

Pennsylvania Mountain Landmarks v.1



Jeffrey R. Frazier

Pennsylvania Mountain Landmarks

VOLUME 1

Jeffrey R. Frazier



an imprint of Sunbury Press, Inc.
Mechanicsburg, PA USA



an imprint of Sunbury Press, Inc.
Mechanicsburg, PA USA

Copyright © 2023 by Jeffrey R. Frazier.
Cover Copyright © 2023 by Sunbury Press, Inc.

Sunbury Press supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Sunbury Press to continue to publish books for every reader. For information contact Sunbury Press, Inc., Subsidiary Rights Dept., PO Box 548, Boiling Springs, PA 17007 USA or legal@sunburypress.com.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Sunbury Press Orders Dept. at (855) 338-8359 or orders@sunburypress.com.

To request one of our authors for speaking engagements or book signings, please contact Sunbury Press Publicity Dept. at publicity@sunburypress.com.

FIRST CATAMOUNT PRESS EDITION: April 2023

Set in Adobe Garamond | Interior design by Crystal Devine | Cover by Lawrence Knorr | Edited by Lawrence Knorr.

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Frazier, Jeffrey R., author.

Title: Pennsylvania mountain landmarks volume 1 / Jeffrey R. Frazier.

Description: First trade paperback edition. | Mechanicsburg, PA : Catamount Press, 2023.

Summary: Pennsylvania hikers know how rugged our mountain trails can be, but also how alluring they are; often causing us to wonder just what's around the next bend in the path. This volume offers some answers, providing an armchair journey to some of the most unusual and inaccessible landmarks that can be found in the mountains of Pennsylvania.

Identifiers: ISBN : 979-8-88819-130-9 (paperback) | ISBN : 979-8-88819-131-6 (ePub).

Subjects: NATURE / Ecosystems & Habitats / Mountains | HISTORY / United States / State & Local / Middle Atlantic (DC, DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA) | SPORTS & RECREATION / Hiking.

Product of the United States of America

0 1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55



Continue the Enlightenment!

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	1
1. The King's Stool (Dauphin County)	5
2. Stairways to the Stars (Berks et al.)	10
3. Umbrella Rock (Elk County)	19
4. The Three Sisters (Huntingdon County)	25
5. Lewis' Rock (Cumberland County)	34
6. Infernal Evidence (Clearfield et al.)	42
7. <i>Memento Mori</i> (Jefferson et al.)	55
8. Picture Rocks (Lycoming County)	69
9. Boxcar Rocks (Lebanon County)	76
10. Warriors' Mark (Huntingdon County)	80
11. Vampire Rock (Clinton County)	86
12. More of the Same (multiple counties)	94
Bibliography	108
About the Author	109

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge my appreciation for the help I've received from friends and guides who shared their knowledge and photographs as I wrote this book. Their help has been invaluable in leading me to and providing details about the many places featured herein. The hikes to these spots are experiences I will never forget. As my current lady's father once said, after gazing upon the hazy blue mountain peaks of central Pennsylvania that surrounded his farm, "mountains are good places to rest the eyes!"

It is a sentiment with which I heartily concur, but I also find that when the Pennsylvania mountains call to me somberly, I must go to them! Passing by sun-dappled woods, peering down into a dark hollow and wondering what secrets it hides, or watching clouds shroud a mountain peak, are sights I cannot resist, and fortunately, I have many friends who feel the same way.

I have been on many hikes with hiking groups over the years and continue to do so. I've also hired several guides to take me to spots I would have been hard-pressed to find. It is to those folks to which I dedicate this volume, but I also want to acknowledge the respect I have for those who have the same passion and commitment to save Pennsylvania's natural heritage as those who did so in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. May their efforts bear fruit; otherwise, I fear we'll not get a second chance.

THE LOST TREASURES OF YORE

(A lament written by the author following the death of his first wife)



Give me woods to walk in or give me a hill to climb
Show me a stream to sit by, where I can pass the time

Let me rest on a mountain, and listen to the leaves
As they softly chatter in a gentle summer breeze

A valley to look down upon as wispy clouds float by,
their smoky tendrils caressing a deep blue azure sky

No matter if the weather is sunny or if the sky is grey
Here on this lofty mountain is where I hope to stay

I'll listen to the peepers and the raindrops' gentle sound
As they kiss the laurel, and patter on the ground

The smell of the woods will fill my head,
And keep me happy until I once again tread

Back to the valley, far, far below,
Where from which I departed, long, long ago

And now the night wind is calling me home,
Back from the mountains on which I once roamed

So I leave the hills and valleys of yore
And go back to the cares of life once more

The old wisdom was truth in so many ways
Of that, I am sure, as I count my days

The mountains will stand as long as there are men,
But once you've gone, you can't go home again

INTRODUCTION

In my many travels, I have been fortunate to have been abroad three times; to Japan, Germany, and France. When in France, I enjoyed a cruise up the Seine River while admiring ruins of medieval castles and ancient villas crumbling along the riverside. On land, I spent three weeks walking the avenues of Paris, Honfleur, Le Havre, and the streets of many quaint French villages. I also reverently strolled along the beaches of Normandy and explored the mysterious places featured in *The Da Vinci Code*, that compelling film about the messages supposedly hidden in the paintings of Leonardo DaVinci.

In Germany, I spent three weeks visiting sites along the Rhine River from Frankfort to the Black Forest, leisurely stopping at any tourist attraction or castle site that held some appeal. Those places included an ascent up to the Drachenfels, where ancient Celtic mythology says Roland slew a dragon, bathed in its blood, and became invincible.

Likewise, I climbed up a steep flight of stone steps into Frankenstein Castle, the very place that inspired Mary Shelley to write her chilling novel *Frankenstein*, the famous monster in her novel of the same name that was created there. Much to my surprise and delight, the castle, and the winding dirt road leading up to it, still look the same as they do in the original black and white movie based on Shelley's novel.

And I shall never forget walking along the ramparts of the castles at Heidelberg and Marksburg, visiting the witch museum at Rudesheim Am Rhein, looking down upon the statue of the Lorelei in the Rhine River

north of Oberwesel, and gazing upon the *Siebengeberge* or Seven Hills of the Rhine.

But despite the colorful and enduring impressions those spots and adventures imprinted upon my mind, they nonetheless have not exceeded, or in some cases have not even matched, the scenic natural wonders I've found in Pennsylvania, especially those that are highlighted in this book.

I seem to have an unquenchable desire to explore the mountains of Pennsylvania. In the years I've spent researching and locating every spot featured herein, and I've visited almost all of them except for several where I could not get permission from the property owner to do so, I have climbed up to many mountaintops, touched the "roof of Pennsylvania," and seen the glory of the world below.

I have stood under the waterfalls of Round Island Run in Sproul State Forest, dared to enter the Devil's Dining Room at Bilger's Rocks and explored the labyrinthine passages there, climbed the Indian Steps and the Thousand Steps, twisted my way around the Standing Stones of Rocky Ridge, looked down upon Ticklish Rock, and rested under the shadow of Umbrella Rock.

I've even ridden in an original Conestoga wagon, pulled by a team of sturdy Belgians, to explore the depths of Pennsylvania's so-called Grand Canyon, being awed by the towering peaks on both sides and seeing the cliff of the wailing child, celebrated in the legends of the area's Native Americans who are said to have avoided it like the plague.

I've taken pictures of these unusual spots and found human-interest stories and legends clinging to these places that seem as old as the rocks. Quite often, I've also found that these unique and appealing spots, and their tales, are steeped in the spiritual charm of the Native Americans and imbued with the pioneering spirit of the Pennsylvania wilderness as it existed when the earliest settlers penetrated its dark interior. Such qualities led me to deem it a worthy effort to help preserve them all for posterity, and so you, the reader, will be regaled by these same tales and historical accounts in this volume and two future volumes of *Pennsylvania Mountain Landmarks*.

Become acquainted with a cascading boulder field said to have been dumped there by the devil himself and with an infamous outlaw whose hideouts included multiple caves and labyrinthine passageways among

the rocks of eastern Pennsylvania. Such are the tales of which legends are made and which add color and mystique to the mountains, forming their very soul. This breath of life, hints of a less complicated and more compelling past, appeals to me and has inspired me to seek it out; to find the spots where it still survives, and bask in the local color and lore that surround them.

To preserve those accounts, which may otherwise have been forgotten in the decades to come, became one of my objectives when writing this book. But I did so with some trepidation knowing how true scholars in history and folklore are reluctant to put any credence in oral traditions and undocumented folktales because they often seem so unbelievable.

This dismissal, however, leaves an open field for an untrained non-scholar like me to search for any kernels of truth that may lie behind the tales, and I've attempted to do just that in some of the accounts that cling to the landmarks heralded in the chapters that follow and in my *Pennsylvania Fireside Tales* series containing many more accounts of the same kind.

But preserving the stories surrounding the landmarks was not the only motivation for this book. I was also inspired when I looked back to the first decades of the twentieth century. During that age of Progressivism, farsighted men like President Theodore Roosevelt, Joseph Trimble Rothrock, Pennsylvania's first State Forester, and Gifford Pinchot, the Keystone State's conservation-minded governor, championed the preservation of our forests for the common good.

By instilling an appreciation for our natural heritage in the people of the Commonwealth, these men, and those of like minds, successfully saved our woodlands. And when regarding our present political environment, it seems apparent that a re-instilment of that appreciation is sorely needed today.

Financial and business interests are once more threatening nature's delicate balance worldwide. And if we don't find a way to counteract climate change's devastating effects, we may once again find our mountains reduced to barren hills, similar to those left by early lumbering interests who sacrificed an arboreal paradise for dollars. Entrepreneurs who, in exchange for millions of board feet of timber, callously and shortsightedly left behind nothing more than thousands of acres of bare slopes and shattered stumps.

So by sharing pictures of the marvelous places that can still be found in our forests and by recalling the quaint tales of human interest, adventure, and historic novelty that add zest to them, I hope this book will prove to be some small help in combatting climate change. Perhaps, by convincing enough people that it is a task worthy of their consideration, it will, in some small way, increase support for the current efforts, which are the only hope we have of saving our planet.

If I ever am given credit for preserving the folktales and legends of Pennsylvania and if I have inspired others to save the earth, then let that be my reward. I have been rewarded enough by being able to collect and preserve Pennsylvania's legendary culture, and none too soon. Mankind's numbers continue to grow, and our encroachment upon the natural environment is the worse for it, as is our cultural heritage.

It is highly doubtful that there are any places left in our state where life has not been affected by the modern world, with its Internet, cell phones, and cable television. If so, then the places where the old stories and legends could once be heard are scarce, except perhaps for some of the places highlighted in this book.

For, as J. F. Campbell in his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, that renowned classic collection of Scottish folklore, has said, "But as there are quiet spots in the world where driftwood accumulates undisturbed, so there are quiet spots where popular tales flourish in peace because no man has interfered with them."

CHAPTER 1

THE KING'S STOOL

In the Northern Ireland County of Derry, near the ancient lake called Lough Foyle and somewhere high up in the Binevenagh Mountains, there is a massive pile of rocks that, when viewed head-on, look like a large throne—so large that it could serve as a seat for a giant, or at least for a large person of great importance. Locals consequently dubbed it “The King’s Stool,” and it takes its place among the many remarkable landmarks of the Emerald Isle.

It was so remarkable that when Irish immigrants came to settle in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania and found a similar rock bench on Short Mountain in the Kittoctinny Hills, they were inspired to give it the same name. In so doing, they perhaps felt a little closer to the land from which they had come, and it must have also given them a sense of kinship with the land on which they now lived.

There is no record of fairytale-type legends associated with the King’s Stool of Ireland, nor any of that type that is recalled about its Dauphin County cousin. However, the monarch’s seat in Pennsylvania does have a remarkable story about it that was once well-known and frequently recalled by the residents of Clark’s Valley who lived in its shadow.

Among the earliest settlers in that idyllic place was a German immigrant named Ludwig Minsker, who settled there with his family in 1750. It was a time when the Pennsylvania frontier was plagued by the Indian troubles of the French and Indian War, and Minsker and his neighbors were always on the lookout for marauding Indian war parties.

Minkser family tradition recalls that during this period, their ancestor, alarmed by a report that local rangers on Short Mountain had spotted an Indian war party, hid his wife and six-month-old son in a large wooden chest into which he drilled air holes for them. Here they remained hidden, the father supplying them with food and water until the danger passed.

It is said that this very same chest, with its air holes, has survived to the present day and is cherished as a colorful family heirloom by Ludwig's descendants. However, the tale does not end there. The young child hidden in the chest was also named Ludwig, and he grew up and raised his children in the same valley, just below the magnificent natural landmark that has weathered the test of time into the present century.

From this second Ludwig Minsker, the most well-known story of Dauphin County's King's Stool originated. Like the rocks it celebrates, the tale somehow managed to survive the ravages of time; seemingly floating undeterred on time's currents until it ultimately found a safe harbor in the place where the events it recalls occurred.

During this particular episode, the Indian troubles here had subsided, and the remaining Native Americans in Clark's Valley had settled into a peaceful coexistence with their white neighbors. Nonetheless, there were still some "Indian haters" who held grudges against them.

So one morning, when Mrs. Minsker had stepped outside their cabin door, she was alarmed by what sounded like screams of agony. Her husband dismissed them as the cry of a "painter," one of the common names used to refer to mountain lions in those days, which could still be seen and heard throughout the state at that time.

The incident was forgotten until some days later when the Minsker children, who had been sent out to look for the family's errant cows, the herd having failed to come back to the barn at their usual time, came running back home to excitedly report a grisly discovery they had made at the King's Stool.

They had managed to track the missing cows up to the top of Short Mountain, where they finally stopped to rest at the King's Stool. Twilight was slowly turning to darkness when they spotted a body at the foot of the unique jumble of rocks. The flesh had long rotted away, leaving only a skeleton of bleached white bones dressed in distinctive garb. They initially



A View of the King's Stool on Third Mountain.



On the King's Stool (My late wife sitting on the giant throne).

wanted to investigate further, but lengthening shadows spurred the frightened children to turn and run home to tell their parents about their macabre find.

The next day the children showed their parents the bones that lay at the foot of the rocks. The clothing the person wore at the time of his death, including a colorful hunting shirt, was recognizable as that often worn by a friendly aborigine who lived in a small hut on nearby Peters Mountain. But how he came to be here and why someone would have wanted to kill him was a mystery to the Minskera.¹

Whether the Minskera ever discovered an answer to that mystery is unknown, but they probably did so at some point since they were undoubtedly told the same story that was told to me one April day in 1991. My storyteller, an eighty-two-year-old gentleman who was a lifelong resident of Clark's Valley and a direct descendant of Ludwig Minsker, had been told the story by his father.

This account claimed that the murder victim, known to locals as "Indian Joe," was killed by outlaw Indians when he attempted to prevent them from kidnapping the wife of Indian trader Peter Allen, whose trading post and house were located on the mountain named for him; Peter's Mountain. Allen's beautiful stone house still stands there today and is used as a private residence.²

The story of the Indian's demise is a longer tale, and it can be found in its entirety in the author's *Pennsylvania Fireside Tales Volume I*. For now, suffice it to say that a drive through Clark's Valley and onto its surrounding mountain peaks is still especially pleasant and colorful in autumn when the trees set the hills ablaze with the vibrant colors of fall. The natural surroundings and beauty are apt to send thoughts back to the time of the Minskera when Indians, mountain lions, and wolves still made these same hills their home.

Then, too, if a closer sense of those times is desired, the reader may want to travel through here at night and savor the nocturnal surroundings. Stop and listen; if you listen closely enough, you may even be so fortunate

1. W. H. Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 446–447.

2. Interviews with locals Jack Strawl (April 24, 1991) and Ralph Kinter (June 6, 1989).

to hear a sound from those olden times; the howl of a coyote from atop Third Mountain.

LOCATION : The King's Stool can be found on Short Mountain above Clarks Valley in Dauphin County (DD GPS Coordinates: 40.3684202, -76.9616425). Along Route 322, take Route 225 North at the village of Dauphin. Follow 225 until an intersection with Route 325. Turn right to go east into Clark's Valley. Follow 325 about five miles. A path at a roadside farm on the right goes up the mountain to the King's Stool.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bartlett, John, *Familiar Quotations*, Little Brown & Co., Boston, Mass., 2019.
- Burke, James P., *Pioneers of Second Fork*, AuthorHouse, Bloomington, In., 2009.
- Burkett, Kenneth P., "A Rockshelter Burial in Northwestern Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Archeologist*, Vol. 47, 1977.
- Cornplanter, Jesse J., *Legends of the Longhouse*, Ira J. Friedman, Port Washington, N. Y., 1963.
- Elliott, Ella Zerbey, *Blue Book of Schuylkill County*, Republican Press, Pottsville, Pa. 1916.
- Egle, William H., *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, Everts & Peck, Philadelphia, 1883.
- Herbstritt, James T. and Love, David A., "Archeological Investigations of Split Rock Shelter, Horton Township, Elk County, Pa.," *Pennsylvania Archeologist*, Vol. 45, 1975.
- Ignoffo, Mary Jo, *Captive of the Labyrinth: Sarah L. Winchester, Heiress of the Rifle Fortune*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Mo., 2010.
- Jones, Richard, *Haunted Britain and Ireland*, New Holland Publishers, London, 2003.
- Skinner, Charles M., *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1896.
- Swaminathan, Nikhil, "Meadowcroft Rock Shelter," *Archeology*, Sept./Oct. 2014.
- Toy, Sidney, *Castles—Their Construction and History*, W. Heineman, London, 1939.
- Wallace, Paul A., *Indians in Pennsylvania*, Pennsylvania Historical Commission, Harrisburg, 1970.
- Welshans, Wayne O., *A Nippenose Collection*, privately published anecdotes and photos, 1995.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEFFREY R. FRAZIER was born and raised in Centre Hall, Centre County, where he says he grew up in a “Tom Sawyer sort of way”, later graduating with a BS from Penn State in 1967, and then an MBA from Rider University in New Jersey in 1978. Some of the fondest memories of his boyhood include explorations of out-of-the-way spots in the mountains and accounts of the legends that seem to cling to them, and beginning in 1970 he began collecting those same kind of anecdotes



from all over the state; ranging from the Blue Mountains of Berks and Lehigh Counties, the South Mountains of Adams County, the “Black Forest” area of Potter and Tioga Counties, the Alleghenies of Clearfield and Blair Counties, and the other counties in the middle. He has compiled his vast collection of tales into a series titled *Pennsylvania Fireside Tales*. This volume is a continuation of his work, written in a format that the average reader can enjoy, especially those who love the green valleys and cloud-covered mountain peaks of Pennsylvania as much as he does.

Enjoying this sample?

To continue reading, buy

PAMountain Landmarks, Volume 1

or visit

<https://pafolktales.com/mountain-landmarks/>

for more information.