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THE CATSKILL GEOLOGISTS BY PROFESSORS ROBERT AND JOHANNA TITUS

Opus 40 – This Summer - You Gotta Go

We like to do a lot of public events all across the Catskills. We do PowerPoint presentations quite frequently. These past two years we have been doing a "book tour" promoting our newest book about the Hudson River School of Art. Then too, we commonly offer geology walks. Robert has scheduled one for his birthday, August 9th; that will be to North Lake. It will be sponsored by the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The group will be hiking up to Sunset Rock near North Lake on that morning. But the big event this summer is a total of five geology walks at Opus 40, near Woodstock, starting this coming Sunday, June 21st, from 10:30 to 12:30. Later walks will occur on July 19th, Aug. 23rd, Sept. 19th and Oct.11th.

Opus 40 was, long ago, just a run-of-the mill bluestone quarry. It closed but, decades later, it was purchased by Harvey Fite, a sculptor and professor of art at Bard College. Fite specialized in bluestone sculpture and thought he would use the quarry for the raw material he used in his art. He, indeed, did carve a number of stone statues and some of those are still on display at Opus 40. But Fite gradually began to conceive of the whole quarry itself as becoming a single gigantic work of art. For almost 40 years he labored to create a massive work of what are called dry wall sculptures. He picked up endless numbers of stones and piled them up to create aesthetically pleasing structures. The centerpiece is a single towering obelisk. See our second photo. This is a most remarkable site, and it is open to the public (for a fee). If you haven't been there then you owe it to yourself to plan a visit. And Robert is hoping to see you there on one of this summer's walks. Keep an eye on our facebook page "The Catskill Geologist" for details.

What is the purpose of these walks? Well, there are several. Of course, seeing this work of art is at the top of the list. This is a most remarkable, even unique sculpture. And it is right here in our Catskills. It's something that we should be proud of. Then there is the geology. The quarry has exposed up a lot of bedrock where it can be easily viewed. We think of it as being one of the best places to see a truly representative cross-sectional view of Catskill geology – that's the geology of the almost 400-million-year-old petrified Catskill Delta. You can see all of the typical Catskills sedimentary rocks right there. We will especially be looking at the delta's ancient river channels.

But, most importantly, Robert aims to show how this type of science works. How does a geologist think when working in the field? How do geologists walk up to outcrops and put together pictures of the distant pasts? Get your calendar out and please see if you can join one of these walks.

Contact the authors at randjtitus@prodigy.net. Join their facebook page "The Catskill Geologist." Read their blogs at "thecatskillgeologist.com."

Trap Team Makes Middleburgh Proud

The Middleburgh Knights Trap Team competed Friday June 5the Bridgeport. Photo courtesy Christy Smith-Layton.

A CONVERSATION ABOUT:

Dragonflies and Damselflies

By Jean Thomas

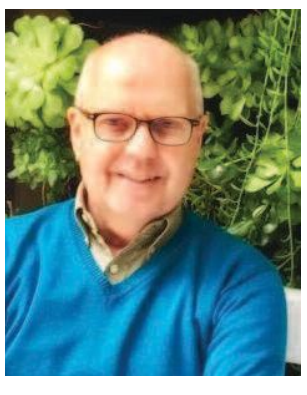
Dragonflies and Damselflies; they are magical, if you ask me. They're gorgeous little insects that disobey many of the rules of insect life and inspire all sorts of legends because of their "out of this world" behavior. Anyone who spends time near water in the summer will most likely see dragonflies and/or damselflies. They appear once the day has warmed enough, as they need warmth and sunlight to become airborne. They are fascinating tiny acrobats that come in a rainbow of colors and sizes. The prehistoric ones could be as big as twenty four inches across, but the biggest ones in New York State are about three inches long. The Common Green Darner is a very common one, and can be found almost everywhere in North America. Oh, and these are migratory, like the Monarch butterfly. They're not just a seasonal novelty, though. The family Odonata includes about two hundred species in New York State, both dragons and damsels. The Damsel flies are daintier and hold their wings differently. All four of their wings are the same size. The Dragonflies are stockier, with bigger eyes in proportion to their heads, and the wings are sized differently with the front ones larger. The name "Odonata" is from the Greek for "toothed ones". While no insect has teeth, the Odonata have adapted their mouth parts to resemble teeth, and boy, are their close-ups scary! Romantics envision these insects as symbols of peaceful country life. The reality is the opposite. They are the top of their food chain as predators, both as larva and as insects. We call them darning needles or devils arrows and fear them because they look like they would sting and they dart around so quickly. The Dragonfly is a creature of contrasts. They have no stinger and their bite is no threat to humans. But for mosquitoes, blackflies and gnats they are ace predators. They hunt in midair, often in mixed-species swarms (each species inhabits its own level). I have often seen these swarms over my lawn in the evening, and even driven through them going past ponds or creeks.

Their life cycle is different from most insects, and is called "incomplete metamorphosis". This is because they skip the pupa stage and go directly from larval to adult stage. Larry Federman is my go-to expert on these beautiful flying jewels, and he resents the term the scientists use, saying the metamorphosis is indeed complete. It just takes three stages instead of four. Listen to my interview with Larry on the "Nature Talks" podcast, episode 29. It's at https://ccecolumbiagreene.org/gardening/nature-calls-conversations-from-the-hudson-valley/episode-29-ramshorn-livingston-sanctuary-and-dragonflies, or whatever podcast platform you use. Back to the life story of the Dragonfly: As larvae, or naiads, they can live up to seven years under water before they become adults. During that time, they are lightning fast hunters, eating anything smaller than themselves, sometimes including tadpoles or small fish. As always, when researching these little guys, I tripped over a really interesting one that is new to me. It's not a pretty one like we're used to, and it looks as scary as its name; the Dragon Hunter. All dragon and damsel flies will eat other dragonfly family members. They're pretty, not courteous. But the Dragon Hunter is a big unattractive guy that not only eats other dragonflies, but has a taste for Monarch butterflies! Who knew?

Of course, the cycle is endless. Both life stages also serve as food for other, larger species. They are important in the overall ecosystem, and so far have remained populous. Their main threat at this time is loss of wetland habitat. It may happen that some types are under threat as humans keep "improving" things and as climate change alters weather and creates fire and drought threats.

To learn more about these creatures, take advantage of this: New York State conducted a five year survey of Odonates and the results are available at https://www.nynhp.org/projects/nydds/. It's like eating peanuts. Once you start, you're going to want more. The report is on a PDF available through the website.

Bob Vedder's "Thoughts to Live By" on Page D4



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