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Review: High Rock and the Greenbelt: The Making of New York City's Largest Park
By John G. Little, Edited by Charles E. Little

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller
San Francisco, California, USA

Mitchell, John G. *High Rock and The Greenbelt, The Making of New York City's Largest Park*. Edited by Charles E. Little. Chicago, IL: The Center for American Places, Columbia College. 2011. 166 pp, ISBN 9781935195207. US\$34.05, hardback. Alkaline paper.

High Rock and the Greenbelt has something in it for every Nature appreciator. There is history, ecology, interpretation, photography, and a continuing call to action. The "greenbelt" is a protected green space on Staten Island which is home to animals, birds, and deciduous trees. There are also lakes and trails. It is also the site of environmental education programs and a respite in Nature for city dwellers.

This new edition contains the original 1976 book *High Rock: A Natural and Unnatural History* by John G. Mitchell which describes the park and places of yore. There is wonderful natural history presented as well as human history and attention to historic sites. Mitchell sought to protect the park for subsequent generations. In its early stages, there were all manner of visitors to the park including Henry David Thoreau, David Brower, and many other local actors, including Frederick Law Olmstead who played a role in designing the park. It has taken an active group to defend the greenbelt from those like Robert Moses who might have built a highway through parts of it. Instead, it has remained a somewhat urban wild in a very populated city.

Included in this book are a number of new features including illustrations by Marbury Brown, photographs by Dorothy Reilly, an update by Editor Charles E. Little, and A Greenbelt Forum by Deborah Popper.

The story contained provides a good example of how to organize and protect a city park. The attention paid to natural and human history provides a valuable illustration of how to interpret a wild place. The decision to include all manner of entries in this book is an example of how to bring a variety of talented people together towards a unified goal.

This is a great book about place and community. It is inspiring and thought provoking and it speaks to a wide audience which varies in age and education. Young readers are likely to find it profound. College students can learn about place and community activism. Older readers may find a few points and avenues taken predictable, but there is enough unusual information provided that most readers will find something of interest.

High Rock and The Greenbelt is easy to recommend for those who are interested in learning about how to interpret and protect a place. Those who live near the park or in New York City or New Jersey would benefit from knowing more about the park that they share. Those who study how to protect a green space may learn some new things about how to create a document that explains their green space. It will also be of use to historians in the region. Those who like photographs are also likely to like those shared here.

Here is a successful rallying cry to protect this area as well other parks that people visit and cherish. Sadly, funds need to be made available to protect such areas. In this story of place, one is reminded that there have been generations of people who have been nurtured and inspired by this greenbelt. This is the same in many open spaces that are being closed across the country due to budget cutbacks. Many people who have a favorite park are likely to want a book like this for it. Walking out in

these green spaces, being cognizant of history, one can be transported to a time before the highways we can sometimes hear in the distance.

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