

THE MOHONK TRUST

June 1978

SUPPLEMENT TO RESEARCH REPORT May 1977 - Wood Rat (*Neotoma magister*)

Sites of nests and scat piles, 1930 to 1978

The following records have been summarized from the cards in the Mohonk Museum files compiled by Daniel Smiley.

1. Sky Top--Duck Hawk Aerie

1930 We first learned of this animal by finding droppings on ledges of Sky Top near Duck Hawk nesting site. Observed with flashlights and flash pictures taken by H. H. Cleaves.

1937, 16 May. With G.S. opposite Duck Hawk nest ledge, crack back from cliff near little wooden bridge, 20 feet down in crack with candle found rat nest--of shredded plant material with animal remains, including an owl pellet and remains of a gray squirrel.

1977, 15 May. No evidence found.

2. South of Mohonk Lake

1930, 6 Sept. A.K.S. Jr. caught one and put in cage at Oak Cottage.

1930, 9 Sept. Another caught and released.

1954, 18 Oct. Caught by Steve Collins and photographed. Released.

1955, 11 June Two caught and photographed by Steve Collins. Released.

1977, 27 Jan. Some old scats, no fresh material. Specimens of old collected.

1978, 6 June Report of recent scats. Checked and found none of Wood Rat.

3. Rock Pass on Maple Path

1952, 25 Dec. Nest found with food storage and inedible litter.

1954, 7 Aug. Recent work.

1977, 27 Jan. No nest, no scats, some artifacts (probably old).

Cont.

4. Newlins Cave--Copes Lookout
1934 (?) Nest found.
1977, 15 May No evidence found.
5. Rock Rift Crevices
1938, 13 Aug. Two nests about 12 ft. apart in one of the cave branches of the crevices, almost under road.
1977, 15 May No scats, no "artifacts" found.
6. Chestnut Spring
(Date not recorded) Scats on rock under cliff overhang, north of cabin.
1977, 15 Mar. No fresh scats, a former deposit N. of cabin.
7. Crevice- Sky Top
1977, 25 Oct. Old droppings and piles of trash found in cave near base of Crevice.
8. Zaidee's Bower
1958, 19 Aug. Droppings seen.
1973, 6 Nov. Droppings seen along Trust boundary line NW of above.
1977, 10 July No evidence of use in bower area.
9. Garden Road
1958, 13 Aug. Road kill between Hemlock Lane and Woodland Bridge. Male.
10. Sleepy Hollow
1931 Droppings seen at base of cliff.
11. Mohonk Lake Shore
1952, 24 June Seen in laurel, 100 yds. SW of Fort Washington.

Cont.

12. Undercliff Road - Station #10
(1967) Scats and refuse under a boulder at this station
See "Natural History of Undercliff Road."
1978, 8 June No recent scats, some old ones.
13. Kleine Bonticou
1956, 28 Jan. Droppings noted in cave on NW side of
conglomerate ridge, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile west of where
railroad crosses Kleine Bonticou Stream.
14. Clove Valley--2 sites
1956, 18 Sept. Male trapped at Dayton House.
1967 Rubin-Larsen house. Several trapped, one an
albino.
15. Sam's Point--2 sites
1937, 22 July. Nest at Sam's Point ice caves, found in
1936, 16 July, apparently deserted.
1959, 21 July Scats seen in Ellenville Ice Caves crevices.
1968 Letter from Ed Reilly, noted he had found "dismem-
bered carcass on one of the boulders near the ice
caves with signs that some kind of hawk had been
making a meal of it."
1977, 17 June Fresh droppings (and larger unidentified
scats) collected in largest Ellenville Ice Caves.
Found many piles of old, and 2 or 3 new droppings
among rocks in bottom of crevices.
16. Mohonk House & Vicinity
1932, 15 Aug. Male caught in Greenhouse, Specimen #581
1940, 23 Apr. Male caught in Rock Bldg. cellar to NYS
Museum No. 6132
1955, 20 June Male trapped Rock Bldg. cellar to Allen
Benton
1955, 5 Aug. Young one caught by cat in Elms cellar,
had started a nest.

Cont.

16. Mohonk House & Vicinity cont.

1956, July, Aug., Sept. Trapped one male Oak Cottage;
3 male, 1 female at Rock Building cellar.

1957, 12 Apr. Male trapped Rock Bldg. cellar

1958, 5 Dec. Male trapped in House, Specimen #761

1959, 12 May Road kill behind laundry, Skull specimen
#484

1978 Probably no longer present in above areas because
of the use of rat poison during the last 12 or 15
years.

17. High Falls Road

1961, 26 July Female trapped in George Ayers house--
.9 miles from conglomerate talus or ledges.

18. Rosendale Cement Mines

1956, 22 Apr. Male trapped above railroad tracks
among rocks at old cement mines (in limestone).
Specimen #718.

19. Orange Co.--Schunemunk Mountain

1958, 12 Oct. Nest and droppings found at Ice Caves.
Conglomerate.

20. Orange Co.--Tuxedo

1963 Seen at Claudia Smith Rock on Tuxedo Mountain Ivy
Trail by Charles Morlang.

Summary

Of the 22 sites listed, ten were checked in the last 15
months. Only one--in the Ellenville Ice Caves showed evidence
of current use by Wood Rats.

Note: Numbers 1 through 16 and 19 are on, or adjacent to, Shawangunk
Conglomerate. No. 17 is on shale substrate nearly a mile from the
conglomerate at Rock Rift. No. 18 is entirely limestone.

Daniel Smiley

May 1977

THE MOHONK TRUST

RESEARCH REPORT - CAVE (WOOD) RAT (Neotoma magister)

Our first knowledge of this animal at Mohonk, in 1930, was "by finding droppings (scats) on ledges of Sky Top near the Duck Hawk nesting site." It was observed there with flashlights and flash pictures were taken by H. H. Cleaves.

These animals are very curious about new objects in their territory and show no fear of humans. After the second year of babysitting hacking-back falcons at the two Shawangunk sites, involving some 70 days (nights), I made inquiry of several of the regular sitters as to their experiences with wood rats (as they are now called). No one had seen a single rat at either place. Obviously this raised the question of possible population change for the rodent, that might be related to the loss of the falcons.

A review of my wood rat records is summarized by the following. In 1930 a "cave rat" scat heap was discovered under a boulder at the bottom of a conglomerate talus slope just beyond the south end of Mohonk Lake. A female was live-trapped there and kept in a cage in my office for four years of observation. In 1937 a cave rat nest was discovered in the roofed-over portion of a crack a few feet back from the Sky Top Duck Hawk area where the rats had first been discovered. During this decade scat heaps were found at two other locations.

Few observations were made in the 1940s. During the 1950s two additional scat heap sites were discovered. The end of the lake territory was still in use, as rats were live-trapped there for photography and then released. Cave rats were trapped in the cellar of the Mountain House, and at four outlying buildings. In ^{both} 1953 and 1959 one was found run-over on local roads.

No records were made of trappings or observations in the 1960s, except for 1967 when a neighbor on Clove Road (1½ miles west of Mohonk) caught several in his house, including an albino. Unfortunately, no visits were made to the known scat heaps in either the 1960s or 1970s through 1976.

During May 1977 visits were made to all of the old scat sites with the following results:

South End of Lake: A few old scats at least several years old (specimens collected).

Rock Pass: No nest at former site, no scats, no recent collections, only a few old bones.

Sky Top (Pinnacle Path): No scats or recent collections of debris.

Newlins Cave: No evidence of scats or nest.

Rock Rift Crevices: A few old scats, no nest or collected material. Formerly two nests here.

Chestnut Spring: No evidence of recent use.

These discoveries, together with the absence of rats during the hacking-back periods leave the question of why the decrease in cave rat numbers. Is it a normal fluctuation in numbers? Could it be due to changes in climate? Were they faced with a new form or different degree of predation?

My hypothesis is that the increased population of raccoons created a predation stress that the wood rat population could not withstand. If this member of the Shawangunk fauna has been lost, it is regrettable.

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Appendix 2:

References

Poole, Earl L. - "A Life History Sketch etc."

Journal of Mammalogy, August 1940.

One record from great horned owl pellet.

Hamilton, W. J., Jr. - "The Mammals of Eastern United States"

Most feared enemy probably great horned owl.

Appendix 1:

Records:

- 1930 First knew of it by finding droppings on ledges of Sky Top near Duck Hawk nesting site. Observed with flashlights and flash pictures by H. H. Cleaves.
- 1937, 16 May. With G.S. opposite Duck Hawk nest ledge, crack back from cliff near little wooden bridge, 20 feet down in crack with candle found rat nest -- of shredded plant material with animal remains, including an owl pellet and remains of a gray squirrel.
- 1937, 22 July. Nest at Sam's Point ice caves, found in 1936, apparently deserted.
- 1955 Two caught and released south end of Lake.
- 1956 Trapped one male Oak Cottage; 4 male, 1 female at Rock Building cellar; 1 male at Dayton House.
- 1958 1 male dead Garden Road, 1 female trapped Spruces dorm, 1 male trapped in House.
- 1958 Scats Zaidee's Bower.
- 1959 Male dead in road behind laundry.
- 1961 Trapped female G. Ayer's house. Letter ^{from} ~~to~~ S. Collins no records of population fluctuations.
- 1973 Scats seen NW of Zaidee's Bower on Trust line.

Field Trip Report - Woodrat (*Neotoma floridana*)

From May to October, 1980, previously recorded woodrat cave sites were checked for evidence of recent use. No fresh scats were found. Observations were made at the following sites (numbers keyed to accompanying map):

1. Cathedral Path

May 26 - 1 scat pile in a cavern along path. Scats very large due to swelling from moisture absorption (per Joel Hermes, DEC-New Paltz).

2. Rock Pass

May 26 - Scat pile found in crevice off Laurel Ledge Road.

3. Zaidee's Bower

May 28 - Woodrat and porcupine scats found in first crevice (walking the loop counterclockwise), and in second crevice past ladder (woodrat only).

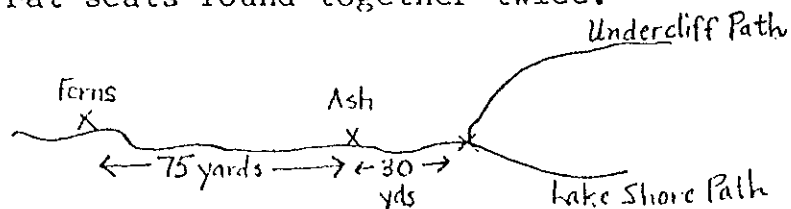
4. Arching Rocks Path

May 29 - Four individual scats in one spot only along path. No piles.

5. South end of Mohonk Lake

June 3 - Scat pile in cave (with mountain laurel covering entrance) on Undercliff Path near gazebo with "Swim at Beach Only" sign. Pile in next cave with overhang and mountain laurel at entrance, south of the above. 5± piles in this area--some caves found with 2 large piles.

June 12 - From Undercliff Path-Lake Shore Path junction, and south on Lake Shore Path from the large ash (30 yards from the junction) to the ferns (distance 75 yards), 10± piles in the talus. Porcupine and woodrat scats found together twice.



Field Trip Report - Woodrat

6. Sky Top near base of Crevice

July 1 - 5± piles and individual scats throughout. Only caves where fresh porcupine scats found. Approximately 150 square yards checked.

7. The Labyrinth

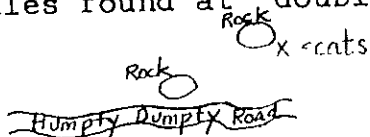
July 15 - Cave to left of ladder by clump of 4 white birches, had woodrat and porcupine scats. Individual scats, no piles, found on many ledges along this path.

8. Rock Rift Crevices

August 26 - Two large scat piles, and many places where 1-5 individual scats found. Evidence less widespread than at #5. Caves cool and moist, scats dark but dried out. A few individual porcupine scats found. Very old gnawed deer jaw bone here.

9. Humpty Dumpty Road, above

September 1 - 1 pile above curve in road before talus begins. In talus, 2 piles found at "double rock."



1 pile in cave 40 yards south past gazebo.

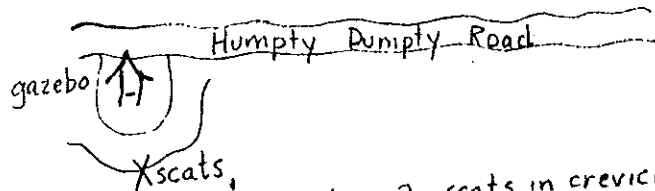
10. Humpty Dumpty Road, below

September 4 - 1 pile in cave below four pitch pines.



X scats

September 15 - Old scats found throughout.



X 1 or 2 scats in crevice. Tiny birch and blueberries at entrance.

XXX Scat pile 2 ft. in diameter, use seems to span many years.

□ Bluebird box ↓ vertical rock

Field Trip Report - Woodrat

11. Sleepy Hollow Trail

September 29 - Three small piles and individual scats at Undercliff Road end of trail, in cave with rock overhang. North of this, 2 piles with porcupine scats in large cave. At Overcliff Road end, at base of cliff (approximately where cliffs become visible from the trail) huge cavern to right in back of fallen tree, woodrat piles and individual scats found with porcupine droppings.

12. Bonticou Crag

October 1 - Along Bonticou ascent trail and 20-25 yards on either side, 3± piles.

October 2 - In talus along west side of the Crag from 100 yards northeast of the ascent trail to 50 yards southwest of the trail, 15± piles. One cave complex with 10± raccoon scats.

13. Newlin's Cave, Cope's Lookout

October 14 - Old scats found.

14. Chestnut Spring, below Pinnacle Path

October 14 - Old scats found in cave behind cabin.

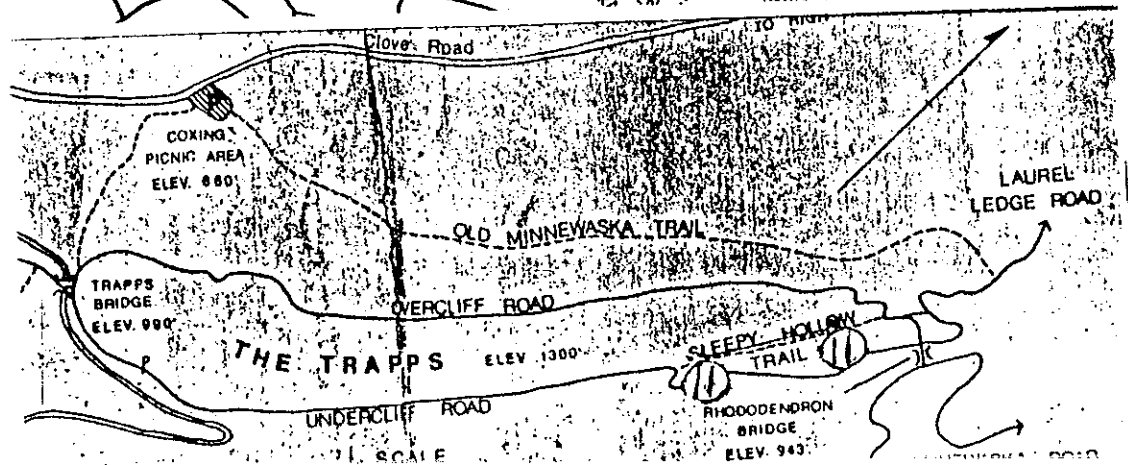
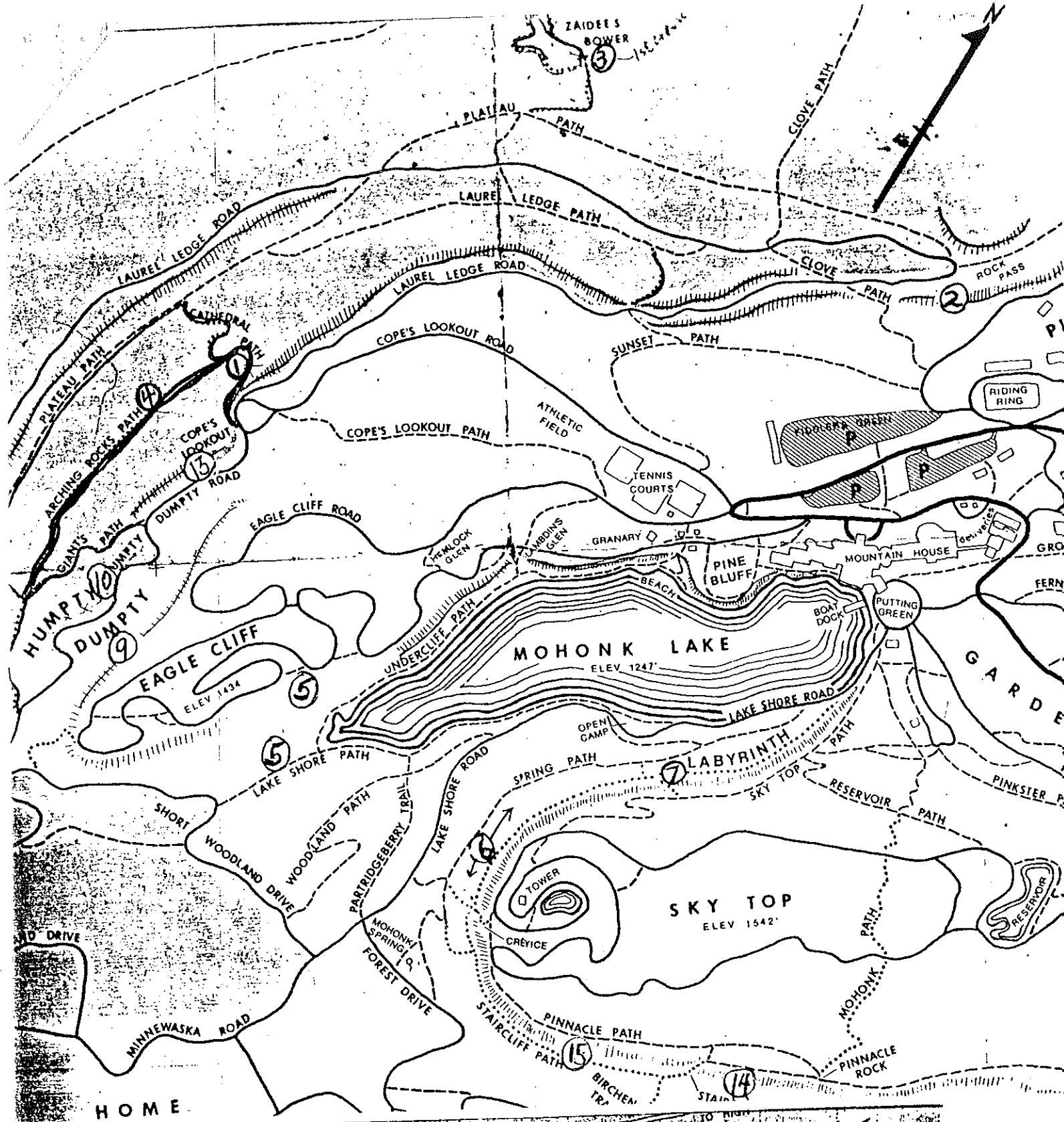
15. Falcon Aerie, Sky Top

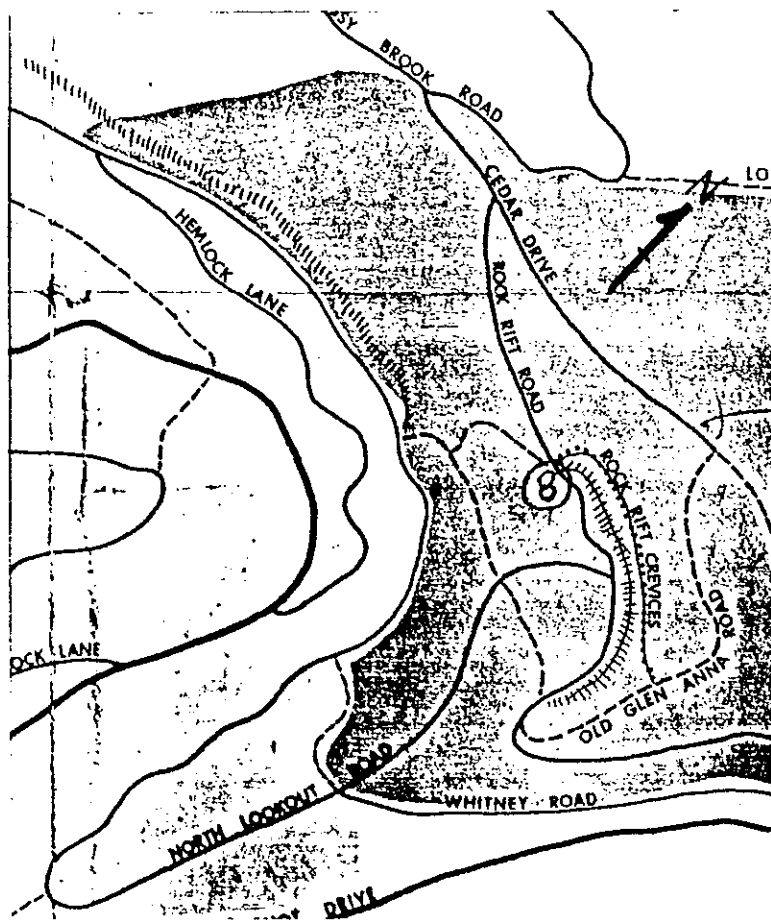
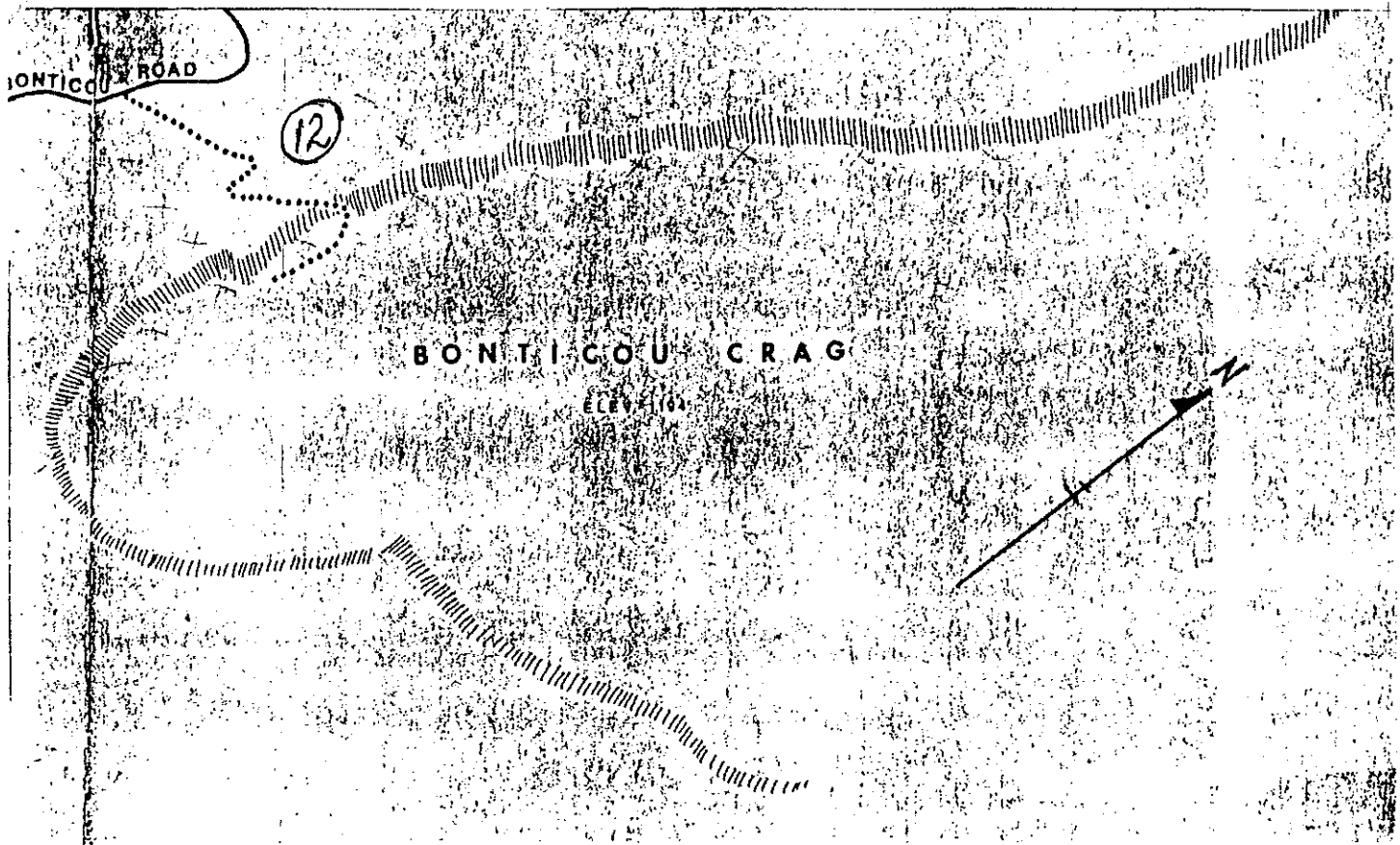
October 20 - On ledge near nest site, 1 small pile. In crack behind ledge, individual woodrat and porcupine scats found.

Note: Old woodrat scats were also found in a cursory check of the talus below Dickie Barre, an area not previously searched for woodrat evidence.

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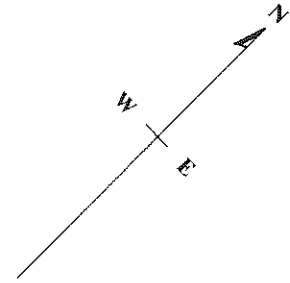
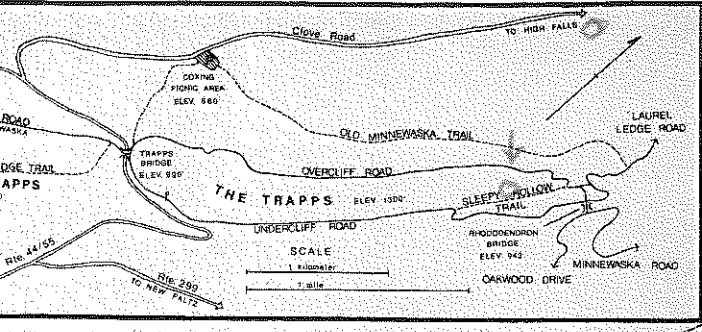
Wood Rat Records

MOHONK MAP FOR DAY VISITORS

SMILEY BROTHERS, INC. MOHONK LAKE, NEW PALTZ, N.Y. 12561

1930-1973

D. Smiley



LEGEND

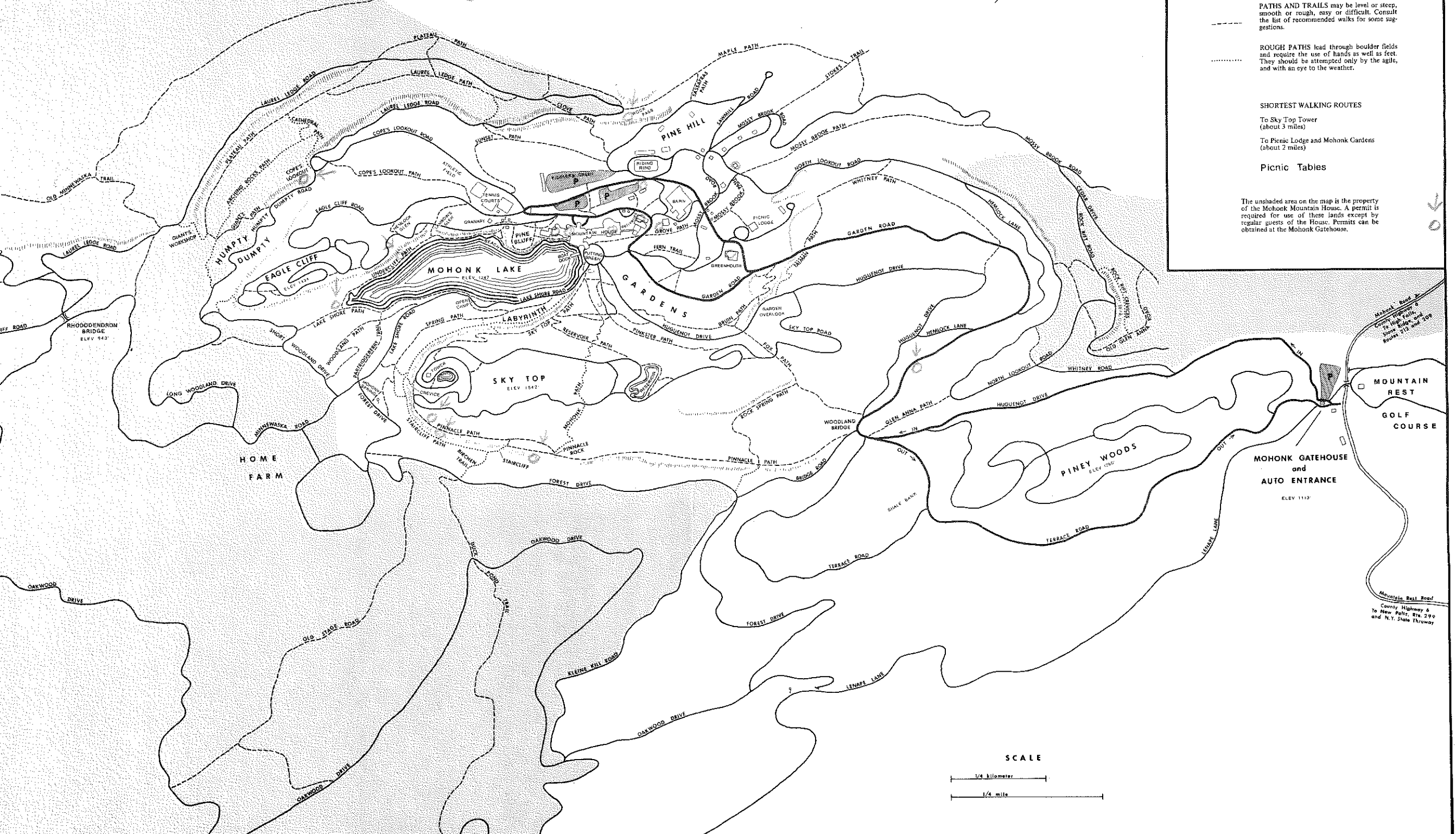
- PUBLIC ROAD
- MOHONK AUTO ROAD
- CARRIAGE ROADS generally have shale surfaces and moderate grades. They are the first choice for easy walking, ski-touring, and horseback riding.
- CLIFF LINE
- PATHS AND TRAILS may be level or steep, smooth or rough, easy or difficult. Consult the list of recommended walks for some suggestions.
- ROUGH PATHS lead through boulder fields and require the use of hands as well as feet. They should be attempted only by the agile, and with an eye to the weather.

SHORTEST WALKING ROUTES

- To Sky Top Tower (about 3 miles)
- To Picnic Lodge and Mohonk Gardens (about 2 miles)

Picnic Tables

The unshaded area on the map is the property of the Mohonk Mountain House. A permit is required for use of these lands except by regular guests of the House. Permits can be obtained at the Mohonk Gatehouse.



SCALE

