Captain Jefferson Cram, of the U.S. Topographic Engineers, was among the first explorers to describe the Pine River. In his detailed report of 1840 on the Michigan–Wisconsin Boundary Survey, he wrote:

The tributary of the Menominee called the Mus-kos Se-pe, is so low in summer as to be unnavigable for any but the smallest of canoes, and in some seasons it is almost dry. . . . The valley of this river is long, and contains deer in great abundance; and consequently, much resorted to by Indians . . . for the winter hunt. This river is called by some Pine River.

Captain Cram’s impression of the country was far from favorable:

The country . . . has an exceedingly desolate appearance; all the timber which was once pine has been consumed by fire, as far as the eye can reach all around on every side. The prospect is one of a broken landscape of barren hills, studded here and there with scarred pine stubs, with scarcely a living tree, except the second growth of white birch and poplar.

Making his observations during late summer and viewing the Pine River from the low profile of his canoe midstream on the Menominee, Captain Cram’s conclusions were quite accurate, but far from complete. Hidden from his vision behind the first bend was a beautifully wild river, serene in its quiet stretches, boisterous as it dashed over falls and rapids, coursing along through a verdant forest.

Chippewa Indians inhabited the area. Those occupying the burned and barren district were referred to as the Badwater Indians. The stretch of the Menominee River here was known as "badwater". The Indians grew only potatoes, as it was too far north for the growing of corn. To the west at the headwaters of the Pine and its main tributary, the Popple, lay a vast region of forest and

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1 This is Paper No. 2 in the series "Studies on the Pine-Popple Wild Rivers Area of Northeastern Wisconsin". It is included at the beginning of the sequence because it gives a vivid picture of the two rivers and adjacent land, as seen by a canoeist traversing their lengths.

2 Mr. Joe Mills (688 Gary St., Ripon, Wis. 54971) is an enthusiastic member of the Sierra Club, and an honorary trustee of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation. —Editor.


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swamp. Much of the land was a flat pinery dotted with stands of mixed hardwoods. The swamps consisted of open bogs edged with cedar, tamarack, spruce and balsam. Deer were abundant, yarding in the thick cedar swamps to escape the heavy snows of winter. It was here that Chief Ca-sha-o-sha came with his band from their summer planting ground on Lake Vieux Desert for the hunt that was to supply them with meat for survival through the cold Wisconsin winters. From the Brule River they pushed their canoes south up Elvoy, Brule and Alvin Creeks. A short quarter-mile portage from the headwater springs of Alvin Creek put them on the North Branch of the Pine River. The western terminus of the portage trail was at the present location of the Forest Service canoe landing northwest of Windsor Dam Campground.

I began my exploration of the Pine River there (Fig. 1, 1) on a bright summer day in 1963, with Nancy, my teen-age daughter in the bow of our light-weight aluminum canoe. I shoved hard, stepping lightly as I felt the keel leave the landing. We dug deeply into the sluggish current to gain momentum. Just around the point of land below the landing we found ourselves in the midst of a collection of loose-fitting logs. However, we had no problem extricating ourselves, as the logs moved easily from the pressure of our paddles. Out on the open river, zigzagging through an open swamp surrounded with white birch, popple, balsam and spruce, we settled back to enjoy the scenery. As we rounded a bend, suddenly a large boulder reared its dark form dangerously close to the bow. A rapid swish of the paddle and we averted a collision with only an inch to spare. Alert now, we cautiously avoided the rocks that appeared regularly ahead of us as we proceeded. A creek came in on the right, then the marsh broadened: we were in the flowage area of Windsor Dam (Fig. 1, 2).

Built in 1891 for the purpose of facilitating the driving of logs, Windsor suffered the fate of all logging dams—abandonment and gradual deterioration. Later the fill was utilized in the approaches to the bridge for a public road, now designated as Forest Road 2174. Some of the original dam timbers can still be found imbedded in the river under the bridge.

Two other logging dams were constructed on the North Branch of the Pine, Gillett Dam, built a half mile below the entrance of the Lake Howell outlet (Fig. 1, 3), occupied the open swamp in Sections 24 and 25. A mile downriver was Stones Dam.

The Pine River, as it flows from Butternut Lake, is too shallow and badly clogged with windfalls to be floated in a canoe. Furthermore, access is difficult. However in August 1967 Dr. Galen Smith, professor of biology at Whitewater State University, managed to get his canoe to the river over an abandoned logging—railroad grade.
Figure 1. Map to show mentioned locations along the Pine and Popple Rivers. 1, Canoe Landing; 2, Windsor Dam; 3, Gillett Dam; 4, Beaver meadows; 5, Jones Dam; 6, Mouth of McDonald Creek; 7, Wildcat Rapids; 8, Junction of North and South Branches of the Pine River; 9, Site of Holt Lumber Company logging camp; 10, Lindel Spur Bridge; 11, Mouth of Kingstone Creek; 12, Pine Dam No. 3; 13, Mouth of Stevens Creek; 14, Highway 139 Bridge; 15, Power line to Lost Lake; 16, Powers Dam; 17, Chipmunk Rapids; 18, Snake-tail Rapids; 19, Mouth of Lauterman Creek; 20, Mouth of Wakefield Creek; 21, Mouth of Seven Mile Creek; 22, Highway 101 Bridge; 23, Junction of Pine and Popple Rivers; 24, Location of Erickson cabin; 25, LaSalle Falls; 26, Pine River Dam; 27, Highway N Bridge; 28, Indian portage; 29, Mouth of Lepage Creek; 30, Mouth of Ellwood Lake outlet; 31, Source of Popple River; 32, Mouth of Rat Lake outlet; 33, Railroad Rapids; 34, Highway 139 Bridge; 35, Mouth of Martin Creek; 36, McDougal Rapids; 37, Burnt Dam Rapids; 38, Podunk Dam; 39, Mouth of Riley Creek; 40, Junction of South Branch with Popple River; 41, Masons Rapids; 42, Little Bull Falls; 43, Murphy Rapids; 44, Nine Day Rapids; 45, Mouth of Hendricks Creek; 46, Washburn Falls; 47, Jennings Falls.
He embarked from a crude bridge in Section 18, and found the river meandering a great deal, but with water of sufficient depth for good paddling.\(^4\)

Gary Werner, a University of Wisconsin student, with two companions, paddled a canoe upriver from the Forest Service landing, in April 1966, as far as the Section 18–19 line. A minor log jam, several beaver dams and shallows in the vicinity of the jeep trail across Section 17 hampered their travel. While the experiences of Werner and Smith imply that at least two miles of the upper North Branch are canoeable, the best choice for the beginning of a canoe trip is the Forest Service canoe landing, with the first portage at Windsor Dam.

All that is necessary at Windsor Dam is to slide the canoe under the bridge into the pool below. A small island obstructs the outlet. Immediately beyond, the river bottom becomes very rocky. Unless the river is extremely high, it is utterly impossible to paddle a loaded canoe. Wading is not difficult as the current is slow, posing no threat to canoe or contents. This condition persists for a half mile. Finally the banks flatten into an alder swamp and the river deepens. From this point on we enjoyed good canoeing for about a mile and a half. Once we caught a glimpse of an otter. Twice later we sighted the animal and attempted to catch up with it as it swam downriver. As we entered big timber, rocks began ripping the surface of the river, and from ahead came the sounds of a rapids. We got as far as the logging-road bridge A clearing fifty yards north of this is the location of a logging camp. The road on the other side of the river continues into the timber inviting further exploration. The residue of a campfire tells us that this is an ideal campsite.

Wading the canoe through the rocks, we find the river turning southward and improving. Once more we clamber back into our seats, and proceeding onward pass dense thickets of balsam and spruce towered over by an occasional white pine. The remains of another logging bridge slip by. Three huge boulders, probably rolled there by loggers clearing the channel many years ago, doze in the sun. Then one of us points to the spinning propeller of a windcharger over the tops of balsams ahead of the canoe. What a shocking intrusion into a wild river area! Presently we come to a road, a bridge and a log cabin, the retreat of some city dweller. We tarry long enough to pull the canoe over the bridge and to glance disapprovingly in the direction of the cabin.

Paddling again, we discover the North Branch taking on the characteristics of a beaver meadow (Fig. 1, 4). The river divides into several channels. Sloughs lead off on both sides. Abandoned

beaver lodges dot the clumps of willow and alder. Due ahead a break in the conifers marks the location of the South Branch, emerging to join the North Branch (Fig. 1, 8).

The Forest Service rates the South Branch an excellent canoe trail, and has provided a fine landing at the Pine River Campground bridge. The two mile stretch to Jones Dam is ideal for a leisurely family outing. The current is slow in the sinuous river as it courses, fringed with willows and alders, through an open swamp. A number of beautiful wild swamp–river–forest vistas open up. Almost all of the scenic views of the South Branch include tall sentinel white pines which miraculously escaped the axes of loggers.

Built in the same year and for the same purpose as Windsor Dam on the North Branch, Jones Dam (Fig. 1, 5) was once the site of a farm. Ramsay and Jones, an outfit operating camps in the area, cleared the land for the raising of potatoes and the pasturing of horses. When the company moved out, the buildings were abandoned, but not for long. A woods character known as Whitewater Mike moved in. 5 In those days there were always a number of lazy, smelly bums inhabiting the woods eking out a living by trapping, poaching game and stealing provisions from the logging camps. One night a barn burned at one of the camps destroying eight fine teams of horses. Whitewater Mike, who had had trouble with James Holmes, the tough camp boss, was suspected of setting the blaze. Sometime later Whitewater Mike was found shot dead. The forest fire which destroyed Whitewater Mike’s last abode also consumed the timbers of Jones Dam. Civilian Conservation Corps boys in the 1930s planted the potato fields with Norway pines.

Downriver from Jones Dam is a much longer and more varied canoe trip with a rapids to be lined or portaged. A full day ought to be scheduled for passing through it. The current, for the most part, is slow, and the river continues to meander from side to side touching the fringes of spruce and balsam. Beaver are numerous, and one often encounters their dams. A mile below McDonald Creek (Fig. 1, 6) the river bottom becomes rocky, a fitting prelude to Wildcat Rapids (Fig. 1, 7). Nicolet National Forest game biologist Ed Wilder rates Wildcat Rapids high as a forest beauty spot. “The area is a green garden of beauty”, he wrote in a report to forest supervisor Phil Archibald, “with giant moss-covered boulders, a nearly solid canopy of conifers and the greatest fall of water per distance involved of any rapids on the river.” 6

5 Information obtained from James Huff in 1969; personal communication.
6 As cited by Edwin Wilder in a 1967 report to Philip Archibald, of the U. S. Forest Service, Rhinelander, Wis.
A deer trail, conveniently located on the left, can be used for the 100-yard portage, or the canoe can be lined through the rapids. A log jam just above the confluence with Wildcat Creek requires another pullout. Farther on, a low footbridge spans the river, and the plywood camp of a beaver trapper follows on the right. The river then bends north. The remnants of a bridge cribbing mark the river where it leaves Argonne Township to enter Alvin Township. An access road from Highway 55 terminates here at the location of a farmstead long abandoned. A log cabin occupies a grove of pines on the east bank, while on the opposite side a barn overgrown by popples decays into oblivion. The canoe float may be terminated at this location or continued to the confluence with the North Branch and a landing at the highway bridge.

A second road from the highway provides access to three cabins standing in a clearing a mile downriver. An improvised log bridge spans the river here, barely high enough to provide clearance for a canoe. The South Branch joins its counterpart, the North Branch, in a wide open flat (Fig. 1, 8). Merged into a broader stream, the river swings southeast between high banks covered with popple, white birch and balsam, occasionally dominated by tall white pines. As we pass a large log cabin on the left, the bridge looms into sight. The landing is on the left. Brush almost hides an unsightly dilapidated cabin. A summer home and two additional cabins stand on the roadside under the shade of many pines.

From Highway 55 to Highway 139 the Pine is wild, fast-flowing, and an adventure to canoe. It is no longer a quiet river for family outings. Only the daring, white-water canoeist should venture onto these waters; and any attempt to canoe them should be made during above-normal water conditions of early spring, or following periods of heavy rains, preferably with a minimum of gear. The low water levels of late summer expose long stretches of rocks, and to canoe at this time would necessitate dragging for miles.

Leaving the Highway 55 bridge behind, the river moves moderately fast between pleasantly timbered banks which soon widen into an open swamp, the flowage site of Forks Dam. The Pine cuts through a narrow opening, pouring into a large, deep, circular pool. The exit from the pool is at the extreme right under the canopy of a huge balsam. The canoe is immediately caught by the fast current of a sharp pitch. A hundred yards of Grade 1 rapids lie ahead. For two miles the river is a series of fairly easy rapids, separated by brief stretches of quiet water. A large clearing on the left is the location of a logging camp once operated by the Holt Lumber Company (Fig. 1, 9). Low rectangular mounds outline the shape of the buildings. A nearby spring was the camp's source of water.
On the opposite side of the river is the overgrown site of an older camp.

A half mile downriver the sagging timbers of a railroad bridge arch overhead. Known as Lindels Spur (Fig. 1, 10) it penetrated the timber of the upper Pine River. Over its tracks went the hardwood logs passed up during the river drives. The right-of-way, virtually all of it over lands controlled by the Forest Service, crosses the river again north of Long Lake.

Near Zepp Farm the river traverses private land. Cottage developments threaten the wild character of the banks. One new A-frame home has been constructed in a manner overhanging the river. The Zepp buildings stand in a field empty and abandoned. Below Upper Zepp Bridge the current slows perceptibly, and the river deepens as it swings to and fro through swampy bottomland. Two cottages with outbuildings and a collection of tin cans, bottles and assorted junk flank the river. Lower Zepp Bridge is an arched wooden structure with a locked gate on its south approach. The excellent gravel road is public, but the bridge and both banks are privately owned.

Ten minutes of paddling beyond this point will put the canoeist at the head of another long series of rapids. In the middle of the first rapids an island is approached. The canoe should be directed into the left channel to be followed with a course directly in the center of the river. The last rapids in this series is in Section 16. After leaving the island at the base of the rapids, the canoeist can relax a bit.

After we had descended the rapids safely, the weather took a turn for the worse. We were enveloped in one of those early spring, wet, sticky snowstorms sweeping the country. Despite the thickly falling flakes, we discerned a large bird perched in the top of a dead pine. We surmised it was a bald eagle, and not wishing to alarm the bird we headed the two canoes toward a suitable landing. The moment we rose from our seats the suspicious eagle spread its broad wings and soared out of sight into the storm. Feeling frustrated we climbed the high river bank, built a fire in the shelter of several protecting pines, and ate our lunches while we listened to the moan of the wind above our heads. After this we were glad to pick up our paddles, for the activity would warm our shivering bodies.

Shortly thereafter we pass a huge boulder on the left where a small stream draining a swamp enters the Pine. The terrain is flat and the current sluggish. The northeastwardly flowing river suddenly turns sharply southwest. We shoot a short rapids before Kingstone Creek (Fig. 1, 11) enters the river. Then comes Pine Dam No. 3 (Fig. 1, 12), a huge affair of rock, gravel and protruding
timbers. The water flowing through the sluiceway is deep enough for the passage of a canoe, but the menacing protruding spikes pose a serious menace to the canoes. So we drag them over the jumble of rocks and timbers to the river a safe distance below.

Having escaped one hazard we confidently resumed our journey downriver, but misfortune strikes one of the canoes in a boulder-strewn rapids. In a moment of carelessness the bow of the light-weight Grumann strikes a midstream rock, and the rear paddler fights desperately against the current to prevent the stern from swinging dangerously downstream. Jammed against another rock, the canoe is doomed. The two occupants in hip-deep icy water watch the canoe as it buckles from the pressure of tons of water against its frail frame. For an hour we struggled with rope and poles to free the wrecked craft from the clutches of the river. On a gravel bar we straightened the canoe as best we could, sealed the rivet holes with adhesive tape from a first aid kit, and with a lone paddler in the damaged canoe resumed the slow trip to the next bridge three miles downriver. Some of the romance and glamor of canoeing a wilderness stream had gone out in the humiliating upset. Running the remaining rapids to Forest Road 2169 seemed devoid of challenge and excitement. Our spirits depressed, we concentrated on getting through to our cars and a change into dry clothes.

On another date and in a better frame of mind, we pushed the canoe into the current of the Pine River, leaving behind Forest Road 2169 bridge. We pass several cottages that flank the river. One of the few active farms on the Pine is located on the right bank. Cattle graze the fields, and a small sawmill supplements the income from the land. On the left a substantial home has been erected on the river's floodplain. A short rapids precedes Stevens Creek (Fig. 1, 13). Then follows a mile-long straight shot of fast water that in the right stage affords a safe and exciting run. The canoe bounces from wave to wave, sweeps around a bend, cuts through Lindel Spur right-of-way, then settles down in the gentle current, as Highway 189 bridge (Fig. 1, 14) is reached. The stretch to the next bridge is devoid of interest. The sounds of highway traffic, the highway trestle, and the odor of septic tank discharges from nearby homes detract significantly from the river's attractiveness. Past the bridge and beyond the next bend, charm returns to the Pine. The only intrusion on the landscape is the power line to Lost Lake (Fig. 1, 15).

Powers Dam is soon reached (Fig. 1, 16). It was one of the four dams constructed on the Pine River by the Menominee River Boom Company, a conglomerate of the logging companies operating on the Menominee and its tributaries. In all, the company operated
41 dams. The purpose of the dams was to store water so that a sufficient river level was available to float the logs over falls and rapids. During the winter months the various logging camps assembled huge piles of logs at landings on the river banks. Just prior to the breakup in the spring, the Company sent expert scalers to estimate the quantity of logs awaiting the drive so that equitable tolls could be assessed. The peak of logging on the Pine and Popple rivers occurred in the winter of 1895–96, when 31½ million feet were banked on the Pine, 9 million on the South Branch, 3 million on the North Branch and 22½ million on the Popple. Thereafter the Boom Company handled a steadily decreasing volume. In the winter of 1916–17, the mill companies banked their last crop of logs on the Menominee watershed. In 1918 the Marinette & Menominee Paper Company purchased all deadhead logs piled in rollways along the river. The curtain rang down on the drama of the river drives in 1919 when the Roper Lumber and Cedar Company drove its winter cut of cedar on the Pine River down to Marinette.7

Below Powers Dam is Chipmunk Rapids (Fig. 1, 17). Several white cottages occupy a farm field. A road skirts the left bank, and if the decision is not to run the rapids the canoe can be landed where the river bends sharply east to go into the first pitch. A good canoeist will find Chipmunk Rapids not difficult although a reading of the river prior to the run will help assure safe passage. Beyond the lower pitch, rocks continue to rip the fast current, but these diminish as the bridge and campground are neared.

Don Quinn and I departed from Chipmunk Rapids Campground early in the day with 20 miles of river ahead of us, much of it rapids. The day before, we had attempted to gain access at a number of points. A washout in the Goodman Grade forced us to turn around. The road at Seven Mile Creek was too soft for car travel. The Highway 101 bridge would have to be our exit. We were prepared for a long, hard day filled with adventure.

A moderate current carried the canoe along at a rapid pace. On the left charred stumps indicated that the area had once been ravaged by a forest fire; but the new forest of white birch, popple and balsam had made remarkable recovery. Tall elms again stood on the wide flats. Wild ducks were constantly flushing ahead of the canoe. A kingfisher rattled his disdain at our invasion of his domain. Attention could not be divorced fully from the river, for occasional rocks had to be spotted and avoided. There was the additional hazard of cedar sweeps close to the banks. We passed a weatherbeaten hunting camp in a clearing on the left. The hunters had stretched a cable overhead to give them access to the woods on the south bank. Entering Section 4, we passed a log jam in

7 Burke, Fred C., 1946. Logs on the Menominee.
midstream, then noted a quickening current. We were nearing Snaketail Rapids (Fig. 1, 18) and, upon catching the first sound of the white water, began hugging the left bank. Backpaddling, we eased along and eventually located the beginning of the portage trail.

The river boils into a furious frenzy among the rocks, filling the surrounding forest with the noise of rushing water. Very few canoeists who dared accept the challenge of Snaketail Rapids have made it. The wild beauty of the spot has attracted many. The portage trail is marked by the coals of numerous campfires. Complete privacy is unattainable because of a recently constructed log cabin. Unfortunately Snaketail Rapids is just outside the east
boundary of the Nicolet National Forest. The cabin owner has access by road from the north. The road is private and the public is not encouraged to use it.

The portage trail is unimproved; it winds between the boulders and tends to peter out at its eastern terminus. The canoe can be launched in the wide eddy below the rapids for the short 100-yard float to Lower Snaketail Rapids, which can be safely run by an expert canoeist. An island is followed by a quick left and right turn, then a short, easy rapids. The current continues fast. Rips and riffles are common.

The Pine River in the Calumet Hecla lands is truly delightful. The practice of selective logging, pioneered in Wisconsin by the Goodman Lumber Company, the former owners of the tract, is being continued. One is struck by the majesty of the forest here in contrast with the second growth of the upper river.

Ten minutes below Lauterman Creek (Fig. 1, 19) is a short rapids easily run on the left. Beyond Kieper Creek, Meyer Falls is located in Section 36. Rocks fill the river in the approach to the falls. Wading becomes necessary. The river plunges 6 or 8 feet through a narrow cut in the outcropping of rock. The portage on the right bank is about 20 yards long. A cottage on a leased location intrudes on the scene.

The river to Wakefield Creek (Fig. 1, 20) has a number of small islands, all of them with lodged logs and debris. A clearing on the right was the location of one of the Goodman Lumber Company camps. Logs were concentrated here in a huge landing for transportation by rail to the company’s mills at Goodman, Wisconsin. A root cellar with its sagging roof is all that remains of the camp buildings. The camp was large, and a stroll through the site will reveal the location of many buildings. The railroad crossed the Pine River to penetrate the company timber to the north. For a number of years after steel was pulled, the bridge was maintained for the big trucks hauling logs. But with the advent of hard-surfaced public roads the usefulness of the bridge ended; and, with maintenance discontinued, it is no longer safe. In its sad state of neglect the bridge has a picturesque quality about it, marred only by the distracting presence of a hunting camp.

A half mile below the bridge, in Section 31 where the river bends east, a rather long series of brawling rapids begins. Some maps indicate Bull Falls here, but this is an exaggeration. Good canoeists successfully run these rapids. Those not wishing to risk an upset can resort to wading or lining their canoes. A mile and a half will leave the worst rapids behind. Small rapids continue to characterize the river. The banks, where Seven Mile Creek enters, are high and sunny, a good place to look for early spring flowers. The river
bottom is shallow and gravelly. The river has exposed a slaty schist type of rock. In the vicinity of Bessie Babet Lake, the river is very shallow. In low water, canoeing would be no joy in this area. The increasing number of cottages and cabins hint of heavy private ownership. Some of the higher banks are eroded. One worried landowner has constructed a bulkhead to shore up his slumping real estate. The river is being encroached upon from all sides. A "No Park—Police" sign reminds us, by contrast, of the "Bide-A-Wee" signboard observed by Aldo Leopold on the Flambeau River. As Don and I approached the Highway 101 bridge (Fig. 1, 22), our thoughts were of the famous conservationist. Our experience had been the same as his. We had been seensawed between the serenity and beauty of the Nicolet National Forest, the Goodman timber, and the ugly degradation of civilization.

Beyond Highway 101, the Pine River flows languidly, shallowing where the rock crop lies close to the surface. On a shelf above the river on the left an unusual formation thrusts its granite form upward. In the distance to the north are two cottages. A cluster of white cottages and green lawns overlooks the confluence of the Popple River with the Pine (Fig. 1, 29). The Popple sparkles in the sun as it emerges from the forest and flows purposefully to join its parent. At this location a trading post grew to a sizable settlement named LaSalle by 1868. The discovery of iron ore at Florence and Commonwealth drained the population. The bridge washed out in a flood, erasing the last vestige of a busy community of a bygone era; but the river murmurs on, a sense of immortality in its movement.

The Pine, a big river now, moves along slowly, its youthful vigor seemingly expended. During the log drives thousands of feet of logs became lodged in the silt of the slow current. None of the boom companies bothered to collect the deadheads. But in 1947 a couple of enterprising sawmill operators, Mr. Walter Buza and Mr. Emmanuel Konell, initiated a salvage project. From the sand and debris they pulled out an estimated 250,000 feet of hemlock logs in an excellent stage of preservation. Still discernible in the butt ends were brands of at least three different boom companies.

Over the line in Section 25 on the right (Fig. 1, 24) is a new log cabin owned by Cal Erickson, editor and publisher of the Florence County Mining News. If Cal is about, he will more than likely wave the canoeist in for a cup of coffee. When Cal isn't trout fishing or deer hunting he is at his typewriter making a living. In many an acid editorial he has attacked the despoilers of nature and wild areas. Cal has particularly criticized the building of roads into the county's last bits of wilderness. He is fighting a proposed road to LaSalle Falls (Fig. 1, 25), an outstanding scenic attrac-
tion in the next section. The falls is at present accessible only by river or trail.

Pine Island is passed enroute. The faint, muffled roar of the Falls will be picked up around the next bend. The portage is on the left just past a small island and log jam. Extreme caution must be exercised in the approach to the portage to avoid being caught in the fast current. The crash of the water over the 20-foot falls is almost deafening. Below, the Pine River boils through a half mile gorge. The portage is easily followed through a pleasant birch woods. The lower end of the carry is down a steep and rocky bank. On the opposite side of the river a trail skirts the gorge, climbs the crest of rocks overlooking the falls, from which excellent photographs can be made. The trail continues to the head of the falls where the timbers of a log sluiceway used during the drives rot into dust. All about are signs of heavy public use. Fishermen come up the river from Pine River Dam (Fig. 1, 26). Some walk in on the trails. A few come down by canoe, make the carry, photograph the falls, and continue downriver perhaps to camp on the shores of the dam. Wisconsin-Michigan Power Company has provided excellent access facilities on the north and south shores of its power dam. The shoreline is wooded, and not a single man-made structure intrudes on the scene. The rocky points and quiet bays make ideal campsites; indeed all the sites are occupied on weekends and holidays. No wonder, for in looking over the scene of rocks, water and forest, one is reminded of the Canadian bush country.

Construction of the dam commenced in 1920 immediately on the heels of the last log drive in 1919. The 42-foot high structure produced a 170-acre reservoir. Drowned were two falls, each about 8 feet high, a half mile rapids, and a third falls of 12 feet. LaSalle Falls was the only survivor. One of the obliterated falls can be felt where the river suddenly drops a foot a short distance above its confluence with Halls Creek.

The most popular embarkation point for down-river canoe trips is the County Highway N Bridge (Fig. 1, 27). The float can be lengthened by beginning at the power plant. To reach the river it is necessary to clamber down a high embankment with canoe and gear. The river below the plant is broad and shallow in mid-summer. The surrounding hills are the highest anywhere in the watershed. The river forms three oxbows in the next eight miles. The Indians eliminated five miles of paddling with a half-mile portage beginning a short distance upriver from the Highway N bridge. The modern day canoeists might indulge in a bit of intriguing diversion by trying his hand at tracing the probable route of the portage. The trail went up the small stream west
of the gravel pit, turned northeast to cross the present blacktop
roughly four tenths of a mile north of the river. If highway trucks
haven’t hauled away the bones, an Indian grave remains near the
gravel pit.

The oxbows are not without interest. The banks are either very
low or quite high. The forest is a delightful mixture of red and
white pine (some of them leaning giants), birch, balsam, and (on
the flats) alder and elm. While the first appearance of jack pine
is between LaSalle Falls and Pine River Dam, the species becomes
common here. The gravelly richer soils of the upper river are giv-
ing way to poor sand in the lower stretches. A large boulder mid-
stream has formed a log jam, but there is no difficulty in finding a
passage.

The end of the second oxbow finds the river almost touching
Highway N north of the bridge. A roadside clearing is traversed
by a faint road and an eroded path down the bank to a muddy land-
ing on the river. Canoeists use this access, the likely eastern termi-
nus of the Indian portage trail mentioned earlier (Fig. 1, 28).

Past the elm and birch flat below the landing the left bank rises
steeply. Like other similar banks downriver it is marked perpen-
dicularly by otter slides. Beyond Johnson Creek, where the river
bends south, a panoramic view of river and forest can be had by
climbing to the top of the left bank. The overlook on county forest
lands is an advertised tourist stop on a recently improved gravel
road. Majestic pines stand on the river bank as the river swings
south and east around the next bend. In the next section a local
group of sportsmen, who call themselves Sons of the Pioneers,
have built a new lodge with four picture windows glaring on the
river. There simply had to be an unobstructed view of the river,
so when the bulldozers went to work not a bush or blade of grass
remained. As a final act of desecration the low shoreline was pushed
into the river. One can understand why men who love the outdoors
are attracted by a river such as the Pine, but what impels men
to such thoughtless destruction of nature? This sort of ravishment
repeated over and over would ruin a river.

The open slopes east of Lepage Creek (Fig. 1, 29) represent
samples of the barrens Captain Cram observed at the mouth of the
Pine while on his mission of surveying the Wisconsin–Michigan
boundary. On the south side of the Pine River, up over the fringe
of timber, is another segment of the barrens. The scene is typical,—
scattered clumps of gnarled popples, the outcrop of rock, the
scent of sweet fern. To complete the picture there ought to be a
flock of sharptail grouse. The birds were quite numerous every-
where in northern Wisconsin 25 to 50 years ago. In the succession
of logging, fires and farming, sharptails found the combination of
openings and forest ideal habitat. The suppression of fires and the gradual closing in of the openings set in a decline, so that today it is doubtful whether a single remnant flock remains on the Pine.

Ellwood Lake Outlet (Fig. 1, 30) enters noisily into the river. Tethered to a cedar nearby is a green flat-bottomed boat named “Agnes.” A path leads into the woods, and we wonder if there isn’t a beaver trapper’s cabin among the trees. If so, he has more compassion for the natural environment than do the Sons of the Pioneers. He has hardly left a trace of his whereabouts.

Ellwood Lake landing is a small space in the rocks and sweet fern to turn around. A rutted road climbs up the slope away from the river. I fervently pray that it will never be improved and blacktopped, that the barren here will always remain undisturbed, for this is the very same barren that Captain Cram saw and wrote about 125 years ago. The rapids are gone, buried by the deadwaters of Henry Ford Dam on the Menominee River, but the land is little changed. Let us hope that the landowners, Florence County, Wisconsin—Michigan Power Company, and several individuals aware of the historical significance of their ownerships, will leave a heritage to the future,—a barren.

THE POPPLE

There are few historical references to the Popple. Since it was away from the principal canoe routes of the Indians and explorers, fame was to come later with the penetration of the watershed by loggers and settlers, and later still it acquired a reputation as an outstanding trout stream. Free flowing throughout its length, the Popple was threatened early in the 1960s by a dam. With statewide attention centered on the controversy, the Public Service Commission denied a construction permit, explaining it had done so to keep the river free flowing. The Pete Blankenheim and Paul Babbington canoe trip in September 1960 proved that 50 miles of the Popple was floatable.8 The exploration of the river from Highway 55 to the confluence with the Pine in 1967 by Sierra Club canoeists confirmed the wild, rugged character of the Popple River Canoe Trail.

The Popple River is born in the swamps west of Highway 55 (Fig. 1, 31). Flowing serenely northeast, the stream’s nature is deceptive. Within a mile it narrows to a noisy, stony brook flowing under countless windfalls through tangles of willows and alders. Bending southward the stream meanders through a beaver meadow. Although the water is deeper, canoeing is difficult because of the

dense alder growth. Though it is virtually a jungle of water and alders we finally stumbled upon a passageway cut by a beaver trapper for his boat. An interesting feature of the beaver meadow is the dozen or so dead pine rampikes rearing their dark huge hulks above the alders. Upon examining one of the fallen monsters, we found the trunk so solid as to defy the sharpest axe.

The bridge in Section 12 on the access road from the highway is safe, but is barred by a locked gate. Clearings occupy both banks. The river is rocky, and progress by wading or paddling is necessarily slow. Signs of recent logging litter the banks. A plank bridge abandoned by loggers has been washed out on the boulders. A green tar-paper hunting camp stands on a glacial moraine to the north. A shaky footbridge spans the river where an old tote road once crossed. On the south side is a watercress-filled spring hole, source of fresh water for the camps. Away from the river, under the spruces at the edge of the clearing, is another camp, a log cabin. East of the cabin the clearing is littered with the rusty furnishings of a camp destroyed by fire.

The river meanders in tight bends through a narrow swamp edged heavily with alders. In a deep, dark stream the South Fork merges with the Popple. The black spruce swamp from which the South Fork emerges is so inviting that we paddle into it to disembark from the canoes where a logging road crosses it. Our topographic map indicates the location of a camp a short walk up the road. We searched in vain concluding it was moved out or had completely disintegrated in the wet swampy environment. In the search we found several huge yellow birch trees growing on the higher ground. We wondered why they had not been harvested long ago.

Back in the canoes on the Popple River, paddling northeast, we feel the quiet remoteness of the river and the vast black spruce swamp. Black ducks flush ahead of us, and a blue heron flaps over the timber. An occasional white pine rears its ragged top above the spruce. Dead snags point to the sky. The old tote road skirting the river on the north side crosses the river in Section 8, and here at the bridge a log jam has formed. A half mile further on, the Rat Lake outlet (Fig. 1, 32) enters on the left and another unnamed stream from the right. The remaining half mile to Forest Road 2167 is broad, shallow in places, and a number of boulders dot the channel. A good landing has been provided by the U. S. Forest Service beside the bridge, a new steel and concrete structure. This is a nice location except for a summer cottage on the north bank. No downriver canoe trip should be commenced here, however.

Below the bridge and around the first bend a huge log jam has formed. Below the jam the river channel is shallow, extremely
rocky, and utterly impassable for a canoe. The rapids terminate
in an oblong pool a half mile southeast of the bridge and just a
short carry from Forest Road 2167.

In April, when Tom Sbonik and I carried our canoe to the pool,
we found it still ice-covered. Snow lingered in the timber, but the
river was open. To overcome the chill bite of the early morning
air, we paddled briskly, passing an occasional floating chunk of
river ice. In a half hour we were at the head of a challenging
rapids. Large boulders were numerous, but the first pitch didn’t
appear very difficult. We attempted a run and made it, experienc-
ing one heart-stopping moment when the canoe hung up moment-
tarily on a rock. The second pitch we approached with a degree of
trepidation. The drop here was considerable; and, with the river in
flood stage, an upset in the icy water would spell disaster. Tom and
I prudently decided to portage. The third pitch, though not severe,
was a long one. We continued to drag the canoe through the open
timber on the right bank, the canoe sliding easily over the foot-
deep snow. In a final frenzied dash through a narrow chute the
river calms in a pool shadowed by surrounding hemlocks. We
returned the canoe to the river, and over placid water paddled
between banks of popple, white birch, elm, maple and scattered
thickets of balsam. A large swamp opened into a beaver meadow.
The current began picking up in Section 11; boulders were again
appearing, and the banks were higher. A log jam had formed at a
large midstream boulder. A minute or two of paddling below the
jam brought us to the head of a rapids 100 yards long. We chose
the more open timber on the right, avoiding the dense pines and
balsams on the opposite bank. After the portage the river meanders
between flat alder banks. Fence posts and barbed wire suggest that
we are approaching abandoned farmlands along the town road.
Tom and I landed the canoe at the edge of a field on the left, and
carried it northeast along the base of a low hill and over the road
to the river below the rapids. The portage we had made was over
private lands. Tom and I felt guilty of trespassing; and, had we
been accosted by the owners, were prepared humbly to confess
our guilt. Local people are generally quite forgiving. It is usually
non-residents highly protective of their property rights who put
up “No Trespassing” signs.

The river sweeps along at a good pace as it moves into the forest.
Boulders dot the channel. Railroad Rapids (Fig. 1, 33) will soon
be heard. Tom and I found the alder flat at the head of the rapids
flooded. We headed the canoe toward higher ground on the right,
and found an old road along which we carried the canoe up and
over the railroad embankment to the river on the other side. A
plantation of red pine in neat rows flanks the railroad. Soon we
were away from the sounds of white water and in the silence of a broad elm flat, interrupted only by the twitter of birds. Tom, who had always lived in a big city, was overwhelmed by the quiet solitude. The serenity we experienced was short-lived, however, for all too quickly Highway 139 bridge (Fig. 1, 34) hove into sight.

Later by canoe and white water boat, I accompanied Marlene and Gil Bortleson in the exploration of the Popple from Highway 139 to the confluence with the Pine. The water level gauge at the bridge read 4.60 when in mid-April we pushed the canoe into the current. Swinging gradually to the right the river half circles a roadside picnic grounds built by the Civilian Conservation Corps boys in the 1930s. The site fell into disuse, and is now overgrown with pipples; but hidden in the grass and briars are fireplaces constructed of mortar and stone, still sound, evidence that the boys had built solidly. Their camp stood in a clearing a mile north on Highway 139.

Ahead the river’s meandering was to take us through extensive swamps. Far from being a dull monotonous float, this stretch offered some of the finest skylines in the wholesheds. Off to the south were the ragged spires of pines piercing the sky. Closer at hand the blue river was rimmed with the waving dead marsh grass framed with dark stands of spruce and balsam. Birch, maple and elm occupied the higher sites.

Nailed to nearby elms were nesting boxes put up by a conservationist interested in the welfare of the colorful wood duck. On the other hand beaver trappers, encouraged by the Wisconsin Conservation Department, were relentlessly pursuing the beaver. We found their wicked steel traps everywhere. We wondered how the animals could survive the onslaught of trappers and a state agency, but somehow enough remain to keep the Popple populated with beavers. For years the Department has been coping with the problem of too many beavers. Trout fishermen contend that the decline of trout fishing in the Popple is due to the activities of beavers, and the Conservation Department, in an attempt to quell the cry, has liberalized seasons and bag limits, not to completely eradicate the beaver, but to control the number of dams to a point at which water temperatures tolerable to trout could be maintained.

Beyond Martin Creek (Fig. 1, 35) the Popple turns east, and a huge log jam fills the river from bank to bank. We discovered the high water of the river spilling out among the trees. We poked the bow of the canoe into the alder brush, and by weaving this way and that we managed to float around the jam. This feat could not be accomplished during normal water levels. A short paddle and we were at the head of McDougal Rapids (Fig. 1, 36). While
Gil and Marlene went to scout the rapids I began the tough portage on the left. The carry was fairly flat but very difficult because of stumps, brush, rocks and windfalls. We finally met at the foot of the rapids, and Gil reported that the descent consisted of three pitches, every one of them swift. Though Gil rated the rapids as No. 1 or No. 2 in difficulty, he felt that canoeists would be well advised to scout these rapids for log obstructions before attempting a run.

Resuming our journey between pleasant banks, we pass through a cut-over land with an occasional white pine missed by loggers. Beavers keep the riverside poppies pretty well harvested. An unpainted hunting camp is our clue that we are nearing a road. We stop to chat with a beaver trapper, and learn that he is from Shawano and was attracted to the Popple because of the abundance of beaver reputed to be here. His car is parked by the bridge.

Ten minutes of paddling below Forest Road 2398 is over a broad, deep and slow current. The original forest here was almost a pure stand of pine, one of the largest in the entire watershed. Logging and the fires that followed changed the ecology so drastically that only a few scattered pines remain today.

Burnt Dam Rapids (Fig. 1, 37) begins around the bend below the hunting camp on the right bank. Garnet Tinsman, of Newald, who owns the camp, states that a logging dam was located at the head of the rapids to supply sufficient water to take logs through it, but a forest fire consumed the timbers of the structure so thoroughly that it is difficult today to believe that a dam ever existed there.

Gil and Marlene decide to run the rapids. Before entering the timber on the left to scout out a possible portage route, I watch the couple cautiously pass around a huge floating log, then, caught in the fast current of the first pitch, whisk downriver, bouncing easily over the white crests. Half way through the rapids a log jam divides the river into two channels; Gil and Marlene find themselves among the trees trying to find a route back to the main channel. The divided waters ultimately regroup into a straight chute of white water for the remaining distance to the base of the rapids.

Meanwhile I learn that a portage would not be difficult. Deer trails and logging roads provide a clear path, with only a short struggle through the brush at both ends of the portage.

Leaving the rapids, the left bank is high with a light scattering of balsams, Norway pines, white birches and popple. Sweet ferns blanket the open ground. Of the original pinery only the charred stumps remain. A Forest Service plantation of pine is growing well. The river passes a hunting camp, located high on the left bank under a clump of pines, bends, then enters the broad willow
flats, once the flowage behind Podunk Dam. The south horizon is a ridge of ragged pine tops.

Where the river cuts through a glacial esker, uncanny loggers constructed Podunk Dam (Fig. 1, 38). The esker runs north–south, then bends southwest, its location in the forest marked by tall pines. Don Quinn and I had discovered Podunk Dam a year earlier at the end of a faint road. Parking the Jeep in the brush, we climbed to the top of the pine-needled esker; and, as we gazed out over the sweep of swamp and forest to the west, resolved to come back another time with tent and pack to really savor the solitude we felt.

The opportunity came the following spring. We hiked in over a trail from the south, set up our tents, and built a fireplace with rocks salvaged from the dam fill. After supper, as the setting sun was painting the western horizon vivid red and yellow, I wandered off to investigate the bogs we had skirted coming in. Suddenly the evening stillness was broken by the yipping of a coyote to the north, followed by a chorus of yips and yaps from a pack to the east. Another coyote responded from the west. The blended voices of all the coyotes filled the forest with wild, vibrating sounds. A shiver ran up my spine. Were they communicating my presence? Or were they just giving expression to their free-roaming way of life? Timber wolves have disappeared from Wisconsin along with the wilderness, but the coyotes remain to add character to the North Woods.

Old timers tell an interesting tale about Podunk Dam. The story illustrates graphically the shrewd bargaining methods of the lumber barons. It is said that a Scandinavian farmer by the name of Annunson from Winnebago County had exchanged his rich farm-lands near Lake Poygan for pine lands on the Popple River. To get the logs out, the river had to be improved, dams built, the channel cleared of boulders. Having exhausted his funds on the land exchange, Annunson went to his friend Philetius Sawyer of Oshkosh, a man once a farmer who had become wealthy from dealings in timber. Sawyer, sensing an opportunity for a prime grab, quickly put up the money, to the tune of $30,000. Before Annunson could establish his camps and begin cutting, Sawyer foreclosed on the loan. Sawyer’s ruthlessness left Annunson destitute, Sawyer later became U. S. Senator, and continued to negotiate for government timber. As if to atone for his misdeeds, Sawyer donated a library to the City of Oshkosh.9

Riley Creek (Fig. 1, 39) enters the Popple below Podunk Dam in a broad expanse of open marsh. To the north is a vista of for-

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9 The information in this paragraph was related to me in 1969 in a personal communication from Clarence Harrison.
ested hills. Snags protrude above the willows. Sentinel pines grace the swamp edges; jack pine forest, a high sandy moraine on the south. From the top of the moraine there is a view of a large open bog, part of it flooded. A corrugated metal hunting camp on the left is followed by a white summer cottage on the right. The river current picks up and protruding boulders appear. The first pitch encountered is very short, and can be run with a good water level. A pool of quiet water about a hundred yards distant leads into the main rapids. In high water the lower rapids are "tops" for an exciting run. Gil Bortleson rated the difficulty a solid Grade 2. Those who will shoot the rapids will find heavy "curlers" and "boilers" in the sharp drops. The current is very swift, producing waves two to three feet high. The river bends sharply in two places, requiring good control of the canoe to avoid smashing into large boulders. Below the second bend, the course is straight ahead to the bridge. Under the bridge the rapids terminate in a broad pool. A parking area has been provided, and trout fishermen have tramped an easily followed trail along the river. The canoe can be portaged over the trail, or a logging road farther north can be used.

One-fourth mile below Forest Road 2159 Bridge, the South Branch of the Popple River (Fig. 1, 40) joins the main Popple. Though an important tributary, the South Branch is unsuited for canoeing. Beaver dams, windfalls, old bridges, and log jams frequently obstruct passage. Heddin Dam, a logging dam between Forest Road 2159 and 2383 is in an excellent state of preservation. The canoeist will find the shallows below the dam difficult to navigate, even in high water. Canoeing the South Branch would entail unfavorable conditions at any time.

The next two miles of the main Popple is punctuated with numerous rocks, a number of riffles, and several short rapids. In places the river is shallow and rocky. A dense forest blankets both sides. Masons Rapids (Fig. 1, 41) is in two pitches. The first pitch is sharp but short, followed by a hundred yards of fast but safe canoeing. The canoe can be landed on the right below the lone pine tree leaning over the river from the north bank. The river is white water as it circles to the north in a half moon course. Nearing the foot of Masons Rapids, the river becomes a virtual rock garden. Any lead chosen for the canoe will result in a hang-up. Any canoe-ist running Masons Rapids can expect to wade to extricate his craft from the rock pile.

An old corduroy road cuts across the neck of land half circled by the river beginning at the landing below the white pine. It can be used for the portage. An excellent popular campsites is located at the base of the rapids. Fishermen coming up the river in motor boats to fish the rapids often camp here.
of the gravel pit, turned northeast to cross the present blacktop roughly four tenths of a mile north of the river. If highway trucks haven’t hauled away the bones, an Indian grave remains near the gravel pit.

The oxbows are not without interest. The banks are either very low or quite high. The forest is a delightful mixture of red and white pine (some of them leaning giants), birch, balsam, and (on the flats) alder and elm. While the first appearance of jack pine is between LaSalle Falls and Pine River Dam, the species becomes common here. The gravelly richer soils of the upper river are giving way to poor sand in the lower stretches. A large boulder mid-stream has formed a log jam, but there is no difficulty in finding a passage.

The end of the second oxbow finds the river almost touching Highway N north of the bridge. A roadside clearing is traversed by a faint road and an eroded path down the bank to a muddy landing on the river. Canoeists use this access, the likely eastern terminus of the Indian portage trail mentioned earlier (Fig. 1, 28).

Past the elm and birch flat below the landing the left bank rises steeply. Like other similar banks downriver it is marked perpendicularly by otter slides. Beyond Johnson Creek, where the river bends south, a panoramic view of river and forest can be had by climbing to the top of the left bank. The overlook on county forest lands is an advertised tourist stop on a recently improved gravel road. Majestic pines stand on the river bank as the river swings south and east around the next bend. In the next section a local group of sportsmen, who call themselves Sons of the Pioneers, have built a new lodge with four picture windows glaring on the river. There simply had to be an unobstructed view of the river, so when the bulldozers went to work not a bush or blade of grass remained. As a final act of desecration the low shoreline was pushed into the river. One can understand why men who love the outdoors are attracted by a river such as the Pine, but what impels men to such thoughtless destruction of nature? This sort of ravishment repeated over and over would ruin a river.

The open slopes east of LePage Creek (Fig. 1, 29) represent samples of the barrens Captain Cram observed at the mouth of the Pine while on his mission of surveying the Wisconsin–Michigan boundary. On the south side of the Pine River, up over the fringe of timber, is another segment of the barrens. The scene is typical,—scattered clumps of gnarled poplars, the outcrop of rock, the scent of sweet fern. To complete the picture there ought to be a flock of sharptail grouse. The birds were quite numerous everywhere in northern Wisconsin 25 to 50 years ago. In the succession of logging, fires and farming, sharptails found the combination of
openings and forest ideal habitat. The suppression of fires and the gradual closing in of the openings set in a decline, so that today it is doubtful whether a single remnant flock remains on the Pine.

Ellwood Lake Outlet (Fig. 1, 30) enters noisily into the river. Tethered to a cedar nearby is a green flat-bottomed boat named “Agnes.” A path leads into the woods, and we wonder if there isn’t a beaver trapper’s cabin among the trees. If so, he has more compassion for the natural environment than do the Sons of the Pioneers. He has hardly left a trace of his whereabouts.

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Resuming our journey between pleasant banks, we pass through a cut-over land with an occasional white pine missed by loggers. Beavers keep the riverside poppies pretty well harvested. An unpainted hunting camp is our clue that we are nearing a road. We stop to chat with a beaver trapper, and learn that he is from Shawano and was attracted to the Popple because of the abundance of beaver reputed to be here. His car is parked by the bridge.

Ten minutes of paddling below Forest Road 2398 is over a broad, deep and slow current. The original forest here was almost a pure stand of pine, one of the largest in the entire watershed. Logging and the fires that followed changed the ecology so drastically that only a few scattered pines remain today.

Burnt Dam Rapids (Fig. 1, 37) begins around the bend below the hunting camp on the right bank. Garnet Tinsman, of Newald, who owns the camp, states that a logging dam was located at the head of the rapids to supply sufficient water to take logs through it, but a forest fire consumed the timbers of the structure so thoroughly that it is difficult today to believe that a dam ever existed there.

Gil and Marlene decide to run the rapids. Before entering the timber on the left to scout out a possible portage route, I watch the couple cautiously pass around a huge floating log, then, caught in the fast current of the first pitch, whisk downriver, bouncing easily over the white crests. Half way through the rapids a log jam divides the river into two channels; Gil and Marlene find themselves among the trees trying to find a route back to the main channel. The divided waters ultimately regroup into a straight chute of white water for the remaining distance to the base of the rapids.

Meanwhile I learn that a portage would not be difficult. Deer trails and logging roads provide a clear path, with only a short struggle through the brush at both ends of the portage.

Leaving the rapids, the left bank is high with a light scattering of balsams, Norway pines, white birches and popple. Sweet ferns blanket the open ground. Of the original pinery only the charred stumps remain. A Forest Service plantation of pine is growing well. The river passes a hunting camp, located high on the left bank under a clamp of pines, bends, then enters the broad willow
flats, once the flowage behind Podunk Dam. The south horizon is a ridge of ragged pine tops.

Where the river cuts through a glacial esker, uncanny loggers constructed Podunk Dam (Fig. 1, 88). The esker runs north–south, then bends southwest, its location in the forest marked by tall pines. Don Quinn and I had discovered Podunk Dam a year earlier at the end of a faint road. Parking the Jeep in the brush, we climbed to the top of the pine-needled esker; and, as we gazed out over the sweep of swamp and forest to the west, resolved to come back another time with tent and pack to really savor the solitude we felt.

The opportunity came the following spring. We hiked in over a trail from the south, set up our tents, and built a fireplace with rocks salvaged from the dam fill. After supper, as the setting sun was painting the western horizon vivid red and yellow, I wandered off to investigate the bogs we had skirted coming in. Suddenly the evening stillness was broken by the yipping of a coyote to the north, followed by a chorus of yips and yaps from a pack to the east. Another coyote responded from the west. The blended voices of all the coyotes filled the forest with wild, vibrating sounds. A shiver ran up my spine. Were they communicating my presence? Or were they just giving expression to their free-roaming way of life? Timber wolves have disappeared from Wisconsin along with the wilderness, but the coyotes remain to add character to the North Woods.

Old timers tell an interesting tale about Podunk Dam. The story illustrates graphically the shrewd bargaining methods of the lumber barons. It is said that a Scandinavian farmer by the name of Annunson from Winnebago County had exchanged his rich farmlands near Lake Poygan for pine lands on the Popple River. To get the logs out, the river had to be improved, dams built, the channel cleared of boulders. Having exhausted his funds on the land exchange, Annunson went to his friend Philetius Sawyer of Oshkosh, a man once a farmer who had become wealthy from dealings in timber. Sawyer, sensing an opportunity for a prime grab, quickly put up the money, to the tune of $30,000. Before Annunson could establish his camps and begin cutting, Sawyer foreclosed on the loan. Sawyer's ruthlessness left Annunson destitute. Sawyer later became U. S. Senator, and continued to negotiate for government timber. As if to atone for his misdeeds, Sawyer donated a library to the City of Oshkosh.⁹

Riley Creek (Fig. 1, 39) enters the Popple below Podunk Dam in a broad expanse of open marsh. To the north is a vista of for-

⁹ The information in this paragraph was related to me in 1969 in a personal communication from Clarence Harrison.
ested hills. Snags protrude above the willows. Sentinel pines grace the swamp edges; jack pine forest, a high sandy moraine on the south. From the top of the moraine there is a view of a large open bog, part of it flooded. A corrugated metal hunting camp on the left is followed by a white summer cottage on the right. The river current picks up and protruding boulders appear. The first pitch encountered is very short, and can be run with a good water level. A pool of quiet water about a hundred yards distant leads into the main rapids. In high water the lower rapids are “tops” for an exciting run. Gil Bortleson rated the difficulty a solid Grade 2. Those who will shoot the rapids will find heavy “curlers” and “boilers” in the sharp drops. The current is very swift, producing waves two to three feet high. The river bends sharply in two places, requiring good control of the canoe to avoid smashing into large boulders. Below the second bend, the course is straight ahead to the bridge. Under the bridge the rapids terminate in a broad pool. A parking area has been provided, and trout fishermen have tramped an easily followed trail along the river. The canoe can be portaged over the trail, or a logging road farther north can be used.

One-fourth mile below Forest Road 2159 Bridge, the South Branch of the Popple River (Fig. 1, 40) joins the main Popple. Though an important tributary, the South Branch is unsuited for canoeing. Beaver dams, windfalls, old bridges, and log jams frequently obstruct passage. Heddin Dam, a logging dam between Forest Road 2159 and 2383 is in an excellent state of preservation. The canoeist will find the shallows below the dam difficult to navigate, even in high water. Canoeing the South Branch would entail unfavorable conditions at any time.

The next two miles of the main Popple is punctuated with numerous rocks, a number of riffles, and several short rapids. In places the river is shallow and rocky. A dense forest blankets both sides. Masons Rapids (Fig. 1, 41) is in two pitches. The first pitch is sharp but short, followed by a hundred yards of fast but safe canoeing. The canoe can be landed on the right below the lone pine tree leaning over the river from the north bank. The river is white water as it circles to the north in a half moon course. Nearing the foot of Masons Rapids, the river becomes a virtual rock garden. Any lead chosen for the canoe will result in a hang-up. Any canoeist running Masons Rapids can expect to wade to extricate his craft from the rock pile.

An old corduroy road cuts across the neck of land half circled by the river beginning at the landing below the white pine. It can be used for the portage. An excellent popular campsite is located at the base of the rapids. Fishermen coming up the river in motor boats to fish the rapids often camp here.
The Poppel below Masons Rapids is known locally as "Deadwater". The setting is an open grassy marsh. Tall hemlocks stand where Rock Creek enters. Masons Creek is next on the right, with beautiful vistas of pine on the north. Since leaving the bridge we have been traversing the timber lands of Calumet Hecla. Where the river crosses the line between Sections 27 and 22 is the site of Camp No. 1 used when Goodman Lumber Company operated a railroad to haul logs to their mills. Deer hunters salvaged some of the materials from the original buildings to build a crude hunting shack. Of the remaining buildings only their outlines can be observed. Fishermen launch their boats here for the cruise up to Masons Rapids. The railroad bridge over the Poppel River is being maintained and is safe for travel. Beyond, cottages appear on the right, some distance back from the river. The steel town bridge has replaced an older wooden structure. A gauging station has been erected here by the U. S. Geological Survey. The embankment next to the gauging station is the embankment of Anderson Dam, named for Rudy Anderson who drowned here in a logging accident. The current bridge rests on a rock ledge over which the Poppel River drops.

None but the most daring canoeists should attempt the stretch of the Poppel between the Iron Bridge and Highway 101. "This is no ordinary stretch of the river," testified Ralph Hovind at the Public Service Commission hearing on the proposed Aspen Dam. Voicing the Conservation Department's opposition, Hovind continued, "It is a tumbling series of falls, rapids and quiet areas thrown together in a jumbled mixture in a remote, hilly country."

Little Bull Falls (Fig. 1, 42) is a half mile below the Iron Bridge. A weatherbeaten, beautifully designed log cabin with steep roof overlooks the falls from the left, while a new cabin stands on the right. Spruce, balsam and cedars shade the outcrop of rock which constitutes the falls. Grade 2 rapids continue half a mile below Little Bull Falls. Fisherman trails border the river.

Murphy Rapids (Fig. 1, 43) is reached after passing a high rock outthrust on the left. The approach is over a wide, sluggish stretch of quiet water. The first brief pitch of Grade 1 difficulty ends in a short pool followed by a quarter-mile of Grade 1 and 2 whitewater including a sharp bend. An island marks the end of Murphy Rapids. Deer use Murphy Rapids to cross the river; their trails converge on both sides.

Enroute to Nine Day Rapids (Fig. 1, 44) a log jam requires a short portage. The name Nine Day Rapids originated during the river drives. One spring a huge log jam occurred. Loggers

10 From same reference as Footnote 8.
struggled for nine days to free the logs, and ever since the rapids have been referred to as the Nine Day Rapids.\footnote{Personal communication from Horace McClain, 1969.} They begin as Grade 2, tapering to Grade 1 whitewater, with plenty of rock-dodging thrown in. The current throughout is very swift. Low water summer conditions would make running difficult.

Hendricks Creek (Fig. 1, 45) is the beginning of fast water leading into Big Bull Falls. Inexperienced canoeists should not proceed into the fast current, but are advised to begin the portage on the right. The falls are approximately 10 feet high over a formidable rock formation. A trail approaches the falls from downriver on the left bank. The canoe, launched into the pool at the base of the falls, can be paddled a hundred yards to rapids which continue almost to Highway 101 bridge. During high water a thrilling ride is in store. On the downriver side of the bridge is a wayside and landing.

This beautiful stretch of the Popple River would have been lost had Aspen Dam been built just above Hendricks Creek, Nine Day Rapids, Murphy Rapids and the river all the way to Little Bull Falls would have been obliterated. The 35 foot high structure would have blotted out over half of the vertical drop from bridge to bridge. Local sporting interests and the Florence County Board supported the Elco Corporation's application to build the dam; but conservationists, assisted by the Wisconsin Conservation Department, presented convincing testimony. Paul E. Klopsteg, a riparian owner, testified that he "would must prefer a first class river, which the Popple is, to a third class lake, which the Aspen might occur. . . . The river is most attractive as it now is; I cannot believe that an artificial lake would make it so". On April 3, 1961, the Public Service Commission denied a permit. In its decision, the Commission ruled that the Popple River in its natural state offers greater scenic value for the public than the proposed flowage. The dam would violate enjoyment of natural scenic beauty by the public, the Commission stated. The Elco Corporation sold its river holdings to the State following the PSC denial. "A large stretch of this segment of the Popple River is now public property," wrote Walter Scott in the spring 1961 issue of the Wisconsin Academy Review. "This preservation is vitally important for the enjoyment of those who want to fish the rapids of a stream so rough that it can hardly be waded, so precipitous and rocky that canoeing is a serious challenge, and so scenic that it embodies rugged northwoods beauty at its best."

The rapids continue for a mile below the wayside. The gradient is not severe and the canoeist needs only to avoid the white-tails in the fast current. A road skirts the right bank, while a farm is
FIGURE 3. View of rapids, looking upstream, in lower Popple River, in Florence County. These rapids would have been submerged and lost, had the "Aspen Lake" dam been built. Photo taken May 1, 1960, by Lewis Posekany; print furnished by Walter E. Scott, courtesy of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

located on the left. Considerable destruction of the bank and cover has occurred. A trash dump is an eyesore. The river is broad and sluggish to Burnt Bridge, where the Girard Lumber Company logging railroad crossed years ago. Two fishing camps are located on the right near Montagne Creek. Fishermen use this area heavily. Below Burnt Bridge the river grows increasingly faster. Two large boulders, one on the left, the other on the right, are a warning to
begin a portage over a brush flat on the left to the pool below Washburn Falls (Fig. 1, 46).

Jennings Falls (Fig. 1, 47) is two miles farther down. The current is swift with numerous riffles. Deadhead logs, occasional rocks, and small jams are obstructions to look for and avoid. Sweepers reach out over the river where cedar swamps are traversed. The river is wide and, in the vicinity of Woods Creek, shallow with a gravel bottom. The river then bends south, and ahead is the sound of Jennings Falls. By hugging the right bank the canoeist may continue cautiously for another 100 yards to a small cove, where the portage can begin northeast on the right. Immediately ahead, the river narrows into a deep gorge to roar and twist among the boulders. Carrying the canoe one should stay in the depression, avoiding the higher rock on either side. At best the portage is a difficult one. Jennings Falls is very impressive in its wild, rocky setting overgrown with pine and balsam.

The remaining mile and a half to the Pine River is prime trout water. The terrain is rough and the river’s current fast, as it moves over a shallow gravelly bottom. Rock outcrops are numerous on both banks. A few rise in high bluffs. Rounding a final bend the Popple flows eagerly toward its union with the Pine River.

Thus, with Sierra Club members as my companions, I had canoed the Pine and Popple; two of northeastern Wisconsin’s wild rivers. In a series of weekend trips during the springs of 1966 and 1967 we had paddled the sparkling waters of the rivers, felt the excitement of running rapids, sensed the solitude of wild stretches, gazed at the vistas of river, swamp and forest. Of the pages of history written on land and river we could only imagine the scenes: Indians with flashing paddles in birch bark canoes, traversing a thin blue thread in a vast unbroken forest. In a stump-studded clearing a lonely logging camp. Lumberjacks cursing the elements as they struggle to break a log. A settler scanning his domain of fire-charred stumps and barn. We observed nature struggling to heal the scars inflicted by man. We thought of coming generations. Would their heritage include a wild river?