



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
January—February, 2026 • Vol. 30 No. 1

## Thacher Park's Year In Review

As the daylight dwindles and December draws to a close, it's time for our annual parkwide Year in Review! 2025 was as busy and productive as ever across all sectors of the park, with new hires, dynamic programming, and several infrastructure projects all helping to make it a year to remember.

2025 saw the return of several perennial favorites to the park's extensive programming calendar. Highlights included the First Day Hike, Thompson's Lake Campground Ice Fishing Tournament (our first since 2022), I Love My Parks Day, Harmony on the Hill, Hawk Watch, Observe the Moon & Stars Night, and the Winter Bazaar. In addition to these classic events, park staff were also proud to introduce several new events to the calendar. Visitors on the evening on June 7th were delighted to find a portion of the Escarpment Trail lit by trailside lanterns for our first ever Luminary Walk, coordinated in sponsorship with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). For those who preferred to visit the park during the day, a series of food trucks stopped by the Overlook and Visitor Center most weekends from spring through fall.

Many of our events require a significant amount of planning and day-of assistance. In this regard, the Friends have been an invaluable resource for Thacher throughout the year. One program in particular exemplifies this reality: the beloved annual springtime Amphibian Migration Volunteer Night. Park staff and Friends members (especially Bert Schou!) worked together to raise awareness of the migration and train volunteers in preparation for the "big night." When conditions aligned on

March 16th, a team of nearly 30 individuals surveyed several road crossings across the park to help amphibians safely reach their breeding pools, and to collect data for the DEC's Amphibian Migration and Road Crossings Project. It was Thacher's largest amphibian migration volunteer event in years, and a great foundation for successful events in years to come.

In addition to these parkwide engagements, each of the park's departments has been working towards unique goals of their own. At the Visitor Center, programs and events were a major focus throughout the year. In June, staff welcomed Commissioner Pro-Tempore Randy Simons to the park for the ceremonial unveiling of a historical plaque honoring Winifred Goldring. Only a few weeks later, the Visitor Center welcomed CaveSim, a simulation cave outfit based out of Colorado, to the park. Over 200 visitors practiced caving in this indoor, safety-minded space, and learned about ethical caving practices along the way. In addition to scheduling and staffing dozens of weddings, professional conferences, events, and other engagements, Visitor Center staff provided general assistance to tens of thousands of patrons seeking to take advantage of the park's significant natural resources.

Thacher's Maintenance Team has been busy completing much of the behind-the-scenes work needed to keep the park both safe and beautiful, including water quality testing, building winterization, bathroom cleaning, and road maintenance. Justin Ratoon, our Stone Mason, has been busy restoring and preserving several



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stone structures at the Overlook. Our sawyers have removed dozens, if not hundreds, of fallen trees near popular trails throughout all seasons. One particularly ambitious project was the creation of an inventory system for fenceposts along the Escarpment Trail, so that potential repairs can be completed efficiently in years to come.

2025 was a year to remember at Thompson's Lake Campground. This past season saw the return of several fan-favorite programs, such as Halloween in August, Learn to Swim Program, and the Summer Storytelling Series (completed in partnership with the Friends). Several infrastructural improvements also were completed, ensuring that the campground will be enjoyed by all for years to come. Native trees and shrubs were planted at over a dozen sites to promote ecological restoration and prevent against site erosion. The playground also received a major renovation, thanks to a grant from the Enhanced Visitor Experience (EVE) Funding Program. Several ADA-compliant renovations were made, including a repaved basketball court, access paths, and the installation of a wheelchair swing set.

Educators at the Nature Center were busy as ever completing, hosting, and staffing over 250 unique programs throughout the year, adding up to over 10,000 individuals educated. Over a dozen of these programs were specifically designed for Nature Bus riders, which continues to successfully bring visitors to Thacher from Albany. This spring, the Nature Center hired Shae

Paradise to replace outgoing Volunteer Coordinator Ian Evans. Shae quickly built upon Ian's work by recruiting volunteers to assist with habitat management projects, event staffing, and building coverage across the park. In all, 776 volunteers contributed 1,942 hours to the park in an amazing display of community engagement.

Several other new hires joined the Thacher team in 2025: The Visitor Center welcomed Alex Purzycki into its fold. In addition, Carley Kiernan was promoted to Park Manager II, allowing Thacher to welcome Lauren Messina from Saratoga Spa State Park as the new Park Manager I.

The hard work that both staff and volunteers contribute to Thacher Park continues to make it a destination of global significance. According to the Visitor Center Logbook and an interactive map at the Nature Center, Thacher Park welcomed visitors from at least 37 states and 24 countries this past year. Our furthest domestic visitors traveled nearly 5,000 miles from Hawaii, with honorable mentions to groups visiting from both Fairbanks and Anchorage, Alaska. Internationally, Thacher welcomed visitors from five continents and as far away as Sydney, Australia.

Thanks again to all the wonderful staff and volunteers who helped to make 2025 a success! Keep an eye on the Friend's newsletter, Park website, and Thacher Facebook Page to see what Thacher has in store for 2026.

- by Peter Farquharson



Photo credit: Previous page: girl scouts painting murals by Shae Paradise. This page left to right: photo of handicap swing taken by park staff, bonfire at the Ice Fishing Tournament by Kellen Graham; Claire Nolan telling stories by Florence Conway.

***The Friends of Thacher Park wish you a Happy and Healthy 2026! Meeting Dates for 2026***

***Wednesday, January 14, March 11, May 13, July 8, September 9, November 11.***

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

## When the Conservation Dept. Kept Animals at Thacher Park



The American Scenic and Historic Preservation society was the first organization appointed custodian of the new John Boyd Thacher State Park in 1914. The following is an excerpt from the

report of 1922, regarding wildlife in Thacher Park and an adjacent private park on the southern border called Ferncliff Park, also known as Helderberg Mountain Park.

“In September 1921, three deer, a stag, a doe, and a fawn were seen in or near the State Park. It is hoped that the family will become permanent residents. The knowledge of the presence of these deer has been one of the reasons for the establishment of a sanctuary for wildlife adjacent to the park by the owners of neighboring property.” Following is a copy of an advertisement in the ‘Altamont Enterprise’ giving public notice of the private park.

“To whom it may concern: the undersigned by virtue of the Conservation Laws do hereby set aside that tract of land, to be hereafter known as “Ferncliff Park” on the Helderberg Mountain, within The Town of New Scotland, and more fully described hereinafter, as a private park in order to therein propagate and protect all fish, birds, quadrupeds, of every kind and species whatsoever.”

To sum up the rest of the advertisement, the tract included all lands situated on or near the Helderberg Cliff and extending back from there to a distance of upwards one and a half miles - extending along said cliffs the entire distance from that point on or near the said cliff on the easterly boundary of the property owned by Kenny Parish, near the old reservoir of the village of New Salem, to Thacher State Park. The reservoir was near the current entrance to Beaver Dam Road off Thacher Park Rd. It appears that Ferncliff Park included fifteen different proper-

ties. There is a map of this same park titled the Helderberg Mountain Park. It included the lands of Frederick Clark Myers whose property was called Cliffhaven. The Myers Family was related to Herman Wilhelm Antemann who owned much of the property that is now the Glen Doone Picnic Area surrounding Yellow Rock Falls. Much more on those families’ involvement with Thacher park in following newsletters.

In the annual report on Thacher Park of 1935, it is stated that “a collection of animals, including elk and deer, near the superintendent's house, is a recently developed attraction. It originated in 1928, when Governor Alfred E. Smith, who had acquired a zoo on the grounds of the executive mansion in Albany, through gifts of his admirers, dispersed the animals and gave a deer and elk to Thacher Park. Other gifts, including an elk received from Major William A. Welch ... and others ... have raised the zoo to three elk and five deer.” Pheasants are raised in the area and a goat. Wild animals are frequently seen in the park and it is a sanctuary for them. During June of 1922, a pair of Peregrine Falcons was also seen several times circling about under the cliff of horseshoe point, suggesting that their nest was not far away on one of the ledges.

On August 16, 1940 it was reported that “Major, a three-year old bull elk, now on the property of the Conservation Department at Thacher Park, is truly a proud father. Twice within the past six weeks has the news been given to him in whatever language the Wapiti (elk to you) use that he was the father of a newborn baby. The mothers are always doing well, while the youngsters are already scampering about. Majors magnificent rack of horns, at present in the velvet, are held a bit higher and perhaps wave a bit more defiantly.”

- by *Tim Albright*

*Photos from Thacher Park archives (top) and public domain (bottom)*



## 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 Peter Farquharson, Tim Albright, Jill Harbeck and Becky Schneider for their contributions to this newsletter.

— Christine Gervasi (Editor)

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

**Wednesday, January 14, 2026**

**Next:**

**Board Meeting**

**7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center**

### **Musings on No Day Like a Snow Day**

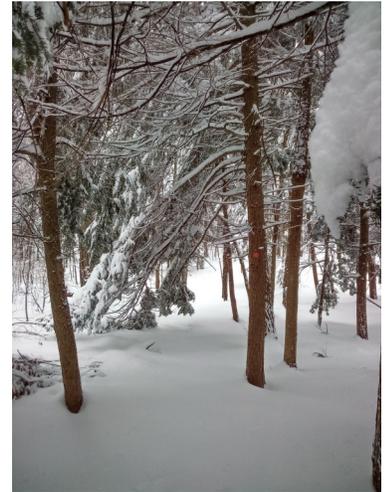
In past winters I would get so excited at the first signs of snow. That first snowfall meant my favorite season was on its way in. When I was a child, I would join other kids in making snow angels and snowmen and snow forts, and having rip roaring snowball fights. Even better was when school was cancelled and we had an entire day to play. Hooray for snow day!

My delight in snowfalls continued into adulthood. Until this year. Oh, I got to stay home and work remotely on December 3 when up to 10 inches of snow descended on the Capital Region. And, fortunately, it was the light fluffy stuff. But as a half an hour became an hour became two hours and *still* I was shoveling, I wished for a snowblower, or kids with shovels, or an entrepreneurial truck owner with a plow or ... anyone!

All the while I ached to get out to Thacher Park. There's nothing like being the first to hit the trails after a snowfall and break trail. But by the time I finished shoveling it was too late to go for a tramp in the woods. And for days afterward I ached too much to go hiking at all.

Next snowfall I'll be smarter. I'll go hiking first.

- by Jill Harbeck



*Photo of unbroken trail in Thacher Park by Jill Harbeck*

### *Join board meetings virtually!*

The Friends Board meets every second Wednesday of every second month. Anybody is welcome at our board meetings and we'd love to have you there! Can't join us in person? Join our Microsoft Teams meetings virtually using this link/QR code! [Friends Group Bi-Monthly Board Meeting | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#)



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