

The Preserve Observer



Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve Magazine Vol. XXVIII Fall 2012



The Psychology of the Carriage Roads

By Clare M. Pierson, Friends President

Psychology seems like a big word to apply to a system of carriage roads, but stay with me here. Here is the nitty gritty on their care: they take definitive attention to their drainage system, configuration of the road bed in reference to the crown and the footing, and clearance on either side to be carriage roads. Driving a carriage requires a certain texture of roadbed: to be firm and smooth enough for the carriage, and soft enough for the horses that draw the carriage. Ours are superb in that regard. And to drive a carriage safely, it is good to be able to see what is coming around the bend, so a 12-foot clearance on either side and a clear view through the forest that has been cleared of brush, and downed trees for an unobstructed view is necessary. That is the bare bones for maintenance.

We love to see the carriages in our park, but how many carriages are there around today? Why maintain these historic roads so meticulously? I can think

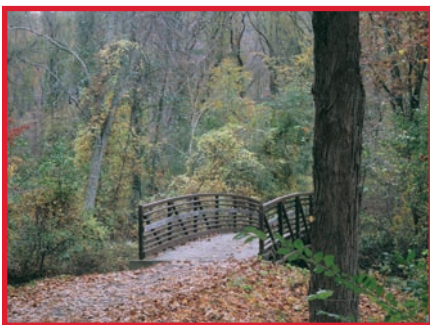


Photo: Herbert Hadad

Part of the beauty of the Preserve

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If God Were a Writer

By Benjamin H. Cheever

I adore The Rockefeller State Park Preserve, and ordinarily just being within its precincts is enough to cheer me up. Man makes roads, signs and potato chip bags. God builds streams, oaks and your occasional granite face. God's work calms me. Man's work not so much. The charm wasn't working though, on the day of the most recent Rockwood Ramble.

It was exactly as if God were trying out a trick he'd picked up in Creative Writing 1: Use the weather to mirror the interior lives of the characters. My mood was darkening, as were the skies.

"The artist must be in his work as God is in creation," wrote Flaubert, "invisible and all-powerful; one must sense him everywhere but never see him."

It's a cliché that writers want to be God. Now I wondered if God might want to be a writer.

Nothing wrong with using the natural world to keep the plot on track. The bard did it. If a groundling didn't see anything wrong with an entrepreneur like Macbeth murdering Duncan for the crown, then Shakespeare brewed up a storm that knocked down some chimneys to get the point across.

Ordinarily, I would have been pleased about the race. I've been trying for decades—and with a complete lack of success—to make runners seem as important to the park as the park is to the runners.

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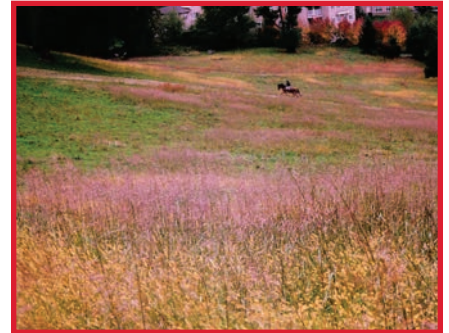


Photo: Herbert Hadad

The meadow below Rockwood Hall

Friends Set New Direction For Its Preserve Mission

By Herbert Hadad and Evelyn Hadad

The Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve is embarking on a bold new set of priorities designed to strengthen its support of the exquisite, more than 1,400-acre suburban sanctuary of woods, hills, trails and waterways for the benefit of the multitude of present visitors and newcomers in the years to come.

The two main thrusts of this effort will be a strong new focus on a variety of events sponsored in the preserve by the Friends group and a commitment to far-reaching publicity for the park to educate its users and the general public of the natural, cultural and recreational attractions the preserve and the Friends have to offer.

"The Friends board is made up of Rockefeller and other community members dedicated to the qualities of the preserve and its future," said Clare

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Letter from Cairo on page 10



*It takes all kinds
of good and committed
people to keep
the Preserve the jewel
that it is.*



The 11th Annual Autumn Country Pace

By Liz Meszaros, Administrative Director

Our Eleventh Annual Autumn Country Pace, a popular equestrian fundraiser, was held at Rockwood Hall, on Sunday, October 14th. This year, we were pleased to welcome some new riders as a result of our collaboration with the Associated Bridle Trails Association (ABTA), which offers riders the opportunity not only to compete in our Pace, but in the Fall Pace Series, sponsored by ABTA. We look forward to continuing to be a part of the Fall Pace Series and welcoming new riders and their families to our event.

We had another successful Pace this year thanks to our many volunteers who arrived at the New York Life parking lot at 7 am to get ready for the first team out at 8 am. While the light rain and wind in the morning was not necessarily ideal, the horses certainly didn't mind, and as the weather improved and the sun made an appearance, it made the day that much more enjoyable! Many riders expressed their pleasure with the length and beauty of the course and its many challenging jumps. Afterwards, over 210 guests enjoyed a delicious feast under the tent prepared by Turco's of Yorktown and served by Margaret Monteforte.

As many of you know, this event is an enormous undertaking that would not be possible without our 45 plus volunteers. Our dedicated Pace committee, chaired by Lou Accurso, worked very hard with the Preserve staff to make this event go off without a hitch. Along with his third hand Laurie Towle, they both did a remarkable job overseeing the entire recruitment and organization of our energetic volunteers. Preserve Manager Alix Schnee and her staff, along with Tommy Capossela of Greenrock, always guarantee a secure and challenging course for the riders! Preserve staff members Laurence Gill and Paul Lucadamo marked the course with arrows to ensure a safe ride and Debbie and Steve Shecter, of the Westchester Horse Council, made certain that all safety concerns with regard to parking and crowd control were addressed. Liz Meszaros, the Friends Administrative Director, registered the riders and coordinated the luncheon, trophies and ribbon and raffle ceremony. Preserve staff members Richard Nelson, Stephen Sciamie and Frederick Von Pichl held down the fort while Chris Davies, another dedicated park volunteer, had the arduous task of calculating the pace results.

Each year, Marlene and John Schrader of Beech Hill Farm do an incredible job designing and setting up beautiful and challenging jumps with help from their Beech Hill volunteers. A special thanks to Agway of Danbury, Connecticut who generously donated bales of hay for the jumps. Sincere thanks go out to the dedicated trail volunteers, runners, friends at the registration desk and start and finish lines, parking attendants, and those who helped set up and clean up. Thanks also to

Friends Board member Evelyn Hadad, who manned the Friends table selling raffle tickets, lunches, t-shirts, hats and totes. The Sleepy Hollow Volunteer Ambulance Corps and New York State Park Police were also on site to ensure the safest possible event. Philipse Manor Hall was kind enough to lend us their PA system for the day and we cannot forget our neighbors at New York Life Insurance Company who once again allowed us the use of their parking lots for this special event. Lastly, Kleen Sweep came up and swept the New York Life parking lot after the last horse trailer pulled out thanks to Viola Powrie!



Photos: Herbert Hadad

Closing in on the finish

A raffle was part of the festivities for the day. The Friends would like to thank Blue Hill at Stone Barns for donating a "Dinner for Four" gift certificate, the Marriott Hotel in Tarrytown, NY for donating an "Overnight Weekend Stay with Breakfast for Two", the Jacob Burns Film Center for their "Annual Dual Membership", Historic Hudson Valley for a "Classic Tour of Kykuit", The Doubletree Hotel for an "Overnight Stay with Breakfast and Dinner for Two", and Beech Hill Farm and Fox Hill Farm for donating free private riding lessons.

In addition, we also would like to thank our Friends and local merchants who supported our Journal and hope that you will patronize them in order to let them know that you appreciate their support to the Preserve:

Blume Electric of Briarcliff Manor
 The Care of Trees, Elmsford
 Corbett Excavating, Inc.
 Cornerstone Auto Repair
 The Hudson Valley Writer's Center
 The Hudson Valley Horse Source

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God (continued from page 1)

Miraculously, Stella Medina arranged for the Rocky's 5K to be held in the Preserve. Apparently she's one of those people who get things done rather than dreaming them up, and then being bitter when they don't materialize on their own. The race Stella instituted raised much-needed money to maintain the trails. This success was followed up with the Rockwood Ramble, a 10 K.

I'd registered the whole family for the 5K and for the 10K also. Godlike, I'd wished both races onto the same day. Person-like, I was in for a disappointment.

Andrew (22) and I were up for the 10K. "You can run the 5K," I told Janet and took her arm and twisted.

Family athletics are a precious and growing development. I taught my wife to ride a bicycle. Both sons run. Olympian and former Pleasantville Mayor and County Legislator, John Nonna, was at the Rockwood Ramble. His family runs and recently sent a contingent up Kilimanjaro. Herb Hadad, a runner emeritus and Friends board member, was on hand to watch his daughter, Sara, and his wife, Evelyn. Usually the oldsters lead the way, but I believe that Michael Antonaccio turned his father Nick onto running and got him out to last year's 5 K.

"You're sure this is a 5K?" Janet asked, as we clambered out of the car into the gathering storm. I had been sure, but now I wasn't. Now Janet has run marathons, but not since right after Andrew was born, and that was 22 years ago.

"No 5K today," I heard, when we got to the start, and Janet heard it also.

"You can do it. Or drive home," I said, and looked away. Was she furious? She had the right to be furious.

Bill Carter took the microphone and spoke movingly about his running buddy Geoff Stein. Geoff had died while running in the park and this year's Rockwood Ramble was dedicated to him.

Runners do die of heart attacks. This is tough on runners, but you can see why God allows it. Everybody else gets such a kick out of it when a runner dies of a heart attack.

It wasn't a heart attack I feared right then, though. It was lightning. I heard thunder. God's getting me in his crosshairs, I thought, for lying to my wife. But then—thank God—the race began. I lit out like a rabbit who's seen the hawk. I glimpsed Andrew's red shirt off in the future. I couldn't see Janet at all. Had she driven home alone in the rain?

But God was watching out for me, or maybe Shakespeare was. The clouds never did burst. Janet ran the race. All 10K of it. She blissed out. She even won a medal. We all won medals.

One more reason to love the park.

I go to the Preserve whenever I have a chance. In nature, I see the face of God. This particular groundling needs to be reminded of the magnificence of life, the mystery of death. It's also useful for me to remember that, try as I might—and I do try mightily—I'm never going to accept this world, or understand it either.



Janet Maslin (Ben's wife) and Benjamin Cheever pleased after finishing



John Cheever (l.), Jennifer Reese (John's fiancée) and Andrew Cheever



Runners leap into action to start the latest race

Carriage Roads (continued from page 1)

of many reasons. We feel comfortable on roads – the ideal carriage road is lovely to walk on, and to push a baby carriage on. It is a lovely surface to run on when properly maintained. The footing is good for us all, not just the horses; being able to see where we are going and what’s ahead is comforting to us all, not just to the horses and the drivers. Think of all the dark, ominous woods in the fairy tales. In contrast, ours are open and inviting.

Walking on the roads, we have less anxiety about tick borne diseases than we would walking on paths through the forest, or untended fields. The reality of these diseases and the toll they take is familiar to us all. I find that if I stick to the roads in the spring, summer and fall, I am free of ticks. The constant threat of these diseases bring many people to make decisions about staying away from the outdoors altogether. Our open and cared for roads can offer an alternative.

As John D. Rockefeller Jr. was building the carriage road system, he was managing his father’s giant empire, and the carriage roads, their construction and placement was how he kept himself on an even keel. He knew that the natural world was healing from all the time he spent in nature and from helping his father build the roads in their estate in Cleveland as a boy. He saw the contrast between the stress of industry and city life, and the balm of nature clearly not only for himself, but for everyone. Indeed, a

large percentage of his considerable philanthropic work was directed at creating, expanding and improving parks all over the country and the world. Speaking of the carriage roads he built in Acadia National Park, he said: “The carriage roads were built so that more people could be restored to themselves in nature just as I was.” He understood the psychology of carriage roads.

He built these carriage roads to draw us into the park; to show us the beauty of the land. He built the lake and carefully incorporated the rivers and streams to delight our ears and eyes as we walk near them. He opened them to everyone. As soon as he finished them- he wanted to share their shapes, their contours, their inviting open aspects with the public because he knew how calming and soothing they could be. For all of us; walkers, equestrians and runners, the park is a haven of tranquility. Ask any park staff member how many people come to the park for solace in times of crisis, and you will be astonished by their stories. In this treasure of open space in lower Westchester, help us maintain these roads as Mr. Rockefeller intended, for all our peace of mind.



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Administrative Director: Liz Meszaros

From the Preserve Manager

By *Alix Schnee*

As you walk through the Preserve enjoying the wonders of the season, take a minute to look around and wonder how the landscapes are maintained.

Without a doubt one of the most challenging aspects of being the Preserve Manager is land management. John D. Rockefeller Jr. designed an environment of contrasting scenes—rolling hills, lakes, meandering streams, woodlands, wetlands, stone walls, carriage roads leading one throughout an ever changing environment. Today these settings are threatened by increased storm damage; climate change, and economic constraints.

So how do we manage it all? A major way is through cooperative affiliations with other organizations. Pernod America recently contributed \$800 to purchase Vinca ground cover as well as to provide a full day's work of 12 volunteers to beautify the walkway leading to the parking lot. Robert Welsch, Westover Landscape Design, in his wonderful way had staff on hand to assist with the project. As a result the planting finished much earlier than expected but it was still a demanding job. Earlier this year, Con Edison made an exchange of labor for the cost of removing tulip trees that interfered with their lines. In early February, a crew of eight men with heavy machinery removed dry brush that dominated the landscape of the equestrian access trail. This critical action ensured that the Preserve was free of brush fires that swept through the region in March.

This past summer, an Eagle Scout, Matt Vogel designed a project to remove invasive weeds and especially the dreaded Mile-a-Minute and Black Swallow Wort. He and his troop logged over 100 volunteer hours in these weeds' removal, filling over 50 of the 30-gallon garbage bags. His efforts coincided with work undertaken through the Bill Shore Memorial Fund. This endowment is enabling the mapping of invasives, on State and family properties, with the anticipation of using the information to apply for State grants that will enable us to remove the most egregious weeds. John Mickelson of Geospatial Ecological Services is overseeing the project and is working with Dave Bedell to map a random sampling of invasives. Bedell's findings, especially of Mile-a-Minute, were relayed to Matt Vogel who then removed the plant.

An innovative means of eliminating Mile-a-Minute has been the release of weevils, which live off of the aggressive weed. State biologists recently released 3,800 weevils in the Deer Exclosure, which has become infested with the plant. After devouring the plant, the weevils will mate and produce another generation and then spread from there at the release site to other patches in the Preserve. They have been documented moving up to 10 miles, so hopefully they will help to control Mile-a-Minute's spread.

Swan Lake is another area of concern. Studies conducted by the State over the past ten years determined that the Lake is in need of dredging. Before this activity could take place, however, we needed to obtain a DEC permit allowing the action to take place. The process has included testing the stability of the dam—core sampling of the material determined that the layering is as it was when it was first built, thus it is very stable. The mud needed examining as well to ensure it did not contain contaminants, it is clean and can, therefore, be easily disposed. The depth of the mud, however, proved problematic. It measured more than twelve feet deep, thus verifying the need to dredge. At this point the dredging is weather dependent. David Rockefeller will cover expenses of the southern, shallow, end. The deeper dredging in the middle and north end will be done by New York State.

David Rockefeller has also been upgrading some of our carriage roads. Ash Tree Loop and Over Look have benefited from his understanding of trail maintenance. The sides of these roads have been cleared to create a 25-foot side boundary, where applicable. The stone pediments on trail's edge have been cleaned of invasives. New York Works, state funding for storm damage, has been applied to restore a part of the carriage road on Buttermilk Hill, the trail had become so eroded it was difficult for equestrians to ride; the bordering stone pediments so covered by weeds that they seemed to have disappeared. The trail is now restored and the valley views have been reclaimed. Meanwhile, Dr. Lucy Waletzky continues to support the maintenance of the specimen trees at Rockwood Hall and to ensure that the invasives on the sloping terrain, beneath the foundation, are kept under control.

Still to come is the restoration of Pocantico River. Again, funding from New York Works has enabled us to finally remove the debris from fallen trees. Nonetheless, the river suffers from encroaching shorelines, which restrict its flow. As a result we had a poor trout season this year, as pools of water prevented their following the river's course. A Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) permit is required before further action can be taken in restoring the river's pathway.

As you can see, we benefit from support of individuals and organization and none is more important than that which we get from our Friends group. Last December we had depleted our funds for maintaining the carriage roads. The Friends of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve stepped in and assisted with trail upkeep through their resources. A strong Friends group will ensure that the strength and vitality of the Preserve are retained. If you love these roads and the special environment in which they've been placed, please be sure to support the Friends.

Have a wonderful fall and winter season!



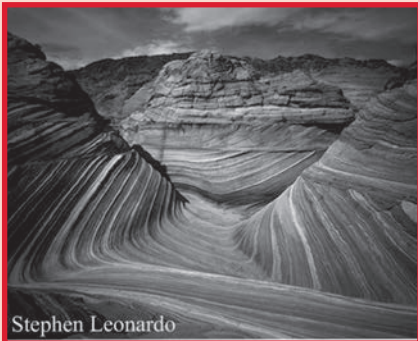
Fall Gallery Schedule at a Glance

The Art Gallery at the Rockefeller State Park Preserve is featuring “Moments-Photographic Memories”, the fine art images of four gifted photographers, Michael Garber, Stephen Leonardo, Michael Pressman and Doris Shepard Wiese. The exhibition is scheduled to run through January 6, 2013.

Michael Garber, a landscape and nature photographer, is intrigued by the subjectivity of light and how it transposes subjects. Formerly, the Executive Director of New York Foundling Hospital, he now travels constantly, reconciling his vision and nature in evocative tangible form. **Doris Shepard Wiese**, President & CO of Kalmar Advertising, is another world traveler. Her imagery is splendidly conveyed in this ideal medium that liberates her artistic spirit. She and her husband plan at least one photographic trip per year.

Stephen Leonardo is inspired by the works of Ansel Adams, he focuses on nature, primarily the West. Committed to film, this self-taught photographer's endeavors sets the images apart, each are hauntingly intense. **Michael Pressman** has never stopped creating images. As an award winning broadcast journalist, producer, writer and director for network programming, his first love of the visual arts has evolved to a full time pursuit – photography. The moments he seeks to capture are singular images of timelessness found in the near and far corners of the globe.

The exhibition is curated by Audrey Leeds.



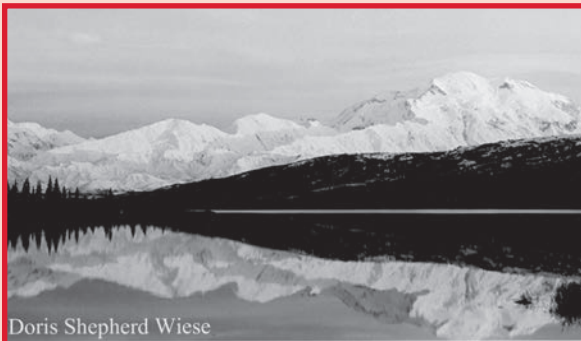
Stephen Leonardo

Stephen Leonardo



© Michael N. Pressman

Michael N. Pressman



Doris Shepherd Wiese

Doris Shepherd Wiese



Michael Garber

Michael Garber

Participants are invited to share their photos of the Preserve taken during all four seasons as part of the SNAP exhibit that will open in the Spring. Please check our web site for more details in the coming months.

New Directions (continued from page 1)

M. Pierson, Friends president. "After 15 years of service, we felt it was time to do even more, and we will do more but this will only be possible with the financial and volunteer help of the people who have come to realize that the preserve is an important part of their life and well-being."

The Friends Board of Directors want to help the organization uphold the heritage and guarantee the future of this unique natural treasure. By creating a stronger presence for the Friends and the preserve everyone will realize a greater awareness of the financial support necessary to achieve key objectives.

The Friends has been notable to date for the funding of many projects in the preserve, for example, the entrance landscaping outside the Visitor Center and Administration Office, the creation of the Japanese peony garden and the gallery lighting for curated exhibits. These projects are in addition to its financial support to New York State, which manages the preserve, in the necessary and costly maintenance of the park's system of carriage trails that are used by visitors for purposes, ranging from carriage riding and horseback-riding to walking, jogging, bird-watching and dog exercising.

For the coming year, we have our regular events and two new additions, an Earth Day Walkathon and a Sleigh Exhibit. There will be more details posted on our web site but it is hoped all events will be supported by those who use and love the park! The listing is as follows:

March 15, 2013 – Wine Tasting Dinner – a fund-raising tasting that includes a sommelier to show the way and add to the fun

April 21, 2013 – Earth Day Walkathon – new event!

May 4, 2013 – I Love My Park Day

May 9, 2013 – 5th Annual Peony Celebration – the fashionable and always-awaited festival of the peonies blooming accompanied by a cocktail party under a tent

June 8, 2013 – Rockwood Ramble 10k Race – exciting foot race in June that tests the hardy strength of runners

October 26, 2013 – 6th Annual Rockys' 5k Race – road race through preserve trails that is perennially a favorite of road runners and always sold out

December 4, 2013 – Volunteer Party – holiday reception and dinner to thank volunteers for their service over the year to the beauty and maintenance of the preserve

December 12, 2013 – Sleigh Exhibit – original old fashioned sleigh and history with reception of holiday treats

"It is a very exciting time for the Friends and the preserve, said Ms. Pierson, "and we hope the multitude of neighbors near and far who reap the rewards of the park will reach out and help us preserve the preserve!"



Peony in bloom during the Friends' Annual Celebration



George Gumina in a scene from Carriage Ride fund-raiser held in late summer

Photo: Laurence Gill

Reaching the Friends

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The Preserve Observer

Editors: Evelyn Hadad, Herbert Hadad

Letters and submissions are invited.

Please contact us c/o the Friends.

Pace (continued from page 3)

Kendal on Hudson, Sleepy Hollow
 The Lyden Family
 Joseph Marra, MBA, Tax Consultant
 Mid Hudson Veterinary Practice
 Phelps Memorial Hospital, Sleepy Hollow
 Sleepy Hollow Animal Hospital
 The Stone Barns, Pocantico Hills
 The Shecter Family
 Westchester Generator, Briarcliff Manor
 The Westchester Horse Council, Inc.
 The Williams Family
 Xtreme Clean of NY

Trophies and Ribbons from 1st to 10th place were awarded.

First Place winners were:

Pleasure Division: Doreen Heal – Madeline McKinney

Hunt Division: Anita Keefe – Luke McCarthy

Western Division: Robin Cunningham – Paul Chisholm –
 Daralyn Calderon

Junior Division: Ursula Scott – Sandy Volpe – Iris Heyman

Board President Clare Pierson said, “The Board of Directors of the Friends and the Westchester Horse Council would like to thank all who have joined us this year to support the park and its beautiful trails and especially all of our volunteers who worked so hard to make this Pace a success! We could not do it without you! Hope to see you again next year as we continue our Pace tradition! See you on the trails!”



Photo: Herbert Hadad

Awaiting the completion



THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL AUTUMN COUNTRY PACE & LUNCHEON

*Sunday October 14, 2012
 at Rockwood Hall*



Original art work by Alta Buden

Rockefeller State Park Preserve Staff

Alix Schnee, Preserve Manager

Laurence Gill, Preserve Office Manager

Richard Nelson, Preserve Naturalist

Steve Sciame, Park Aide 6

Contact Station Personnel:

Tony Corda

Frederick Von Pichl

The poem, below, was just accepted for publication in a journal called Hunger Mountain.

I was inspired to write it after a day of volunteering in the Preserve's deer enclosure with a community service team from my husband's firm. The experience complicated my understanding of the Preserve—which I had only ever experienced as a bucolic retreat. If anything, with a better sense of how fragile its diverse ecosystems really are, I have come to treasure the Rockefeller State Park Preserve more than ever.

Jo Ann Clark

Executive Director of Hudson Valley Writers' Center

The Preserve

As in most states altered or achieved,
 what peace one may find here's delusional.
 Look beyond the stranglehold that mile-a-minute
 or Japanese Angelica has on the hardwood
 indigenes—ash, beech, Great Northern oak.
 Look beyond the phragmite choking up
 the hollows, beyond the unculled bovine deer
 grazing to pristine sterility the forest floor,
 having already stripped the understory bare.
 Look past coyote sightings and the actual
 coyote, past disease-bearing, disease-born ticks
 dug deep into hides and skin. The sight-specific
 forest remaining is primeval enough, with daylight
 breaking on the Roman-emperor beaks of snapping
 turtles—baleful legions jockeying onto bog water's
 half sunken logs like coffles of drunks elbowing in
 at the bar. But otherwise peaceable here. And quiet,
 but for a clamor so pre-human it eradicates all
 but the rustlings and snaps of a dogwood's falling
 branch striking lithe ones on its brittle way down,
 the rampagings of squirrels through embankments
 of leaves, mufflings of seed pods breezing into scrub,
 numberless soundings of birds unseen, birds glimpsed.
 Layered aromas of growth, rot, and pending rain
 crowd the senses in. To save it entire, call down
 volaries of lightening, up-ended obelisks
 of flame. Burn to a char the heartwood and bark
 of each centuries-old legendary tree. If only
 we dared—those of us who are now too many,
 who live too near, who once discovered fire.

Letter from Cairo

By Edward Salim Hadad

I've walked and run the Preserve and Family trails all my life, and it is something I love to do. Four months ago, I was beckoned to the other side of the world.

I was presented with a chance to participate in a special project with the American University in Cairo (AUC). The consulting firm I work for helps nonprofit clients design fundraising strategies, and AUC wanted a director to travel to Cairo to assist them in their development program and lead the search for a new Vice President for Institutional Advancement.

I had been to Egypt before and was fond of the country and its people. Although the current political situation looked less than ideal, after some consideration I decided it was a professional and personal opportunity I didn't want to pass up.

Let me tell you a little about AUC. It was created in 1919 by a group of Americans who were determined to bring to Egypt an institution that provided a first-rate liberal arts higher education. In Cairo, AUC carries an exceptional reputation for students, faculty and staff alike. For almost 90 years, the university was located in the heart of downtown, just a few steps away from Tahrir Square, now famous as a focal point of the 2011 revolution. Four years ago, however, AUC completed the construction of a sprawling new beautiful campus about 12 miles from the center of the city in what is called New Cairo.

I now live in New Cairo in a faculty residence about a quarter mile from campus. Cairo proper straddles the Nile River and has millennia of history. New Cairo was created in the middle of the desert where virtually every building and road is no more than six years old. The neighborhood, anchored by the university, is in a slowed state of progress. Before the revolution, the area was enjoying a fantastic boom in housing construction and real estate appreciation. Following the revolution and the flight of foreign investment, the economy has dragged. In my neighborhood there are thousands of five-story, multi-family homes and apartment blocs in varying states of completion.

I have tried to maintain my running regime and plans for running in next year's New York City Marathon. Four or five days a week, in the morning or early evening, I traverse the neighborhood in my pair of New Balances. It is a desert where natural vegetation is rare. Any trees, grass or shrubs must be planted by residents and vigorously watered and maintained. There are dried-out and dead brown bushes and palms in many places where the owners have delayed moving in or have underestimated the attention required to keep the plants alive.

(continued next page)

Cairo (continued from page 10)

Wildlife of the neighborhood is composed of some birds, but mainly packs of feral dogs. As I run by, most watch curiously, some bark; once or twice I have been concerned by a lurking group of seven or eight, but so far I have made it through without incident. The buildings are all mainly sandstone-colored over brick to reflect the intense Egyptian heat, and virtually everywhere you look the color is yellow. It is dusty from the sand and from the construction work that does continue. The air is clean though. In nearby downtown Cairo next to the Nile, there is more water sustaining vegetation, but there are millions of people, dense traffic congestion and stifling pollution.

Throughout New Cairo, there are pockets of temporary tiny brick square homes where Bedouin and migrant construction workers live with their extended families. Across from my building there is one such family that has grown to anticipate the routine of the strange light-skinned foreigner running by their home. As I exit my building stretching and preparing my Ipod, they start yelling to each other in preparation.

Each time I pass, the whole family cheers as the patriarch named Mohamed races alongside me for 20 yards or so. His seven year-old son Ahmed has garnered the courage to now join us as well. They smile and yell words in Arabic that I can't comprehend. I respond with one of the phrases I know, "Yalla bina!" which means, "Let's go!" The women, other men and children all clap and cheer. It's the same routine nearly every day, but they don't seem to lose the novelty for it, nor do I.

One of the other bonuses of my Egyptian experience is exposure to the Arabic language and its richness. People are eager to teach you. My father knows some, and I have learned enough for us to swap greetings, observations and jokes.

I recently traveled back to New York City for an intermittent trip home. My girlfriend Adlin, her Boston Terrier and I took the train up to visit my parents in Pocantico Hills. After months in the desert, I craved my familiar hills and trails, and we headed straight into the woods of the Preserve. At this point, we were a month into autumn. The oaks, maples, beeches, elms and poplars were buoyant with color. There was grass and plants and trees everywhere! Deer and wild turkey were not coy this day as they ran across our path. Decaying leaves and other vegetation on the ground were creating that distinct autumn smell. Emanating from all around us, it was like the sweetest aroma ever to pass through my nose. I took a deep breath filling my lungs with the nourishing air.

There were sounds of birds singing, crickets chirping, squirrels rustling; there was life everywhere! It was heavenly.

I have never taken for granted the beautiful woods of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve and the surrounding private lands open to us, but after spending a few months out in the desert, it makes you realize how lucky we are.

The project at AUC has been rewarding and satisfying. The staff I work alongside is warm and professional. The president and other leaders of AUC are all accomplished, supportive and determined. The campus itself has trees and blossoming flowers and fountains, but nothing can replicate the real thing. I write this letter from Cairo, happy to continue the project and run alongside Mohamed and Ahmed each day, but also taking comfort in knowing that I will leave the desert and return back home to the forests, wetlands and pastures of Pocantico Hills.

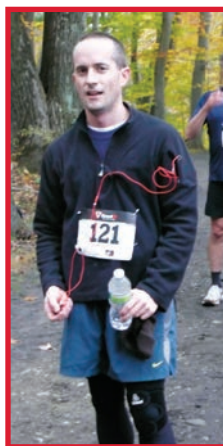


Photo: Herbert Hadad

The author after finishing Preserve race



Edward, Ahmed and members of the New Cairo fan club



Mohamed (Edward's training partner) and members of Mohamed's family

Photo: Edward Hadad

The Preserve Observer

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The massive storm Sandy that struck the East Coast did not spare the Preserve. Here is some of the damage and the aftermath.



Photos by Laurence Gill