

CAMP & TRAIL

X *Classic Camping Notes*



WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM OF FAMILY CAMPING



Located in Bear Brook State Park near Allenstown, New Hampshire, the museum is open from Memorial Day to Columbus Day. I tried for three years to get to the museum when I traveled to Vermont for the Snow Walker's Rendezvous, finding it already closed. Then, last year I got to Vermont for my canoe instructors recertification and was able to finally get to see the inside of the exhibits.

As you enter the grounds, the front of the building is guarded by a display of tin can campers from all ages. The inside is first a row of display cases and shelves full of books and artifacts of the day. The information desk sells vintage cards and books (I picked up 2 autographed canoe books by Bill Riviera).

The inner room is the gold mine. The outside walls are lined with shelves full of old gear, and in one corner is an umbrella tent full of interesting artifacts. The central display is a composite camping covering camping gear from 1880 to 1940. It's one of those displays you can sit and look at for hours.

When the guides found out I was interested in classic camping, and traveled all the way from Idaho to visit them, there wasn't enough they could do to help me out.

The museum also has a hall of fame of camping's greats including Horace Kephart, L.L. Bean, Sheldon Coleman, Teddy Roosevelt and many others.







CAMPING 1880 - 1940

This is a composite campsite. No one party would carry such a wide assortment of equipment. Nor would an actual campsite be so congested.

The 55-year old tent appeared in the 1940 L.L. Bean catalog. The shear pole rig allows easy access into the tent and indicates that this is a semi-permanent camp during a canoe trip. For an overnight stop, a canoe paddle would probably have been used as a single tent pole.

The bough bed is another indication of a semi-permanent camp.

Spruce boughs were used for the base while more flexible limbs of fir or hemlock topped off the bed for a remarkably comfortable surface.

The sleeping bag, ca 1895, consists of a cotton duck shell insulated with thick felt padding and wool resulting in a very heavy bag, but probably quite comfortable, even in cold weather.

Originated in the Adirondacks in the late 1800's, the pack basket in the tent doorway is still popular among woodsmen, especially in Maine.

At the left of the tent is a Norwegian Bergen pack whose design dates back more than 100 years. This particular pack was purchased in 1935 and used extensively in New Hampshire's mountains. The Bergen pack was modified for use by Alpine troops during World War II.

Hanging over the tent is a pair of moccasins known as "lamigans". Made in Canada for use on snowshoes they were popular because the soft soles did not wear out the snowshoes' mooshide filling.

The folding reflector oven, also known as a "shed baker", is capable of more than 600 degrees. Earlier non-folding versions were tipped onto their backs for use as dishpans. This kept the interior shiny - and therefore efficient - while great heat sanitized it.

The coffee pot over the fire hangs from a "dingle stick". It was believed that allowing one to remain over a dead campfire invoked the wrath of evil spirits. To this day, the dingle stick is set aside for use by those who follow.

A bucksaw, far better than an axe for cutting firewood, could be dismantled for packing and quickly reassembled. An axe, however, was necessary for splitting.

Usually whittled of cedar, the shavings near the fireplace were known as "prayer sticks", effective in starting a campfire.

Rolls of birch bark were considered prize findings. Even when wet, birch bark burns fiercely. Fallen birches rot quickly from the inside, leaving rolls of bark virtually intact.

Stripping bark from a live tree leaves a permanent scar inviting disease.

Beaver "works" (these in the foreground are real) are common along many canoe routes, especially where the beaver's favorite food grows - poplar.

Beaver eat only the bark. The limbs are used for building dams and lodges.

Equipment in the foreground was likely to be used by pack-train guides in the West.

The cast-iron Dutch oven has three short legs so that it can be set over a bed of live coals. Coals are also heaped upon the rimmed cover. Since cast iron absorbs and retains heat well, the oven continues to bake even after the coals start to cool.

Made in Wyoming, the Sims stove folds compactly to fit, along with its stove pipe, into the canvas pouch shown near it. The Sims was used to heat a wall tent, especially during the hunting season. It also served as a cookstove. During periods of drought when open fires were banned, the stove pipe was fitted with a spark arrester.

While camping in the backwoods during the era from 1880 to 1940, the cutting of boughs and poles did little harm to the woodlands. Campers were relatively few and the forest was extensive, much of it inaccessible except by canoe or pack train. Following World War II when camping mushroomed into a massive exodus into the Outdoors, such cuttings became unacceptable. Sophisticated modern equipment has eliminated the need for an axe and a bucksaw except in the most remote backcountry areas.





Autogypsies

In 1917, a group of young men from Seattle, Washington, called themselves "autogypsies." They traveled across the United States in a 1917 Ford Model T, which they had converted into a mobile home. Although they called themselves "autogypsies," they were not really gypsies. They were simply young men who had converted an automobile into a mobile home. They traveled across the United States in a 1917 Ford Model T, which they had converted into a mobile home. They traveled across the United States in a 1917 Ford Model T, which they had converted into a mobile home.



Roughing It Smoothly

Autocampers wanted the pleasures of "roughing it" between 1915 and 1940, but they also wanted privacy and comfort in the woods. They built or bought house cars or campers. These were cars, made of wooden frames and galvanized steel, with a kitchen, bath, and toilet. They also had seats and beds that unfolded for sleeping. Some campers even had a small stove on which they could cook. Many families enjoyed domestic comforts while camping. House campers also held camping equipment steady with poles and splines.






At Home in a House Trailer

In thousands of backyards from 1910 to 1940, there were house trailers. They were built with wood, metal, or canvas. They had a kitchen, bath, and toilet. They were used for camping and for traveling. They were also used for living. They were built on wheels and could be towed by a car or a truck. They were also used for living. They were built on wheels and could be towed by a car or a truck.

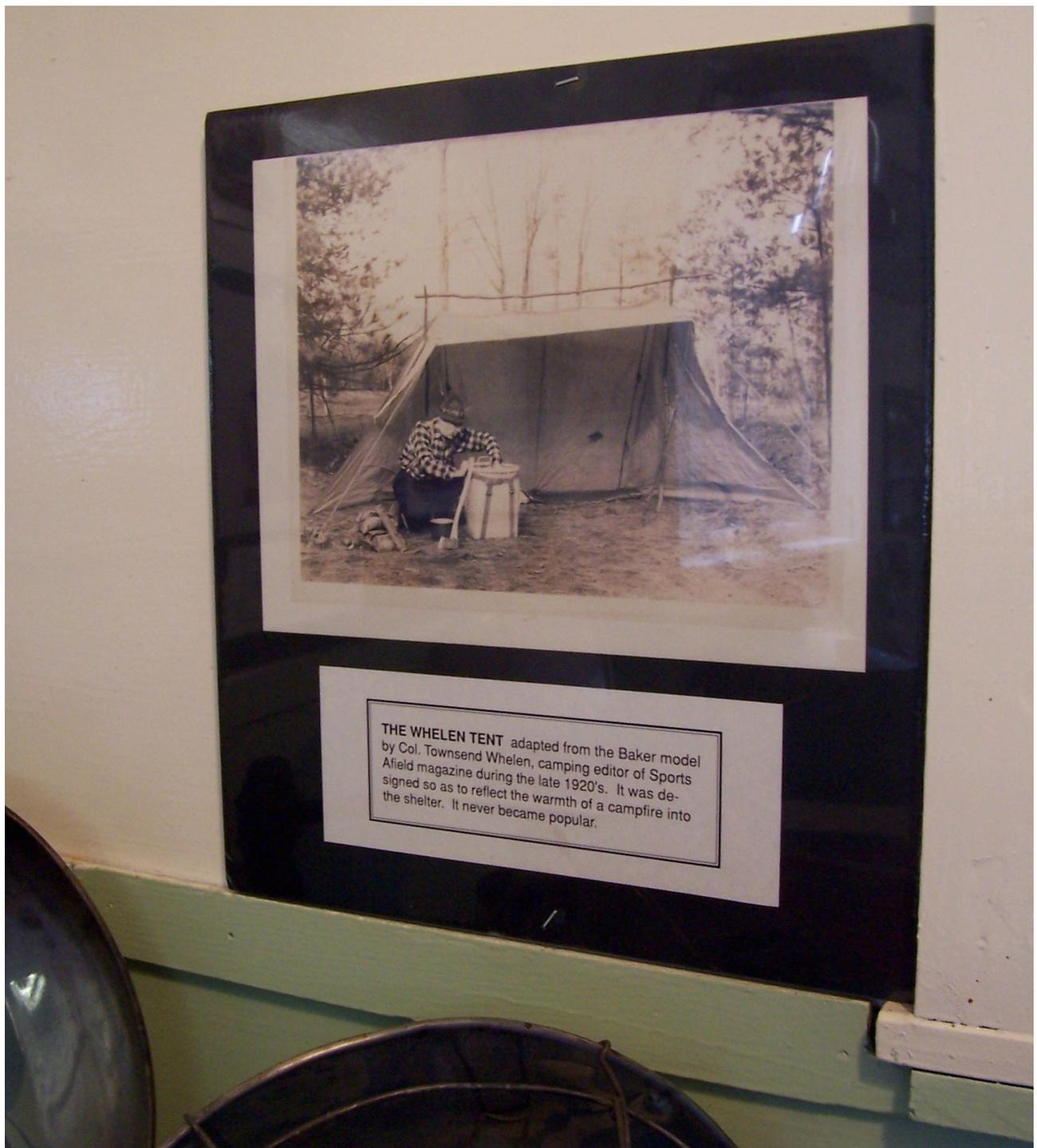




Autocamps

Autocamps were a popular form of camping in the 1920s and 1930s. They were built on wheels and could be towed by a car or a truck. They had a kitchen, bath, and toilet. They were used for camping and for traveling. They were also used for living. They were built on wheels and could be towed by a car or a truck.



It's a hidden treasure and you should make an effort to see it. It's a small display, but rich in camping heritage. For information go to www.ucampnh.com/museum/Welcome.html. The website was recently

redone, making it simpler and up-to-date, but removed many of the great collection photos that inspired me to make the trek over and over until I got to visit.