



Winter Cardinal by Marianne Markle

Winter is a great time to bundle up and get into nature at Mohonk Preserve or bring the outdoors inside with one of our upcoming nature webinars.

In this issue of *Ridgelines*, Preserve President Kevin Case will share some of our goals for 2021 and beyond. We'll also highlight the latest accolade for our legacy weather and climate program and announce new support and an expanded role for the Preserve's Trailhead Ambassadors.

We'd also like to acknowledge that this marks the 200th issue of a publication that began in 1967 as *The Mohonk Trust Newsletter*. We are grateful to the many writers, editors, photographers, and designers who have helped share the Preserve's stories.

Thanks to all our members and donors for your steadfast support in 2020 and we wish everyone a healthy and safe 2021!

SEASONAL UPDATES



PHOTO GALLERY. View seasonal photographs by our volunteer photographers, visit mohonkpreserve.org/photos. See more photos by the Mohonk Preserve Volunteer Photographers on their Facebook page: facebook.com/www.mpvp.

GET INTO NATURE. See a full list of upcoming programs at mohonkpreserve.org/events including free webinars DIY Forest Bathing with Jane and Morels, and get into nature on the land while Forest Bathing with Jane Dobson.

Photo: Snowshoer enjoys the Million Dollar View of the Catskills by Glenn Koehler

CHECK THIS OUT

COVID-19 Visitation Protocols. In accordance with state and CDC guidelines and to ensure the health and safety of members, visitors and staff, Mohonk Preserve has instituted several important protocols for visitation. Please be sure to wear your mask and practice social distancing. Read more at <https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/visit/visit-us.html>.

Bring a digital Mohonk Preserve trail map with you on any mobile device! Our new trail map is now available on Apple iOS and Android devices using the Avenza Maps app.

Check out our 2021 line up of exciting events:

- Registration opens soon for the Rock and Snow Bridge 2 Bridge 5-Mile Run on April 10, 2021. Visit [mohonkpreserve.org/b2b](https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/b2b) for more information.
- Save The Date for our Virtual 24th Annual Benefit Auction on April 17, 2021. Visit [mohonkpreserve.org/auction](https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/auction) for more information.
- Pfalz Point Trail Challenge will be held on August 29, 2021, registration opens in late May. Visit [mohonkpreserve.org/pptc](https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/pptc) for more information.
- Registration is open for Rock The Ridge on September 25, 2021! Space is limited, register today! Visit [mohonkpreserve.org/rock-the-ridge](https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/rock-the-ridge).

MOHONK PRESERVE MEMBER REWARDS PROGRAM. Show your valid Mohonk Preserve annual or life membership card at nearly 40 local businesses listed at <https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/how-to-help/join/member-rewards-program.html>, and receive a discount or special offer.

We welcome our new business members who joined between October 1 through December 31, 2020:

- Calmbucha
- Hotel Kinsley
- Max Building Group
- Pastimes
- Westwind Orchard



Winter View of the Catskills from the Bench at Slingerland Pavilion by Mary-

Seizing Nature's Moment

A Message from Mohonk Preserve President and CEO Kevin Case

A colleague of mine recently noted that our entire careers have been focused on getting people outside and into nature. In 2020 we achieved that goal with overwhelming success! It's like the dog that chases the car and finally catches it – now what? We're humbled that Mohonk Preserve is playing such an important role for people during these challenging times. We also recognize that 2020 was not just a year of record-setting visitation, it was also a time when local communities felt the brunt of the pandemic in many ways, issues of inclusion and diversity increasingly took center stage, and climate change became impossible to ignore.

As the Preserve looks ahead, these challenges are framing how we think about our priorities. What has become apparent is our growing responsibility to support our local communities as healthy, vibrant places for all. In the short term this may mean hosting food drives for local food pantries or partnering with local businesses to help raise their profiles. In the longer term it's evolving into a community-based organization that is authentic, responsive, connective, and inclusive.

The issue of inclusion, often discussed along with diversity and equity, is about ensuring we're providing opportunities for diverse groups to be involved in and have access to the Preserve and making those who have not been traditionally engaged feel welcome. While we have made good initial progress through our Library Lending program, providing visitor passes at local libraries, and our Healthy Ulster program, distributing free one-month passes to county residents, we can and will do more. This means continuing to identify and expand ways to ensure all people can experience the Preserve and feel welcome when they visit.

In more sobering news, the Preserve's Mohonk Lake Cooperative Weather Station recorded an overall temperature for 2020 that was 4.5°F above average, making this the warmest year on record in 124 years. Precipitation was 14.60 inches below average, marking this the 7th driest year on record. Snowfall was 36.56 inches below average, marking this the 2nd least snowy year on record. While the Preserve can't single handedly change the course of climate change, we can and will do our part to effect change in how we use, generate and conserve energy. We can explore opportunities to produce renewable energy and take advantage of available renewable energy sources such as community solar.

At the same time the climate is changing, habitats are changing. Mohonk Preserve lands are proving to be some of the most important lands for preserving biodiversity in a changing climate. Not only is it vital that we sustain strong protection of these lands for their significance as habitat, but we must also manage them in a way that ensures their resilience, focusing on how we balance our rising visitation levels with the ecological carrying capacity of the land.

When all is said and done, I'm thrilled the dog has caught the car. The energy, passion and commitment of our members, visitors and supporters continues to keep me in awe. I know that this shared love – and concern – for our natural lands and environment aligns with the Preserve's mission of protecting the Shawangunk Mountains region and inspiring people to care for, enjoy, and explore their natural world. With your encouragement and generous support, we'll keep finding deeper and more meaningful ways to keep doing just that.

Hope to see you on the land,

Kevin



Climate Tracker Recording Weather Data at the Lake Mohonk Weather Station by Jolie Parker

Counting on the Weather

While the weather on the Shawangunk Ridge may sometimes be unpredictable, you can count on the fact that it is being carefully tracked and recorded daily at the Mohonk Lake Cooperative Weather Station as it has been since 1895. This rich legacy was saluted by the National Weather Service on Jan. 22, 2021 when the prestigious Honored Institutions Award was presented to Mohonk Preserve at a ceremony hosted by Director of the National Weather Service **Dr. Louis Uccellini** and featuring staff from across the country.

Honored Institution Awards are given to cooperative observation institutions such as police departments, universities, and other organizations where observations have been taken for a minimum of 25 years. During the virtual awards ceremony, Mohonk Preserve was acknowledged for over 125 continuous years of weather observations at the Mohonk Lake Cooperative Weather Station.

The award was presented by meteorologist **Christina Speciale** from the National Weather Service in Albany, N.Y., who noted that the Preserve's site is the longest standing cooperative weather

station in the Albany area, with continuous records dating back to May 1, 1895. “For over 125 years, Mohonk Preserve has captured the weather and climate footprint of eastern New York and has served as a dedicated partner for the Albany Weather Field Office,” she said.

The Mohonk Lake Cooperative Weather Station is located near the Preserve’s Daniel Smiley Research Center on the grounds of the Mohonk Mountain House at an elevation of 1,245 feet and experiences all four seasons. Annually, it receives an average precipitation of 51.86 inches with 61.7 inches of snow. At this location near the top of the Shawangunk Ridge, some years are much snowier, as was the case in 1967 when the weather station recorded over 114 inches of snow.

“Given its expansive period of record, it has experienced historic snowstorms, tropical cyclones and severe weather,” Speciale remarked. “Infamous tropical events include the Long Island Express Hurricane of 1938, Hurricane Donna of 1960, Hurricane Floyd of 1999, and most notably Hurricane Irene of 2011 when the observers measured 8.52 inches of rain.”

Weather readings were first recorded by the Smiley family, founders of the Mohonk Mountain House, followed by Mohonk Preserve co-founders **Dan and Keith Smiley**, and are carried on today by Mohonk Preserve Conservation Science staff and volunteer Climate Trackers, led by Mohonk Preserve Research Collection and Citizen Science Coordinator **Natalie Feldsine**.

Beginning in the late 1970s, data collection expanded to include regular monitoring of the pH of precipitation, lakes, and streams. Today, the Preserve’s weather data is composed of more than 45,000 days of weather observations. The Preserve’s weather data is dependable because the station has been in the same, comparatively stable location for over a century and the same protocol has been followed by the relatively few people involved in collecting the data.

In 1970, Dan Smiley was awarded the National Weather Service’s highest accolade for volunteers, the Thomas Jefferson Award, for his “unusual and outstanding achievements in the field of meteorological observations,” including over 50 years of continuous weather observations. In 2013, Mohonk Preserve Research Director Emeritus **Paul Huth** was awarded the John Campanius Holm Award for outstanding public service in the provision of daily observations in support of the climate and weather programs of the National Weather Service, lauding his then forty-year commitment to the Preserve’s weather program. Paul began his career working with Dan and adding to the Preserve’s long legacy of weather and natural history data.

The importance of the Preserve’s weather collection has been recognized by scientists from across the country and around the world. To identify the extent of global climate change, researchers need access to reliable data covering the longest period possible. Since the Preserve’s readings began, average daily temperatures have risen from 46.7°F in 1896 to 49.9°F in 2019, at a rate of approximately 0.03°F per year. Additionally, 2020 featured several monthly and seasonal records, including the hottest July and the second hottest summer. In fact, the latest data collected by the Conservation Science team reveals that 2020 was the warmest year on record, with temperature for the year 4.5°F above average; and the 2nd least snowy year on record, with snowfall 36.56 inches below average.

The Preserve’s weather observations are part of over a century of unparalleled research, collections, and natural history of the Mohonk Preserve Daniel Smiley Research Center. For more information on the Preserve’s Weather Program, access to weather data and monthly summaries, and other Conservation Science initiatives, visit mohonkpreserve.org/what-we-do/conservation-science.



Plein Air Art Walk by Kate Schoonmaker

Trailhead Ambassadors Help Visitors Get Into Nature With Support From M&T Bank

Mohonk Preserve has experienced a significant and dramatic increase in the number of members and visitors looking for a rejuvenating outdoor experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of M&T Bank, the Preserve's volunteer Trailhead Ambassadors will continue to ensure that everyone can have a safe and enjoyable visit. The M&T Bank sponsorship will help support the cost of equipment and supplies, including personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and plexiglass barriers, as well as training for Trailhead Ambassadors.

"With record visitation throughout the summer and fall, the Preserve's Visitor Experience staff needed greater support at trailheads to orient visitors, especially those visiting the Preserve for the first time, and to help encourage proper social distancing," said Mohonk Preserve Volunteer Programs Manager **Andy Reynolds**. "To address this growing need, we expanded our existing volunteer Trailhead Ambassadors group to a full-fledged visitor experience program to help welcome these new visitors and let them know about the options available for healthy outdoor activities."

The Trailhead Ambassador group consists of volunteers, supervised by staff, who operate information stations outside the Preserve's Visitor Center and at the "Welcome Boulder" near the West Trapps Trailhead on busy spring, summer and fall weekends. The Trailhead Ambassadors welcome hundreds of visitors, answer questions about the Preserve, provide information on basic wayfinding and visitor amenities, and help newcomers select appropriate activities based on their fitness levels and interests.

The Trailhead Ambassadors are part of the full Mohonk Preserve volunteer corps numbering more than 400 individuals who contribute over 15,000 hours of their energy and skills annually in activities including gardening, photography, bike and ski patrols, education programs, conservation science, and many others. Find out more about the Trailhead Ambassadors, other volunteer opportunities and upcoming training sessions at <https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/how-to-help/volunteer/training.html> or contact Andy Reynolds at areynolds@mohonkpreserve.org.

Mohonk Preserve thanks M&T Bank for their longstanding partnership with the Preserve and ongoing commitment to our community, and we look forward to welcoming our Trailhead Ambassadors back to the land this spring.



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