

## THE BEAVER DAM

There is nothing that represents the spirit of Canada, or its people, more than the aquatic mammal known as the beaver. This animal, loved by many, despised by few, has cast a warm glow over our country, becoming its personal mascot. Beavers make their homes in low lying areas prone to flooding. Water which flows year-round is needed, as the reservoirs surrounding their homes need to be replenished by a creek or small river. These aquatic creatures leave a small outflow to preserve the life of the body of water they depend on for their survival. This is great planning by the beavers' engineering staff.

After beavers find an appropriate site for their new homestead, they start constructing a dam to capture the water where they will build their home. The water for their building site must be deep, as all entrances to their homes must be accessed from below the water line. As the beaver colony grows, so does the size of their dam. Beaver dams can stretch across acres of lowland forest, with the water killing the trees and vegetation. During the process of this change, some of nature's most diversified habitats are created.

The beaver ecosystem was a constant area of play when I was a child and young teen. Large rafts were built, floating on gigantic innertubes of rubber, making traversing anywhere on the water possible. Powered by large sticks pushed into the mud, the raft would be propelled forward through the wetland's vegetation. The yellow and white blossoms of the large lily pads threw a cascade of colours through the swamp dominating our senses. The loud croaking of bullfrogs would fill the morning air as we launched the raft into the brown waters of the beaver dam. The smaller pond frogs, plentiful in this environment, would swim out of the way of our approaching craft.

A trip to the beavers' home was always the first order of the day. Approaching the area quietly, we would sometimes see a beaver, but most times our presence would have been detected early, with the distinct sound of a beaver's tail hitting the water sending a clear signal of danger as we drew near. The swamp would grow silent, the quiet overwhelming our senses. Shortly, the frogs would begin to croak again, and the insects would sing, chirping their mating calls, knowing the perceived danger had passed.

The water in the beaver dam was a miracle of science. Every scoop of water taken from the pond was full of life. Larvae of flying insects filled the beaver pond, with the annoying mosquito the most popular inhabitant of this water world, using the swamp as a perfect soup for its breeding grounds. We used this waterway as a road to access certain areas of the pond, where small islands were surrounded by water. Different miniature ecosystems were created on these islands of life. Amphibians used the grasslands to escape the water when they so desired, and the hardwood trees full of greenery shielded the homes of nesting birds.

I cannot overlook the wire fence we used to cross the water. Keeping our feet on the wire above the water line was a game of balance and skill we played as adolescents. I will never forget the memories this special animal helped to create, a symbol of strength and hope in our country of high achievers, like our friend the beaver.

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