

# Up in the Adirondacks

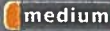


Der Adirondack-Park im US-Bundesstaat New York stieg im 19. Jahrhundert zum beliebten Ausflugsziel für besser betuchte Naturliebhaber auf. Heute lädt die umgebende Wildnis zu ausgefallenen Erkundungstouren ein. **CLAUDINE WEBER-HOF** stellt diesen besonderen Fleck Natur vor.   

Foto: David John Weber

Above it all in the Adirondacks:  
Long Lake lives up to its name in  
northern New York state



Today, I am on top of the world. Pilot Tom Helms is flying me high above the Adirondack Park in northern New York state. Below us, reflecting the sunlight like little mirrors, are numerous lakes and ponds. Around them is a deep carpet of trees. The mountainous landscape looks so soft that I can imagine stepping out onto it.

Tom turns the seaplane to one side so I can see all of Long Lake. Down on the water, two jet-skiers zigzag about. A grand holiday home comes into view, but the land next to it reveals a different kind of building activity: a beaver dam. From up in the sky, the fallen trees look like a woodworking job left in chaos. Tom raps the plane's fuel gauge to get my attention. "Guess we should land," he jokes.

As he lowers the plane onto Long Lake, Tom tells me that the Adirondack Park is a big experiment. Half the land is protected as "forever wild" by the constitution of New York state. The other half is in private hands. Ever since the park was established in 1892, people have watched to see whether the two parts — nature and the 130,000 people who call the park home — can live in harmony. Today, conservationists still consider the Adirondacks a living laboratory.

At six million acres, this "laboratory" is the size of a small state. A five-hour drive from Manhattan, it is also, by American standards, easy to access. Getting to the park took much longer in the late 19th century — 30 hours by train and coach. And because of its isolation, only the rich could afford a visit to the playground in the wild.

Tom and I climb out of the plane and onto the dock. As I pay my bill, Tom makes a recommendation: take a tour of Great Camp Sagamore, the holiday home of the Vanderbilts. In fact, I already have a reservation to stay at the summer home once owned by the famous railroad millionaires.

As I drive away from Long Lake, I consider the Adirondacks in detail. The park has 2,800 lakes and ponds and



Pilot Tom Helms, who flies visitors into the wilds of the park for canoeing and fishing expeditions; a trail marker from this part of the Empire State



2,400 kilometers of river — including the source of the Hudson, the great river that gives New York City its drinking water. The park is also very biodiverse. Ninety percent of the species native to America's Northeast are represented here. And, even more impressive, it is the largest park of any kind — state, national, or otherwise — in the continental US.

It has long been a favorite of American outdoorsmen. One, Teddy Roosevelt, was called to a higher duty in 1901 while vacationing in the park. The vice president was in the Adirondacks when he received the news that President McKinley had died of a gunshot wound. Roosevelt left the park on a train from the little town of North Creek to become the 26th president of the United States.

My musings on nature and history end when the GPS tells me to take a left turn. As I drive onto a dirt road, tall trees rise on either side of the car. I drive slowly over the bumps, watching for deer and rabbits, until I come to a sign announcing Camp Sagamore.

From the parking area, I walk down a hill to a group of wooden buildings that stand at the side of a lake. To call Sagamore a "camp" is an exercise in understatement. I stop on the central lawn, and a big house much like an Alpine chalet fills my view. The exterior is rough. In some places, bark is even separating from the wood. Nothing



The Vanderbilts' summer house is the focus of Camp Sagamore; a picnic hamper from circa 1900





Nature in motion: a creek on a hiking trail in the park

Flagg and I visit some of the buildings where the exclusive social gatherings took place: the playhouse, used for games and theater, and a wonderful outdoor bowling alley. At camp, my guide tells me, there would have been formal summer parties and many changes of dress each day. Guests included film star Gary Cooper and even Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the leader of China. All would have enjoyed being far from the prying eyes of the press.

Far from the eyes of wives and a safe distance from the main camp stands another little building: “the Wigwam.” Here, hidden in the trees, gentlemen could meet to smoke and drink without offending the ladies. There were female visitors, too, I am told, just not the marrying kind. Flagg points to the silvery birch bark covering a wall. The use of rough materials for decoration became known as the “Adirondack style,” a playful, faux simplicity that is still associated with the American upper class.

As we leave the Wigwam, a bell starts to ring. Flagg explains that it’s the dinner bell, so we hightail it to the dining hall, an enormous room of stone fireplaces and long wooden tables. Through a window, I can see people coming in from all directions. Some are putting down canoe paddles and others are putting away their drawing pencils: all are hurrying to see what the cook has prepared.

Tonight, it’s stuffed peppers. I take a seat by a window overlooking the lake and watch a loon crossing the water. The birds are reclusive, Flagg says. This

Watch your step on wild Adirondack trails: you might see little animals in the leaves, like the red eft, an orange salamander



The Hudson River and a typical Adirondack guideboat

way of life is why some people love Sagamore. There are no televisions at camp, cell phones don’t work too well, and a single desktop computer offers access to the internet. Even today, the camp serves as a refuge from a very busy world.

I spend the night in a quiet cottage on the lake and wake to the sound of the loon’s call. I cannot remember the last time I was so relaxed. Lying in bed, I watch as the morning sun turns the sky a golden color. I wish I could stay a few more days, but it’s not to be. After breakfast, I shake Flagg’s hand, climb into the car, and watch as the camp disappears in my rearview mirror. I follow the quiet road that guides me silently through the trees.

As members of high society were planning to spend their summers in camps like Sagamore, loggers were moving wood along the region’s rivers. This I learn at my next stop: the Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake. With its many exhibition buildings and historic cottages, the museum campus still has some of the character of the logging camp that once occupied its park-like site.

Today, the museum is comparable to any big-city institute and is among the area’s top attractions. It is as though all the loggers, tuberculosis doctors, railway men, and hunting guides had left their things in one place and disappeared. There is logging machinery, literature on “cure cottages” (author Robert Louis Stevenson occupied one on Saranac Lake in 1887), a luxury railcar, historic guideboats, and even a boatbuilder to explain the tradition.

Laura Rice, the chief curator of the museum, takes me across the thick grass between exhibition buildings to the Boillot Galleries. She wants to show me how artists viewed the Adirondacks over time. Inside, I see an 1830s’ landscape by Thomas Cole, the artist who started the famous Hudson River School of painting. But Rice points to a



else about the place is rustic, though. The building's massive red front door would look perfect on a fairy-tale castle.

I am lost in this enchanted world, when I hear a loud "hello." Crossing the camp is a friendly-looking man. He introduces himself as Jeff Flagg, a professor who leads tours here. As we start to walk the grounds, Flagg explains that Sagamore was a place very typical of the **Gilded Age**.

"The camp was designed to give you the experience of being in the wilderness, and yet you could



"The idea was to recreate a country estate, as well as a farm with several dozen workers who maintained the owners' complex," Flagg says. By 1901, though, Durant's money problems forced him to sell the camp to Alfred G. Vanderbilt, one of America's wealthiest men. Vanderbilt died in 1915 and left Sagamore to Margaret, his wife, who entertained friends there for 40 years.

Alfred G. Vanderbilt and his wife, Margaret



Above, an example of the rustic Adirondack style in furniture

### A CLOSER LOOK

America's **Gilded Age** was a time of industrial growth that started after the Civil War (see *Travelogs* 4/11) ended in 1865. The name comes from the title of a book Mark Twain co-wrote in 1873 criticizing the era. "To gild" means to cover a less valuable material with a thin layer of gold. Unlike the working classes, the rich of the Gilded Age could leave or "vacate" the city in summer to avoid the heat and disease. In fact, the verb "to vacation" was first used in 1883.

have all the luxuries that you had back in the cities," he says. In the late 1800s, it was a novelty to have hot-and-cold running water, flush toilets, and electric lights in the middle of the woods. I ask Flagg why people like the Vanderbilts would travel so far from New York City. After all, another of the family's holiday homes — The Breakers in Newport, Rhode Island, a palace from the same era that in places had platinum gilding on the walls — was considered the finest house in the land.

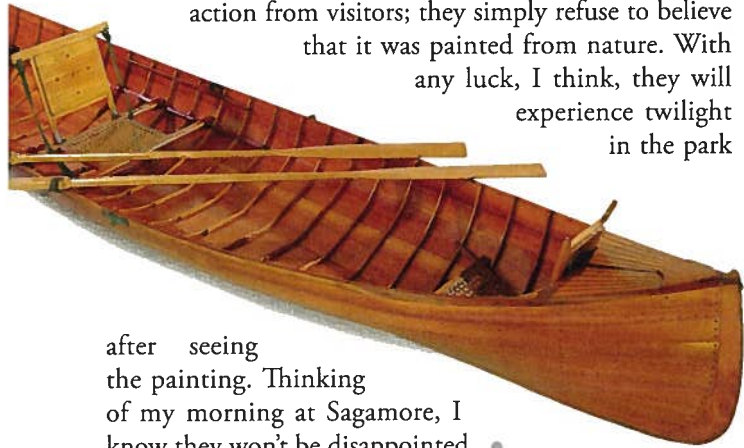
"Wealthy urban Americans had become detached from the natural world," Flagg says. "They were looking for a way to become close to the nature they thought was part of their heritage. This was a phenomenon of the 19th century in America, when the frontier in the West had been declared closed."

The man who helped the rich to get back to nature was William West Durant. The son of a railroad tycoon, he developed the lands his family bought for almost nothing from the state of New York. While his father put rail lines into the Adirondacks, getting as far as North Creek, the son planted fine homes on the park's lovely lakes. From 1895 to 1897, the younger Durant built Camp Sagamore, named for a character in the classic American novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. It was one of his proudest projects.

<b>acre</b> ['eɪkər]	Morgen (ca. 4047 m <sup>2</sup> )
<b>after all</b> [ˌæftər ˈɔːl]	immerhin
<b>Alpine chalet</b> [ˌælpaj̥n ʃæˈleɪ]	Almhütte (Baum)Rinde
<b>bark</b> [bɑːrk]	Biber
<b>beaver</b> ['biːvər]	Biber
<b>biodiverse</b> [ˌbaɪoʊdəˈvɜːs]	artenvielfältig
<b>bump</b> [bʌmp]	Bodenwelle (→ p. 57)
<b>coach</b> [kəʊtʃ]	Pferdekutsche
<b>conservationist</b> [ˌkɒnsərˈveɪʃənɪst]	Umweltschützer(in)
<b>country estate</b> [ˌkʌntri ɪˈsteɪt]	Landsitz
<b>creek</b> [kriːk]	Bach, Flüsschen
<b>deer</b> [diːr]	Hirsch, Rotwild
<b>detached</b> [dɪˈtætʃt]	abgewandt
<b>dirt road</b> [ˌdɜːt ˈroʊd]	unbefestigte Straße
<b>enchanted</b> [ɪnˈtʃæntəd]	verzaubert
<b>entertain</b> [ˌentərˈteɪn]	bewirten, zu Gast haben
<b>fairy-tale</b> ['feri teɪl]	Märchen-
<b>flush toilet</b> [ˌflʌʃ ˈtɔɪlət]	Spülklosett, WC
<b>frontier</b> [frʌnˈtɪər]	Grenzland
<b>fuel gauge</b> [ˈfjuːəl geɪdʒ]	Kraftstoffanzeige
<b>gilded</b> ['gɪldɪd]	vergoldet, golden
<b>GPS</b> [ˌdʒiː piː ˈes]	Navi(gationsgerät)
<b>heritage</b> ['herətɪdʒ]	Erbe, Abstammung
<b>maintain</b> [ˌmeɪnˈteɪn]	in Stand halten
<b>musings</b> ['mjuːzɪŋ]	Grübeleien, Träumerei
<b>novelty</b> [ˈnɒvəlˈtiː]	Neuheit, etwas Neues
<b>outdoorsman</b> [ˌaʊtˈdɔːrzmən]	Naturliebhaber
<b>pond</b> [pɒːnd]	Teich, Weiher
<b>rail lines</b> [ˈreɪl laɪnz]	Eisenbahnschienen
<b>rustic</b> ['rʌstɪk]	ländlich
<b>tap</b> [tæp]	leicht klopfen auf
<b>understatement</b> [ˌʌndərˈsteɪtmənt]	Untertreibung

## IF YOU GO...

different picture: *A Twilight in the Adirondacks* (right) by Sanford Robinson Gifford. The artwork from 1864 glows with a wonderful light. Rice says it gets a very strong reaction from visitors; they simply refuse to believe that it was painted from nature. With any luck, I think, they will experience twilight in the park



after seeing the painting. Thinking of my morning at Sagamore, I know they won't be disappointed. ●

<b>alley</b> ['æli]	Bahn
<b>birch</b> [bɜ:tʃ]	Birke
<b>cell phone</b> ['sel foun] US	Mobiltelefon, Handy
<b>chief curator</b> [tʃi:f 'kjʊreɪtə]	(Museums)Direktor(in)
<b>dining hall</b> ['daɪnɪŋ hɔ:l]	Speisesaal
<b>faux</b> [foʊ]	gekünstelt
<b>fireplace</b> ['faɪəpleɪs]	offener Kamin
<b>hightail it</b> ['haɪteɪl ɪt] <i>ifml.</i>	flitzen
<b>hiking</b> ['haɪkɪŋ]	Wandern
<b>logger</b> ['lɒ:gə]	Holzfäller(in)
<b>loon</b> [lu:n] <i>N. Am.</i>	Seetaucher
<b>offend</b> [ə'fend]	beleidigen; hier: stören
<b>overlooking</b> [ˌoʊvər'lʊkɪŋ]	mit Blick auf
<b>playhouse</b> ['pleɪhaʊs]	Schauspielhaus, Theater
<b>point to</b> ['pɔɪnt tə]	zeigen auf
<b>prying</b> ['praɪɪŋ]	neugierig
<b>rearview</b> ['rɪərvi:jʊ]	Rück-
<b>reclusive</b> [rɪ'klu:si:v]	sehr scheu
<b>refuge</b> ['refju:dʒ]	Schutz, Zufluchtsort
<b>stuffed peppers</b> [ˌstʌft 'pepərz]	gefüllte Paprika
<b>taproom</b> ['tæpru:m]	Trinkstube
<b>twilight</b> ['twaɪlaɪt]	Dämmerung (→ p. 57)



### Getting there

Numerous airlines have flights to New York City. Rent a car at the airport and drive five hours to the Adirondack Park. The driving time is the same from Boston, too.

### Great Camp Sagamore

A two-night stay costs around \$279, meals included. Contact the Sagamore Institute on Lake Sagamore; tel. (001) 315-354 5311; [www.greatcampsagamore.org](http://www.greatcampsagamore.org)

### Adirondack Museum

Plan three hours to visit the museum. Highlights are the authentic camp buildings and the railway exhibition with a luxury railcar like those used by the Vanderbilts to reach the Adirondacks. Entry costs \$18; open late May to mid-October. Routes 28N and 30, Blue Mountain Lake; tel. (001) 518-352 7311; [www.adkmuseum.org](http://www.adkmuseum.org)

### Long Lake

Stay at the historic Adirondack Hotel across from Long Lake's public beach and try the hotel's Tap Room restaurant. Double rooms start at \$65. 1245 Main Street; tel. (001) 518-624 4700; [www.adirondackhotel.com](http://www.adirondackhotel.com)  
Tom Helms will show you the Adirondacks from above. A 20-minute flight costs \$70; tel. (001) 518-624 3931; [www.helmsaeroservice.com](http://www.helmsaeroservice.com)

### North Creek

The Copperfield is a comfortable hotel with a good restaurant: Trappers. Double rooms from \$150. 307 Main Street; tel. (001) 877-235 1466; [www.copperfieldinn.com](http://www.copperfieldinn.com)  
The Source sports shop has hiking and boating information. 6 Ordway Lane; [www.thegearsourcetonline.com/theSource](http://www.thegearsourcetonline.com/theSource)

### More information

There are thousands of wonderful lakes to visit in the region, including Lake George, with historic Fort Ticonderoga, and Lake Placid, where the Winter Olympics took place in 1932 and 1980. See [www.visitadirondacks.com](http://www.visitadirondacks.com)

