

## The Fern Crew *by Mike Serviss*



*The Fern Crew in action*

Clark Reservation is well known for its immense diversity of plant life. The flora is so diverse, in fact, that the park is regarded as the most species-rich area of fern diversity in all of New York State! This diversity is highlighted by the presence of one of the most rare and threatened ferns in North America, the American hart's-tongue fern. Unfortunately, a multitude of invasive plant species threatens the sensitive habitats that the American hart's-tongue fern calls home. This issue begs the question, who is charged with protecting these areas from invasive plants? The answer: a group of park stewards affectionately known as The Fern Crew.

The Fern Crew consists of eight to ten seasonal interns, work study employees and volunteers whose primary task is invasive

species management in the park during the summer. This crew is part of the FORCES (Friends of Recreation, Conservation and Environmental Stewardship) program that was created by Tom Hughes, Natural Resource Steward Biologist for the region, and aims to provide field experience for college students majoring in a variety of natural sciences. This summer's Fern Crew accomplished a great deal in a very short period of time. Largely hidden from sight in the deep ravines and plunge basins of the park, the crew eradicated over 30,000 invasive plants! Additionally, they led over 15 educational programs, participated in plant community studies and updated GIS mapping projects, among other things. So, the next time you see a college-aged worker in the park armed with a trowel and wearing a FORCES t-shirt, please be sure to thank them for their hard work!

## Camp Groups Galore! *by Shannon Fabiani*

This summer, many local youth groups and summer camps visited Clark Reservation State Park. The Fern Crew, described in further detail in the article written by the Crew's leader, Mike Serviss, hosted over 15 educational programs! Depending on the interests of the group and the time they have with us, the crew led an assortment of activities with the kids, all celebrating the uniqueness of this special park. Activities included interpretive guided hikes, ecology scavenger hunts, 'pale-swallow-wort tag', fossil rubbings, aquatic ecology, and exploring the treasures found in the Nature Center.

There are a few different types of excitement I describe when kids visit Clark. You have the 'first-time-visitor' who is beaming with excitement and amazed by the uniqueness of Clark, usually the glacial history (often described using a few Ice Age movie references) and the fossils along Table Rock

trail. There is also the 'return visitor' who is eager to answer questions because they remember and recall facts that you or your crew members taught them the summer prior. Often there are the children who have rarely (or perhaps never) been in such a natural environment. The excitement here comes from that shift from 'fear of the unfamiliar' to a confidence to explore the rest of the trail -- even when it looks "spooky" (a direct quote from one youngster).

Lastly, there is the excitement when the child realizes that "science" is not just a subject in school that only lives in textbooks. "THIS is science!!"

Clark Reservation is a great place for kids to learn that science can be -- and is -- fun!

*Children learning science in the field*

