

*Rainbow Falls*

## STEEL RIVER

Toni Harting

I called it the "Crotch Cruncher," this wedge-shaped slab of rock, sticking up menacingly smack in the middle of the portage trail. During the numerous centuries that this path had been used by Native Peoples and later by white travelers, the rock's sharp horizontal top-ridge must have threatened the well-being of many who tried to carefully step over it, burdened by an unwieldy canoe or large pack resting on their shoulders. One slip of the foot, a simple loss of equilibrium at the crucial moment when suspended precariously over the sharp rock, and . . . zap . . . instant agony! The Cruncher is a rock true to its name, deserving a whole lot of respect and a careful approach.

And this was but one of the many hazards we encountered on the Diablo Portage, the first one we had to do on our two-week trip down the Steel River in August 1991.

The Steel presents a remarkable 170-km adventure. It

is in many aspects a superb wilderness tripping river: remote, a closed-loop trip with easy access and take-out in the same location on Santoy Lake, lots of flatwater and manageable whitewater, unpolluted (you've never seen such clear water), between 15 and 20 portages ranging from the 1000-metre Diablo killer to an easy five-metre lift-over, excellent to bad campsites, several very scenic waterfalls, few people (saw only six, all fishing in one lake), bugs, rain, sunshine, wind, hard work, easy days, you name it, we had it all. A marvellous river indeed, but you've really got to know what wilderness canoeing and camping is all about. Not a trip for novices without sufficient whitewater and portaging experience.

The only access/take-out point is on a government dock at the end of a gravel road leading from Hwy 17, a few kilometres east of Terrace Bay on the rugged north shore of

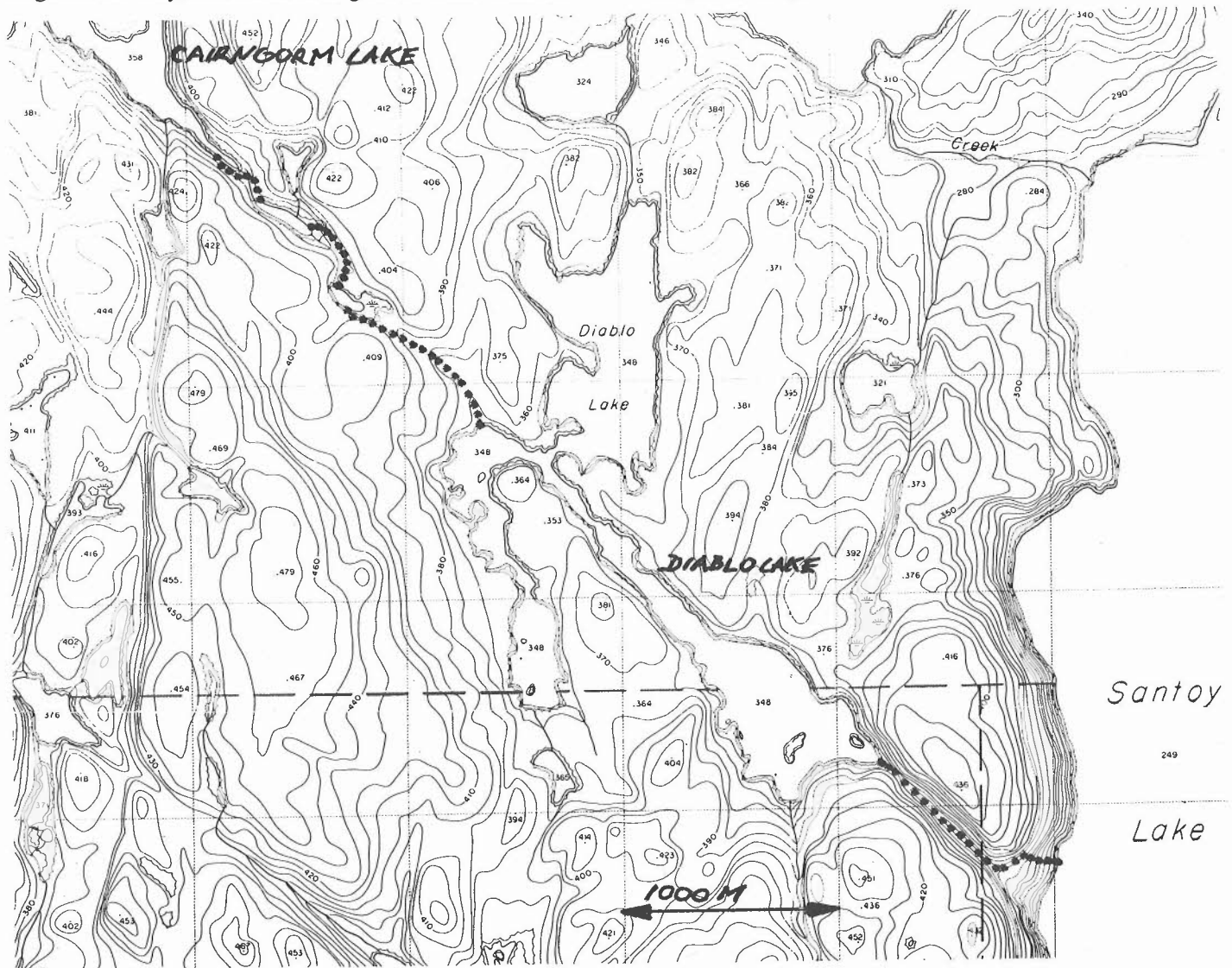
Lake Superior, to the southern end of Santoy Lake. Paddling north for about eight kilometres on Santoy Lake, the depression or saddle between the hills on the west shore is easily seen. This is the location of the Diablo Portage between Santoy and Diablo lakes, a vertical climb of about 100 m over a trail 1000 m long. The first few hundred metres are by far the steepest: the trail goes straight up the 30-45° angle slope (for some reason there are no switch-backs here), climbing about 70 metres. Then it enters a steep-walled ravine, levelling off a bit but becoming extremely dangerous because of the countless slippery helter-skelter rocks with deep, foliage-hidden trap holes between them that can easily break your leg if it gets caught in them. And of course a bit further on the fearsome Crotch Cruncher.

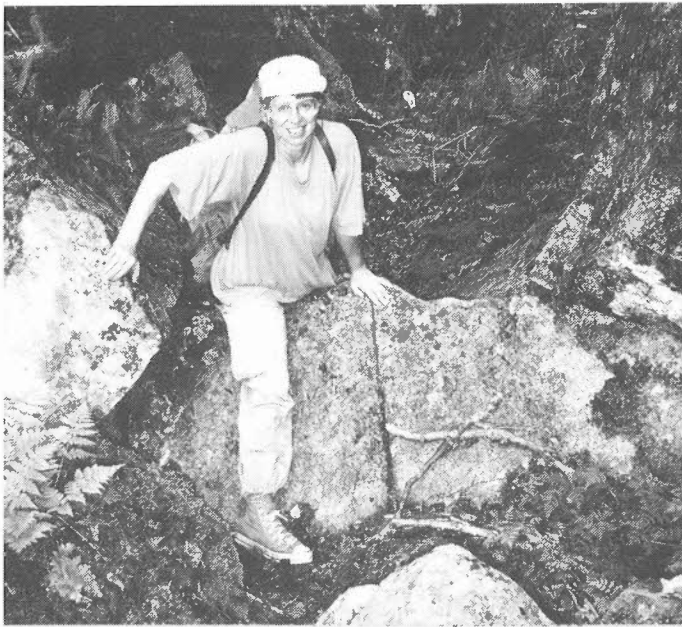
Indeed a portage trail worthy of a story all its own, the toughest one of the lot, one you have to do at the very beginning of the trip with all the food packs still at maximum weight and your body not yet accustomed to hard work. It is ironic to realize that Cliff Jacobson and party avoided this portage (on the well-intended advice of a "knowledgeable" local) by doing a much longer and maybe even nastier one from Hwy 17 directly to Diablo Lake. Read the poor man's hilarious story "Little Boats and Long River Trips" in Canoe magazine of May/June 1982. It is good to learn from his

account that they enjoyed the rest of the Steel River at least as much as Ria and I did.

Besides the obligatory 1:50,000 topo maps, we used two other sources of written information before and during the trip. The first one is the official brochure with a simple map provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Although there are a number of bothersome mistakes on it, such as several wrong portage lengths and locations (for instance, the Diablo Portage is *not* 1673 m long), it gives good basic information and is a must for anyone paddling this route. A copy can be obtained free of charge from the MNR, P.O. Box 280, Terrace Bay, Ontario, P0T 2W0. The second source is an interesting article "Steel River Circle Route" by Norm Stewart published in *The Wilderness Canoeist*, Autumn 1980. The names that I give of several of the region's features that are not named on the official topo map or the brochure have been taken from this article.

At Diablo Lake the highest level of the trip has almost been reached; there is still about ten metres to be climbed to the first big lake, Cairngorm Lake, via three more portages. Neither of these are simple or short, and it's easy to lose your way at the end of the last one, having to crash through bush and marsh to find a put-in point (as in fact we did), but it's all part of the game.





Crotch Cruncher

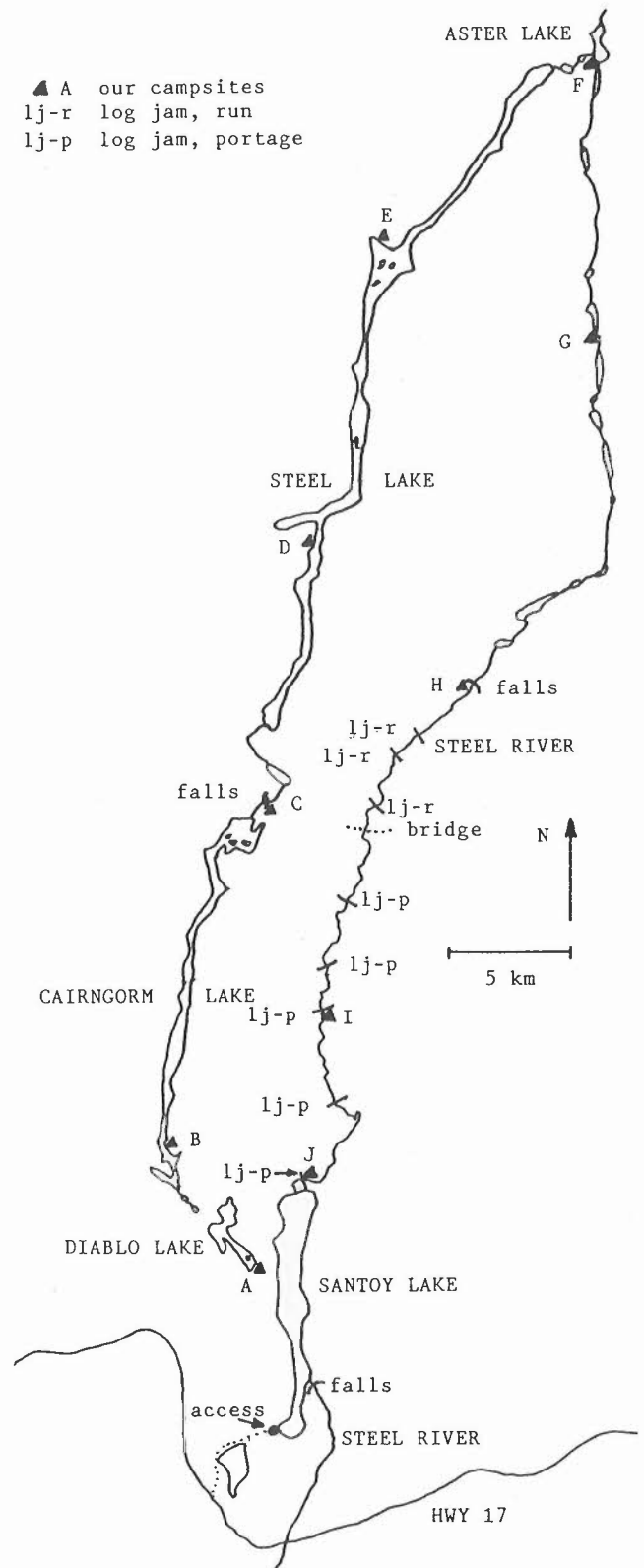
Then, at the far southern tip of splendid 16-km long Cairngorm Lake, the good part begins; from now on the rest of the 170 km is all downhill via lakes and moving water, a drop of 110 metres back to Santoy Lake. After the ordeal of the first four portages — which took us, slow heavily-loaded old trippers that we are, two days to do — we had a much-enjoyed lay-over day at the first campsite we found on Cairngorm, a real beauty on a wide peninsula facing north. The blueberries were numerous, the weather was fine, and sleeping was the order of the day.

Cairngorm Lake, as well as much longer Steel Lake further down, is oriented almost exactly north-south. Both lakes are lined with rolling hills and quite narrow in places, and it is no problem to switch from shore to shore trying to avoid east or west winds. On these lakes we almost permanently had north-northwest wind, however; paddling close to the left shore did give some shelter but not much.

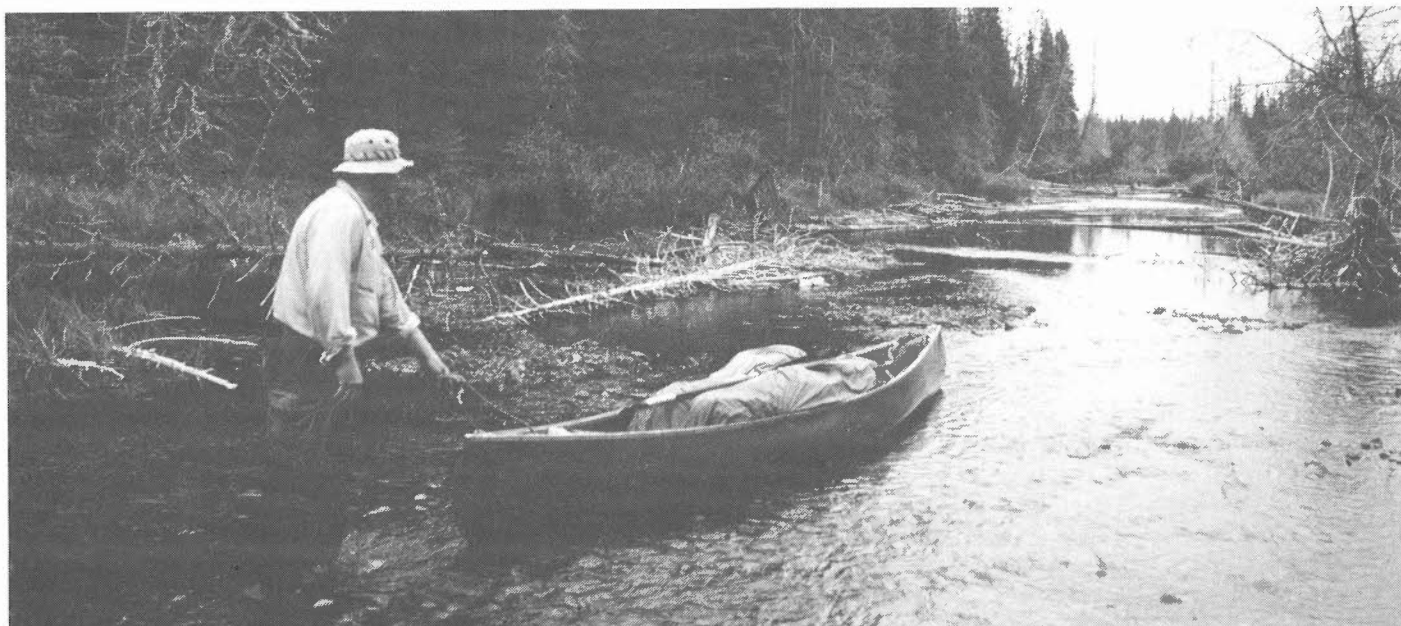
The north end of Cairngorm widens to a bit more lake-like circular shape and has some nice islands. Although we looked for it, we could not find the heron rookery that is reportedly somewhere around here.

The narrow stream that connects Cairngorm Lake to Steel Lake is the first indication of flowing water of the Steel River. This part is not canoeable and ends tumbling over a waterfall into a pool partly filled with logs and deadfall. Because of a lack of official names and for my own identification I called this one First Falls.

This stretch of the Steel River is bypassed via a 400-m portage that begins at the end of a narrow bay at the northeast top of Cairngorm Lake. The easy trail leads to a good campsite overlooking the pool below First Falls. I have never seen such a lush, enchanting forest floor as that crossed by the portage trail just before the campsite. A thick, richly-green, undulating carpet of moss and ferns, accentuated here and there by dark red bunchberries and whitish mushrooms, dead leaves and branches. A perfect spot to just sit on a log and look, doing nothing, absorbing nature's beauty, listening, smelling, feeling.



Below the First Falls' pool the narrow river is very shallow and in places obstructed by fallen trees. Wading the canoe is called for until the river becomes deeper before it enters Moose Lake, a quiet and unremarkable body of water, about 1.5 kilometres long. Two portages and several beaver dam lift-overs later the southern tip of Steel Lake is reached.



This lake presents the longest stretch of flatwater on the trip: 30 km of easy paddling (except for the occasional head wind) down a typical Canadian Shield lake. Both shores are often quite irregular with several deep bays and granite rockfaces interrupting the line of trees. There are some islands and the few sand beaches offer good camping spots.

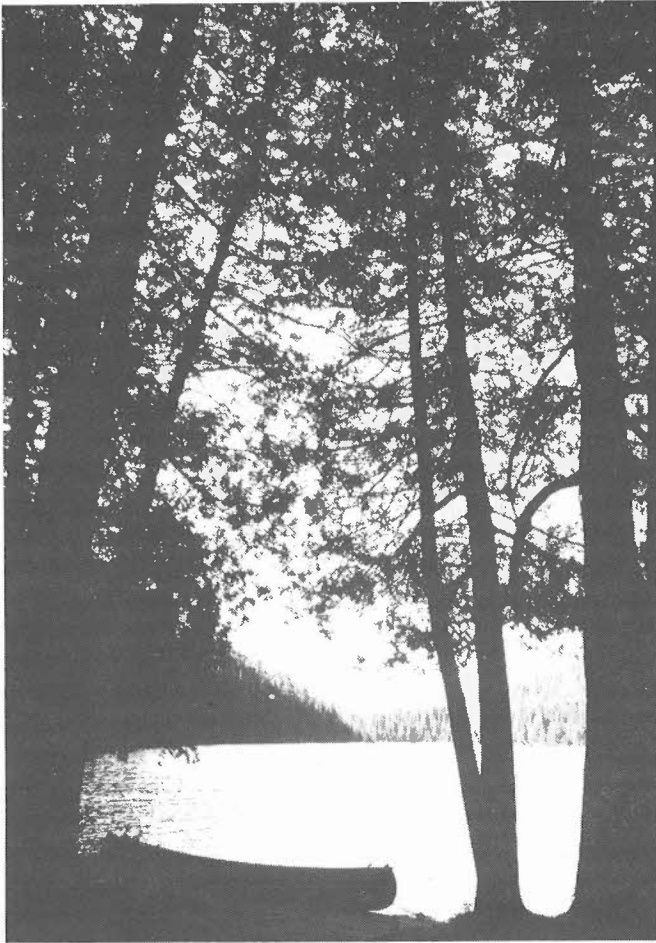
The first of the two disturbing experiences we had on this trip took place in a bay on the west side, about two-thirds up the lake. While exploring by canoe the area around our south-looking campsite we discovered an ugly blotch on the otherwise pristine landscape. An illegal access trail had been hacked out of the bush — according to my information this had been done long ago by inhabitants of communities in the region — making it possible to haul motorboats and camping gear to the lake to go fishing. The place was a bloody mess, broken boats and gear everywhere, empty beer cans, fish guts, oil cans, you name it, it was there. There was no way we could do anything to help clean it up, just too much garbage. Spoiled our good feelings for a while.

The last section of Steel Lake turns to the northeast and ends in a shallow bay. Here the river proper again begins its run, dropping via three rather rough rapids (portages with some hard work available) into Aster Lake, the most northerly point of the trip.

This is where we encountered our second disappointment, a badly overused, soiled campsite that was a far cry from the beauty spot assured us by previous trippers. We cancelled the planned lay-over day and only stayed for the night, setting up the tent as far away from the muck as possible.

But next day, just below Aster Lake, the real river fun started. Up till now the trip had consisted of flatwater paddling, portaging, and some wading, but the rest of the river would provide us with moving water, including many runnable rapids and riffles as well as long runs of fast current. In places there are lake-like wider stretches without any discernable current, requiring pool-and-drop paddling. An occasional short portage can be made to avoid some nasty spots





— a risk-reducing measure the two of us always take when canoeing in one boat on a remote river — but there are no really dangerous or unexpected surprises. Just a tremendous ride down a fast, diverse river. The water level on our trip was rather low which accounts for the lack of problems, but earlier in the season with higher water the situation demands more caution.

This river/lake paddling ends at Rainbow Falls, the second of the Steel River falls, which has a total drop of about 20 m. It is a very scenic spot with a nice campsite providing ample space for several tents. Definitely a good place to spend a day of rest.



A few kilometres downstream from Rainbow Falls the river takes on a completely different look. It leaves most of the Shield rocks behind and starts to meander lazily back and forth through a long plain filled with sand and rock flour, extremely fine grounded-down rock that clings to everything it touches, continuing all the way to the northern end of Santoy where it empties into the lake. In many places the banks of the river consist of “beaches” of sand and rock flour, ideal highways for moose. We indeed saw a number of moose here, but there must have been many more because numerous tracks were visible in the sand.



The meandering part of the river has no rapids but is obstructed in several places by huge log jams, each consisting of thousands upon thousands of logs carried down over many years during spring high water and pushed together into massive walls that somehow still allow water to seep through. These towering constructions are most impressive, some of them being hundreds of metres long. The bigger ones are stationary, not moving from their established spot



on the river, most often a sharp bend. But smaller ones are sometimes taken apart by the current, the logs then drifting downstream until they are absorbed by the next jam; or they may form a new obstruction themselves somewhere in a suitable location.

We encountered a total of eight log jams, five of which had to be portaged. Of the other three, two had a small canoeable channel bypassing the main blockage and the third one was in the process of breaking up so we could paddle right through. It would be an interesting exercise trying to estimate how much wood is locked up in these massive piles; must be astronomical.



There is one spot on the river, just before the last two log jams, where one can observe what may happen to old log jams. At that point the western shore of the river consists of the remains of an old jam, the logs being locked tightly together by sand that has filled in the spaces between them, forcing the river to find a new channel that bypasses the old log jam because no more water can seep through. This log cemetery must be quite old; mature trees and bush are growing on top of it.

There apparently is logging going on in the Steel River area. A modern logging road crosses the river in these parts but we didn't see any activity. However, the road is obviously used regularly.

When the river flows into Santoy Lake, it carries an enormous amount of rock flour and sand, much of which settles down in the quiet waters of the lake in the form of a huge sandbank almost blocking the river flow. While canoeing south down Santoy Lake, we had a long, reflective look at the saddle in the hills on the western shore where the Diablo Portage winds its way up the slope. It was only 14 days ago that we were struggling there, but the memory of all the sweat and hard work and rolling curses was already beginning to fade. We now tend to remember the good things about it, the joy of finally getting all the stuff to the end of the trail, the laughs we always manage to have when the going gets rough, the fully-clothed, rejuvenating swim in Diablo Lake to clean off the sweat and grime. Ah, the precious rewards of wilderness canoeing . . .



*Silver Staircase Falls*

We had one more sight to enjoy before the end of the trip. The river flows out of Santoy Lake just south of a one-hundred-metres-high vertical rockface called Windigo Wigwam Point on the east shore. The water tumbles down a most impressive series of cliffs and rapids, locally known as Silver Staircase Falls with a total drop of more than 40 metres, into a deep valley with fast current and several rapids. A portage trail gives access to some nice look-out points providing a good view of the falls. The trail continues on down to the river itself for those planning to explore the river to its end where it flows into the cold waters of Lake Superior. We did not follow this route because our car was waiting for us at the south end of Santoy Lake, but for those who plan to do the whole river and want to enjoy some last whitewater rides, this is the way to go.

We arrived at the take-out point dead tired and dirty because we had to battle the final three kilometres against a hard south wind that came up after our side trip to Silver Staircase Falls. But a nice swim in the refreshing lake to clean ourselves and the canoe from all the caked-on dirt and rock flour made us come alive again. Afterwards we stood together on the dock looking back at Santoy Lake and a very good canoeing adventure.



Would we do this trip again? I definitely think so. The Steel is among our all-time favorites and it would be a joy to again see the now familiar sights and discover new ones on this gentle yet demanding river. But we would seriously cut down on the amount of gear, making it less of a fight going up that unforgettable Diablo Portage.



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Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association — Editor: Toni Harting  
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.

## NEWS BRIEFS

**NASTAWGAN MATERIAL AND DEADLINE** Articles, trip reports, book reviews, photographs, sketches, technical tips, or anything else that you think might be of interest to other readers, are needed for future issues. Submit your contributions preferably on floppy computer disks or in typewritten form; contact the editor for more information. Contributor's Guidelines are available upon request; please follow these guidelines as much as possible to increase the efficiency of the production of our journal. The deadline dates for the next two issues are:

*issue:* Winter 1992      *deadline date:* 25 Oct. 1992  
Spring 1993                      24 Jan. 1993

**WCA MEMBERSHIP LISTS** are available to any members who wish one for personal, non-commercial use. Send five dollars in bills (no cheques, please!) to Cash Belden at the WCA postal address (see WCA Contacts on the back page).

**SYMPOSIUM** The eighth annual Canoeing and Wilderness Symposium will be held in Toronto towards the end of January 1993. It will focus on the Arctic islands such as Baffin, Ellesmere, and Banks. The format for Friday evening and all day Saturday will be similar to last year's. We plan to mail out registration information in November to past participants and to WCA members. Suggestions for speakers and presentations are always welcome. Contact: George Luste, 139 Albany Ave., Toronto, M5R 3C5; tel. (416) 534-9313.

**NEW ADDRESS** Please note that the WCA has a new postal address, see the list on the back page.

**WINTER POOL SESSIONS** We will be renting a swimming pool again this winter for those paddling enthusiasts who want to stay in shape while the rivers are frozen. It's a great opportunity to work on perfecting your canoe or kayak roll in clean, warm water. Sessions start in January and continue to mid-March. Call Bill Ness at (416) 321-3005 to register. Don't delay — space is limited.

**1993 CANDIDATES FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS** Your Board of Directors is made up of six members who are elected for a two-year term. The term for three directors will end at the next Annual General Meeting and members in good standing are invited to throw their hat in the ring to fill the three vacancies.

Interested individuals who would like to contribute a little more than their membership fee but aren't sure what the job entails are invited to contact any Board member or the secretary of the WCA who will be happy to answer questions. Although nominations can be made up to the time of the elections, candidates are requested to declare themselves prior to the deadline of the Winter issue of *Nastawgan* (25 October), so that they can publish a brief platform.

**BOOBOO** Sorry, Bob Shortill, your article in the last issue should of course have talked about la riviere Bazin and not le. You know how it is with some old people . . .

## WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Wonder what is going on with an issue or how you might get involved? Call one of the folks in the following list (compiled by Richard Culpeper) and you can find out.

*French River (Ontario Hydro)* Jane Burgess, (416) 466-3154

*French River (general)* Toni Harting, (416) 964-2495

*Kesagami Provincial Park* Richard Culpeper, (705) 671-3343

*Killarney Provincial Park* Richard Culpeper, (705) 671-3343

*Legal* Bryan Buttigieg, (416) 831-3554

*Missinaibi River* George Luste, (416) 534-9313

*Nastawgan* Toni Harting, (416) 964-2495

*Ontario Hydro Demand Supply Hearing* Richard Culpeper, (705) 671-3343; Jim Wood (ORCA), (705) 767-3303; Ed Snucins (Sudbury Canoe Club), (705) 688-1938

*Polar Bear Provincial Park* John Winters, (705) 382-2057

*River Aux Sables* Richard Culpeper, (705) 671-3343; Ed Snucins (Sudbury Canoe Club), (705) 688-1938

*Small Hydro* Richard Culpeper, (705) 671-3343; John Hackert, (416) 438-7672; Ed Snucins (Sudbury Canoe Club), (705) 688-1938; Dale Miner, (705) 799-7338

*Spanish River* Loreen Joe, (705) 523-2373

*Wilderness Canoe Association Conservation Committee* John Hackert, (416) 438-7672

*VIA Rail* Richard Culpeper, (705) 671-3343



## ALGONQUIN PARK THREATENED

Algonquin Park. Mention the name and it conjures up images of mist-covered lakes with tall white pines along the shores, moose browsing on the water lilies in a winding stream, and the howl of wolves echoing amongst the hills. Here is a place that is embedded in the Canadian psyche; a place of such beautiful scenery that it inspired the famous paintings of the Group of Seven. A place that every year attracts thousands of campers and canoeists from all over the world.

Welcome to the oldest provincial park in Ontario and one of the largest parks in Canada. Located on the southern edge of the Canadian Shield between Georgian Bay and the Ottawa River, Algonquin Park covers 7,571 square kilometres of rolling hills, rushing rivers, and rich wetlands.

Most Canadians believe parks are supposed to be areas of protection where wildlife may live free from the impact of humans. Unfortunately, very little of Algonquin is actually protected: 75% of the park is available to logging and there's

even hunting in the park! If that's not enough, recreational overuse, regional stresses, and increased Native access compound the problems which together present a considerable threat to Algonquin's natural integrity. If something is not done soon, Algonquin's natural ecosystem may not survive the next one hundred years.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) is leading the way in pushing for increased protection, and with your help we can succeed. For over two decades, the Wildlands League chapter and the Ottawa/Hull chapter of CPAWS have been fighting for the wild in Algonquin. With your help we can make Algonquin's 1993 centennial something to celebrate. Tax-creditable donations are most welcome and can be made to: CPAWS, Wildlands League Chapter, Algonquin Park Campaign, 169 Bloor Street East, #1335, Toronto, M4W 1B9.

## KEEPING IT CLEAN: BROWNBAGGING

It is painfully evident that the lands and waters of canoe country everywhere are increasingly being degraded because of the shortsighted way in which many paddlers and other visitors treat the waste products of their bodies: feces and urine. Ever-growing numbers of people spread ever-growing amounts of the stuff around, together with countless sheets of eyesore-white toilet paper that takes years to decompose, even if it were buried.

And in depressingly many cases the paper is not buried at all, just left flying around in the bush. What a disgusting result of thoughtless, ignorant, just plain stupid behavior by nature "lovers" who don't give a damn for whatever reason.

But everybody should give a damn, a whole lot of damns, in fact. Of all the problems facing our canoe country, the worst one is pollution caused by too many people producing, and not properly taking care of, too much waste and garbage.

This obviously is not an easy problem to solve, demanding education, understanding, and commitment. Although the Wilderness Canoe Association does not have a mandate to provide formal education in any subject related to the outdoors, there is a way in which we can try to help lessen the problem. This is because all members have one thing in common: we're all readers of our journal *Nastawgan*. I therefore invite anybody with useful ideas about the correct treatment of human waste and garbage to write a short note presenting discussions of new and also old ideas on this important subject. Be as honest and descriptive as you need to be in writing about your idea. False modesty and "polite" language for the sake of not offending sensitive souls does not have a place in our journal. What we need is a clean

environment and that can only be achieved through honesty, sacrifice, hard work, and the killing of taboos.



As a modest beginning of this series of ideas I offer the following on *brownbaggging*: Do not bury the soiled toilet paper together with the feces (or shit, if you agree with the reasoning discussed in that marvellous little book *How to Shit in the Woods*, see Reviews on page 24), but collect it in a small brown paper bag (or a big paper bag if yours is a group of several people). At the end of the day, the bag plus contents is then burned in the campfire, leaving Mother Earth free from obnoxious sheets of toilet paper. Good for you. Good for nature.

Toni Harting



## WCA PHOTO CONTEST

The WCA again offers its members an opportunity to participate in an exiting and rewarding competition. Have a good look at your photo collection, select the shots that you particularly like, and enter them in this unique contest, which is for all of us who try to express photographically something of our wilderness experiences. Each photograph you enter means a chance of getting published in *Nastawgan*.

### CATEGORIES

1. *Flora*: wild plants in their natural settings.
2. *Fauna*: wild animals in their natural settings.
3. *Wilderness*: scenery, landscapes, sunrises/sets, mood shots, close ups, etc. that interpret the 'feeling' of the wilderness. There should be no evidence of man in the photographs.
4. *Wilderness and Man*: as in category 3, but with man in harmony with the natural environment.

### CONTEST RULES

1. Entries will be accepted from WCA members only.
2. *Not* eligible for entry are: photographs that received prizes or honorable mentions in previous WCA contests, photographs made by the panel of judges, and photographs by professional or semi-professional photographers.
3. All photographs must have been taken by the photographer her/himself.
4. Any kind of photograph is acceptable: color as well as black-and-white, slides as well as prints (minimum print size 3 1/2 x 5 in., maximum 11 x 14 in., border or no border, unmounted or mounted, no mats or frames).
5. A maximum of four photographs per category may be submitted; you may enter as many of the four categories as you want.
6. The WCA reserves the right to use any of the photographs entered in this competition for reproduction in *Nastawgan*, and to have duplicates made for the purpose of WCA promotion.

### HOW TO ENTER

- a. Select a maximum of four photographs per category.

b. Each photograph submitted should be numbered and clearly marked with the photographer's name. Include with your entry a sheet of paper stating your name/address/phone, and indicate by number for each photograph the category entered and the title of the photograph.

c. Include with your entry the \$4.00 fee in bills (preferably) or by cheque made out to the contest organizer Dee Simpson, regardless of the number of photographs entered.

d. Pack everything in a strong box or between two sheets of cardboard in a sturdy envelope marked "photographs" and send or deliver to: Dee Simpson, Forevergreen Inc., 181 Carlaw Avenue, Suite 230, Toronto, M4M 1S2, to be received *no later than Sunday, 17 January 1993*. (Submissions will also be accepted till that date by Toni Harting, 7 Walmer Road, Apt. 902, Toronto, M5R 2W8.)

*JUDGING* will be performed by a panel of experienced photographers who will look for content, spontaneity, originality, feeling of wilderness, and joy of photography.

*PRIZES*: The winner of each category will receive a matted 8x10 enlargement of the winning photograph. All placed photographs will receive a certificate in recognition of their achievement. Honorable mentions will also be given if deemed appropriate. All winning photographs and a selection from the other entries will be published in *Nastawgan*. Winners will be announced at the Annual General Meeting in February 1993, where all entries will be shown and constructive comments will be given on many of the photographs.

*RETURN OF PHOTOS*: Entrants may pick up their photographs at the AGM. Those not present there can pick up their photographs at Toni Harting's home (phone first), or they will be returned by mail (in that case, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope of appropriate size). Indicate with your entry how you would like to have your photographs returned.

## FALL PARTY

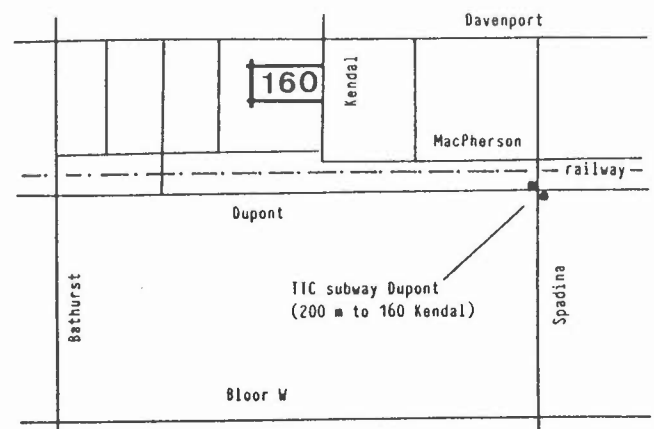
Want to meet old canoeing friends? Want to hear some tall paddling stories and see interesting photographs? Want to find out what the WCA is all about, who its members are, and what inside information they can give you?

Then come to the WCA Fall Party, also called Wine-and-Cheese Party, on Friday evening, 27 November, in the staff lounge of the Casa Loma Campus of George Brown College, 160 Kendal Avenue, Toronto. Non-WCA members are also welcome. Admission, to be paid at the door, is \$6.00 per person.

### Program

- 6:30 — 7:30 Registration and welcome  
 7:30 — 8:00 Slide shows  
 8:00 — 9:00 Meet the people, enjoy the wine and cheese  
 9:00 — 9:30 Slide shows  
 9:30 — Coffee and gab

For more information, contact Dee Simpson during the day at (416) 778-9951.



There are several parking lots in the area. Do not park on the streets.

## THE CASE OF THE SNEAKY MUSHROOM

Many visitors to Algonquin Park these days are enjoying wild mushrooms as food. The flavors can be subtle and excellent and, provided the collector can positively identify any species eaten, it is an activity we whole-heartedly encourage.

We personally have been very keen on wild fungi ever since friends served us steak with pearly white oyster mushrooms many years ago. Although we have learned to identify and prepare many other kinds since then, the memory of that first meal remains vivid and the oyster mushroom remains one of our favorites. In some ways, we see it as the model edible wild mushroom — good tasting, easy to identify, and abundant.

Still, as far as the basic biology of the oyster (and other) mushrooms was concerned, we naively thought all those years that we had a pretty good picture of how things worked. The structure we ate was just the reproductive part or “fruit” of the mushroom plant — in the same sense that a blueberry is the reproductive part of a blueberry plant. The only difference, really, was that you can easily see the non-berry part of a blueberry plant, whereas with a mushroom the non-reproductive part is much less visible. For one thing, it consists of very tiny thread-like structures called hyphae (singular hypha) and secondly, the hyphae are out of sight in dead leaves on the forest floor or inside dead wood.

The visible, reproductive part of a mushroom doesn't contain seeds the way a blueberry does, but instead produces millions of microscopic spores each capable of starting a new mushroom plant. The spores float through the air and although the chances are slight some of them happen to land on surfaces suitable for the particular species of mushroom in question. In the case of an oyster mushroom spore, this is the exposed, dead wood of a hardwood tree like sugar maple.

The spore gives rise to a hypha that grows into the wood, branching again and again until it forms an enormously complicated network of threads that digest the wood and break it down (rot it, in other words) into simpler chemicals. When conditions are warm and moist enough and if the thread network is healthy enough, some of the threads will come together and produce one or more of the visible, spore-producing structures we call mushrooms.

These were the basics — or so we thought — of an oyster mushroom's life and it all seemed quite simple. With the benefit of hindsight we might have suspected that reality would be a bit more complicated.

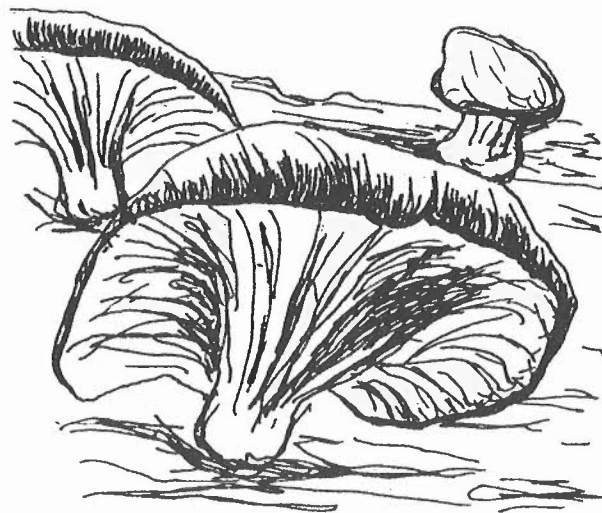
At first glance, the hyphae of an oyster mushroom would seem to be in an especially favorable spot. There is a lot of energy locked up in the cellulose (food) surrounding an oyster mushroom growing inside a dead tree. To actually use this food, however, the mushroom must break the cellulose down and this requires the action of enzymes. Enzymes are proteins and all proteins contain nitrogen. The problem for an oyster mushroom is that dead wood contains very little of this vital commodity. And, unless the oyster mushroom can get past this problem, it will be unable to manufacture the

enzymes and other proteins it needs to feast on the bountiful supply of cellulose all around it.

To make matters worse, the oyster mushroom has to compete with bacteria, some of which can take nitrogen right out of the air and make their needed proteins that way. The oyster mushroom, unable to perform this difficult chemical trick, might seem to be left at the starting gate in the race to exploit the rich bounty (i.e. dead wood) left when an old tree dies.

Old Algonquin hands will recognize that this situation is quite similar to that found in bogs — which are also notoriously poor in nitrogen. The fact that several bog plants (sundews and pitcher-plants, for example) get around the problem by trapping protein (nitrogen) -rich insects suggests a possible solution for the oyster mushroom as well.

To be sure, insects are far too big and powerful to be captured by mushroom hyphae but other, more suitable-sized nitrogen sources are available. The woody environment of the oyster mushroom is shared by tiny worms (less than one millimetre long) called nematodes. They make a living by preying on the bacteria which digest the same wood attacked by the oyster mushroom. Because they have fed on the nitrogen-rich bacteria, the nematodes are themselves a rich source of nitrogen.



In hindsight it makes excellent sense that mushrooms would be able to tap this source of nitrogen but, until 1983, no-one realized that they actually do. The oyster mushroom and 10 other species of wood-rotting fungi have now been shown to be carnivorous nematode eaters and thus to have solved their nitrogen deficiency problem. Whenever a nematode approaches an oyster mushroom hypha too closely it is stunned by a chemical given off by the mushroom. Over the next hour new threads from the mushroom converge on the immobilized (but still living) nematode, enter its mouth, grow through the nematode's body and digest it from the inside out. Within 24 hours the drama is over and the oyster mushroom is making new proteins of its own from those taken from the nematode.

Although it may seem gruesome to us, the fact that the nematode is only paralyzed — rather than being killed outright — before the oyster mushroom begins to feed on it is actually a very subtle feature. If it were dead, the nematode would be quickly attacked and at least partly consumed by bacteria before the mushroom threads could make physical contact with the victim. By keeping the nematode immobile but alive the oyster mushroom can avoid the bacteria problem and keep all the nematode's precious nitrogen for itself.

We confessed at the start of this article to a naive belief in the essential vegetarian simplicity of mushrooms. For years in fact, we have enjoyed delicious snacks of fried-up oyster mushrooms without suspecting that what we were

doing to them they had already done to tiny animals inside old tree trunks. The amazing discovery that the oyster mushroom and its relatives are "meat-eaters" brings up once again the thought expressed first and best by Shakespeare — "There are more things on heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy" . . . Of course, for any nematodes reading this, the message is somewhat less elegant — "If you don't want to be paralyzed and devoured alive, beware of the fungi among ye!"

Reprinted from *The Raven*, courtesy of Ministry of Natural Resources.

## THE CORACLE – GREENEST BOAT AFLOAT?

Chris Riddle

As wilderness canoeists most of us like to think of ourselves as environmentally responsible. Sometimes this is hard as we survey the array of fibreglass, kevlar, and other man-made fibres that go into so much of our canoes and gear.

This, and an interest in the history of exploration in Canada's North, may explain the fascination I have for all-natural, environment-friendly boats of one form or another. From birchbark canoe, to sealskin kayak, to dugout canoe, Canada has a rich tradition of such craft.

On a recent visit to England I was fortunate to meet Peter Faulkner, who continues the tradition of another all-natural boat: the celtic coracle. Given Canada's heritage, I question Peter's claim to build "the greenest boats afloat" but I will grant that they are 100% natural.

The coracle is constructed of willow canes woven on a hazelwood frame over which is stretched a hide skin to waterproof and tension the whole. A plank seat adds rigidity to the gunwales and a woven willow mat insulates the paddler from the water.

The craft has one element that should make it attractive to hardy three- and four-season WCA members: it is fur-

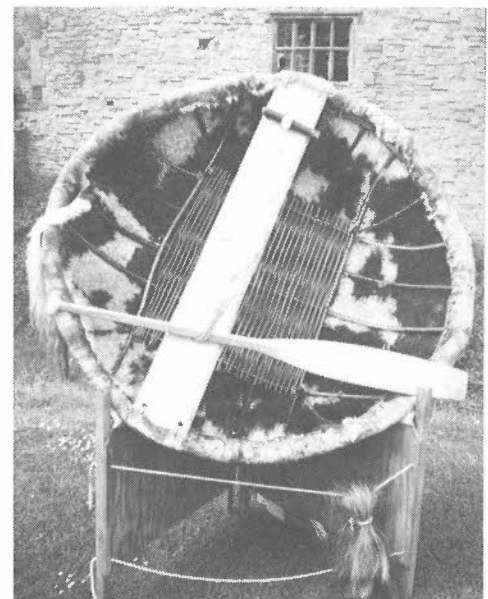
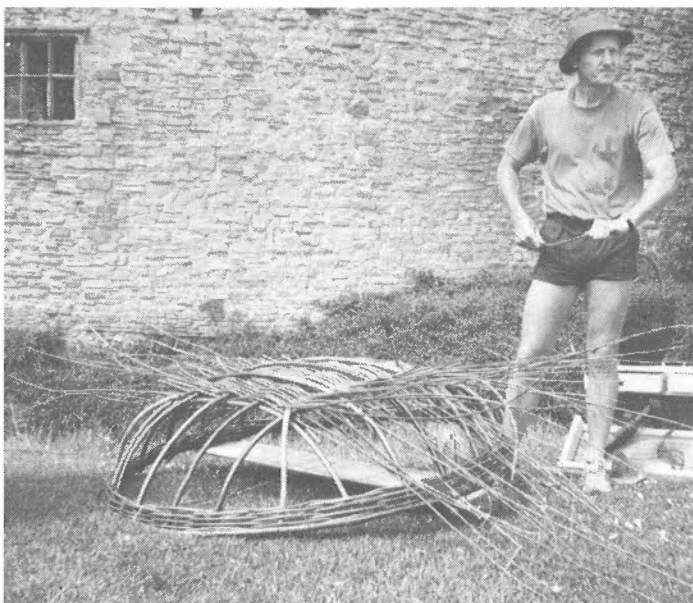
lined! However, its lack of tracking ability may be of concern; from pictures of the coracle in action I would guess that its behavior in rapids resembles the way ducks bob along through class I and II water without concern twirling slowly round and round!

Peter has paddled over 600 km in his first coracle, which he built on the banks of the river Teme on the Welsh borders.

As Peter says: "The coracle is about alternatives. The craft may seem simple but its creation encompasses many processes and skills harvesting and management of a withy (willow) bed; coppicing hazel; selecting, cleaning and curing hide; plaiting a 45 cm horsehair cord; and the critical operation of sewing the hide to the frame.

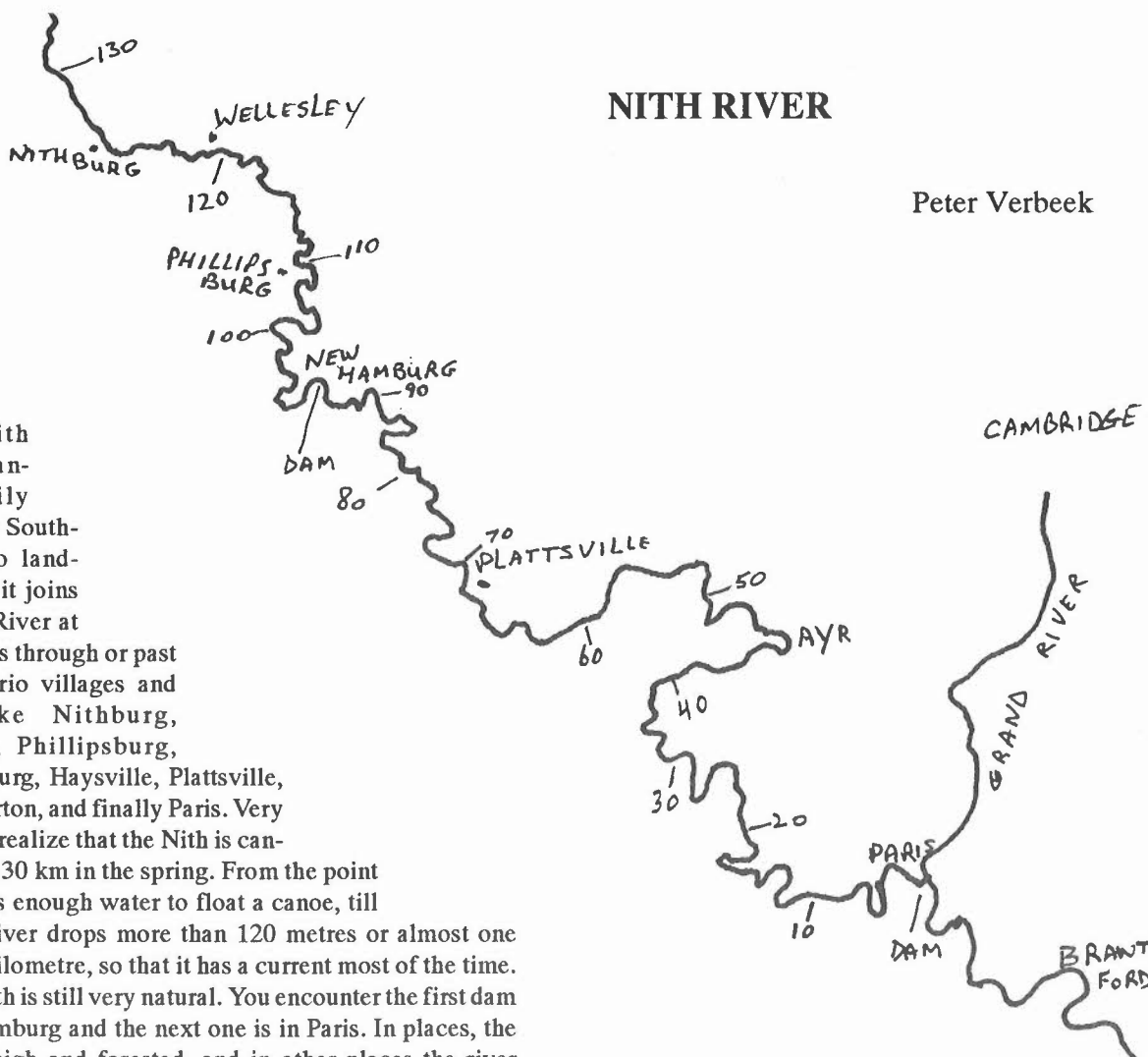
"The true beauty of these craft is not only to be found in their actual visual components, but in the very system which underlies their creation the harmonious partnership between one's creative skills and the natural materials of which the coracle is made."

For more information contact Peter Faulkner, XXIV Watling Street, Leintwardine, Craven Arms, Shropshire, England SY7 0LW.



## NITH RIVER

Peter Verbeek



The Nith River meanders lazily through the Southern Ontario landscape until it joins the Grand River at Paris. It runs through or past many Ontario villages and towns like Nithburg, Wellesley, Phillipsburg, New Hamburg, Haysville, Plattsville, Ayr, Wolverton, and finally Paris. Very few people realize that the Nith is canoeable for 130 km in the spring. From the point where it has enough water to float a canoe, till Paris, the river drops more than 120 metres or almost one metre per kilometre, so that it has a current most of the time.

The Nith is still very natural. You encounter the first dam in New Hamburg and the next one is in Paris. In places, the banks are high and forested, and in other places the river winds through fields and meadows. There are frequent riffles and a few places where you have to line your canoe through the remains of old mill dams. South of Phillipsburg there are a couple of (very) low roads that you must lift your canoe over. Only in the last ten kilometres before Paris does the Nith become wilder with some real rapids.

In recent trips on the Nith, I observed many muskrats, turtles, blue herons, kingfishers, ducks, geese, turkey vultures, hawks, a large owl, and many other birds that I did not recognize. Fish were jumping in many places and the odd fisherman that I saw told me about catching good-sized trout and bass.

The Nith can be canoed comfortably in four days. The

first day could go from the bridge on Wellesley Township road 18S, north from Waterloo Road 7, map location 40P/7 NU124155, to a bridge in location 40P/7 NU222043, for a distance of 31 km. The second day would continue onward and end at the bridge just west of Plattsville for a distance of 30 km. The third day would end at Wolverton after a trip of 35 km. The last day would see the series end in Paris. Of course, one can make the day trips longer or shorter as may be preferred.

If I get enough expressions of interest, I shall organize two weekends in April 1993 which will be devoted to canoeing the Nith River. Watch for the announcement in the Spring 1993 issue of *Nastawgan*.

## CORRECTION

It has come to my attention that there is an error in my article *A Grand Wayfaring in the Summer 1992* issue of *Nastawgan*. In the third to last paragraph I state that the Michelin main tilt is under water in Smallwood Reservoir. It turns out that it is not. Flour Lake still exists although there are flooded areas immediately above and below it on the watershed and these are related to the Churchill Falls plant. That section

would read more accurately if it said: "I am haunted. It matters not what the fate of the Michelin tilt is by time. Its remains exist on a point that has been spared direct flooding, but is bracketed by diversions and control structures that are part of the vast Churchill Falls Project. It may not matter what Horace has shown us along Grand River . . ."

Garrett Conover

## WINDIGO RIVER

At six in the morning, a helicopter landing about 75 yards from our tent woke us up. Although we were still tired after a 24-hour drive to get to Windigo Lake in northwest Ontario, we got up to begin our canoe trip down the Windigo to the take-out point at Muskrat Dam Indian Reserve. The Windigo flows northward most of the time, which gave us, in late July, prevailing southerly winds and therefore a lot of sailing.

Campsites were hard to find along the river. The weather was not great and we had a lot of rain, accompanied by hordes of mosquitoes and black flies. There was much fire damage in the area along the river, and some of the portages were covered with fallen trees. It took us six days of hard but satisfying work to get to the end of the trip at Muskrat Dam.

Larry Flesch



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## DAM DIFFERENCE

(Submitted by Larry Lemanski.)

What a difference a dam makes . . . .

The Magpie High Falls in —

— May 1976



— and in September 1991



One of Ontario's prettiest canoe routes was scarred when forest fire raged over 600 hectares of the Lady Evelyn Smoothwater Provincial Park near Temagami this June.

Temagami 5, one of the area's worst forest fires since the 1977 Gull Lake burn, changed the face of five kilometres of the Lady Evelyn upstream from the Gray's River for years to come. A total of nine portages and five campsites were affected. The Ministry of Natural Resources expects maintenance concerns (blowdowns, sweepers, etc.) to surface in the future on the affected portages and increased pressure on campsites on either side of the burn.

Covering the story for *The North Bay Nugget*, I found myself staring numbly from a helicopter hovering over the blackened remains of a campsite at the west end of Macpherson Lake. I recalled a mental image of my paddling companion portaging through a garden of wildflowers at the same spot only three weeks earlier. The stark reality of bare

## TEMAGAMI FIRE

Paul Chivers

branches, charred black, challenged my memory of a myriad of subtle green shades sprinkled with white pin cherry blossoms. The 70-metre white rock knob I had climbed to get a view of the river now bristled with blackened spikes that were once healthy spruce and pine.

As devastating as this fire was, it could have been worse if it had come during the spring, when many of the forest's inhabitants are too young to fly or outrun the flames. The 72,400-hectare park contains several stands of old-growth red and white pine. However, this burn was confined to an area of younger trees, estimated to be about 80 years old.



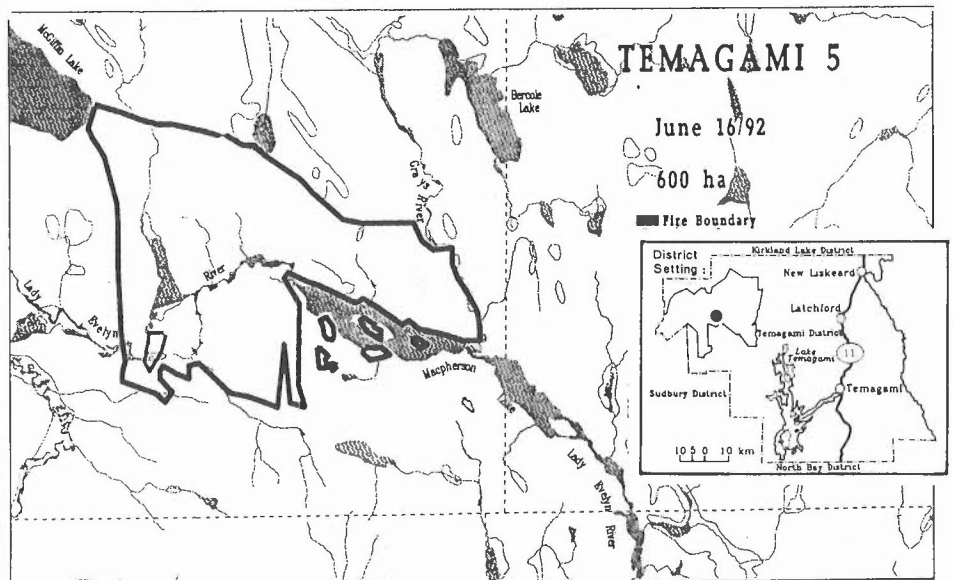


Temagami 5 started at a campsite on the east end of McGiffin Lake less than two kilometres north of the Lady Evelyn. Two fishermen had flown into the site, stayed a few days, and paddled out believing they had left their campfire out. But when conditions are as parched as they were this June, fire can play strange tricks. It can burn underground for days before resurfacing, and when this one did, it found dry fuel and strong northerly winds to help it spread.

Two Northwest Territories CF215 water bombers and five helicopters attacked the flames from above, while over 150 people worked on the ground. It took about 12 days to bring the fire under control and clean up the area, at a cost of about \$800,000, according to Bill Ray, North Bay / Temagami district fire operations manager.

"The visual aspect will probably be there for the next couple of years," said Ray, but it should prove to be good from a wildlife perspective. Ray expects sightings will increase as the area regenerates itself.

Already the blackened landscape is showing signs of recovery. A party that travelled through the burn in early August reported seeing ferns starting to poke their way through the charred ground. The group reported no difficulties on any of the portages, but did note several downed trees in the river at one set of rapids.



WCA member Paul Chivers is staff photographer at The North Bay Nugget.

## RUNNING THE RAPIDS

*Impressions from a summer 1991 trip; by Jon Berger with help from Kit Wallace, Michael, and Erika.*

A grey overcast sky turned to blue clear with bright light as we approached the first rapids. Although we had been out more than two weeks, this was our first real downstream run. Even though I had been down the Miniss River, which flows northeast of Sioux Lookout in northwest Ontario, three other times, the nervousness of the first run built up as we neared the top of the drop. Kit and I manoeuvred the canoe through the shallows and I pulled up and secured the stern so I could scout the water.

Kit stayed with Michael and Erika as I went down the rocks and over and under the overhanging cedars. At various points I checked the water. The rapid was not difficult it's a straight shot if you stay off the boulders that create the large waves near the bottom. I checked again and weighed all that might go wrong. When you run with your children in the boat, and travel with only one canoe, a second and third look are mandatory.

Back at the canoe, I nodded to Kit, and said, "It's okay, but you should check it." Kit went off for her scout and I chatted with Michael and watched the sleeping Erika. Kit returned and we both gauged the current and the whole situation. Inside I felt the familiar fright mixed with the anticipation of the run. The thoughts went through my head bright clear, cool breeze, straight shot mixed with an almost sickening feeling of inability to act. I have had this fear at the top of rapids many times before. It is an old companion

that I know well. I can shake it by looking down the rapid at the landmarks and by trying to get a feel for the rhythm of the water. This way I can understand the speed and the current's direction and I know when to make my own strokes.

I knew this type of rapid — not much manoeuvring, a lot of water, a big surge, and then the need to hit a needle-like line at the bottom. I knew if we missed that opening we would go through without any problem, but we might take a bit of water. I anticipated these events because although I knew the route down the rapid, I did not feel in the groove. I was only guessing how the canoe would behave during the run. Certainly it was a very educated guess, one that allowed a safe run. I was just rusty. If we had run miles of the stuff in the weeks before I would have had the confidence. I knew that feeling would return after the run.

Kit agreed that the run was safe. Again we checked the line from the top. We put on the life jackets and off we went. At this moment, I still felt unsure. I kept repeating to myself, "Ride it, ride it, keep the line." We went in fast. The ride is much faster for Kit in the bow than it is for me in the stern, and we moved quickly through the top section. I could feel the current bite on the paddle. I could feel the surge lifting the stern. I sensed rather than heard the roar of the whitewater. I saw the explosion of the haystacks, and at one point, each little droplet of water stood out. A wave rose on my right; we were too close to the big surge at the bottom. I gave a twist of the paddle to move us to the left, but the wave leaped across the gunwale and we took a bit of water.



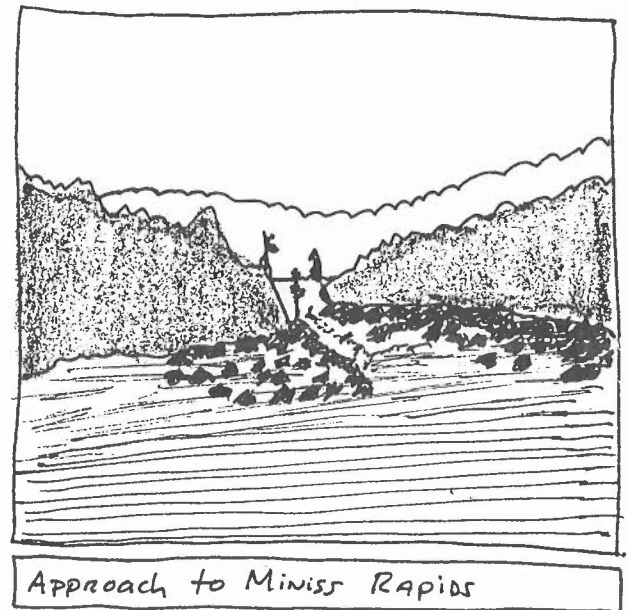


The last wave marked the bottom of the chute. We careened down the outrun and glided into the lake. The canoe slowed down, but adrenalin continued to hype my body. In contrast to the heavy fear-induced inaction at the top of the run, I felt ready to move. We had to bail a bit of water and in my excitement I just ripped the loads out of the canoe, got lunch, bailed the water, and walked about without any sense of fatigue.

For a short while, we enjoyed the sunny rocks, but the sun moved to the southwest and we packed up and headed downriver. My heart still pounded. We glided over the brightly lit late afternoon water. Soon the next rapid sounded from below. A short glance showed no run — wade or portage? Kit spotted the trail and the complicated unloading spot involved downed trees and muskeg. Nonetheless, we decided that a quick carry was better in the evening.

It took a while to get the loads and the children to the start of the firm trail. Michael and Erika, by now real portage veterans, set off with backpacks and instructions to wait above the water. Kit and I followed with the loads. I got the canoe into a good slot and we relayed loads and children over logs and boulders and swung them into the canoe.

Out on the river, we picked up the current and paddled to the next drop. We edged up close to the top and stopped to scout. We faced a steep short pitch. The river narrowed and ran out in a big tail of whitewater compressed in the narrow gut. I scouted and thought, darn, another brushy



portage. I did not want to take water and if we ran down the middle we probably would get a lapful. I expressed my disappointment to Kit, who took her own scout. She returned with a different story. "There is a route on the right if we hit the line." I took another look and agreed. This time, both Michael and Erika sat side by side in the stern compartment of our wide nineteen-foot canoe. Done up in lifejackets, the two midshipmen waited for the surge. This run lasted only a few seconds and we shot through on Kit's line with nary a drop over the gunwales.

By now the sun had moved further and the water, in places, had shadows instead of bright light. Time for a campsite, and a ledge showed across a lake below the last run. We approached with caution, but unlike the earlier rapids, this one was wider with less of a drop. We went in on the right. The rapid was in the shadow of the trees to the west. The lake below was brilliantly lit in golden light, as a westward opening bay allowed the sun to illuminate the shores. I stood in the stern and gauged the run. It turned out to be an easy S-turn and we glided to the bottom.

Across the lake, we landed on the open ledges and unloaded to make camp. All of us felt the excitement of the rapids. Even the children displayed more than their usual campsite energy, as they bounded over the trails, romped through the clearings and marked places to play baseball, cavort, and swim.

We had a fine campsite with a perfect combination of direct evening light, a cool breeze, flat open ledges, choice of good tent sites, and firewood close at hand. The evening promised a chill for sketching and swimming.

Embark upon a canoe trip with young children and all of your concerns change. The rhythm of travel is different as the children add their own beat and sound. It is hard to hear a bird call when Michael plays with his Game Boy and Erika plays her "Fox and the Hound" tape. Children's activities and needs replace the peacefulness of the solitary voyages. Yet, with the loss of the uninterrupted sounds of water and wind comes a sharing of experiences.

Now at home, there are two other people who like to

hear my canoe trip stories. Erika with her three-year-old speech, loves to talk about the beaver that swam under the canoe and the heron that perched in a spruce tree. Michael never tires of Mac and Joe canoe trip stories. Mac and Joe are two boys of indeterminate age, whose baseball exploits kept Michael entertained during the long paddles of course, they also like canoeing and many of their trips are on our former routes.

Travelling is quite different with Michael and Erika. Last summer, at three, Erika crawled throughout the canoe.

Sometimes she sat in the bow in front of, or on, Kit's feet — how the dear woman paddled I will never know. Sometimes she shared Kit's bow seat — how the dear woman paddled I will never know. Sometimes she sat behind Kit in the space we had allocated for her (her canoe seat). Sometimes she crawled back to Michael's compartment and shared his space and his toys. Every once in a while she would climb back and sit at my feet. It came as no surprise that in some of the rapids she actually walked toward me as we whooshed through the surge. Michael did it when he was her age.

Michael usually spent his days in the canoe with his toy men. He played endless baseball games with them. Kit had filled his sack with small compact games and drawing materials. When he tired of these he played with his Game Boy. When he tired of that, I told him one baseball story after another. Early in the trip, I ran out of "real" games that I had played or saw. So I invented Mac and Joe two friends who played on a baseball team like his

team. I gave them personalities, other friends, and teammates. Then I invented a 24-game schedule with twelve different teams, each with their own lineups. I narrated each of the games and commented on the strategy and exploits of Mac and Joe.

Michael has been with us for seven trips. At 14 months he could toddle over the easiest trails. At 2-1/2 he still had to be carried over the rough sections. At six he is a real portage walker. With a few exceptions, he carries his backpack and helps Erika on the trails. At three, Erika proves to

be a prodigy of a walker. Help is necessary for deadfall patches and muskeg holes, but she moves right along. Of course, Kit has to carry a heavy pack and shepherd the pair, and that is a tough, slow pace for someone who wants to step out with a load. On occasion we leave them in the canoe dragged up on shore or sitting on a floating bog while we shuttle loads to higher ground. Once we gave them a sleigh ride through the marsh as we pushed and pulled the canoe at top speed over the floating bog and spongy ground. Our legs hurt after that effort!

As time goes on Michael and Erika entertain

themselves more and more. Yet our major concern is still keeping them occupied. Michael, ever the baseball player, turned every campsite into "a field of dreams." We carried a tennis ball for each child plus we accumulated a selection of beaver sticks for bats. And you thought campsites were chosen for view, tent sites, kitchen, and swimming? After a day on the water, one of us cooked while the

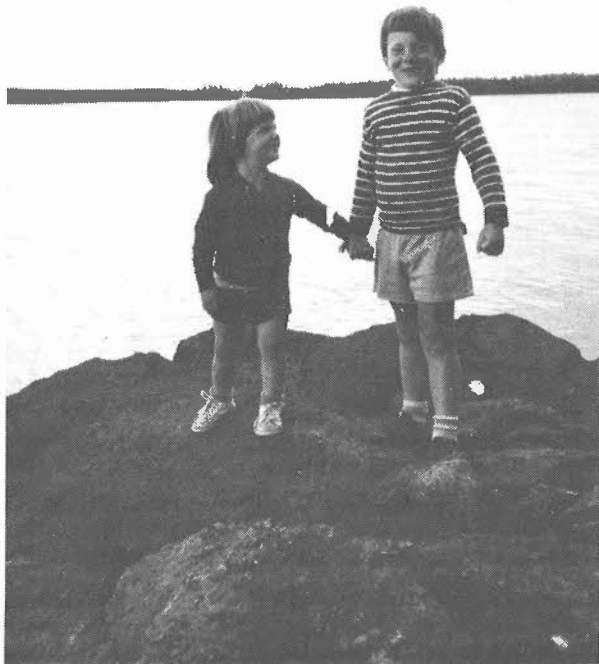


The Surge

other played baseball. Erika frequently played, helped around the kitchen, or climbed on the rocks.

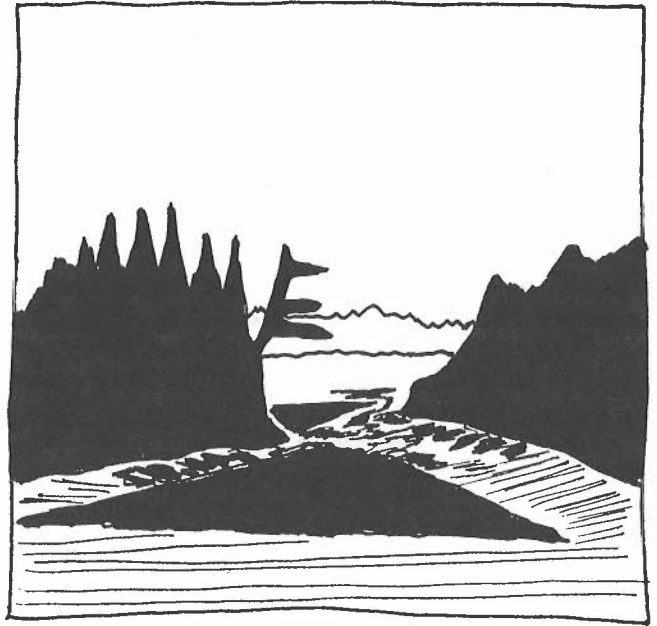
I tended to find entertainment for Michael and Erika in our surroundings. The "stick house" proved to be popular. Together, we created miniature teepees, lean-toes, and sod lodges from moss, sticks, rocks, and bark. The sequential construction process fit Michael's and Erika's needs. Each brought materials for the frame, the roof, the vestibule, and the trail to the site. No matter who brought what, everything fit. Sometimes I got them started on a stick house while Kit and I took one trip over a portage.

Any day on the trip is one of short moves and frequent stops. We rise with the children. More than likely someone did not sleep through the night. No more do we make the early start. In the tent, there is some play and reading of books. Then I start to roll the pads and bags and get somebody dressed. I dress and get out as soon as I can. Outside I unload the vestibule and begin to stuff the two packs. Kit hands and stacks the stuff in the front and I pack away. Erika comes out to help. Michael is still in the tent in a bit of a fuss. Maybe this year he will come out eager to go. The children play about as Kit and I get the tent down. I pack the tent while Kit gets the early morning cold cereal out for Erika and Michael. We both move gear to the water and begin to load. At last, after a campsite check (don't



underestimate the importance of such a precaution), we load, board, and paddle off. Our goal is to make some miles before breakfast.

For a few moments, there is a bit of quiet in the canoe, and then the entertainment begins. I have my eye on a headland down the lake, or a cluster of islands some miles



away, as a breakfast site. The children think we are going to stop immediately. Soon we hit a suitable compromise and cook a quick breakfast. If it is sunny we are in for a swim. We try to make a game of collecting squaw wood and birch bark. Exploring take places during dishes, pots, and packing. Then we head out again.

Kit and I try to do a good number of miles before lunch. If we are lucky, there will be a couple of portages or rapids, so Erika and Michael can get out and run about. If the paddle is long, we try for a swimming stop. Finally, we reach the zone of lunch. We land and the children hit the spot like marines taking a beachhead. They run and tear about. They skip and jump. They collect sticks, rocks, pine cones, and other treasures. One of us watches while the other gets out the lunch. We all swim. More running and screaming, and of course Michael insists that Kit read all of his baseball cards to him.

Back on the water, Erika listens to a tape. Michael plays the Game Boy. Kit and Jon dig in at the paddle as the wind rises and whips up whitecaps. Michael tires of his machine and asks for a baseball story. Jon relates a new Mac and Joe adventure, as he reads his fluttering map and tries to gun the canoe through the strong wind to a narrows somewhere down the lake. Erika is shifting her seat in the bow and wants to come back with Michael. Kit and Jon dig in at the paddle.

It is a golden day with bright sun on a wind-tossed lake. Should we keep going? The shoreline has not looked promising for hours. We have to keep moving as there is no campable ground in sight.

More songs, more stories, and Kit passes out snacks. Then we sight the glimmer of a ledge down the lake. We paddle hard into the wind to make that point. The closer we get the more promising it looks. Yet looks can deceive. It could be a cliff, a rock swamp, or just not good enough. We get closer and finally Michael and I hop out — he hops, I fall or lunge out, with my back and legs stiff from the paddling to scout the ground. Yes. It is a good spot and it is time to make camp.



Both Michael and Erika are ashore and well up from the water. Kit and I unload, pull the canoe up and tie it to a tree or rock. Michael wants someone to play with him, and so does Erika. But I ask the age-old canoeist's question "What is the first thing you do when you get to a campsite?" The answer "Pitch your tent!"

The tent goes up, the sleeping gear goes in. Then start the rounds of swimming, baseball, books, wood cutting, cooking, cleaning, and packing up. Kit usually goes into the tent first with the children while I close up everything for the morrow's start.

I take a soothing bath. I do a sketch and go into the tent to help with the bedtime routine. Michael has his Phillies yearbook and his behavior chart, and Erika has her books. Kit sleeps near Michael to tend to his needs during the night. I sleep next to Erika to watch over her.

Just before I go to sleep, I check my map and make a note on where we are and where we are going. Not a bad day . . . we made 14 miles in a head wind.



*Parsseux Falls, Mattawa River*

Photo by Toni Harting

## TERMINOLOGY

*These are some of the ratings worked out by Seth Gibson and his crew of Keewaydin paddlers on a 1989 trip down the George River in northern Québec.*

### THE WATER

**EV** Eau vive: lively water (as differentiated from dead water). This indicates that there is a notable downstream flow of current, which, if left alone, will get you to your destination without paddling. It may take a while, but it's easy.

**FC** Fort courant: strong current. This is more than EV. It means that you will certainly get to your destination without paddling, maybe sooner. If a head wind blows your hat off, forget about paddling upstream to get it. The *courant* may, in fact, be very *fort*, and have standing waves of two feet or so. No rocks allowed, however.

**R I** Similar to EV and FC, only more so. Often with a few rocks added for a little excitement. No need to worry about running these, unless the river has dropped a foot since the river was rated, in which case you're probably in a rock garden, now.

**R II** These are now real rapids, probably with rocks, both large and small, and some standing waves. If the R II is quite long, in the wilderness, and in water colder than 50 F, it's often referred to as R III.

**R III** Be cautious. This means Charlie's really sweating it off to get Jeff through. Bonzo back-ferry time! Lotsa rocks, maybe some of those 3-4 ft standing waves (is there a rock under that one?). Planning ahead is certainly required; swimming frowned upon. These are the real things, and must be treated with respect.

**R IV** Rocky IV, a movie all the trippers have seen. Certainly not something you'd want to shoot with these little open canoes, right?

**R V** Recreation Vehicle, something we all wished for on Helen's Falls Portage.



### THE WIND

**W 0** Dead calm. Happens only on hot, sunny days, during long portages through muskeg.

**W I** A light zephyr blowing in your face, to keep you cool on warm days, and blow the bugs away. If it's a tail wind, it will allow the bugs to fly along with you, and munch on you at will.

**W II** A bit stronger wind, annoying as a head wind,

requiring extra effort, and defeating the benefits of cooling and mosquito control.

**W III** A real pain in the face; it can blow you upstream in an R III rapids, fling wave tops onto the bowman's lap, and generally slow you up. As a tail gale, a W III is almost more dangerous: a large wave coming from behind may flow



over the gunwale into the sternman's but, or even cause the canoe to broach. This often leads to total bailing.

**W IV** Forget it! Wave tops get blown into your face, canoes are blown over, and loose gear gets whipped away. And that's before you even try to launch the canoes.

### MISCELLANEOUS MOTS

**Wallywallywack** Keewaydin Wilderness term for Kangiqsualujjuaq.

**Kangiqsualujjuaq** Inuit name for Port Nouveau.

**Port Nouveau** Québécois name for George River

**George River** A small Inuit settlement at the mouth of the George River on Ungava Bay. Population about 390.

**Coff Pottee** The first thing that is put on the stove in the morning, similar to the tot of pea which appears in the afternoons.

**Tot of pea #10** can hung over the fire on cold afternoons (or even hot ones), the contents of which can be used to make a number of different hot drinks.

**Revolta** Ryvita Crackers. When covered with PB&J, they can be used for lunch. After the PB&J is licked off, they can then be reused for almost anything, preferably not another lunch.

**PB&J** Peanut Butter and Jelly, or for that matter, anything we can spread on our bread or crackers for lunch. They help tremendously with the Revolta.

**ATM** Appalachian Trail Mix. Brown rice, lentils, and barley. This really sticks to your ribs, your shirt, and the cooking pot.

**...eh?** A comprehensive expression used by Jeff to be sure we understood what he said was Canadian. For example: Watch out for the rock there, eh?

**Holy Jumpin'!!** This could mean a number of things, depending on the emphasis, circumstances, or person saying it. The expression is attributed to the early natives of St. Agathe des Monts and is very difficult to translate into American. Charlie says one loose translation might be: "My goodness, look at that R IV up ahead, eh?"

## UPPER WANAPITEI RIVER

Bryan Buttigieg

The Upper Wanapitei was billed as an easy two-day float — the perfect way to extend our May long weekend.

Located just north of Sudbury, the river is one of three running through roughly parallel valleys on the western edge of the Temagami wilderness. The put-in is alleged to be only one hour away from Sudbury, which it is if you start at the extreme end of the regional boundary and drive recklessly over the logging road that runs next to the river. We drove the route between the river and downtown Sudbury four times in two days and not once did we complete the drive in less than two hours.

The first of our four excursions up the logging road started in downtown Sudbury at 11:30 a.m. By the time we had made it to the road, engaged in some necessary road construction, and completed the first car shuttle, it was 3:00 p.m. — hardly the usual time to start paddling. Fortunately wind and sun were on our side and we had a very enjoyable late afternoon paddle through the first eight kilometres of grade I and II water.

The river is little used, and although the route was once maintained by MNR, there are few cleared campsites. Clearings by the logging road that runs along the east bank of the section we paddled provide the easiest if least scenic campsites. There are better potential sites on river right for those with more time to set up than we had allowed ourselves.



A pair of red suspenders hung along the river marked the first take-out. Properly attired, Richard was driven back to Sudbury to pick up his paddle and sleeping bag which he had left behind in his haste to make an early morning start.

The unscheduled drive proved it is not even necessary to prepare food for this trip: simply drive to Sudbury for dinner.

Having traded the Mohawk paddle he had used the first day for his double blade, Richard was in better shape to play in the first Grade III rapid on the route early the next morning. Pat and I carefully planned our route from the portage on river right. Our execution was miserable and we swam the entire drop.

Still feeling silly at not catching that last eddy, we decided to walk the road rather than try the next set. The water volume was lower here on account of a split in the river around an island formed from an old logjam. The route on the left is a series of ledges easily scouted from the road. That on the right starts after the first ledge and can only be scouted from eddies upstream. Both were run successfully by the rest of the group.

From here on the river is a series of flatwater stretches punctuated by more Grade I and II rapids, some long enough to allow for enjoyable playing. The flatwater sections allowed us lots of time to bask in the hot, clear, bug-free weather. Hills on river right marked the ridge separating the Wanapitei from the Vermilion River. A path has been cut by local climbers to one of the more daunting-looking rock faces. The view must be spectacular and should allow glimpses of the Sturgeon River to the east.

We saw no other paddlers and only one fishing camp. The river can only be paddled early in the year and then only after it has dropped below the level of the road. As there is usually little logging in the spring, the road is lightly travelled and does not really detract from the scenery — in fact it provided my best view of a red fox I had enjoyed in a while. The road veers away from the river once, in a section containing the only other Grade III rapid along the route. The portage is on the right and well used. Everyone successfully paddled around the large hole at the centre below the first ledge. I enjoyed that special view from the portage one only gets with an ABS canoe on one's shoulders.

Water levels were good, but close to being too low in some spots. There is a water-flow meter along the river. Ontario Hydro readings for the two days we were there were 39 and 38 cubic metres per second. The water was about one metre below the road at the lowest sections of the road, so the trip should be possible at somewhat higher levels.

To get to the river, take regional route 80 out of Sudbury to Capreol. Travel north of Capreol to the unsigned mining/logging road on the right. Take that one north as far as you can drive. The logging road is shown on the government of Ontario road map.

The Upper Wanapitei is truly part of the lazy person's Temagami, allowing easier access and no crowds. Combined with trips down the Vermilion and the Sturgeon, it is possible to spend from one to five days of very enjoyable paddling as long as you don't forget your paddle.



## THE HANG-UP

It is coon country, bear country, and mouse heaven. Dinner is over and an evening free from care lies before us. Well, not quite. There is the food pack to hang up. Actually it is an evening free from care because we have a method guaranteeing that animals will never be able to reach the food unless they cut the cords, and it involves a minimum of effort on the part of the camper. Of course, no doubt most of you who may read this will already know all these tricks, so this idea is directed to all newcomers to Wildwood Wisdoms or those of you who haven't thought of it.



We carry two ropes with us, each 50 feet long. Bernard ties a flat stone about the size of a hatchet head to one rope end and after about 3 to 10 tries, successfully throws the stone-weighted rope over limb of a selected tree and lowers the stone back to earth. We now have a rope hanging close to the tree trunk, over a limb about 20 feet up.

Bernard unties the stone and ties one end of this first rope to the pack on the ground.

We then repeat the stone throwing using the second rope and another appropriate tree, but not throwing so high this time. (Between the two trees there is either a little ravine or simply open ground. The trees may be 12 to 20 feet apart.)

When the second rope is free of the stone, one end of it is tied to the pack also. Then, with Bernard hoisting the pack in the air and perhaps aiding it with a paddle, I haul on rope No. 1 until the pack is about 1/3 to 1/2 of the way up in the air. I tie my rope securely to tree No. 1. Bernard then pulls on rope No. 2. This move hauls the pack out into space and well away from tree No. 1 and, of course, it is now even a little higher off the ground. He secures his rope (No. 2) to tree No. 2 and the job is done.

There are times, of course, when there may be a good clearing but poor trees, i.e. they are too dense for the rope throwing stunt. That is when yours truly swarms aloft, rope in teeth, to do the honors. In fact, if one doesn't mind a little pine gum and a reputation afterwards of having simian aptitudes, it is sometimes quicker to do it this way, and good exercise besides.

Well, that's all there is to it. How about a little contest sometimes? Found any good stones lately?

Claire Muller

## REVIEWS

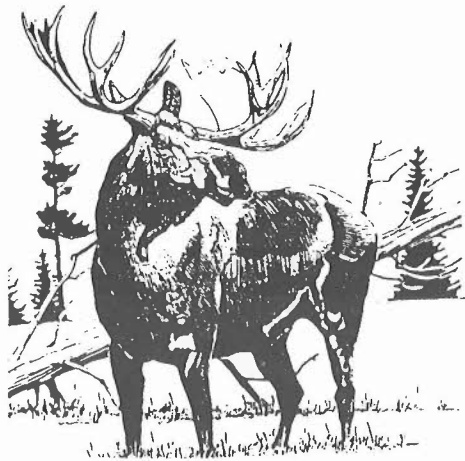
**MOOSE COUNTRY, Saga of the Woodland Moose and ALGONQUIN SEASONS, A Natural History of Algonquin Park**, both books by Michael Runtz, published by Stoddart, Toronto, in 1991 and 1992 respectively, each 110 pages, \$39.95.

Reviewed by Toni Harting.

This must be the combination every publisher dreams of: subject matter that assures a large audience, an author who can write well and with insight about a subject he/she is truly familiar with, and a photographer who delivers excellent pictures.

In the case of these two books, which were researched, written, and photographed by Runtz, the publisher and we, the readers has indeed hit the jackpot. Runtz, who works in Algonquin Park as a naturalist, gives a great amount of pictorial information supported by authoritative text on subjects very dear to every wilderness canoeist's heart. *Moose Country* is possibly the best book ever produced anywhere for the general public, illustrated with many beautiful, often unique photographs, on the King of the North Woods. And *Algonquin Seasons* presents a delightful display of photos and supporting information on many of the enchanting aspects of one of Canada's best-loved nature parks. It records a year in the life of the park which turns 100 years-old in January 1993.

The production quality of both hardcover books is very high, making it a real delight to study them and enjoy the beautiful photographs. They will surely bring back happy memories of adventures in a park where most of us have spent many unforgettable moments.



**BARRENLAND BEAUTIES, Showy Plants of the Arctic Coast** by Page Burt, published by Outcrop Ltd., The Northern Publishers, Yellowknife, NWT, 1991, 246 pages \$21.00. Reviewed by Ria Harting.

While leafing through this softcover book and looking at the more than 200 color photographs, I wondered if I would take it along on a trip up north; it weighs about as much as *A Field Guide to Wildflowers* by Peterson and McKenny. Of course, the latter book does not contain pho-

tographs and does not specialize in flowers growing in the Arctic, which *Barrenlands Beauties* does to its great merit. Besides the information on Arctic plants, the book also contains a chapter called "Botanizing in the Arctic Coast Communities," which gives interesting background facts. The photographs are informative but of varying quality, ranging from excellent to mediocre. Certain parts of the text are also given in Inuinaktun (printed in our alphabet), the dialect spoken in most of the central Arctic, so the book tells me.

I decided that this book would indeed be a great companion on wind-bound days. It is also a good investment for those not willing to carry books on a trip but would like later on to identify their pictures of flowers and grasses taken while canoeing the Arctic coast. The identification keys used in the book are similar to those in other guides. The publisher could have been a bit more careful in producing the book. For instance, the measure scale at the back of the book is printed too low on the page, throwing off its ruler.

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**THE FRENCH AND PICKEREL RIVERS, THEIR HISTORY AND THEIR PEOPLE**, researched, written, and published (1992) by William Campbell, RR1, Britt, Ontario, Canada P0G 1A0; 328 pages, hardcover \$35.00, softcover \$29.00.

Reviewed by Toni Harting.

If ever there was a true labor of love in the publishing world, this book is it. Over a period of six years, Bill Campbell has collected on his own initiative a vast amount of historical information on the development of the French and Pickerel rivers area that has played such an important role in the creation of modern Canada. He then put much of what he discovered in this astounding book that he published himself with all the risks, hard work, but also deep satisfaction that accompany such an ambitious project. He persisted in his dream against many odds and a failing health, and the result is a fascinating book that makes the area come very much alive, especially the people who have lived there before as well as the ones now inhabiting the region surrounding the two rivers.

Hundreds of photographs, most of them old black-and-white family treasures but also several recent color photos, and a number of maps enliven the text tremendously. It is as if the reader actually listens to the voices of old, the pioneers talking to us in their own language. There may be a few shortcomings — a more accurate copy editing would have been a welcome improvement, for instance — but this book is nevertheless a true gem and will surely be devoured by all those interested in local pioneer history. It is for sale in numerous stores, marinas, lodges, etc. in the area, but direct sale is also possible by contacting the author/publisher at the above address. (I have a few softcover copies available in Toronto for pick-up sale; contact Toni Harting, (416) 964-2495.)



**HOW TO SHIT IN THE WOODS; An Environmentally Sound Approach to a Lost Art**, by Kathleen Meyer, published by Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, California, 1989, 77 pages, \$7.95.

Reviewed by Toni Harting.

It may make some people squirm in discomfort, but the age of openness in discussions of "bodily functions" has arrived in the form of this exceptional little book. Meyer has the courage to call a shit a shit when that is what she needs to talk about, and she makes that possible by displaying a marvellous combination of insight, intellect, and humor. With this slim softcover volume she has produced one of the most important environmental books to see the light in many years, presenting for the first time a unique, no-holds-barred collection of tips, ideas, and information on the correct way to "go to the bathroom" in the wild (and not so wild) country,

so as not to have ourselves and/or nature suffer badly in the process.

Ironically, this most natural of subjects has been taboo for far too long in many "polite" circles, and we should be very grateful that someone (a woman, of course!) has now written a sort of guide book to help us get out of the mess. I don't agree with everything Meyer writes — for instance, burning toilet paper is in my opinion the best way to get rid of it — but that is just some minor twiddling and in fact beside the point. This book is an absolute must, required reading for anybody with the remotest interest in keeping nature unpolluted. Read it, study it, follow the tips provided; it will make you a much cleaner and happier camper, even if some of the techniques may require considerable dedication and practice. Maybe somebody should organize a workshop to teach people How to Shit in the Woods.

## SPECIAL PLACES

There is a place dear to very canoeist's heart — the restaurant. The ones I have in mind are the classic ones, the important ones that all trippers in an area frequent either before, after, or at both ends of a trip.

I can think of three that I'm particularly fond of, despite their geographic locations, or perhaps because of their locations. The first one is the Wild Cat Cafe in Yellowknife, NWT. The log building, low-raftered ceiling, the bunk house tables, and the staff all encourage good talk, an extra cup of coffee, and of course that incredible breakfast that you remember for five days later on the river and look forward to returning to. It is there that you meet all your fellow trippers, often from your home town.

The second restaurant but still a classic is TOGO's in Inuvik, NWT. There, after travelling one of half a dozen rivers of the northwest you can get a 'burger — caribou burgers are cheapest, muskox next, most expensive are hamburgers. The ambiance is definitely northern with its jukebox at every table and locals wandering in and out, as much to chat as to eat, but colorful all the same.

The last special restaurant that I came across and the one that led me to writing this article was discovered this summer: The Four Aces Restaurant and Tavern in Mattice in Northern Ontario. My husband and I finally, after years of promising ourselves, did the middle section of the Missinaibi River and ended our trip in Mattice. We had arranged a car transfer to be done by Ross Sawyer in Chapleau and he had left the car in the "restaurant where you pull out of the river — you won't miss it, everyone goes there." And to our delight and surprise, not only was the lunch delicious, but the guest book they gave canoeists to read and sign was wonderful. In it we met up with big and small names of our canoeing world.

And no one had told us of any of these hidden canoeing treasures that make the beginning and end of a trip so wonderful. I'm sure there are other special places out there waiting for us.

Christine Yip

## AUGUST

*There were clouds folding sheets in the skies up above  
And branches entwining in the trees  
Waves caressed rocks, murmuring love  
Your dark hair tempted the breeze  
There was a long afternoon by Seven Mile Lake  
Rocks growing warm in the light  
Carp rolled in the lotus out past the point  
The glare, on the water, too bright  
We found a long channel at  
the end of the bay  
Left the canoe pushed into  
the reeds  
Climbed the hill, hands  
furling bushes  
Our feet carelessly  
scattering seeds  
The butterflies danced in  
the soft honey light  
The flowers pressed down  
to the ground  
The planet tumbled  
willingly, slow as the day  
Around  
Around  
Around*



(anonymous)

## WCA TRIPS

### 3-4 October LONG LAKE AREA

Dale Miner, (416) 693-2067, book early.

Leisurely flatwater trip in scenic country. Two short portages take us away from the cottagers. Good campsites and a route through the fall colors. Limit four canoes.

### 3-4 October ALGONQUIN PARK, SOLO

John Winters, (705) 382-2057, book before 27 September.

We will be doing an easy weekend trip in the northwest corner of Algonquin Park. A leisurely pace will permit us to enjoy the scenery. Those looking for a gruelling workout will be sadly disappointed. Solo paddlers only please. Limit of six canoes; novices welcome.

### 4 October ELORA GORGE

Dave Sharp, (519) 621-5591, book before 27 September.

The Gorge is always a good spot to spend a day practising your whitewater skills. Often September rains will bring the water levels up sufficiently to make this a good workout for novice to intermediate paddlers. Limit six canoes.

### 10-12 October PETAWAWA RIVER

Diane and Paul Hamilton, (416) 877-8778, book before 2 October.

From lakes Traverse to McManus we will enjoy Thanksgiving weekend amid the wonderful scenery of the Petawawa valley. Experienced cold weather trippers will enjoy the challenge. Limit four canoes.

### 17-18 October BEAUSOLEIL ISLAND

Herb Pohl, (416) 637-7632, book before 12 October.

This flatwater trip involves open water on Georgian Bay and the exploration in the Beausoleil Island area. A base camp will be established at Oake Campground. Canoeists should be prepared for cold weather and strong winds. Limit six canoes.

### 17-18 October GANARASKA TRAIL HIKE

Rob Butler, (416) 487-2282, book before 9 October.

Three fit backpackers are invited for 45 rugged kilometres on the Ganaraska Trail from Victoria Bridge on the Black River to Lutterworth Lake Landing, west of Gull Lake. Car ferry arranged.

### 17 October GRAND RIVER

Doug Ashton, (519) 654-0336, book before 9 October.

A gentle flatwater trip suitable for novices. The trip will be from Cambridge to Paris through farm country. Hope for sunshine but prepare for inclement weather. Limit six canoes.

### 18 October ELORA GORGE

Anne-Marie Forsythe & Stuart Gillespie, (416) 881-5145, book before 14 October.

The water level in The Gorge can rise in the fall and this makes an exiting whitewater trip. The cold water makes this a trip for experienced paddlers in properly outfitted boats.

Wet or dry suit and helmets required. Trip subject to water level. Limit six boats.

### 24-25 October HIKING IN ALGONQUIN

Doreen Vela, (416) 463-9973, book before 16 October.

A mystery hike! At the time of writing route and location of camp(s) are still to be confirmed. A chance to wind down from the canoeing season and exercise your legs. Hikers need cold weather clothing and camping gear.



### 24-25 October SOUTH GEORGIAN BAY AREA

Hugh Valliant, (416) 669-3464, book before 5 October.

The annual trip! This could be your last chance to canoe this season. A flatwater paddle suitable for novices. The exact route will be decided later. As you may notice from the previous listings, the weather could be cold and paddlers should prepare for this. Limit four canoes.

### 24 October BURNT RIVER

Bill Ness, (416) 321-3005, book before 16 October.

The Burnt is a quiet river with a few mild riffles and some easy portages. The scenery is excellent and this is a great trip for family canoeing. Travel is from Kinmount to the village of Burnt River. Limit six canoes.

### 1 November GRAND RIVER

Steve Lukasko, (416) 276-8285, book before 24 October.

A flatwater trip from Cambridge to Paris on the Grand. November chills encourage brisk paddling or warm clothing or both. Limit five canoes.

### 22 November NORTH PICKERING HIKING TRAIL

Bill Ness, (416) 321-3005, book before 14 November.

An easy day hike in the wooded West Duffin valley, weather permitting.

## PARTNERS WANTED

Coppermine River in summer 1993? Call Peter Verbeek, (416) 757-3814.

## PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

*This PRODUCTS AND SERVICES section is available, free of charge and on a first-come, first-served basis, to members as well as non-members for their announcements regarding items for sale, special products, discounts, services, courses, etc. Contact the editor if more information is required.*

**DISCOUNTS ON TRIPPING SUPPLIES** WCA members who present a membership card will receive a 10 percent discount on many non-sale times at:

ABC Sports, 552 Yonge Street, Toronto,

Algonquin Outfitters, RR#1, Oxtongue Lake, Dwight, Ontario,

Rockwood Outfitters, 669 Speedvale Ave. West, Guelph, Ontario,

Suntrail Outfitters, 100 Spence Str. (Hwy 70), Hepworth, Ontario.

Members should check at each store to find out what items are discounted.

**THELON/KAZAN** For experienced paddlers interested in canoeing the Thelon or Kazan rivers in the NWT, we offer canoe and equipment rentals and logistics from Kasba Lake, and easy access from Winnipeg or Minneapolis to the edge of the tundra. This is a new and very cost-effective access for all rivers of the central Barrens. We also offer escorted expeditions annually down these rivers, and to the Thelon Game Sanctuary for wildlife photography. Contact 'Tundra Tom' at Great Canadian Ecoventures, P.O. Box 9-E, New Denver, BC, V0G 1S0, phone (604) 358-7727, fax (604) 358-7262.

**CANADA'S CANOE ADVENTURES** Join our canoe and kayak trips that take place in all ten provinces and in the northern territories. Discover gentle holidays for novices or remote adventures for experienced paddlers. Proceeds are donated to the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association. Contact us for your free color catalogue: Canada's Canoe Adventures, 1029 Hyde Park Road, Suite 5a, Hyde Park, Ont., N0M 1Z0; tel. (519) 641-1261; fax (519) 473-2109.

**CANADIAN RECREATIONAL CANOEING ASSOCIATION** Established in 1971 to promote heritage and ethics, to establish guidelines, and to distribute information regarding canoeing and kayaking in Canada, the CRCA has valuable materials of interest to all recreational paddlers. Testimonials from adventurous paddlers, resources for canoe route clean-up projects, route suggestions, books/maps/guides/videos/prints and more are all available through the association. Contact us for your free product/service catalogue which outlines one of the most comprehensive collections of padding materials available anywhere: CRCA, 1029 Hyde Park Road, Suite 5a, Hyde Park, Ont., N0M 1Z0; tel. & fax (519) 473-2109.

**BIRDER EXTRAORDINAIRE** At last a book which describes in fascinating detail the life and legacy of one of

our most famous birders, James L. Baillie (1904-1970). Meticulously researched and written by Lise Anglin in a style both compelling and informative, *Birder Extraordinaire* takes us through the entire lifetime of this dedicated birder who has become a household name for so many of us. Order this book now for \$10.00 plus \$2.60 postage and handling and save \$2.00 off the regular price. For information contact: Toronto Ornithological Club, c/o Jim Griffith, 560 Blythwood Road, Toronto, M4N 1B5.

**FRENCH RIVER PROVINCIAL PARK MAP** is now available. This 1:50,000-scale full-color map, recently produced by the Ministry of Natural Resources, is an indispensable guide to canoeists and boaters who want to visit any part of the French River system, from Lake Nipissing to Georgian Bay, and provides much useful information such as campsites, portages, and access points. Sales of the map, which costs \$10.00 plus postage and handling, are primarily made through The Friends of the French River Heritage Park, P.O. Box 142, Copper Cliff, Ontario P0M 1N0. (I have a number of maps available in Toronto for direct sale at \$10.00; Toni Harting, (416) 964-2495.)

**1993 CANOEING CALENDARS** are again available from the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association. The Canadian Heritage Rivers calendar costs \$9.95 and presents a number of fine color photographs of several heritage rivers in Canada. The Canoe cartoon calendar made by Paul Mason gives you thirteen of the zaniest canoe/kayak cartoons ever and costs \$6.95. For more information on how to order these unique calendars, contact the CRCA, 1029 Hyde Park Rd., Suite 5, Hyde Park, Ontario, N0M 1Z0, phone (519) 473-2109.

**VIDEODISK MAPPING** From the Canada Map Office in Ottawa, a must item for the paddler who has everything: a set of topo maps for the entire country on double-sided video disk; a bargain at \$1,200.00.

**CANOE TOONS**  
PAUL MASON



# Where it is ...



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## Wilderness Canoe Association

## membership application

I enclose a cheque for \$25 (single) or \$35 (family) for membership in the *Wilderness Canoe Association*. I understand that this gives me/us the opportunity to participate in WCA trips and activities, and entitles me/us to receive *Nastawgan* and to vote at meetings of the Association. I also understand that WCA trips may have an element of danger and that the ultimate responsibility for the member's safety is his/her own.

**PRINT CLEARLY!**      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Prov. \_\_\_\_\_

New member      Member # if renewal: \_\_\_\_\_

Single       Family

Phone Number(s):

( ) \_\_\_\_\_ (h)

( ) \_\_\_\_\_ (w)

\* This membership is valid for one year.      Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_      Ext. \_\_\_\_\_

\* Send completed form and cheque, payable to the WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION, to the membership secretary at the WCA postal address.