

# Wildlife without borders

■ Americans and Canadians hike the proposed route for an animal-migration corridor between the Adirondacks and Algonquin Park.

By Mike Lynch

John Davis was camping in the Five Ponds Wilderness in early October when he heard a large animal crashing through the woods. “My headlamp was not strong enough to see the animal, but I’m pretty sure it was a moose,” Davis recalled, adding that he saw fresh moose tracks in the mud the next day.

At the time, Davis was on a two-week trip on the U.S. side of the proposed Algonquin-to-Adirondacks Trail that would start in Newcomb and end in Algonquin Park. If it was indeed a moose Davis heard, that would be apropos: the idea for the A2A Trail was inspired by Alice the Moose, a seven-hundred-pound cow that journeyed from the Adirondacks to Algonquin Park in the late 1990s.

Davis started his trek at the Adirondack Interpretive Center in Newcomb on October 1 and finished fifteen days later on Wellesley Island in the St. Lawrence River. On the Canadian side, John Allport, a retired attorney, started the journey south from Algonquin before passing the torch to fellow trail supporters.

Right now, the A2A trail consists of 193 miles of hiking paths, fifty-six miles of rail trail, ninety-five miles along major roads, and 115 miles on back roads. The October explorations were a reconnaissance mission for the Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative, an umbrella organization that has about forty-five partners, including land trusts, environmental organizations, and recreation clubs.

The trail is the latest evolution of the Algonquin-to-Adirondacks initiative. In the 1990s, scientific studies showed the importance of the route between the two parks as a wildlife corridor, and wildlife advocates have wanted to protect lands between the parks ever since.

In 2014, the Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative took a big step when it hired its first executive director, David Miller. Around that time, the idea to create a trail linking the two parks developed, with the goal of promoting the ecological importance of the wildlife corridor. “The trail, I would say, is the part of our work that catches people’s imagination the most,” Miller said. “But really at the core of the A2A is the recognition of the importance of an ecological corridor that joins the two Parks.”

Miller said the wildlife corridor will become



PHOTO BY DAVID MILLER



PHOTO BY RICHARD GROVER

even more important in the future as the climate warms and wildlife seek refuge farther north. “Having that north-south [corridor] is going to be really important,” he said.

A2A’s immediate goal is to draw public atten-

tion to the trail, although Miller says the route won’t be completed for years to come. Wildlife advocates see the trail as something users will explore one segment at a time rather than in one big push. It will also teach users about natural history. The segments will include portions that are hiked, cycled, and paddled.

Davis hiked from Newcomb to Long Lake before getting a ride to Little Tupper Lake. From there, he paddled a route (with portages) that took him to Lake Lila and thence to Lows Lake and the Middle Branch of the Oswegatchie River. Once he left the Adirondack Park, he mostly cycled.

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After leaving the Park, Davis traveled on a hybrid bike. “I was mostly bicycling via dirt roads and sometimes paved roads, little country roads. It’s very nice bicycling. It’s safe, relatively safe terrain, there’s very little traffic. It’s really scenic.

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There are little towns along the way where you can replenish supplies or even stay. It's an area that both inside the Park and outside the Park really lends itself to light ecologically minded, human-powered tourism."

In Canada, meanwhile, John Allport spent time walking on back roads, major roads, and abandoned rail lines. He said this part of the route wouldn't have the draw of hiking trails with mountain vistas, such as exist in the Adirondacks, but it will immerse the traveler in the natural world. "It's more likely to be used for day trips than for extended adventure hikes," he remarked.

Allport said the rail trails south of Algonquin Park pass through sparsely populated country and don't see much traffic from hikers and cyclists. "I think it's more known to the hunting and snowmobile crowd," he said. "Those rail trails are accessible to ATVs and snowmobiles, but again in the seven days I was out there, including three of the days exclusively on rail trail, maybe I only saw four ATVs and a couple of people on bicycles."

Allport hiked roughly twenty-five miles a day for seven days and stayed at motels in towns,

partly to save time setting up a campsite every night. There are no developed campgrounds or campsites now. He biked another thirty miles over two days. He said much of the terrain could be ridden by cyclists if the trails were improved.

Whether or not to create campsites on the trail is an issue the trail organizers will have to grapple with in the coming years. Now that the reconnaissance is over, A2A plans to move into the next stage of development. That will include moving some sections off major roads to back roads, relocating other sections, putting up trail signage and markers, fund-raising and marketing, and developing an online map and resources.

Next year, the organization hopes to hold another end-to-end hike with more involvement from local schools, hiking clubs, and organizations.

"With the reconnaissance hike we stayed under the radar a little bit, and that was partly by design because we didn't know what we would find," Miller said. "Now that we know, we'd like to do it again with more community involvement." ■



PHOTO BY JEFF NADLER

Davis saw many signs of moose inside the Adirondack Park.



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