

The Theodore Roosevelt's Adirondack Experience

The early years

Paul Smith's 1871

On Tuesday August 1, 1871, the Roosevelt clan gathered in New York City for the train ride north. Theodore Roosevelt, then twelve years old, kept a diary of the trip.

The gathering "comprised Uncle Corneil Roosevelt and his wife Aunt Laura, Uncle Hilburn West and his wife Aunt Susy, West Roosevelt (or "little Doctor" as we commonly called him), Father and Mother, my sisters Anna and Conie, my brother (Elliot)."¹

Corneil Roosevelt was Cornelius Van Schaak Roosevelt Jr. (1827-1887), brother to Teddy's father, and Laura Porter Roosevelt (1833-1900). Hilburn West was Dr. Hilborne West (1818-1907), friend of Theodore Senior and married to Susan Ann Elliot, half-sister to Theodore's wife Mittie. West Roosevelt was James West Roosevelt (1858-1896), son of Theodore Senior's older brother Silas and his wife Mary West Roosevelt. He was referred to as Jimmie or West in the diary and his grave marker is "J. West Roosevelt." Prophetically, the "little Doctor" West became a doctor.

"August 1, 1871. Lake George. We went by cars (railroad) to Glens falls and then took the stage to the William Henry Hotel on the shore of Lake George. Ellie (brother Elliott) and I had one room and Jimmie had another one right by us."

They spent two days exploring the area, including two mountain climbs and a steam boat ride up the lake. Teddy, ever the naturalist, named the animals they encountered using both their common name and Latin name.

"Plattsburgh August 4th/71. We started on the Minnehaha up Lake George... At the head or rather tail of this lake...we got off the steamer and took stagecoach. On the way to Lake Champlain, we passed Fort Ticonderoga...We arrived here (Plattsburgh) towards evening. The proprietor of the hotel gave us a cannon ball from the battle of Plattsburgh."

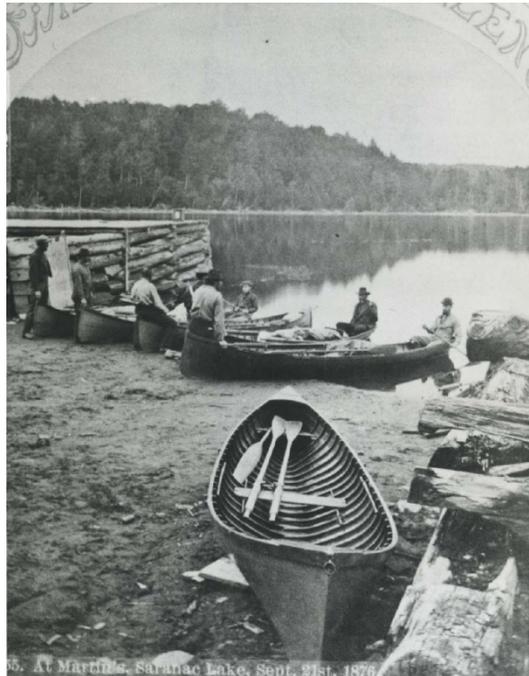
"Paul Smiths August 5th. This morning, we took cars (railroad) for an hour and a half and then got into two stagecoaches which our party about filled up... At Franklin (Falls) we stopped and had lunch... While we were waiting for this West and I went to see the falls...After lunch, I went to sleep and did not wake until we arrived at Paul Smiths after performing a journey of about sixty miles most of it by stage coach."

They spent seven days exploring the Paul Smiths area. Boating, fishing and mountain climbing.

On August 8th, a party consisting "of Father and guide Godfry in one boat; Uncle Hill and his guide Moses Sawyer in another one and we three boys and our guide Jake Hayes in another

one, camped four days “in the bush.” They returned August 11th from their camping expedition, and spent until Monday morning the 14th at Paul Smiths.

“Martins. August 14/71. We left Paul Smiths to day and came here. Ellie, Connie and part of the party went by stage coach; the rest of us went by boat. West and I with Jake in one boat, and started a long while before the rest.” They rowed through Lower and Upper St. Regis Lakes and then portaged into Big Clear Pond (Lake Clear) . They went down the outlet into Upper Saranac, through Round Lake (now Middle Saranac), and ran the rapids into Lower Saranac. At the other end of this lake was Martins.



Seneca Ray Stoddard photo of Martin’s waterfront in 1876.

“Lake Placid. August 15th/71 We came here by stage coach. Nothing remarkable happened while on the coach, but after we came here, West and I went out on a specimen hunt.”

On the 16th, they traveled back to Plattsburgh via Ausable Forks. There they caught the train to Plattsburgh. The next day they took a trip to the Ausable Chasm. On August 18th, they left Plattsburgh for Vermont.

Paul Smith’s 1874, 1875 and 1877

After an 1870 rapid increase in height when only eleven years old, Theodore’s father took him aside and stated: “Theodore you have the mind but you have not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must make your body. It is hard

drudgery to make one's body, but I know you will do it." Mittie, who was an eyewitness, reported Teddy jerking his heads back and replying through clenched teeth: "I'll make my body."²

Theodore Senior converted the second floor piazza to a gymnasium and encouraged Teedie to spend all his spare time out there exercising.³ This was the beginning of his strenuous life. What started out as drudgery, to a boy as hyperactive as Teedie, the work was both a release and a pleasure.⁴

He continued the routine for two years and his training weights continued to get heavier and heavier. The fall of 1872 interrupted this training, as the family sailed for Europe on October 16th. They would not return to the docks of lower Manhattan until November 5, 1873. The family returned to a new home at 6 West Fifty-seventh Street, and a fully equipped gymnasium on the top floor. Fifteen year old Theodore got right back to work building his body.

"In 1874 and 1875...his main interests continued to be study and exercise."⁵

"Not even his triumph in the preliminary Harvard entrance examinations of July 1875 was allowed to affect the inflexible program he had devised for himself. Four times a year he took a recess of a week to ten days, but even these breaks were doggedly purposeful: he would head for the lakes of the Adirondacks, or the woods of Long Island..."⁶

It was during these summer recesses of 1874 and 1875 that he returned each August to Paul Smith's, on his own as a youth.⁷ Then again, at the end of his freshman year at Harvard, he bolted north on June 21st with fellow classmate Henry Minot to Paul Smith's "so as to get the birds in as good plumage as possible."⁸ Roosevelt was back at his parent's Oyster Bay summer cottage, Tranquility, by mid-July. The result of these excursions to Paul Smith's was his first publication, *The Summer Birds of the Adirondacks in Franklin County, N. Y.* 1877. The four page booklet lists 97 species of birds he encountered in the four summerings at Paul Smith's.

Adulthood - married

The Santanoni Experience

When Robert C. Pruyn (1847-1934), President of the National Commercial Bank in Albany, encouraged by his wife Anna Williams Pruyn, decided to invest in wilderness property, he bought in the Town of Newcomb. On July 9, 1892, he purchased approximately 6,975 acres surrounding Newcomb Lake for \$18,000.⁹

His decision to buy in Newcomb was likely influenced by fellow Rutgers College classmate Robert Henderson Robertson (1849-1919). Robertson's father, Archibald, was one of the principals in the Adirondack Iron and Steel Company when it was organized in 1839.¹⁰ He had purchased a portion of original principal Duncan McMartin's \$20,000 shares after Duncan's

death in 1837.¹¹ Robert grew up in Philadelphia with this area of the Adirondacks as his second home. Born in 1849, his middle name was in honor of mine principal David Henderson who was accidentally killed in 1845. Later, on March 6th, 1877, Robertson was one of the founding members of the Adirondack Club, the predecessor to the Tahawus Club.¹²

Immediately after the purchase was complete, Pruyn hired Robertson as his architect on his new Great Camp Santanoni, named for a local mountain, Santanoni Peak (4,607'), visible from Newcomb Lake. Robert Pruyn had already selected the site for his camp on the east shore of Newcomb Lake, when he visited the property in June, so clearing of the land and construction started that summer.¹³ The camp was completed enough to have its grand opening May 22, 1893.¹⁴ The Pruyns continued to add property and by the end of the decade owned nearly 13,000 acres, which today are part of the New York State Forest Preserve.¹⁵

It was only natural for Robert Pruyn to invite the new occupant of the Albany Governor's Mansion, Theodore Roosevelt, to his wilderness estate. They likely knew each other from Roosevelt's previous time in Albany as Assemblyman. Roosevelt, being the outdoors man he was, gladly accepted. He and Edith left the children behind, ventured north, and signed the camp guest book on May 20th, 1899. They stayed until Monday the 22nd and in a letter written to Pruyn a week later he commented "I do not know when I have enjoyed forty-eight hours more."¹⁶



Chasing a porcupine – Santanoni May 1899



At the boathouse dock – Santanoni May 1899

Photos from the Adirondack Experience

1901

His next visit to the Adirondacks as Vice President in September 1901 was historic.

1905 – President Theodore Roosevelt

The Ladies Home Journal in October 1905¹⁷ published the following article on Pages 11 & 12

Why the President is SO Popular

By Lyman Abbott, D.D.

Illustrations from Photographs Taken for The Journal by Arthur Hewitt, with the Special Permission of the President

Arthur Hewitt was a professional photographer with his studio at 22 Twenty-First Street, New York, and has a collection of Roosevelt photographs in the Library of Congress. The following are Hewitt's photographs from the article. Although they were taken on Oyster Bay at Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill residence, the boat was an Adirondack guide boat built by John Henry Rushton in Canton, New York. Rushton, although known for his canoes, did make guide boats.



The president had likely first learned of guide boats in his youth at Paul Smith's, so it was only natural to have this light weight row boat as part of his fleet on Oyster Bay.

Endnotes – references to Bibliography

1. *Theodore Roosevelt's Diaries of Boyhood and Youth*, 1928, Charles Scribner's Sons; pages 241-255
2. *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, Edmund Morris, Page 60
3. *Ibid*, Page 60
4. *Ibid*, Page 61
5. *Ibid*, Page 76
6. *Ibid*, Page 77
7. Birds of ADK intro
8. *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, Edmund Morris Page 90
9. *Santanoni*, Page 33; Essex County Liber Book 103, Page 449.
10. State of New York Laws 1838, Chapter 158, Page 134. Other principals were his Uncle Archibald McIntrye and his brother-in-law Davis Henderson.
11. *The Story of Adirondac*, Arthur Masten, 1968 reprint of 1923 original; Page 81
12. *The Tahawus Club*, Arthur Masten, 1933; Page 63

13. *Santanoni*, Page 47
14. Ibid, Page 2
15. Great Camp Santanoni web site
16. *Santanoni*, Pages 126-127
17. *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1905 available on-line. The article does not explain the photographs and focuses on his political career, and accomplishments at this point of his second term in office.

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