

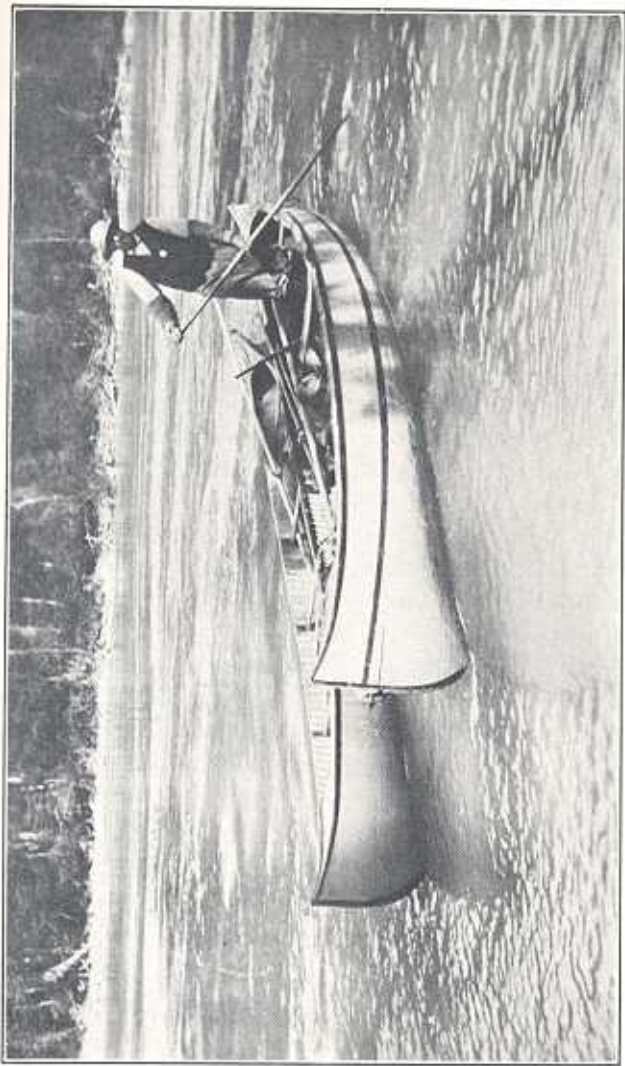
CHAPTER XIII

FROM KINBASKET LAKE TO THE FERRY

On August 5, about midday, I noticed two Peterborough canoes, each with an occupant, coming down the lake from the south. As they came nearer I saw that the man in the larger canoe was Emond, and that Casey Knudson was in the smaller. With Emond were two Airedale dogs. When they landed I learned that the larger canoe was one that Emond had had for some time, and that she was twenty feet long; the shorter one being an eighteen-footer, much narrower than the other, and had just been purchased.

Emond had brought Knudson with him to fight a fire that lightning had started in the timber, in the Selkirks, a short distance above the head of Kinbasket Lake. A like fire had broken out on the left hand side of the River just below the lake, but Emond already had that under control; Knudson did not remain but shortly returned, up the lake, in one of the canoes.

The next day Emond suggested that I go with him, down the trail, to what is called "The Ferry," twenty-five miles below the Kinbasket cabin. He had arranged to meet there Mr. Melrose, his superior officer, who was making the rounds and coming down Canoe River with canoemen. As this would give me an opportunity to acquaint myself, somewhat, with Kinbasket Rapids—which begin at the



ALPHONSE EMDND AND HIS CANOES

lower end of the lake—I agreed to the suggestion. Making up two twenty-five pound packs of bedding and food, accompanied by Emond's dog Fannie and her year old pup Jack, we started at noon and following a rather rough and brushy trail; after walking a distance of nine miles in three hours, we reached Cummins Creek and stopped for the night in a small cabin Emond had there.

The next day we went to the Ferry, sixteen miles from Cummins Creek, arriving early in the afternoon. Here there was another good-sized, furnished log cabin. The place is called the Ferry because at one time a pack-trail existed from Revelstoke along the west side of the Big Bend to its northern end, then turned eastward crossing the Columbia a short distance above the mouth of Wood River, and then followed Wood River to Athabaska Pass. The crossing of the Columbia was with a cable like the one described at Surprise Rapids. The cable is still usable—Emond and I crossed over on it to the still standing, but dilapidated log house at its west end—but the trail has long since become overgrown with brush and is now disused. A cable-tender was formerly stationed at the Ferry.

The cabin Emond and I occupied is on the east side of the River about a quarter-mile above the cable. I remained there but one night. The days had become considerably shorter, the weather had turned cooler, and the Columbia, at last, showed signs of receding. The time seemed at hand for me to prepare to make a regular and continuous

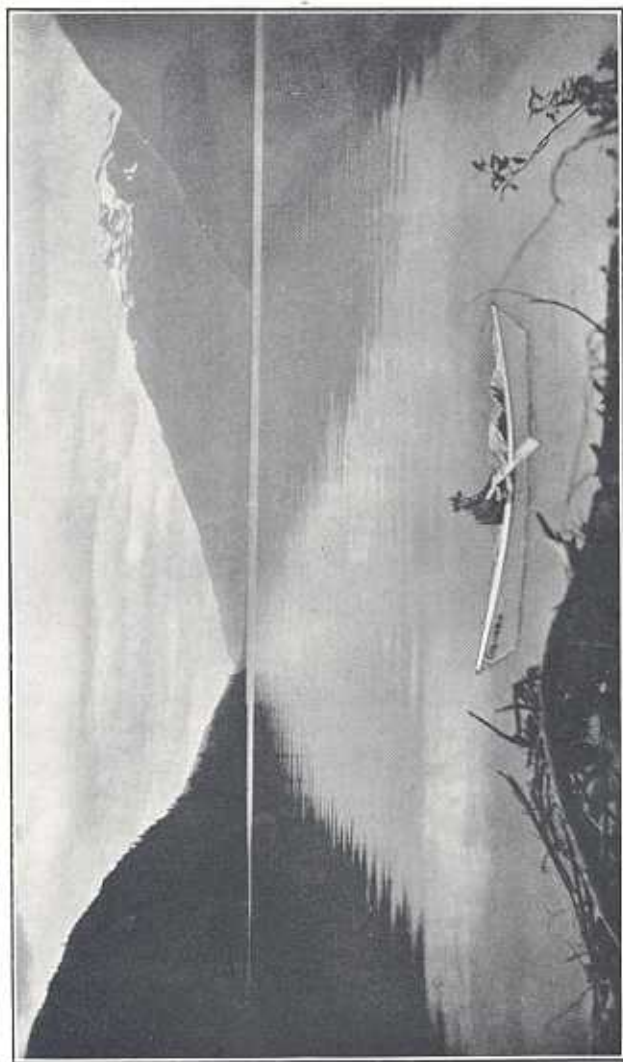
descent of the River, if its condition and the frequent rains permitted.

Leaving Mr. Emond behind, I shouldered my bedding and hiked the back trail to Kinbasket Lake, reaching Cummins Creek by the middle of the afternoon, just ahead of a driving rainstorm, and put up for the night. Leaving in the morning the brush-lined trail was still saturated with moisture from the recent rain, and long before the lake was reached I was wet to the skin from head to foot. This, with the fact that the three days' steady hike had tired me considerably, made me determine to rest up a day before running the twenty-three miles of rapids I had before me. I wanted to be fresh for the ordeal.

Between Kinbasket Lake and the Ferry there are fifteen separate rapids—seven from the lake to Cummins Creek; one at Cummins Creek; one at Yellow Creek; and six below Yellow Creek.

I consider Kinbasket, or Twenty-three Mile Rapids, at time of high water, the most trying section to navigate of the whole Columbia River. Not because they are the roughest—although they are rough enough in places—but because of their length and continuity. They are the longest on the River, the next being Priest Rapids, in the United States, but which do not compare with them for violence.

The lake had fallen about a foot, and on August 11 I looked, for the last time, at the Kinbasket cabin, pulled across the short stretch of water to the foot of the lake and slid quietly over the crest. The Columbia is about 300 feet wide on leaving the lake, and the first "take-off" of the swift water is



KINBASKET LAKE, LOOKING SOUTH

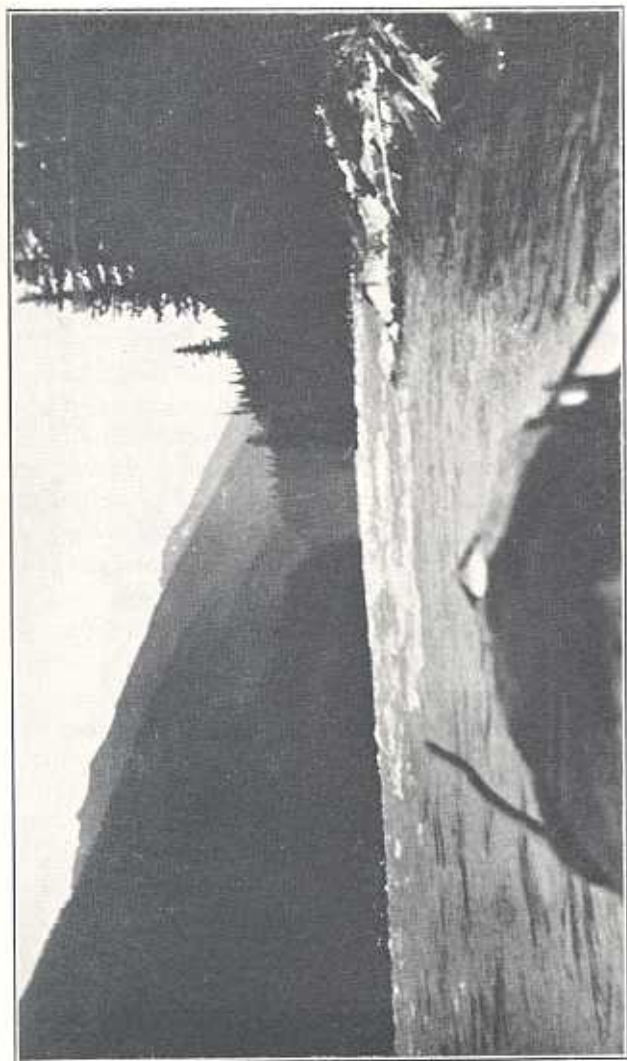
easy, merely gliding down a smooth flowing incline. I did this in the usual manner, stern first, but in three-quarters of a mile had to go ashore on the right—the River was contracted still more than above, and there was a vicious rapid below.

There is almost always a contraction of the channel at the head of rapids with a sharp descent below. The rapids are caused by either submerged or protruding rocks over, or against which the swiftly moving water dashes and throws upward great froth-topped waves, breakers, or combers. When the rocks are numerous and close together navigation is dangerous, as it is almost impossible to guide a boat so as to miss them all. When they are widely spaced, with sufficient breadth of channel between them, even though the combers are large, the skilled boatman can weave his way safely through them. The experienced whitewater man knows just what to venture and what to avoid. If the rapids are too rough to run they can often be lined. Usually the thrashing water is near the middle of the stream, but sometimes it is along the shore, in which case portaging, or carrying both load and boat is necessary. The contraction of the channel at the head of rapids and the obstructing rocks below act to dam up the current above, retarding it so that there the navigator generally finds slack water, or an eddy, in which to put ashore and make an examination of what is ahead of him—the size of the breakers and the roar they make giving ample warning to go no farther until investigation is made.

The rapid I had reached was plainly too rough to run, and after making the landing I walked down

its length along the rocky right hand shore and determined that it was a case of lining for a full mile on the side I had followed. Returning to the boat I dropped her down in the current, holding the towline in my left hand, and with the pike-pole in my right hand kept her offshore as best I could, but she persisted in coming inshore and grinding against the beach. It was slow and difficult work partly because of numerous overhanging limbs in the way of free action, and which had to be removed by cutting with the axe. But I finally reached the end of the lining and came to smooth flowing water—but not for long for just below was another equally vicious rapid. I examined this and it also had to be lined for its full length. I negotiated it successfully, but when through the day was about spent, and I had made only about two miles after a hard day's work.

It was necessary to find a place to spend the night. There was no level ground only the sloping, rocky beach with steep timbered hillside above, and I had, perforce, to make a bed of some kind. First cooking a meal on the rocks I found the smoothest place there was, close up under the timber, making it smoother by removing the larger stones and placing them on the lower side to form a kind of trough. Then cutting spruce boughs to lay in the hollow, spreading the sleeping bag, into which I crawled with my guns within reach; with the swift flowing, rock-tossed River at my side; and with no other shelter than the thick, drooping branches of a hemlock tree, beyond the ends of which shone the clear, starry sky above the glaciated summit of the Selkirks. A momentary appreciation of the grandeur



ONE OF THE KINDASKET RAPIDS

of the surroundings and then I sank into the deep, untroubled sleep of the weary.

The next day I lined three raging rapids, keeping down the right hand shore as it presented the least difficulties.

The second rapid was different from the rest. Near its lower end is a long, sweeping curve to the left; the River widens and forms a bay of shallow water thickly strewn with rocks. There is little current near shore but the rocks are too numerous to permit passage, and the deep channel is too boisterous to run. My only recourse was to get well out from the shore where there were fewer rocks and deep water. To do this I must wade, and plainly, an empty boat was the only thing that could be handled. It was a quarter-mile to the foot of the bend, and I unloaded and carried everything there. Then I removed all clothing except a shirt, and as rubber boots would be useless in deep water, and one cannot keep his footing barefooted on the wet, slimy rocks I put on my leather, hob-nailed boots and waded away from the shore dragging the boat after me. It was a hundred feet out to where the rocks were sufficiently scattered to get through them, and the water was up to my armpits. By alternately dragging and lifting I was able to get the boat to where the luggage was piled, but not until I had, many times, slipped and floundered, immersed to the chin, but regaining my footing as I clung to the boat. This is the only place on my trip where I regretted not having a companion with me—merely for the purpose of taking my picture. I must have been an interesting looking object,

ridiculously clothed, tugging, hauling, and slipping around, almost submerged. The water was cold, fresh from the glaciers, but had no serious effect upon me, and after putting on dry clothing, drinking some hot coffee, and eating a little lunch, I was in good shape and continued on my way.

There was another rapid requiring lining, but with no exceptional features, and the afternoon was about three-fourths spent when I reached a place where someone else had camped, as was evidenced by charred sticks and empty cans lying around. The place was a small low flat on the right hand side of the River, and as it was doubtful if another favorable place to sleep existed farther down stream, I stopped here and made camp, in the open. During the day I had cracked an oar using it as a lever, and the old, empty tin cans left by the previous campers were just the things I needed to mend it with. Finding a suitable one I cut it to form a sleeve and tacked it tightly around the break, making the oar fairly serviceable. The second day I made better progress than on the first. I had lined three rapids, come three miles, and was now five miles below Kinbasket Lake.

Getting an early start the next morning I found the River less turbulent, and with only one rapid to line, before noon I reached Cummins Creek, four miles from my last camp. Here I landed just above the mouth of the creek.

When going down to the Ferry with Mr. Emond we dropped off the trail to investigate the River at the mouth of Cummins Creek. There, leaning against a tree, I had seen a pair of nine-foot cedar

oars, and a canoe paddle. I wanted one of the oars to replace the mended one, which might fail at any time. The oars were on the lower side of the creek where it was impossible to make a landing, and the creek was too large to ford. So, I walked up the upper side, through the timber, to where there is a bridge, crossed it, and then going down the opposite side got an oar and the paddle. As it was almost noon, and as there was no place at the boat to do cooking, I followed the trail up the creek to the trapper's cabin, a quarter-mile from the River, where I knew there was a supply of food and a good stove to cook on, and there prepared a lunch.

Cummins Creek is a large, torrential, glacial stream and hurls a great volume of water into the Columbia River from the Rockies. The amount of water and its velocity is so great that a rapid is created, reaching almost across the River, and extending down stream for a half-mile.

I shoved my boat away from the bank at the head of the rough water, and hugging the left hand shore, where there was the least commotion, I was able to "shoot" the first rapid that I had completely run since leaving Kinbasket Lake. There was good going, thereafter, all the way to just above Yellow Creek, seven miles below Cummins Creek, and I made the distance by the middle of the afternoon.

Yellow Creek enters the River on the left, the Selkirk side. Immediately opposite, coming from the Rockies, is a small, clear stream, which has built up a low, rocky point extending into the River about two hundred feet, and is about three hundred feet wide. There is a rapid above Yellow Creek which

rounds the low point with great velocity and turbulence—the most agitated place I had yet seen. On the right hand side, above the point, was a bay of quiet water. Mr. Emond had advised me to drop down into this bay and make an examination before trying to run past Yellow Creek. I followed instructions and found that from where I landed the distance was too short in which to avoid the turbulent water at the point—the condition was similar to that which existed at the log jam at Surprise Rapids. Had I made a start about a thousand feet farther upstream a crossing to the Selkirk side could have been safely made, and continued on past, and close to, the mouth of Yellow Creek.

However, it was too difficult to go back upstream, lining down was too risky, and there was, apparently, nothing else to do but make a portage across the point, and I began to carry my dunnage over. While doing this I found a fine, grassy place for a camp—there was good water in the little creek, and ample wood for a fire. It was early yet, but the place appealed to me after the other unfavorable camping places I had had and, besides, I wanted time to shape down the oar picked up at Cummins Creek—I might have urgent need for it—and it would also take some time to drag the COLUMBIA across the point. Finishing carrying the dunnage, I immediately got busy with saw and spokeshave reducing the cedar oar to the dimensions of the broken one. By the time this was done, and supper prepared and eaten, it was late, and I deferred getting the boat below the point until morning. Had I known it, and completed the portage immediately on arriving, I

could have reached the Ferry, nine miles below, by nightfall. As it was I had made eleven miles on my third day in the rapids.

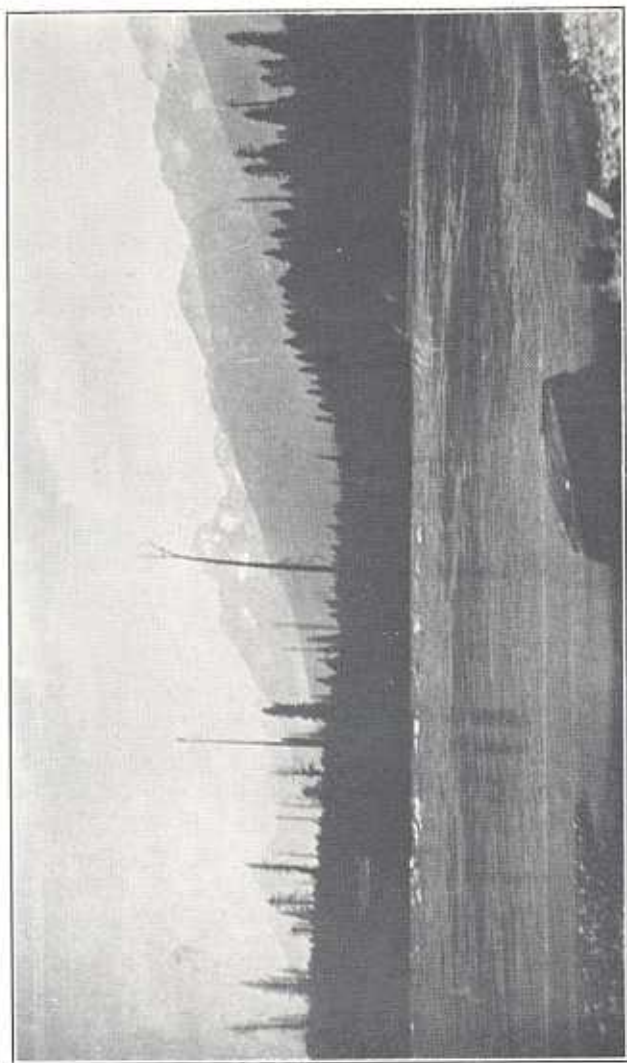
On examining the River in the morning it was evident that it had risen a foot over night. On the previous afternoon, just below where I landed, was a small, rock-strewn channel, nearly dry, but now it contained ample water so that by wading, and maneuvering the boat around the rocks she could be taken across the point, and below all dangerous water. I put this plan into execution, landed in quiet water, and ten minutes later had everything loaded.

There are six rapids between Yellow Creek and the Ferry, and of these I lined only a part of the first, at an exceedingly bad place at its lower end for about two hundred feet. The breakers here sweep diagonally across the River and impinge on the right hand shore against a low, perpendicular bank covered with timber to the water's edge. Finding that the hundred feet of rope was too long for me to continually handle alone I had cut it in two, and the fifty feet had served thus far while lining. Now one hundred feet was necessary to span one bad place where the water was surging against the bank, and I tied the two sections together. First clearing out of the way all the limbs and brush I could, and then, fearing that the rope would be jerked out of my hands by the strong current, I fastened its free end to a convenient limb. The boat was then shoved from the shore and I began paying out the line, but in a short distance her stern caught on a limb, at the water's edge—that I was unable to reach to

remove—and she immediately began to fill from the outside as the rope tightened in my hands. She would be swamped if the line was not given plenty of slack and I, at once, let go all holds, the bow caught the current, slowly turned outward, the boat made a complete revolution and came to shore safely at the end of the line. About a bucketful of water had come aboard; this I bailed out, and then getting in rowed down a comparatively placid river.

The next two rapids were easy and I ran them with only casual inspection as they were approached. The fourth rapid is called "The Cañon," but has only one wall and the River is quite wide. I had been warned not to get too close to the wall, but found ample room to keep away from it and no element of danger. I ran the Cañon, and the two remaining rapids without hesitation, and reached and landed at the Ferry at 10 o'clock in the morning of August 14.

Mr. Emond had left a note at the cabin, stating that he was at the trapper's cabin, on Wood River four miles away, and asking me to come over and see him. I immediately started, and in an hour and a half, over a plain trail, much of it across flooded bottom land at Wood River, found the cabin just at the base of the mountain slope. As I approached the place I shouted; Emond opened the door, and his Airedale dog, Fannie, rushed out, launched herself upon me, striking me in the side and knocking me down. I kicked her off and was not bitten, and then Emond called her away. I could not understand the dog's actions, as Fannie and I had been good friends, but soon learned the reason. In my ab-



LOOKING NORTH AT THE FERRY

sence Fannie had had a litter of pups. Emond had drowned all but one, which the dog watched with anxious eyes, looking upon everyone but her master as an enemy ready to steal her offspring. Airedale dogs are treacherous, anyway, and especially so when nursing puppies. Afterwards Fannie always growled at me if I got near the little one she had left.

I reached Emond just in time for lunch, and after eating returned to the Ferry cabin alone. While inside I heard some grouse calling; getting my shotgun I killed three of them, and had my second good mulligan. Before I left the place for good Emond killed three more with my gun and we both enjoyed a stew.

The following morning, Emond came over to the Ferry cabin for provisions, and then returned to Wood River, while I remained and repaired the boat, the bottom of which had been somewhat cut up the night of the storm on Kinbasket Lake, and further damaged against the rocks while lining down the rapids I had just come through. The one day was all I expected to stay at the Ferry, but the next morning it commenced to rain and kept it up steadily for three days and the weather was too disagreeable to venture on the River.