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Title: Lost Pond

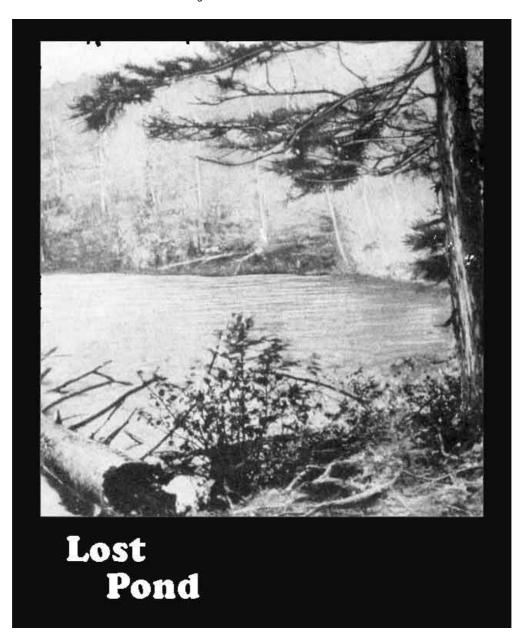
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# **LOST POND**

By HENRY ABBOTT

> NEW YORK 1915

## LOST POND

"Lost Pond" was a tradition, a myth. It had never been seen by any living person. Two dead men, it was alleged, had visited it on several occasions while they were yet living.

Wonderful tales were told about that pond for which many persons had hunted, but which no one of the present generation had ever been able to find.

Every guide in Long Lake township talked about Lost Pond and repeated the legends, which through the passing years had probably lost none of their original enticements. Many of these guides had even got the stories at first hand from Captain Parker and Mitchel Sabattis.

Captain Parker, a famous hunter and trapper, had died about ten years ago at the good old age of ninety-four years. Mitchel Sabattis, an Indian, who had married a white woman and had brought up a family of husky half-breeds, was the first settler in the Long Lake country. He was a highly respected citizen, and a mountain and a United States post office had been named after him. Sabattis lived to be a very old man. Many believed him to be past a hundred years when he died, but the family Bible was not available to prove the date of his birth.

Now, all of the natives knew that Lost Pond was somewhere on Seward Mountain, and they apparently believed that the best fishing place in the State was right in that pond. "By Mighty! that pond was just alive with speckled trout — big ones. You could catch all you wanted there in a few minutes. The water fairly boiled with the jumping fish. Now, if we could only find it," etc.

To the layman it would seem, possibly a difficult, but certainly not an impossible task, to find that lost pond; and if it was such a remarkable fishing and hunting place as tradition painted it, why had not some one combed out that mountain and recovered the pond?

Seward Mountain, seen from a distance of ten or fifteen miles, looked like a hogback ridge. A nearer view disclosed the fact that it included several peaks and ridges, and really covered a lot of ground. The highest peak was perhaps not more than twenty-five hundred feet above the lake. But if one could draw a straight line through its base eastward from Raquette River to the foot of Sawtooth Mountain, the line would measure about twelve miles. If a similar line could be stretched northward from Cold River to Ampersand Lake, it would be about eight miles.

One cannot, however, always go through a mountain. It is usually necessary to go over or around it; and following up and down the ridges, through ravines and around swamps and other obstacles, the travel distances above named might be doubled, and then some. The mountain was covered with forest, and there was not a human habitation on it or within many miles of it in any direction. Some lumbering had been done along Cold River and several of its tributary creeks, but the higher portions were untouched and the heavy spruce and hemlock cover looked black from up the lake.

Giving proper consideration to these facts and knowing the Long Lake guides as well as I did, I could readily understand that it might be less strenuous to tell the marvelous stories about Lost Pond than it would be to go up in the Seward country and search out the pond. Then there was always the possibility that too much investigation might spoil a good story.

Ever since childhood I have possessed that very human characteristic of wanting that which is forbidden, longing for what is just out of reach; and when a thing is said to be impossible, I at once have an intense desire to undertake to do that thing.

Now, there was good trout fishing in many of the ponds and streams tributary to Long Lake which were comparatively easy to reach; but this lost pond which I had heard so much about was so "impossible to find" that I was possessed with an irresistible longing to find it, to see what it looked like, to fish in it. So I discussed the matter with Bige, who, with some show of reluctance, agreed to assist.

Bige and I had made many camping excursions up in the Cold River country; had followed its crooked course about fifteen miles upstream; had explored and fished a number of its tributary creeks on the Santanoni side.

Cold River carries the drainage from Santanoni Mountain and foothills on its left bank and on its right receives the flow from the eastern and southern slopes of Mount Seward.

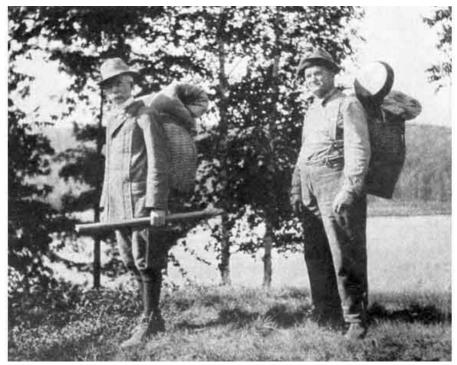
One day in July, when Bige and I were up on Santanoni, from an opening through the trees above a ledge of rocks we looked cross the valley to Seward, studied the contour of its basins, peaks and ridges, and agreed upon the spot where Lost Pond ought to be found. We also determined upon a route which we should take to reach it, and appointed the following Tuesday as the time when we should make our start.

Monday night we packed our duffel so that we might make an early start in the morning. We took our small light-weight tent, blankets, aluminum cooking utensils, fishing rods, and food for three days. If we should get some fish the grub might be stretched across four days.

We expected some strenuous tramping, so determined to "go light" and omitted many things we usually take on our trips; but when we "weighed in," Bige's pack tipped the scales at fifty-two pounds and mine weighed thirty-seven. I am not selfish in such matters, so gave Bige all the heavy things.

With our two packs stowed amidships, Bige in the bow with a pair of oars and I in the stern wielding a paddle, we got away in the morning just as the sun broke over East Inlet Mountain and gilded the summit of Sugar Loaf on the opposite side of the lake.

The early birds greeted us with a chorus of song, seeming to wish us luck as we made good speed down the lake, passing Owl's-Head Mountain on the left, Sabattis on the right, and farther down Blueberry, Kempshall and Buck mountains, while Santanoni and Seward loomed up in the distance.



**Starting for Lost Pond** 

It is about fourteen miles to the foot of the lake and five miles farther down the outlet, through "Lost Channel," to the place on Calkins Creek where we left our boat in the shade of some balsams.

We now shouldered our packs and started on the strenuous and interesting part of our undertaking. Following up Calkins Valley about six miles, we passed, at intervals of two or three miles, three abandoned lumber camps, the log buildings being in all stages of decay from long disuse, many of them with roofs caved in and overgrown with weeds and bushes.

A few rods beyond the last log camp, while pushing my way through the high grass and bushes in a log-road, I almost stepped upon a spotted fawn which jumped up under my nose and turned to stare at me with his solemn-looking eyes which seemed much too large for his head. The little fellow was apparently about a month old, and was as frisky and awkward in his movements as a young puppy. He had no doubt been hidden there by his mother, who had warned him to lie low till she returned, to look out for enemies, and especially to beware of any animal that walks upon two legs. He was now uncertainly wavering between fear and curiosity, and with his head turned and his eyes fastened upon me, he stumbled clumsily away through the high grass directly into Bige's outstretched arms.

Here was now a situation not down on our programme. We had captured a live deer. We were not intending to start a menagerie or to stock a zoological park. We were out in search of a pond that had been mislaid on a mountain. We could not very well carry the deer up the mountain while pursuing our explorations, and we had no idea that he could be made to walk in our company so far as we should have to go. Moreover, neither Bige nor I was properly equipped to feed an infant; so we put him back in his grassy bed, patted him on the head, advised him to stay there until his mother returned, and proceeded upon our journey.

Half a mile farther on we left the log-road, turned sharply to the right, and climbed up the steep slope of one of the foothills. Passing the ridge, we now came into a section of the forest which had never been visited by the lumberman's axe. The tall spruces and hemlocks interspersed here and there with yellow birch and maples cast deep shadows, and the forest floor

was as free from underbrush as if cleared by a landscape gardener. This was what poets and nature writers call the "primeval forest." Also, traveling with a pack on one's back was much easier here than in the lumbered country.

A spring of cold clear water with a rivulet flowing from it down the slope reminded us that it was lunch time, and that this was an ideal place to eat it.

After lunch we took up our burdens and continued our journey eastward until about two o'clock, when we had crossed the fourth high ridge from Calkins Valley and dropped into a deep basin. This was the valley Bige and I had located when we surveyed the country from over on Santanoni. This was the place where Lost Pond ought to be; but there was no pond here, lost or otherwise.

We sat down to talk it over. Bige said "Le's go home." But I outvoted him and we continued on, taking a northeasterly course, which we followed for what seemed about five miles. When we had passed through a valley between two high peaks we made a sort of ox-bow curve around the one to the right and there laid a straight course with our compass back in the direction from which we had come but a mile or more south of our outward route.

During the afternoon we encountered about all the different kinds of forest travel that it is possible to find anywhere. There were steep rocky ledges which had to be climbed; cedar swamps which must be negotiated; several acres of burnt ground now covered with a dense growth of poplar and wild-cherry saplings; blackberry bushes as high as one's head — oceans of them; balsam groves with deep beds of moss for a carpet; "witch-hopple," which tangles one's feet and gives one a hard fall at unexpected moments; there were steep climbs up and steep slides down; and there were delightful stretches of "big woods," but always the charm of variety.

We were too intent upon our quest and made too much noise in our travels to see much wild life; the animals always had ample notice of our approach and always had convenient hiding places.

About six o'clock we came upon a noisy brook which was tumbling down out of the mountains through a steep valley. The bed of the stream was filled with boulders, and there were numerous short falls and rapids. We heard the noise of the brook long before it came into view, and Bige promptly named it "Roaring Brook."

There was something suggestive about this brook, and we sat down and discussed it while resting. It was a dry season; there had been no rain for two weeks. Surface drainage could not account for all the water coming down that brook. It might come from one of the swamps we had passed through earlier in the day. It would have to be a very large spring or a lot of small ones to keep up the flow of that volume of water. It might be the outlet of a pond. We decided to follow upstream and settle the question of its source.

About a half-mile up, we came upon a level stretch of quiet water, but there was a noise of splashing in the stream ahead. Cautiously we crept forward and peering through a clump of alders saw an old black bear and one cub, wallowing in the shallow water. Neither Bige nor I had lost any bear, old or young, and we had no intention of attacking with our only weapon — a fishing rod — an old mother bear in the presence of her child; so without a conference, but with a common thought, we carefully backed up a few rods and hid behind a clump of bushes through the branches of which we watched the performance.

We were reminded of an old sow and one pig wallowing in a mud hole. The old bear lay down in the water and rolled over in it while the cub climbed upon his mother and took headers off of her back. They were evidently taking their "weekly tub" and were enjoying it immensely.

After some ten minutes of this moving-picture act, the old bear climbed out on the bank and shook herself; the cub followed, stood on his head and rolled and tumbled about on the grassy bank until his mother gave a commanding grunt and started off into the woods with the cub following at her heels.



The Tent at the Source of Roaring Brook

About twenty rods farther upstream we arrived at the source of Roaring Brook. It was a beautiful sheet of glassy water set in a bowl in the hills, with the bowl tilted on one side until the water spilled over its lower edge into the brook. The pond was about two hundred yards in diameter. Three deer were standing in the shallow water on the opposite edge. The water was clear and cold as ice. We both dropped our packs and shouted in chorus, "This is where we sleep!"

It was getting late, so we hurried our preparations for making camp. I undertook to set up the tent while Bige collected a quantity of dry moss for a bed. This he peeled off of a ledge of rocks on the hillside in great slabs that were three to four inches thick. Over a double layer of moss he placed balsam boughs, sticking the butt end of each bough through the moss in a sloping position and making one course of boughs overlap another like shingles on a roof. The result was most satisfactory. Bige is a wonder in making a camp bed.

While hunting material for tent pegs and poles I noticed a curious rectangular-shaped hillock of green moss a short distance from the shore of the pond. Kicking the mossy covering away, there was disclosed the rotted logs of what had many years ago been a camp about twelve feet square. A dozen yards away was a moss-covered log which seemed flattened on top and tapered at both ends. Scraping away the moss and rolling over the log, I found a "dugout canoe." This had been hewn from a pine log about thirty inches in diameter and sixteen feet long. The canoe was in fair condition, but heavy and somewhat decayed at one end. Having finished our tent and bed, we rolled the canoe down to the water's edge and undertook to put it in order for use. To insure its floating with two heavy men aboard, we cut and trimmed out two dry spruces about six inches in diameter and lashed them, one on either side of the canoe and against two smaller crosspieces placed above to keep the stringpieces near the gunwale. The crosspieces also served the purpose of seats. For many years I have carried in the bottom of the pack, when on camping trips, a coil of small rope or heavy twine and have often found it very useful. It fitted in perfectly on this occasion.

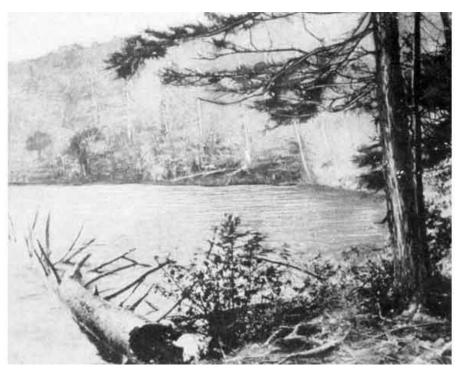
The dusk of evening was now upon us, so we hurriedly pushed our pirogue-raft into the water and climbed aboard. Bige poled our craft out toward the center of the pond while I strung up my rod and put a white miller on the end of the leader. We had heard splashing and saw ripples on the smooth surface of the water before leaving shore, indicating the presence of fish of some kind. At the first cast I hooked one, and after a short struggle Bige brought him aboard with the landing net.

Then followed twenty minutes of the swiftest and most exciting bit of trout fishing that I have ever experienced. I could have hooked three or four at a time if I had put on that many flies, but one kept me busy. With every cast two or three trout would make a rush for the fly, and they would fight one another for possession of it. Even after one fish was securely hooked and was struggling for his freedom others would appear and try to take the fly away from him. Bige said "the trout climbed out, stood on their tails and reached for the fly long before it hit the water."

It was now quite dark and we were losing more fish than we saved. It was impossible to see the landing net, and we often knocked them off the hook when trying to scoop them up. We had enough fish for supper, so we decided to leave some of them for morning, went ashore, built a fire, cooked our trout and bacon, and ate supper by the light of the fire.

I have fished for trout for twenty years, more or less, and during that time caught a great many under varying conditions. It has been my fortune to catch much larger trout than any we saw in this pond, though none of these would weigh less than a pound each. But never before nor since have I met any more sporty fish than these. They were, moreover, the most beautifully marked of any trout of any variety I have ever seen. They lived in ice-water in midsummer. They were muscular and like chain lightning in action.

With every cast I experienced all the excitement, all the thrills, and went through all the strategic maneuvers that a nature writer would describe in twelve hundred words.



**Lost Pond** 

The pond had no visible inlet, but a considerable quantity of water was flowing out of it every minute. This must be replenished through some subterraneous passage, and the water doubtless filtered through an enormous field of ice that had been buried under millions of tons of rock and earth for countless ages — since the glacial period, when the mountain slid down from the arctic regions into its present position.

Bige and I discussed it at supper, and that is how we accounted for the peculiar conditions. We were also agreed that there could now be no doubt that this was the pond of Sabattis-Parker fame. The stories fitted well with the facts. Some one surely had been here before and a long time ago, else how could the ruins of the camp and the moss-covered dugout be satisfactorily explained?

That night Bige and I went to bed with clear consciences. We were at peace with all the world. We had put in a long and strenuous day, had met and overcome many obstacles and difficulties, and had accomplished something worth while. We had recovered and put back on the map a pond which had been lost for more than thirty years. Incidentally, we had had a lot of fun in doing it. A pair of hermit thrushes holding converse with each other across the valley and high over our heads sang us to sleep.

We were awake in the morning before the sun and in our skiff out on the pond casting with great care our most alluring flies. We whipped every square inch of that pond. We spent two hours and a half on it, used every fly in the book, and never got a rise. We never even saw a trout big or little. We could have seen them had they been there. It was not more than three feet to the bottom in the deepest part, and we could see the bottom and everything, animate and inanimate, in the water. The shoals of trout we had seen and heard — some of which we had eaten — the night before, had disappeared utterly and completely. Bige said "They have gone back into the ice-chest."

The conviction finally forced itself through our dense intellectual domes that the trout in Lost Pond gave attention to business only at night. This was a night fish pond. We should have to wait until night for another bite.

Slowly and sadly we poled back to camp. The sight that met us on landing, to employ a stock literary expression, "would have made the stoutest heart quail." It would surely be stating it mildly to say that we were amazed.

The pack-basket which contained our provisions we had left standing just inside the tent flap. It had been dragged out and was now lying on its side several feet from the tent, while remnants of its contents were scattered over the forest carpet in every direction. A bag of flour, intended for flapjacks, had been ripped open and the flour thoroughly mixed with leaves and dirt, ditto the sugar and coffee. Butter was nicely spread over a ground area about six feet square, while a half-eaten loaf of bread was floating in the water. Potatoes and onions had been chewed up and "the

chawins" spat out on the ground. To add a touch of the artistic to the picture of destruction, the yolks of a dozen eggs gave a dab of yellow to the southeast corner. Porcupine quills were sticking in the splints of the basket and were liberally sprinkled over the ground, while disturbance in the leaves marked the path where the slab of bacon had been dragged away.



The Robbers

We followed the bacon trail several rods back into the woods to the foot of a small birch tree, where there remained some scraps of bacon rind. Calmly sitting on a limb of this tree, about thirty feet up, we saw the two burglarious villains licking the bacon grease off of their paws and faces while emitting occasional grunts of pleasure and satisfaction.

We threw sticks and stones at the porcupines and made several hits, knocking out some quills, but could not bring them down; so I climbed another tree to about their level and shot them — with a camera. Their picture now adorns the rogues' gallery, where it is "held up to the scorn and contempt" of all campers, and especially as a warning to all "tenderfeet."

Returning to camp, we looked carefully over the wreckage for something fit to eat. We found "the makings" of one pot of coffee left in the torn bag, two unbroken eggs, and a pint bottle of maple syrup.

Bige filled the coffeepot, hung it on a spring pole which rested across a log with the rear end sticking in the ground, laid the two eggs on the log where the spring pole crossed it, and started a fire, while I went for an armful of dry firewood. Returning, I clumsily stumbled over the ground end of the spring pole, upset the coffee in the fire and knocked the eggs off the log. For a moment I watched the contents of those two eggshells trickle down through the leaves and moss, then I looked up at Bige.

I am sure he had profanity in his heart; I saw it in his eye. What Bige really said was "Sufferin' bald-headed Mike!"

We sat on the log several minutes before any attempt at conversation was made; then Bige said, "Le's go home." The next remark logically was, "Which way?"

It would have been difficult and impracticable to return the way we had come. We knew that, generally speaking, home lay in a southwesterly direction from where we sat, but we were uncertain whether Lost Pond was on the northern or the southern side of the high points in the Seward group of mountains.

However, one of the first principles of woodcraft which I learned while still in the primary class is that "water always runs downhill," and that if one follows a brook down far enough it will

surely lead to a larger stream, and it in turn will finally take one to a lake. It may be a long and circuitous route, but when one has lost his bearings in the forest, that is generally a safe rule to follow. Also in a lumbered country, where water is the only means of transportation for logs, all log-roads run downhill and ultimately lead to river or lake. We felt reasonably certain, therefore, that if we followed down Roaring Brook and should cross a log-road at any point, it would be quite safe to leave the brook and continue down the log-road. Moreover, at this place the brook was flowing south and its waters must ultimately reach Long Lake or its outlet.

So we packed up and started downstream. It was not a cheerful procession, but our packs were lighter than when we came up the hills the day before.

In due time and without incident worthy of mention, we reached Cold River and later Calkins Creek, found our boat, and late in the afternoon were pushing slowly up the lake when we were met by a violent thunder shower. Before we could reach an island, turn over our boat and crawl under it, we were soaked to the skin.

Half an hour later, when the storm had passed, we went around to the other side of the island where there was an unoccupied open camp. Here we built a big fire and spent two hours drying our clothes.

We ate our breakfast in the kitchen of Deerland Lodge at about nine o'clock that night. It was a good breakfast.

#### END OF LOST POND

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