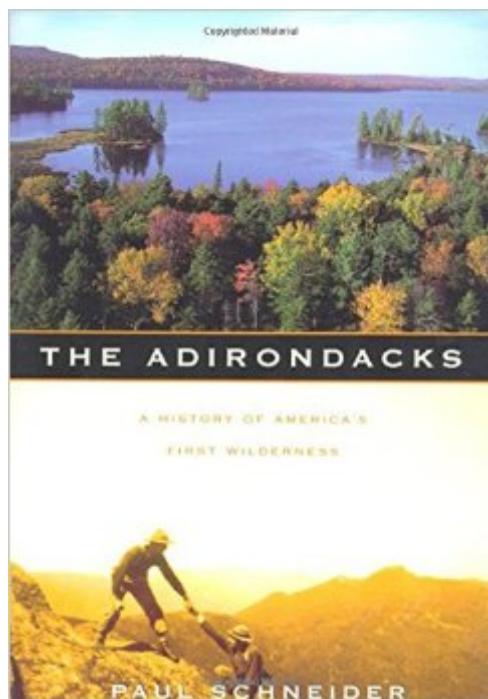


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The Adirondacks: A History Of America's First Wilderness



Synopsis

His book is a romance, a story of first love between Americans and a thing they call "wilderness." For it was in the Adirondacks that masses of non-Native Americans first learned to cherish the wilderness as a place of recreation and solace. In this lyrical narrative history, the author reveals that the affair between Americans and the Adirondacks was by no means one of love at first sight. And even now, Schneider shows that Americans' relationship with the glorious mountains and rivers of the Adirondacks continues to change. As in every good romance, nothing is as simple as it appears.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Lively and well written, Paul Schneider's *The Adirondacks* has appeared virtually simultaneously with Philip Terrie's *Contested Terrain*. Both are regional histories; either book well serves readers as an introduction. Those more familiar with the extensive Adirondack literature will not find the works redundant but rather complementary. Schneider is a journalist, whereas Terrie is a professor who writes more conventional history, largely recalling his own and other historians' previous narratives. Terrie's new survey is moderately revisionist, however, in concern for the ordinary people of the region. Although Schneider likewise repeats much familiar history, his journalistic slant conveys more immediacy. The strength of his work derives from personal interviews with many Adirondackers, well conveying deeply different values and agendas. Dating from 1991 through 1995, the specific issues may be dated already as news, but as oral history and a record of controversy Schneider's book will become a lasting addition to the Adirondack literature. ISBN 0-8050-3490-0

The title of this book, more than anything else, misses the mark here. "A History of America's First Wilderness" suggests a comprehensive history of key forces that shaped Adirondack geography and culture, and this book doesn't attempt to be that. Paul Schneider is a journalist, not an historian, and this difference in perspective is reflected in his writing. His book consists of a series of anecdotal essays, snapshots in time, with little thematic development, analysis, or reference across chapters. It's enjoyable reading and will give some insight into historical forces that have formed the ongoing battle in the Adirondacks over development, but better regional histories, such as Diana Muir's "Reflections in Bullough's Pond; Economy and Ecosystem in New England" probe deeper than "The Adirondacks" even tries.

Paul Schneider's *The Adirondacks: A History of America's First Wilderness* is both good history and great story-telling. Taking the region that is now the Adirondack Park from the first arrival of whites through the present, Schneider skillfully weaves together both present and past. For example, his chapter "The Prince of Otter China" tells about fur trapping today, and introduces the reader to several living "characters." Neighboring chapters then recount the history of trapping in the Park. Other groupings of chapters do likewise for lumbering, wilderness guiding, and mining. One "chapter" of the Adirondacks which he unfortunately slights are Dr. Trudeau and the tuberculosis "cure cottages" in and around Saranac Lake. This small quibble aside, I recommend this book to readers -- both New Yorkers /Adirondackers and general readers -- who want to learn more both about a specific, fascinating place and time and the idea of the American "wilderness" in general.

Bought this book as a gift for my husband. We love ADK and frequent the park multiple times a year. The book came in very good condition and arrived quickly. My husband finished it in a couple days, but did remark it was a bit dry.

This book was a lot of fun to read. The author interviewed loggers, trappers, environmental activists, and administrators and interwove their stories with historical accounts. This juxtaposition of modern and historical served to keep the perspective fresh and relevant. However, be advised that this book was probably not intended to be a comprehensive, scholarly history of the Adirondacks. There are gaps in the historical storytelling. The author rarely takes the perspective very far from New York State. However, it does provide a very readable background for the modern debate over the Adirondack Park.

I borrowed this book from my local library (an impressive feat of self-control, as I normally treat like a library!) and had high hopes for it. I am currently stationed on Fort Drum and fell in love with the ADK when I first moved here in 2010, so I have always spent time in the park and read as much about it as I can. I wanted to love this book, I really did. And it is easy to fall into, I limit myself to two chapters a night so I can draw out the pleasure of reading it. That said, there are problems with the book. For one thing, the author writes as if he expects us to know the park as well as he does, so sometimes his descriptions of places, people, and events are more succinct than they should be. For example, he devotes two paragraphs to the treatment of tuberculosis in sanatoriums in the park during the late 19th century, but more than one chapter on only four or five ADK guides during the same period. Since the sanatoriums spawned entire towns and industries around them, I would have preferred more time spent on that, or at least equal space dedicated to it. So it is a mix of too much detail and not enough. In short, if you live near the ADK, or in the park and know the area a little bit, this book will help you to understand the place better, and appreciate it more. If you have never been to the park, or you are an "armchair traveler", this may not be the book to start with, until you've learned more about the park elsewhere. I've lived here almost four years, and I've traveled all over the park, yet still I had trouble with some of his descriptions, and even of places I've actually been to. So read it, but take your time with it.

I've been a fan of the Adirondacks for many years. This book offers a concise and readable history of the region. I learned a great deal about the park. This knowledge will greatly enhance my future visits to the park. The author's interviews with local people and officials greatly added to the enjoyment of the book. If you have any interest in the Adirondacks, I highly recommend this enjoyable book. Happy reading!

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