

THE RESTLESS WATERS

I was back at my creek again after a long absence. It feels good to be back. I don't intend to wander far from this stream, for any length of time, again.

This isn't just any creek. These waters talk to me. The restless voices that were here long ago are the same. Every gurgle, every ripple has a message. No matter how dormant the voices are at other times, my creek still comes alive at my approach. I can hear and feel the excitement aroused by my presence.

Many long-forgotten adventures are resurrected when this stream reminds me of the times I attempted to dam her, and of the troubles these endeavors caused the neighbours who plied her shores, down stream, in search of water for their households.

The pirates all but abandoned the area during some dry summers. One couldn't find a tadpole, let alone a sea monster. The steam dried to trickle during these periods.

I knew that if I was to live up to reputation as a swashbuckler, I was going to have to get more water somewhere.

How I longed for the big river, with its wild rapids, that the big people said was just over the mountains. I made my first attempt to dam the creek one summer of little rain, when the evaporated waters refused to fall on schedule. The fact that I was about six at the time didn't deter me.

When I was setting the planning stage in motion, two obstacles stood out, stark and naked. My lack of expertise, and material.

Then I spied it. Instant resolution. There was a ready supply of fresh gravel on the road that



*Tom
McLaughlin*

crossed the creek, and was there for the taking. The cottage people had hired my father, earlier in the summer, to draw gravel from the divers pits around our farm, to spread on the road to their cottages, on the nearby lake. I eyed this vein of lush ore until I could resist the temptation no longer. The gravel lay there in abundance. "What road needs gravel where the wheels don't go?" I reasoned.

LADDER LOOKOUT

I immediately loosed the action stage. With my five-year-old brother as lookout and ladderholder, I climbed to the granary roof, and removed a sheet of tin that was flapping in the wind, and was about ready to go anyway. The idea was to use the tin to haul the gravel to the creek.

The job went well from the start. No adult was causing us any trouble, mostly because my brother proved to be a good lookout, and I was careful to smooth out the shovel marks as we went along. I knew that my father would take strong action if he noticed the center of the road diminishing.

We worked diligently for a few days without anyone taking notice of our project. Our dam was well-hidden by thick alders at the narrowest part of the creek. My engineering expertise was limited, but at least I got that right. Most of the gravel

stayed put, but a lot of it washed away in the strong current.

I heard my father say that the water in the creek seemed to be rising, and he asked my eldest brother to check for a beaver dam, and to break it. I guess I had my fingers and toes crossed. My brother, a good scout, discovered our dam, and at great risk to his own life and limb, he informed our superior that there was no beaver dam.

A short while later, a busybody cottager noticed that the road was sinking below the wheel marks. Then all hell broke loose. It didn't take them long to solve the mystery of the disappearing gravel. The project was brought to an abrupt halt. I was ordered to carry the gravel back to the road, and without the help of my criminal partner. I could never understand why he was not disciplined along with me when we were caught in our mischief. I could sure have used the company.

Have you ever tried to shovel gravel out of running water? It was a long, lonely job.

I wasn't finished yet, by a long shot. There were two words in the English language that I had trouble comprehending. The words were, "discourage" and "quit". I lost the franchise to build the first dam by default. The same thing couldn't happen again. I just hadn't thought things out well enough before beginning operations.

Have you ever noticed that when you get an idea in your head that you feel strongly about, and if things go wrong, you tend to blame the method, or somebody? It is difficult to bring yourself to blame the idea, and I suppose that's just as well; otherwise, many good ideas would get cast aside. I was of this ilk, and I felt sure that it was just a matter of going about things differently the next time.