

JULY, 1912.



From an old print of the lake and the Willoughby Lake House.

Willoughby Lake.

BY JAMES P. TAYLOR.

Illustrations, except as noted, from photos by the Author.

NOWHERE in Vermont is there a more perfect revelation of the loveliness of waters and the dignity of mountains than at Willoughby Lake. Willoughby is a vast spring which bursts from a profound cleft in a mountain range. Its beauties are best appreciated when seen from an exquisite forest road through the glimmering foliage of white birches whose stems frame pictures of lake and cliff and forest. All views are fringed with leaves and branches; all center about some mountain theme. Overlooking the waters of Willoughby, two precipitous mountains, Mount Pisgah and Mount Hor, not merely dignify a charming lake, but also add a touch of severe grandeur that is seldom to be found in Vermont.

Willoughby Lake lies midway between the historic village of Coos on the Connecticut River and Belvidere Mountain of the Green Mountain Range. Its waters

flow north through the Willoughby River and then through the Barton River into Lake Memphremagog, twenty miles away. To the east of Lake Willoughby are the forest-burdened highlands of Essex County, an ideal region for the pedestrian who loves the woods and mountains. To the west between the lake and Jay Peak, the traveller going "over the mountain" must cross three interesting north-bound rivers, the Black, the Barton and the Missisquoi.

Willoughby is in the heart of the lake district of the Green Mountain State. The region north of the Winooski River and east of the Green Mountains, unlike other parts of Vermont, is fairly crowded with mountain lakes. The lakes west of the mountains, St. Catherine and Bomoseen and Dunmore are solitary bodies of water. But Willoughby lies in the center of a lake district extending from the Lake of the Clouds on Mount Mansfield to Maidstone



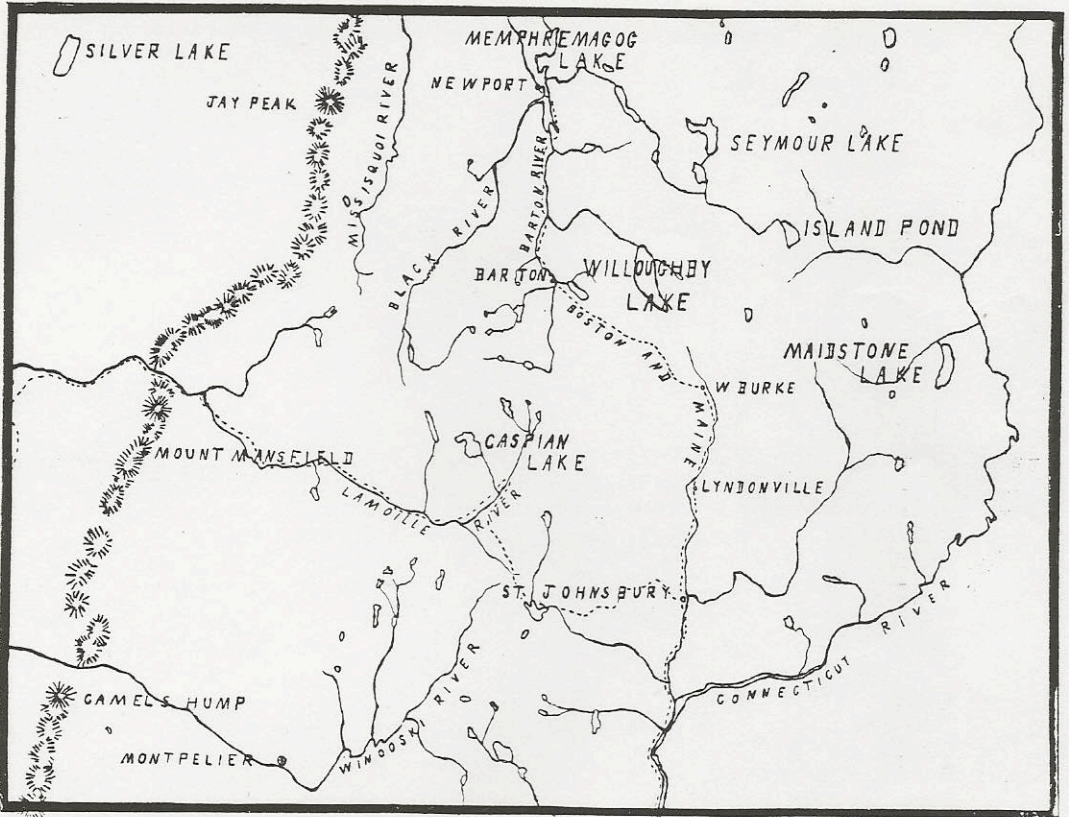
MTS. PISGAH AND HOR AT WILLOUGHBY LAKE, THE SWITZERLAND OF EASTERN AMERICA.
FROM PHOTO BY ERWIN & ROYSTON.

near the Connecticut, from Caspian Lake to Memphremagog. And Willoughby is the most beautiful of them all.

Compared with the queen lakes of neighboring states, Lake George and Lake Winnepesaukee, Willoughby seems almost insignificant in size, without promise of varied beauty. It is only about six miles in length and from three-quarters of a mile to a mile and one-half in width. Its shore

of the lake. Willoughby the Charming, the lower lake, is surrounded by the homes of men, farm houses on the uplands, summer cottages hidden among the birches near the water. A quaint little village, Westmore, is situated on the eastern shore, looking out upon long reaches of sand and outlying shallows. Willoughby the Charming is to be haunted and familiarly enjoyed; Willoughby the Grand is to be visited on

Map of the lake region of north-eastern Vermont.

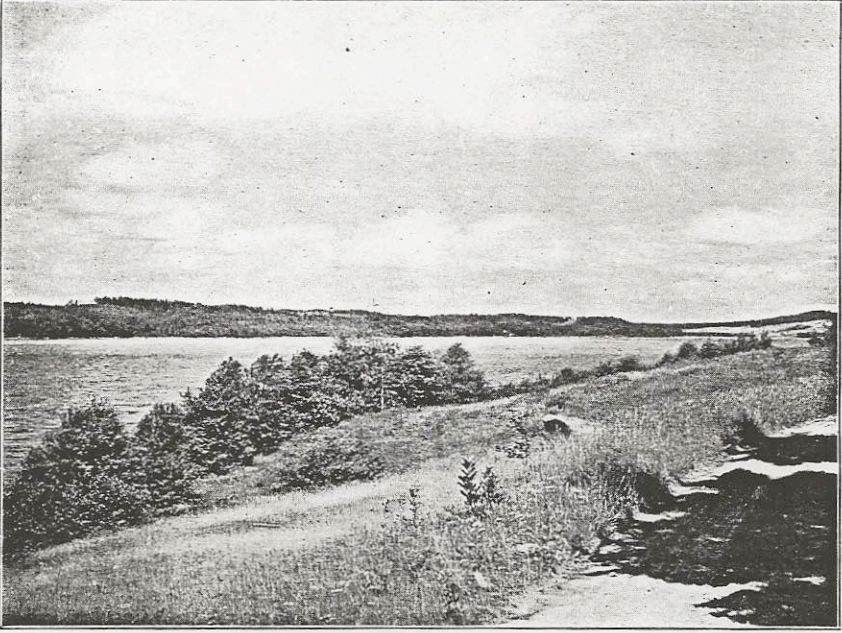


line is unbroken by far-extending point or deep-reaching bay. Yet the traveller finds no lack of variety of expression. There are, in fact, two Lakes Willoughby, the lake of forest and cliff and landslide, and the lake of groves and sloping hills and open country.

Willoughby the Grand, the upper lake, is walled in between the precipitous heights of Mount Pisgah and Mount Hor. It is overshadowed by rocky cliffs from which great masses of rock come hurtling down to bury themselves in the profound depths

pilgrimage and admired from afar.

But both lakes share the three-fold drama which is the life of Willoughby. There is the rush of waters to fill and overflow this vast cleft between the mountains. There is the hurl of rocks from wind-swept heights into the quiet depths of the lake. There is the march of vine and shrub and tree from the water's edge up easy slopes, up forbidding cliffs, until they surmount what seem to be impregnable heights. Though often played in silence and secrecy, the parts of this drama are being played

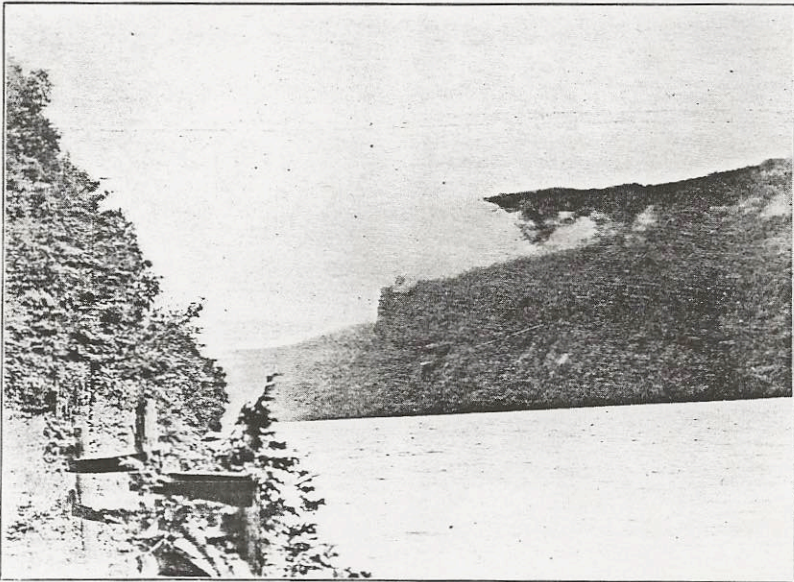


“WILLOUGHBY THE CHARMING.”

eternally. To hear and see the drama, to become a very part of this life is to know the Willoughby Lake of those who love it.

The glory of Willoughby is the triumph in the landscape of flower and bush and tree. Inhospitable boulders and threaten-

ing cliffs seek in vain to make barren and harsh scenes which in the richness of their foliage reveal the Green Mountain State at its best. The student of the Willoughby drama should make four attractive trips along the eastern side of the lake. He should paddle up the lake in a canoe,

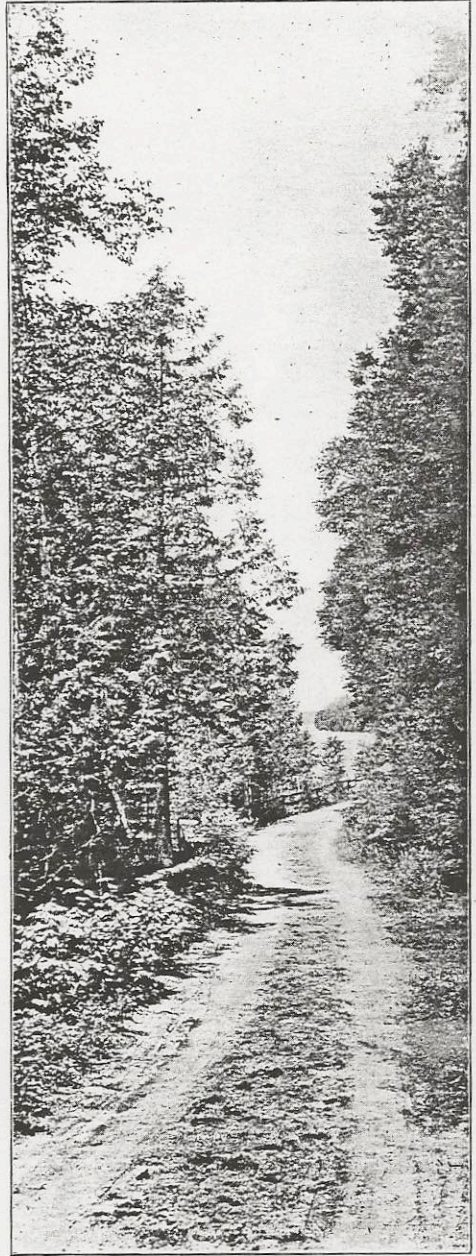


“WILLOUGHBY THE GRAND.”

closely following the granite-white shore. On foot he should study the windings in and out, the rising and falling of the forest road. He should clamber among the great fragments of rock which lie immediately under the cliffs at the crest of the talus slope. He should walk the pleasant trail to the summit of Mount Pisgah. In all these experiences the views of lake and mountain and cliff are glorified by a wealth of foliage.

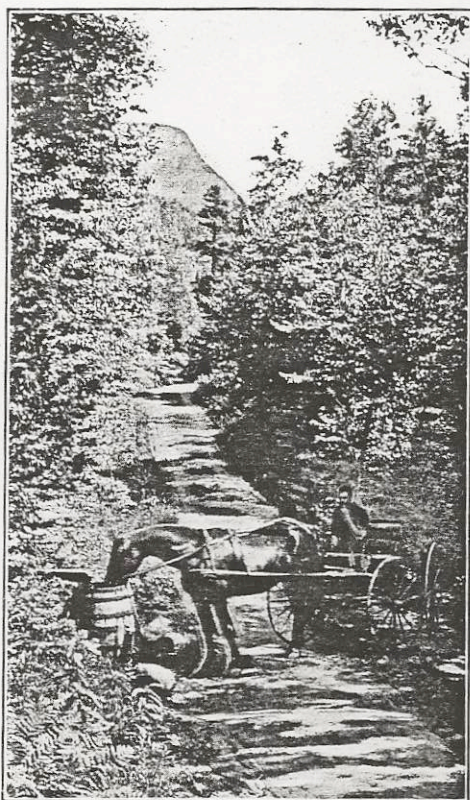
The road, one of the most exquisite bits of road in all Vermont, would be almost commonplace, were it not for the mantle of forest which hides the rough masses of rock on the slopes of Mount Pisgah, were it not for the veil of birches which half conceals and half reveals mountain and lake. From the cool mountain side the rich vegetation crowds down to the very wheel tracks. Here, if anywhere, speeding along in an automobile seems a crime, a sacrilege. This beautiful roadside growth, abundant, varied, is made for leisurely inspection. Seldom does nature student behold such magnificence in the fruit of the Red Baneberry and False Solomon's Seal. The delicate spire of the Rattlesnake Fern alternates here and there with great patches of dark Brakes and with colonies of bright Sensitive Ferns. Roadside boulders serve as backgrounds for fern and flower. Pendent from overhanging branches is the reddening fruit of the mountain maple, haunter of trails and wild roadways. But the supreme glory of the road is the procession of splendid birches between the road and the lake. Their gleaming trunks and tremulous foliage make visible in a thousand modulations Mount Hor with its great scars shining in the morning light, and the river-like lake radiant at sunset.

The most dramatic phase of the life of Willoughby is the hurl of the rocks from the crest of the mountains to the depths of the lake. The fated moment for some great mass on the cliffs of Mount Pisgah may come even during the summer months. It crashes down the precipice, and then plunges and bounds through the birch wood on the mountain slope, unseen by the canoeist who, disturbed by the uproar, pauses safely far from shore; but the tops of the birches trembling violently, mark the course of the destroyer. Occasionally in July or August boulders force their way through vainly obstructing trees clear to the lakeside. But slides and the frequent falling of the rocks



“THE WINDING ROAD.”

occur in March and April when water and frost and ice have completed their preparations for dislodging huge blocks of granite. Showers of rocks have been seen to leap over the tree tops and to plunge into the lake, churning the waters into foam, and throwing up spray that can be seen from one end of the lake to the other. The



PISGAH MOUNTAIN.

From photo by Erwin & Royston.

great slide which scarred the face of Mount Hor shook the hotel south of the lake.

But silent witnesses to the journeyings of the rocks are visible everywhere. Some rocks have just left the summits of the mountains; others have reached the lake. Clearly seen through the transparent waters are boulders which lie so close to the surface that they must be avoided, even by the canoeist. Here and there are tiny islands of stone, shining white in the sunlight, and near them granite masses upon which plants and trees are growing, so that they invite a landing and have been dignified by names. Along the forest road there is a massive natural retaining wall of granite, parts of which, however, seem to threaten rather than protect the roadway. At one place shapely blocks are piled by the rude masonry of chance and richly adorned with ferns and flowers; at another place gigantic boulders are heaped up one upon another and seem to be so delicately balanced that the rumble of the passing carriage would overthrow them. The

birches on the slope of Mount Pisgah have not yet concealed the courses of the most recent slides, marked by two broad lines of white, here and there melting into green. Above them are great scars on the face of the cliff, marking the sources from which the rocks crashed down, one scar white and gleaming in the sunlight, the other a dark blotch, black like an angry wound.

The mountaineer standing on the summit of Mount Pisgah almost hesitates to venture to the edge of the cliff, for the outermost rocks are already parted from their fellows. When seen from Pulpit Rock, granite blocks on the face of the cliff fairly seem to dangle in mid-air, overhanging an abyss. The impression is ever the same. We feel that this world of stone is imperceptibly moving, and is always just on the point of falling like an avalanche. Even on the rolling hills of Willoughby the Charming the fields seem to overflow with streams of boulders which are on their way to the lake, some inconsiderable in size, others as large as cottages. One of the most majestic sights that the Willoughby region offers is the vast "Rocking Rock" on a hilltop, which is breaking into fragments that it may easier set out on its pilgrimage.

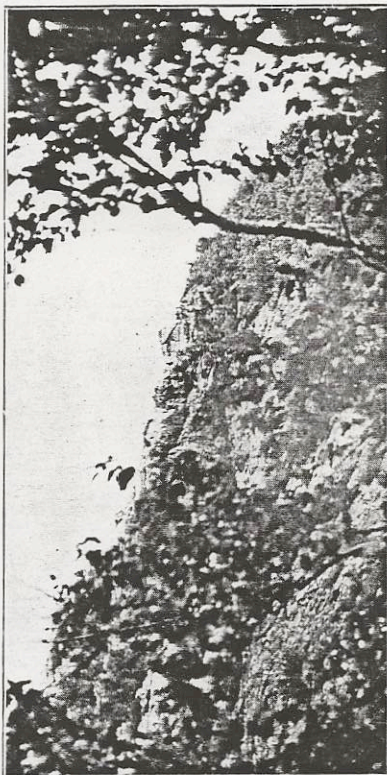
But the activity, the eternal motion of the life of Willoughby is most vividly revealed in the drama of cloud and mist and water. Processions of summer clouds follow the course of this pass through the mountains, casting their shadows upon the forests below and giving meaning to the sky. In autumn mornings a stream of low-lying mist flows past Mount Hor like a river. The white current bends and swirls about the dark headland thrust out to forbid its passing. When the lower part of the range is concealed by mist, and the sky line is clearly revealed, we can appreciate why the fathers named Mount Hor and the range to the west "The Whaleback," for the majestic creature of the sea seems to lie there in his native element.

Seldom save at sunset are the waters of the lake at rest. Then they are quieted that they may perfectly reflect the glories of the sunsets, the colors of which, intensest right above the distant Green Mountain Range, paint the whole dome of the sky from Jay Peak to Westmore Mountain. During the day the air is always stirring, moving in the mountain cleft, giving such life to the lake that it seems to be a river

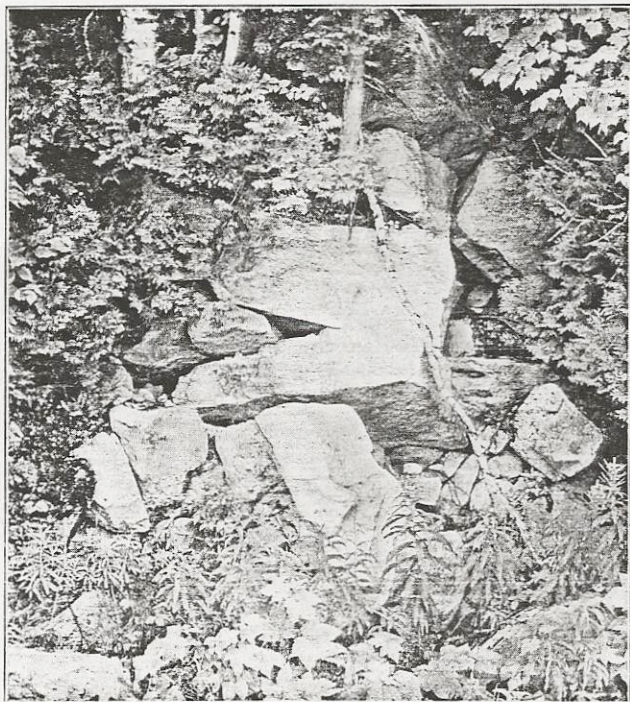
forcing its way through a mountain range. At times the waters pile up in the narrows with the sweep and passion of a rapid which tempts the canoeist to adventure and compels him to his best endeavor.

But even at midnight the voice of the waters is not utterly silenced, for more than a score of springs on the mountain steeps are pouring their streams into Willoughby. The murmur of the summer evening faintly echoes the rush and tumult of March and April. Roaring Brook, the little stream which in August is scarcely large enough to fill the watering trough in its course, fully deserves its name in April. But the largest contributions to the waters of the lake come from springs in the depths of the lake, three or four hundred feet below its surface, springs which pour their waters strongly but silently, all unseen and unknown, into the mountain cleft.

Spring-fed, profound, it is no wonder that Willoughby Lake is the home of a nobility, of great Square-tailed Trout, Rainbow Trout, Lake Trout, and Land-locked Salmon. It is no wonder that the lake is a paradise for fishermen who by day win proud victories from the waters of Willoughby the Grand, and during glad



The Cliff of Pisgah as seen from Pulpit Rock by a telescopic lens.



BY THE ROADSIDE.

evenings feast in cottages on the shores of Willoughby the Charming.

Just below Wheeler Mountain, west of the lake, there is a wonderful spring which in name and in character typifies Willoughby and all that it may mean to its lovers. The Ponce de Leon Spring bursts from rocks overshadowed by a mountain; stirs in its basin, a living water; tosses high the sands, which gleam like silver in the sunlight. So too, is Willoughby Lake a majestic spring of immortal youth, a living water which gives joyous life to all those who seek it.

