

A worthwhile trip

Kane Mountain's four-season luster

BY LISA BALLARD

I wanted to climb Kane Mountain (2,180 feet) near Caroga Lake, but it was a haul to get there from my house on Chateaugay Lake. The two lakes are 200 miles apart, about as distant as you can get from north to south and still be within the Blue Line. Sometimes the sheer vastness of the Adirondack Park limits my willingness to explore its backcountry bounty.

"You Kane do it," quipped my husband, Jack, who hankered for an outing.

"But it's almost four hours of driving each way for a hike that might take an hour and a half," I sighed, but that little mountain had persuasive pull. I had only hiked it once, a dozen years ago while writing my book, "Hiking the Adirondacks." I loved the hike for the 60-foot-tall fire tower on its summit.

Since then, things had changed. The South Trail, which I had trekked up, was no longer open. In 2018, the landowner closed the property to the public. On the bright side, a loop was possible using two different trails. I was curious, but that long drive...

"Whatever happened to your Kane-do at-

titude," teased Jack. We put our packs in the car and headed south.

Kane Mountain crowns the northwestern side of Green Lake in the Shaker Mountain Wild Forest, a 40,527-acre tract best known as the southern terminus of the Northville-Lake Placid Trail. It's also the southernmost unit in the Adirondack Park, period, which makes it a popular spot for casual hikers from the Capital Region.

Nowadays, one can ascend a mile on the East Trail or the 1.5 miles on the North Trail which is also on the east side of the mountain but further north of the East Trail. We took the East Trail up, because it would get us to the top quicker, and went down North Trail, more joint friendly.

The broad East Trail headed northwest, climbing steadily on a moderate grade. While some rocks and roots littered the trail, the footing was generally good as we passed through a forest of birch, maple, poplar and scattered hemlock. Some of the trees grew atop the boulders, reaching down the rock with their roots like landlocked octopi.

A quarter mile from the trailhead, the route climbed a couple of short, steep sections. A

little higher, we crossed a stretch of bedrock and then the path became rougher and more eroded. We approached sparse woodland and reached the fire tower. It was a short, moderate climb from the car, barely a warm-up compared to many hikes in the Adirondacks but enjoyable just the same.

There was no view from the base of the fire tower, which was anchored to bedrock and surrounded by hardwoods. We dropped our packs at its base and made our way up the six dizzying stories to the metal cabin in the sky. Kane is not the highest point in the Shaker Mountain Wild Forest. Pigeon Mountain (2,789 feet) is, but Kane's fire tower is the pinnacle of these wildlands for its outstanding 360-degree view especially to the south, which included the Catskills, sizable Canada Lake and the Mohawk Valley.

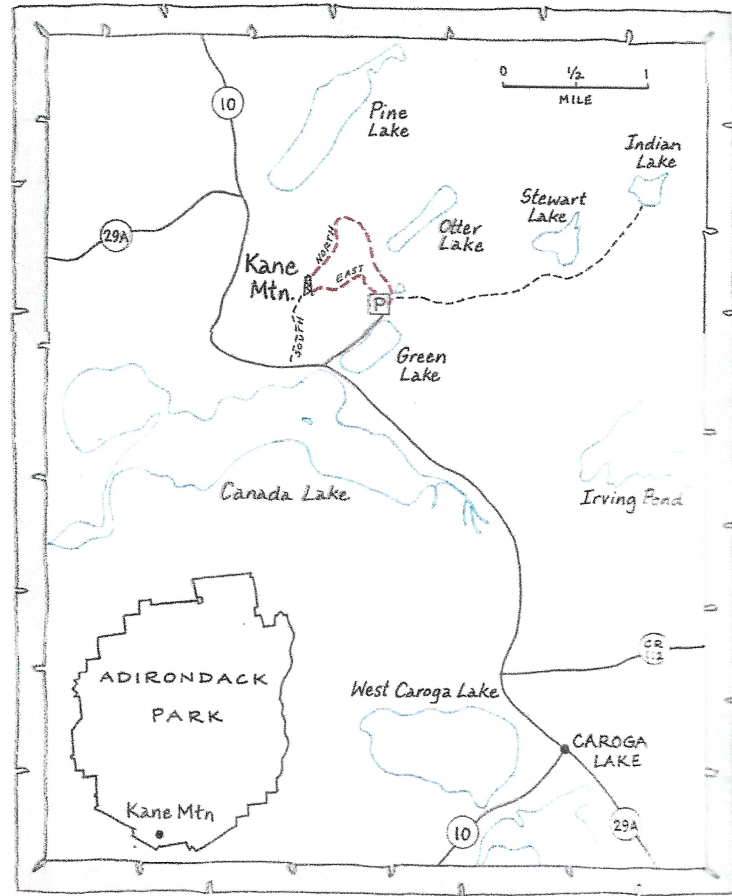
Built in 1926, Kane's tower was manned until 1988. Even in its early years, it was a popular destination for hikers, though ironically, many were afraid to climb its airy steps.

"I've had 1,500 visitors since May. Most people will climb the precipitous sides of Kane Mountain but are afraid to go [60] feet high into the observation tower," said James Luff



Kane Mountain firetower.

PHOTO BY JOHNATHAN ESPER



MAP BY NANCY BERNSTEIN

the fire watcher in 1932 in an interview with *The Daily Observer*, a former Canandaigua newspaper. Apparently, most visitors back then were happy to see the tower from below and then have a picnic in the grassy clearing by Luff's cabin.

After the state abandoned the fire tower, it fell into disrepair, and the watcher's cabin became a canvas for graffiti. In 2003, the Canada Lake Protective Association and state Department of Environmental Conservation restored the tower and painted the cabin. The association continues to maintain both structures. The tower is on the National Registry of Historic Places.

After ogling the view, we donned our packs and took the North Trail down. At first, it passed over more slab similar to the top of the East Trail, but soon, the path turned muddy, something for which Kane Mountain has a reputation. After passing two giant boulders, the trail also got noticeably steeper in spots, but nothing extreme.

Suddenly, a white-tailed deer bounded off to our right, flagging its white tail. The rustling startled me. As my heart rate subsided, I noticed acorns sprinkled across the trail like hundreds of oversized ball-bearings, not easy to walk on but a dining delight for a deer.

The North Trail was narrower and less worn

than the East Trail. It spilled down the mountain in waves for a half mile. At a T lacking a sign, we intuited a right turn, since that was the direction of our car.

The path climbed a little, leveled off, then continued gently downhill as the forest thickened around us. We crossed another mudhole on stepping stones, then came to a second T at a woods road. We took another right, immediately passing the trail to Stewart and Indian Lakes. We were back at the parking lot a few steps later, a total of 2.3 miles on our hiking boots for the day.

On the drive home, we had time to ponder the relatively easy hike. Was it worth the road-trip? Absolutely! The view from the fire tower was superb and different from the views from fire towers in other parts of the park. And we always welcomed the exercise and the chance to wander through pretty woodlands. It's a kid-friendly and dog-friendly climb that can be done year-round. We might go back this winter, and do it again with snowshoes. I must have a Kane-do attitude after all. ■



LISA BALLARD is a Chateaugay Lake-based author who contributes to numerous national and regional publications.