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CHAPTER ~~XIII~~ ~~26~~ 17

FLORIDA, VIA CANADA

"For the animal shall not be measured by man...  
they move finished and complete...living by  
voices we shall never hear." Henry Beston

It was a blow not to be able to stay home for the winter in the cabin. Realizing, however, that I still had my health and was better off than most older people in that respect, especially as I don't have arthritis, I decided that if I planned it carefully I might be able to take a camping trip somewhere that I'd never been before, and stay out longer. Money that I would have to put into heat and snowplow if I stayed home could go for gas. I had to pay for food no matter where I was.

One idea led to another. I had never been fortunate enough to do the kind of exploring and wilderness living I had always yearned for, like travel up the Amazon and down some of its tributaries, or be among the first to study the mammals of the African Serengeti, or spend some time in Antarctica. But there still were things which I could do, on a more miniscule scale, most of them things which people who live in parlors never dream of, or would

even think of doing.

Foremost into my thinking came my long secret desire to own some kind of camping vehicle. The kind I could live in when the weather was bad, which might be a wise thing to do as I got older. I still enjoyed the challenge of bucking the weather in my tent, but by now I had seen so many different kinds of camping vehicles in Florida I wondered if there weren't some modified form of that kind of life which I could afford, and with which I could experiment. I tied to that notion the possibility of going on a year-long camping trip, from north to south, according to the weather.

That meant working another winter in Florida to earn a vehicle. This time the job was more tolerable for I was in a constant state of anticipation as I spent most of my free time investigating camp vehicles. From the start I knew that R.V.'s were out, as they were horrendously expensive. Most older people who owned one had sold their home in order to acquire it. It wasn't long before I realized that my only hope was to get a second-hand van, the kind I could walk into from the driver's seat. It would be fun fixing up the inside to live in it, and I could lock the door at night, something you never could do with a tent.

All winter, as I earned my little dollars and stashed them in the bank, I ogled every van I saw on the road. Half way through the winter I started going to second-hand car lots to learn what was available. I was astounded at the prices of those even on the edge of being junk. I learned that vans are prized possessions of their owners. Seldom are they turned in to dealers; they pass from friend to friend, or are hung onto until they <sup>are</sup> ready to fall

apart. The choice, I soon learned was definitely limited. I was humble enough to be contented with a second-hand van, but I did not want it to look as if it dropped out of a Grapes of Wrath lineup.

I had hoped to drive home in my house ~~house~~ on wheels in the spring and test it out in trailer campsites along the way. But there was nothing available in Florida which I could afford, or which looked as if I wanted to sink my hard-earned savings into. On the long trip home I had plenty of time to debate with myself if I really wanted to do this thing. I could afford to stay home a few winters if I used my new savings to supplement my winter income. I soon realized, of course, that once the savings were gone I'd be right back to square one, if I didn't invest it in a vehicle.

When I got back to Connecticut my godchild and I looked around at the numerous second-hand car dealers in the area. The experience was the same as in Florida. Either a dealer had no vans come in, or the two or three he had were ugly junk. I was about to give up, and hoped there just might be something available in Maine, as I knew a large second-hand dealer there, when we stumbled upon an address in the yellow pages of the telephone book. I gave them a call. "Yes, we have about thirty vans here," was the amazing answer. Gladys and I all but went through the red lights trying to get there before some other buyer beat me to a good choice. Thirty! How could that be?

We drove into the sales yard and there it was! A Chevy Van. I recognized it right away. All <sup>new</sup> white <sup>paint</sup>, though I'd rather have had a less glaring color, but no rust in sight. We both held our breath when we went in and asked the price. It was exactly what I had saved for it! \$2500!

It was what is known as a half-window van, meaning windows on only one side. That suited me fine. In a campground I could position the van so that the blind side was next to a neighbor, giving them and me more privacy. I could use the window side to watch birds. It had been owned by a milkman, who needed something larger. It was five years old but the dealer was willing to sign a statement that the engine was in good condition. To me that was as important as the looks of the thing. I just couldn't face motor repairs on a year-long trip.

I am always reluctant to admit that some modern inventions are practical to have in one's life. Whether it was because I was getting older, or common sense was taking over after a lifetime of daring the elements, that van gave me a new view on outdoor life. Like my kayak, which I loved the way you are not supposed to love inanimate objects, from Day One I loved that van.

When I got home to Maine, in the van, it was spring even that far north; though the leaf buds were just beginning to pop ~~through~~ <sup>had</sup> the leaves were half way developed in Massachusetts as I <sup>had</sup> passed through. Shadblow was out near my cabin. Also in blossom when I arrived were red trillium, bellwort,, bloodroot, Dutchman's breeches, bluets and birdfoot violet, pussy toes, and some of the yellow violets. There were still a few hepaticas in bloom.

It was difficult to pin down to routine daily chores, when I again felt like a bird on a windowsill, ready to take off. I had decided to go down to the Thoreau Society meeting in mid July in Concord, and from there work my way up through Vermont and New Hampshire to Canada. I would camp in some wild Canadian spot for a couple of months, then gradually move down through the Great Lakes area to Tennessee and Kentucky, two states which I had never been in before.

It would be simple to slip on down through Alabama and Louisiana from there, into Florida for the winter. I would thus find a way to camp out all year in my van, heading home slowly come spring.

In anticipation of this I spent much time cleaning the inside of the van, and testing out simple furnishings. I found a very colorful oval-shaped rug on sale, which just fit the floor of the van. But first, having already learned that a van can be as noisy as a truck, I put a 3/4 inch sheet of plywood on the floor, having had it cut to fit. The rug went on top of that. A friend had given me a long, narrow, <sup>wooden</sup> box which just fit along the blind side of the van; it had two lids, with hinges so would be good storage boxes for clothing or whatever. I paint<sup>ed</sup> it gray-green, with paint left over from my cottage paint. When the lids were closed I had a long flat top which could be used for anything from a table to a place to spread out papers. I knew the opposite side of the van could be balanced, as to weight, with my typewriter, books and other items.

It was another case of happenstance, or even serendipity, that my folding camp cot, when opened, fit exactly behind the two front <sup>a</sup>sets, across the width of the van, as the long box didn't come up into that corner.

When the day came to leave it seemed incredible that I could turn my back on my cabin in mid summer, and leave that super wonderful well. As I drove out the yard lane I thought of Emerson's words, "One can make one's own world through perceptions of a reality lying wholly outside social arrangements." If my cabin life was short of social life, in the eyes of some, van life would certainly be "outside most social arrang<sup>m</sup>ements." But I had many appointments with singing birds and wildflowers and trees and lakes and ponds, even with bears though I didn't know it then, and with wild yodeling

loons, and with a little yellow-touched warbler needing me to save it, and miles of cornfields and glorious forests all along the way.

I had piles of maps, it still being the day when you could get them free. I love maps. When I have nothing better to do I pore over maps. Such a trip as this one required me to have many of them at hand, ready for instant's use.

When I was 18 or 19 I went on a car trip up through New Hampshire and Vermont with some friends, to Toronto. The roads were gravel nearly all the way. But I knew that time hadn't stood still up that way any more than it did anywhere else, so it was no surprise to meet only paved roads. But even traveling at a steady pace it took me four days to get across southeastern Canada to Shebandowan Lake, in Ontario, where <sup>Van Dore</sup> Wade had lived, as a young man. That thousand mile trip was quite a surprise, though I don't know exactly what I expected. It was mostly straight going, on a very good road surface of a well-built two-lane highway. The shoulders were rather steep, and signs were frequent forbidding camping or stopping except for an emergency. I had assumed it was going to be wild enough country so that side dirt roads would lead off into the forest where one could camp for a night. There were very good campgrounds, at long-apart stretches, but they were expensive. Wire fences ran along for miles, down the bottoms of the shoulders. Stores and garages were about fifty miles apart, yet I didn't see one broken-down car on the road. What I did see most, as to human travel, was a surprise- groups of motorcyclists, most coming in from westward. There were less than half a dozen hiker groups; I imagined they could slip in under the shoulder wires and curl up in sleeping bags for the night, unseen. I realized that this tight control of the Canadian highways was due to the excessive invasion of hippies who had neither jobs nor financial support and had

become a burden on the native residents. I understood both sides and was determined to be a non-problem visitor in my own limited financial way, otherwise how else would a Canadian Mountie view me except as another invading hippie, though of a different generation.

One other surprise was that no glacial boulders were ever in sight. I never did find out why. There were rock outcroppings here and there, though, which formed steep-sided hills or low mountains, or formed walls along the highway where the road had been blasted through. Maybe the ice load just sat there, a couple of miles thick, and didn't move, this close to its center, hence didn't drag boulders along and drop them. To my knowledge, there was but the one <sup>un</sup>glaciated spot and that was ~~in~~ in Wisconsin, where the ice flowed around it and left no debris. But this part of Canada was so far north one would expect it to be strewn thickly with glacial rocks and boulders.

The woods were thinner than I had expected, in that the spruces were very skinny with short side branches, compared to my Maine yard spruces. There was a "starved" look to the spruce forests. Maybe from such protracted and excessive cold. I saw one <sup>e</sup>first of pure popple for the first time in my life, but even that looked skimpy.

Once I passed Thunder Bay most of the fences disappeared and there were many little short roads or driveways down into the woods and lakes. A blessing to me for at last I found a free campsite. My financial arrangement was that once I got into a travel routine, I would camp one or two weeks at one place, then travel for a day to the next place. That way I wouldn't be using money for gas any more than two or three days a month, except to go for groceries where necessary. When the month was up, it was time for the next social security check. That way I would never exceed my income, yet could travel for a year or more. I wasn't thumbing my way, nor did I have my hand out. I was <sup>of</sup> the least harm to the environment for every

place I stayed overnight I picked up all the debris left by those who were there before me, and I found that the litter is no less in sight in Canada than in the United States. If I stayed more than two days I got the whole place cleaned up. That gave me exercise while saying "Thank you" to Canada.

At Shebodowan Lake I lined up my van so that I could look out over the Lake from my van windows. The very first <sup>bird</sup> to sail into view was a small duck which I decided was a female ruddy duck. Then, to my utter contentment, two loons swam around one another, very close to the shore near me. I felt very anthropomorphic about it; as no one else was there I was sure they were saying to me, "Welcome to Canada and my wild loon habitat." The black of their heads and necks was like deep black velvet, the white markings gleaming white.

About a half hour later two men came in from fishing, and dragged their outboard up onto the shore. They kindly lifted my kayak down for me. One drawback my van had, I had discovered, was that it was much too high for me to get the kayak up or down by myself. Up to then I had become adept at getting it up onto and off my car roof; but not only was the van high but the ski racks which fit it added a few more inches.

As I had expected, mosquitos and little black flies, but also unexpected no-see-'ums, were in much evidence as the sun went down. When I was out on the lake I hadn't noticed them, for the strong breeze out there kept them away, but when I paddled in to shore to start preparing supper the bugs took note of my presence. I was prepared, however. I had made double-netting pieces to fit over the <sup>van's</sup> open front windows, which I fastened into place with a combination of safety pins and clip clothespins. But it meant I had to prepare and eat my supper inside the van. A few came in with me, and I took



the time to demolish them. Black flies are easy to squash on the windows, to where the light attracts them. The no see 'ums I got rid of with burning a bit of punk. But the mosquitos are always something different. They hide in clothing or among boxes of things, but even they were conquered by <sup>n</sup>burying the punk long enough to smother them. Unlike the others, the mosquitos come out of their hiding places at night and sing exasperat<sup>a</sup>ingly in your ear, and make three-point hungry landings. But as I say, I took the time to smother them with whatever incense pieces I had in the van.

I stayed two days at this campsite; there were so many people in and out with their speedboats there were no more water birds to be seen. I can see people anywhere, but I can't see wild ducks and loons anywhere, so I decided to take off the third morning. I headed for Lake Kas<sup>h</sup>abowie, not many miles away, where Wade and a friend had a cabin when they were young men. The campgrounds at Kashabowie, though relatively small and seemingly far from anywhere, proved to be full up. The owners, however, let me park my van on a lawn back of an empty building. It was a choice site, for it was on a small high point looking down on the lake's painting-like tiny island, which was covered with evergreens. In his book, FAR LAKE, Wade describes this scene.

The little settlement nearby, consisting of 5 or 6 houses, was in a hole in the wall of woods. There was a small country store which, in looks and merchandise, was a pleasant diverting mix of the late eighteen hundreds and the present. The owner, whom Wade had known, had died in 1955, but his son, who was Wade's age, and had known Wade, remembered him. The son proved a great talker, the type of character one could use in a book without need of embellishment.

While I was in the store a couple of older Ojibway Indians came in. Their skin was much more yellow hue, and their cheekbones higher than with my Penobscot friends who in color were a light copper. The woman introduced me to a mosquito coil, which I'd never seen before.

I had written to wildlife specialists in the area before I left home, hoping to find some marshes around or near a lake where I could do some rail observing. Atitoken Lake had been suggested. I had to go through the town, or small city, of Atikoken ~~the~~ to reach the lake. So I was somewhat prepared that it would not be a wild lake out in the middle of nowhere, which I would have preferred. It was quite large, however, with two sections westward and one to the east, divided by a very high, wide dam which was broad enough for a one-lane road across the top. I'd been w<sup>n</sup>ared ahead of time, the area's wildlife specialist, by David, after I got ~~the~~ to the town, that the lake was very polluted. So I drove out to the end of the dam car tracks, and had with me all of my jugs full of good town water.

I slept in my van atop the dam, at its farthest end, with only woods behind me, in order to have time to get the lay of the land before starting out with kayak and camping gear. It looked, and proved to be, a very cozy spot for a one or two night stand. As I drove out over the dam I could see black clou<sup>d</sup>s moving up. I was there only a few minutes when a heavy shower greeted me. I had no way of knowing but that was to be the major theme of my outing at Atikokan. It was to prove to be an unusually wet summer. But, innocently, that first couple of days, during which time there were several more though brief showers, I waited for everything to dry off.

While waiting I went over the rough checklist of wild~~plants~~ and recorded I'd seen, as I drove across Canada, and added to it everything growing on and near the dam. It had been a surprise to me see the tall spires of handsome lavender-magenta fir<sup>e</sup>weed so ubiquitous and

in such profusion. I had long ago been told that fireweed sprouted after a grass or meadow fire, which helped its seeds to sprout. But I had long been suspicious that it was more a case of the seeds sprouting easily in disturbed soil, as where new road shoulders were made or old ones scraped. This seemed especially true in Canada. Fireweed extended all the way from northern New England to my camp spot on the dam. Obviously there hadn't been a fire for that thousand or more miles, but there were countless miles of new road shoulders.

The background forests seen from the dam were composed of mostly popple, Jack pine, willow, paper birch, balsam, white cedar and white spruce, with considerable large stands of alder and silky dogwood around the lake edges, as well as some common juniper tucked in the cracks of open rock ~~scrapings~~ outcroppings.

In prowling around the dam site I saw only very common and familiar wildflowers, the same as I had at or near home; there were white mellilot, red, white and alsike clovers, jewelweed, daisy fleabane, red raspberry, great mullein and much pearly everlasting. It is always amazing to a traveler to step out of a vehicle hundreds of miles from home and see the very same wild plants you'd recently said goodbye to at home. Even the woods were full of wild sassa-parilla, the same as in my woods around my backyard. And on some of the rocks was the same polypody fern I had on my own rocks. But I have always looked upon these common wildlings as close friends. I never could understand how anyone could be really lonely with so many of them around. They are very companionable if you let them be. Especially if you have made the effort to learn their first names. I've known most of them since childhood.

When I finally got my kayak into the water, with the help of David and a friend of his, I loaded it up with gear and food for two

weeks. David went off with my van, to keep it safe in his yard, so I had to make sure I had everything I needed with me.

When I started out the lake was smooth as glass, but dark clouds made a heavy horizontal line across the western sky. David had told me of a marsh at the far western end, so I decided to head that way, hoping to sleep right out there with rails. I stopped at a rock ledge on my way, where I got out and ate lunch early as I wanted to make the marsh before any heavy rain arrived. The water was already wind-ruffled back where I had just come from.

By the time I got back out into the lake the wind was so strong I decided to just hunker down and see where it would blow me to as it seemed to be going my way. It seemed like being back at the dawn of mankind, for I had no appointments, no stresses, no clock-watching demands. I just let nature waft me on its breeze. But it was a stiff breeze and when it blew me to the far side of the lake, near the narrow channel which led into the marsh area, I decided to paddle on when the wind let up a little. Without any effort on my part, the kayak soon nestled into an open cluster of lily pads, which held the boat in place. There I sat, my feet up on the gunwales, while the water rocked the boat like a cradle. It was total peace, like being an infant in a nursery.

But the storm clouds were coming closer, and though I could glimpse the marsh up ahead, and the far shore, I decided that the weather had begun to look threatening and I'd better be on my way, hoping to find a sheltered spot for the night while the sun was still high and out from under clouds. The wind was getting stronger, but my boat was very stable, being so loaded from one end to the other. But I stuck close to shore, just in case. I passed three fishermen

in two outboard motor boats. I called to ask if they were catching anything. One of them held up a string of medium-sized wall-eyed pike. But they ~~was~~ <sup>were</sup> fishing on the outer edge of the polluted part of the lake. I wouldn't want to eat those fish no matter how well cooked. I headed for the channel into the next lake area.

Fortunately the clouds had been moving slowly, and for that reason I didn't think their storm packed much wallop. I could take any little shower they threw at me, but I didn't want to get caught in strong squall winds. I finally reached the marsh on my right, but I steered a bit to the left across open water, for I could now clearly see the far shore. David had said I might find a campsite over there. But as I got nearer~~x~~ to the land I could see that there was no level spot. Just a solid rocky ledge, on a steep slant, - geologically the ~~old rocks~~ Laurentian Shield, famous in this part of Canada. I knew I couldn't set up a tent on so steep a slope for the night. As there wasn't much choice, I moved back close to the marsh shore at that side, and tied painters to two trees, for <sup>e</sup> and aft, the boat in the water in a spot clear of rocks and shrubs.

Expecting rain to descend at any moment, I quickly got out the netting tent, spread it, with the sleeping bag in it, in the bottom of the boat, then threw <sup>my</sup> tarpaulin over <sup>it and the whole</sup> the open cockpit. I tied the two corners <sup>of it</sup> at the head end to an overhanging tree branch, and fastened down the bottom corners by running a rope <sup>of the tarp</sup> under the boat from one corner to the other. No sooner did I get these chores done than down came the rain. It poured, pounding on the tarpaulin. But I was snug as a bug in a rug, and felt a bit smug, too, for having dared the rain for several hours to hold off, as it were, until I was ready for it. As it was still warm, and no where near bedtime, I just sat on top of the tent and sleeping bag. reading. eating. resting.

Most of the next day I spent hunting for a place to set up the tent. After dawdling around for awhile where a couple of huge great blue herons were preening and resting without seeing me, I finally found a niche in the great rock shield which ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> just big enough for the tent floor, - a sort of gouging out of the rock into a small basin form. It was quite a chore<sup>e</sup> carrying my gear up that steep rock slope, but it was that or sleep another night in the boat. At least the sky was clear. There were some small trees growing up from below the ledge, which were positioned just good enough to tie up the tent roof to.

The rest of the morning I sat around looking for birds, but nary a one was in sight. I was hoping this would be like my first everglades camp, where they would come out to see and be seen once they accepted my presence. In the afternoon there was another shower, so I crawled into the tent to read, and to test its perch. I was a bit suspicious, as the only practical spot to place the corner opening the tent was at the top edge of a 6-8 ft. drop off of the rock ledge, into sloping forested ground. But I managed to crawl in, then back out later, with no problem. I cooked supper out on the open rock ledge, building up a level spot for a small fireplace with pieces of stones. For the first time in days I cooked a meal out under the open sky .

Mosquitos were bad here as soon as the sun started to slide down toward the west, which was behind a dense stand of trees. I cleaned up camp, washed dishes in the lake, and tied the front end of the pulled-up kayak securely for the night. I read until too dark. I woke up in the night, and sort of half sat up, aware that something was different. Before I was fully awake~~for~~ I felt myself falling.

I lost my balance and fell head first over the edge of the low cliff. I grabbed a young sapling growing up out of the edge of the rock. Though I was inside the netting tent, I held tightly to the sapling while my legs and feet were still up on the ledge; my heavier body parts, head, shoulders and hips were dangling in space. What I desperately wished for was a sharp knife, or a scissors, to cut my way out of the netting. I was trapped like a porpoise in a fisherman's net. I kicked what little I dared to do, hoping to dislodge some of the clothespins holding the tent door edge together.

Fortunately, I was slender and still quite athletic. I wiggled my hips, and pulled with my heels. Gradually I got my head braced against the sapling. That gave me enough leverage, so that pushing against the small tree with my arms, I was able to worm my way back up onto the solid rock.

Back on solid underpinning again I had to rearrange the lay of the floor of the tent. There was no moon, only starshine. I have always said I had cat's eyes in the dark; my ability to see better than most people in limited light helped greatly in this instance. By feeling around, however, I found the flashlight. Also matches, and the mosquito coil. By then the front edge of the tent had partly opened and mosquitos were coming in unbidden. Once I closed the netting again, and the coil lit, I was one big itch.

I had the notion I was going to stay awake the rest of the night, lest I slip over the edge again. I counted stars, and listened for loons. Suddenly, there was the sun coming up over the far side of the lake. I'd fallen asleep and was dangerously close to the rock edge again. I was contented to move back into the kayak that morning.

Paddling back toward the marshy area, it was with relief that I spied a small glen in a flat area above the rock slope. I

tied the boat to a water-edge shrub while I went up to explore. To my relief there was a fairly good camping area up there, a rather large flat area covered mostly with birch-popple woods. There were many low shrubs and much sarsaparilla. Again, ~~ix~~ I took on the task of carrying everything up from the boat. The boat itself fit rather snugly into a cleft in the rocks just below the site; a scraggly shrub at the upper end of the cleft<sup>e</sup> was a fine anchor to tie the painter to. But it was a clumsy position for the boat, difficult for getting things in and out of it.

It was a pleasure, however, to set the tent up properly. I spent ~~much~~ of the ~~morning~~ morning hanging things out to dry, including the new plastic tarpaulin and the sleeping bag. With the clippers that I always carried with me when camping, I cleared the small space needed by the tent. There were many trees to choose<sup>o</sup> in tying up the "ridgepole" rope, and for pulling out the sides of the tent; regular tent stakes took care of the corners. The ground was so damp I <sup>first</sup> spread an old plastic table cover on the ground under the tent floor. <sup>Some</sup> ~~much~~ of the food and water containers I brought up. It was noon by the time I had all this ~~equipment~~ assembled.

I had started building a small cooking fireplace on the rock ledge down nearer the water, where a small niche in the rock kept it level. But before I could cook anything on it the rain began again. The enforced rest period after lunch, tempted me to lie down and read and see if I could take a nap to make up for some of the lost sleep of the past few nights. Very seldom can I sleep in daytime, but I must have needed more rest than I'd realized, for the next thing I knew I could hear rain gently pattering on the tent fly and the clock said four o'clock.

Supper I prepared in the tent, over the sterno stove. Once more a can of hot soup, tea, banana, cookies. I listened to my battery



radio for awhile, and fell asleep. I was one mighty surprised person to find it was six in the morning when I woke up! I had heard a downpour on the tent fly during the night when I half woke up briefly. But I was so warm, and dry, I just snuggled deeper into my sleeping bag and knew nothing more until morning. I sure must have needed more sleep than I had realized.

I had stashed a few dry twigs under the tent floor, and had several larger <sup>e</sup>pieces of dry wood in the kayak, under the covered ends. I had let the kayak "out to sea" for the night, hoping bears or other animals wouldn't get into the food still stored in it, for some things were in packages which could be ripped open. But when I pulled it in on its tether, all was fine. I finished arranging the stones for the little fireplace and made myself a breakfast of griddle cakes, using a piece of fat salt pork for cooking fat. I couldn't find the syrup, without pulling the whole kayak apart, so I substituted strawberry jam. With hot coca made with <sup>w</sup> powdered milk I had a substantial breakfast. ~~As~~ <sup>As</sup> with all such breakfasts, it was leisurely. I didn't have to hurry to get out on a throughway, nor to punch a time clock. Time just slid by, over and around me, as the earth turned toward the morning sun.

There were still some rainy-looking clouds floating around. It reminded me of all the passages I have read in books and articles about explorers having to spread their notes out to dry after long seiges of wet weather. Long ago I'd started using pencil for outdoor notes, just so rain wouldn't spoil any record. But soon <sup>had</sup> I opted for pen with ink, especially after the ball pen was invented. With the promise to myself my notes would always get first attention whenever necessary. I've never been sorry. I have over fifty years worth of such notes, and they have never suffered the casualties I've read of happening to others, but I've felt that has been because I give my notes prior attention above all else.

This was one reason why I had chosen a kayak over a canoe. The kayak always has decks covering bow and stern. Also, my type of kayak is almost impossible to tip over, whereas a canoe is the most tippy/<sup>small</sup>boat ever invented. But I always did make the extra effort, and kept my journals in a plastic bag, and in the boat; I always placed them on top of something so if a wave or rain did get in, they would be raised above the bottom.

I took a walk through the woods to the marsh area, so I could look down on it and choose the best areas to get my kayak and its long oars through. I could see some channels through the <sup>water</sup>weeds. No rails were evident from the sloping woods, and I doubted any would be present as the water was one to two feet up the weed stems. I was delighted, however, to see a small duck swimming with a flock of young ones trailing behind her. It was such a small bird it either had to be a grebe or a blue-winged teal, but I didn't have my bird glasses with me.

It rained again during the afternoon. But it cleared up just before supper time, and as I had rescued all the burnt ends of wood left from the breakfast fire, having put them in a plastic bag in the boat, and having more dry wood there, I cooked a supper of cabbage, potatoes and canned ham. Tea, and graham crackers for dessert added up to a satisfying meal.

Had another good night's sleep. I decided the Canadian air must have some soporific value. It had rained all evening, but stopped by nine. There is something so cozy about lying in a dry sleeping bag in a tent, when you know everything outside is dripping wet, that sleep comes more easily than in noisy, stress-filled cities.

The portable radio promised about two to three hours of sunshine for the morning. Eager to see something besides my campsite, and the almost birdless marsh, I put my kayak out on the lake early and ate <sup>a pick-up</sup> breakfast of odds and ends while I paddled. At the far side

of the lake from my camp area I deliberately pushed in among some sedges and lily pads. But they seemed almost drowned, and even ~~X~~ as I approached silently, I could see that no rails or Rails need solid, if wet, ground to walk on, and there was none. other water-type birds were present. ^ Soon I saw a flock of eight redwings, all females, catching insects on the wing. Bird company.

I paddled over into the marsh area, as far as the farthest northwest corner, as I'd been told a brook entered there. But I couldn't find it. On the way back into the marsh I disturbed a blue-winged teal. I tried gently paddling into the water weed<sup>s</sup> to get by her, but she swam in an arc around my boat, acting as if hemming me in. I gave a little push with the paddle, to get out of her way. She was "talking" low. I sat still again, "parked" in the weeds, hoping she'd go hide in the marshy vegetation. To my surprise, she went into the broken wing act, so common with birds with young nearby. Then I caught sight of them. A fleet of tiny little ducks, apparently the same family I'd seen when looking down on the marsh from the woods. This time I paddled hard and got out of their life.

There was a train track about 300 to 400 feet up back of my campsite. During one of the rainy periods, having nothing better to do, I hid behind a large tree as a train went by and counted the cars. There were one hundred and eight~~een~~, of a great variety of design, from regular freight cars to cylindrical tanks, some with catwalks atop like the widow walks on Nantucket houses, huge bins, and open flat beds.

The weather became progressively worse the next few days, with thunderstorms and hail added to the daily showers. Normally I am against radios in the woods. They taint the air, as it were,

with foreign noise. But I had learned when camping in Florida it is wise to have contact with storm warnings. Here, in the Canadian woods, the weather reports helped me plan for the night in deciding what to do with the kayak for the night, and it helped with planning dry wood for meals. The radio was saying that the usual storm track for that latitude had changed, so disturbed weather could be expected for some time. If there were to be hurricane winds or tornados I wanted to know about it ahead of time.

It was so wet it was no longer fun chasing wildflowers. I tried to keep one set of clothes dry, mostly by drying them in front of the cooking fire, but also by spreadin wet ones out in the sun in the few sunny hours. I did go out in the wet now and then and observed the presence of such common plants as butter and eggs and other open-sun species. I enjoyed the great blue lobelia which lived in the area. The only birds I was able to add to my list in between showers was a flock of tree swallows, zooming out over the lake from the opposite shore, / where they flitted back and forth from lake to bushes.

There came a very chilly night. I'd managed to get my slightly damp sleeping bag dry during a sunny spell in the morning. I brought up a blanket from the boat, and wrapped up in it like an Indian during the now usual afternoon rain. I sat there, listening to a train go by. Now and then I thought of a tramp jumping off that train and finding my campsite. Certainly I couldn't lock my tent door.

But, I slept snug in my bed that night, having eaten my supper in the tent again. I ~~stashed~~ <sup>stashed</sup> what was left of it, including part of a sardine sandwich, in a plastic bag which I left near the foot of my bed, not wanting to go out with it and get wet again. The few moments I ~~woke~~ <sup>woke</sup> up my nose told me it was cold out there.

About six the next morning, having just gotten dressed in warm clothing, I heard a faint noise out back. I looked out the back ~~next~~ tent window just in time to see a small bush vibrating. Nothing else was moving. The wind wasn't blowing. Thinking it might be a squirrel, or maybe a raccoon which had disturbed the bush, I started on hands and knees for the tent door. There was the bush mover! A bear! Standing in my doorway! Fortunately the sheet of plastic was still clipped over that end against the night's rain. The bear stood there, sniffing all around the tent-end edges. Then I remembered the half a sardine sandwich. Sardine odor is not subtle.

Often I had wondered if the time might come when I would need a back door. Having only one door, most tents have seemed a trap to me. Now I WAS trapped, and in a tent of my own design. I couldn't get out. He wanted in. I could see this was not a full-grown bear, but still he was bigger than I. Even in my<sup>c</sup>aged situation, one part of my brain said he was a big amiable creature, very cuddly. He was sliding his paws and claws over the plastic but he couldn't get a hold.

The last time I met up with a bear in the woods was several years previously, in northern Wisconsin. I was visiting one of my professors and his wife. He wanted some forest soil~~s~~ samples, as that was his specialty, so I offered to take samples while he went off with his dog hunting for an hour or two. We parked on a one-lane car track in deep woods. I took the soil augur, a bunch of small sample bags, and a pencil. He went off to the right, through the woods, with his dog, saying there was a pond over there where he might find some ducks.

I moved down the car tracks, ahead of the car, taking samples, putting them in the little bags and labeling them. Soon I heard something in the bushes up ahead. Looking up I saw what I thought<sup>t</sup> was the

rear end of a horse, wagging about in the bushes. Thinking the poor animal's reins or halter had gotten tangled in the bushes I stepped forward to help, when up stood a huge granddaddy bear, his paws hanging limply down in front of his chest.

I was too startled to even scream. I started walking backwards, towards the car, away from that mountain of flesh and brown fur. The bear just stood there, after first getting a firm<sup>er</sup> footing by stepping out into the car lane and straddling it. Slowly, trying not to startle him, I kept moving backwards. When I got near the car I could still see the professor over in the woods to the right. He was six feet tall and it looked to me as if the bear were taller than he. I yelled, "There's a bear in the path."

"A what?" he asked. I repeated what I'd said.

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?" he asked. "It's not open season on bears."

I was supposed to be crushed to death by a bear because it wasn't open season? With no help forthcoming I had moved closer to the car, and hoped like mad the doors weren't locked. They weren't. As I opened a door the bear dropped down on all fours and disappeared into the bushes. I was never able to convince that professor it wasn't a baby bear I saw, as that was all he had ever encountered in those woods.

This bear wasn't a baby, either, nor was he a granddaddy. But I didn't want to be cooped up with him in that small tent. I tried to remember where my sheath knife was, so I could cut a hole in the tent wall netting. But the bear suddenly walked away, and in a moment he was outside the back window, his claws again sliding on the plastic which gave him no "toe" hold. I grabbed up my jacket and dashed

outside. The boat paddles were lying alongside the tent; I grabbed them. The bear had moved a few feet back of the tent; he picked up my large <sup>plastic</sup> foam container in which I kept fresh vegetables. He was mauling it, turning it over and over in his paws. It had a very loose lid, which I had tied on with rope, hoping a raccoon wouldn't find out how to loosen it.

I hurried down to the boat, and glancing <sup>back</sup> ~~off~~ I saw the bear heading for the railroad tracks. I untied the boat, which I'd pulled up into the rock cleft, <sup>the night before</sup> pulled the tarp off its cockpit, ~~untied~~ and loosely wrapped the painter around a bush twig after letting the boat down part way <sup>t</sup> into the water. I could now jump in and push off fast if I needed to.

Cautiously I walked back up to the tent. The bear was back. He was again fumb<sup>l</sup>ing with the foam container. Finally he put one corner into his mouth and bit down, chomping off a corner of both the lid and container. Half ~~turning~~, ready to run, I clapped my hands to see if a noise would scare him off. He ~~xxx~~ dropped the container and started off rather slowly toward the tracks. I picked up two pans, where my cooking gear was stacked on the ground, and banged the bottom of two pans together. This time the bear started running, noisily plunging through bushes to the tracks. I began to see I had more to fear from bears coming down the tracks than tramps.

As soon as he was out of sight I quickly removed the sardines and crackers. Again the radio weather prognostication was sunny most of the morning, thunder storms in the afternoon. I spent the morning spreading everything out to dry on the ~~xxxxxxxx~~ rock slope, including the tent and tarp which I'd taken down. I knew I could

not stay that night in the tent; not only <sup>could</sup> ~~should~~ the sardines disappear, but me, too, and the plastic container.

I cooked breakfast, and also lunch, at the little fireplace in the niche on the sloping rock. I was now in the routine of drying wood the first half of the day and using it to cook supper and breakfast the next day. I knew I could come back here any time of the day to cook. I would just have to find a safer place to sleep at night.

I found a sheltered little backwash along the marsh shore on "my" side of the lake. There were several large trees, some with overhanging branches, and marsh vegetation on the other side of the indentation to break any wind from the east, and the water weeds would catch and hold the boat if strong wind swooped down from the west. So I was getting ready to sleep incamped quarters again, in the boat. This time I put effort into building a sort of mast, with a cross bar, which stood up in back of the stern seat, and which I held in place by tying its upper end to an overhanging branch. By using one of the tarps, I created an improvised tent so I could sit up and read, or work with typewriter and paper, even if it were pouring rain. That afternoon's thunder storm gave me ample testing opportunity. Everything remained dry ~~xx~~ except the outside of the tarp and the boat. Once more, though I was restless and yearned to get out and walk, I was fully aware of being cozy and very comfortable. It was this sort of experience which appealed to me more than push button civilization. This was a challenge, and one that I could handle successfully. An exercise in self reliance.

But the mosquitos down here by the water drove me, as unusual, into my netting tent early. ~~xxxxxx~~ In such a situation, I had it



spread out in the boat bottom, the sleeping bag inside it, and the head end tied up to an overhanging branch. Just before dark a kingfisher flew over, and a string of nine ducks. I wasn't very sleepy, having caught up on rest while in the campsite. I was soon glad I had trouble getting to sleep, for once more I had an Aurora Borealis to watch. As it wasn't raining, I pushed the tarp back so I could watch the sky. It wasn't as spectacular as some northern lights shows I had seen, but I reveled in that cosmic display out there in the wild, all by myself. Somehow I felt part of outer space, a realm from whence we all came, and to where I often fantasize returning to explore when my tenure on this planet is up.

I tried once more the next day to find a better campsite, but realized I'd now seen it all. There was nothing better than sleeping in the kayak unless I wanted to go back and risk a bear visit. That second night in that little back water was so comfortable I slept all night, from about ten o'clock until the sun was up. It was a beautiful morning. so I tied up the boat securely, and hiked up the tracks northward to find Caracus Stream, as it was supposed to be clean enough water to drink. Twice a train came by. Both times I lay flat in leaves under bushes, hoping not to be seen.

The stream proved easy to find, being about six feet wide and flowing rather lively. While standing there, wondering if I dared fill the plastic jug I'd brought along, I noticed a small dam made of sticks and small logs. Ends of the sticks <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ obviously <sup>y</sup> beaver-cut. I had brought some laundry with me, I found a tussock of grass to sit on at the foot of a small water fall with a pool at its bottom. I filled the bucket I'd carried the clothes in and

scrubbed away out in this lovely scene. The walk back was uneventful. Not even a train. But I did pick a cupful of raspberries, having a small pan with me. Stewed they made shredded wheat without milk more palatable. I did carry back a jug of water and used it in cooking so it got amply boiled.

The following day there were thunderstorms, morning, afternoon and evening. Being warned about it by the radio, I decided to return to the campsite where the bear had been, feeling he was far off elsewhere by then. All food I put into the boat and let it out part way into the water. It was great to stretch again on the wide tent floor. I slept better than I'd hoped, waking up only for loud thunder.

The wind dominated the next few days. I tried several times to get out in my boat but I couldn't get very far. There was a weedy place across the lake to where I paddled with my lunch one day. All I could do was read, as very few birds were in sight. Later in the week several ducks appeared over there, and several swallows, some looking like bank swallows, in with the tree swallows. I tried the marsh again, though I knew by now no rails were present. The parent duck with the young was much less concerned about me, letting me pass through the weed channels without her panicking.

The last night I stayed in that area I decided to spend it out in the kayak rather than risk an unpleasant bear experience the last minute. So I tied up among the meadowsweets and alder in the same backwater where I was after the bear appearance. I lay awake quite awhile, on purpose, hoping to see some of the Perseid shooting stars, as it was time for their annual display. But I didn't see a one. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I was startled wide awake by a strange, loud sound. It echoed in my ears like someone pounding

on wood. As I became fully awake, the memory of the sound was as if someone of giant size had dropped an armload of ~~wood~~<sup>boards</sup> on a wooden dock. Fully aware now of where I was I knew that couldn't be. I sat up and started pulling clip clothespins off the netting tent opening. But all was silence. There was not even a frog splash. Memory of the sound sorted itself out in my mind. It had to be a tree, cracking and falling, for wood had been the whole core of the sound. Beaver! I remembered the beaver at Caracas Stream.

In the morning I went to look, just a couple of hundred feet, or less, back of my boat tie-up. There it was! A popple, the favorite of beavers, ~~lying~~ out over the lake, its green leaves forming a bower over the water. The two ends of the cut stump and tree were typical beaver-pointed cuts. What if they had dropped a tree across me and my boat in the middle of the night? Would I have heard them gnawing, and been able to chase<sup>a</sup> them away in time?

I said goodby to that inner lake, paddled out to where I'd had lunch my first day ~~in~~, and once more<sup>e</sup> ate lunch there, up on a high mossy rock ledge. There was a channel in from <sup>nearby</sup> Atikoen, and I spent the first part of the afternoon paddling up into it. My rowing was a bit handicapped as the <sup>before</sup> day I'd gone across the lake into the weeds back at my old <sup>and</sup> campsite, pushing against the wind to get back out, one of my paddles broke at the juncture of the metal collar. For the first time in all my years of paddling I had left the extra set of paddles in the van, as nothing had ever happened before and they were always in the way. But now I had to improvise a splint, like with a broken arm. It had taken my entire roll of surgical adhesive tape, but it worked. I handled the contraption <sup>g</sup> gingerly, so it was not as pleasant rowing as I was accustomed to. I wanted to make sure I got back to the landing area in proper time, to meet David with the van.

But I did get far enough up the channel to see the wood duck boxes David's people has set up there. But I didn't dare go too far as I could see storm clouds building up. My radio batteries were dead, so I had to be my own meteorologist. I thought it better to paddle back to the ~~landing~~ spot which I had chosen for my last night out, not far from the landing beach which would be easy to attain next day. I pulled into a small marsh not far from the rock cliff where I'd had lunch. I ate a picnic supper in the boat, watching the storm clouds which by now looked real bad. Only a mild thunderstorm passed over in the afternoon. Then, about eight o'clock that evening I was ~~out~~ in my boat in the worst thunder storm I'd ever experienced out on water. But I had long been anticipating something strenuous, <sup>judging by the looks of the sky</sup> Suddenly the wind, which had been blowing up the lake, veered around and blew right directly into my little cove; it felt and sounded like a row of bowling balls coming down an alley right at me. I'd put up my cross-mast, hoping to be able to sit up for the evening, and I was working on my journal notes when the wild wind picked up my tarp like it was a sail, pushed and lifted my boat over two small boulders sticking up out of the water, and rushed me <sup>to the boat</sup> back to the end of the cove through a mass of dense water weeds. Leaning out ~~x~~ to see where I was going, it looked and felt as if I were traveling at express train speed.

But what I had hoped would happen did. I was caught in the water weeds. I couldn't go anywhere but back to the shore of bushes and trees. Even if the boat tipped over, the water wasn't much higher than my knees. I was very definitely in a sheltered cove for the night. There wasn't much more the storm could do to me, <sup>other than for the lightning to hit</sup> Strange ~~y~~, my alder rigging had held. The tarp wasn't down over my face. ~~But~~

in that the wind hadn't knocked it down. But the lightning led me to pull it down myself, and wrap it around me, as if that thin plastic could protect me from those cosmic electric bolts. There was so much lightning all evening its light glowed through my green tarp.

For two weeks I had cherished a bottle of rootbeer, promising it to myself as a dire emergency or special treat. At the height of the storm, when the wind was roaring and the thunder echoing off the Laurentian Shield walls, I decided now was<sup>a</sup> the time to break out the rootbeer. The last<sup>of</sup> my water was used up except half a cupful of chocolate mixed with powdered mix and the end of the water, in a jar. I filled up the jar with rootbeer. This concoction proved to me once more that when isolated from humanity and the comforts of a home kitchen, most anything tastes delicious and is a special treat. As far as I was concerned rootbeer and chocolate tasted divine, at least consumed when/out in a wild thunderstorm. Gradually the thunder became reduced now muttering off in some distance. I snuggled down into my sleeping bag about ten o'clock. I awoke at six a.m., having slept a peaceful eight hours in that sheltered cove on a Canadian lake, out of touch with humanity.

Today was the day to leave Atikokan. The sky was still threatening, though in a more grayish sort of way. As I'd expected, I couldn't use the double paddle to get out of those dense weeds. So I up-ended it and used one paddle, as with a canoe. Besides, I didn't want to put a strain on the splint job. It was hard work, but I got out to the open lake, free of weeds, having had to paddle around the rocks the wind had lifted me over.

A drizzle-like rain blew over the lake off and on all morning. The rain let up as I reached the boat landing. I could see a big raspberry patch up ahead, and, eager to stretch my legs, I beached the boat part way up out of the water, and climbed out. I did glean

a half cupful of red raspberries, which were a great treat. Just as I was pushing through the raspberry briars to return to the boat I heard an unfamiliar noise. There, lifted above the briars, was a bear snout. I couldn't judge the size of the animal so I sprinted for my boat. I pushed it off into the water and jumped in. Bears could swim, I knew, but not faster than I could paddle the kayak.

As I pushed off into the water the bear came out into the open. An adorable baby bear! Just before going after the berries I had stopped long enough to place the boat tarp on the beach, move a few things into it, then cover ~~it~~ <sup>them</sup> over in a tarp fold. I was half a mind to go shore and rescue the tarp and contents, for among the wrapped items was my journal, and two books. But I didn't dare risk <sup>for</sup> it rarely is there a baby bear without a protective mother nearby. Wouldn't you know, that little bear ran right up to the tarpaulin and started shaking it and kicking it about. Here were two threats to my journal notes; a bear cub who could make a shredded mess of things, or a shower come along in time to blur the ink of the journal pages.

I "stood out to sea" in the kayak, not quite daring to land, as bushes in which the mother could be hiding were very close. But I noticed there were several small stones in the <sup>a</sup> shallow water. I decided to try throwing some of them at the little fur ball, hoping to scare it away without hurting it. It worked. At first he investigated the stones as if they were something to eat. But one must have hit him as he soon ambled away. Not daring to wait, I ~~then~~ partially beached the boat and ran for my things. No sooner ~~than~~ <sup>been</sup> I had all stowed aboard than the misty rain began again.

It rained off and on all afternoon. But all the wet became

memory before evening, when my wet gear was all spread<sup>a</sup> out to dry in D<sup>a</sup>vid's garage, where he had a wood fire going. He and his wife had just returned two days earlier from a canoe trip in the Boundary<sup>r</sup> Waters Canoe area, where they had shared the same storms I'd been out in. Now they were going through a second drying-out process.

Two days later I left Canada behind, crossing through International Falls. I wound up at a free campsite in northern Minnesota half way between ~~K~~ Mediji and Park Rapids. As I'd become used to, there was a small grocery store and gift shop across the road. So I put down roots for two weeks. There were a few picnic tables, a privy, and a beautiful lake. Rain showers were still coming up every afternoon but I ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> high and dry, and felt like a sissy, in my metal-walled and roofed van.

My fifth day at this lake a series of thunderstorms began around one-thirty in the afternoon. One storm would pass by and within ten or fifteen minutes another followed. That continued into the evening and over half the night. There wasn't much wind, but I was again using lightning to read and write. As storm after storm rolled up I began to feel like Noah in his Ark. This is a good example of what is meant by things being relative. Relative to my last night sleeping out in my boat at Atikoken, being in the van during these storms, able to get up and move around, with all papers and books in out of the wind and wet, the van was a luxury. It would not seem a luxury to a woman living in a modern home. What you compare things to establish<sup>es</sup> sets of values.

There were marshes at the far back end of the lake, but I knew the water was too high to hope to find rails there so I didn't bother taking my kayak down. One evening a car came in pulling a long dugout-like boat. It was an older man and his wife. I decided

to try being neighborly , for I was inquisitive about the boat which was so very long, flat-bottomed, and with such narrow beam I had never seen anything like it before.

"My husband is going ricing," the lady said. I thought I didn't hear her right so I got her to repeat the word further along in the conversation. I learned that in this part of Minnesota wild rice still grows in some of the isolated places , much as it did in past Indian days. All you have to do when the rice is ripe is paddle in among the tall grass-like rice plants, which are always in shallow water, hence the flat bottom of the boat, bend the tops over with one paddle while you shake them with the other. The rice falls into the bottom of the boat. They told me where a patch of it grew down the pike ways, where I could see it growing if I wanted to. But I could tell from the conversation that wild rice patches are family and tribal secrets. So I just recorded the conversation and kept away.

One of my most delightful experiences with loons was at this campsite. My very first evening there a loon called. Beginning the second day, a large, handsome loon, which was so strong and big and active I decided it was a male, hung around in front of a wall of marsh weeds several hundred feet out across the lake; it was as if he were on a stage in front of a backdrop. Some of the time he seemed to be half dozing, tucking his head momentarily under his wing. Then, suddenly he'd "sit up", talk in a low subdued voice, and very busily engage in preening.

The fourth day, when I happened to be watching him, he appeared to be trying to attract something off to my left. He looked that way in a very alert manner, sometimes turning around rapidly in a circle, but maintain<sup>m</sup>g the same spot. There was a dense area of woods to the left, and I suspected an indntation<sup>e</sup> of the lake extended



in back of the tree line. As the loon seemed to grow agitated, as I watched him through my binoculars; I saw something moving out from the shrubby tree patch toward him. It was a loon, but much lighter color than he was, either a female or a nearly full-grown young of the year. As the newcomer approached him he swam off to the right, away from the approaching bird, and disappeared into the weeds and reeds.

When the new bird reached the spot where he had been, it hesitated, looked all around, then started back. Suddenly the first loon arose from the water, near the visitor, head first, then neck, then full body. Instantly, the two of them engaged in some kind of wild fight or frolic.- splashing water high into the air, diving, coming up together and stirring up another big splash, then down again, keeping this up so long I had to attend other things. At times they threw up such a curtain of water they couldn't be seen.

I preferred to think they were cavorting, not fighting. Later I learned that this behavior is known as the "Penguin Dance;" it is thought in some cases to be the equivalent of the broken wing act to distract an approaching danger. That could not have been the case this late in the season. Nor could it be a mating dance. It could have been a way to get exercise after the young-raising season, or was this older bird teaching the behavior to a young one?

There were many other birds present, all arboreal except for an occasional blue-winged teal on the water. A flock of a dozen myrtle warblers moved through the campground shrubbery. Three even perched on top of my kayak. They were on their way south, and I would soon be moving along with them.

I did stay there two weeks. While I saw the "Penguin Dance" of the two loons only once more, the big male was out there by himself, as if posing on a stage, every morning as long as I was there,

swimming quietly back and forth, or just dallying in one spot. I reveled in his presence and hated to part with him. But I stayed with him all the last morning knowing I wasn't going very far on my next hop down the road. I ate graham crackers and peanut butter and an orange for a quick lunch, then took off for Itaska State Park. To my surprise and contentment, my first evening, there was a movie for the campers on wild ricing, mostly concerning Indians. Nothing could have been more appropriate.

There were strange Indian mounds at Itasca, out in the middle of the forest. They were about six feet high and eight to ten feet long. There was a law against digging in them, even by professional archeologists, for they are considered to have been created four thousand years ago. They are found other <sup>1</sup> places in the State also.

I stayed just two nights then headed down to Ft. Ridgeley, near the Minnesota River, where Thoreau, Thomas Mann and other excursionist had gone upstream, in 1861, on the "Frank Steele" to witness the annual payment to the Indians by the U.S. government. I briefly visited the museum at the Fort, for there had been a big battle between white people and the Sioux Indians the year after Thoreau visited there. My campsite was at the bottom of a glen where Sioux Indians had hidden before attacking the fort.

Of considerable interest to me here was the fact that this woodsy glen was the last of the eastern forest<sup>S</sup> before the beginning of the prairie. Up on the road to the museum it was all open, flat prairie, mostly planted to corn. In the far distance were shelterbelt lines of trees, planted there to break the ravages of the dust bowl in the days when I was a college student. Now, <sup>the</sup> tall grain elevators and a house in an island of trees, was a new vista for me. The contrast was unbelievable. I walked from my campsite among bladderrot and other forest floor wild plants, up across the road, and stepped onto prairie on the other side.

My last morning there I climbed up through the shady wild forest to the prairie edge, where I stood with one foot ~~foot~~ in the eastern forest habitat, and the other in prairie plant life. To my utter surprise, my climb up there took me through the largest, most lush stand I had ever seen of wild ginger. Also present were the tallest and huskiest true Solomon's seal I'd ever encountered. There were also blue cohosh, red and white baneberries, all, again, very sturdy plants. These were under oak, poplar and ash. The poplars were huge, to two feet d.b.h. There were no conifers at all, so no doubt the soil was rich in hardwood humus. But what, in the history of the planet, could cause such a sharp delineation between woodland and grassy prairie, with a thousand miles of the prairie stretching out before a forest took over again? What we do know about it is that millenia ago the sea extended into this heartland of America. And it stayed long enough, with its salt bottom, and salt marshes, to make its mark on the land, including laying down a limestone layer.

One unfavorable aspect in that area was that poison ivy was as exuberant and ubiquitous as I'd ever seen it. If most people recognized it, it would be a great deterrent against trampling the wild vegetation. But few urban people know it when they see it. One waitress in Minnesota told me she had gotten such a bad dose of poison ivy it had gotten into her blood stream, which put her in a hospital for a long time.

I learned a few new wild plants while there, from John and Nancy, he being a Game Manager for the State. Among them were goats-beard, cup plant, and rattlesnake root, and some of the western sunflowers. A few I'd heard of but not seen before.

The next week I was with friends in Minneapolis, Kay and Dale

and Douglas, who helped me follow Henry Thoreau's trail, which is still possible to trace in that big city.

I had a date to meet up with Wade and his wife in northern Michigan, so I had to head back northward. They were due from Florida for a few days. I camped on the property of one of Wade's childhood friends on Lake Superior. I was enchanted to find myself on the edge of the oldest hardwood forest I had ever been in. The trees not only had solid girth but they were very tall. The weather turned cold, and again very rainy. But I had a pile of mail to go through, and there was birdwatchin<sup>g</sup> and wil<sup>d</sup>flower chasing to do while I waited.

That great lake was a magnet for me. I found it difficult to realize that it was fresh water. Yet, huge as it is, man has managed to pollute it. Nothing on this planet is safe from human thoughtlessness, but at least the lake looked clean and clear from the rocky shore of this tall for<sup>e</sup>st. Strangely, no birds were in sight. Most of them already headed south, no doubt.

It was time for me to follow them to a lower latitude, as I wanted to get down there <sup>be</sup>fore frost really began. As soon as Wade and Erma left, I took off and soon found myself in ~~in~~ Moraine Park, at Pine Lake, in Wisconsin. Here I met a knowledgeable young man, the Park Education Ranger, who reminded me of the Ranger at Ft. Ridgley, and <sup>e</sup>veral other such young people. These flowering youth of America, often at great sacrifice to their families, go through conservation, forestry and ecology degrees, where they learn the best ways to manage the nation's resources. But when they finish their education they find that the jobs which they should be filling are filled by those who quit school on a much lower level who accept

lower salaries and work their way up to higher paid levels without any further schooling. Those in power encourage this way of doing it, for they themselves do not have the professional expertise and resent anyone under them knowing more than they do. The less educated the employee the easier for political clout to impose its uneducated will. Which is why management of this continent, and <sup>ecological areas</sup> elsewhere in the world, have ~~has~~ such insurmoutable probelms. It's a self-perpetuating system.

This young man in Wisconsin had just come from Oregon, where he ~~was~~ <sup>had been</sup> stunned to see so much clear-cutting although the land was so dry that natural regeneration could not follow. Those who did the destroying were so blind they couldn't even see they were <sup>i</sup>spoiling the land for their own descendents. Professional foresters know how to manage forest for ~~perpetual~~ <sup>perpetual</sup> regeneration. Wildlife managers know how to manage the land for perpetual replenishment of wildlife. But they seldom are given an opportunity to put their knowledge into <sup>c</sup>practice. Politics has become more important than scientifi <sup>c</sup>know-how.

In this area Wisconsin was developing a Glacial Moraine Trail, at the southern edge of the great ice sheet which dumped its load of rock and gravel debris along its leading edge when it melted back. There are many kettle hole lakes and ponds in Wisconsin, much like Walden Pond in Massachusetts. Some of them have naturally filled in with peat moss, and have become cranberry bogs, which in turn will eventually fill in and become solid land.

Wisconsin was the childhood home of John Muir, who is considered the father of America's National Park system. Wisconsin was also the home of Aldo Leopold, the nation's first wildlife manager; I had been fortunate to know him back during the second World War when I worked for the Wisconsin Conservatio<sup>n</sup> Department, and often was

assign<sup>ed</sup> a research project in his library, in the University.  
~~Being~~<sup>Running</sup> down through Illinois I felt as if I were traveling through a perpetual, never-ending cornfield. But I was one to appreciate it, being a Yankee whose family landed here just sixteen years after the Indians helped save some of the Pilgrims their first winter with corn. <sup>corn</sup> ~~It~~ was originally developed by Central American Indians from a large-seeded wild grass. The Indians made a religious ceremony of selecting the best seed every year, Thus by a slower form of evolution than using the principles of genetics, they managed, over a couple of thousand years, to produce what has become one of the world's most important food plants. Corn was geared to their ceremonial needs, in that it does not plant itself. It needs the hand of man to perpetuate itself. Like the banana and the pineapple, corn is a cultigen. Corn kernels, even cobs, have been found in the dust of ancient Aztec, Mayan and Inca cities, and deposited in ~~caves~~, and in their burial grounds. Through Indian trading habits, corn spread all over the North American continent, though it grows best where not too cold.

I made a stop in the Shawnee National Forest, on the edge of Kentucky. It was empty but for an older couple in a much fancier van than mine. They were leaving in the morning. Was I to have a whole National Forest to myself?

The man came over to invite me to their campfire for the evening. He brought me two garden tomatoes, an apple, and two freshly caught fish. One fish, unwrapped, was a large-mouth bass, which I instantly planned for supper. The other was wrapped in a newspaper, and after the man left I noticed the paper moving. I opened it up and saw the fish, a smaller bass, give a couple of

gasps with his gills. I could see the lake down through the trees. As I tend to have an Albert Schweitzer attitude toward wild lives, though I am also a pragmatic scientist, a consumer, and a carvivoire, I picked up the folded newspaper and walked down to the lake where I found a nice little water niche on the shore edge. I squatted down in the damp moss and held the fish under water, with my hand around his middle. He lay on his side, like a real gone one, but in a few moments his gills began to lift and drop. I righted him, holding him gently just under the water surface, as both his gills and his mouth were now suckin' water in and out. Suddenly, what I hoped would happen, did. I felt life's energy surge in him. I ~~x~~ opened my loose hold and off he awam into the nearby water weeds. I saved a fish's life. Maybe. I didn't know how much he was injured by the hook; or, maybe the natural film protecting his skin had been broken from his being handled, which would ~~let~~ mould in. But I had performed my own personal ecology-spirit-rites by respecting his right to live. Soon after, I ate his companion without a twinge of remorse.

In the morning I went down to the lake with my field glasses. No dead fish was floating in sight. When I returned to my <sup>van my</sup> neighbors were gone. The Forest was all mine. I'm not a hater of the human race, else I'd not have so many friends. But at times there is something almost mystical deep within me which yearns to be alone on the wild planet. At such times I feel I am back in early Cenozoic, or Tertiary, times. Humans distract me from this ~~eff~~ ineffable race-memory within me. For company that day I had a male cardinal, several magnolia warblers and a dozen robins, they having been around since the Jurassic, long before the Tertiary. Even I couldn't sense the Jurassic.

The next morning, feeling as though I were the only sentient being

walking among the trees, I stepped out onto the lake shore, and to my utter astonishment, at the far back of the lake, against a backdrop of marsh plants, was a lone loon, paddling back and forth. From the left side a lighter-colored loon appeared from behind some bushes and swam toward him. I blinked. As soon as they were together that fabulous splashing began. The Penguin Dance! They sent up fountains of water, now and then both calling a tremolo duet.

How could this scene, hundreds of miles south of that northern Minnesota lake, be such a complete duplicate? It bothered me then. It haunts me now. It was as if both I and the loons were living in a time warp. It was migration time, I knew, but I couldn't accept that explanation, any more than the time warp one. Why a replicate?

A thunderstorm move<sup>d</sup> in, emphasizing the Minnesota resemblance. But this forest was very different. Another couple appeared; the man, who had been a forester here in the past, took me around the forest. Fifty years before it had been a corn field, but a poor one. The National Forest acquired it and foresters planted a few pine trees. It was mostly a mature hardwood forest now, which had been seeded in naturally by birds, squirrels and wind from shrubs and trees in nearby gullies. This generation of trees was now more than a foot in diameter, - hickories, tulip, red maple, sycamore, persimmon, even the largest sassafras I had ever seen. There was a dense undergrowth of hickories, red maple, dogwoods, sassafras and red cedar. It intrigued me as I'd long been interested in natural plant regeneration wherever mankind abandons a cultivated area, or where something like floods and volcanoes cause disturbed soil. All farming, done by the mile, damages the natural ecology. But give Nature a chance<sup>and</sup> it knows how to take over.

The last night I stayed alone in this beautiful forest a gang



nooks, to drive through Birmingham. That stretch dragged out interminably. How humans live in such a maze of roads and billboards and crowding traffic is beyond me.

Eventually I went off the through-way to get to Selma. There I deliberately went to a small gas station, assuming I'd be giving a wee bit of business to a black family. But, too late to back out, a white man, looking like what blacks call "white trash", came out of the junky-looking gas station to wait on me. A group of blacks drove in, and got out of their good-looking car to raise the hood and check something. They were all dressed neatly and attractively, and quickly drove off.

The man who waited on me as as untidy as the blacks had been neat. He needed a shave, and his shirt was soiled and unironed. Worse, he tried to get chummy with me. He asked if I were alone, if I slept in the van, and where was I going. When the gas was in the car, and he stopped closer to be paid, he started talking about going catching crabs. He hung onto the car window ledge and looked and acted as if he didn't want me to leave. But leave I did. By myself, as usual.

I was in southern longleaf pine country all day, with much smothering southern honey-suckle vines. It looked very much like Georgia and northern Florida as I rolled along southward. It had gotten very warm. All concern about frost was forgotten.

I did get into Florida for the night. A one-night stand there at Blackwater River State Park had me impatient in the morning to reach the <sup>S</sup>détination I was looking forward to,- Appalachicola National Forest. I had often, in the past, by-passed this Forest, when I was going to or from something else. Now I wanted to experience a National Forest in the Florida panhandle. It ought to be a birdy

place now that migration was started, though it was just too far inland to see any water birds.

I wound up at Mack's Landing in the Forest. It was a small campground, quite pretty because of the trees, which were mostly spreading live oak, some loblolly pine, and many shrubs in the open campground, making the spot a sort of little island in the big forest. The Ochlockonee River, a small stream, ran along the western edge.

That first noon hour a Forest Service worker was detained in the campground because the generator belt on his truck wasn't working. We sat atop a picnic table talking, for I quickly learned he had a degree in field biology, but as with so many others he couldn't find a job where he could use his knowledge. There were numerous ~~large~~ yellow butterflies flitting around, fairly large ones. As I watched them I kept an eye out for birds. While we were talking I noticed something fluttering ~~x~~ in a large spider web at the outer tip of a tree branch rather high up. It seemed mostly yellow so without thinking much about it I assumed it was one of the yellow butterflies.

About fifteen or twenty minutes later I looked up again at the spider web; the <sup>t</sup>butterfly was still caught but barely fluttering now. We both spoke about it and ~~we~~ decided that the spider had probably stung it by now and would soon be feasting on the insects's soft body. About ten or fifteen minutes later I looked up again. I seem<sup>e</sup>d to see something moving down under the butterfly wings. I studied the web contents more seriously. I jumped off the table and yelled, "It's a bird. Not a b<sup>u</sup>tterly!" I ran for my field glasses. It was a little warbler, hanging upside down in the web., (with some yellow on it.)

The young man drove his truck under th<sup>e</sup> tree and I got out my fishing rod and quickly assembled it. He got up on the <sup>t</sup>ruck cab roof, from where he was just able to reach the web with the rod. ~~XXX~~

We pulled town the ~~pin~~<sup>thing</sup> outer branch tip to which was attached the large almost ballooon-shaped web, and held it to where I could use my two free hands to extricate the tiny little bird from his prison.

The bird, seeming no heavier than one of his feathers, looked to be in good condition. It was a bit of a struggle to get the sticky web removed from him without injuring his wings. When it looked as if I had all the web removed, and his bright, alert little eyes were watching, I walked over to a bush and gently set him on the ground under it so he could fly up into its branches. But he moved only a wee bit, as if still shackled. I picked him up and saw that a fine thread of web still pinned down one of his wings. This time I studied every inch of him before setting him on the ground again. He stood there blinking a bit, then took off to another bigger bush. Just to see him fly was like watching a miracle.

time in Florida that it attracts many birds. This one was no exception. In just one day that I kept an eye on it, it became a larder for catbirds, a rose-breasted grosbeak, two olive-backed thrushes, a phoebe, a scarlet tanager, several warblers in fall colors that I couldn't identify, a very busy, aggressive brown thrasher, and two vireos. Most of them sat on the bush eating the berries and spit out the pink-lavender pulp, apparently eating only the seeds inside. Some, however, swallowed the berries whole, like the catbird and the thrasher. They were <sup>all</sup> my choice company.

I also had the company of two special kinds of insects. One was the antlion, of which there were at least half a dozen, judging by their small cone-shaped pits in the sand. They were <sup>not</sup> far from a colony of medium-sized red ants, some of which no doubt ended in <sup>their lives</sup> those sandy traps. Also there was a huge solitary wasp probably a digger wasp. It had a hole in the sand near the picnic table where I ate. Once he arrived with a locust which he carried under himself like a bomb stashed below a plane fuselage. The locust was longer than the wasp, but he managed to stuff it down into the hole. He did stop, however, to carry out more sand in his front "arms," probably to make space for it below. When I looked up there was a phoebe perched on one of my boat ropes, watching me.

This was such a great spot for migrating birds filtering through I hated to leave. But after four days I felt I should move on to Chiefland, where a friend was expecting me. I knew birds would be there, too. I picked up food supplies in the center of Chiefland then drove southward to the friend's trailer park. To my relief, the trailers were far out in the country, and widely separated. Miles and miles of dirt roads, and pine forests, were on all sides.