



A picnic ground for children offers an overall view of Manitowadge, gained after a short but steep climb.



A forest ranger's camp on the shore of Manitowadge Lake during the summer of 1954.

Right: Manitou-midgets dressed warmly for outdoor play in May.

MANITOUWADGE

CAVE OF THE GREAT SPIRIT

by L. CARSON BROWN

IT WAS FORBIDDING land. From the beginning of time it had lain virtually unknown except to the nomadic Ojibway. Yet it was revered land, inspiring awe in the native tribesmen. It was Manitouwadge — “Cave of the Great Spirit”. Here a quiet lake nestled in the shadow of a rugged escarpment, surrounded by dense forest.

Thirty miles to the south transcontinental trains of the Canadian Pacific Railway left their plumes of smoke as they laboured around the north shore of Lake Superior. Twenty-five miles due north the steel road of the Canadian National

etched man’s challenge to the unconquered wilderness. The miles between were unknown territory with a few timber companies just nibbling at the fringe of the vast covering forest.

Such was the situation in 1931 when James Edgar Thomson, a Canadian graduate student at the University of Wisconsin who was working during the summer with a field party of the Ontario Department of Mines, entered the area to make an assessment of its mineral possibilities.

Dr. Thomson, who was to become the director of the department’s geo-

logical branch, had spent the preceding summer as the leader of a geological field party in the Heron Bay area. There, in conversation with the Indians — conducted largely in sign language interspersed with guttural grunts — he heard for the first time of the lake the Ojibway called Manitouwadge. His professional interest was aroused when the Indians, who were not ignorant of the story the rocks had to tell, described a greenstone belt with rusty gossans — an indication of promising country in the lexicon of prospectors in Ontario’s Precambrian Shield.

Thomson learned what he could from the Indians, talked to prospective Indian guides and collected rough sketches of possible canoe routes into the Manitouwadge country. The day of aeroplane travel for geologists and prospectors had not dawned, nor were there such aids available as aerial photographs and maps.

Nevertheless, Thomson determined to probe the prospects of the unknown territory and, with the concurrence of Dr. A. G. Burrows, the provincial geologist, he began his quest the following year.

June 17, 1931, saw the start of the expedition as Thomson and his guide, Moses Fisher of the Pic River Reservation, paddled up the Pic River from the C.P.R. crossing just east of the Heron Bay settlement.

They paddled upstream against

