

Tupper Lake's Wild Center; the High Line North???

Tupper Lake's Wild Center and its Wild Walk.

by Ralph J. Ferrusi

In early May we revisited Manhattan's High Line: an abandoned elevated freight line in the Chelsea District on the Lower West Side between Hell's Kitchen and the West Village, that had been transformed into a super-cool mile-and-a-half elevated linear public park (Boating on the Hudson and Beyond, July 2017, pp's 18-21).

In late May we spent a week in the Adirondacks and Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, and visited Tupper Lake's Wild Center and its Wild Walk—"an elevated trail across Adirondack treetops"—and couldn't help but notice some similarities. And, were fascinated by its 54,000-square-foot museum "with live animals and hands-on everything". And, while we were in town, we paddled for a couple of hours on the Raquette River, that goes right past the Wild Center. Let's go:

We lashed our trusty 17-foot We No Nah Sundowner to the roof rack and headed north, looking forward to some World-Class canoeing on the zillions of lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams the 'Daks are famous for. When we arrived in Tupper Lake, the weather gods were not smiling on us: as in the Hudson Valley, the weather for just about the whole week was grey, dreary, cloudy and, "unsettled".



Tupper Lake.



The Wild Walk—an elevated trail across the Adirondack treetops.



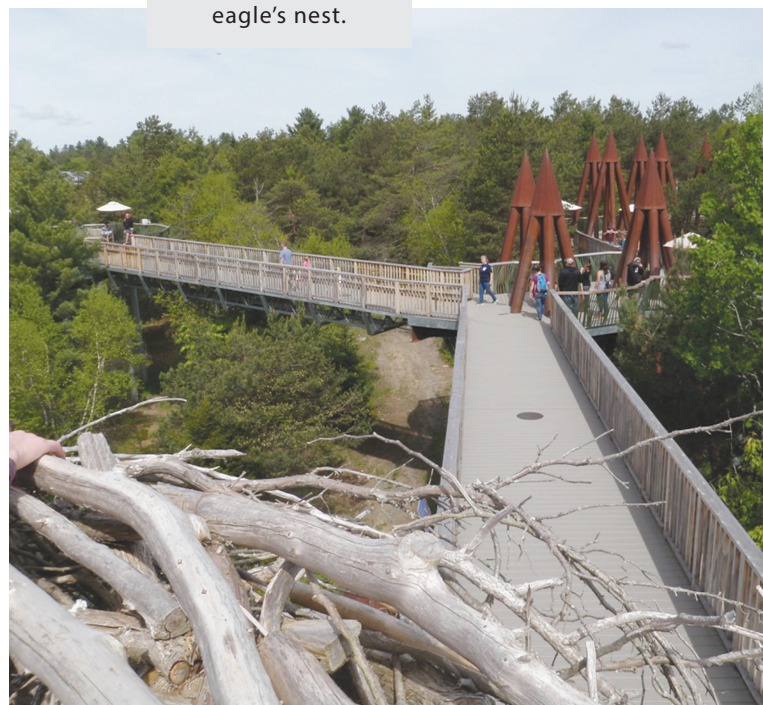
The author in the spider web.



Ten-foot diameter eagle's nest.

We're early risers, and at breakfast at Shaheen's Motel in Tupper the owners informed us the Wild Center didn't open until 10:00 AM. It was grey and threatening: whoops, what are we going to do for the next two or three hours??? We finally decided to head to the Center early, and walk some of its hiking trails until the Wild Walk opened. We were pretty much the only vehicle in the parking lot, and walked over to some trail signs, and decided to follow a trail that promised to take us down to a place overlooking an "ox bow" of the Raquette River, one of the waterways we had planned to canoe anyway.

It was a great trail—wide and smooth—and the morning was chilly, and for a while things were OK, but part way down the trail, in the sunny spots, bugs started buzzing. In recent years we'd often visited the Adirondacks in late April/early May, before the black flies hatched. This year, we had reserved a leanto south of Tupper at Paul Smiths College John Dillon Park, but the Park didn't open until late May. We re-planned



our whole trip around the later opening date.

Anybody who knows anything about the Adirondacks knows that late May/early June is BLACK FLY SEASON.... I had walked across Maine on the Appalachian Trail in the late-70's in a black fly hatch, and it was, in a word, maddening. They are persistent, and you are pretty much defenseless. Somehow I had figured that 2017 would be an exception. Wrong...

Kath had some packets of OFF!—gawd she's resourceful—and they made the walk down to the Raquette pretty bearable. There were a couple of wooden platforms, connected by a nicely-constructed boardwalk, overlooking the river. Wow: it looked like perfect canoeing: we'd give it a go in the afternoon.

There were a fair amount of vehicles in the parking lot when we arrived back a bit before 10:00 AM, but we managed to be the first people on the Wild Walk that morning. It was a treat having it pretty much to ourselves at first: it's a very popular destination, and I'm sure it's swarmed on nice days later in the season.



The "snag", four stories tall..



We put in at a State launch on Route 3/30.

You gradually ascend on the wide, smooth walk, and it draws you onward and upward. It's touted as a "treetop" walk, but most of the trees around the Walk in the 81-acre area it's built on aren't really that tall, so the average height of the walkway is very similar to Manhattan's High Line—20-30 feet—two or three stories. It does get you up there, but not anywhere as high as a typical northeastern hardwood's "tree-top" canopy that I would estimate at 80-100 feet: a dizzying 8-10 stories.

We walked across an "Indiana Jones" suspension bridge (with sturdy, reassuring railings) to the "snag", a huge, four-story-tall realistic dead tree trunk with a spiral staircase inside, and realistic wild animal/bird sounds all around you. Pretty cool. Next destination was the huge round woven Spider's Web. Little kids were awed by it. I was the first one to roll down it towards the center, and several little kids followed. One other adult may have tried it; most hung back. Some little kids walked down it; I tried this also, and succeeded in getting to the center, but balancing on the bouncy

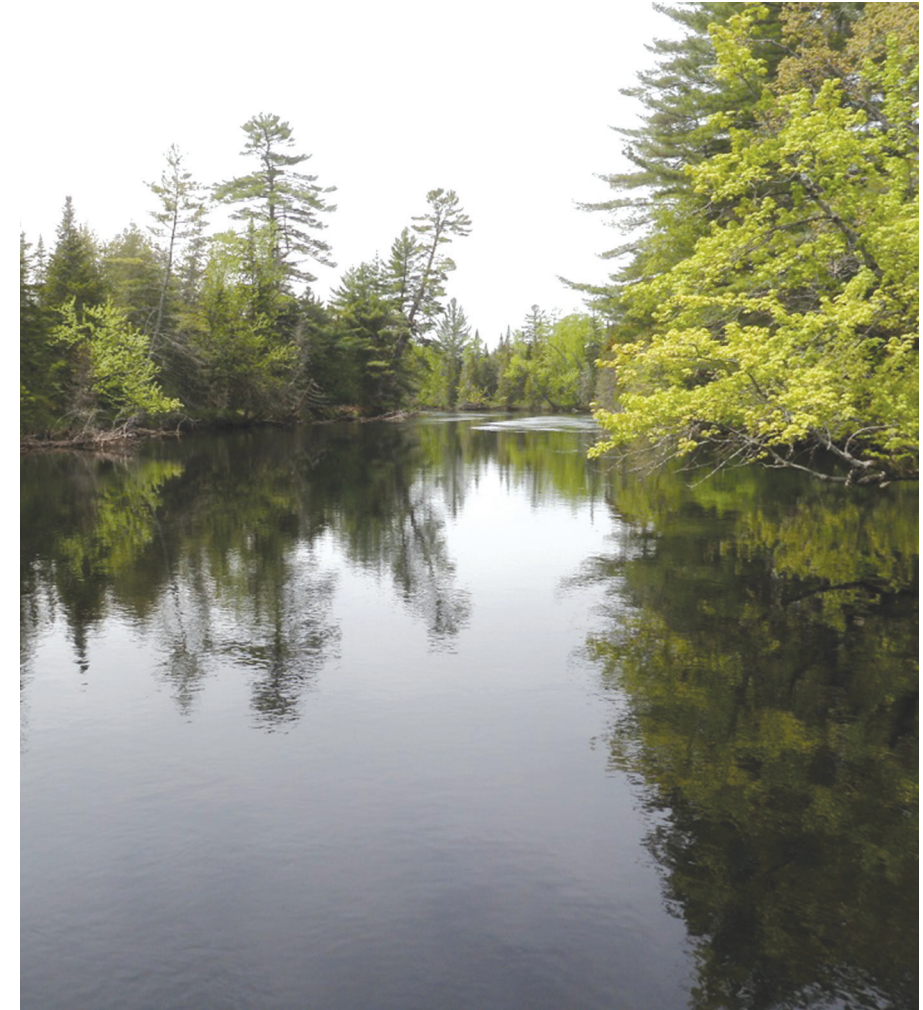
"web" wasn't as easy as you might think.

The next destination was a huge "birds nest"—said to be a replica of a real, ten-foot diameter eagle's nest—that you climbed up to. Below the "nest" were signs pointing out Whiteface Mountain in the far distance, and the Seward range: in my opinion some of the toughest mountains of the Adirondack's 46 4000-footers.

At this point, it dawned on me that we had reached the far end of the walk. As clever and fascinating at the Wild Walk is, it's about

a thousand foot walk, and even though we were just ambling along, we had, essentially, reached the turn-around point. In comparison, the High Line is about a mile-and-a-half long: a good hour or more round-trip ramble.

We headed back. We had a two-day pass, and it was supposed to rain the next day, so we decided we'd go to the museum on the rainy day, and on this relatively



inside the Wild Center's museum

clear afternoon figure out where we could launch our canoe and paddle the Raquette to the ox bow the Wild Center platforms overlooked.

We put in at a State launch on Route 3/30, about an hour's paddling east of the Wild Center. We paddled with the (pretty mild) current, and the wind was at our backs. And the bugs... They were bad, at least in the back of the boat where I was. The river was wide, and good paddling, but, as far as the bugs, we were the only meal in town. We reached the platforms and turned back, upstream and against the wind... As usual, I had underestimated the current. Most of the time when we canoe, I don't want the trip to end; this time, I couldn't wait to get out of the boat, safely away from the bugs and inside the car...

It indeed rained the next day, and we used our two-day pass to go inside the Wild Center's museum. I was not expecting to be impressed by going indoors to see exhibits about the outdoors that was right there outside the museum!!! I was astounded, astonished, and amazed. There were huge glass-enclosed "ponds" and "streams" that allowed you to see, close up, the fish and wildlife that are all around you outdoors, but that you rarely, if ever, saw close-up in the wilds. There were films and clever exhibits concerning smells, and sounds. I was fascinated, as were many of the little kids. I was smiling and grinning, loving it.

There was an otter in a big tank, and it was "playing", as otters are supposed to do. A little kid started racing it, and the otter followed the kid along the edge of the tank, around the corner, then around the next corner. And back. Shee-it, I gotta try that: I ran like hell—I haven't run in decades—the otter, separated by the thick glass of the tank—keeping pace with me. Priceless... Walk the Walk, but don't miss the museum.

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