

Yes, We Have Virgin Forest in Wisconsin

One Visited by The Journal Rambler at 'Top of the State' in Vilas County

BY RAMBLER

FOREST LAKE, in that area of woods and waters in northern Vilas county close to the Michigan line, proved the outstanding "virgin forest" experience of a recent ramble through the summer resort region of northern Wisconsin. Occasionally when we have lamented the passing of the original forests and have said that Wisconsin has little of them outside of here and there a specimen tree that by some accident of circumstance has escaped the woodsman's ax, we have been told that "up in Vilas county near Land o' Lakes there is Forest lake, surrounded by virgin forest." So on this trip we made it a point to ramble there.

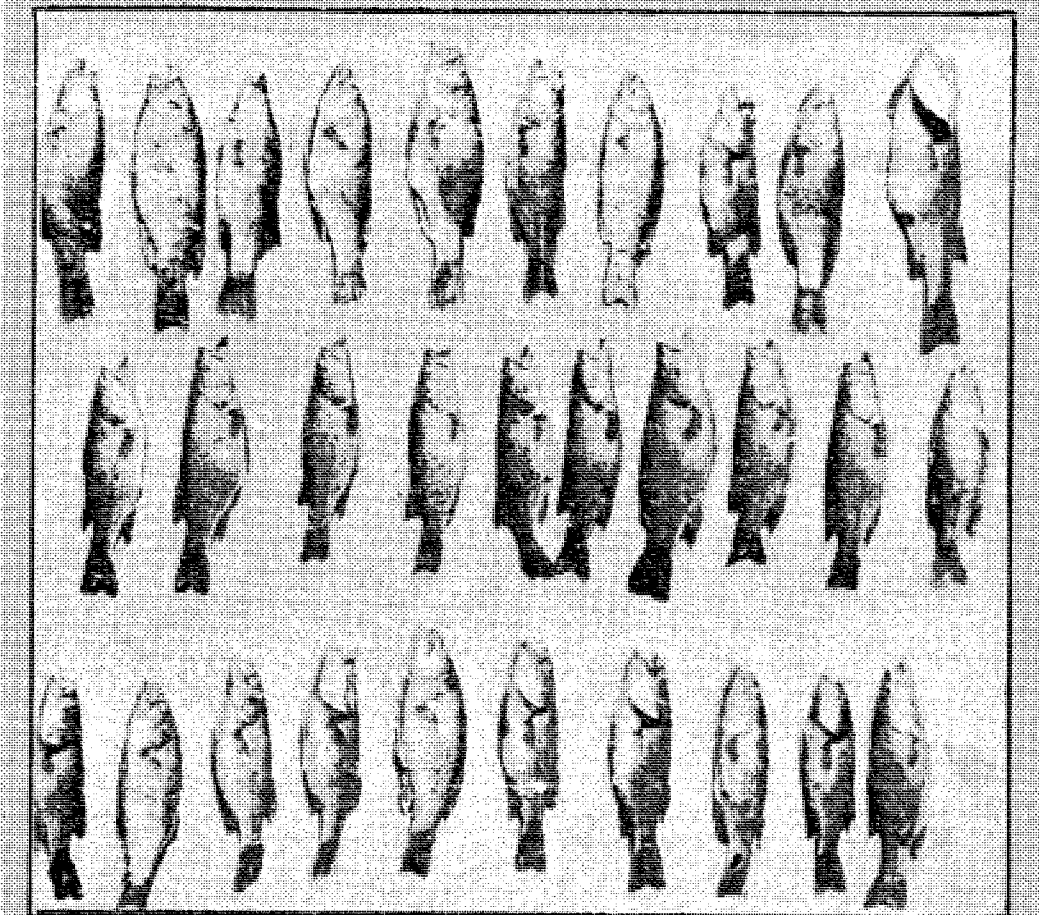
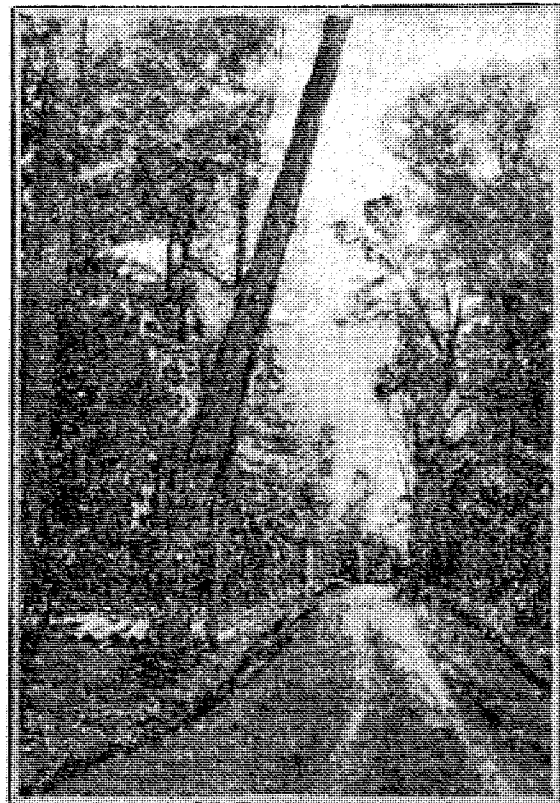
Wisconsin has larger waters than Forest lake but we've seen none with such deep, dark virgin woods. For a mile or two of the six-mile circumference of Forest lake we strolled through a forest where the trees stood as though they were the pillars that supported a roof of green tops. Scarcely a growing thing was to be found on the ground - no grass, wild flowers or young trees - so tightly roofed by that unbroken mass of tops of white and Norway pine and occasional hemlock and yellow birch. A brown, deep carpet of pine needles covered the ground, and here and there a ridge had been laid up where a gigantic trunk had fallen a generation or more ago.

Deer in the Forest

Deer tracks were everywhere. Mostly we found them in paths worn deep in the mold, where the deer made their way down to the water, but all around were the impressions where the sharp hoofs of deer had pierced that soft brown floor, indicating that the deer tarry there in numbers. Perhaps they enjoy the shade - surely they find no pasturage there among the towering shafts of pine.

As we paused at a spot to look around at trunks that lifted 100 feet without a limb and examined the ground for deer tracks a crackling sound turned our eyes along a path toward the lake. There was a tremendous, stately buck, head erect, great spread of antlers that we saw so closely as to recognize the "velvet" that marks them at this season of the year. He approached slowly, with curiosity rather than caution, and our companion expressed regret that we had left the camera at the model cabin. He is no photographer or he'd know that dense shade and reddish hide against brown bark of pine forbade making a good picture.

Fish, mainly smallmouth bass, the redeye variety, abound in the lake. Being a pure spring fed water, it is a natural bass lake, and yet extensive



Ancient Forest Remains in Wisconsin

Pictured above are scenes from Forest lake, Vilas county, three miles from the Michigan boundary, where Oscar F. Hiemke, Milwaukee (pictured at right), and associates have established a wild life preserve, built roads and other improvements, resolved to save one of the outstanding remaining tracts of virgin timber. The bass shown in the center were caught in two hours of casting by Arthur Thompson, Guy Warnke and George McCabe of Milwaukee. The largest weighed five pounds.

FOREST LAKE, Inc.
OSCAR HIEMKE, President
525 E. Michigan St. Tel. MARquette 7240

measures have been taken to assure good fishing in the future. A carload of fingerlings is planted annually, and with state co-operation a million suckers and other undesirable fish have been removed.

"Fish When We Want Them"

We were urged to "just fish a little while; row across that bay and around that island," and a wager was proposed that we'd have plenty of

bass for dinner. But our schedule called for dinner in the Manitowish country, so we could not accept the challenge. However, while we were saying goodbye a lady picked up a cane pole, turned a shovel of earth and found an angleworm, and when we were stepping on the starter she came up from the dock with a small-mouth, "just to prove that we can catch them when we want them."

One reaches Forest lake on the county road (B) that branches west from Highway 26 at the state line. A delightful road has been built, entirely circling the lake. It is well maintained and safely graded, but one does not want to travel fast - rather loaf along and observe the woods on either side, perhaps spying deer, and surely pausing at the observation tower that looks out over the lake from an elevation of 500 feet. Part of that road has been adopted by the state in making the new route from Land o' Lakes to Winegar, with a fork to Boulder Junction.

We wondered how it came to pass that loggers had not taken the forest many years ago. No one seems to know, but some few years ago the place was discovered by Oscar F. Hiemke of the American Appraisal Co., Milwaukee, who resolved to save the timber against logging operations that even then were being started. The shore land of Forest lake was purchased. A road was built around the lake. Then considerable more timbered land was acquired to save more virgin trees and also to better guard against fires. A fire apparatus is on the ground. An observation tower enables one promptly to locate any fire that may occur. Obviously a good deal of money has been put into this endeavor to save an outstanding bit of old Wisconsin. We were told that the timber in individual trees would bring as high as \$100 to \$150. One of the islands is covered with gigantic pines, said to be the largest of the state's remaining timber. We visited trees that three men could not reach around.

On a "Triple Divide"

An interesting spot, indeed. Located at a "triple divide," water a quarter of a mile north flows to Lake Superior. Half a mile southeast water flows to the Wisconsin river, and trout streams just to the west are the headwaters of the Manitowish chain. So Forest lake must be perched high. The altitude is 1,900 feet above sea level, one of the highest lakes of the state.

Two miles east of Forest lake is the Land o' Lakes airport, for the neighborhood is one of many summer homes, large clubs and summer resorts. Within 10 miles are said to be 121 lakes. A few miles southwest is Northern Forest park, where the state owns nearly 100,000 acres, now protected as a wild life preserve, as is also the land around Forest lake. No doubt that accounts for the confidence with which the deer we saw on this visit looked us over and approached for more careful scrutiny.

At Last, a Victory

A motor vehicle finally came off best in a collision with a street car. It was a 10-ton truck, fully loaded.