

# AFOOT IN NATURE'S GAME PRESERVES

## THE ADIRONDACK PARK REGION

By Leonidas Hubbard, Jr.

**W**ORDS, no less than men, are corrupted by evil associations. So it happens that our little monosyllable, "park," calls up in many minds a visual image with foreground of asphalt walks, cast-iron benches and tired nursemaids. Such must have been the effect of its pronunciation upon a postmaster far within the boundary of the proposed Adirondack Park, for when asked where that boundary lay, he replied:

"Why, there ain't any park around here. The nearest one's at Northville. It belongs to the railroad and has tame deer in it."

If visions of tame deer and lawn mowers arise in the mind of any reader of this article when the Adirondack Park is mentioned, let him cast them out. Imagine, instead, 4,500 square miles of mountain and forest lying north of the Mohawk Valley and south of the plains of the St. Lawrence; west of Lakes Champlain and George and east of the farming land at the lower end of Lake Ontario. Add to this, rough roads over which stages, drawn by two, four or six horse teams carrying mail to insignificant little post-offices thirty miles from the railroad, rattle over brooks and across rivers, past lakes and ponds, while mountains tower on left and right, with stretches where a break-down would mean a ten-mile walk to the nearest settlement. Place here and there the stony little clearings and rude houses of the mountaineers. People these with rough, good-hearted men; men who will tell you it is sixty miles to Lake Placid by road, but that you can reach it in twenty-seven miles across country by taking a trail at the northeast corner of a certain clearing on Boreas Pond, following the right branch after the second creek is crossed and keeping the trail to Indian Pass. Men they are who know the whole country within a radius of forty miles as though it were their own wood lot.

It is as though Nature had designed the Adirondacks for a spot sacred to her own worship. She seized the bottom of

the old Archæan Sea and lifted it above the primeval waters. Then she crumpled it together in mighty rolls, with high peaks, deep valleys and great, jutting, igneous rocks. As the ages wore away, some rocks broke apart to make soil, and Nature, fearing lest the valleys should become fertile, lest men should enter them to plant crops, make homes and build cities, sent great ice sheets scouring the mountains and carrying down into each valley masses of broken rock which should make the soil unprofitable for tilling.

A desire for that primitive sort of freedom which comes when man turns his back upon the land of convention and crosses the boundary into Nature's domain, sent me walking southwestward from North Creek on a July afternoon with no baggage save a small camera. But let me make my apologies at the beginning. Let me confess that I traveled more on hope than on faith. I hoped to find wild country, but, being just out of the West, where we are given to picturing the Adirondacks as a sort of backyard to a boarding-house syndicate, I had my doubts. The idea that here, in the heart of Eastern civilization, was a great tract of game-filled forest seemed out of the question, and my faith in being able to meet Nature in her own haunts was small. But if I could find her, the news might accumulate, nations might rise and kings might die; they would not trouble Nature or me. For some days, at least, the goddess and I would be lovers; we would tell each other our secrets, and that jealous old witch, Civilization, might scowl to heart's content.

To get a view of the promised land I left the main road and followed an old time wagon trail to reach the summit of Crane Mountain, which looms up, as symmetrical as a giant fortress, on the very boundary of the proposed park. Round and round, and up and up, led the trail; now across a gulch, now beside a mad, dashing little mountain brook, to the clearing where stand the deserted

buildings of the old paint plant. Then I stumbled over stones, up and up a steep footpath, to the rocky tableland, where dwarfed fir and popple struggle with blueberry bushes for every bit of soil and moisture.

I pass Crane Mountain Pond, its waters clear as any spring, and its bottom of bare brown rock; pass into a pathless wood of birch and popple, which changes to rank fir thicket, and now standing, now on hands and knees, clamber up the peak to the old Government signal-pole.

About me lie the Adirondacks, mountains and mountains and mountains; endless on the north and west, with a hollow where I know Lake George must be on the east, and merging southward into a level plain. Ah! there are men and cities and telephones, and I shake my fist at them. To the far north, blue and hazy, are the highest peaks; they belong to the group of giants about Mt. Marcy. A dozen ponds are scattered here and there through the forest, and some pretty villages are on the north and east. To westward the woodland is unbroken, save here and there by a rock where even the aggressive little fir can gain no foothold. I think of the wild things that lie hidden in that stretch of forest, and make a mental apology to this region for misjudging it.

I sit with my back to a precipice and a sparkling breeze strikes my face. It is a feather-weight breeze, well trained, that dances lightly about, ducks playfully out of the way, but lands hard and often when it tries. How close the sky seems; how bright the fleecy white clouds, that sail unconcernedly about, cutting off the sunlight, now here, now there, from a man or a hay field or a town. They are like some thoughtless, selfish persons who get in your light or puff their cigars in your face and never think of begging pardon.

It was near sundown next day when walking down the valley of the Sacan-

daga, intent to penetrate that wild country I had seen to westward, I came to Oregon. Here the valley of the little stream widens into a meadow-covered alluvial plain. Oregon is a deserted village. A score of empty buildings show where a great tannery has been abandoned. Only two families are squatting in the valley now.

It is nine miles, they say, to the nearest stopping place. But I do not care. Along the stream runs a mountain road, a little brown line half hidden by beech and hemlock, birch and maple; spotted everywhere with deer tracks, great and small. Two of the animals stand at the roadside, and I hear them crash away through



The Deserted Tannery, where Business Once Thrived.

the woods as I approach. Now I almost step on a lazy porcupine, and a few steps further on a woodchuck hurries across my path. Here road and river converge, and I hear trout jumping.

When at last I saw the light of Griffin—I saw but one, though the postmaster-farmer-landlord assured me that three families lived there—I had walked sixteen miles along a good road and passed but three inhabited houses.

Following his direction I walk, next day, through a tangled wood, along a mad little mountain stream, and at Lake Pleasant see the first resort in a walk of forty miles. Rest seekers reach Lake Pleasant after a stage journey of twenty

six miles. The lake is four miles long, and Lake Sacandaga, equally large, lies at its side. The village is county seat of Hamilton County, and the primitive character of the community is indexed by the tiny county buildings and the fact that absence of lawyers has led to the election of a doctor for County Judge.

Tall and blue, on the east, Speculator Mountain rises from the water's edge. I am standing on the bank in the early morning, watching a moving picture of drifting clouds above the mountain top when, suddenly, from a cottage on the farther side, the shrill notes of a bugle come floating through the morning stillness. It is a time and place for poetry. Instantly come the lines of Tennyson:

"O hark, O hear: how thin and clear,  
And thinner, clearer, farther going;  
O sweet and far from cliff and scar  
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing."

And one imagines himself in the land where

"The splendor falls on castle walls  
And snowy summits old in story."

I am still standing by the lake side when the stillness is broken by a rush of feet and a rattle of wheels as the out-going stage dashes past. There is something typical in the stages that penetrate this region. Compare the dashing, sun-burned stage-driver of the mountains with his sallow, red-nosed contemporary who stands in front of the Grand Central Depot and calls, "Keb, keb, keb, sir? Keb?" As the one is to the other, so is wild Nature to an effete civilization. I look at this hardy fellow and know that, rain or shine, in spite of shower or wind or blizzard, he will drive his twenty-six miles each day, to or from the station at Northville. He will meet emergencies as they arise, and he will not complain of cold, darkness or storm. He is a man and he has my most profound respect.

North of here, eastward of the Indian Lake region, lies a great stretch of wild land. Thirty miles away, through the very heart of it, is North River. As usual, there are plenty of Jeremiahs who tell of dire happenings sure to befall any one who ventures into this forest. But there is an old, half-marked wagon trail leading north and east. Somewhere at the other end of it is a lumber camp. Beyond that I will trust to luck.

I have walked four hours through dense, hard wood, when a snake, lying in the path, sends shivers through me. It is not a venomous snake; there are none such in the mountains. Snakes may be all right in swamps, where malaria and typhoid and similar poisons abound, but here, in the pure air of the Adirondacks, they seem out of place. I have just crushed this one with a stone when there is a shout and I look up to see a flannel-shirted lumberman laughing at me.

Only the faintest trail leads from here through the forest northward. Maple and beech and birch and hemlock bend down their branches as if to hide it from the wanderer. It crosses the dashing Congamunck. Mink have left their tracks on the muddy bank. Deer were here this morning drinking. Fox tracks fairly cover the road, and a bevy of young partridges flutter up from the ground and look down at me from the leafy branches. I toss a grasshopper into the ripple; there is a splash and the insect disappears within the maw of a hungry trout. What a place for the hunter or trapper. Or what a place for the lover of wild things to come with note-book, glass and camera.

The path divides and I wander off for more than a mile on the wrong branch. Then it ceases to be a path at all, but I am repaid for the extra walk by the sight of a fox that leaps playfully away without seeing me. Now it stops and paws the ground. It is looking for mice; then leaps away again, the curves of its lithe body and waving brush an ideal for the esthetic physiculturist.

There are other tangles in the trail, and it grows late. The questions of supper and lodging present themselves. Will I eat to-night and will I sleep in a bed? It is questionable, but a sport must have its uncertainties or it is no sport at all.

Now it is dusk. The path goes up and up. On the right hand is a pond, and, beyond that, a mountain. Some bird is calling out there on the pond. There is a chirping in the branches above my head. A rivulet tumbling down the mountain seems very loud. The trees merge into a black mass and darkness has settled over the forest. There is an old hunter's shanty on the rivulet. I stoop and take a long drink. Then I enter the shanty, whose sides have begun to fall in, and lie down for the night.

There is a thrill in these long tramps; the thrill of freedom; the joy of defying railroads and steamers, stages and punctured tires. One feels that, after all, he is not the slave to convention; that he may throw rules aside, level mountains, conquer forests and annihilate distance. And this hard, earnest walking brings out one's philosophy. There is none of the philosophy of the cynic; one does not question for an instant that life is worth living. He is happy and life is good.

It is at such times that Nature whispers her most precious secrets.

Then came a night of sleep, pleasant sleep, with no disturbing sounds and no ill effects. In summer a night on the floor of a hunter's shanty need not be more unpleasant than one in your bed at home. If you are tired, you will not feel the hardness of the boards. If it is warm, your clothing furnishes ample covering. I wonder why men take so many blankets and so much luggage when they go camping in summer?

This stretch of thirty miles without village or settlement is not exceptional. West of Indian Lake, with the Cedar River for its heart, is another great tract of wild timber land. North and east of the same lake, toward Newcomb, is another, through which the upper waters of the Hudson wind their way. Still northward, toward the Saranac Lakes, is even wilder country. Through it flows Cold River.

This is the forest region of the Adirondacks. Draw a line from the village of Lake Placid, near the northeastern limits of the proposed park, to Forest Lodge on the Adirondack League Club's grounds in the southwest. South and east of this is the country of forests. North and west is the lake region. Here are lakes and ponds and chains of lakes. Here are rivers with rapids and carries; long trails for the canoeist.

From Blue Mountain Lake, on the east, or the Fulton Chain, on the west, he may pass into Raquette Lake, thence to Forked Lake, and down the fourteen miles of Long Lake to Raquette River, whence he may turn eastward into the Saranacs or westward into Big and Little Tupper. It is a wilderness journey. Forests line the shore of lake and bank of river. Mountains shoot upward through the forest and pour down their icy

streams to make the canoeist camping places, and to give him trout. Yet here on these very lakes, within a few hours paddle of the remotest point, one may find hotels that look as though they had been transported direct from the metropolis or created in the forest by the magic of Aladdin.

Yet in the midst of this ideal wilderness the heart of the nature lover is saddened at the lumberman's vandalism. The lumberman is a good fellow to meet when you are hungry or when you do not know your way; but the Merrie Men of Robin Hood were said to be kind to those in distress. Wherever you go in the forest's depth or on the lakes and streams, you find tracts of land that will soon be robbed of their timber and left as barren "slashings." The State owns an immense amount of forest land, but it should own all. In the stretch between Lake Pleasant and North River I found three camps. The Cold River region is being "lumbered." Wherever lumbermen can get control of timber land they are busy cutting away every tree that will make a stick of timber or a bit of pulp.

The actual work of preserving the Adirondacks began in 1897, when the Legislature of New York created the State Forest Preserve Board and appropriated \$1,000,000 for its immediate use. The Board was authorized to procure by purchase as much land as possible within the boundaries of the Park. The law provided that land whose owners refused to sell might be taken, and the owners were directed to present their complaints to the Court of Claims.

The Board paid from \$1.50, the price of "lumbered" land, to \$7 an acre, and more than 250,000 acres were procured with the first appropriation. Later appropriations have enabled it to increase the State holding to something more than 400,000 acres. More than half of this is land that has not been lumbered, and still possesses its primeval wildness. There are some hundreds of thousand acres within the boundaries of the Park that will be protected from the timber cutter by reason of its being owned now by sporting clubs. With a generous appropriation from the coming Legislature, the Forest Preserve Board would be able to place a final ban upon the destruction of the Adirondacks.

In many Western regions fire has destroyed the forest that men attempted to save. But the Adirondacks are well guarded from this danger. Notices embodying the law in regard to fires for clearing land and for cooking are posted everywhere that a man can enter the woods, and the "protectors" of the Fisheries, Game and Forest Commission are ever on the lookout and ever empowered to call out whatever force of fire-fighters may be required. I saw not a single Adirondack region that had suffered from fires within the last decade.

Let the State save the trees, and Nature herself will manage the rest. Man has been defeated on every hand in his efforts to gain a foothold here. The whole region is a record of defeat. Wherever you find roads you find deserted clearings and abandoned houses. Men tried to farm and gave it up. Why? I have asked that question time and again. A glimpse at the stony little fields appears to give the answer. But here and there is an alluvial valley, clear and fertile, yet deserted. Corn will not ripen here on account of the frost. Wheat is not worth the cost of transportation to market. Hay brings good prices in the lumber camps, but the demand is limited and transportation, even to the camps, is difficult.

Other attempts to make this region produce wealth have been no less dismal in their outcome. On one walk of twenty miles down the valley of a mountain stream I passed four deserted tanneries. Once the business thrived and the valley was full of workers. But other regions, with better facilities for transportation, built tanneries, and these locked their doors forever. On half a dozen mountains are abandoned garnet mines. Here is a deserted paint plant and there an old graphite factory. All are closed. The grounds of the Tahawus Club, through which the Hudson dashes as a tiny stream from the foothills of Mt. Marcy, are the scene of a vast failure. Where the club's cottages stand was once a village of five hundred inhabitants. There are the old mine, the ancient roads and the great furnace where hundreds of men labored, digging and smelting the iron ore from the mountain side.

Such records of defeat are everywhere. In taking the region for one great breathing spot the State will injure no homes

and harm no industry save that which seeks to tear away the forest.

Nature has fought a good fight in preserving her haunt so near the heart of the world's great civilization; but man's cupidity is limitless, and he now seeks to tear from her very mountains their wonderful clothing of straight green pine, glistening birch and stately hemlock. So it is that the State is taking a hand in this struggle to save the Adirondacks as a trysting place for nature and her sweethearts.

With the Adirondacks preserved from the timber cutter and protected as at present from fires, the cities of the East will always have a playground within a few hours' ride. And this playground will never be crowded. Here will always be game and forests and wild nature. The outpouring of the cities in summer scarcely makes an impression upon the region as a whole. Hotels along the railroads receive most of the resorters. Hotels they are that range in character from the little country inn where you pay one dollar a day for board and may secure a liberal reduction by the week, to the palace whither you return from your day's fishing to a hot bath, and sit down to talk with the ends of the earth by wire and phone.

If you care to leave these behind, you may wander about for days in the interior without seeing a golf suit or a shirt-waist. I can take you to a little pond that winds in and out between two great mountains; it is scarcely wider than a good-sized river, but deep, and cold, and long. Deer come there to drink at night, and land-locked salmon grab for your trolling spoon; yet so far is it from the beaten paths that not a boarder has its single summer house sheltered during the whole past season.

Here and there in your interior wanderings you will find the preserves of some millionaires' club, miles away from the railroad, reached by its members after long drives at rates delightful to the soul of the liveryman. Now and then a single millionaire has his mountain home on some interior stream or lake. But these are only atoms. Centuries may roll away and atoms may congregate, yet the preserved North Woods will continue to offer a wild spot where man may forget his fellows and commune undisturbed with Nature.



A MOVING PICTURE OF DRIFTING CLOUDS ABOVE THE MOUNTAIN TOPS