



# nastawgan

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*Climbing up from Indian House Lake.*

## **Losing the Trail: Wandering the Quebec & Labrador Barrens**

**Story by Alan Stirt**

**Images by Alan Stirt, Dave Brown and Wendy Scott**

(Note – Place names are taken from Cabot's *In Northern Labrador* and from the 1/50,000 and 1/250,000 scale maps from the Canada Map Office. *In Northern Labrador* is in the public domain.)

“Well, the Moisie’s a nice river but it has too many trees and it’s not very good for hiking. We’re going to more open country.”

In 1986 my wife Wendy Scott and I were on a QNS&L

(Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railroad — now Tshiuetin Rail) train heading for the headwaters of the Moisie River. I was chatting with another canoeist, Karl Shimek, a veteran wilderness traveler and member of the WCA. He and his son were headed toward more barren country and the Kogaluk River, which flows from the Quebec/Labrador highlands to the Labrador Sea.

Although I had glimpsed the barrens a few years earlier

when walking the hills above the George River, it had never occurred to me that I could do a barrens canoe trip without going to the Northwest Territories. I asked Karl if he could send me a trip report when he returned. The next December I received an application to join the WCA and a 5-sentence summary of his trip. It included the admonition “If you go on this trip, don't take our route through the gorge.” My correspondence with Karl developed into an intense desire to canoe the country that lies above the hills of the George River.

I later spoke with Karl again at a WCA symposium. He said that the first 15 km of the upper Kogaluk was largely unrunnable and had steep brushy banks that made portaging difficult. However, it was mostly navigable below the confluence with the northern tributary. Karl's route reached the Kogaluk from its headwaters almost due north of the eastern arm of

Mistinibi Lake.

Another more traditional route was outlined in William Brooks Cabot's *In Northern Labrador*, published in 1912. Cabot was a well-known engineer from Boston who developed a fascination with the north and its inhabitants. He had both the means and the time to indulge this interest. Between 1903 and 1910, Cabot spent eight summers with the Naskapi (now called the Innu). In 1906 he worked out the route from the Labrador coast to Mistinibi Lake. In 1910, his last trip in this area, he reached Tshinutivish, a Naskapi camp on Indian House Lake. Cabot called himself one of the “minor wanderers” of the country. When asked by a Naskapi why he was there he responded “...I was not a trader, not a hunter, and stayed in my own country most of the time; but once in a while liked to travel, to go to a new country, to see the animals and birds and fish and trees and the people; then I went

back to my country again. “ This description fits most of the wilderness travelers I know.

Today, because of infrastructure development — mainly the QNS&L, the Trans-Labrador Highway and the Labrador coastal ferries — those of us with lesser means can travel to this country with relative ease. Cabot's route roughly followed the traditional Naskapi one. He traveled from the coast, up the Assiwaban River (now the Kogaluk) then portaged up to the plateau via the High Portage about 25 to 30 km upriver from the western end of Cabot Lake. Then he followed a route from pond to pond to Hawk Lake then to Mistinibi Lake. From there, it wasn't far to Indian House Lake and Tshinutivish.

Our friends, George Stone and Jill Bubier, had travelled this route from Indian House Lake to the Kogaluk and the coast. They called it “the time we took our canoe on a 10- day hike.” I



*Al and Dick hauling on a frozen stream on the way to Hawk Lake.*

wanted to see the barrens and I don't mind portaging, but 10 days of walking seemed like a bit more than I wanted.

So I plotted another route.

### 1992 TRIP

In 1992 Wendy and I planned a trip from Schefferville to the Kogaluk and then down to the Labrador coast. Our regular trip partners, Dave Brown and Ann Ingerson, were not available so we asked a new acquaintance, Dick Irwin, if he were interested. He was.

We had been introduced to Dick the previous year at a WCA Symposium and discovered that we lived close to each other. (We live about 12 km south of the Quebec border in Vermont. Dick lives just north of the border in Abercorn, QC.) We lucked out with Dick and his vast experience in canoeing the north. He proved to be a wonderful trip companion and friend who was tireless, strong and a great navigator.

The plan was to take the train to Schefferville, go down the De Pas River to Indian House Lake on the George River. From there we would portage east, following Karl Shimek's portage route until we reached Lac Mistinibi. Then, instead of staying on Karl's route, we would follow the traditional one until we reached Hawk Lake. Next, we would leave the trail and head north aiming to hit the Kogaluk on the south rim of the canyon, just across from where the northern tributary drops into the river. We didn't know anyone who had accessed the river that way, but the maps showed that the valley was wooded and steep, but did not appear impassable.

The logistics were a bit complicated. We drove to Labrador City and then took the QNS&L to Schefferville. We planned to end the trip at Nain, on the Labrador coast, where we would catch the coastal ferry down to Goose Bay. From there, a friend of Dick's would drive us to Labrador City where we could pick up our cars.

We had planned for 4 weeks on the river but had to cut back to three weeks because of last-minute scheduling dif-





*Sunrise on Hawk Lake.*



*A vista north of Hawk Lake.*



*A maze of ponds and rock on the barrens.*

facilities with our shuttle driver.

In order to finish the trip following our new schedule, I knew we would have to travel quickly. Dick had traveled many times with a mutual friend, Stewart Coffin. I had followed some of Stew's trip reports from earlier trips and knew that he and his companions tended to cover a lot of distance in a short period of time. The secret, according to Dick, was not to move really fast but to keep moving. We kept moving.

It was an exhilarating trip. We travelled through some of the most remote country I had been in, putting in some long days and making good time down the De Pas to Indian House Lake. I assumed Karl chose the portage out of Indian House Lake, which was south of the traditional route, because it was the shortest way to reach the high country. It paralleled a stream that flowed out of Pallatin Lake.

The walking was tricky in places and the route moved through some thick and swampy country. We camped the first night by a frozen expansion of the stream. The next morning we climbed a hill to see if Lake Pallatin was open. We were pleased to see that the ice was gone, but less pleased to see a black bear and 2 cubs ambling down what would be our portage route through the brush.

The only signs of previous travel here were some flakes of chert I found on the shore of Pallatin Lake.

We followed a route from Pallatin Lake into the Deat River system and took that up to Mistinibi Lake. The lake was a glorious sight. Stretching from west to east, it seemed to be a corridor beckoning toward higher country.

While we ate lunch on an island, the weather started to turn. By the time we made camp, we were in the middle of a full-blown storm that pinned us down for two nights. We woke the first morning to about 6 cm of snow on the ground. We hunkered down for the day and were very pleased when Dick emerged from the woods with a sizeable tree on his shoulders that fueled a large warming fire. The next morning, the wind was quieting down so we headed off to the eastern arm of the lake to start the overland route. The hilltops were covered in snow, creating a beautiful backdrop for our paddling and portaging.

The route to Hawk Lake was reasonably straightforward. We had to cross a wide, rocky streambed at one point. Since the stream was frozen we were able to haul across the ice, avoiding a long detour to find a narrow crossing point. From Hawk Lake we veered off the traditional route to head directly toward the south rim of the Kogaluk canyon. Because the landscape was so barren, it was easy to climb a hill to scout the route.

We were having lunch on an island. "Is that

peanut butter meant to last the whole trip?” Dick’s question triggered the biggest crisis of our journey. We had failed to accurately forecast Dick’s (rather prodigious) appetite in our peanut butter calculations. By carefully husbanding our resources we managed to survive. Much to our surprise, Dick continued to go on trips with us, but he would bring a secret stash of extra peanut butter to augment our meager rations.

Our route to the canyon rim worked out well. In fact, some of the thin blue lines on the map actually had enough water to paddle. As we approached the south rim of the canyon we were surprised by the sheer beauty of the falls of the northern tributary tumbling into the canyon across from us. The country on both sides of the canyon was very stark, barren, and rocky. I knew immediately that I wanted to someday follow the tributary from its source.

The trickiest part of the trip was finding our way into the canyon. Once we dropped below the rim, we left the barrens behind and were confronted with very steep slopes choked with thick vegetation and punctuated with the occasional impassable rock-slide. Dick did an incredible scouting job and after a few detours, we reached the bottom as dusk was falling. I was feeling relieved to have finished the portage when Dick reminded me that he had left his canoe near the top when scouting the route. We rushed headlong back to the top. Because the thickness of the vegetation made over-the-head portaging impossible, we each grabbed an end of the canoe and rushed back down to the river. This was fairly easy since his canoe weighed only about 16 kg.

It was getting quite dark by the time we made it back down, but Wendy had cooked supper and packed all our gear away. There was no good place for our tents on the steep slope so we threw everything in the canoes – including our hot dinner- and ran down a few riffles in the dark until we came to a sandy spot. We hacked out tent spots in the alder bushes, ate supper and went to bed.

We woke up the next morning to a very high river that flowed up to the bushes in some places. After lining a few tricky spots we were able to run most of the rapids. At one point we startled a mother black bear nursing her cub next to the river.

About two days of paddling brought us to where the Naskapi high portage joins the river and then into Cabot Lake. The river beyond Cabot Lake was easy to navigate and featured a scenic falls near the mouth.

After portaging around the falls, we arrived at a fishing camp. A motorboat was coming off the bay and Chesley Anderson, the camp owner, greeted us. He was bringing in some clients who had flown into Nain. After they finished unloading cases of beer



*Taken from the south rim, our first view of the northern tributary.*



*Wendy on the south rim.*



*Wendy and black flies north of Lake Mistinibi.*



*Al and Wendy on the De Pas.*



*A rest stop on our portage out of Indian House Lake.*

from the boat, Chesley invited us in for lunch. We heard that the Taverner, our boat to Goose Bay, would probably arrive in Nain the next day. The wind had picked up and Voisey's Bay was kicking up some waves. We knew it would take us two or three days to paddle to Nain under ideal conditions so we accepted a motorboat ride with one of the guides, Joshua, who was going to make a supply run. After a cold, windy run, we arrived in Nain as dusk was falling. Somewhat dazed and confused by the transition from the wilderness to the hubbub of a town, we stood around the docks trying to decide what to do. A light rain was falling. A gentleman with a soft Texas accent approached, said we looked like lost souls, and offered to take us in. That's how we met the Moravian minister. We had some wonderful meals and a place to stay with his family. The boat was delayed for a day, and we ended up taking advantage of their hospitality for two nights.

Back on the docks, waiting to board the Taverner, I sat next to a slightly disheveled man with untied tennis shoes and an unbuttoned uniform jacket. He turned toward me and asked, "What were you doing in Nain?"

"We just finished a canoe trip from Schefferville and down the Kogaluk River," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"I work on the boat."

"What do you do on the boat?"

"I'm the captain."

During the journey the captain invited us up to the bridge, and we shared a meal in the officers' mess.

In a few days we were getting off the boat in Goose Bay.

The Taverner made its final voyage down the coast of Labrador the next year.

The profound beauty of the high open country had affected me deeply and I knew that I wanted to return. Two years later we planned a trip that would bring us to the northern tributary of the Kogaluk.

### 1994 TRIP

In 1994 we again traveled down the De



*Wendy and Dick getting protection from the flies.*

Pas to Indian House Lake. Dave Brown, Ann Ingerson, Dick, and Wendy and I wanted to spend as much time as possible in the barren high country so we planned a circuitous route. On the map, it looked like an inefficient way to get anywhere, but it was a great way to spend time on the land.

This time, we took a different portage route out of Indian House Lake that was closer to the route Cabot took. It was about 5 km north of our 1992

route and went over the northern flank of Mont Tshiasketnau. Although it was longer than our first route (about 8 km vs. 6 km to get to the next lake), it was mostly in open country. The scenery was stunning, with views of the lake far below and boulder fields and ponds ahead of us. I had rather fond memories of this portage until I viewed Dick's videos of the trip a couple of years ago while I was helping digitize his VHS footage. The scenes gave me a clearer glimpse of what the portage



*A rocky stream bed near the height of land.*



*Dave heading overland.*

was really like and offered a lesson on how memory can soften events. I concluded that the portage might have been very enjoyable if not for the steep climb, the black flies, the oppressive heat and the heavy loads.

The first night of this day-and-a-half portage, we camped between a pond and an esker. That morning, the esker became our highway until we left it to head east toward Lake Ntshuku Ministuku. The country was mostly open and flat as we neared the lake. Near the end of his slightly different route, Dick came across some old tepee poles and the remains of firewood.

Next we headed upstream to Lake

Kashetsheministukut and then into Mistinibi. Here we left the traditional trail and headed north from the east end of the lake through Lake Cananee and into Napeu Kainiut. Then we headed upstream to Lake Brisson and portaged from pond to pond to get to Lake Dihourse. From Lake Dihourse to the height of land, we followed a string of streams and ponds. The blue lines on the maps seemed so inviting but the “streams” often were more an idea than reality.

The height of land that was the Quebec/Labrador border was a rocky, relatively flat area with numerous small ponds. This unprepossessing piece of land had a certain majesty. It

felt like the top of the world. The place, of course, cannot be separated from the effort it took to arrive there.

We were finally on the northern tributary of the Kogaluk. The small amount of water in the upper reaches of the river forced us to do a lot of portaging and wading. The country was open and remote feeling, and I found it satisfying in a bone-deep way.

Before the trip, I had chatted a bit with Herb Pohl, who had traveled down the tributary, reaching it from the northern end of Indian House Lake. We didn't discuss the route; Herb mostly talked about the almost ecstatic feeling of freedom he had while traveling in that isolated, open country. I agree that there's something about it that draws you in.

From the height of land to the confluence with the Kogaluk, we saw very little sign of recent travel. Aside from a small piece of canoe canvas on a hillside, the only signs of people were the tent rings we found along the way. I was deeply touched by coming across this evidence of use from earlier travelers on the land; people who were much more intimately connected to the country than we were. They called it home.

The tributary became more navigable as we traveled down. We encountered some large lake expansions and we were able to run some rapids. We had to negotiate some short portages around ledges and other unrunnable drops. Old tent rings showed up in many unexpected places. Although we didn't come to this country to relive or investigate its history, history had a way of finding us.

Because we were in mostly barren country, collecting firewood for cooking became a group activity. We were able to find enough twigs and branches of willow, birch, alder and the occasional black spruce to keep our small cooking fires going.

One day we surfed the waves down a lake heading east with a strong wind at our backs. We enjoyed the ride while we could because we knew that it would be over in about 5 km. Our route



*Dick with the firewood boat.*



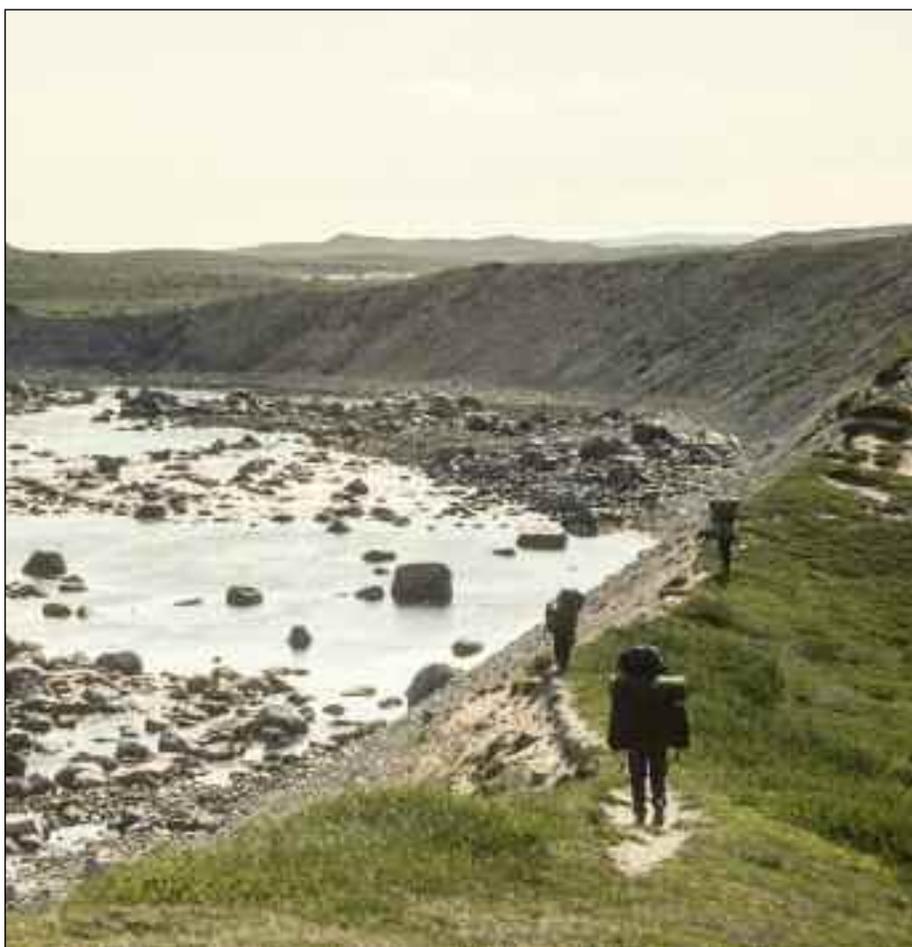
*"This unprepossessing piece of land..." On the Quebec/Labrador border.*



*An expansion on the northern tributary.*



*Dave and Ann on the northern tributary.*



*Portaging around a boulder-choked stream near the height of land.*

followed a U-turn around a point to get to the outlet of the lake. The wind would be in our faces. We pitched camp on a muddy patch of ground and called the campsite “lands end”.

As we neared the rim of the canyon and the confluence with the Kogaluk, the river necked down and started dropping to its final falls, so we left the river and portaged the last 1 km or so to the rim.

We had an incredibly scenic camping place that night at the intersection of a canyon formed by the tributary with that of the Kogaluk. We were able to have our evening cocktails – about 1 shot of rum or whiskey – on ice thanks to a snow bank left over from the previous winter.

Our descent into the canyon was relatively straightforward. I had printed a few photos taken from the south rim in 1992. They showed a steep, thickly wooded slope with no obvious sheer cliffs or other major obstacles. The going was steep at times but with trees to grab onto and ropes to let down the canoes slowly, we were able to navigate the trickiest spots.

The river was lower than on the previous trip and we made it to the coast in good time.

We camped near the beginning of Cabot Lake and got up and paddled most of its length before breakfast the next morning. There are few places to land on the lake and the wind can come up quickly. (Cabot calls it “the Wind Lake of the Assiwaban”.) We stopped on a beach near the eastern end of the lake to have breakfast. A few years later, I noticed that a photo I took that morning was remarkably similar to one in Cabot’s book. Not much had changed in the intervening 100 years. [CabotLakeImages]

Wendy and Ann needed to get back home for work, so we had arranged with Chesley Anderson to pick them up at his camp at the mouth of the river. Due to a miscommunication their ride didn’t appear on the day we thought it would. The motorboat arrived the next day and Wendy and Ann were able to fly from Nain to Montreal.



*Pond hopping as we approach toward the northern tributary.*

Dave, Dick and I paddled up the coast, spending about three more days on the water. We camped on some of the many islands on the journey to Nain and enjoyed paddling amidst the wildly beautiful scenery. We've traveled many miles on the northern Labrador coast and have always felt lucky to be able to go to such wild places. We paid careful attention to the weather, left plenty of time to be wind-bound and carried some fresh water in case we had to rush to shore quickly. One night on the way to Nain, we collected rainwater running from the tarp to use for cooking because there was no easily accessible stream nearby. Once one got past the smoky taste picked up from the tarp, it wasn't too bad.

We paddled into Nain in a strong crosswind and prepared for our return to home. This trip remains one of my favorites. It's very gratifying to pick out a possible route on the maps and then see what's really there.

I knew I wanted to return to the area.

## **2000 TRIP**

In 2000 we planned another trip into the area. The crew was Dave, Ann, Wendy and I. Wanting to see some new country we chose a different route from the De Pas to the George River watershed and an alternate way to get into Mistinibi Lake. We started down the

De Pas before heading east. We left the river about 60 km above its confluence with the George and portaged along a stream until we reached a chain of ponds that led to a small tributary of the George. Dick Irwin and Stew Coffin had used this route many years earlier to gain access to the upper George. We had in previous years passed through the headwaters of the George en route to other rivers and wanted to see a part of the river we had never paddled. The portage route was slow going for us and took us through lots of brushy areas and swamps. Once we had crossed into the George River drainage, we were able to paddle parts of the relatively small stream we were on.

The upper George was smaller and the rapids more technical than those on the river below Indian House Lake. There was a beautiful section with fast water flowing between a maze of small islands. Pulling in to a portage around a steep drop, we interrupted an eagle chasing some young geese.

About 23 km above Indian House Lake we left the George to go up the Dumans River. We had planned to go up the Dumans at least to Lac Leif but changed our plans when we saw that the lake expansions were too shallow and rocky for paddling. Consulting our maps, we struck a route that took us from the first lake expansion on the Dumans through another pond and then



*Starting our descent to the Kogaluk from the north rim.*



*On Cabot Lake.*



*View from an island in the Labrador Sea on the way to Nain.*



*Wendy and Al portaging up the Dumans River.*



*Caribou crossing a narrows on Mistinibi Lake.*



*Huddling under the canoe for protection from the hailstorm.*



*Wendy ready for portaging in the barrens.*



*Ann and Dave portaging north of Hawk Lake.*



*On the south rim of the Kogaluk.*



*South rim campsite.*

into the southwestern arm of Mistinibi. From Mistinibi, we followed our portage route from 1992 through Hawk Lake to the southern rim of the Kogaluk canyon.

The hailstorm hit as we were portaging over a particularly barren piece of ground. It took a little while to realize what was happening. “What’s that noise? Oh, it’s hail. The hailstones are getting bigger. We better duck under cover. There is no cover! Look — Dave and Ann are getting under their canoe. Good idea.” We put the canoes down and huddled underneath them until the hail stopped falling. Dave took a photo of Wendy and me peering out from under the canoe, looking annoyed and uncomfortable. The hailstorm, though relatively trivial, highlighted our vulnerability when traveling in barren country. It’s during moments like these, rather than when running a big rapid or dealing with wind and waves on a big lake or the ocean that I feel most affected by the open landscape. It’s a feeling of both total insignificance and utter freedom. It largely explains my devotion to traveling in this country.

After the storm was over we proceeded to the canyon rim, which is composed of a series of terraces. While having lunch near the highest level, Dave saw a bear with a cub running toward us. When we all stood up and yelled, they turned away.

To ensure that we could complete our descent as quickly as possible the next day, we portaged to the lowest terrace before setting up camp. In the morning, we crashed our way down through the steep brushy terrain and reached the river before lunch. We stopped to camp after travelling some miles downriver. When we were getting organized, Wendy realized that her raincoat was missing. It had been tied to the back of her pack and had probably been grabbed by some of the thick brush we crashed through. Because the weather on the coast is notoriously unstable, we knew we had to outfit her with some protection from the elements. Using a spare plastic liner

from one of our Duluth packs, two stuff sacks, and some duct tape, we fashioned a serviceable though unsightly raincoat

We traveled down the river, stopping to fish below Cabot Lake. The brook trout were ravenous, and we would often see several sizable trout following a hooked fish that was being reeled in.

Soon we came to the portage around the falls and proceeded to Voisey's Bay. As we paddled up to Nain we had a couple days of good weather on the Labrador Sea.

### Afterword

The land is shrinking. There is a lot of pressure for mineral development in northern Quebec. The Quebec government is implementing Plan Nord, with the aim of developing the natural resources north of the 49th parallel. As of 2015, the government plans to invest about \$2 billion for infrastructure for 17 mining projects over the next five years. The Strange Lake Camp next to Lac Brisson has been evaluating the mineral potential of the area. Substantial deposits of rare earth minerals have been found and there are on-again off-again plans to build a road from the camp down to the Labrador coast at Voisey's Bay.

Whether one sees this development



*North rim campsite.*



*Cabot Lake Pictures.*

mostly as a badly-needed source of jobs and wealth for the region or mourns the loss of a magnificent, pristine area, the area will be profoundly changed.

We feel incredibly lucky to have been able to travel in these wild areas before major development changes them forever. I find it hard to take the long view of the fishing guide I met on the QNS&L railroad a few years ago as we talked about the dam building commencing on the Rupert River. He said he didn't really feel the loss of the river too badly because "in 5000 years you probably won't be able to tell the dam was ever there."

Since my first trip to the area in 1992 I have paddled and portaged through other wild and beautiful areas of the Canadian north, but I still have a special fondness for the haunting beauty of the country around the Kogaluk River.

**About the Author:** For almost every summer during the last 35 years, Al Stirt and Wendy Scott have migrated north to Canada. They have traveled thousands of miles by canoe through the vast wilderness of Northern Quebec and Labrador. They consider themselves lucky to be able to travel in the footsteps of Naskapi and Inuit hunters who call this area home. They have a special fondness for the places where the taiga gives way to the barrens.



*The Taverner in Nain.*



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Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning “the way or route”

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal,

*Nastawgan*, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

## Articles Wanted

Consider submitting your story – they are all worth sharing, no matter how “big” or “small” your trip was. Glad to help, if help is needed. Reach out to Aleks Gusev, Editor, for encouragement, tips & tricks!

## Events Calendar

Wine & Cheese WCA Party will take place on Saturday evening, 14th November 2015 at Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club (1391 Lake Shore Blvd West, Toronto).

31th Annual Wilderness and Canoe Symposium will take place on 19th-20th February 2016 at Monarch Park Collegiate (1 Hanson Street, Toronto).

## Contributors' Guidelines

If you are planning to submit any material for possible publication in *Nastawgan*, you would do the editors and certainly yourself a great favour by first consulting the *WCA Guidelines for Contributors to Nastawgan*. These guidelines should be followed as much as possible by all contributors, so that the editorial team can more effectively edit your contribution to make it fit the *Nastawgan* style. The latest draft of the guidelines is available on the WCA website.

## Fall Meeting

Save the date and check the website for more details!

Fall Meeting will take place between 30 Sep – 02 Oct at Cedar Ridge Camp, McArthurs Mills.

## Symposium Reflections

The 2016 Symposium will be remembered by many as a special event, most notably because George Luste's seat, A12, was unoccupied for the first time in three decades. That's a long time by any standard, and it's a testament to the strength of the gravitational pull George exerted on the wilderness paddling community. His ability to inspire us propelled the Symposium on the trajectory whose arc we'll continue to ride for another thirty years into the future – or more. All of the Symposium features we expect and appreciate were there – book sale, music concert, canoe on display, strong program and even stronger attendance. The formidable workload of organizing such an event is shouldered by many volunteers, contributing to the more communal atmosphere of this weekend. Linda Luste, Erika Bailey and Emma Brandy were terrific in their efforts to put up a great book sale. Session facilitators added yet another dimension to the program with their interesting personalities and speaker introductions. Mike Ormsby greeted us on behalf of the aboriginal peoples that live in and around GTA, and shared his personal gratitude to Kirk Wipper for sparking his lifelong interest in canoeing and canoe building. Specially poignant moments came late in the program when Ross McIntyre and Dave Hadfield shared their recollections of George Luste, culminating in the chords, words and images of Dave's song “Tell me a Story.” It was a wonderful tribute to George. Thank you Dave and Ross! I feel particularly indebted to all who opened your

homes to many out-of-town travellers. This is a tradition George started many years ago, and it forged many amazing friendships ever since.

Some of you may be aware of the recent efforts to digitize past Symposium content. This has been my priority for the past few years, as George entrusted me old VHS tapes from the nineties. With generous help from Roger Harris and Marc Chiasson, and professional services of Vladimir Paskaljevic, film director and editor, I embarked on the digital journey to bring past symposium gems to the online world at large. This is an expensive and time-consuming process, financed by the proceeds of the Symposium ticket sales. The programs for 2014 and 2015 were recently completed and are available in the Digital Archive section of WCS website. I'm inspired by your continued interest in attending the Symposium in person, despite the availability of the content online. Symposium is so much more than watching the colorful presentations. It's about meeting people in person and sharing in the ways that can't be replicated in the digital domain.

On a more somber note, Monarch Park administration asked me to look for a new Symposium home for 2017 and beyond. The reasons for this remain obscure even to the school staff, but this time it's for real. The search is on for the new school with a large auditorium on the subway line. Please send me your ideas, along with any suggestions for 2017 Symposium program!

Thank you, Aleks Gusev.

# Annual General Meeting – March 5, 2016 at Black Creek Pioneer Village

Story by Geri James,  
Images by Larry Hicks

On Saturday, March 5, 2016, 40 WCA members attended the Annual General Meeting at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto. The Village is a living history experience featuring heritage buildings originating in communities across south central Ontario that have been faithfully furnished with original furniture and artifacts. The Toronto Region Conservation Authority generously provided this space for the WCA AGM as recognition of the WCA's volunteer support of Paddle the Don in Toronto.

Our day started with a brisk 5 km hike in the Humber Valley where we enjoyed sightings of many birds including hawks, cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers and robins. After the hike we got down to business with our Chair, Dave Young, providing an overview of WCA activities, including events such as the Fall Meeting, Wine and Cheese, Outdoor Adventure Show and Paddlefest. Dave noted that membership is strong and attendance at events has been good. Our Treasurer, Barb Young, provided additional financial details, showing that the WCA remains financially sound. Our Outings Chair, Bill Ness, provided an overview of outings activities in 2015 which, although reduced in number, continue to provide members with great opportunities to paddle or participate in other outdoor activities. Jeff McColl provided an overview of key conservation issues affecting the WCA. Our special guest, Arlen Leeming, Project Manager, Don & Highland Watersheds, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, provided an overview of the Paddle the Don event to be held on May 1, 2016 and explained how WCA can continue to support this premier paddle event in Toronto. After the meeting we enjoyed an informative tour of Black Creek Pioneer village as well as a social lunch at a local pub.



## *The Crossing*

By Kate Hall

*The boat it was loaded with free-board to spare  
We set out from shore while the weather was fair  
But the Lake she is fickle and you just never know  
When a good ole' nor-easter might start to blow*

*The way's clear before us, no freighters in sight  
We watched four pass by us the previous night  
But we were on shore then all safe and sound  
Not out on the water Thunder Cape bound*

### CHORUS

*We're two hearty trippers with a love for this place  
A yearning to paddle, feel nature's embrace  
There's a feeling of freedom, living outdoors  
Cooking on wood fires, exploring the shores*

*We paddled on steady, stoke after stroke  
The Giant was wearing the clouds like a cloak  
But we had our bearing and we knew it was true*

*There's no turning back now we must follow through  
The rollers are building, the wind's at our back  
The fathoms beneath us are cold and their black  
We danced on the water to waves rise and fall  
Feeling her rhythm and giving our all*

### CHORUS

*When we reach the Giant I kneel at his feet  
Give thanks to the lake, our crossing complete  
With a kiss on your lips and the sun on my face  
My heart is elated and I feel God's grace  
Looking back at Pie Island it's hard to believe  
That we made this crossing on our own steam  
We were granted safe passage and I can't wait till when  
We'll be back on Superior to go tripping again*

© Kate Hall Pine River to Silver Islet, Lake Superior by Canoe, July 2013

# The Mysterious Disappearance of Father Buliard

By David F. Pelly

Late October on the barrenlands is a stormy time of year, the wind howling and the early snow of winter whipping across the frozen tundra and newly formed lake ice. It is a difficult time for travel — not enough snow on the land for easy sled travel, and lakes where the ice can be precariously thin.

On October 24, 1956, Father Joseph

Buliard, a veteran of seventeen years in the Arctic who must surely have understood the difficulties and dangers of travel at this time of year, made the fateful decision to leave his tiny mission on an island in Garry Lake, on the Back River, some 450 kilometres west of Tasiujaq and 300 kilometres northwest of Baker Lake. Though it was not

a particularly cold day, he dressed warmly in a caribou-skin inner coat under a heavy duffel parka, caribou-skin pants, and caribou-skin kamiiit. As he left his cabin, he did not lock the door — it was his habit to lock up only when going on extended trips. He expected to be absent only a few hours. He hitched his six dogs to the sled, ready to depart.

Emerging from his tent a hundred metres away, John Adjuk noticed the missionary's preparations and approached to talk. (Father Buliard spoke fluent Inuktitut.) Adjuk expressed concern that the weather was deteriorating. As he recalled, there was already a white haze enveloping the landscape and a light snow was falling; that, combined with the warm air, offered a warning sign — a blizzard was coming, thought Adjuk. It was not a good day for travel, even a short distance, implored the Inuk. There are fish in the net and the dogs are hungry, countered the priest. He was determined to go, despite the weather and the warning, and his own weaknesses.

Shortly after his arrival in the Arctic many years earlier in 1939, Father Buliard fell through the ice near the Repulse Bay mission and severely froze his hands. Though his fingers were all saved, they were never the same. He suffered terribly from cold hands and a loss of dexterity. That, on top of his extremely poor eyesight, made him ill-suited for travel alone in Arctic conditions. He had, in fact, become lost and disoriented on more than one occasion. For several years prior to 1956, while based at his mission in Garry Lake, Father Buliard had been more than a little dependent on his guide and companion, Anthony Manernaluk, to keep him safe and comfortable. Although they had travelled hundreds, if not thousands, of miles together by dog team, it



*Father Buliard pulling fish from his net in 1955 (Photo courtesy of Archives of the Diocese Churchill, Hudson Bay).*

was always Manernaluk's skill that kept them alive. Manernaluk, living in Rankin Inlet years later, remembered his years with Father Buliard fondly; he spoke of him as he would a father, more so than a Father. "Before, he was always cold, hands and feet," recalled

Manernaluk, who came to live with the priest as an orphan at age fifteen. "But when I travelled with him, he was never cold. I kept his mitts and kamiit clean, no snow, not frozen." Always, when they stopped for the night, Manernaluk built their iglu in great haste — the priest never managed to acquire this skill — so Father Buliard could take shelter inside while his young Inuit companion fed the dogs and organized the camp. By the time Manernaluk crawled into the iglu, "Father Buliard had tea and bannock ready," he added with a smile.

In the summer of 1956, Manernaluk became so seriously ill that he was flown out to Baker Lake, and then Churchill, where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. "When I was in that hospital in Churchill, Manitoba, and when the doctor told me that I had to be sent down to Brandon, to hospital, I tried to tell the doctor that I didn't want to go. I knew that Father Buliard wouldn't make it on his own and I wanted to be with him, so I tried to force the doctor to send me back home." But to no avail, with the result that Father Buliard was left to fend largely for himself.

Adjuk and his wife — in need of religious education so she could be baptized — came to camp nearby the mission. Another young man (identified in RCMP reports alternately as Andy Semigia or Anthime Simigiak, who himself perished in a storm a year later while hunting, at age nineteen) stayed some of the time with the priest in the mission. But none of them were as devoted to helping and caring for Father Buliard as Manernaluk had been full-time. So it was that, on October 24, 1956, when he set off to check his nets for fish, Father Buliard travelled alone.

"I tried to tell him that a storm might be coming," said Adjuk, who survived to over ninety with the memory.

"But Father Buliard said he needed food for the dogs, and he left anyway. Shortly after, a blizzard started. The winds were very strong, so that the snow was blowing. He didn't make it back home. He was never seen again. If he had listened to me, he would not have died."

There has been much speculation about what happened to Father Buliard. The first version of events — ultimately proved incompatible with the facts — came with the news of Father Buliard's disappearance, which reached the outside world only several months later. An Inuk reported the third-hand details to the mission in Gjoa Haven, whence Father Pierre Henry sent word south in January 1957, saying: "This is the story. Anthime Simigiak had been visiting Father Buliard's mission. Before nightfall, Fr. Buliard accompanied him home with the dogs of the mission. Anthime's father, Sabgut, had his tent set up on the opposite shore of Garry Lake. On returning, after having accomplished this kind deed, the missionary turned away on glare ice proceeding toward the mission. Unfortunately, the dogs went straight ahead, without taking the detour to avoid the undercurrent which freezes only very late in the season. That is how the catastrophe took place."

Adjuk, who was closest to the scene, by his own account actually saw Father Buliard after Simigiak had departed the mission. Apparently the last to see the priest alive, Adjuk told it this way to the RCMP, an account which he has repeated on many occasions over the last fifty years of his life. After the missionary left with his dog team, the wind picked up, and the snow started drifting. Visibility reduced such that the priest could not be seen, even though his nets were, on a clear day, within site of the mission, just a few miles away across the ice. The next morning, Father Buliard had still not returned, and the storm continued. Nevertheless, Adjuk walked out to where the nets were and found nothing: no sign that anyone had been there, the ice apparently undisturbed, the nets untouched. There were

no tracks visible; the blowing snow had obliterated whatever clues the dogs and sled had left. Worried, he walked to Sabgut's camp on the mainland, where he told Sabgut that the missionary had not returned. Over the next few days, Sabgut and Adjuk made some effort to search on foot for Father Buliard, or at least for some clues to his disappearance. They found nothing and, quite naturally, accepted his loss as part of the delicate balance between life and death on the barrenlands. In one Inuk observer's words at the time, "We accept death from causes such as starvation, drowning, freezing to death, much easier than white men do, as we live with it all the time." As Sabgut later told the RCMP, the dogs probably smelled some caribou and chased after them. Then the father, with his poor vision, could not find his way back home. Perhaps, he suggested, the dogs had run away with the sled — it was known that Father Buliard was adequately but not highly skilled with the dogs. Nor could he build an iglu. Probably, he froze to death, lost on the tundra.

There are, however, other theories, which may reveal nothing more than the vivid imagination of some non-Inuit writers and RCMP investigators, but which must nonetheless be told. Adjuk dismissed them unequivocally. "A person who was not there to see wrote about someone drowning Father Buliard, wrote lies about the Inuit. This liar wrote that some Inuit men drowned Father Buliard. It was his imagination. He had never even been to Garry Lake." Adjuk was referring to a book, *The Howling Arctic*, written by Ray Price, published in 1970, several years after the events, which contains a chapter about Father Buliard's disappearance. By this account, which the RCMP tried in vain to confirm through repeated investigations, a self-declared shaman named Kukshout plotted to murder the priest. (Kukshout was undoubtedly a powerful figure in the Garry Lake area but, according to Adjuk, he did not perform any "wonderful" acts, as befitting a shaman.) Kukshout had had disagreements with

Father Buliard, according to the priest's diary, even though he was baptized Roman Catholic and had previously served as a guide for the missionary. The police based their rationale for motive on Kukshout's desire to remove Father Buliard's influence, which, they argued, served to diminish Kukshout's power over "his" people. The RCMP claimed to know, absolutely, that "Fr. Buliard while at Garry Lake always slept with a loaded rifle next to him at all times," because he feared attack from someone in the area.

The police theory held that Kukshout intercepted Father Buliard on the ice, en route to his nets, shot him dead, and then — with the help of two other men, Sabgut and Simigiak, who both lived in the same camp as Kukshout — put his body through a hole in the ice, where it disappeared, never to be seen again. To a significant extent, this thinking is based on what happened to the priest's dogs. Sometime later (there is confusion about whether it was days, weeks, or months later), five of the dogs returned to the mission. No one ever said they were coated in ice. They were no longer attached to a sled. Someone, theorized the RCMP, had released them. And clearly, they had not plunged through thin ice, taking Father Buliard with them. One thing is clear in the RCMP reports — a year later, Kukshout was using these dogs as his own. That, it might be argued sensibly, was only practical. The other curious circumstance that the police offered to support their theory was the untimely disappearance of Simigiak, one of the supposed witnesses, while out hunting a year later with Kukshout, who returned to camp with Simigiak's rifle in hand. Many years later, in 1978, Sabgut reportedly committed suicide, tortured, some said, by allegations that he had played a part in the disappearance of Father Buliard. At the very least, it all adds up suspiciously. Not until the winter of 1979–80, a few months after the passing of their principal suspect, Kukshout (who, ironically, died as a result of breaking through the early win-

ter ice on a lake near his home in Whale Cove), did the RCMP close their file on this case. There have been other, even wilder, rumours. An officer in the Canadian army, who was responsible for retrieving Father Buliard's diary from the mission in 1961 while engaged in a northern mapping survey, reported hearing that the priest's body — with a knife still stuck in its back — had been found three hundred kilometres downstream, where the Back River reaches the ocean. Some people suggested that an Inuk who disliked or envied Father Buliard had placed a curse on him and, when he died, a sense of responsibility befell those around Garry Lake who knew of the curse. An RCMP document records this idea and adds: "When Buliard became lost and did not return, this particular [Inuk] spread the word that his wish had been obeyed by the spirits and that he had gotten rid of the Father." Still others suggested that it was an Anglican plot to undermine the competition. On the other hand, one police officer wrote: "To my knowledge there is no support for the rumour that Fr. Buliard was murdered." He goes on to describe other times the priest was lost on the land. "It was almost an annual occurrence with this wandering Priest, to go missing. Emergency messages were dispatched over the CBC Northern Messenger programme to the effect that 'Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Fr. Buliard travelling somewhere on the Barren Lands please contact your nearest RC Mission as soon as possible.' There was hardly a spring passed when the aforementioned did not happen. The fact this Priest would disappear and succumb to the elements of the Arctic is no surprise to me. It was surprising to me indeed that he survived as long as he did." There were several reports that Father Buliard had predicted his own death. "Sooner or later," he told his fellow missionaries, "I'll finish by going through the ice, the rivers up there are so tricky in so many spots." One of his closest friends and his biographer, Father Charles Choque, reflects that "his idea was that time was short and he had to really do the

preaching as much as he could in his life. He knew that something would happen to him. Because of the way he was living, he knew that one day something would happen." Adjuk's wife recalls that Father Buliard told her, not long before he disappeared, that the "next time he became lost, he would never come back," and he asked her not to worry, only to pray for him. Father Choque, who served in Baker Lake during the time that Father Buliard had his mission at Garry Lake, has clearly given much thought to what happened on that tragic day in October 1956. "We don't know," he said. "We don't know exactly what happened, because we didn't see anything." Then, in what was perhaps a moment of surprising candour, he added, "Personally, I think that he was killed." Most Inuit, however, and in particular those who knew Father Buliard, say that simply could not be. Adjuk, who was living beside the mission in 1956, points out that the Inuit needed Father Buliard; he was a source of tea and ammunition, and "because of this, we were happy about him being up there." "We loved that man," said Madeleine Makiggaq, who was named at her baptism after Father Buliard's sister. "When I think back and start remembering him, I still feel compassion for him." Everyone who lived around Garry Lake, who survives today, says he was well liked and respected; no one speaks the slightest ill of him, or believes his death was anything but accidental. None more so than Anthony Manernaluk, who was perhaps closer to the missionary than anyone. "When I heard of Father Buliard being lost, I felt I lost a parent." Asked to explain why the RCMP entertained their suspicions for so long, Manernaluk was blunt. "I don't know, and it's not true."

Further reading:

Charles Choque, *Joseph Buliard, Fisher of Men* (Churchill, Manitoba: Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation, 1987). Excerpted from *Ukkusiksalik* by David A. Pelly © 2016 by David A. Pelly. All rights reserved. Published by Dundurn Press (dundurn.com)



*Father Buliard with local Inuit at his mission in Garry Lake (Photo courtesy of Archives of the Diocese Churchill, Hudson Bay).*

# My Adventures with George

Story by Bill Pollock



come to Bathurst Inlet”. I pulled his loaded canoe up on the beach. Not a word from George. He was obviously tired and not a local. Finally he said “Thank you,” and I introduced myself. We talked for awhile. He said that he had left Yellowknife by canoe with George Grinnell on June 6, but that his partner had to be evacuated for stomach problems at Taltheilet Narrows. George L. decided to paddle on by himself up through Aylmer Lake and over the height of land to the Back River. He continued down the Back River to a point where he crossed over another height of land to the Western River and down it to Bathurst Inlet.

He didn’t end the trip there. His plan with his partner was to paddle along the coast to Kugluktuk and ascend the Coppermine River to Yellowknife. Well, after replenishing his food supplies, he did paddle to Kugluktuk but decided it was too difficult to paddle alone upstream on the Coppermine.

My group left early the following morning to paddle the length of Portage Bay and hike over to Wilberforce Falls on the Hood River.

The next time I spoke to George was at the Paddlers Gathering at the Hulbert Outdoor Center in Fairlee, Vermont in 2004. At that event I met Deb and Andy Williams who organized the Paddlers Gathering. Andy, Deb and George all wanted to do Clearwater River from Clearwater Lake to the Richmond Gulf in Nunavik that summer. Somehow or other I was either invited or invited myself. Whatever happened, I was so surprised that such an insignificant person like myself would be paddling with the legendary George Luste, whose many northern trips were legendary. The icing on the cake was to be travelling with Andy and Deb Williams. To make a party of six George enlisted John Bland as his partner and I recruited John Pratt, a friend from my boarding school days.

The trip was relatively uneventful except for the awesome beauty of all the waterfalls and the problem that I had with my bow partner who kept falling

My first meeting with George was at Bathurst Inlet Lodge on July 18, 1996. The group I was guiding on the Mara and Burnside Rivers in the Northwest Territories had arrived earlier in the day. After we had our camp set up, I took a walk along the shore and spotted a white canoe with a solo paddler. He was doing

a Bill Mason “goon” stroke. I figured he was a local and didn’t know much about paddling for speed. As the canoe came closer I began to think I had seen this guy before. Wasn’t he the big guy that ran the Wilderness Canoe Symposium? And when he reached the shore and looked up, I said, “George Luste, wel-



*George, Andy, Eric and Bill on Mount Caubvick.*

out of the canoe. I arranged for the flights, provided the food and did the cooking but I had a lot of help. It was a race among Andy, George and I to see who would be up first in the morning to make the fire and put on the coffee. I think Andy had the record. The last two long portages were the toughest I had ever done with extreme heat, furious bugs, few clouds, very steep hills and no wind. It was HOT! But what a beautiful trip and with such wonderful people. It was the start of a great relationship.

We always made two trips on portages. On the first we carried only packs and often spent time finding the trail. On the second we carried the canoes and what was left. On longer, more difficult portages we would take a break at the end of the trail before heading back for the second load. When George was ready to head back he would say, "Well the canoes are not going to come to us, so I guess we might as well go get them ourselves," or "We've got to leave here before we can arrive there."

In 2005 George and his wife Linda, Deb and Andy, John Shultz, Bob Schaefer, Eric Leroux and I did the Koroc River in Nunavik. On the trip some of us hoped to climb 1,652 meter Mount Caubvick. At the request of the Barnes and Pauze families George had brought a plaque to be placed near the location where Susan Barnes and Daniel Pauze had lost their lives in an attempt to climb the mountain a year earlier. I didn't realize how heavy the plaque was until I had to lift it (about 7 kg.) George had carried it along with epoxy adhesives and silicon cement along with his share of food, equipment and personal gear 12 km to our base camp with epoxy adhesives and silicone. He also carried it from base camp about 6 km twice because the first attempt was halted by strong winds and a snow blizzard in mid July. On the second attempt we reached the upper plateau at about 300 meters from the summit and attached the plaque to a rock near where the body of Susan Barnes was found.

For the Caubvick – Koroc trip I was asked to bring only the breakfasts and lunches. I wondered why they didn't want my wonderful dinners. Some of them were even freeze-dried. After tasting the dinners that others supplied I



*George, Bill and Wayne enjoying happy hour on the Western River.*

fully understood. Even my spaghetti with rosé shrimp sauce could not match the amazing entrées that Linda and Deb concocted. When asked for their recipes, it was evaporated this, home-dried that, special purchase something else and so on. I became very dehydrated just figuring out the amount of time and effort put into these gastronomic delicacies. Shame on you, Pollock!

Later, paddling down the Koroc, Eric and I were in the lead and running a good class 2. The rapid took us around a bend and became more serious. We

found ourselves heading downhill directly into the center of a 20-foot wide rock straddling the middle of the river. The water was pillowing against the rock, spewing it out to the left and right and dropping about a half-meter on each side. I shouted to Eric to push off from the rock when we reached it, and I tried to angle the canoe slightly so we wouldn't hit the rock head on. The pillow helped to turn us and we dropped off the two-feet into a swirling pool that took us on down the river but we took on a lot of water. We managed to get to



*Bill, Eric, Tija and Deb on the Natashquan River.*



*George and Linda in the Russ Miller canoe in Wabakimi Provincial Park.*

shore and empty the canoe. Deb and Andy followed and managed to come through the way we did but also took on water. George and Linda weren't so lucky. George and the canoe washed out on the left side of the rock, Linda on the right side. We rescued them in the pool below, made a big fire and dried them out.

In all, I have done seven trips with

George and members of his family. After the Koroc I did the East Natashquan River in 2006 with Andy and Deb Williams, George and his daughter Tija and Eric Leroux. In 2007 George and Linda, Wayne Clarkson (George's brother in law) and I paddled for two weeks in the Wabakimi Provincial Park. In 2009 George and I did a 10-day trip on lakes and the Ottawa River in La

Verendrye Wildlife Reserve. In 2010 George and Linda, Tija and Marilyn Sprissler, Wayne Clarkson and I paddled the Western River to Bathurst Inlet Lodge. In 2012 George and Wayne joined a group I was guiding on the Richmond Gulf for 10 days.

On five of these trips we used Pakcanoes because of their light weight and transportability on aircraft. I am always amazed at how resilient they are. We dragged them, fully loaded, over sharp rocks with great concern for what these rocks were doing to the bottom of the canoes. In the evening, when we turned them over, there was hardly a scratch on them. If we had been using ABS canoes the paint would have been gone from the keel area exposing and abrading the Royalex beneath.

In 2006 we flew from Natashquan to the only long lake near the headwaters of the East branch of the Natashquan River. Our baggage was too heavy for the plane. I thought we had a twin otter, but it turned out to be a single otter. So we had to leave some of the most important items in our cars – like booze and snack foods. However, we still survived the trip.

Wabakimi was my first trip with Wayne. We all met in Sudbury to take the train to Allenwater River. Once we loaded the canoes and gear and got settled Wayne quietly and discretely told me that he didn't know how to canoe. Fear gripped every part of my small body. I stood up looking for a Via conductor. "Stop the train! Stop the train!" I shouted gaining the attention of all the passengers. George and Linda grabbed me and pulled me to my seat. They convinced me that they would protect me and that Wayne wasn't all that bad. Well, Wayne and I got on beautifully. We shared a lot of laughs over the next two weeks, and he picked up whitewater skills so quickly that I promoted him to Master Bowman First Class on the second day. But I spent hours trying to figure out why such a serious, competent, genuine, sincere, and thoughtful person like Marg could possibly fall in love and marry this humorous, happy-go-lucky, unserious, but totally lovable person. Well, I guess we all have to laugh now and then.

On the Western River in 2010, the



*Wading in shallow rapids on the Koroc River.*

pilot of our chartered aircraft spent 30 minutes trying to find a safe place to land. We ended up on a strip of water about 10 km from where we were hoping to land. The next day we stopped shortly after lunch when the wind came up and we were wind-bound for three rainy nights with a leaky tent. We had three long portages of about 2 km each. It was amazing to see how much George and Linda could carry, and Tija carried more than her share by helping Marilyn. Some of the terrain was very rough, full of humps and holes, other places were wet and slippery. The last one ended in a 30-meter drop to the river with no easy place to load the canoe. Later on Bathurst Inlet, Tija and Linda got quite upset with Wayne and me for paddling too far ahead of them. Wayne and I were in the doghouse again!! Marilyn brought along a Mantis tent-tarp in which all of us could sit out of the wind, rain and mosquitoes. It was a great place for cooking and eating our meals. There were only a few nights that we didn't need it, but when we did it sure made happy hour and camp life pleasant.

On our 10-day trip in La Verendrye Wildlife Reserve in Quebec, George was in the stern in my Jensen designed 44 lb. We-no-nah 18-foot Kevlar canoe that I use in marathon canoe races. He was not used to such a sleek, lightweight canoe and we almost went over a few times until he got the hang of it. In the evenings we talked about our families and our more domestic experiences but seldom why we canoed, or travelled in northern wilderness. I am sure we are quite similar in our need for wild, natural places. The opening paragraphs of George's essay on "Solitude and Kinship in the Canoeing Experience" in *Canexus, The Canoe in Canadian Culture* edited by James Raffan and Bert Horwood (1988) sum it up well for both of us:

"Any personal experience is difficult to capture in words, and wilderness canoeing is no exception. It is a totally absorbing physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual experience. Of these, the most difficult to describe clearly are the emotional and spiritual elements and they, of course, are the most personal. In this context the canoe plays a supportive role. It provides the conveyance for the



*George running a rapid on the Allenwater River in Wabakimi.*

wilderness experience and may contribute to that experience to some degree, but it is not an end in itself. It must be more than simple physical enjoyment or intellectual curiosity. My belief is that the strongest personal attraction arises from the emotional and spiritual kinship of the individual with the landscape."

"The beckoning curiosity for the new, unseen landscape beyond the immediate horizon is undeniable. So is the possibility of adventure into the unknown, with its real though often exaggerated dangers. Taking a new step is what people fear most, ...and it often takes some critical, personal decision to make that first

step and decide to get out, to do something new. Thinking back nearly thirty years before I had started canoeing, I can vividly recall a moonlit summer night when I was strolling barefoot and alone along a sand beach of the south shore of the Ottawa River. Preoccupied with my thoughts, I happened to glance northward. It must have been past midnight, and the black outlines of the trees on the far shore of the wide river were barely discernible in the darkness. Even now it seems like yesterday, and I can remember the feel of the cool, granular sand under my feet as I stood there transfixed. Then and there I had an over-



*George, Wayne, Marilyn, Linda and Bill in the Mantis tarp-tent on the Western River.*



*George and Linda in the Wabakimi, 2007.*



*George on a 2-km portage on the Western River, 2010.*



*Tija Dirks on the East Natashquan River, 2006.*

whelming urge to go and see that “unknown darkness” of the north country. The next day I was planning my first solo canoe trip to James Bay.”

“The lasting effect of that first solitary northern sojourn was an introduction to the gentle rhythms of the natural world. It awakened far deeper emotions and awarenesses than I could have anticipated; some hitherto dormant but basic resonance

within had been nudged. The experiences that affected me were both simple and profound. They were truly simple – happenings such as observing the tranquil magic of the early morning light at daybreak – or the stillness of the forest at midday – or the haunting call of the loon at dusk. And enveloping all was the overwhelming presence and immense solitude of the northern landscape itself.”

“At the time I don’t think I was fully conscious of a deeper significance to my canoe venture. It was only years later, after reading the thoughtful prose of others, and reflecting on the meaning of my own experience, that I began to grasp the more substantial complexities. One learns that even the basic notions of wilderness and solitude can be complicated concepts, related to our own perceptions, part and parcel of our emotional and spiritual makeup. Wilderness and solitude ... enrich interdependence between experience and awareness.”

Following the above, George quotes Barry Lopez from his book, *Arctic Dreams*:

“The land urges us to come around to an understanding of ourselves.”

To take the discussion a little further, “Biophilia,” is a concept advanced by the famous biologist Edward O. Wilson and Yale forestry scholar Stephen R. Kellert. The biophilia hypothesis suggests that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. Wilson defines biophilia as the “inherent inclination of man to affiliate with the natural world instrumental to people’s physical and mental health, productivity and well-being.” I am sure that nature, wilderness and the north have crept into George’s very soul as it has mine. Kellert writes in his book, *Birthright*:

“Nature (wilderness) remains our magic well: the more we draw from its nourishing waters, the more we sustain the human body, mind, and spirit. The wondrous diverse beauty of the natural world remains the source of who we are and can become as individuals and societies. Like all other life, we are rooted in the Earth, our health and potential dependent on our connections to the natural world of which we are a part.

A worrisome aspect of modern life is that we have come to consider nature a dispensable amenity rather than a necessity for health and happiness.”

I will have spent the best northern trips in my life with George and his family. George was a very quiet man. He commanded respect because he made good decisions and we seldom disagreed. I send my condolences to all of them, and I thank them all for putting up with me. George may be no more, but he is not dead for his memories will live on in all of us. One who leaves you with good memories never dies. Thank you, George. Good night.

*The cedar trees have sung their vesper hymn,  
And now the music sleeps –  
Its benediction falling where the dim Dusk of the forest  
creeps.  
Mute grows the great concerto – and the light  
Of day is darkening, Good-night, Good-night.  
Finale. E. Pauline Johnson*

# 31st Annual Wilderness & Canoeing Symposium Program

Blair Doyle – NS “Wilderness 911 - reality check or relief?”

Wendy Grater – ON “Arctic Challenge – An all-women’s ski expedition across Auyuittuq”

Ian Evans – ON “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone – A Walk to the South Pole”

Wally Schaber – QC “Last of the Wild Rivers - Present and Future of Rivière du Moine”

David Chapin – NH “The Maps of Peter Pond”

Amelia Ingersoll & Kera Zegar – VT&VA “Lessons Learned in Northern Quebec”

Rodney Brown – ON “The Big Lonely – William’s Story”

Ruby Zitzer – MT “1,000 Miles, 41 days, in a canoe across North West Territories Canada”

David Pelly – ON “Ukkusiksalik – The People’s Story: The Power of Inuit Oral History”

Ed Struzik – AB “Future Arctic, Field Notes From a World On the Edge”

Sue and Jim Waddington – ON “Paddling with Tom Thomson”

Martin Cooper & Ken Lister, Toronto, ON: “Abandoned Landing: Paul Kane and the Lost Leg of the French Portage”

Dave Brown – VT “Book Building for Paddlers”

Sylvain Tremblay – QC “Solo and Simply, Paddling Northern Quebec Rivers”

Scott Ellis – VT “Connecting rather than conquering nature with digital filmmaking”

Dave Hadfield, Ross McIntyre – “Tribute to George Luste”

Roy MacGregor – ON “Canoe Country: The First Wonder of Canada”

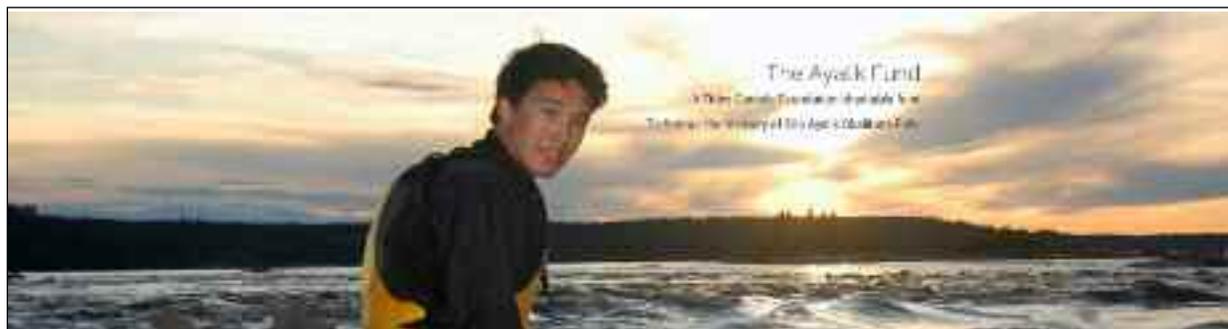
Ron Chambers – YT “Perspective on canoes in the northern First Nations lifestyle”



## A Message from Laurie & David Pelly

We want to express our deepest gratitude to so many of you who dropped a donation into the Ayalik Fund box during the symposium. Collectively, you will make a difference in a young life. When we add the \$3,000 from you to the major corporate donation made by the Wilderness & Canoe Symposium, we have enough and then some to bring one more young Inuk down south for a self-confidence-building, life-changing wilderness adventure with Outward Bound. As always, we will target youth who would not otherwise have this opportunity, youth who need to know that they are valued, for whom this boost in self-esteem can indeed change the direction of their life for the better. We will make every effort to let you all know more about the young Inuk you are supporting. Meanwhile, if you would like to keep abreast of the Ayalik Fund’s progress, or read more about the youth who went on the Outward Bound trip last year, and other news as it is posted, please add our website to your favourites. You can also pick up tidbits on the Ayalik Fund’s Facebook site, including a beautiful picture of the three youths we recently sent to *Encounters with Canada* (please like s on FB!). It is clear that you were a crowd of people who truly understand the benefits of the outdoor experience when it comes to building self-confidence in our young people. We were quite simply overwhelmed by your support and generosity – thank you!

[www.AyalikFund.ca](http://www.AyalikFund.ca)



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