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Martin van Buren National Historic Site Habitat Assessment

Report to The Nature Conservancy

by Erik Kiviat

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Introduction

At the request of the Eastern Regional Office of The Nature Conservancy, I visited the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site (Lindenwald) (Town of Kinderhook, Columbia County, New York; U.S. Geological Survey Stottville 7.5 minute topographic map sheet; see attached maps). The purpose was to determine if any habitats onsite should be surveyed for rare animals "tracked" (i.e. listed) by the New York Natural Heritage Program. A 1996 inquiry to NHP revealed no file data on rare animals for the site or its vicinity.

I was at van Buren NHS and adjoining properties ca 1300-1545 h EST, 18 December 1996, reconnoitering habitats and consulting briefly with National Park Service staff. The weather was cloudy, cool, and calm, and the ground was quite wet.

Observations

The Martin Van Buren National Historic Site comprises ornamental grounds (e.g. lawns, plantings), young deciduous woods, and farmland (20 acres in fee simple and 20 acres in easements). *Robinia pseudoacacia* and *Prunus serotina* are prominent in the two woodlots. There is a near-permanent, disturbed-looking, ca 8 x 30 m pond that is connected beneath the site driveway to a larger farm pond offsite on the south. I noted *Lythrum salicaria*, *Lemna minor*, and *Salix* trees at the on-site pond. Extensive farmland adjoins portions of the NHS. Kinderhook Creek is off-site to the west.

The Martin Van Buren Nature Area is a Columbia County park, managed by Friends of Lindenwald, on the east side of Route 9 northeast of the NHS. The Nature Area is mostly deciduous woods and swamp, with a "seasonal" stream. Young and maturing woods have *Acer saccharum*, *Quercus* spp., etc., with scattered trees reaching 40-60 cm dbh. The wetland (16 acres?) has *Alnus* and other tall shrubs and small trees, but herbaceous openings are apparently small. The stream is ca 1.5-2 m across and is not rocky. There is an unusual stone wall running approximately north-south in the eastern portion of the Nature Area, with individual large rocks in a single tier ca 50 cm high, many of the rocks apparently a carbonate breccia.

The habitats I saw at the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site had little if any potential for rare animals. Of interest, nonetheless, are nursery colonies of little brown bats between the closed wooden shutters and glass windows of the big house, reported by National Park Service staff. The bats are visible through the windows from inside the house in summer, and the staff takes advantage of this unusual opportunity to educate visitors about bats. There are also big brown bats present, and possibly other species, according to Judy Harris of the National Park Service.

The Nature Area contains a lot of suitable breeding habitat for American woodcock and American goldfinch. I do not believe the forest and swamp are extensive enough or have enough tree basal area to attract breeding red-shouldered hawk. Wood turtle, spotted turtle, blue-spotted salamander and four-toed salamander are possible in the swamp.

Table 1. Summary of possible rare elements, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site (see text for Martin Van Buren Nature Area).

Element	Comments	Recommendation
Bats	Nursery colony of little brown bat in main house; rare species not likely?	Ask bat expert about likelihood of rare species

Recommendations

It might be worthwhile for a bat expert to visit the big house during the appropriate season. Chances of tracked bat species occurring in the house, however, seem slight.

It is not clear whether the Nature Conservancy is interested in having surveys conducted at the Nature Area because it is not a National Park Service property. The Alan Devoe Bird Club might be contacted for any records of rare birds there. If any survey work is to be conducted, I would recommend a reptile and amphibian survey in spring (e.g. March to May or June).

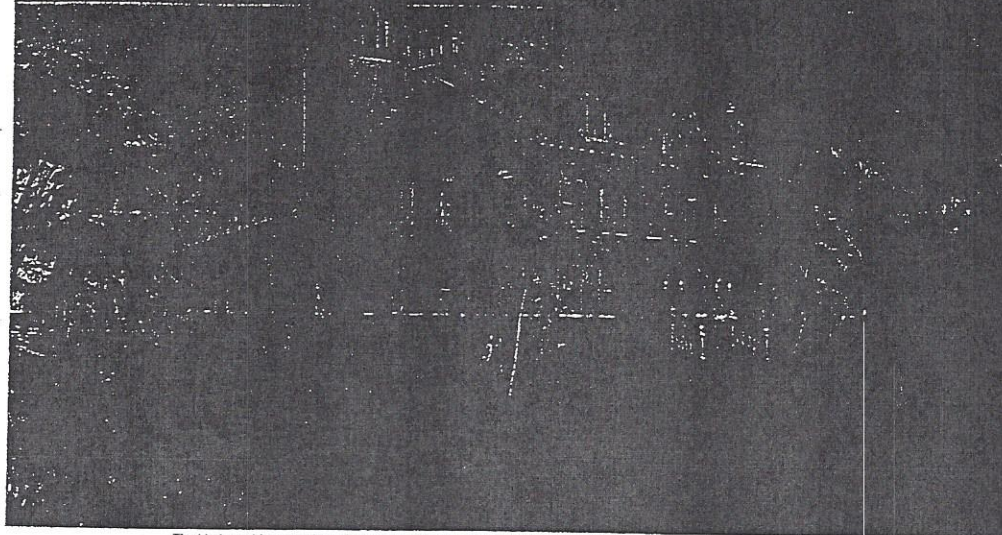
Contact

Judy Harris
Martin Van Buren National Historic Site
518-758-9689

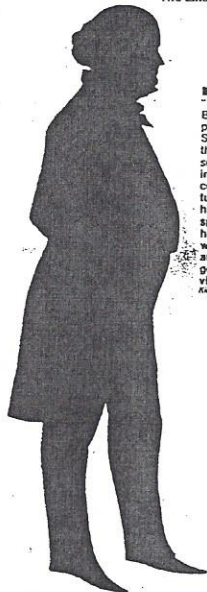
USGS Stottville

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY





The Lindenwald estate, shown here in Richard Upjohn's early 1850s watercolor, was Martin Van Buren's home for the final 21 years of his life. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University



Van Buren

"Ex-President Van Buren returned to the place of his nativity on Saturday last... after the lapse of a long series of years, spent in the service of his country, he has returned to the home of his youth, probably to spend the evening of his days among those who have long appreciated the splendor of his genius and admired his virtues."

Kinderhook Sentinel, May 1841

The recipient of the *Sentinel's* florid praise did indeed spend the rest of his days in close proximity to the small New York village he always considered home. Martin Van Buren was born in Kinderhook in 1782, soon after a fragile union of states successfully ended its fight for independence. His parents kept a tavern and, like their Dutch predecessors of 150 years, made a moderate living farming in the Hudson Valley. Young Martin, possessed of a fine mind and a strong ambition, embarked on a legal career at 14 with an apprenticeship to a local attorney. In 1804 he joined his half-brother's law practice in their home town. Three years later Van Buren married a distant relative and childhood sweetheart, Hannah Hoes. Meanwhile, he was becoming known as more than a country lawyer. His first appointed post, as a county official, set him on an upward course that led to the highest office in the state—and, eventually, the nation.

Early 19th century politics was a whirlwind of boisterous characters and opposing interest groups where a new party system was taking shape. Van Buren artfully positioned himself in the eye of the storm, persistently advocating the principles of the Jeffersonian Republicans: states' rights, strict constitutional construction, civil liberties. His efforts, along with those of like-minded politicians,

brought about an alliance of the "planters of the South and the plain people of the North," the Democratic party. During the administration of the new party's first President, the enormously popular Andrew Jackson, Van Buren was Old Hickory's top advisor. As eighth President—the first born under the U.S. flag—Martin Van Buren continued the era of Jacksonian Democracy.

Not until his defeat for the presidency in 1848 did Van Buren give up public life. The 1850 census listed his occupation as "farmer." Once settled at Lindenwald, he resisted all attempts to lure him back into politics. In 1862 Martin Van Buren succumbed to his "old enemy," bronchial asthma. He was buried in Kinderhook, where in life he had always known a beloved home.

A watercolor-on-ivory miniature of the ex-President painted "from life" was Albany artist Daniel Wagner's 1846 contribution to Van Buren's portraiture.

Michael Freedman



A Master Politician's "Magical" Career

"It is said that he is a great magician. I do not believe it; but his wand is good common sense which he uses for the benefit of the country." A long series of elected and appointed posts afforded the "little magician" ample opportunity to practice his true craft: cool, competent diplomacy. A discreetly guarded man, Van Buren operated most effectively behind the scenes, where an observer noted, he "crowded to his object with muffled oars." Yet, in his later years Van Buren realized such that the wizardry had failed, that the political system he had helped to create would not prevent civil war.

1801

Defeated in the first New York gubernatorial election, but became a principal force in the 1804 election.

1808

Appointed to the position of Secretary of the Albany County Board of Supervisors.

1812-20

State Senator, then Governor of New York. He was re-elected Governor in 1815 and 1819.

1821

Defeated in the election for the Governor of the state.

1821-28

U.S. Senator, then Governor of New York. He was re-elected Governor in 1825 and 1829.

1829

Governor of New York. He was re-elected Governor in 1832 and 1836.

1831

Nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court by President Andrew Jackson, but declined the nomination.

1833-37

Vice-President of the United States under Andrew Jackson.

1837-41

President of the United States. He was re-elected in 1840.

1844

Lost Democratic Presidential nomination to James K. Polk.

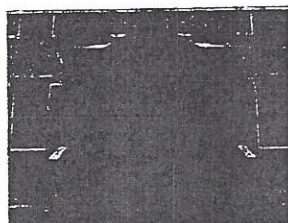
1848

Presidential candidate of the Free-Soil party, a group opposing extension of slavery; defeat marked end of political career.

A Beautiful Goblet of White House Champagne reads this 1840 pro-Van Buren campaign novelty card. When a tab is pulled, the card depicts the candidate frowning at "An Ugly Mug of Log Cabin Hard Cider," the trademark of opponent William Henry Harrison.



Just south of Kinderhook, on land that once belonged to his ancestors, stood a dwelling that Martin Van Buren thought would make a fine home in which to live out his post-White House years. The large, two-story red brick house had been built by wealthy judge Peter Van Ness using local materials and following a simple square plan, which emphasized a Palladian window illuminating the second story hallway. The Georgian style carried over to the inside as well; pilasters and entablatures framed six-panel molded doors, and finely carved cornices edged the

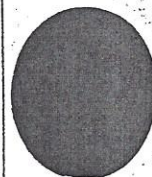


Architect Richard Upjohn's elaborate modifications included a new front porch con-

structed in a popular melding of the Romanesque and Gothic styles. Michael Fredericks

ceilings. Adorning the entrance was a silver-plated doorknocker inscribed with "1797," the year the house was completed.

William Van Ness, Van Buren's lifelong friend and former employer, inherited the house from his father but lost it to creditors in 1824. Fifteen years later, though neglect had rendered the building and grounds rather unattractive to a man who took pride in elegant surroundings, Van Buren paid owner William Paulding, Jr., \$14,000 for the estate. Even before he moved in permanently Van Buren was anxious to begin what he called "improvements." In accordance with his heritage he set about making his piece of the Hudson Valley into a working farm. Soon the place came back to life; by



Van Buren commissioned this painted miniature of his wife, Hannah, shortly after she died in 1819. He never remarried; aided by his sister-in-law and various educational institutions, Martin raised the couple's four sons who became his close companions.

1945 he could gaze proudly on more than 220 acres of cropland, as well as formal flower gardens, ornamental fish ponds, wooded paths, and outbuildings of all kinds.

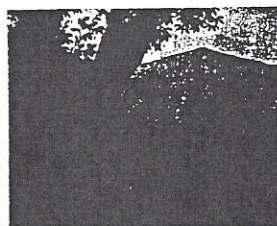
Primarily concerned with the grounds, Van Buren also lavished attention on his new house. His most elaborate modification involved removing the central stairway in the entrance hall to create large rooms on both stories. Fifty-one vividly colored wallpaper panels, imported from France, formed a mural-like hunting scene in the downstairs hall. Underneath was a wallpaper balustrade design. Elsewhere he placed fine furniture and Brussels carpets, and hung portraits of some personal friends—Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson. Van Buren described one "improvement" to a friend in 1846: "When you visit me again you shall wash off the impurities of Mammon in the Bath which has been put up." Lindenwald was a source of great satisfaction to its owner.

"We are to undergo a great Revolution here," Van Buren wrote in 1849. Because his son Smith agreed to move in and help manage the estate, Van Buren gave him license to make alterations in order to accommodate his



Van Buren is believed to have purchased this mahogany armchair—part of a 10-piece parlor set attributed to the New York company J. Moors—while selecting Lindenwald's new furnishings in 1841. Michael Fredericks

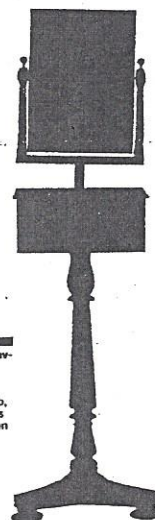
growing family. Smith sought out Richard Upjohn, whom Van Buren referred to as the "great architectural oracle." The new plan called for kitchen ranges, running water, a furnace, and many additional rooms. But it was the decorative features—a four-story brick tower, a central gable, attic dormers, and "as beautiful a Porch as you ever laid your eyes upon"—that transported Lindenwald from the 18th to the mid-19th century, an era when fashionable builders modeled their works after the grand villas of northern Italy. Finally, Lindenwald was painted yellow. The indulgent father explained that "the idea of seeing in life, the changes



Never one to spare expense when it came to decorating Lindenwald à la mode, Van Buren acquired costly French wallpaper that formed a scene entitled "Landscape of the Hunt." Michael Fredericks

which my heir would be sure to make after I am gone, amuses me."

The next decade brought few alterations to Lindenwald. Van Buren lived happily at his country seat until his death in 1862. Afterward, the house changed hands many times. Over the next century or so it served as a private residence, a tea house, a nursing home, and an antiques shop. The property became part of the National Park Service in the 1970s. Restored to the era of Van Buren's occupancy, the mansion and grounds recall the time when this gentleman farmer "drank the pure pleasure of a rural life" at his Lindenwald.



This painted-grain shaving stand, which remained at the estate through numerous changes in ownership, attests to Van Buren's widely held reputation for immaculate grooming. Michael Fredericks

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About Your Visit

Established
Kinderhook, New York
1817
The eighth president of the United States, Martin Van Buren, lived here from 1841 to 1849.

Location
The site is located on the east side of the Hudson River, about 10 miles north of Newburgh.

Hours
Open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Admission
Free for all visitors.

Special Events
Annual reenactment of the Van Buren family's arrival in 1841.

Historical
Lindenwald was built by Peter Van Ness, a wealthy judge, and was later purchased by Martin Van Buren in 1841. The house was designed by Richard Upjohn and is a fine example of the Greek Revival style.

Architecture
The house features a central gable, a four-story brick tower, and a porch with columns.

Interior
The interior is decorated with French wallpaper, Brussels carpets, and fine furniture.

Exterior
The exterior is painted yellow and features a central gable and a porch with columns.

Surroundings
The estate includes 220 acres of cropland, formal flower gardens, ornamental fish ponds, and wooded paths.

Visiting
Visitors are encouraged to walk the grounds and view the house. A guided tour is available for a fee.

Restrooms
Restrooms are located near the entrance.

Gift Shop
A small gift shop is located near the entrance.

Maps
Maps of the estate and the surrounding area are available for purchase.

Directions
From Newburgh, take Route 9N north for 10 miles to the entrance.

History
The site was originally owned by the Van Buren family and was later purchased by Martin Van Buren in 1841.

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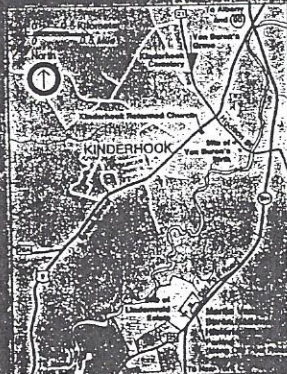
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MARTIN VAN BUREN NATURE AREA NATURE TRAILS

TAKE ONLY
PICTURES...

KEY:

WHITE BLAZE = OUTER LOOP TRAIL

BLUE BLAZE = NATURE TRAIL

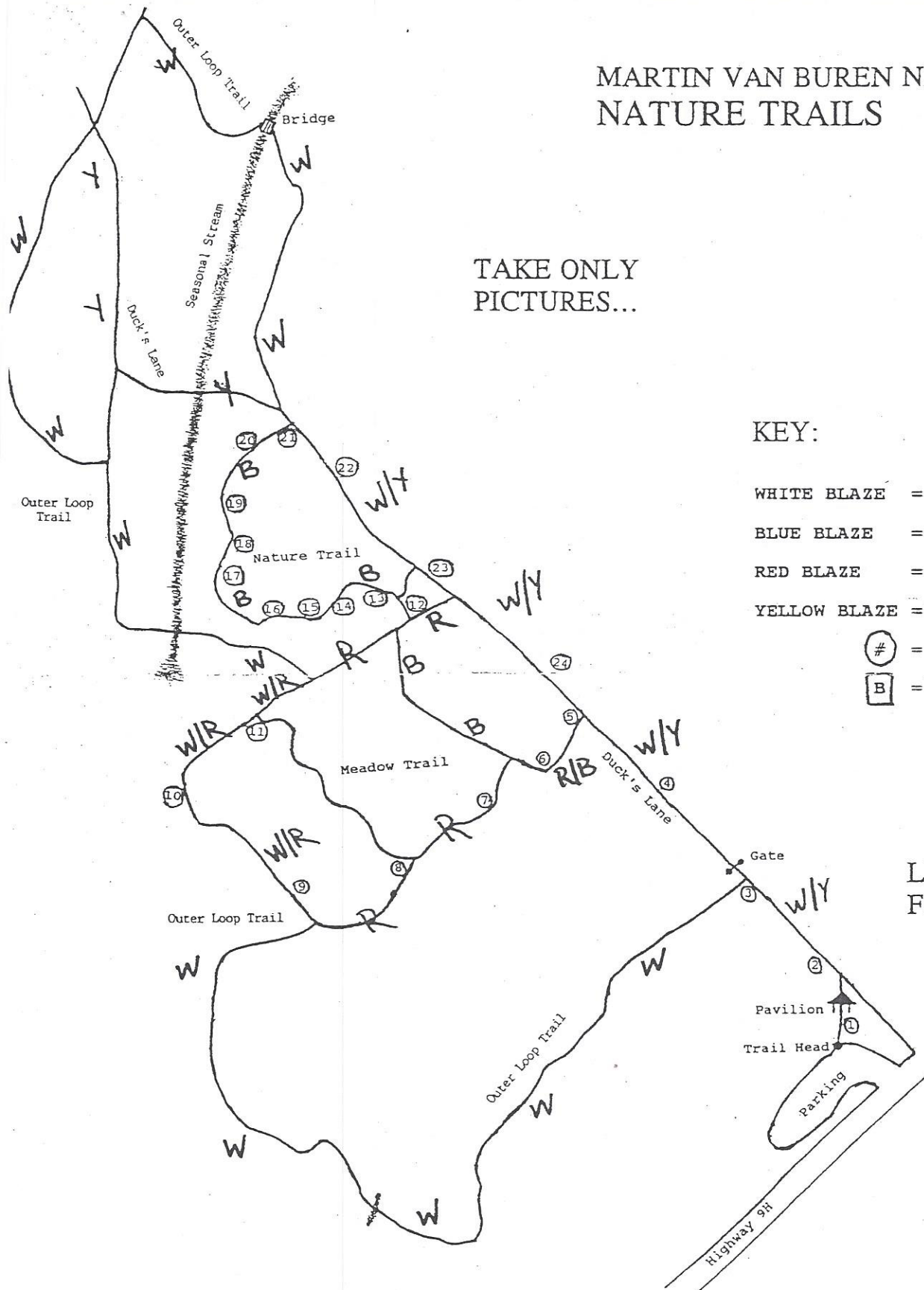
RED BLAZE = MEADOW TRAIL

YELLOW BLAZE = DUCK'S LANE

= INTERPRETIVE MARKER

B = BRIDGE

LEAVE ONLY
FOOTPRINTS...



INTERPRETIVE TRAIL GUIDES ARE AVAILABLE AT THE GATEHOUSE ACROSS ROUTE 9H.

HELP US TO MAINTAIN THIS PARK. REPORT DAMAGE TO A PARK RANGER OR CALL 758-9689.

Welcome to the Martin Van Buren Nature Area! This park area is a diverse natural and recreational resource. Please observe the following rules while you enjoy this area:

- * Take out what you have brought into the park. Remove all trash.
 - * Only charcoal fires are permitted in the park. Campfires are forbidden, please do not use wood from the park to start charcoal fires.
 - * Please stay on the trails; avoid creating new paths or using those that have been closed or rerouted.
 - * Do not feed any animals or birds.
 - * Camping by individuals is not permitted.
 - * Hunting, trapping or fishing is prohibited.
 - * Trail bikes are permitted but please ride safely and be respectful of hikers.
 - * Restrooms, water and information are available at the Gatehouse at Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, across route 9H.
 - * Report all damage or safety hazards to a Park Ranger.
-

As befits a diverse natural area, the Martin Van Buren Nature Area is a cooperative effort made possible by a number of organizations and park agencies. The park is owned by Columbia County. It is administered and overall management is provided by The Friends of Lindenwald. The trail system and the interpretive trail guide were developed by the 4H Club Nature Nuts. Technical support, publications and programming are provided by Martin Van Buren National Historic Site. If you have questions or suggestions, or if you would like to help maintain the park please call 518/758-9689.