

Algonquin Peak Winter Camping and Hike

Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness Area, NY

Feb, 2010

Participants: Tom, Brent Doug, John

Wow, hard to believe, but this year marked the sixth year of the WA Algonquin Peak Hike trip. Why the same trip every year? Actually, it isn't the same trip every year. Well it is, sort of, but not really. Sure, every year we setup camp in lean-to #10, and every year we have beans & wieners for Friday evening dinner, and every year we summit Algonquin Peak. On the other hand, every year has one or two new participants with whom to share the experience; every year brings with it different weather conditions; and every year the Saturday evening presentation by the Adirondack Mountain Club is different. So, you see, it is a different trip each year - sort of.

After arriving at lean-to #10 John, Doug and I decided to warm-up for the big hike by climbing Mount Jo – an easy 710' elevation gain. Tom chose to save his legs for the big climb on Saturday and stayed back at the lean-to to relax. The Mount Jo climb is a very nice hike in itself. The trail follows cliff faces and ends with a beautiful view of Heart Lake and Algonquin Peak beyond it. As we descended my not-so-young knees made me think that I too should have stayed back at the lean-to.



We awoke Saturday morning to a crisp cold that was perfect for this type of hike – not too cold, but cold enough to help prevent over-heating during the steep ascent. We had a simple breakfast cooked on the camp stove and then headed out for the trail head for an early start. Our intent was to take the longer, circular route – the route that last year wasn't possible due to terrible wind conditions and equipment problems. With snowshoes on, and crampons stowed in our day packs, we headed down the trail for Marcy Dam and then to Avalanche Pass. As we crossed Avalanche Lake we stopped for a chat with a park warden who thanked us for traveling with the proper gear.



At Lake Colden, the trail veers west and it is here where that the steep climb up to the saddle between Boundary Peak and Algonquin Peak starts. The climb from Lake Colden to Algonquin Peak is steep, very steep. Doug and John didn't seem to have much trouble but Tom and I slowly made our way up wondering why we had so little energy. But we persevered and met up with John and Doug just before the tree line where we switched from snowshoes to crampons and put on additional clothing to protect ourselves from the bitter winds that are so common at the high altitudes in this area.

The final push to the summit was hampered by strong winds (but not nearly as strong as the previous year) and blowing snow that obscured the cairns marking the route. With just one additional stop to help Tom adjust his crampons we made our way to the summit (1559m/5114' above sea level, 2900' of altitude gain). It had taken us almost 5 ½ hours to get to the summit but with the view obscured by clouds and blowing snow we had no reason to hang out. We almost immediately began the descent down the less steep north trail.



Doug and John, apparently with energy to spare, took the side trail to Wright Peak while Tom and I waited at the frozen water fall for them to return to the main trail. The final part of the descent always seems longer than it is when you're tired and therefore the parking lot was a welcome sight for us weary hikers. This year's circular route took us about 8 ½ hours. Man, were we tired!

And so I return to the question: Why the same hike every year? Well, there's the satisfaction of challenging yourself physically and mentally. There's being with friends for a few days. And thirdly, there is just something magical about being in the mountains. So they're not the Rockies, but the Adirondacks are pretty darn nice – and a lot closer to Toronto.

Until next year...

Brent