

# The Adirondacks...

*from exploitation to conservation*

## The Early Adirondacks

The first people of the Adirondack region began to live in the area along Lake Champlain soon after the last of the glacial ice melted, about 10,000 years ago. Later, Algonquin-speaking people hunted, fished and collected plant foods from the rich wetlands, lake shores and river valleys of the region. After they settled in farming villages in the Mohawk and St. Lawrence valleys around 1,000 A.D., Iroquois people also recognized and used the rich plant and animal resources of the Adirondacks.

"A Good Time Coming,"  
1862. Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait,  
courtesy of The Adirondack  
Museum. Currier and Ives  
reproductions of Tait's paint-  
ings popularized the  
Adirondacks nationwide.





(top) Log jam on the river, courtesy of The Adirondack Museum.

(above) "Charcoal kilns, Adirondacks," Seneca Ray Stoddard, courtesy of The Chapman Historical Museum. The making of charcoal for early Adirondack iron mining consumed massive quantities of wood.

The name "Adirondack" may have been derived from the Mohawk word "ha-de-ron-dah," or "bark-eater," used to describe an itinerant Algonquin tribe occasionally forced to subsist on spruce bark during the long winters.

The first Europeans to visit the Adirondack region were French explorers and missionaries, notably Samuel de Champlain and Father Isaac Jogues, who arrived in the early 17th century. Early relations between Europeans and native

Americans developed around the lucrative fur trade. By the 18th century, scattered settlements and military posts were located along Lake George and Lake Champlain. This corridor became the focus of the century-long struggle between France and Britain for control of North America that culminated in the French and Indian War (1757-1763).

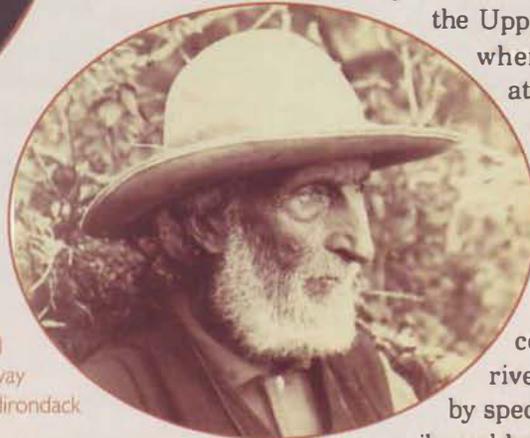
Among the first successes of the American Revolution were the capture of Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point in May 1775. Cannon from these posts were used to drive British troops from Boston. The Battle of Valcour Island (1776) in Lake Champlain delayed a British invasion of New York from Canada by a year. This invading army was later defeated at the Battle of Saratoga.

### Resources for the Taking

With the exception of its eastern fringe, the Adirondack region remained virtually unknown to Europeans until the early 19th century. After iron ore was discovered in the Champlain foothills in the late 1700s, increasing industrial demand from cities in the Northeast spurred exploration and the development of iron mines, forges and blast furnaces throughout the region. The discovery of high quality ore along the upper Hudson River in 1826 led to the development of the McIntyre iron works and the founding of the village of Adirondack,



Ebenezer Emmons, courtesy of The Adirondack Museum. Emmons named many Adirondack high peaks.



"Alvah Dunning, Adirondack Guide and Hunter," 1891, Seneca Ray Stoddard, courtesy of The Chapman Historical Museum.

(below) Verplanck Colvin under signal tower, peak near Lake George, 1878, courtesy of The Adirondack Museum. Colvin used this structure for triangulation, a way of determining the locations of Adirondack peaks.



or Tahawus, where the major southern access route to the High Peaks Wilderness now begins.

Blast furnaces were fueled by charcoal made from beech, birch, maple and other hardwoods. Loggers sought first white pine, then red spruce

for lumber. Starting in 1813, rivers flowing out from the center of the Adirondack region transported millions of pine and spruce logs to sawmills around the rim of the mountains. Wood-using paper mills began to put additional demands on Adirondack spruce soon after the Civil War. Bark stripped from hemlock trees fed the first leather tanning factories, or "tanneries," in the 1810s. By the early 1890s when the industry left the region, much of the hemlock within reach of the tanneries had been cut. As demand for timber grew, loggers pushed ever deeper into the wilderness. Logging in the Upper Hudson watershed peaked in 1872, when the "big boom" on the Hudson River at Glens Falls corralled more than a million logs. Starting in mid-century, railroads worked their way toward the heart of the region, extending the reach of Adirondack industries.

During these decades of industrial exploitation, settlers had formed small communities in many of the interior river valleys, lured by cheap land offered by speculators and the state. Despite poor soils and harsh winters, many persevered, supplementing what crops and livestock they could raise on their small farms by hunting, trapping, fishing, guiding, logging and working in the mines.

### The Adirondacks Discovered

One of the first to write about the vast beauty of the Adirondacks was geologist Ebenezer Emmons, who in 1837 was the first to climb the mountain he named "Marcy" after the state's governor, and the first to apply the name "Adirondack" to the mountains. Subsequent explorers and writers prescribed the region's spectacular scenery and "balsamic influences" as antidotes to the dreary sights and polluted air of the cities. Tourists came by train, steamship and stagecoach. From the 1840s on, increasingly luxurious hotels were built to accommodate them. Local residents supplemented their income by guiding city "sports" on wilderness hunting and fishing adventures. Eventually the Adirondacks became one of the premier resort areas of the Gilded Age. Some of America's wealthiest families acquired large holdings as summer vacation retreats. Several, including the Vanderbilts, Morgans and Carnegies, acquired Adirondack "great camps," built in the style developed by William West Durant in the 1870s and 1880s.



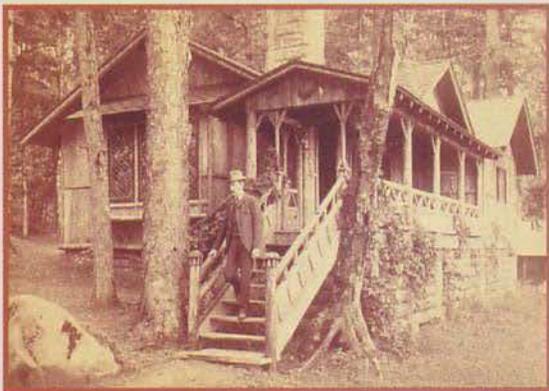
## Forever Wild

As the public became more aware of the beauty and promise of the Adirondack region, politicians and journalists spread the alarm about what they perceived as the destruction of the forests for lumber, paper, leather tanning and iron. They sought an end to the unrestricted exploitation that had depleted the once abundant populations of fish and game.



Verplanck Colvin, hired in 1872 to conduct an Adirondack survey, along with Harvard professor of arboriculture Charles Sprague Sargent and Franklin B. Hough, "father of American forestry," decried the abuse of Adirondack forests and championed the protection of the region as a vast public park. Their voices were joined by influential New York City merchants, who feared that continued logging would lead to reduced flows in the Hudson River and Erie Canal, the major upstate transportation corridors of the day. Finally in 1885, responding to overwhelming political pressure, the New York State Legislature acted

to create the Adirondack Forest Preserve.



After the establishment of the Forest Preserve, attempts to weaken the law that established it led the state to give it even stronger protection in 1895, when these now famous words were added to the New York State Constitution: "*The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed.*"

(top) "Fort William Henry Hotel From Dock," Seneca Ray Stoddard, courtesy of The Chapman Historical Museum.

(middle) From the 1840s on, increasingly luxurious hotels were built to accommodate the large numbers of tourists.

(bottom) William West Durant at Camp Pine Knot, courtesy of The Adirondack Museum.

Originally consisting of scattered parcels covering 680,000 acres, the Adirondack Forest Preserve has grown over the past century to more than 2.7 million acres, an area twice the size of Delaware. It is the largest complex of wild public lands in the eastern United States.

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