



Seneca Army Depot

Coordinates: 42.754367°N 76.865845°W

The former **Seneca Army Depot** occupied 10,587 acres (4,284 ha) between Seneca Lake and Cayuga Lake in Seneca County, New York. It was used as a munitions storage and disposal facility by the United States Army from 1941 until the 1990s. The Depot was listed in the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure Commission and formally shut down in 2000. The property has since been transferred to the Seneca County Industrial Development Agency, which leases it to Seneca County Economic Development Corp.^[1]


Home to the world's largest herd of white deer, the base is in the towns of Varick and Romulus. Adjacent to the storage facility is the now-closed Seneca Army Airfield, whose long runway could handle large cargo aircraft.^[2]

History

During the 1940s, the Army stored radioactive materials in connection with the Manhattan Project in igloos Eo801 through Eo811, on the south end of the Depot. Despite no formal confirmation from the Department of Defense, it is known that during the cold war the depot held the largest stockpile of Army nuclear weapons in the country.^[3] The Army RADCON team performed a survey on these igloos during the week of May 13, 1985.^[4]

In 1978 the United States Coast Guard opened a Loran-C transmitter station on the base. It closed in 2010, made obsolete by GPS.

The depot was a major employer in the region. It was linked to the outside world by the airfield, railroad lines and highways (NY-96 and NY-96A). The depot was not included in any of the 1990s Base Realignment and Closure plans. After the 1995 base recommendations, the Army announced that the base would close. The Seneca County Industrial Development Agency filed suit in federal court. The lawsuit ended when the Army agreed to provide the same benefits to the community as were available to those in the formal closure process. The depot formally shut down on September 30, 2000.

Seneca Army Depot	
Varick and Romulus	
	
Coordinates	42.754367°N 76.865845°W
Type	Munitions storage and disposal
Site information	
Owner	Seneca County Industrial Development Agency
Site history	
In use	1941 to 1990s

In August 2002, The Glen Region of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) began using the airfield for autocross racing competitions,^[5] but site availability after August 2011 is not yet determined.

In early 2007, the Cornell 2007 DARPA Urban Challenge Team began using the depot's private roads to test its autonomous vehicles.^[6] Some warehouses are leased to The Advantage Group, which runs a storage and shipping business. Much of the housing at the depot has been sold to private developers and is now available as part of the area's civilian housing stock. Much of the railroad track and outer yards are being used for railroad car storage. As of 2008, no customers ship by rail. The depot's former airfield is slated for use as a New York State Police training center. In early 2007, Cilion announced plans to build an ethanol plant on a portion of the former depot, but the project languished and appears to have died in the face of rising costs for corn and public concern about the wisdom of the project. An article dated July 20, 2009 in the Watertown Daily Times stated that the Fort Drum-based 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) would soon start using the depot for combat training.^[7]

A portion of the southern end of the base was transferred to New York State and used for the construction of Five Points Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison. Land also was transferred to Seneca County for the construction of a county jail and sheriff's office.

Demonstrations against nuclear weapons storage

Beginning on July 4, 1983, and running for several years, antiwar and anti-nuclear activists mounted major protests at the facility, staging civil disobedience protests and establishing the Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice. Major events in 1983 took place in August and October. During the October event, many people including Dr. Benjamin Spock climbed the fence surrounding the depot and were detained. Most fence climbers were released after being given "ban and bar letters" telling them they would be charged with trespass if they were apprehended inside the depot again.

On three occasions — July 4, August 1, and November 3 — feminist artist Helene Aylon put pillowcases on the depot's fence that were filled with "rescued earth" from nuclear sites across the country during her 1982 "Earth Ambulance" voyage and sleep-out at the United Nations. Writer/activist Grace Paley was also among the demonstrators.

Demonstrations continued for several years, mostly originating from within the Women's Peace Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, which operated from an old farmhouse on Route 96 in Romulus.

Current disposition of the depot land

The Seneca County Industrial Development Agency marketed the land to manufacturers or other industry.^[8]

Much of the land is dotted with large, concrete munitions storage bunkers known as 'igloos'. Development started on the depot's northeastern section, but much of it is non-taxable.^[9] As of 2014 the depot is home to a maximum-security state prison, the Five Points Correctional Facility and the Seneca County Law Enforcement Center, which includes the county jail. The non-profit, Hillside Family of Agencies that is headquartered in Rochester, NY closed in the fall of 2019. There are a few private businesses including First Light (<https://www.firstlight.net/>), which uses some of the ammunition bunkers.^[9]

Reuse plans

As of 2014, the towns of Varick and Romulus are discussing to bring the property back on the tax rolls by opening it up to residential, commercial and agricultural development with a new east-west road, cutting the property in half.^[9]

The White Deer herd

The white deer, long the symbol for the depot, began appearing after the fence was erected in 1941. A handful of White-tailed deer that carried a recessive gene for all-white coats were isolated within the depot. The depot initially allowed only brown-coated deer to be killed, so the herd of white deer grew to more than 200, although hunters are occasionally allowed inside to kill a white deer.

The white deer are naturally occurring, not albinos, and have not pink, but brown eyes.^[8] The white deer live alongside another 600 brown white-tailed deer. Seneca White Deer, a non-profit group, received clearance to run limited bus tours in 2006, 2009, and 2012. These tours "turned out to be hugely successful".^[8]



Seneca White Deer inside the depot.

In 2016, the property was sold to local businessman Earl Martin of Seneca Iron Works for \$900,000 and established as Deer Haven Park, LLC.^{[10][11]} An agreement was later made between Martin and Dennis Money, founder of Seneca White Deer, Inc., to lease part of the land and operate it as a conservation park for the white deer, although White Deer later shut down, citing financial problems.^{[11][12]} On June 27, 2020 self-guided auto tours with the option to download an auto tour app were made available.

References

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3. <http://www.democratandchronicle.com/article/20090426/SPORTS0103/904260358/Old-fortress-yields-sightseers-Seneca-Army-Depot>
4. "Seneca Army Depot Activity (SEDA)" (<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/seneca.htm>). *www.globalsecurity.org*.
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8. Matthew Daneman (December 16, 2014). "Fate of famous white deer in question after base closure" (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/12/16/fate-of-famous-white-deer-a-question-mark/20465873/>). *USA TODAY*. Gannett Co. Retrieved December 23, 2014.
9. Figura, David (June 6, 2014). "Are the white deer at the former Seneca Army Depot doomed?" (http://www.syracuse.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2014/06/is_the_white_deer_herd_at_the_seneca_army_depot_doomed.html). *Syracuse Post-Standard*. Syracuse Media Group. Retrieved June 18, 2014.
10. Deer Haven Park, LLC (<http://deerhavenpark.org/DHPhome.php>), Retrieved April 18, 2018
11. ***Democrat & Chronicle***, *Seneca Army Depot buyer announced* by Leo Roth, Sean Lahman and Steve Orr, June 16, 2016 (<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2016/06/16/seneca-army-depot-buyer-unveiled/85975764/>), Retrieved April 19, 2018.
12. Seneca White Deer, Inc. (<https://www.senecawhitedeer.org/>), Retrieved April 19, 2018.

External links

- [Global Security's Seneca Army Depot Page \(http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/seneca.htm\)](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/seneca.htm)
- [White Deer \(http://senecawhitedeer.org/\)](http://senecawhitedeer.org/)
- [Nuclear Summer: The Clash of Communities at the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment \(http://www.alibris.com/search/search.cfm?qwork=4753292&matches=24&qsort=r\)](http://www.alibris.com/search/search.cfm?qwork=4753292&matches=24&qsort=r)

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