

The Burroughs Encampment – Communion with Nature

By Skip Doyle

“One has only to sit down in the woods or the fields, or by the shore of the river or the lake, and nearly everything of interest will come round to him.” writes John Burroughs in his essay, *A Sharp Lookout*, “So, on a large scale, the student and lover of nature has this advantage over the people who gad up and down the world, seeking some novelty or excitement; he has only to stay at home and see the procession pass.” So to celebrate creation in our own backyard, the brothers of the Holy Cross Monastery in the town of Esopus have invited the Adirondack Mountain Club to camp along the shore of our Hudson River to attend the Slabsides open house on May 18, and to hike the nearby woods of the Black Creek Forest on May 19. “We are all stewards of the Earth,” says Brother Scott Borden, prior of Holy Cross Monastery, “In our monastic community we already have several environmental initiatives underway; it is only natural that we open our doors in fellowship to those who share this mission.”



It is but twice a year, that Slabsides, cabin of John Burroughs – nature writer of the turn of the century – is open to the public: the third Saturday in May and the first Saturday in October. Slabsides Day includes morning walks through the trails of the John Burroughs Sanctuary (located off Floyd Ackert Road in Esopus, NY), a welcome by Joan Burroughs (granddaughter of John Burroughs), guided tours of the cabin, and a noontime lecture – this year by Matt Skipkey of Scenic Hudson who will talk about the Hudson River Valley lands protected by Scenic Hudson and its generous citizens.

John Burroughs was one of the best know writers of his day. Without TV, the Internet, or even radio, people were focused on the written word: reading was as much for entertainment as it was for education – John Burroughs provided both. And without electronics as a diversion of the mind and audio/visual stimulation, people ventured into the outdoors both for the love of learning and to experience life with all their senses. As much as depicting the nuances of nature in his writings, John Burroughs inspired readers to venture into nature, learn about nature, and to experience nature firsthand. In the later 1800’s when religious revival was encouraging a personal relationship with God not only in church services, but also through open air revivals and spiritual tent meetings, John Burroughs was evangelizing an individual, intimately personal relationship with nature. Jeff Walker, professor at Vassar College and author of the John Burroughs book, *Signs & Seasons*, explains, “John Burroughs sought to convert everyone into a nature lover not only in espousing the wonders of natures, but by leading people into nature by showing people how assessable nature is. He did this not only through his writings, but by personally taking individuals to Slabsides—from national figures like Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Ford, and John Firestone, to the scholarly students of Vassar, to opening his study to his neighbors.”

On Sunday, May 19, participants in the encampment will explore the nearby Black Creek Forest. Says Rita Sheenan, director of parks for Scenic Hudson, “Scenic Hudson is not only about preserving the natural beauty of the Hudson River Valley, it is about access and health. Through trail and outdoors programs, we promote people to visit these places both to foster a sense of health for our environment and also for a healthy mind, body and spirit of those individuals who walk these properties.”

This Burroughs Encampment is sponsored by the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK). “It is the mission of the ADK,” explains mid-Hudson Chapter chairman, Peter McGinnis, “To education about nature, protect nature, and to enjoy nature. The Burroughs Encampment is a way in which we do all three. Membership in the ADK is open to all; we have a vast array of conservation and recreation programs – hiking, kayaking, snow sports, and more. Through our website (midHudsonADK.org) or by contacting the leader of the Burroughs Encampment, Skip Doyle (SkipNewYork@yahoo.com), you can immediately become anADK member to participate in the many natural wonders of our Hudson River Valley.