

# “I Know My Place”

## Snowshoeing Out the Back Door

By Fred LeBrun

**A**S I SIT DOWN to write, the first snow of the season begins to fall here in the Rensselaer County foothills of the Taconics. A few inches are expected, no more, a threadbare blanket that likely will be gone by nightfall. Although I suspect enough will persist on this gloomy, gray early November day to trigger a flood of memories of what will soon embrace us.

I do not dread what's to come one bit, the icy chill in the air day after day. The heavy snow, beckoning as it did when I was young, to come out and play.

When I was a little boy, growing up against the dark side of a mountain in the northern Catskills, a heavy snowfall was more of a challenge than a reward. For one thing, there always seemed to be a lot of them. I had no snowshoes.

This was before modern aluminum ones, anyway. Those old floppy, heavy wooden ones designed by native Americans as some sort of revenge didn't have steel cleats, which made them useless for getting up and over the icy cliffs that separated each layer of our mountain. So during the hard winter months, and there were lots of those too, my travel was limited to the back woods, as far as I could wade in leather boots before becoming totally exhausted. Then it was a weary slog back to our old farmhouse, to thaw out by the big wood-burning furnace roaring in the living room. I credit those long-melted deep snows of yesterday for my lifetime passion for reading.

A half-century later, my wife and I live in a small, modest nineteenth-century farmhouse with a tiny screened back porch. Behind us are twenty-three acres of mixed hardwoods, hemlock, and white pine. Running through it is a small, dark trout stream that originates a quarter of a mile or so away, burbling out of a bog. Along its meandering route, it's swampy, lined with red maples and vines, dark and dense and full of owls. In all, perfect habitat for a staggering array of creatures.



*Snowshoe tracks, 1998.*  
Etching BY RYLAND LOOS

*When the house  
has disappeared  
behind me and the  
woods have closed in,  
I will stand very still,  
watch, and wait for  
something to happen.  
It always does.*

When the ground is bare, I have my rituals walking those woods. Just as my father and I did ambling almost daily through a three- or four-acre patch behind our house in the Catskills, always following the same route, the same routines of peeking in specific rabbit holes and turning over certain rocks. Taking careful note of the natural world, a familiar yard at a time.

When the first heavy snow comes this winter, I will be a little boy again. Only now, I strap my lightweight Havlick snowshoes to a pair of lace-up LL Beans. I'm sure for the umpteenth time I will note how much I wished snowshoes like these were around back in the 1950s. I will head out at first light along the stream, loping along into the perfect silence of a new snow. When the house has disappeared behind me and the woods have closed in, I will stand very still, watch, and wait for something to happen. It always does. Some little mousy critter will try to break through and sink back down again, or a mink will slink along the bank, or an owl or hawk swoop through. I have seen ruffed grouse fly out from under the snow, scaring the bejeezus out of me. I have watched a grey squirrel gently nibbling on a snowball as if it were an ice cream cone.

I will do this alone, something I would not dare do anymore if I were snowshoeing a challenging mountain in the Adirondacks, or the Catskills. Inside an hour, I'll be back by my glowing fireplace, recharged as only nature can recharge, full of stories for my wife. Aware with heightened awareness of the steaming coffee in my hand, the smoky scent of the cherry logs.

I will be content to say, on so many levels, I know my place, and am at peace.

*Semi-retired from the Albany Times Union, though not from writing and editing, Fred LeBrun contributes frequently to this and other Adirondack periodicals.*

# WINTER ADVENTURES

*A collection of favorite winter outings*

## ADK WINTER OUTING

**Text and photographs  
by Mary Coffin**



**H**AVE SEEN ADK'S WINTER OUTING EVOLVE over the past twenty-eight years, from a cross-country ski-only event to include the growing popularity of snowshoeing and on occasion dog-sledding or skijoring. Three chapters host Winter Outing, each hosting for two years in succession in the cycle. Iroquois, Black River, and Onondaga chapters share this responsibility. In my opinion, it is the best bargain of all ADK extended or seasonal outings. Great camaraderie has developed over the years, and newcomers are warmly welcomed.

Winter Outing is held in the heart of the Tug Hill snowbelt, which boasts 300 to 400 inches of lake-effect snow annually. The outing has never been cancelled due to lack of snow. On the contrary, in 2004 we had to postpone the outing several weeks when a lake-effect storm delivered seven feet of snow overnight, closing the roads.

The most rustic of ADK's seasonal outings, Winter Outing is held at the Mad River Club through a unique relationship between ADK and the hunt club. ADK is the only organization permitted to use this facility. Participants bring sleeping bags and pads and sleep on the floor. It is heated by woodstoves and has indoor plumbing, but only one bathroom for each gender. The club is a male-domi-



nated organization, so guess where the only shower is located. A few hardy souls even choose to tent outside. Others who prefer more privacy and more comfortable amenities stay in nearby motels and B&Bs. A list is available upon request. The clubhouse has a full, well-equipped kitchen for meal preparation; no one has ever gone home hungry, especially after the Saturday evening hearty banquet.

The Mad River Club is a short drive from favorite and



The topography is characterized by rolling hills shaped by the glaciers and networks of streams running off the highlands, with bogs filling the depressions.

diverse skiing venues, including Winona State Forest, with groomed trails and tourathon course, picturesque Chateaugay State Forest (see Ron Fillhart’s article), challenging John Young Trail/Inman Gulf in Tug Hill State Forest, Tug Hill Forest Preserve, and the Jeff Three/Rodman trail network. Ski and snowshoe trips are offered daily for all experience levels from novice to expert, and half-day to full-day. ADK volunteers lead each trip.

The Tug Hill flora and fauna are Adirondack-like in this transitional area between the temperate mixed hardwood and coniferous boreal forests. The topography is characterized by rolling hills shaped by the glaciers and networks of streams running off the highlands, with bogs filling the depressions. There are several steep gorges or “gulfs” as well. All of these features lend themselves to wonderful and varied skiing and snowshoeing opportunities.

For information on or reservations for 2011 Winter Out-



ing, January 21–23, or other ADK Adventure Travel offerings, visit [www.adktravel.org](http://www.adktravel.org) or see pages 34-35.



*Mary Coffin, Winter Outing ADK Extended Outings Committee-host liaison, has been intimately involved in Winter Outings since 1986, when Bill Coffin asked her to help him chair the event, and has since chaired it ten times.*

**ADK offers three other seasonal outings (Summer Paddle Outing, Fall Outing, and Spring Outing) and is always looking for chapters to host and showcase their neck of the woods. If your chapter is interested, contact: [fkkmek@frontiernet.net](mailto:fkkmek@frontiernet.net).**

# SNOW COUNTRY: Skiing on a Corner of Tug Hill

By Ron Fillhart

**COLD AND GREY, THE STONE WALLS STAND** in long, straight lines, lasting monuments to the farmers who once worked the land.

**T**HE ECONOMIC REALITY of farming on the Tug Hill forced many to abandon their farms to forest. Where crops once were harvested and livestock grazed, only the stone walls remain. As maples and pines replaced corn and cows, those of us who love the woods gained thousands of acres to hike and ski in the Chateaugay State Forest.

Situated on the western slope of Tug Hill, a dozen miles west of Lake Ontario and some 800 feet higher in elevation, Chateaugay is not to be confused with the town that lies in Franklin County near the Quebec border. When the winds of winter sweep across the open waters of Lake Ontario and lift over Tug Hill, the lake-effect snow that made farm life so difficult provides a wonderful setting for winter recreation.

The Tug Hill region has several excellent trail systems appreciated by skiers, particularly those who attend ADK's Winter Outing (see Mary Coffin's article for more on that). With some of the highest snowfall totals east of the Rockies, the trails in winter are usually white. Winona State Forest in northern Oswego has dozens of miles of trails, and hosts the annual Tug Hill Tourathon. For scenic views, you can't beat the trails along the rim of the hundred-foot shale cliffs of Inman Gulf, part of the Barnes Corners Ski Trails. Osceola Tug Hill Ski Center in the middle of Tug Hill often has snow when few other places do.

Still, my favorite in any season is Chateaugay State Forest.

## TRAIL SYSTEM

**T**HE CHATEAUGAY TRAIL SYSTEM includes about five miles of maintained but ungroomed trails. They once bore creative names such as Keebler, Elf, and Hobbit, but were given number designations a few years ago. There are eight trails in total, ranging in length from 0.1 to 1.3 miles; they pass through a patchwork of second-growth hardwoods and plantation pines. Some of the shorter trails simply connect the longer ones, so it is wise to obtain a map or go with someone who knows the area.

Parking is along County Route 2 at Beecherville Road, about nine miles east of Pulaski, two miles east of the vil-

lage of Orwell and 0.3 miles past County Route 50. From the parking area, you have to ski or snowshoe 0.3 miles on Beecherville Road, unplowed in winter and shared with snowmobiles, before reaching Trail 1 on the left. The trail immediately crosses a bridge over Peking Brook and heads north, leaving the snowmobiles behind. It parallels many stone walls before reaching Orwell Brook.

A favorite place to take a break is the stand of hemlock next to Orwell Brook, where the nearly hypnotic sounds of running water can be heard year-round. The trail continues along the streamside for a distance before leading to a second parking area on New Scriba Drive. A number of trails branch off Trail 1, giving you several options for the return trip.

## CHALLENGES

**A**WORD ABOUT THE TERRAIN: while there are considerable stretches of relatively flat trail, this is not a ski for someone with little cross-country skiing experience. The bridge over Peking Brook can be a bit unnerving. A small unbridged stream on one trail can be challenging to cross and some of the trails have short but fairly steep hills.

For those with limited ski experience, I recommend snowshoeing or hiking the trails first. A hike can be combined with a visit to the fish hatchery in Altmar. Plan to visit the hatchery in late September or early October when salmon make their way upstream to spawn. Or combine a hike with a visit to the nearby Salmon River Falls. It's a short walk from the road to views overlooking the beautiful 110-foot falls, just downstream from the Salmon River Reservoir.

The history of Tug Hill forests is intricately linked with their history of logging and agriculture. Left to its own devices, nature will return the land to trees. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Chateaugay State Forest. As you move through these woods, you feel a part of that history.



*Ron Fillhart lives in Lacona, New York, with his wife, Ann, who assisted with this article, and daughter, Lydia. He has been a member of ADK's Black River Chapter's executive committee for the past sixteen years.*



# The Peavine Swamp SKI TRAIL

By Neil F. Woodworth

**THE NORTHWESTERN ADIRONDACKS** have a well-deserved reputation for plentiful snow cover. The communities of Wanakena and Cranberry Lake lie on the edge of one of the largest blocks of contiguous Forest Preserve, a 400,000-acre area. Combine these two attributes, and you have some wonderful ski possibilities.

**THE PEAVINE SWAMP SKI TRAIL** is located between the two communities in the Cranberry Lake Wild Forest. It is part of the very popular fifty-mile-long "Cranberry 50" loop of trails circumnavigating Cranberry Lake. Although located in a designated Wild Forest area, it was specifically designed and constructed for cross-country skiing and is not used by snowmobiles.

By reason of its specific design and layout for skiing, the trail has wide bridges and straight runs on the steeper hills. The trail is 4.8 miles in length between the southern trailhead at the end of Ranger School Road on the grounds of the SUNY Environmental and Science Ranger School in Wanakena, and the northern trailhead, off of New York State Route 3 about 1.8 miles west of the bridge over the Oswegatchie River just west of the hamlet of Cranberry Lake.

## A LOOPY LOOP

**THE NEARLY** north-south trail has three satellite loops, all on its east side, that add distance and variety. The most southerly goes to a lovely lean-to on the shore of the Oswegatchie Flow, one of the lake's many attractive inlets. The main and satellite trails offer some interesting climbs and descents that will keep intermediate skiers interested. The trail passes through mature red spruce, balsam fir, and some very large, old-growth hemlocks on the tops of the larger hills on the route.

Despite its name, the Peavine Swamp Ski Trail is well drained with good bridges; wet spots are rarely a problem. The trail normally has plenty of snow cover.

Despite its name, the Peavine Swamp Ski Trail is well drained with good bridges.



*Peavine Swamp lean-to and trail*  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
SHERMAN CRAIG




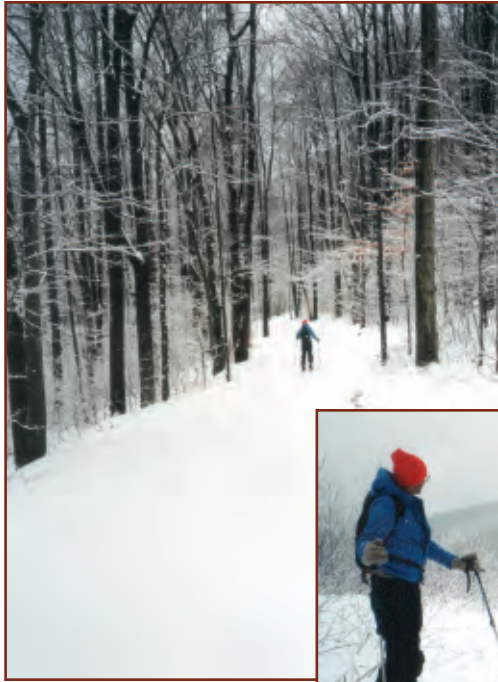
The segment from the Ranger School to the Oswegatchie Flow lean-to is usually tracked out, but you may need to break trail on the rest of it. Wider backcountry skis are ideal for this ski trail, especially on the hills.

## HEAD SOUTH

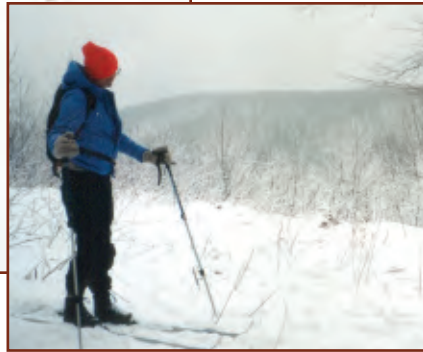
**MY RECOMMENDATION** is to park at the northern trailhead on Route 3, ski south on the main trail to the southernmost loop, and take it to the Oswegatchie Flow lean-to for lunch. Then explore either the middle or northern loop on the way back for variety.

Another great ski option nearby is the Dead Creek Flow, Janacks Landing, and Cowhorn Junction trails to Glasby Pond or beyond it to Cat Mountain Pond. When there is less snow, the High Falls fire truck trail to High Rock on the Oswegatchie is an easy trip. Both trips begin at trailheads a quarter of a mile apart on South Shore Road in Wanakena; see ADK's Northern Region guidebook for details.

 Neil Woodworth is ADK's executive director and counsel; he and his wife, Holly, have become very familiar with the Cranberry Lake area since acquiring a vacation home there.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
JOHN DAVID FAWCETT



# HISTORIC SKIING *in* Allegany State Park

By Art Klein

ing climbs extends about two miles to the interesting Stone Tower, a former observation tower. Across the road is the Roscoe Complex. Generally groomed and connected trails with loops are well marked and ranked according to skills. Beginners are delighted because the initial segments and first loops are fairly gentle slopes.

The main trail, the five-mile Ridge Run, continues from the Summit downhill to the Paterson Trail not far from the downhill end of Snowsnake. Paterson is a good choice as a return trail to the Summit. It's wide enough for two-way skiing.


Novices can descend Paterson to meet their more advanced friends from Snowsnake or Ridge Run for lunch at the nearby lean-to. This junction has a connector to the former Bova (bow-VAY) downhill ski area. Some skiers spot cars at the parking lot there and skip the ascent back to the Summit.

**OPTIONS** *Several loops off Ridge Run* near the Summit, such as Leonard Run (5.0 miles), Christian Hollow (4.0 miles) and Sweetwater (2.7 miles), offer a variety of challenging conditions. After the loops, Ridge Run itself gets more challenging and many people are more apt to chug their way back up to the Summit area.

The Paterson Trail (3.5 miles) is a right turn from the Summit area. A converted rail bed, it is a generally steady gentle slope wide enough for two-way skiing.

A short distance down Paterson we find the sole black diamond trail, Snowsnake. It is insidious. It is wide enough for telemark turns and snowplowing but shortly gets steep with a series of switchbacks that demand tight control. We extract many skiers who fail to turn and plunge into the banks here. A series of steep climbs and descents reminds us that cross-country skiing demands conditioning.

The cross-country complex was dedicated to Art Roscoe in 1978 in special ceremonies. I never pass the gate to the trails without saluting him.

 *Art Klein has skied in Allegany State Park since 1947, when his uncles put him in leather straps on hickory slats and aimed him downhill at Bova Hill. He has been a member and officer of ADK's Niagara Frontier Chapter since 1988. Bob Schmid, a park historian with the Allegany State Park Historical Society, assisted with this article.*

**T** O ME, ALLEGANY STATE PARK (ASP), snow, and cross-country skiing are a single concept. I have enjoyed ASP's Art Roscoe Ski Complex since about 1970, when skiing in the park was reborn. We, the new members of a new American sport, were unaware we owed this bonanza to heroic efforts fifty years earlier.

In the early 1930s, just about the time America discovered skiing, Art Roscoe, an Allegany State Park engineer, recruited a former Olympic skier from Germany, Karl Fahrner, to help him develop suitable areas for skiing in the park. By 1938 they had downhill skiing areas and two ski jumps and had begun the cross-country trails.

They also brought throngs of people from all over the Eastern United States. They successfully endowed the fairly new ASP with a winter identity.

Roscoe's selection of the so-called Summit area for cross-country skiing was especially fortunate. It is exceptional cross-country terrain and has great snow, typically a fine arctic type with minimal moisture content. The area is accessible on an entrance road to the park, ASP-2, just a couple of miles from the east park entrance at Salamanca, and midway between the east entrance and the Red House Entrance.

**SUMMIT SKIING** *Over twenty miles of trails* beckon skiers and snowshoers to the Summit, which also has a sliding hill known far and wide to sledders and tubers. The groups amiably get along and rarely crowd or aggravate one another.

When I first skied the Summit it was a simple wide place in the road. Now it is very popular, with parking lots, a ring of cabins, a public bathroom with a shower, and a warming hut. Northward past the cabins a wide, fairly easy trail with two slightly demand-

# HOT DOGGING IT *in* Allegany State Park

Text and Photographs by Larry Beahan

**I T WAS A GORGEOUS DAY** for a cross-country ski marathon—crisp temperatures and blue skies. New snow covered Allegany State Park’s world-class cross-country ski area. The wonderful smell of sizzling hot dogs lingered in the air.

It was the Art Roscoe Ski-a-thon. Art laid out the trails (see accompanying story); they follow old logging railroad grades with panoramic vistas through the hilltop forest. They are ideal for my brand of ski-ambling, and for racing, too.

An abandoned fire tower that was undergoing restoration sits in the midst of the ski area. Race organizers offered to share proceeds with the tower committee for feeding the racers.

I went to the event just to cook hot dogs. But the spirit of the athletes in flashy Lycra suits, waxing skis and charging down trails, swept me away.

Our charcoal fires were burning well and no one wanted to eat hot dogs at 9:30 AM. So I strapped on my skis to show off my stuff on the Sweet Water five-kilometer course.

The start of the course is uphill. I was moving smoothly. Then, behind me, came an unfamiliar slap, slap, slapping. If my skis make any noise, it is a swoosh. But this fellow was putting so much into it that the tails of his skis rose off the snow and slapped back down with each lunge.

I went into second gear, tried slapping mine down, and stayed ahead until politeness overcame me. I was not registered to race and he was into serious preparation. I stepped aside. He shot past and my grateful cardio-respiratory system attempted to recover.

Of course he is using waxable skis, I thought. If I had been waxing, it might have been different. A sticky wax at the mid-point of the ski, under your boot, and glide wax fore and aft is fast, but you have to get it just



right, and I never had.

I started a half hour before the race, figuring that that was time enough to round the course and be out of the way. I did not anticipate superhuman velocity. I moved on, enjoying the view and listening to a chickadee here and there. The temperature was in the high teens. I grew warm under my fleece and parka. Reasoning that you wear out faster if you sweat too much, I took the time to strip off a layer.

Slap, slap, slap, a flash of skin-tight black Lycra shot by me. There was brief silence and, in a blaze of scarlet and indigo, the second-place racer bulleted by. I dodged aside, expecting an onslaught, but these guys must have been Olympians. No one else was close. Their sleek appearance turned me to an inventory of my own baggy blue-gray outfit. Of course they’re fast. They’ve got the right wardrobe.

I attacked the trail with renewed determination. Then, with such a slapping, grunting and swooshing as I had never heard, the pack zoomed in on me.


“On your right.” “Thanks.” “On your right.” “Thanks,” they called. I took the hint and quickly moved to one side.

Courtesy took its toll on my speed—such as it was. I had had enough of this high-speed stuff. Dripping sweat, I skied back to the refreshments. All the cooking jobs were filled. So I smothered a hot dog with chili from a steaming bucket and gobbled it down.

The crowd of watchers saw rapture cross my face as, dripping chili and sweet onions, I inhaled another. They joined in.

Slap, slap,  
slap, a flash  
of skin-tight  
black Lycra  
shot by me.

So now I know where I fit in best at a ski marathon. I am a perfect skill for the hot dog stand.

 Niagara Chapter member and retired doctor Larry Beahan has written several articles for this magazine, as well as books of history and fiction.



# Winter Wonderland on Slide Mountain

Text and photograph by Carol and David White

**I**N WINTER, CHOOSE A CRYSTAL-CLEAR DAY to climb 4180-foot Slide Mountain, the highest mountain in the Catskill Forest Preserve at the west end of the Burroughs Range. Its high altitude features copious snow; the landscape becomes an unforgettable winter mosaic of pristine snow on balsam fir and spruce, twinkling with rainbow colors in breezes, with the deepest-of-deep blue sky sometimes visible through forest openings. Blanketed with snow, the trees seem closer than usual. You might catch a day when ice predominates, causing firs to bend over the trail to create a fragrant conifer tunnel.

Slide is one of two winter climbs, the other being Panther Mountain, required for membership in the Catskill 3500 Club, whose nearly 1900 members have climbed the thirty-five Catskills mountains exceeding 3500 feet.

From NY Route 28, turn south from the hamlet of Big Indian onto County Route 47 for about nine miles to the Slide Mountain parking area on the left. The first experience you'll have after leaving the parking area is crossing the West Branch of the Neversink River, which is sometimes bone dry, sometimes iced in, and at other times dangerous and even impossible to cross. Caution is the word if in doubt; just two miles north on County Route 47 is a delightful hike to Giant Ledge and Panther Mountain, which features a bridge at its only stream crossing.

**WHO DID THE TRAIL WORK?** **A**DK has accomplished excellent trail work as the grade steepens through massive boulders on the yellow-marked Phoenicia-East Branch Trail. Ascending stone steps at 0.4 miles, turn right for another 0.3 miles, passing a spring on the left, to a junction with the red-marked Wittenberg-Cornell-Slide Trail (WS); this is your descent route. Continue straight on the yellow-marked trail for 0.9 miles to the Curtis-Ormsbee Trail. Crossing a bridge, you ascend an area that can be sheer ice. Beyond, drainages that flow across this section of trail are frozen and buried in winter.

Reaching the Curtis-Ormsbee Trail, you'll see a monument that commemorates William Curtis and Allan Ormsbee, builders of the trail, who died on June 30, 1900, in a snowstorm while climbing Mount Washington to attend an Appalachian Mountain Club meeting. Their trail is a 1.7-mile scenic delight that connects in 900 vertical feet to the WS Trail, 0.7 miles below the summit.

Just 0.1 mile up this trail you approach great rock ledges, easily ascended to the top, where there's an interesting view down into the rock fortress. Moderate and gradual grades prevail, with several steep pitches up characteristic Catskill

ledges. Doubletop Mountain to the west is nicely framed from the top of a ledge, and at 0.7 miles a spur path goes right to Paul's Lookout; several open ledges offer excellent viewing south to nearby Table and Lone mountains.

The trail very gradually ascends, curving through open woods of yellow birch, and then resumes moderate climbing through shady evergreen woods. From a high point, the trail loses a bit of ascent to the WS Trail junction. You'll have climbed 900 feet up this trail and over 1500 feet from the trailhead.

**MAKING TRACKS** **A**long the final 0.7 miles, snowshoe hare and other tracks make you smile and realize that you are not alone up here! Take a short path left at 0.6 miles from Curtis-Ormsbee to one of the finest vistas in the Catskills. You can see nearby Giant Ledge and Panther, north to Sherrill and North Dome, all Devil's Path peaks and the Blackhead Range, and Cornell and Wittenberg mountains near to the east, part of the Burroughs Range. You soon pass a clearing, the true summit where a fire tower once stood.

Descending slightly to the great rock ledge, the vista reveals the Ashokan Reservoir spreading over the southeastern Catskills, a major source of New York City's still-unfiltered water. The summit is becoming more treed-in, so winter is an optimum season to enjoy Slide; this mostly evergreen-covered summit is somewhat wind protected—and beautiful, blanketed in snow. You'll be standing on several feet of snow, for better viewing.

Read the John Burroughs Memorial Plaque below this lookout ledge; among its observations is: "He made many visits to this peak and slept several nights beneath this rock." Burroughs was an important naturalist whose books were required reading in schools for decades. Along with Emerson and Thoreau, Burroughs believed that regular retreat to the natural world is the catalyst for a return to simplicity and reverence.

On the return, pass the Curtis-Ormsbee Trail junction and descend on the red trail; recent blowdown has created more openings to the north. The trail turns south at 3800 feet, descending very gradually through an attractive open woods. When it turns west, the trail becomes rocky, but it is a pleasant descent when buried in snow. Turn right at the junction on the yellow trail for 0.3 miles, then left down steps and back to the trailhead.



*The Whites write often of their outdoor adventures throughout the Northeast; they are the editors of ADK's Catskills guidebook.*

# UP The True North Slide

## A Winter Adventure on Gothics

Text and photograph by Laurie Schweighardt



WINTER ADVENTURES ❄️ High Peaks

**G**OTHICS IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE PLACES in all seasons, but especially in winter for its breathtaking beauty. I'd climbed it a few times in the winter, but always via marked trails. This time friends (all Winter 46ers and all men) suggested the True North Slide. A few weeks previous I had successfully hiked Bennie's Brook Slide on Lower Wolf Jaw. With an influx of confidence from mastering that challenge, I jumped at the chance to climb the True North Slide on Gothics.

We started from the Garden Parking Lot in Keene Valley and made our way on packed snow to the Orebed trail. We left the trail at the first drainage past the lean-to and headed almost due south. The woods were fairly open and afforded nice views back to the Johns Brook valley and surrounding peaks.

As the route got steeper we switched from snowshoes to crampons and I replaced my poles with an ice axe. Our first goal was the base of Gothics' North Face, a spectacular wall of rock.

**I** was becoming apprehensive with the increasing pitch of the slide. But with the majestic, sheer face looming ahead, the grand scenery temporarily squashed any misgivings I had.

It was a relief to see the face washed clean of snow; no need to worry about avalanches on this day. I had read that the North Face can avalanche. The pile of snow at its base did make me wonder.

We climbed as high as we could and then bushwhacked through a small stand of trees to join the True North Slide. Here's where the fun really started. While the conditions underfoot were generally good, with supportive snow, it seemed to me that all the ledges we navigated over were ice-covered. With each step the exposure grew and my misgivings turned to fear. It's amazing how clear one's mind becomes. I was totally focused on staying in constant contact with the ground: Plunge in the ice axe, left foot down, dig that crampon in, right foot down, dig that crampon in. Repeat. Look up every once in a while to soak in the views and take some pictures. Remember to breathe. Try not to swear too much. Turning around and heading back down was not an option. My companions seemed to be enjoying themselves. Was I the only one feeling scared? I can't believe I allowed myself to be talked into this.

The final pitch to the summit ridge topped out at about 45 degrees. I tried not to venture too far off to the right. The edge was icy and the drop-off precipitous. The view of the North Face, however, was breathtaking from this perch. I post-holed as I made my way toward the trail, feeling safe in the security blanket of deep snow.

As I neared the top and traversed the summit cornice, I finally relaxed. No matter how many times I've hiked Gothics, I will never tire of the views. The sun breaking through the stormy clouds added dramatic lighting to the unfolding panorama of snow-capped peaks. I'd made it! I drank in the spoils of my triumph.

**T**HE DESCENT **B**ut victory would be short-lived. We continued over the summit and headed toward the cable route that drops to the col between Gothics and Saddleback, but were stopped dead in our tracks by a cascading slope of ice. A handful of climbers had successfully scaled the slabs, but tried to dissuade us from going down. We discussed taking the trail that climbs over Armstrong and Upper Wolf Jaw instead, but quickly nixed that idea.

Fortunately, we spotted a route around the ice. We dropped off the side of the mountain and plodded our way through the snow, rejoining the trail beyond the ice. Soon after, we reached the junction with the Orebed trail. I sprawled on my back, feeling relieved to be on fairly flat ground and in familiar surroundings. Changing back into my snowshoes, I enjoyed the walk back out to the Garden along with the company of my friends.

During the drive home, I reflected on my accomplishments in the mountains. I never thought I could climb all the high peaks in the Adirondacks, and then I found myself standing on Marcy with no more left to climb. I got hooked on winter hiking while standing on Cascade one crisp and extremely clear February day and spotting Mount Washington far in the distance, as later verified by the fact that observers on that White Mountain high point reported being able to see Adirondack peaks. Today I had conquered my fears and overcome my insecurities on a challenging but exhilarating hike. It was a spectacular and unforgettable day on one of my favorite peaks.



Laurie Schweighardt is ADK's membership director, a winter 46er and winter Catskill 35er.

CLOSE TO HOME:

# Winter Outings *at the* Loj

BY MATT MALONEY

*Users of the High Peaks backcountry and Adirondak Loj guests alike are familiar with the assortment of trails on the state land of the High Peaks Wilderness. But most are unaware of the network of trails on the “finest square mile” encompassing Heart Lake.*

**THE LOJ AND ITS ADJACENT SQUARE MILE** of property are home to a network of trails for skiing and snowshoeing. Even guests at the Loj don’t know about or simply don’t use these trails. Maintained and signed by the club, the trails are primarily designed for winter use. The notable exceptions are the trail system that climbs Mt. Jo and the Heart Lake Loop Trail.

In summer, these trails look overgrown or narrow and seem to go nowhere in particular. Come winter and the arrival of snow, though, and they comprise the heart of a wonderful array of ski tours. They offer long stretches of relatively flat, easy gliding for the novice skier, with more challenging runs for the more advanced skier. All of the trails are manageable by a reasonably fit snowshoer.

You’re actually skiing over the top of a sand delta deposited by glacial meltwater that flowed off of the High Peaks and into the extinct glacial Lake South Meadow.

WHERE TO BEGIN

**F**OR A RELAXING GLIDE on skis with relatively easy terrain, the Southeast Corner Trail is a favorite of mine. This loop trail starts and ends on the state-maintained Van Hoevenberg Trail. It traverses a mostly open forest of birch and beech trees with some areas of balsam firs in the understory to catch the snow after a recent snowfall. The loop’s south end starts near the border of the High Peaks Wilderness Area; the north end intersects the Van Hoevenberg



JAMES BULLARD

Trail just before the bridge over MacIntyre Brook. The downhill to the brook provides the only challenging descent on the loop. There is also a small, easy hill at its south end. Otherwise this loop is as flat as a pancake. And well it should be; you’re actually skiing over the top of a sand delta deposited by glacial meltwater that flowed off of the High Peaks and into the extinct glacial Lake South Meadow.

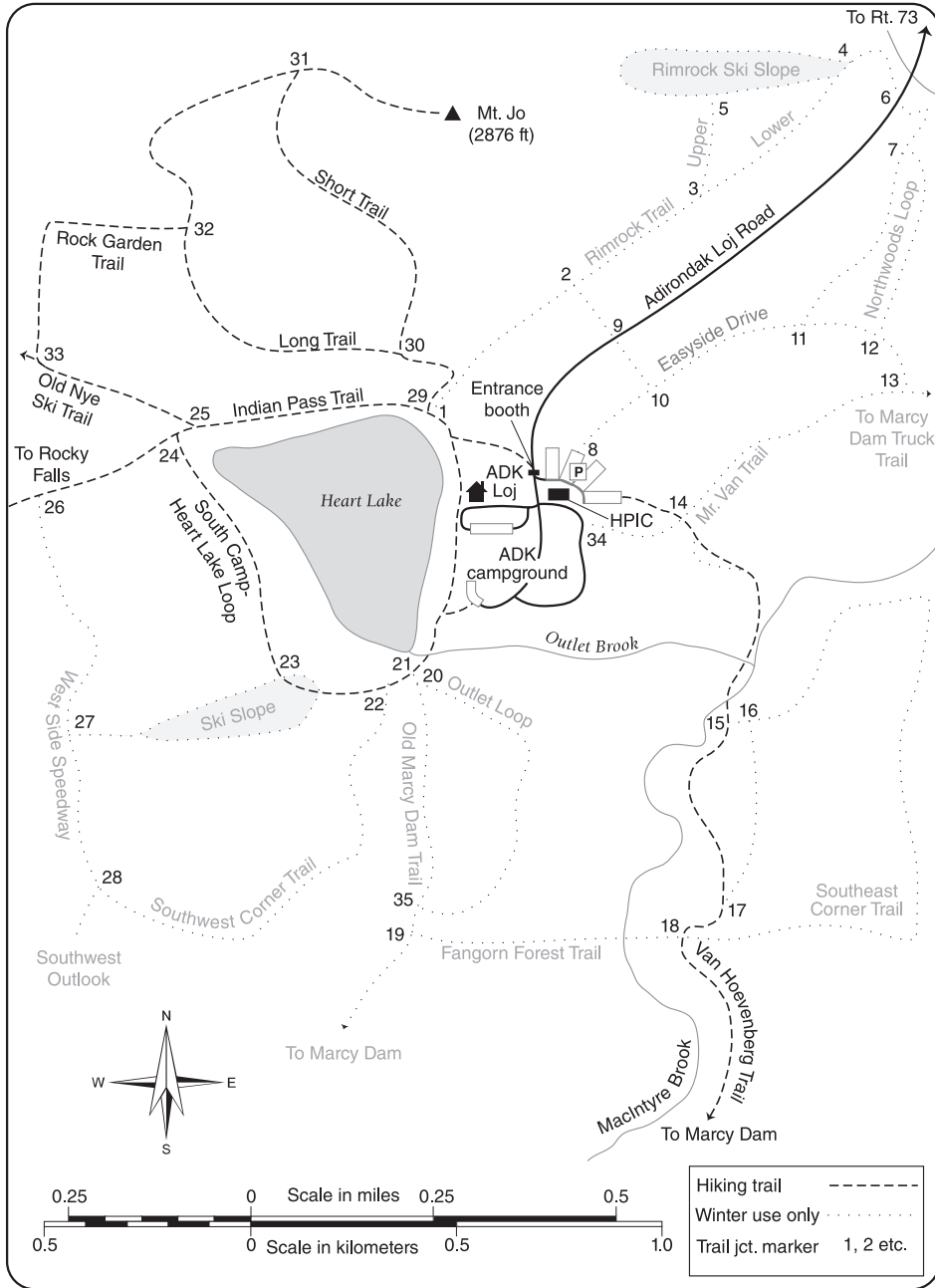


MARY COFFIN

At the extreme southeast corner of this trail, near the club’s property corner, there is an abrupt drop-off into the valley of Marcy Brook and the basin of South Meadow swamp. This was all once part of the glacial lake. Today, with the leaves down, you can look across South Meadow Swamp in the distance and see Mount Van Hoevenberg, Cascade and Porter mountains, and even Whiteface.

From here the trail turns sharply north on its way toward MacIntyre Brook. The total distance of the loop is roughly a mile.

In order to make a longer loop, take the Old Marcy Dam Trail from the outlet of Heart Lake to the Fangorn Forest Trail. The latter traverses short, steep hills of glacial sediments in an east-west orientation to an intersection with



ADIRONDAK LOJ SKI TRAIL MAP

the Van Hoevenberg Trail. Almost immediately after this junction the south end of the Southeast Corner comes in on the right. This loop adds about another mile of distance. Either loop makes a perfect pre-dinner traverse and offers opportunities to catch the glow of a winter sunset and the alpenglow off of Cascade if you happen to be in the right place at the right time. Bring a headlamp if you're skiing late in the day.

### ON TO BIGGER CHALLENGES

**I F YOU'RE LOOKING FOR** more challenging downhill trails try the Southwest Corner Trail. It features a wonderful look-out to the MacIntyre Range from the top of a small hill cloaked in spruce and fir.

Keene Valley; they are popular base camps for rugged trips into the Lower Great Range and the Big Slide-Yard loop, or for easier outings in the brook valley.

Whatever your plans, there are plenty of chances for solitude, scenery, and a wonderful winter experience through ADK's winter trails and cabins system.

*Matt Maloney is ADK's education interpreter and works at the Adirondak Loj.*

Not to be forgotten are the two small ski hills on the property. The most easily accessible is the Laura Waterman Ski Slope, which is adjacent to the loop trail around Heart Lake. Many a beginning skier has learned to ski more challenging terrain by practicing downhill runs on this forgiving slope. On the other hand, the easiest ski trail is the Easyside Drive-Mr. Van Trail Loop. This loop is particularly lovely after a fresh snowfall because it runs through primarily evergreen forests.

If you're looking to enjoy the serenity of ADK's winter trails, the Loj makes the perfect base. The trails are short enough to allow one to do different activities throughout the day or relax by the fire and do nothing at all until inspired to try a ski or snowshoe. The Loj offers private rooms and four-person bunkrooms for families, and a co-ed bunk room. Breakfast is included with each night's stay, and family-style dinners are available each night at 6:15 PM so you don't have to miss the sunsets over Heart Lake.

ADK also rents out two cabins in the Johns Brook Valley. Winter Camp and Camp Peggy O'Brien are both fully winterized and are excellent for groups. Each can be reached by a 3.4-mile snowshoe or ski along the Phelps Trail from

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