To Cataract Mountain

By Dave Gibson

Paul Schaefer, our founder and mentor, was born on this day, September 13, 108 years ago.

So I decided to celebrate his birthday by climbing his favorite mountain. It is untrailed and fabulously lonely save for friends Raven spiraling over its peak, Chicadee and Golden Crowned Kinglet finding food among the thick young balsam growing vigorously at its summit. Views from there include Crane Mountain and lower peak upon peak in the Wilcox Lake Wild Forest.

View from Cataract or Eleventh Mountain to Crane Mountain

Paul Schaefer wrote about this mountain in his book *Cabin Country*: “More than two centuries ago, surveyors running a line of one of the great pre-Revolutionary land grants, established a corner, one of thousands, on a wild and beautiful mountain in Warren County. It marked a corner of the Eleventh Township of the Totten and Crossfield Purchase of more than 1 million acres. Thus by an accident of exploration a mundane name was given to the mountain rich with unique natural features. On maps it is called Eleventh Mountain.”
Paul preferred this name: Cataract Mountain. “On its eastern plateau there is a great sphagnum swamp which receives drainage from a nearby summit. Its stream, fed by rain, snow and clouds, drops over a ledge; and in a series of slides and falls and boulder-filled pools, it drops more than 1,000 feet to the valley below. ..There are numerous spots where I can stand on a rocky ledge above the precipitous forested slopes dropping off to the valley far below and experience solitude so wonderful that it causes emotions I cannot describe.

At such times, my mind wanders to Mt. Alvernia in Italy, where Francis of Assisi had his hermitage and where his friars have been guarding the trees and plants there for more than 700 years. Here on Cataract Mountain – protected by the “forever wild” covenant – the work of the Divine Artist is all around us, from the lichens clinging to the bare rocks to the hawk wheeling in the sky far above.”

…”I could write a book about our experiences on that mountain. It would be one, for the most part, that would tell how the natural conditions of the mountain prevented us from achieving our much-labored hunting goals – that is precisely what makes Cataract Mountain so wonderful!”