



Morning trip

With paddles raised and eager for a new experience on local water, Diane Nesson and David Jenkins set

out on a morning's trip down Beaver Brook to Forge Pond.

Canoe trip passes by historic farms

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — A lazy canoe trip down Beaver Brook from Littleton into Forge Pond can bring many untold pleasures.

Most of all, in this hurried world, it should bring unsuspecting peace and tranquility.

Starting a few yards from busy routes 495 and 119, the canoeists soon drift down a limpid stream into an area where high density traffic noises are shut out and the silence is broken only by the slush of the paddles in the water, a call of a bird or two or the splash of a muskrat slipping into the underwater entrance to its home.

Spotted turtles and green frogs slide off lily pads as one rounds a bend, or perhaps the shrill of a pair of wood ducks as they fly up from a hidden cove is heard.

If you're lucky, a green or a great blue heron might be seen at the edge of the stream, eyes alert for a frog or small fish. And only by chance nowadays, a bittern might be spotted.

AT NESTING time, a closeup of the bubbly male marsh wren dancing up and down, as if on a pair of stilts, on a pair of reeds might be observed. You probably wouldn't find its nest, a ball of grasses lined with down and feathers, set low and well hidden. But the wren, if so inclined, will call your attention to a rude nest he has built nearby, solely to distract intruders from entering into the real but hidden nest where she sits on five to ten brown eggs.

As your canoe lazily twists around curves and bends in the narrow stream, you might like to recall in this bicentennial year that you are passing through some of the best farmlands in northern Middlesex County. This is the type of land sought after by the earliest settlers. Plenty of grass and water for their cattle.

Today, the lands are idle, some reverting to their natural state. The buildings, too, are gone or some in a delapidated state.

BEST STARTING point on such a trip is at the narrow bridge on Route 119, one-half mile north of Littleton Common. Prepare yourself for a half-day trip, although the distance to Forge Pond is but three miles as the crow would fly. The meandering stream, however, must take at least twice that distance before its waters enter the eastern end of the pond.

Before you drop your canoe down the steep banking into the brook, stop briefly to take a look at the Proctor Homestead across the other side of the road.

The Littleton Bicentennial Committee has tabbed the ell of the house as being built in 1658 and there is little doubt that this was one of the earliest farms in town. It is handily located on the "Great Road" (Route 119) from Boston through Concord to southern New Hampshire.

According to Mrs. Robert M. Lingham, who is the ninth generation of Proctors living there, the original farm consisted of 108 acres. Now it has 90.

Before you "set sail," a quick look at the new industrial complex being built across from the Proctor farm should convince you

that our natural countryside is fast disappearing. Forty acres was purchased in 1825 by the town for an almshouse, or poor farm, to care for local indigents. Those who could work did so for their board and keep. With modern welfare arriving, the farm was abandoned in 1919 and the few needing aid sent to neighboring poor farms.

Paddle downstream for a few minutes and you will begin to sense the quiet and solitude in this little Beaver Brook valley. On the left at the edge of the woods of the Littleton Sportsman's Club property will be a stone marker, indicating that you have crossed the Littleton line into Westford.

ADJACENT TO it are the farmlands of the Cogswell farm, which once marked the northeastern corner of Nashobah Plantation, set aside in 1654 for the Indians. The plain salt-box homestead on Beaver Brook Road was built about 1750. Across from it in a meadow which leads to the brook is "a very great Rock that Lyeth in the line between said Nashobah & Chelmsford plantations." The latter afterwards became part of Westford.

And now comes the remains of an old bridge, which connected in a neighborly fashion this farm to the Flagg farm across the brook. Located mostly in Westford, its 190 acres was considered one of the finest of the many big dairy farms in town.

Fifty years ago it was operated by Elbert H. Flagg with the help of a typical large and husky farm family. They had a large herd of cattle, complete with a bull, plus a large apple orchard on the long hill (now bisected by Route 495) behind the comfortable farm house. The boys were hard workers and the girls excellent cooks and seamstresses, but one by one they left the uncertainties of farm life.

Across the road was another set of fine buildings setting on 106 acres of rich land. Known as the Calvin L. Howard farm, the last operator was John H. Howard. He was a graduate of "Mass. Aggie" and owned the only herd and pure bred Holsteins in the area, his sister Alice, a graduate of Simmons, was town librarian.

Two roads in Westford bear the names of Howard and Flagg, honoring these old families.

AS BEAVER Brook nears its outlet, it broadens substantially into meadow and marshlands, perfect habitat for water animals and fowl and an area that will be kept in its present wild state for many generations to come. A map of 1730 shows this extended space to bear the name of Great Tadmuck Meadow where wild cranberries and blueberries were harvested by the colonists.

The stream divides another old place, once operated by Melvin Hutchins, a well-known name until a few generations ago. Fifty years ago it was owned by the Parker House people of Boston to supply dairy products to the famous hostelry. These were shipped by rail from the North Littleton station over the old Red Line to West Concord, then to the North Station.