

convince themselves that they are not dead and buried after all. They have been in the bush all winter—pulled out just before the breaking up of the ice, and were by no means sorry to get in. But the glare and glamor of the city did not appeal to them for long, and instructions from headquarters came by way of a relief after a week of it. Now they are off once more to patrol the woods, but this is the eventful season, the season of forest fires, thunder storms and flies.

By no means is the journey one continuous joy ride over breeze-swept lakes and through scenes of unbroken loveliness. True that each headland reveals a scene more startling than the last, but the rangers have been too long in the woods to pay much heed to scenery. Their one thought for the present is to "get there," and presently the chain of lakes is left behind, and they find themselves negotiating a narrow creek with a stiff current against them. The water is high, for snow still remains on the hill tops, and their progress becomes slower and slower, till presently they reach the foot of a rapid, boiling and tumultuous. Then comes the one dread of the trail, "the long portage."

The men beach their canoe, dragging it high and dry. One of them takes up his pack and his rifle, lifts the canoe bodily on to his shoulders as though it were a giant sunhat, and

Excellent canoe man the ranger must be or he would lose much time on the trail—and sooner or later the day would inevitably come when he would lose his life also in one or another of the boiling rapids. Not necessarily by drowning would this occur, but if the woodsman loses his canoe and all his outfit when far from Indian camp or white settlement, he is apt to perish miserably ere, by raft or on foot, he can reach a place of succor.

Having gained their destination the chief duty of the forest rangers at this time of the year is to look out for fires—and incidentally to take care that they themselves are not eaten bodily by the flies, which are now a nightmare. The blackflies are perhaps the worst, for they crawl under one's clothing—into the ears and nostrils, and actually draw blood when they bite. But there are intervals when the blackfly population seems asleep, and they do not bite after dusk, but should they cease their activities for a moment one becomes aware of countless millions of mosquitoes, the humming of which sounds in one's ears like the humming of a swarm of bees. Only those who have gained experience can imagine how bad these pests are in the forests during the spring of the year, and unless one can find an open place at the lake margin, wind-swept of flies, there is no evading them.



The Forested Shores of Buttes Lake.

walks off into the bush. The other shoulders the remainder of the outfit—a load that would make the eyes of even a camel water with self-pity—and staggers off at his companion's heels.

There is a rough trail following the course of the creek, which is here so rapid that no canoe man could negotiate it, and along this trail the men make their way. In places it is so overgrown that they simply have to force an opening through it, and each time this happens millions of mosquitoes are shaken from the branches and begin to make merry over the feast. The longer the portage the more ferocious they become, till finally the men are forced to lay down their loads, wipe the perspiration from their faces, and take a breather.

But the long portage is usually rewarded. It may lead over the divide and into the next valley—or at any rate you can rest assured that the rangers have chosen the easiest way to their goal. Next day the current is with them instead of against them, and it is then that their excellent canoe-manship saves many an hour on the trail. The first rapid terminates with a waterfall, that must be portaged, but the second and third are passable. Who that has never felt it can imagine the thrills of that headlong plunge down the rapids?—here a lightning stroke of the paddle or the pole diverting calamity as the canoe rides nose on towards a boulder; the boulder sweeps by within arm's length—both men are pulling for dear life to straighten the craft as she rises and falls in the very centre of the race. The danger is past; each heaves a sigh of relief as with a final bound the canoe shoots forward on still water.

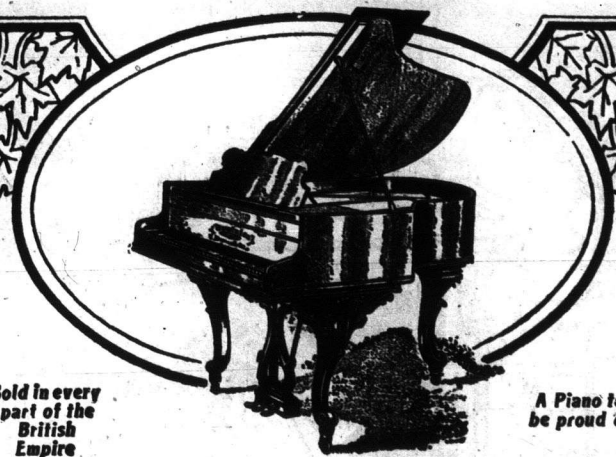
There are, however, one or two precautions which the rangers are careful to take; first never to leave a candle burning in the tent, and second to keep the tent closed and creep in under the flap. Of course a smudge fire can be made to smoke them out, but the smoke is almost as bad as the flies. It is far better not to let them in, and before retiring to go round with a match and singe the wings of all those that can be seen on the underside of the tent.

The forest ranger is usually a past master in making his camp comfortable when he has reached the central cache. Possibly the men have brought with them a prospector's folding stove with which to do their cooking, but more generally this is done by reflecting the heat of their tiny wood fire on to the article to be cooked. Splendid cakes can be made by the use of a reflector, and when eaten hot with fresh meat or pickerel just taken from the lake the forest ranger is not likely to envy his city friends their meal.

His bed he makes by securing a number of light cedar stakes between two logs, so that only the logs come in contact with the ground, while the weight of the sleeper is supported on the laths; and this primitive spring mattress he covers with soft brushwood, the scent of which pervades one's very dreams. Given two Hudson Bay blankets, a life in the open air from dawn to sunset, and sufficient (if not too much) exercise, the ranger is not likely to suffer from insomnia.

Sometimes it happens that for days the men are almost idle, then follows a spell as eventful as it is strenuous. For weeks past no rain has fallen, and there has been little dew at night time. So dry is the muskeg that it crumbles

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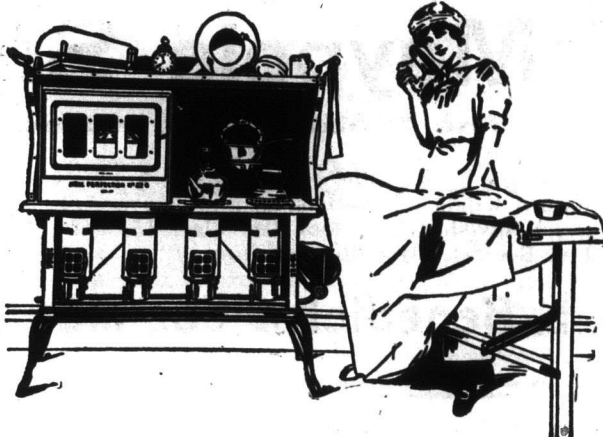
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