



The professor doing laundry duty at Lost Lake

# Up to Lost Lake and Back

## *A Fishing Trip Without Fish*

By HAROLD W. PRIPPS

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

SOME men are born with nicknames, some achieve nicknames, some have nicknames thrust upon them. Thistles, who at the tender age of sixty, was making his first camping trip to the North Woods with us, belonged to the last named class. This is not a tale of how the venerable gentleman happened to have such a nickname, but it is only fair to him at the start to explain how it happened.

We were assembling Prof's folding canvas boat at the Musky Lake landing, preparatory to making the start of our trip. The day was hot and we were drinking an undue amount of luke-warm lake water. Prof, suggesting that a chew of gum might help some toward alleviating our thirst, passed a package around.

"Gum! Waugh!" snorted he of the silver locks, "Why, you fellows aren't tough! When I was a lad, I used to chew thistles!"

Then and there we nicknamed him "Thistles."

The boat was soon launched and

loaded. With joy in our hearts we slipped away on the first leg of our journey. It was my first trip in a folding boat, and I must admit that I had some misgivings. My old canoe would have been my choice, but this was Prof's party. I was pleasantly surprised at the ease with which his boat handled and the stanchness and carrying capacity which it displayed.

Our plan was to establish a permanent camp at a trapper's cabin and from this make a number of side trips, chief of which was to be a trip to Lost Lake. In the dozen or more trips which I have made to this country, I had often heard my friend Ham, the trapper, mention this lake, but somehow or other I had never got to it. I had a sneaking suspicion that he was saving it for himself, but I never accused him of it. Last winter, while on a visit to the city, he suggested that we'd better go and "look her over together." Did Prof and I leap at the invitation like hungry trout? Well, rather.

And well we might, for it was a lake with an enviable reputation. No roads led anywhere near; no canoe routes had any direct connection with it. In the good old days when they took out the pine, there had been a logging road connecting it with the Flambeau River, but a thirty years' growth had wiped that out. There was one little clearing on the lake, and on this a hardy pioneer had sought to establish a homestead some years before. But the isolation of the spot and its inaccessibility on account of surrounding swamps had forced him to abandon it as a homestead. The last person who was known to have fished in the lake, years before, had caught a boat load of small-mouthed bass with worms. He never went there again, it was reported, because he had almost broken his back lugging a huge packsack full of the "whoppers" through the rough swamp and slashing country. Others had tried to find the lake, but had failed. But Ham, as assessor for this particular township, had cruised every corner of it,



This is better than portaging, although it means wet feet

and any lake or creek which he didn't know of didn't exist. Ham caused further excitement, when we reached his cabin that afternoon, by telling us that all the deer in the country hung around Lost Lake in the summer time, and there would be chances galore for photos. Small wonder, then, that we decided to leave for this promised land the morning after our arrival at Ham's.

There is one thing besides making freshmen uncomfortable, which Prof can do to perfection—getting up early in the morning. He proved this by routing us out the next morning at the unheard of hour of 4 o'clock. We were glad of it after we were once on our feet and had a peep out-of-doors, for it was a glorious morning.

Six o'clock found us well on our way. The four of us—with tent, blankets and provisions for a week—rode quite comfortably in the sixteen-foot boat. There wasn't any room to walk around, however, so Thistles kidded Prof, whereupon the latter advised Thistles to go and build a raft.

It was a great day to wet a line, and we were passing over excellent waters on our way down the Turtle River, but so confident were we that there would be fish in plenty when we reached Lost Lake that we didn't even let out a trolling line. Our discussion as to how best to

ship all our prospective fish was cut short by the first rapids. A great windfall had become firmly lodged in the main channel and we had to portage. Soon came the portage at the mouth of the Turtle, where it joins the Flambeau River. Fifteen minutes' brisk work here and we were bound up stream against the strong current of the north branch of the Flambeau. We roped up the next set of rapids and were thankful that we had started in the cool of the day, for it was even then getting quite warm.

With two paddles and a set of oars going, it wasn't much work going up against the current; but even at that, we were glad to take advantage of the foaming back water below each bend.

**I**NTO one of the many little marsh creeks which flow into the river we pushed our way, and soon found ourselves in a perfect wonderland of game. The month was July, the day, like the preceding, hot and sweltering. The mosquitoes and deer flies were at their worst. We were seeking relief in more of Prof's gum; the deer were seeking relief in the waters of this rush-lined creek. We saw seven in the first mile and heard many others, which had been warned of our approach, crashing away. Once we all stood up and saw a great buck, with a fine set of horns in the vel-

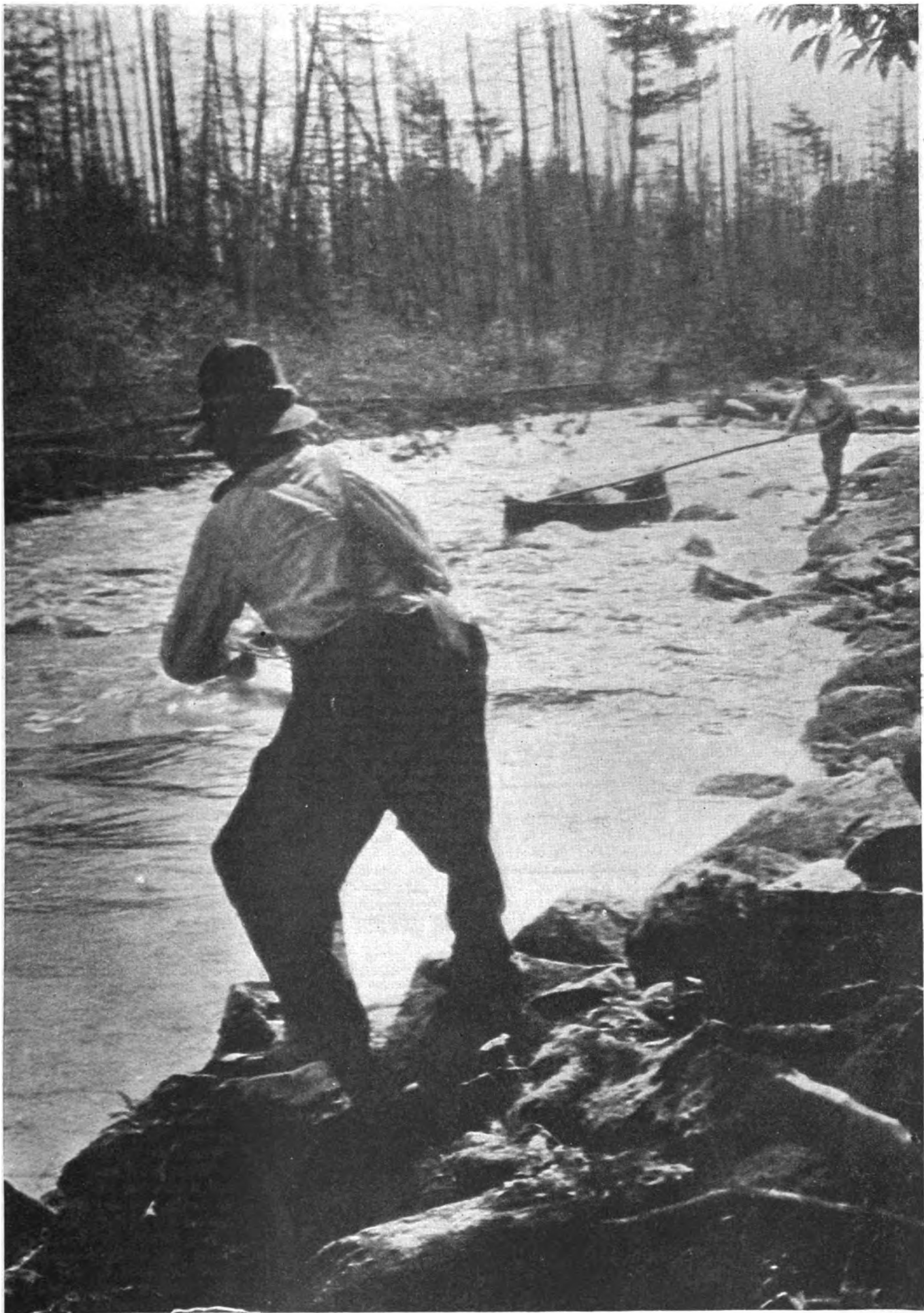
vety, bounding away over the marsh ahead of us. He had leaped out of the creek, crossed a point of marshy land, entered the creek again with splashing bounds, out again and up a burnt hill. He afforded a splendid sight, for he was in view for fully 300 yards.

I, for one, should have been content to continue up this creek; but Ham announced, while he poked the boat into the bank, that here was the trail to Lost Lake. The trail, if one could call it such, was almost a mile long. For about a third of the distance it ran along a survey line cut through the "popple" brush the winter before when the snow had been on the ground. The trail now resembled a giant's brush with the stubs of cut "popple" sticking up a foot or more high. Over this uncertain footing we had to take our outfit.

"Lovely, perfectly lovely," croaked Thistles. "So this is camping in the great, green North Woods. Ding, dang these pesky skeeters!"

"When I was a lad, I was tough," mocked Prof.

Ham and Prof took the boat over and we didn't envy them any. Thistles and I followed with as much of the outfit as we could take in one load; then went back for the rest. With two hands full, a load on one's back, the woods hot and still, and the mosquitoes working over-



**We roped up at the next set of rapids**





This is only a mosquito head net

time, we had an interesting portage, I can assure you. But at the end of the trail lay Lost Lake. When we saw it we felt rewarded for the hard work of the portage. It was a pure gem of blue with a dark green fringe of evergreens for a setting. Across the lake the little clearing beckoned to us.

We found it to be an ideal spot, situated on a little knoll overlooking the lake. Here stood the lone homesteader's cabin, but that had been burned down several years before. Back in the brush an old shed remained, into which had been crammed a home-made chair, some rude beds, and other salvage of the fire. The porcupines had complete possession of the place and it looked a fright. One old fellow squatted in the corner and

chattered at us. My camera being handy, I took his photo and then drove him out.

"We're going to have some fun with those porkies before we get out of here, or I miss my guess," promised Ham. At any rate, we didn't worry about it then, but set to work to get camp in order for the night.

During the past winter with the aid of friend wife and her sewing machine I had made a new tent. I busied myself immediately to set it up and see how it looked. It was made of unbleached muslin, dyed green, and waterproofed by the paraffin-gasoline method. I had read a description of this tent by Emerson Hough, who said that it was used in Alaska during the mosquito season. Instead of a slit for a door in the front we had made a large round hole with a cheesecloth sleeve sewed on. To quote Hough, "You crawl in the hole, pull the hole in after you, and tie a knot in it."

This expression stuck in my mind and, when thinking of the best tent to use in the North Woods during the mosquito

season, I remembered this model. I made a little paper tent on the scale of a half-inch to the foot and it looked good to me. To insure perfect ventilation we put a cheesecloth window at the back. Of all the airy, mosquito-proof tents I have seen, this is the best ever. Best of all it cost, all told, less than \$5 and weighs under ten pounds. We made the ground cloth separate and tied it into each corner with tapes which had been sewed into the tent for that purpose. In the 7x9 size it is an ideal tent for two or three fellows, although four of us slept in it while at Lost Lake, because we didn't want to carry our heavier wall tent along.

While I had busied myself setting up the tent, the others had been busy, too.

Prof had a dandy pile of balsam tips for the browse bed; Ham had constructed a table out of small birches; while Thistles was seeing to it that our belated luncheon wasn't delayed any longer. He sat calmly in the old homesteader's chair and superintended that fire as if born to the job. It didn't take more than half an eye to see that, even though he hadn't camped in the North Woods before, this was not the first time he had cooked over an open fire.

"If you were any kind of a cook, you would have had fish on the menu," joshed we, while eating.

"And if you were any kind of fishermen, you would have caught some fish for the cook to fry," came back Thistles.

"Just watch me," promised Prof. "Who wants to go out as soon as we've finished?"

Thistles wanted to, so Ham and I agreed to get everything in order about camp. The two set out to make the round of the lake. Just about dusk they returned with long faces.

"Nothing doing. Not even one strike."

"That's funny," remarked Ham, "but maybe this is their off day."

The two joined us, where lounging on the bank we were smoking our pipes with a smudge close by to drive the mosquitoes away. It was a quiet evening, as clear as a bell. The occasional calls of feeding night birds were the only sounds to be heard. Before us lay the lake, its surface like a polished mirror, except when the occasional splashes of small fish near shore rippled it. We watched these ripples with interest for some moments. Then Prof could contain himself no longer.

"I've got to find out what they are," he said; and taking his fly rod and a can of worms, which we had brought along, pushed out in the boat. His bait had barely touched the surface of the water when a fair sized perch took it.

"That's fine," we encouraged, sarcastically. "A few dozen of those and we'll have enough for breakfast."

We lay there on the bank in the light of the afterglow and watched him pull in thirty perch before he quit.

"Aw rats!" Thistles was disgusted. "I can get perch right off the dock at home. I came four hundred miles up into the woods for bass, muskies and pike, and you show me perch."

"Give us time and we'll show you," was all the argument he got.

All this while Ham had been whittling at a great big club.

"Didn't know we were going to play ball here," said I. "What's the bat for?"

"Wait, you'll see." With this and a knowing look he walked up to the tent and leaned it up against one of the poles.

We turned in soon after. Some time during the night we were awakened by the squealing, grunting noises which a porky makes when he's investigating something that smells good. The grub was slung on the ridge pole in pack sacks



Our temporary camp at Lost Lake



Assembling the folding canvas boat

and covered with a tarp, so we weren't worrying about that. But the rods and a rifle had been left outside under the table because there wasn't room in the tent for them, and as any woodsman knows, a porky can gnaw either one of them to ruin in a hurry. Pretty soon there came the clatter of tin dishes and some extra squealing, which told us that our visitor had crawled up on the table and was rummaging around.

"Get up, tenderfoot. That's your cue," came a muffled, sleepy voice from the blankets. "The porky swatter is just outside the door, leaning against one of the poles."

But you couldn't have got Thistles to leave that tent for love or money.

"Aw, you ain't tuff," Prof and I kidded him, yet neither of us stirred.

"Well," said Ham, "I s'pose it's up to me. Gimme that flash lamp."

Out he went in his shirt tails to do battle with the foe. Bang! Swat! came the sounds of the bludgeon, then a scurrying through the brush. Most anyone would have been satisfied to quit at this point with the foe in sharp retreat. Ham is a thorough cuss, however, and scouted all around the clearing to see whether any more of the enemy was prowling about.

"He won't poke his nose round here again," promised the 1,000 per cent batter as he returned. "I can't find any more in the clearing so I guess we can pound our ears in peace."

I was the last one to fall asleep. The chorus of snores which filled the quiet clearing was enough to keep anything at bay, and we slept without further disturbance.

The sun had barely peeped over the fringe of trees across the lake when we were up. Since most of the perch caught the night before were disposed of at breakfast, Thistles, Prof and I went out on the lake to get some real fish, while Ham set off in the woods to verify some figures for his plat book. I will spare you any suspense by stating that we circled the lake carefully and returned after three hours without having had any encouragement whatever. It had become unbearably hot, so there was nothing to do but while the day away as best we could. We covered our faces with squares of cheesecloth to keep off the flies and mosquitoes, picked out soft places on the ground in the shade of some wild cherry trees, and snoozed lazily. Ham returned about two o'clock and declared that the woods were a furnace for heat and that we certainly had picked out the coolest spot in the county. After lounging about for another hour we finally bestirred ourselves, Thistles to gather a hatful of luscious raspberries and the rest of us to investigate the homesteader's well, which we had cleaned out the night before. With a kettleful of ice-cold, crystal-clear water, which had seeped through the clean white sand at the bottom of the shaft, Prof made the bulkiest lemonade I ever tasted. This, together with some sandwiches and the raspberries, served with condensed cream, made an excellent hot weather lunch.

After this, Prof and Thistles started out to take another whirl at the fishing.

"I've got a hunch that they'll report nothing doing again," said Ham, after they had left. "I've noticed before that

in lakes where those small perch are so plentiful, the bass fishing is no good. If the bass were plentiful, these little perch would have been thinned out more than they seem to be here. Looks to me as though the bass had all died off. This has happened in some other lakes and I've seen shores lined with dead bass in the spring."

His deductions were corroborated by the results which the two reported upon their return.

"Absolutely nothing doing," growled the tough 'un. "Why, I'm surprised at this kind of fishing. From what you fellows told me, I had thought that any water in this country was good for some kind of game fish. I can do better than this five minutes' walk from home."

It sure did look bad. We told them of Ham's theory as to the scarcity of bass. Then and there it was decided that the gray of the next dawn would find us on our way to the waters we knew and could count on with reasonable certainty. After supper we got things in readiness for an early start the next morning.

Early, did I say? Never in all my camping experience have I got up as early in the morning as on this trip, and I must admit that I enjoyed it. Prof booted us out at three a. m. The wisdom of this was seen later, as it promised to be another hot day. We broke camp and started across the lake for the first portage.

The camp had been a delightful one, but we knew other delightful spots that offered fish in addition. In spite of its isolation, we hadn't seen a living thing at the lake excepting the porcupines. We

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to me to spend three days and nights camping alone in the north woods, it would be accepted only upon one of two conditions, viz., that there is no other possible way for me to go (for they say we are all crazy on some subject or other), or upon the positive guarantee that the trip will end as happily as this one did. But the guarantee must be iron-clad and absolute, and with not more than one-tenth of one per cent of a chance for failure.

## Somewhere in New York

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clearing like a Colossus of Rhodes at the end of a hike.

"What luck?" came the chorus.

"Oh, I got a few," was the communicative answer, as he threw his basket down with a motion of attempted indifference with due care that it should fall right side up in a soft place. There was something too darned modest in his demeanor to suit me, so without further parley I dove into the creel. What a sight! They had been most carefully packed by a cunning hand, just like strawberries or apples, except in the inverse ratio. The eight-inchers were all on top and the next layer was made up of beautiful "natives" of ten and twelve inchers, then there were three one pounders and last of all a wonderful "brown" of about a pound and a half!

As we three looked at the layout on the grass and then beamed up at him, the Giant blew his nose just to show what an "onny" stunt it was for him.

Then we drank a toast, "Long life to all trout fishermen and to the romance of all fishing!"

It was the end of a perfect trip, except the snake.

## Up to Lost Lake and Back

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had expected to see quite a lot of wild life.

"Let's call her the Dead Sea," suggested Thistles.

"Wait a minute," halted Ham, "Look over there by that point of Norways."

There stood the first deer we had seen on the lake, belly-deep in the water. We halloed and shouted at her; but she unconcernedly went on with her feeding, nor did she move from where we first saw her while we were on the lake.

Because of our early start, the portaging back to the creek was all over by six a. m., just as it was beginning to warm up. We stopped long enough in the creek to catch a few chubs with some of the worms which Prof had saved, and then hastened on to the Flambeau. Needless to say, we weren't backward about wetting a line this time. Going downstream required only one paddle in the stern to keep the boat headed straight, and we made good use of our opportunity. Casting carefully from our crowded

boat, it wasn't long before Prof had a lively musky on his hook.

"Everybody steady now," warned Ham.

Soon the fish was brought alongside and landed neatly. It wasn't a record breaker, only eight or nine pounds, but it looked mighty big after the perch of Lost Lake. Since it wasn't advisable on account of the crowded condition of the boat for more than one of us to cast at a time, Prof now yielded the rod to me, when Thistles, who had been trolling, yelled, "I've got one, too!" Sure enough, he had one, and it proved to be a dandy wall-eyed pike. Then it was up to me to deliver to keep the count even.

"What'll you have?" asked I, with rod upraised for the first cast. Anything would have been acceptable.

"Let's have a bass for variety," ordered Prof.

The gods were with me, and in the foam of a little eddy round the next bend, I got the smashing strike which means small-mouthed bass.

"Well, old croaker, what have you got to say now?" Prof questioned Thistles.

"I take it all back. This sure is the real thing, and as far as I'm concerned, Lost Lake can stay lost."

## The Mississippi At Its Source

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of Douglas Lodge—the park hotel—with its convoy of attractive cabins. In the north part of the park, not far from the Mississippi's source, is the Minnesota state school of forestry.

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There's a fascination about it all that grips one. Turn the lights on wary Mr. Beaver at night and watch him rebuild the dam, which was cleaned out the morning before. One of the Douglas Lodge men is kept well occupied during the season undoing the damage done by these remarkable busy-bodies. They told us in the summer of a drain creek for the hotel which is supposed to be open and running at all times. For many moons, however, the ditch has been dredged every morning, only to be dammed up again at night by the beavers.

Ever sit pondering for a moment in the region of the northern lakes, then have your dreams disturbed by the maniacal shriek of the loon? If you have, you probably have heard also the far away, dismal, answering night-call. The Indians heard it centuries ago at Lake Itasca. The same cries echo the call of the wild there now.

Small song-birds nest there. And, through he isn't numerous, the bald eagle is at home in one or two of the towering Norway pines. The muskrat, free from fear of transformation into an adorning muff or boa, is in his element, and now and then you all but stumble over a gloomy porcupine, raking in lilies or making lazy progress toward a nearby tree for his bark meal.

It leads one's imagination on to history that is to be, this quiet, beautiful, restful, ever-sorrowing lake with its legends and scenes of ancient struggles.