



Gary Lee



Phyllis Samson



DEC photo



Jack Howe

Home *away* from Home

By Ellen Bidell and Brian Scott

The smell of the campfire, the call of the loon, the camaraderie of friends, and the solitude of the woods. These are the things that keep people coming back to DEC campgrounds year after year.

Nearly 100 years ago, the first recreational campers in New York State packed up their cars with a weekend's worth of food, headed to a rural or wooded area, and often just pulled to the side of the road when they found the "perfect" camping spot. Those outdoor adventurers set up a simple shelter made of canvas held between several poles in which to spend the weekend. Today, accommodations run the gamut from a single-person nylon tent to large motor homes with a number of amenities and modern conveniences. While the gear has changed considerably over time, the reasons that people choose to camp have not, and camping is now one of the most popular outdoor vacation activities in the United States.

DEC operates 52 public campgrounds throughout the Adirondack and Catskill parks. Most campgrounds open

in mid-May and half stay open through Columbus Day. Depending on the campground, the number of campsites ranges from only a few dozen to more than three hundred. Most can accommodate RVs, but several are only accessible by foot or boat. None offer water or electric hookups (these are available at some campgrounds administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), but most have modern restrooms with showers.

DEC campgrounds provide a wide variety of experiences, including island camping, tent and trailer camping, boat launching facilities, hiking trails, beaches, and day-use areas with picnic tables and grills.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, one third of U.S. adults say they have gone on a camping vacation in the past five years and only six percent of people who have



Gerald Grogalewski



Thomas Burger



John L. Mitchell



Thomas Burger

While the gear has changed through the years, the reasons people camp have not, and camping is one of the most popular outdoor vacation activities in the U.S. today. (Photos, clockwise from bottom of page 6: Bear Mtn. Park, circa 1940s; Point Comfort, Piseco Lake, circa 1930s; Eighth Lake, circa 1930s; Hearthstone, Lake George, circa 1930s; Eighth Lake, 1966; Limekiln Lake, 1987; Limekiln Lake beach, 1987; Brown Tract Pond, 1982)

gone camping said it was not for them. But to some, camping is more than just a vacation, it is a lifelong tradition.

Thomas Burger and his family, of Canandaigua, New York, have been camping at DEC campgrounds every year for 44 years. They generally stay one or two weeks at Limekiln Lake, but

To some, camping is more than just a vacation, it's a lifelong tradition.

have also visited Lewey Lake and Rollins Pond in years past. Limekiln Lake is located near the village of Inlet in the Adirondacks. Thomas prefers it there because of the location—there are many activities nearby, including a water park, antique shops, restaurants, museums, golf and hiking. There are 271 large campsites, a guarded swimming beach, and boating is allowed on the lake.

In addition to making lifelong friendships that started around a campfire, Thomas also recalls teaching his son how to canoe on Limekiln Lake. "In years past, black bears would roam the campground freely, adding to the Adirondack experience. It has given me a great appreciation for nature," he said. It does trouble

Thomas to see some of the changes that have come with the passing of four decades. He feels that people don't appreciate enough what the campground offers and don't fully understand their responsibility to help care for and maintain it. "I have watched the excellent staff at Limekiln Lake continually improve conditions at the campground, adding a shower building, improved fireplaces,

bear containers for food storage, and the creation of a new program for children to learn about nature," explained Thomas. "I would like to see more people appreciate these improvements and work to keep our campgrounds as beautiful and serene as they can be, so that they may be enjoyed for years to come." He says that

his camping experiences have encouraged him to do what he can to help preserve the Adirondacks.

Another long-term camping family, the Fentons of West Winfield, New York, also prefer Limekiln Lake for their camping vacations. They have been returning to the campground for the past 35 years. In recent years, their trips have lasted the entire two weeks

allowed at DEC campgrounds. Like the Burgers, the Fentons enjoy the campground's large sites. "Limekiln Lake Campground has big, roomy campsites in a variety of settings. Some are close to the water and the beach area, while others are way back in the woods," Tom Fenton explained.

"We generally try to make at least one trip to Limekiln around the 4th of July. On this trip, it has become a tradition to watch the fireworks in the evening at the public beach at Inlet. Another tradition has been to climb Rocky Mount at least one time on each trip. It is an easy climb, but the view of Fourth Lake and the surrounding mountains is spectacular," Tom recalls.

"For us, camping has changed over the years, mostly as we have progressed from tents to a 5th-wheel camper. But even though our accommodations have become more comfortable, we still enjoy camping for the same reasons: hiking, canoeing, kayaking, building campfires and just spending time outdoors with our children, grandchildren and friends. We have made good friends that we keep in touch with throughout the year, and acquaintances that we only

see during the summer, but we are often able to renew our friendships while we are camping. Either way, the experience will never grow old for us," Tom said.

Brenda Carmer has spent a lifetime camping. She first camped at DEC's Sharp Bridge Campground as a child in 1932, and has returned every year since. There were neither paved roads nor electricity at the campground when her family started visiting. Brenda has special memories of the swimming hole where she spent much of her time, wet wool bathing suit and all. Her father helped build a diving board made of lumber from a nearby mill and installed it at the swimming hole. "Sometimes, the campground was so busy during those early years that if the campground was full, people were willing to share their site with another family, rather than turning them away," recalled Brenda. She added that each campsite used to be marked with the names of the families who stayed there, rather than a number.

Located along the banks of the Schroon River, Sharp Bridge Campground started in 1920 with a single campsite. The summers spent at Sharp Bridge remain so much a part of Brenda, now 84 years



Darren McGee



Susan Shaffer



Susan Shaffer

Camping offers the opportunity for families to reconnect with nature and each other. A number of DEC campgrounds offer activity programs for children.



Susan Shaffer

old, that she is currently writing a memoir about her camping experiences. She even wishes her ashes to be spread over Sharp Bridge when she passes away.

What keeps people like Brenda Carmer, the Fentons and the Burgers returning to the same campground? For many, it is more than just the beauty of a particular location. Nearby activities and attractions can enrich the camping experience and keep people coming back year after year.

Ellen Bidell is a citizen participation specialist in Public Affairs and Education and **Brian Scott** is a conservation operations supervisor in the Bureau of Recreation in DEC's Albany office.

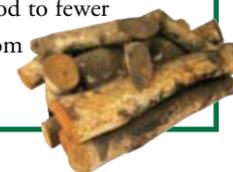
Connect to Nature

Reservations for DEC state campgrounds are made through ReserveAmerica, either online at www.ReserveAmerica.com or by calling 1-800-456-CAMP (2267).

Daily site fees range from \$14 to \$22. Visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov to view the *2009 New York Camping Guide*, which has photos and descriptions of all 52 campgrounds and their amenities.

Remember: Don't Move Firewood!

Make sure to buy firewood near the campground for your nightly campfires. A new state regulation prohibits importation of firewood into New York unless it has been treated to kill pests. The regulation also limits transportation of untreated firewood to fewer than 50 miles from its source.



DEC Campgrounds: More Than Just Camping

While most every camper enjoys being outdoors and sitting around a campfire, different campgrounds offer unique appeal depending on a camper's interests. Check out some of the following campgrounds to see if one might be a future destination for you and your family.

Boaters of All Kinds: Fish Creek Pond and Rollins Pond

Fish Creek Pond and Rollins Pond are located in the Adirondacks on State Route 30 north of Tupper Lake. The two campgrounds are adjacent to each other, and combined offer nearly 650 campsites, accommodating everything from tents to 40-foot RVs. Fish Creek Pond Campground offers a natural sand shoreline and water access for most campsites. Motorized boats are allowed on both Fish Creek Pond and Square Pond, as well as on Upper Saranac Lake. For those who prefer canoes and kayaks, Rollins Pond Campground has several ponds and the St. Regis canoe area is nearby. Favorites of many campers, Fish Creek and Rollins Pond both offer a variety of boat rentals.

Families: Moffitt Beach

A popular family campground, Moffitt Beach is located near Speculator in the Adirondacks. The campsites are nestled in a grove of 70-foot tall white pine trees, and many are at the water's edge. During summer months, the campground offers several activity programs for children, including nature hikes, crafts, games, and live entertainment. There is a guarded swimming beach on the shores of Sacandaga Lake also.

Serious Hikers: Devil's Tombstone

Devil's Tombstone Campground is located in the Town of Hunter in the Catskills. It is one of the oldest campgrounds in the Catskill Forest Preserve, and an ideal base camp for serious hikers. The trails lead to some of the preserve's highest peaks, including Hunter,

Indian Head and the West Kill Range. With only 24 tent and trailer sites, Devil's Tombstone is one of the smaller DEC campgrounds, and the camping is primitive, with no shower facilities and no swimming or boating on the small lake. The area is rich in history, and legend has it that the rugged mountain pass was a favorite haunt of the Devil when settlers first arrived in the Catskills.

A Camping Adventure: Lake George Islands

Located in the middle of Lake George in the Adirondacks, the forty-four Lake George islands offer great camping for those seeking privacy. There are 387 shoreline campsites accessible only by boat. All sites have a dock for at least one boat, a fireplace, picnic table and toilet facility. Lake George is renowned for some of the best recreational boating in the Northeast. There are more than 50 miles of trails nearby for hiking to many of the mountains overlooking the lake.

Fisherman's Paradise: Wilmington Notch

Wilmington Notch is located in the Adirondacks just east of Lake Placid on NYS Route 86. The campground lies on the shores of the West Branch of the Ausable River, a favorite spot for anglers looking to challenge the riffles in search of a great catch. If the fish aren't biting, campers can visit any of the nearby attractions: Olympic venues, Santa's Workshop or High Falls Gorge. The 54 campsites are situated in a birch and pine grove at the base of Whiteface Mountain.