LAKE PLacid — In the final season of its four-year exhibition on Adirondack children’s camps, the Adirondack Museum has finally come out with a book to serve as a companion to the exhibit.

The book, like the exhibit, is called “A Paradise for Boys and Girls: Children’s Camps in the Adirondacks,” and it makes a case for the special importance of youth camps to this region.

The YMCA’s Camp Dudley (outside Westport) is, after all, the oldest continuously operating youth camp in the country. Dudley had its beginnings in the Catskills in 1885 but was moved to its permanent site on the Adirondack coast of Lake Champlain in 1892.

Since Sumner Dudley’s first experiments with youth camping, there have been at least 323 residential children’s camps established in the Adirondacks. Some lasted only a year or two, but some — including Old Dudley — continue to operate today.

The three authors of “Paradise” — Adirondack Museum curator Hallie Bond, University of British Columbia assistant professor Leslie Paris, and Cornell University professor Joan Jacobs Brumberg — explore the history of Adirondack kids’ camps, their influence on the lives of campers, and the camps’ impact on their host communities.

Work on the exhibition and companion book began nearly a decade ago when the Adirondack Museum hired Leslie Paris to compile a detailed research report on Adirondack camps between the world wars, a topic she had already chosen for her doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan.

Bond, who had already put together the Adirondack Museum’s exhibition on boats, was the curator assigned in 2001 to develop the new exhibit on children’s camps.
The Adirondack summer-camp phenomenon has been felt in Lake Placid as much as anywhere else in the North Country. According to an online database of Adirondack summer camps, developed by the Adirondack Museum in conjunction with the “Paradise” exhibition and book, there have been at least eight such camps here over the years:

- The first was called the “French Recreation Class for Girls.” Believed to have been the first exclusively girls’ camp in the country, its session lasted 14 weeks and cost between $225 and $300 — in the 1890s! It closed in 1897.
- A camp known only as “Lake Placid” operated for just eight summers, from 1918 through 1925. The staff of seven took care of 20 boys. Like the earlier girls’ camp, this one offered “French lessons ... to all the boys who wish.”
- The longest-running children’s camp in the Lake Placid area is Camp Treetops, established in 1921 on the campus that would later also become the home of the North Country School. Treetops is still operating, and you can visit it on the Web at www.nct.org
- Three music camps for kids operated on Placid Lake in the post-World War II years: Birchwood (1948-63), Minnowbrook (1949-77) and Grenwolde (1952-56). Birchwood, on Whiteface Bay, was acquired by the state and its buildings were torched. Camp Minnowbrook is now a private camp, while Grenwolde is now known as Camp Solitude and is operated as a summer lake inn.
- Camp Undercliff, operated on the upper West Lake from at least the 1930s until 1956. In addition to music, Undercliff offered campers a more traditional array of summer-camp activities, including riflery, water skiing — and ice skating at Lake Placid’s Olympic Arena!
- Camp Woodsmoke, established in 1964, is the only children’s camp still operating on Placid Lake. You can visit it on the Web at www.campwoodsmoke.com.

Want to check out the Adirondack Museum’s online summer-camp database for yourself? Go to www.adirondackmuseum.org/paradise/index.html.

BOND’S RESEARCH into Adirondack youth camps led her to an interesting conclusion.

“One of my theories is that Adirondack children’s camps created a lot of the constituency for the Adirondacks,” she said. “They came up here every summer as kids, and they keep coming back as adults.”


In that foreword, Terrie writes that it was his experience as a summer-camp counselor in the Adirondacks during his college years that “planted the seeds of both environmentalism and a passion for all things Adirondack” in him.