ALONG THE SHORES OF ROSSIGNOL

The flowage of the hydro-electric power dam, No.1 on the Mersey River, has greatly changed the face of nature in the lakes above. You have to look at one of Faribault's maps to see the lake country as it was. First Lake, Second Lake, Rossignol, Yeaton Lake, Fourth Lake, Fifth Lake, Lowe's Lake -- these are all one now. The old divisions between them are still marked (1959) in many places by dead tree-tops protruding from the flood. When you navigate "The Big Lake" (as woodsmen call it) today in a motor boat you have to watch for these bristling shoals which once were dry land. The Big Lake contains roughly one hundred square miles of water and drowned forest; its shores are irregular and ill defined, due to the rise and fall of the stored water as the seasons pass; and their old time beauty is spoiled by what appears at a distance as a grey cliff extending all about the shores, and is in fact a wall of dead trees.

The lake is perhaps ten miles across at its widest. It is the largest body of fresh water in Nova Scotia. Rossignol was always the biggest of the lakes, and on modern maps this name is given to the whole flooded area. The Indians called Rossignol "git-che-ho-spem", which means The Big Lake, and that is what woodsmen call it still -- The Big Lake.

First Lake ("Panook" to the Indians, a name given to the first lake on any river, hence such variations as Banook, Ponhook, Panuke, etc. in other parts of Nova Scotia) is just that. From its foot at Indian Gardens the Mersey River poured away 15 miles to the sea. This lake extended northwards two miles from the Gardens. Then, above a short "run", it opened into Second Lake, which was called Kes-kus-ok-tek by the Indians, meaning "A wide flat stone". Second lake was L-shaped. The short fat foot ran two miles eastward. Its island-dotted shank ran northward nearly 4 miles. Second Lake was always a trial to voyageurs because its long irregular bays and coves exposed it to the sweep of the four winds and often made passage dangerous for canoes. (On wide Rossignol you expected that,

of course; Second Lake was so much smaller that you were always surprised by the size of the waves coming out of one of the bays.)

At the south-east end of Second Lake, just before the "run" into First Lake, there was a bit of shore known to the woodsmen as "Missus Howe's Shore". It has a curious history. During the late 1880's an American woman named Mrs. Howe arrived in Liverpool with a man named White. She announced that she had had a strange dream. She dreamed that she was in a northern country of lakes and forest, and that on the shore of one of the lakes she dug and found a chest full of gold coins. She dreamed it several times, and the place was always the same. One night she walked in her sleep, got out a map of Canada, and stabbed it with a pin. The pin was still there the next morning, stuck in the heart of western Nova Scotia. By careful reference and measuring, with the aid of her friend Mr. White, and using large scale maps, she had tracked down the dream-site. It was on one of the Mersey lakes, and she knew the exact spot.

All of this may have been an elaborate disguise for a gold-prospecting expedition. Gold had been discovered in the Caledonia region of Queens County by ~~one Nappier in~~ 1884, and already there was a mining boom there, with prospectors coming from all directions, some from as far as ~~Colorado~~ Mexico. Caledonia was flourishing, and Mr. Banks had come from Annapolis with a small printing press in a wagon, and set up a newspaper called The Caledonia Gold Hunter. At this time, too, an Indian named Jim Charles, who lived on the shore of Lake Kejumkujik, was believed to have found a rich deposit of alluvial gold somewhere in the region. He kept the spot a secret, panning a little of the gold at a time, and selling it to the bank in Annapolis. (See my notes on Jim Charles and his "gold mine")

The speech, manners and dress of Mrs. Howe were those of a woman who had spent much time in the rude society of American mining camps. Richard Paterson of Caledonia, aged about 80, in the year 1940 told me that he remembered Mrs. Howe very well, and that his brother was foreman of the workmen she hired for the

fantastic "treasure hunt" at Second Lake.

I quote from Paterson:- " She was a middle-aged woman, very ugly, and half mad. She would throw herself into a trance anywhere, kneeling or sitting down, with the head bowed forward and her hands over her face. She declared that 'voices came to her out of the eastern hemisphere', and these voices told her where to dig. Her companion was an elderly man, an American named White, who apparently put up the money for the search. He seemed completely under her spell. Together they spent two years, off and on, hunting for gold on the shore of Second Lake. They came to Liverpool first, hired a team and drove to Caledonia with a box full of dynamite rattling in the back of the wagon. Caledonia became their headquarters for hiring workmen and buying supplies. They used to hire teams in Caledonia, drive to Sixteen Mile on the Liverpool road, turn down the tote road to Indian Gardens. There they hired one or two of the loggers' boats and rowed up to Second Lake. They and their workmen camped in tents on what's called Mrs. Howe's Shore, and they dug pits in various places there. In Caledonia she wore women's clothes; but on the job she wore a man's shirt and trousers and knee-high leather boots. She smelt very bad, and nobody liked to be close to her inside a tent. One day she came ~~skrieking~~ striding away from the brushwood privy they had built behind the camp. She said to the men, as casual as could be, "I'm troubled with a fistula in my behind. It runs all the time." After the second season at Second Lake she and White went back to the States and never showed up here again."

George Banks, editor and proprietor of the Caledonia Gold Hunter, confirmed Paterson's description of Mrs. Howe. "She was a stocky, swarthy person, more like a man than a woman, and she usually wore men's clothing and boots."

The only thing Mrs. Howe's workmen found was a number of Indian arrowheads made of stone, lying in one place by the shore. She carried them off with her when she left.

So much for "Missus Howe's Shore". The opposite shore of Second Lake, i.e. the part running westward from the mouth of East Brook, was known to the woodsmen as the Turning-lathe Shore. A number of sharp-edged rocks stood like teeth along this shore. Now and then a drift log, abandoned by the drivers, was caught against these rocks by the prevailing wind. The waves bobbed the log up and down and the rock edges cut deep grooves in the wood. As the log slowly revolved, the grooves completely encircled it, so that in a few months it looked as if it had been in a carpenter's turning-lathe. Hence the nickname for this shore.

Just to the west of Second Lake, and joined to it by a short bushy brook, lay Yeaton (pronounced Yetten) Lake, a much smaller body of water. It was a favorite camping place for moose hunters like myself. It would be interesting to know how many big bulls have been lured into the open bog west of this lake, and shot from the ridge of rock behind the tenting place.

To Yeaton Lake, just after World War One, came an American lady author named Emma Lindsay Squier. She wanted to write a book on the Canadian wilds, and at Liverpool she engaged Captain Laurie Mitchell, a former British Army officer and an enthusiastic sportsman who knew the Queens County woods like a book. Mitchell arranged a camping expedition by canoe to Yeaton Lake, taking with him his daughter Madge as company for Miss (or Mrs?) Squier. Afterwards Emma published a book called "On Autumn Trails", giving highly fanciful word-pictures of the Mersey timberland and its bird and animal life. For good measure she threw in some "Indian legends" which she invented herself.

At the north tip of Second Lake was a sheltered round cove which led to the waters of Rossignol. From its shape the woodsmen called it The Hopper, because it resembled the wooden trough of an oldfashioned grist mill. This place was a boon to drivers bringing booms of logs down the lakes. It made a safe and convenient harbor for the logs, and a snug camping place for the drivers. Here they could "wait out" a gale before venturing across Second Lake. The Hopper was

screened from all winds by the surrounding hardwood knolls. On the south side was a small conical hill, whose top still protrudes above the present flowage level. This hill was known to the Indians as"Ne-ga-je-go-a-gwom". The Micmacs of my own day still called it that, but could not explain what it meant. The tradition is that it was the scene of a fight between the Micmacs at Indian Gardens and a marauding party of "Kwedech", i.e. Mohawks. This, and other Micmac legends of war with the Mohawks, are hard to explain, as the Mohawks were an Iroquois tribe with hunting grounds far away in the region of Lake Champlain. So far as we know, they never venturing ventured so far to the east as Nova Scotia, and they would have had to cross a wide expanse inhabited by various hostile tribes before they even reached the Bay of Fundy. My guess is that these legends arose from warfare with Gorham's Rangers in the period 1744-58. Gorham recruited his rangers in New England's backwoods, and they included a number of half-breed and full-blooded Mohawks. For some years they were posted at Annapolis, whence they made raids against the Micmacs and presumably collected the British bounty for every scalp they brought back.

see back of this sheet

I have searched the hill at The Hopper for arrowheads etc., but found nothing. In 1929, when the lakes were very low, and when hydro-electric power dams were being built on the Mersey River, a party of woodsmen found on the muddy shore of The Hopper a stone pestle weighing between five and ten pounds. It was of granite, smoothly polished, with a hole bored in the top, presumably for a wooden handle which had long since rotted away. They threw it into the water. It may have been an Indian relic; if so it was the only thing of its kind found in Nova Scotia to my knowledge.

As your canoe emerged from the up-stream end of The Hopper you saw before you the wide expanse of Rossignol, stretching away to the north and west, with a long bay called Alec's Bay running to the south. This bay was named for Alec Harlow, a Caledonia lumberman who owned timberland there. The Indians of my

Note re "The Hopper"

In the spring and summer of 1964 a severe drought lowered the level of Lake Rossignol and the adjoining waters, exposing many places flooded by the storage dam at Indian Gardens. In August of that year James Harding of Milton, and a companion, went up the lake from Indian Gardens and landed on an exposed strip of land on the south side of The Hopper at its eastern entrance. Formerly this had formed a point, tipped by large rocks, just where the waters of Rossignol flowed into the upper tip of Second Lake. Harding and companion, on stepping out of their boat, found themselves in the midst of an ancient camp site which had extended along the shore of the ancient "Hopper Run" for about 150 yards.

The water raised by the Indian Gardens dam in 1929 had covered the place and gradually washed away the turf and loam, exposing hundreds of stone chippings and arrowheads, etc. They picked up 80 arrowheads, some spear heads, and various other stone tools and objects. They camped there for two days and searched the site thoroughly.

In September 1964 Victor Scobey of Liverpool went up the lake from Indian Gardens and searched the Hopper site for Indian relics. Harding and his companion had been very thorough in their search however, and Scobey found little left except a great litter of stone chippings.

Exploring further, he found chippings on the north side of The Hopper at the point where Lake Rossignol entered it, although not in great quantity. Scobey then went across Lake Rossignol to the spit of land called The Screecher, between Rossignol and Fourth Lake. Long flooded, it was now exposed. He found chippings on both sides of the old "Screecher Run" where Fourth Lake emptied into Lake Rossignol. No great quantity however. Also he found evidence of a small camp site (chippings) on the south tip of what was formerly Long Island, near the old west shore of Rossignol about a mile N.E. of The Screecher. Amongst the objects he found at the Hopper was a spear head of whitish stone about 8 inches long and about 3½ inches wide at the bulge of the typical leaf shape. It had been made by chipping and "pecking".

All this evidence in worked stone shows that the camp site at The Hopper was used by a considerable number of people, and for a long time. It is the richest find of artifacts since the discoveries at Indian Gardens after 1929.

day called it Glee-gway-alek. With the flowage created by No.1 dam in 1929 it is now possible to take a motorboat through the drowned trees from Alec's Bay to Second Lake. If you steer a S.W. course across Rossignol from The Hopper you come to a place called The Screecher, the outlet of a chain of small lakes -- Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Silver Lake and Coade's Lake -- which empty into Rossignol from the west.

The Screecher was a beautiful place in the old days, a low spit of land separating Fourth Lake from Rossignol, with the stream flowing past its tip. It was a favorite camping place for hunters, with an ancient clearing and a scatter of graves shaded by big beech and birch trees. These burial mounds were mostly Indian, made within historic times. (The ancient Micmacs were too afraid of ghosts to bury their dead beside a camping place.)

Levi "Guy" Minard, of Milton, had a crew of loggers at Fourth Lake in the 1880's. One of his men was Richard Paterson of Caledonia. I knew both of them when they were old men. I was tracking down the origin of the Screecher legend and they gave me the following information.

Minard's crew were camped on the spit, waiting for a fair wind to take a boom of logs across Rossignol to The Hopper. A gale held them there several days, and for want of amusement some of them decided to dig in one of the burial mounds. In the grave they found nothing but the skull and thigh bones of what must have been a very tall man, judging from the length of the bones. They put the skull and bones back and refilled the grave. These relics were undoubtedly the remains of a white man, for the Micmacs were a stocky people. (see back of this sheet).

A few years later an American scientist came to Milton. He was seeking Micmac skulls for study, and they were hard to find. The ancient Micmacs hid their burials with such care that few have been found in Nova Scotia. The burials usually found are those of Indians who died within historic times, when there was a notable mixture of white blood. Levi Minard told him about the graves at The

Note re the "giant" buried at "The ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ Screecher"

Henry D. Thoreau, in his book "The Maine Woods", describes a journey into the backwoods of Maine in the year 1846. In a footnote, speaking of the perils of a logger's life, he quotes from a Penobscot newspaper:-

" On the 11th (instant), on Rappogenes Falls, Mr. John Delantee of Orono, Maine, was drowned while running logs. He was a citizen of Orono, and was twenty-six years of age. His companions found his body, enclosed it in bark, and buried it in the solemn woods."

Screecher, and the learned man engaged guides and a canoe, went up there, and dug up the skull and the big thigh bones. He carried them off to the States, along with other skulls.

This incident started a legend of a "giant" found buried at The Screecher. Now, mark how a legend grows. People asked the modern Micmacs how The Screecher got its name. (Sam Glode told me this.) The real name of this place was Caduska. The early loggers about the lakes, never at home with Indian words, applied the name Caduska to Seventh Lake, on the stream above The Screecher. In the old days, before any storage dams were built on the river, there was a little waterfall near the camping place, where Fourth Lake flowed into Rossignol. To anyone approaching it in calm weather, especially on a still night, the sound of this waterfall was like that of a moose or some other large animal urinating into a pool. Hence the ancient Indians applied the name Kedooske, from the verb "to piss".

When curious white people asked the Indians for the meaning of Kedooske -- the whites spelled it Caduska on their timber maps -- the question was embarrassing. The Micmacs, being polite creatures, merely said that it meant "a sound."

"What kind of a sound? A loud sound?"

"Yes, a loud sound."

"You mean like someone screeching? Like a war-whoop?"

"Yes, like that."

Thus arose the name The Screecher for the pleasant little camping place at the outlet of Fourth Lake. As Sam Glode and another old Indian, John Paul, (I consulted them separately) put it to me, "Injins didn't want to say a swear word."

There was an old legend amongst the Micmacs of a maiden of their tribe taken in war by the Kwedech (Mohawks) and beloved by a Kwedech warrior. She escaped from them at Annapolis, crossed over the South Mountain to the headwaters of the Mersey River, made a crude canoe, and paddled down towards Indian Gardens. The Kwedech warrior pursued her, but on the way down the lakes she met a Micmac

hunting party, and these ambushed the Kwedech and killed him.

Not long after 1880 some romantic white applied this legend to The Screecher, though it is separated from the direct and natural canoe route to Indian Gardens by the windy width of Rossignol. Screecher became the name of the Mohawk warrior, and the Mohawk became a giant, and the tale was that a Micmac war party saw the Screecher coming down Fourth Lake, waylaid him at "Caduska" and buried him on the point. For proof there was the skull and the "huge bones" found by the loggers.

I am told that this tale appeared in print in a Queens County weekly (either the Caledonia Gold Hunter or the Liverpool Advance) many years ago; and I was shown a manuscript version of it, written in pencil, in a Queens County farmhouse. The final development of the story was made by a Caledonia girl, Grace Dean Macleod, who afterwards married Wycoff Rogers and attained some fame as a short story writer and novelist. She was the daughter of a Caledonia lumberman, who took her on a canoe trip through the lakes when she was in her teens. They camped at The Screecher and someone told her the legend of the "giant Mohawk".

Some years later Miss Macleod published her first book of short stories, "Stories of the Land of Evangeline". Included was a tale called "The Kaduskak Giant", in which she enlarged and embellished the legend considerably. For example her detailed account of the fight between the Micmacs and Mohawks at "Kaduskak" was taken almost word for word from one of Fenimore Cooper's novels. I knew Mrs. Rogers in much later years as a pleasant and witty old lady, and she autographed a copy of her book for me. Like the Micmacs, I was too polite to bring up the matter of the real meaning of "Kaduskak"; and so far as I know she had never intended any of the stories in her book to be taken for unblemished fact. Yet again and again I have heard the story of the Kaduskak Giant recited as a genuine Indian legend, with Mrs. Rogers' book quoted as the authority.

About 1910 a wealthy American named Frankenberg bought the point of land at The Screecher, hired carpenters in Caledonia, freighted materials by boat from

Lowe's Landing at the head of Rossignol, and built an elaborate hunting lodge. He left a few of the best beech and birch trees standing, and made lawns running down to the water on both sides. For some years the Frankenburg family and their guests came every summer to the lodge. Then Frankenburg died, and the family lost their interest in the wilds of Nova Scotia. The lodge lay empty and boarded up for years. When No. 1 dam began to raise the height of Rossignol in 1929 the Nova Scotia Power Commission bought the whole property from the Frankenburg heirs and tore the buildings down. Today you can take a motor boat over the spot, and Fourth Lake is no more than an arm of the greater Rossignol created by the dam.

Levi Minard and Richard Paterson, both of whom saw the skull and bones dug up at The Screecher, told me that they were the remains of a man who might have stood close to 7 feet, certainly not a "giant" in the sense of the tale; and they were convinced it was a white man, not an Indian. Paterson added that it was probably a logger or trapper who died there in the early days, when the only "white" cemetery was far down the river at Liverpool, a difficult canoe journey across the lakes and down the various rapids.

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Fifth Lake lay north of Fourth. The numbering of these lakes seems to show that the first white explorers counted Rossignol as Number Three in the chain, and turned off Rossignol at The Screecher instead of passing on to Kejumkujik River. Fifth Lake was deceptive in appearance; at first sight you were apt to paddle up the full length of it, 2½ miles, only to arrive at a blind end. (The stream from Sixth, Seventh and Eighth lakes flows into Fifth at its south-west end, not far from the outlet into Fourth.) Hence the Indian name for Fifth Lake -- Imooekak -- "leading-straight-on". This lake, like Fourth, is now merely part of the great flood of Rossignol.

On the east side of the neck between Fifth and Fourth lakes an old hunting trail ran up a spur of the ridge. The top of this spur now forms a small muddy island in the flowage, its trees long since uprooted and washed away. Here, on

the site of the ancient trail, one day in 1937 I picked up an iron hatchet blade of the old French pattern, hand-forged, with a triangular socket. (Examples can be seen in the museum at Fort Anne.) The early traders sold many hatchets of this kind to the Indians, who used them as tomahawks. I found another at Indian Gardens some years later, identical in pattern and workmanship. They had a deep crust of rust and of course the wooden hafts had rotted away long ago. (I got John Francis, a Micmac who lived near Milton, to fit new hafts and decorate them in the Micmac fashion, and they now hang on the wall of my study.)