

DUNRAVEN BOG

I have heard this called by woodsmen "the biggest bog in Nova Scotia", and it may be, although on the map it does not look as big as the great swamps between the Clyde River and Pubnico Lake. Dunraven Bog contains perhaps 12 square miles. But you don't see anything like that on the ground. The swamps are veined with long strips of dry ground on which the pines grow thick and tall, so that your view is restricted.

Strangely enough this sprawling bog is on ~~the~~^a height of land in western Nova Scotia, and from it streams flow north to Sixth Lake and Lake Rossignol, eastward to the former Second Lake on the Mersey River, which is now ~~part~~ part of the Rossignol dam flowage, westward to Jordan Lake and the Jordan River, and southward to form the Sable River.

A small reedy lake, Beaver Lake, lies in the heart of the Dunraven swamps, and from it flows Conway Brook, which runs northward to the flowage of Lake Rossignol. The odd feature of Conway Brook is that it flows between long fingers of dry land covered with pine woods, and you walk up its bank to Beaver Lake and find yourself in the heart of the famous Dunraven Bog without having seen any open bog at all.

On the south side of the bog rises a wooded ridge known to woodsmen as Porcupine Hill, on the edge of which Lord Dunraven used to camp. This was ~~Windham~~^{Wynham} Thomas Wynham-Quin, the fourth Earl Dunraven (1841-1926) who in later years turned to yachting and made some famous (and expensive) attempts to recover the America Cup.

When I came to Queens County in 1923 there were old men who could remember him as an insatiable hunter and fisherman in the County for several years. He had served in the British Army in Africa, succeeded to the title in 1871, and apparently made his annual visits to Nova Scotia in the years following.

He used to hire guides, white and Indian, including a number of "beaters", in Greenfield, where he came in summer for the salmon fishing. In September he and his numerous party of guides and beaters traveled by wagon to Indian Gardens on the

Mersey River. There they embarked in birchbark canoes, paddled to Second Lake, thence up West Brook to Rush Lake, ~~which~~ which lies in the south-eastern corner of the great bog now known by his name. Although there are sections of treacherous muskeg or "floating bog" in the woodsmen's term, most of these swamps can be walked over in summer and early fall. It was an ideal feeding ground for caribou, and in the 1870's ~~1860's~~ it was the home of the only large herd of caribou remaining in Nova Scotia -- they could be counted in hundreds, feeding in the bog or sheltering on the long pine points. They had survived because the great bog was in the heart of western Nova Scotia, and could only be reached by a ~~long~~ ^{long} and arduous march, or by a canoe journey involving frequent portages on the West Brook stream. Hunters found it easier to hunt moose, which were quite numerous and could be found close to the settlements; and of course there were ^{other} small herds of caribou here and there, feeding on bogs where the caribou moss grew in places easier of access.

Dunraven had the illusion that every kind of game in Canada was inexhaustible, and when Indians told him of the great caribou herd near Rush Lake he was delighted. At the edge of Porcupine Hill stood a great old pine tree with a spreading top. He had his men hammer iron spikes into the trunk, for easy climbing, and on the high forks of the tree they built a shooting platform. Repeating rifles were in use in the 1870's, but Dunraven preferred the single-shot Snider, to which he had become accustomed on active service in Africa. It was really the reliable old Enfield rifle, a muzzle-loader adapted to breech loading by Snider's patent, and all the British forces were armed with it at this time. For repeated action Dunraven used the simple expedient of a rubber band about the breech, into which he tucked three or four extra cartridges for quick re-loading.

Armed with this weapon and a pair of field glasses, Dunraven would take his place on the high platform, while his retinue of guides and beaters circled about the bog end and "drove" along the pine points where the caribou went for shade and ~~rest~~ rest in the warm September days. Their shouts and the tramp of their feet -- and their human scent -- drove the caribou into the open swamp, and across the open towards the great pine where the noble lord was lurking, too high to be scented.

In this way, in several annual visits, Dunraven and his companions slaughtered most of the herd. Much of the meat was left to rot where the animals fell; but Dunraven had some compunction, for he had many choice cuts of venison covered with salt, neatly wrapped in the hides, and sent them out by canoe for distribution to the poor of Milton and Greenfield.

When he had killed most of the herd at Dunraven bog, he removed his hunting to Newfoundland, where he repeated the slaughter of caribou. Later he moved on to western Canada, and subsequently wrote a book about hunting experiences there.

Eventually, sated perhaps with game slaughter, he turned his attention to yachting and with his "Valkyrie 1". "Valkyrie 2", etc. attempted to capture the America's Cup, racing in American waters. He lost, and there was a squabble over the lack of sportsmanship on the part of the Americans -- and vice versa.

The old pine tree which was his shooting platform at Dunraven Bog stood for many years, and was still there when the Sable River Lumber Company built a light railway past Porcupine Hill in the period 1907-1914.

It had rotted and fallen, and could not be found when I first visited Dunraven Bog in the 1930's. There were persistent rumors in Milton, down the river, that a few caribou survived at Dunraven Bog at that time. One could even find woodsmen who swore they had seen unmistakable caribou tracks there. Rumors like this persisted in various parts of Nova Scotia, of course. All were false. The last caribou on the mainland of Nova Scotia were positively seen and killed in 1912. In Cape Breton the last survivors were killed by hunters in 1919.

J. H. R.