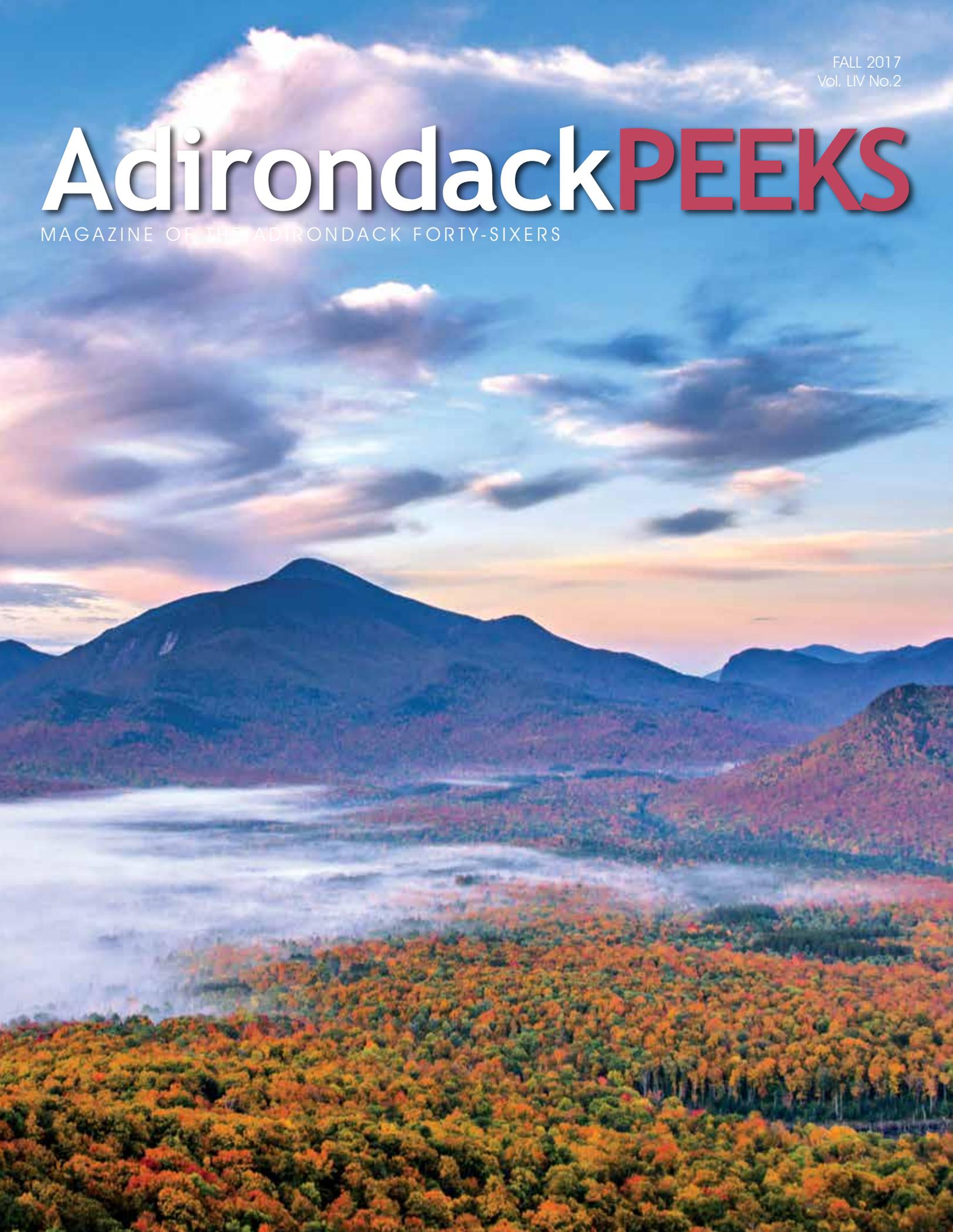


FALL 2017
Vol. LIV No.2

Adirondack PEEKS

MAGAZINE OF THE ADIRONDACK FORTY-SIXERS



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Skiing the 46

By Ron Konowitz #487 S

I want to thank my parents John and Regina Konowitz for getting me into "The Woods"—and hiking—pretty much from the time I could walk. My parents were both teachers and their summer jobs, on and off starting in the 1940s, were at Pok-O-MacCready Camps on Long Pond in Willsboro. There is a long history of hiking at camp and I had many early mentors, including Jim Bailey #233, Phil Corell #224W, Jack Swan #267, and John Konowitz #486. I completed my first round of the 46 Peaks in 1968 on Mount Emmons at age 14.

In the mid 1970s I purchased a pair of Lovett Mohair 220 cm skis, which were actually made by Trucker, to go along with a pair of low cut Alfa ski boots with the stiffness of bowling shoes. Prior to that I used borrowed white 10th Mountain Division army skis (World War II vintage) from my older brother, which had the old front-throw cable bindings. At that stage my skiing was limited to the approaches, switching to snowshoes and crampons for the rest of the ascent and

descent. The two mountains I did ski to the summit and back down on that first setup were Whiteface and Marcy which were fairly easy. The Memorial Highway on Whiteface takes you all the way to a short trail to the summit and, in the 1970s, the Mount Marcy ski trail was much wider than it is today. It wasn't pretty, but I made it up and down on my skis!



ABOVE: Making turns in the East Bowl on the summit of Mount Marcy sometime in the 1980s. Photo Credit: Dominic Eisinger
BELOW: Ski-To-Die Founder Geoff Smith in the late 1980s about to ski the "Out of Egypt" slide on Pyramid Mountain. Photo Credit: Ron Konowitz

Around 1980 I switched to the ski which changed everything for me, the Karhu XCD GT (62cm tip/54cm waist/ 59 cm tail) with full metal edges. My first pair was 215 cm in length but within a few years I had downsized to a 200 cm version. Paired with leather Asolo Snowpines (which were like glorified hiking boots with a duckbill to fit the binding) and skinny climbing skins, they enabled me to really push my limits and thrash myself unmercifully while trying to ski the High Peaks. Luckily I was still young and could get back up from all the crazy crashes and burns that occurred during this early learning curve process.

Fortunately, it wasn't long before I ran into the Ski-to-Die Crew in the woods and my learning curve began to accelerate rapidly, as did my body-pummeling episodes. Their skill with skinny skis and leather boots was so far advanced beyond what I could manage, enabling them to ski anything and everything. I was amazed, intrigued, and eager to ski like they did. I had already completed many rounds

hiking and bushwhacking the 46 High Peaks so my "boots on the ground" knowledge of the terrain was a real asset to them in identifying new routes to explore. Thus, I was allowed to follow, watch, and try to emulate their unique skiing styles. I definitely was the comic relief on these early missions. I tried to ski everyday (practice, practice, practice) and, eventually, my relentless determination paid off and my skiing skills improved.

I never thought about skiing all of the 46 High Peaks back then. It was more about exploring the woods and the incredible feeling of sliding on the snow while finding and completing first descents of different ski lines. We (the Ski-to-Die Crew) pretty much skied and explored every drainage and slide that existed at that time, checking off one first descent ski route after the other. Most of our Ski-to-Die missions were fast-paced long days filled with challenging route finding followed by No Fall Zone descents of slides, massive steep faces, tight, narrow steep streambeds filled with waterfalls, finishing



Scouting out good slide routes in the 1980s.

We always skied with big packs filled with all kinds of emergency "Just in Case" extra clothing and gear. Strangely enough, on all those slide ski descents we never carried avalanche gear in our packs as there was a perceived lack of avalanche risk on slides by backcountry skiers at that time. All that would change for me on Wright Peak in February, 2000.



Ron on the first descent of the "Back in the Saddle" Slide on Saddleback Mountain. Photo Credit: Dominic Eisinger



Telemarking down Saddleback Mountain with Gothics in the background, circa 1980s. Photo Credit: Dominic Eisinger

with a race to the trucks, kicking and gliding back to civilization. We were young, brought together by chance, with the common goal of exploration and adventure in these Adirondack mountains.

It was about 1995 when I realized I had skied nearly three-quarters



October, 1993 on a search mission for Thomas Carlton as a Volunteer Crew Boss with the New York State Forest Rangers. We were airlifted to Scotts Clearing to begin a search of the drainages on the north side of Marshall towards Wallace. Photo Credit: Sharp Swan #556W



On the Summit of Pyramid Peak, circa 1980s. Photo Credit: Geoff Smith

of the High Peaks and decided I would try to finish the rest. I set strict rules for myself—I would only count a peak if I had skied continuously from my truck to the summit, de-skinned, and then skied back down all the way to my truck. The weather and snowpack condition usually determined if I was successful.

From the beginning I had soloed more than I had skied with groups. I enjoyed the total immersion and heightened sensory awareness of being alone in the woods, felt every subtle change without the distractions of group dynamics and therefore traveled safely while moving more quickly and efficiently at my own pace. The biggest challenge of skiing, whether alone or in groups, back in the 1980s and 1990s was trail breaking on the ascent in deep snow, especially on the more remote peaks. Due to the lack of winter travelers at that time routes were broken out infrequently.

Falling into spruce traps (holes created around buried evergreens) over your head was to be avoided; it ate up valuable time and required enormous energy to extract oneself from the deep snow. It was not unusual to take two days to "prepare" a peak. I broke out an up-track as far as possible the first day, skied down from that high point, returning the following day to finish a pathway to the summit.

Through trial and error, I was able to figure out where the path of least resistance was going to be, utilizing aspect, terrain features, wind speed and direction to determine where the snow would be the most consolidated and therefore climbable using skins. I rarely descended via a hiking trail or herd path, preferring drainages, slides, and open woods.

Old Mountain Phelps used to call them "Random Scoots." I found myself continuously bushwhacking off the trails and herd paths during warm weather hiking and climbing trips, wintertime backcountry ski missions, and even Type 1 and Type 2 Searches for lost hikers with the NY State Forest Rangers. All this time spent rambling around "In The Woods" gave me a much better understanding of all the subtle terrain features that the Adirondack High Peaks have to offer and enabled me to eventually figure out ski routes for every one of the 46 High Peaks.

Whether it was skiing off the Pleasure Dome on Marcy to the slides into Panther Gorge, the Johannsen Face on Haystack, or the many slides and faces of Gothics, Saddleback, Colden, Giant, Dix, the MacIntyres, Santanoni or The Elevator Shaft on

Colvin, I always felt blessed to be spending my winters dancing on the snow in such an amazing place.

When thinking back to those early days there are many memorable adventures that stick out for me. One of those was an early March solo ski up Marcy, down the ramp system past the Pipeline to Four Corners, up Skylight, down to Moss Pond, up Redfield, down Uphill Brook, up Cliff, down a drainage on the backside of Cliff to Lake Colden, and then out via Avalanche Pass. A perfect sunny windless day of route finding with four-to-six inches of powder on top of a 10+ foot snow base. I didn't see another human all day!

I finished skiing the 46 High Peaks on Allen on March 12, 1996. I skied from the summit to the top of the slide, jumped a short headwall, and continued down the slide and Allen Brook drainage. Sharp Swan #566W and Teresa Cheetham-Palen #6684 were with me that day to celebrate. Only a few people



Ski-to-Die founder Pat Munn in the mid 1980s on Dix Mountain (with the Grace Peak Slide in the background) about to ski the slides into Hunter's Pass. Photo Credit: Ron Konowitz

These days I ski on 170 cm Voile Vectors (118/94/107) and 176 cm Voile V-8s (141/112/123) paired with Voile Switchback bindings, plastic Scarpa T2 Eco boots, and Wide Ascension climbing skins. Shorter, wider skis with a rockered tip rise make turns effortlessly and make backcountry skiing so much easier. It's a wonderful way to experience the Adirondack wilderness.



Telemarking down a streambed on the Range Trail, circa 1980s. Photo Credit: Dominic Eisinger

knew I was close to finishing my ski round. Sharp insisted that I should somehow document, as he called it, "This Historic Event." So I wrote a handwritten, one-paragraph double-spaced letter to Grace Hudowalski #9, signed Howard M. Hughes III (which happened to be one of the pseudonyms I used in the trailless peak canisters during that time).

Several months later, I was invited by Grace to her Schroon Lake summer home, "The Boulders", for dinner. I had been in awe of Grace since I was a young boy. Over the years we had become good friends and she was like a mom to me. I had always enjoyed visiting and trading stories of mountain adventures with Grace, both in her Albany home and at Boulders. That evening Grace had also invited hikers extraordinaire Ed Bunk #3052W, Mimi Moulton #3148, and Wayne Ratowski #3036W.

After a wonderful dinner with everyone contributing great tales, Grace proposed a toast to my Ski Round. Grace asked Ed Bunk to reach in the corner cabinet and bring out the bottle of Cherry Heering. The bottle was quite dusty (with a faded satin yellow rose still attached) and the cork, which had not been extracted in many years, was very dry. Following a very formal toast to my Ski Round, someone asked Grace when that bottle had last been opened.

Grace replied, "Well, my husband Ed (Hudowalski #6) passed away in 1966. Cherry Heering was always our favorite after-dinner drink."

I was totally humbled. Grace had chosen the occasion of a dinner toast to my Ski Round to finally reopen that bottle, some 30 years after her husband's death. Grace had given me a special moment to be forever cherished, just as she had done for so many others during her lifetime. ■



On the summit of Panther in February of 1996.
Photo Credit: Teresa Cheetham-Palen #6684



Summer 1996—Boulders. Grace Hudowalski toasting Ron Konowitz' completion of the 46 High Peaks on skis. From left: Ed Bunk # 3052W, Grace Hudowalski #9, Wayne Ratowski #3036W, Ron Konowitz #487 S. Photo Credit: Mimi Moulton #3148



Ron Konowitz in the late 1980s on the first descent of the "Back in the Saddle" slide on Saddleback Mountain.
Photo Credit: Dominic Eisinger

March 23, 1996

Dear Grace,

On March 12th, 1996 at Noon
I completed my 46th Peak on Skis.
Joining me atop Allen that beautiful
sunny day were long time childhood
friend Sharpe Swan 566 W and
ski mountaineering enthusiast Teresa
Cheetham. The descent via Allen
Brook was Absolutely Splendid!

Pok-o-Spirit Lives!
Howard M. Hughes III
46^{er} #487 Ski #1
Ski-To-Die
Keene Valley NY

Since I finished skiing the High Peaks several natural weather events have significantly changed the mountains. In 1998 the Ice Storm caused damage to many of the open woods in the lower and middle elevations by snapping off the tree crowns. In 1999 Hurricane Floyd dropped six-to-eight inches of rain causing 18 new slides to be formed. In 2011 Hurricane Irene arrived with 13 inches of rain and caused almost 40 more, much longer, slides to form.

In February of 2000, I was caught in a massive avalanche along with three other backcountry skiers on a slide that was newly formed by Hurricane Floyd on Wright Peak. We were all rapidly and violently dragged down the mountainside, while suffering different levels of injuries. One skier in our group, Toma Vracarich, died. Toma was only 27 years old. Although avalanches are rare in the Adirondacks (this was the first, and still the only, avalanche death ever in New York State) they do occur, they happen quickly, and they can be fatal. It was by far the worst day of my life, one that still haunts me today.

The availability and popularity of skiing and climbing slides in winter has grown significantly. Winter travelers venturing out onto these slides should have the proper avalanche gear and the training to both assess the snowpack and rescue anyone buried if an avalanche occurs. Avalanche courses offering invaluable information on safe winter travel are given each winter throughout the Adirondacks.

Mountain Vignettes

Lost and Found on Whiteface Mountain

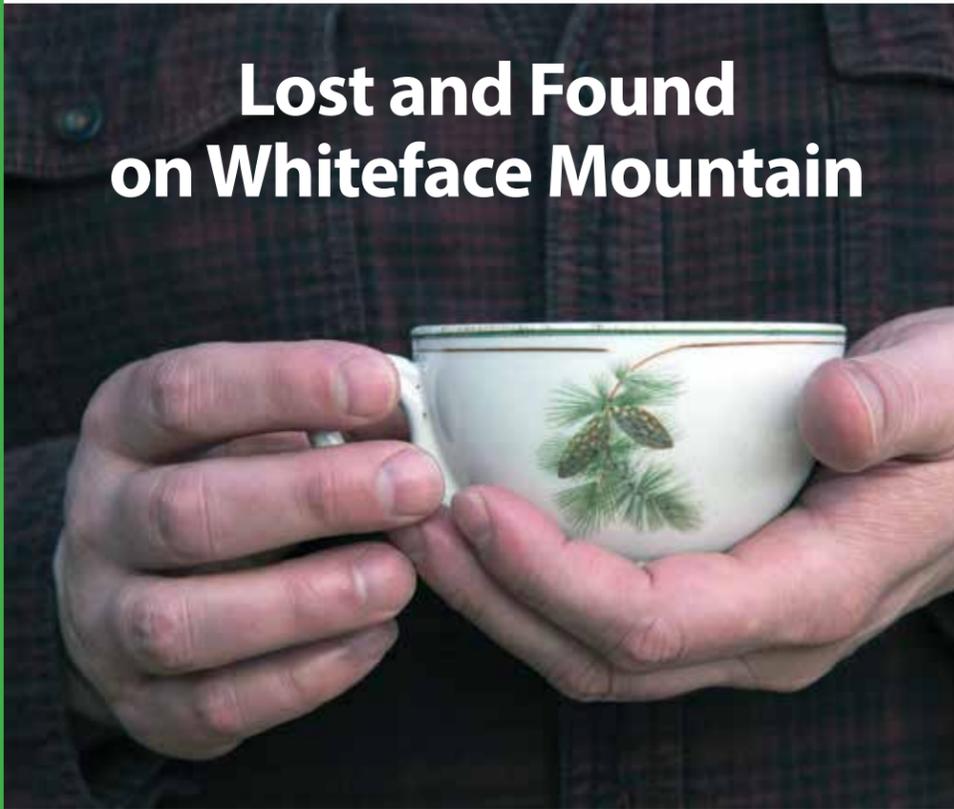


Photo Credit: Mandy Applin

By Mandy Applin #9142
and
Jeff Earl #9143

When hiking in the High Peaks of the Adirondacks, my husband, Jeff, and I are amazed at how much respect visitors usually have for the area. We happily follow Leave No Trace ethics, and “take only pictures, leave only footprints,” packing out our own trash and items we find that other hikers have lost along the way. Occasionally, I will find pieces of food packaging, remnants of broken hiking poles, or a lost hat or mitten. Sometimes, my mind plays tricks on me and I’ll see a piece of trash carelessly tossed next to the trail—but when I approach it, I realize that it is simply a twirl of birch bark or a shiny leaf on the forest floor. I once found a pair of glasses in a stream where we stopped to fill our water bottles after a long day hike in the Seward Range. As we signed out at the trailhead, we found a note scrawled around the edges of the trail register about the lost

glasses. We were able to reunite them with their owner the next day.

A few years ago on a hot July day, Jeff and I climbed Esther and Whiteface. We separated on the trail, each hiking at our own pace, occasionally meeting up along the way. After enjoying the summit of Esther and then having lunch on the peak of Whiteface (peak numbers 11 and 12 for us), we separated again on the way down the trail. On this day, hiking a short distance behind me, Jeff found something unusual. He saw a white “glint” on the trail and stopped to get a closer look. It was a sliver of pottery. Thinking that it was a bit of trash that he would pack out of the woods, he poked at it with his hiking stick to lift it from the trail. When it didn’t budge, he jabbed, then pushed, at its edge with his hiking boot. After almost giving up, he used a small stone as leverage to dig up the pottery

shard, which revealed itself to be a whole, unbroken china teacup.

When we found each other on the trail, he stopped to take something from his backpack. I expected to see a pretty stone, a feather, or a digital photo of some other interesting find along the way. Instead, he reached into the outside pocket of his backpack and produced the small teacup, holding it in delicately in the palm of his hand.

I stared in disbelief. A china teacup? Buried in the hiking trail of Whiteface mountain? It seemed so out of place. After looking it over and commenting on its good condition and pretty design, we wrapped the teacup in a thick wool sock and tucked it into Jeff’s backpack. He carried this small treasure off the mountain with the food wrappers, banana peels, and other small pieces of trash that we would dispose of in town.

At home, we researched the number codes that are printed on the bottom of the teacup and were able to piece together a bit of its history. The teacup was created by Syracuse China in July of 1928. (Syracuse China was founded in 1871 as Onondaga Pottery Company - O.P. Co.). At that time, Syracuse China, which was known for creating items for hotels, restaurants, and railroad dining cars, owned two manufacturing facilities in the Syracuse area. This teacup was made at the Fayette Street plant, and its design of pine needles and pinecones, known as the “Lodge” pattern, was produced exclusively for the Lake Placid Club. The manufacturing facility in Syracuse closed in 2009, after 138 years in operation.

Eighty-two years passed between the manufacture of the teacup in July of 1928 and the day we found it during our hike on Whiteface. We can only imagine the interesting people and events that the teacup may have witnessed. We will always wonder about the rest of its history and how the teacup came to be embedded in the Adirondack soil at the edge of the trail on Whiteface.

For now, the teacup, which still carries a little bit of Adirondack dirt along with its mystery, sits proudly on our fireplace mantle. We consider this piece of New York history as one of our greatest treasures, and it has given us a delightful story of our 46er journey to share. ■

Rainbow Lake Recon

By Margaret Wooster #5233

Esker

Derives from the Irish Gaelic word *eiscir*, meaning “ridge of gravel.” Also called *serpent kames*, eskers are long narrow ridges, formed by meltwater streams that ran beneath the ice of a retreating glacier.

While the sun is looking is the time to break camp: exhale the thermorests, mop up the damp untie the flies, pull up the pegs shake out the tents, drink up the dregs give the place back to its red squirrels and jays sort out the food for the next four days throw it all in the car for one short drive (take one last look around site 25) then over to the dock, get the kayaks down load tents and a tarp to cover the ground bear barrel, books, a ukulele to play and don’t forget the food for the next four days.

Then paddle five miles through the Kushaqua Narrows past the broad inlet of Saranac Shallows through the wide culvert under Onchiota Road through the tight pipe into big Rainbow past the boys swinging from ropes in the pines to jump in the lake, though the trees show signs of coming down and still down the esker you travel hugging its shade of pine, birch and gravel through the small gap: that’s where you go to a clearing between the pond and the flow. There’s a concrete dock—what’s that doing here between Rainbow Flow and the pond called Clear?

A circle of stones is set in a ring with a pile of firewood and dry kindling left as a gift by someone before practiced in the art of camping decor. But first raise the tents, peg down the flies, lay down on the earth, imagine sunrise. Imagine your heart pressed into the ground, a two-way recharge: imagine the sound. Could be an animal after your meat; could be the swish of your own heart beat. But here come the stars, get ready to gaze and share the first of your meals for the next four days.



Bryozoa *Pectinatella Magnifica* or “moss animals” at Clear Pond. Bryozoa are colonies of hundreds of tiny freshwater animals that indicate good water quality. Photo credit: Maureen Wall

Legs Diamond

We first heard of Legs at the St. Regis Outfitter in Saranac Lake. Fact or fiction? Evidence supports the former.

Killer, charmer, dancer, dealer, gangster, gambler, fugitive, stealer, hijacker, kidnapper, loan shark, thug, bootlegger, trader in all sorts of drugs. His name was Jack Diamond but they called him Legs he danced like a devil drunk from the kegs. His hideout was here between pond and flow like a fox he was always ready to go.

Dug the gaps in the esker, built a dock for his plane decoyed a sailboat to complete the feign. In the midst of Prohibition the liquor would flow to the Great Camps surrounding—who would know? A sunken old boat at the back of a bay adds to the thrill of what people say.

Above the old boat like lamps in a room moss animals float, they glow in the gloom. Did Legs ever see them? We’ll never know more. He was killed by a gang at age 34. I never saw them until we came here to Legs’ froggy backwater in the late of this year.

It all happened here a century ago yet now it’s a pond and a wilderness flow.