

Ringing Rocks

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upon an aeon, it must have been a thunderous waterfall. Fissures in dark grey rock hold quiet water and tannic leaves. People who've hiked the Burren of Ireland, say the falls area is eerily similar, lacking Eire's orchids. Again, the power of stones resonates. Give yourself a leisured stroll to seek the elusive source of these waters. Then return to the spillway, an exquisite and fairly unique place to open up a backpack picnic, legs dangling over the precipice.

On either side, you'll be treated to the original water music. Off in the distance, new ringers are creating concerti from wild sources. Someone in your party will be sure to refer to this as a 'Rock Concert.' You won't see the bears. You might hear a hawk. Jays and squirrels most likely protest your presence. You will not be in a hurry to leave this privileged place, alone in still and stunning beauty.

Others whom I take to Ringing Rocks try to put its allure into words. It reminds one of turning into his own wooded driveway, at the end of a long and satisfying academic day. Another friend was taken right back to the earliest, deepest reaches of Chartres and Mt. St. Michel, where the sacred wells burst forth. Someone else marveled at "emptied fullness." All of this waits for our eyes and hammers, within about 45 minutes of Route One doorways.

Food possibilities: Bucks Bounty, a roadhouse with Indian motifs and superb crab cakes, interesting beers and ales, on River Road on the right just below the Frenchtown bridge. The renowned Frenchtown Inn, back in New Jersey. Stockton for the hearty, quirky, homemade Miele's and Stockton Inn (more for atmosphere than food, "There's a Small Hotel, With a Wishing Well" was written here and well remains.) Lambertville's Swan Hotel for divine salmon.

BOOK REVIEW: THE UNWELCOME GUEST

by Mark Oshinskie, an attorney and writer on environmental issues

In *Waste is a Terrible Thing to Mind* (2001), former NJ DEP Assistant Commissioner and part-time folk and bluegrass radio DJ John Weingart conveys the 1994-1998 saga of his agency's attempt to find a New Jersey resting place for New Jersey-generated low level radioactive waste materials.

Radioactive wastes are by-products of both military (weapons tailings) and civilian uses of radiation. Civilian uses of radiation include energy generation (about half of New Jersey's electricity is generated by nuclear plants), and industrial and medical activities, such as diagnostic tests. (Incidentally, I've been told by a New Jersey scientist that you can tell if an area has more retirees than average by testing its sewage sludge. Sludge from Ocean County, with its many retirees, contains elevated levels of excreted radioactive materials from medical tests). Highly radioactive materials, such as spent fuel rods, severely threaten human health and must be carefully entombed for millennia in highly secure locations. The federal government is still working on establishing such a national repository. However, much radioactive waste contains much lower radionuclide levels. These low-level rad-wastes include trash that has become contaminated by contact with radioactive materials, such as tools and lab equipment.

Weingart chronicles his agency's many efforts to find a New Jersey municipality to volunteer to host a low-level radioactive waste facility within its boundaries. In return, the town would get \$2 million per year. Somehow this reminded me of Durrenmatt's *The Visit*.

But the author is convinced that his agency's quest was not nearly that sinis-

ter. He says most scientists agree his agency was not asking any of the towns to either sell their souls or internalize any real health risk. According to the present scientific consensus, these materials are not hazardous because they emit about as much radiation as a few chest x-rays (and less than the annual exposure from natural background), will be encased in concrete and stored on remote 300 acre sites.

The author found that municipal officials in about ten of New Jersey's 567 towns showed enough interest in accepting the waste that the notion was put to public discussion. At that point, the siting process jumped the track, principally because individuals would not tolerate the perceived risk. Townspeople in crowded gymnasiums shouted down distrusted government officials with statements of fear and defiance.

Weingart's central point is that, as has been observed by authors of books like *Tragic Choices* and some tort law scholars, people assess risk inaccurately because they rely on emotion and anecdotal perception rather than reason and statistics. For example, although it is statistically safer to travel by plane than by car, many fear flying. Events since the book's publication may intensify this emotional approach to risk assessment, both in transportation and generally.

Weingart raises another example of inaccurate risk perception, namely that the risks imposed by smoking and heavy drinking far exceed the risks of living near a landfill or low level rad-waste site. Yet, this overlooks the cool factor. Smoking and drinking are dangerous but people begin these activities because

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Photo taken by Ellen Pepin at a party for Tina Schvejda on February 22. L to R: Sunil Somalwar, Dick Colby, Tina Schvejda, Bill Green and Ken Johanson.

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