

# Down the Road



## Realizing The Catskill/ Shawangunk Gateway

by John Adams

*Hudson Valley Organic Gardens, Wawarsing*

(With this article, we introduce a new **Wawarsing.Net** series, **Down the Road**. We invite you, as John Adams has here, to look into the future, "down the road," and tell us what you see, or would like to see, in our community's possibilities. Photos courtesy John Adams.)

When my wife and I first came to live in the Rondout Valley, about ten years ago, you could buy a baseball cap in **Wawarsing Town Hall** that read: *Ellenville – Your Home in the Mountains*. I always liked that little saying; but when I told my wife, she replied: "But it's not IN the mountains... it's IN the valley!"

Ellenville *feels* like it's in the mountains. To be precise, Ellenville is nestled at the base of the **Shawangunk Mountains**. (That's "Shon-gum" to locals, or simply "the Mountain.")

Look east on **Canal Street** and the Mountain is the backdrop of our downtown. Continue on to the **Ellenville-Wawarsing Chamber of Commerce** visitor center, near the corner of **Canal Street & Berme Road**, and then walk across the street to **Berme Road Park**. There, you can ascend the ridge on the old **Smiley Road**. This trail is the remnants of a carriage road that took city folks to **Lake Awosting** and the **Minnewaska Mountain House**. In later years, it was the way to bring wild blueberries and huckleberries out of the hills and to market.

**Lake Maratanza** is a sky-lake atop the mountain and was once the main source of drinking water for Ellenville. Its watershed was owned by the village, so on old maps Ellenville looks as big as Poughkeepsie. The almost 5000 acres was sold to the Open Space Institute and is managed as **Sam's Point Preserve** by the Nature Conservancy.

As the preserve is discovered by nature lovers, our downtown will begin to provide amenities for them, much the same way that the creation of the Mohonk Preserve twenty years ago made New Paltz the place to stock up on provisions in the morning, and end the day with a good meal in town. A family's day at **Sam's Point** should begin and end with a meal in Ellenville!

Here's my recommendation for Ellenville and Wawarsing: become *THE Catskill/Shawangunk Gateway*. Some of us think that our Town needs to plan NOW for the day when it *resumes* its role as "The Gateway to the Mountains." Recreational gateway communities – *properly planned* – enjoy a high quality of life, providing benefits to residents as well as recreational tourists. And what employers don't like the idea of employee benefits they don't have to pay for?!!

Now is the ideal time to burnish our recreational gateway image, with gateway-style architecture and native landscaping & signage. We all would benefit from being part of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revive the image of the Ellenville area.

Funny how the *Greater Ellenville Area* (AKA *Wawarsing*) has always been called *The Catskills*, when *The Shawangunks* are right at our door. Some recent events confirm what some have known all along: our narrow Rondout Valley that gives us that "nestled in the mountains" feeling is the place where *The Catskills* MEET *The Shawangunks*. The former estate of NYC restaurateur Frederick W. I. Lundy, a 5000-acre property west of **Rte. 209** in the foothills of the Catskills, will soon be the **Ver Nooy Kill State Forest Preserve**. The NY-NJ Trail Conference hopes to join the mountains by re-routing the Long Path, a hiking trail that begins at the George Washington Bridge and ends near Albany. The new trail will come down a rock scramble called **Jacobs Ladder** to the hamlet of **Port Ben** where it intersects the **D&H Canal/O&W Rail Trail**, then crosses **Rte. 209** (the future **Shawangunk Mountains Scenic Byway**), then up **Lundy Road** until it finds its way to **Ver Nooy Falls**.

As the trail passes the old **Lundy Estate**, you see a sight that was once common around these parts, and may be making a comeback. A rustic cedar summer house, like the ones I know from my summers working at **Lake Minnewaska's** Wildmere Hotel in the 1970's, still stands in the woods at the edge of the road. Superintendent David Miller tells me that *Eastern Correctional Facility* has built the brand-new summerhouse that stands along the rail trail by the restored **Napanoch Railroad Station**. It is a replica of the Lundy summerhouse – constructed without a single nail. These little buildings once dotted the mountainside, and, though they have come to be ↗