

Adirondack Adventures

Lake Placid can be a winter playground for you and your dog.

Lisa Densmore

I used to be a world-class athlete, a member of the U.S. Ski Team. For many years, my visits to Lake Placid, N.Y., were strictly for competitions at Whiteface Mountain. That was in the 1980s.

Twenty-five years later, I was anxious to return to this picturesque village in the heart of the Adirondacks, not as an athlete, but just for fun. I wanted to experience this winter resort for its many attributes that I missed years ago. Of course, I wanted to bring along my Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Bravo. I figured if Lake Placid was like most ski towns, dogs are as much a part of the scene as people. It was true.

After the long car ride, Bravo and I were ready for some exercise. The three-mile loop around Mirror Lake, located in the middle of the village, turned out to be the perfect dog walk and a great way to get a sense of the place. We passed the Olympic arenas and speed skating oval, strolled through the heart of the village, then headed around “the back side of the lake” through a wooded residential area.

While on Main Street, we stopped at the Brown Dog Deli and Wine Bar, a New York-style deli with hot sandwiches named for various local canines and artwork on the walls by well-known dog artist Stephen Huneck. (518) 523-3036.

The local mushers on Mirror Lake caught Bravo’s attention, so I thought we might have fun trying skijoring — which was an official event during the 1932 Winter Olympics here. The tradition continues at Mount Van Hoevenberg, site of the cross-country skiing events during the 1980 Winter Olympics. Although the Olympic venues are not generally dog-friendly, Mount Van Hoevenberg hosts several skijoring days during the winter, and we happened to be there on one of those days. I picked up a harness for Bravo at Jones Outfitters, then rented some cross-country gear for myself.

Bravo turned out to be a pathetic pulling dog. He just sat in the snow, looking at me with questioning eyes. A fellow skier suggested that I toss a tennis ball for Bravo to get him to move down the track. That worked fine until he got the ball, at which point he would stop short, and I would fall over as the short bungee cord between us jerked tight. I felt like Wile E. Coyote. Jones Outfitters: (518) 523-3468; www.jonesoutfitters.com

I decided it would be drier to ski unattached to my dog, so I headed to the Lake Placid Club. Its three golf courses become 500 acres of snow-covered fields with more than 18 miles of groomed trails, all dog-friendly, no leashes required. There are other dog-friendly Nordic skiing options in the area, namely the short section of the Jack Rabbit Trail between Route 73 and Keene, and on the Peninsula Trails at the northern end of the village. Lake Placid Club turned out to be Nordic nirvana. Bravo ran beside me as I strode down the track, though sometimes he veered off to explore a snow-covered bush or to push his nose into the powder.

The next day, we drove nine miles to the nearby town of Saranac Lake to watch the winter carnival parade and the storming of the ice palace. First held in 1897, the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival is the oldest winter carnival in the eastern United States. The ice palace is a remarkable structure, 90 feet high and 60 feet wide, made entirely of ice from local lakes. Bravo and I explored the ice palace, then took another lake edge walk along Lake Flower, in the center of town. At the dam, about 100 mallard ducks were crammed onto the edge of the ice or swimming in the water. It was all I could do to keep Bravo at heel, water dog that he is.

On our last day, we hiked along the forest trail from Connery Pond to Whiteface Landing on the north shore of Lake Placid.

The lake stretches three-and-one-half miles from the northwestern edge of the village to the base of Whiteface Mountain. I had snowshoes with me, but the trail was well-trodden. From Whiteface Landing, the view across the lake to the village was a stunning winter panorama. I felt like I had hiked into a postcard.

Lake Placid turned out to be picture-perfect for both Bravo and me.

Lisa Densmore is the author of *Best Hikes with Dogs: New Hampshire & Vermont* (The Mountaineers Books, 2005). Though she now calls New England home, she grew up in the Adirondacks with two Toy Poodles and enjoys returning there with her substantially larger Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Bravo.