

**Diary of the Fifth Waterborne Expedition, to Algonquin Provincial Park.**

**Undertaken in the summer of 2002, commencing on the 1st day of August.**

**Under the pen of Robert Thomas.**

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

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

**Thursday, August 1<sup>st</sup>**

Having completed the formalities, I returned to the restaurant patio overlooking Canoe Lake access point, where the men were ensconced, eating their breakfast, and beheld at my place a considerable plate of fruit. I was pleased by this.

“My”, I said. “But isn’t this nice. Some fruit,” sitting down eagerly to partake.

The others said nothing, laying in to their eggs and sausage with signal enthusiasm. What a splendid antipasto in the morning, I thought, a plate of sumptuous fruit, coming before the course of eggs, sausage, ham and bacon I had ordered. Both refreshing and nutritious. I had no idea the culinary arts were so advanced in these remote parts. The plate of fruit, I supposed, comes with every meal. The men must have been ravenous to have consumed their own plates of fruit and started well in to their main course before I had even completed the formalities. But they were hungry, with a long journey ahead of them.

And so I ate, first the melon, and then a few fat strawberries, and then a zesty slice of pineapple, commenting all the while on the glorious sunshine, the comparative calmness of the water, and our good fortune that here on Canoe Lake, a very much frequented point of access, the amenities are so lavish.

The men ignored me, looking only into their plates. That was fine. They were hungry and eager to finish up and launch. No time or inclination for idle chatter. Look how they concentrate on the task at hand. And I continued to enjoy the antipasto of fruit, expecting that before long, the waitress would appear with my breakfast proper.

At length, though, Richard began to laugh. That long, intense outburst of laughter he is known to produce when something seems particularly funny. Then Simon. Then Anthony. In a moment, Anthony was reaching over to a vacant seat beside him.

“Here is your food, Rob.” And smiling he produced a plate, laden with fried eggs, the accompaniments of pork meat, and brown toast.

“We expected you would know at once it was an elaborate ruse.” said Simon. “We

connived with the service to produce for you a plate of fruit, and impounded your breakfast proper, concealing it thus. Since you inflicted upon us three years ago, relentlessly and without quarter, fruit for breakfast, we thought it meet to compass this retribution.

At the time, it was a matter of some vigorous debate, you may recall, as to whether the expedition should be diverted to Pembroke for just the breakfast we three of us have been enjoying. Alas, since you enjoy fresh fruit (indeed, why else would you have planned the very breakfast of fruit which caused the aforementioned incident) it seems the ruse was for naught.”

“We could not deprive you indefinitely of your breakfast proper” said Richard. “For it would never arrive, and ultimately, the situation would have become awkward.”

“Tuck in, Rob”, continued Anthony. “Lest it get cold. And let it be a lesson for you, that when you inflict hardship upon the enlisted men, be it by forcing us to eat fresh fruit for breakfast, or by some other enormity, retribution will come, eventually but surely!”

And so I laughed, and we all laughed. I commended the men in good sport on the elaborate ruse, brilliant in conception and daring (though futile) in execution, and hastily consumed the remaining fruit, moving on to the hearty repast of eggs before me, still warm enough to enjoy.

Indeed in our hearts, the hot breakfast, taken at leisure on the sunny patio at Canoe Lake, was a more convenient and somewhat more pleasurable experience than the steak dinner of last evening, and was never actually planned. We knew that Canoe Lake was popular, with good facilities and a large store, but whether a full breakfast could be had was never firmly established, that is, until we drove in this morning.

The stopover this year was Tea Lake Campground, small, crowded, unremarkable, abutting, as one might expect, Tea Lake. We departed on Wednesday after work, the usual practice, striking north from the Financial Services Commission, where Anthony works, having packed all baggage into the Grand Prix on Tuesday night at Anthony’s house, the cargo pod proving especially useful. Despite our best efforts to arrive at Tea Lake before sundown, however, we arrived just as the light was failing.

Compared to last year, though, spirits were high. It will be recalled that last year the morale of the men was devastated by the promulgation of a fire ban, having its prevalence in a long period of dry weather. At the time, I feared for the expedition itself, and anticipated a violent backlash from the men which, however, never came to fruition.

This year, I tracked the forecasts for a period of time in advance, sending out regular bulletins by electronic mail, so that a second fire ban should not be unexpected, if it eventuated, but also to assuage the anxiety of the men, knowing that a second ban might prove catastrophic. At length Anthony thanked me for my efforts but advised that he and the others were confident that the weather this year was appreciably more damp, what with numerous rains in June and July, and that a fire ban was not

apprehended.

Also, the menu has been varied considerably. In previous years, fresh meat was prepared on at least the first night in back country. Indeed, last year, fresh meet was prepared for two nights out, salmon on the first night, and then fillet on the second (of which, due to a mild heat stroke, I never partook). I have changed all this as part of a new dispensation, a reform of the equipment and commissariat.

Aside from kippers and eggs on the first morning out, a tradition I am still loathe to put aside, no more fresh meet shall be packed, I declared. Instead, let us have steak and potatoes and fried mushrooms and beer at the stay-over, and bring additional utensils for this purpose. But in back country, dinners shall consist of other foodstuffs, including meals from freeze-dried packets, which are lighter, easier to back, not in danger of spoilage, more quickly prepared, more easy to clean up after, and not as productive of scent.

And so last evening, after unloading the tent, barbecue implements and essential impedimenta from the car, I had the dubious pleasure of preparing steak on an open fire as night was closing in. But first we had to build a fire and consolidate a good bed of coals, no mean task in itself, while beset by mosquitoes for the dying period of dusk. And although the lantern was deployed, its light is not really sufficient for the purpose of cooking as well as the multiplicity of other of tasks which need illumination.

Despite these incommodities, as I have indicated morale was high. Beer was flowing liberally. Fat cigarettes of cannabis were in due course manufactured for those inclined. For those not, tasty clove cigarettes or corncob pipes stuffed to the rim with vanilla Cavendish were available. And we set about our culinary tasks, either seasoning and grilling steaks (my own pleasure and burden), chopping and frying mushrooms, or positioning and repositioning foil-wrapped potatoes hopefully about the nascent coals. Fortunately, the fire pit was equipped with one of those heavy grills, so we need not deploy the flimsy folding version which I always have in reserve.

This repast though taken in the dark was on the whole successful and the T-bones consumed ravenously. And afterwards, more beer and conviviality around a glowing fire pit, now built up considerably, and such a wondrous sensation after being deprived the previous year. It would have been better to have arrived earlier, and to have enjoyed the better part of an afternoon here. But no matter, for a steak dinner and beer in the wilderness has the effect of making men content, regardless of its particular circumstances. Even so, I mused, next year, we should perhaps take an entire day to travel, leaving in the early morning, instead of departing frenetically after work on an historically meaningless crusade to secure the stopover during daylight.

We rose early, eager to evacuate our meagre lodging. It was a beautiful morning, the oblique sunshine happily piercing the leafy canopy above. We could now make out the principal features of our site. It was surely better than our stopover last year on Pogg Lake, disastrous for various reasons. This site was somewhat rectangular, with the car entrance at one short end, and the opposite end demarcated by a line of

shrubbery which sloped downward toward Tea Lake, now clearly visible. Probably not a bad little site for a weekend of car camping, we agreed.

But we had no intention of lingering. As the men packed up, I dutifully set out for the ranger's lodge. For it was closed last evening when we arrived, so I still had to pay for the reservation and obtain a permit, even for a single night. Alas, the door was locked, and the posted sign indicated that business did not commence until 10:00 am. Well, that was that. On returning, I gleefully announced that we had just saved a sum of money, for the ranger's lodge would not be open for some time, and I had no intention of holding up the expedition.

The men concurred, emphatically. We would not waste half the morning just because the ranger could sleep in. I had done my duty by making the attempt. So we finished packing, loaded the impedimenta, and cheerfully set off. At least, it was agreed, we were not as delinquent as the campers who had occupied the adjacent site. Disgracefully and carelessly, they left behind a quantity of rubbish. We might deny the Queen her due revenue, in the present exigency, but we would never defile her lands with our detritus.

Now I have said that Canoe Lake is one of the more frequented access points, and the connecting lakes and rivers, similarly, are populous during the high season. Indeed, that is why we have so far avoided Canoe Lake, preferring more remote systems in the park. In fact, Canoe Lake was Plan B. Initially, we had planned a trip down the mighty Petawawa River, intending, I suppose, to circumvent most of the rapids by means of portages, with our ultimate objective being Eustach Lake, reportedly the deepest lake in the park, surrounded by 25 metre cliffs. Anthony was particularly intent on Eustache, since by very definition, he thought, swimming must be optimal, an overriding consideration in all of his plans and calculations.

But when I called the outfitter to reserve our super-light kevlar boats, the proprietor inquired, routinely I suppose, as to our itinerary. We could not use kevlar on the Petawawa, the outfitter advised. And was my party experienced in the navigation of rapids? No, I affirmed, we were not experienced in such things. Well, then you better consider the matter further, the outfitter continued, for it can be very dangerous, especially if you are not experienced.

I agreed not to reserve any boats for the time being, and to study a special booklet on the Petawawa which the outfitter would send along, to inform any course of action we might take. Forsooth, I was obliged to cancel the mighty Petawawa, much to Anthony's chagrin, but with the affirmation of the remainder of the expedition, who were not keen to risk bodily injury for the sake of optimal swimming, and made recourse to Canoe Lake, which I thought, in any event, we should certainly explore at some point. In future we might attempt the Petawawa with professional assistance.

So we drove in to the Canoe Lake access point, parked the vehicle, and immediately explored the amenities, which included an extensive camping store, the rental agency, and full restaurant with patio. It need not be said that we would stay for breakfast. We quickly annexed a table overlooking the inlet and ordered our morning repast, before I proceeded to the office to register and obtain our permit. On returning, I was

subjected to the ruse described above, having to do with the substitution of my breakfast for a plate of fruit.

Afterwards, fortified against hunger, we descended to the jetty, now increasingly crowded as additional parties arrived (several of foreign tourists it seemed) dabbled perfunctorily in the store, purchased some candy bars, and then ordered the boats we had reserved, the attendant emphasising the vital importance of our preserving intact the emergency canisters which, by law, all boats are now required to carry, on pain of fine.

In the event, Canoe Lake, though lined with cottages, was quite lovely, and certainly nicer and more eventful than the great Opeongo. Two summer camps are located there, one for girls and one for boys, and I surmised that my niece and nephew, avid campers both, might even be staying there, for I know they spend a month in Algonquin Park every summer. The first portage out of Canoe Lake was a mere 295 metres long, and though of no account, was rather congested and confused. But we bypassed the crowds and overcame even this meagre challenge with unusual dispatch. For doubling back on portages is now proscribed.

Consistent with the new dispensation, each boat is entitled only to one heavy back pack and one light one, the former carrying (in my case) equipment and fuel or (in Anthony's) the commissariat, and the latter clothing and light matter. The camper with the light pack is also required to carry the canoe simultaneously, while the other, along with the heavy pack, conveys the paddles and water skins.

This new efficiency has been made possible partly by the institution, as I have described, of rigorous economies in the commissariat, hitherto lavish, and partly by further miniaturisation of the equipment, with lighter sleeping bags and mats now mandatory, the exclusion of deemed superfluties, and the purchasing of a more compact tent. Hence, by overcoming every portage in a single thrust, it is hoped, much time and effort shall be saved. For recall the ordeal of last year, when lengthy portages, including one in excess of five kilometres, were tediously executed only by the exhausting process doubling back, a shameful and cumbersome display of inefficiency not befitting our level of expertise.

So we entered the long and narrow Joe Lake, striking north-east, leaving behind the weary crowds, most of whom, as I have said, seemed to be foreigners, probably sent out on some kind of two-day package to experience our great and unspoilt wilderness. Richard and Anthony have, of course, continued in their role of the Forward Element, and as is typical, they shot out ahead. Some younger canoeists appeared to be following them, perhaps in the hope of being shown the optimal path. For the reputation and elan of the Forward Element is now matter of record, and following in its wake almost a sought-after privilege. But Richard and Anthony are impatient of fame, and managed to lose their admirers, diverting them to an incorrect channel and then dashing away.

Our destination was Burnt Island Lake, a large, sort of T-shaped reservoir with many jutting headlands. Three portages on the short interceding river blocked our progress, two very small ones and one longer in between. The first and last were circumvented,

using standard portage circumvention techniques perfected on previous expeditions, when Richard tabled various Portage Circumvention Plans, some successfully executed but others abandoned.

A circumvention is performed thus: where the portage is short, the waters are neither too deep nor too rapid, and where the obstacles, be they rocks or beaver dams or stumps of trees, can be negotiated without excessive risk to body and limb, we step out of our canoes into the river, feet clad, and carefully manoeuvre the boats around the obstacles, one dragging the bow and one pushing the stern, emerging on the other side, at which point we mount again and proceed. The practice is a great step in the perfection of our methodology and tactics, and the Forward Element has been instrumental in pioneering it.

Our goal was to proceed as far as possible into Burnt Island Lake, which widened and then narrowed successively, being as indicated cut by wooded headlands and promontories. We needed to find a good site as close as possible to the large bay in the mid-section of the lake, being the point of egress tomorrow on the route north into the White Trout system. In the event, most of the excellent promontory sites were taken, and those that were vacant were not close enough to the bay, so we continued, relentlessly, further into the lake, the Forward Element scouting ahead.

Simon and I, however, became at length impatient. The day was progressing rapidly and the sun declining over the tree-lined promontories. And the breeze, though following, was sharp and might turn. And we were tired of negotiating the big reservoir. Spotting several potential sites along the coast, I investigated with my Bushnells. One site, in particular, seemed more than adequate, so Simon and I turned to port and made it our objective, despite the continued advance of the Forward Element. For we were concerned that if we did not make ground soon on such a busy lake, there should be no hope. This was one of the few occasions where I felt compelled to use my general authority to override the discretion of the Forward Element, a decision never lightly taken.

I was pleased that the sight was a good one. Otherwise, my decision may have seemed precipitous. It was on two levels, basically, a lower level of gravel and stones sloping down into the water, and a broad upper level, well grassed and open to the sun, enclosed on three sides by forest and shrubbery, incorporating, much to our surprise and amazement, a picnic table. We speculated as to the reasons for this. Either Burnt Island Lake is relatively accessible for day or weekend campers who might appreciate such an amenity, or the table is convenience for fishing parties.

Indeed, discovery of a large empty bottle of Jack Daniel's corn whiskey suggested that individuals with less than a full commitment to the purposes and precepts of back country camping have visited the place, and we cursed the miscreants using quite explicit language. It is rare to see evidence of such egregious behaviour, even in a park so well frequented. In addition, we noticed that the fire pit contained human vomit, suggesting the miscreants had carried on to extremes and also that their visitation was recent. Let us hope they tip and secure a watery grave.

The swimming was good, with no diving but a comfortable, rocky descent into the

lake, and after beaching the canoes and unpacking the essential paraphernalia, we immediately partook. A wood detail was subsequently organised, initially not very successful, with excessive reliance on birch bark, but a second attempt was made and eventually good logs were found. The fire-pit was located on the plateau at the point where it began to slope down, and was equipped with a heavy grill, another uncommon convenience in back country.

For dinner I prepared a simple pasta dish with instant Alfredo sauce – copious butter and some cooking liquid having to substitute for milk, and it was taken with gusto. The festive mood was tempered, however, by the ominous clouds forming overhead, Anthony speculating openly about possible deployment of the tarpaulin. Also, I discovered that the emergency canister issued to my canoe had been misplaced, lost, probably at that first chaotic portage. This was serious, for as indicated, the attendant emphasised that every boat is required, on pain of fine, to carry an emergency canister at all times, even though we had no idea what they contained. Let us hope, I declared sombrely, that our lack of an emergency canister is not detected by the authorities!

The men discovered a totem that had been carved from a sizeable branch. By whom, we do not know. Perhaps by the ancients, by natives tribesmen, or by a knife-wielding ruffian well-lubricated by corn-whiskey. It was a substantial work, though, standing upright, reaching a height of several feet. The lower part was smooth and untreated but a head was distinctly carved into the upper section, and the execution was far from contemptible.

At this point, I actually regretted somewhat my decision to make ground here. For it is easily recalled that on previous expeditions the men have been carried away by their superstitious tendencies. Anthony, in particular, has been fond of carving totems to various deities, thought hardly on the scale and conception as the one we discovered this day. However, he repeatedly incised his index finger while attempting to execute his carvings, once for using the wrong iconography, another time for employing an inferior blade.

At first, Anthony insisted on taking the totem with us for its apotropaic property, as a kind of talisman, to protect the expedition from evils. I suggested it would be too heavy and cumbersome, especially under the new dispensation, and besides, the deity it represents might punish us for removing its likeness from this place, which might actually be a kind of sacred grove or sanctuary rather than a campsite, especially considering the lavish facilities here and the evidence of boisterous celebration.

I did not actually believe the latter pretext, but thought I must employ matching rationale to be successful in this exigent. Go ahead and worship the totem, I suggested, with all due reverence, but let us not dislodge it. Thereby, we shall incur divine favour. Anthony conceded, and the other men agreed, and they proceeded to utter incantations before the totem and pour libations of tea and Alpenbitter, and burn offerings of cannabis, and deck it with sprigs of pine. I found the whole ritual and its orthodoxy outrageous, but it has always been my policy to allow the men to worship their own gods.

Night gradually closed in and we commenced the evening chores: collection of

additional wood, erection of the tent and securing of the fly, spreading of the tarpaulin over the equipment (for as I have said it was overcast), hanging of the food pack from the limb of a suitable tree, and cleaning of the cooking pots and dishes. At this point, Richard reminded me of the surprise he and Anthony had in store for me, of which I had been advised several times during the planning of the expedition. He produced a head lamp, that is, a stubby flashlight secured to the forehead by means of a flexible band.

Is this not just what is needed, he declared, for cleanup and other night-time chores? Is it not brilliant? I agreed that in fact it seemed ingenious, if unconventional. It would benefit Simon in particular as he cleaned the dishes every evening. Simon was at first sceptical, however, saying he has managed heretofore without such conveniences, and also inquiring whether the smuggling in of the device was entirely consistent with the rules attending my new dispensation, equipage now being carefully determined and distributed. At length, however, Simon could not resist, as he began his washing duties, to don the lamp, and he admitted that it was good.

And thereafter we dissipated down by the water's edge, or around the fire on the plateau, drank tea and liquor, and discussed politics, acknowledging a very successful commencement to this year's expedition, pleased at having incurred divine favour most fortunately (and fortuitously), and hopeful that rain should not eventuate.

I should also mention that Anthony's "camping shoes" are a constant source of ribald amusement, for though heavy and thick-soled they are patent black and resemble office attire. Not really standard equipment, I quipped. Richard repeatedly asked whether Anthony has also brought his "camping flannels", something, he says, for the "discerning camper".

Mentioned in Dispatches:

Richard: for obtaining and packing a head lamp, a most ingenious equipage, which will greatly facilitate and make more efficient Simon's washing of dishes every evening (500 points).

Simon: for recanting as to the utility of the head lamp, and enthusiastically adopting it (200 points).

Demerits:

Forward Element: for advancing too far into Burnt Island Lake without making ground, forcing the expedition leader to employ his general authority to override their discretion (500 points).

Anthony: for causing ribald humour affecting the men by wearing shoes which, though in fact adequate to the task of camping, in their design resemble office attire (350 points).



**Friday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>**

It rained last night, not surprisingly, though by the time we rose, the sky had cleared. This must be due, the men supposed, to our having propitiated the resident deity last evening. I agreed while suggesting that someone should brew the coffee while I begin the kippers and eggs. This is a long-standing custom. The men have simply come to expect kippers and eggs on the first morning in back-country. It is like a constitution for my regime, that is, the basis of my authority and prestige, without which a crisis would ensue.

The men consumed the hearty morning repast with great zeal, and words like “delicious”, and “hits the spot, Rob”, were forthcoming. Richard, however, declared that he had misplaced both his fork and his lighter. The latter is a minor incident, the former an offence punishable by demerits. I advised Richard of this and of the urgency of his locating the missing implement. I was encouraged, though, for in previous years, Richard has made various declarations about having misplaced this or that, only to have subsequently located the missing article. That he is a member of the elite Forward Element has obliged me to overlook some of these transgressions.

We made a very late start, though. I do not like it when this happens. A full cooked breakfast is inevitably time-consuming even if good for morale, both in its preparation and clean-up. Also, factionalism was rampant. Do we burn the plastic kipper bags or wash them in the lake and pack them out? Anthony proposed to resolve the dispute by consulting our resident deity through further incantations.

I decided, however, that this was a purely secular matter, and that no amount of rinsing in the lake could eliminate entirely the smell of smoked fish, which would contaminate the garbage bag, which in turn would contaminate the food pack because stored in its upper pouch. What better means of attracting a bear (although never having seen a bear, this was not really a concern)? So we burned the plastic bags in the small morning fire which is normally ignited for the purpose of disposing of accumulated paper rubbish. We would ensure safety by this small emission of noxious fumes. Indeed the fish oil causes the containers to burn rapidly and completely. I believe this has been the practice with the kipper refuse in previous years, at any rate.

Before setting out, there was the matter of the JD bottle. We might take it with us, but it is bulky and delicate and could break, and anyway it is illegal to carry any glass container into the park, even if to remove it. If it broke, injury could result, and Anthony in particular has sustained enough cuts to his appendages over the years without adding this further peril (for surely the bottle would be stored in his food pack). We obviously could not destroy, bury or burn the vessel. So the only option was to leave it conspicuously in the open, where a returning party, or perhaps a park ranger, might find and remove it. We also wrote down the email address for Jack Daniel's, displayed on the label, with the intention of lodging a complaint with the company that people were partaking of its product where they should not be and that something should be done. Also, Richard found his lighter, as I have said a matter of small import. The fork, wherein his fate depends, remains outstanding.

Today was almost continuous portaging, the first real test of my new policy against doubling back. We exited Burnt Island Lake striking north in the direction of White Trout Lake, or destination. First we had to acquire Sunbeam Lake, a small body of water on the way, accessed by three small portages broken by what can only be described as large ponds. And after Sunbeam it was basically the same situation, only we faced three quite considerable portages in succession, again with only brief watery intercessions.

It must be said that Simon and I, being of course the second boat, and the Forward Element having got out ahead beyond eye-shot, went completely astray as we approached the second portage of 1,400 metres. The small, interceding lake at this point was very swampy and reedy, and at first it seemed that numerous avenues through the growth were available. So we chose one and proceeded, and went nowhere but into a reedy cul-de-sac. Tired and frustrated, we attempted other possibilities and at length extricated ourselves. Surely the Forward Element can negotiate such troublesome passages without discomfiture, because of its training, experience and acute directional instincts. Simon, of course, attributed our predicament to my bad steering. "As stern-man you have the boat, as you so often are fond of declaring," he announced. "So figure it out and extricate us from this dank and febrile place!" I rejoined, "But Simon, you have the bow, and therefore it is your duty to be familiar with what lies ahead."

Lunch was taken at the beginning of the final long portage of 930 metres, consisting largely of pepperoni sticks. For this year, pepperoni has replaced *landjaeger* sausage, a German variety popular with the men, in part because it translates into "land hunter sausage", but also because it has proven tradable. I had not been able to secure *landjaeger* during the purchasing phase. There is some concern about the negotiability of mere pepperoni, and I concurred. For *landjaeger* has proven excellent in the back-country commodities market, is much sought after by other canoeists, and can often be traded for other necessities, as well as used to pay off hostile natives.

Finally, sweaty and exhausted, we emerged into the eastern portion of McIntosh Creek, part of a wilderness zone. The creek runs through an extensive bog mat, which widens out into an inlet of White Trout Lake. Bogs can be lovely to canoe. The narrow, winding, shallow thoroughfare is ornamented with expanses of lily pads, bog flowers, and other colourful flora, and impressive dragon flies often descend curiously and flutter this way and that overhead. Just beyond the mat, tall spruces and pines, both living and also, naked and slumping bleached white in the sun, long perished but still beautiful, dominate the narrow passage. Exotic birds, especially herons and falcons, can occasionally, if we are lucky, be spotted.

Bogs can also become tiresome and exhausting. The winding course, difficult to navigate with any speed, can greatly extend the distance and time travelled. Because it is surrounded by tall shrubbery and trees, little wind enters the bog, so it can become quite hot. And not only dragon flies but horse flies and deer flies often welcome us, something never experienced on open water. It is hard to paddle while sensible of a sharp pricking of the skin, sometimes in several places at once.

But having appreciated both the beauty of the bog and its detractions, we eventually entered White Trout Lake. As is often the practice, we had, after studying the map, designated a number of apparently desirable sites in advance, all of them closer to the boggy inlet of the lake, and located on islands or promontories. These unfortunately were taken. In fact, the one sight we really desired, on the eastern end of a large island located just beyond the inlet, was crowded by a large party of teenage merrymakers, which we greatly resented. They should not appear to be having fun at a site which is rightly ours.

We had therefore to continue across a wide section of the lake to the opposite side, where more islands and promontories essentially cut the lake in two. In the event, the sites in this area were also occupied. All this searching for a vacant site was no doubt a consequence of our breaking camp later than we should. Here my policy against doubling back was completely vindicated. For it would have been considerably later if we had actually doubled back on all those portages.

In the event, we found a satisfactory site on a headland about halfway up the lake, with good rocks to dive from. We got in later than we expected, naturally, and I hastily prepared tea and began boiling water for the macaroni and cheese, while the others prepared the encampment. But none of this transpired before the obligatory swim. This evening it was especially deserved. Our bodies were sweaty and covered in dirt from numerous portages, and our skin irritable from the scratches and scrapes endemic to portaging and from the cruel attentions of innumerable insects. So a dive into the cool lake was like a soothing unguent.

The site was not entirely dissimilar to the first one. It consisted of a narrow waterfront strip where the fire-pit was located. This was separated from an upper section, however, by a short rocky ledge which had to be ascended, and the upper section was wide but rocky and uneven, though the tent emplacement had been made reasonably level. Since the site faced west, we could enjoy the sunset, and since, unlike last evening, the sky was clear, we anticipated stars.

The macaroni and cheese sated the men's hunger after a day of long exertion. I always make extra servings, preparing three boxes. Since one box is supposed to be good for three people, and three boxes just suffice for the four of us, we always speculate that the prescribed servings represent the consumption of small children or Japanese grown-ups, or perhaps gnomes or people who have had their stomachs stapled or their mouths wired shut. In any event, following the prescription in our case would mean widespread starvation and doubtless I should be toppled. I even fortify the macaroni with slices of thick pepperoni brought along for the purpose, and copious butter and olive oil, since we have no milk.

After dinner had been consumed and the clean-up finished, Simon again requesting use of the head lamp and Richard obligingly handing it over, we sat by the fire against the rocky ledge, and took tea and chocolate, as well as cigars and other substances routinely used by the Forward Element especially. And of course there was the Alpenbitter, a cheap syrupy grog issued in large quantity to the enlisted men, and for Simon and myself, somewhat more refined in our habits, scotch and brandy.

The sunset was indeed spectacular, the large globe of the sun becoming larger and more intensely orange as it collided peacefully with the distant tree-lined slopes, casting out golden rays which illuminated the infinite spruce and brilliantly reflected from the flattening surface of the lake. And after the sun had done its work, the night sky was excellent and clear. Shooting stars and satellites were sought out and gleefully identified. And Richard, who dabbles in astronomy, produced a star chart he had copied from a text book, as well as his compass, and donned the head lamp.

After orienting the map, he located several constellations and pointed them out like a professor to his students: Tea Pot, Serpens, etc., as well of course as the usual hum-drum of both dippers, big and small. We found it all very interesting and I congratulated Richard on his erudition. “The Forward Element”, I said, “is not it seems all duty, routine and martial tradition. It is clear they also make room for study and civilised pursuits!”

Our necks slightly strained and the mosquitoes at length making themselves felt (I often avoid repellent myself but felt obliged to apply my semi-effectual citronella), we at length retired, in the hope that further instruction in astronomy will be forthcoming on subsequent evenings, clear skies continuing.

Mentioned in Dispatches:

Richard: for instructing the expedition in astronomy, deploying his astronomical paraphernalia, and in a learned fashion pointing out, to our amazement, various obscure constellations with which we were not familiar (300 points).

Demerits:

Richard: for misplacing his fork and failing to report its recovery (500 points).

Simon: for leading the rearguard astray into various swamps during a series of long portages when time was of the essence (200 points).

**Saturday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>**

“In damnation!” I yelled, “Motorised boats are not permitted on White Trout Lake”. The small vessel with its two occupants and an outboard engine sped south, passing our site at about 100 yards.

“Copy it down, Rob”, said Richard. “We shall lodge a complaint.”

“But how did it even get in here”, asked Simon. “There are no points of ingress for that kind of vessel, no permanent structures to house them.”

“From a cottage, perhaps?” asked Anthony. “Are there cottages in these parts.”

“Nay”, said I. “This is not a development zone. If it were, we should not be here.”

At all events we stood perplexed as the boat sped away, becoming a mere speck and

then disappearing, and at length returned to our oatmeal.

We had risen reasonably early, the coffee pot quickly set brewing and water boiled for instant oatmeal. This is the only breakfast the men shall enjoy henceforth. No more eggs, and no more of the bulky luxuries packed in previous years, like peanut butter and honey and pita bread. The amount of oatmeal packed is in fact carefully measured at two packets per man per day, to avoid excess. However, a surplus of two packets per man is now available, I declared, because none was taken on the very first morning at Pogg Lake (it now seems to have been a ridiculous idea). Fortunately, we were able to enjoy a full hot repast that morning, notwithstanding the elaborate ruse the men contrived at my expense. While I thought the men would be pleased by a surplus of instant oatmeal, the reaction was muted.

Granola bars, a staple snack, are also rationed, at three per man per day. We therefore bring a considerable quantity, upwards of 100, packed in several large zip-locks. The men like them and of course I select a wide assortment: fruit flavoured, chocolate, marshmallow, peanut butter, various combinations of these flavours, etc. Simon boasts to have built up a considerable personal surplus of granola bars already, through his abstinence. I congratulated him for laying in stores against contingencies.

But I know that Simon is always conniving to undermine my authority, and I wondered whether this building up of surplus granola bars was part of a strategy. Perhaps he will use the granola bars to bribe the others into putting aside their allegiance to me, for I know that the Forward Element, with their base cultural appetites, can be susceptible to such machinations. Recall the fresh fruit controversy and the long debate over sullied pots, recounted in previous memoirs.

We were finishing the coffee and discussing the day's itinerary, agreement quickly reached that we had to secure an optimal site on Misty Lake, because we were scheduled to stay there for two nights, when in the distance we noticed that troublesome boat again, speeding back. At first, it seemed to be following an oblique course away from us, towards the north-west. Suddenly, however, it tacked significantly in our direction, not altering its speed. Curious, we thought. It is coming our way. And suddenly a consideration entered our minds not hitherto entertained. The occupants of the vessel must be agents of the Crown.

Indeed as the vessel approached and reduced its rate of speed, we could make out clearly two park rangers. We simply kept our places, not surprised or alarmed. As the boat landed, Anthony, never bashful, yelled "Pray tell, by what means is your vessel introduced into these parts?"

One of the rangers answered with complete nonchalance: "Good Sir, by helicopter."

To which Anthony replied "But of course, how else! We could not figure it out!"

And so both rangers disembarked. Pleasant small talk ensued. How are you folks doing? Good. Nice weather we're having. Yes, hopefully it will hold. How long have you been out? Two nights so far. How long is your journey? Five nights altogether. From whence have you come? Burnt Island, after many portages. And so it continued

thus in a friendly and convivial fashion. All the while, though, the rangers cast their eyes about, almost furtively. Obviously, they were scanning for infractions, as they must.

On the one hand I was proud and confident. For we were model campers. They could see the regulation garbage bag, the total absence of glass or metal containers, the efficient camping stove with its light canisters, the collapsible saw, the hanging rope used to suspend the food bag, the clean pots and pans neatly staked along with the teflon cooking implements, the plastic flasks of alcohol, even the inflatable sink, which must have seemed impressive.

On the other hand, I was very much concerned and apprehensive, and my heart began to pound. For we had mislaid one of the emergency canisters. Suppose he wishes to confirm that we have two emergency canisters, one for each canoe, as we must by law, under pain of fine? I can only produce one, and cannot account for the other. Shall a fine be forthcoming? Shall we be ordered to leave the park? I was incredulous that on the very trip when an emergency canister has been mislaid, we are inspected. A signal catastrophe in the annals of camping, and I shall be responsible.

As all this raced through my head, and the hair on the back of my neck began to stand, the ranger inquired finally, after the perfunctory chatter, if he might see our permit. This was a relief. I will produce the permit and they will withdraw, the matter of the canisters never coming up. So I went over to my utility pack suspended from a nearby tree limb, and unzipped one of the small side pockets, extracting a tightly folded yellow slip of paper, returned, and surrendered it. The ranger unfolded and reviewed the document. And he continued to glance it over for several seconds. I became slightly nervous. Surely everything is in order, I thought. At length he said "Do you have one for this year?"

A brief moment of awkward silence. The men looked at me, perplexed. Surely I had completed the formalities at Canoe Lake. "Oh," I suddenly realised, "I may have given you the wrong form." I went back to my utility belt, unzipped the small pocket again, and sure enough retrieved another tightly folded slip of paper.

Returning I explained, "It would seem I had not removed and disposed of last year's registration form, and inserted both into the same pocket on my utility belt. My most humble apologies." And laughter went up, combined with much shaking of heads and expressions of flabbergast.

"No problem indeed," replied the ranger, quickly reviewing the slip, "Everything appears to be in order." And so we exchanged friendly farewells, and the rangers embarked and withdrew after wishing us a successful journey hereafter.

"That was precarious," I declared after the boat had motored to a safe distance. "For although the rangers seemed amicable enough, and although ostensibly we have not infringed any express regulation, I was very nervous throughout the whole encounter. Recall, men, that we have mislaid an emergency canister. What if one of the rangers had asked us to produce our emergency canisters? What could we have done or said to extricate ourselves from such a serious predicament? You are all aware that we must

have one canister per boat, on pain of fine.

Good thing we did not bring along the empty bottle of Jack Daniel's. The situation would have been compounded. How would we have explained its presence? Most of the culpability would have redounded to Anthony, since he would have carried the bottle in his food pack. Even worse, supposing the Forward Element's cannabis and dubage manufacturing paraphernalia had been left out in the open, for the rangers to see, instead of being hidden away. That, combined with our loss of the emergency canister, would surely have landed the whole expedition in gaol!"

"Not at all, Rob," replied Anthony calmly, "The dubage paraphernalia is right here beside me, in this opaque plastic bag."

"Mother of God!" I exclaimed. "What manner of recklessness is this! Just beside you! And you carried on a friendly and effusive conversation with both rangers, all the while cognizant that illegal paraphernalia was just beside you! Paraphernalia that could land us all in gaol, relegating the expedition to infamy!"

"I was never worried, Rob. These men are park rangers, not drug enforcement officers. Surely they are not overly concerned about a little cannabis. Being nervous and furtive would have exacerbated the situation. As for that tiresome emergency canister, I would not give the matter a moment's thought."

"Yes, Rob." continued Richard. "A small quantity of cannabis is not a problem. They want to know that we are here legitimately. Good God, man. It's a silly law at any rate. I think seeing an empty glass bottle among our equipment would have been far more serious, though surely we would not have left it out to be seen."

"Rob, you worry too much." concurred Simon. "We would not have 'landed in gaol' as you put it. They probably would just have confiscated the stuff. You are the one who almost put us in trouble with the law by failing to produce the proper registration form. Perhaps you should review your own performance."

And so I let the matter drop, though I reminded Anthony that demerits had, of necessity, to be forthcoming. We quickly assembled the paraphernalia and readied the boats for launch. If we did not make good time today, we might not secure an adequate sight for the two-night stay-over, always an imperative consideration. So we proceeded south, back into the boggy inlet which soon narrowed down to two separate courses marked by small signage, to the left McIntosh Creek, whence we had emerged into White Trout Lake yesterday, and to the right, to our surprise, the Petawawa River.

Apparently there were two Petawawas, this very small one linking White Trout and Misty lakes, and the mighty and rapid Petawawa to the north. Simon and I, and surely Richard in the lead boat, found this very amusing. For we knew that conquering the Petawawa had been our first intention this year, and that Anthony in particular had lamented our having to abandon the idea.

Simon yelled out, "Anthony, behold, we are now entering the mighty Petawawa. Your wish is fulfilled!"

And Richard, “Veritably, we needn’t worry about canoeing the mighty Petawawa now, Anthony, for we shall have already done so. It’s entire length, and without professional assistance!”

I could not hesitate adding, “Well, we can certainly say that we canoed *a* Petawawa!”

And there was much laughter, though Anthony, according to reports, was not amused. In truth the initial part of the minor Petawawa penetrated the same bog mat cut by the McIntosh, though the course was wider. It was also picturesque, with purple flowers and white water lilies bobbing on the water and lovely old stands of spruce and birch. This Petawawa was broken by several minor portages circumventing small cataracts, followed by one significant portage at 850 metres. Because of our speed and efficiency, due in part to the new procedure on portages, we managed to pass several groups. This was good because it hopefully facilitated the discovery of an optimal site. Indeed, at one portage a group of young campers seemed rather disorganised, and one of its boats went temporarily adrift.

After completing the final portage, I summoned the Forward Element and issued the following orders. It must strike out ahead and reach Misty Lake with all speed, passing any party encountered on the way, using any means at its disposal. Its objective was to secure the best site possible, preferably an island or promontory facing west and with good diving rocks. Simon and I would bring up the rear. Normally, I did not like the Forward Element getting beyond eye-shot on open water, a practice I have previously circumscribed. But this was an emergency. The river seemed busy and we must not be relegated to an unsatisfactory encampment for two nights. And with that I wished the Forward Element good luck and God speed, their eyes lit up with excitement, and they quickly embarked and paddled off at double time.

Simon and I followed, eager to make good progress even if the Forward Element had been sent out ahead. Misty Lake begins as a series of long, narrow fingers stretching east to west. The wind was significant and contrary, and the going was difficult. Canoeing into a contrary wind on open water is not amusing. At length the waterway began to open into the main lake, and we passed a number of sites on both sides, some good and some satisfactory, but there was no sign of the forward element. Furthermore, since it was later in the afternoon, the sun was beginning its descent and our vision was somewhat obscured.

We did see a canoe out ahead, apparently stationary, but we could not make out its two occupants or the colour of the boat against the sun. After a few minutes it began to move north, to our right. We thought it might be the Forward Element. But suddenly we heard yells from our left. It was Richard and Anthony. We turned and made for what appeared a jutting promontory with a beach sloping upward, where the Forward Element stood, waiving vigorously, canoes beached and packs nearby. To immediate appearances a most excellent locality. It even faced west. “Do come and behold, Rob”, said Richard as we came up. “Perforce you shall be impressed.” So Simon and I landed, the Forward Element glowing, and I proceeded to conduct an inspection.



The pebbly beach, flanked by large boulders, ascended to a plateau which accommodated the campsite proper. It was spacious and roomy, and surrounded by trees affording good privacy and ample shade in event either of excessive sun or rain, but also giving a view of the lake on three sides. Hence the site had two components, the main sheltered plateau and the secondary beach lower down. The fire-pit was large and surrounded by excellent sitting logs, and the Forward Element had already collected together a quantity of firewood and arranged it according to the Doctrine of Progressive Combustibility. Most impressive, though, was that a path led along the northern edge of the plateau to a substantial diving rock about 15 feet above the water. This was exactly the perfect arrangement for swimming, especially over two days.

“So,” asked Richard, “What sayest thou?”

I looked around one last time and nodded, “In every particular and in all respects an excellent site.”

“But Rob,” continued Anthony, “Listen to how we contrived to secure it: That canoe that you saw bobbing in the water at some distance from the promontory as you approached us, we raced it here! As is my practice, I had studied the map and clearly this was the most desirable site. So we made it our objective. As we entered the lake and approached the promontory, we saw this other boat also approaching the area from our right. We had to assume that it had also made the promontory its objective. To have assumed otherwise would have been negligent. And we could see that they were canoeing hard.

And so we did the same! We canoed with all our strength and might, straining every atom of our beings. All previous hardships, travails, disappointments and victories have honed us for this one moment, to best a rival for the optimal site on a lake, and secure for the party the best encampment for its two-night stay, always an imperative. And so we beat the water relentlessly, and soon we could see that we were getting closer than our competitor, outstripping them, and the promontory was becoming more distinct, and we could make out its excellent features, which only impelled us to greater exertions. Exhausted but ecstatic, we made ground on the pebbly beach, knowing the other boat still some distance off. And it stopped, and just floated in frustration and despair. We ignored them, for we have no empathy. We are the Forward Element. Here in the wilderness, only the strong survive!”

I congratulated the Forward Element for having achieved yet another victory, confirming that it would be mentioned in dispatches for this amazing feat. But they wanted more, not only to be mentioned but also a special commendation or some other reward or sign of high esteem. I agreed that perhaps some additional tribute was in order. This would also bind the Forward Element closer to me, strengthening their allegiance.

“Henceforth, the Forward Element shall have a motto, which I am awarding on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, since I consider that I command the expedition by a kind of Royal Writ in any case. The motto shall be *Semper Certius*, which translates from the Latin as *Always Faster*, that is, faster in relation to any other canoe or canoeist.

You may use the motto on your devices and stationary.

I am also bestowing on the Forward Element, again in the Queen's name, armorial bearings, more specifically, a coat of arms, a sign that you are now distinguished personages. The arms shall consist as follows: above the motto, a compartment of waves, above the compartment, a tripartite shield, the parts enclosing severally a canoe, a map, and a bolt of lightning. Supporting the shield, two paddles, blades upright, their shafts entwined with laurel symbolising victory. The whole surmounted by the Royal Crown."

The Forward Element was pleased and excited by the conferral of such a signal honour, and that the Crown had reposed such confidence in its abilities and integrity. At once Richard and Anthony yelled three times in succession "Semper Certius" and then sang God Save the Queen. Simon was a bit put off by all the pomp and circumstance, especially being a man of republican sentiment, and also uttered some words about my usurping the role of the heraldic authority. Or perhaps he just resents that by a liberal distribution of rewards and honours I have strengthened my hold over the expedition.

We immediately had some lunch consisting of chocolate and cheddar cheese, and after unpacking all the paraphernalia, water for tea was set boiling while we donned our bathing suits and tested out the diving rock, which proved more than satisfactory, if at first somewhat daunting. We then relaxed and read for the remainder of the afternoon. For dinner I prepared our very first freeze-dried meal: beef stroganoff.

The men had been sceptical of my gradual conversion to freeze-dried modalities, and doubted the preparations would be palatable. But it turned out rather well. We could not, after all, have Craft Dinner and pasta every night. How would that effect morale? The stroganoff was easy to make, only required one cooking vessel, and was both tasty and filling (of course I made six servings instead of just four). After dinner, yet another dive from our precipice, then some more reading and the ignition of a good fire, followed by the usual brewing of coffee and production of cigars, tea and pipe tobacco.

Soon we descended to the pebbly beach with our beverages and smoke, and lay down to look up at the evening sky. Unfortunately, the sky was slightly overcast tonight, so although many stars were still visible, it was not as brilliant as last evening. And as the pebbles at length made the situation uncomfortable, we ascended back to the plateau and stoked the fire, then made some more tea and carried on convivial conversation until midnight, celebrating an eventful day and especially the excellence of our encampment.

Mentioned in Dispatches:

Forward Element: for acquitting itself extremely well in the securing of a sight in every particular and in all respects excellent (1,000 points).

Demerits:

Anthony: for carrying on as a convivial and effusive interlocutor with agents of the Crown while just beside him rested a container of illegal substances and paraphernalia, placing the expedition in jeopardy of landing in gaol (500 points).

### **Sunday, August 4<sup>th</sup>**

It may have been overcast this morning, but that did not prevent us from jumping headlong from our diving rock into the lake immediately on rising. It was Anthony's suggestion. In fact not a suggestion but a simple statement that this is what he intended to do, and that others might join him. Of course we all did precisely that, for who could oppose such single-mindedness, and this kind of opportunity was rare. The plunge was a sharp and radical invigoration first thing in the morning, the water especially chilling, but there were no regrets.

Since there was no canoeing today, everything was leisurely. After drying off from our morning dip, we prepared the coffee and instant oatmeal. Additional surpluses have built up because some of the men have not been consuming their full two packets every morning. And since the men are idle, I have begun to notice bartering and secret agreements, the incipience of a commodities market. Some trading may even go underground. Black marketeering would cause distortions in the commissariat. Simon is cornering the market on granola bars, and Richard controls a quantity of instant oatmeal. Apparently there is this notion that surplus rations are attributable, inalienable and negotiable. The presence of *landjaeger* sausage, so eminently tradable, would surely have exacerbated the situation.

I felt I had to intervene, but needed to do so carefully, without taking oppressive measures, stifling initiative or acting in a confiscatory manner. I simply said offhand, after casually inspecting the food pack, that, fortunately, there seemed to be a surplus of certain foodstuffs, and that this would be "for the general use and enjoyment or for contingencies". The men seemed to get the point, that or the bartering went entirely underground.

The day was spent relaxing and reading, diving of our rock or in convivial discourse, either on the wide plateau or, more preferably, down by the water, usually ensconced on one of the large rocks. I tried to explore along the promontory but the opportunity was limited. To the north, another campsite was soon encountered, and to the south the forest was too dense. As indicated the day was overcast, but at first this was actually appreciated, for it provided a break from the sun. As long as it did not rain, all would be well.

Around noon I declared that for the first time I would prepare some bannock bread. This is a kind of pan-baked, thick oatmeal pancake. The mixture is pre-packaged. You simply add water and prepare a moist dough, rather a messy business. It is hard to make without an evenly heated pan, very difficult with my portable stove, which has a smaller, very intense flame. It also requires constant attention to prevent sticking or burning. A good coating of olive oil is certainly needed. But it turned out in large chunks instead of a consistent pancake as desired, and some portions were

under-cooked.

However, the men liked it, especially with soft butter and fresh tea. It will take some practice, I declared, but bannock bread is now a regular part of the commissariat. I then turned my hand to the organic banana bread mixture we had also brought along. This was a disaster, harder to make, less appetising, and diminutive in quantity. It would not be a regular, and Simon summed it up when he advised me that anything with the label “organic” is immediately suspect.

Anthony reminded us that in his mind the organic desert was reminiscent of the Up-Country Chocolate-Oatmeal-Coconut Instant After-Dinner Harvest-Home Cookie-Chew Yum-Yum that we experimented with on expedition some years ago, and which proved similarly unpalatable but was a serviceable caulking. But after our snacking adventures, Richard told me outright that the men were pleased, or at least acquiescent, in the new dietary regime. We also opened a large “summer sausage”, which I had purchased in place of the usual Genoa salami. I had not been sure about the wisdom of this, and it turned out to be somewhat like corned beef. Only Anthony and I found we could eat it.

Eventually we were sensible of significant noises from the opposite shore. We spied with my Bushnells. Apparently one of the sites was occupied by a large party of youngsters. Up to 11, we counted, clearly beyond the stipulated complement. Richard advised me to copy this down so we could lodge a complaint. I would do so, and if such obstreperousness continues, I would, furthermore, have no hesitation dispatching the Forward Element on an embassy across the lake to express our displeasure, bearing its new coat of arms.

Eventually, though, the rain came. It was somewhat inevitable though we were loath to acknowledge it. We repaired to the tent. Of course, the fly had been put in place, in the circumstances, and the equipment and packs had already been centrally organised, with tarpaulin nearby so that it could be quickly spread out and secured by rocks. Unfortunately the bivouac fire that as a matter of practice is kept going all day would be extinguished, but we had collected a quantity of firewood which was also placed under the tarp.

In the event, the rain was neither prolonged nor severe, basically allowing for a good nap. After a while, we emerged one-by-one, and Richard quickly set the tea pot boiling. We were quite pleased to have not been, but the overcast continued, and we now regretted that we should not be enjoying such a perfect site in similarly perfect weather. A pretty mist, however, emanated from the hills opposite (the screams of the young campers had abated), which better be appreciated through my Bushnells.

The dying hours of the afternoon were spent in further dissipation, including reading, drinking tea and smoking, and reminiscing about previous trips. Soon I began the second repast of Kraft Dinner, something, I’m afraid, of a let-down after the stroganoff served last night. My handkerchief, routinely mocked by the enlisted men, again proved invaluable to assist in draining out the boiling water.

But as there were no stars to be seen this evening, and it was rather more cool, and

maintaining the fire difficult for the dampness (the drier wood quickly consumed) we retired early after some perfunctory coffee and liquor.

Mentioned in Dispatches:

Anthony: for suggesting a plunge into the cool lake immediately on rising, which caused great invigoration after our slumbers (250 points).

Demerits:

Simon: for claiming to dispose of surplus granola bars (notionally attributable, inalienable and negotiable) and thereby causing distortions and precipitating irregular trading practices which threatened the commissariat (250 points).

Richard: for doing the same with instant oatmeal, of which he often (perhaps by design) only consumes one packet in the morning instead of the prescribed two (250 points).

### **Monday, August 5<sup>th</sup>**

The Forward Element is loath to admit that its late victory may have been exceeded. That is to say, that the two-day promontory, secured by such heroic exertions leading to a succession of honours, may not deserve the title “best site of the expedition”. For presently we are established, for the last night of camping, on what in my humble estimation is our best site ever. And indeed, it was not even secured by the Forward Element exclusively, that is, by its probing out ahead independently. After entering Tom Thompson Lake, a smaller body of water, we were able to follow closely behind the Forward Element, even able to converse, as we picked our way slowly along the lake’s eastern shoreline, looking for the best place to make ground. One site seemed especially good, but we agreed to continue to the one just beyond, and sure enough we were not disappointed in any respect.

It is the ideal site in my opinion, projecting slightly and consisting of three rocky terraces beneath a well-treed slope. The main camp may be said to occupy the second terrace, where the fire pit and tent emplacement are located. The upper terrace commands the main encampment and affords extra space where one can sit or recline, since the ground is grassy and comfortable. The lower terrace is somewhat triangular. On the northern flank of the site it faces a small, peaceful bay, and is quite flat, leading to a small and peaceful “secondary lagoon” as one walks further back, under a picturesque canopy of trees, almost a kind of natural launching ramp. In the opposite direction, towards the front of the site facing the lake, the lower terrace breaks up into a series of large rocks which are negotiable for several metres and suitable for shallow diving. Finally, a path leads from the upper terrace to a rocky prominence further up, and excellent place view the lake and its surroundings.

Considering how busy our transit was today, I am actually surprised that we were able to secure a site of such excellence. We rose early enough – the precise time I do not know because we lack a time piece among our accoutrements – and quickly broke camp after the obligatory oatmeal and thick coffee to fortify us. It is often difficult to

motivate the men after a two-night rest, but they seemed eager, and the Forward Element in particular wanted to resume the display of its prowess, which it cannot do on land. Also the planned itinerary was not without its daunting aspects. We had to cross two lakes, Timerwolf and McIntosh, and overcome three portages, two of moderate size but the final one into Tom Thompson of 2,320 metres, by far the longest portage of the expedition.

It was a busy area and we passed several parties, the portage entries and termini being especially crowded, often with groups of young boys and girls, probably organised camp groups. We also noticed some interesting equipage and paraphernalia. One party we met on portage had a cooler, something we would consider quite bulky and excessive given the nature of our commissariat and the exigencies of transport. Another was accompanied by two dogs and what was described as an “electronic direction finder.” A party of women sported two lawn chairs! This was beyond the pale, we thought. Only a party of women would revile the prospect of sitting on stones and logs, in commune with nature, and then burden itself with such awkward paraphernalia.

But all difficulties were overcome, the policy against doubling back again saving us much time (the long portage would have been especially Hellish). And after making ground at this excellent place, we hauled the impedimenta up to the second terrace and began unpacking the equipment needed to create all the comforts of our temporary wilderness home: the tent and rain fly, the cooking stove and fuel canisters, cooking pots and implements and inflatable sink, the seasonings dispenser, the collapsible saw, and all the remaining foodstuffs, plus our personal gear, especially our sleeping bags and mats, the latter used not exclusively at night but also during the day as a convenient platforms to recline in the open to read or nap.

The site, however, was bereft of fire wood, and two successive details were necessary. I actually had the pleasure of accompanying the first one, something I don't normally do, firstly because it is beneath my station as expedition leader, second because I am usually occupied setting up the kitchen, preparing tea and organising the evening repast. Such is the efficient allocation of responsibilities in a well-run camp. I do, however, ensure that all wood is organised according to the doctrine of progressive combustibility, which the enlisted men have enthusiastically adopted and which has proven its validity through multiple trials. Also, since the site is so excellent, I could use the wood detail as an excuse to become more familiar with its environs.

Simon, of course, brought along his large canister of bear repellent. The enlisted men tend to be in fear of ursine predation, but the idea has never exercised me. In fact, the only wildlife we have even seen on this expedition, aside from a heron or two along the bog mat and perhaps a falcon, has graced us today in the form of fat garter snake, which slithered back and forth on the lower terrace between some bushes and the water, probably in search of food, and the occasional circling gull, perhaps scrounging for detritus in these busy waters.

Despite the business of the waterways, though, we observed that our lake is mostly vacant. As our journey was scheduled around the Simcoe Day weekend, and since today is Simcoe Day, most of the canoeists are surely going home at this point. A

number of parties passed by, sometimes the same ones we had passed earlier. One party of young gentlemen, apparently from a camp, even put on a rather peculiar display, part affectation, part physics and part, we thought, stupidity. The group, consisting of four canoes, each of three men, came together gunwale to gunwale, holding the boats in place manually, bows pointing in the desired direction. Then, every canoeist reclined backward and raised his paddle upright, flat of the blade against the following wind. In this manner they hoped to convert their several canoes into a kind of wind-powered catamaran.

It did not work, indeed was comical, the arrangement simply drifting this way and that without progress, the canoes barely saying adjacent. Though the enlisted men thought the concept “neat”, the consensus was that it was futile for various reasons, the wacky invention of some lazy camping savant. The flats of a dozen paddles could not harness the wind, and un-keeled canoes held manually together would not be a suitable platform for wind propulsion even if they had a proper sail! Richard turned to me and said quite seriously, “Rob, do not fear. For though it is amusing to observe this kind of experiment from afar, the Forward Element would never entertain any means of propulsion aside from its own power and proficiency.” Anthony nodded, saying “Otherwise, or coat of arms should be revoked.”

The silence is what is often most impressive in back-country. Here, industrial civilization is but a memory, and there is nothing but the gentle lapping of water against rock, and the constant symphony of tall spruce undulating in the wind. When I mentioned how I like the silence, Richard concurred, saying the seclusion is something that must be worked for, and that not many people are willing to do so, fortunately. And while the ears enjoy a lack of stimulation, the nose is pleasantly assaulted by the rich scents of burning pine and birch as the fire is enlivened, by the moist and fragrant breeze wafting off the lake, and by the hearty aromas of thick brandied coffee, rich cigar tobacco and vanilla Cavendish. Even the usually noxious scent of cannabis leaf seems natural out here in the wilderness.

I prepared an early dinner of my curried instant rice with coconut and almonds, although this time I could not fortify the preparation with almond paste, since I had not been able to find any. I was only marginally satisfied with the results, and shall seriously contemplate excluding curried rice from subsequent menus, for it requires multiple ingredients and is time-consuming to prepare using two cooking vessels. I first made the dish on our second expedition and had continued doing so every year, but it surely did not occupy the same place of honour, or constitute so revered a tradition, as the kippers and eggs. The men declared they were quite satisfied with the repast and encouraged me not to abandon it, but I simply could not concur, since I had every intention of exploring further the world of freeze-dried cuisine.

As the day progressed, despite some initial scattered clouds, the sun broke through and the afternoon and dusk were extremely pleasant. After dinner we sat or reclined at various points on the rocky promontory, reading copiously, drinking brandied coffee, consuming whatever could be consumed of the remaining snacks (I’m afraid we shall indeed leave the park with a surfeit of granola bars and oatmeal), smoked and conversed. One excellent place to ensconce was along the rocky ledge of the third terrace, overlooking the lower camp, where one could sprawl out and read. As dusk

came, the tree-lined slopes on the opposite shore became resplendent by the sun's glimmer, and the scattered clouds were etched in silver, a most remarkable site, and I ascended to the rocky point of the encampment to appreciate it fully.

It is a windy evening but this is agreeable because it keeps the mosquitoes at bay. Unfortunately, though, the night is also proving rather cool, indeed the most chilly yet this year, and we have all donned our sweaters, which we may have to sleep in. Well, we cannot expect to enjoy such an excellent site without such minor disappointments. At least tomorrow, as we return to Canoe Lake, we shall have but one portage, that 295 metre one formerly beset by weekend tourist speaking various tongues, now hopefully departed. Otherwise, I think it will be a pleasant journey, the numerous cottages and summer camps providing a gentle re-introduction to that industrial civilization we do not miss. My only concern is the damned mislaid emergency canister. If the cold does not disturb my sleep this evening, the missing canister surely will. For if challenged to produce both canisters when we return to the rental agency, I shall have no answer, and we must have one for each canoe, on pain of fine.

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