

A Date With Nature

By Ray Peterson
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There is a wealth of enjoyment in rambling through the woods and pasture. You can pass through a certain area a dozen times a week, yet Mother Nature, with superb showmanship, always has something of interest to display.

A few days ago, using a recent thunder shower as an excuse to skip work, I set off, swinging my usual equipment, a pan for mushrooms and a container for berries.

Clumps of wild roses, pink and fragrant, were common along the way. One cluster, as though standing on tip toes to twine wreaths in a willow bush, was over seven feet tall. This year's record rainfall and late spring has upset many schedules. The roses, as if trying to make up for a six week lag, have been amazingly prolific and showy.

A Red-tailed Hawk burst from a grove of aspen. In noisy pursuit darted an alliance of feathered fighters, a crow and a blackbird. I wonder if the blackbird called for reinforcements to harass his ally after the hawk had been banished.

Pushing through the leaf mold alongside a willow crown, were a large number of Inky Caps. These mushrooms, members of the Coprinus tribe, are always welcome at our table. Another find was a large, purplish capped fungus with yellow gills and a white stem, *Russula alutacea*. This is a tasty plant with a distinctive flavor that makes it one of our favorites.

Lavish mantles of Fleabane daisies brightened the meadowlands. In moist, shady spots where woods and

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Summer Treasure

Elizabeth Cruickshank, Regina

This summer we "travelled the roads not meant for hurry, but for heart's content." No road failed to yield delight.

Snows coming, after Spring's green, brought many birds within view of our kitchen window. We wished we could feed all the migrants suddenly deprived of food.

In the valley, Baltimores, in their brilliant plumage and large numbers, looked so incongruous. In the same field a cow was nudging and licking a brown bundle in the snow. Finally the bundle moved and a wee calf responded to the young mother's urging. Cows, dumb?

Where beavers had built a dam that had stood the stresses and strains of the swollen Qu'Appelle, we found white baneberry in bloom. We wondered when the flower stem grew thick and red, to hold the showy white berries with the bright black eyes, if the beavers felt their gaze.

One bright day we hailed a distinguished company resting on a burnt-over field. The black field, the checkered white and black backs, hundreds of black-bellied plovers, a picture and pattern to thrill the eye of any viewer.

We did not go to see the Queen, but in July's ravine we saw a royal sight by the duck pond: colonies of anemones — "a host in the sunshine, a snowdrift in June." Greek legend tells us anemones grew from the tears of Venus shed in the forest over the tragic death of her sweetheart Adonis. Delicate charming tears they must have been.

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meetings were first held in the informal atmosphere of a book and fishing tackle store owned by John MacVicar, and the programs varied amazingly. One night, the versatile Dr. George led a discussion on the beneficial and harmful habits of Crows; another time his charming wife displayed her hundreds of colored paintings of Alberta flowers. Then Mr. C. H. Snell, a pioneer surveyor and one of the charter members of the Red Deer Society, came back from helping survey a base line west of Lake Athabaska and gave the members a fascinating account of the nature of that region — which included him inadvertently eating a rare Whooping Crane back in 1916! Mr. Snell, who still makes his home at Red Deer and is still a valued member of the Society, repeated the lecture on Lake Athabaska only a few months ago.

Sometimes the meetings took the form of a nature outing. The members visited the Tamarack Swamp three miles from Red Deer, and there found a great variety of rare flowers and insects. The Canyon was another favorite location for outings, to Christmas Island where members could use field glasses and watch the spectacular ariel hunts of the Peregrine Falcons; to the popular resort of Sylvan Lake, where the late Mrs. W. A. Cassells, beloved "bird-woman" of Red Deer, would lead an expedition to spy on a pair of Golden Eagles or to scout the hollow trees along the lake front where the first colonies of Purple Martins to settle in Central Alberta had their nests. Miss Mina Cole, the present botany expert of the Red Deer club, occasionally led an outdoor expedition and on several occasions the members gathered over 60 different plants on a single outing.

Today, the Natural History Society still thrives at Red Deer, a vigorous club that specializes in conservation measures. It gave away 3000 leaflets on bird-box buildings to the school children of Central Alberta during

recent years. It defended and saved the beaver living within the Red Deer city limits on Waskasoo Creek. 300 farmers sought the Society's help in protecting deer in a farm belt, when the game department opened the area for hunting a few years ago. And the members act as Custodians of the Gaetz Lake Park, a 230 acre wildlife preserve near the city.

Fifty years of Nature Study, started by Dr. Henry George as a sideline to a private museum of nature oddities.

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meadow met, flourished stands of Grass of Parnassus. Here too, were the green spikes of Bog Orchids and an occasional clump of tall, hollow-stemmed Cow Parsnip. Here and there, like a scattering of bright jewels, were small, orange-red mushrooms. These vividly-hued plants, Cone-shaped Hygrophorus, are edible, but Kathryn and I dislike their slimy characteristics that persist even after cooking.

The open hillsides were emblazened with the white, spicy, heads of Yarrow, rose flowers of Indian Paint Brush, tousled crests of drying Everlastings, and the purples of Peavine and Giant Hyssop.

At the head of an old, grassed-in trail, a blaze of lilies posed in regal splendor. One slender stalk boasted four glowing blossoms. I stifled my urge to gather a large bouquet of these easily-killed plants and picked only a token offering from a few single-blossomed stragglers.

Now and then, I lingered to pick strawberries, rich, glossy fruit, with unsurpassed flavor, that puts even their cultivated cousin to shame.

It was with a feeling of reluctance that I neared home. I wished that the hike could have lasted longer. One feels a serenity, a peace of mind when on intimate terms with nature, that nothing of man can ever quite match.