

40 Years of Hikes in the Adirondacks

Leon Glass

Born in 1943 in Brooklyn, New York in the shadow of Ebbett's field, I am perhaps an unlikely person to find himself bushwacking through the blowdown near the summit of Cliff almost 60 years later on the way to my 46th high peak. This is a short essay being sent to the Historian of the 46ers explaining my journey.

As a child, I spent many summers with my family in Northern Vermont, mostly swimming in Lake Champlain, but also taking a few hikes to go berry picking and up Eagle Mountain near Milton, Vermont. During my high school days in Erasmus Hall, I started taking music lessons on the French horn, and this would play a surprising role in my hiking career. I guess in the summer of 1960, after my first year in Brooklyn College, I got a job as a waiter in Camp Minnowbrook, which was only accessible by boat ride from the town of Lake Placid. Minnowbrook was a music and arts camp, and waiters had to take an audition for the privilege of serving the wealthy campers who mostly hailed from the posher suburbs of New York City. The director of Camp Minnowbrook, Lothar Epstein was an immigrant from Europe, and organized an active hiking program to keep his musicians and dancers fit. I remember the hiking rules from those days pretty clearly since they seem to be quite different from current norms. Always wear cotton next to the skin and NEVER drink water while hiking since that would cause cramps. Rinse the mouth if thirsty but don't swallow! In the two summers I spent at Minnowbrook, I must have done several of the more accessible peaks, since there was a hike every few weeks. I remember distinctly the hikes up Whiteface starting at Whiteface landing, where we were dropped off by boat which had picked us up at camp, and then picked us up at Whiteface landing at the end of the day. I also remember a hike up Colden because I remember doing a circle loop and the trip leaders were a bit confused about the right trails to take on the way back. In my list of peaks, I have only listed Whiteface from those years, since all the other peaks have been done subsequently.

During the next 12 years, my hiking career in the Adirondacks lay fallow. After finishing Brooklyn College, I went to graduate school at the University of Chicago in Chemistry. Then I spent a year as a postdoctoral fellow in Edinburgh, Scotland, where I was married to Kathleen Cranley, who had come to visit from Chicago. I then went back to Chicago for a couple of more years of Postdoctoral study. Kathy and I did several good hikes in the French Alps during our honeymoon, but the Adirondacks during those years were far away.

That changed in 1972, when I assumed a position as a postdoctoral fellow and researcher at the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York. Kathy had a job working at Riverton Properties, a nascent New Town being developed in Henrietta, New York. One of the co-workers at Riverton, Scott Carlson, was a keen hiker and each Columbus Day he organized a trip to the Adirondacks. It was a bit of a ritual, with an obligatory greasy breakfast at Ruth's Diner in Lake Placid at 6 AM, before the hiking started. The one memorable hike from those days was up Haystack from Adirondack Loj. When we

finally submitted at about 3PM, the rather large group was quite tired and the thought of hiking back up Marcy to get back to Adirondack Loj was not appealing, especially since there were a few people who were struggling already. The decision was made to hike out through Johns Brook River Valley. We got back after dark, much to the relief of families who had been left behind to take care of children and who had wondered where we had disappeared to.

The decisive step in my hiking career was my move to assume a job at McGill University at Montreal in 1975. The seeds for taking a fall hike, which were set by Scott Carlson, took root, and for many years, whenever possible, I took a fall hike with a few members of my family and friends, students and colleagues. Now I was the trip leader and I did encourage people to drink on the hikes. Which mountains were done in which years and with which friends? No records were kept, and the details are lost to my memory. However, I did adopt Scott Carlson's habit of drawing a little circle around a peak on a hiking map after a peak was climbed. We always tried to hike a new peak each time, but some of the popular peaks, such as Marcy, Colden, Giant were climbed several times. Frankly, I had no expectation of finishing all 46 peaks. My attention was focused on my career, which was progressing well in Montreal as I found a great environment for mathematical studies of physiological systems especially cardiac arrhythmias using a branch of mathematics sometimes called "chaos theory". My scientific studies have received some recognition. I have been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a Fellow of the American Physical Society, and was appointed to the Isadore Rosenfeld Chair in Cardiology at McGill University in 2001.

Attention was also focused on my family. My daughter Hannah, who was born in 1972, was joined by Daniel in 1978 and Paul in 1980. Tragically, Daniel had a kidney infection in the perinatal period, and was sick for his entire life. He died shortly after a kidney transplant in 1982. Following Daniel's death we took many family vacations that involved hiking, but not in the Adirondacks. We visited spectacular National Parks in Western US and Canada including Yosemite, Sequoia, Mount Rainier, the Olympic Peninsula, Vancouver Island, Banff, Gros Morne (Newfoundland). Perhaps the high point for me was a solo hike up Half Dome from Yosemite Valley in the 1980s.

A big step towards the 46 peaks with trails was taken by my son Paul and me in the summer of 1991 when we stayed at Johns' Brook Lodge for several days while Kathy was busy finishing work on her Ph.D. thesis in medical ethics. Paul had just gotten strong enough to be comfortable on full day hikes (but did complain about the hike into Johns Brook Lodge carrying a bulky sleeping and clothes in a crummy backpack). In those days, we hiked all the mountains in the Johns Brook Valley. When we finished those, we also climbed Haystack and Marcy from Johns Brook Lodge. A few of these hikes were probably done when we went back to Johns Brook Lodge with Kathy the next year and stayed a couple of days.

The first trailless peak was climbed on a day hike with my colleague Jacopo Mortola. Somehow we ended up struggling through the blowdown on Mt. Clinton (Marshall). This

was a daunting experience and probably was a big factor in discouraging me from hiking on other trailless peaks for several years.

My adventures on the trailless peaks continued in 1995, when Paul and I hiked Tabletop as a day hike from Adirondak Loj. I was surprised how easy the hike was and found the herd path well defined. I guess around that time, I learned a bit about the 46er traditions and I wrote down the names of other hikers in the ledger for August 18, 1995: Gary and Tim Bertram, David Turk, Jake Kate, Mike Hagerty. But at that stage I did not really think I would do all 46 peaks and I did not communicate with the 46er office. But I did start recording the exact dates for climbing the peaks.

For me, the breakthrough hike that convinced me that all 46 peaks were possible was a two night backpack trip with Paul in 2000. Now Paul was much stronger than his Dad and we were able to do Skylight and Gray and he seemed eager to do one back pack trip per year with his Dad. In 2001, we did a one night back pack trip. After hiking in to the lean to near the trail head to Macomb, we managed to climb Macomb, East Dix, South, Hough. Upon recommendation of some other hikers, we decided to leave by way of Dix, so we ended up the day climbing Dix also before hiking out. After a bit of uncertainty at the beginning of the climb up Macomb, the rest of the day was uneventful, but this was a very long hike.

At the start of 2002, it seemed like with some concentrated hiking it might be possible to finish all 46 peaks. I thought I would be able to do the three remaining peaks with trails without much trouble, and that I would try the remaining trailless peaks with the help of family and friends.

For my first try up Iroquois, I decided to go by the back route from Lake Colden so that I could do Iroquois only climbing Algonquin once. However, by the time I reached the saddle between Iroquois and Algonquin, I was so tired I decided to just go back over Algonquin. Several weeks later, I decided to climb Algonquin, then Iroquois, and then climb back over Algonquin. This worked fine.

I had just missed hiking up Blake in the Fall of 2001. I had taken a trip from St. Hubert's with my colleague Alvin Shrier and got to the saddle between Blake and Colvin. But there was a thin layer of snow and Alvin had to get back in time for dinner in Montreal so we cancelled the Blake lap. But in the summer of 2002, I set out with Colin Hill, a former student living in Ithaca. Colin, who is about 30 and was a tennis player in college, developed knee pains. I left him up on the top of Colvin and went over to Blake as fast as possible since distant thunder could be heard. This was not a great introduction to the Adirondacks for Colin I am afraid.

Finally, I climbed Sawteeth with Kathy and Hannah. I expect that Sawteeth had been one of the peaks that we had climbed with Scott Carlson in the 1970s, but not being sure made this into a very pleasant day hike with my family.

I had saved the toughest trailless peaks until last. A former student, Jason Golan, is a keen, young and strong technical climber who had done lots of hiking in the Adirondacks but not many trailless peaks. Jason expressed interest in joining me on some of the tougher hikes. On a two night overnight hike with Alvin Shrier and Jason Golan we climbed Panther, Coughsachraga, and Santonini. We missed a turn at Times Square and were a bit surprised to find ourselves at the top of Santonini when we thought we would be on the top of Couch. Getting back, I was definitely the weak link, being completely exhausted by the end of the hike and managing to step off the logs going knee deep into the bog next to the trail just before getting back to the lean to right as dark fell.

Then Paul and I climbed Seward, Emmons, and Donaldson after camping near the lean to near the trailhead. Chatting up hikers on these trails convinced me that I could do Allen as a day hike, even though it was rather late in the season and the days were short. Jason Golan and I drove down to Newburgh and stayed in a bed and breakfast, woke up at 5:30 AM to get on the trail by about 6:30. I had clipped out the AMC article on Allen and we followed this carefully tracking each turn. However, we missed a left turn in the “wasteland” area but after about 15 minutes we realized we had run out of markers and backtracked. The rest of the day was uneventful and we returned back just before dark.

Finally, Jason Golan, Paul and I went back the next week. We left Montreal late and ended up arriving at the trail head just at dusk. We hiked all the way into our campsite (about four hours) in the dark with head lamps with Jason leading the way. We climbed Redfield and Cliff. The trail to Cliff was about as messy as advertised and we hit a big rain storm coming off Cliff that turned the corduroy road into a small stream so that we forgot about trying to keep our boots dry. Not much celebration that evening staying in a very crowded lean to with four other hikers. However, a few weeks later, I made a pretty good cassoulet which was enjoyed by Jason and his girlfriend Julie, Paul, Kathy, and Alvin and Eva Shrier.

As someone who has spent his life as a scientist, hiking the Adirondack High Peaks has been a unique physical challenge. I am sorry that the goal is no longer in front of me but feel a great sense of privilege for having had the opportunity to hike in these beautiful mountains.