



RED RIVER CAMPS

BY JANET KELLE

Nestled in the heart of the Deboullie Lakes Region of the Northern Maine Woods is a secluded but picturesque location called Red River Camps. Named after the Red River which flows out of Pushineer Lake, these camps have a long history dating back to the 1800's. Originally built around 1886 by Harry Chatman and William Whitman as a private camp for friends and family to relax and enjoy the beauty of the Maine woods. The camp compound included sleeping cabins, the main lodge, school house, blacksmith shop, barber shop and several horse barns.

Red River Camp owners throughout the years included:

- 1886 Harry Chatman and William Whitman
- 1928 William McNally
- 1932-1948 Dr. AC Christie
- 1948 Herschel Currie
- 1962 Wilfred "Sleepy" Atkins
- 1967 Gene Bovard
- 1972 Pete Norris

- 1979 Mike and Rhonda Brophy
- 2009 Jen and Joe Brophy-Price

In the 1930's Dr. Christie changed the camps from private lodging to commercial sporting camps. Over the years there have been several changes to the camps. The school house from the Whitman years is now the current owner's residence. Other changes include the Blacksmith Shop is now Gardner Cabin, the Barber Shop is now Pushineer Cabin, and the horse barns have been replaced by Upper and Denny Cabins. An exact replica of the original boathouse can be found along the water's edge.

Current owner Jen Brophy-Price began her love of the camps at the young age of nine months old, when in 1979 Mike and Rhonda Brophy purchased the camps. Beginning in April 1980 the entire family lived at the camp throughout the summer until the last week of November. When school was in session Jen and her brother Matthew stayed with friends "in town" but weekends and summer



break were spent with their parents at the camp. She recalls riding her bicycle around the camp grounds, and tells the story of how planes from Loring AFB would fly just above the tree tops over the camp. According to Jen, reaching the camps has gotten easier over the years with a woods road that brings you right to the front door. It never used to be that easy, before the road was built you would have to drive through North Pond Brook three times then through Chase Brook to reach the camp, which she recalls as part of the fun of going to camp.

The Brophy's have owned the camps for over 30 years, the longest of any previous owner, and in 2009 Jen and her husband are keeping the family tradition alive by purchasing the camps from her father. When you meet Jen you can see how much

she loves the camps and is determined to keep the family tradition alive.

The original main lodge still stood until a fateful day in May 2008. On May 17, 2008, just a few days after Mike had arrived to open the camps for the season, the lodge was struck by lightning. Camp cook, Gloria Curtis, had to drive down the woods road to the "telephone booth", the only spot that you can pick up a cell phone signal. It took fire trucks two and a half hours to reach Red River Camps. Unfortunately the lodge was a total loss, however,



they were able to save Togue Cabin which is located beside the lodge. The greatest tragedy was the main lodge housed much history of Red River Camps which included pictures and memorabilia dating back to the 1920's which was lost



in the fire. Fortunately, Jen had begun scanning the collection of photos the prior summer so some can be reproduced.

Work on the new lodge began right away with the help of many local friends. The new lodge opened for business in July 2009. Keeping with the traditional look, the new lodge was built with local, hand-hewn logs.

Since taking ownership of the camps, Jen has begun renovations on several of the cabins. For many years the camps were utilized by hunters in search of deer, bear, and moose as well as fishermen taking advantage of the many lakes within “striking” distance. As many in Aroostook County can attest, the deer population has declined drastically over the years and in turn so have the number of hunters. The camps are still busy, especially in the early summer and fall with fishermen looking for their big catch. Jen has seen an increase in the amount of families that are visiting the camps to take advantage of the hiking trails, animal watching, and multitude of lakes to canoe and kayak. Wanting to increase that trend, Jen is looking to expand and market to families for reunions, class reunions, weddings as well as businesses for company retreats.

There are a total of nine guest cabins: Pushineer, Upper, Togue, Gardner, Galilee, Denny, the Little Cabins, and the Island. The cabins overlook Island Pond with the Main Lodge and Togue cabin located at the water’s edge.



Along with comfortable accommodations and friendly atmosphere, guests are given access to camp canoes that are located at all the area ponds and lakes. Guests can also choose between bringing their own food and fending for themselves or purchasing a meal plan which includes three hearty homemade meals guaranteed to keep you satisfied!

Red River Camps has had visitors from all over the world. Bath Iron Works, Bank of Ireland and the German National Frisbee Team can be counted among the many guests. The grandson of an earlier owner, Herschel Currie, pays a visit every year. The University of Farmington Research Climatological Studies Group stays once or twice a year to conduct research in the pristine local area.

The Deboullie Lakes region and Red River Camps in the Northern Maine Woods are two of the best assets in Aroostook County, in my humble opinion. There is no better place to relax and enjoy the true meaning of “The Way Life Should Be”. Although I would love to keep this area all to myself, I can’t help but wanting to tell everyone what a wonderful place we have right in our backyard! If you would like more information about Red River Camps or the Deboullie Lakes region check out Jen’s website www.redrivercamps.com.

