

“DINO,” THE DINOSAUR TREE

Douglas Lake has been blessed to have some enormous white pines dotting its shoreline to the east of the island along the south shore of the lake and elsewhere. However, it has been on the island where some of the very largest pine trees could be, and still can be, found.

The island itself is unique to the area in the sense that it contains many areas of virgin forest that have never suffered the ravages of a lumbering industry that all but destroyed other old growth forests surrounding the lake.

On the southern tip of the island, where the land rises only a few feet above lake levels, were some of the very largest white pine trees that could be found anywhere on the lake. I can remember walking the old foot path that began behind Case's boathouse and wound its way through soaring pines that all but blocked out the direct sunlight. The area between that boathouse and the steep ascent to the much-higher ground midway up the island more than earned its nickname of "The Enchanted Forest."

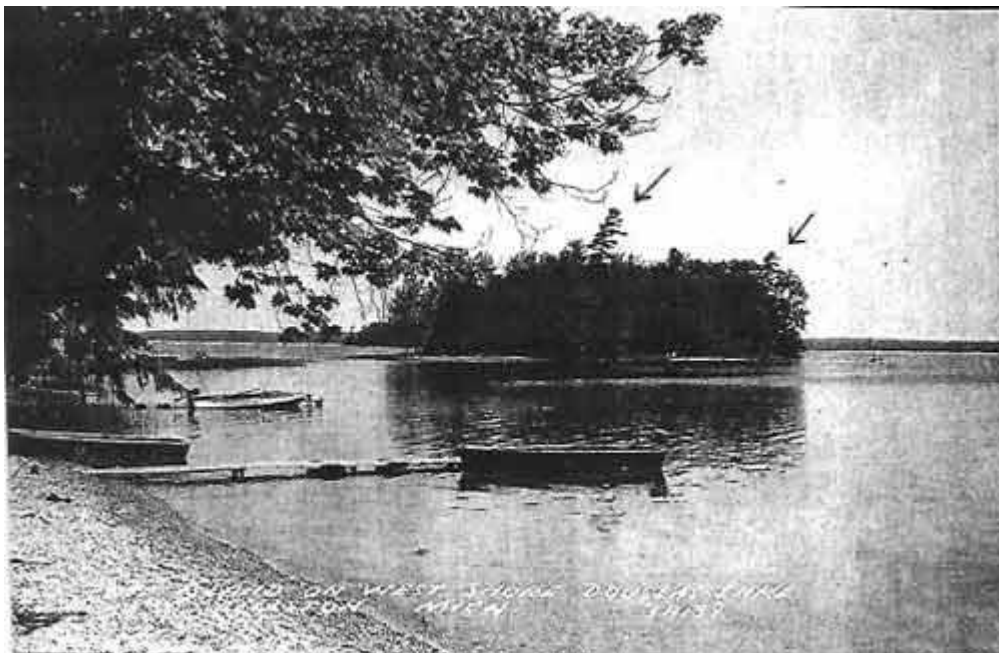
Contained within "The Enchanted Forest" were a few exceptionally large pine trees possessed of both great girth and extraordinary height. When viewed from below by hikers along the trail or by island residents, the larger trees did not seem to tower all that much higher than the other century-old pines. However, when viewed from the southern shoreline of the lake, one or two of them really stood out. The one that I recall the most vividly was the truly HUGE white pine that I and many others of my generation used when trying to fix the location of the large submerged rock lying along the eastern side of the island, straight out from the Douglas Lake Hotel dock. I am sure that that tree acquired many nicknames through the years, but we called it, rather simplistically, "The Big Pine." Until it was felled as the result of damage sustained by it from a lightning strike in the early to mid-1960s, it dominated the island's tree line and was the focus of everyone's attention.

A few years back, when I began writing short articles about the history of the lake, I started to hear stories about "The Dinosaur Tree" or "Dino," a gigantic pine tree also located near the southern tip of the island. According to these stories, children arriving at the lake for the first time each summer would strain to be the first one in their families to spot "Dino" as they drove down Bryant Road towards the lake. However, these stories related to events that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, not during the 1950s or 1960s, which were associated with the "Big Pine." The "Big Pine" would have been long gone during those later years. It was not until I was given a picture taken by Joan Hartwig or a member of her family that I finally understood what these stories were all about.

The following photographs illustrate the evolution of both the "Big Pine" and the "Dinosaur Tree". The first picture, taken by a photographer named Beebee sometime between 1900 and 1907, clearly illustrates the enormity of the "Big Pine" at the very beginning of the 20th century.



In the second photograph, taken from the shore near the Douglas Lake Hotel in the mid-1950s, both of the trees being discussed appear to be visible. The “Big Pine” still towers above all of the other nearby trees. However, if you look to the far right of the island, a second tree is beginning to emerge above the tree line. That second tree is, in all likelihood, “Dino, the Dinosaur Tree.”



In the last picture in this series, taken by a member of the Hartwig family around 1970, the distinct image of the head of a lumbering dinosaur looms high over the surrounding trees as the photographer approaches the final hill before beginning the descent down to the lake while traveling west on Bryant Road.



And now for the truly interesting question: what kind of dinosaur is “Dino?” Some have felt strongly that he is a Tyrannosaurus Rex, with his large head and two stubby front legs, preparing to lunge at some unseen prey. On the other hand, still others have felt equally strongly that “Dino” is actually an Apatosaur, characterized by a huge body and a long neck that would allow him to graze on the tops of trees that could not be reached by other dinosaurs. What do you think?