

The Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks: A Center for Scientific Inquiry and Inspiration

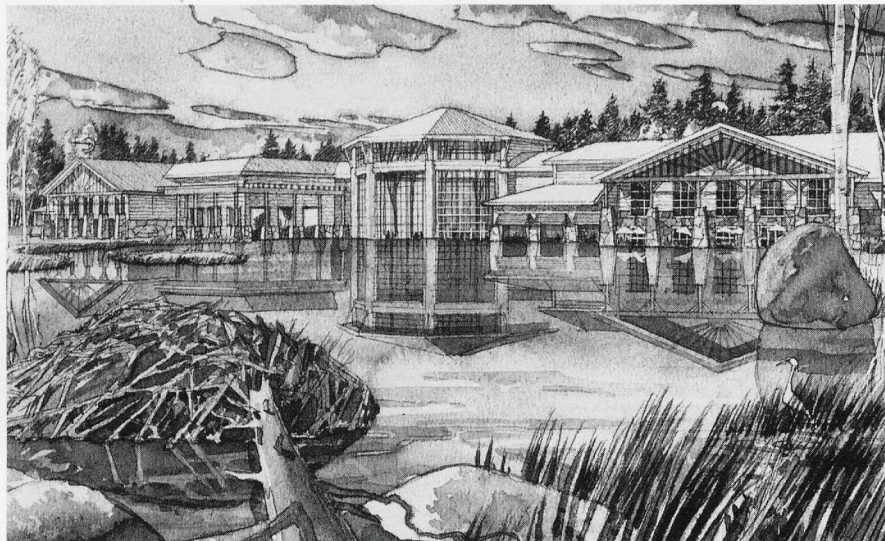
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Background Information

The Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks is a new educational center which has been under development for almost two years and is well on its way to fruition. The 38,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility will be located in Tupper Lake, in the center of the Adirondacks. This will make it easily accessible to a large number of travelers crossing the Park from all directions.

Over the past year much has been accomplished. The Museum now has a wonderful 31-acre site in Tupper Lake on the oxbow of the Raquette River which was a gift from the local community, a comprehensive Museum Master Plan completed by a team of project designers who are the best in the business, thirteen hundred members, and support from nearly one hundred diverse groups and organizations from around the Park. In addition, the Board of Trustees has presented the Museum concept at four formal public forums, provided weekly presentations to groups and organizations around the Park and beyond, initiated its first series of educational programs called Expeditions, and developed close ties with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and a host of area colleges, universities and cultural establishments around the Park including the Adirondack Museum and Adirondack Park Visitor Interpretive Centers. The Board has also raised a substantial amount of operating funds to launch the capital development of the project.

The genesis for creation of the Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks came not only from the sheer beauty and



Architectural drawing of the proposed Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks

expanse of the natural resources of the Adirondacks, but also from an intrigue and interest in all the dramatic natural history events we are seeing here in recent times. The Museum's founders saw a profound opportunity to create a natural history museum to share and explain these occurrences and their relevance in overall geologic time to the general public who live in and visit this area. In keeping with this overall intent, the mission of this Museum is to inspire a broad public understanding of the natural systems that shape and sustain life in the Adirondacks. The sharing, promotion and sponsorship of research will be an important part of fulfilling this mission.

Sharing of Research

The sharing of knowledge obtained from research will be a centerpiece of the museum experience. There are many creative and innovative ways that this can be done in our new age of technology. The Museum Master Plan, prepared by world

class project designers, contains the conceptual plans for the exhibit program which will include both live and interactive exhibits covering a full spectrum of Adirondack natural history topics.

Included in the interpretive program will be a presentation of two billion years of geological history, a view of the various ecological zones at various elevations with live exhibits, images from a collection of real time off-site video cameras showing wildlife activity throughout the Adirondacks, interactive multi-media exhibits which allow visitors to pursue more in-depth information about exhibits based on their particular interests, satellite transmissions of interviews with scientists who at scheduled times are available to answer particular questions about nature, and more. The overall intent is to engage people in science and research findings through entertaining and interactive exhibits with the idea that an enjoyable and interactive experience makes learning easier and more effective.

Betsy Lowe is Project Director of the Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks.

The use of Internet technology and the Museum's Web site will be an important outlet for sharing scientific information with a broad audience. It is expected over time that more people will visit the Web site than the actual museum and we want the site to reflect the technological sophistication and educational content of the eventual museum. From its earliest stages, the Museum's presence on the World-Wide-Web has been of utmost importance. Its initial site, www.adknature.org was created and put on line shortly after the idea for the institution was born and has been maintained since then by volunteer Web-masters with a passion for the project. As the development of the Museum moves forward, the sophistication of the Web site, in content, design and capability will grow with the project to stimulate continued learning and information sharing known as digitized education.

Museum staff have participated and will continue to participate in national and international conferences to keep abreast of the latest tools and techniques of Museum exhibitions to ensure exhibits continue to be dynamic and present information in the most effective ways for the public. The Museum is currently a member of the American Association of Museums and has participated for three years in the International Association of Science Technology Centers annual conferences. These conferences provide a wealth of information about running natural history museums, contacts with professionals in the field, and the latest methods and approaches to exhibit design and educational programs.

Promotion of Research

The Museum will promote research and information sharing among scientists by hosting regional, national and world-renowned speakers, groups and organizations at its facility — whether in the Grand Hall, Panoramic Theater, outdoor amphitheater, or through offsite sponsored expeditions. Respected leaders in

the field of natural history will give an outside perspective on what makes the Adirondacks special. In addition, Museum staff will foster good working relationships with colleges and universities in the area so that it will have the latest knowledge of ongoing research to support and showcase in the Museum.

The Museum will be a place where all can share their ideas. In forums the Museum held with scientists and teachers earli-



The Museum's logo: a river otter.

er this year, it was very apparent that scientists are anxious to share more of what they are discovering and teachers want to know more about this research and expose it to their students. In addition, the Museum will be a fabulous place for student interns to further their studies in fulfillment of degree requirements. Professional journals and publications will also be a part of the Museum's offerings over time and will promote the sharing and transfer of information originating at the Museum or from outside sources to the general public.

Sponsorship of Research

The Museum will also sponsor its own research and monitoring activities in collaboration with individuals, groups, and educational institutions that have a natural history focus and are complementary to other research efforts ongoing in the Adirondacks. In addition, these scientific research projects will be tied into an

overall Citizen Science program the Museum is formulating. Students from the youngest to the university level will assist with in-depth studies being conducted by professional scientists and other ongoing projects and exhibits. Students will see their work in parts of the Museum's Today Exhibit, including film and data that will be incorporated into the live media screens. The film will be a part of a larger video project where students will write and produce nature films under Museum sponsorship. Students will undertake bird counts and water quality studies for the Museum's database and participate in field research that will be used in the Naturalists' Cabinet collections. The serious use of carefully reviewed citizen science information in museum exhibits and research will give strong focus to the Museum's mission to engage students and the public in scientific learning and research.

The Museum will seek to hire the best for all its professional staff and will conduct national searches for these positions. It is expected that this facility will attract some of the most capable people for all aspects of managing its exhibits and programs thereby fostering the highest quality in all of these areas. In addition, the Museum will continue to meet with leading scientists and educators to discuss not only the overall interpretive programs for the Museum, but ideas about how to ensure good science in all of its activities. Participation in the first sessions was high and there is a great deal of interest in continuing this process.

Contact Information

Anyone with an interest in the Museum who would like to comment on the future of the project, learn more about its development or meet with staff or Trustees can reach the Museum by e-mail at www.adknature.org, phone at (518) 359-2533; or writing Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks, P.O. Box 897, Tupper Lake, NY 12986.



Repose. Drawing by Barry Hopkins.