



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
March-April 2017 • Vol. 21 No. 2

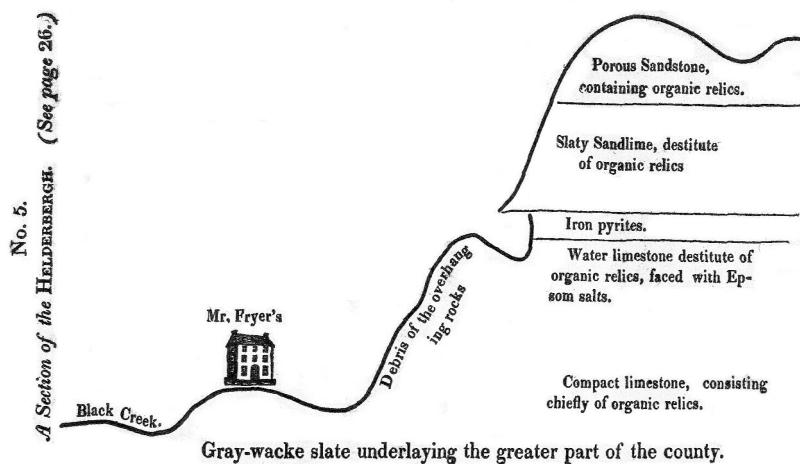
Early Reports on the Lands and Geology of Today's Thacher Park

Long before there was a John Boyd Thacher State Park, the cliffs and ravines of the Helderbergs caught the attention of both the public and 19th century scientists studying the tremendous rock strata and their fossils.

I recently came across this notice of the cliffs, rocks and fossils of Thacher Park in Horatio Gates Spafford's 1813 Gazetteer of the State of New York. On page 134 the Gazetteer describes "A lofty ledge of rocks, of great extent, being the main spine of the Helderbergs, on the eastern border of Bern [sic; Berne], is well worthy the attention of the curious. Its eastern front has the perpendicularity of an artificial wall or a basaltic column, presenting a lofty rampart of 200 to 500 feet elevation, with an upright or shelving precipice, in many places 200 feet high, and perfectly inaccessible but by climbing on ropes or ladders. The rocks abound much with those impressions resembling muscle-shells [sic; mussel-shells], attributed to petrefaction [sic; petrification; = fossilization]. There are many natural caverns, 2 of which are of great extent. One of these has been traced 12 rods under a fine soil on a plain, where the exploring party ascended through a natural shaft or tunnel. Another very extraordinary one opens by a

narrow entrance in one of the above noticed precipices, and has been explored about 400 feet, through some spacious openings or rooms." Thom Engel thinks the latter is one of the caves in Thacher Park, and the former may be Knox Cave, about four miles west of the park.

By 1820, pioneering geologist Amos Eaton (1776-1842) published a geological survey of Albany County (Eaton, 1820), which includes a drawing of the rise from the valley below to the Indian Ladder cliffs. Eaton's early forays into the Helderbergs were followed through the century by regionally to internationally significant geologists and paleontologists. These included James Hall, of the New York State Museum/Geological Survey, and Great Britain's Sir Charles Lyell, the father of modern geological thought.



First geological figure of the Indian Ladder cliffs at today's Thacher Park.
By Amos Eaton, 1820

Traveling in Europe many years later, John Boyd Thacher heard so much about the Helderbergs and their rocks and fossils from Europeans that he decided to preserve the famous cliffs for their "natural beauty and extraordinary scientific interest".

-by Dr. Chuck Ver Straeten,
Geologist, New York State Museum

Updates from the Park



A few days ago, I was over at the park and took a walk by the Visitor Center. It's coming along beautifully. Since it was a weekend, I was able to look inside and see the progress in the interior. What has been done already looks great! The picture above was taken from the entrance leading into the Visitor Center lot and the picture on the right was taken from down near the escarpment. I'm excited about this new addition to the park and am looking forward to its opening later this year.

-by John Kilroy



If you've been through the Park recently, you've noticed that the new Thacher Visitor Center is nearing completion. In fact, the Park staff are already taking reservations for events in the new space. Time is running out to have your family name or other meaningful mark in the form of pavers or other naming opportunities. If you have interest, please visit the Thacher Nature Center for more information, or www.thacherparkcenter.org.

- by Laure-Jeanne Davignon



Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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As always, call 872-0800 or 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call any board member with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Chuck Ver Straeten, Sigrin Newell, John Kilroy, Laure-Jeanne Davignon, Bonnie Schaller, Laurel Tormey-Cole and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

Want to contribute? Please email me at cgervasi@albany.edu
Christine Gervasi—Editor



Friends of Thacher Park Member Form

Member benefits: Newsletter, Scheduled Events Calendar & 10% Discount at the Nature Center Gift Shop. Renewal date follows name on address label.

Name _____

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☐ I'd like to become a member of the Friends of Thacher Park. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____.

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- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter \$40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Donation \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (62) \$5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$100 | |

Please make checks payable to the **Friends of Thacher Park** and send to Bonnie Schaller, 6324 Hawes Rd, Altamont, NY 12009. For more info: bschaller@nycap.rr.com

Please Save These Dates

May 6, 2017

“I Love My Park Day” at Thacher Park

Join “Friends” and local residents as we spruce up Thacher for the summer – gardens, raking, roadside cleanup and more.



June 3, 2017

“National Trails Day” at Thacher Park

Join Jim and Bonnie Schaller for marking & brushing out trails and other maintenance work left from Winter.

Details will be available closer to May and June



14th Annual

NATURE ART EXHIBIT

At Thacher Nature Center

***March 11th through 31st,
Tuesday through Sunday, 9am-5pm***

Opening Reception March 11, 1pm-4pm

*Be sure to check the program calendar for
painting and drawing workshops!*

Save the Date!

Native Plant Sale

at Thacher Park Overlook

Saturday May 20th and

Sunday May 21st

10am-3pm

For Pre-orders, please see
the enclosed flier. Pre-
order deadline is April 26th



Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2017

March 8, May 10, July 12, September 13, and November 8.

7:00 pm at Thacher Nature Center. Come join us!

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



Next:

Wednesday, March 8, 2017
Board Meeting
7:00 pm at Thacher Nature Center

Feeding the Owlets

From the point of view of mice and voles, the deep snows of late February must have been a blessing. After almost three months with little or no snow cover, they finally could forage with some protection from predators.

Evolution has, however, fine-tuned the interaction between owls and their prey. At certain frequencies, owls' hearing is so acute that they can locate prey under 2 feet of snow. Owls can detect a difference in sound between left and right ears of 0.00003 seconds. As a mouse moves under the snow, the owl turns its head until the sound is the same in both ears. It flies toward that last sound, making corrections mid-flight to keep the sound balanced. Just before striking, it spreads its talons, ready to grab its prey.

Owls need these skills to provide food for their young. They mate in winter, and their mating calls can be heard in February and March. The deep resonance of the

Great Horned Owl seems as if the earth itself is breathing. Nestlings hatch in April, when the snow is gone and rodents desperately run around trying to restore depleted winter foods. It appears that the diverse habitats of Thacher Park provide many niches for small mammals. Great Horned, Barred, Screech, and Sawwhet owls have been seen and heard in the park.

- by Sigrin Newell



Barred Owl hunting. Photograph by David G. Hemmings.

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org