



Lake Takijuq

Back Door to the Hood River

Story by Rob Dale

Photos by Greg Konigshaus, Sara Gartlan, Rosemary Warren, Rob Dale

The Hood River is the stuff of legends. In this vast tundra, the wildlife far outnumber the people. The muskox, an ice age survivor, still thrive. The Caribou herds migrate hundreds of kilometers during the short, but explosive summer. The midnight sun casts an orange hue over the land throughout the night. As a grand finale, the river tumbles over the spectacular Wilberforce Falls and cuts through a 200-foot gorge of red

feldspar. A favourite river of both the late Bill Mason and the WCA's late George Drought, and their writings help make the river iconic.

To reach the headwaters of the Hood, our group is taking the scenic route. We will travel for a month on the Emile, Parent, Coppermine, and Fairly Lake Rivers. Cross Lake Takijuq. Then resupply and spend 3 more weeks running the

Hood River. All in all, it will be 50 days on the land, spanning 3 watersheds.... Some days are pure heaven. Some days are tougher than boot camp.

Iva Kinclova, our organizer, has recruited both friends and strangers. Our common bond is the WCA and a strong desire to reach the tundra. Our crew for part 1: Iva, Greg Konigshaus, Sara Gartlan, Curt Gellerman, Lisa Goodman, and Rob Dale. Additions for part 2: Hugh Westheuser, Silvain Plagnol and Rosemary Warren.

Emile River

Day 1 to 9: July 1st, 2016 – From the Air Tindi floatbase in Yellowknife, we fly via Twin Otter to our starting point on Balsler Lake. On our first afternoon we assemble the pakCanoes and settle

into camp life. For the next week, we travel upstream on the Emile River system. It's mostly lake-hopping and portaging. Occasionally we waded up some swifts.

This part of NWT is shield country. We could squint our eyes and pretend it's Temagami. However, the midnight sun is a clear giveaway we are north of 60. Sun-bleached bones and caribou antlers are a common sight. The black spruce trees are a little thin and the portage trails are rough.

Finding a rusty kettle is cause for celebration. Some rusty old metal confirms we found the overgrown portage trail. We are not just aimlessly wandering through the bush.

On Mesa Lake, an eroded and fractured esker creates a chain of islands.

The level gravel hills make for great camping and birding. Little sandpipers dart up the beach by the canoes. Loons are in a nearby pond. An arctic redpoll is perched on a lone black spruce.

At the east end of the lake is an abandoned Dene hunt camp. By no means a highlight, it's mostly scraps of plywood covered in scruffy willow bushes. This is the start of our first height-of-land portage with 2 days of lugging and hauling to Grenville Lake. There is no clear trail. It's a matter of wading through thigh-high bushes. Today isn't the day to find zen in the wilderness. It's a grueling day of bootcamp, "I didn't sign up for this... wait... yes I did."

The reward is experiencing a land seen by so few. During our 50 day trip we will not see another human.



Parent River

Days 10 to 15: To break up the routine we change paddling partners every week. From Grenville Lake we are starting to transition out of the boreal forest and a vast horizon opens up. The lake is large and shallow. The blue sky dominates the view like a prairie sky. We set up camp and watch a massive thunderhead and rain storm drifts by in the distance. Its vector is a good distance from us, so it is safe entertainment. We just need a few extra rocks to hold down the group shelter as winds pick up.

Under the midnight sun, I assumed my watch would be a useless item. However, in the early days of summer it's hard to judge the time without it. A midnight pee break or 6 am breakfast call has the same quality of light. To sleep without a mask and or toque over the eyes is not possible.

We break camp extremely early and leave Rawalpindi Lake. With no wind, this large lake is unbelievably calm and glassy. Soon our first respite, the first downstream trickle at the headwaters of the Parent River. At this hour, the low sun is blinding. With one eye shut and other one desperately squinting, we blindly navigate the channel.

Our respite on this little tundra river was short lived. 2016 will be the hottest year in arctic to date and the water levels are extremely low. Sections of river are reduced to a boulder garden. Half of the rapids are unrunnable, forcing us to wade, line, and portage.

The other rapids are fun class II-technicals. The goal is to simply find any channel with enough water to float a boat and avoid the pillow rocks concealed an inch below the surface. Keen eyes in the bow and decisive action is needed.

Bystanders get a kick out of watching Lisa and me on this slalom course. There is often a barrage of "Left-left-left, more LEFT" and other shouting. We're described as an old married couple.

Coppermine River

Days 16 to 18: We join the Coppermine River at Rocknest Lake and black spruce forests once again cover the land. For a



Map Overview

few days we are on the main stream.

I always assumed the Coppermine would be a good first-time arctic river. It's well documented and there are commercial flights out of Kugluktuk. Don't underestimate this river as a "first-timer". It's a high volume river. For some, including myself, it was a shock to go from shallows and class II rapids of the Parent into the fast currents of the Coppermine.

The first two rapids are power chutes with big wave trains. Runnable, but intimidating. Iva points out our line. We must lace the canoe between the standing waves and the eddy line. The pakCanoe flexes in the waves and races down with

velocity. We hit our dry line.

There are a few portages, but we cover a great distance in a mere 3 days with the aid of a good current. An endless stretch of class II rapids brings us to the confluence of Fairy Lake River. Sara and Iva are thrilled at the fishing in the cobblestone shallows. The arctic grayling are jumping right and left going for the fly.

Fairy Lake River.

Days 19 to 24: If you imagine a road map, here is where we get off the highway and head up some lonely dirt road. The next leg will be the most challenging. It's all upstream.



Camped on a beautiful esker, Parent Lake

We portage 4km to bypass the long stretch of rapids at the confluence. Like all big tasks, it has to be broken into small pieces. Our golden rule is in full effect: “Only Portage Your Gear”. It is far too easy to lose or misplace gear in the dense scrub and black spruce. Honestly, I misplaced a red canoe for 10 minutes. To my knowledge, there is no actual portage trail, just a couple of game trails that braid, overlap and randomly disappear. It takes 11 hour to complete the portage and we still need to set up camp and cook. Thankfully,

there is plenty of daylight.

For the next few days the temperature drops. It’s time for balaclavas and extra layers. July 21 is a date I will never forget. We get a dusting of snow... 4 times. A northwest squall blows in with intense wind. On one instance, Iva and I were paddling hard up a swift when the squall returned. I stopped paddling in the bow to put on my rain coat, yet the canoe kept moving forward. The gust was strong enough to push us upstream while Iva merely steered the canoe.

The river has a beautiful little canyon.



Endless rapids on the Coppermine River

I imagine only a handful of people have seen it and think: What would it be like to run? But it’s impossible to be sentimental. Under grey skies and bitter winds, this fortress of rock must be portaged. It’s a steep rise onto a rolling plateau and the winds are strong. Curt muscles through it. Iva and I choose to wait. We’ll haul the packs across, and we’ll get the canoe in the morning hoping the winds will calm.... But the arctic isn’t the safest place to make a bet. The wind increases overnight and our morning chore to retrieve the canoe is arduous.

Day 24: The river valley opens up. We have entered the tundra and start stockpiling wood. It’s mostly gangly sun-bleached twigs and roots. Overlooking the final set of swifts, we get our first glance at Lake Takijuq and we cross paths with some young bulls. That graceful stride is undoubtedly caribou. They are lingering, as the big herds migrated north weeks earlier.

Lake Takijuq

Days 25 to 28: This is my new favorite lake and months earlier I knew this would be good. The contour lines on the maps reveal impressive cliffs on the Hinigaluk Peninsula. The ancient mountains jut out and practically divide the lake in two. It’s surreal to see it all saturated in intense golden arctic light.

Our attempt at a day hike on the peninsula is aborted. We spot a barrenland grizzly foraging in the dense scruff. We drift silently in the canoes for a moment. While he is still unaware of our presence, we study the bear and are puzzled at its size. Is it a juvenile or an adult? There are no good references to judge size on the tundra.

Our hike will come soon enough. Our next campsite is on a cobble beach at the base of a wedge-shaped ridge. It is a challenging vertical hike, but we get eye-level with the birds. This site is home to a nesting pair of rough-legged hawks and peregrine falcons. With the binoculars we get a crisp look at their plumage and their aerial maneuvers.

I would love to linger and explore



Seriously, snow in July! Fairy Lake River



Headwaters of the Hood, Lake Tahikafaaluk



more of this vast lake, but arctic winds could easily trap us for days. We have to keep moving. Being windbound by whitecaps risks botching the timing of resupply. The mountains of Hinigluk blur into the distance as we paddle to the northeast corner of the lake.

It's nearly a month into the trip and the next big portage over the height-of-land feels minor to our hardened group. We sleep in and feast on pancakes. There is no rush and eventually we hit the trail. By the late afternoon, the heat is intense and the work gets sweaty. On the tundra there is no shade. Standing on the sandy banks of Tahikafaaluk Lake, we have reached the headwaters of the Hood River. It's all downhill from here!

Hood River

The fabled Hood River, loved by so many, starts off in rough terrain. The land

A resupply in the Arctic is better than Christmas



Grandson & Grandfather duo, Silvan and Hugh

is very craggy, rocky, and not even close to level. For picking camp sites, it's best to stick with the trip notes. We have to thank the late George Drought and his wife Barbara Burton for collecting years' worth of information.

Day 32: On August 1st, on the eastern shores of Lake Tahikafaaluk, in cold grey overcast skies we hear a familiar drone. Our beaver bush plane is arriving with Hugh, Silvain, Rosemary and our final 3-weeks of food. People rush to the water's edge for joyous handshakes and greetings. A human chain is quickly formed as packs, barrels, and cardboard boxes of groceries get unloaded. Sadly, in this whirlwind of excitement, Lisa slips on-board for her return flight. Within minutes the plane takes off and disappears into the horizon.

I won't lie, a resupply is better than Christmas! We have wine, fresh salad, tomatoes, apples, oranges and they all taste so good. And there is coffee, thank goodness; we brewed our last batch that morning.

Before the flight up, the pilot was concerned about the heavy payload, but thankfully Hugh was still able to get the wine onboard. A rest and celebration was needed. Let's face it, even athletes get rest days. We have been pushing hard for a month. That night we shared stories, feasted on fresh food, and finished all that wine in no time.

Hugh Westheuser is veteran of the arctic. He is a retired RCMP officer formerly stationed in Yellowknife and Inuvik. He has run many arctic rivers, including the Nahanni, Coppermine and Anderson. At 81, he now walks the portages with a paddle as a cane while his grandson Silvain carries the canoe. We all help shoulder the extra packs and are honoured to travel with our elder. The resupply also brings a fresh supply of new stories; there are no shortages with Hugh.

The land itself shares a few stories. An ancient stone fox trap still remains on Cave Lake and tent rings can be found elsewhere along the river.

The upper Hood is a series of small lakes connected by swifts and rapids.



Muskox: Ice Age survivors



View from inside the Wilberforce Canyon



Wilberforce Falls: Highest falls north of the Arctic Circle

Once again, water levels are low. With confidence, Curt is able to solo paddle a few unloaded canoes down one of the first steep bony runs. By the next bend in the river, we realize the water levels are EXTREMELY low and we need to edit our expectations. Even the swifts are unrunnable and the number of portages keeps adding up. Outfitters run the river in July and the big rapids have good

trails. However, it's bushwhacking to get around these swifts.

Day 36: We have a close encounter at Willow Rapids. It is extremely shallow and bony. After scouting, we see the start of a clean run followed by a lift-over at the boulders lower down. Iva and Hugh choose to portage; it's not worth banging up the pakCanoes. The others go for it, desperate for a hint of whitewater action.

I'm in the bow of the lead canoe with Greg in the stern. Half way through the run, a grizzly bear enters the water from river-right. We are now on a collision course with a bear! I cried out "Bear". Greg glances into the distance. It takes an extra second to register that the bear is much closer. We do the ugliest eddy-turn. With a hard jolt, the canoe backs into the bouldery shore. Meanwhile, the bear walks up the opposite river bank, never taking his eye off us. Our hearts are racing. This bear is big. Then Curt and Rosemary's canoe passes by committed to the current. The puzzled bear stands upright. Looks at them. Looks at us. Looks at them. Looks at us. The bear soon loses interest and disappears into the bushes, defusing the tension. I would have never imagined getting that close to a bear. Thank goodness all it wanted was a curious look.

Day 38: This is also the land of the muskox. It takes a keen eye and some luck to spot them from a canoe: "Why is that boulder moving?". On the south end of Esker lake, Iva spots a group of three. We stopped to get a closer look. The zoom lens lets us keep a respectable distance and Greg gets some great photographs.

The east end of Esker Lake brings on a change of scenery. This is the Hood River of the brochures, memoirs, and travel guides. The craggy rocks are replaced with massive eskers, gravel moraines, rolling hills, and more greenery. Most importantly, we have river current. Our nagging fear of walking the Hood River is over and the joy of paddling whitewater has returned.

Days 40 & 41: The confluence of the Wright River is a mandatory stopping point where this small tributary cascades over a cliff. It's a special place for Drought and Burton who kept returning to the Hood for many years. Old tent rings disclose the Inuit also camped here. From the high ground they could monitor the caribou herds. Today the only hunter present is a peregrine falcon perched on the tallest boulder.

Day 47: The last day before Wilberforce can rank as my greatest paddle day. The sun is warm. All the portages are behind us. We are running rapids all morning.

Between two sets, Curt spots 3 muskox on a high ridge and we all land the canoes. As we hike up the tiny knoll, we are amazed to find the whole herd. For the next 45 minutes, we all quietly hunch in the bushes, whispering, and passing the binoculars back and forth. Completely hidden from river level, 50+ muskox are grazing and relaxing in the valley. The calves are playing with a joyous stride. The alpha male bullies and charges some other males. Occasionally, a few muskoxen would wander closer to the river and spot us. After a puzzling look and a grunt, they returned to the safety of the herd.

We are only 10 km away from Wilberforce Falls. This stretch of the river is fantastic. It carves braided channels into the gravel bottom. The current is fast and effortless. Large hills and eskers form the valley. Anticipation is building up. This is our final approach.

The trip notes say to pull out 1 km from the falls at a river-left gravel bar. We pass by few gravel bars and have a nagging urge to pull over. With the river so low, we get closer, then a little closer, and finally pull out at the lip of the first rapid.

Standing on pale pink rock, we hoot and holler. Setting up camp will have to wait. We drop everything to start exploring. A short hike gets us on top of a pinnacle of rock overlooking the falls. The water drops in 5 stages, walled in by red sandstone. In little rocky nooks ferns are growing in the misty air. Beyond the falls, the river continues through the canyon with series of big whitewater.

Day 48: We have a few extra days to explore, relax and sip tea all day long. There are one or two sik-siks (arctic ground squirrels) visiting and checking out their new neighbours. They explore the kitchen area and sniff around but never steal food.

Slowly we start portaging the non-essential gear. A gravel esker 2 km west of the falls provides a good landing strip. Our charter twin-otter will be equipped with low pressure tundra tires. This option is more predictable and less expensive than landing a floatplane at the mouth of the river.

In 1986, Bill Mason's group were some of the first recreational canoeists to paddle the Hood River. In his book *Song of Paddle*, he recalls an experience different from ours. The weather was cold and wet. Portaging was difficult on the uneven and waterlogged tundra. The canyon was filled with intense rapids, boils, and whirlpools. Mason and Wally Schaber attempted to run the canyon in a decked canoe, but capsized in the torrent.

Day 50: In one aspect this hot summer, after many cursed weeks of low water, is a strange blessing. The unrunnable has become runnable. On the last day, Curt and I decided to run the canyon.

I believe you should get your white-water kicks close to home and play it safe in the wilderness. However, the canyon it is too cool to pass up. Scouting from above the canyon, the five rapids look deceptively small. At river level it's a clean class III run.

With help from Silvain, the three of us carry the pakCanoe down the scree slope inch by inch. It's a slow process. It's incredibly steep. The rocks are loose and every step is a potential twisted ankle, but in the end it takes us only 20 minutes.

It's a sobering sensation to commit to the canyon, yet my heart beats with ex-

citement. The canyon walls engulf my senses and fill my peripheral vision. The sun is bright casting hard and defined shadows. Half the canyon is glowing orange, while the other half lingers in a cool blue darkness. Our canoe drifts in and out of the light as we negotiate the drops and paddle around the river bends.

Third rapid is the biggest. With a ledge on river-right, we miss our dry line and take the bumpy ride down the center though the wave trains. No harm, we just need to stop and bail. This rapid would have been an absolute monster any other time.

The current slows down and the lofty canyon walls fade away. We reunite with the group at the esker for our 1pm charter flight. Sara is still off picking berries on the tundra until the very last minute. She hustles back as the plane circles for the final descent.

Within hours, we are back in Yellowknife and celebrate our return at a local brew pub. Most of us haven't seen a mirror in 50 days. Tanned, muscled, and scruffy looking, we somehow fit right in with the locals. Nostalgia kicks in instantly. The pain and hardships of the trip are overshadowed by bliss as we reflect on our unforgettable memories in the arctic.



Curt and Rob committing to Wilberforce Canyon



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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.

CCM+WCA= BFFs: Two Great Organizations with a Similar Vision

For many years, the WCS as well as individual WCA members have been supporters of and donors to the activities of the Canadian Canoe Museum. The remarkable paddling adventures of more than a few of its members are even featured in our exhibits. Each year, an annual speaker's evening is held in the name of the symposium's founder, George Luste. In a small return gesture, the Museum has for years selected a storied canoe from its collection to be displayed at the symposium. It has also, on occasion, contributed a presenter.

The WCS presenter's lineup is always impressive, offering a surprising, insightful and wonderfully eclectic mix that is also so much more than reflections upon canoe tripping.

It was a sincere pleasure to be asked to return a second time to join the team and to offer the Curator's perspective from the Canadian Canoe Museum with a talk that ranged from recent artifact acquisitions, exhibit developments, architectural program designs for a new mu-

seum facility. We were also keen to mention a \$1.4 million commitment made just 24 hours earlier by the Canadian government to assist with the pre-construction phase of the new museum.

This time, we also brought along a wonderful canvas-covered canoe recently acquired for our collection from veteran canoeists Greg and Suzanne Brown. The canoe was made 50 years ago for a camp by renown BC canoe maker Bill Greenwood/Greenwood Canoe Company, based in the Vancouver area. You can learn more about the company from a great site hosted by Bill's daughter, Susan. www.greenwoodcanoe.com. This wooden canoe has quite a history and was paddled thousands of kilometers by the donors, including a trip from the Methye Portage in northern Saskatchewan to Montreal, and later from their home near Georgian Bay to Ungava Bay and Hudson Strait. Remarkably, the most damage this 17' red canoe suffered was in transit returning after one of the legs of the northern

journey, and by porcupines in later years!

We were also keen to report on our adventures in boxing and transporting the private library of George Luste's 14,000 books, a collection that includes an outstanding cluster of rare books devoted to canoeing and the Canadian North. I should expect that, relieved of more than 30,000 lbs. of books, the Luste family home on Toronto's Albany Ave has rebounded a half-story! The collection also contained many duplicates intended for resale and, in keeping with a tradition started by George and Linda Luste many years ago, boxes of duplicate books were selected at the Museum and sold by Symposium volunteers at the assembly, raising hundreds of dollars to be used in caring for the Museum's collection. Thank you to all the volunteers and to my Museum colleagues for their tireless efforts.

Days after the February event, Aleks Gusev informed us that the WCS makes an annual contribution to a selected not-for-profit organization and that the Museum could expect the generous gift of \$10,000 dollars! We are pleased to say that a portion of this gift will be gratefully assigned to activities related to the management of the books and archival materials.

I have been thinking about the sympathies and the diverse activities of these two organizations. In recent months, the Museum has had cause to refresh its strategic plan. Equipped with our new playbook, perhaps the aspirational Vision Statement for “Canadian heritage connecting all peoples to the land and to each other” explains our affinities.

Hope to see you next year!
Jeremy Ward, Curator



WCA Hiking Weekend

By Barbara Burton

The 8th annual Duntroon Hiking Weekend was thoroughly enjoyed by 13 WCA hikers October 28-30. We were very comfortable in the newly-constructed Woolner House by Nordic Highlands cross country ski area, with its beautiful view over the fields to Georgian Bay. We hiked 15 km up and down the Bruce Trail escarpment on Saturday, starting at Eugenia Falls Conservation Area. We travelled across a small, clear river numerous times and enjoyed its beautiful waterfalls. After walking in 6 inches of snow in Huntsville on Friday, it was lovely to be hiking in shirt sleeves on Saturday. The yellows of the larches and beeches were a brilliant contrast to the leaves carpeting the forest floor. A delicious pot-luck feast replaced most of the calories we burned off. Our Sunday hike on the Bruce Trail from Nottawasaga Bluffs Conservation Area was shorter in duration. It featured a lovely escarpment lookout



Dave above Hogg falls

and a keyhole crevice route though the cliff. It was an appropriate lead up to Halloween with eerily misty views through the trees and across the valleys, but once again the weather held. Many thanks to Barb Young and Diane Lucas for arranging this great getaway weekend. Look for it next year.



Sue Segwick and Beth Bellaire crossing the river



The keyhole



The group at the viewpoint

Fourth Night Magic

Story by Robert Kimber

Our position is, roughly, 51 degrees, 56 minutes north latitude, 65 degrees, 30 minutes west longitude. To put that in more accessible terms, we're way out in the Canadian bush, still in Quebec but about five miles away from the southwestern corner of Labrador. It's Sunday, early August, about 6:30 p.m. We're pitching camp on the shore of one of the innumerable little ponds that make up the labyrinthian waterways of northern Canada, a country so densely laced with streams, rivulets, bogs, rivers, lakes, and ponds that no one could begin naming any but the larger bodies of water. But names the mapmakers cannot get around to, the wilderness paddler can, because any place you make camp and lay your head for a night becomes a home, Garrett Conover has already named tonight's resting place Camp Hummock for the obvious reason that hardly anywhere within a hundred yards of our campfire can you find enough level ground to pitch a tent.

We are eight: Hugh Stewart and Neil McDonald from Quebec and Ontario; Wendy Scott, Dawn Morgan, Ann Ingerson, and Dave Brown from Vermont; Garrett and I from Maine. Ages are as diverse as origins: Dawn and Neil are in their twenties; Hugh, late

fifties; me, mid-sixties; everybody else, fortyish. We're making our way toward the Labrador border. Once we've crossed it, we'll be in Lac Assigny, the first of a chain of lakes that make up the headwaters of the Atikonak River watershed. From Lac Assigny on, it'll all be downhill, though "downhill" on a wilderness canoe trip is not always the equivalent of smooth sailing. Before this trip is over, we will have portaged twenty-one times, Four days ago, we climbed off the Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway train at a whistlestop named Eric. Since then, we've already made seven of those twenty-one portages. We're only about forty miles into our 250-mile trip, and already Hugh has dubbed this "the trip that wouldn't give an inch."



Author

Hugh is cooking tonight. "Ham au gratin or spaghetti?" he asks. Three voices say, "Ham au gratin." He puts a bag of mixed nuts and one of garlic sticks on top of a wanigan for us to snack on as we do chores. Garrett has cut a couple of dead black spruce for firewood. Dave and Wendy are sawing them up and tossing the billets over to him to split, I set up the galley poles for Hugh to hang his pots on, split some kindling, get the fire going. Neil, Ann and Dawn are pitching tents. One of the joys of traveling with old hands is the ease, the utter routineness of routine. We set up a rotation of cooks, but nothing else is foreordained. Everyone knows what chores need to be done and automatically steps in.

Camp Hummock may not be ideal for setting up tents, but it's superb for lounging. All these hummocks padded with caribou moss make exquisitely comfortable backrests, and once camp chores are done, we kick back, pull out maps and journals, and start comparing notes on the day's travel.

The first joint on Garrett's thumb is equal to one mile on a 1:50,000 scale map, and he calculates each day's mileage in thumb joints. Before Dave Brown even



Camp Hummock

leaves home, however, he lays out the route on his maps and marks each mile with a tick mark. He and Garrett rarely come up with the same daily tally.

“Eight miles today,” Garrett says. “I get nine Dave says, so I write “8.5” in my notes.

“Which point was it where we had lunch?” Dawn asks me, “This one here, or the next one up the bay?”

Wendy is collecting our cups and lining them up on a wanigan lid. “Cocktail time,” she says and tips a tiny flask lid of rum into each cup, about an eighth of an inch, not enough to induce even a mini-buzz but enough to warm the tongue and heart.

Hugh’s pot of rice is bubbling softly. In a pot next to it, water is heating for after-dinner tea. The swarms of black flies that often keep northern travelers in headnets in the evening are blessedly absent tonight, and they will remain so for most of this trip. Why? None of us knows, but we speculate an unusually dry summer, perhaps, or maybe just a low in a normal cycle.

A light northwesterly breeze has swept away the showers that drove us into raingear in the morning and at noon, and now the wind has dropped; the air is still and cool, promising a night of perfect sleep. We pull on wool shirts and hats. Hugh serves up heaping platefuls of ham au gratin and rice. We cradle the warm plates in our laps and eat.

The flow of talk that is almost as constant as the flow of the river stops for a few minutes. A moment of sweet stillness takes over in our little company. We look out on the glassy water and on the spires of black spruce rising around us, on clouds of translucent gold drifting across the sky. We grin at each other.

Garrett calls this moment fourth-night magic, a time that does indeed seem to come with astonishing regularity on the fourth night out, that moment when a canoe company coalesces into a clan. We’ve shared four days of wet feet and driving rains. We’ve waded and wallowed, tracked canoes up rapids and lined them down, chopped our way through blow-downs, humped canoes and wanigans and hundred-pound packs over portages, Four days of bruising adversity we’ve shared, and four days of fun surpassing mere fun. Bliss is the better word, beatitude maybe. Blessed are the wilderness paddlers, for

they shall know heaven in the boondocks,

We are warmed by food and wool and a tot of rum, of course, but most of all by the presence of our brothers and sisters of the bush. When fourth-night magic descends, what goes unsaid but is understood by everyone around the fire is simply this: There is no other company I would rather share right now. There is no other place I would rather be. This, my friends, is as good as it gets.

Robert Kimber has written often for outdoor and environmental magazines. He has paddled and snowshoed extensively in Maine, Quebec, and Labrador and is the author of “*A Canoeist’s Sketchbook*”. His story “*Fourth Night Magic*” first appeared in “*Wildbranch*”, published by the University of Utah Press in 2010.



Author

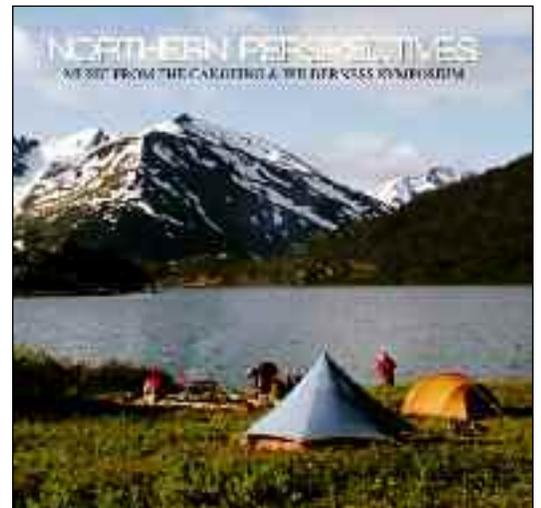
Northern Perspectives Symposium Compilation CD Sells Out

In 2013, as WCA members at the time and Wilderness Canoe Symposium attendees in the years since know, Robin Hadfield and I produced the CD *Northern Perspectives*, a compilation of some of the favourite songs played over the years at the symposium. The CD was intended as a tribute to George Luste for the work he has done for all of us who love the wilderness in founding and organizing the symposium for the first 28 years; and to help fund a lasting memorial to George. It has been for sale at the symposium each year since. (You can read more about the genesis of this project in the Spring 2013 issue of *Nastawgan*.)

The artists generously donated the use of their songs and music, and all proceeds from sales of these CDs have gone to the George Luste Fund at the Canadian Canoe Museum, which sponsors the annual George Luste Lecture at the museum – a fitting memorial to a man who always saw a deeper meaning in northern wilderness travel, beyond just an adventure. As George stated in his introductory remarks to the 1993 symposium (which were reprinted in the 2013 programme), “Canoeing has never been an end in itself for me, but rather a means, a means by which to experience a landscape rich in natural beauty and a means to a richer appreciation of its history.”

As of this year’s symposium, the *Northern Perspectives* CD has officially sold out. (The shop at the Canadian Canoe Museum may still have a few copies left.) Thanks to everyone who purchased a copy over the last five years, we have been able to contribute over \$3,000 to the George Luste Fund. Your support has been much appreciated.

Sandy Richardson



Lac Loiseau Portage

By Lauren Sayre



I knew from our initial scout of the portage that I wanted to set myself up on that small hill for a picture. Katie and I would usually run most, if not all, of the portages we encountered to make sure the path was navigable and that we found the right body of water at the end and ended up in the right spot. My memories from the rest of the day aren't as vivid, but I remember feeling confined by the scenery as we followed along the narrow headwaters of a river we had yet to officially meet. After winding our way down along the narrow waterways and the occasional lake, finding this expansive view from the top of that small hill was liberating. It's rare that we find vantage points like these on canoe trips. Usually we are on the water looking up at the scenery around us or too encompassed by trees to see very far. It's views like these that remind me how removed from civilisation we are, how far we've travelled by canoe and how much further we have to go.

We were two weeks into our trip. Fourteen days of traveling by canoe through northern Quebec, a wilderness of rivers, lakes, trees and the occasional bear or moose, with 29 days remaining to get to our destination, the Inuit settle-

ment of Umiujaq. The lake spread out in front of us was Lac Loiseau which fed into the Rivière Coats, a river whose whitewater we would be running whitewater on for several days. The Coats would be the next segment in our trip and getting to the start of it was as exciting as the whitewater we would be running. I remember this feeling of anticipation as I took that picture. I remember climbing that hill to get to this vantage point and trying to catch my breath because I had hurried with the canoe on my head to get far enough in front of the group. I remember the slight breeze that I was grateful for because it flushed the black flies out from around me. I remember relishing that view of the water extending out in front of us and acknowledging the extent of the journey we were on. I take photos to remind myself of moments like those and also explain to others what it's like to be on trip.

When I took this photo I wanted to show a scene that encompassed our travel through this area. I wanted an image that would portray a portage with a destination in sight. I set myself up to get it with the girls in front of me, carrying their loads to the lake to get a sense of what we really do up there in that re-

mote setting. It's not just a summer camp, it's an *expedition*. I could easily have taken a photo without the canoe on my head, but that wouldn't have conveyed the story properly. I wanted to show it from a unique vantage point. I had my camera around my neck as I portaged the canoe up the hill. When I got to the top I waited for the rest of the group to pass me enough to get a good shot. To keep the canoe in place I held the gunwale with my left hand while I took the picture with my right. When I looked at it I wanted the feeling of being back under the canoe, with just the sound of the wind and the mosquitoes. Perhaps my biggest motivation though is that I wanted people who were

not familiar with canoe tripping to look at it and gain some understanding of what we do on those trips.

I find it incredibly hard to explain to people in my life who are not familiar with canoe tripping what exactly it is that we do in the remote woods of northern Canada. For the most part I have given up on effectively conveying how we trip and what it's like to be on a seven week expedition where we rarely see another soul outside of our small group. The terminology is too overwhelming and the idea of twelve people voluntarily going without technology or showers for seven weeks is too hard for many to fathom. I find myself relegating to the smaller victory of someone actually understanding the difference between a kayak and a canoe (in the US at least, people just aren't as knowledgeable about these things). It is this daunting task of explaining how I spent my summer that has shaped a lot of the photos I have taken throughout my trips; my pictures can show so much more than I could ever explain. At the same time, they can also take me back to a moment where all I had to worry about was getting to that lake.

The Campfire Ring

By Greg Went

Coming down the ridge to the base of the falls. It's the end of the portage and probably our camping spot for the night. Trip notes say that there is a fairly good campsite at the end of the portage. If there is, we'll stay for the night. It's getting late and we aren't pressed to make kilometers. We're close to the village that is the take-out point for this year's trip. I figure two to three more days and we'll be there.

Saw more signs of man's use of the land today. Passed two cabins and what looked like a set of poles cut for a tepee shelter. The start of this last portage was also a clear sign. Blazed, well-marked, and wide enough to run snowmobiles on it in winter. The campsite shows lots of use too. It has a fire ring, some cut logs for seats around it, and a table fashioned out of a piece of plywood nailed between two trees.

The fire ring was about two meters around. Lots of stuff in it. Some of it burnable and some of it not. Instead of being hauled out, non-combustibles, aluminum cans, fruit and vegetable tins, odd bits of metal, were just consigned to the fire ring. I used a stick to poke around in the ashes to see what else was there and then I saw it. An ember. I worked to save it and was able to get our fire going from it.

Someone else had been here. Recently. Probably in the last two days. I doubt if the ember would have survived longer than that.

I fished some tins out of the fire ring and put them in our trash bag. I didn't dig out all of the refuse, but I did pick out quite a bit. I left a place better than I found it. I lessened the hand of man on one small spot in the wilderness. I found satisfaction in knowing that.

I also knew that my personal ember of respect for the land had not gone out either.

Manna

By Robert Perkins

It was a hot afternoon. I was portaging from the bottom of the pencil-thin Beechey Lake into the Great Fish River. It's the longest portage on the river, about a mile. I was sweating and focused on placing each foot in front of the other, head down, looking for my way through the willows and the wet spots. Never the same trail twice. The sweat had washed off the DEET. The black flies and mosquitoes were enjoying their meal. I'd already carried the canoe and two packs across, my personal and the food baby. That's one mile over with a load, walk back, another mile over with the baby, and walk back.

I was on my fifth mile and I still had another pack to retrieve.

My head was down because of the tumpline carrying the wanagan. Tumps are used all over the world to carry loads and were in regular use in canoeing until the 1960s. It's an old-fashioned system: a leather strap with a slightly wider head band tied around a plywood box holding a week's supply of food and my kitchen: a pot, a pan, a cup, a wooden bowl, a small pressure cooker, spices, rum and chopsticks. (If you eat with chopsticks, you eat more slowly when on your own). To balance the load on your back, you lean a little forward.

I'd been out a month. I'd landed on Jim Magrum Lake before the ice melt and spent my first two weeks of the summer enjoying the advance of spring, the melting of the ice, and relatively bug-free days. In early spring, there were no black flies and the first mosquitoes are a little ditzy. I'd finished the fresh food I'd brought with me from Yellowknife. I camped on the east side of the lake waiting for the breakup. I wasn't in a rush.

One morning at Magrum Lake, sitting in the mouth of my tent, I heard a noise. I froze. I waited. A wolverine walked by five feet from the tent and onto the corn snow-covered lake. Wolverines are touted as being mean and solitary, without much humor. The tent hid me and I had the privilege of watching her cavort. She lolled around in the cool snow. She rolled sideways. She spun in circles on her side

the way Curly of the Three Stooges did. She hopped sideways and then hopped sideways the other way. She was having fun. Then she walked off across the lake, her dark body becoming smaller and smaller until she was the size of a peppercorn against the snow and then she disappeared. Poof!

That's the type of thing you think about on a long portage as you put one foot in front of the other, look up to see the rise you're heading toward. Head back down. You'll hear the river soon. Just keep moving. I pride myself on not stopping. Head down, walking on, I passed a potato; walked right by it before my mind registered it was a potato. Unimaginable. Impossible. Yet, when I put the wanagan down and walked back, there it was lying on the ground. I picked it up. It was firm; no little sprouts had appeared in its eyes. A potato.

The rest of the day I enjoyed thinking about the potato, my potato now. How did it get there? Who would have thrown away a potato? There must be someone ahead of me on the river. Later in the summer, I found boot prints and a few small wrappers, paper and some aluminum foil.

I kept the wrappers and foil to mail back, but not the potato. The night I found it, I cut it up and fried it; ate it with salt.

Back in Yellowknife that fall, by contacting other float plane bases, I discovered who'd been ahead of me on the river that summer. When I sent him back his trash, I mentioned the potato. He wrote back,

"I wondered what happened to that potato."



Killarney Solo (58, and Still Great!)

Story and photos by Cynthia Sherwood



My first selfie, kinda wonky as I couldn't stop giggling!

My champagne birthday year had arrived! I was born in 1958, turned 58 in March and decided I needed to celebrate by having a BIG adventure. I

wanted a challenge and to determine if I “still have what it takes”.

I settled on a solo canoe trip. I had wanted to do one last fall, but the news



My sleek craft on the shore of Three Mile Lake

that a late spring frost had decimated the blueberry crop and the bears were very hungry gave me a convenient excuse to postpone the trip. Okay, to be honest, I was not sure I could manage on my own. My biggest fear was indeed, bears, but my friend lent me some bear spray which did alleviate some of my anxiety. Once I had the bear spray, I knew that announcing my intentions was the next step. I work in a female dominated profession and when I mentioned my “vacation” at our next big staff meeting I enjoyed the grimaces on the faces of my colleagues at my revelation that it would involve camping and paddling and “shudder” peeing in the woods! And all that by myself! My determination to discover if I still have what it takes raised some eyebrows!

Once I had announced my quest, I had to get serious and choose a park, and a route. I decided to explore the NW corner of Killarney, especially as there were some lakes I had not been on and the route looked like an interesting combination of lakes and rivers. As a cycle commuter, I cycle 24 km a day and when I get home I throw a few 1 kg weights around, so I was convinced that I was in great shape and could handle a physical challenge. I made my reservation and started collecting my gear. I always enjoy the preparation phase of any trip. Unfortunately, life always seems to interfere, this time in the guise of suddenly being asked to host a German friend of a friend who needed a place to stay in Toronto for a few days! Which is why, the night before my departure, I ended up haphazardly packing the food bag. Of course I needed one baggie a day of self composed GORP, and an extra meal, in case of an emergency and two kinds of cheese for lunch, ...you get the picture!

I left Toronto on a Thursday after work and camped overnight in Grundy Lake Provincial Park. The campground

hostess warned me to keep all food-stuffs in the car as that very morning they had relocated a nuisance bear and had been plagued by a few of them that summer! It rained all night, not an auspicious start to my adventure but luckily the rain stopped just before dawn. I was up early, eager to get on the road, into a canoe and on my way!

A couple of hours later, I was in the office at Killarney Kanoes. As Steve finished the paperwork on my permit and canoe rental, he squinted at the permit and said laconically, "Oh, you're camping on Deacon or Fox tonight?" "Yes", I said, smiling broadly, "I've never been on either, so I'm looking forward to that." "There's a new portage from Balsam to Deacon", he said, pointing to the map. The entrance is right across from the last campsite on Balsam." So much for a leisurely paddle up a creek I thought. He continued, "low water, they put it in about a month ago, 640m." I kept smiling. "No problem" I said, instantly doing the math in my head and stifling a groan!

I finally had the canoe loaded. A big pack with my tent, sleeping bag, extra clothes, all the bits and pieces I felt I needed for a comfortable trip. Another big pack with my firebox, pot, dishes and food and a daypack holding my first aid kit, and camera. It filled the Souris River 15' Tranquility solo, and I was ready to launch! The paddle up Bell Lake was tricky, as I was paddling a strange canoe into a headwind. I quickly adapted and the canoe ended up being a dream, very responsive and fun to paddle. The weather was fantastic and I felt proud to finally be on my way. When I came to a calm bay, I decided it was time to start documenting my BIG adventure, which is more easily said than done! I had bought a "selfie stick" and was determined to take share-worthy photos which captured the spirit of my adventure. It turned out to be an insurmountable challenge to get a proper photo of myself paddling, while holding the selfie stick and staying upright. After a number of near fatal attempts to do so, I



Morning coffee in the sunshine (pre-plunge)



Après-plunge, my clothes drying in the sunshine while I pack up



Only on a canoe trip can you capture such a stunning sculpture!



I was there! The view from my lunch spot on Balsam Lake

ended up taking a shot with my bow on shore while pretending I was paddling in the middle of the lake...these episodes did make me laugh, which was also a dangerous thing to do in the middle of a lake!!!

After a quick lunch I continued pad-

dling, anxious to tackle the unexpected portage into Deacon. The newly-cut portage was a meandering path, strewn with 6" high small stumps, requiring intense concentration to navigate. This level of concentration took my mind off the weight of my first pack but made the return hike seem longer than 640m. I took the canoe next. The removable yoke and light weight made it easy to portage. Then back for the second pack...As much as I love the outdoors, I am not a keen hiker. I have flat feet and even with orthotics, my feet end up hurting. I have never minded portaging. To me it is the necessary means to the glorious activity of paddling. But my second pack was extremely heavy, perhaps also due to the 2 one litre tetra packs of wine I had thrown in at the last minute! After all, I was celebrating my champagne birthday year!

Deacon Lake is small and I was quickly able to ascertain that both sites were taken, so 10 minutes later I was at the portage into Fox. Mercifully it was only 200m much to my relief! But that did add another kilometre to my portage tally for the day! As I set up camp, I realized that my hips were re-

ally hurting. A unique pain for me. I rummaged around in my first aid kit and managed to find some unexpired Advil and popped a few, optimistic that a good night's sleep would take away the pain. I realized that cycling was different than carrying a heavy canoe pack. So much for my excellent physical condition!

There is only one site on Fox and I did revel in the solitude. Needless to say it was lights out at 8 pm!

The following morning, I crawled out of the tent into a thick fog. Eerie and a reason to crawl right back in and read a few chapters before starting my day! Eventually the sun artistically burned away the fog and there was not a cloud in the sky.

I had breakfast and was rinsing off my firebox at the edge of the lake when the unthinkable happened. A piece of it came off and slid into the lake! I panicked and jumped in, fully clothed to grab it, but of course I missed! I could see the piece, balanced precariously on a rock, on the edge of an abyss. Reason prevailed. I chucked my watch up onto a patch of moss, took a breath and lowered myself slowly under water, eyes on the prize. I managed to grab it, much to my relief. Once again I had to laugh at myself. There I was, soaking wet, victoriously clutching the piece of metal...Of course I had a change of clothing but wet clothes are heavy, adding even more weight to my carries!

Back out on Deacon, I confidently paddled across the lake, preening somewhat, for the benefit of the men camped on the island I passed. But the portage was not where I thought it was and I ended up paddling back and forth along the shoreline a few times, looking in vain for the tiny portage sign. Apparently, I was told, having tiny, obscure campsites and portage signs contributes to the "wilderness aspect" of Killarney! With each pass it became harder to maintain my dignity, and I was enormously relieved when I finally spotted the portage! More laughing at myself, this trip was turning out to be enormously self entertaining!



The sunset from campsite #109 on David Lake. At this point I started to relax, guessing that, although illegal, I was safe!

Back on Balsam, I forced myself to have a snack. The pain in my hips, after 3200m of portaging, took away my appetite but I knew I had to stay fed and hydrated. I took a deep breath, looked at my proposed route, and once again set off, refusing to dwell on the 1105m, times 5, necessary to get into Harry Lake, the next lake on my permit. I tried, I honestly tried! But after poking my canoe many times, into various possibilities, I came to the conclusion that due to low water levels, it was impossible to reach the portage into Pike Lake. So I had a decision to make. Although I can be spontaneous and take risks, I am a law abiding citizen. It had been impressed upon me that the permit was per lake and it was absolutely against the rules to camp on a different lake than was on the permit for each day. I was allowed to camp on David Lake the next day, but on this day it was supposed to be on Harry Lake...I decided to have lunch and contemplate my willingness to break the rules.

My lunch, on a rocky outcrop, in the September sun was delicious. Until I carelessly cut my finger. Blood dripping freely, I scrambled to find the first aid kit. I managed to patch myself up, all the while shaking my head at my clumsiness, and vowing to be more aware. After all, I was on my own!

Having resolved to violate the rules and accept the consequences, it was with some trepidation, that I resumed my trek, the 605m portage into David Lake, hoping to find a campsite as it was Saturday, and the lake may have been fully booked. The last carry was a slow one, my sore hips screaming for attention, my mind striving to ignore the screaming, concentrating on finding yet another kind of mushroom. I was amazed at the variety of mushrooms I encountered throughout the trip. Big, tiny, round, fluted, yellow, white, red, brown, I wished I had brought a book to identify them with. Each campsite and portage hosted yet another variety. Oh, the splendors of nature!

There was a campsite, tucked away, just past the portage into David Lake,



A windy, wavy morning on David Lake. A perfect day!

and I gratefully set up camp and cooked my dinner. I spent some time practicing wide-eyed innocence and a charming excuse in case a ranger happened by and asked to see my permit. Once the sun set I relaxed since I didn't think anyone would come looking for a spot after dark.

The next day was clear and sunny although there was quite a wind. That helped to dry out my wet clothes from my unexpected plunge the day before! I leisurely broke camp and set off, hoping to find a sunny spot to stay for 2 nights. The paddling was exhilarating,



Fluted fungus on a portage – oh, the splendors of nature!



The rocks on the way to Great Mountain Lake. I noticed much more vegetation than 35 years ago!



A snack before my hike back to David Lake.

the possibility of dumping always lurking in the back of my mind. As I approached campsite #106, my spirits soared as it was perfectly placed, high and dry with a southern exposure.

Suddenly not one but 6 men emerged, seemingly out of nowhere and began to get into canoes, beached out of my sight line. A query revealed they were just out for a day trip, so disappointed, I



I spent most of the rainy rest-day lounging under my tarp. Notice the trusty Sven (saw). He has come along on every trip for 40 years!

kept paddling.

Another hour of paddling brought me to an empty and appealing site and I decided to have lunch, then set up camp. My intention had been to do some hiking off David, up onto the La Cloche Silhouette hiking trail, so 2 hours later I set off in the canoe, to look for hiker's campsite #34, from which I could access the trail. I know what you're thinking and you are right, I never did find that campsite! I ended up hiking the 2945m portage into Great Mountain Lake, a hike that brought back many memories of the time I did it with younger hips and a fibreglass canoe on my shoulders. During the afternoon, clouds had moved in and by the time I got back to my campsite, there were some ominous ones on the horizon.

I cooked my dinner on my trusty firebox, a very heavy item to drag on a southern Ontario trip but I always struggle with a stove and fuel and have never needed more than one match to light a fire in the firebox, even in the rain. My secret is birchbark and of course dry branches which are always plentiful and burn, even if it is raining as a pocketknife can quickly strip off the wet bark. By 9 pm, as I was reading in my tent, a light drizzle started and I fell asleep to the lullaby of rain on the fly and wind in the trees.

It was still raining when I woke up and a quick excursion to the drop box revealed a leaden sky. However, it did briefly stop and I scrambled out of the tent and got my tarp strung up between Red Pines, growing conveniently close to one another, before another deluge hit. Sadly it was my "day off" and I ended up spending most of it either under the tarp, cooking a meal or in the tent, reading my book. At 4 pm it finally seemed to be clearing up and I went for a paddle, yes, back along the shore, trying one more time to find campsite #34, just to satisfy my need to know and maybe for next time. I took a guess and went ashore at a likely spot and did find a path leading away from the apparent campsite...but did not find

any official signs, orange or blue, so I cannot confirm that I actually found it! I had to laugh though, as the evening before, a plane had landed on the lake, taxied up to the dock by a lodge and took off again 2 hours later. So the idea that tiny signs, or apparently no signs, enhanced the idea of Killarney as a wilderness park seemed slightly hypocritical!

My last night in Killarney was uneventful — not even one bear came sniffing around my tent! The wind blew throughout the night which dried everything out nicely, and packing up the next morning went smoothly. I laughed as I finished packing the food pack since I still had enough food and wine left for another 5 days! Although the skies were gray, it was dry and I only had 2 portages to get back onto Bell, back to Killarney Kanoes. I shared the last 740m portage with a group of Grade 11 high school students and their teacher from Meaford, who were on day 8 of a 10-day trip. They were portaging Mad River ABS canoes and big food barrels but still smiling. Our future environmentalists!

Upon arriving home, I immediately sat down at my computer to send trip reports to assure those concerned that I had survived. To my canoeist friends I sent a brief description of my “portaging trip with a bit of paddling”. The non-canoeists got a slightly more dramatic report including my paddling, alone, in a small boat, battling waves and a fierce headwind. Both reports included the words...OH, my HIPS!

Back at work the next day, I met a colleague in the hall who gazed at me intently and said, “I’m glad you’re okay, and tell me, was it life altering?” I laughed and knowing that she has never even camped, I responded, “I learned a lot...it wasn’t life altering but it was definitely life affirming!” Another colleague put her hands on my shoulders, and with a twinkle in her eyes said, “I was so worried about you but it seems that you still DO have what it takes”! I gave her a hug and said, “I guess so...onwards to 60...maybe Quetico?”



Last day of my trip. Finally, a shot with my paddle. I wedged my bow between two rocks!

Ashes, Ashes, All Fall Down

Words by Dave Olesen, Photos by Kristen Olesen



Dave (in red shirt) with this friend Marcus on the shore of Obelisk Lake.

Call me dimwitted, because even the most obvious facts sometimes take a while to sink into my thick skull. It is late October, and although the days have been calm and mild lately, we have had a few autumn gales and we will almost certainly have a few more before deep winter. After every hard blow we walk our trails and find our way blocked by fire-killed trees that have fallen. All the trees here and for many miles around are dead and burnt – their blackened skeletal stems stark in ranks across slope and swale. One by one and sometimes two by two and sometimes in dramatic domino-effect jumbles, the charred remains of a mature taiga forest are falling down. Day by day, storm by storm, month after month, year after year, the trees will fall until they are – and this is what took me a couple of years to fully grasp – all lying down. One by one and ten by ten, gravity will call them home. Of course this is obvious, and a given, but it took me a few years to realize it. They will all fall down. Not some of them, not just the weak ones. All of them. My, what a mess

And I have been surprised by this lately. Not sure why. After all, what had

I thought a dead tree would do, if not fall down? Did I think the trees would stand upright for decades, slowly turning to an elegant silvery gray, and then somehow melt away at their butts and sink gradually and gracefully out of sight? Nope. Some might hang on for a decade or two or even three, but the soil around the bases of most of these trees is gone, and the roots and trunks of many of them are deeply charred. They topple down. They crash, they lie in jumbles, they heap themselves into thick piles that will, my friend Mitch likes to say, “stymie a moose.” In some places now, two years after the burn, it looks as though a tipsy D-8 Cat skinner has been wandering randomly across the hillsides, pushing up slash piles, clearing ground for a new airstrip or pasture.

There are no new seedlings of spruce pushing up just yet, and where the fire burned hottest there is still no new growth at all, but blonde rows of grasses and rich stripes of purple fireweed laced the less intense portions of the burn this past summer. (It is interesting that it took two years for the fireweed to appear. Pink *Corydalis* was the only prominent pioneer in the first summer.) Every so

often, old daydreams of Icelandic horses have revived. Maybe, just maybe, a horse really could make a living around here in these coming years.

When the most precarious burned trees began to topple down in the weeks and months right after the fire, I was seized by an urge true to my boyhood roots in small-town street-and-yard Illinois. The CBD (Call Big Doug) Landscaping mentality of my high-school part-time job: “It’s autumn and the leaves are down. Time to get raking and make the yards clean and neat again, and impose our tidy order on this unruly cycle, at least here in town.” Here by the Hoarfrost River my urge was not to grab a rake but to reach for hardhat and chainsaw, to get out there and buck and pile and clear. A laughable reaction really, in the face of the day-to-day realities of time and work, and the vast scale of the place, but the instinct is there and after every new windfall it surges again.

But no, one does not rake up the fallen leaves in an autumn forest, and after a wildfire one does not blithely set out to cut and clear and slash-burn the millions upon millions of trees that will now be tipping over and falling down. (In my layman’s calculations I easily get an estimate into billions, for this big burn alone, but I will hold back and stick with millions.) My urge is just a deep desire to combat the chaos, to do my small bit to restore the beauty and wholeness that have been obliterated. Tilting at windmills has been a theme around here for thirty years. “Cleaning up” after a forest fire falls squarely in that category.

The soothing sitting-room wisdoms of “nature’s cleanup,” “let it burn,” and “the wonder of rejuvenation,” like so many sitting-room wisdoms about wild nature, are all valid, and at some remove yes, they can be soothing. Reality is more chaotic, and at times it is horrific. (The string of starving wolves we have watched die slow deaths here over the past two winters come to mind as examples of not-so-soothing wildness. Likewise the charge of a senile half-blind grizzly bear on a November morning nine years ago — his

hot sour breath and the look in his eyes and the sudden realization that it might be my day to die, or his.)

It has not been soothing, but instead more like jarring and jaw-dropping, to pause deliberately and squint across miles of rolling outcrop hills, and to try to imagine the scene before me going through the changes and successions that lie ahead. It is like trying to imagine the country under the weight of the last – or the next – wave of glacial ice. That is something I have tried to do from time to time, but I have never honestly conjured up a convincing image of the ice sheet, in my mind's eye. This latest attempt to envision long change is easier, because the change is already well underway: the once-lovely green hills are black and jumbled, and the trees are toppling day by day. As if the lip of the next Keewatin ice sheet was visible on the far horizon, and on a calm day audible, rumbling and grinding down the valley.

My stilted efforts to conjure the changes that are coming to the scene before me are accompanied by a surprisingly deep sadness. This, like the falling trees, caught me off guard, even as it brought me close to tears the other day. “Heartfelt” is a maudlin word, but here it has its place. I can feel sometimes, right in my heart, that span of years, and with it comes the awareness that I will not be here to see this place return to any semblance of that mature, deep-rooted, spongy-lichened, taiga-forest integrity that we all recall from a long Sunday hike we took together as a family, just over two years ago. I will never see it come back to that. None of us will. That is gone, and all four of us will be long gone before it comes back to what it was on that memorable afternoon just before the lightning struck and the fire began to prowl the hills.

Once down, these dense spruce and tamarack trunks will lie in heaps for decades far beyond a narrow human life span. Decay proceeds extremely slowly here in a country where our first old cabin – the one that was here from the late 1970's – stood for nearly 40 years on unpeeled birch rounds laid crosswise right on the sand. When we took that place down, in 2004, to erect on its site this workshop that we have called home since the fire, the wood of those birch

logs was as solid as it was on the day the trees were felled. Try that in a temperate latitude! Hell, in the Pacific Northwest an unpeeled birch round laid on the ground beneath a building would soften to mush before lunchtime. Charred wood being highly resistant to decay, the bark-free trunks that now

lie perched a foot above the ground will still be here, lying in jumbles, when my children are older than I am now, just starting lap 60 around the sun. This is not sad, but it is not soothing Mother Nature Knows Best stuff either. More like the cold hard facts of life and death, more like the hot breath of a bear about to kill you. It gives new meaning to the glib phrase “a 200-year burn,” and gives visible and visceral meaning to a span of two centuries.

Again and again I turn from my reverie and stride down the hill toward home, rifle or chainsaw forever in hand, while a trio of four-month-old husky pups rockets around and leaps over and wriggles under the windfalls. Another generation of that boundless young-dog energy enlivening our walks down these familiar trails into another freeze-up season. Sad as it makes me some days, I feel fortunate to have been given this first-hand lesson in Time, and Nature, and the Real Deal. Not given, so much as smacked-up-side-o'-the-head by it.

“What emerges from the recent work on chaos and complexity is the final dismemberment of the metaphor of the world as machine, and the emergence of a new metaphor – a view of a world that is characterized by vitality and autonomy, one which is close to Thoreau's sense of wildness, a view that, of course, goes well beyond him, but one he would no doubt find glorious. Instead of a vast machine, much of nature turns out to be a collection of dynamic systems, rather like the mean eddy lines in Lava Falls...



Dave and Kristen's daughters and dogs out for a walk near the mount of the Hoarfrost River.

They are aperiodic, like the weather, they never repeat themselves but forever generate new changes, one of the most important of which is evolution. Life evolves at the edge of chaos, the area of maximum vitality and change.” — Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996.

Dave Olesen was born and raised in Illinois, and attended university in Montana and Wisconsin, with a 1979 degree in Humanities and Northern Studies from Northland College. Dave immigrated to Canada in July 1987, after purchasing a remote property and old cabin at the mouth of the Hoarfrost River on the northeast tip of Great Slave Lake. It was sled dogs that first brought Dave to the far north, on long expeditions in 1979-1981, and his passion for winter and dog mushing continues. His most recent book is *Kinds of Winter* (2014, Wilfrid Laurier University Press), an account of four solo journeys by dog team centered around his home territory. His 1994 book *North of Reliance* a collection of essays, was recently published in a second edition by Raven Productions of Ely, Minnesota. Dave lives at the Hoarfrost River with his wife, Kristen, where they operate a small bush-flying business and outfit groups for dogsled adventures. They have two daughters. In 2014, a wildfire destroyed their home and they are now in a period of recovery and rebuilding. Dave posts monthly “ramblings and musings” at bushpilot-blog.wordpress.com

Discovering Canoe Camping in a New Land

By Adrienne Blattel



Our group poses in front of a towering waterfall. Photo by Adrienne Blattel.



Amir, originally from Afghanistan, photographs a gregarious red squirrel. Photo by Adrienne Blattel.

edge and confidence to lead these trips ourselves. It is so special to be able to share these skills and this experience with newcomers. It's quite involved: participants know little about canoeing or camping, much less about staying comfortable in the outdoors in Quebec or "surviving" and staying well in a remote setting far from cars and cell phone reception.

There were 16 of us in all — 14 participants plus Frédéric and I. I held a planning meeting a few days prior to give participants a chance to ask questions, voice worries, and plan meals together. It helps them prepare psychologically for an experience which has its challenges. I like having the chance to show them examples of clothing they could bring from their own wardrobes and gear they could improvise from simple items at home. This was supplemented by rental tents, sleeping bags and other camping gear from Mountain Equipment Co-op.

My goal is to give participants as many tools as possible to go on and organize this kind of outing (or any camping or canoeing for that matter) with friends and family. Canoe camping is emblematic of the Canadian wilderness, so it seems important that everyone get the chance to try. There's so much to learn. Every year, I am once again surprised by how long it takes me to organize this trip. For example, preparing the meals as a team takes a lot of coordination, but is well worth the effort when everyone enjoys sharing food we made together and learns from the process. Language and cultural differences add to the confusion: the person assigned "parmesan cheese" had never heard of it; the couple who were assigned "smores" needed to look up the recipe online (and came up with a delicious twist). A father-son team from Quebec brought a scrumptious homemade "pouding chômeur", a traditional Quebec dessert, plus a fantastic spaghetti sauce! Everyone contributed so much.

Participants hailed from countries such as Algeria, Columbia, Mauritius, the United States, Jamaica, Afghanistan,

Between July 29 and 31, 2016, my husband Frédéric and I had the pleasure and honour of leading an "intercultural" introduction to canoe camping weekend for the community centre where I work. It is the seventh I've organized, one per summer, since I started an "Intercultural Outdoor Recreation Program" back in 2010 in Montreal. The aim of this program is to bring people together from near and far through outdoor recreation and to give new Canadians the chance to try our traditional Canadian outdoor pursuits.

At first, other experienced guides led our canoe camping trip. We learned from them and now have gained the knowl-

Syria, and Quebec. Some had been in Montreal for many years, and others were recent arrivals. Four were Syrian refugees who arrived in Montreal 6 months ago: two sets of two non-identical twin 21-year-old brothers, coincidentally. Most participants had never been canoeing, camping nor canoe-camping before. There was a wonderful dynamic of sharing and exchange across cultures. For example, around the campfire and under the starry sky, our Columbian participant asked many sweet questions about the meaning of various Quebec expressions and words, and one of our more local participants answered her with humour and enthusiasm. My tent was beside the Syrians; I loved overhearing their passionate discussions in Arabic as they worked together to pitch their tent for the second time, this time without “outside” help.

We went to “Vallée Bras-du-Nord”, a stunning 18 km river trip west of Quebec City. This popular route is run by a local development co-op with much success. The first campground and put-in were hopping with people as a result. It was quieter and more serene as we travelled down the river. The route can be done all in one day, or else there is the option to camp half-way down at the peaceful and big “Camping de la Vallée”. I was worried the route would be too short when divided up into two days, but in fact it was ideal. It was just enough to give us the feeling that we were travelling somewhere and tire ourselves out, but left time to swim, take advantage of the place, and get home at a reasonable hour on Sunday.

It was a delight to see a number of people swimming in fresh water for the first time; most were accustomed to oceans and swimming pools. There weren’t many mosquitoes. We hung our food at night in case of visits from animals. The Syrians seemed unreasonably nervous about snakes. When I assured them there are no poisonous snakes in Quebec, one brother quipped: “that’s like saying there are only vegetarian bears in Quebec!”

We admired a spectacular waterfall partway down, one of the highest I’ve ever seen. The river mostly consisted of moving current and even a couple of mini rapids to get our new paddlers turning around in circles. Most paddling



Participants from Syria swim in freshwater for the first time. Photo by Adrienne Blattel.

duos cited communication with their paddling partner as the greatest challenge of the weekend, but all seemed on speaking terms by the end. We enjoyed sand beaches and high cliffs along the route. We carried everything we needed in the canoes. I showed the group how to waterproof their gear well using sturdy garbage bags. It was sunny all day every day. For some reason this group was especially nervous about the prospect of flipping; no one flipped.

On the way home, we stopped for soft-serve ice cream in St-Raymond at “Ti-Oui”, which Benoit told us derives from “Petit Louis”. A few people experimented with soft-serve ordering lingo. “Un marbré dans le noir” will get you a vanilla-chocolate twist dipped in chocolate, we established. I suggested that Majd open an ice cream store one day called “Ti-Maj”.

And without further ado, here is the story of the trip written by one of our participants, Jad Albasha, recently arrived from Syria.

“When I was in my country, several times I saw people doing the canoe ac-



Nicolas, who moved here from Mauritius, tries his hand at steering the canoe. Photo by Adrienne Blattel.



Majd and Jad, the twin brothers from Syria, canoeing as a duo. Photo by Adrienne Blattel.



Our group paddles by high cliffs. Photo by Adrienne Blattel.

tivity on television, sometimes in the sport news, sometimes in the movies. I didn't had the idea that one day I'll do it too!

Even I didn't thought about it, because I didn't hear anybody did it before in Syria.

So, when I knew that in the summer

we're going to do the canoe camping, I was like... OH MY GOD!! Is it me who is going to do it?!!!!

I was really happy, but at the same time I worried, because it is going to be my first time, and maybe it will be so difficult for me to do it.

I was thinking like this even when



two professionals of our group explained the steps very well for us.

My first 5 minutes were the hardest. Too many things were rolling and rolling in my head. I should stay in the middle, I should be in the same rhythm with my partner. I must keep my eyes open and my brain awake!

But after that, it was easy, okay it was not that easy, but also not that hard.

During the journey I saw the beautiful fantastic nature of Quebec, it was like I said before, it was like the movies.

Another important thing I did it for the first time in my life, I swam in the river! It was really awesome!

During the three days, there was no mobile network, and I was really happy with that, because I got the time to keep my eyes on the nature, and enjoying the beautiful views over there.

One last thing, I know that I talked a lot, but there were many things new for me, so I love to talk about them. So, the last thing I would like to talk about is sleeping near the banks of the river in a tent!

I did a lot of camping in Syria, but I've never slept in a tent in the forest!

It was a great experience.

I spent a lovely beautiful days there, and I'm sure that I will do it again and again.

Thank You.

Adrienne Blattel leads and guides outings for the Intercultural Outdoor Recreation Program, which she founded in 2010. Adrienne runs this program through a non-profit, inner-city community centre in Montreal called the Milton-Park Recreation Association. More information about this program can be found at www.pleinairinterculturel.com, and you can contact Adrienne at pleinair@miltonpark.org.



Roasting marshmallows was a new experience for most. Photo by Amir Norouzi.

Food for Paddlers

Just-Add-Water Pancake Mix

Sarah Lawson, a new member of the WCA, submitted the following:

I invented this mix in 2014 as I was preparing for a trip with my young family to Lake Superior Provincial Park. It's a just-add-water pancake mix that is easy to make at home, kid-friendly and a bit more substantial than refined flour store-bought versions. I was inspired by vegan cookbooks that replace eggs with ground flaxseeds and also by some recipes from Canadian Living. Ground flax and buttermilk powder are available at your local health food store. The photos are of blueberry/raspberry pancakes cooking on our camp stove. Note the diapers drying in the background! We were on the east coast of Lake Superior, north of Sinclair Cove.

Recipe

Dump into a Ziploc bag:

1 cup white flour

1/2 cup whole wheat flour

1/3 cup buttermilk powder

1 tbsp sugar

1 tbsp ground flax

1 1/2 tsp baking powder

1/2 tsp baking soda

a pinch of salt

a pinch of cinnamon

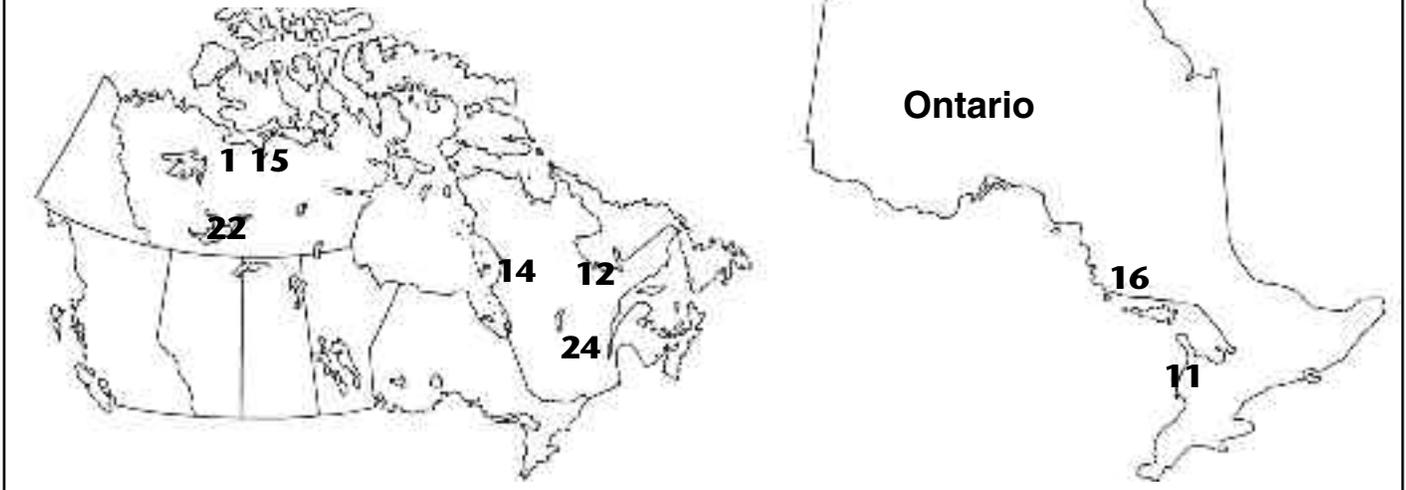
Mix with 1 1/2 cups of water.

Yum!

If you would like to share your favourite tripping recipes, please contact Barb Young, 12 Erindale Crescent, Brampton, Ont. L6W 1B5; youngj david@rogers.com



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