

Canoe Trip

The road to the lake is so twisted that one stretch is named “The Dragon’s Tail.” Our truck, bristling with canoes and kayaks, yaws through the tight curves like a ship coming about, far too sluggish for the thrill-seekers who swarm thick to challenge the dragon. Motorcycles and hot rods stack up behind us like a trail of creeping ants, and when we turn off the highway they gun their engines, freed. The boat launch is quiet though, the dusty pebbled road lazing with its concrete toes in the water. We lade canoes as close as we dare to the sinking point, the grind of the final push giving way to sudden silent weightlessness as they slip into the water, gunwales low to the murky green.

Jonathan Rogers 11/28/18 3:45 PM
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Jonathan Rogers 11/28/18 3:45 PM
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On the water we are sluggish again, but there is no wind today to shove our burdened convoy backward. There are also no jellyfish beneath us, as there were in the early years of these trips – quarter-sized wisps pulsing through the dim, impossible as faeries. A mile of paddling and jests tossed from boat to boat, then with shoulders burning, we make landfall. The Island.

Jonathan Rogers 11/28/18 3:44 PM
Comment: Yes! The whole opening paragraph is excellent, but this moment when the canoe goes weightless is really lovely. I would encourage you, however, to give this moment its own clause rather than tucking it into a nominative absolute.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 8:59 AM
Comment: Rework this. It looks as if somebody is tossing both jests and paddling from boat to boat. I think the absence of a verb in this sentence (fragment) exacerbates the problem.

Our advance scout rolls lazily out of the silken cocoon of his hammock to greet us as we clamber up the shifting rocks. Joe has made the journey alone and by moonlight to claim this ground before any rivals, and we render the praise due him; his bleary-eyed sacrifice guards us from being forced to an inferior second choice to this, the magic spot. We heave gear up the steeps amid head-sized stones that turn over to gnaw our ankles. Thirty feet from the water, a fringe of gnarled pine roots reaching out into empty air marks the border from bare rubble to stubborn forest. On the edges of the island’s narrow wooded crown we sling our hammocks between leaning grey pillars, leaving open the dirt patch around the firepit. Those who insist on tents look among the roots and rocks and sloping ground for the least bad place to lie down. All the activity startles gray-brown lizards who dart into stony crevices or up tree trunks where they turn invisible on the bark.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:00 AM
Comment: Yuck. Rework this sentence.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:02 AM
Comment: I like the visual here, but the nine-word stretch from subject (fringe) to verb (marks) requires that I engage my brain and therefore disengage my visual sense. Rework this.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:02 AM
Comment: You can do better.

There are coals glowing dull amid the pale ash from our man’s morning fire. Dug in, we fall to feeding these into crackling life. By tradition there must be meat cooking as often as possible, and we need to start making inroads on the absurd amount of beef and pork in our coolers, or we’ll have to haul it out when we leave. While marinated steak sizzles on a black iron griddle, contributions to the island library begin lining up on the long plank spanning two flattish boulders, with smaller rocks pressed into service as bookends. Lewis and Chesterton have made the trip with us, along with Dostoevsky. Golding has not been forgotten. Every genre is accounted for, and leather-bound, gilt-edged tomes press against creased paperbacks shedding their covers on the dusty plank; an ephemeral Alexandria in the wilds.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:02 AM
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Others arrive in twos and threes, until our chatter spreads out and goes spilling off down the rocks. A swimming creature is sighted – no, it isn’t a beaver, it’s Dave, come without a boat and swimming all the way in. He arrives with eyes red and swollen from the cold water, and we older ones reminisce about having the energy of a twenty-something. From there the conversation naturally flows to the year an armada of wild boar swam from the nearer southern shore and landed on the island, and the tale is told once again with much gesticulation.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:04 AM
Comment: I’m not sure I get what you’re showing here.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:04 AM
Comment: When you use a semicolon, an independent clause should follow. Here you need a dash.

Jonathan Rogers 3/17/18 9:05 AM
Comment: Why passive?

We fill our bellies with steaming pork in memory of the boar as evening draws in. Small and innocent-looking flies snatch mouthfuls from the backs of our ankles, leaving a welling drop of blood each time. A

breeze carries them off and palavering goes on without further predation. Pipes and cheroots are lighted and fragrant smoke wafts amid conversations of fatherhood, books, authors, church planting, the correct pronunciation of *Pinus strobus*, third-party candidates, the kid who was seized by the head and pulled from his hammock during a bear attack a half-mile from here, impending marriages, and how long do you think you could live alone on the island, away from mankind. We gather gingerly on the sharp rocks as the sun sinks between framing mountains across from us, setting the lake aflame. As the last gleam flares a harmonica appears in old Maynard's hand to sound the Doxology, and we join our voices to the familiar strain and the unheard song of the emerging stars.

Jonathan Rogers 11/28/18 3:46 PM

Comment: You sure you need a passive here?

You've done it again. This is really strong. Mostly, I just want to go on this trip. I marked a few places where your sentence structure is overly ambitious. This piece is too good not to be a little bit better.

Your opening paragraph, by the way, is fantastic. And the last grind of the canoe before it goes weightless...that is so on-the-money I don't even know what to say. To me that launch the best two seconds of a boat outing: you don't know if this is going to be a disaster or a miracle...and it's almost always a miracle.