

Shawangunk WATCH

Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy

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**BLACK
BEARS**

**JAKOB
FRANKE**

**GARDINER
DEVELOPMENT**

**MAMAKATING
TRAILS**

**A
Black Bear
on
Rock Hill**



Preserving Open Space in the Shawangunks since 1963

Developing a Trail Network in Mamakating *by Kerron Barnes*



JAKOB FRANKE FAREWELL TO A FRIEND Joan James and H. Neil Zimmerman

BY NOW MANY OF YOU HAVE HEARD ABOUT THE PASSING OF JAKOB FRANKE last November 10th. His death was sudden and unexpected—he had scheduled a trail crew trip up to the Gunks that morning. It was only 6:30 am when trail crew members received notice that their trip was canceled.

Jakob was born in the Netherlands in May 1941. He had a long career in Cell Biology at Columbia University. After retirement he remained active with travel, building hiking trails with the NY-NJ Trail Conference and rewriting his Field Guide to the Morris Canal of NJ. His unflagging enthusiasm for trail work, especially on the Long Path / Shawangunk Ridge Trail, was a major contribution to our ridge. His organizational skills were invaluable and his enthusiasm contagious.

After the devastating ridge fire of May 2015, Jakob and his crew went in to assess the damage. Soon after he tirelessly organized volunteers to go in to clean up, even to the extent of having to replace the trail markers that had melted in the fire.

As Jakob wrote for the December 2015 issue of the Shawangunk Watch: “I was concerned about what the fire had done to the Shawangunk Ridge Trail, a trail I had helped build. It was closed for a couple of weeks because of smoldering embers, and because the fire had obliterated many trail markings. The blue markers that show the route of the Long Path and co-aligned Shawangunk Ridge Trail are definitely not fire proof! However, by the end of the month we had assessed the damage and found that, despite the missing trail markings, the trail was very recognizable. The trail was in most places a nice brown ribbon through an otherwise black landscape... Only where the trail passed over slab rock was it hard to follow. After a few days of nailing up new markers the trail was reopened. It was a real surprise to see how rapidly the ridge turned green again. It was only a few months later that we had to go back and do some serious clipping and weed whacking. Ferns were taking over sections of the trail, blueberry was sprouting everywhere, and scrub oak was sending out shoots like crazy...”

Jakob and his wife, Gely, were given the Trail Conference’s Paul Leiken Extra Mile Award in 2014. And, just days before his passing he received the Conference’s highest honor, the Raymond H. Torrey Award, given for significant and lasting contributions that protect hiking trails and the land upon which they rest.

Joan James is a trail builder and maintainer. Neil is President of Friends.

MAMAKATING is well on its way to joining five historic trails that cross the town into a network that it hopes will attract hikers, promote tourism, and expand economic activity.

The arrival of a new Town Board in January 2014 brought an enthusiastic focus on the town’s future as reflected in its master plan, now nearing completion. Community-wide visioning sessions and subsequent discussion showed that residents wanted to keep the community’s rural character and natural assets and to combine nature and history to help make the town an attractive place to live and visit.

A major element in this goal is promotion of the five trails that run through town—the D&H Canal, two former O&W rail lines, the Long Path, and the Shawangunk Ridge Trail. All intersect on Sullivan Street in Wurtsboro.

This vision actually began to form some 15 years earlier with the rediscovery and opening of the D&H canal trail that runs the length of the town.

In about 1999 Mamakating received a grant from the state legislature of \$20,000 for “improvement to the canal.” I was asked to develop a project for this grant.

We needed to locate the canal on current tax maps, find out who owned it and what condition was it in.

A historic-preservation consultant found that all but a few parcels were publicly owned. The towpath was almost intact. The one physical gap could be closed with a footbridge over a brook.

Then the town filled in gaps in the ownership and access along the towpath. We bought one property with partial state funding and acquired easements over three others. The Village of Wurtsboro swapped land with one homeowner who had unknowingly built a garage on village property. We then had about 10 miles of continuous trail.

In 2014 we received a federal Transportation Alternatives Program grant of \$1,057,190 to improve 1.5 miles of the towpath through Wurtsboro to ADA



standards. This work is expected to be let for bid in early 2018. With this canal project under way attention has turned to connecting the five trails.

For the ridge trails, the town goal is to include them in a highly publicized network. New signage, maps and literature are planned as is coordination with trail organizations. The result would be numerous trail loops of varying length plus longer sections for distance hikers.

If all goes according to plan the trail system should be ready for hikers in summer 2018.

ABOVE: The “lower” O & W Railbed about one-half mile north of Sullivan Street in Wurtsboro.

BELOW: A very beautiful section of the D & H Canal stretches from Summitville to Wurtsboro. Both photos by Thomas Nozkowski.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Jakob Franke on the trail in the Shawangunks. Photo courtesy New York/New Jersey Trail Conference



Kerron Barnes is Interagency Coordinator for the Town of Mamakating, writing grant applications and managing grant programs. He is also a whitewater-rafting guide and a Sierra Club volunteer.

COULD YOUR TOWN DO THIS?

Many communities have trails and trail segments that have not been considered in development plans. (Master Plans should consider them.) A town may not even be aware that it has valuable trails. Here’s a start-up roadmap for community officials and activists who want to emulate Mamakating.

Begin by taking inventory. Find every former canal towpath, railbed or abandoned logging road that could be developed as a trail. Locate it on a tax map, document all owners and inspect it for condition. Then make a list of steps to get it into usable shape. Include road segments if necessary to create as long a stretch as possible.

Take your idea to local elected officials who have imagination. An uninterested or short-sighted town or village board is a damper on trail development. Advocacy groups may need to combat a lack of awareness or appreciation of such assets by talking up the possibilities.

Once the town government is on board the main obstacles will be finding funding to pay for land or easements and to connect trails. Expect to take time developing trust and cooperation from private landowners.

Trail organizations are local advocates’ best friends. Seek support from such groups as the Open Space Institute, the NY/NJ Trail Conference and Parks and Trails NY. Running clubs and fitness organizations are often looking for race routes or locations for walking programs and can be mobilized as advocates.

Be persistent. Stay in the process for the long haul. Every once in a while a property or segment becomes available, or another town official takes up the cause. Remember that history is on the side of this movement.

THE BIG, BLACK, FURRY, VEGETARIAN? WELL, MOSTLY *by Susan Erny*

AT DUSK ONE DAY last May my husband and I were sitting near the base of the mountain behind our home when we saw a large, black creature walking down the path to our barn. It was a huge bear, most likely the culprit that ripped the suet cakes and bird-seed feeders from the seven-foot-high wire stretched between our hemlock tree and barn. As we cautiously followed the bear, it passed our Honda Civic- its back as tall as the hood. Then it ran across the road into a field. We were both in awe of this beautiful, enormous animal living in our midst.

We are hardly alone in seeing bears. The bear population in the New Paltz area has been growing over the past six to eight years, as evidenced by increased calls to the Department of Environmental Conservation about bears causing problems. And black bears are expanding their range, sometimes into residential areas.

But having more bear neighbors doesn't need to be threatening if we learn about them.

"Black bears are intelligent, fascinating animals that have a lot of unique adaptations," says Matt Merchant, the DEC Region 3



wildlife biologist who's been in charge of the bear program for 15 years. Matt gets up close and personal with bears. His duties include educating the public and helping people deal with bear conflicts, sometimes removing 12 to 30 bears a year regionally—even from urban environments like Poughkeepsie and Westchester. "We don't usually remove bears from a site where they are a nuisance, except in special cases such as when the bear is young and very likely not to leave on its own. Otherwise, if we resort to trapping, we tag, measure, tattoo and release the bear on-site. We'll shoot at it with rubber buckshot and paintballs and use noise like an air horn and shouting, to haze the bear and discourage the bear from returning to the site. Our handling of it also traumatizes the bear and further discourages it from continuing its unwanted behavior." Bears' ears are tagged with plastic tags that denote where they came from. Radio collars are used on fe-

male bears so they can be found during hibernation, which helps monitoring their young.

Bears are essentially afraid of humans and don't want any contact with us. But when bears awake in the spring they are extremely hungry, and food may be scarce. This is when the tempting aroma of backyard birdseed feeders, suet, garbage cans, compost piles and beehives leads them to our yards. If bears become acclimated to these alternative food sources, they may lose their fear and become assertive, sometimes even breaking into homes. If the DEC removes a bear it may find its way back or move to another residential area. So the DEC recommends feeding birds only in winter, using bear-proof garbage and compost containers, thoroughly cleaning outdoor grills, never feeding pets outdoors, and using a small air horn to keep bears away from your home.

About 6,000 to 7,000 black bears live in New York State, mostly in the Adirondacks, according to the DEC. About 2,500 bears live in our region, the majority in the Catskill Mountains. The black bear's ideal habitat includes dense forests, open areas with shrubs, meadows, wetlands, and streams and ponds. The heaviest bear recorded in New York weighed 750 pounds; an average female weighs 160 pounds and males approach 300 pounds. Black bears are four to five feet long and two to three feet high on all four paws,

Bears are fantastic tree climbers and swimmers, able to sprint 30 miles an hour. They are most active from dawn to dusk but they also may roam during daytime. They may live 30 years or more, but many are killed much younger by hunters and vehicles.

The DEC sells hunting licenses that allow the hunter to take one bear. Eight hundred bears are "harvested" each year in an effort to control overpopulation.

The brawny black bear with its big claws and long teeth is primarily a vegetarian. Ninety percent of its sustenance comes from plants: grasses, sedges, clover, skunk cabbage, plant roots, fern fiddleheads, cattails, jewelweed and other flowers, nuts, and fruits—particularly berries- up to 30,000 a day. Bears will travel far to find food. One radio-

collared female bear's keen sense of smell led her 40 miles on a three-day trek with cubs in tow to a massive patch of hazelnuts.

When it comes to animal protein, bears are opportunistic. Their diet may include insects, grubs, tent caterpillars, bird eggs and hatchlings (no feathers please), certain fish, newborn fawns, beavers, rodents, and even carrion. Black bears are well-equipped for their food search with powerful forearms, large claws and long, sticky tongues. Sticky tongues? Yes, these specialized tongues help them probe for ant colonies for larvae and pupae, or "brood." After sniffing out the pheromones and other chemicals that ants use for communication and defense, bears flip over rocks, moss, or leaves and gather up the brood on their adept tongues. Brood is a delicacy for young cubs. Adult bears put their noses against rotten logs and bite into them with their canine teeth once they locate ant nests. In preparation for the

long winter, bears may gain up to 30 pounds a week.

When you think of cozy bear dens you might not consider hollow trees or holes in the ground or crevices under boulders or blown-down trees, but those are some of the places bears choose to spend the winter. These dens may be as small as 2 ½ feet by 5 feet with a squeeze-tight entrance. A female may start denning in November, while males may wait until December. Shorter days, dropping temperatures and a decrease in the food supply trigger their urge to hibernate. Adult bears don't eat, drink, urinate, or defecate for up to 100 days during winter denning. Their fat and fur insulate them from the cold. All the fat they've built up now breaks down to supply life-sustaining water and 4,000 calories a day. Muscle and organ tissue break down to provide protein. Adult bears lay rolled up in a tight ball, heads between their front legs and their backs toward the drafty entrance. Cubs nestle into their mother's belly and suckle-and-sleep for three months. Since black bears' body temperature remains near normal they are not considered true hibernators. This gives them the ability to jump into action in a hostile situation. They leave the den in March or April. Most black bears use a different den each year.

Bears mate from between late May until September, but the fertilized egg doesn't attach to the female's uterus until November or early December. This ensures that cubs are born in January or early February while mother bears are still in their winter dens. If a pregnant female hasn't accumulated enough fat by the time she moves into her den for the winter that egg will spontaneously abort. Mother bears wake up only long enough to give birth. Litters are typically one to three cubs. Babies weigh about one half pound.. These little ones leave the dens with their mothers and stay with them through the second winter. Then, as yearlings, they are sent off on their own. Females breed every other year. After bears mature at age two to six years they live solitary lives.

FOS performs a great service to these magnificent creatures by helping to maintain the habitat they need to survive.

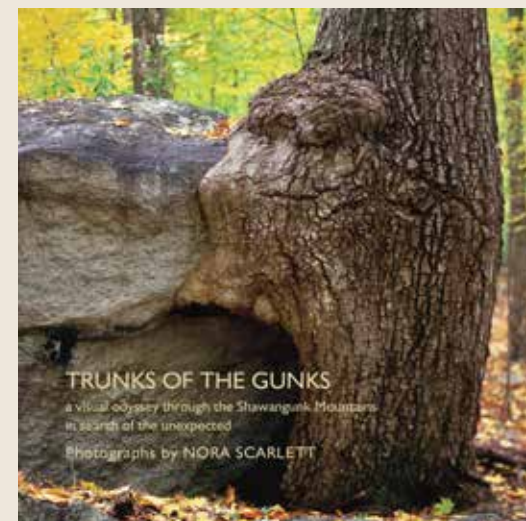


PHOTOGRAPH: ELEANOR KNIEREMEN

WHAT IF YOU MEET A BEAR IN THE WOODS?

YOU MAY MEET A BEAR while hiking or camping, though such encounters are rare. Usually, a bear runs away when it sees, hears, or smells people. If a bear doesn't, here's what the DEC advises: try to scare it by making loud noises—use an air horn, clap, shout, or bang pots. Raise your arms and wave them to make yourself look intimidating. Do not throw things at the bear. Stay together. Slowly back away from the bear. Don't run- it gives bears the impression that you're prey. If the bear starts pawing the ground or snorting or standing on its hind legs, it doesn't mean the bear is about to attack—it's a warning that you're too close. Give the bear space to leave. If a bear charges you, stand your ground. Use bear spray if you have it. If the bear makes contact with you, fight back with anything at hand like a rock, a stick or a knife. Only one in a million bear encounters ends fatally for a human. Since 1902, in all of North America, only 63 people have been killed by black bears. They are usually timid creatures. Black bears live here, too. Admire and respect them - from a safe distance.

TRUNKS OF THE GUNKS



TREE TRUNKS, that is. This new book of photographs by Nora Scarlett puts some wonders of nature right before your eyes. The lengths to which a tree will go to survive under tough conditions is amazing. A tree that sprouts in a crack may need to create an extensive, exposed root system. One that grows next to a boulder will wrap its trunk around that bolder. And then there's the tree that produces a hodgepodge of branches, and one has to wonder why.

The creation of this book started with a single photograph, the one on the cover, shown here. Taking this picture caused Nora to wonder "what other amazing trees were hiding in plain sight." (Searching for other examples was always a good excuse for a hike.) Nora applied her extensive experience as a commercial photographer to produce this marvelous collection.

Nora is an old climbing and hiking friend, but I first became aware of this project when I saw one of her slide shows for guests at the Mohonk Mountain House. I immediately asked her if we could use some of her photos in the Friends' newsletter and she agreed. They appeared in three issues. When the Mountain House built Grove Lodge it installed nine large prints of Nora's work

The book is entitled *Trunks of the Gunks*, and published by Black Dome Press. It is available at many local shops, as well as online.

—Keith LaBudde

From River to Ridge

by Karen Schneller-McDonald

IN THE SHADOW OF MILLBROOK MOUNTAIN lies an 89-acre parcel slated for residential development. If you look down from the top of Millbrook Mountain and see the MK power line, you are looking at the property. It lies along Shaft Road, in the Shawangunk Kill watershed, (within the larger Wallkill River watershed) and contains at least 35 acres of wetland. Its land and water connect Shawangunk Ridge and Wallkill Valley ecosystems.

Both the Ridge and the Shawangunk Kill are well-known for an unusually high number of rare plants and animals. Properties like this one, between Ridge and River, play a significant role in wildlife habitat connections and corridors as well as in watershed health.

The Town of Gardiner and residents are reviewing the plans for this



project and evaluating how it would affect local water and wildlife. How we look at land and water affects this evaluation. Are natural resources merely “constraints” to development, as they are so often described in project proposals? Or, do they provide benefits for local residents? If they provide benefits, how will the Town ensure their protection?

Information needed for an adequate look at impacts is often missing from standard environmental reviews. This project is no exception. The following examples are taken from the review of the project, and include questions to ask (and answer) to provide that information.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

How will sensitive resources be protected in a conservation easement area open for use by a subdivision’s residents? How will the conservation area be managed and monitored, and who is responsible for addressing post-construction impacts? Parceling up portions of wetland that comprises most of the easement into private lots complicates management and is likely to result in impacts on water quality, habitat, and stormwater runoff.

WATER

What we do on land affects our water, which is a shared resource.

Streams, groundwater, and wetlands are all connected. In particular, small streams and wetlands play a critical role, collectively providing benefits that include alleviating flooding, replenishing groundwater and streams in times of drought, improving water quality, and providing habitat. To evaluate impacts on water, project review needs to look at water resources as part of the larger watershed:

- Wetland report including
- a description of all wetland habitat types;
- wetland delineation including data sheets and verification of wetland boundaries;
- functions and values assessment - how the wetlands benefit the community;
- describing DEC wetlands that exceed 12.4 acres but don't appear on DEC's wetland maps; they are eligible for future mapping, and DEC recommends 100 foot buffers around them.
- Groundwater pumping Analysis of the cumulative effect of groundwater pumping (for individual wells) on nearby wetlands and small streams.
- Stormwater assessment Any project with impervious surfaces will increase stormwater runoff and affect its path and storage. How will stormwater management “green infrastructure” and “low impact development” practices be applied?
- Impacts on streams How will the project affect water quality, streamflow, and habitat for trout? Steep slopes along streams require a wider buffer to slow runoff and reduce sedimentation. How will project construction affect downstream flooding on nearby roads?
- Buffers for water quality protection. Vegetated (not lawn) buffers of at least 100 feet along the edges of wetlands and streams protect water quality, intercepting and slowing runoff into the water. Septic systems and stormwater basins, construction of roads and houses should be located outside this buffer because they interfere with its ability to provide these benefits. In light of worsening water quality conditions (resulting in toxic algal blooms) in the Wallkill River, buffer protection helps protect water quality for all watershed residents.

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

The parcel contains a variety of aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial habitats likely to be used by animals that are of “conservation concern.” This includes wildlife species listed by NY state as Threatened, Endangered, Special Concern, or Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). SGCN are experiencing population decline; their long term welfare is in jeopardy, and they need management intervention or they are likely to reach critically low population levels in New York.

Since the NY Natural Heritage Program hasn't surveyed all sites it doesn't have the information to support a definitive statement as to the presence or absence of all rare or state-listed species on a specific parcel. That's why we often need site specific information to identify impacts

on these species so we can design effective, science-based mitigation. This includes:

- A habitat map (aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial). Wildlife is likely to be present where suitable habitat is found.
- Identification of rare plants onsite
- List of wildlife species of conservation concern that may use the project site, and their habitat needs. Match species with the habitats they use; make connections between impacts on habitat and impacts on species:
- aquatic species
- bats (All of NY's bats are conservation concern species. All cave bats found in NY State have experienced drastic declines since the appearance of white-nose syndrome. New York has lost between 75% and 100% of wintering bats since 2007).
- birds (breeding birds including raptors, and migrants) Habitats on the project site mentioned in this article may be used by at least 20 species of conservation concern.
- reptiles and amphibians (seven species listed as NYS Special Concern species have been found near the project site; field surveys conducted at the appropriate seasons are needed to document presence and identify critical habitats and travel corridors).

The Shaft Road parcel includes a variety of habitats including wetlands and streams that collectively benefit residents. Environmental impacts on some of these resources may be significant. A “hard look” at impacts by local reviewers is called for by the SEQRA process to ensure that we have enough information to support conclusions about the site's natural resources and how this project may affect them. With that information in hand, we can plan effective avoidance and mitigation to reduce those impacts.



Three photos of the 89-acre parcel now under threat of development in Gardiner. This land lies under Millbrook Mountain and reaches to Shaft road.



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This issue was edited and assembled
by Susan Erny, John Hayes,
Keith LaBudde, Steve MacDonald, and
Thomas Nozkowski



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

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The latest financial report of
Friends of the Shawangunks
and The Shawangunk Conservancy
may be obtained by writing to the
Office of the Attorney General,
Charities Bureau,
120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271,
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the above address.

NOTES FROM THE SOUTHERN SHAWANGUNKS by Susan Erny



The illegal eighth floor, under construction at Dragon Springs.

DRAGON SPRINGS, THE MASSIVE 400-ACRE COMPOUND complex atop the Shawangunks' western ridge, has come before Deerpark's Zoning Board of Appeals monthly since the last Shawangunk Watch was published. In question were the same five variances DS presented last July. The ZBA and DS heard many critical comments from the public, the DEC and Andrew Willingham, an engineer contracted by the BashaKill Area Association. DS submitted modifications to minimize the variances in January, February, and March. The requested changes included the grade and width of a driveway, a bridge width, and an internal fence. Exterior fencing has been temporarily withdrawn. In March the ZBA determined that it needed comment about driveway variances from the Town Engineer and Highway Superintendent. Correspondence from John Lyons, lawyer for Deerpark Rural Alliance, the local watchdog group, pointed out that because there has not yet been a determination of environmental significance of the DS site plan by the Planning Board, the ZBA has no right to approve any variances. The next ZBA meeting with DS is scheduled for April 20.

Deerpark Rural Alliance continues reviewing documents. Of particular interest is a stop-work order issued by the town's building inspector for construction of an eighth story on the rehearsal hall, exceeding the town's seven-story limit.

BEAUTIFUL EARTH GROUP, ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT BREWING in the Southern Gunks, got a green light from the Mamakataing Planning Board in March for its proposal to build an Advanced Agricultural Center on 48 acres. Permission was conditioned on several remedies urged by consultants hired by the Basha Kill Area Association.

The BE property lies in the Rondout Valley east of Route 209 at the headwaters of the Basha Kill, next to the D&H Canal Towpath and at the foot of the Shawangunks. The three-phase project includes 12 high-tech greenhouses, a 44,100 square-foot pilot plant, and a 214,445 square-foot research and office building. Water usage up to 42,000 gallons a day is expected. Solar, wind, and geothermal energy will power these facilities.

A number of issues raised by BKAA engineer Willingham and Hudsonia ecologist Erik Kiviat resulted in amendments to the site plan. Floodplain and wetland boundaries and a stormwater management plan were corrected, a shagbark hickory habitat for the endangered Indiana Bat was preserved, and pollution from an on-site dump will be cleaned up. The amended site plan and special use permit were approved on March 28.

Beautiful Earth plans to begin building next year.

BEST NEWS: No news from Seven Peaks or Deerpark Commons.

—Susan Erny is a Friends board member



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- BENEFACTOR** \$250.
- PATRON** \$100.
- FAMILY** \$25.
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