

THE STATE I'M IN #5

By Dorothy Kurtz

Last year, I covered the sights in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Starting in 2010, I planned to cover a different county in NJ for each year, and for 2010, I started at the top--the top of NJ with its northern-most county, Sussex County. If you would like more information about travel in this county, I recommend the following: Sussex County Chamber of Commerce, 120 Hampton House Road, Newton, NJ 07860 (973-579-1811 or www.sussexcountychamber.org). In addition, because Sussex County is part of the Skylands Regional area, this other source could also help: *Skylands Visitor* magazine, PO Box 329, Columbia, NJ 07832 or www.njskylands.com).

Anyhow, I'm no stranger to Sussex County, and I have visited here five times in the past. In my former NJ columns I've written about certain places: Waterloo Village, Mountain Creek Resort, Mountain Creek Water Park, Crystal Springs Resort, and Space Farms Zoo/Museums. That's why they won't be covered here. Also, keep in mind that I usually tried to visit a different place each month in NJ. Nevertheless, Sussex County was a two- to three-hour drive from where I live; therefore, that's the reason I chose to

make three visits for four nights each in 2010: May, August, and November. Anyway, this was how it began.

Thursday, May 20, 2010: I said I was going to start at the top, and I did--the northern-most attraction in NJ: High Point State Park, 1480 State Route 23, Sussex, NJ 07461 (973-875-4800). First, I entered the park office and received a park map and other literature from the helpful staff. Then, I lingered for a short while and glanced at the few pictures, texts, and exhibits inside that explained the history of this area. Hence, I learned a little bit more about the former everyday lives of the local Native-Americans, the Lenni-Lenapes; how this state park started; and about the local flora and fauna. Second, I headed toward the main attraction for me: the High Point Monument. From the base of this 220-foot granite-structure, I was 1,803 feet above sea level--the highest elevation in NJ. Thus, I could view three states at once: New York's Catskill Mountains, Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, and NJ's Wallkill Valley--what beautiful and impressive hilly scenery all around me! Third, I took the Scenic Drive through this park and noticed Lake Marcia; Dryden Kuser Natural Area, an Atlantic white cedar swamp at 1,500 feet--the highest known swamp of its kind; more flora and some fauna; and other majestic views. I also learned from

the staff that in addition to its great views, this park offered many outdoor activities for all four seasons. So, there has been something for almost everybody at High Point State Park.

Friday, May 21: This area of Northwestern NJ has had more varieties of minerals than any other place on Earth. I learned these facts and more at the Franklin Mineral Museum, 32 Evans Street, Franklin, NJ 07416 (973-827-3481). Here, I spent an interesting and educational few hours in this mid-sized museum looking at samples of rocks, minerals, and other items. The first exhibit room displayed the many kinds of rocks & minerals from this area of the state, including the "Franklinite," named for Franklin, NJ. The second room, my favorite, showed what looked like plain gray and beige rocks at first, under the normal lights. Then when I turned off the regular lights and turned on the ultra-violet lights, those rocks turned into different bright, day-glow colors of reds, oranges, yellows, greens, and blues. Only certain areas of Northwestern NJ and Northeastern PA have these kinds of rocks. Later, I spent the most time in the third room, the largest room in this museum. This room exhibited over 6,000 rocks & minerals from around the world. In addition to rocks & minerals, other rooms presented fossils and Native-American

artifacts. Finally, I walked through a replica of a zinc mine. Even looking at the confined space of this "mine" gave me a newfound respect for mine workers. For an extra charge, the public could go to a mine-taillings dump and collect discarded rocks that may or may not contain Franklinite, zinc, or fluorescent rock. If you didn't feel like digging, you could buy rocks and other stuff at their gift shop. The Franklin Mineral Museum was definitely a worthwhile stop, especially seeing that room of fluorescent rocks alone.

Saturday, May 22: To be honest with you, I had some misgivings when I first heard about this place, but after reading more about it, I decided to visit. Wild West City, 50 Lackawanna Drive, Stanhope, NJ 07874-3108, off State Route 206 (973-347-9900), sounded at first like one of those tacky roadside attractions that were mainly for children. Maybe that was true when it opened in 1957, but nowadays, this place had enough attractions to entertain and educate both children and adults. First off, there were close to 40 different places to visit along both sides of a dusty Main Street. This included many exhibit buildings that covered the history of life out West, circa 1880 in Dodge City, Kansas, for different people from many walks of life: lawmen, merchants, and bankers as well as craftsmen,

children, cowboys, and so forth. In addition, close to a half-dozen shops sold plenty of merchandise from books, Western-theme clothes, and Native-American items as well as the usual souvenirs, Western-style toys, etc. If you got hungry, the Golden Nugget Saloon and the Silver Dollar Saloon offered the usual burgers, chicken, and other fast food. There was also a pizza place and a candy (sweets) store. Other areas included a chapel, a petting zoo of farm animals, and an area to pan for gold. (It was mostly pyrite--fool's gold.) For an extra charge, this place offered pony rides for children and a train ride as well as a wagon ride and miniature golf. Most of all, there were re-enactors demonstrating different crafts, cooking, and the main feature--the cowboy shows of gun fighting, roping, horseback riding, and so on. Those cowboy shows happened in the middle of Main Street; and finally, there were can-can girls and country & Western singers at the Golden Nugget Saloon. By combining historical accuracy on the one hand, with the West of the dime novels on the other hand, Wild West City was definitely not a tacky roadside attraction but a very fun place to visit for all ages.

Sunday, May 23: On State Route 206, just north of Interstate 80, in Andover, NJ, you could see a big, yellow, one-story building called Scranberry Coop, 42 Main

Street/Route 206, Andover, NJ 07821 (973-786-6414). It didn't look like much from the outside, but inside, it was a different story. Thereupon, I noticed many rows of antiques, collectibles, and gifts for sale. The management told me that this building contained 10,000 square feet and included over 150 dealers renting around 200 booths. Unlike a flea market where the dealers handled their own booths and the sales themselves, at this place it was more of a consignment deal with the management. Thus, the dealers didn't have to man their own booths, and you paid for what you bought at a central pay area. This was also different from most flea markets because at this retail establishment you wouldn't find "cheap" items like knock-off designer perfumes, tube socks, t-shirts, etc. Instead, the items for sale ranged from antiques in furniture, household items, and artworks as well as clothing, toys, books, and other stuff from the 19th century to more recent times. Some of the dealers had set up their booths to look similar to period rooms. Therefore, Scranberry Coop reminded me of a cross between a smaller version of the Atlantique City Antique and Collectibles Show and a decorative-arts museum--except this art was for sale. (Yes, I bought a few things here myself.)

Thursday, August 5: If a visit to that fake mine at the Franklin Mineral Museum made me develop a new-found respect for mine workers, then a tour of a real zinc mine confirmed that respect. The Sterling Hill Mine Museum, 30 Plant St., Ogdensburg (973-209-8505), was a working mine until 1986. Nowadays, the public may take a guided tour of this mine. Starting in the gift shop, I bought my tickets and spent about an hour looking at the rocks & minerals for sale there, including the fluorescence rocks that the staff displayed in a dark room and lit by ultra-violet lights. I also toured the grounds and saw old mining equipment and statues of mine workers before taking the guided tour. First, our guide showed us the main exhibit hall where we were free to view the pictures, texts, and exhibits of mine equipment, rocks & minerals, and other things before going into the mine itself. The outside temperatures in the 80s (Fahrenheit) changed to the upper 50s once inside the mine. Then, our guide pointed out a coal mining cart containing fake coal, made from styrene painted black, that the production crew used in filming a scene from the film *Zoolander*. Nevertheless, this was never a coal mine but a zinc mine. Although, a zinc mine has been more stable than a coal mine, our guide said that the work was still hard and dangerous. As we toured the different areas here, our

guide would stop and point out, via displays of mine equipment and mannequins, the many jobs the mine workers did in this mine to keep it running smoothly. Even children worked in this mine until sometime in the 1920s. The scariest part of the tour for me was when our guide turned off all the lights except for a candle, and shortly after that, he blew the candle out, and we were in total darkness for a few seconds. My favorite areas of this tour were the three rooms of fluorescence rock displays under ultra-violet lights. Thus, I saw more of those kinds of rocks here than at the Franklin Mineral Museum as well as displays of other glow-in-the-dark objects using the materials from those rocks. Another exhibit room showed pictures, texts, and objects covering the history of this mine and of the area as well as more rocks & minerals before the tour ended. As much as I loved looking at the displays, especially of the many rocks & minerals, I could think of many different jobs that I would rather do than work in a mine.

Friday, August 6: After making a few wrong turns here and there, we finally found our way to Tomahawk Lake, Tomahawk Trail, Sparta (973-398-7777). This place reminded me of my childhood when my parents took my brothers and I for a day at the lake in the summertime, except that we

usually visited a lake in Southern NJ. The basic admission included free parking, access to the lake, and if you have small children (under four feet tall), a child section of the lake with kid-sized slides and floating rafts. For extra charges, the park provided water slides into the lake, paddle-boat rentals, and miniature golf. Here's the bad news: There was a snack bar selling the usual hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, etc. at prices that were a bit high. Nevertheless, the good news was that you could bring your own food and picnic at the tables or on the beach, or you could also bring a grill and cook your own food in the picnic area. We brought our own food and spent the day sitting on towels on a white-sand beach eating our lunch, or we swam in a clear lake. (Clear to me meant no cedar water as found in many of the lakes in Southern NJ.) Overall, it proved to be a relaxing day in a wooded setting.

Saturday, August 7: Since 1970, Peters Valley Craft Center, 19 Kuhn Road (Route 615), Layton (973-948-5200) has been a center for education in the making of fine and decorative arts. This place offered adult summer workshops where students signed up for classes lasting from a few days to a week. The rates included accommodations and food. Meanwhile, on weekend afternoons in summer, the public may

visit the workshops and watch the instructors and students at work. Although this place offered lessons in many kinds of arts and crafts, what you saw for that day depended on which classes were in session. The day I was there, I browsed through their gift shop that sold items the instructors and students made. (This shop is open year round.) Later, I visited the workshops. (You do need a car to get around because of the distances, unless you are a long-distance walker.) At the first workshop I saw, I spent the longest time at, the Ceramics Studio; thus, I watched the instructor show the class how to mold a teapot and cups using a potter's wheel. Then, one of his assistants showed me the grounds and the three kilns that the class used to fire their creations. Afterward, via a narrow dirt road, I arrived at the next studio buildings. Here, I observed some metal workers making jewelry and a wine-cooler urn. Around the corner, cake-decorating students made fondant-cake decorations in many different pastel colors. At a nearby building, woodworkers showed me the equipment they used and some recently sawed wood boards. Finally, in another section of the village, a few blacksmith students were making different iron and steel products. Therefore, at Peters Valley, the instructors and students were more than willing to explain what they were doing and how they were

going about it. I easily spent at least three interesting hours there.

Sunday, August 8: For years, I've heard about the NJ State Fair. After fair officials held the fair in different locations in the past, for the last several years, it has been held at the Sussex County Fair Grounds, 27 Plains Road, Augusta (973-948-5500). The official name of this event has been called The NJ State Fair and Sussex County Farm & Horse Show. (Warning--Once you enter the gate after buying your ticket, you can not get your hand stamped to leave and return later that day.) Upon entering, I headed toward the Live Stock Barns where I had a close look at many different breeds of cattle, pigs, and sheep as well as goats, rabbits, and other farm mammals. Another barn presented many varieties of chickens, ducks, and other kinds of poultry. Across the way, a large greenhouse displayed a plethora of flowers and herbs as well as fruits and vegetables, especially plants grown by hydroponics. Other pavilions exhibited arts, crafts, and craft and cooking demonstrations as well as special-interest groups with their share of displays and several food vendors. (The food prices were a bit high, so I ate a sandwich at a food concession that the Rotary Club operated, and the profits would benefit their charities.) Of course, this fair had

amusement rides, and I sat and ate my lunch within view of them. After lunch, I headed toward my favorite section, the Horse Show. Here I had a chance to observe several horses up close and even pet a few of them before watching a riding competition nearby at the Horse Show Ring. This fair included many more exhibits, demonstrations, and shows that I didn't have time to see in a day. Nevertheless, for the one day I was there, I looked at more animals, plants, and objects up close than I would usually get to view in most other places. In addition, through out the year, the Sussex County Fair Grounds also presents many other different events.

Thursday, November 4: Despite the rain, I spent an interesting few hours at Olde Lafayette Village, Routes 15 & 94, Lafayette (973-383-8323). Here, housed in what looked similar to old styled (18th and 19th century), wooden buildings, brand-named discount and outlet stores sold mostly 21st-century merchandise. Except for an antique store and a book store that included a section of used books, most of the current-day items for sale consisted of clothing, shoes, and jewelry as well as home décor, vitamins, and other things. Meanwhile, a duck pond was in the center of this quaint-looking village. (At least the mallard ducks didn't mind the rain.) Although, I wouldn't

recommend going out of your way to visit this place, if you are already in Sussex County, however, it is worth spending a few hours in this "village." Who knows? Maybe you might find some bargains or just have a good time browsing in Olde Lafayette Village.

Friday, November 5: If I'm visiting the sights in Sussex County, I should take a look at the county seat. Thus, on the date above, I walked through downtown Newton. At first, however, I entered the Sussex County Historical Society & Museum, 82 Main Street (973-383-6010). Once inside, a very friendly and informative guide showed me the two exhibit rooms of this place as well as the library. The first-floor room displayed pictures, texts, and items having to do with the history, industries, and people in Sussex County, especially in Newton. One of the highlights was a large fireplace made up of rocks and bricks from different sections of the county. In the upstairs room, I observed exhibit cases of items covering the following subjects concerning Sussex County: dinosaur bones, tools from the local Lenni-Lenape Native Americans, and farming equipment as well as rocks & minerals, historical items, and other exhibits. Afterward, I walked through downtown Newton and looked at the buildings near Newton Green Park, especially the classical-designed county parks building and

the county courthouse. Then, I spent the rest of the day walking up and down Newton's main business street, Spring Street from Main St. to Madison St. Here, along both sides of the street, I browsed at stores and had lunch. Some of the businesses included a thrift shop, art galleries, and antique shops as well as a bookstore, music store, and boutiques. Newton reminded me of a lively downtown still holding on to many of its businesses despite the more modern shopping centers located right outside of town along Route 206.

Saturday, November 6: It was time for me to explore nature, and what better place than Stokes State Forest, 1 Coursen Road (off Route 206), Branchville (973-948-3820). Although the forest office doesn't open until about noontime in the off season, the staff still left literature about the area outside on the porch. Once I picked up some maps and brochures, I headed toward one of the main features of the forest, Sunrise Mountain. Along the way to the mountain, I noticed that compared to nearby High Point State Park, Stokes looked more rustic and "woody" as I traveled along a narrow, paved, and winding road. The views from the mountain, however, proved worth the long drive (about seven miles) as I looked out over the valley below with its green and other colors on display along with

seeing distance farms and hills. Autumn was definitely on exhibit here in all its colors of reds, oranges, and yellows. After driving along another "woody" road where I glanced at a deer crossing the road, I returned to the forest office in time for a picnic lunch nearby. After lunch, I entered the opened office, and the helpful staff gave me directions on how to get to the other park attractions. Meanwhile, inside the office, I saw a few exhibits containing pictures of the sights to see in Stokes as well as Lenni-Lenape arrowheads. The exhibit I noticed the most was a camp tableau that included a tent with food left in the open and a (stuffed) black bear and (stuffed) raccoon helping themselves to some of that food. A nearby text explained the proper way to store food at a campsite as well as what to do, or not do, if you see a bear. (I didn't see any live bears during my time here; I only saw deer, small mammals, and birds.) Later I went to the next feature at Stokes, the Tilman Ravine. Via along another long and winding "woody" road, I arrived at the ravine area and looked at an impressive evergreen forest of hemlock trees near Tilman Brook. Next, I stopped off at two of the most popular sights in Stokes: Kittle Field and Stony Lake. Both places provided picnic grounds, grills, and playgrounds. Kittle Field offered an open field for

playing ball, Frisbee, and other outdoor games; Stony Lake had a beach and a lake for swimming in the summer and fishing year round. Therefore, Stokes State Forest offered something for most people from tenderfoot-nature lovers to rugged-outdoors people.

Sunday, November 7: Right around the bend from the Olde Lafayette Village, the Lafayette Mill Antique Center, 12 Morris Farm Road (off Route 15), Lafayette (973-383-0065), comprised of a five-building complex containing over 50 dealers selling antiques and collectibles. Here, located on different floors, rooms, and nooks & crannies, within those five adjoining buildings, I browsed at items dating from the 19th century through the 1990s. Much of the merchandise included furniture, jewelry, and toys as well as glassware, dishes, art, old signs, household items, clothing, seasonal decorations, etc. At times, I didn't know whether to look up, down, or sideways because it seemed that almost every corner was packed with merchandise. Like I did at Scranberry Coop and the Atlantique City Show, I felt overwhelmed. Many of the decorations included old Christmas and Halloween items. Much of the toys for sale dated from the 19th century and early 20th century. Nevertheless, an additional number of toys from the 1950s and '60s made me feel older because I

played with some of them myself as a child back then. Similar to Scranberry Coop, the whole experience of this place gave me a feeling that I was in a decorative arts museum, except this art, too, was for sale. I also took time to browse inside of other nearby antique stores, boutiques, and an art gallery before heading home. If you visit Lafayette Mill, wear comfortable shoes and be prepared to go up and down stairs.