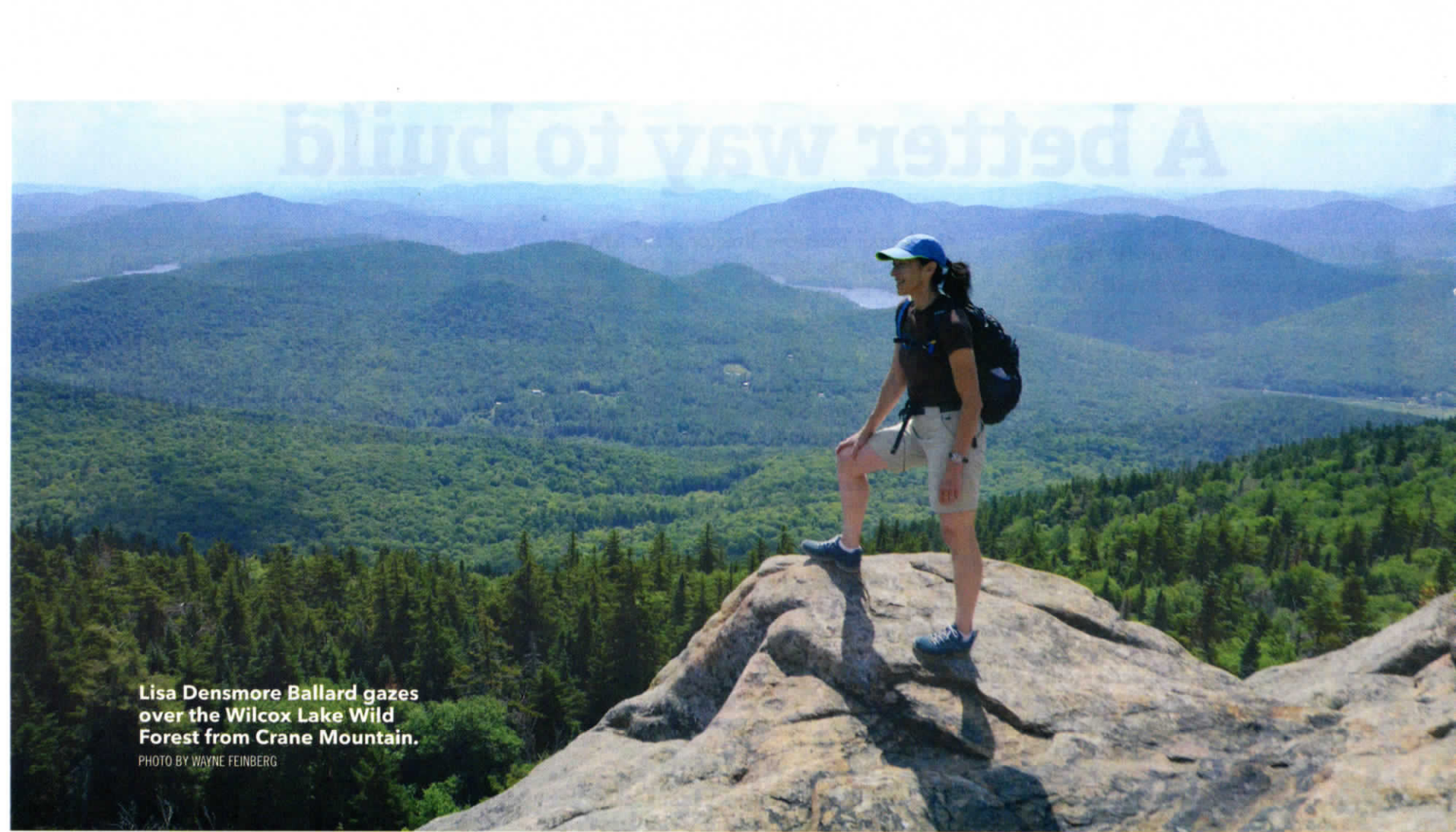


A better way to build blind of view tested



Lisa Densmore Ballard gazes over the Wilcox Lake Wild Forest from Crane Mountain.

PHOTO BY WAYNE FEINBERG

On Crane with Wayne

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By Lisa Densmore Ballard

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"I'll trade you," I bargained, "If you'll hike up Crane Mountain with me, I'll take you to the airport. It's a short hike to the top with lots of lookouts, then we'll swing down to Crane Mountain Pond where there's a beach. It's an easy three-mile loop."

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It was my favorite hike in the southern Adirondacks.

I picked Wayne up in Saranac



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My brother, Wayne, claimed he was allergic to hiking. A decade ago, I coaxed him into climbing modest Baker Mountain by Moody Pond in Saranac Lake, a mile from his home. In a moment of weakness, he agreed, needing to walk his dog. One would think we had scaled Everest.

"Want to hike up Ampersand Mountain?" I asked him last spring. Ampersand was close to his home with a fantastic view on top.

"If I don't show up at the trailhead, don't wait," he replied. It became his standard comeback every few days when I called him to see if he might join me on Baxter, Giant's Nubble, Rooster Comb, St. Regis Mountain ... I was updating my book *Hiking the Adirondacks*, hiking three days per week and constantly looking for trail buddies.

Wayne played golf. To his credit, he usually walked the course, but to me, that wasn't a real

hike. I finally coaxed him off the manicured greens again, last June, when he needed a ride to Albany airport.

"I'll trade you," I bargained, "If you'll hike up Crane Mountain with me, I'll take you to the airport. It's a short hike to the top with lots of lookouts, then we'll swing down to Crane Mountain Pond where there's a beach. It's an easy three-mile loop."

"If I must," he grunted.

I avoided telling him how steep the ascent would be, climbing almost 1,400 feet in only 1.4 miles. I didn't want him to find another ride.

The Climb. Crane Mountain (2,851 feet), located fifteen miles northwest of Warrensburg, is a minor mountain with a major view. From its summit cliff, you can see across Lake George into Vermont to the east, Moose and Baldhead mountains to the south, and Garnet Lake to the southwest.

There are two stories behind the name of the mountain and the pond on its northwestern shoulder: one credits a pair of cranes rumored to have nested on the pond during the previous

century; the other pays tribute to a state surveyor with the last name of Crane who marked a fifty-five-mile line that ran over the mountaintop. I was excited to see both the mountain and the pond again. The only other time I had explored the route was nine years ago while working on the first edition of *Hiking the Adirondacks*.

It was my favorite hike in the southern Adirondacks.

I picked Wayne up in Saranac Lake on the morning of our hike. He was clad in a striped polo shirt, pleated khaki shorts, and tennis shoes, his version of outdoor wear. He looked like he was going to a putting green rather than up a mountain.

We reached the trailhead around 2 p.m. and headed up the well-worn path through

a dense hardwood forest. We quickly gained elevation despite the rough, bouldery route. When I first did the hike, there were many rock perches on which to rest and ogle the views, but that was in the fall when the leaves were down. Now it was late spring.

"Where are all those great views?" asked Wayne, breathing hard. I shrugged.



PHOTO BY LISA DENSMORE BALLARD

DIRECTIONS: At the junction of US 9 and NY 418 in Warrensburg, go 3.6 miles west on NY 418 toward Thurman. Turn right (northwest) on Athol Road. Go 1.1 miles to a T-intersection. Turn right (northeast) onto Cameron Road. Go 0.9 miles, then bear right (north) on Glen/Athol Road. Go 1.4 miles, then turn left on Valley Road. Go 4.6 miles, then turn left on Garnet Lake Road South. Go 1.3 miles, then turn right on Ski Hi Road (dirt). Go 1.9 miles to the trailhead at the end of the road. N 43 32.239', W 73 58.034'

After a half-mile of upward scrambling, the talus turned to smooth slab. Luckily it was dry and at a low-enough angle that Wayne's sneakers gripped the bedrock without incident.

At the top of the slab, we found a short spur to an unobstructed lookout toward the pond. Grateful for a flat spot, we took a short break.

"Check out the blueberries," I said, cheerfully, pointing to the calf-high shrubs all around us. "What blueberries?" asked Wayne.

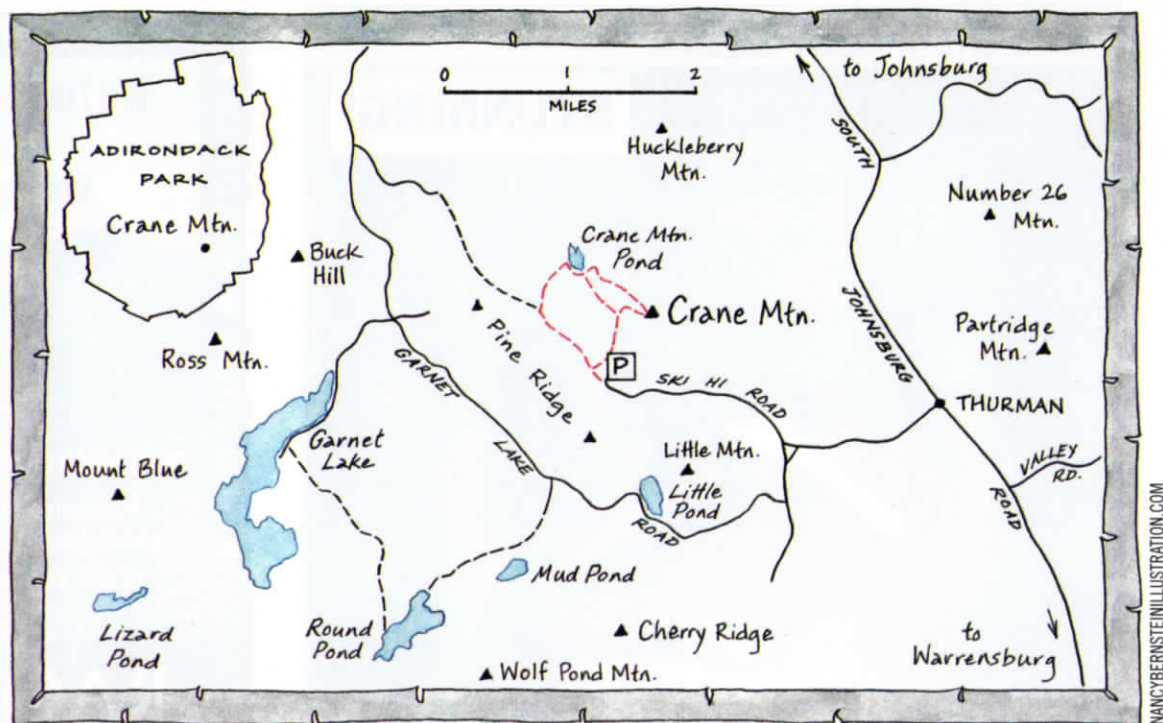
I gently tipped a cluster of small white flowers toward him. "These are blueberry blossoms," I replied. "This place will be blueberry heaven by late July."

"Great." Wayne rolled his eyes, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "In the meantime, we might starve."

I handed him a granola bar, and we continued our climb. The forest transitioned to birch and softwoods. Then we broke onto another expanse of slab, the start of the patchwork of trees and rock characterizing Crane Mountain's upper slopes and signaling the halfway point to the summit.

A few minutes later, we passed a junction with a trail to the pond where I intended to close the loop on the way back to the car. From there, we headed up another short, steep, eroded jumble of rocks and roots. Then things got more interesting.

At 0.8 miles, we climbed a short ladder up a small rock wall. Just below the summit, we came to a second, much longer ladder—tween-



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At 0.8 miles, we climbed a short ladder up a small rock wall. Just below the summit, we came to a second, much longer ladder—twenty-four rungs leaning against a vertical cliff. It demanded our full attention. Wayne seemed to warm to the hike after he scaled the cliff. When we reached the top of the mountain, at 1.4 miles, I thought he even smiled a little as he scanned the wildlands before us.

"How did you like those ladders?" I asked, as we sipped from our water bottles, admiring the view.

"Interesting," he replied, with a faint glimmer of enthusiasm.

A fire tower used to grace the top of Crane Mountain. Today only the footings of the tower remain, but there's no need for more elevation to take in the sights. Heaving waves of forested hills lie to the south and west. The vast amount

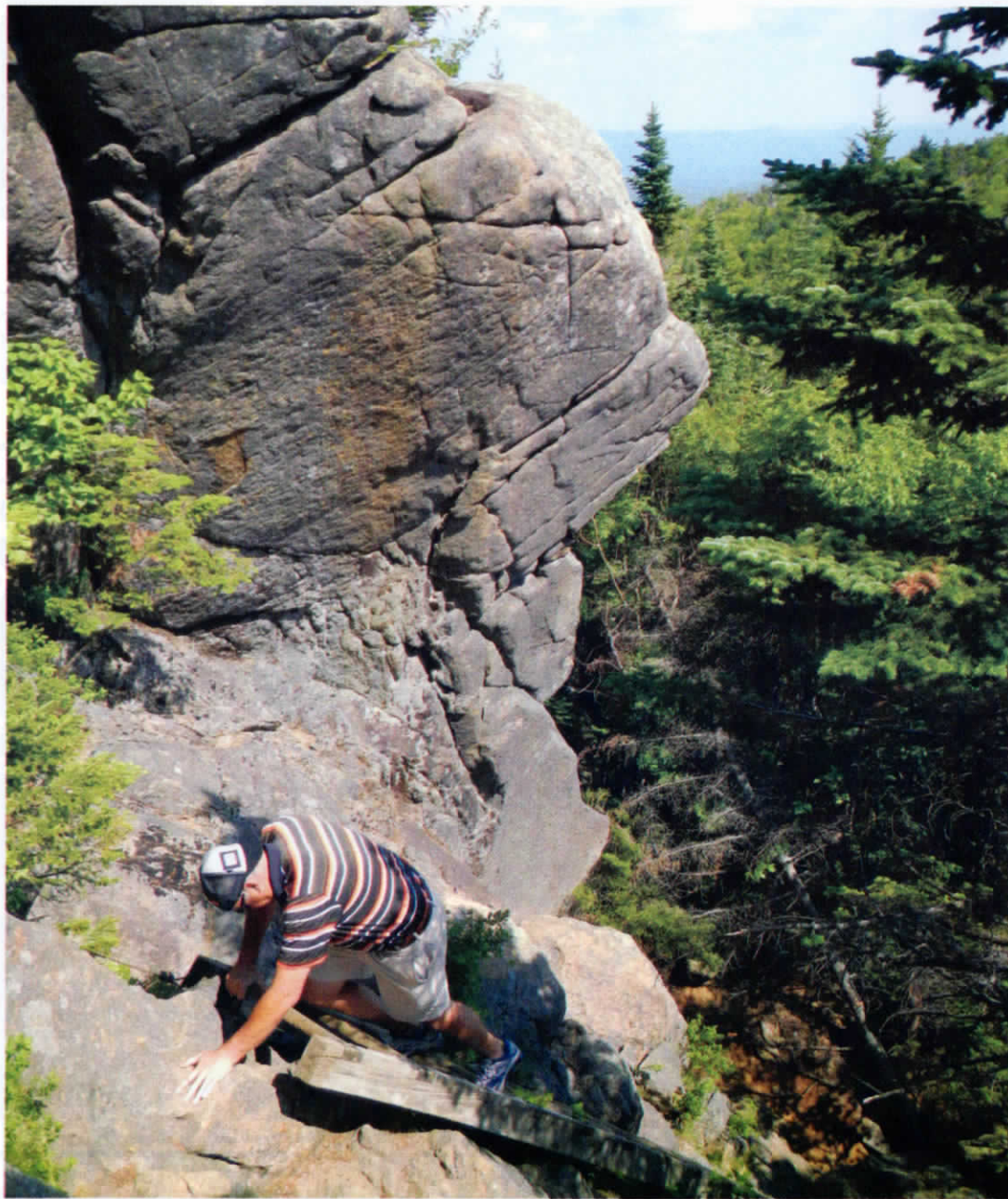
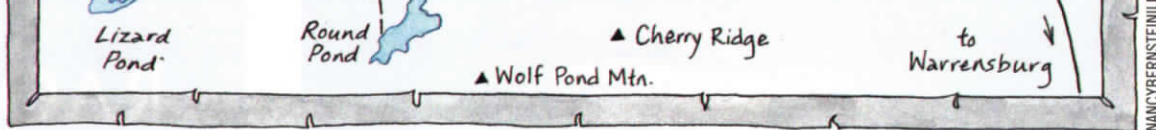


PHOTO BY LISA DENSMORE BALLARD

Crane Mountain, continued on Page 25

Wayne Feinberg, the author's brother, climbs the ladder with success.

of uninhabited land so close to the urban sprawl between Saratoga and Albany is impressive.

The pond. After our steep climb, we quickly covered the half-mile down to its namesake pond. Wayne perked up even more when we arrived at the edge of the water.

We turned left, following its southern shoreline. As we walked, I pointed out the beach on the western side of the fourteen-acre pond, a popular spot for camping and fishing. Then we took another break on a broad rock jutting into the water.

“Want to swim?” I asked my brother.

“No, thanks,” he replied, contentedly looking at the placid water. The reflections of puffy, fair-weather clouds floated on the glassy surface, disturbed here and there by a rising fish.

Closing the loop. The reprieve from my brother’s grouching was short-lived. In my excitement at showing the pond to him, I missed the poorly marked trail back to the midway point on the summit trail. Rather than backtracking, I decided to return to the trailhead by another route called the Putnam Farm trail. My mistake added about three-quarters of a mile to our hike.

From the pond, the descent via the Putnam Farm trail was steep and rocky, similar to the summit trail. We quickly found ourselves at a tall rock wall, which required a right turn and then many slow, careful steps down a pile of boulders.

“I wouldn’t call this an easy hike,” sniped Wayne.

At the next rock wall, we paused at a plaque in memory of Paul Schaefer (1908-1996), a leading conservationist in the Adirondack Park during the twentieth century. Schaefer wore many hats: home builder, guide, hunter, photographer, author, and



PHOTOS BY LISA DENSMORE BALLARD

Hikers who do the loop pass Crane Mountain Pond after descending from the summit.

defender of the Forest Preserve. He lived near Schenectady but kept a cabin in Bakers Mills, just north of Crane Mountain. I wondered how many times he had trekked this very trail.

The trail finally leveled off back in the forest at the base of the mountain. Our pace picked up on the smoother trail, a woods road, really. At one point, we crossed a natural earthen bridge with sinkholes to either side, adding yet another point of interest to this varied hike. The pits distracted my brother again.

“Cool caves,” he said. “The little stream just disappears down there.” Chilly air wafted up from below. One could imagine a fairytale troll

waiting for a daring, curious hiker to take a closer look, but I knew the real hazards of casual spelunking—such as the moist ground collapsing or cornering a fox or weasel in its den—and we were anxious to get back to the car. We walked on, reaching the trailhead twenty minutes later.

“Dinner’s on me,” announced my brother as we signed out at the registration box. “I know a great place in Saratoga.”

“Maybe he’s starting to like hiking after all,” I thought. I asked hopefully: “I’m climbing Pitchoff next week. Want to come?”

“If I don’t show up at the trailhead, don’t wait for me,” he chuckled. ■

RIGHT: Wayne enjoys a view of unbroken wilderness.

BELOW: The conservationist Paul Schaefer had a cabin not far from Crane Mountain.



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