

JOHNNY APPLESEED CAMPSITE — THUNDERSTORM POINT

The year of the fire we found our second intended campsite burned, so we continued on, finally selecting a tiny peninsula in a small lake. The fire was burning nearby, and before going to bed trips were made to the hottest spots to cool them down. One of the boys put an emptied pot upside down on his head to free up a hand, and the site was thereby named, "Johnny Appleseed Campsite." It was small, and our big tent had to be perched on bedrock at the highest elevation—an engineering feat—and in a very vulnerable position. I always felt uneasy about that. On our 1985 trip there we went to sleep quickly after a tiring, happy, and satisfying day of travel from Bathtub. It was a beautiful night until 2 a.m. when a monster thunderstorm pounced on us with no warning. The tent held, but my adrenalin wasn't down until daybreak. At breakfast, Johnny Appleseed became "Thunderstorm Point."

If 1981 and 1985 had been somewhat exciting, 1987 was spiritual. It had been a late farewell to Bathtub and a long time cutting our way through the blowdown on portage two. We arrived at Thunderstorm on a fine, calm evening as the sun was setting. All of us had been there before. As we drew near we saw our five old tent poles stacked neatly against the dominating jack pine—just the way we had left them two years before, and we felt as though they were welcoming us home. In the reds, blues, and purples of the dying day we beheld our old fireplace just as it had always been—a small pile of cut wood nearby. The emotions we felt deep down inside cannot be described. Later, while eating supper in the still darkness, we sat by our tiny fire for the sake of its light, heat, and companionship. Its flickering and crackling cheer made our home all the more special and soothing. We recalled Sigurd Olson's chapter "Campfires" from his famous book, *The Singing Wilderness*. I read from a slip of paper Sigurd's quoting G.M. Trevelyan: "We are literally children of the earth, and removed from her our spirits wither or run to various forms of insanity. Unless we can refresh ourselves at least by intermittent contact with nature, we go awry."

We sat there on the earth of which we were made and felt a great satisfaction to be in such peace and harmony with it. Our bodies were weary, our souls and spirits were refreshed. I added Sigurd's quoting of Thoreau: "In wildness is the salvation of mankind." We looked about us and felt saved. Content.

Paul quoted Sigurd's last paragraph which we knew by heart: "There have been countless campfires, each one different, but some so blended into their backgrounds that it is hard for them to emerge. But I have found that when I catch even a glimmer of their almost forgotten light in the eyes of some friend who has shared them with me, they begin to flame once more. Those old fires have strange and wonderful powers. Even their memories make life the adventure it was meant to be."

We ended our very long, tiring, and fine day with our traditional evening bath, the smooth surface of the lake broken by the splashes which also shattered the stillness of the northern night. It was getting chilly, and we sought the warmth of our friendly blaze. As we dried and had final looks at the brilliant stars, an aurora began. It grew in size, intensity, and complexity until it became one of the best I've seen. We sat down on the rock and gazed wonderingly at the spectacle in the sky—soon comforted by a warm breeze that began blowing in from the south.

Later, as the aurora began to fade, a loon wailed, and the trees on the opposite shore of the little lake took on a ghostly luminescence. We glanced over our shoulders to see the full moon rising—its moonbeams starting to shine through the lacy network of evergreen branches. Several nights prior it had tipped the waves with sparkle during our night crossing of North Caribou. Now it illuminated our little lake and peninsula and filled the night with its magic. Later, dog tired, our souls at peace, feeling a oneness with our beautiful world, we ended our night of mystery—full and overflowing with some of the richest fruits of northern wilderness travel. It had been an experience to linger long in our fondest memories. Yes, Sigurd, it had been a day and a night that made life "the adventure it was meant to be."

