

2015

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Recommended Citation

Geller, William (2015) "118 Deer Went By...: Reminscing about the Old Sporting Camps Deep in the Maine Backcountry," *Appalachia*: Vol. 66: No. 1, Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia/vol66/iss1/8>

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118 Deer Went By...

*Reminiscing about the old sporting camps
deep in the Maine backcountry*

William Geller



Editor's note: This is part two of the story of a vanished way of life in Maine, between Rainbow Lake and Yoke Pond just west of Millinocket, south of Baxter State Park. This region encompasses the northernmost 49 miles of what we now call the 100-Mile Wilderness. The previous installment in our Summer/Fall 2014 issue (LXV no. 2) told about the vanished world of logging. As that story closed, we left an old logger sitting at the edge of a quiet lake in July 1966. This story begins with that moment. But in this story, the history unfolds through the eyes of a sporting camp caretaker named Rex Hale, who docks his boat where the logger is sitting.

ON THAT SUNNY JULY 16, 1966, REX HALE SLOWED HIS MOTORBOAT as it approached the dam at the mouth of Nahmakanta Stream near White House Landing on Pemadumcook Lake, deep in Maine's roadless backcountry, 93 miles upriver from Bangor. He met up with an old friend, a logger who had spent decades sending timber down the waterways to sawmills and paper mills. Rex found the old logger waiting for him at the dam. That evening, they sat quietly on the porch of a camp below the dam, reminiscing about the area's sporting camps.

"I remember when I came here in 1911," Rex said. "I was 10 years old. I loved listening to the stories my parents and their friends told." Rex's father, Charles A. Hale, was clerk at this former lumber camp. The family lived in Norcross at the time, and Rex's father operated a sporting camp at the carry,¹ between Ambejeus and Millinocket lakes starting around 1900. Rex's mother, Doris, had grown up at the sporting camps at Passagamet Lake and Kidney Pond. His mother-in-law, Grace McDonald, and her husband, Joseph, ran the sporting camps here in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Rex remembered guiding for the Haynes family in the Jo-Mary and Cooper Brook area in the 1940s and 1950s, generally during the fall hunting seasons. Jasper Haynes and his clients paid Rex more than he could earn at his job at the paper mill. Rex's Aunt Phyllis's two sons Robert and Raymond Leet were part of the crew that just finished sluicing at the dam across the way. About 1957, his father-in-law, Ernest Mayo, passed the caretaking of this camp to Rex.

¹ A *carry* is a portage path for boats.

At left, Buckhorn Camps around 1901. COURTESY OF SANDY HAYNES

THE SPORTING CAMP ERA BETWEEN RAINBOW LAKE AND YOKE POND started in the early 1890s. The Bangor and Aroostook Railroad continued to extend its tracks north from Brownville and by 1894 reached the West Branch at North Twin Dam. Nearby at the foot of a teardrop-shaped cove of North Twin Lake, the company built some homes for its railroad section workers and a little settlement called Norcross sprang up. Norcross became the jumping-off place for “sports”—that is, men and, later, women, who came. In the early years, the sports were typically men who came to fish and hunt. As the camps improved, women also came as guests, either to fish and hunt or simply vacation. By 1900, couples, and families were beginning to come and stay most of the summer. The length of stays shortened later.

By 1966, the sporting camp owners struggled to make ends meet. They kept on because they loved the way of life. The camps fed and housed hunters and anglers at the head of Nahmakanta Lake (established in 1872), at the mouth Nahmakanta Stream at Pemadumcook (since 1890), at Yoke Pond (1892), at Rainbow Lake (1895), at Middle Jo-Mary Lake (1895), at Lower Jo-Mary Lake (1900), at Third Debsconeag Lake (1901), and at Fourth Debsconeag Lake (1903).

For years, the old logger told Rex, the American Indians had traveled to these waters for food, and they worked as guides when white men first explored there. By the 1870s, white trappers were guiding and using their crude trapline camps and logging camps. Once the railroad reached Norcross in 1894, the number of sports increased dramatically, and the camps of the most enterprising guides radically improved. Other guides worked for the prominent camps that usually had a branch camp or two on nearby ponds.

Most of the camps instructed the sports to meet their guides at Norcross. The journey began with a steamer ride to one of the jumping-off places on Pemadumcook, Jo-Mary Stream, Nahmakanta Stream, and Ambejejus Falls. From any of those locations, travel was by canoe with several portages and hiking depending on destination. Rainbow Lake was furthest at 25 miles. Yoke Pond guides met their sports at Katahdin Iron Works and took them on a jarring 17-mile buckboard ride and hike. These routes to the camps did not change until the 1920s, when Greenville became the jumping-off place for both Yoke Pond and Rainbow Lake camps.

THE SOUND OF AN APPROACHING BOAT INTERRUPTED REX AND THE logger’s conversation. Betty and Buzzy Hopper, proprietors of Nahmakanta Lake Camps, motored by to their landing in the far cove. Betty was Rex’s wife’s

sister's daughter. Rex wondered if they were biking tonight. For a time, Buzzy biked the old tote road to Nahmakanta Lake where they had another boat to take to the camps at the head of the lake. Buzzy worked the 3–11 P.M. shift at the post office and returned in the dark without a light, sometimes with Betty on the crossbar. The Ketchum family would have smiled approvingly because Lewey Ketchum ran the river at night in his canoe 70 years previous. Lewey built the original camp in 1872 for Samuel Colt, the founder of United States Rubber Company. Colt abandoned it about 1890, and Lewey and his family lived there summers for the next 30 years, running it for at least the last 25 as a sporting camp.

Rex and the logger were not sure when the first camp was built in the vicinity of where they sat, but Rex knew a man named Stinchfield and Fred Heath operated a sporting camp here from about 1895 to about 1910. The two men also used it as a logging camp and toting shanty. If sports timed it right, they could hitch a tote ride almost daily to Nahmakanta. In 1910, Great Northern Paper took over the area and built its Debsconeag Depot Camp, which included a 60-person white boarding house that resulted in the name



Guides and “sports” (camp guests) fish on Jo-Mary Stream in the late 1890s or early 1900s. COURTESY OF SANDY HAYNES

“White House Landing.” When GNP no longer needed it for its logging operations, the company hired Joseph and Grace McDonald (ca. 1920) to run a retreat complex for GNP’s executives and guests. By 1929, they opened the camp to the general public. About 1943, GNP did not renew the commercial lease and helped the Myshralls, who had the lease, move operations to Third Debsconeag Lake to what had been the Sammy Smith and Fred Spencer camps. GNP had all but the three original log structures removed about 1943 and issued a private camp lease to the current owner Stephen J. Chamberlain in 1950.

From the porch, Rex looked across to the point where John and Madline Michaud had a camp from about 1899 to about 1911. The Michauds were one of several families in the watershed who accommodated sports in their year-round home. Charles and Ana Collins on Rainbow Lake and Lee Clement on Fourth Debsconeag Lake did the same when they first opened.

The old logger was curious about the camps at Fourth Lake that had been operating continuously since 1903. He knew Lee Clement was the first to open a sporting camp there, but was not so sure he was the first person to live on or near the point. A trapper and American Indian woman had a camp there. Some think they built and lived in the currently standing camp whose interior walls and ceiling she intricately decorated with birch bark that is still in excellent condition. Others think that was done later by a visiting artist. The Ketchum children told the old logger about paddling by and waving to the Indian family, and he thought that was probably before 1903. He had also heard the story that President Theodore Roosevelt stayed in the camp during his presidency, but old Norcross Hotel records had no evidence of him coming through Norcross.

The Clement name shifted Rex and the logger’s conversation to the Smith family. Sammy Smith had a camp without a lease at the outlet of Prentiss Pond, which drains east a short distance to Nahmakanta Lake. The timber cruisers discovered it in 1922 and would not provide a lease until convinced to do so by Clement. Supposedly the pond had no trout, but Sammy’s son Nelson fixed that by going over to Tumbledown Dick Pond and bringing back trout in pails. No one was quite sure when Sammy or someone in his family stopped using the camps, but shortly after Sammy died in 1948, Jasper Haynes replaced a roof. Sammy and Jasper were both ardent trappers.

Rex was familiar with the Haynes family because he had guided for Jasper Haynes, whose uncle was Guy Haynes and one of Rex's neighbors at Norcross. Guy had a camp on the big island closest to the dam at Rainbow Lake. Three others also had camps up there in the early years. Charles Garland was at the southeast corner (1900–ca. 1913) with a 5-acre garden, Walter McPheters was at what is now known as Rainbow Spring (ca. 1900–1915), and Charles Collins was on the west side of the dam (1903–1926). With the exception of Garland, who brought his guests in from the West Branch through Second Debsconeag Lake, the guests of the others came by steamer to a dock below the porch where Rex and the logger now sat, walked the portage trail to Third Debsconeag Lake, and paddled to the upper end where they took the old tote road to the southeast corner of the lake. Both Haynes and McPheters had small camps near their portage to Rainbow.

The only remaining camps at Rainbow Lake are the Rainbow Lake Camps built by Fred Clifford about 1926 and Fred Daisey's place east of the dam on the north side of the lake. When Clifford built, Collins still had his camp at the dam as did Eban Upton. Eugene Hale was operating at the east end of the lake, and Manley Boynton was on the lake, probably in the northwest cove. The 1924 fire destroyed the Haynes and McPheters camps. By 1938, Clifford had bought the camps at the dam, and Boynton and Hale were gone. GNP had owned the camps since 1958. Rex and the logger thought Daisey's camp had originally been a Sammy Smith trappers' camp.

REX AND THE OLD LOGGER REMEMBERED KETCHUM'S CAMP, DOWN Rainbow Stream at the head of Nahmakanta Lake. By 1966, the camp was known as Nahmakanta Lake Camps. Lewey and Louisa Ketchum and their children were typical sporting camp operators: the whole family worked. They maintained a garden and some animals, ate game and fish, and harvested berries. Louisa cooked, cleaned, and took care of the garden with the children's help. Lewey guided, met, and brought in guests and made trips for supplies. In a single day, Lewey could paddle to Norcross towing an empty canoe and return with both canoes filled with supplies, as long as the weather was good. As dam tender, he would open the dam's gate for water to flush him down stream. In coming back, he only had to portage at one place. The family left after hunting and before ice-up. Lewey would return once the ice was solid to cut the next year's firewood and ice, trap, and tote in supplies with the help of

the loggers' teams. He would return home to Indian Island just before ice-out and return with the family when they could negotiate the waterways.

BY THE MID-1920S, REX'S NORCROSS NEIGHBORS, RALPH AND PERSUS Boynton, owned the Ketchum camps and the branch camps at Wadleigh and Second Musquash ponds. Persus was the sister of Maurice York, who had opened the camps at Daicey Pond.² Ralph died in a logging accident a few years later, but his wife, with the help of her widowed daughter and her five children, operated the Ketchum camps at Nahmakanta until 1945. Over at Wadleigh Pond, Persus allowed John Oden to renovate and add new buildings at his expense. Oden, a successful New York businessman and musician, came with his chef and personal black minstrel band and guests who, one year, included members of Guy Lombardo's Band. The musicians played in the G clef cabin, which Oden had purposely built with corrugated metal for the musicians. Camp guests loved the camp's lively and welcoming atmosphere—although at first they were in a state of shock because at that time it was so unusual to find a group of black musicians deep in the woods of Maine. The camp became a community gathering point. Walter Rudder, who by 1966 owned the camps, hid his liquor bottles in stumps and tree hollows.

Rex and the logger heard a splash and scanned the lake. They saw a fire burning on the south side. It was probably someone's campfire near the mouth of Jo-Mary Stream. "We've both poled up that stream many times en route to either the Haynes' place, Buckhorn Camps on Middle Jo-Mary near the dam, or Potter's Antler's Camps on Lower Jo-Mary at Indian Point," the old logger said. They are the only camps still operating commercially in the Jo-Mary Lake area. Neither Rex nor the logger had been up Cooper Brook from Middle Jo-Mary to Yoke Pond camps for years.

But the old logger knew that Charlie Berry had established himself on Yoke Pond about 1892. In the first years, he was thought to be in partnership with Jack Caughlin. The old logger had heard that Berry served Caughlin coffee in a number-10 can; Jack would lift the giant container to his mouth with one hand. Berry's remained rustic longer than most of the other camps. Not until 1934 did guests find a bathtub and toilet at his camp. Berry sold the camps eleven years later to Keith and Corabel Skillin, who are still running them.

² The name *Daicey* originally was spelled "Daisey," after George Daisey. For some unknown reason, the spelling was changed to that seen on maps today. —Editor.

Rex recalled hearing that about the time Berry was establishing his camp, seven men, including Potter and Haynes, were doing the same on the Jo-Mary Lakes. Bert Hobbs guided from his camp at the southeast corner of Upper Jo-Mary from about 1895 until 1905 or so, when he came down with tuberculosis and quarantined himself at the camp. By then, 1966, Hobbs's son was maintaining it just for his family. Before Stinchfield and Heath moved over to Nahmakanta Stream they, Charles Harris (a guide and farmer from Milo), and Elmer Harris, youngest brother of Benjamin C. Harris of Katahdin View Camps on Pockwockamus Deadwater of the West Branch, all operated camps, but neither Rex nor the old logger knew where they were or when they had been open.

Rex knew from Jasper Haynes that Bert Haynes (Jasper's father) and his new wife Nellie had come by train to Norcross to stay at the new hotel in 1895. While paddling the lakes looking for a new camp spots, they had seen 118 deer. That had convinced them to build on Jo-Mary Island in 1895; the hunting would be excellent. Bert and his family spent summers in the camps. Like all camp people then, Bert logged, guided, helped survey, picked spruce gum, gardened, hunted and fished, and was a fire warden (a job that included scouting and running phone lines).

Bert Haynes drowned in Lower Jo-Mary Lake in 1927 after his canoe capsized. The wind blew strong that May day as Bert and a camp sport headed across the lake on their way to an outlying camp at Cooper Pond. Bert did not know how to swim. Generally, Bert took the route through the more protected and shorter Cooper Brook Deadwater, but a log drive that was under way likely caused him to take the open lake route.

After Bert died, his wife and son Jasper continued to run the camp until 1960, when Jasper crashed his ski plane, dying in the accident. The Zaninetti, Santorelli, and Hendrickson families, former camp guests from Long Island, New York, were by 1966 running the camps and featuring northern Italian cooking that everyone was talking about.

To the west of Jo-Mary Island, site of the Haynes camp, on the south shore of Lower Jo-Mary Lake at Indian Point was Antlers Camp. Contrary to what Rex often read about the camp, George Potter and his two oldest sons, Joseph and Sumner, built the camp about 1898. Sumner's family operated Antlers until about 1915 when he sold it to his brother Leon, who ran it until 1945. The development of Antlers was like most other sporting camps. The camp started with a couple structures that multiplied over time to include

a main lodge with dining and cooking, living quarters for the proprietor's family, sleeping cabins, a guide's camp, root cellar, and ice house. After the Potters sold the camps, guests reported ghost sightings. At least two guests on two different occasions were awakened by something at first light and noticed a man sitting on the end of the bed. Their descriptions of the man were the same. The camps had been so neglected that the roof of the main camp had collapsed in 1965.

The old logger asked Rex if Jasper Haynes had ever mentioned a relationship between his family and the Potters. Between the late 1890s and the mid-1940s, the Potters and Hayneses built branch camps on the nearby ponds. As the only camp proprietors in the Jo-Mary Lakes and lower Cooper Brook area, they seemed eventually to have worked out an unwritten agreement of one camp per small pond. In 1897, Bert Haynes built his first camp at Cooper Pond. He also established camps on Henderson and Leavitt ponds. By about 1905, both families ran camps on Leavitt and Henderson ponds. Haynes kept the camp at Leavitt, and Potter had the camp at nearby Henderson Pond. Haynes built on Johnston Pond (1915). Beginning about 1923 the Potters had a camp on Church Pond. In 1942–1943 and 1948–1949, Jasper Haynes built branch camps at Jo-Mary Pond. Potter had a camp at Tumbledown Dick (ca. 1902) and Turkey Tail ponds (post-1919). The camps still in use are those at Church, Cooper, Henderson, Turkey Tail, and Leavitt ponds.

REX AND THE OLD LOGGER STOPPED TALKING FOR A MOMENT. They had finished identifying all the camps they had heard of between Rainbow Lake and Yoke Pond. Ingrained in the old logger's mind were the challenges of keeping a camp year after year. He reflected that Berry, Haynes, and Potter had had to tote their own supplies. Haynes and Potter had used a variety of boats over the years and pulled sleds by various means across the ice in winter. Berry had brought all his supplies in over land because no navigable waterway comes near the camp. When he did not have a horse, he used two pack baskets, each one big enough to carry all the meat of a full-grown moose except one hindquarter. What couldn't fit in a pack basket would go in his wheelbarrow—like the cook stove he pushed in over the 17 miles from Katahdin Iron Works or the refrigerator he brought in 2 1/2 miles from Third Roach Pond. The handles on the wheelbarrow were so large most large men could not grip them.

Rex wondered what it might have been like for Charlie to run a camp without the help of a family. The children played important roles. Sandy Haynes, Jasper's son, and Buddy Campbell used to keep the phone line open between Buckhorns' and Ragged Mountain Fire tower and, when the tower was unmanned, all the way to Millinocket. A tree or branch falling on it would short it out or break the line. Eleanor, the Potters' daughter, used to pole the guests up Jo-Mary Stream and across the lake to the camps. John Skillin, son of the Skillins at Yoke Pond, was unofficially guiding before he was eligible for a Maine Guide license. The Ketchum daughters hiked into Gould Pond every Friday to catch fish for the camp's Friday evening meal.

And Rex and the logger remembered some of the more memorable guests they either met or heard of. The Haynes family paddled to Norcross on July 27, 1897, to pick up "Fly Rod Crosby." The next day they all traveled to Church Pond, where they counted 58 deer getting close enough that Fly Rod could pet them. A couple days later, they paddled up the lakes and river so they could climb Katahdin. Over at Antlers, Eleanor Potter always liked a Chicago couple who came for many years, spending the whole summer. The wife brought in jars of candy that she shared with Eleanor every day. Another favorite was Fred Greenhalgh, a haberdasher from New York City. Greenhalgh spent many hours of his summer-long stay roaming the woods looking for odd pieces of wood for door handles and picture frames, apparently a hobby of his. Over at Yoke Pond Camp, women accompanying their husbands to the Maine Woods for the first time would often come dressed in their finest. At camp, Charlie feared theft so he collected their jewels and put them in a can that he secretly buried in the woods.

Their talk of valuables reminded Rex that he better check on the gun and fishing rod collection Mr. Chamberlain (as everyone associated with the camps called him) had in his cabin. Few knew about it, but he kept a close eye on the camp just the same. Rex would get it out and ready for use before his son Jack met Mr. Chamberlain at the Norcross wharf with the camp boat and brought him out here to the camp about noon the next day (July 17, 1966). Mr. Chamberlain, who lived in New York City, had been a yearly guest at Antlers from about 1920 to 1950, when he bought these camps.

Loon calls interrupted Rex and the old logger, and they stopped to listen. They were peaceful calls this time, echoing back and forth around the lake.

In the silence that followed, Rex wondered if his son Jack would continue the family tradition and become caretaker once he was no longer able.

The old logger thought about his next few days. He would have Jack take him by boat tomorrow afternoon over to the Ambejeus Boom House at the head of Ambejeus Lake and the mouth of the West Branch, the other jumping-off spot for loggers and sports he and Rex hadn't talked about. A couple of the old-timers he knew on the current log drive would be working there. A few evenings talking logging, sporting camps, and people upriver to Ripogenus Lake would be fun and help solidify his memories.

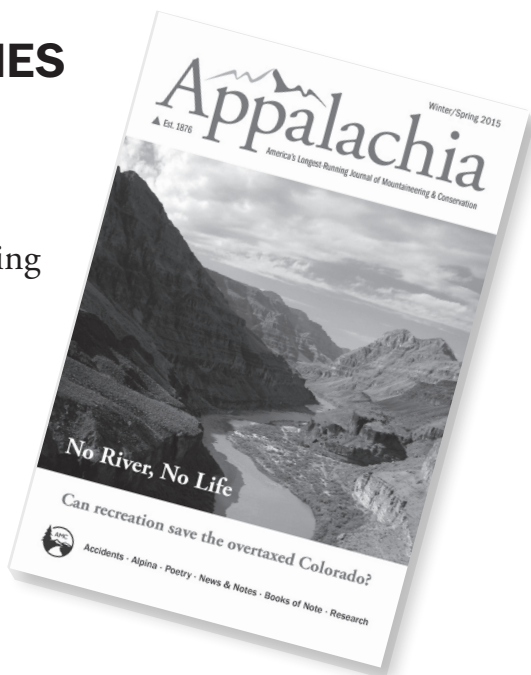
WILLIAM GELLER is the retired comptroller of the University of Maine at Farmington.

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