

Cache Lake Country: Life in the North Woods Study Guide

Cache Lake Country: Life in the North Woods by John J. Rowlands

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Plot Summary

Cache Lake country is the story of Jim Rowlands's life living on Cache Lake in the 1940s. The book extends over a one year period, presumably in 1946. Cache Lake is a small body of water in Northern Maine, or the "North Country", as Rowlands calls it. Rowlands discovered Cache Lake on a trip for the timber company he worked for in order to survey land. After several days of survey, Rowlands came upon a lake that reminded him of his childhood. He decided at that moment he would live there, promising himself that he would return. In a week, Rowlands was camping at Cache Lake and when his company asked if he would work from a permanent camp on Cache lake, he immediately agreed.

Not long after he discovered Cache Lake, Rowlands met Chief Tibeash, a Cree Indian Rowlands's father knew and who he remembered from his childhood. The Chief teaches Rowlands much of what he needs to know to live in the wilderness. Rowlands eventually built a cabin in October with the help of his coworkers. Then Rowlands began many years of living on the lake and learning how to live in the North Country. After the first few years, a man named Hank, an artist who made his living drawing and taking pictures of wild animals, arrived. Both Rowlands (called "Jim" by his friends) and the Chief liked Hank immediately.

The first chapter of the book is an introduction, "Portage to Contentment", where Rowlands explains how he came to Cache Lake and his first impressions of the land. He introduces his two friends, Chief Tibeash and Hank and describes the scenery and animal life in the area. The next twelve chapters each cover a month, and together they describe an entire year on Cache Lake. Along the way, Jim explains how to live in the area, describing the use of timber, hunting, foraging, and fishing. He explains how to make a number of crafts and tools, including moccasins, canoes, stoves, outdoor bake ovens and a number of other things. Jim describes the animal life in great detail and puts a great deal of emphasis on the changes in the weather and seasons. Most importantly, Jim focuses on his friendship with Chief Tibeash and Hank and the way they supported one another at all times.

In January, Cache Lake country is characterized by "Long Nights and Deep Snows," and in February, with winter still going, Jim focuses on the stars and the silence of the terrain. March shows the first indications of spring and the awakening of animal life. April melts the ice and warms the temperature. In May, the green of the forest appears as does new animal life. June is Jim's favorite month, and is full of "soft twilights and fireflies." July is full of fishing, camping and summer activities and August brings the harvest and preparation for the long winter. In September, the birds fly away and the forest prepares to sleep. The frost comes in October and cold rain and gray skies follow in November. December is a thicket of blizzards and "wailing winds."



Chapter 1, Cache Lake, Portage to Contentment

Chapter 1, Cache Lake, Portage to Contentment Summary and Analysis

Cache Lake is small and hidden away within the wilderness; only the author and the occasional trapper and Indian has ever seen it. The author, Jim, comes upon it unexpectedly while travelling up through a series of lakes; when he finds it he stops, motionless. He has seen thousands of lakes, but this one is different. For reasons beyond him, Jim paddles ashore, starts a fire and boils some tea. He then realizes that Cache Lake is where he had always wanted to be.

Jim is able to come back regularly, given his work, and on his way back he is able to meet up with Chief Tibeash, a Cree Indian Jim knew years before through his father. The Chief teaches him to use his senses to imbue every sound in the wood with meaning. At the time of writing, the Chief is around seventy.

When he was young, the Chief had showed Jim had to handle a canoe. He had promised to come back when he left. When his company offers to let him live in a permanent camp on Cache Lake to watch the timber company; he only asks for building supplies. The supply crew help him build the cabin in October. The Chief helps as well. Jim then notes that the building went well and that he was lucky enough to have a spring nearby and describes how to spot one.

A few years after living on Cache Lake, a patrol brings Jim a young man who draws and photographs wild animals and birds. He is a great artist by the name of Hank. Jim is happy to have him stay. The Chief likes him and the three of them get along. They build Hank a cabin on Beaver Tail Lake.

After Jim had lived at Cache Lake for two years, a geologist visits. The geologist is studying local minerals and explains to Jim that Cache Lake was made by beaver works hundreds or perhaps thousands of years ago. Jim then, in just a few paragraphs, takes the reader through the change of seasons. He notes that there are always clear signs of the first heavy snow. While the North is somewhat "savage", Jim has made him home there effectively. The snow is heavy and deep, but Jim handles it happily.

Chief Tibeash is the headman of a tribe of Cree Indians, but he is not headman but birth but by wisdom. He helps local Indians settle disputes and solve problems. The Indians' ways have changed, and as they use new materials, such as tents though in winter, he returns to his forefathers' ways. Jim admires them for their belief that everything, water, land, trees and animals, has a spirit and feelings. They are warmhearted and generous. Jim is also a hard worker. Though you must learn patience to successfully hunt with them; they are not in a hurry and rarely rush around.



For Jim, time is an odd measure because its value and speed changes; time moves according to seasons at Cache Lake; one can lose track of time in days or weeks; Jim loses track of days within a month of living there. Sometimes Jim worries that men are not meant to live alone in the wilderness.



Chapter 2, January, Long Nights and Deep Snows

Chapter 2, January, Long Nights and Deep Snows Summary and Analysis

January is very cold at Cache Lake; it therefore becomes a season of rest in nature. Even plants are dead and seeds are waiting to grow. One day Jim takes his favorite husky, Wolf, to go see the Chief. He notes that in the winter, people are so grateful to see each other that everyone is always welcome at any time. When Jim arrives, it is nearly nightfall and a blizzard is on the way. The sounds of the night storms are wonderful and vary substantially. Jim notes that Hank put together a wind gauge to measure the wind.

Walking in the snow, one can often get snowshoe lameness that makes it hard to walk for a few days; it results from the bending of one's toes while walking in snow shoes. Avoiding this is achieved in part with moccasins, which the Chief taught Jim how to make. Jim then covers a mid-winter picnic that he, Hank and the Chief went on. Jim gives a leisurely description of their walk to a clearing and the meal, while discussing the importance of wearing snow blinders to avoid snow blindness due to overwhelming light reflection on the snow.

Jim mentions that they saw some lumberjacks off in the distance and tells the story of one lumberjack, Sam, who got left behind in the woods. He quickly became lost and panicked; then he ran but he quickly became tired. The next morning, Sam found his way into camp; his feet were frostbitten, he had two frozen fingers, and it was only Sam's strength that kept him alive when other men would die. Anyone can get lost, so Jim encourages always having a compass. Jim also notes that direction streams flow, the location of hills and the like for markers when the compass is less helpful. He stresses that one must always tell one's friends where he is going and in what direction. The sun, wind and moon are often good aids as well.



Chapter 3, February, The Stars and the Silence

Chapter 3, February, The Stars and the Silence Summary and Analysis

Wolves are on the move in February and they get hungry; their howls are heard often. The Chief is annoyed because they will scare away pelts he's trying to trap. Jim notes that the Chief said he never knew of a case where a wolf attacked a man. Wolves are typically born in April or May and are like dog puppies but then they must hunt as a team together, say, for a deer.

Jim claims that one can sleep out in the open in below zero temperature with the right outfit and a few simple rules. He also makes remarks about trapping furs and driving sleds and toboggans.

The Chief and Jim spend two days on the trail to the Chief's cabin on Thunder Lake and they follow waterways when they could. He notes the Chief's great patience and lack of frustration; he recognizes that he can only control so much. Before night falls, the Chief and Jim find a camp site and they have to make a cover to block wind that might flare up. Jim recommends rabbitskin robes for sleeping out in the open; it is like two blankets, though it sheds hair quickly. Another tip is to bring blankets you can roll up in, as this is the most efficient way to stay warm. An axe and firewood are obviously important, though in below zero weather a low quality metal will chip.

The Chief chops down several trees and Jim cuts balsam boughs for their bed. They quickly put together a hut from their materials. Next they start supper and talk about food. They note how silly it is that some people think that anything you eat in "nature" is healthy. You must also eat often because of the energy you use. Bacon is a great source of energy, as is rice, biscuits, and brown sugar. Fish are good as well, and that night the Chief and Jim cook some.

Jim marvels at the sparkling stars; one can see Orion, Taurus, the Big Dipper and many other constellations very clearly. The stars truly are guides in Cache Lake. He also notes that nights are extremely quiet; one can hear things quite far away. He then notes that owls can be heard and tells the reader about their feeding habits. He then notes that in February he starts to think of fishing again and notes that in the present year he made a fishing rod early on. He then describes how he made it. As the chapter ends, Jim brags about the amenities he made for his cabin and how pleasant his home is in general.



Chapter 4, March, Strong Winds in the Sugar Bush

Chapter 4, March, Strong Winds in the Sugar Bush Summary and Analysis

It is not yet spring, but the blood still stirs. Some animals are coming out and nature is waking up. Red squirrels are one sign. This was also a sign that the sap has started, so Hank, the Chief and Jim start tapping trees. They then make sugar out of the sap. March is also the time to build birdhouses, and Jim is getting excited about fishing. He then describes his rod's parts in some detail.

The snow becomes wet as the weather heat up, and this making crossing snow somewhat dangerous. Ice fishing is also hard to do, but the Chief goes anyway. On another day, the Chief and Hank come over and make knife sheaths and knives together. Jim reminisces about old treasured knives, axes and other implements he has collected over the years. He also mentions that the three men will get "hankering" and often discuss what meals they'd like to have. Sometimes they cook, and that March, Hank and the Chief make a drum. The Chief tries it out.

Jim describes their treks through the forest and along the water in March. Their snowshoes would get wet but it was easier to make out tracks. They even saw some moose tracks, and Jim discusses a moose anecdote. In the same month, Jim starts to work on touching up his canoe, sometimes sealing it up with grease and spruce gum. Taking care of a canoe will make it last. He then notes that in the winter, one has to bathe inside rather than in the river; getting the water hot can be difficult.

Moonlight one night reminds Jim of his visits to the area when he was young. He hunts Side Hill Gravers, an unusual sort of beast that Jim does not clearly describe. He then mentions a bear hunt he went on with the Chief and two young Cree Indians who respected the Chief. The Chief caught his bear and then told the bear's ancestors that he was a good bear and that he was happy that the bear could join them.

Later in March, a heavier than usual spring rain came; Jim mentions learning to judge the size of rain drops.



Chapter 5, April, Thundering Ice and Black Water

Chapter 5, April, Thundering Ice and Black Water Summary and Analysis

The ice is out of Cache Lake; the ice thunders when it leaves . The information of the ice breaking spreads quickly throughout the woods. However, not all the snow melts, but everywhere else plants start to grow, such as skunk cabbage. Fresh tracks in the soil appear, and Jim made casts of some of them.

Jim begins to describe the various flowers that start to bloom, though a lot of life is still hidden, such as the squirrels waking up in their homes with their new families and the minks. Many types of insect eggs hatch and they make noise in the evening. Timber hauling begins once the ice breaks. Standard lumberjack jargon can be heard; Jim describes his favorite memory of a log drive down the lake and river. Life among the lumberjacks was simple; the food was good, Jim notes, and many camps had animals around, and they all had cats for unknown reasons. Jim then tells the story of a lumber camp cat. Sometimes the cat would bring home animals for one of the lumberjacks, Victor, to shoot.

As the rains fall in April, Jim prepares for summer. This year he makes a new table, among other things. Hank makes some candle holders and often makes his own candles. Jim then describes how he made a bellows to start fires. The Chief tells him about a litter of husky pups owned by an Indian on Otter Stream; Jim goes off and brings one back. His name is Tripper, and he is the size of a ground hog when Jim gets him. Old Wolf doesn't quite know what to make of Tripper. Jim will start to train Tripper in the fall, particularly to run sleds.

Jim also starts to plant seeds, and gets a seed catalogue, or a series of varied types of sees; Jim doesn't live too far from civilization, so he can often get whatever he needs. He will plant tomatoes and potatoes in particular this year, though rhubarb is indispensable. Jim has trouble keeping deer away, but Wolf sometimes sleeps outside in the summers and helps out.

The days grow warmer practically every evening. Jim starts to hear frogs and notes that they can make good pets and eat annoying insects.



Chapter 6, May, The Green Tide Flows North

Chapter 6, May, The Green Tide Flows North Summary and Analysis

To Jim, May seems like an uncertain month, with variable conditions. Spring gains but winter has not left; snow remains. Jim imagines that if he could fly up high in the air he would see a "green flood" from the south making its way up the continent. He would also see millions of migrating birds. Nature is awake and alert, for the summer is short and much must be done. He also notes that the millions of traveling birds travel at night and must coordinate so as not to consume all of the food in a particular area, so the birds return in a certain order.

Each spring Hank and Jim visit the new beaver dams, and Jim is able to employ the implements he made over the winter, particular that things he whittled. Jim then comments on the skills required for good whittling. He also started making a saddle-pack for Tripper, as he will be out in the woods more; he will also need sheaths for his large and small axes. The Chief, Jim and Hank will also had an "eat-out" soon. Jim then notes that he also checks on local bears and starts to fish. The three men also plan a canoe trip and the Chief starts to make arrows and sling sticks to launch them.

The canoe trip begins when the mosquitoes thin out. They must make paddles and Jim comments on them, noting how to handle them and which materials to use to make them, along with how to care for them. They also needed tools to start a fire. Jim next describes how to build an outdoor oven with mortar. He notes that they bake bread, and then transitions into a discussion about how much he likes partridges.



Chapter 7, June, Soft Twilights and Fireflies

Chapter 7, June, Soft Twilights and Fireflies Summary and Analysis

In the summer, dawn is the best time of day. Jim enjoys shaping the early morning clouds into pictures. He discusses large birch bark canoes that hold eight to ten people. The bowman is the most important member of the crew and gets to select the rest. Often groups would race one another.

June is a good month for family in the woods; birds are nesting and singing; young animals come out with the old. Jim then describes some of the new animals, including foxes and porcupines. Robins arrive and start to break the dawn, and at twilight, Jim sees the bull bats flying in the air. Lightning bugs are everyone as well. It turns out that they light caverns surprisingly well. Jim returns to the discussion about canoeing.

The mother partridge and her little "balls of fluff" are perhaps the prettiest woodland sight in June; the clucks of the mother are endearing. The huskies spent time in the lake at this time as well. Tripper is excited by everything. Jim also makes a horn and explains how to do so. Hank helps, as he is excellent at making things generally.

When Jim travels, he travels light; and if he has only a small distance to go, he carries both his canoe and his pack. He then explains what he takes in his pack and how he carries it all. He notes that he carries needles in case he loses his compass because he can magnetize them. Hank even once magnetized his knife. There are various innovative ways to magnetize metal, and Jim reveals some of them.

Jim loves the summer weather and believes that it has done more than anything in nature to make men friends. Weather gets the quiet to talk and the talkative to be quiet; Jim made some of his best friends during good weather. Jim also notes how one can notice signs of good and bad weather. The Chief warns against trusting any one sign too much. A surprisingly large number of signs are available. Jim then transitions into discussing the beauty of dewdrops. The chapter ends as he returns to describing weather signs and the winds. Bad weather is fairly rare in June. He also sees an Indian family that he has known for a while.



Chapter 8, July, The Moose Are in the Lakes

Chapter 8, July, The Moose Are in the Lakes Summary and Analysis

In July the woods are hot, dry and quiet. Nature pauses between spring and fall. Things have stopped growing and the rains have stopped. July days are long and the evenings are ablaze with the red sun. July is Jim's least favorite month; it is hot and fully of insects, particularly mosquitoes, and netting only somewhat helps. You must also make sure your tent is free of bugs at night. Most birds are silent as they have mated. As some consolation, butterflies are aflutter. The study of butterflies is a great pleasure.

That month, two young men on a canoe trip stop by Hank's and spend the evening with them. Jim and Hank teach them woodcraft and how to handle a canoe. The same summer, Jim makes himself a grass cutter, and he also makes a habit of taking afternoon naps in his hammock. Hank enjoys his hammock as well.

Jim notes that it is nearing time for their camping trip. A lot of preparation is required, not only of the canoe but of a sail for the canoe. Sometimes they will latch two canoes together for even better sailing. Outboard motors are somewhat helpful as well. Jim then suggests learning how to carry one's knapsack and pack it tight. The tump line is also useful, which is a strap you put on your head to make carrying things on your back easier. One must also watch one's food carefully and make ice when you can. Ice boxes can be designed, it turns out.

Jim has spent time on his front porch. He is sometimes concerned about fire in the big woods, and a few miles away he almost got trapped in one. Jim buried his items, sank his canoe with rocks and stayed in the water. Camp fires must be built in safe places. Jim then reviews the details of picking a good camp site. Sundials are also good to design at the camp site, and Jim explains how to do this as well. The chapter ends with Jim noting that he, Hank and the Chief can communicate by leaving symbols for one another in the woods, as the Chief cannot write.



Chapter 9, August, Harvest of the Wilderness

Chapter 9, August, Harvest of the Wilderness Summary and Analysis

August is the best time to travel in the North Country. The insects are nearly gone and the weather tends to be settled. It is also harvest season. Berries are red, for instance. Woodcraft is needed to travel to harvest. Often roughing it requires a balsam bed, and this leads Jim to transition into how he has a very nice mattress and how a pilot friend of his brought it in.

The provisions needed on a camping trip depends on the time of year and whether one is out in the woods the whole time or if one will stop in a permanent camp. One needs three pounds of food per day per man, one pound of meat, at least. You also cannot rely on getting food from the forest. Jim then gives a list of recommendations. His rice ration is particularly important. He has a weakness for butter. Hank, the Chief and Jim put together thirty pounds of food rations.

Jim also explains the tents one needs. Tents need vents, but they also need walls. Often the walls are made from saplings stacked up and down against the sides of the tent. Teepees are sometimes a good option. In fact, there are many options and Jim covers a number of them at length; unsurprisingly, the type of tent needed varies between winter and summer. It is important to waterproof one's tent and fireproof it as well. But the two "proofs" often contradict one another.

The three men enjoy the camping trip, but it is as much exploration for them as it is for first-timers. They also travel along a chain of lakes and streams to Lake Waweashkashing. They fly-fish there, though Jim is not very good at it. The Chief knows what he is doing, though. He fishes mostly early in the morning, and unlike most fishermen, he fishes when he needs food. Jim and the Chief have certain preferred pools as well. Special flies and lures are a luxury. They will often eat their fish just after they are caught, but if they want to store them, the Chief will dry them in the sun.

The forest night is a place of "mystery and adventure." Many unusual sounds are heard, along with the occasional beaver felling a tree. Northern rabbits often play. Under the moon, one can hear the call of a loon. At night the men cook and Jim discusses some of his recipes. A number of forest tricks can aid a good meal, such as baking in clay.



Chapter 10, September, The Moon When the Birds Fly Away

Chapter 10, September, The Moon When the Birds Fly Away Summary and Analysis

The nights start to cool and the Northern Lights come out. Summer is over. Everyone in the forest must prepare for winter. Jim has a head start on his chores, though. The September days are clear, but at night it chills quickly. Beavers release their young and the fawns and yearlings are together while the buck is away. Birds molt and their colors change, as do the leaves. The robins left in late August. Jim notes that one can learn much about the birds from observing their patterns.

In September, it is time to harvest rice out of the rice paddies. The rice is wonderful with duck, and so, Jim notes, the waterfowl are on the way. Hank gets his photographs, watching for them. He is very careful and is excellent at building blinds for himself. He mostly photographs birds, though sometimes he catches jumping fish. The fish also make for good eating.

Jim notes that city people don't realize how hard it is to walk in the wild, since the terrain is hilly and one must always watch one's step. In the city, you also use different muscles to walk and so your feet can wear out quickly. In fact, knowing how to tend to your feet is important to travel through the woods. Chafing is particularly important to avoid.

September is also a time for fishing and smoking fish; the three of them and a friend often make smokehouses for these occasions. The Chief will also smoke geese, venison and moose. Jim has smoked meat for years but also smokes cheese and salt. Smoking things is easy.

Indians start to head north to trapping grounds and Indian women bring back cotton goods. They acknowledge Jim as they pass. Jim recalls a time when an Indian man passively asked him for aid and another time when his canoe capsized, which separated him five days from civilization. From that day forward, Jim has always kept food with him, just in case.

Jim continues to train Tripper for sledding, though he is not large or strong enough yet. The Chief and Jim clear some trees to see Faraway See Hill clearly; they make a game of it and the Chief wins.



Chapter 11, October, Frost on Scarlet Leaves

Chapter 11, October, Frost on Scarlet Leaves Summary and Analysis

In timber country, lumberjacks set up camp for the winter; tractors now do the hauling, though Jim misses the horses that pulled logs before. He enjoys watching the lumberjacks work together sawing large trees down. Teams will often leave early in the morning and take the tractors, which make a lot of noise. Unfortunately, that is the best way to do it.

Before sunset, Jim and the Chief make camp and cook. Jim finds some Fool's Gold and makes fire by chipping them together. He notes that the Chief can do basically everything he needs to do with materials from the woods. The Chief is quiet and sees everything; he can even track bears. Jim then tells the reader other stories of the Chief's excellent forest skills. He is also an excellent woodsman and taught Jim how to call moose.

The Chief is not superstitious, because his beliefs about how to hunt and fish are traditional among his people. Jim discusses a few of them. He also notes that he has engaged in a number of important chores, such as mending his chimney pipe and setting up his cookstove. He makes notes about how he makes piping. Jim must also stow his food in warm places so it doesn't freeze. Mice also go after his food and work very quickly; Jim makes a trap for them.

Next Jim discusses how South American Indians make blowguns and hunt with them; Jim wants to make one for himself. Nonetheless, Jim and the Chief had good hunting. They also hunt more waterfowl on Snow Goose Lake. The geese have come strong in the last few years. The partridges are not all gone yet, and so they hunt some of them. Hank brought five to make a Sunday meal.

Jim hopes that Tripper will be able to wear the harness in the winter, for Jim has made a new sled. Old Wolf loves any sled and stays close to Jim while he constructs it. Tripper's training has gone well. Jim and the Chief also prepare buckskin to make moccasins, which is a lot of work. Jim describes the construction details—removing hair, drying it, tanning it, and working it. Jim, Hank and the Chief have tanned other things as well, such as a bearskin rug. Jim makes a fire piston as well and explains how to make one.

As the chapter ends, Jim notes that he, Hank and the Chief pass the time in the long winter nights making models of cabins, canoes and the like.



Chapter 12, November, Gray Skies and Cold Rains

Chapter 12, November, Gray Skies and Cold Rains Summary and Analysis

The thin ice moves over the forest in November and creeps into the lake. If you have properly prepared, November will find you content. When late rains freeze, you can stay indoors. The Chief enjoys telling stories to pass the time, and one can hear the wolves howl in the night. Jim has a profound sense of contentment in November, a sense of security and happiness. The ice storms are slow and dangerous at first and so snowshoes are needed, as are bear paws. Jim also has a permanent toe strap on his show shoes, and he notes that snowshoeing generally is difficult. One time the Chief reversed his snow shoes as a joke and on another evening told him about old-time Indian games. The games varied across tribes, but they had their own form of the shell game and football which they played with a grass-stuffed rawhide.

As winter approaches, Jim and Hank makes friends with small animals hiding away, Jim with a mouse and Hank with a tame skunk. Wild animals, however, are difficult to train. Apparently something interesting is always happening at Cache Lake and it is never certain what Hank will do next. Recently, he dyed an old piece of canvas the color of marsh grass to hide under while he photographs geese. Jim then explains how he makes dyes from various substances.

Jim, Hank and the Chief built a crystal detector radio receiver in November. A radio engineer friend of theirs, Mr. Beedee, showed them how to do it and they searched for parts. Jim goes through how they collect the parts and put them together. The aim was to make it entirely from things found in the forest. During the days of construction, the Chief hunts wolves that are killing animals. Hank notes that the rabbits are turning white. He also found Hank moving over the ice in what might be called an ice boat made from a tree crotch. It also had a canoe sail. Hank was crafty and creative and Jim was able to try it out, as did the Chief. It wasn't as exciting as one might imagine, but it was wonderful fun.

Jim makes things too, though. He tries to build a new sort of cooking pot but creates another sort of pot instead.



Chapter 13, December, Blizzards and Wailing Winds

Chapter 13, December, Blizzards and Wailing Winds Summary and Analysis

Snow covers the North Country; blizzards are a constant fact of life. Life is absent from the countryside. In the mornings, the windows are covered with crystals. Jim admires the frost pictures and the designs of snow flakes. Frost seems so normal that we forget it changes the shape of the land. Jim sometimes hears the lynx that live around the area. Weasel tracks abound. The fur of animals is at its best during December, and trappers are aware of this fact. The only birds in the area have grown winter coats, and Jim often helps them out with food in squirrel-proof feeders.

On Christmas, Jim, Hank and the Chief decorate a spruce with bird food. It is often difficult to get a fire going to cook one's own food, but they have a fireless cooker; Jim explains how to make one in detail. When the fireless cooker is heated, you must put a heated stone into the bottom of the cooker immediately; it is also important to fill one's cooking pot. Jim explains how to produce fine flavors.

For five days in December, the temperature is thirty below zero; you must have the right clothing to survive. This involves creating dead air spaces between layers of clothes that prevent heat from escaping. A good all-wool, one-piece union suit will often do the trick, along with a pair of heavy woolen trousers. Walking in the winter is hard because your sleeves can chafe your arms. One must avoid sweating because it releases heat.

Sometimes people get caught in the cold without enough clothing; paper often can make a good windbreaker in a pinch. From time to time, someone freeze to death in the woods. Any time you go into the woods, carry a first aid kit; Jim advises the reader about which items to take. He also encourages known how to thread stitches. Once Jim cut his finger with a hunting knife and had to put four stitches in his finger. Jim also learned to use a hypodermic syringe.

You must know how to stop bleeding and to care for broken bones. It is also useful to use heliographs, which allow you to flash sunlight long distances in order to signal to others. Jim explains how they work and when they should be used. One can often use Morse code. The Chief, Hank and Jim share a heliograph and it works perfectly.

In the winter, the three of them go to the settlement to pick up special luxuries for Christmas dinner; sometimes they have to wait for Christmas dinner until after Christmas if the weather is bad. But Jim keeps himself busy. Sometimes the weather prevents them from going to the settlement. However, Jim had his sled prepared with Old Wolf at the helm.



One morning the Chief, Hank and Jim hear the lumber company's plane; it dives and roars over the cabin. The weather is bad for flying; Jack, the company's pilot, is talented, but Jim worries why he had come. Jack lands the plane lugging a pack-sack full of things. It turns out Jim's sister had sent the Chief a new pipe; the company also sent a turkey and Jack brought plum pudding and brandy. The snow is coming so they have to unpack quickly. Jack then takes off before the snow could stop him. That Christmas Day Hank, Chief Tibeash and Jim set down to Christmas dinner. Each year before they eat, the Chief lifts his arms and says in Cree, "Come near our own brother today", speaking to all their friends, near and faraway.



Characters

Jim Rowlands

Jim Rowlands is both the author and main character of Cache Lake Country. Originally a timber company supervisor, Jim was on a timber survey mission in Northern Maine when he came upon Cache Lake. It immediately struck him as the most picturesque lake he had ever seen, and he sees it as the perfect archetype of the forest scenery of his youth. He returned quickly after his first visit, and when his company asked him to live there permanently as supervisor, he eagerly obliged.

It becomes clear that Jim acquired a real sense of peace living at Cache Lake. He describes an overwhelming sense of contentment and security living in his cabin, seeing mostly only his friends Chief Tibeash and Hank. Jim is a resilient man, able to survive harsh conditions, and having a rugged work ethic and a love of nature and animals. He also is a craftsman and is able to construct most anything he needs to get along well in the North Country.

Jim's descriptions of Cache Lake has depict a serene man living just as he had always wanted to. He seems to want for nothing, not a wife, a family, great accomplishments, a career, money, traditional spirituality or lots of friends. Instead, he is happy from little but his own sense of unity with friend, beast and nature. Jim's activities as the main character and perspective as author both reflect this happiness.

Chief Tibeash

Chief Tibeash is a seventy-year-old chief of a Cree Indian tribe in the North Country. While he sometimes spends time with his tribe, for the most part, Jim describes him as spending time in his cabin on Snow Goose Lake. Jim maintains that the Chief is not a stereotypical Indian Chief. He is not averse to a number of American forms of life and tools. He is a smaller man, and is very thin.

The Chief, however, is very in touch with nature and practices many of the traditions of his ancestors. He speaks English and Cree and certainly is closer in identity to the Cree community. The Chief has a kind of spiritualist view of reality, where all animal, human and plant life is connected and must be honored. For instance, after killing a bear, the Chief will thank the bear's ancestors and encourage them because the spirit of their descendant is about to join them.

Throughout the book, the Chief is a loyal friend; he is thoughtful and always helpful. He seems to never complain and displays no obvious anxieties about anything. The Chief, like Jim, seems wholly at peace and happy in the same serene sense. While the Chief is a more spiritual man, Jim and the Chief, along with Hank, maintain a deep bond and spend many long years together. All in all, the Chief is Jim's teacher, but their relationship is still one of equality.



Hank

Henry Kane, a photographer and illustrator, befriends Jim and the Chief several years after Jim moves to Cache Lake. Creative and wily, Jim and the Chief are always surprised at his next plot, scheme or plan.

Old Wolf

Jim's old husky that pulls his snow sled. Old Wolf is a kind, gentle and inquisitive dog.

Tripper

The husky pup that Jim brings home in the book and raises to be a sled dog to help Old Wolf.

Cree Indians

Chief Tibeash is chief of a tribe of Cree Indians, many of whom make brief appearances in the book.

The Lumberjacks

Jim is the supervisor for a timber company that harvests timber from the North Country; the lumberjacks therefore come yearly and Jim works with them.

Visiting Friends

A number of Jim's friends visit in the book, though few are named and few stay for long.

Travelers

Often travelers in the North Country will stop by and stay with Jim, Hank or the Chief.

Game

Jim, Hank and the Chief enjoy hunting game but sometimes the game is personalized, such as with a bear that the Chief killed.

Woodland Friends

In the winter, Jim has a friendly mouse that stops by in his cabin and Hank has a trained skunk.



Objects/Places

The North Country

An area of forest in Northern Maine and Southern Ontario where Jim, Hank and the Chief live their lives.

Cache Lake

The small, picturesque lake where Jim makes his home.

Jim's Cabin

Jim's company helped him build a cabin on Cache Lake, but he maintains it and his efforts have made it a home.

Hank's Cabin and Beaver Tail Lake

Hank has his own cabin on Beaver Tail Lake within a day's walk of Jim's cabin.

Chief Tibeash's Cabin and Shining Tree Lake

Chief Tibeash has his own cabin on Shining Tree Lake, also within a day's walk of Jim's cabin.

Birch Canoes

Jim, Hank and the Chief make canoes out of birch and maintain them. They use them frequently in the summers.

Arts and Crafts

Cache Lake Country is full of the details of arts and crafts made by Hank, the Chief and himself.

Prepared Food

All three men become master cooks, combining native food with rations they receive from a nearby settlement.



Native Food

Jim, Hank and the Chief make food from the animal and plant life on Cache Lake every week and sometimes every day.

Clothes

The three men make most of their clothes from animal skins, include moccasins.

Tools

While some of Jim's tools come from the settlement, he, Hank and the Chief make axes, knives, sheaves, packs, tents, sheets, stoves, ovens and so on out of woodland materials.

Camping

Each summer, Jim, Hank and the Chief go on a camping trip; Jim explains their preparations and camping habits in detail.

Fishing

Jim is a huge fan of fishing and can't wait for the summer to arrive so he can go out in his birch canoe and find fish to catch and eat. The Chief is an excellent fly fisherman, but only fishes to eat.

Hunting

Jim and the Chief hunt regularly, collecting venison, moose meat, rabbit and so on. They also use the animal parts to make coats, skins and the like.

The Green Tide

The green tide is Jim's description of the coming of the summer and winter. If viewed from the air over a long period of time, the summer would look like a green tide moving back the snow as it proceeds up from the south to the north and vice versa in the winter.



Themes

Contentment

The first chapter of Cache Lake Country is called "Portage to Contentment", and so from the beginning, the reader will be able to tell that Jim Rowlands finds in Cache Lake Country his spiritual home. It reminds him of the mountains and forests of his youth. When he came upon Cache Lake, it struck him at the ideal lake, a place that no other place could better represent his sense of beauty and peace in the world.

The reader knows nothing of Jim Rowlands before the book, what his life consisted of, save that he worked for a timber company that asked him to live in the North Country to supervise logging operations. Thus Rowlands, while giving a sort of autobiography, focuses entirely on the world of the North Country and his little pocket of life within it, filled with arts and crafts, fishing and hunting, preparing for winter and summer and sharing this simple life with his two friends, Chief Tibeash and Hank.

Seemingly every chapter Jim reminds the reader of the scenery that surrounds him, of the peace that fills his life, and while he rarely says explicitly "I am at peace", his tone constantly reflects a leisurely but full and meaningful sense of life in the North Country. From the forest, to Jim' cabin, from food rations to birch canoes, Jim is happy, secure and at peace.

Advice

Cache Lake Country, were it not for the paeans to friendship and the minor details of Jim's life, would read exactly like a guidebook to the forests of northern Maine. First, the book is set up according to month, and each month is full of advice relevant to living that month on Cache Lake. First and foremost, Jim outlines the weather characteristic of the month. Is the snow coming as it does in September? Or is it almost finishing melting, as it is in May? The best weather comes in June and the coldest months are the most dangerous, though often the most beautiful.

Jim also describes the flora and fauna of the forest. He describes which plants can be used to forage for food, how to collect sap to make sugar, how not to be afraid of being eaten by wolves, how to attract birds to one's cabin, how to hunt and how to fish. He details game hunting, and making food from any number of animals and plants in the forest. Jim also gives advice on navigating the forest, including how to make a compass, what to take in a first aid kit, and how to dress for the winter.

Most impressively, however, is the advice Jim gives on how to build crafts that make life easier in the North Country. Jim seems to have a strong preference to make the items one needs from materials in the forest and often he, the Chief and Hank (particularly Hank) come up with inventive ideas for building stoves, ovens, blowguns, moccasins, canoes with sails, tents, and methods of signaling with sun light.



Friends

Were it not for the paeans to friendship, again, Cache Lake Country would read just like a guidebook. However, friendship is perhaps the most important theme of the book. While one might think that anyone who wanted to live in the Cache Lake Country was a reclusive and misanthrope, Jim is no such person. He explicitly claims that men are not meant to live alone. Jim knows that few people live in Cache Lake Country, but while he has visitors, the main source of comfort and happiness in his life is his relationships with the Chief and Hank.

Jim knew the Chief in his youth. Chief Tibeash was friends with Jim's father, and when Jim moved to Cache Lake, Chief Tibeash befriended him as well. The Chief knows the forests well, and while he is not a stereotypical Indian, he does display the close contact with natural and native spirituality of a Cree Indian. Jim clearly admires him greatly. On the other hand, Hank impresses him in a different way. Hank is a photographer and artist who imagines inventive ways to get his shots or do his sketches without disturbing local animal life. He always surprises Jim with whatever his next scheme happens to be.

The three men share many activities, even going on picnics together; while Jim is self-conscious that the reader might think "we were queer", it is clear that he is not embarrassed by the deep sense of intimacy that pervades their relationships.

Style

Perspective

Jim Rowlands is the author of *Cache Lake Country*, and the book is narrated from his point of view. Thus, the book is written in the first person. Jim seems to have two main aims in the book, both of which shape his perspective. First, he wants to describe life at Cache Lake in Northern Maine. Second, he wants to communicate his sense of beauty, contentment and the easy pace of life in the forests and on the lakes where he spends his days.

Regarding the first aim, Jim sets up the book such that all but the first chapter corresponds to a month of time. Jim describes the weather of each month, the common human and animal activities of those months, and he lists dangers, flora, what can be eaten, and so on. He also goes into great detail about all the tools and crafts one can make in order to make life in the North Country easier and more creative. It also allows one to pass the time. A number of illustrations of crafts, forest scenes, animals and the like fill the pages. They all appear to have been drawn by hand, probably by Hank.

The second perspective runs deeper, however. Jim has found contentment in his life at Cache Lake, from the beauty of the landscape, to being surrounded by largely undisturbed animal life and to the food he eats and the weather he must structure his life around. But more than anything, Jim aims to communicate the deep connection he feels with his friends, Hank and Chief Tibeash.

Tone

Cache Lake Country's tone is one of its best features. Jim claims early on that life in Cache Lake Country has given him a sense of contentment. In many ways, Jim's lifestyle embodies one region of traditional American spirituality—that the real beauty in the world comes from a solitary or near solitary engagement with vast, uninterrupted nature. It is important to emphasize that this book was written long before the modern environmental movement; it does not share any New Age element and has no doctrines to preach. Rowlands seems only to think of the rugged beauty of the life he leads and his feeling of deep connection with life around him.

The tone perfectly reflects Jim's sense of commitment and connection to nature. The book is spread out over an entire year and each chapter covers a month (save the first one). Across the text, then, there is a leisurely pace. Nothing is hurried, nothing rushed. Jim always seems relaxed; even when he must prepare quickly for the winter, he has already planned ahead. The text moves lightly from page to page, suffused with drawings of nature and the crafts he, Hank and the Chief make.

The book seems to have no plot at all; its only aim to draw a portrait of life in the North Country, to show how it proceeds through time and the sense of contentment Jim



derives from it. Consequently, the tone of Cache Lake country is almost comforting, always warm and thoughtful.

Structure

The structure of Cache Lake Country has two important elements. First, its superstructure ranges over an entire year, from January to December in what may be 1946 or 1945. The first chapter introduces Cache Lake Country and explains how Jim came to live there and know Hank and the Chief. But each subsequent chapter covers a month of the year and is largely defined by the weather, flora and fauna, and recreational changes specific to that month.

The second important element of Cache Lake Country's structure is its focus on giving advice about living in Cache Lake Country during the month in question. Jim explains the use and construction of a wide range of crafts, at least a dozen, and often includes illustrations to show how they work and how to construct them. Along with these instructions are advice about dangers in the woods, say how to survive the cold, how to avoid chafing, how to avoid getting lost, and so on.

A number of themes are tied to each chapter and usually are displayed in the subtitle. For instance, in chapter six, May, the subtitle is "The Green Tide Flows North." The "green tide" is Jim's term for how the coming of summer would appear in the North Country from the air. He imagines that the ice melts from the south up through the north and that from far away this would look like a "tide" of green, so the chapter discusses the melting of the ice and all the activities that are made possible by it.



Quotes

"I knew then I had found the place I had always wanted to be."
Chap. 1, p. 12

"Men were not meant to live alone."
Chap. 1, p. 27

"I guess maybe you will think the three of us are queer, but not long ago we went on a midwinter picnic."
Chap. 2, p. 33

"When you get down to hardpan, the whole business of living in the wilderness, finding your way about, and avoiding the dangers, is much a matter of common sense and getting the habit of observing everything closely."
Chap. 2, p. 47

"I wish you could step out with me and look at the sky one of these February nights."
Chap. 3, p. 61

"Whenever men boil water the song of the kettle is a song of peace and contentment and home."
Chap. 3, p. 66

"No man taught me. It is the way my people made their drums talk many, many years before I was born. It has been sleeping up here."
Chap. 4, p. 77

"The man who has never walked in the woods and smelled rain and felt it on his face has missed something indescribable."
Chap. 4, p. 87

"Young fellow, your name is Tripper!"
Chap. 5, p. 103

"I have never know what it is about a spring that makes a man want to keep its location to himself."
Chap. 6, p. 127

"The weather has done more than any one thing in nature to make men friends."
Chap. 7, p. 142

"The Chief can't write, but his signs tell a lot."
Chap. 8, p. 168

"Now comes the most favorable time of the year for traveling in the North Country."
Chap. 9, p. 170



"The nights are getting cool now and the Northern Lights are beginning to play in the sky, for summer is over and fall is on the way."

Chap. 10, p. 191

"Logging is not what it used to be forty years ago when big horses, the pride of the tote teamsters, did all the heavy hauling."

Chap. 11, p. 210

"If you have done what you ought to do to be ready for winter, this is a month of contentment."

Chap. 12, p. 230

"'Come near our own brother today.' And so he speaks to all our friends, near and faraway, on Christmas Day."

Chap. 13, p. 270



Topics for Discussion

Why did Jim move to Cache Lake?

What does Jim like about Chief Tibeash?

What does Jim like about Hank?

Why do you think Chief Tibeash, Jim and Hank get along so well?

Do you find anything romantic about Jim's vision of life? About his friendships?

Name two crafts you learned about in Cache Lake Country. Explain Jim's instructions on how to construct them.

List three warnings Jim offers about traveling in the winter around Cache Lake.

Discuss three of Jim's favorite animals and explain why he likes them.

Does Cache Lake Country have a plot? If so, is this a strength or a weakness of the book? Explain your answer.