

February 5, 2015; Report on progress with Covered Bridge and Campsite Restoration

First some background on the bridge.

Over 150 years ago, in 1865, one of the first farmers in the Beaverkill Valley, Thomas Davidson, built a covered bridge across the river. It covers a 118-foot span and is supported by original laid up stone ramps. The bridge was just up river from Henry Ellsworth's tannery. During the mid-1800s, tanning was the Beaverkill's most lucrative business as leather goods were needed for the Civil War.

The tannery closed by the end of the 19th Century but the bridge remained, spanning the river over a popular swimming and fishing hole. It became a state campsite around the turn of the century and in the 1930s a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was established there. The young men in the camp built bathhouses, a ranger's cabin, and the springhouse, which is still standing. This springhouse shelters, as reported in an early 1928 New York State brochure, "One of the finest springs in the entire Catskill region."

The Covered Bridge is on the National Historic Register and the campsite is being considered for the Historic Register. The grounds, campsites, and buildings are in remarkably good condition in terms of historic integrity.

With the NYSDOT (New York State Department of Transportation) and a pledge from Uncle Sam of \$1,000,000 the bridge is scheduled to be restored. The DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation) has pledged \$250,000 for work to be done, which could include restoration of the original laid up stone ramps and work on the existing bathhouses and ranger cabin. This will provide opportunities for education centers and historic information for campers and visitors.

There was a public meeting about the bridge restoration a year ago, but a final schedule for beginning restoration has not yet been announced by the DOT. FOBC members can contact the DOT to try and get information, but as of this date, there has not been a public announcement about the schedule of work.

However, Open Space Institute and the Catskill Mountainkeeper are working to move this project along, particularly to make sure the plan will include maintaining the historic integrity of the campsite and bridge. A committee has been formed; Erik Kulleseid, OSI (Open Space Institute), Ramsay Adams, Catskill Mountain Keeper, Peter Malik, Nature Conservancy and resident of the valley and John and Patricia Adams. The plan is to hire an historic landscape architect who will map and do the historic research to help DEC restore and maintain the campsite appropriately. The committee is raising private money to accomplish interpretation and restoration priorities not being undertaken by the state. It is also hoped that with an "on site" organized group, we will be better informed and will be able to "keep tabs" on the work as it progresses.

If you are interested in learning more about this effort, including ways you can participate or contribute, please contact Patricia at Patriciabadams@yahoo.com.