

ADK RAMAPO - THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS

Chapter History 1991-2006

by Chris Connolly

Since 1991, a new generation of Ramapo leaders has built upon the achievements of the Chapter's founders during the first 20 years. With the aid of a dedicated corps of hike leaders, long-serving Hiking Chairs June Slade and Pete Tilgner scheduled a full complement of weekend hikes throughout the year. Harriman remains the most popular hiking venue, followed by NJ Ramapos, Schunemunk/Storm King, Minnewaska and East Hudson Highlands. While an annual 23.5-mile SBM sojourn is no longer a regular feature of the hike schedule, Ramapoers still had the opportunity of long-distance local treks like Aaron Schoenberg's 21-mile R-D cakewalk.

Over the years, Ike Siskind, Aaron Schoenberg and, currently, George Preoteasa have led Catskill high peak day trips. Mid-week hike events were added in 1999 when Betty Heald began leading North Jersey Chapter-sponsored Thursday hikes, which have since become a regular part of the hike schedule. The growing cooperation between the Ramapo and North Jersey Chapters culminated in 2001 under Chapter President Pete Tilgner with both Chapters jointly opening up most of their hikes to the other's members. Starting in 2005, Ramapo began leading hikes in September for the annual New York Hudson River Valley Ramble. In addition, Ramapo has offered Minnewaska and Darlington cross-country ski outings and road bike trips in, among other locales, Greenwood Lake, Schunemunk/Cornwall and the Monroe-Goshen Heritage Trail.

Perhaps the Chapter's most remarkable hiking legacy began in 1990, when master hike leader-Aaron Schoenberg commenced the first of what has turned out to be annual week-long excursions to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Expeditions covering the Appalachian Trail (AT) in Maine were added from 2001 to 2006, and Vermont Long Trail treks are planned to start in 2007. Aaron's incomparable planning has introduced the wonder of the Whites and other New England heights to a grateful group of Ramapo members, including his most faithful follower, Dean Gletsos, who has accompanied Aaron on 15 White Mountain trips. Each expedition has been memorialized in comprehensive trip reports with photo albums.

Ramapo members have continued to roll up individual peak-bagging accomplishments. Former Chapter presidents George Perkinson and George Sheedy completed section-hiking the AT in 2005 and 2006, respectively, while Dean Gletsos in 2006 became only the third Chapter member to ascend all one hundred fifteen 4000-footers in the Northeast. The host of members who joined the Catskill 3500ers, Adirondack 46ers and White Mountain 4000-footers also continued to grow. Among other highlights, Ed Walsh and his then 13 year-old son Eddie bagged their final Adirondack 46er together in 1991; Paul Leikin in 1996 topped all 35 Catskill peaks after turning 80; and Aaron Schoenberg claimed his 35th Catskill peak in 2005, precisely 35 years from bagging his first peak. But the laurels for most prolific peak-toppers must go to Norm and Kip Smith - they have conquered the AT, Catskill 3500s, Adirondack 46ers, Whites 4000-footers and the Northeast 115 while, in their spare time, climbing the highest points in all 50 states.

Thanks in large part to Programs/Special Outings Chair Suzan Gordon, the Chapter has offered a varied program of social events and educational speakers. Beginning in December 1998 under Chapter president George Sheedy, the annual December holiday party - the brainchild of Susan Gerhardt and Suzan Gordon - is a friendly place for conviviality and cheer, whether staged at Nanuet Public Library in the beginning or at the Unitarian Society in Pomona. The Mohonk Day outing inaugurated in 2005 by Suzan has proved a smashing success with its combination of day-time Gunks recreation and sunset 5-course gastronomic delight - there

were 22 attendees in 2005 and 30 in 2006. Quarterly Chapter meetings at the Nanuet Public Library have featured presentations on a diverse array of topics - fauna (bears, hawks, snakes and wolves), fungi, Hudson River geology and local history (Erie Railroad, Storm King, Palisades Interstate Park and Rockland Lake). One popular tradition, the Strauss House winter weekend in the Catskills, came to an end in 2003 after a quarter century due to a change in hotel management.

The Chapter celebrated its 20th anniversary festivities at Bear Mountain Inn, its 25th at Duck Cedar Inn in Tuxedo, and its 30th at the Unitarian Society. Fifty-nine party-goers celebrated Ramapo's 35th year in 2006 at La Terraza Restaurant in New City, along with ADK Executive Director Neil Woodworth and New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Executive Director Ed Goodell. After 35 years, the Chapter still counts ten loyal charter members who attended the first meeting in November 1971 - Jim Bates, Rita Boyd, Elliot and Kate Gorman, Julius and Hermine Levine, Ike and Marilyn Siskind, Mary Sive and Kip Smith.

The advocacy of veteran Conservation Chair Ron Javer has kept Ramapo in the forefront of land preservation efforts in the region. Beginning in 1999, Ron enlisted the Chapter in the multi-year and, ultimately, successful campaign to prevent power plant construction in the Torne Valley on Harriman Park's south border. In 2006, he was instrumental in the Chapter's joining the Ramapo Highlands Coalition, which advocates the protection of aquifer lands in the Ramapo River watershed that provides drinking water to two million people in Rockland, Bergen and Passaic Counties. Also worthy of note are the contributions of long-time member Betty Hedges, who served with distinction as Chair of the Rockland County Conservation Association.

Communications with the Chapter's members markedly increased with the onset of the new millennium. While *Ramapough* newsletters throughout the 1990s featured inimitable poetic verse contributions from Paul Leikin, it was Peter Reiner's ascension as Newsletter Editor in 2001 that transformed the *Ramapough* into a consistently high-quality quarterly publication. That success enabled the newsletter to expand from four to six pages each issue in 2005, with regular coverage of recreational and conservation news. At the same time, Denis Kmiec managed the transition to bulk postage mailing of the newsletter, a change that engendered substantial cost savings in addition to the savings in printing costs due to Neil Zimmerman's assistance. The Ramapo website made its internet debut in 2000 thanks to the Chapter's first Webmaster, George Preoteasa. In 2006, due to the hard work of Richard Sumner, the website received a substantial upgrade in 2006 when Ramapo's web address changed to **www.hudsonhikers.org**. The Chapter's outreach to prospective members also benefited beginning in 2004 from the placement of Pete Tilgner-designed recruiting posters at well-frequented hiker venues, with Campmor and Anthony Wayne Visitor Center being the most popular locations.

Ramapo's record in giving back to the trails by its members use has continued to be outstanding. The Chapter currently maintains a 4-mile Long Path (LP) section on the western border of Harriman State Park -between Arden Valley Road and Route 6 - adjoining the Arden House property. The LP maintainer ranks have included Ruth Livant, Mary Sive, Fred Engel, Paul Leikin, Dick Warner, Elliot Gorman, Jim Quinn, John Troy, Marty Last, Chris Connolly and Rudy Garfinkel. Under the initiative of Chapter president George Sheedy, Ramapo donated funding and volunteer labor for the 1998 construction of the Frank Bouton Shelter on Table Mountain in the Catskills, as a memorial to a beloved Chapter member who served as Secretary and Treasurer. In concert with the N.Y. DEC, Ike Siskind supervised the labor of a dozen other Ramapo members on this project - Jim Bates, John Giuffrida, Don Hendrickson, Ron Javer, George Perkinson, Aaron Schoenberg, Richie Schwartz, Mary Sive, June Slade, Norm Smith, Nick Viggiano and Ed Walsh. (The Chapter's photo album commemorates the Bouton Shelter's construction efforts and September 1998 dedication). In June 1997, Pete

Heckler, Aaron Schoenberg, George Sheedy and Dale Timpe were among the hike leaders who placed mountaineers on the summits of all Catskill 3500 peaks on the same day - an enterprise that rewarded ADK with the kudos of a "Ten Best National Trail Day" event designation.

The breadth and depth of individual Ramapo members' service to the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference - the organization responsible for building and maintaining 1750+ trail miles in our metropolitan region - is truly exceptional. Two members have served as President of the Trail Conference (Don Derr from 1978 to 1984 and Neil Zimmerman from 1987 to 1999); six as Trail Chairs (Gail Neffinger in Orange/Rockland AT, Pete Heckler in West Hudson, Dick Warner in North Jersey, Charlie and Cora Sanders in East Hudson, and Stella Green in Upstate NY); and 12 others as Trail Supervisors (currently Ike and Marilyn Siskind and Manny Silberberg in Harriman, Suzan Gordon and Pete Tilgner in Sterling Forest, George Perkinson and Pete Kohlberger in Orange/Rockland AT, and Chris Connolly in Schunemunk and NJ Palisades; and formerly Paul Leikin in Schunemunk, Mary Sive in the Catskills, Susan Gerhardt in Minnewaska, and Ed Walsh in LP South). In addition to Neil Zimmerman and Don Derr, Pete Heckler served as a member of the Trail Conference's Board of Directors from 1995 to 2004, while Chris Connolly has been a director since 2005. Moreover, five other members (Suzan Gordon, John Jurasek, Margo Moss, Pete Tilgner and Richard Zinn) currently serve as Delegates-at-Large, and Pete Heckler is beginning a second stint as Trails Council Chair. The Chapter has also assisted in Trail Conference publications, with Ike Siskind leading a team of Ramapo members who participated in the 1998 edition of the "New York Walk Book." In addition, Neil Zimmerman and Stella Green co-authored "Fifty Hikes in New Jersey".

Our members' record of acknowledgment for service to the trails is equally remarkable - Ramapoers have been recipients of Trail Conference honors on 21 occasions. The last two of only seven recipients of the Trail Conference's highest award - the Raymond H. Torrey Award for significant and lasting contributions for protection of hiking trails and land - are Chapter members Neil Zimmerman (2004) and Pete Heckler (2006). So are five of only 14 Honorary Members recognized for long-time service to the Trail Conference - Don Derr (1989), Paul Leikin (1991), Stella Green (1996), Dick Warner (1996) and Neil Zimmerman (2002). In addition, ten members have received the William Hoferlin Award for exemplary service to trail management - Dick Warner and Paul Leikin (1989), Ed Walsh and Frank Bouton (1990), Dave Sutter (1995), Stella Green (1996), Ike and Marilyn Siskind (1997), Susan Gerhardt (1999) and Pete Heckler (2004) - and three others the Ken Lloyd Club Award - Ilse Dunham (2003) and Suzan Gordon and Pete Tilgner (2004). In 2005, the Trail Conference's Extra Mile Award for special project achievement was named in honor of Paul Leikin, one of the Chapter's most illustrious members. The first honoree of the renamed award in 2005 was, appropriately, another Chapter member, Steve Zubarik, who was recognized for his chainsaw labors in Harriman.

Dedication has also been a hallmark of Ramapo members' service on the Chapter's Executive Committee. Ron Javer is the senior Committee member, having served as Conservation Chair from 1981 to 1989 and from 1991 to the present. Manny Silberberg is next in seniority - he has been Chapter Director or alternate since 1991. Among other current Committee members, Suzan Gordon has served as Programs/Special Outings Chair since 1998, and June Slade, Pete Tilgner and Peter Reiner as Secretary, Hiking Chair and Newsletter Editor, respectively, since 2001. Previously, Marilyn Siskind had served as Membership Chair from 1980 to 1987 and, again, from 1994 to 2003, while Ruth Livant was Publicity and then Trails Chair from 1989 to 2001.

The longevity of Executive Committee members is in curious contrast with Chapter presidential tenure, where the tradition of a single two-year term has remained unchanged for

35 years. Current president Peter Reiner is the 18th person to occupy the executive chair. The 17 previous incumbents were:

1971-74	Manfred d'Elia
1975-76	Ike Siskind
1976-77	Graham Yarbrough
1977-78	Mary Sive
1978-79	Ken Garrison
1979-81	Roy Sengstacken
1982-83	John Giuffrida
1984-86	Dick Warner
1987-88	Lou Thibault
1989-91	Ron Javer
1992-94	George Perkinson
1995-96	Sue Gerhardt
1997-98	George Sheedy
1999-00	Pete Tilgner
2001-02	Aaron Schoenberg
2003-04	Dean Gletsos
2005-06	Chris Connolly

Nor should the durability of our hike leaders go unmentioned - a special salute goes to the Chapter's "Lou Gehrig", Nick Viggiano, who has led two Chapter hikes each quarter (8 per year) since 1984. Chapter President Dean Gletsos took the initiative in 2003 of recognizing Ramapo members' exceptional service to their Chapter with the distribution of ADK's White Birch Award at our annual meeting. There have been a dozen White Birch honorees to date - Paul Leikin, Ike Siskind and June Slade in 2003; Suzan Gordon, Ron Javer, Aaron Schoenberg, George Sheedy, Marilyn Siskind and Pete Tilgner in 2004; and Manny Silberberg, Nick Viggiano and Neil Zimmerman in 2006.

While looking to the future, Ramapo looks back to honor the contributions of those who have left for happier trails - Frank Bouton and Charlie Sanders (1997), Chapter co-founder Fred d'Elia (2000), Ken Dukes, Roy Sengstacken and Anne Silberberg (2001), Paul Leikin and Ruth Livant (2004), Shirley Williams (2005) and Marty Last (2006). Each year during the last week of July, the Chapter remembers them with a Memorial Hike that Aaron Schoenberg often leads.

The Chapter's 35 years are filled with a long history of members who devoted their time and energy to their passion for the outdoors and conservation activities. Their efforts and accomplishments now live on in this history of the Ramapo Chapter, 1971-2006.