



Seymour Mountain, Seward Mountain, Mount Donaldson & Mount Emmons

Seymour: 40th Peak Hiked, Order #34, Elevation 4120', No Maintained Trail

Seward: 41st Peak Hiked, Order #24, Elevation 4361', No Maintained Trail

Donaldson: 42nd Peak Hiked, Order #33, Elevation 4140', No Maintained Trail

Emmons: 43rd Peak Hiked, Order #40, Elevation 4040', No Maintained Trail

Distance: 22 Miles (of mud)

Duration: 16:25 Hours

August 14, 2004

My familiarity with the Adirondacks was among the high peaks in and around the Keene and Marcy area. I'm not sure what I expected from the mountains off Corey's Road, but I was surprised by the intensity of this hike, its duration and THE STINKIN' MUD.

August 13 (or Friday the 13th) brought upstate New York a day of wetness from Tropical Storm Bonnie. The storm was preceded by relatively wet weather throughout the course of the week. It was also followed by the wet remnants of Hurricane Charley, which made landfall just 20 miles north of Ft. Myers, FL where my parents live and where I just moved from. My timing on that was good and I hoped the hike would fall in the



*SEWARD STANDS IN THE FOREGROUND AND SEYMOUR IN THE BACK FROM DONALDSON (ABOVE).
EMMONS AND DONALDSON FROM SEWARD (BELOW).*



calm between the storms, but it was still quite wet.

I arrived at the trailhead at about 11:00 p.m on August 13th, yes, Friday the 13th. I met Rico who was already reclined in his SUV reading a book. I was going to sleep in the back of my truck on a sleeping bag. The bed is about six feet...just long enough to accommodate me. We talked for a while in the light drizzle and agreed to get up at 4 am. I didn't know if the alarm on my phone would work, so he agreed to be the alarm keeper. It was cozy inside the bed and cool outside, but I couldn't fall asleep until a bit after midnight.

4:20 I was awakened by a light tap on the window of my truck. The reality of four hours of sleep hit me, but I was ready for the hike. Rico had pressed "sleep" on his alarm clock three times and woken us up late. I made sure to give him a hard time about the late



start, but was glad for the extra twenty minutes. He blamed me soon after anyway for being hypoglycemic and taking thirty minutes to get ready. In the ensuing blame game we were 1:1. I prepared my pack (this should have been done the night before), ate breakfast and got my gear together. By about 4:50, I was ready to begin in the cool of the early morning (in the high 50's).

4:50 The rain from the previous night had stopped and the stars twinkled in the darkness as we stepped from the parking lot onto a muddy path. This was God's way of foreshadowing, but we didn't pick up on the hint! My flashlight and Rico's head-lamp lit the way on a wide path known as the Blueberry Trail. This was an easy way to warm up and wake up on the trails slight ups and downs.

5:25 We hiked through mud and across streams and arrived at the intersection to the Calkins Brook Truck Trail. A sign gave the mileage as 1.2 miles. I considered this fairly good time in the mud and darkness. Finally, at about 5:40 we put our lights away as the sun awoke the clouds. Another four hours or so and I hoped to be awake.

6:30 The Blueberry Trail led to the Ward Brook Truck Trail and we veered right. I could feel the anticipation of climbing the first mountain. The day was brighter, but the clouds had moved in to obscure the sky in part. Seymour's herd path was 1.2 miles away on what seemed like a grassy two lane highway compared to most paths. Twenty more minutes led us to the Ward Brook lean-to where several people were waking up and looking groggily in our direction as if to ask, "Are you really awake and hiking?"

7:05 We talked most of the way in and the time and miles went by quickly. I saw a cairn with a path and asked where that went. Rico thought it went to Seward. The path for Seymour was approaching rapidly...or was it? We suddenly reached Camp Four lean-tos and followed a faint path for less than a hundred feet before consulting directions and the topo map. We agreed that we'd gone too far by about ½ mile. We grumbled and laughed it off, but both knew we had a long walk ahead of us and that an extra mile would be regretted later.

HERDPATH LEADING TO SEYMOUR FROM THE WARD BROOK TRUCK TRAIL.





RICO HIKING UP THE TRAIL TO SEYMOUR.

7:30 We back-tracked to the cairn previously mentioned and started up what we silently hoped was Seymour Mountain (and not Seward Mountain). So far, we'd traveled about 6.5 miles with one mile that shouldn't have existed. The sun was strongly present in the partly cloudy sky. I anticipated a clear summit since it was warming and the clouds were moving quickly. I had fully awoken and felt ready for the task.

The path ascended gently and paralleled Ward Brook through the woods as it climbed into a steeper grade. It eventually led to a narrow slide of open rock. Water streamed down in a sheet. I anticipated a slippery climb up the very steep grade as on Allen Mountain, but was surprised by the grip that the rock offered. I was able to climb nearly straight up most of the sections and was only slowed by my endurance. Red algae, which is extremely slippery, was not present on these rocks.

The lack of trees immediately behind (cleared from the slide) showed a view that confirmed that we were gaining altitude on the mountain. It's always amazing how the panorama and landscapes below invigorate me and renew my strength. Soon after, however, a distant cloud closed the gap and shrouded the mountain as it blew onto our slope. The long steep grade finally gave way as we neared the summit ridge. The path wound its way through the woods as I realized that I needed food...badly. After the first four false summits I stopped for a banana in between mud pits. The path finally, after another false summit or two, led to a small cliff overlooking what would have been the Seward Range. The clouds were blowing below us through the col and to the south. Part of Seward Mountain peeked through every now and again as the sun warmed us and the clouds and wind chilled us while stealing our views.

9:00 After several pictures, we sought the true wooded summit where a sign was nailed to a tree several feet above our heads. We both breathed a sigh of relief when the sign read, "Seymour." The path up was about 1.5 miles in length and rose about 2000 vertical feet. A path continued on for another hundred feet or so, which led to more cloud obscured views. Rico explored while I called Deb. We met again on the cliff overlook and re-nourished ourselves. I was amazed at just how hard this mountain was to climb. No peak is a cakewalk, but this was more rugged and longer than I expected. Forty minutes later found us packing up and beginning the trek back down the steep slide.



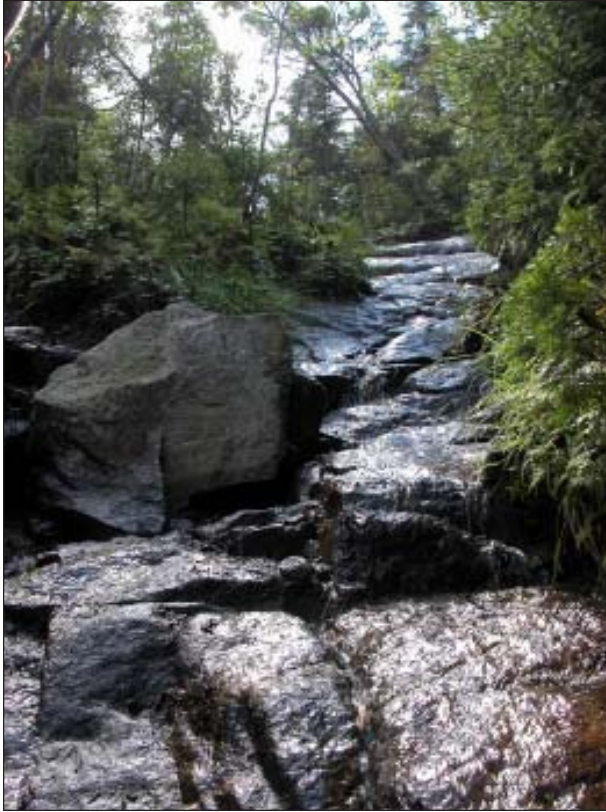
10:45 The Ward Brook Truck Trail was warm and sunny as we exited the herd path and turned left in search of the herd path to Seward Mountain. As we sought the herd path, I realized that my body had subconsciously shifted gears. Since we climbed up and back down the same trail and retraced our steps on the Ward Brook Truck Trail, I psychologically felt like I was done for the day and hiking out. This contributed, at least partially, to the energy problems that I soon ran into. The Seward path also paralleled a brook (Seward) and the identification cairn was located just prior to a wooden truck bridge.

We started on what looked like the same trail as Seymour's, but it differentiated itself as we crossed the brook into a hundred yard sea of mud...this time with a stench. Our trek of mud had begun as we waded up to our ankles and beyond. The path's grade increased quickly in the woods as it paralleled the brook on the right-hand (wet) side. I had to stop to filter some water (a good excuse). I brought two liters and depleted them quickly. The brook offered a beautiful break as it rushed through a small flume padded on each side by sphagnum and other soft mosses.

I needed to stop for breath and a snack more than several times in the course of the following three hours. They were some of the longest I can remember. I realized that I was having a very bad day keeping my sugar high enough to sustain the pace and duration of what was needed in the present and what would be needed in the hours ahead. Rico out-paced me



VIEW WEST OF SEWARD NESTLED IN THE CLOUDS FROM THE FIRST OVERLOOK ON SEYMOUR.



ONE OF MANY ROCK BASE SECTIONS OF THE 2.5 MILE PATH UP.



easily and would disappear only to wait for me on an overlook. I felt bad, but couldn't walk any faster. I was pushing my limit and the path seemed to never end. The long trek through the woods ended and led to a long hike up rocks, which made it no easier, but broke the monotony that sought to overwhelm me.

2:45 p.m. At long last, the path leveled a bit and meandered to and then along the base of a small cliff head wall. We scrambled up where it was obvious, wandered briefly (and levelly) and reached the summit where we collapsed in exhaustion. It was wooded, but it could have been in a cave (I wouldn't have cared). I just needed food. Again, I called Deb and, for the first time, she and Rico talked on the phone. The clouds had broken enough to clear the peaks by about 1000 feet. We could see through breaks in the trees beautiful, if not hazy, panoramas.

Rico asked me several days later if I had considered going back since I was having such an off day. I wanted nothing more, but would settle for nothing less than achieving my goal...to do all four peaks. I gathered a bit of a second wind after my rest on Seward. I knew Donaldson and Emmons would be easy compared to the first two of the morning. We'd already climbed the majority of the vertical necessary for the day. The prospect of two relatively easy ascents buoyed my mood.

A group of about eight French-Canadians found their way to the peak soon after we did. I remembered passing them on the Ward Brook Truck Trail as one was hanging a bear bag. We passed them again as we descended for Donaldson.

SEWARD AND CLIMBING A SIMILAR SECTION.



WADING THROUGH THE MUD ON THE RIDGE OF SEWARD AND A LITTLE BIT OF MUD ON MY BOOT (AND UP TO MY SEAT (NOT SHOWN IN PICTURE!).

The path down Seward was a moderately steep walk on bare anorthosite and short scrambles. It soon wound its way into the woods as it skirted around the large false summit of the ridge. I figured it would re-ascend, but was pleasantly surprised when it did not. The herd path was again wet and muddy and we found the first scenic overlook west from Donaldson just past the herd path to Calkins Brook (our exit route). I snapped a few pictures of Seward and then began the trek down the long ridge that is Donaldson. The mud was brutal and deep. We passed several erratics that overlooked to the east, explored a few and missed the summit (but found it later). Rico made a comment that this was a long mountain ridge. He was correct. The knee-deep mud pulled to make it longer as it went over my gaiters at times. Note: My gaiters come to just below my knee. An especially deep quagmire about 100 yards long was located about midway on the Donaldson ridge. I think we would have disappeared, had we stepped into it, but faint paths skirted the more shallow mud at the edges on either side.

The descent from Donaldson to Emmons was easy and quick. There were only a few rock scrambles that we'd have to come back up to get back to the Calkins Brook herd path.

4:10 p.m. The trail wound over two small bumps and within forty minutes, we made our way through the woods and up a couple scrambles to easily summit Emmons. We hiked without much of a break from Seward to Emmons. It was an easy task made difficult only by the mud. Emmons reminded me of Street Mountain in some ways, just without the blow-down. The red disk marking the summit sat on a partially wooded area. Views unfolded to the south and I unenthusiastically snapped a picture. Exposed rocks gave us an area to drop our gear, eat and for me to call Deb to let her know it would be a late night. We took a break of just over twenty minutes and focused on getting back to Donaldson to find the true summit. I was unhappy about having to re-ascend the mountain again, but the vertical distance was thankfully short.



5:25 p.m. The only outlook we ignored on Donaldson turned out to be the true summit on a rock ledge overlooking Marcy, Allen, Seward, Seymour and my last hike for the forty-six...the Santanoni Range. Several other mountains peeked through the haze as well. Our constant immersion in mud left us weary and anxious to start the long walk back from the range.

The trail to Calkins Brook left the summit ridge via a flag marked herd path. This was a firm dirt path (amazingly) that wound its way off the ridge just after the summit on the second ascent of Donaldson. The mud was replaced with blow-down...lots of it! This was a day of challenges, one after another. My feet were, at this point, getting quite sore which made the blow-down worse as it forced me into positions and movement I sought to avoid. A strong grade downward increased the pain and chafing. This was still better and shorter in the long run than our other option, which was to re-ascend Seward and travel the 2.5 miles down its ridge.



BLOW-DOWN ACROSS THE TRAIL TO CALKINS BROOK. I RESTED FOR THE PICTURE.

6:37 After what seemed an eternity (one of many) Calkins Brook broke the silence of the forest and we refilled our water supply and ate a snack. My snacking had become a common theme on every peak and several times in between.

I thought the truck trail would be only a short distance ahead, but my hopes faded when Rico said a good distance still remained. We assumed a quick pace after the brook on the wider and more even path that became the norm. Mud greeted us intermittently as we

focused on getting to the Calkins Brook Truck Trail in the rapidly failing light. As the trail to Seward had progressed endlessly upward, this progressed downward ceaselessly. It was amazing to me that we could continue to descend so constantly and not greet the ocean...but I was delirious as that thought entered my mind. Finally, we entered a meadow where the trail leveled among the hardwoods. About fifteen minutes later, we exited near the cairn on the truck trail after crossing the brook. I had to “see a man about a horse” at that time. Again, it gave me another excuse to rest (another recurring theme).

The truck trail continued on for about 2.2 miles. It ascended nearly immediately, which actually felt good for a brief period. The ground covering alternated between grass and rocks in this two-lane foot highway. We set as quick a pace (a forced march) as we could and said a scare few words between us as we focused in our individual “zones.” Up and up we ascended and finally reached more of a level grade. An intersecting horse path sparked my hopes for an early escape, but it was not to be.



8:30 p.m. We reached the Blueberry Trail from the truck trail and collapsed as we dropped our packs in search of our lights. After a brief respite, we were off again on the 1.2 mile return via the trail we walked in the morning darkness. My feet were so sore that I could hardly avoid the rocks of the path and rolled my ankles several times from weakness and improper foot placement. I tried to focus on the sounds of the night to take my mind off the pain as coy-dogs howled in the distance.

This distraction was a nice change from the lack of animal wildlife that accompanied the trip. Toads seemed to be the dominant species of the day in addition to one grouse that we flushed along the path.

9:05 p.m. The time progressed underfoot and twilight turned to total darkness as we signed out at the register. My truck never looked so inviting, except maybe on Big Slide or the Saddleback/Basin hike. Non-the-less, this was the longest hike in both distance and duration that I'd ever completed. I knew it would be long, but not this rugged and certainly not this muddy.

It took about ½ hour to carefully pack the truck with the muddy articles. I sat for a bit until my feet dried as well and then bid Rico a safe ride back. I had over an hour's drive ahead of me and Rico had nearly 3 ½. He told me later that he drove part way and camped in his SUV again.



THE SOUTH SIDE OF SEWARD AND ITS FALSE SUMMIT (RIGHT) FROM DONALDSON.



The hike took a large toll on my body. My feet were swollen from sweating since my boots didn't breathe (they were covered with mud for at least 14 of the hours). This led to the skin being worn off the outside bottom of my big toes. On the other side of each, a large blister had formed. The laces had obviously loosened up because my ankles were badly chafed as well. Once again, I also managed to partially remove one of the large toenails. The exertion caused a lethargy that I felt until the following Friday. I ate an unusual amount of food to fuel my body: A container of chicken soup, 2 hard boiled eggs, 3 turkey/cheese sandwiches, 2 breakfast bars, 3 protein bars, 1 yogurt (eaten with a very large knife), 3 bananas, 1 apple & 5.5 liters of water. I, once again, found and pushed my physical and mental limit for a day hike. This turned out to be the longest hike of my life and of my journey to summit the forty six tallest peaks of New York.

Clarity

He looked to the wind for inspiration, for answers.

The eagle cried in answer.

His gaze unlocked from the distant clouds,
brushed by the first hints of sunset,
to the velvet sea of green below.

The evergreen expanse covered the hills
with a living blanket of wonder and beauty.

Coy-dogs howled in the distance.

The sun pushed its set closer with each moment
as the cliff-face succumbed to a veil of shadows.

His mind sought the Mother.

The earth speaks,
sometimes whispering and sometimes roaring in her native tongue.

Many are deaf, though they hear.

Many are blind, though they see.

Some can see what they hear and feel what they see...

and some can speak back and touch the source itself.

These truly understand the ebb and flow of the native tide.

The sun set as the wind spoke and all was made clear.



SUMMIT PHOTOS ON SEYMOUR (ABOVE), SEWARD, DONALDSON AND EMMONS (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT).

