

CANOE VOYAGES ON THE FUR TRADE ROUTE

By

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Volume 1 - "WE BECOME NORTHMEN"

MOOSE LAKE TO LAKE SUPERIOR - 1961

F O R E W O R D

The portion of the old fur trade canoe route through the border lakes covered by this volume is from Grand Portage on Lake Superior to Prairie Portage on Basswood Lake.

Grand Portage was the entry to the "pays d'en haut" - the upper country - from the great lakes waterway. The portage, used by the Indians to avoid the cascades and rapids of the Pigeon River, was a man killing thing - nine grueling miles in length, unimproved and hilly. One of the first white men to use it was La Verendrye the French explorer and trader. Of it a letter of his states:

".....all our people, in dismay at the length of the portage, three leagues, mutinied and loudly demanded that I should turn back." - October 31, 1744

The Lake Superior landing of the Grand Portage blossomed into a village of that name and from approximately 1784 to 1804 was the great depot of the North West Co., - a fur trading company headquartering in Montreal, that stretched its operations and explorations as far as the Pacific and Arctic oceans.

The trip recounted here was made May 15-17, and August 6-11, by Willard Conradi and Richard Olson of Duluth and myself on the first part and Willard Conradi and I on the August portion. We covered 110½ miles of which 10½ were on the 31 portages.

George D. Hedrick

December 15, 1961

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

The historical quotations have been taken from the published writings of the following:

Sir Alexander Mackenzie: partner of the North West Co.; organizer of the X.Y.Co.; discoverer of Mackenzie River; first man to cross to Pacific by canoe. "Voyages from Montreal". Vol.I. (1785)

Alexander Henry (The Elder): fur trader. "Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories". (1760-76)

Alexander Henry (The Younger): partner in the North West Co. "New Light On The Early History of the Great Northwest"- The Mss. Journals of Alexander Henry (The Younger) and of David Thompson.(1799-1814) Ed. by Elliot Cones.

Daniel Harmon: clerk and partner of North West Co. "Journal of Voyages". (1800)

Dr. J.J. Bigsby: member of the American boundary commission. "The Shoe and Canoe".(1823)

Pierre Gaultier de La Verendrye: one of the earliest and most persistent of the French traders and explorers. "Champlain Society Edition". (1731) Ed. by L. Burpee.

Maj. Joseph A. Delafield: boundary commission agent for the U. S. Government. "The Unfortified Boundary".

John Tanner: captured as a small boy, he lived with the Indians for 30 years. "My Thirty Years of Captivity by the Indians".

Sigurd F. Olson: author and long time student of and traveler in the canoe country. "The Lonely Land". (1961) Quoted by permission of A. Knopf, New York, New York publisher.

John Macdonnell: clerk of the North West Co. "Five Fur Traders".

Robert Ballantyne: clerk of Hudson's Bay Co. "Hudson's Bay," (1859)

Monday, May 15, 1961 - Moose Lake to Saganaga - 28 miles

We stood there, three wet voyageurs in the cold drizzle, looking across the end of Sucker Lake to where it made an elbow with Birch. There before us was the invisible border with Canada, the famous unfortified one and there too, was the old fur trade "road" reaching westward for Lac La Pluie\*, the Winipic\*, the Red River, Athabaska, Chipewyan, Isle a la Crosse and beyond.

There were none but us - Will Conradi and Dick Olson of Duluth, Scout Executive and Scoutmaster, and myself - nor any sound except for the drip of rain and the soft voice of the damp fire. I closed my eyes and pictured an imaginary brigade of north canoes slipping through the channel, the rhythmic swish of paddles hurrying them to <sup>Yos</sup> Gods Portage des Bois Blanc (1) half hidden in the fog ahead.

Here we had picked up the old fur trade route and were to follow it to Lake Superior through the historic border waters where paddle blades of Indian, French, Canadians, English, Scotch and Americans have flashed for hundreds of years. This was our dream trip of months of anticipation but already the dream was punctured! We were in trouble and there was work to be done.

We had left the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base on Moose Lake east of Ely at 6:00 a.m., with one canoe, an outfit and a small motor. At 7:15 a.m., just as we were lining up on the outlet of Birch Lake, the motor shook its gas tank loose!

\* Rainy Lake and the Winnipeg River

(1) Prairie Portage



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The one horsepower Neptune belonged to Will so he went to work on shore to make emergency repairs. With knife, pliers, adhesive tape and wood plugs he patched it and with the tank securely (?) roped in place we took off after an hour and a half with hopes high but fingers crossed. It ran just twenty-five minutes and wouldn't start again so we broke out the paddles and put our shoulders into it to Carp Portage, our first carrying place.

"We waited at the Carp for the canoes behind. Mixed nine gallons of Indian Rum it being the custom of the Bourgeois to wet the whistle of every Indian met on the way." - John Macdonnell, August 15, 1793 waiting on Carp Portage at Birch Lake.

We mixed no rum and wet no whistles but hurried across the flat portage. Crossing the little end of Carp Lake, we went up the Knife River chain with paddles, the ailing motor and its gas cans now just useless pieces of baggage to be toted. Along the chain we met several parties of fishermen going out after the opening weekend. None seemed to have had much luck. After the usual greetings which always included "where are you heading?", they universally expressed amazement that we were going to Lake Superior!

"Knife Stone Lake leads (going west) to the Cedar Rapids which are six in number, and we found them very bad and difficult to pass. Obstructed by fallen trees that formed bridges over the passes, with a heavy growth of cedars on the banks that gave a dismal darkness to them....it was sufficiently rude, without the fatigues that follow'd in descending them...." - Maj. Joseph Delafield, July 1823 describing the Knife River from Knife Lake to Carp Lake.

Our first lunch was eaten at the west end of Knife Lake. Here again Will and Dick tried to patch up the motor but the tank had developed a long new crack that was impossible to plug. We faced the hard reality that the Neptune had completely expired. We had counted on using it through the long lakes and leaving it at Gunflint Lodge to be delivered at Duluth. Now our schedule was in jeopardy.

"Knife Lake" Dorothy Moulter was a rescuing angel in blue jeans and tennis shoes. After paddling the mile to her islands, we made a deal with her and her father "Cap" for a tow up Knife and Cypress lakes. She took us there in her square stern canoe and five horsepower Johnson and even carried one of our packs across Monument portage. Dusk was falling as she set out for the long return trip. She is a good woodsman and though cold and with wet feet, she returned safely.

Swamp portage was speedily crossed and we took the first campsite we found in the far west bay of Saganaga. In the failing light, camp was made and a bright fire soon flickered. Big steaks broiled on old chicken wire, mashed potatoes and coffee in time soothed the inner man.

It had been a long and eventful day, generally chilly and sometimes wet. Gloves and parkas had been in order. Thanks to Dorothy though, we had kept our schedule. As we puttered around the evening camp, the overcast moved off and the stars came out. We turned in with concern for a cold night and a canoe man's perennial worry for the morrow - a big lake and what a big wind might do - for then we proposed to go the length of Saganaga on paddle power.

Old woman of the winds, lay still tomorrow!

Tuesday, May 16 - Saganaga to Granite Lake - 21½ miles

The red gods smiled on us today! In a gentle north wind and a bright sun we cruised the length of Saganaga in comfort and speed with three paddles working. We were at the far side of Saganaga Falls for lunch. Fear of a big wind which might have held us up was put behind us.

The day started numb. There was ice on the bucket and the temperature was 28 when I got up at 4:15 a.m. The others quickly followed when they heard the breakfast pots rattling and I shook them in their bags with the old voyageur reveille call: "Alerte! Leve, leve, nos gens!", the French equivalent of "Up and at'em men!".

"At the first peep of day our ears were saluted with.... "Level! level! level! issuing from the leathern throat of the guide. Now this same 'Level!' is in my ears a peculiarly harsh and disagreeable word, being associated with frosty mornings, uncomfortable beds, and getting up in the dark before half enough of sleep is obtained. The way in which it is uttered, too, is particularly exasperating.....as if from the bowels of the earth, a low and scarcely audible 'Level! level! level!' would break the universal stillness, growing rapidly louder, 'Level! level! level!' and louder 'Level! level! level!' till at last a final stentorian 'Level! level! level!' brought the hateful sound to a close and was succeeded by a confused collection of grunts, groans, grumbles and sneezes from the unfortunate sleepers thus rudely aroused...." - Robert Ballantyne 1859.

It had been a cold night as we had feared. All of us had slept cold and Will had gotten up about 1:00 p.m., put his clothes on and stirred up the fire for a mug of coffee. When he went back to bed, he left his clothes on.

The chill didn't bother the beaver who cruised in front of our camp to inspect us as I built the morning fire. He was a welcome sign, a true denizen of the wild waters. It was his ancestors, animals just like him, who started all this fur trade business. Perhaps now, he was a good omen for us.

On the water at 6:00 a.m., we made excellent time and after getting into the larger part of the lake began to see a few fishing parties coming out of Red Rock Bay for the day. There are habitations on Saganaga in several places, resorts, custom's house, ranger stations, trading post, etc. These were expected as not all of "Big Sag" is in the roadless area and the Gunflint trail, a good highway, forks to it on the south.

The three of us agreed that Saganaga Lake is very large, very beautiful and very full of channels and islands.

"Thence pass into Lake Saganaga which means Lake of Bays...In my passage thro' it I could form no idea of its size or direction of the lake, it was so cluttered with Islands, both large and small. The maps sent me by Mr. Ferguson of his last year's work terminate here, and after advancing about two hours in groups of islands, my old guide acknowledges he is lost....." - Maj. Joseph Delafield, July 20, 1823.

"Lake Saganaga was the hithermost post in the north-west, established by the French; and there was formerly a large village of the Chipeways here, now destroyed by the Nadowessies. I found only three lodges, filled with poor, dirty and almost naked inhabitants, of whom I bought fish and rice.....When populous, this village used to be troublesome to the traders, obstructing their voyages, and extorting liquor and other articles." - Alexander Henry, the elder.

Our first stop was at the entrance to the big lake, a narrow strait known as a "detroit" in the French days. The second was on an un-named rocky island and the third on Voyageur island, a favorite camping place of the fur trade voyageurs of old. Originally I had hoped to have camped here but we never got that far.

From there we wound thru many islands to L'Anse du Sable - Handle of Sand - the site of an Indian village during fur trade days. It is part of the mainland near where the Granite river flows into the lake over Saganaga Falls. All we could find were a few pieces of a wood stove and some stove pipe in the underbrush. These, we decided, were not relics of the fur trade days!

"....we entered Lake Saganaga and came to L'Anse du Sable. Here we found some Indians making canoes for sale; but as none of them were to my liking, we proceeded to the detroit in the lake." - Alexander Henry, The Younger, July 25, 1800.

Now we left Saganaga and took to the Granite river which spills into the lake here. The river being high it was easier to take the portage on the Canadian side than the American one which is shorter. On the far side we ate lunch sitting in the warm sun.

The Granite and Pine rivers are the same stream winding their ways from Gunflint to Saganaga. The name changes half way through. In many places they narrow into rocky chasms and roar down waterfalls or hustle with white plumes down innumerable rapids. Between these the water quiets and spreads into many lakes. This was the fur trade route and the "water communication" down which the border was defined and determined. It is one of the most beautiful stretches of water along the border lakes and up it we proposed to go.

Granite river, Horsetail rapids where a set of trade kettles were recovered by divers in 1960, Maraboeuf lake, Devil's Elbow lake, Gneiss lake, the river again, Granite Bay lake and again the river where we camped alongside a right angled, rocky trough named Siskile rapids. In between the water portions of this route were seven portages. On the Gneiss lake portage were moose tracks and on the rocky hillside just before we camped we saw a young bull. Big as a horse but dark in the late afternoon sun. He was too far in the brush for pictures.

Supper was a banquet in the dusk - baked ham, scalloped potatoes, apple-sauce, pudding and blueberry muffins. Afterwards Dick and Will trolled briefly and came back with three walleyes for breakfast.

It was a good day. The wind and weather were favorable and we made good time through beautiful waters. We turned in anxious for the morrow.

Wednesday, May 17 - Granite River to Gunflint 6½ miles

The bright frosty morning contained an evil sign - Dick was sick. As Will and I devoured the walleyes flavored with bacon grease, he couldn't touch a thing and complained of a bad headache. But good voyageur that he is, he toted his share and hour later when we took the outfit over the portage to Pine lake. None-the-less it was an ill omen of trouble ahead.

Up the route we went - Granite river, Pine lake, Pine portage, Pine river to a fantastic jumble of rocks, the Wooden Horse portage, about 300 yards long.

"The portage of the Wooden Horse falls where I camped last night is a rude and romantic spot. Pitched my marquee on the only flat rock there was of sufficient size for it, in the middle of the portage by the side of the falls. The cascades are tumbling through chasms of granite, and being in several shoots, in all 30 feet, the noise is very great. But these sounds are so familiar that I lose no rest...." - Maj. Joseph Delafield, July 20, 1823.

Up the Pine river to the Little Rock falls and portage, a fine tumble of water from Magnetic and Gunflint. But here disaster dealt us a stout blow.

Having carried the canoe over, I was returning for the last pack when my foot skidded on a root. Turning sideways as I fell I landed on a jack-pine stub, a foot high beside the portage path. With the wind knocked out of me, I barely was able to yell a faint: "Will"! Five minutes later a diagnosis indicated a broken rib and I was incapacitated.

We limped over a short portage and across Magnetic and Gunflint lakes. I rode as passenger. Dick, when he was able paddled bow. The rest of the time he laid his head over the gunwale and tried unsuccessfully to heave! Most of the paddling was done by Will.

Fortunately for us, we didn't have to be left behind like a sick voyageur who came along this same portage years ago!



".....one of our voyageurs was seized with inflammation of the bowels, which bleeding, &c. subdued only for a time, being reproduced by the roughness of the water. The man's agony and exhaustion were extreme. We were, therefore glad to see, on entering Lake Keesaganaga (Saganaga at Granite River), a large wigwan, on a marshy point, belonging to a well-known old Indian named Frisee.....Frisee willingly received the sick man, but said that both hunting and fishing had failed them; that his young men had been out four days and had only killed two rabbits. The voyageur, he said, must be content with family fare. And on landing I was not a little disturbed by seeing two men and a woman, at the entrance of the wigwan, feeding with their fingers, out of a tub, on the unwashed entrails of a rabbit, and wiping their hands, when they had done, on their heads or the back of a dog.

There was no help for it - stay our man must; so Mr. Astronomer Thompson paid Frisee one half the proposed reward in tobacco and coarse blue cloth, promising the remainder on our return to receive our man again....To our friend we gave tobacco and biscuit. He was content to stay, and nodded languidly to his comrades as they stepped into the canoe." - Dr. J.J. Bigsby-1823.

At Gunflint Lodge we were again rescued, for the second time in two days, by a woman. This time it was Mrs. Justine Kerfoot, operator of that resort. She fed Dick some pills and put him to sleep on a couch in the lobby - two treatments which brought Dick great relief. She arranged with the mail man to haul us into Grand Marais for treatment and provided the car to take us to meet him at the main road. In the late afternoon she hauled Dick and Will and our outfit into town.

All these things she did for just our thanks. A real "Lady of the Lakes and Forest" with the old fashioned spirit of a helping hand!

And so we come to an ignominious finish on Gunflint Lake.

Sunday, August 6 - Gunflint to North Lake - 12 miles

Today there is an omen also - this time a good one: a bright afternoon sun and a moderate west wind to hasten us eastward down Gunflint Lake! Will and I are back, unfortunately without Dick, to finish the trip to Lake Superior. We started from the public landing, stopped momentarily to say hello to Mrs. Kerfoot and went our way heading east down the long narrow lake.

The channel to little Gunflint lake is screened at the eastern end of the big lake. So hidden is it that you wonder if it is really there. Then you are on it - a right angle turn and a passage barely ten feet wide and a left turn into a weedy channel. A couple of feet of water and no current obviate the need of a portage.

"After passing a narrow strait, with low flats on each side, the lake contracts to a pass filled with rushes, the Flint lake (Gunflint) or Lac des pierre a fusil of the Canadians, suddenly displays a handsome shoot or rather strait....On the right of the entrance of the lake is a short and clean sand beach...." - Maj. Joseph Delafield, July 19, 1823.

The character of the land we are approaching seems different than that we have known in the canoe waters to the west. High hills and saw-tooth ranges can be seen ahead and the lakes seem to have fewer islands.

A "do-it-yourself" marine railway helped us over the portage into Little North Lake. I went 'round and 'round on a windlass to pull the car with our canoe out of the water and then Will pushed it over the level to the other side. Then I had to watch out for the spinning iron handle of the capstan as the lowering car spun it in reverse. A nearby barked tree was evidence of the clobbering one could get!

Down Little North lake to North lake we hurried looking for a campsite in the late afternoon. We passed up the clearing at the old and beat Border Patrol cabin for a little, closed in site with tables at a nearby point. Experienced hands quickly made the camp and kindled a bright fire under the blackened pots.

Near to our beached canoe was a "live" beaver house and Mr., or maybe it was Mrs. Beaver, made several trips in front of our camp to look us over. Apparently finding us harmless they went ahead doing the things beavers normally do.

Shortly before dark as we launched the canoe for a little trolling. We heard and saw a tree crash up the hillside from the beaver house. Up through the brush we hurried and sure enough there was a huge beaver with a six inch poplar he has just felled. We tried to corner him but he growled and hissed and headed for the water. I tried to stop him with my paddle but he paid it little heed and we decided to stay far enough away not to get bitten. Into the lake he plunged and with a mighty slap of his wide tail disappeared. The next morning all but the trunk of the tree was cut and hauled off.

Monday, August 7 - North Lake to Mountain Lake - 16 miles

We are Northmen! Like the voyageurs of old we performed the ancient rites at the divide.

".....slept at the height of Land, where I was instituted a North Man by Bateme performed by sprinkling water in my face with a small cedar Bow dipped in a ditch of water and accepting certain conditions such as not to let any new hand pass by that road without experiencing the same ceremony which stipulates particularly never to kiss a voyageur's wife against her own free will and the whole thing being accompanied by a dozen gun shots fired one after another in an Indian manner. The intention of this Bateme being only to claim a glass. I complied with the custom and gave the men.....a two gallon keg as my worthy bourgeois....directed me." - John Macdonell

"At this place the men generally finish their small kegs of liquor and fight many a battle". - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 24, 1800.

We didn't sleep at the Height of Land but the first thing we did this morning in making that portage was to tramp right through the camp of a couple of young men who did. Because there is no "water communication" between the lakes here the boundary commission have opened a straight, 50' wide swath of trees between North and South lakes. Appropriately there are several border monuments and a sign at the divide marking the Hudson Bay waterway on the west and the Lake Superior waterway on the east.

Having carried our outfit over, we did the ceremony on the far side of the portage. Small cedars boughs were scattered around indicating that others had done the same. With one of these I sprinkled Will as he knelt over the boundary marker and then he showered me. Then with a little "Indian rum" and Methodist wine, brought along for the purpose, we toasted each other and all voyageurs, ancient and new, who pass this way! Now we can in truth shout the raucous boast of the North Men, elite of the voyageurs: "Je suis un homme!"

Through South and Rat lakes and their two portages, we proceeded to Rose Lake.

Rose Lake begins with a long, shallow and narrow channel with a high head-land and cliffs on the south side. In this channel the old-timers thought there was an unexplained "suction" which made canoeing hard, yea even dangerous!

"In this part of the lake the bottom is mud and slime, with about three or four feet of water over it; and here I frequently struck a canoe pole of twelve feet long, without meeting any obstruction than if the whole were water; it has however, a peculiar suction or attractive power, so that it is difficult to paddle a canoe over it. There is a small space along the South shore, where the water is deep, and this effect is not felt. In proportion to the distance from this part, the suction becomes more powerful! I have, indeed, been told that loaded canoes have been in danger of being swallowed up, and have only owed their preservation to other canoes, which were lighter. I have, myself, found it very difficult to get away from this attractive power, with six men, and great exertion, though we did not appear to be in any danger of sinking". - Alexander Mackenzie.

Ah yes, those were the good old days! Will and I could find no suction now in Rose's shallows, and we were a little bit disappointed.

We paddle well together. The Alumacraft fifteen footer being his canoe, he has the privilege of being the stern man. My job in the bow is generally just to paddle so I set a moderate but regular pace, one that both of us can maintain indefinitely. I paddle best on the left and he on the right so we are a comfortable combination though now and again we change sides.

On the south side of Rose, where the channel opens into the part of the lake, is an interesting portage that we stopped to see but not to make as it is off our course. It is Stairway portage leading to Lake Duncan. The trail starts climbing at the water's edge and goes steadily up a forested hill. Halfway up is the "stairway" - a hundred, halved log steps going almost straight up - leading to the top. It probably was made by the CCC's and kept in order by the Forest Service. Five boats, belonging no doubt to resorts somewhere to the south, and two canoes were at the landing but we saw no one.

We have been making the portages, not shall I say with jaunty ease but without too much trouble. This afternoon we were put to a stern test - the Rose to Rove portages, two miles in length.

We have a portaging system and now it proved its worth. One of us took the canoe, with life jackets tied on the bow seat for better balance, while the other shouldered two packs. Together we hiked 400 steps and the packs put down while the bow of the canoe was wedged high in a tree or over a limb so it could be gotten under again without lifting.

The one who had the packs now took the canoe forward 400 steps while the other back-tracked to pick up the third pack the paddles and the rods at the starting point. He carried these forward to the first stopping point and left them. There he exchanged for the two packs which he took forward while the other of us was returning for the packs, rods and paddles. We liked this system which gave each of us a chance at all the carrying and the back-tracking empty handed gave us a frequent rest.

The first two-thirds of this long portage followed up an old logging railroad grade. Many of the ties were still in and the walking was good. The last third wandered off through the woods on a usual portage trail. The two miles took us two hours and forty minutes and we were very glad to get on the water again. We were pleased, though, that two fifty year old desk men could do so well.

Portaging is always hard work. It is a necessary labor in order to get between the lakes which normally have no navigable waterway. The trail is usually rough walking and winds up and down, in and out through the trees and brush and sometimes into muddy or wet places. The canoe is awkward and heavy and bears down sharply on top your shoulders. The pack straps cut. The paddles are awkward to carry and the fishing lines catch in the brush. Many times you are beset by flies and mosquitoes. It is always a relief to get done with portaging for it's like hitting yourself on the head with a hammer:- it feels so good when you stop!

It was 5:30 p.m., when we finished the portage and embarked on Rove Lake anxious by searching for a campsite. Unfortunately, there was none on the lake nor on Watap connected with it. So, tired as we were, we hoisted everything to our backs once more and portaged into Mountain Lake. There was a fine but can-littered site on the island immediately off the Mountain Lake landing and there we pulled ashore on the rock ledge about 7:30 p.m. Camp made, a good supper, a flaming rosy sunset and into bed, tired but happy.



Tuesday, August 8 - Mountain Lake to South Fowl Lake - 13 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles

We slept late and took our time this morning so were not on the water until 8:30 a.m.

Mountain Lake is long and narrow, reaching some seven miles east to west. Great wooded headlands come up to it from the side, round off on the top edge and drop quickly to the waters edge. At one time we could count seven of these and the far ones were dim with the haze.

"This picturesque lake in one place shows six distinct distances in lofty basaltic headlands. In the vicinity, but away from the lake, we see large, naked, solitary, barrow-like hills, - high and often precipitous. Our astronomer says that he has not discovered the feeders to this lake, and our Indian guide, 'the little Englishman', says there are none. As we float over its transparent waters, we notice below us very large blocks of basalt reposing on fine sand." - Dr. J. J. Bigsby

There was no one but us on Mountain Lake although there were resorter boats at the east end. On the northside at one place we spotted a shack and on the south shore, lazily rocking in the easy riffle, a drifting boat. There are few people through here and few campsites. The few portages coming in from the south do have boats at them - a certain sign that fishermen are brought in from the resorts. The boats are often badly beat up from lack of proper care.

The three portages - Lesser Cherry, Vaseaux and Greater Cherry - leading from Mountain to Moose through the Lily lakes were bad. There were down trees to work around or over and in places the trail was flooded. The Forest Service piers were underwater as were a couple of boundary posts we spotted. This we couldn't understand until we came up to a large beaver dam on Lower Lily lake. This was the cause of the flooding in this chain.

Signs of logging 20-30 years ago have been evident in stumps. Now on Moose Lake we picked up a long log boom high and dry on the south shore and there was a chute in the rapids at the <sup>east</sup> west end. Most of the boom chains were gone, no doubt collected as souvenirs. The portage from Moose was not notable for anything but the landing on North Fowl Lake was. It was a wide, soggy flat of swamp grass through which we reached some boggy water. Will took off his socks and boots and by his wading and dragging the canoe I kept my feet dry.

".....We had passed two carrying places, and arrived at the third, called the Moose carrying place, when he (Ke-wa-tin his Indian brother by adoption) said to us: "I must die here; I cannot go farther". So Ne-no-kwa determined to stop here, and the remainder of the party went on. ....there remained only the old woman, and one of the younger wives of Tau-ge-we-ninne, Wa-me-gon-a-biew, the elder brother, Ke-wa-tin, the second, and myself the youngest." - John Tanner, 1793 - age 13 years; an Indian captive and adopted son.

The Fowl Lakes, north and south, down which we now proceeded has many shallow bays and places and the north shores are quite flat. A narrow spit of sand which we could see in the distance almost completely separates the two lakes. A silvery, odd shaped object and some brown humps on the sand bar later metamorphosed into a small flying boat and a dozen resorter boats beached there. We spotted two boats trolling and three cabins - we are back on the beaten track!

"Looking to the north-west, Fowl Lake lay below, nearly bisected by a rushy narrows....Lord Selkirk attempted to form an agricultural establishment on the lowlands about this lake; but it failed and is deserted....It is so called from an Indian tradition that the hens and chickens of the white men have been heard to clack and scream here."  
- Dr. J.J. Bigsby

A hundred yards back from the sand spit was a nice campsite in a clump of trees. Someone, possibly the resort owners to the south, had nicely cleaned it and cut the brush so that it was well open to breezes from two directions. Here we made our camp for this day so that we could take advantage of the sand beaches at our door.

We gave a piece of hot gingerbread to the pilot of the flying boat and his two "tourists" that he guided - a young couple. They seemed to appreciate the gift as they hurried to fly out before the dark caught them. The young woman couldn't imagine how we had cooked it - she had never seen or heard of a reflector oven - but flew off munching it and waving.

We are eating well. We have carried a few extra "goodies" and in addition have been testing some of Armour's new "freeze dry" foods. Their scrambled eggs, beef steaks, pork chops, chicken rice dinner and chicken stew are excellent and of natural flavor. They will provide the camper with an improved bill-of-fare in the dehydrated foods. No voyageur or bourgeois either, ever dined as well!

"But the canoe man.....have no other allowance here and in the voyage, than Indian corn and melted fat." - Alexander Mackenzie

After supper we enjoyed the luxury of a soap bath and swim at the sand beach. Refreshed, it was a fitting climax of another day.

Wednesday - August 9 - South Fowl Lake - 5 miles for trolling

This was our "lay-over" day. Being well on schedule we enjoyed a day of staying put and not traveling. After sleeping a little later than usual and then a leisurely breakfast, we trolled down to the end of the lake to reconnoiter the head of the Pigeon river, down which we will go tomorrow.

We got but little idea of the river as we approached the south end of South Fowl Lake. A concrete and stone dam, built by the logging company in 1934, obstructs most of the view. However as we pulled to the landing at the dam's base, we got a quick and incomplete preview of what was beyond. Through the square mouth of the dam where long gone gates used to raise and lower a head of water, we glimpsed a rocky chasm of jumping white water. From atop the dam's gate platform where we climbed, we got a long, more studied look at the river.

The Pigeon River\* - begins with a shoot of water pouring through <sup>the</sup> open ~~now~~ <sup>now</sup> of the dam to begin a quarter mile of rapids. It was too shallow at this time to run and even if there were sufficient water, the tangled logs and rocks would prevent it. The portage around this froth of fast water is several hundred yards to the east and is two miles in length. There is no portage or trail at the rapids but by working carefully through a precipitous slope of boulders tomorrow, we hope to get the canoe down to where we can wade the rapids. There is supposed to be some five miles of rapids that are troublesome to get through. It has been years since I have done much "white water" work and I am a little concerned!

We investigated the remaining iron parts of an old logging sled and a boom log on shore and a little cabin on the island near the mouth. To the south of the island is a high hill with a precipice on the lake side. It is crowned with a cross of poles but I'm sure it has not the significance of those erected by voyageurs in fur trade times to commemorate deaths. The long portage, which we will not take, starts at the base of this hill and goes around it through a saddle halfway up.

\* Riviere aux Tourtres - River of Turtles referring to the wild pigeons. Earlier it was known as River aux Groseillers from Radisson's famed companion and-in-law.

"We enter it (Fowl Lake) by a long portage, woody like the rest of the environs, and overlooked at it's west (east?) end by a basaltic precipice not less than 600 feet high." - Dr. J. J. Bigsby.

"At the further end (of Fowl Portage) is a very high hill to descend, over which hangs a rock upwards of 700 feet high." - Alexander Mackenzie

".....we have come up several difficult rapids, where many persons have been drowned....For every such unfortunate person, whether his corpse is found or not, a cross is erected by his companions.....at this place, I see no less than fourteen. This is a melancholy sight." - Daniel Harmon, 1800.

Back on our sand spit camp we enjoyed an afternoon nap as best we could amid the biting flies and played a joke on all future campers there. The joke was that we wrestled a 100 pound boom chain into a pine tree and looped over a bar limb in such a way future voyageurs can only wonder how it got there! It will be a fine conversation piece for word-hesitant travelers in the future.

The two boys we met on Height of Land portage~~d~~ pulled into camp at a game warden's cabin late in the afternoon and came to visit us. They are from St. Paul and one is the son of a Conservation Department employee there. One says he has hunted here in the past.

The evening ended with five small walleyes and a northern pike caught in the dusk. These are the first fish we have caught and we cleaned them on the bottom of an overturned and wrecked boat. We'll hang them in the tree for the night and have them for the morning breakfast.

Thursday - August 10 - South Fowl to Partridge Falls. Pigeon River - 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles

Down the river we went today and we got our feet and tails wet!

Anxious to try the unknown river, we were off to an early start today. A husky north wind under a heavy gray overcast sent ~~waves~~ <sup>waves</sup> of white caps rolling down the lake. Lucky we were that they blew toward the dam, not from it. With this tail wind we plunged and bobbed down the lake amid the hiss or ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> rollers that swept under us.

The carry around the dam, without benefit of portage trail was dangerous. Teetering among the big boulders with the loads, a loss of balance could have meant a broken leg or skull fracture. We took it easy - the packs we carried down one at a time and the canoe was carried upright with one of us at each end. We felt our way along and set it down often.

A hundred yards down the first rapid, we tied the canoe in the water and set in our outfit. Previously we had built a rack of poles on the canoe bottom to keep things above the water we expected to get in the canoe. On these went our packs which were tied to the thwarts. In case of a spill, we wanted everything held together. Everything had previously been tied into waterproof bags and into these now went our pants. Today we'd canoe in our underwear to have dry clothes at the end of the day!

Into the water we plunged, me at the bow and Will holding on to the stern. Fortunately for us it was shallow, not too fast and reasonably warm. The most difficult thing of working the canoe down the river was the footing. Sometimes it was real shallow, sometimes deep and the rocks were big and slick and always we hung onto the canoe, guiding it, easing it along trying not to scrape its bottom. Sometimes for a few feet I could lay over the bow and float with it.

The first rapids were one mile and one-half long with a short pool near the beginning. In a few places we could ride for a little ways - sometimes on the seat, sometimes "poop decking" on the bow deck with feet and paddle feeling for and fending off of rocks, rarely inside on the seat. Mostly we walked with wet boots and underwear.



After this first long rapids, we hit about five miles of sluggish shallow river where we paddled. This was "flat land" and there were few nice places to get out on the bank. By lunch time we were back in the rapids again and could only land on a slight pile of rocks at the side of the gurgling stream. Fifteen minutes after lunch we came to a fine lunch spot. It was a wooden platform, high and dry in the middle of the river - the stranded gate from the dam on Fowl Lake. But then we didn't need a stopping spot.

Unbeknowns to us we had passed the rapids. Now the river continued, winding its sluggish, dirty way through brushy low lands and muddy banks. All afternoon our eyes were peeled for the "Meadows" or "Prairie" - the voyageurs first camping spot on the river after leaving Ft. Charlotte.

".....we embarked and proceeded to the Prairie where our people were camped. All were merry over their favorite regale, which is always given on their departure, and generally enjoyed at this spot, where we have a delightful meadow to pitch our tents, and plenty of elbow room for the men's antics." - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 20, 1800.

"We slept or tried to do so in these meadows. The mosquitoes were in billions. As soon as the tread of man gave notice of his approach, I saw them rising to the feast in clouds out of the coarse grass around. We burnt the grass after watering it, and lived in smoke". - Dr. J.J. Bigsby

We found two openings which could have been the Meadows camping spot. One was a block long clearing on the south side where there were the crumbling remains of two cabins. Other signs indicated that this had been the location of some sort of logging operation. Many red raspberries grew here. They had received sufficient moisture to make them luscious and abundant. We picked ourselves a feast.

The other possible meadows was a clearing on the northside down river from the "raspberry cabins". We could not tell which was the place but we are certain one was.

We passed up spending the night in the Indian Service cabin, complete with beds, stove, etc., for a beautiful little campsite on the brow of Partridge Falls. No one had been here this year and it was clean and nice. A torrent of fast water plunged along side and tipped itself over the falls. There was a steady roar and by carefully peeking over the edge, a 50 foot drop could be seen. Some chains and logs below gave a hint of what went over here during the logging days.

Friday - August 11 - Partridge Falls to Highway 61 - 4 miles by portage

"Bang, bang..... bang.....bang!"

Will and I looked at each other as we cooked over the breakfast fire at 6:45 a.m. The shots came from very near but upstream in the direction of where the logging road met the river. We agreed that some Indian had probably come up from Grand Portage and was hunting over that way. Later, when we had broken camp in the damp fog from the falls and canoed upstream, we found deer entrails floating in the water. Not only was someone hunting but they had made a kill. At the landing and logging road we found car tracks and deer's blood.

We had arranged, before leaving Duluth, to be picked up here at 12:00 o'clock noon. We didn't feel up to making the four mile portage to the highway. So here we whiled away the time, waiting. Loggers had been operating on this Indian land and trails and roads ran in many directions. On one I found tracks of moose, deer and bear as well as smaller animals. Bordering the road to the south were many red raspberry bushes and Will and I gorged.

As time went by we fidgeted and became anxious. Twelve o'clock arrived and no ride appeared. At 12:30 we cached the canoe and outfit save for one pack and set out for the highway. Two hours and four miles later we arrived at Highway 61 where the cars were whizzing by and still no ride appeared. We set our pack with the cruising flags and Will's red jacket on it at the side of the pavement as a signal to Curt Thornton, who was coming from Duluth to pick us up. Then the two seedy and dusty characters sat down in the brush of the roadside to wait.

You should have seen the tourists spot that pack and try to figure out what and why it was. They nearly ran off the road as they passed it, still wondering.

Not so the driver of the logging truck that turned in to the logging road from the black top but the driver following him in the yellow Model A pickup with the canoe rack stopped at it as I yelled at him:

"Where are you going".

"Up to the river", he answered.

"We've got a canoe up there we want brought down," I said as Will and I walked to the car.

"That's what I'm going after".

He proved to be our ride - an Indian by the name of LaDue from Mineral Center and was on his way to the river to look for us. And what's more, he turned out to have been the deerslayer of that morning. He had come up the night before and had stayed at the Indian Service cabin. As he was landing his canoe preparatory to going home, he spotted a spike buck and killed it. His canoe was cached in the same brush as ours! He had looked for us but deciding we hadn't come down river yet, had gone back home.

LaDue and his yellow Ford portaged us to the highway and to the place where it crosses the old portage trail. There Curt waited and we transferred the load and made ready to return to Duluth.

The trip was not quite complete, however, until we stopped at Grand Portage National Park. Here the Great Hall of the North West Company has been restored and there are maps and relics of interest. In the fur trade days this was a place of many people, of great excitement and of the annual rendezvous of the partners of the North West Company. Now it is a quiet little Indian village and a tourist stop - its only claim to fame shrouded in the distant mists of 200 years ago.

"The Grand Portage is situated in the bottom of a shallow Bay.....on a low spot which gently rises from the Lake. The pickets are not above fifteen to twenty paces from the water's edge. The Gates are shut always after sunset and the Bourgeois and clerks lodge in houses within the palisades where there are two Sentries keeping a look out all night....

The North men while here live in tents of different sizes pitched at random, the people of each post having a camp by themselves.....They are separated from the Montrealeans by a brook.

All the buildings within the Fort are sixteen in number made with cedar and white spruce fir split with whipsaws and squared, the Roofs covered with shingles.....Six of these buildings are Store Houses for the company's Merchandise and Furs &c. The rest are dwelling houses shops counting house and Mess House. - Macdonells, descriptions of Grand Portage in July 1793.

And now our trip was done. Sure, we had yet the ride to Duluth in the settling evening but that was anti-climatical and had nothing to do with our canoe voyage on a section of the old fur trade route - Lake Superior to Basswood Lake. As I stood alongside the Great Hall and gazed across the tenting ground of the Northmen to where Hat Point stood out into Lake Superior, my last thoughts at the river two hours earlier <sup>Came</sup> ~~came~~ to mind.

With LeDue's truck loaded I had stood aside to contemplate the Pigeon for the last time. Tan colored, sluggish, small and unimposing, yet for countless years the highway to the west, the beginning of the unfound northwest passage, the concourse of fur fortunes and empire building in the making. Along the waters we had used had come a brawling band of adventurers - voyageurs, bourgeois, partners, winterers, clerks, North Men; pork eaters, comers and goers, Indians and whites.

As I stood there I hoped their ghosts had watched Will, Dick and I during that canoe voyage and that they had smiled in approval on the guys who came this way just for the fun of it.

And then I remembered something that Sig Olson had written in "The Lonely Land":

"I also knew there were some things that would never be dimmed by distance or time, compounded of values that would not be forgotten: the joy and challenge of the wilderness, the sense of being part of the country and of an era that was gone, the freedom we had known, silence, timelessness, beauty, companionship and loyalty, and the feeling of completion and fulness that was ours at the end."

We turned the car toward Duluth and put the wilderness behind us. "Huzza! Huzza! pour le pays sauvage!"

ROUTE AND SCHEDULE

MAY 15

Moose	
Newfound	
Sucker	
Birch	9 3/4
Carp P	265 y
(des Carpes)	
Carp	3/4
P	100 y
Pothole	1/16
P	100 y
Seed	5/8
P	200 y
Knife R	1/8
Knife P	1/4
Knife	9 3/4
(Lac des Couteau)	
Little Knife P	30 y
Cypress	5 3/8
Monument P	1/4
Swamp	5/8
Swamp P	25 y
Saganaga	28m

MAY 16

Saganaga	10 1/2	
Saganaga FP	38 y	
Granite R	3/4	
Horsetail P	99 y	
Marabouef	5 1/4	
P		
Devil's Elbow	1	
Gneiss	3/4	
Gneiss P	88 y	
Granite R	5/8	
Rapids		
Granite River	1/2	
Granite R P	143 y	
Granite Bay	5/8	
Swamp P	181 y	
Granite R	1 1/8	21 1/2m-49 1/2

MAY 17

Siskile Rap. P	200 y	
Pine	1 1/4	
Pine P	595 y	
Pine R	1 1/4	
Wood Horse P	300 y	
(Cheval des Bois)		
Pine R	5/8	
Little Rock P	50 y	
(Escalier)		
Pine R	1/8	
P	50 y	
Magnetic	1 1/4	
Gunflint	2	8m-57 1/2
(La des pierre a fusil)		

AUGUST 6

Gunflint	5 1/2	
North	3	8 1/2m-66m

AUGUST 7

Height of Land P	418 y	
(Hauteur de Terre)		
South	2 1/2	
South LP	374	
Rat	1/2	
P	22 y	
Rose	5	
Long P	2	
Rove	1 1/8	
Watap	2 1/2	
P Mountain	550 y	
Mountain	1	13m-79m

AUGUST 8

Mountain	6	
Lesser Cherry P	495 y	
(de Cerise)		
Lily	1/2	
Vaseaux P	250 y	
Pothole	1/2	
Greater Cherry P	803 y	
Moose	3 1/2	
Moose P	500 y	
North Fowl	2 1/2	14 1/2m-93 1/2
(Outarde)		

AUGUST 9

Fowl (5m fishing)		
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AUGUST 10

South Fowl	2	
P	200 y	
Pigeon R rapids	1 1/4	
Pigeon R	4 1/2	
(River Au Tort)		
Partridge P	100 y	
(du Perdrix)		
Pigeon R	5	
Partridge Falls		13m-106 1/2m

AUGUST 11

P to Highway 61	4	4m-110 1/2m
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Moose Lake to Height of Land -  
159' rise  
Height of Land to Lake Superior -  
614' fall

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"She's very old, thees country....That's because she's nevair change. I have hear that long tam ago - two hundred years, maybe - the voyageurs come thees way. In the north canoes, m'sieu - thousan' of big canoes, thousan' of men.....All thees men have go. Of them there is nothing left, eh? Only a few story, a few song, maybe. But the country - she nevair change, m'sieu. Not even one leedle rock have change....For me it is lak the medicine, thees country. Bush medicine, eh, m'sieu?"

Antyme Gagnon speaking in Walter O'Meara's  
Bush Medicine.

PREFACE

This is another account of canoe voyaging along a segment of the old fur trade route - the present international boundary - from Basswood to Crane Lake.

I traveled alone to the amazement of many. Two voices registering disbelief carried across the water to me. The first was a fishing guide anchored in a channel on Crooked Lake. He said to his "dude":

"You really got to like the lakes and woods to put up with that."

The second remark was over the buzz of an outboard motor on a canoe in Sand Point Lake. The operator spotting me, shouted to his comfortable companion in the bow:

"Hey, look! There's a guy all alone doing it the hard way. That's what I like to see - a real romanticist!"

Regardless of what may be said by others, there was fun and satisfaction in flexing my muscles on the paddle in the same old waters and under a pack on the same old portages as those ancient travelers - the long gone and mostly forgotten fur brigades. It was good bush medicine!

George D. Hedrick  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
January 25, 1962

### HISTORICAL REFERENCES

The quotations in this volume are from the following sources:

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Maj. Joseph A. Delafield: boundary commission agent for the U. S Government. "The Unfortified Boundary".

Sigurd F. Olson: author and long time student of and traveler in the canoe country. "The Loney Land". (1961) Quoted by permission of A. Knopf, New York, New York publisher.

Sunday, July 23 - Fall Lake to Basswood (Pipestone Bay) - 14 miles:

I started alone this morning from Winton with a small outfit, headed by canoe for Crane Lake 90 miles to the west. This was another cruise on my voyages along the old fur trade "road".

There was a reason for being hauled back to Winton from the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base where I outfitted. I wanted to start a canoe trip at least once on Fall Lake where the first Scout trips run by Carl Chase began. These ran from Winton, with borrowed and rented equipment in the late twenties and early thirties.

There was a reason too, for making the trip alone: I couldn't find a canoe mate. Nick and Dave, my two sons, had jobs. Others too, had jobs or couldn't arrange their time or vacations. Not wanting to give up the trip, I went alone - and thereby found myself labeled somewhat of a freak!

Mike Miler and some of the boys from the Base, on their way to church in Ely, dropped me on the Winton beach. The two packs, life jacket, fishing rod and paddle were quickly loaded and I was on my way at 9:00 a.m. My cruising flags - a small American one and my own personal one, tied to a birch stick and stuck in a pack, hung limp in the total calm under the overcast sky. It was a good day to start.

Fall Lake up which I now traveled is not a wilderness lake but one on the edge of the wilderness. Consequently there were many private cabins and several resorts along the shores. A few motor boats moved this morning and Wilderness Outfitters big launch, enroute to the four mile portage and thence to Basswood at Hoist Bay, passed me at a distance.

My first portage came after  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles of Fall Lake. This was a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile carry to Newton Lake. I hadn't been able to sufficiently reduce my gear to make a one-trip portage feasible, so this one, and all subsequent ones required two trips. The two packs, rod and paddle were carried on the first trip over and the canoe on the second.

Newton Lake was short and so was the portage around Pipestone Falls that led out of it. Now I was again in the huge and sprawling Basswood Lake albeit still a day's travel away from the main east and west track through it. Up Pipestone Bay I now canoed headed for the location of several logging campsites of the old Swallow Hopkins Co., which had a large mill at Winton and operated through here in the early 1900s.

I traipsed around three of these logging sites and all were a disappointment. Nothing was found nor was much to be seen at either place. Just some evidence of digging or grading long ago. None were as profitable from the standpoint of souvenirs as the sites checked last year in Jackfish Bay and on Ensign and Jordan Lakes.

During the afternoon as I quietly paddled along, I got a pleasant surprise. On a small island I came on a real, live mermaid - well anyhow, a lady sunning herself. She said in answer to my started hello: "You made good time. We passed you on Fall Lake". I remembered when she and two men passed me enroute to some fishing and we had waved. Now the two men were fishing, doubtless on the otherside of the lakes, and she was awaiting their return.

A campsite was picked at 4:00 p.m., but because a gentle rain was falling I kept the packs under the canoe hoping it would quit. The site chosen was a large one in an open woods. A little exploring among the pines revealed that at one time there had been a resort or a lodge here but almost no signs of it were left. It was a pleasant spot, open and comfortable - if only the rain would stop!

After sitting in the dripping woods for an hour I decided the rain might never quit so I made a simple meal of a can of chili, a slice of salami and a cup of coffee. Then I pitched the patched little mountain tent and prepared for the night. The canoe was placed bottom up at the shore. The packs were hung from a wire I stretched between two trees and the kettles arranged on them as a bear alarm. The poncho was laid over the tent for additional rain proofing.



Inside the tent I crawled and then a horrible discovery. This discard from an Army salvage pile leaked. The roof was dripping and pools had collected on the floor. Allah be praised for the air mattress! It kept me elevated above the flood though I was showered from above.

I was bushed tonight. Fourteen miles is a lot of paddling alone even if the lake is calm as it was today. But I was pleased: not only had I maintained the theoretical schedule I had made out, I was five miles and a half day ahead. It was a margin against any future slow up.

Monday, July 24 - Pipestone Bay to Lower Basswood Falls - 9 miles:

It rained all night and this morning the leaky tent was as wet inside as it was out - the first of several such wettings it was to get. The sleeping bag too, had absorbed a lot of moisture. Outside the weather was threatening. A drizzle still fell, a gusty north wind blew and heavy clouds scudded overhead. Hoping to cover at least a few miles before it should turn worse, I quickly packed the wet gear and started up the lake without breakfast at 6:30 a.m. Fortunately, I was able to stay along a lee shore for all but a couple of miles so I progressed steadily.

At the mouth of Jackfish Bay where it joins the main lake, I found a Canoe Base crew camped on a small island. They were from Albuquerque. Having just finished breakfast they apologized for being unable to offer me some. I was sorry, too! I stepped ashore into their camp, however, and thereby discovered the signs of their tragedy: a badly beat-in canoe they had smashed the day before running Lower Basswood Falls. They were very shame-faced about it as well they should be. There are no rapids here-about suitable for running, especially by amateurs!

Here I joined the main route of the fur trade canoes traveling between Grand Portage on the east and the western posts. In these waters beat the big canots du nord (north canoes) down on their gunwales going east with packs of furs or west with loads of trade goods. Occasionally threading through the channels would be a "light" canoe carrying a partner or bourgeois in a hurry or the spring or fall "express" carrying messages and mail. These were often addressed to someone "wherever he may be found". A light canoe might make up to a 100 miles in a long day, unhamp-  
ered as it was from cargo.

"It gave one a strange and somehow disturbing sense of nearness to the past - to travel these selfsame waters and camp on the same portages, in the same forest, under the same stars. You could see where the feet of those long-dead men had worn away the rocks. Sometimes in the stillness of the forest night it was not difficult to hear their ghostly chatter and laughter.

It was not hard at all, during the daytime, to imagine the great brigades - forty or fifty canoes together - coming down the border lakes. Without half trying, you could see the rollers breaking against the high, painted prows, the red paddles flashing in the sun; and you would hear the gay voyageur songs, in perfect time with paddle strokes, come surging across the water." - Walter O'Meara in the Lost Child.

The fur trade was the first large scale commercial enterprise in Canada. It was built on the barter of European manufactured goods with the primitive, "have not" Indians for animal furs, principally beaver. The fur trade was started by the French, but the fortunes of war dumped it all into the eager laps of the English. The chief operator through here was the North West Company whose main headquarters was at Montreal. Their wilderness base was at Grand Portage on Lake Superior until in about 1804 when they moved north and built Fort Williams. The border lakes were the main artery of their canoe transportation.



"The names of the North West Company sounds like a rollcall of the clans of Culloden. These men were hardy, courageous, shrewd and proud. They spent a good part of their lives traveling incredible distances in birch bark canoes, shooting rapids, or navigating inland seas. They were wrecked and drowned. They suffered hunger and starvation. They were robbed and murdered by the Indians and sometimes by one another. They fell the victims of smallpox, syphilis, and rum. Yet they conquered half a continent, and they built up a commercial empire, the like of which North America has never seen." - W. S. Wallace.

While Basswood Lake was never a main center of trading, the old traders journals attest to the life there as they passed through.

"To the portage of the Bois Blanc (1) which is 180 paces. Then follows the lake of the same name, but I think improperly so called, as the natives named it the Lac Passeau Minac Sagaigan, or Lake of Dry Berries.(2)

Before the smallpox ravaged this country, and completed what the Nadowasis in their warfare, had gone far to accomplish, the destruction of its inhabitants, the population was very numerous; this was also a favorite part, where they made their canoes, etc., the lake abounding in fish, the country around it being plentifully supplied with various kinds of game, and the rocky ridges, that form the boundaries of the water, covered with a variety of berries.

When the French were in possession of this country, they had several trading establishments on the islands and banks of this lake..... This lake is irregular in its form, and its utmost extent from east to west is fifteen miles; a point of land, called Point au Pin (3) jutting into it, divides it in two parts; it then makes a second angle at the west end, to the lesser Portage de Bois Blanc (4) two hundred paces in length." - Alexander Mackenzie 1785.

"We passed a wintering post of the Hudson's Bay Co., consisting of two or three comfortable huts on a cape. Boisblanc (5) very crooked, and resembles the letter Z in shape." - Dr. J. J. Bigsby 1823.

- (1) White Wood Portage - now Prairie Portage between Basswood and Sucker Lakes.
- (2) Basswood Lake.
- (3) Translated Pine Point is probably the cape now known as Canadian Point.
- (4) Lesser Whitewood Portage, now a part of Horse Portage.
- (5) Basswood Lake.

"Found - 4 Sotees (1) and their families with about the meat of 2 moose dried - The house (2) burnt to the ground about  $\frac{1}{2}$  pm the rain came heavy and we put up - about 2 pm the gentlemen (3) came and put up with us." - David Thompson, August 1797 at Prairie Portage to Basswood.

"To Gros Portage des Bois Blanc (4), which is near 300 paces long. Here we met three canoes from Rainy Lake, loaded with packs from the Athabasca Department, bound for Grand Portage. I delivered them my dispatches for Montreal. We came on through Lac des Bois Blanc (5) as far as the Pine Islands (6), where we found a few Indians making canoes. Mine was in such bad shape that I could proceed no farther; I therefore determined to wait for a new one here, there being several on the stocks. The Indians were drinking and rather troublesome.

This morning we had rain, which continued until ten o'clock, when the weather cleared up, and the Indians set to work finishing my canoe. At eleven o'clock, four more canoes from Rainy Lake, with Athabasca packs, passed, and at one o'clock Roderick McKenzie arrived in a light canoe, two days from Lac La Pluie (7), expecting to reach Grand Portage early on the 29th (8) he left at two o'clock. Several canoes overtook and passed me while I was impatiently waiting; but the Indians, from yesterday's debauch, were not in a working mood, and were continually smoking and begging for liquor. The weather was warm and sultry, which so increased their laziness that they finally fell asleep. The women brought me plenty of fine large huckleberries, of which there is an abundance on the rocks around this lake. Toward evening the Indians awoke and insisted upon my giving them liquor, otherwise I should have no canoe; and they threatened to break my old one. However, I persisted in refusing. We came to high words, and, in our turn, menaced them with a good beating if they misbehaved. This had the desired effect and about midnight we got rid of them.

This morning the scoundrels refused to work, and I was obliged to set my own men to finish the canoe. She was completed at ten o'clock, when we loaded and embarked, giving the fellows a receipt for the canoe - 60 skins payable at Lac La Pluie." - Alexander Henry, the younger in Basswood Lake, July 26-28, 1800.

- (1) Saulteur Indians now known as Chippewa.
- (2) Bark wigwam.
- (3) Probably partners who wintered at the trading forts, known as "bourgeois."
- (4) Greater Whitewood Portage - now Prairie Portage.
- (5) Basswood Lake.
- (6) Probably the islands around Ottawa and Washington Islands.
- (7) Rainy Lake.
- (8) This would be going from Basswood to Grand Portage in two days!

About 9:00 a.m., I landed amid the boulders on the west side of the first falls of the Basswood River and began to carry the 1 $\frac{1}{4}$  mile Horse Portage. Every 200-300 yards were placed canoe rests along the trail. My method was to carry my packs to a rest, then walk back and bring up the canoe repeating the process until I was over. In this way everything more or less moved forward together and nothing was ever far behind. Fortunately level and with a good walking path, this portage none-the-less, took me two hours and forty minutes to cover. During that time I met no one but occasional voices coming through the woods, indicated people were in the rapids and pools of the river.

In the fur trade days Horse Portage did not exist providing a walking passage around a series of bad rapids. There were a couple of short portages but for the most part the big birchbark canoes were worked through the fast water.

"We came to the end of the lake (1), and thus to Petit Portage des Bois Blanc (2), which is about 200 paces over. Thence we went down several ugly rapids." - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 28, 1800.

It was now noon and with the rain clouds dispersed and the sun out in full force, I spread my lunch things in the shade at the west landing of the portage. I had barely started "building" a sandwich when Jeroux Sharp arrived followed closely by his crew bound for the Base. He and I had a pleasant visit as his people made the carry. Then he took off and I was again alone.

Near Wheelbarrow Portage I met still another Canoe Base party, the third for the day. They told me how to portage on the near side of Wheelbarrow Falls and save a mile of paddling.

- (1) Basswood at the Basswood River.
- (2) Lesser Whitewood Portage. It is now about the first 125 yards of Horse Portage.

At 4:00 p.m., I arrived at Lower Basswood Falls. The river here, spills down in three cascades that make it a very pretty and noisy place. There are two portages - the main one on the right and one on the island that lies between the middle and western cascades. The island landing is a huge sloping rock and is apparently the old fur traders portage to Crooked Lake.

"We proceeded to Petit Rocher Lac Croche (1), a portage of about 100 paces over a rock, to Lac Croche." - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 28, 1800.

On the hump of this island was a splendid campsite with a table and there I landed for the night. I hung out all my wet belongings and perked myself up with two cups of cold instant tea. Then I just sat on a small grassy opening overlooking the falls and relaxed. The French Voyageurs, who certainly must have camped on this spot many times, and I shared a common feeling i.e., it was good to be finished with the day's travels!

It wasn't long before I discovered the warblers in the tall pines of the islands. And they drove me crazy! Eager to identify them I immediately set out "birding" with my field glasses. They proved to be the most elusive birds I ever tried to identify. Either I couldn't find them at all or they were so jittery they wouldn't sit still long enough for me to spot any field markings. I finally gave up.

In the evening after supper I put the canoe into the lake above the falls and trolled for a while. I caught nothing but I did spot a nice doe and managed to stalk quite close to her. I turned in early under a full moon.

"Nor Ghosts, nor Rattlesnakes, nor Spiders - nothing can prevent the fatigued voyageur from sleeping." - Nicholas Garry

(1) Little Stone Portage of Crooked Lake.

Tuesday, July 25 - Lower Basswood Falls to Crooked Lake - 9 1/8 miles:

This turned out to be a day noteworthy for animals and their antics.

I was on the Basswood River on the way to Crooked Lake at 6:45 a.m., and within a mile was invited ashore for a cup of coffee. The people at whose camp I enjoyed this early morning hospitality were the Wm. C. Wilsons of Birmingham, Alabama. We had seen each other twice yesterday - once at the first portage west of Horse Portage and the second time on opposite sides of the Lower Falls. At the first meeting we had only said hello, as I called to them to portage on the south rather than the north side of the river. Now as I passed and called "good morning" they invited me into their camp.

Mrs. Wilson several years before had read of canoe tripping in a magazine and they had come up and tried it, outfitting through Wilderness Outfitters of Ely. The experience had been so enjoyable that they were now making their fourth trip and looked forward to others.

Mrs. Wilson paid me a thrilling compliment. She said: "Yesterday I said to my husband when we saw you traveling alone 'do you suppose that's that Mr. Olson who writes those books'?" She was referring of course, to Sigurd Olson of Ely. I was sorry I wasn't.

Within two blocks of the Wilson's camp I found the first of the animals that were to mark this day. These were mink, two young animals playing and hunting among the rough boulders of the shore. Evidently they were this year's kits, half-grown and naive, for they let me approach with the canoe to within fifteen feet of them. After watching for a while I carefully backed away and from around a corner, called to the Wilsons to come and see them. Together we took pictures.



A short ways farther down the river I came to a picturesque cliff - the famous "picture rock" of Crooked Lake. Here are some of the finest examples of Indian paintings to be found in the country. On here is the figure, famously known to students as the "eccentric moose" - a small drawing of a moose smoking a two-bowled pipe! This too, is the cliff where the early explorers referred to the arrows of the Sioux still in the cracks of the rocks.

"Within three miles of the last portage is a remarkable rock, with a smooth face, but split and cracked in different parts, which hang over the water. Into one of its horizontal chasms a great number of arrows have been shot, which is said to have been done by a war party of the Nadowasis or Sioux, who had done much mischief in this country, and left these weapons as a warning to the Chebois or natives." - Alexander Mackenzie

"Until lately, the arrows shot by the Sioux, during a conflict at this spot, might be seen, sticking in the clefts of the rocks." - Dr. J. J. Bigsby.

"At the Rock in Arrows we met nine canoes loaded with Athabasca packs." - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 28, 1800.

From here on the river channel, quiet and wide, is simply a long arm of Crooked Lake. At one place on the low western shore two doe fed. They let me approach to within a hundred feet as they continued to feed then simply walked back into the brush and disappeared.

About mid morning I "detoured" on the right side of a long island instead of following the border on the left. By so doing, I got a handsome dividend. This was a perfectly bleached deer skull crowned with fine antlers, five points on a side. I spotted this white "thing" from some distance away where it lay on the rocks at the waters edge. The more I studied it and the closer I canoed the less like driftwood and the more like antlers it looked. And sure enough it was, surrounded by the scattered bones. Apparently this was the spot where some whitetail monarch had made his last stand against the wolves the winter before.

Incidentally, this area is reputed to be home to the largest population of timber wolves of any place in the country.

As I turned west around the point containing the Table Rock campsite, I met the first of the fishing boats I was to see on Crooked Lake. This was a guide with a man and a woman still-fishing in the narrows there. These people came out of Zup's Curtin Falls Fishing Camp at the west end of Crooked. He is one of the Zupancich brothers of Ely and was a determined fighter against the aeroplane ban. Now he is cut off, 45 miles and three long portages from a road. It is expected that his place will be bought out by the government and the property allowed to return to a wild state.

In the last narrow channel before the wide part of Crooked Lake, a doe whitetail deer gave me a great thrill. Unseen by me on a hillside to my left, she became frightened or was chased. At any rate, the first thing I knew was that she ran at top speed down the hillside, jumped into the water fifty feet ahead of me and began swimming across. I was able to snap pictures of her as she was swimming and as she climbed out on shore. There she shook herself, took a last look at me and with a bleat, flipped her tail in the air and jumped into the dense woods!

Here was an example of where camera-readiness paid off. Whenever I start out I set my camera lens according to the light and wrap the camera, with the case open, in the poncho at my feet. The strap is snapped to the thwart. In that way it is protected from splash, can't get loose from the canoe yet is ready and handy for quick shots. That is the only way many of the fleeting pictures of the wilderness can be captured. If the camera is carried in the pack or gadget bag - kapat! The picture is gone before you are ready.

Now I came into the main and big part of Crooked Lake. Its name is appropriate for it is crooked with many bays, islands, channels and capes. It is very beautiful.



"Then succeeds the portage of La Croche (1) and is followed by embarkation on that lake, which takes its name from its figure. It extends eighteen miles, in a meandering form, and in a westerly direction; it is in general very narrow, and at about two-thirds of its length becomes very contracted, with a strong current." - Alexander Mackenzie.

Camp was made about noon on a nice point which had large smooth rocks sloping to the water for a landing. Unfortunately the site was dirty with cans, paper, food remnants and fish skins. I was too hot and bushed to go on so I just sat in the shade, drained of ambition, and perspired. Finally in the late afternoon, I gave the site a good cleaning and set up my camp. About 7:30 p.m., I boiled a pot of rice and apricots and this comprised supper. A soap down and bath on the rock as the evening came on, lifted my spirits.

The surplus Army, mountain tent I am using has proven to be "bad sleeping" - moisture condenses so badly inside it that the sleeping bag becomes damp and the inside of the tent is "wringing wet" by morning even though it doesn't rain. Each afternoon a necessary part of camp making is to hang these up to dry.

I tried fishing this evening and caught a small mouth bass and a couple of northerns. In front of the camp was a weed bed full of minnows in which northerns were feeding, judging from swirls and splashes, but these out-foxed me. Cast as I might, they would not strike.

Wednesday, July 26 - Crooked Lake to Iron Lake (Rebecca Falls - 9 miles:

After a breakfast of farina and coffee, I was on my way up the lake at 6:30 a.m., There were scattered clouds overhead but to the west, where I was headed, a dark bank thundered and there was lightning and a rainbow. No other signs than this were needed to indicate the certainty of a storm but fortunately it moved to the north and the sun shone brightly.

(1) Crooked Lake.

By 9:00 a.m., I was almost at the western part of the lake where I had planned to put up and in full sight of Zup's camp. The site available, an old Canadian ranger cabin, was not especially attractive nor did I care to stick around near the resort for the day. I decided to continue.

At Zup's resort I visited briefly with Mr. Zupancich and bought soap, flashlight batteries and tea. After starting on this voyage I discovered I was short of soap; the flashlight had been turned on when shoved in the pack and had burned out and the tea I was using as a coolant in the hot afternoons at a rate four times more than I had planned for! I was glad for the chance to do a little re-outfitting with Mr. Zup.

A quarter mile past Zup's, Crooked Lake ends abruptly in a wide precipice of water known as Curtain Falls. On the left I began to portage.

"Lake Croche is terminated by the Portage de Rideau, (1) four hundred paces long, and derives its name from the appearance of the water, falling over a rock of upwards of thirty feet. Several rapids succeed." - Alexander Mackenzie.

"At sunset came to Portage de Rideau, where we stopped for the night." - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 28, 1800.

"The portage from Crooked Lake is one port over a granite ridge. The fall is called by the Frenchmen the Window Curtain Fall. It is a handsome shoot, 35 feet descent." - Maj. Delafield, July 24, 1823.

As I deposited my packs at the far end of the portage, I discovered a Canoe Base crew coming through with Curt Carley guiding. This was a pleasant surprise and I had an hour visit with him and his people over trail sandwiches and a punch on the edge of the falls. Like the old fur brigades as they passed I gave him "my dispatches for Montreal" i.e., a message for the Base that I was making a good trip.

(1) Curtain Falls Portage.

Passing the narrows in the river into Iron Lake, I was slapped full in the face with a strong west wind. There was no convenient place for protection so I struck out for an island one-eighth mile away. Only by sitting in the bow seat and paddling first on one side and then on the other did I make it. A lone paddler in the bow looked silly but it did keep the canoe headed into the wind.

The bit of blow proved I could not go on against it, so I made a "degrade", the first of the trip. A "degrade" is the old voyageur's French word for being windbound. This one lasted an impatient three hours, made worse by the many large, biting flies on the tiny island.

I could have made camp at the small, little used site here but I was anxious to camp at Rebecca Falls one and one-half miles away. So when the wind slacked off at 5:00 p.m., I hurriedly paddled up the lake. This proved to be a bad error in judgement!

I reached the falls campsite easily but the storm that had been hanging on the winds off to the north reversed itself and came into camp too. Just before I finished pitching the tent the heavenly buckets up-ended and the deluge started. By the time I finished the tent and could get into it, I was too wet to do so. I just stood in the pines for half an hour and dripped in silence. The woods and I were so wet and I was so discouraged that I didn't attempt cooking supper but after a look at the falls, went to bed. Thank goodness the sleeping bag was dry, at least to begin with. For what consolation it was worth, I knew I was not the first voyageur to be so sadly afflicted!

"At noon it rained hard having no shelter but ye heavens for a Canope nor no wood to make a fire." - Henry Kelsey - July 2, 1689 exploring north of Churchill River.

"It is a strange thing when victualls are wanting, worke whole nights and days, lye down on the bare ground, to have the belly empty, the wearinesse in the bones, and drowsinesse of the body by the bad weather that you are to suffer, having nothing to keepe you from such calamity." - Radisson

Thursday, July 27 - Iron Lake (Rebecca Falls) to Lac La Croix (Fish Stake Narrows) - 9 miles:

It was a wet world into which I crawled this morning. Pants, socks, boots, shirt and poncho were soaked from yesterdays downpour. Also the inside of the tent and the outside of the sleeping bag. The woods dripped and to shake a bush or knock a tree was to invite a shower. But there was a promise of better things - the sun shown brightly in a cloudless sky. That, with a hot breakfast of coffee and oatmeal, made a good start of the day.

The old fur traders never saw Rebecca Falls - at least none of the journals mention them - for they lie one and one-half miles off the old route. Had they been searching for beauty they would have done well to have found them.

The two Rebecca Falls are spectacular and different. They are not like normal falls but more like giant tilted troughs of rock, each a block long, down which roar the waters of Iron Lake into McAree Lake. The two falls run parallel to each other and my last nights campsite was on a block square island in between.

I was given the once over as I started down the lake this morning. Two beaver, each independent of the other, spotted me in the canoe from 150-200 yard away, and swam up and passed closely by. I have seen many beaver through the years but none ever came alongside.

Through Iron Lake and into Bottle Lake the old route and the present border led me. Near the Bottle Portage were three does that made a beautiful study in wild life. One was quite curious and allowed me to come close for pictures.

Bottle Portage has a corduroy road on it so Zup can run a Jeep, which he keeps there, back and forth with supplies. As I landed at his pier I heard boats coming and soon two of his showed up. One brought some of his guests going home and the other their baggage. His men threw my packs on his jeep so I had just the canoe to carry.

I visited with the guests briefly at the Lac La Croix end of Bottle Portage. One of them, a gentleman from Chicago said: "You aren't Mr. O'Meara are you?" He was referring to Walter O'Meara, author of "The Savage Country" and "The Grand Portage." It was the second time I had been mistaken for an author!

"To the Flacon (1) Portage, which is very difficult, is four hundred paces long and leads to the Lake of La Croix, so named from its shape." - Alexander Mackenzie

"Here I saw the first dog (a large black Indian one that Auge<sup>s</sup> the interpreter killed in La Croche) eaten. He castrated him as soon as he fell to prevent rank taste in the flesh. The hair of the animal was singed off as Canadians singe their hogs and then washed clean with water." - John MacDonnell, August 16, 1793 camping at Flacon (Bottle) Portage.

Lac La Croix on which I now embarked means Lake of the Cross or Cross Lake. It is approximately 27 miles in length and like all of these lakes is typically bay fringed and island studded. Here I picked up the motor boat crowd for two marine railways over the portages to the west provides easy access from Crane Lake and there are several resorts and an Indian village on the lake.

"The Lake of the Cross is thirty four miles long by eighteen wide, according to Mackenzie. According to our survey, it contains 260 islands, often pine tufted with rushy sides, besides rocks innumerable. A few miles from the Pewardic Portage (1), on an island near the south main, there are the remains of a round tower, or defensive building of some sort, twenty-seven feet in diameter. It was erected by the Indians and commands a wide view of expanses and woody isles.

(1) Bottle Portage.



"The new or Dog River route (1), from Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods, enters Lac La Croix on its north-east side by the River Maligne, and thence forth is the same as the old route." - Dr. J. J. Bigsby

"We next entered Lac La Croix, but the wind soon came on ahead and obliged us to put ashore, where we waited some time. We again embarked, came on to Pointe au Sable, and put up for the night. Mosquitoes and sandflies were very troublesome. We here found Indians making canoes." - Alexander Henry, the younger, July 29, 1800.

The day being early I pushed up the lake and soon came to a prominent landmark - Warrior Hill on Irving (or Shortess) Island. This is a high hill raising abruptly from the waters edge and the entire western side is a bare, steep slope of irregular granite. Legend has it that this was a warrior training ground and among other things, the young Indian lad was required to run up it. Whew! The beauty of the place was marred somewhat by the initials of desecrators scratched in the black lichens. This sort of thing is not new but it is regrettable that some can only enjoy the beauty of these places by despoiling it!

"The traveller has left his mark on this rock in various ways; some by name & some by date & some by strange device." - Maj. Delafield, at picture rock on Crooked Lake.

A mile or so on beyond the hill is the picture rock of Lac La Croix, another splendid example of Indian picture paintings, including several moose. In one place a considerable area is covered by nothing but hand prints. Here I met three lads from Chicago eating lunch and resting. After taking their pictures for them with their camera and some pictures of my own, I paddled across the lake for lunch.

- (1) When the North West Company closed their Grand Portage depot in 1804 and established themselves at Ft. William in order to assure themselves of being on British soil, they opened a long idle route to the interior. This was the Kaministiquia River, Sturgeon Lake, Maligne River route which joins the border lakes in the northeast part of Lac La Croix. It was known as the new route.

A short ways beyond the lunch site I picked a small and little used campsite in Fish Stake Narrows. Again I just sat and drank cold tea before pitching camp, attempting to cool off after another hot day. I even peeled my clothes off but the pesky flies soon drove me back into them for protection from their bites. So, I just sat after draping all the trees and bushes with my wet gear from yesterday.

From my camp the Picture Rock was in plain view one and one-quarter miles away. Several boats stopped to view the paintings as did a U. S. Forest Service, red and orange marked plane. I flashed my white map at them but they never noticed or were not looking for me. About the same time a yellow Canadian Lands and Forest plane landed to the east and disappeared behind a wooded point. The map shows a ranger cabin over there.

I caught two northerns and a walleye today. For all the trolling I do while traveling, I should catch more although I'm not really doing much "serious fishing."

To bed at 9:30 p.m., after a cooling soap bath!

Friday, July 28 - Lac La Croix - 7 $\frac{1}{4}$  miles:

This was an uneventful morning as I wound west and north through many islands finally landing about noon, after bucking some wind, at a tiny round island near Gull Rock seven and one-fourth miles west of Fish Stake Narrows.

At one place though, I did catch some fish. Skirting a point I apparently trolled my davele across a reef to lakeward. A walleye hit and was landed and in rapid succession, two more. Finally in desperation, I reeled in, in order to go on my way. One was saved on a stringer for supper.

Canoeing alone is a bit different than when you have a partner to share the paddling and camp work. Because of the ever present danger of accident, I stay on the most traveled route through these lakes so that if I need help I'll have a better chance of attracting it. The strange lakes require that the compass and map be kept before me on the bottom of the canoe and are constantly used for reference.



I marveled at the French explorers who came through here with hardly any knowledge of where they were or where they were going. They of course relied upon Indians to guide them. The crude maps made as the country unfolded were full of errors and wild imagination.

"All the old maps, are denied to be of any avail; they are known to have been made in ignorance, and to be replete with errors." - Arthur Barclay.

Operating the canoe alone is different. I sit on what is normally the bow seat with my feet toward the center. This is so my weight is nearer the middle of the canoe and more of it is consequently down in the water. This is essential or the slightest wind would whirl me around or at least, make guiding the canoe harder. The packs are stowed as far to the other end of the canoe as possible.

A light line, tied to a thwart, is threaded through the pack straps and tied to everything so that if I capsize my gear and the canoe will be tied together. Whenever I go ashore one end of the canoe is lifted out and this same line, used as a painter, is tied to something as a double precaution.

Distance is covered more slowly, possibly two miles an hour in a calm and it is a difficult adjustment from speedy trains and cars to this. But I am resigned to slow progress and instead of becoming frustrated, enjoy the opportunity for studying the lakeside. I paddle best on the left but switch when necessary as a relief. Each stroke must provide the forward movement and the guidance to the canoe. Strokes are slower but each sends the craft 10 - 20 feet depending on how much glide is utilized. Wind from any direction except behind adds greatly to the problem of motivity.

"The movement of a canoe is like a reed in the wind. Silence is a part of it, and the sound of lapping water, bird songs and the wind in the trees. It is a part of the medium through which it floats, the sky, the water, and the shores. A man is a part of his canoe and therefore part of all it knows. The instant he dips his paddle, he flows as it flows, the canoe yielding to his slightest touch and responsive to his every whim and thought. There is magic in the feel of a paddle and the movement of a canoe, a magic compounded of distance, adventure, solitude and peace. The way of a canoe is the way of the wilderness and of a freedom almost forgotten, the open door to waterways of ages past and a way of life with profound and abiding satisfactions." - Sigurd F. Olson

In the middle of the afternoon a motor canoe came up to the island from the east then headed north toward the Indian village. Running the canoe was an Indian and a woman, shielding a baby from the splash, sat in the bow. Amidships the black-haired heads of two smaller children appeared above the gunwale.

The Indian village lies about three miles to the north, out of sight behind Island 27. I spotted it in the distance as I canoed up at noon - red and white buildings far away. I shall visit there in the morning although I'm not very presentable. Dirty clothes and a week of whiskers give me that "trail worn and weary" look.

Fish chowder, butterscotch pudding and coffee made in the skillet, the utensil not in use, wound up the day.

Saturday, July 29 - Lac La Croix - 9 miles:

I was up at 5:00 a.m., and as a moderate wind was blowing, I pulled the camp down and hurriedly packed it, and took off across the lake. I wanted to safely make the big traverse from the south to the north shore before any stronger wind should stir up the waves. Actually I needn't have hurried as the wind calmed.

A mile from the Indian village I went ashore, cooked a skimpy breakfast on a willow fire and "prettied up", just as the olden day voyageurs did before coming into a fort or post. Actually I had little along except the clothes I wore so this operation turned out to be a simple thing, i.e., my regular morning washing, putting on my heavier shirt which, though wrinkled was clean, and putting my comb in my pocket in case I needed it! Then with my gear packed out of sight in the packs and my flags flying, I set out for the village and a call.

"We shot white water and made the windy traverse of Lac La Croix, and passed through the Indian village on the River Namakan." - Walter O'Meara in The Lost Child.

Children spotted me almost immediately as I rounded the wooded point and set my course for the cluttered beach. A small boy called out in Chipewewa to his playmates and I could see the several small heads come up and turn in my direction. But as I drew close they ran up the path toward a gray old cabin. A woman and some girls came out of it and stood and watched and a man and a teen-age boy stopped sawing and hammering in a nearby new cabin under construction and walked down to the shore where I had stopped. Without getting out we engaged in some small talk. When they found out I was an idle visitor they returned to their work.

The village sits on the Canadian shore at the junction of the Namakan River with Lac La Croix. About 100 Indians live here in the small houses, all looking much the same, that have replaced the bark wigwams. These are scattered along the shore for a quarter of a mile at the edge of the woods. Smoke came from the chimneys of a few but there wasn't many people to be seen.

There are no roads in the village - just paths - and no automobiles since it is forty miles to a road. Transportation is by boat and there were many outboards parked up and down the shore.

The outstanding structure in the village was the fine schoolhouse and the school teacher's home at the top of a rise. The Canadians furnish these. The school was very neat with a picture of Queen Elizabeth on the wall behind the teachers desk and a couple of Indian dance drums on the floor at the other end.

At the north end of the village, below the school house, was a pier at which some children played. As I approached they scampered away but I tied the canoe and walked up the bank toward a little house there. I was promptly met and loudly greeted there by six assorted dogs whose dispositions were doubtful. Fortunately a woman came out of the house and yelled at them in Chippewa and settled them down. She was friendly and we carried on a short and limited conversation as she showed me her garden and the teacher's cabbage patch which she tended in his absence. Later on her son came down to the pier as I prepared to take leave of the place.

Three miles to the west is Campbell's Trading Post, now owned and operated by Bob Handberg, which is also a resort. The trading post is the "store" for the village and is open all winter. Bob Handberg uses many of the Indians around the place at housekeeping, guiding and odd jobs. This provides them some summertime employment and makes them eligible for unemployment help from the Canadian Government during the winter. In this manner, with some fishing, hunting and trapping they eke out an existence according to Bob Handberg with whom I visited.

At Bob Handberg's I bought some candy, had a cold drink and mailed some postcards home. Then I canoed west for about three miles and finding no available campsite, made my own on a rock ledge in Canada.

Sunday, July 30 - Lac La Croix - 5½ miles:

Slept an extra hour this morning, rising at 6:00 a.m. Had I some clean clothes and a razor I would have stayed nearer Campbell's and, fresh and neat, attended a Sunday service held there. I have an idea that the Indians are attracted to it and that would have made it interesting.

Not having these things though, I made my breakfast among the rocks, tore down the camp and started cruising slowly down the south arm of the lake. On the way I passed the closed Lac La Croix Fish Camp. Inspection of the grounds indicated it had once been the site of a logging camp and the old blacksmith shop was still there.

Lac La Croix contains the junction of the "old" and "new" fur trade "roads" as the canoe routes were called. The old came here from Grand Portage via Basswood Lake; the new came from Ft. Williams through a northern chain of lakes and entered Lac La Croix by the Maligne River. It was along this route that the Dawson Trail was made and used for a short while until the completion of the railroad to the west killed it. Down the Maligne came Col. Wolseley to put down the Riel Rebellion.

"And now, in the spring of 1870, eight hundred volunteers and four hundred imperial regulars were streaming west.....never had Lac La Croix seen such a sight as this....Colonel Wolseley's great force appeared quite suddenly one early June morning on Lac La Croix...Their canoes shot out from behind the island called Framboise, huge and shadowy on the horizon. Then they slipped into the sunlight and the whole flotilla was aglitter with the flash of polished leather and burnished brass. And the lake was spattered with the scarlet of flags and uniforms." - Walter O'Meara in La Porcelaine Claire.

Made camp on a nice spot on the mainland near an island a mile from the end of the lake. Again it has been a very hot day and as I sat in the shade of the campsite a man and woman came to cast in the narrows. We began a ship-to-shore conversation which ended with their offering to bring me a cold drink from the resort at which they were staying and which I could see a mile or so across the lake.

About 3:00 p.m., the gentleman came racing back with the cold drink wrapped in newspaper, a piece of smoked walleye and a big chunk of his wife's cake. I thoroughly enjoyed every bit of them but must confess that in my dirty clothes and whiskers, I felt much like the bum with a handout at the backdoor. The gentlemen turned out to be Mr. Albert Kodl of Oak Park, Ill.



He is the retired treasurer of the Liquid Carbonic Corp., and he and Mrs. Kodl have been coming here for almost 30 years.

I have seen two canoe parties today, the first in two days. One was a group of boys under the leadership of a teacher from Roseville and another from Rochester. They were eating lunch on the island when I arrived. The other group of four came in the late afternoon and included at least one former Scout for they had a canoe labeled "Troop 177, Cloquet".

After supper I trolled in the narrow rewarded only by one little northern which I threw back. I did spot a beaver on shore eating grass, however. Carefully I stalked him edging the canoe ever closer. Finally he discovered me - a strange "object" off shore - and took to the water slowly and with dignity. When I purposely made a noise, he slapped his tail with a loud crack and dove.

Monday, July 31 - Lac La Croix to Vermillion - 12 miles:

Again, up later than usual and, after the camp chores and camp breaking, stopped within a mile at Cotton's Resort to visit with the Kodl's, the people who befriended me yesterday. They invited me in to morning coffee where I also met Mrs. McClenagahn who is "Cotton" and owns the resort. It was a pleasant visit among friendly folks.

A half mile further is Beatty Portage out of Lac La Croix, a marine railway which hauled my canoe and gear across for a dollar. The proprietor is a man in his thirties who lives there the year around and traps in the winter. An older man probably his father, came out of the cabin and spotting my deer skull, began a conversation relative to the present deer and moose population. The effortless transfer of my baggage from one lake to the other would have been appreciated by the fur brigades who countless times grunted and groaned across this same trail.

"At daybreak we embarked and came to the first Petit Portage de la Croix (1), which is 200 Paces long; then through a crooked piece of water (2) to the middle Portage de la Croix, (3) which is 400 paces; thence it is but a short distance to the last Petit Portage de la Croix, (4) which is but 50 paces over. We then loaded and descended the little Riviere la Croix (5) to Vermillion Lake." Alexander Henry, the younger, July 30, 1800.

Down Loon Lake I battled a strong wind in my face but half way through it I was able to make a twenty foot lift over a sandy point that saved a mile of paddling and changed my direction. Now with the wind from the side it was no particular effort to run the distance to the middle "Portage de la Croix". Here again is another marine railway that hauled my stuff across for another dollar which I gladly paid to the operator.

The Loon River down which I now embarked winds through the woods for about five miles to Vermillion Lake. I intended to camp overnight in it but found it unattractive - shallow, sluggish and dirty - so I kept going. Part way through was a large clearing on the south bank which I explored. Low mounds of grass covered dirt outlined the position of buildings that once had been there. It was, I learned the next day, an old logging campsite.

A short ways beyond a young couple came around a bend in an outboard and spotting me, stopped to visit. They turned out to be from Hinckley and missionaries of the American Indian Mission bound for the Indian village on Lac La Croix for two weeks of religious work. They had been there two years ago and were now returning after a month with the Indians on Lake of the Woods, Crane Lake and Rainy Lake. They had besides camping gear and food, bibles and hymn books in Chippewa. The man was white and the woman Indian. I imagine their arrival at the village was a pleasant surprise for the inhabitants.

- (1) Beatty Portage
- (2) Loon Lake
- (3) Loon Falls Portage
- (4) Portage in Loon River not now used except in very low water
- (5) Now Loon River



It was camping time by now but there was no site to my liking so I kept my head bowed over the paddle until I came into Vermillion Lake - much farther than I had intended. Even then the site turned out to be the poorest I've had - and dirty. Too tired to clean it much I made the camp and a simple supper and ate it on a shore patrolled by a huge beaver.

I turned in certain that this would be the place and the night I'd be scourged by scrounging bears. None came.

Tuesday, August 1 - Vermillion to Crane Lake - 12½ miles:

Again I was slow in starting this morning. Up at 8:00 a.m., and it was 9:30 by the time I started up Vermillion. Almost immediately I threaded through a scattered party of seven canoes headed the other way. They seemed to be three couples, each in a canoe and four canoes of girls.

Past the narrows I stopped for a coke at Watkins resort, ate lunch at an island in the mouth of Sand Point and hurried on to the Canadian Customs station on another island. There I checked in and visited Bob Handberg's store but bought nothing.

Now I ran into trouble. I started south from the island and as I ducked out from behind it into the traverse across the lake, I was caught in a squall. The rain poured down and the wind blew. Fortunately it didn't get enough of a sweep to build up rollers but it made me dig the water for all I was worth. There was nothing I could do but keep my head in the poncho hood, paddle hard ahead and hope for the best. Being ignored by a passing outboard that didn't even ask if I needed help, didn't help my feeling of concern.

Fortunately I made the relative safety of shallow water about the time the squall moved on and the sun came out to beat down again. But the storm left a wind gusting from the south to battle as I traveled down King Williams Narrows. At the mouth of Crane Lake it proved too much and I pulled up at a cabin, windbound again.

The cabin was a pleasant place perched with its outbuildings on a point twenty feet above the water. Locked and in good order it none the less had a warning sign for the likes of me: No camping - no fires! Apparently in the past the owner had been so bothered.

For historical purposes the trip was done. When I turned south in Sand Point Lake into the narrows, I left the old fur trade route. It held its aim westward into Namakan and beyond and I headed into civilization. I was almost to the end of Crane Lake, my landfall, and I had made the trip without accident or trouble for which I was thankful. Most important to me now was that I had sweated and strained and worked and lived as the voyageurs and company partners had done in the same way and the same place. I felt I had recaptured something of another time, another people - a heroic and savage age of the past. I was proud of that and inwardly there was a glow of satisfaction. It was sort of like Antyme Gagon said: "For me it is lak the medicine, thees country. Bush medicine, eh, m"sieu?"

I tramped around the cabin - and read - and snoozed - and tramped some more. After about three hours the wind lay and I canoed to Bob Handberg's store and made my last camp in the little woods on their point.

The next day Gar Mulrooney and Mike Miler drove my car up and hauled me and the gear back to the starting place - the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base on Moose Lake.

JULY 23

Fall L	$4\frac{1}{2}$	
P	$\frac{1}{4}$	
Newton	$2\frac{1}{2}$	
Pipestone FP	220y	
Pipestone Bay (Basswood L)	$6\frac{1}{4}$	13 $5/8$ m

JULY 24

Pipestone Bay	2	
Jackfish Bay	3	
Horse P	1815y	
Basswood R	$\frac{1}{2}$	
P	100y	
Basswood R	2	
Wheelbarrow P	180y	
Basswood R	$7/8$	9 $5/8$ - $23\frac{1}{4}$

JULY 25

Lower Basswood FP	110y	
Basswood R	3	
Crooked L	6	9 $1/8$ - $32\frac{3}{8}$

JULY 26

Crooked L	7	
Curtain FP	670y	
Iron L	$1\frac{1}{2}$	9 - $41\frac{3}{8}$
(Rebecca F)		

JULY 27

Iron L	$2\frac{1}{2}$	
Bottle L	1	
Bottle P	$\frac{1}{4}$	
Lac La Croix (Fish Stake Narrows)	$5\frac{1}{4}$	9 - $50\frac{3}{8}$

JULY 28

Lac La Croix (Tiny island near gull rock)	$7\frac{1}{4}$	$7\frac{1}{4}$ - $57\frac{5}{8}$
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JULY 29

Lac La Croix (western part)	9	9 - $66\frac{5}{8}$
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JULY 30

Lac La Croix (SW end)	$5\frac{1}{2}$	$5\frac{1}{2}$ - $72\frac{1}{8}$
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JULY 31

Lac La Croix	1	
Beatty P	$\frac{1}{4}$	
Loon L	5	
Loon FP	$\frac{1}{4}$	
Loon R	5	
Vermillion L	$\frac{1}{2}$	12 - $84\frac{1}{8}$

AUGUST 1

Vermillion	$4\frac{1}{2}$	
Sand Point L	$4\frac{1}{4}$	
Crane L	$4\frac{1}{4}$	12 $3/4$ - $96\frac{7}{8}$

Distance traveled  $96\frac{7}{8}$  miles of  
which  $2\frac{3}{4}$  miles were on 9 portages