

FALL 2016
Vol. LIII No.2

Adirondack PEEKS

MAGAZINE OF THE ADIRONDACK FORTY-SIXERS



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AdirondackPEEKs

Semi-Annual Magazine of the
Adirondack Forty-Sixers, Inc.

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Printed by:
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Albany, NY, 12205

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Adirondack PEEKS is published twice a year by the
Adirondack Forty-Sixers, Inc., a non-profit organization.
PEEKs is free to members in good standing; to all others,
\$7.00 for a single copy, \$12.00 for one year, \$23.00 for two
years, or \$34.00 for three years (New York State residents
add sales tax). To subscribe, send your order to: Adirondack
Forty-Sixers, P.O. Box 180, Cadyville, NY 12918-0180.

President's Report

To say there is a lot going on in the world of the 46ers is an understatement. As our membership ranks continue to grow, there are a lot of projects and events going on and I would like to cover a few of them.

One project that is currently in the works is our Volunteer Trailhead Steward. This would place 46er volunteers at popular trailheads, such as Cascade, to help promote proper hiking techniques, as well as hygiene and overall trail etiquette. A core group of volunteers have already received training via the Summit Steward Program on how to professionally and properly deal with communications to the hiking public. As this is a fledgling program, we are still in need of volunteers to help man the summer (2017) season, as well as more popular weekends in the Spring and Fall. For more information please email bhoody@rochester.rr.com.

I would also like to mention the Clark/Marshall 100 Year Anniversary of the three climbers' (Herb, George and Bob) first ascent of a High Peak—Whiteface—which will be coming up in 2018. Although it is still a bit off, this promises to be a great time, with many activities to enjoy, including the Friday, August 3rd Adirondack outdoor movie night in Saranac Lake and a Saturday, August 4th commemorative hike with the potential of having hikers on all 46 summits (feel free to dress in apparel and gear from the 1918-era). The Saranac Lake Free Library will open the Adirondack room that has everything "Adirondack", including the George Marshall collection. Historic Saranac Lake will sponsor an evening roundtable discussion on how the High Peaks have changed since the time of the first three 46ers to the present (panel to be named later). On Sunday, August 5th, there will be an old fashioned barbeque at Whiteface Mountain ski resort to celebrate the centennial of the first High Peak climb by the Marshall brothers and Herb Clark. CLARK AND MARSHALLS' ORIGINAL 46ER ALE, the official brew of the celebration, will be made locally at the Blue Line Brewery of Saranac Lake. A more fulsome article by Joe Ryan #3787 on the planned events can be found on page 51 of this issue. Check out the Facebook link for the event at: <http://bit.ly/29zcmuR>.

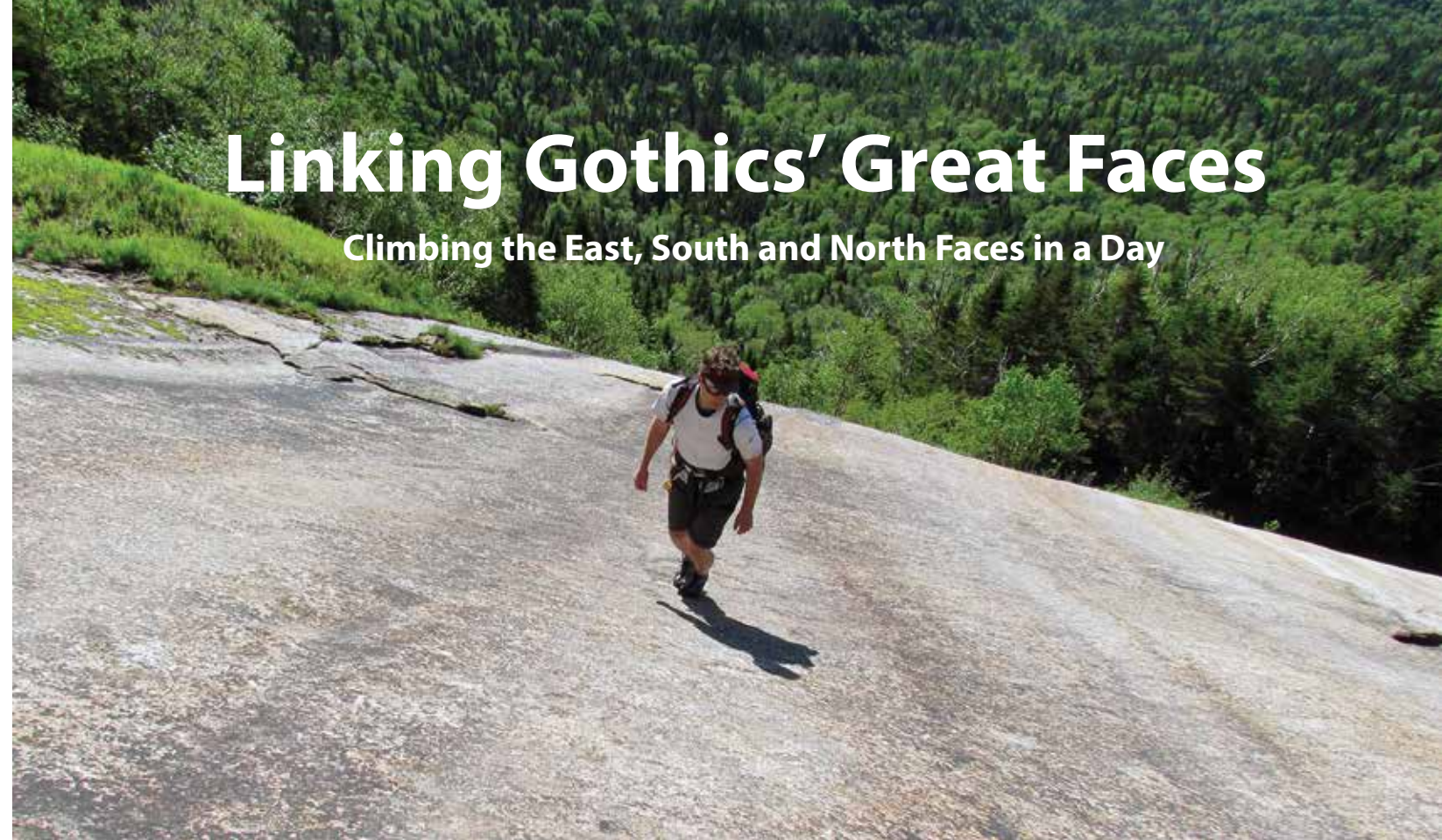
And one last reminder—and I realize that I am largely preaching to the choir—a lot of folks will be finishing the 46 in the upcoming weeks, maybe some that are reading this magazine. I know that I'm a tree-hugging party-crasher, but let's keep in mind not to overdo it on Finisher celebrations. Have fun, but please don't climb Cascade with 90 of your closest friends and celebrate by throwing empty bottles of liquor off the summit. I jest, but I'm not actually too far off. Be smart and be safe. In lieu of using my report to bestow some sort of wisdom or inspiration I refer you to an article written by our Vice President, Siobhan Carney-Nesbitt, posted on our website (<http://adk46er.org/about.html>). It gives great insight on what it means to be a 46er.

Brian Hoody #4410W

The membership of the Adirondack Forty-Sixers Inc. consists of hikers who have climbed to the summits of the 46 major peaks of the Adirondacks. The club is dedicated to protection of the Adirondack environment, to education in Adirondack wilderness ethics, and to participation in work projects in cooperation with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to meet these objectives. The views expressed by contributors to this magazine do not necessarily reflect those of the Adirondack Forty-Sixers, Inc..

Linking Gothics' Great Faces

Climbing the East, South and North Faces in a Day



Greg Kadlecik #7013 on Rainbow Slide. Photo credit: Kevin MacKenzie

By Kevin "MudRat" MacKenzie #5430W

Each year I plan something that tests my limits and explores as much Adirondack terrain as possible. After a winter of icy face climbs like those on the east side of Basin and Giant, a light bulb went off—what might it be like to combine Gothics' east, south and north faces into a day-long adventure? The result was a linkage of several established fifth-class climbing routes (technical climbing involving the use of ropes and other protection), the oldest dating back over a century. The resulting route entailed 18 miles, 6,300 feet of elevation gain, and 19.5 hours round-trip (including a bivouac along the Alfred E. Weld trail) from the trailhead in St. Huberts. The trip effectively bridged the gap between slide climbing and low-grade technical rock climbing.

I ran the idea by a few friends—gluttons for this particular type of Adirondack punishment. Rich McKenna #5570, Greg Kadlecik #7013 and Mike McLean rose to the challenge. Each had the mental focus necessary

to remain individually safe while pushing their respective limits. This was key, especially with terrain saturated by recent rains. The synergy of hard routes with trusted companions made the trip stand out as one of the most exciting I've completed. We chose June 15, 2013 to make the attempt.

On the Shoulders of Adirondack Giants

Our linkage was steeped in Adirondack climbing history and based on the footsteps of those who came before us. Our itinerary began with two routes on the East Face/Rainbow Slide. We planned to ascend 900 feet to the summit by first climbing Over the Rainbow, a 5.5+ route on the Yosemite Decimal System (YDS) established in 2004 by Bob Hall #4244, Sheila Matz #4245, and Ed Palen #710.

For a comparison of different technical climbing rating systems look here:
<http://www.climber.org/data/decimal.htm>

A traverse would lead to the upper portion of the historic Goodwin-Stanley Route, the first known ascent of the Rainbow Slide. Jim Goodwin #24 and Edward Stanley established this 600-foot-long fourth-class route (climbing with exposure where rope is often used) in 1938.

The linkage continued over Gothics' summit and down to the Pyramid/Gothics col, where we would bushwhack to the base of the South Face. An aesthetic line up the 5.4-rated Original Route added another 750 feet of elevation gain with the bushwhack back to the trail. This route was first ascended in 1896 by Newell Martin and Milford Hathaway. *Adirondack Rock* (by Jim Lawyer and Jeremy Haas) describes the route as "one of the earliest technical ascents in North America." Our second pass over Gothics' summit would take us to the base of the North Face via True North Slide and a final ascent of over 1,000 vertical feet up the 5.1-rated New Finger Slide, first ascended in 1990 by Don Mellor, Janet Mellor, and Bill Dodd #3453.



MudRat MacKenzie at the base of the South Face. Photo credit: Greg Kadlecik #7013

Though all but the Goodwin-Stanley Route are rated as technical climbs, they're relatively easy (between 5.1 and 5.5+ on the YDS), so we intended to solo (climb without protection) as much terrain as possible. Mike, who had the most technical climbing experience, brought 60 meters of rope, cams, chocks and a variety of slings to ensure safe passage.

East Face—The Rainbow Slide

The fluty song of a wood thrush awakened three of us just before 5:00 a.m. We ate breakfast, filled our water and mentally prepared for the long day. Ours would be a couple of hours shorter than Rich's, who hiked from the trailhead and met us at our bivouac site by 6:00. Our camp would remain set up; Greg and I decided ahead of time to spend an extra night to enjoy the solitude while Mike and Rich would exit together.

The first of five bushwhacks began from the Pyramid/Gothics col after we'd climbed over Pyramid. We wound our way northeast down through moderately dense evergreens and mossy ledges. In prime winter conditions this is usually an exciting glissade but it's a slower endeavor without the snowpack. The most exciting event of this morning occurred when my hydra-

Safety depends on constant re-assessment and adaptation to ever-changing internal and external conditions.

tion system burst while I was jumping down a ledge. Three liters of cold mountain water travelling from my back to my shoes was an eye-opener!

A 500-foot descent placed us on contour with the bottom of Over the Rainbow on the technical slab of the Rainbow Slide. Views of vertical cliffs to the right, the Ausable River Valley, and the steep wide swath of striped anorthosite overhead were as stunning as I remembered. We easily soloed the first 200 feet of the colorful slab, stopping near a left-facing overlap where it grew steeper.

Safety depends on constant re-assessment and adaptation to ever-changing internal and external conditions. The face was dry except for seepage at the top. After considering our overall itinerary and estimating the time it would take to stay on route, we traversed right on an inferior line. This avoided the wet slab above, but added a sketchy traverse over a corner to a small shelf of grass. For safety, Mike set up an anchor and belayed us over from the other side. Above, we climbed to a small ledge and up the low-angle slide tributary on the top right-hand side. We nicknamed the new variation Fools Gold.

The upper portion of the Goodwin-Stanley Route was next, so we struck a southwest heading from the top of the tributary to a long ledge in the center of the cirque. Typical Adirondack scrambling with equal portions of moss, lichen and stone awaited. An anorthositic overhang I like to call the Roof of Gothics greeted us from above.

The first pitch was especially mossy. Greg found himself using a full-body friction technique culminating with a committing lunge to a tree. Fortunately, the roots held. I followed, ready to spin to my side and slide down to the base if necessary.

Maneuvering on small patches of bare stone, we delicately connected islands of vegetation until we reached an exposed traverse a couple of hundred feet higher. Careful footwork brought us under the stone overhang. A glance to the southwest under this chunk of bedrock frames both Pyramid Peak and the upper reaches of the east face. A scramble up another overgrown wall followed by a brief push through dense krummholz intersected us with the Range Trail below the summit at 10:45 a.m. We were tired and bleeding (attributes of a good Adirondack bushwhack), yet sporting satisfied smiles.

South Face

A quick trek over the summit to the Gothics/Pyramid col led to a southwesterly descent to the South Face. A defined herd-path guided us through a narrow cleft riddled with deadfall, ledges, and slippery rocks. Some 450 feet lower we replenished our water supply and traversed along the bottom of the face. The key to successfully completing such a linkage is efficiency and minimizing breaks. Thus, we snacked as necessary during the day, which included a quick bite to eat before the climb up the Original Route.

The sculpted theater of stone is equal parts inspirational and intimidating, partly owing to its steepness, with technical routes rated up to 5.10d. It makes you think long and hard about your abilities if you're not a seasoned technical climber. Our route ascended 300 feet of elevation and followed a dominant crack between two aspects of the face.

From afar, it looks nearly vertical, but that's a trick of perspective. The first couple-of-hundred-foot section is actually considered fourth class (just a scramble not requiring ropes) though it often breaks 45 degrees with some steeper sections.

Greg focused by retreating into some music. Mike thoughtfully studied the route. Rich reflected on his prior year's solo climb—he'd soloed it once and felt confident. I contrasted current conditions with those of my 2012 winter climb up the route. It's an entirely different outing on stone versus ice and snow. My fear of heights kicked in, combined with a general concern for the unknown, ironic since it is curiosity for that same unknown that draws me to these adventures. Since Rich was familiar with the route in the "dry season" he led the way for the first 100 feet—it would be an unprotected climb to start.

Far above, two climbers named Doug Ferguson and Dustin Portzline were rappelling to the bottom of South Face Direct (5.10d), which begins partway up our comparatively easy line. We passed by them while climbing to a comfortable perch a hundred feet up the route, where we assessed the conditions. Doug politely asked if we were okay soloing (climbing without being tied into a rope). I smirked and said we'd considered the options and were each comfortable with the decision. I thanked him for his sincere concern and willingness to check on us. Despite my cheekiness his question was an excellent one; a fall from this height would be catastrophic even if it was "just" considered to be fourth class climbing.

Our goal was not to tempt fate but to have a successful and subjectively safe day. When seepage made some of the face slippery, we talked and decided to continue with protection. Mike set up an anchor in a crack and led the most technical portion of the ascent. This gave Greg, Rich and me time to lean back and enjoy the scenery as well as continue further conversations with Doug and Dustin. The arena was dramatic with the steepest faces of Pyramid bearing witness to our climb. This is what a day in the backcountry is all about—living in the moment, feeling the sun on one's face, enjoying the company of friends and breathing the invigorating air of the High Peaks!

Moving again, we climbed a hand-crack up to an exposed face climb. The pitted anorthosite, though damp, had plenty of traction so climbing was easy though footwork was obviously important. A final traverse off-



Rich McKenna #5570 under the overhang, East Face. Photo credit: MudRat MacKenzie

route to the left avoided the wet crux at the top. Thereafter, a series of vegetated cracks led to a 45-minute bushwhack up to Gothics' western shoulder. The time was 3:15 p.m. as we moved on toward the North Face.

North Face

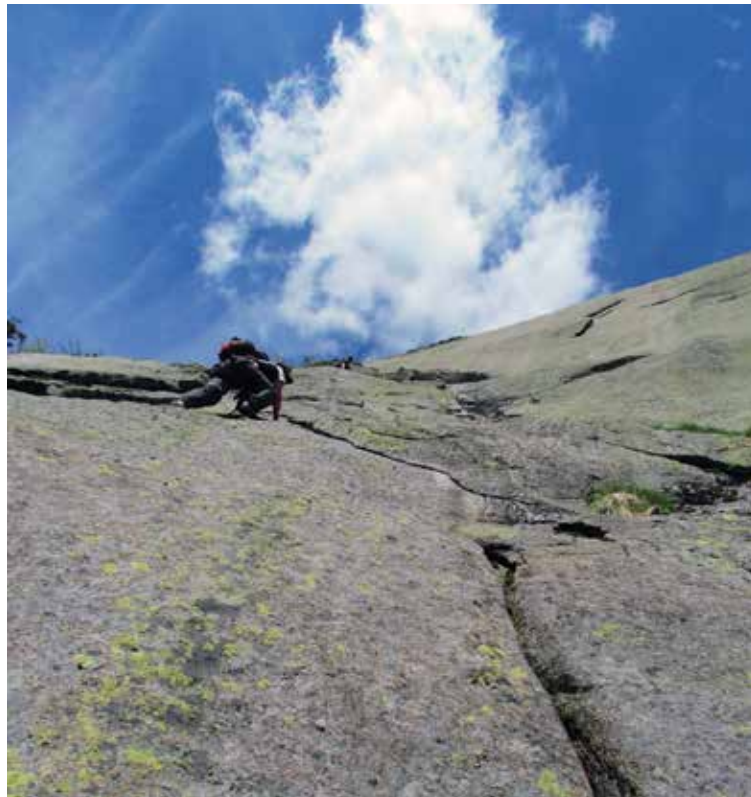
The trek to our final climb took us over the summit once again and down 1,000 feet, partially via True North Slide. After descending the upper ledges and mossy bulges at the top, we exited left. A bushwhack then led

The North Face, an anorthositic monster with a spotty skin of moss and lichen, is humbling, beautiful and sometimes frightening.

to the northern edge of the North Face. A snowshoe and rusty ice tool at the bottom (which I later found out belonged to Jim Wallace #6672W) spoke of winter mishaps in the area. A traverse across the base led to the New Finger Slide, an extension of the North Face that was created in 1990.

The North Face seemingly enveloped us on approach—an anorthositic monster with a spotty skin of moss and lichen. It is humbling, beautiful and sometimes frightening, depending on the conditions. Its size forced me to question my focus—the climbs and multiple bushwhacks had taken a toll. In hindsight, this quiver in my self-confidence was both a test and moment of growth. However uncomfortable, these experiences are part of the reason I like to re-define my limits at regular intervals. I decided to proceed with caution and err on the conservative side, if necessary.

A diagonal ramp at 3,750 feet in elevation



Mike McLean leads the middle pitch on the South Face of Gothics. Photo credit: MudRat MacKenzie

began the route. At the top, we chose a direct climb up a carpet of green moss to a tree island below the crux. Three hundred feet above the forest, we followed a crack away from the edge onto the face. This was the crux of the climb, rated a mere 5.1 but mixed with crumbly lichen and very exposed. My desire to climb the route purely by staying on the defined route conflicted with the growing realization that my mind wasn't in the right space. In a last attempt to regain focus, I tried to friction-climb up a nearby slab above a grove of trees—natural protection from below.

One step, two steps...slip! One way to minimize risk while slide climbing is to make sure there is natural protection below you when possible. This can be something as simple as a small stand of trees. I'd prepared for this and simply slid back into the balsams, then accepted the fact that I'd lost my focus and that climbing a more conservative adjacent line would be prudent. A chill wind blew by the time we'd ascended a large overlap at the top where the slide retreated into the krummholz. We reunited on the summit for the third and final time of the day; it felt good to rest.

The descent via trail revealed a final panorama of stunning beauty. Haze painted the distant mountains in the subtle pastel tones of early evening while Pyramid Peak was boldly illuminated close by to our south. I couldn't imagine a more suitable close to an epic Adirondack adventure. We descended the trail back to our camp. Greg and I fell asleep to a robin's song and cool breeze while Mike and Rich walked back to the trailhead.

In the years since, I often think back with a smile on what we accomplished as a team on one of the Adirondacks' most magnificent mountains. I also credit this trip in opening my mind to technical climbing. I'd always been one to solo whatever I was climbing even when the terrain was technical by definition. A seed began to grow from this venture; perhaps attaining some technical climbing knowledge would be prudent—placing protection, managing a rope, belaying.

The seed sprouted and grew. As a result, backcountry opportunities opened over the coming months that would eventually lead me onto the countless unclimbed anorthositic jewels in Panther Gorge. Every trip is a journey, a learning experience. One never knows where it may lead. To quote Grace Hudowalski #9, "It is not important whether you make the summit; it is important how you make the climb." ■



Rich McKenna #5570 on crux of New Finger Slide on the South Face of Gothics. Photo credit: MudRat MacKenzie

Kevin "MudRat" MacKenzie is a NYS licensed guide, volunteer for the high-angle rescue team, member of NYSOWA and Climbing for Christ, photographer and writer who focuses on slide climbing and other technical backcountry venues. His articles and photographs may be found in *Adirondack*, *Adirondack Life*, *Adirondack Outdoors*, *Adirondack Almanack* and prior issues of PEEKS. Trip reports, photo sets, video and other resources may be found at www.adirondackmountaineering.com.

A Day on the Whiteface Slides

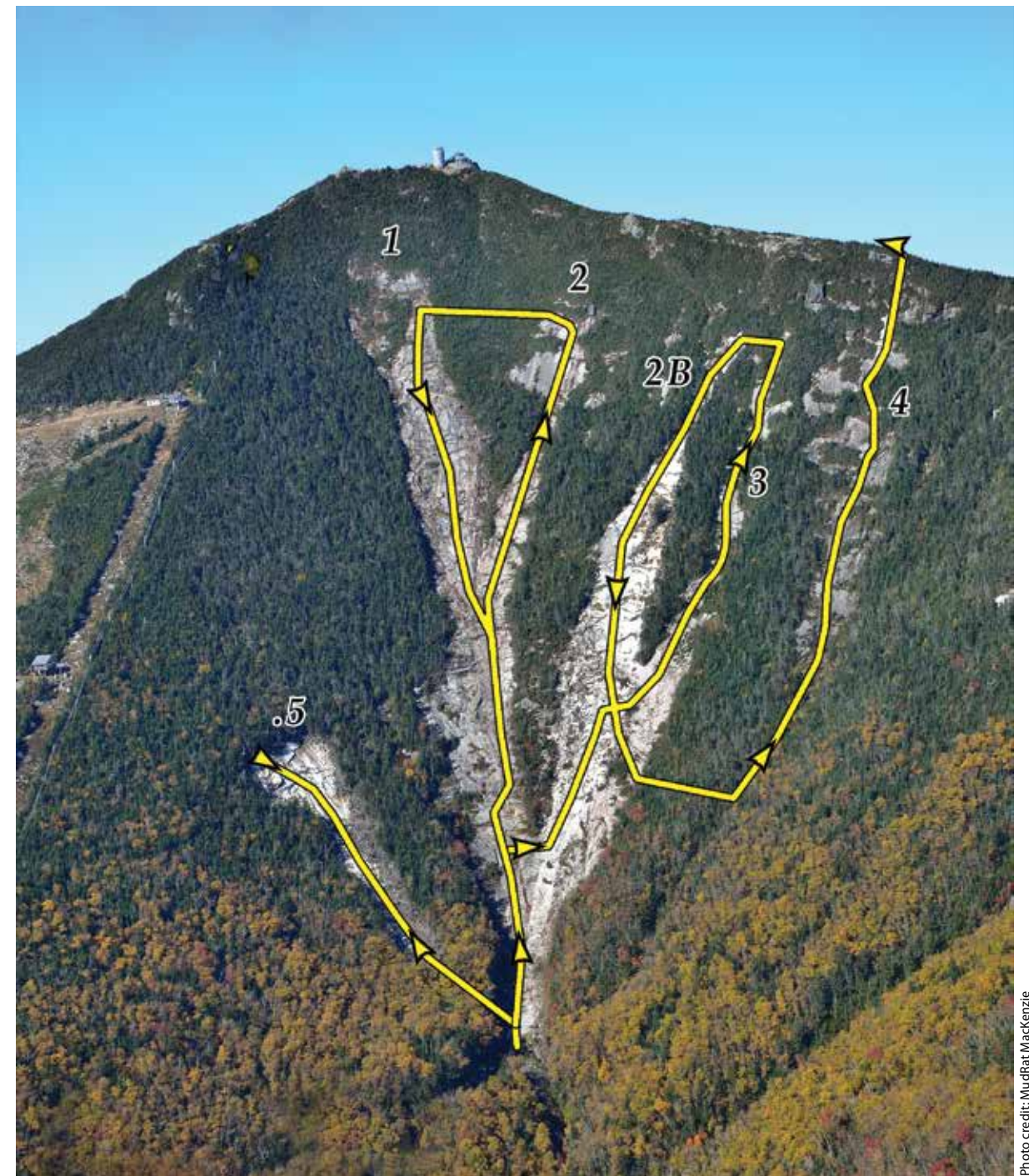


Photo credit: MudRat MacKenzie

- Climb ski slopes and enter from the left.
- Climb up/down **Ski Slide .5** on the left.
- Climb up **Ski Slide 2** and bushwhack over to **Ski Slide 1**, descend to base.
- Climb up **Ski Slide 3** (portions require technical soloing) and bushwhack to **Ski Slide 2b**. Descend.
- Bushwhack over to **Ski Slide 4** (portions require technical soloing) and climb to arrete.
- Ascend to summit, then descend trail back to ski slopes.

Photographs from the 1940s reveal pre-existing slides in the eastern cirque before it was altered on September 6, 1971. An estimated four inches of rain fell within an hour from a localized thunderstorm, which also created another slide that crossed the Memorial Highway. In 2011, heavy rains combined with spring melt-water to create two new slides: **Ski Slide #2B** (between **Ski Slides #2 & #3**) and the small **Ski Slide #.5** which intersects #1 on its lower left-hand side. Climbing a single slide from the Ski Center involves a total of about 3,700 feet of elevation gain over five miles. Linking all the slides is a bit more! ■
—Kevin "MudRat" MacKenzie



Simmons' Cherokee as it sits today. Photo credit: Scott VanLaer

A Tale of Two Cherokees

By Scott VanLaer

On August 8th, 1969 F. Peter Simmons took off in a borrowed Cherokee 140 from Long Island, bound for the Adirondacks. He was a fairly inexperienced pilot, with roughly 370 hours of flight time, but he knew the route, having made the solo trek several times before. He owned a summer house in Tupper Lake and usually flew direct to an air strip close to his home. Thunderstorms in the Adirondacks forced him to land prematurely in Albany where he waited for the poor weather to pass. The delay meant that landing at the grass strip, where there were no lights, would not be possible. He chose an alternate destination—the Adirondack regional airport in Lake Clear. His wife was waiting for him there.

Once the storms passed, the flight continued without incident, and about 12 miles out from the airport Simmons began his descent. Fairly quickly, he realized he

could not level out and the plane continued to lose altitude at the rate of 1,100 feet per minute. He was caught in a severe down draft, right over the MacIntyre range. One benefit of being a new pilot is that the lessons you learned from your instructor are still fresh in your mind and Simmons was keenly aware of what was happening and acted swiftly. He knew he was going down. Recalling the instructions he had received as a student he lifted the nose, slowing the plane down, and cut the engines. Accepting the inevitable fate of a crash, he guided the plane as best he could. He had no control over what would happen upon impact and he wouldn't remember it.

The tail hit a tree and the left wing sheared off upon impact, spinning the plane. The left wing was actually thrown to the right of where the plane landed. All this happened above the ground. The trees then slowed and

softened the impact with the forest floor. Remarkably, the fuselage hit the ground intact with relatively little damage. Inside, F. Peter Simmons was alive. The safety belt in that model was not a shoulder harness but only a basic lap belt which didn't prevent his face from violently slamming into the control panel upon impact. He suffered severe traumatic facial injuries and spent most of the night unconscious.

At the airport, Simmons wife, Dottie, waited and waited, growing more anxious as the lights of her husband's plane failed to appear. It was after midnight when she contacted Massena flight control and reported her husband's plane, tail number N6483R, missing. She was told he had reported in on approach twelve miles out around midnight but they could no longer raise him on the radio. The possibility or hope that he had landed at another strip

was offered to her. That seemed unlikely and there was nothing more she could do directly. She drove back to Tupper Lake in despair, taking the family boat back to their water-access-only summer home.

"I remember hearing the loud noise of the inboard motor waking me up early in the morning. I knew something was wrong," her son Gordon recalled 45 years later. He was fifteen at the time.

I have spent the past five years searching for, and documenting, the archeological

handkerchief. It was 2:45 in the afternoon. Simmons was still alive. Parker reported the finding. This was an era before GPS units and Parker had difficulty pinpointing the exact location of the wreck; he mistakenly reported it as being on Mt. Marcy.

That is where Forest Ranger Gary Hodgson was on patrol when the discovery was made. Incredibly, he had no idea there was even a plane missing in the area. Search and rescue missions in the backcountry were not as well coordinated then. If there ever

Hodgson explained. He retired in 2001 with a reputation as one of the greatest rangers to ever walk the Adirondacks. In 1969, however, he was still fairly new to the job, having only been on duty for five years. That morning of August 9th hikers he passed on the trail asked him if he was out looking for the missing plane.

"What plane?" he replied. Retreating to the Marcy Dam Outpost, one of two locations with landlines (Lake Colden being the other) he called out to Lake Placid airport manager Steve Short to find out what was going on.

It was into the evening hours when Ranger Hodgson finally spoke to Tom Parker via phone about what he had seen from the air earlier that day. Numerous State Troopers were now making their way into the woods, at first via truck up the Marcy Dam truck trail and then on foot. Hodgson spoke at length with Parker and believed that the plane was actually on the MacIntyre Range, possibly near Cold Brook Pass. Cold Brook itself flows right past the Lake Colden Outpost. In 1969 a marked hiking trail began there (today it is technically abandoned), going directly through the pass between Mts.



Gordon Simmons at the controls 45 years later. Photo credit: Scott VanLaer

remains of plane crashes throughout the Adirondacks. The region's most mountainous area, the High Peaks, is the final resting place of several aircraft. Those completing their 46 are very familiar with the tragic plane crash that occurred on Wright Peak in 1962 but hikers often pass very near two other crashes on their way to the summits of Marshall and Seward. Those crashes occurred just one year apart but had very different endings.

As the sun rose on August 9th some 23 planes began searching for the missing Cherokee. The civilian air patrol was in charge of the massive effort. Tom Parker was piloting his plane over the MacIntyres with an observer, Gene McArdle, when they made the discovery. A glint of sun off metal caught their eye. Looking down, they could hardly believe their eyes. A man in a business suit was standing on the wing waving a red flag, or actually, as it turned out, a bloody

was a man you wanted looking for you if you were lost or injured it was Ranger Hodgson.

"For some reason things in the woods imprinted on me. I could close my eyes and see specific trees, rocks and I could just recall routes and terrain. I could lay in bed with my eyes closed and remember details, images, and the quickest way to get places,"

Marshall and Iroquois, rising to 3,900 feet before descending to the Indian Pass trail to the west.

Hodgson and Caretaker Al Jordan hiked to Lake Colden Outpost and then began their ascent. When they reached the height of land it was dark. Hodgson developed a hasty search plan and shared it with Jordan.



Gordon Simmons and Gary Hodgson. Photo credit: Scott VanLaer

“We know it’s in the saddle here, let’s just go back and forth between the trail and Mt. Marshall, turning when we start to hit elevation.” Equipped with just headlamps they knew it was quite possible to walk past the plane without noticing it against the black landscape. Ranger Hodgson knew how difficult it was going to be to find the plane in the dark and he relayed that sentiment to his search partner. What happened next many would call luck, fate, or good fortune. Some say it was divine intervention.

“The only person who knows where this plane is, is the good Lord,” Hodgson said to Jordan. Suddenly, an immense gust of wind howled through the pass. It could only have been heaven sent. “It sounded like a door slamming. It wasn’t the sound of anything that should be in the woods,” remembered Hodgson.

Honing in on the strange sound, Hodgson and Jordan found the plane just 150 feet from the trail. A portion of the plane was acting as a sail, capturing the wind, moving, creating the sound the two men had heard. Inside, the pilot was still alive. It had been 21 hours since the crash. Simmons was semi-conscious.

“His face was all smashed but he was not bleeding anymore,” Hodgson recalled. They lit a Coleman lantern inside the cockpit for light and warmth. They mixed an instant grape flavored drink with water to encourage Simmons to drink during the periods he was conscious and placed him in a sleeping bag. The situation was still grave. Simmons’ head injuries were severe and there was no possibility of evacuation by air in the dark and there were not adequate resources for carry out by foot. Heading down Cold Brook Pass in a litter would have been a slow operation requiring a minimum of a dozen people. The stricken pilot would have to spend another dark night inside his crashed Cherokee. Jordan remained with him, getting him to drink when he was awake, while Hodgson retreated to the Lake Colden Outpost to call in their status.

Several searchers arrived at the outpost just as Hodgson did, bringing with him the good news. It was now 11:00 p.m. A plan was made for the next day. Hodgson spoke via phone to several people out in civilization. There was considerable discussion about how Simmons would be extricated. Hodgson called DEC pilot “Ace” Howland who often flew missions for the department in and around the High Peaks. Hodgson explained the location quite simply and logically. “Fly

to the outpost and then up the valley to the west behind it.” The directions made complete sense to both men because of their intimate knowledge of the area. It would be like someone else saying “Turn right at the third stop light.” Those instructions were all the helicopter pilot needed. Hodgson then hiked back up the steep pass with a chainsaw, reaching the crash just before dawn. Simmons had fared well, according to Jordan, drifting in and out of consciousness but drinking the grape-flavored beverage each time he awoke.

At sunup, Hodgson got to work clearing the pick-up area of trees; the plane had already cleared some of them. Daylight also revealed how lucky Simmons had been. That side of the trail was littered with large glacial erratics, some the size of houses. If the plane had struck any of them the mission would



Harding Cherokee crash on Seward. Photo credit: Scott VanLaer

have been that of a recovery, not a rescue. At 8:00 a.m. the helicopter approached, carrying Dr. Herbert Bergamini from the Lake Placid hospital. He was lowered on a cable into the area Hodgson had cleared and immediately went to access and assist Simmons. The stricken pilot was stable but needed critical medical care as soon as possible. The helicopter lowered a litter for Simmons. The ground crew retrieved it and packaged their patient. He was soon hoisted up into the helicopter by cable, flying away to a hospital.

F. Peter Simmons survived the plane crash in Cold Brook Pass and endured 34

hours, most of it alone, with only minimal medical assistance before he was rescued. His injuries were severe: broken ribs, a fractured skull, shattered cheek bone and damage to the vision in his left eye. His jaw was wired shut for a time but he would make a full recovery and even made jokes that he was better looking after the crash because of his facial surgeries. He would pilot a plane again a few times but didn’t continue flying for long. In September of 1970 he hiked back up to the crash site with his family and painted a message on the plane. The letters of that message have faded but are still partially visible. On August 10th, 2014, the 45th anniversary of his father’s rescue, I hiked to the crash site with Gordon Simmons and his son. Gordon had not been to the crash site since 1970 and it was his son’s first visit. They brought with them the ignition key

to the plane but the control panel had been removed. It renewed memories for Gordon and emphasized the incredible and unlikely survival of his father who, at 88, was still alive. After the hike we stopped at Gary Hodgson’s house in Lake Placid. The Hodgsons had continued to keep in touch with the Simmons family. Christmas cards were exchanged each year. On the 10th anniversary of the rescue the Hodgsons were guests at the Simmons’ camp on Tupper Lake. F. Peter Simmons, who was an engineer, moved to California and went on to help develop the Hubble space telescope. Gary Hodgson would remain a Forest Ranger until 2001. Over the

decades the Hodgson legend grew. During his career he was involved in the search for 19 plane crashes and 700 total search and rescue missions.

The following year, another crash in the High Peaks would occur but this time there would be no happy ending. It would be remembered by the recovery party as one of the saddest events of their careers. On July 27th, 1970 Charles Harding was piloting his Piper Cherokee on a return flight from Montreal, carrying his wife and three of their four children when he encountered reduced visibility over the Western High Peaks. He contacted the Massena airport via radio and requested an instrument flight plan as he had lost visual contact with terrain below. He reported his altitude to be 4,100 feet and was advised to climb to 7,000 feet. While Harding was reading the flight plan back to Massena



Chilling reminder. Photo credit: Scott VanLaer.

the radio went silent. No further contact was made.

During the afternoon and into the evening of that day planes and helicopters searched for the missing plane. Around 8:00 p.m. Herb Helms, the legendary bush pilot from Long Lake, spotted the wreckage not far from the summit of Seward Mountain. He could only make out the tail section as the rest of the plane was in flames. He reported that the crash was not survivable. Any attempt to actually reach the wreckage would have to wait until morning.

Forest Rangers, State Troopers and members of the Tupper Lake fire department

were the first to attempt to reach the crash, starting at 4:30 a.m. that Sunday morning. Forest Rangers Dave Ames, and Frank Dorchak, were part of that first crew.

“That was a heart-wrenching one,” Dorchak recalled 45 years later. Forest Rangers in the Adirondacks get very hardened to tragedy and death in the woods. It’s an occupational hazard to all first responders. “I had nightmares about that one for a long time,” Dorchak recounted, his recollection of that episode still keen and intense.

After four-to-five hours and over 2,000 feet in elevation gain later, that first crew found the crash site. It was only 300 feet from the most commonly-hiked drainage taken by those ascending Seward. The ground crew received directions from a state police helicopter overhead, watching their position relative to the crash site, which, indeed, was

student at the time.

The rangers and troopers secured the scene and kept the students away from the wreckage while they investigated and placed the victims in body bags. The adult victims were placed in rescue litters. Once that was completed, the shared responsibility of carrying the victims off the mountain began.

It had only been 20 years since the “Big Blow” (the hurricane of 1950 that decimated much of the High Peaks forest) and that side of Seward was still covered with massive blown-over trees, now interspersed with small saplings regenerating from the natural disturbance.

“The trees laid over each other like pickup sticks,” recalled Dave Reukaut, one of the Paul Smiths students. “We lined up and passed the litter up and over trees from person-to-person. It was slow and difficult for the first few hundred yards.”

Besides battling physical and emotional fatigue, the heat and blackflies took their toll on the crews. At around 7:00 p.m. they reached the bottom of the drainage where Ward Brook meets the old truck trail that also bears its name. From there the victims and crews were given rides out of the woods.

The wreckage of the plane remained on the side of Seward. It was damaged beyond any salvage value given its remote location. Hikers occasionally come across the plane and, more than once, a hiker would frantically call it in to the Forest Rangers thinking they had come across an unknown crash. That came to an end when the main herd path up Seward changed. The plane’s precise location had never been recorded by GPS. After a couple of failed attempts I finally located the wreckage last year. It sits, calm and peaceful, despite the violent impact that placed it there.

These are just two of the stories of plane crashes in the Adirondacks. The High Peaks region, surprisingly, doesn’t have proportionately more wrecks than the rest of the Adirondacks. I have located and documented 19 crash sites to date as I continue to work on my project. I believe there are about 40 in the Adirondacks with significant debris remaining. In the 100 years of aviation history above the Adirondacks about 250 planes have crashed. I plan to publish more accounts like these, including the location of each site in a forthcoming book. ■

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