



nastawgan

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Paddlers survey the Kogaluk canyon for a decent route.

In Ntesinan Across the Labrador Plateau

**Words by Stephen Loring
Images by Dave Brown**

Ntesinan is the Innu word for the land, the country. The Innu (as the Naskapi refer to themselves) have for centuries lived and hunted in what is now called Labrador. Recently they have begun land claim negotiations with

the federal and provincial governments. During the fall of 1979, a small party set out from the Quebec North Shore & Labrador Rail Road landing at Astray Lake, bound for the coast of Labrador. The party consisted of

It did not seem strange or unnatural to be setting out as I was on such an errand. Rather there came a sense of unspeakable relief in thus slipping away into the wilderness.

Mina Benson Hubbard

Stephen Loring, a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, his younger brother Erie, and the then-not-yet-venerable Maine Guide Thomas Hallenbeck.

The trip was, in part, a means to facilitate archaeological and ethnohistorical research, in that it sought to document evidence of previous Indian land use. But there were other reasons for traveling not so clearly definable. The party worked through the series of lakes east of Schefferville, portaged across the divide into the Ungava watershed, and located the headwaters of the De Pas River, which they followed until it joined the George at Indian House Lake. From there they followed a route that had been pioneered by William Brooks Cabot between 1903 and 1910, that entailed a long portage to Lake Mistinibi and then across the

barren Labrador plateau, hopping from pond to pond, to reach the valley of the Kogaluk River, which was descended to the sea. Upon reaching the Labrador coast they paddled to Zoar Bay and a mid-October rendezvous with Inuit hunters from Nain. Following is excerpted from Stephen Loring's journal.

15 August. The North Coast of the St. Laurence

The Cote Nord is rich with birds. It is a cool misty land, lush in its own way, bejeweled with forests and flowers. Each night's fire consumes bridges. The aspen and birch burns and creates a circle, a warmth and



Calm weather provides ideal conditions for a crossing of Lake Mistinibi.

light that keeps back the mist of the sea. Each night's fire is a milestone that marks more than the day's accumulation of miles. My distances are measured in different units. On the ferry, we crossed the Saguenay, continuing east through the fog. Cormorants preceded the boat and lured us from the shore to the deeper, darker waters. Another river crossing – it seems that I am always trying to put distances between myself and others. The river forms a tangible barrier. I look back over my shoulder once the ferry pulls clear of the shore, looking back fearfully as if expecting pursuit. When the river fog obscures the abandoned shore, I feel

an illogical sense of relief. Still, I would be at a loss to try and name my pursuer. If only I could, I might then know something of the nature of this headlong rush. There is such a power in names, the Inuit know this. I know it now in that I cannot face this sense of uncertainty because I cannot define it. It has no name, or else, and this may be closer to the truth, it has my name.

18 August. Camp at the North End of Petitsikapau Lake

Altogether an extraordinarily fine day, as all should be when bracketed by the calls of loons. Theirs was the first sound that lured me into con-

sciousness this morning as well as now, when after dark, by firelight, I write these words. After trying to load all our stuff AND Eric into the canoe, we still managed to take twenty-eight miles and stuff it into a kit bag of memories. The boat is heavily loaded and will require attention and care in the days ahead.

The woods are full of cloudberry, the lake air is full of terns, and our stomachs are full of Tom's amazing pemmican stew. Life is just royally grand for the three of us, satiated as we are.

In 1975, when Tom and I paddled down the shores of Lake Mistassini, we reveled in the open expanses and



The barren, rocky landscape in the vicinity of Hawk Lake is typical for the plateau.

the big-sky sense afforded by lake's immensity. These Labrador lakes are wonders, too. Fleets of broad cumulus wind a parallel course through the sky matching our own excursions on the water. Storms come and go. We watch the curtains of rain that hang on the horizon grow nearer and eventually descend on us. Waves lash the boat. Nervously we point toward land, then the cloudburst has passed us by and the sky is a showplace for cloudy creations. The wonder of lake travel is in its openness, especially on big lakes where there are no boundaries to contain one's thoughts and the horizons are layers of blue. I get to feeling at the center of things.

A squall pushed us ashore on toward evening. We poked about through the vegetation of alder that masks the forests behind the shore. Into the woods and one forgets the quest that sought a camping spot as the thick carpet of moss on the ground is strewn with cloudberries, and they are sought and consumed reverently, one by one. Later, Tom makes bread and pemmican stew. The bread was served with peach jam that my mother had made, and the stew included the dried morels that I had watched grow on the old elm stump in front of Tina's house in South Woodbury. I love this sort of mingling of different times and different places.

It had been an amazingly fine day too! Damn close to being perfect, I suspect. I can almost not bear to have it end, and yet I am tired, bone tired. This friendly little fire and the few faint flickerings of northern light will not keep me here long.

22 August. De Pas River at the Outlet of Fredrickson Lake

Crossed over the height-of-land this morning after an early climb up the hill that forms part of the divide between Quebec and Labrador, between the St. Lawrence and the Ungava Bay

watersheds. We portaged the kit from lake to pond then on to another lake. They were relatively short portages but the loads, as Eric will attest, were heavy ones. We were quick to load up and be under way as these waters flow north. The headwaters are a succession of narrow lakes connected by tumbling brook-like sections. If we didn't know the nature of rivers, there would be little to suggest that such inauspicious beginnings would ever be transformed to the stark immensity of the George River at Ungava Bay.

A family of bald eagles sat in a dead spruce at the mouth of the river where it entered Frederickson Lake. Two mature birds and a single immature who stayed on the nest while the parents circled above. I made my way through the alders to the base of the nest tree. The ground was splattered with guano from above. It looked as though a light snow had fallen. There were several discarded eagle feathers; I carried two back to Eric.

27 August, De Pas River

The river matures with every mile. What started out as a shallow brawling brook has gathered waters, like years, and a much more stately character, so that the continuous shoal water and gravelly rapids have been left behind us. We find ourselves paddling broad, straight sections between sets of bouldery rapids.

The morning was cold with more or less constant rain, but it warmed up and cleared off by late afternoon. The caribou are constantly about us. We chased a merganser up a small brook and saw an osprey nest with two young birds within.

This evening we are camped above an embayment of the river in a spruce grove. The route to camp first ascends a thirty-foot-high wall of boulders before crossing an alder thicket to the final spagnum-moss-covered camping spot. A characteris-

tic feature of this river's shores, which I haven't noticed on other rivers, is this ice-rafted wall of boulders that forms a nearly continuous natural levee above the river banks. All the river's rocks are scoured and streaked from the same tremendous force of the spring ice-out.

28 August. De Pas River

Awoke once again to an incredibly fine morning. Where do these days come from? One for a summer would seem a fair share yet today. We are again blessed with a cloudless blue sky and a bright sun. We worked downriver past an old abandoned and sorry-looking fish camp. The river turned into a narrow canyon and quite quickly her whole character changed. Bare rocky hills rose above both shores. The waters of the river became more and more contained and consequently less ruly, quicker, and more powerful. The country on the eastern shore was burned, so there was an added element of desolation to the scene. The canyon became more and more pronounced, and the river seemed to run through a maze of huge boulders. Always, with each little distance made, the speed of the current increased as the angle of the river's descent sharpened. We had to maneuver into the center of the river to find a clear course through. Once there, we could not get back to the security of a route near one of the banks as boulders completely barred the way. Loaded as it is, the boat develops a forward trajectory that is difficult to direct. Maneuvers must be anticipated with plenty of time to allow for the canoe to follow one's desires. While canoeing through the boulders massed in front and beside us, our thoughts are ever downstream forty or sixty yards away, when an obstruction is spied alternative channels are sought out. Always the search is for deep water. So I was a little nervous, when in the

very middle of the rapid, I could find no way through the boulder barricade that stretched from shore about fifty yards and twenty seconds away. “I think we are in trouble Tom, I said, meaning: “I sure hope we can find some boulders to crash-up on and ‘park’ instead of going over.” “Yup, we’re in trouble,” not reassuring words from Tom, never a man to waste words at such times. We were definitely committed to the center of the rapid. At nearly the last moment, with our destruction, or a form of it, at hand, Tom spied a hole we could squeeze through, pulling of the whole set with a lot of splash and flair and, needless to say, luck. This rapid was our introduction to a long gorge that had three sets of large

rapids. It took us the rest of the afternoon to work down through it. We camped opposite the mouth of the canyon on an overgrown food plain. It seems that often at the end of a particularly long heavy rapid, the country opens up, forming a deep, sheltered bowl.

This was a wild spot, ringed with the barren rocky summits of tumbled mountains. Much of the country, least the side we were on, had been burned and the stark white skeletons of spruce added a further solemn note. Some light still lingered in the western sky after our stew had been consumed. Tom and Eric, excited about the baking possibilities afforded them by their wealth of blueberries, addressed themselves to the

matter of barbers and fires. I set out for the country behind our camp. My intentions were to pick berries. I even carried a bowl in which to place them. Even though I kept thinking it would be nice to climb, I figured that it was late, almost dark, and the summit far away. When I had picked some berries and climbed a knoll, I found that the summit shadows still called and eventually, subconsciously, I just put down my berry bowl and started up. I was well up one side clambering over the fire-hardened stalks of burned spruce when my goal suddenly dawned on me. I just plugged into high gear and charged for the summit. In the late gloaming light, a purple tinge, the last reflection of the day, glowed in



The route out of the eastern end of Lake Mistinibi involves more portaging than paddling.

the west silhouetting the distant summits of rocky crags. The river poured down through the gorge we had negotiated that afternoon, into the bowl-like embayment, where the orange light of our campfire betrayed the bakers' progress, and down through a hilly valley lined with spruce. Six miles or so away the river turned an angle and there was a last glimpse of the water we travel, although the valley that contained it continued its serpentine course to the north. What is the feeling that comes when I stand out on top? It is more than a deep satisfaction and sense of contentment, but what more I cannot say. It is partially a remembrance of

past days and persons therein. It is more than this, too, but in my heart I do not begin to know the whole of it. Mine is a long and careful descent through the darkness of the ruined forest. .

4 September. Indian House Lake

A small camp on the beach of Mushauwaunipi, the "Barren Ground Water" of the Naskapi. A waterfall crashes down to the lake behind our camp, which is nestled into the alder growth facing the beach. The full moon dances on the cold lake waters. We had risen with the determination of camping on her shores and with every turn of the

river searched the farther shores for signs of her water; by late afternoon we had crossed over the invisible line separating the river waters from those of the lake and we had joined the George. We lunched at the confluence, on a brightly carpeted terrace. I climbed a rocky knoll to take a look up the George River waters. I remember a passage from Mina Hubbard's book that moved me when I read it:

When the outfit had been landed, and the canoes drawn up on shore, George (Elson) walked up the bank a little way, and there, with folded arms, stood quite still for



Travelers portage along the canyon rim just before beginning the descent to the Kogaluk.

some time looking up the river. Presently I asked: "What are you thinking, George?" "I was thinking how proud I am of this river," he replied.

So we cross again in the footsteps of Wallace and those of Mina Hubbard. The years past, as yet changes to the land have been few. How long this may last? I wonder. And I wonder where there would be changes in the feelings at seeing the land. We all have our reasons for traveling.

5 September. At the Beginning of the Portage across to Mistinibi Lake

Ours was a slow morning, a lengthy bacon, eggs, and potato breakfast. We washed our clothes and broke out the wool clothing as the weather has turned cold and promises to remain so now. Tom made an inventory of the food and we are good through to the end of this month.

Eric and I spent the afternoon surveying the first half of our portage route across to Mistinibi. We wandered about for a bit before finally climbing a high ridge from which we could spy a distant arm of Mistinibi. It was a tremendous feeling to actually lay eyes on the very country through which I had been portaging since March. It always tickles my fancy when the lay of the land mirrors the map. I mean it is supposed to, but here we have been traveling on faith for a couple of weeks now and who would know the consequences if it all were different? I remember some lines from a MacLeish poem of which I am fond:

*Senora, once the maps have all
been made
A man were better dead than find
new continents.*

And later:

No fortune passes that misfortune

*To lift along the evening of the sky,
Certain as sun and sea, a new-
foundland
Steep from an ocean where no
landfall can be.*

It had been raining off and on and there was a dark sky of heavy low clouds so that distances were obscured. From our high perspective we could look down past the kettle-hole beneath us, and along the huge esker that will be our road the day after tomorrow, past a land of jumbled boulders strewn with a glacier's disregard for order, to see a part of the distant lake, our destination. On our way back to find Tom we worked out what seemed to be a really nice route for our carry. It wound about the flanks of several hills gaining and giving elevation with a miserly touch. And later that night, when the darkness had closed in about our camp, I left the company of my friends and the warmth, which was as much theirs as it was the fire's, and wandered north a bit. Here we turn to the east. Our path is no longer that of the George bound for the icy waters of Ungava, we turn east toward the sunrise. It is a profound move full of consequence. I find my view of Tshinutivish, the old Naskapi camp which had been a lodestone for Cabot for so many years, and took a long hard look at the great water, its barren reaches stretching toward Ungava and other mysteries.

10 September. At the Eastern End of Mistinibi's Long Arm

We have begun the long barrenland portage across into Labrador and to the presumed shelter of the Kogaluk (Cabot's Assiwaban) Valley. Despite my forebodings about the weather, it remained kind for our passage. Although heavily overcast, the day was warm with gentle winds. We paddled off Mistinibi up the long, river-like arm past the point where

Cabot found the Naskapi camped in 1906 (where the hunters had speared over a thousand caribou as they were swimming across the Narrows in the course of their migration). This eastern extension of the lake is paralleled by a high sandy esker. Strange to think of these incredible serpentine hills as former river beds atop glacial ice, strange the changes the land has endured.

14 September. Eastern End of Long Pond

It started to rain last night just as Tom was putting the finishing touches on a cake. The sky grew darker and darker during the day, there was a ring around the sun, and we hurried onward with the fear of bad weather and the dread of being stuck in a stickless country. We all felt a pervasive nervousness and uncertainty the empty land instills. The land feels so incredibly empty despite the fact that we must have seen literally hundreds of caribou. When I had spoken, the year before, to Inuit friends in Nain of my intention to cross the Barrens in September, they had told me that I had better be off the plateau by the middle of the month, for the small ponds and lakes could freeze up overnight and bring to an end any thoughts of paddling. These memories hastened us on. We had hard traveling to Cabot's Long Pond through extremely jumbled terrain, erratics and perched boulders everywhere. Pushing into the wind was disheartening and exhausting. We camped at the eastern end of the pond at the beginning of the next portage. We hid below a small knoll feeling spooked and exposed. Northern lights silhouetted the hill and the boulders behind the camp.

16 September Barrens

The wind and rain picked up last night as Eric and I raced to finish dinner. There was wood to burn, the



Wading rapids in the upper section of the Kogaluk.

bleached ancient remnants of a forest destroyed by fire. The wind eats at the wood and the fire consumes all in urgency and haste. Like fireworks, the coals are whisked away and sent tumbling into the dark empty night. We eat in the tent as the wind makes life outside unpleasant. A dangerous night! Wind-driven rain and snow. Before sleep there is the last rethinking of each stake placement, the tightening of guy ropes and the strength of canvas. Awake in the dark of the night suddenly. The wind has reached a crescendo and it seems that only our willpower holds the tent down. Both Eric and Tom are awake, but we all remain motionless and

silent. All our thoughts are bent in a contest with the wind – to break that concentration, even for a moment, would be to risk our one critical link with our safety. It seems that the storm's fury had summoned us from an uneasy sleep that it might regale us with its passion and power. It is hard not to think of the wind as an entity, as something that might be reasoned with.

20 September. At the Foot of the High Portage on the Kogaluk River

Camped again on moss and leaves, which is quite a change from our snow-and-ice-covered camps, which we left behind on the barrens. We

have descended to a haven, almost as if it was a lost world hidden in the empty fastness of the interior. Gentle forests of birch, alder, and spruce comfort us. All day we watched the gaps in the mountain wall above us where we could see spumes of snow, indicating that the ferocious winds of the plateau blew unabated.

23 September, Kogaluk River camp

A downriver day carried at last toward the sea. The current with its wild mountain urgency rushes us along. I steer without paddling so to keep our stay among these mountain walls as long as possible. But the river yearns for the sea and carries us

swiftly toward the rest that she imagines is there. I keep the boat in the swiftest water, we slide past gravel bars and towering banks of sand. A single bull caribou – his freshly exposed antlers white and flashing in the morning sun, as are the blades of our paddles. These miles are so effortless, we travel entranced and silent. I steal glimpses of the valley behind us; its rocky walls are the boundaries of my wishes; so much of what I love is here, it is here and hidden, so there is both a tugging at my consciousness to stay, but also the relentless pull of the water. Rivers lead ever on.

27 September. West End of Cabot Lake

A bit of inclemency: rain all night and morning, our old associate the indomitable west wind, and a bit of idleness has kept us encamped on the shallow gravel bar at the lake's western end. Cabot's Windy Lake, often my thoughts have strayed here since the winter of '75-'76 when Anne and I first compared Cabot's sketch map with the modern topos. And the years since I have often looked at the place on the Labrador maps that have usually hung on the walls of wherever it was that I stayed. We are content to dally. A fire of whole trees blazes be-

fore me. With the spring waters the Kogaluk clears her shores and all those miles of cut banks and sandbars give up their horde of fallen spruce and eroded alders to be carried downriver and piled like the corpses in the aftermath of a Civil War battle or like the broken lances in a painting by Ucello.

I broke from the stillness of our camp for several hours of fishing. I caught three pike, but the big one got away. The latter tricked me fairly with the final powerful surge, that headlong drive, that big pike resort to. I was not quick enough and the moment's slack was all the fish



Portaging across the plateau toward the canyon of the Kogaluk.

needed. I make a caribou curry for dinner served with the last of our rice. Our seventh dinner from the fellow Tom killed. We dried enough of the meat to make a large sack so we have food to last us as long as we don't get pinned down on the coast. The skies clear late, when only Eric and I still linger by the fire. We heap the trees higher, higher and higher, the orange sparks dancing with the white stars in the sky. The northern lights, that spectral river, mirrors our course in its meanderings across the heavens. The green light twists and turns, the cold green light.

1 October, Kogaluk River

It is remarkable how unreasonable I can become! Strange that I find it is so hard to admit even to myself consciously that the trip, this adventure, must soon end, that this world of lake-river-lake-portage-lake-river must end. So I become unreasonable, realizing it only now in reviewing my feelings and actions this day. And poor Tom, Tom who wanted really badly “a moving day,” was forced to cope with an incredible array of delaying tactics. He sadly sighed as Eric and I muttered thoughts of camping here as opposed to there:

“You'd think I was dragging you guys down the river with a chain.”

I guess that these days have been so moment-to-moment and the reality of other lives outside of our own company seeming so remote that I have just floated along in the assumption of the journey's perpetual motion.

It took this day of trying to slow us down to bring me the thoughts of a homeward journey. Damn how this river races past her shores, I want to cry out “Let's just float it! It's fast enough,” but Eric and Tom are remorseless with their paddling (strong, deep, mile-eating strokes).



Portaging across the plateau toward the canyon of the Kogaluk.

Their silence goads me into paddling as well. I am so unhappy. So unrealistically so.

October. Kogaluk River Mouth, near Wolsey Bay

We moved down the last of the river this morning, arriving at the falls from which we portage down to coastal waters. And we leave the interior behind us. Tom is ready to get out and be on the coast, but he is tolerant of, or at least resigned to, the moodiness that is in Eric and me as we begin to confront ourselves with questions of the future. The immediacy of our life, wherein the world is confined to the small universe of our travels, must undergo the transition to a way of plans as well as resuming the ways of a society that doesn't always understand or seem completely real. We change the splendor and wonder, the magic and the adventure of the wild lands for a shadow of their glory. And I wonder how much of this in ourselves we exchange, what shadows we become.

I was hoping to camp at the river's mouth but Tom and Eric, for different reasons, were for moving on and covering the last miles to Voisey Bay. Still they seemed content to fish awhile and did not seem upset at my wanting to poke about a bit. I left them casting out of a rock, the captured fish tied to the long laces of Tom's L. L. Bean boots. I rewalked the portage trail and found a splendid overlook from which to photograph the falls.

Back at the bottom of the portage trail, Tom has a large brookie, "good size, better'n a couple feet long." He seems more resigned to camp and so we do. I crossed over to the river's northern shore and climbed up alongside the falls. It was near dusk then reached the pool below the first fall. I stood entranced watching the fall of water.

The last light of the day shone on the tops of the spumes, casting them in a

red and golden glow. I ended by climbing all the way up to the top of the falls so that I could stand on the very edge of the first thunderous drop—the very end of the river's life—from whence I could, at the same time, look upstream over the smooth tranquil waters that had carried us so far. I wouldn't have wanted to leave the river without such a direct leave-taking. I needed the opportunity to look back over the country through which we had traveled and firmly cap the lid of those memories that I might hold them through all the years ahead. I needed the chance to say good-bye. So I stood awhile with thoughts of the country full in my head.

Then, filled with emotion and resolve at last, I took leave of the river and turned to go. A brilliant three-quarters moon, ghostly white in contrast to the sunset sky, was the country's mute reply. It was a very cold, clear night.

This story was first published in the *Appalachia* journal, Winter issue of 1986-87. At that time, Stephen Loring was a Ph.D. candidate in the Anthropology Department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In the early 1970s, in order to see the fall goose migration and something of the traditional way of life before the dams were built, he spent three autumns with the Cree of James Bay. Since 1975 he has conducted archaeological and ethnohistorical research in Labrador, where he has traveled with Indian and Inuit hunters. Today, Stephen is Museum Anthropologist and Arctic Archaeologist at Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. He helps Curate and facilitates access to Smithsonian's archaeological, ethnohistorical and archival collection pertaining to the indigenous peoples from North American Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.



The author.



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Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association
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.

WCA 2018 AGM

Saturday, March 3, 2018
MEC North York Community Room
(784 Sheppard Ave E Toronto)
Join us for: Outdoor activities, education, business meeting
Look for more details at www.wildernesscanoe.ca
Interested in helping the WCA? Join the Board! Contact any current board member for details.

WWF Canada Needs Help

World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWF Canada) is looking for help in locating paddlers that have good quality high resolution landscape pictures with or without species, which they would use on social media and potentially in media stories. I was given to understand that WWF doesn't have budget for purchasing photos at the moment, so they're looking for donations. They'll of course give a credit to the photographer in any use of their photo. The list of rivers:

- Liard • Dubawnt • Thelon • Kazan
- Horton • Anderson • Taltson
- Stikine • Ekwan • Birch

If you are in position to help, please forward your images along with detailed description to Rebecca Spring at rspring@wwfcanada.org

Events Calendar

Wilderness and Canoe Symposium will take place on 23-24 February 2018. Location remains the same – Monarch Park Collegiate at 1 Hanson Street. Details at www.wcsymposium.com
WCA AGM is planned for Saturday, 3rd March, 2018. Visit WCA website for more details.

Exciting Volunteer Opportunity – Nastawgan Assistant Editor

For over 40 years, the heart of the Wilderness Canoe Association has been our *Nastawgan* journal. Editing *Nastawgan* has been a labour of love for current and past editors including, most recently, Aleks Gusev. However, due to the other commitments, including running the annual Wilderness & Canoe Symposium, Aleks needs help in producing the journal. Therefore, we are looking for an Assistant Editor to work with Aleks towards building the necessary competencies to independently handle some aspects of journal production.

What we expect from the new *Nastawgan* Assistant Editor:

- Passion for paddling and/or the outdoors

- Good writing and communication skills (ability to spell and delete jargon)
- Willingness to network with WCA members to source stories and areas of interest
- Ability to meet deadlines

What we offer the new *Nastawgan* Editor:

- Opportunity to support and give back to the WCA
- Recognition as a valued member of the WCA management team
- Opportunity to expand your skills and expertise (looks good on a resume!)

For more information or to discuss this opportunity, please email: geri.james@bell.net

RCGS Expeditions Committee Grant Deadline

Royal Canadian Geographical Society has supported a range of significant mountaineering, paddling and related expeditions across Canada over the years.

Again this year, there is a call by the RCGS Expeditions Committee for proposals related to significant Canadian expeditions, with a deadline of January 21, 2018. Please see http://www.rcgs.org/programs/expeditions/expeditions_how_to_apply.asp for both the types of grants and sums available, and an on-line application form.

All grants come with certain reporting obligations, however they are not overly restrictive.

If you have any questions, please forward them to muscant@rcgs.org

WCA Activities

Want to view all club activities, learn more about our extensive outings program for members, or organize and post a trip? It's easy! Visit the Outings section of the WCA website: www.wildernesscanoe.ca



50th Anniversary Memories: The Fermilab Canoe Race

Story by John Martin



John Cumalat and George Luste won the second straight Main Ring Canoe Race in 1978. They'd won the last four-mile paddle held in 1976. Their 1978 time was 49:33.

September 30, 1979, about 1:45 p.m.: SNAP!! @#@#@#@!!! Gerd Hartner, in the bow of his canoe at the race starting position, dipped his paddle in the water, gave a mighty first pull and, to his astonishment, broke it in half. Hilarity ensued among the cheering onlookers. Recovering quickly from the shock, Gerd was handed a replacement paddle so he and teammate David McFarlane in the stern could start again.

This was one of the more bizarre happenings at the once-upon-a-time annual Fermilab Canoe Race around the cooling ponds of the 4-mile Main Ring particle accelerator. The race was one of the most exciting extracurricular competitions in the history of physics labs and was held on a weekend in early autumn for a few years starting in 1974. The event was founded and organized by Larry Allen, an operations specialist, with help from other employees and the Amateur Radio Club (egad, the dark ages before cell phones) for communications around the ring to monitor mishaps. The race was a time trial, with each of about a dozen canoes setting off at three-minute intervals. Crowds (not large!) of spectators showed up, pizza and beer were provided afterwards, and trophies were presented to the winners.

It was a grueling experience. Paddling

flat out for about an hour is hard enough, but the course is interrupted by 17 exhausting portages up and around the dikes through long prairie grass and much soft mud. Competitors included university and lab physicists, graduate students, engineers and other staff members, both men and women. Some had more enthusiasm than expertise. In one race I passed a team going the wrong way desperately trying to turn their canoe back to the right direction. Often people got soaked and muddied along the way and plunged into the water after the finish line to clean up and cool off.

Canadians, of course, were overrepresented. As well as hockey, canoeing is in our DNA, so we were determined to win or at least place highly to avoid embarrassment. I won two of the races (with bowmen Jim Prentice and Bob Sheperd) and finished second in another four (with Mike Shaevitz, Dale Pitman and Jim Prentice). However, the outstanding Canadian was my colleague George Luste, who won often and set an early record of 45 minutes, 19 seconds in 1976 with bowman John Cumalat. That year the four of us physicists in the first two canoes were all from experiment E25. Based on this showing of strength, we asked for more beam time, to no avail as I recall.

The 1976 record was finally broken in 1980 by the powerful team of Steve Conlan and David Carlson in a racing canoe with professional paddles. They clocked “an astonishing time of 41:17.” As far as I can tell from the Fermilab archives, this was the last time the race was held. That year George paddled with B.J. Bjorken and came in sixth.

George is a legendary figure in North American wilderness canoeing circles, having paddled all of the great rivers, and most of the rest, in northern Canada over his lifetime, but that is another story. If interested, Google “George Luste canoe”. Sadly, he died of brain cancer in 2015.

The only year I beat George was in

1979. He could not participate the other year I won). He used a racing canoe, which gave him a bit of an advantage over the rest of us in aluminum clunkers, but he handicapped himself by inviting the new director, Leon Lederman, to be his bowman. Leon got a shoe stuck in the mud on one of the portages and spent valuable time retrieving it, worried he and George might be disqualified if he came to the finish line only half-shoed. According to FermiNews at the time, he claimed the difference between his time and mine was “statistically insignificant.” I suppose we would have to repeat the race many times over to prove him wrong!

On that note I encourage Fermilab to think about restarting this canoe racing tradition, since the Main Ring cooling pond course is unique in the world. Perhaps a separate kayak race could be included or even a paddleboard race. How about a kite-surfing race on a windy day? Seeing racers fly over portages would be interesting. The canoe races were great fun and helped relieve some of the stress of carrying out the great physics mission of the laboratory.

John Martin, a former Fermilab user who collaborated on E25, E531, E516 and E691, is a professor emeritus at the University of Toronto. This story was first published in Fermilab News
<http://news.fnal.gov/2017/11/50th-memories-fermilab-canoe-race/>



Satellite view of Fermilab complex

Reflections on Kipawa River

Words by Fred Argue

Photos by Gary Ataman and Fred Argue



Hunter's Point Church

Our group selected the Kipawa area because of its proximity to Toronto, clean water, changing landscapes, routes of adjustable length, plus moderate challenges of navigation and finding camping sites. Negatives might include the absence of other canoeists (but notable use by sport fishermen using motor boats who staying in lodges or cottages), some large lakes, poorly or unmarked campsites and portages and no evidence of maintenance on portages. Overall rating of difficulty: Moderate.

This trip was announced in the Wilderness Canoe Association's (WCA) web site. It described the one-week venture as being suitable for persons willing to paddle up to 30 kilometres per

day and prepared to make portage crossings, lake to lake, that were not necessarily on cut trails.

For this report, we'll divide the article into three sections: (1) Kipawa, (2) the participants and lastly, (3) the logistics. While many people like to do a chronological reporting of day-to-day activities my preference is to see canoe trips more as a totality under the three noted parts.

PART ONE

Kipawa, The Location

The name Kipawa gets much publicity by having a popular Swift canoe of this name in the Prospector dimensions.

Kipawa can draw some confusion as there is Lac Kipawa, ZEC Kipawa and the Town of Kipawa: they are all closely related. Our trip started in the Town, went down the lake a few days and then headed into the ZEC for about four days then headed back to the Town. ZEC stands for Zone d'exploitation contrôlée ... or controlled harvesting zone. Yes, they harvest tourist dollars.

Kipawa means, "*it is closed*" in Algonquin. This term comes from the many bays and channels people used to try to get off the lake only to find at the end of the bay, "*it was closed*". The Kipawawini were the "*people of the closed lake*". Many of the place names in the region originated from the



Left to Right: Fred, Heather, Linda, Gary, Jen and Chuck

Algonquin of Temiscamingue.

The Lake

This body of water is located in Quebec almost directly north of Toronto, slightly more than a four-hour drive, and North-West of Ottawa. The nearest town is Temiscamingue on the Ontario-Quebec border. This region is upstream, off the Ottawa River, above the popular river destinations of Dumoine, Noire and Coulonge. Lac Kipawa is parallel to Temagami and about the same large size and similar with long channels, bays and islands. Pilots say it is shaped like a spider when viewed from the air. People looking for an alternative to Algonquin Park might consider the Kipawa region. The Lake has a shoreline of 1300 km to give an idea of size; mean depth 11.3 m. The lake is home to several lodges that seemed to host re-

peat guests, primarily fishermen from northern U.S.A. The water quality was high. To the east of the Kipawa region you have Parc La Vérendrye, another canoe route centre.

Kipawa, the Town

This is located at the south end of Lac Kipawa, beside the Algonquin Nation's Kebaowek Reservation. You can find private parking for \$20 per week, across the street from the public wharf. And within walking distance there was a public building where we found free washrooms and hot water showers.

The dock is primarily used by sport fishermen coming and going in their 100HP plus boats to the several local outfitters ... or pourvoires. As a canoeist you should know you are sharing the waters and land most often with fishermen and cottagers,



Chuck's fishing adventure



Campsite #2 on a beautiful beach on Rivière Audoin

not other canoeists. The boaters were always courteous and slowed or gave us a wide berth and friendly wave. One day as we were headed into a large piece of water, with a black cloud overhead, we stopped at the dock of Kipawa Lodge where we were given a greeting of soft drinks, iced water and an invitation to camp at

their nearby point – an offer we quickly accepted.

Kipawa, The ZEC

Like Lady Evelyn Park is beside Temagami, this ZEC is beside Lac Kipawa. It is 2397 km sq. in size. The mission of the administration is to oversee the responsible utilization of the

land and to protect the flora and fauna. This management system is a wise use of decentralization. Who knows best, the locals, or Quebec City bureaucrats? Through permits, logging, camping, fishing, hunting and various sports are regulated. Before entering the Town of Kipawa we stopped at the ZEC office and registered for camping and fishing. One tent for a week was \$15 and Chuck's three-day fishing permit was \$80 (family \$95). My sinister mind went to thinking, "What if all six of us slept in one tent: the money we could save?" We opted for our privacy.

Non-residents wishing to fish will need a 7-day Quebec fishing license, which we purchased for \$42.70 when passing through Temiscamingue. Prices were canoeist, not fisherman, friendly. Chuck ended up catching a beautiful walleye pickerel on Day 6, grilled on the fire by Linda, and enjoyed by all.

One gets the feeling that there are no "Friends of Kipawa" as the portage trails we used were mostly not maintained and were unmarked and campsites were rarely signed and few boxes were provided. On one hand you feel very remote and abandoned, and on the other, the motor boats give the sense of nearby civilization. The logging industry has roads most places giving boat ramp access to many lakes. There are seven outfitters located within the ZEC which add to the sports fishing community, and in the fall, moose hunters. While Kipawa is located in Quebec, English appeared the more prominent language amongst persons we met. Five of the seven outfitters listed on the ZEC map wintered in Ontario.

A map of the area is available for \$10 from Association Faunique Kipawa at: 12, chemin de Penetration, Béarn, QC, J0Z 1G0, Tel. 819-726-2266. On the map you have campsites and portages marked and dotted lines suggesting paths for canoe routes. However, many campsites are not marked and some that are marked do not exist so the map has some shortcomings. The website www.zeckipawa.reseauzeccom describes a number of loops for canoe travel: Circuits des Raiders, Aventuriers, Brousse, Cigarette, Sonperes, l'Échelle and Tuk-Tuk. The ZEC Headquarters are at Béarn on Route 391 and an alter-



Beer, and a rum punch served in a watermelon shell, was our reward that night

native access point from ours; the more northern Lac Ostaboningué.

Because our trip was centred in the south of the ZEC, we only spent about three of our eight days in the actual ZEC. Our path (looking like an imperfect letter “P”) took in parts of the established loops and can be seen in the map provided herewith by Gary. Our route represents only a small portion of the total water trails available.

PART TWO

The participants were aged: in their 50’s, Gary and Heather Ataman, Linda Doran, Chuck Fong, in her 30’s Jennifer Cook and 76 Fred Argue. We fell into the family dynamics of Gary and Heather — parents; Chuck, Jen and Linda — the kids; and grandfather — Fred. The same love of family, *gemeinschaft*, quickly developed in the group and we thrived in the intimate and trusting nature of the group. Jen aptly referred to us as a tribe, clan or family.

These were experienced outdoors persons with many accumulated kilometres of backcountry paddling and hiking. The group had several existing connections amongst the members, Jennifer excepted. Fred had been with Gary and Heather on the Chiniguchi River Loop in 2012 and several other WCA ventures such as Turkey Weekends. Chuck and Linda were both members of the Toronto Outdoor Club and had tripped together and knew Gary through that organization. Thus Gary was the common thread. Jennifer came from a family of Outdoor Educators and canoe trippers, was a graduate of Camp Tawingo and an extensive solo world traveler. As a teacher from Iqaluit Jen knows and appreciates the extremes of remote life, weather and living conditions. We were all up to the challenge we knew Gary had planned.

We ended up being a group of six because Gary sent out an urgent email to his personal contacts list asking for a volunteer to join the trip: Jennifer, an early registrant, did not have a partner. In response Linda volunteered, then later in the same day two more persons answered the call. Thus, Gary simply put Linda with Jen and added a third boat to the group, Chuck and Fred. Gary



Linda Cooking Dinner

and Heather always paddled together. Each day Jen would make up the pairings in the other two boats which covered all combinations: Jen with Fred or Chuck, Linda with Fred or Chuck, or two same sex boats. The variety gave lots of personal time to get to know one another. The established travel adage prevailed, “What was said in the canoe, stayed in the canoe.”

We feel it only appropriate to single out Gary for special mention. Besides having the initiative to propose the trip, he was the competent leader in all aspects. Never being bossy, he led through example in a quiet and efficient manner. In paddling, navigation, organization, camp skills, and reading the moods and strengths of each person, Gary excelled. He was equally and quietly supported



Apple Crumble for desert!



Rebecca Ataman proceeding her parents ... AGAIN

by his partner Heather who was a like-minded and equally seasoned adventurer. While I was the least able to carry a heavy load, while never asked, Gary was always back on the portage trail to shoulder the load of my extra bag containing the last day's meal.

Gary, Heather, Linda and Fred have

already renewed connections at the WCA Fall Meeting and Wine and Cheese, and at Christmas we're having a reunion when Jen returns from Iqaluit for a holiday.

For me, the most important part of a trip would be the people. Others choose route, meals or weather, but I stick by the human factor. River or lake, sunshine or rain, portage or paddle, it is the participants that linger in my memory. Gary struck gold in forming our group. Vetting participants is the practise of many trip leaders as they know how important the right mix of paddlers is to the success of their venture. No matter how good the route, weather and meals, one "bad apple" can sour the whole expedition. From the educational world a model is used to sort out skills and information, and then attitudes and beliefs. These are the four factors upon which lessons and decisions are based. Skills and information are more easily

taught and learned and measured. They are easy to fix and compensate for amongst group members. It comes down to the attitudes and beliefs that make the difference in how a team performs.

Most attitudes are measured along a continuum, and where you fit along this line is of importance. Some examples would be: selfish to selfless, me to we, unreliable to dependable, careless to precise, closed to open, aloof to intimate, thoughtless to caring, you get the idea. In our group, we leaned heavily to the right-sided positions.

Only more important than one's attitudes are your beliefs. These are hard to describe, to discover or to transmit; however, they are of ultimate importance. Some examples of beliefs seen on this venture would be: the group working together is stronger than the individuals; my efforts are best used in helping others, rather than dwelling upon my-



Hunter's Point Church

self; I'm best served by helping others; things belong to the group, they are not mine; whatever effort people put out, that is their best; each individual has dignity and the right to their opinion; and, decisions, made after consultation with the group, are better than directives made in isolation. This list could go on, but I think you see that the group was bonded by sharing same values and beliefs although our knowledge and skills differed.

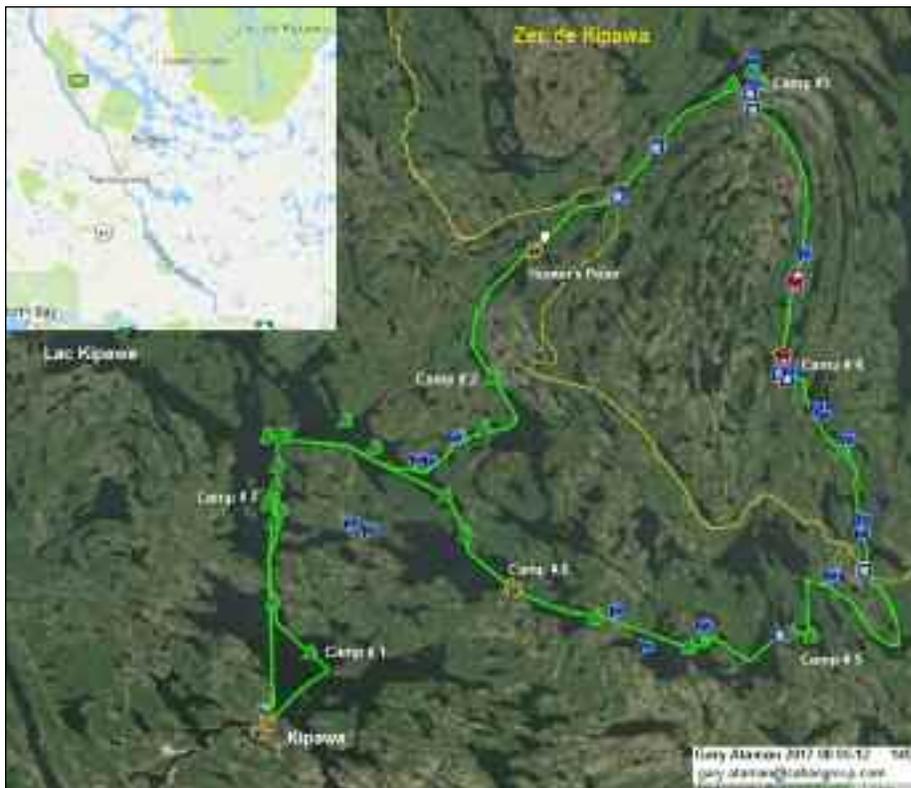
PART THREE

The Logistics

Two cars, three passengers in each, headed from Toronto at 8:00 am to rendezvous in North Bay for lunch at the Elvis-themed, *Fifties Restaurant*. It was easy to find a car on main street with two canoes on top. This noon meal would provide time for introductions. Gary's car carried two Swift boats, a new 16.5 ft. Prospector one for the Atamans and the Cook Family Kipawa canoe for Jennifer. Fred carried his We-No-Nah Spirit II – all Kevlar ultra light boats.

There were only two testing moments during the trip, both on the first day. In Temiskamingue, beside the huge Tembec Forest Products Plant, we stopped for gas at an ESSO Station. Linda, who had been quietly nodding off while Fred and Chuck chatted in the front, went into the washroom unnoticed by the boys who irresponsibly got back into the car after filling up the tank and headed off to get Chuck's Quebec fishing license further into town. It was only some time later that Jen noticed Linda was missing and reported that she had been seen back at the ESSO. Sheepishly Fred and Chuck returned to get their colleague. Linda was quick to forgive, but none of us dared forget her again.

The road was paved all the way to Kipawa Village and the dock. We arrived at 4:30 pm and figured it would be an easy paddle to our first night's destination, an island 4 km away. The waters in the bay in front of the wharf didn't seem too bad, but we could clearly see whitecaps in the open waters ahead. As the pairings had formed, Jen and Linda headed out, Fred and Chuck followed. It didn't take long before we



Actual route taken

were in the full force of the winds and waves that swept down the huge lake and thwarted our progress. We were all struggling to make headway and it was a little unnerving seeing the water test the upper reaches of the gunwales.

Gary and Heather were making slow and steady progress, Fred and Chuck were falling further behind and Jennifer and Linda were clearly struggling to stay on course. Gary fell back and adjusted the ladies' packs to weight down



Beach Camp #3 on Lac Pommeroy



Just North of Bridge Crossing the Rivière Audoin

the bow (to lower it) to avoid it being blown left or right by the oncoming winds. This worked and we all laboured to make a short trip into a much tougher haul than we would experience throughout the week. At 6:30 pm, landing in light drizzle, this crossing provided an auspicious start which was cheered somewhat with a dinner of steak, baked potato with salad. We were all happy with our tarp set-up and a blazing fire to dry out after our wind-blown, waterlogged, crossing.

Things only got better. While each day we had rain, we also had sunshine. We never saw winds comparable to that first day, but it made us aware that we were wise to have brought extra meals in case we ever became windbound. It was strange how we always slept in comfort. If we went to bed in the rain, we woke up to sun and drying winds. Or if we went to bed with a sunset, we arose to showers. While we got wet, we don't recall ever being cold.

You cannot count on such things, but Jen and Linda proved to be our real, every day, every minute sunshine. They giggled and shared their mirth with all. They would burst into song any place or on any occasion. Some word would come up ... that would trigger a song

connection, and the music would begin.

Our equipment was trip appropriate. Through Gary's pre-trip planning prevented duplication. Our canoes were Kevlar and fast, tents were backcountry, three MEC Guide Tarps were in regular use. Any chairs were modern, small and light.

We saw little wildlife, probably because we were too noisy. We saw the usual gulls, ducks, song birds and a few raptors plus evidence of moose on the portages. Hunting blinds for ducks and moose provided proof that wildlife was around. One special moment in nature was during a drizzle when we saw a collection of seven or eight loons gathered in a wide circle flapping their wings in a ritual dance while making throat calls an event we had never witnessed. Gary was able to video this spectacle event. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwfT8Wwq7Q0>. Searching on the internet, some studies provide evidence that support two hypotheses that the loon gatherings are centred around familiarity and reconnaissance. <https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Paruk2006.pdf>

For cooking we had an axe, saw and grate, two small gas stoves and Jen's black pot set. Two wash basins with soap, scouring pads and towels, plus

group cooking utensils completed the kitchen. We never needed more than provided.

Jen organized the meals and assigned each of us one day. When we discovered we had one more day than people a few meals were assigned at the last minute. Days one and eight were also covered by volunteers in Jen's plan. The food seemed to be especially delicious. This is often the case because we are all so hungry after a day's paddle. This might sound strange, but each meal seemed to include "love" – or at least tender consideration and unique character. Linda and Jen had a secret larder of organic or heritage vegetables which would be added to leftovers to create an even better breakfast or lunch for the next day. Unbelievably, even on the last day, fresh veggies appeared to supplement an otherwise dehydrated bland dish.

But, the best part was Gary's new kitchen tool, a folding backcountry oven. This had special design features which were discovered at a previous workshop and ordered for our use. There were not many days when we didn't have home baking, and some days even competing chefs. Presentation of meals seemed important and little treats

like a rum punch served in a watermelon shell, or whiskey sours created to solve an overstocking of Scotch, just seemed to make things taste better.

Gary's daughter Rebecca provided useful advice based on three previous trips in the area, as a camper and counsellor at Camp Wapomeo of Canoe Lake. At the Hunter's Point abandoned church, on Day 3, we saw Becca's name on the wall of passing canoeists' signatures, where we added our names as tradition dictates.

Hunter's Point was originally a Hudson Bay Post and was first called Hunter's Lodge, where First Nation persons traded in furs. The post closed in the 1880's, but a small native population moved in to occupy the site. Some whites and métis also established themselves in the community and opened a general store and a post office (1886).

By the turn of the century, 100 people lived at the site which included a Catholic mission. A Presbyterian church was erected in 1914 followed by the Catholic church (formally named St. Eustache) in 1916. A Catholic school was also built in 1928, when the community peaked at 150. Though the community was gradually abandoned in the 1960's, the 2011 census indicated that there were 21 residents.

Further into the Algonquin settlement of some thirty homes or cottages we met a First Nation's resident on her wharf who gave us a brief history of the area. Her elderly father watched us from his porch and two daughters departed by motor boat to an Indigenous summer camp across the water on the far shore.

For maps, Gary had downloaded from <https://zeckipawa.reseauzec.com/en/cartotheque/autres> a route he had in

mind. The l'Échelle route was selected. The route was closed by the park because of a few blown-out beaver dams but we found it still possible to travel. Thoughtfully, Gary made copies of maps for each canoe. In rough terms we were to do a first day of 5 km, a last day of 10 km, and six days in-between 20-25 km for a total trip of some 145 km. We also had his Garmin inReach Explore + Satellite Communicator and GPS. This gave current topo maps of our area where waypoints could be added. Between Rebecca's recollections (which were very accurate), the ZEC map bought in Kipawa, and information picked up on the second to last day from a party of 12 Wapomeo campers intersecting with us, we had adequate information. Data we collected on our route will be made available to other paddlers on the WCA's www.myccr.com (My



Heading to Lac Bouleau as the water grasses point the way under our boats

Canadian Canoe Routes). Having satellite communications meant Gary was able to send, every evening, a note to our emergency contacts to let them know, “There was no emergency.” A short retelling of the day and a mark on the map told loved ones at home of our progress.

If you want a rough idea of our path follow this sequence of lakes, starting and ending at the Town of Kipawa. The first and last 20 km were the same headed towards Hunter’s Point and out, plus added to this, the l’Échelle Loop that we did within the ZEC.

About 13 km up Lac Kipawa we headed east into an arm to Pointe Turtle and up into a 5 m wide opening into Lac Bedout which took us north to The Church at Hunter’s Point. This is a must-see stop. The route turns into a waterway, Rivière Audoin. Go into Lac du Bouleau, then Lac Pommeroy with a 1 km moderate portage into Lac à la Truite.

At the end of the lake there is a blown out beaver dam which starts a series of beaver meadow portages, small ponds, more of the same ending at Lac l’Échelle. Down this lake, and a longer portage across into Lac Pants, some narrows into Lac Sheffield where you head west back towards Kipawa via Lac McLachlin, Lac Grindstone, Lac Hunter and into Lac Kipawa where we entered. All of this does not make much sense, but when you combine this with waypoints showing portages, campsites, lunch stops and a map, the route will reveal itself.

Parts are long lakes, parts long shallow narrows, some scenic twisting water between lakes and thrown in are some portages of varying lengths, one 1000 m, another of 600 m and several more 100-300 m, sections over, around, or past beaver dams, and between lakes. Portages were moderate to rough, but not a significant problem. We did two carries with paddlers forwarding loads

when sufficiently tired, and taking a break on the return to the second pack. Climbing loaded over logs, ducking under deadfalls, and going through mud and tall grasses all took their toll on our energies. No sign of maintenance was noted. There were only minor changes in elevation.

Upon returning to Kipawa Village around noon on Saturday August 12 we unloaded canoes, loaded cars, and headed on foot to the community’s free hot showers. With the same configuration of passengers Gary and Fred headed to North Bay, *Fifties Restaurant*, for lunch. Driving south we stopped at Jen’s cottage road at Little Doe Lake where we were greeted by her father, Jim, who took a final picture of the group. An uneventful trip back to Toronto, a depositing of passengers to their homes, and final hugs and farewells ended our trip, but not our enduring friendships and lasting memories.



Another blown out dam makes for an extra walk in a semi-dried out beaver pond

The Absence of the Witch

By Robert Perkins

For the past twenty years, I've had a prized possession on my desk from canoeing on The Great Fish River. The tundra. I used to be a more avid collector of artifacts.

I brought my finds home: a small arrowhead for hunting birds, a fishing hook made of bone, a petrified stick doll carved for a child and then dropped, or abandoned, at an Inuit camp, a core sample, and an ivory toggle from a parka, a pair of wooden snow goggles. I have lusted after others. I would kill to have the shaman's coat made from the skins of common loons that sits in the dark, quietly, in the Prince of Wales Museum in Yellowknife. Out of the top of the caribou hide cap accompanying the coat sticks the beak of a yellow bill loon. A missionary in the Gary Lake area collected it in the 1950s. God bless those Inuit for remaining in touch with their tradition that far into the 20th century.

I've stopped that now. If I see an object, I leave it there, even when it's precious. I feel it's better on the land than in a museum. I am quieter now about what I do. I realize the artifacts I brought back were partly to prove to others, and to myself, that I had been somewhere special. That I was special. Mountain climbers do this all the time and hang tiny pictures of themselves on top of immense peaks, or confine a whole range of mountains in a



twelve by fourteen frame. We do this with our experiences, don't we? I prefer memories, as large as the night sky, or as small as two hands held up.

I could not resist this, though. I walked past it with the wannagan on my back, the tumpline encouraging my neck to bend slightly forward looking close at the ground, watching my step. There it was, not unlike the potato I found. I walked back to look again, to verify what I'd intuited in a second, not even putting the wannagan down. I was looking at a piece of shit, probably a musk ox, or perhaps a caribou, but more likely a musk ox. It was dry, not very large, but what made this a discovery was the goose print hardened into the top of it. I reflected: first the musk ox took a dump and before it dissolved in rain, it dried, yet remained moist enough so that when a goose stepped in it, a big enough goose to leave an indelible print, there was a perfect cast made of the goose print. Then it dried. And then I found it. I don't know how this fits in with the story, but I read today a line from Emily Dickinson: "The absence of the witch does not invalidate the spell."

Robert Perkins has canoed the Great Fish River, or the Back River, and its tributaries for 16 summers of his life, often for months at a time, and on his own. Rob will share his story titled "Hawk Rapid" at the Wilderness and Canoe Symposium in Toronto, 23-24 February 2018. Photo of Rob negotiating Hawk Rapid on Back River in his beloved canoe "Loon", taken by Dick Winslow in 1988, adorns the cover page of the excellent book by Bruce Hodgins and Gwyneth Hoyle "Canoeing North Into the Unknown".

The Arthritic Twinge

Words by Greg Went

It happened to me the first time this year. Middle two fingers on the left hand. Could not get them to bend to grip the canoe paddle. I actually had to force them down over the paddle using the right hand. Then after a couple of minutes of paddling the fingers would straighten right up again. Then I had to bend them back down again into the paddling grip. This went on all of the first day. Luckily, I was paddling in the stern and I don't think any of the buddies noticed. At least I'm hoping they didn't.

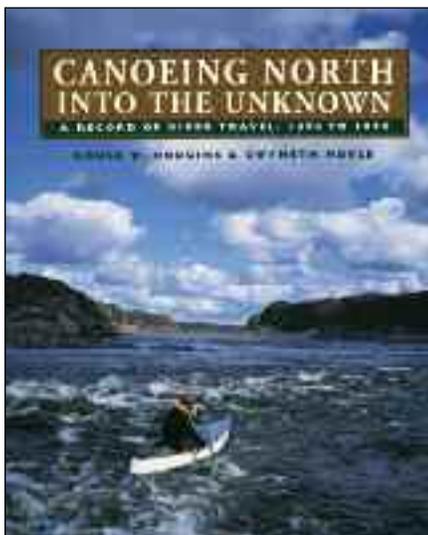
I thought maybe it was just muscle and memory patterns realigning. After all, it's been a year since the last canoe trip and I'm not in my twenties anymore. So it might take muscle and memory a bit longer to refocus.

Then at the first night's camp I had the dream. The bad dream. That it might be over. That I might have overstayed my welcome as a wilderness canoeist. That even though the mind was willing, it needed an increasingly less able body to be a full participant in wilderness canoeing. Didn't let the buddies know. Decided to give it a couple of more days of testing to see if the body would come around. If it didn't, then this for sure would have to be my last wilderness canoe trip.

The arthritic twinge continued on day two. Really starting to worry me. Spent all of yesterday paddling using just two fingers and the thumb on the left hand and trying to maintain some semblance of a smooth paddling motion. Paddled more on the right side so I could use just a straight pulling motion with the left hand. Made it work yesterday, but what about the rapids coming up?

Day three. Hands able to assume the paddling position right from the start. Also able to stay with it all day. It's going to be OK. At least for one more year. This year.

The warning signs are frequent now. Almost every trip. Time is getting shorter. Though I hope I have a few more trips left. You see, I have to get these last trips in. I have to make sure that I have enough memories stored up to carry me through all the remaining winters of my life.



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