

KEEPSAKE CURRICULUM

# STORIES TO GROW UP WITH



## The Boy Scouts on Swift River

By

Thornton W. Burgess

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Thornton W. Burgess

Author of  
The Boy Scouts of Woodcraft Camp  
The Boy Scouts on Lost Trail  
The Boy Scouts in a Trapper's Camp

**Illustrated by C. S. Corson**

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# Note from the Publisher:

This book is a wonderful book of adventure for young boys. Written in 1913, it cultivates the natural adventuresome spirit of boys balanced with character development. This book is in the public domain so I have formatted it to make it available either in an ebook form or as a paperback. Though I have changed some of the language to make it easier to read, I have left many of the words so as to encourage a larger vocabulary. Several I have footnoted with a more modern translation. I have also added some illustrations by my daughter Bethany to enhance the story.

Though not religious in its expression, the story is full of good character and morals. It lends itself to many good conversations in which the character of God and His laws can be talked about and applied in the various circumstances which arise in the story.

## **Additional Illustrations by Bethany Voss**

*“MY GRACIOUS HOW HE’S GROWN!” WALTER EXCLAIMED.*

Page 34

*“IT WAS A BULL MOOSE”*

Page 61

*“CAUGHT IN THE ACT”*

Page 108

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JUST AHEAD LOOMED THE GREAT ROCK  
(Page 47)

# Introduction

“The Boy Scouts of Woodcraft Camp,” to which the present volume is in the nature of a sequel, was written to demonstrate what may be accomplished by the application of Boy Scout principles where boys are thrown in constant contact with one another, as in a large school or camp, and at the same time to stimulate in boy readers a desire to learn for themselves the great lessons of manliness and self-reliance, of true courage and of purity and clear thinking and living which nature is ever ready to teach those who seek to learn. In “The Boy Scouts on Swift River” I have endeavored to show the direct application of the lessons learned in Woodcraft Camp, and for this reason I have chosen four of Dr. Merriam’s boys, three with whom you are already well acquainted if you have read the first book, and one who is a “tenderfoot,” to face the test of self-dependence in a canoe cruise on unfamiliar waters.

I am well aware that certain old hunters and perhaps some naturalists may accuse me of “stretching the truth” in regard to the boldness of the bull moose in inflicting his society upon the young cruisers. For this reason I want to say here that the incident is literally true in the main points, as I myself was one of the victims of his undesired attentions, and prize today as among the choicest of all my photographs those made of his royal highness on that memorable occasion. One of the great charms of the wilderness is the continual encounter with the unexpected. The true Scout is “prepared” to meet such situations and to do the right thing instinctively, but to be thus prepared he must have learned the value and blessing of self-dependence. The boy who has never been forced to stand squarely on his own feet, who has never met an emergency for himself, alone and with the full knowledge that he has none to whom to turn, will seldom become a leader either in boyhood or manhood.

Other adventures in the woods are described in “The Boy Scouts on Lost Trail” and in “The Boy Scouts in a Trapper’s Camp.”

THE AUTHOR

# Contents

I.	FIRST AID . . . . .	8
II.	WHO SHALL IT BE ? . . . . .	14
III.	CHOOSING THE OUTFIT . . . . .	21
IV.	THE EMPTY BUNK . . . . .	28
V.	WAS HE YELLOW? . . . . .	36
VI.	SWIFT RIVER . . . . .	43
VII.	THE FIRST PORTAGE AND CAMP . . . . .	50
VIII.	WALTER'S STRANGE PORCUPINE . . . . .	57
IX.	AN INQUISITIVE MOOSE . . . . .	65
X.	AN UNEXPECTED MEETING . . . . .	72
XI.	A WET CAMP . . . . .	80
XII.	THE STORY OF A LOST MINE . . . . .	86
XIII.	AN UNEXPECTED BATH . . . . .	92
XIV.	A THIEF IN THE CAMP . . . . .	99
XV.	THE FLAME SIGNAL . . . . .	109
XVI.	A NIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN . . . . .	117
XVII.	THE SEARCH . . . . .	127
XVIII.	PLYMPTON'S STORY . . . . .	136
XIX.	THE MYSTERY OF THE CAVE . . . . .	147
XX.	COMRADES . . . . .	154



# Chapter XVII

## THE SEARCH

Woodhull's preparations were soon made after the Indian had awakened him. His anxiety for Plympton had destroyed his appetite, but he was too good a Scout and woodsman not to appreciate the necessity of conserving his own strength, and so he forced himself to eat a substantial breakfast with the guide. When Louis was preparing for the voyage he had hesitated for some time whether or not to take his knapsack. So long as they stuck to the river it was useless, one more thing to look out for and an additional weight on the carries where every ounce counts. On the other hand there was the possibility of a hike of two or three days in the mountains, in which case the knapsack would prove invaluable. And so at the last moment he had put it in.

It was just what he needed now. In it he packed the emergency kit of first aid supplies, a supply of crackers, a roll of erbswurst, a package of raisins, and last, but not least, one of the venison steaks which he had brought in the night before. He did not forget salt, pepper and some cocoa, sugar and milk powder. He knew that Walter and Hal would feel half famished after their short rations of the day before and the walk down in the keen mountain air, and he wanted them to be in the best possible condition for what he feared might be a long, toilsome hunt for their missing comrade. With the knapsack on his back, his canteen filled with water and his rifle in hand Louis was ready. The guide carried an axe, a two-quart tin pail which he had chanced to have with him when he came into camp, and a small coil of rope, the painter<sup>1</sup> taken from one of the canoes.

Thus equipped they struck the Mt. Tucker trail just as the first gray light stole through the woods. A heavy mist shrouded everything, and Woodhull was glad enough to leave it wholly to the Indian to find and keep the trail. This the latter did as by instinct, and by the time the fog began to lift they were well on their way. It was Woodhull's plan to try to reach the junction with the west spur trail before Walter and Hal should and there await them. This would give him a chance to prepare a hot meal and have it ready for the youngsters on their arrival, thus saving time. At the junction of the trails there was no sign of the boys. The mist was still heavy, although it was rapidly lifting. The guide at once started a fire and filled the pail with water at a spring close by. A short forked stick was driven into the ground and a long sapling was laid in this so that the butt projected over the fire. From this was

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<sup>1</sup> a rope attached to the bow of a boat for making it fast.



suspended the pail of water. A piece of the venison was impaled on green twigs and propped up before the blaze so that in a few minutes it was sputtering and sizzling merrily. The guide was an adept in this kind of cookery and devoted himself to the steak, while Louis took his rifle and stepping to one side fired once and, half a minute later, twice in quick succession.

Almost at once they heard the rolling yell of the Delawares some distance above, and they knew that Walter and Hal were on the trail and would soon join them. The mist disappeared, and in less than ten minutes the boys appeared, hurrying down the trail. The steak was done to a turn by this time and, after the first greetings, no questions were asked until a piece of the steak served on a piece of clean bark and flanked with a steaming hot cup of cocoa was before each of the famished youngsters. Then with a few brief questions Louis drew out the story of the day before.

“You are positive that you saw Plympton after passing this point?” asked Woodhull for the fourth time.

“Absolutely sure, Louis,” replied Walter with his mouth full. “A quarter of a mile up there is a big yellow birch stump close to the trail and Hal and I sat on that while we waited for him. That was one of the times he was trying to follow the trail for himself. After that we went on together for a while and it wasn’t until we had gotten over that first lot of ledges that we missed him. He went off the trail either just before reaching the ledges or else on the ledges. I’m certain of it.”

“I hope it was before he reached the ledges. If he got off the trail on them he may have met with a serious accident. A fall up there might cost him his life,” said Woodhull. “Hurry up, you fellows so that we can get a move on. If you were hungry think of poor Edward; he didn’t have anything in his pockets but a little sweet chocolate and some hardtack, did he?”

“That’s all,” replied Walter. “I had the erbswurst with me.”

“Have you saved some of this venison for him, Louis?” inquired Hal as he disposed of the last scrap of his own share. “My goodness! I never tasted anything half so good before in all my life!” he added, without waiting for a reply.

The boys having finished their hasty breakfast the whole party pushed forward to the birch stump where Walter and Hal had waited for Plympton the day before. Here a brief conference was held.

“It’s up to you fellows to show what your Scout training is good for now,” said Louis. “It makes all the difference in the world whether he left the trail before he reached the ledges or after, and we want to know. Keep your eyes peeled for some sign of where he made the wrong turn.”

A remembrance flashed through Hal’s mind. “Louis,” he began eagerly, “I am almost sure that he didn’t reach the ledges. You remember, Walt, how we thought we heard him reply once to our yells before we started back and got lost ourselves?”

Walter nodded.

“Well, if he had been on the ledges we’d have heard him all right,” continued Hal. “It was because he was below the ledges and off to one side that we couldn’t hear him. They just smothered his voice and threw it the other way.”

The Indian, who had been listening closely, grunted his approval of this reasoning. It was decided to examine the trail closely as far as the first ledge, and then if no trace of the missing boy had been found to divide the party, Woodhull and Walter searching the ledges while the guide and Hal returned and reexamined the trail back to the birch stump. The whole party then moved forward slowly, carefully studying the ground for possible footprints.

Walter was the first to find evidence that they were still going right, the print of a heel off a bit to one side. From the size they knew it was made by the missing boy. The guide came over and studied it closely. Then he moved on in the lead as before. Presently Walter noticed that the Indian, instead of keeping in the trail proper, continually crossed it, going a short distance parallel with it first on one side and then on the other.

“What’s he do that for?” muttered the boy.

“Search me!” replied Hal, his eyes glued to the ground. “There’s another print! We’re right so far.”

At every sharp turn in the trail the guide made a short circle. After he had done this three or four times Walter began to understand the purpose.

“I’m on to that fellow now,” he murmured so that only Hal should hear him. “He’s looking for signs off side.”

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the Indian, who was out of sight behind some young spruces some thirty yards beyond a sharp turn in the trail, called

to Woodhull. All three joined him at once and found him bending over a light but clear imprint of one of Plympton's shoes.

"Him leave trail here," said the Indian. "Him not know him lost yet."

Taking the direction from the footprint the four spread out, the Indian in the middle, so as to cover as much territory as possible, and moved forward studying the ground and the surroundings more closely than ever. The direction was still up toward the ledges. As these were approached it was plain to be seen that they could not be scaled at this point. Presently the Indian spoke again.

"Now him find him lost. Him lose head."

He pointed to a little bare patch of moist earth. There were several footprints pointing in different directions. One of these was deeper than the rest and the Indian at once moved forward in the direction of this. "Him run now," he said, and presently pointed to some twigs bent and broken as by the passage of a heavy body. A little later he pointed to a mass of crushed ferns.

"Him fall down," he said briefly.

With these mute evidences pointed out to them the others could picture for themselves the panic and mad flight of the day before, and where once Walter and Hal might have regarded with something like scorn this evidence of loss of self-control, in the view of their own late experience they felt nothing but sympathy. The guide's intimate knowledge of the country was now invaluable. He knew that in his panic Plympton would naturally have followed the line of least resistance, and now pushed ahead rapidly, making short cuts which continually intersected the line of flight, thus saving much time. Every little while they stopped to shout and to signal with rifle shots, after which they would listen in vain for a reply.

Finally, after one of the Indian's short cuts, they failed to strike the trail where he had expected it. He at once bade the others remain where they were while he cast about in a wide circle. After a little while they heard him calling and when they joined him found him smiling for the first time that morning.

"Him find head. Him good boy all right," he said as he pointed to a maple which grew almost alone in little opening. A broad fresh blaze showed conspicuously on the side nearest them and when they examined the tree they found three more. The tree was blazed on four sides. At one side was a fallen tree and close to this were scattered fresh whittlings from a birch stick.



It was all a mystery to Walter and Hal, but the guide and Woodhull seemed to understand it perfectly, and something of the anxious strain in the latter's face cleared.

"That's a sign for us," he replied to Hal's question. "He got himself together here and sat down to think it out. He knew that if he failed to get back to camp we would search for him. He blazed this tree so that we would see it no matter what direction we might come from. If it had been blazed on one side only we might have passed on the other side and not seen it at all. Just remember that in case you ever get lost. It is nothing to the discredit of a man to get lost in the woods, particularly in strange country. The very best of guides get turned around right in their own territory. It is losing his head, his self-control, that discredits a man. Plympton got himself together here, and I'll warrant that he has left a plain trail that will take us straight to him. Let's examine those blazes."

The boys walked close to the tree and at once they saw a pencil mark in the middle of the blaze. It was in the shape of an extended x like this.



They immediately recognized an old Indian sign meaning, "This path not to be followed." They had often used it when doing Scout work at home or around Woodcraft Camp. Of course there were no paths here, so they interpreted it to mean "This direction not to be followed." The same symbol was found on two more of the blazes, but on the fourth was an arrow like this.



“Direction to be followed!” shouted Walter. “See! There is a new blaze on that tree over there to which the arrow is pointing! Hurrah! Sister is right on the job now! We’ll find him in no time.”

“Walt,” said Woodhull abruptly, but in a low tone so that the others should not hear, “don’t you think it would be a little more in the true Scout spirit, the spirit of kindness, to drop that nickname, Sister, and hereafter call Plympton by his given name or at least a contraction of it. I know why you fellows call him that. At first I was willing that you should because I wanted the sting of it to spur him on. He was weak---weak physically and, because of his nervous temperament, lacking in self-control. He isn’t strong physically now, though he has hardened up wonderfully. It is this fact that he isn’t as strong as the rest of you that has worried me most in having him lost this way. But he is strong now in self-control, and the proof of it is right here on this tree. He has pulled himself out of a panic, and that is a thing that many a strong man has failed to do. This tree is a sort of monument to the boy’s finding of himself, of his manhood. Forget that snake incident. That was no test, and never can be. It is something wholly beyond him at present, as is his tendency to faint at sight of blood. Forget it. You and Hal have thought him a quitter. I tell you he has more sand than almost any youngster I ever met. I know that’s pretty strong talk, but it’s a fact. You fellows have no idea of the fight he has been putting up to overcome weaknesses with which he was born, and which his life and training previous to his coming to Woodcraft Camp tended to increase rather than diminish. He has never peeped about being called Sister, but I know it hurts every time he hears it. Now is a good time to drop it. For if he has stood the test of a night lost on the mountain, and I believe he has, you can hardly call him weak any longer. Will you do it?”

Walter had flushed as he listened, but he was too fair minded not to realize the simple justice involved in Woodhull’s request, and he promptly agreed to drop the objectionable name.

“Thanks,” replied Woodhull. “I want this cruise to end with a true feeling of comradeship among us all, and it couldn’t if you and Hal persisted in rubbing into Plympton every time you spoke to him the fact that you regard him as a weakling.”

The whole party now moved forward along the trail that Plympton had blazed. Now it was a bent twig and again a blaze on a tree that guided them. The course was fairly straight, showing that the wanderer had regained full command of himself and picked his way carefully, bringing to bear such knowledge of woodcraft as he

possessed. The direction was nearly due southwest and presently the guide spoke. "Him strike other trail pretty quick."

Sure enough, a quarter of a mile further on they struck the old west spur trail.

"I hope he didn't cross it without seeing it!" exclaimed Louis as they approached it.

"He didn't!" shouted Hal. "There's a new blaze on that tree!"

Hal hurried forward to examine the blaze. "He's gone in that direction!" he cried, pointing to an arrow in the middle of the blaze.

The Indian grunted. "Him go up," he said briefly, and at once took the lead.

"I wonder why he didn't go back to camp instead of going up the mountain," said Walter thoughtfully.

"For the simple reason that he didn't know in which direction camp lay," replied Woodhull. "Right in here it's pretty flat and the woods are thick. It was beginning to get dusky when he got here, and he had lost all sense of direction. Probably he had no compass and there was no way for him to get his bearings. He just took a chance, and by the time he found that he was wrong it was too late to turn back. This trail is very much like parts of the other and it is very likely that he didn't know that he was on the wrong one until he reached the top. You know he has never had any experience in mountain climbing. This trail is awfully blind because it is so little used, and I am afraid he may have lost it somewhere up above. If he hadn't it seems as if he would have heard us signaling." The worried look returned to Woodhull's face.

But apparently the missing boy had succeeded in keeping to the trail. At every blind turn they found new blazes or bent twigs or three or four stones in a pile, signs which he had left for his own guidance should he have to return over the trail.

"Good scout-craft," commented Woodhull as they noticed these.

The party moved on rapidly, stopping only to shout and to signal with the rifle. As on the main part of the mountain the trail led over a series of ledges. The vegetation grew more and more sparse and at last the summit of the west spur loomed above them, bare rock for the most part, and covered with great boulders. Woodhull was growing more and more anxious. It was strange that they had heard no reply to their signals. Just before the last steep climb he ordered all hands to keep silent

while he signaled once more with three shots from the rifle. Hardly had the echoes died away when the guide held up a warning hand.

“Him there!” he exclaimed.

Again Woodhull signaled and all listened with strained attention. This time they all heard a reply, a faint halloo, so faint indeed that they looked at each other almost in doubt. Again the signal, and again that faint reply. There was no doubt of it this time, and with a ringing cheer as by one impulse they started up for the top.

“Strange his voice is so faint. Do you suppose he’s stumbled over a ledge on the other side?” panted Walter.

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” replied Woodhull. “But thank God he’s alive, anyway.”

A hasty survey of the top when it was reached disclosed no familiar khaki-clad figure, and Woodhull waved the others to silence while through his cupped hands he sent a ringing call over the mountain top:

“Hallo-o-o, Plympton!”

Instantly came the reply: “Hello-o, Woodhull!”

The voice was weak, but it also had a peculiarly smothered sound, and as to direction there was none unless it might be said to issue from the ground. The party now spread out and with shouts of encouragement began a hasty search among the great boulders scattered about. The replies had ceased and there was nothing to guide them. Suddenly the guide stopped and pointed to a huge pine that lay freshly uprooted.

“Him lone pine landmark. Him gone now,” he said, and out of curiosity walked over to the fallen giant. A moment later an exclamation of astonishment brought the others hurrying to his side. They found him peering down into a great hole between the rocks exposed by the upturned roots of the tree, and in the dim light at the bottom they made out a white upturned face. It was Plympton; and he lay there unconscious.

