

Mount Marcy, NY, 5,344 ft. – July 4, 2005, HP #4: Via South Meadows

We had left Washington, DC two days before on this, my first, trip to the Adirondacks. This was the third day of our trip, and the first day of our overnigher up Mt. Marcy, the highest point in the state of New York.

Following a drive through Lake Placid and a stroll down the main street, as the afternoon was rapidly disappearing, we decided we better drive to the starting location of our hike. The plan was to begin the hike from South Meadows, where we would leave the car, and backpack 2.8 miles along an old fire road to Marcy Dam. We would camp near the dam, and then pick up the classic Van Hoevenberg Trail to the peak the next morning. The advantage of starting at South Meadow as compared to the Van Hoevenberg Trailhead at Adirondak Loj is free parking.

Curiously, “Adirondak Loj” is not a foreign language spelling, but just a peculiar spelling for “Adirondack Lodge”. As the story goes Melvil Dewey – the inventor of the Dewey Decimal System – was at one time the owner of the lodge. Dewey liked phonetic spellings, and so he named his lodge “Adirondak Loj”.

The old fire road we followed was basically flat gaining only 100 feet to the dam, making the backpacking relatively easy. The mosquito’s, however, made the flat walk rather unpleasant. We took it slow and made it to the dam within 1.5 hours. By the time we settled on a camping spot and set up the tents it was dark. After a snack, we played a game of "tie the food bag up in the tree." Each of us was given two tries to throw a 5-50 cord, with a stick attached to one of its ends, 20-feet up and through a fork in some tree branches. All our laughing, at missed attempts, got the dog camping across from us quite excited. On the eighth throw we finally succeeded.

This was our easy day, having covered less than three miles and only 100 vertical feet.



Monday morning, July 4, 2005, we woke up early, and by 8:00 a.m. were on route to the highest point in New York, via the Van Hoevenberg trail. After about 1-mile the trail passed a turn off for Phelps Mountain, and another 1.5 miles further along it crossed Phelps Brook by means of the three-pole-bridge. About two miles into this day, we came to the beautiful site of Indian Falls, and because the last half mile had been quite rocky and steep, we decided to relax and take in the views. Rested, we continued up a trail resembling a stone staircase. About a half mile from the peak the trail passed the Hopkins trail to Keene Valley, on the left, at a plateau elevation of 4,420 feet.



The last 900 feet of vertical climbing were quite steep, so we stopped at some big rocks for lunch and decided to leave our day packs there to be picked up on the descent. Near the peak we passed a large cairn, and on the peak, we asked someone to take a photograph of our group of four, namely Jason, Yenny, Eric, and me, in front of the plaque commemorating the 100-year anniversary of the first recorded ascent in 1837. We also located a geological survey reference marker.

With our moderate pace, it took us four hours, from the dam, to cover the five miles up to the 5,344-foot peak. In those five miles we gained over 3,200 vertical feet.

On the summit we were greeted by the so-called Summit Steward (some college kid whose summer job it was to ensure no one walked on the roped-off fragile arctic vegetation areas), and he informed us that we were the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th peak-baggers that day.

The descent to Marcy Dam required about as much time as the ascent, however we did take a much longer rest at Indian Falls where we dared a dip in the ice-cold water only to be foiled by the clouds covering the sun as soon as we got in. While at the falls a guy and his girlfriend offered to filter some water for us. The unfortunate fellow had a big red circle on his shoulder indicating a tick was under his skin.

By the time we got back to camp we were rather tired and hungry and not looking forward to mosquito-thirty (the time of day the mosquito's attack). Plus, we realized we had another 2.8 miles of hiking to do with the added weight of our camping gear. We ate, relaxed, and rested before packing up our gear. On the bright-side, Eric had by now used up most of the 11 liters of water he had packed in. At 2.2 pounds per liter, he had packed in 24 pounds of water.



Back on the fire road to South Meadows the mosquitoes were even worse than the day before. They made us forget how tired we were, as well as how heavy our packs were, and caused us to make it back to the car in less than one-hour.

It was a long day, having covered almost thirteen miles, which climbed over 3,200 vertical feet and then came down the same plus another 100-foot descent to the car. Tired or not, we all felt pleased having "bagged" the highest peak in New York!