

The Eagle Has Landed

Those words took on added weight when they were heard in the Canadian wilderness.

By Patricia Snell, Kendall, New York

MY SUMMERS were never boring; my father, an adventure seeker, saw to that.

In 1969, I was between high school and college. I didn't have a job, but I wasn't bored. Every year, my parents would plan trips that took my brother and me to a wide variety of destinations.

This July, we were going on a canoe trip to Lake Temagami in northeastern Ontario, Canada. The lake was in a remote, sparsely populated part of the province, about 400 miles from our Rochester, New York home.

We packed our supplies and loaded two canoes onto the car for the long drive. Along the way, my aunt, uncle and two cousins joined us with their canoe, as they had done on previous trips.

While I don't remember most of the events of that weeklong trip, the memory of a tiny island where we camped for a couple of days remains.

The island was really just a slab of rock with a few scraggly plants. We had chosen it as our campsite because the thick forest on the shores was filled with hungry mosquitoes.

There were several things about this near-treeless island that made it a poor choice for a campsite.

One was the lack of privacy. We dubbed it "No-John Island" and used a canoe to ferry over to an outhouse on shore, where there

were some uninhabited cabins.

The island also was a poor place to pitch tents. The hard ground would not accept tent stakes, so heavy rocks were used to anchor the tents. Inside the tents, the slab of rock made a poor mattress.

The most memorable event on the island happened as we huddled around my father and his small transistor radio on July 20.

My father was holding the radio against his ear and straining to hear the historic broadcast about Apollo 11 and the landing of the lunar module Eagle on the moon.

Radio reception was poor in our remote location, but my father could hear the dramatic details and repeated the news to us as he heard it. The landing was not proceeding as planned, but finally the historic words were announced from the moon, "The Eagle has landed."

It was a strange experience to be camped on a remote island while we heard news from a far more remote place. We had the odd perception that we were just in our backyard, compared to thousands of miles that the astronauts had traveled into space.

Our island seemed more like home. We lacked comfort and privacy, but at least we had air to breathe and gravity.

Any comparisons between our canoe trip and space exploration are presumptuous. The only thing I can say is that we were all adventure seekers who were challenged by our own adventures, and we all succeeded.

I did not accompany my family on any more trips after the summer of 1969 because I had my own adventures to experience at college and in my future work.

I'm grateful that my last family adventure was a memorable one,

thanks to the astronauts and a tiny island on Lake Temagami.