



# The of

*A new festival  
celebrates the  
100th anniversary  
of a remarkable  
adventure book*

**BY JOE FITZGERALD**

**T**he water darkened as the sun sank, and Kejimikujik Lake turned to glass. The canoe sliced through as if cutting molasses. I was moving away from civilization, following a historic path.

A century ago, two American adventurers and their Nova Scotia guides plied these same waters on a 21-day voyage of discovery. In 1908 one of the Americans, Albert Bigelow Paine, published a book about their adventures, *The Tent Dwellers*. It's a testament to southwestern Nova Scotia, a

# EDGE

## the UNKNOWN

remote and beautiful place.

This year the 100th anniversary of Paine's book was marked by The Tent Dwellers Festival, a series of events celebrating the area's rugged wilderness, historic hospitality, and legacy of outdoor adventure.

Paine was an award-winning writer best known for his biography of his friend and literary icon Mark Twain. Paine's writing contains the

same dry humour and self-deprecating wit. On the trip his companion brought along a piece of beef, a treat for when they tired of eating endless trout. He lovingly saved it for days to let it age, prompting Paine to write, "Age told on that steak. It no longer had the deep rich glow of youth. It had a weather-beaten, discouraged look, and I wondered how Eddie could contemplate it in that fond way."



Albert Bigelow Paine wrote that wilderness can teach and take you in, and that people discover their soul there.



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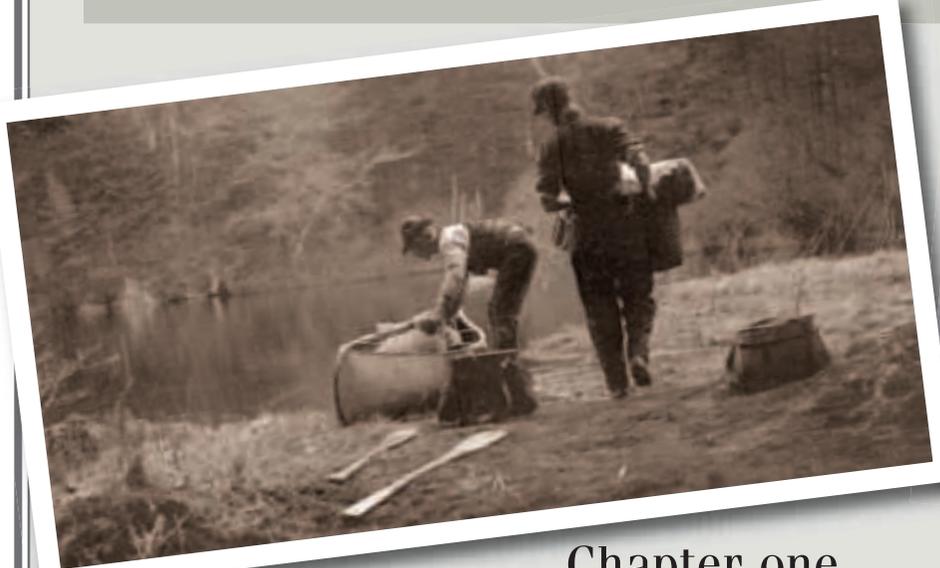
“Not only is it funny and incredibly good descriptive writing,” says Jonathan Sheppard, the chair of the festival’s planning committee, “it’s also quite insightful. People who read that book 100 years hence can still experience the same feelings of excitement, loneliness, and remoteness.”

In a world where real wilderness is becoming more scarce and difficult to access, Paine’s descriptions can still be witnessed in much the same way as they were a century ago. “We’re lucky,” says Sheppard. “We can retrace that entire route and still have a wilderness experience. There are not many places south of the 60th parallel where you can do that.”

Southwestern Nova Scotia still boasts one of the largest wilderness areas in the Maritimes. Kejimikujik National Park, the Shelburne Canadian Heritage River System, and the Tobeatic Wilderness Area stand woods to woods to woods. They are home to wildlife and lakes, few roads, and plenty of quiet. “It also has a pretty warm regional climate,” says Sheppard. “So you have a lot of species that are at the northern limit of their range. We’ve got rare plants not usually found north of the Carolinas, we’ve got all kinds of reptiles and amphibians, and because of that we are a biodiversity hot spot.”

*continued on page 20*

# The Tent Dwellers (EXCERPT)



## Chapter one

IT WAS DURING THE HOLIDAY WEEK THAT EDDIE proposed the matter. That is Eddie's way. No date, for him, is too far ahead to begin to plan anything that has vari-coloured flies in it, and tents, and the prospect of the campfire smell. The very mention of these things will make his hair bristle up (rather straight, stiff hair it is and silvered over with premature wisdom) and put a new glare into his spectacles (rather wide, round spectacles they are) until he looks even more like an anarchist than usual—more indeed than in the old Heidelberg days, when, as a matter of truth, he is a gentle soul; sometimes, when he has transgressed, or thinks he has, almost humble.

As I was saying, it was during the holidays—about the end of the week, as I remember it—and I was writing some letters at the club in the little raised corner that looks out on the park, when I happened to glance down toward the fireplace, and saw Eddie sitting as nearly on his coat collar as possible, in one of the wide chairs, and as nearly in the open hickory fire as he could get, pawing over a book of Silver Doctors, Brown hackles and the like, and dreaming a long, long dream.

Now, I confess there is something about a book of trout flies, even at the year's end, when all the brooks are flint and gorged with white, when all the north country hides under seamless raiment that stretches even to the Pole itself—even at such a time, I say, there is something about those bits of gimp, and gut, and feathers, and steel, that prick up the red blood of any man—or of any woman, for that matter—who has ever flung one of those gaudy things into a swirl of dark water, and felt the swift, savage tug on the line and heard the music of the singing reel.

I forgot that I was writing letters and went over there.

"Tell me about it, Eddie," I said. "Where are you going, this time?"

Then he unfolded to me a marvelous plan. It was a place in Nova Scotia—he had been there once before, only, this time he was going a different route, farther into the wilderness, the deep unknown, somewhere even the guides had never been. Perhaps stray logmen had been there, or the Indians; sportsmen never. There had been no complete surveys, even by the government. Certain rivers were known by their outlets, certain lakes by name. It was likely that they formed the usual network and that the circuit could be made by water, with occasional carries.

Unquestionably the waters swarmed with trout. A certain imaginative Indian, supposed to have penetrated the unknown, had declared that at one place were trout the size of one's leg. Eddie became excited as he talked and his hair bristled. He set down a list of the waters so far as known, the names of certain guides, a number of articles of provision and an array of camp paraphernalia. Finally he made maps and other drawings and began to add figures. It was dusk when we got back. The lights were winking along the park over the way, and somewhere through the night, across a waste of cold, lay the land we had visited, still waiting to be explored. We wandered out into the dining room and settled the matter across a table. When we rose from it, I was pledged—pledged for June; and this was still December, the tail of the old year. ■

*Passage courtesy of Nimbus Publishing. Excerpt from Albert Bigelow Paine's The Tent Dwellers.*



Jonathan Sheppard

*Southwestern Nova Scotia is as close as most people will get to real wilderness, and it's accessible*



Paine's transformation during his journey is a key theme of *The Tent Dwellers*. "He starts off as a real greenhorn," says Sheppard. "He pokes fun at himself more than anyone about how little he does know about travelling in the wilderness. He identifies feelings of fear, discomfort—things a lot of us feel when we're in the woods. You see an amazing progression in the course of the book. He talks about the wilderness teaching you and taking you in, and

how you will discover your soul there. That is a message that resonates with people."

In Paine's time most visitors came to the area from the U.S. and Central Canada, but that has changed. "Early in the season, the majority of our clients are European, but most of the visitors to the park are from Nova Scotia," says Glen Parlee, who operates Adventure Outfitters Ltd. in Kejimikujik Park, where the tent

# The beloved brooky

When American adventurers Albert Bigelow Paine and Eddie Brecht set off to canoe through the waterways of Nova Scotia in 1908, their motivation was the teeming population of native speckled trout. This kind of trout, also known as brook or “brooky,” are the most abundant of Nova Scotia’s four trout species and the official provincial fish. Brookies, which have distinctive red spots with blue halos on their sides, yellow worm-like markings on their backs, and white-edged fins, are touted by many as the most beautiful sport fish in the world.

Today’s trout population faces more challenges than it did a century ago. “Back in the time of the tent dwellers, the Tobeatic was pretty much untouched,” says Gary Corbett, who worked as a fish-and-wildlife biologist for Parks Canada for 30 years and is now a sport-fishing guide. “It was a virgin population of wild trout not influenced by acid rain, human activity, or stocking. Now we’ve got the acid rain problem, the logging activity over the years, and increased angling pressure.”

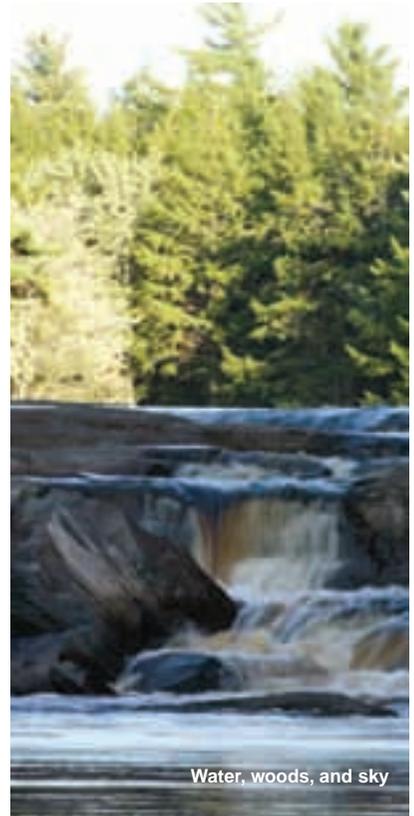


Ironically, the part of the original tent dwellers route most easily manoeuvred today through Kejimikujik Park and the Mersey River system still offers good angling oppor-

tunities. “Keji Lake and the Mersey River have quite good trout fishing,” says Corbett. “The buffering capacities of the soil make the pH levels in the park better for trout.” Also, introduced species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel, which wreak havoc on trout in most southwestern Nova Scotia watersheds, have not penetrated the Keji/Tobeatic system yet.

In a unique study conducted by the park to understand the habits of trout in the Upper Mersey River watershed, wild brook trout were surgically inserted with radio transmitters and tracked. “We wanted to know if the trout moved in and out of the park, which they do,” says Corbett, “but our study also shows that as soon as the water reaches 18 to 20 degrees [Celsius], they take off to spring holes, they’re very difficult to find, and they actually don’t feed much in the summertime.”

What does that mean for anglers? “The key to good trout fishing in that area is to fish between the middle of April and the end of May,” says Corbett. “They go on a feeding binge in the spring. What you need to do is ‘match the hatch’ of the various insect life in this period.” Corbett says that stoneflies are first to hatch, followed later on by mayflies and caddisflies. — J.F.



dwellers had to portage. “A lot of people come here and they may not get back for 20 years, but they always seem to get back. The park has done a great job over the years in preserving the area. It’s as close as most people will get to wilderness, yet it’s still easy to get to.”

Most people canoe, kayak, fish, or hike. Parlee has heard wonderful stories from many visitors. For example: “There was a German gentleman who hiked the entire perimeter trail of the park and didn’t see one person.”

Just as it did a century ago, a good chunk of the local economy depends on people being attracted to the wilderness. “People still come here to find solitude and get away from it all,” says Jonathan Sheppard. “A big part of the festival is to work locally, on a grassroots level, to sustain the tourism value of this wilderness area.”

I landed the canoe at my campsite and soon sat by a crackling fire. Frogs and crickets commenced an evening cacophony, while bats whizzed back and forth gorging on mosquitoes. I felt far from the pressures of the world, and close to the tent dwellers of long ago. ■