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## **Outdoors: Boreas Ponds are Adirondacks' hidden treasure**

<http://www.timesunion.com/tuplus-sports/article/Outdoors-Boreas-Ponds-are-Adirondacks-hidden-7719876.php>

For years I've looked down on the Boreas Ponds. The first time, I stood on Mount Marcy and observed that shining body of water. Later, I did the same from Gothics Peak, Allen and others.

Those forlorn, long-distance glances at the ponds would be all I could get, because they were glimpses of private land, and I was part of the public. Boreas Ponds was the girl you couldn't get to prom, the fancy car you couldn't afford, the presidential candidate you actually liked: unattainable.

Last year my wife, Gillian, drove into the ponds with another reporter and staff from the Nature Conservancy. I was aggravated I couldn't join them as they launched canoes on the water I'd dreamed of for so long.

But this spring, New York state finalized its purchase of the Boreas Ponds Tract, located near the towns of North Hudson and Newcomb. Finally, my long-awaited dream came true.

Last weekend, I parked my car near Blue Ridge Road to a black fly greeting and walked past a metal gate. A few minutes later, there was the sound of truck wheels on the gravel road.

"It's a six-mile walk into the ponds," the driver told me.

Gulf Brook Road is located just off Blue Ridge Road a few miles west of Northway Exit 29. A big gate is the sign to start walking. A good headnet to ward off black flies will cost you \$10 or less; no headnet is free but might cost you some blood.

I shrugged. I had been waiting years for this hike I thought might never happen, so six miles were no discouragement at all.

Some leaseholders are allowed motorized access for the next few years, but the public is not. "It's really pretty," the man told me, before driving off again.

I walked with the flies and the concern that reality couldn't possibly match my expectations. I was going to earn my first view of the Boreas Ponds on foot, and there was something that felt right about that.

Motorized access to the ponds is one of the big debates about the tract. Some plans duplicate Gillian's experience of driving all the way to the ponds with a boat. Some duplicate my

experience of walking the whole way. Others are somewhere in between, allowing access by bicycle and horse. Whatever the outcome, the plan will aggravate someone, maybe everyone.

It took me two hours to walk the road into Boreas Ponds, a small price to pay for one of the most stunning places in the Adirondacks. The state could decide to stock the ponds with piranhas, promote black-fly breeding and release rabid raccoons, and the Boreas Ponds still would be worth a six-mile walk. I watched a loon pop to the surface in front of the bare rock flanks of Gothic Peaks. This was as good as it gets.

There is more to the tract than just the picture perfect view from the water. Dirt roads, some abandoned and some maintained, run like veins through the newly acquired land. There is going to be enormous pressure on the state to maintain those roads for one use or another.

If you bushwhack high up in the Macintyre Range, the home of New York's second-highest peak, you'll find the vestiges of old roads there as well. Not many people would argue the peaks would be better with those old roads, and the same can be said for the Boreas Tract roads.

I left the picture-perfect views and walked north toward the High Peaks. I had been waiting years to explore here and couldn't turn around.

Far from the main string of ponds, the ones shown most often in photos and press releases, was a beaver pond where I stopped for lunch. My old friends the High Peaks were hard to name from this new angle, and the ground was covered in moose tracks.

I left so much unexplored, but turned back. Snyder Brook waited for me on a hot, sunny May day; the clear water poured over smooth river rocks and was too tempting. I climbed in and let the cool water wash over me, despite the folly of skinny-dipping in black fly season.

The ponds and their million-dollar views were nearly silent when I passed them on my way out, disturbed only by loon call. I wondered if this place would get quieter and wilder or louder and more developed. I was happy to visit when I did.

I walked the six miles back to my car. I had black fly bites on my hands, arms and other places you don't need to know about. I'd waited so long for this hike that I'd overdone it, cramming nearly 30 miles into one day. My feet were peppered with blisters, and I walked the last few miles in just socks, not able to bear my stiff boots on the hard road anymore. None of that mattered or could keep the smile off my face. I'd waited a long time for my day of solitude with this place. I hope it's still there for others in the years to come.