

## Adirondack Lean-tos

It was our biggest group ever- ten winter campers! We had chosen Puffer Pond, near Indian Lake, as our overnight destination as it was an easy 2 mile snowshoe hike terminating at two closely positioned lean-tos to accommodate the group.

As we got closer to Puffer Pond the younger campers raced ahead to secure the “perfect” lean-to for themselves. Their land grab backfired as wind kicked up during the evening and blew snow off the frozen pond surface into their exposed lean-to. Those positioned in the lean-to back from the water’s edge were slightly shielded by trees and doubly protected by the tarp hung across the open side of the lean-to.

Harmony was achieved when the group on ‘snob knob’ invited everyone to share a single fire after dinner under a full moon night sky. The night’s entertainment included reading the lean-to registration book; a time honored entertainment as captured in [No Place I’d Rather Be: Wit and Wisdom from Adirondack Lean-tos](#) by Stuart Mesinger. Most entries either complained about the weather, bugs or poor fishing or regaled about the weather, wildlife or scenery.



*Ian, Mark and Matt listen as Dan dispenses pearls from the logbook*

There are benefits to winter camping in a lean-to. Foremost, is that you don’t have to carry your shelter with you. Lean-tos are spacious; although each lean-to can be different typically there is adequate room for 5 campers. The lean-to provides a level, dry platform for changing clothes, setting up a stove, mixing food, or just plain sitting.

On the other hand, lean-to's aren't particularly warm in cold weather – even if you close off the open side with a tarp as we did. They are usually situated in high-use areas. They can house rodents and the sleeping arrangements can leave you lying wide awake between two prodigious snorers.



*WinterCampers at the Puffer Pond Lean-to*

## **Lean-to Distribution**

The lean-to is an open faced camping shelter found throughout the Catskill and Adirondack back-country areas.

However, not all lean-tos are restricted to backcountry access. Last fall, I hiked into [John Dillon Park](#), an handicap accessible wilderness facility created through a partnership among International Paper, Paul Smith's College and the State of New York. The park was closed for use, but I was interested in viewing their handicap accessible lean-tos equipped with ramps and fold-down wooden sleeping platforms.



Lean-tos are also located along the Appalachian Trail. WhiteBlaze, an internet resource dedicated to the Appalachian Trail, has a [forum devoted to Shelters & Lean-tos](#) where users share their shelter experiences and discuss issues related to shelters of lean-tos from Georgia to Maine.

Lean-tos are also found in Finland, where they are called “laavus”. They are especially common in the Pukala National Forest of Finland.

### How Many Lean-tos Are There?

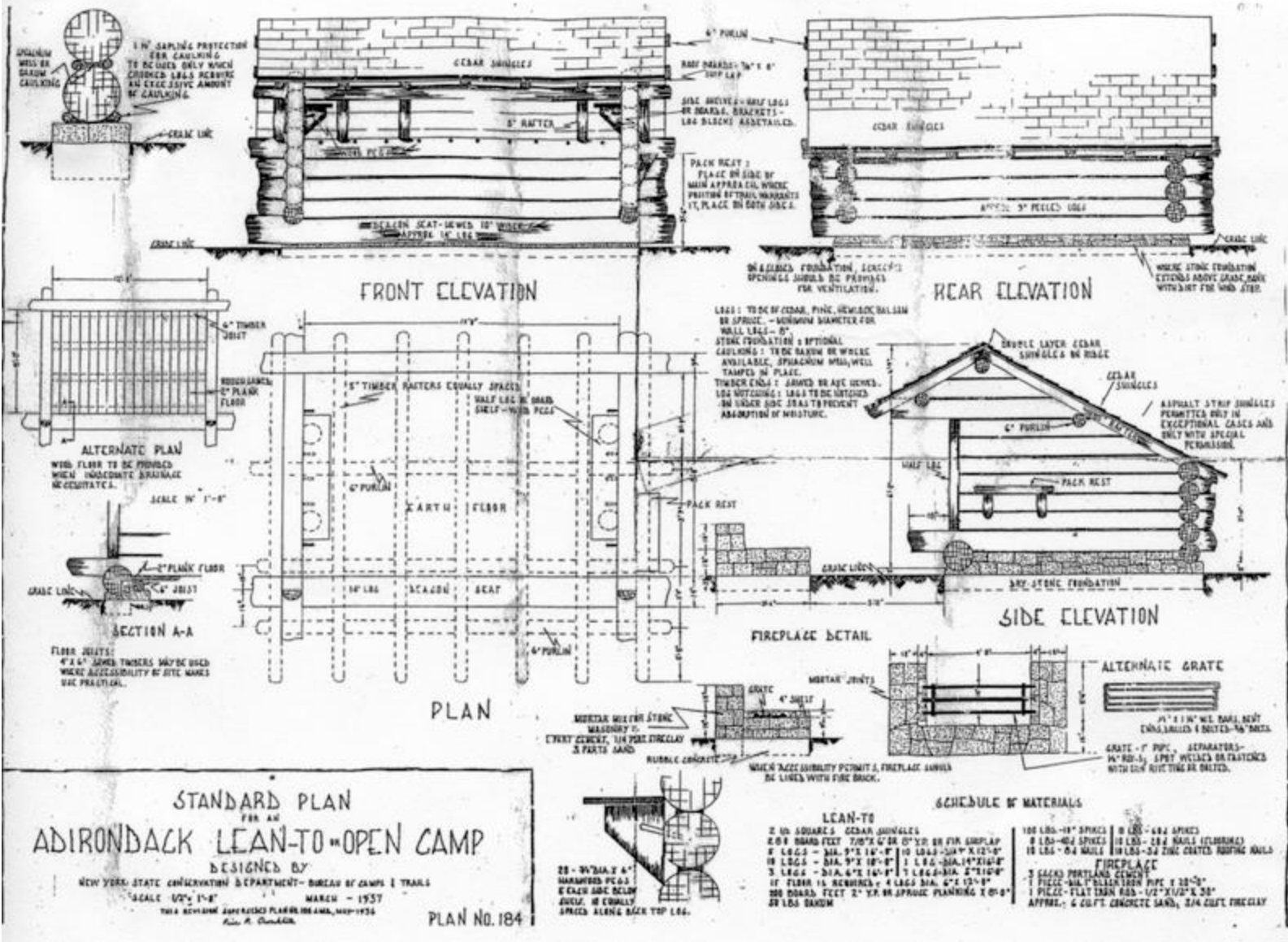
The current, best guess is that there are 295 public lean-tos. An online blogger, DSettahr at [Adirondack Forums](#), stated it was his “(long term) hiking goal... to spend a night in every single lean-to in the Adirondacks and the Catskills.” To that end he began an inventory and posted a spreadsheet of all 295 lean-tos in the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains. Over time, with the contribution of many hikers, he ended up with a spreadsheet of 295 lean-tos. You can read the whole [discussion here](#).

Lean-To Name	Location	Park	Completed
Skeeter Lake	Aldrich Pond WF	Adirondacks	
Balsam Lake Mtn.	Balsam Lake Mtn. WF	Catskills	
Beaver Meadow	Balsam Lake Mtn. WF	Catskills	
Beaver Pond	Balsam Lake Mtn. WF	Catskills	
Belleayre Mtn.	Belleayre Mtn. Ski Area	Catskills	
Hirschland	Belleayre Mtn. Ski Area	Catskills	
McKenely Hollow	Big Indian WA	Catskills	
Rider Hollow	Big Indian WA	Catskills	
Shandaken Brook	Big Indian WA	Catskills	
Chub Pond #1	Black River WF	Adirondacks	
Chub Pond #2	Black River WF	Adirondacks	
Gull Lake	Black River WF	Adirondacks	
North Lake	Black River WF	Adirondacks	
Remsen Falls	Black River WF	Adirondacks	
Sand Lake	Black River WF	Adirondacks	
Woodhull Lake	Black River WF	Adirondacks	

## **Lean-to Construction**

Lean-tos are built mostly by hand with chainsaws and chisels and the logs are assembled using a scribe notching technique that results in a very tight fit of joints and allows the use of the entire length of logs. The floor space usually measures 12' x 8' in size.

The original plans for building a lean-to were published by the New York Conservation Department – Bureau of Camps and Trails in March 1957 entitled as Plan # 184. The original plans can still be found [here](#).



**STANDARD PLAN**  
FOR AN  
**ADIRONDACK LEAN-TO OPEN CAMP**

DESIGNED BY  
NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT - BUREAU OF CAMPS & TRAILS  
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'-0" MARCH - 1937  
THIS STANDARD APPROVED PLAN IS AN ADAPTED COPY OF THE  
PLAN NO. 184

**LEAN-TO**

- 2 10 SQUARES CEDAR SHINGLES
- 2 8 8 BOARD FEET 7/8" X 6" OR 8" X 8" OR FIBR LAMPLAP
- 2 LOGS - DIA. 9" X 12'-0" 10 LOGS - DIA. 8" X 12'-0"
- 18 LOGS - DIA. 9" X 12'-0" 1 1/2 LOGS - DIA. 14" X 12'-0"
- 3 LOGS - DIA. 6" X 14'-0" 1 LOG 6" X 14'-0"
- IF FLOOR IS REQUIRED: 4 LOGS DIA. 6" X 12'-0"
- 100 BOARD FEET 2" X 4" OR SPRUCE PLANKING X 6'-0"
- 28 LOGS BAKEM

**SCHEDULE OF MATERIALS**

- 100 LBS - 18" SPIKES
- 10 LBS - 6" SPIKES
- 10 LBS - 2 1/2" NAILS (CLADDING)
- 18 LBS - 8 1/2" NAILS
- 10 LBS - 3/4" ZINC COATED ROOFING NAILS
- FIREPLACE**
- 3 BAGS PORTLAND CEMENT
- 1 PIECE - 3/4" DIAM. IRON PIPE X 20'-0"
- 1 PIECE - FLAT IRON ROD - 1/2" X 1/2" X 20"
- APPROX.: 6 CU. FT. CONCRETE SAND, 2 1/4 CU. FT. FIRE CLAY

## Lean-to Usage

New York State maintained lean-tos are open to any and all comers up to the marked capacity of the shelter. As is the case at other campsites, you may not stay at a lean-to for more than three consecutive nights without a free DEC permit. When using a lean-to, don't hammer nails into the logs or make other "improvements." It's even illegal to set up a tent inside a lean-to!



*Mark, Matthew and Sparky prepare for an evening fire in front of the Cascade Pond lean-to*

Lean-tos are commonly available in the winter. In 14 years of winter camping only once have I encountered a lean-to in use by other campers. On one of my very 1<sup>st</sup> winter camping trips during a Martin Luther King weekend an intrepid Boy Scout troop preceded us into the popular John Pond lean-to in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area. We read their intentions at the trailhead register so we retrieved a tent from our vehicle and tented on the other side of the pond rather than try to share the lean-to with the troop.

## Giving Back to Lean-tos

If you have used a lean-to and enjoyed the experience you can give back by volunteering through two worthy organizations; Adopt a Lean-to or Lean-to Rescue efforts.

[Adirondack Mountain Club's Adopt a Lean-to program](#) began in 1985 with the approval of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Typically Adopters make multiple visits to 'their' lean-to to keep it cleaned up and maintained. Adopting a lean-to does not entail

major reconstruction work, and adopters do not need to be ADK members. The adopters hailed from New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Canada. Although adopters drop out of the program each year, it's remarkable how many don't: seventy-three individuals and groups have adopted lean-tos for at least five years; 44 for at least ten years; 20 for at least fifteen years; and 4 for at least twenty years.

[Lean2Rescue](#) is a group who have restored, rehabilitated and rescued more than 30 lean-tos since 2004. Started by Paul DeLucia of Baldwinsville, NY, the all volunteer group works closely with the DEC to identify and complete suitable projects from [roof repairs](#) to entirely new structures. Most of the work is carried out using non-motorized tools and vehicles, and the bulk of the building material is carried into the woods via canoe, portage carts, and human pack mules. Most impressive of all, Lean2Rescue operates year-round, including through Adirondack winters.

WinterCampers.com



*Jim Muller is a Leave No Trace Master Educator. He enjoys canoeing during warm months and winter camping ([www.WinterCampers.com](http://www.WinterCampers.com)) during the cold months.*

## References Cited

Lean-to Building Plans: <http://www.wintercampers.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Lean-To-Plan.JPG>

WhiteBlaze Appalachian Trail Lean-to Forum:  
<http://www.whiteblaze.net/forum/forumdisplay.php?s=a3eaedb061508eea7305827d2101230e&f=34>

Adirondack Forum: <http://www.adkforum.com/index.php>

Adirondack Forum lean-to inventory discussion:  
<http://www.adkforum.com/showthread.php?t=10503>

Adirondack lean-to spreadsheet:  
[http://www.wintercampers.com/\\_misc/ADKLeanto\\_20091026.xls](http://www.wintercampers.com/_misc/ADKLeanto_20091026.xls)

DEC regulations regarding lean-tos: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regs/4081.html#12998>

John Dillon Park <http://www.johndillonpark.org/>

No Place I'd Rather Be: Wit and Wisdom from Adirondack Lean-tos:  
<http://www.amazon.com/No-Place-Rather-Adirondack-Lean/dp/1931951144>

Adirondack Mountain Club's Adopt a Lean-to Program:  
<http://www.adk.org/trails/documents/lean-to.pdf>

Lean2Rescue: <http://www.lean2rescue.org/>