

RAPE OF THE NORTH : TEMAGAMI

BY BRUCE McMURCHY

Introduction:

This I hope will be a documentation, without prejudice, detailing the experiences and observations of three generations of McMurchy's and direct relatives, dating back to the mid-thirties. The area covered reaches from just north of North Bay, on No. 11 Highway, to north of the Village of Temagami. We have held continual permanent and seasonal residence here for over fifty-five years, pre-dating the present Trans Canada Highway.

Geography:

The area of concern comprises a relatively narrow band of Ontario. This is what a northerner calls the true wilderness lands of Eastern Ontario. It's main feature is the growth of truly tall Red and White Pine trees. There is a northern limit beyond which no hardwood trees will survive. This limit lies just north of the Nipissing ridge, immediately north of the City of North Bay, proper. There is also a northern limit beyond which the Red and White Pine will not survive. This limit is very evident when one reaches New Liskeard and observes the Clay Belt farm lands. Beyond this point only the "pulp wood" grow to a large extent, specifically Spruce, Birch, Poplar, Tamarack and Jack Pine.

The area is, therefore, bounded by Lake Timiskaming (the Quebec border) on the east, the Mattawa River, Lake Nipissing and French River on the south, the devastation of Sudbury on the west and the Clay Belt on the north. This is barely 80 miles by 80 miles or 1/64th the area of Ontario itself.

Other features of the area were; that it was blessed with an abundance of clear fresh lakes, various species of wild life and a multitude of flora. The mineral content throughout the district is also well known. Two watersheds exist; one to the west into Lake Nipissing and one to the east into Lake Timiskaming. The total watershed is serviced by this rain forest area. The centre of this shed is dominated by Lake

Temagami, a lake with the longest shoreline in interior Ontario, except for Lake Nipigon. The main islands have been numbered over the thousand mark with Bear Island at the hub of the lake, which was for years a real Hudson Bay Post.

We have four months of freeze-up, two months of summer, four months of flies and twelve months of sheer beauty.

History:

We have seen the evidence of the presences of native people in the area hundreds of years ago, by personally observed hieroglyphics on the rocks. What is now the Ontario Northland Railway was the first means of servicing the area due to the mining in Cobalt and north thereof. Prior to this the only access was north on the Ottawa River and Lake Timiskaming and overland to the present village of Temagami.

The first highway known as the Ferguson Highway, after the Premier of the day, wound its way north from North Bay and brought the first tourists and summer residents.

The more adventuresome and perhaps affluent Americans bought up most of the cottage sites on Lake Temagami and logging was done at will throughout the accessible area.

It was at this time, the mid-thirties, that my uncle started a tourist camp at Tilden Lake, 20 miles north of North Bay and later my aunt at Lowell Lake just south of Temagami.

This introduced me to the area when it was reaching its height of overall prosperity.

With prosperity came excess. For the next 20 years it was over-fished, over-cut, over trapped, over-hunted and over-mined. The only control was the ten Ministry of Lands and Forests. Very few from the ministry were ever seen north of North Bay, unless it was for a picture beside a trophy catch or kill.

The exceptions were the very few local game wardens and Wilf Spooner, Minister of Lands and Forests and true northerner. The only thing that saved



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the area somewhat at that time was the inaccessibility due to the wilderness nature of things. Most evident of this period of plunder is the fact that there are no deer left living north of North Bay, and no fur bearing animals evident in and around the lakes adjacent to the new highway. Also most of the pine were taken where accessible. We are to believe that the deer all moved south. This is true, for I watched them go on the front fenders of cars, one by one.

It should be said, at this time, that my relatives were party to and made a living off the then plenty. Saw mills and tourist camps abounded. American tourists came because we had something natural to offer even though the exchange on the dollar was then in a reverse position. This was before our governments taxed Tourism beyond competition.

Present Problems:

In the untouched area that was logged in the thirties, the pine are just now showing themselves above what has been referred to earlier as the "Pulp Trees". This has taken fifty years of shade growth. Second cut is well underway but because of more roads and modern equipment, there are now no inaccessible areas.

The protected strips around the lakes and highways are a joke. We can now sit on our spruce dock and see daylight through the trees protecting Highway 11. Highway pollution is also affecting these trees from the road side. Beyond this narrow band is the strip cutting where only the pulp wood will return in this generation. It is really difficult to understand that this is also the Temagami Game Preserve. Is the plan to force the animals out of these areas into the hunting and trapping areas so they can be better extinguished.

There are three camps, with the native people and a few others of us in the middle.

First, there are the environmentalists, which were made aware of the crisis by the Temagami Cottagers Association and the true north trippers. I cannot condone the extremist attitude

which is too often prominent. Neither can I accept the hypocrisy of those who want all logging stopped, but line up at Milnes Mill in Temagami for the dock, deck and panelling pine and spruce lumber. We must eventually chose between the sight of a stand of tall pine and the beauty of pine furniture.

Second; there are the loggers and the related industries. They cannot be blamed for trying to make a living from what is considered a renewal resource. However, if Milnes Mill, just north of Temagami, is an example, by their large debt, one would wonder at their managerial abilities. From my trips to this mill I was always sure a lucrative retail business could have been added.

The desire for modern mechanism has lead to over-cutting and over-spending. The creation of logging roads has made it convenient to reach remote areas for the so called sportsman as well, while the natural habitat is getting smaller and smaller. We should be learning our lesson from the Copper mine already finished and the Sherman Iron Mine just recently closed. In fifty years of observation these now seem to have been short term industries. It is said that logging as it is being licensed now, can only last five years. This is a short term just to try and sustain a small group, which could otherwise be employed, on a more continuous basis, improving portages and camp sites.

The third party to this triangle is the Ministry of Natural Resources, noted as, formerly the Ministry of Lands and Forests. The Ministry has gone, within my lifetime, from being mostly oblivious to the north, to an over-involvement.

Staff decisions appear to have been made straight out of a book or from some other jurisdiction that has already destroyed it's forests and wild life.

Here is the true culprit, far from the scene, with an obvious bias to the wrong industries.

Strip cutting leaves us without a forest, without the habitat for wild life, without the attraction that brings tourists and campers, without the protection of a rain forest for the Nipissing and Timiskaming water sheds,

without pine trees for at least two generations and without work for future loggers.

The selection of certain townships for the native people to warden is only a ruse to divert attention from other areas such as South Rabbit Lake and farther north of the Red Squirrel Road. This treaty is a saver, on face value, to the Townships selected, but it leads to three questions.

One, when can it be terminated by either party? Two, what is to stop wardens from logging or contracting to log here at will? Third, can this warden-ship extend to excluding other uses of the Townships such as camping, canoeing and fishing?

At least, I am satisfied that if there is one group that has not been completely infected by our obsessive materialism it would be these native people.

Select cutting is the minimal hope, without the gross machinery and the extension of easy access roads. The maximum hope is a decade of complete moratorium on logging and hunting. Hunting is touted as being a very large industry. Given time, it will also follow the route into oblivion, of the Copper mine, the Sherman mine, the Ontario Northland Boat Lines, formerly the T. & N. O. on Lake Temagami, Milnes, the deer, and soon the moose.

A summer ago, I took my wife on an arduous portage out of Rabbit Lake to Rueben Lake. This lake, I could remember from my childhood, as a very remote deep water lake. We camped on an island with the whole lake all to ourselves. We went to sleep to the sound of loon calls and woke to the songs of birds and frogs. We then listened to the sound of chainsaws from 6 am to 6 pm.

Not only will the forest be stripped almost to the shores of this lake, a gravel road will remain, which will now afford easy access to the lake with whatever equipment can be hauled.

If the Ministries of Natural Resources-which is a conflict in terms-and of Environment are the human antagonist, then the combustion engine has been the inanimate catalyst of doom.

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It drives the massive machinery capable of levelling all standing foliage. It creates the oversized roads which are now available for all motorized highway and all-terrain vehicles to reach every part of the once virgin forest. It drives the, faster than required, boats which have disturbed the natural inhabitants such as loon nests along the shore line. It propels the float planes to all lakes large enough to land on. It can run the helicopter to track the moose into position to kill, or as the Ministry has created for the hunters and trappers, to harvest.

Perhaps, we could ask the South African police how many blacks they have harvested to date?

Long ago a wise Department should have designated some lakes as non-motorized. Other lakes should have been limited to under ten horsepower motors and larger lakes to whatever is reasonable, short of motorized mayhem.

In the long run, the only thing that the area will have to offer is how it was in the beginning. Logging, hunting and fishing can co-exists in extreme moderation.

I am convinced that there are truly more people to be marketed, who simply travel to the area to observe the forests and the animals, than there are that go there to destroy. Then, why should the Ministry of Natural Resour-

ces be developing a trout that will survive in acid waters, instead of putting the research money into eliminating the problem? It is like building a tall, tall smoke stack in Sudbury to disperse the fumes and fall out farther away, like on the Temagami Lakes.

To continue the present path and policies will lead eventually, to a one precious area:

- * sans fresh living water,
- * sans tall trees,
- * sans indigenous animals,
- * sans tourists,

SANS EVERYTHING