

RECOVERY #18

A report on the activities of the Colvin Crew in and around Raquette Lake June 20 and 21, 2009

A two-day recovery was undertaken by the Colvin Crew in an attempt to “follow in the footsteps” of our namesake, Verplanck Colvin, Superintendent of the N.Y.S. Land Survey. Our activities would be limited to finding his numerous baselines scattered around the shore of Raquette Lake and the accompanying primary triangulation station located on the peak of nearby West Mountain. Additionally, the boundary corner common to Lots 6, 40, 34 & 35 of the Totten and Crossfield’s Purchase would be searched for. Eighteen plus hours were expended over the course of both days in pursuit of this recovery.



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

Based solely upon the field notes I have reviewed, it appears that Mr. Colvin and his crews visited this lake on at least five separate occasions during the performance of his official duties. His initial visit in 1877 was to establish a horizontally measured sub-baseline that could be used to strengthen his primary triangulation



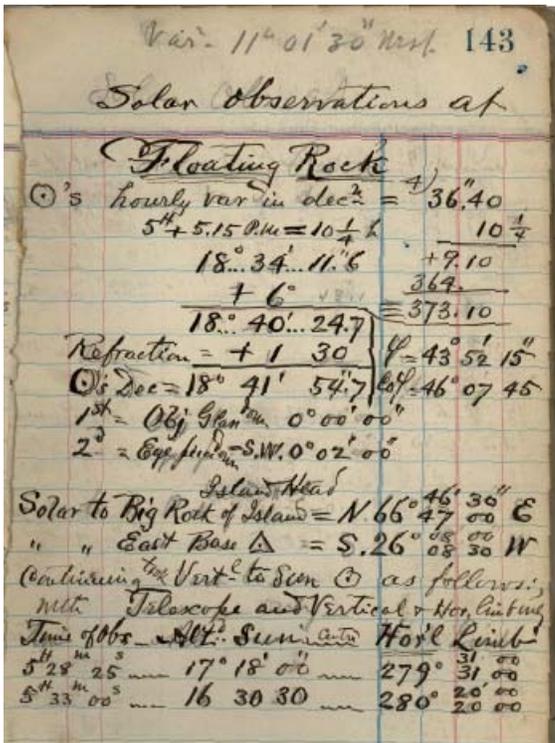
network of the Adirondack Mountains. This necessitated finding two points on the shore of Raquette Lake that would allow for the longest possible distance to be measured. Additionally, both points had to be visible from West Mountain and Blue Mountain. Following standard procedure, Bolt 69 was set on the south shore of Raquette Lake at a location formerly known as “Otter Point”. With the ice cleared of snow, vertical wood stakes were set into the ice to act as guides in keeping the tape straight. The 1,000 feet long steel “ribbon” was then stretched northerly with metal “ice blocks” being used at the intermediate chaining points for a total distance of 14,571.95 feet. The northerly terminus of this line was marked with a copper plug set in a small rock located at the northeast end of Needle Island. The distance

was then measured back (14,572.33 feet) resulting in an averaged measurement of 14,572.14 feet being used in the network calculations.¹ With the baseline now in place and the instrument zeroed upon it, angles were then taken to the distant signals on West and Blue Mountains.

1882 finds Colvin on the top of West Mountain extending his primary triangulation network southerly and westerly over the Adirondacks. Reciprocal angles are turned to the above mentioned lake baseline, thereby incorporating the baseline into the network and allowing for its use in computations.

¹Field Book 98, Page 6.

Field notes for the year 1888, show Colvin retracing the boundary line common to Lots 35 & 40 in the Totten and Crossfield's Purchase, setting Bolts No. 77 and 78 where said line crosses the northern (outlet) end of Raquette Lake.



May 1892, Colvin is back upon Bolts 77 and 78 extending triangles northeasterly along the shore of Raquette Lake towards the outlet. Of note is his occupation of a station named "Floating Rock"² where a solar observation is taken. The field notes for this work are recorded in his "Private Field Book for the Year 1892" and list payments made out of pocket for meals, lodging and guide services.

April 7-11, 1896 appears to be the end for surveying in this area, with the field work being performed in Colvin's absence by Hillard D. Lockwood, Asst., E.A. Hoffman, and Joseph Laheane [sic], helpers. Their work consisted of connecting all the previously run baselines on Raquette Lake into one cohesive line.

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

Friday, June 19, 2009:

In an effort to not repeat last year's "hi-jinks" and unplanned midnight swim, the superintendent and one crewmember arrived in advance of the main party at the New York State D.E.C. Golden Beach Campground during *daylight* hours. After erecting the weekend's camp a preliminary reconnaissance was made for the near by "East and West Base" bolts.

Saturday, June 20, 2009:

Nine members plus the superintendent assembled at 9:00 am at the Golden Beach swimming area. A plan was laid out to first search for the bolts located around the southern shore of Raquette Lake so as to arrive at Camp Huntington by noon. Sta. 1 (East Base) & Sta. 2 (West Base) would be our first objective. They are roughly located along the line separating Lots 6 & 40 in the Totten and Crossfield's Purchase. A recently flagged line was found marking this line but after a quick search along the easterly shoreline Sta. 1 (East Base) was not recovered. A suspicious looking boulder matching the description found in the field notes³ was found. Unfortunately, due to the presence of a cedar tree growing on top of the boulder it was not investigated further. A bearing was then taken upon the flagged line and by it's reciprocal, the search location for Sta. 2 (West Base) was identified. After a brief paddle across the lake, landing was made near "Burkes" Marina located along Rt. 28 on the southerly shore of Raquette Lake. In short order, Sta. 2 was recovered in good condition. The crew then departed for Sta. 4 (Bolt 69) located westerly along the southerly shore of Raquette Lake. Sta. 4 represents the southerly terminus of Colvin's 1877 baseline and is depicted as the point the tripod is set over in the accompanying lithograph. After a diligent *visual* search of "Otter Point", the bolt could not be found. Thanks to a 1940's era photo supplied by the landowner, it appears the shoreline has changed little and a good chance remains that the point is still there



² Field Book 292, Page 143.

³ Field Book 98 Page 1.

buried under the lawn⁴. We then struck off across the lake in a northeasterly direction to search for Sta. 3 located on the property of S.U.N.Y. Cortland now known as “Camp Huntington” and in Colvin’s time as “Pine Knot”. Camp Huntington is the oldest of the famous Adirondack great camps being built by William



West Durant in 1877. Upon reaching the S.U.N.Y. boat landing, the crew met up with the camp caretaker who by previous arrangement commenced a walking tour of this magnificent facility. An amazing find was made during the tour of one of the camps, whereupon a book on display⁵ was already opened to the *very page* whereupon a description was being given detailing V. Colvin’s attempt to mediate a dispute between William Durant and his sister Ella. Apparently Colvin was a friend of the Durant family and may have visited this great camp shortly after

it’s construction, possibly even staying in the very cabin we were visiting. Following this informative tour the group searched for Sta. 3. The mark was readily found only two feet from the “Camp Huntington” sign. Amazingly, the masons had not covered it up during construction of the sign. After lunch and while standing upon Sta. 3, Paul Miller, OLS was welcomed as our newest member of the crew and presented with the coveted membership pin. Paul makes up the second half of our “northern contingent” and brings an extensive land



surveying background to our organization. The crew then proceeded back to Golden Beach, our starting point for the day, where the boats were loaded onto our vehicles and a thirty-minute drive to the northern (outlet) end of Raquette Lake was undertaken. Upon reaching the outlet of Raquette Lake, we once again entered the waters to search for Colvin’s 1892 stations. Of the possible eight points to be recovered, six were searched for with four being found. Of the four found, two were marked by a drill hole only, one was marked by an “x” and one was marked with both an “x” and a drill hole. Of note was the recovery of the “Floating Rock” station. We then continued on westward in search of Colvin’s 1888 work, where the township line between Lots 35 and 40 intersect Raquette Lake. As Jeff and Todd Storey had recovered both of these points in 2008



while performing a preliminary reconnaissance for this trip, we were able to paddle directly to them. Both points were found in good condition with no threatening development nearby. After a one-mile paddle back to our vehicles, the day’s activities were concluded at 6:00 pm. Suffice it to say, that after nine hours of recovery work and 6-8 miles of paddling the superintendent turned in early after a fine venison dinner.



Sunday, June 22, 2009:

In anticipation of another long day of “following in the footsteps” of our namesake, the crew reconvened at the Golden Beach swimming area at 8:00 am. The objective for the day was to try and recover the north end of Colvin’s 1877 baseline located on Needle Island and to climb West Mountain in search of his primary triangulation point. In order to save a lengthy paddle across the lake, the crew elected to travel first by vehicle to Antlers Point where we would launch our boats. Following the brief drive to Antlers and then a forty-

⁴ Plans have been made to return to this area over the summer with the proper metal detector to search again.

⁵ “Durant, The Fortunes and Woodland Camps of a Family in the Adirondacks”, Craig Gilborn, Page 93.

five minute paddle northward up the lake, Needle Island was reached and Sta. 5 was quickly recovered. At last, we had found part of Colvin's 1877 baseline! After another forty-five minute paddle we reached the foot of West Mountain and the trailhead leading to the summit. The boats were pulled into the woods, backpacks were donned and foot travel commenced. The first half of the 2.8-mile long trail was relatively level with the second half providing an unrelenting grade of 30-40%. Upon reaching the summit, the superintendent was greeted with the news that Colvin's bolt had been recovered. Sure enough, the mark had withstood the



construction and demolition of a fire tower, hundreds of hikers, alpine weather and souvenir collectors to survive. As this was a primary triangulation station occupied by theodolite, three drill holes⁶ were also recovered marking where Colvin had set his tripod. Shown here filled with white powder. Additionally, two of the signal tower anchor holes were also found. Of note is the stem of a U.S.C.&G.S. bolt found 0.2' northwesterly of Colvin's bolt. I believe the reason for this to be that the U.S.C.&G.S. used the center of the fire tower for their triangulation network and upon transferring the plumb line from the top of tower found that the tower was not exactly centered over Colvin's mark so they established their own mark⁷. In any event, at

least they had the foresight to leave Colvin's mark undisturbed. After a round of group pictures and a short lunch break enjoying the southeasterly view, the crew began the descent down the mountain to the waters edge. Upon arriving at our boats, it was evident that part of the paddle back to our vehicles would be directly into a strong headwind and the resulting rough water. Upon taking to the water this proved to be a mild understatement and after an hour and a half of very hard paddling, Indian Point was finally rounded and the wind was now in our favor pushing us on to our destination of Antlers Point and our vehicles. Landing was made at 5:30 PM and the recovery was concluded after nine and half hours. We had traveled eight to nine miles by boat and 5.6 miles by foot.

Parting notes:

While Colvin's 1877 south baseline location (Bolt 69), has temporarily eluded us, twelve other points were recovered, thereby adding to our knowledge of Colvin's work. The Storey brothers stayed on and were able to recover two more points. One located on "Beach's" Island and the other marking the corner common to Lots 6, 40, 34 and 35 in the Totten and Crossfield's Purchase. The success of this recovery was once again due to the crew's dedication in following in our namesake's footsteps. Like Colvin, the crew was not deterred by long hours or strenuous marches into the wilderness.⁸



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

⁶ Colvin referred to these as "foot holes" in which a short essay can be found on our Website under the "Crew's News" page.

⁷ This was not always the case; see the short essay found on this subject on our Website.

⁸ Wait till they see the next recovery! The most ambitious recovery in the history of the Crew to date, stay tuned.



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

VERPLANCK COLVIN

For membership information, go to www.colvincrew.org