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KITPU LODGE

Eagle Lake and its companions, Long Lake and Kempton Lake, are set in a small cluster to the west of the Mersey River, and about fifteen miles above the town of Liverpool. In bygone times a tribe of Indians buried their dead at Kempton Lake, and their descendants (probably anxious to keep the white men out of it) vowed that the whole region of the three lakes was haunted by an evil spirit. Hence the early loggers on the Mersey knew it as the "Injun Devil Country". The loggers, unimaginative men, went in <sup>anyhow</sup> and cut the big pine timber, floating it through the lakes and down to the main river. The last of the mature pine was cut in 1908. The camps were abandoned and rotted down. The bush closed in upon the old log-roads until they vanished or dwindled to faint trails, kept open by ~~the~~ wandering moose and deer.

There is no motor road above Milton on that side of the Mersey, and from Long Lake you <sup>can</sup> range westward through forty or fifty miles of almost unbroken forest before you strike the farming country behind Yarmouth. It was and still is an interesting country to explore, and in 1931 I ventured up <sup>the Mersey</sup> there with three friends who share <sup>a</sup> love for the woods. We found the mouth of Eagle Brook without trouble, and the trace of an old log-road <sup>coming down from</sup> running up to the lake. It was about a mile, according to the map. Parker and Gordon undertook to carry the canoe up there, taking it in turns, while Smith and I carried all the duffel. It looked easy enough, but the trail petered out <sup>in the woods</sup> after a few hundred yards, and in the search for it we became separated, striking ~~out~~ through the woods by compass. Parker and Gordon reached the lake with the canoe about sundown. Smith and I missed it by a <sup>little more than a</sup> few <sup>in the woods</sup> hundred yards, and travelled far past the foot of it before turning back. It was dark, with rain falling, and we were burdened with four sleeping bags, tent, ax, lantern, haversacks, cooking gear, and provisions for the week-end. By the time we joined our companions at the lake we were hot and weary and profane, and there followed the business of making camp in strange

woods, in darkness, and in pouring rain.

The wind increased, and during the night the tent flap blew open and I awakened to find a pool of water in the sleeping-bag about my feet. This was hardly a happy introduction to Eagle Lake, and when an owl came and screamed harshly in a pine above the tent it seemed that the Injun Devil had turned up in person to put a curse on our intrusion. However nothing supernatural occurred to us then or afterwards. If there is an Injun Devil he has been a benign and kindly devil and we think upon him with all gratitude. In the morning we explored the lake, and followed up the tributary stream into Long Lake, surrounded by pine woods that had not heard an ax (except those of a few hunters) for thirty years. The whole region was lonely and beautiful. It seemed a perfect place for a camp. But was it really safe from intrusion? We knew the difficulties of the approach from the river, but we wondered about the loggers' old tote-road leading ~~from~~<sup>to</sup> the head of Long Lake ~~to~~<sup>from</sup> the village of Milton on the lower reach of the Mersey.

In the following February, choosing a time when lakes and swamps were frozen hard enough to cross, but with only a light snow, Smith and I set out on foot through the woods from Milton. We had a day's provisions in our haversacks, and our compasses and a vague and incomplete map showing the route of the ancient tote-road. It was difficult to follow, and much of the time we travelled by compass alone. However we reached the south end of ~~the~~<sup>Long</sup> lake and ate a belated dinner over a ~~fire~~ fire beside the ice. February days are short, and we wasted precious daylight trying to find an old trail reputedly leading from this point to Big Falls on the Mersey River. Eventually we had to strike off by compass, crossing the wooded plateau between Eagle Lake and Bon Mature Lake and arriving at the river just at dark. We crossed over the hydro-power dam at Big Falls and returned to Milton by the road down the east side, which was deeply rutted and frozen and gave us a long rough journey in the darkness. When we got back to the car we had travelled thirty-one miles afoot, most of it through woods; but

we had satisfied ourselves that the old tote-road from Milton no longer existed except in short sections, and <sup>even</sup> there it was little more than a deer-path. This confirmed our hope that the Injun Devil Country was no longer accessible from the settlements to the south except by a man with tough feet and a compass.

During the next summer <sup>(1932)</sup> Parker and Smith built <sup>a log</sup> the camp at Eagle Lake, <sup>on</sup> at the north tip where its waters tumbled through a <sup>rotten</sup> decrepit logging dam on the way to the river. The Micmac word for Eagle is Kitpu (pronounced "Geetpoo") and so we called it Kitpu Lodge. The original ~~idea~~ <sup>idea</sup> was to build it <sup>from trees</sup> of logs cut on the spot, but logs of good size and straight lines ~~were~~ had to be sought, and <sup>when</sup> ~~when~~ <sup>found</sup> it was impossible to get them to the site by simple man-power. We were literally "stumped" until Parker <sup>came forth with a bit of logic that seemed</sup> had a stroke of genius. The top-log of a pine tree is usually sappy and apt to sink when rolled into the water. The old-time loggers must have lost a good many in Eagle Lake before they got their drives away down the brook to the river. So Parker and Smith took a canoe and a pike-pole and cruised around the lake, seeking for signs of the old log-landings. There, probing in the ~~mud~~ mud on the bottom, they found plenty of good pine logs, perfectly preserved from rot by their long immersion. Spearheaded with the pike-pole, the logs could be drawn to the surface quite easily. With one held awash on each side of the canoe, secured ~~by~~ by lashings across the gunwales, the two men paddled down to the camp site at the lake foot. It was hard work and painfully slow. Sometimes it was long after dark before they arrived with their soggy tows. But in this way <sup>all</sup> the logs for Kitpu Lodge were obtained. Each bore the mark of a bygone lumber firm, a simple H K cut in the side with an ax; and some of these marks can still be seen in the round outer faces of the camp walls. It is quaint to reflect that our whole camp (except for the floor and roof boards, which were man-handled up the trail from the river) had lain on the bottom of Eagle Lake for twenty-five to forty years before we came there.

Kitpu Lodge consists of one big rectangular room, with the south pitch of the roof carried down to cover the verandah, which faces on the lake. Smith's father, a veteran seaman and shipwright, brought his sharp broad-ax up to Eagle Lake and (at the age of 70) hewed every log square except for the outer face, which was left in the round. It was a beautiful job of ax-work, the sort of thing you rarely see now that the day of wooden ships is ~~past~~ almost past, and a stranger stepping inside the camp would assume the inner walls to be of boards. The roofing, the floor-boards, the door and windows, the iron cots, the stove, and all that sort of thing were taken up the river road from Liverpool by truck, boated up the river from Big Falls to Eagle Brook, and then carried by simple man-power up the mile of trail to the camp. Tables and shelves were made on the spot. So were the hewn spruce knees that hold our two canoes ~~well~~ out of the way overhead.

Here for twenty years we have enjoyed fishing and hunting in their seasons, and the quiet beauty of this lake-land at all seasons. In autumn when the hardwoods are in full color I find it easy to lay aside my rifle for an hour at a time, merely to sit and gaze. Long and Eagle lakes are joined by a calm stream of dark water, winding through wild meadows in the ~~shades~~ alternate shade and sunshine of ~~the~~ the red swamp-maples; and to paddle slowly through that flamboyant show on a bright October day is an experience that seems as fresh and lovely now as when I first saw it in '31. There is a different sort of pleasure to be had in spring, when the hardwoods are breaking out their fresh green and the wild duck come to rest in the lakes on their way north; and another in early summer when the swamps are a blue fire of iris, when the hot sun brings out the rich scent of the pinewoods, and the outpour of the lake through the old log-dam below the camp makes a satisfying music.

But in some ways I like it best in winter. In the ~~styx months~~ cold months we leave ~~at~~ our cars at Big Falls, cross over the Mersey by the power dam, and tramp 2½ miles through the woods to Kitpu, using skis or snowshoes when the snow

is deep. The camp is like an ice-box when we throw open the door, but a brisk fire in the big stove soon changes that, and having thrown off our packs we are free to roam about the lake shores on the ice, or along the hunting trails we have cut out amongst the ridges, until darkfall brings us back to the lodge and <sup>the</sup> prospect of stout ~~camp-cookery~~ camp-cookery. We use eiderdown sleeping-bags and fling the camp door wide open when we turn in, for the sake of the cold clean air. Often I have moved my bed outdoors and slept under the stars beside the lake, hearing drowsily the heavy ~~woomp-woomp~~ woomp-woomp of the lake ice <sup>cracking</sup> ~~ripping~~ under frost pressure on a zero night, and feeling the faint jar of it in the frozen earth beneath my head. On sunny days there is a surprising warmth on our small verandah, sheltered as it is from winds north, east and west, and with the winter ~~striking~~ sun striking in from the south. Many times we have sprawled here at ease in January or February, smoking, chatting, without mackinaws or mittens, and watched our water-hole in the lake ice freezing over in the cold wind, not fifty feet away.

In snowtime, too, we can read the stories of our four-footed neighbors. In these woods there are many deer, an occasional moose (in past autumns, when moose were plentiful, we have "called-up" the big bulls many a time, and sometimes taken photographs), rabbits, wild-cats, weasels, foxes, otters, mink, porcupines, squirrels, wood-mice and the rest. About two miles from Kitpu is a cave in ~~the~~ great rocks, inhabited every winter by a pair of slumbering bears. We have never disturbed them, although one spring we tramped over there and saw one big bruin stirring in the entrance. This courtesy of ours was ill returned last spring, when the bears visited Kitpu Lodge in our absence and chewed great pieces out of Parker's small dinghy, which we had dragged up from the river to the lake the year before. One bear, after their habit, left his mark of defiance in a spruce tree beside the camp, standing on his hind legs, stretching one huge paw as high as he could reach, and raking off a long strip of bark. I stand <sup>more than</sup> ~~five-foot-nine~~ <sup>eight</sup> and my arms are long. When I stood in Bruin's position and reached up, I found

that my fingertips came a good eighteen inches short of the uppermost claw marks. Through most of the year we travel the trails and the lake shores unarmed, but if I ever meet that chap face to face I hope to have the comfortable feel of my Krag .300 in my hands.

The miracle of all this is the common miracle of western Nova Scotia --the presence of a still unspoiled wilderness within a few miles of the coast and the busy motor highways. Even the climate differs. As I write this in Liverpool, in January, the roads remain bare and the lawns are still green, although it is time for cold weather, even on the south coast. Yet fifteen or twenty miles inland there is deep snow in the woods and the lakes are covered with heavy ice. The salt air of the shore makes the difference, of course. When the temperature in Liverpool is a mild  $34$  Fahrenheit it is  $30$  in Milton, just two miles up the river, and at Kitpu Lodge it is probably from  $24$  to  $20$ .

We are busy men. My friends work most of the week in their offices, and I must spend many hours (often far into the night) at my writing tasks. It is exacting labor, performed in the stuffy indoor air and to the accompaniment of far too many cigarettes. That is why, years ago, we formed the Kitpu habit. The air up there clears and cleans the mind and gives a tingle to the blood. The noisy world of men and machines drops back into its proper perspective. The spirit of something eternal and indestructible lingers in the woods and by the waters, inspiring in such times as these. Forgive me if I quote some lines of verse, scrawled one evening at Kitpu years ago, but as true today as they were then.

#### KITPU: NIGHEFALL

Great Sun, that brassy warrior of the day,  
Has fallen on his sword and stained the west  
With blood and fire, and drawn a disarray  
Of cloud about him for a funeral vest.

Wrapt in his bloody rags he sinks below  
 The <sup>e</sup>wstern hill; and from the thickets there  
 Night creeps, a hooded woman full of woe,  
 A mourner with a star caught in her hair.

A million yesterdays have passed the gates  
 In that unceasing western sepulture.  
 Poor fool, she ought to know Tomorrow waits  
 Beyond the brooding pines of Bon Mature.

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 J. H. R.  
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