

A Canoe Trip to Fort Temiscamingue in '79

By Sha-Ka-Nash

Before taking the lake, the canoes are gone carefully over with gum and a burning stick to repair whatever damage has been done on the portages. The wind being favorable, a sail is again rigged up, this time with a forked stick tied up in the centre of the canoe, with the end set up in a frying pan on the bottom of the canoe; a light pole being made fast to one of a covering, a pack strap put over the fork at the mast head that serves for hal-yards, and then brought aft to serve as backstay.

So we put off and sailed down the big Lake Temiscamingue. When we came down to the big steep rocks on the west side the Indian crews had a great talk in their own language, and every one who used tobacco, put a little piece in the water in front of the steep rocks, the writer adding his quota with the rest. I never learned the real significance of the performance, but anyone who has passed on the lake with a loaded canoe in front of those rocks will know that it was very advisable to court the favor of the water sprite.

Before we got down the lake we had all the wind we wanted, but a big bark canoe, if it is not loaded, and well handled, will stand a surprising amount of sea. We could see the Old Fort buildings as we came down the lake and when getting near the Narrows we went ashore on the west side, had dinner and a general clean-up. Most of the men carried a bit of soap, a towel and a piece of comb.

In a deep bay to the eastward of us, on the Quebec side, there was a lone trapper or hermit of some kind, name of Kelly, and the bay was called Kelly's Bay. We unrigged our sailing gear, cut some dry wood, taking it with us in the canoe and paddled on, side by side, down and through the Narrows. As we came through the Narrows we could see the buildings belonging to the O.M.I. on the west side and we turned in and landed on the south side of the point in front of old Fort Temiscamingue, piling what little things we have on the beach, and turning the canoes bottom-up over it. The guide delivers the packet to the office and we are at liberty for the rest of the day to take in the sights around the old historic Fort Temiscamingue. Such a number of Indian tents and birch-bark wickiups reminds one very forcibly of the old trading days, and of the time when the Hudson's Bay Company's birch-bark brigade left LaCloche, as soon as the trade returns of furs were all collected, came through Nipissing Lake past Mattawa, other canoes joining them as they passed the Posts and on up the Upper Ottawa to Temiscamingue, where the canoes from the Fort joined with them going up north through Lake Temiscamingue and the

Quinze, on to the H.B. Post at Abitibi, then down the Abitibi River and the Moose River to Moose Factory, where the river runs into James' Bay waters. Quite a canoe trip. I, myself, have seen and talked with two men who had made some trips from LaCloche to Moose Factory and return; in fact one of them had a muzzle-loading gun that he had got at Moose Factory in part payment for one of his trips. The trip took them nearly all summer, each canoe bringing back with them from Moose Factory, their supplies for the year. Just think of it, you railway men and train travellers! From Nipissing to Moosonee in two days; not to mention the airmen in a few hours. Progress, you will say; MAYBE so.

However, at the time of our own trip, Fort Temiscamingue was a place of great importance. There was a large trading store and office combined and a big storehouse a little piece apart, the two buildings facing each other, forming two sides of a square enclosed between the two ends fronting the lake with high stockades, two large buildings, one of them the chief factor's house, the other the clerk's house, a smaller building for a men's house, with a number of other post buildings. The late Mr. Colin Rankin, chief factor, was in charge of the Temiscamingue District and had control over an immense territory, both in the Province of Quebec and Ontario. The principal posts were Nipissing, Matta, Grand Lake and Abitibi, with a large number of smaller posts stationed here and there all over the district. There were two clerks, named Cummings and Simpson, and David McLaren was in the store. He seemed to hold some position as store man or steward, at least something above ordinary labor. The only others I can recall were William Pétault and the late

Mr. John Turner, of Bear Island, who was at that time blacksmith at the Fort. I met the late Mr. C. C. Farr, who was then in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post, Hunter's Lodge. Mrs. Farr being along with him, probably on their way in to his post. I made the acquaintance of the late Wapi Kishik, a splendid specimen of a good old Indian, and also his wife who, by her appearance could only have been part Indian. There were quite a number of Indians camped in the vicinity, coming in to the Fort from the surrounding country.

In the evening, my partner and myself pitched our little tent on the beach. The rest of the crew slept here and there, some of them under the canoes and others in the camp of some friends. In the morning several members of the crew went across the Narrows to the Priest's place, and later in the day we made ready for the return trip. We loaded each canoe with two half-barrels pork, two kegs lard, twenty-five bags flour and three packing cases each nearly one hundred pounds. We got eight days' provisions on the same scale as we had coming down. The guide could have had more if he had thought it necessary in case of wet weather. He is boss on the trip, all right, but there are some things he must not do. He cannot carry any letter or parcel, however small it may be; only what is in the packet he gets from the office. He must not travel in the rain nor break cargo. The main objective, first, last and all the time is to land the cargo dry and intact. The rules made by the officers of the old company were made to be obeyed, something like the laws of Medes and Persians that altereth not.

The guide gets the packet and bill of lading from the office and after a hand-shaking with everybody in sight, we get in the canoe and paddle away through the Narrows and then up the lake, but what a difference between that and the light canoe coming down. The canoe gunwale is a bare hand-breadth out of the water, so that we require favorable weather, which we fortunately had and landed at our portage alongside of the creek safe and sound.

Where there is no dock it is quite a job loading and unloading the canoes at the portages, and along the river where we camped. The canoe must be side-on to the shore, one man in the water holding onto the canoe, and moves it in the water so as the other man in the water doesn't need to move while he is handling the pieces he receives from the bowsman (who loads and unloads the canoe and pass it on to men on the shore, standing in line one after the other to receive it. The cargo must be piled on stout poles to keep it off the ground, with poles on top of it to rest the coverings on, as every precaution must be taken to prevent the cargo from getting wet.

Our cargo looks quite a formidable pile to start over the portages with. First thing that is done is to run the pickle off from the half-barrels of pork, the pickle being replaced as soon as the pork gets up to the post. On the short portages each canoe crew carried over their own load separately, but on any long portage like between the creek and Sesekinika, the cargoes are carried together, and only divided at

the end, when they come to the lake. To keep the stuff together the portage is divided into stages maybe a quarter of a mile or less, and one stage is always completed before starting on another one. Our loads generally averaged three trips over the portage, not including the canoes, so that four men had always to make four trips.

The portage between Sesekinika and Clear Lake is somewhat hilly, as also between Clear Lake and Mud Lake. All men who are able are supposed to carry two hundred pounds weight as a load on the portages, and it is no trouble at all for any ordinary man to carry two bags of flour, as on the sandy portage between Mud Lake and the river, a good level portage where we put down the load halfway across, several members of the crew carried three bags of flour and some of them four in one load, though such actions are not approved of by the company.

Here we are at the river again. Load the canoes and pick up the material we left and start to face the current, and that we do pretty soon. After leaving the portage for a piece the bowsman and steersman use their poles

to keep the stuff together in the lake. To keep the stuff together the portage is divided into stages maybe a quarter of a mile or less, and one stage is always completed before starting on another one. Our loads generally averaged three trips over the portage, not including the canoes, so that four men had always to make four trips.

Having got across the rapid to (Continued on Page 4)

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