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## *Preface*

Shall we sit here on this Persian rug  
of moss and lichen? The river  
like a knife cuts Precambrian rock  
for us alone, and from its gorge  
ages rise like mists that shawl  
the rounded shoulders of these hills.

Joanne Hart

I sink into the moss, breathing hard from the short climb. The mists are thinning. Beyond the river's gorge I can see the lake. It moves gently, bright in the morning sun.

When I have rested, I grip a little birch, hoist myself to my feet, turn, and look up. Mountains were here once, tall as the Canadian Rockies. Wind, snow, ice and rain have worn down their peaks to the rounded shoulders of these hills. But the cliff behind me is steep.

One man's lifetime is nothing to Precambrian rock. The face of the stone hasn't eroded any that I can see. Each crevice and toehold is just as it was when I first scrambled up it. I marvel that anything can stay so stolidly the same while the people have so changed.

The few remaining farmers admit that this is no farming

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country. They drive school buses or work in the city, and keep cows as a hobby.

The fishermen no longer row out in high-ended dories, ever watchful for a blow from the northwest. They tend the nets in fast motorboats and get weather reports on the radio. 'Tschgumi still drowns men, but not as often as he used to.

The loggers are sober technicians who live at home, commute to work, and, with their brontosaurian machines, cut more timber than whole crews of old-time lumberjacks. They buy bonds and certificates of deposit instead of "blowing it in" on one glorious orgy at the end of the drive.

But the Indians have changed the most. We called them Chippewa, or Ojibway. They spoke of themselves as Anishinabeg, which means the real, original men.

Their language is just right for the northern forest. In a few soft words, conditions of ice, snow, wind, water, and the other forces of vital importance to all life here can be described precisely. I'm not going to use much Anishinabowin in this book, so we won't need a glossary. You'd know, wouldn't you, just from the sound, that "mukwa" is bear and "omeemee" is pigeon? Surely "'Tschgumi" suggests the mystery of the great, cold, spirit-haunted lake.

Maybe you won't believe everything I tell you. That's all right. No hard feelings. I wouldn't swallow some of this stuff either if I hadn't seen it. But credibility should not be the concern of an eye-witness. His job is just to tell what he saw. It's up to other people to make the judgments.

In telling what I saw, I haven't been able to keep all events in the order in which they happened. The chapter about a cave, for instance, starts with childhood memories and ends with a return in later years. When the narrative is pursuing bears or bankers it wanders in time wherever the spoor may lead.

It has been a relief to say some things here that I wouldn't have dared to include in my articles for outdoor magazines. Some hard facts about equipment would have enraged advertisers. Certain of my youthful indiscretions violated the law and the sportsman's code. I'm not proud of these, but they did happen.

This isn't a how-to-do-it book, but I have described a few tricks for living in the woods and on the water, methods that I would like not to be lost. Technique is lighter than equipment and easier to carry over portages. Some of my practices are contrary to the advice

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of established authorities. I don't mean to assert that those people are wrong. I'm just telling how things went for me. You can take your choice.

More controversial, or anyway more bitterly argued, are the questions of progress versus conservation. Again, I have tried simply to report memories from some battlefields of that never-ending war. But I have been unable to speak as an honest neutral. So I may as well confess that I am one of those radical troublemakers, now being compared to Nazis and Stalinists, who nag at the human race to relax, a little, its strangle-hold on the quivering planet.

My acknowledgments are short because testimony should be given from recall rather than from research. But I thank my wife, my daughter and my son for dredging deep into remembrance of things past.

And now let's look at one of those remote ages that rise out of the mists above the river.

J. L. P.

