

## A SPRUCE BARK CAMP IN THE ADIRONDACKS.<sup>1</sup>

by John R. Spears.

Once upon a time a denizen of the great American metropolis, a man with the tastes of a prince and the purse, alas, of a pauper, found the summer season almost upon him while as yet no preparations had been made for a vacation for himself and family. By dint of those little economies which to rightly balanced minds are a pleasure rather than a pain, he and his wife had managed each year to save from \$100 to \$150, which they felt able to expend for the privilege of living with their two children, a boy of twelve and a girl of ten, for a brief interval in some place out of town. They had gone to the sea-side and lived with sea-side farmers and boarding-house keepers; they had gone to the hills of Connecticut, to the plains of Long Island, to the sands of New Jersey; and they had lived near the banks of the Hudson. But when they came to sit down by the open fire in the parlor of their up-town flat and think it all over, they could not for the life of them see very much difference between the various resorts in which they had sojourned. The old farmers who chewed tobacco, the farm wives who looked very much over-worked, the old parlors that smelled musty when first opened, the old bedrooms with excruciating prints and faded mottoes on the wall, the old wells with pools of kitchen slops nearby, were as much alike in the various localities as peas in a pod. Memory went further and called up pictures of the other boarders, who were very much alike, also, but here the subject becomes painful. The one thing that the souls of this couple longed for was something new.

By a lucky chance, while they were talking about the matter one evening, the door-bell rang, and after madam had gone to the speaking tube and said, "*Who is it?*" in a voice familiar to all who live and visit in flats, they had the satisfaction of welcoming a young friend who had hunted and fished and traveled in no end of places. When he had heard the story of their troubles he said with an assurance that was charming:

*"I can tell you just what to do. Go up to the Adirondacks and build a camp of your own. Why, I'd rather own a camp in the woods than an estate on the Hudson. You*

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*see, I couldn't pay the taxes on the estate, if I owned one, but a camp doesn't cost anything."*

How this proposition was received with enthusiasm, how the latest map and guidebook of the Adirondacks were purchased next day, how the family passed their evenings chiefly on the parlor floor with the map spread out where all could see it, how they lived in a dream of brooks and creeks and woods and mountains, need not be dwelt upon, but must be referred to because such doings form a very delightful prelude to a vacation in a spruce bark camp, and serve to brighten the whole period between the forming of the project and its consummation.

Eventually, although they knew nothing about the country there save what is told in the guide-books, this city family decided to go to the westerly side of the great forest, because they rightly inferred that the woods would be quite as attractive and the expenses much less there than on the easterly side where society people go.

So it was, that on a certain day in the last week of May they found themselves in a Hudson River train bound for Utica and thence to Prospect Station on the Utica and Black River Railroad. It is worth saying that no such delightful journey on the cars had they ever made before, and this was due solely to the fact that they were on a voyage of discovery.

It was nightfall when they reached the hotel at Prospect village, a mile and a half back in the country from the station, and they were all tired. But, although the hotel was very much like other village hotels, the sauce of a novel project made the supper taste wonderfully well, while the tucked-up little parlor seemed very inviting afterward.

When supper was over, the city man got the landlord into the parlor and took him into the confidence of the party. The landlord understood the matter fully. He had built and lived in spruce bark camps and expected to do so many more times. Plenty of experts in such matters were to be had as guides, but one good man would serve the purpose. "Bill" was just the man, and Bill was in the bar-room at that minute. He was called in, and found to be awkward and shy, but he had an honest face and a rugged frame, and the whole family liked him on sight. They engaged him at once, after which there was a long consultation over the outfit needed. Then the livery-stable keeper was engaged to carry the party up

to the location which Bill had decided upon, subject to approval; after which the two very tired but contented parents and two very tired and excited children went to bed and slept soundly until seven o'clock the next morning.

The sun was shining brightly. A robin sang among the half grown leaves on a maple just opposite the window. A gentle breeze was swaying the branches of the tree. One glance from the window made the family impatient to be on the way to the woods, and they quickly dressed and went down to breakfast.

Everybody else in the house had been to breakfast; but a great platter of broiled steak, and a deep dish full of mealy potatoes, and a plate heaped up with the lightest of bread, and a glass pitcher full of milk. Ha! it seemed to the children and the parents, too, for that matter, that they had never seen a better breakfast.

When it was all over, the man with the livery team came to the door. He had a great three-spring wagon that was ample in size to carry the party and the outfit, and, bundling themselves in very quickly, away they went.

The village of Prospect stands on the banks of a stream called the West Canada Creek. Alas, that the beautiful Kany-a-hoo-ra of the Indians—the “Leaping-water”—should have received such an appellation from the white man. But the name of the stream is quickly forgotten in the beauties of the region, when at this season one drives over the road that winds in an easterly direction along up the valley. The views of fields divided by old lichen-covered fences, of groves of birch and maple and spruce and balsam just spreading their pale green verdure, of stretches of tumbling water, of grass and tree covered hills, with now and then, as the road rises over a knoll, a glimpse of the mountains, blue and dreamy in the sunshine, are pleasing to the accustomed visitor, but altogether lovely to one who sees them for the first time. As the party drove along, the guide and the driver pointed out hills where they had seen, or perhaps killed, foxes; woods where partridges could be found in season; brooks where no end of speckled trout could be caught by any one; rifts and still waters in the river where big fellows—three-pounders—were to be taken by the skilled and lucky; and, finally, a field where an old she bear and a cub had come one night and killed and eaten a calf, and “*it wasn't no more 'n twelve years ago, either.*”

By this time, they were approaching the little hamlet of Northwood, where there is a post-office and a daily mail, and, what seemed very comforting to the madam, a telephone line to the village. She was thinking what a great comfort

the 'phone would be should either of the children be taken sick, for a doctor could be sent for very quickly.

A mile and a half beyond the Northwood post-office the party found only a narrow clearing on the left and north of the road. Beyond that was the great forest stretching away unbroken for more than a hundred miles. To the right was a forest also, but it was not a very large one, for the creek could be heard roaring over the rifts not far away, while the driver told them that the clearing extended from the road to the creek not far above them. It was in this patch of woods, between the road and the creek, that the guide had proposed to build the camp.

They turned into a grass-grown road that led into the woods. There were ruts and rocks and logs and roots plenty in it, but no one minded the jolting, and pretty soon they emerged into a little open space that had been cleared no one knew when, and had never grown up to trees again. It was almost an acre in extent, facing the creek, and was carpeted with grass. There was an icy brook running along one side, a long stretch of deep, still water in the creek above it, and a longer stretch of rifts below. Into this clearing they drove and then stopped that they might look about. A gentle breeze was drifting along through the forest heavy with woody odors. The sunshine flashed through the swaying tree tops and danced on the tumbling waters. An old partridge sitting on a log in the thicket hard by, unconscious of the presence of strangers, began to beat his breast with a stately thump that quickly merged into a whirring roll.

Would that place do for a camp? They scarce could find words to answer, so lovely did it seem to them. The camp kit was taken from the wagon, the driver was paid his fare, and then the real work of building a spruce bark camp was before them. With a brief interval for luncheon, this work kept them all busy until night.

First of all, they selected a spot for a site for the camp from which there was a gentle slope in all directions so that, since the ground had to be the floor of the camp, no water could flow across that floor in case of rainfall. Then the guide went into the woods and cut two stout forks which he brought to the site of the house and drove into the ground about twelve feet apart. A ridgepole was laid across the forks. Then a spruce tree about a foot in diameter, which stood nearby, was felled into the clearing, and the bark was stripped off in six-foot lengths and laid aside. A twelve-foot length of the butt was cut off and rolled around until about twelve feet from the forks and parallel with the ridge-pole.

This log was to be the rear wall of the house. Stout poles were laid from the ridge-pole to this log for rafters to support the roof, and, this done, the bark of the tree was spread out over the rafters. The one spruce did not furnish half enough bark for the roof, but two other trees were cut and stripped and enough bark obtained to complete the roof and close in the sides as well. The front was left open. It faced the south. This part of the work was, of course, done by the two men. The wife and youngsters had a plenty to do as well. Their part was to make the bed. And such a bed!

With a good knife each, they attacked the boughs of the fallen spruce and cut great armfuls of the twigs, being careful that none with a stem thicker than a lead pencil was taken. These twigs were laid with their butts to the front of the camp all over the floor, until they formed a bed a foot deep. Then a great stack of hemlock boughs was cut and the twigs torn off and spread over the spruce. On top of these a deep layer of fine balsam twigs was placed, so that, at last, when all was complete and supper was over, the tired family dropped down upon that bed, while such fragrant odors as Solomon in all his glory knew not of, arose to soothe and comfort them.

Then the shadows of twilight fell. A huge fire of driftwood with a length of spruce for a backlog was built before the camp. The darkness increased. The flames of the fire leaped and flared about, half lighting, half concealing with black shadows, the view of forest and stream. The last song and chirrup of the birds were hushed, and only the tumbling water on the rifts and the snapping of the fire were heard to break the silence of the night. Care had fled and peace was nigh. With such hearty thanks to a kind Providence as are seldom uttered elsewhere, the man with the tastes of a prince and the purse of a pauper drew a blanket over the wife and little ones and closed his eyes to sleep in utter content.

The spruce bark camp is a simple structure. Two upright forks, a ridge-pole, a backlog, a dozen rafters, a roof and side of barks, a carpet eighteen inches thick, of fragrant evergreens, and there you are. But that is not all that the camper needs. For comfort he must have a table and seats about it. Four forks are driven into the ground to represent the legs of the table. Over these, poles are laid, and, over the poles, breadths of bark. Other forks but half as high are driven near these and stout poles laid over them to serve as benches in place of chairs. For a stove, nothing better is known than a yard square piece of sheet iron supported on rows of stones, say five or six inches large. A very small fire under the

sheet iron will serve to boil the coffee or fry the fish. There are books in plenty which tell one all about camp kits and quantities and qualities of food to take into the woods, but the wise man takes the simplest of outfits. A few pails of different sizes, a couple of frying pans, a few tin cups, knives and forks, and an abundance of wooden plates and saucers that can be thrown away and so save dish washing—what more would you have?

Mayhap the cost of this outing will be of interest. The railroad fare from New York to Prospect was \$5.59 for each adult and the children at half-fare brought the fares of the family to a total of \$17.77. From the railroad to the hotel the hack fare was 45 cents. The hotel bill over night was \$3.00. The livery man charged \$2.50 for carrying the party to the camping ground. The guide was employed for two days and his bill was \$5.00. The cooking utensils purchased in Prospect cost nearly \$3.00. The kit could be had for less by one who knew what he needed. The ax was borrowed of the guide, but a new one can be had for \$1.50. Blankets (three double ones at least should be taken in May for a family of four) were carried from home. Only old clothing, and that all of wool, was taken.

The question of what one shall eat in camp is all important, for nowhere else in the world are appetites keener. If the camp be located properly, that is to say within walking distance of a farm-house, one may live on the fat of the land. Here is the fare of the party just described, for one day: For breakfast; oatmeal and milk, boiled eggs, flap-jacks with butter and maple sugar, and coffee with milk and sugar. For dinner; broiled trout, fried raw potatoes, roast beef, bread (baked at a farm-house) and butter, strawberry short-cake, and coffee. For supper; cold beef, bread and butter, strawberries and cream, and tea. This was in June, when wild strawberries are everywhere abundant about the Adirondacks. The milk was purchased at a farm-house about a quarter of a mile away at 15 cents a gallon. It was kept in a large pail with a cover over it, placed in a shady pool in the brook. Some of the strawberries were picked by the members of the party and some were purchased at 10 cents a quart, all nicely picked over. They were had in any quantity for weeks. The average cost of food for the family was a dollar a day.

The trout were caught in the brook chiefly, though even a tenderfoot may take them from the West Canada if he will try. A butcher drove up over the road from Prospect twice a week. By leaving word for him at the post-office the party were able to get beef, mutton, and Bologna sausage—and good Bologna sausage is

not to be despised when camping out in the woods. The best cuts of beef cost 14 cents a pound. Eggs cost from 10 to 14 cents a dozen. Potatoes that year were 50 cents a bushel. At first only steaks of beef were purchased. How to cook a roast was a problem, the solving of which proved one of the chief delights of the outing.

There were some features of the camp life which to some people would not be wholly agreeable. Wood for cooking and for the camp fire at night had to be gathered. The cooking had to be done and the dishes had to be washed. A rain storm came now and then. They were dry enough in their camp, but the cooking was done out-of-doors, and woe betide the cook when it rained. As a matter of fact, a roof should have been built over the stove, as the sheet iron arrangement was called. Then, there were mosquitoes and black flies, though not so many as had been seen in boarding-houses. But those ills were not counted ills. All shared the work alike. They were living out-of-doors where the air was more than pure—it was deliciously sweet and fragrant. They roamed the woods and examined every tree and shrub and weed they saw. They studied the habits of the birds and squirrels, and even made friends with them by spreading crumbs near the camp for them to eat. They found that a porcupine was making himself too much at home in the camp when they were away, and they made a trap of a box and caught him and had a great lark examining him before they let him go.

They got acquainted with the natives, and, if the truth be told, made a study of them as was done with birds and squirrels and porcupine, and the study was found interesting. They made a trip nearly every day to the post-office, where they got their favorite New York daily, only twenty-four hours old, and so kept the run of the world, which at that time seemed a very long way off.

On Sunday they went down to Northwood and heard the sermon that was preached at 2 o'clock in a neat little church that stands there. They remained to attend Sunday-school afterward. The gratitude which the people showed for the help which the strangers rendered in these services, forms one of the most pleasing recollections of the outing. Indeed, from the day that the ground was reached until the day, seven weeks later, when, with tears in the eyes of wife and children, they drove away, the days were all too short and the nights were all without heaviness.

There are two kinds of people in this world—those who do not know anything about spruce bark camps in the Adirondacks, and those who do; and those who know feel very sorry for those who do not.

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