



The Oak Leaf

The Newsletter of TRISTATE RAMBLERS

Volume 42 Number 2

FALL 2019

President's Message *by Meg Fernandez*



It's hard to believe that 2019 is coming to a close! We had a picture perfect day for our summer picnic, which was held at Lewis Morris Park on July 13. As always, Jeff

Sovelove did an outstanding job gathering all our supplies, setting up, and staffing the grills. Thank you, Jeff, for all your efforts. Among the 75 attendees, we were honored with the presence of four past TSR presidents: Roger Di Peppe, Martin Frahme, Terry Kulmane, and Gail Biggs.

Special thanks to our pre-picnic hike leaders: Bev and Stan Kaltnecker, who led 25 members on a short walk, and Bijoy Mechery and Charlie Stepnowski, who led 24 members on a moderate hike. We appreciate Terry Kulmane and Gail Biggs for handling the sign-in table, as well as all the volunteers who came early to help set up or stayed late to help clean up. We could not hold these events without our volunteers.

New this year, all members who signed in received a raffle ticket. Congratulations to Ursula Davis, who won the gift card! Another new feature was the distribution of custom TSR hats to all our amazing hike leaders in appreciation for their outstanding volunteerism throughout the year.

The annual business meeting and holiday party will be held at [Masker's Barn](#) in Watchung Reservation on Saturday, December 7. One moderate hike and one shorter walk will be

offered, followed directly by our meeting and party. Detailed informational emails are being sent to all TSR members, so be sure to check your inbox!

Two very special events at Picatinny Arsenal were organized this year, and I'm sure you will enjoy reading about them in Rozanna Fanelli's article. We look forward to other special offerings for our members in future schedules. Also, members may begin to notice additional hike offerings in our online schedule. Please read Nancy Sierra's article in this regard.

Lastly, for family considerations, I have decided to step down as TSR president. Bill Reynolds has been nominated to take over the position in 2020 following the election at our annual meeting. The club will be in good hands, and I know that our members will support him in every way possible. TriState Ramblers is a

volunteer organization, and we encourage all members to offer their time whenever feasible.

I look forward to seeing you soon at the holiday party!

~ ~ ~

Editor's note: Thank you, Meg, on behalf of all TSR members, for your dedicated and thoughtful leadership this year.

Farewell to Our Friends

[Diane Bonifanti](#) 7/28/19

[Mary \("Jimmy"\) Hagerdorn](#) 4/16/19

[Charlotte Hershkovitz](#) 10/12/19

[Len Shnitzer](#) 6/29/19

Please notify the membership chair, John Crump, of the passing of TSR members and former members (johnmcrump@yahoo.com).



The Oak Leaf

The Oak Leaf is a publication of TriState Ramblers of New Jersey. Comments or questions may be addressed to the editor, Lise Greene, at lise.greene@montclair.edu.

The newsletter is created electronically by the graphic editor, Jay Winslow, and emailed to all members. It is also posted on the TSR website. In order to ensure receipt of *The Oak Leaf*, please keep your email current with John Crump, membership chair, at johnmcrump@yahoo.com.



TriState Ramblers Holiday Party and Annual Meeting: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

Masker's Barn in Watchung

Reservation, 2 Cataract Hollow Road, Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922

Directions: On Cataract Hollow Road, pass the Deserted Village and turn right onto a dirt road. At the second grassy field, marked with "TSR Park Here" signs, park head-in (no parking along the road). Masker's Barn is a short walk down Cataract Hollow Road to the right. There are no restrictions on footwear in the hall.

Limited reserved parking is available at the barn for the handicapped and those delivering significant goods.

Register in advance with Terry Kulmane (908-644-4547, terrykayhiker@yahoo.com).

To work up our appetites, **two hikes** will leave from the Masker's Barn parking lot prior to the party. Dress appropriately for the weather, including microspikes if conditions are snowy or icy.

Leader: Lynda Goldschein, 908-757-7058; cell morning of hike only 908-347-5012

Meet: 9:30 AM sharp. Hike about 4.5 miles in 2.5 hours. One or two uphill sections; rest is fairly level. Bring water; hiking boots and walking stick recommended. NOTE early start.

Leader: Arlene Fineman, 908-403-6554, arlenefineman@gmail.com

Meet: 9:45 AM sharp. Hike 3.35 miles on leader's choice of trails in

about 2 hours. Easy to moderate terrain. Bring water and hiking boots; hiking poles suggested. NOTE early start.

The **annual meeting** with election of officers for 2020 begins at noon. *Sign in at the door to receive a raffle ticket. Two lucky members will win \$50 gift cards!*

Lunch will follow the meeting — hot tea, coffee, table snacks, and catered buffet provided. Please bring your own cold drink along with a salad or homemade dessert to share with fellow hikers. Meal contributions can be dropped off at Masker's Barn beginning at 9:00.

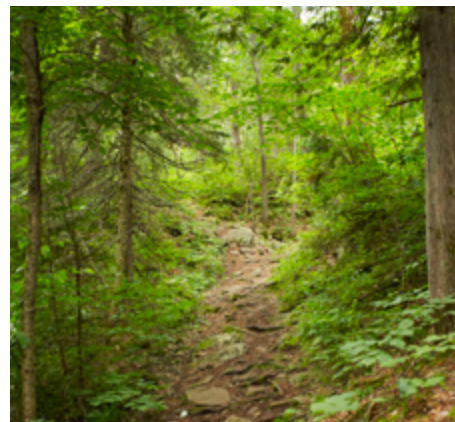
Swap table items include unneeded hiking clothes, gear, and related articles in good condition. Place your contributions on the table; donors must take home any unclaimed items.

Volunteers are needed for setup, sign-in, distribution of raffle tickets, monitoring the swap table, and cleanup. If you can help or have any questions, please call Ellie King at 908-233-8411 or email Terry Kulmane at terrykayhiker@yahoo.com.

Contacts on the morning of the party: Ellie King (908-487-0489), Terry Kulmane (908-418-7476), Meg Fernandez (908-612-9527), Bill Reynolds (201-874-8758).

Add-On Hike Clarification

by Nancy Sierra,
TSR Schedule Coordinator



There has been some recent discussion among club members concerning the validity of "add-on" hikes — those posted on our website following publication of the schedule booklet. At its fall meeting, the TriState Ramblers board discussed, clarified, and reaffirmed the process.

Leaders are always encouraged to fill empty days on which no hike outings are scheduled. Occasionally, leaders have unforeseen opportunities to offer hikes on days that are already scheduled or on Fridays, when hikes are not generally scheduled. They are welcome to post such events. Of course, courtesy toward other leaders should always be a consideration. If the proposed hike is close to one that is already posted and at the same level of difficulty, it would make more sense to join the previously scheduled event. Since add-on hikes may be of any length and at any level, those details are required in the posting.

While we encourage everyone to become a hike leader, safety is of prime importance. Please do not post events unless you are an experienced leader or have an experienced co-leader. You may find it helpful to check the online list of hike leader guidelines. Remember to always bring a sign-in sheet, which can be printed from our website.

If you have any questions about add-on hikes, please contact me. Happy hiking!

Notes for TSR Participants

- ▶ All activities are smoke-free, phone-free, fragrance-free, and dog-free.
- ▶ Carry a card with your identification and emergency contacts.
- ▶ Bring adequate water.
- ▶ Bring traction devices in icy/snowy conditions.
- ▶ Do not spray insect repellent near other participants.
- ▶ Call the leader in advance with any questions.
- ▶ Have a great time outdoors!

Trail Maintenance Coordinator

by Steve Gruber

The New York/New Jersey Trail Conference builds, maintains, and protects public trails. Volunteers, including member clubs such as TriState Ramblers, work to ensure that trails and natural areas are sustainable and accessible for everyone to enjoy. TSR helps to maintain about three miles of the section of the Appalachian Trail around Wawayanda State Park.



Did you ever see the position “trail maintenance coordinator” listed in our schedule booklet and wonder what that person does? Well, I schedule a club hike every May for the purpose of helping with AT maintenance. One group hikes from Warwick Turnpike north to Long House Road and another group hikes south to the Iron Bridge; each section is about one and a half miles. We clip any shrubbery invading the trail and remove fallen trees if possible. We also weed-whack annual plants close to Warwick Turnpike. Sometimes we need to repair damaged stream crossings and boardwalks. One or two people renew the blazes on the trees.

Following each work-hike, I send a report to the Trail Conference listing the total hours worked and travel time for all participants. Please check the schedule for details on next spring's work day (Tuesday, May 19, 2020) — and join us!

Paddling on the Passaic

by Carol Czajkowski • Photos by Natalie Andrea

We were a very optimistic group as we unloaded our boats — in the rain. Our positivity paid off when the sun came out at 10:45. We had an absolutely lovely day and saw many egrets, great blue herons, cormorants, and green herons. The photos were taken by new member Natalie Andrea, an expert kayaker and photographer. Other participants were Carol Czajkowski and Martin Frahme (leaders) and intrepid paddlers Jean Fletcher and Diane Willer.



From left: Jean, Diane, Martin, and Carol on the Passaic River



Passing under a tree bridge



Launching in the rain

Wild Earth Fest: Thinking Ahead to Spring 2020

by Debby Bronner

TriState Ramblers will be participating in the Trailside Nature and Science Center's 10th Annual Wild Earth Fest from 11-5 on Sunday, April 26, 2020. The festival takes place in Watchung Reservation (452 New Providence Road, Mountainside, NJ 07092).

Wild Earth Fest is an educational event to promote awareness and appreciation of global and local conservation issues. Visitors learn about these topics through displays, talks, demonstrations, games, crafts, music, and other fun family activities. Last year, more than 2,000 people participated.

This is a great way to get the public involved in the Trailside Nature and Science Center as well as to familiarize hiking enthusiasts with TriState Ramblers. We will display our club information on a table and answer questions regarding TSR. By early March, I will be seeking volunteers to help staff the tables. If you have any questions or interest in signing up early, please contact me at debbybrunner@gmail.com or 201-563-1648.

Fun Facts About TriState Ramblers from TSR Sign-in Sheet Analysis

Hey, members, did you know that in the previous membership year (July 2018 through June 2019) . . .

- ▶ Events were held most often on a Wednesday or Saturday.
- ▶ Weekends averaged more participants per event than weekdays.
- ▶ More people attended events on a Saturday — which may include bike rides or paddling trips in addition to hikes — than any other day of the week.
- ▶ Saturday was followed closely by Thursday — which includes both regular and alternate hikes.
- ▶ The top 10 leaders accounted for almost half of all events held.
- ▶ Charlie Stepnowski and Bijoy Mechery, together or separately, led more than 20 hikes.
- ▶ More than a third of our members (and guests) hiked in Morris County.

First Aid Checklist for Leaders

We have posted on our [website](#) a comprehensive first aid checklist provided by REI for outdoor enthusiasts. TriState Ramblers leaders may wish to read through the list occasionally to ensure that they have appropriate items in their first aid kits. The following items from the list could be especially helpful for our leaders.

Basic First Aid Care

Adhesive and butterfly bandages
Antibacterial ointment
Antihistamine
(for sting swelling/itching)
Antiseptic wipes
Aspirin (for response to heart attack)
Cleansing pads with anesthetic
Elastic wrap
Finger splint
Gauze and nonstick sterile pads
Ibuprofen and acetaminophen
Insect sting reliever
Medical adhesive tape
Safety pins
Tweezers

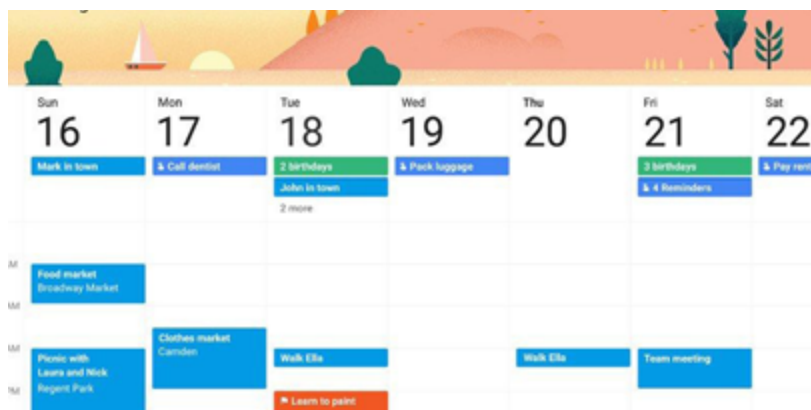
Other Medications/Treatments

Aloe vera gel (for sun exposure)
Eye drops
Hand sanitizer
Insect repellent
Lip balm
Loperamide tablets (for diarrhea)
Sunscreen

Tools and Supplies

Blunt-tip scissors
Cotton-tip swabs
Knife or multi-tool
Magnifying glass
Medical gloves (avoid latex)
Small mirror

“Connect” to TSR Event Calendar on Your Device



Those who use Google calendars can add the TriState Ramblers calendar to your own, eliminating the need to visit the TSR website calendar. Note that the hike meeting location is included as part of the Google calendar entry, which can be clicked on from the app (not the website) for those using their phones for directions. While in your Google calendar, go to: Settings – Add Calendar – From URL. Copy/enter/type in the following address: <https://calendar.google.com/calendar/ical/vonrbb5m7l276srdgo4qr379cc%40group.calendar.google.com/public/basic.ics>. That's all there is to it.

SOUTHERN SAUNTERS *by Lise Greene*

On the way to, during, and returning from the National Square Dance Convention in Atlanta in June, my husband and I took hiking breaks at some southern locations.

The first was Stone Mountain in Georgia. After gawking at the awesome, enormous carvings of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson on the stone mountainside, we visited the historical and environmental education center and then headed up a trail to the summit. That one vertical mile gave a good workout rewarded by a panoramic view.

During most of the four-day convention, dancing of many types at many levels was available 12 hours a day. One hot afternoon, we exchanged our dance shoes for hiking boots and set off on a quest to locate the Bamboo Forest on the East Palisades Trail along the Chattahoochee River. It is apparently so secret that none of the hikers we encountered along the way had even heard of it — until one person's eyes lit up in recognition and he tried excitedly (though unsuccessfully) to give us directions. The last man we came across explained that we would need to take another route to reach the elusive bamboo; but we had run out of time, so it remains a



Natural Bridge State Park, Virginia

mystery except for photos I found online.

Leaving the dance convention, we stopped in Helen, a Georgia town whose center retains the Bavarian quaintness of its long-ago settlers. Our “hike” was a trek up the long street and down the other side with short excursions to walk in a park, rest along the Chattahoochee River (no bamboo there, either), and indulge in delicious chocolate.

Reaching Virginia, we hiked along Cedar Creek at Natural Bridge State

Park. The highlights were a 215-foot-high limestone bridge (see photo), forests, falls, and Monacan Indian Village with interpreters. Continuing north, we took an interesting self-guided walking tour on the grounds of historic Washington and Lee University in Lexington.

The next day, we walked for several hours throughout the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton. Outdoor exhibits in two sections (Old World and America) bring to life the stories of early immigrants and their descendants through interpretive signs, talks, demonstrations, and actual or reproduced traditional rural buildings. The cultures include English, German, Irish, West African, and American.

In addition to the hiking/walking stops, we enjoyed visiting relatives on the drive down and back. We also stayed one night at Jubilee Partners in Georgia, a farm community where I spent a semester six years ago teaching English to refugees from war-torn countries. That was during the winter/spring term, before the farm's famed blueberries burst into season. In June this year, it was a joy to reunite with my former colleagues and one of my students — and pick dozens of perfect blueberries!

TriState Ramblers Facebook Group *by Debby Bronner*

Our TriState Ramblers Facebook group was created for dues-paying club members who wish to post photos of club events, seek advice on hiking gear, arrange carpools to our hikes, and share useful information regarding hiking, biking, and paddling. Because the group is “closed,” Meetup participants are not able to join.

We have been on FB for three and a half years and currently have about 100 members who, so far, have been sharing photos. It would be wonderful if we could utilize the group more for the following activities:

► Share rides to upcoming events

- Ask for help in scouting a new hike
- Discuss tips on hiking, canoeing, and biking
- Ask questions about favorite trails
- Request advice on travel plans involving outdoor activities
- Support and encourage new volunteers to lead for the club

It is important to keep our Facebook group focused on topics regarding outdoor activities. With that in mind, we continue to maintain these rules:

- No advertising or spam
- No politics
- Be kind and courteous

If you are already a FB user and want to join the TSR group, please follow these instructions:

- From your Facebook News Feed, click Groups in the left menu.
- In the search bar at the top, enter TriState Ramblers.
- Select the group, and then click + Join Group below the cover photo.
- Since it is a closed group, you will be asked to wait for the administrator's approval.

Thank you all for participating in making TriState Ramblers a great club. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding Facebook, contact me at debbybronner@gmail.com.

SUMMER PICNIC 2019 *Photos by Debby Bronner and Jeff Sovelove*



Checking in



Digging in



Grilling a variety of burgers



Hikers setting off

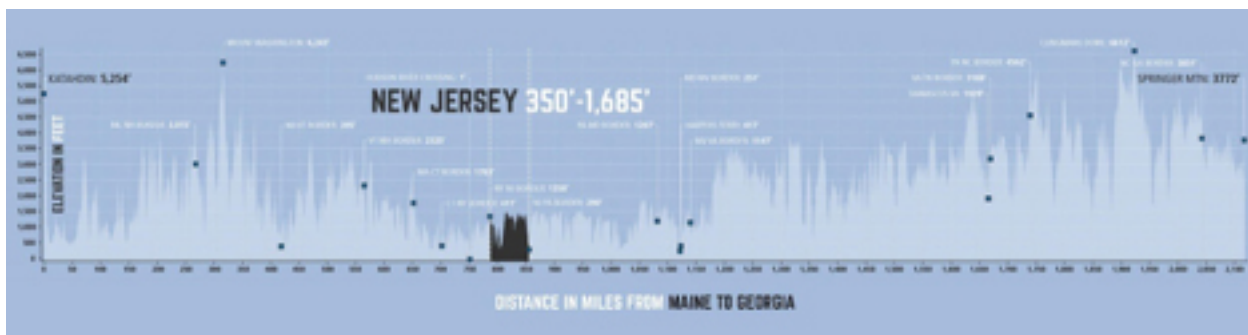
Introducing the Appalachian Trail Hiking Series *by Dianne Jones*

The Appalachian Trail (AT) is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, ranging from Maine to Georgia. According to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), the AT covers 2,192 miles over 14 states, with approximately 464,500 feet of elevation gain. Every year, many thru-hikers (backpackers) tackle the entire trail, others section hike, and some day hike on portions of the AT. The ATC estimates that about three million visitors use the trail annually. The record for finishing the Appalachian Trail is just under 42 days. That's more than 50 miles a day!

Our own Alan Breach

has completed all but the last few miles over the course of many years. Alan is now sharing his knowledge by planning a series of 15-20 hikes that will cover all 72 miles of the AT in New Jersey. Elevation changes in our state are generally moderate and vary from relatively flat and gentle to short, steep, rocky pitches. Other sections cross bogs and wetlands, including a wildlife sanctuary that features a wide spectrum of bird species. The trail passes near the High Point monument and includes the "Stairway to Heaven."

Be on the lookout for this hiking series in the 2020 schedules!



WESTERN WANDERINGS *by Lise Greene*



My husband, Mark, and I spent three weeks driving through and hiking at some of our country's most spectacular western landscapes and sites this fall. We arrived in Utah in September and returned from Arizona in October. It turned out to be positively perfect weather — pleasantly warm, very low humidity, no rain, no bugs, and just a few fluffy white clouds the last couple of days.

Our rented Nissan got a real workout over 2,800 miles, including some white-knuckle rides over boulders and around dizzying mountain curves. The trip was one indescribable sight after another . . . so I will not even attempt to describe them. Instead, I have simply listed below our major stops in the order we visited them, with links, in case anyone would like to replicate the route or parts of it. (Our visit to Petrified Forest National Park was inspired by a hiker's article in the Fall 2018 issue!)

We did dozens of relatively short hikes totaling about 70 miles, learned a lot of history, met kind and interesting people, and enjoyed the last

three days with family and friends. During this centennial year of the Grand Canyon's national park status, we visited on our anniversary (see photo).

I am easily moved to tears. This journey often made me misty from the extreme grandeur of nature to the extreme sorrow of human behavior, especially toward Native Americans.

Tips: (1) If you bring a GPS, make sure the states you want are loaded before you go. (2) Refresh your knowledge of each day's destination before heading out. (3) A Senior Lifetime Pass for national parks could save you hundreds of dollars. (4) If possible, make hotel reservations in advance and stay two nights at the same place when feasible; a bit of extra driving can save the hassle of packing up every day. (5) If you forget the phone charger, ask hotel staff to borrow one left behind by a previous guest; maybe you'll even be lucky enough to be able to keep it. (6) It is often possible to make a peanut butter sandwich at the hotel breakfast buffet for a quick picnic lunch that afternoon. (7) Use sunscreen!

UTAH

[Great Salt Lake State Park](#)
[Kennecott Bingham Canyon Copper Mine](#)
[Arches National Park](#)
[Canyonlands National Park](#)
[Dead Horse Point State Park](#)
[Capitol Reef National Park](#)
[Fruita](#)
[Scenic Byway 12](#)
[Anasazi State Park Museum](#)
[Escalante Petrified Forest State Park](#)
[Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument](#)
[Bryce Canyon National Park](#)
[Zion National Park](#)

ARIZONA

[Kaibab Plateau Visitor Center](#)
[North Rim of Grand Canyon](#)
[Cliff Dwellers in Marble Canyon](#)
[South Rim of Grand Canyon](#)
[Horseshoe Bend](#)
[Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell](#)
[Shadehouse Museum/ Navajo Cultural Center](#)
[Navajo National Monument](#)
[Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park](#)

COLORADO

[Hovenweep National Monument](#)
[Mesa Verde](#)

ARIZONA (again)

[Canyon de Chelly](#)
[Petrified Forest National Park/ Painted Desert/Old Route 66](#)
[Chapel of the Holy Cross](#)
[Teacup Trail to Sugarloaf mountaintop and on part of Little Horse Trail](#)
[Old Town Cottonwood](#)
[Tuzigoot National Monument](#)
[Arizona Botanical Gardens](#)
[Jerome State Historic Park](#)
[Audrey Headframe Park](#)
[Prescott National Forest and Bradshaw Mountains scenic drive](#)
[Sharlot Hall Museum](#)
[Arcosanti](#)
[Badger Springs Canyon Trail](#)
[Musical Instrument Museum](#)

FRANCONIA RIDGE LOOP *by Thea Landesberg*

Five things we didn't know at the start of last July's hike over Franconia Ridge:

- ▶ We would hike about nine miles and be on the trail for nine hours.
- ▶ We would climb three peaks, the highest more than 5,200 feet.
- ▶ The last four miles or so down from the last peak would be covered with foot-menacing, ache-inducing boulders.
- ▶ Hundreds of other hikers would be on the trail, too, most of them merrily passing us on the way up and down.
- ▶ It would be the most memorable hiking experience of our lives.

Sure, I had done my homework before the trip, poring over the AMC White Mountains maps to locate a trail that would challenge us without overtaxing our physical abilities. That pretty-looking loop called Franconia Ridge seemed just right.

And so, on a cool July morning, Bill and I set out from the entry point of the Falling Waters Trail. The first thing we noticed was that we were not alone, as countless others poured onto the trail. Normally I dislike seeing and hearing so many people around me, but the crowd was upbeat and created a very positive vibe. This provided our first inkling that we were embarking on one of the most popular hikes in the United States.

Falling Waters is just that: stream after stream over slabs and boulders, requiring some fancy footwork to walk across. The younger set danced across the waters, but we more mature folk took small, careful steps to avoid slipping. I didn't want to be the one falling down in Falling Waters. Three miles later (all uphill), we staggered to the top of Little Haystack Mountain. At 4,760 feet, the reward was 360 degrees of gorgeous White Mountain views shared with dozens of other hikers and a surprising number of dogs.

It would normally have been a time to rest and celebrate our achievement, but peak number two, Mount Lincoln (5,089 feet), stared at us from the north. We fell in with a flow of hikers on this narrow, easy-to-follow trail



that afforded more astounding views above the tree line. An hour or so later, we arrived at the crest. Once again, I briefly basked in the feeling that I had accomplished some life-altering feat until I looked north to see — OMG! — the trail that led to the next peak, Mount Lafayette. It was now perhaps four hours since we started, and although it was 60 degrees, we were sweating. Turning back was not an option. We continued toward the 5,260-foot peak, while 20-somethings seemed to leap from rock to rock as they passed us by and fearless eight-year-olds ran with boundless energy.

Let me pause here to say that, yes, I knew the outlines of the trail by the map in my pocket. But there was no way to truly anticipate the vistas around us. No hike description could really prepare us for the beauty on this high point, nor the effort we would need to reach the last peak. The New Hampshire terrain was different from any we had hiked before.

A lot less joyful festivity met us at the top of Mount Lafayette. Instead, hikers sprawled over the rocks to marvel at the mountains, bask in the sunlight, and contemplate the hike down. The AMC Greenleaf Hut was visible in the distance, a kind of beacon to weary hikers. Five hours into the experience with another four-plus miles to go, I had one thought: The trail is all downhill from here, so the hardest trekking is behind us. We can do this.

I was so wrong. The trail to the hut snaked downward, scattered by slabs and rocks. Above the tree line, there

was no respite from the sun. Most of all, my legs were trembling from the exertion. A glass of lemonade later, and buoyed by the festive atmosphere at the hut, Bill and I set out for what we thought would be a less demanding downhill trek. We can do this, we thought once more.

Wrong again. Old Bridal Path is nearly three miles of boulders, large and small. I carefully used my pole to avoid twisting an ankle or worse, which meant I was hiking at a snail's pace. As was the case on the ridge, many hikers passed us by. Others, like us, paused often to share the lovely views of the mountains to the east as well as laugh about our various aches and pains. We encountered three middle-aged sisters who came annually to hike this trail, and farther on we kept company for about a mile with two young French-speaking Canadian women who asked us about hiking in New Jersey.

As we rested in our motel that evening, Bill did a lot of Googling about Franconia Ridge — looking, I think, for confirmation that our hike was as difficult and fantastic as we had experienced. Sure enough, he found dozens of comments echoing our feelings. In August 2014, *National Geographic* posted an online article titled ["World's Best Hikes: 20 Dream Trails"](#) that included Franconia Ridge. This hike, reported the post, was "a rite of passage for adventurers" and "one of the most iconic hikes in the Eastern U.S." Sure, experienced hikers want to conquer Mount Washington, but we recommend Franconia Ridge for an equally rewarding experience of a lifetime.

Mahlon Dickerson Reservation Stewardship Plan *by Paul Sanderson*

Multiple emails were sent in October about a proposed 10-year stewardship plan for the forest in Mahlon Dickerson Reservation (MDR), located in Jefferson Township. The plan is the result of a partnership between the Morris County Park Commission and New Jersey Audubon. Although it is designed to be a comprehensive natural resource planning tool overseen by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Forest Service, environmental groups are very concerned that the outcome will be detrimental.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition quickly scheduled a hike to publicize the proposal, which includes a number of activities such as prescribed burns and forest thinning. The organization believes the plan is ill conceived and would harm, not help, the healthy forests in MDR. On Saturday morning, November 2, Zachary Cole (outreach and education director) and Elliott Ruga (policy director) welcomed more than 20 hikers — including me — at the picnic pavilion parking lot. We headed north on the Highlands Trail and had the opportunity to actually see one of the three proposed work areas and to hear an expert's explanation of the risks and benefits of the proposal.

Dr. Emile DeVito (director of science and stewardship at the New Jersey Conservation Foundation) accompanied us about a quarter mile to a portion of the Highlands Trail, on the left just past the brook crossing. While measuring the circumference of many trees along the way, he explained that the plan would allow selective removal of any that are less than 18 inches in diameter. He discussed the composition of the forest and the ecology of the area, which is fairly dry. Its southern exposure would benefit the regeneration of oak trees more than other species of trees. Calling attention to numerous nearby mature oaks (black, red, white, chestnut) with a diameter less than 18 inches, he noted that all would be subject to removal. Virtually the entire understory in this stand of forest is non-oak.



An imagined "island in the sea" at Mahlon Dickerson Reservation (Paul Sanderson)

Acknowledging that thinning itself is not necessarily a problem if done properly, DeVito described his personal participation in such a project. The undesirable trees were either girdled by hand or killed by professionals applying herbicide to their trunks. One problem with the MDR stewardship plan is the proposed use of mechanical equipment that would disrupt the forest. By contrast, a natural approach would be to fell the trees and leave them in place, avoiding the use of heavy equipment that may require expansion of access points to the Highlands Trail.

In addition, trees larger than 18 inches might be subject to removal because of their greater commercial value. While not part of the proposed thinning, larger trees would provide income to pay for the project. Another major concern was the probable introduction of invasive species into an area that currently has little or none.

According to Cole, a contract was recently awarded to the New York/New Jersey Trail Conference to improve parts of the Highlands Trail, such as this section. Hikers' recreational experiences may be affected by thinning areas close to the trail, and expansion to allow the cutting may be counter-productive to the improvements.

The final message for the day: Mahlon Dickerson Reservation's forest is healthy and has a good diversity of trees, with most of the canopy trees (mainly oaks) no more

than 100-125 years old. Left to a natural cycle, maple, beech, and other types of trees may replace much of the current oak forest in coming centuries.

The Highlands Coalition urges concerned individuals to contact David Helmer, executive director of the Morris County Park Commission, and recommend approval of an ecologically sound stewardship program for the reservation. The plan was initiated on April 1, 2018; public discussion began on October 30, 2019; and the stewardship period is 2020 through 2029. The draft plan was prepared by a forester working with New Jersey Audubon and will be overseen by the state's forest service. For more information about the plan and ways to express your views, visit www.morrisparks.net/index.php/media/planning-documents.

Chicken of the Woods



Chicken of the woods on Liffy Island in Lake Hopatcong (Bob Turner)

Historical Walking Tour of Picatinny Arsenal by Rozanna Fanelli



Tour guides Jason Huggan and Jeff Ranu (Debby Bronner)



Picatinny Peak (Bob Turner)



Fall tour participants at Building 151 (Debby Bronner)

What a great way to spend a beautiful October day — not only walking, but also exploring a new place. Since Picatinny Arsenal is not open to the public, 24 TriState Ramblers were fortunate to participate in a unique opportunity to access this national military research and manufacturing facility. The site was filled with spectacular views of the hills and lakes, but equally rewarding was the chance to learn about Picatinny's history, purpose, and functioning. Our knowledgeable tour guides — Jason Huggan (archeologist) and Jeff Ranu (historian) — led us through three sections covering approximately four miles.

The fall tour began in the Middle Forge, where iron ore was processed before the military took over the

area. In this vicinity we also learned about the former bag loading area, smokeless propellant powder factory, and arsenal power plant. Additionally, we heard about the Picatinny Railroad and the Wharton and Northern Railroad and viewed remnants of railroad tracks.

After lunch, our second walk was along Farley Avenue in the downtown landmark area to see some of the oldest houses (which are still used as residences), the administration and headquarters buildings, and the golf course.

The final visit was to Navy Hill in the former Lake Denmark Naval Ammunition Depot area. We learned about the depot's history and the infamous 1926 explosion, which started when lightning struck an explosives warehouse and started a

major fire. Nineteen military and civilian lives were lost and dozens were injured. That catastrophe resulted in important changes to prevent future explosions at Picatinny and other military installations.

Picatinny Arsenal covers more than 5,850 acres and is the largest employer in Morris County. Throughout the facility, we viewed a variety of current housing units with associated child development centers and playgrounds. What a treat to experience and learn more about the arsenal! Special acknowledgment to our TSR coordinator, Lise Greene, for scheduling this tour, which was a repeat of a summer trip with 30 hikers in July.

TriStaters, be on the lookout for a tour on April 10, 2020, which will visit two different areas of the base.

Hiking the Italian Amalfi Coast *by Gail Biggs*

A few years ago, I first saw the Amalfi coast of Italy while careening down a narrow, twisting road on a wide bus in the pouring rain. I vowed to return when I could see that beautiful place under more favorable circumstances. In October, Butch and I had a chance to join a hiking holiday on the Amalfi Coast, and away we went.

We stayed in Sant'Agata, a small village perched above Sorrento, overlooking the blue Mediterranean. The first day, we hiked along paths that farmers originally used to transport chestnut logs. (The trees provide lumber for all manner of supports for grape vines as well as olive and lemon trees.) The paths crisscrossed the hills as we made our way down to Sorrento, passing olive groves with trees laden and netting spread below to catch the precious fruit. Because of the steep terrain, planting was done on (sometimes very) narrow terraces.

Homes were also "terraced" with many stories, many stairs, and very creative driveways leading to incredible parking spaces. We marveled at some that ended with a rooftop parking spot accessible from the road above.

The roads were a marvel to behold. The main ones were narrow, winding, and two-lane. Side streets were often the width of a very small car; no wonder most are Fiats and Smart cars, many with retractable side mirrors. Motor scooters were everywhere, with daredevil drivers darting in and out of traffic. Mini three-wheeled trucks carried products from farms to major towns.

Our travels included a trip to the ancient city of Pompeii, buried in AD 79 by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, still an active volcano. That did not stop us and hundreds of other tourists from climbing to the top and peering down the caldera. The city of Naples spreads out around the area, and despite the fact that another full eruption would surely cause large-scale death and destruction, people clamor to live in this beautiful,

(continued on next page)



Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi



Terraced farming



Life on the edge



Pompeii



Vesuvius caldera still emits smoke

Hiking the Italian Amalfi Coast *(continued)*

convenient location on the Bay of Naples.

We hiked the lovely Isle of Capri with its dramatic views and rich history. Like the ancient Greeks and Romans who made this stunning place their home, tourists are now drawn to its shores. We hiked away from the busy areas to view the cliffs and coastline, including the Puta Carena lighthouse.

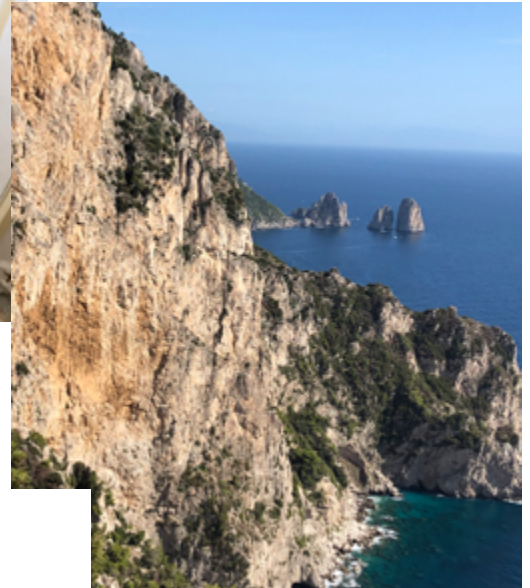
No hiking trip on the Amalfi Coast would be complete without a trek on the Path of the Gods. This well-traveled route took us 600+ feet above the coastal village of Positano. We passed abandoned stone dwellings once inhabited by monks and others seeking solitude, as well as donkeys transporting barrels of wine to a village beyond. The scenery was spectacular — for those without vertigo or fear of heights.

The Path of the Gods ended with two choices for returning to Positano: 1,700 steps down or the local bus. We chose the latter, which resulted in our unforgettable “Italian bus experience.” As we waited, more and more hikers joined the group, which soon numbered about 45. When the bus arrived, it attempted to pull over, but the crowd surged. The angry driver stopped, appeared at the door, and ranted long and hard in Italian at the unruly throng. Hopeful riders scurried out of the way as she turned around and backed into the correct space. When the door opened, the crowd surged again and pushed in. I managed to stand at the very back without much to hang on to; not one more body could have squeezed in. The bus wound its way down to Positano with constant pumping and squeezing of the brakes, and no guard rails in sight. The breathtaking views were mostly unappreciated as we prayed our way down the mountain.

In summary, our hiking trip to the Amalfi Coast was seven days of stunning scenery, dramatic vistas, and rich history. Limestone cliffs overlooking the blue Mediterranean surrounded our walks, providing lovely memories for years to come.



Mosaic tile floor at Chiesa di San Michele Arcangelo, Anacapri



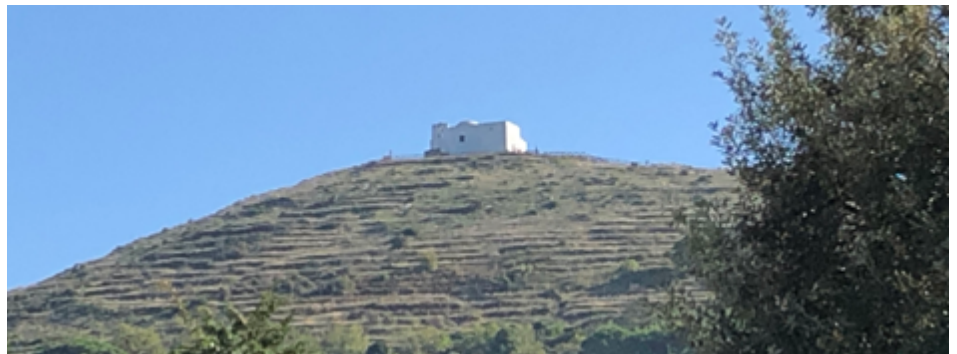
Hikers' view from Capri



Path of the Gods



Phone in Rome hotel



We hiked up to Chiesa di San Costanzo on the hill