

“A Camping Trip in the Algonquin National Park”

Transcription via www.algonquinpark.on.ca

(Transcript from the Editorial Section of *The Toronto Sunday World*, 11 August, 1912. Thanks to the National Gallery of Canada for the image and Rory MacKay for the transcription)

“This is a plea for the campers who go out in the woods alone, prepared to pack their own duffle and canoes, do their own cooking, get their own fish and find their own way.

Guides may be alright, but with them the canoe cruiser leads a sort of lazy existence and he doesn't get the most enjoyment and the most good of his trip.

And about the best place for the city man who essays to hit the woods on his own book is Algonquin Park. It is sufficiently well traveled to keep the portages fairly open and reduce the chances of getting lost to just about the minimum in backwoods travel. The Ontario Government has issued maps of the park that help the wayfarer find his way if he uses considerable wood sense but these maps are not all they should be in the way of accuracy.

Two is the most popular sized party in the bush. Four fellows, if they are all hard workers and non-shirkers, prepared each to do his share, make an good gang for the bush, but four fellows of a mind when it comes to work as well as progress are hard to find. Therefore, two will get along better and faster.

One of the men at least should be pretty good at cooking. He doesn't need to be fine at fancy dishes, but able to stand over a smoky blaze and patently fry the fish to a turn. It's fierce when the beans burn, and you're placed in about the same opposition as the missionary to the Eskimos, who cast adrift on an ice floe and essaying to eat his boots, incontinently sneezed his false teeth into the middle of Baffin's Bay. We've heard of the fellow that could make wild blueberry pie in a fry pan, but they exist only in fancy and in the stories brought home.

Yes, the commissariat department is the important part of the expedition. This practice of lugging a lot of luxuries over mile long portages tho, doesn't go to Algonquin Park. The average canoe cruiser tears open his grub pack after he's toiled thru the sun and mosquitoes up a steep rocky hill, and fires the jam pots

and tinned dope at the tree tops and lives on bacon and beans , and rice and bread with a very few side dishes. And he thrives on the simple fare, altho, it's a sudden change from high life in the city to chasing beans round a tin plate. On the third day out every camper makes up a bill of fare that he's going to have at the finest restaurant when he gets back to town.

However, there's no more pleasant time than when the cookee lifts the boiling, good-smelling kettles off the wangan over the fire, gives the meat in the fry-pan just one extra flip, and you sit down to eat and eat .

Then the evening meal over, and everything ship shape for the night; the tent pegs in securely and the ropes pulled tight; the canoe drawn up and all the little odds and ends that might get left or lost put away; the smudge smoking of your pipe pulling well; ah, that's the best time of the day. You chat for awhile as the day dies out and the dark creeps into the woods around. And then as that still hush of the north sifts in with the mist, and the lake glistens with the last red glows of the west, you stop talking and just think.

And then, slowly the wind that dropped with the sun stirs the trees and the lake; back in the bush things are moving. You stir uneasily. You are sure you saw two bright eyes shining with the reflected glow of the fire. Then, far across the open sky the loon sends out its wild, weird call, the wood owls harshly reply, and suddenly the air is alive with mingled sounds. And just as suddenly all is still again. The quietness pervades your very soul. Subdued you crawl into the tent, hang up the mosquito netting, draping its folds about the entrance, light the candle, put out a few extra clothes, and enfolding the blankets about you , soon dream of street cars with flat wheels pounding by the door.

Maybe you're awakened during the night with the noise of heavy feet and the stirring sound of deep breathing. You pound on the canvas wall and off something scampers into the crinkling underbrush. A deer, attracted by the moonshine on the white tent most likely, but it sounded more like a bear, and you smile pleasantly and sleepily to yourself as you frame up the hair-raising story that you'll tell the tender-feet back in the city – only to drop back to slumber before you have a chance to enjoy their words of surprise.

And in the morning, the bright, fresh dewy dawn, it's up early for a quick start. Breakfast over, and the dishes packed, the stuff is loaded into the canoe and away you go to find one of those portages marked as being in the north arm of the lake, just behind a jutting point, but which you find is to the south-east by east, and up a creek.

And then for that beautiful job of portaging. If you are good at packing up your duffle into well-balanced loads you'll go over that portage in two trips with about sixty or seventy pounds on each journey, and while if a man was to carry that much four miles over the city streets he'd get a half column on the front page the weary camper who totes the load gets nothing but black fly bites, and the consciousness of having got into another lake.

But it's all in the game. You'll probably discover a score of muscles that you never knew you had, but which force themselves to your notice by reason of their aching in twenty different styles. But then think of the way the girls will admire your brawny, sinewy arms as you strut about the office with your sleeves rolled up displaying muscles that shine beneath a tawny skin. Much of the joy, no doubt, consists in what you will bring home in the way of fancy fiction and fish maybe. Also, the ninety-seven odd mosquito and fly bites. And by the way, do you know that so far as skeeters, black flies, sand flies and midges go that the female of the species is more deadly than the male. The male pest of the bush which Longfellow, it is said, called "the forest's prime evil" is a gallant gentleman who goes about sipping sweet nectar and minds his own business, while the lady is a whining, peevish, venomous virago who gads about seeking whose blood she can devour.

Catching fish is great sport. Not catching them is, well, that's a different matter. Don't go to Algonquin keyed up with the idea that you are going to land every fish in the lakes. Don't imagine for a second that you are going to bring to the surface sufficient succulent meat to fill a cold storage for months. Assuredly you are not. You may have to eat bacon for the entire trip. Some enthusiastic alleged fishermen have been known to undergo such a cruel ordeal. True, there are fish – plenty of them – in these woodland lakes, but fishing is like playing "long shots."

Trolling is the most popular way of doing it. Some indulge in still fishing, but the pains and patience are hardly worth the while. Trolling is strenuous labor. This is especially true in the case of the man who supplies the motive power to the canoe. It is very simple and comfortable for the one who sits still, holds the line and waits for some "sucker" to grab the bait. He gets all the fun there is in it. He has the sport of landing the fish. If the spoon or minnow happens to deceive a whopper, of course the joy to landing it repays for hours of fruitless labor.

Wake up at 6 a.m., scare up a little breakfast, and start out. This is the best time, just when the mist is lifting off the water, and the air is as cool as October. At this time the fish are most easily deceived. And at this time black flies are not so apt to follow your canoe. These pesky, vicious insects make life miserable during the hotter period of the day. Dusk is also a favorable time to troll. When it is growing dark the fish go strong for bait. And, if perchance you don't get any "strikes" you have the opportunity of stirring up a few loons, whose weird calls echo and re-echo, and give you the jigs -- a milder form of the creeps, and then the reflections on the water as the sun is casting its dying rays of the day fill one's soul with poetry, pleasant thoughts and so forth. Fishing for sure isn't the only thing in these wilds."