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MISSINAIBI TRAGEDY

Jim Morris

We had been planning this trip down the lower part of the Missinaibi River (from Mattice to Moose River Crossing) in northern Ontario for about six months. After our initial trip on the Coppermine River in 1989 and a second major trip around the North Shore of Lake Superior in 1991, we were feeling pretty confident about our ability to put things together. However, on Friday, 18 June 1993, we were still up until 2 a.m. at Doug's place doing last-minute packing of food barrels and tents.

It was already 6 a.m. when we (Doug Pryke, Paul King, Peter Carruthers, Dave Snell, Jim Morris) left Orangeville and drove to Cochrane in about 12 hours where we stayed for the night. The next day, a few final banking and last-minute shopping stops as well as the Cochrane/Mattice car shuttle took several hours and we finally arrived in Mattice at about 11:15 a.m.

We put in at the public launch in Mattice Park, keen to start on the river after the long drive. The water level seemed high; all the rocks at the bottom of the ramp were under water. After checking the equipment, securing painters, and tethering-in our packs, Doug led us in our Indian prayer for Patience, Alertness, Courage, and Endurance and gave a tobacco offering to the spirits of the Missinaibi. Little did we know how much that blessing would be required.

This prayer was a gift to us from Minor Mustain from the Sioux Nation prior to the start of our first trip on the Coppermine. It begins every morning with a pause in time in order to stop the hurry of breaking camp and to slow down to allow heightening the awareness of the magic and wonders of the wilderness in which we are about to travel. It gives time to contemplate the significance of even the smallest

flower, the buzz of the mosquito, the flight of a butterfly, the frantic to-and-fro of the ant colony, the shape of a cloud; time to listen to the ripples and gurgles of the water which will be our constant companion of the day and whose every mood we must listen to and feel; time to absorb all the lessons and wonders of nature around us:

Wakan Tanka, Tunkasila, Maka Unci, Tatuyetopa:
Great Mystery, Grandfathers, Mother Earth, Four Directions:
We pray for our family (the two legs, the flying beings, the swimming beings, the tree plant beings, the stone beings, and the creeping and crawling beings) and for our loved ones at home;
We pray for Patience, Alertness, Courage, and Endurance in all aspects of our lives.

River Spirit:

We pray to be with you in a good way,
and ask you to show us your ways.

Mitakuye Oyasin.

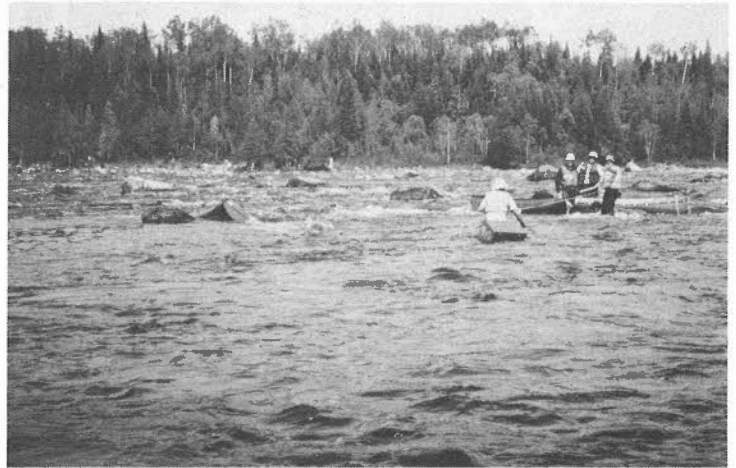
All my relatives, we are all related.

The weather was sunny and warm, mid seventies, sky clear, all auguring a good start to our trip. The first rapids at Rock Island were soon encountered and we landed on the island to scout. The left channel was given only cursory inspection; it was very narrow, had fast current, and a couple of ledges, but it could have been lined. The main right channel looked much more promising. Large diagonal standing waves from the left shore met smaller ones coming from the right; both provided a clear tongue to the left of a largish hole at the bottom. Viewed from our slight elevation at the top of the island this channel looked easily runnable. Dave and I headed upstream, did a simple ferry to our agreed-on entry point, and started the run just slightly to the right of the diagonals.

The waves were much bigger than they looked from shore, about two feet high. When they met the opposite diagonals, things got interesting. There was only three feet between the waves, which were now over two feet high, with not enough space between them for our canoe to rise up and recover under the weight of my 240-pound bowman and all our gear. We started shipping water, and more water, tilting sharply to the left. I called out for a brace, but we were already two-thirds full. We avoided the hole and slowly swamped, getting up to our chests in water, but still in the boat. Thankfully the water was warm. The canoe hit something under water and the stern rose up sharply. We looked back upstream; Peter was behind us having no problems in the solo boat. However, Doug and Paul were also swamping but they managed to reach the eddy to bail out before coming to assist us.

Peter helped us do a canoe-over-canoe rescue and to pull in our packs on their tether line. The Duluth packs were full of water and therefore very heavy to pull into the boat. (Would drain holes in the bottom of the packs be of some help?) The wannigan was floating high and dry and still upright, so perhaps we don't need the neoprene seal around the lid. We all headed for shore, spread our clothes on the rocks, and enjoyed our lunch in the sunshine. Paul rubbed some salt in the wounds of our overconfidence by photo-

graphing the very wet dollar bills, credit cards, and other contents of our wallets also drying in the sun. We had not yet dropped the trappings of civilization before experiencing the harsh discipline of the bush.



The lessons to be learned from this incident are to get right down to water level before judging the height of waves, use spray covers, or get a lighter bowman. And waterproof everything important to your survival!

The next set of rapids are Black Feather; our trip notes from Hugh Valliant and Rolf Kraiker said that this set could be run on river left. Viewed from the canoes the right side was not easily runnable. The water volume was high and at least two offset ledges would have to be negotiated before running a boulder garden, then another ledge. We opted to run on the left without scouting. The water came right up to the trees and there was no shoreline, but it was obviously a typical Canadian Shield boulder garden. Dave and I started down the left shore, back-paddling and boulder-dodging very slowly and carefully. Everything was going well until Paul and Doug suddenly appeared on our right. That distraction was all we needed to miss seeing and avoiding one rock and we were wrapped.

Paul and Doug did the same thing but much worse. Dave's brand-new boat was half underwater, pinned on the rock, bow and stern full of water, and sinking further with each surge of the current. But it was still recoverable. Paul's boat was totally under water, both gunwales submerged but not broken, although the bottom was pushed up level with the thwarts. It looked like a total write-off.

We set up rescue lines to the shore with our painters and throw-ropes and floated our packs and gear on these ropes down to Peter in the eddy below. The river was over three feet deep and flowing fast. But by using the painters from the securely anchored canoes we were able to move safely from one boat to the other. The river bottom was rocky, a combination of small rounded stones and large rocks. It would have been very dangerous to try to move about without the safety lines. The combination of water pressure and the uneven bottom created a high risk of classic foot entrapment.

Peter floated a log up to us on the rescue line, and by using this as a lever with the other three people pulling evenly and strongly on the upstream gunwale of Dave's

canoe we were able, after considerable grunting and straining, to spill the water out and refloat the canoe. The miracles of ABS: the boat floated free with no serious damage to either the hull or the gunwales, discounting a few cosmetic wrinkles, which we tried to convince Dave that it made the canoe, and him, look tougher and more rugged.

Now to Paul's boat. By this time it was even deeper in the water, only the inside bottom showing white and strained above the river surface. It was now so totally submerged that only the part that pressed firmly against the rock was showing above water. Again we used the rescue lines to get upstream to it. After deciding which end was most likely to come free, i.e. had the most water flowing into it to help with leverage, we started to raise and pry up the other end. Slowly, by pulling and levering under the hull and supporting the whole length of the gunwales, we were able to raise it. Amazingly, neither gunwale was broken. When the boat eventually came free the bottom was pushed up tight to the centre thwart. It looked like an old boot the dog had played with. I climbed into the canoe and jumped up and down on the bottom. It started to take shape and look like a canoe again, so I jumped some more.

We all got to shore where Peter was feeding clouds of blackflies and we hauled our gear back into the boats. On the opposite shore at the foot of the rapids was a rocky shoreline which looked like a promising campsite. By this time we were exhausted; had had enough of whitewater for one day and wanted to regroup and survey the damage. The campsite on river right, at the end of a portage, was more than reasonable. Surprise, surprise, when Paul's boat was unloaded the action of the waves and the weight of his packs had restored his Mad River to its original shape.

A word about our equipment. All our canoes are outfitted with grab loops both bow and stern. One of the worst things in whitewater canoeing is trying to grab a wet, slippery hull, swamped two feet deep under cold water in fast-moving current, and finding that the clown whose boat you are trying to rescue has not had the good sense to fit it with something to get hold of. To our grab loops are tied fifty feet of good-quality five/sixteenths or three/eights polypropylene floating rope. The common 1/4-inch twisted rope is too thin to hold, will cut into your hands under the weight of a canoe, and will retain the shape of old knots. The fifty-foot painter is coiled neatly and stuffed under a bungee cord so that it can be pulled out easily and cleanly when needed.

Our packs are tethered to the centre thwart with a fifteen-to-twenty-foot cord secured to the thwart and passed through a strap or loop on each pack and tied off to the last pack. In the event of a dump all packs must be able to float free of the canoe in such a way that they don't interfere with a canoe-over-canoe rescue but are still within easy reach once the rescue is complete. Try this out in a practise session. Have a canoe-over-canoe rescue race, with one canoe having the packs tethered as described, and the other with the packs tied in by their individual straps. You'll see the difference. Our clothing is in waterproof canoe packs and our food in old olive barrels, three barrels to a standard Duluth canoe pack. Each barrel will hold enough food for eight people for

one full day. As a touch of luxury and comfort each boat is also fitted with closed-cell ensolite knee pads. Strap-on knee pads tend to restrict the circulation to feet and ankles, making them cold and stiff. I remember one paddling partner stepping out of the stern of our canoe onto a shallow sandy beach and falling flat on his face after three hours of paddling while wearing knee pads.

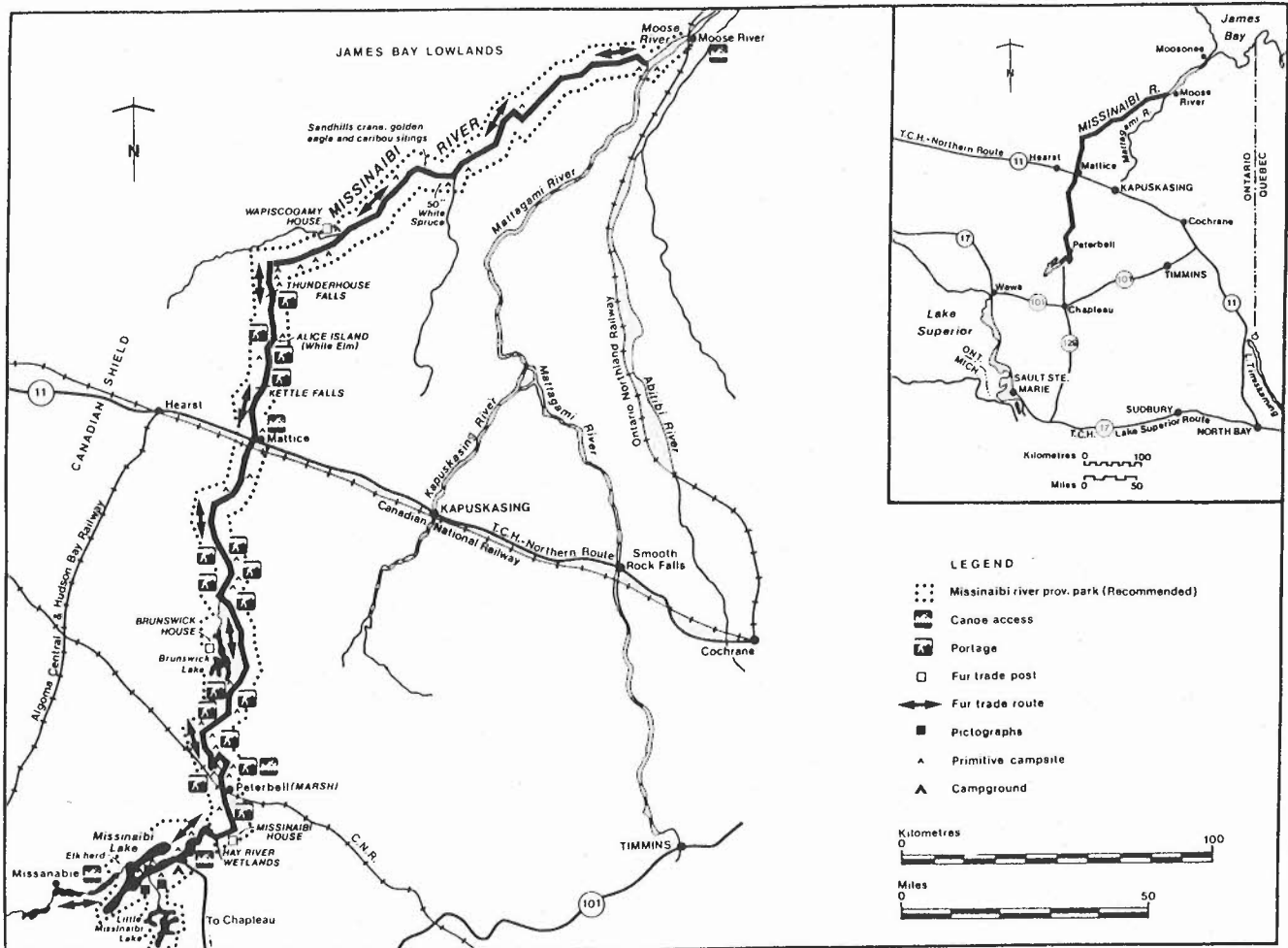
Day two got off to a slow start; we did not get on the water until 10:30 a.m. We ran a number of boulder fields, either scouting from the boats or stopping on shore for a quick look. After our first day's experiences we made sure of our proposed routes. At Beam Island the main channel looked runnable with heavy standing waves at the bottom and no need for any manoeuvring. But, because of our experience at Rock Island, we took the left channel to get a better look at the size of the waves. This trapped us in a smaller channel so we lifted over a small ledge. The main channel could have been run but we decided to play it safe.

We arrived at Kettle Falls about 12:30 p.m. and lunched at the end of an easy 200-yard portage. This walk can be shortened by putting in halfway down the trail and running the bottom section. The weather was clear and sunny with enough wind at the water's edge to keep the bugs manageable. We saw another group of people fishing on the opposite shore, but as we did not see any canoes, we assumed that they had driven in from town. The run past Skunk Island and Alice Island was uneventful and the rapids at Makatiamik were flooded out. We were getting the impression that the water level was much higher than in the trip reports of Hugh Valliant.

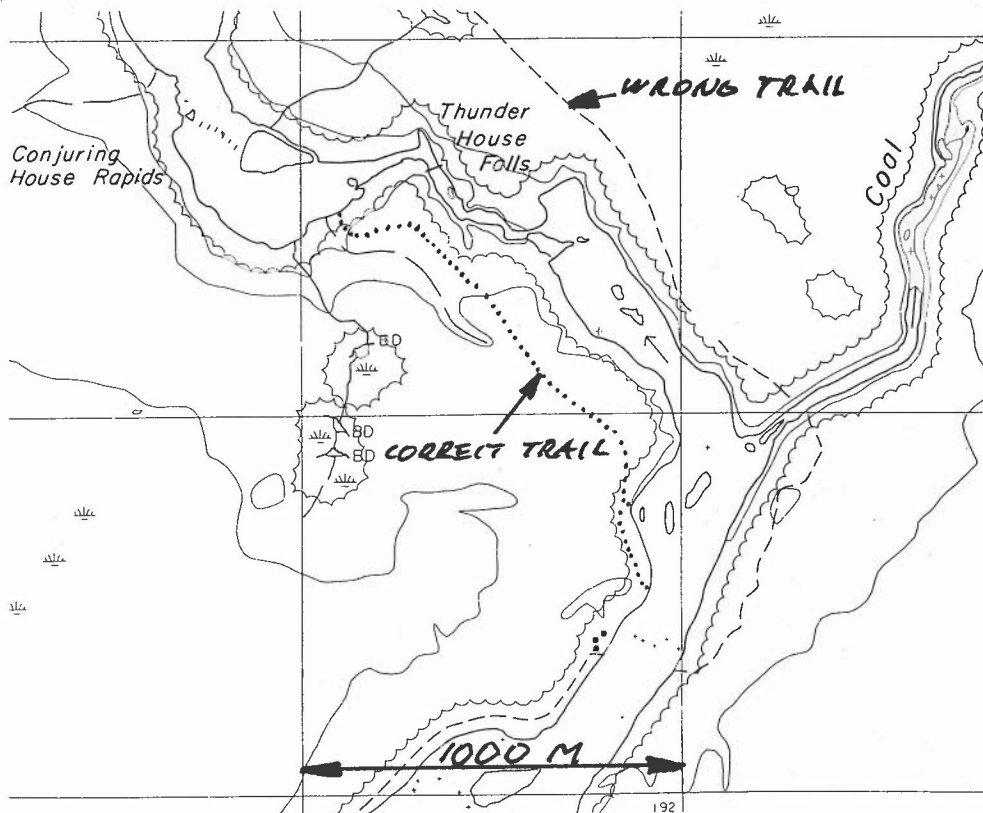
When checking out Bare Rock Point we found it bare of any suitable campsite. There was only the bald rock surface to set up tents on as the scrub came right to the water's edge and would have been a mosquito heaven. We pressed on to an unnamed rapid about a mile downstream. There we camped on the flat rocks, as the mossies were bad in the trees and there was a semi-permanent hunt or fishing camp in the clearing. I woke about 5:00 a.m. with severe diarrhea and nausea, which later proved to be beaver fever. Was this the notorious Missinaibi Misery? I could not keep breakfast down and felt weak and feverish. Fortunately no one else was bothered.

We left about 9:30 a.m., excited at the prospect of finally seeing the highlight of this part of the river: Thunderhouse Falls. We ran a couple of small boulder gardens and kept our eyes and ears open for the first signs of the portage around Thunderhouse. From our trip reports it was obvious this is one portage you don't want to miss.

Eagle-eyed Paul was the first one to see the portage sign on river left just above a small island. We could distinctly hear the thunder of the falls. We cautiously approached the take-out point, as the current was already speeding up, and made sure that each boat was secure at the relatively small landing area of the portage before the next canoe left the safety of an eddy above. Even at this point we could feel the power of the falls. In the side channel the water was smooth, fast and powerful. In the main channel, below the island, standing waves were already forming.



Map courtesy of Canadian Heritage Rivers System



Ontario Basic Map

We started the portage, knowing it was more than a mile long, everyone already retreating and withdrawing into himself, preparing for the physical ordeal ahead. Portaging is the most solitary of canoeing experiences. We were all hurting, struggling with sore necks, shoulders, knees, and thighs, fighting off the sweat dribbling into our eyes, struggling to keep the canoe balanced while wiping sweat and swatting blackflies and mosquitoes, trying desperately not to get mad at these pesky biting insects, who were taking advantage of your inability to strike back. Counting steps, reciting poetry, good or bad, singing songs, counting steps, where was I. Hoping someone else had given up first and dropped their load. Wanting to rest and drop the canoe, but knowing it will be harder to pick it up again. Stopping, hands on knees, to catch your breath — and the flies catch up, biting into your sweat. No wonder the voyageurs completed their backbreaking portages as quickly as possible. The flies were harder drivers than the gouvernails, the harshly demanding sternmen of the fur-trade canoes.

We took a quick look at the falls before returning for the second half of the load. They were awesome. The whole river dropped 20 feet through a gap only about 15 feet wide, formed a pool, and dropped again another 30 feet with the solitary spire of the Conjuring House Rock standing amazingly amongst this tumbling roaring torrent of water. The noise alone numbs your senses, is felt through your whole body, not only your ears.

I returned for the second load, really struggling now, weak and exhausted; the diarrhea of this morning was taking its toll. Carried the packs through to the end and met Doug at the campsite in the middle of the portage. He asked if I had seen a canoe dump on the other side. Apparently Dave had seen a canoe go over on the far side of the river as he was starting his portage, but that the paddlers were close to shore and were pulling the boat out as he passed into the trees.

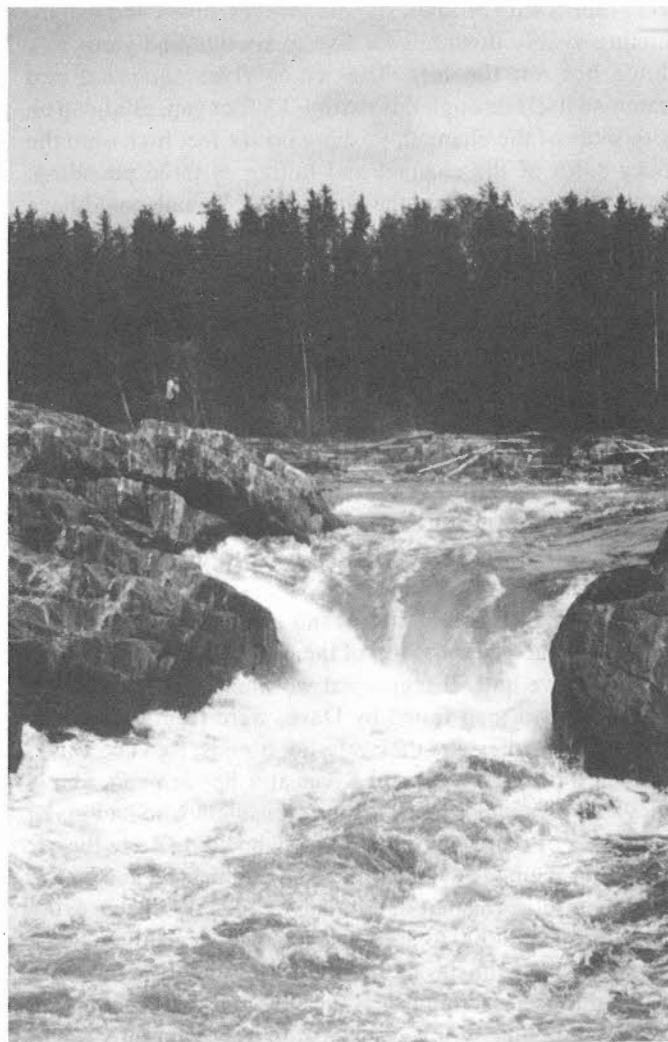
Doug and I went down to have another look at the falls and saw two guys on the other side, wearing lifejackets and carrying ropes, dripping wet and looking very distressed. We yelled back and forth to them but could not be heard over the tremendous noise of the river. We tried to sign to them asking if they were a party of two or four, suddenly fearful of the dump which Dave had told us about. We indicated they should go back upstream and cross over to us, while we went upstream checking the shore. We hiked to the top of the portage and started down checking the shoreline again as we went.

We saw the two guys struggling upstream against the current on the other side, almost losing their canoe while lining around a rock outcropping. It was going to take a long time for them to get upstream and across, so we had some food and rest while piecing together what little information we had. Doug and Paul had seen a paddle and then a lifejacket swirling in the small eddy at the bottom of the second drop. In a gully of a side channel, which looked like it had been cut out with a massive drag bucket, we had seen a cooler box and a shark-like shape which later turned out to be half of a Grumman canoe, nose-up because of its flotation. These things circled around in the eddy, being sucked under

in a vortex and floating up again. Anyone caught in that would not survive.

Peter said, "... they can't be drowned, I don't feel any sense of disaster." I had never thought of him being other than totally practical and logical; this acknowledgement of a sixth sense was new and interesting. We were all restless, constantly scanning the river, feeling we should be doing something but not knowing what to do in the absence of hard information. We were feeling guilty that someone might have drowned while we were mundanely having lunch. But we needed the rest and renewal of energy.

We established a search pattern. Dave would walk the portage trail to intercept the two men we had seen in case they had been able to make their way across; Paul and Peter would walk the river-left shore, checking the right shoreline, particularly the eddies on river right; Doug and I would ferry across the river and check the left shore while keeping Paul and Peter in sight. This was necessary because as the canyon was thirty to fifty feet deep with sheer walls, it was impossible to scout your own side of the river. We established whistle and hand signals, donned our lifejackets, and carried throw bags.



Even 400 yards downstream from the falls the current was fast and very strong, like a hydro generator's sluice box, and we needed a powerful front ferry to get across. Doug and I secured our canoe, then climbed up to the top of the ravine and beat our way through the heavy bush checking the shore opposite Peter and Paul. When we came to the cut where the broken remnant of the canoe and a cooler box were circulating we saw a dark object, scary at first, until we identified it as a duffel bag. It could only have been retrieved by a technical rope descent forty feet down a sheer rock wall into this maelstrom of water boiling in the eddy. But it was not worth the risk.

Everything in this closed box canyon circled around in the eddies and then, when they reached the main current coming from the falls, were pulled under water, then back into the eddy again until they were eventually flushed out and floated downstream. We continued climbing through the bush; I had taken a higher route hoping it would be easier as I was still feeling drained from the morning's illness and the portage, when Doug found a trail on the lower level. We came to the top of the falls without seeing any signs of bodies in the water.

The falls were even more horrendous from this point of view. Starting below the islands at the portage was a class 3 set of rapids with pillows, standing waves, holes, and ledges, running visibly downhill for five to six hundred yards to a sluice box on the left. The whole river squeezed and crammed itself through this narrow 15-foot gap, piling up on both sides of the channel, pushing up six feet high onto the rocky sides of the channel and falling as three pounding, hammering tongues into the pool below. No one could have survived that torrent. It was worse than the top of Niagara Falls in sheer volume, the water pouring over the ledge being ten times deeper because of the constriction in the channel.

I was totally wiped out and exhausted at this point. When I looked up after stopping for a drink, Doug was fifty yards in front, rounding the huge eddy pool. There was no way I could have caught up. I waved him on to try to meet the two guys further upstream in case they were still in difficulty. After twenty minutes or so, he turned back. Dave had signalled from the other side that he had found the two survivors. (As we made our way back to the canoe, Doug found signs of a possible Indian vision quest site facing the Conjuring Rock: a small firepit and spruce boughs in a cleft in the rock face near the top of the cliff.)

When we had all regrouped we found out that Pat and Ziggy, the two men found by Dave, were from Cleveland, Ohio, and that they and their missing friends, Ken and Dave, had heard of the Missinaibi River at a Sportsmen's Show. They had contacted the Canadian Consulate who had given them a list of outfitters in Cochrane who could drive the car shuttle for them. They had organized all the food and equipment themselves as part of their adventure. They were using a standard 1:250,000 topographical map instead of the guide put out by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The topo still shows the portage on river right although this hasn't been used or maintained for years. The trail was apparently established by Ontario Hydro when they were considering damming Thunderhouse Falls for a power-generating project.

When they were approaching Thunderhouse Falls on the right the first canoe with Pat and Ziggy had dumped close to shore and while they were rescuing themselves they had seen their two friends, Ken and Dave, dumping out in the main current. They had pulled their boat ashore, emptied it, then raced downstream to the falls where we had seen them for the first time.

Everyone was badly shaken, realizing that logically no one could have survived going down Thunderhouse Falls but not wanting emotionally to give up hope. A partial lifejacket floated by so Doug and I paddled downstream through the next set of rapids into a widened section of the river to retrieve the jacket and search the bays for any sign of survivors. We picked up the lifejacket, a horsecollar type, whose straps had been torn and ripped right out of the material, a final indication of the tremendous forces in action in the torrents above. We found the cooler box in one bay with the top ripped loose, all the contents gone, and a paddle swept up on a rock in the centre of the next rapids. All these pieces of flotsam were left on the shore where they were found in case this gave later searchers some clues as to the river's action.

When we returned to the group we decided to spend the night at the campsite in the centre of the portage. Ever since our Coppermine trip in '89 we had carried an E-Pirb (Emergency Position Indicator Radio Beacon) with us. Although we had not registered it with the local authorities, as we had on previous trips, we decided to set this one off about 4 p.m. From the stories and journal of Hugh Valliant's trip we expected some response in three to four hours. Hugh had met a group of American Boy Scouts, or Venturers, whose leader had been taken ill with severe abdominal cramps, suspected appendicitis. They had set off an E-Pirb and within two hours had a Search and Rescue bomber, a Ministry of Natural Resources Beaver floatplane, and an OPP helicopter circling overhead. Were they ever impressed with Canada.

Pat and Ziggy, the two surviving Americans, preferred to set up camp on their own at the top of the portage where their gear was. We had invited them to have supper with us but they had declined, needing some grieving time on their own. After it was obvious that we would not get help that night, and not even being certain that our E-Pirb was working, we discussed alternate plans. Pat and Ziggy could either try to get back upstream about 10 miles to where a road was shown on the topo map going back to Mattice, or continue downstream with us for five days to the nearest habitation, Moose River Crossing.

On Monday morning, with still no sign of assistance, they decided to go back to Mattice because they had to contact their families and get help searching for the bodies. Remembering the difficulties that I had seen them experience yesterday while going upstream I showed them how to tie a bridle on their canoe for lining upstream and gave them some tips on rounding points while lining. We discussed front ferries and the importance of crossing the river in slack water well below obstructions and bends. They stashed all excess gear to lighten their load. We agreed to keep the E-Pirb going and to contact the police as soon as we got into Cochrane.

Before they left they gave Peter a bottle of Crown Royal as thanks for our help. It was to have been a present for their friend Ken whose fortieth birthday would have been on the following Wednesday. With great grace, Peter accepted this without the usual demurs, stating that, "... I recognize your need to give us this gift; we will think seriously about it and find an appropriate time and place to drink it in memory of your lost friends." We exchanged names and addresses and departed with good wishes and mixed feelings. We didn't know if they would be capable of getting back upstream safely, but not wanting to abort our trip, nor to force them to continue downstream for another five days without being able to communicate with their friends families at home, we wished them the best of luck.

After a short paddle below Thunderhouse Falls we came to the top of Stone Rapids and started two back-breaking and mind-numbing portages. The first section is maybe one mile long, broken by a short paddle of about the same length. The long, slow climb back up to the long portage trail hardly compensates for the break in the carry. The second section of this portage is much longer than the first. Starting off with the long climb, then through a combination of numerous wet and boggy sections of deep, black, sucking mud which almost takes your boots off, and dry upland forest trail it finishes with a steep, slippery descent to the river.

There are a couple of campsites just off the trail looking over the Hell's Gate gorge below. This is a spectacular and awesome gorge that deserves much more time to explore and photograph. But as often happens, we didn't take the time to appreciate the beauty and wildness of the obstructions which cause the grunt and sweat of the portage. This portage marks the point where the Orkneymen from Hudson Bay coming up-river in their York boats met the canoes of the Coureur de Bois with their loads of furs from the interior. It took us two carries over the portage and Dave was struggling with his heavy seventeen-foot canoe and pack. I agreed to carry Doug's and Paul's packs from the campsite to the bottom of the portage while they went back to help Dave. I think I took the wrong end of the deal, the climb back up that steep hill nearly did me in.

At the end of this portage we decided to switch partners as the rapids from now on were simpler. Peter paddled with Dave and I took the solo canoe. The first corner to the left shortly after putting in deserves scouting if only to establish a line of entry. Because of the ninety-degree turn in the current, this entry line is much further to river left than casual inspection would indicate.

All this time we had kept the E-Pirb operating and at about 3:30 p.m. we heard the sound of a plane. Then a huge, black, four-engined Hercules bomber appeared overhead. It was a Canadian Search and Rescue plane out of Trenton in southern Ontario. We waved our lifejackets to try to attract its attention. Paul took out his signalling mirror and I dug in the wannigan for old flares which Roger Harris had given me years before because they were stale dated for his power boat. The first two flares were duds but Paul fired the last one successfully. We pulled into shore at a bend on the right and the Hercules circled again about 150 feet up and dropped two streamers into the river only 20 yards from us. Doug ran

upstream and I paddled hard to try to retrieve these, not realizing that they were only tattletales dropped from the plane to indicate wind direction. They sank as soon as they hit the water.



When the plane circled again it dropped a parachute with a radio attached. Peter spotted where it dropped (again only 30 yards from us but high up in the trees), and marked the direction with a paddle while I climbed up the hill to establish its location. Peter and Doug had the energy to climb up to the parachute which they found entangled hung up in a tree. We dug out the camp axe and folding saw and Paul took it up to them. I held the axe and rope above my head to try to indicate to the pilot that we were going to have to cut a tree down and that it would take some time, but don't know if this signal was seen or understood by them.

Peter, Doug, and Paul recovered the radio after cutting down the tree. They then established communication with the pilot telling him of the tragedy and of the two Americans that were heading back upstream to Mattice. These Search and Rescue guys were really great. Their voices were so cool, calm and professional, totally reassuring. They took all the information about the names, addresses, descriptions, and circumstances of the victims and two survivors and were considerate enough to suggest that they get in touch with our families just in case the story got picked up by the press causing our families to worry. They selected a campsite for us about a mile downstream on an island and told us to wait there for an OPP helicopter which would be there in two hours. Trust Search and Rescue in all they do, but don't trust them in selection of a campsite. It was a mossy dome, real mosquito heaven, low bushes on a wet and low island. We camped instead on the opposite shore up a steep bank.

Two hours later, right on schedule, an OPP helicopter dropped onto a tiny low shoreline and an officer dressed in army type fatigues came over to get more details of the two survivors and our estimate of how far upstream they would have travelled. By this time it was about 8:30 p.m.; we discovered later that the officers picked up Pat and Ziggy about 10:30 p.m. on the river road and took them into Mattice for the night. Next day they flew back to their campsite to start a search and investigate the area. When we were giving our statements to the police in Cochrane the next Saturday we were told that one body had been discovered on Thursday and that the other was found while we were with the police.

When we returned to Toronto we discovered why it had taken twenty-four hours to respond to our 'mayday' and what degree of effort and dedication the Canadian Search and Rescue had put into this operation. When the E-Pirb was activated we were at the bottom of the river gorge and the steep sides of the gorge had narrowed the radio beam. The first space satellite coming over the area picked up our rescue signal about two hours after it was set off. But because of the narrow beam, it could not be precisely located. About two hours later, another satellite passed over on a tangent giving them a very rough location. No planes were reported missing and we had neglected, for the first time, to advise the local authorities, OPP, RCMP, or Coast Guard that we were carrying a rescue beacon. Regardless, the next morning Search and Rescue sent up two high-altitude planes to overfly the area and triangulate our position. While this was being done the slower-flying Hercules was dispatched from CSRB Trenton. We hate to think of the total cost involved.

With the introduction of newer satellite technology and computer data bases, a more efficient system is now in place for river and wilderness travellers. A smaller radio beacon, a Personnel Locator Beacon, is available which has an individual registration number. When this device is activated it sends its registration number to the satellite together with the



'mayday' signal. Search and Rescue then first telephone the home number of the registrant to determine if their is cause for an emergency and to get the location of the travellers. They then advise the local authorities to start the rescue. The owners of this device should have left their travel itinerary with these same authorities. We have since discovered that this item is available from Superior Equipment in Thunder Bay, but may be too expensive for regular paddlers.

After this the rest of our trip was more routine. We had a day's travel to make up, so spent long hours at the paddle and had to skip the regular campsites. This caused one new experience for us. Being brought up in the no-trace school of wilderness travel we had never spent a night on spruce boughs. This day it became necessary, as at 6 p.m., after travelling 60 km, the only campsite we could find was a flat area off-shore, wet and muddy, with large rounded cobblestones sticking up through the mud. We covered these with spruce boughs cut from live trees, put our tents on top, and spent the most comfortable and fragrant night of the whole trip. This was also Paul's night to catch his first fish, a nice pickerel, with Dave's rod and line of course.

At the junction of the Missinaibi and Mattagami rivers is Portage Island, with a good campsite on the Missinaibi side of the island. On the upstream end there is a great spring of fresh, clear, cold water halfway up the bank.

Next day, 26 June, we completed the trip to Moose River Crossing and with the help of the railway staff and their flatcars portaged our gear to the station. Every portage should have a railway line and flatcars.

After supper that night we gathered on top of the viaduct over the centre of this great river and drank the bottle of Crown Royale with many and mixed thoughts. Sympathy for the families of the drowned strangers, a hope that somehow they would understand the needs and drives which cause some men and women to take risks, to extend themselves to prove their self-reliance in the wilderness. And that this drive makes them better people, more open to themselves and the wonders of nature. We also hoped that this tragedy would not force a licensing system and bureaucratic interference into the right of individuals to risk their own lives in a pursuit of their happiness and fulfilment.

The Ontario Provincial Police and the Canadian Forces Search and Rescue provided us with excellent follow-up to this incident. Search and Rescue sent us the information on

the PLB and a suggestion that all wilderness travellers read the Air Force Rescue Manual, "Down But Not Out," as a primer for their services. The OPP followed later with the coroner's finding of misadventure and recommendations that the portage signs be better maintained and kept clear of foliage (something that all river travellers can and should do) and that an up-to-date map showing Thunderhouse Falls and its portage should be erected at the put-in point in Mattice.

An article in the Toronto Sunday Star of 8 May 1994 puts much of the blame for this (and other) accident(s) on the fact that the topo maps used by the party were apparently inaccurate. But no experienced canoeist or wilderness traveller relies solely on topographical maps, no more than you would trust a city map to show all new traffic lights or one-way streets. Topo maps are still in circulation ten or more years from the date of the initial survey and the remoteness of many of the areas which they cover does not justify the cost of updating them.

The Missinaibi River Canoe Route river guide, however, published by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, is an excellent guide to the river, showing the portage locations and their lengths, detailing campsites and information on local landmarks. Even then it is not to be trusted completely. At the water levels we experienced many rapids were simply not there. Similarly at very low water levels boulder gardens and even ledges appear. The Star

article should be praising Government's Search and Rescue Teams, not decrying the existence of old maps containing mistakes when better information is available.

The article also mentions 35 drowning deaths in the Missinaibi River "corridor" (which amazingly includes, according to the article, not only the Moose River but also the far-away Agawa pictographs site on Lake Superior) during a 17-year period, including five at Thunderhouse Falls. But most of these were canoeing and boating accidents by local residents; only 11 of the drownings were of outsiders visiting Missinaibi Provincial Park.

The River God is an impersonal god. It carries on powerfully and implacably, giving a great deal of pleasure to those who understand it and respect its strength and power. It is unforgiving and often humbling to those who ignore this strength and come to it unprepared. People who know the river have made many mistakes and have learned from them. They are therefore slow to criticize others, and are often prepared to share their knowledge with less experienced trippers. Unfortunately Ken and Dave did not meet anyone who could help them understand the dangers of canoeing on the wild and often dangerous Missinaibi River.

But we must not restrict or license or 'bureaucratize' adventure. We must be able to make our own decisions as to acceptable risks and not blame Government when things go wrong. Wilderness canoeing can be a supremely satisfying but also very dangerous enterprise. If you know what you're doing, by all means paddle this and other northern rivers. But if you don't, stay away.



Photo: Toni Harting

Conjuring House Rock section (low water, August 1977)



ISSN 1828-1327

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,

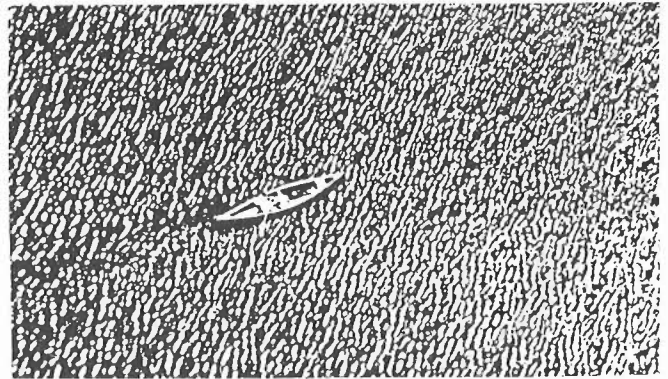
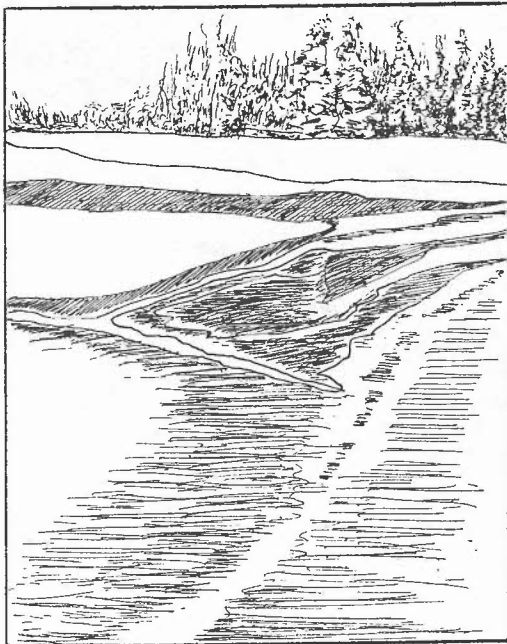
Nastawgan, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

EDITORIAL

You may notice that this issue of *Nastawgan* has only 24 pages instead of the usual 28 (and occasionally even 32 or 36), in spite of the uncommonly long Missinaibi article. It is the first time in my nine years as editor (this issue is number one of year ten) that we've had to scramble for material to publish and that worries me. The reason is of course that not enough material is deposited on my editor's desk to maintain the amount of stories and information we've grown accustomed to in our journal over the years.

The quality is of course still there; most of the time I'm very pleased with what I read after opening the envelopes. But we need more submissions, especially from those of you who are not among our regular contributors. We need to hear from the newcomers, the ones nobody has ever heard of but who may have some very interesting personal experiences to share. (This does not mean, of course, that I wouldn't welcome more material from the experienced hands in the business; keep sending the goodies, please!)

Is it maybe that the spirit of the WCA members is getting a bit complacent, that the existence of *Nastawgan* is being taken a bit too much for granted, counting on its appearance every three months in the mail? Well, that continuity can only be assured if you, the members and contributors, get hold of a pen (or, preferably, a computer keyboard) instead of a paddle and put those stories down that we all want to read. If you need help in putting something together, contact me, but first of all your input is needed to keep the WCA journal a dynamic and healthy publication.



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 (WordPerfect preferred, but any format is welcome) 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 1994	deadline date:	23 Oct. 1994
	Spring 1995		22 Jan. 1995

WCA MEMBERSHIP LISTS are available to any members who wish one for personal, non-commercial use. Send a five dollar bill (no cheque, please!) to Cash Belden at the WCA postal address (see WCA Contacts 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 your canoe or kayak roll in clean, warm water. Sessions start in January and continue to mid-March. Cost is approximately \$50.00 for a whole winter of paddling pleasure. Call Bill Ness at (416) 321-3005. Don't delay — space is limited.

CRCA-AGM On 22 October, the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association will be holding a Canoeing Dinner Presentation in conjunction with its 23rd Annual General Meeting at the Sam Jakes Inn in Merrickville, 45 minutes south of Ottawa. There will be guest speakers (Kirk Wipper, James Raffan, Max Finkelstein, Paul Mason), slide shows, photography contest results presentation, canoeing displays, Canada Heritage Rivers System information, and fund-raising auction. For more information, contact CRCA, 1029 Hyde Park Road, Suite 5, Hyde Park, ON, N0M 1Z0, phone (519) 473-2109.

SAVE THE LAVASE PORTAGES

The following is part of a cry for help received from Paul Chivers, a member of the RESTORE THE LINK COMMITTEE which is a group of concerned citizens that values the LaVase Portages near North Bay and the important role this route has played in Canada's past. The LaVase Portages are a series of carrying places and streams that bridge the great divide between Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing which was used for thousands of years by aboriginal people, and for more than 250 years by explorers, missionaries, and fur traders.

Portions of this historic portage are currently not accessible to the public because of private ownership. Recently, one of the key privately held land parcels which the LaVase Portage crosses has been listed for sale. It is the short-term objective of the Committee to acquire this land and to return it to active use.

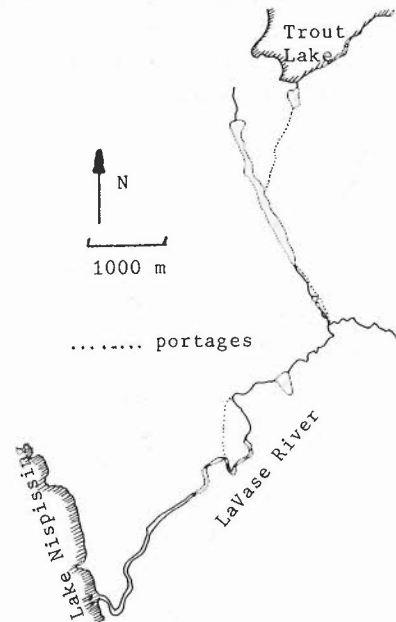
The Committee has established some strategic partners in its quest to protect this heritage site including an agreement with the North Bay — Mattawa Conservation Authority to own and manage this site once it is acquired. The North Bay — Mattawa Conservation Authority is applying to the Ontario Heritage Foundation on behalf of the Committee for a grant to acquire this 96-acre parcel and we intend to raise the local share of the cost of this important acquisition through community fund raising.

At this time we are seeking letters of support from sympathetic groups, agencies, and individuals to include with the application for an Ontario Heritage Foundation grant. We would greatly appreciate including a letter of support from the WCA as a whole, as well as from individual

members who want to help protect this historically so important piece of land. Please forward your letter of support to:

Restore The Link Committee
c/o Bill Becket, Secretary Manager
North Bay — Mattawa Conservation Authority
RR#5, Site 12, Comp. 5
233 Birchs Road
North Bay, Ontario, P1B 8Z4.

For more information please contact Paul Chivers at (705) 476-1977.



THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

Just looked at the map. Only five more kilometres to the first portage. Can't wait.

Made the mistake of telling the buddies. Getting some puzzled stares in return. The buddies say this wilderness canoeing thing has enough work in it for everyone now. You go looking for more. Wanting portages?

The buddies still don't understand.

The first portage into the wilderness should be long and hard. Better yet, it should meander up and down several ridges so that the wilderness traveller has no doubts about what is meant whenever the canoe and gear have to be carried. Best results come when all rational thought while on the portage trail revolves around sanity issues. "Getting too old for this." "This is pretty crazy." "Will this trail ever end?"

Have this mental picture of an ideal first portage. A poorly marked trail blocked by big trees from storm blow-down. The trees too big to climb over. Too tall to walk around. Each tree has to be negotiated separately. Usually by leaning the canoe against the tree, climbing over, and then dragging the canoe over the tree. All three steps to be repeated for the next tree just down the trail. This first

portage should end in a swamp across which the canoes should have to be pushed or dragged through knee-deep mud to find enough water to float them.

Perfect.

Without portages on rivers, the range of a motor boat with a couple of extra gas cans might be 200 kilometres. Even cabin cruisers and houseboats would find their way down wilderness rivers. A looming portage is actually the sentinel guarding the wilderness. All are welcome into the wilderness, but the price of admission is posted on the portage trail. The price charged is not money, but personal effort to carry food, gear, and canoes over the portage. A portage is the true calculation of their admission price into the wilderness.

Too high a price for most.

Counting bags at the end of the first portage. Everyone looking tired but at ease. We have the first portage behind us. We have paid the price of admission to the wilderness.

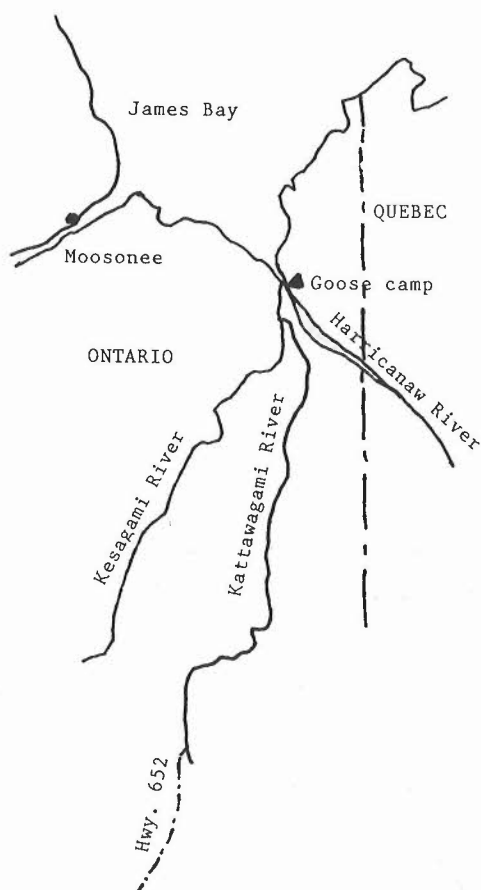
Greg Went

KATTAWAGAMI RIVER

Article: Paul Hamilton

Photos: Pat and Bryan Buttigieg

It all began with a chance meeting on a beach at the mouth of the White River. With easy confidence the man we met there described a very memorable canoe trip he had taken a few years earlier: few portages (yeah right!), good runnable whitewater, excellent scenery, and little travelled. I vowed then to investigate doing a trip on this river, the Kattawagami, located northeast of Cochrane and flowing north into James Bay. (On the Official Ontario Road Map 1994-1995 it is called the Lawagamau River, but everybody in the area calls it the Kattawagami.) The following July (1993) found Pat and Bryan Buttigieg, Diane, and myself shuttling north from Cochrane to the put-in at the Highway 652 bridge over the Kattawagami.



Day 1. It was a nice sunny day to stretch our muscles as we started to get into trip mode. We paddled approximately 25 kilometres, including several rapids. The scenery was rather dreary with stunted black spruce and a large burnt-over area.

Day 2. On the water by 8:30 a.m., anxious to get to Bayly Lake. We travelled through several small rapids but the river ran out of current near the lake. Once we got to the lake, which was rather shallow and reedy, a strong headwind came up and we struggled to reach a narrow beach on the north shore where we camped.

Day 3. Bayly Lake to the Eddy Hop. A beautiful, partly sunny, hot day, good to run down several swifts and rapids to Pineapple Rapids where we camped. The scenery was improving, more Shield rock and less tangled brush. I hoped that, as the terrain got rockier, we would be able to find better campsites. It poured rain all night and the site being on a slight incline we awoke to a flash flood coming through the tent. My reaction to this event is not fit for publication.

Day 4. Eddy Hop to Little Spruce Rapids. Rain! Our compensation for the weather was a series of very nice rapids up to the Triple Tongue where we lifted over the ledges. We had lots of small whitewater from here down to Little Spruce. We pitched our tents in the wild roses beside the rapid. The wildflowers were quite profuse: roses, potentilla, and bearberry.

Day 5. We started the day running down Little Spruce in the rain, then lined with some difficulty the Big Spruce side channel. Next we cheated the Snout Falls by lining a side channel on river right. Very slippery rocks made lining a hazardous endeavor. We ran through a series of exciting R2's, scouting from the boats and an occasional boulder as we went. Our group was glad to reach Adrienne Falls which according to Bryan's extensive research had to be approached with caution. On river left we found a side channel behind an island very close to the brink of the falls. Diane spotted a cairn of logs indicating the portage which was in



passable shape (the only one of the trip that wasn't overgrown) and well blazed. We camped below the falls, which provided a spectacular view with few bugs. The weather co-operated while we had a good dinner and a pleasant evening.



Day 6. Adrienne Falls to The Maze. Ran Adrienne Rapids from our glorious campsite with some tricky rock dodging. We paddled against a strong headwind to Staircase Rapids which we lined on river right. After portaging the next rapid we came to the Maze which, as its name says, is a maze of islands, rapids, and falls. Diane broke her paddle in one of the rapids. We had a very hard time lining, testing our timing and teamwork. By the end of this trip we will no doubt be experts at lining and lift-overs. Pat, Bryan, and I cleared and marked a winding, 800-metre portage for tomorrow. The day ended with a blazing red sunset, always a welcome sight on a canoe trip.

Day 7. The Maze to Raindrop: 3.5 kilometres. Awoke to fog instead of sun: disappointed! But the fog soon burned off as we started our portage. As anticipated, this overland trek proved to be very tough going. When we finally were on the water we came to Terrace Falls, another maze of islands. These already tired canoeists got a major break finding a sneak channel on river right avoiding the falls portage. We lunched at Driftwood Rapids and did a short portage. At Quinby we lined the top and ran the bottom, followed by lining both Pearson's Pitch and Quickfist. (These flamboyant names are



courtesy of the experienced paddlers of Wanapitei who have made several trips down this river and whose reports were invaluable.)

Day 8. Raindrop to The Slide. We were blessed with a clear, sunny, hot day as we ran and lined a number of rapids. Later in the day we did some four-person lift-overs and portages in this flat, open, rocky area. We camped on an island in the middle of the falls known as the Slide. It was a fun but tiring day and I could hardly write in my journal that evening.

Day 9. The Slide to The Faucet. The now hardened river travellers started the day with three R2's. What a way to start the day: big waves and some fancy manoeuvring. We continued on to Jack Pine Falls, a truly spectacular drop. The sunny weather made clearing the portage around Peace Falls very hot work. We ran down through the Needle, a long narrow tongue and on to the Island Rapids. Again we were back to carefully scouting our way along as there is a falls hidden amongst the islands. A portage was discovered on the river right. Both the Arrow Chutes and the Faucet were portaged on river left. Remember what that guy had said about the river having few portages? Yeah, right! By now, everyone was quite tired and we made camp at the foot of the Faucet. The hard work of these portages was offset by comradeship of the group and by the beautiful country.

Day 10. The Faucet to The Devil. I was feeling the effects of the demands of this trip as was everyone else. The day started sunny but turned overcast, cooler for portages. It rained briefly, making the rocks slippery for lining and lift-overs. Carried or lined everything today. I cannot describe the beauty of this river with its endless rapids/falls, its variety of trees and flowers that we have seen in the last few days.



Day 11. The Devil to 13 kilometres from The Finale. We regretted paddling away from this comfortable site especially since we knew we'd soon be leaving the rocky Shield country for lowland marsh. We had probably the most relaxing campsite of the trip on a dried-up back-channel of the Devil. The consensus was that the water level was dropping, a cause for concern as we still had lots of river to cover before the take-out. We came to Bill & Jane (rapids) and lifted/lined on river right. We landed to scout the Rollercoaster which had some big waves and a few holes.

Pat and Bryan ran down with no problem, however Diane and I didn't get through completely dry. After we bailed the boat, we proceeded on to the Three Companions. The first two were easy lift-overs on river right but the third one was a perfect @!#! of a portage. As we started, it began to rain in torrents. Despite being wet and somewhat cold we renamed these falls Tom, Dick, and Harry (perhaps Hairy! with those slippery rocks). Our canoe slipped at the next two-metre lift-over and we cracked a bow skid plate.

Lunch at the fabulous Windigo Falls. We portaged around the falls and started into an R2 with no problems. The next one was an R3 where we got into a little trouble but eddied out to look for a new route. The third rapid was a straight run through but we took on some water. At the Finale, Bryan and I sawed down on a number of saplings to clear the existing portage. Another slippery portage and tricky launching (we were getting good at this). We paddled several kilometres when a big moose and her calf splashed into the river just ahead of both canoes. At first mother moose didn't look too darned pleased with those red floating logs, but after a minute she realized we were harmless. They just stared at us for quite awhile. Personally I'm convinced they were only admiring Pat's purple tripping hat. We made camp on a pebble beach; everyone was completely bushed. My sleeping bag never felt so good.

Day 12. The Beach to The Goose Camp: 42 km. A long flatwater paddle seemed boring after fast-paced whitewater of the last week. Lots of manoeuvring back and forth across the river to avoid grounding out because water levels were still going down. We came to a narrowing in the river where the high banks on both sides had collapsed into the water. This debris of trees and dirt stretched right across the river creating a treacherous obstacle. We scouted both shores and chose to line river left. I jumped on to an upended tree root to test the ground and soon discovered to avoid the light grey soil as it was basically quicksand. Stepping on downed trees and the darker dried soil we lined through these 100 metres of debris. From this point on the water was muddy until the confluence of the Kattawagami with the Kesagami. Several kilometres further on we noticed the tidal effect from James Bay. The tide was an important consideration as we had to turn the corner at James Bay to travel up the Harricanaw River to the Goose Camp. Our timing was just right so that the tide was with us in both directions.

Day 13. Goose Camp. No travelling today, it's make-and-mend time. Everyone was relaxing after the exertions of the past few days. We had to wait for the float-plane pick-up as arranged by Bryan with Bushland Airways. The plane flew over at 11 a.m. but there were whitecaps on the Harricanaw and he didn't dare land. Just as we were cooking dinner the plane came back and landed. We quickly threw our gear into the boat and headed out to meet the plane midstream. Because we had to do separate plane trips, the group was reunited in Moosonee. The delay in getting to Moosonee caused us to miss the freight train, so after arranging to have our canoes shipped to Toronto we caught the Polar Bear Express to Cochrane. It had been an excellent canoe trip filled with great rapids, amazing waterfalls, beautiful scenery, a fair number of portages, and terrible bugs.

CHICAGOLAND CANOE BASE

Yes, there is a canoeist's heaven and it's in Chicago. The name of this little piece of paddlers' paradise is Chicagoland Canoe Base and its guardian angel is Ralph Frese who, for 50 of his 68 years, has been active in the field of canoeing to such an extent that he has now become something of a legend. And understandably so.

His knowledge of canoes and canoeing is astounding, he has been everywhere, knows everybody, paddled a zillion streams and lakes, builds and sells beautiful canoes, is possibly the best canoeing-story teller in the business, and is also a highly respected environmentalist, historian, and lecturer. His store is filled with everything a canoeists might desire: paddling and camping equipment, numerous canoes and kayaks, clothing, pfd's, paddles, books, videos, audio recordings, trip descriptions, catalogs, and an irresistible collection of over 750 book titles.

Ralph calls his store "The Most Unusual Canoe Shop In The U.S.," and this may very well be true for Canada too. It is even larger and filled with more delicious canoeing goodies than Tim Dyer's famous White Squall paddling and outfitting centre in Nobel, just north of Parry Sound, Ontario.

When you are anywhere near the Windy City, go down to canoeist's heaven and you'll surely feel blessed: Chicagoland Canoe Base, 4019 N. Narragansett Avenue, Chicago, IL 60634, USA; phone (312) 777-1489.

Toni Harting



STILL MORE ON THE PEE OF PADDLING

My wife and I had a good laugh over THE PEE OF PADDLING. Silvia has been using the Freshette for some time — we imported it from the States, after having had a rather interesting exchange of correspondence re. its use — and she is highly satisfied. With our "communal" Pee-Can, we're doing quite nicely. It sure beats getting dressed and out into the rain or whatever inclement conditions.

UELI MEYER; Burgdorff, Switzerland

ELLIOTT MERRICK, who, for some strange reason, seems always to have shown a great deal of interest in the fair sex, sends the following:


PROGRESS WITH PEE PROBLEMS (or THE LADY'S LAMENT)

A dame, though suffering in canoe and tent,
Thought this thing not worth a cent;
But one day, finding that she'd went,
She wished she'd given her assent.

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REVIEW

NAHANNI, the River Guide, by Peter Jowett, published by Rocky Mountain Books, Calgary, 1993, softcover, 224 pages, \$13.25.

Reviewed by Toni Harting

Looking through this profusely illustrated book is pure delight and makes the paddler's mouth water with anticipation of great adventures on one of the world's most famous wilderness rivers. The writer has been with the Canadian Parks Service since 1981 and has spent two years in the Nahanni park as a warden. He has managed to collect a tremendous amount of detailed information and presents it very well indeed in this well-organized guide book which is filled with clear text supported by many maps, photographs, references, travel tips, emergency phone numbers, lists of plants, place names, birds, etc. A must-have for past and future Nahanni visitors, and a should-have for wanna-goers.

CROSS-COUNTRY CANOE TRIPPING

Article: Bob Henderson and James Wheeler

Photos: James Wheeler

(Although this article was originally written for organizers of Ontario-based summer camp canoe-tripping programs, it presents so much information WCA members can learn from that we're delighted to be able to present it here. Ed.)

There seems to be a trend, perhaps even a one-upmanship, within summer camp canoe-tripping programs that necessitates each summer a more remote and/or longer trip to be planned for the senior showcase canoe trip. Destinations for such senior expeditions include the Nahanni, the Coppermine, the Seal, the Missinaibi, and other remote settings in arctic and James Bay watersheds. One highly respected (and rightly so) camp in 1993 combined the Coppermine and Hood rivers for a successful six-week affair which included the drive west from Ontario. (Most of their difficulties happened while on the road, not while on the water).

It is a debatable issue whether the arctic watershed should serve as the pinnacle tripping area for senior campers and staff from Near North camps. We simply wish to raise this issue for debate, while at the same time we want to highlight a successful alternative to the remote destination which is likely staring one in the face, in one's own backyard. It is the "cross-country" senior camper trip starting and/or finishing at one's own base. The merits and description of the cross-country variety of Ontario tripping is the main focus here.

There is a certain distinctive commonality for *all* successful long canoe trips. A long trip is a long trip when it becomes less a trip, a holiday, but more a lifestyle. It was said so well by John Steinbeck in *Travels with Charley*: "... people don't take trips, trips take people". Canoe tripping becomes the natural way, and whatever one was doing before the travel experience seems unnatural and distant. One loses the "trip" atmosphere as the "trip



Many camps have long-established traditions for such tripping, but other camps perhaps feel some pressure to begin such a tradition or seek financially acceptable alternatives to the epic distant venture. As the Far North (not the Near North) becomes more accessible and the publicity regarding its waterways increases, so too does the attraction for these routes by campers, staff, and camp directors alike.

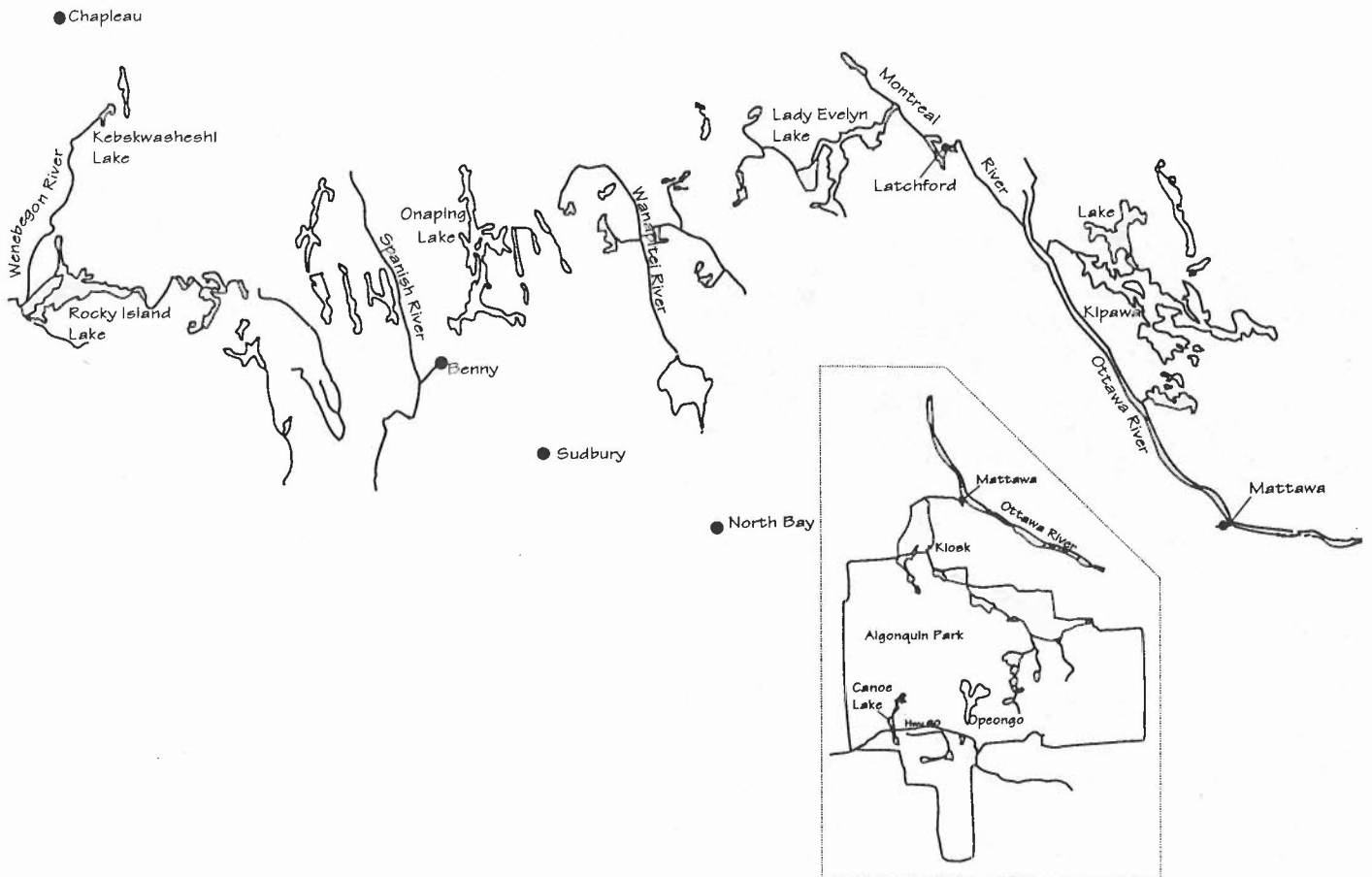
takes" the person. Canoe tripping becomes simply what one does. The cross-country trip is particularly good at creating this very special feeling. The disorientation from one's regular context of daily life has many positive educational outcomes and possibilities. There are also possible negative outcomes of a difficult re-orienting back into the societal fabric. But that is not the main topic here.



Overall these thoughts suggest a thriving commonality to long trips organized by summer camps, clubs, and friendship groups whether they are in Algonquin or Quetico parks, Biscotasing, Temagami, or Kipawa areas, or James Bay waterways, or areas further afield. But many canoe trip areas, rivers, or routes have their own special characteristics or distinguishing flavors.

For the twenty-to-thirty-day Quetico Park trip there is the joy of covering a distinct area of canoe country thoroughly; the finest of "blue lake and rocky shore" travel. For the James Bay trip such as the Missinaibi there is the distance, the headwaters-to-the-sea idea. For virtually any route in the great Canadian watersheds there will be a rich heritage component and some quality of landscape to propel the imagination. But, we suggest, there is an extra-special intrigue to the cross-country trip that is harder to pinpoint because of the breadth of travel. It is precisely this sense of cross-country/cross-watersheds to one's travels that accounts for the special flavor. Here are examples.

Most summers since 1979, the Taylor Statten Camps (Ahmek and Wapomeo) located on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park have run thirty-to-fifty-plus-day canoe trips in the Near North Canadian Shield. Speaking geographically, we are not sure how to pinpoint it better. In 1979 when this tradition started as an exploration trip, the so-called Bisco trippers left their outpost camp near Lake Wanapitei, west of Temagami, for a forty-day loop that saw them paddling a section of the Sturgeon River, and on the Wanapitei, Opikinimika, Mollie, Onaping, and Spanish water systems (this is not a complete list). Up-river sections blended with down-river paddling with a full complement of large lakes, portage searching, and creek work. On that first trip, the group paddled into the town of Shining Tree and met an astonished old trapper who informed the paddlers that, by his knowledge, they were the



first group on a particular portage in thirty years.

The irony with the first Bisco trip is that with the north/south water flow, the against-the-flow loop from northwest back south and east meant that in those 40 days only the fringe of Biscotasing was paddled. Now the camps regularly start trips in the Biscotasing area proper or from a western origin and have food drops at Biscotasing townsite and elsewhere. The trips then travel to their outpost in the Temagami area or return to their home base on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park.

The following is a brief description of a 1993 cross-country trip for seven 15-16 year old boys with two staff.

We began with some of the hardest travel of the whole trip, getting from our drop-off point in Wakami Provincial Park (southeast of Chapleau) to Rocky Island Lake and the Mississagi River system. A gamble on the Kebskwasheshi River out of the similarly named lake paid off and we managed to connect with the Wenebegon River and from there got into Rocky Island Lake quite easily. From here, we did a small area of the Bisco route through Bark Lake and Lac aux Sables. We then left the standard route and headed towards Mozhabong Lake via Russian Lake.

The rather long lift from Lower Ritchie (just off Lac aux Sables) to Russian Lake was only accomplished due to the generous assistance of a local man who helped transport equipment and people, as well as guiding us through a maze of private trails and logging roads which eventually led to Russian Lake. We made Mozhabong for our pre-arranged food drop and then headed towards the Spanish River and connections to Benny. We opted to drag the Monkrief Creek which turned into a six-hour ordeal to cover 15 kilometres. We dragged for 10 km and then had a series of paddles and drags up some rather big water for the remaining five kilometres; a pretty trip but a lot of work and some dangerous drags.



Again, at Benny we found a very generous man who drove us and our equipment across the 18 km to Onaping Lake. From here we followed the usual Scotia-Avery-Welcome route to the Wanapitei River. During this stage of the trip we again came across locals who went out of their way to help us. Joey, one of our trippers, was cut badly and needed some repairs to his forehead. A 14-year-old kid, Louis, living by the main rail line, brought us to a line phone where he was able to contact and stop a train headed towards Sudbury and the nearest hospital. His father met Joey and a camper at the station and drove them to the hospital while Louis entertained the rest of us for dinner and offered us beds for the night. All together an outstanding young man.

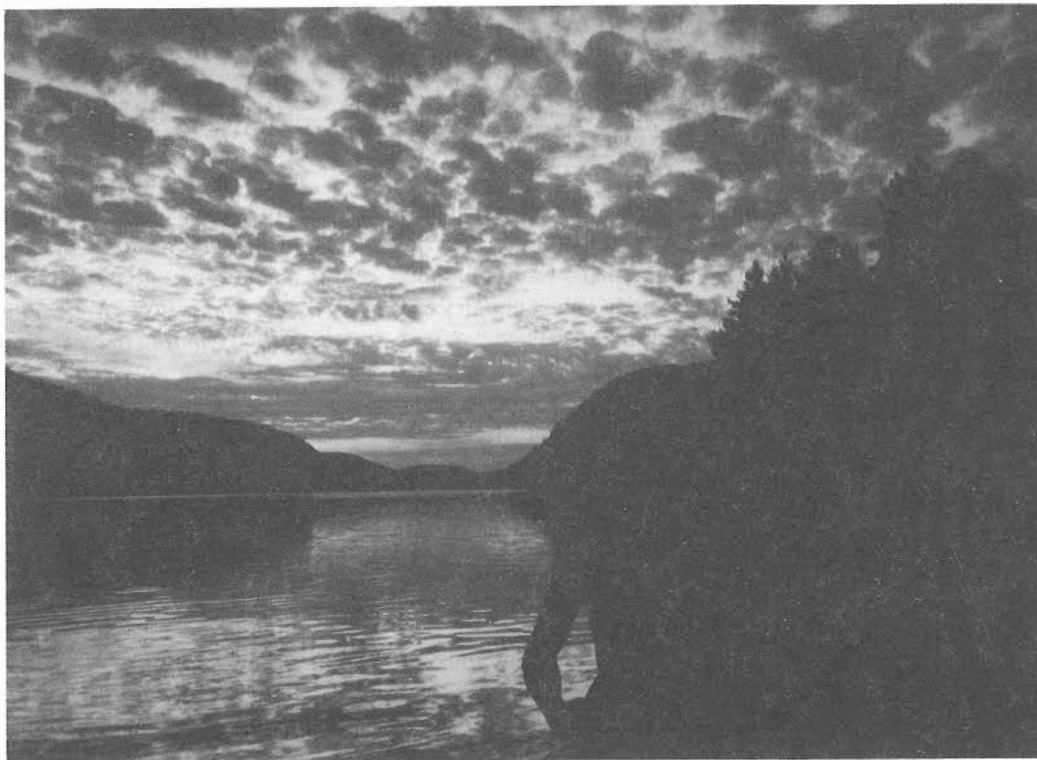
We travelled to the Lady Evelyn River from the Wanapitei across to the Sturgeon, up past Ishpatina Ridge, and through Smoothwater Lake. Our Temagami segment was limited to the Lady Evelyn River and Lake and the Montreal River down to the Ottawa River. We connected into Kipawa via Lanial and did a very standard loop down to Kipawa village and then Beauchene Lake for our last food drop. We connected Beauchene Lake to the Ottawa using the Beauchene River. We spent two days on the spectacular Ottawa and one day on the Mattawa and then started up the Amable Du Fond towards Kiosk in Algonquin Park. Once again some local residents offered us a ride for the last 20 km or so of the river and saved us by far the worst part of this final connection into the park. We did the Kiosk-Cedar-Lavieille-Opeongo route and spent our last night on McGavery Lake just off Louisa Lake. On day 50 we paddled up to Canoe Lake through the Smoke Lake wiggle and ended under the Trading Post Bridge feeling larger than life.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the trip was the constantly changing landscapes. Each segment had its own particular feel to it. The sandy river banks of the Kebskwasheshi and Wenegegon rivers and a huge sand dune at the entrance to Rocky Island Lake are definitive characteristics of the first segment. Another memory of this area are the great, very isolated beaches on Bark Lake.

The second segment was over in Bisco country — more rocky with some very big lakes (Onaping, Mozhabong). I also recall this part of our trip as being very rugged, i.e. using a lot of snowmobile routes instead of portages and doing many pretty tough portages. This no doubt contributed to its low population of fellow trippers which really gave us a feeling of isolation and provided for a very exciting, albeit, at times, frustrating segment.

Certainly hitting the Ishpatina Ridge area was a landmark of our trip. It marked the end of the rougher Bisco-type tripping and the start of the Temagami section — now portages were marked. The next real landmark was the Ottawa River. Here began our Kipawa segment — the last bit of looping we would do before we began our final push into the park. I found the Ottawa to be absolutely spectacular. On a calm day, paddling between the cliffs on this river is quite an experience. The Kipawa segment was a very typical one in terms of route and landmarks. That's to say, "blue lake and rocky shore" standard Shield tripping. The Beauchene Lake and River were very nice, as was the Ottawa River between Beauchene and Mattawa.

Coming back into Algonquin Park was definitely a trip highlight. It was a real pleasure to be able to count on portages and campsites being well marked. The section from Kiosk to Opeongo was fantastic. These were among the nicest three days we had on the trip. One day that comes to mind was from Cedar to Lavieille. We were all so together as a unit — everything just clicked. We went a long way and all felt really good about it. No doubt the biggest event of the trip was our return to Canoe Lake. Rounding the bend with Ahmek coming into view is a moment that I will never forget. So many positive emotions coming together as an individual and a group. The experience of paddling into our summer home base really added to the excitement and emotions of the trip from day one, and provided for a moment that will always be with me.



These cross-country trips are called thus because of the connections made between somewhat distinctive canoe countries. Temagami is classic plateau Shield country, while the Bisco Lakes are near the height of land between James Bay and the Great Lakes watersheds and therefore lower in relief. Kipawa big lake country is radically different than the plateau headwater lakes and creeks of Algonquin. While these evidently are canoe tripping areas, the connections are not so travelled or obvious (i.e., the Avery-Scotia-Welcome route to the Wanapitei River or the Ottawa as a means to connect Kipawa and Algonquin). It is this sense of connection that generates an endearing flavor of special excitement to the cross-country trip. One does not hook into *one* watercourse but into a larger sense of waterways and therefore a larger understanding of the country. This creates a better perception of what it really means to travel through the land.

Unlike some trips that stress avoidance of places like towns or roads, on the cross-country trip you accept these things and use them. It's fun, helpful, and educational to have local folks along the way support your venture. All parties enjoy the interaction. You really begin to see the canoe as your vehicle and the land and water as your roads. Cross-country trippers begin to picture Canada as the natives and Voyageurs did. You realize that you're not on a "normal" trip (i.e. a fun time in the bush), but you are in fact really moving and you get places. It gives you a lot of respect for those who came before you and the hardships they must have endured, because, like you, they had to "get to places" too, the next food drop, the next outpost/town, home for the end of the season.

For all trippers involved, their ideas of the Canadian Shield and likely Canada as a whole will never be the same. They will look at a road map and see waterways and portage connections. They will see watersheds and heights of land. They will picture towns as supply depots and imagine help-



ful characters along the road and rail lines. They have learned to picture Canada from a canoe in a way parallel to Canada's indigenous native groups, the Coureur de Bois, and the Voyageur who were followed by the Surveyors, Fire Rangers, and Trappers. This is the richest connection that can be made with the past.

The trippers learned that the country, all of it, is an open map. They understand that "country" means not only the remote, low-access, distinctive watersheds, be it a Quetico Park or Coppermine River, but that open canoe country also exists out from one's backyard, canoeing between towns, incorporating the odd road, connecting Algonquin and Kipawa, Biscotasing and Temagami. These ideas on cross-country tripping lead to another thought from Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*: "... who has not known a journey to be over and dead before the traveller returns? The reverse is also true: Many a trip continues long after movement in time and space have ceased ..."

Now we'll take the liberty of being opinionated!

This cross-country style of tripping, whereby you start and/or finish at your base camp, is exciting for campers and staff and allows for building on tradition without taking away from a trip's distinctiveness which seems so important. It is rewarding tripping and it is at the level of comprehension suitable to senior campers. That is to say, it is working within the range of geography to which they have likely become familiar, extending and pushing the concept of areas into a satisfying synthesis. It is a pinnacle experience appropriate to their knowledge and skill as they learn to see a bigger picture to an area once known in parts.

We stress this because, while a grand enterprise, we are not convinced the arctic canoe trip is the best pinnacle experience. Arctic waterways should mark the beginning of

NEW ideas, new thinking about canoe tripping that might best be arrived at appropriately in a post-summer-camping canoe tripping career. Wouldn't the arctic watershed trip be part of an evolution as one builds competencies and an imaginative spirit for the still larger sense of Canada?

The bigger point here though is to showcase the exciting cross-country tradition of canoe tripping in Ontario's Near North and bespeak the special qualities involved. It is also the task here to highlight specific route options and interesting connections. When one thinks cross-country home base canoe tripping in Near North Shield Country, the land opens up to seemingly endless options. Some summer camps have a lot of knowledge to share concerning cross-country connections.

So the closer-range cross-country trip has its merits. It is certainly less stressful on camp resources and personnel. Contact is easier if there are troubles. The *real* danger of the distant trip, the highway time, is reduced and the camp builds a knowledge of their more immediate geography as trips complement each other year to year trying new wrinkles on previous routes.

The long trip is the quintessential camp experience for many camps. The cross-country trip allowing access to a camp's base is suggested to be the optimum way to maximize this peak year. Thinking educational first and foremost, the cross-country trip has many merits. Let the arctic waterways be saved for one's post-camp life. But most important, continue canoe tripping at all costs.

(Bob and James are both former tripping staff with camps Ahmek and Wapomeo with a long-term interest in camping. James was a staff member on the 1993 trip referred to above.)



WHERE HUMAN HISTORY IS BRIEF

Willem Lange

TREE RIVER, Northwest Territories - (I wrote this on a canoe trip late July 1991, as I sat on the shore of Coronation Gulf scanning the sea for the first glimpse of a boat that was supposed to be coming to pick us up.) [See Lange's article, "Romancing the Tree," in the Spring-1993 issue of *Nastawgan*. Ed.]

Here, on the cusp of a new climatic optimum, I gaze out across an icy, but clear, cobalt sea and try to imagine it as it was 100 years ago, when the first of the steam-powered explorers' schooners tested it in July and found it choked with ice and themselves at the mercy of the whims of the wind.

In one respect, this grassy flat, beside the mouth of a river more than 2,000 miles from home, is like many places in New England: there was once a village here, but it's gone now. There are no cellar holes; the ground is frozen hard as rock only a foot or so beneath the grass. But there are a few odd bits of evidence of long-ago residence — a strip of lacing holes from a green rubber boot; half a dozen 30-gallon drums, one end out of each and air holes at the opposite end to make a stove; bits of glass and cheap china; and a derelict Wisconsin air-cooled engine perched on top of a little mound.

At the western edge of the grassy flat, away from the river mouth, rise several steps of glacier-rounded bluffs of banded, deformed dolomite roughly 2,400 million years old — a number beyond my imagining. On the first step of the bluff, in a little meadow of coarse grass, lies a graveyard. Two stones of alien polished granite inside a white-painted enclosure made of the absolute minimum number of boards mark the graves of Otto Binder, aged 42, born in Kentucky, who died here on April 2, 1922, "while in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company;" and Corporal William Doak, RCMP, aged 39, "who was killed at Tree River NWT on April 1st 1922 whilst in the Execution of his Duty. Maintiens le droit." Just outside the fence, beside two tiny depressions in the turf, stand two more markers — little crosses carved out of single pieces of narrow board, each cross no more than 3 inches wide. They mark the graves of native children.

Poking around in the grass near the graves, Knox and I found a little skull, clean and white as bone — the skull of an arctic fox. "Do we take this home as a souvenir," I asked, "or do we leave him here facing out to sea as he no doubt did in his lifetime, looking for carrion on the ice?" The question contained its own answer, and we left him there on a rock.

The water in the bay is brackish, but Nick found a freshwater pool just behind the beach a hundred yards away. It's hard to dip out, and when it came to camp, we found it full of mosquito larvae. As the water heats up, they become quite active, then succumb and turn hard and pink, like hundreds of minuscule shrimp. Makes the tea quite chewy and nutritious.

Beyond the pervasive mystical elements of this frozen, treeless country literally at the end of the earth, I think what I like a great deal about it is that I can comprehend its human

history. Not its geology; that's far beyond me, as I've already mentioned. But people have been here for such a short time — and so few of them, at that — that my weak brain can encompass at least the salient features of their residence, and even name most of the Europeans who passed through here before the advent of the airplane made it so easily accessible.

The natives ("The People," they call themselves) didn't reach here from Alaska until just before 900 A.D., during an earlier climatic optimum. Following the sea mammals eastward through rapidly opening northern seas, they reached all the way to Greenland in only two or three generations, and met the vanguard of the Norsemen, coming from the opposite direction on the same impulse. About 400 years later, the Little Ice Age exterminated the Greenland Norse and fragmented the native culture into discrete regional groups that persisted into what we Europeans, in our naivete, call historical times.

It's quite probable that John Franklin of the Royal Navy camped for the night of July 23, 1821, exactly where we are camped today, and used the same clayslick rock as a landing place. In August of 1905 Roald Amundsen's little *Gjoa* went by here just offshore, out of the ice at last and almost all the way through the Northwest Passage. The mystical Englishman John Hornby wandered through here a few years later, a nomad among nomads. He starved to death in 1927, 300 miles southeast.

Two Roman Catholic missionaries, Rouviere and LeRoux, dark and fanatical, showed up near here in late fall of 1913. They argued with the natives and were murdered. Two troublesome white explorers were also murdered in 1911 just east of here. Inspector French, RCMP, arrived in 1917 to investigate, found the deeds to be justifiable homicide, and then was stuck on the coast for the summer. He lectured the natives on the evils of murdering Europeans ("They appeared to be greatly impressed."), and found a Swedish trapper camped on the river a few miles upstream from our campsite. We passed the spot yesterday. And then in 1922, on April Fool's Day and the day after, a native who had already been arrested for murder shot and killed poor Binder and Doak, right here on the flat. After that, the post was closed, and everyone went away.

Those days are to this country what the Wild West is to ours: half myth, half fact, and surviving only in spirit. For the land is now measured and monitored by satellite; traversed by airplane; and governed by a legion of bureaucrats stretching all the way to Ottawa. We are fishing here at the mouth of the river by grace of a permit ("Names and addresses of persons travelling, hereinafter called Travellers, etc. ..."). Taking home that fox skull would have entailed procuring an export permit and license; and the wild creatures of the area are counted and protected by the government in much the same way God is said to look after the hairs of our heads.

Still, the tundra rolls away empty and unbroken to the horizon, and the dark sea toward the polar ocean. The

muskoxen and caribou graze on the hillsides. The natives still collect qiviut, the muskox's wool, from the bushes where they feed, and sell it to travellers like us. On our last trip, one of the natives demurred to take a cheque. "I don't

know," he said. "You got gold card?"

(This article first appeared in *The Valley News*, January 8, 1992.)

CO-OPERATIVE TRIPPING VENTURE

This spring, we surveyed our WCA members in eastern Ontario and western Quebec to see if we could not increase the number of trips advertised for that region in *Nastawgan*. Thanks to Bill Scott, one of our club fellows, an idea was brought forward to link up with a local organization. I contacted the Coureur de Bois Canoe Club in Ottawa and in discussion with their co-president, Maureen Lamb, it was agreed that we would insert announcements of their trips in our journal and vice versa. Members of both clubs will gain as a result of an extension of our canoeing network. The plan is to initiate this co-operative venture in the spring of 1995.

In brief, the results of the survey were as follows: In response to the question "What is your level of satisfaction

with the current trip arrangements as advertised in *Nastawgan* for the Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec region," the average score was about 6 out of 10. Sixty per cent of the participants would like to see more local arrangements and the remaining 40 per cent felt it is alright the way it is.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those members who responded to the survey and provided helpful information on expanding our traditional advertised choices.

Earl Silver

WCA TRIPS

For questions, suggestions, or anything else related to the WCA Trips, contact any of the members of the Outings Committee: Bill Ness (416) 321-3005; Ken Coburn (416) 767-5845; Mike Jones (905) 270-3256; Ann Dixie (416) 486-7402.

Remember that WCA trips may have an element of danger and that the ultimate responsibility for your safety is your own.

1-2 October FALL HIKING IN ALGONQUIN

Doreen Vella, (416) 285-1322; book before 16 September.

On Saturday we will hike the 11-km Mizzy Lake Trail and on Sunday the 7.5-km Track and Tower Trail. Easy hiking and bug-free conditions. Both routes are easily accessible from Highway 60. Overnight camping will be at the Mew Lake campground. No limit, "The more the merrier!"

1-2 October FALL CANOEING IN ALGONQUIN PARK

Herb Pohl, (905) 637-7632; book immediately.

Starting at the Western Uplands parking lot, we'll follow the Oxtongue River to the confluence with Gateway Creek. The latter will lead us to a portage route through a string of partially travelled lakes to Smoke Lake. For the benefit of the less determined we'll stop at the Smoke Lake parking lot, but the really energetic may continue down the Oxtongue River to our starting point. Limit four canoes.

1-2 October UPPER MAGNETAWAN RIVER

Tim Gill, (416) 447-2063; book immediately.

For precise route information call the organizer. The Upper Magnetawan has beautiful scenery in the fall. There are lakes, challenging whitewater, and gentle moving water. Limit four canoes.

8-10 October PUMPKIN PIE ON THE PETAWAWA

Earl Silver and Anne Dixie (416) 486-7402; book immediately.

A three-day trip from Lake Traverse to Lake McManus. Gourmets welcome. The Petawawa is one of our more challenging whitewater rivers when water levels are high. All significant rapids can be portaged. Participants should hope for fine weather, but be prepared for wet conditions. Limit four canoes.

16 October GRAND RIVER

Mike Jones, (905) 270-3256; book before 7 October.

Gently moving water, mooing cows, bounding deer, and fall colors at their finest. Rain aplenty. Suitable for the family. Limit five canoes.

16 October MINDEN WILD WATER PRESERVE

Steve Bernet, (519) 837-8774; book before 1 October.

This man-made, world-class whitewater course on the Gull River provides some of the best summer whitewater in central Ontario. The course is technically demanding and suitable only for solid intermediate or advanced paddlers with properly outfitted whitewater boats. Helmets are required. Participants are cautioned that capsizing and swimming could result in serious personal injury and damage to your boat. However, for those with the requisite skills, the Gull provides some truly exhilarating paddling. As well, the bottom of the course can be safely used by novices to build their skills. Limit six boats.

30 October ELORA GORGE

Tim Gill, (416) 447-2063; book before 22 October.

The Elora Gorge is unpredictable late in the year. If there is plenty of rain the water can be high, fast, and cold. Participants should wear appropriate clothing, wetsuit recommended, and be prepared for inclement weather. Boats should have floatation and be properly outfitted. Limit six canoes.



FALL PARTY

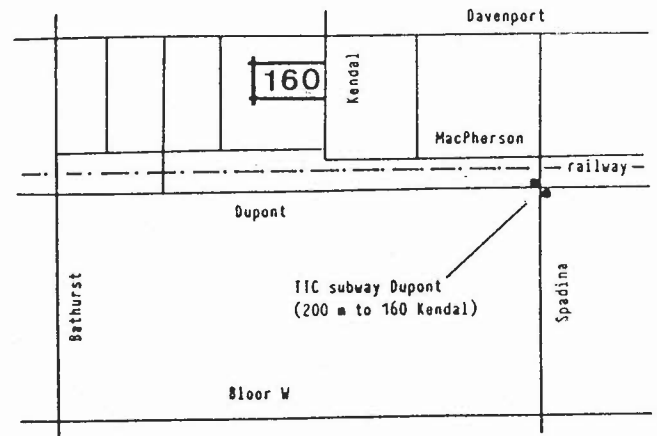
Want to meet old canoeing friends? Want to hear some tall paddling stories and see interesting photographs? Want to find out what the WCA is all about, who its members are, and what inside information they can give you?

Then come to the WCA Fall Party, also called Wine-and-Cheese Party, on Friday evening, 2 December, 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 \$7.00 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 Mike Jones in the evening at (905) 270-3256.



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

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, Ont.

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

CANOE WANTED Used 16-ft ABS canoe, suitable for whitewater and river tripping. Andrew Hall, (416) 921-6419.

CANOE FOR SALE Excellent 14-ft Peterborough canoe, cane seats, new canvas, mast step; a classic for \$1200.00. David Young, (416) 444-2440.

NORTHERN BOOKS Used, scarce, and select new books on northern, arctica, Canadiana, wilderness, and canoeing topics. Write for new free catalog, Northern Books, Box 211, Station P, Toronto, ON, M5S 2S7, or call (416) 531-8873 and leave a message.

TURKEY JERKY A new approach to an old and established way of carrying concentrated food on trips: jerky made from turkey meat, which means no processed red meat. Charqui Chef turkeyjerky uses only the breast portion of the turkey and therefore contains less than 3% fat, is high in protein (60%), has 56 cal per 20 g serving, is more easily digested than beef, and contains no chemical preservatives. Simuva Foods Inc., 2482 Yonge Street, Suite 45005, Toronto, M4P 3E3; (416) 481-3616; fax (416) 481-3599.

1995 CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS CALENDAR

Plan your next adventure with the full-color Canadian Heritage Rivers calendar, printed on glossy-recycled paper and produced by the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association in co-operation with the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. Thirteen of Canada's most spectacular Heritage Rivers are featured with a description of each river. Experience the Bonnet Plume, Missinaibi, North Saskatchewan, Churchill, Clearwater, or Bay du Nord every day. Cost \$9.95 (plus \$1.50 postage & handling and 7% GST); USA orders in US funds. Send your order to: CRCA, 1029 Hyde Park Road, Suite 5, Hyde Park, ON, Canada N0M 1Z0.



CANOE TOONS
 PAUL MASON

Where it is ...



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Wilderness Canoe Association

membership application

I enclose a cheque for CDN \$25 (single) or CDN \$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(s): _____

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.