

STAIRWAY TO THE LAKE

The project most liked by the international volunteers was the log step-and-stair path at the new Noblewood Park in Willsboro. Noblewood is the 100-acre property at the southern mouth of the Boquet recently purchased by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the Town of Willsboro. The Nature Conservancy secured the property until such time Willsboro obtains sufficient funds from the sale of their current beach on Willsboro Point.

A seasonal camp, overlooking Lake Champlain from a steep bluff, is the future site of a children's Day Camp. Down below is the proposed new town beach. Between the two is a dangerously pitched path through the woods. Improving this path was part of a successful proposal submitted by the Town to the Lake Champlain Basin Program for public access enhancements. The volunteers became the laborers and the badly needed in-kind match for the grant.

With advice and encouragement from Bill Brosseau at the Adirondack Mountain Club, we began. Hemlock and cedar logs were to be used, each path step would be the foundation for the next, and logs would be connected with lap joints. Two platforms were to be constructed in order to run giant cedar log stringers for stairs down the steepest incline. Marshall Benedict was on call with a chain saw, thanks to Peter Paine, Jr., and Paul White's nearby saw mill could rip one side of logs used as step treads.



The first day gave me the jitters. It was painfully slow. No one had experience taking bark off logs, measuring/sawing/splitting accurate lap joints, nor figuring the rise/run relationships for the number of steps required.

"Dead men," I explained, were those logs dug into the bank that would carry the tread log. I waited as this term and technique were digested.

"*Oui, je comprend. Cadavre.*" Julien began speaking French to others, mimicking the burial of still bodies underground. Meanwhile, others gingerly tapped a hatchet with

a hammer, trying to split a 9-foot log.



But by the following day, everyone was hard at work and taking command using sledges and steel wedges, hand auguring holes for spikes, and digging their hearts out. Each new step was a thing of pride. Julien asked for a broom on the last day, and carefully sepi the stairs. Only one task was not finished. The volunteers had wanted to chisel a "John Henry" in one of the steps, but couldn't arrive at an appropriate word, message, or symbol. The international peace sign was suggested, but they worried about the ease of creating a circle.

"How about the peace sign in a square?"

"Yeah, squares for peace." This required an explanation. What was a social "square?"

"Ah, now I understand. They used this word in *Pulp Fiction*. I didn't know."

So, there is no label, no mark, no indication that this stair trail was created by young volunteers who paid their own way to the Adirondacks to offer their assistance.