SCOTS AND THE GULF COAST

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Sailing in the Adirondacks: SCHROON LAKE and LOON LAKE

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KACHOW!

GULF DISTRICT HIGHLIGHT
Summers in New York State are a flurry of Flying Scot racing activity. The FSSA calendar records competitive events almost every weekend from the Great South Bay of Long Island to Saratoga Springs in upstate NY; the sailing is intense, spirited and fun. But the Flying Scot is not just a great, competitive racer. The boat’s designer, Gordon “Sandy” Douglass, conceived the Scot first and foremost as a family boat: simple to rig, easy to launch & recover, comfortable to sail, stable in a blow, but responsive – a boat “one could grow into” as Sandy put it. For New Yorkers, these “family values” are especially appreciated. New York State is blessed with spectacular waterways, which played a historic role in the founding of the nation: great, powerful rivers, a canal system that was integral to the push westward, and pristine lakes that stretch northward from midstate to Canada. New York is truly Flying Scot territory.

The first author (RKL), a Long Islander, was introduced to the Flying Scot at the Horrocks-Palmer Regatta at Sayville Yacht

Richard K. Larson (FS 5573) and Paul Conolly (FS 2)
Club. At the time, the family owned a Thistle, a very different boat. Where the Thistle had a narrow, undecked, open cockpit that required most sitting to be done on 4” wide wooden rails, the Flying Scot had spacious seating and broad comfortable side decks. Where the Thistle had a rather complicated cockpit filled with many bits of string, the Flying Scot layout was remarkably simple. Most telling, in winds that kept the Thistle fleet ashore, the Flying Scots went out and raced without incident. Within a month, our Thistle was for sale. Flying Scot 5573 (“Lyra”) arrived from the factory in April 2004.

Wanting to expand family sailing venues, RKL inquired on the FSSA forum whether anyone could recommend a sailing lake in New York’s magnificent Adirondack Park, which comprises approx. 6 million acres in upper New York State, an area larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Great Smoky, and Everglades Parks combined.

At this point, the second author (PC) entered the scene. PC, an old hand at Flying Scots, and the current owner of Flying Scot #2 (which, despite its hull number, is in fact the oldest Scot in the fleet, predating hull #1 in production order) posted a reply that began with the simple invitation: “Come to Schroon Lake!”

For five years now RKL & family have made an annual summer pilgrimage to the Adirondacks, always with 5573 in tow, and have enjoyed wonderful sailing in northern New York. In this article, we describe two area lakes where we have sailed our Scots.

**Schroon Lake**

Schroon Lake is situated about 1.5 hours by car north of Albany, immediately northwest of Lake George. Although smaller than Lake George, and certainly less famous, Schroon Lake has retained many of the qualities of Adirondack life that originally attracted visitors to its better known neighbor, but which Lake George is now rapidly losing in a welter of tourists shops, neon signs, and waters overrun with power boats, jet skis, parasailing concessions, and tour barges.
Schroon Lake is approximately 9 miles long, and up to 2 miles wide along its axis, which runs roughly north-south. It is pinched in its middle at “The Narrows”, but both above and below this point the lake is wide and spacious, with very ample sailing room. The winds are primarily from the south, and in a strong blow, the nine-mile long fetch can generate serious waves. But for the most part, as in all lake sailing, sailors can expect flukey wind shifts and willy-waws to keep life interesting.

At the north end, along its western shore, lies the town of Schroon Lake, which is the chief municipality in the area, boasting a large grocery store, a pharmacy, a reliable garage, an old-fashioned cinema that screens one family movie per week, several charming shops, and numerous restaurants that run the gamut from fine casual dining, to well-prepared American diner fare, to coffee & crepes. The pace of life in Schroon Lake is slow and relaxed — folks greet you with a smile and are pleased to spend some time with you. Nightlife is definitely not on offer, however: restaurants typically serve from 5-9 and the town carpet pretty much rolls up by 10:00pm.

For vacationing boaters, there are numerous rental possibilities. The western shore of Schroon Lake, along Route 9, is its most developed area, and is dotted with cabins, chalets, one motel, and numerous homes, many that rent time during the summer months, many with a dock, and some even with ramp access. The lake bottom drops off quickly on the western side, presenting few hazards to navigation. PC’s home is on the western shore and, when not on the lake, FS 2 can be found at her mooring there. RKL & family have typically stayed along the western shore and found it very convenient for mooring and sailing FS 5573.

Schroon Lake’s eastern shore is considerably less developed and in parts much wilder. Cabins and homes to the northeast typically are accessible only via narrow, windy private roads leading deep into the woods. The eastern shore is also navigationally more complex. On the northeastern side of Schroon Lake lies 45-acre Clark Island, currently home to a private summer camp for teenagers. Around the rocky island are several outcroppings, most of which are marked by warning buoys. The channel between Clark Island and the shore is sailable, but the waters quickly become shallow on either side, hence caution is required. Despite its greater remoteness and somewhat trickier sailing, the eastern shore has a wilderness making it a lovely place to vacation.

For launching and recovery, Schroon Lake has two well-maintained, public dock facilities with no associated fees: one at the north end in the town of Schroon Lake, and one at the southern end in the vicinity of Pottersville. Although busy on weekends, requiring Scot sailors to be quick about their business, the launch sites have a friendly atmosphere, and a 23’ mast raising or lowering is always viewed with interest and enthusiasm.

The lake offers excellent fishing, with a wide variety of species to tempt anglers. And although power boats and jet skis are found here, as everywhere, life on the water is peaceful and unhurried. There are many coves and inlets to explore along the nine-mile stretch of water, and shallow waters in which to drop anchor, lower the swim ladder and dive in. Unsurprisingly, many different classes of sailboats make their home in these waters. In addition to the oldest Flying Scot, Schroon Lake is home-port to Daysailer #1, the first of that spectacularly successful design by Uffa Fox.
Loon Lake

Lying approximately 10 miles southwest of Schroon Lake is Loon Lake, a horseshoe-shaped body of water near the town of Chesterton, NY. Although much smaller than Schroon Lake, with perhaps less scope for exploration under sail, Loon Lake shares many of the attractions of Schroon Lake, and is somewhat quieter.

Nearby Chesterton offers many of the same amenities in terms of shopping and dining, and although there is no public launch site, launching & recovery from Loon Lake Marina are available at a minimal $15 charge – far less than the usual $40-$50 of Lake George. RKL & family spent a lovely week on Loon Lake in Summer ’07 and although Schroon Lake remains the sentimental favorite, Loon Lake evokes very fond memories.

We should mention that for non-sailing days, there are many area attractions accessible from both sites. In the immediate Schroon Lake area, Mount Severance, Treadway and Pharaoh mountains offer great, relaxing hikes with fantastic views of Schroon and many other area lakes, ponds, and the surrounding wilderness. Historic Fort Ticonderoga with its strategic and breath-taking views of Lake Champlain and the ford to Lake George is only 1 hour east of Schroon Lake. At a slightly longer distance, on Blue Mountain Lake, is the Museum of the Adirondacks, with a wonderful array of exhibits of Adirondack life as it developed over the 19th and early 20th centuries, when the area became one of the nation’s premier vacation spots. For drizzly days, we love the Natural Stone Bridge and Cavern just 15 minutes west of Schroon Lake off Route 9, whose galleries and arches drip and echo in the midst of a beautiful forest setting. And for days when temperatures truly soar, we head 90 minutes north to Ausable Chasm, a spectacular gorge that Teddy Roosevelt once declared a wonder of the world, and which features a relaxing tube trip down its length, in cool river water, beneath a distant ribbon of sky framed by sheer, moss-covered rock faces.

For Scot families considering a week or two of Adirondack sailing in the Lake George area, Schroon Lake and Loon Lake are wonderful, relaxing venues.