

Merrymeeting News

The Newsletter of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay • P.O. Box 233 • Richmond Maine 04357

FALL 2000

To Preserve, Protect
and Improve the
Unique Ecosystems
of Merrymeeting Bay.

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Support comes from members' tax-deductible donations and grants.

Education

Hands Around the Bay, Speaker Series, field trips.

Conservation & Stewardship

Protecting natural resources through private and public ownership, easements and stewardship.

Membership Events

Paddle tours of the Bay, field trips, conservation meetings, potluck suppers and shoreline clean-ups.

Research and Advocacy

Water quality, data collection, toxics, fisheries restoration.

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Frank Burroughs, Bowdoinham
Andy Cutko, Bowdoinham
Steve Eagles, Richmond
Ed Friedman, Bowdoinham
Kathleen Kenny, Dresden
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Bill Milam, Woolwich
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On-Line

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Photo by Ed Friedman

MUSCLES FOR MUSSELS

In the last issue of Merrymeeting News we described a project using freshwater mussels to monitor dioxin and PCB levels in the Kennebec. In August, working with many volunteers and state employees from multiple departments (Environmental Protection, Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and Marine Resources) we collected, sorted and then deployed around 1500 Elliptio complanata in the river. On September 26 and 27, at the end of the 8-week test, we gathered those caged freshwater mussels from the many sites in the Kennebec where they had been put.

Ten cages of thirty-five mussels each were set out in the river above the SAPPi pulp mill in Hinckley and ten cages downstream of the mill. This project was done to evaluate an alternative method of dioxin monitoring. In the past fish have been used for monitoring but problems include catching them, their refusal to stay put (and thus uncertainty as to the source of their contaminants), and variability between individual fish.

Downstream, in the Augusta area and spread out to the south end of Swan Island, twenty-seven cages of twenty mussels each were deployed along the east and west banks and in the center of the channel to make a rough grid of 3x9. The intent here was to home in on a PCB hotspot of unknown origin, most likely in the Augusta area where PCB levels in fish tissue have been close to 100 times the level at which health advisories are triggered. By extending the cages somewhat above Augusta and a ways to the south we also hoped to determine the boundaries of the effected section of river.

Retrieved mussels were weighed and measured (shells and tissues) and then placed in jars according to their cages. During the winter these tissues will be analyzed at the state lab in Orono. From the weights and measures we do know that the dioxin mussels above the mill showed more growth than those below and that the PCB mussels at the south end of the grid showed a bit more growth than those in the Augusta area. We eagerly await the lab results!

Lots of people helped in various ways to make this project happen. Many thanks for the muscle to: Keith Sherman, Vaughan Crandall, Don Wardwell, Danielle Clark, Sandra Lary, Nate Gray, Mary Gilbertson, Harry Vanderweide, Chuck Penney, John Reynolds, Erica Chipman, Joe Glowa, Barry Mower, Judy Potvin, Beth Swartz, Slade Moore, Keel Kemper, Ben Hunsberger, David Stuntz, Bob Dale, Kathleen McGee, Andy Cutko, Bill Milam, Frank Burroughs, Warren Whitney, Steve Pelletier, Trevor Hunt, Scott Kinney, Scott Leeman, David Page, Therese Anderson, and Mike and Sandra Salazar.

Ed Friedman

CHOICE VIEW FARM UPDATE

HELP! HELP! HELP!

Choice View Farm-- if you have not yet been by this Dresden property to enjoy the view you owe yourself this treat. The preservation of this field and view is the number one priority of FOMB's conservation program right now and we need your help. We have until May 1 to raise the approximately \$100,000 balance necessary to protect this parcel.

There are a multitude of methods we use to protect land, some of which involve a cash outlay and some of which do not. This property was under imminent threat of development and while that threat still exists it is now postponed thanks to the new owner's willingness to work with us, at least for a while. We do need to raise the money in this case to make protection a reality.

Some of the financial assistance we have requested for this project requires matching funds to be raised from our membership. You can be assured that **the effects of your donations will be multiplied**

and are critical for the success of this community effort to protect this endangered parcel.

This parcel offers the most spectacular view of the Bay available from a public road. I can write and beg and beg and write but instead please find your way by car or bike along Rte. 128 to the field just south of the lower bridge across the Eastern River. If you like what you see then please write out a generous check to FOMB for our land conservation efforts and note Choice View Farm on your check. You **CAN** make all the difference. Thank you very much.

Ed Friedman

BOTANISTS UNITE!

The New England Wild Flower Society, owner of Coffin Wildflower Sanctuary on the east side of the Bay, is recruiting volunteers for the Plant Conservation Volunteer Corps. These volunteers monitor rare plants, control invasive species, manage selected habitats and conduct botanical surveys.

Volunteers should be committed to the conservation of native flora of Maine and have a basic knowledge of plants, however the NEWFS will train. If you're interested, contact Christopher Mattrick of NEWFS at 508-877-7630 or mattrick@newfs.org.

Warren Whitney

CALENDAR

Most events at 7:00 p.m. in the Beam Classroom, Visual Arts Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick. December 13th event at 7:30 in the Cram Alumni House, Bowdoin College. May 16th event at Bridge Academy in Dresden.

DECEMBER 13. MERRYPEETING BAY: RECOLLECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS.

Buster Prout, Ronald Burrell, Bruce Berry and Richard Nickerson. Moderated by Frank Burroughs. Begins at 7:30 p.m. in Cram Alumni House.
FOMB Annual Meeting at 6:00 p.m. in Cram Alumni House, 83 Federal St., Bowdoin College. Public invited.

JANUARY 17. IMAGES OF THE BAY.

Heather Perry, photographer; Bryce Muir, artist.

FEBRUARY 21. CURRENTS OF CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING THE ANDROSCOGGIN.

Amy Poland, Curator of the Exhibit "Currents of Change", Pejepscot Historical Society.

MARCH 21. EDWARDS DAM REMOVAL: ONE YEAR LATER.

Dave Courtemanche, Department of Environmental Protection, Michael Jones, Aardvark Outfitters, Rob Dudley, USGS, Mark DesMeules, State Planning Office.

APRIL 18. HAVE MUSSLES WILL TRAVEL: BIOMONITORING PCBs AND DIOXINS ON THE KENNEBEC.

Ed Friedman, FOMB, Mike and Sandra Salazar, Applied Biomonitoring, (in abstentia).

MAY 16. LOG DRIVES ON THE KENNEBEC.

David Calder, Riverman on the last Kennebec log drive Bridge Academy in Dresden.



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Merrymeeting News is sent to FOMB members and other friends of the Bay. For information call Warren Whitney, Executive Director, at 666-3376.

GOMMEA CONFERENCE

The Gulf of Maine Marine Education Association (GOMMEA) is an organization of educators, scientists and others interested in marine life in the northeast. Every fall GOMMEA hosts a conference for teachers and other marine educators. This fall the topic of the conference was Merrymeeting Bay.

On October 20th about 60 GOMMEA members attended a morning conference at the Chewonki Center in Wiscasset and then drove to Bath for a boat ride aboard the Hardy III tour boat up into the Bay. The morning led off with FOMB Steering Committee member Frank Burroughs presenting "Merrymeeting Bay: The Sense of a Place". Combining the reading of a piece written by Frank and a slide show with pictures of the Bay by Sally Butcher, this is one of the most effective indoor methods of getting a feel for the Bay's environment and traditions. Frank's tales of local characters, stories of the Bay in previous generations and descriptions of what it's like to be on the Bay in its different moods provided the setting for the rest of their day.

Keith Sherman of the Department of Marine Resources is one of those lucky few who gets paid to spend time on the Bay and its tributaries, (well, perhaps in a few other places in the state too) and is involved with fish research. Keith agreed to come to speak to the teachers about anadromous fish in the Bay area. He provided them with descriptions of sturgeon, the growing sport fishery for striped bass and the effects of improving water quality in the Bay.

Andy Cutko, another FOMB Steering Committee member and staff ecologist at the Maine Natural Areas Program, presented a talk with slides on plant life in the Lower Kennebec and the Bay. Andy described some of the different ecosystems, especially related to plants, that occur as you move north from the ocean up into the Bay, gradually moving from salt water to fresh. The impacts of the tide on plant life, including the sheets of ice moving up and down during the winter, scouring the mud flats, were also described.

Finally, Andy used some of the maps and research from our Aquatic & Upland Habitat Assessment Project that compared three sets of aerial photographs in the last several decades. Changes in the location and amounts of wild rice, impacts of human activity, and questions about sedimentation were all discussed.

Nathan Lipfert of the Maine Maritime Museum provided a historical perspective of shipbuilding and shipping in the Bay. If you've ever been out on the Bay, seen a 30' cabin cruiser go by and thought, "that was a big boat", you need to see Nathan's presentation. Old photos of enormous schooners at the dock in Richmond, cargo ships headed up and down the Kennebec, and ocean going vessels being built for global trade in Bowdoinham (!) will leave you shaking your head.

After these presentations and others were finished the assembly moved to Bath and boarded the Hardy III, a 100-passenger tour boat out of New Harbor (typically making the Monhegan Island run). Brilliant sun, foliage and warm temperatures meant the upper deck, outside seating was the place to be for a glorious boat ride.



Photo by Warren Whitney

Using the water sampler at GOMMEA conference

Linwood Rideout, FOMB member and long time guide on the Bay, and ecologist Dick Anderson provided commentary on the trip that went up past BIW, under the old and new bridge and on up into the Bay as far as the Eastern River. Linwood regaled the teachers with tales of how guides, fishermen and other "Bay men" lived, worked and played in the area. Dick's knowledge of the area and sharp eye helped everyone see four bald eagles, some osprey and, if you were quick, a few leaping sturgeon.

Theresa Torrent-Ellis, FOMB's water quality monitoring coordinator, was also on board to show the teachers how to take water samples and run through some basic tests that might be appropriate for their students who had an interest in taking on a monitoring project.

Upon arrival back at the Maine Maritime Museum the smiles and comments made it clear a new group of people had just been awed by Merrymeeting Bay. The morning sessions provided the science and history that these teachers will hopefully bring back to their students, informing another generation of a special place that needs our efforts so that it continues to be a healthy, thriving area.

Warren Whitney

TIDINGS/FALL

Habit, habitat, and habitation are three applications of one basic metaphor, having to do with clothing. The habits that nuns wear preserve the original sense of the word.

For most of us who are not nuns, clothing is a superficial and shallow kind of habit, easily and regularly changed. Changing the other kind of habits, or habitats, or habitations is more difficult, especially when the three things have grown together, so that they can scarcely be distinguished.

For twelve years, we had a Labrador retriever, Bonnie, and she, like all her breed, insisted on being walked. And so twice a day we walked. The morning walk was just after breakfast, usually about 6:30; the evening one would be around 8:30 or so. It got to be a habit, as necessary to her sense of order and well-being as sitting down to a table, placing a napkin on my lap, and mumbling apologies to God and those in need before eating is to mine.

Our regular beat took us across one hedgerow and along another, to the lower end of the major runway of Merrymeeting Airport. We would walk about halfway up the runway, then turn and retrace our steps. On either side of the runway were pastures, prime bobolink, meadowlark, and woodchuck habitat in the summer, a glacial waste in the winter.

As a puppy, the dog liked the wide-open expanse of the runway, an invitation to romp. But as her age and dignity increased, she became more sober in her habits, and as fretful as a Victorian parson about the functioning of her bowels. There were a few square yards of pasture, not outwardly unlike the acres that surrounded them, which she chose as her depository. There was a strange premonition of civilization in the precision with which she would return to this spot, and the fastidious care with which she would inspect it, before at last hunkering and doing her business. Then, as though she had discharged some onerous obligation, her air of preoccupation would vanish, and she would trot briskly

away, with the jaunty, aggressive self-satisfaction of a mounted policeman.

For the whole of her walk, she would eagerly examine everything she encountered, even if it were the exact same thing that she had encountered in the exact same place on all the previous days. I concluded that her habitual routines served her as a mirror, assuring her that, so long as she found no whiff of change or challenge there, she was queen for another day, still the fairest of them all. Since we are all

As a puppy, the dog liked the wide-open expanse of the runway, an invitation to romp.

stuck with vanity anyway, I admired a version of it that involved such an unjaded appetite for all the informations of one particular place.

The airstrip had other habitués. For some migratory birds, it was apparently a sort of landlocked beach or dislocated chunk of tundra, and I regularly saw species there that I never saw anywhere else in Bowdoinham. Flocks of snow buntings, sometimes as many as a hundred of them, would hang around for weeks at a time in the winter. A small but regular flock of black-bellied plovers paid a flying visit at the end of each summer. Two miniature bogs, created where the airfield interrupted natural drainage patterns, held snipe briefly in the spring and sometimes for as long as a month in the fall. Twice, in May, we saw an upland plover on the runway, a bird I have never managed to see anywhere else.

Woodcock liked its openness and proximity to the sheltering hedgerows. Walking in the spring evenings, we would hear their call, which sounds more derisory than pre-nuptial, and then the liquid noise of their astonishing courtship flights. One year, an unsuccessful suitor kept it up all through April and May and well into June, landing and taking off, spiraling down, landing again and taking off again, until I began to wonder whether he was aiming at procreation or a pilot's license.

A score or so of killdeer arrived every March, and one or two pairs would stay on to nest along one of the banked, sandy shoulders of the runway. One or the other parent would run toward us if we approached the nesting ground, mewing and feigning injury—a broken-winged, fluttering, collapsing fan dance of supplication and allure. Bonnie fell for this a few times in her youth and was led on a merry chase, but soon learned to put on a manner of offended respectability and almost completely ignore the bird's extravagant enticements. Killdeer don't build much of a nest, simply laying their eggs in a shallow depression. One year I found that a pair had chosen my own bootprint, a better illustration than I could have possibly invented of how habitat is a derivative of habit. It was in soft, sandy clay on the inclined shoulder of the runway, and the eggs were laid in the heel, at the downhill end of the print. This would have insured that the nest would be flooded out by the spring rains if the birds had not cobbled the heel print with pebbles, ranging in size from BB to buckshot, making a platform where the water could not collect and, in the process, providing a textured, parti-colored background against which the speckled eggs were virtually invisible. All four of the eggs hatched; all four chicks fledged; and I watched with step-parental pride as they quickly grew into the anonymity of maturity, and lost themselves among the suddenly numerous adults that always arrived in late summer, using the airport as a staging area for their journey south.

In late winter, we would encounter each morning the strictly parallel tracks of a pair of foxes, linking one hedgerow to another. All year long, but especially in the fall, there were deer tracks, and once there were moose tracks, in late March. A night or two after I had seen them, I got home late from some meeting or other, and there, in a pool of light from the parlor window, stood the moose itself, staring in-

side. It was a chill, foggy sort of night, with patches of rotting snow still on the ground, and it was as strange a sight as I have ever seen.

Habits die hard, but all things die. The dog is gone. And now the airport is changing ownership. Gossip has it that the airfield itself will be preserved, and that is good. It is a sweetly anachronistic part of the communal landscape in Bowdoinham. But we hear there is also to be an upscale development in the pastures adjacent to the runway. And we have begun to think seriously of changing our own habitation. Now that the children are grown and gone, our house seems out of scale to our lives.

Change is the only human constant. Our habits hide it from us, but do not hide us from it. So one day we will move, form new habits in a new habitation, and get on with our lives. We think of this with equanimity, and even with anticipation, and we know that we will al-



Killdeer

ways have, as they say, our memories. Among those memories the one that seems uppermost just now is the oddest one of all—that moose standing outside the window in the nighttime. He was a big spooky shadow of a thing in the mist and darkness, and it was hard to believe that he and I were equally real, had an equal claim to being there. I guess it was about like what seeing the ghost of an old inhabitant would be like. It did not feel as though I had come upon an intruder in my world. It felt more the way you feel in dreams, where you are always discovering that you yourself are the unwitting intruder, exposed, out of place, an outsider looking in upon the strange furnishings of your own life.

Frank Burroughs
Tidings is a regular feature of Merrymeeting News

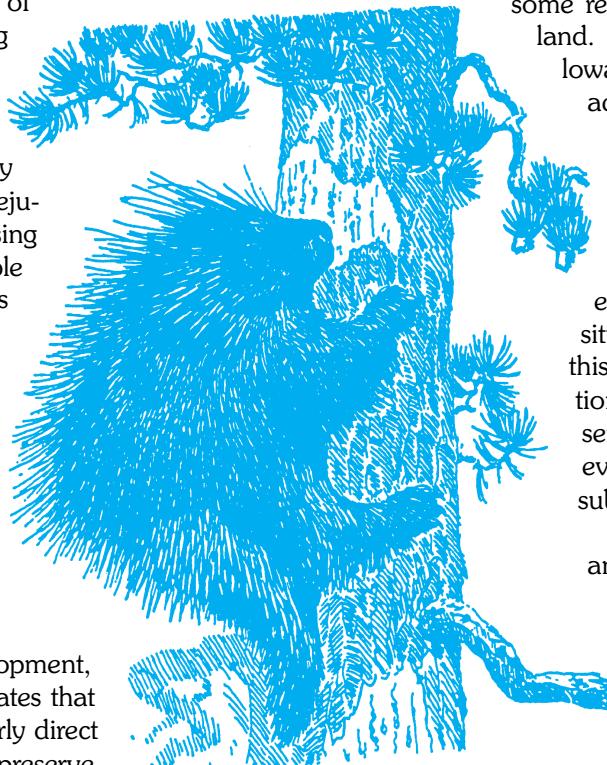
CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

A few short decades ago Merrymeeting Bay was an open sewer. The meeting place for the industrialized and heavily polluted Kennebec and Androscoggin Rivers, it had an unpleasant odor at times, was unfit for swimming or other recreation, and for many was an undesirable location near which to build a house. While the coast of Maine was undergoing a building boom, the shores of Merrymeeting Bay remained relatively untouched.

Fortunately, the health of the Bay is rebounding. Unfortunately, this rejuvenation is accompanied by increasing development pressure as more people recognize the Bay's special qualities and simultaneously are unable to build on land elsewhere because the Maine coast is saturated and already over-built. Towns in the Bay area are experiencing some of the fastest growth rates in Maine, and the State Planning Office warns that the mid-coast area will look much like a suburban area all too soon.

FOMB is not against all development, and our mission appropriately dictates that we focus on the area that has a fairly direct influence on Merrymeeting Bay. To preserve, protect and improve the unique ecosystems of Merrymeeting Bay, however, FOMB does work to combat sprawl and even seemingly innocuous development that would harm the Bay.

In some cases FOMB will, alone or with partners, actually raise the funds to purchase a threatened piece of land, such as is being done with Choice View Farm. In other cases FOMB



Porcupine

will work with landowners who wish to protect their land from future development through conservation easements.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between FOMB and the landowner that is permanent. In such an agreement the landowner and FOMB agree to certain restrictions to which owners of that property are bound. While each conservation easement is different, most of them have some restriction against sub-division of the land. There is flexibility, however, and allowances for logging, farming and other activities are often included in conservation easements.

In addition to the knowledge that their property will be protected forever, landowners may receive property, income and estate tax benefits depending on their individual tax situation. FOMB has a responsibility to this property, and makes annual inspections to insure that the terms of the conservation easement are being upheld, even (and especially) when there are subsequent landowners.

Members of FOMB's Conservation and Stewardship Committee have developed a presentation for landowners who would like to learn about conservation easements and how they can be used to protect their land from future development or other inappropriate activities. This presentation has been given

to one group of landowners already, and another session is currently being scheduled in a different area. If you and your neighbors would be interested in meeting for an hour one evening to discuss conservation easements, please contact Whit at 666-3376.

Warren Whitney

COMMUNITY RESOURCE DIRECTORY

This summer and fall members of the FOMB education sub-committee have been updating the Community Resource Directory. First published in 1997, the Directory is a listing of local "experts" who are willing to share their knowledge with school children through our Hands Around the Bay program.

Armed with this list, teachers can arrange to have the volunteer expert come to class, lead a field trip or consult over the phone. A local boat builder might describe to a third grade history class how large schooners were built on the shores of the Bay. A forester could take a class on a field trip, showing how landowners can manage their woodlot for wildlife habitat, income from tree harvesting or both. A teacher might need to consult with a local historian on Benedict Arnold's trip up the Kennebec. About sixty volunteers have agreed to be listed in the Directory. Some of their areas of expertise include:

Maps and navigation

Geology

Boat building

Local agriculture

Forestry

Wildlife

Ducks

Ice industry history

Archeology

Water quality

Once updated and re-published, the Directory will be presented first to principals at area elementary schools and then hopefully at staff meetings so that all teachers will be aware of its existence and the procedures for contacting and utilizing the services of the volunteers.

If you're a teacher, or know of a teacher who would benefit from this Directory, please feel free to contact Whit at 666-3376 to be sure that the Directory is introduced in your school.

Warren Whitney

FOMB ANNUAL MEETING

The FOMB annual meeting will be held on December 13th at 6:00pm in the Cram Alumni House at Bowdoin College, 83 Federal Street in Brunswick. At this meeting we'll recap some of the accomplishments of the year, enjoy a family style dinner, and members will vote on a slate of officers for 2001. If you or anyone you know is interested in serving on the FOMB Steering Committee, contact Whit at 666-3376 and he will forward that information to the nominating committee.

With just enough time to polish off some tasty desserts we'll rearrange the seating in preparation for the Speaker Series event for the evening, which begins at 7:30. Frank Burroughs will lead Buster Prout, Ronald Burrell, Bruce Berry and Richard Nickerson in stories, tall tales and recollections of the Bay by people who've made their living on or near the Bay for decades. It should be a great evening of entertainment, food, and FOMB business. We hope to see you there.

Warren Whitney

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, P.O. Box 233, Richmond, Maine 04357

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS.

- \$15.00 enclosed for individual membership. \$20 Family
- \$30 Smelt \$50 Alewife \$100 Striped Bass \$250 Salmon \$500+ Sturgeon
- \$ _____ enclosed as an additional tax-deductible donation.

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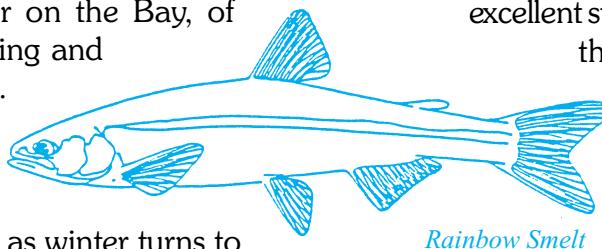
Thank you to David Hansen for designing this issue of MMNews.

TIME FOR SMELT

By the time this newsletter is mailed, the leaves will be off the trees, hunting season will be winding down and, having procrastinated long enough to witness a couple of snow storms, I'll finally have the storm windows up. That means winter is coming, and winter on the Bay, of course, is all about smelt fishing and the annual Smelt Shack Pool.

Every year my wife and I make informal bets on how long the smelt shacks will stay out on the Abagadasset River as winter turns to spring.

Open water between the shacks and the shore just means you need a homemade bridge - there are weeks of fishing left at that point, no need to rush things. A few inches of water up the sides of the shack means you need to remember your



Rainbow Smelt

knee high boots, not a problem. As the ice pack starts to break up, well, it's time for spring chores anyway, might as well call it a year.

As smelt fishermen prepare for this year's season FOMB hopes they'll again do their part in keeping the Bay clean. The vast majority of fishermen are excellent stewards of the Bay and make sure their shacks are completely removed without leftover refuse from the winter's activities. FOMB has a cleanup day every spring, and it's nice to know that much of what we are collecting is from somewhere upstream.

But no matter where it comes from, we work towards a clean Bay, so if you are smelting this winter, please remember to do your part for the Bay and gently encourage others to do the same.

Warren Whitney



FRIENDS of MERRIMEETING BAY

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WHAT IS GOMMEA? (pg 3)
MUSCLES FOR MUSSELS! (first page)

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