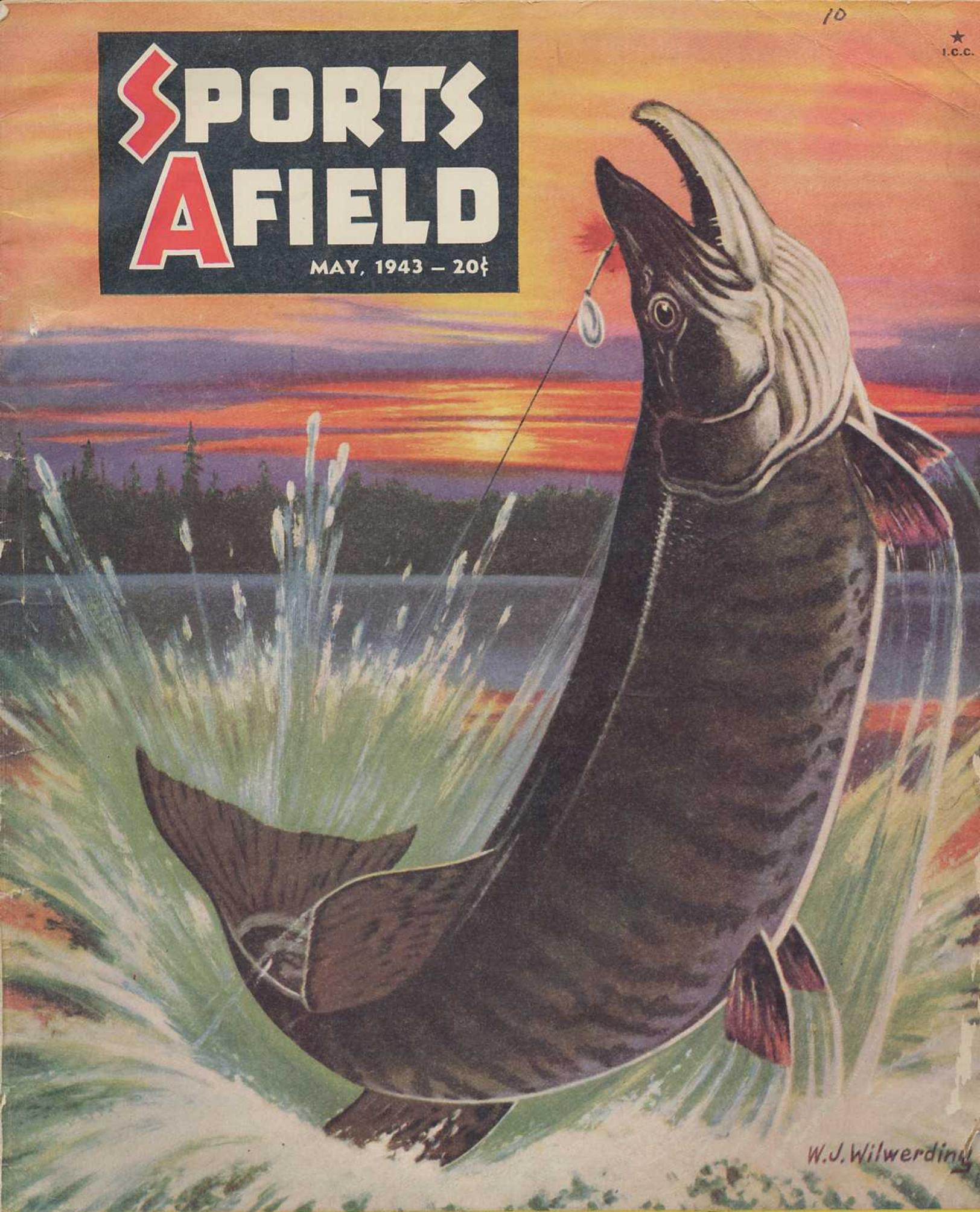


SPORTS
A FIELD

MAY, 1943 - 20¢

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★
I.C.C.



W.J. Wilwerding

NORTHERNMOST MUSKIES IN THE U.S.A.

come home like the other dogs when they follow you out with the team."

"That's a good name for him," I said. "From now on his name is Sport."

In July he proved it beyond doubt. At sun-up during a spell of hot drought I hitched the bay team to cut dry-bearded barley on the north forty. Before the third round with the binder I heard the young dog baying in the tawny grain. All morning he tongued without pause. When I returned after lunch with my gallon jug refilled from the cold well, he was still at it. Whatever kind of trail, he wouldn't pause a minute for rest or drink. As the circling binder closed down on the center core of yet standing grain, the trail left the grain and soon Sport was barking holed in a fence row.

REINING the team in the shade of a big butternut, I went over to the hole where Sport had already scooped out a washtubful of fresh dirt. Soon an old shovel was in my hands and dirt came out by the scoop. Five feet of digging ended at a big niggerhead boulder. With an oak top rail from the fence I pried the big niggerhead loose and in a flash Sport was underneath amidst a garble of excited squealing and growling. Out he backed, furiously shaking a big ball of fur.

It was the huge weasel which had been preying on our hens for weeks. From then on Sport's prestige was unquestioned among the family and even father indirectly retracted his harsh initial prediction. "That Sport pup has shore got grit," father told a neighbor at the mill one morning.

One fall day we were hurrying to get the odd jobs done before hunting season began and had gone down to the marsh pasture to fix fence. It was a joint fence and the neighbor lads were there to help. Sport, of course, was there with me.

"Did you say that dog of yours would run anything you set him onto?" called one of the neighbors.

It was an unknown challenge for I

knew the lad had a track for us. The reputation of myself and my dog depended upon it. "Where?" I asked severely, and when the lad pointed with his axe handle, I waved my hand along the trail with a "Hunt 'em up, Sport!"

AWAY the little hound went, baying through the tall grass and bog. The trail led to a drainage ditch and then along it for 30 feet before the dog bayed in the shallow running water under an overhanging bank. I leaned over to peer under, cautiously expecting a mink or coon. Back in the shadows was . . . a big snapping turtle.

"Want to sell that dog?" asked the neighbor, never expecting an answer. Next spring Sport proved his versatility by adapting from reptiles to fish. He successfully tried to catch suckers where he saw me spearing them in a shallow creek. His head often went clear under water as he attempted to clamp onto his slippery quarry.

Trailing rabbits was, of course, his naturally intended business. He knew the word "rabbit" as well as he knew his own name. The mention of it would perk his ears and turn his head.

His sure nose would ferret out the exact tracks of his quarry regardless of double-backs or fancy "J's." I know of one time when two fresher trails crossing the original scent could not induce him to swerve from the scent he started on. So faultless was his nose that in zero weather I have seen him take a 10-minute old track across blowing snow—and a rabbit in cold snow leaves about as much scent as a passing cirrus cloud.

The winter Sport was five I went hunting with a friend who had the "best rabbit dog in the state." That winter the big buck rabbits were lean and wary from fall hunting and ran wide. The other dog being faster took the lead and the swift pace forced the

rabbit to circle far wider than ordinary. Soon the hounds were beyond earshot.

"Better go hunt your dog up," my friend told me when his own dog came back winded.

"Wait a while," I declined. "I've never gone after Sport yet."

Five minutes later Sport's distant bugle toned into hearing and shortly afterwards the rabbit fell to gun.

Sport hunted cornfields as methodically as a trooper. Head high to the windward he systematically worked up and down between the rows at right angles to the wind. When a shock contained rabbit fur he would stop, sniff, and bugle until a gunner came to shake it out. He never wormed into the shock, which would thus allow the rabbit to slip unseen out the other side. Brush piles he worked the same way.

Other dogs hunting with him, Sport simply ignored. Hunters who were not his intimates he treated the same. Sport would start to sprint at the report of a (Continued on page 52)

Trailing rabbits was of course his naturally intended business.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY WALTER J. WILWERDING



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FIGHTING

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"Shouldn't there be some red in this bug?" I inquired weakly.

"There was," he said, winking at me, "but I clipped it off!"

Completely bewildered, I gave up and tied on Fred's bug. With a little practice I was able to whip it out passably. I had to admit that it hit the water with a juicy plop and that in answer to the rod twitches, its hair legs throbbed realistically.

"Work Katie with a long hop, a pause and two short hops." Fred directed.

Katie lived up to her reputation. I worked her according to Fred's formula but for a spell I got no action, then just as she paused between hops, a sassy bass gave her an enthusiastic wallop. Somehow I missed him. Later I had a sizzling session with a dogged largemouth only to lose him when the leader fouled on a lily stem.

THAT week I did some more shopping. This time I was cautious and limited myself to a couple of Katies. I was glad I did. When the Grippetts Association went bass-bugging next, I felt sure someone would pop up with a new theory; a different favorite. I wasn't disappointed. This time I drew Doc Leonard. It didn't take long to figure out his weakness. It was nice! Like the Piper of Hamlin, he had big mice and little mice, black, gray and white ones. He was sold on them, caught fish on them and steadfastly avowed they were the answer to a bass bugger's prayer. Fact is, he wouldn't use anything else! I'll have to give him credit for one thing though. He hadn't named any of his favorites "Massacring Mickey."

By that time I wasn't surprised at anything. I expected Walt and Paul would have entirely different ideas too. And they did. Paul wasn't content without a dragonfly model while Walt swore by the popping bubbling type. "Gargling Ger-tie" he called her. Yes, you guessed it. They each stoutly maintained, "I wouldn't use anything else."

Now, within reason, different ideas are good. They're a healthy sign and show that the boys are thinking. But here everybody was completely sold on a different type of bug, that's dangerous. It's apt to split the Grippetts Association wide open. There must be some superior lure, I decided, a bug to end all arguments. In the interest of peace and harmony, I determined to find such a bug.

It was no easy task. In the process I accumulated a motley collection but none of them filled the bill. With bankruptcy staring me in the face, I stopped buying bugs and learned to make them. Compared to tying dry flies, they're duck soup. Cork or balsa wood, waterproof cement, feathers, bucktail and a vivid imagination are all you need. I produced dozens, most of them monstrosities, before I stumbled on the ideal combination.

The first week it worked like a charm, taking a nice bass and crappies galore. I didn't say anything. I wanted to test it thoroughly. On the next occasion, they riddled it. The third time when I scored with the best bass of the day, I was convinced I really had the answer.

It's time to spring my discovery, I

thought, this'll sure weld the Grippetts Association together as never before.

"Listen fellas," I said earnestly, "Here's a bug I've developed. It's a real killer: a natural!"

Proudly I displayed my brain-child. It was of the crippled minnow type with a bullet shaped head of balsa followed by a cluster of hackles and a streamer tail hiding a long-shanked number 2 hook. The head was slate gray; the hackle and tail, brilliant orange.

"It's sure-fire," I said, "I've never seen anything like it."

"Neither have I," agreed Jack heartily, "What an eyesore!"

I was stunned, dumbfounded. Before I could recover, the others chimed in. I won't dwell on what they said. Take my word for it, it was plenty. I tried to reason with them. It was no go. The whole stubborn pack gave me the needle all the way home.

For a couple days I couldn't figure why the gang should be so all-fired bull-headed about their bass bugs; they're fairly reasonable about most things. Then it came to me. They just hadn't seen the light, that's all. So I'm bidding my time, waiting for our next trip. When I hit the jack-pot again, they're bound to wise up. Can I be sure of hitting the jack-pot? Brother, that's a pushover. With a killer like "Galloping Grippo" I can't miss. She's the best little bug in the business, Mister. Me, I wouldn't use anything else!

Old Sport

(Continued from page 21)

stranger's gun in order to reach the rabbit before the luckless gunner and drag it to my feet.

Sport was ever at my heels. If I slipped away without him he would come bugling along my footsteps, often through the main street—to the amusement of townsmen—and once or twice to embarrass his church-going master. Once when a neighbor drove me four miles out into the country in his model T, my wife let Sport out 10 minutes after my departure and the persistent little hound made a belated arrival at the auction sale I was attending.

Several years later I was driving in from the country with my own model T. Sport now rode the seat beside me, between myself and an ex-neighbor. No longer did he run alongside as in buggy days. And even had I been driving a buggy I think Sport would have been riding, for his tan muzzle had a few hairs of gray sedateness slated through it by passing years, and added years weighted his steps.

Ahead a big snake slid into the road. It was so long it lay across both wheel ruts. I speeded the car and felt the jar when the wheels jumped the heavy body. When we stopped to look, the snake had vanished through a fence row into a grain field.

"See if Sport'll take the trail," urged my fellow passenger, the ex-neighbor. "See if he's still got the stuff he used to have. Remember the snapper down in the marsh?"

I hesitated. It was a pretty big order for not a very big dog. Then I pointed to the



"I wish the Sergeant wouldn't keep saying
'Hip, hip, hip, all the time!'"

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track. "Hunt 'em up, Sport," I said.

The staunch little hound took a whiff, gave a throaty growl, and bristled his spine. He looked back over his shoulder as much as to say, "Do you really want me to?"

I wouldn't have insisted. But when he saw I wasn't going to call him back, he gave a determined bellow that shook his slight canine frame with its intensity. Then he plunged after the monster snake.

His silver bugle echoed out of the yellow grain field. As I stood listening I was suddenly back on the north forty on the afternoon I first saw the stuff my pup had in him. Young Sport after a weasel or old Sport after a snake, that dog still had stuff in him and I knew he would take any trail on God's earth for me as long as he could walk and smell.

Grabbing a post shovel from the car I headed toward the baying sound. Soon I saw the grain stalks wave above the dog and about 30 feet ahead they rippled over the huge snake. In a desperate sprint of hatred I headed off the slithery giant and brought the shovel blade down to strike that thick reptilian head with the full force of my 200 pound frame.

The snake writhed in dreadful contortions. A fraction of an inch at a time he slipped from under the shovel. Sport was now bellowing fiercely and attacking the thick reptile. It was all I could do by kicking and shouting to keep the valiant little dog from tangling in the lashing coils. Minutes later ex-neighbor Charlie steamed up with a jack handle and flailed the heavy head to a pulp.

In a moment it was all over. A decade of memory was erased back to the heat of that July day when I stood, shovel in hand as now, looking down on Sport and his first triumph, the dead weasel. So vivid, yet so long ago; almost the lifetime of a dog ago. Time measured by the life of a friend is short. I felt very old. It was several hours before I had swallowed the lump in my throat.

Another hunting season went by and late winter was in spring transition. One night after Sport had spent a day self-hunting, he failed to come back to the house.

"Perhaps he's digging out a den or stopped at the neighbors," my wife comforted me. But I worried about the short haired dog out in the frozen night.

Next day dawned and set without a Sport. Each morning thereafter I was outside before I was dressed, futilely looking for fresh dog tracks in the snow that drifted the steps nightly. A week, eight days, and many more passed and I had all but despaired his return. The snow thawed until the roads were soft with mud under slushy water, then a norther' whipped in and froze all to crust and ragged ice.

It was early the morning after the norther', before the cold dawn crept across the refrozen snow of ruffian March. I wakened suddenly and sat up in bed. Between wind gusts that buffeted the windows and shook the shutters I heard a faint scratching. Jumping out of bed I lighted an oil lamp and in my bare feet hurried down the cold steps and through

the silent kitchen. My hand shook a little as I pulled the door latch, half expecting to find myself betrayed by phantom hunch that lurks in empty memory.

But there, shivering in the flickered lamp light, too exhausted to rise and greet me, was Sport!

He was plastered from muzzle to tail with gobs of frozen mud. His gaunt ribs stood out like wishbones under his ice scaled coat. The sides of his legs were crimson raw and caked with frozen blood where they had been rasped by a heavy ice-caked chain as it dragged from his collar for many freezing miles. Weeks of tugging were shown on his collar-worn neck. He had at last jerked the staple and come straight home without pause.

From that moment on no stranger could get within 10 feet of him. But destiny coiled relentlessly for a second strike and I was yet to know that Sport and I would never work another hunting season's woods together.

* * *

Over 30 years have gone racing by since my last hunt with Sport, taking with them the spring from my step and the keenness from my eye.

Sport . . . Old Sport. Yet it is I who have grown older. I remember him not as he left in early autumn but as a sweet smelling pup on an April evening of a long gone spring. Together we shared our prime, the early summer of life when we were grown strong from the risen sap of rural springtime, from a youth of open skies and rainwashed sod.

Somehow his gentle face is made clear-

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You may expect Delta's war production experience to reflect itself tremendously in improved lantern and bicycle styles when victory is won.



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er in my memory by the passing time. Broad forehead, patient, mellow eyes, tan muzzle that grayed slightly from many seasons running to gun. I see him clearly as of when he and I were young and jaunty and he would lie with his square-trimmed muzzle on the day's bag of game, as he always lay, in the back of the buggy box, and dozed to deep and fitful slumber while the plodding horses strained their harness toward oats and a warm home stall.

His is a memory that grows more real with time, and if I close my eyes when the fire is warm in winter and lean back in my big old rocker, I can rumple those velvety ears again, and I am afraid to look.

I wait, and by and by, when I blink the moistness from my eyes, Old Sport has gone; and then I sigh and lift my worn Ithaca from across the rocker arms and place it back on half cock in the corner behind the door to the stairway landing.

Some day I'll rumple the velvet of those ears once more, and when I open my eyes his knowing hazel ones will look in mine again; and then I'll know that he and I are together in some far-off land beyond the trespass of some soulless hand that one day in early fall when the leaves were red-and-yellow turning and my gun was oiled and waiting, fed poison to the most kind and gentle friend a plain man ever had. . . .

Vermilion River Grab Bag

(Continued from page 29)

cast again. On the third try I had a strike and set the hook into a fish which seemed to bid fair to equal Mac's. When it was landed and weighed it fell almost a pound short of the first walleye, but I was far from dissatisfied. Without moving from our stand we garnered five wall-eyes there, of which Mac's first turned out to be the largest, although they were all good fish.

When the action slowed down we paddled farther upstream and came into a stretch where the south bank of the Vermilion recessed into a weed-filled bay. We headed over to it and Mac steadied the canoe while I cast to the edge of the lily pads. If there were big pike in the river this was a likely place for them. I had reeled in almost to the canoe when something devastating hit the lure. Before casting I had put on the extra reel with heavy line, but when I brought the rod tip up with a vigorous jerk this fish kept right on going, and going the wrong way, heading under the canoe. As he went under I tried to give him line, but in the excitement a loop of it slipped over the reel handle and jammed, and the rod tip curved down under water against the canoe. It would have been a lost fish and in all probability a broken rod if Mac hadn't acted quickly. He swung the canoe around so that I was again on the same side as the fish and I managed to slip the loop off the reel handle.

The fish went right ahead in the same direction, taking out a dangerous amount of line. I was exerting steady pressure

with the rod all the time and finally, just as the axle of the reel began to show, the heavyweight slowed up. He rose to the top and swirled his long length around on the surface, heading over at right angles to his original course. He was a real fish, an overgrown, piratical, old pike. He played me for 15 minutes before his wind commenced to weaken and I could begin to play him. For a while when he went back into the weeds I thought he would surely get loose or break the tackle as he swept around in a long arc and a mass of weed stalks pressed against the concave side of the curving line. But everything held and finally Mac was able to paddle in to shore. I reeled in the last few yards of line without resistance, stepped out into the marsh grass and drew the exhausted fish onto firm ground.

We looked at the big fellow respectfully, and then I reached for my pipe and sat down to recover. "He'll go 20 pounds easily," Mac averred. He got the scales out of the canoe and proved his estimate. The big pike weighed 21 pounds.

"Did I hear you say something about staying in bed this morning?" Mac asked. "This fish is worth a couple of sleepless nights in a row. We'll take it along to show the boys. It'll make their eyes pop."

THE inner man had begun to make his presence felt so we paddled over to a jack pine grove on a high bank and built a cook-fire. Sizzling in the fry pan, the fillets from one of the wall-eyes gave off a fragrance better than incense. The firm white meat was made for a gourmet, and the morning's business had given us the appetite to do it complete justice.

Fortified by the meal we set off again up river, paddling along easily until we got to a low fall of water beneath which a deep pool seemed to give notice of a shoal of walleyes. Mac got out on the rocks below the cascade and cast into the back-eddies. A yank on his line and an arching rod and Mac was onto a fish inside of two minutes. Landed, it proved to be, sure enough, a husky walleye. I did my fishing from a ledge of rock beneath a wall of granite which dropped sheer into the river from the forest high above. The dark green spires of the spruces lining the lofty banks, the tumbling white water of the falls and the two of us below, playing the fighting fish in the waters of the pool, whose surging current reflected the blue of the sky between bubbling rafts of foam—it was a place and a time to remember. The walleyes never stopped striking and we threw back more than we kept.

It was hard to break away from the pool, but we got moving at last and, paddling on about a mile upstream, came out into a broadening of the river where another quiet bay tempted Mac to try for pike again. While he changed to a weedless hook I headed the canoe through the weeds to a patch of open water farther in. Mac cast across this space to the edge of the weeds on the other side, dropping his lure at intervals of a dozen feet as he worked over from left to right. After a few minutes his methodical pattern brought startling results. There was a fierce strike on his lure and he hollered,