The Adirondacks
by
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The oldest mountains in the United States occur along the eastern seaboard in the extensive Appalachian range, and the oldest of all in this chain of mountains are the Adirondacks in upper New York State. They are the roots of ancient peaks that in long past ages towered thousands if feet higher than those of today. Their history has been a complicated one of intrusion and volcanism, of uplift and faulting, of deposition and erosion. During vast periods of time, measured in hundreds of millions of years, tectonic and thermal forces worked to alter the original structure of these rocks. What sediments were at onetime included in this mountain mass have either been largely washed away or altered by heat and pressure. The basement complex of archaic igneous rock dating back to proterozoic times is now exposed on the bare dark peaks and gray fractured cliffs of the present mountains. The metamorphic limestones, granites, and gneisses with which these igneous intrusions are associated are also of ancient origin. The coarse crystaline structure of these formations, shot full of larger crystals of garnet, turmaline, and black hornblend, dramatically tell a story of eons of compression and heating and annealing deep within the earth's crust to which they were subjected before the overlying burden was stripped away.

These now time-softened hills retain few features of their ancient craginess. The snow-clad peaks of the Paleozoic and again of the Mesozoic eras have been cut down by the inexorable forces of erosion, and in more recent geological times the grinding and polishing weight of mile-thick ice rounded and smoothed them. But narrow rifts still divide the higher peaks and hold between their iron-gray walls deep blue lakes left behind by melting glaciers.

And to this day rushing torrents carve sunless chasms into the adamantine rock.

In winter the most inhospitable conditions prevail when sudden storms roaring through the windy gaps pile huge drifts and sweep clean the frozen lakes exposing a cobalt-blue surface filagreed with white. The brooks become cascades of yellow-tinted ice, frozen infusions of forest litter; the larger streams are choked with jumbles of congealed snow and blocks of ice; and wherever on the cliffs water seeps a curtain of icicles hangs from glazed rocks.

These are the most severe aspects of the Adirondacks. In spring all changes: the once ice-filled gorges become cool shaded ravines whose rocky sides are shaggy with purple lichens and emerald mosses, and, when the first fresh-green leaves unfold the air is filled with bird song. Though the brooks have moderated, cascades and waterfalls persist providing the forested slopes with a variety and richness of sound and movement that only flowing water can give. The frail white flowers of the woodlands and the uncurling velvet spirals of ferns push through soggy banks of mahagony-colored pools, made gold by a shaft of sun, to border them with a fringe of green. From each small cascade foam spreads in concentric arcs of persistant bubbles stabalized by the organic tincture of the soil.

In the less rugged southern part of the Adirondack Park the terrain is more open and flatter and here the low lands afford the streams wider channels to flow at a more liesurly pace and back up into marshy basins. In the spring blooming Labrador Tea whitens these boggy places, while a tender green fuzz envelopes the tamaracks. In the margins of the bogs, among the sedges,

nurished by the decay of last year's leaves , violets grow in purple profusion. But before the violets appear, when the trees are still leafless, the shad,like drifts of unmelted snow,looms through the bare gray trunks. And later in the second growth woods on higher ground Linaea covers moss-encased rotting stumps and forgotten logs with trailing vines, perfuming the air for yards about with its tiny pink flowers.

In the fall of the year the Adirondacks reach their time of greatest glory. Then the autumnal color-changes reveal the great variety of vegetation; where before all was green, and one leaf was scarcely distinguishable in the mass from another, now this uniformity is replaced by all shades of browns and russets, yellows and reds. The hillsides become patterns of contrasting vivid colors, which thousands of city people travel hundreds of miles to view. The undistinguished, bushy pastures change their character completely. In the tangles of weeds and coarse grasses the leaves of blueberry bushes glow in the slanting rays of the sun, like the coals of burned-out subterranean fires, and the sharp spears of paling grass are the flames above the surface. Lichens seem to be richer in hue at this time of year. The forest floor when the fall of the leaf begins is strewn with discarded needles of the pines, scattered like jack straws among the red and yellow maple leaves and browning ferns -- all except the evergreen ferns that retain their green under the snow. The quiet, flowing brooks are at their best now, littered with still unfaded leaves revolving in the eddies and plastered on the wet rocks at each little cascade. The clear water reflects in blurred and swirling patterns all the colors of the fall mixed with the blue of the sky -- kaleidoscopes of shifting hues. Along the marshy borders of the flows, cattails turn to russet-brown

and their full ripe coffee-colored heads lose their plushy firmness as they begin to disintegrate and disperse their seeds.

Second to the mountains themselves, the rivers, streams, and lakes of the Adirondacks are the wildest areas. The Hudson River rises at the foot of Mt. Marcy, and to the north the Ausable flows into Lake Champlain. Water is everywhere abundant. In the southern part, an intricate network of inter-connecting lakes and ponds offers some of the best canoe country in the United States. Ponds dot the country-side, every hollow in the hills holds one; some are the sources of brooks, whereas others are intermediate between the flow from high drainage basins and large streams. The hiker often comes upon them shimmering through the yellow birches on an October day as he follows the course of a brook to its origin.

~~In~~ There are few places on this continent ~~does~~ where the land retains such an intimate relationship with its water system. The areas between the streams are small or steep and rocky. This is not farming country although farms there have been and still are. It is a land of wildness, a land where the forests belong, a land of the beaver and bear, of the deer and fox, a land where one can still see what the land once was, a land to go to and return from, a land where one can ~~to~~ escape from his neighbor ~~in~~ and enjoy the peace of solitude which those who live in cities need. It is a land where the human spirit can yet be free.