

**For Dancing, Music, Laughter, and Camaraderie:
Head for the Hills - the Poconos - in November.**

By Ellen Harrison and the HFTH Committee

(reprinted from CDSS News, May/June 2007, with permission)

The advent of autumn in the Northeast has that tinge of familiarity. We all greet the increasing nip in the air by donning sweaters – watching for the leaves to turn and fall, and then looking forward to them crunching beneath our feet – anticipating Halloween and Thanksgiving. For more than 20 years, however, in the Princeton Country Dancers' community, the approach of fall brings the anticipation of something else – the weekend that we all pack up our households and Head For the Hills. Almost always held the second weekend in November (half way between Rum and Onions, our notorious Halloween dance, and Thanksgiving), Head For the Hills is PCD's annual music and dance retreat. Features include four big dances, workshops in contra, English, couple dancing, singing (including a yearly Sunday morning Sing), ritual dancing, band workshops,, a Saturday afternoon cocktail party -- complete with bartenders and a swing band -- and a Saturday night ceilidh, or talent show – all staffed, run, and presented from within the community.



Head for the Hills was started in 1984 by Dan Post (now long departed to western pastures). Dan attended an English dance weekend at Hudson Guild Farm in north Jersey, and was so taken with the facilities that he began musing on how PCD could make use of them. Dan's stated vision was to "go away for the weekend with 100 of your closest friends," offering workshops and dances staffed by leaders, callers and musicians mined from the abundant talent inherent in the community. This way, not only did we provide all of our own entertainment, but costs could be kept down by not having to hire expensive "outside" talent. Those who ran or played for the variety of programs were offered "shares," i.e. a discount off the price of the weekend.



The first year was a rousing success, jump-starting plans for it to become a yearly tradition. Now we welcome dancers from near and far, newcomers and those who return each year. They come from as close as Philadelphia, New York and Princeton, and from as far as Seattle, Virginia, and Vermont to join us. We remained at Hudson Guild until, sadly, the facility closed in 1995. After an extensive search, we were back up and running in 1997 at a new location, Camp Harlam in the Poconos. During the summers, Camp Harlam hosts a summer camp for children from Reformed Jewish congregations all over the northeast.

The camp's winterized motel-style rooms, two gorgeous dance halls, and other common rooms are more than sufficient for our needs, especially as the HFTH community changes and grows.

And we have changed, and we have grown. One of our biggest changes is notable from last year's registration figures – 27 of our attendees were under 18. We've added more family and children's programming while always ensuring that our core of dance, music and song workshops remain vibrant and exciting. Additionally, every year more of the children who've grown up attending Head For the Hills become workshop leaders and musicians. Another sea change has been the growing interest in couple dancing, leading not only to couple dance workshops in every time slot (recent offerings have included Tango, Swing, Cajun, Scandinavian, and Waltz) but also more couple dancing included in the social dance portions of the weekend, often with large, acoustic pickup bands playing from the middle of the dance floor.



A typical Head For the Hills would include workshops in English and Contra dancing, ritual dancing (Cotswold Morris, Border Morris, Longsword, Rapper, Molly, Abbot's Bromley, to name a few possibilities), 3-4 couple dance workshops as aforementioned, the writing and rehearsing of an all-age mummings'-type play, to be performed in the Saturday night Ceilidh, the Sing, a more organized singing workshop, often culled from other singing traditions (Songs of the Sephardim, Quebecois tunes, Sacred Harp), group instrumental instruction (piano for contra bands, fiddle, whistle, mandolin, and a current favorite, the all-age band workshop, where the younger generation and those just starting out learn tunes in order to join the amazing pick-up band on Saturday night and play for the dancers, many for their first time ever.). Sometime during the weekend, a workshop slot is often given up to relaxation, as someone teaches yoga, tai chi, or massage techniques. Just before the last dance on Sunday afternoon, there's a pause that refreshes as a group gives a brief chamber music concert. At any given moment, you might see little groups of two or more conspiring in corners, planning their secret Ceilidh act, or a motley group jamming in the living room under the main hall. Regular bands for the Contra and English dances include Raise the Roof, A Band Named Bob, Hold the Mustard and A Joyful Noise.



In 2007, Head For the Hills will be held November 9-11th. For more information, contact Judy Klotz at 609 393 3762 or go to www.head-for-the-hills.com