Palm Sunday Pilgrimage in the Wilderness

"God is as near us as ever He was" writes Esopus naturalist, John Burroughs, "why should we take our revelations at second hand?"   And so, on Palm Sunday, nature lovers from the mid-Hudson chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club – founded in Poughkeepsie 65 years ago – continue their half-century tradition of a pilgrimage in Harriman State Park and attending services at the Episcopal Saint John's Church-in-the-Wilderness.

Events of the day include a choice of two morning hikes, Palm Sunday Services at 12:30, a hikers' church service at 3:00 p.m., and a reception in the barn at 4:00. Hikers who are not club members are welcomed to join the hikes, and people of all faiths are welcome to the church services.

St. John's pastor is the Reverend Dr. Richard Jeske, who tells us: "This church is named after Saint John the Evangelist, the author of the Gospel of John in the New Testament. He speaks of God's creation in his first chapter, and on Palm Sunday we'll read what he has written, as we welcome hikers from near and far who regularly make their pilgrimages to witness the wonders of God's creation."

The Saint John's Church was born of tragedy. In 1879, John and Margaret Zimmerman were a young wealthy couple from New York City, traveling through the Middle East on their honeymoon. While dining at a café in Palestine, Mr. Zimmerman choked to death. Returning to New York in mourning, Margaret Zimmerman sought to build a memorial to her husband. Purchasing 250 acres from the Conklin family – whose name is found throughout historic sites on Harriman trail maps – and enlisting the architect Ralph Townsend, construction on the church began. Using local hornblend granite and a Northern England architectural design chosen by Mrs. Zimmerman, the cornerstone was laid in 1880. Period religious artifacts were sealed within the cornerstone including three coins to mark the year, Wayne's Centennial Medal, the Centennial Bible, a church hymnal, and the New York Herald of June 23, 1880. In1883, the facility was expanded to include a school for orphaned boys which continued in operation until 1918.

This year, Palm Sunday coincides with the first weekend of spring. Whether sweeping the cobwebs from your mind, doing spring cleaning of the soul, or simply needing to shed your winter legs, Palm Sunday in the wilderness is a refreshing breeze of fresh air.

If you go:

The **shorter hike of the day**, which is sponsored by the Appalachian Mountain Club, is 8 miles long. The trek is described by the leader, Tom Parliment, as a "Pleasant hike through southern Harriman, ending at St. John's in the Wilderness Church for service at 3 p.m." Contact tparliment@verizon.net for more information.

In the **longer hike of the day** which is 10 miles, this trek begins on the Ramapo-Dunderberg Trail which is the oldest trail through Harriman State Park. After visiting the hideout of Claudius Smith's Den, the hike continues on the Blue Disc Trail which AMC Hiking Committee chairman, Stacy Gould, cites as her "favorite scenic trail in all of Harriman." On the White Cross Trail, participants take a few minutes for silent meditation. And on the return Trinity Trail, participants share verses from their favorite psalms. For more information, contact skipnewyork@yahoo.com or check the website www.meetup.com/Hudson-River-Valley-ADK-Outdoors-Recreation-Conservation/events/104422002/.

Trail maps of Harriman State Park are published through the New York – New Jersey Trail Conference and are available at www.nynjtc.org.

For **church services**, Saint John's in-the-Wilderness is located at 16 Johnsontown Road in Stony Point. Access is off Seven Lakes Drive in Harriman State Park. The website is www.stjohnsinthewilderness.org. Contact 845-786-0366 for further information.