

CHAPTER 12

THOREAU CARRY ON THE PENOBSCOT RIVER

"In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of the eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment." Henry Thore u

Through the University housing lists I quickly found a room in Orono, within walking distance of the campus. After work in my new library job, and weekends, I went real-estate hunting, hoping to find a small cabin of a size and price which I could easily handle. The available cabins proved to be numerous, but I soon learned they led me a merry chase all over the very rural countryside only to find that most of them would have been best benefited by a lighted match. The few livable ones which I found were too far to drive back and forth to work on snowy, icy days. A few were so close to a road edge, or to other buildings, there wasn't too much privacy or yard in which to grow either wild or cultivated flowers. The real estate people explained that most of these cabins were left from the days when there were as many as 300 sawmills in the Old Town- Stillwater River area.

With not much faith left, the weather already growing chillier, feeling I was going to be stuck all winter in one room where I had to share a bathroom, I decided to look at one more possibility. The real estate man's wife had called it a Doll House, which scared me off. But, I went to look,

I drove up to Old Town, across the two bridges over the Penobscot River onto Rte. 2, and headed north once more, having already gone up that way several times. Four miles up river I came to a small settlement on the river bank. At the end of it I went down a driveway which led me onto a tree-screened terrace above the river. It was a rather large yard, with a small, attractive, one-story cottage at the ~~right~~^{north} end, and an odd-looking yet modern garage to the ~~right~~^{south}. The driveway was circular, enclosed from the highway by shrubs and a wide, deep depression which I could tell was wet by the plants growing there. Back of the cottage was a young woodlot of hardwoods and shrubs. It was not only the most-possible looking domicile I had seen on my lists, but even charming. I phoned the real estate office from a neighbor's.

No one could come right away so I walked around the property, not ~~quite~~ quite believing my eyes, thinking surely something has to be wrong with this to be comparable in price to some of the derelicts I had been looking at. Why hadn't someone snapped it up by now? The whole setting was in a quiet little nook, scenically framed by the river along the west side. The new-looking, grey-green shingled roof sloped down rather low on the front, south side, under which was a small front porch. A chimney rising above the back section of the roof proved it had some kind of heating system. Judging by the outside, the cottage was so compact in size and style I felt I could take care of it easily, including roof repairs and outside wall painting. And, I could see from the outside, that the west window looked out over the river.

I stood at the top of the river bank, which was about ten to fifteen feet above the river surface; across the way was the tip end of a long island, which was forested, as was the ~~main~~^{island} island downstream below it. The scene might as well have

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been on Thoreau's West Branch up in the Maine wilderness. I was so elated I felt I would levitate if something didn't pin me down right quick.

There was one concern, however, of which I had been aware even as I was driving down into this place, which kept my balloon from over-inflating. I have always derided people who buy or build, or even rent, a house which is in the bottom of a river valley. Although this spot wasn't exactly in the very bottom, yet it was on the flood plain. I knew that the high bank which I was standing on was but an illusion. This was a fairly large river; it was fed by countless lakes and streams far to the north, including the water running off mile-high Katshdin, down ^DDebsgoneeg Falls and the Deadwater on which I had just been camping.

I had always felt that people deserved what they got for not having more sense than to live on a flood plain. So I walked down the bath between this yard and the settlement houses, hoping to find someone of whom to ask questions. The only person in sight was a boy about ten or eleven years old. I asked him, "Does the spring flood ever come up in here along these houses?"

He said, "My father says it used to flood up in here^e but since they rebuilt Rte. 2 it hasn't come this high. Not in ten years."

That sounded rather hopeful, though I couldn't see how a change in the road would keep the river flood out, yet they might have banked it differently than it had been. I walked back to the cottage, and explored a path which I'd noticed led down the bank at the west end of the cottage, below the west window but still high above the river. It led to a cellar, as I suspected, but it was wide open as there was no door. I walked inside and saw first the huge modern-looking furnace. But the cellar ended abruptly behind the furnace, for it extended only under the western end of the building. Just inside the door were shelves, obviously for storing things like canning jars. Most eye-catching were the supports of the back end of the cottage, for they were very large tree boles, more than a foot in diameter. Nothing could have been sturdier. I studied them for there were water stains on

them though they now look almost excessively dry. There certainly were no molds growing on them. It could be that the river water had not gotten up to them in the last ten years. But I couldn't tell for sure if these were old or relatively new^water stains. Who could I ask^{whom} I could trust? It could be that the real estate people wouldn't know, if they had recently acquired the property for the first time. If they'd had it in the past through more than one change of hands, they might know.

I left the place reluctantly, for it was intriguing, and headed back to ~~for~~ my room, having decided to take the property if payments were made low enough for me to meet them. I knew I didn't intend to spend the rest of my life there, what with so many wild spots beckoning me from Florida ^{northern} to ^{Maine}. It sure looked like a good spot to tuck into until the next venture called.

The cottage proved to be partly furnished, with twin beds in the small bedroom, a table and chairs in the dining room by the western window which I'd seen from outside, and an efficiency kitchen built against the south wall, with gas stove and refrigerator. There was a walk-in closet^t off the dining room, and a living room across the southeast corner of the cottage, with a huge rocker and a small desk.

When I got into the cottage the first time and saw the view out the dining room window, looking out over the river ~~xxx~~ to the wooded island, I felt as if I'd buy the place just for that scene, for I knew I would soon be watching birds in migration out there, - along a 10,000 year flyway.

Why the cottage had not been snapped up before now I soon learned. There had been an older couple in it; the wife died about a year ago^{of cancer}, and the husband had just recently died of a heart attack. The property had only just come onto the market after a family settlement. I did do some wondering if river pollution had been the cause of their health problems, for I knew that the Penobscot was as polluted as other rivers in the east. I r^solved to minimize the possibilities by bring^{ing} in drinking and cooking water from the University, and use the water from the well sparingly for anything else.

Between the ^{cottage} ~~cece~~ and the garage, not far in from the river bank top, there was a typical well-head with a sturdy cover over it. I knew that wasn't far enough back from the river for safe filtering of the well water; I was sure the well went down to the water table, which would be the river surface level in flood as well as normal times. After the flood water dropped down, pollution organisms would remain in the sides of the well. Thus before I even saw the inside of the house, and learned that this water supply was piped into the kitchen and bathroom, I knew I would have to resign myself to carrying water for drinking and cooking, were I to live there.

I was so intrigued with the woodlot out back that one of the first things I did was to explore it. But the ditch between my yard and the woodlot was so deep I knew it wasn't going to be practical to keep climbing up and down it, that someday I would have to build a little bridge. Once I got out there I didn't find anything too unusual in wild plants, and the woodlot itself, with no evergreens, was only about ten to fifteen years old, which seemed to prove that the river hadn't flooded in there for at least a decade. The only trees of any size were a couple of willows, which are river bottom trees and can stand flooding. The species present were mostly red maple, gray birch, and some ash.

I was pleased, however, to come across a stand of wood betony, near some birches, which is a usual place for them to grow; there is now some evidence they have a symbiotic relationship with birch roots. This betony is closely related to the rare lousewort. But I had never seen wood betony so close to a river.; its presence was possible evidence it hadn't flooded up in here for some time. ^a ~~R~~omping through this woodlot, I didn't see any river flood debris hung up in the shrubs or other ^t ~~v~~egetation, which is a usual sight so close to large streams.

Eventually I discovered that my driveway had not always been circular,

but that it had extended to the edge of the ditch and across it through the woodlot on the other side. I realized this when I noticed that there was a very straight-line semblance of an opening through the trees over there. Nature rarely creates straight lines through growing plants. I crossed the ditch and where I climbed up out of it I studied the ground under my feet. Scraping the surface humus away with the toe of my sneaker I discovered, sure enough, a tar-surface underneath. I walked a few ~~feet~~^{feet} ahead, scraped again, and repeated ^e that a few times; in every case, there was an underlying tar surface which had become covered with forest humus. I could see, without going all the way and testing, that this had been a road which came out onto Rte. 2 a quarter mile ahead, northward.

So this is where the old road had been, which was low enough to flood! It was now obvious, just standing there and looking out through the trees at the highway, that the new Rte. 2 was considerably higher than this old one had been. So this was why the spring flood no longer came into the settlement. The wide wet depression between my yard and the highway, and the ditch, at right angles to it which led right to the river, were intended to drain any excess water back out to the river. It was even more obvious now, that if I wanted to keep coming over to this woodlot I'd have to build a bridge over that ditch drainway.

One day, when I picked up my mail on the way to work, I sat in my car and read a letter from Leonard Kleinfeld, an old Thoreauvian friend, who wrote, "Now that you live in Maine do something for Henry Thoreau there." I wasn't too keen about starting something like that by myself, though I had often wished ^{that}, even before I lived in Maine, there were some active Thoreau group in Maine. His MAINE WOODS was such an outstanding piece of

literature , that Fannie Eckstorm, a prominent Maine writer in recent times, had declared MAINE WOODS the best book yet written about Maine in its wilder days. My subconscious mind worked on Leonard's suggestion all day.

Driving home after work, I once again started thinking of Leonard's comments about Thoreau. Then, all of a sudden, I felt as if I had been hit by something jolting. That covered roadway, extending from my yard to across the ditch into the woodlot out back of my cottage, was the old carriage road over which Thoreau had ridden on his first trip to the northern Maine woods. Instantly the whole thing was clear! I had bought a Maine cottage on the Penobscot River where Henry Thoreau had ridden right through my yard! What serendipity!

Supper had to wait while I got out my copy of Thoreau's MAINE WOODS.

Sure enough, on September 1, 1846, Henry Thoreau rode in a carriage in which was also his Bangor cousin, George Thatcher; they drove ~~from~~ from Bangor to Old Town, crossed the river over the two bridges into Milford, drove due north through Milford, right through my yard and that back woodlot to Costigen which is the little settlement ^{a half mile up the road,} ~~where he lived for many years,~~ and reached Enfield that first day.

As Henry states it in his book, "We landed in Milford and rode on the east side of the river, having a more or less constant view of the river, and the Indian islands in it, for they retain all the islands to Nicketow." The road was then known as the Houlton Road, the only ststraight road in these ^{asc} parts, as "straight and ^{well} made and kept in as good repair as almost any you will find anywhere.", recorded Thoreau. No doubt the road was kept that way by the logging people who had to use ^{it} ~~them~~ all year for one lumbering chore or another.

Henry went on to say, "We crossed the Sunkhaze", a small river which enters the Penobscot a half mile down the road from me. The next towns which he mentioned passing through were Olamom, just north of me, and

just up the road
 Passadumkeeg, an historical Indian site. There was no way Thoreau and his companions in that carriage could have gotten from Milford, across the Sunkheze to Costigen other than through my yard ~~otherwise~~ on that old road which I had uncovered by scraping my toe out in that back woodlot. Rte 2, as it was now constituted, was only ten years old. By putting such bits and pieces of facts together you get something ~~put together~~ that for ~~while~~ was forgotten.

The words "serendipity" and "fortuitous" kept swimming in my head, as I realized that if I stood on my front porch and spit to the east I would hit Henry Thoreau's trail through my yard, and if I spit to the west I would hit Henry Thoreau's trail down the Penobscot River, right under my window, as he paddled by with his Indian guide, Joe Polis. If I had planned it, I couldn't have done better. But it just happened. I began to feel as if it were ordained that this should happen. And so did some of my Thoreauvian friends, as I learned later.

I was just four miles upstream from Old Town, a rural but modern town of just over 9,000 residents; Bradley was just below that on the river with around a thousand inhabitants, then Orono with about 10,000, its population swollen by the presence of the University of Maine, ^{16 miles downstream for my place} then Bangor, the third largest city in Maine with 33,000 residents at the time I was living on the Penobscot. Bangor had only about 14,500 people when Thoreau used to visit his cousins there, at which time Bradley had less than 800, Milford was only 677, and Old Town 3,381, of which most of the 380 were Penobscot Indians. These increases were generally slower than for the rest of the nation. Milford was up to 1,800 at the time I was there, which was the town of my residence, despite the proximity of Costigen less than a mile up the road. Costigen was and still is more ^{or} ~~less~~ ^t a waystation, with a convenient post office and country-style grocery store and gas station, all of which proved very handy in bad weather, and are patronized by the drivers of the numerous logging trucks which pass through.

Bangor was the major town in the area even in Thoreau's day. In 1850 he disembarked there from the Boston steamer to visit his Thatcher cousins. There is some indication that Thoreau visited there when he was a boy of about ten, with his father, and it was by taking the steamer at Bangor to Boston that Penobscot Indians often found their way to Thoreau's home town of Concord where they traveled from door to door selling baskets.

Most of the population along the river until recent years was tied to logging and the sawmills. Now the pulp mills maintain much of the population, there being, among other such paper products, a paper towel mill at Old Town. The still developing educational facilities at the University at Orono attract a large population, which offers the most modern education for the youth of Maine. But somehow, the gap between town and gown ~~is~~ remains quite wide, for the mills have too long tempted youth to drop out of school, a paycheck having more appeal than taking tests and exams.

Milford, to my delight, was and still is a small, friendly country town, and as in all such little towns the Post Office was the center of information and sociable comings and goings. This one had a husband and wife team for postmaster and postmistress, who were eventually to be rather important friends in my Maine life. Across the street was the gas station which was to feed and care for my car as long as I lived there. Around the corner near the bridges was Chet's, a real home-town second hand store which was second only to the post office as a source of information and congeniality.

To get back to downstream of what was now "my" river, Bucksport ~~was~~ is located at what some people consider the mouth of the Penobscot. Because Penobscot Bay, into which the Penobscot flows, is so large, spreading out for many miles and containing many islands, it is easy to debate just where the river ends. Bucksport, which you must cross the river on a high bridge to reach, is a town with many large mills; tourists usually stop there for maps and general information on the Down East and for northern sections of Maine. Once you cross the river into Bucksport there is a sense

of entering the far North Country of historical and literary fame, where Maine is still sparsely settled compared to the rest of eastern United States. Officially, however, the Penobscot River begins at Searsport. But it has a big overall basin, covering one fourth of the State of Maine. It has 1,604 streams, 467 ponds and lakes, and is 160 miles from north to south and 115 miles wide. Having entered the region myself from Searsport, and camped and walked around the Millinocket and lower West Branch area, and paid a short visit to the lower East Branch area I felt that I'd become at least minimally acquainted with The Penobscot before I settled down to live on the main River itself.

Having gone to Maine from Massachusetts I was very much aware that Maine once belonged to Massachusetts, the two states having separated in 1820. I arrived there just under the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, and of course there was no sign of Massachusetts in sight. Maine it very definitely is, all the way from Kittery bridge up to the Canadian border, to my delight and even pride. I was lucky to be alive when a state so close to my home state of Connecticut was still on a pioneer interface. It still had several genuine Indian tribes, such as the Penobscots, the Micmacs and the Passamaquoddies, whose ancestors had experienced the immediate effects of the glacier meltback.

If I were to live here, perched high above the Penobscot River, I had to have wildflowers growing out there close by and birds keeping me company all the year round. One of the first things I did was put up a bird feeder in the yard. Not to see what rare species I could lure, but to know that I was living with the wild birds every day. I like to pretend that all of the birds in the world belong to me. After all, there are only eight thousand kinds on the whole planet. I want to be part of their lives and in my small way help them bridge the problems which have arisen between their wild needs and the pressures of mankind. I like to put out a helping hand to minimize the stress.

As is true for anyone moving into a country place, I had my share of chores indoors as well as outside. Fortunately, I was handy with hammer and saw, if not very professional. I'd had my eye for some time on a couple of dead, branchless trees in the woods out back. Gradually I dragged them to the bank of the ditch and lifted their ends to the opposite side. Other such fallen, but smaller diameter wood I cut up and laid across the stringers as a corduroy path across the bridge. Not being very good at toenailing I fastened them in place with wire woven around their ends and around the stringers. It was worth it, not to have to slide down into the deep ditch and climb up again.

The sandy river soil outside the garage was so soft that in wet weather my car^s sank in to the hubs. I managed to get it out myself, as the rear wheels were still on solid ground. But in case I wanted to pull the car into the garage in the winter, I gathered rocks from along roadsides, dug two ditches, car-track wide, filled in with the stones, then added gravel on top of them which I gleaned from a small nearby gravel pit. In the end, however, after all that work, I never did drive the car into the garage for later I discovered the garage underpinnings were weak. But I did have a safe, firm place to park the car out of the way.

Indoors, I built two sets of bookshelves, and constructed two sets of shelves in the walk-in closet. But most of the indoor work^{which} I tackled was in the garage, where I built a work bench all along across the back of the building, something like a greenhouse bench, where I could work with plants or any little carpentering tasks. I made a rough frame for a couch, so I could sleep out there when company needed the house. Here, too, I built some shelves, for things like flower pots and garage-type storage.

My Thoreau friends had been writing to me. They were intrigued with my living in what they called "Thoreau Country." When they learned that

my cottage was set plump in the middle between Thoreau's carriage road and the river down which he had peddled from the Maine woods, they began suggesting they come for a visit. The first to arrive were two friends from Florida, Wade and Irma Van Dore. Wade had been a Thoreau devotee since his teens, when he dropped out of school and went to live in the Canadian wilderness and write poetry. He built a cabin in the Shebandown^o area of Ontario, determined to live the simple life. Wade was one of those who probably should have gone to college, as he had the mental capacity for it, but he chose to be a self-made man and do his own studying. The book of poetry which he created there, FAR LAKE, attracted the attention of Robert Frost. For several seasons he lived on the Frost farm in New Hampshire, helping with the farm chores, and spending long hours discussing poetry with Frost. Wade eventually wrote a biography of Frost, and his own experiences with the poet, THE LIFE OF THE HIRED MAN.

They arrived a day before I expected them, so they explored the outside area by themselves. They were in the yard, with their camper car, when I arrived; the real estate man was with me, to sign the deed. We all went into the cottage for the signing, with Wade and Irma as witnesses at the dining room table overlooking Thoreau's Penobscot River trail.

After I saw the real estate man to the door, Irma turned up the thermostat, as it was getting cool. As the kitchen stove was hooked up to the big gas tank out in the yard, she began fixing cabbage and other food they had brought in. The electricity was not yet turned on so they brought in two little wooden candle sticks which someone had given them along the way and placed them on either side of a wooden bowl of mine in which they had placed red grapes. Wade lit the candles, murmuring^{ing} something from Thoreau, as our house-warming devotion. We even had chocolate pudding for dessert, which I'd made beforehand.

*Wild Boats
Sherwood*

After supper we drove over to Indian Island, Wade and I being much interested in Thoreau's Penobscot Indians. We met and talked with Chief John Mitchell, and asked him questions about Joe Polis only to learn that the Polis family was already forgotten. But this proved to be the first of many visits to the Island for me and the beginning of many Indian friendships.

Wade and Erma stayed for a couple of days, exploring the area while I was at work all day. Wade surprised me by building a wonderful, solid door and hanging it on hinges, with a latch, closing in the open cellar. One of the things he suggested, when we were talking together their last evening, was that we name my place "Thoreau Carry." "Because," he said, no one in Maine uses the word "portage." Witness the portage up at Mud Pond, on the West Branch. It has always been known as Mud Pond Carry. Though Henry Thoreau and Joe Polis didn't do any carrying of their canoe near my part of the river, they did carry that particular boat many times up in the Ketchikan area.

Wade gave me a ~~xxxxx~~ donation with which to buy a new mailbox, and have "Thoreau Carry" printed on it, to install a telephone, and with which to buy a wood stove, ^{the} long, narrow log type, for the garage. The mailbox, and of course the telephone, have long since passed out of my life, but the log burner is still around, - Sears brand.

I felt a little down in spirit after Wade and Erma left next day, for winter was up ahead, and and it began to look as if I would never, ever attain my goal of spending a winter in my favorite island, Moorea, in the South Pacific. But I don't stay down long, as most life is an adventure to me and I was where I had chosen to be for awhile.

One of the things which Wade and I had discussed was Leonard's insistence that I start a Maine Thoreau group. He was all in favor of it, so my hopes soared when I got home from work that next day and found a check

waiting for me at the Post Office for membership in our new Thoreau group which between Leonard and me, and now also Wade, we were calling the Thoreau Fellowship. I was off, with a hop and a skip.

The next weekend after the Van Dores left I worked out a bird feeder tray, using a board about one and a half feet long and ten inches wide; I hammered an edging around it to keep the bird seed from rolling off. I began attracting the birds, or, as it were, notifying them of what it was, by putting hunks of white bread on it to start with. As I had it on a post in the yard a few feet from the east side of the house, I knew that I would have to find a closer-by site for it come snow time; the important thing now was to acquaint the birds with the tray.

In no time, a blue jay pounced on the bread, as is what often happens. The smaller birds are usually aware of it when the larger ones find something to eat. Before long, a couple of chickadees landed on the tray, and examined the bread, which was bigger than they were. That did it. I switched the bread for sunflower seeds. The big ones gave it up, leaving the tray to the small ones. I was afraid squirrels would soon find the tray, though I hadn't seen any around. But this was a start, for in no time the white throated sparrows had joined the chickadees.

I found the kind of log burner stove Wade had in mind, at Sears as I have indicated, Bangor having a large Sears outlet. As there was no chimney in the garage I had to improvise. I cut a hole nearly a foot square in the north wall. I learned of a tinsmith in Old Town; he cut a metal square for me to fit over the hole, and cut a brooder-size stovepipe hole in its center. This I nailed over the hole to keep out rain and snow, but it allowed a stovepipe to go through it without catching the wall on fire. Sears delivered the stove right to the garage and the next rainy day I assembled it all, including the outside piece of stovepipe, with its rain cap.

At once I was catapulted into one of my favorite outdoor exercises, gathering firewood. ^d ~~Co~~wood was too expensive; besides I only needed a small supply to use now and then to warm up the garage when I wanted to work out there. I picked up odds and ends of wood along roads, gather^{ed} quite a bit of driftwood from the river bank, and cut up some of the down~~ed~~ wood in the woodlot out back. To me there isn't a much cozier feeling a human can experience than a wood fire when you are the one who collected the wood. While I've never been much of an imbiber of anything between meals, I did pick up a small kettle at Chet's, which I kept out there, with a mug, and a container of tea bags. I brought out a jug of water on chilly days to make tea if I felt in the mood. Such a simple thing as that always made me more ecstatic with a sense of self-sufficiency, than if I were in an expensive decor-appointed home where ^e everything was according to the interior decorators and Emily Post. It was a sort of race memory, from the days when some women were very skilled at making a cave a cozy home; especially producing warmth and comfort where the cold breath of the glacier was in the air.

The fall slid by very fast, as the days grew shorter and I had only week-ends to work outdoors. The day the first snow flurry blew around the yard a white-throated sparrow landed on the feeder. By then I could see that the wind off the river sometimes sucked the bird seed off the tray; I decided to move the tray in under the porch, where it would be in out of the wind but be more or less in out of the snow also. At first I was afraid it would disturb the birds to have me going in and out of the front door, as the porch was small but I place^d it ~~near the~~^{near a} corner, and though they did scare off when I opened the door or came up on the porch from the yard, they seemed to take my presence as just a temporary inter^ruption. Once I got out of their way, they resumed their feeding activities. By then I was adding regular bird feed mix to the sunflower seeds, which some of the birds seem to prefer. It was just delightful having them right outside my door.

I knew there would be more snowstorms in northern Maine than I had been accustomed to in southern New England, but somehow I wasn't prepared for two and three storms a week. I do love snow. It is even more fascinating than rain, which, common as it is, seems to me one of the most beguiling happenings on the planet. After all, Nature could dump water on us in sheets; why in segregated raindrops? In my innocent days, snow was popped frozen raindrops; like popcorn. Actually, it is six-sided crystals which spread out at sixty-degree angles to each other, the crystals having been built up, ^water molecule by water molecule, size and shape dependent on the temperature and amount of humidity present. Snow covers the earth like an ermine wrap, soft, pure, unsullied, covering up many a human-caused eyesore, and muffling the sounds of the world. But!

One thing I had not anticipated, was driving to work early in the morning, after a night's snow or ice storm, with logging trucks competing for space down highways still half choked with snow. While it was only eight miles to my job in the University library, and my driveway was close enough to permit easy access to the highway, as a local snowplow kept all our driveways open, I learned one indisputable fact about northern Maine life, - loggers own the road. Or think they do.

But as with most of life's activities, there were little tricks to minimize the situation. In this case, I would wait for a logging truck to pass if one were in sight up the road, spouting and blowing snow from all sides like an old fashioned train steam engine, then I would slip in behind it. I followed it, using it as a shield against anything up front, but staying a safe distance behind in case it had to stop suddenly. That did demand constant, unrelieved attention. But I learned that was much better than getting out into the road ahead of a logging truck, as I used to do at first, assuming it was then out of sight behind ~~xxx~~

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me. But it didn't take me long to discover that drivers of logging trucks are constitutionally unable to stay back of a private car if it is right up there in front of them. They just don't want any car in front of them. They feel they have to pass you if you aren't racing away from them. They do pass like a ^h thundering behemoth, with all the snow blowing up around the truck ~~in~~ and in your path, blocking your vision so you can't tell if you are being pushed off the road. It is much better to follow a logging truck, then stay there behind it for as far as it is going in your direction.

One day I almost stayed home from work because a storm had been pouring down snow all night, the wind was picking up with the increase of daylight, and I'd lost some of my adventurous enthusiasm for getting out on that highway and hassling with those trucks. But, as I've always been one to strive for perfect attendance, I did get out there behind a truck, which I could hear coming though its rattle-roller was muffled by the snow storm. It was a lucky morning for more than one reason. That particular truck went three quarters of the way to where I was going, much minimizing the driving hazards. And, it proved a fortuitous morning, for that day a young man named Major, that being his first name and not an army title, came to see me in the library. He had heard of my Thoreau interests, and as he was working on a Master's thesis on the subject of Thoreau and the Penobscot Indians, we had much in common to talk about. Especially for me, for if I could have chosen what ethnic group to have been born into I would have settled for the American Indian. No matter the abuse treatment they have been subjected to. It wasn't much different from what came my way for being an outdoorsy woman in the days before women's lib. Major and I are still talking, two decades later.

As winter approached I kept an eye on the river, hoping to learn something about its freezing over process. How did it get from a moving stream with a strong current to an ice-over standstill. But the river had

to go through a partial-flooding stage first, for every drop of rain and snow melt off Katshdin, seventy-five miles to the north, which didn't evaporate along the way, slid by under my dining room window; even the north country goes through a rainy season in November, before things are pinned in place by frost and ice. I could see that sometimes the river would drop down a bit when there was freezing upstream, then when the sun came out and melted everything the river would rise a little. This off and on flow of freeze and melt was obvious at Old Town, whereⁱⁿ the early morning, the water going over the Old Town dam was just a thin veil, then by early afternoon the flow was copious.

For me, from my point of observation, the freezing began as a skim of very thin ice along my shore edge, where the inner tiny shelf of ice was anchored to the ^weed_s, the outer fragile edge being out in the water flow. At first, this ice was only paper-thin, less than a foot wide, but as the nights grew colder, and the temperature remained freezing during the day, the ice shelf gradually extended further out into the water, as much as five feet from the shore where it was ~~anchored~~ anchored more firmly now. The shelf was still too thin to try standing on it, but gradually it grew thicker and sturdier, looking to me like a miniature Ross Ice Shelf in the Antarctic. But the open water, with an obvious current, remained out in the middle, very dark-colored and looking deeper than it probably was. A similar ice shelf extended^{ed} out from the island across the way, so that the river now ran between two growing white shelves.

The first powdering of snow which fell after the ice shelves began to form delineated the ice, making it very obvious out close to the dark water. Gradually the shelves developed wide scallops which were carved by the river water as it nibbled at them, producing an artistically designed scene as if done on purpose for human enjoyment. As I stood at the top of the bank, looking down and out over the scene, it had taken on an even more arctic-like configuration.

I could now observe how the moving river freezes over. Some of the ice islands which began to break off from the shelves and slid by downstream, here and there got hung up on the outer edges of the scallops, their thin edges resting on the shelf on which it had gotten hung up, the outer edges of the little island still in the moving water. Other islands floating by caught on the outer edges of the first ones, thus gradually building the shelf out into the stream. During the night, when temperatures were always lowest, the caught ice islands congealed into place, freezing too solidly to move again. Sometimes water lapping over them gradually froze, like a layer of glue.

Thus the ice shelf builds itself out further and further into the moving current, where even more ice islands moving downstream caught, became unhooked and moved on, or caught and remained there. As winter set in, the shelf of ice itself froze thicker in place. The process was as slow and unspectacular, in miniature, as was the accumulating of the ice which grew into a glacier, the last one over this river spot of mine having been two miles thick, and it sat here for about 60,000 years. Something had happened to the summers; they weren't warm enough or long enough to melt the previous winter's ice accumulation. That could, and probably will, happen again. I might even be watching the incipient beginning of a glacier, as I stood there on my river bank, watching from time to time every day the growth of the ice shelves out from the river bank. But, I knew there was no expectation by the meteorologists of that kind of change in our climate within the foreseeable future.

In the early shelf-building process, some of the ice islands passing by took on a fairy-like quality. The thin planes of ice which slid up onto them stood up almost on edge, looking like fairy sails, and as the wind caught the tiny sails an island would be pushed along a little faster, and the island would move too fast to stay hung up for long on another island or

on the outer ice shelf. When the sun came out these little glistening ice sails acted like a prism, refracting light into the colors of the rainbow, presenting a scene of tiny blue and red and green sails.

One weekend noon time when I was standing out there atop the bank watching this constantly moving scene, a little crowd of small islands with ice sails slid by close together, as if someone upstream had opened ^{ed} fairy fleet gates and let them through all at once.

But soon these little ice islands with their fragile sails began to coalesce; they bumped into one another and became hooked together, forming ice rafts which move as larger entities downstream. As the rafts increased in size they lost their elfin character and the scene changed to one of power; for the growing rafts became strong enough to catch on and pull away the outer edges of the growing ice shelf. The whole relentlessly moving mass of what were now ice floes looked as if they were capable of ramming something like bridge abutments, and dams, or anything which stood in their way. The massive floes slid by below my window sill with awesome majesty; by now some of them had small mountains of ice pushed up onto them, making them appear to be strong, heavy ramming machines.

The one day, in early December, I looked up idly from my work at the dining room table and glanced down at the ice-choked river. My attention was instantly alerted. Something was different. I stared at the scene, trying to determine what was the matter. Then I realized, that after days, weeks, of watching ice slip by, nothing was moving. It had been moving as usual when I had looked out a half hour before. Ice now covered the river, from shore to shore, and was anchored there. Locked in until spring.

Christmas Day it was good to be in my own home even if I had to be far from friends. The temperature was below zero and the wind blew all day. A combination which was too much for me so I just stayed indoors.

But there was excitement out there in the heavens, if not on earth, as far as I was concerned, for the astronauts were orbiting the moon for
had

would be on the first train to the moon, for that is the way Verne got people there. But now, neither love nor money, nor anything else, could tempt me to be cooped up in that claustrophobic space vehicle out there in space, where if anything went wrong you couldn't open the door and step out.

The next day, the astronauts were on their way home. It made me weary thinking about them, there were so many hazards still ahead of them. I knew they had a whole Space Center guiding them, but it was all too new and too iffy. But, by mid day they were more than half way home. The next trip will probably get a man on the moon, but to think they have to go all through this again! With even greater iffiness!!

Several tree sparrows, a blue jay and one hairy woodpecker were coming to my improvised bird feeder just under the roof. I also had a suet bag out there, which was visited frequently by the woodpecker. I reveled in contentment as I sat in the warm cottage, in out of the wind, and watched the little feathered creatures sit on the feeder and peck at the seeds, or perch on the porch railing waiting their turn.

A heavy snowstorm the last week in February half buried my car, and marooned me and the cottage. In a way it was a cozy feeling to be stuck indoors when I had so much paper work to do. There was no chance of boredom. I did have a telephone, and there was a snow^{mo}obile next door in case of dire need. There had been ample warning that the storm was on the way, which gave everyone ample time to stock up on supplies at the store. I had enough to eat in the house to keep me alive for a month if need be.

When the highway bulldozer plowed me out two days later, the driver told me that over Greenfield way, just two towns eastward, some people had to be rescued by snowmobile, for even with eight plows working in the area they couldn't get all the families out and some had scoffed at the storm warnings. Most Maine old timers are very self-sufficient in a Maine winter, but younger generation people act sometimes as if they expect to be rescued

Usually I enjoyed digging my own paths, and resourcefully getting my own car out of drifts. But there were times when the snowfall was so heavy, and the drifts so high that I accepted the fact it was better for machinery to do the work.

After this big storm, I started digging a path toward the garage, but the drift piled up by snow off the river was so deep, that I decided to veer off to the right to try to find the well head and the gas tank, which were not to be seen. The snow was rather light, not tightly packed, so shoveling was fun. Healthy outdoor exercise in the vast open air of Maine! The path took on the appearance of a ^{roofless} tunnel, the snow was so deep. Near where the gas tank would be the snow walls of the tunnel became a strange sea-green color, like my concept of glacial ice, though I'd never seen glacier ice. I had a strange feeling that I was looking down into a patch of the Ice Age, or into the Ice Caves of Kulbái Khen. At first I thought the light might be caused by rays from the western sky filtering down through the snow; or, was there a leak in the gas tank which caused it? But later, after I rested a bit, I continued the path down the slope to the cellar, and there again, I came to a patch of the same sea green color down in the walls of the tunnel. At this spot the light would come from a northern angle; and, this spot was far from the gas tank. It was the most fascinating snow I ever saw, and I yearned for the ^skill of the poet to put this igloo snow into metaphor. Science could wait for an explanation.

As I was starting to walk back up the slope through my deep snow path, the sun broke through a passing cloud and instantly turned the whole yard surface of the snow into a field of sparkling sapphires, red rubies, gold, and blue and violet jewels as if a barrel of jewels had been scattered over the snow surface. Then a cloud covered the sun and instantly I was in a field of white-cotton snow.

For three days I reveled in being marooned in this soft, white, safe world. Too soon came the snow plow, and the need to lock my door

against my own species, not against bears, or moose or wolves. It might as well still be the Middle Ages, when highway men ruled the roads. We have not yet advanced as far as some of us like to think.

The river was now a long, wide ribbon of white ice, though gray in some spots. The wind kept it mostly swept free of snow, but snow caught in the rough spots, looking like thick clabs of cotton; the scene the same from shore to shore.

About six thirty one morning, as I'd had breakfast and was picking up the dishes, I was suddenly aware of a bright color in the dining room. It was still dark out, well before sunrise. Instantly I thought there must be a fire across the river. I went out on the porch, and looking up at the sky was astounded to see the most colorful northern lights I had ever seen, that gorgeous scintillating rainbow coloring from outer space, the shimmering ~~curtains~~ curtains of the aurora borealis. It was a textbook display, with white lines coming in from all directions, reaching a central point a bit south of the zenith.

I could see the stars through the diaphanous curtains of moving light. The sky was a panorama of blowing, flowing ever-changing colored draperies. The pink-red bands were the most spectacular as they flowed across the sky. From outer space came these charged ion particles from the storms on the sun's surface. Spinning out from the sun they are captured by the earth's magnetic field. This happens in daytime too, but it can be seen only at night.

The first open streaks of water appeared on the surface of the river on March 26th. After a whole long winter of forgetting about such a thing, I didn't even notice that trees on the island across the way were reflected in open water over there, until, returning to some work on the table my mind's eye became aware of the reflection. I looked up and sure enough, there was a long open streak of water for the first time since the river had frozen over. The rest of the river had by now changed from a dull white to a pearl gray, and yellowish near the base of my bank where it looked as if the ice were softening.

The reverse of what had happened in the fall now began, but the process was not as slow. The open streak froze again, snow covered everything with a new white blanket, and as it was damp, sticky snow it didn't blow off the river, but gradually melted as the sun was now higher and rather warm by mid day. Then the open streaks began again, and soon ice islands, or small floes were moving downstream out in the open streaks. I was away all day, at work, when much of the change occurred, but what I did see of it was almost as intriguing as the fall ice build-up. But gradually big ice floes broke loose upstream and floated down past my yard, catching on the river's ice cover and breaking off pieces, carrying it all downstream. Then came a rise in the water level, caused by the melt runoff upstream, lifting some of the big sheets of ice cover.

I just happened to be standing, leaning against the big gas tank, on Saturday, April 12th. At breakfast time there had been a large open channel in the middle of the river, and a few black-looking open holes here and there in the ice which still covered at least fifty percent of the river. I was watching the great variety of ice islands, or floes moving rather rapidly past me. It was about one thirty in the afternoon. I could see massive floes pushing against each other up the river, and they all seemed to be ganging up on one another downstream. Yet, what happened, happened slowly. All at once there seemed to be little motion, for the floes both upstream and downstream seemed to be blocking one another.

Suddenly, as I was standing there staring at it all, wondering which group of floes would give first, there was a slight cracking sound upstream. I had my field glasses in hand so I looked upstream, just in time to see all of the ice up there, both the floes and the large ice shelves still hitched to the shore, get up, as if they had been sitting, and the whole thing started moving. I lowered the binoculars and looked at the ice and floes out in front of me, and it was now all moving downstream, faster

then I would have thought possible just two minutes before. I didn't understand why some of it didn't get hooked up by the edge-anchored ice shelves, maybe there was too much hydraulic power out there. It all kept right on inexorably moving; nothing that I could think of could stop it. Then I realized that the pressure of the ice from behind, which in turn was ~~used~~^{pushed} by the rising water and swifter current, provided the energy for the wash out. In a matter of moments the whole width of the river was cleared, wide open; only a tiny ice island here and there tagged along, and there ~~was~~^{still} an ice shelf about three feet wide extended out into the water from the island.

This seemed a demonstration that the planet Earth was breathing. It was also as if someone had pushed a button, or rung a bell, as the cue for the ice to get up and move out. To my surprise, even as I stood there, though I should have anticipated it, small flocks of gulls, ducks and other birds were moving upstream, rather low over the now open water, as if celebrating that great expense of liquid which had been hidden all winter.

It was the first bird action I had seen along the river since fall. Counting, just to get an idea, over one hundred ducks, mostly mallards and blacks, passed by as I leaned on the gas tank. In early Pliocene days the count would have been thousands upon thousands, if there were a river then in this area. But I was happy, in my own depleted times, to watch ducks pass by in little groups of threes and fours to ten or more. To me it meant that the planet was still alive despite the human invaders of paradise. I saw one great blue heron standing on the shore just upstream of me. He, unlike me, was expecting a fish to come by. I had too much else to see and react to, not needing a fish for my dinner.

By sunrise the next day, it being Sunday and I could be out there to look, there were many gulls, a teal, and two mallards shuffling about with their feet on the ice shelf across the way. Ice out was no longer

spectacular as in Indian and early white-man days, when the ice piled up with great churning, grinding noises, floes stacking up powerful enough to push bridges and house^s downstream before them. But the aftermath of today's simple break-up was still something worth looking at. By lunch time the gulls and the few ducks were still there, huddling together in cozy little niches. It was companionable-fun to watch them from my dining room window. At two o'clock I glanced out to see how they were doing and found that not only were the birds gone but the ice shelf they had been standing on as well. I went out to look and all of the birds were vanished; it was as if I had imagined them there the last couple of days.

Although neighbors said high flood stage would not occur until late in April or early May, I kept a wary eye on the river for there were reports of more snow falling on Katshdin. I pushed a tall stick in the muddy soil at the edge of the river, to watch the water level creep up each day. I had to keep moving it back or it would have drowned out of sight.

On April 19th the river was so high it was beginning to seep into the cellar through the ground. Looking at the river now, you would never know there was a steep bank there. The river channel was filling up. This was getting scary for that was an awful lot of water. Would it get deep enough to engulf the big boles in the cellar. Were those water marks more recent than I had judged them to be?

What was most scary to look at was the strong current out in the middle of the river. Hydraulic^{power} was built up. I knew, from what I had seen of the West Branch of the Marmington River, where I was camping at the time of the 1938 hurricane, what such a current could do to a little house.

By now I'd had to move the stick at the water's edge about two thirds of the way up the bank. every day^I looked at it, checking it at night with a flashlight, hoping to see^{the} the water had started to recede^e. But I had to
that

keep moving it back from the water, up the slope. Need I say, I got up two or three times in the night to check it with my flashlight. For the river continued to gain on it. Originally I moved the stick in ^{the} early morning, but now I took to moving it just before dark, as I didn't want it to get drowned, or be out of reach, so that I couldn't retrieve it. Also, when I looked at it at one or two a.m., I wanted to know how much the river had risen since after supper.

I realized that if it did flood up into the yard I could get out easily, for generally speaking, the rise was slow. But if there were a flash flood, if a dam broke somewhere upstream and a ^wall of water came rushing down, I'd not have much chance if the river filled up before then to the top of my bank, for there'd be no place for the river surge to go. So there I was, fidgety, nervous, like all foolish people who choose to live in a domicile on a river bank from time immemorial. I wondered how many Penobscot Indians lost their lives in the floods of this stream in the last seven ~~thousand~~ ^{thousand} years or more. I was willing to bet ^t most of them built their domiciles above the flood level, like they do today on Indian Island. By now I was keeping my car near the highway entrance and pointed out that way. And I knew the few items in the house I would grab before I ran.

The night between the 24th and 25th I was sure I detected a receding from my stick when I went out at midnight. At least there was no gaining on it. So I didn't go out again until five a.m. To my relief, with the river almost to the top of my bank, its edge was just below the stick. I rushed out there when I got home from work and found the river edge still in the same place. On the back side of the stick. It stayed there for two days, which was still nerve wracking for any extra melted snow or heavy rain to the north would bring the river over the bank.

But then the water level started to drop, and it went down much faster than it had come up. Relieved, and no longer interested or wanting to put as much time into it as I had when the river was rising, I didn't take many

more notes on it, so I only remember that the river did rather rapidly drop down to a more normal stage.

All pepped up for spring activities I walked out over the ~~the~~ abandoned road through the back woodlot and planted a few Christmas ferns, an evergreen woodfern, some Dutchmen's breeches, mayapple, bloodroot, and a few individual items which I had brought^t back from my Concord beds and had heeled in just before the flood distracted me. As I was planting them I heard^d a rumble, and wondering if it was caused by something going downstream, as the sound was to the west of me, I stood up and glanced up and down the river as by then I was not far from the edge of the high bank. The rumble was repeated. I looked up at the western sky, the seeming source of the sound. Thunder! A very dark cloud was approaching from over the trees on the island. I smiled to myself. Spring, thunder, winter was really behind us. Thunder mutter and wildflowers sometimes seem to go together, as if the sky were talking to the plants. In such circumstances I was always sure they heard one another. They seem to celebrate the last melt-back of the glacier which made it possible for the wildflowers to push up in her^e from where they had set in escrow in the Appalachians, those sixty thousand years, patiently waiting. Now they were here! Right at my feet! I looked down at the bloodroot blossoms, and knew that the clock-tick timing of nature was in tune with itself.

The river continued to be a highway for birds into early summer, many appearing to be late comers, as if they were tired from their long journey northward. To my great delight, loons appeared on the river now and then. They never tarried long. Nor did I ever happen to see them fly in. And they remained silent, never once treating me to their wild voice-echoes from millenⁿia past. I'd look out over the river and there they were, one, two, maybe three of them. Cavorting, diving, coming up quite a distance from where they ~~re~~ went down. But always silent. I knew their numbers were

dwindling, that they were seldom if ever seen in the states to the south any more, so their presence gave me a feeling of living in a special nature niche.

Paired gulls were now floating on the river, robins, white-throated sparrows, song sparrows, and one phoebe were flitting around the yard. I didn't appreciate the small group of cowbirds which had appeared; I sure didn't want them forcing their young on the other small birds, but I knew of no way to discourage their presence. There were birdy goings on all day, a drastic change in their behavior from winter when I saw them moving only from the feeder to the shelter of the trees. Eventually, a phoebe built a nest under the porch roof, so at least one was buttoned down to stay for a while.

Tree swallows were now hanging around on my side of the river, sailing back and forth over the water in their search for insects. It hardly seemed there were enough insects hatched yet to keep so many supplied with flight-energy. These swallows never went into formation, as I'd so often watched them do in the Florida everglades, but I watched them closely now and then, uselessly hoping to recognize any of them as my friends from the sub-tropics. But they were all look-alikes, like clones, with no individuality to recognize.

By the end of the first week in May I was really living in birdland, and as it was nesting season, they were mostly individuals, or pairs, never flocks of birds. There was a kingbird, a black and white warbler, a purple finch, all singing close by. There was a yellow-shafted flicker, a yellow-bellied sapsucker walking clumsily about the yard, magnolia and yellow and other warblers, an oriole, a robin, and the phoebe was^f flitting around among them all.

I was a bit puzzled why so many of them were single birds, though I was aware many were males, and most were singing. No doubt they were trying to attract mates, as most had just arrived. Somehow I didn't expect to see so many species of the song birds in one spot in Maine. It was one

great treat to step out into the yard and ^{cause} these flying wonders to scatter in front of me, or to hear them singing, declaring their territories. It was all proof of nature's great evolutionary potential for variety.

I gradually collected several ^a wildflower plants from along back country roads. They were not already present out back, probably because the floods of countless years had washed them out, or drowned them, before the new highway was built. So I felt I was replacing what had probably once been there: clintonia^s, star flower, goldthread, the baneberries, all quite common species. I created a special bed for a few small plants of arbutus, as they need very acid soil and their own soil bacteria. Transplanting ^s always takes longer, and seems harder work, than collecting, because each plant must be tucked into its new spot with tender loving care, as they are much more fragile, generally speaking, than garden plants.

One morning I returned to the cottage after setting out a whole bed of plants, to be fortified with a cookie and some fruit juice. I scared up a large flock of brilliantly colored goldfinches, which flew to the shrubs nearby. They were so golden in their new spring feathers. They all looked like males to me. A song sparrow was perched in the highest shrub ^{branch} above them, singing its heart out, as if to warn the goldfinches they were trespassing on his territory. I was out living in nature again.

A river is a good mirror, not only of clouds and birds passing over, but it reflects the air currents as wind, breezes, and very light airs ruffle its surface. Now and then an unseen puff of wind would fan out the ^water surface in one small area, then disappear. Sometimes the wind blew the ^river upstream, at least on its surface, and ^d caused a few wavelets to lap the shores.

I was out in the yard once, occupied by some small chore, and just happened to stand still for a few moments, looking at the river, when suddenly waves were slapping at my bank, pushing in from the west but I could see nothing to cause it between my yard and the island. Then, instantly, a wild, powerful

blew the nes leaves on the trees nearby so str ongly they looked like pennants on ship masts. The wind seemed to be coming from due west, judging by the waves slapping at my shore, but the leaves were blowing toward my cottage^s if the wind were from the south. As I tried to puzzle that one out the wind veered around to the south, the river was being pushed upstream meaning no more waves at my shore, but the leaves kept blowing in the same direction. That was about a 45^o degree turn for the wind in a split second. If it hadn't been my habit of "reading the river and the sky" all the time, automatically, I wouldn't have been conscious of such an abrupt change. But I had been half watching some dark clouds hidden partially behind the island trees. So I was half expecting something. In fact I was hoping for rain as we were having a long dry period.

It had been hot and muggy. Now it was chilly. Looking across at the island trees I could see their leaves were now turned up, making a silvery line, instead of fluttering from south to north as they had been doing. Then came a sprinkle, and as the dark cloud moved overhead down came the rain. I ran for the cottage. The rain came straight down, there was no wind with it. From the window I could see the river flatten out. The tree swallows, oblivious of the raindrops, continued their circling just above the water.

I later learned that this sudden squall-behavior of the wind, veering so suddenly and so strongly, extended all the way up to Moosehead Lake where it turned over a rather large boat and killed two people. Weather is fun when safety is right at hand, but it can be life threatening out away from protection. Such changes remind me of a roller coaster. You choose to enter the interface of danger, knowing that laws have made it safe for you; but if you didn't have that margin of safety you were taking a chance. Being out in a small boat in summer is taking a chance.

Weatherwise , I had to mostly struggle with my car the second winter at Thoresu Carry. It began when the weather report said rain, so I didn't pay any attention to my car at bedtime. By morning, however, the rain had turned to ice for the temperature had ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ dropped much lower than predicted. Two things happened. The whole world turned into a glassy scene, the trees so covered with ice that their branches bent down to the ground. The world had such an illusory look to it I was reminded of my childhood favorite fairytale, where a creature with a magic wand took us down a hole into an underworld where all the trees were made of glass and jewels glittered on the branches.

But this was for real and it looked formidable for getting out in it to work. Suspecting that I was exaggerating that this was the worst, while also the most beautiful, ice storm I had ever seen, I went back into the house and turned on the radio, just in time to hear the weatherman say, "This is one of the worst ice storms on record."

As the highway was apparently well sanded, for cars and trucks were moving right along out there, I decided to make the effort to get to work. I slid out to my car, where it was parked near the garage, where I had turned on the block heater before breakfast ^{hence} ~~xxxx~~ assumed it would be easy to start. But when I went out to open the car door I found that all doors were sealed tight with thick ice, that the ice was still covering the windshield. I thought that over for a few minutes, went back into the cottage for a round-dish electric heater I had, brought it out, disconnected the block heater ^{and} plugged in the dish heater. Slowly I held it up and down the ^{door} edge of the driver's side. In no time it worked. I opened the door with ease, and put the heater inside on the passenger front seat. I got in, then held it up near the ice-costed windshield without getting it close enough to crack the glass. Again it worked, better than I'd hoped. C'mper though I was I had to admit that electricity ^y has its excuse for being. The other door was soon melted-open, too.

That was also the winter that for twenty-eight nights in a row the temperature was down to twenty-five and thirty degrees below zero during the night. That was before I put the block heater in, and what had caused me to do so. I'd had to prevent some way to keep from paying the garage to come every morning to get the car started so I could get to work. What I did reminded me at the time of the pioneers. While they didn't have to contend with motors, they did have vicious weather with no modern comforts. They just adjusted to whatever the weather threw at them. So I worked out a system. I ran the car motor at seven or eight in the evening. Stayed up late on purpose, reading and listening to the radio, then went out to run the motor at eleven. I set the alarm and was up at two O'clock and put on my heaviest accumulation of clothing. Back to bed, then out in the driveway again at four thirty to five. Then again before breakfast.

During that bitter-cold period I parked the car near the front steps with the front end turned away from the wind off the river. And I also did something which earned me a lot of teasing but as far as I could see, it worked. I wrapped the front end with heavy old blankets, then threw my camp canvas tarpaulin over all that. I was sure then, and still am, that it trapped and held enough heat from the engine when I ran it, to hold for at least three hours in that severe cold.

Such a routine might be tolerable for a week, or even ten days. But I had to admit that a month was a bit much. But I found certain satisfaction in having been self-reliant when one day I had to stop at my garage for some minor need and my garageman asked me, with a very puzzled look on his face. "Why haven't you been yelling for help every morning like everyone else around here?" When I told him he howled, and yelled to his crew that I was getting up at two in the morning and running the motor. They all looked incredulous, as if they would never get up for a car.

up at two in the morning to run my car motor. The whole idea of getting up in the middle of the night to baby a car motor was just beyond them. It was a foreign notion to them to not be able to pay for service.

There was one animal which my heart was set on see^{ing} in Maine. The moose. I had been living there two years and had not yet seen one when one day when I got home from work my next door neighbor phoned me. Imagine how I felt when he said he had watched a moose walk around my driveway a couple of days before, while I was at work. For me, the moose was to become a tantalizing quarry for some time to come. I wasn't sure I wanted one out in my driveway very often, yet I often found myself half-consciously looking out there with real hope.

A moose varies in height from five and a half to six and a half feet at the shoulder, meaning the animal's back would be above my head as I am but five feet four. Their long legs are supposed to be an adaptation to deep snow, but there were plenty of tales around about them stepping over cars, sometimes kicking and deliberately turning the car over. While I knew of no proven such incidence, still I couldn't afford to have a moose think my car was in his way. But their long legs also enable them to browse in lakes on water plants, such as pond lilies and water grasses. It is an animal of the far north, also being found in Europe. They are strictly cold climate animals

They have an elongated, almost horse-like ~~face~~ ^{looking} benign-~~looking~~ face, with a touch of a sad expression. Far back beneath the chin there is a dew-flap of ¹flesh, gristle and hair, present on both cow and bull. The male's antlers, which are shed every year as with all deer relatives, begin with a covering of velvet which eventually the bull rubs off on bushes and tree trunks as the antlers develop to full size and the underlying bone becomes hardened. The antlers are a bull's major weapon, which he uses against another bull when fighting for a mate.

Like our domestic cow, the moose is a herbivore, meaning it eats plants but not meat. It has a four-chambered stomach in which the plants that are swallowed without chewing are stored; later, at its leisure, the moose regurgitates some of the plant material and chews it as a cud. The moose is not exactly a pretty animal, in the sense that a leopard or an eastern deer is. As someone has aptly said, a moose looks as if the Creator put it together with left over pieces from other animals, yet it is a product of evolution as surely as is a graceful antelope. Eventually I saw three of them all at once, standing up to their bellies in a lake where they were pulling up and eating water plants; I was surprised to see how long one of them could keep its head under water searching for plants before it had to get its nostrils out for air.

One damp-soil shrub which I have never heard of Moose eating, though that doesn't mean they don't, is the rhodora. The flower of this shrub was such a favorite with Ralph Waldo Emerson that he wrote a poem about it; I myself have never come across it in Concord, Massachusetts, where Emerson lived, but it is listed as being present, though uncommon, in Angelo's CONCORD AREA SHRUBS. Once, when I was living there myself, a woman came up to me and said, "What is this foolishness about rhodora? There is no such flower. Emerson was just being poetic."

At that point I had never seen rhodora myself, but I was familiar with it in the botany books and looked forward to coming across it some day; ~~xxxx~~ the blossom is rather large so I knew it must be conspicuous. That day happened when I was walking around Indian Island, at Old Town, just four miles from where I lived. I had been out exploring the island by myself just to see what grew there. I was just making the turn to the left at the far end of the island, as that was as far north as you could go without stepping into the river, when there it was! Instantly I recognized it, for after all, there is nothing else quite like it in the wild, especially in spring. The flowers were even a little larger,

in the drab early spring scene, when winter-dead stalks festooned the landscape and there were as yet no green leaves out on the trees. But I was also surprised at the delicacy of the lavender tint, when I had been expecting a more purplish color. They were quite spectacular in that there were several bushes clo^s~~f~~, together, and as the flowers grow ~~elsewhere~~^{near or at} the tips of the branches, and the leaves aren't out yet, the over-all appearance, on bare branched bushes, was that someone had gone out there and festooned the bare winter branches with something made of crepe paper. Eventually I came across an even large^r mass of them in a meadow not far from my cottage, which, seen from the road, appeared as a lavender mist over the still dead-looking drab early spring meadow.

~~XXXX~~ The return of the growing season brought with it my usual outdoor chores. I filled in a deep depression in the ground near the back of the cottage, where someone apparently dug out the soil for some reason and didn't fill it back in. I brought in evergreen trees, - hemlock, and red pine, which were native to the area but no doubt had been drowned by floods in the past, and I planted a spruce tree in the center of the driveway circle. I continued building up a compost and soil area where I had already started planting vegetables, adding potato, carrot and parsnip skins and outside cabbage leaves to it.

I went on an all-day wildflower collecting trip with a University botany student, who wanted to learn the native plants, and transplanted them into suitable habitats in the woodlot out back, none of them rare species which I won't dig for any reason. Gradually I was moving in most of the local native species which I was reasonably sure would exist there now that flooding was prevented by the new road contours.

As time went on my visitor list grew. A Thoreauvian from Canada, and his mother came to spend a day with me. Major Benton came several times.

Don and Barbara, came for lunch; they were engaged after having met at some kind of University gathering. Don was teaching chemistry there, and Barbara was a biology major at Bar Harbor. They, like Major, were to become part of my life beyond Maine. Perhaps the most widely known internationally were Monroe and Isabel Smith, founders of American Youth Hostels, both of whom were in poor health and have since passed on.

I took great delight in showing off my little corner of Maine to visitors and helping them to understand what a unique corner of the country it is. I have lived in several states, and visited as many more, but Maine has a flavor not to be found anywhere else. To me it has always been a twin state to Florida, as both are about as long from north to south. And both extend through different climatic and botanical zones. Just as there is no other state in this country like Florida, so also there is no other state like Maine. They are both ^{unique} ~~unique~~, in opposite ways.