

CHAPTER I FISH RIVER LAKES SYSTEM and Other Aroostook County Lakes

Between 2,400-2,500 lakes and ponds contribute to the beauty, recreation, fire protection, and drinking water of the State of Maine. Their importance as sources of need and enjoyment is undeniable, and their contribution of legends and anecdotes is unsurpassable.

The most northern of the eight major lake systems in Maine is that of the Fish River in Aroostook County, near the Canadian border. Under the burly shadow of Mt. Katahdin lie all eight of its lakes, connected by rivers varying in length from one half to eight miles. A 100-mile canoeing distance without portage exists from the start of Fish River to its mouth, in Fort Kent. By odd coincidence, none of these lakes bears an Indian name.

The largest is LONG LAKE, 20 miles long by six miles wide. An island in the northern end of the lake is the center of the fall goose migrational stopping point. The majority of these birds come from Temiscouata Lake in Quebec Province; the others, chiefly from the St. Lawrence River by way of Fort Kent. After they leave the Fish River area, most of the geese are thought to fly south via the Penobscot, Sebasticook, and Kennebec valleys on their route to Merry-meeting Bay. This migration takes place between October 1 and November 30, and at times reaches a total of nearly 3,000 birds.

A 1965 study was conducted on adequate feeding conditions for the geese. Three recommendations were made: to provide an undisturbed aquatic roosting site for the fall migration, to improve opportunities for geese to feed in upland areas, and to keep within safe bounds, hunting deaths among the flocks. As a result, the 103rd Maine Legislature passed a bill making the north end of Long Lake a game management area. In addition, copper supposedly exists

near the lake, and mining operations in the area may eventually be considered.

A recently constructed one-half mile long causeway, a "through-way," connects the northeast end of Long Lake Island to the mainland. This island, formerly used for agricultural purposes only, now has its shores divided into camp lots; but construction has been strongly discouraged as 1965 investigations showed a problem in sewage disposal.

The smallest of the Fish River Lakes is MUD LAKE, in Sinclair. Called SALMON on some maps, it is only three miles long and is reached by a short river from Long Lake. Kamp Karawanee, established for the study of ecology, gun safety, and outdoor living, is located on Mud Lake.

A second short river connects Mud to CROSS LAKE; and a third brief river, at the foot of Mud Lake, leads into SQUARE LAKE. These in turn are similarly joined to EAGLE, ST. FROID, BIG FISH, and PORTAGE LAKES by rivers of varying lengths.

SQUARE LAKE, widest of the chain, is the locale for the least disturbed of any ledge and rock fossils in North America, dating back 285 million years. The fossils are crinoid stems, small marine animals that resemble plants of that early era, and are supposedly of the Lower Devonian Age.

Square Lake, which belies its name, has an acreage of 8,150 feet and a temperament best described as capricious. The wind gets a wide sweep, and the water over a sandbar in the center of the lake sometimes churns up waves three to four feet high.

When the level is low, smooth limestone ledge rocks show white "worms" running through them, about one-half inch long, perfectly round, and filled with grey limestone.

When the ice rumbles in Square Lake and re-echoes in the surrounding hills, it is rumored that John Goddard speaks. Goddard, a lumber baron of Houlton, accentuated his braggart pomposity by driving a pair of captive moose.

EAGLE LAKE, third largest of the Fish River Lakes Region, has the deepest water, ideal for salmon fishing. The lake was given its name by Rufus McIntyre, a lawyer and land agent of Parsonfield, and Major Hastings Strickland, Sheriff of Penobscot County. In January,

1839, they were conducting a civil posse of 200 men to the territory north of Bangor during the Aroostook War, to capture British land agent McLaughlin, accused of allowing New Brunswick lumbermen to take the best timber from a disputed ownership area. En route, they noticed the unusually large number of white-headed eagles.

BIG FISH LAKE, known also as BIG LAKE or as FISH RIVER LAKE, about five miles long, and studded with small islands, lies in the lower part of the system. The Zella Isle Camps, on one of the islands, have been acknowledged for their scenic advantages and fishing opportunities.

PORTAGE LAKE, eight miles long, is located 14 miles from the 20-foot falls at the foot of Round Pond, falls which create both a challenge and a problem to the canoeist of the Fish River Chain. Portage is possibly the best known of the group and was the first to provide tourist comfort. Its southern end once harbored a muskrat settlement of mud and grass mounds, comparable to small haystacks about three feet in diameter and two feet in height. The "village" was visible only when the level of the lake was low. Beavers weighing 25 to 40 pounds were not rare in the area.

The three-mile-wide lake bends almost in a loop from west to north. Its shores rise into high hills on all sides. According to Ava Chadbourne,¹ the lake received its name from the French verb *porter*, to carry. The use of foreign terms, especially French, was prevalent at the time of the American Revolution when the Fish River Region was first conspicuous.

North of the Fish River lakes, on the New Brunswick border, lies the most northerly lake in the Eastern United States, LAKE BEAU. Also on the border, at Fort Kent, is 51-acre BLACK LAKE, one of six fresh water sites chosen in 1971 for a five-year intensive research program on stocking trout.²

Directly south and east of the Fish River Chain are McCLUSKEY, named for two Brunswick, Maine, boys who introduced dynamite to secure a water supply at the lake; MADAWASKA, bearing a name meaning "porcupine place"; FALL BROOK, whose once 20-foot depth has been reduced to shallow water because of algae, although in 1954 it was a natural trout hatchery and had produced more trout than any other Maine lake up to that time;³ and PIERCE, one of the rockiest lakes in Maine.

At the extreme eastern boundary of Aroostook County, adjoining Quebec Province, are DEPOT LAKE, used by so many moose in 1904 that the State legislated money for game protection and increased the number of game wardens, as only six served a vast extent of wilderness at that time; ROWE LAKE, east of Depot, vying with Rangeley for trout fishing; and SQUAPAN, east of Rowe, named for a legendary Indian squaw said to have married a Frenchman named Pan (*Pain?*).

The more southerly lakes in Aroostook County are DREWS, or MEDUXNEKEAG, a word indicating "where people go out," "falls," or "rapids"; WYTOPITLOCK, meaning "alder place"; MOLUNKUS, denoting "a stream in a fume, notch, or ravine"; SKITACOOK, interpreted as "still water"; and MATTAWAMKEAG, "fishing place beyond gravel bar" (Abenaki), "rapids at mouth" (Malecite), "on a sandbar" (Micmac), and "river with many rocks in its mouth," just south of which lies "Bible Point," a 27-acre lot donated to the State in 1972, where young Teddy Roosevelt used to read his Bible and where a marker to him was erected in 1921.

No bass nor perch prevail in Aroostook County waters, and togue and trout are now becoming scarce.