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COVID-19 Archive

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COVID-19: Fresh Air, an Antidote to Quarantine

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The quarantines imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic have forced millions to adopt new habits, distance themselves from society, and confine themselves within their homes. After a few weeks' anxieties grew high and many could no longer bear the imposed restrictions. Given the specified outlines of proper social distancing there were not many options for one trying to remedy this heightened level of anxiety. However, for people living in the tri-state area, Harriman State Park located in the lower Hudson Valley has been a haven to which many have retreated in efforts to escape the realities of the pandemic.

Prior to the imposition of the quarantine, Harriman State Park seemed to be an entity outside the consciousness of the local population. On any given day the roads were nearly untraveled and the trails quiet. This all changed in March though. Despite closures of state parks in New York, the once empty roads and quiet trails became populated with hundreds of people. Seeking respite from their now monotonous routines, and with the closure of areas where congestion was inevitable, people looked for open space. Thus, the near 50,000 acres that make up Harriman State Park seemed like the perfect option. As the weeks have worn on and the weather has improved, making outdoor activities more inviting, the number of people taking trips to the park has skyrocketed. The parking lots are now full beyond capacity, the roads are lined with cars, and the trails are crowded with people trying to get a dose of fresh air. For some,

though located miles from home, amid the sights and sounds of the outdoors, absent cellular connection to receive updates on the pandemic, they're unable to escape, as every breath is filtered through a mask. For others though, Harriman State Park appears to be another world entirely, without a mask covering the lower half of their face they breath the air freely, and you can see their smiles.

This dichotomy of the masked and maskless alters the experience for both parties. Those wearing masks are able to uphold the highest level of safety but, as a result are unable to truly tap into the freedom usually experienced in the outdoors. On the other hand, those venturing into the wilderness without masks are able to strip away one of the burdens of the pandemic, but only superficially. While they no longer feel the strings wrapped around their ears or the cloth scratching under their nose, they are met with a new obstacle. They now feel a new weight of social anxiety which forces them to distance themselves even further as they park their cars, step far off the trail as they pass others, and search for the most secluded trails. In doing so they are reminded each and every time of what they were trying to escape and find themselves questioning if it's even possible to do so.

Thus, Harriman State Park, once a hidden gem in the Hudson Valley, has become infected with the realities of the pandemic. Locals who used to be able to get away in the sequestered Catskill foothills are now unable to do so as the park has been overrun by people from every corner of the tri-state area. In sum, the purity usually found in venturing outdoors has been stained by this overwhelming influx of newcomers and turned the park into yet another space encumbered by the pandemic.

