

Summer's End

Summer is my favorite time of year. In my younger days, summer ended on Labor Day, the last day of freedom before school resumed. When school became a thing of the past, I was able to extend summer until the Fall Equinox in late September. My final strategy was to take a vacation in early October, allowing the fall colors to postpone my dread of the coming dark season.

Eagles Mere provided my end of summer retreat. An historic town set in the mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania, it borders a small lake that served as a nineteenth century resort for residents of Philadelphia, Baltimore and Harrisburg. The lake still provides swimming and boating in the summer and a toboggan run in the winter. The summer and winter crowds are absent in October, leaving the lake and its surrounding woods undisturbed.

As part of my end of summer ritual, I would load my sixteen foot canoe atop my minivan and head north from Harrisburg. A late morning departure would bring me to the Eagles Mere Inn early in the afternoon, time enough to unpack my bag, make a dinner reservation, and explore the village on foot before darkness fell.

A block and a half from the inn was the Lake Road, a steep, block long ramp that ran down to the lake. In winter it sported a toboggan run; in fall, it provided a short walk to a quiet lake. The boat ramp at the end of the road would provide an easy access point for my canoe the next morning. In late afternoon, it provided a pleasant spot to say hello to the lake.

Above the lake, a lovely park bordered the main road. Tall trees shaded the grassy area that extended for several blocks. Near the end stood a gazebo, doubtless the stage for summer concerts but deserted now, as was the park. The village shops began within site of the gazebo, and clustered around the tall village clock. The end of summer closed the shops, leaving a village that hinted of its activities as it slept for the season. Walking past the closed shops, my spirit would absorb the quiet - a refreshing break from my hectic life in Harrisburg.

Morning brought a leisurely breakfast and a chance to launch my canoe. Most times it was the only boat upon the lake. On occasion, the lake was draped in fog, providing a journey into the mist. Paddling slowly along the shore, I would enjoy the woods that bordered the lake. Those woods awaited my afternoon hike, communing with the trees and listening to the few birds that remained.

Beyond Eagles Mere sat Ricketts Glenn State Park, my destination for the following day. The park hosted a large lake and the Falls Trail, where two streams entered a steep ravine and created twenty-six waterfalls. The steep trail required concentration and careful footing, but rewarded the effort with a view of a hundred foot waterfall. The trail approached that hundred foot drop from the top and wound down along its side. At the bottom, large rocks provided ample sitting to watch a wonder of the northern mountains. The water flowed, as it had for millennia, carving its way through trees and rocks that would eventually succumb to the pull of gravity.

The return trip was less inspiring and more difficult. After descending alongside one of the two streams, the ascent along the second stream remained. Reaching the top would leave me longing for the trail food I had packed. It would provide enough energy to venture out upon the lake.

The L-shaped lake is far larger than the oval lake at Eagles Mere. Two hours of paddling would explore only a small portion of it. Two hours was enough for my final canoeing of the season. Pulling the canoe from the water, I would tie it on the minivan for the last time until spring.

The next morning I would check out of the inn and drive to Worlds End State Park. Contrary to its name, the park was only a short distance from Eagles Mere. The picnic area bordered a roaring stream that parted

tree covered hills. A rocky stream bed made the stream hostile to canoes but filled the air with the sounds of rushing water. Instead of canoeing, I would hike the hills and enjoy the colors that fall had painted on the trees. The hiking would end at the base of the hills, listening to the water splashing along the rocky stream bed.

The trip home always proved breath taking. A two lane road wound through a steep ravine. The hills on each side would be awash with bright yellows, reds, and oranges. The trees took their last chance to blossom before the cold winds stripped them of their leaves.

Out of the mountains, the colors were less intense. The sounds of traffic displaced the quiet of the woods. At home, I would wash down the canoe, oil the gunnels and prepare it for winter.

It could have been a sad time, but I still thrilled with the quiet of Eagles Mere, the trips around its lake, the wonder of the Falls Trail, and the incredible splash of color in the northern mountains. Those memories reconciled me to the end of summer and the beginning of the dark half of the year.