

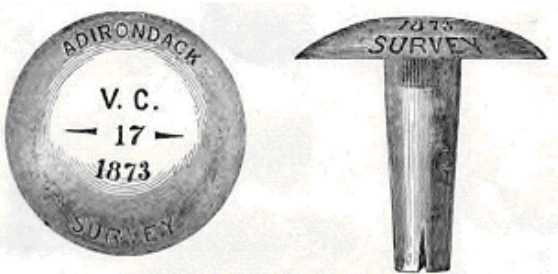


A report on the activities of the Colvin Crew
 In the vicinity of Middle Saranac Lake
 June 21 and 22, 2008

Based upon V. Colvin's 1874 report to the state legislature, a two-day outing was undertaken by the "crew" in an attempt to "follow in the footsteps" of our namesake. Our activities would be limited to finding his measured baseline located on Middle Saranac Lake, along with its corresponding primary triangulation station on nearby Ampersand Mountain. Colvin's observations from Ampersand Mountain allowed for an extension of his existing high peak network, northwesterly into the St. Regis area via St. Regis Mountain and southwesterly into the Tupper Lake area via Mt Morris. Additionally, the nearby township line separating Lots 23 & 24 in McCombs Purchase would be investigated.

An incomplete history of V. Colvin's Saranac Lake area activities:

Spanning a period of 20± years starting in 1873, Verplank Colvin visited this area of the Adirondacks multiple times in his official capacity as Superintendent of the Adirondack Surveys. On October 8, 1873 an *existing* theodolite station located on an island midway in Lower Saranac Lake was occupied¹. This station, which had already been observed from Mount MacIntyre had an "automatic stan-helio signal of the first order" placed upon it and was left guarded by only a standard signal card. Between October 10th and the 13th, V. Colvin along with his support team camped out in a leaky bark hut upon the summit of



Ampersand Mountain in what can only be described as some of the most inhospitable conditions he had encountered to date. Plagued by heavy rain, wind, snow, disappearing guides and a lack of food, he was somehow able to complete his round of measurements. This encampment was a true testament to his dedication in completing his duties.

As the mountain top was found to be heavily forested, axe men were instructed to clear the summit of trees *and* stumps in order to obtain clear lines of site. Three holes were then drilled into the newly exposed summit rock in which to accept the feet of the tripod and Bolt 13 was set. Measurements were made and on the evening of October 13, a hasty decent was made by the use of lantern to the comforts of a local lodging house.

¹ 1874 Report at Page 48, Note: I believe this to be Halfway island located on *Middle* Saranac Lake

Upon a return trip to Middle Saranac Lake on March 20, 1891 and with the aid of Lincoln McVeigh and Ryan Irven (sic) as assistants, a measured baseline was established between bolt 48² on the south shore of the lake and bolt 49 found on Halfway Island across the lake and near to the north shore. This baseline extends roughly in a southeasterly to northwesterly direction and comes very close to aligning with the summit of Ampersand Mountain³.

Based upon the late winter date of the field work, I can only surmise that this measurement was performed in accordance with his normal baseline measuring practice of having a horse driven plow team clear a path through the snow on top of the only large level area available (a lake) that would on a warm sunny late winter day, collect and maintain a trough of unfrozen water thereby providing a level chaining surface of a uniform temperature in which his 1,000 feet long pre-calibrated steel ribbon could be immersed in. So, at 2:20 pm with an instrument setup on Bolt 48 to keep the tape in alignment with an “x” mark made at the base of the boulder in which Bolt 49 rests apron⁴. The tape was stretched and the distance between bolts was found to be 4,983.150 feet. Total elapsed time of measurement was 2 hours and 12 minutes in which V. Colvin computed a taping speed of 37 feet per minute⁵.

McCombs Purchase:

In 1891 while *continuing* his resurvey of the township line between Lots 23 and 24 in McCombs Purchase and with the assistance of E.D.A. Colvin and Lincoln McVeigh, a distance measurement was made across Middle Saranac Lake. With this measurement, Colvin was now able to compute the total length of the township line along lots 23/24. The distance across Middle Saranac Lake between traverse station 183 (Bolt I) to traverse station 184 (Bolt J) was found to be 5,836.436 feet⁶. Additionally, both of these bolts were used to form smaller measured baselines that formed a connection with the primary triangulation network mentioned above⁷.

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

Friday evening, June 20:

Upon arriving at the Middle Saranac Lake boat launch at 8:00 pm and with the light fading fast, the superintendent dispatched two unsuspecting members to transport the weekends camping supplies via canoe to campsite 68, located about two miles away at the southeast corner of the lake. The superintendent then proceeded to the Ampersand Mountain trailhead parking lot where he hiked a half-mile in to what he thought was site 68. With the aid of a flashlight he was single-handedly able to efficiently erect the night’s shelter. By 10:00 pm the boat crew had not yet arrived and shouts could be heard ¼ mile or so away along the lake. Fearing the worst and deeply concerned for the contents of the boat, the superintendent hurriedly bushwhacked in the dark along the lakeshore to discover that the boat crew had safely made shore and were in the process of starting the nights fire at what *they* believed was the proper camp site. During the ensuing heated discussion, a sign was found saying site “68”. So, in his haste to rectify this grievous error made on his part, the superintendent fell out of the canoe while paddling back down the lake to remove the erroneously located camp. The superintendent’s evening still had one more humiliation remaining to be bestowed. Upon arriving back at the erroneous campsite, a sign was found to be hanging on a tree **directly above** the tent stating, “camping prohibited”. *That’s a boss for you.*

Saturday, June 21:

The Crew assembled at 9:00 am at the Ampersand Mountain trailhead parking lot, where three new members were signed up. A plan was made for everyone to meet back on Middle Saranac Lake to begin the

² Also known as Bolt 50. Shown in the wrong geographical location on Page 105 of Field Book 289 and Page 111 of Field Book 291.

³ Mislabeled in Field Book 289 Page 101 in which the bearing to Scarface Mt. is mislabeled as “to Ampersand Mt.”

⁴ See photo 1

⁵ Field Book 289 at Page 100

⁶ Field Book 291 at Page 137.

⁷ Field Book 291 at Page 136.

days adventure. During the paddle up the lake, two more guests were encountered that joined the procession, thereby bringing our total to nine souls for the day's activities. As we were nearer to Bolt "J" than Bolt "I", Bolt "J" would be our first objective.

The location of Bolt "J" was found quickly enough as a blazed and yellow painted line was observed extending southerly from the lakeshore denoting the boundary line between N.Y.S. and private holdings. Unfortunately, the original nickel plated copper bolt had been removed and only the drill hole remained⁸. A bearing was taken on the blazed line and by its reverse, a mark on the opposite shore (1.2± miles) away was selected as the search location for Bolt "I". A brief rainstorm was encountered while crossing the lake that would set the stage for a day of intermittent showers. Upon arriving on the north shore of Middle Saranac Lake in the vicinity of our projected bearing, a search was made for any evidence that would help us in locating Bolt "I". In short order, a shout arose from one of the crew (who was resting in his canoe after his exertions in having *others* paddle him across the lake) saying he had found a drill hole in a rock along the shoreline. Sure enough, that was all that was left of Bolt "I" as vandals had beat us there again and the bolt was gone⁹.

With our spirits slightly dampened, we set a course for primary triangulation station 49, located on the southerly side of Halfway Island. After a brief paddle and with the use of V. Colvin's field book sketch, Bolt 49 was quickly located and found to be in good condition¹⁰. Of interest is the year 1883 found stamped on the bolt vs. the measurement date of 1891¹¹. Obviously, Colvin had utilized this point many times over the years between 1873 and 1891; thereby presenting the possibility that the bolt found today was a replacement for an earlier mark.

With our faith revived, we struck out back across the lake to find our final point, Bolt 48. This point was described as "being on top of the middle boulder of a three boulder point difficult to ascend"¹². Within short order the error in V. Colvin's sketch location was discovered and we identified the correct location along the shoreline¹³. True to the notes, it was "difficult to ascend". We found the stem of the original bolt minus its head, which had been removed¹⁴. Due to the confusion in finding this last point along with the desire to verify the distance between Bolts 48 and 49, a detail was sent back to the vehicles to collect the survey gear. Upon arriving back at Bolt 48, a boat team was dispatched to erect a signal across the lake on Bolt 49. In between passing showers, a measurement was obtained of 4,983.250 feet (±5mm + 5ppm) vs. the record distance of 4,983.150 feet¹⁵. Having thus completed the scheduled recovery, the boats were loaded and the day's activities ended with the crew retiring to their campsites by 3:30pm. In the evening, the crew reassembled at a fine restaurant in Saranac Lake where we were able to sufficiently revive ourselves after the day's strenuous adventure.

Sunday, June 22:

Again the crew assembled at 9:00 am at the Ampersand Mountain trailhead parking lot. With the threat of thunderstorms and hail forecasted for the day coupled by the fear of the peak being obscured by clouds, most of the crew elected to disperse. With the arrival of two members that wished to view the points found on Saturday, the superintendent returned to the lake to form a three-person boat team that within two hours had completed their mission.

Our two newest members, brothers Jeff and Todd Storey decided to push ahead with the days scheduled outing of climbing Ampersand Mountain and recovering Bolt 13. The following details are as reported:

⁸ See photo 2

⁹ See photo 3

¹⁰ See photo 4

¹¹ Field Book 289 at Page 100.

¹² Field Book 289 at Page 104.

¹³ See photo 5

¹⁴ See photo 6

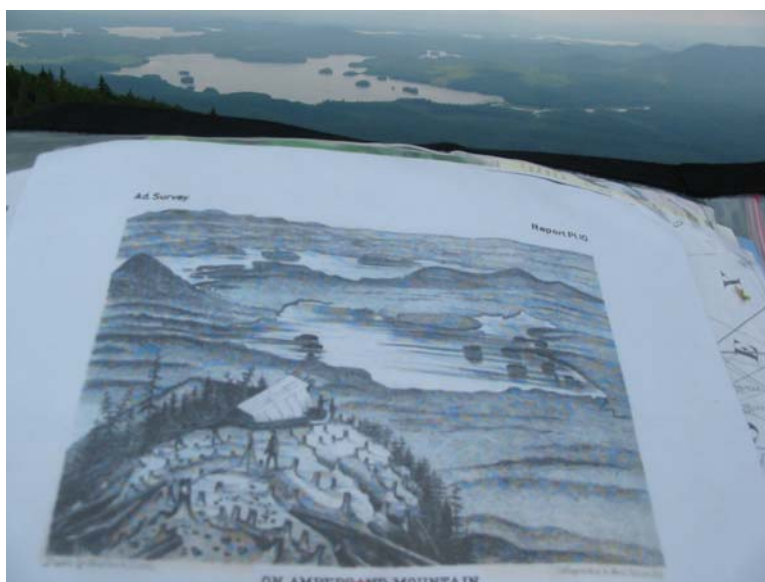
¹⁵ Note: As the ambient air temperature and barometric pressure applied were assumed for our measurement and I have not as of the time of this writing verified the length of the foot V. Colvin used, I would have to say our namesake out did us.

“The weather turned out fine with only a brief shower (*isn't that typical*). The view from the top was clear with many high peaks visible. A USC&GS standard disk stamped “Ampersand 1942” was found on the highest point¹⁶ with a *solitary* drill hole residing 10 inches away in an easterly direction¹⁷. Additionally, the location of three of the four “stan-helio” anchor points (eye bolts) were recovered, the fourth falling on an area of cleaved rock and destroyed¹⁸. After a brief exploration of the ridge line located westerly of the summit in which an azimuth mark was found for the USC&GS disk, the mountain was descended safely and the crews activity concluded for the weekend”.

As to whether the *solitary* drill hole or the USC&GS mark best represents the location of Colvin’s Bolt 13, I have submitted a request to the NGS (formerly USC&GS) for their 1942 field notes in the hopes of clarifying this issue. If successful, I will submit an addendum to a future recovery report with the details.

Parting notes.

Without the dedication and thoroughness of the “crew”, this recovery would not have been the success it was. I submit these last two photos as a testament to their desire to “follow in the footsteps” of our namesake.



Respectfully submitted,
James M. Vianna, L.S.
Superintendent

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

For membership information, contact JViannaPLS@aol.com

¹⁶ See photo 7

¹⁷ See photo 8

¹⁸ See photo 9

Photo Log
Photo's supplied courtesy of the "crew"

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9

