

1951 Canoe Adventure
(as remembered by Eric Lederer)

Toward the end of the last camp session in August 1951 a group of campers from Camp Chingachgook, two "tents" with two counselors, had been camping on Tongue Mountain. Their excursion was over and to bring them back to camp two war canoes with skeleton crews were sent to get them. That day there was a strong wind blowing from the south, and with one counselor and two or three skeleton crew members (I don't recall which) in each canoe the lightly laden canoes practically flew up the lake to Tongue Mountain Point where, by appointment, the campers were to be picked up. There the canoes were loaded, each getting about eight kids and a counselor along with all their camping gear, such as sleeping bags, tents, cooking equipment, etc. Whichever counselor was in charge made the decision that we should return to Chingachgook right away. It was not a good decision. I was part of the skeleton crew on one of the canoes, and the only other person I can name who was there is Fletcher "Bub" Wait, also a skeleton crew member. As I'm writing this 54 years later my not knowing the names of other people involved doesn't surprise me.

Heading south the canoes, now heavily loaded and much lower in the water, were going into the wind instead of with it. The lake was very rough and there were plenty of whitecaps. The canoes had not gone far when water started splashing in over the sides, and at times the bows were so low that when they hit a wave a fair amount of water came in at the front. After going perhaps a half mile I knew it was hopeless and so it proved to be, as the water was so deep in the canoes that when there was a slight tilt to one side or the other the water rushed to the lower side, causing a lot more water to pour in over the side. Bub, being in the bow of my canoe, recalls at this point that coming down from a wave the bow went under the next one, knocking him off his seat and spelling the end of the trip. The canoe rolled over to the left. I heard someone in the other canoe shout "They're over!" and a few seconds later they too were over.

All the people involved were good swimmers and trained as to what to do in such a situation so nobody was hurt even slightly. However, just about all the camping equipment in the canoes wound up at the bottom of the lake where, no doubt, it still lies. Several power boats came fairly near the capsized canoes with all of us hanging on but it wasn't for a while that one of them figured out that we needed help. A number of us got in a boat that, because of the rough weather, had lost its capability of steering, but at least we were out of the water. Eventually we all got picked up by power boats and were brought back to Chingachgook, with the canoes being towed.

We got back to Chingachgook well after when we were expected and missed the regular meal. Somehow we got fed, and there was surprisingly little fuss made over the whole incident.