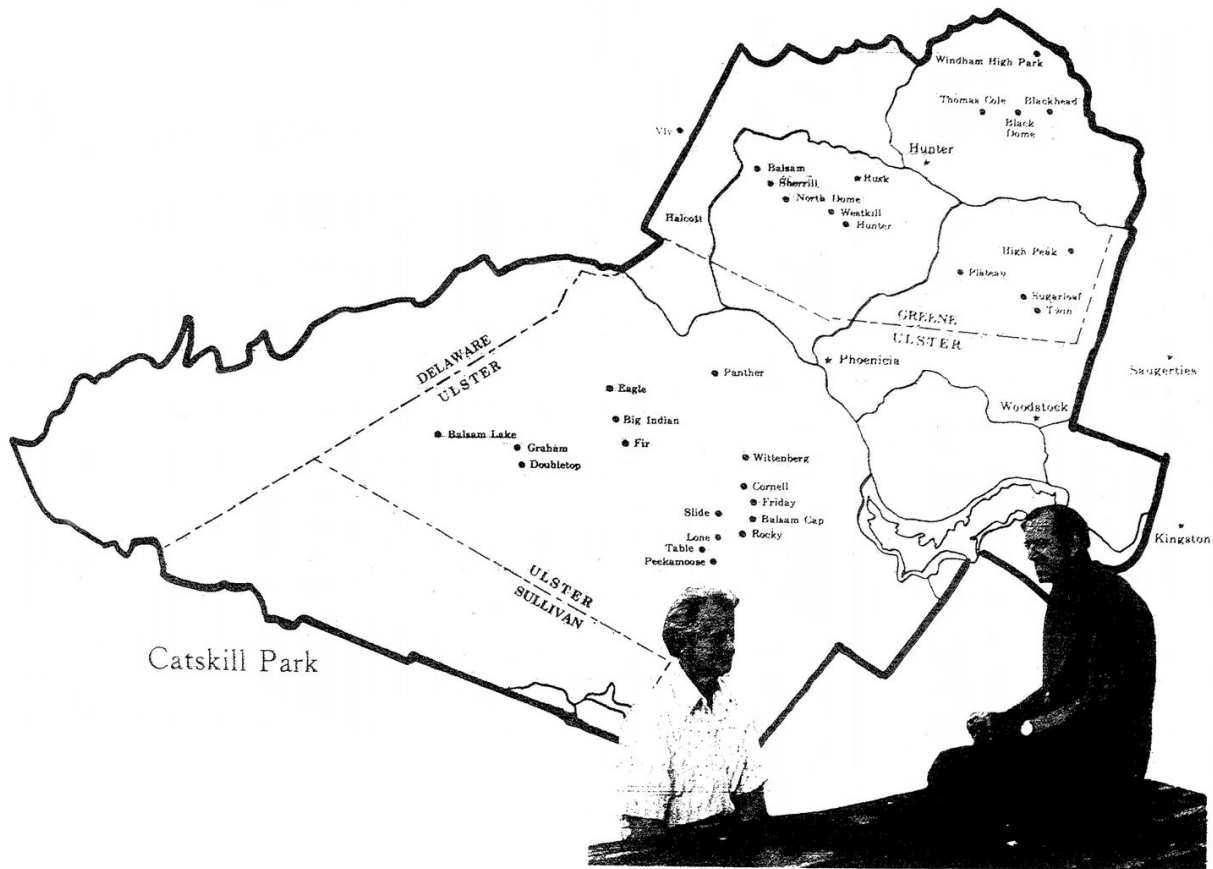


## Though 'over the hill,' 2 climbers reach their peaks

By EDWINA HENDERSON

Freeman staff

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Richard Davis (left) and Samuel Steen have taken the song title "Climb Every Mountain" to heart. The two have scaled 34 Catskill peaks in each month of the year during the past five years. The map shows many of the mountains that must be climbed for membership in the Catskill 3500 Club.

**SAUGERTIES** - If Samuel Steen and Richard Davis stacked up all the Catskills peaks they've climbed, they calculate they'd be floating 106 miles out in space now.

The two senior citizens are charter members of what they call the "Over the Hill Gang." They are also the first recipients of the self-bestowed "Man for All Seasons Award."

Both members of the Catskill 3500 Club, Steen and Davis set out about five years ago to climb each of the 34 Catskill Mountains over 3,600 feet in elevation in each month of the year.

Two weeks ago, they completed their quest with a hike to the summit of Kaaterskill High Peak.

That made a total of 408 ascents. The two men estimate they walked at least 1,800 miles toward their goal, about the distance from Maine to Florida.

## **Just started keeping track**

“I’d been hiking the Catskills since about 1970,” said Steen, a retired Air Force sergeant, “when I realized how many times I’d been up. Dick had been up a lot, too, so about five years ago we started keeping track,” he explained.

They don’t know if theirs is a singular accomplishment, but, to their knowledge, they are the only ones who had that specific goal in mind and documented their adventure.

Membership in the Catskill 3500 Club requires climbing each of the 34 highest mountains once, plus going up four of them in the winter. Recognition is also given those who climb them all in the winter, Steen said.

The Club - with 331 members from across the country but concentrated in the Hudson Valley, Connecticut, New Jersey and New York City area - meets each March for an annual dinner and recognition of new members and accomplishments.

Their other activities include regular day hikes, a weekend outing of winter climbing and maintaining the Long Path over Peekamoose and Table Mountains in the western part of Ulster County.

The group was organized in 1962 to encourage Catskill climbing and exploring. Steen attained membership in 1972, Davis in 1977.

Belonging to the Club provides “a nice companionship. We’re all there for the same things. It’s great to be with them and have that related feeling.” Steen said.

At 60, Steen, a Kingston resident, is the younger and more talkative of the two climbers.

His exploits include hiking the Appalachian trail and mountain climbing vacations out west.

The nearby Adirondacks and White Mountains are more rugged, but “uphill is uphill,” he said.

## **Friendly eastern scenery**

And, he adds, the eastern scenery is “more friendly, softer and greener and more pleasant.”

Davis, 69, is a retired electronics engineer who used to work for International Telephone and Telegraph.

A spry, taciturn man, he keeps a 30-acre homestead on land his family has owned for three generations. Davis said he has been hiking Catskill and Adirondack trails since 1948.

When he isn’t hiking, he gardens, makes wine, does some haying and cuts wood to warm his split-level contemporary house. In winter, he harvests and sells Christmas trees and when the thaw comes, makes maple syrup.

Although the “Over the Hill Gang” was named in jest, Steen isn’t so sure it won’t catch on. He has been contacted by an editor of a national hiking magazine who became intrigued with the notations the pair made in mountain-top registers as they charted their progress through the 34 peaks, mainly in Ulster County. The remainder are in nearby Delaware or Greene counties.

Names like Kaaterskill and Vly are a reminder of Dutch influence on the region, while Thomas Cole, Graham, Cornell, Sherill and Balsam serve as a roster of British names from the past. Others, such as Sugarloaf, Doubletop, Rocky, Panther, Black Dome, Table, Bearpen and Indian Head bear more descriptive names.

Steen and Davis said they made about half their climbs, including the last one, together. Occasionally one went alone and they often went in larger groups of friends and climbers.

### **A quiet, calm pursuit**

Although there are some youngsters in the 3500 Club, "hiking is an interest that comes along later in life," Steen said, when a person feels like a quieter, calmer pursuit.

Both he and Davis kept journals of their climbs and between them logged sightings of just about every native animal but the elusive and nocturnal bobcat. "We saw tracks in the snow many times but we never came across one," said Davis.

"We did see a bear," added Steen, "and they say if a man and a bear are on one acre of ground chances are the man will never see a bear."

They also carry field guides and have learned to identify the Catskill flora as well, although neither is interested in eating wild foods excepts for blueberries.

While achieving their goal, the men took different routes up the mountains and we "got quite familiar with all the peaks," Steen said.

The bulk of the mounts have well-marked trails maintained by the state, but 13 are trailless, requiring a compass and some ability to "orienteer," they reported.

At 4,180 feet above sea level, Slide Mountain in the town of Shandaken is the highest of the Catskill peaks and also the one Davis and Steen recommend for the novice climber.

At the bottom of the list is Rocky, a mere eight feet taller than the minimum 3,500, by trailless and accessible only after climbing up and over another mountain.

Having a goal gave the two men a "motivation," Steen said. "And the more you get out and into the woods, the more chance you have to see things. Now that we've done it, I'm afraid we haven't been out as much as we were before."