WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE
The Natural History of the Adirondacks

Tupper Lake, NY - The Wild Center, in the heart of New York's Adirondack Mountains, with its live animals and hands-on interactive exhibits is dedicated to telling the story of nature in the place journalist and best-selling author Bill McKibben calls the most important experiment in nature conservation anywhere on the planet.

The Adirondacks are bigger than Yosemite, Glacier, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone and Great Smokey National Parks combined. The scale of the Adirondacks makes this a place where nature has a good chance to run wilder and where the forces of nature can be seen at work on a grander scale than most places. The region is home to bear, moose, rare birds, forests that predate Columbus, and, perhaps surprisingly, people.

The Modern Adirondacks
The unusual geology under the Adirondacks made the modern history of this land equally unusual. Imagine the crust of the Earth beneath your feet rising up like a massive rock dome. Most mountain ranges in North America run as north to south ridges that often served as paths of migration. The Adirondack dome was more like a blockade than a path. As the dome cracked and eroded over millions of years, it formed an irregular jumble of mountains, lakes and rivers.

The dome, still visible from space, was difficult to traverse and it was cold. Native Americans skirted around its perimeter. They traveled up and down Lake Champlain and the Mohawk and St. Lawrence Rivers, but left the higher ground unsettled.

For more than 10,000 years after the last Ice Age, while other parts of America were populated by thriving communities of Native Americans, the Adirondacks were largely untouched by man.

Wild at Heart
To the European settlers spreading across America the Adirondack dome was equally forbidding. It was an obstacle to people on foot and wagon and its high elevations and northern latitude meant deep snow and cold. Like the Native Americans before them, the Europeans tended to skirt the region, farming around its gentler edges. The interior of the dome remained a wild place long after most of the lands from Boston to the Mississippi were settled and industrialized. It was both wild and forested, and eventually those forests attracted the saws of an industrializing America whose economy was founded on extracting wealth from the seas and lands. The extracting finally began to reach into the dome. Beavers were extirpated for their furs, centuries old while pines fell for their timber, other trees destined for pulp mills and steel furnaces.
jammed Adirondack rivers. By 1870 many of the perimeter lands of the Adirondacks were stressed by clear cutting, tannery effluent and mining. Big animals - moose, beavers, otters and mountain lions - were extirpated or threatened.

But the heart of the dome remained a wild island, and in the mid-1800s people, looking around a changing America, had a change of heart.

**A Model for the World**

Today the 10,000 square miles of the Adirondacks are wilder in many ways than they were 100 years ago. There may be nowhere else on Earth where the same claim can be made for a space of this great scale. The Adirondacks, now a park larger than many nations, is again blanketed in wild forests. Moose bugle here, beavers smack their tails and it's possible that mountain lions growl. A 10,000-square-mile island in the densely populated northeastern United States, the Adirondacks are wilder today because in 1894 a group of scientists, citizens, sportsmen and conservationists convinced their fellow voters in New York State to amend the state constitution to protect the Adirondacks. Because of that groundbreaking stand, perhaps the very first incident of environmentally-based legislation in the nation's history, the wild domed core of the Adirondacks that was never fully breached had the chance to recover the land.

The Adirondacks are one of the only places on Earth where people have sustained an effort of this scale and duration to find a better way to coexist with the natural world.

Discover more about the natural history and this coexistence at The Wild Center.

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