

Forevergreen

The summer camp prides itself on how little it has changed since its founding in 1906. Girls still sleep in canvas prospector tents on elevated wooden platforms. There is no electricity or plumbing, and personal electronics are locked in the director's office. Tradition is important here: some of the Sunday rituals still invoke God, though religion left the camp's ethos long ago. Each morning begins with a reading about camp history, like the 1930's-era packing list suggesting that girls bring extra pairs of bloomers.

For over 100 years the camp has inhabited the same peninsula on Cache Lake in Ontario, which still feels as isolated as an island. The land is shockingly unchanged; scanning sepia photographs in the camp "library," I recognize the same shoreline outcrops and spiny silhouettes of boreal forest I've appreciated in my nine years there. I can walk the hills of the tent line by dim lamplight now, knowing which tree roots twisted Robin's ankle and almost broke my tailbone and which rocks get slippery when it rains. I know the shallowest hill for walking to the outhouses so that you don't breathe heavy through your nose arriving at the top. I don't know the feeling of the pine needles on my feet well—shoes are strictly required to protect from rusty nails—so I converse with the forest carpet in other ways. I sit bare-legged on the ground so the needles emboss the backs of my thighs, and I absentmindedly deconstruct pinecones with my fingers. I scoop a handful of "woodsies" from the topsoil to seal in the envelopes of letters home.

Cache Lake's unusual shape, warped with inlets and capes, endows it with convoluted wind patterns and water currents. So when teaching a sailing lesson, there's just one reliable route for travelling. Tack out to Stoddard's Point on a close reach, come about, cross the wind, head close-hauled to Treasure Island, prepare to jibe, cross the wind, cruise home on a broad reach, sheets out. I learned to sail this triangular path summer after summer, and now it is what I teach campers, continuing the cycle.

But, often, I feel more intimately acquainted with the ephemeral things moving through this land, rather than with what is permanent. Take the wind: changing by the day, I decide when the lightweight 9-year-olds shouldn't captain a pram because they'll be blown down the channel. I listen for calm days, when sitting in a boat, the breeze gently rocks you east if you are still. So much of the summer's action plays out on the docks lashed

to the south-facing shore—celebrations of canoe strokes mastered, secrets whispered while sunbathing—but these wooden skins aren't enduring either. Seeing photos of camp in winter feels voyeuristic to me, the docks yanked up and stowed until summer, leaving the shore stripped naked. The metaphorical weight of all that has occurred on these docks across 100 years would probably breach them.

More than anything, I know the sounds. The song of the wood thrush in the pine boughs and the loon in the dark. The springy slam of the dining hall door. The tree by the water pump with the board nailed into it that creaks in the wind. We sing all the time—to herald the start of a meal, to announce the departure of a canoe trip and its arrival home, to commune before retreating to bed. Our voices are alarm clocks, revelries, prayers.

When you spend enough time here, the ephemeral things become staggeringly permanent, and summer on the peninsula becomes a wonderful tangle of past and present. I imagine the trees have acclimated to the songs resounding off of them and between them, the same songs from the 1950's or before now part of the forest itself. Though the lodge has stood in the same spot for a century, all its planks have been replaced one by one over time, just as the cells dying and regenerating in my body make me not exactly the same person I once was. The docks are liminal spaces that keep coming back. The brush of the wind through the cedar trees at the flagpole probably sounds the same to generations of women. I wonder how many of them sailed the triangle: tack out to the point, come about, jibe, home.