



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
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The “DR” Brush & Field Mower (its use in John Boyd Thacher State Park)



Jim and Lucas mowing in 2019

The story goes back at least 15 years. As new trails were developed in Thacher Park North, some – like the Perimeter Trail off Old Stage Road, and the (now) Fred Schroeder Memorial Trail just to the north - ran along open fields. The fields were left un-

mowed for most or all of the season and by late June the trails needed mowing as the grass was at least 2 feet high. Soon it was realized that the Salisbury Trail, Meadow Loop Trail, and even part of the Long Path also needed mowing since they went through old overgrown fields. The idea of a mower strong enough to mow those fields led to the purchase of a “DR Brush & Field Mower”, with a 17 HP engine, and a 30” wide cut. John Kilroy recently reminded me that the Friends of Thacher paid half, and the Office of Parks paid the other half for the mower. The State took over the ownership and maintenance of the DR. But it was volunteers that ran the DR in the spring – and the state often provided the transportation to various sites in the Park for mowing.

Even Fred Schroeder himself ran the DR in the earliest days, with help from other volunteers like Bob Marriott. Then Bonnie, myself and others took over for several years. Only in the past few years did Park staff, summer help, etc. run the DR with help from me or Bonnie - to show them the way. This continued to June 2023.

Then, at a recent Friends meeting, Carley Kiernan (Assistant Park Manager) told me that the

DR was broken beyond repair. It had served us well over the years, even though it had been repaired, welded, and fixed numerous times. So, due to its age, the decision was to replace it with a new DR mower. Carley said that the Friends group might pay for it. The DR Power website showed six models - and a mid-range one was quite similar to the old one. I showed it to Donny at Maintenance and he agreed on the one I chose. It has a 17.5 HP engine, and a 30” wide cut. John Wager agreed. A dealer in Schenectady would order one for us. He gave us the DR sale price with no shipping charge from the factory to his store. It came to \$3,100.00 and \$100 to deliver it to Thacher Park. At the September Friends meeting, the motion was made to buy the new DR and it passed. \$500 down, and \$2,700 on delivery. A check was written at the meeting by our Treasurer Betsey for the \$500 deposit, and I drove up to Schenectady and delivered it, with our tax-exempt form.

The new DR Field and Brush Mower was delivered to Schenectady on September 25th. I drove up and paid the balance with the second check that Betsey mailed to us. The DR had to be partially assembled first; gas, and oil added; and warranty info obtained before delivery. The DR was delivered to the Thacher Park maintenance garage on Sat. October 7th. The trails in Thacher park will continue to be maintained and mowed well into the years ahead!

- by Jim and Bonnie Schaller



Old DR being unloaded from the Gator in 2019 (left), and the new DR Pro XL30 (right)

Woolly Bear Caterpillar - Predictor of the winter to come, or just cute and fuzzy



Photo of a 2023 woolly bear, suggesting a moderate winter, by Christine Gervasi.

The Woolly (or Woolly) Bear is the larval stage of the Isabella Tiger Moth (*Pyrrharctia isabella*). They are found in the U.S. and Canada. They have thirteen distinct segments that are either rust colored or black.

The old saying is that the more rust colored area the milder the winter will be. If the black area is larger the winter will be more extreme. If they are all black, white or yellow they are not Woolly Bears. They are a different species. So don't panic if you see one that is all black.

In the fall of 1948 Dr. Curran, who was the curator of insects at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, went with his wife to Bear Mountain State Park to study these caterpillars, to see if he could scientifically prove the old tales. They collected as many as they could in one day. He then counted the number of brown segments, took the average and predicted the weather for the coming winter. He reported his prediction to a reporter friend who worked on the New York Herald Tribune. The resulting publicity made the Woolly Bear the most recognizable caterpillar in North America.

Between 1948 and 1956 the rust colored bands took up more than a third of the body. The corresponding winters were milder than average. Dr. Curran concluded that the folklore has some merit and may actually be true.

According to Woolly watchers there are two generations each year. One about June/July and one in September. Look for the ones in the fall. They are the weather prophets. Once you find one you will start to see them everywhere.

They are most active during the day. After filling up on food that includes violets, lamb quarters, and clover, their goal is to find a place to hide for the winter. They overwinter in the larval state. Their entire body enters a frozen state until May when they emerge as the Isabella Tiger Moth.

Every year the Woolies look different depending on the region. So if you see a local one pay attention to the bands and what it predicts about your coming winter weather. And remember:

If there is more rust color the winter will be mild and if there is more black the winter will be more severe.

-by Brian Horl

New for 2023: two buildings of local art & craft!
See us at the Nature Center and Visitor Center

THACHER PARK

WINTER BAZAAR

SATURDAY DECEMBER 2, 10AM-4PM
SUNDAY DECEMBER 3, 11AM-4PM

Unique handcrafted gifts by local artisans

Handweaving ~ Woodwork ~ Silverwork
Local Honey ~ Watercolors ~ Handmade Soaps
and more!



Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2023

Last meeting this year, Wednesday, November 8.

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

(Mask guidelines will follow CDC recommendations)

Patriot's Day Service Project

Thacher State Park recently hosted the 2023 Student Conservation Association (SCA) AmeriCorps Patriot Day Service Project in honor of 9/11. Over the course of this three-day project coordinated by SCA AmeriCorps members Peter Farquharson and Marina Dreeben, members of the Hudson Valley Corps travelled to Thacher Park to work on two large-scale stewardship projects.

The first project involved a series of vegetation and bird surveys in the OSI Meadows near Old Stage Road. Participants identified plants growing in the meadows, as well as bird species using this space for nesting and foraging. This information will help Thacher staff and regional stewardship experts to create a habitat management plan tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of the meadows.

In the second project SCA AmeriCorps members broke ground on a 0.7-mile trail reroute to address concerns of flooding and erosion on a section of the

Long Path. Spanning 358 miles, the Long Path begins at the 175th Street Subway Station in New York City and ends in John Boyd Thacher State Park. Participants braved rain, mud, and poison ivy to clear the trail tread and build a 16-foot bridge, putting a total of 244 hours of work into this iconic trail in only two days. Although there is more to be done, this massive contribution of time and effort was essential for kickstarting this project.

Special thanks to the Saratoga-Capital District Regional Stewardship and Trails Teams and the Capital Region PRISM for providing technical assistance. We also thank the Friends of Thacher Park for providing volunteers with a desert banquet, and to member Chuck Ver Straeten for giving SCA AmeriCorps members a guided tour of the Indian Ladder Trail. And, of course, thank you to all the SCA AmeriCorps members who made this project a success!

- by Peter Farquharson



SCA AmeriCorps members surveying meadows near Old Stage Road (left) and constructing a bridge on the Thacher Long Path section.

Check for updates at 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 Jim and Bonnie Schaller, Brian Horl, Peter Farquharson, Rebecca Schneider, and Sigrin Newell for their contributions to this newsletter.

— Christine Gervasi (Editor)

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<https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Liking Lichens

When something you have believed all your life turns out to be wrong, it's a shock. Throughout the twentieth century we were taught that a lichen is a symbiotic combination of an algae and a fungus. The fungus breaks down rock and provides minerals. The algae photosynthesizes to provide sugars for energy. Both partners together are able to survive in a place where neither could live alone.

However, in 2016, new techniques of DNA sequencing discovered that there was a third fungal partner. Then 2 years later a fourth partner was discovered. As scientists pursued this line of inquiry it turned out that there are also bacteria and yeasts that are symbiotic partners in lichens. The scientist who made the initial discovery says, "Interestingly, we have yet to find any lichen that matches the traditional definition of one fungus and one alga."

This information is from a fascinating book, *Entangled Life, How fungi make our world, change our minds, and shape our futures*. The chapters on lichens and on the "wood-wide web" make excellent winter reading.

Sooner or later this winter there will be several weeks with no snow. Then would be a good time to bring the family to the park for a lichen walk. In the winter lichens stand out and are easy to see, no longer hidden by green. You will find

them on rocks, tree trunks, fence posts, and cliffs. Challenge your children with a scavenger hunt.

How many colors can they find? How many different lichen habitats? How many forms? Sheldrake says, "The names used to describe lichens sound like afflictions, words that get stuck in your teeth: crustose (crusty), foliose (leafy), squamulose (scaly), leprose (dusty), fruticose (branched). Have the kids roll these delightful words around on their tongues and send them off to find examples.

At the end of the hike, the whole family can come to the Nature Center or the Visitor Center to get warm and brag to the staff about how much they found. Families don't need to have snow to have fun at Thacher Park.

- by Sigrin Newell

Sheldrake, Merlin, [Entangled Life, How fungi make our world, change our minds, and shape our futures](#). (2020) Random House



Photos of lovely local lichen by Christine Gervasi

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