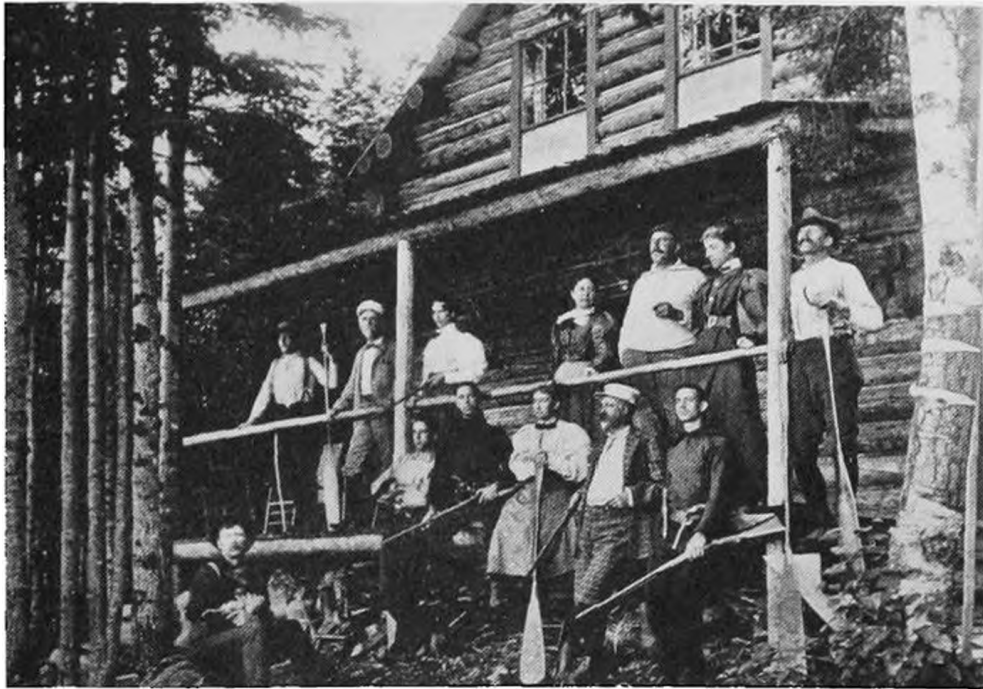


A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE NORTHERN MAINE GUIDE

For over a century the State of Maine has produced a unique occupational specialty, the northern Maine guide. Renowned as an expert woodsman, the Maine guide took clients — or “sports” — into the deep woods in search of quarry and adventure. The guide served both as adviser and servant; he showed his sports areas where fish, deer, and bear could be found, suggested methods that would lead to a successful hunt, cooked meals, prepared camp, fixed equipment, and paddled or poled the canoe into the wilderness. The guide, a unique regional adaptation to the rising national interest in hunting and outdoor life in the late nineteenth century, became an institution in the northern woods and a key component of interior Maine’s tourist industry. However, in the past forty years social and technological advances have undermined the economic role of the guide. Today, the Maine guide is in many ways an obsolete professional, sadly out of tune with the changing recreational interests and pursuits of the nation.

The forerunners of the professional guide were Indians, who greeted northern Maine’s first European explorers and for over a century guided military officials, settlers, priests, traders, and lumbermen through the forests, instructing them on the lore of the region. In some instances the Indians were paid with trade goods and in others they acted out of friendship. In any case, although the Indians were superbly suited as guides, their activities were occasional and individualistic. Only in the late nineteenth century would guides establish themselves as a self-defined professional community.

The resources of northern Maine, furs and timber especially, attracted Europeans to the area in the late eighteenth



“Sports” and guides pose before C. S. Cook’s camps on the Rangeley Lakes. In the 1890s commercial sporting camps served a growing tide of recreationists drawn to interior Maine’s outstanding scenic and wildlife resources. Special laws, associations, and activities marked the professionalization of the guiding community during these same years.

century. French-Canadian voyageurs and trappers entered the wilderness from the north, establishing trading and military routes between the Penobscot and the St. John rivers and the St. Lawrence Valley.¹ By the first decade of the nineteenth century, scattered bands of New Brunswick and Maine woodsmen had worked their way as far north as the so-called disputed territory — the unsurveyed region on the St. John, Aroostook, and Allagash rivers claimed by both state and province.¹ Despite these early pursuits, northern Maine remained virtually roadless well into the next century, a fact that established the basis for guiding activity.

During these early years, guides were employed mostly in connection with the lumber business. Lumbermen required detailed information about the location and value of the region’s scattered groves of pine timber, and as the logging industry spread into the upper Penobscot and St. John drainages, timber surveyors — local settlers with a knowledge of the

rivers and lakes of the roadless territory — were hired to explore and report back to lumbermen. Henry David Thoreau, on his trip to Chesuncook Lake in the 1850s, encountered two of these solitary figures and described them in his journal, admiring their ability to survive for weeks at a time hundreds of miles from the nearest civilization dependent on only an ax, a canoe, and a small ration of salt pork. Like the Indians, “lumber explorers” helped to pioneer guiding techniques and to establish a colorful folk tradition upon which later guides would build.

As lumbering and farming settlements sprang up along the northern rivers, roads were opened into the interior woods to link the small farms with outside markets. By the 1830s farmers had a firm foothold in the eastern section of the Aroostook territory, founding communities such as Caribou, Houlton, and Madawaska. Lumber towns such as Ashland were struggling to become logging capitals similar to their southern cousin, Bangor. These small communities would later serve as gateways to the north woods for sporting enthusiasts when railroads made the region accessible to the growing recreation industry in the late nineteenth century.

It was from these varied sources — the Indian, the explorer, the trapper, the timber surveyor, and the farmer — that the guide emerged. Guiding in the early nineteenth century was a part-time occupation, as it had been for Indians; farmers or woodsmen worked for lumbermen, timber surveyors, geologists, speculators, or sportsmen during “off” times. A good example of the occasional guide was Joseph Attien, among the earliest recorded and most famous of nineteenth-century Maine guides. Attien figures prominently in Thoreau’s “Chesuncook,” which appeared in several of the 1858 issues of *Atlantic Monthly*. On his northern pilgrimage Thoreau and a close friend hired this reticent Indian guide to take them moose hunting. Attien, who struck the impressionable Thoreau as unduly “civilized” in speech and manner, is also mentioned in Fannie Hardy Eckstorm’s classic *Penobscot Man*. Annoyed

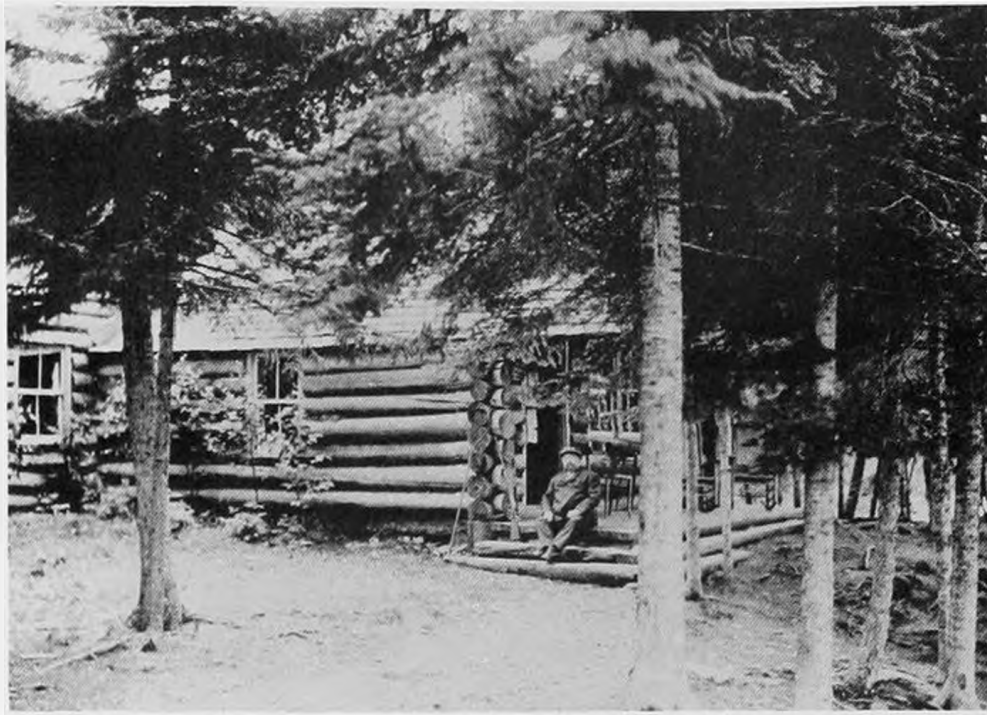
By 1920 Maine guides such as Haze Albert McDougal, shown here on Madawaska Lake, had developed special techniques and tools.

Embellishing traditions left by Indians, explorers, trappers, and timber surveyors, guides enriched a colorful Maine wood heritage. Courtesy Northeast Archives Folklore and Oral History (NEA).



with Thoreau's literary treatment of Attien, Eckstorm attempted to correct the supposed slander by pointing out that Attien gave his life while trying to save his bateau crew in the 1870 Penobscot river drive. Attien, according to Eckstorm, was one of Maine's most respected and capable river drivers.² The impressions of Attien left by Thoreau and Eckstorm, despite their differences, highlight a feature no doubt typical in the 1850s: he was a paid guide, but he considered another occupation — logging — his true vocation.

Guiding remained a subsidiary activity until transportation into northern Maine improved at the end of the century. Rail travel, and with it the fish-and-game-oriented tourist, progressed slowly northward from southern Maine. Transportation brought with it lavish resorts, such as the Crawford House in the White Mountains, the Rangeley Lake House at Rangeley, and the Kineo House on Moosehead Lake. The "sporting" industry moved north as the wilderness gave way to civilization. In northernmost Maine, the few early roads — the Military Road built in 1832 and the Aroostook Road completed in the 1840s — were replaced in 1893 by the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad. The new railroad brought the sports within forty-five miles of Ashland, gateway to the western Aroostook



"Mr. Bagney" strikes an imperious pose on the steps of a log sporting camp on Millinocket Lake. NEA photo.

logging camps and a jumping-off point for Aroostook's first sporting camps.³ In 1896 the railroad extended directly to the booming lumber town.

The Ashland area's first sporting camp was built in 1890 by a Canadian immigrant named Wilfred Atkins. Atkins had earlier worked at the famed Kineo House. Bankrolled by the resort's owners, Atkins searched for two years before choosing the site for his first camps on the shore of Millinocket Lake, on the upper Aroostook watershed. The site was chosen well, and by 1903 his investment had grown to include fifty-two camps on Millinocket, Millimagassett, and Munsungan lakes.⁴

The register of the Oxbow Lodge, a hotel built by Wilfred Atkins after he sold his sporting camps, shows that by 1905 a large number of wealthy out-of-state sportsmen were traveling to the area to hunt, fish, and enjoy the woods. In 1908 sportsmen hunting in the Ashland area alone shipped 73 deer south on the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad; the combined shipment of deer on the northern Maine railroad that year reached 3,515.⁵ As the interest in northern Maine hunting and fishing increased, more local men turned to guiding to fill the demand.



The Atkins Camp guides on Millinocket Lake demonstrate an interesting range of 1920s sportswear. Commercialization of sporting clothes and equipment in the decades after World War II would undermine the role of the traditional guides. NEA photo.

Statewide, the guiding business was rapidly becoming professionalized by similar forces. In 1897 each guide was required by law to register with the fish and game commissioners and procure a certificate "setting forth that he is deemed suitable to act as a guide." By 1898, 1,763 men and 3 women had registered as professional guides. Two years later the State Legislature, encouraged by the Inland Fish and Game Commission, the guides themselves, and a powerful lobby of lumbermen and timberland owners, passed a law requiring nonresident hunters and fishermen to hire guides during certain seasons. Lumbermen feared that unsupervised sporting activity would pose a fire danger in the forest.⁶ Less formally, the guides began holding annual Woodsmen's Rendezvous. Each region in the state would hold a contest testing local guides' woodcraft skills. The winner would travel to Augusta, where guides from Maine, Quebec, New Brunswick, and New Hampshire would compete to determine who was the best guide of all.

By 1920 the northern Maine guiding community was at its peak, and camps built on the Machias River, Portage Lake, Big Fish Lake, Square Lake, Eagle Lake, and Red River created a

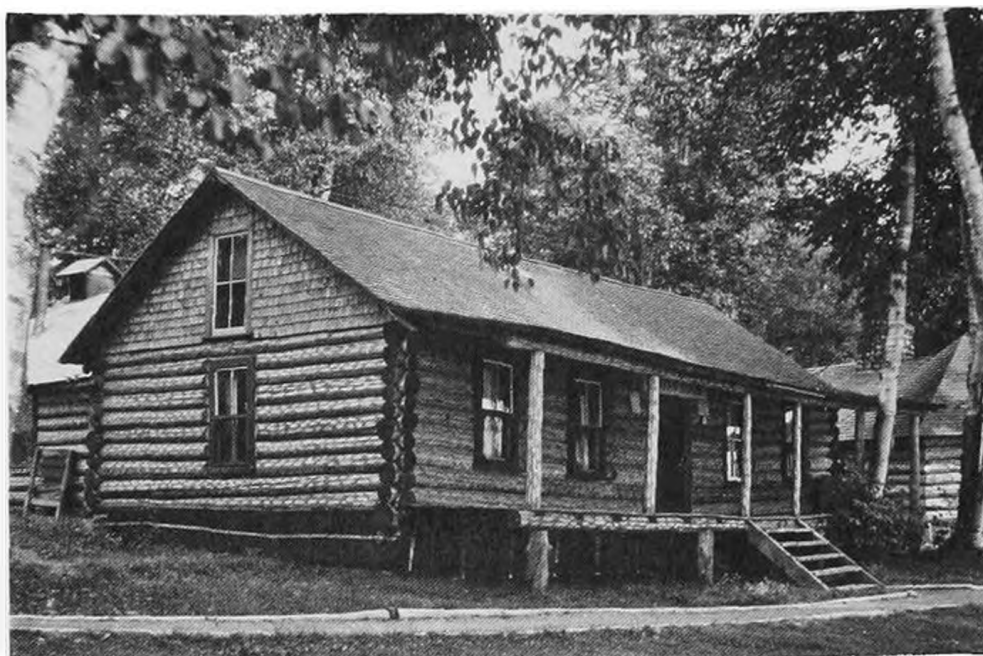
border that marked the edge of civilization. Beyond this frontier was the territory in which the guides operated. It was a lonely, rugged land, and according to an 1897 map produced for sportsmen by the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, the area north of Township 14 and west of Range 7 was void of any major logging roads.

A good description of this industry can be found in the existing literature advertising the many camps in the region. Atkins's camps on Millinocket Lake, for instance, featured cabins built of peeled spruce logs, advertised as "light, roomy, airy." The furnishings included iron beds with woven wire springs, hair mattresses, sheets, pillows and blankets. There were also "comfortable chairs, a table, a commode with toilet articles, and last, but not least, a cheerful rustic open fireplace." The cabins accommodated from one to four persons each, and promised "never ending charm to people from the city."⁷

Food in these camps was often simple because all perishables had to be brought in weekly by canoe or tote wagon. Most dinners were of the hearty "New England" style, composed mostly of meat and potatoes. The majority of camps had to store the meat in dug-out storage sheds, but some camps had natural coolers where springs came to the surface in small caves. The fare was inevitably supplemented by local fish and game. The Atkins camp menus boasted a wide assortment of local treats:

Delicious fresh brook trout, cooked as only they know how to cook them in these woods, are always a feature during the summer months, wild berries in season, vegetables from the camp garden, game in the fall, and sparkling spring water from the cold spring that never fails in its supply.⁸

Fresh milk would come from the camp cow, brought in at the beginning of the guiding season. One example of this was the McNally cow on Big Fish Lake. Each year Will McNally would hire a youth from Portage Lake to lead the cow up the twenty-five mile trail along Fish River.



Camp architecture, as this dining cabin suggests, conveyed rustic values. But interiors displayed a comfortably civilized ambience. (See photo, page 10.) Photo by Bert Call, courtesy Dexter Historical Society.

The Atkins promotional literature also provides a good description of the dining facilities. A special dining cabin stood in the center of the line of camps. The building, a "well lighted and picturesque" log structure seventy feet long, held a guest dining room sixteen by twenty feet in size, well adorned with mounted trophies from nearby woods and stream. The tables were "covered with dainty linen, and set with silverware and china." These and other furnishings struck a balance between rustic charm and civilized comfort. Guides ate in the dining room at the rear of the kitchen.⁹

As the number of practicing guides increased, new regulations developed that set the standards for the profession. These first guides were not required to take a test to acquire a license. They simply spoke to the local warden and a license was issued. But around 1925 the applicants were taken out into the woods, where they would guide the game warden for the day. Practicing the skills necessary to guide out-of-state sports, the applicant demonstrated his qualifications to the warden. One of two types of license would be issued. The "Class A Guide" held all the responsibilities and privileges of the traditional guide. A



Bert Call photo, courtesy Dexter Historical Society.

“Class B Guide” was less experienced and could only guide local people in areas with which he was familiar. This second classification provided important practical training that assured a continuing supply of experienced and qualified guides.

Guiding skills could be divided into two spheres: those the guide thought were most important and those the sport thought were most important. In the guide’s mind, his first responsibility was to look after the sport’s welfare, follow safety precautions, cook good meals, and make sure that the sport had a good time. In the sport’s mind, however, the guide was hired primarily to locate fish and game.

There is no doubt that a number of the sportsmen were good woodsmen, but many were inexperienced and had to be watched closely. Portage Lake guide Almon Holmes remarked that sporting groups were

all anxious to get right out there. A new party, in particular, you had to watch. Some of them had no idea of the dimensions of the woods. They would take right off and get the highest trees between them and camp and couldn’t find the way back.¹⁰

Wilfred Atkins added, "A lot of fellows had a compass in their pocket, but they didn't know how to use it."¹¹ Holmes's solution was to set a sport out on a ridge and then pretend to walk away. Hiding behind a tree, bush, or stump, Holmes would observe the sport's behavior and determine whether he needed to be watched or not. Atkins would give the party members a lecture about safety before he put them out into the woods. He would require the hunters to return to camp at lunch time. By noting who came late and who was on time he would know which hunters to keep an eye on.

Guides took care to protect sports not only from their own inexperience, but from the inexperience of others. It was common practice to use the stand method of hunting, placing the hunter on a ridge or on the edge of a field where the deer might come out into the open. The hunter would be told to remain quiet and still. This allowed the guide to string out a large party with relative safety, and it reduced the risk of their getting lost or shooting each other as they crossed paths.

In addition to guarding the safety of the sport, the guide was obliged to see that the guests were comfortable. It was important to the guide that his charges had proper clothes, boots, and equipment. Poorly equipped clients would be unhappy, and this would affect the guide's chance of being rehired the following season. The guide's role as a servant began early in the morning. Before the sports rose for the day, the guide would begin by building fires in the cabins. As the guests dressed and ate breakfast in the dining hall, the guide readied the canoe with paddles, poles, cushions, seats, hunting or fishing gear, and the cooking equipment for lunch. Before leaving he would confer with the other guides to ensure that each of the sporting parties would have peace and solitude on their journey.

The trip to the hunting or fishing grounds involved a distinctive type of canoe as well as traditional methods of canoemanship. The guides' canoes were twenty-foot, cedar ribbed, canvas canoes, painted and generously shellacked on

their bottoms for protection. These canoes, much longer and wider than those commonly used today, were designed and constructed by local guides themselves. A single mold could serve as the basis for several models made for personal use or sale to other canoeists. Maine's renowned designers included the Jacksons of Allagash, the Flewellings of Crouseville, the McNallys in Ashland, and Ace Gallope from Fort Fairfield. Wilfred Atkins described the advantage of the longer canoe:

For good canoemanship, ... nothing ... will take the place of the twenty-foot canoe. It draws less water and thus is more maneuverable than the smaller [sixteen-to-eighteen-foot] canoe. Because it is wider, it will carry your load better and is easier to handle in rough water.¹²

Traditionally, the guide propelled his canoe by poling with a fifteen-foot staff of green hardwood, about one inch in diameter but thicker in the middle to prevent snapping. A metal cap on the end of the pole prevented the tip from shattering or slipping on the rocks.

Travel upriver with a pole is called caining. Guides poled the canoe against the current by seeking temporary shelter in eddies behind large rocks. When traveling downstream, called snubbing or setting, guides used the pole to check speed and pivot around rocks. According to Wilfred Atkins, experienced guides could pole as fast as a man can walk; Atkins often made the twenty-five mile Aroostook River trip from Oxbow Flats to Millinocket Lake in a day. Poling, Percy Jackson added, "is something that comes from experience. A beginner is lost with a pole; ... he pushes his bow out into the current, gets turned around, goes over the rocks, and upsets two or three times." To veteran guides, the pole was a versatile and useful adjunct to the canoe.¹³

When the hunting or fishing party reached its destination, the guide began to work at finding fish or game. This was the task he had been hired to do; the sport considered this the most important duty. Given his prior knowledge of the area and his understanding of how weather changes affected the behavior

and location of the quarry, he was able to suggest likely hunting or fishing locations. Wilfred Atkins recounted a description of fish behavior to show why the guide's knowledge was necessary:

A trout is very sensitive to water temperature, much more so than the salmon, who will tolerate warm water. So you have to keep the water level in mind. Where are you going to find the fish? This is important and it takes an experienced man, who has been continually watching the season's weather, to predict it quickly.¹⁴

It was even more important that the guide understood exactly how the weather would affect the game animals' food supply, environment, and subsequent behavior. Both guides and sports felt that a good guide would see that his client got his trophy. Sometimes the guide would have to shoot the animal himself, but only in instances where the sport had failed to bag his trophy by the end of the trip. Although this was illegal, it was a practical business consideration, for the guide had to see that the sport left the camps satisfied and with something to show for his money, or he might not come back the following year.

Around noontime, whether the sport had bagged his prize or not, the guide would begin to cook lunch. This tradition was known as "dinnering out." The guide's cooking kit usually consisted of a cast-iron fry pan, a tin coffee pot, a set of agate dishes, and some silverware. Over an open fire or two, the guide would pan-fry or broil fresh game or fish. The most common fare was trout fried in pork fat with strips of bacon placed inside. In addition, the guide might cook pancakes, johnny-cake, toast, vegetables, and tea or strong coffee. The real cooking challenge for the guides was the meal that had to be cooked in a reflector oven. This device captured heat from the fire to bake pies and biscuits. Baking items evenly with a reflector oven taxed the cooking skills of the guide.

After lunch, guide and sport would continue the hunt. At the end of a long day, they would return to camp and to the comfort of a warm fire and a few highballs. Here, around a

campfire or fireplace, the guide might be asked to tell a story or two about his experiences in the woods. The sport would reciprocate with a tale of his own from the city, and in this manner a friendship would be struck that kept the sport returning year after year.

The wilderness quality of the north Maine woods was the key to the indispensability of the guides. Although the woods was used intensively by the forest industries, the northern region remained wild and relatively trackless. Almost all lumber was hauled to the riverbanks and lakeshores by horses and floated to the sawmills in the spring. Snow, ice, and spring runoff were the basis of Maine's log transport system, and the industry generally closed down for the summer. Thus woods roads were maintained for winter use only. During the summer and the fall hunting season, bogs and streams blocked travel on the winter-oriented roads, which were often impassable even by horse and wagon.¹⁵ Wintertime use of the forest by lumbermen incidentally meant that the guide's working areas would remain quiet, wild, and relatively inaccessible during summer and fall.

At the turn of the century the growing pulpwood industry developed new lumbering techniques that began to alter the wilderness quality of the Maine woods. Between 1900 and 1930, lumbermen experimented with ways of extending overland hauling of lumber, first with a variety of steam log haulers, then with special gasoline trucks and diesel tractors.¹⁶ These efforts met with limited success, however, and in 1930 Great Northern Paper Company still employed over 1,000 horses. Truck design was inadequate, and horses were more practical in areas not readily accessible to good highways.¹⁷ Nevertheless, auto travel prompted an effort by major pulpwood concerns to extend woods roads into the previously trackless northern forest.

The guiding community faced other challenges as well. The Depression cut deeply into the recreation business, and World War II hit the guiding industry even harder than the

Depression had. Gas rationing discouraged tourism, and food rationing prevented camps from securing supplies for guests.¹⁸ Also, recruiters looked to woodsmen to fill the ranks of the U. S. Army's 10th Mountain Division and to supply the U. S. Marine Corps with snipers.¹⁹

The postwar economy brought drastic changes as well. As wartime production was reoriented to civilian needs, the woods industries expanded rapidly. The most significant change was the advance in the use of trucks in the woods industry. New four-wheel-drive vehicles allowed lumbermen to move timber over the roughest terrain in summer months as well as in winter. New all-season lumber roads became available for public use.²⁰ By comparing an early Bangor and Aroostook Railroad map with the U. S. Geological Survey maps produced in the 1950s, the increase in accessible woodlands can be documented. In 1897, thirty-two of the northwestern townships were void of major lumber roads. This included an area of about 1,244 square miles. By 1955, however, the number of roadless townships had declined to seventeen, or about 612 square miles.²¹ This trend continued, and today's north Maine woods maps show that all but two of the original townships have been bisected by at least one major logging road. While these are by no means all-purpose roads, they do include "jeep trails" that can be crossed with four-wheel-drive vehicles.

As the all-season lumber roads opened up the wilderness, a new approach to north woods recreation emerged. Since recreationists could drive into the woods, they no longer needed guides to take them upriver in a canoe. Cars cut travel time drastically and consequently fewer recreationists needed lodging at the sporting camps. They could either drive home at the end of the day or carry tents and camping equipment into the woods. Almon Holmes described the change: "After they got the roads in, well, it was a few days here and a few days there. Now they just travel from place to place and put up wherever they can."²²

Airplanes also came into use in northern Maine in the postwar years. Portage Lake became a headquarters for bush pilots serving the woods industries. As pilots, planes, and



A game warden tags pelts of beaver caught by Wilfred "Sleepy" Atkins on the Allagash River. In the early 1950s when this photo was taken, the guiding tradition was threatened by increasing public access to the Maine "wilderness" and by new types of equipment that left outdoor recreationists more self-reliant. NEA photo.

facilities became available to recreationists, airplanes opened up distant areas that could not yet be reached by road. Before 1945, according to Alma Lowrey, sports had to be poled nine hours upriver from Portage Lake to McNally's camps on Big Fish Lake. After the war, sports could be flown up in fifteen minutes.²³ The airplane, however, was not advantageous to all sections of northern Maine society. "After World War Two," Percy Jackson recalled, "when they brought in these pilot guides who could come in and drop [sports on remote lakes], my business dropped off."²⁴ Almon Holmes added that airplanes changed the guiding business: "They wouldn't hire us to pole them up the river, so we'd have to wait around the camp for them to fly in."²⁵

Better transportation into the woods meant greater pressures on fish and game as local recreationists entered the deep woods in increasing numbers. This, coupled with intensive cutting in the forests, reduced wildlife populations. The decrease was so serious that, according to veteran guides, game animals have never returned to their previous numbers. Almon Holmes's reminiscence is typical of the old guides' assessment of the situation: "Oh, yes! The game was much better then. In those days [fish] anywhere from three to eight pounds were

common. You can't find that today."²⁶ As local hunters and fishermen reduced the game numbers, many of the traditional clientele — the trophy-seeking, out-of-state sports — moved on to Canada, which was also made more accessible to them by postwar transportation developments.

The growing intensity of lumbering, the extension of all-season hauling roads, and the arrival of float planes brought changes in the forest structure, the game population, and the number of sports. Equally as important were changes brought about by new technology in the sporting goods industry. These advances altered the role of the guide and the style of camping and added the traditional woodsmen to the endangered species list.

The first guides had been hired to assist the sports against the harsh wilderness environment. More sophisticated camping equipment freed recreationists from dependence on guides as it made them more dependent on their gear. There were two related movements in the rise of the sporting goods industry. The first was an effort to provide the working outdoorsman and dedicated hunter or fisherman with functional tools. The second was a trend to supply the occasional weekend campers with conveniences that would "civilize" their wilderness experiences.

The most important advances in primary sporting goods were gas lanterns, gas stoves, and coolers. Coolers made it possible to carry a variety of perishables into the woods and freed sportsmen from the risk of going hungry should they fail to catch or shoot their supper. Gas stoves made cooking in the woods less an art, and further reduced dependence on guides. Instead of collecting dry wood, chopping kindling, and waiting for cooking coals, the sportsman could simply turn a knob and strike a match. Wilderness cooking became accessible to everyone. Gas lanterns replaced the inefficient and cumbersome kerosene lamps. More importantly, because gas lanterns produced more light than their predecessors, outdoorsmen could engage in more activities after sundown. People who might have once enjoyed hearing guides tell stories around the

campfire played cards and read books instead. Four-wheel-drive vehicles also became primary sporting goods, opening previously inaccessible areas to the nonprofessional.

These primary goods had a serious effect on the guiding community. On one hand, the guides themselves began to lose the traditional skills that had been the mainstay of the guiding profession. On the other hand, the equipment affected popular attitudes about wilderness. The new equipment made camping less rigorous and more accessible to a broad range of people. "Roughing it" became a positive feature of camping, and men who once would have been afraid to stay alone in the woods felt their courage boosted by coolers filled with groceries from the local supermarket. Feeling more at home in their civilized wilderness than those who had camped in the woods in the past, they began to come more often, and more frequently without a guide. As a result, the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife began to establish regulated campsites along the woods roads, more to regulate the weekend migrations than to provide for the camper's comfort.

The secondary sporting goods movement was launched when big wholesaling and manufacturing businesses realized that weekend campers presented a lucrative consumer market. They began to direct their sales toward the weekend camper rather than the woodsman. Even traditional outfitting companies began shifting marketing strategies to appeal to casual recreationists. Today, sporting-goods manufacturers and wholesalers circulate catalogs among middle-class Americans several times each year, offering brand-name, technically sophisticated articles designed to cushion recreationists from the hazards and discomforts of wilderness camping. Incidental comfort-oriented items such as designer "woods clothes," freeze-dried ice cream, and portable toilets, showers, and sinks add style considerations to sporting-goods merchandising.

By the 1970s, the secondary market for sporting goods included a group of people with interests different from both the traditional sportsmen and the weekend woodsmen. Less interested in exploiting the fish and game populations, this

new breed turned to rigorous activities such as hiking, white-water canoeing, crafting, and rock climbing. Given the state of sporting goods technology, woods survival — the traditional responsibility of the Maine guide — no longer posed a problem. Survival itself, accented by the challenge of a steep mountain or swift river, became the objective of the new sporting generation. Aided by modern camping technology, they entered the woods intent on self-sufficiency under stress. This too had a serious effect on the struggling guiding industry.

The traditional sports of the 1920s had found it respectable, indeed fashionable, to hire guides. The weekend woodsmen of the 1950s and 1960s were indifferent: they hired guides when the territory suggested it would be wise. The new breed, however, seemed embarrassed at the idea of following a guide. To them, a guide acting as a servant and adviser was at odds with the idea of self-sufficiency through the pursuit of rigorous activities.

People are a product of their environment, both natural and man-made, and the changes in the forest and equipment clearly have had an effect on the character of the guides. Earlier the guides' environment had been a vast, untamed wilderness. Reputation and livelihood were based not only on the ability to survive, but on the ability to thrive on the bounties that could be harvested from their environment. Almon Holmes described his fellow guides of the 1920s: "I have seen a good many men go into the woods with nothin' but a jug of maple syrup, a chunk of pork, and a bag of flour with eggs inside. They would stay for two weeks, but could stay a month if they wanted to."²⁷

Today, the wilderness has been transformed into a heavily trafficked commercial forest, crisscrossed by logging access roads. At each major entrance to the north woods is a toll booth, kept busy by a flood of vacationers. Guides have been affected by this changed environment. Percy Jackson commented with obvious discomfort:

"We don't have any guides today. They [contemporary registered guides] take a box of sandwiches with

NORTHERN MAINE GUIDE

them and they drive out today and come back tomorrow. They can't pole a canoe and they don't have any idea of safety on the water, 'cause they're guiding from a pickup truck. Yet they hold a guide's license. No, we'll never have any guides like the old ones, it's too late."²⁸

Sadly, I must agree with Mr. Jackson. The "old time" guide has been lost forever. He has gone the way of the river driver, the teamster, and the trapper. The new technology has been adopted not only by the sportsman, but by the new guide as well. The truck, the airplane, the stove, the lantern, the cooler, and a variety of lesser items offer him a more comfortable existence. Unfortunately, when he accepted the comfort, he helped destroy his own relation to an environment that had shaped the character and the special skills of his predecessors.²⁹

While it is true that a number of camps still exist and practicing guides can be found, they are the exception, rather than the rule. In 1980 the Fish and Wildlife Department changed the licensing procedure to ensure that only qualified applicants would carry forth the guiding tradition. Now guides must have physicals, pass written examinations, and go before a board of senior game wardens, the secretary of the department, and an appointed citizen of Maine. Unfortunately, while a more rigorous screening gives the state the best of the applicants, it is no substitute for growing up in rural Maine in the 1920s.

NOTES

¹Philip T. Coolidge, *History of the Maine Woods* (Bangor, Maine: Furbush-Roberts Printing Company, 1963), pp. 38-42.

²Dudley C. Lunt, "Introductory Note," in Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods* (New York: Norton, 1950), pp. 11-13; Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, *The Penobscot Man* (Somersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 63-103.

³Dena L. W. York, *History of the Greater Ashland Area* (Presque Isle, Maine, n.p., 1983), p. 22.

⁴Wilfred "Sleepy" Atkins, Maine guide, interview conducted by the author, Presque Isle, Maine, August 1984.

⁵Figures on deer trophy shipments by rail out of Aroostook County can be found in the annual publication, *In the Maine Woods* (Bangor: Bangor

and Aroostook Railroad); statewide figures for this period are available in the *Annual Report of the Inland Fish and Game Commission* (Augusta).

⁶*Annual Report of the Inland Fish and Game Commission*, 1898, 1900.

⁷*A Few Pertinent Facts Concerning Atkins' Camps at Millmocket Lake*, pamphlet in possession of Wilfred "Sleepy" Atkins.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Almon Holmes, Maine guide, interview conducted by the author, Portage Lake, Maine, August 1984.

¹¹Atkins interview.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Percy Jackson, Maine guide, interview conducted by the author, New Sweden, Maine, July 1984.

¹⁴Atkins interview.

¹⁵Holmes interview.

¹⁶Coolidge, *History of the Maine Woods*, pp. 142-43.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 151-52.

¹⁸Jackson interview.

¹⁹Dr. F. R. Lowrey, interview conducted by the author, Caribou, Maine, 1984.

²⁰Coolidge, *History of the Maine Woods*, pp. 151-52.

²¹U. S. Geological Survey, maps, 1955-1959.

²²Holmes interview.

²³Alma Lowrey, sportswoman, interview conducted by the author, Portage Lake, Maine, August 1984.

²⁴Jackson interview.

²⁵Holmes interview.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Jackson interview.

Mr. Lowrey graduated from the University of Maine at Orono with a B.A. degree in history in June 1985. A native of Caribou, he is a lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps, and is a registered Maine guide.



Bert Call photo, Dexter Historical Society