

# SHAWANGUNK WATCH

Fall 2005 Preserving Open Space in the Shawangunks Volume 10 #2

Friends of the Shawangunks & The Shawangunk Conservancy

## RESERVE JUDGEMENT!

### Awosting Reserve Preserved?

It certainly looks that way. The master appointed by a Delaware court has accepted the bid of Open Space Institute (OSI) and Trust for Public Land (TPL) for 2,518 acres of the Awosting Reserve. While the deed hasn't been signed, and we can expect John Bradley to try to prevent the transfer, it appears that the purchase will be consummated one of these days. The proposed 349-house development will not happen.

What, you may ask, is a Delaware court doing selling the Awosting Reserve property? Awosting Reserve, LLC was established in Delaware, and thus its courts had jurisdiction. A number of the investors in Awosting Reserve became disgruntled with the lack of progress in the development, in which \$13 million had already been invested. They realized that progress, if any, would be slow in coming, so they initiated a lawsuit under the terms of the investment to get their money back. Since the corporation was now essentially devoid of any assets except the land—having spent most of the money raised on studies, planning, lawyers, and operating expenses—there was no recourse but to sell land.

The court appointed a master who solicited bids for the property. OSI and TPL made an unconditional offer of \$17 million for the property. (Bradley had announced that it was on the market for \$35 million.) There were a number of competing bids from developers, but all were conditional upon receiving the necessary permits. Given that the Town of Gardiner is rezoning the ridge property that includes



*A hiker looking over the upper portion of the Awosting Reserve from the Gertrude's Nose Trail. This spectacular Minnewaska State Park Preserve trail would have a gated community in its viewshed if the Bradley development were to be realized. Photo by Annie O'Neill*

Awosting Reserve lands, that there is strong local opposition to any development from citizens affiliated with the group Save The Ridge, and that Friends of the Shawangunks was committed to fight any development through what would be a long and involved environmental review (and indeed had already involved itself in defending the town in two lawsuits initiated by Awosting Reserve), the master apparently decided that a certain \$17 million now was in the best interests of the investors seeking to get their money back.

OSI and TPL expect eventually to transfer the property to the state for incorporation into Minnewaska State Park Preserve. The deal includes the Tillson Lake property, but excludes 213 acres that Bradley retains, including his home and a 143-acre parcel extending into the Palmaghatt Ravine that was supposed to have eventually become part of the Awosting Reserve development. The omission of the 143-acre parcel is the only down side in a transaction that will protect forever this incredible piece of property that Bradley had assembled over many years.

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# Recent Land Protection Efforts in the Gunks

In the past two years 2,117 acres have been acquired by Open Space Institute (OSI), Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC), NY-NJ Trail Conference (NY-NJ TC), and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This brings the total amount protected by those four organization plus Mohonk Preserve, The Nature Conservancy, and The Shawangunk Conservancy to more than 42,000 acres. OSI has set a goal of protecting as much as possible of the linear corridor extending from Rosendale to the New Jersey border.

The major conservation holdings on the ridge are administered in six large units. From north to south they are Mohonk Preserve, Minnewaska State Park Preserve, Sam's Point Preserve, Shawangunk Ridge State Forest, Bashakill Wildlife Management Area, and Huckleberry Ridge State Forest. Additional lands have been protected in four of these areas in the past two years:

## MOHONK PRESERVE

Several small but important parcels totaling 59 acres have been acquired, along with conservation easements on 71 other acres. Most of this activity has been focused in the corridor along the Coxing Kill. The Preserve now totals 6,600 acres.

## MINNEWASKA STATE PARK PRESERVE

With the transfer to PIPC of OSI's holdings in the Witch's Hole and Mine Hole Hollow, Minnewaska now contains more than 14,000 acres, the largest park preserve in the state. (It would be considered the fourth largest state park, behind Allegheny, Harriman, and Sterling Forest.)

In the last two years approximately 1,135 acres have been acquired by OSI and DEC, protecting the boundaries of Minnewaska, including the Witch's Hole (Hornbeek), where Route 44-55 enters the western entry to the Park (Polich and Pasternak), Stony Kill Falls (Napanoch Sand & Gravel), the Saunderskill (DePuy) and the Mill Kill (Polich).

Two of these acquisitions were very strategic, and illustrate how encroaching residential development—even a few houses—can seriously impair park and preserve vistas and character.

## SHAWANGUNK RIDGE STATE FOREST

This unit of about 4,800 acres extends from Route 52 in the north to Route 17 in the south. It is now possible to start at Route 17 and hike for more than seven miles on protected land in a wilderness setting. The first parcel was protected more than 20 years ago, and recent acquisitions have been made of OSI, DEC, and NY-NJ TC. OSI and NY-NJ TC hold options on additional parcels that will be added to the state forest in 2006.

## BASHA KILL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

This DEC-administered resource is the largest freshwater wetlands in southern New York and includes over 3,000 acres of wetlands at the base of the Shawangunk ridge. In the past year OSI has added to it 305 acres of ridge land, and OSI and the NY-NJ TC expect to make further significant additions in the next two years, including a single nearly 600-acre acquisition that will contain the three highest summits on this stretch of the ridge.

## VIEWSHED PROTECTION

OSI has launched a farmland/ag program which protects the open fields that are often visible from the ridge. OSI has secured agreements with four farmers to permanently protect their farms, a total of 968 acres (Davis, Davenport, Misner, Paul, Phillis Bridge), and hopes to preserve other in the viewshed of the Gunks.

## A COOPERATIVE EFFORT

It is worth noting that the organizations protecting land in the Shawangunks are not competing with each other, as evidenced by the fact that OSI, which makes most of the purchases, seldom retains a parcel. It transfers ownership to Mohonk Preserve, PIPC, or DEC, depending on which organization holds adjacent lands. Similarly, NY-NJ TC has transferred property it acquired to DEC. Neither OSI nor NY-NJ TC sees itself as a land manager but as a facilitator in protecting the ridge. And both are doing a great job.

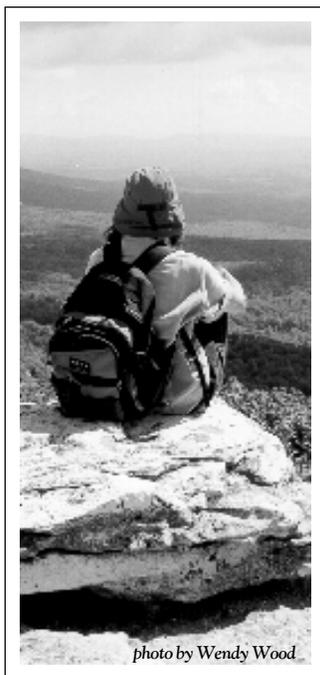
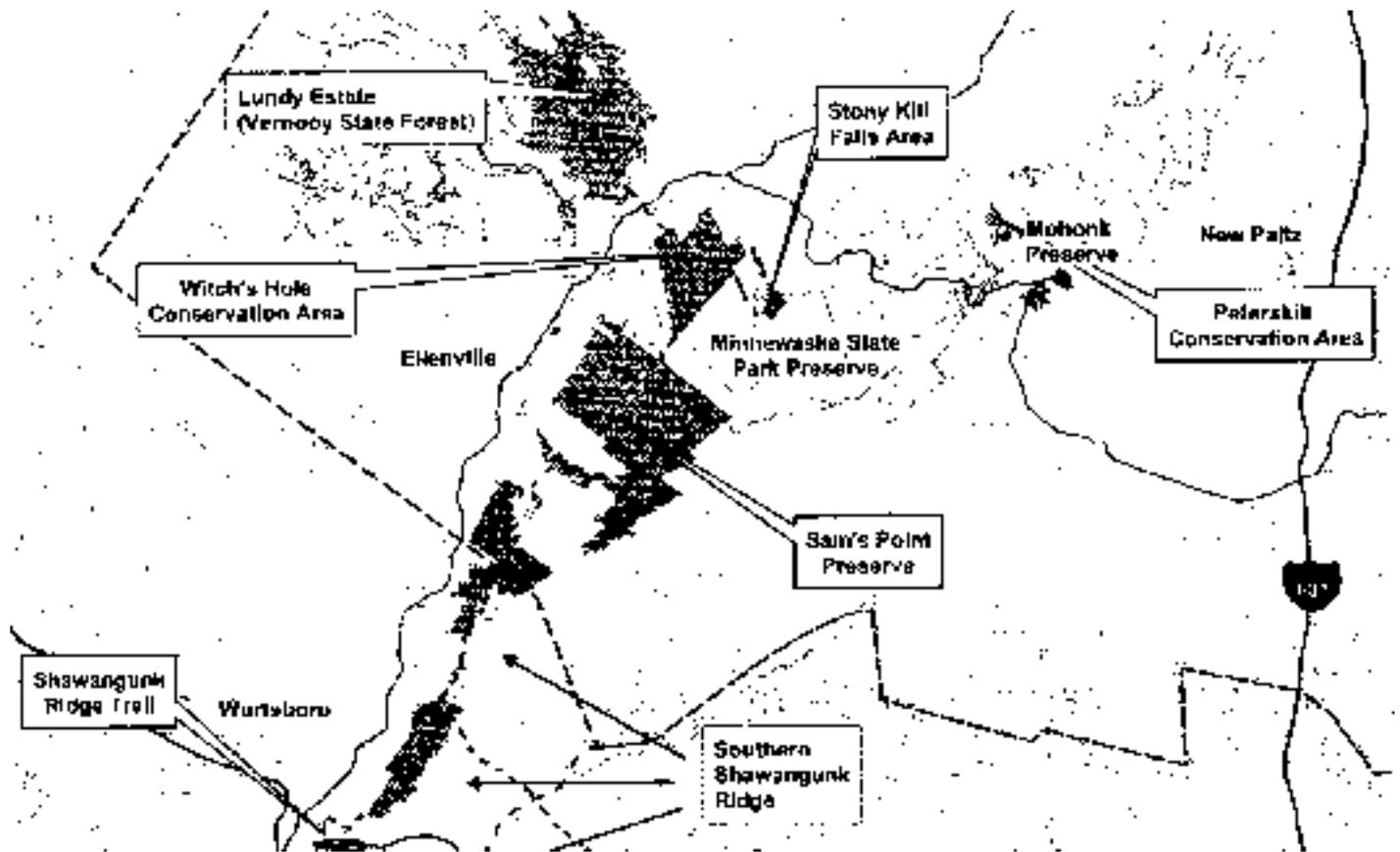


photo by Wendy Wood



photo by Rafi Magnes



## Problems in the Northern Preserve

The Friends' board has spent a lot of time discussing the impact of hikers, bikers, equestrians, and ATVers on the northern portion of the Mohonk Preserve (that land north and east of the Clearwater Road). The Preserve's land management plan designates this area as one in which human use will not be encouraged, and no new trails, carriage roads, parking areas, or other facilities will be constructed. What has in fact happened is that hikers and mountain bikers have created unauthorized trails, and equestrians and ATVers have done considerable damage in this area. ATVers have actually constructed bridges and dams to facilitate their use of the property. It certainly is ironic that one of the areas designated for the greatest protection is also one being most abused.

To address our concerns Friends arranged a meeting between some of its board members and some board members and staff of the Preserve last November to discuss what might be done to alleviate the problems. It became obvious that there are no easy solutions. The Preserve felt that the problems were being caused by a relatively small number of people who found relatively easy access to this area from or across the many private holdings on its borders. Access to this area from the Preserve itself is not causing the problems. Patrol of the area was being done mostly on weekends, using volunteers. The Preserve's ranger staff—at least on weekends—was focused on the heavily-used Trapps area.

In December Friends board members Jenn Cairo and Annie Mardiney accompanied Hank Alicandri, the Preserve's head ranger and director of land stewardship, to the northern Preserve to examine the major access points and to develop an approach that might alleviate the problem. The necessity for getting the cooperation of property owners bordering the Preserve to limit access was clear but not easily achieved. Trespass across the private property is one means of access, but many owners do not even post their land. One owner who has

lived here for over 55 years gave up posting because the signs were almost instantly torn down. We suggested that we would be willing to purchase signs for those neighbors who would use them, but this has not led anywhere. The Gunks Climbers Coalition has asked boulderers who were trespassing across Town of Rosendale property to desist, and has met with some success.

The rail trail is another source of many unwanted visitors. The Watchtower has tried to prevent access across its property, but other property owners have not followed suit.

Unfortunately, the unauthorized access trails are shown on the latest New York-New Jersey Trail Conference maps, although they are marked as "closed." The Trail Conference's reason for showing the trails is to help hikers identify what they are encountering on the ground as they hike. Because of the Preserve's prohibition on new trails in this area, the Trail Conference abandoned a plan for a trail that would have started in Rosendale and connected with the Preserve's network of trails.

The Preserve has taken some steps to deal with the problem. It has redone its signs, posted its boundaries where the problem access occurs, removed the bridges and dams built by ATVers, increased its volunteer patrol, assigned a ranger to this area on weekends, increased its monitoring of its boundaries, and initiated meetings with neighboring owners to ask for their cooperation. It intends to meet with Town of Rosendale officials to make them aware of the problems resulting from trespass across the Town's land.

In spite of all this, the problems still remain. Sometimes the nature of the problems changes as kids grow up, people move away, and interests evolve. But new problems replace the old. The Preserve hopes that new ATV laws will help with one source of the problems, but it will require the cooperation of abutting property owners to have a significant impact.

# Bedrock Ecology

by Ed McGowan

Director of Science and Trailside Museum at PIPC

Open a typical intro biology text book and somewhere near the back you will find a chapter or two describing the basics of ecology: the world's major biomes (e.g., ocean, desert, deciduous forest), ecological niche theory, and so on. Students learn how latitude, warmth, and precipitation shape our natural world and how animals partition resources through competitive interactions. While this information barely scratches the surface, it is precisely conditions below the surface that determine much of what actually lives in a particular location. Though rarely mentioned in introductory texts, bedrock geology is often a key to understanding local ecology.

In the Shawangunks, the influence of bedrock geology is laid bare and visible in gnarled old pitch pines clinging to cliff tops, the vast expanses of monotypic pine barrens and, of course, the dramatic escarpments themselves. However, to truly appreciate the influence of geology in the Gunks, one has to first turn the clock back 14,000 years to the retreat of the Wisconsin glaciation. As the massive ice front receded northward, it revealed a glacially scoured ridge system of fractured and polished quartz conglomerate scraped clean of its soil. This signature rock of the Gunks, formed during the Silurian period 400 million years ago, is extremely durable and resistant to weathering. Thus, soils form slowly over it and those that do are characteristically acidic due to the low buffering capacity of the rock.

These acidic conditions support and are perpetuated by the familiar heath community of the Shawangunks: mountain laurel, huckleberry, blueberry, pitch-pine, red maple, chestnut oak, and scrub oak—a community that also depends on fire for its maintenance. Wetlands and watercourses are similarly acidic (most of the sky lakes do not support fish), except where the conglomerate gives way to the underlying Martinsburg shale, a natural buffering agent, such as at trout-rich Mohonk Lake.

On a recent hike in Sam's Point Preserve, I was reminded of the dominance of these acid conditions when I encountered a golf cart-sized limestone erratic, a decidedly non-acidic visitor carried there from afar by a glacier long ago. In contrast to the nearby conglomerate outcroppings, this tiny island of limestone was adorned with wild columbine, a common wildflower of less acidic environments.

The influence of surface geology is also evident in the unique assortment of rare plants and animals that call the Gunks home. Many of the rare plants, in particular, owe their existence there to the

conditions presented by the conglomerate. For example, two state-threatened plants, arctic rush (*Juncus trifidus*) and mountain spleenwort (*Asplenium montanum*), occupy a precarious niche on vertical cliff faces. A narrow zone of pebbly grit along the cliff tops provides another niche for two more state-rare species, the pioneering Appalachian sandwort (*Minuartia glabra*) and broom crowberry

(*Corema conradii*), the latter species notable for being confined in New York to a single Gunk's cliff line. Still another niche is created where impermeable bedrock traps surface moisture providing appropriate conditions for the state-rare clustered sedge (*Carex cumulata*) and *Rhodora* (*Rhododendron canadense*), arguably the Gunks' showiest flowering shrub.

Rare fauna also depend on the conglomerate in some obvious and not so obvious ways. Peregrine falcons nest at cliff side eyries, safe from marauding raccoons, while timber rattlesnakes penetrate rock crevices to overwinter in subterranean retreats well below the frost line. Rattlesnakes also use rocky openings to gestate while pregnant and as meeting points when searching for a mate. The Allegheny woodrat, New York's rarest mammal and a rock specialist, occupied cave-like recesses within cliffs and talus fields as recently as the 1960s but is now likely extirpated from the Gunks. Even the region's earliest human inhabitants utilized natural rock shelters as evidenced by artifacts dating to 4000 BC.

In each case, the stability and permanence of the Shawangunk conglomerate have provided favored habitats for generations of these species. It is conceivable

that certain rattlesnake dens, woodrat caves, native American rock shelters, and peregrine eyries were used more or less continuously by their respective inhabitants over thousands of years of the Gunks' history. For the woodrat and Native Americans, this cycle has been broken. For other species, including the peregrine falcon (see Thompson article), wise conservation measures are providing a second chance.

Today, new arrivals, including the black vulture (which nests in hidden talus caves), add to this ongoing legacy of stone. For these species, and the myriad others that rely on this intriguing rocky landscape, sound stewardship is critical as we face the challenges ahead. While the conglomerate is durable, the ecosystem it supports is not.



photo by Annie O'Neill

# Members' Hike

by Tom Nozkowski



Hikers Tom Nozkowski, Malcolm Spector and Bob Anderberg

Bob Anderberg of the Open Space Institute (OSI) and I offered to lead a hike that would show a small sample of the beauty of the lands preserved recently in the Shawangunks. Through the efforts of the OSI and with the moral support of individuals like the members of Friends, extraordinary parcels of land have been saved forever, for the benefit of all. On July 16, we took a walk to explore and enjoy the Mine Hole Creek. Mine Hollow, the area around Mine Hole Creek, was included in a parcel of 1,366 acres acquired from the Schevchenko Scientific Society on August 9, 2001 by OSI, and sold to Minnewaska State Park on August 6, 2004.

It was a very hot and humid day, not ideal hiking weather, when we met on Foordemore Road, a mile east of Route 209, at the beginning of the Mine Hollow Road. This road was built more than 50 years ago and runs from the Rondout Valley up the Shawangunk Ridge to connect with the Smiley Carriageway a few hundred yards from Napanoch Point. It is one of the few walking routes ascending the west side of the Ridge.

Under its previous owners the Mine Hollow Road was getting some rough maintenance, by loggers and hunters, but these days, under state management, it is no longer maintained at all. On our walk we found many fallen trees blocking the road.

The route we took to our first objective, the Mine Hole, was the same as described in a previous "Shawangunk Watch." A dry few weeks left only a rivulet of water to plunge in front of the ancient diggings—but still it is a very beautiful place.

We walked roughly northeast from here, following—where we could—the remnants of a hunters' footpath along the Mine Hole Brook. Passing beautiful crevices and talus, we hopped from one side of the brook to the other, until it ended in a wet and laurel-studded area immediately below the low end of the great Napanoch Point escarpment. At this point the remains of a small reservoir can be found, most likely built to supply water to the Foord Sanitarium that until the late 1940s occupied the site of the current Ukrainian National Association Resort.

Our hikers scrambled up the escarpment and emerged in a different world: out of the damp and dark forest and onto the bright and austere rock cap of the Shawangunk Ridge. We stopped for lunch, blueberries and good conversation here. We then followed cairns marking the remnants of old berry-picker trails until we reached a lookout over the Witches' Hole area—another recent acquisition by the Open Space Institute! From here we got on the upper part of the Mine Hollow Road and followed this back down the mountain to our cars. Walks like this are wonderful things, increasing our appreciation of this extraordinary place and the efforts of organizations like OSI to make a gift of it to all of us.



Hikers Participating: Tom Nozkowski, Joyce Robins, Malcolm Spector, Bob Anderberg, Bob Larsen, Barbara Rubin, Jake Berthot, June Finer, Alice Finer, Nathan Boddie, Patty Lee Parmalee, Lisa Cavanagh



The Finer Family enjoying a rest!

## Hikathon Nets Over \$1,800

Hikathon 2005, put on by Dava Weinstein (former Friends board member) and Dorothy Calvani, has once again produced more than \$1,800 for The Shawangunk Conservancy. Dava and Dorothy asked their friends to join them in a hike and lunch in return for a \$50 per person donation. No, they didn't get 36 hikers—not all of their friends are able to join them on the hike, but they contribute nonetheless. And some contribute—and hike—year after year. This year, instead of providing lunch for the hikers, Dava and Dorothy took them out to lunch at Oscar, the restaurant that is located where the Log Cabin was on Route 44-55, west of Minnewaska State Park Preserve. To Dava and Dorothy, and all their friends, we say thank you.

# Jenny Lane Campground Update

The latest word is that the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), on the advice of its engineer, has abandoned the idea of using the Jenny Lane site for its proposed campground. We are relieved that the Jenny Lane area is no longer threatened. The AMC is once again exploring the possibility of developing a campground on its property on Route 299, just east of its junction with Route 44/55. What had been a problem with the line-of-sight at the entrance to the property has apparently been resolved with the Ulster County highway department, a development that will greatly reduce the cost and impact of using this site. There still remain problems with Town of Gardiner zoning over the restroom facilities required and emergency vehicle access to the campsites. The Palisades Interstate Park Commission is assisting with a review of the plans to try to reduce costs, and will approach the state for additional funding. Meanwhile, the American Alpine Club, as part of a program to assist in providing camping facilities near major climbing areas, has indicated an interest in supporting this project. There is a need for some type of controlled camping facility in the area, so Friends will do what we can to facilitate the development of the campground on the AMC's Route 299 property.

## LETTERS

The following letter appeared in *The New Paltz Times*

June 21, 2005

Dear Mr. Moran,

Friends of the Shawangunks opposes any camping on the Shawangunk Ridge because of the very fragile nature of the Shawangunk ecological systems. Our positions on camping have been, and continue to be:

Opposition to the proposed AMC campground at the Jenny Lane site in Minnewaska State Park Preserve,

Support for an AMC campground on the parcel it owns on Route 299 (i.e., off the ridge),

Support for the closure of Mohonk Preserve's camping area on Route 44/55, at the top of the Trapps, and

Support for the elimination of camping at the DEC's multiple use area on Route 299.

We strongly oppose the proposed campground at Jenny Lane. Such a use of this site is precluded by the master plan for Minnewaska, which calls for "A pioneer camping area...limited to organized groups...for environmental education programs." This clearly is not what AMC has in mind. A complete discussion of our position on this issue can be found on page 6 of our Fall/Winter 2004 newsletter (enclosed).

Because users of the DEC and Preserve campgrounds are climbers, a campground near the Trapps would be ideal. The AMC's parcel offers this proximity, as—of course—do the DEC and the Preserve campgrounds. I realize that the DEC has attempted to rectify some of the problems at its campground, but the recent fire highlights a situation that probably cannot easily be dealt with: the lack of on-site management to prevent abuses such as unsupervised, open fires.

As a member of the Preserve's Land Stewardship Committee, I am aware of the Preserve's desire to eliminate camping on its land. It hasn't done so because camping alternatives are limited. I understand that if the AMC builds a campground with the proposed 50 sites, Mohonk Preserve would close its campground. I would hope the DEC would do likewise.

I urge you to support our efforts to have the AMC provide camping on its property on Route 299.

Sincerely,

Keith LaBudde, President



by Christopher Spatz

Standing  
below the tower at Skytop  
looking down the Shawangunk Ridge,  
the crags rise:  
the Trapps, the Near Trapps, Millbrook,  
brilliant and white, like breakers along a petrified wave.  
The half year  
when the leaves are down,  
from the Clove's trailing trough, another crag builds behind.  
Watch  
and the seascape take stops;  
block upon graduated block, tier after tier recede from its ziggurat pieces.  
A mote  
of hardwood lines its base,  
across its crest, pitch pine bow like bonsai monks gnawing bedrock and wind.  
In between,  
beneath the big eaves,  
along the walled corners, inside the labyrinth talus,  
a Great-horned  
will flush vultures from their be-shitted stump  
at the door of last year's slotted, bone-lined cradle;  
coyotes  
will shake down a yearling deer,  
its skeleton left to trellis the mountain laurel's bloom;  
the Long-tail  
will phantom the cobbled, conglomerate paths,  
the alleys, the stacked stairs, the landings, showing only its painter's print:  
the citizens of stone.  
Twice raised in tectonic crash,  
cut and masoned with the slow cleave of ice,  
from Skytop now,  
at this distance, in November's pitched sun,  
ruins silent and teeming, surprise and delight  
the hushed tongue.  
There,  
Lost City!

*Christopher Spatz is a writer and rock climber who lives in Rosendale. He writes about the Shawangunks for local and regional publications.*

# SOUTHERN SHAWANGUNKS UPDATE

*The struggle to protect open space in the southern Shawangunks continues to intensify, with new challenges from commercial and residential developers joining those already confronting us.*

## BASHER KILL SUBDIVISION

The latest hot spot is in the Town of Deerpark, on the southern border of the Town of Mamakating. A proposal has been made to construct 330 single-family houses, a retail center, and associated recreational amenities on a 689-acre ridge parcel bordering State Route 211 and County Route 61. A portion of the parcel abuts the Basha Kill Wildlife Management Area, and an unnamed tributary of the Basha Kill traverses the entire western section. The D&H Canal parallels the tributary along Route 209 and the Shawangunk Ridge Trail coincides with this section of Country Route 61. In addition, much of the land is steep slopes, with 33% of the parcel on grades exceeding 15%. The undertaking's location and expansive scale increase the likelihood of widespread negative impacts. It has prompted Deerpark residents to form a watchdog group called Deepark United Neighbors and Deepark's Planning Board to designate the Basher Kill Subdivision as an action requiring the highest degree of scrutiny under the state's environmental law. The applicant is preparing an environmental impact statement for the project.

## WURTSBORO AIRPORT

The sale and development of the historic 419-acre Wurtsboro Airport on Route 209 is a cause for deep concern to the Town of Mamakating. A developer is attempting to acquire the land and planning to mine 30 acres over the next seven or more years, to create a drag race facility, and to construct 50 upscale homes to accommodate airplane owners. Each of these will permanently scar an important section of this verdant valley, further destroying the viewshed from the Shawangunk Ridge. The quarry and drag racing operations alone will bring noise, air, and water pollution to the area.

The town, which has actually offered a higher price than the developer, has a plan that will protect this key piece of the valley. This plan respects the proximity of this land to the historic D&H Canal and the Basha Kill wetlands. It takes into consideration the airport's significant history, its recreational potential, and its viability as a learning center. It includes the continuation of the airport operation and the creation of a recreation area. The town may be willing to utilize eminent domain, if necessary, to protect this property from inappropriate development and to make it accessible to all residents of the area. It has put together a financial package with funding from the Federal Aviation Administration, the New York state Department of Transportation, and the Pilot's Association that will protect it and maintain its current use. Hundreds of residents attended two recent public hearings, and many favor the use of eminent domain because they contend that local residents will have more input and influence concerning this land's future when control rests with the town rather than with a private entrepreneur.

## SHAWANGA LODGE

While the proposal for a 250-room resort hotel on this property on top of the ridge just north of Route 17 is not dead, the fact that the site is no longer on the state's list of possible casino locations is encouraging. The plans originally presented had the odor of "casino" about them, so one can only hope that the idea of developing this site will be dropped. What use will eventually be made of this property will be greatly affected by what the Department of Transportation decides to do about the Route 17 exit on top of the ridge when this road becomes Interstate 86. Currently Exit 114 consists of a westbound exit only. There is strong support for the concept of not expanding the exit beyond the addition of a westbound entrance. If this happens, commercial use of the Shawanga Lodge site would be unlikely.

## YUKIGUNI MAITAKE MUSHROOM PLANT

The proposal for this plant in the Town of Mamakating continues to worry the community. The environmental impact statement calls for a 925,000-square-foot, 83-foot high factory on 47 acres just north of Wurtsboro between Route 209 and the Shawangunk Ridge. It would use up to 366,000 gallons of water a day and negatively impact the D&H Canal, the Basha Kill Wildlife Management Area, and the view from the Shawangunk Ridge Trail. The Basha Kill Area Association (BKAA) has filed an Article 78 lawsuit against the town Planning Board for failing "to take a hard look" at the environmental impact of the plant; a court decision may be expected by the end of December.

The Zoning Board of Appeals has approved all four of the variances requested by Yukiguni Maitake (YM), in spite of the fact that its own attorney and the Sullivan County Planning and Community Development Division recommended that all four be denied. The ZBA has replaced its attorney with someone with connections to both YM and the ZBA chairman. One of these variances will permit the construction of an 80-foot tall building in an area zoned for 45 feet. The BKAA has vowed to fight on. It is likely that an Article 78 lawsuit against the ZBA will be forthcoming.

While the BKAA is prepared to confront Yukiguni on all levels in the courts, it has incurred considerable legal expenses, and will gladly accept contributions to the BKAA Legal Fund, P.O. Box 1121, Wurtsboro, NY 12790.

On each of these issues the BKAA has been addressing consequences to groundwater, storm water management, flora and fauna, visual and cultural resources, traffic, zoning, and the economy. Its efforts have been strongly supported by Friends of the Shawangunks (FOS) at public hearings, in written remarks, and with financial aid for legal expenses. On October 23, at the BKAA annual dinner, FOS and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference were recognized for their advocacy on behalf of the BKAA. Letters to the following officials would help:

Basher Kill Subdivision:  
Chairman Willard Scott  
and Planning Board Members  
Town of Deerpark  
PO Box 621  
Huguenot NY 12746

Wurtsboro Airport:  
Supervisor Charles Penna  
and Town Board Members  
Town of Mamakating  
2948 Route 209  
Wurtsboro NY 12790

November 12, 2005

*Dear Keith and FOS Board,*

The Basha Kill Area Association is so grateful for your extremely generous donation presented to us at our Annual Meeting.

Your gesture significantly reduced the stress a small organization like ours naturally encounters after throwing down the legal gauntlet to major developers. We now have the ability to plan strategies and tackle the actual merits of various issues without having to worry about raising revenues for legal purposes.

We are proud to be your partner in the ongoing saga of protecting the Shawangunk Ridge and its environs from inappropriate development.

With much Admiration and Respect,

*Paula Medley*

# Blue Trail to Re-Open

Malcolm Spector

On October 24, 2005, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission informed the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NY-NJ TC) that the "Blue Trail" from High Point, in Sam's Point Preserve to the Smiley Carriageway in Minnewaska State Park Preserve could be reopened, rehabilitated, maintained, and re-blazed.

Named after the color of the blazes used many years ago, the blue trail will be the only maintained walking path linking Sam's Point Preserve to Minnewaska State Park Preserve. (The trail from Verkeerder Kill Falls to Mud Pond, a link in the Long Path, crosses a small section of private land owned by John Atwater Bradley, was closed in August 1999 at his request) Currently the blue trail is shown as an unmaintained footpath on Trail Map 104 of the Shawangunk Trails map published by the NY-NJ TC.

The blue trail is approximately three miles in length and crosses a very isolated and remote section of dwarf pitch pine forest amid the smooth slabs of Shawangunk conglomerate. The route circles the rim of a vast bowl facing north, with views down into what is commonly called the Witch's Hole.

The trailhead in Sam's Point is at the overlook on the site of the former fire tower on the red-blazed, High Point Trail. Along the Smiley Road, the trailhead is marked by a large three-stone cairn, east of the junction of Mine Hollow Road and west of the rusted pot-bellied stove at Four Mile Camp.

The blue trail was a traditional and ancient walking path over the ridge. It was a link in the Long Path, a long-distance hiking trail that extends from the George Washington Bridge through the Catskills. The old "Hoeflerin" maps from the 1970s and before, clearly show the Long Path entering the Gunks at Verkeerderkill Falls, ascending to High Point, and crossing over the blue trail to the Smiley Road.

So what happened to this trail? Why did it have to be reopened? When Ice Caves Mountain, Inc, purchased Sam's Point in the 1960s, access was limited to the visitor center parking area; hiking trails in other parts of the ridge were "closed." This meant that maintainers from the NY-NJ TC could no longer cut back the brush, rebuild the cairns, repaint the blazes. (The same fate befell the red trail down to Ellenville from the High Point Carriageway.)

After thirty years of such neglect, the surprising thing is that the blue trail is still there. True, the blazes are faded and the blueberry and scrub oak have grown up to waist level in some places. (Do not hike this trail in shorts!) But the tread way is surprisingly bare and relatively easy to follow. Many cairns still mark the way over the slabs. Clearly people have continued to hike the trail and give it a little loving care.

On October 25, the day after PIPC gave the go-ahead, a trail crew from the NY-NJ TC went out and spent two days working on the trail. With a couple of more workdays in the coming month, the trail should be easy to follow, even if not all the brush has been cut back to the usual standards. At the moment, the section nearest the Smiley road requires the most work.

The Trail Conference plans to blaze this trail aqua or light blue, the color reserved for the Long Path (LP). This is part of a plan to relocate the Long Path as it leaves the Gunks and enters the Catskills. The plan, which requires a series of approvals yet to be obtained, would route the LP from Verkeerderkill Falls over the red trail to High Point, over the blue trail to the Smiley Road, down the Jacob's ladder trail to Port Ben Road, up the Lundy Road and onto a trail along the Vernoooy Kill up to Vernoooy Kill Falls. This will eliminate 14 miles of road walking along the current Long Path. Some of the proposed segments of this plan are shown on the current Trail Conference map 104.

# SURVEYOR in the Courtroom



"Not every property line and ownership question ends up in a court of law but some do. Getting there can be a long, tedious, complicated, and costly process involving judges, juries, witnesses—some expert and some not—and other diverse characters who may or may not comprehend what it's all about. Sit in the Witness chair with Norm Van Valkenburgh, a land surveyor who has been there, and experience 'a day in court'."

So reads the publisher's catalog announcing Norm's new book, *Chains, Links, and Gavels: The Surveyor in the Courtroom*. Norm is a frequent contributor to this newsletter and a surveyor for The Shawangunk Conservancy. The book (with foreword by Friends president Keith LaBudde) examines two boundary disputes and chronicles Norm's involvement in them beginning with his initial research and survey and running through his preparation for court and testimony as an expert witness. Along the way he introduces the other actors in the dramas—plaintiffs, defendants, attorneys, witnesses, innocent bystanders, and judges, and offers his opinion of the right or wrong of each.

One of the cases he discusses is the long and drawn-out struggle by The Shawangunk Conservancy to preserve the natural features of Rock Hill Ridge. As readers of this newsletter will recall, the facts of the case were confusing, complex, and almost incomprehensible. Norm brings order out of that chaos as he describes his many journeys up and down the ridge and along the twisting path through the courtroom.

The book will be available directly from Purple Mountain Press and at local bookstores well before Christmas.

In addition to being a surveyor's surveyor, Norm is the author of four mysteries, *Murder in the Catskills*, *Mayhem in the Catskills*, *Mischief in the Catskills*, and *Murder in the Shawangunks*, as well as *Old Stone Walls: Catskill Land and Lore*, all published by Purple Mountain Press.

Malcolm Spector is on the board of the Friends of the Shawangunks and on the board of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. He maintains a segment of the red-blazed High Point Trail in Sam's Point Preserve.

# On the Wings of Falcons

by John Thompson, Daniel Smiley Research Center



David Johnson

This year, for the first time since 1955, peregrine falcons nested at the Trapps cliff and a young peregrine was banded in the Shawangunk Mountains!

The year 2005 produced two successful peregrine falcon eyries in the Shawangunks, one at the Trapps and one at Millbrook Mountain. Due to dedicated and skilled staff and volunteers keeping close watch on the Trapps eyrie,

we were able to determine that the parents were feeding nestlings and no longer incubating eggs.

On June 4, Joe Bridges and Richard Goldstone rappelled to the eyrie ledge and found three grayish-white down-covered chicks sitting feebly on the ledge. The chicks were about 14 days old. By determining the age of the chicks we knew that they were not too old to band.

Six days later, on June 10 in a foggy misting rain, Joe Bridges again rappelled to the nest, while I and Chris Nadeski, a wildlife biologist with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, were lowered in harnesses. The cliff face was wet and slippery. We dropped down in front of the ledge side-by-side with nets at the ready to keep all the nestlings on the ledge. Unfortunately, there was only one chick. What had happened to

the other two? We looked around all the corners and in every crevice and found no evidence of the two other chicks that were seen less than a week earlier by Joe and Rich. We assumed another raptor that swooped in and took the young away.

Chris worked quickly, unpacking his banding equipment and handling the little falcon as the mother looked on just a few feet to Chris's left. He banded the chick and treated the parasites in the chick's ears, then put the little guy back on the ledge.

During the next 3 weeks, the young peregrine developed its flight feathers, metamorphosing from a little gray puffball to a fully-feathered, brown, regal fledgling. On June 30, the eyas jumped out of the only ledge it had ever known and glided into a new life, landing on a new ledge. The next day, we observed the little guy chasing a turkey vulture and taking off and landing quite skillfully. Oh, they grow up so fast!

As far as we know, the Trapps fledgling is healthy and flying around, hunting on his own. We hope that we will see him again. Look for a two-colored band that is black over green and reads 52 over R on the left leg of the next immature peregrine that you see!

Photo by Richard Goldstone when he and Joe Bridges first checked the nest



Chris Nadeski, Research Scientist 1 from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, and a noted Peregrine Falcon expert is banding the Trapps fledgling as the parent looks on.

Photos by Joe Bridges and John Thompson

What can we learn from banding? On the first banding of peregrine falcons in the Shawangunks, on June 17, 1929, Daniel and Keith Smiley banded two peregrine falcon chicks (one male and one female) on Sky Top. Three months later the male was shot by a farmer in Grand Island, Nebraska 1,300 miles away. This band recovery was interesting in that it documented peregrine falcons migrating East to West instead of North to South.

This coming spring we would like to monitor each of the historic eyrie cliffs two times per week during the peak of the peregrine breeding season. You can help us at the Research Center by volunteering to do observations. Without careful observations, we would not be able to do banding. By banding we will be able to understand peregrine falcon movements and habitat use.

Only by having good science can we make management decisions to best protect this species. With the increasing threats to our ecology, and the increasing recreational use of the Shawangunks, we need to be very aware of the requirements of peregrine falcons and the other important resources of our natural landscape.

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John Thompson is Natural Resource Specialist at the Daniel Smiley Research Center of the Mohonk Preserve. John performs baseline monitoring of the ecology of the Northern Shawangunks and is designing and implementing a land management plan to protect and adaptively manage the 6,600 acre Mohonk Preserve

# PLEASE BE GENEROUS AT YEAR'S END

WE ARE STILL FIGHTING TO KEEP THIS VISTA THE WAY IT IS



Photo by Hardie Truesdale

The battle to save the ridge is costing money.

We need to pay:

- Legal Fees
- Consultants and Experts: (Engineers, geologists, hydrologists, traffic consultants, soil analysts, biologists, archeologists. The gist is that the -gists cost money)
- Printing costs

If you have expertise that you can help us with, please let us know.  
If you can organize a fundraiser, it will help us support this fight.

## OCTOBER SHOWERS

Precipitation for the month was 18.21 inches, 390% above normal, the rainiest month in the 1,318 month record of the Mohonk Lake Cooperative Weather Station due largely to one of the largest storms and rainiest days on record. The remnants of Tropical Storm Tammy combined with a frontal passage to drop 9.12 inches of rain (from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup>), an amount only surpassed by Hurricane Ione in 1955 and the 1938 hurricane. The 6.16 inches of precipitation on the 8<sup>th</sup> was the third highest daily total on record, surpassed by a storm on 2 March 1914 that dropped 18 inches of snow, and Hurricane Diane on 19 August 1955.

Temperature for the month was 0.8°F above the 105 year average. The first frost occurred on the 28<sup>th</sup>, 7 days later than the 110-year average. The 2005 growing season was 198 days long, 19 days longer than the 110 year average.

Paul C. Huth, Director of Research, Daniel Smiley Research Ctr.  
John E. Thompson, Natural Resources Specialist



Awosting Falls in October by Elizabeth Barnett



FRIENDS of the SHAWANGUNKS  
Preserving Open Space Since 1963

**Friends of the Shawangunks, Inc.** is a not-for-profit organization working to preserve open space in the Shawangunks.

**The Shawangunk Conservancy, Inc.** is a not-for-profit land conservancy.

Friends of the Shawangunks  
P.O. Box 270  
Accord, NY 12404  
845-687-4759  
e-mail: gunks@hotmail.com

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## YES, I want to help Save the Ridge!

- This is a new membership
- Hero/Heroine (\$1,000 and up) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Champion \$ 500
- Ardent supporter \$ 250
- Individual membership \$ 15
- Family membership \$ 25
- Total Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to *Friends of the Shawangunks* or *The Shawangunk Conservancy*. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

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This is a gift membership from: \_\_\_\_\_

Matching Grants: If the organization for which you work has a matching grant program, just send us the forms and we will do the rest. Thank you.

IBM matches should be made to *The Shawangunk Conservancy*.

### Friends Newsletter

Editor: Annie O'Neill  
Design and production:  
Annie O'Neill,

A copy of FOS and The Shawangunk Conservancy's latest financial report may be obtained by writing to the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271, or by writing to The Shawangunk Conservancy.

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