

Temagami: jewel of the North

by Peter Stathis

"Once you've come to Temagami, you will always return."
— Rick Whitteker, manager of the Temagami Wilderness Centre

With the summer just around the corner and the academic community getting out of school soon, an escape from the congestion of Toronto to the scenic Canadian northland may be the ideal summer adventure.

The Temagami wilderness is one of Ontario's most picturesque regions.

One of the few remaining stands of true wilderness left in Eastern Canada, its natural beauty has not yet been devastated by commercial development and hypertourism.

The Temagami wilderness encompasses more than 5,000 kilometres of mountains, forests and winding waterways (rivers, lakes, falls) that make it ideal for camping, canoeing, swimming, rock climbing, cliff-diving, fishing, photography, (as well as skiing, dog-sledding, and snow-shoeing during the winter season).

Temagami is much closer, however, than you might initially think: only an afternoon's drive away from metropolitan Toronto. A four hour drive on Highway 11 past North Bay and 45 minutes further northwest on 11 will take you to the Temagami Wilderness Centre: one of the lodges that provides the nature enthusiast with bed and breakfast as well as equipment, supp-



CRYSTAL BLUE WATER: A view of the Temagami region from the window of a Cessna bush plane. The wilderness extends over 5,000 kilometres of forests, mountains, rivers, lakes and falls.

lies and general outfitting for out-trips throughout the region.

The natural wonders of Temagami include the red and white pine, jack pine, poplar and white birch trees, with some of the old growths dating back well over 1,000 years. Depending on how discreet and lucky you are during an out-trip, you may see much of the Temagami wildlife including moose, deer, black bears, beaver, wolves, loons, the great

blue heron, many species of fish, and the majestic golden eagle.

The Temagami Wilderness Centre (TWC) provides qualified nature guides who will navigate small groups (between 5-12 people) along the complex network of Temagami's waterways and trails.

The guides also provide trippers with a rich historical background, telling stories, showing geographical landmarks, and pointing out ancient Indian hieroglyphs and other relics from the past. As well, they instruct the trippers in canoe survival skills, wood-working, and how to find and prepare much of the plantlife in the region.

Rick Whitteker, the manager of TWC, explained that because he has fallen so much in love with Temagami, he is fortunate to have a job which allows him to play while he works and gets paid.

A small man with wavy black hair, silver spectacles and a thick beard, Whitteker has been managing the Centre for three years. He knows about every aspect of the operation: the outfitting, the scheduling of trips, and the topography of the region. He is so busy during summer and winter vacation seasons, that he rarely has time for a holiday himself.

Recently, I had the unique experience of travelling with a group of tourists from France as part of a week-long trip that took us through an exhilarating set of circumstances.

We were flown by floatplanes to a pre-determined lake where our canoes and gear had been stored and were waiting for us. Our objective was to paddle back to the Centre over the next week.

Although there was a translator along with us on the trip, there was never a language barrier in our group. This was a credit to the invigorating experiences we shared with each

other in this remote region. In a few days, we had already formed strong bonds of attachment.

We passed along dark, quiet channels surrounded by the stark walls of mountains, swamps where we had to push our way through mud, winding white-water rivers, an open bay where we battled an approaching storm, and the ancient Natsawgan trails that wound through the hills where we portaged our canoes.

I tried to keep a daily journal and take as many photographs as possible, but once we began paddling, I found that my sense of time and purpose quickly became distorted.

The week-long trip canoeing, camping and hiking in the bush

sometimes felt as long as a month or as short as an afternoon. And nothing beyond the canoe or the tent seemed to matter anymore.

The constant churn of paddling the canoe made me realize that I had muscles where I didn't even know any existed. Digging the paddle down, dragging it across the length of the boat and then forward over water and plunging down again. Over and over, the feeling of powering the canoe along with your partner can be a great feeling for those of us who spend most of our time sitting in lecture halls or offices.

After a long day of paddling, you will enjoy just about anything for food once you set up camp.

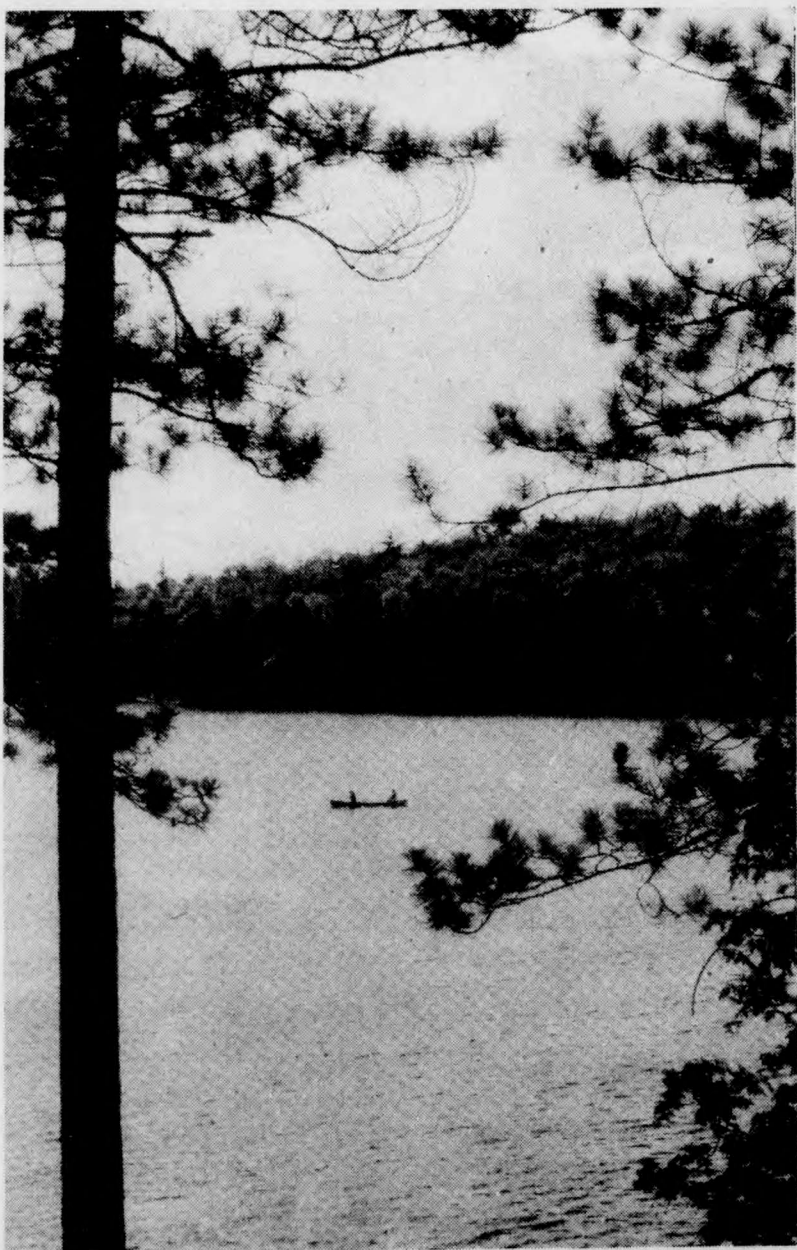
Our dinners were simple but satisfying: lentil soup with carrots, onions and instant beef gravy as a sauce for mashed potato. And for drink, all you need to do is dip your plastic cup into Temagami's famous crystal clear lake water.

After the breath-taking forestscape of trees and calm water, I returned to Toronto to see the familiar concrete and steel monolithic apartments and sprawling industrial strip malls.

Instead of wildlife and the sound of a canoe paddle in the still water, I saw asphalt streets and the exhaust of a steady stream of cars hurrying to their destinations, mine included.

There was a sense of elation to be coming back home, but also one of deep regret — one environment is clean, quiet and natural and the other busy, noisy and artificial.

Yet even one week in the bush was enough to rejuvenate an otherwise jaded and cynical urbanite. I plan to return to Temagami this summer. Once is never enough.



SURROUNDED BY SERENITY: A quiet moment on Lake Temagami. Many of the waterways in the district offer a panorama of natural beauty uninterrupted by other tourists, camps or boats.



BORIS KOEHLIN

TREE HUGGER: Some of the old growth trees date back well over 1,000 years.

Temagami out-trips cost between \$250 to \$500 Cdn. for four days to one week including transportation, food, and outfitting. If you would like to explore Ontario's rich history and geography, contact Rick Whitteker at the Temagami Wilderness Centre (705) 569-3733 for further details.