

JULY 7, 1988

The outfit I rented the car from in Bangor is going to think I turned the odometer, back if I don't start making some headway on this trip to Maine and Quebec. I've made it down the coast from Bar Harbor to Portland, and have looped back inland by the capital city of Augusta and northwest to a small outpost close to the Canadian border called Jackman.

However, compared to how many miles it takes to run errands back home, I haven't turned the meter over. Until I stopped trying to visit at every coffee house that looked inviting, I was really falling behind. I'd learned that in the smallest towns live the most eager talkers; but up here, after a coffee drinker opens his lips to take a sip from his cup, he'll make a reclusive Navajo in Arizona seem like a chatterbox.

Don't let me mislead you. These people are very polite and helpful. They'll come out of the kitchen or from behind the counter to point out a landmark.

The problem, I think, is that they need to be gradually broken in on my runaway horse stories and specialties on bandit raids along the Mexican border. The lumberjacks and logging camps ended in Maine about the turn of the century. Good fish stories and outrageous moose hunting adventures develop, of course, but I suspect that most of that material has been published under the auspices of the Chambers of Commerce that entice tourists to their state.

The island where I'm staying at this time uses kerosene to light the log cabins. Crisp, white sheets cover the beds. In the winter they cut and store ice from the frozen lake for summer use. At night, loons give out eerie cries over the waters. Under the spell of the night, and the odor from the lamps, a nostalgia reminds me of the long ago days of my youth.

At a lunch shop I found a paperback of lumberjack stories. When I return to a reading light I'm going to blend their style with mine. I think, after glancing at the book, that my trouble has been being too truthful.