

Attack the 'Dacks

CHARMING LAKE PLACID HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE | BY PETER BRONSKI

ACCESSIBLE ADVENTURES

1 Summit the Empire State's tallest peak. At 5,344 feet, Mount Marcy reigns as New York's highest peak. From the Adirondack Loj trailhead at Heart Lake (operated by the Adirondack Mountain Club; www.adk.org), head for Avalanche Pass, stand atop the Empire State's mightiest mountain and return via the Phelps Trail and Marcy Dam for the quintessential tour-de-Marcy.

2 Climb the Chapel Pond Slabs. Rock rats have long been drawn to the flawless granite and jaw-dropping scenery of Chapel Pond Slab on Route 73. Classic multi-pitch routes like Empress (5.5, 700 feet) are popular with climbers of all levels, while Washbowl Cliff, Spider's Web and the Beer Walls provide more technical challenges. Enjoy the views of Giant Mountain across the valley and a post-climb dip in nearby Chapel Pond.

3 Paddle the original Adirondack "highway." Historically used by guides as a passageway through the Adirondacks, the Raquette River epitomizes the Adirondack flatwater experience. Start on Long Lake and voyage north by canoe or kayak along the Raquette River and the Saranac chain of lakes. Along the way, keep a watchful eye for iconic loons.

4 Run the Hudson River Gorge. The mighty Hudson River empties into the Atlantic Ocean alongside the concrete jungles of New York City, but the river starts its 300-plus-mile journey at Lake Tear of the Clouds, a tiny alpine lake on the upper ramparts of Mount Marcy. As the river tumbles out of the Adirondacks en route to the Hudson Valley, it drops into Hudson River Gorge and serves up 17 miles of Class III to Class V whitewater.

5 Tackle North Country singletrack. Adirondack Park saddles two-wheelers with a complicated regulatory system, but Whiteface Mountain (www.whiteface.com) simplifies the endeavor. Drop \$6 for a trail pass and ride the mountain's trail system, or spend \$19 more, get unlimited rides to the top of Little Whiteface on the Cloudsplitter Gondola and soak up all the downhill you can handle. Elsewhere, stick to areas designated as Wild Forest.



GETTING THERE Lake Placid is a five-hour drive from New York City (295 miles) and a little less than two hours from Montreal (110 miles). Lake Placid Airport offers Continental flights to many cities in the Northeast. Otherwise, the closest major airports are two to three hours away in Albany, New York, Burlington, Vermont, and Montreal. Whether you arrive by plane, train or bus, public transportation in and around Lake Placid is sparse, so be sure to reserve a rental car.

THE VIBE

Located along the shores of 137-acre Mirror Lake near the northern terminus of the Adirondack Mountains' High Peaks region, Lake Placid is the vibrant cultural hub of the Adirondack Park, a vast swath of New York State contained within what's locally known as the Blue Line. At more than 6 million acres, the Park is larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite and Great Smoky

Mountains national parks combined, earning its distinction as the East's greatest wilderness. The area's 46 peaks topping 4,000 feet, deep forest, countless lakes, rivers and backwaters and constitutional protection as "forever wild" might have something to do with it, too. ■ Lake Placid is picturesque and perennially bustling with tourists, Olympic athletes and enthusiastic outdoor adventure seekers, and makes the perfect base camp for excursions into the surrounding environs. The area features a tight-knit outdoor community, and premier adventurers of all ages call the region home — from twenty- and thirty-somethings like Jeremy Haas, a former editor of *Climbing Magazine*, to Don Mellor, a local legend who literally wrote the book on climbing in the 'Dacks. Its proximity to high peaks, plentiful lakes and rivers, and deep wilderness ensures that virtually every outdoorsman is a multi-sport athlete, equally adept with a paddle, rope, ski or bike.

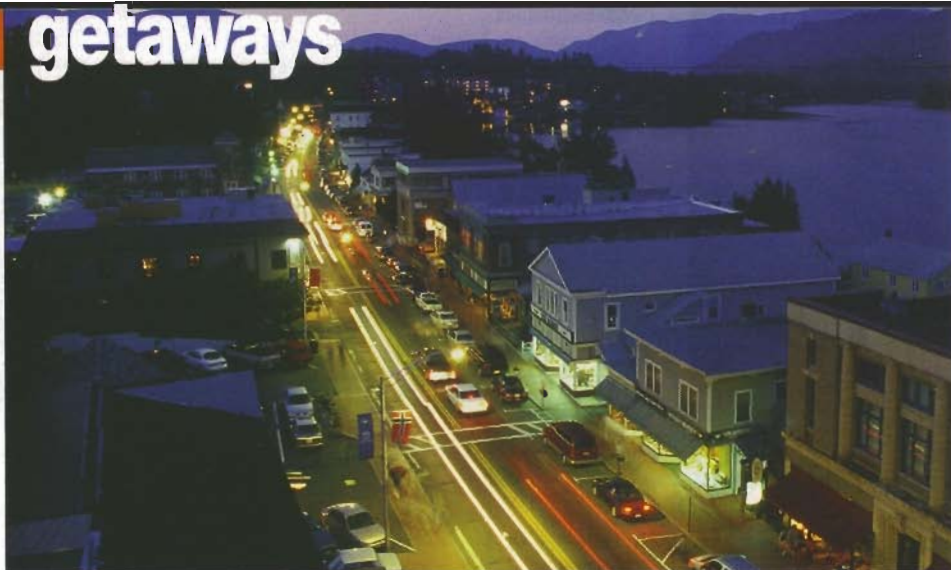


inside scoop

- As the host of both the 1932 and 1980 Winter Games, Lake Placid oozes Olympic history. Visitors can browse the Olympic Museum (518-523-1655, Ext. 226), or take a self-guided tour of the Olympic Center. Down the road at the MacKenzie-Intervale Ski Jumping Complex (518-523-2202), an elevator ride takes you to the top of the 26-story tower. The Verizon Sports Complex at Mount Van Hoevenberg offers a complex network of mountain bike trails and a trip on the "Summer Storm," a thrilling ride down the 1980 bobsled run with a professional driver and brakeman in a bobsled on wheels (518-523-4436).
- The Adirondack region is enamored of winter festivals. In mid-January, the Adirondack International Mountainfest brings slide shows and gear demos to town, as well as ice climbing and mountaineering clinics taught by world-renowned climbers such as Geoff Tabin, Kitty Calhoun, Steve House and Simon Yates. A month and a half later in March, the Adirondack Backcountry Ski Festival provides more clinics and tours. Both festivals are coordinated by The Mountaineer (www.mountaineer.com) and benefit local and national non-profit outdoor organizations. To get away from all the festivities in town, put together your own winter trip on the famous Jackrabbit Trail.
- December through March, dependably heavy snows keep winter adventures interesting. In summer months, temperatures typically peak in the mid-70s, while lows hover in the 50s. Black fly season doesn't end until mid-June, something not to be taken lightly when booking reservations.



► **main event** The 23rd annual Adirondack Canoe Classic will undoubtedly attract a diverse field of racers. Brian McDonnell, organizer of the three-day stage race, admits this is more of an event than a race. "You'll find there are a lot of people who are in this who have a lot of longevity with the race," says McDonnell. "There's a good community that has developed around the 90-miler." ■ September 9, families, solo kayakers, race veterans, eight-person teams in war canoes and top competitive paddlers will follow Native American trade routes from Old Forge, NY, to Saranac Lake Village, through a wealth of waterways, including Fulton, Eckford and Saranac lake chains and the Raquette and Saranac Rivers, with 10.5 miles of portaging dispersed throughout the 90-mile course. Frequented by wilderness guides in the late 1800s and extending into Maine, these are the original "highways" of the Adirondacks, and the first 90 miles of the 740-mile Northern Forest Canoe Trail. The 250-boat race limit fills up quickly in July, with a robust open touring (non-competitive) class, stock (wilderness expedition canoe) class and competitive class. Call (518) 891-2744 or check out www.macscanoe.com for more information.



Accommodations

For the ultimate experience in hospitality and comfort, relax at **LAKE PLACID LODGE** (Whiteface Inn Road; 877-523-2700; www.lakeplacidlodge.com; \$400-\$1,300) where you'll pay for what you get, and it's worth it. To be in the center of the action, and a short walk from downtown Lake Placid, **LAKE PLACID RESORT** (One Olympic Drive; 518-523-2556; www.lakeplacidresort.com; \$79-\$179), with over 1,000 acres of grounds, can't be beat. For a more rustic setting and authentic Adirondack experience, head to **ADIRONDACK ROCK AND RIVER** (Allstead Hill Lane; 518-576-2041; www.rockandriverr.com; \$45-\$90). Home of the Adirondacks' premier climbing guide service, ARR offers inexpensive accommodations in classic Adirondack lodges. Finally, for the perfect blend of wilderness and crea-

ture comforts, relax at **TRAIL'S END INN** (62 Trail's End Way in Keene Valley; www.trailsendinn.com; 518-576-9860; \$95-\$220). The inn's quaint setting and hiking trails out the back door make Trail's End popular with the outdoor crowd. Camping is available in the area from April through October.

Good Eats

For hearty steaks, ribs and Maine lobster, **THE GREAT ADIRONDACK STEAK & SEAFOOD COMPANY**, with patio dining during the summer, will satisfy the hungry customer (34 Main Street; 518-523-1629; www.greatadiron-dacksteakandseafood.com). A short walk away, **THE COTTAGE CAFÉ** (5 Mirror Lake Drive; 518-523-9845; www.mirrorlakeinn.com) features unsurpassed views of Whiteface Mountain and sunsets over Mirror Lake for lakeside ambiance and casual dining. To lunch with locals and outdoor folks who

are in the know, make the **NOON MARK DINER** (Route 73 in Keene Valley; 518-576-4499; www.noonmarkdiner.com) a mandatory stop. Named for the mountain that dominates the view from the valley, Noon Mark serves world famous pies, and its full menu is popular with outdoor enthusiasts. The **LAKE PLACID PUB AND BREWERY** (14 Mirror Lake Drive; 518-523-3813) is a popular night spot that offers superb microbrews upstairs and a lively scene downstairs at **P.J. O'NEILL'S** Irish pub. Named after the famous turns of the 1980 Winter Olympic bobsled run, **ZIG ZAG'S PUB** (130 Main Street; 518-523-8221) is another popular haunt with live rock 'n' roll music on many nights.

Top Shops

The most complete shop in the region, **HIGH PEAKS MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES** (331 Main Street; 518-523-3764; www.high-peaksma.com) covers all four seasons and every activity, from hiking and mountain biking to skiing and ice climbing. It also offers guiding services and hosts numerous events and how-to clinics. **PLACID PLANET BICYCLES** (51 Saranac Avenue; 518-523-4128; www.placidplanetbicycles.com) is the best place in town for bikes, accessories, trail maps and local trail knowledge. Stop by **THE MOUNTAINEER** (1866 Route 73 in Keene Valley; 518-576-2281; www.mountaineer.com) for hiking, climbing and camping needs.

// LOCAL HERO // Emilie Drinkwater

Last year 29-year-old Emilie Drinkwater placed first in her age bracket (women's) at the Whiteface Mountain Uphill Bike Race — eight grueling miles of eight percent grade up Veteran's Memorial Highway to the 4,867-foot summit of the Adirondacks' fifth-highest peak. Her first-place finish might not have raised eyebrows, except for the fact that she's not a biker. For the last six years, the Lebanon, New Hampshire, native has worked as a rock, ice climbing and backcountry skiing guide for Adirondack Rock and River Guide Services.

Since graduating from nearby Saint Lawrence University in 1998, Drinkwater has made a name for

herself in the Adirondacks as the consummate multi-sport adventure athlete.

"I could never see myself working in an office and any kind of indoor job," she explains. "I really need to be active."

Drinkwater's parents introduced her to the outdoors at a young age, skiing and hiking in New Hampshire's White Mountains, and during her high school years, she was a competitive Nordic skier. Her experiences at Saint Lawrence and in the Adirondacks forged her as an outdoor adventurer, she says.

Today, climbing and backcountry skiing rank as Drinkwater's pre-



ferred summer and winter sports. "I love the backcountry climbs, like Wallace, which is a good six-mile hike

in," she says of the tallest wilderness cliff in the East. "It's very much worth it once you're back in there. The climbing is so aesthetic and outstanding." Drinkwater is especially fond of Mental Blocks, a six-pitch 5.7a climb that features a Yosemite-like pendulum high on the face.

Lately, though, Drinkwater is more and more focused on racing, including the occasional Ironman and the annual Stowe Derby (a downhill ski race on cross-country skis).

"I haven't seen my future in [racing] yet," says Drinkwater. "But it's been good ... I really like it." If her race finishes are any indication, her future looks mighty bright. ■