

RECOVERY #21

*A report on the activities of the Colvin Crew, in and around Moose Island,
Lake Placid, Twp. 11, Old Military Tract
Essex County, N.Y.
July 31, 2010*

After a well attended two-day trip into the Northwood's Club this past spring, the “crew” reformed on the shore of Lake Placid to follow once again in our namesake’s footsteps. With Whiteface Mtn. adding a majestic backdrop for the day’s activities, good fortune was to be on our side as sunny skies, pleasant temperatures and calm water was awaiting us.

This time, our activities would be limited to a boating and light hiking recovery around Moose Island in the northern end of Lake Placid. Our goal would be to recover as many bolts as possible from Colvin’s *secondary baseline* around the shore of Moose Island and hike the east-west line separating Lots 274, 294 and 314 from Lots 273, 293 and 313 in an attempt to recover Colvin’s traverse stations. Over the course of the day, the crew would expend eight and one-half hours in pursuit of this recovery.



1942 compilation map showing V. Colvin’s work around Lake Placid.

An incomplete history of V. Colvin’s Lake Placid activities: -----

Based solely upon a partial reading of Colvin’s 1897 report to the N.Y.S. Legislators¹ Mr. Colvin found himself back in this area attempting to untangle a mass of conflicting boundary lines that cross the lake in this area. As only Colvin could pen himself, “*The lands of the State and of the private owners are in this district, notably intermingled, owing to duplicate systems of allotments made early in the present century by men who might well be called rivals in the art of complicating affairs. The allotments of Richard’s survey (1832) run all over the allotment of Thorn’s survey (1804) so that the only way in which they can be told apart is by cutting into the marked trees and differentiating by age the marks, as ingrown*”² So, with the unenviable task of resolving these discrepancies before him, Colvin held a meeting with local surveyors Thew and Chellis during July of 1895 in which a grand plan was laid out detailing how the surveying was to progress. In short, a

¹ Transmitted to the N.Y.S. Legislators on March 9, 1897, detailing fieldwork performed during the year 1896.

² Ibid. page 45.

horizontally measured *primary baseline*³ would be run upon the ice of Lake Placid and via ties to the existing mountain top triangulation, geodetic coordinates would be obtained. Then, a *secondary baseline* would be constructed around the shoreline of Lake Placid and incorporated into the primary baseline. Finally, traverses would be run along the multiple ancient blazed lines that upon reaching the lake shore could be connected to the secondary baseline thereby obtaining the total allotment distances across the lake and providing for checks upon the variation of the needle at the time of the original surveys.

May 23, 1896 Upon arriving upon the southern shore of Moose Island, Superintendent Colvin along with various surveyors and lineman began a search for the true line separating Lots 294 and 314 of the Richard's survey. Numerous marked trees were encountered and only after "boxing"⁴ many of them, was the original line discovered. "Late in the afternoon, the original corner tree of Richard's Survey at the joint corner of Lots 293,313, 294 and 314 was discovered, having upon it Richard's scribe marks (in the bark). Temporary marks were then blazed upon the trees along this line as a range to guide the men who would subsequently be sent to extend the line to the mainland"⁵.

Recovery notes of the "Colvin Crew" -----

Saturday July 31, 2010 Eleven members of the Colvin Crew including the superintendent and one guest⁶ assembled at the N.Y.S. boat launch on the south shore of Lake Placid at 8:00 am. There, we received instructions from our guide for day, fellow member Carolyn Wiggin, L.S. Boats were soon placed into the water and the paddle to Moose Island commenced. Upon arriving at the south end of Moose Island much as Colvin had done 114 years earlier, a search was conducted along the easterly shoreline for the *secondary baseline* points. One bolt and a drill hole were discovered, but owing to confusion as to the misidentification of Bolt "O" as Bolt "P" on an official map of the state⁷, considerable time was spent verifying our starting point. The answer was finally obtained when the crew paddled to Hawk Island and obtained a GPS inverse. Bolt "O" represents the easterly land terminus of the common division line between Lots 313 and 314. As lunchtime was approaching, the crew broke for a quick bite to eat. Sufficiently revived by the



Bolt "O"



Note rare "V.C." side stamping

break, a search was then commenced for any evidence leading westerly from this bolts location. Shortly, one of the crew announced he had found a few scraps of barbed wire protruding from a tree. The Superintendent then took a compass bearing between Bolt "O" and the tree containing the wire and by projecting it westerly, set off into the interior of the island in search of our first point, Traverse Station 14. Upon reaching the end of the measured distance, and after the Superintendent proclaimed he should be within a few yards of the point, **Traverse Station 15** was discovered less than 10 feet away by Ralph Schissler, L.S.⁸ With our spirits in high gear, we then continued on looking for the next four traverse stations. Unfortunately, either due to the Superintendent's orienteering or the discovered error in stationing on our "official" map, no more traverse stations were

³ Recovery of this primary baseline is planned for a future outing of the Colvin Crew.

⁴ "Boxing" refers to the method of cutting into a blazed tree to the depth of the original mark on a slant so as to be able to count the number of annular ring growth back to the time of original marking. In this case, 64 rings or years.

⁵ Ibid. page 169.

⁶ Member Jim Jennings, grandson Luke.

⁷ Map entitled "MAP OF PART OF TOWNSHIP 11, O.M.T. COMPILED FROM NOTES OF A SURVEY MADE ABOUT THE YEAR 1895 BY VERPLANCK COLVIN", dated March 1942 as prepared by Donald Bousquet & A.J.D.

⁸ Of course the Superintendent did not reveal to the crew what an immense stroke of luck that really was.

found. We abandoned our search 1,062± feet short of the corner common to Lots 293,313,294 and 314 where Colvin in 1896 set a bolt in a “massive stone” to memorialize Richard’s originally marked spruce tree. Upon returning to our boats on the easterly shore, we then proceeded around the southerly side of Moose Island, discovering Bolts “7” and “R2” along the way. Upon reaching the search area for Bolt “S2” (which marks the westerly terminus of the line we explored on the east side of the island) a large blazed hemlock was found and in short order Bolt “S2” was discovered. As the day was getting late and a long paddle ensued back to our starting point, we did not pursue exploring this line easterly into the islands interior. After an hour or so paddle back to the state boat launch, our vehicles were reached by 4:30 PM and the day’s activities were concluded with a group photo and a round of goodbyes.



Ancient blazed hemlock, possibly dating to time of Colvin survey

Parting notes:

As Colvin realized many years ago, local knowledge is key and a guide should be secured when venturing into uncharted territory. So, this time, special thanks goes out to our guide for the day,

Carolyn Wiggin, for all the effort she put forth in researching and making this trip the success it was.



Bolt S2, note stamped over date of 1896

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



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