

courtesy of author



COMING HOME *to Jadwin Forest*



By Gary Brown

If you drive through Lewis County on Route 812, sooner or later you will pass through the Frank E. Jadwin Memorial Forest. To many people, this huge tract of 20,000 acres of public land is just that. But to me, it is someplace special. You see, for many generations of my family, part of this place was home.

From the 1880s through the 1930s, my family farmed 600 acres of this land. This is where my great-grandfather landed, shortly after leaving England with his Irish wife. This is where my grandmother was born.

Many of us still meet here to hunt deer every year. Folks come from Texas, Pennsylvania, or from wherever life has taken them. It is certainly not the best place to go deer hunting, but for us, it's the only place to go.

We enter the woods on a path that is little more than a rut left over from the wagon trail to Hay Barn Hill. By now it has seen six generations of Browns. The old, hand-laid stone house foundation is still here, just to the left of the trail. I look at it every time I pass. There is nothing

new to see; I guess I am just paying homage. In the late 1800s the house that stood here was home to five adults and eleven kids. If I try hard enough, I can see my grandmother Ellen as a three-year-old playing in the backyard in 1878. It's always good for a private smile.

Several hundred yards down the trail, I pass Gramp's Pine. Although it's just a huge pine tree to others, it's a storybook to us, and I often stop to rest for a minute, or to simply reflect on my way out of the woods. A few hundred yards farther in,

We moved away from this place, but we never really left.

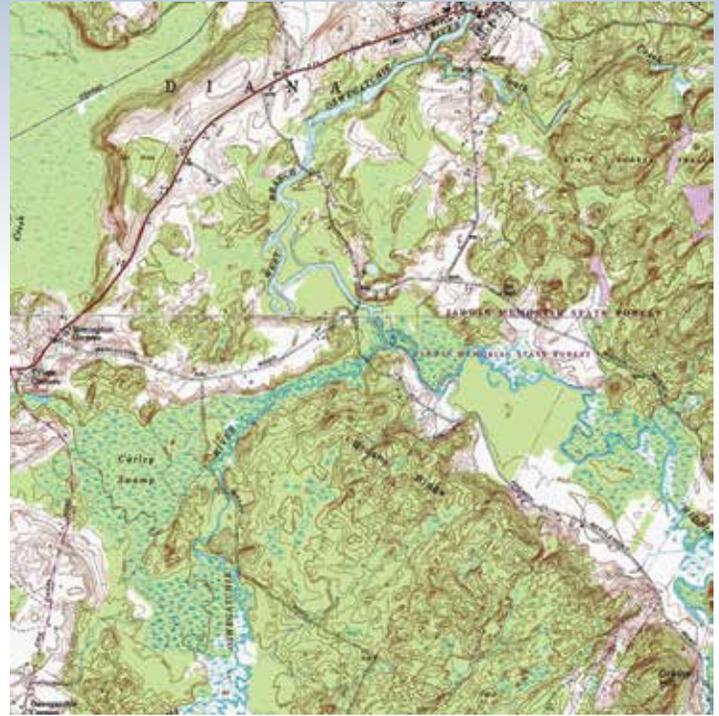
there are rock piles on both sides of the trail. I am amazed that anyone could have scratched out a living on this rocky land. From this vantage, even a stranger can figure out that someone cleared a pasture here long ago. I keep to myself that I know who did it, and just about when.

Nearly a mile from the main road, I arrive at Hay Barn Hill. Here is where our hunting party gathers, even after 132 years. Here is the hallowed ground: Tim's Rock, the White Birches, Piano Key Swamp and The Rocks. You can look for the names on your map, but you won't find them—they are known only to us. This is where my son got his first buck, and where my brother got his last.

I can see the ghost of a relative behind every tree. The old spring is still there, still full of water. I feel protective of the area, so you'll have to pardon me if I refuse to show you where it is.

The guy across the road now owns what once was Elmer Young's camp. He never knew Elmer. That is his loss. Elmer hunted and trapped these woods to survive. His stories mesmerized me as a kid. They still do.

In 1985, I came here from Pittsburgh to hunt with my father. While we were here, Dad had a stroke. Three nights later in his hospital room, he told me that if he was going to die, at least he was in the right place. You see, we moved away from this place, but we never really left.



Courtesy of USGS

People come and go, but these lands remain. Like the rocks that pepper its fields and woods, Frank E. Jadwin Memorial Forest is a beautiful constant in a rapidly changing world.

For a lucky few, it is full of private memories.

Gary Brown is at home in the Adirondacks and on the St. Lawrence River.



Edwin Sykes

Take a Hike!

Located in northern Lewis County, 20,412-acre Frank E. Jadwin Memorial State Forest is one of the largest and most diverse state forests in New York. The area contains more than 12,000 acres of natural hardwood and conifer forest, 5,000 acres of softwood plantations, 2,500 acres of ponds and wetlands, and 500 acres of brush land, historic sites, and other unique areas. There are several trout streams here, including the West Branch of the Oswegatchie River, Blanchard Creek, Brown Creek, and Compo Creek.

The forest was named after Frank E. Jadwin, a former Conservation Department District Forester who was locally instrumental in the acquisition and establishment of the state forests that exist today. Visitors can explore a number of trails. There is motor vehicle access on many miles of roads, and there are (via a permit) special motorized routes for people with disabilities.

Directions: Access to the forest is located off State Route 812, approximately six miles south of Harrisville. From Harrisville, take Routes 3 & 812 south for three miles, then continue to follow Route 812 south another 3 miles.

