

*Temporary
Study Commission
on the Future of
the Adirondacks*

41 STATE STREET
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12207

HAROLD A. JERRY, JR.
Executive Secretary

TO: Members of the Temporary Study Commission
on the Future of the Adirondacks

FROM: Executive Secretary *Haj*

DATE: November 14, 1969

RE: Peter S. Paine - Field Report

Enclosed herewith is a copy of a field
report submitted by Peter S. Paine, Jr., which
you may find of interest.

I think it is great.

HAJ:lw
enclosure

cc Harry W. Albright, Jr.
Charles H. Palmer
Ronald Pedersen

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Harold Jerry and George Davis

FROM: Peter S. Paine, Jr.

RE: Trip from Tahawus to Duck Hole via Preston Ponds and back via Bradley Pond

On Saturday, November 1, 1969, Patty and I hiked in from the Upper Works at Tahawus to the Duck Hole via Preston Ponds, a distance of some eight miles, spent the night in the bunk room of the ranger's cabin (thanks to the kindness of Bill Petty), and came out the next day via Bradley Pond, roughly eleven miles. The purpose of this memorandum is to give you a summary of some of our impressions of this trip which may be of interest to you.

We started just beyond the McIntire furnace which some of the Commission saw on a previous trip. Once again the absence of any signboard giving information about a most historic structure underlines the inadequacy of current educational activities by the Conservation Department. We passed the drilling being done by National Lead on the way to Henderson Lake and agreed with George's assessment that it would be unfortunate indeed if the strip mining activities were pushed further back into the edges of the High Peaks wilderness area. The trail up to the Preston Ponds is a right of way through National Lead land and both sides are posted since the Tahawus Club and other hunting and fishing clubs have leased the sporting rights on this property. The trail is rather heavily eroded in places and was extremely wet. It appears to have been maintained more by the Tahawus Club than the Conservation Department, since the small bridges and walkways are not in Conservation Department style but of cut plank. Much of the trail follows old logging roads.

I was subsequently informed by Woody Olmsted that Finch Pruyn manages National Lead's timber lands but that this fact is not generally known. While the country has been lumbered from its general appearance no substantial cutting has been done recently. As you know, the Forest Preserve line is between Lower Preston Pond and the Duck Hole so this whole piece of country juts well into the middle of one of our prime wilderness regions. I would certainly think that here is a good case for some kind of restrictive easement to be taken by the state. Beyond Lower Preston Pond some excellent work on primitive bridges over wet places has recently been done by the Duck Hole caretaker, Clarence Scanlon, and Ed Reid, the local ranger. Local materials were used, cut with a chain saw and hand finished, which give a rustic appearance very much in keeping with the surroundings.

We arrived at the Duck Hole in gathering darkness and while I must confess it was comforting to have the ranger cabin there, since it had started to rain and was pretty raw, the shock of finding such a well equipped house, with hot and cold water, stoves, refrigerators and two cars in the middle of a wilderness area, was considerable. There is little question that the availability of the road has led to a substantial increase in the elaborateness of the cabin and the use of it by the Conservation Department.

Our discussions with Ed Reid, Clarence Scanlon and his wife uncovered many interesting points. To begin with, it seems the ranger cabin is used fairly frequently by Conservation Department personnel as kind of a private hunting camp. Ed Reid was in there not on official business but with his eight year old son to do some deer hunting and had, of course, driven his truck in. (You will recall that another ranger was visiting the Shattuch Clearing ranger cabin for the same purpose when we went in there with the Commission).

The cult of the automobile is naturally all consuming when an automobile is available. For example, when Clarence Scanlon started off deer hunting the next morning he drove half a mile down the road to a point where he began his hunt in order to avoid a ten minute walk.

Reid indicated that the Duck Hole ranger cabin had not been so elaborate in days gone by and had not been manned as much as it is now. A ranger had been in there at peak periods in the summer and during the fishing and hunting seasons. Once the decision had been made to have a couple in residence, the presence of a woman required certain changes. The Scanlons now drive out every Wednesday for two days off. Scanlon's presence does seem to facilitate back country maintenance as he has been doing a lot of work alone and with Reid on the Moose Pond trail and the other trails, including the bridges mentioned above. Reid stated at one point that he thought the Department spent too much money on grandiose building projects (the Lake Colden Ranger station?) and too little on routine maintenance of back country trails and lean-tos. This is an interesting observation from a man on the spot.

Ed Reid reflected much the same general thinking that Bill Petty evidenced. He feels that the area is locked up and should be made more accessible to the public. He also seemed rather unaware of the actual amount of back country use which the area was receiving - the figures I quoted him on winter climbs of some of the trailless peaks in the region and the growth of cross country skiing were a surprise to him. He conceded that the horse trail deep into the territory (not the twelve mile loop) had been a mistake - it was built over some pretty wet ground and the horses had churned it into a quagmire three feet deep in places. In order to justify the expense of building the trail,

however, he suggested that it should be opened for snowmobile use in the winter time. The local pressures for snowmobile penetration of the area are apparently considerable. When asked how much private land or stateland not in a wilderness area was available for snowmobiling in the Tupper Lake region, Reid had no available information.

When asked why he liked hunting deer back in this country Reid replied because it was so remote that few other hunters were likely to be seen, and the deer, while not numerous, were likely to be of better quality. This fact was proved the next morning when he shot a very decent nine point buck - about 5 years old - weighing perhaps 175 pounds about half a mile from the cabin which we helped him dress and drag in. There was a lot of deer sign in the area I walked through and considerable evidence of browse. Some hunters from Plattsburg hiked in, spent three days in a lean-to, but not gotten any deer the previous week and we did meet three men coming out from the area on our way in who were just on a day hunt. Scanlon said he had seen about ten people in the region since the season opened.

Both Reid and Scanlon expressed great interest in the idea of getting moose re-established in the Adirondacks and thought that the wolf idea was rather exciting, though likely to be opposed by the hunting fraternity. Reid said that one possible blessing of the wolf was that packs would stir up deer and move them off some of the posted and un-hunted land like the Rockefeller estate thereby reducing inbreeding. I don't know the merit of this idea.

We had a delightful time with the Scanlons and Reid, and the above is not meant to be critical of them personally in any way, after all, we were enjoying the comforts of home in the middle of a wilderness area ourselves! I was also careful to keep discussions of a bull session nature without identifying any particular idea with the Commission or its staff.

On Sunday in a steady rain with the temperature about 38 we started for the car over the Bradley Pond trail after dealing with Reid's deer. This trail follows up a stream whose source lies in the col between Henderson and Santanoni and is exceedingly beautiful and very little travelled until one gets to the Bradley Pond lean-to. There was evidence of a solitary deer hunter having been over it within the past 24 hours but we had the feeling of being the first people to walk it for a long time. Beaver have forced detours in two places, but no effort has been made as yet to officially relocate the trail. Erosion is minimal until the steep slopes of the col are reached where the trail is more stream than trail. This part of the trip gave me the impression of being further from civilization than just about any other trip I have taken in the High Peak region.

The illusion of wilderness was shattered some 400 yards below the Bradley Pond lean-to by a hideous orange plastic camp which had been set up by deer hunters, probably this year, and just left to fall to pieces. It was too bulky for us to carry out or bury without tools and impossible to burn due to heavy rain. Why they felt it necessary to do this so close to the lean-to escapes me. The lean-to itself is, as you know, in a lovely location at the height of land but in need of repair to the roof which has been patched with plastic by some enterprising hiker or hunter.

Since it was just above freezing and still raining hard (the cloud was right down on the col with visibility of no more than 50 yards) we decided in view of the weather and the late hour to forego Santanoni. However, thanks to your excellent directions we had no trouble in locating your camping place and the beginning of the Santanoni trail. The rest of the trip down is over territory which you have already covered. My only comments are that the trail is much more heavily used than on the Duck Hole and is in miserable shape on the upper portions. The evidence of heavy lumbering in the lower portions makes the finish of the trip something of an anticlimax. Things are going to get worse rather than better in this respect as you may know, because Woody Olmsted indicates Finch Pruyn is going to build a road right to Bradley Pond in order to lumber much of Santanoni. We also spent a good deal of time picking up or burying the candy wrappers and debris recently left on the trail by hunters or hikers. As you know both sides of the trail are posted from Bradley Pond on down.

Once again one wonders whether some kind of buffer zone should not be established at the upper end of Finch Pruyn's holdings on Santanoni to prevent either road building or significant cutting. Woody did indicate that the growth rate was so slow at those altitudes that forestry considerations alone would not justify keeping such a road open, though the amount of presently available timber would justify building it to begin with, but that recreational use by Finch Pruyn's leasees would certainly ensure that the road was maintained for four wheel drive vehicles and snowmobiles.

In spite of the weather we had a great time and enjoyed every minute of the trip. We were well prepared for rain and stayed relatively dry. Since I was only carrying 15 to 20 pounds of gear I even managed to stay up with my wife who is quite a mountain goat and could quite readily be seconded to the ridge running squad headed by the two of you.

For your information the bits and pieces gleaned from Woody Olmsted came from an all day tour round Finch Pruyn's lands in the Elk Lake and Boreas Ponds area which we made on Monday, again in the pouring rain with minimum visibility. I arranged this through Lyman Beeman who could not have been more helpful, and now feel I have caught up with the Commission on the meetings I missed which involved Finch Pruyn.

P.S. A footnote to the foregoing on a wholly different subject.

A hunting friend of mine in Willsboro who has hunted the Dix Wilderness area for years stated that an old logging road up West Mill Brook leading into that area from the east is being extensively used, illegally he says, by jeeps and increasingly sophisticated equipment. A huge machine called a Tree Farmer was used to haul a very elaborate deer camp four miles up this road and he saw one of the new all terrain vehicles up there as well. He says this is all state land. When I sounded him out on the idea of a wilderness policy which would ban all motorized vehicles from a wilderness area including those used by the Conservation Department, he was immediately enthusiastic and said he would use all his influence with the Essex County Fish & Game League to get such an idea approved. He says if the current invasion by motorized transport of varying kinds continues there will be a hunter on every stump throughout the High Peaks region and feels very strongly that there must be somewhere left in the state where the hunter who wants to get away from the crowds and is willing to make the effort to pack in his gear can do so. This character is not what one would call a conservationist or a back pack snob and I was rather astonished to hear him expressing these views.