

## WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

March 1, 1956

Every year toward the end of February, I tack some cotton batting onto the telephone pole just outside the window, and hang some pieces of string on the carraganas. Sometimes within minutes the Canada Jays will be tugging and pulling at this nest building material; flying away with their mouths full of it. I watch the direction they take and try to get some idea of where to look for the next. I have done this for years but so far it has availed me nothing.

I have followed the birds right to the acre of spruce trees where I knew the nest was hidden, but it is like looking for the needle in the haystack. The nest is almost sure to be in a spruce tree, large or small, but there can be thousands of spruce trees in an acre, and I never have time to make a thorough search. It is often hard work too, floundering around with or without snowshoes in a whole winter's accumulation of snow. I have one consolation. My luck is as good as most people's. For some reason the nest is seldom found and when one is discovered it is often by accident. Lumbermen find more than anybody.

Mr. Mindrom, who lives near Hoadley, tells me he has twice found nests, one on his farm last April and one some years ago in Saskatchewan that contained young birds in February. Nests with eggs have been found in January. The nest is warmly made and lined for protection against the sub-zero temperatures.

Canada Jays have other peculiarities too, as indicated by the wide variety of descriptive names that have been given them. Whiskeyjack is the most common, but he is called meat bird or meat hawk, camp robber (due to a trick of making off with small items), moose bird and venison bird. They like the wilds yet they are the most trusting of birds and are easily coaxed to eat from your hand. Hunters say that they are attracted by a gunshot, and certainly the game is hardly dead before they come drifting quietly in to wait politely by until something is available for them. My favorite method of calling them up is to build a campfire when I stop for lunch in the woods. It seldom fails to bring them, and if you don't watch closely, they seem to materialize out of thin air, so silently do they appear.

Once for a period of about two weeks, we ate lunch in the woods back on Section 6 almost every day. A pair of these birds got very tame, and would light on our shoulders, head, knees or hands to take a piece of bread. We enjoyed their company and often laughed at their droll ways. But one day one of them did a foolish thing. He hopped into the still hot embers that were the remnants of our noontime fire. Before we could chase him out he had burned his feet, and we knew he felt pain because he picked at the bottoms of his feet with his bill and looked extremely puzzled. This was our last day in the woods, so we never knew how he fared after his mishap.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
May 3, 1956

There are probably not very many houses in this part of the country that can boast two telephones. But we have two in ours. One is the orthodox variety which connects us with more than a score of other subscribers on a party line as well as with phones in Rimbey, Calgary, New York, London and the rest of the world. The other, which we have been using for more than a year, is far less pretentious in scope but comes in handy nevertheless. We call it the barbed wire phone, for it runs on the top wire of the fence lines. Had we known how easily installed it was, we might have been using it years ago.

Such systems have long been in use on the prairie but were not thought to be practical for bush-grown fence lines. While small brush doesn't seem to bother a great deal, trees of any size touching the wire do tend to ground it, especially if they are grown around the wire.

Our total length of line is about three and a half miles and serves four homes. Almost any kind of wire will serve as lead-in wire and to carry the line over road allowances and gateways. We have made good use of the light, insulated wire left along the roadsides by seismograph crews. Our phone boxes are homemade, using receivers and speakers from dismantled phones. We use various types of batteries, from three ordinary telephone cells to a hotshot or a six volt car battery. A Ford coil is used to step up the power and for buzzing.

The best possible ground is the well, but if you ground to the pump, reception may be interfered with when the pump is operating.

We use signals as on any other party line. Here it is, one long and one short to coincide with our ring on the other telephone. The signals are buzzes created by the coil at the sender's set and heard through the receiver.

In spite of its restricted use as compared to conventional phones this line is used almost daily and in the time that it has been operating, has saved a lot of people a good deal of time and considerable travelling. We in this house, being on the regular phone line, are frequently asked to relay messages in one direction or another, so that, all in all, the barbed wire phone is not only a boon to the four "subscribers" but benefits other people as well.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
May 10, 1956

Who would want to be a hawk?

In our society a person who breaks the laws can expect a fair trial when apprehended. He is deemed innocent until proven guilty, and justice, when it is meted out, is more lenient than severe. Moreover, it is the

individual who is tried and punished. His relatives, friends and neighbors are not made to bear responsibility for his misdeeds.

Everyone will agree that this is as it should be. Why then, do we apply a completely different type of thinking to the question of hawks, owls and other predators of the bird and animal world, visiting the sins of some individuals on the whole race. It cannot be just because they re predators for man is a greater predator than any of them. It is man, who, on this continent, destroyed untold millions of buffalo in the space of half a century; who exterminated the passenger pigeon and the great auk, and scored a near miss on several other wildlife species.

You will say that we have learned a lot about the conservation of wildlife resources since that time. Could be. Could be we have some more to learn too. And there are some who feel that in the matter of predator control, we are learning the hard way.

The issue is not simply whether or not predators should be controlled. Rather it is a question of which ones to control and to what degree; how the control is to be administered and by whom. For some time now, the controversy has centered on hawks and owls. A few years ago it was the coyote who was bearing the brunt of the hard feelings, and even now that policy in regards to his control is more or less settled, he is no doubt still suffering from a persecution complex.

In the division of opinion on the control of hawks and owls, both sides lay claim to conservation motives. The sportsmen are intent on conserving upland game for their fall shooting, and the bird lovers are just as intent on conserving the hawks from the hunters.

So far, while both sides have had their say, the sportsmen have raised the loudest voice. And they are not just talking through their hats. Hawks do take a toll among game birds and when the hunter sees one attacking a pheasant which he has contributed good money to raise, his ire is understandably roused. Thereafter he will most likely shoot hawks on sight.

And right here, say the bird lovers, lies most of the trouble, and they are not talking through their hats either. Only some hawks and very few owls, they state, can be considered harmful, and to protect the beneficial ones, all must be given protection, since very few hunters are able to distinguish between the two. To many of them it couldn't matter less. They will not tolerate anything that competes with them for the privilege of killing game; nor anything that looks as if it might. This is not exaggeration. It is all too true.

Another excuse the sportsmen give for shooting hawks is that they thereby help keep nature in balance. If we are going to shoot big game, they say, then we should also shoot a proportional number of wolves and coyotes which prey on them. If we are going to shoot upland game then we should shoot a proportional number of hawks and owls. End of argument. But why end it there? By the same token we should also go out and shoot a proportional number of mice and gophers and other rodents which animal and bird predators also hunt and devour in quantity.

There are not just two sides to this question. There are a great many, and what might be a solution where sportsmen are concerned, might be just the opposite in so far as other sections of society are affected.

Until wildlife biologists, legislators and public have more adequate information on which to base their arguments and courses of action, rigid control of any species of hawk or owl should not be attempted.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

May 17, 1956

Hawks and owls are important to us not only in an economic sense, but in other ways as well. They have an esthetic value at least equal to that of robins or orioles or any other bird that is pleasing to eye and ear.

Owls are among our most interesting birds. Being mainly nocturnal, they are more often heard than seen, and this may account for some of the strange beliefs and superstitions connected with them. They had a pretty grim reputation in Shakespeare's time, being directly associated not only with witches, but with witches' brews, in the form of an ingredient.

Owl wing feathers are soft-edged, making them almost noiseless in flight. While some of the smaller kind probably are noiseless, the Great Horned Owls are not quiet. I have heard one's wings in the dark some thirty feet above my head as it came in to light and hoot from the top of a pine tree below which I stood.

Hawks are masters of flight and no one will ever know the sum total of pleasure that has been derived from watching them soar and sail and glide on the air currents; from observing their hunting and nesting activities, and from seeing them at play, swooping and tumbling and performing all manner of acrobatics, apparently for the sheer fun of it.

There are people, strange as it may seem to some, who would rather watch hawk than shoot a pheasant; and people who would rather spend a weekend hunting for the nest of the Great Grey Owl than bag their limit of prairie chicken every day for a week. Some of these people take the view that destruction of any species of wildlife, even on a regional scale is wrong, and they, too, have a right to their beliefs and opinions, as well as a right to express them.

Luckily, such people have had some influence down through the years. They have been responsible for the establishment of national parks and wildlife refuges. They have helped bring about saner hunting laws, and have been instrumental in preserving various species from extinction. In general, they have acted as a break on too rash a use of our wildlife resources.

To get back to the hawks. A hawk taken with feathers in its stomach may not necessarily have made the kill. It may in fact, have been eating carrion. It has been shown that game birds eaten by hawks during hunting season are often ones that have been crippled or injured or even killed

by gunshot. It has also been shown that more game is eaten by them at this time of year. Could hunters themselves be responsible for fostering an increased appetite for game among birds of prey? For the rest of the year too, somewhat the same principle applies. That is, that the smaller and weaker specimens are usually the ones that fall to the predators, implementing Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, and providing another argument for non-control of predators.

I don't want to leave the impression that I am against hunting. I like to hunt and never do as much as I would like. In fact, I am not even against hunting as practiced by my friends the hawks and owls. They hunt to exist. We hunt mostly for fun; or because hunting has been in our blood ever since the days when our early ancestors hunted the woolly mammoth and the cave bear, and caught wild geese in snares. They too, hunted in order to live, but it is safe to say that they also derived some enjoyment from the business.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

May 24, 1956

I am firmly convinced, both as a result of personal observation, and from reading everything I can find on the subject, that hawks and owls, taken as a group, do far more good than harm. That the number of rodents and insects consumed in an agricultural area, if it could be translated into dollars and cents, would be generous payment for the birds that are killed. If we leave out the two or three harmful species there is little question of the value of the remainder to the general economy.

The worse of the bad hawks is the Goshawk, the Blue Chicken Hawk that was such a worry to the farmer's wife in former years because of his raids on poultry. Being a bird of the wild places, he kept retiring as settlement advanced, and is no longer as common in the farming areas as he once was.

Apart from the Goshawk and two of his smaller relatives, the Coopers and Sharp-shinned Hawks, most Alberta hawks eat more rodents and insects than they do birds. Right here the question of control arises. Should birds such as the Marsh Hawk be shot because they kill some game birds, or should they be protected because they destroy a large number of harmful rodents and insects?

Surveys have been conducted from time to time for the purpose of determining the food habits of hawks and owls by examination of stomach contents. These surveys are most helpful but we would be foolish to rely on them altogether. Yet the data contained in the published report is frequently quoted to prove that many or all species of hawks eat birds and are therefore harmful. In my opinion, surveys of this kind do not prove anything. Hawks, like people, tend to eat whatever is at hand. Therefore all kinds of factors may contribute to the results of a survey.

Where was the survey made? Was the food supply there identical to that of the area under discussion? Not likely. When was it made? Sources of food in any area vary greatly from season to season and from year to year.

Were the birds examined taken from a farming area, from rangeland, from forest areas or from all over? It could make a difference.

Many of these surveys were made in the States where there is no ten year cycle among upland game and rodents and other small mammals, and for that reason might have been quite different if taken in the area to which they are supposed to apply here in Alberta. In a survey taken here the position of these cycles would need to be taken into consideration.

Before we adopt strict control measures in regard to any bird of prey, we should have complete and specific knowledge of that creature's influence on the economy of the area affected. Knowledge obtained over a period of years. At present we do not appear to have sufficient information along this line to assume responsibility for this control, and it would certainly be a tragic mistake to leave such responsibility in the hands of the licensed hunter.

Even farmers, chief beneficiaries of the eating habits of hawks and owls, are often either indifferent or antagonistic toward birds of prey in general. The reason for this, I think, is the same as with the hunters. It is the birds' harmful aspects which most often come to our attention. If farmers would adopt a policy of never shooting a hawk except one caught in mischief, they would make money for themselves.

Another of the arguments against an open season on any hawk or owl, is that the most harmful species live mostly in remote and inaccessible areas; are fast and cunning and hard to shoot, whereas most beneficial hawks sit tame and trusting by the roadsides, an easy target for anyone with a gun.

So far, we have only considered some economic aspects of the question, but there are others. We'll go into some of these next week.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

May 31, 1956

As you may have read in the news columns of this paper a couple of weeks ago, a little girl became lost in our neighborhood earlier this spring. Her name was Susan and she was three. Being a visitor she did not know her way around and when she became separated from her five playmates she was automatically lost. It was by extreme good fortune that she was found some three hours after her disappearance for she was three quarters of a mile from her starting point and darkness was setting in. As it was there were half a hundred people on the scene and more were on the way. Had she not been found by dark there could easily have been hundreds more in the hunt. Yet a general alarm had not gone out until nearly six o'clock. She was last seen before five and for the first hour or so it was calmly assumed that she would turn up at any moment as the four original searchers covered every building and fence corner on two premises.

When she was found it was at some distance from any of the search party and by people who didn't even know a little girl was lost. Imagine, if you can, the consternation of Mr. and Mrs. Lamb, who were driving Old

Maud on the buggy down the little-frequented road on which they live, when they came upon Susan. Clad in sweater and jeans, she was standing by a mud puddle trying to decide which way to go around it. When they questioned her, they could understand most of what she said but not what she meant. Since there was not another person within sight or sound, they were sure she did not belong where she was, so they resolved to take her back in the direction from which she appeared to have come. Soon she was back where she belonged with her brothers and cousins and her distraught mother. A tremendous blast of auto horns called the relieved searchers in.

This was not the first search for a lost child this neighborhood has known. It was the third that I can remember, though I had no part in the other two which took place back in the Thirties. One was for a little girl named Ella Robinson and a good many other people also remember this occasion. The other was also for a small girl who was found asleep not far from her home and in the same general area where Susan was found. In those days there were few telephones and the search parties were not large.

All these searches ended happily after a few anxious hours and with no harm to the kids concerned.

There is no way of predicting the actions of a three-year-old. The others I have mentioned were, if I'm not mistaken, found in the woods. Susan had kept to a road, even though, in doing so she had crossed the main road.

I know a small gaffer who has - or did have - a penchant for wandering. So what did his Mama do? She pinned a sheep bell to his back; and pinned it right through all his clothes so that he couldn't get rid of it by taking off his shirt. He had to get out of sound as well as out of sight before he was lost.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

June 7, 1956

A book might be written about the history of travel in Alberta, but most of it would deal with travel in the present century, by rail and highway and air. The history of travel here before this century would take but a chapter or two, and before 1700 a few pages might do it.

Two hundred fifty years ago means of travel in this area were few. On foot and by canoe in summer; on foot and by dog sled in the winter months. Since seventeenth century Albertans lived a nomadic existence, a lot of moving about was done by these three methods.

Canoes here were not so often made of birch bark as they were in the east. Many of them would likely be dugouts, hewn or burned out from large balsam poplar trees which grew along our rivers in wooded country. Canoes of a sort were also made of buffalo hides stretched over willow frames. A crude, temporary form of these called bumboats were often used to cross stream in prairie country. Sometimes a band of hundreds of men, women and children gained the opposite bank of the river in this manner. But

since canoes were limited to water courses, walking remained the only way people could get where they really wanted to go. Walking would be modified in winter by the use of snowshoes.

In the following century, horses made their appearance in Alberta plains, brought here by the Blackfoot from the south of the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel. These were the original Cayuses or mustangs which the Spaniards introduced to Mexico in 1515. Horses played a major part in making the Blackfoot the powerful nation they were by the end of the eighteenth century.

White men, when they came to the area, came in by water. They introduced the York boat, which was built something like an oversized canoe, about thirty five feet long and capable of carrying three or four tons of goods and supplies as well as a number of men. In winter they used both dogs and horses but in summer the dogs were kept tethered.

Anthony Henday, when he was here in 1754, owned a horse, though it seems he did not ride it but used it to carry his gear.

Dr. James Hector, travelling from Edmonton to Rocky Mountain House in 1858, was surprised to see another party coming toward him across a swamp. It was Mr. Brazeau, for whom river and collieries were named. What Hector found most astonishing was the fact that Mr. Brazeau had a team of horses hooked to a sleigh which Hector describes as being built much like a dog sled, only on a larger scale.

Since that time some millions of miles have been logged in this province with team and sleigh or with team and wagon in summer. That is mainly how this area was settled and it goes without saying that it was no picnic, for of course, the vehicles were here before there were roads. When a wagon got stuck in the muskeg and reaches or harness or wagon tongues or singletrees were broken by a plunging team, repairs had to be made on the spot.

As one early settler into the Buck Lake area concluded the story of his coming, "Nineteen miles and eleven reaches later, I arrived at Buck Lake."

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

June 14, 1956

While hawks and owls are the predators most in the limelight at present, there are others that have come in for some attention recently, ranging from moose to mink.

Moose, of course, are not predators in the usual sense of the word, but, along with deer and elk, they are sometimes regarded as such by forestry people. They do a great deal of damage to young forest cover, stripping saplings of bark and branches to a height of nine feet in some cases.

Game animals are also being accused by some ranchers, of over-grazing land leased by them from the government for pasture. And elk have a well-known fondness for hay in the stack when snow is deep. But imagine the

furor that would arise if the people and groups concerned were to advocate open season throughout the year on all big game, whether male or female or young. Yet that is exactly what some people are demanding for some hawks and owls.

Small animals, too, such as rabbits and mice and porcupines, do a great deal of damage in the forests, as they live mostly on bark in winter. Porcupines, by the way, have been extremely numerous this past winter; still are, in fact. Could this be a result of coyote control? Coyotes are just about the porky's only enemy hereabouts.

Not long ago I heard a fisherman decrying the predatory habits of the mink. It seemed to him a tragic waste of money to stock streams with trout for mink to eat. But the mink is a useful animal; a valuable fur-bearer, who likes fish when he can get it. How far, I wonder, would this fisherman go in controlling mink? At what point would the trapper object? Next thing the fishermen will want is an open season on the kingfisher.

It all boils down to this. Sooner or later, sportsmen will be forced to the conclusion that creatures other than themselves also have some rights to the country's fish and game resources. A true outdoorsman should be happy to help provide a living for wildlife in all its varied forms, and, so far as is possible, in its natural habitat, where it can live in a natural existence. Very few wild creatures look well in a zoo. It is to be hoped that the time does not come when the zoo will be the only place we can go to see a coyote or a Great Horned Owl, brought in from some remote area where man had not destroyed them all.

Some control over certain species will always be found necessary, but it should be just enough to keep things in balance and prevent the occurrence of extremes of peak and depression in any species, either predators or nonpredators. I am aware that this is an ideal and that in practice it doesn't quite work out. But it would be a more desirable goal to work toward than one that had as its objective the elimination of any or all predators.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
June 21, 1956

There are two species of bird that I would be happy to see eliminated completely; and perversely, they are the very ones that will probably be among the last forms of bird life to survive on this planet.

They are the starling and the English Sparrow. Both were introduced from Europe to the New York area in the last century by nostalgic, wealthy and shortsighted immigrants who missed the birds of their childhood.

Two poorer representatives of the birds of Europe would have been hard to find; or two more adaptable and prolific ones. The sparrow, brought over about 1850, had spread across the continent in great numbers within fifty years. The starling, introduced in 1890, was almost as fast spreading. Starlings first reached Alberta about twenty years ago but were not seen

in any numbers until 1948. They were not common right here until after 1950.

The worst feature of both birds is that they displace species that are far more valuable. They do this in at least three ways: by competing for the food supply; by taking over nesting sights; and by direct and forceful attack.

To me there is no more annoying, irritating, monotonous and unlovely sound in all the outdoors than the cheep-cheep-cheep of a flock of English Sparrows, and if I did not wage perpetual war on these pests with a .22, that is what I would hear all spring. But I do wage all-out war, so I listen instead to the melodious singing of two pairs of wrens, to the cheery calls of the robins and phoebes, and the beautiful oriole-like notes of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Then there are the swallows that for more than twenty years have flitted about the yard from May to August, catching insects on the wing, and the junco that has a nest by a delphinium in the flower garden. There are several kinds of song sparrows too, of which my favorite songster is the White-throat with his pure, clear, carrying notes that can be heard throughout the twenty four hours of the day in early June.

Harry also dislikes sparrows which is lucky for me, for our combined onslaught on the pests makes it impossible for them to become established at either place. If he were to let them multiply on his premises, I would fight a losing battle here too, for his buildings are just moments away as the sparrows fly.

While sparrows never go far from buildings, starlings may be found in the wilds. Their favorite nesting site is a woodpecker hole, and they drive out not only valuable woodpeckers, but birds like chickadees, Tree Swallows, Sparrow Hawks, wrens and others that nest in woodpecker excavations.

In the cities these two birds have had an influence on our architecture, for buildings are necessarily designed to eliminate cornices and projections where they can roost or nest.

In the east, starlings do not migrate; they are year-round residents. We are more fortunate in that Alberta starlings have developed migratory habits, coming and going the same as the crows. But while crows, in spite of their reputation, are welcomed back in the spring, starlings are not. They will never be welcome anywhere.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
June 28, 1956

June is the month of orchids in the woods of Alberta. Orchids are much more common here than many of us realize, although some species are certainly quite rare. Unfortunately the rarer ones are becoming even more so as more land is utilized for lumbering and agriculture. Members of the orchid family do not like to be disturbed. Even grazing and burning take a toll.

In the past, I have tried transplanting some species of Lady's Slippers to save them from destruction by agriculture and even though I removed a large quantity of the surrounding soil, and set them out in a place as similar to their original location as possible, they did not thrive but came up weaker and with fewer blooms each year until they ceased to come at all.

The best known orchid here is the large Yellow Lady's Slipper. There are at present, four known clumps of these in our pasture, and I have driven stakes around them or otherwise protected them from trampling by livestock. There used to be a fifth one which was the largest and best of all, with seventeen perfect blooms on it two years ago. Last year it had killed back completely, as if the effort of the previous season had been a sort of swan song.

There are also several plants of White Lady's Slippers within a quarter of a mile from the house, but these do their best in a wet season and during a dry spring are scarcely noticeable. Far commoner, yet less known, is the smaller Purple Orchids. Also slipper-shaped, with several tiny, purple-spotted flowers on one stem, it can be found in almost any very moist spruce woods. There is also a pure white version of this orchid, as well as several other white or greenish-white species to be found in moist woods.

Very uncommon, so far as I am concerned, is the small Pink Fairy Slipper. It has a distinct preference for piney woods, and I know of only one place where it grows. Doubtless there are others, for there are many areas of pine cover throughout the country that should suit it very well.

For many years I have heard it told that it is forbidden by law to pick the flowers of the Lady's Slippers. I have never tried to find if this law is actually on the statute books, but in any case it is a good idea. The effect of such a law would not be to scare people into leaving the flowers unpicked, but rather to impress upon them that these plants are so scarce as to make a law deemed necessary.

So if you know where there are any clumps of these rare and beautiful flowers, do not pick them but enjoy them where they grow. Do give them some protection if it will help to preserve them in our wooded areas for a little longer.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
July 12, 1956

I was caught out more than a mile from home, with only a willow tree for shelter, during the worst hailstorm in the history of Alberta. I was in a bush pasture, far from buildings of any kind, along with six other persons, six horses and my dog, Ike. The storm struck at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon, August 7, 1949.

Before that date natives of this province would not have thought such a destructive storm possible here, nor anywhere within a thousand miles.

Similar storms were known to occur in Texas and Kansas and other far-off places, never in Alberta. But Alberta's weather is apparently capable of anything and this time it outdid itself. The storm cut a swath of destruction several miles wide and more than two hundred miles from west to east, extending well into Saskatchewan.

The largest stones which fell here measured three inches long by two and one half inches wide and an inch and a half thick. They averaged about the size of hen eggs.

The ominous roar made by this storm as it approached, warned of unusual violence, even for a hailstorm. I was alarmed because for some time I couldn't see any shelter that looked the least bit adequate. Not until the last minute did I turn loose the horses I was leading and make a dash for a large, heavy trunked, thick limbed willow, with Ike right on my heels. When I reached it, the tree was already sheltering three boys in their early teens and a grey-bearded old-timer. Ike and I crowded in, but I had to sit on him to keep him there.

We were just in time. The first stone plopped beside us and it was the size of a large egg. That one cold, white, lump of ice was an awesome sight. It made us wonder what was coming, let me tell you. We soon found out, for it was followed in short order by the deafening arrival of several million more, in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. Between the thunder and the pounding hail the noise was terrific.

At least two large stones managed to filter undeflected through the branches, leaving two black and blue bruises on my back for a couple of days. None of us beneath the willow were actually hurt however, but one of the other chaps told us after the storm that he hadn't made shelter in time, had been knocked unconscious and had come to again with the huge stones bounding all around him. He had then crawled hastily under a willow.

With the storm over, I was probably the most comfortable of anyone, since I was wearing a canvas coat and was comparatively dry. The three boys were most uncomfortable for they wore only light sport shirts, now soaked, and the tons of ice which covered the ground had lowered the temperature drastically to a few degrees above freezing. I'll bet they still shiver when they think about it.

There was not a horse to be seen in any direction. Nor did anyone look for them that evening. We went wading off through the water and ice and crushed vegetation to see what damage had been done at our various homes.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

July 19, 1956

Where will you be going this weekend? To a beach resort? A favorite picnic spot? A fishing stream? Or are you planning a longer trip, to a provincial or national park perhaps? Will you visit one of our many historical sites en route; and is it your habit to stop at lookout points to relax for a moment and enjoy the view?

Wherever you travel I wish you an enjoyable outing. I also hope you will do your best to see that the next person can enjoy his. Here are some of the things I hope you won't do.

Don't leave your garbage scattered about your picnic spot. Either bury it or take it home to dispose in the usual manner. Nothing mars the beauty of a picnic area like used paper plates and napkins and Kleenex plus an assortment of empty bottles, cans, bags and cartons.

Don't cut strips of bark from the birch trees. It disfigures or even kills the trees and spoils the beauty of the place. Look on any calendar that has a photo of a Canadian - or American - scene in which there are birch trees. The chances are there will be ugly black squares on beautiful white trunks.

Don't break bottles. The bottle breaker is about the worst kind of litter bug. At Bragg Creek, where side-channels of the Elbow River are warm and shallow, children must be kept out of the water because of the broken glass among the stones. At the lookout over Glenmore reservoir and dam, which supply Calgary with water, broken bottles are sometimes a menace to auto tires. The same is true of countless other stopping places. Don't contribute to this unpleasant situation.

And don't wash your car in a river or lake. Fishermen will curse you loud and long. Apart from that, it is strictly forbidden by law.

As for you gals, whatever else you may or may not feel compelled to do, for goodness sake, don't go smearing lipstick all over the landscape. If you must smear it, do so where it will make somebody happy and where it can be easily removed. Don't use it to paint your name and address on bridges and statues and the belly of the dinosaur on St. George's Island. (This is a waste of time anyway for Dinny is frequently repainted.) And don't add to the defacement of the historic old stone chimneys near Rocky Mountain House or the stone cairn nearby. There is hardly any room left for your name anyway.

Some day the Historic Sites and Monuments Board may send a man out to take down all these names and addresses with a view to exacting toll from everyone thus proven guilty. And if you can't pay your fine and have to go to jail, don't expect me to contribute one red cent toward your bail. I wouldn't even smuggle you in a lipstick to brighten up those cold stone walls.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
October 11, 1956

In many dictionaries you cannot find the word "muskeg". This is surprising, for muskeg is a pretty common thing across Canada's northland, all the way from British Columbia to Labrador. You can get a good definition of the term, however, by looking up "bog". That is what muskegs are called in Ireland, for example.

Originally an Indian word, its usage now is mainly Canadian. It is the term applied to bog areas throughout our northern coniferous regions.

Muskegs - and bogs - have their beginning as a body of water from which there is little or no drainage. Sphagnum moss, growing around the margins, gradually spreads out over the surface of the water, until, as the seasons pass, it covers the whole pond, forming a foothold for other vegetation. As the sphagnum and other plants grow on the top, old roots decay, forming a vegetable muck on the bottom of the lake or pond, and we have a muskeg. At this stage it is called a floating muskeg, or, if it is a bog, a quaking bog. In either case they become more solid with age, forming deposits of peat.

In Ireland, as in other parts of Europe, peat has long been harvested for fuel. In the United States, peat bogs were once looked on as vast reserves of fuel, should wood and coal ever become scarce. In this atomic age it seems unlikely that much peat will ever be burned on this continent. Here in Alberta, it was probably never thought of as fuel. When our reserves of peat are used it will be for increased agricultural production.

One group who will not be happy to see the swamps and muskegs drained and broken up, are the botanists. This is because of the unique flora to be found in these places, including bog cranberries and several types of orchid as well as many other plants which will grow in no other habitat. It is too soon to begin worrying about this in Alberta though, as at no time in the foreseeable future will all our peat lands be drained.

There is another interesting thing about bogs. They contain quantities of acid - tannic acid mostly - which is a remarkable preservative. In the process of digging peat in European bogs, all manner of interesting things are turned up after being buried for hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years. These include various animals as well as such things as primitive weapons and canoes and bridges used by ancient inhabitants of these areas. There have also been found in this manner, a number of specimens of the people themselves, and many have been better preserved than the mummies of the Egyptians or the ancient Peruvians.

The most remarkable of these finds have been in Denmark, where, in olden times, criminals and some other people were customarily buried by dumping them in a bog or lake.

One of the best preserved of these ancient bodies was Tollund Man, found in a Danish bog of that name in 1950. Although he had been buried about two thousand years ago, his face looked as if he had been merely asleep, and around his neck was a braided leather noose which apparently caused his death. Scientists who examined him theorized that he had not been hanged as a criminal, but as a human sacrifice to pre-Christian gods.

A complete account of this and similar discoveries can be found in the **National Geographic** magazine for March 1954.

Since Alberta muskegs have never been harvested for peat, no one knows what may lie buried in them. Moreover, they will likely retain their

secrets for a long time to come. Tollund Man was buried seven feet deep.  
That is a good six feet below anything a plow is going to turn up.