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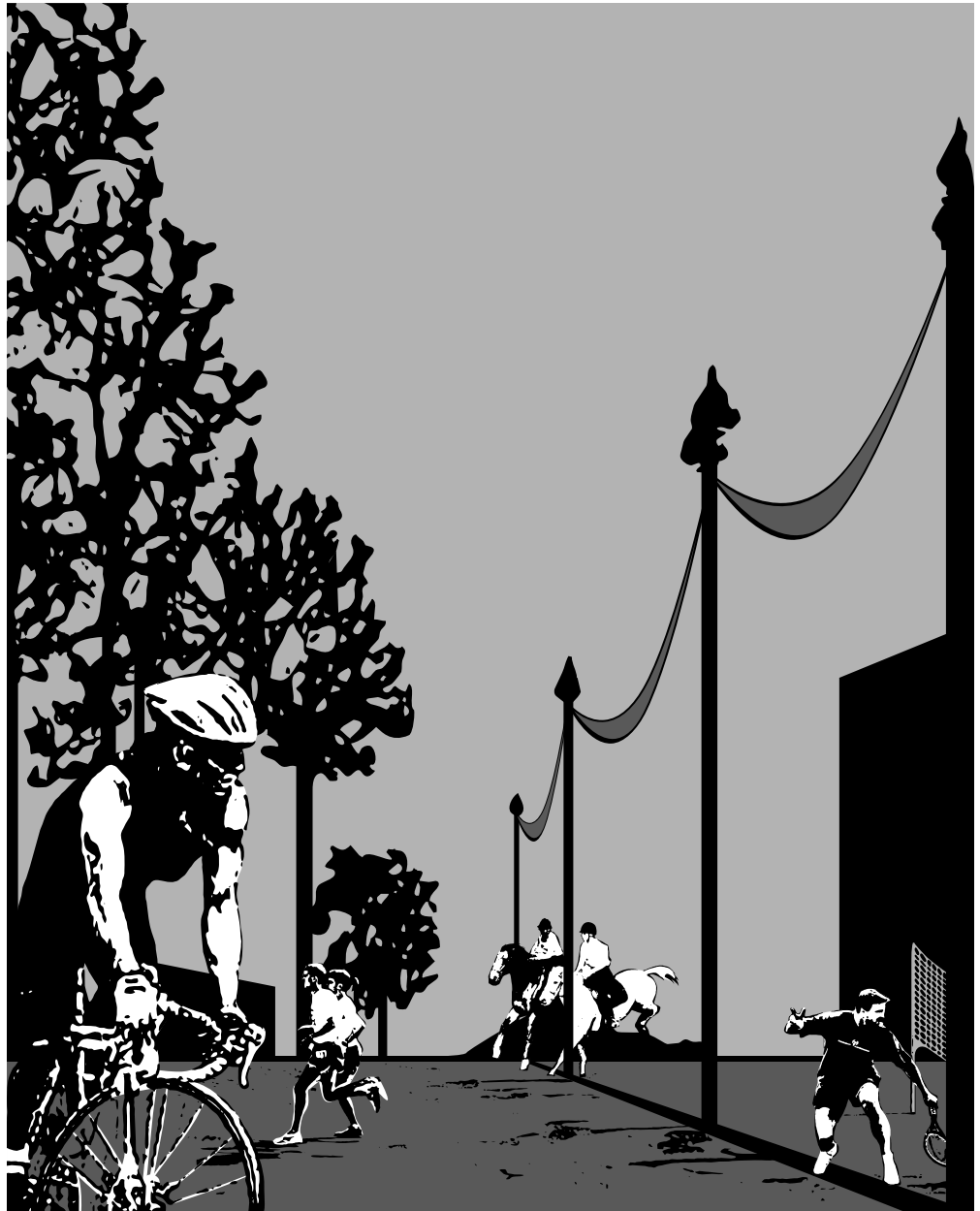
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FUN IN THE SUN

IT'S SPRING AND TIME TO
GET OUT AND GET IN
SHAPE!

By Bianca Jordan

Since the 1860s when businessman James Stranahan argued that a park in Brooklyn “would become a favorite resort for all classes of our community, enabling thousands to enjoy pure air, with healthful exercise, at all seasons of the year,” Park Slope residents have enjoyed Prospect Park and all that the spring and summer seasons have to offer outdoors. Park Slope and its park aren’t as big and famous as Manhattan and Central Park, but the Slope is graced with its own twists and turns, athletic challenges and nature reserves. Whether it’s baseball, football, running, cycling, soccer, tennis, volleyball, horseback riding, rollerblading, walking or bird watching, the area is a haven for both serious athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. For those pining to get out after a long and cold winter, you’ll find what you want right around the corner, often at no or little cost.



CYCLING

Five Borough Bicycle Club
891 Amsterdam Ave., Room 101
(212) 932-2300 ext. 115
info@5bbc.org
<http://www.5bbc.org>

In its twelfth year and boasting 1,000 members, 5BBC is among NYC’s leading recreational cycling clubs. It offers free day rides, 15 to 20 of which start in Prospect Park, as well as weekend trips and courses.

Day rides are free to all and held every weekend. Most popular are the “Montauk Century” ride (May 16), which draws

1,100 people, and the “Beach Bum Series” (July to August), consisting of 25-to 30-mile rides to the Rockaways. Locally, Park Slope rides start at Grand Army Plaza (Flatbush Avenue at Eastern Parkway).

Rides are rated from the easiest “C Rides” (20 to 35 miles, easy pace, flat terrain) to the harder “A Rides” (40 to 60 miles, moderate to fast pace, hilly terrain). Trained leaders guide all rides, and participants provide their own bicycles and helmets. Also suggested: water, pumps, spare patch kits, locks, food, money.

Weekend trips require membership, which costs individuals \$20/year, families \$25/year. Benefits include a newsletter, courses and discounts at bike shops and on patches and 5BBC jerseys. According to Communications Coordinator, Brian Hoberman, Brooklyn hails more members than any other borough, with a large contingent from Park Slope. To join, visit <http://5bbc.org/join5bbc.shtml>. Jenn Flandro, a member of one-year, says she really appreciates how “there are a lot of rides where you see different sides of NYC, but it’s athletic. So, while it’s relaxed, it isn’t just a tour.”

Pure Energy Martial Arts

1/2H Page Ad

Pick up from last issue, Page 27, top.

Kissena Cycling Club
(718) 636-4508
treasurer@kissena.info
http://www.kissena.info

Racing should be “hard, fast and fair.” That’s the Kissena mantra, a 41-year-old cycling club that welcomes all, from beginners to hard-core cyclists pursuing the professional track. More competitive in nature than 5BBC, President Brian Grundstrom takes pride in watching Kissena members move from the lowest “cat 5” racing level, where members might cover three laps around Prospect Park (10 miles) within a half hour, to the impressive cats 1, 2 and 3, where teams can cover 50 miles in two hours.

This year, there will be 10 Park Slope “road races,” including two early races on April 10 and 17. Generally, Prospect Park events begin at 6:30a.m. at the Wollman rink, though check online. Road races are on public roads and are team-based. A women’s race will take place in mid-August.

Races also happen at Floyd Bennett Field and, coming soon, at Queens’ Kissena Park. Kissena Park will host many shorter “track racing” events, and its much-anticipated reopening to the cycling community is scheduled for April 24 and 25.

The United States Cycling Federation (www.usacycling.org) sanctions races, so licenses are required to compete. Kissena sells \$5 one-day licenses at cat 5/public races. Regulation equipment, including team uniforms also are required. For schedules, locations and regulations, visit <http://www.kissena.info>.

Annual membership is \$40. Benefits include mentor coaching, clinics, a members-only discussion group, roller races, bicycle shop discounts, as well as a friendly Independence Day trip to Pittsburgh. Of its approximately 100 members, 56 are Brooklynites.

Joaquin C. de Baca, a member since January, says he appreciates the tips he’s received from

more experienced riders, and also that “there are a lot of Kissena guys out there training in Prospect Park. You can just pull up next to them and train with them. The club’s really good that way.”

HORSEBACK RIDING

Kensington Stables
51 Caton Place
(718) 972-4588
bhorsetamer@aol.com
http://www.kensingtonstables.com

Over a century old, the Kensington Stables offer everything from guided trails and lessons to pony parties and horse boarding. Run by President Walker Blankinship and his family, the stables are open year-round to beginners and trained riders. Regular customers who have proven to be safe, reliable riders may also lease horses. The stables include an indoor ring, a small corral, the exclusive use of Prospect Park’s Breeze Hill and The Shoe riding areas, and access

to the park’s bridle path.

There’s no membership. Helmets are required and provided. Stable users provide additional equipment. Lessons are pay-as-you-go. Group lessons cost \$35/hour; semiprivate lessons, \$40/hour; private lessons, \$45/hour or \$25/half hour. Pony parties are also available and require advance reservations. Costs vary and are posted online.

Lumi Rolley, who started using the stables 20 months ago, said she loves riding regularly and learning horsemanship in NYC. Before, Rolley had a limited riding knowledge. Now, she takes weekly lessons and leases a horse. “The horses are amazing. They not only put up with beginners and trails, but also our urban environment with all of its noises and obstacles. It’s a comment on their character.”

PEDAL BOATING

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Prospect Park pedal boating
Wollman Rink
(718) 282-7789
(718) 965-7777 (party planning)
info@prospectpark.org
<http://www.prospectpark.org/acti/main.cfm?target=boat>

While Prospect Park is smaller than Central Park, its 60-acre lake is almost three times the size of its Manhattan neighbors. For you water-lovers, this means that there's boating fun to be had just around the corner at Wollman Rink. Popular with families, pedal boats may be rented here from mid-May through September. Each boat holds four and costs \$10/hour plus a \$10 refundable deposit. Boats can be taken out on Lullwater, a shady waterway that runs through woodlands and under bridges, as well as on the lake itself. While pedal boating isn't strenuous, don't underestimate the energy you'll need out on the water.

It's also possible to hold pedal boat parties for kids. Parties cost \$200 (for 3 hours), include use of five boats and food concession services, and may be held

Thursdays to Sundays. See the Web site for specific hours.

Administrated and run by the Prospect Park Alliance, pedal boating is open to all and requires no membership.

RUNNING

Brooklyn Road Runners Club
(718) 921-7183
info@runbrooklyn.org
<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Midfield/2472/index.html>

At 10 years old, BRRC's mission is to enjoy "good running, good company and good conversation year round." It actively competes in New York Road Runners' races and organizes several races throughout the year in Prospect Park and Bay Ridge. While it's an informal club, its members are devoted runners who have placed in the men's and women's divisions at NYRR scored races.

Upcoming races include a 5K Race for Freedom on May 24 in Prospect Park. Additionally,

BRRC holds group runs on Tuesdays and Thursday evenings, 6:45 p.m. at Ninth Street and Prospect Park West, and on Saturdays and Sundays, 9 a.m. at 15th Street and Prospect Park West. Runs are free to all, and usually cover one to two park loops. Groups are broken up into sets by pace.

Membership costs \$20/year. Member meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in Circle's Restaurant's backroom (Prospect Park West, between 14th and 15th Streets). Meetings gather guest speakers and fellow runners and cover upcoming activities. For more information, visit the Web site, or call President Steve Bonal, (718) 921-7183, or Michael Balbos, (718) 788-6276.

Eric Neutuch, a BRRC member of 2 years, says, "the BRRC keeps me motivated to run" and adds, "the friendly group runs give me a reason to run when the weather is not so good."

Prospect Park Track Club
P.O. Box 16058, Van Brunt Station
(718) 595-2049
contact@pptc.org
<http://www.pptc.org>

Formed in 1970 by running coach and mentor Harry Murphy, PPTC is Brooklyn's oldest running club. At 352 members, it's also Brooklyn's largest. Most members are Park Slope residents, although the club attracts a diverse set, from our Brooklyn neighbors to out-of-state runners who regularly visit the area.

PPTC holds two major races each year: the popular Thanksgiving Day 5-mile Turkey Trot and the hard-core Cherry Tree 10 Miler (February). Also, coming up are the September Music that Heals 5K and the 4-mile Flatbush Frolick, also in September. Free to all are group runs, which start at 8 a.m. every Saturday at the park's Grecian Shelter.

For members, PPTC holds the Harry Handicap and Potluck. Participants are given

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head starts so that anyone at any level can compete with PPTC's fastest members. There's also talk of a June picnic and relay race around the lake.

Annual memberships cost individuals \$25, families \$35. Benefits include clinics, monthly meetings with guest speakers, a monthly newsletter, plus special events and parties. Applications and instructions are available online.

According to President Anne Perzeszty, the club promotes running as a lifetime activity. It allows members to meet personal goals, whether they're fitness-based or competitive. "With a club that's open to everyone, you can find the level that's good for you and you don't have to fit into someone else's training regimen."

TENNIS

Prospect Park Tennis Center
Parade Ground (Coney Island and
Parkside Avenues)
(718) 436-2500
info@prospectpark.org
<http://www.prospectpark.org/acti/main.cfm?target=tennis>

Newly under Prospect Park Alliance management, plans are underway to improve this already well-used resource. Currently, the tennis center has 10 hard courts and offers tennis lessons, adult leagues and a Junior Development Program. Courts are open to daily, 7 a.m. to 12 a.m.

Membership is not required, although players must buy an annual \$100 tennis permit for the outdoor season (April to November) or a \$5 single-play ticket. Prices are lower for children and seniors. Permits may be used at all NYC Municipal Tennis Courts for one-hour increments. For more information, visit <http://www.nycgov-parks.org>, call (718) 965-8993 or 965-8914, or visit the Permits Office at Litchfield Villa (95 Prospect Park West).

Center improvements are still in discussion; however, the Alliance plans to promote use of the courts, further develop the

Junior Development Program, improve court conditions, add two courts and build a new clubhouse and proshop. These improvements will be implemented over the next two years. Specifics will be announced as plans are further developed.

Will Toubman, who frequently uses the courts, says they are among NYC's most popular and it's best to arrive a half-hour early; on Saturdays, earlier. Also come with your permit, as the staff is strict. "But" says Toubman, "it's worth it for those courts."

WALKING/BIRD WATCHING

Big Onion Tours: Park Slope
(212) 439-1090
bowtmyc@aol.com
<http://www.bigonion.com>

Driven by its desire to bring out the "fabric of a neighborhood," Big Onion leads educational walking tours throughout NYC's ethnic neighborhoods and historic districts. About 25 tours are scheduled for the year, 6 to 10 of which cover Park Slope.

All guides have advanced degrees in history and, interestingly, many reside in Park Slope. Park Slope tours cover the area's growth, from the Flatbush Trolley and Brooklyn Bridge's construction, to the neighborhood's post-Civil War development. Guides highlight current events and development as well as local history. Tours typically include 10 to 25 people. Participants vary from curious 20-somethings who've recently moved here to 70-somethings returning from afar to see the old neighborhood.

Currently, Park Slope tours are scheduled for April 24, May 15 and July 10. They last two hours and begin at 1 p.m. at the southeast corner of Plaza Street West and Flatbush Avenue.

Reservations and membership are not required. All tours (except the Multi-Ethnic Eating tour) cost \$12 for adults and \$10 for students, seniors and New-

York Historical Society members. Tips are appreciated. See site for updates (<http://www.bigonion.com>), or call 212-439-1090 for schedules or to request a brochure.

Also available soon, a Big Onion Guide to Brooklyn (NYU Press, 2004). This new book will include 10 self-guided tours of Brooklyn. One chapter is devoted to Park Slope, another to Prospect Park.

Brooklyn Bird Club
(718) 875-1151
membership@brooklynbirdclub.org
<http://www.brooklynbirdclub.org>

Founded in 1909, the Brooklyn Bird Club strives to promote bird watching by creating a local community educated in and respectful of birds and the natural environment. The club has an alliance with the Audubon Center, and its 20 members range from novice birders to skilled naturalists.

The club sponsors weekly field trips within Brooklyn and around the tri-state area. Tours are most popular during the migration season (April to June). Trips are held every weekend in the spring, with fewer scheduled in the summer. Warbler season is April to May and is considered especially pretty. On April 3, 8 a.m., a tour will leave from Grand Army Plaza's Stranahan Statue and will focus on early spring returnees and late season migrants, including sparrows and raptors. Experienced birders lead tours, which are rated for hiking difficulty. Prospect Park tours are easy and typically include 10 to 25 participants. The club also holds monthly meetings covering topics such as warbler identification, bird songs, nature photography and conservation.

Membership is not required and all may follow the club's suggested self-guided Prospect Park tours, available online. Only events involving carpools require registration. Membership costs \$20/year. Benefits include a newsletter, monthly meetings and field trips. Suggested equipment:

binoculars, good walking shoes, weather-appropriate clothing.

Brooklyn Botanical Garden tours
1000 Washington Ave.
(718) 623-7220
<http://www.bbg.org>

If it's a pretty walk you seek, little can rival this NYC landmark's beautiful trails and walkways. Located just off Prospect Park, The Brooklyn Botanical Garden is expertly manicured and meticulously maintained; highlights include a rose garden, daffodil hill, lilac collection and a Japanese Cherry Orchard.

The garden offers several walks, including weekend tours that are free with the cost of admission. Tours start at the Visitor Center at 1p.m. Reservations are not required. Also free are the garden's self-guided tours, which can be completed in two hours and cover both standard attractions and seasonal highlights. Ask for a "map and self-guided tour" brochure. During the much-anticipated annual Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival (May 1 and 2), only self-guided tours are available. The event typically attracts 20,000 to 30,000 people. For a list of seasonal highlights, go online or call for a brochure.

Also available are 1.5-hour group tours, which change with the season and vary in price (\$10/person to \$50/person), minimums (10 to 20 people) and luncheon packages. From March 2 to May 30, "East Meets West" group tours guide participants through the garden's Asian influences. June is rose month, and tours featuring the Cranford Rose Garden's 1,200 rose varieties are available.

Membership is not required for walking tours; however, it does reduce the cost of admission and courses. ■

Illustration by Rachel Carns

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