

SCOUTS LIKE IT ROUGH

(Prepared for Buick Magazine by Oren R. Felton, St. Paul, Minn.)

The wilderness has ever yielded to the advance of Man and his Machines. Frontiers have been rolled back on our continent until only one relatively small area of primeval wilderness remains — the Canoe Country of northern Minnesota and Canada.

Here astride the border is the modern adventurer's Mecca and the angler's paradise. Stateside is Superior National Forest of about 2,000 square miles and on the Canadian side is Quetico Provincial Park of roughly the same area. Beyond Quetico (the name is backwoods French for "quest for the coast", since it was along these waterways early explorers paddled in search of the western sea), there lies another roadless area for 50 miles toward Hudson Bay.

These borderland lakes and rivers were the highway down which came the first wealth of the new continent, the furs for the eastern markets. Here 200 years ago, when Chicago, Minneapolis, Indiana and Missouri were yet unknown and unnamed, the voyageur with his pack and canoe was traversing already well-known portages between lakes and rivers. He gave picturesque names to these portages, as "Horse", "Wheelbarrow", and "Bottle" by which they are known today.

The Quetico-Superior region is the ridge-pole of the continent. Here Precambrian rocks, the oldest things on earth man's eyes may see, are battered by the ice-age glaciers and split by the frosts of a million winters. When the last glacier melted and receded to the far north, it left the area so wrinkled and pocked that more than 40 percent of its surface is covered by lakes and connecting streams. Here Man, the Roadbuilder, finds the terrain unsuited to his roads and he, too, must

natural horseplay of a Crew of Explorers, genuinely funny things happen. A pair of Explorers, hearing about the purity of the ^{lake} water, decided to sample it the first afternoon and both leaned over the same side of the canoe at the same time to drink directly from the lake. Result: an unexpected dunking.

One of the Advisors out fishing along^e hooked a big northern pike. In the excitement, he upset the canoe and as he fell out, accidentally jerked the fish into the canoe which righted itself, saving fish, rod and reel, and incidentally earning from his Crew the name, "Tippenance." In the middle of some of the lakes, large slightly submerged rocks are utilized by the guides to land an Explorer so that the next canoe is greeted by a Scout apparently walking on the water and thumbing a lift to the next portage.

Even misadventure becomes humorous in retrospect. A crew attempting to shoot forbidden rapids upset several canoes and lost all their food except the bread which was hopelessly water-soaked. For the next three days of their trip, their diet was fish, blueberries and bread "mush" in varied combinations. And under-sized Explorer, carrying a canoe over a rough, slippery portage, weakened and fell down, the canoe pinning him in such a way that he could not squirm out from under and could only call weakly for help until his comrades returned to rescue him.

This next summer, 1100 Explorers will outfit at the Sommers Canoe Base -- 90 Crews of them. Another 400 Explorers will organize on their own, around someone who has been trained in canoe expeditions in previous years through a trip from the Base, and rent equipment and canoes from commercial outfitters.

Each Explorer will return to tell of his experiences and the Canoe Country. He will relive his trip many times, thrilling again at the thought that he camped under the ancient pines that saw the first explorers paddle by; of portages he has trod, unchanged from the time of America's pathfinders; of scuffing with his boots the same rocks the moccasins of Indians and voyageurs scuffed long ago. The 80 or 100 miles he paddled and portaged

will become longer and longer in his memory until he, too, will have joined the ancient seekers for the western sea. The fish he caught become larger and longer until he qualifies as a true Izaak Walton. He, in his own concept, will become an intrepid voyageur who with only a canoe, a box of matches and a few handfuls of food, conquered the wilderness. He will dream of the day when he can return to the Canoe Country and the tales he tells will cause many other Scouts to yearn for such an adventure.

Battle for the Wilderness

A 25-year war to keep the Quetico-Superior as our last untouched wilderness is entering its final battle. Resort builders and power and timber tycoons eye the 4,000-square mile tract and regard it a criminal waste to padlock forest land and exclude all forms of mechanical travel. Advocates of commercialization say they cannot understand why canoeists get so disturbed over the prospect of a few roads and tourist lodges. Let more people in, they say — the country will be just as beautiful as ever. Superficially, yes, but resorts mean concentration of fishermen, outboard motors, aircraft, a portable radio on every beach where now only the deer come down to drink. The fish would disappear — in iced cartons by air express. The moose, wolf and beaver would leave. Only the trees would remain — ^{for a few years} until the loggers came in.

Commercial interests have infiltrated the wilderness with resort outposts which can only be established and maintained, in the absence of roads, by use of airplanes. In 1950, wilderness lovers succeeded in securing a presidential ban of the use of airplanes over the roadless area after Jan. 1, 1952. Last summer, owners of these resorts flaunted the order by painting in bold letters on their deluxe station wagons, "We'll still be flying in '52." Immediately after January 1 and repeatedly since, airplanes have deliberately been flown over the banned area to provoke a test case. So far, nothing has been done to enforce the regulation.

(Ed. Note: This is as of March 1.)

If the airplane ban is beaten, the resort operators and industrialists will have a foot in the door — in fact, a whole leg. They will go on from there to tame the wilderness to their own profit. There are thousands of lakes with roads and lodges; the Quetico-Superior area is not only the most beautiful canoe country left, it's practically the last. If the Quetico-Superior wilderness is lost, it will not be possible to move northward, or anywhere else, to find another. To the north is sub-Arctic wilderness of endless muskeg and stunted trees, but the Quetico is big-timber country and it is custom-built for canoes.

"Friends of the Wilderness" state-side and a comparable Canadian Quetico-Superior Committee, backed up by agencies like the Izaak Walton League and Canadian and American Legions, are fighting for the preservation of the wilderness and the establishment of an international wilderness forest straddling the border as a living memorial to Canadians and Americans who fought side by side in two world wars.

If the battle for the wilderness is decided by dollars, real he-man canoeing is doomed to become a lost art, to be added to the lore of the campfire along with the making of Indian arrowheads and the building of birchbark canoes. Today's Boy Scouts, adventure-bound Explorers tomorrow, will be able to say, "We'll still be paddling after '52" only if the heritage of 29 years of canoeing on the trails is preserved in the next few months.

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