

The Ridge War

A quiet community challenges a landowner in Upstate New York

By Manuela Hoelterhoff

Typical of Shawangunk Ridge are the white-quartz cliffs at Awosting Falls.



AT WHAT POINT DO THE RIGHTS of a community prevail over the development rights of a landowner? That, of course, is an issue confronting many towns, including one in New York, a state once heavily sprinkled with apple orchards and dairy farms. But in the rural enclave of Gardiner, some 90 miles north of New York City, in Ulster County, there's far more at stake: the Awosting Reserve, part of the Shawangunk Ridge (fondly called the Gunks), whose soaring cliffs and spectacular views have landed it on the Nature Conservancy's list of the Last Great Places. Hawks swirl in its air currents above hikers, bikers, and especially rock climbers, for whom this is heaven. Vast portions of this beautiful area have already been preserved for future generations with the 1987 creation of the 12,000-acre Minnewaska State Park (established after local opposition sank a proposed Marriott conference center) and the 8,600 acres of the funky old 1869 Mohonk Mountain House resort and the adjacent Mohonk Preserve.

Last December, the developers Chaffin/

Light produced a plan to build a gated enclave of 349 fancy vacation homes on the 2,700-acre Awosting Reserve, a property assembled by owner John Bradley, a New York City attorney. One of the area's few small lakes may yet become the water hazard of a golf course. With his project, this self-styled conservationist and litigious land baron—who once unsuccessfully charged this mild-

mannered middle-aged hiker with criminal behavior—has enraged even lucky locals who, unlike myself, have never encountered him swinging a truncheon or pursuing hikers on his golf cart.

Parts of the area would be left untouched (this cluster-

housing approach is increasingly used by canny developers who leave bunches of trees and bubbling brooks as proof of their environmental sensitivity). But all of it could be saved. Regrettably, substantial offers by conservationist groups to buy the land have been rejected. So now comes a review process of great cost and complexity that will busy lawyers until the snows melt many times (for more information, see savetheridge.com). □

Parts of the area would be left untouched. But all of it could be saved

The Ridge War

A quiet community challenges a landowner in Upstate New York

By Manuela Hoelterhoff

Typical of Shawangunk Ridge are the white-quartz cliffs at Awosting Falls.



AT WHAT POINT DO THE RIGHTS of a community prevail over the development rights of a landowner? That, of course, is an issue confronting many towns, including one in New York, a state once heavily sprinkled with apple orchards and dairy farms. But in the rural enclave of Gardiner, some 90 miles north of New York City, in Ulster County, there's far more at stake: the Awosting Reserve, part of the Shawangunk Ridge (fondly called the Gunks), whose soaring cliffs and spectacular views have landed it on the Nature Conservancy's list of the Last Great Places. Hawks swirl in its air currents above hikers, bikers, and especially rock climbers, for whom this is heaven. Vast portions of this beautiful area have already been preserved for future generations with the 1987 creation of the 12,000-acre Minnewaska State Park (established after local opposition sank a proposed Marriott conference center) and the 8,600 acres of the funky old 1869 Mohonk Mountain House resort and the adjacent Mohonk Preserve.

Last December, the developers Chaffin/

Light produced a plan to build a gated enclave of 349 fancy vacation homes on the 2,700-acre Awosting Reserve, a property assembled by owner John Bradley, a New York City attorney. One of the area's few small lakes may yet become the water hazard of a golf course. With his project, this self-styled conservationist and litigious land baron—who once unsuccessfully charged this mild-

mannered middle-aged hiker with criminal behavior—has enraged even lucky locals who, unlike myself, have never encountered him swinging a truncheon or pursuing hikers on his golf cart.

Parts of the area would be left untouched (this clustering approach is increasingly used by canny developers who leave bunches of trees and bubbling brooks as proof of their environmental sensitivity). But all of it could be saved. Regrettably, substantial offers by conservationist groups to buy the land have been rejected. So now comes a review process of great cost and complexity that will busy lawyers until the snows melt many times (for more information, see savetheridge.com). □

Parts of the area would be left untouched. But all of it could be saved