



## Macomb Mountain, South Dix, East Dix, Hough Peak & Dix Mountain

Macomb: 16<sup>th</sup> Peak Hiked, Order #21, Elevation 4405'

South Dix: 17<sup>th</sup> Peak Hiked, Order #37, Elevation 4060'

East Dix: 18<sup>th</sup> Peak Hiked, Order #42, Elevation 4012'

Hough: 19<sup>th</sup> Peak Hiked, Order #23, Elevation 4400'

Dix: 20<sup>th</sup> Peak Hiked, Order #6, Elevation 4857'

Duration: 13.5 Hours

Distance: Approximately 20 Miles

September 27, 2003

I left my Grandparents in Upper Jay at 4:45 a.m. and cranked up a Tommy Shaw CD to wake up. I'm not a morning person even when it's 7:00 a.m. The ride in total darkness was pleasant and the five mile ride down the manicured Elk Lake Road was enhanced by autumn leaves falling around my car and blowing in the wind. This set a relaxing atmosphere. I explored the Dix range trailhead and Elk Lake in clear weather on the 26<sup>th</sup> in preparation for this hike. The weather for this day was forecasted to be cloudy in the morning with high winds and possibly a shower, but clearing in the early afternoon. Hopefully the weather would be as beautiful as the day prior.

**5:35** I arrived at the trailhead mentally prepared for the five peak traverse of the Dix Range. There were about ten cars already parked. The temperature was about fifty degrees. The sky was overcast with a nice wind sweeping the land. I was trying to beat the thunderstorms that were expected later in the evening as well as sunset. I wanted really like to finish close to dark or soon after. There was a barely visible glow signifying the upcoming sunrise just over an hour away. All that I really needed in the way of



*DIX FROM THE DOCK ON ELK LAKE TAKEN ON A CLEAR DAY PRIOR TO THE HIKE.*



*THE DIX RANGE AS SEEN FROM ELK LAKE. DIX IS FAR LEFT, HOUGH, SOUTH DIX AND THEN MACOMB.*

clothing was my tank-top and jeans...yes jeans, but I learned of my crime later. I decided to start this trip with two liters of water rather than the one liter that I normally carried. It added some weight to the pack, which would later prove to be detrimental.

I donned a headlamp at the sign-in register and used it in conjunction with a small hand flashlight. The headlamp stopped working about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile down the trail. Oh, well. The flashlight worked.

About  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile down the trail, the Hurricane Floyd damage was apparent. The trail was cut through continuous blow-down. Just after the blow-down there were two private trails, one of which led to Clear Lake and one to Elk Lake. These trails, obviously, got very little use. The main trail proceeded straight and became an old logging road of nearly flat grade.



*FOOT BRIDGE OVER A STREAM ON THE WAY TO MACOMB.*

**6:20** I hit the first of several streams spanned by a bridge. According to my research in books and the internet, this was the first of two bridges before the ascent of Macomb. Several more rivulets added to the wetness of the area. I made excellent time and set a pace between three and four miles per hour, even in the dark. By this time, it was just about light enough to turn out the flashlight.

**6:40** I reached the second bridge, which was larger than the first. In this context, a bridge is a single





*TYPICAL BLOW-DOWN FROM HURRICANE FLOYD ON THE WAY UP MACOMB ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE STREAM AND IRON DEPOSITS ON A ROCK ON MACOMB (RIGHT).*



flattened log with a rough railing attached that spanned the stream. Just north of the bridge, there was a clearly defined herd path that led to a small campsite with one occupant. The herd path roughly followed the stream by weaving in and out of the major blow-down obstructions. Some of the blow-down had been cut, but there was just over a mile of large trees to either climb over or wiggle under on all fours. The up/down motion was only broken when the path

(or several) broke off and lead around something too entangled to climb.

**7:30** The herd path led higher above the stream in elevation (about twenty or thirty feet). It was a steep scramble, at times. It was also very rugged and accompanied by a strong wind blowing the clouds east up the stream. It didn't appear to be a clear day as I entered the cloud ceiling. On the brighter side, Slide Brook was a constant friend all the way up with its reassuring babble. Any daylight I gained was sucked away in this twilight world. As I neared the base of the slide, the path wove in and out and sometimes up Slide Brook. Orange rocks spoke of iron deposits.

**7:50** I realized that God has a sense of humor as I took a break at the base of Macomb Slide with a sick and painful stomach. I forced a banana down, hoping; maybe; I was just hungry. The adrenalin kept any major pain at bay and I hoped to walk it off.

The slide appeared to be approximately 35 degrees and my visibility was not much greater than 50 feet. Looking up into the gloomy mountain scar was anything but beautiful as I knew it would be if there was sun. Supposedly, there are spectacular views of Elk Lake from the slide. None existed today if not in my imagination.



The initial trek up the left side of the slide was through course dirt and small rocks. This medium made it tiring-like walking uphill in a sandy beach. Eventually, the rocks got larger and a “path” of sorts led to the right and meandered up the center.



*LOOKING ACROSS THE SLIDE, THE GRADE IS EVIDENT DURING A PARTICULARLY STEEP SECTION*

Several breaks led me to a large rock about halfway up the slide. As I looked down, I was reminded of my fear of heights. The grade looked steep from this perspective and the bottom of the slide had, long since, disappeared.

I took another break next to what looked like a 20 foot granite Noah’s Ark stranded on an island of destruction. I was reminded of the immense power of nature by looking at the huge rocks that were swept downward during the slide’s creation.



*A STONE ARK WAS CENTERED IN THE SLIDE.*

The top of the slide appeared more quickly than I imagined it would. The cliffs offered two distinct paths. I opted for the one on the left, which was accessed after a scramble up part of the cliff. The path wound through conifers for about .2 miles and caught at my shoulders and pack while drenching my fleece in a shower with each step. It was one of the most confining paths I’d been on, especially in these conditions. I was already exhausted, which was due in part to my food needs and not feeling well.

**8:46** I reached the summit of Macomb in 25-30 m.p.h. winds with a temperature of about 52 degrees. This was my first slide climb and a good memory, regardless of the weather. I took a moment to wring my fleece out as it was heavy and soaked. I also took a minute to eat part of a sandwich and have some soy milk for energy. I knew Elk Lake and the Boreas Mountains were just west, but only fast moving clouds and a cold survey bolt greeted me. The summit sign was a welcome sight on a tree adjacent to the summit rock, which was about the size of a bedroom floor.





**9:25** The col between Macomb and South Dix was an easy trek of about twenty minutes on a distinct, but varying herd path. The path followed my expected compass headings and I felt very comfortable during this portion of the hike. A short distance from the col, the path opened to looming boulders of anorthosite as I enter the boulder field of South Dix. Never have I felt so distant from humankind: about four miles in from the trailhead in some of the most remote peak wilderness with no visibility and another problem...the blowing fog kept clouding my glasses to the point where I couldn't see. I also couldn't see the necessary details without them such as the path, cairns or where the path reentered at the top of the boulder field. I followed the east flank of the field and eventually climbed higher toward the center. The documentation I read said to follow the field up to the highest point, where the path entered into the woods again. Easier read than done, but persistence paid off.



*ON THE SUMMIT IN WET JEANS AND SOAKED FLEECE.*

**9:50** I neared the summit of South Dix as the path entered the cripplebrush and opened to what looked like the summit or a summit. The first rock hump was a false one (which is where my picture was taken), but I took a summit picture regardless...at least it was close and I didn't want to ruin my new camera with the moisture. The true summit was slightly ahead and just north of the summit ledge. This was a substantial piece of rockwork, which supposedly had great views to the south. Immediately after the ledge, the path diverted north to Hough or proceeded to East Dix...where I went.

On the way to East Dix, the wind strengthened and was blowing from the East. The gusts were upward to about 50 m.p.h. on the ridge. It was time to put the camera away. The trail was obvious and I made good time after circumventing a large boulder where I was briefly at a loss for direction. Low visibility made finding the exit path hard. By 10:28 I had trekked to within 1/10 of a mile of the summit where I took a break. During my break, I heard my first hints that other were hiking in addition to myself. I yelled, "Hello."



*SURVEY BOLT AND THE SUMMIT ROCK ON MACOMB'S SUMMIT. NOTICE THE DIFFERENT SPELLING ON THE BOLT.*





*BEGINNING OF THE BOULDER FIELD ASCENDING SOUTH DIX (ABOVE). JUST BELOW THE SUMMIT OF SOUTH DIX (BELOW).*

Three men from the Boquet River area were also on their way to East Dix via a different herd path. I verified that they were on course.

**10:50** Shortly after my break and a quick scramble over and through some rocky areas, I reached the summit of East Dix. The winds were horrendous from the east and I couldn't see the supposedly spectacular views of the Champlain Valley. I asked one of my new acquaintances to take a picture as I stood on the highest boulder on the peak. He did, but I later found out that my camera was on play and not record, so the effort was in vain: I missed my summit shot of East Dix. We spent about ten minutes in the cold driving mist and retreated back to South Dix where parted ways: I to Hough and Dix and they to Macomb followed by Hough and Dix. Just a note: the ridge path to East Dix from South Dix was a moderate descent for at

least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way. The hike up to East Dix was fairly steep at times with a couple scrambles up rocks.

The way back to South Dix brought me past several other hiking parties. There was an ADK group on the peaks as well. As we reach the summit of South Dix, I found myself on an exposed ledge for a moment...until a gust knocked me off into the trees. I'm glad the wind was blowing west.

**11:55** I re-climbed South Dix to go to Hough. My plan was to try and catch up to the ADK group for further company. Before I got started, a gentleman passed by who was a few years younger than myself. I asked if he'd like some company and he agreed. It turned out that he's already a forty-sixer.





The path down the north side of South Dix was steep at times and a challenge, but we arrived at the col in a short time. A steeper grade greeted us as we exited the col to Hogback and I realized that I was tiring under the new pace set by Chris.

**12:20 p.m.** I summited the Hogback or Pough after a hard climb. I needed food and the ascent to Hough was grueling. I apologized and said he could go on without me if need be, but he vowed to accompany me to at least Hough's summit and possibly beyond. I literally spent much of this ascent in regret for slowing Chris and for attempting such an endeavor as I leaned my head on my walking stick time and again to catch my breath. I carried too much water and my jeans were soaked, heavy and starting to chafe the inside of my thighs. I quickly realized why jeans are bad to hike in. Hough was also plagued by blow-down, forcing intermittent climbing followed by squatting and crawling. I literally had to lift my leg with my hands several times to get over the trees due to my tired state and heavy jeans.



*THIS WAS NEAR THE INTERSECTION TRAIL ON SOUTH DIX TO HOUGH OR EAST DIX.*

Usually, I'm the one setting too fast of a pace. This time the shoe was on the other foot and it didn't fit. In our conversations, I informed him that he'd make a good Kuk Sool practitioner based on his hiking stamina.

Hurricane Floyd did extensive damage in 1999 to this entire region. Chris stated that the trails drastically changed from 1998 to 1999...and not for the better. Although there was still blow-down, it was obvious that much work had been done to clear it.

**12:54 p.m.** I summited Hough and ate a partial sandwich and an avocado behind the protection of an erratic near the summit rock which was again the size of a room floor. The wind was again whipping...this time from the west. The ridge after the summit was a trek along the west side...not fun with the strong winds, especially near the cliff that we briefly walked along. Elk Lake should have been a beautiful sight, but was obscured. I stopped on the way down and searched for new batteries for the GPS, which beeped a low battery warning. The descent was steep and welcome after losing so much energy.



*EXHAUSTED ON THE SUMMIT OF HOUGH.*



*SITTING ON THE SUMMIT OF DIX AND A PARTIAL VIEW OF THE CAP ROCK ON THE BECKHORN (LEFT).*

Again, we reached the col in a short time along with the illegal campsite (since it's above 4000 ft.) and bailout trail down Lillian Brook. It was another welcome flat area. I caught my breath, but was exhausted and anxious about ascending to the Beckhorn. I didn't know if I could do it (really I did, but it didn't feel like it, especially at Chris's pace). I also didn't want to do it alone, so I push myself as much as possible. This was one of the longer ascents other than Macomb. The hike out of the col was steep and somewhat confusing. It was merely a matter of ascending to the ridge and walking north, but several winding and distinct paths meandered through the dense trees and blow-down. Chris and I debated over which was correct (they both turned out to be). It was exhausting climbing over and under the continuing blow-down in my state. I was glad I had company in the low visibility and jumble of trees. After a disheartening trek, we reached the ridge and the grade leveled slightly before the final assault on the Beckhorn.

The only thing that kept me going while climbing Dix was Chris's patience with my exhaustion and knowing that this was peak number five of the day...a euphoric feeling. The



*SHROUDED IN EVER-PRESENT BLOWING FOG, IS THE SUMMIT RIDGE OF DIX.*

fact that I needed to climb this to reach the yellow Beckhorn trail, my exit path, was added incentive. The feeling was reminiscent of climbing Giant after Rocky Peak Ridge without food...no choice but up.

Again, I exhausted quickly, but the Beckhorn was finally marked by large boulders that had to be ascended by climbing up steep cracks. There was one area that would have made a marvelous picture with it's unique layering, but pictures were not on my mind. I was at least warm again after a





quick change into a dry shirt and a rain jacket. The Beckhorn was done. It was now a .2 mile walk to the true summit. This was an easy trek broken by a brief break to eat wild blueberries. Shortly after, I finally encountered the ADK group.

**2:35 p.m.** I summited Dix with a sigh of relief. Chris had met a personal goal of reaching the summit by 3:00. Even with me slowing him, we made his goal. The wind was still from the west and knocked us around as we took summit pictures and I found the old bolt...smaller than the others I'd encountered. After another break and food, we trekked back via the yellow trail: 2.1 miles down a ridgeline.



*OLD SURVEY BOLT ON DIX.*

We first passed the horn of the Beckhorn, which is a massive rock on top of the rock-peaked ridge. This was, at first, a precarious scramble down the sheer rocks creating the Beckhorn. It quickly became a steep, but manageable trail down the ridgeline made of dirt/mud, rocks and roots. Conversation made the time go quickly. I was heading down, so I set a good pace. I did notice, however, that I'd broken my big toenail loose on my right foot. A similar problem occurred in May on Giant with my left toe. The most tedious part of this trail was the stream bed: a rock hop that lasts for about twenty minutes. Afterward, we finally descended from the clouds into a beautiful stand of hardwoods where the reds of autumn were in dull view around us.

**4:20 p.m.** We reached the yellow trail intersection back to the trailhead where I grabbed an apple for moisture as well as food. Only about 3.9 miles were left to get to the car.

**4:35 p.m.** Dix pond was a misty sight and a welcome break. We sat for a few minutes and



*DIX POND.*

each had some cheese for further energy. The Colvin/Blake range had sun on it. Again God displayed His sense of humor.

The hike back to the Slide brook was really a walk in the park, but not after six peaks (five different ones). There were two small, but formidable feeling, shoulders that were gradually climbed and descended on this clearly cut trail. Lillian Brook was a beautiful stream with a newly built bridge and lean-to set about .1 mile from the trail itself. It was at this point that I saw two patches of fleeting blue sky for the first time since yesterday. Rrrgghh.



*THE NEW FOOTBRIDGE OVER LILLIAN BROOK.*

We got back to Chris's tent where I ate again and finally excused myself for the final trek out, hopefully, before dark.

**6:30 p.m.** Dusk quickly enveloped me. The long shadows started about 3:30 p.m. or so yesterday. There were no such signals of a waning sun today. At about forty five minutes from the tent, the trailhead was still .3 miles away. I reflected and found it amazing how confident I felt in the darkness of the morning with the (at the time) promise of a rising sun. As twilight loomed, however, the forest closed in with the looming threat of darkness.

**6:35 p.m.** I reached the trailhead with a little dim light to spare. I reached my goals...all five peaks by dark.

**Summary:** In retrospect, the Dix Range was not the traverse I should have done as the first hike on my vacation. I should have built up to this endeavor. The injuries I sustained also affected the rest of my trip. In some respects, though, I completed it at the best time other than summer with more daylight. Within two weeks, the road would have been blocked two miles from the trailhead due to hunting season and winter, effectively adding another four miles to the hike. Four days later, the weather dropped into the thirties with snow on the peaks. When I look back, I realize this trip had a totally different feel than any in the past. It was a feeling of total isolation in a drenched and rugged environment. The awesome power of nature's fury was all around: the blow-down, the slides and boulder field, the blinding clouds and the driving gusts of wind.

I set personal time goals for each peak in order to beat daylight. I made the most of my goals and exited by dusk. Had the sky been clear and pictures plentiful, I may not have made it out by dark. I spent no longer than about ten to fifteen minutes on each peak to rest and eat. Pictures would have taken more time. I intent to summit Dix again on a pristine day for this purpose via Hunter's Pass.

I hike for a combination of reasons. One is to simply enjoy the freedom and isolation in the beauty of nature. Another is to capture these details and panoramas through a camera's eye. The final reason is to challenge myself with goals close to my limits. The hike through low visibility, gusts, dampness, misdirection, blow-down and this area's rugged terrain satisfied my last goal. I climbed five different peaks above 4000 ft. this day. I felt good for that alone. The irony of the day rested with the thoughts that occurred several times in the last months: that I did not want to climb this range without seeing the views.





**Problems/Lessons:** I didn't account for the wind and fog on my glasses. My body heat also fogged them in the cold dampness of fifty degrees. My digital camera didn't like the conditions any more than I did. The dampness affected the electronics by lowering response time. The entire camera body and lens spent most of the day cold and fogged up. I climbed with my Citizen watch also. The inside was completely fogged up. The zipper on my pack also split, but fixed itself. On a final note, jeans and hiking in the Adirondacks do not mix.

Today was also the annual day that SLU sends a person to summit each high peak.

My father spent the day with my grandparents fixing up the property under a warm, but windy beautiful day. They were thrilled that the weather was so good for me. I informed them of the truth of my reality.

Damage assessment: My leg muscles were actually fine. My left toenail that fell off from hiking Giant developed large blood blister from Dix. My right toenail lifted from the skin to the root. I subsequently lost this a couple weeks later. Both little toenails also lifted. I got raised and bloody chafe marks on the inside and outside of both thighs. The new knee brace on my right knee wore through my skin and inflamed my hamstring tendon. My shoulders were also chafed slightly from the pack. As usual after such an ordeal, my head also ached. Yes, it was worth it!

As usual, I beat the conservative estimates of time for such a trip in most of the guide books. I've learned to plan based on this assessment.

The cell phone did not work so I couldn't call back to the trailer to tell my family that I once again escaped death (ha-ha). My father and God-Father, Gene, went looking for me since I hadn't arrived by 7:30 p.m. I actually arrived about 7:34 p.m. We must have passed each other on Route 9N. They arrived back at the trailer at 9:30 p.m. after driving to Elk Lake and finding that I had signed out at the trailhead. I guess that's better than calling the police and DEC!

This hike marked the last of the extreme hikes for me (or so I thought). Future hikes may entail up to two peaks, but never again five. Several months after this, I moved to Canton. Time constraints then ceased to be an issue. I also didn't want to put my body through the pain again...I've proven what I can do.



## Doctrine of the Mountain

I have been the river that gently flows around the immovable.  
I have been the reed that bends to gale force winds.  
I have been the sand that yields to footprints left upon me.  
I have been what the undercurrents have justified.

Rivers eventually change course.  
Reeds that bend too far meet the earth.  
Sand soon yields to limestone.  
Undercurrents change and dictate new philosophies.

Now, I am the mountain...the stone upon which adversity breaks itself.  
Yeah, though great winds blow around me, water beats upon me  
and the cold of winter surrounds me,  
I do not yield.  
I am my own mountain fortress, solid to the core and wide at the root.

Only eons of torment show any wear for the weather...far more than a human lifetime  
...and still I stand.