VII

Ontario
(The Lake Country)

Manitoulin Island came closelyinto view as I finished my dinner in the ship's cafeteria. For an hour and a half I'd been cruising across Lucas Channel, between Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, on the Chi-Cheemaun. The vessel was more like an ocean going luxury liner than a ferry boat, and I explored the ship's passageways and catwalks, feeling like a wealthy Playboy on a Carribean cruise.

The Chi-Cheemaun, meaning "big canoe" in Ojibway, links Tobermory with South Baymouth on Manitoulin Island. The thirty mile trip was a panoramic gift to myself, progress at $4.50!

Manitoulin looked like a furry turtle from a distance. The green smoothness of its forests seemed to be floating on the water. In Algonkian myth, this is the ancient home of Gitchi-Manitou, the supreme spirit. Today the spirit seemed troubled. On the eastern horizon dark clouds were piling up, ballooning into the heavens, looking like worried wrinkles on the brow of the sky. As I walked down the gangplank in South Baymouth, I wondered what those dark masses held for me.

In hiking across Manitoulin and its neighboring islands, I spent most of my time on roads. Although there were fine stretches of bushwhacking, and rambling along lonely lanes, I spent most of the time out on paved Route 68. The rains were coming every day now, sometime during the day or night, and the clouds were nearly always appearing in incredible patterns and colors, as the light shown through in different ways. The road walking was made that much easier with the company of these giant contortionists overhead.

My fourth day on the island saw me crawling out of my tent on the shore of Manitowaning Bay. The water was calm, and yet the sky seemed to be moving like a kaleidoscope. It had rained all through the night, and now the dark clouds were retreating over the hills across the bay. To the south, I could see fresh looking white ones rolling in to take their place.

I set off along the shore and soon hit a narrow lane that led me back to the highway. After five or six miles, I came to an overlook, high above Sheguiandah Bay. The many islands, channels, and bays, for miles around came into view, while the water turned various shades of blue in the shadows of the clouds. It was a beautiful sight, but the thing that interested me the most, the thing that brought me to a halt, was far on the northern horizon. I couldn't believe what I saw. Mountains, yes. The La Cloche Mountains were on my map. But these were white, snow-covered peaks. Was it that late in the season?

I was standing there trying to figure them out, when I met Doug Brown, editor of the Bruce Trail News. Doug explained that what we were looking at was actually rock, bare ledges that are common in this area. I was intrigued. With an anxious pace, I set out for the La Cloches.

I did 26 miles that day, leaving Manitoulin Island for the La Cloche Peninsula. The air turned cold, and the rain came in waves throughout the next day. I stayed in the tent, and watched the drops run down the tent fly in little rivulets. My mood reflected the day. Clouds of grey covered my soul in the form of dollar signs. My money was nearly gone. I wasn't sure what to do. I had enough to last me a few more weeks but I had to face up to the fact that I would have to stop walking. Defeat pulled me to the ground. Defeat, not from the distance or the trip itself, but from the lack of financing.

Looking back at what I should have done was no help at all. What I decided to do about it in the next few weeks was more important.

At Whitefish Falls, the next day, I picked up a few supplies and learned of a bear problem in the area. The creatures had been making many appearances right in the heart of town. I quickly bought a pound of bear-repellent in the form of moth balls. Whenever I'm in bear country, I hang a small bag of these odoriferous pellets on either end of the tent, and sometimes with my food hung high in a tree. So far, I've had no trouble with bears, or moths!

John Muir once wrote, "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."

And so my depression gave way to the beauty and rhythm of the wilderness, as I stood atop Mount Ararat. The sun warmed the open ledges I rested on, and sparkled off the lakes in the narrow valley below. The North Channel, the Bay of Islands, and sprawling Manitoulin, glittered to the south, while the La Cloche Mountains rolled to the west like white lace over a green carpet of woods.

I'd left the road at Whitefish Falls and bushwhacked my way to the top of the mountain after a day and a half. The La Cloche Mountains aren't the Alps, but they have their own distinct beauty. They're very old mountains that rise out of the lake country a thousand feet or more. The naked rock shines as white as a TV commercial smile, and walking is difficult but rewarding.

On the summit of Mount Ararat, I found a weathered board anchored in a pile of rocks. Carved into it were the names of several people and the year of their climb. The earliest was 1958; the most recent, 1973. I added a "Jim - "75", and wondered who would be the next in line to sign.

Keeping to the ridge, I descended the steep west side of Mount Ararat. Heading up another mountain overlooking Alexander Lake, I came upon a small ravine cut into the rock as if by some expert stonemason. The sides were straight, and the edges even. Along one side, a brook bubbled from the earth, and twisted its way through the trees and rock, to the lake below. I found a level spot, and pitched my tent before going off to explore the area. Like some western mountain goat, I hopped from rock to rock, scrambling up cliffs and generally having a ball!

The tent was well protected in its sheltered niche in the mountain, but a short scramble led to an open spot with all the stunning views of the entire area. The town of Little Current was visible across the North Channel, but closer to home was Alexander Lake, just below me. Nestled between two steep, rocky ridges, the narrow lake appeared as a stone of turquoise set within a ring of crystal. Two loons floated like bits of flotsam on the surface of the lake, fishing for their evening meal. One would suddenly disappear under the water and minutes later would pop up far across the lake. It got so I couldn't tell which was which as they played their game of hide-and-seek.

Later, as I was watching the sunset from the warmth of my sleeping bag I heard the haunting cry of these same birds. It echoed off the sides of the surrounding mountains and seemed to last forever. First one loon, then another, would give the distinctive, plaintive call, waiting for the sound to fade into silence before calling again. I listened to their contest for twenty minutes before working up the courage to join in. During a pause in the action I saw my chance. Aaahh-oouuuuu!! My bellow sounded across the still canyon. I waited for the expected resounding echo, but was disappointed by the meager results. My new playmates picked up the game and answered with one of their showstoppers. The

cry bounced over the hills. I tried again, but was shown up once more. I thought maybe my style was wrong. Yes, that's it! I needed a new song. Laahhh-rrooouuuu!! With all the soul I could muster, the call erupted from my surprised vocal chords. I gave myself a 10 on performance, but only a 3 on the echo. Let's see what the guys do. There was no sound. The lake was still, the valley quiet. (I hope they didn't think I was too looney.)

During the night the rains moved in once more. For two days I stayed camped in my sheltered ravine on the mountain, coming out on the ledges between showers. The views were still there, but were cloaked in grey and peppered with the now-and-then color of a changing tree, I found peace in those two days, peace with myself about the outcome of the trek. I could go home when I got to Sault Ste. Marie and take it from there, perhaps get a job. There was nothing else to do. Worrying could only mar what remained of The Walk. I found comfort in God, that force which guides the natural rhythms of our lives. In the course of my stay in the La Cloche Mountains I wrote:

The greatest knowledge of all
    Is to know God,
And to know yourself, you must first
    Know God.
The greatest love of all
    Is the love of God,
And to love, you must first
    Love God.
The greatest peace of all
    Is the peace in God,
And to find peace, you must
    Seek peace in God.
To know God is to love Him,
    And in Love there is Peace.

I'm not a Jesus freak, or a religious nut, and I don't want to preach to you about God. It's just that when you're out in the wild places, and it comes down to you, and nothing but what is there at the wave of nature's hand, a man can't help but feel the presence of some supreme force, some guiding hand that lights the way through the intricate paths that are woven in this life. With the feeling of this presence the load is somehow lightened. A man never really walks alone.

The day it cleared, I moved on, keeping to the ridge and the ledges. The moss and lichens covering the rock were still wet. It made for a few slips, and a fall or two, but luckily not at a crucial time. At one point I came upon a deep chasm about fifty feet deep and ten feet wide, splitting the entire mountain. I crossed on a natural bridge of boulders and trees. A few miles brought me to a sharp notch in the range where I left the mountains for the woods. Taking a northwest bearing, I set out through the forest for Evangeline Lake. I was tramping through what I thought would be unbroken forest when I stepped into a slight clearing. A huge wall of sticks and mud, ten feet tall, loomed before me, beaver artistry at its best, but long abandoned. The water was nowhere to be seen. Like the ruins of an ancient civilization, the dam collected the dust and the leaves of another year.

I skirted the western tip of Evangeline Lake in the cool morning. The wind was pointing an icy finger, and I wore a pair of socks as mittens to keep my hands warm. Striking the dirt road, I rolled along, passing Maple and Cutler Lakes, and coming to Lee Valley. The farms seemed as if they'd been cut that morning from the darkness of the wood, tidy and sharp. The people were as you would think them to be, living in such places. I was offered many rides, and everyone seemed to wave as I passed by. Brian and Ruth Morris, with their daughter Katty, stopped to offer a lift. I declined the ride but enjoyed a lengthy

rap. They drove on, only to return a few minutes later to offer a place to stay. I accepted, and was soon warming in their home in Temperance Valley. Total strangers, we emerged the closest of friends.

When I left the Morris's in the late morning, I headed into Massey and then west, following the Trans-Canadian Highway. Eight miles brought me to Wolford where I hit the tracks of the Canadian Pacific Railway. As the night approached, I made camp near the tracks in a stand of pines surrounded by open fields. I was tramping through dreamland when the earth trembled, and a distant roar seemed to converge upon me. I opened my eyes, only to be blinded by the dazzling light of some roaring monster. For a moment I was terrified; I couldn't move. Then I realized it was a train. I was going to live after all! But no more camping so close to the rails.

I passed through Spanish and hit a road which led me north past Wolford and Grab Lakes. The road got narrower and narrower as I left the last cabin behind. After skirting several beaver ponds, I found myself a couple miles west of where I thought I was. McGivney Lake, rather than Lang Lake, blocked my path. Circling the lake, I headed northwest, through the dense forest. It was hard going, and the underbrush whipped at my pack and scratched at my body.

Coming down a hill, my tent fly suddenly fell off its perch on the top of the pack. Pulling the pack off, I was horrified to find my tent missing. Somewhere over the last mile of trackless woods, it had fallen off. I felt sick! The thought of getting caught in one of the cold rains that were growing more frequent was a grim one. I headed back the way I'd come, and worked my way to a stream where I had stopped for a break. The tent hadn't been missing when I stopped there. I turned about and worked my way along in a zig-zag pattern, trying to cover all the ground I could. After a frantic hour I finally saw the bright blue of the tent. The air broke with my cries of elation, and the

floor of the forest caught my tears of joy.

Tying the tent on extra tight, I crossed a large bog and teetered across a beaver dam blocking a small stream. The going was rough, through thick bush country, and after crossing an open ledge I made camp overlooking a small pond. I stayed there two days as the rains came again, falling on my trusty tent.

When I moved on I found the going easier, the exception being two stream crossings. I'd learned by now that where a stream is shown on the map, I could expect to find a beaver pond! This meant hard going due to downed trees and flooded forest. After crossing the ponds on the dams, I stepped out onto the shore of McCarthy Lake at Dollar Bay. The lake was like a spider with many arms, coves and bays. With the water level down, the shore looked easy to walk along. I decided to follow the lake's edge west, and set out on the rocky, sometimes marshy shore. It was a lonely, isolated area, and in the mud and sand I read the passing of moose, deer, beaver, raccoon, bear, and wolf.

Several miles later I came to a narrowing of the lake and was able to cross to the south side. (Actually, at the time, I thought I was just crossing a stream.) Eventually I found myself on a logging trail. The distant whine of chainsaws filled the air. I was out of the wilderness, and be-bopped down the trail, coming upon a little Frenchman sitting on his tractor. His back was to me, and from the way he held his magazine, it appeared to be some kind of centerfold. I approached quietly and said, "hello". It was as if he'd just been shot! Jumping from his seat and stumbling to the ground, he spoke an excited mixture of English and French. I don't think I've ever witnessed so much action precipitated from one word, before or since.

It was raining the morning I walked into Elliot Lake. It's a good sized town of about 9,000 people and is like an island in the Ontario bush. One minute I was in the wilds, and the next I was collecting my mail at the post office.

Elliot Lake, "Uranium Capitol of the World", is a mining town, but possessed none of the characteristic ugliness of most mining towns. In fact, it was a rather pretty little town. Set on a few hills and in the heart of the woods, now exploding into color, it was a most beautiful place.

Clayton McWatters, the postmaster, ushered me into his office and over a hot cup of coffee I told him about the trip. He and the people at the post office had been looking forward to my arrival since receiving my usual advance note asking that my mail be held. Thanks to his help, I got what amounted to royal treatment during my two day stay in Elliot Lake. I was given a tour of the Uranium Museum, and talked with Fred Mann who edited the Elliot Lake Standard. Reeve, Roger Taylor, and vice chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, Tom Donahue, presented me with momentos of my visit to the town in the form of a uranium ore sample and an Elliot Lake medalion. A lady in a florist shop gave me a carnation. On top of it all was a two bedroom suite for two nights in the Elliot Lake Centre, a multi-faceted learning center that provides people from all over Canada and the U.S. with various programs in the northwoods environment.

I left Elliot Lake under a drooping grey sky. Throughout my two day stay it had rained and stormed. I wasn't surprised at all when the drops came to visit again, and I huddled under a tree until the initial shower passed. The colors dripped from the trees. At every turn I was dazzled by the flaming fall foliage.

After six miles I came to the outlet of Elliot Lake (the lake). A short series of cascades opened into a chain of small lakes. My tent found a home on a little thumb of land sticking into the still lake. The clouds swirled in amazing twists of grey, and the drab light only succeeded in making the oranges, reds, and yellows stand out that much more. A deer waded into the shallows.

She raised her head and gazed curiously my way, then out over the rest of the lake. A man will drive for miles in the Fall to capture the vision of these glorious trees. Some states even have auto routes marked out for the color-conscious tourist. But the deer, that most delicate creature who calls these haunts his home, is blind to the beauty that strikes in the Fall. It is one of the great ironies of nature that deer are colorblind.

The following day, I left the trail with compass in hand and worked my way west. I had met two brothers in Elliot Lake at Fred Mann's store who lived and worked in the bush. When I'd mentioned bushwhacking, they'd looked at each other and laughed. Each time I mentioned the word they'd burst into another fit of riotous mirth. Finally, I asked them what was so darn funny. They flustered and turned to one another; one of them haltingly explained that "bushwhacking" was a term they used when relieving themselves in the bush! Let me say right now, when I say "bushwhacking" I don't mean any such thing. It's meant in this account as hiking through trackless country.

And so I made my way to Baker Bay on Matinenda Lake. This was another huge sprawling lake of the North Woods, and on the map looked like a large ink spill. The sky had been clear all day, but now a grey blanket seemed to fall upon the world. Dark, ominous clouds hugged the sky over my camp. I shivered with the feeling of being watched. Suddenly, the clouds parted. A giant eye of light glared down at me from a layer of black mist I could have reached out and touched. I half expected to hear the booming voice of Zeus, but all that sounded was the rustle of leaves in the wind, and the patter of rain, falling once again.

At sun-up I set off along the lake's rugged shoreline. In the large boulders and dense brush I found the walking difficult, and after a few miles I took to the ridges above the lake. The advance and retreat of many glaciers over

thousands of years has laid bare the ancient rock, cutting sharp cliffs, and digging valleys which later filled with water to form the many lakes in the region. The ridges are often terrace-like, the jagged steps sometimes 100 feet high.

Getting up these "steps" was a challenge I answered with an almost perverse delight. Sometimes I'd merely climb up where footholds were ample, or the slope slight. Othertimes, I'd make a tough climb without the pack, using slim toe-holds and cracks, and pulling the heavy load up after me on a rope. More than once I scrambled up a tree that had fallen against the steep face, like a ladder just waiting for me. Each "step" brought more magnificent views until the top was reached. Then, Matenenda, the surrounding ridges, the entire world of intense color, would spread before me.

For two clear days I traveled the high rock around Matenenda Lake, coming down to the shore a few times during the day and to camp at night. On the afternoon of the second day, I descended the steep slope of the mountain into a narrow gorge where a stream flowed rapidly toward the lake. I hit a faded trail and followed along the rapids. As I neared Matenenda again, I was surprised to hear the roar of falling water. A moment later I was standing on a shelf of rock watching the stream cascade over two fantastic falls into the lake.

It was like an added treat to the candy of the day. No falls were shown on my map. I was an explorer from 200 years ago. What would I have called them? Perhaps Afternoon Delight Falls? Or Surprise Falls? Walkin' Jim's Falls? Or how about something different like Water Falls?!

Fording the stream, I headed west, passing a decayed remnant of a log cabin hidden in the dense undergrowth. Half a mile later, I struck a faint trail and followed it away from the lake. When it petered out, I kept heading west through a narrow valley, coming to Crosby Lake. Steep slopes hemmed in the long, narrow lake, and I walked along the rocky shore. Upon rounding a point, cliffs crowded out the shoreline. Nowhere to walk, I made camp, and in the morning went straight up the ridge, topping out with views of Matenenda, Crosby, and the surrounding ridges.

I crossed a series of hills, admiring the colors and the views, and by mid-day found myself on the northeast shore of Williamson Lake. Two streams converged here and fed the lake, forming a marshy delta that looked impassable. To keep going west I would have to skirt the swamp through thick blowdowns and no telling what else. The prospect had little appeal to me. I decided to raft it.

Gathering a few dead and down trees, I soon had a makeshift raft. Remembering my unpleasant episode in Maine, I made sure the lashings were tight. Shoving my creation into the lake, I found that it indeed floated, and I placed my pack and all my clothes on top and slipped into the water behind it. Holding onto the little craft, Chi-Cheemaun II, I kicked my way across the north end of the lake.

Once I gained the opposite side, I hit the woods again and found myself walking for nearly a mile through nothing but birch trees. With the whiteness of the trees' bark, the bright yellow of their leaves, and the sun tilting through, the air itself seemed radiant. The traditional cool, dark forest was, for that strange stretch, replaced with a warm, bright one. The sun baked the leaves, and the aroma of Autumn scented the day. I sucked it down deep into my lungs, savoring it like a fiend with his dope.

I eventually struck a road, and in doing so, stepped through the Time barrier to Today. The next day, I left Constance Lake about noon. It had rained, but the sun soon prevailed. I cut straight west, following my compass and fording the Little White River. Once on the other side, I bush-whacked my way to a trail that led me to a gravel road. Approaching the lane, the woods suddenly opened into vast, pastured valley, the farming community of Kynoch. All around the valley's rolling fields, were high ridges dressed for their Fall parade. The sharp cliffs' faces seemed an everpresent reminder of the wilderness that lay beyond the edge of the fields.

Once I hit the road, I stayed with it. The next day I passed through Wharncliffe, Dunns Valley, Ophir, and Leeburn. The road was dirt for most of the way, winding through forest and farmland. The hills were ablaze with color and when the wind wisked by a scarlet maple, the result was a waterfall of color flowing into a sea of fallen leaves.

A few miles west of Leeburn, I set off early one morning through a slowly lifting fog. I was in a wooded area, and rounding a curve, spotted an animal in the top of a nearby apple tree. It was black, and I first thought it was a porcupine. But this thing was too big, and was wolfing down the apples too fast. I kept walking towards it. Just as I realized it was a bear cub, I also noticed Big Mama at the bottom of the tree! I came to an abrupt halt. You've all heard the advice, "never come between a mother bear and her cubs"? Well, right about then, I didn't even want to be <u>around</u> a mother bear and her cubs! What would she do? Was I close enough for her to want to defend the little one? I looked around for my own tree to climb. And then Big Mama saw me.

She gave a big grunt and took off into the bush doing about sixty. Junior was left up in the tree! I was about ready to say, "You can't do that," when

Junior swung down from the top of the tree, displaying the suppleness of a monkey. He did it in a flash and was off like a dart after his mother.

At Echo Bay I picked up the Trans-Canadian Highway and walked it into Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. By the time I got into town it was late in the day, and I knew I had to find a place to stay. My money was nearly gone, so it had to be a campsite. Sault Ste. Marie isn't exactly a small town. In fact, it's quite a large industrial city. Looking for a place to pitch a tent is no easy matter. I stopped at a gas station on the edge of town and asked the young attendant if he could think of any vacant lots off hand. Armed with directions from him, I walked thru a residential area and soon found a tract of marshy, scrubby woods.

It was a very strange night. The city noises weren't new to me, just forgotten. I had to fight to get to sleep, and then I think I just told myself I was drowsing. When the first bit of light lit the sky I set off through the downtown area, watching people pop out of their cars like gophers on their rush to work.

Eventually I got to the bridge that would lead me over the St. Mary's River and back to the States. I stopped at Canadian Immigration and handed in my two month permit. I had two days to spare. I was shocked to learn that pedestrian traffic wasn't allowed on the bridge. The man at Immigration told me he had no authority, but if the bridge people caught me, I'd be brought back.

I nervously set out, looking neither to the right or left, for fear of seeing someone waving me back. I hadn't even got out over the water when I heard shouting, and turned to meet a man running toward me. The fellow was red with anger, and I thought I should be the one burning up. It was no use. The guy spoke very little English, and all he could say was "No walk on bridge."

I was about to give up in genuine disgust when the Boss walked out to see what all the hollering was about. "Ah-ha," I said to myself, "Here is a man I can talk to!" I explained what I was attempting to do. He listened with interest. "And since I've come over 1700 miles on foot already," I finished, "It just wouldn't be right if I had to take a ride now."

"You an American?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

VIII

A Rich Man's Life, Without the Money (Michigan)

It felt strange being in a car, driving along at fifty miles an hour. No pack hugged my shoulders. It was in the back seat. I looked over at my brother, Mark. He had a donut in his mouth and was saying something about Christmas. I told him I didn't know when I'd be back. He grabbed another donut.

Mark was driving me from Traverse City, his home in Michigan's Lower Peninsula, to Sault Ste. Marie in the Upper Peninsula. I'd been off the trail eight long days since reentering the States. October was here, and I was on my way back. My boots were resoled, my gear was clean, I carried heavier, warmer clothing, and in my pack was a new grubstake of traveler's checks.

My father and grandfather had each loaned me money, while aunts and uncles had donated to the cause out of sheer goodwill. I carried the spirit of all of them with me as I drove north. And also I carried a new game plan. I'd walk through the rest of the Fall season and into the Winter, until the coffers ran dry once more. Then I would stop and get a job, pay them back, and continue as soon as I hit the money.

By late afternoon Mark was saying goodbye, and I was walking west, away from the American Sault (Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.) In the distance I could see the huge span of steel uniting the Canadian Sault to the smaller American town of the same name. On a nine inch catwalk, I'd crossed the two mile bridge in good order, catching superb views of the Sault Locks, the St. Mary's River, a host of small bays to the north and south, and the industrial might of the sprawling Canadian steel mills. The columns of smoke streaking the sky in the direction of the mills gave witness to the city's existence. I turned my back to it and set off.

After a couple miles, I turned onto an old railroad grade and made my way through marshy forest country. The sky wore its raincoat, preparing for a night on the town, but I didn't care. All that mattered was my presence here. I was back on the trail. My pack rode easily on my back; my feet dug into the sandy path before me. I felt as if I had almost drowned, going under but being rescued and put back into the stream of life, my life, the way I wanted to live it.

The next morning under windy, cloudy skies, I passed thru Brimley and entered the Hiawatha National Forest. On a jeep trail, I wandered through mature hardwoods. The trees were past their peak of color, showing but a dull yellow and brown. The trail was strewn with the fallen leaves, and occasionally a leaf would float to the ground, swinging back and forth like some trapeze artist in his final performance. A few miles brought me to a viewpoint atop a high ridge. Two hundred feet below me was Spectacle Lake, a mile beyond was Saint Mary's River, and far to the east, the smoke stacks of the Sault still spewed their own clouds into the grey sky. On the river a freighter worked its way slowly eastward, probably full of Minnesota ore, and disappeared behind a stand of rusty maples.

The ridge here was steep, and brought back memories of the Niagara Escarpment. A leaf-strewn path led me along the edge and then down, passing above Monocle Lake. Lake Superior's Whitefish Bay was in an angry mood when I reached its shore. The water, looking cold and murky, was topped with white caps which broke on the narrow beach in a continuous roar. Superior is the largest of the Great Lakes and boasts the second largest volume in the entire world. I was to see its lighter side, but this first chilling taste of the inland sea was hard to forget.

Two days later I was walking a dirt road up the north side of the Tahquamenon River, a broad, sluggish river,twisting its way through the Michigan woods. Immortalized in Longfellow's poem, "Hiawatha," the river provided young Hiawatha with the birch trees for his canoe. His friend, Kwasind, is said to have cleared the river of the snags and sandbars so his people could use it. When the white men came years later with saw in hand, dams were built and logs were floated down in great log drives.

Today the golden waters flow free of logs. In the glow of a Fall afternoon I rambled westward for several miles before leaving the river and striking off on my own through the trackless forest. As I reached the gentle trickle of Lynch Creek, it began to storm. I threw the tent up and crawled in. Sometime during the night the rain quit, and I awoke. My head was by the open door of the tent, and as I opened my eyes, the moon, just a sliver of light, shot its silver rays through the hemlock trees overhead. Raindrops sparkled like stars caught on every branch of every tree. Coyotes yipped, and an owl hooted nearby. The creek was only a few feet away, and mumbled its way through song after song. This was the Michigan I was looking for.

83% of Michigan's U.P. (Upper Peninsula) is publicly owned. That's to say, most of the land lies in National and State Forests, parks, wildlife refuges, and Wilderness Areas. Still, I hadn't known quite what to expect. I was from Michigan, but it had been years since I'd been in this upper part of the state. With a trace of regional loyalty, I was hoping for something good, something beautiful, something exciting. So far, my first few days had been like biting into a slice of raw eggplant; there just wasn't much taste to it. Oh, there were some nice moments and scenic walking, but I hadn't quite found a Michigan "feeling" distinct from anywhere else. Lynch Creek gave that gift to me.

In the morning, I bushwhacked west through sometimes swampy country, coming out at last on a vast plain. The fields were dotted with patches of scrubby jack pine and clumps of silver lichen. The soil was sandy, covered with knee-high grass, dried brown in the Autumn sun. Picking up a jeep trail, I hiked along under clear sky, and later that day found myself staring over a bend in the river at Lower Taquamenon Falls.

I was in the Tahquamenon Falls State Park. From a viewpoint I looked directly across the river at the Lower Falls, a series of small cascades stretching across the breadth of the river. Framed with the golden brown trees on either side, and the spotless sky above, the iced-tea colored water churned and fell in stunning beauty. Taking a foot trail southwest along the river's back, I poked toward the larger, Upper Falls. It was a great trail, and I found the now glass-like river to be soothing after the crowds near the Lower Falls. A number of small creeks emptied their strength in the Mother River, huge hemlocks, white pine, and birch trees lined the upper banks, and the leaves of maple and beech trees rustled underfoot. A Kingfisher took off ahead of me, giving his warning cry as he flew up the river. I scared him up again, and again, for nearly a mile until he turned back.

After four miles, the banks were getting steeper. I rounded a bend in the lazy river and there it was: Tahquamenon Falls. It was the appropriate way to come to the Falls, working my way up the water's edge on such a day, finding it suddenly there, as if by magic, looming across my path, unmarred by roads or power lines. The water was like a giant veil pulled down over the face of the river. Falling forty feet, the 200 foot wide Tahquamenon drops into a gorge cut into the sandstone over thousands of years. This is the second largest falls east of the Mississippi, Niagara being the first. For such a large volume of

water, it struck me as very smooth, very soft in its fall. When I climbed out of the canyon and looked up the placid river, it was hard to believe, or for that matter understand, the fall's existence. We are worshippers of waterfalls. Look at any major falls in this country and you will find it to be visited by thousands every year. Perhaps there's a rhyme and reason to it all; I don't know. I left the falling water for the quiet flow of the upper river, following along the bank on my own trail.

For the next few days I wandered through the Lake Superior State Forest. The area, cut over in the late 1890's for its virgin pine, is now covered once again with large stands of pine thanks to reforestation efforts on the part of the State. The terrain features sand plains and dunes, while clear, smooth-flowing trout streams lace their way to the lake they call Gitche-Gumee: Lake Superior.

I had hoped to walk along the vast stretches of beach, but the days were too windy and the crashing surf nearly covered the shore. Keeping to little jeep trails and roads I poked along, the smell of leaves baking in the sun and the sound of their rustle as I tramped through, filling my senses.

I remember taking a break one day, leaning my pack against a tree, and stretching my tired body out in a thick bed of brittle leaves. Above me, three maples thrust their limbs to the sky, holding it up in that small corner of the world. A flock of geese, honking and squealing among themselves, flew purposefully over. A breeze ruffled my sky-pillars, sending two more sun-dried leaves to their final resting place. They swung and floated, almost racing to see who could be there first. I never did see them hit ground. I was too lazy, too comfortable, to tilt my head. And as I studied the picture-window above, one leaf after another would lose its grip and come swinging down. For nearly an hour they came, one, two, sometimes three at a shot. It seems that the odds of one landing on me would be quite high, but as close as

they came, not a one alighted on my willing, landing-strip of a body. With visions of being covered with the sweet smelling leaves, I tried desperately to will them my way. No use. I finally roused myself in a fit of raging leaf tossing, winding up half buried and content.

One night I camped on the banks of the Two Hearted River, another Michigan river immortalized in words, this time by one of this century's finest writers, Ernest Hemingway. As a young man Hemingway had fished the clear, golden waters and walked the banks crowded with pine and birch. Trout still abound in the cool water, and I could make out their dark forms lounging in the shadows of the rickety old bridge I crossed. It's a very peaceful river. If you closed your eyes you wouldn't know it was there, so quiet and smooth it flows. It's the kind of river a man can sit by and watch for hours. Nothing changes except the man. Dreams come and go, and float with the rolling water. I found myself wishing for the body of a swan, that I might sit gracefully in the current, letting it take me where it will.

It was cold. One of those runny-nose mornings, and I walked the few miles from Grand Marais Creek into the town of Grand Marais in short order. October 18th and already I was starting to think in terms of long underwear! Grand Marais was my first mail drop since resuming my trek from The Sault. The little town, situated on a protected bay of Lake Superior, looks as if it was set down all in one piece atop the open sand flat. Being so exposed to the wind, I wouldn't be surprised if the little town just up and blew away one of these days.

After picking up my mail I headed west along the beach, entering the territory of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. More than thirty miles of Superior shoreline lie within the park, some of the most spectacular scenery the State has to offer. It was only right that the sun should shine, and the

wind should calm. Leaving a few beachcomers behind, I walked along the wide white-sand beach at the base of the Grand Sable Banks.

The Banks, 250 foot ramparts of sand and clay, extend for five miles, west of Grand Marais. The high bluffs are the exposed portion of an ancient glacial deposit. The constant work of wind and water have turned the face of the Banks into a wall of wrinkled turrets and gullies. In some places the sand formations take on the shapes of miniature castles or giant Grecian pillars. Springs by the hundreds seeped from the Banks, their trickles of water feeding the lake its purity. A heavy flow would often have its own tiny, artfully dug canyon. Along the base of the Banks for nearly the entire distance were sculptured fingers of sand deposited in eerie looking mounds by the constantly changing seeping springs. Everywhere the world was Sand!

Other than my tracks, the only ones scarring the smooth beach were the little scratches of an occasional gull. The Grand Sable Banks dwarfed me on one side while Lake Superior stretched like an endless sea on the other side. The narrow strip of beach was my trail through these giants, and I walked it slow and deliberate, soaking in the day and the mood.

When the high banks ended, merging into a rocky cliff, my beach disappeared into the clear water. No choice but to go up. I climbed the sandy bank, often sliding back down in the loose ground. When I finally reached the lip of earth on the upper rim, and swung my pack and then myself over its edge, I entered a whole new world. A mature beech-maple forest topped the ridge. The sandy earth was replaced with a grassy coat, covered with the season's leaves. Looking back down the shoreline, following the curve of the spinelike Banks, I could see distant Grand Marais. The Lake seemed ten times bluer, the sand much whiter from so high up. The contrast was stunning.

I set off through the rustling leaves, and soon picked up a trail which led me down to Au Sable Point. Stepping out of the greying woods, I entered a clearing. Standing boarded up and lonely, a giant lighthouse towered over the field. The nearby lake was peaceful today, but I could see the weathered age of the out-buildings and the light itself. What storms, what winds, this place must see.

The shoreline turned southwest, and I spent the next day hiking along 12-Mile Beach. Like its name implies, the beach extends for 12 miles, through untouched regions of surreal wilderness. The morning was cold, and ice crunched underfoot until the sun warmed it up to a sweatshirt of a day. A trail runs the entire length of the lakeshore, but in walking the beach yesterday, I'd missed it. On this day, I followed bits and pieces of it, often losing it in the sandier parts. It posed no problem. Walking the beach was easy.

The only problem of the day was trying not to pick up any of the beautiful stones along the beach. As long as I can remember, I've been a collector of all kinds of stuff, rocks being my specialty. The spectrum of samples at my feet was sorely tempting. I ended up settling on two that were particularly nice. I might add that Lake Superior is known for its agates. I met many folks in Grand Marais with pocketfuls of the pretty stones.

The trail sometimes led into the woods, and it was during one of these quiet times away from the lake when I came across a mink. Mink are small, weasel-like critters, usually found near watercourses where they feed on smaller aquatic animals. They're generally noted as being mean-tempered and sometimes will even overpower larger muskrats (a tasty treat if you're a mink!)

I was surprised to see this fellow out in the woods, but he was even more surprised to see me. Running clumsily to a young maple tree, he scrambled up, only to come sliding back down. He tried again, and again, but each try brought the same results. It was as good as any Three Stooges movie. As long as I kept laughing, he kept trying to get to the first limb of that slippery tree. When I froze, he aborted the attempts and turned to look at me. I spoke in my most peaceful tone. What I said is beyond my memory, but when I started up again he stood and watched. I passed within several feet of him, and when I was away and down the trail I turned and looked back. His white throat and dark fur were still there, and I could picture his little eyes staring after me.

Sometime in the afternoon I left the beach behind and began walking atop the escarpment of the famed Pictured Rocks. I don't know what I was expecting, but the area took me completely by surprise. The sandstone cliffs rose out of the turquoise water 200 feet below. Streaked with bands of pink, green and orange, the rock had been worn smooth by the steady hands of water, wind, and ice. Huge bowls, caves, and arches have been carved out over the eons by the erosive threesome. The water is so clear that the colored faces below the surface are clearly visible as the cliffs extend into the depths.

I was totally enthralled with the region, and hiked around one promontory after another on the upper edge of rock. At one point I came to a small stream flowing steadily off the sharp edge forming Spray Falls. The water pounded into the lake in a fit of mist. But the fine day was saving the best for last. Rounding a bend in the now well-defined trail, I came face to face with a large gazebo-like column of rock. Like a cage of rock, with pillars for bars supporting the roof of stone, it stood out on a point of its own. A large pine tree stuck proudly from its top, the roots wrapping around the rock and downward to the lake. I climbed

out and into the rock, and could see why it is referred to as Chapel Rock. It had the ring of a holy place to it, the quiet beauty that makes men silent and brings peace of mind.

A short walk brought me to Chapel Creek. I pitched my tent, and was surprised to meet Tim, a student from Marquette, Michigan. He had been out four or five days, and was spending his semester break out on the trails, the ideal place to get one's self together after the pressures of a modern education. We talked long into the night among the old cedars, like a couple owls hooting to each other in the light of a full moon.

In the first light of day I rounded Grand Portal Point, one of many promontories with a natural "portal," or arch. Across the lake, Grand Island came into view with its own sharp cliffs. Everywhere I turned I was reminded of the power and presence of water and wind. One splash of a wave on the giant buttresses I travelled, carried so much more now. Each of its clinging drops tore off some minute grain of stone from the skin of the earth. Each blast of here-and-gone wind whisked away another atom of the rock's mighty face. Slowly, but oh so surely, it was being turned to beach. How many millions of years it would take, I had no idea; that's for scientists to figure out. But the knowledge was enlightening. I felt totally absorbed with this beautiful region, and perhaps even more valuable, I felt the youth all humans should feel. Age is only a matter of perspective.

Eventually, I descended to Miner's Beach. The area was accessible by roads so there was a lot of litter around the picnic area, and though there weren't any people about, the feeling of wilderness had totally evaporated. I was hiking through at a fast pace, when I noticed a young man bent over a book, sitting on a table set in the sun. Tom Hall, an employee of the Park Service, was soon telling me some alarming details about the lakeshore. Plans are in the making to "develop the shore so more people can enjoy it." Of course, this means paved roads, signs, litter, noise, and a hundred other unnatural intrusions upon the scene. The

mood of the area will change from one of relative wilderness to something more like Downtown, U.S.A. The National Parks are supposed to be places of special, outstanding beauty, preserved in their natural state. But any attempts to put a road along the shoreline can only succeed in destroying the "specialness" of the lakeshore. If it's selfish to want something so exceedingly beautiful to remain untouched, then count me as selfish. Why shouldn't the Park Service encourage more folks to get out of their cars and off their butts, and to walk to these unusual sites. Is that too easy? Must they spend millions of tax dollars on developed destruction?

Sorry if the smoke I'm burning gets in your face, folks. I'm just hoping that if you ever go to the Pictured Rocks, years from now you'll have the same experience I had: one of solitude, beauty, and the sense of something "special".

Tom shared my views on the park, and he invited me to stay at his home that night on the outskirts of Munising. We arranged to meet later in the day, and after passing Miner's Castle, a spire of sandstone resembling the ramparts of Camelot, and wandering through a fine hardwood forest atop the escarpment, I descended to Sand Point and the ranger station. Tom and I walked the road to Munising Falls and then took a trail up to his house on the canyon rim. He and his wife, Pat, made me feel welcome, and I found two more people on my growing list of supporters.

Two days later I was hiking up a jeep trail in the Rock River Wilderness Study Area, one of the areas then being studied for "Wilderness" classification by the Forest Service. The region was closed to all but foot traffic, and the little lane was smothered under a layer of fallen leaves. I passed the old site of a former lookout, marked on my map as the Johnson Lake Lookout Tower. The curious thing was the lack of any such lake on my topographical maps. Shrugging it off to progress, I headed south on a faded trail and descended into the Rock River Valley. At one point I stowed my pack and continued down, feeling light

and buoyant without the "anchor" on my back. The path was overgrown with high weeds, all of which were spouting their seeds to the Autumn breeze. Spring is most often thought of as the season of birth; Fall must be the season of propagation. At every turn, the green things of the earth were sending their future generations off on the winds. The seeds stuck to my sweatshirt, and at the end of each day my boots were full of the little hitchhikers.

I reached the Rock River Falls, a small but very beautiful scene. The river flows over a ten foot ledge, falling into a shallow pool. After dozing off in the sun at the base of the falls, I headed back up the trail and retrieved my pack. Taking a compass bearing, I headed southwest and crossed the Rock River. A couple more miles of bushwhacking brought me out on another series of jeep trails which I followed to Laughing Whitefish Falls.

Upper Michigan is a showcase of falling water. Throughout the area are a number of **waterfalls,** and in Laughing Whitefish I found one of the most awe-inspiring. The Laughing Whitefish River plummets more than a hundred feet into a deep gorge. It's not a straight drop, but rather on a near straight angle. I spent two nights camped near its head, exploring the area and listening to the hum of falling water.

About ten miles west of the falls, I walked into the Skandia Post Office. Verle and Howard Kellstrom ran the combination P.O., gas station, and grocery, and they welcomed me right in. I spent a few hours in the town (its name comes from the mostly Scandinavian settlers) getting supplies and mailing letters, and talking with the Kellstroms, two more very likeable folks.

I headed directly west out of town, and soon left the paved road for a dirt one. After half a mile it came to an end in the yard of a large farmhouse. A gate

blocked the faded trail leading across the pasture and into the woods. I nonchalantly opened the gate, closed it behind, and cut across the field. (If you're going to trespass, do it where they can see you! No sense in skulking about!)

Once in the forest, I entered a maze of logging trails through the steep, hilly region, winding through the hollows. My map was no use at all with so many trails, and I tried my best to head west. The next day I left the hills behind and found myself on a vast sand plain for most of the day, poking through the piney flats on old logging trails.

For the next two days I walked the roads, skirting the city of Ishpeming. Once north of Highway 41 I took to the jeep trails again through the Michigamme State Forest. October was nearly spent, and the days were much cooler. Thin layers of ice covered the ponds and puddles in the morning. The trees were just about bare of leaves. It surprised me to see some still clinging tenaciously to their lonely perches. But with the demise of most of the foliage, the forest took on a whole new look. Naked and exposed, open to the winds, and subjected to the prying eyes of my own curiousity, it laid bare its soul. Birdnests by the hundreds became visible, their hiding places a secret no longer, and the forest creatures themselves roamed in a more exposed light. The roll and lay of the land became much more apparent, and the once lush and life-giving green was replaced with a more sober brown and grey.

This was quite hilly territory with lots of swamps, lakes, and streams. My course led me along Dishno Creek, up the Peshekee River, then west to Herman. It was easy going, this walking, and I stopped often to listen to the murmur of a brook, to gaze across a marshy tract or into the barren forest, or to chat with one of the few people I saw.

One day near Brocky Lake, a truck came rolling slowly up the hill behind me. It sputtered to a stop, and a round, wrinkled face stuck out the window. Many of the people in Upper Michigan claim Scandinavian blood, and many are from Finland, such as this old-timer. I didn't catch his name, but he struck me as the spirit of the entire U.P. His accent was strong, but I had no trouble understanding him. He had seen an article in the local newspaper about me, and we talked for quite a spell. He seemed to emit a glow as he spoke. Almost vibrant, I would describe him. His smile beamed, and it seemed that out here in the middle of what some people would call nowhere, was where he belonged. I don't exactly remember what he said, but I think it was the way he said it that impressed me. One story I recall; in Finland, when he was a young man, the sleighs of the village would line up on Christmas morning. At the signal they would take off and race for the church. To win was the highest honor of the year. I don't remember if he ever won, or even how we got onto the subject, but the story somehow hit me. Here we were two complete strangers, from two different countries, from two different generations, but out there in the forest we were communicating. We found common ground in the fact we were both there. It said something. Perhaps there is something called the "Brotherhood of Man" after all.

I woke up on October 29th like I usually did -- very slowly. One eye peeked open; then the other, and suddenly I was conscious. I could tell right away it was a cloudy day by the dullness of the light filtered through my tent. The air had a bite to it, and I reached up to pull aside the flaps at the door. Snow! The field, the trees, the world itself had turned white overnight, creeping upon me silently as I slept. There was not quite an inch of the stuff, just enough to turn the landscape into a wonderland as each tree, twig, and stalky weed was coated in crinoline.

With the icy mornings, as of late, the snow should have come as no surprise. While the earth was readying itself for the coming season, so should have I. But it caught me with my pants down. Was winter here already? Where were my snowshoes, winter tent, warm boots, and mittens? But weather in its constant variability, has to be accepted, especially when its temper is so constantly a part of life. After the initial shock of the snow's presence passed, I welcomed the new dash of beauty, and packed up.

Hiking up the Peshekee River, as the snow melted into the earth, I followed what is known as the Huron Grade Road. Two National Forest Service guys told me the story behind it. Just after the turn of the century a company was formed to build a railroad into the area. Millions of dollars were invested and the line was constructed. But the grades were much too steep, and the curves too sharp. The first train through was the last; it derailed in a heap of smoldering steam. The man who had formed the company took off with all the money, while the misguided designer of the tracks committed suicide. Today, all that remains is the grade.

I followed the grade through a sharp cut in the rocky hills, and at one point saw five deer cross the road ahead of me. Eventually I turned off onto a more westerly trail. Again, there was a maze of trails, but I happened to take the right ones each time. I didn't see a soul until two days later when a few miles southeast of Herman, I ran into Steve Hayden. Steve was surprised to hear me talk of getting mail in Herman, my planned mail stop. The Post Office had been closed for four years! He offered to drive me up to L'anse after he checked his trap line, and we agreed to meet in Herman.

I had just left Steve, and upon rounding a bend in the road I gasped in surprise. Before me was one of the most inspiring sights of my entire trip.

A large, gnarled, dead tree stood with one barren arm pointed over the dirt road. Perched comfortably on the naked limb was a huge bird, its white head facing the little valley below. This was the symbol of the wilds, of all things strong and free. This was the Northern American Bald Eagle.

Far above, in the clear Autumn sky, its mate floated gracefully in circles on the power of an unseen air current. It was my first sighting of any kind of eagles in the wild, and my heart was in my mouth. The one on the tree tilted its head around his shoulder and upon the sight of me spread his giant wings and went swirling aloft. My neck craned; my eyes followed them into the heavens. Around and around they went, higher and higher, until they were merely dots in the space above.

A few miles brought me into Herman, a small town, its shores abandoned. Steve gave me the promised lift into 'L'anse, six miles north, where I picked up mail sent to Herman. From L'anse I got a ride thirty miles north to Houghton, and for three days I visited with my sister, Sue, on the Michigan Tech Campus. When I made my way back to Herman to resume the walk, I carried my trusty snowshoes lashed onto my pack. Now I was ready for the snow.

It was November now, but Indian Summer was giving one last glimpse of the warm weather before sliding over for the approaching winter. The day I left Herman, I walked with the sleeves of my sweatshirt rolled up and my chest bare to the sun. It felt soothing, and I hiked straight west on faded jeep trails until picking up a dirt road near Alberta.

I started across the Baraga Plains, vast flatlands covered with meadows and stands of pine. The soil was sandy, and the road was dusty, but it smelled good, and the sand cushioned the road, making each step a silent one. After a couple

miles I came unexpectedly to a prison camp run by the Department of Natural Resources. Passing it in an uneasy hurry, I hiked west, my own freedom seeming all the more valuable.

I camped the night on the shore of Little Lake. It was a peaceful place, and as dusk crept in, I sat by the water's edge and watched. A flock of small, sparrow-like birds winged about on the far side of the tiny lake, flowing like falling leaves, first one way then the other. Occasionally a fish would feed on some unseen water bug, and ripples would swirl outward, the circles growing into nothingness.

The western end of the lake glowed pink and purple through the trees, and looking eastward, the blue was turning darker. A star, or perhaps it was even a planet, shown so bright it reflected in the mirror of a lake. I scanned the heavens for other patches of light, but none were showing themselves.

The pines to the west became outlined in deeper blues and violets. Their picture I'd seen a hundred times before, yet it still held me. I watched and waited, and soon they blended together in the darkness of the night. To the north, a star was suddenly visible; to the south, another. In no time the sky was full of the shining jewels. I returned to my tent, and as I tugged off my dusty boots, the silence of the evening was broken with the honking of a hundred geese flapping out of the north. Their splashes marked their landings as I crawled into my warm bag for a good night sleep.

In the morning I continued across the plain, taking to old jeep trails after a few miles. It was another perfect day, and the hiking was perfect. I saw a few deer, and later, as I approached the Sturgeon River Gorge I saw another bear. I descended into the deep canyon cut by the river, and camped by Sturgeon Falls. Actually it wasn't much of a falls, but rather a frothy cataract formed when the wide stream was funneled into a narrow fault in the rock. But the roaring torrent

was indeed beautiful, and is now being studied for possible "wilderness" status.

Somewhere during that day I had crossed my 2,000 mile point. My journal entry reflects my profound thoughts on the feat: "It feels good, but sometimes its almost unreal. I do wish I had something to celebrate with. Say a dozen donuts, or a pizza, or . . . . "

The next day I hiked up Silver Mountain (1312 feet). It was the high point of the day, in more ways than one. Prickett Lake and the gorge were clearly visible to the east, while looking west, the land appeared flat and drabby with the endless forest a blur of grey. The Chippewas had called this a place of bad luck. It turned out to be just so when miners tried to mine silver from the base of the mountain prior to 1850. They eventually gave up. Today the only riches to be found were in the open rock ledges on the summit which warmed up nicely in the late morning sun, making for cozy perches for a sightseer like me.

Now in the Ottawa National Forest, I traveled an abandoned R.R. grade overgrown with young trees, and flooded in spots by beaver ponds. West of Bob Lake the following day, I left the grade, hiking jeep trails for a few miles before taking to my compass along Newholm Creek. I saw a number of deer that day, and had fun with a big doe grazing in a field. She didn't see me, and I froze in my tracks and gave a series of my weirdest noises. Each time she looked up, I'd drop into silence. She would look up, and around, and straight at me, but she didn't quite know what to make of it. In a moment her head would turn back to more important things, like food. This went on for several minutes, until at last she realized there was indeed something fishy going on (or should I say humany). Her eyes bored into me. What do statues do when their eyebrow itches? I tried to ignore it. No use. I thought I'd die if I didn't scratch it! As I raised my arm, she was off.

After a few miles of bushwhacking, I emerged from the woods and found myself in an area of rolling farmland. I took to the gravel road and began passing occasional homes. The skies had been overcast all day, but now the rain started to fall. Up ahead a bridge beckoned, promising temporary shelter from the cold rain. I was almost there, and I pushed ahead at high speed. As I zipped off the side of the road, I didn't see the rusted strands of barbed wire snaked through the grass. I hit them hard across my right leg, and as I fell, my left hand ripped across the hidden attacker. I found myself sprawled on my face, cut and bleeding. For an instant I didn't understand what had happened. It was soon clear. I staggered under the shelter of the bridge and decided my leg would be all right. But my hand was cut deep. I stopped the bleeding with my bandana, and waited 15 minutes for the squall to pass. There was nothing to do but keep going.

In the morning, I hiked into Rockland, a small, pretty town tucked in the extremely hilly country. I stopped at the general store and the lady behind the counter soon had my hand fixed up with iodine. It was a day made for hiking, and I zipped along the dirt road, passing through the ghost town of Victoria, a town which dates back to the mining days of the 1850's. The Forest Service road was a wild, scenic road, and at one point I left it to climb a high hill. To the north I was able to see Lake Superior's azure waters 15 miles away across the rolling forest.

But my goal for the day was the fire lookout on Norwich Mountain. I pushed hard, and as the sun was sinking in the sky I came to the trail up to the tower. Visions of a night in the lookout with a spectacular sunset wove through my head as I puffed up the steep trail. Harder and harder I pushed, sweating and hoping the sun wouldn't set until I was there to see it. At last I topped out! But where is the lookout?! I guess I was a few years too late. It was gone. Sitting on one of the cement anchors, I caught my breath and watched the sun turn the horizon ablaze, dropping lower and lower. It was worth it after all.

The next evening wasn't so pleasant. I had hiked all day on roads under sullen skies, and found myself a few miles north of Bergland when an icy rain hit. Making camp, I crawled into my tent to spend the most miserable night of my entire walk. During the night, the rain turned to wet snow. The wind picked up, and blasted the earth with one burst after another. I had gone to sleep, but was shocked back to reality when the tent came tumbling down about me. Crawling into the wet world, I stumbled about in the darkness trying to set it back up. I was soon soaked, and by the time I regained the warmth of my bag I couldn't stop shivering. I put on dry clothes and after finally warming up, I slipped once again into a much needed sleep. Once again the tent came crashing down! It was worse going out the second time. I knew what it would be like. How snug it was there in the bag. But I stripped off my dry things and ran outside once more to restake the tent.

When the morning came, there were three inches of snow on the ground, and a strong cold wind blasting the day. I was to learn later that the same storm would sweep east to Whitefish Bay where it would capsize the Edmond Fitzgerald, a massive ore carrier. All 27 hands went down with the ship. Feeling weak and feverish, I spent the day in bed, and moved on the following day up a snow-covered track heading west. Upon reaching the West Branch of Iron River I found the bridge out and was forced to ford. Stripping off my boots, socks, and trousers, I broke the ice on the river's edge and plunged across the knee deep stream. Definitely a chilling experience!

I was just within the bounds of the Porcupine Mountains State Park when the snow hit again. It came silently in the night and kept falling throughout the next day, blowing into a real blizzard, and nearly burying the tiny tent. The white magic slowly engulfed me, and though it was incredibly beautiful, I still felt woozy and remained in the sack.

When the snow quit, I started out again on my snowshoes. As much as I had been looking forward to my trek through the Porcupine Mountains, I had to cancel. My health just wasn't up to it. I had to get to a real bed and rest up for a few days. I walked until nine o'clock that night under a full moon, and south of Black River Harbor I reached a motel where I took refuge in a warm bed.

Ironwood was my final Michigan mail stop, and I elected to make it a point of recuperation also. When I arrived, finding the local flop houses full, I inquired about lodgings at the Chamber of Commerce. They gave me the name of Ralph and Helen Allender, two 70 year olds, who sometimes boarded guests. I stayed with the Allenders for three nights, throwing the weakness that gripped me, and preparing for the next leg of the journey.

During the short break taken when I reentered the States, I had spent a day with my brother in Traverse City and had met Bob Hall. Bob, a former skipper and just about everything else, was a fairly well-to-do restaurant entrepreneur from Key West, Florida. From our first meeting he was instantly caught up in my adventure. Perhaps the most important item of equipment I was missing was a sub-zero sleeping bag, and Bob Hall, a relative stranger, came through with a helping hand. When I reached Ironwood there was an expedition sleeping bag, good for -50 degree temperatures waiting for me, compliments of Bob. His only stipulation was that I keep him posted on my adventures. I **did**. (Thanks Bob!)

My stay in town was a relaxing one, but I did manage to buy a pair of winter boots. They lacked support, but were warmer than anything else I could find. Warmth was the important thing now. I also bought mittens and new snow extensions for my tent poles, and counted myself fully prepared for the snow and cold. I enjoyed Ironwood, and spent many hours chatting with Helen about the earlier days. When I left, one cold, clear morning, I left behind another state, many newfound friends, and a piece of myself.

IX

Light On the Ice, Please
(Wisconsin - Minnesota)

"Each moment of the year
has its own beauty,

a picture which was
never seen before

and which shall
never be seen again."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Some days are made to order. A man couldn't ask for a more perfect span of hours, a more likely place to spend it, or a more enjoyable way to live it. Each breath is like a tonic of youth, an instant spring in the step, and each thought emerges from the heart, not the mind. Such was my first day in Wisconsin. I thumped along on snowshoes, following a blazed snowmobile trail through rolling forest. The sun found its way through the naked limbs of the trees, warming the near sub-zero morning to a comfortable compromise of a day.

Snowshoeing is strenuous business, and my body threw off enough heat so that I found hiking in a down jacket too stuffy. I soon reached a happy medium with just a sweater. Throughout my winter hiking, my wool hat was nearly constantly on my head, and my hands carried either gloves or mittens depending on how cold it was, mittens being much warmer than the gloves. For trousers I still wore my blue jeans (with a rip across the one knee) with a pair of long johns worn underneath. Bluejeans are <u>not</u> winterized gear. If I'd had a choice in the matter, I'd be wearing a pair of wool pants. Wool will keep a body warm even when the material is wet, a valuable asset in the wet winter snows. So much for my winter wardrobe.

The trail wove through the hilly country, over hills and through the hollows. It was very quiet in the heart of the forest; the snow seemed to muffle every sound, as if too much noise might disturb the sleeping earth. Several miles brought me to a side trail up to the Upson Fire Lookout. I chugged up the hill and then climbed the extremely high ladder up to the lookout. The perch itself was locked up, but clinging to the ladder I hung around for awhile and studied the view. To the east, Ironwood was clearly visible, as were Copper Peak and the distant Porcupine Mountains. Southwest was the White Cap Mountain ski area, while farther west the endless series of low, wooded ridges spread themselves forever. The most stunning view, however, was to the north. Far on the distant horizon, the dull brick-colored trees dropped off sharply into a fuzzy blue haze: Lake Superior, its presence still being noted after nearly seven weeks of walking. From its far boundary, the trees formed a continuous carpet over the gentle roll of the land to the clearing at my feet. Their tops took on a red tint in the late afternoon, and looking down through the treetops into the snow, the entire forest lay like a vast field, the trees standing like weeds saluting the day.

With the snow and cold, the winter brought its short, economy-size days. I didn't carry a watch, but I could feel a marked difference in my time schedule. The day began as soon as I got the nerve to crawl from the warmth of my bag into the freezing morning. As soon as the sun started to set I began looking for a likely place to camp. Winter camping requires double the time needed in other seasons. A patch of snow must be tramped down and the tent carefully pitched, snow must often be melted for water, and every chore seems to take much longer and beg more care in the cold.

I camped that first night in a saddle between two hills. A tiny brook seeped out of the frozen earth nearby, and by the time I had cooked dinner, darkness was

upon me. I washed the dirty pot the best I could using hot water, and groped my way into the tent. Slipping into my new sleeping bag was like sinking into ecstacy. So warm! In comfort I wrote in my journal by the light of a candle. Later, as the moon came out, the woods lit up in a silvery, bright light as the snow reflected the cool rays shooting through the night.

Dawn rode in on a typical wintery day. A thick mist hung down to the earth like a leaden curtain, imprisoning the sun all day. My snowshoes rode my pack, the snow on the trail being packed and hard. A few miles brought me to the Potatoe Falls River, and I strolled along through snow-laden cedar and spruce trees on the east bank. The rapids gurgling and my own breathing and tramping were the only sounds.

After fording the icy river and hiking several more miles, I came to the Tyler Forks River, following its winding course for a couple miles before making camp. It was starting to rain as I set up the tent, and the drops fell steadily through the night and part of the next day, and gradually turned to snow. For a day and a half a real blizzard descended upon the land, piling snow in high drifts that threatened to bury my tent. Between the times I crawled into the raging storm to clear snow and set up the fallen tent, I remained in the coziness of my bag and read James Michner's Centennial. I managed to finish it before moving on. As far as the tent blowing down, it did so at regular intervals, and I could often hear the particular guilty gust long before it hit. But the snow wasn't as wet as that first tragic storm, and I suffered no ill effects (unless you count losing the place in my book!) A winter tent, however, was a luxury I sorely missed.

When on the third day of my stay I noticed the glare of the sun pouring from the heavens, It was indeed a welcome sight. I dug out the tent and set out in the

thigh-deep snow, and found that even with the snowshoes I sank deeply into the fine powder. I puffed along feeling a trifle guilty breaking the untouched smoothness of the new tapestry of snow. After three days of hibernating in the tent, I felt a surge of bouncy energy in my skinny bones. It's a good thing, too. With the going so difficult I needed all I could muster. Still, the day was exceptional, and the world about me was showing me its stuff: the magic of winter.

After a night in an old barn's hayloft, I passed through Mellon, stopping for groceries and to dry out a few things in the laundrymat. Besides picking up a few supplies, I wolfed down two quarts of milk, a dozen donuts, and two fruit pies! My stomach satisfied for the moment, I left town on an unplowed road, and entered the Chequamegon National Forest. I soon turned off onto the North Country Trail.

The North Country Trail is currently being studied as a possible addition to the National Scenic Trails System. At the moment, it's more dream than reality. In some places, however, such as the Chaquamegon, it has already been laid out. When completed, the trail will reach from the Appalachian Trail in Vermont, through New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and end up in North Dakota. I'm hoping some day to see this and other trails extending the entire width of the continent. After all, aren't I living proof that it is possible?

The trail was not laid out for winter travel, and I soon lost it, hitting a Forest Service road near Trout Brook. It was snowing pretty good by now, and when I came to an old quarry site I made camp. For some reason I decided to have a fire that night, and set about gathering wood. I soon had more than enough. Now, for supper.

Who hasn't heard the expression, "water, water, everywhere, but not a drop to drink"? The phrase fits winter travel perfectly. All about me was a blanket of water in the form of snow. Wisconsin is a land of rivers and lakes, but already they were freezing over. And if they weren't totally iced over, their banks were dangerously covered with weak ice or snow. Getting water was somewhat of a problem. I often melted snow, starting out with some water in the pot so as not to burn it. (Yes, you can burn snow!)

But on this particular night I was right near Trout Brook. It rushed through the forest in a constant state of tumbling and tossing, its path sometimes under banks of snow and bridges of ice. The scene was straight off the winter post-cards from the area. With cookpot in hand, I tramped down to the singing stream. Finding a spot where the bank looked firm (where I thought the snow covered solid ground,) I stepped carefully to the water's edge. The solid spot wasn't! A giant chunk of the bank suddenly gave way. I found myself dumped into the icy water like an alka-seltzer (plop-plop, fizz-fizz!) The water was up to my chest, and as I clawed at the wall of snow lining the bank, it gave way, sliding me back into the freezing brook. A downed tree proved to be my savior. Grabbing its stable limbs, I pulled myself out.

Darkness was nearly upon me, as I raced back to my store of wood. In no time, a blaze was crackling, and for several hours I stood naked in the warmth of the fire, drying out my soaked clothing. The pants got a good roasting, so good that when I slipped them back on later in the evening, I failed to notice they were on fire! The observation was quickly noted.

The snow had stopped by morning, and I set out under clear skies. The new carpet of snow added a freshness to the day, and once moving, the bitter cold was lost to the day's beauty. Deer-hunting season had just begun, and after a few miles I ran into a whole slew of deer hunters. I remember how funny I thought it that they were complaining about too much snow. I wonder how the deer felt about it.

I continued west, spending the remainder of the day in solitude. In the morning, I again followed the North Country Trail for several miles, and later on a forest service road, I met Jim Oas of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Jim was up hunting deer, and gave me the impression he was there more for the winter beauty and silence than to bag one of the elusive deer. After walking the road a couple miles, we reached his trailer, a virtual palace on wheels, where I spent the night stuffing myself on the great dinner Jim cooked up, and talking into the night.

I reached my first Wisconsin mail drop the next morning in the little town of Drummond. Set in the heart of the Wisconsin forestland, Drummond was once a thriving center of logging in the area, supporting thousands. Today it's a sleepy, little town, the kind of place where everyone knows their neighbor, a stranger walking through is big news, and someone to make feel welcome.

Throughout my trek, there were individuals who reached out to help me, to share their lives with me, and there were occasional towns that offered me whole-hearted hospitality. But up to this point, no such town had gone so far out of its way to extend a smiling hand in my direction. Drummond, I thank you. There would be towns after you, but none before you.

Town Postmaster, Warren Johnson, and his wife, Gladys, had me over to dinner, Mrs. Lee managed to get me a place to sleep on the floor of the Lutheran Church (later she brought over an entire turkey dinner), Mrs. Benson sewed a couple patches on my holey jeans, I had lunch with a group of Senior Citizens, the librarian, Mrs. Albert Kofal, opened the library especially for me in order that I could see some old pictures of Drummond's hey-day, and I spoke to a number of friendly people, among them Ralph Sorenson, who had laid out this portion of the North Country Trail in 1965. My stay in the town was short, but full to the brim with nice folks. It was two days before Thanksgiving, but lately it had been every day for me.

When I left on the morning of the 26th, the temperature hovered at ten below zero. With the air still, and the sun shining, it was hard to believe. I took to the N.C. Trail on the snowshoes and passed under the shadows of a stand of virgin white pine. Standing at the base of the largest, looking up its massive trunk, I was dwarfed by the tree's size and beauty. These giants once covered nearly all of upper Michigan and Wisconsin, but in the 1880's armies of loggers cut their way through millions of board feet of timber. This grove of virgin pine is one of the few which still stand untouched in the North Woods.

The forest before me lay in an unbroken sea of white. The trees thrust through like the quills of a brush, and the pines carried heavy loads of snow that when bumped, dumped the unwanted burden on me. I walked at a slow pace, stopping often to listen to the silence. I saw two deer, (does) and later passed a distant hunter. I was wearing a bright red sweatshirt and glowing orange gloves, but he didn't see me. Keeping a sharp eye on him, and preparing to drop if he raised his rifle, I passed hurriedly over a ridge.

For the most part, the trail was easy to follow through this section of the forest. Around lakes, over ridges, through the hollows, I walked through winter at its best. When I made camp that night, instead of pitching the tent, I made a shelter using my plastic tent-fly draped over some logs. Open to a fire on one end, the shelter proved to be a comfortable way to spend the night. As I wrote by the light of the snapping fire, the sound of coyotes calling to the stars echoed through the woods.

Thanksgiving Day came clear but cold, and I hiked the trail northward passing a series of small lakes: Nelson, Stratton, Wishbone, Bufo, Tower, and others. At Rainbow Lake I attempted to break the ice to get water. Try as I may, it was just too thick. The day was a repeat of yesterday's frozen beauty, and once again I was engulfed by the silent world of white. It was a world of drifts, corniced swirls of snow, icicles clinging to the sides of rocks, limbs of trees coated like

decorations, and everywhere the telltale tracks of some creature's passing.

For the next two days I plodded steadily north, a couple times weaving through the enchanting rows of a pine plantation decked in its winter finery. At Lake Ruth I left the National Forest behind, taking to a plowed road and passing Iron and Ahmeek Lakes. On one small lake I found a hole chopped. Going down to investigate, I found the ice to be seven inches thick. No wonder I couldn't break through the icy surfaces.

It warmed up that day, and during the night a light rain fell. I was walking the road at dawn, and by the time I reached Lake Nebagamon I was again being soaked by an icy rain. I found lodging at the Lawn Beach Inn run by Wally and Marge Urbaniak. They were a nice couple, charging me what amounted to ridiculously low prices, and introduced me to Kay Collette, a member of the Lake's Bicentennial Committee. Kay's son, Tony, took me over to the site of the old Weyerhaeuser Mill and logging camp, now a boy's camp. The caretaker showed us around as another snowstorm hit. In the tiny museum were pictures of the large lake covered with a layer of logs waiting for the mill. Young Tony told me that in the winter, a track was laid across the ice, and trains would haul the logs right over the frozen lake. It was an interesting era, the logging age, and I tried to imagine the small village booming with thousands of husky loggers.

After two snowy nights in the comfort of the inn, I set out one frosty morning, and kept to the roads for the next couple days working my way across what was generally uninspiring country. The days were nice though, and I walked along with frosted beard, my walking stick beating out a rhythm on the icy surface. It was December now, and the cold was here to stay, but it wasn't as hard as most people would think. I was dressed warmly, ate good, and slept comfortably. One night I even slept in a house. Its windows were missing and it was half full of snow, but it was shelter.

As I approached Pattison State Park one afternoon, a bald eagle swooped across the sky just above me, its wing tips like fingers, sifting the cool, fresh air. I stopped at the park headquarters and chatted with the rangers for awhile before hiking over to Big Manitou Falls, the largest waterfall in the state. I was very impressed. The season was having its fun with the falling water, turning the sides to cream-colored ice. The formations looked like the beginnings of a cave's stalagmites. The entire scene was dressed in a coat of white and topped with dark green evergreens around the rim of the canyon.

The next day I took to the tracks of the Soo Line. As I crossed the line into Minnesota, a fierce wind buffeted me with fine snow. The air became a near solid blanket of white, and I found my eyes being clogged with snow, my face stinging under the battering. A train came up on the run, and I slid down the embankment out of its path, watching it pass like a ghost. For several miles I pushed on, hardly conscious of the terrain about me, and at last I made camp. To crawl into the bag at the end of such a day was the highlight of the day.

Moose Lake was my first Minnesota mail stop. I followed the tracks into the good-sized town the next day and found the old hotel, at $5.00 a night, a good bargain. I stayed two days in the town. I don't know why; it was a lonely place, and I didn't strike up any great friendships. But I did visit the local museum. While there I spoke with an elderly lady who told me about the Great Fire of 1918. This disasterous forest fire swept through the state, wiping out entire towns in a matter of minutes. More than 400 people lost their lives. The lady I talked with was ten years old when the fire hit. Her family, like many others, took to the lake after which the town is named. There they lay, breathing the air just above the surface, until the holocaust had passed. When the smoke cleared, the land for miles around lay barren and scorched. Walking the shore of the big lake later in the day, I shivered when I thought of the experience.

When I moved out onto the tracks in the sub-zero morning, it was the start of the last leg before another break in my journey. My funds had dwindled to a state of near non-existence, and it was time to get a job. My benefactor, Bob Hall, had sent me some money, but to have to depend on someone else, wasn't part of my plan. I wanted to do it on my own. My decision to leave the trail was a hard one, but it was necessary. I needed a winter tent. To continue onto the plains in mid-winter with a shelter that blew down in every gale was courting disaster. I thought if I broke off now, I could be back on the trail by winter's end, soon enough to watch spring creep onto the scene. Yes, it would be hard giving up the good life, but promise of the good times to come helped see me through.

In the meantime, I had 70 miles of walking along the rails before I reached my temporary end-point in Remer. The Soo Line made for easy, pleasant walking, and as the snow piled deep in some places, I slipped on my snowshoes for several miles of the day's hike. The day was calm (luckily for me) with temperatures hovering in the -15 degree range. My beard wore a coat of ice most of the next few days, but the only time I was really painfully cold was when I first climbed out of the bag in the early morning.

With my winter boots I used a system I had read about called the hydro-thermal theory. The theory rides on the fact that even in cold weather the body sweats, acting as a form of heat production. If the sweat is held tight against the body, the warmer it's bound to be. Using the gallon size plastic garbage bags, I'd put the bag over my foot, then the sock, and then the boot. My feet were always warm.

The tracks led me in silence through forests of poplar and birch, alder swamps and marshes, and occasional fields. I tried to picture the roaring inferno of 1918 burning through, and the image of the lady's words stuck with me for months. Deer tracks criss-crossed the rails, and everything from moles and rabbits, to crows and coyotes left their calling cards in the track-studded snow. North of

Kettle River I watched three deer struggle through the deep snow-covered bog. Moose are sometimes seen in the area, but I saw no evidence of the giants.

I camped that night in a forest of pine, watching the darkness creep upon the land like a thief stealing what little warmth the sun held. I was awake in the middle of the night, and putting on my clothes. I stumbled into the starry world. The air hacked at my lungs with its frost-laden hands, and my nose started running, the snot freezing into little icicles. I walked out to the tracks. The moon was a sliver of light hanging in the top of a nearby tree. The sky was a bag full of stars that had spilled just for me. And then I saw the rails. The iron was blown free of snow there, and now it was covered with magic patterns, swirls of frost so fine and delicate no master could duplicate them. In the ghostly blue light of the night the frost glistened and twinkled. I grasped the sight to me as a man holding gold. I had seen the ever-elusive starlight on the rails.

In the morning I came to a fire tower next to the tracks. It was a grand-daddy of a tower, standing at least a hundred feet tall, and it seemed to take forever to climb up the stairs to the top. With each tier of steps, the view of the surrounding country opened wider and wider. The lookout itself was locked, but standing on the steps, the sun felt good as I surveyed the land I'd been hiking across.

It was flat. The naked forest was broken here and there by farms and marshland, but for the most part it stretched on, its brown fading to a distant grey. Two crows flapped by, the sun shining their blackness to silver. The air was still, and for a moment it seemed that winter was far away, far below me. With the arctic temperatures, it was a very brief moment!

I tramped through Lawler, stopping at a near empty store and buying some donuts from a toothless old man dressed in a ragged wool suit. He chewed a wad

of tobacco as he spoke and what he said, I couldn't really tell, but I smiled and agreed, before setting off again.

The next morning as I left the town of McGregor, a train came rumbling through on the Burlington-Northern line, a line which bisects the Soo. The speed was dazzling, the contrast to my steady pace, overwhelming. The forest was mostly scrub pine now, with vast bogs dotting the countryside. Sometimes I felt like I was out in the Alaskan tundra. At Pallasade I crossed the Mississippi River on a tressel high above the famous watercourse. Here the mighty river was a mere 40 yards wide, winding gently southward, a far cry from the mile wide sewer flowing into the Gulf of Mexico.

I slept that night in an old barn; maybe I should say ancient. The structure was tilted, looking like it had collapsed long ago. Looking inside I could see that the only reason it still stood was its cargo of hay. I burrowed into the straw, making a shelf to stretch out on and spent a cozy night in the sweet smelling abode. During the night I was reading, as I often did, by the light of the candle. The hood of my sweatshirt was pulled over my head, keeping that part of me warm, and the candle burned brightly at my head. My nose twitched. A fowl smell filled the air; something was burning! I jumped up to find the tip of my sweatshirt roasting to a dark brown over the flame of the little candle.

I slept well that night, and crawled out the door in the first light of morning to behold a new world, one of sparkling beauty. Each branch of every tree, every weed, every bush, every blade of stalky grass still above the snow, was decked out in a coat of hoarfrost. The crystaline cloak covered everything in sight. It was as if a thousand master artists had whisked through during the night, doing a rush job on the countryside. I set off along the tracks,

the trees snapping and popping in the severe cold.

The blue sky disappeared with the afternoon, and as I passed through the tiny town of Swatara a bitter wind was blowing. I made camp in a stand of evergreens, and with the fall of night the wind died to a soft breeze. It was my last night before Remer; the last night on the trail for a good while. My journal paints a good picture: "Now, here I sit next to a crackling fire. At first a sliver of a moon shone and many stars, but I think it has clouded over somewhat now. Still, it is cold. These nights by the fire I will surely miss. It will be a hard adjustment, to step back into city life for awhile. The hardships I suffer are always worth the rewards I reap in this nomadic life I've led for the past seven months. Only one thing surprises me -- I'm finally getting sick of oatmeal!"

The next day, in the late afternoon, I hiked into Remer and stepped off the trail. I had come an estimated 2,350 miles. I wasn't giving up, just pausing to catch my breath.

Back On The Trail

Beaver tracks broke the snow before me. The fine, brush-like lines showed where the tail had dragged behind as the creature had crossed the train tracks. On both sides of the Soo Line the land dropped into marshy plains laced with canals and ponds. All was frozen over, and the world was still locked in winter.

It was March 10th, and after exactly three months, I was back on the trail. My break had been spent working in a drugstore in Royal Oak, Michigan. There I had saved up a nest-egg of funds to see me through the rest of my walk. My boss at Sherman's Drug Store, Gary Smith, was another of those people I owe a great deal of thanks. Not only did he rehire me (I'd worked there a couple years before) but he believed enough in my adventure to purchase a new winter tent for me, an expedition tent tough enough to see me through the worst of blizzards.

So now I was back on the tracks. I had left Remer early in the clear morning, marveling at how fresh and clean the world seemed, like it had been born that morning. A snowshoe hare scampered among the pines. Three deer munched on their browse. Chickadees zipped from tree to tree, and the drifts lay smooth and soft across the land. How good it felt to be back out in the wilds, back under the open sky, feeling the wind and the sun. Once again I had bid farewell to the outside world, the world of cars and timeclocks, and once again I was free. My back welcomed the nudge of my pack like a woman caressing her lover. This was most definitely my place in life. Some men were plumbers, some politicians, others were engineers or cowboys. Me, I'm a walker. It's more of a lifestyle than a profession, but I like the ring of it -- professional walker! Yes, that does sound good. Now if I could only figure out how to get paid for doing what I love to do most!

The tracks shot through the barren land like an arrow, slicing the flat marshlands, sprawling otherwise unobstructed across the land. I kept to the rails through the day, and as the sun started to set, I began looking for a place to set up my new tent. Having found a clearing higher than the marsh, I put up the tent and set my camera's timer for a picture. The camera was set, the timer buzzed, and I ran into the picture to pose. My snowshoes caught, and in a tangle of legs I fell headlong into the snow! Like a madman I roused myself and stood nonchalantly (snow-covered side away from the camera) as the camera clicked. Another grand picture of the graceful, wilderness traveler!

I knew my new tent was a good one, but I didn't realize how soon I would have to put it to the test. A snowstorm hit that night and blew for the next two days. With white-out conditions, I stayed put. The tent held up well, but after three nights in the same spot, I was getting a little stir-crazy. After all, I had just started up again. I was anxious to be out and hiking.

When at last the storm broke, I continued up the tracks and two days later reached Cass Lake. For the next few days I followed snow-covered country roads through Hubbard County. I was strolling along on the first morning out of Cass Lake, when out of nowhere a large Saint Bernard came running after me. He was just a pup and very friendly, and he started following me down the little road. Try as I might to get him to turn back, he kept padding along behind. I finally gave up, letting him tag along, and I got a few laughs watching him flounder in the snow, sticking his nose into every frozen nook and cranny. When I sat down to eat a candy bar, he was all over me, smothering me under a barrage of dog kisses (Yechhh!) and otherwise showing me I had a pal.

The two of us walked the road under clearing skies, and after five or six miles came to a crossroads marked as "Nary" on my map. I walked into the only

building, a general store, and over a can of pop talked with the young couple who ran it. They had no idea whose dog had befriended me, but later, when I stepped back outside, there was no sign of him. The fellow from the store was right behind me, coming out to drive his schoolbus route. As I started down the road, the bus horn sounded. Turning back, I saw the guy wave and point to the back of the bus. Filling the back window of the departing bus was the big, friendly face of my animal friend. They headed back up the road we had walked down.

The next day I was walking a deserted road, enjoying the woods, the silence, and the feel of the sun (it was ten below). I was fooling around with my walking stick, drawing a haphazard line in the snow before me, when suddenly the stick caught on something. I walked right into it and found myself sprawled out on the road. My shirt was ripped and an ugly wound bled from my chest. It was extremely painful at first, but a couple miles of hiking were like an antidote. Although I still carry a slight scar, the embarrassment to myself was much worse. I mean, I could just see the headlines: "Hiker Walks Half the Country, Dies of Self-Inflicted Stab Wound From Walking Stick."

The next day found me walking the last mile out to the shore of Lake Itasca. As I appraoched the frozen surface through the pines, my ears were welcomed with the murmur of a rushing stream. The lake was the Source; the stream was the father of waters -- the Mississippi River. Only 15 feet wide at this point, the river's waters flow 2,552 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. A line of rocks marched across the lake's outlet, and I sat myself down in the sun, listening to the babytalk of the famous river. I tossed a twig into the current, watching it float down and out of sight. How far would it get? How many miles would it see? Would it shake hands with the muddy Missouri? Would it float lazily in the eddies of Louisiana? Or would it be washed up on some beach on the Gulf to be picked up by some Minnesota refugee collecting driftwood? I wondered.

It was a warm day, and I snowshoed up a trail on the west side of the lake. I wound through large red and white pines, and after a mile took to the frozen surface of the lake. I was a bit wary at first, but was soon tramping right along. I felt totally alone, totally free, totally exhilarated as I moved across the vast stretch of open snow, laying down my set of lonely tracks and knowing no one would see them. A deer was drinking at one of the springs along the lake's shore, and the sight brought the entire day to a fitting end. I marched inland and camped.

I was in the Itasca Wilderness Area, and that night it seemed like the coyotes were right next door as they yipped and howled in the stillness of the forest. In the morning I again took to the lake, leaving my webbed tracks in a wavy line across the perfect surface of the snow. Every once in awhile a crunching sound would come from under the ice, cracking the morning silence and startling me, but I finally wrote it off as air pockets between the ice and snow. Still, it never failed to make my blood rush.

A Bald Eagle nest was marked on my map, and as I approached Garrison Point I scanned the forest. The striking white of a mature eagle's head caught my eye, and as I focused in on the bird's lofty perch, it took to the sky, flapping slowly westward. Still not seeing the nest, my gaze followed the bird and searched the forest in his direction. As I looked closer toward the shore I spotted it. How could I have missed it! It was built in the top of a very tall pine tree, looking like a big bowl, perhaps six or seven feet across. It would have been a good place to spend a night, so large was it. I had seen another eagle near Cass Lake, but this sighting of both bird and nest was a special treat. I counted my blessings and continued over the ice.

Coming to the southern end of the lake, I entered a swampy area. The snow was deep and slushy, and I slugged through to a trail leading to the largest red pine in the world. I was soon looking up at the old tree. It was big, but

not as large as I had expected. Red pines aren't large trees. It was 120 feet tall and had a diameter of 37 inches, plenty large for a red pine!

I walked out to the road shown on my map as Wilderness Drive. It was buried under a couple feet of snow and I set off along its roly-poly course heading west. The day was so warm, I soon stripped down to my underwear and rolled the sleeves up. The sun beat down through the stands of red pine, setting the snow to melting. As I turned onto the Two Spot Trail, the snow was becoming more sticky by the minute. It soon started clinging to the bottoms of the snowshoes, pulling like lead ballast. Walking was exhausting.

Still, as trying as it was, I just couldn't complain. The rolling woods and many small ponds, the blue sky and warm sun, and the clean quiet of the wilds all served to make it a day of days. I saw two deer, heard one snort a greeting, and noticed many tracks. If not for the prodigious snow I could have claimed spring was here. A freshness rode the air with the scent of pine, filling my huff-puffing lungs like an elixir. My body wanted to jump and my throat longed to scream with the joyous mood of the day.

I left the park, entering the White Earth State Forest. The trail's snow became packed under the tracks of a snow machine and the going was much easier. Taking a side trail to the top of Anchor Hill, I climbed the fire tower and squeezed into the tiny lookout. Feeling like a bird in a cage, I looked out at the vast Minnesota woods. It was a panorama of gently wrinkled land, topped with a brushy texture of an endless forest. Nowhere was there a break in the solidity of the pattern. The lakes I knew were there, were blocked by ridges of trees. I was locked in, totally enveloped; it felt good. I felt secure in my aloneness, and set off following a series of snow-machine trails through the hushed wood.

The hills got steeper with deep swales, and small ponds and swamps nestled in the glens. Coming upon an old log cabin, I decided to spend the night, and soon had a meal cooking in the oil-barrel woodstove. It was a cozy place, and I would have liked to have been stranded there for a few days, but in the morning I set out again. I passed Long Lost Lake, and later, on a plowed road, I went through little, Elbow Lake Village. The weather turned cold again, and that night and all the next day another snowstorm moved through. I stayed in another cabin, this one lacking the warmth and comfort of the other, but the roof and walls were solid and kept the drifting snow out.

When the storm passed I took to plowed county roads through the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, and two days later I found myself in Detroit Lakes, picking up mail. There was a good flop house there, and I stayed overnight. Craig McEwen of the Becker County Record did a nice story on me and took a number of pictures, and I stopped at the local Coast-to-Coast hardware to look up Herb and Ramona Beug, who I'd met out in the wildlife refuge. I went out and had a few beers that night with their sons, Bruce and Mark, and all in all enjoyed my short stay in town.

When I left in the morning, it had warmed up again, and I was hiking into a different kind of world. Detroit Lake was still frozen hard, and a number of cars could be seen out on the ice. I stuck to sleepy little roads passing many lakes with names like Monson, Bullhead, Cormorant, Dart, Leaf, and Nelson. My quadrangle maps were covered with the blue of hundreds of others. Half the day was spent passing summer cottages, but gradually the buildings thinned out, as did the trees. A husky followed me for a few miles but eventually turned back, and I camped in a lonely stand of hardwoods.

There was still snow on the ground, but only in stray patches, and they were fading fast. I had returned to the trail in time to get a taste of winter,

but that was all, merely a taste. I could feel Spring, and I could feel the new country to the west. I'd be out on the prairie the next day. No more vast forest realms for several hundred miles. How would I react? What would it be like? I was filled with excitement and a pinch of apprehension as I fell asleep under the naked limbs of a maple tree.

XI

On The Lone Prairie

It was morning. I was asleep, but I slowly became conscious of a distant roar, like giant breakers pounding on the rocky shore of the sea. I roused myself. I was on the edge of the sea, yes, a sea of flatlands, open plains. The roar was the undying wind. I was in North Dakota, and after two days on the plains, I still wasn't used to the openness. My tent was pitched near the security of trees by the Sheyenne River, as if I might be swallowed up if I ventured too far out in the wind.

The day before, I had left Fargo, a bustling, lonely city, and I had walked a rusty railway across the Red River Valley (remember the song?) The land was as flat as the traditional pancake, or perhaps I should say waffle. It was put into a network of squares and then plowed into neat rows that reached to the horizon like a giant score of outstretched music. If they could only cram it into one of those museums of modern art, they could call it "Study in Texture."

The day had been warm and spring-like. A few more weeks and the land would be sprouting green; several more, and the furrowed tracks would be under miles of waving wheat. In ancient times a huge lake had covered what is now the Red River Valley. As the lake dried up, the silt settled on the bottom, making for the rich soil in the region today.

Now, as I set off under grey skies, the wind sifted the cool morning air and raced over the barren fields. I walked a series of narrow dirt roads, hemmed in by the endless brown of upturned earth. For the next several days I would be following the winding course of the Sheyenne River, crossing it now and then, sometimes several miles from it, but generally within its locale.

For the first several miles the wind pushed me about as I marched along. The little town of Kindred rose out of the flat fields a couple miles away, looking like the city of Oz looming over the dusty plain, but not a soul was to be seen. I crossed the Sheyenne and stopped at the Wally Graff farm for water (the river being quite dirty looking). Graff's grandfather had homesteaded here back in 1894. The house was built with the first load of lumber ever shipped into nearby Kindred. I spent awhile talking to the Graffs and their daughter, Tammy, and then set out again, following a rutted road along the river through the wooded bottoms.

North Dakota was homesteaded in the 1880's and 90's, and the land was divided up into "sections." Each section is a mile square, and on my map, I could see the lines of roads, following the section lines, cutting the territory into tiny one mile squares. These roads were often merely trails used by the farmers or ranchers for boundaries, and I called them section line trails. I followed section lines most of the way across North Dakota, sometimes just following the fence, other times a faded tractor trail. It made for pleasant walking and no one seemed to mind me treading across their land. Of course, out there,not many folks noticed me.

The next morning I moved out onto one of these section trails after spending the night on a wooded ridge above the river. I still wasn't used to wide spaciousness, but that day, that morning, I was to be initiated into the order of the plains.

The land was more hilly here, an area known as "the sand hills." The plains rolled gently to the horizon unbroken by plow and covered with tawny grass. Not a building in sight, only the endless grass, the faded track, and a few meadowlarks. Everyday their songs grew louder and clearer, just

like the days themselves. It was cold that morning, and the occasional puddle trapped in a rut was frozen hard. The sky was clear, the air, still. The grass didn't wave; it stood at attention. A hawk soared by. I laughed at my silly misgivings.

At first I had felt naked without the trees to close me in. I felt too small, too vulnerable with all this openness, all this space. But with that first stretch of unspoiled prairie I was a man in love. How exciting to be able to see for miles, to feel the kiss of the wind, and to sense the vastness and the freedom that comes with it. There was an entirely different feeling out there. Hiking and camping, and I suppose living too, were all on another level. I found myself wishing I could walk forever across the boundless undulating grasslands.

I turned onto another, more worn track, and was surprised to hear the rumble of a car coming up behind. I was even more surprised to find it was a mailman! He stopped on his 120-mile rural route to talk a spell. His concern and love for this part of the Sheyenne Valley was evident as he told me about a proposed dam the Feds would like to build. Much of where I was now walking would be under water. He shook his head. And then we talked of modernization and its effect on the farmer. He farms his own land when he's not delivering mail, and he told me about his new tractor with air-conditioning, stereo tape deck, and even a T.V., while his neighbor still plows with a team of horses. It seemed to typify North Dakota for me. The old and the new both trying to keep their place in today's world.

Somewhere during our chat, I mentioned the fact I was originally from Michigan. Oh, yeah! He perked up. He had once been to Michigan. In fact, he had a cousin Frieda in Kalamazoo. Did I know her? No, sorry I didn't. He spoke of driving through the Upper Peninsula. With a sigh I broke in. "Nice country up there, isn't it?"

"Nice country?!" he exclaimed, "Why you can't even see the land for all those trees!" He shook his head with disgust.

And that's how life is out there. A man looks and thinks in an entirely different way. He has to. The land makes him. It grows into him and becomes a way of life, a point of view. It was already in my blood, pumping through my heart and into my soul. I was definitely in the prairie.

I saw about six people all day as I hiked the little roads and for a time I slipped along the river's bank on a deer trail. Deer were everywhere. And I was to see more in North Dakota than in any other state. But while the deer population is on the rise, the human population is decreasing. There were more people in the state in the 1920's than there are today. The reason is simple. The prime source of income is agriculture. More folks make a living at farming than anything else in the state. With the coming of modernization the farms have been getting bigger and bigger. I might add, that out of necessity they must get larger. The farmer is caught in a bind. Inflation is killing him. Unless he can do it on a large scale he will lose, and even then he often takes a licking. But with one farmer buying out another, the farmers are getting fewer. And since there are fewer farmers, not as many stores are needed to supply them. It all comes down to one thing : less folks in North Dakota.

That night I spread my bag outside an old barn, the only remains of a former homestead. With the first light of dawn I was up and moving through the frost covered fields. Every three or four miles I passed a farm, but people were even fewer, just grass and scattered trees. The dirt track was a brown ribbon stretched straight through the yellow sea of grass. I thought myself a pioneer, heading west to homestead, following the ruts of countless wagons. I scanned the horizon for buffalo, and kept a steady watch for renegades.

The mood was broken when I turned onto a gravel road and began passing more tamed fields. I cut through the dried husks of a corn field to the river, and found where an old bridge had been washed away. I had hoped it would still be standing but it didn't matter. The river flowed steadily by, over giant plates of ice, and I sat in a warm patch of sun under the aspens lining the bank. It was quiet. I laid back and looked up at the naked limbs scratching the sky. How lucky I was. How men would give their fortunes to have what I found in the sky over North Dakota!

Eventually I walked back to the gravel road, followed it to a paved one, and walked it into Lisbon. You would expect to see the town for miles away as you're approaching from the east, at least I thought I would. But it surprised me. One minute it wasn't there, and the next moment, as I came over the hill, there it was. I liked Lisbon right off. It sloshes the sides of the valley, straddling the Sheyenne, and gives the impression of being the typical smalltown U.S.A. The houses are trim and neat, and the people friendly, but I think the main reason I liked it was the Lisbon Hotel. It stands directly across the street from the post office, and was a bargain for $5.00 a night. The room was elegant, with a desk, radio, bed, the whole works. It was a pretty building, built back in 1909, and the folks running it were a friendly sort. The lady lent me a book of local history written by Snorri Thorfinnson (who I was later to meet) and called the local newspaper. Lisa McDonald came over to interview me, and was soon making plans to meet me the next day up river to take pictures and introduce me to Snorri.

I slept well that night, and in the morning, mailed my snowshoes home before setting off up the road to Fort Ransom. I still wore my winter boots (the ones with no support) and after yesterday's march into town on hard-surfaced road my feet had been sore. As I crossed the Sheyenne once again and began following

the dirt road along the river, my left foot was suddenly shot with pain. Somewhere in the inner bones of the foot I was paying for wearing my winter boots too long. I was supposed to meet Lisa 14 miles away in Fort Ransom by four o'clock. I knew I wasn't going to make it.

Sure enough, after ten miles of limping along the pretty road, Lisa drove up. I hopped in, and we drove through Fort Ransom and up to the little farm of Snorri Thorfinnson. He and his wife welcomed us in, and we chatted over cake and coffee before Snorri took us on a guided tour of the Fort Ransom area. It was a beautiful ride with some stunning views of the valley. Once again I was being taken by surprise by the hills and vistas of North Dakota. Snorri's farm itself, with sheep roaming the rolling pasture, with its big pine trees, could have been any farm in Vermont or New Hampshire. Totally unlike the North Dakota I had pictured.

Later, Lisa drove me back to the point she had met me, and after a few pictures I started up again toward Fort Ransom. My foot was still sore but the incentive was enough to help dull the pain. A tractor laced back and forth across a nearby field, and I stopped to talk to the young beauty driving it. She and her sister walked me down the road to show me where I could camp. It turned out to be a section owned by the Sheyenne State Forest. North Dakota State Forest? You bet.

After a wonderful night with Aurora Borealis (the northern lights,) I set out on the morning of April 1st with my lame foot feeling a bit better, but still aching. A few miles brought me to the village of Fort Ransom. It's a quaint little settlement and was founded in 1878. The fort itself was built and occupied from 1867-1872. It was of no real significance because it was built for the protection of the railroad, but the rails were laid out miles away. There was a trading post at one time (1848 or thereabouts,) and the valley

was a fur trapper's paradise, with lots of beaver, fox, and even grizzlies.

It's an area rich in history, and not just recent history. Just off the road, is a giant mound of earth with a statue of an imposing Viking looking out over the valley. The statue was erected several years before to honor the Norwegian heritage of most of the valley's folks. But of particular interest is the mound itself. The pyramid, for that's what it is, consists of mostly natural features. Two-thirds of it has lain there as part of the earth for thousands of years. But the top one-third is all topsoil that has been hauled in. Snorri thinks this may be the oldest pyramid in the world.

The oldest trail in time, the Old Game Trail, passes nearby. This was the route used by migrating peoples as they crossed the Bering Strait and spread down into the Americas ten thousand years ago. It generally led from one water hold to another, and was still visible when the first whites came to this area. Could these people have built the Fort Ransom pyramid?

Snorri thinks so. In his book, he theorizes that as these mound builders moved farther south, they got better and better at the construction of their pyramids. This accounts for the great temples of the Mayas and other Central American civilizations.

Standing at the base of the giant mound rising up with its smooth coat of short grass, I found myself lost in thought, but thoroughly excited. On my small trek through time, I was crossing the path of history itself. The roots of entire civilizations were all there before me. As I treked west across the state I was to find all kinds of historical facts leaping at me from the lives of the people and the lay of the land. The past is very close here, very much alive. That's one of the reasons I loved it so much.

I stopped at Snorri's home again, and was ushered to the kitchen table by Mrs. Thorfinnson. Over milk and sandwiches more of the North Dakota story spilled out of Snorri. I was mesmerized. Here was a man who must be in his seventies, has been in every town in North Dakota (with a story to tell about each of them) and is a poet, author, speaker, and an all around intriguing character. He told me a number of stories, both before and during his time, and I think I could have listened to the man for days. One of the walkin' stories he told was of the early Norwegian settlers of Fort Ransom. It was nothing for them to walk down to Lisbon, buy a sack of flour, and tote it back, all in the same day! His own grandfather, after starving with his family through his first winter in Winnipeg (and losing nine of thirteen children,) walked down into North Dakota to check it out, then back to get his family. Those were the days of the foot!

Yes, it was a highlight of the trip to meet someone so full, and so blossoming with knowledge. Before I left, I was honored when Snorri presented me with one of his little books of poetry. It was a fitting memento of my meeting with the man, but even moreso, was the insight he gave me into North Dakota.

I continued up the valley road, once used by pioneers and Indians alike as they traveled the region. It was a peaceful, clear day, and I passed a number of small farms, lots of sheep, cattle, and horses. I camped that night in the Little Yellowstone Park, and the next day walked through Kathryn. My boots were supposed to be waiting for me at the Kathryn P.O., but they hadn't arrived yet. Neither had my maps for the next section of walking. My foot was nearly back to normal, and I elected to continue on to Streeter, my next stop, without the aid of detailed maps. I had a road map of North Dakota showing the main roads and railways; all I had to do was get on a section line trail and go west, judging my distance by the roads I crossed and the folks I met.

I left town on the tracks, following them through the grassy hills for a few miles before coming to a lake set in a bowl of prairie. I walked through the deserted park lining its shore, and camped that night next to Clauson Springs. It was a lonely place with barren picnic tables and silent playgrounds, and the trees that sprung up around the oasis were soon bending under a strong wind. Sometime during the night the snow joined the howling force, covering everything in white. By the next afternoon it had stopped, and the sun was again trying to reclaim its lost ground. By the time I hit the road again on the next day, the land was playing at Spring again.

As I walked straight west on a section trail, I had a tremendous feeling of historical spirit. I thought often of the men and women who had settled these open lands a mere hundred years ago, coming west without the aid of a map or trail. What had it been like? What went through their minds as they looked out across the unbroken sea of grass? What faith they must have had. What self assurance, what willpower to sacrifice the known for the unknown! They came blinded to what lay ahead, but they came just the same. Somehow I sensed their spirit, or was it the prairie's? Or were they the same?

With the exception of a couple jogs north or south, I walked directly west all day through mostly plowed land. The wind was blowing strong and cold, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for a few ducks I saw flying against the wind. They flapped and flapped, and stayed suspended in one place. There weren't many people, but many deserted farmsteads, and I laid out my bag on the floor of a tilting old barn that creaked and groaned through the night.

The next day I hiked into the dying town of Montpelier. There were many deserted buildings, but the two saloons seemed to be doing a thriving business. I stopped for a cold one at the Circle 13 Saloon, a beautiful bar with many stuffed animals ranging the walls, and as I scanned the collection, my eyes did

a double take. No! But yes, it was! A very famous animal throughout the west, the jackalope! I'd heard of these comical animals of myth decorating the western saloons, but it was the first I'd ever seen. Sure enough, it was the head of a jack rabbit with the horns of an antelope. Now who said they don't exist?

I slept in another old barn that night, and toward the end of the next day's hike I found myself on the tracks again, west of Gackle, N.D. I had walked over 24 miles through another perfect day, and was ready for a good night's sleep. Stretching out under the stars, the tall, dry grass was like a mattress beneath me. Slowly the night came on and the stars spilled over the heavens. I found it hard to get to sleep, wanting to gaze into the sparkling showcase above, but gradually my eyelids caved in. I slept great.

In the norning I was up and walking the tracks before the sun had risen into the sky. Frost still covered the fields, and the briskness in the air pushed me on at a strong, keep-me-warm pace. I don't know if you're as guilty as I, but I had pictured North Dakota as being dry and dusty. I soon revised my opinion as I passed one lake after another. Later, when I got my detailed maps for this stretch, it showed the area to be covered with a myriad of little lakes. Of course, with this observation came another. The number of waterfowl was tremendous. I've never seen so many birds. I learned later that I was crossing the main migration path for Canadian-bound birds.

I was passing one small lake that morning when I scared up two mallards. They took off on the wing, but I noticed the four coots sharing the same water didn't seem too concerned. It seems there were three males and a female, and the males were obviously interested in only one thing. Thoroughly absorbed in their courtship rites, they took no heed to my presence and tried to impress the lady

with their macho dashes across the water. One of the guys was already on the good side, and seemed to be able to get closer to the gal than the others. She would peck and nip at him, but typical male that he is, he kept coming back for more. As I started up again the two unsuccessful suitors took flight. A couple minutes later the two lovers took off, flying over a distant ridge where I hope they lived happily ever after!

Several more miles brought me to Streeter, and I walked into the quiet town, passing the school and neat little homes. At a Methodist church a sign read: "Attend service now. Avoid the Easter rush!" I liked the town right away..

Like most towns in North Dakota, the town was built on a railroad track. Many of the towns were built before the tracks were actually laid, but on a location where they knew it would come. In some instances, if the tracks were laid in a different direction, the town would pick up and move to the tracks. That will give you some idea of how important the railways were in settling the West.

Streeter was founded in 1905 at the end of a spur line of the Northern Pacific. It's evident that it used to be a much busier town. There are a few empty businesses, a sign of the times for many towns like Streeter in the state. But the folks are still a lively sort, and the people showed me how friendly folks could be. Postmaster, Harold Bachman, treated me to lunch at the Senior Citizen Center, and I met carrier, Albert Zinck, and scores of other friendly folks. The couple who ran the town's only hotel were out of town for the day, so as I waited I hit the town's laundermat. Several folks stopped in to say hello and wish me luck, and later that night I stopped at Joe's Tavern and had a few with the banker, the school principal, and the friendly barkeep.

The conversation drifted from my trip, to local beers, to the Navy, to the Lion's Club, to the town idiot, to all kinds of simple things that I missed hearing talked about. I was made to feel so welcome by everyone I ran into, I began to think the town must be another Brigadoon.

In the morning, I took one more look at Main Street and with a silent thankyou set out on a paved road going west. The gravel took over after four miles, and Albert drove by on his rural route, stopping to give a few more encouraging words. I turned north towards the day's destination, Lake George, known to the local folks as Salt Lake, and felt so good I thought I'd burst. The day was clear, the country beautifully brown under the warm sun. I ran into Al Moos whom I'd met in town, and was invited to dinner. He agreed to come get me at the lake about five-thirty. I continued along, singing my way over the prairie. I turned west about a mile from the lake, and was just in time to see a freshly born calf being licked dry by its mother. The little thing struggled to stand, but wasn't doing a very good job, and the mother watched me warily until I set off toward the lake.

Now, I've mentioned the many lakes in the area, but up to now they had been very small bodies of water. When I crested a hill and looked out over Lake George, the sight was breathtakingly beautiful. Like a jewel set in the prairie, the bluest of waters glistened under the sun, standing out brightly against the golden brown hills. A couple miles across, the egg-shaped lake and its valley offered a panorama of solitude and drew me to a long halt.

Later, I moved down to the deserted park on the lake's south shore, and I couldn't resist testing the water. It had a very strange taste, not really salty but chocked full of a mineral of some kind. After a moment of deliberation, I decided to try a little wading. Off came the shoes and socks, and into the clear water I stepped. Very quickly I was out! C-C-Cold! I wondered if the white

stuff I saw on the other side of the lake was ice. After all, it was only April 8th. I walked along the shore and let my feet enjoy the freedom from their heavy boots, and then started playing a little game with myself. The object was to see how many steps I could take in the water before jumping out in pain. Twelve was the limit!

I spent a couple hours dozing in the sun (if it sounds like I did a lot of that, it's because I did! It's a favorite pastime,) and was shocked out of the silent world when Al drove up with his son, James. We piled into the battered ol' pick-up truck and rolled over the dirt roads several miles to their home. It was a grand ride. The mood was so classic, so typical of the whole region, bouncing over dusty roads with the sun tilting toward the horizon, the shadows getting longer, and the grass rolling forever in each direction. That was North Dakota in a nutshell. But was it? Well, perhaps part of North Dakota in a small nutshell!

Lydia Moos proved to be quite a cook, and we feasted on roast goose and duck, rice, salad, and wine. But if the food was great, the company was better. Later, they drove me back to the lake under a starry sky, and as I stood in the darkness and watched the lights of the truck bounce away and fade, the quiet night engulfed me. I slept well on a picnic table under a little awning, and was awakened in the greying dawn by the hoot of an owl sitting on one of the nearby tables.

I was walking by one of the many lakes of the day, seeing a lot of cranes, geese, and ducks, when I glanced over and saw several large white birds. My eyes nearly popped! I did a double-take. They were pelicans! Pelicans in North Dakota! Now I must seem a total idiot to some of you folks, but I just never pictured the pelican as a bird of the prairie. I've always thought of

them as sea birds. It was definitely an eye opener, but North Dakota wasn't finished with me.

I camped that night on the grassy plain north of Long Lake, a mile from the Long Lake Wildlife Refuge. For the first several miles of the new day I headed southwest on a compass bearing through the boundless grass. By now I was expert at barbed-wire fences, so I had no trouble with the five or six I hurdled that morning. I saw four deer leap over the things like they weren't even there, but it took me a while longer.

I noticed my first spring flowers that day, little yellow buttercups and blue crocuses. It seemed like spring. But I spoke too soon. When I hit the road again, the wind was picking up, blowing cold and strong against me. It felt like winter again, and I learned later the gusts were from 30-48 MPH.

I ran into more folks that day. Dan Matz waved me into his farmyard as I passed by, and I met his wife, Kathi,and two sons John and Jason, six year old twins. I spent a fun night at their place and set out again. For 35 miles, covering parts of three days of hiking, I was on the same sectionline heading straight-as-a-crow-flies-west. It was good going, alternating between isolated fence line, tractor trail, dirt road, and, as I got closer to Bismarck, hardrock pavement.

About 12 miles east of the state capitol I turned onto a tractor trail and pitched my tent in a secluded field. The wind had died and the sun set in an orange glow. I turned in as the last light still lingered, and was startled to hear the hum of a motor coming down the trail. The car stopped outside my tent, and I stuck out my head. An equally startled voice broke the quiet. "By golly, I thought it was a space ship at first!"

The bright red "spacey" form of my tent had caught the attention of Ken Dopler, a local farmer, and he had driven out to see what had landed on his land. We were soon talking like old friends, and just before he left, he pulled out a big ham sandwich and handed it to me. There was something about people out there that just made them want to give some part of themselves, to give a helping hand. I don't think it was me, or my unusual adventure; it was a way they'd been brought up. They were raised on the gift of sharing and helping their neighbor. It's just the way they were, like the open land itself.

I walked the roads into Bismarck in the morning. The transition to the city was an ugly one, passing from the open grass to crowded trailer parks and the foreboding walls of the State Penitentiary. Once in town, I ended up staying three restless days waiting for my maps to arrive for the next leg of the walk. It was a lonely time; in the rush of the city no one had time to talk. I visited the state museum, the capitol building, and numerous bars, but something wasn't there. I just didn't fit in.

The maps finally arrived, and I left town one cloudy day and soon came to a large bridge. The muddy Missouri River swirled by underneath, and I slipped the pack off and watched the mean current whisk by. The murky green water was a highway of history. I let my mind drift . . .

On Crossing the Missouri

The bridge I walked was more than steel,
A bridge through Time was more the deal.
The old Missouri swirled below,
And I stopped halfway to watch the flow.

The water, a brown-green tea,
Flowed and rolled down towards the sea,
Like a living thing I watched it rove,
While through my mind, the years it wove.

A sudden far-off thunder brewed
Yet, the sky was clear, and the rumbling grew,
The earth shook as over the hills
A wave of brown seemed to spill.

On and on the buffalo came,
Thousands upon thousands filled the flood plain,
And into the current they wildly pressed,
Swimming the river and heading West.

The sun set, and set again
Before the plains were quiet again.
I shook myself with interest new
As a red man, along the banks, came into view.

He gave a sign, and the women appeared
With a boat of skins, for the river they steered,
In this "bull boat" of buffalo they showed their skill
As for the opposite shore they calmly drilled.

They had vanished, when out in the deep,
A keel boat came northward, slow on the sweep.
The crew decked in buckskin, crowded the ark,
And I knew it had to be Lewis and Clark.

I gave a Whoop and a wave, they didn't seem to see,
But the wonder in their eyes was clear to me,
And they rounded the bend with a sureness that told
Of the story they knew would soon be told.

There was a scream, a piercing wail
That filled the prairie, hill and dale,
And turning south, I saw the smoke
And heard the engines throbbing stroke.

Into view a steamboat pressed,
Carrying the breakers of progress west.
Trappers, and traders, and soldiers they came
Leading the way across the plains.

On up the river to Fort Union they passed,
And I turned to the east and saw the flash
Of sunlight on steel, as hammers drove down,
And rail after rail was laid westward bound.

I heard the curses and saw the sweat
As backs bent hard and fast, but yet
The western stretch of Eastern foil
Took year on year of back-broke toil.

And as the rails passed me by,
And the years flew to the blink of an eye,
I saw new faces from the east,
A flow that ebbed, but never ceased.

These stalwart souls, on they came,
Across the oceans to this land untamed,
With foreign tounges they made do, and passed
Through a strange but ripe land, new and vast.

They rode the trains as far as they'd carry,
And set out afoot across the prairie.
Some led wagons, some hefted packs
Others, only the clothes on their backs.

They blew like dust all through the land
And left their bones to mark their stand
But they made a place to sink their roots,
A bridge of sweat, a land of fruit.

A cold breeze and traffic snapped through the Time,
And I stood Today and scratched my mind,
Wondering who will stand here a century from now
Watching America wave and take a bow.

And so, I watched the story of the land unfold before me in the mighty river. When I moved on, I felt like a sailor crossing the equator for the first time. I was "across the wide Missouri," just like the song! The terrain would be more rolling, and cattle would be much more evident in this country. I was excited as a school boy out for his summer vacation, and I zipped down the road.

From the city of Mandan, I turned south, walking through a twenty minute rain shower, and getting great views of the river and distant Bismarck. The capitol building, the skyscraper of the prairie, was visible with its 19 stories,

and it could be seen for miles. I arrived at the Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park and spent the next couple days exploring the area as rain came and went.

Fort Lincoln was originally established as Fort McKeen in 1872, but the name was changed a few months later. It was built primarily to protect the working parties of the Northern Pacific Railroad, but General Custer used it as a base for his ill-fated and ill-advised ventures.

One evening when the rain had stopped, and the clouds were still blossoming under a setting sun, I walked up to the top of the ridge overlooking the river. The grass faded into the west, a soft, unbroken carpet, and the river roamed like a twisting silver road below me to the east. There was a reconstructed blockhouse and I climbed about in it for awhile before descending to the old site of the fort itself. All that remained were the foundations of various houses and barracks. The shadows from the stone lept across the blanket of golden grass. It was a ghostly place, and I could almost hear the sound of reveille and the pound of six hundred horses being lined up on parade. A hawk swooped by, and I headed back to my tent.

It rained throughout the next day, and I spent most of the day in the shelter of the earthen lodges of the Mandan Indians. In 1938, excavations revealed the remains of 70-80 lodges over an eight acre site. It had been occupied for nearly a hundred years, and abandoned around 1750.

Five of the lodges had been reconstructed, and I walked among them, sitting out a number of showers during the day in the dry confines of their walls. They were amazing bits of architecture. Dome shaped, the structure's roof was laid out like a big wheel. The spokes were logs, covered with a matting of twigs which was covered with a layer of earch. At the top of the lodge, about ten feet above the cookfire, a hole was left to let the smoke escape. From the outside they looked like giant gopher mounds or little

volcanoes.

They appeared to be comfortable places, and I could feel the ghosts of the old men telling stories by the fire, the women working on a buffalo hide in the shadows. If it was night, the man would have his horse in the lodge with him. If it was raining, the family bull boat, made from the skins of buffalo, would be over the cook hole. I sat on the dry earthen floor in a doorway, looking out at the pounding rain. A thin line of water was slowly working its way into the powdery, sheltered dust. What had happened to the Mandans? They were like the dust under the flood of the whites, swept into the past and swallowed by a new age.

After a drenching night, the world looked half drowned when dawn broke through the clouds the next day. It was a down-jacket of a day, and I fought a freezing wind blasting directly out of the west. Never have I known such wind as in Dakota. Almost always blowing, the zephyr was known to drive some early settlers crazy with its sometimes humanlike singing and whispering. On the windy days I could always depend on being shoved off the road sometime during the day by the rushing unseen hand, as if it just couldn't wait for me to step out of its way!

On this day, I found the wind exceptionally strong. I bent double, and was still brought to a standstill on occasion. My pack didn't help. It acted like a sail, catching the wind and pulling me east. To add to my snail's pace was the wet earth. Along the more isolated section trail, the mud was deep and stuck to my boots in big clods. I felt like I was walking on elevated shoes of lead!

By late afternoon things were going a bit better, but the wind was still numbing my face with its wintery blast. Hadn't anyone told the wind this was Spring? A young man stopped his truck, going the opposite way, and asked what I was doing. He talked awhile and left, but a few miles later he and his brother pulled up with a lunch their mother had packed up after hearing about my venture.

I jumped into the cab of the truck and dug in, while Wayne and Gary Haugen, both of high school age, plugged me with questions.

After thanking the boys profusely, I headed on again. The land had become more hilly, but I was totally unprepared for the sight as I reached a high point overlooking the Heart River Valley. Magnificence would be an understatement. The river snaked through the broken hills four hundred feet lower than the ground where I stood. The hills themselves were cut into sharp gullies and washes, like some huge hand had dug its claws through the bare earth. I descended the little dirt road and took a truck trail south a short ways to a spot the boys had told me about. Here I made camp with the river rolling nearby, and the grassy, contorted hills surrounding me.

Easter Sunday, April 18, 1976 proved to be the best Easter I've ever spent. I decided since it was a holiday and I was in such a perfect spot, I'd spend the day right where I was. It was cold and still windy, so I pulled out a book and was reading when a pick-up truck bounced over the hill. It was Gary Haugen with his father, Kenny. They had been thinkin' about me, and invited me over to their place for Easter dinner.

We were soon back at the Haugen home, nearly 3,000 acres spread out on the North Dakota hills. Kenny's wife, Rose, had fixed a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, and with all the kids (Wayne, Gary, Laurie, and Steve) Rose and Ken, Ken's brother, Art, and their Grandpa, I dug in with gusto. After the meal, Kenny, Gary and I drove out to check the calves.

The word "cute" is a dainty kind of word, but in this case it fits. Calves are just plain, down and out cute. They haven't lost that curious look yet, and they flit about on their legs like they're going to fall any minute. As we bumped through the calfin' pasture in the truck, Kenny explained that this was a good year for calves. Last year hadn't been, and they'd lost nearly 50 cows.

Like many farmers today, Kenny finds it necessary to take work outside the farm to make ends meet. He was leaving on a truck run to Duluth that afternoon. As he and Steve left, I bid them all farewell, and Gary drove me back to my camp on the Heart River. I was deeply moved by their kindness. They'd shared a very special time of year with a total stranger, and a rather grubby looking one at that! My list of North Dakota friends was starting to fill pages.

The day had cleared and calmed somewhat by the time I again found myself alone. I hiked up into the hills through hundreds of blue crocuses, and scrambled up a rocky spire. Cactus grew scattered among the rocks. I found the wind still blowing strong up there, but couldn't resist the view it offered. The land was a hodge-podge of up and down, gentle curves and sharp cuts. The clouds racing through the sky sent shadows playing over the hillsides and dipping to the twisting river. My tent, a mere speck of red amidst the yellow of the grass, was surrounded by brown dots I knew to be cattle, grazing lazily in the sheltered lee of the hill. It was a scene of perfection, and I realized that once again I'd found one of those undescribable treasures that make the walk and all life worthwhile.

Back at the tent, I picked up my pen again, and these words fell together:

Chasing Rainbows

As foot on foot lead into miles
Of dusty roads and wayward whiles,
I've rambled on and grasped of Life
And found the truth that hides in strife.

I've heard the wisdom of untold men
And shared a smile now and then,
And sang the songs that need be sung
And from all I have some reason wrung.

Yet, still I know there's something more
That years can't fathom nor memory store;
It's the wordless, in a world of diction,
The dreams of fact built on fiction.

Some gather gold and find it nought,
It's the source of dreams and cannot be bought.
It's the nameless product with a topless price,
Yet some buy it once, some even twice.

Poor is the man who never seeks,
For without the search the find is weak.
Thus is the question that I've found
And I'm well on my way -- Answer bound.

I hit the road again in the morning, crossing the river and climbing out of the valley. Clouds scuttled along the horizon, framing the weird shaped hills, and scattering the light in intermittent waves across the fields. Fifteen miles brought me into the town of Almont. I hadn't planned on stopping, but I had a few things to mail and detoured into the little town around lunch-time. For being an unexpected guest, I was sure made welcome. Most of the folks recognized me from an article in the Bismarck paper, and though I forgot to write down names, they were all very friendly. One man bought me lunch, and later as dark thunderheads rushed over the plain, I accepted a few drinks set up in the local saloon.

When I did move on, it was through a world smelling as fresh and as alive as the day it was born. The rains had thoroughly soaked the road, and I slipped along under spectacular clouds. At one point, the setting sun broke through the dark lining and lit up a patch of prairie like it was on fire. The effect was

enough to make my mouth drop. It was like a scene out of the Wizard of Oz. You know, when Dorothy is running down the road and the tornado is coming.

In the clear skies of morning, I could see the outline of Heart Butte ten miles away. It rose like a medieval tower out of the boundless plains. I spent the first half of the day getting to it, walking on a section trail and passing a number of old soddies in ruin. An oldtimer stopped to talk for awhile, and I realized that most people out here were much more conscious of history. The common man is very knowledgable about the history of the land he lives in. The old man pointed to some piles of stone and told me, "That used to be the post office. Served folks for miles around. Why, I remember getting my first ice-cream cone there. Cost my Pa three cents."

I gradually approached the Butte, finding the country around it for several miles, a series of plowed fields. Cutting across the neat furrows, I climbed the rough, sharp rock, and was soon looking down on what seemed to be the whole of North Dakota. Wheat fields, grasslands, and cut bank hills spread over the earth. To the south, I could see Lake Tschida, formed by the Heart River Dam. The rock itself was covered with bright orange lichen and made for a perfect spot to have lunch. I pulled out my cheese and french bread; all that was missing was the wine.

A few days later, I was working my way slowly west, and darkness was approaching. I had been doing a lot of cross-country travel the past couple days, so I turned off the road and climbed a fence, ignoring the No Trespassing sign. Who was going to be out there to see me? No one would ever even know I had passed. I got water from a well, and started walking north along a little creek.

As I walked along, a teenage boy on a horse came riding down on me. I smiled and said hi, but he wasn't too sure about me and looked up to where a

pickup was barreling over a hill toward us. Over another hill another boy, a couple years younger was running up. By now, I knew I was going to have some explaining to do, and when I saw the non-too-happy-looking guy in the pick-up, all I could think of were those little prizes the cows were leaving all over the fields for me to step in. (Oh, shit!)

His first words were, "What are you doin' out in my calfin' pasture?" He was obviously angry, and he thrust his big round face at me. He was a short man, but you could see that he was all muscle, and for those first uneasy minutes I thought he was going to grab me. I was trying my best to keep cool, but was at a loss for words. I stuttered out something about walking across the country, and that I was just looking for a place to set up my tent for the night.

"I don't believe you," he growled. "Let me see some I.D."

I took off my pack and fumbled through the pockets, looking for my wallet. Digging out my diver's license and handing it to him, I said, "My name is Jim Stoltz."

He looked like I'd just hit him. "What?!"

"I said, my name is Jim Stoltz." What had I said that was so shocking? He looked at me in disbelief.

With an almost sheepish grin he said, "You can't be Jim Stoltz. That there is Jim Stoltz!" And he pointed to the youngest of the two boys.

I couldn't help the grin that grew on my face, nor the laughter that welled up and came rolling out. In a moment we were all enjoying the joke that life had played on us. Leo Stoltz, with his sons Edward and Jim (no relation) were soon explaining that they had been having trouble with rustlers, but I was welcome to camp on their land. The Stoltz home was five or six miles away, and they

invited me to stop by the next day. I was soon alone, and thanking my stars for the name I bore.

In the frosty, clear morning I cut across a few plowed fields and climbed up the most western of the two Dobson Buttes. It was a steep hike up to the top, and the view was a might hazy, but being high above the grass-lands was worth it. The top of the butte itself was flat and hard as could be, and the wind shot over it like a gale. I noticed the local kids had been busy. Stones had been piled to form the four letters of a one word love poem. I wonder how much effort had gone into it, and how many pilots flying over had appreciated it.

A few more miles brought me to the Stoltz spread and I met most of Leo's 14 kids! (With that many, one of them had to be a Jim.) We were sitting at the table when the phone rang, and a neighbor asked Leo if he'd seen a strange man walking around! He smiled and said, "Yeah, he's sittin' right here. He's my brother!" We had a good laugh, but the best part was yet to come. The story spilled out. Several people had spotted me wandering across the pastures and had called the sheriff. Unable to locate me, the sheriff saw it as a good chance to try out the newly formed Stark County Ground Search and Rescue Team. With one call from Sheriff Faller, there were folks on horseback and C.B. equipped cars and trucks searching throughout the area, looking for the lost mystery man last seen hiking over the Buttes.

Well, we really had a laugh then, and soon the sheriff drove up. He looked a bit embarrassed about the whole thing, and we gave him one of my news-clippings which he took back and read over the radio. The posse was called off.

Two days later, I was walking into Belfield on what is knownlocally, as the Old Red Trail. It was appropriate that I walk a short ways on this road.

It was the first road to reach from coast to coast, long before Highway 10 and I-94. Again, my maps hadn't arrived, so I got a room in the town's hotel. It turned out to be a most welcome delay.

I wandered down to the Fort Houston Museum. The raggety building stands on a corner on Main street, and if you didn't know it was there you'd never find it. I walked in, finding the little building bulging with relics of the Old West. Every nook and cranny (and then some) was filled with history. The place was run by a wiry little man with big cowboy boots. A cigar hung constantly from his mouth as he answered my many questions. Duane Indergaard quickly became a self-appointed guide, and for the next day and a half drove me around the countryside filling me with one story after another. He was a walking history book, and the land came alive with the tales he spun of the early days.

When I left one morning for the Badlands, I was never so totally aware of an area before getting to it. We had driven through it, talked of its geologic wonders, its history, and with all of the preliminaries my expectations had grown. With long, purposeful steps I marched into the west wind, straining for a glimpse of the rugged canyons of the Badlands.