

RECOVERY #20

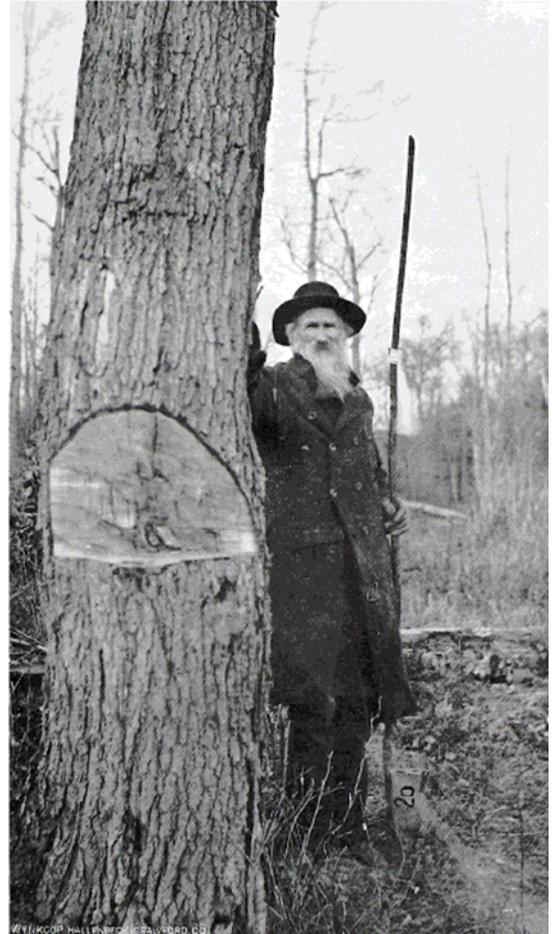
A report on the activities of the Colvin Crew, in and around the Town of Minerva, Essex County, April 24-25, 2010

Following the short winter of 2009-2010, the “crew” was once again hot on the track of our namesake and extending our knowledge of his work into new areas of the Adirondacks. While Colvin probably occupied about a dozen peaks in this area our limited time would only allow us to visit three of these peaks, namely, Kettle Mtn., Polaris Mtn. and Prospect Rock with the last two requiring access through private property belonging to the Northwood’s Club. The crew expended thirteen hours of hiking and searching over the course of two days in pursuit of this recovery.

An incomplete history of V. Colvin’s Minerva activities:

Based solely upon a reading of Colvin’s 1896 and 1897 report to the N.Y.S. Legislators¹, it appears that Mr. Colvin and his crews visited this specific area of Minerva first in 1895 for the purposes of identifying and clarifying the newly created boundaries of the N.Y.S. Forest Preserve. The exact location of these ancient boundary lines (circa late 1700’s) were apparently in dispute due to loss of field markings and conflicting legal descriptions². In particular, “the northwesterly corner of the twenty-sixth township is found to extend beyond the northeasterly corner of the sixteenth township by a distance of twelve chains and sixty-seven links on the course of the division line of those townships produced northerly”³ was in need of Mr. Colvin’s personal attention, as the “local experts”⁴ he had employed could not reach a consensus as to the correct location of the common corner.

August 27, 1895 Upon arriving in camp with copies of the original field notes and after a personal inspection of the ancient field markings, Colvin quickly determined the true location of the northerly bounds of the sixteenth township and instructed the survey party to place a signal upon the highest point of rock where the line crossed over Polaris Mountain. The purpose for having this new signal constructed was to geodetically tie-in this township line to Colvin’s overall survey of the Adirondack’s via his primary triangulation network. Of this signal point Colvin writes, “The summit is a savage looking peak of naked rock --- here a nickel-plated line bolt was sunk in the granite and marked with the letter L in the middle, here after called Station L --- so that the line might always be found at this point --- it is a dangerous station as the rock slopes rapidly towards the verge of the cliff --- and the slightest stumble of the explorer at this point would be certain death”⁵.



A line tree of 1772 showing depth of mark
Orson P. Morse, Local Surveyor.
Plate No. 22 from 1896 report.

¹ See <http://www.colvincrew.org/archives/380> for instructions on how to access these reports through the N.Y.S. digital archives.

² Some things never change.

³ Page 79, Report of the Superintendent of the State Land Survey of the State of New York, transmitted to the Legislature March 2, 1896.

⁴ Surveyors Morse, Comstock and Lynch

⁵ Page 77 & 81, Report of the Superintendent of the State Land Survey of the State of New York, transmitted to the Legislature March 2, 1896.

September 2, 1895 “I devoted to the examination of a summit near the center of the sixteenth township which is locally known as Prospect Rock --- this hill is very accessible from the club grounds and commands a view of over forty prominent mountain peaks --- in fact, the number of important points visible from this rocky eminence is almost startling for the facility which it offered for astronomical observations in the azimuth work -- its command of all the signal stations in this part of Essex County made it possible to radiate azimuth lines in all directions and connect the future detached surveys readily with this central point”⁶



Surveyor Morse standing under the “side-line signal” with Mt. Van De Whacker (Vanderwhacker) in the background. Plate No. 11 from 1896 report.

September 3, 1895 While performing observations on top of Prospect Rock with the solar transit discovers “that Polaris Mtn. is aptly named being within a few minutes of true north.”⁷

September 4, 1895 “bade farewell to members of the association (Northwood’s Club) who had been so courteous in their attentions to myself and men and thus greatly aided in the success of the work”⁸

October 26, 1895 Colvin is occupying his triangulation station located at the Blue Ledge’s above the Hudson River where he writes, “I now noticed, for the first time on the easterly side of the deep canyon of the river a sharp peak which was quite new to me. This could only be the summit know to the river drivers as Kettle Mountain whose cliffs and steep slopes face the river above Harris Rifts --- I reconnoitered this summit very carefully with telescope and found the sharp crest well situated for use as a signal station -- it was evident that this would be an important point for connecting the allotment lines with surveys to the north and south”⁹

January 8, 1896 “Kettle Mountain near the east bank of the upper Hudson was occupied and angular readings

secured to the stations visible there from, sufficient for present purposes, the party leaving the mountain and reaching Minerva the same evening”.¹⁰

Recovery notes of the “Colvin Crew” -----

Saturday April 24, 2010 Sixteen members of the Colvin Crew, along with the superintendent, assembled at the camp of fellow crewmember Tom Peterson at 9:00 AM. After a short ride into the Northwood’s Club property, the crew was warmly welcomed and given a quick tour of the clubhouse by our hosts for the day, Tom and Haydie Callaghan (Haydie being the club president). Following an introduction to Paul Moulton who would act as our guide for the day, our packs were quickly shouldered and the march to Polaris Mt. commenced.

⁶ Page 82 & 83, Report of the Superintendent of the State Land Survey of the State of New York, transmitted to the Legislature March 2, 1896.
⁷ Page 84, Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Page 124, Report of the Superintendent of the State Land Survey of the State of New York, transmitted to the Legislature March 2, 1896.
¹⁰ Page 117, Report of the Superintendent of the State Land Survey of the State of New York, transmitted to the Legislature March 9, 1897.

Most of the three± mile hike in was along existing club trails with the final assault upon the summit being a steep bushwhack. At the base of the steepest section, the northerly boundary of the sixteenth township was encountered and found to be blazed and painted. It pointed us in the direction to climb. Unfortunately, this was up and over a steep ledge so a slight detour was made westerly to a more climbable section. Our guides had previously informed us that they knew where the bolt was and with their assistance we soon reached the highest point of the sixteenth township where it crosses over a large section of exposed ledge rock. A solitary “eye-bolt” was readily found and pointed out to us by our guides as being the point they knew of. We were close! While the Superintendent commenced searching the area with his metal detector for the remaining eyebolts, Colvin Crew Historian Larry Rathman and special quest Bill Brannon¹¹ quickly zeroed in on the operative area and in short order had cleared away the accumulated vegetative growth and exposed bolt “L”. ***There it was***, still marking the line as Colvin had envisioned 115 years ago, in perfect condition, kept hidden from vandals by its remoteness and uncovered by a descendent of the surveyor who helped set it. ***It doesn't get much better than***



that folks! Other evidence found of Colvin’s occupation of this point included another eyebolt, nails and wire used to tie the wooden signal to the eyebolts. After a short lunch we continued on to the summit in order to search for a possible second triangulation station. It is unclear when reading Colvin’s report if a second station exists on the summit of Polaris Mt. but being this close we had to look. The summit was found to be densely wooded and after a careful search with two metal detectors, nothing was found¹². Following some group pictures, a four-mile “forced march” along a different route than we had taken in ensued to get us back to our starting point. Evidence of recent moose activity abounded and by 3 PM half the group had arrived back at the clubhouse where they made a short side trip to the top of nearby Prospect Rock to view the station Colvin was so enamored with. Unfortunately, the bolt had long since been removed but the drill hole, eyebolts and rare tripod leg holes¹³ were recovered. By 4:00 PM the entire crew was back safe and sound at the clubhouse and



View looking southerly back to our starting point at the Northwood’s Club (field in background)
Lonesome and Split Rock Pond in the foreground



Prospect Rock drill hole

partaking in much-needed refreshments provided to us by our hosts for the day. The Superintendent then made a brief presentation welcoming the Northwood’s Club into the Colvin Crew and thanking them for their continued support of Verplanck Colvin’s work (and his followers). The crew then proceeded back to the Peterson camp where most had elected to spend the night. Following an excellent family style potluck dinner, the Superintendent put the crew to sleep with a faulty slide show on Colvin’s work. Lights out by 10:00 PM.

Sunday April 25, 2010 The crew once again assembled in front of Tom Peterson’s camp at 9:00 AM to commence the day’s planned activity. The Superintendent was encouraged to see that besides himself, thirteen members had sufficiently recovered from the previous days exertions and were actively seeking more adventure.

¹¹ Bill Brannon is a local surveyor from Minerva and a descendent of Colvin’s assistant surveyor, Orson P. Morse.

¹² More research is needed to verify if such a point exists.

¹³ See <http://www.colvincrew.org/archives/283> for more information on Colvin “footholes”

This time we would be bushwhacking onto Kettle Mtn., situated high above the Hudson River gorge. A relatively easy hike of 1.5± miles (each way) with little elevation change¹⁴ was encountered and we reached our objective promptly. The bolts location was quickly discovered but as is typically the case, had once again been removed by vandals leaving only the drill hole and signal framework eyebolts for us to view. Following a short lunch break overlooking the Hudson River Gorge and O.K. Slip Falls, a different bushwhack was taken back through the forest and the road was safely reached by 2:30 PM, thereby concluding the day's activities.

Parting notes:

This recovery would not have been possible without the support and interest of the Northwood's Club. Time has a way of changing many things, but one constant I have witnessed first hand is the Northwood's Club commitment to assisting Verplanck Colvin (and his followers). As Colvin himself wrote "I was most hospitably received by members of the club and given every facility in aid of my work"¹⁵ and so here we were, some 115 years later finding the same generosity being extended to the Colvin Crew thereby allowing us to perform our mission of "following in the footsteps" of our namesake.



Kettle Mt. drill hole

Respectfully Submitted,
James M. Vianna, LS
Superintendent, Colvin Crew



The Crew on Polaris Mt.



The Crew on Kettle Mt. with O.K. Slip Falls in the background

The COLVIN CREW is an honorable organization formed for the purpose of perpetuating the Adirondack doings and dreams of that pioneer surveyor,
VERPLANCK COLVIN
www.colvincrew.org

¹⁴ Just what the doctor ordered after the previous days trip.

¹⁵ Page 77, Report of the Superintendent of the State Land Survey of the State of New York, transmitted to the Legislature March 2, 1896