

Sample chapter for Adirondack Hikes in Hamilton County

Preface to the Third Edition

Adirondack Hikes in Hamilton County is the result of a number of people asking me to write a hiking guide to include stories I have written and have appeared over the years in the Hamilton County Express where I work as a reporter.

Some changes have been made from the original works as they first appeared in the paper. Where changes have been made, they have been made to update trail conditions as much as possible. But the reader should be aware that conditions of trails are constantly changing, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse.

This work, while not being a work of fiction, is a work of personal opinion. The difficulties of a particular hike and the time it takes to complete a hike are the result of the physical and health conditions of the individuals taking the hike and the variety of natural conditions met on the trail on a particular day. Weather is a big factor to consider. A hike on snowshoes or skies will almost always take longer and be more difficult than one taken under ideal conditions during the warmer months.

Another point I would like to make is how this guide does not include anywhere near all the hiking trails available in Hamilton County. It includes only hikes I have taken to this point. There are many trails, especially in the southern half of the county I have not taken but would like to take someday. One of the most famous trails I would like to do is the Northville/Placid Trail (NPT), most of which is in Hamilton County. So my apologies to my friends in the southern half of the county who might feel slighted in this guide. But you know how it is. You live and work here and never have enough time to get out in the woods as much as you would like. If God grants me enough years and the health needed to add more trails to my list, I promise to come out with a third edition.

Concerning trails not listed in this guide, your best bet is to stop in at the local Chamber of Commerce or the Town Hall where they will be happy to advise you of what is available in their area.

Concerning trail maps, some are available from the local Chamber or Town Hall. But the best maps I know of are produced by Adirondack Maps, Inc. and their maps are available at many locations throughout the Adirondacks. The map they produce and I use includes most of Hamilton County and is called “The Adirondacks – Central Region. It also includes the Northville/Placid trail on the reverse side.

The final point is to ask you to just enjoy the woods at your own pace and never bite off more than you can chew. The point in taking a hike is to enjoy the natural surroundings, not to “bag peaks.” If all you are doing is bagging peaks, you might just as well run up and down the stairs in your own house all day. Or you could go to New York City and climb the stairs to the top of the Empire State Building for the magnificent view there.

The fact of the matter is that most of my favorite hikes do not involve climbing a mountain. Most of my favorites are to a pond or stream where a person can just relax, maybe have lunch, fish or even go for a swim, before heading back to what we feel compelled to call the “real world.”

TRAILS IN HAMILTON COUNTY

THE INDIAN LAKE SECTION

CEDAR RIVER

Not all days need to be spent hiking deep into the woods, climbing a tall mountain or boating on a large lake. Sometimes the best places for enjoyment are found close to where you park your car near one of the hundreds of miles of rivers and streams that wind their way through Hamilton County.

The Cedar River and Rock River are but two examples of easily accessible flowing waters in Hamilton County. Others include, but are not limited to, the Hudson, Jessup, Sacandaga and Raquette rivers, and creeks such as the various branches of the Canada. All offer waters that are sometimes bubbling, sometimes placid, but always enjoyable to view. Alongside these waters, you can fish, paddle, swim, have a picnic or take a nap. You might want to ask around to find out where the best swimming or fishing holes are located because you won't find them on any map. You might get an answer. Then again, you might not. But if you do a little exploring, you just might find your own private spot that you won't want to give out.

On a fall day after the new snowmobile bridge over the Cedar River was opened with a small dedication ceremony, I made a mental note to return in the summer to do a little fishing from the bridge. I recently followed through with my note and was not disappointed. The fishing was not that great that day, although I did catch a couple of small mouth bass that were just a couple of inches short of the 12-inch legal size. They were returned to grow a few more inches. Maybe another time and they will find their way out of the river and into the frying pan. But the day was beautiful and so was the river. And as they say, “A bad day fishing is better than a good day doing just about anything else.”

In addition to the fishing, the Cedar, like so many other rivers, creeks and streams in Hamilton County, is a perfect place just to hang out, go for a swim, have a picnic or put your canoe or kayak in for a little paddling. For the most part, these flowing waters are not heavily used and you can often find solitude and beauty close to where you park your car.

The Cedar can be accessed in several locations along the Cedar River Road in Indian Lake. It can also be reached by driving down to the end of Benton Road in Indian Lake where you will find a large parking area near the small beach where you can swim or put out to paddle. It should be needless to say, but swimming in these rivers, creeks and streams is done at your own risk. There are no lifeguards! And whatever you do, don't dive! Rocks or logs might come up to greet you. But with using a little common sense safety precautions, these flowing waters can provide hours of quiet enjoyment.

SNOWY MOUNTAIN

Snowy Mountain is the tallest mountain in the southern Adirondacks, the highest peak in Hamilton County, and the trail to its top, especially the final climb, is very steep and demanding. From its top, especially from the fire tower, you will enjoy outstanding views of Indian Lake, the distant High Peaks.

Snowy is the big boy west of NY 30 and south of the Town of Indian Lake. Some people confuse it with the much smaller Chimney Mountain because its top does resemble a chubby chimney. It is short of being a 4,000 foot peak by just 101 feet (3,899). If you climb it, you will think it is a High Peak and then some. You will be gaining about 2,106 feet from the trail-head and that doesn't include all the ups and downs along the way, and covering almost 4 miles one way, meaning you will be doing more climbing than you would on some of the High Peaks. The views from the summit are worth the effort. And now that the fire tower has been fixed and reopened, the views are even more impressive. But not if you are in the clouds.

Access to the trailhead is off the west side of NY 30, 6.5 miles south of Indian Lake village and 4.7 miles north of Lewey Lake Outlet. The parking area is obvious on the east side of the road and is opposite of the trailhead. The trail is marked with red DEC trail markers and heads west up Beaver Brook Valley. Several times Beaver Brook is crossed and sounds from the highway are gradually left behind. Silence can be one of the main attractions when hiking in the Adirondacks. The world seems to slow down and it is even possible to imagine it going backward to a time before our so-called civilization. You can hear your heart beat and your lungs fill with air while you exert yourself ever onward and up.

The stream and several of its tributaries are crossed repeatedly. Steady climbing begins and you might begin to wonder, "Are we there yet?" No! As the

trail steepens, you will see the signs of erosion caused by tens of thousands of boots going to where you are going. When you notice the trees seem to be getting smaller and you start being able to see through breaks to Indian Lake below and to the east, you will know you are getting close and that the steepest climbing will soon take you to the summit.

What a relief! You climb your last step and take in the view. Your lungs catch up to you and your heartbeat begins to slow down. Besides the views, there is much to see before going back down. There is a closed fire observer's cabin. It is near a cliff that looks out to Indian Lake and beyond to the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area. Don't venture too far out on the rock slab that becomes the cliff. It's a very long way down and we don't want the Rangers to have to go looking for what remains of you. This is not an idle warning. It has happened.

There is also a spring near where the trail continues to the fire tower. The actual summit is about 500 feet to the SW and up a slight grade. With the fire tower now open, you can climb up it for 360-degree views. Also, you should find a short trail to the west that will take you to a cliff that looks down on Squaw Valley and out to Squaw and Panther Mountains. Mt. Morris, near Tupper Lake, can be seen beyond Panther Mountain and the mountain with the fire tower to the west is Wakely Mountain. Enjoy! You deserve it. You know you do. Take time to look around. Take photos and have your lunch before heading back down.

A word of caution! And this applies to all of the mountains. Don't get careless on the way down. Your legs will be tired from the hike up. Going down can be very jarring upon them. You will be thinking the hardest part is over and this might cause you to become a little careless. More ankles are sprained and legs broken on the way down than they are on the way up. So watch your step and don't hurry.