

Six Mountain Hikes from around the world

Paul Carpenter



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Cover image – An Teallach Highlands of Scotland
Back cover image – A view across Loch Morlich in the
Cairngorms

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To Mum and Dad,
Where would I be
Without you.

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Introduction

I've always liked that saying 'watch where you place your feet, cause you never know where they might take you'. It relays a thought of childish adventure rummaging amongst the scrubland at the end of the garden or exploring a woodland or the interior of your house.

Some people know already from year to year where their feet will take them, and that's OK, to get to know intimately the people and surroundings around you is something I'll always miss, but occasionally I get itchy feet and desire pastures new. After all you never know what's around the next corner and if I hadn't been inquisitive enough to find out, I wouldn't have experienced many of the sights and sounds beyond my horizon that I've seen while creating this book.

Such as the realization of hearing the sound of nothing amongst the giants of Norway, or falling asleep to the singing of Maori in New Zealand nor (especially nice for a truck driver like me) sitting 10,000 feet up in the Sierra Nevada's early in the morning drinking my coffee without the sight of a single person or vehicle, although this was the case during most of my wilderness trips.

Of all the countries and mountain areas which I have visited, I could not say that there is one in particular I like, they all have their own unique beauty and character, be it their landscape or human histories and apart from writing about the route I have tried to include remarkable tales of the people who went before me and lived in these wild areas – but less talk and more on with the adventure, so turn the page and allow me to take your feet to far flung and near colourful places!

Paul Carpenter – Scotland 2011

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UNITED STATES of AMERICA

New York State, The Adirondacks

Mountains of Snow and Winds of Dreams

I'm sure there was some apprehension when I first suggestion to the family that we should all go off on one of my ventures but the idea of staying in a cabin in the mountains, by a lake, appealed to them all - especially the kids. Remembering my own childhood make-believe adventures, I knew what their imagination would make of this forest clad mountainous region and the possibility of seeing so many animals.



Towards the high peaks

At dawn on our first morning we surveyed the wonderful scenery that was to be our back yard for two weeks, it was obvious from their reactions that, for once, I had made a right choice – especially

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as, due to a week-long freak snowstorm just before our arrival, everything lay under a thick blanket of snow. This, apart from being a surprise to the locals, meant that our spring plans of canoeing and horse riding were cancelled but the family didn't complain. Lake Placid and all its winter Olympic venues were just down the road – and we soon took advantage of this winter paradise playground.



Heart Lake

The snow also affected the walk I'd planned but luckily the cabin we'd rented (the Campground Cabin) was on Adirondack Mountain Club land. This encompassed Heart Lake and the grand Adirondack Loj, whose property was in an area of the park called High Peaks, one of the most popular hiking areas in the park. What originally was to be a 5-day excursion became a 3-day circular route from our cabin (staying in lean-to's) with a few single day trips. I'd hoped to use skis, but unfortunately my skill didn't match the amount of trees I would have to evade! Consequently this meant using snowshoes, on which I was less skilled on than skis, but was easier to master (so the guides said)...

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Fortunately snow is more forgiving than rock, when fallen onto; tales of my considerable experiences of this will follow but first, a little history...

The Adirondacks, despite being one of the largest parks in the USA (6 million acres of Government and privately-owned land) is not that well-known for its hiking potential outside the USA; this I found very unusual. Visitors in earlier days, especially those suffered from an illness, went there for healing effects of the surrounding trees, to breathe in the fresh, fragrant air, absorb the peaceful and presumably soothing view. Fortunately we had no illness, only two very active kids, but even during their noisy play my wife and I could feel the calming effects of our surroundings. Time - and life - seemed somehow slower there than anywhere else I have been. Some would say it was due to being there with my family but the fact there was nobody else sharing the woods with us, probably helped. In the summer there would be masses of campers using the tent pitches and lean-tos, which the snow presently hid. For now, we saw only squirrel's, chipmunks and heard only birds.

As in other areas of wilderness that the white man has invaded with his modern inventions, it was as easy for us to sit back and enjoy the tranquillity of the mountains as it was for the first paying visitors a few centuries ago: artist, writers and the well-to-do. But to the first inhabitants several millennia ago this area, with its animals, trees and mountains, was not seen as scenic wonders – it meant food, clothing and shelter. They didn't affect or change the look of the mountains, nor really did the first white hunters and pioneers who penetrate them, but it is *their* presence you feel along the banks of clear rivers, in the early morning mist and in the rustling of trees.

They were the Algonquin Indians, who hunted and lived in these mountains, along with the Mohawks; they used the waterways for transport and ate the bubs and bark off trees; from their name

derived the Adirondack, meaning bark eaters in the Iroquois language.

For centuries the tribes of North Eastern America and Southern Canada fought battles between one another, moving periodically to better hunting or farming grounds (the Iroquois were mostly farmers, living in timber houses); or to move deeper into the vast forest to escape from a stronger enemy. Eventually between 1400 and 1600 A.D, two wise or holy men called Deganahwideh and Hiawatha travelled amongst the Tribes reminding them of the teachings of the Great Spirit and his dislike for war. They were sent to establish the great peace, spread the great laws, but mostly to bring together the tribes into one Long house (sort of government house) under a tree of peace. The branches of this tree would protect those under it and the roots would spread to others who would wish to join. Five tribes first agreed to this peace, the Mohawks (people of the flint), the Oneidas (people of the upright stone), the Onondaga (hill people), the Cayugas (people of the muck lands) and the Senecas (people of the great mountains) with the Tuscarora nation joining in 1715. Making what had been the five nations into six, collectively called the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee. Together they ended the bloodshed and starvation that had threatened the Indians futures and grew into one mighty and powerful tribe, with a government system that was fair to all, a system that may of influenced the forming of the Declaration of Independence, fitting in with the Anglo Americans idea of a free and independent country. The Iroquois helped many during the French–English and Revolutionary conflicts.

The first record of a European seeing the Adirondacks and encounter the Iroquois was a French explorer in 1609, called Samuel de Champlain. Unfortunately, this meeting was not planned and in the fight that ensued, he used a harquebus (long barrellled gun) which unknown to him broke one of the Indians cardinal rules, which is to never use a weapon that the other side does not know about. Subsequent actions like this, and the fact

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that the French made friends with the Iroquois arch enemies, the Huron, meant that they lost a strong ally to the British. Most of the land that surrounded the more mountainous and impenetrable parts of the Adirondacks was populated well before the interior. After the wars, trappers (who later become the first guides), settlers, landowners, then logging and mining companies took their share of the Iroquois land, who were already slowly dwindling through disease, involvement in the wars and by encroachment of their land. They, in time were put onto reserves and the Adirondacks started to see towns, business, and tourism develop. Naturally after this rush of development, it did not take long until the Adirondacks saw its first opportunity to becoming a park, especially when the logging companies had nearly completed their aim of clearing the area of timber. Not only did they leave a landscape bare and ugly, but also the run off of rainwater down the Hudson River was starting to threaten the big cities to the south. So in 1892 the park was created, and after a bit of magical forest management and time, the mountains and the trees that had covered them were brought back for all to enjoy.

Three day Circular Hike

Day 1 Our Cabin – feldspar lean-to

+450m 10.9km

For the first couple of days, I just mellowed out with the family, exploring our surroundings, building up my energy; on American cuisine i.e. steak, steak and more steak, gathering my rations for the trip and getting to grips with the snowshoes. I think the kids had more fun with then most, watching our youngest in a size 12 shoe was hilarious. Since our arrival the weather had been wonderful; freezing during the night, but bright and clear during the day, it was no different upon my departure. It felt quite weird leaving the family behind this time; usually it's to a busy airport. However, today as I waved, it was to my wife standing outside our little cabin with the kids messing around in the deep snow. The whole scene looked like something out of the little house on the prairie and in a way, made me feel better during this trip, knowing that they would be not far away.

I left early, walked the short distance to the trailhead at the start of my walk and signed the 'Intentions book'. Then I was off, waddling along like an overburdened penguin, firstly through a dense patch of fir trees then out into a much more open, mixed wood of firs and, mainly, birch; their smooth cream-coloured bark carpeted the floor of the forest. This was to be my scenery for most of the trip, except on the high peaks, where trees finally gave way to the weather. But I was happy with what lay ahead of me and surprised to realise how far I could see into the forest - beyond the naked trees to an endless carpet of white. Another reason to slow down was the chance to train the binoculars on a wide variety of birds.



Typical woodland

The Iroquois have an interesting explanation of how birds acquired their songs, which they told their children, to show them that it is preferable to be honest than to cheat. Long, long ago the only songs and music heard in the forest of North America were the drums and voices of the Indians. The Great Spirit loved a good song and was often found listening to the tunes. Then he discovered that the birds longed to sing like man. He gathered all the birds to his council stone and told them that at sunrise the next day they must all fly; the higher they went, he said, the better the song they would achieve. One particular bird felt quite jealous of the eagle perched next to him, knowing the eagle could fly much

higher. So in the morning, just before all the birds took flight, he hid amongst the eagle's feathers.

During the first day quite a few birds reached their limit and returned to earth possessing the commonest of songs. Only the larger birds soared higher, the eagle with his large, powerful wings going furthest. Then, just as he reached his limit, the bird hiding in his feathers flew out and upwards as the eagle descended. Eventually the little bird saw a hole in the sky, went through it and found himself in the spirit world - or the happy hunting grounds; there he heard a beautiful song. He stayed long enough to memorise it, then flew back to earth - eager to show off his new talent. But his arrival was less than welcoming. All the other birds knew he had cheated and, in shame, he hid in the thickest wood. He can still be seen there today, only singing occasionally; but when he does the other birds fall silent, for they too wish to hear the sweet song of the hermit thrush.

Back on the trail, I had my own problems. Unused to walking on deep snow and snowshoes, I realised that if I wanted to reach my destination on two limbs, not four, I must adopt a completely different speed and stride. The path was compacted by the hordes who had preceded before me but, if I ventured just a few inches off it, would sink into the soft snow and possibly fall headlong into, not an attractive option. This happened a few times but not enough to discount the obvious advantage of snowshoes for walking on snow. On the style I wore my boots were strapped on to a larger base in the same way as a tele-mark binding is to a ski, thereby enabling me to lift the back of my feet, with the base and the support under the boot having crampon like metal spikes. Their lovely bright red colour also made them easier to find if thrown in anger - so I was told!

Along the trail I saw many reason to justify the use of the snowshoes - deep holes (called 'postholes' locally), caused by those who thought just boots would do. As for the metal spikes, their

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advantage on steep ground is obvious and as they are all facing downwards are all hidden away during a fall - unless you end up contorted into all sort of weird positions, as I did, a few times. Generally I regarded them as a new toy to play with at the outset, then later appreciated the energy they saved on the lesser-used trails. For the first few miles, I found the trails easy to follow and walk along, but as I distanced myself from the cabin and on to lesser-used trails the depth of the snow (times up to 12 foot) hid half of the circular markers used in this area (positioned 8 ft. above ground level). Also, whereas the trees had been trimmed a certain height above the ground, I was constantly amongst their dense, higher branches due to the depth of the snow and in some places occasionally became entangled in branches hidden just below the snow.

On the first leg of today's trip to Marcy dam none of these potential annoyances caused problems; I was left with my thoughts as I occasionally passed hikers/skiers enroute to and from the dam. You could call the Dam the gateway to these mountains, due to the numerous trails verging on to it, the many lean-tos and campsites around the lake and a Ranger Station. Most of the walk was in solitude and silence, after the birds stopped singing for the day; only the scraping and crunching of the snowshoes kept me company as the trail led me past the trail to Algonquin peak, halfway to the dam.

Within these wonderful forests there are also maple trees, which in spring are used by the locals for what is affectingly called 'sapping time' - the time-honoured tradition of gathering maple sap, which is then boiled to make the syrup. It may sounds simple but there many conditions that determine the quality of the end product: - which tree is best to sap, how much sugar it contains, how much sap can be drained from a particular tree... Then, once you have the sap, you have to know how to heat it properly. I've no idea if, with time and patients, the gathering and making of maple syrup becomes easier; but for a beginner like me the end product

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probably wouldn't compare with what my wife likes to pour over her morning pancake! I *might* perhaps be able to make one by-product I know my kids would like - something called 'jack-wax'; namely a ladle full of hot sap poured onto the snow and left to cool until hard - then eaten. And the extra bonus of a few snow fleas (which virtually littered certain areas) would surely add to its energy content!

Late March and April are regarded as 'sapping season' due to the spring thaw, when the frozen roots of the maple thaw and once more absorb water. The sugars present in the roots dissolve into this, in turn causing more water to be absorbed into the roots and this forces the sap up into the branches. The best times to gather the sap is after cold, freezing nights - when the sap in the trunk freezes and stops flowing, while water is still being absorbed by the roots; this causes an excess of sap that is released the next day, up the trunk, once the trunk thaws. No trees under 10 ins. in diameter are sapped and, on average, one gallon of sap can be made from two trees 18 ins. diameter. Or, you can buy a gallon from local producers for \$20 - 30 dollars a gallon...

Apart from making jack-wax, I soon realised the unique advantages of snow and ice - they made travel over obstacles a lot easier, especially the watery ones. Although the big thaw had begun, most of the rivers I met were still piled high with snow. As I descended the last rise towards Marcy dam, I could hear its outlet flowing, but saw only snow all around - except on a timber bridge crossing the dam, which was partly visible. The lake was wonderfully - piled high with snow and some ski tracks across it; but even with this evidence of the ice's strength and the potential easy short cut, I was wary of using it. Apart from the usual film-induced horror of falling under the ice, I had an inkling that the recent new snow - combined with a drop in temperature - had slightly decreased the thickness of the underlying ice.

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Although the Adirondacks lie on the same latitude as Northern Spain, the winter brings severe drops in temperature; this helps form thick icy crusts on all the areas 3,000+ lakes. The only element that can stop the ice thickening is a good layer of snow, which acts as a blanket. On certain lakes their ice cover is used as a winter short cut for vehicles, particularly logging trucks. The snow is cleared constantly to enable the ice to reach a thickness sufficient to take the weight. It seems unbelievable that a 10-ton truck can cross over ice, but 18 ins. of ice is all that is needed – providing it has no cracks. On one occasion, on Raquette Lake near the Needles, a fully laden truck went under; the driver escaped, the cargo, once released basically took care of its self and the truck, was fitted with a steel air tank and raised that way.

With evidence like this of what the ice's strength might be on Marcy Lake, some might not hesitation to use the short cut but there were several signs around the lakes edges which made my decision for me, i.e. slight darkening of the snow (which I considered meant areas were turning to slush and unlikely to take the weight of a 32 oz. Steak, let along my bulk). So this time it was off along the bridge for me!

Just across the bridge I signed another 'intentions book' - you can't have too many people knowing of your whereabouts. I could have visited the Ranger Station nearby to register too, but carried on – enroute to Avalanche camp about 1.5 km`s away - past a few lean-tos and the junction for the Van Hoevenberg trail to Mt Marcy.

It's difficult to look back and remember particular parts of trails I used on the trip, other than the particularly testing ones. Most streams were silent, small bridges hidden, boulders just another pile of snow; even some lean-tos were hidden, like Kagel lean-to. I'd intended using it as an indication of my proximity to Avalanche Camp but, before I knew I 'd missed it, I'd arrived at my destination. From here my circular route began, returning via the well-used trail I could see coming down from Lake Colden. My

trail, going off on the left, looked slightly less used and much narrower; I gave up using the poles at one point and packed them away because they kept sinking into the snow, unbalancing me. On this new trail I became acquainted with the annoying situations mentioned earlier. So far I'd been going slow to conserve energy but now had no choice.

Even though the trail I'd been using thus far had been well trodden, I was constantly looking out for trail markers, mostly out of habit, but as I progressed further along my present trail, that practise seemed futile. If tangled branches didn't hide them, they were hidden by the snow line; so I had no choice but to trust my compass and the tracks left by those who had preceded me in checking my general direction. According to the map, I should go in a straight line roughly S/E over a constant climb towards the next trail junction. My only hope was that, like all the other junctions thus far, the signpost would be visible... It wouldn't do to climb any further than was necessary and, luckily for me, the tracks I was following led me straight to a visible signpost and I followed the next track S/S/W up the final climb of the day towards Lake Arnold.

It soon became clear, after waddling through these mountains for just a few hours, why the region was neglected until well after the surrounding countryside was settled. Today it's easy for us to presume that tarmac roads and large stores were always there, but stories abound of the trials and tribulations experienced by the first people who tried to tame this wilderness. Some had to build their own roads from the nearest settlement to their new homes, covering distances of ten's of miles. What they could not farm or make themselves, they had to buy from the few corner shops existing at the time, involving long and difficult journeys over land and water. But one particular character, one amongst many, braved the wilderness and the elements to bring these people a little light entertainment, perhaps news from the outside world and - more importantly - a suitcase (the type called a 'turkey' in those days). Its

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contents ranged from kitchen utensils to envelopes and harmonicas. He was called a 'pack peddler' and his prosperity was limited only by his ingenuity. Slowly but surely that turkey case would turn into *two* cases, then he might arrive with a wagon and, maybe a few months later, this would be pulled not by him but a horse. Eventually his visit ceased - because he had opened up his own store somewhere in the area. A true example of the American Dream!

Naturally the path to the realisation of this dream wasn't easy and possibly, in some instances, ended in death. The rough roads and wilderness probably claimed their fair share of lives; local ghost stories abound to back this up. One concerns an old, particularly gruesome-looking pack peddler who happened to be visiting a loggers' camp near Indian Lake. For some reason he and the loggers did not get along and that night he was dragged from his bed and killed. Then he and his cart were put in an old cellar, which was set alight. Since then spooky events have occurred in that house and others - strange noises; such as that of a babies cry whose skeleton was subsequently found under the floorboards and given a proper burial. Most noises could be explained but there were no doubts about the old peddler's visits as on some nights his horse was heard coming up the track, followed by the sight of his gruesome face and twisted hands. Locals say he was returning to the last place saw alive.

My thoughts, however, were far from ghosties and ghoulies, being focused on the trail - or lack of one. On reaching Arnold Lake I could see the signpost, but only one set of ski tracks going in the direction I needed; the rest carried on up to the summit of Mt Colden on my right. The best thing about the ski tracks was that I could at least use them, as a guide down to my destination, but that didn't mean the snow wouldn't be as compacted as it would have been by snowshoes. So, after a few hesitant steps (and sinking into the snow past my knees), I decided a rest was in order before descending further into the virgin snow. Arnold Lake was near and

convenient for this purpose and was, I am sure, a great place to picnic out in summer, being surrounded on one side by the steep rise of Colden and the remainder by old, unlogged forest. The air was still cold and the lake surface resembled a soup bowl with its thick fluffy layer of snow. The area was peaceful and resembled a Christmas picture post card and after half an hour I felt tempted to stay there the night. But despite the beauty of the lake and the fact that the 3 kms left, all downhill on new snow was starting to feel like much more, I got up and moved on.

To my surprise and relief I found snowshoe tracks just as I passed the lake, which naturally I used. Now and again I lost them among the trees, tried to find them again and on one occasion did not – which led to an amusing (though not at the time) situation. I found a short, steep slope down into a ravine and would have passed it if not for the tracks I saw along its base; during the descent one of my snowshoes got caught under a branch hidden and I spent much time and energy thrashing about to get a foothold in order to pull my leg out.

My other limbs were useless in the deep snow; I was unable to anchor onto anything solid. When I finally manage to escape this trap I fell into another and another until I reached the bottom! I did try sliding down but in the soft snow it was as pointless as the thrashing of my arms and legs. On another of my ventures away from the tracks I found a river whose steep banks I'm sure did have a bridge somewhere along it but, instead of walking along the bank to find it, I thought I'd be clever and cross - via what looked like two wide tree trunks. In reality it was just one, with heavy snow build-up on either side - which of course I didn't know until I stepped on it...! The only sense I had shown in this entire fiasco was not putting all my weight on that first step so, instead of crashing down into the snow and ice on the river, I managed to get on to the trunk and crawl across.



Mt Colden

Eventually I found the tracks again; they soon lead me to the next trail junction and on to the lean-to I planned to spend the night in, roughly 6 hours after leaving my family. Before coming here my idea of a lean-to was a small shelter, open at one end, made up of odd branches. The lean-tos here looked like that basically but are larger and much sturdier, more like a log cabin with one missing wall. Each has an 'Intentions Book' (whose entries helped wile away many amusing hours) and an enclosed toilet nearby. This one also produced some very inquisitive birds, including the Black-capped Chickadee and Red breasted Nuthatch. As the evening draw on they occasionally landed on the shelters entrance and walked towards me. As I cooked supper one flew straight towards my head and somehow stopped instantly within millimetres of my eyes, hovered around for a second and was off. If it hadn't stopped when it did I would probably have a large hole in my forehead now! Considering the bird was that close I should have been able to identify it, or at the most recall some distinguishing marks but all I remember is its clear, bright eyes. So I've named it the swift head-butter!

Day 2 Feldspar lean-to – Lake Colden via Mt. Marcy

-1629m +620m, 11.4Km

I knew about the snowstorms before leaving home, so decided to bring my 4-season sleeping bag; it normally keeps me comfortable during hikes in Scottish. But last night the temperature plummeted; I awoke with feet so cold I had to put socks on – and gloves on over them – before I could get back to sleep! This proves how different it can be sleeping in the open air, rather than a tent; I envied the local birds for their insulating layers of feathers; once snuggled up with their beaks in their feathers, the spread of their warm breathe was sufficient to keep them cosy.

Waking up brought a bonus - seeing the clear moonlit sky. The image of the moon and stars was fantastic and very clear, probably due to the clean air here. According to Iroquois tradition, the moon existed before the earth and the face on it is that of an old woman; she, in her divinity, tried to foresee the end of the world – and failed. The stars appeared much later and were created out of mortals and animals, i.e. the ‘big dipper’ (or ‘saucapan’ as I call it); they see this as a bear and three hunters. These hunters were pursuing the bear on earth until they were attacked by a giant stone monster and carried up into the sky by invisible spirits. The blood from the injured bear is said to cause autumn leaves to turn red and yellow. Another involves a group of 7 stars called Pleiades situated within the Taurus constellation. In Greek mythology these represent seven sisters and to the Iroquois, seven young Mohawk warriors who, during a particularly energetic dance to a powerful witch song (performed because their parents refusing them food for a secret feast), rose up into the night sky and became seven bright stars that will dance forever. Whenever they are seen directly above the villages of the Iroquois it signifies the beginning of the New Year feast.



Lean-to by lake Colden

Now it was morning. Time for the all-important, delightful moment of emerging from a warm snug sleeping bag into the sharp, crisp cold of the back and beyond – but this would only happen when I saw signs of the temperature being above freezing! This I would know when the ice on the roof began dripping down, these drips would also provided me with a source of water. Apart from being free from snow fleas, it was easier to filter and used less gas to boil then snow would have. But if that method of water collection appears easy and lacking in adventure, try getting it from the occasional patches of river lying clear of snow that might be found nearby, although it could be debatable as to which would get wetter, the inside of the water bottle or your clothes...



Sign post under 6ft snow

I got up, got my boots on and went in search for my food. Despite the cold temperature of both day and night, plus thick layers of snow, I was still warned to tie my food up between trees. I had to venture out into the woods (which I affectingly called ‘string gallery’ due to the many differing cords hanging from trees) and retrieve my bag. I had to tie it up because the Adirondacks have black bears - with a certain liking to our cuisine and toiletries. It’s useful to know that most of them do not hibernate in caves here; providing it is out of the way they might choose a space between boulders or under exposed roots – with sometimes only a layer of snow between them and the elements. This is another reason why I follow visible tracks - I didn’t want to step on and arouse a potentially very grouchy bear, perhaps with young.

My plan was to climb Mt. Marcy, return, pick up any equipment left behind and proceed to Lake Colden. Returning to the last trail junction of yesterday, I set off, not actually thinking I’d achieve

Lake Colden. At one point up the trail to the summit I even thought I might be staying at the same hut again. Since early morning the cloud had been down below 1450m, thankfully producing no wind or rain but I found only one set of snowshoe tracks to follow through some of the thickest snow so far encountered. Initially each deep step, through tangled branches and dense tree's either showing or hidden by snow, didn't feel too bad – especially with the light pack on my back. But this first part of the ascent, running parallel with Feldspar Brook, was the steepest and eventually I felt like a child's toy whose batteries were running out, gradually slowing down. When I stopped to regain my breath there was an occasional view but in comparison with my efforts there weren't enough of them.

I was thankful for the cloud as it kept the sun off my back and the glare off the snow (yesterday's problems). When I reached Lake Tear-of-the-Clouds it lived up to its name, with cloud and slight drizzle swirling above it, in and out of the trees, creating a mystifying atmosphere. It is unlikely that few Europeans saw the lake before 1872, when a certain surveyor named Verplanck Colvin and his team found it, and discovered it was the source of the Hudson. It is interesting that the source of the Nile was found before this lake – but it has one claim to fame that the Nile does not. Many famous visitors may have picnicked by its shores on their return from the highest peak in the Adirondacks (Mt. Marcy) but, roughly 30 years after its discovery, one such visitation had local as well as national significance. The visitor was Theodore Roosevelt, Vice-President of the U.S.A., who was on holiday after leaving President McKinley recovering in hospital following an attempt on his life. While Mr. Roosevelt and his party were resting by the lake, a guide appeared with a message for him: the President had taken a turn for the worst. Later, back at the Tahawus Club where he was staying, another message came: the President was dying. So Roosevelt began a 40-mile night journey over rough roads and wilderness to North Creek and the nearest train station.

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I decided not to stop at the Lake during my trip. As I was on flatter and firmer snow I could regain my breath and make my way to the next track junction, Four Corners. Positioned on the top of a sort of divide between two rivers, it gave access straight down into Panther Gorge and, on either side, Two Summits. Amazingly, the sign was still just visible so I turned left and began climbing again, through a thinner wood of spruce and balsam. This lasted until halfway up, where many of the rocks and slabs were still visible but partly covered by ice. The snowshoe spikes came into their own and I made good time during the last part of the climb, as I didn't need to raise my legs above my head after every step. There were occasional views down into Panther Gorge and beyond Elk Lake, when the cloud cleared. Just below the summit there is a small rock face, which served as a windbreak for about an hour. There was few view's as the summit lived up to its Indian name of Tahawus – or 'Cloud-splitter'. Information on a plaque records the date of the first ascent (05.08.1837), details that it was named after a governor of that time and lists the surveyors present.

During a cold, cloudy day in the middle of the week such as I was experiencing, this summit might only expect to be visited a couple of times. So it seemed ironic that two hikers, ascending the summit from opposite directions, now arrived within 5 minutes of each other! It had taken me 2 hours from the lean-to to reach the top; then the other hiker told me he had left the Loj (7.5 miles and – 1000m away) 4 hours earlier. I'd felt *my* time was quite an achievement, especially when each kilometre felt more like a mile, but on hearing just how used he was to the conditions and the area, I felt better. For all I knew he could have even been a '46-er' (member of a club whose members have climbed mountains over 4,000ft). From his comments on the unexpected snow conditions I gathered that local businesses were delightful with the financial benefits resulting from the extended snow cover, raising the ski slopes/shops profits by up to 50% compared to the previous year. I remember wondering at the time if that was

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because my wife was working the Visa card excessively but as he didn't mention toyshops maybe it was OK...

The return trip down to the lean-to went as expected but took more time than if there had been no snow; this finally convinced me, on leaving the lean-to, to take advantage of one of the snow's advantages – walk along the rivers, which I had so far had little opportunity to do. In this case, the Opalescent River – and the trail I *should* have taken down to Lake Colden virtually run parallel with it. Occasionally, and reluctantly, I had to return to the trail when snow cover looked unsafe or on steep, narrow gorges; but that did not spoil my enjoyment. I expect scrambling up this river is a major occupation for some during the summer, but for me it was simply pleasant to see and hear the water tumbling through ice; there would have been good views of the surrounding peaks had the cloud lifted.



Lean to by Indian pass brook

Around Lake Colden and Flowed Lands (another large lake near it) lies a perfusion of lean-tos, hidden around their shores. Full

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occupation in the warmer months probably turns this area into a kind of camp city, 'humming' from activity and people!.... But there were no such telltale signs or smells as I crossed the river for the last time, via a bridge, and headed towards the river connecting the two lakes. All other tracks I'd been following had taken to their own destinations and I was alone again. Bliss – surrounded by the peace and quiet of empty hills! I was less than a kilometre from my destination and consequently in no hurry; and, as I emerged from the endless cover of the trees into the open space created by the lake, my fatigue diminished.

At one point, before common sense took over, I thought of dropping my gear and heading towards a small lake called Calamity Pond, some kilometres past Flowed Lands. There is a statue there which – when erected (all 1 ton of it) not long after 1845 – was carried in over wild, rough and mostly trail-less country. It was erected in remembrance of David Henderson, an employee of McIntyre Ironworks; he died by the pond from a bullet accidentally discharged from his own gun. In comparison to the lovely, solid-looking bridge ahead of me, getting that stone there must have been some achievement, but they did it – and apparently it's still standing.

I was standing too, but my legs were telling me it wouldn't be for long. Instead of heading for the bridge with its pleasant platform on the other side allowing passage around a rock face, I headed down on to the Lake; it saved much hassle and seemed the much more energy-consuming way. I soon reached the small outcrop of land I was aiming for, arrived at a lovely snug lean-to called Cedar Point, and relieved my legs. Apart from resting on the summit I hadn't had a real break all day so, instead of emptying the rucksack as usual, I just laid there reading the Intentions Book again; helping me to unwind, it also enlightened me on the subject of a particularly large furry animal that enjoyed visiting this particular shelter – a female bear! The hikers had named her Gertrude and she seemed to be quite a character, a dab hand at helping herself

from suspended food bags. Thankfully the remarks were written during May/June, around the time another, more ferocious little beastie appears – the ‘black fly’ or ‘buffalo gnat’. Like the Scottish midge, they swarm in their thousands – biting and sucking continuously. They thrive on cold, fast-running rivers and mountain streams and it is probably a good idea to avoid this area during their four-week stay. Mosquitoes, however, arrive around mid-June, so one pest replaces another. They prefer to breed on the calmer, stagnant waters of the lowlands, which explains why the Iroquois wrote a story about them rather than the black fly, though it could apply to either.

On the Seneca River many winters ago, says the story, two giant mosquitoes appeared; they preyed on the Indians who used the rivers for canoe travel. The Indians were forced to move because so many of their people were killed on the water, but the beasties followed and, eventually, two canoes full of warriors were sent to kill them. After a short time the mosquitoes descended on them, almost filling the sky as the Indians continuously fired arrows at them. Half of them were killed. The remainder chanted their war song and lead their enemy into the trees and bushes where mosquitoes could not fly. After many arrows had pierced their skins they dropped to the ground, where the Indians battered them with their war clubs. Once their blood began seeping out on the ground, hordes of smaller mosquitoes erupted from them; and to this day they attack humans as revenge for the death of their grandfathers. Thinking about these two adversaries, whose business is to ruin hiker’s waking hours, I considered my two present problems of deep snow and freezing nights. They were heart-warming and superficial compared to the constant hitting of my face, neck, legs and arms due to the little beasties, or running about after a brown bear called Gertrude!