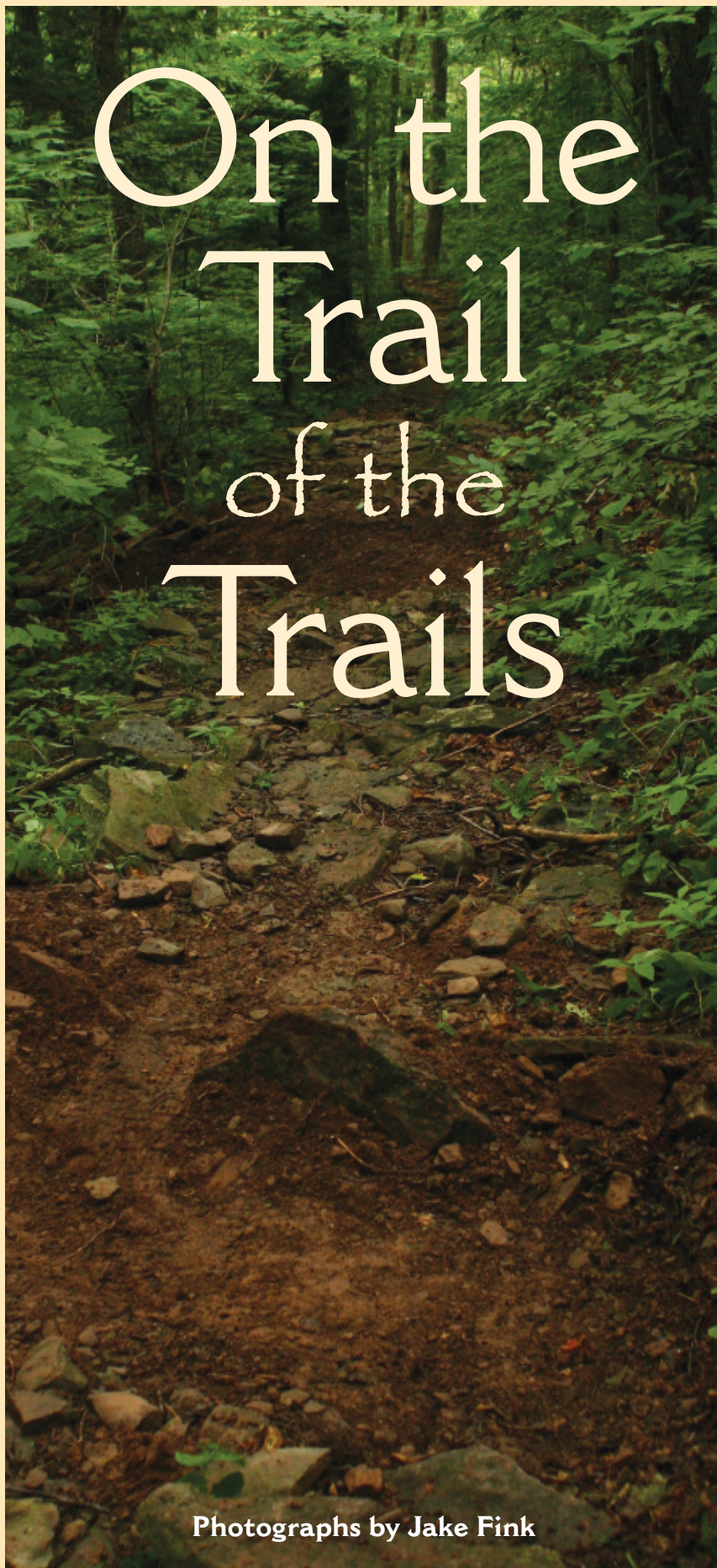




# ADK'S TRAIL PROGRAM REACHES A MILESTONE

BY WES LAMPMAN

**T**he small black-and-white photograph stopped me dead in my tracks. The photo was of a person crouched down, arms cradling a large boulder, poised to move this seemingly immovable object for reasons unbeknownst to me. Upon further investigation, I learned that this was a recruiting poster for a summer job with ADK's professional trail crew.



Photographs by Jake Fink



Most people would quickly dismiss the notion of rolling rocks around by hand in the insect-infested backcountry all summer for a meager wage. Not me, though. And thus I became a part of the trail-building movement that has become much bigger than I could have ever imagined.

## A LONG HISTORY

*Since its founding* in 1922, ADK has utilized member volunteers to build trails. The ADK Trails Committee had the moxie to persevere through years of war and depression to establish many trails used to this day. The history of the committee is rich indeed, with many colorful characters who helped to define ADK's mission.

Because one of the mandates to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and its predecessors was to make the Forest Preserve more accessible by creating trails, the state body and ADK quickly became allies. This early association galvanized the common goal to accommodate responsibly the burgeoning desire of so many people to see the Adirondack and Catskill backcountry.

It wasn't until the late 1970s that ADK became large enough for the Trails Committee to begin fundraising to pay for a seasonal "pro crew." It is fitting that in 1979 the first crew boss to supervise a six-person professional trail crew was Tony Goodwin, author of ADK's High Peaks guidebook and director of the Adirondack Trail Improvement Society (ATIS) trail crew among other notable accomplishments. A crew leader from the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) was hired to help train the ADK crew; this was the first of many cross-pollinations between ADK and AMC's professional crews.

## UPS AND DOWNS

*Throughout the early* 1980s, the ADK pro crew established itself as qualified to begin the

arduous task of rebuilding miles of trails, primarily in the High Peaks, that had fallen into disrepair from poor design and poorly drained soils. The pro crew worked and trained with DEC and ATIS trail crews, but developed their own reputation and skills that set them apart. They primarily used axes to carve bridges and ladders out of harvested logs, to keep hikers on the trail. This became a liability in 1985 when, thanks to a tree-cutting violation within the DEC, permission to harvest trees in the Forest Preserve for trail work was revoked. Understandably, disgruntled crew members disbanded, leaving ADK staff and Trails Committee members scratching their heads.

As often happens within ADK, staff and volunteers worked together to turn what could have been the end of the trails program into a new beginning. A new crew boss, Tom Parker, was hired and a full-time trails coordinator position was created and ably filled by Willie Janeway. Tom and Willie ushered in the "rock era"—the pro crew still used their axes, but got most of their blisters from using rock bars and grip hoist winches. Most of the rock steps and water bars on the Van Hoevenberg and Phelps Trails were installed during 1986–1992. The crew increased in number, allowing application of rock skills outside of the High Peaks. My career on the pro crew started in 1993. Willie was still working for ADK, but was not supervising the trails program anymore. I did get to work with crew members that he and Tom had trained, though, and was lucky enough to hear many of the stories about their heyday. To me, the stories help make the trail crew what it is and perpetuate the rich heritage of the program. Everyone who has been on the crew has a story to tell, whether it's about the time they spent five days out in constant rain, or the first rock they truly set, or the pack-in that they thought may cripple them.

Throughout most of the 1990s, the work the pro crew completed

*The ADK Trails  
Committee had  
the moxie to  
persevere  
through years  
of war and  
depression to  
establish many  
trails used  
to this day.*



*Re-routing is becoming the standard approach when a new trail is called for in a UMP.*

remained essentially the same; rock staircases was what every crew leader wanted to build and there were plenty of opportunities. The Ampersand Mountain trail showcases rock work efforts that span 1994–2002, with hundreds of rock steps and rock water bars.

### A NEW CENTURY

*The turn of the century* brought many changes to the ADK pro crew program that ultimately changed the focus from rock work to more diverse skills. For most of its existence, the program was funded through a cost-share agreement between ADK and DEC. Although this put more financial burden on ADK, it did provide the club with the ability to negotiate where the crews would work and what projects would be completed.

But by 2000, the agreement was not practical any longer and was abandoned. Instead, ADK bid on and was successfully awarded a DEC trail contract that would provide more funding for the program. With this increased funding, DEC spread out the projects, resulting in less emphasis on the High Peaks and hence less rock work.

For instance, the crew began to spend over ten weeks a season work-



ing in the Catskills, as opposed to perhaps two weeks in past years. Many of these new regions had a backlog of trails that were in dire need of basic maintenance such as side cutting and blowdown removal. Brushing out trails properly is a big endeavor, and the crews began spending more time doing this than they did reconstructing trails with rock and wood.

Other developments that have brought change to the pro crew program are recent state land acquisitions and the implementation of unit management plans (UMPs). Looking at the project on Ampersand Mountain in hindsight, it becomes apparent that re-routing the trail would have been better for the

resource. Re-routing is becoming the standard approach when a new trail is called for in a UMP. The UMP and new land acquisition afford DEC planners the opportunity to avoid sinking limited resources into an existing trail that is severely eroded and will never be fully rehabilitated. Instead, a properly designed new trail will be more sustainable and require less maintenance.

### THE AGE OF RE-ROUTING

*So, as in past decades,* the focus of the pro crew program is changing once again. At first it was hard for veteran “rock jocks” to accept building new trails over setting rock steps. But just like those big



entirely in the forest, with over five miles of new trail through some beautiful woods. This is one of the longest re-routes that the professional trail crew has ever completed. ADK's crew also finished a new trail to Coney Mountain near Tupper Lake and the Long Pond-Kunjamuk Connector Trail in the Siamese

Ponds Wilderness Area. I urge you to visit these trails and admire the work of the ADK pro crew; you will be pleasantly surprised at how enjoyable these trails are to hike.



*Wes Lampman is ADK's trails director, based at Heart Lake.*

## VOLUNTEER SPIRIT

*Typical* of ADK's organizational structure, the professional trail crew has its complement of volunteers. Like the professionals, the volunteers are out in all weather, tackling all sorts of trail work. Chapters and individuals adopt and maintain trails and lean-tos; teens participate in week-long ADK-sponsored trails projects; volunteers of all ages gather on community-, chapter-, or club-sponsored clean-up days. They remove blowdown, clear brush, and do rock work, just like the pros.

On National Trails Day (NTD), in June each year, volunteers around the country gather to "give back" to the places they love. For the past few years, ADK's NTD efforts in the Adirondacks have been primarily focused in the Five Ponds Wilderness area, in cooperation with Five Ponds Partners, a subcommittee of the Clifton-Fine Economic Development Corp. ADKer Sherman Craig, chair of Five Ponds Partners, has been an active volunteer through it all, both on the trails and behind the scenes. But Craig is quick to note that success is due to the efforts of many.

"Any achievement of this committee," says Craig, "relies on many people." The efforts involved in coordinating such large events are varied, he adds, from fund-raising (over \$5,000 for each Trails Day), to organizing a wel-



*National Trails Day, 2009. ADK ARCHIVES*

come reception and banquet (including live music performed by committee members), to organizing the work projects (which includes coordinating with the Department of Environmental Conservation). This year, the Cranberry Lake Boat Club donated boats, gas, and drivers to get people to trail heads and pick them up after. The club is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2009.

"There is a lot of committee and community support" for National Trails Day, Craig continues. It is a day to volunteer, a day for pros and novices alike to get out on the trails and give back.

—Lisa Crosby Metzger

staircases, the trails that are constructed by crews of this new era will garner the same accolades.

The new trail that was created on Lyon Mountain in 2008 by the ADK pro crew is a good example. It took over ten weeks to install approximately 3.5 miles of new tread on terrain that was complicated by many boulders, steep slopes, and copious amounts of precipitation, leaving soil conditions less than ideal to work with. It would have taken years to repair the existing trail with rock steps. The new route is much more scenic with a pleasant grade.

This season the pro crew completed the long awaited re-route of the Northville-Placid Trail off of the Cedar River Road. The re-route is

