

Adirondak Loj

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 13, 2012



The rustic Adirondak Loj is a historic gateway for hikers in the Lake Placid area.

Photograph by: Adirondack Mountain Club

Editor's note: Some of the details might have changed since the original publication date. Please check with the establishment before heading out!

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Lake Placid is a two-hour drive from Montreal. Take Highway 15 to the U.S. border, then Highway 87 to Exit 34 and Route 9N south to Route 73. The Adirondak Loj is eight kilometres from Lake Placid, off Route 73.

Adirondack Loj, 1002 Adirondack Loj Rd., Lake Placid, N.Y., 518-523-3441; private rooms cost about \$160 U.S. for two people, including breakfast; bunk rooms with six to 12 beds, about \$50 to \$65 per person, including breakfast. Dinner costs \$18.50. Takeout lunch costs \$8. Except during holidays, and high-season months (February, July and August), three meals daily are included on mid-week,

multiple-day stays. Campsites and wilderness cabins are available.

Adirondack Mountain Club's Heart Lake Program Center: 800-395-8080; www.adk.org.

As you drive deep into the woods around Lake Placid, N.Y., and arrive at the Adirondak Loj, you are greeted by a vintage log chalet set amid towering pines and beside a crystalline lake.

Come in. The living room is rustic, with a lived-in comfort. Everything is quite traditional and quintessentially Adirondack style. A birchbark chandelier gamely tries to brighten the dark pine walls. Handmade hickory furniture surrounds the stone-framed fireplace. Here and there, a sepia-toned photograph shows a landscape of mountains and forests. A moose head above the mantel surveys all comings and goings. Settle into a rocking chair, circa 1928, and grab the newsletter.

The newsletter is the first sign you're not in just any country chalet. It's an alert on Black Bear Preparedness. This is an authentic hikers' lodge, where the lore and chatter revolves around trail conditions, black flies and elevation gain.

The Adirondak Loj is at the heart of the Adirondack State Park, the largest protected territory in the United States outside Alaska. Operating under the motto "forever wild," the park restricts development with rules both large and small. For example, the park's footbridges have to be made of wood, not steel. And no motorized vehicles, or even bicycles, are permitted on its trails, meadows or mountains.

You might have noticed the unorthodox spelling of the Adirondak Loj. It's no mistake. Melvil Dewey, the inventor of the Dewey Decimal System of library classification, also created a method of simplified, phonetic spelling that seemed to catch on at the Adirondak Loj.

After check-in, there is enough time to unpack your gear and take a dip in tiny Heart Lake. The Loj's rooms are simply furnished, with cotton fabrics, a bedside lamp, a pine dresser and a choice of private accommodations or bunk beds. Backpacker-style, the bathrooms and showers are down the hall. What the Loj lacks in hotel amenities, it makes up with the spirit of the great outdoors.

"True, it's a rustic inn," said John Million, deputy executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club. "But the Loj is surrounded by a rare wilderness, and it is also the closest access point to the High Peaks mountain area. With the trailheads to Mount Marcy, Mount Van Hoevenberg and other major routes, as many as 75,000 people, mostly hikers, pass through this area annually."

Staying at the Loj can be as solitary or sociable as you want. Book a private room and explore the outdoors on your own. Or join guided activities - many are free - like birding, caving or the study of old-growth forests, wildflowers or wild edibles. Campfire nights often are held on Wednesdays. Barbecue suppers at the lakeshore on Saturdays are the place to review the hiking conquests of the day. Meals at the Loj are served at communal tables.

The hearty, homespun dinner costs \$18.50. Everything, including the bread and the strawberry shortcake, is homemade. At 6 p.m., a person walks through the halls clanging a loud supper bell, indicating dinner is being served family-style on indoor picnic tables. The menu changes nightly, but

you can expect nourishing soup, fresh salad and comfort-style main courses like meat loaf with mashed potatoes, lasagna or pork chops. Give the chef a heads-up before you arrive and you can have vegan or vegetarian dishes like a tofu cashew stir-fry.

From 5 to 7 p.m., the Loj also serves micro-brews from Cooperstown Brewing Co. in New York state and Swedish Hill wines from New York's Finger Lakes district.

The Adirondak Loj and the High Peaks Information Center, stocked with maps, books and last-minute equipment, are operated by the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), a conservation group with 30,000 members. Workshops focus on topics like natural history, tracking animals and rock climbing.

"We provide education to promote responsible recreation," said Ryan Doyle, the ADK's outdoor leadership coordinator. "We want people to go into the backcountry and enjoy Heart Lake and the hiking trails, but at their own ability and with some knowledge."

You won't need an alarm clock here. That clanging bell, for breakfast this time, resonates through the Loj at 7:15 a.m.

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