



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
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## “...Must Be Known To Every Geologist...”



Beginning in the late 1830s, Albany, New York became a very significant North American center for geological and paleontological research. This was associated with the scientific efforts of the New York State Geological Survey/State Museum, most notably the geologist and paleontologist James Hall. A visit to the geologists and collections at the New York State Museum in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was soon accompanied by a horse or buggy/wagon ride to the well exposed and highly fossiliferous Lower to Middle

Devonian rocks west of Albany, in the Helderberg escarpment and hills.

As early as 1841 the “father of modern geology”, Sir Charles Lyell of England, made his first of five visits to New York and its geologists. Editions of his book, *Principles of Geology*, were read by geologists globally for generations. Mrs. Chris Hartnagel, wife of an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century New York State Geologist, wrote that Lyell said “*The Helderberg outcrops must be known to every geologist if he were to understand his science.*”

The Helderberg rock outcrops Lyell spoke of are the cliffs and hills of Helderbergs, from west of Thacher Park to southeast of Clarksville. Most of the Helderberg rocks are from the Devonian Period, from about 420 to 390 million years old. John Boyd Thacher State Park preserves a portion of this land (about 3.3 square miles).

John Boyd Thacher, traveling in Europe many years later, heard so much about the Helderbergs and their rocks and fossils from Europeans that he decided to preserve a portion of the famous cliffs and hills for



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their “natural beauty and extraordinary scientific interest”.

Since the 1840s, the Helderbergs and today’s Thacher Park were and remain the site of many visits by geologists and paleontologists - from the state, the region, and around the world.

*By Chuck Ver Straeten*



*Photos of Escarpment, Mine Lot Falls and Commemorative Plaque by Chuck Ver Straeten*



*Photo of Thacher Escarpment by Michelle Johnston*

## Thank You to our SCA Interns!

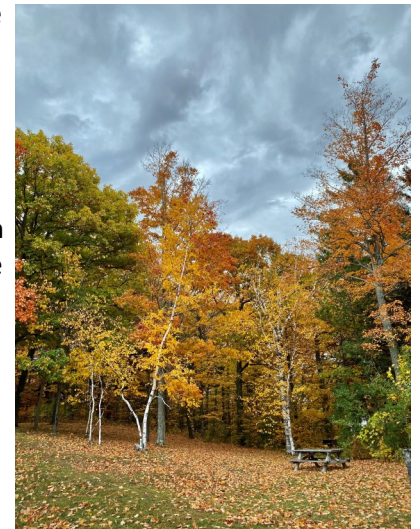
Katie Blaylock and Audrey Trossen started working with us in January, starting with focusing on the educational needs of the Nature Center and Visitor Center for a 10 month period, ending shortly into November. However, when the changes and challenges of COVID-19 began to shut down a large part of our work, both Katie and Audrey dove head first into hands-on, socially distant projects that we were still able to conduct.

Katie, our Environmental Educator through the Student Conservation Association focused on leading guided hikes, creating environmental programs and educational videos, and so much more! Audrey, our Geology Educator through SCA, has spear-headed a comprehensive manual to assist future SCA interns and staff with information of the special geology at Thacher, as well as organizing and putting information together for the large amount of educational geology samples that will be used for future programs.

Both Katie and Audrey have been amazing at the hard work of nest box monitoring, raising and selling native plants, caring for the animal ambassadors, diving deep into the world of invasive species removal by removing the invasive garlic mustard from our forests and fields, as well as surveying wild animals with trail cameras! Once we were able to open our doors, Katie and Audrey have jumped in to greet visitors and share their passion for the natural world that surrounds us.

2020 brought us a lot of challenges and changes, and we are grateful for everything they have accomplished during these difficult times! We've had great fun working with Katie and Audrey and will surely miss them when they go. We are very grateful for everything they've done here and wish them the best of luck in the future!

Thank you!  
Savannah Wilson



*Photo by Michelle Johnston*

Our last board meeting this year is **Wednesday, November 11, 7:00 pm** at **Thacher Visitor Center** (socially distanced, masks required). Because of Covid-19, the speaker/presentation has been cancelled this year.

Programs at Park and Nature Center are ongoing. Information on upcoming events can be found on the Thacher State Park Facebook page, or call 518-872-0800.

# LOVE

A simple four letter word that we all know the meaning of, right? Well maybe not so fast. Webster's dictionary defines love as both a noun and a verb and gives many examples of both uses. Okay, not uncommon for a word to be both. But here is where it gets tricky. I chose this topic for a couple of reasons. The first is that we all need more love in these trying times and second is because of an article my daughter sent me. The article was excerpts from a survey where 4 to 8 year old children were asked to describe love. Some of the definitions were funny and some were surprisingly insightful if you actually think about what they wrote. Here are a few examples:

Love is when mom gives dad the best piece of chicken. (age 8)

Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt and then he wears it every day. (age 7)

Love is what makes you smile when your tired. (age 7)

When you love somebody your eye lashes go up and down and stars come out of you. (age 7)

Love is what is in the room with you on Christmas if you stop opening presents and just listen. (age 7) There is a lesson to be learned from that one.

This next one touched me deeply because of my own experience with love and loss.

A four year old whose elderly neighbor had just recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man sitting on his porch crying the young man went into the

man's yard, climbed on his lap and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he said to the gentleman the young boy replied, nothing, I just helped him cry. We need more people with that young man's soul.

So I thought if these children can define love, I should be able to. What I found is, for myself, there are many definitions. There is the love for your parents. Be they good or bad there is still a level of love in most cases. There is the love for a child or grandchild which for me is an unconditional love. I do feel that the word is over used in the case of friends. People use the word love when leaving a gathering of friends when it is a fondness for their friendship and not love of them. I think a friend of mine described it best. She said that to her saying you love someone carries with it a deep commitment to that person so she only uses it when it is truly meant. I could not agree more.

All of this brings me to what I consider the truest and deepest level of love. That is the love of your soul mate. Many of us in our youth think we found love but as we mature and look back we can see it was not true love. Some people know right away when they find their soul mate and with others it is a feeling that grows with time. Either way it is a very deep emotional commitment that transcends all others. It is a total commitment of heart and soul. To the point that when one half departs this world it takes a large part of your soul with them. To the point that you wonder why you go on. I once read that deep sorrow and grief over the loss of a soul mate is the price we pay for deep love. I humbly submit this to you as my definition of love.

*From the Porch, by Brian Horl*

Check for updates at [www.friendsofthacherpark.org](http://www.friendsofthacherpark.org)

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**As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.**

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Chuck Ver Straeten, Savannah Wilson, Brian Horl, Sigrin Newell, and Michelle Johnston for their contributions to this newsletter. Special thanks to Katie Blaylock for her article on nest box monitoring (insert).

Want to contribute? Please email me at [cgervasi@albany.edu](mailto:cgervasi@albany.edu). Christine Gervasi—Editor

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Wednesday, November 11, 2020

## Board Meeting

Next:

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center (socially distanced, masks required)

Because of Covid-19, there will be no speaker/presentation this year

### Scatter Hoarding in the Park



*"Gray Squirrels are so common that many of us forget to notice them unless we are six years old." \**

Hike at Thacher with the open-eyed curiosity of a child, and you will discover that gray squirrels are

fascinating. A child is likely to first notice the rapidly flicking tail, which warns other squirrels of a hawk, or a red fox, or a person. This tail, at 40% of its body length, helps with balance, and is a distraction to predators. The tail also helps with thermoregulation, offering shelter from rain and snow. There is a clump of blood vessels at the base of the tail. In the winter, these vessels contract to retain body heat and in summer, relax to disperse it.

Gray squirrel's favorite food is hickory nuts, with acorns a close second. Since both Shagbark Hickory and various Oaks grow throughout Thacher Park, you are likely to see squirrels

on any hike in late fall. Hickory nuts have twice the calories of the average acorn and store well over the winter. Both kinds of nuts have hard shells. This is the tree's adaptation to keep squirrels from eating a lot of nuts all at once, and to entice the animal to bury each nut where it has a better chance of germinating.

Squirrels are "scatter hoarders", placing each nut individually. After digging a hole 1-2 inches deep with its front paws, the squirrel places a nut in the hole and forcibly puts it in place by pounding it into the ground with its front incisors. (Ouch!). Studies have shown that squirrels can relocate as many as 95% of their stored nuts, by precise spatial memory or by smell. Hikers may see piles of hickory husks. These fragrant husks are thought to prevent competitors from finding and digging up cached nuts. Squirrels also practice deliberate deception; they bury, unbury, and rebury their food, misleading any neighboring squirrels.

Squirrels are easy to see and fun to watch – a good reason to hike at Thacher in late fall before the snow flies.

*-by Sigrin Newell*

*\* Susie Spikol, Northern Woodlands, December 16, 2019*

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at [www.friendsofthacherpark.org](http://www.friendsofthacherpark.org)