

# A trail of two seasons

## Cooper Kiln Pond an adventurous ski

BY PHIL BROWN  
EXPLORER STAFF

I've lived around Lake Placid long enough to have hiked, biked or skied most of the official trails in the region, so whenever I discover a new one that I like, I tend to get excited. Such was the case last winter when I skied to Cooper Kiln Pond.

The 5.9-mile trail begins on a back road just north of Whiteface Mountain, climbs over the Stephenson Range, drops to the pond and then continues to descend to another road. Skied in that direction, west to east, the trail promises a thrilling descent of 1,900 feet from the height of land on Morgan Mountain.

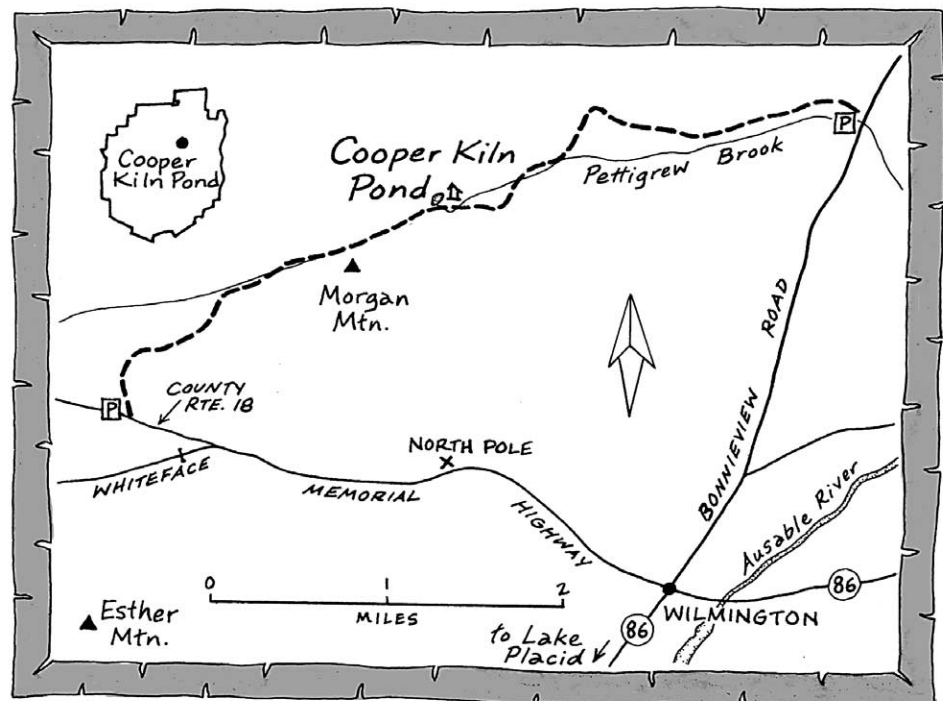
Of course, you'll need two cars for the through trip. If you can't do a shuttle, you can start at either end and make the pond your destination.

In *Guide to Adirondack Trails: High Peaks Region*, Tony Goodwin says the route is suitable for experts and "adventurous" intermediate skiers. That's true if you ski it end to end, but less-experienced skiers

should be able to handle much of the route. Starting from either trailhead, just ski as far as you feel comfortable and turn around.

I first skied the trail early last winter. Although there was plenty of snow, the creeks had not fully frozen, and so I had to do a little bushwhacking along a stretch of trail that follows a brook. Later in winter this is not necessary. If you're a snowshoer, you have to nothing to worry about even early in the season. By the way, this route should appeal to snowshoers: it sees little traffic and a lot of snow.

On my first trip, I skied only as far as the height of land, just north of Morgan's summit, and turned around. On my second trip, I continued through the pass and descended

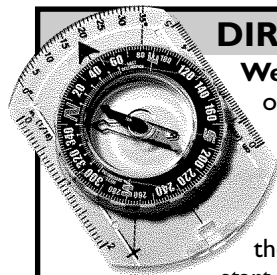


to the pond. Both were fun outings, but neither was as exciting as the third trip, when my friend Jeff and I did the whole thing.

The trail starts out rather flat, following an old road. After a quarter-mile, it starts to climb at an easy-to-moderate grade. At about 1½ miles, after crossing a small bridge, the trail steepens considerably for a

short distance before reaching the height of land. As you climb, the evergreens become more dominant. The forest is lovely and serene when the snow is hanging on the branches.

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### DIRECTIONS

**Western Trailhead:** From NY 86 in Wilmington, head northwest on Whiteface Memorial Highway. Go 2.8 miles to a fork and bear right onto County 18 (Franklin Falls Road). Look for the trailhead on the right about 0.7 mile from the fork.

**Eastern Trailhead:** From NY 86 in Wilmington, head northeast on Bonnieview Road and go 3.2 miles to the trailhead on the left. (Both Bonnieview and the Whiteface Memorial Highway start at a 90-degree turn on NY 86.)

## A peaceful hike in warmer weather

BY MICHAEL ZEUGIN  
EXPLORER CORRESPONDENT

No bugs, no crowds, no mud (mostly), colorful foliage and, often enough, previews of winter at high elevation. How can anyone resist hiking in fall? So in early October, I spurred my family out and up into the hills above Wilmington.

We had tried the one-way hike from Franklin Falls Road (County 18) to Bonnieview Road once before, when our daughter was 4. She almost made it to Cooper Kiln Pond. Now she is 7, and toughened by backcountry skiing. At 5.9 miles this trail seemed a good bet.

What a peaceful day. The sun is backlighting the changing leaves, and the wind flutters the yellow, orange and red foliage like prayer flags strung in a Himalayan pass. The pungent scent of autumnal decay permeates our olfactory senses almost like the smell of freshly pressed cider.

As we cross over the hump on Morgan

Mountain and head down toward the pond we come upon a carpet of vibrant green moss, covered with snow. My daughter yelps with delight. She grabs a handful and says, "It's been so long, since I touched snow." It has in fact been only five months and one week. The moss looks like a snowy forest seen from an aircraft at 30,000 feet.

Cooper Kiln Pond is not a great swimming or fishing hole, being shallow and silt-bottomed, but the large rocks around the shore make ideal perches from which to enjoy the view of the sloping mountain ridges. It's the kind of place that makes you want to release



Michael Zeugin and his daughter on the trail to Cooper Kiln Pond.

with a deep breath all of life's stresses. "Can we stay overnight in this lean-to?" my daughter asks. She knows a good thing when she finds it. But today we're doing a through hike.

The downhill to Bonnieview Road follows ridges and creeks that cascade out of the mountains. Snow covers a bridge over the creek and splashes the shady turns in the trail on the first part of the descent. The route is shadowed and cool. The wind shushes us as it rushes through the ever-

greens, practicing for the whistles and roars of the winter to come.

Near the end of the trail, the kaleidoscope of fall leaves gives way to tall conifers. The forest floor is all cones and needles. I start a pine-cone fight, which my daughter is delighted to carry on for the last half a mile.

We're hungry and tired when we reach the car. We can think of no better way to cap the autumn day than supping on butternut squash soup, apple pie and hot cocoa.

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The trail tops out at about 3,240 feet. If you turn around here, you'll enjoy a descent of 900 feet over two miles. The only steep pitch will be at the start of the return. From then on, if the snow is ample and the streams are frozen, it's a fairly easy cruise.

If you go all the way to the pond, be ready for a quick descent from the pass with some tight turns among the trees.

Cooper Kiln Pond lies at elevation 3,010 feet, about 2.7 miles from the western trailhead and 3.2 miles from the eastern. On most days, you'll have it to yourself. I did when I first visited the pond. The scene reminded me of a Japanese watercolor, with its muted hues: a frozen white surface unbroken except for a few boulders, dark mountains rising in the background, yellowed stalks lining the shore, a gray sky looming over all. It was the picture of solitude.

On my next trip, it was a different picture. When Jeff and I arrived at the pond, a snowmobile was running around in circles on the ice. Several other machines were parked at the lean-to. We also met another skier who had climbed to the pond from the eastern trailhead on Bonnieview Road. As we three prepared to ski down to the road, we heard more snowmobiles coming up the trail. It was so steep that they got bogged down and were spinning their treads, digging up the snow.

Yes, the Cooper Kiln Pond Trail is a snowmobile route, but the machines rarely travel from end to end. The terrain is too steep for that. Instead, as I understand it, most go to

the pond and turn back. Even that can be rough going in deep snow: The trail rises 1,700 feet from Bonnieview Road to the pond.

After waiting for the machines to get unstuck, we headed down. The trail below the pond follows an old tote road, plenty wide enough for turns. (And you'll want to turn to check your speed.) We stopped on a flat stretch after a long downhill and then left the trail to ski through a hardwood glade. Once back on the trail, we resumed our thrilling descent pretty much the rest of the way to Bonnieview Road.

We did stop once to chat with two skiers coming up the trail. I realized that there are advantages to starting from the eastern end if you're doing a round-trip. The descent is longer and the old road, given its width and grade, is ideal for skiing. And the pond makes a natural turnaround point. But you do have to beware of the snowmobiles.

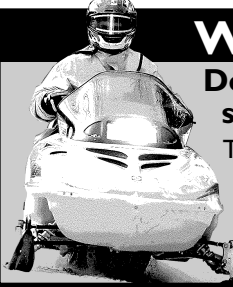
It occurred to me later that this is the very sort of trail that should be closed to snowmobiles—and not just for the safety of skiers. First, it cuts through the heart of a Forest Preserve tract (the Wilmington Wild Forest). Second, the terrain is too steep. Third, because most snowmobilers don't try to go through the pass, the trail in effect dead-ends in the middle of the "forever wild" Preserve. It does not connect with other trails.

In its management plan for the Wilmington Wild Forest, the state Department of Environmental Conservation proposes to keep the route open to snowmobiles. That could change if DEC ever completes its snowmobile plan for the Adirondacks. [See Page 5.] Meanwhile, you'll just have to share.



Photo by Nancie Battaglia

The Cooper Kiln Pond trail needs at least a foot of snow to be skiable.



### WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

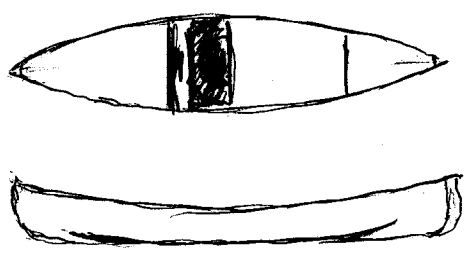
**Do you think the Cooper Kiln Pond Trail should be closed to snowmobiles?**

The state Department of Environmental Conservation would like to know your opinion. E-mail DEC's Region 5 office at [r5ump@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:r5ump@gw.dec.state.ny.us) or send a letter to NYSDEC, Ray Brook, NY 12977-0296.

SALES PITCH # 2 'BE HAPPY!'

LAKE LYLA, BOG RIVER FLOW, LITTLE TUPPER, ALL WONDERFUL PLACES TO PADDLE. BUT... IN THE SUMMER, ALL VERY CROWDED. YOU MIGHT NOT GET A PLACE TO PARK. IF YOU GET ON THE WATER, FINDING A CAMP SITE MIGHT BE IMPOSSIBLE. IF YOU DO FIND ONE, YOUR NEIGHBORS ARE APT TO BE VERY FESTIVE AT NIGHT. NONE OF THIS WILL MAKE YOU VERY HAPPY. HOWEVER, THERE IS HOPE. ON YOUR DRIVE TO ANY OF THESE LAKES YOU WILL HAVE PASSED HUNDREDS OF OTHER PLACES TO PADDLE. MANY OF THESE ARE SELDOM, IF EVER, USED. MOST WILL REQUIRE A WALK THROUGH THE WOODS TO GET TO. IT MIGHT BE A FEW HUNDRED FEET. IT COULD BE SEVERAL MILES. YOU WANT LIKE DOING THIS CARRYING YOUR 50-70LB

CANOE WHICH WAS PROBABLY DESIGNED AND BUILT BY PEOPLE FROM SOMEPLACE FAR AWAY FROM THE ADIRONDACKS. WE LIVE HERE, WE WORK HERE, WE PADDLE HERE. WE KNOW WHAT'S NEEDED HERE. WE BUILD AND PADDLE 17LB CANOES. WE HAVE SO MANY PLACES TO PADDLE THAT WE'LL NEVER GET TO THEM ALL. WE'RE VERY HAPPY!



LENGTH	16' 5"
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