



## BYWAY BUZZ

LAKE COUNTRY SCENIC BYWAY NEWSLETTER

November 2005

### SNELLMAN AREA OF THE BYWAY—*By Archie & Helen Henderson—Byway Ambassadors*

“How many of you can pronounce my last name?” asked the Naval Officer in New Jersey. Helen’s son, Bob, came the closest Bob was in the Naval Reserve, sponsoring a young man for officer training. Bob asked Pihlaja where he was from in Minnesota. “It’s just a little spot on the roadside, you wouldn’t know” was the reply. After further questioning, it became clear that he was from Snellman and that Bob and Pihlaja were second cousins. Through the vagaries of circumstance, they had never met and didn’t know of each other before then, about ten years ago.

Snellman, on the Lake Country Scenic Byway about 8 Miles west of Osage, hasn’t always been as small as it is today, comprised of a gift shop, a country store, a church and a handful of homes. In the 1920’s, Snellman had a creamery, blacksmith shop, dance hall-Jalo’s tavern, store and Finnish Lutheran Church. Just north of the village was the site of Comet Skiways, one of the first winter recreation sites in the area. It was staffed by a young ski instructor named Eddie Jokela. He had served as a ski trooper in the newly formed Mountain Division in World War II. He was also a featured accordionist in the Blue Jackets dance band that served the area.

The area between Osage, Snellman and Toad Lake was settled predominately by people of Finnish ancestry and know to many as “Little Finland”.

Local Ojibway Indians were friendly in the early 1900’s as settlers became more numerous. But those who began settling on the south of Shell Lake met some friendly resistance. One method that the Indians used was to scare the horses which were being used to hoist logs, one by one

atop the walls of the buildings. This resulted in the log falling back to the ground. Helen’s grandparents first settled on the south shore of Shell Lake at the turn of the century and her uncle Jacob used to tell about playing with an Indian boy while neither could understand the others speech.

The Indians came early each year to collect and boil maple sap. They would set up tipi’s to live in during the sap run. Using small tree trunks outdoors, they would construct a brace to hold up two large iron kettles. Beneath the kettles, they would build fires to boil the sap down to maple syrup and candy. Nothing was added to the syrup or candy, except to grease the pan for candy. We had the understanding that they used muskrat grease, but that was never verified. In the early forties, this practice was still going on county lands. They sold the thick maple syrup for a dollar a quart.

Much earlier, the Sioux Indians would come from North Dakota to Toad Mountain. From this high point, they could spy on the whereabouts of the Ojibiwa, probably so as not to meet up with them, as they came to share in the rich supply of maple sap, wild rice, fish and wild game. These were in short supply in their area of North Dakota.

The Ojibway had an Indian name for Toad Lake, correctly translated as Frog Lake, named after a large frog which lived in the lake. White man misinterpreted this to mean toad.

WE will tell you more about this vibrant and interesting area of our Byway, in future issues.

### ANIMALS OF ITASCA—*Frank Mitchell—Hubbard County Historian/Byway Ambassador*

Much has been written about the people in Itasca Park, Many articles were written about Schoolcraft, Brower, Mary Gibbs as well as the loggers, fur traders, railroad men and Native Americans. They all played a part in getting the park established. But how about the animals that played an important and interesting part of the parks development?

Most information for this article is taken from the Park Rapids Enterprise and the Hubbard Co. Clipper. Northern MN. Had a large population of bear, deer, beaver,

muskrats, coyotes, raccoon, mink, otter and timber wolves as well as an occasional sighting of elk and moose. Most species of fish were abundant in the many lakes and streams in the park. With the coming of the white man many of these animals were killed both for meat and fur., Fur trading was a great industry, with furs used by natives and also shipped overseas.

By 1901 the beaver were completely exterminated in this section of the state. Being interested in wild animals, Gov.

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John Lind learned that beaver could be obtained in Ontario. Gov. Lind started a momentum that resulted in the two females and one male being shipped to Park Rapids then taken to the park and put in Lake Itasca in the spring of 1901. Beaver from other areas were also released in the park. Since beaver are such prolific animals, in less than 20 years they had become so numerous that the lake was over populated and they were destroying many trees on the lake shore.

Headlines in the Park Rapids Enterprise of April 1920 read **Beaver in Itasca Park to be Trapped.** Ex-Gov. John Lind, State Forester Cox and Professor Wentling of the Forestry School came to the park to witness the trapping of beaver. Since it was through the efforts of Governor Lind that beaver were obtained he wanted to witness the trapping. It is not known how many beaver were trapped.

Elk were also introduced to the park. 640 acres near Douglas Lodge was fenced with an 8 ft. high woven wire enclosure for the elk. A load of elk was brought in from Jackson Hole in Yellowstone Park in Wyoming. In the fall of 1914 this load of elk was placed in this pen. In January 1915 it was reported that most of the calves and

one large elk had been killed by wolves. It was discovered that there were wolves inside the pen when it was fenced. It was reported that there were 11 females, 2 males and 2 calves left in the pen. James J. Hill the great railroad builder, also donated his herd of 23 elk to the park, Superintendent, McNeil in the 1926 counted 44 elk but said there probably were over 50 elk in the pen. In April 1928, 10 elk were caught and crated for shipment to Ely to be released in the Superior National Forest.

Eventually all the elk were removed and taken to northern Minnesota and released.

Deer also were getting very numerous and were destroying most of the new pine seedlings, so the park was opened for deer hunting in the early 50's.

Porcupines were also getting numerous and were destroying much mature timber by eating the bark from the trees. Since the fisher is the only animal that has the ability to kill them, a number of fishers were trapped and released in the park. They do this by some how getting at the belly of the porcupine where there are no quills. They are powerful animals and can kill and carry a porcupine great distances before eating them. This greatly reduced the number of

porcupines in the park.

Raccoons were real rascals that were forever getting into garbage cans. They would forage for food and end up tipping the can or scattering the garbage all over. What a mess! Of course the tourists enjoyed watching their clever ways and seeing their "cute" faces.

Buffalo were also penned up near the original headquarters office. This was a big attraction for tourists as well as locals to see these large animals up close. There was also black bear in a pen next to the buffalo pen at one time. It was decided later that it was not the intent of the state parks to keep animals penned up, so eventually they were all released.

The black bear has also increased in numbers. When garbage was taken to the park dump areas it was not uncommon to see 5 to 10 bear eating garbage especially at night. They also frequented the holes used for disposing fish cleanings. It became necessary for the DNR to live trap nuisance bear and remove them from the park.

Squirrels and chipmunk are also plentiful, especially in the camp grounds and where they come for food and clean up scraps and crumbs dropped by the campers.

Of course we don't want to forget the "little critters" that are so common. Bats and mice will always find a way to get into the buildings, especially the log building. These can cause more fright and discomfort for workers and guests than the larger animals.

So it can be seen that throughout the time since the park was established various animals have played a large role in the operation and maintenance of the park.

Frank J. Mitchell

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