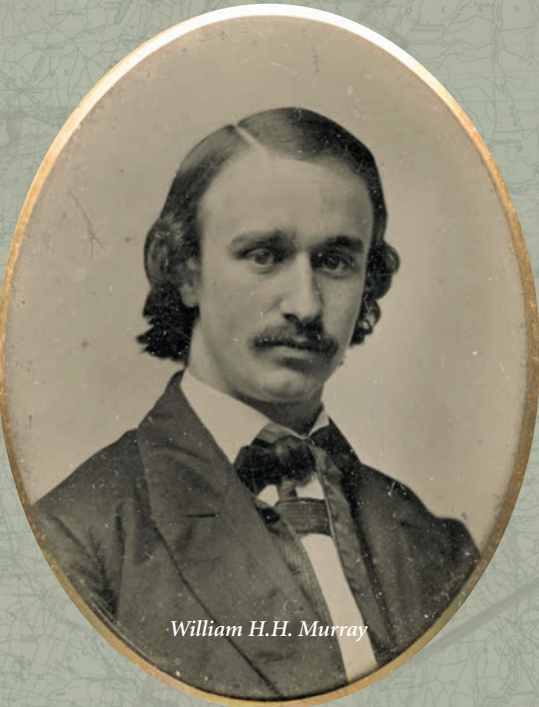




MURRAY'S RUSH



William H.H. Murray


COURTESY OF ADIRONDACK EXPERIENCE

BY TERENCE YOUNG

THE ADIRONDACK BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN CAMPING.

In late spring 1870, with summer rapidly approaching, the editors of the *New York Daily Tribune* decided to send a reporter into the Adirondacks. Traveling widely, he was pleased to report that the region was an "Enchanted Ground" where high altitude lakes and higher mountains made it cool and refreshing during the hot summer months and where views were exquisite. If someone chose to camp in this delightful region, the reporter promised, he would "take back with him at the Summer's close the happiest, brightest, freshest memories of his life."

A newspaper report praising the camping qualities of the Adirondacks is unremarkable today, but was nearly unknown before 1869. Even the correspondent admitted that the area had recently seemed far-off and marginal with news accounts sounding "like legends from a distant and mythical country." But now, he reported, "this wild region is much more definitely known" and growing rapidly in popularity because William H.H. Murray had published a ground-breaking



book, *Adventures in the Wilderness; Or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks*, in April 1869. "Last summer," continued the reporter, "Mr. Murray's book ... drew a throng of pleasure-seekers into the lake region. It was amusing to see the omnipresence of this book. It seemed to be everywhere. Hawked through the cars; placarded in the steamers; for sale in the most unlooked-for places; by every carpet-bag and bundle lay a tourist's edition of Murray." Today it's recognized that the publication of Murray's book was the commencement of recreational camping in America, but its appearance immediately generated both

negative and positive reactions, including at least one from an unexpected quarter.

Church Leader

William Henry Harrison Murray, or "Bill," as he was generally known, was born in 1840 to a modest New England family whose ancestors had been among the first settlers of his hometown, Guilford, Connecticut, and his youth was an enthusiastic mixture of study, farm work, and outdoor recreation. Gregarious and energetic, Murray entered Yale College in fall 1858, and after graduating joined the Congregationalist East Windsor Seminary near Hartford, Connecticut, where he finished

his theological studies in 1864. Murray then served in a succession of increasingly prosperous and prestigious churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts, most famously at the Park Street Church in Boston. During these years, he earned a reputation as a church leader and as an eloquent, engaging speaker. The minister also became well known for enjoying outdoor leisure-time activities.

Murray took his first camping vacation into the Adirondacks during summer 1864 and returned annually for many years. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, and canoeing around the region but his favorite campsite was on

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RACQUET RIVER.

ADIRONDACKS

Osprey Island in Raquette Lake. Murray also brought larger parties that included his wife, his friends, and his friends' wives. Smitten by the Adirondacks' scenery and the freedom he enjoyed there, Murray began writing a series of lively, often humorous personal essays about canoeing, hunting, fishing, and the haunting beauty of the region. In one of these, he recounted an experience that nearly every camper has enjoyed—eating. "Breakfast [while camping] means something. No muttering about 'those miserable rolls;' no yawning over a small strip of steak, cut out in the form of a parallelogram, an inch and a half by three; no lying about slightly colored water by calling it 'coffee.' No; but up in the woods you take a pancake, twelve inches across, (just the diameter of the pan) and one inch thick, and go conscientiously (sic) to work to surround it. You seize

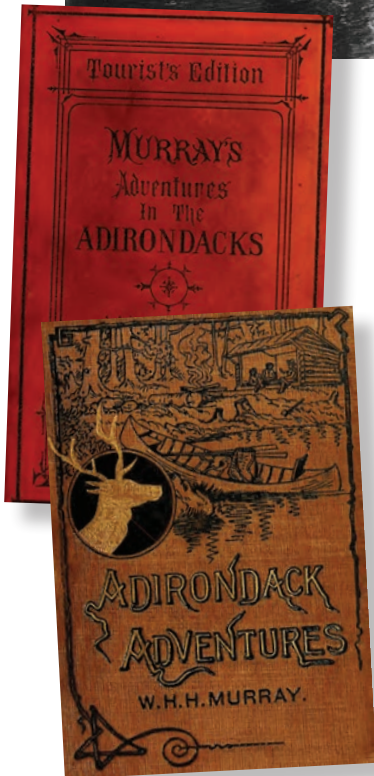
a trout ten or fourteen inches long, and send it speedily to that bourne from whence no trout returns. You lay hold of a quart pan full of liquid which has the smack of real Java in it, made pungent with a sprinkling of Mocha; and the first you know you see your face in the bottom of the dish. And the joke is, you keep doing so, right along, for some thirty minutes or more, rising from each meal a bigger, if not a wiser man."

Little Book

Although several of these essays were printed in a Meriden, Connecticut, periodical, Murray never intended them for anything greater until a good friend encouraged him in early 1869 to publish a book with the prestigious Boston publisher of Osgood, Fields, and Company. Murray didn't have a manuscript, but liking the idea he bundled up his essays with an introductory chapter on how to camp in

the Adirondacks and submitted the whole to the press. Initially publisher James T. Fields declined Murray's manuscript, but not wanting to embarrass the minister, he reluctantly agreed to read the submission. Two days later, he called Murray to his office with exciting news; Fields wanted to publish Murray's book. "Your method of interpreting nature and your humor are unlike anything that we have ever seen," gushed Fields. "This little book, I am confident, is destined to a great career."

In spite of Fields's enthusiasm, *Adventures in the Wilderness* was greeted by mixed reviews. The *Overland Monthly* dismissed Murray's writing as "gorgeous French, badly translated" while *The Nation* found his practical advice to be "sensible and worth taking." Nonetheless, the book was immediately popular with the public and a tremendous commercial



Murray's book was so popular that unauthorized versions were printed by a variety of publishers, usually with slightly different titles.

success, making Murray both famous and wealthy by June. It's unknown how many copies were sold, but the book was in its tenth printing by July 7, and later Murray recalled that for a long time *Adventures* had sold at a rate of approximately 500 per week. Within months of the book's release, the sleepy Adirondack region was transformed into a national destination as an unprecedented horde of 2,000 to 3,000 recreational campers, hunters, anglers, and more arrived from New York, Boston, Hartford, Philadelphia, and other cities. This stampede, which continued unabated through summers 1869 and 1870, came to be called "Murray's Rush" and its instigator gained a nickname—"Adirondack" Murray.

Adventures in the Wilderness produced its remarkable effect for several reasons. In 1868, the first

railroads and telegraph lines reached the Adirondack region's margin, greatly improving access. The post-Civil war economy was booming, which increased the wealth of the largely white middle classes and made it possible for more of them to buy Murray's book and act on his advice. In addition, Murray had produced America's first substantial how-to-camp book. Adirondack travel literature published prior to *Adventures* had offered readers little useful information, but the long introductory chapter in Murray's book provided a nascent camper with practical information and advice. Murray explained how to get to the Adirondacks, how to avoid pesky insects, where to buy equipment, the names of local guides, which qualities to value in one, and what accommodations were available, as well as what to bring and what not.

Camping Pilgrimage

Adventures produced its dramatic popular response because Murray was the first writer to present camping as pilgrimage. Everyday American life had changed rapidly after the Civil War, which had spurred widespread industrialization and urbanization. Cities were becoming the average middle-class American's home because they offered employment, amenities and other attractions. However, they also assaulted their residents with smoke, noise and crowding. *Adventures*, Murray declared, was written for those "who, put up in narrow offices and narrower studies, weary of the city's din, long for a breath of mountain air and the free life by field and flood." These lost ideals, he assured his readers, could be found on a camping trip. In particular, Murray detailed how one's physical health benefited from an



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Adirondack outing and, being a minister, argued that camping was essential for one's spiritual vitality. "If a person would know how sensitive his nature is," Murray declared, "he must leave the haunts of men,—where every sight and sound distracts his attention, ... and amid the silence of the woods, hold communion with his Maker."

Murray broke the gender barrier by insisting that camping was "delightful to ladies. There is nothing in the trip which the most delicate and fragile need fear. And it is safe to say, that, of all who go into the woods, none enjoy the experiences more than ladies, and certain it is

that none are more benefited by it." Yearning for a sense of belonging and connection, many Americans heard Murray's call to the wild, but not everyone was happy when they arrived.

In particular, critics brought up the issue of who was an authentic camper by focusing their ire on the presence of amateurs and women. One of them, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, was particularly aggrieved about the novices drawn to the wild by *Adventures*. A widely known author, painter, and illustrator, he provocatively titled an article in *Appletons' Journal*, "Abuses of the Backwoods." Thorpe charged that Murray's book had

attracted urban "pretenders and superficials" who possessed neither a proper understanding of the wild nor the appropriate abilities to enter it. According to Thorpe, "The highly cultivated mind which rejoices in the wilds of Nature, is too sensitive to remain unmoved when they see 'those temples of God's creation' profaned by people who have neither skill as sportsmen, nor sentiment or piety enough in the composition, to understand Nature's solitudes, and sympathize with the 'home of the Great Spirit.'" Before entering the Adirondacks, Thorpe insisted, city amateurs needed to become skilled and educated



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Thomas Bangs Thorpe



Kate Field

to nature's meanings so as not to violate it.

Thorpe's denunciation was rejected by Murray and others, but most notably and perhaps most unexpectedly by Kate Field, who suggested that many of these complaints had arisen simply because some critic's "favorite hunting and fishing grounds have been made known to the public." A renowned and highly regarded journalist, travel writer, actor, and lecturer, Field had read *Adventures* during spring 1869 and decided to camp in the Adirondacks with three female companions and no men for the month of July. After this experience, she publicly embraced the equality and openness that camping promoted rather than gender divisions and exclusivity. "The greatest good of the greatest number," she declared in August 1869, "is the true democratic platform, and if several hundred men think that the life-giving principles of the North Woods was instituted for the benefit of a few guns and rods, they are sadly mistaken."

Black Fly Club

Field's declaration for open wilderness was salt in many critics' wounds, but she was undeterred. In fall 1869, Field took to the public lecture stage to praise the Adirondacks and to argue that women should camp. On one occasion, she told the audience at a packed Steinway Hall in New York City that her Adirondack camping trip without any men had gone very well. Simply oozing sarcasm, Field admitted "it was agreeable to women to be accompanied on such excursions by the tyrant man; but when there was no such tyrant at hand to rescue her, it is surprising what powers of rescue she finds within herself." Field and her companions, who called themselves "The Black Fly Club," had no trouble "rescuing" themselves, leaving Field to report simply that the Adirondack scenery was grand, the local men were "unmitigated roughs," and that mosquitoes were "like the poor, 'always with you.'" Nevertheless, she had successfully fished and hunted, and besides, "the flapjacks, eaten

with maple syrup, made up ... for all inconveniences."

Field's lectures and publications particularly rankled Thorpe, who snorted that "now the wilds ... have been invaded by Miss Kate Field." According to Thorpe, who saw the wild as a testing place for his manliness, "Miss Kate's" public lectures distorted wilderness when she "softened" the Adirondacks with "her womanly imagination." The authentic backwoodsman hunted and fished; he did not pursue "soft breezes, pretty cascades, charming evening effects, lovely Nature, and all that sort of thing." No one who engaged in these activities was camping, he sneered, but "sight-seeing," and likely a woman. "The wild woods," he proclaimed, were not "a place for fashionable ladies of the American style; they have, unfortunately, in their education, nothing that makes such places appreciated, and no capability for physical exercise that causes the attempt to be pleasantly possible. ... Let the ladies keep out of the woods (even such male ladies as admire Mr. Murray's book)."

Field, much bigger in spirit, simply ignored Thorpe's diatribe and continued her lecturing, prompting an increased, if still small, number of women to camp in the Adirondacks.

Despite the gender and authenticity controversies of 1869 and 1870, growing numbers of campers were readily purchasing reliable equipment, obtaining current information, and learning effective techniques by 1872. Campers no longer needed to be convinced that they could enjoy themselves in the wild; they just wanted to know where and how. The critics of those first years had largely gone quiet. In the nearly 150 years since the publication of *Adventures in the Wilderness*, additional camping controversies have sprung up, but its diversity has continued to increase beyond its white, middle-class beginning. Today, as millennials take up camping, another social distinction is easing. William H.H. Murray, Kate Field, and the other early advocates of camping as an equalizer would approve. ■



THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

The Adirondack Experience in Blue Mountain Lake, New York, holds the William Henry Harrison Murray papers, which include his correspondence, newspaper clippings, unpublished manuscripts, ephemera, and copies of publications by and about the minister and author. Additionally, a smaller collection of Murray materials was collected, used, and donated to the Adirondack Experience by Warder H. Cadbury, an Adirondack historian. The collection consists of records related to the 1970 reprinting by the Adirondack Museum and Syracuse University Press of Murray's 1869 book *Adventures in the Wilderness; or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks* for which Cadbury wrote the introduction.

A collection of Kate Field's correspondence is at the Boston Public Library's Special Collections in Boston, Massachusetts. It consists of approximately 1,500 letters pertaining to English and American literature collected by this St. Louis-born journalist, actress, and author

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