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STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN FLIN FLON

EVERY MORNING I WENT to the mine, looking for work. Miners and helpers were being paid about forty cents an hour, and any vacancies were much sought after. There was always a line-up waiting for someone to be injured or killed, when someone new would be hired. After a while I gave up trying. The Great Depression was at its height.

Fairburn was in the same boat that I was. We camped together on Ross Lake Island near Flin Flon, where there was one grocery store and a few log shacks. We pitched our tent in the woods just north of the store, where we sat one day contemplating what we might do to eke out a living for the next few months until the trapping season opened once again.

Fairburn now turned to his ability as a man with a pool cue. He came up with a plan whereby we could both make a few dollars. The habitués of the three pool halls in town were onto him, and when he too often cashed in at the popular game of pea pool, they would quit the game and try to reorganize another session at one of the other two establishments.

Hanson giving one of his colleagues an outdoor haircut.

In the game, a number of participants received a numbered pea from a leather bottle. If a player could sink or pocket the ball with his number, he collected the stake (set at twenty-five cents or more) from each of the other players. If before that he had sunk any ball corresponding to another player's pea, that player paid him an additional stake or ante.

Fairburn's plan was to out-smart the pea-pool gamblers. I as his helper would only play pool with the non-gamblers as a pastime. We would separate, and I would act as undercover man by locating the pea pool game as soon as it was going, then I would locate Fairburn, who was always playing snooker somewhere in another hall. I would signal him by placing one, two, or three fingers on my hat brim to tell him where the pea pool game was going. This gave Fairburn a chance to hot-foot it over there and play at least one game before it broke up because he had made some tremendous shot, sunk his own ball and cashed in. No one seemed to catch on to how he got to the game so quickly, for sometimes the game had not yet started when he arrived there. One man once protested that Fairburn was a professional. His game mates disagreed, saying that they all knew him as a trapper and prospector of long standing. We made enough from his winnings to keep us in groceries for some time.

In that summer of 1931, there was a good crop of wild strawberries. I picked and sold strawberries for a week, averaging about ten pounds a day, which I sold for a dollar and fifty cents each day, or fifteen cents a pound. I had to walk about ten miles from town towards Beaver Lake, where an area of the countryside had been burned off in 1928. The best berries grew there, but I never saw anyone else picking berries while I was working at it. Then heavy rain fell for three days, which put an end to my strawberry business.

We had to make other plans if we were to continue to eat. Fairburn and I had a little talk with Quincey, who had financed my trading venture. I informed him that I had a commercial fishing outfit and a camp at Deschambault Lake. I would need twenty more nets for next winter's fishing. We also needed to build another camp on Jan Lake, where the Indians had told me there were numerous trout and very large whitefish. Quincey was interested in this proposition at once. He agreed to advance us one hundred dollars and supplies to last us for one month, so that we could go to Jan Lake and build the camp as soon as possible.

In late July, we set out paddling across Beaver Lake in calm weather. As we neared the west shore, we rounded an island where on the shore

we saw a very nice camping place with some tent poles leaning against a spruce tree. It was only 7 P.M. so the sun was still above the horizon, but the campsite looked so inviting we laid up for the night. Besides, islands are sometimes less infested with mosquitoes than is the mainland.

We pitched the tent and spent the evening reading stories from magazines we had brought in case we became storm bound while on our travels. We also had a deck of cards and a cribbage board. As we were about to turn in for the night, we saw a great heavy black storm cloud moving closer from the west. We carried the canoe off the beach to the edge of the woods and turned it upside down over our groceries and equipment. As it was still very calm, we neglected to secure our tent more than is usually required.

At about 3 A.M. we awoke to a tremendous thunderclap. The lightning struck so close that we were dazed for a few moments. When a few drops of rain struck the tent and more thunder and lightening followed in the distance, we heard a mounting roar. I got up and had only partly dressed when the wind hit the tent. It took the two of us to hold the tent from being blown off the island. There was a deluge of rain descending. When the wind eased off, more soaking rain fell while we sat on our bedrolls and held up the tent with our heads to keep the bedding dry. It had rained for about an hour when dawn began to break. Then it eased off.

I went to check the groceries, which were in good order, for everything had been securely covered with a tarp. The canoe had been blown away. I found it top side up, caught in some trees and containing several pails of water. But for the trees, it would surely have been blown out into the lake, leaving us stranded. After that experience, I always tied my canoe so that it would not get blown away at night, a precaution I recommend for any wilderness canoe traveller.

We lost half a day drying out our bedding and clothes. Then the route led up the Sturgeon-weir River and to Pelican Narrows, where we arrived five days after leaving Flin Flon.

One day later, at Deschambault Lake, I looked up some of the natives—I knew them all. These people had become interested in prospecting. They sat around the campfire and told us many tales of the gold and silver they had found. One chap said he had found very nice silver as bright as a two-bit piece or maybe brighter. We made an agreement with him that if he could guide us to this place, we would supply the groceries and give him a half interest in the mine, if indeed there should ever be one there.

We left our canoe and outfit with this man's wife, and with the three of

us paddling we set out for the silver strike. After crossing five portages, we arrived at the site by 5 P.M.

Jim Fairburn looked closely at the shiny material in the outcropping of the rock and said with some disgust, "I expected this. It's white iron pyrite. or fool's gold. A fresh break is very white for a few days, but oxidation turns it bronzy. It's worthless."

Our guide looked crestfallen. I don't think he believed us at first. We had lost two days just to come here and assess this find—nothing but a wild goose chase. The next day, we paddled wearily back.

Proceeding to my fishing camp at Deschambault Lake, we picked up two axes and a large rip saw. I had taken this saw in trade for groceries in the previous winter. It was so large that at the time I did not think I would ever use it.

The Indians had given us directions on how to get to Jan Lake, and we soon departed. After we had found the portage and crossed over to Pelican Lake, we made our overnight camp on the first island. The next morning, we followed the east shoreline of Pelican Lake until we passed through the narrows into Jan Lake.

It was a pleasant surprise when Fairburn and I first saw Jan Lake. To begin with, it was a fine calm sunny day. Bright clear water and sunny woods were everywhere, giving the impression of a quiet land, uninhabited and clean, far from the worries of the outside world.

We stopped on a peninsula, where we made a pot of tea to go with our bacon and bannock. Looking eastward, where there were several islands lying on the horizon, we thought one island appeared particularly attractive, for it had a long sandy beach. After lunch we paddled directly to this island. It had a beach indeed, one of the finest I have ever seen up this way. After landing and looking about, we decided we had found the beauty spot of the North. The south end of the island was an ideal place to build a camp. It had only a few scattered large spruce trees near the beach but a heavy thick stand of timber to the north to give us shelter. Off shore to the southward, there were two other islands fairly close by.

The tent was set up, a short piece of fishnet set out, and we had fish in our frying pan in short order. Then we began to cut logs for our cabin.

This structure was to be eighteen feet wide and twenty-four feet long. To hurry things along, we made a trip to Deschambault Lake, where we hired two Indians to help us with the logs. We completed building the cabin of peeled logs, gathered a large quantity of sphagnum moss, and

piled it nearby to use in chinking the log structure later on.

If anyone had told me I would live there for the next five years, I would have believed him. If anyone had told me I could live here for the rest of my life, I would have answered that I would be happy to do so. As it turned out, I did spend part of my life there—happy and worry-free years—and I look back on this spot with fond memories.

On our return to Flin Flon on August 19 because our groceries and cash had run out, Fairburn and I set up our tent on Ross Lake Island. I killed time in town by playing pool or just talking to the fellows in the pool room. Fairburn again pursued the game of pea pool to raise grocery money.

One day I went back to where I had picked strawberries earlier in the season. To my astonishment I found that blueberries were ripe and growing profusely all over the hills. I had a good feed, but since I had brought no container, I picked my hat full and went home. Fairburn was having supper when I arrived, so we had blueberries for dessert.

That evening I went down to the pool hall to see if anyone wanted to buy blueberries. I soon had orders for one hundred pounds. For the next two weeks, I kept myself busy picking and selling blueberries. On my best day I harvested sixty pounds and did quite well selling them at ten cents a pound.

One day in the pool room, Quincey told me there was a gentleman named Webster staying at the New Richmond Hotel. This man was from Regina, and he was looking for a man with a canoe for one or two days of work at Phantom Lake. I lost no time in contacting this prospective employer. He turned out to be an Inspector of Mining Claims for the Government of Canada. Webster asked me to be at the hotel at 7:30 next morning and to bring a tea pail and two cups, while he provided the food.

When we met in the morning, Webster asked me to wait and he would return shortly. I did not realize that he had gone to hire a teamster with horses and wagon to haul the canoe to Phantom Lake for the price of three dollars. For that money, I could have packed the canoe myself and reached the lake before the team got there.

Webster's work that day was to inspect trenches and assess the work to confirm that the claim holders were complying with their obligations to hold their claims. He had a map showing all claim locations. With this map we had no difficulty at all in finding them all, where we measured the depth, width, and length of each work trench.

Back at the landing after paddling around the lake, it was 6:30 P.M. Webster

asked me to walk to town for a team and wagon to haul the canoe back.

"Forget the team," I said. "I can pack the canoe back myself in less time and at the same cost as hired transport."

He looked at me for a moment. Then he asked, "Do you need any help with the canoe?"

"None at all," I replied.

"Very well, Hanson," he said, "meet me at my hotel when you get back to town, and I'll pay you for your work.

With that, he was off on foot. I tied my paddles across the canoe thwarts and padded them with my jacket. Then I shouldered the canoe, hiking along at a trot for the two-mile carry. Before reaching Flin Flon, I had almost caught up to Webster, but he never looked back. I was trying to get to the hotel ahead of him, but I was a few seconds behind, for he was already in his room when I arrived there.

When I knocked on his door, he was quite surprised to see me and asked, "Have you left the canoe on the trail somewhere?"

"No," I answered, "the canoe is at Quincey's place, where we picked it up this morning."

We washed up and went out for a beer together. He paid me nine dollars wages and three dollars for bringing in the canoe, twelve dollars in all, which was four days' wages based on the average rate in 1931.

When the next day I had another good go with the blueberries, I thought that I was doing very well indeed.

Webster and I had talked about the country where I had trapped and fished commercially. I told him of the fishing camp we had built at Jan Lake that summer. Jan Lake was marked on the map in those days, but the full size was not shown and much detail was lacking. We also noted a sizeable body of water between Jan Lake and Beaver Lake, which bore the improbable name of Turd Lake. I had never been there, but I knew that it had once been fished commercially by an outfit named Normans and Enerson. There had been a white trapper there named Jackson, so some people called it Jackson Lake. This lake too was to affect me personally one day.

After the blueberry season had tapered off, I tried to promote the sale of wild cranberries, which were also quite abundant. The venture failed for lack of demand.

At that time there was a freight road being built from Flin Flon to Beaver Lake. The purpose of this road was to haul mining ore from some distant gold mine to the smelter in town. Some wag had spread the rumour that

the road was for hauling gold bricks. It was an ambitious project, with much blasting and filling to be done. Fairburn and I went to see if we could get work on the road, but we were told that only dried-out farmers from the south would be hired for this project. We went back to our tent.

"Well, we tried, Jim," I said.

It was time to recruit help for our fishing venture coming up that winter. I went over and talked to Bob "Tiny" Fred, a giant of a man who had worked with us in the previous season. He had grown tired of his job at the Community Hall and said that he would be pleased to return. Fairburn introduced me to Harold Lowder, a fellow pool player, and I asked him to have supper with me at the café. Lowder told me that he was on the waiting list at the mine, but it seemed unlikely that he would be called. He had no fishing experience and no money to buy winter clothes, so I assured him I would teach him how to fish and I would buy him the parka, cap, mitts, moccasins, rubbers, etc. that he would need. He joined our group. The fifth member was John Johnson, a greenhorn who wanted to go fishing and trapping.

After we had made all the arrangements for the supplies we found a man who would freight out our fish for three-and-one-half cents a pound. His name was Bill James, and his price seemed reasonable at the time.

As we had only my small canoe, which was inadequate to transport our sizeable load to Jan Lake, I talked to our freighter, James. As a result of this meeting, he rented us two canoes, a sixteen-foot model similar to mine and a nineteen-foot freighter model. We had twenty-eight hundred pounds of freight, and we would be heavily loaded when our own weight, that of five men, was added to the three canoes.

We left Flin Flon behind on October 12, 1931. Even though we travelled part way by hired transport on the partially completed road to Beaver Lake, it still took us three long hard days to get to Beaver Lake. Most of the time was taken up by portaging our freight.

At Beaver Lake we were greeted by rolling white caps created by a cold high wind. At supper time I assessed the situation and told our crew we had better get Angus McDonald to tow our canoes across the lake. With his outboard motor and some of our freight in his canoe, we would be much better situated for open lake travel. Otherwise we would surely get into trouble in rough water.

That evening three of us put our bedrolls and some groceries into the big canoe and paddled across the lake to Angus McDonald's place. It was

a gruelling trip fighting a side wind, and we were soaked with spray as the waves struck the canoe broadside. We were in luck, for Angus was willing to tow us across as soon as the wind let up.

In the morning McDonald towed our canoe back to where Fairburn and Johnson were waiting. The canoes were loaded and ready, tied one behind the other, a brigade of four canoes now being taken across the open lake using McDonald's six-horsepower motor to do the work. The trip back to McDonald's was uneventful because the wind was down.

After we resumed the journey to the mouth of the Sturgeon-weir River, a strong wind began to blow from the west. When the waves began to crest and spray fell on the loaded canoes, McDonald headed for the nearest point of land, for this would have us running with the waves. Half way to the point, I knew the waves were getting higher and we were in trouble. I signalled to McDonald to head for shore as soon as possible. Our big freighter canoe was taking water over the stern, though Fairburn held his sweater over the top to keep out some of the water.

As we were close to shore now, McDonald stopped the motor. Bob and Harold jumped out of the canoe and stood waist deep in the water. The shoreline was all broken limestone, which would have holed the canoes had we tried to land the normal way. Instead the canoes would have to be untied and eased into shore.

Even so, the big canoe struck a rock, which ripped a hole in the canvas covering, and it soon filled with water. John and I managed to save our loads, but all our flour, sugar and oatmeal lay awash in the big canoe. It took all six of us to unload the big freighter. Standing waist deep in the water, we passed the freight from one man to another and finally piled it on shore, one piece at a time.

Now came the chore of drying out the soggy cargo. We hung dry goods over poles to dry in the sun and wind, and we kindled a good fire beside a high limestone cliff. Here the clothing dried out quickly.

With our foodstuffs it was another story. The flour was in twenty-five pound bags, four bags sewn into a burlap cover. We cut open the burlap and spread the bags on the limestone rocks to dry, then spread out the oatmeal and sugar bags in the same manner. The oatmeal turned out to be a total loss, for it formed hard lumps as it dried. Some of the sugar had turned into a white syrup, which leaked from the bags and formed pools on the flat limestone rocks. Some of this liquid was spooned up.

We all slept in the tent that night with an open fire just outside the entrance and the tent flaps tied open to let in some warmth.

In the morning, the white caps were still rolling in the lake, so we spent the day patching two of our canoes and drying our goods. When we set out again for the mouth of the Sturgeon-weir River, the weather had become warm and the wind was calm. The storm had blown itself out.

Our outfit was across Beaver Lake. Another day and Angus McDonald helped us over Spruce Portage and seven miles farther on at Snake Portage. He left us then and headed his canoe for home. We continued on, though it was hard work paddling against the current and sweating on the portages, cold and in danger when we decided to wade our loaded canoes up some lesser rapids while some of the men helped from shore by pulling the canoes on ropes.

We passed Scoop Rapids after we had stopped to take out a supply of whitefish to eat, then on to Birch Portage, then Dog Portage, making slow progress. When we had reached Crow Lake (now named Corneille Lake), it was only six miles to a place where we would need to cut a two-mile portage. We would have to make a new freight road there to haul our fish from Jan Lake to join up with the winter freight road which ran from Flin Flon to Pelican Narrows.

We spent the first three days cutting out the old trapline trail that marked the portage; it had to be widened considerably to let horses and sleighs through. Then we began the large job of moving our outfit across this portage. We carried the big freighter canoe, now somewhat waterlogged, across in short stages. By the time we had made this portage, I had learned to pack with a tumpline, having at last developed my neck muscles to carry a good part of the load. It was easier than using a packsack, and I could carry more weight. Though my canoe had absorbed moisture into the wooden ribs and planking and now weighed eighty pounds, it seemed light, since I had become a better packer.

The route led across a small lake and ended at a four-hundred-yard portage. Here we again widened the trail for the winter freight road and at last came to the east shore of Jan Lake. We made our camp there that night, for there was a high wind blowing.

Awakened to bright sunshine and a light wind, we made a quick breakfast and departure. When we arrived at Sandy Island and our new fishing camp built that summer, every man was very happy indeed to have reached our destination.

When we put up our tent and unloaded our outfit, the date was November 1, 1931. Life took on a different pace now. Three weeks of paddling, portaging, and cutting roads had been a race against time. Afraid of

becoming ice bound by freezing lakes and unsafe ice, we had worked from daylight until dark every day. Now the sun shone warmly and freeze-up was delayed, so we assumed a more leisurely pace and took time to enjoy our beautiful surroundings.

I wanted to build a hand-powered sawmill using the big rip saw that I had left in the cabin when it was built. With it, I planned to saw boards for the cabin floor. On a small island near the cabin, there stood a fine grove of white spruce. We built a scaffold there and squared two logs by hewing them with axes. I then marked them in widths of one and one-half inches. Using a fishing line and charcoal, I marked off the edge of each board. When we first tried out the saw, we had only succeeded in sawing two boards fourteen feet long before it was evening and time to quit for the day. The next day we sawed twenty-eight boards. The sawmill was operating satisfactorily as we changed off every fifteen minutes.

Then Bob and I left by canoe for Deschambault Lake to bring up the cookstove, stovepipes, sinkers and floats for the nets, all of which had been left at Tower Island the previous winter and now were required at our new location. We made this trip without any difficulty and returned just ahead of freeze-up. Then we made ready our fishnets for the fishing season, which would open on December 1.

My plan was for Bob and Harold to fish on Deschambault Lake to be ready for Chris Walker, who was coming up to get a load of fish for Nipawin. In case Walker wanted to come farther on to Jan Lake for big trout and whitefish, we cut out two portages of a mile long each. I hired two Indians to cut the portage between Deschambault and Pelican Lakes. Bob and Harold cut the other from Jan Lake to Pelican Lake before they left for their fishing station at Deschambault Lake. We hired Roderick Ballantyne to freight their supplies down with the dog team because by this time winter had set in. The fishing gear was already in camp for them, left there the previous season.

Soon, it was four days before the fishing season was to open. The men at Deschambault Lake jumped the gun a bit in sub zero weather when Fred Vessy arrived back from Lake Lenore. He was one of the fellows we had helped out when he came up in the previous winter with his inadequate fishing outfit. This time he had ten regular fishnets, various equipment, a helper, and a teamster with horses to take back a load of fish. He borrowed a ton of fish from our men to be paid back as soon as he could get his nets producing. In this manner, the teamster had a minimum of waiting time and left right away for civilization with his load.

Three days later, Chris Walker arrived at Deschambault Lake from Nipawin with two teams. Our lads had only one load of fish ready at that time. When Walker learned that it was only twenty-two miles to our Jan Lake operation, he took one team and an Indian guide and arrived at our camp in good order. He took a load of Jan Lake fish to Nipawin, the first such haul ever made to my knowledge.

At Deschambault Lake, our men fished until January 15, when a fight erupted between Vessy and his helper. They parted company, and the helper headed north with Harold Lowder, who wanted to quit fishing and go back to Flin Flon. Bob and Vessy would continue to fish at Deschambault, an arrangement that was entirely satisfactory to me.

Harold Lowder and Vessy's helper left for our Jan Lake camp carrying their bedrolls. They arrived at 9 P.M. after a very hard trip wading through heavy snow. The next day I paid Lowder his wages. He had $44 coming, and he said he was pleased, for it was more cash than he had seen in a long time. As it turned out, Lowder was the only man among us to make any money from that winter's fishing operation.

The very next day Bill James arrived with two teams to haul out fish to Flin Flon. Lowder and his companion left us then in the luxury of James' heated caboose, which he was using so that our fish was delivered to Flin Flon unfrozen.

That winter I was also trading for furs with the Indians and with a few white trappers that called in at our Jan Lake camp. I arranged to have freight brought in with the fish freighters. Our profit on trading was paying for our groceries. I traded one twenty-four hundred pound load of fish to Chris Walker for groceries and some cash. Trading in fact was a paying proposition. My buying price was eight dollars a hundred pounds for pork and five dollars a hundred for flour. Flour was selling for sixteen dollars a hundred pounds in Pelican Narrows. I sold mine for ten dollars. I doubled my money on all groceries and paid off nearly all our debt in Flin Flon.

We were not drawing on our fishing returns, leaving it all until spring so we would have cash when we returned to Flin Flon. At Flin Flon we had been promised eight cents a pound for whitefish. As our cost for fish boxes and freighting was three and one-half cents a pound, that would leave us a profit of four and a half cents. Our gross shipments to Flin Flon had been two hundred and forty-four boxes of fresh fish, on which we had expected to realize a profit of about four hundred dollars.

Near the end of the fishing season, I ordered twelve dozen muskrat

traps and had them brought in with Bill James. I traded two dozen traps away and kept ten dozen. Then I sent word to Flin Flon that we would be in town about the end of May to collect the proceeds of our winter fishing. Bill James took back his two canoes on his last fish haul; after he left we were on our own.

Everyone at camp wanted to go muskrat trapping. Then Bob and Vessy pulled into camp from Deschambault Lake one day with Roderick Ballantyne, a native dog-driver who had bought all their supplies and equipment. These two fishermen were also eager to go trapping.

Now we were a group of five men once more, but the cabin was roomy and comfortable. We spent our time planning the coming muskrat trapping season, which was yet some weeks away, and operating our man-powered sawmill to cut some lumber. I had been a few boards short of completing the cabin floor, but now we cut twenty-eight boards extra and piled them so that they would season properly.

One day Fairburn said to me, "Olaf, I could make a canoe if I only had the material—canvas, paint, and nails."

Certainly another canoe would be a godsend for us with the muskrat season coming up. My own sixteen-foot canoe would prove most inadequate as soon as we had open water.

"Start building your canoe, Jim," I said. "I'll get Ballantyne to take me to Pelican Narrows with his dog team, so I can buy everything you need."

By the time I returned, Fairburn had sawn out two fine birch gunwales about sixteen feet long and several canoe ribs. He had spent time looking for just the right tree with the proper natural bend in it to form the curved ends of the canoe. He finally came up with a curved tamarack that he sawed in a neat cut that divided the trunk from end to end to form the desired canoe ends.

We all took a hand in the job. Some of us had a natural talent for working with wood, while others had learned from expert craftsmen. We also had the other canoe available to copy. Together we had the canoe ready for the canvas cover after one week. After keeping the hull in the cabin for three days, we applied the canvas, which was a tricky and exacting process.

The result was a fine birch canoe fourteen feet long and three-and-a-half feet wide. When after two weeks it was completed, with inside gunwales, centre cross bar and end thwarts, and a slick painted finish, it was as good as any factory-made canoe on the market at that time. I used that canoe for several years.

Then John Johnson and I left to begin trapping muskrats at Tulabi Lake,

Big Stone Lake, and the as-yet-nameless body of water that would in August 1935 be dubbed Hanson Lake. At that time, Side Lake had not been officially named either. Our plan was to return to Jan Lake via the Sturgeon-weir River at the end of the season. Fairburn and Vessy were to trap the Jan Lake area, while Bob would stay in camp and do some trading.

Roderick Ballantyne took my partner Johnson and me and our outfit across Jan Lake and the three-mile portage to Tulabi Lake on March 18, 1932. It was the first time I had trapped there. We had good luck and caught three hundred and fifty muskrats before moving on to Big Stone Lake. After a portage to Pasowun Lake, we camped overnight and caught only one muskrat. Next day we packed everything: fur, groceries, tent, stove, bedrolls, and canoe across the portage to Side Lake. This was prime muskrat country, but someone had been trapping there before breakup of the ice. We set all our traps in a creek running down to "my" lake.

I had a rough map made up for me by one of my Indian friends to guide me on this route. The lake was drawn with no detail and no outlet indicated. There we continued trapping.

By this time, we were almost out of groceries, with only five pounds of flour, a bit of sugar, and enough coffee to last for two weeks. There is a small creek flowing into the lake from Jack Pine Lake, and there we set up our camp. We made the short portage into Jack Pine Lake, where we were able to catch enough pickerel to keep us going. We spent our time trapping in this vicinity until the season ended.

Then we began to search for the outlet of the lake that would lead us to the Sturgeon-weir River. My Indian friend had not told me exactly where to look for the creek. A very irregular shoreline with long bays that led to dead ends further complicated matters. Striking southward from our last camp, we explored each bay, and it was easy going as long as we paddled south. We encountered strong head winds after we had reached the southern extremity of the lake without finding the outlet and had to turn northward to resume our search.

At the end of one bay, we found a small creek, but at its mouth there was no telling if the water flowed in or out. After paddling on this watercourse for a few hundred yards, we found we were travelling upstream and therefore not on the outlet for the lake. Finally, wind-bound by high contrary winds we were laid up for two days, usually a depressing experience, but even more so when you are out of grub.

This trip was getting to John Johnson. New at the wilderness life, he seriously began to believe we were never going to find our way out of this

lake and insisted that we return to Jan Lake the way we had come. I could see his point of view, since it did seem that this lake had no outlet at all. I explained to him, however, that the return trip via Tulabi Lake would be across thawing muskeg on one portage, a distance of three miles we had walked easily on our way in, but we would sink to our waists on a return walk.

My partner's mood grew worse. "You made a good job of getting the Indians to show you how to get into this lake, but you made a poor one of getting them to tell you how to get out," he growled.

I kept my peace. Among this labyrinth of bays, islands, and points, I was getting a bit concerned myself and hoped to find an out-flowing watercourse very soon. We worked our way northward until we were at the north-east end of the lake, where there are several islands. On the first island there stood a log cabin. No one was living there, but I had sensed we were near the outlet now. We travelled eastward with a fair wind, which took us to the east end of a bay in short order. Here at last we found a creek flowing generally south-eastward.

I tried to encourage him, but his black mood persisted and he refused to talk. I had learned from the Indians that there were four small portages on this creek, but since Johnson had elected to remain mute, I did not tell him of this fact. It was new country to us, and at a waterfall I missed finding the portage by looking for it on the wrong side. Johnson was good enough to help me let the canoe down a rope. Below the falls, we found the portage I had missed and a fine camping place. At this place we made a lunch of one small bannock, a bit of sugar, and black coffee.

At the fourth portage I told Johnson this was the last one. He looked at me as if to ask how I knew that. When we shortly reached the Sturgeon-weir, I believe he began to realize that I knew something about the country after all.

We travelled with a purpose now, going steadily upstream and over the portages we had cut to Jan Lake on our way in that previous autumn, arriving at the Jan Lake cabin in good condition, except that we were starving for good food.

Fairburn, Vessy, and Bob were in camp waiting for us. After two days of rest for all hands, we all left together for Flin Flon. Fairburn, Johnson, and I were in one canoe, while the two heavier men, Bob and Vessy, paddled the other.

Our first stop was at Pelican Narrows, where we had an offer of forty cents apiece for our muskrats. Johnson and I had four hundred and

forty-eight skins, while Fairburn and Vessy had taken three hundred and ninety-seven. We had expected to realize fifty cents and so decided we could do better in Flin Flon.

In this thinking we were mistaken. Our final selling price was thirty-seven cents a pelt. My share of our catch was $82.88. Johnson however held his share until the next year, when he realized fifty cents a pelt. The rest of us had debts to pay, so had to sell and almost paid up in full with the proceeds.

Then we were off to see the fish buyer for our final settlement. There had been a hint that our proceeds might not meet our expectations; when Walker came for his last load of fish, he could pay only a cent and a half a pound, for the demand had fallen off. Still, we were hopeful, so the proceeds from the more than five tons we had shipped out that winter came as another surprise. Our buyer told us the fish had sold for an average of three cents a pound. We had originally been promised eight cents less freight and boxes totalling three and one half cents a pound, which would have left us four and a half cents net. At three cents a pound, the fish did not pay for the freighting, so we ended up in debt. I walked out of the office and swore to the boys that I would never, the rest of my life, go fishing commercially again.