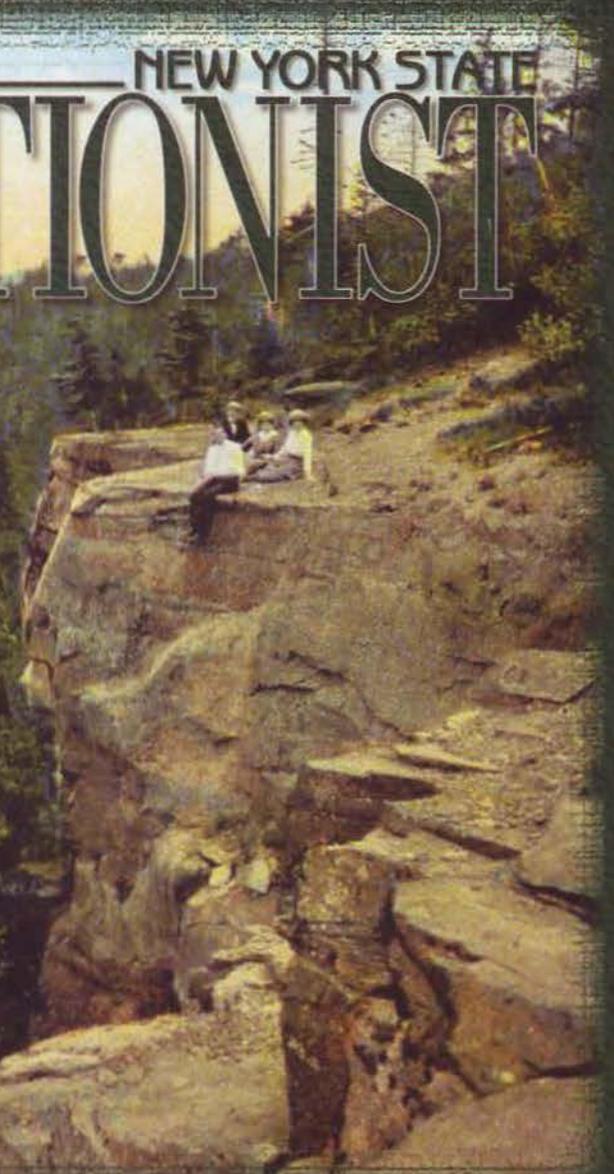
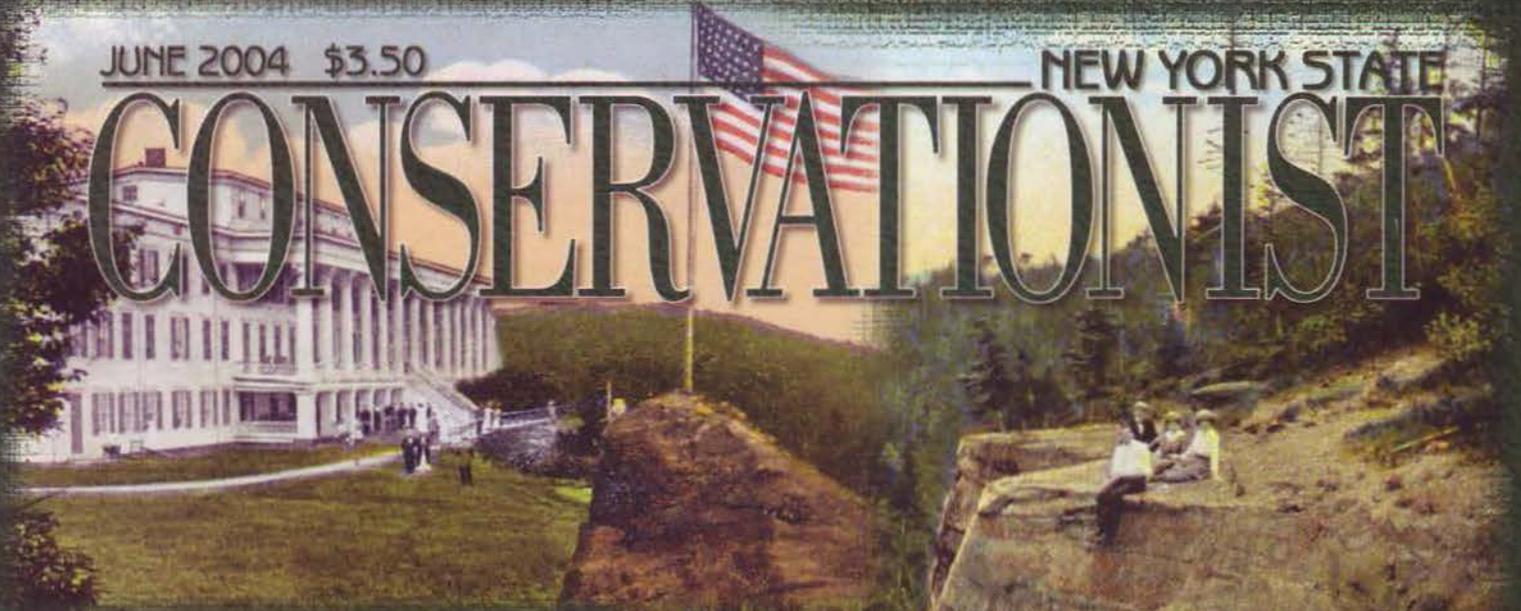


JUNE 2004 \$3.50

NEW YORK STATE

CONSERVATIONIST



CATSKILL CENTENNIAL ISSUE

A look back at New York's
legendary Catskill Park, pg. 5



CATSKILL PARK



Art by James Gurney

100 YEARS OF STEWARDSHIP

By Bill Rudge and Julia Yuan

...“Here the Slide Mountain rears its majestic form, surrounded by its retinue of lesser peaks. Here, also, are the deep, cool valleys, whose silence is broken only by the rushing cascades, or by the murmur of woodland sounds. Here are the rocky glens, among which the Peekamoose is so justly celebrated, while on every side the eye is greeted by an array of scenery unsurpassed throughout the State.”

—First Annual Report of the Forest Commission, 1886, predecessor to Department of Environmental Conservation.



Slide Mountain

Left Out. At First

In 1884, a state-appointed Forestry Commission was directed to investigate and report on the condition of the Adirondack and Catskill forests. The Commission initially viewed the Catskill region as an area so thoroughly impacted by lumbermen, tanners, quarrymen and settlers that its merchantable timber was gone; where fire had ruined the thin soils covering the region and thus destroyed any opportunity for the forest to regenerate; where streams were considered to be of only local influence. They concluded that the region was an area unworthy of inclusion in the proposed forest preserve.

Later, upon closer inspection (after the forest preserve was created), experts reported that the Catskill Forest Preserve included the grandest of scenery.

So was the stage set for one of the most remarkable conservation success stories in the nation. The once denuded land of the Catskills is now a park of more than 700,000 acres, almost half of which is protected by the State Constitution. This is a park that provides nearly 90 percent of the drinking water for the nation's largest city; a park that contains old-growth forests, steep hemlock ravines, numerous free-flowing streams, and habitat for beaver, deer, turkey, bear, bobcat, fisher and the ubiquitous porcupine, as well as a host of forest-dwelling birds including Bicknell's thrush. The Catskills also provide a broad variety of



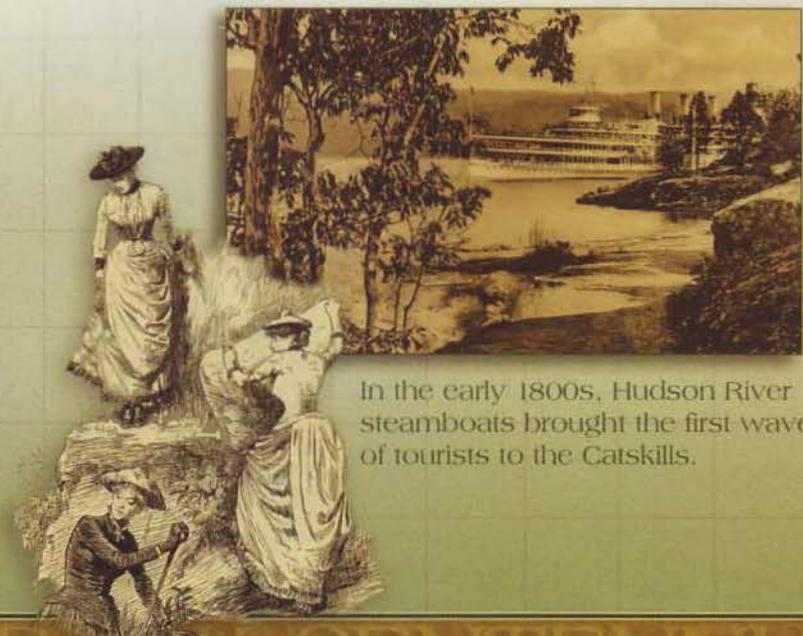
In 1884, a state-appointed Forestry Commission viewed the Catskill region as an area so thoroughly impacted by lumbermen, tanners, quarrymen and settlers that they recommended that the Catskills not be included in the proposed forest preserve.

outdoor recreation including birding, fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, biking, skiing and snowmobiling.

The history of this region is a colorful mosaic, filled with peaks and paintings, reservoirs and fire towers, hotels and hemlock, taxes and trout.



In 1708, Johannes Hardenbergh and six others purchased 1.5 million acres of the Catskill Mountains from Queen Anne of England.



In the early 1800s, Hudson River steamboats brought the first wave of tourists to the Catskills.

Formation of the Catskill Preserve and Park

In 1884, the New York State Legislature debated an act to preserve the forested lands of the Adirondacks, including requiring the state treasurer to pay taxes on the proposed forest preserve lands to the counties involved. Newly elected Assemblyman Cornelius Hardenbergh of Ulster County sensed an opportunity to reverse Ulster County's \$40,000 debt to New York State on abandoned lands, and successfully added the counties of Greene, Sullivan and Ulster to the deal, despite the Forest Commission's recommendations.

On May 15, 1885, the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve was created. Governor David B. Hill signed legislation requiring that "all lands now owned or which may hereafter be acquired by the State of New York...in eleven Adirondack and three Catskill counties...be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be sold nor shall they be leased or taken by any person or corporation, public or private." A three-person Forest Commission was created to administer the then 681,000-acre Adirondack Forest Preserve and the 33,894-acre Catskill Forest Preserve.

In 1904, the Catskill Park was created and encompassed 576,120 acres, of which approximately 92,708 acres were state-owned forest preserve lands. New park boundaries were delineated on a map by a blue line—continuing a tradition begun in 1892 on official state maps showing the Adirondack Park.

Did You Know?

The Catskill Park is a geographic region encompassing 705,500

acres of the most mountainous tracts of both public and private land in Delaware, Greene, Ulster

and Sullivan counties.

The Catskill Forest Preserve is the state-owned public land within the Catskill Park. Article XIV of the State Constitution assures lasting protection, directing these lands be "forever kept as wild forest lands."

Since its creation in 1885, the Catskill Forest Preserve has grown from 34,000 to 288,000 acres, and encompasses more than 41 percent of the lands within the park.



George Proffers

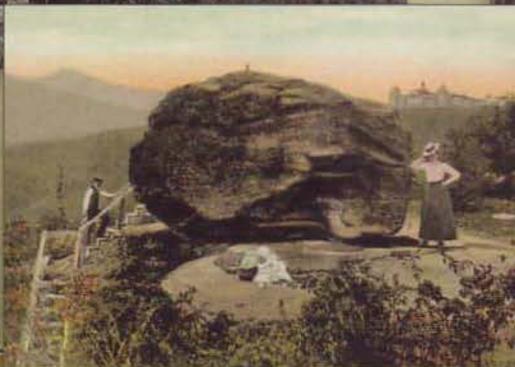
Overlook Mountain



In 1823, the Catskill Mountain House opened near North Lake. It was one of the largest and most renowned hotels of its time. Many more grand hotels would follow.



In the 'Gilded Age,' Catskill resorts were favorite destinations of wealthy New Yorkers. Improved transportation brought ever-increasing tourism.





The Laurel House and the other grand hotels are gone, as are the visitors in long skirts and parasols. Today a new generation of tourists still finds adventure in the Catskill Park.

America's First Vacation Land

The advent of the steamboat in the early 1800s brought tourists to the Catskills via the Hudson River.

About this time, the Catskill Mountain House opened near North Lake, which signaled the start of the Catskill vacation industry. The Catskill Mountain House (see page 7) was one of the largest and most renowned hotels of its time. The scenic beauty of the Hudson Valley and the Catskills encouraged wealthy New Yorkers to spend their summers here. In the years that followed, many more grand hotels and resorts were built to accommodate the increasing popularity of the Catskill region as a place to escape city life. Other hotels that sprang up included the Overlook Mountain House, the Laurel House (left) and Hotel Kaaterskill. Hotels of this era are now long gone; fallen victims of fires, the Depression, two World Wars and the rise of the automobile and airplane travel in the twentieth century.

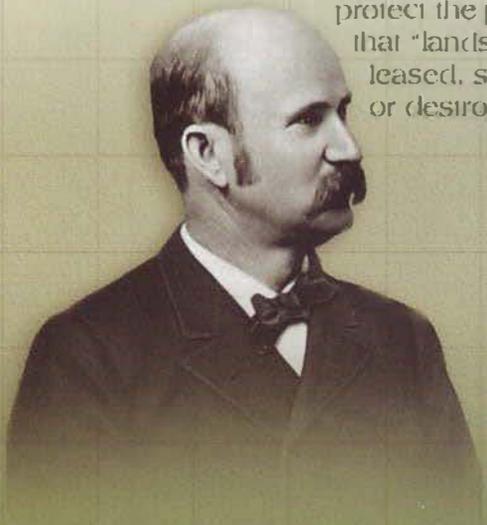
Fly Fishing in the Catskills

The Catskills, considered to be the birthplace of fly-fishing, offer some of the finest fishing in the United States. The most recognized waters include Esopus Creek, the Beaver kill, the Willowemoc, Schoharie Creek, the Neversink River, Catskill Creek, the East and West Kills, Batavia Kill and the Delaware River. These waterways have attracted fishermen for more than 150 years. In the 1830s, local innkeepers began catering to anglers lured by the abundance of native brook trout. Unfortunately, the trout eventually declined as a result of exploitation and habitat change. Rainbow trout were introduced into a few Catskill streams in the late 1800s and the first brown trout was introduced in 1886. As trout populations became diversified, more and more anglers were attracted to visit the Catskill area.

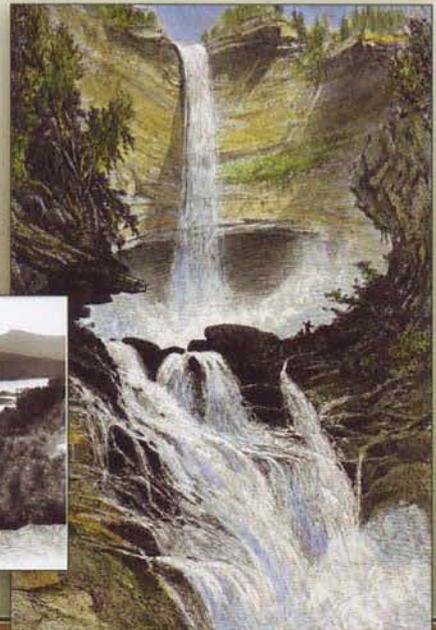
In 1885, Governor David B. Hill signed legislation creating The Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve. The State Constitution was amended in 1894 to

protect the preserves so that "lands shall not be leased, sold, removed or destroyed."

In 1904, the Catskill Park was created, encompassing 576,120 acres.



Catskill Falls



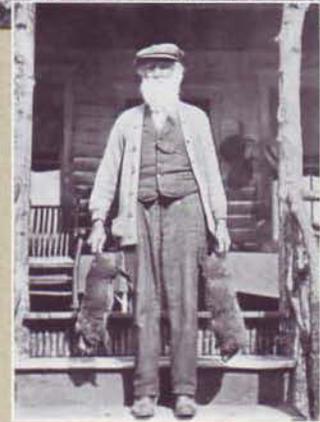
Sunset Rock

Who was John Burroughs?

Farmer, naturalist, and world-renowned writer John Burroughs spent his later years at Woodchuck



Lodge, his Catskill home. He hiked and camped on Slide Mountain and wrote inspiring prose about his many outdoor experiences in the Catskill wilderness. More than 100



years ago, John Burroughs possessed a fundamental understanding of land-use ethics. He equally cherished both working landscapes and the undisturbed remote wild lands of the Catskills. One of the Catskill Park's many values is its success in preserving for future generations what Burroughs found so inspiring.

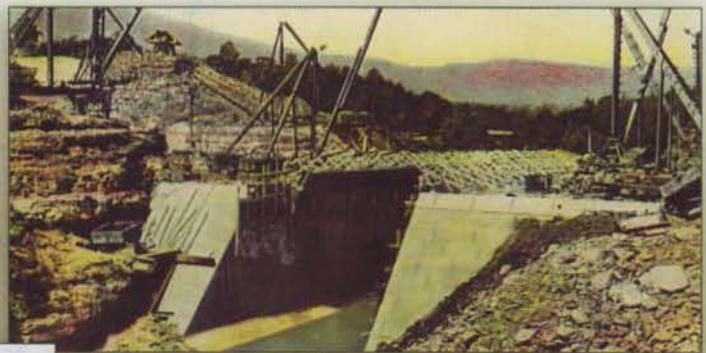
John Burroughs' appreciation for the region is evident in this passage, in which he describes one of his favorite Catskill streams after one of many fishing trips:

"If I were a trout, I should ascend every stream 'till I found the Rondout. My eyes have never beheld such beauty in a mountain stream. The water was almost as transparent as air, — was, indeed, like liquid air. You lay down and drank or dipped the water up in your cup and found it just the degree of refreshing coldness. One is never prepared for the clearness of the water in these streams."

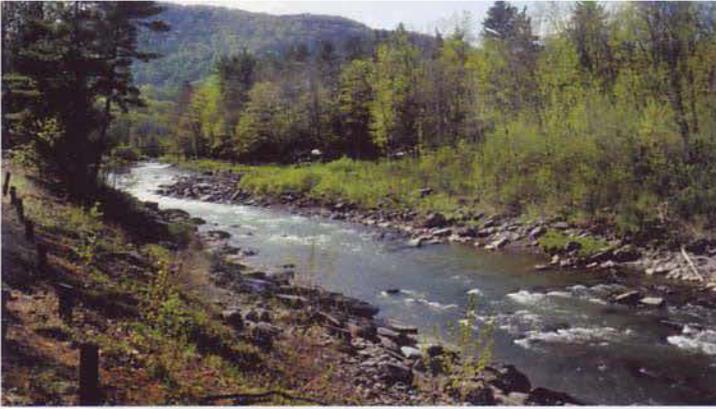


The first forest fire observation station in New York was built on Balsam Lake Mountain in 1905. It looked like the one shown here on Hunter Mountain.

In 1905, the New York City Board of Water Supply began planning to secure water from the Catskill Mountains. This was a project of immense proportions.



The Ashokan Reservoir was built in 1907 (shown here), followed by the Schoharie, Rondout, Neversink, and Pepacton Reservoirs. Dozens of towns were displaced during the construction of these reservoirs. Today, the Catskill region provides nearly 90 percent of the water—some 1.2 billion gallons per day—to eight million residents of the Lower Hudson Valley and New York City.



The Catskills offer some of the finest fly fishing in the eastern United States. The Esopus Creek is a favorite Catskill trout stream.

Theodore Gordon, who many consider to be the father of American fly fishing, began a detailed anthology of his fly fishing experiences on Catskill waters in the early 1900s.

Today, brook trout that are descendants of the original wild populations are still widely distributed, while rainbow trout are irregularly distributed throughout the region. Even with the abundance and popularity of "brookies" and "rainbows," brown trout are the most common Catskill trout species. The brown trout's wide distribution and potential to reach a large size make it a popular gamefish. To augment natural reproduction, DEC annually stocks many fingerling and yearling trout throughout the park. The Catskill region has been a focus of DEC's Public Fishing Rights program since the 1930s and many miles of easements have been acquired.

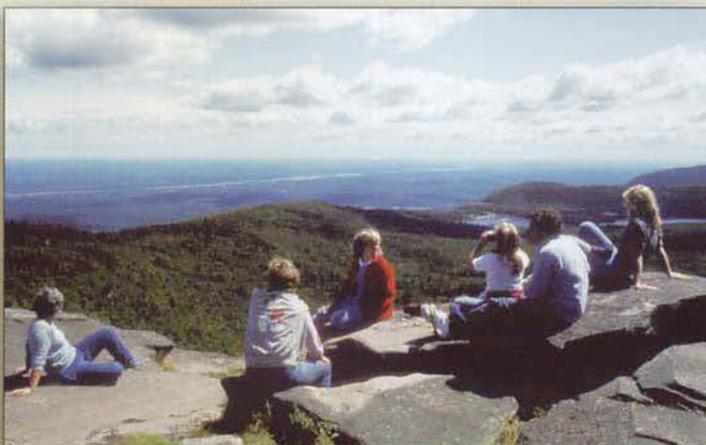
Fire Observation Stations

Throughout the nineteenth century, New York's forests were subject to frequent outbreaks of fire, burn-

ing thousands of acres in the Catskills and Adirondacks. As part of a new state fire fighting system developed in 1909, the Forest, Fish and Game Commission began building observation stations at the highest points in the region, from which smoke could be seen quickly, even over the widest forest expanses. The first fire tower erected in the state was built in 1905 on Balsam Lake Mountain, and was privately owned. Eventually, 23 towers were built atop the Catskill's highest peaks, the last was built on Overlook Mountain in 1950. As public use of the park increased, the role of towers in fire detection became obsolete, and by 1990 all fire towers had been closed. However, in recent years, local communities, the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, and DEC have successfully restored five towers within the Catskill Park. All have since opened, introducing visitors to the splendor of the park from an otherwise unachievable vantage point.

Devil's Tombstone

Devil's Tombstone Campground, located in a rugged Catskill Mountain pass called Stony Clove, is one of the oldest campgrounds in New York State. The word "clove" comes from the old Dutch word "kloove," which means "gash or cut in the body of the mother earth." The earliest mention of the campground depicts its use as an undeveloped pull-off campsite in the 1920s. The campground came into "official" use in 1926.



North Point View to the Hudson River



Early Fall on the Willowemoc



Bicknell's Thrush

On June 15, 1881, a 21-year-old amateur ornithologist named Eugene P. Bicknell hired a local guide and together they climbed toward the summit of Slide Mountain. After a hike through rain, cold, and fog, they arrived near the summit. In a small opening in the fir forest, Mr. Bicknell heard the song of the Swainson's thrush. He then heard an unfamiliar song more reminiscent of a veery's. A thrush-sized bird flew across the opening—enabling a clear shot—and Bicknell collected the bird. Upon closer inspection Bicknell believed it to be a gray-cheeked thrush.

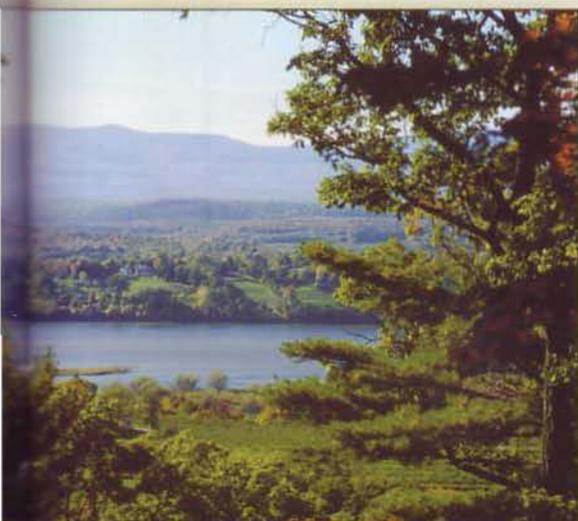
Confused about its identity, Bicknell sent the specimen to the American Museum of Natural History. Indeed, a short time later, a leading ornithologist at the museum declared this bird a new subspecies of gray-cheeked thrush, naming it *Hylocichla aliciae bicknelli*. Bicknell surprised the ornithological community with his startling discovery of an unknown thrush just outside America's largest metropolitan area—and in the backyard of many great ornithologists.

For more than a hundred years it remained a subspecies of the gray-cheeked thrush. In 1995, after a complete examination of the evidence, including a DNA analysis, the American Ornithologists' Union bestowed full species status upon the bird, naming it the Bicknell's thrush—*Catharus bicknelli*. Today, we know that the Catskills are the southernmost part of its breeding range. In New York State, the Bicknell's thrush is listed as a *Species of Special Concern*.

In 1997, the Catskill Peaks region was identified by Audubon New York as an Important Bird Area because it supports a significant proportion of the state's Bicknell's thrush population, in addition to providing habitat for other members of the sub-alpine bird community. In 2000, Governor George E. Pataki designated Catskill Forest Preserve peaks higher than 3,500 feet in elevation as part of a state Bird Conservation Area.



Courtesy of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science

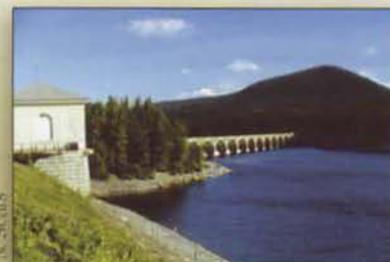


View of the Catskills from Olana

Winter Hike on Slide Mountain



F. Gerry



N. Skyles

Ashokan Reservoir



F. Gerry

Frick Pond

This campground is small and primitive, with wooded sites near the small, shallow Notch Lake. The campsite's namesake still survives—the Devil's Tombstone is a large boulder, approximately five feet by seven feet in size, which was probably carried down the mountain many centuries ago by a landslide or glacier. Some say you can see the stone face of the devil high on a cliff of Hunter Mountain, which is located on the western side of the campground.



Belleayre circa 1960 and today

A Park for Deer

In 1887, the state legislature authorized the Forest Commission to create a deer park at the foot of Slide Mountain. Approximately 100 acres were enclosed with a ten-foot-high wire fence and stocked with 45 deer trapped in the Adirondacks. The intent was that progeny from these deer would re-establish the Catskill deer population—however they failed to multiply as expected. In 1895 the remaining deer were released. Most residents welcomed the return of deer, and deer numbers reached their peak in the latter half of the twentieth century. Today, the park provides a unique setting for those seeking a wilderness deer hunting experience.



Kaaterskill Falls

communities as well as the remarkable forests that now grace its peaks and valleys. Since its creation, the constitutionally protected forest preserve lands within the park have grown to encompass more than 288,000 acres. The balance between open space protection and community development is elemental to these lands. On this, its centennial, the Catskill Park stands as a lasting symbol to this stewardship.

Historic photos courtesy of the Haines Falls Free Library, the collection of Timothy J. Mallery, (www.catskillarchive.com) and DEC.

Bill Rudge is a natural resources supervisor for DEC in New Paltz. Julia Yuan is an environmental education assistant with DEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Albany.

A Park for Skiers

Skiing in the Catskills began in 1935 at the Simpson Memorial Ski Slope in Phoenicia, where the first rope tow in New York State was installed. Special ski trains helped popularize the slopes as a winter tourist destination. The success of Simpson Memorial Ski Slope led to a proposed amendment to Article XIV of the State Constitution, allowing for the construction of two ski centers on forest preserve land, one on Belleayre Mountain in the Catskills and one on Gore and Pete Gay Mountains in the Adirondacks. The state legislature passed the proposed amendment in 1946, and in 1947 it was approved by the state's voters.

The success of the Belleayre Ski Center prompted the development of several additional ski centers on private lands within the park, including Hunter Mountain and Ski Windham. Combined, these recreational sites attract many thousands of visitors to the region each year.

The Park Today

A blend of public and private land, Catskill Park is no ordinary park, collectively embracing its historic

If you go:



Unlike most national parks, the Catskill Park encompasses a patchwork of public and private land, intermixed with communities and laced with a network of scenic rural roads and a few state highways. There is no official park entrance. Most people drive into the park from the east on Routes 23 or 23A leaving the NYS Thruway at Catskill, or on Route 28 from the Thruway at Kingston. Route 17 provides additional access from the south.

In 2004, the centennial year of its creation, a variety of Catskill organizations and interested citizens are planning numerous activities and events to highlight the many values and opportunities associated with the Catskill Park. These events include A Lark in the Park, a series of outdoor events held throughout the area, that will occur between October 2 and 11, 2004.

For more information, visit DEC's website at: www.dec.state.ny.us, or call event organizers at (877) 426-0323.

