

## CHAPTER 14

### MY MAINE WOODS CABIN

"So live that only the most beautiful wildflowers will spring up where you have dwelt." H. Thoreau

In the spring I was back in Maine, all geared up to find a cabin and a piece of wildland somewhere, preferably in sheltering woods well above any river valley. I was tempted to look for something in the wilder parts of less developed Washington County, near the shore, out beyond Cranberry Lake, in real Down East country. But two considerations deterred me. I needed to be within driving distance of a university library, and with my older years crowding in on me, and already knowing my limitations with cold wind, I knew I should find something in the protection of woods yet be near enough to shopping facilities so I could handle my own errands. There is nothing windier than a coastline, except a mountain top; I gave up Down East.

I had planned to go camping in one of the two or three private campgrounds in the Brewer area while looking around. I knew it would take time to find property which would fit my purse and my needs, for I wanted some land with any building I bought so I could fuss with wildflowers. I hoped for a simple life, <sup>which</sup> would not be too primitive, which would have some modern comforts yet be small enough for me to take care of it.

Having worked all winter in a fancy millionaire's<sup>e</sup> resort in Florida, I brought back what was, to me, substantial savings, which, added to the equity I'd had in the Penobscot River cottage, should be enough with which to purchase something to my liking, even if maybe it would have the lure of homesteading. A cottage? A cabin? One story, in any case.

The campgrounds I'd had in mind wouldn't open until June. I had assumed the owners lived there, so would let me in. But it was now only May, and it took some hunting to find a campground which would let me in. It was at Holden, east of Brewer. They permitted me to park in a small isolated corner, and put up my tent. They were concerned that the electricity wasn't yet connected, but I had nothing with me to hitch it up to so I was just contented to find a spot to camp in with permission.

With a spot to tuck into I went off for the first day, not bothering to set up my tent until I came back. I made the rounds of the real estate offices to pick up listings within my financial limit, and left my name at General Delivery at the Post Office, for an address. It took most of the time I had that day to do those errands, and to pick up food for the next couple of days. I did get to see a couple of places, but, as I could tell from their descriptions, they weren't of interest to me.

I gave up shortly after mid afternoon and drove back to my campsite. All I was interested in that first night was a place to stretch out, eat a simple supper, plan a simple breakfast, and be ready to take off first thing in the morning on a real house-hunting tour. So I just spread my netting tent on the ground, put pad and sleeping bag in it, and tied the head end up to the car doorhandle. I was in a woodsy spot, out of sight of what few people were around, so I didn't even bother to get out the canvas fly and throw it over the tent.

I had a very comfortable night. But while I was sitting eating my breakfast, in the car of cold cereal,<sup>and</sup> hot tea made on my sterno stove

raindrops started collecting on my windshield. It was cloudy, yet only broken clouds. I had no radio and hadn't bought a paper to have the weather report, which was very careless of me as I'm a dedicated weather watcher, especially when out camping. I paid for my inattentiveness. Not wanting wet or even damp sleeping gear I pulled sleeping bag, pillow, pad and tent into the car, assuming I could set them up properly at day's end.

Normally, in a camp setting, I have everything set up snug, buttoned down, so if it rains I can lie on my cot, in my sleeping bag, and listen to the rain on the tent canvas. I usually ~~had~~ <sup>have</sup> books, papers, flashlight, candles, so being confined in a rainy spell was no punishment. But, while I didn't know it at the time, and would have rushed to get the tent and naves up had I known; it was to be two weeks before I could stretch out full length again. Blithely, I took off for a day's real estate hunting.

It seemed to me that I drove all over Penobscot County, one of the biggest counties in the state, looking at property which was either too small or too big. In some cases the land was possible, but the building was good for only a match to be set to it, much as with my experiences when looking for my Penobscot River cottage. It was the same thing all over again. As the day wore on and nothing within reason turned up, it became one of the few times in my life when rainy weather looked gray and dispiriting. I'm not one to be depressed by weather, for to me rain is a remarkable phenomenon, and the subdued lighting caused by overcast clouds brings out subtle tints in grass, shrubs, and especially in trees and their bark. But I did feel a bit depressed and I suppose it was <sup>because</sup> of the cheerless appearance of the structures I was looking at. I didn't realize until later, too, that my homing instinct pulled at me to go home to Thoreau Carry on the Penobscot.

One thing I have always liked about being out in rainy weather all

day is coming inside to cozy dryness, the protection of four walls and something overhead that's not flapping in the wind. But as the day wore on I began to face the realization that the closest I would get to coziness that night was lying on top of my possessions in a small two-door car. For the rain had not let up.

When I got "home" to my campsite that night it was dark, gray and a bit chilly. Though I knew how to cook in the rain in my tent, and knew I could improvise on the floor of the passenger seat in the car, I just wasn't interested in rising to the challenge. I had picked up a couple of delicatessen things, to go with what I'd bought the day before. As I sat on the passenger seat, eating my cold supper, I planned just what I would do if the rain let up. If I could just get the netting tent up, and I could see there were trees and bushes located in positions which would make that easy in my spot, then throw the tarpauling over it, I could sneak the cot and sleeping bag and all the other things in without getting them wet by using my umbrella.

One thing I had to concentrate on, was keeping my street clothes from getting wrinkled. You look like a bum moving around in civilization in clothes which look as if you slept in them. To keep those clothes separate, and dry, I spread them out on the back window shelf. I couldn't mess them up there even if I forgot about them when moving things around. Though I may look like a hippie when camping, or working outdoors, I strive to look as conventional and non-obvious as possible out in the rest of the world. I never attain to style; but I do avoid attracting attention.

As the rain kept coming down all evening, I settled for rearranging some of my possessions in the car so I could spread the camp pad over them from back window shelf edge to over the seat backs. When you put your mind to something which has to be done you can do it. I did manage to create a reasonably snug nest to sleep in on top of everything, with my feet out

over the seat tops. But during the night I mostly wound up with knees bent and feet tucked up.

The first couple of nights of this was a challenging adventure; a mental exercise. It made an adventure of my skill at ingenuity. But after a couple of more days of soggy rain, and depressing shanties, it became wearisome. The third afternoon I spent in the University library, just to be in a dry, cheerful place, and to find outlet for my mind in some books I'd wanted to look up.

I buckled down the third evening to heating a can of soup on my sterno, which I cautiously placed on the car floor of the passenger seat. This worked fine, and with raisin crackers and fruit juice for dessert, it wasn't too bad an evening. I had bought a couple of magazines; they proved easy to read with my flashlight. But I began to feel I was living a TOBACCO ROAD life, or GRAPES OF WRATH. I kept reminding myself of our American ancestors who lived for a year or more in Conestoga wagons, which because there were also children <sup>trav</sup>eling with them, there wasn't much more room than I had. But, looking at wagon pictures later, I decided they'd at least had more head room than I. It didn't take much moving about in my nest to stop my possessions ~~xxxxxx~~ <sup>to be</sup> bumping my head on the car ceiling.

The rain went on day after day. I took to spending more time in the library, where I carefully kept secret from my friends there that I was living a tramp's life in my car. But eventually my post office Milford friends discovered that I was back, and where I was staying. Vivian, Wilfrid and Martha made me welcome in their home until I could find what I was looking for. What a different world it is INDOORS!

One place which the real estate people had sent me to as an "almost." If it had been one story I might have considered it. It was out in a small settlement, about twelve miles east of Milford, in a real forested area.

when I checked in with the real estate people at day's end, they said they could tell by my comments that I had gone to the wrong house but the right settlement. The next day I went back there again, and as was suggested, I knock<sup>ed</sup> on the door of a neighbor, and told her what I was looking for. She cheerfully offered to show me the way. There was a wide car lane in past the house I had already looked it, then past hers, which was set back aways, past an old fashioned blue trailer, then up through an enclosing line of trees, into a narrower lane.

It was a flat woodsy area up in there, almost like a closed-in plateau. As we walked down that lane I suddenly saw it, on my left! Instantly I knew I had come home! It was a low camp-like building which looked as if it had grown there. It was long, narrow, low and appeared tight and neat. But simple. I didn't have the key, and <sup>the</sup> window shades were pulled down. I could see it had one large center room, with glesed-in rooms, or porches, added to each end. There was a very odd-looking chimney out back. It sat in a clearing, surrounded by forest.

I returned for one more night with my Milford friends, then went down to Bangor for the key, first thing in the morning. I had lunch with my friends, then we all drove out there, they in their car so I could bring mine along. My witnesses, who were to help me decide whether to buy it or not, each had a positive reason for purchasing it. Nobody, including myself, said a negative thing.

The center room had a high ceiling, and its walls <sup>w</sup>ere panelled with knotty pine, as I'd been told was the case by the real estate people. The owners had planned to retire here, and their son had done the paneling. Then the husband died suddenly of a heart attack. The cabin had sat there six years, waiting for the family to decide what to do with it. It had only just come on the market and was in good condition. The kitchen cupboard, above and below a counter, were the same knotty pine. A round chimney hole

was high in the north wall, with a metal cover over it. ~~There~~ There were two window openings, with no windows in them, but curtains at the half way mark, which opened into the front<sup>t</sup> glassed-in porch, and one in the east kitchen wall on the same side with the kitchen wall cabinet, but the back door<sup>w</sup> was between them.

A door opened into the front closed-in porch. There were six small-opened windows out there, which I knew meant<sup>t</sup> work cleaning them, letting~~ing~~ alone repainting them. The wall on the west side, either side of the front door, was pine panelled like the center room, but the walls in which the two windows were set without glass, were covered with black tarpaper. This room was about 7 or 8 ft. wide, and had an unpainted ceiling of beaver board.

The back room was by far the smallest, only six feet wide. It had open rafters, without a ceiling. <sup>on braces under</sup> Up on<sup>t</sup> the rafters were several lengths of the pine paneling. Only a part of the back, east wall was panelled. The rest, and the inside walls on either side of the back door, were black tarpaper.

The floors in all the rooms were good solid hardwood, with a large, homely linoleum on the big room floor, mostly gray in color but some green and rose. I could see I had my work cut out for me, but all of it was something I could do.

The furniture was what one might expect in such an out-of-the way camp in the woods. Standing below the chimney opening there was an old white enamel gas cooking range. Along the south wall, between two ceiling-to-floor windows, was the biggest and homeliest divan I had ever seen. A very old fashioned cabinet radio stood in the northwest corner of the big room. It reminded<sup>later</sup> me<sup>t</sup> of the radio on "The Walton's" TV program.

There was a useable dining room table and four chairs, and a big old rocker. There were twin beds on the front porch, one on either side of the doors. That was about it, for furniture.

We decided that this had been a one-room cabin at first, then someone

had built the end porches on, and closed them in to make two rooms. One thing that puzzled me were rows of wooden pegs just below the ceiling, around most of the center room. "Those are gun racks," Wilfrid said. I frowned at them; they looked neat and intriguing, but I knew I'd either remove them or find better use for them. There was a separate gun rack, which was a rather fancy light frame affair, with the same pegs. I knew I'd give that to someone eventually.

Standing in the middle of the room and looking around, I was almost overwhelmed by my good fortune. If I had made the general over-all design I couldn't have done better. And outside the windows were wonderful woods all around, yet the yard was open and had that driveway lane. The real estate man told me that beginning in the backyard, a hundred miles of wilderness extended eastward, only tote roads out there and no settlements. If there had been no building here I would have bought the land and set up a summer camp. But there was this cozy camp-cottage. As if designed for me. And what seemed even more unbelievable was that I had enough money to pay for it in full, with enough left over to stay home for a year and do some remodeling, as I wouldn't have to pay rent or mortgage.

There was one surprise, which I ~~didn't~~<sup>hadn't</sup> quite dare hope for, - electricity. That is one invention I seldom resent having to live with. Most houses are so over-civilized people don't have to do anything, just sit and look at them. Then wonder why they get depressed. Our homes tend to insulate and insulate us from our origins. They offer easy push-button life, but no challenges.

This one grew close to the ground, like a mushroom. It had windows on all sides, looking out at the edges of the Maine Forest. It had <sup>some</sup> walls which needed finishing, which I could do. It needed carefully selected furnishings from Chet's second hand store in Milford. It needed a better cooking stove, and some kind of heating system would have to be devised if I were to ever stay here in the winter.



There were endless chores to be done outdoors. I wanted a vegetable garden. And this was an ideal setting for wildflower beds in the woods. I'd want a picnic table<sup>out</sup> there. And I'd need to develop a small parking lot if I was to eventually <sup>s</sup>ell wildflowers again.

All these things were working in the back of my head as I walked my friends out to their car. Suddenly I remembered I hadn't noticed if there were a sink. "Oh yes," said Martha a seventh grader who seemed to get a big kick out of the place, unlike many teen-agers I knew <sup>who</sup> would say "Yuk." "In the corner, near the kitchen cuboards." But no faucets. Just a drain-out sink." Lack of a well had made the price within reason.

That was good enough for me. The place seemed complete. When they left I toted my possessions into the cabin and felt as if I had always lived there. I would miss the Fenobscot, but never would I have to worry about floods in the night. And there was a wall of forest on my north side so that even the real north winds couldn't get in here. And no trucks or cars coming at me from the east, where there was only wilderness.

There was so much to do. Where to begin? I usually wait for rainy weather to work at indoor chores. But wouldn't you know, now that I was no longer living out in my car the sun was out bright and warm every day. I found an instant use for the gun pegs; as there was no closet in the cabin I hung my clothes up on them for the present. My camp sleeping gear fit nicely as a starter on one of the twin beds in the front room. I set up my sterno stove on the sink counter.

As I had a lot of books stored in the car, and many more down in Milford, one of the first things I did was build bookshelves in the windowless windows. I knew that if I ever stayed there in winter I would have to close up those open window holes anyway. I bought some lumber to fit, and stain for it which matched the knotty pine. The books, of course

I arranged with the spines facing the big room; their varied-color bindings added a patchwork of color to that end of the room.

I had a good twin bed, the books, the wood burning stove given to me by Wade, and many odds and ends still to be picked up at Thoreau Carry down by the river. I was just beginning to work on this new cottage when, as if I'd been psychic about it, there was trouble along the Penabscot. The rain which I had been camping in out in my car, plus a couple of days of almost eighty-degree temperatures, and now steady warm sunshine, melted much of the snow on Katshdin and the ice and snowcover in the valley up there, faster than normal. Thoreau Carry, which I had sold last fall, fearing it would flood someday, was up to the indoor windowsills in water, and you could move around in the yard only in a boat. The water was up over part of the new highway up to and beyond the Costigen Post Office. Not even loggers could get through.

After the river dropped down, I stopped in to arrange for a friend to pick up the stove and other things. Looking around in the soggy mess I saw that the stringer bridge I had built had been lifted up by the flood and moved by the water down to the river's edge where it caught on something. No one was home so I had to return later.

When I did get in there to make a specific date for pickup, I found myself caught in one of those human relationships which only happen to other people. The new owner claimed I had signed over to him the contents of the house and the garage at the time of the sale. The opposite had happened; When I told him at that time I was looking for a place to store my possessions, to get them out of his way, he offered to give them space for the winter. I had kindly thanked him. Now I was too shocked to discuss it with him, for humans who do things like that lose my respect and I don't even want to look at them. I phoned my real estate agent who had listed the

river cottage and sold it, and bought my present cabin, and told him what was going on and asked what I should do. He explained it to the lawyer of his real estate company, who in turn called the cottage owner and told him there was nothing in the deed which stated that the contents of the house was included in the deed, and that if he didn't return my possessions, which everyone knew had been loaned to him for the winter, he would be sued.

Of course I had nothing with which to sue anyone, but the lawyer told me that most people who try that trick back down when they are threatened with a law suit. And that did happen in this case. So I finally got to Thoreau Carry with a friend and his small pickup and gathered up the few possessions I wanted. Some, like a sleeping bag, had been so badly damaged by the flood I threw them away. The twin bed frame and support had been lapped by the river so it had to be put out in the sun for a few days; fortunately the top mattress was high and dry. I got back a bookcase I had made, and most of my books were safe as I'd stacked them on the work bench in the back of the garage. The bottom of the log stove legs had been in the river water, and were a bit rusty but that was minor.

Despite his unadmirable behavior I couldn't help but be sorry for the men who bought my place. I was pleased to learn that at least he recognized that what happened was "an act of God", not anything that I had put over on him. The river stayed windowsill height ten days!

With some of the left-over Florida earnings, I bought several rolls of pink fibre-glass insulation, several sheets of penelling plywood to cover the black tarpaper walls, narrow strips of trim, and nails. I had already discovered that the hot sun on the roof of the small back room created so much heat out there that it seeped into the ~~center~~ <sup>center</sup> room. So I also bought a large sheet of plaster board to try on one side, - cut

it up in sizes I could handle but which would fit the rafters, stuffed the pink glass-wool in between the rafters and covered it over with the plaster board pieces. It worked, so I bought enough more of the plaster board to cover the whole open area, which, when finished resulted in a ceiling. With some of the narrow wooden strips I had bought, which by then I had painted to match the pine panelling, I covered the seams of the plaster board. It was a fairly fancy-looking ceiling out there. And of course, that put an end to the excessive heat which had been a problem. If ever anyone needed to understand why insulation should be used in a house that was a simple and very obvious example. I'm sure an expert would have found something the matter with the way I did it, but to me it was a problem conquered.

It was a novelty to me to stay home all day, be my own boss, quit what I was doing if I wanted to do something different, or peck away at my task until late hours if I wanted to. I suppose some people would be ruined having so much free time, but I was always the kind to invent something useful to do. I couldn't stand sitting around, bored. I was now on <sup>low</sup> Social Security which paid my expenses as I had no rent to pay. Gradually, during the summer, I covered the tar paper walls with the sheets of plywood which looked like pine panelling; they blended better than I had hoped. In addition to covering the tar paper areas with it, I put a sheet over the inside walls where the book cases were built in. ~~This~~ I made it a double layer **in those spots, so I could add a thin layer** of insulation wool, so the front porch room could be closed off for the winter and not have cold seep through the book area.

One of my first tasks was to find a stove, which would provide both heat and cooking surface. The sterno stove was only a momentary stopgap, for though I could cook potatoes on it and heat canned soups and vegetables, it was impractical for cooking meat, even hamburger. Over the years I had developed a sentimental <sup>tal</sup> interest in old cast iron kitchen stoves, the kind with six lids, and an oven door which could be opened to put your ~~cold~~

cold feet in on a draft<sup>y</sup> winter day. Having been brought up with one as a child, in the days before central heating was common in homes, I put out the word around Milford that I was in the market for one. Not long afterwards I received a message to come look at something in an acquaintance's attic. There, to my surprise and delight, was just the stove that I wanted! In no time it was installed in my cabin, and hooked up to the weird contraption of a chimney outside. I lined the grate with small flat stones to reduce risk of cracking the firebox walls, and burned wood in it for while. From then on I had an abundance of hot water, as I could place all the kettles I owned on its surface.

The men who set it up for me removed the colorful round metal cover over<sup>r</sup> the stovepipe hole. They built a small fire in it to test the chimney and we all went outside to watch the smoke curl into the air. The chimney, if it could be called that, was a galvanized metal hot water tank, the tall, skinny old fashioned kind, with a hole in the top into which had been stuck brooder stove pipe, with a conical weather-cover over it. The big old tank stood about my shoulder-height above the ground, on a heavy metal rack, fastened to the building; it was a real Rube Goldberg contraption, but I wasn't too surprised at it when I first saw it, for if there was one evidence of Yankee ingenuity I'd seen when looking for a cabin to buy it was the variety of stovepipes extending out and up from them. In such backwoods country, as Maine still was then in its northern areas, there were no fire laws to limit the imagination of cabin owners. I was guilty of the same myself, when I invented a way for the smoke to get out of the garage through a chimney when I was living at Theresu Carry. And I knew I'd have to do the same here, once I set up the logstove that was now out back of the outhouse, covered with my tarpaulin.

My stove became as familiar as a friendly live thing so I named it, "Miranda." Many a winter day was I to sit beside it, sometimes with my feet in the oven, writing, studying, reading. Miranda became my most

favorite indoor possession, at least for awhile.

But by early fall, that first year at the cabin, I faced the fact that Miranda's small firebox, which couldn't keep <sup>firewood</sup> ~~just~~ burning all night, was not going to be sufficient when the temperature got down to zero. I had to choose between getting a different kind of stove, or rig Miranda for oil. I was too devoted, by now, to Miranda to part with her, so I called in the oil people and had them install oil burners and all the little pipes and gadgets for a control system. I built a high platform out back of the kitchen window, large enough to hold two oil barrels. The whole system worked beautifully. I now had heat all night, without having to get up every two or three hours to tend the stove.

Out in the back yard, not far from the back door, were two evergreen trees, which I called "teen-agers." They were ~~fi~~ rather young like some of the trees sprouting up around the cabin, nor were they big enough to climb up in. One was a white spruce, the other a balsam. The remarkable thing about them was that both were as shapely as if they had been trimmed by a gardener. Both were handsome enough to be what I called City Hall trees, or even elegant enough for the White House lawn. I subconsciously loved them with my eyes every time I went in or out of the house.

The backyard was open; my neighbor had told me that the previous owner had kept it mowed, as he did all around the cabin. But in the six years, in fact now a seventh growing season, since he had done so, many young spruces and balsams were stretching up, as well as a few odds and ends of hardwood shrubs. The northeast corner of the yard, where the most sunlight was able to get in, looked like the best place for a vegetable garden. I could see that the soil was very acid, for huckleberry and mosses were crowding into that corner. But I knew I could remedy that with compost. An important thing, besides the open sun, was that it was protected on the north and east by woods, which would keep out cold blasts.

There was space for flowers, along the south side of the camp, though I would have to dig out numerous evergreen seedlings. I dreamed of pansies, and marigolds and petunias. But that soil, too, would have to be remedied, for it was pushing up baby balsams which looked like a mat of bottlebrushes, signifying an acid boreal soil.

On the north side of the cottage <sup>yard</sup> opening, a spruce and pine forest marched right up to the edge of the side yard. I knew that this boreal forest would break the winter wind; that when arctic winds would be howling in winter, it would be quiet and calm in here. Anyone who has ever walked along a highway in winter, especially facing north when the thermometer is well below freezing and the chill factor lower than that, knows what a terrific change it is to take a turn in the road through a forest. Trees form a natural windbreak, and having them at the back of one's house in a dense stand greatly reduces the cost of fuel. I did miss the constantly changing scenes of the river, but the quiet, the shelter of those trees, fit the age I was growing into better than an open, windy river.

This forest, which surrounded my yard on all sides, continued on for a hundred miles to the east. It had been partially cut over just before I came, not far out back, so there was only a thin stand of trees between my place and the dense stands a few feet beyond. It was from the east that the wind came, when we had nor'easters, that seep<sup>ed</sup> into my cottage and made the floor so cold I had to put my feet in the oven on such days. Fortunately they added up to less than half a dozen days all year.

I reveled in that wilderness out back, even though the front edge of it had been disturbed. While most such land in Maine is owned by paper mills today, because there are no towns out there it is called "the unorganized territory." I just loved that. To think that I had lived into the last of the wilderness age. My own yard was on an interface between wilderness and civilization. I knew I would never get out there and see

most of it, but there was nothing to stop me from exploring its fringes. There was evidence that my own property had been <sup>as pasture</sup> ~~farmed~~ once, but out back there in this wild Maine woods, no farm machinery, ~~no~~ no farm animals, had disturbed the soil. There weren't even any stone walls out there. Of course horses had been used in the past to get out the timber; but all evidence of them was now gone what with the use of tractors and trucks ~~and power~~ <sup>such</sup> other ~~big~~ logging equipment. The soil was what had developed since the glacier melted back and permitted trees, shrubs and wildflowers to come in and drop their leaves and needles and fruiting bodies for the past ten thousand years. It was all native, virgin soil back there. To me, it was Henry Thoreau's "unhandsled globe."

It was mostly the big paper companies, like St. Regis, and Diamond Interantional which owned it. I am one who feels that though these companies are guilty of taking most of the wealth out of the Maine forests to Chicago and New York. they have kept these countless miles of wilderness from being developed from the time of the settlers until now. That has made it possible for the forests to be supported. And mills don't cut and run today. They have fixed home bases, and cut the forest on a rotation basis. They do clear-cut, usually, as it is no longer commercially feasible to selectively cut as in the days when most trees were cut for lumber or ship masts. Today they are grown on a twenty to ~~twenty-five~~ year rotation, the size best for pulp, and with all the same age they can be cut in wide swaths all at once. That way the supply of paper-pulp trees never runs out. A quarter to half a century up ahead, using this method, there will ~~continue~~ to be pulp for the BOSTON HERALD and the NEW YORK TIMES. And, as far as I was concerned, it ~~was~~ obvious that these paper companies couldn't care less if I planted pink ladyslippers and fringed polygale under their trees.

Along the western edge of my property, just inside the line of trees



as you enter my little plateau, was a one-track car lane northward into the next property. At one time this whole piece of land was one farm, and when the widow who inherited it sold it, she divided it up into homesites with access to each one. She had lived in the two story house which I'd looked at first down below, there was the piece on which lived the neighbor who had led me to my place, and between hers and mine there was a camp tucked in back a-ways, owned by a paper company employee in Bucksport who sometimes came for a week-end. An old blue trailer near my entrance was by itself, lived in parts of summers by a retired man.

At the far end of <sup>the</sup> lane along my western border there was a small piece of land, about a quarter acre, which bordered my north side; it was owned by a man in Millinocket. Just beyond, next to that, there was a wedge-shaped piece owned by an Old Town real estate man; that was the end of the old farm, and was hemmed in by forests. But the lane went in to it.

The woods on my south extended all the way to Eagle Lake, twenty-five miles away. It was in this southerly direction that my land covered its maximum, adding up to nearly two acres. The first time I walked through those woods I could tell it had been pasture recently. The trees were only ten to fifteen years old, except for one group forty to fifty years old, which must have been left as shade for cattle. There were rock piles, <sup>evidently</sup> thrown up that way as the stones were removed from the soil instead of <sup>laid</sup> as stone walls.

Exploring in that direction when I was still new there, I came to a small brook running by a huge hemlock tree, which had an exposed big root that made a perfect seat. Later, on hot days, I would walk over there, sit on that root, listen to the tinkling of the little brook and enjoy its cool airs.

The lane through my yard, and on through my exit to the top of the hill which led down through the little settlement, was only a car track; but there was underlying rock which kept it firm. The lane led down

to the gravel road below. In front of the old house down there, but across the lane, was a well, with a wooden structure over it to keep animals and children out. But I learned it seldom had more than one or two feet of water in it, and though everyone's deed said the water in it was available to everyone living there, we all found other water sources. My helpful neighbor was in the process of having a well drilled when I arrived. So she now had her own water. The ~~comp~~ man from Busksport had a small truck and brought large metal containers of water with him.

I quickly learned to go up the road a half mile to Crocker Turn, where there was a red-painted pump close to the road, outside a log cabin, which was used by anyone, courtesy of the owner who was there only in the fall. But I lived there for a while before I knew I was welcome to use that pump. I gathered drinking and cooking water from the new well of my neighbor, and carried my laundry up a brook which was not far from the pump. I did do some wondering about water for gardening, for there are always dry spells now and then every year.

The Crocker Turn pump made a difference in my life. I bought two large green plastic containers, and saved some milk jugs. At first I drove them to the pump and back, but soon I found a second-hand children's metal wagon. Two or three times a week I pulled that to and fro for water. Then one day I decided I wanted a rainbarrel. I had always been intrigued and a friend found me a good sturdy one with rainbarrels and now I had good reason to own one. I set it under an eave near the back door where I knew most of the water drained off the roof. That instantly, or rather, after it rained, gave me a good supply of water for the vegetable garden, and later for the flower beds.

The brook which was three quarters of the way up the road to the pump was a delightful place to walk in, <sup>from</sup> both sides of the road. It had a crude, not very sturdy bridge-rail, which you wouldn't dare lean on. The first time I looked down at the brook from it I saw a few plants of turtlehead growing tall and strong. The water was sparkling clear, not

as strongly tea-colored as the much smaller brook by the big hemlock. This brook was five or six feet across, in a well-worn bed with rather steep banks along it. It didn't take me long to find time to walk in there, but I found nothing more unusual <sup>than</sup> as red trilliums, and even those were scattered. It was too acid a soil there, with spruces and pines along both sides, for many wild species to tolerate the soil, even though one would expect the perpetual dampness to have lured in some.

But I did discover, in thick grassy patches along the road near the brook on the west side, a surprising stand of smooth yellow violet, some bloodroot, and maidenhair fern. I knew they couldn't exist there just on their own, that there must be others around, spread, as it were, like stepping stones, from one habitat to another. But none of these were actually along the brook. I wondered if I would stumble across their source someday.

This was a very innocent looking brook most of the time. But before my first summer was out, we had a series of heavy rain showers. Before the brook had time to drain out its swollen quantity of water, it washed up over the edge of the road, ran down the side of the road, creating a gully as it went, and when it reached our settlement it cut right across the ~~highway~~ road at the beginning of our driveway and washed out the road there for several feet so that no car could get in or out, or up or down the gravel road. This was the Peonobscot in microcosm, showing what an accumulation of water can do. It took a town crew to repair it, for they decided to put in a culvert under the bottom of the driveway so next time the water could continue down in a ditch, unimpeded by the ridge of soil at the bottom of a driveway.

Right across the road from the bottom of the driveway, was ~~more~~ more woods, in this case extending about ten miles to the western edge of Milford. These woods had much more hardwoods mixed in them, and I looked forward to exploring this area near the settlement for wildflowers.

One thing I learned was that out in those woods, about three miles west of me, believe it or not, was an abandoned airplane<sup>s</sup> tarmac. It had been some kind of practice landing field, which I never quite understood, and was now used only for special landing reasons such as for planes fighting forest fires, and hunting for lost people. As soon as I heard of it I drove in there, from the County road. It's the kind of thing I love out in the woods. Something manmade then abandoned, where nature is gradually reclaiming it. The edges of the tarmac were crumbling, where shrubs and young trees were coming in, their roots breaking up that which mankind left behind. But it was fun to walk out on it. You feel free as the birds, surrounded by forest, with all that wing-space.

As with most places where open spots are left along wild edges, berry bushes were coming in. These were blackberries, their fruit as big and abundant as I had ever seen. Also, in the area, there was a bog. It didn't take me long to find pitcher plants in it. Maine, was, indeed, a great big, wonderful wild habitat, perfectly capable of obliterating mankind.

My own backyard was a delight from day one. Bluets, violets and wild strawberry blossoms carpeted it. You couldn't walk out there without stepping on them. In some spots, yellow cinquefoil completed a picture I carried with me always of very young childhood days when my sister and I played in a city park which was carpeted with bluets, violets, strawberries and cinquefoil. That was not only years away, but four hundred miles away, indicating how widely spread these and other species were in following the glacier back from the Appalachians.

These bits of flower-power, whose energy goes into soil building, food production for wildlife, and oxygen-creation, were an important part of my everyday life. I could never be lonely where I had them for company.

I gradually dug up the soil where I wanted the vegetable garden. Not being heavy enough to put sufficient weight on a shovel, I sat down

on a folded burlap, and whacked at the soil with a trowel and a pry-tool which I drove into the ground with a hammer. This was indeed the hard way but I love working with the earth. I whacked the soil out of the grass and weed clumps. I usually had clippers with me, too, to snip any roots too tough for me to chop with the trowel. This chopped up and opened up the soil so that I could later go over it with a shovel more easily than trying to force the shovel into the turf. If you keep at such an exercise long enough you finish what you started out to do. And in a case like this, it would never be that hard again. I piled up the whacked sods to put on the compost pile. Some of the grass of the larger sods I cut with the clippers and let it fall into the soil.

I had been warned that deer often wreck gardens in this area, and that this was one of the areas in Maine with the highest deer population. As there were several wind-fall dead balsams out back, about four to five inches in diameter, I sawed off their butt\_s and tops and dragged them to the garden site. I set their butt ends in a bucket of creosote while I took a couple of days to dig post holes. Once I got the posts into place, I fastened similar poles, but not creosoted, across their tops, at about six and a half feet height. Then I enclosed the whole area with chicken wire, around the outsides of the standing posts and over the top. The top had to be done with long strips of wire as the garden was about twelve feet square.

I was quite late that first year getting vegetable seeds into the ground, and though Maine has a short growing season, I did get peas and beans, and beans in. Tomato and pepper plants I bought in flats at the store. Then along came such a dry spell that I used up every drop in the rain barrel and had to make extra trips to the pump at Crocker Turn for water, else I'd lose to drought rather than lateness of planting.

Off and on during the summer I took time off from chores to go

wildflower exploring. I knew there would be limits to the number of species found in the boreal forest, yet there are acid soil plants which have their own charm and value, and are not found elsewhere. Most of my life bunchberry has been something exciting to find. But here the back end of my backyard was covered with it. I remember the first time I ever saw it. I must have been nearly forty years old. I knew it existed, from my wildflower books, but had never seen it. Then one day I was taking a walk with a group of people in Vermont; we were being led up to a bog on the side of the hill, and we were walking single file in a narrow path. All of a sudden we were walking through a mass of it and I ~~yelped~~ yelped. Not on purpose. With surprise! Then there were years when it was only a memory, for it is too warm for it in southern New England except at high elevations.

I had already found the wood oxalis out back, near the little brook by the hemlock. That, too, is a northern cool damp soil plant. I hoped to find arbutus, knowing it grew in this area, but there was none around my neighborhood. But I found it later on an open wet area on the road to Milford, and brought home two or three clumps and put them into a specially prepared bed. They did survive, for as long as I was there. Arbutus is very difficult to transplant; not only does it want the right moisture and light and acidity, but it needs a soil bacterium without which it won't grow.

A real acid soil, cool climate plant, which I found here and there in the woods around my place but never in any quantity was the twisted stalk. It looks like a Solomon seal until its ~~pink~~ <sup>as I had the roseus form,</sup> bell-shaped blossoms, ~~with a roseus form,~~ appear. Another in this habitat was the Clintonia, or blue beads, a very obvious plant with large, heavy lily-like leaves. The flowers grow atop a stalk from the center of the leaves are greenish white. You need only catch a glimpse of Clintonia

along shady roadsides, or just inside the edge of woods, to know you are in boreal soil habitat.

Out one of the tote roads east of my place I was pleasantly surprised to come upon, in a damp and open sunny roadside ditch and its banks, a mass of sundews of the round-<sup>a</sup>leaved variety. They are supposed to be insect-eaters, luring small insects by their odors, and trapping them on sticky droplets on the leaf hairs. But of all the hundreds upon hundreds of sundews I have seen in my life only one or two had little insects stuck on them. They couldn't have been much nourishment for those plants; all the rest must have gotten their diet needs from the soil and sun. I eventually saw this patch of sundews many times in several seasons yet never saw an insect on any of them. They are supposed to be carnivorous plants, like pitcher plants, which absorb juices from bugs by osmosis, with the help of digestive juices on the plant hairs.

One day when I decided to find out if I could walk from my place to the brook up the road by going through the woods instead of walking up the road, which would give me much more privacy in my wanderings if I could stay off the road, I was moving along quite easily through deeply shaded spruces when I could see bright light up ahead. I approached the light cautiously wondering if there would be some secret cabin clearing in there. Even before I came to the end of the dark spruces I could see out into a most unexpected woodlot of hardwood trees. As I reached the edge, there before me were some huge sugar maples, several large ash, and some hardwoods of shrub size. The entirely different type of canopy let in much more light than spruce, even though the trees were well clothed with their summer crop of leaves. I was so surprised I'm sure I stood there with my mouth hanging open for I had been assuming I was hemmed in by spruce and balsam woods, despite the fact that across the road down below my place there were more

hardwoods than north, south and east of me. So now, I thought, I bet this is the source of those wildflowers out along the road. And just as I suspected, as I walked through the stand with its spreading maple canopy, I found myself walking through countless bloodroot, yellow violets, and maidenhair fern. Just as I'd thought, those plants of these species out by the road were stepping stones, reaching out for a new habitat to spread into, but they had been at least partially stopped by the line of balsams and spruces. But here was a wild garden of nature's making.

Eventually I planted wildflowers in there which I knew would have spread into it if any had been within miles of it. One was spring beauty, which I'd gotten from friends in Pennsylvania but which I knew grew from Nova Scotia southward if the habitat was right. Here it was, for those spring beauties took off as if they had just been dropped there by <sup>the wind in front of</sup> the glacier. Another such plant which I tried was the yellow trillium. Generally speaking I don't like to introduce wild plants into New England which aren't already present somewhere, but yellow trillium was one of those species now found in the Appalachians, which somehow didn't quite make it north with the returning native plants ~~of~~ the glacier melted. I've always felt that it, like a few others, would make it on their own given a little more time and no interference by mankind. In any case, I had yellow trilliums in three places around my new area and all snuggled<sup>d</sup> in and seemed as happy as the red trilliums.

I called this hardwood natural wildgarden my "Secret Forest". Very few people did I bring in there, hoping it would remain unknown as long as possible. I used it mostly as a holding in place for any surplus plants I had, and it proved a nice safe place for them; none of them up and died on me as might have happened had I tried putting them near bor<sup>e</sup>al soil.

In the woods across the road I found for the first time in my life, both red baneberries and white baneberries growing not far from one another. I've read that they can and sometimes do crossbreed, <sup>e</sup>producing a pinkish



But when I put them into beds, I deliberately <sup>place</sup> ~~put~~ them separate, mostly in case someone wanted to buy them as nursery plants I wanted to make sure I gave them the right kind. No doubt a technical botanist could tell them apart, as the leaflets of the white are more deeply cut, but I never could or never tried hard enough.

One day when I was out looking for some bearberries with which to fill a bed I was startled to walk right up to a purple fringed orchid almost as tall as I. I had the feeling I was looking it square in the eye. Now this is a plant I won't dig for anyone, for any money. So I just stood there and loved it with my eyes. I don't know how to keep it alive, <sup>nor how</sup> to propagate <sup>it</sup> and I don't know anyone who can. So I let nature take care of it. The very fact that this particular plant had lived there long enough to grow to that size, to say nothing of the years it probably took for the original seed to germinate, was proof enough to me that it was happier than I could ever make it. I'd never forgive myself if I moved it and it died. So I left it there and walked away from it. If only everyone felt that way about the wild orchids we wouldn't have so many endangered species on the edge of extinction today.

I found a small stand of pink ladyslippers out beyond my back yard, in a partially open space where some balsams had died. It was just open enough to give them light yet shady enough to keep them out of the hot sun. Usually you can't pay me to move pink ladyslippers. Like the fringed orchid, they too are orchids and I know of only one <sup>e</sup> person who has been able to keep them alive. They need a certain <sup>n</sup> <sup>r</sup> micro<sup>r</sup>hizae in the soil, but sometimes even that won't keep them happy. The habitat, and microclimate, must be just right. I knew of three or four in a spot which was going to be destroyed by a bulldozer so I dug them up and put them in with what was already growing out there back of my place. I was relieved when they <sup>r</sup> survived year after year. Usually they dwindle down to nothing year after year.

I continued to delight in the bunchberry in my back yard, for their dogwood-like blossoms of early summer were now changed to clusters of orange-red berries, which brightened up the ground back there. A narrow footpath led from them due east into the woods, along which was ~~xxxxxx~~ a mat of goldthread<sup>d</sup>, which has a shiny evergreen leaf which looks something like a strawberry plant leaf. The root is a long thin gold-colored thread, giving it its name. Further down that path, to the left, under a rather open canopy of spruce, was a wet area with enough sphagnum moss in it to look like a bog. I tried planting a few pitcher plants in it and to my relief they lived. To keep bog plants happy in such a place, though every-<sup>must</sup>thing else, <sup>be</sup> right; the habitat becomes unsuitable if too many trees form a shady canopy. There has to be open sun. I couldn't get in there and cut some of the trees I would have like<sup>d</sup> to remove, so gradually it did get too shady and the pitch<sup>r</sup> plants began to grow smaller and smaller.

Having become familiar with my own property, and that adjacent to it, I decided I should go down to the Penobscot River woodlot out back of Thoreau Carry and see if anything could be rescued after that bad spring flood. I had wanted to go earlier, but I felt I should know just where to put anything that survived, rather than to have to move them twice. I didn't expect to find very much, and I had been berating myself for having brought them into such a flood-plain spot in the first place. I had been assuming all summer that most of them had been smothered by the ~~floats~~ and jetsam of the flood even if they had survived drowning. But I felt it was my duty to rescue anything which might have survived.

To my relief I found about sixty-five to seventy-five percent of what I had put in there, not only alive but many of them developing new shoots, though all were covered to some degree by river debris. But without help some would be choked out.

The taller ones, like white trillium and bloodroot, were visible enough above the debris to be easily seen. Others, like wind anemone, downy yellow violet and hepatics I had to hunt for in spots which I had to remember. By scraping away debris and dead leaves I gradually found many of them. Wild ginger, which can grow a bit tall was plastered down, so was foamflower. One species I just couldn't find, rattlesnake plantain. That is a wild orchid, and evergreen, but easy to transplant if you do it right. But they are ground-huggers. I thought I knew just where I had put them, but the more I scraped in those two or three spots the more I was sure they had rotted in the excessive wet. But I stood on the old wagon road for a moment and tried to orient myself with the memory of planting them. I ~~was~~ <sup>could see that I</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> scraping too far to the south of the spot. Choosing another ~~spot~~ <sup>spot</sup> the location <sup>of</sup> which seemed right but which was unrecognizable because of all the piled up sticks and debris left by the flood, I scraped an easy spot to reach with the toe of my sneaker and there was a rattlesnake plantain. I had to remove all that flotsam in order to get close to the ground, then gently poke away the sticks and leaves and sand plastering the little plants down. I felt that I found them all, there seeming to be about as many as I remembered putting in there. ~~It~~ I'll report here, rather than forget later, I had what I felt was an ideal bed to put them in at the base of a pine near my cabin. They seemed to agree with me for the next year nearly every one of them put up a stalk of blossoms, tiny little white orchids that seemed to yell "I'm happy." I had never before seen a bed of rattlesnake plantain put up so many blossoms in one season. Maybe they'd had a rest under the river gully.

In digging up the ginger <sup>and</sup> foamflower and all the others I felt like a mother collecting her children whom she had carelessly left in a hazardous place and was overjoyed to find them still alive. No one will ever know how lifted was the load of guilt as I drove out the <sup>o</sup> County Road and brought

all those wildlings home with me. I gave them all love-pets every now and then, the rest of the years that I lived with them. The rattlesnake plantain were so happy as time went on that they walked right over their bed log-barriers and continued to expand in all directions. I often wished I had instruments with which to ~~measure~~<sup>test</sup> the soil and microclimate in that bed to determine what was so acceptable about it.

I knew of two other species down there by the river which I wanted but I returned for them later, knowing they were happy right where they had come in on their own naturally. One was the tall snow thoroughwort, with blossoms cluster<sup>ed</sup> at the top which looks like its close relative the boneset. While it is common in some areas I had only seen it once before in my life. I took only a few from the rather large stand, as I suspected I didn't have a suitable habitat for it, and that proved right; I never did get it to grow big and strong as it was where I found it.

The other was wood betony, closely related to the rare lousewort which saved a dam going up where it grows in northern Maine. Any lousewort is not easy to transplant; there seems to be some evidence it needs to be close to some tree roots for a symbiotic relationship; probably birch. I put it close to some gray birch, and while it didn't exactly thrive, in that it didn't increase itself, it did survive.

I'd put most of the plants, which I brought up from rescuing them along the river, in plastic bags, as plastic acts somewhat like a greenhouse, permitting light to get in and keeping moisture in, so long as there is also an opening for air. I had set the two bags of white trillium on the ground under some small evergreen trees, to make sure the sun didn't get at them before I could plant them. In the morning when I went out to get them and take care of them one bag<sup>s</sup> was missing. Since no humans had been up in there, I knew some wild animal had gone off with it. I hunted around

without any luck. I had to settle for being thankful for the bag which was left; as I didn't know if there were any stations of them in Maine, I felt badly about losing any of them. I suspected the culprit to be a big fat old raccoon, which I'd seen a couple of times step out of the bushes on the car lane. Most plants which have heavy roots, such as trillium roots, are attractive food for many wild animals. Quite some time later I found the <sup>empty</sup> plastic bag in a stand of young balsam firs south of my camp.

No matter where I have camped, from Maine to Florida, I have had to contend with raccoons. It was one of my chores once, to feed a couple of raccoons in a small zoo, where I learned how ingenious they can be, while at the same time they can be entrancing wild animals. They are born with an insatiable curiosity, and they can outwit most humans who aren't used to dealing with them. Having human-like paws they can get into what an Indian would call "heep trouble."

In my wandering around the woods I learned that much of Maine is good wild apple and berrying country. There were two <sup>wild</sup> apple trees, still relatively small but both <sup>be</sup>ing fruit, when I arrived at my cabin. One was directly across the car lane from my center room windows, the other not far from the privy. The former had apples good only to feed to the pigs, but the one near the privy made the best apple sauce I ever tasted. There were three or four wild apple trees down along the gravel road below, two of which had fruit that made good apple sauce. The front yard <sup>at</sup> the two story house down there had the biggest crab apple tree, with the mostest fruit I ever saw on any apple tree. It made superb crab apple jelly.

I notice a young apple starting to shoot up under the center room windows and because it was plumb in the middle of a flower and fern bed I wanted to pull it up, But remembering the story of the Baldwin apple I made myself wait until it was big enough to produce fruit, by which time

its branches were overtopping the cottage and brushing against the roof shingles in the wind. Once I found that it had about the poorest apples in the area, unlike the Baldwin which had appeared wild among other wild apple trees along a farmer's stone wall, I cut it down and used its good apple wood in the fireplace.

But berries are the wild ambrosia of Maine. In early summer the wild strawberries in my yard produced more fruit than I could eat up on my cereal. I started cooking them, to make sauce out of them before they could spoil. Then my neighbor took me to a big field of them three miles <sup>up</sup> down the gravel road, where, leisurely sitting on an old cushion, and a headnet over my face and neck to keep off the little black flies, I easily picked enough wild strawberries to make two batches of ~~str~~<sup>s</sup>trawberry jam. Preparing wild strawberries in such quantity can be a chore, as they have to be hulled. ~~It~~ It was one of the few tasks I undertook which tempted me to sit down for very long. Being a modern-day Cro-Magnon, I escaped boredom by turning on the TV or radio. The jam they made was true ambrosia in January and February.

Blueberries, of course, are the famous berry crop of eastern Maine. There were a few of their low-bush varieties in my yard, but probably because they grew under the canopy <sup>f</sup> of larches <sup>s</sup> and pines they seldom produced many berries and those few were small and a bit dry. But I had two sources of blueberries of good quality and in quantity; one was in a field which was being taken over by balsams and spruces so that before long a forest would shade them out, but there were still enough berries to be worth going after. Five miles to the <sup>s</sup>outh, however, down the gravel road, there was a recently abandoned commercial blueberry field of many acres, out in the open sun, where the ubiquitous and virile spruce and <sup>am</sup> balsam seedlings had not yet gotten established, for blueberry fields in production are burned over regularly. I knew that the Maine forest would catch up with this one eventually, but

not in my time. I took with me the old cushion, two large pens with handles on them, the binoculars in case a marvel should drop in out of the sky or if a bear should find the patch while I was there, the headnet, with a wide-brimmed hat ~~against~~ against the hot sun, a bag lunch and a jar of fruit juice. Sitting in one spot for quite awhile, as the berries were so plentiful I didn't have to move very often, I was as comfortable as a field mouse. By then I owned a battery-powered radio, but I left it at home, for here was the real world which I didn't want bombarded by the sounds of a culture alien to nature.

I went on many of these blueberrying trips to that field, and always picked enough berries to make a double batch of jam, to have a supply in the refrigerator with which to embellish my morning cereal, and for a big bowlful to take down to Vivien, Wilfrid and Marthe. Sitting out there under the vault of the sky, engaged in a millen<sup>nn</sup>ium-long primitive occupation, though using metal ~~containers~~ rather than bark or clay containers, often set me to pondering human life in nature. While it was so rigorous most of the time for the human race, ~~that~~ <sup>in the past,</sup> people lived short lives compared to what we attain today, I felt my whole being stirred by race memory, for all of my ancestors, and everyone else's, lived like this in nature. They were all collectors and gatherers. I reveled in being a collector and gatherer.

A few years before I arrived at my cabin area, several trees were cut down on the west side of the gravel <sup>R</sup>oad about a third of the way up to the pump. Raspberries had come in, and produced the biggest, fattest red raspberries I had ever seen on wild bushes. But picking them was a much different experience than sitting on a cushion in a blueberry field. Here, not only were the <sup>re</sup> raspberries stalk thorns to contend with, but the tree-cutters had dropped the tree tops, and rejected tree boles, right where they had cut them. To get in there, push through the briars, and step over

the tree slash, meant trying not to break a leg or an ankle. I usually left my car parked out there on the road shoulder, so if I didn't get out of there by dark my neighbors would know where I was. But here again, I picked enough juicy ripe raspberries to make a two-batch mess of jam.

As if that weren't enough of Maine berrying, along came the blackberries before the red ones were finished ripening. The blackberry bushes also were in two places, across the road from the red raspberries, where there<sup>e</sup> was a small stand of them, and out the tote road east of Crocker Turn. They, too, were big and fat and juicy, about the best wild blackberries I had ever encountered. The struggle in picking them was the extra-strong thorns, and the height of the cones which would get hold of my hair, or the headnet.

I had an odd experience with the blackberries one year. They were out a tote road where I often walked for the pure pleasure of being all alone out in the Maine wilderness, yet on a safe two-track lane once made by a logging truck so I couldn't get lost. I walked out there in the spring, when the blackberry blossom buds were just appearing to see if they would have a big enough crop to go after them later. I<sup>again</sup> saw them when the blossoms were in full bloom and there were masses of them, then I went out several times, watching the berries develop from small green things, through big white-green, then as they began to turn red. I checked once more, just as the red was starting to turn black. Judging by blackberries growing near me, I decided it was ripe-time, I<sup>I</sup> gathered<sup>ed</sup> up my pans and headnet, and put on a heavy long-sleeved jacket against the tough blackberry thorns, and walked out there, having arranged my schedule to have time the next day to make blackberry jam. When I got out there, where I had never seen a human in all the times I'd gone out there, every last ripe<sup>b</sup> blackberry had been picked! I was astounded. Dismayed. Yet I knew I didn't own those berries. Perhaps



the family of some paper mill owner had picked them, and they had more right than I. Several months later I was standing in line at a supermarket cash register when a lady who looked vaguely familiar spoke to me and said, "I was out your way not long ago. We went out for a walk and found the most wonderful patch of blackberries!" I said nothing. And made no effort to learn her name. Maybe she has as much right to them as I, but she walked out there once. I had watched and loved the whole process of their development all season. But, there was nothing I could say.

I eventually learned where there were other blackberry patches, some even nearer to home. But I realized the dangers inherent in going off into the woods alone for such treasure, so I often left a note on my table, describing where I was going. I had learned that at that time, it cost \$25,000 for a helicopter to look for someone lost in the Maine woods, to say nothing of the cost and miserable experience of a broken leg. But, like they teach the Scouts, I was always extra careful when alone. Often I brought friends with me, whenever they were in the area, and that was fun.

There was yet one other kind of berry I ~~had~~<sup>managed</sup> to pick, which I had long yearned<sup>ed</sup> to do; Paul took me in his outboard motor boat up the Sunkheze, where we picked wild cranberries. They were the kind which are part red and part yellow, than which no cranberry can be better. I got just enough of them to make a small jarful of cranberry sauce for Thanksgiving, and another for Christmas. Much of the fun of that trip was going up what I call Henry Thoreau's Sunkheze, though he only saw its mouth at the Penobscot.

There was one thing I realized, no matter where I go in Maine, the climate of long cold winters, and the soil conditions, are just right to assure forest regeneration. From Cranberry Lake to Hatchesin, to my area seedling spruce and balsam come up thicker than peas in a vegetable garden. They soon smother out everything else if allowed to develop into dense, dark evergreen forests. ~~And~~ They can shut out sunlight if you permit them to grow. I had to keep pulling the seedlings out of the partially open

area on the south side of my cottage. And I'd had to pull up or cut more than a hundred of them in the little spot I cleared for a parking lot for a couple of cars. But this is why it pays paper companies to cut on a rotation basis. They don't have to go out and plant trees to cover the spots they left open. Nature starts a new crop right away, not only from the seeds which are already stored in the soil, having fallen from the standing forest before it was cut, but also from seeds blown in by the wind from the trees left standing around the cut area. There are many areas in the world where new trees must be planted by hand after a clear-cutting, but Maine is not one of them, at least in the evergreen forest areas.

A young woman came to see my wildflowers one day, and, I suppose showing off what she had read about not cutting trees, she said, "I hope you never cut down any of these trees." I tried to explain to her about the masses of seedlings which would come in if I let them, but she was horrified that I would touch them. But I didn't mind her having the "woodmen spare that tree" attitude, much as it didn't fit where I was; it was nice to have someone from the city, as she was, wanting to protect rather than destroy.

I had finished up most of the indoor painting, and remodeling, before the real cold set in. As I had expected, I found bureau drawers, chairs, and many odds and ends of items at Chet's in Milford. <sup>second-hand store</sup> My favorite chest of drawers had a grooved pattern on the front of each drawer, looking as if it had been a good piece of furniture in its day. It was low and long, and had very dirty old white paint covering it. A friend had given me a cerise-colored rug, which fit ~~fit~~ wall to wall in the front <sup>o</sup> porch room, so after I scraped down the chest of drawers I painted it old-rose-pink. At a rummage sale I had picked up two old-rose-pink old fashioned portieres, and as they nicely covered the two beds in there I found myself with a pink bedroom in the woods. To finish it off I bought curtain material with small

pink roses in a white background, and made curtains for all four windows out there, and a skirt of it around the beds extending to the floor. I never on God's earth would have planned a pink bedroom for a cabin out in the Maine woods, but one does build around a rug. I found it quite amusing to see the faces of city friends the first time they walked into it. For I had even painted the old-rose pink the bedstead to match the chest of drawers.

The neighbor who had shown me my first sight of the cabin proved to be a character out of a story book. I cherished her friendship, not only because I am a friendly person but because, though I don't mind living alone, I think it is wise to see a human to talk to now and then; and it's also wise to have someone nearby in case of an emergency. She had insisted I use her mailbox until I found the kind I wanted, and now and then she invited me in to a TV program.

But soon I noticed she was acting rather strangely, as if she were afraid of me or didn't want anything more to do with me, a contrast after having been so friendly. I finally pinned her down, and learned to my surprise that she had decided I was a communist. Why else would I live alone in the woods? I was hiding. I was in *cabwots* schools with some of the university professors. Over the years I had been called everything else possible, for choosing to live close to nature. But this was the first time I had been called a communist. How to answer anyone with that kind of mind? I not only didn't know any communists, but I had never read of any of them being interested in birds and wildflowers.

I decided to write her a note, in order to have it down in black and white. "My family, " I said, on paper, "settled two towns in Connecticut, One of my great grandfathers was in the French and Indian Wars, one was in the Revolution, qualifying me to be a DAR, my grandfather was in the Civil War, and my father in the Spanish American War. This helped me to realize how the men in one's

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Sherwood

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family are used as an explanation of one's own behavior, an unbroken war record from generation to generation proving your own worth though you weren't present and had nothing to do with such records. So I laid it on thick that I was a born and bred Connecticut Yankee, so how could I be a communist? Obviously I couldn't possibly explain to her, as grade school had been her highest education, that my reasons for living the life of the natural world had to do with race memory of Cro-Magnon days, neither of which she ever heard of, and a desire to protect the natural world.

She accepted my, to her, superior ancestry, but I gave up watching TV programs with her, <sup>and</sup> collecting drinking water from her well, and made the effort to find a suitable rural mailbox. Strange how often it doesn't pay to be neighborly. Then we wonder why we do have all those wars, though generally speaking, I like to blame wars on men.

I buckled down, now, to resolving the water situation. I bought a second hand child's red metal wagon, and two five gallon green plastic containers. I had on hand other smaller plastic containers. The wagon now made it possible to walk up to the pump at Crocker, <sup>Turn</sup> most of the time I enjoyed that chore, for there were wildflowers to look at as well as the brook, along the way. Gathering water at a pump was one of those tasks which made up for what I call boring push-button life. I couldn't just turn on a faucet, convenient as it would have been at times. I had to work for my water; it was a challenge and I met it. Admitting, of course, that if I'd have had a bunch of little kids in the house, it would have been drudgery. But the <sup>innate</sup> drive of the explorer, the back-packer, is this desire for self-sufficiency, and for independence from civilization.

Barbers, the gal who wanted all the eagles killed, was one who walked with me along the brook in the woods. We sat on a rock and listened to the soft gurgle of the water as we talked about pioneer days. We both agreed it would have suited our natures better than what we were <sup>e</sup> expected

to do now, if we had been confronted with the challenges of covered wagon days. Admitting of course, that to bear children, and care for infants in the wilderness with no doctors or any kind of medical help at hand, didn't appeal to us. Barbara was especially firm on that, having three children, one of whom, as a small baby, had needed emergency attention. I had already learned that Barbara was a good conversationalist, who pondered the imponderables. She had been brought up in foster homes and hadn't finished her schooling. Yet she was the kind of thinker who should have gone through the intellectual disciplines of college.

Barbara reminded me of a story I read not long after the end of World War II, written by an officer who had been stationed on New Guinea. He and his trained men had been astonished to find how easy it was to teach Stone Age boys, who had never been near an engine before, how to take airplane engines apart, clean them, and put them back together. He made a statement which has made me do much thinking ever since. He said that most human beings have innate intelligence; how much they know depends upon contact with what other humans know, not on their smartness. Then he added the thought that if humans had not been innately smart they would have become extinct long ago. The most advanced university doctorate student couldn't survive in the New Guinea jungle or the Australian outback without knowing the wilderness smarts the way inner city kids today have street smarts. It was in such terms that we talked. We admitted there were primitive peoples still alive on earth who were smarter than we in their own way. This applied to many Down East Mainers, who, without benefit of advanced education ~~had~~ <sup>have</sup> survived <sup>d</sup> the vicissitudes of northern Maine far from the best urban advantages. They may sound hickish to the city-bred, but they had evolved their own expressive English, embroidered with apt metaphors and a local accent which it took adjustable brains to develop. Barbara herself, ~~had~~ used imaginative colorful expression with a very intriguing Down East accent, with a Yankee Maine twang. Stupidity could not have made this possible. Native smarts could and did.

I was startled one day, when walking out along the back edge of my vegetable garden, which <sup>was</sup> a strip of land about four to five feet wide between the wire of the garden fence and the edge of the woods, to see, down at my toes, a couple of ladies' tresses in full bloom. And among them were some ternate grape ferns. The tresses are another form of wild orchid, the blossoms being small and up a stem as with rattlesnake plantain. But I had learned years ago, that unlike the plantain, these are very difficult to transplant. I decided to leave them right there. The ternates, too, which are almost impossible to move successfully. Later I found more of the tresses out the tote road, near the sundews.

One day, when walking along my car lane, not far from the cabin, I noticed a few small white things close to the ground just inside the fringe of young evergreen trees. Forcing my way in under the low-growing branches, I got down on my knees the better to see. There, before my unbelieving eyes, was a whole natural bed of the one-flowered pyrola, Moneses uniflora, which I had seen only once before in my life. The creamy-white blossoms more than an inch across, occur as one per plant on a slender stem from two to five inches tall. The plant itself is a small rosette of leaves, close to the ground. It is also known as one-flowered wintergreen. It looks similar to the shinleaf blossom; they

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suggest a porcelain appearance. They belong to the ~~pyrolaceae~~ <sup>pyrolaceae</sup> family. They spread by underground runners, and as I happened to know that the New England<sup>d</sup> Wildflower Society needed some specimens of this species I eventually, one spring, sent them some plants. Their runners are long and thin~~ly~~ underground, and <sup>root at the end of the runners</sup> as buds must be present for them to live it was a chore finding and not breaking<sup>s</sup> suitable runners<sup>s</sup> in among young matted tree roots.

I learned later that someone else had also sent them a few of these not very common plants, and they had tried developing a bed of them. But they just wouldn't take hold. So they gave up trying rather than risk loss of more of them, until the day comes when maybe someone will discover the trick to growing ~~the~~ one-flowered pyrola. In a couple of years that bed had disappeared, which made me sad until I discovered that out back <sup>in my woodlot</sup> of my compost area, there was a nice colony of them growing in a spreading circle around a fairly large spruce tree. I discovered the tiny leaf rosettes first, so I made frequent trips out there to <sup>s</sup>watch them come into bloom. This plant does a very interesting<sup>s</sup> thing with its flowers. The blossom stem comes up slowly out of the center of the leaf rosettes, and the bud, then the blossom, hang down under the top of the stem like a very shy flower. Gradually the stem pulls the flower up, until, when at the height of its bloom, the blossom is on top of the stem, facing the sky, so that anyone walking among them looks down on a star-like flower which is from one to two inches across. Their disappearing in one spot then re-appearing unexpect<sup>s</sup>edly somewhere else reminded me of fringed gentians, and gives me the notion that they are biennial. A couple of 1 years later I found a new patch of them in the woods south of my privy area, and those out by the spruce were <sup>s</sup>diminishing, which further suggests they are bi-ennial.

What I call the real wintergreen, Gaultheria procumbens, has thick, oval evergreen leaves, very different from the thin leaves of the pyrola. But the flowers of this species are also creamy white and waxy. The winter-

green is one of the common damp, cold soil arboreal species, and while there was only a little of it on my property it is common through the Maine forest area. Since I was a child I have enjoyed ~~eating~~ chewing on its new red-dishgreen shiny leaves in spring; later in the season it gets a bit strong or bitter. It has fascinating red berries, which are rather dry but <sup>a</sup>fragrant; usually ~~usually~~ only one is found per plant, and as they therefore don't lend themselves to gathering in quantity, as not every plant produces them, I have always left them for the ground birds, the chipmunks or whatever else needs them more than I do.

In anticipation of digging more wildflower beds in my woods, and not wanting to encroach upon my neighbor's holdings, I decided the easiest and most sure way of seeing exactly where my boundary lines were was to run a white string from the four large red painted posts which marked my corners. I acquired a ball of string and just went out there and threaded it through the woods, beginning with the southeast post which was deep into the woods back of the privy. From there I ran it to the post at my southwestern <sup>r</sup>corner, then through the woods to the post up the end of that western lane, to a post near the compost area, then down to join up with the first post. I knew it wouldn't hurt any deer which might run into it; he would just make more work for me. If any red-blooded logger happened through the woods at that time he sure would have <sup>c</sup>called that ordinary white household string dangfangled. But it enabled me to walk my bounds, and daub a bit of orange paint on every tree <sup>and close to</sup> inside/my line. It didn't take me long to become acquainted with those individual trees. and at last I had no fear of trespassing. This boundary-running I could have done with my compass, as the <sup>e</sup>xact readings were in the deed. But apparently those who had laid out the property set those posts and I decided they were good enough for me, as my wildflowers wouldn't hurt anyone.



When October and November came around I was presented with the problem of hunters coming at me from out back. Open season was first on the game birds, then on deer, and as this section of Maine had a reputation for having a high deer population I knew what I was in for. I soon discovered that hunters drove up into the tote road past Crocker Turn, parked their cars there, then walked through the woods stalking whatever they were looking for. The day came when I could hear shooting on all sides of me except down toward the road. One noon time two tall men walked into my clearing from the east, coming in out of the woods which I had considered wilderness; one was an older man, the other his big husky son. The older one was exhausted. With that big heavy gun in his hands, dressed like he could afford anything at the store, I wasn't very sorry for him. Subsistence hunting makes sense to me, but not shooting and killing things for fun. Even though I well know that a wild animal crop needs to be harvested, generally speaking, or it will soon eat itself out of existence. To me that is the balance of nature., though I well knew of the example of the overpopulated Kaibab deer territory. Guns and fun-killing just aren't my thing. I'd rather let nature strike its own balance, with its native wild predators.

I started putting my radio out on the back step and turning it up full blast. Else I could find myself shot at, as anyone coming at me from the woods could see me moving around out there, but not see the cabin, it was so naturally camouflaged. Anything moving in the woods gets shot at first, then checked. But how far into the woods can radio sounds penetrate? It depends upon the wind direction, partly, but trees muffle such sounds. When I could tell that the blaring radio wasn't having much effect on the guns I was hearing out there, and I realized I didn't quite have the cabin ready for winter living, the idea of going to Florida to work for the winter began nibbling at my mind.

Sitting with my feet in Miranda's oven, hearing the shots out in the woods, I realized I had gotten through more than half a year without working for someone, living successfully on my limited Social Security check. But I was still hale and full of pep, and felt that there were things I needed for the cabin, like a fireplace. I felt it was time I got back to work while I was still able to do so. Who knew how long my health would last? If I worked this winter, maybe next winter I could sit between Miranda and a fireplace without risk of freezing to death or getting pneumonia. And maybe smoke from a chimney would turn hunters away.

This time I had a home which I hated to leave. But I would be right back here in the spring. All my wonderful wildflowers would be out there. I would never again have to sleep out in a car in a long spell of spring rain, like a tramp or a homeless one.

It proved easy to button up the cabin for the winter. After all, there was no water to shut off, a distinct advantage at such a time.

I headed for my sister's in Ft. Lauderdale for Thanksgiving, and to work in Florida for the winter for my cabin renovation expenses.