

Tarzan in the Northwoods of Wisconsin



An early gasoline-powered hand car being used on the Minneapolis, St. Paul, & Sault Ste. Marie line for an inspection tour in 1908 in Rhinelander. Wisconsin Historical Society photo.

By Jeff Long

“She said she was not ready to marry anyone yet,” replied Professor Porter, “and that we could go and live upon the farm in northern Wisconsin which her mother left her.”

– “Tarzan of the Apes”

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I grew up in Racine County, Wisconsin, just south of Milwaukee along the shores of Lake Michigan.

My father was a keen outdoorsman, so naturally most of our family vacations involved treks “Up North” to the lakes, rivers and dense forests that abound there.

On more than one of those vacations, Edgar Rice Burroughs came along with me. I began devouring ERB's novels when I was about eight, after finding a cache of them in my grandfather's basement. My imagination soared to Barsoom, Caspak and Pellucidar.

Grandpa must not have been much of a Tarzan fan. The Apeman's adventures weren't among his books.

As I frequented bookstores to fill the gaps in grandpa's collection of Martian and other tales, I eyed the Tarzan books suspiciously. I knew Tarzan from the Johnny Weissmuller movies that played every Saturday on television. I liked them well enough for what

they were. But I just couldn't imagine being interested in books about a monosyllabic jungle man living in a treehouse with Jane and their adopted son, Boy.

Finally, though, Neal Adams' illustration on the cover of “Tarzan of the Apes” got to me. And whoever wrote the blurbs on the backs of those Ballantine editions really sold the heart-pounding adventure inside.

I bought it and was thrilled by the story – so different from Johnny's version.

What really hooked me, and made me a Tarzan fan forever, was the final chapter. The Apeman travels to Wisconsin – my Wisconsin – to rescue Jane Porter once again.

The Northwoods

Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Vilas and Oneida counties make up the Northwoods of Wisconsin, home to vast forests and thousands of lakes. Rhinelander is the county seat of Oneida County, which was formed in 1887 from sections of Lincoln County. It was named after the indigenous Oneida tribe, one of the five nations of the Iroquois.

Wikipedia offers this history:

“The area that eventually became the city of Rhinelander was originally called Pelican Rapids by early settlers, named for the stretch of rapids just above the convergence of the Wisconsin and Pelican Rivers.

“Around 1870, Anderson W. Brown of Stevens Point and Anson P. Vaughn traveled up the Wisconsin River to cruise timber for Brown's father, E. D. Brown. Upon arriving at the meeting point of the Wisconsin and Pelican Rivers at the site of John Curran's trading post, and seeing the high banks along the rapids and the excellent pine stands, Anderson Brown envisioned a mill town with a lumber mill powered by the waters of the Wisconsin River.

“In its charter, the city was named Rhinelander after Frederic W. Rhinelander of New York, who was president of the Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western Railroad at the time. This was part of a bid by the Brown brothers to induce the railroad to extend a spur to the location to further their lumbering business.

“Ultimately, after over 10 years of negotiations, the Brown family agreed to convey half their land holdings in the area to the railroad in exchange for a rail line to their future city. In 1882, the railroad line from present-day Monico to Rhinelander was completed, jump starting the development of Rhinelander as the commercial hub of the region.”

Motoring

Tarzan roared into the Northwoods in August of 1909, according to the chronology Philip Jose Farmer created for “Tarzan Alive.”

Suddenly, out of the northeast, a great black car came careening down the road. With a jolt it stopped before



The Lion-Peugeot Type VC2.

the cottage, and a black-haired giant leaped out to run up onto the porch.

Later, after Tarzan had rescued Jane from the forest fire, he is driving Mr. Philander along the forest roadway toward town.

“Bless me!” exclaimed Mr. Philander, as the car moved off after Clayton. “Who would ever have thought it possible! The last time I saw you you were a veritable wild man, skipping about among the branches of a tropical African forest, and now you are driving me along a Wisconsin road in a French automobile. Bless me! But it is most remarkable.”

There's really only once choice Tarzan would have made for a vehicle to bring across the Atlantic from France to prosaic Wisconsin – the Lion-Peugeot Type VC2.

In 1858, the lion became the official emblem of the Peugeot brand. The Peugeot Lion appeared on the cars of the sons of the Peugeot brothers, around 1907. These "Lion Peugeot" cars proudly displayed the Lion on an arrow on their radiator grille.



Forest Fire

“The Peugeot Lion emblem is one of the most iconic symbols of the French automotive industry,” according to the Peugeot website. “It represents the pride, strength and quality of the cars produced by the Peugeot brand.”

Although Numa the lion was the hereditary enemy of Tarzan and the Mangani, the Apeman always respected him. A manufacturer that assumed Numa as its logo would have caught his eye as he and D'Arnot browsed vehicles. Especially since the lion is standing on an arrow.

The Lion-Peugeot Type VC2 was an early motor car produced near Valentigney by Lion-Peugeot between 1909 and 1910. Some 1,175 were produced, according to Wikipedia. The cars represented an evolution of the Lion-Peugeot Type VC1, which had been in production since 1906. The Type VC2 retained a single cylinder 1,045 cm four-stroke engine, mounted ahead of the driver. A maximum 9 hp of power was delivered to the rear wheels.

I can picture it speeding through the blazing Northwoods as Tarzan raced to the side of his future mate.

To the east the black smoke clouds rose higher into the heavens, suddenly they eddied, and then commenced to drift rapidly toward the west. On and on they came. The inmates of the tenant house were gone, for it was market day, and none was there to see the rapid approach of the fiery demon.

– “Tarzan of the Apes”

Forest fires plagued the Northwoods in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, according to a report published in 1910 by Wisconsin State Forester E.M. Griffith. In 1909 – the year Tarzan rescued Jane – the most common cause was from settlers clearing land. The second leading cause was train engines, followed by hunters and campers.

Griffith wrote:

“The forest fires of 1908 were the most extensive and destructive that had occurred for many years, burning over 1,000,000 acres and destroying merchantable timber and young growth valued at \$9,000,000. In view of the widespread and lasting destruction of the forests the State Board of Forestry



Tarzan and the Wisconsin Christmas Dec. 20, 1981 - March 7, 1982

Story and Art by Mike Grell.

Color scans from the Dennis Wilcutt Collection via erbzine.com

strongly recommended that a forest fire patrol system should be organized to prevent as far as possible the starting of forest fires. This recommendation was criticized in some quarters upon the ground that the board was advocating a system to meet unusual conditions and that such destructive fires as swept the northern portion of Wisconsin in 1908 would probably not occur again for many years.

“Such a delightfully easy way of doing practically nothing to check the fires and taking chances on the future was apparently endorsed in 1909, as the rains were frequent throughout the summer and only 166,000 acres were burned over with a total loss of \$104,000. However, the long and dangerously dry weather during the summer of 1910 caused forest fires to start in all directions and as the year closes we find that 892,000 acres have been burned over with a loss of over \$5,000,000.

As the report notes, 1908 and 1910 saw much more extensive forest fires than 1909. Still, despite the frequent rains of 1909, that summer saw 166,000 acres burned,

Oneida County suffered 13 forest fires in 1909, with nearly 3,300 acres burned, according to the report. Certainly among those acres were those surrounding the Porter cottage.

Griffith wrote:

“A wise man, or a wise state, should not need to be taught the same severe lesson more than twice in the course of three years. What our pleasantly optimistic friends call 'unusual' years occur only too frequently, but the real reason why the forest fires in northern Wisconsin are so much more destructive than in the past is because the hemlock and hardwood forests, which formerly checked the fires, are now being cut so heavily that their value as 'fire breaks' is being rapidly destroyed and therefore the fires are much more extensive and destructive. The urgent need of a well organized forest fire patrol to prevent fires is fully explained in this report.”

Hodag

We can't discuss Rhinelander and its surrounding forests without mentioning the Hodag.

The Chamber of Commerce describes the beast this way:

“Some say the Hodag is the fiercest, strangest, most terrifying monster ever to set razor-sharp claws on this earth. Others describe the Hodag as a reclusive woodland creature, misunderstood by many and only wanting to be left alone in the woodland



The Hodag statue in front of the Rhinelander Chamber of Commerce.



Inside the replica train station at the Railroad Museum in Rhinelander.

paradise that is the Rhinelander Area. No one really knows for certain, but for the people of Hodag Country, he's as real as the towering pines and the crystal clear lakes that encompass the area.

"In 1896, Rhinelander pioneer and timber cruiser Eugene 'Gene' Shepard claimed to have snapped a picture of a ferocious monster just before the beast sprang on him from a white pine log. The camera caught the most horrible sight: a hairy animal seven feet long and thirty inches tall, with white horns, menacing tusks, vise-like jaws and sharp claws.

"The Hodag has become a local legend and the symbol of the City. Parks, plaques, schools and businesses bear the Hodag name and image. And rumors of Hodag pranks, sightings and other close encounters circulate to this day. When something out of the ordinary occurs in Hodag Country, you'll hear people say, 'I think it was a Hodag.'"

It seems to me that Tarzan would have encountered the Hodag during his race through the blazing woods to find Jane. Why ERB didn't mention that encounter,

we'll never know. Perhaps it sounded too unbelievable.

I think Tarzan, in an unfamiliar setting, might have come across the Hodag and found a way to communicate with it in the way he communicates with Tantor and other wild creatures.

Perhaps the Apeman rescued the Hodag from the fire. And in thanks, the beast guided him to Jane.

Train station

The Railroad Museum at Pioneer Park in Rhinelander is home to a full-size replica of the depot originally built in 1892. It includes the telegraph office where I propose that this historic message was received:

Fingerprints prove you Greystoke. Congratulations. D'ARNOT.

A feature story by Gary Entz of WXPR Public Radio as part of its "Northwoods Moment in History"

series relates the following:

“The Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad, more commonly known as the Soo Line, formed in 1884 and became a significant part of Northwoods history. Although the company was primarily a freight railroad and was never one of the nation’s great passenger railroads, it nonetheless provided passenger service to the Northwoods with a branch of its Laker passenger train.

“The Soo Line reached Rhinelander in 1886 and pushed on rapidly to Sault Ste. Marie, reaching that terminus late in 1887. In Rhinelander the Soo Line built a depot, water tank, and roundhouse east of Thayer Street.

“The Soo Line offered Northwoods residents passenger service to Minneapolis-St. Paul with connections available to Chicago. The first passenger train pulled in to Rhinelander from Minneapolis at 3 p.m. on Nov. 23, 1886. It was a special train of two locomotives pulling six Pullman cars and a dining car for 42 dignitaries. The railroad representatives were

welcomed by a civic committee, a band, and a crowd of several hundred people and then whisked off by sleigh to view the mills and to a fine reception at the Rapids Hous.”

Mid-Continent Railway Museum in North Freedom, Wisconsin, relates this history about the passenger car that Tarzan and the Porter party must have traveled aboard:

“Soo Line sleeping car #1210 'Rhineland' was built by the Barney & Smith Car Co. in May 1902. The “Rhineland” was built as a first-class, 12 section sleeper with a smoking room and a state room.

“The sleeper is of wood construction, has six wheel trucks, and originally had full vestibules.

“The car was stored in Schiller Park, Illinois until December 1977 when it was moved to the Mid-Continent. The car is currently privately owned and used as a bunk car at the museum.



The telegraph inside the replica train station at the Railroad Museum in Rhinelander.

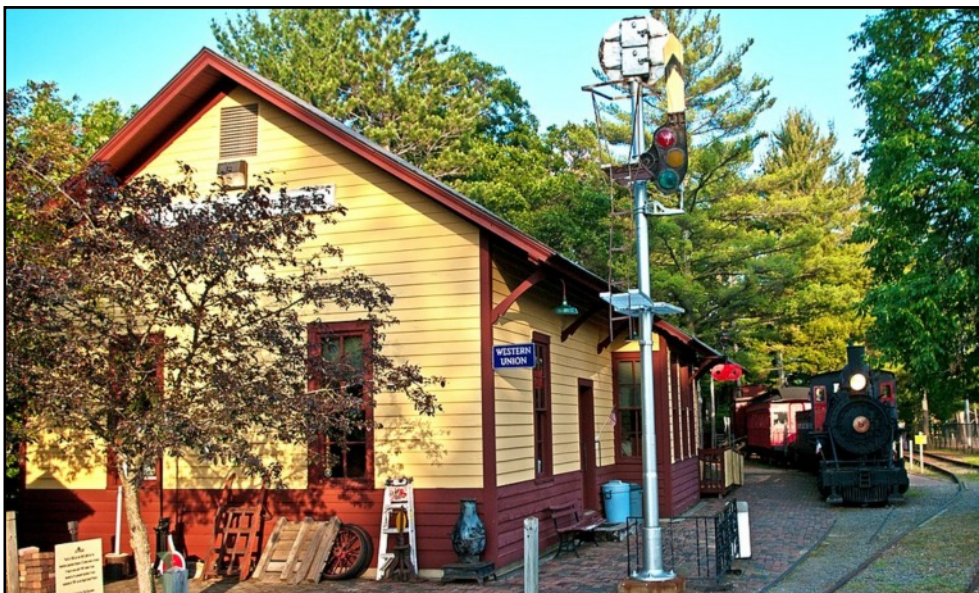
“Articles of Incorporation for the Minneapolis Sault Ste. Marie & Atlantic Railway (commonly known as Soo Line) were filed in Madison, Wisconsin on September 29, 1883, by several Minneapolis businessmen. Their goal was to link the flour mills of the Twin Cities with the Great Lakes shipping port of Sault Ste. Marie. By the end of 1887, the line was completed across the northern part of Wisconsin to reach the road’s namesake.

“The next 25 years saw much expansion and consolidation with other smaller roads. The Wisconsin Central was leased in 1909; in 1961, it was formally absorbed as well as the DSS&A to form the new Soo Line Railroad.

“Today the Soo Line exists only on paper, under the Canadian Pacific banner, most of its original trackage now operated by other companies or abandoned.”



The Soo Line sleeping car #1210 'Rhineland' was built by the Barney & Smith Car Co. in May 1902. The “Rhineland” was built as a first-class, 12 section sleeper with a smoking room and a state room.



The replica Rhineland train depot.



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