



The health benefits of being in nature

Nature enthusiasts are known to say that spending time in the great outdoors has a positive effect on their mental and physical wellbeing. Such an outlook is more than mere speculation, as it turns out spending time in nature provides a host of health benefits that might surprise even the most devoted outdoor enthusiasts.

Nature and cognitive health

A 2010 study published in the American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias found that engaged persons with dementia in horticultural therapy-based (HT-based) programming solicited higher rates of participation than traditional activities (TA) programming. In addition, a separate 2013 study in the journal *Dementia* found that exposure to a therapeutic garden had a positive impact on quality of life for people with dementia. And it's not just dementia patients who can experience the cognitive benefits of time spent in nature, as the Hagley Museum and Library reports that numerous studies have found exposure to nature improves cognitive function.

Nature and vitamin D

The potential health benefits of vitamin D are increasingly drawing the attention of medical re-



searchers, and for good reason. According to the Harvard Medical School, recent research has suggested that vitamin D may offer added protection against conditions such as osteoporosis, cancer, heart attack, stroke, and depression. Exposure to sunshine can help the body generate vitamin D, thus providing further reason to spend time in nature.

Nature and overall well-being

Given the aforementioned health benefits related to spending time in nature, it's easy for even non-scientists to conclude that being outdoors has a profound impact on overall well-being. But non-scientists can rest assured that recent research has confirmed such conclusions. A 2019 study published in the journal *Scientific Reports* found that

individuals who spent at least 120 minutes a week in nature were significantly more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who spent less time outdoors. Though the authors of the study cautioned that the exposure-response relationship was under-researched, and therefore likely needed to be studied more extensively, in the meantime individuals, after a consultation with their physicians and confirmation that it's safe to get out more often, can aspire to spend at least 120 minutes in nature each week. The results may speak for themselves.

Nature has a lot to offer, and the benefits of spending more time outdoors may be even more significant than people recognize.

3 fun and effective outdoor exercises for seniors

The benefits of spending time in the great outdoors are significant. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, spending time outdoors may improve mental health and help to reduce stress, and the vitamin D the body absorbs while outside can have a positive effect on blood cells and the immune system.

Seniors can benefit from the great outdoors as much as anyone. Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium, which strengthens bones. That's especially beneficial for seniors, as the National Council on Aging notes that bone density often decreases after age 50, which can increase the risk of fractures. That's especially so in women over the age of 50, as a 2021 report from Amgen, Inc., indicated women can lose up to 20% of their bone density within five to seven years of menopause.

Spending time in the great outdoors also provides a social benefit, encouraging individuals from all walks of life, including seniors, to get out of their homes and spend time with other people.

With so much to gain from spending time outside, seniors can consider these three outdoor exercises as they seek to maintain or improve their overall health.

1. Walking: Walking is free and effective. In fact, WebMD notes that a brisk 30-minute walk can improve blood flow, contribute to a stronger heart, strengthen bones, and even help people sleep better at night. In addition, a 2022 study published in the journal *JAMA Neurology* found that people between the ages of 40 and 79 who walked about 9,800 steps per day were 51% less likely to develop dementia than people who didn't walk much at all.

2. Cycling: Riding a bike is both fun and a great form of outdoor exercise. Though many studies regarding the health ef-



fects of cycling have looked at the value of riding a bike to work, a scenario that does not apply to retirees, the results of such studies still offer insight into just how valuable it can be to ride a bike. For example, a 2020 study published in the journal *The Lancet* found that people who cycled to work were 24% less likely to die of heart disease and 11% less likely to develop cancer. Seniors, whether they are still working or retired, can incorporate cycling into their daily routines and enjoy all the fun and health benefits that riding a bike provides.

3. Hiking: Hiking is a bit more strenuous than walking, particularly when individuals choose to traverse steep and/or rocky terrain. WebMD notes that hiking after age 60 can help people reduce their risk of falls and fractures; lower their risk for a host of ailments, including coronary heart disease, colon cancer and diabetes; reduce blood pressure, even in adults who have already been diagnosed with hypertension; and maintain healthy bones and joints. Hiking is not a one-size-fits-all activity, so seniors, especially those who would characterize themselves as novice hikers, are urged to speak with their physicians prior to hiking trails that are not flat.

Seniors can consider these three fun activities and others as they answer the call of the great outdoors. Walking, cycling and hiking offer a great reason to get out of the house and reap the health-related benefits of spending time outside.

20th Catskills Lark in the Park through Oct. 9.

The Lark is a series of free events celebrating the Park with a full range of offerings across the region. Since its inception, the Lark has brought together thousands of people that have participated in hundreds of events, all aimed at enjoying the recreational assets of the Catskill Park and Catskill Region. Main organizing partners are the Catskill Mountain Club, the Catskill Center, the New York Jersey Trail Conference, and the NYS DEC, and many volunteers.

For more information and to participate, visit catskillslark.org Register online at least one day in advance of the event.

Sept. 30

Hike to Stoppel Point, 9 a.m.
Hike Giant Ledge from Woodland Valley, 9:30 a.m.
Hike to Bramley Mountain, 12 p.m.

Oct. 1

Photography Hike at Catskills Visitor Center, 9 a.m.
Guided Hike and History of the Escarpment Trail & Trailhead Cleanup, 9 a.m.
Hike to Red Hill Fire Tower, 10 a.m.
Hike to Headwaters Trails, 10:30 a.m.
Outdoor Skills Hike for New Hikers, 11 a.m.
Yoga at the Market, 11 a.m.

Oct. 2

Mountain Bike Lake Minnewaska Carriage Roads, 9:30 a.m. (note: There is a small fee to enter the park)
Hike to Rochester Hollow, 10 a.m.

Oct. 3

Hike Millbrook Ridge, Alder Lake, and Balsam Lake Mountain, 8:30 a.m.

Hike Slide Mountain - Curtis-Ormsbee Loop, 8:30 a.m.
Backpack the Devil's Path, 3-5 p.m.
Giant Ledge Hike, 10 a.m.

Oct. 4

Hike the Plattekill State Forest Road, 9 a.m.
Dry Brook Ridge Trail Maintenance Hike, 10 a.m.
Birding Walk at the Catskills Visitor Center, 10 a.m.
Loop de Loop Hike at Frick Pond, 3 p.m.
Yoga at the Arboretum, 3 p.m.

Oct. 5

Huckleberry Point Hike, 8:30 a.m.
Topo Map Reading for Beginners, 5:30 p.m.

Oct. 6

Platte Clove History Hike, 9 a.m.
Hike to North Mountain, 9 a.m.

Oct. 7

Mountain Top Historical Society - Hikefest #1 Kaaterskill Falls, 8:30 a.m.
Mountain Top Historical Society - Hikefest #2 Kaaterskill Junction, 9 a.m.
Mountain Top Historical Society - Hikefest #3 Kaaterskill Clove Vistas, 9 a.m.
Hike Pakatakan Mountain, 9 a.m.
Paddle the Pepacton Reservoir, 11 a.m.

Oct. 8

Forest Bathing Walk at Catskills Visitor Center, 10 a.m.
Native Plant Presentation, Mountain Top Arboretum 10 a.m.
Burroughs History Hike, 10:30 a.m.

Oct. 9

Indigenous Peoples Day/Manitou Tour Hike, 10 a.m.



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Fall Fishing Tips

The weather may cool off in the fall, but that doesn't necessarily mean the fishing does, too. Gamefish often become more active as they feed in preparation for winter. Forage is plentiful for gamefish in the fall as young-of-the-year yellow perch, sunfish, gizzard shad and alewives reach desirable sizes. Gamefish will often follow these species around, so it can sometimes be challenging to locate fish.

Below are some tips that will hopefully help you land a few more fish this time of year:

- Start shallow and then work deeper until you start catching fish. Fish will often be in very shallow water in the early fall so it's a good starting point.
- Use moving lures like crankbaits, stickbaits, spinnerbaits,

swimbait, etc. to cover water looking for active fish.

- Keep an eye out for feeding activity. If you notice fish jumping on the surface or birds diving, get to that area quickly and cast into it.

With the cooler water temperatures, fall can be a good time to visit your favorite trout stream. Most streams would have seen little fishing activity during the warm summer months.

- Follow trends. If you catch fish in an area one fall, try that spot again next fall.

Gamefish often use transitional areas between deep and shallow water for staging and foraging in the fall. Target areas such as tributary mouths, drop-offs, weed edges, and underwater structure.

Glory days of fly fishing in Phoenicia

Phoenicia has a legendary reputation in the pantheon of American fly fishing. It is noted for having the first boarding house that catered to fishermen in the 1830s. Before improved transportation routes like the Plank Road (1851) or the U&D Railroad (1870) anglers came to the Milo Barber farm to fish Stony Clove Creek which was more famous than the Esopus at that time. Once transportation was easier and hotels and inns built, a thriving hunting and fishing culture developed.

Flash forward to the post World War II years, when Folkerts sporting goods store was the unofficial headquarters of Esopus Creek trout fishing, and Ray Smith, Phoenicia's famous guide and fly tier, served many celebrity clients. Elmer's Diner was the spot where fishermen gath-

ered to swap tales and journalists from far and wide came to hear what they had to say.

On Sunday, Oct. 15, from 1-3 p.m. some anglers and other local residents who remember the glory days will bring together more about the colorful characters and the famous catches from Phoenicia's piscine past at the Phoenicia Library, 48 Main Street, Phoenicia.

The Jerry Bartlett Memorial Angling Collection is a special collection of books on fishing and also an historical repository. Programs are recorded and archived at www.catskillangling-collection.org. For more information see the library website www.phoenicialibrary.org.

This free event is made possible with funds from the Catskill Watershed Corporation in partnership with New York City DEP.

Safety guidelines for the great outdoors

People venture into the great outdoors for many different reasons. The Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act was developed in part to analyze the outdoor recreation economy of the United States. In 2018, its report showed outdoor recreation contributed more than \$412 billion to the U.S. economy and 4.5 million jobs. In 2019-2020, Parks Canada reported 24.8 million people visited parks and historic sites.

The outdoors became even more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. Outdoor areas were safer places to gather and made it easier to gather without compromising social distancing guidelines. Since then, nature has continued to provide the space and respite people need.

As people continue to venture outdoors, it is important to do so safely. Yale Medicine says serious medical conditions and severe injuries can occur in the wilderness. Preparation is key to avoid such scenarios.

Check the weather

Know what the weather will be when spending time in the great outdoors. Hikers or those engaged in other activities should have a way to protect themselves from rain and lightning strikes or being caught in cold weather for a long time. Appropriate clothing and a tarp or another temporary shelter can be crucial.

Take a first aid kit along

The first aid kit should be stocked with the basics for rou-



tine medical issues like cuts, burns or insect bites. For serious outdoors people, a lightweight splint can immobilize a sprain or broken bone. Outfit the kit depending on the activity. Consult with a medical professional or park ranger about what to bring.

Leave a plan with someone

Much in the way a pilot files a flight plan, people spending time outdoors should create their own travel plans and leave the details with someone at home. The plan should list who is going, where everyone will be and the expected time away. This way if the group is not heard from in a set period of time, the person at home will know where to begin the search.

Respect plants and animals

Injuries can occur from encounters with flora and fauna. Do not handle or consume wild plants without knowing they are safe. Do not approach or feed wild animals. Store food up and away from tents so that bears and

other animals will not be lured to your campsite.

Practice fire safety

The conservation organization Wild Virginia urges outdoor lovers to follow fire safety guidelines. Do not create a fire beneath overhanging branches or anywhere other items may catch fire. Use a ring of sand or stones to contain the campfire. Never light a fire if the fire danger rating is high. Parks usually post wildfire risk charts that will indicate if fires are off limits. Always fully extinguish a fire before leaving the area, and check that the ashes are no longer smoldering.

Know limits

Each individual should know his or her medical history and physical limitations and keep them in mind when planning days outdoors.

Spending time outdoors presents plenty of opportunities for enjoyment, especially when people take safety measures into consideration.

Special antlerless deer, early bear, Canada goose, and squirrel seasons approaching

Early bear and early antlerless deer seasons begin September 9

The early bowhunting season for bears will open in all of the Southern Zone on Oct. 1, followed by the regular firearms season beginning Nov. 18.

As the population has grown, season lengths and bag limits have been liberalized and hunters have successfully stabilized the population. The September season is an important opportunity for hunters, as regular Canada goose seasons have been restricted to 30 days and bag limits reduced to one bird in most areas to protect the more vulnerable migratory geese. Resident geese look the same as migratory geese, making it difficult for the public to distinguish between the two populations. For more

information on the differences between migratory and resident geese and how these birds are managed, read the article "Canada Geese in New York - Residents or Visitors?" www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/canadageeseny0819.pdf

Migratory Bird Hunters: Protect the Game, Don't Skip HIP!

All migratory game bird hunters must register annually for HIP (Harvest Information Program) through DEC's licensing system. The HIP registration is legally required and helps state and federal biologists estimate hunter participation and harvest of migratory game birds. HIP registration identifies active hunters who receive follow-up surveys

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service. Providing a valid email address during HIP registration will ensure that you can participate in hunter opinion and harvest surveys. For more information on how biologists estimate harvest and to see harvest data for New York and the rest of North America, visit: Migratory Game Bird Harvest Survey www.fws.gov/harvestsurvey

There are two options to register with HIP: online at the DEC hunting license website, or via the automated phone system, available by calling 1-866-933-2257. At the end of either process, you will be given your HIP registration number. Migratory game bird hunters must carry this number while hunting.

Safety

During all hunting seasons, hunters should remember to follow the primary rules of gun safety:

- assume every firearm is loaded;
- keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction;
- keep the safety on and finger off the trigger until ready to shoot; and
- always be sure of your target and what is beyond it.

For more information on hunter safety, visit DEC's website; watch videos about hunter safety and tree stand safety for more tips on how to prevent accidents.

Hunters should also be prepared to cool and process harvested game quickly to preserve meat quality. Hunters should also remember that several changes enacted in 2021 continue this year. Hunters and anyone accompanying them must wear a solid or patterned fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink hat, vest, or jacket when hunting deer or bear with a firearm. Hunting hours for deer and bear now include the full period of ambient light from 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset. Finally, 12- and 13-year-old hunters can hunt deer (not bear) with a firearm or crossbow when accompanied by an experienced licensed adult.

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GET OUT & EXPLORE GREAT OUTDOORS

The most popular recreational activities

Summer is a season for recreation. Warm weather beckons people outdoors every day and during every season, but a quick glance outside your living room window in June, July and August will illustrate just how much people cherish any chance to spend time in nature when the mercury rises.

So how are people spending their time outdoors?

According to a recent report from the Outdoor Foundation that studied participation in various sports and activities, the most popular outdoor activity in the United States is running. The Outdoor Foundation report indicated that more than 61 million U.S. residents did some recreational running in 2019. To put

that in perspective, 61 million people represents roughly 19% of the American population age six and up.

Fishing was the second most popular outdoor recreational activity among adults in the U.S., attracting more than 50 million participants.

Outdoor recreation also is popular in Canada, where winter-dominant sports like skiing, snowboarding and hockey aren't the only ways to enjoy the great outdoors. For example, the Trans Canada Trail, a recreational trail that connects every province and territory in Canada, attracts cyclists, joggers and hikers throughout the warm weather seasons.

6 tips for taking stunning nature photos



Exploring the great outdoors is a rewarding way to witness the majesty of nature. Nature frequently presents awe-inspiring vistas that can take individuals' breath away. Some nature lovers are content to bask in the moment and set the scene to memory. Others may want a more permanent way to commemorate the view.

Amateur photographers eager to capture the majesty of the great outdoors can practice their picture-taking skills. According to the photography tips and technique experts at Picture Correct, many factors are involved in taking nature photographs. These tips can help anyone take stunning nature photos.

• **Invest in quality gear.** The right photography gear makes it much easier to take great photos. Lenses are very important for capturing shots. Macro lenses are designed for insects and flowers. Wide-angle lenses help snap landscapes. Telephoto lenses can focus on animals without having to get too close.

• **Take the foreground into consideration.** When you find an inspiring landscape to photograph, skip the empty landscapes and think about zeroing in on something interesting in the foreground. This can be a particularly attractive flower in front of a vast field, or even a rusty watering can left out in a row of crops. Items in the foreground impart interest in the photo.

• **Consider depth of field.** Sometimes you will have no control over the busy background an interesting subject is in front of in a planned photograph. A shallow depth of field achieved with a wide aperture can blur a background and separate the subject from that background, according to Shotkit, a photography and gear authority. Some post-production work also can be done to blur backgrounds in apps like Lightroom or through Photoshop.

• **Zoom in and crop subjects.** Smaller pictures can be just as compelling as larger ones. Zoom in on the bark on a tree, the skin of a lizard or the wings of an insect. Closer looks at what is hiding in plain sight in nature can

lead to compelling pictures. Zoom in and think about a macro lens, which will magnify even the tiniest details.

• **Study what you want to capture.** The best photographers do their research. If you want to grab a great photo of an egret by the water's edge, spend time watching these birds in their habitat and learning their behaviors. This might help you predict when to snap the best photo.

• **Use light wisely.** The photography resource Expert Photography recommends taking photos primarily during the golden hours. These are right after sunrise and just before sunset. The light during these times of day has a softer, hazy quality that will illuminate subjects evenly and less harshly than midday, when shadows also may pose challenges. Taking photos during these times also means fewer people around and a better chance that wildlife will be out and about.

Nature photography is wildly popular and there are many ways for amateur photographers to make their photos pop.

Trailing behind



The Shavertown Trail, maintained by the Catskill Mountain Club, provides an initial moderate hike followed by stunning views of the Pepacton Reservoir. photo contributed by Peter Manning

September is tree stand safety awareness month

September is the month many hunters, especially bowhunters, start heading back to the woods to put up stands and get ready for upcoming hunting seasons.

Every year, hunters are seriously injured, paralyzed, or killed falling out of tree stands. Falls from tree stands have become a major cause of hunting related injuries and fatalities in New York.

Fortunately, there is something hunters can do to prevent severe injuries if they fall from a tree stand or elevated platform - wear and properly use a fall-arrest system (FAS). A FAS will keep

you attached to the tree from the time you leave the ground until you get back down. A harness alone does not protect you if it isn't attached to the tree the entire time you are off the ground.

A FAS includes a vest style full-body harness (FBH) with shoulder, chest, and leg straps, a strap that attaches to the tree when in the stand, a tether strap that attaches the harness to the tree strap, a "lifeline" to keep a hunter safe while climbing and descending, and a suspension relief strap to be used in the event of a fall.

Wear a FAS and be safe this season!



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DEC announces start of small game hunting seasons

Special youth and military hunting opportunities available

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos has announced that most small game hunting seasons open Saturday, Oct. 1, across New York state.

From waterfowl and upland gamebirds to squirrels, rabbits, and more, there are abundant opportunities for hunters across New York state, Seggos said. This year, hunters can enjoy even more waterfowl hunting opportunities, with an increase in mallard and Canada goose bag limits and an extended goose season.

Season dates, bag limits, and other hunting regulations for New York's small game species are available in the Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide, which can be obtained from a license-issuing agent or at www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/huntguide.pdf

Waterfowl hunting and special youth and military days

New York offers vast waterfowl hunting opportunities as hunters may harvest more than 30 species of waterfowl. New York has five waterfowl zones and nine Canada goose zones that help to maximize hunting opportunity across diverse habitats. Most waterfowl zones also have special hunting days for youth and members of the military (both active duty and veterans) that often begin prior to the regular hunting season, giving these hunters the opportunity

to hunt with less hunting pressure.

Youth Waterfowl Days:

Northeast, Southeast and Lake Champlain Zones: Sept. 23 and 24

Military and Veteran Hunting Days:

Northeast and Southeast Zones: Sept. 23 and 24

Opening dates for the regular duck seasons:

Western and Southeast zones: Oct. 21

For more on waterfowl hunting season dates and bag limits, visit the Waterfowl Seasons page on DEC's website.

Ruffed grouse hunting

Ruffed grouse hunting season runs from Oct. 1 through the last day of February in most parts of the state.

Ruffed grouse hunters in the Northern Zone are reminded to positively identify quarry before shooting. The Northern Zone, specifically Wildlife Management Units 5C, 5F, 6F, and 6J, is also home to the spruce grouse, a State-endangered species that is illegal to hunt. Loss of a single spruce grouse, particularly a female, could be a significant setback for a small local population. For tips on how to discern the two species, view the Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide or the Ruffed Grouse Hunting Information page on DEC's website.

DEC encourages ruffed grouse hunters to take part in the grouse

hunting log program and submit feathers from harvested birds to assess recruitment (number of young produced per adult female grouse) for different parts of the state. Interested hunters should visit the DEC website.

Pheasant season and Pheasant propagation update

During the spring of 2023, the Reynold's Game Farm suffered a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza outbreak in the breeder flock. After enacting precautionary measures to ensure the facility was properly decontaminated, DEC secured a contract to acquire 30,000 pheasants from a commercial hatchery to supplement fall upland bird hunting opportunities around the state.

Prior to hunting seasons DEC will release adult pheasants on lands open to public hunting for the upcoming fall pheasant hunting season. The pheasant hunting season begins: Oct. 1 in northern and eastern portions of New York; Oct. 21 in central and western portions of the state; Nov. 1 on Long Island.

Since 2007, DEC has offered a special youth-only season to provide junior hunters the opportunity to hunt pheasants during the weekend prior to the regular pheasant hunting season. In Western New York, the youth pheasant hunt weekend is Oct. 14 and 15. In northern and eastern New York, the youth pheasant hunt week-

end is Sept. 23 and 24, and on Long Island, it is Oct. 28 and 29. Both the junior hunter and their adult mentor must have a hunting license. Only the junior hunter can carry a firearm and harvest birds on these dates.

An interactive map of statewide pheasant release sites, approximate timing of stocking, and number of birds stocked, can be found on DEC's website: nysdec.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=956034387b054aa6a3c0cea020119796

Squirrel, rabbit, and hare hunting

Opportunities to pursue squirrels and rabbits can be found throughout the state, including on many public lands. Squirrel seasons started Sept. 1 in upstate New York and begins Nov. 1 on Long Island. Rabbit hunting begins Oct. 1 in upstate New York and on Nov. 1 on Long Island. With ample opportunities and mild weather, squirrel and rabbit hunting are great ways to introduce novices to hunting.

Snowshoe hare hunters in the Southern Zone, where the season starts in late fall or early winter, are encouraged to report their observations to DEC through its website.

Wild turkey hunting

Wild turkeys can be found throughout the state but reach their highest densities in landscapes that have a mix of forests, old fields, and farmlands. Wild turkeys are less vulnerable to harvest in areas with abundant food (e.g., hard and soft mast), because they don't have to roam far and wide foraging, so scouting before the season is important. The statewide fall season bag limit is one bird of either sex. Hunting hours are sunrise to sunset.

Season dates for fall 2023:

Oct. 1 - 14, in the Northern Zone; Oct. 21 - Nov. 3, in the Southern Zone (corrected dates**) Nov. 18 - Dec. 1 in Suffolk County, Long Island

**Note: there is an error in the hard-copy 2023-2024 hunting regulations guide. As always, DEC recommends hunters visit the DEC website before going afield to confirm season dates and regulations.

Turkey season dates: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/29461.html

Corrected Hunting Guide: www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/huntguide.pdf

Furbearer Hunting Seasons

With 16 species of furbearers living in New York, furbearer hunting and trapping opportunities are abundant. Coyote hunting season begins Oct. 1 across much of the state and hunting seasons for other furbearers such as bobcat, raccoon, and fox begin Oct. 25. Season dates and zone boundaries for all furbearers and other hunting information including tips for identifying coyotes can be found on DEC's website and in the Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide.

Citizen science

Citizen science efforts such as the Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Log, Ruffed Grouse Parts Collection, and the Bowhunter Sighting Log provide hunters the opportunity to partner with DEC to monitor game species. To learn more about how to participate in these efforts, visit the DEC website.

DEC encourages hunter safety

While statistics show hunting in New York is safer than ever, mistakes are made every year. DEC believes every hunting-related shooting incident is preventable, and Commissioner Seggos encourages hunters to use common sense this season and to remember what they learned in their DEC Hunter Education Course.

Firearms safety:

Point your gun in a safe direction. Treat every gun as if it were loaded. Be sure of your target and beyond. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.

In addition to blaze orange or pink being required for hunting big game with firearms, DEC encourages small game hunters to wear blaze orange or blaze pink. Wearing orange or pink prevents other hunters from mistaking a person for an animal or shooting in a hunter's direction. Hunters wearing blaze orange are seven times less likely to be shot.

For more information and other important safety tips, visit DEC's website and watch videos about hunter safety. For more information about getting outdoors safely and responsibly, visit DEC's Website.



The Poets' Walk

by Peter Manning

If you ever find yourself traveling over the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge with some time to spare, you might consider a stroll along the Poets' Walk. Once over the bridge heading east, the park is reached by making the first left onto River Road and going about a mile to the entrance on the left. The walk to the large rustic gazebo is easy enough for all ages and offers a pleasant interlude during the course of one's day. The Poets' Walk is also one of a relatively few number of public parks that makes the connections between a public road, the Hudson River and, importantly, the view of the Catskill Mountains. As such, this landscape offers a glimpse into how the American people began to develop a greater appreciation of the natural environment.

The Poets' Walk, created in the 1990s and managed by Scenic Hudson, is a landscape that not only joins the many celebrated estates along river - public, private, or vanished - but was carved from one of these estates. The original estate was known as Steen Valetje ('Little Stony Falls' in Dutch) and was the home of Franklin H. Delano and Laura Astor in the mid-nineteenth century. The park's name derives from its early visitors, including Washington Irving and Fitz-Greene Halleck, two famous writers of the time, who particularly loved walking at this estate. Wikipedia notes that poet William Cullen Bryant and Jack Kerouac also visited the park.

When I visited the park years ago, the interpretive kiosk explained that the grounds were designed by Hans Jacob Ehlers, in part "to enhance the natural contours of the land - to look as if they had not been designed." This is interesting because the role of Ehlers has since been dismissed by some and the "design" is attributed to the routine field work of 18th century tenant farmers and to nature's hand (Poets' Walk Park at 25: Getting the Story Right by Reed Sparling, 2021 scenichudson.org).

Most prominent here in nature's contributions are the influences of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains.

There are so many avenues for further exploration into this topic,

and one in-depth companion for the journey is Landscape Gardens on the Hudson: The Romantic Age, the Great Estates & the Birth of American Landscape Architecture by Robert M. Toole. Toole, a landscape architect well known in circles of garden design and historic landscape restoration, has put forth an important work that connects so many of the threads in the story. For those of us who have plunged into the subject in any detail, many of the topics are familiar yet are given refreshing treatment. The book carefully details the transition from formal and geometric designs clustered around the houses to the emergence of the wilder, more "picturesque" mode of design that employed the whole site - including the distant yet ever-present Catskill Mountains - to create an experience of landscape that would become unique to America.

Readers of Toole's book may notice the source of a phrase in one of the chapter's headings: "In Complete Fairyland." These were the words used by Washington Irving to describe his visit to the home of the Livingstons near today's Poets' Walk. Toole remarks, as does Alf Evers in "The Catskills from Wilderness to Woodstock," that Irving's experiences here were essentially pivotal, quite likely influencing Irving's Rip Van Winkle, which appeared seven years later in 1819. As the intrigue of the Catskills strengthened its influence on the American imagination, the transition toward wilderness appreciation continued to unfold from the vantage points toward the Catskills along the estates of Hudson River's eastern shores. The influential writings of Andrew Jackson Downing, landscape gardening aesthete, are infused with his personal experiences from the gardens of these estates. He included much encouragement for readers to explore these picturesque settings, where the design of nature takes precedence to that of the landscape gardener.

Because places that express our connections with the greater landscape can be experienced firsthand, this keeps alive relationships that are rooted in history and culture, and it serves the innate need to be outside. In expressing appreciation of today's Catskills,

we are quick to reference, for example, the many outdoor recreation amenities and our associated adventures. Yet flipping back the pages of the story enriches our understanding, especially when we can do so by entering the same landscape that initially inspired the imaginations of artists, poets, and writers.

Between the crest of the Catskills Mural Front and the eastern shore of the Hudson is a lens through which generations have gazed - in both directions - only to be fixated by a muse that defies description but has influenced the course of events, particularly in the creative realm. Herein or thereabouts is a zone of interpretation, a geography of American consciousness, and a potent concentration of landscape appreciation. Though perhaps outmatched by the grandeur of other locales, this is really where much of our cultural and natural history initially went down - ideas surging forth in expressions of art and literature and motivated by a captivating beauty between civilization and wilderness - all running right up today and eagerly looking toward an optimistic future.

While origins of this special place are commonly and correctly traced through the sprawling estates of the landed gentry and leisure time activities of the well-to-do, we are still led to ponder the sensibilities of those who worked the land. What kinds of conversations, if any, took place between the farmer working the horse-drawn plow and Mr. Washington Irving as he strolled the grounds? I can answer by saying that I worked as a gardener and groundskeeper on what was the Steen Valetje estate prior to and after the land was transferred to create the Poets' Walk. Despite stooping over perennial beds, going back and forth on a tractor mowing lawns, and generally getting sunburned, it was an enjoyable place to spend two summers. Though there were no shortage of poetic moments, I wouldn't go so far as to call it a "complete fairyland;" that phrase is reserved for the Catskills.

Peter Manning is the Executive Director of the Catskill Mountain Club. To learn about CMC projects, events, membership, and to join the mailing list, visit catskillmountainclub.org

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