

# Researching Adirondack Dick

By Scot H. Dahms

(1) As the search function on my vehicle radio kept looking for a station to stop on without luck, I was reminded of living in Montana and driving between Glendive and Glasgow. I thought that not being able to get in a radio station would only happen west of the Mississippi. I was wrong as I was in the Adirondacks of New York driving on Highway 2 west of Blue Ridge. Now I could say I had been in two places like that.

My trip to the Adirondacks was the culmination of a year of research leading to writing a book about Richard K. "Dick" Wood. In this issue of TRAPS, you will find an ad for the book titled Adirondack Dick. I read over 400 magazine articles and books with over 300 being written by Dick. I also looked at hundreds of photographs taken by Dick. Although I believed I had a very good understanding of the man and his life, I thought one part of my research was lacking and that was never seeing the area where he earned his namesake and lead to the title of my book.

In my research, I found that Dick's escapades in and around the Adirondacks was facilitated by the railroad. If the railroad had not been in place, I think Dick would not have done as much trapping as he did in the Adirondacks. Dick used the railroad to travel to several locations to trap and meet with trappers including Big Moose, Malone, Lake Placid, Racquette Lake and the Boreas River. His first trip to the Cold River area was initiated by reaching the end of the railroad spur at Lake Placid and then travelling by John Brown's grave on his first trip into that area. While trapping at Big Moose Lake, Dick used transportation by a train as part of his trapline. Dick took the train to the Big Moose River and followed that to Big Moose Lake to check his traps.

(2) My trip follows a path similar to the one Dick would have taken out of Utica to the Old Forge/Thendara train station. The train station is now a museum including information about trains in the Adirondacks. Train touring trips are available at this station. I did not have time to take one of the trips, but maybe I will in the future.

From here, I drove to the town of Big Moose. The train station had been converted into a restaurant. I found that the current station was not the one Dick

came through. The original station burned down in 1923 and this one was rebuilt in its place in 1926.

My next stop was Racquette Lake where Dick trapped with a fellow who had a cabin in the town. They trapped northwest of the town and stayed at a camp north of Shallow Lake.

One goal of my trip was to get as close to Duck Hole as possible. Duck Hole was a pond with a cabin by it which Dick and EJ Dailey utilized when they trapped Cold River. I was not outfitted for nor did I have the time to hike to Duck Hole which was seven miles from the end of the road. Maybe in a future trip. I took Highway 25 north out of Winebrook Hills to get there.

Little did I know the amount of history located at the end of this road. As I approached the trail head accessing the High Peaks Wilderness Area which includes Duck Hole, I was surprised to find a manmade structure. Out of the trees came this huge rock structure on the east side of the road with cut rocks on the other side of the road. (3) At first, I thought it was a rock piling for a bridge that had been torn down, but where would the bridge have come from and go to. I saw interpretive displays and found out that this was a huge furnace made to process iron ore mined out of the Adirondacks.

Construction for the furnace started in 1849 and was completed in 1854 at a cost of \$43,000. In 1855, the furnace produced 10 to 12 tons of iron a day operating around the clock. Transportation difficulties, lack of funds and a national recession caused the owners to cease operations. In 1857, flooding destroyed the dam and the furnace never fired again. Archibald McIntyre was one of the financial backers of the operation.

The Hudson River had been dammed for a power supply and the remnants of the dam and steel equipment are still in place. The building covering the rock furnace had extended over the road I had travelled to get there. The cut rocks on the other side of the road are where the building terminated.

I continued north on the road and found some old dilapidated houses. The area had gone through three stages. The first stage was the iron ore stage when the furnace was built along

with the houses for the people that worked at the furnace. The next stage was when the buildings were used as a camp by well-to-do families from eastern cities to enjoy nature, catch fish and hunt game. This stage was from 1876 to 1947. In late 1924 while Dick and his family were touring through the area, Dick made a comment about the camp. Dick's wife and child camped overnight at the small outpost while Dick and another person hiked in to Henderson Lake and camped. The third stage was the Titanium era which lasted from 1947-1963. Persons who worked at the Titanium mine in Tahawus lived in the camp.

The next day, I was at Lake Placid. Dick discusses going to the end of the railroad line at Lake Placid with EJ Dailey. From there they travelled into the Cold River valley and passed by John Brown's grave. Until I read Dick's article talking about passing John Brown's grave on the way in, I did not know where John Brown was buried, nor had really thought about it.

From here, I travelled to Duane and Malone. Note that Duane is Duane Center on current road maps. Dick had travelled there to meet with a couple of trappers in 1919. I stopped at the Franklin County Historical Society to see what information I could find there. I was able to get some information on one of the trappers that Dick trapped with.

(4) In many northern New York towns, I found it common for each town to use an old snow plow with the name of the town painted on it to mark where the road department was located. Duane was no different.

After leaving Malone and Duane, I travelled to the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake. The museum has several different buildings with different topics including all aspects of Adirondack life. I think the best was the logging displays. One interesting thing I learned from the logging displays was that a sled with water barrels with controlled outputs were used to build up the ice in winter to make it easier to haul the sleds with logs on them. Another interesting point was the amount of work they did at night to make the most of solid ice before it got melted during the day.

Logging, itself, is a dangerous operation, but logging at night on and around ice does not sound very appealing to me at all.

I was disappointed with the display on trapping. It was small and had an Alligator Trap marked as a tree trap. I filled out a comment card describing the incorrect information on the trap. They had some traps from French Louie and had a list of other donators. The museum also had some vintage firearms.

My path headed back north to Ogdensburg or more specifically north of Flackville. On the way, I stopped at Jo Indian Pond. EJ had had a trapping cabin there and Dick had taken some photographs of EJ's cabin and catches. I knew the chances of finding it or it still standing was slim to none, but stopped anyway.

(5) (6) An article in the May edition of the Watertown News discussed EJ and his old shop north of Flackville. I thought the town could not be that big, so it should not be too hard to find his old shop. I was correct as the town was only a cross roads. I travelled north out of town and found his shop and his old house. Both were in poor condition having not had anyone use them in many years. I was amazed that EJ could run a fur buying and trap supply business out of such a small building.

After taking a few photographs, I continued north to Lisbon and the Train Depot Museum. The Watertown News story said that EJ's business sign was now in this museum. The museum had a small display with some traps, EJ's packbasket and more recent articles written by EJ. I was able to get my picture taken with the sign.

(7) I travelled south again and stopped at the Little Falls Historical Society. I was able to get information about a person from the area that trapped with Dick. Before my trip, I had corresponded with the St. Lawrence County Historical Society and the Madison County Historical Society as well.

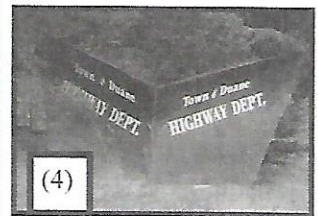
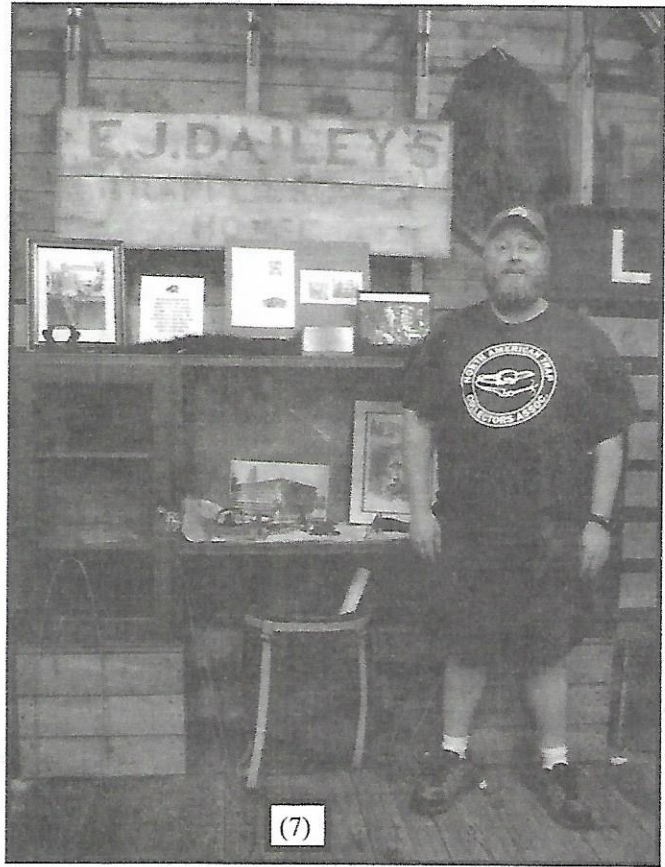
To conclude my Adirondack trip, I attended the New York State Trappers Convention in Frankfort over Labor Day weekend of this year. There was a memorial for Johnny Thorpe with pictures and other mementos. The shirt for the convention had a picture of Johnny on it giving the thumbs up. He was a fixture at that convention for years.

I headed home and was very satisfied with the information I collected on the trip. I made stops at several locations where Dick had traveled through including Big Moose, Racquette Lake, Lake Placid, Malone, Duane, Jo Indian Pond, Flackville and got within 7 miles of Duck Hole. I communicated with five historical societies and two museums before and during the trip. I learned some history about the area that I did not really comprehend or know including the importance of trains in the Adirondacks, the furnace, logging operations, and John Brown's burial site. Most importantly, I was able to see the area where Dick got his namesake and my book got its title.

If anyone has information contrary to what I have written here, I encourage them to email, write, phone or respond in the magazine.

References:

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