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# Cache Lake Country, John Rowlands, 1947

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**Description :**

Cache Lake Country, by John Rowlands, is a seasonal presentation of stories and projects about his living in a wilderness cabin on a North Woods lake. It is both a how-to collection of projects and a wilderness living collection of essays. Rowlands and Henry Kane, the illustrator, combine their skills for this well done book.

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*Cache Lake* is a timeless classic of living on a lake in the North Woods. Rowlands uses the passing of the months to present different topics, projects and stories illustrating his life on this lake. The book has 13 chapters, a Prologue, *Portage to Contentment*, a chapter for each month of the year and a good index. One of the most remarkable things about this book is the wealth of illustrations. Henry Kane, the illustrator and a photographer, who also lived near Rowlands lake, has contributed many full-page illustrations and small drawings that grace nearly every page of the book. As Rowlands discusses a project, or tells a story, Kane provided either small, margin-sized drawings or larger ones to assist in the discussion. This collaboration of text and illustrations makes this book unique in many respects. The quality of the drawings and text adds tremendous value to this book. It is hard to read this book without finding yourself captivated by the idea of making a number of the discussed items, or find yourself lost in the mists of Cache Lake.

Here is how Rowlands found Cache Lake in *Portage to Contentment*:

*After I cleared the thoroughfare and came out on the small lake, I stopped paddling like a fellow will when he sees new water for the first time. The sun had come up and mist hung motionless like a big cobweb just above the surface. "Ghosts breath" we called it when we were young. Over to my right, to the eastward, the shore was lined with jack pines and in one place close down by the water I could see a natural clearing. On the west was part of the great swamp I had passed coming up from Snow Goose Lake, but going north on that side the land lifted up and the white boles of big canoe birches showed on the low ridge.*

*I have seen maybe a thousand northern lakes, and they all look alike in many ways, but there was something different about that little lake that held me hard. I had sat there perhaps half an hour, like a man under a spell, just looking it over.....*

*This was the lake of my boyhood dreams! This was the lake I used to picture when I camped with my chum by a little millpond near a meadow on a farm...*

*Then for no reason that I understood, I paddled ashore, built a fire and made myself a pail of tea. And there was the big tree, not the elm that stood by the old millpond, but a tall white pine just where it ought to be. I knew then I had found the place I had always wanted to be.*

He names this place Cache Lake, as in this cache, the best of the North was stored. Rowlands, in a piece of incredible fortune, is able to live on this lake at the behest of his timber company. He builds a lakeside cabin, finds Chief Tibeash, a Cree who he had known as a child living nearby and begins living the life of his dreams. From January, *Long Nights and Deep Snows* through December, *Blizzards and Wailing Winds*, Rowlands entertains and educates the reader with small essays and innumerable projects related to living in the North Woods. From logging camp stories to canoe camping with the Chief and Hank (the illustrator), from building an outdoor clay oven, making bean hole beans and long-tailed pie, we have pieces of daily life on this lake in the woods.

Cache Lake, as a physical entity, is never actually defined by Rowlands, but is used as a metaphor of finding the ideal place to live your chosen life. Many have speculated as to where Rowlands actual Cache Lake is, but in reality this book is more about making or finding your own Cache Lake, rather than finding his. In his opening chapter, Rowlands defines Cache Lake this way:

*On most maps Cache Lake is only a speck hidden among other blue patches big enough to have names, and unless you know where to look you will never find it. But a place like Cache Lake is seldom discovered on a map. You just*

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*come on it--that is if you are lucky. Most men who travel the north woods sooner or later happen on a lake or stream that somehow they cannot forget and always want to go back to. Generally they never do go back.*

This, I think, is the heart of this book. John Rowlands found this lake while cruising timber, but instead of a just a pleasant memory, he returned and lived the good life. I think this book is a celebration of his discovery and his attempt to illustrate the pleasures of living in the place he could not forget. I think this book is a manual for finding pleasure in life, and then living that dream.

*Cache Lake* was published originally in 1947 by WW Norton & Company, New York. This was reissued in 1953 in a slightly smaller format as the Wilderness Edition, this time with a 2 page Foreword by Rowlands. Here he opens the Foreword with:

*It is now better than a dozen years since Cache Lake Country was first published and in that fragment of time the world has seen great changes. We have watched the dawning of the Atomic Age, bringing new triumphs for man, new hopes and also new and haunting fears.....*

There is a Cache Lake for everyone, but it won't be found beside a four-lane highway nor will there be a clear trail to lead to it. If it is worth finding, it will be far from the sights and sounds of civilization, quiet and clear, and without pretension. Unless you know what to look for you may pass it by.

In 1990, this was again reissued, by Lyons & Burford, with an excellent Introduction by Verlyn Klinkenborg. Here Klinkenborg comments on and reveals the only clue that Rowlands left as to the actual location of Cache Lake. He also provides some interesting background on Rowlands life outside of the lake. For instance, we find that Rowlands was the public information officer for MIT and an established and respected journalist for the United Press. Klinkenborg's introduction makes this edition well worth finding.

*Cache Lake* was again recently reissued by Countryman Press (2003). All editions can be fairly easily found on eBay or Bookfinder for very good prices. The Wilderness Edition is commonly found for less than \$5 and Klinkenborg's edition for less than \$10. I highly recommend this book in any edition, but Klinkenborg's is worth finding for its completeness of detail about Rowlands, and the Wilderness Edition is just a great handy size for the bedside or cabin table. In my opinion, the 1947 and 1953 editions have clearer drawings, than the 1990 Lyons & Burford,(I have not seen the Countryman Press edition). But this is the sort of book that one needs two editions, one at work and one at home. One needs the work edition for those few moments of time that can be captured during the day to look for your Cache Lake, and an edition at home for projects and dreams.

Note: Article opening image is my *Cache Lake* in the Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains of Montana.

*Post-scriptum :Version 1.0 4/6/2004*