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A Canoe Trip in Cape Breton, 1885 This account originally appeared as "Cape Breton lakes" in John Knight's book. Incidentally, published in Montreal in 1913. It is offered here as a sample from a new book of writings about Cape Breton called Impressions of Cape Breton, edited with an introduction by Brian Tennyson and published in 1986 by the University College of Cape Breton Press. In what some writers are pleased to call the mel? low month of August, 1885, I saw Cape Breton from the cockpit of the Nettie. The Nettie is a Rob Roy canoe fourteen feet in length, beam in proportion, fast under paddle, and as safe and seaworthy as a ship's lifeboat. Her crew on a recent voyage from Sydney, Cape Breton, to the Barra Straits, consisted of the writer, who is five feet eight inches long, beam in proportion, a veteran paddler, a lover of the sea and all connected with it. The cruise of the Nettie was not sufficiently eventful to excuse her crew for publishing these notes from the little ship's log. But as she was the first craft of her class to weather Point Aconi; to brave the run from thence to Cape Dauphin; to attempt the passage of the six knot tide that surges through the Big Bras d'Or, and to make the trip from Baddeck to Barra, eleven and a half miles, in two hours and five minutes; enthusiastic members of the American Canoe Association looking for fresh waters and billows new into which to dip their double-bladed propellers may pardon me for publishing my log, and it is for them that I now drop the paddle and take up the pen. I was a voyager in August last from Port Mulgrave, N. S., to Sydney, C. B., by the steamer Marion, Captain Burchell. As we steamed through the then calm waters of the winding channels that open into St. Peter's Bay, I occupied, by special permission of the skipper, the lofty wheel house, and from thence looked out upon the wood-fringed shores and the ever-changing lights and shadows of scenery which a legion of tourists and an army of writers have raved about. If these travelling scribes saw the Bras d'Or Lakes and surroundings under such favourable conditions as I did from my quiet retreat in the Marion's wheelhouse, with naught to disturb my silent enjoyment of the scene save the skipper's voice, as with finger on the chart (we had been talking canoeing) he pointed out some small bay in the calm depths of which was reflected faithfully not only every object on its shores, but even the varying tints of the trees • then it is not surprising that they have failed to convey t'h'ense'n'n'res'or''h'a'' are when the light summer air disturbs their surface at midday, and causes the tiny sun-kissed waves to plash against one's canoe in drowsy murmurings, or when the last faint puff of the evening breeze passes away and leaves the water so motionless that it seems like sacrilege to dip a paddle therein. Before the Marion reached Sydney, the cruise of the Nettie was planned, and I had held as much talk with her owner. Captain Burchell, upon the ways and means, as if the contemplated voyage was that of an ocean steamship freighted with wealth of the Indies. Now read my Log Book! August 4th--The Nettie was launched and provisioned, and with a kindly shout of caution and encouragement from her owner, I started before a fair southerly breeze for Sydney Bar, six miles distant. A mile from North Sydney, a schooner-rigged boat,



containing two officials of the Bank of Nova Scotia, sailed across my bows and hailed me. I informed them of my destination, and intention to pass Sunday in North Sydney. They point out a landing place and sail for the same to assist me in securing quarters. As I near the shore I become sensible of much noise and notice a crowd of people awaiting the Nettie's arrival. Fearful for the safety of the canoe, if handled by excited sightseers, I paddle vigorously to another point but the more active of the natives run along the shore, and, reaching the reef of rocks, my haven, await my approach. I am met with a storm of questions, and have to listen to the best efforts of the local humourists. The students of history among them call me Christopher Columbus; the more modern newspaper devourer is satisfied with saying: "It's Captain Webb from the Whirlpool Rapids." Just as I am meditating flight from these good-natured savages, I am rescued by two good Samaritans, Messrs. Waters and Stavert, who deposit the Nettie in the Bank of which they are officials, and escort me to the hotel. August 6th • At daybreak I am assisted by my good friend Stavert to launch the little ship. The sun is shining brightly, and the morning air is fast freshening into a strong breeze. But I am desirous of weathering Point Aconi before noon, so, about 5.30 a.m., I unwillingly part from Stavert, whose company would have trebled my enjoyment of the voyage, and paddle out into the harbour channel. Off Cranberry Head there is a broken, confused sea.

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