guests, an art pavilion, staff quarters, and thirteen bunkhouses, among other various outbuildings and storage sheds. There were nature hikes, a small stream that fed into Black Lake, basketball courts, an archery range and a great campfire circle where everyone could come and be entertained by songs and stories. There was even a great totem pole carved with a bear, an eagle, and the camp's mascot, the elusive imp, Kattywumpus. The golden-eyed Kattywumpus, a green creature with lobster claw-like horns on its head, is an interesting character and one featured in many of Maine's camp stories. In fact, we may feature him in his own episode, but for now, suffice it to say that any pranks played on the unsuspecting campers - usually the work of sneak teenage counselors - was generally blamed on Kattywumpus, much to the chagrin of his so-called victims.

The camp was co-ed, with some bunks designated for boys and some for girls, though this usually changed each season depending on the number of guests. Each of the bunkhouses had room for eight campers and were named after various local animals: Black Bear

Cabin, Trout Cabin, Beaver, Fox, etc. and were decorated appropriately.

In general, it was a beautiful place for summer fun and relaxation, remote enough to feel like you were in the deep woods, but still only an hour away from Portland, Maine's largest city. It was an ideal destination for both local children and for out-of-staters to spend several weeks.

In 1981 the pristine peace of Camp Redfern was forever shattered when 11 year old Dustin Goodwin went missing while on a hike. The hike itself was five miles around the camp, a way to catch a glimpse of all the facilities, but also explore some of the forests and hills that surrounded the camp. It was an easy hike with a wide, well-maintained path. This was no mountain climb, it was meant to be done in sneakers and regular summer clothes. Campers were encouraged to bring a water bottle, but in truth, every mile or so there was a water fountain installed on a wooden post. The hike began just outside the dining hall, nicknamed Big Red because of its bright red exterior, making it look more like a dairy barn than a mess hall. It ended back at Big Red, making a large, winding circuit of the campgrounds.

On the day Dustin Goodwin went missing, Beaver, Blue jay, Fox, and Chickadee cabins were scheduled for the hike. Goodwin had been bunking in Fox Cabin and partnered up with another camper, Tyler Norris. Two counselors, Brad Gillespie and Lauren Fowler were the hike leaders. Gillespie, fifteen at the time, now fifty-seven years old and working at The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard made a statement to the police after Dustin Goodwin's disappearance. I've asked our investigator Lucas to read a portion of it:

LUCAS: I don't know what happened. We were on the Birch Bend. That's this little grove of birch trees out by the soccer fields. Lauren was talking to the group, telling the story. There's this little story we're supposed to tell every quarter mile or so, you know. You tell the kids about nature or animals or

some local legend or whatever. It's stupid. Lauren's good at it. Then all of a sudden that kid, Tyler speaks up and says that Dustin is gone.

There's a buddy system, right? Everyone has a buddy, and when we yell buddy up, you grab your buddy's hand and hold it up in the air. Well, Tyler whatever his name was, he was Dustin's. And he said the kid was gone.

No one saw Dustin Goodwin leave the trail, but none of the kids could say they were paying particular attention to him. Even Brad Gillespie, who was at the back of the group admitted he wasn't really paying attention. The hike, dubbed Large Loop, was an easy hike. There were several places where it went through actual wilderness, but these weren't very long stretches and they were spaced between known locations of the camp. It was not impossible to get lost, but it would be incredibly difficult.

The first thought was that Dustin had stepped off the trail to take a quick pitstop. The counselors expected him to pop back onto the trail a few feet back and come jogging to catch up. When that didn't happen, they began to grow nervous. They sent two campers back down the trail to the last water fountain, thinking maybe he had got turned around. When they came puffing back with no news, Gillespie and Fowler knew they were in trouble.

Brad Gillespie radioed back to the camp director's office. The Director, and owner, Raymond Hull hastily called the entire camp together, blasting a pre-recorded bugle call over the mounted speakers that were scattered across the camp. Anyone on the grounds would hear it, and would know to meet at Big Red, the dining hall.

The entire camp turned out, all of the campers and counselors, the adult staff of the dining hall and nurse's station, even the camp's handyman, Billy Doyle. The only person not to show, was Dustin Goodwin, missing now for at least fifteen minutes.

Hull organized the camp into a makeshift search party and instructed his staff to begin searching the grounds, walking in one stretched out line, an arm's length apart, looking for the missing camper. For many, there was no fear. Many of the counselors would later say they assumed the kid would turn up with a sheepish grin on his face and some lame excuse and then everyone would go back to their scheduled activities while Director Hull admonished the kid and his counselors for being careless.

After two hours and no sign of the missing Dustin, Hull finally admitted they had a serious problem and he called the police. Local police and game wardens arrived and began performing a similar search as the campers had done. They yelled Dustin's name and called for him, but there was no trace. It was as if Dustin Goodwin had completely disappeared.

The campers spent a sleepless night in the dining hall and in the morning quite a few of them were picked up. Some campers remained, but the spirit of the season was broken. Camp Redfern closed a week early that year.

The leading theory was that someone had kidnapped the boy, dragged him to a nearby vehicle and left the area unbeknownst to anyone. Dustin Goodwin was never found.

Raymond Hull was convinced to put the disappearance behind him the next season. No other people had gone missing in the area since the Goodwin boy's disappearance, and most people assumed it was a strange, singular event. Brad Gillespie returned as a counselor, but Lauren Fowler didn't.

The summer of 1982 was off to a great start. It was a bright, sunny July, no real humidity, but plenty of good summer heat. Camp Redfern was as busy as ever. It was in its second two-week session. Counselors were planning for the big send off campfire

in a few days, working on skits, and campers were hastily preparing for the talent show.

It was after lunch and Fox and Moose Cabins were enjoying a free swim session. Many of the campers were splashing, jumping from the dock. Others were diving down and searching for "gold" rocks painted and tossed into the deeper spots by the staff. There was a small game of water volleyball being played with a beachball.

Drew Weiss had been searching for those golden rocks with a pair of goggles and flippers with his best friend and bunkmate, Jordan Brewer. The two lived in Lisbon and were about to enter the sixth grade. They had convinced both of their parents to send them to Camp Redfern that summer and had been lucky enough to get bunked together.

When the lifeguard called for a "buddy check" a call every camper knew meant to stop playing for a moment, grab hands with your buddy and hoist them up high, Drew looked around quickly for his buddy. There was normally a small prize or extra play time for the swimmers that responded first. To his horror, he couldn't find Jordan anywhere.

Drew Weiss exchanged several emails with us as we prepared for this story. He and his family moved away from Maine after the summer of 1981. He is a fairly well known commercial real estate agent in Colorado. He didn't want to do a recorded interview for our show, but he did agree to let his emails be read. Here's Tom, reading Drew Weiss's story:

TOM: He was right there. We were diving down looking for those golden rocks. I remember he was wearing one of those facemasks. It had a red border around it. I had a blue one. He wanted the blue one because he thought it matched his bathing suit, but the red one wouldn't fit me so he let me have it. He had just told me he thought he had seen something sparkling down there when we came up for air. That's when I heard the lifeguard call for us to buddy up. I turned to look

back to the shore, you know how you do when someone suddenly calls for you. Then I turned back and Jordan was gone. I mean, he was two feet from me. I thought he had dived back down, but I would have heard the splash. I would have felt it. The water was clear, I should have been able to see him, but he wasn't there. He was nowhere. I don't think I can really explain that to you. He was just nowhere. He didn't swim away, he didn't get out of the water, he didn't hit his head and float away. He was just... gone.

Again a search was mounted by Hull and the entire camp. This time Hull didn't wait to call the police. Jordan Brewer was not hiding beneath the dock. He wasn't back in his bunk. Game Wardens searched Black Lake using scuba gear and aircraft. They found nothing.

Jordan Brewer was never found.

Over the next three years, three more campers went missing. Christy Huff went missing in 1983 on her way back from making a leather pouch in the art pavilion. In 1984, Randall Stanton went missing waiting to get into a game of basketball between the Fox and the Black Bear cabins. Caroline Marsh disappeared on the last day of the 1985 camp season while everyone was packing their gear to head home.

All of the missing campers, coincidentally, were bunked in the Fox Cabin.

In 1986 fourteen year old Molly Boone had heard the stories of the missing kids. She knew that the campers had taken to calling Fox Cabin the Ghost Cabin behind the counselor's backs. She didn't care. In an interview with the Bethel Star in 2003, Molly's younger sister, Theresa discussed her sister's disappearance in the summer of 1986. Unfortunately, Theresa Boone passed away in 2019. I've asked our producer Megan to read a segment of her interview:

MEGAN: She knew all of those stories. Of course she did. She didn't care though. It didn't matter to her because her boyfriend was a CIT - a counselor in training - that year. She was going to get to spend two weeks with him away from our parents. Our parents didn't even know about Rob. They had reservations about sending Molly, but she could be so persuasive when she wanted to be. So in the end, she went to Camp Redfern.

Molly Boone was supposed to spend the first two weeks of August 1986 at Camp Redfern. She bunked in Fox Cabin. On her third day at camp, Molly disappeared. She was supposed to meet her boyfriend, Rob Singer at 11:00 PM, two hours after lights out, behind the climbing tower. Rob waited until midnight, then snuck to Fox Cabin, willing to risk getting in trouble. He knew the stories about the missing campers from Fox Cabin, too and was scared.

Molly wasn't in her cabin, and Rob decided he now had to alert the director. Here's Megan reading Theresa Boone's interview about her sister again.

MEGAN: They arrested Rob on the spot. They thought he did it. My parents always thought he had something to do with her disappearance. They never charged him. There was no evidence he had done anything. That didn't stop my parents from suing him and Camp Redfern. They didn't win anything - they couldn't prove anyone had done anything to cause her disappearance, but it did get Hull to install security cameras. And Rob... poor Rob. A year after the civil case, he killed himself.

We here at Malevolent Maine want to make a point to say that we in no way believe Robert Singer had anything to do with Molly Boone's disappearance. Out of all the missing campers, Molly's is often the one that is most easily explained. It's the old angry boyfriend story. Maybe they were fooling around and Rob

wanted to go further than Molly was willing to. He got angry, killed her, and then disposed of the body.

Despite there being zero evidence of this theory, it hounded Rob Singer for the rest of his life. Until the day he died, he maintained his innocence. He never saw Molly Boone that night. She was never found.

Kristi Collier disappeared on her way to the archery range in 1988. In 1989, Jeremy Foley was the last camper to go missing, bringing the total up to eight. Despite the newly installed security cameras, officials were only able to say he disappeared somewhere along the so-called "swamp walk" counselors took campers on through the marshy area near the lake. He was seen walking into the swamp, only ankle deep, surrounded by tall grass at 11:15. He even smiles up at the camera and gives it a peace sign. By the time the thirty minute trek through the swamp, which only got waist-deep at its deepest ended, a frantic counselor can be seen on the security footage desperately counting campers again and again.

Both Kristi Collier and Jeremy Foley stayed in the Fox Cabin. They were never found.

After the 1989 season, once the Foley investigation was complete, Raymond Hull had Fox Cabin bulldozed. He built a new cabin, Bald Eagle, as far from its site as he could in preparation for the 1990 season.

It would be Camp Redfern's last.

Since Dustin Goodwin went missing in 1981 there have been ghost stories told about the missing campers. Stories whispered in the darkness about the spirits of the missing kids roaming the grounds around the camp and whatever monster took them. Most of these are easily dismissed as the fiction of overactive if slightly morbid teenage minds.

That changed in the summer of 1990.

Camp Redfern was in the midst of another busy summer. Despite the yearly disappearances in the past several years, business remained fairly robust. With his new cabin as well as some other cosmetic renovations, owner and director Raymond Hull hoped to finally put the past behind him.

On July 25, counselor Nate Becker went out on night patrol. Night patrol wasn't nearly as exciting as it sounded. It meant doing a round of the cabins to make sure the campers were sleeping and not up carousing late at night. Each counselor took a shift, one night a week. After the bunks were checked, the counselor checked in on Big red, the dining hall, as well as a perfunctory scan of the waterfront and the other common areas. All told, a typical night patrol took about 15 minutes, a minor inconvenience to the counselor who was on shift.

Nate Becker set out at 11:00 PM to do his first round. Another one would follow at 2:00 AM. A dense fog had settled over the camp sometime after sunset, so when Becker set out, he went slowly, carrying the big flashlight with him. He couldn't see more than a few feet in front of him. The night was still, but the fog was doing strange things with the echoes of his own footsteps. Sometimes they sounded as if there was someone following him and others it sounded like they were somewhere ahead.

Buildings seem to swim out of the darkness at him. More than once he stumbled into the corner of one of the sheds, not even aware he had drifted from the path. He got turned around more than once, unsure of where he was until one of the cabins suddenly appeared before him, then cursing himself for getting lost. He was on edge, like someone was watching him from somewhere in the fog.

So when he heard the sound of laughter, the hairs on the back of his neck rose, and despite the July heat, his skin broke out in goosebumps.

He heard voices somewhere in the fog, but when he called out, there was no reply. Now, sure that some of the campers were playing tricks on him, Becker pressed forward.

He counted the cabins, shining the light in through the window to count shapes in the bunks. Camp Redfern had thirteen camper bunkhouses, but Becker said he lost count somewhere after ten. He couldn't remember how many were left. Bald Eagle had been the first and he was working his way down the line when he saw a light in the distance.

It was faint, a greenish blue light, almost like a glowstick, but more pale. Nate Becker followed the light, assuming it was just a distortion of one of the floodlights caused by the fog. He took hesitant steps closer. Something didn't feel right, but he kept walking towards the light.

The cabin emerged from the fog slowly, like a rock slowly being revealed by the receding tide. Becker could see that strange blue glow leeching from the windows and the door jamb. The giggles and whispers seemed to be coming from the cabin before him.

It took him a moment to realize what he was seeing. Fox Cabin, nicknamed Ghost Cabin after nearly a decade's worth of missing campers, had been torn down, every trace of it destroyed. The other cabins had been painted with a new color scheme to distinguish them from what had come before. Now, Becker stood in front of Fox Cabin, returned somehow to its old glory.

Without thinking, Becker placed one foot on the first step leading up to the cabin. He was halfway up the stairs when the door to the ghost cabin swung open and revealed its occupants.

Nate Becker knew what the missing kids looked like. He had been a camper at Camp Redfern since 1987, and their pictures were posted in the camp office in case anyone found any trace of them after all these years. He saw those pictures every day when he

went to get his daily schedule, and he knew he was seeing them now.

All eight of the missing campers were in the ghost cabin, sitting on bunks and cross-legged on the floor. It was all of them, Dustin Goodwin and Caroline Marsh and Jeremy Foley who Becker had sort of known. All of the missing kids were in the cabin.

Their skin was pale and stretched over thin bones. Their eyes glowed with that eerie pale blue-green light, like ghostly spotlights. When they saw Becker, they smiled and their mouths were full of razor sharp teeth. They reached out to him with greedy hands.

That's when Nate Becker screamed and ran.

What he saw that night broke Becker's mind. He snapped, running through the fog. He found an old shovel somewhere, probably from the maintenance shed and began smashing anything and everything he came across. In the end, he injured sixteen campers and staff members in addition to damaging the property before he was finally subdued. When he was finally tackled to the ground and tied up by several of the older counselors and staff members, they were shocked to see that a thick streak of his hair had turned pure white.

The statements Becker gave were often incoherent. He would begin speaking and then trail off into what can only be described as nonsense. Talking about the "Thing that Hungers" and "filling a basket". He talked about the missing kids, often calling to them using their first names, as if he knew them and was in communication with them. He mentioned floating cabins and soulless lights. He insinuated he was still lost in the fog.

That was the end for Camp Redfern. Raymond Hull was forced to shut down the camp. He sold the land to a land trust who has let the camp rot, slowly being reclaimed by the natural world.

We contacted Hull for an interview but received a statement from his lawyer. It read:

Mr. Hull has nothing but sympathy for the families of the missing. He has always been open and upfront with the tragedies that occurred at Camp Redfern in the 1980s. The events that happened between 1981 and 1990 were terrible for the families of the missing and the entire extended Camp Redfern family. At this time Mr. Hull has no further comments about those events.

When we reached out through social media, we were able to connect with Brad Gillespie. Over forty years removed from that first disappearance at Camp Redfern, he had some new perspective on his story. Here's our investigator Lucas reading his comments:

LUCAS: I don't know what happened at Camp Redfern. I wish I did. I think whatever it was, it was something that can't be explained. That kid couldn't have just disappeared. None of them could have. Something happened to them. Something supernatural. Do I think Nate Becker saw something that night in the fog? Yeah, I do. I've spent my life trying to figure out what happened there, and I don't think it can be explained. At least not by our current understanding. Something took all those kids, year after year. And, yeah, maybe something of them lingers there on those grounds. That's why I won't go back. Not now. Not ever.

After he sold Camp Redfern, Raymond Hull disappeared from public life. Aside from his lawyer's statement he could not be reached for public comments. His current whereabouts are unknown.

Nate Becker has been in the Augusta Mental Health Hospital since 1990. He does not receive visitors except family. He has good days, but according to reports those are simply days he doesn't

rave about the ghosts of missing campers. He paints pictures. Nearly all of them bear a striking resemblance to the missing campers. All of them have bright glowing circles where their eyes should be.

If Nate Becker saw the missing campers, or whatever remained of them, no one has ever been able to corroborate.

No trace of the missing campers from Camp Redfern have ever been discovered, nor has an explanation for their disappearance ever been offered. Whatever took those kids, it has never been fully understood or explained.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.