

KRAIG ADAMS

Adirondack High Peaks Hiking Guide

Mount Marcy and Algonquin in 2 days, plus my 3-day traverse

2027 season edition · updated October 2026

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Welcome

In early October 2020 I hiked a loop over the two highest mountains in New York, alone except for my parents' yellow lab, Shia: from the Adirondak Loj at Heart Lake up the Van Hoevenberg Trail to the summit of Mount Marcy, down the west side past Lake Tear of the Clouds to a lean-to at Lake Colden, then up the steep side of Algonquin Peak and back down to the Loj. Two days, about 18 miles on my GPS. It's the trip from my film Hiking the Mount Marcy Loop in the Adirondacks.

The Adirondack High Peaks are a place I've been to multiple times, and I'll probably visit every fall or summer for the rest of my life. I grew up about five hours away in New York State, and I've been going there since I was a kid. I've probably been over Mount Marcy six or seven times now. It's a special place.

This guide also has another trip I filmed here: three days in September 2019 from Keene Valley over Mount Marcy and Mount Marshall to Heart Lake, then a road walk into Lake Placid, from my film Hiking in the Adirondacks New York.

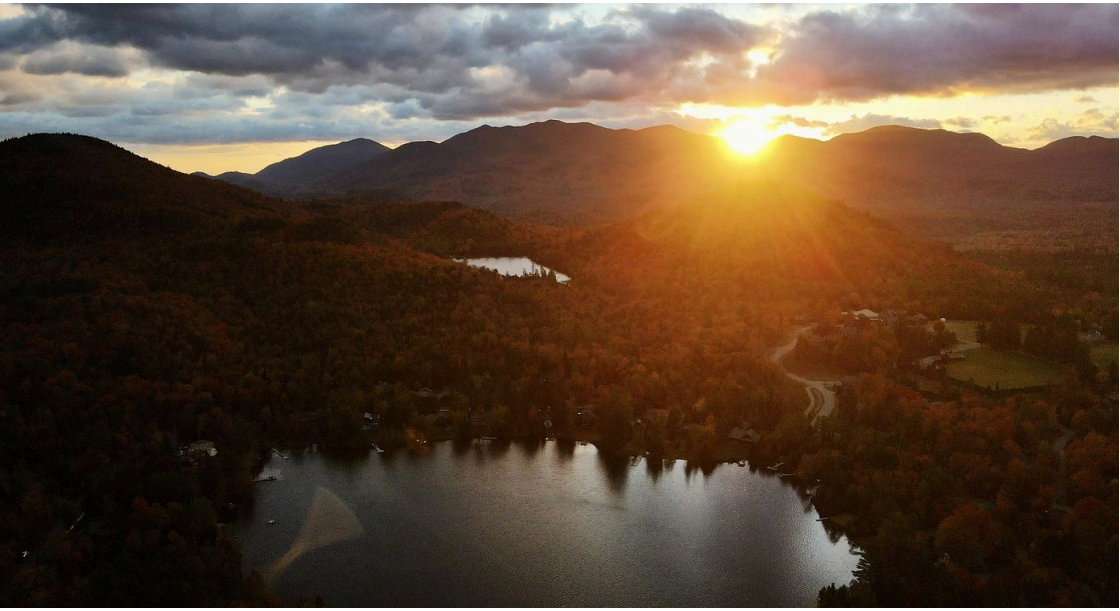
What's inside

- Straight answers to the questions people ask about Marcy and the High Peaks
- When to go, the High Peaks rules in 2026 (bear canisters, groups, camping, fires, dogs), and getting to the Adirondak Loj
- Both days of the loop: my notes, the trail, where to get off, a map with an elevation profile, and links to that day in my film
- My 2019 traverse from Keene Valley, with its own map, and what has changed on that route since
- Other ways to do it, where I slept, food and water, hiking with a dog, what I paid and gear for this route
- Weather and safety, one page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps while you still have a signal in Lake Placid: don't count on a phone signal on the trail. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Rules, closures and fees change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these.



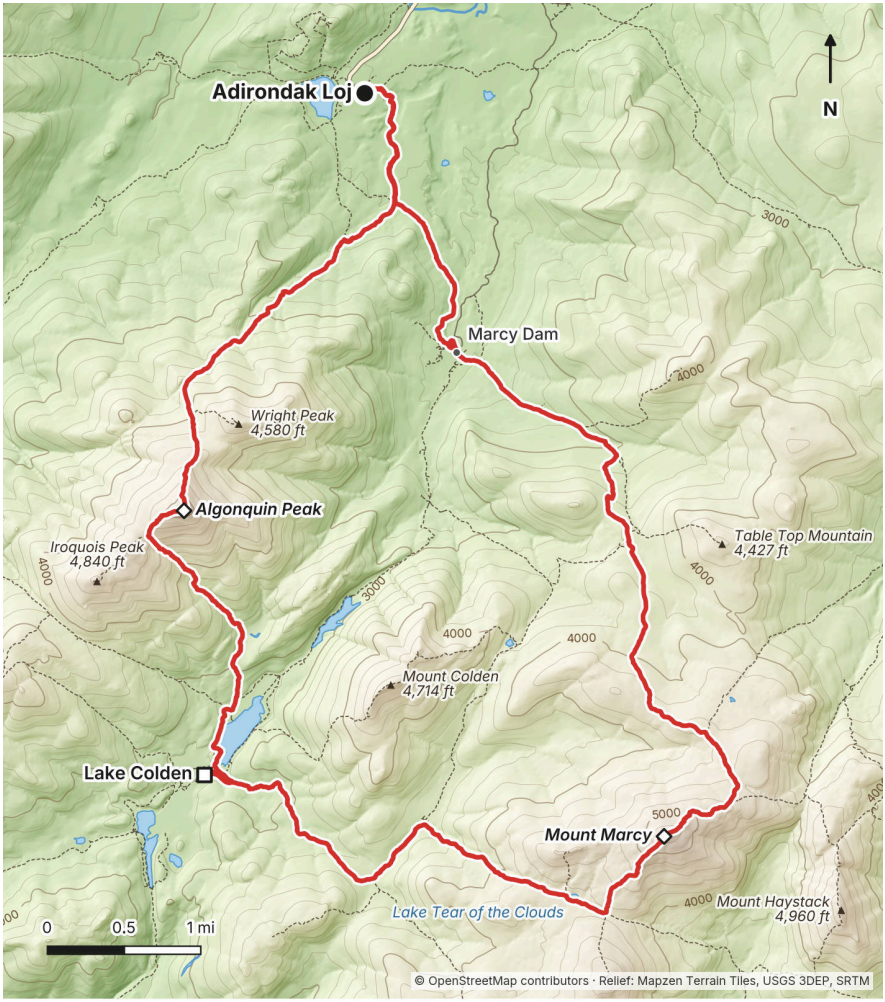
Sunrise over Lake Placid from my drone, the morning I started. Drones aren't allowed in the wilderness; this was taken over the village.

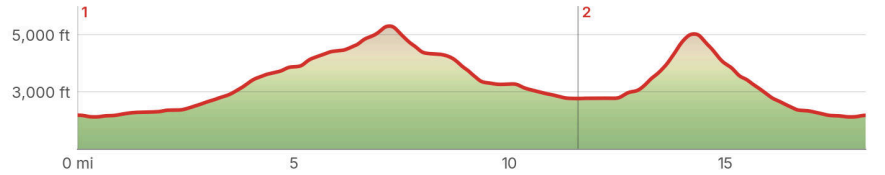
At a glance

QUICK FACTS	
Distance	18.3 miles (29.4 km) on my GPS, a loop from the Adirondak Loj. I called it "the 22-mile loop" in the film
Climbing	about 5,760 ft (1,755 m) up and the same down
Days	2. I did 11.6 miles on Day 1 and 6.7 on Day 2
Start and finish	The Adirondak Loj trailhead at Heart Lake, about 9 miles by road from Lake Placid
High points	Mount Marcy, 5,344 ft, the highest point in New York (Day 1); Algonquin Peak, 5,114 ft, the second highest (Day 2)
Low point	About 2,090 ft, near the Loj. My camp at Lake Colden: about 2,760 ft
When	I went October 1 and 2, 2020, in the fall color
Difficulty	Not long, but rocky, rooty, wet and steep. Both summits are open rock above the trees
Permit	None, but sign the trail register. A hard bear canister is required for overnight trips from April 1 to November 30 (2026)

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Adirondak Loj over Mount Marcy to Lake Colden	11.6 (18.7)	3,351 / 2,764	Opalescent Lean-to, Lake Colden
2	Lake Colden over Algonquin Peak to the Adirondak Loj	6.7 (10.7)	2,407 / 2,994	Home

The numbers are from my own GPS, smoothed the same way every day (see Using the GPX files).





My loop: south from the Adirondak Loj over Mount Marcy, west to Lake Colden, then north over Algonquin Peak back to the Loj. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Straight answers

How many days do I need? I did it in two: 13 miles summiting Mount Marcy the first day, as I put it in the film, and only 8 back out to Heart Lake over Algonquin the second (11.6 and 6.7 on my GPS). I think it's a good loop most people can do; you just have to be prepared for the weather. If you want an easier time, take three days and spend two nights at Lake Colden. See Other ways to do it.

How hard is it? Harder than the miles look. If you watch my videos you're probably thinking that's not that many miles for a full day of hiking, and that's the thing about the Adirondacks: it's tough to do more than 15 miles in a day. It's so dense and wooded and muddy and rocky. The climb up Algonquin from Lake Colden is the steepest part: about 2,300 ft in under 2 miles on my GPS.

Do I need a permit? No permit or reservation for the High Peaks Wilderness in 2026. You do sign in at the trail register at the trailhead. There's no quota yet, but a state study recommends limiting the Loj's road to about 400 visitors a day from 2027, possibly with permits (see Permits and rules).

Do I need a bear canister? Yes, for any overnight trip in the Eastern High Peaks from April 1 to November 30. It has to be a hard canister. In 2019 a ranger told me bears can crack the clear one I'd bought (see Permits and rules).

Where do I park? At the Adirondack Mountain Club's lot at the Adirondak Loj. In 2026 it's $25 a day for non-members, or $120 for a multi-day or full-week stay, and it fills early. In 2020 I paid about $10 for two days.

Can I have a campfire? No. Campfires are banned everywhere in the Eastern High Peaks. Bring a stove.

Can I bring my dog? Yes, on a leash. In the Eastern High Peaks dogs must be leashed at all times. Shia came with me in 2020. See Hiking with a dog.

Where do I sleep? Lake Colden has lean-tos and designated campsites. I slept in the Opalescent Lean-to. Lean-tos are first come, first served, and you share them.

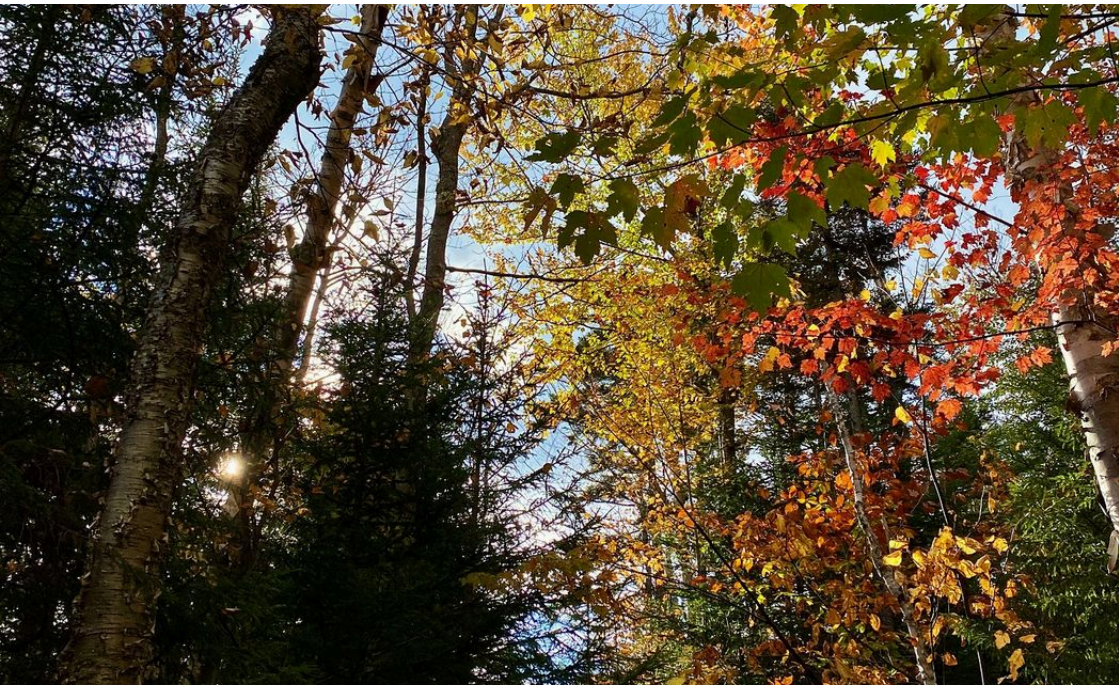
Which way should I go? I went over Marcy first, so the longer day came first and I climbed up Algonquin's steep Lake Colden side. Going the other way, you'd go down that side instead.



Shia on the open rock of Algonquin's Lake Colden side, near the top, in the fog, Day 2 mile 2.4.

When to go

Fall. I did this hike the first week of October. The first, second and third weeks of October are peak for fall, and you're going to get those burnt orange, amber, red and yellow leaves. It's different at different heights: the valleys are a bit different than up in the mountains. I LOVE NY's foliage report had Lake Placid at peak for September 30 to October 6 in 2026.



Fall color on the trail past Marcy Dam, Day 1.

Summer. My 2019 trip was in early September. It rained the first day, and that made the trails very muddy.

Weather. The Adirondacks almost have their own weather system. Rain can come in out of nowhere, and it can be beautiful on one side and rainy on the other. That's what I got in 2020: blue sky on Marcy, and on the second day rain, then sun, then rain again. In October it can be below freezing on the summits; check the mountain forecast (see Weather and safety).

Hunting season. October is hunting season in the Northern Zone: bear from September 19 to December 6, 2026, and the regular deer season from October 24. Wear something bright orange, and put an orange vest on your dog.



Blue sky on Marcy: Shia on the rocks just below the summit, Day 1 mile 7.5.

Permits and rules

These are New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) rules for the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness, checked on DEC's own pages and in the regulation (6 NYCRR 190.13) on October 1, 2026. The whole loop and my 2019 route are in the Eastern High Peaks.

Permits. None for hiking or camping in 2026, and no fee. Sign in and out at the trail register so people know where you went in and came out; the rule is to sign every DEC register you pass. In April 2026 DEC released consultants' visitor-use reports for the High Peaks and asked for comments. For Adirondack Loj Road (the Loj and South Meadow trailheads) they recommend a limit of about 400 visitors a day, by managing parking or with a hiking reservation system, and press reports on the full report say it suggests parking attendants and permits there Thursday to Sunday, June to October, starting in summer 2027. In June 2026 DEC said no policy changes were anticipated, and it hadn't adopted the recommendations by October 2026. If you're going in 2027, check DEC's High Peaks page for a permit or parking reservation.

Group size. At most 15 people on a day trip and 8 overnight. DEC doesn't give permits for bigger groups here.

Bear canisters. Required for overnight campers in the Eastern High Peaks from April 1 to November 30: all food, garbage and toiletries, in a commercially made hard canister. Bag hangs don't count. DEC warns that bears here "have regularly defeated bear-resistant canisters made of clear plastic." In 2019 I went to REI right before the trip and bought one of the clear blue smaller ones, thinking it would be okay. On the trail a ranger checked my bear canister and told me that bears can open and crack those. You really need the heavy-duty ones: the big, thick black plastic canisters you can rent. See Getting there for where.

Camping. No camping above 4,000 ft, and between 3,500 and 4,000 ft only at designated sites. Use designated sites where you can, and pitch within 15 ft of the site's DEC disk; anywhere else, camp at least 150 ft from any road, trail or water. No camping on summits. From South Meadow to Flowed

Lands, which takes in Marcy Dam and Lake Colden, the regulation keeps camping to designated sites once DEC has marked them all, and you must follow its posted camping signs. At Lake Colden there are lean-tos and designated sites.

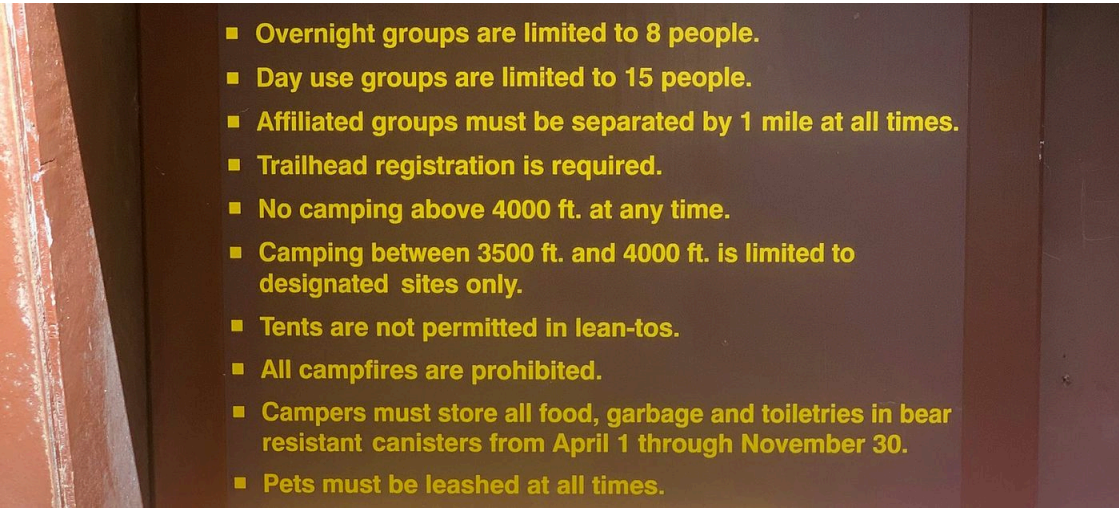
Lean-tos. First come, first served; they can't be reserved. Share them until they're full, normally 8 people. No tents inside a lean-to, and DEC says to pitch tents at least 150 ft from one.

Fires. No campfires anywhere in the Eastern High Peaks. Carry a stove.

Dogs. Leashed at all times in the Eastern High Peaks, never left alone, and carry proof of your dog's current rabies vaccination.

Other rules. No drones, no bikes, no glass containers. Quiet hours 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. As I said in 2019: this is a wilderness, so that's no drones, no fires, and you sign in and out. Leave no trace. Just know the rules, and please respect these places. A DEC sign at the trail register at Heart Lake lists the same rules.

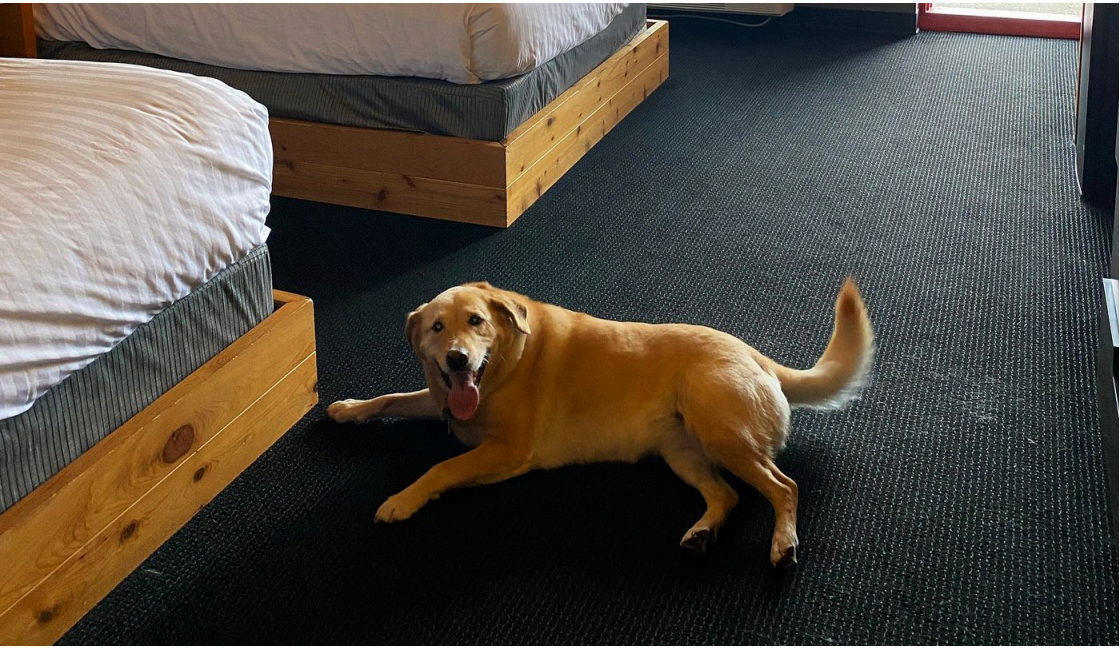
Above the trees. Marcy and Algonquin have rare alpine plants on their summits. Summit stewards ask you to walk only on bare rock.



The rules on the DEC sign at the trail register at Heart Lake, September 2019. They're still the rules in 2026.

Getting there

My way in, 2020. I drove, with Shia, who doesn't really get out hiking that often, so she was a little skeptical of the long ride all the way to the Adirondacks. The night before, I stayed where I always stay, the Lake House in Lake Placid. It's a great spot, and they allow dogs; they welcome dogs. I picked up little booties for Shia, but after trying them on in the hotel room she did not like them at all, so we ditched that. That was a bad idea. In the morning I drove to the Adirondak Loj, paid for parking, checked in at the log book and started hiking.



Shia in our room at the Lake House in Lake Placid, the evening before.

My way in, 2019. I almost always find myself taking the train or bus up from New York City at least once a year to hike. In 2019 I came up on the Friday (my photos pass the Saratoga Springs train and bus station that afternoon) and started walking from Keene Valley on the Saturday morning. Exactly how I traveled isn't in my records.

By car. The Adirondak Loj is at the end of Adirondack Loj Road, which leaves Route 73 between Lake Placid and Keene. From the trailhead to the village of Lake Placid it's about 9 miles on the road; I walked it in 2019 (see My 2019 traverse).

Parking at the Loj (2026). The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) runs the lot: non-members $25 a day, $15 for a half day (after 1 p.m.), $120 for a multi-day or full-week stay; ADK members $10, $6 and $50. ADK's page doesn't say how a one-night trip is charged, so ask at the booth. ADK says its lots often fill before 6 a.m. on summer weekends and before 9 a.m. on weekdays. When they're full, ADK sends overflow parking to the lot at the end of Meadows Lane or the right side of Adirondack Loj Road from Meadows Lane toward Route 73 (about a mile), so you add a walk; there's no parking on the Loj Road between the booth and Meadows Lane, or along Meadows Lane. In 2020 I parked my car for two days for about $10 ($7 if you're an ADK member, I think it was).

Without a car (2026). Amtrak's Adirondack runs every day from New York to Westport, but its October 2026 timetable lists no bus on to Lake Placid, so you'd need a car service. Adirondack Trailways runs buses from New York's Port Authority to Lake Placid, about 10 hours with a change. Cape Air flies from Boston and New York JFK to Saranac Lake, about 20 minutes from Lake Placid. From Lake Placid to the Loj you need a taxi or car service: Lake Placid's visitor site lists a few, but no scheduled shuttle to the Loj, and says rides are sparse even in peak season, so book ahead.

Bear canisters. The High Peaks Information Center at the Loj rents them and sells maps and supplies (2026). It opens at 7 a.m. on weekdays and 6 a.m. on weekends, so for an early start, rent your canister the afternoon before. In 2020 I rented mine in Lake Placid at Eastern Mountain Sports. It was cheap: less than $20 for three days. Whether the Lake Placid EMS store still rents canisters wasn't confirmed in October 2026; call first.

The Adirondak Loj. I don't even know what "Loj" stands for, but there's a lodge, a gift shop and a small grill where you can get a delicious hamburger. ADK also runs a campground and the High Peaks Information Center there, and its food stand by the information center is the Hungry Hiker.



Shia at the Loj after the hike, Day 2.



The view from the summit of Mount Marcy, Day 1.

DAY 1

Adirondak Loj over Mount Marcy to Lake Colden

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
11.6 mi (18.7 km)	**3,351 ft** (1,021 m)	**2,764 ft** (842 m)	**8.4 hours** (8:23 a.m. to 4:49 p.m.), about 7 of them moving

HIGH POINT

Mount Marcy, 5,344 ft (1,626 m on my GPS), mile 7.2

LOW POINT

about 2,090 ft (636 m), near the start

ON THE WAY

Marcy Dam (mile 2.4), Indian Falls (4.4), the Phelps Trail junction (6.6), Mount Marcy (7.2), Four Corners (8.0), Lake Tear of the Clouds (8.3), Feldspar Lean-to (9.4), Lake Colden (11.4)

SLEEP

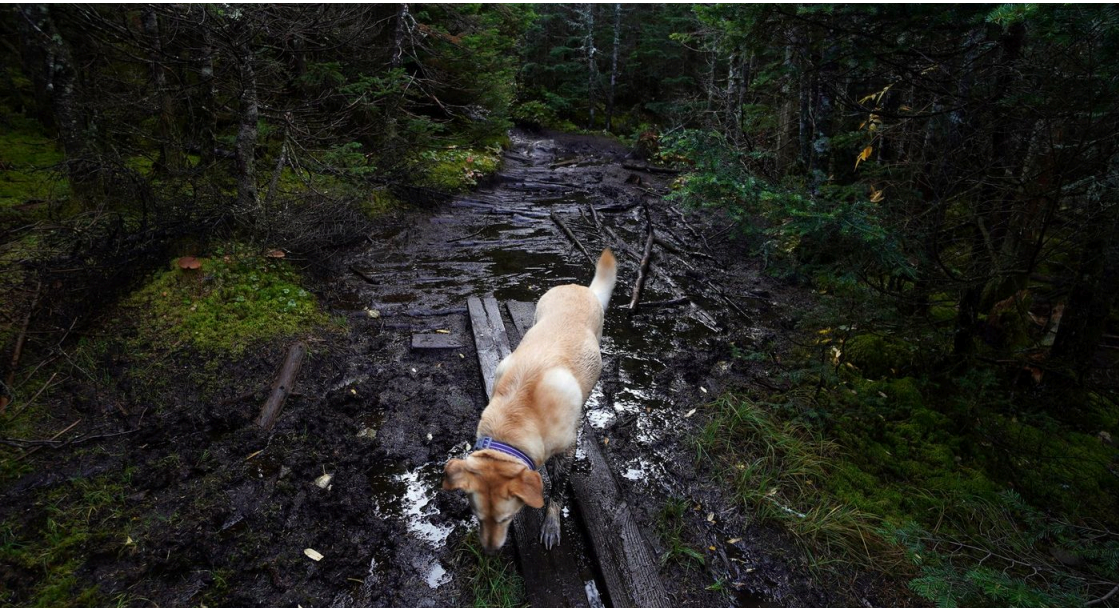
The Opalescent Lean-to at Lake Colden, about 2,760 ft (842 m)

FOOD AND WATER

All my own. Streams and lakes; treat or filter

My day

I parked at the Loj, signed the log book and started up the Van Hoevenberg Trail with Shia a little before 8:30. Once she was there, it was wolf mode activated: she was hiking faster than me. She was having so much fun, and whenever I stopped to set up the camera for a shot and then went back to get it, she was so confused. She would even whine. She just wanted to keep hiking.



Bog bridges on the trail, with Shia, Day 1.

I got to the summit of Mount Marcy at about 12:30 and stayed half an hour: blue sky, big clouds and fall color in the valleys below. It was pretty windy on the peaks.



Me on the summit of Mount Marcy, Day 1.

Then it was down the west side, past Lake Tear of the Clouds, and down Feldspar Brook and the Opalescent River to Lake Colden. There are a lot of campsites around there, and it's a beautiful spot. I made a custom AllTrails map at the time so people could see where I camped: "Spent 2 days hiking this loop. Summited two peaks and spent the night at a lean-to at Lake Colden."

The trail

To Marcy Dam. From the trailhead and register at the Loj, the Van Hoevenberg Trail is wide and fairly flat for the first 2.4 miles, past the junction with the trail to Algonquin (mile 1.0, where you'll come back on Day 2), to Marcy Dam (about 2,360 ft). The dam itself is gone; there's a trail register and lean-tos there, and the trail toward Avalanche Pass leaves here.

Up to Indian Falls. Past Marcy Dam the trail climbs along Phelps Brook, past the trail to Phelps Mountain (mile 3.3), to Indian Falls (mile 4.4, about 3,630 ft), where the trail crosses Marcy Brook at the top of the falls. DEC lists the Phelps Brook crossing above Marcy Dam and the crossing at Indian Falls among the crossings hit by high water, and OpenStreetMap shows a high-water route just past Marcy Dam.

To the summit. The trail keeps climbing through spruce and fir past the Hopkins Trail junction (mile 6.0) and the Phelps Trail from Johns Brook (mile 6.6). Above that the trees get short and then stop, and the last stretch is open rock to the summit of Mount Marcy at mile 7.2: 5,344 ft, the highest point in New York. Stay on the rock: the summit's alpine plants are rare and easily killed.



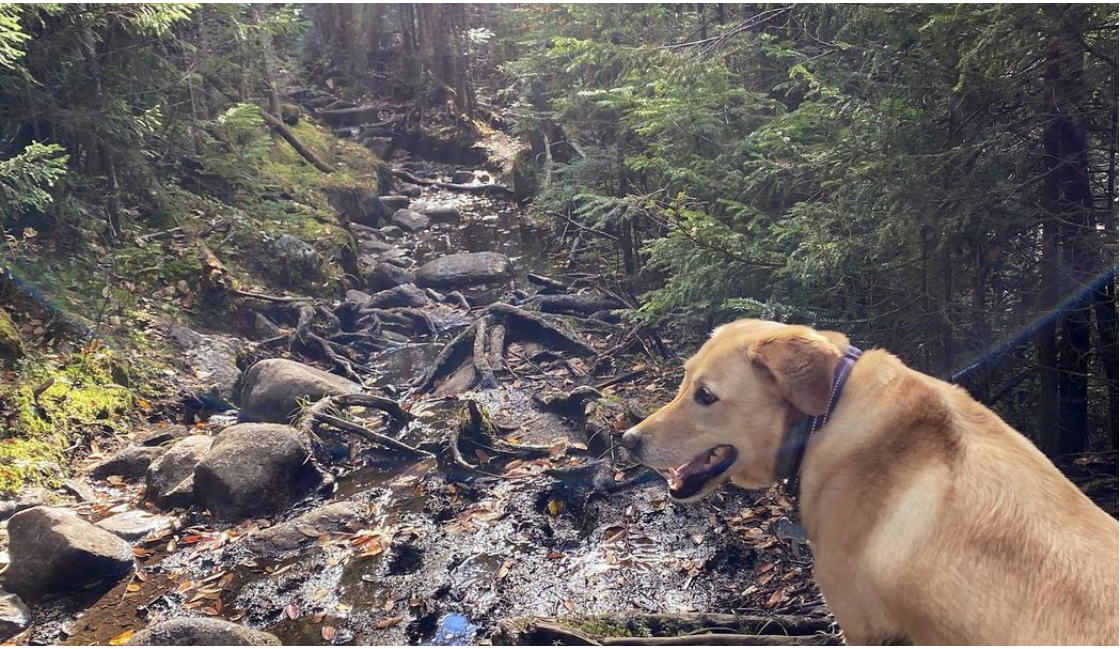
The open rock of Mount Marcy's summit, Day 1.

Down the west side. From the summit the Mount Marcy trail drops southwest over open rock and through the trees to Four Corners (mile 8.0, about 4,350 ft), the junction with the trails to Skylight and Elk Lake. From there it turns west past Lake Tear of the Clouds (mile 8.3), the little pond often called the highest source of the Hudson River, and down Feldspar Brook to the junction with the Lake Arnold trail beside Feldspar Lean-to (mile 9.4, about 3,330 ft).



The marsh near Lake Tear of the Clouds, with my camera and Shia, Day 1 mile 8.2.

Down the Opalescent to Lake Colden. Below Feldspar the trail follows the Opalescent River down past Uphill Lean-to (mile 9.9) to the Lake Colden camping area, where the trail from Avalanche Pass comes in (mile 11.4). My lean-to was a few minutes farther, at mile 11.6.



Rocks, roots and mud on the trail below Feldspar, with Shia, Day 1 mile 9.6.

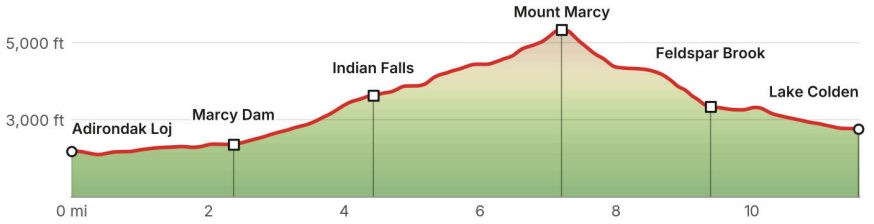
If you need to get off

Before the summit, turn around: the Loj is the way you came. From Four Corners the trails to Skylight and Elk Lake lead away from your car. At Feldspar (mile 9.4) the Lake Arnold trail goes north to Avalanche Camp and Marcy Dam, then back to the Loj. DEC says in 2026 it's open, but at its Opalescent River crossing the trail is flooded, the water can be knee deep or deeper and the old bog bridges float, and it lists that crossing among the ones hit by high water: don't count on it in heavy rain. From Lake Colden the lowest way back to the Loj is the Avalanche Pass trail past Avalanche Lake to Marcy Dam. It was closed by slides off Mount Colden in July 2025 and reopened on August 26, 2026, with repair work going on through 2027.

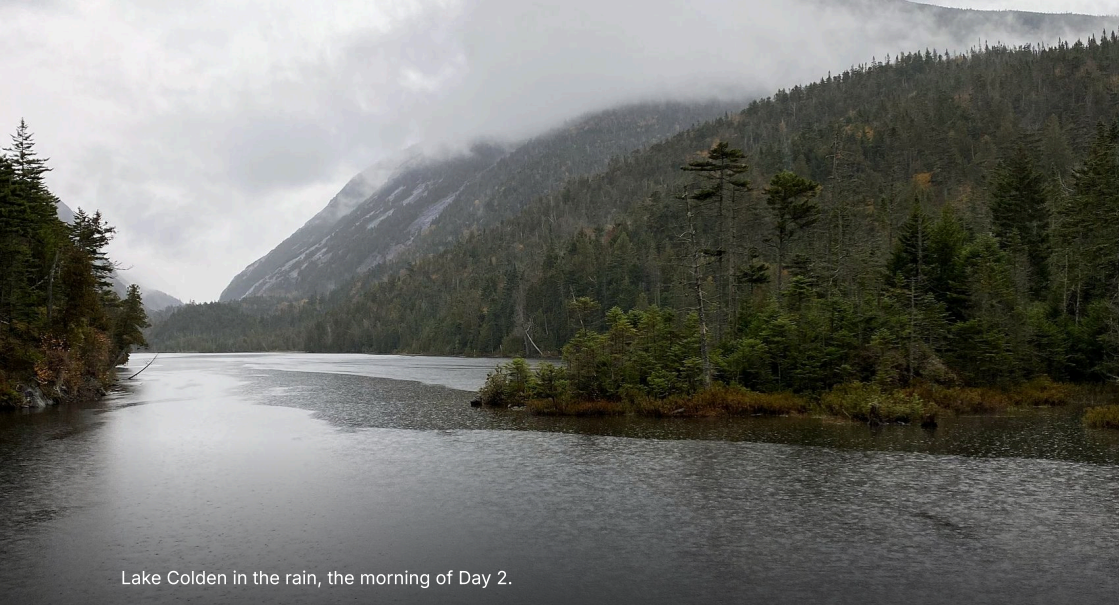
Watch this day

Film, Day 1 · How I did it (behind the scenes)





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Lake Colden in the rain, the morning of Day 2.

DAY 2

Lake Colden over Algonquin Peak to Adirondak Loj

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
6.7 mi (10.7 km)	**2,407 ft** (734 m)	**2,994 ft** (913 m)	**5 hours** (9:01 a.m. to 1:59 p.m.), about 4.5 of them moving

HIGH POINT

Algonquin Peak, 5,114 ft (1,556 m on my GPS), mile 2.7

LOW POINT

about 2,090 ft (636 m), near the end

ON THE WAY

the Algonquin trail junction (mile 0.9), Algonquin Peak (2.7), the Wright Peak junction (3.4), MacIntyre Falls (4.1), the Van Hoevenberg Trail (5.7)

SLEEP

Home

FOOD AND WATER

Lake Colden and streams on the way up; MacIntyre Falls on the way down

My day

Day two, it was raining so much. Crazy weather: it was raining, then the sun was out up high, and then it was raining again. It was cold up there. Shia was a fast hiker, waiting for me.

From Lake Colden I went up the steep side of Algonquin, over the top and down the other side to the Loj by about 2 p.m. Then I sat down at the grill at the Loj, covered Shia with my shell because she was a little cold, and was ready to dig in and enjoy a beautiful bacon cheeseburger. My camera battery died right before. That's the second time a camera has messed up during the burger, the final clip of a hiking film. Oh well, next time.

The trail

Along Lake Colden. From the lean-tos near the dam, the trail runs north along Lake Colden's west shore to the junction where the trail up Algonquin leaves (mile 0.9, about 2,770 ft). DEC has replaced the bridge at this junction, north of Lake Colden (its October 2026 notices).

Up the Lake Colden side. This is the steepest climb of the trip: from the lake to the summit of Algonquin, about 2,330 ft in 1.75 miles on my GPS. It took me two hours. Steep rock is slippery when it's wet; take your time.

Algonquin Peak. The summit, at mile 2.7, is 5,114 ft, the second highest in New York, and open rock with alpine plants: stay on the rock. It's exposed in bad weather.

Down to the Loj. The trail drops north off the summit, back into the trees at about mile 3.0, past the side trail to Wright Peak (mile 3.4) and MacIntyre Falls (mile 4.1), to the Van Hoevenberg Trail (mile 5.7), the trail you started on. The trailhead is a mile farther.



Shia on the trail below MacIntyre Falls, Day 2 mile 4.7.

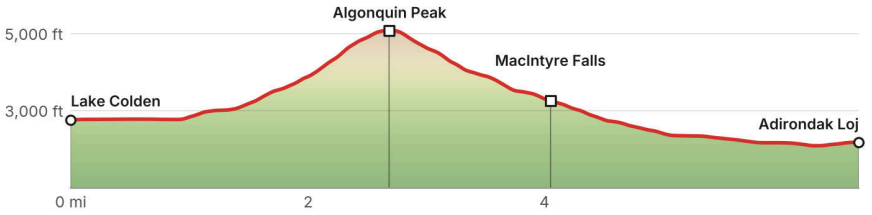
If you need to get off

If the weather is bad, don't go up Algonquin. From Lake Colden the low way out is the Avalanche Pass trail past Avalanche Lake to Marcy Dam and the Van Hoevenberg Trail back to the Loj (reopened in August 2026; expect trail crews). Once you're over the summit, the Loj is the closest way out.

Watch this day

Film, Day 2 · How I did it (behind the scenes)





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

My 2019 traverse: Keene Valley to Lake Placid

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
24.7 mi	**6,335 ft**	**5,230 ft**	**3 days**
(39.7 km) on trail over 3 days, plus 9.0 mi (14.4 km) on the road to Lake Placid	(1,931 m) on trail	(1,594 m) on trail	September 7 to 9, 2019

HIGH POINT

Mount Marcy, 5,344 ft, Day 1

SLEEP

Feldspar Lean-to (night 1), a campsite near Scott Clearing on the Indian Pass Trail (night 2)



The view from the trail in the clouds, Day 2 of my 2019 trip.

This hike was a little more challenging than I expected. It rained the first day, and that made the trails very muddy. The Adirondacks are very forested. It's very difficult to get through this dense, mossy, rooted trail, and extremely difficult when it's muddy like it was. But to be honest, that's what I love about hiking: you face challenges and you overcome them, no matter what. Figure it out, get creative, and tough it through.

It's a one-way trip: it starts in Keene Valley and ends at Heart Lake, so you need a ride, or you do what I did and walk the road into Lake Placid.

2019	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
Day 1	Keene Valley, the Garden, Johns Brook, the Hopkins Trail, Mount Marcy, Lake Tear of the Clouds to Feldspar Lean-to	12.2 (19.6)	4,291 / 2,044	Feldspar Lean-to
Day 2	The Opalescent, Lake Colden, the Herbert Brook herd path, Mount Marshall, Cold Brook Pass to the Indian Pass Trail	8.1 (13.1)	1,814 / 2,758	Campsite near Scott Clearing
Day 3	The Indian Pass Trail past Rocky Falls to Heart Lake	4.4 (7.1)	231 / 428	Lake Placid
Day 3	Adirondack Loj Road and Route 73 to the village of Lake Placid	9.0 (14.4)	480 / 812	

Day 1: Keene Valley over Mount Marcy to Feldspar

I bought my food in town right before I headed out: Twix, oatmeal, jerky, apples, oranges, all of that. I started walking from Keene Valley at about 8:45 a.m., up Johns Brook Lane to the Garden trailhead (mile 1.3), then up the Johns Brook valley on the Phelps Trail, onto the Hopkins Trail near Bushnell Falls (mile 6.2), and up to the Van Hoevenberg Trail below Marcy's summit. I summited Mount Marcy, the highest point in New York, in rain and wind at about 2 p.m. (mile 9.9). Then down the west side past Lake Tear of

the Clouds to Feldspar Lean-to (mile 12.2) by about 5. It rained a lot that trip. I had a black rain jacket that says it's waterproof. Not really: I was just soaked that entire first day.



Mossy trail in the forest, my 2019 trip.

I had my hammock on this trip, and I think I'm not going to hammock camp anymore. It always sounds better than it actually is. On the first night it was raining, so I decided to just sleep in the lean-to. There were four other people, so it was kind of tight quarters. They say six max, but that would be kind of crazy. (DEC's rule is to share a lean-to until it's full, normally 8 people.)

Day 2: Feldspar over Mount Marshall to Scott Clearing

Down the Opalescent to Lake Colden, then toward Flowed Lands to the start of the Herbert Brook herd path (mile 2.9), and up it to the summit of Mount Marshall (4,360 ft, mile 4.8) by about 2:15 p.m. Mount Marshall has no maintained trail: the herd path is unofficial, and hikers describe it as crossing

the brook many times and unmarked near the top. From the summit I went down the herd path to Cold Brook Pass and the Cold Brook Pass trail to the Indian Pass Trail (mile 7.2) and camped near Scott Clearing (mile 8.1) at about 6:20 p.m. It took me ten hours to go 8 miles.



Mud on the trail, Day 2 of my 2019 trip.

Day 3: Indian Pass Trail to Heart Lake, and the road to Lake Placid

The Indian Pass Trail north is nearly flat, about 230 ft of climbing: past Rocky Falls (mile 1.8) to the trail register at Heart Lake (mile 4.0) and the Adirondak Loj (mile 4.4) in two hours. Then I walked to Lake Placid: Adirondack Loj Road to Route 73 and into the village, 9 miles in three hours.



On Adirondack Loj Road, walking to Lake Placid, Day 3 of my 2019 trip.

What has changed on this route (October 2026)

DEC's trail notices on October 1, 2026 list problems on or near the 2019 route:

- **Feldspar Lean-to:** the bridge over the Opalescent to the lean-to has a broken stringer. Use caution.
- **Calamity Brook Trail:** its high-water bridge over Calamity Brook, on the way in from Upper Works, is out, and that trail may be impassable in heavy rain. DEC plans to repair it in late fall 2026. It isn't on my route: I used only the short stretch of that trail from Lake Colden to the Herbert Brook herd path.
- **Cold Brook Pass trail:** not maintained since Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. Expect blowdown and a faint tread. DEC says it's not a good way out in high water, because of the crossings on the Indian Pass Trail.
- **Indian Pass Brook:** on DEC's list of crossings hit by high water.

Mount Marshall's herd path needs map and compass skills, and the Cold Brook descent is rough. If you're not comfortable off marked trails, do the loop in this guide instead, or climb Marshall and go back the way you came.

Getting to the start. The Garden trailhead at the top of Johns Brook Lane is $10 a day (2026); when it's full, the Town sends you to the Rooster Comb lot. The Town of Keene ran a shuttle from Marcy Field to the Garden on weekends from July 4 to October 11, 2026, $10 a person for a round trip, cash only. The Town tows cars parked along Johns Brook, Market and Adirondack Streets in Keene Valley.

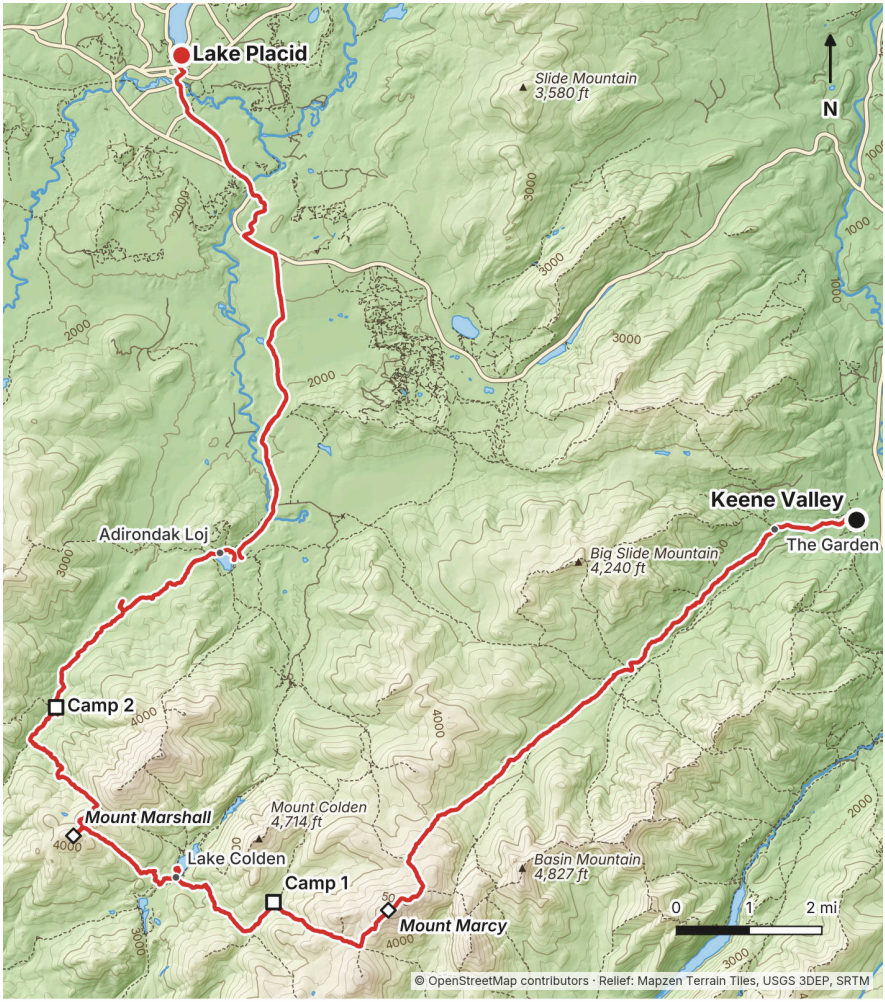
Keene Valley. In 2019 I listed my places to visit in Keene Valley: Valley Grocery for groceries, the Noon Mark Diner, Old Mountain Coffee Company and the bar at the Keene Valley Ausable Inn. All four were still listed in 2026. I also listed the Keene Valley Hostel, which may have closed: check before you plan on it.

Watch this trip

Film, Day 1 · Day 2 · Day 3 · Behind the scenes



The morning after: sunrise on Mirror Lake in Lake Placid, September 10, 2019.





My 2019 traverse: Keene Valley to Mount Marcy, Lake Colden and Mount Marshall, then the Indian Pass Trail to Heart Lake and the road to Lake Placid. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

Three days instead of two

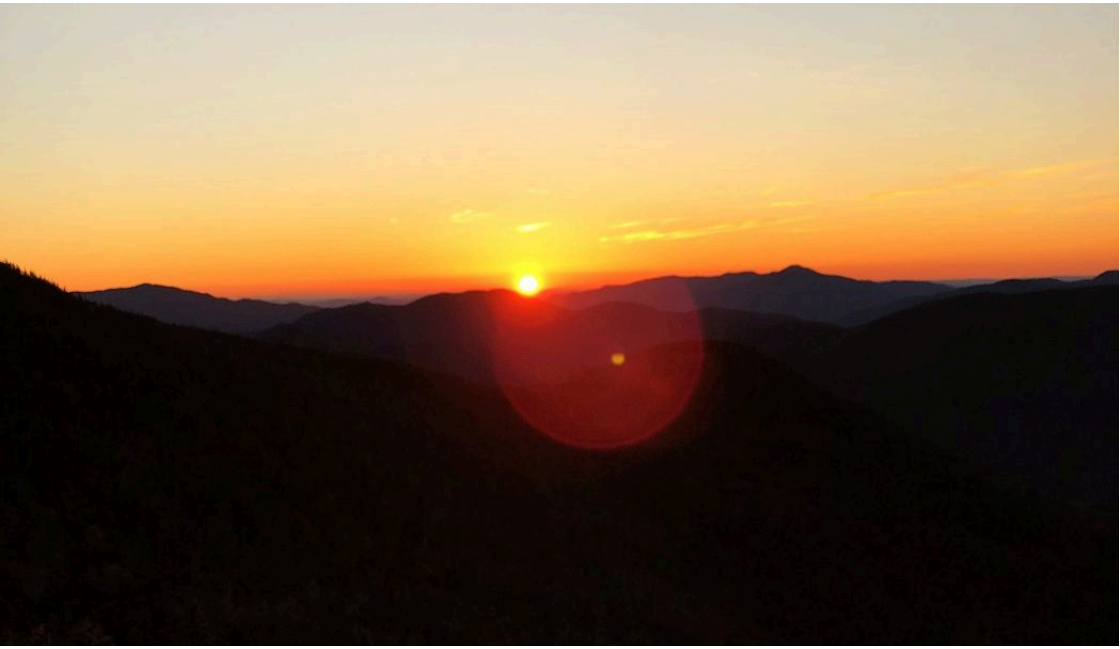
Spend two nights at Lake Colden. On the middle day you could climb Mount Colden from the lake, or go up and back to Iroquois Peak from the col beside Algonquin, or just rest. Remember that you can't camp above 3,500 ft except at designated sites.

The other way round

Up Algonquin from the Loj first, down its steep side to Lake Colden, then over Marcy on Day 2. The Lake Colden side of Algonquin is then a steep descent, which is harder on the knees and worse when it's wet.

Through Avalanche Pass

Instead of going over Algonquin on Day 2, walk out from Lake Colden through Avalanche Pass, past Avalanche Lake, to Marcy Dam and the Loj. It's the low route and the one to use in bad weather. On my 2017 trip, from Heart Lake, I went in this way, past Avalanche Lake, camped near Lake Colden, climbed Algonquin, and came out over Mount Colden the next day. The pass reopened in August 2026 after the 2025 slides; the two designated campsites at Avalanche Lake are closed.



Sunset from the trail near Algonquin, my 2017 trip.

Marcy as a day hike

Up and back from the Loj on the Van Hoevenberg Trail: 7.2 miles each way on my GPS, about 14.4 miles round trip (the usual figure is 14.8). Start early.

Start in Keene Valley

My 2019 route: from the Garden up Johns Brook to Marcy. See My 2019 traverse.

Where I slept, food and water

Where I slept

NIGHT	WHERE	HEIGHT (MY GPS)
Before Day 1	The Lake House in Lake Placid	
1	The Opalescent Lean-to at Lake Colden (Day 1 mile 11.6)	about 2,760 ft (842 m)

In 2019 I slept in Feldspar Lean-to (about 3,320 ft) and at a campsite near Scott Clearing on the Indian Pass Trail (about 2,380 ft).

Lake Colden. A camping area with lean-tos and designated tent sites along the lake, all first come, first served. Lean-tos are shared until full, normally 8 people; no tents inside.

At the Loj (2026). ADK's Adirondak Loj has rooms for up to 38 guests, and its Wilderness Campground has campsites, lean-tos and cabins, by reservation. Good for the night before if you'd rather not drive in the morning.

In Lake Placid (2026). The Lake House is now one of the buildings of the High Peaks Resort, on Mirror Lake. It takes up to two dogs per room, up to 75 pounds each, for $75 per dog per night, and dogs can't be left alone in the room.

Food

All mine, carried in the canister. In 2019 I bought it in town on the way: Twix, oatmeal, jerky, apples and oranges. In 2020 my gear list included Mountain House meals and a Jetboil. There's nothing to buy on the trail. At the Loj, the Hungry Hiker food stand serves American food, ice cream and beer; ADK's two pages disagree on its hours (daily 1 to 8 p.m., or 1 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday to Monday) and neither gives a fall closing date, so check before you count on it.

Water

Plenty: Marcy Brook, Feldspar Brook, the Opalescent River, Lake Colden and streams on both days. The summits are dry, so fill up before you climb. Treat or filter everything. In 2017 I learned that a straw filter is good for drinking from a stream but not for filling bottles; bring a filter that fills bottles.



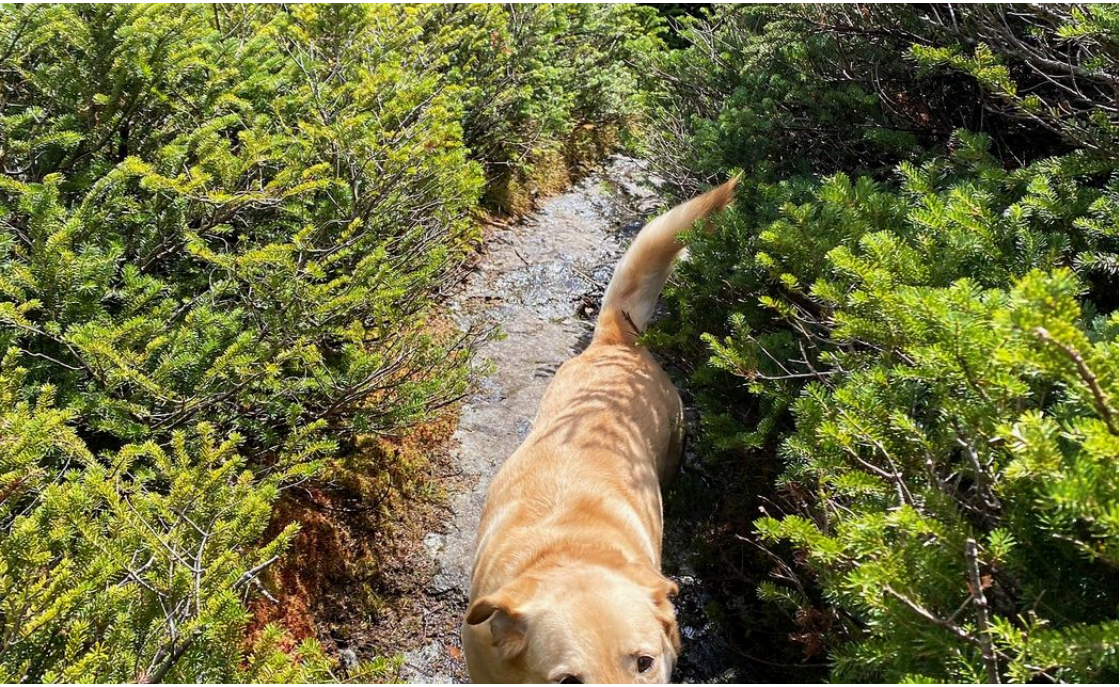
Shia in a little stream on the trail below Marcy's summit, Day 1 mile 6.7.

Toilets and waste

Use the restrooms at the Loj before you start. On the trail, use a privy where there is one; otherwise bury waste at least 150 ft from water, camps and trails, and pack out toilet paper. Nothing goes into the water.

Hiking with a dog

Shia is my parents' dog. I grew up with her; she was about nine, a yellow lab mixed with something. She doesn't really get out hiking that often, but once she was there she was hiking faster than me. She does not like going back and forth while I set up the camera.



Shia on the trail in the short trees below Marcy's summit, Day 1.

The rules (2026). Dogs must be leashed at all times in the Eastern High Peaks, kept under control and never left alone, and you must carry proof of your dog's current rabies vaccination. Dog food goes in the bear canister with yours. Dogs aren't allowed at all on the Adirondack Mountain Reserve (the Ausable Club land at St. Huberts), which this loop doesn't use.

What I learned. She wouldn't wear the booties I bought her, so we ditched them. She was a little cold at the end of Day 2, and I covered her with my shell. She got very muddy. Bring a towel for the car, and something warm for the dog in the fall.



Shia in the Opalescent Lean-to at Lake Colden, the evening of Day 1.

Hunting season. In October, put a bright orange vest on your dog.

Lodging. The Lake House in Lake Placid welcomes dogs (2026: up to two per room, up to 75 pounds each, $75 per dog per night).

What I paid

ITEM	WHAT I PAID
Parking at the Adirondak Loj, two days (2020)	About $10, I think ($7 for ADK members)
Bear canister rental, Eastern Mountain Sports, Lake Placid (2020)	Less than $20 for three days
The Lake House, Lake Placid (2020)	Not in my records
Permit	None
Food (2019, bought in town)	Not in my records
Train and travel from New York City (2019)	Not in my records

For your budget (2026). Parking at the Loj is $25 a day or $120 for a multi-day or full-week stay for non-members ($10 and $50 for ADK members). The Garden lot in Keene Valley is $10 a day. There's no fee for the wilderness. A bus from New York to Lake Placid starts at about $136.

Gear for this route

What this route needs

- A hard bear canister (rent one at the Loj)
- Boots or shoes for mud, roots and wet rock, and gaiters if you have them
- Warm and rain layers, a hat and gloves: it's cold and windy on top in October
- Microspikes late in the fall, and snowshoes once there's 8 inches of snow (it's the rule)
- A stove (no campfires), a water filter, a headlamp
- Something orange in hunting season
- A map, the GPX files and a satellite messenger

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I carried everything for two days and a night at Lake Colden in October 2020, with my parents' dog. Here's what I carried, what I'd take now, and what I filmed with.

What I carried in 2020

From my 2020 film's gear list.

- **Pack:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear Southwest 2400 (Hyperlite)
- **Tent:** NEMO Hornet 1P (NEMO), now the Hornet OSMO. I slept in the lean-to.
- **Quilt:** UGQ Bandit quilt (UGQ). Similar: Hyperlite Mountain Gear 20° Quilt (Hyperlite).
- **Liner:** Outdoor Vitals Sleeping Bag Liner (Amazon)
- **Sleeping pad:** a Therm-a-Rest mat
- **Pillow:** Klymit Pillow X (Amazon)
- **Stove:** Jetboil MicroMo (Amazon). No campfires in the Eastern High Peaks.

- **Spork:** Sea to Summit Alpha Light long spoon (Amazon)
- **Food:** Mountain House meals (Amazon). All of it in the canister.
- **Bear canister:** a rented hard bear canister. Rented in Lake Placid for less than $20.
- **Water:** Katadyn BeFree AC · 1L (Amazon)
- **Headlamp:** SLONIK rechargeable headlamp (Amazon)
- **Bear spray:** Counter Assault bear spray (Amazon)
- **Satellite messenger:** Garmin inReach Mini (Amazon)
- **Shirt:** Amazon Essentials Quick-Dry Tech Hoodie (Amazon)
- **Sweatshirt:** Amazon Essentials crewneck fleece sweatshirt (Amazon)
- **Puffy:** Patagonia Nano Puff Jacket. Similar: Arc'teryx Cerium Hoody (Arc'teryx).
- **Rain shell:** The North Face Dryzzle jacket. Similar: Arc'teryx Beta AR Jacket (Arc'teryx).
- **Pants:** Patagonia Terrebonne Joggers. Similar: PATH Projects Killam PX Pant (PATH Projects).
- **Shorts:** quick-dry hiking shorts
- **Winter hat:** Muji boucle watch cap. Similar: PATH Projects Hoyt Merino Beanie (PATH Projects).
- **Cap:** ZOWYA running cap (Amazon)
- **Sunglasses:** Warby Parker Barkley sunglasses. Similar: Goodr OG Sunglasses (Amazon).
- **Socks:** People Socks merino crew socks (Amazon)
- **Shoes:** Brooks Cascadia 13 (Amazon), now the Cascadia 20
- **In 2019:** a hammock, a clear plastic bear canister (the wrong kind: see Permits and rules) and a rain jacket that wasn't really waterproof. I wore my white hat and a light gray sun hoodie: very lightweight, and it dries quickly.

What I'd take now

What I'd add for this route from my current kit.

- **Sleeping pad:** Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite NXT (Amazon)

- **Sleeping bag:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear 20° Mummy Bag (Hyperlite). It's cold on top in October.
- **Rain shell:** Arc'teryx Beta AR Jacket (Arc'teryx). Cold and windy on top in October.
- **Poles:** Black Diamond Alpine Carbon Z Poles (Amazon). For mud and wet rock.
- **Microspikes:** Yatta Life Ice Spikes (Amazon). Late in the fall.
- **Navigation:** AllTrails+ (AllTrails, 30% off). Load my GPX files and download offline maps before you leave Lake Placid. Offline maps need the paid plan.

Filming kit

What I filmed this trip with in 2020. My setup is much smaller now (below). No drones in the wilderness: see Permits and rules.

- **Camera:** Sony a6600 (Amazon)
- **Lens:** Sony E 10-18mm f/4 OSS (Amazon)
- **Mic:** Rode VideoMic NTG (Amazon). With a dead cat for the wind.
- **Tripod:** a tripod
- **Tripod head:** Joby ball head (Amazon)
- **Batteries:** Sony NP-FZ100 batteries (Amazon). Two of them.
- **Wrist strap:** Peak Design Cuff Wrist Strap (Amazon)
- **Phone:** an iPhone 11 Pro
- **Drone:** DJI Mavic Air 2. Flown only outside the wilderness. Similar: DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon).

What I film with now

Since September 2026 I film with a smaller setup: the Pocket 4 and the Mic 3 on the trail, and the Mini 5 Pro in the air.

- **Camera:** DJI Osmo Pocket 4 (Amazon)
- **Mic:** DJI Mic 3 · 1 TX + 1 RX (Amazon). It pairs with the Pocket 4.
- **Drone:** DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon)
- **Tripod:** SmallRig Carbon Fiber Tripod (Amazon)

Weather and safety

Emergencies. Call 911 or the DEC Forest Ranger emergency dispatch, 833-NYS-RANGERS (1-833-697-7264). If you're lost or hurt, stay calm and stay put. Don't count on a phone signal in the valleys.

Mountain weather. Use the National Weather Service's mountain forecast for Mount Marcy (weather.gov/btv/mountain). The summits are often much colder and windier than Lake Placid. Turn back if it's bad: you can go around Algonquin through Avalanche Pass.

Wet rock and slabs. The steep side of Algonquin and the summit rock are slippery when wet, and in October they can ice up. Later in the fall, carry traction such as microspikes (the information center rents trail crampons); once there are 8 inches or more of snow, the rules require snowshoes or skis.

High water. DEC warns that streams can become impassable within minutes in heavy rain. On this loop, DEC lists the Van Hoevenberg Trail's crossings of Phelps Brook above Marcy Dam and at Indian Falls among the crossings hit by high water; the Lake Arnold trail's Opalescent crossing, a way off on Day 1, is another. If one is high on your way out, DEC's advice is to be ready to wait it out.

Hypothermia. Wet and windy is the danger, even in summer. Carry dry layers.

Bears. Use your canister for all food, garbage and toiletries, and keep it away from your sleeping spot.

Hunting. October is hunting season in the Northern Zone; wear orange.

Leave a plan with someone at home: your start, your route, your camp and when you'll be out.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
adirondack-high-peaks-day-1.gpx	Day 1: Adirondak Loj over Mount Marcy to Lake Colden, 11.6 mi
adirondack-high-peaks-day-2.gpx	Day 2: Lake Colden over Algonquin Peak to Adirondak Loj, 6.7 mi
adirondack-high-peaks-loop.gpx	Both days, with waypoints for the places in this guide
traverse-2019-day-1.gpx	2019 Day 1: Keene Valley over Mount Marcy to Feldspar Lean-to, 12.2 mi
traverse-2019-day-2.gpx	2019 Day 2: Feldspar over Mount Marshall to Scott Clearing, 8.1 mi
traverse-2019-day-3.gpx	2019 Day 3: Scott Clearing to the Adirondak Loj, 4.4 mi
traverse-2019-day-3-road-walk.gpx	2019 Day 3: the road from the Loj to Lake Placid, 9.0 mi
traverse-2019-full.gpx	All of 2019, with waypoints

The tracks show where I actually went. They're a record of my trips, not official trail lines. Phone GPS wanders under the trees, so each track is thinned to a point every 15 m; that's why my loop is 18.3 miles, not the 20.7 AllTrails showed for the raw recordings or the "22 miles" I said in the film. My track reaches Marcy's summit at 7.2 miles from the Loj; the usual figure is 7.4.

AllTrails: on alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import (offline maps need a paid plan). **Gaia GPS:** open the file on your phone and choose Gaia GPS, or Import on gaiagps.com. **Garmin:** Garmin Connect on the web, Training, Courses, Import, then send it to your watch. **Organic Maps** (free): download the offline map for New York, then open the GPX file with it.

Before you leave Lake Placid, download offline maps for the High Peaks, turn on airplane mode, and check that each day and your location show up.



Fall color on the way down from Algonquin, Day 2 mile 3.8.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Rules and closures

- DEC's backcountry notices for the High Peaks: closures, bridges, Avalanche Pass work (dec.ny.gov, Backcountry Information for the Adirondack Park)
- Whether DEC has started a permit, reservation or daily limit for the Loj and the High Peaks (a 2026 study recommended one from summer 2027)
- The bear canister rule (hard canisters, April 1 to November 30)

Getting there

- Parking prices at the Adirondak Loj (ADK posts a new page each year)
- The Garden lot and the Keene shuttle, if you start in Keene Valley
- Trailways and Amtrak times, if you're coming without a car

Conditions

- The mountain forecast: weather.gov/btv/mountain
- Fall color reports (iloveny.com) and hunting season dates (dec.ny.gov)

Your stuff

- A hard bear canister, a stove, a filter, warm and rain layers, a headlamp
- A leash, an orange vest and proof of a current rabies vaccination for your dog
- Offline maps and the GPX files on your phone

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
1	11.6 (18.7)	Adirondak Loj over Mount Marcy to Lake Colden	Opalescent Lean-to, Lake Colden	Marcy Dam 2.4, Indian Falls 4.4, Marcy summit 7.2 (5,344 ft), Four Corners 8.0, Feldspar 9.4
2	6.7 (10.7)	Lake Colden over Algonquin Peak to Adirondak Loj	Home	Algonquin junction 0.9, summit 2.7 (5,114 ft), MacIntyre Falls 4.1
Total	**18.3 (29.4)**			**About 5,760 ft up and down**

Trails: Van Hoevenberg Trail · Mount Marcy trail over Four Corners, Feldspar Brook and the Opalescent · the Algonquin trail from Lake Colden · the Algonquin trail to the Loj

Places: Adirondak Loj and Heart Lake · Marcy Dam · Indian Falls · Mount Marcy · Four Corners · Lake Tear of the Clouds · Feldspar Lean-to · Lake Colden · Algonquin Peak · MacIntyre Falls

Rules (2026): no permit (check for 2027); sign the register. Hard bear canister April 1 to November 30. Groups: 15 day, 8 overnight. No campfires. No camping above 4,000 ft; designated sites only from 3,500 to 4,000 ft; elsewhere 150 ft from trails and water. Dogs leashed, with proof of rabies vaccination. No drones.

Parking (2026): Adirondak Loj, $25 a day or $120 multi-day or full week (non-members).

Emergency: 911, or DEC Forest Ranger dispatch 1-833-697-7264.

About this guide

Adirondack High Peaks Hiking Guide: Mount Marcy and Algonquin in 2 days, plus my 3-day traverse, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated October 2026.

I hiked the loop on October 1 and 2, 2020, and made a film about it: Hiking the Mount Marcy Loop in the Adirondacks. The traverse is from my film Hiking in the Adirondacks New York (September 7 to 9, 2019), and the 2017 notes from Hiking Alone in the Adirondack High Peaks. Everything in first person comes from those trips, the films and their descriptions, my GPS recordings and AllTrails map, and my photos. Rules, access and safety facts were checked on October 1, 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

Paid links, no sponsors. The gear links in this guide are paid links: I earn a commission if you buy through them, at no extra cost to you. Nobody paid for a mention in this guide, and it isn't sponsored.

Safety. The High Peaks have real risks: steep wet rock, exposed summits, fast-rising streams, cold and storms, and long ways out. This guide describes my trips and what I found, not current conditions. Trails, rules and bridges change. Check with DEC and the weather, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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