

The Ridge Rocks

Nature at Work in the Gunks

by Henry J. Bartosik, h.bartosik@att.net

Recent articles in *Wawarsing.Net* and other local publications have extolled the virtues of our local section of the **Shawangunk Ridge**, and in particular the **Ice Caves**. During my weekends when I serve as a volunteer Interpretive Guide at the **Mohonk Preserve Visitor Center**, the most often asked question to me is "How do I get to the **Ice Caves**?" Not an easy trek from the **Center**!

Caves, or in our case, crevasses, are a fascination for the potential of challenging the imagination. What animals shelter there? Can we find evidence that Indians and maybe pre-historic man used them? Is there still any ice there (youngsters often ask if they can 'eat the ice')? Hikers like to visit the "caves" to cool down on a hot day.

My first visit to the **Gunks** was in the late 50s during our summer geology fieldwork from Queens College. The only evidence of life that we found were bones from deer that had fallen from the upper reaches of the crevasses and copperhead snakes on the ledges. I would caution hikers to the hazards inherent in venturing into the crevasses, especially from falling rock debris. In the 50s we were not given helmets as we explored the "caves," but they are available today and should be used, even though they are not fool-proof guarantees for head safety; they are better than nothing on your head. The *Preserve* has also shown concern for the delicate balance of wildlife in limiting access to the 'Caves.' And, take caution where you place your hands.

There is more to the **Ridge** that has been overlooked. We are presently in an interglacial period of time. The last glacier that visited here receded about 10,000 years ago. It left its 'mark' on our landscape! The **Gunks** are experiencing isostatic rebound from the weight of the previous glaciers on the conglomerate and the underlying over-10,000-foot-thick shale. Certainly that contributed to the creation of fissures. The process is complicated. Look for scratches, striations (try to establish the probable direction that the glacier moved), polished surfaces, chatter marks, erratics, glacial overburden, moraine deposits, plucked 'chunks' of the metamorphosed conglomerate on the **Ridge** and elsewhere in the streams surrounding the **Ridge**.

There are many wonderful examples of nature at work: ice wedging pushing large sections of rocks apart, weathering forces breaking down the rock surfaces, tree roots winding their way into the cracks seeking food and water, mosses and lichens helping to establish a soil by trapping leaves and the limited sand, to name a few.

Mrs. Dumond recommends in her May article in *Wawarsing.Net*: 'check out the information in our local public library'; and, now go out and enjoy nature to the utmost. On a clear day one seems to be able to see forever! Hope to see you out on the bike trails as my wife, Billie, and I do our volunteer mountain bike patrol, maintain our **High Peters Kill** trail, or at the **Mohonk Visitor Center**. "SHON-gum!"

P.S. I am always on the lookout for fossil outcrops; the only ones that I have been able to find thus far are 'fossil' ripple marks from the beach during the deposition of the sand that is now the conglomerate. The shale should be a better source for fossils, but I have no idea where to look. Please contact me for roadcuts and outcrops for places to conduct 'fossil hunts' in the **Gunks**. Thanks. 🌿

Students Clean Up Sam's Point

On May 18th, *Ellenville Middle School's Student Council* members spent a day giving back to nature. The group of fifth through seventh-grade students, chaperoned by teachers Eda Nemeroff and Robert Hanington, put on their oldest jeans and sneakers, dug their hands into work gloves and cleaned up *Sam's Point Preserve* for the grand opening.

Supervised by Park Supervisor Heidi Wagner, the group spent the day moving fallen branches off the paths, getting rid of trash, and removed an old sign that would be replaced with an updated one. The group was even able to take a hike to the **Ice Caves** and brave the walk through it.

"It was hard work, but knowing that we made a difference made it worth it." *Rebecca Avery*

"**Sam's Point** was hard work, but it was fun and we helped our environment." *Ed Pestone*

"The hard work was worth it." *Lauren Gillette*

"It felt good to help the community and at the same time learn and have some fun." *Erin Logan*

"It was a lot of work, but fun. We all had the feeling of satisfaction." *Michael Stoeckeler*

"We moved a lot of branches and trash. We also went on a hike to **Sam's Point** and the **Ice Caves**. It was worth the hard work." *Jake Grogan*

"I'm not a tree hugger, but we sure were when we were around those trees." *Caden Otunu*

"...a fun and educational experience that I will never forget!" *Erica Stoeckeler*; President of *Student Council*

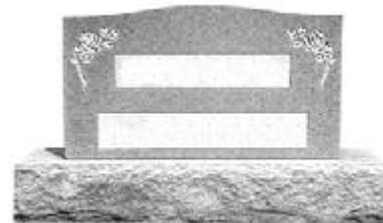
"Our future lies in the hands and minds of these students. Giving back to nature ensures a safe and clean environment for them to live in." *-Eda Nemeroff, Council Advisor* 🌿

Herpetological Survey with Randy Steckert

Saturday, July 9th; Rain date: July 16th;
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

After a short presentation at the **Conservation Center** join timber rattlesnake expert Randy Steckert on a search for reptiles and amphibians along the **Shawangunk Ridge**. Be sure to wear long pants and boots. Meet at the **Sam's Point Conservation Center**. Moderately difficult. Limit 15.

Please call *Sam's Point Preserve* at 845-647-7989 to register. 🌿



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