

Mother of a Hike

Going up and growing up along the MacIntyre Range

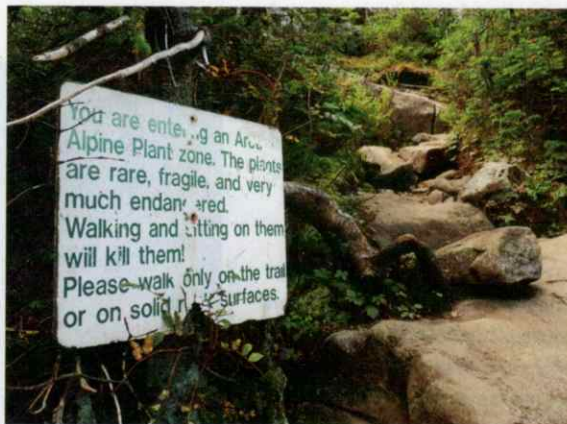
BY LISA BALLARD

I'm the kind of hiker who needs a reward for my efforts, typically a bald mountaintop or a fire tower with a grand view. At age 57 and an Adirondack native, I've trekked hundreds of miles throughout the park, cherry-picking the best panoramas.

Then, there's my son, Parker, 22, a student at St. Lawrence University, going for his Forty-Sixer patch. A 22-miler is just another day on the trail for him, and sometimes not on a trail. His reward is the backcountry experience with his hardcore friends and checking the proverbial box next to another 4,000-footer, but he still hikes with me on occasion. When we plan an outing, I set rules: Keep it short, *cough*, under 15 miles, and reach at least one open, rocky summit.



FROM LEFT: Along Algonquin's trail. The author and her son, Parker, on the summit of Iroquois.



We've done some classic treks together, including cresting Cascade Mountain when he was in grade school, Mount Marcy in middle school, and Mount Colvin in high school. "What shall we hike next?" I asked the summer before his senior year in college. I feared it might be our last memorable mountain experience together. After graduation, his life would undoubtedly get more complex and potentially take him away from the Adirondacks.

Parker suggested the MacIntyre Range—Algonquin, Wright and Iroquois.

"Iroquois is a trailless peak," I said. Forty years ago, during my peak-bagging teens, I swore off trailless peaks. They were sheer misery, bushwhacking through stubborn shrubs that scratched until they drew blood, or barely skirting hypothermia after scrambling up wet,

slippery streambeds. What's more, there was no reward at the summit of those trailless monsters, only scraggly trees and a small canister with a log book inside that you had to sign to prove you had made it to the top.

Nevertheless, I agreed. Algonquin and Wright were among my two favorite mountains, and I figured Iroquois was survivable, knowing that nowadays the routes up most of the trailless 4,000-footers have well-defined "herd paths." Still, my legs ached just thinking of the vertical gain, about 4,000 feet, and the 11.5 miles. This hike was definitely going to be a mother for this mother, but how could I say no?

The Range

Algonquin, Wright and Iroquois are three of the four prominent mountains that make up the MacIntyre Range. Another trailless peak, Mount Marshall (4,360 feet), lies past Iroquois.

The eight-mile range is one of the most conspicuous in the High Peaks. Wedged between Mount Marcy to the east and Street and Nye Mountains to the west, it forms the eastern wall of Indian Pass and the western cliffs along Avalanche Pass. Algonquin Peak (5,114 feet), the second-highest mountain in New York, crowns this impressive alpine ridge-line. Wright Peak (4,580 feet) stands slightly apart, on the north end of the range. Iroquois Peak (4,840 feet) is south of Algonquin, between Algonquin and Marshall.

Boundary Peak (4,829 feet) rises from the saddle between Algonquin and Iroquois, but it is technically not far enough away from Algonquin, nor does it rise significantly enough from the ridge, to be considered a separate mountain.

The Hike

Parker and I planned our September trip as an out-and-back hike from Adirondack Loj. We'd climb Algonquin, traverse the ridge to Iroquois,

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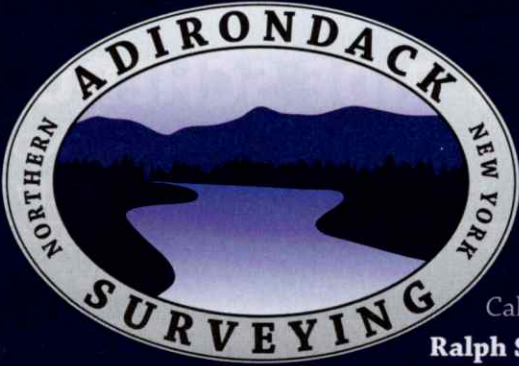
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then catch Wright on the way back as we descended from Algonquin to the Loj. The trail up Wright Peak was only 0.4 mile long. Looking at a map, it appeared a mere spur, considering the miles we would hike that day.

We left Adirondak Loj at dawn. Mist hugged the birches and maples along the lower Van Hoesenberg trail. A few had sprinkled leaves, adding dabs of red and yellow to the normally drab, well-trodden path. As a photographer, I dearly hoped we would find more color as we climbed. Parker was less enthused about potential photo ops.

"You're a fast hiker when you want to be, when you're not taking

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photos," he said.

"I always take photos," I said, annoyed. "Why did you want to do this hike with me if you wanted to sprint the whole thing?"

"To spend some time with you," he said. "When we hike together we talk more." With that, my mood softened, grateful for the trail-time with my son.

At 0.9 mile, we turned right off the Van Hoesenberg trail and began the 2,992-foot ascent of Algonquin. The trail became rockier and the slope more noticeable, but so did the fall colors. I stopped frequently to take pictures, intrigued by the mottled violet and green hues of the hobblebushes along the path.

At 2.3 miles we came to the base of a 50-foot waterfall. It was barely a trickle. We stepped across the rocks along the edge of the glassy pool at the base of the cascade, pausing

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briefly to remark at its low flow, then continued our climb.

At 2.9 miles, we came to the junction with the trail to Wright Peak. I handed Parker a rock, anticipating the leave-your-rock-here program at the top of a number of the High Peaks. Trail stewards from the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) use the rocks to outline the route through the alpine zone, keeping hikers off the fragile arctic vegetation.

"Meso-igneous anorthosite," said Parker, a geology major. I chuckled, appreciating the rock lesson. Normally I was the naturalist, and Parker was the student. We decided to carry our rocks the shorter distance up Wright on the way back and made a temporary mini-cairn at the trail junction.

Motherly Mishaps

Continuing up Algonquin, we clambered over several large boulders, then stretch after stretch of steep slab. The climb was demanding, but also energizing, thanks to the ever-improving view. As we cleared the krummholz, we could see Lake Placid, the Olympic ski jumps and Whiteface Mountain to the northeast, and the bald pate of Wright Peak much closer. Just below the summit, the cliffs of Indian Pass appeared to the west and a number of the High Peaks, including the Great Range, Marcy and Colden, crowded the panorama to the east.

We rested on the summit of Algonquin, enjoying lunch and the scenery. I offered Parker a smooshed peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He declined, pulling an over-stuffed turkey and cheese hoagie loaded with shredded veggies from his pack. He gave me half, then offered me some beef jerky.

"Jerky tastes better while hiking," he said. "It's filet mignon from a bag."


I gratefully accepted the dried

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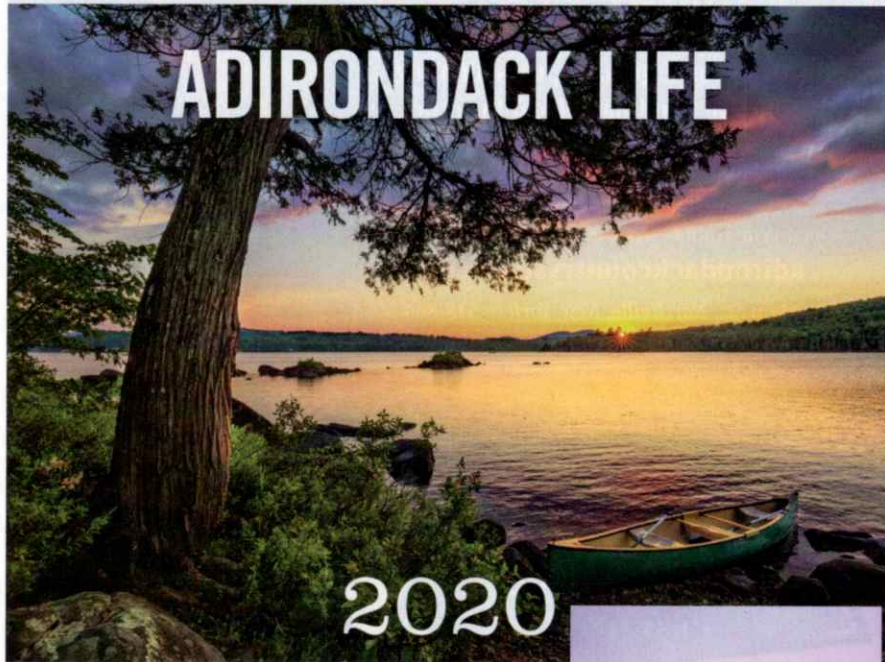
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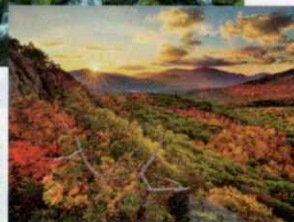
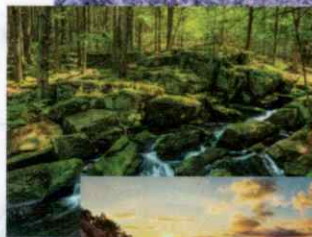
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meat, which was, indeed, delicious. How funny for Parker to supply the food, I thought to myself. That's usually a mom thing.

After eating lunch, we dropped off the back of Algonquin, heading toward Iroquois, 1.1 miles farther along the ridge. Most of the way to Iroquois was a delightful ridge walk among stunning alpine flora. The deer hair sedge, carpeting the cracks in the bedrock, had turned strawberry blond, and red freckles covered the mounds of diapensia, catching the sunlight.

At one point, the trail became a waist-deep trough, traversing a hedge of thick gnarled evergreens. I nearly jogged through it to keep up with my six-foot-tall, 22-year-old. *Whack!* As I strode forward, my right thigh caught a thin stump poking out from the side of the trench. I crumpled in pain.

"Are you okay, Mom?" Parker asked.

"It's going to leave a mark," I replied, making light of it. I limped on. Better to keep moving, so it doesn't stiffen up, I told myself. We still had a long way to go.

By the summit of Iroquois, I could walk again, though my thigh throbbed.

"Want some ibuprofen?" Parker asked. I gratefully accepted, wondering who was mothering who.

We had another snack, then turned back toward Algonquin. In my mind, Wright was next. I hadn't thought about the need to reascend Algonquin. To take my mind off my agony, Parker told me about his classes, his plans for Thanksgiving break and the new Star Wars movie. Talking to take his mind off the exertion was an old trick I used on Parker. Now he was using it on me.

Ascending Wright

By the time we made it back to the junction with the Wright Peak trail, the last thing I wanted to do was go uphill again. The ascent of Wright, though less than a half-mile, looked

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near-vertical.

Parker handed me my rock from our little cairn with an encouraging smile. We put our rocks in our packs and talked more as we climbed. Parker told me about a video he edited for a geology class. He reminisced about climbing Marcy with me when he was younger, then we brainstormed ideas for a post-graduation expedition together.

Upon reaching the summit, Parker placed our rocks in the pile surrounding the leave-a-rock sign. We found a spot to take in yet another view of the majestic High Peaks. From this vantage point, we could see every rock in the famous Trap Dike on Mount Colden.

"I would really like to climb that," said Parker.

I glanced proudly at my son, who had become so able in the outdoors. There comes a time for every parent when they suddenly realize their children are adults, too. My revelation was that moment on the MacIntyre Range. It was a mother of a hike for this mother of a hiker, but immensely enjoyable, too. ▲

IF YOU GO

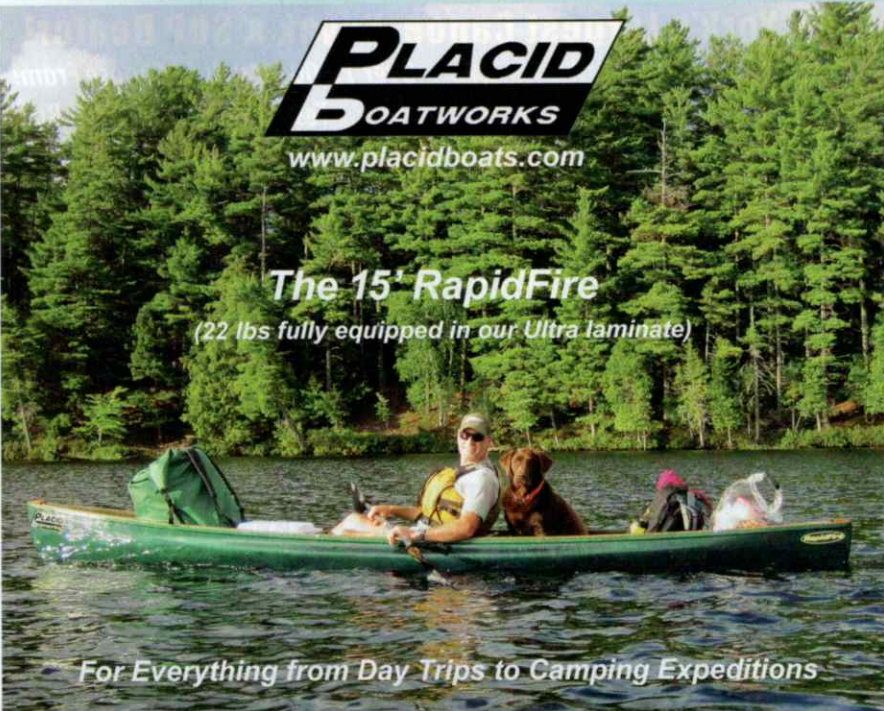
Start early, especially during the fall when the days are shorter and because the parking lots at Adirondak Loj, in Lake Placid, often fill up. The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) charges a parking fee, \$12 for the general public, \$5 for ADK members.

Be prepared for sudden changes in the weather in the alpine zone, including strong winds any time, and snow even during the summer.

Hiking the MacIntyre Range is strenuous. Attempt this hike only if you are physically fit.

For more information, trail maps and current trail conditions, contact ADK at (518) 523-3441 or the New York State Department of Conservation Region 5 office in Ray Brook, (518) 897-1200.

Consult ADK's *Guide to Adirondack Trails: High Peaks Region* or *Falcon Guides' Hiking the Adirondacks* for complete trail descriptions.



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