

**Diary of the Third Waterborne Expedition, to Killarney Provincial Park.**

**Undertaken in the summer of 2000, commencing on the 3rd day of August.**

**Under the pen of Robbert Thomas**

**Crew: Robert, Simon, Richard, Anthony**

**To Strive  
To Seek  
To Find  
And Not To Yield**

**Thursday, August 3**

It has been a glorious summer day, quite contrary to the weather forecasts, and David Lake, where we are now encamped, abutting the Silver Peak massif, has provided the best swimming in our experience. This is due to the lake being entirely bereft of life. The great mining metropolis of Sudbury is located to the north, and the Big Stack there has over many years spewed forth copious pollutants, which becoming thus airborne have migrated south for deposition in the various lakes and rivers. Wherefore do we owe the excellent swimming to the fortuitous discovery and separation of nickel, and to the consummate skill and hard work of the Sudberionians.

For signs of life within the lake are quite abject, since it is surrounded by quartzite and therefore slow to recover. As to fish, there are none. Plant life is entirely absent. But the water is perfectly clear, and the rocks bereft of troublesome algae. Also, we are camped on a rocky promontory which affords the specifications for diving, so that our enjoyment of the dead lake is further enhanced. What is more, not only can the water be drunk without purification, so acidic is the stuff, but drinking large amounts purges the stomach and the intestines, killing microorganisms. So I have ordered the men to consume at least five litres a day.

The site, though, however excellent, was only secured by a dashing stratagem. The 740 metre portage from Bell Lake to the swampy ingress of David Lake was being overcome. Richard and Anthony, who have continued in their role of Forward Element, had of course reached the portage first and carried the baggage to the other side. Simon and I came up subsequently, likewise took up our impedimenta, and set out for the portage terminus. We met Richard and Anthony on their return, as they made their way back to collect their boat. They warned us of the probable presence of a bear, for they had seen a large and hulking form crashing through the

underbrush, too short for a deer and too cumbersome for a moose. Simon asked Richard if he might hand over his cannister of bear repellent, which for the protection of the Forward Element Richard always carries on his person. Richard replied emphatically in the negative, and I backed him, saying the Forward Element is not expendable. So Simon and I proceeded nervously to the portage terminus, to deposit our packs. Our attention, however, was soon diverted from bears. For at the terminus, a young family was milling about, consisting of a father and mother, and two young daughters. Now the children seemed quite exhausted, and were beseeching of their mother when they should make camp and where, for they were quite fatigued. To this the mother replied fondly that the family would encamp at 'the point', which was the best place on the lake, and that they would arrive there presently, at which time they could all relax and swim.

I was attentive to this conversation, and immediately took mental note of the mother's comments. For "the point" was exactly my objective, and I did not intend to relinquish it. I told Simon as we started back that the Forward Element must be alerted. We soon met Richard and Anthony on the path, canoe aloft, and I ordered them to halt and listen, speaking to them as follows:

"Pay attention. You have new orders. The young family yonder have indicated in their conversation, which I happened to overhear, that they were going to make for 'the point', and that it is the best camp on the lake. I can only conclude that this is the same place that we ourselves have designated as our first day's objective. You must intercept them. Load your canoe with all speed and launch immediately. Use whatever means at your disposal. You must reach 'the point' first and secure it. Simon and I will follow up and effect a junction with you there. God speed and good luck. And God save the Queen!" Their eyes lit up with excitement, and they set off at double time without a further word. I remarked to Simon, who was marvelling at their zeal, "When I let loose the Forward Element, like a dog off its lead, there is no preventing it."

Simon and I, however, did not find "the point" all at once. In fact, the site which I myself had assumed to be "the point", on the south shore of the lake, nearest Silver Peak, was occupied by other campers. We hugged the coast and continued, eventually reaching the lake's extreme western end, which disappeared in a swampy inlet, with no sign of the Forward Element, despite my frequent calls (to Simon's dismay) of "Ahoy there!" At length I spied a canoe in the far distance, and using my Bushnells, could eventually make out the occupants as Richard and Anthony, canoeing vigorously in our direction, and periodically waiving their paddles wildly to attract our attention. And so, once I was sure of the identity of the oncoming boat, Simon and I turned about and soon we all met up in the middle of the lake. Richard was very animated and excited and debriefed us in the following words:

"The young family, chatting at the portage terminus, did not push off in time and we beat them to the quick. Having brought up the canoes, Anthony and I loaded the impedimenta and without

delay set off, canoeing at double time. We heard the two young girls complaining of their exhaustion, their mother commiserating that soon they would reach 'the point' and relax and swim. This merely got our blood up. So we entered the main lake and headed straight to a rocky promontory on the north shore, which, after Anthony examined the map, we suspected must be 'the point', owing to the optimal location, despite your suggestion that the best site was to be had along the south shore. We reached the promontory and it was deserted. We landed and beached the canoes and brought up the impedimenta, and then stood guard on the promontory's edge, paddles at the ready, thereby completing the young family's discomfiture. They eventually came into view, and canoed to within a hundred yards of our position. Their boats, which were two, then came together as if in conference, and we could hear the two young girls crying profusely that their site had been occupied."

"I yelled at them: 'Go hence in the name of the Queen! We claim this site. If you approach any closer, we shall use all means at our disposal to repel you. Though you outnumber us, we have the advantage of the high ground. Furthermore, we are not alone. The main body of our force will be arriving presently to reinforce us. Thus, if you assault, you do so uphill, and your rear is exposed to attack. So go hence. You will find a patch of swamp over yonder, where you can take refuge for the night, though it be damp and unhealthy.' Thus did I spake and the young family withdrew ignominiously. We then had a swim and, afterwards, scanning for you on the lake, spotted a dot on the horizon, and, surmising that it must be your boat, launched to retrieve you."

I congratulated the Forward Element for their excellent work and their tactical insight, while chiding Richard for his smugness, saying that he should behave more magnanimously to the vanquished, and we set off.

This victory consummated a day begun with hardship. We arrived late last evening at the grounds, the long access road from route 69, a most tedious undertaking. We encamped in a barren gravel pit not far from the access point on Bell Lake, making no provision for a fire of any sort, and pitching our tent on the rough ground under the glare of headlights. We had been told to encamp there by the grounds management, that it was Crown land, and that as Canadian subjects we were permitted so to do. But the unevenness of the terrain was disconcerting, and a wrong step could prove fatal, causing one to plummet headlong down a precipitous embankment. The men were hungry but nothing could be done, and I had no choice but to acquiesce in the orange juice being untimely raided. I do believe, however, that Richard and Anthony found succour by recourse to a dube. What provoked the greatest misery, however, and must go down in the annals of our adventure as a grievous blunder, was the forgetting by Richard and Anthony of the tent pegs. These are an indispensable and the tent cannot easily be erected without them. At first, I blamed this astonishing lack of foresight on the copious dubage, but there was no point extenuating the matter, and I directed Richard and Anthony to secure the rings and cords by means of large stones.

When we rose this morning it was cloudy, and spirits were generally low, and furthermore we were stocked by a wily fox, who circled about in a wide perimeter. Then, having imbibed what remained of the orange juice, we set off on a long diversion, for we were obliged to drive into the town of Killarney, in order to supply the deficiency of tent pegs which Richard and Anthony had forgotten. Also, Anthony needed to purchase a gas burner (my own stove being mislaid).

The excursus was not without its merits, however, for Killarney is a picturesque little harbour, crowded with monstrous inboard cruisers and crawling with Yankee tourists. We four of us, somewhat conspicuous in our appearance, our attire unkempt, our hair dishevelled, our countenances besmirched by two days of growth, our belts laden with various multiplex implements and other paraphernalia of camping, and not having performed any ablutions, as we ambulated among the legions of stylish, middle-aged yachtsmen, whose fondest notion of wilderness exploration doubtless consisted in a brisk nine holes, found refuge in the quaint dock-side inn which was in process of serving up breakfast. We were somewhat taken aback, however, when the maitre-de inquired loudly, on our entering the place, whether we were with the package group, whose name I forget, but which may have been Bounders of Adventure or Yachtsmen's Excursus or the Hammerhead Club or something like that, in which case we could partake of the buffet. It is a good thing none of us have yachts or have yet attained middle-age, for the buffet looked unpalatable and we politely declined, instead ensconcing ourselves at a table and demanding menus.

So the folly of the tent pegs was momentarily forgotten while we partook of a full and hearty breakfast. I say full and hearty and my omission of the word "delicious" is quite intentional. But it hit the spot in the circumstances, and then we planned our immediate tasks. We had already obtained the tent pegs at Killarney Outfitters, not actually in the town but on the way. Anthony explained to the proprietor that he had forgotten the tent pegs, taking full responsibility for his oversight, and aluminium replacements were quickly furnished forth. Anthony also lacked a propane burner, quite astonishingly, and asked for one of these as well, volunteering to pay for it.

Now the attendant was most helpful indeed. Only one model of burner was available, consisting of a single small burner powered by a small hand-pressurised liquid fuel thermos. However, of this one model, there were two variations. One used the standard liquid fuel only, and the other model, considerably more expensive, could operate not only on the standard fuel, but also on European motorcar gasoline. The attendant helpfully elaborated that the "dual-fuel model" would come in handy if we had occasion to camp on the European continent. Anthony was excited by this idea, and began talking about the possibility of next year camping in France, and that we could always stop at the side of a highway in France and pitch our camp. Furthermore, he could speak passing French and would happily solicit gasoline on behalf of the entire group, were we to camp in France. We tried to share Anthony's enthusiasm but emphasised the cost differential, and that,

after all, it may be several years before we had occasion to sojourn on the European continent, in France or any other place, because there was still a lot of ground to cover in our own jurisdiction.

So Anthony relented, opting for the less useful but less expensive single-fuel model, and the attendant promptly lead us outside onto the porch for a demonstration. Her words were eloquent: "The operating principle of the non-dual-fuel single-burner hand-pressurised liquid fuel stove is that of fuel wastage and conflagration. Pressurised canisters ignite easily and burn cleanly and efficiently. This model has the advantage of being ignited, and remaining lit, only by the most extreme exertions, and of consuming fuel at a prodigious rate. Having filled the thermos, pump it about a dozen times, then release the valve, toss a match and run away. The resulting conflagration will consume all matter in the immediate vicinity, but eventually, when there is nothing left un-charred and the conflagration has burnt itself out, you may return and cook your meal amid the scorched wasteland. And for you four, one container of fuel should suffice for the six days." As she said this we beheld a great blaze rising on the patio, which took some effort to extinguish by stamping and throwing sand. But the demonstration of the inefficiency of the burner was awesome, for we had never known the wonders of liquid fuel and hand-pressurisation, and priding ourselves on being high-impact campers, destruction of large areas of wilderness by fire had a definite appeal. We speculated, however, than the one canister of fuel might not be sufficient for six days and four men, and not having opted for the dual-fuel model, we could not supplement a fuel shortage by enjoining passing motorists, and besides there were no motorists at all within the back-country, and this was not Europe, and the device was inimical to North American gasoline. So having purchased two canisters of the liquid fuel, and gingerly packing up the burner according to its instructions, so that it would not explode, we thanked the attendant, paid and withdrew. What was even more exciting, however, was that the two canisters of liquid fuel, though heavy and bulky, would not take up as much space as the nine super-light pressurised propane/butane cartridges which we had brought along to power my super-light titanium dual-burner camping stove (which as I said has been mislaid).

Thence we proceeded into Killarney proper, for after fighting the conflagration we were all quite famished, having partaken only of the orange juice that morning and not of the hot oatmeal porridge which I had planned, since a stove had not been unavailable. Were it not for my brilliant insight in planning a hot meal on the first morning, in fact, we would not have noticed the lack of a stove until we were encamped on David Lake itself, by which point the situation would not have been remediable. Another reason for venturing into town was for the purpose of Anthony's obtaining a fishing licence, for he had brought along a collapsible rod, and of course fishing without a licence would be a contravention I would never tolerate. And so, after a short time, all the necessary activities complete, the supply of tobacco supplemented, and a camping stove now in our possession, we set off once again for the access point, launching from Bell Lake in the early afternoon. Morale was soon further elevated, for not only was our hunger sated, but as we canoed the clouds parted and the whole convoy was bathed in sunlight.

On securing the promontory after the repulse of the young family, we immediately set to work establishing the encampment, for it was here that we were scheduled to remain not for one night but for two, in accordance with the itinerary, for which reason securing the most picturesque and salubrious place had been the more imperative. A foraging expedition was instituted, after the tent had been raised and the gear hauled up. Anthony and Simon regretted the lack of a hatchet or a machete, our wood-processing equipment amounting only to the reliable collapsible saw, which we had taken the previous year and which had proven its utility, and which had the advantage of being extremely light-weight. I admonished the two of them that heavy and cumbersome items like the machete and the hatchet were best left behind in civilization, that in the wilderness they serve only to slow us down. Supposing, for instance, that Anthony and Richard's canoe had been encumbered with a machete and a hatchet. Might not such heavy impedimenta have reduced their rate of speed significantly? Might not the young family have gained on them? Might not a boat with two young children and two ageing parents have bested my Forward Element, on account of their being weighted-down by heavy equipment, taken for the purpose of felling trees and processing logs. This would have been a signal defeat from which the expedition might not have recovered. The elan and repute of the forward element would have been a thing of the past. "Imagine all of you", I said, "if we had been relegated to the swamps to make our encampment, as we have relegated the young family. Imagine if the young family had gained the promontory for our want of lightness in the equipage, as the result of hauling bulky equipment out of our insatiable lust for wood. Sure, we would now be well endowed with quantities of kindling and sizeable logs processed with utmost speed. But we would enjoy this luxury hunkered in a swamp, beset by mosquitoes, making our places of repose on the soggy ground, the air rank and unhealthy."

I then distracted the men from their bickering by ordering a distribution of chocolate. This was not the usual milk chocolate, for I had not been able to find any in sufficient quantity, but rather heavy bars of coconut chocolate, whose appeal among the enlisted men I had at first suspected. In the event, it was an enormous success, by consensus the coconut shards complementing the taste of the dark chocolate admirably, and the men thanked me effusively. After this light snack I then prepared dinner, which was as follows: We brought along a large sirloin roast, which had been frozen until the moment of departure. I now took this out of its plastic encasing, and carved into chops by means of my multiplex implement, which were then seasoned. Once a bed of coals had been consolidated, we arranged the small collapsible grill, which comes with its own stand, and I proceeded to barbeque the roast as steaks. As accompaniments, I prepared fried mushrooms sauteed in olive oil and pepper, and pan-fried potatoes. These were done on the single burner which Anthony had purchased, having perilously ignited the device. The men ate with gusto and it was a delightful repast taken while ensconced on the promontory's edge as the sun began its decline and the dead lake sparkled.

The men's spirits were the more elevated because the eggs had been safely delivered. This was no small issue. The presence of fresh eggs, I have always found, is an effective morale booster and this year I brought a larger number. However, the eggs I purchased are of the large variety, which is fine, except that the egg containers are designed to accommodate only medium-sized eggs. By various means I had cushioned the eggs within the containers, which could not be made to close completely until some of the eggs were consumed, thus providing more space, and so had to be secured with elastic bands. The opening of the containers was, on this account, a matter of great anticipation, and the discovery that the eggs had all survived intact caused much rejoicing.

The sunset was particularly spectacular, and the site perfectly situated so as to enhance its appreciation. The promontory, though adequately wooded and not entirely barren, nevertheless admits of a good wind, which is all the more refreshing, except that it also provides a natural stoke and the wood was consumed at a furious rate, the pit being very well placed on the top of the promontory but also therefore exposed. And so as the night went on, we were gradually bereft of wood, and Richard regretted not only the machete and the hatchet, but also a chainsaw, which he claimed he could use to demolish an entire stand of birch in a matter of seconds.

Simon then made a most remarkable observation. He declared in utter amazement that the moon was staring directly at him, by some fortuitous positioning of the moon and the earth, and that moon rays were pointing at his feet. This strange celestial event, he announced, must surely happen only once in a man's life, and how singular that it should occur on this particular canoe trip. "This is surely a sign and an omen," he said, "a propitious indicator of our good fortune. The expedition will thrive, and no harm shall befall us. For the moon this night, what the Romans called Luna, directs her golden beams at our encampment. It is a manifestation of divine favour. The gods smile upon this enterprise, and we shall not fail in our endeavours. Quick, let us sacrifice some of our provisions in the burning fire, to appease Luna and acknowledge her favour."

Now I have spoken in a previous memoir of the men's inclination to superstition. On the one hand, Simon's devotion to Luna aroused deep admiration. On the other hand, he was surely mistaken in his understanding of lunar light, and furthermore a sacrifice of much-needed provisions on some spurious presumption of divine favour did not seem prudent. Soon, however, Richard, who had dabbled in astrology, offered Simon a counter-explanation: "I worship Luna and revere her, and we must all invoke her protection, especially during the hours of dark. But Simon, she does not look upon you. For she is far away and very big, and her glorious illumination bathes the whole orb of the earth. It is your perspective which deceives you. Her very presence this night in such brilliant fullness is auspicious, and no doubt she smiles upon our enterprise, but all see and appreciate her in equal measure, and I, too, behold her effulgent beams directed full toward me."

After such a devout and knowledgeable explanation of the workings of Luna, an eerie silence descended, as the men contemplated the machinations of the gods and the inconstancy of Fortune. Eventually we all retired, one by one, the exertions and stresses of a long and eventful day overcoming us. And instead of sacrificing good provisions in the fire, we poured libations of cold tea, to appease the god of extinguishment.

Mentioned in dispatches:

Simon, for securing two dispensers of spices and seasonings and producing them at dinner to the general merriment.

Richard & Anthony, for intercepting the young family, securing "the point" and thus completing their discomfiture, and for holding the point until the main body came up (1000 points).

Demerits:

Richard & Anthony, for forgetting the tent pegs (500 points).

Anthony, for inadvertently stabbing his toe with his multiplex implement, thereby sustaining a self-inflicted wound which may inhibit the Forward Element (200 points).

Simon, for not cooperating with my investigation into the missing stove, for not willing to be interrogated as to its whereabouts, and for silent insubordination (300 points).

### **Friday, August 4th**

This day was set aside for a single purpose and for that alone: to gain Silver Peak, the highest prominence in Killarney. This was our first major goal to be overcome, aside from ad hoc emergencies like intercepting the young family, and it was the subject of meticulous planning. We rose at a reasonable hour and the first order of business was a full morning repast consisting of kippers and fresh eggs fried in butter. It is the tradition, invariably observed, to enjoy kippers and eggs on the first morning in back-country. The men expect it of me and if I did not provide it, or became unwilling or incapable, or some other exigency interposed to prevent the preparation of kippers and eggs, my position as leader would be at risk and the men could riot. For kippers and eggs is one of those institutions which preserves social peace and maintains the settled order of things. Along with them, copious amounts of thick, black coffee was available, sweetened lovingly with cubed sugar and perfected by the precious coffee whitener. The latter is a more than adequate substitute for fresh milk, and the men have become accustomed to its



chemical taste. And to complete the repast, if one is in need of additional fortification, English muffins can be had, laden with peanut butter.

It was fortunate that the sun was again bright in the sky, for it would have been difficult to motivate the men under conditions of inclement weather. I ordered the men to deploy in "light formation", which is the standing order in respect of expeditions from a base camp. We equipped ourselves with granola bars, chocolate, gorp and landjaeger sausage, and filled our skins to capacity. Other equipments included maps, multiplex utility implements as needed, including my deluxe Swiss Army tool, smoking paraphernalia, bandages in case of injury, and a sufficiency of iodine tablets, should our supply of water need refreshing. In addition to these things, I packed my compass, Bushnell binoculars, a whiskey flask, and the disposable camera. These were carried in my special utility belt, which, as I have mentioned in a previous memoir, is strictly a prerogative of command, and which the enlisted men are permitted to look at and inquire about but never to touch.

The crossing was uneventful, except that there is a lovely little isle in the middle of David Lake which Anthony proposed we swim from as a preliminary, in which he was vociferously overruled by myself, with the vocal support of the majority of the expedition, after deliberation at a special council. For Anthony is afflicted by what is known as "swimming mania". He cannot resist to swim at every opportunity, and is known to go to extreme and dangerous ends in order to reach a place reputed for swimming, whether such locales be attested by eye-witness accounts and therefore part of the factual record, or merely places of rumour and fancy, whose existence is a matter of speculation or myth. When seized by a mania, Anthony will babble on and purport to describe the swimming locale, even, as I said, if it's very existence cannot be proven, in the most expansive language. Or spying a place which appears suitable for swimming, he will go into a trance, fixated on the single idea of swimming, moving inexorably toward the place, not suffering to be prevented by man or beast. In these cases, he needs to be restrained, his attention diverted by dubage and landjaeger, and some attempt made to reason with him in his frenzy. This time, before Anthony's mania became well advanced, we undertook to go to the isle to swim on the way back from our hike, at which point, in any event, we would be in greatest need of refreshment, and Anthony reluctantly acceded.

The hike was pleasant though arduous, the maps giving a false impression of the actual length of the path, since it does not convey the additional distance caused by hilly, irregular terrain. Some parts of the journey were quite steep and rocky, others involved lateral, intermediate marches across the white limestone ridges. Sometimes the foliage was sparse, consisting of outgrowths of pine and moss, at other times we laboured along narrow, well-wooded defiles. The pathway was marked by cairns built up from stones, sometimes assembled into ingenious designs (one looked like a dog, another like an artillery piece), and also by blue arrows pegged to trees and bushes. The rock formations were fascinating, sometimes showing a stratigraphy on the cliff-faces, and

the limestone was not jagged mainly but undulated like great petrous waves frozen in time. The summit was a continuous stretch of shining white limestone plateaus. We beheld a view which commanded as far as the eye could see. To the distant north, a mere unsightly speck, the great metropolis of Sudbury with its huge, protruding stack which fortuitously caused our lake to perish. To the south, at some distance away, the shores of Georgian Bay itself, the horizon disappearing in misty waters and islands. And immediately below us, stretching out on all sides, picturesque lakes, rivers and swamps, surrounded by thick pine forest, with brilliant highlights of shining white limestone. The very highest summit was surmounted by the remnants of the superstructure of an abandoned weather station. The sky above us was a continuous vault of blue, and the sun bore heavily upon us, while the white limestone actually reflected the heat, thereby intensifying the effect of the sun's glare.

But we enjoyed the summit for some time, ensconcing ourselves on the hard rock, and partook of luncheon in full enjoyment of our surroundings, before exploring the various plateaus in succession. Richard discovered droppings, probably, he said, of a bear. He had no knowledge of how to identify animal droppings, but said that we should fear the worst. And soon a second and third pile of droppings were discovered, to Richard's dismay. Studying the droppings carefully, he said that they seemed to contain the digested remains of berries, for the summit was pocked with wild berry plants, not edible to humans but perhaps palatable to bears. Richard seized his bear repellent, released the safety clip and advised us all to stay close and form up in phalanx, should a bear appear. We found this burdensome, so I detailed Richard to make a study of the droppings on his own, plot their locations, estimate whether they were recent or old, and describe their colour, texture, and contents. For this would be useful information not only for the present, but also in future, should the bear problem become endemic. After all, Richard, being custodian of the bear repellent, needs thorough information on bears and their habits, migratory patterns and diet, if he is to provide competent protection.

A German introduced himself to us and offered to take our picture as a group, to which we reluctantly agreed. He also mentioned a certain lake, called Topaz Lake, which, though hard to access, had the most perfect swimming imaginable. These words were unfortunately uttered within ear-shot of Anthony, and he began to extract from the German all sorts of details about the place: where it was located on the map, how to get there, the size of the lake, the formations surrounding it, etc. I took the German aside and politely advised him that he should speak no further of Topaz Lake, or any other place where the swimming is good, for he would send my poor colleague into a frenzy, and that if he brought up the matter of swimming again, I would have to ask him to leave the summit. All the same it was too late, for Anthony was already fixated on Topaz Lake, and began pouring over the map to determine the quickest and most efficient means of getting there. The German also presumed to lecture us on various hiking routes, which I found annoying because the itinerary was firmly established and he would only excite the enlisted men to undertake foolish adventures.

We eventually began the descent when the heat became unbearable. Unfortunately, when we emerged from the wooded path back onto the open limestone ridges, we lost our way, for the cairns and blue arrows could not be found. I struck out on my own to explore an alternative route suggested by a line of cairns, but this proved unproductive and I eventually rejoined the main group. Then, retracing our steps as far as possible to recover our bearings, we soon rediscovered the route and continued on course down to the water's edge.

The swim on the small island in the middle of David Lake was extremely enjoyable and refreshing, especially since we were all fatigued and sweaty after the long journey to the summit of Silver Peak and the subsequent descent. Richard even discovered some objects which he insisted were artefacts. We did, however, accede to his demand that he scout the little island for bear droppings, his repellent at the ready, before we actually landed, then signalling the all-clear with elaborate hand gestures designed "to obfuscate any ursine predators, especially of the aquatic type". The short return to camp was uneventful save for Simon precipitating into the lake as he disembarked, a matter which he dismissed lightly but which I view as an indication of the need for remedial training. Or perhaps Simon has become somewhat nervous about my investigations into the missing propane stove. For I have made it clear that everyone will be questioned in due course.

Naturally we were completely famished, so I prepared a double ration of Kraft dinner, improved with Parmesan cheese and sliced pepperoni. For no matter what hardships they face and overcome, the men are always diverted with a good meal, and it restores morale and confidence. After dinner we relaxed on the rocky promontory by the flickering light of the hearth, under an open sky bespeckled with innumerable stars (even satellites could be spotted), drinking tea and whiskey and Alpenbitter and smoking a variety of things, in some cases cured tobacco leaf, and in other cases a species of malodorous weed. With respect to the tea, we have had to boil water directly on the live coals, despite the deleterious effect it has on the tea pot, since we are increasingly concerned for the supply of liquid fuel.

Richard, however, became by stages gloomy, and when I asked him why, he replied that the deadness of the lake was creating "a feeling of death". To which Anthony responded "Yes, I too feel gloom and dread, and it seems to originate in the bosom of the bereft lake." The men became increasingly fearful and nervous, despite my dismissal of their ludicrous apprehensions. Simon remarked that the promontory was an eerie and haunted place and that we should never have encamped here. And when they began to talk of morbid death and rotting carrion, I sent them all to bed, believing that prolonged exposure to the sun may have affected their judgement.

Mentioned in dispatches:

Richard: for observing the bear droppings, and conducting a thorough study of them in order to learn more of the habits of bears.

Anthony: for suggesting that we swim at the intermediate isle, and for conceding that we do so not at once but after surmounting the summit of Silver Peak.

Simon: for picking up the blue arrows and helping to restore us to the correct path

Demerits:

Simon: for precipitating into the water from his canoe on disembarkation, and for silent insubordination (200 points).

### **Saturday, August 5th**

We have conceded defeat and retreated ignominiously to the tent. Attacks by chipmunks can be repelled by planning and coordination, if you have serviceable weaponry, but the cunning of the mosquitos has proven insuperable. At exactly dusk, without warning, they launched a surprise attack, descending in large formations at low altitudes. We had just finished our repast, and were busy washing the dishes and implements, when suddenly death and destruction reigned down upon us. In any contest between humans and mosquitos, the latter have the advantage, owing to their diminutive size, their speed and agility, and their reckless disregard for casualties. The application of repellent is one measure to blunt their attack, but then they resort to guerilla tactics, hovering for patches of exposed flesh, or humming about the ears, wearing us down with that intolerable buzzing. And these mosquitos, though small and agile, are yet by comparison plump and robust, and you can almost distinguish thorax, legs and stinger, and bulging sack of human blood which they is their plunder and their impedimenta.

For we are established at the sole campsite on an island in Deacon Lake, in the extreme north-west corner of the park. This body of water is considerably smaller than David Lake, and also, much to our chagrin, teeming with life. Indeed it is surrounded by dense forest, and the shoreline fringed in places with what approaches swamp. The route of ingress from neighbouring Balsam Lake is particularly clogged with reeds and lily pads. Hence, Deacon Lake is the dominion of mosquitoes, and indeed a particularly virulent species of them.

The swimming is deficient and there are no rocky ledges from whence to dive. But Anthony could not be dissuaded, and he plunged in soon after landing. This was therapeutic, for the denial of swimming will cause Anthony to suffer a reaction, and his swimming mania to take hold. Anthony had not swum for several hours. He and Richard broke off from the convoy earlier in the day, at one of the northern inlets of David Lake. Anthony had spotted what he thought was an excellent swimming hole, and convinced Richard that their boat should make a diversion, and

catch up with Simon and me in due course. I reluctantly consented, knowing that it is better to indulge Anthony's mania when it is possible to do so, and that, if I denied the request, his disappointment and bitterness and resentment would be implacable. Besides, this new discovery might distract Anthony from his delirious obsession with the mysterious and inscrutable "Lake of Topaz".

So Simon and I, by a quirky twist of fate, discovered ourselves in the unfamiliar role of Forward Element. Simon was amused at the bitter irony, and could not restrain his quips. "How is it like, Robert, to lead from the front at last, like a real commander." I countered this by an admonition, recalling him to his duties: "Simon, you have the bow. I shall overlook your remark. Your duty is to sweep the forward approaches for hazards and obstacles, alert me to oncoming vessels, and keep the course true, so that the other boat, when it comes up, will have a clear path." And it was not long before Simon alerted me to a group of people occupying the beach head of the portage to Balsam Lake. As we came closer, and deployed my Bushnells, and we could discern that the group consisted entirely of women, a most uncanny spectacle. In due course we landed in their midst, and one of them, quite casually, advised us that they were thinking of "going topless". I thought it was a silly issue to contemplate on expedition, when matters of planning, logistics and commissariat should be foremost, but I said, just to humour them, that I could find no objection to the proposal. Simon added that not only was toplessness to be commended, but that the ladies should feel free to dispense with other superfluous outer garments. As Simon and I unloaded, another of the girls asked us how long we had been out, and we said two nights thus far. Another suggested that we should return to civilization and return with cold beer, to which I replied that this would only be entertained as a condition of their toplessness, adding furthermore that unfortunately we had no dehydrated beer and subsisted on Scotch whiskey.

Simon, on beholding the full grandeur of the assembled female host, exclaimed "I have heard of your kind. You are Amazons of legend, a tribe of savage female canoeists. They do not stay at home and occupy themselves in domestic tasks, but canoe to the beat of drums, hunt wild game with bow and arrow and wield the club and the spear. No doubt, you sacrifice bear and wild moose, build huts with your hands for shelter, don the pelts of beavers, and craft boats from hewn wood." Simon continued in this vein and soon beseeched the women to induct him into their tribe, insisting that he would undergo all manner of ordeal to prove his worthiness, and that he too would dispense with his outer garments if necessary. I pulled him away with the greatest difficulty, insisting that we must keep the itinerary and that it would be a disgrace for us to be derelict of duty while acting as the Forward Element. Besides, this wild tribe of women canoeists must be approached with circumspection, for who knows what their culture and customs are like, how they might treat us if we came into their power, and whether or not they practised cannibalism.

So, Simon and I continued with the portage, leaving the Amazons behind, came into Deacon Lake, and quickly gained the island site. We could not do much until Richard and Anthony came up, for they always have the tent and food pack, since as the forward element in the normal course, their first duty on securing an encampment is to erect the tent. But eventually they penetrated the swampy ingress, and I yelled to them, as they approached the landing, that it was a nice island but that the lake was unfortunately teeming with life. To which Richard yelled back "Yes, life is resilient and adaptive, much to our discomfiture. Witness my sighting this morning of a fish in David Lake." At this comment I turned away in disgust. For this morning, after we had finished our repast of pancakes and coffee, and were enjoying the sun and the morning breeze on the rocky promontory, some of us performing ablutions in the water below, Richard claimed to have sighted a fish in the dead lake. I dismissed it out of hand, saying that such a claim is beyond proof and therefore not worthy of scientific attention. "Sightings are notoriously unreliable, Richard, like Bigfoot and the Yeti." I said. "If there were a breeding population of fish in David Lake, there would be more tangible evidence."

It was a leisurely afternoon at our island site. We snacked on cheese and biscuits and chocolate. The men also partook of the customary dubage, and also their Alpenbitter, a cheap grog issued in large quantities to the enlisted men. Myself being leader I eschew these crude intoxicants and partake of cigars and good whiskey, and Simon too, being an enlisted man with aspirations to command, and therefore desiring to model himself on my behaviour, habits and comportment, will join me in a dram and condemn the nasty habits of his compeers. Since the lake is robust with life, as I have said, Anthony deployed his collapsible fishing rod, unfortunately to no avail. But it was nice to have the quaintness of someone fishing on expedition, which we had never before experienced. Richard and I played several games of backgammon by the water's edge. We regretted, however, the sudden raids by chipmunks, who made inroads in search of plunder. In a previous memoir I recounted epic battles against the chipmunks, and how we routed them and looted their acorns, obliging them to sue for peace. This, time, we kept them back with projectiles and forays, and surrounded our camp with ditch and palisade. Afterward, while foraging for wood, Anthony and Simon discovered a small standing tree, which has long-since been dead, and took the liberty of felling it. We then cut it up for fuel, using the collapsible saw, Richard also making use of my miniature Swiss Army saw, part of my multiplex implement, to trim the dead tree of small branches, and I commended his effort and was pleased by the aesthetic appearance of the cut logs. However, I could not commend Richard for his weak grasp of my doctrine of progressive combustibility, which he is still learning to apply, when he endeavoured to ignite and maintain the camping fire.

For dinner I planned a repast of spaghetti and instant sauce. Naturally, this requires the boiling of an appreciable quantity of water. Now I have said that we are increasingly concerned for the supply of liquid fuel for the exploding stove, even though we purchased two full canisters out of precaution. At this point, Anthony suggested, and the others concurred, that I place my stainless

steel pot, which has a shiny copper bottom, directly on the live coals. This not only would allow us to boil the requisite supply of water, but would do so more quickly than a mere stove, and would also conserve liquid fuel. I refused, for the notion of blackening my cooking receptacles was of the utmost repugnance to me. Could we suspend the pots over the fire instead, I suggested, by assembling a kind of tripod or counterweight apparatus? Anthony replied that he could rig and assemble anything, especially with a length of stout rope, for he was an experienced knots consultant. A system of pulleys and guy wires could allow us to manipulate the pot without it actually touching the fire. Richard suggested that we adopt the practice of the aboriginals, heat large rocks on the live coals instead, and then plunge them into the pot of water. This would have the effect of boiling the water at length without exposing the exterior of the vessel to flame. I responded to these suggestions by saying that Anthony might be capable of rigging up some elaborate device, but he better do so quickly or the light would fail and we should go hungry, and that Richard's suggestion, though ingenious, was inadmissible because large stones could have the effect of denting the bottom of the vessel.

Exasperated by these discourses, and always eager to fulminate, and, as I have said in a previous memoir, cunning to a fault, a quality accentuated by a keen legal mind, Simon leapt onto a sitting-log and delivered the following peroration.

"How much longer must we endure the shackles of tyranny! Are we but minions, mindless and dazed, needing to be instructed, harangued and cajoled in the performance of our daily tasks? Long have I warned you of the evils of one-man rule. Now the effects of this degenerate condition are plainly manifest. Are we stones? Are we blocks of wood? First, we are forced to encamp on our initial night in a gravel pit, when the supply of motel rooms in the vicinity is plentiful. A gravel pit, barren and desolate, littered with dangerous pot-holes and precipitous cliffs and gullies, besieged by rabid foxes, and probably contaminated by toxic waste! I was demeaned and diminished by the experience, and slept a ruinous night with my backside punctured and perforated by pebbles and small stones. Then, folly of follies, in an act of almost criminal negligence, the man forgets to bring his twin burner camping stove, an indispensable equipage, without which we cannot prepare tea or obtain hot food, or boil quantities of water, making it more potable to imbibe. Far from owning up, he couches our predicament in circumlocutions, speaking of contingency plans and proposing fact-finding missions to ascertain the truth. We know the truth. It is his absent-mindedness. While at the same time, he berates and denounces Richard and Anthony for forgetting a few measly tent pegs, which can readily be substituted by hand-crafted stakes. By such iniquities are we ground down! Thirdly, while the forward element, on my express advice, was systematically and carefully extricating the group from the wilderness of Silver Peak, where we had lost our way on the descent after emerging from the pathway onto the rocky slopes, by prudently turning back to the last place which we recognized as bearing on the correct route, our glorious leader goes off on a wild goose chase, or shall I say a wild cairns chase, pursuing instead a line of silly cairns, assembled as a joke or a

prank, no doubt, to lead astray the credulous, off into nowhere, causing the rest of us to organise a search party at great expense of time and effort. Are we loyal to obey a leader who gets lost and separated from his own men? Who heeds not the advice of his scouts and chases half-baked schemes without consideration? And now, instead of helping us to preserve fuel, an exigency, I might add, arising directly from his forgetting of the stove, by boiling water in the large pot upon the open coals, he argues and obstructs, using threats and dilatory tactics, on the grounds that exposing the pots to open flame will have the effect of blackening them on the exterior. What kind of leader sacrifices the welfare of his men for the sake of preserving metal pots pristine! Who would deprive the expedition of hot water for tea and ablutions, just to avoid sullyng his delicate hands with carbon-black. This is a camping ground, not a luxury resort. We wear dirt and soot and impurities with pride, on ourselves and on our equipments, as badges of honour and signs of hardihood, and do not flinch from their omnipresence like dainty housewives! Preposterous and intolerable! And what of these frequent mentions of the Queen? He speaks of the 'Queen's lakes', the 'Queen's gavel pit', the 'Queen's quartzite limestone', the 'Queen's shrubbery', and so on and so fourth. He does this to deflect the attention of the men away from serious issues, by exhorting the public adoration of a foreign despot. He uses the mystery and power of royalty to reinforce his own capricious authoritarianism. I say this: if the situation continues, let us invoke freedom, liberty, and enfranchisement, act as real men who know their rights, and throw off the yoke of oppression and servitude, tossing it into the fire to burn with the other debris, the better to besmirch those lately pristine pots!"

The men cheered and clapped enthusiastically, and lifted Simon onto their shoulders, carrying him aloft around the campsite, as if in triumph. I knew this behaviour could not go unchecked, lest any vestige of law and order break down, and the expedition be reduced to chaos. So I climbed to the top of the nearest tree and delivered the following rebuttal:

"Invert the pyramid of society and it will topple from imbalance! Pay no heed to the glib demagogue, who will excite your fears and anxieties then leave you bereft. The gravel pit was the nearest accommodation to the launching point, and Canadian subjects are permitted to encamp on Crown land. The foxes, though rabid and emaciated, were picturesque, and the pain and discomfort of sleeping on stones and pebbles builds character and hardens the body against privation. I have taught you to laugh in the face of adversity, and at the gravel pit you acquitted yourselves with honour. Desire for motel rooms is a standing grievance among the enlisted men, but so long as I am in charge this will be checked. For it softens the men and enervates them, diminishing their endurance by exposing them to luxury. As for the stove, I admit that it is not available. The investigation into its whereabouts is continuing. Under optimal circumstances, it would be here. Its absence is a discomfiture to everyone. While the stove belongs to me, and I do not have it, we have to keep an open mind and not jump to conclusions. Woe betide the man who accuses his leader of absent mindedness and then is proven wrong. This is not to say that I relinquish accountability. However, let us avoid casting aspersions, and not worry about who



forgot what until all the facts have been established. I do not wish to excite suspicion, but one begins to wonder if he who cunningly uses the lack of a stove to embroider his polemic and arouse discontent among the men might somehow be connected to its disappearance. Better to let me investigate the matter thoroughly and make a full report. Think instead of the tent pegs, whose disappearance is palpable and egregious, and how you can avoid such a calamity in future. From every great mistake a lesson can be learnt, and you can further hone your wilderness skills by diligently fashioning hand-made pegs in substitute, using your multiplex implements. I shall now speak of the cairns. It is true that in pursuing the line of cairns, I became separated from the main group. This was an opportunity for the men to solve a problem on their own. I myself investigated the cairns, not because it could lead us back to the correct path necessarily, although this was surely a possibility, but rather out of artistic and anthropological interest, matters far beyond the scope of the enlisted men. Also, I wanted to dispel by scientific investigation a certain rumour then current among you, that the cairns were in fact mysterious signalling devices planted by extraterrestrial beings. The enlisted men are liable to superstitions and can be demoralised by the operation of strange beliefs. And so, by looking into the cairns on my own, I was able to establish by dispassionate and logical inquiry that they were in fact the product of human ingenuity and not of some super-intelligence from a yonder galaxy. As for the pots being sullied, I was only endeavouring by example to ensure the cleanliness of the compound and its accoutrements. Consider yourselves fortunate that I do not conduct daily inspections of your feet and hands and kit, preferring instead to carry out spot-checks. For a clean camp is a well-run camp, and sullied pots and blackened fingers are the first signs of deterioration. Finally, I admit that I frequently acknowledge the suzerainty of the Queen and encourage the men to behave as loyal and dutiful subjects. For I consider that my authority derives from the Crown and that I command by a kind of Royal Writ. My initial intention was that the Queen be toasted with iodized water at every repast, and that each day commence with a rendition of 'God Save the Queen'. However, I have shelved these plans out of politic sensitivity to certain republican elements among you, a concession I was very loath to make."

These remarks caused the men to contemplate their folly and reconsider their words and actions. I then withdrew and, as is their wont, the men started bickering among themselves, accusing each other of rashness and engaging in mutual recrimination. Eventually the rebellion died out and the men besieged the tent, whither I had withdrawn, begging forgiveness and entreating me to resume command. And so, by mildly reprimanding some and admonishing others, and by reinforcing my clemency with a distribution of Alpenbitter, I gradually restored order and discipline to the camp.

Dinner was finally prepared, the pot having been set upon the open coals as proof of my liberality, and we ate with gusto. We even spied a chaotic and obstreperous party of canoeists enter our little lake, and make straight for the portage into Fox Lake, just to our north, where only one site is located and which, as Deacon Lake itself, is probably swampy and teaming with

life. They must be amateurs, we observed, coming in at such a late hour and disturbing the peace with carousing, and their equipments and raiment seemed crude. The spaghetti, however, though replete with carbohydrate, is largely bereft of vitamins, and some of the men are getting weak from deficiencies. And Alpenbitter, I hear, leaches vitamins and nutrients from the body, so insidious is the stuff. Anthony himself is getting weak, but this could at least in part be due to psychological stress caused by swimming mania, as manifested by periodic outbursts pertaining to the "Lake of Topaz". But just as we began to clean up, the mosquitoes descended. We formed a circle round the burning fire, in an effort to repel them with smoke, but there were simply too many. I myself, though I usually eschew repellents of any kind because of sensitivity, in my extremity applied it liberally, while the others veritably soaked themselves and their clothing. At length the vile swarms encompassed us, and we fled to the tent, and now lie here, regretting the windy promontory on David Lake, though it be haunted.

Mentioned in dispatches:

Richard: for crushing a propane cartridge with a large stone into a mere wafer, thus facilitating storage of waste and saving space.

Simon & Anthony: for discovering a standing tree bereft of life, felling it, and thereby supplying the want of combustibles.

Demerits:

Anthony: for manifestly failing to catch any fish (200 points).

Simon: for perorations against his commander, and for inciting the men to discord (500 points), which is tantamount to treason, and for compassing submission to a tribe of Amazon canoeists in disregard of the common weal (500 points).

Richard: for forgetting his socks (1,000 points).

### **Sunday, August 6**

We emerged from the tent into a cloudy morning. This lowered morale even further. Spirits had not recovered from our discomfiture by the mosquitos, and the taste of defeat, combined with the unexpected overcast, produced a state of general malaise. The dull morning repast of oatmeal only exacerbated the situation, although Richard tried to enliven the mood by vocally extolling the virtues of apple and cinnamon flavouring, and pointing out the advantages of pre-packaged oatmeal: we needn't mix the stuff in large vats like the ancient Scots; the packets are combustible; one man can receive a double ration of two packs instead of one; the measuring of portions is obviated; and the artificial flavours are superior to salt.

The morning did not pass without my recording a number of incidences, however, which may be indicative of worse things to come. The men did not bring rain ponchos, contrary to the planning brief. On the one hand, my donning of a spacious poncho allows me to set myself apart even more conspicuously from the enlisted men, who would trudge unprotected in sodden clothes. On the other hand, packing of a rain poncho is part of Queen's Regulations, and it is described in the briefing material as mandatory for the prevention of trench-foot. So I was naturally cross, but proudly sported my ample poncho as an example. In the event, it never rained, and I soon became the butt of some rather insubordinate quips. Simon said that, not only did he not bring a poncho, but that, judging by my appearance, the things appear impractical and constraining. Soon, owing to the warmth and humidity, my spectacles began to fog and I began to perspire effusively beneath the rubbery mantle. So I removed the poncho and re-rolled it, declaring severely that, although it had not rained, if it had, I would have been comfortable while the men suffered privations.

Simon, too, must be sent for retraining in his speciality of washing dishes. His task is to fill the inflatable sink with air, which he is able to do efficiently because he is full of the stuff, and then wash the pots and pans. He often does this in conjunction with Anthony or Richard, but he is the specialist and exercises a general jurisdiction over the cleaning of pots and pans and dishes. I will not sully myself with such a base occupation, being both leader and cook. However, Simon has grown lax, and his cleaning of the pots and accessories is often not up to standard. Sometimes, there is even a slight residue of sand left behind on the bottom of the large boiling pot. At other times, he performs his task without having first obtained a quantity of hot water. I have been contemplating his reassignment to some other duty. This morning I let him off with a stern warning, but could not push the matter further because morale, owing to the weather and the recent mosquito attacks, was already dismal. And besides, I must proceed with caution against Simon because of his high standing among the men as an instigator against authority and spokesman for grievances.

The journey from Fox Lake and its swampy ingress back into Balsam Lake, and thence to Harry Lake via Pike, was largely uneventful, two small portages of about 1000 metres in total being overcome. Now Pike Lake begins as a long finger of water, expanding into a basin before the portage into Harry. On the map, it looks clear, with only the slightest fringe of swamp indicated. When I chose the route, I had in mind that it might be salubrious and picturesque. On the contrary, though, it was the most filthy and unnavigable stretch of thick, stinking swamp we have ever encountered. One's paddle, after plunging into the soupy morass, could only be extricated by laborious pulling and twisting, to liberate it from thick sediment and the prolific grasping reeds and toad pads which seemed almost wilfully to entangle every movement. There was a real danger of a paddle being stuck fast in the muddy matrix, dragging under man and boat. If a canoe had tipped, its occupants and their baggage would have been sucked inexorably down into

the hellish miasma, their bodies preserved for eternity in the acidic sludge. It was extremely fortunate, owing to the time of day, that the mosquitos did not return in strength, for this foul place was their natural abode, and surely the base from which they had launched their attack the previous night. This time, we would have been totally exposed with no place wither to retreat.

Anthony was so distraught by the complete lack of potential for any kind of swimming that he lashed out at me from the forward canoe: "It is you who take us further and further from Lake of Topaz! It is you who drag us into these murky regions of bog and foetid swamp, of standing water and stinking mud flats, of giant mosquitoes infesting gloomy skies! Is this your notion of hardening the men by privation, of testing us by hardship? You have thwarted my plans to reach Lake of Topas. You have stood me up as an object of mockery. You have accused me of some fixation of mind. In the fulness of time I will gain my objective, and discover the fabled Lake, subverting this whole misguided enterprise and your inviolable command, if needs must!" But Richard, level-headed to the last, wacked Anthony across the head with his paddle and yelled: "Oh Anthony, you are bereft of reason! The dank and filthy air has compounded your mania. Behold yonder, I spy the portage to Harry Lake. Pretend it is Topaz. Make it your objective. If we canoe vigorously and portage with alacrity, we shall have our deliverance." Whereupon Anthony recovered his composure and the Forward Element continued on without demur.

The island site is nice, only one of two on the lake, and the men are happy again and have put their privations behind them. Fortunately, Harry Lake is not quite as teeming with life as Fox, and the swimming was more than satisfactory, to Anthony's amazement. In fact the site happens to surmount what can be described not inaccurately as a kind of rocky ramp or slope rising gently from the water's edge, the fire pit well situated to give a commanding local view. The presence of sunshine would have made the pleasure of the venue, already advantageous by its own features, the more complete. However, the sky continued ominous and on gaining the island I ordered the tarpaulin to be deployed, detailing Anthony to take charge. Anthony's mania had subsided and he set to his task of suspending the tarpaulin over the fire pit with great skill and enthusiasm. If there is one thing that can distract Anthony from his swimming mania, aside from additional swimming, it is the suspending of a tarpaulin, in which he has developed a kind of speciality. Fortunately the tarpaulin proved of no avail, for rain did not eventuate, and soon it was partially collapsed.

We noticed a peculiar feature on a jutting piece of land just opposite the island, and through the Bushnells we discovered that this was a bronze plaque. It had been erected in the early part of the century, by an individual who had frequented the area for hunting and fishing, extolling the beauty and grandeur of the place.

Two families canoed by. We were not sure where they were destined, perhaps to the single remaining site. They were quite alarmed at our profligate use of wood. According to published

guidelines, one should only burn such wood as can be collected by hand. Use of implements to cut large pieces into smaller ones is discouraged. The recommendation is commendable but in reality most sites are foraged clean of such lighter debris, and we are compelled further afield in search of more substantial specimens which can then be reduced to manageable segments by the collapsible saw. Nevertheless, I decided to issue an injunction against fire building, stipulating that henceforth, we should forego fires, and just sit under the stars, as the guidelines exhort. This would demonstrate our ecological sensitivity. The men were so outraged that they drew up a petition to the Queen and forwarded it to my attention. Their objections were these: mosquitos cannot deal with fires and otherwise they should molest us; a fire will also repel bears and other large predators (Richard's cannister of bear repellent notwithstanding); the fire adds to an overall effect which sustains morale, which would otherwise plummet; sometimes, as this night, there are no stars to appreciate; and (especially) we have previously endorsed high-impact camping as a modus operandi, and there is no reason to abandon methods to which we are accustomed. An addendum was attached to the petition to this effect: let us only camp on lakes which are demonstrably dead, or partially dead or approaching the point of death. I accepted the petition and its addendum in the name of Her Majesty, adding that, for the production of copious pollutants, we should publicly thank the Sudburionians.

We have given up our fight against the chipmunks. We have tried everything: forays and projectiles, charges on foot, reconnaissances-in-force, probing attacks, flanking manoeuvres and chemical warfare. But they are as cunning as they are numerous, and no tactic or device prevails to blunt their repeated and increasingly vicious raids. At length Simon suggested that we cultivate the chipmunks as allies, as we had done the previous year. Before his proposal could be taken formally into consideration, he approached one of the chipmunks and gave it a quantity of peanuts, cashews, and other delectables which he eagerly stuffed into his jowls, and told the rodent to report back to his base with news that the humans are willing to discuss terms in exchange for a share in their snacks. Before long, a truce was agreed and we were liberally distributing the choicest tidbits to the rodents, which they swallowed whole as their cheek flaps swelled beyond measure, especially walnuts and cashews, and they eagerly embraced the new state of affairs.

I cooked my rice and red curry dish, although the curry was much thinner than I would have liked. Last year it was much better. I fear the stresses of command are impacting my culinary performance. Water continues to be boiled on the open coals, and the blackening is now well advanced and perhaps irreversible. The hitherto shinny copper bottom of the large pot is no longer even visible. I blame Simon for this. My handkerchief has proven extremely handy, though. It is used to grasp the handle of the pot and pluck it from the coals, or to remove a hot pan from the vicinity of the exploding stove. The enlisted men have mocked my handkerchief, as they mock and deride every manifestation of culture and refinement, but now it is indispensable and, as usual, their judgement was premature. In fact, so impressed am I by the efficacy of the

handkerchief, that henceforth, its use will not be restricted to members of the officer class. I might even declare that handkerchiefs are mandatory for all members of the expedition.

We had a delightful post-prandial swim, then fed the fire, and enjoyed the warm evening sitting on the rocky slope, exchanging quips and jocularities, Richard leading the humour with funny recollections, anecdotes and scenarios. Of course our moods were lightened by substances. I produced my scotch and brandy, offering some to Simon, who in turn proffered his flask of bourbon, while the other men broke out their Alpenbitter grog and drank heartily, and also fashioned powerful cigarettes of dried cannabis, what the men call "dubages".

Mentioned in Dispatches:

Richard: for wacking Anthony with his paddle, thereby intervening to jolt him from his mania rage.

Anthony: for skill, efficiency, and courage in the suspension of the tarpaulin.

Demerits:

Richard, Simon and Anthony: for neglecting to bring rain ponchos and thereby suffering privations (500 points each).

Simon: for unsatisfactory cleaning of dishes, pots, and implements, and for refusing to use sand as an abrasive, and for silent insubordination (1000 points).

The Queen's Cartographer: for failing to indicate that Pike Lake is but an unnavigable morass (500 points).

## **Monday, August 7**

I have just finished my talk with Richard. It will be recalled that last year Richard accumulated an inordinately large number of demerit points, for such breaches as misplacing his flashlight, forgetting Anthony's wineskin, and using the collapsible saw as a fire stoke. At first, I contemplated dismissing him, but realised that, as a key member of the Forward Element, he could not be spared. So I offered Richard a place on this year's expedition, but implemented a performance review process. Every evening after pitching camp I sit him down, ask him what he has learnt during the previous day, how he is interacting with other campers, any skills gaps he would like to address, how he might further improve his track record, and where he thinks he might be in five years time. This evening, Richard was in good spirits and talked to me

unreservedly. He said that he is aware of Simon's efforts to undermine me, but that he knows his duty and would only consider throwing his lot in with Simon if I cancelled the grog ration.

Indeed all the men appeared to be in good spirits this evening. We are camped on a lovely island in a narrow section of the winding Balsam Lake, at this point more of a broad river than a lake at all. The island is slightly elongated, with sites at each end. Since neither site was occupied, we chose the better site at the north end, and aside from David Lake it is the best site yet. It is certainly vast in terms of its area. The site occupies what is basically a crescent-like feature. One side of the site faces north, with an excellent view of the shorelines of the narrow lake to either side, and the other south, commanding a sort of bay facing the remainder of the island. The space in between, somewhat longer than it is wide, is largely clear of growth. On one side is the thickening forest of the island, on the other the continuation of the shore, but with two small copses of pine. The fire pit occupies the centre of the expanse, with excellent sitting logs already in place.

And aside from the excellence of the site, the weather is perfect. Although it rained as we slept last night, it was not a heavy downpour and the equipment had been stored beneath the tarpaulin, which held up nicely except that Anthony's cleverly devised Y-beam had fallen over. As we were having our breakfast, which consisted again of oatmeal and thick tea, the sky cleared. We could not resist one last swim under these circumstances, which was refreshing after the morning's humidity. We then struck camp and loaded the boats, and took our leave of the chipmunks, who promised to send out word to other colonies that we have plenty of almonds and peanuts and should not be molested. And so we took the portage over to Pike lake, and again negotiated the unwholesome swamp (I was afraid some of the men might contract malaria, so I bade the expedition make all possible haste) At the second portage back into Balsam, the terminus of which is an unbelievable mud bog, the strap on my back pack suddenly broke. Fortunately, there are no more portages of significant length. It was also at this portage, we subsequently learnt, that Richard misplaced his cannister of bear repellent, gravely endangering the whole expedition.

We soon reached island and, though my initial plans were to continue to another island further along, the advantages of this particular sight were irresistible, and the Forward Element wisely made ground. The swimming, again, is excellent, and Anthony's perilous experience on landing his boat has not discouraged him from enjoying the water. For as he touched shore and slipped his leg into the water, he was accosted by a huge snapping turtle which almost severed his foot at the angle. Only by successive pummeling with a paddle was the creature induced to back away and allow Anthony to pass. Last year, as is recounted, a gigantic turtle assailed our campsite on Opalescent Lake, almost pulling down our tent, and was not easily repelled. Indeed, huge snapping turtles are a far greater menace than bears, and I think that next year I will revise the standing orders to require the Forward Element to equip itself with a cannister of turtle repellent, at least until Richard loses it.

As soon as the turtle was defeated, we brought up the gear and settled in. Our first order of business was to slate our hunger, for we had not eaten since the frugal repast of instant oatmeal. And so we unpacked the salami and cheese, the remaining granola bars and the halva, and set to, and almost all the remaining snack food was demolished. An ominous cloud was noticed, so Richard and Anthony hastily erected the tent, and the tarpaulin was deployed over the gear, but the cloud soon passed us by without incident, and we reveled again in the breezy sunshine. A wood detail, consisting of the Forward Element plus Simon, was dispatched to accumulate combustibles, while I made ready the kitchen. The detail, however, was coming up dry. At length a dead tree was found, which was, however, still standing. Normally, I would simply send the men out further afield in search of debris, but being confined on an island, this limited our scope for movement. Indeed the island, while covered in heavy pine, does not have abundant ground-level covering. Now presently the men returned asking if they might employ my collapsible saw to fell the tree, and even took me to inspect the tree itself and render a decision. I refused, saying that, although we had done it in the past, the felling of standing wood, even if dead, is strictly prohibited by the Regulations. But they besieged me with entreaties, and Simon latched onto the opportunity to foment a rebellion. "On this, the very last night of our expedition," he exclaimed, "he will have us go bereft of a fire, and lacking a source of heat and illumination. Even to the last he insists on making us miserable. Or is it just a roundabout way of avoiding the further carbonation of his cherished cooking pots!" Anthony added "I have bested a snapping turtle in single combat. I sent the gruesome reptile back whither it came, risking life and limb to make our camp safe from its predations. I will not now be lectured by some regulation-thumping commander who puts bureaucratic rules ahead of my comfort." I gave up, for I had no more energy for long orations, with the proviso that the lower section where moss was growing should be left intact. Furthermore, if the incident ever came back to me, I would deny it.

So I walked away, and the men felled the tree with the collapsible saw and then cut it up into pieces according to the doctrine of progressive combustibility. And having thus accumulated a sufficiency of wood, we swam some more and then made a pot of tea on the exploding propane burner. All in all, it was a long and lazy afternoon, and we enjoyed this last opportunity for leisure. Richard ensconced himself on his sleeping mat and read. Simon read as well and at length had a nap. I went to join Anthony on the rocky shoals, where he diligently cast his rod into the river again and again. His fixation is not so much the discovery of Topaz Lake anymore, but that of catching a fish to eat. And since this is our last night in the back-country, he is feeling enormous pressure from the men to catch something. However, his efforts proved to no avail, and he commented dryly that this lake, too, must be largely bereft of life. I walked along the shoreline, enjoying the sunshine, the delightful breeze and the lapping of the shiny water against the rocks. I then secured the bar of soap, sat with my feet in the water, gave myself a thorough foot bath and treated my blisters.



At length I prepared dinner, which again consisted of spaghetti and instant sauce. Afterwards, we drank a pot of tea, enjoyed various manifestations of smoking, and immolated the dead tree in its entirety, so as to destroy all evidence of our transgression. And the enlisted men finished consuming their grog, and their spirits were high, and speaking of spirits, the remaining scotch, bourbon and brandy, too, ceased to exist.

Mentioned in dispatches:

Anthony: for wrestling the snapping turtle to submission in its very lair, thereby securing the encampment against predation.

Demerits:

Richard: For losing the cannister of bear repellent, leaving the expedition utterly defenseless against bear attack.

Simon: For agitating in favour of the felling of standing wood, despite my injunctions.

Anthony: For manifestly failing to catch any fish.

**This has been the diary of our Third Waterborne Expedition. The events herein recounted have been set down faithfully, without bias, passion or embellishment.**