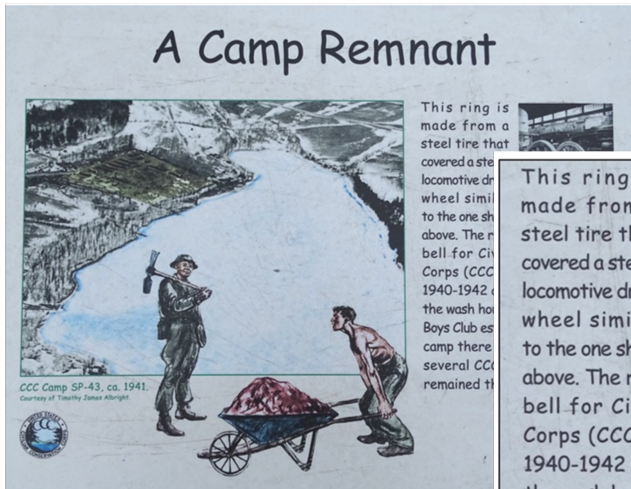




Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
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The story of the CCC Camp at Thompsons Lake



I know I heard of the Civilian Conservation Corps camp on Thompsons Lake some time back. Then my interest peaked - with the new sign at Schoolhouse No. 5 on Ketchum Road (photo top). It tells of Camp SP-43 of the CCC, which was run from 1940 to 1942. The old "Fire Ring" used as a fire alarm "near the wash house" is on display (photo top right). We've seen the large old concrete foundation in the campground - between campsites 133, and 134, so, we figured that was the old wash house location (photo bottom right)!

I only have two books on the CCC - for their camps in the Adirondacks, and in the Catskills. On the CCC website (New York) it only lists the camps in order, with the location, number, and beginning date.

"SP" stands for "State Park", and Camp SP-43 - opened on September 16, 1940. The Thacher State Park website / "History" notes: "The CCC camp on Thompsons Lake provided labor for forestry, and trails". (Those were most likely the trails in "Thacher Park South").

Of course, by the early 1940's, most all able-bodied men were joining (or drafted in) the military for WW-2.

This ring is made from a steel tire that covered a steam locomotive drive wheel similar to the one shown in the photograph above. The ring served as the fire bell for Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp SP-43 from 1940-1942 and was located near the wash house. When the Albany Boys Club established an overnight camp there in 1942, they reused several CCC buildings; the ring remained the club's fire alarm.

Then just recently, I was looking through my collection of old U.S.G.S. Topographic Map quadrangles. I spotted two from "Altamont". Those show the Thacher Park area and Thompsons Lake (photos next page). The oldest, dated 1944 (surveyed in 1942 - 1943), shows the "State Reservation" parcel on Thompsons Lake. In it are a cluster of small black rectangles, and squares - symbols for buildings. Those almost certainly represent the CCC Camp SP-43! The road coming down from Ketchum Road loops around into the "Reservation". Only one building is on the other side (or N.W. side) of the

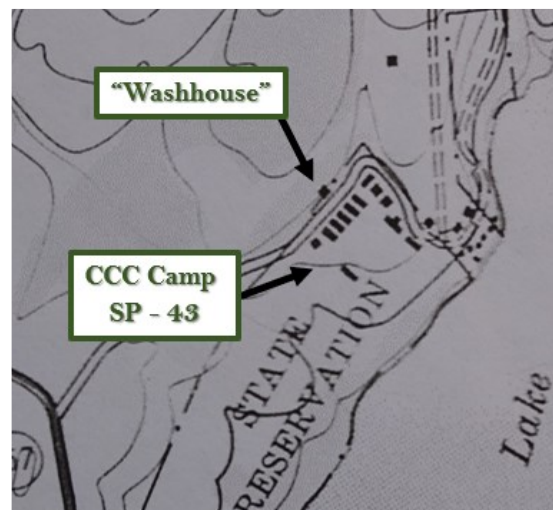
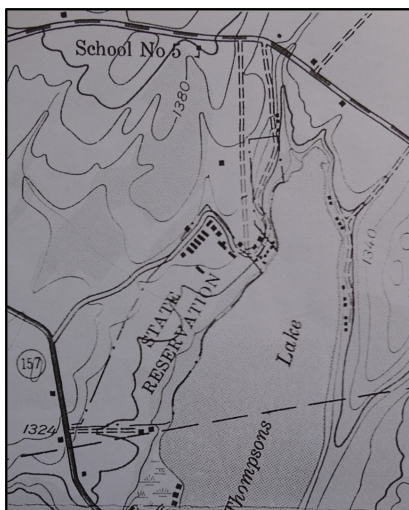


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road in the Reservation - surely the "wash house" (foundation of today)!

As the sign says, the Albany Boys Club ("Camp Thacher") used some of the CCC buildings at first, soon building their own new camps, and facilities. The Thompsons Lake campground - of today - was built in 1962 by the State (per Tim Albright's book). That's our story for now.

- by Jim & Bonnie Schaller



Stony Traces of the Past

Have you ever been out for a hike and come across what looks like a low stone wall in the woods? There are many throughout the Hudson Valley and Capital Region, including here at Thacher State Park. Actually, "many" is an understatement, as geologists and archaeologists believe hundreds of thousands of miles of these walls were constructed across rural New England in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. This begs the question; why all the walls in the woods?

Well, as more and more people arrived in New York and Dutch settlers moved up the Hudson River, housing and infrastructure needs skyrocketed. Before steel came along, wood was the building material of choice. Starting as early as the mid-1600s large swaths of old-growth forest were clear-cut throughout the Northeast to supply the timber industry. As this was going on, freshly-deforested areas were divided up into thousands of properties known as smallholdings and sold to settlers for farming. With the trees effectively out of the way, one of the next steps towards farming was tilling the soil, and during that process, the farmers found rocks. Lots and lots (and lots) of rocks, most of which were deposited by receding glaciers at the end of the last Ice Age.

As the rocks kept coming out of the ground, farmers struggled to figure out what to do with them, and in the manner of lemons and lemonade, they built walls. It is believed that at first farmers simply stacked them in ever-growing piles along the edges of their fields as they worked. Due to freeze-thaw patterns, year after year the first crops to emerge were piles of boulders, which were added in messy tiers to gradually form walls around the fields. Over time, they grew to mark property lines, the boundaries of orchards, pastures, cemetery plots, and even flower gardens.

While records from early colonial times are sparse, there are historical documents suggesting that Indigenous people, immigrants paying off debts, and potentially slaves also contributed to these sprawling structures. We likely will never know the full extent of the walls that were constructed, or the identities of most of the laborers. Though hundreds of years later most lie abandoned in the woods, tens of thousands of miles of hand-placed stones remain largely intact. They offer us a tangible link to generations past and the hope that given time nature may recover some of its lost territory.

- by Victoria Gellatly

Photos of Helderberg stone walls by Christine Gervasi



Reimagining Thacher Nature Center

The Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center originated from the extraordinary act of generosity of Fred and Martha Schroeder, allowing for the construction and opening of the Nature Center in 2001. Since then, it has connected thousands of visitors to Thacher Park, serving as a place where people of all ages can appreciate and connect with nature, building a lifelong sense of stewardship and love of the natural world.

The Nature Center still sports the original exhibits and displays as constructed in 2001. In celebration of its 25th anniversary, we propose an interior transformation to make the space more accessible and engaging. In each of the upcoming newsletters we'll walk-through one of the four habitats represented in the immersive new exhibits: meadow, pond, forest, and a Devonian sea.



As you walk through the front door, you'll step into the meadow habitat. To the left is an observation honey bee hive where you can view the busy bees at work and try to spot the queen! To the right is a section of honeycomb large enough for children to crawl in and

curl up like a bee larva while visitors of all ages and abilities learn about metamorphosis, the lifecycle of a honeybee, and why we have honeybees and other pollinators to thank for the food we eat each day.



The curved tabletop in the meadow habitat will feature seasonal displays where visitors can engage and experiment with flora, fauna and the seasonal changes in the park. Murals incorporating interactive activities bring the beauty of nature indoors, creating an accessible space to connect with and appreciate the outdoors, no matter the weather.

As you move through the Nature Center you transition from the meadow habitat to the forest, much like meadows over many years become forests in nature.

To support these exciting updates to the Nature Center exhibits, checks made out to Natural Heritage Trust can be mailed to:

*Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, NY, 12186*



Or scan the QR code to donate online. (Please be sure to select Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center as the site.)

- by Becky Schneider

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, Victoria Gellatly, Becky Schneider, and Sigrin Newell for their contributions to this newsletter.

— Christine Gervasi (Editor)

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



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

Wednesday, November 13, 2024

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Umwelts in Thacher Park

It is difficult to get your head around the idea of Umwelt*. This word refers to the unique sensory bubble that surrounds each animal as it perceives the world. This is difficult because each species of animal has its own Umwelt, many of them very strange to humans.

For example, a butterfly exploring Thacher Park meadows is aware of many different odor variations in the nectar of the flowers there. Females taste plants with sensory organs in their feet. In addition, butterflies see ultraviolet light, perceiving nectar guides on the petals that humans don't see.

One good way to imagine yourself into the Umwelt of a honeybee is to watch the bees in the glass sided hive at the Nature Center. Hum a few verses of the song "Shake Your Booty" while you watch honeybees return from foraging in Thacher meadows. They waggle their booties to inform other bees about good sources of nectar.

The tree hoppers that I wrote about several months ago have a surprising Umwelt. The only way they have of interacting with the world is through vibrations. You who are mothers, imagine that the only way you have of letting your offspring know they're in danger is by bumping your abdomen on a blade of grass. Scientists now know that more than 190,000 species of insects communicate using vibrations which are inaudible to human beings.

One of the easiest ways to imagine oneself into the Umwelt of another animal is to think about White-tailed deer. As large mammals, their brains, eyes, and ears are similar to ours. We can imagine that they see and hear the way we do. They hear each other; loud wheezing noises signal danger and males grunt to signify aggression. Their waving white tails as they bound away from danger are clear visual cues.

It is possible to empathize with the lives of White-tailed deer. Their emotional lives are not that different from ours; mother-child bonding, curiosity, courtship, anxiety, fear, and rage. It is an Umwelt that we can relate to.

Yet there it ends. White-tailed deer can jump as high as 9 feet and as long as 30 feet. Imagine how that would feel in your body. Deer communication is dominated by scent through scent glands located all over their bodies. It is difficult to think of a conversation between two different brands of perfume. We can project our way into the Umwelt of deer only partially.

Before your next hike at Thacher Park, learn more about the Umwelts of various animals by reading a fascinating book: *An Immense World*, by Ed Yong. Try to imagine your way into the sensory worlds of the various animals you encounter at the Park, even if it's only Squirrels and Chipmunks.

- by Sigrin Newell

*Umwelt is a German word whose literal translation is environment

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