

ABANDONED: The Methol Swamp

The story behind the pictures

Methol. Acidalia. Burnwood. During the 19th century these were the names of bustling little Delaware County, NY, towns. Their existence and growth was literally fueled by the trees in the mountains. Methyl alcohol, acid, turpentine, dyes, charcoal, and more were the products that made these towns. After the start of the 20th century there were cheaper ways to produce these goods and soon the towns dwindled and died. All that remains are a few foundations and the names of the roads that led to these places. The Methol Road. The Acidalia Road. The Burnwood Road.

I first found the Methol Swamp when I was 18 years old. A long hike on the abandoned Methol Road surprised me with an amazing site - a body of water filled with starkly bone white dead trees. They were like ghosts stoically standing against a brilliant blue sky. It was awe inspiring, silent, majestic, mysterious and vibrant. I never forgot the day that the Methol Swamp and I met. It was magical.

When Methol was a vibrant community the swamp was a lake, probably a focal point of the town. I assume it was called Methol Lake. Over the century the dam broke, the lake filled in, and now this body of water is a swamp - or the more palatable 'wetland'. The only occupants along the shoreline are owls, birds, bees, minks, beavers, muskrats and numerous amphibians. It is an untouched and forgotten world. Abandoned.

I didn't return for over 35 years, but I often thought about that landscape. During the summer of 2012 I learned that the land that once held the town of Methol was for sale. I knew that this was my opportunity to return to see that landscape again. Off I went on the deserted Methol Road. I walked and walked, admired the woods, and wondered how much longer I had to hike to see the mysterious Methol Swamp. And then it appeared.

Methol. The Methol Swamp. Abandoned, forgotten, free, and left alone to be whatever it chooses.