

Memories of Crescent Lake

In 1942 or '43 my father, a band leader and insurance agent, purchased a roughly framed cottage on Crescent Lake from a discouraged New Yorker who came to realize that he was way over his head. I don't know if it was the black flies or the mosquitoes that got to him, but he was willing to sell out at an attractive price.

At the time the paved road from Claremont ended in Unity near the school house (now the fire station). We would continue on to what is known as Cold Pond Road, then left onto North Shore Road, then take a right onto what is known as Shorewood Estates Road. As we drove down the road there were the remains of a logging operation. Our camp was at the very end of the road, and at the time there was only one other camp on this road. It was owned by a timber scout who was also a member of the Claremont fire department. His name was Middy Daniels. There was one cottage on the West of us owned by a family from Wells River, Vt., which was on the end of Page Road and not accessible from our road.

The Rural Electrification Agency (REA) had recently strung power lines around the lake, so my dad brought a table saw into the shell of a camp and proceeded to finish the construction. It has 3 bedrooms, a large living room and a modest kitchen. There was a dug well and a hand pump in the kitchen for water. Hot water was made in a pot on the electric stove. There was a septic tank constructed in front of the camp for sink waste and we had an outhouse out back. There was a galvanized bucket big enough for me to take a bath in when the lake was too cold, and my mother had a miniature washing machine about the size of half barrel for washing clothes. We had no telephone or running water.

A master mason, Eddie Page from Claremont, for whom Page Road is named, was enlisted to construct a large fieldstone fireplace at one end of the living room. Once constructed, this fireplace allowed us to extend our season at the lake. In the winter, when the roads were unplowed, we would drive to the head of Shorewood Estates Road and snowshoe to the camp, I riding on my father's shoulders. We'd build a roaring fire in the fireplace and cook ourselves a hearty meal, clear snow off a patch of ice, and go ice skating.

In the spring another problem presented itself. Roads that weren't paved started the season by being very muddy. Our urge to "get to the lake" sometimes overcame our common sense. Sometimes the unpaved road out of Unity would halt our progress, but when we were able to get past that mess, we could proceed further toward the camp. More often than not, we would get stuck in the mud further down on North Shore Road. This would necessitate my father's trekking to the Gibson Farm down the road to ask for help. Farmer Gibson would bring out a team of work horses that would, when hitched to the front bumper of our car, pull us out of the mud and send us on our way.

If we made it to the camp, we faced other enemies: black flies and mosquitoes. The property was overgrown with trees, and the lake itself was a great breeding place for the enemy. The solution of the time was to fill five gallon pails with pine needles and set them afire. They would smolder and give off a cloud of smoke that the bugs didn't like. Of course, one had to be upwind for this to work, and the smoke was a bit off putting.