Botantist uses maps and charts to color portrait of Adirondacks

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- Want to know where in the Adirondacks that Cold War nuclear missile silos were located?

Or which Adirondack county has the most Lyme disease cases?

The 288-page atlas uses 450 maps and 300 graphs, charts and illustrations to answer just about any question you could think to ask and many more that would never cross your mind, said Jenkins.

"It's impossible to open it without becoming engaged for 10 or 15 minutes at a time," said William Porter, a professor at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and head of the Adirondack Ecological Center in Newcomb, the state university system's major center for Adirondack research.

"I like maps ... and they're complemented by Jerry's superb ecological interpretations. He has a captivating writing style, and I like that it makes a lot of Adirondack science accessible to nonscientists," Porter said.

Did you know of the 55 most-visited and most-settled lakes in the park, 23 were artificially created or substantially enlarged by dams? It's there on page 19, with a map showing the old dams and 29 existing hydroelectric plants.

"Dam building, though often destructive and controversial, is both an honored Adirondack tradition, and judged by popularity and profits, an enormously successful one," Jenkins wrote.

After selling out of its first 4,000 copies in two months, the publishers are putting out another 4,000 books.

The atlas project was directed by the Wildlife Conservation Society and took nearly six years of research. In some ways, Jenkins has been preparing his whole 60 years to write this book. Trained in philosophy and mathematics, he works as a botanist and geographer.
The information in the atlas is presented in a series of tightly focused, stand-alone features that rarely run more than a page. Woven into the facts and figures are old stories about Indian wars, logging drives and forest lore.

"The text is minimal: reading maps is almost as much fun as making them, and we didn't want to spoil your fun," Jenkins writes in the first chapter.

The Conservation Society's Leslie Karasin, a primary researcher on the atlas, said the book has many audiences, from avid hikers to traveling business executives. The book is perfect for newcomers wanting to learn about the area and can surprise old-timers with its near-forgotten information treasures _ like the location of the region's turn-of-the-century train stations and steamboat docks.

There's a bounty of practical information on where to find the region's libraries, fire departments, campgrounds, hotel rooms, convenience stores, and hospitals, among other things. Other chapters reveal the secrets of the six-million-acre park and its forests, including the location of great fires, big storms and ranger rescue missions.

In a section called "The Big One Comes Back!", the atlas charts moose sightings since 1980. There are also separate sections for bears, beavers, coyotes, cougars, lynxes, deer, wolves and rabid raccoons. (Want to know which county had the most "bear incidents?" See page 65.)

The atlas also gives a quick history lesson on the Adirondacks with a chapter on War, Settlement and Industry. It begins with the Beaver Wars involving the Five Nations of the Iroquois and ends with a section entitled, "Armageddon from Au Sable Forks: The Cold War in New York, 1950-1990" and "The Most Powerful Park in the World," a section that shows the location of now-abandoned nuclear missile silos in the park.

Using data gleaned from the U.S. Census Bureau, the atlas presents a portrait of the people who live in the Adirondacks with population maps on age and ethnicity; marriages and divorces; births and deaths. There is information on occupations, income, working and living costs, poverty, unemployment, social services, death, injury, disease and crime.

"Some of the information was right there in books or on the Internet," Jenkins said. "Some of the historical data we found in libraries and archives. Local governments shared with us. Some of it we had to dig for. We got to know some of the town clerks real well, we talked to them so many times during the project."

"We didn't just want to make an encyclopedia that was going to sit on someone's book shelf. We wanted it alive and interesting. A book that would draw people in," he said.

By the way, hikers will probably want to know that Lyme disease was most prevalent in Saratoga County, which had 11 cases in 2000.

Saratoga County also had the second-most cases (25) of Beaver Fever _ doctors call it giardia _ a thoroughly unpleasant, but rarely serious, intestinal disease that can be transferred from infected mammals through contact with contaminated water or food.

Don't believe it? Look it up. Page 137.