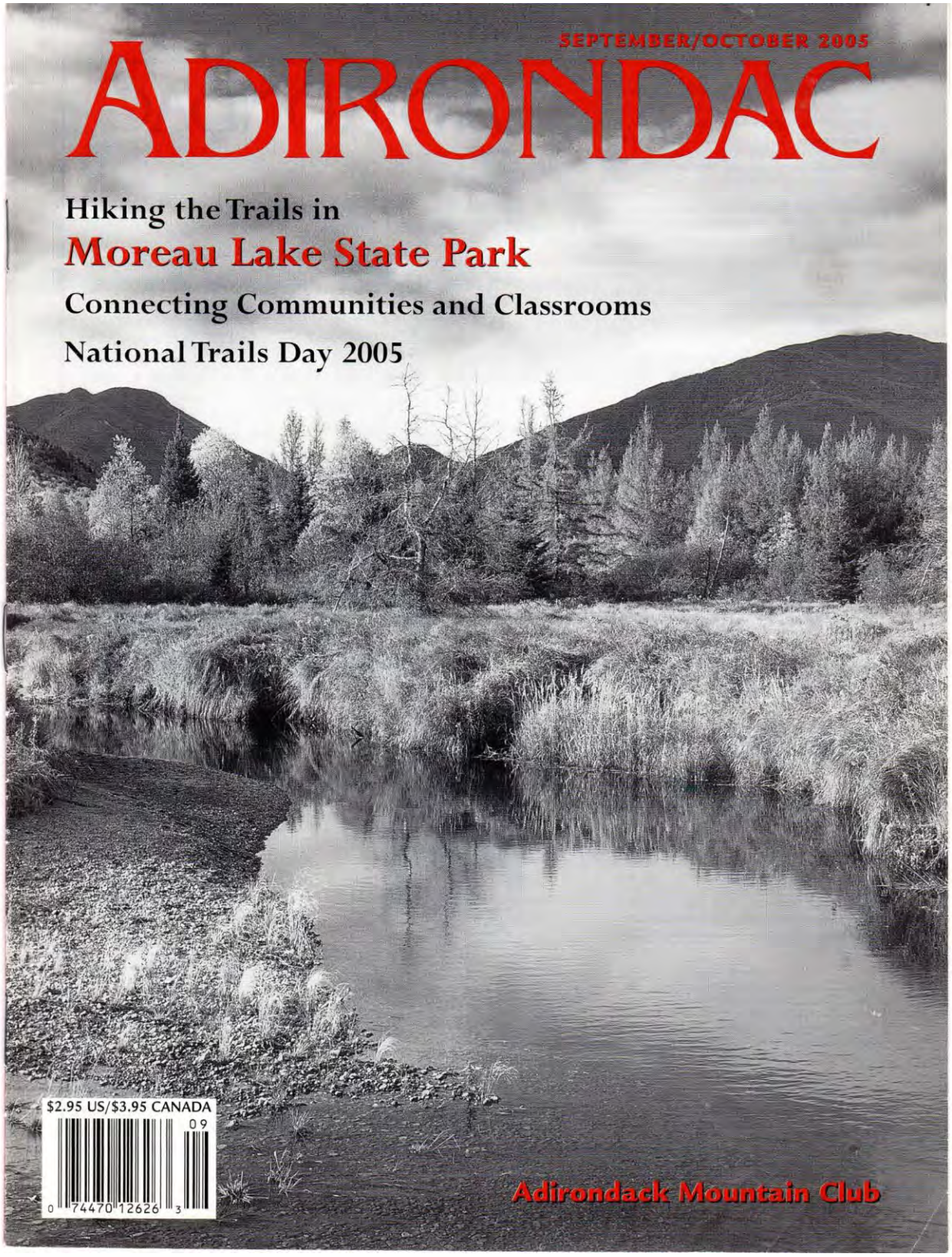
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# *Hiking the Trails in*
# Moreau Lake State Park
## Saratoga County

By Jack Freeman
and Bob Goodwin

We, your authors, have many things in common. Both of us have retired from Eastman Kodak in Rochester, where we were active members of ADK's Genesee Valley Chapter. We both developed a deep affinity for the Adirondacks during our tenures in Rochester. After retiring, we have settled in the Wilton and Glens Falls areas. When new wildlands in Moreau State Park opened up (see below), Bob found a ready-made personal playground just ten minutes from his home …perfect for an aging "mountain man." Over the last two years, Bob has spent a great deal of time exploring the area and has introduced Jack to the intricate network of trails with exceptional views.

Together, we proposed to the club that descriptions of the trails in Moreau be included in the forthcoming new edition of ADK's Southern Region trail guide, which is being reworked by Freeman. While it is true that Moreau Lake State Park lies just south of the Adirondack Park border, or Blue Line, the ADK Publications Committee agreed that the astounding quality of these wild lands will make a fine addition to the new edition, which is scheduled for release in 2006. This was not an easy decision, because of ADK's long-held policy of describing only Forest Preserve trails in its Forest Preserve series of trail guides. Moreau Lake State Park's total current area of 4000 acres compares favorably with that of several units of the Forest Preserve.

***Above: Detail of woods along the Yellow Trails.***
***Below: Moreau Lake***
***Photographs by Bob Goodwin***

## And Now, For a Little History...

In 1998, the State of New York bought approximately 3200 acres of undeveloped land along both sides of the Hudson River in the Towns of Moreau and Corinth in Saratoga County, and Lake Luzerne and Queensbury in Warren County, to add to the existing acreage of Moreau Lake State Park. The Open Space Institute had purchased these new lands from the original owner, Niagara Mohawk, and held them for the 1998 transfer to New York State. Before this addition of new acreage, the land around the Moreau Lakes was essentially developed parkland, with boating available, swimming off a sandy beach, picnic tables and developed campsites.

Hikers and mountain bikers have been quick to discover the scenic and recreational value of these newly-available lands, especially the heights of the Palmertown Range south of the Hudson River. From rocky bluffs above the river, one gets spectacular views northward, about 800 feet above the northeast-flowing river.

Another view looks east toward the Green Mountains of Vermont, where Pico and Killington peaks can be spotted on a clear day. The interior land south of the bluffs holds interesting terrain, rocky, with streams flowing off the heights in several directions and covered with a thick second-growth forest, composed mostly of hemlock. A few ancient specimens of hardwoods remain on the bluffs. Gnarled chestnut oaks with their deeply furrowed bark are especially noticeable here at the near-northern limit of their range.

**The interior land south of the bluffs holds interesting terrain, rocky, with streams flowing off the heights in several directions.**

## To the Trails

Park authorities, with the help of volunteers from the local mountain biking club and some members of the ADK Glens Falls–Saratoga Chapter, have laid out and built a series of trails covering these new public lands. These trails form an interconnected network, making it possible for hikers to choose routes of varying distances and difficulties. To facilitate this, each trail has its own colored trail markers (yellow, orange, red, white, light blue, or dark blue). This concept works well if the hikers have a colored map of the park, which is available for $1 at the park entry station on Old Saratoga Road. We have indicated the colors of each trail by using letters on a black and white version of the map (Figure 1).

Of the five main trailheads, two are in the Moreau Lake developed portion of the park, where an entrance fee is charged during the summer months. The trailhead for one of the Red trails is located at the south end of Moreau Lake, across the road from an informal canoe launch area. The other, for the Light Blue trail, can be found at the back corner of the parking lots for the swimming area of the lake.

The other three trailheads have free access along Spier Falls Road. One that provides access to the mid-point of the Yellow trail is at the high point of the road just before it drops down to the Hudson River. A second one, for the Orange trail, is just beyond (upriver from) the parking area for the DEC boat launch area *below* Spier Falls (park out near the road). The last one is for the southwest end of the Yellow trail. This is just up the road (upriver direction) from a paved area next to a natural spring. It is also about a tenth of a mile down the road (downriver direction) from the DEC boat launch area *above* Spier Falls.

*Above: Flowers along the Yellow Trail.*
*Below: View from escarpment of the Hudson River, looking downstream toward Glens Falls.*

## A Favorite Hike

One can use the complex of trails to make an all-day tour of the top of the Palmertown Range, or to make a quick jaunt of less than an hour to reach a couple of the more beautiful cliff-top view points. One of our favorite hikes requires two cars and a shuttle. We park one car near the Orange trailhead and drive the other to the southwest end of the Yellow trail. We then start our adventure by following the Yellow trail

*Hudson River, as viewed from western end of escarpment. The river makes a sudden change in upstream direction from southwest to northwest.*

**Park authorities, with the help of volunteers from the Glens Falls–Saratoga Chapter, have built a series of trails that form an interconnected network; each trail has its own colored trail markers.**

to the premier lookout cliff, which looks down on the bend in the Hudson River. This is a climb of about 600 feet and takes us a little over a half an hour. Many people out for a brief jaunt turn around here and descend to their vehicle the way they came. However, we continue on this trail along the escarpment, stopping at a number of excellent lookouts until we reach the place where it first crosses the Orange trail. Here we take a left for a short walk out to the traditional lookout over Spier Falls Dam (see sidebar).

After a nice rest, during which we observe the hawks soaring above the cliff, we return to the Yellow trail and continue on it until it leaves the edge of the escarpment and crosses the Orange trail again. At this point we leave the Yellow trail and take the Orange trail down to our spotted car, having sampled the several great views of the Hudson some 800 feet below.

## And If You Don't Like *That* Route...

There are many variations to this theme that miss a couple of the lesser views, but sample the interior of the range. One of our favorites provides the first lookout described above, but then backtracks on the Yellow trail less than a tenth of a mile and joins the Dark Blue trail. We take it to the height of land where we find a junction with one of the White trails. We often take this White trail back over to the Yellow trail and continue as before. By going this way, we walk a little farther, but we avoid a 200-foot descent and ascent where the Yellow trail crosses one of the major streams coming off of the Hudson River side of the mountain. We like the way this trail passes around a number of the rocky prominences that are a signature feature of the Palmertown Range.

Sometimes, when we are feeling particularly energetic, we continue on the Dark Blue trail until it reaches a different (short) White trail junction. At the top of the hill on this White trail we step off the trail to the right to admire the very rugged rocky knolls in this area. We then continue a short distance to the intersection with the Orange trail, where we can decide to take it to the left, and go out to the Spier Falls

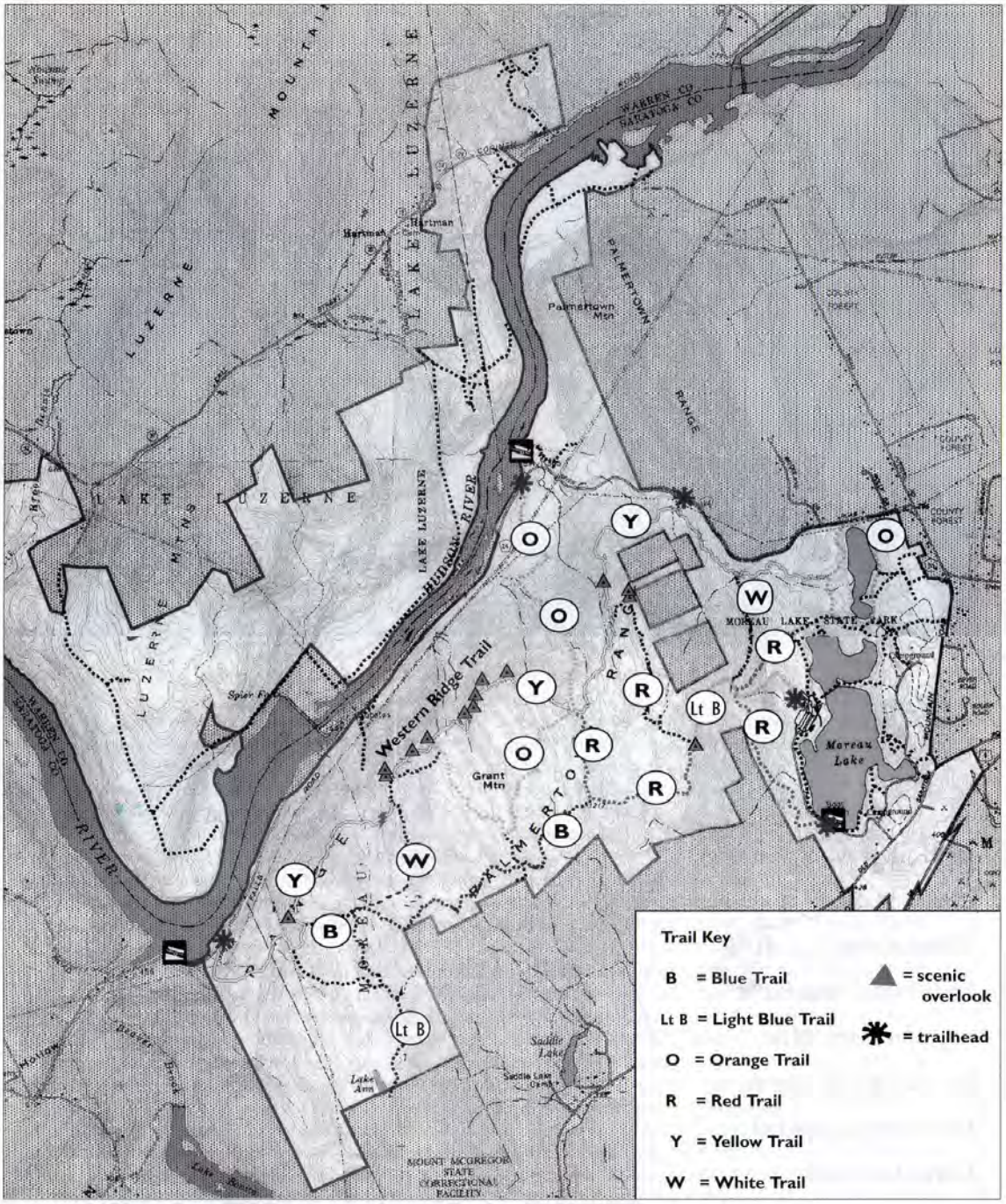
LAKE LUZERNE
LUZERNE MOUNTAINS
WARREN CO
SARATOGA CO
Harriman
Palmertown Mtn
PALMERTOWN RANGE
HUDSON RIVER
Western Ridge Trail
Grant Mtn
Moreau Lake
MOREAU LAKE STATE PARK
Saddle Lake
Lake Ann
MOUNT MCGREGOR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
Trail Key
B = Blue Trail
Lt B = Light Blue Trail
O = Orange Trail
R = Red Trail
Y = Yellow Trail
W = White Trail
= scenic overlook
= trailhead

*Figure 1*

*Snowshoeing is popular in the Moreau Park uplands, where one often encounters ice-covered cliffs.*

**The dappled lighting of a clear spring day after most of the snow has melted and before the leaves pop open is a very special time to visit Moreau trails.**

lookout and then continue on the Yellow trail, or take it to the right, and pass near the almost featureless actual summit of the range, known as Grant Mountain. (President Ulysses S. Grant died on the other end of the range, near the present-day Mt. McGregor prison.) We finally follow the Orange trail back down to a car at the Hudson River.

Several variations to these hikes lead to other interesting features, including the lookout above Moreau Lake at the end of the Light Blue trail. From here one can, on a clear day, see Pico and Killington Peaks in Vermont's Green Mountains. Because tree leaves obscure the view, summer is not the best time to visit this lookout. With the map that can be purchased at the park entrance, one can plan one's own adventure. Further help with specific routing suggestions and detailed trail descriptions will be forthcoming in ADK's Southern Region trail guide.

## A Park for All Seasons

Moreau is truly a four-season park. After the heart of the summer season, the park no longer charges an entrance fee. The campground and the beach are closed then, but hiking, biking, and boating continue. The dappled lighting of a clear spring day after most of the snow has melted and before the leaves pop open is a very special time to visit Moreau trails. You may hear the raucous noise of the "spring peepers" that inhabit many of the tiny kettle ponds sprinkled across certain areas of the mountaintop. A little later, the spring flowers and flowering trees appear. The best section for flowers is along the Yellow trail in the vicinity of the lookout of the Hudson River bend.

Fall colors in Moreau are just as brilliant here as they are elsewhere across upstate New York. Be aware that much of the area is open to hunting in the fall, so wear orange or red and watch for hunters.

The park entrance is open for parking in the winter. Many people use the relatively flat area around the lakes for Nordic skiing and ice fishing. We have seen an occasional skilled skier descending the trails on the Moreau Lake side.

For the most part, the upper part of the mountain is great for snowshoeing. In the later winter, or early spring, one will find ice falls at places on (and off) the trails where the sun has melted the snow during the day and then it has refrozen at night.

There are times and places where we advise the use of instep crampons.

## A Special ADK Introduction

ADK's Fall Outing this September will provide participants with an opportunity to explore the trails of Moreau, easily accessible from Exit 17 of I-87, south of the central gathering site in Lake George. The schedule calls for a led hike on Sunday into this area of the southern Adirondacks that few ADK members have seen. Interested readers may find this article with color pictures at http://www.adk.org/ad_mag/Moreau_Park_Hike.aspx.

*In addition to what they reveal about themselves in the first part of this article, the two authors have served the club for many years, Goodwin as a volunteer in many areas and Freeman as a volunteer, then an employee, and now a volunteer again. They express thanks to Margi Goodwin and Tillie Helms for their assistance in crafting the article.*

*The following is provided by editor/owner Mark Frost of the* Chronicle *of Glens Falls and his staff, as printed in his North Country ENTERPRISE magazine, Autumn 2001, and in a subsequent* Chronicle *story on Feb. 12, 2004.*

# History of the Spier Falls Dam

***Spier Falls Dam as seen from a view-point along the Western Ridge Trail.***

When the Spier Falls hydroelectric dam was completed on the Hudson River upstream from Glens Falls in 1903, it was the fourth largest dam in the world, the largest built by private enterprise (the Hudson River Power Company), and the largest in the world used to generate electric power. The brainchild of Eugene F. Ashley, a Glens Falls lawyer and entrepreneur, it was named for the head of the Glens Falls Paper Company, William E. Spier. Mr. Ashley was an attorney for the paper company, and became friends with Mr. Spier, who provided encouragement, friendship, and perhaps a loan of $150,000, though the loan cannot be confirmed. Most of the financing came from $5 million in bonds from the Boston banking house of E.H. Gay & Company, an astounding amount in 1900.

As many as 1700 people, many of them Italian immigrants, worked on the Spier Falls project. It is said that the stonework was so well done that it never needs repair. Constructing the 1,570-foot-long dam and its 50,000-horsepower (24,000-kilowatts) generating station was a massive and perilous undertaking. The dam is 157 feet high, 115 feet broad at its base, excavated to 64 feet below the riverbed and anchored to bedrock in an eight-foot trench carved into the rock. Ashley's company was careful for the workers' safety, with written warnings posted at points of special danger, paid doctors on hand, and beds reserved at the Glens Falls Hospital in case of need.

Nonetheless, seventeen workers drowned when a barge ferrying eighty-five workers across the river overturned in high water.

Power from ten General Electric generators was sent via transformers to transmission lines at 30,000 volts, then an unusually high tension for electricity producers. The transmission lines took electric power to customers downstream in the Hudson Valley, lighting homes and serving businesses from Glens Falls to Albany and Troy. The impact on these communities was large, accounting for an economic boon to the region. By 1907, Ashley had borrowed and spent $11 million and had stock outstanding of $16 million.

The Spier Falls Dam continues in operation today. The complex passed through several owners, ending up as part of the consolidation that formed Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation in 1950. In 1999, "NiMo" sold most of its hydroelectric facilities, including Spier Falls, to Orion Power Holdings.