



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
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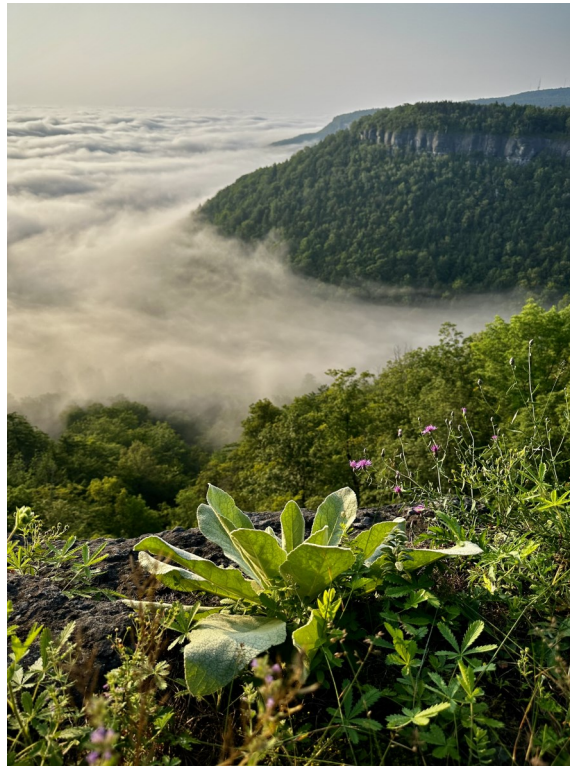
## What makes a mountain?

On clear days at the Thacher Park Overlook, one can see the Taconic crest about 35 miles to the east, and occasionally as far as some of the low Adirondacks, about 50 miles northwest. Sitting at approximately 1200 ft above sea level, the Helderberg Escarpment towers over Voorheesville and New Scotland (~400 ft) and provides a nice view of the state capitol buildings in Albany (~150 ft). If you've ever driven up Thacher Park Road (or if you're really ambitious, biked or run up it!), you know it's a pretty good climb to the top.

Technically speaking, the highest point of the Helderberg Escarpment is just south of the park off Pinnacle Road. Starting from the intersection of Routes 85 and 85A in New Salem, we gain over 1200 ft in elevation over about 2.5 miles as the proverbial crow flies. Following the road, that number is closer to 5 miles. Either way, does that make it a hill or a mountain?

While many people differentiate between hills and mountains in terms of height and grade, with mountains being taller and steeper, there is no official consensus on criteria to distinguish between the two. For many years, the United States used a height of 1000 ft from base to summit as the threshold for the designation of "mountain," though that is no longer the case. Despite this, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) does recognize multiple hill sub-types! These include man-made hills called mounds, such as those created by the indigenous peoples of the American Midwest, as well as natural hills, including drumlins, buttes, tors, and puy.

Turning to the dictionary is equally non-committal. Merriam-Webster defines a hill as "a usually rounded natural elevation of land lower than a mountain" and a mountain as "a landmass that projects conspicuously above its surroundings and is higher than a hill." With that, we have successfully determined that hills and mountains are not the same thing ... probably.



While the most appropriate method for measuring landforms is (unsurprisingly) also up for debate, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) offers the most concise and specific set of criteria for what constitutes a mountain. Peak above 8200 ft? Mountain. Peak between 4900-8200 ft with at least 2° grade? Mountain. Peak between 3300-4900 ft with at least 5° grade? Mountain. Local feature with at least 300 m (985 ft) of elevation gain relative to the surrounding area in a 7km (4.4 mi) radius? Mountain.

So if we measure to the very top and play by the UN's rules, the Helderberg Escarpment can indeed be classified as a mountain. Not

quite convinced it belongs in the same category as Mount Marcy or Katahdin? A walk from the bottom may change your mind. Whatever you call the Helderbergs, Thacher State Park sits on edge of one of the most unique geological features in New York state.

- by Victoria Gellatly

For more information check <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00035-021-00265-8>

Photo of the Helderberg Escarpment at Thacher by Michelle Johnston

## *New Art at Thacher Visitor Center*

On August 19 I had the opportunity to emcee a dedication at the Visitor Center. Fred Holman, an artist from Brant Lake, donated a painting to the Friends four years ago to use any way we saw fit. We had discussed doing an auction or raffle but COVID happened and all plans were put on hold. Earlier this year we started to figure out what to do with the painting. The Board decided the best use of the painting was to donate it to the park and for it to be hung somewhere in the Visitor Center. It was also decided that I should coordinate this venture since Mr. Holman is my brother-in-law. I met with Carley Keenan to discuss our options. She was able to get permission from the regional office to not only hang the painting but to also hold an open house for the dedication.

We decided the best location to hang the painting would be in the Hearth room. We then started to plan when we could hold the dedication and what was needed for it. Carley was instrumental in having the invitation designed and distributed on social media. The event was attended by about 20 people who listened to Mr. Holman speak about the painting and dedicate it to his sister, Gertrude Horl, who loved working at the park before she became ill. Gertrude, who most people knew as Trudy was also my wife. Our daughter Tori, her boyfriend Todd and our grandson Oskar were also in attendance. The painting is of a lovely view of the escarpment and will be on display (once we get a protective cover) over the fireplace in the Hearth room for all to enjoy.

I would like to thank everyone who put in the time and effort to bring this program together before Tori, Todd and Oskar returned to San Francisco. It meant a lot to me personally that this was able to happen.

*- by Brian Horl*



*Trudy Horl's family with the painting. Photo by Laure-Jeanne Davignon*



*Fred Holman with his painting of the Escarpment. Photo by Christine Gervasi*

### **A Note from the Friends**

An article in the Friends of Thacher State Park July-August 2023 newsletter, "The Evolution of Religion," was published in error, and is not consistent with the Friends mission to support and advocate for the Park through volunteerism, education and environmental stewardship. We regret the error.

### **Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2023**

Meeting dates are Wednesdays, September 13, and November 8.

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

(Mask guidelines will follow CDC recommendations)

# Upcoming Park Project: Patriot's Day Service Project

Each year, Thacher State Park hosts two interns from the Student Conservation Association (SCA) as they complete ten-month service terms focused on environmental education and stewardship. This year's interns are Marina Dreeben and Peter Farquharson, who are both based out of the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center. In addition to assisting with school field trips and guiding public programs, Marina and Peter have been busy planning two major projects in honor of Patriot Day this upcoming September.

The first project, headed by Marina, is a 1-mile reroute of the Long Path in the park's North Property. The current trail route gets very muddy in the spring and summer months, leading to significant erosion. The new trail location, which was initially scouted and proposed by Friends members Bonnie and Jim Schaller, will move foot traffic to a nearby area that's less prone to mud and better suited for hiking and snowmobile access. In the second project, Peter will

be facilitating a series of bird and vegetation surveys in the meadows near Old Stage Road. Little is known ecologically about the meadows, and these surveys could help to determine whether or not they're suitable habitat for rare or sensitive species.

These projects will be completed with the help of several organizations. Professionals from the NYS OPRHP regional trails and stewardship teams, as well as the Capital Region PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) will provide supervisory guidance. Most of the heavy-lifting, however, will be completed by roughly 35 total SCA members from the Capital, Hudson Valley, and New York City regions. These interns will gain valuable experience building trails and completing biological surveys, all while improving the experience for Thacher Park patrons for years to come.

- by Peter Farquharson

## Featured Event: Hawk Watch

Join us at the Overlook on **Saturday September 9<sup>th</sup> from 10am to 3pm** for Hawk Watch! Every September, raptors leave their breeding grounds in the Northeast and Canada and begin their migration south for the winter. Our position on the Helderberg escarpment gives us clear sightlines and air currents that are favorable for



soaring birds, making the Overlook an ideal location for observing this migration.

During our Hawk Watch event, visitors will have the opportunity to learn about the raptors flying overhead and meet the Audubon volunteers who collect data on their migration. The event will also feature live animal shows, guided hikes, citizen science training, and a native plant sale. And make sure to stop by Di Folco's food truck for lunch!

- by Marina Dreeben

Photo credit: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-of-a-hawk-flying-on-the-background-of-a-clear-blue-sky-15964871/>

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

### Officers of the Friends Board of Trustees

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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 Victoria Gellatly, Michelle Johnston, Brian Horl, Laure-Jeanne Davignon, Peter Farquharson, Marina Dreeben and Betsey Miller for their contributions to this newsletter.—Christine Gervasi (Editor)

Friends of Thacher Park  
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<https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

Wednesday, September 13, 2023

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

### Friends Take Leadership Role in Native Plant Sale

For nineteen years the Thacher Park staff have taken primary responsibility for putting on the native plant sale with financial and other support from the Friends. At the inception of the popular annual sale, there was little public information on the benefits of using native plants and there were not many places to buy these plants. The Park staff wanted to educate the public on the many ways native plants help the environment by supporting pollinators, other insects and birds and protecting the overall environment.

Over the years, this event has been a huge success. Since the pre-order process was introduced, the success has grown. Each year we have both repeat and new customers. As the popularity of our sale has grown so has the availability of native plants from other sources. Other groups now have sales, with local garden shops and some of the big box stores providing a limited selection of native plants.

Over the same period there have been growing pressures on the limited staff at the Nature Center and the Park. In the Spring of 2022, the Park let the Friends know that 2023 would be the last year the Park could provide the primary staffing for the plant sale. With this news came a new opportunity - for the first time a new organization The Wild Ones - a local chapter of a national organization dedicated to promoting and educating the public

about native plants (<https://wildones.org/>), participated with the Park and the Friends on the sale.

Putting on the native plant sale is a major commitment of time. It starts with deciding which plants to include, doing the ordering, potting and then watering and growing the plants from mid-March to mid-May. The work continues with the pre-sale and the main sale.

After much discussion between Parks, the Friends, The Wild Ones, we decided that the Friends and Wild Ones would take on primary management of the sale, with a trial year planned for the 2024 sale. To make this work under volunteer management, it was clear that we will need to simplify the process. One of the first decisions was to discontinue the pre-sale for the first year, which will remove a great deal of complexity from the process.

For this new process to work and to continue the native plant sale as a volunteer-led effort, **we will need your help!** One of the most time-consuming tasks is daily watering for the two months.

If you can pitch in yourself or are part of a group with interest in learning more about native plant care, or are in need of volunteer hours, we invite you to help make sure we can continue this important sale. Please contact Betsey Miller, Friends Treasurer, at [bmiller15@nycap.rr.com](mailto:bmiller15@nycap.rr.com).

- by Betsey Miller

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