

Pratt Rock Park

Initial Concept Plan

PRATT PARK COMMITTEE

TOWN OF PRATTSVILLE, NEW YORK

Hemlock carving on Pratt Rock bench



Pratt Rock Park

Initial Concept Plan

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The Pratt Park Initial Concept Plan was presented to the Prattville Town Board on 21 October 2019, and prepared in 2019-2020 for

The Pratt Park Committee and the Town of Prattville, NY

by

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Pratt Rock Park overlooking Schoharie Creek

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Introduction



Arm and hammer carvings on Pratt Rock

Preserve

For Pratt Rock Park to remain an area of interest for years to come, the carvings that first established the Park's identity must be preserved. The iconic monument memorializes the early history of Prattville and symbolizes a connection between the landscape and local culture. Conservation experts will be engaged to conduct a full conditions assessment, including site visits and archival research. They will then develop a plan to restore and protect the Pratt Rock Carvings for future visitors to experience within their picturesque setting.

Reveal & Enhance

Making Pratt Rock Park more accessible is vital for the park to play a larger part in the Prattville community. The best way to improve the park and attract new visitors is through enhancing the natural assets of its landscape by strategically planting new, native trees and thoughtfully managing the existing flora. Stabilizing trails, restoring retaining walls, renovating benches, and adding landings will both attract more casual visitors by improving access to the park's striking views and make the park usable for people with mobility limitations.

Provide Access

A revitalization of the entry landscape and redesign of the park's signage will improve how the park announces itself to visitors and turn the northwestern entrance, closest to the town center, into the main pedestrian access point. These improvements will reinvigorate the monument and its landscape, opening the park up to a new, larger audience.

Pratt Rock Park

New York's Mount Rushmore

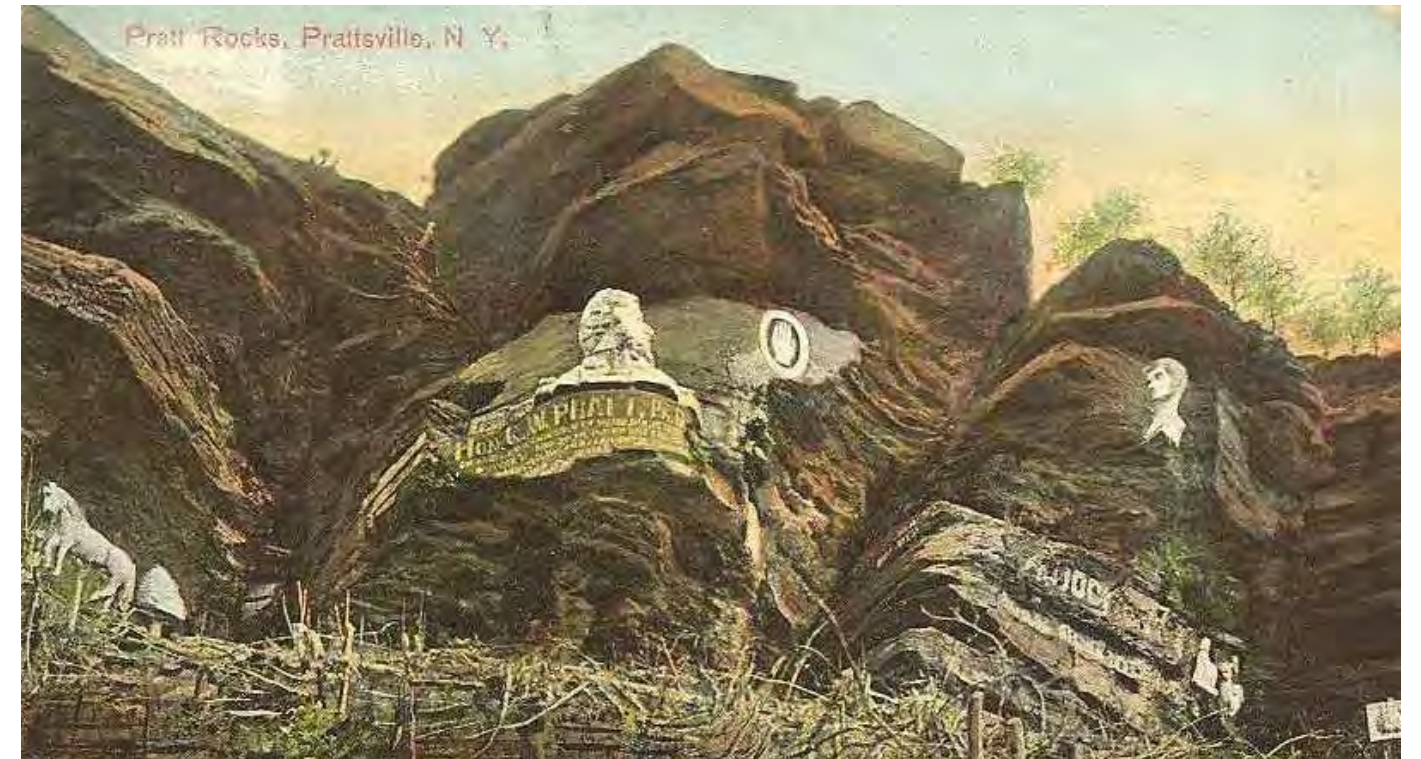
Located in New York's Catskill Mountain Range, the town of Prattsville and Pratt Rock Park are an everyday oasis for residents and a dynamic natural retreat for visitors. The proposal outlined in this document aims to preserve, reinforce, and improve access to Pratt Rock Park through an accentuation of the town's centuries-old history and the protection of the landscape, ensuring that this remains a treasured Catskill park for years to come. Conservation of the Pratt Rock Carvings and restoration of trail elements such as steps, benches, stairs, and stone walls can reinvigorate Pratt Rock Park's original function within this iconic New York landscape.

THE SCHOHARIE VALLEY AND PRATTSVILLE

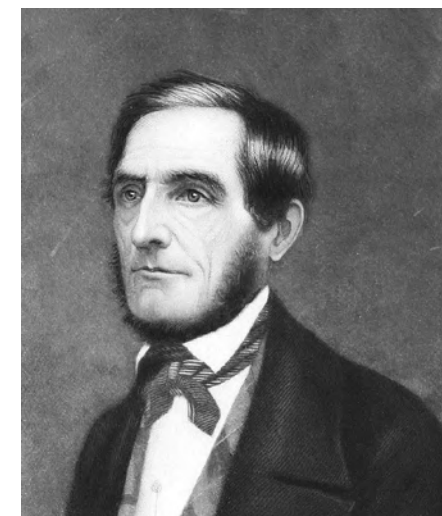
Prattsville is located in the scenic Schoharie Valley. The word "Schoharie" is attributed to the Mohawk Tribe, early inhabitants of the Schoharie Valley. Translating to "floating driftwood," the term calls to mind places in the valley where wood debris from the creek finds its way onto riverbanks. In the early 1800s, Colonel Zadock Pratt arrived at a settlement known as "Schoharie Kill." By the time he arrived, the Schoharie Valley had a long history of farming and industry, dating back to early settlements by Dutch and German farmers. Pratt built a large new tannery in Prattsville, transforming the village and giving it importance in the regional and even national economy.

PRATT ROCK PARK

Wanting to give Prattsville a public park, Zadock Pratt worked on Pratt Rock, located on land he owned, for more than twenty years, and donated it to the public before his death in 1871. The park encompasses a portion of the steep hill and sheer cliff face above the Schoharie Creek along Route 23. Both a regional and national landmark, it was listed in 1992 on the New York State and National Register of Historic Places. The park's original charge was to serve as a place to hike, picnic, and enjoy the surrounding views. However, Pratt hired a supposedly jobless stonemason to memorialize his own accomplishments in the grey sandstone cliffs above his park. It is said that stonecutter worked continuously for 20 years to finish the intricate carvings. Although the carvings are not massive, Pratt Rock has been called "America's first Mount Rushmore," and is even considered the nation's first Civil War monument as it includes a memorial to Pratt's son George.



Postcard of Pratt Rock Park, ca. 1909



Portrait of Zadock Pratt



View of Prattsville, N.Y., 1844

CATSKILLS WATERSHED

The Schoharie Creek, its reservoir, and the nearby Shandaken tunnel are parts of the Catskill/Delaware Watershed, which feed directly into New York City's water supply systems. Due to regulations outlined in the Clean Water Act, the Department of Environmental Protection closely monitors and protects this watershed in order to maintain the highest possible quality of water, aid in the conservation of wildlife, and promote public enjoyment of this incredible resource.

The watershed is located in the Appalachian plateau—which consists of sedimentary rock formations made from layers of sandstone, conglomerate ridges, and less resistant limestone and shale. The area's geological makeup dates back to the Ice Age, when the ice sheets in this area left behind both a significant layer of glacial till and bedrock.

HURRICANE IRENE

On August 28, 2011, Hurricane Irene's rainstorms hit the region and caused record flooding of Schoharie Creek, which rose more than 16 feet, destroying much of Prattsville. Main Street was hit particularly hard—every structure was either partially or completely destroyed. Today, the town has been rebuilt. However, the proximity to the creek and the rising threat of climate change-related flood events are a reminder that any future plan for Prattsville needs to be mindful of its environment.

TREE GROWTH

Although there were great benefits to the local economy, Pratt's industrial ventures—which eventually led to an increase in logging and the establishment of mills in the Schoharie Creek as the tannery expanded—had a significant adverse effect on the local environment. By the time the tannery closed in 1845, the surrounding mountains had been stripped bare of hemlocks. The new growth in the forests of Pratt Rock Park is both an example of natural resilience and a reminder of the area's industrial history.

Today, Prattsville's Town Board has made the preservation and promotion of Pratt Rock Park a priority. Renovations to the park will improve access for a wide range of visitors to enjoy and explore the unique character of this historic place. In particular, a conservation effort will ensure that the carvings remain a part of the Prattsville visitor's experience for centuries to come. Once the initial renovations have been completed, Pratt Rock Park will be connected to other trails around Prattsville, incorporating this site into the surrounding network of remarkable hikes and natural amenities.



New York City's water supply system



Houses destroyed after Hurricane Irene



"Peeling, and piling hemlock bark, for Prattsville Tannery," ca. 1850



Pratt Rock Park today

Pratt Rock Park Today



Pratt Rock
Carvings

Stone
Walls

Trail

Stair
Entrance

Stone Wall

Route 23

Parking

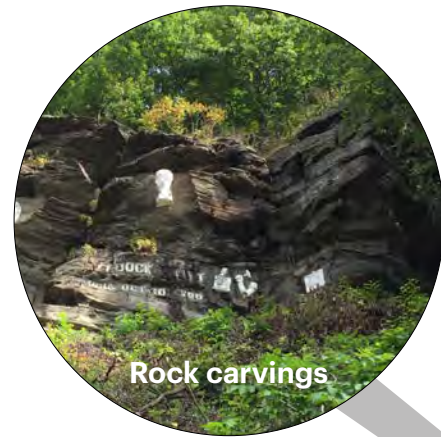
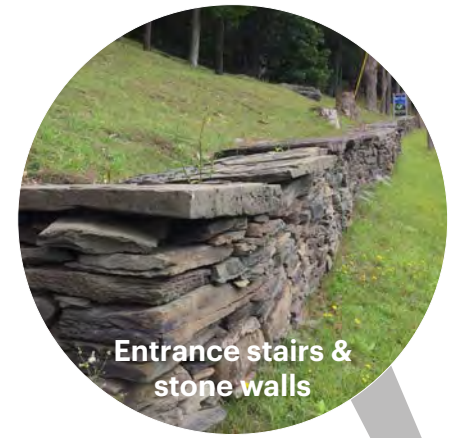
to Prattsville

to Windham / Lexington

Schoharie Creek



Trail Features



Schoharie
Creek

Route to
Prattsville

Trail

Pratt Rock

Preserve



Pratt Rock carvings today



Bust of Zadock Pratt

Conserve Pratt Rock Carvings

The Pratt Rock Carvings are a unique reminder of the history and development of Prattsville. However, without a conservation strategy the iconic monuments are at serious risk of damage from erosion, water infiltration, and vegetation growth. In creating a concept plan for Pratt Rock Park, MVVA's first priority is to conserve and protect the historic carvings.

MVVA's concept plan for this conservation work builds on the recommendations of experts in the field of monument conservation and restoration. The conservation plan will follow four phases.

INITIAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The first step in developing a responsible conservation and stabilization program for a historic monument is an Initial Needs Assessment that takes into account the fact that underlying damage may be concealed by previous repairs. The scope of an Initial Needs Assessment can be readily defined and priced, and the data generated from it will allow the design team to make well-informed decisions about the scope and cost of the next phases of work.

Initial Site Work

The conservators will carry out a preliminary visual survey of all exterior masonry materials. They will develop and submit a photographic conditions glossary that will include each existing condition. The experts may observe conditions that warrant the review of a structural engineer. The data collected from this work will enable the development of recommendations for next steps and related cost estimates to implement the work.

Preliminary Repair Matrix

The team will develop an outline for a building material conservation and repair matrix. This will include (a) a list of conditions observed, (b) potential options for cleaning, stabilization, and/or repair of the observed conditions, (c) unit costs to implement the potential repair option, and (d) preliminary priority designations given to each condition. Starting this matrix early will help the team understand the different parts of the project, how they fit together, and which have the highest priority.

Preliminary Review of Archival Materials

The conservators will review relevant historic information to design a responsible conservation and stabilization program. This includes original construction materials and methods, repairs made over time, historic drawings, and, if appropriate, photographic images.



Conservator during preliminary review



Carved bust of George Pratt



Preliminary Laboratory and On-Site Testing

Preliminary laboratory and on-site testing will be carried out to fine-tune conservation repair materials and methods. This information is critical in the early stage of development of conservation methods that are both physically and aesthetically compatible with the historic materials.

Final Report

The conservator will develop and submit a report describing all tasks executed and their findings.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

More in-depth surveying and testing will be carried out to present small scale mock-ups of potential conservation, stabilization, cleaning, and repair options. Each option will have associated cost estimates. This phase will also include the following:

1. Creation of backgrounds (CAD or photographic) for use in close-up conditions surveys and other documentation needs.
2. Implementation of close-up conditions surveys to define the extent of the work and define priorities. Additional laboratory and on-site testing if required.
3. Implementation of small-scale mock-ups of conservation options for further fine-tuning of materials and methods, client review and approval, and presentation to local, state and/or national authorities.

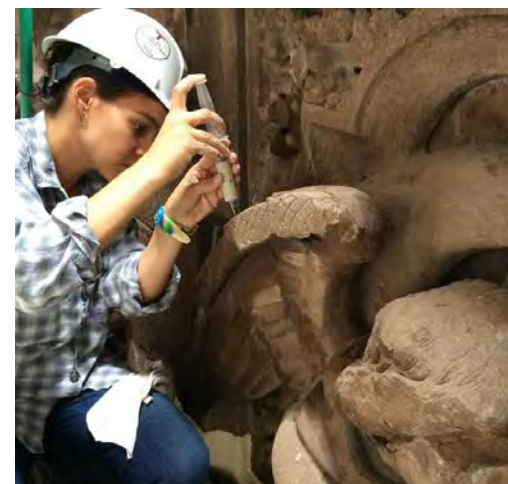


CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

The team will design the specific materials and methods to accomplish the chosen option, as well as develop drawings and specifications to serve as bid documents. Project approval will be obtained from the relevant authorities.

CONSTRUCTION ADMINISTRATION

The conservator will work with the design team to choose a contractor and will provide construction administration and quality control services to ensure that the quality of work developed in the design phase is carried out.



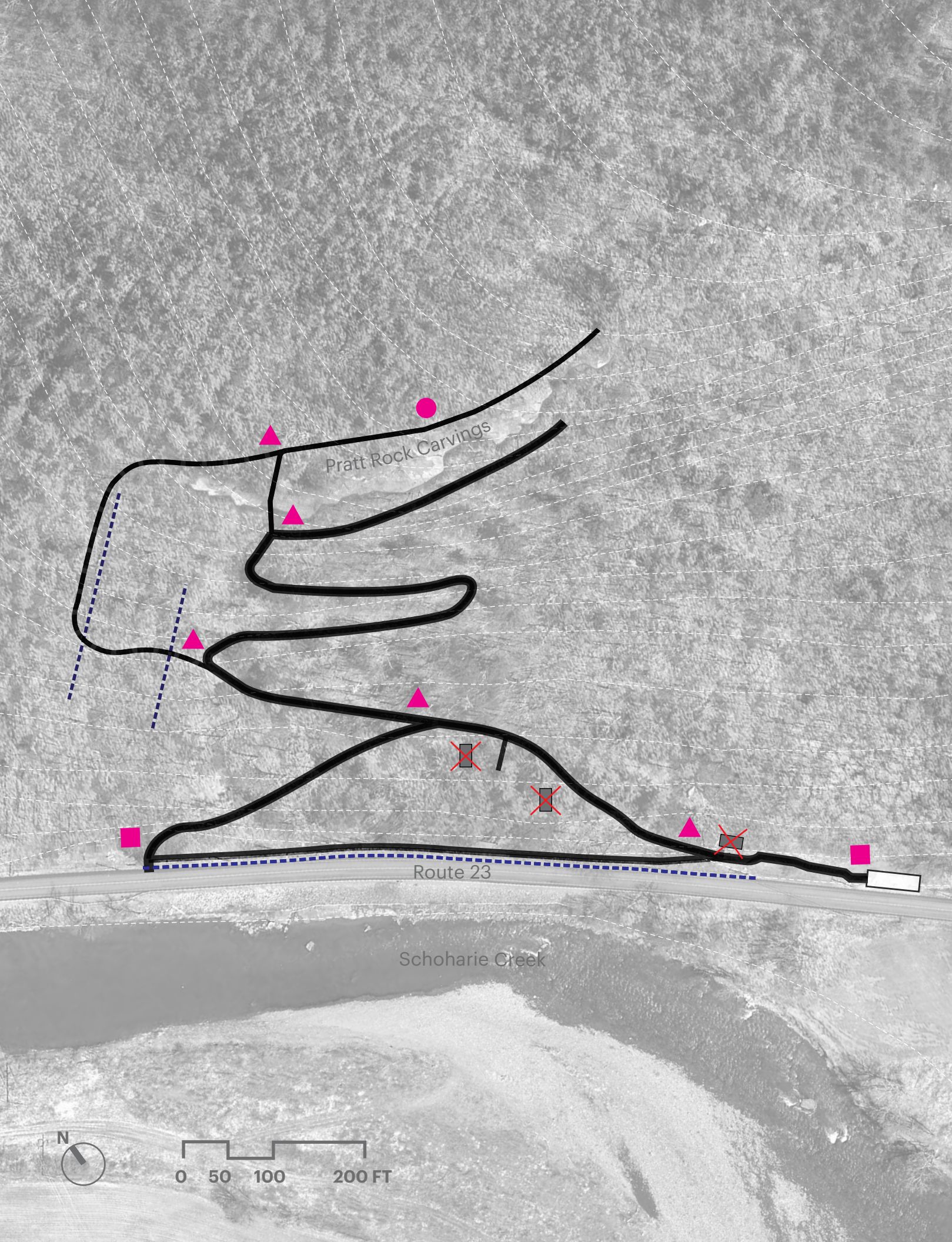
Conservators during laboratory testing, on-site testing, and repair

Reveal & Enhance



The Schoharie Valley seen from the top of Pratt Rock

Announce the Park



SIGNAGE



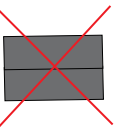
Signage provides trail users all necessary information regarding trails and facilities, in addition to the historical details of the park. Primary and secondary trailhead signs would give an overview of facilities and amenities around the larger site. Directional signs would help guide visitors at crossroads along the trail. To ensure safety while visiting Pratt Rock Park, warning signs would be placed around the site, cautioning hikers about any potential hazards.

- Trailhead signage
- ▲ Directional signage
- Interpretive signage

WOODEN PAVILION AND WALL REMOVAL



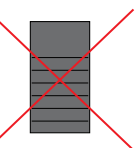
MVVA recommends removing the existing pavilion, which does not align with the original simplicity of Pratt Rock Park's path and approach, and moving the existing park's picnic tables into this area. These picnic tables would offer a resting place at the beginning or end of a visit, and no new furniture would need to be acquired. Also, removing the wooden retaining wall and reinforcing the slope above this area will help reestablish the park's original character.



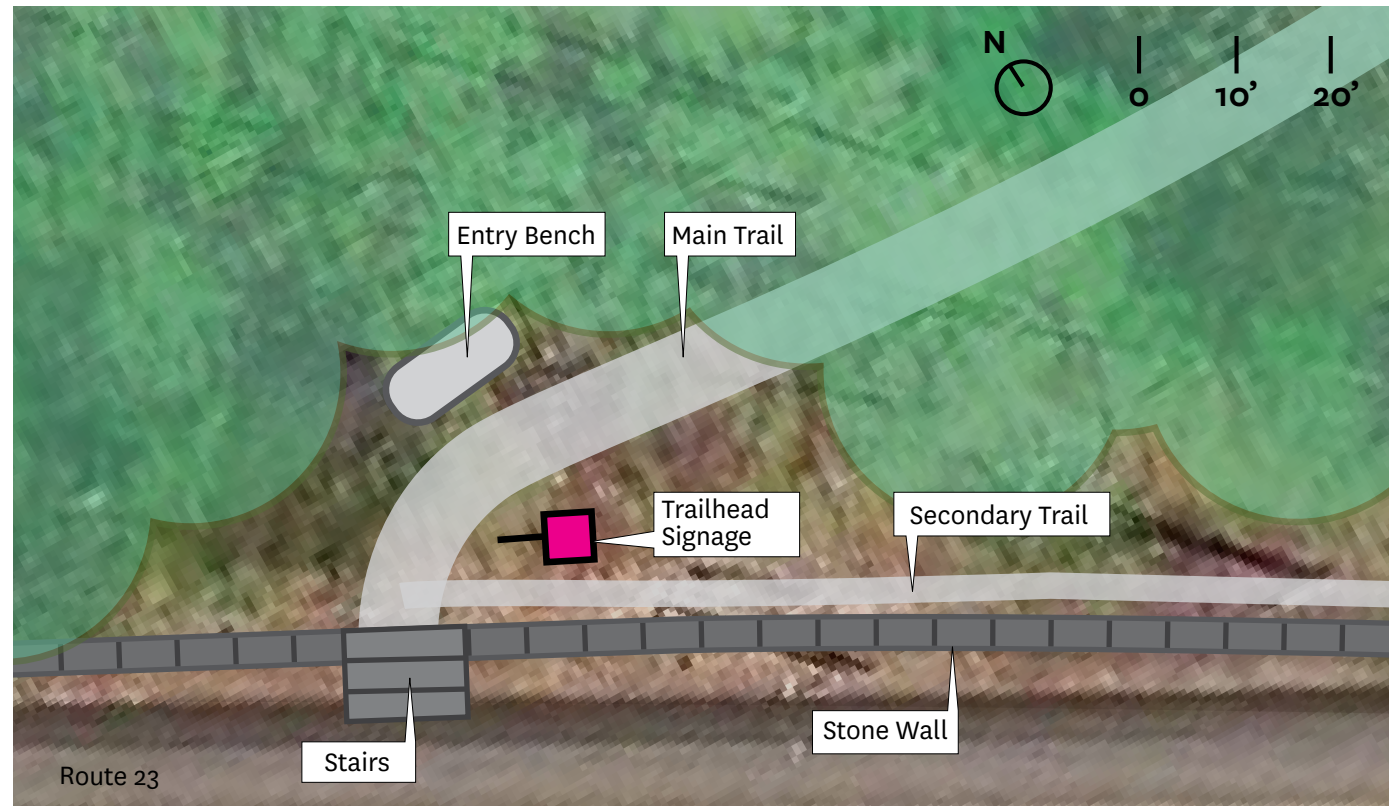
STAIR REMOVAL



The existing wooden stairs were a later addition to the park and interrupt the slow terraced rise to the carvings. Removing the stairs and reinforcing the trails along the terraces would reinstate the original means of traveling to the top of Pratt Rock.



Pedestrian Entrance



For pedestrian visitors entering Pratt Rock Park from the town center, the northwest entrance along Route 23 is the closest access point. With a few key updates, this area could be transformed into an easily accessible and welcoming entry point for the park.

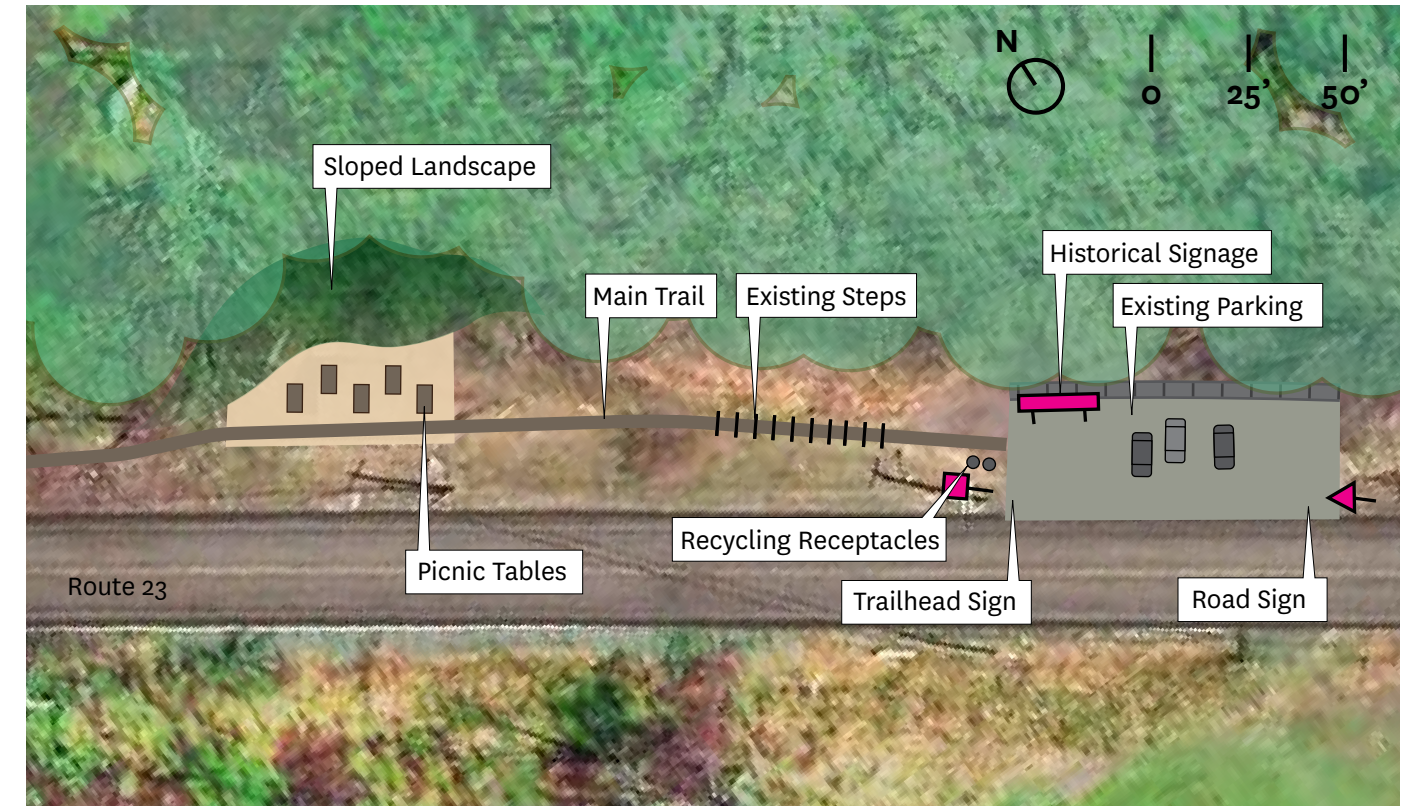
The stone wall and stairs would require renovation in order to ensure they can hold up to the increase in visitors entering the park from this side. Stone steps may need to be reset or supplemented to provide a more manageable ascent. Riser heights are currently very steep.

The entry bench should be preserved. From this angle, visitors will be able to quickly start ascending towards the carvings or turn right to follow the secondary trail along the stone wall.

A trailhead sign will inform visitors about the history of Pratt Rock Park and access to the carvings.



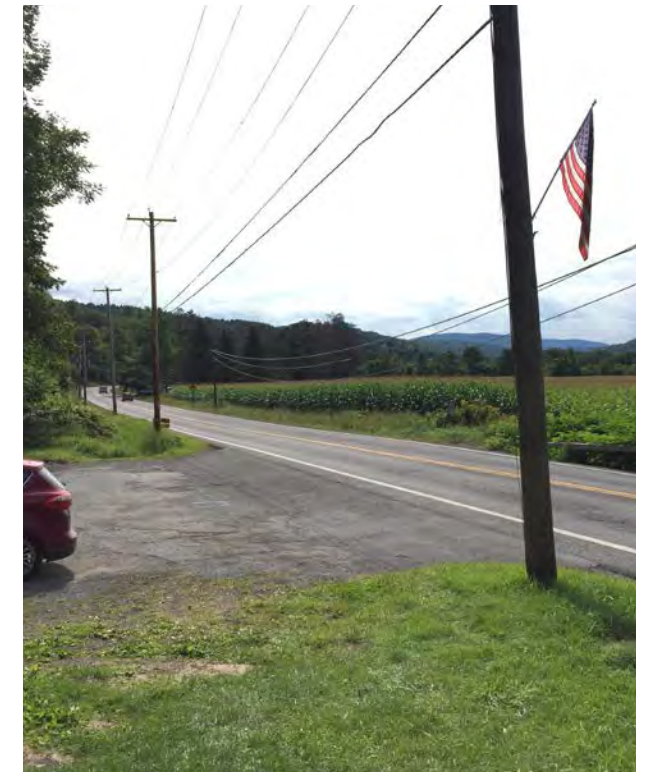
Vehicular Entrance



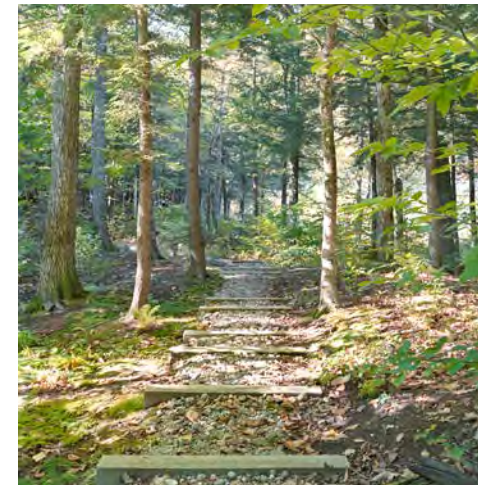
The entrance on the northeast part of the site is currently the main access point for the park. We propose that it remains the main vehicular access point, with a few additions to improve visitor experience.

Added trailhead signage, adjacent to the steps leading to the main trail, could double as road signs signaling to drivers that they have found the entrance and parking for Pratt Rock Park.

Moving up toward the trail, recycling and trash receptacles could be added to prevent garbage from accumulating. MVVA recommends removing the existing pavilion and moving the existing park's picnic tables into this area. No new furniture would need to be added. The existing picnic tables would offer a resting place at the beginning or end of a visit. Also, removing the wooden retaining wall and reinforcing the slope above this area will help reestablish the park's original character.



Stabilize the Trail



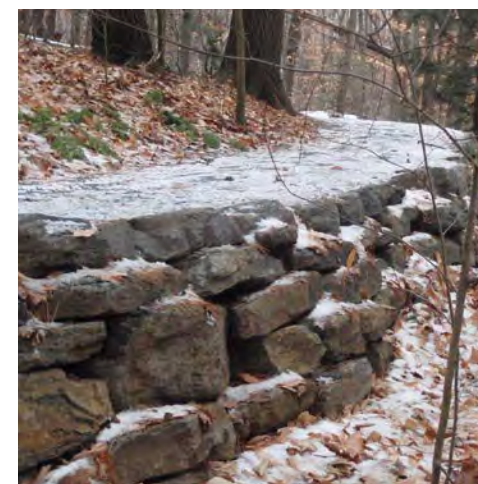
TRAIL STEPS

Steps can be built on steep trail sections to ensure user safety and to help prevent erosion. MVVA's proposal to break up long slopes into a series of short flights of stairs with ample landings in between would vary the experience of the trail and help maintain the dramatic landscape. Steps would be built with salvaged wooden logs, stone found in the park, or precast concrete elements.



RUN-OFF MANAGEMENT

Effective drainage is essential to promoting trail safety and stability, and minimizing maintenance costs. The most effective drainage solutions are often the simplest to implement and maintain. These include: culverts, drainage depressions and dips, cross drains, drainage turnpikes, and switchback drainage. Waterbars could also be used to divert water off the trail treads.

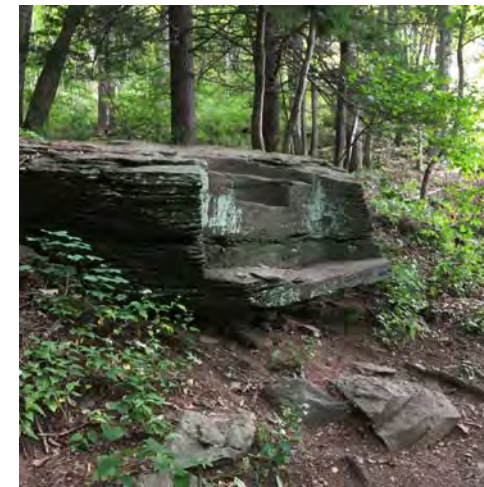
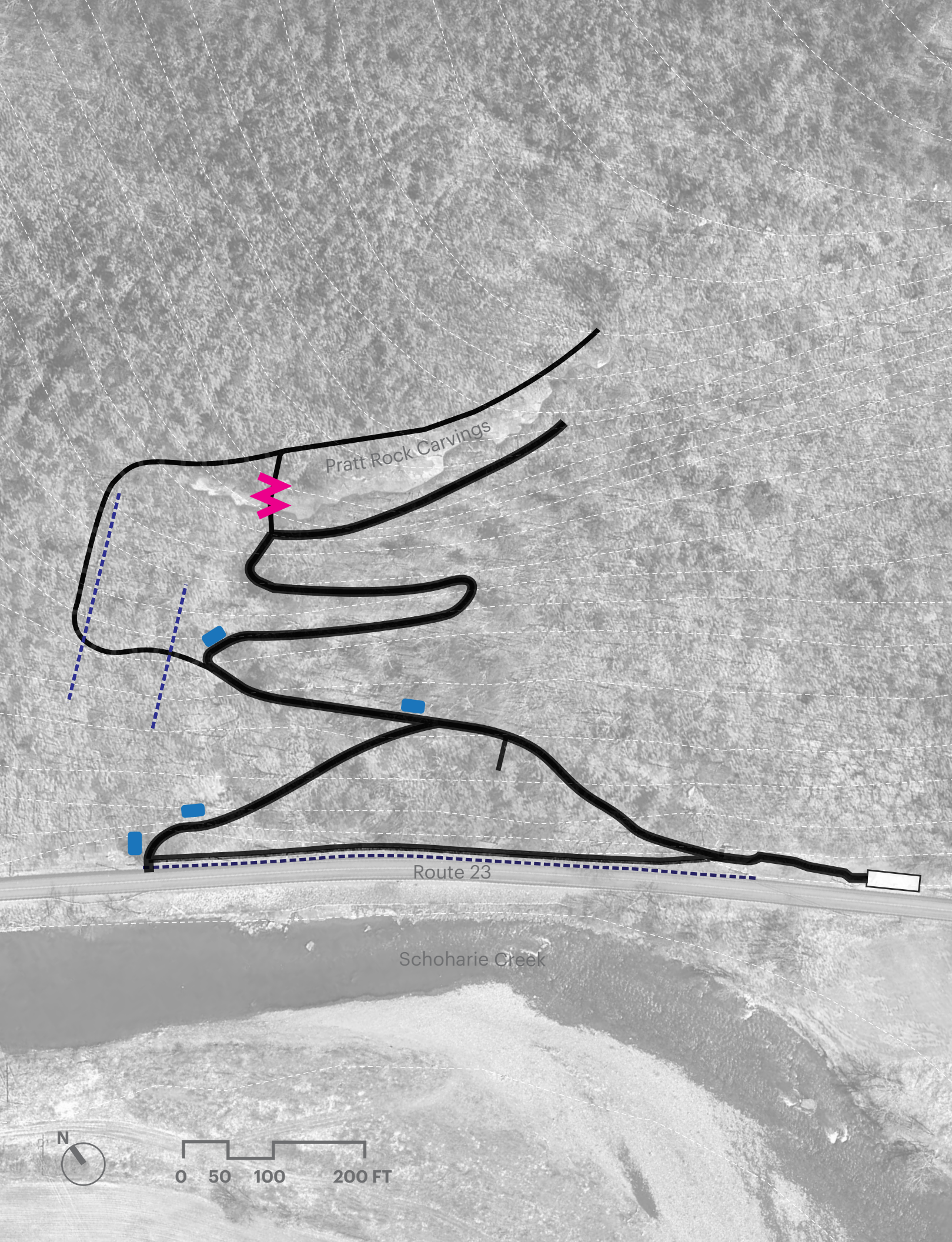


RETAINING WALLS

Retaining walls, usually built from log stones and earth, help retain slopes, prevent erosion, and protect the trails and users from falling debris. Specific recommendations for design and location of retaining walls would be determined based on further study of the site and the materials available.

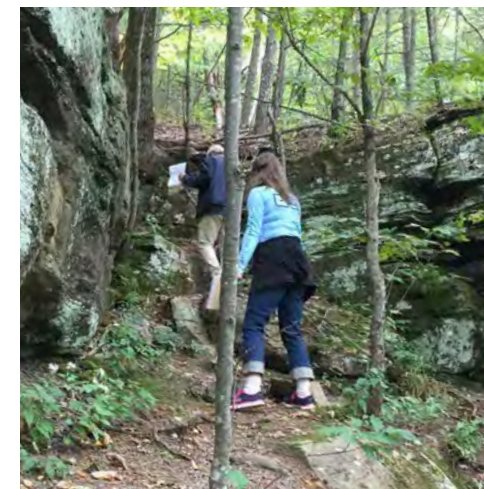


Restore Trail Features



STONE BENCH RENOVATION

To improve trail accessibility for all ages and abilities, providing a variety of seating options is essential. Preserving the stone benches and adding soil and reclaimed forest mulch below them would permit use of the historic stone benches for their intended purpose, currently impossible due to the severely eroded trail surface, which leaves the seating surface 3 to 4 feet above the current path.



STEP CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE

Clearing new growth and adding handrails or a rope to guide visitors through the steeper stepped areas would improve access for the more adventurous hikers. Reorganizing existing stairs on site will improve ease of passage.

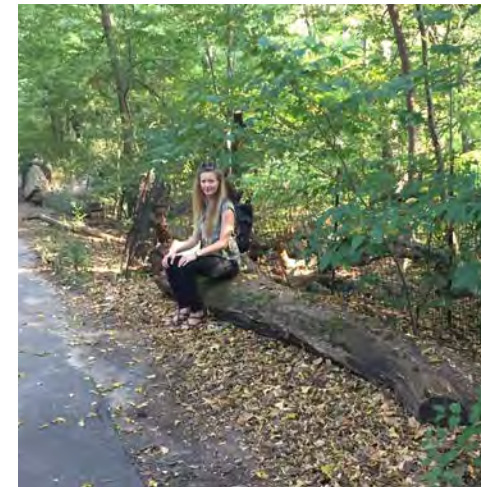
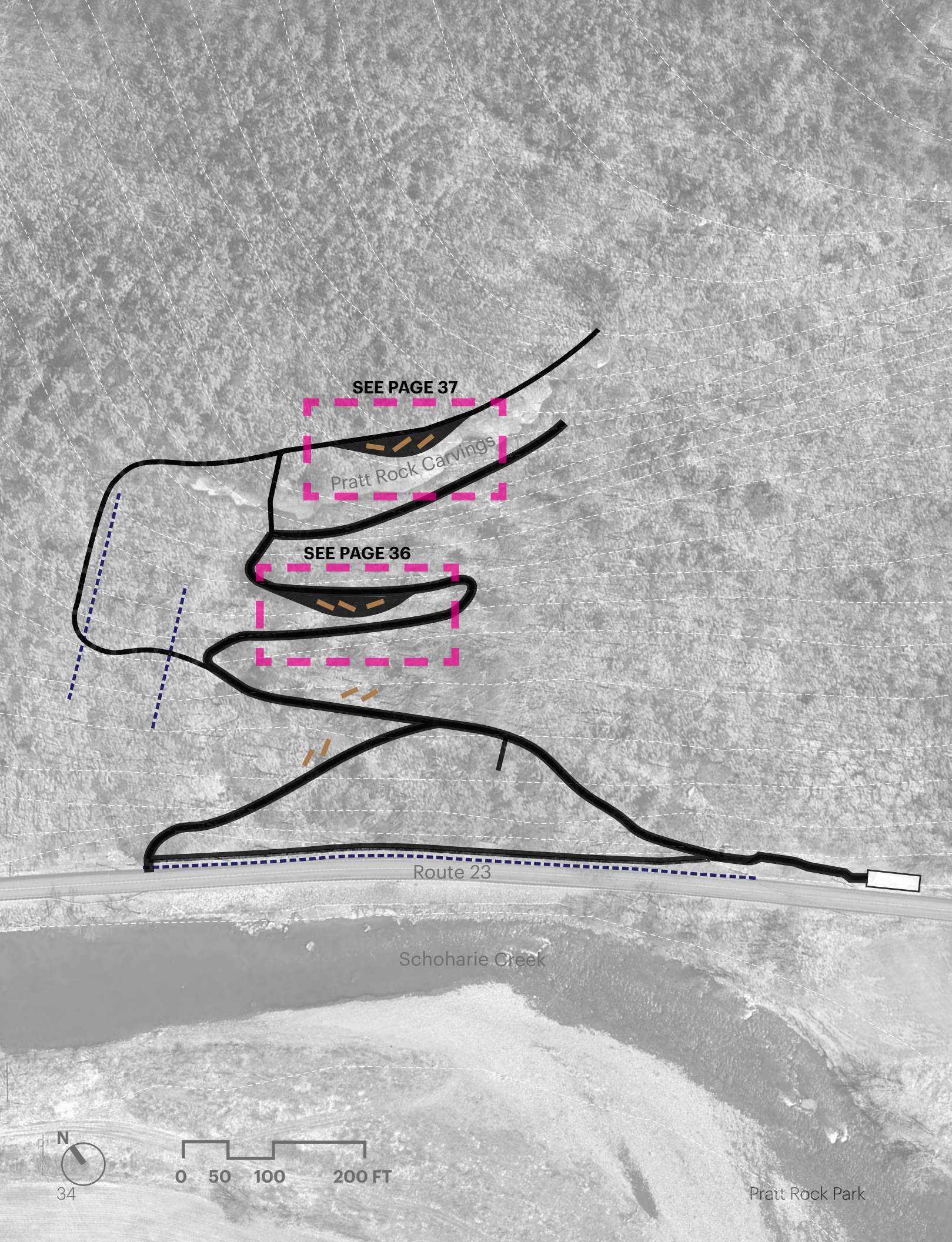


STONE WALL RESTORATION

The stone walls along the trail can be used for wayfinding purposes and are an integral part of the park's history. Restoring these walls would ensure their lasting impact in the park. These updates would require cutting vegetation growth, removing additional soil, and gathering loose stones that have fallen over time.



Build Landings to Reveal Views



LOG BENCH ADDITION

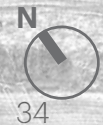
Benches made with reclaimed rot-resistant wood (oak or black locust) found on site would be incorporated along the trail and replaced over time as necessary.



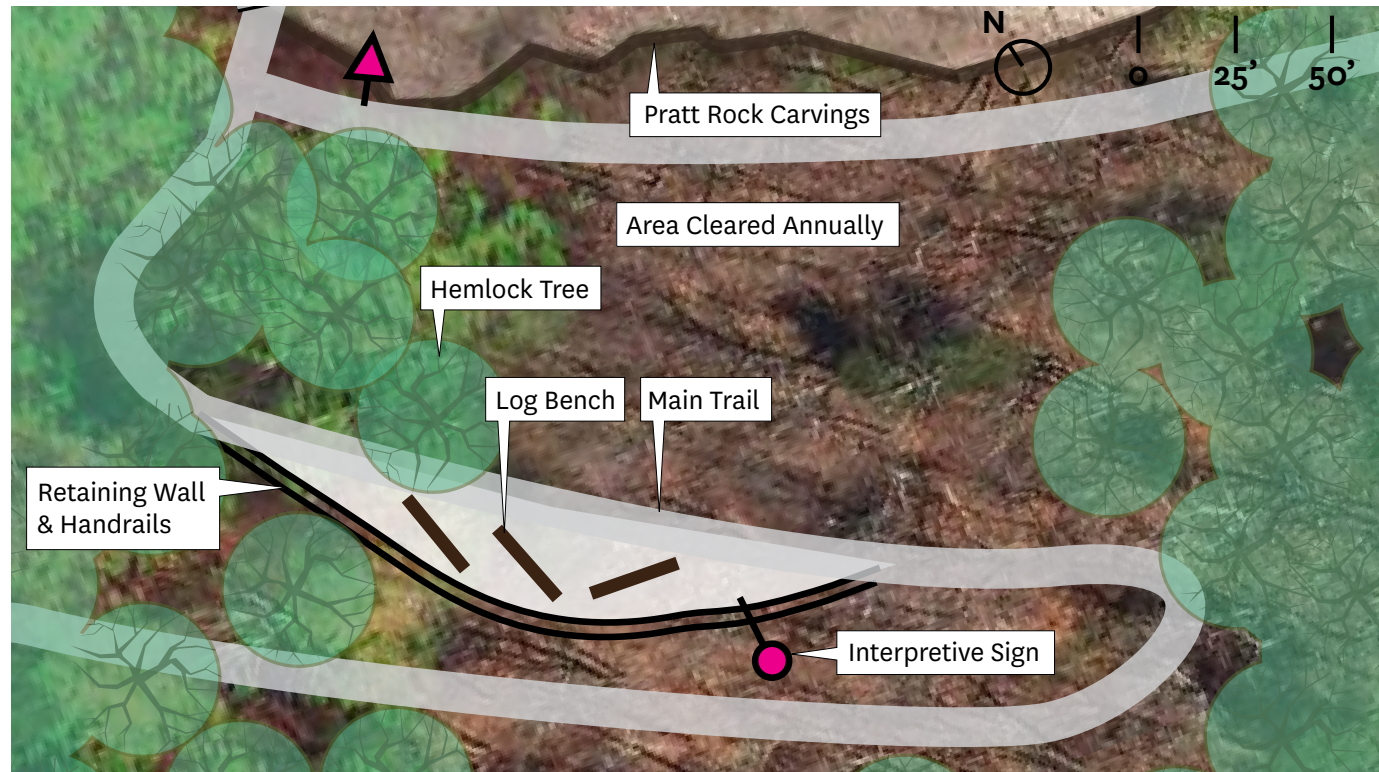
TRAIL AND PRATT ROCK LANDINGS

See pp. 34-35 for enlargement plans

Adding an overlook would provide space for visitors to step back and look at the carvings from below. This could be accomplished by supplementing the trail below the rock carvings with a retaining wall and handrails. At the top of Pratt Rock, a handrail made of rot-resistant wood could be placed 3 to 4 feet from the edge, creating a landing area. It would be invisible from below and therefore preserve views of the carvings, but would ensure safety for visitors at the top.



Pratt Rock Landing



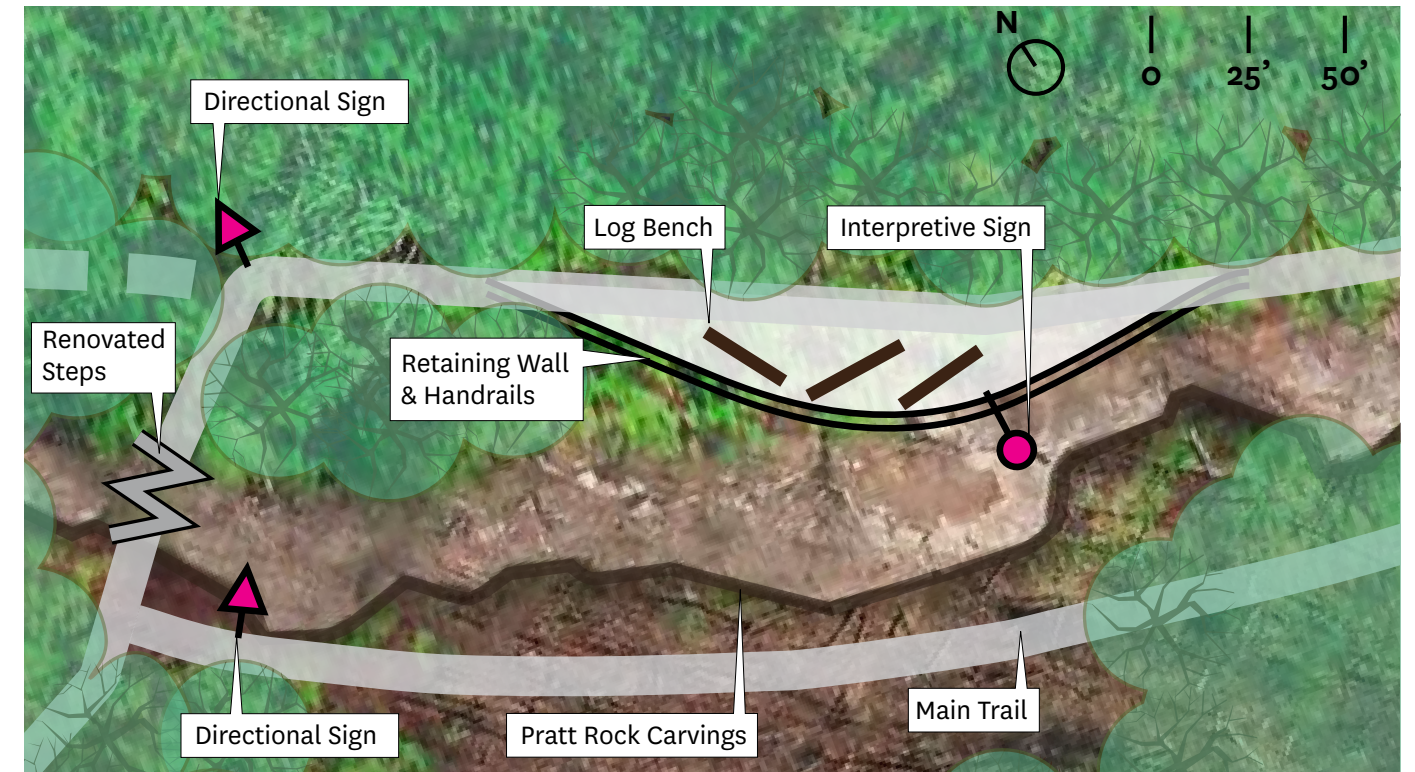
Midway along the trail, MVVA suggests creating an overlook area where the trail becomes wide enough to accommodate benches, signs, and handrails. This location would provide excellent views down to the valley and up to the carvings, with enough space to see both at the same time.

The landscape in this area would be cleared annually and planted with a woody shrub groundcover that would not grow above 2-3 feet (see p.24). A few hemlock trees would be added, providing a visual connection to the history of Prattville. This overlook would feature three benches and a sign explaining the history of Pratt Rock Carvings and the park.



View from the middle of the trail to Pratt Rock

Schoharie Landing



Finally, at the top of the trail near the Pratt Rock carvings, another overlook area will present a peaceful opportunity to contemplate the expansive views out over the valley. It will also provide three log benches and a sign describing the history of the Schoharie Valley and surrounding region. The landing area will be surrounded by a handrail made of reclaimed wood and will guarantee visitor safety.

A series of renovated steps carved into the rock will provide a safe route to the top of the trail. Handrails or a rope could be added to make the journey in the steeper part of the trail easier.



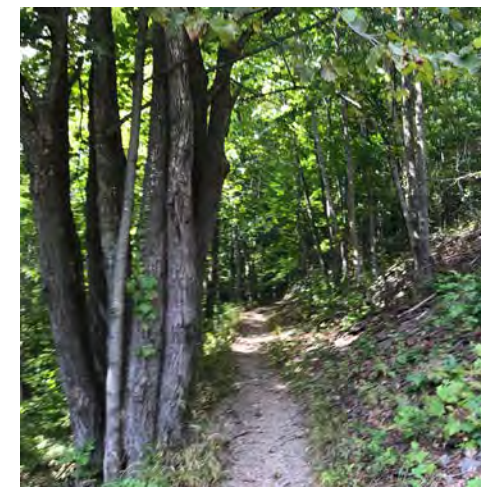
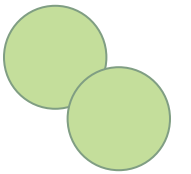
View from the top of Pratt Rock Park towards Schoharie Creek

Manage Woodland & Reclaim Timber



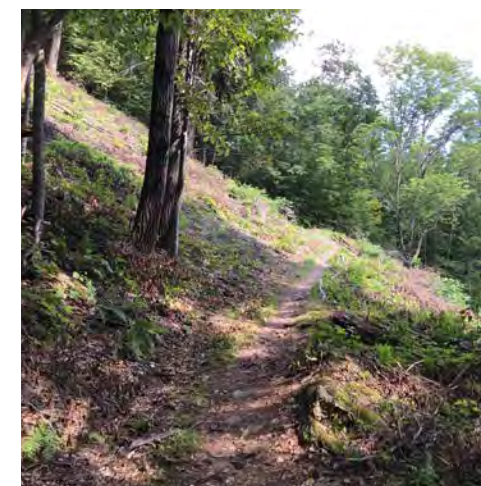
PLANTING HEMLOCK TREES

A few hemlock trees (*Tsuga canadensis*) planted along the trail would provide a visual connection to the history of Prattsville and reference the stylized bench carvings. Hemlocks are the third most common tree in New York State. They serve as a vital component of our forests and a characteristic tree in the landscape. As coniferous evergreens are able to withstand cold winters, they will also enhance the character of the trail all year round.



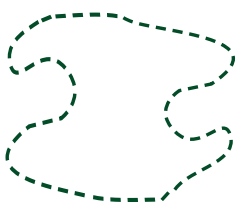
COPPICING NEW GROWTH

Regrowth of a few tree species as multistem trees would offer a management strategy for existing tree species in the park. These trees could be managed by cutting (coppicing) every 5-7 years to control the overall height of growth. New growth on the surrounding slope and directly under Pratt Rock would be cleared annually. Cleared areas could be overseeded with a native grass and wildflower mix, or planted with a woody (shrub) groundcover that would not grow taller than 2-3 feet (see species suggestions on p. 29).

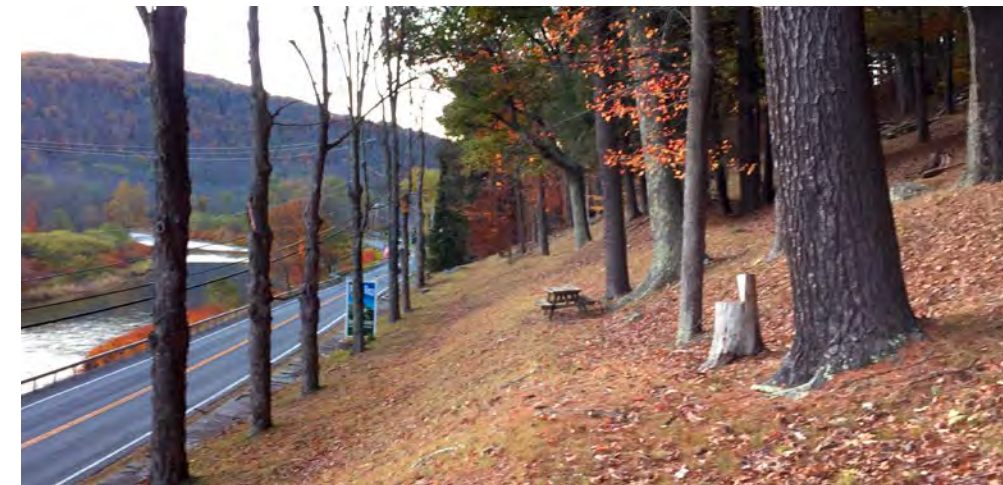
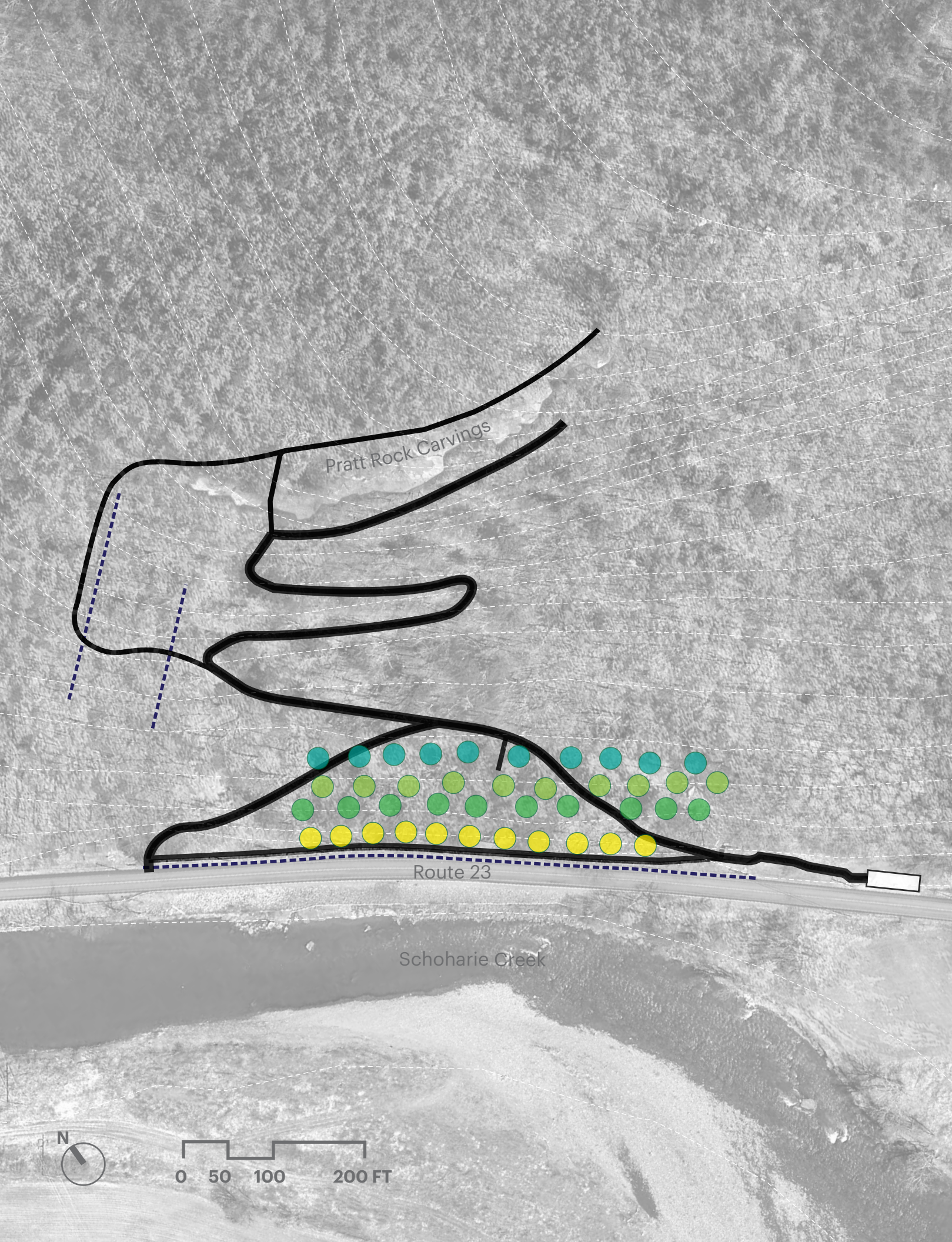


CLEARING ALONG TRAIL

Keeping the paths clear is essential to providing safe and unimpeded movement along the trails. Clearing woody undergrowth would remove any low branches on adjacent trees or shrubs that might obstruct travel.



Maintain Historic Maple Terraces



ROW OF SUGAR MAPLE TREES

The original planting of Pratt Rock Park features a prominent row of sugar maples along the road. The sugar maples are declining in health and will eventually need to be replaced, but they are key to the character of the park. MVVA recommends replanting the row of trees with Red Oaks (*Quercus rubra*).



ALLEES ALONG THE TERRACES



Today, the species along the terraces include sugar maples, oaks, and pines. Tree stumps should be removed and replanted with a mixed variety of oaks and maples.

Species for woodlands area:

LOW SHRUBS SPECIES

Diervila lonicera

Fothergilla gardenii

Itea virginica

Vaccinium angustifolium

Vaccinium stamineum

LOW HERBACEOUS SPECIES

Antennaria neglecta

Antennaria howellii

Carex communis

Carex laxiculmis

Carex pensylvanica

Eurybia divaricata

Mitchella repens

Symphyotrichum cordifolia

Tiarella cordifolia

GROUNDCOVER &

FERN SPECIES

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi

Dennstaedtia punctilobula

Dryopteris marginata

Onoclea sensibilis

Polystichum acrostichoides

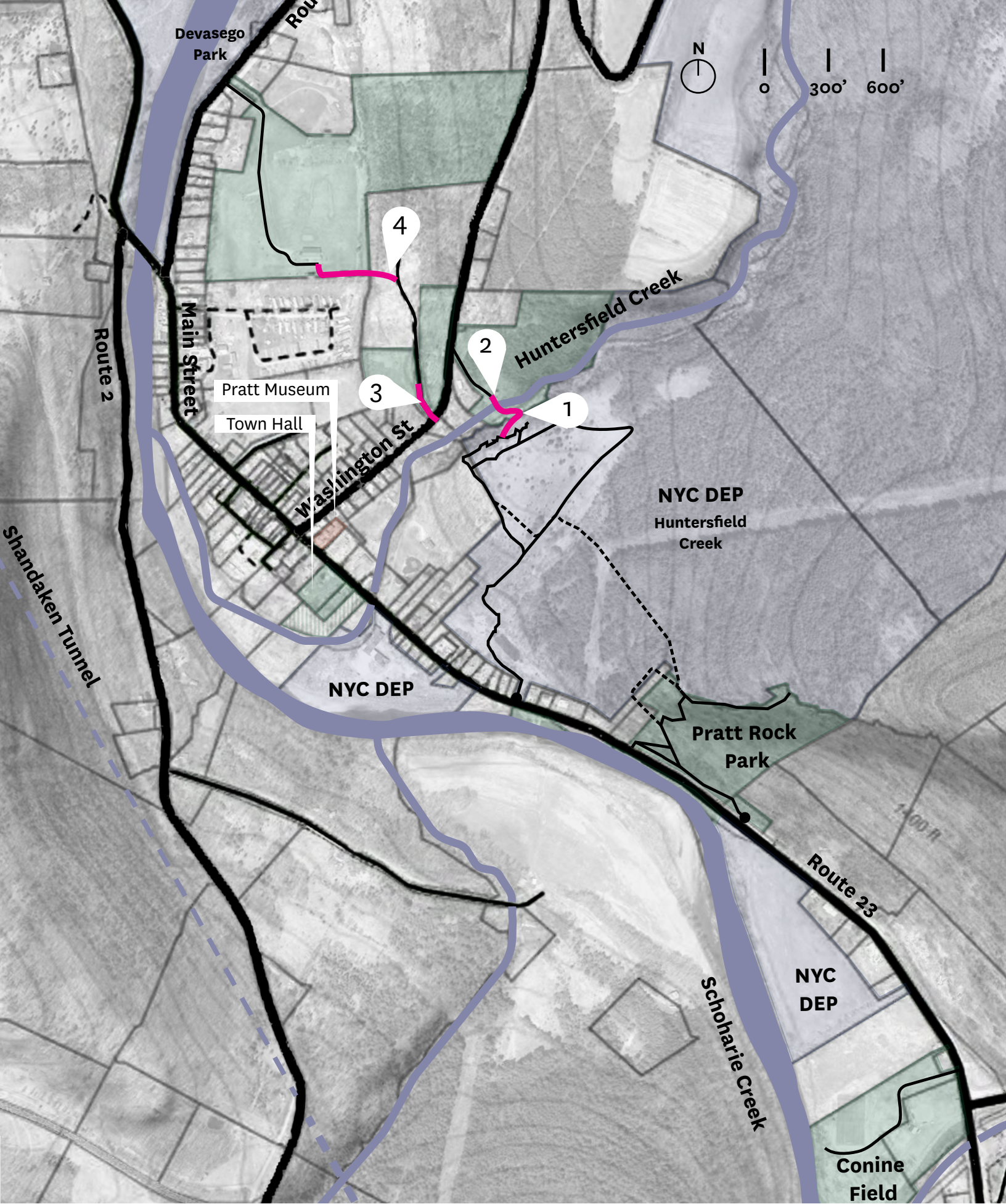
Thelypteris noveboracensis

Xanthorhiza simplicissima

Provide Access



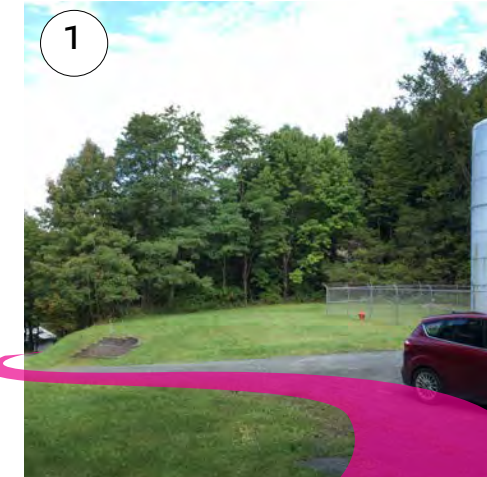
The Schoharie River seen from the Pratt Rock Park



- Existing Route or Trail
- Proposed Route or Trail
- Parcel Owned by Prattville
- Parcel Owned by NYC Department of Environmental Protection

Huntersfield Creek Access

Access to Pratt Rock Park from the north could be improved through the development of new trails and better access to existing path networks within the area.



Path along the water tower

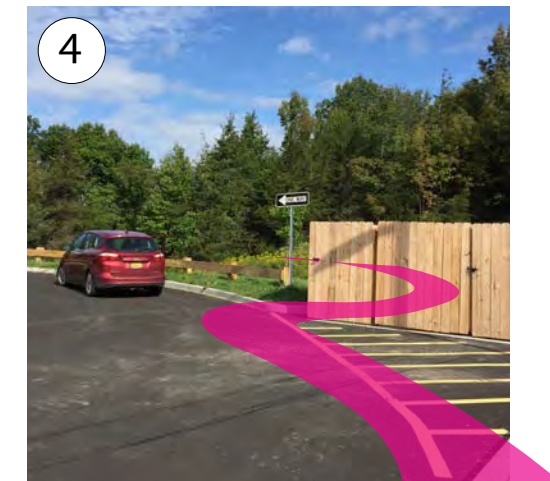


Path crosses Huntersfield Creek

The park network could be extended by lengthening DEP trails to cross Huntersfield Creek and connecting it to the water tower road. Also, incorporating additional signage would guide visitors through new areas.



Sidewalk along the road to the Newly built retirement residence

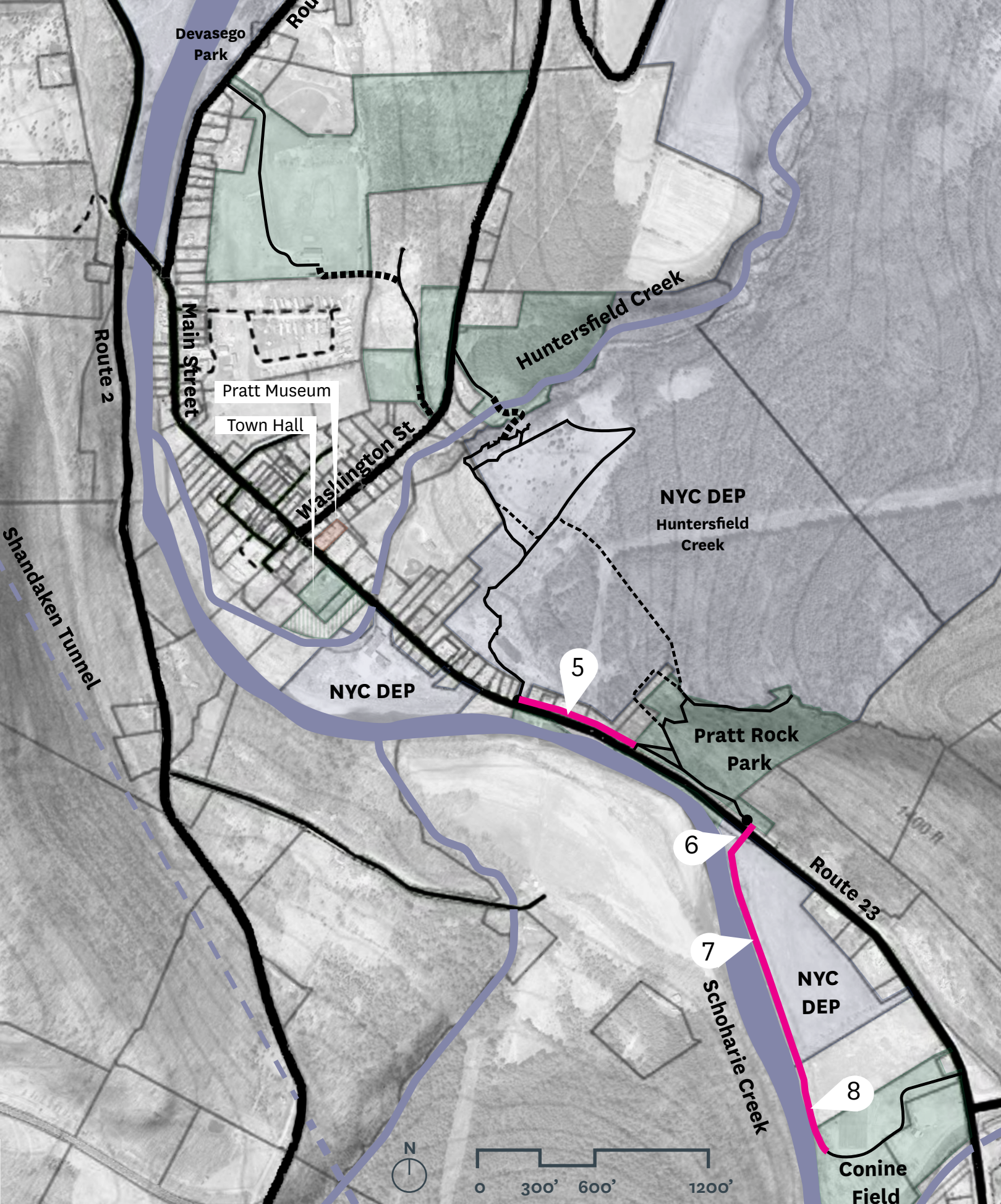


Path connects road to existing Prattville Park

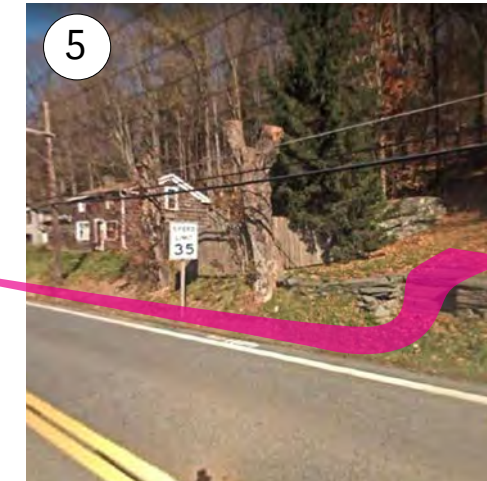
Adding a sidewalk along the new road would improve access for the retirement home residents. Also, connecting the new road to Prattville Sewer Plant area with a new trail would supplement current network in this area.

Schoharie Creek Access

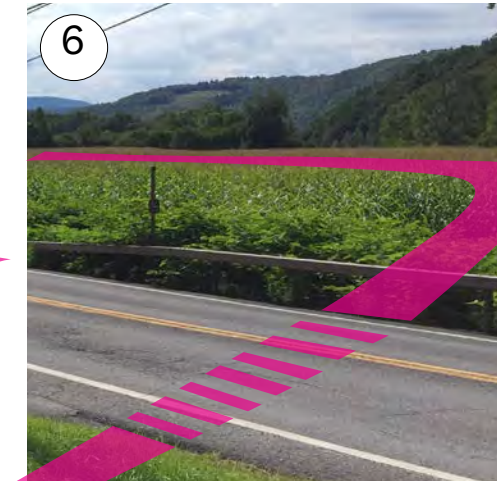
Access to Pratt Rock Park from Route 23 and connection to Schoharie Creek could be improved through a new connection south of the park.



- Existing Route or Trail
- Proposed Route or Trail
- Parcel Owned by Prattville
- Parcel Owned by NYC Department of Environmental Protection



5 Sidewalk connecting downtown to West entrance of Pratt Rock Park

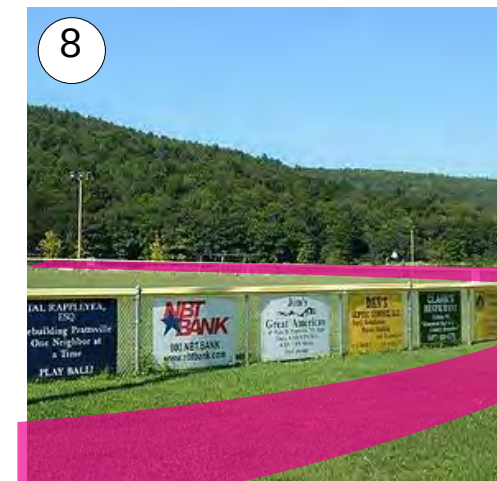


6 Crosswalk from Pratt Rock Park to DEP Property across Route

Park network improvements could also include providing a safe trail or sidewalk connecting Prattville to Pratt Rock Park, as well as a crosswalk to connect to the DEP property along Route 23.



7 Trail along Schoharie Creek



8 Trail ending at Conine Field

Also, creating a trail along the Schoharie Creek would bring visitors to Prattville Park to enjoy views of the river, and allow them to walk all the way to Conine Field.

Appendix



Horse and hemlock tree carvings



Huntersfield Creek, between Prattsville and Pratt Rock Park

Trail Maintenance Guidelines

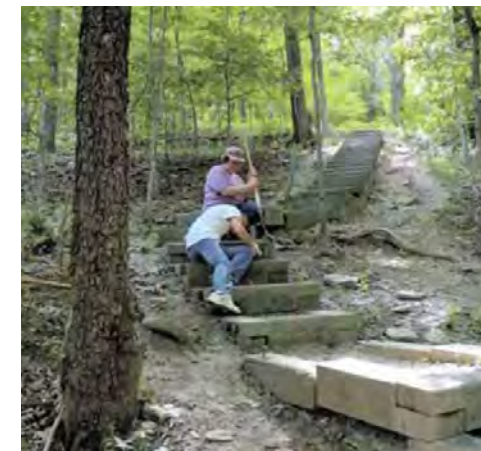
Maintenance programs help ensure the safety of the park for all users and staff visiting the site. Trail upkeep begins as soon as any trail is completed and open to the public. For a site with multiple trail options, monitoring and maintenance strategies depend on level of use and trail materials.



TRAIL CONDITION LOG

The maintenance program begins with an inventory of trails and related facilities. Compiled in a trail log, this information can be collected during condition surveys and inspections but should provide sufficient detail to allow for any future maintenance decisions. For less frequently used trails, the yearly condition survey could take place at the same time the crews clear out trails at the beginning of the season.

Information is frequently recorded based on location and marked on a detailed trail map for easy reference.



MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Necessary maintenance activities before a heavy-use season include:

- Clear windfall, dangerous tree growth, and slide areas
- Repair any drainage damaged by erosion or wash-outs
- Remove new plant growth in spring or early summer
- Level or restore trail treads
- Check and repair any damaged structures and signs
- Repair any damage to parking lot



COOPERATIVE MAINTENANCE

Cooperative trail development and maintenance projects that engage the community in the day-to-day work of a local park benefit the public and the town by improving visitor experience and saving on upkeep costs.

Community maintenance projects also provide all active groups with a sense of ownership over the success of Pratt Rock Park. This format often results in less damage to the trail and associated structures, as well as greater public understanding of the value of their park.



Cost List

STONE CONSERVATION*

Item	Quantity	Unit
Initial Needs Assessment		LS
Design Development		LS
Construction Documents		LS
Construction Administration		LS
Total Stone Restoration		
<i>* includes all rock carvings and (4) benches</i>		

TRAIL ELEMENTS

Item	Quantity	Unit
Restore Trail Bed	3,500	LF
Trail Steps	25	EA
Retaining Walls	180	EA
Remove (1) Pavilion	1	EA
Handrails - Timber Fence	400	LF
Black locust log bench	5	EA
Total Trail Elements		

LANDSCAPE

Item	Quantity	Unit
Tree Planting	12	EA
Tree Removal / Thinning	2	AC
Total Landscape		

TRAIL ACCESS

Item	Quantity	Unit
Restore (2) stairs	2	EA
Restore Wall	750	LF
Signage - Interpretive	1	EA
Signage - Trailhead	2	EA
Signage - Directional	4	EA
Total Trail Access		

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PHOTOGRAPHY CREDIT

Pages 2, 8, 50, 54: Michael Van Valkenburgh
Pages 6, 18, 22, 24, 36, 37, 38, 44, 52: Grace Pelletier

Page 11: Georges Sachs on Wikipedia, Pratt Rock Park Article; Pratt Museum in Prattville; Library of Congress

Page 12: Schoharie Creek Management Plan; NY Rising Community Restoration Plan; Hudson Rising Exhibit at the New York Historical Society

Page 20: Steven K on Trip Advisor

Pages 21, 23: ICR-ICC inc.

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