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On the cover: The Orpheum Academy of Dance and Creative Arts will perform their annual holiday ballet, "The Nutcracker," this December at the Orpheum Film & Performing Arts Center in Tannersville. For more information about this performance, please see the article on page 6.

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Grand Opening of the Kaaterskill Rail Trail. Photo by Georgette Weir. Trail Crew working on Long Path Bridge in Platte Clove. Photo by Jeff Senterman

THE GREAT OUTDOORS IN THE CATSKILLS

By Jeff Senterman

As the year comes to an end, it is a good time to think back on the great adventures you have had in the past year in the Catskill Mountains and all of the hard work that has gone into making your experience more enjoyable. Hundreds of volunteers spend thousands of hours every year maintaining, building and protecting the trails and open space of the Catskill Park. These hardworking volunteers partner with land managers such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York City Department of Environmental Protection and many smaller landowners who open their lands to public recreation.

December can also be a great time to get out and enjoy the forests and mountains of the Catskills. Be aware of the ongoing hunting seasons and be careful, but get out and enjoy yourself. The deep winter snows generally have yet to set in and the woods is quiet and waiting for its winter blanket. There are opportunities to hike and explore and new vistas open up from the trails without any leaves on the trees.

Wrapping up the 2013 Trail Work Season in the Catskill Mountains!

2013 turned out to be a very busy year for the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, our partners and the trails of the Catskill Region. New trails have been opened, trail crews have continued to build completely new trails, bridges have gone up, new maps

and brochures are now available and all that's just the tip of the iceberg. Here are some of the accomplishments over the last year that the Trail Conference is celebrating for 2013:

- The Kaaterskill Rail Trail (KRT) Committee opened the first phase of the Kaaterskill Rail Trail on National Trails Day this year. This project was supported by the Trail Conference through staff time, volunteer labor and materials that were purchased with funding from our Catskills Community Trails Fund. Dozens of volunteers helped clear, build and open the trail and then over 100 people joined in on the opening celebrations. The KRT has become an incredibly popular route following its opening and the Trail Conference and KRT Committee are working to fund Phase 2 which will connect the KRT directly to the trail system of the North-South Lake State Campground.
- The Trail Conference has been managing the continued construction of 9 ½ miles of new backcountry hiking trail between the Village of Phoenicia and the Burroughs Range Trail (Wittenberg-Cornell-Slide Trail). Work this year has included technical rockwork to create a sustainable and enjoyable trail experience. The Trail Conference's crew's logistics have been managed by both volunteers and staff and through funding with the Catskill Community Trails Fund. The expected grand opening celebration for this new section of the Long Path will be on the 2014 National

Trails Day in June. The finished trail will provide a direct backcountry hiking connection between the Phoenicia and the trails of the Slide Mountain Wilderness. It will also remove about 7 ½ miles of the Long Path from its current route along roadways.

- Following the removal of the damaged original, the Trail Conference spearheaded construction of a 30-foot replica king post bridge for the Long Path in the Catskill Center's Platte Clove Preserve. 18 volunteers in a single day constructed the bridge, keeping opening a key connection for the Long Path through the Catskill Mountains. Funding for the bridge and the management time came from our Catskills Community Trails Fund.
- The Trail Conference launched five new brochures and maps for the restored Fire Towers of the Catskill Park. These brochures have become great tools for the thousands of visitors to the Catskills who climb to the five fire towers for their vistas. These brochures are distributed by Fire Tower volunteers, local communities and businesses and by other organizations promoting recreation in the Catskills. You can download your own copies of the brochures and maps at www.nynjtc.org/news/catskill-fire-tower-brochures.
- As one of the three co-sponsoring organizations, the Trail Conference took part in the 2013 Lark in the Park which was the biggest and best Lark in the Park event so far!
- The Trail Conference held a volunteer appreciation picnic for trail and lean-to volunteers in the Catskill Region, including volunteers from the Trail Conference, the Catskill 3500 Club, the Catskill Mountain Club and several other organizations who work in the region.
- The Trail Conference is co-chair of the Catskill Park Advisory Committee, a subcommittee of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Forest Preserve Advisory Committee (which the Trail Conference is also a voting member). The committee discusses and works on issues related to the Catskill Park and the Catskill Mountain Region. Significant progress has been on several fronts including advocating for additional DEC resources, new ways to work on Unit Management Plan updates and how to utilize volunteers in areas where DEC has not had the resources to do work. It's also become a great forum for communities to better understand how they can connect and use the forest preserve as an economic driver.
- The Trail Conference, along with the Catskill Center, the Catskill Mountain Club and local business owners took part in the first Catskill Park Awareness Day. The ongoing goal of the Catskill Park Awareness Day is to educate New York State Legislators on the importance of the Catskill Park recreational resources to the economic wellbeing of the region and for the Legislature to support the Park.
- As a member of the Board of Directors for the Friends of the Catskill Park Interpretive Center, the Trail Conference and all partners are very excited that by the end of 2014, the Catskill Interpretive Center will be constructed and open. The Interpretive Center will become a focus for tourism, visitors and information on the park, the outdoors, recreation and more. The Trail Conference will be helping to staff the center and is currently designing and building an interpretive trail network and bridge for the site.
- Due to the generosity of REI, the Trail Conference has been able to expand our Lean-to Maintenance Program. For more information on the program, please visit www.nynjtc.org/catskill-lean-tos.

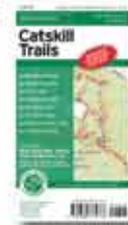


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• In 2013, thanks to support from the Catskill Mountain Club, the Trail Conference launched a new Roving Trail Maintenance Crew for the entire Catskill Region. The crew has been working on trails throughout the region that need additional clearing and maintenance. In 2014 the Trail Conference hopes to launch two more Trail Crews to improve trail conditions in the Catskills—one in the Willowemoc Wild Forest and one along the northern sections of the Escarpment Trail and the Black

All of these amazing accomplishments throughout the Catskill Region are thanks to the Trail Conference's volunteers, members and supporters. If you are interested in supporting the Catskill Community Trails Program, please visit www.nynjtc.org/product-donate-catskills-trail-program and make a donation today. Your gift goes directly to the trails and the programs of the Catskill Mountains!

Be Aware of Hunting Season in the Catskill Mountains

Hunting is allowed on most Forest Preserve lands of the Catskill Park and rifle season for deer hunting runs through December 9. For details about hunting seasons, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) maintains a website at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/65231.html>.

Hikers should always be aware of the hunting regulations in the area they are hiking and should wear blaze orange, even when hiking in areas where hunting is not allowed. Don't forget your pets either! Dogs should have a blaze orange vest too!

Help Maintain Vistas in the Catskills with Photos!

The Trail Conference is working with the DEC to create a new crew that would work on maintaining vistas along trails in the Catskill Park. As part of this effort, the Trail Conference is looking for historical photos from viewpoints along the trails of the Catskill Park. If you have a photo, please send the photo along with location and date information to catskills@nynjtc.org and the Trail Conference and the DEC will use that to help determine the maintenance that could be completed in the future.

Join the Catskill 3500 Club's Winter Weekend January 24-26!

Spend some time this January winter hiking with the Catskill 3500 Club! Do you want to climb a peak in the winter? Do you want to get more comfortable with snowshoeing? All four required winter peaks for 3500 Club membership, as well as some bushwhacks will be led by experienced hike leaders so you can pack in two fun-filled days in the outdoors and spend a great weekend in the beautiful Catskill Mountains.

As last year's weekend was so popular, the group will once again be at the Frost Valley YMCA—a great setting not only for hiking, but also for cross-country skiing. There are three housing

options available: the Friendship House, which is inn-like housing, rooms with double beds and private baths; the Castle, which has private rooms but shared baths; and Biscuit Brook Lodge, a large cabin with bunks and configurations of four or six beds to a room. It has a central meeting space with a fireplace (perfect after a day of playing in the snow!). Please contact Maria Bedo at 917 881 9272 or at winterweekend@catskill-3500-club.org for more information or if you'd like to attend. This event is sponsored by the Catskill 3500 Club and is open to the public.

Take a Hike!

If you are looking to get out on the trails, but need some help to get your bearings on Catskill Mountain trails, the region has several different groups that lead guided hikes. The Catskill Mountain Club (CMC) offers members and non-members the opportunity to go hiking, paddling, biking and skiing throughout the Catskills. More information on the CMC and schedules of their activities can be found at www.catskillmountainclub.org. The Catskill 3500 Club leads hikes up the 35 peaks in the Catskills that reach above 3500 feet in elevation. Visit the 3500 Club's website at www.catskill-3500-club.org for information on their activities. The Rip Van Winkle Hikers also lead hikes throughout the region and you can find out more information about the club check out their website at www.newyorkheritage.com/rvw.

Getting Involved

If you are interested in learning more about hiking the Catskill Mountains, getting outdoors, joining a trail crew, adopting a trail for maintenance, or just finding out more information about stewardship of our recreational facilities in the Catskill Mountains, please contact the Trail Conference at 518 628 4243 or via e-mail at catskills@nynjtc.org.

Jeff Senterman was formerly an Assistant Forest Ranger for the DEC in Greene County, graduated with a degree in Environmental Science from Lyndon State College, has worked in the Environmental Planning field, is currently the Catskill Region Program Coordinator for the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference and is a member of the Board of Directors for the Catskill Mountain Club and the Friends of the Catskill Interpretive Center.

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference partners with parks to create, protect, and promote a network of 2,000 miles of public trails, including 29 lean-tos and over 200 miles of trails in the Catskill Mountain region. We offer volunteer opportunities for people who love the outdoors, as well as publishing detailed hiking maps for the Catskill Mountain Region, along with a number of other regions. For more information on our maps and our Catskill Community Trails program please visit us on the web at www.nynjtc.org/catskills and follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NYNJTC.Catskill-Region.