

# SHAWANGUNK WATCH

Winter 2008 Preserving Open Space in the Shawangunks Volume 13 #2

Friends of the Shawangunks & The Shawangunk Conservancy

## Natural Selections of 2008

What happened on the ridge this year? Shanan Smiley has listed by season the most noteworthy observations from the Daniel Smiley Research Center. There was a mild and wet winter, a dry spring with a large Minnewaska fire as a result, and a hot summer and fruitful autumn.

### Winter

Bear tracks seen on Christmas Bird Count; first winter observation.  
Porcupine activity increase evident by chewing marks seen on Maples.  
Two Porcupines found dead, presumably killed and eaten by Fisher.  
Wettest February on record with 10.09 inches of precipitation.  
Peregrine pairs seen on Sky Top, the Trapps, and at Millbrook.  
Lowest temperature was 2°F, another mild winter (-24° in 1917, -19° in 1994).  
Due to heavy rains and snowmelt the New Paltz flats were flooded on March 5th-6th and 8th-10th.

### Spring

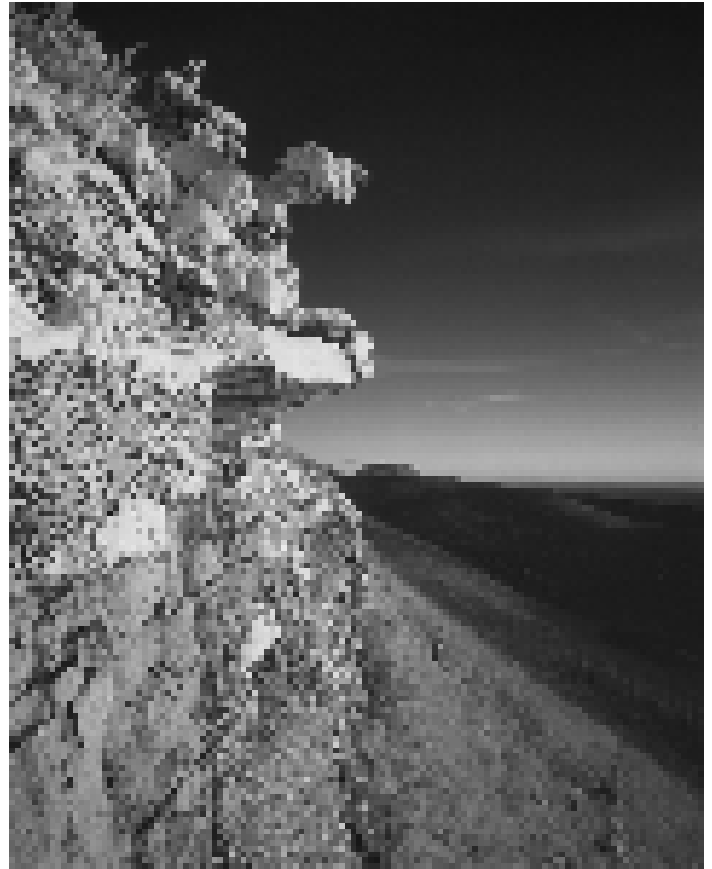
Marbled Salamander larvae found in two vernal pools, species of Special Concern.  
Heavy bloom of Trailing Arbutus, a sweet smelling early spring flower.  
Last frost on April 14th, 11 days earlier than average.  
Minnewaska Fire (3,100 acres) in April; Painted Trillium, Starflower, Shadbush, Indian Cucumber-root and Sassafras blooming and/or re-sprouting.  
First Woodcock of season found dead, killed by an unleashed dog.  
Average bloom of Pink Ladyslippers, an orchid that has declined in the state  
Barn Swallow and Cliff Swallow numbers are less than usual.

### Summer

Golden Shiners found in Minnewaska Lake!! First fish there since the 1920s.  
Sunfish and Rock Bass nests are more numerous in Mohonk Lake.  
Whorled Pogonia stand has only one bud.  
First breeding record of Redpoll Warbler in over 80 years of records!  
Highest temperature of the year was 95°F on June 9th and 10th.  
Gypsy Moth larva and adult numbers low with minimal damage to Oaks as a result.  
Hemlocks in drastic decline as a result of another mild winter and two non-native insects.  
Whip-poor-will remote monitoring in several locations on the ridge as part of a Cornell population study.  
More Deer Ticks than usual, possibly due to a mild winter.

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Winter Morning at the Twilight Zone Wall  
by Hardie Truesdale

Berries! Abundant crop of Blueberries and Huckleberries; good pollination this year.  
Peregrine nests on Trapps and Millbrook cliff. Success at Millbrook.  
June and July ranked in the "Top Ten" warmest on record.

### Autumn

The picking and eating of Blueberries continues into late October!  
Double-crested Cormorant found dead at Duck Pond; only seen rarely during migration.  
Witch Hazel with a heavy bloom, but not many Lime Tree Winter Moths (pollinator of Witch Hazel).  
White Pines loaded with cones.  
First frost October 19th, 2 days earlier than normal.  
Pine Siskins here to take advantage of the cone crop.  
Low numbers of raptors migrating past the Hawk Watch, but large numbers west of here. Hawks used a different flyway this year.  
Yellow-fruited Ilex (a species that only occurs at Mohonk) with a large crop of berries.  
Saw-whet Owls migrating through are being banded again this year. 277 so far this season.

*Shanan has her Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Montana State University. She moved to New York from Montana four years ago. She started out volunteering at the Daniel Smiley Research Center and is now the Research/Curatorial Assistant.*

## Oh, Deer: A Ridge Without Fear

Christopher Spatz

Last month, I picked a November handful of dry, late-season plants from one of my haunts in the lower Coxing, and headed up to Minnewaska for a talk with Bob O'Brien. A friend and climbing partner, Bob is also Minnewaska's invasive species' specialist. I'm lousy at identifying flora, and Bob is one of the Shawangunks' go-to people on floral taxonomy.

We walked across the Peterskill parking lot, stepped into the woods, and within a thirty foot radius found all but one of the samples, as well as a few significant others, in my erstwhile bouquet: Japanese stilt grass, Japanese barberry, phragmites, hay-scented ferns, Queen Anne's lace. The goldenrod we found in a nearby meadow. The ferns and goldenrod are native; the others are not. The string binding the bouquet: deer don't eat them. Up and down the ridge, these plants represent a spreading understory unfit for ground-nesting songbirds and amphibians, crowding out wildflowers and chestnut oak seedlings the deer have mowed down, crippling fields' and forests' ability to regenerate. My bouquet was one you might gather for a funeral.

The death-knell is tolling not just in the Gunks. Eastern forests that have famously recovered during the last century are under siege. Some call them living graveyards. While droughts, gypsy moth infestations, and fragmentation have had their debilitating effects, the primary siege engine is, as Princeton ecologist John Terborgh once roundly concluded, "All deer." All deer, and the absence of the native predators who hunt them. The Shawangunks, indeed, the greater Appalachians, are critically missing wolves and cougars.

For decades, in outposts near and far, researchers in ecology and conservation biology have been observing predator and prey dynamics: between spiders and grasshoppers in Connecticut, and starfish and mollusks on the Olympic Peninsula; between Aleutian otters and sea urchins, Venezuelan armadillos and leaf-cutting ants, and the effects these relationships have on their respective ecosystems. Lose the predator, and the prey population explodes, devouring the indigenous plants, pushing out native species, inviting a host of weeds, herbivores and the rampant success of lesser predators, triggering what ecologists call a *trophic cascade* of lost biodiversity. Worldwide, on land, sea, and in the air, wherever the top predators have been marginalized or hunted out—which is to say, pretty much everywhere—the news is grim.

And the news is now captured in a terrifically disturbing book, *Where the Wild Things Were*, by former Nature Conservancy writer, Will Stolzenburg. If you enjoy the tension of agile prose delivering crisp vignettes of ecology studies gripped in a horror story, this is *the* book. Under the title, Bambi's Revenge, the deer crisis gets its own chapter, including scenes like this one. Fresh from Venezuela studying ecosystem meltdowns on nascent island jungles leaking predators behind the waters of a hydroelectric dam, John Terborgh comes home to his boyhood woods outside Washington, D.C., where he witnesses a hauntingly parallel catastrophe underway. "A floor once colored with bluebell, phlox, and spring beauty," writes Stolzenburg, "had been swept by an invasion of garlic mustard and Japanese stilt grass."

Japanese stilt grass, *Microstegium vimineum*, is a relentless invader. First introduced nearly a century ago in a Tennessee crate packing Japanese porcelain, stilt grass takes like slow fire. It has advanced down the road shoulders of the Clove all the way to High Falls. In one season, it has blanketed the derelict canal beyond my Rosendale home, creeping up the bank and into the yard. Like John Terborgh, I've watched

it consume a place close to my heart, straddling the stream-bed, sweeping through the reaches of my Coxing idyll. Stilt grass alters soil chemistry dooming competitors. Its seeds can persist after removal—a rigorous, hands-and-knees chore—for five years. In tandem with white-tailed deer, stilt grass forms a dynamic, shadow duo.

"...whatever *Microstegium* couldn't overcome on its own," notes Stolzenburg, "with whitetails they could. With their hooves the whitetails prepped the stilt grass's soil, with their incisors they cleared the competition." Troy Weldy, a botanist with the Nature Conservancy's office in Albany-Pine Bush, got a look at the Gunks' stilt grass, and told Bob O'Brien we have the worst invasion he's seen in the state.

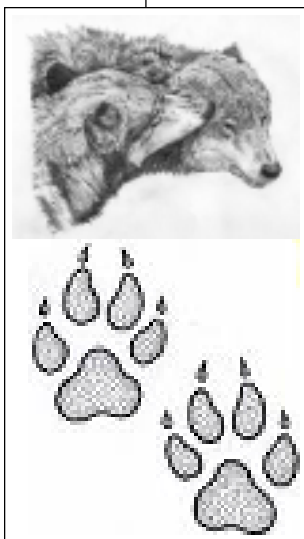
In *Wild Things'* denouement, the cavalry coming to the rescue of this sorry state are the very predators we've eradicated. On the nation's gaudiest wildlife stage, in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone, reintroduced wolves had an unforeseen impact on unchecked elk herds. Decades of over-browsing had reduced Yellowstone's riparian corridors—stream ecosystems home to 80% of the arid west's floral diversity—to wastelands. While direct predation had little effect on elk numbers, the *presence* of wolves in the landscape altered where and how elk browsed.

Attuned again to the roving packs—seventy years after wolf extermination in the park, the quarter-ton ungulates had lost their fear—elk quit acting like pampered cattle, avoiding the chase and ambush sites of stream corridors, where willow and wildflowers soon returned, and with them, beaver, fish and frogs, birds and butterflies. The stunning revival was mirrored in Zion, where the park's showpiece, hoodoo tourist canyon was moribund with unregulated mule deer, in a fecund, sister canyon ruled, not by wolves, but by cougars; ditto for oak stands near popular Yosemite tourist stops.

In 1999, researchers first christened this predator and prey interplay the *landscape of fear*, and its habitat impact, an *ecology of fear*. With alpha predators restored to select landscapes, with a sense of fear lodged again in the collective soul of some of our precious, living national cathedrals, ecosystems are being reborn. The results have detonated through ecology and conservation literature, but have been slow to inform game management policy wrestling with issues like deer control. A decade in to the findings of fear-generated habitat recovery, we're still attempting to restore ecosystems with firepower, with deer harvests.

Leaving aside the roiling conflict of selling herd reductions as a conservation necessity to millions of hunters—whose license fees and gear taxes fund countless other wildlife initiatives—targeted deer harvests have had extremely limited success, where herds exceeding five, ten, and twenty times a given landscape's ability to sustain them are common. Some hunting interventions, like suburban Fairfax County, Virginia's, have failed miserably. Part of the difficulty is recruiting and educating hunters reared on a culture of trophy bucks to the need for removing breeding does, regulating the harvest down to *sustainable* levels.

Sustainability means an ecosystem's ability to replenish itself; deer numbers so low that they register *no* debilitating impact. With state game managers working to ensure robust harvests, we haven't seen sustainable whitetail numbers in decades. But even a hunting program like the Institute of Ecosystems Studies' (IES) across the Hudson in Millbrook, which has successfully suppressed its 2,000 acre herd long



enough to see habitat revival, has yet to consider the possibilities for natural regulation. Ray Winchcombe, who manages the IES program, was reticent about the prospect of controlling herds with native predators. "I've never read a study where natural predation adequately reduces deer censuses," he said, missing my hook dangling the potential lessons of fear for whitetail management.

Ward Stone, on a recent swing through the Gunks, got closer to the fear solution, fielding a garden variety deer complaint when he reportedly quipped, "Let the dogs out." Fifty years ago, farmers and rural folk let their dogs run every evening. "We'd hear them baying after the deer all night long," said the Smiley Research Center's Paul Huth. Packing up like pups weaned on *Call of the Wild*, pets hounded the herds, keeping them moving, forcing deer to eat on the run. The practice was banned years ago, but old Ward winked that dogs exercising their inner-wolf held off the forest degradation we're now witnessing.

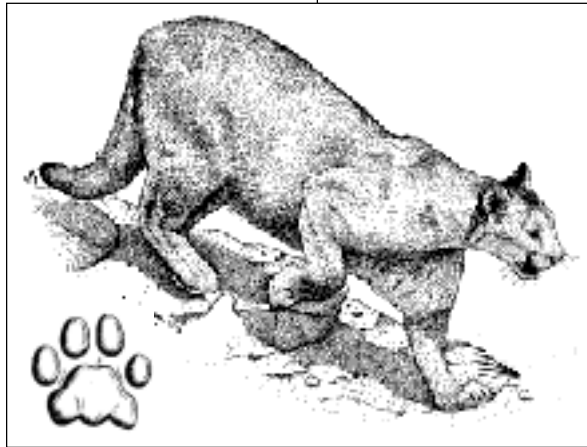
Faced with the whitetail conundrum, the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership (SRBP) has just begun a three-year, grant-supported management program administered by the Smiley Center based on the IES model. Covering 30,000 acres, targeting fifteen times the habitat of IES, this is an ambitious initiative. While I was privileged to attend planning sessions at the Mohonk Preserve, and was invited to add, as were many, my voice to the development process, I confess, "I didn't know then..." Forgive me, please, my Monday morning, bookworm apprehensions.

Until reduced to sustainable habitat numbers, *landscape of fear* researchers have observed that browsing response to hunter presence is limited to one season each year, and for only half of each day. Last night, I counted a herd of twenty leisurely munching away in an area adjacent to land targeted by the SRBP's plan; in the same fields where I see them every evening on my drive home from work. To get them to act again like the hair-trigger prey that they are, to keep deer from browsing at leisure whenever and wherever they please, they need the fear of ambush 24-7-365. 100 Yellowstone wolves scared the bejezus out of twenty thousand elk in a way decades of park management with rifles couldn't. Without much altering the number of elk, the ecosystem still revived.

I have graciously been provided a copy of the SRBP's management plan, have reflected on the tasks meant to restore our chestnut oaks and missing warblers, to halt those pernicious invasives and deer-repellent natives crowding out the trillium and the lady slippers, and I hope to God it works. \$150,000 over three-years, and countless man-hours recruiting and educating hunters; getting them out there in perpetuity beyond the years of the plan; counting the harvest and estimating the census; monitoring the response of the understory; waiting, listening for the songbirds' return, is a long and arduous effort. That's a lot of managing, and imagine trying this in less enlightened places beyond the Gunks; a tiny island in the ocean of herd first, ecosystem afterthought, last, forest and wildlife management.

So, here's a thought, a dream, a *wild fantasy*: enhance the suite of natural predators. With surrogate nests and quail eggs, the SRBP's plan is tracking predation on ground-nesting. Stolzenburg cites studies where coyotes rescue songbird habitat from the ubiquitous trio of little predators — raccoons, opossums, and housecats — like an avenging angel of the suburban San Diego chaparral. Bobcats don the wings in the Smokies. These middleweight guardians will protect some of the Gunks' habitat, but the word remains out on their ability to harry deer.

We need a bigger angel. We need the thing a deer evolved its discriminating nose to catch wind of, its stealth-sensitive ears to hear, and its ballerina hooves to leap away from. The Gunks are far too small to support the lanky range of wolf packs, but how about...a few cougars? For those who may believe that the Shawangunks harbor mountain lions, let our whitetail-ravaged habitat be the ultimate indicator of their absence. As *Where the Wild Things Were* illustrates, forest death by herbivore doesn't occur where the wildest things roam.



In both size and arrangement, the Gunks' 40,000 protected acres, with its connecting corridors to the 700,000 acre Catskill Preserve, resembles strikingly what's left of Florida panther habitat: the 26,000 acre Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge abutting the northern boundary of the core, breeding population within the 720,000 acre Big Cypress National Preserve. The Refuge supports a handful of panthers, a handful of the hundred or so beleaguered felines stalking the palmetto thickets and hardwood

hammocks of the greater Big Cypress Swamp.

Could the Shawangunks support a half-dozen cats patrolling the eastern edge of a core population of reintroduced cougars in the Catskills? Could cougars cast their regenerative spell of fear on the ridge, complementing, even easing, long-range whitetail management? With the Adirondacks' six million acres, the Catskills remain one of the largest intact, *forever wild* preserves of public land in the northeast. There exists in the Endangered Species Act mandates for cougar recovery to their former eastern range, mandates that would restore to our state forest preserves' forever wild charters the very essence of wild.

The science is in. Big predators drive ecosystems; eastern forests are dying without them, an environmental crisis of national concern. Alpha predator restorations to the East's public lands are an ecological imperative.

Can we afford not to bring the wild things back?

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*Christopher Spatz is a member of the Mohonk Preserve's Land Stewardship Committee, and is president of the Eastern Cougar Foundation. His review of Where the Wild Things Were for the ECF Update: Newsletter of the Eastern Cougar Foundation is featured on the website: <http://www.thewildthings.net/>*

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## LETTERS

*Dear Neil & Friends of the  
Shawangunks Board,*

It is fair to say that the BCAA board was absolutely ecstatic upon hearing of, and then receiving your wildly generous contribution to the BCAA's Legal Fund. Your intervention could not have arrived at a more opportune time, since we were teetering on a precipice as far as our financial status was concerned.

But, you saved us, thus enabling the BCAA to continue advocating against the seemingly relentless march of wacko developments proposed for the Shawangunks in the BashaKill area.

Friends has been a loyal supportive partner through many turbulent years. We are most grateful for your backing and confidence in our work, particularly as you are a group we regard so highly.

*Best Wishes,*

Paula Medley and the BCAA board

# Minnewaska Reduces Services this Winter

Eric Humphrey, park manager at the Minnewaska State Park Preserve sent the following letter describing Minnewaska's curtailed winter plans.

**TO: MINNEWASKA'S VISITORS AND COLLEAGUES:**

The state's fiscal situation and overall status of the nation's economic condition have affected all state agencies. The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation had to make reductions in expenditures. The entire Palisades region has been affected by these reductions, as some facilities have closed, personnel have been reassigned, and others had to be let go. This letter is to provide you notification of the reduction in services being offered at Minnewaska State Park Preserve this winter. The agency and region including Minnewaska have suffered a loss of seasonal staff, and remaining seasonal staff can only be retained on a part time basis. The reduction in staff will effect the winter operations at Minnewaska, and will require less snow removal operations and grooming of carriageways. The reduction in plowing and snow removal includes the following: the Awosting parking lot and connector road will be closed for the winter, 1 parking lot on top of the hill will remain closed for the winter, only half of the Peters Kill parking lot will be plowed, and several satellite parking areas around Minnewaska may not receive plowing. Minnewaska has typically groomed 20 miles of carriageways during winter operations which included Lake Minnewaska carriageway, Millbrook carriageway, Castle Point carriageway, Upper Awosting carriageway, Sunset carriageway and Beacon Hill carriageway. The 2008-09 winter operations will require a reduction in groomed trails due to lack of staff and funding for equipment and repairs. Groomed carriageways will be reduced by at least half this winter to under 10 miles. Every attempt will be made with staff available during storm events to groom a few carriageways in an effort to provide some services to our patrons. Revenue consisting of vehicle use fees or cross country ski fees will not be charged this winter. Some carriageways will be closed to all visitors as the inability to groom will not permit search and rescue operations in these areas. I apologize for any inconvenience or hardship these actions will create, and thank you for your patience while we navigate through this difficult time.

*Thank you for your cooperation,*  
Eric Humphrey, Park Manager

Eric also wanted all park users to know that the park preserve will open from 9am to 5pm daily weather conditions permitting. Numerous public programs will continue to be offered throughout the winter months. Minnewaska will continue to rent snow shoes from the Peter's Kill office this winter. Visitors are advised to please adhere to all signage related to trail closures when in effect, which are designed to ensure patron safety. Please call 845-255-0752 should you have any questions or for current ski conditions when applicable.

Thanks Eric for letting us know this disappointing news!

## **Hardie Truesdale's Shawangunk Ridge Photos at Gardiner Library**

Photographs of the Shawangunks will be exhibited at the brand new Gardiner Library from December 18 to February 26. The opening is on December 20 from 2pm to 4pm.

See the Shawangunks as an artist does!



*Photo of Awosting Falls in Winter by Hardie Truesdale*



*Trapps landscape  
Photograph by Hardie Truesdale*

# On the Mohonk Rockfall Event and the Physical Features of the Trapps Cliff

Frederick W. Vollmer

I received an email from Joe Bridges on October 31, 2008 notifying me of a rockfall from the Trapps cliff on the Mohonk Preserve, and asking me to contact Head Ranger Hank Alicandri. The email contained pictures taken by Peter Darmi (forwarded via Dick Williams) of meter scale blocks on the carriage road, as well as pictures of the impact marks on the cliff below. I arranged to meet Hank on November 6, to have a look at the scar. From the base of the cliffs you can see a orange-brown surface from which the rock detached, as well as some debris that accumulated on ledges, and whitish impact marks where falling rock struck the cliff on the way down. The orange-brown surface is a joint surface which has accumulated a staining, probably of iron oxides, due to ground-water flow over many years.

The cliffs are composed of the Silurian (425 million years old) Shawangunk Formation, which here is mainly a conglomerate composed of quartz (silicon dioxide) pebbles cemented together with a quartz cement. Quartz is very resistant to erosion because of its hardness, lack of cleavage, and low solubility. The cliffs by nature, then, are very hard and resistant, however natural weaknesses in the rock and the relentless forces of nature insure that they are constantly pulled down. Underlying the conglomerate are weak Ordovician shales, which are more easily eroded, and eventually undercut the cliffs. Thus erosion is a natural process that maintains the steepness of the cliffs over thousands of years.

The physical characteristics of the cliffs here, and their appeal to climbers, are caused by three main features. First, and most prominent, are the bedding planes in the conglomerate. These show up as the clearly defined horizontal lines in the cliff face, and are the original sedimentary layers that formed during the deposition of the conglomerate in a high energy stream environment. These layers dip, or tilt, gently back away from the cliff face, and form the solid handholds that climbers use to scale the cliffs. The second set of features are a series of joints, or regular fractures, that roughly parallel the cliff face. These form the slabs (or flakes) paralleling the cliff face, where a climber might do a layback. The third main features are steep to vertical joints at a high angle to the cliff face. These cause the blocky character of the cliffs, forming corners or dihedrals. While the details vary from place to place, essentially these planar weaknesses

break the rock up into block-like fragments that can detach from the cliff face.

During the cold seasons water seeps into joints and other natural openings and freezes. The phase transition from water to ice involves a volume increase which is strong enough to incrementally force the joints further apart and fracture the rock. These freeze thaw cycles slowly open the fractures, and weaken the rock mass over decades. What commonly happens to set off the final event is an increase in groundwater during Spring thaw or following a heavy precipitation event. This groundwater not only adds weight to the rock mass, but the pore water pressure effectively pushes back against the weight of the rock, causing failure. In this case there was a large precipitation event about two days before the rockfall which likely was the final push.

Rockfalls are common events in mountainous areas, and are expected in areas of steep topography. However, considering the infrequent nature of these rockfalls in the Shawangunks, driving to the cliffs is far more dangerous than hiking in them. Rockfall is nature's way of maintaining the rugged regions whose scenery so inspires us. Mountains are built up by the Earth's tectonic forces, and worn down by the erosive powers of wind, water and ice, finally succumbing to gravity's inexorable pull.

I'd like to note that in a cooperative venture between the Mohonk Preserve, SUNY New Paltz, and the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, a seismograph was recently installed on the Preserve. This sends a radio signal to a computer in my laboratory at SUNY New Paltz where it is sent via the internet as a node on the Lamont-Doherty Cooperative Seismographic Network (LCSN). The record for that evening contains events that appear to record events related to the rockfall. I'd also like to thank Peter, Dick and Joe for passing along notice of the rockfall, and Hank for taking me to the site.

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*Dr. Frederick W. Vollmer, is a professor of geology in the Department of Geological Science at SUNY New Paltz, where he has taught since 1984 and been Chair since 1990. He holds a Ph.D. in Geology from the University of Minnesota, a M.S. from SUNY Albany, and a B.S. degree from the University of California, and specializes in structural geology and rock deformation.*



*Peter Darmi discovered the rockfall on an early morning run*



*Climber Ethan Ladoff took this photograph of the ceiling that is no longer there. Note the upper left hand corner below the overhang.*



*photo by Peter Darmi*

## A Climber Considers Rockfall

by Annie O'Neill

There they stand—those majestic cliffs we call the Trapps and the Near Trapps. All that conglomerate we think of as our eternal climbing playground—that escarpment we are lulled into believing is “solid as rock.” But on the night of October 29<sup>th</sup> a resident of one of the roads bordering the Preserve heard a roar of thunder at about 10:45 pm. But the sky was full of stars! The next morning climber Peter Darmi was on a run when he was shocked by the tons of rock littering the carriage road. His words of shock have to be censored! He took photographs before anyone arrived to see the swath cut on the talus slope; the piece of carriage road missing; the downed trees; and the scarred cliff. Back in the early 1980s I almost was on the first ascent of the climb that no longer exists—Chimango (hawk in Spanish, and near the climb Hawk). The roof is gone and there is a lot of rubble to be cleared. Many climbs have been temporarily closed in that area


I called Paul Huth at the Daniel Smiley Research Center for some statistics since I knew there had been heavy rains a few days before. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October there was .75 inches and a notable frontal passage with significant winds and driving rain—driving toward the cliff. On the 26<sup>th</sup> there was 2.02”, on the 26<sup>th</sup> another .01” and then on the 28<sup>th</sup> 1.07” fell. That is close to 4”—what Paul calls “a substantial dose of water.” And by the way, a heavy frost was recorded on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Could all of this have “lubricated the joints?” He said that “maybe as systems and climate changes the more extreme conditions could affect stability.”

Paul told me that in Dan Smiley’s lifetime this was unheard of—there was no rockfall for decades. But of course if there were fewer climber witnesses how would anyone know? We know there was major rockfall in the Near Trapps in the Lost World area—an area that is

often full of ice in the winter and constant seeps in the summer. There are other areas of major fall: to the right of Gelsa; near Vulga Tits in 1987; in 2007 some cliff came down near Flake, Rattle, and Roll; before 2004 rock came down to the right of Gold Flakes; at the end of November some “microwave-sized” pieces came off in the area of Inverted Layback. How lucky that all this happened in the absence of climbers.

From 2004 to 2007 I accompanied the legendary climber Dick Williams as he revised his guidebook to The Near Trapps. Let me tell you, it was no picnic in certain areas we explored. Dick said in the introduction that I bravely followed him on so many occasions on some great climbs and “on the many scary, dirty, and loose rock-hellish climbs.”

So for those of us who think that most of what happened since the geologic episodes that Professor Vollmer describes as Shawangunk history on Page 5 are past tense, we will have to realize that the cliffs are always in transition and flux. There will always be erosion, expansion, joint crack, and minor falls. After all the cliffs once were vegetation free and as soil built up in cracks and faults, plants, shrubs, and then trees tenaciously put down roots. Add to that rain, wind, drought, freezing and thawing, and we have a recipe for movement. “Breaking up is just always hard to accept.” This is not a climbing wall!

I would suggest that you get *Time and the Mountain: A Guide to the Geology of the Northern Shawangunk Mountains*. This small Mohonk Preserve booklet with text and illustrations by Jack Fagan and photographs by Hardie Truesdale will give you a succinct overview of our fascinating geology. 

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## Friends of the Shawangunks Member Meeting

By Chris Rowley with permission of *The Shawangunk Journal*

At the Oct 19 meeting of the Friends of the Shawangunks, held at the Ukrainian National Association, Bob Anderberg, General Counsel of the Open Space Institute made a presentation regarding the growth of the “Greenway” along the Shawangunk ridgeline, as State Parks, Preserves and other acquisitions gradually swell the publicly preserved land down its length. “OSI’s goal” said Anderberg, “is to protect as much land as possible on the Ridge. We would ultimately like to have a single protected piece of land running the fifty-mile length of the ridge.”

Anderberg pointed out that back in 1963 there was no protected land on the ridge at all. Today there are about 40,000 acres. “Since I last reported to the Friends of the Shawangunks, last year, OSI has acquired about 300 acres of land on the ridge and another 450 acres, acquired in previous years, has been transferred to the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation as an addition to the Minnewaska State Park Preserve. “In addition,” said Anderberg, “OSI has started a farmland protection program in the two valleys on either side of the Shawangunk Ridge. Our goal is to protect as much farmland as possible. Last year we were able to protect about 800 acres of farmland in the Rondout Valley.”

Anderberg ran down a list of acquisitions and projects. Minnewaska State Park Preserve—now has 21,282 acres. It is the largest Park Preserve in the state of New York. If it was a State Park it would be the third largest in New York behind Allegheny and Harriman. The park was painstakingly assembled from 42 acquisitions beginning in 1971. This work is still going on. The biggest acquisition was the 7,000 acre Lake Awosting acquisition in 1971. The smallest was a third of an acre on Jenny Lane. In the last year OSI has added two parcels to the park. On Rt 44-55, the land on the left side of the road as you take the long straight down towards Kerhonkson was privately owned, but now belongs to the park. The other was the Beck parcel, off of Stony Road, along the Saunderskill.

Our goal over the next ten years is to increase the size of the park by another 3,500 acres to about 24,500 acres in size.

Mohonk Preserve is now 6,800 acres. Last year OSI acquired a 56 acre conservation easement in the Clove Valley from Mandy Patinkin.

OSI is in the process of purchasing approximately 180 acres at the very northern end of the preserve. We’re pulling the preserve north into the town of Rosendale. This includes the Town of Rosendale’s Waterworks property.

OSI transferred into the park preserve approximately 4,000 acres of land. This land had been kept off the tax rolls for more than a century because it belonged to the Village of Ellenville. Now it is back on the tax rolls.

With the help of the New York New Jersey Trail Conference, thousands and thousands of acres of land on the southern, “spine” of the ridge area have been preserved. These lands are preserved in a series of Units of State Forest land. There’s the Shawangunk Ridge State Forest, the Roosa Gap State Forest, the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area—one of the largest freshwater wetlands in southern New York. And OSI is currently working on creating the Huckleberry Ridge State Forest, which is about 1,000 acres right now. The Trust for Public Land is currently in negotiations to add another 500 acres, which had been a proposed 2,000 unit housing development.

When the meeting was opened to questions there was some discussion of ways of linking the Minnewaska Park Preserve with the Catskill State Park and establishing some kind of wildlife crossing of Rt 209. Mr Anderberg explained that such a linkage was enormously difficult to achieve, that the land along Rt 209 was commercialized, but that OSI was engaged in discussions with farms and landowners in that area and that progress might yet be made.

## Resurrecting a Trail

Keith LaBuddle



photo by Annie O'Neill

As I recall, I got started on my trail project in November of 1968. (It's hard to believe it was 40 years ago!) Rock climbing was over for the season, and I was sitting in my 8x16 plywood shack, studying a Mohonk Mountain House map, looking for a hike I hadn't already done. I noticed a dotted line going to the top of Bonticou Crag from what is now known as the Clearwater Road. While I had already been to the top of Bonticou Crag via the talus scramble, I hadn't noticed any sign of this other trail, but then I hadn't been looking for it either.

Off I went to Spring Farm, through the fields, through a barbed wire fence, and eventu-

ally to the Clearwater Road. I reached a point where the road dropped sharply and a ridge rose to my right. This obviously had to be where the trail started, but there was no sign or blaze to be seen. I started up the ridge anyway, choosing the path of least resistance, avoiding laurel and staying on bedrock as much as possible. Finally I noticed a faint blue blaze on a tree. Thus encouraged, I continued up the ridge, checking out various possible routes for the trail and searching for another blaze, either in front of or behind me. Once I found a blaze I tried to find a logical path back to the previous blaze. The blazes were few and far between, but enough to keep me going. Finally I had to call it a day, but I was determined to return and keep trying to follow the old, and obviously abandoned trail up the ridge.

I returned several times, and with the help of the infrequent blazes, did eventually find my way to the top. Although it needed work, the trail proved to be one of the more enjoyable ones I had hiked in the Gunks. I was so pleased with what I had accomplished that I wanted to share the results with others. The following spring, when I encountered Joe Donohue, The Mohonk Trust ranger, I asked if I could clear and re-blaze the trail. He not only gave me permission, but also provided the materials.

So I set about cutting back the laurel, removing fallen trees and branches, and painting blazes first up and then down the trail. The bright blue blazes from the top of Bonticou to the Clearwater Road obviously attracted the attention of other hikers, for the trail—known as the Ridge Trail—began to show signs of use.

Eventually the Preserve took what had been the Bonticou Trail, renamed it the Northeast Trail, extended it with an easy ascent link to the Ridge Trail, and incorporated the portion of the Ridge Trail between this link and Clearwater Road into the Northeast Trail. The portion of the Ridge Trail that led from the link to the top of Bonticou was re-blazed with yellow paint, and now provided an easy ascent route of the crag for those who didn't want to do the talus scramble.

I still enjoy hiking "my" trail, sometimes in one direction, sometimes the other, sometimes incorporating the talus scramble (easier up than down), and sometimes using what I call the link. On one of my excursions earlier this year I encountered a hiker coming down the trail from the top of Bonticou. In passing, he commented on what a "great trail" it was. I resisted telling him of its history, but continued on my way with a very satisfied feeling.

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Keith LaBuddle, longtime chairperson of Friends of the Shawangunks is an avid rockclimber and hiker. He has remained a member of the FOS board.

## Stand for Land (STAND) Mobilizes in Marbletown

Bobbi Esmark

Ours is an area of scenic vistas, accessibility to the outdoors, real working farms and small town charm. We thrill in the spotting of an owl, fox, black bear, or other wild life in the woods or fields behind our homes, or on the hikes we take in the Shawangunks or Catskills. A simple drive to Stone Ridge, to surrounding towns, or to friend's homes provides us with landscapes of unrelenting beauty year-round. And yet the Marbletown we love is changing every day. Dramatic growth in our hamlet has been accompanied by subdivisions and new construction. Every day we hear expressions like "market forces," and "inevitability of growth." We are told that Marbletown will change, that time will gradually erase all its rural features and soon we will join the great legion of other outer suburbs. So we won't see fisher, bobcat, fox, or pileated woodpeckers in our back yards any more. So we don't hear the coyotes howling at night anymore. So we can't purchase fresh meats and vegetables from our local farmers. Is that such a bad thing when we are told that growth will bring business, opportunity and an expanded tax base? And, we're already surrounded by hundreds of acres of protected land, why do we need more?

STAND FOR LAND (STAND) was born out of a desire to provide advocacy for the rural character of Marbletown and its surrounds. But, to clarify: the group does not want to cloak Marbletown in ineffectual charm or shield it from the spotlight of the future. Rather, they are advocates for balance. STAND believes that balance between growth and development can be achieved through public awareness, education and through direct fundraising for the purposes of supplementing the purchase of open space, development rights or easements. The group recognizes those who have come before them in this effort, those who have protected their farms and lands and the Shawangunk Ridge. This stands as a reminder of what is possible. STAND knows that the protection of the environment and maintaining our rural character is not only compatible with economic growth—it can be an economic force.

Founders of STAND FOR LAND met while serving on the Town's Environmental Conservation Commission and worked together for several years to provide research, resources and public programs that culminated in the Conservation Subdivision Law and Marbletown's Natural Heritage Plan. As the group moves forward they will cultivate awareness in the community and engage those officials in Marbletown who will directly impact the town's future blueprint. The main question for both officials and the general public is: "How will we protect our rural character as well as protect our aquifer, natural habitats and wild life that in turn help to define who we are?"

Working as a task force, STAND comes together as catalyst, facilitator, or partner for entities whose mission and activities parallel, or share, the path to our goal. STAND raises funds and awareness for conservation, smart and planned growth, educational programs and the purchase or protection of farmland and other areas critical to rural vitality. In mid-October, STAND held an informational party as the kickoff for a campaign to protect the lands contiguous to the Osterhoudt farm in Stone Ridge. Working as part of Open Space Institute's Citizen Action Program, the group hopes its efforts will add the grassroots component to the broader scope and vision of Open Space Institute's farm protection initiatives in the Rondout and Esopus valleys. STAND raised more than \$3,000 at a recent fundraising party towards the goal of \$25,000. In embarking on this relationship with OSI, we hope to partner in future initiatives earmarked for our town and surrounds.

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Bobbi Esmark, a local artist, owns the BE Gallery in High Falls. She is joined by Daisy Foote, Tracy Dewart and Natasha Williams as founders of STAND

# The Foot Path to Shawangunk

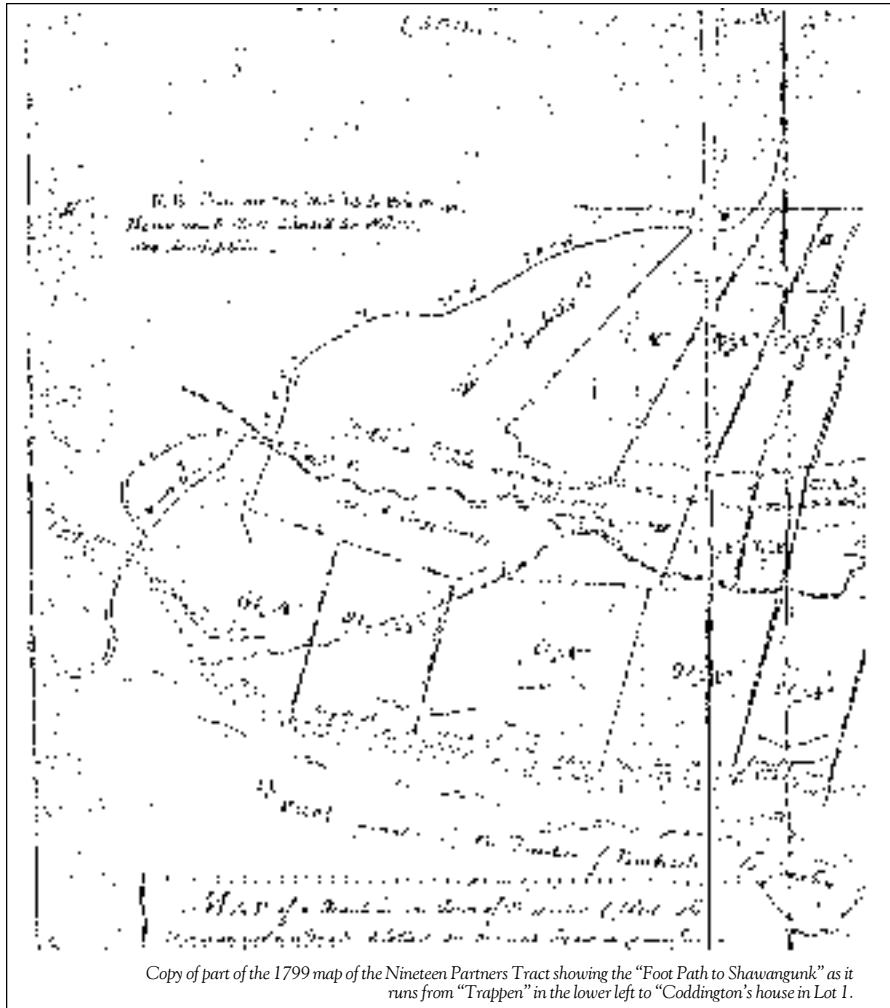
by Norm Van Valkenburgh

Chances are many hikers of the trails and lands of the Mohonk Preserve in the upper Coxing Clove have walked on, along, or over the "Foot Path to Shawangunk" without knowing it. The path has, indeed, been all but forgotten; however, in the early 1700s and, probably, in the 1600s it was the route followed by anyone wanting to get from the Sanders Kill and Stony Kill area near what is now St. Josen to the flat lands east of the Shawangunks and to and from points in between.

...a certain gully in the mountains, called the Shawingunck hills, where the footpath from Rochester to Shawingunck crosses the said mountains, which said gully, lies on the South easterly side of the said mountains, and is commonly called and known by the name of the Trappen...

The closing course in the description runs "Southerly all along the said footpath to the place where it first Began..."

Phillip Dubois later conveyed an undivided one-third interest in the tract or transport to Moses Depuy and to Frederick Schoonmaker while retaining a one-third interest. Following the death of Dubois, his heirs, Depuy, and Schoonmaker had the land divided into lots and distributed amongst them. The survey of the subdivision was made by Jacob Hoornbeek and his 1772 "map or chart" shows the footpath as a dotted line running the easterly boundary of Lot No 1 of the Groote Transport northerly to a point on the Sanders Kill near now-called St. Josen.



An early reference to the footpath is in the 1730 grant from the Trustees of the Town of Rochester to Phillip Dubois. The trustees had gained title to this and other lands by a 1703 Letters Patent from "ANNE by the Grace of God of England Scotland France and Ireland Queen Defendr of the faith." The patent stated that the "said Towne of Mombaccus from hence forth for ever be Called and known by the Name of the Towne of Rochester..." Thus, the land granted became known as the Rochester Patent. With this 1730 mention of the footpath as prominent feature of the landscape, it is safe to assume it was known and used as early as the mid to late 1600s.

The lands of the 1730 grant was designated the Phillip Dubois Tract and became also known as the Groote (or Grote) Transport. The point of beginning in the grant is described as:

of the...tract formerly conveyed to Jacobus Bruyn near the Traps."

In 2002, Bob Larsen and I decided to see if we could find traces of the footpath where it crossed or ran along the boundary of Mohonk Preserve lands. Bob's interest was its historical and cultural significance. My interest was its function as a boundary line between tracts of land dating back into the mid-1700s. Since it constituted a major property line, we expected it might be marked, at least in part, by stone rows, wire fences, hedgerows, etc. Starting out, we had the benefit of a map made by Loyal Nerdahl, who had located sections of the footpath in 1939-40 while surveying the then Smiley Brothers property.

We began our search and survey at a point in the West Trapps Connector Trail. From there southerly (about 250 feet) to the Trapps or "Trappen," the terrain has been significantly altered over the years by the construction of what is now Route 44/55 (in 1927-30), the earlier



New Paltz-Minnewaska Road, and the Trapps Bridge carriage road crossing where we knew any signs of the footpath there had been obliterated long ago.

Running in a general northerly direction for over 1,100 feet, we found no sign of the footpath or any other evidence indicating a boundary or property line and didn't really expect to inasmuch as the land on both sides had long been in a single ownership, first of Smiley Brothers and later of Mohonk Preserve. We did, however, track a logical, dry, gradual, descending route through the woods until we came to a capped iron pipe with stones piled around an old blazed 24" oak tree. The pipe and stones had been set by Nerdahl to mark a point on the westerly line of Lot 19 of the Nineteen Partners Tract.

Continuing northerly, we first found a 30" hemlock with very old blazes and then a large double oak tree similarly blazed before coming to another of Nerdahl's capped iron pipes with stones piled around it on the southerly verge of Shongum Path. Turning northwesterly, now reproducing bearings and distances from the 1799 description of Lot 19, we found another capped iron pipe at the foot of a short, steep slope and in range with a stone row. This marked the southeasterly corner of the first private lands we encountered. We followed the stone row to a cornering where we found a reinforcing rod set in the ground.

We continued, now northeasterly, along the stone row to its end, then produced it to cross the Coxing Kill and the Clove Road bridge to still one more capped iron pipe. Twenty-five feet northeasterly of this, we found another set in a drill hole in a rock to mark the bounds of a right-of-way no longer in use.

Here, we and the footpath turned northwesterly. We crossed the High Peters Kill Trail where it leads out of the Coxing Entry Parking Area, picked up a stone row, ran it along the Enderly Cemetery and beyond to where it cornered. Producing the stone row, we followed an old wire fence and then another stone row to a capped iron pipe set in an intersection of stone rows at the foot of a steep slope. The stone row running westerly from this point soon ended at the foot of an obvious ramp going up the slope.

We climbed the ramp to the top and northerly to an old woods road. We followed this on an obvious route uphill, winding around scattered boulders, to the point where the woods road turned to run downhill.

Turning left off the woods road, we picked out a logical route climbing the slope ahead. It seemed at times we could see a trail but this may have been because we wanted to see one. Along the way we passed a burned hemlock stub, the site of a lightning-caused forest fire a few years earlier, before topping the slope at King's Lane.

We followed King's Lane to a pile of stones at the base of a large, downed oak tree. We knew, from an early deed description, that this marked a southwesterly corner of a parcel of land formerly owned by Smiley Brothers and now part of the Mohonk Preserve.

From this point onward as we went north, we were guided by Nerdahl's 1939-40 survey. His map labels the traverse he followed to the northwesterly corner of the then Smiley Brothers parcel as "Shawangunk Foot Trail." Indeed, the trail, or footpath had been called in the early deed as the westerly line of the parcel. Following Nerdahl's map, we left King's Lane as it branched to the east, and ran up a gentle slope, first passing a pile of stones at the base of a large, dead oak tree, then crossing an old woods road, and finally coming to the corner of a stone row at the top.



photo by Annie O'Neill

From this point on the footpath marked the boundary between lands of the Preserve on the east and private lands on the west. We followed the meandering stone row to where it ended at an 18" oak tree. This stretch of stone row and footpath is on relatively level ground with a marked difference in past land use on opposite sides. We were now at the height of land in the gap between Ronde Barre on the northeast and Dickie Barre on the southwest.

The terrain ahead gradually descended. We continued to reproduce Nerdahl's traverse of October and November 1940. He had marked angle points in his traverse by tacks driven in notches cut in trees which he then blazed. We found many of these trees (some were down and others were gone) and when we stood beside them we could see the actual depression in the ground left by the feet of the many people who had traveled the path. It was probably much more distinct at the time of Nerdahl's survey but could still be seen by the practiced eye.

We ended our search for and traverse of the Shawangunk Foot Path at a pile of stones marking the northwesterly corner of the Preserve lands at a point where the land began to drop steeply toward the Peters Kill. The land below had been lumbered (probably more than once) in the not-too-distant past and we were sure it would be fruitless to search for any sign of the old footpath in the debris and scarred hillside the lumberman had left behind. However, we knew an old road ran along the foot of the slope and wound around the foundation remains of a house which long years ago had been the home of the Coddingtons's as shown on the 1799 map of the Nineteen Partners Tract. We also knew that, beyond the foundation, the old road joined the Rock Hill Road, crossed the Peters Kill and went on to St. Josen.

Just easterly of this final pile of stones is a curious formation known as "The Paint Mine," also called "The Indian Paint Mine." Similarly and without attribution in either case, the Shawangunk Foot Path has been called "The Indian Foot Path." The mine by whatever name consists of a large excavation with two piles of tailings. The story of who dug the mine and for what purpose appears to be lost somewhere in the past.

We did not blaze the footpath or mark it by distinctive signage. It is, nevertheless, an historic relic dating back to 1730 and into, at least, the 1600s. It is also an important boundary line separating early patents and land grants, one dated 1703 and issued by Queen Anne.

**SURVEYOR SPEAK** has elements that this editor was not familiar with. Norm clarified some of my questions:

- ◆ Trees are measured by dbh—diameter at breast height. You can add in the word diameter, as in "an old blazed 24" diameter oak tree" and "a 30" diameter hemlock."
- ◆ Produce in surveyor speak means to extend; however, you can't change produced in this instance to extended because that would read as if we built an extension of the stone row. Change the wording to "...then extended the line of it across the Coxing Kill and..." Interesting to know this!
- ◆ Monumentation refers to the monuments we found or set; i.e., a pile of stones, an iron pipe, a stone row or wall, a wall corner, a blazed tree, etc.

Norm Van Valkenburgh ... continued from page 9

Fortunately, segments of the footpath are delineated on the ground by stone rows, a few old blazed trees, a former woods road, King's Lane, and, here and there, by the faint tracks left by generations of past travelers who walked it. Capped iron pipes and other monumentation indicate some of the angle points in the path. Over the years these markings will disappear into history and the path will remain only as a mention in scattered and faded documents and a vague outline on maps known to only a few.

Norm Van Valkenburgh has been surveying in the Shawangunks and Catskills for more than fifty years. He is also the author of fifteen books, four of these being murder mysteries featuring Ward Eastman, a surveyor/sleuth. These include Murder in the Shawangunks and Murder in the Catskills. His latest work is a children's educational book America's First Wilderness: New York State's Forest Preserves.

## Friends Goes Online

### www.Shawangunks.org

Check out Friends' new website at [www.Shawangunks.org](http://www.Shawangunks.org) It should be launched by the time you are reading this newsletter. It has a back issue of our newsletter *Shawangunk Watch*, links to dozens of Shawangunk sites, and more than 80 photos showing natural features of the ridge. The site also provides an easy way to join Friends, contact us, or send a donation using a credit card.



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