

# Woman survives gorge fall

## Has a broken elbow after tumbling 200 feet

By THEODORE DECKER  
Cooperstown News Bureau

CHERRY VALLEY — An East Springfield woman was back at home Tuesday after falling 200 feet into a local gorge Monday night, in the same area where an Index girl survived a similar plunge 13 years ago.

Stacy J. Baker, 20, was released from Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital Tuesday afternoon, only 12 hours after she was rushed there by the Cherry Valley Emergency Squad. She had been treated for cuts, bruises, scrapes and a broken elbow.

Rescue workers and police said Baker's relatively minor injuries and her release from the hospital were nothing short of miraculous, given the distance she tumbled into the gorge on private property off O'Neil Road in the town of Cherry Valley.

Police said Baker was attending a small party when she apparently backed up suddenly and stepped right off a cliff.

"She's a very lucky girl," said Otsego County Sheriff's Deputy Richard Devlin Jr. "I looked over that ledge last night with a flashlight, and it was eerie. Where I was looking, it was straight down."

"I just heard about it (her discharge) a few minutes ago, and I couldn't believe it," said Cherry Valley Fire Chief Rodney Yerdon on Tuesday. "She fell probably 40 to 60 feet before she hit anything, and then went down kind of a steep slope to the bottom — probably a total of close to 200 feet."

Ten young adults and teens who attended the party were arrested by county deputies after the 11 p.m. accident.

Charged with trespass in connection with the party are Baker; Brent M. France, 20; Gertrude H. Wayman, 21; Nicholas E. Stasilli, 16; Andrea L. Wissick, 19; and Rebecca B. Barrett, 19, all of Cherry Valley; Shaun M. Berberick, 19, of Sharon, Pa.; Alexander M. Bosc, 18, of Springfield Center; Eric S. Junick, 20, of Salt Springville; and Becky A. Harper, 22, of East Springfield.

See GORGE on Page 10



# Gorge

Continued from Page 1

Harper also is charged with first-degree unlawfully dealing with a child for allegedly supplying the beer to underage drinkers at the party.

All were released on appearance tickets to appear in Town of Cherry Valley Court on July 16 at 7:30 p.m.

Devlin said the investigation is continuing and further arrests and charges are pending, as he tracks down other youths who attended the party but left before police arrived. He said, however, that he doesn't expect any serious criminal charges to be lodged.

An investigation into Baker's fall revealed that the small group entered the posted private property and had what Devlin called a get-together at which some alcohol was served.

"It wasn't like a big beer bash or anything, but there was some beer there," he said. "Nobody was what I would consider intoxicated at all."

He said Baker hadn't been drinking at all that night.

While the party-goers have been a little hesitant to talk because there was some alcohol

there, Devlin said they have been generally cooperative.

A message seeking comment that was passed on to Baker through Bassett Hospital staff went unreturned Tuesday. Others who were at the party either declined to comment or could not be reached Tuesday.

The young adults who witnessed the accident told Devlin they were gathered around a small campfire at the site, which Devlin said apparently is a popular party spot for local youths. The ravine is located off the west side of O'Neil Road, just south of county Route 50.

"The fire department didn't seem to know who the owner was, so I have the feeling it is someone from out of the area," he said.

"Everybody saw what happened," Devlin said. "The story I'm getting is that they were gathered around the campfire and something in the fire popped and startled her. She took a step backwards. When she stepped back, that's when she went over."

"According to the kids that were there, they heard her screaming most of the way down."

One of the friends, Brent

France, scrambled down the ravine to wait with Baker until rescuers arrived, Devlin said. He did not return a call Tuesday.

Yerdon said firefighters and the rescue squad had to hike into the ravine to reach Baker. She was conscious and talking throughout most of the ordeal.

"We had to carry her all the way down the ravine to the road through the woods," Yerdon said. "Everything went very smooth. It's a time of crisis and everybody buckles down and does what they have to do."

Monday's accident bore some eerie similarities to a June 1984 accident at the gorge that had more grim results.

Then, Constance Laymon of Index survived but suffered severe spinal injuries after she fell off a 75-foot cliff during a late-night teen party in the same area. Police said Laymon free-fell about 40 feet and then tumbled another 30. Laymon, then 17, was a Cooperstown Central School student who attended the bash along with about 30 other youths. Witnesses said at the time that, like Baker, Laymon hadn't been drinking but just slipped off the crumbly edge of the precipice.

