

## Autumn

IN THE VALLEY OF THE ASSINIBOINE

By John E. Nixon, Wauchope

Not one false note in all the eye perceives,  
 No jarring contrast and no line untrue,  
 From that wide arch of opalescent blue  
 Down to the valley where the river weaves  
 Its winding course and in far distant cleaves  
 The lessening hills. This scene the Indian knew  
 In long dead autumns when October grew  
 Like multitudes of red and golden leaves.  
 Surely a spirit harbors in this place,  
 Haunting lost paths and hearthstones overthrown,  
 Making dim pasts to our tomorrows join —  
 Some lingering echo of that vanished race,  
 Too soon forgotten and too late unknown,  
 That whispers in the word Assiniboine.

## Cranberry Hike

By RAY PETERSON, Tofield, Alberta

It was a grey, still day, with occasional bursts of sunlight smiling through the low clouds. Micheal and Colin trotted happily along beside us as Kathryn and I started off towards the muskegs. The third week in October is a bit late to pick cranberries, perhaps, but the notion had struck us and off we went.

The countryside, already stripped of its gay autumn colors, was clothed in warm browns and greys, trimmed here and there with the hardy greens of short, second-growth grasses, and the old-gold of a few remaining willow leaves. The water in a large slough we passed was a dark mirror blue-grey, cracked in the centre by the wake of a cruising muskrat. As we crunched through a long stretch of woodland, Kathryn scuffed a foot in the thick covering of fallen leaves. "It's like walking on a thick carpet of cornflakes," she said.

We ducked through a ring of tangled willows and entered a small muskeg. It was a pretty place with its humps of Labrador Tea, the small

clumps of white birch sapling. Clustered on small-leaved plants was the small, richly-red fruit of the Dry Ground Cranberry. It was lunch time. We perched on mounds of moss, holstered with spagnum moss, and ate the sandwiches we had brought. How few they seemed, and how good they tasted, especially the cheese ones garnished with a liberal sprinkling of the tangy, juicy cranberries.

After picking a few quarts of the small, bright berries, we crossed to a larger muskeg. Here we found the larger fruit of the Swamp or Field Cranberry. Its fruit, often mottled and speckled before fully ripe, hangs from the ground on fine threads and grows in assorted shapes, spherical, oblong, and pendant-shaped.

Scattered over the muskeg were great quantities of dried mushrooms, too brown and shrivelled to be identified. Large clumps of grey lichens dotted the muskeg. Here too, were a few clusters of tiny, dark-green lichens that poked up in slender, pointed miniature fingers that looked

like a phalanx of miniature spears. Another lichen that attracted us was a light-green wonder of beauty with se-like tips of crimson.

I tossed a large, round clump of grey-green lichen to Kathryn. Here," I suggested, "A hat."

"To go to the Ladies Meeting with," Micheal put in quickly.

The afternoon passed very quickly, and all too soon it was time to leave.

A small flock of Mallards rose into

the air from near the dark pyramid of a muskrat house. As we neared home, a Blue Jay scolded from the row of dead sunflowers along the garden. And then, catching our instant attention, a small, plump bird with rose-flushed underparts and a striking grey patch on its head, hopped atop a rail fence. It was a Grey-crowned Rosy Finch.

It had been a pleasant hike, and to help us remember it we would have a few jars of spicy cranberry jelly.

## Rhapsody in June

By ELIZABETH CRUICKSHANK, Regina

The choice of the most spectacular argument of the province, the Cypress Hills, for the summer meeting of the N.H.S. was a happy one. Rain had given a fresh-washed smell of forest and rich earth to make heady atmosphere for the motorcades that converged on the park.

Pink-sided juncos were numerous, one mother leading us to her nest in a grass-curtained hollow in the roadside. A red-breasted nuthatch disclosed his home too, a tiny hollow in the tree trunk beside Mr. Budd's cabin. Over a meadow we followed an ovenbird who called "teacher, teacher, teacher" to friends so glad to see her.

An exhilarating argument about the identification of a plain little warbler must have made it feel like a prima donna, as it sang and bowed on its tree-top stage before the crowd of dedicated birders. Being a Rocky Mountain orange-crowned warbler—its crown not on display—it was quite at home in the aspen forest.

A thrilling experience was sighting a lazuli bunting, a Blue Boy picture framed in spruce wood with a cathedral of pines for a background.

On the deep sponge of humus on the forest floor we found orchids not named for their odd and beautiful blossoms but for their odd-shaped roots, — coral root. Some had spotted blossoms, others striped, but all stood in groups, their purple-madder thick stems conspicuous in the subdued light.

Shining arnica reflected the sun that found its way among the pines to make little pools of light on the burnt-orange pine needle carpet.

From the edge of the road leopard frogs hopped out of our way to the brook that trilled happily as it tumbled in and out of willow and rose



From the crisp hour of dawn birders and botanists were abroad on pages of discovery. A Maryland yellow-throat set the mood at that early hour, a melodic mood that was to accompany us through the whole visit — "witchery, witchery, witchery".