



ROCK LODGE CLUB



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There are few clubs that better blend the old and the new than Rock Lodge Club. The 145-acre resort in northern New Jersey is best known for its pristine woodland, vast hiking trails, foliage, and a spring-fed lake.

Located 40 miles from New York City, New York, Rock Lodge Club is more than 1,000 feet above sea level, which allows nudists to enjoy the summer weather in the mountain air that’s generally 10 degrees cooler than the temperature in Manhattan, New York. The 250-member club is open from May 2 through the end of October.

The club has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years with a number of younger members and families joining. According to Sal Durante, Rock Lodge Club’s membership chair, this is due to the efforts of a number of the cooperative club members. Several have served as club “cheerleaders,” recruiting younger members. Another member operates a Saturday shuttle service from Manhattan, New York, during the winter months.

Another member has spearheaded Rock Lodge Club’s digital presence on social media and on the club website (www.rocklodge.com). In addition, there is a YouTube channel that includes a four-minute feature CNN did on Rock Lodge Club in 1995. All of this has generated additional media attention in recent years from *The New York Times* and *Self magazine*.

“We’re a member-run club and have been for years, so that helps a lot,” Durante said. “We have a few core members in particular who devote a lot of time and energy to it.”

Few clubs have as storied a history as Rock Lodge Club. In 2007, the club celebrated the 100th anniversary of “The Stone House,” the focal point and namesake of the property that still houses members and guests. The Stone House has a poured concrete roof, stained glass, a basement with a coal furnace, and a water system that pumps water from a spring to a holding tank on the third floor.

The building was constructed by A.L.A. Himmelwright – an

engineer at the Roebling Construction Company, who bought the property in the late 1800s. Prior to the purchase, the land was used for timber and agriculture. There is also evidence that the land was used for iron mine prospecting, possibly connected to the nearby Thomas Edison mine works. On the grounds nearby is an apple orchard, a large garden, and livestock areas.

From 1904-1905, Himmelwright used oxen to dredge a swamp and built a dam to create a lake. It is fed by a stream located near the lake, as well as by 17 underwater springs. The mainspring is mentioned in early deeds and leases as a water supply for both Rock Lodge Club and surrounding neighbors. The clear, spring-fed lake attracts nude swimmers, boaters, and anglers and is a central part of what makes Rock Lodge Club a family-oriented, nude recreation destination today.

Other early buildings still in use today include a stable, which is now known as the Hacienda and houses the club's office. There is also an icehouse, which, prior to the availability of refrigeration, was used to store ice harvested from the lake in the winter. It was recently converted to an exercise room.

In 1916, Himmelwright built a bungalow (clubhouse) and, during the Roaring Twenties, the property was used as a training camp for boxers, including heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey. Amenities for the boxers included an indoor, handball court and coal heat, with a fireplace, a living room, and a men's room – but no ladies' room.

The boxer's camp was one of the ventures undertaken to make Rock Lodge Club profitable. Another was the Rock Lodge Club Health Farm. During the Great Depression, Herman Shoshinsky leased the property as the proprietor of the American Gymnosophical Association (AGA), and nudism came to Rock Lodge Club. Ownership changed hands in the late 1930s when the property was bought by Francis DePaolo – a chiropractor who lived nearby.

In 1942, DePaolo and Shoshinsky had a falling out, and the AGA moved to Newfoundland, New Jersey. Rock Lodge Club, as a cooperative nudist club, began that year with a one-year lease. In 1946, a 10-year lease was negotiated, and summer cabins began to appear, though it is believed some were built in the 1930s. In 1957, a 40-year lease went into effect, and a building boom occurred. Along with summer cabins, much of the club infrastructure was built in the late 1950s and 1960s.

By the mid-1970s, a sauna was added, along with more rooms in the Bungalow, a water slide on the "Rock Beach," outdoor showers, and paved driveways. A few members built year-round cabins. In the 1980s, sand was brought in and "Sandy Beach" was created. A dock and benches were installed, which made the area a natural attraction for younger members and guests. In the 1990s, Rock Lodge Club added a hot tub and a children's playground.

In the late 1980s, with the end of the 40-year lease looming, several attempts were made to organize a purchase by members. In 1990, Rock Properties was formed, and money was lent by members for the purchase of 35 acres. This was soon paid off; another land purchase was made in 1995, bringing the club's total acreage to 145 acres.

The club's history has been richly preserved online in part because of the efforts of George Sellmer, who joined the club in 1937 and served as the club's unofficial historian for decades.

The club has a full component of nudist amenities, including clay and all-weather tennis courts, volleyball and badminton courts, paddleboats and rowboats, along with a fully-equipped kitchen and laundry room. Many of the courts have been redone in recent years, and pickleball has been added as well.

Rock Lodge Club is best known for its four-acre lake and its two beaches. On summer weekends, it's possible to find people swimming, fishing, boating, or just lounging on rafts. The lake is accessed by Rock Beach or Sandy Beach, along with other entry points from the cabins. Rock Beach tends to be for those looking for quiet, while Sandy Beach tends to be the center of activity.

"People come because of the lake," Durante said. "It's such a relaxing place." ●



