nastawgan

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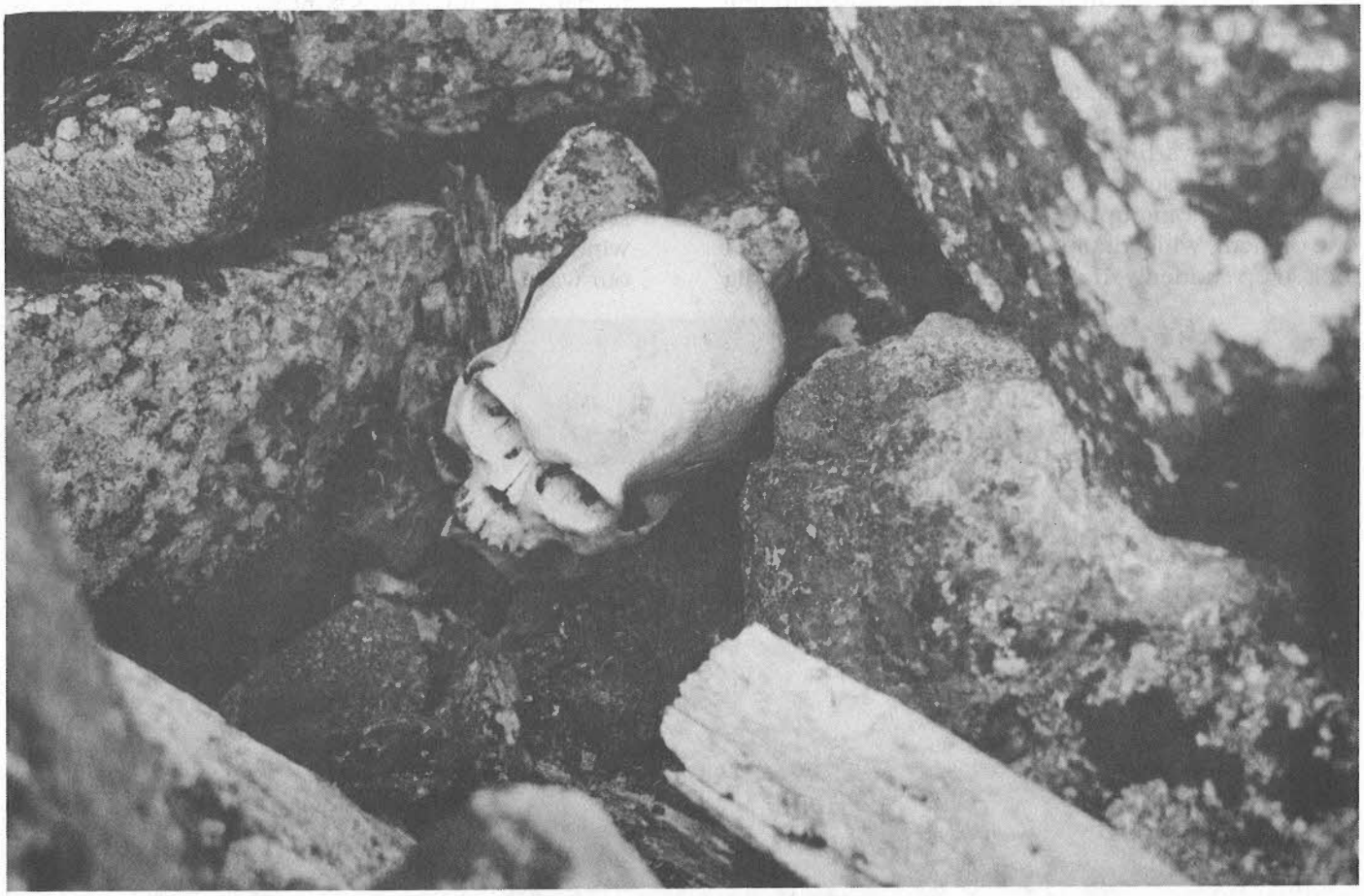


# SIXTY DAYS IN THE LAND OF LITTLE STICKS

## Part 2: Nowleye and Kamilukuak Rivers, Casimir and Kasba Lakes

Article: Sara Seager. Photos: Sara Seager and Mike Wevrick

*(The first part of the trip, going north from Wollaston Lake to Lake Angikuni, was presented in the Spring 1996 issue.)*

It was exhilarating to have been out for a month in an area completely new to us and still largely untouched. We were thrilled to begin the second part of the trip because it was different yet again, and far less travelled. Although the journey overall was incredible, this part of the trip can be summed up in three somewhat negative canoe-tripping words: upstream, rocks, and wind.

LAKE ANGIKUNI TO NOWLEYE LAKE
(map reference 65K)

The first afternoon out of Angikuni was typical of a paddling day: halted by wind at midday. We stopped in a bay (ME2114) a few kilometres upstream of where the Nowleye River joins Lake Angikuni. Up a grassy hill were many piles of rocks with long poles underneath their top layer; on closer inspection these turned out to be five Inuit graves. One had rocks turned aside and I looked down to see the owner of the grave, now a human skull. Animal bones and caribou antlers literally cluttered the land, but to come face to face with a

human skull is a different matter entirely. Because the rocks had been displaced and the skull bleached by the sun, I believe it had been tampered with. I wondered who these Inuit were and what their lives had been like. Three of the graves had possessions near them, including primitive metal pots of all sizes, carved wooden platters and a big spoon, boat parts, and a very narrow kayak paddle pieced together with wooden pegs.

Typical too on this day was haze blown in by a steady though uncommon south wind. It was alarming to realize this was forest fire smoke, though we were at our northernmost point more than two hundred kilometres north of the tree line.

The upstream stretch between Lakes Angikuni and Nowleye shows three rapids on the map. In reality there are about seven swifts. The wind was strong and it was tough going upstream against it. After lining up one of them, while draining my shoes from the boat, I looked up suddenly, right into the brown eyes of a big bull caribou who was ferrying across the rapids. At an arm's length he was as surprised as I, but since the rapids planned his route he could not get away. Three more bulls followed, but drifted farther downstream to cross away from us. There were always several caribou a day up to some type of antics.

The only substantial rapid between Lakes Angikuni and Nowleye is the exit rapid from Lake Nowleye, and we made our first portage in two weeks.

NOWLEYE LAKE
(map reference 65K)

It was amazing paddling on vast, 600-sq-km Lake Nowleye. We reached it in the calm evening as the sky was tinting pink, feeling carefree and so happy on this large and open lake. Its barren and rocky shores added to the feeling that we were alone in the universe. I thought it must be a shallow lake because despite the lack of wind, there were swells, though of very low amplitude. We paddled on and on and on, enjoying ourselves entirely.

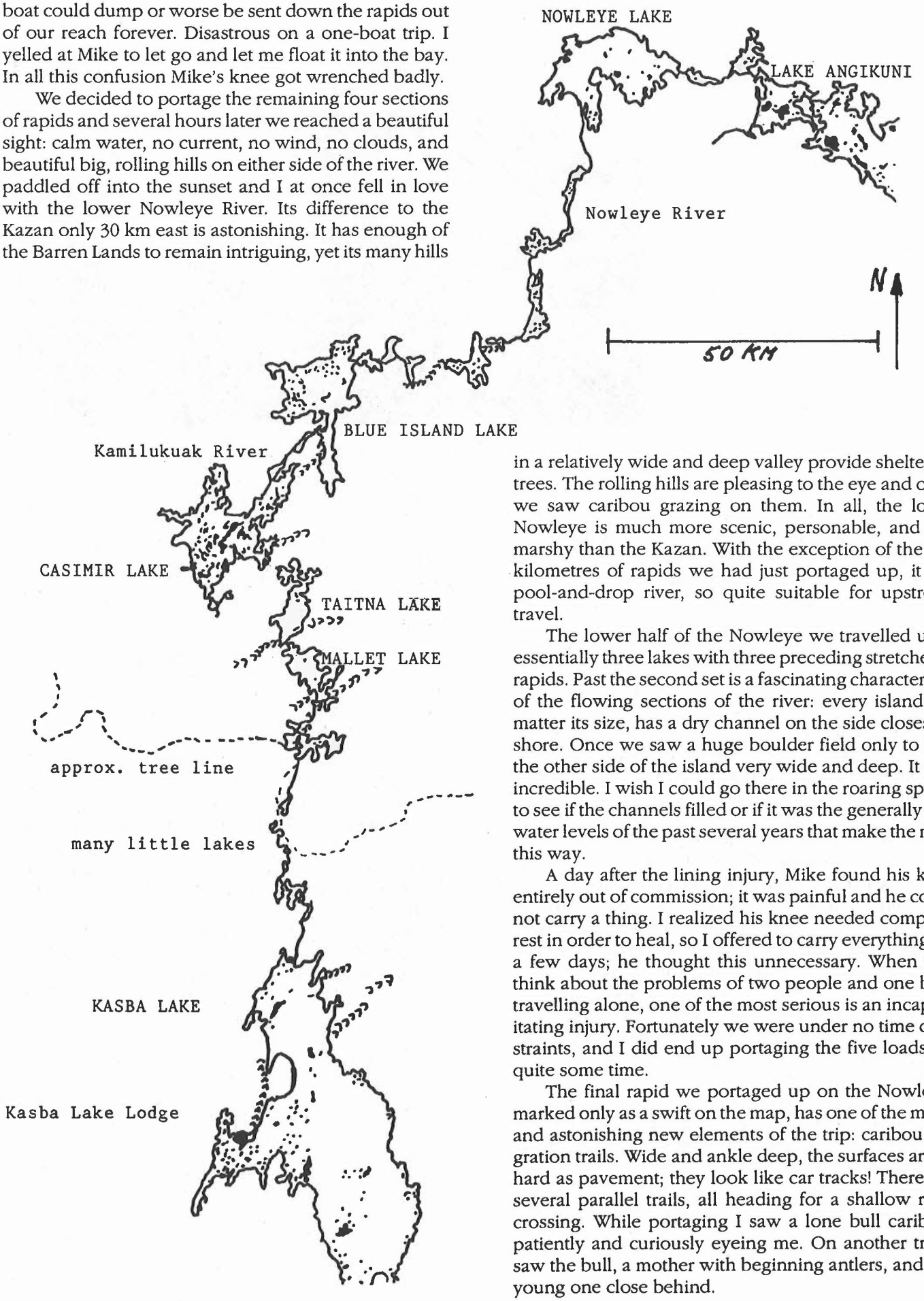
But Nowleye is a trickster lake, for as soon as the wind did pick up the innocent swells became huge and menacing, rendering us wind bound for two days. We are always cautious on large lakes, realizing full well the added perils of travelling with just one boat. But after two days we also realized we could be trapped for quite some time (later we read about a couple wind bound for five days), so we left very early one morning and paddled a treacherous stretch to shelter among some islands. Finally, following the usual pattern, the wind died down later in the day, and we zoomed on our way to the mouth of the Nowleye River.

NOWLEYE RIVER
(map reference 65K, 65F)

The first section is one of the difficult parts of the upriver route because of rapids for a few kilometres, the second rapid upstream being quite forceful. It was my day in the bow of our Old Town Tripper and so I took the front rope. I had to fight the rapid and pulling the bow through the current was a struggle. I got stuck — the boat was going to pull me in. The rope slipped away and I screamed to Mike to hold on. We switched positions for another try, Mike being stronger I thought might have more luck. But no, the current pulled him into the water. The boat was now at a 30-degree angle and water gushed in. My heart was palpitating — the

boat could dump or worse be sent down the rapids out of our reach forever. Disastrous on a one-boat trip. I yelled at Mike to let go and let me float it into the bay. In all this confusion Mike's knee got wrenched badly.

We decided to portage the remaining four sections of rapids and several hours later we reached a beautiful sight: calm water, no current, no wind, no clouds, and beautiful big, rolling hills on either side of the river. We paddled off into the sunset and I at once fell in love with the lower Nowleye River. Its difference to the Kazan only 30 km east is astonishing. It has enough of the Barren Lands to remain intriguing, yet its many hills in a relatively wide and deep valley provide shelter for trees. The rolling hills are pleasing to the eye and often we saw caribou grazing on them. In all, the lower Nowleye is much more scenic, personable, and less marshy than the Kazan. With the exception of the five kilometres of rapids we had just portaged up, it is a pool-and-drop river, so quite suitable for upstream travel.




The lower half of the Nowleye we travelled up is essentially three lakes with three preceding stretches of rapids. Past the second set is a fascinating characteristic of the flowing sections of the river: every island, no matter its size, has a dry channel on the side closest to shore. Once we saw a huge boulder field only to find the other side of the island very wide and deep. It was incredible. I wish I could go there in the roaring spring to see if the channels filled or if it was the generally low water levels of the past several years that make the river this way.

A day after the lining injury, Mike found his knee entirely out of commission; it was painful and he could not carry a thing. I realized his knee needed complete rest in order to heal, so I offered to carry everything for a few days; he thought this unnecessary. When you think about the problems of two people and one boat travelling alone, one of the most serious is an incapacitating injury. Fortunately we were under no time constraints, and I did end up portaging the five loads for quite some time.

The final rapid we portaged up on the Nowleye, marked only as a swift on the map, has one of the many and astonishing new elements of the trip: caribou migration trails. Wide and ankle deep, the surfaces are as hard as pavement; they look like car tracks! There are several parallel trails, all heading for a shallow river crossing. While portaging I saw a lone bull caribou, patiently and curiously eyeing me. On another trip I saw the bull, a mother with beginning antlers, and her young one close behind.

Following this portage was our last stretch on the Nowleye River, a 14-km lake. Finally we had a chance to cover some distance on a perfectly windless, calm, long lake, three rare elements on this trip. What would you do? Race onward? We caught a lake trout, and headed to a rock beach for lunch. As it happened it was not just any beach, but the gravesite of a lone Inuit. The grave itself is built into the natural line of rocks above the gravel beach and on the rise of the hill. A wooden sled runner is buried among the rocks for the afterworld, and by peering between the rocks we could see the tell-tale skull. High on the hill behind the grave is an inuksuk — so closely resembling a human from afar that I wondered what I would say to the person.

After a long lunch and some exploring, it seemed warm enough to wash my hair, so I did just that for the first and last time in 40 days. It was in this way that we unintentionally took on a lackadaisical, "live for the moment" type of style. Because the trip was so long, we lost sight of the end and had no goal to hurry towards.

This lake on the Nowleye River does not compare with the beauty of the river farther north. At first I thought it was just the gloom and doom of an overcast day, but on closer inspection it turned out to be the rocks. The hills and shores are covered with rocks, several centimetres apart and mostly on top of the ground. We had no idea that this was only a minor version of what was to come.

NOWLEYE RIVER TO KAMILUKUAK RIVER
(map reference 65E, 65F)

Where we left the Nowleye River (LD7260) the hills are a solid grey — a potato field of rocks. There is barely a place to put your foot. We climbed a hill and as always without trees there was an amazing view of the surrounding country. Despite the sun everything was grey, and the endless rocky, offensive scenery stretched out to all horizons. Still, the caribou roam here and as we began to pick our way around the rocks a couple stared curiously at us from a ridge.

The lakes between the Nowleye River and the Kamilukuak watershed are all similar, the rock-covered shores made bearable only by eskers, spaced a few kilometres apart. These pink, sandy hills are magnificent places to lunch, camp on, or explore. The portages in this section are also similar, only a couple of hundred metres long, and usually composed of boulders as the shortest course is commonly a dry stream bed. Often the portages are extended by a hundred metres or so due to underwater boulders blocking the shores. On the portages it was tricky hopping from rock to rock. The fierce wind played with the boat and more than once I ended up on the ground under it; sometimes I couldn't carry it at all. (After the trip it was pointed out someone could hold the front end of the canoe to prevent it from spinning in the wind.) The wind also often stopped us from paddling, making for many leisurely afternoons eating fish, exploring, reading astrophysics texts, or lounging about.

During the upstream travel, with all channels being blocked by rocks, the wind relentlessly blowing, and the endless portaging, more than once Mike was not feeling positive about my choice of this route. After all, this was supposed to be a canoe trip, not a hiking trip. My opinion was rather opposite in that while the route was, I admit, unnecessarily rough, the short length of the summer season in the north, my desire to see this region, and the need to keep expenses down meant we had to loop back to Kasba Lake. There was no way other than "up." We had much more time than necessary; this route just meant we saw a lot of the land, to say the least.

A good example of rough travel is the height-of-land portage between the Kamilukuak and Nowleye watersheds were we had to cross huge rocky "mountains" (LD5357). Although I had been apprehensive for a few days prior to our arrival there, it turned out to be extremely scenic because a truly spectacular view greeted us at the top. Just downhill are a few little lakes, which, because of the sheltered hills, have some stands of spruce and mossy patches. Beyond them we could see the beginnings of the next fair-sized lake. Portaging over the hills was actually quite charming; it felt like a mountain trek and with the yellow caribou moss between the rocks, suddenly it was "rockland" itself that appealed to me.

Past this height of land the three little ponds have decent rockless shores and are surprisingly pretty and deep enough to paddle in. Joining the first two is a tiny

stream going down; indeed we now were in the Kamilukuak River watershed. A while later, just as I was wondering how many modern-day travellers had been through this surely untrodden path between watersheds, we saw a very old, rusting oil drum on a small island (LD4856). We had seen other signs of visitors on the Nowleye River: a weather-worn miner's stake (LD8897) and five kilometres from that a recently used site with hundreds of rock core samples stacked on a rickety structure (LD8292).

KAMILUKUAK RIVER TO THE KASBA WATERSHED
(map reference 65D, 65E )

A few lakes and a day or two southwest, from a bay in island-studded, large Blue Island Lake (FU4640) we portaged into the Kamilukuak River. Don't let the term "river" fool you, the Kamilukuak is not one to be paddled! Where we travelled it, it is a series of little lakes connected by streams not wide enough to fit a canoe. In some places the map does not even show connections by little streams. The portage into the river is strikingly different from the surrounding landscape. As we travelled closer to the tree line we found small patches of forest, not just clumps of trees, in any sheltered areas.

This portage is particularly well protected and with the water available in the Kamilukuak "brook" hosts relatively large trees. We even saw two birches already turning yellow, trees we had not ever seen so far from the tree line. The forest is fascinating, partly because of its charm and beauty but mostly because it is such an anomaly in this barren and rocky part. In the evening we camped in a smaller but similar forest patch, where we heard a squirrel. After living for so long in the harsh Barren Lands coupled with recent travel through unscenic "rockland," these sounds were a comfort and a relief. Mike spoke for us both when he said, "I've decided I really like trees."

From here back to Kasba Lake we were not in any major river system. So we became used to portaging even more. Past our forest campsite several mountain lakes — ponds surrounded by steep hills — took us to the next fair-sized lake, Casimir Lake, and the start of what I call "Esker Territory." Every ten or so kilometres there are eskers. Not just the usual pink, sandy hills, but long, detailed complexes with double and triple ridges that have forested valleys between them. One little hollow we camped in has four walls — a roofless, soundproof cabin. The eskers are so fantastic that these lakes are worth taking a trip to just for themselves.

Still in the transition zone, we were not overwhelmed by dense forests, but in sheltered spots stand large spruce trees. One of the esker complexes is the most charming and scenic place I have yet encountered in the world. It is double ridged and on one side guarded by pointed spruce trees. At the top I caught a stunning view of the surrounding royal-blue little lakes and the pink esker complex trailing off into the distance. On the other side a few esker side arms surround a huge beach area with an inland pond. A perfect place for contemplation.

I realized how completely accustomed we had become to our northern travelling lifestyle. We had not seen anyone in over a month, but that rarely crossed our minds. We did not use watches; the setting sun (though quite late at 60 degrees latitude) told us it was time to camp. Our growling stomachs indicated meal time. We had grown so used to our simple and monotonous diet that we had no cravings for food other than what we had. We had not bathed since Kasba Lodge, but that too was not an issue. We had grown so content with each other's company that we had no psychological or emotional cravings for anything or anyone from "outside." The trip became our perfect life.

The map indicated that, past relatively large but barren Taina and Mallet Lakes, we would be more or less pond hopping all the way back to Kasba Lake. But compared to the ones in Algonquin Park, the lakes seem to be of a fair size. With the increasing vegetation this meant good landings, not rocky.

By now it was late August — early fall. Canada geese were forming Vs. Some days saw temperature shifts of more than 20 degrees C from morning chill to afternoon heatwaves. The forest patches were growing in size and density, and the roughest portage of the trip

was through a two-kilometre tangle of spruce into the Kasba Lake watershed. This was our last height of land to cross, and we found ourselves in a stream where the colored bushes and tall spruce trees reminded us of Algonquin in the fall.

From here on we figured we would have a relaxing last few days. The smaller lakes and solid forests meant the wind would be less of a deterrent, and shores would be vegetated, not rocky. Mike's knee was slowly healing so that he could carry the by now not-so-heavy packs, although still not the canoe, since he had to transfer weight off of his bad knee onto his paddle-cane. It seemed we would be able to cover the remaining one hundred kilometres or so easily in one week.

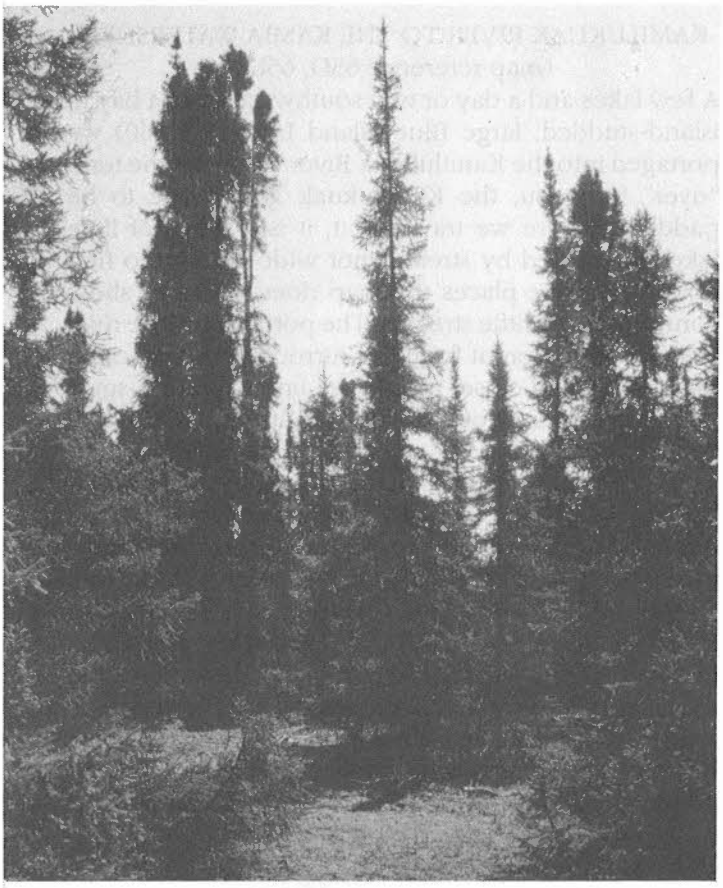
But we were in for some surprises. Late one day, I reached the end of a portage in total shock. First there were whitecaps everywhere and huge swells due to a massive headwind. Although the lake was only 6.5 km long, we were trapped since it was running in the direction of the wind. Worse: a forest fire we had been watching all day, debating its exact location with navigational interest more than worry, now appeared dead ahead: smoke was thick at the other end of the lake. I saw it moving towards us. Memories from farther south during the first part of our trip jolted me into sheer panic. The sky over the bay was now opaque and at this rate we would be asphyxiated in how many minutes?

I was dumbstruck, so that I could do nothing but watch the smoke approach, though somewhere in the back of my mind I knew we had to think and act fast. I looked at Mike and saw my own fear mirrored in his expression. The day was too much already as we had suffered the killer portage and been pummelled by a passing hailstorm. All of these thoughts passed in seconds, for almost instantly we decided to power over to the right shore, since the smoke was mostly rushing down the left. As we raced over the water I noticed the bay ahead clearing and realized that what we saw must have been an eruption of smoke because the fires burn in starts and bursts, like gusts of wind. We camped high on a hill, in the open spruce forest, beside the tallest tamarack I have ever seen.

By the next morning it was raining steadily. We packed up in the rain for the first time in 57 days. Dry and sunny weather for two months sounds ideal, but it is a trade-off to the severe hazards of forest fires.

Before we left this campsite, we began to see signs of humans. We noticed old trap-line markers down near the shore of our campsite, stakes that when pulled out were obviously cut. The next day, between two little unnamed lakes, we found a very narrow and overgrown portage. That evening, on an esker unmarked on the map, we came across a trapper's recent camp full of caribou bones, jaws, bits of antlers and teeth, a broken ceramic plate, rope, and cut logs.

In this last stretch before Kasba the forest becomes more continuous and much more dense, almost impassable. The many caribou trails seem to wander randomly around the spruce trees. On the ground, orange and spongy moss make each step sink past the ankles, but the higher terrain still has the open spruce forest where the going is easy. This scenery is remarkably different from the rockland we had seen a week before. On the whole trip every ten days or so saw us in completely different surroundings, but our constant companion, the wind, remained unchanged. Often incredibly strong, it would blow us wildly down the little lakes, some only five hundred metres long.



BACK TO KASBA LAKE
(map reference 65D)

The last two small lakes before Kasba Lake have esker hills for their shores, and sandy esker outcroppings in many places. We wished we had better weather to explore this pretty section. Once into Kasba Lake the bay in which we found ourselves appeared to be quite unlike the rest of the lake, with esker hills providing shelter. Outside of the sheltered bay, the wind was ferocious as usual. While we were deciding where to camp the wind threatened to blow us out of the bay and down the whole 75 km of Kasba Lake.

By morning the wind had calmed, and we paddled away. The air smelled of fresh ashes, and we were disappointed to see most of the northwest shore of Kasba Lake recently burnt. Some of the fires were still smouldering, even after three days of cold temperatures and heavy rain. Earlier in the summer, all of the fires or burnt-over areas we saw had been at most a few kilometres in diameter and more often much smaller. Not here.

By mid-afternoon the wind had picked up, blowing us to our final destination in no time. We reached Kasba Lake Lodge facing the blinding setting sun to be greeted by the owner, Doug Hill, the first person we saw in four weeks. We arrived just in time, he told us, as the whole outfit was packing up and leaving the next day, 28 August. Somehow (though without a watch or calendar) I had calculated the date to be a day earlier. Being late would not have been a disaster since I kind of liked the idea of wintering over at Kasba Lodge, with just Mike and the hermit caretaker as company. (Actually the hermit could have radioed a plane.)

The next morning we flew out in Kasba Lodge's Beaver float plane on a 1.5-hour flight to Points North. We saw much fresh burn and many fires still smouldering; this part of the North had indeed been ravaged.

## CONCLUSION

I was devastated that we had to leave. Unlike any other trip this had not so much been a holiday as a new and improved way of living. In sixty days, "real" life had become so dim as to seem partly impossible and mostly unbearable. The solitude, the vast wilderness, the free and compelling lifestyle, the constantly changing terrain, and my excellent companion were a truly unbeatable combination.

However, we finished with a sense of completion, having started in the boreal forest and then travelling north to the tundra. We crossed the tree line directly, and on our southward journey back we parallelled it in a transition zone, until we finished again in the boreal forest. We started in early summer, just one week after the break-up, and finished in the northern fall, somewhat near our starting point, when the leaves of the bushes had already colored, the weather had turned considerably colder, and the geese were flying south. We witnessed raging forest fires, paddled wild rapids, big rivers, rock-filled creeks, ocean-like lakes, crossed heights of land. All of this gave us a sense of the way things fit together. Such are the rewards for the overland traveller: getting to know the lay of the land and not just the river banks.

*The author would be interested in corresponding with anyone who has been or plans to go to the area: sseager@cfa.harvard.edu*

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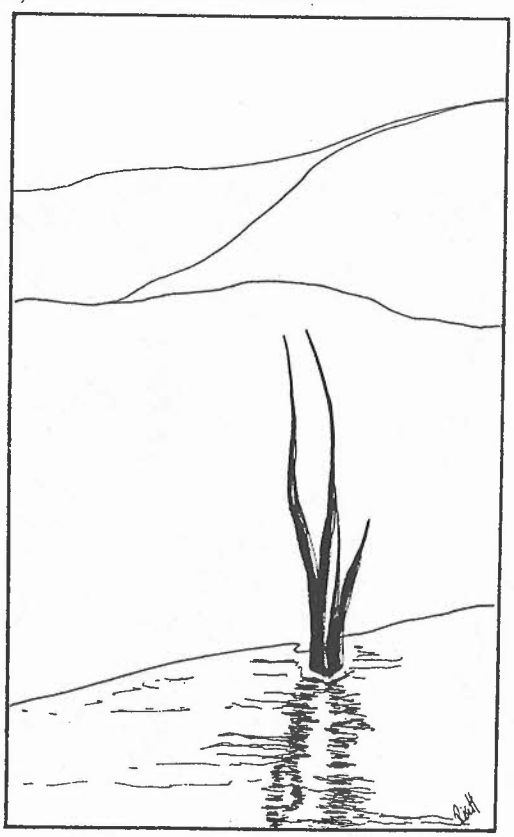
Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning 'the way or route'

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal, *Nastawgan*, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

## EDITORIAL

We are in trouble, maybe even in deep trouble! The quantity of material fit for publication in our journal has reached a dangerous low on my editor's desk; I have only one major article on file for the winter issue. If I do not receive several short and long articles before the deadline date of 27 October, we will for the first time in many years see a *Nastawgan* with fewer than 24 pages, the thinnest issue in a very long time. And that would be a shame because traditionally the winter issue is often the fattest one of the year.

Please overcome your reluctance to write a piece for the journal, do not think that writing is not for you, that someone else should do it, you're just a reader. Not so, everyone has something to say that can be of interest to all of us, be it a long trip report or a short note on a clever technical innovation. And the editor is always there to help you get your prose onto the printed page. Try it, you'll like it. *Nastawgan* is *your* journal, don't let it wither. Act now.



## 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 1996 | *deadline date*: | 27 October |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Spring 1997 | | 26 January |

WCA MEMBERSHIP LISTS are available to any members who wish one for personal, non-commercial use. The list can be ordered as hardcopy or on a 3½ in. DD computer diskette. Send a five-dollar bill (no cheque, please!) to Cash Belden at the WCA postal address (see WCA Contacts on the back page).

*ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1997* will be held in conjunction with Canoe Expo in the spring of 1997. Discussions are underway with Canoe Ontario about holding the meeting at the exposition on Sunday morning, one hour before the show opens to the public. Your Board of Directors wants to try out this arrangement to make the get-together convenient for WCA members, at the same time providing them with the opportunity to purchase Canoe Expo tickets at a discounted price. Further details will follow.

*HOME FOR CANOEING* The Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association (CRCA) is continuing its "Home for Canoeing" campaign to build an Outdoor education / Environmental Learning Centre at which the Association's office will be located. It will also serve as a centre for outdoor and environmental education, slide shows / seminars / guest speakers on canoeing/kayaking and the outdoors, a "Wall of Fame" area to pay tribute to great Canadians who have made outstanding contributions to canoeing and kayaking, a place to find information about paddling in Canada, and much more. Donations sent to the CRCA — designated for the "Home for Canoeing" campaign — will receive charitable donations tax receipts and will be

recognized in perpetuity at the new "Home for Canoeing" as well as in Kanawa Magazine. Contact: CRCA, 1029 Hyde Park Road, Suite 5, Hyde Park, Ontario, N0M 1Z0; tel. (519) 473-2109; fax (519) 472-0768.

*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 into March. Cost is approximately $50 for a whole winter of paddling pleasure. Call Bill Ness at (416) 321-3005 to register. Don't delay — space is limited.

## FALL PARTY

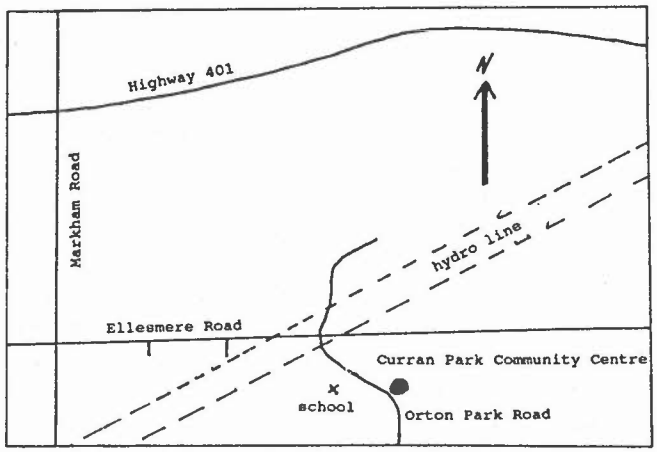
Want to meet old canoeing friends? Want to hear some tall paddling stories and see interesting photographs? Want to find out what the WCA is all about, who its members are, and what inside information they can give you?

Then come to the WCA Fall Party, also called Wine-and-Cheese Party, on Friday evening, 29 November, at the same location as last year: Curran Hall in Scarborough. To get there, take Highway 401 to Markham Road, turn south to Ellesmere Road, turn east on Ellesmere to Orton Park Road (three lights), then half a kilometre south to the hall on the east side by the tennis courts. There is parking behind the building or on the street. An entry fee of $7.00 per person will be charged at the door. Everybody is welcome, including non members.

***Program***

| | |
|---|---|
| 7:00 – 8:00 | Registration and welcome |
| 8:00 – 9:00 | Featured presentation |
| 9:00 – 10:00 | Meet the people, enjoy |
| 10:00 – ... | Coffee and clean-up |

*For more information contact Sharon Hackert, (416) 438-7672.*




**New directions to the Wine and Cheese**

Last year there was some concern expressed because the venue for the Wine and Cheese had no subway access. As a remedy I have scouted a canoe access for downtown dwellers.

From the foot of Yonge Street, paddle on Lake Ontario in an eastern direction. The imposing Scarborough Bluffs will be on your left. Just past the Highland Creek Filtration plant is Highland Creek.

Paddle upstream about four kilometres past Scarborough College until the river splits in two. Keep to river left. By now you'll see Scarborough Centenary Hospital. About 300 metres north of the fork you will see a large concrete platform on river right and a path that goes uphill to Plover Avenue. Portage right onto Botany Hill and right again at Orton Park and you have arrived. Plenty of canoe parking is available free! Sorry, no camping.

The portage is only about 800 metres. There may be some lining, liftovers, and additional portages depending on when it last rained. In November it gets dark early so an early morning start is recommended.

John Hackert

## TRAVELLING HOME

In the village. Pulled in early this morning after camping eight or nine kilometres upriver last night. Now checking on flights out. Seems we're lucky this trip. The twice-weekly plane is due in today.

Once you arrive at the village on the bay or the chartered plane starts its descent to pick you up at the mouth of a river you have just canoed, it could be less than 24 hours till you are back in your routine. Too big a transition happening too quickly. The mind is still operating under a wilderness travel regimen and the body is close to landing in a big city. No adjustment period.

Many articles have been written on jet lag. It's what happens when travellers move rapidly to a different time zone. The body needs some time to adjust. But much more painful is wilderness lag. I'm mentally still n the wilderness yet I'm surrounded by all these man-made things and all this noise and all these people. It hurts. It really hurts.

One thought will help me get through this adjustment period as it has all the others. It's knowing that although the trip is over, the memories are not.

Greg Went

# POINTING AT THE FOREST

**Gerry Yellowlees**

It is October 1992. Ebony, my dog, and I are camping on Big East Lake, which is located some 32 kilometres east of Bracebridge. The lake is quite large and isolated. Dense forest defines its perimeter.

Ebony is staring fixedly at the forest. What has she seen? What has she heard? Suddenly, the forest is transformed into a foreign world. Shadows deepen. Trees smother the light. Bushes hide danger. Fear grips my stomach. Some time ago, a couple of canoeists were killed by a bear in Algonquin Park. While canoeing through that area, I was told by a park Ranger that there have been a number of bear "incidents" reported. Cool and wet weather has limited the amount of food available for the bears to eat.

I leave the campsite and move to the open shore.

The world is filled with light as the sun warms my soul. Water gently caresses and cleans rocks until they sparkle. The contrast in my feelings amazes me. My confidence surges back. Danger shrinks. I'm surprised at my apprehension of being close to the forest. I've always felt part of the outdoor environments, moving freely in and out of those other worlds. But suddenly, I'm confronted by my humanity. The forest is now an alien place where I don't belong. It has its own rules and its own inhabitants. I am the intruder.

After five minutes of watching Ebony standing immobilized, I start to ponder the possibilities of what may be attracting her undivided attention. One such possibility is a moose. We have observed one coming down to feed on water plants at the other side of the lake. Another, more disconcerting possibility is that it might be a bear. When setting up camp we had taken a walk around the perimeter to check it out, coming across fresh bear droppings nearby.

Five more minutes pass. By now, Ebony has been standing still and staring into the forest for fifteen minutes! There is something there. What do I do? It's there and I am here. Neither of us is moving. Stalemate. I could take off in the canoe and wait on the lake, or I could go and see what it is. The suspense is killing me, but I fear the forest and the danger that lurks in its dark recesses. Waves of claustrophobia wash over me as I stare into the jumble of bushes and branches that seem ready to entrap me. Underlying my anxieties is the fear of the unknown. What is it out there?

I stand on the beach for what feels like hours, rationalizing. Should I go or should I stay? Leaving the campsite would be the safest thing to do. But entering the forest would let me gain control of my fear. It may only be a rabbit. I need to know. But more than curiosity is pulling me into that alien world; I feel that I have to leave the "safety" of civilization, to experience becoming a part of the forest.

With the acrid flavor of fear invading my mouth, Ebony and I proceed slowly into the forest. Adrenalin is pumping. We walk stealthily up the hill, leaving behind the security of the camp. I try to avoid stepping on any twigs, becoming aware that I'm walking on tip-toe. I'm not in any rush, trying not to listen to the voice in my head. It is saying: "This is stupid, what are you trying to prove?" Focus. Forget the voice. Focus.

Creeping higher and higher up the hill, we soon become surrounded by bushes and trees. The forest closes in around us. My hopes of seeing it before it sees me grow dimmer and dimmer. Branches whip at my face, clawing at my hair. Confused, I don't know whether to look out for my feet or my face. Control. Stay in control. Focus.

Hurray! Daylight is ahead of us as we approach the shoulder of the hill. I stop and crouch down. I can see. Relief releases the tension, which flows out of my limbs, leaving them weak and trembling. Before showing myself, I take a rest. Then, very slowly I move forward. Ebony is no longer moving steadily. Caution makes her movements hesitant and jerky — moving and stopping, moving and stopping. Her movements tell me that it's there.

Well, this is it! There is no more cover left. The bushes are thinning out and the rocks are beginning to show through the soil. Slowly I raise my head above the remaining bushes — nothing. "OK," I say to myself, "up and over the top." Apprehensively, I leave the safety of the bushes to climb the final rise. No fast movements now and no noise, I don't want to show aggression nor do I want to show fear. My heart is thumping. My stomach is churning. Steadily, I go on.

A SCREAM! Good God! What is that? I drop to the ground, numbed by an ear-piercing assault of noise. Memories of childhood air-raid drills race through my head. My ears hurt. My nose is buried in dry moss. Somehow my mind notes that tufts of dry grass look like they are dying. No longer being spaced out, trees encircle me, looming large and menacing. There is no mistaking the anger of invaded privacy in the scream. There is no mistaking the threat!

I obligingly freeze. Helpless, I can't see where the noise is coming from. I don't know what it is. Some demigod of the forest is watching me, prostrate on the ground before it. It is the one who is all powerful, deciding our future. I am at a loss to know what to do. I'm watching and waiting. Nothing! It is waiting and it is watching — me!

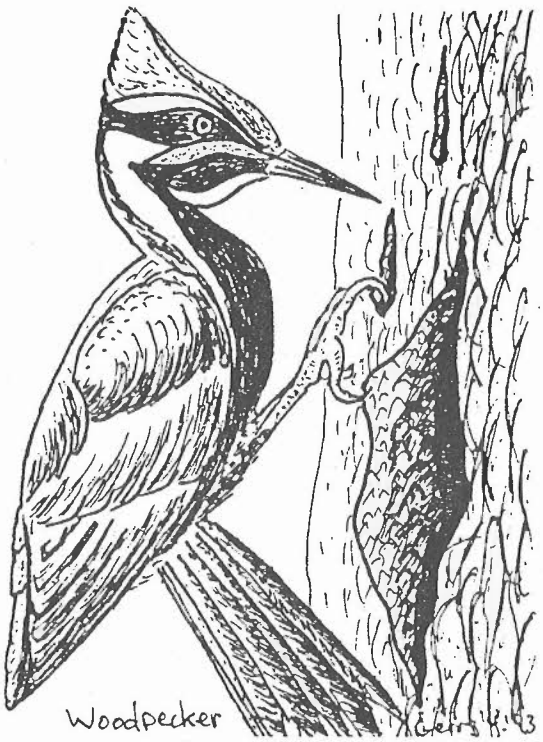
Another scream. I know it came from up in the air and from very close to us. Another long pause. Nothing has attacked me. It is not a bear. Dare I hope that I'm safe? Confidence slowly relaxes my muscles. Finally I move to get a better view of it.

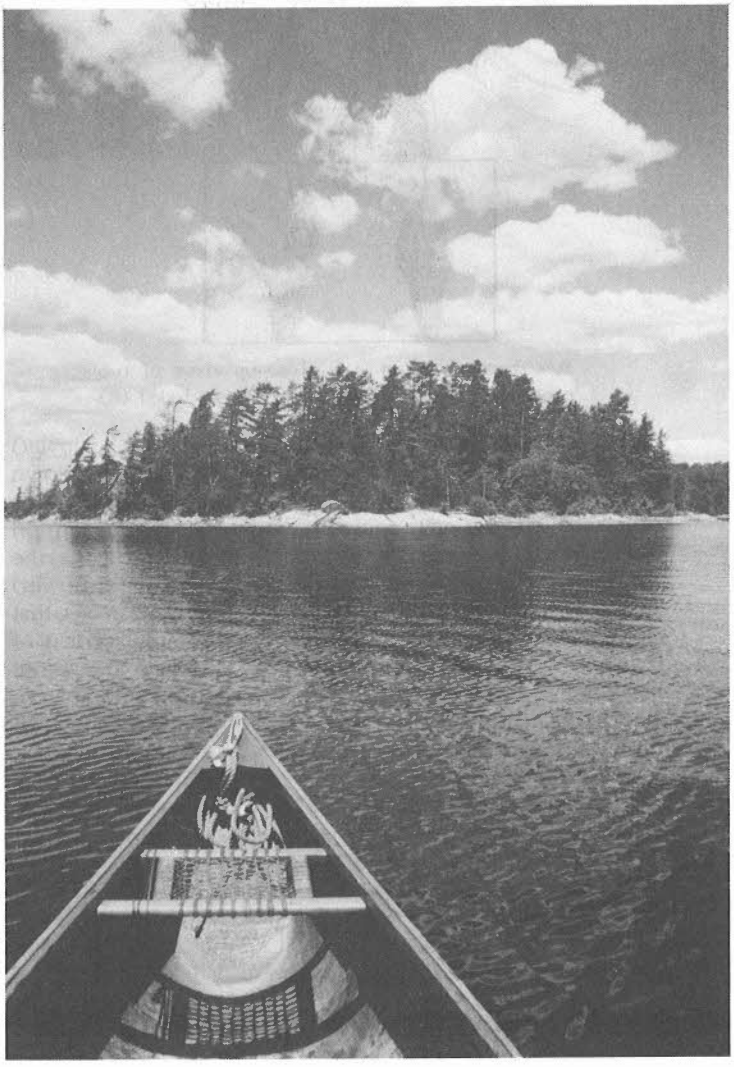
I am greeted by a magnificent sight. A huge bird, about half a metre tall, is eying me suspiciously. Its brilliant, tuxedoed front and Count Dracula-caped

back declare that it has few enemies to worry about. A blazing red cap shakes angrily at me. It is a pileated woodpecker, the king of North American woodpeckers. I'm overtaken by a sense of joy. Ebony and I watch in amazement as the long beak shreds the tree trunk in seconds.

My heart is pounding and adrenalin is sharpening my senses, but inside I'm aware of a deep sense of satisfaction. Fear has been overcome. Earlier, I had seen the mirror of my soul in the shadows of the forest. Where one might have found beauty, I had found despair. Through overcoming fear, I had recaptured the beauty of the forest in the shape of a magnificent woodpecker. No longer an alien, I had shed my feelings of loneliness. It was good to feel at home again in the forest.

Many times I have sat in my kayak at the top of a rapids. Stilling the demons inside, the river has flowed into me through every sense until it has filled me totally. I know the perfect peace that comes with an awareness of every wave and sound of the maelstrom below me. By looking at the shadows behind the facade, it is possible to look into the mirror of the soul. What beauty is there, is your beauty, and what despair is there, is your experience.



## SEPTEMBER

*Ah, love, could we find but one*
*Of all the dreams we lost*
*Would we pick it up again*
*Regardless of the cost?*

*Would we trade September's days*
*For what we missed back then*
*Would we take a different portage, now*
*Or do our route again?*

*Almost asleep in the canoe*
*In the quiet of a weedy bay*
*You touch the question carefully*
*And smile, as if to say:*

*It doesn't matter how rough the route*
*When you've finally camped in peace*
*Sometimes the shelter matters most*
*And the passage matters least*

Larry Everson

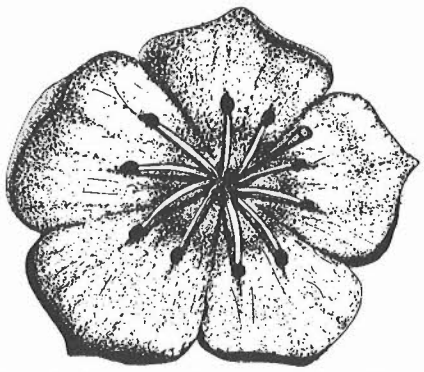
# Flower Bombs

Our human languages are full of images inspired by the natural world. We use the eagle to symbolize pride and fierce independence, the fox to represent craftiness, the turkey for stupidity, and the weasel for treachery. We ourselves don't really object to these images -- provided that we remember that they are really just figures of speech and don't always describe reality particularly well. After all, as magnificent as a bald eagle appears to us land-bound humans for instance, there is nothing especially admirable about a lifestyle based on eating dead fish or robbing other birds of prey of their catches. Or, to take another example from those above, turkeys may not look very bright but just ask anyone who has ever tried to hunt them about how wary they really are.

The list of cases where our popular human perceptions about plants and animals diverge mildly or strongly from reality is long but just this week a very interesting example came to mind with the early summer wildflowers now blooming across Algonquin Park. Flowers, it goes without saying, are the very symbol of shy, delicate, passive innocence. They are the total opposite of all the selfishness and violence that seem to play such large roles in our modern world.

But is our perception really accurate? Most of the time, yes, but there are two fascinating exceptions now in flower. In both cases the blossoms contain "explosive" devices just waiting to be triggered by some unwary visitor. And, just as with terrorist bombs, these floral booby traps are intended to advance the cause of their manufacturers with little regard for the lives of innocent bystanders -- hardly the sort of picture we normally associate with flowers.

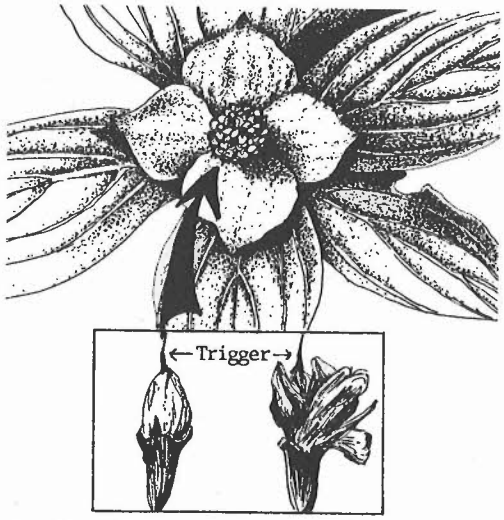
The first and more innocent example is afforded by our two laurels, the bog laurel, a plant of open sunny bogs, and the sheep laurel, which is to be found in more upland, shadier situations often under black spruce. Both laurels have conspicuous, very beautiful, pink flowers, and especially in the case of sheep laurel, often grow in great profusion and attract the attention of park visitors. A close look at an opened laurel flower will show that each one has ten stamens (the structures which produce the pollen) surrounding the pistil (female, or pollen--receiving part of the flower) in the centre. There is nothing unusual about this arrangement except that, at first, the stamens are bent backwards and have their ends (the anthers) stuck in little notches in the nearest petals. They are under considerable tension in this position and when something jostles the flower the stamens snap upright instantaneously, catapulting their sticky pollen up from the flower and into the air. If the disturbance was a nectar-hunting insect, the projected pollen may find the mark, stick to it, and inadvertently be transported to the pistil of another flower, thus assuring cross fertilization.



Laurel stamens ready to catapult pollen

Algonquin's other explosive flower is much more sophisticated, much more violent, and also much more familiar to most people. Almost everyone, in fact, has seen the showy white "flowers" of the common bunchberry growing on the forest floor under hemlocks or fir. Very few of us, however, ever get down to have a really close look at woodland flowers and the truth about bunchberry was only discovered fairly recently. The first thing to appreciate when you make your own personal inspection of a bunchberry "flower" is that what seems to be one flower is really very many. In fact, the four white "petals" surrounding the apparent flower are not really petals at all, but special structures called "bracts." The bracts surround 8 to 15 tiny true flowers (each with their own small, light-greenish-yellow petals) and it is these which can and do explode.

Before blowing up, each true bunchberry flower is a tiny vase-shaped structure about two millimetres tall and with a thin "antenna" projecting upwards for another one millimetre. Inside




Bunchberry blossom with close-up views of two central flowers: unexploded (L), exploded (R)

the closed petals are packed the pistil (female part of the flower) and around it the four stamens with their anthers bent down against their supporting stalks. Both the anthers and the petals of a mature flower are apparently under tremendous tension (for such small structures) because when something touches the "bomb's" hair-trigger (the antenna sticking up above the flower) the result is a violent "explosion." It happens so fast, in fact, that all a human observer sees is the blink-of-an-eye replacement of the closed flower by a completely open one with spread-out petals and upright, extended stamens. The only clue that an explosion has occurred is a brief shower of pollen flying in all directions above the deceptively quiet and immobile, spent, open flower below.

Bunchberry pollen grains are apparently much too large and heavy to be carried away by wind. It is not hard to see, therefore, that the violently convulsive explosions of its flowers, set off when a visitor brushes against the antenna-like trip-wire, tend to greatly improve the chances of the pollen being forcibly plastered onto some insect that will then carry it to another bunchberry flower head some distance away. It is also probable, however, that very small insects are occasionally killed or maimed by these explosions. It is nothing new, of course, that

individuals sometimes end up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Flowers are so firmly entrenched in our human perceptions as the ultimate symbols of delicacy, beauty, and innocence that it seems almost sacrilegious of us to be drawing even the remotest of parallels between them and the violence we humans are capable of. But if we want to have an accurate and honest picture of the world around us we do have to guard against be ing carried away by our own myths and symbolism.

This being said, let us hasten to reassure any readers who may have been having second thoughts about going on a hike and breathing in the sweet fragrance of Algonquin wildflowers. It is true that some of the flowers may blow up in your face but unless you are very little (mosquito-size or smaller) you probably won't have anything to worry about. Keep smiling.

Reprinted from the 25 June 1987 issue of *The Raven*, courtesy of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

# ESTIMATING A RIVER'S LENGTH

William Hosford

The length of a river may be estimated as follows: First set a pair of dividers on the map's scale to a convenient distance (e.g. 1 mile) and then measure the distance along the river by swinging the dividers from center of river to center of river. To account for the bends, the distance can be corrected by multiplying by an appropriate river factor, RF. River factors can be estimated by measuring the average amplitude of the bends, a, between divider points and their average wave length, L. Figures 1 & 2 give the river factors for various values of a/L.

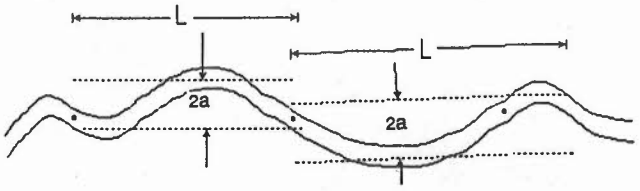



Figure 1 Measuring the wave length and amplitude of river course.

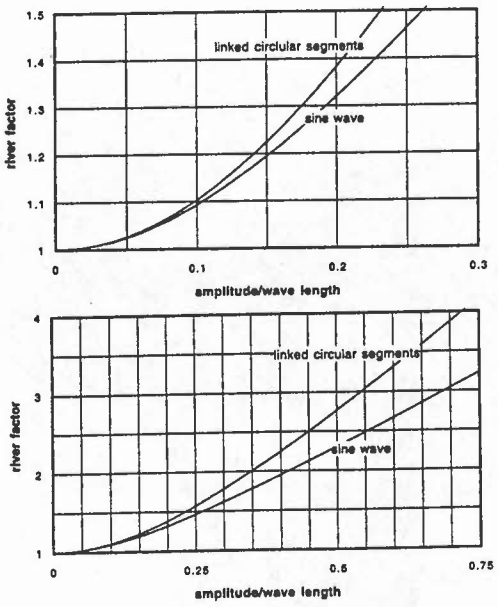



Figure 2 Relation between river factor and amplitude/wave length ratio predicted by two methods.

These charts are based on approximating the river shape by two different methods. One was to assume that the shape can be described by a series of linked arcs of a circle. With this assumption,

$$RF = (\theta/2)/\sin(\theta/2) \quad \text{and}$$

$$a/L = [1-\cos(\theta/2)]/2\sin(\theta/2)]/2$$

where $\theta$ is the angular arc length. In the first expression, $\theta$ must be in radians (1 radian = 57.29 degrees).

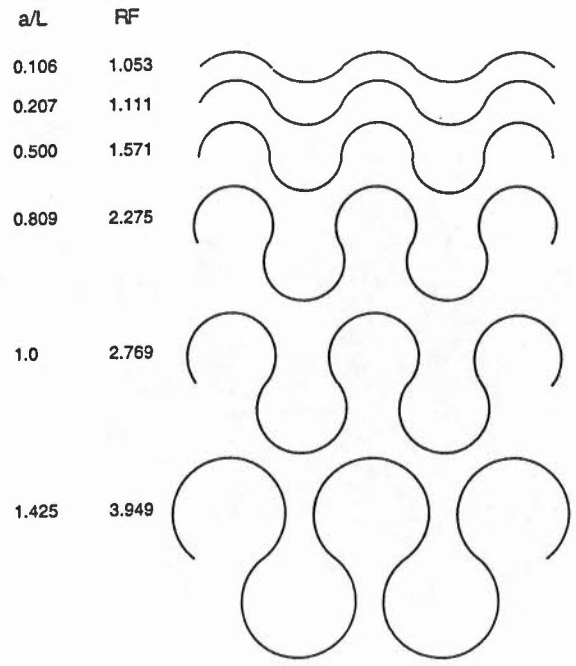
The second method was to approximate the river shape by a sine wave of amplitude a and wave length L. In that case the river factor is given by

$$RF = (1/\pi)\int_0^{\pi}[1 + 4(\pi a/L)^2\cos^2 x]^{1/2}dx$$

which must be evaluated numerically.

The differences are not large for $a/L \leq 0.2$. For larger a/L, I feel the circular segment approximation is probably better.

Another way of estimating the river factor is to make a visual comparison with lines of a known river factor. The shapes of rivers approximated by circular segments for several levels of a/L are shown in Figure 3. These may serve as a guide to estimating the river factor.




I want to acknowedge the help of Professor David Srolovitz and Sridhar Narayanaswami on the sine wave approximation.

# CANOEING FOR THE NINETIES, THE COLEMAN KITCHEN

The Coleman kitchen is the latest canoeing innovation from the same company that brought us the Coleman stove, the Coleman cooler, and the Coleman canoe. With this distinguished ancestry its not surprising that the Coleman kitchen is the most innovative piece of camping equipment seen in a long time.

The Coleman kitchen is a folding food preparation and cleaning area which includes two useful countertops plus its own sink which has a sanitary drain attached to it so you can process greywater in an ecologically sensitive fashion. The top cover has a full-sized backgammon and checker board for after-dinner entertainment.

Weighing in at only 25 pounds, the Coleman kitchen is easy to carry on the longest portage. It folds up into its own pack which is about 9 in. x 16 in. x 40 in., so it takes very little space in the canoe. On the Noire River in Quebec this year we found that it was indispensable. Expect to pay between $275 to $350 for it .

In the accompanying photo hot dogs are served off the barbecue on a remote northern Ontario river. In the other photo the Coleman kitchen is carried on a portage; note the entertainment centre.

John Hackert

# WHICH WAY DID HE GO?

John McInnes

Following historic trails can enhance the enjoyment of a northern canoetrip. Travelling traditional native routes, or those of early explorers and geologists, can add a sense of history and continuity to a modern day expedition. The journals of these early travellers are also a fruitful source of ideas for trip planning.

If you want to follow in someone's footsteps, however, it is fairly important that they knew where they were. This is not a problem with many of the early explorers, like David Thompson, or with travels undertaken on behalf of the Geological Survey of Canada. Such individuals were usually interested in geographical exploration *per se*, and were often trained, at least to some extent, in map making. Many northern travellers, however, had interests other than exploration. Interested primarily in hunting or prospecting, their journals offer little in the way of route description, focusing more on the thrill of the chase, the derring-do of the author, or the prospect of instant wealth.

Warburton Pike's description of his travels north of Great Slave Lake in the late 1880s falls into this category. His map leaves a string of place names behind; but in many places it is difficult to trace the route he followed accurately, and relate the names be bestowed on features to their modern counterparts. Other travellers in this area — notably Munn and Whitney — were even more vague than Pike in their geographic descriptions.

Around the same time, a young American, Frank Russell, was travelling in the NWT gathering specimens for the University of Iowa. In the summer of 1893, while staying at Fort Rae, he decided to undertake a trip up the Yellowknife River. Accompanied only by a young Metis boy, he paddled along the north shore of Great Slave Lake to Yellowknife Bay and began his ascent of the river, intending to reach the Barren Lands to the north. He was unsuccessful in this attempt, and turned back after several days' travel, low on rations, lamenting that "The caribou were beyond our reach. The net yielded no fish and our supply of dried meat was nearly gone." Before turning back, Russell and his companion climbed a high hill for a view of the country. From its peak, he asserted: "The site of Fort Enterprise (Franklin's base on Winter Lake) must have been within our horizon."

It is certainly possible that Russell believed this at the time, especially if he was unfamiliar with the diaries of Franklin and his officers, in which they provided detailed descriptions of their ascent of the Yellowknife in 1820. However, that he could make this assertion in honesty in his book, "Explorations in the Far North," written after having returned to the University and presumably having the opportunity to review Franklin's journals, is difficult to believe. A reading of Russell's and Franklin's accounts side by side makes it clear that Russell was nowhere near Winter Lake when he abandoned his journey; indeed, he was no longer even on the Yellowknife River. The modern detective can easily trace Russell's route, and Franklin's, if he has at hand NTS maps 85J, 85O, 85P, and 86A, in the 1:250,000 series.

After portaging the first rapid on the Yellowknife (now called Tartan Rapids) some 6 miles above Great Slave Lake, Russell paddled to the north end of Prosperous Lake (which he calls Prospect), and then portaged over a thousand paces past a series of cascades to what he called "Fishing Lake." Yet he is still 35 miles south of Franklin's Fishing Lake. This portage is easily recognized from its description as Franklin's "Bowstring Portage," which ends in Bluefish Lake, unnamed by Franklin, and presently the site of a hydro operation. The descriptions of the next short portages above Bluefish Lake also agree well between the two accounts. These portages put Franklin in Quyta lake, not named by him, the site of his first camp above Great Slave. Russell, having reached Quyta, asserts that he is now upon "The Nine Lakes." In fact, the "Nine Lakes" was the arduous portage route followed by Franklin around the canyon section of the Yellowknife above Fishing Lake, not a single body of water (like Quyta) at all. Russell's assertion is remarkable, in that the diaries of both Franklin and Hood clearly indicate three days of hard travelling, over numerous lakes and portages, were necessary to reach Fishing Lake from Quota.

After paddling to the north end of his so-called Nine Lakes and camping, Russell the next day chose to proceed up a river draining into the southernmost of three bays in the north shore. (The three bays are obvious on modern maps.) On his return, he notes that they heard "the roar of rapids in the direction of the northern bay, indicating the presence of a tributary of considerable size." Indeed, this "tributary" was none other than the Yellowknife River itself, which Russell missed; he began instead the ascent of what is now called the McCrea River. Portaging a short fall he paddled out on "perhaps the Lower Carp Lake of Franklin," in fact Angle Lake. Lower Carp Lake actually lies 50 miles to the northeast of this point.

Moving up the river entering the south shore of Angle Lake, Russell "followed the channel of irregular width for a couple of miles to a large lake extending to the southwards" (now Short Point Lake). They found the river entering this lake on its east shore, and portaged over to the lake above (Neck Lake). This lake they followed east and then north fur six miles before halting to climb the hill on whose summit they abandoned their journey. If Russell did see the site of Fort Enterprise from here, he had excellent eyes; as the raven flies, he was only 24 miles from the mouth of the Yellowknife, and only 20 miles from his first portage at Tartan Rapids. The real site of Fort Enterprise lay fully 120 miles to the north, over the divide between the Yellowknife and Snare River systems.

Was Russell making his assertions from geographic sloppiness, and a failure to check Franklin's journals before publication? Or was it just out of embarrassment at having achieved so little on his exploring expedition? Either way, the modern traveller should be forewarned before trying to follow in his footsteps!

# THE MINOTAUR OF LABYRINTH CANYON

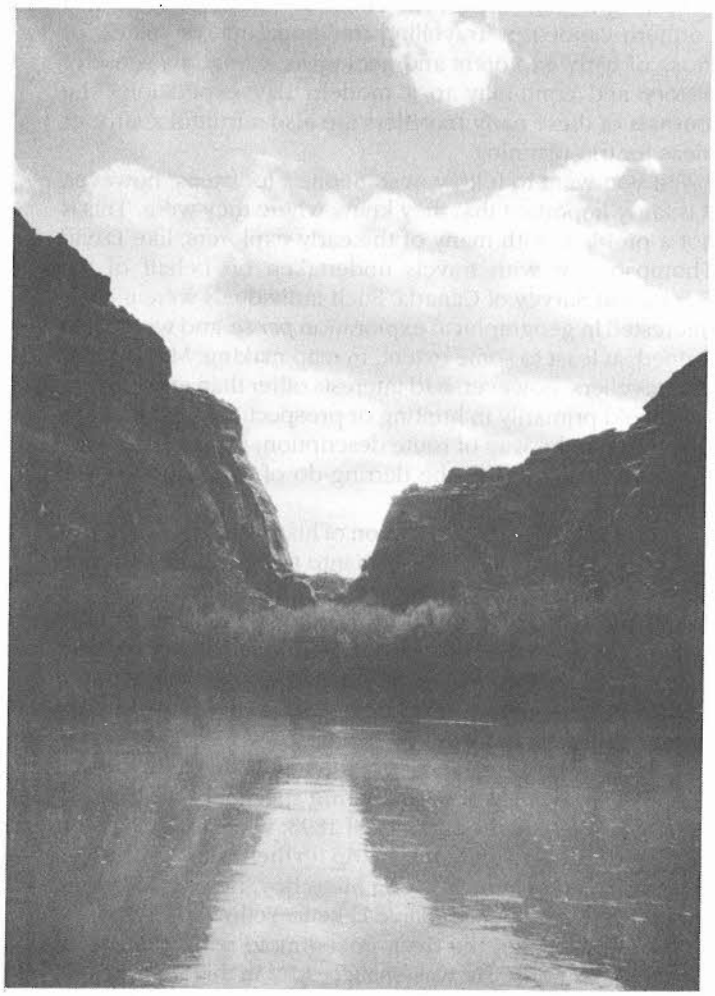
Peter B. Irvine

It is the canoeist's worst enemy. It challenges the endurance, delays progress, and can create catastrophes that defy the imagination. It appears out of nowhere and stays as long as it likes, unpredictable and deadly. It cannot be mastered and yields only to perseverance and strength of will. It can capsize a canoe in the twinkling of an eye. It is invisible but as powerful as a freight train. It is the wind.

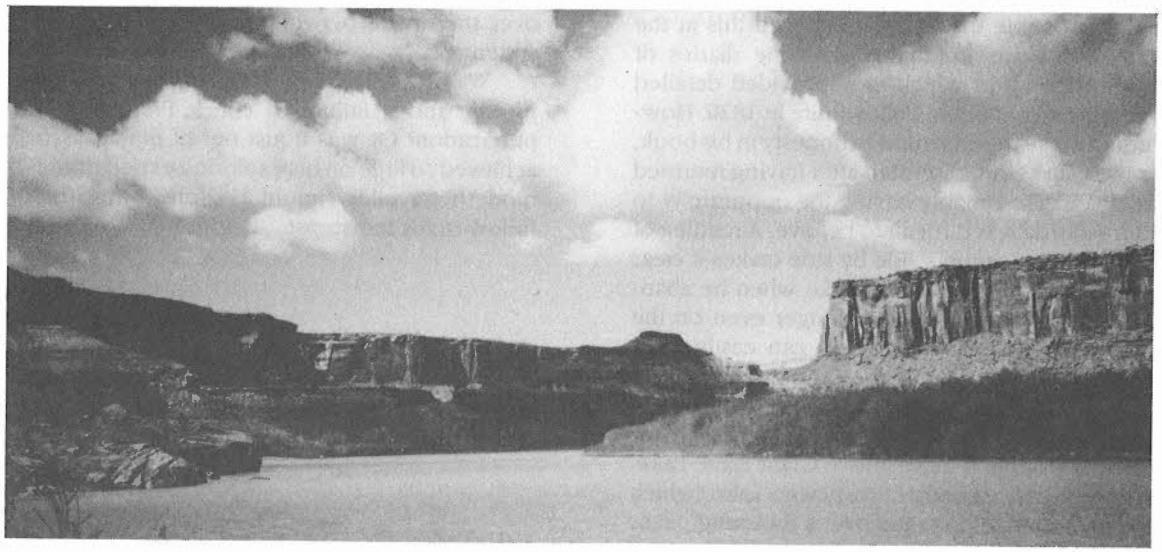
My wife, Angela, and I learned something about the wind on our 75-mile canoe trip down the Green River of Utah in early March several years ago. We had decided to take the trip on our own, just the two of us, without a guide or support party. We knew only what we could read about the river, having gleaned most of the information we had from John Wesley Powell's *Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, written over 100 years ago. We have never before or since taken a canoe trip without other people in our party.

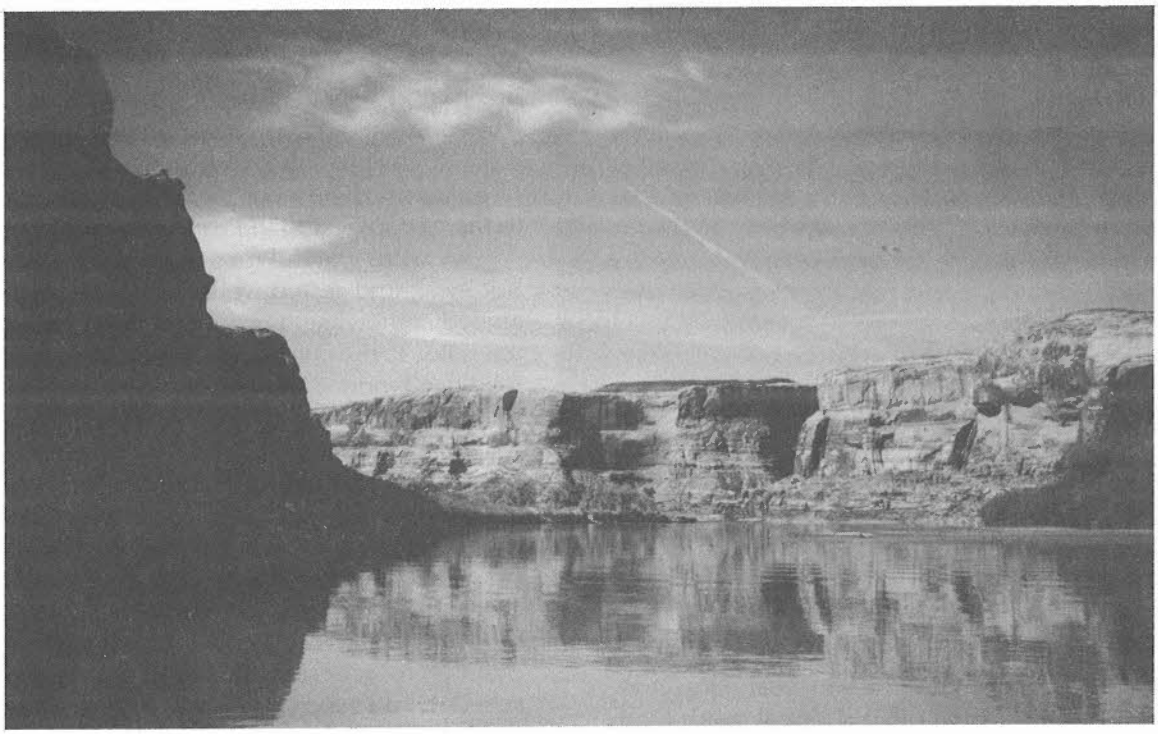
We started at Green River State Park in the town of Green River, Utah, planning to canoe 75 miles in five days to Mineral Bottom, the only take-out before the confluence of the Green with the Colorado River and the formidable rapids of Cataract Canyon. We decided to do the trip on our own, because we wanted to have the experience of relative solitude on the river. We were lured by descriptions of the magnificent red-rock landscape of Labyrinth Canyon and reports of the Green as a placid flatwater river. Based on this, we supposed that there would be nothing to fear, other than the ordinary minor hazards of canoe travel. We were wrong.

The second day of our trip, the wind had not yet started. We decided to camp on a sandy beach opposite Trin-Alcove Bend, a site that Powell himself had used in 1869. He describes it as follows:



"Our camp is in a great bend of the canyon. The curve is to the west and we are on the east side of the river. Just opposite, a little stream comes down through a narrow side canyon. We cross





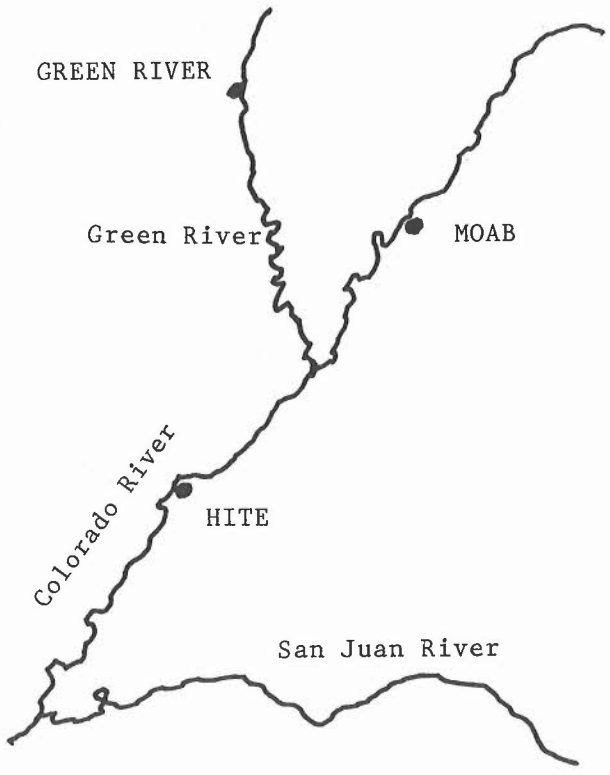
and go up to explore it. At its mouth another lateral canyon enters, in the angle between the former and the main canyon above. Still another enters in the angle between the canyon below and the side canyon first mentioned; so that three side canyons enter at the same point. These canyons are very tortuous, almost closed in from view, and, seen from the opposite side of the river, they appear like three alcoves. We name this Trin-Alcove Bend."

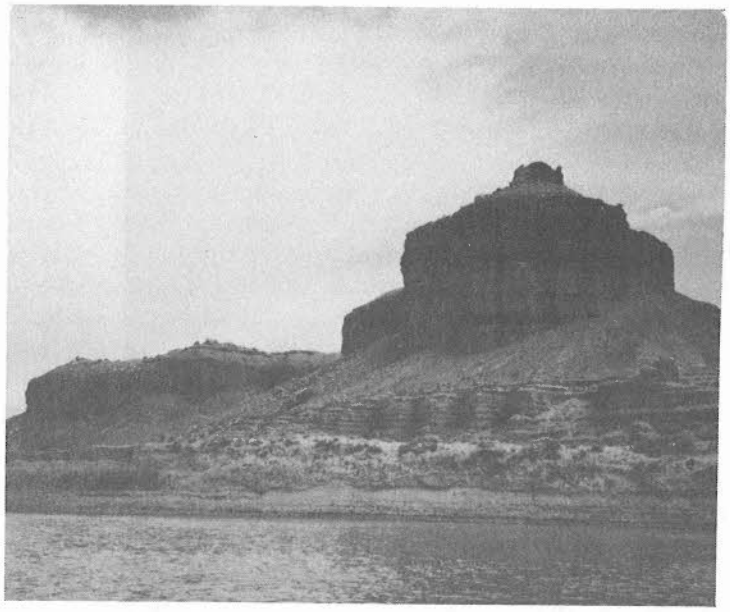
We decided to quit early and explore the canyons. After making camp, we paddled the empty canoe across the river. Exploring the canyons on foot offered a wonderful opportunity to see the landscape up close. We spent a long time wandering up and down the canyons, discovering a number of fire rings along the way, an immense cottonwood tree, as well as the sun-dried skeleton of a coyote. After a couple of hours, we returned to our camp to rest for the long trip ahead.

The next day, the headwind started in earnest. The day was a long one. Despite the steady wind, we paddled 14 miles before coming to a long section where the banks on both sides of the river were steep and covered with a tangle of tamarisk bushes. Although we were very tired, there was no place to camp, and so we were forced to push on. As we continued, the wind became stronger. We began to fear nightfall.

After struggling on for three more miles, we were exhausted. Finally, we came to a sandy island devoid of vegetation. Though it offered no shelter from the wind, the island presented the only available campsite, with night almost upon us. Gratefully, we unloaded the canoe and pulled it well up onto the sand. There being nothing to which the canoe could be tied, we made sure it was far enough up so that if the river rose during the night, it would be safe.

The wind blew sand in our faces and hair, as well as in the food we prepared, making it gritty and unappetizing. The wind also made it very difficult to pitch the tent, and our apprehension grew. Fortunately, we knew exactly where we were, because on the rock directly across from the island, there was a carved inscription: "Launch Marguerite 1909." We had located this point on our map, and we knew that we had paddled 17 miles that day, despite the headwind. We felt satisfied with our progress.





During the night, the wind howled up the canyon like a freight train. The sound of it was deafening, and we could scarcely hear each other shout. It was a long and sleepless night. We began to be very concerned about how we would paddle against the wind the next day, as it showed no signs of abating. Finally, morning came, and we climbed out of the tent. In an instant, the wind flattened the tent and began scooting it across the sand. As we chased it down the beach, I heard Angela shout and point. I looked at the river, and there in the middle of the current was our canoe, floating right side up and drifting fast. The wind had picked it up from the shore and deposited it in the river. I ran down the beach after it and plunged into the water, still wearing all my clothes, including shoes. With a hollow feeling of desperation, I swam to the middle of the river and grabbed the canoe. Fortunately, the canoe had no water in it and was upright; otherwise I would not have been able to keep hold of it. A canoe filled with water can weigh as much as a ton, and when it is caught by the force of moving water, a man cannot control it by himself.

With considerable effort I was able to pull the canoe back to the shore. The water was very cold and I was shaking uncontrollably. I quickly stripped and put on dry clothes. At that point we realized the truth of the matter. The wind could have caught our canoe at any point during the night, and we would not have known it was gone until getting up the next morning. I began to feel that despite our misfortune, somehow luck was with us.

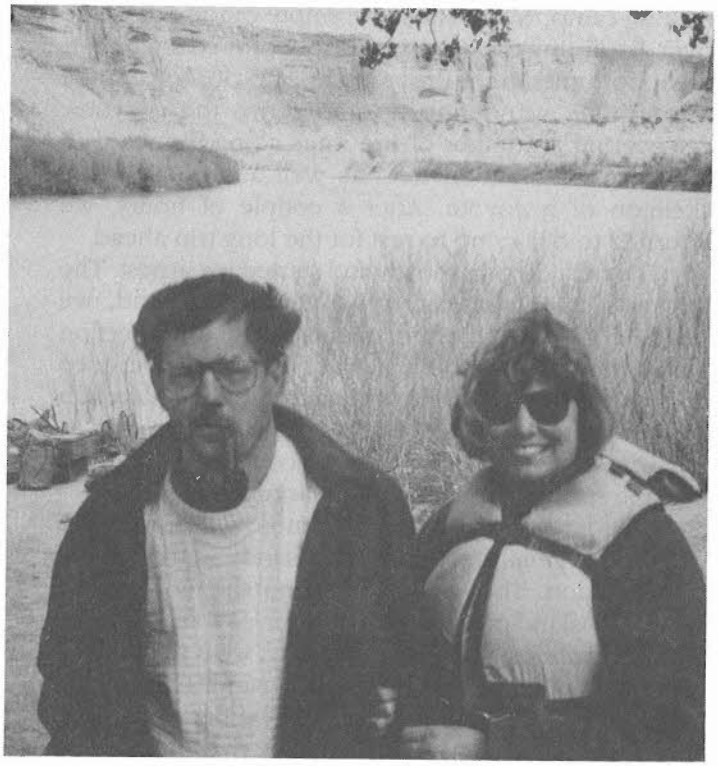
The terrible dilemma that presented itself at that point was this: completely unsheltered from the wind as we were on that island, we simply had to get off of it, but the only way to do that was to load up the canoe and paddle against a ferocious headwind so strong that we doubted our ability to make any progress at all. Nevertheless, we resolved to make the attempt.

That day we paddled just over ten miles around Bowknot Bend, a huge bend that curls back on itself, so that the river returns to a point only a few hundred yards from where it was. The headwind continued to blow and impede our progress. We knew one thing: we had to find a sheltered campsite. Fortunately, after we had completed the circuit of the bend, we found such a site, high above the river, sheltered by a small alcove of rock as well as a couple of trees. We tied the canoe to the tree lowest to the river and encamped.

We were grateful for a shelter from the wind, ate a hot meal, and rested well. During the night, the wind abated somewhat. The next day, we paddled the last ten miles to the take-out at Mineral Bottom with only a mild headwind. When we finally reached the take-out, we told our story to an outfitter who had come to pick up some customers. He told us about a technique to anchor the canoe called a "dead man." You simply find a Yule-sized log, tie the canoe to it, and bury it in the sand. That way, the wind is powerless to catapult your canoe into the river as it had ours (unless the rope breaks!).

Grateful for our good fortune, we waited for our outfitter to pick us up. When he arrived, right on schedule, we asked him what he would have done had we failed to show up on time. He said that he would have rented a plane, flown upriver to look for us, and then dropped a message to us with rescue instructions. We felt somewhat relieved but still wished we had asked him that question before embarking on our little adventure.

The hard-won lessons of our trip were these: one, never underestimate the power of the wind; two, never embark on a hazardous trip without backup people in your party; and three, if you encounter the kind of wind that we did in Labyrinth Canyon, remember the "dead man."



# AN IDEA THAT WATER HAS

A river is an idea that water has.

I don't know where it comes from; it just seems to be. And the farther back upstream I go, looking for answers, the more questions I find, until finally everything is questions.

I didn't realize that till recently. I've been writing about a particular river, just like every other: it starts somewhere, flows downhill with more or less violence, and ends up at the sea, mingling its water with salt. But I find that I'm writing about the river as if it had a personal character.

It had never been canoed before. Unmarked by man, it was as it had been at the end of the Ice Ages. For 8000 years it had spoken only to itself, and now to us spoke only of itself.

We camped each evening beside it. Some nights it chuckled; others it roared. Sometimes it was smooth, but shifts of the wind brought us the distant rumble of unseen canyons.

We camped one evening below a waterfall. Even in late summer, ice lingered beside the main cataract; and in the dusk of midnight the vibration of the earth filled our imaginations.

Early explorers thought of rivers not as tributaries, but as extensions of the ocean. The mouth of a river was to them not the fruition of an idea or the beginning of another cycle of water, but instead the beginning of a highway to the interior of the land.

Our goal was the end of a river, below the last falls, where the fish coming up from the sea would meet us. We would not have started without that. But what happened along the way turned out -- as it always does -- to be most important. In trying to divine the character of this river, and the idea behind it, we could hear only the heart of moving water talking to itself in an 8000-year-old monologue.

One evening, after a long day, we pitched our tents only two miles closer to the sea; the next, only two miles more. There were more rapids and falls below us still, mile after mile. "My god!" I thought. "Isn't this river ever going to let us go?"

We were camped right on the Arctic Circle. I climbed a nearby hill, its solid rock top scoured by glaciers and littered with boulders. I could see 30 miles each way up and down the valley, and pick out the shimmer of moving water, smaller and smaller in the distance, till it disappeared into folds in the hills.

"Why do you want to be let go?" it asked. "After this, what else is there?" Always questions, never answers.

Nor, if I were asked while gazing up that valley like a knotted rope, could I say why we were on this river, and not another. For the genesis of that idea is as obscure and uncertain as that of the river, and subject as much to turn upon the difference of half an inch.

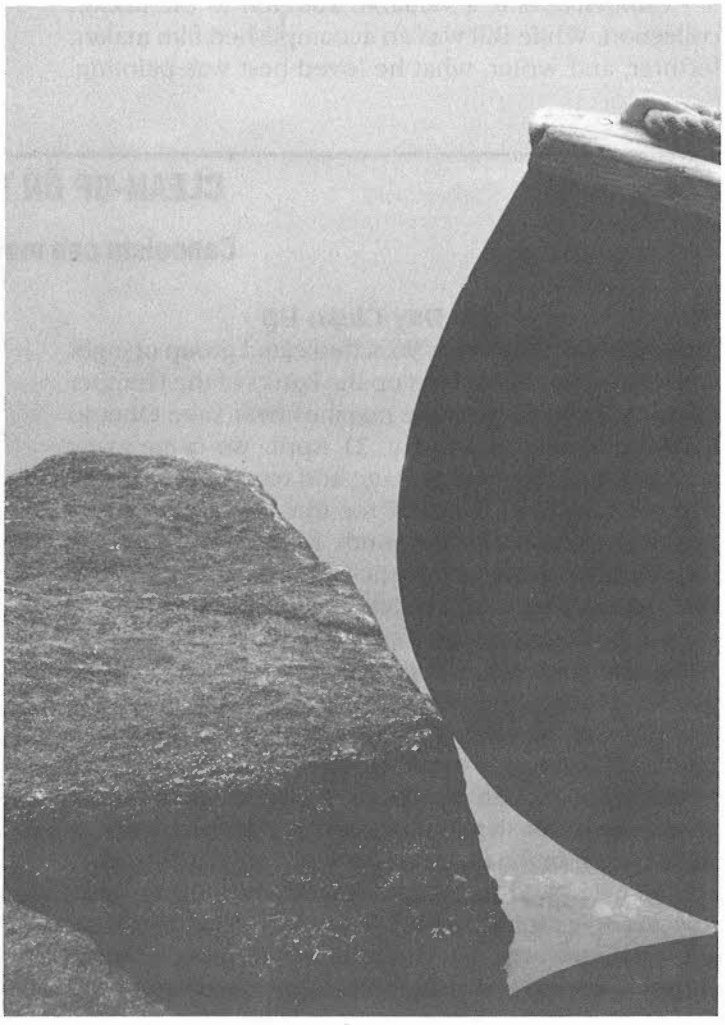
Both began in broad, shallow lakes of finite potential, each looking for an opportunity and a direction. The water found the lowest spot around the hundred-mile perimeter of its lake, and trickled through, committed but tentative. So did we. But together we gathered power and focus, growing to almost obsession as we tumbled down off the escarpment. It wasn't as if the river were carrying us; it was more as if it were trying to elbow us out of its valley.

I think of other rivers I have known: Gallatin, Madison, Burnside, Suwannee, Hiukitak, Saco, Pemigewasset, Connecticut. Each a unique idea become indelibly a part of me, and most beautiful where that idea has not been subjugated to some human notion of utility or polluted by those who cannot perceive it.

That wild river was like a small child: noisy, energetic, and pure; existing for no purpose that we could perceive. It was an idea born of inscrutable design, solely for the pleasure of its creator.

Would I ever go back? Another question without an answer. How could I? For I have discovered, sitting here in my study 2000 miles away, that the river will not ever let me go.

Willem Lange



## REVIEWS

**FIRE IN THE BONES: Bill Mason and the Canadian Canoeing Tradition**, by James Raffan, published by Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 1996, hardcover, 300 pages, $27.00.
Reviewed by Toni Harting.

This excellent book really does not need a long review. On the contrary, the less said of it here the better, so to give you more time to read it. And read you should, because it tells in astounding detail the life story of Bill Mason, known all over canoe country and beyond for his unfailing love and enthusiasm for the art of wilderness canoeing. An important book about an exceptional human being.

**CANOESCAPES**, by Bill Mason, published by The Boston Mills Press, Erin, ON, 1996, 160 pages, CDN$50, US$40.
This is part of a review by Michael Peake, published in the winter-1996 issue of his journal *Che-Mun.*

Though, incredibly, 1996 marks the eight year of the passing of Bill Mason, he is with us still. His legend has only grown and he is woven into the very fabric of Canada and canoeing.

*Canoescapes* is a valuable addition to the Mason collection. While Bill was an accomplished film maker, lecturer, and writer, what he loved best was painting. He devoted the last few years of his life to it and many canoeists are familiar with some of his work. What *Canoescapes* does is gather all this artwork together in one volume along with Bill's comments on his art. The book opens with an acknowledgement from Bill's wife, Joyce. She writes that the book is presented as Bill designed it. Some of the text was deleted because the accompanying artwork could not be found. The whole family worked on the book, including his children, Paul and Becky. Joyce reveals that the publication of this book is the fulfilment of a promise made to Bill a few weeks before his death.

Each picture is displayed on a full page of this 10-inch-square book. On the opposite page of almost all works is the commentary from Bill on what he remembers about the scene or just some accompanying thoughts on the piece.

The final section of the book is a two-page Afterword by Bill Mason, perhaps the last words we shall read from him. He reminds us all that it is important to listen to Nature and that this takes time. He writes, "We can enjoy the view from a car, train, aircraft, motorboat or snowmobile, but to achieve a relationship with the land we must travel on foot or by canoe ... Too often it's the destination that's important, not the journey itself."

While Bill Mason's own destination on this earth has been reached, he is still leading us on a wonderful journey.

## CLEAN-UP ON THE HUMBER

### Canoeists can make a difference

#### Earth Day Clean-Up

As a tribute to Earth Day '96, a dedicated group of eight canoeists worked to clean up the banks of the Humber River in Toronto, from the marshes near Lake Ontario to Bloor Street, on Sunday, 21 April. We came away with about 15 bags of garbage and recyclables, kindly accepted by Mike Daroczi for the waste bins at his PetroCan station on the South Kingsway. Our finds included the expected plastic bottles and bags, styrofoam cups, cans and bottles; but the kid's "ride-em" tractor, election sign, golfballs, bread trays, and downhill ski boot were surprises.

We came away with muddy boats and muddy clothes, but mostly with a feeling that we really had made a difference: we could see cleaner banks in many places even though we could not reach them all. By cleaning up a small part of Toronto's backyard, we truly felt strength in the adage, "Think globally, act locally."

As we poked our way along the river, using sticks to collect plastic and rubber gloves to pull garbage from the mud, we wondered about the Humber's beginnings, historical and geographical, where it began and how it used to be. After the trip we did some reading, finding that though there's scarcely a sign of it now, the river was an important trade and travel route, making a significant contribution to early Canadian economy.

#### Humber Beginnings

The greening of ravines in the spring and their flaming of color in the fall distinguish Toronto from most other North American cities. Even though many ravine streams are now buried or dirty, their rivers, notably the Humber and the Don, played important roles in not only Toronto's but also Canada's history.

The Humber's main branch starts near Orangeville, ending 93 km downstream at the marshes of Lake Ontario after dropping 365 metres. The East Humber begins between King City and Aurora at Wilcox Lake, joining the main flow just south of Highway 7 at Woodbridge, while the West Humber joins up further south, between Woodbridge and Weston. Black Creek, the Humber's main tributary, now looking more like a spillway alongside its namesake highway, joins the main stream in Toronto just north of Dundas Street. Its water quality was of concern even in the 1950s when it was the most urbanized of the Humber's branches.

It was Colonel John Graves Simcoe, Upper

Canada's first Lieutenant-Governor, who, in 1793, named the Humber after an English river. He replaced the anglicized name, St. John's Creek, associated with the fur trader and interpreter, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, whose house and orchards stood at the Humber's mouth.

Names around the Humber all have roots in the history of the area. The names of its past First Nations, explorers, and millers all sound familiar because they have been used as to name neighboring roads, parks, and places.

**The Toronto Portage and the Fur Trade**

The Toronto Portage was a route used by French fur traders, following the Humber to Baby Point, then continuing for 46 km of paddles and portages to the Holland River and on into Lake Simcoe, Georgian Bay, and Lake Huron (which led, in turn, to routes on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.) It was a trade route from the 1600s until the 1790s when the Portage's hard slogging inspired Simcoe to build Yonge Street so the Portage could be avoided.

In 1615, Etiènne Brûlé was the first European to cross the Humber River portage, travelling on Champlain's orders with a group of Huron Indians to find allies in the war against the Iroquois. It is not certain whether Etiènne's surname was prescient or descriptive of his demise; it means 'burned' in French, which is supposedly how he met his end with the Hurons in about 1634. In 1635, use of the portage was prevented by the Senecas (a group of Iroquois) at what is now Baby Point. The Iroquois left the Humber by the 1700s, and were replaced by the Mississaugas who traded with the French until these withdrew from their trading posts in 1759. The Mississauga Indians relinquished title to north shorelands of Lake Ontario from the Bay of Quinté to the Etobicoke River in 1787, but borders were not resolved until 1805, well after Europeans had settled in.

**The Humber's Merchant-Millers**

Between the late 1700s and 1878, up to seven mills operated on the Humber, processing lumber, grain, and even wool. Blacksmiths, wheelwrights, wagon makers, coopers (barrel makers), and other craftsmen would operate near the mills. Each mill had an associated store, inn, tavern, and also stables for farmers to stock up and rest before heading back to their farms after bringing produce to the mill. The merchant-miller played the roles of merchandiser, distributor, and produce broker. He would transport his own goods along with bartered or purchased farm produce by wagon on the long (10–20 km) journey to York, returning with goods and merchandise for the mill store.

Baby Point was named after Jacques Baby, a French Canadian whose family arrived in 1686. He operated a mill near what is now Baby Point. Samual Scarlett (whose namesakes are Scarlett Road, Scarlett Woods Golf Course, Scarlett Mills Park) was the only miller who recognized the need to reforest; by 1860 the old forests were gone from the valleys of the Humber and its branches.

Thomas Fisher came to York (later named Toronto) in 1821, and leased King's Mill and its timber reserves, now known as Old Mill. His house was built on the site of the Old Mill subway station. He constructed grist, saw and nail mills. He sold to William Gamble in 1835, moved a mile upstream to Lambton near Islington, and built a grist mill just below Dundas St. on the Humber's west side and a house, named Millwood, above it. The Old Mill ruins are those of a second mill built after the original mill burned in Canada's confederation year, 1867. Other place names telling of other millers include Howland Avenue, Dennis Avenue, Cruickshank Park, Rowntree Mills Park, and Wadsworth Boulevard in Weston.

Even though floods and ice jams were common on the Humber, the merchant millers rebuilt property destroyed, since the water power of the river was invaluable. In 1878, a hurricane (predecessor to Hazel in 1954) wiped out all of the mills on the Humber, as well as drowning several people and destroying houses. Few mills were rebuilt, ending nearly 100 years of millers on the river.

**A Silent Legacy**

Now, nothing is left of the Humber's mills. One would still stand if an attempt to restore Millwood and the mill below had succeeded in the early 1960s. But a number of problems (including a landowner who refused to sell the land between the house and mill sites) prevented the great grandson of Millwood's owner, Sidney Thomas Fisher, from proceeding. Instead, furnishings and other items were donated to Montgomery's Inn on Dundas Street in Islington, now restored as a museum. In addition, his and his brother's Shakespeare collection and early prints formed the basis of the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library on St. George Street.

Today, the Humber's natural history is more evident than its anthropological one. The marshes are home to black crowned night heron, red-winged blackbirds, kingfishers, mergansers, some swans, and geese, geese, geese. We also saw a solo greater black-backed gull, normally an Atlantic coast resident.

*I think knowing the history of the rivers around us deepens our respect for them. Some WCA members decry the club's "urban paddlers," but more paddlers discovering our urban waterways — our "nearest wilderness" — might increase the pressure to rehabilitate them. We hope to have a bigger clean-up next year. See you then!*

References

Fisher, Sidney Thomas. *The Merchant Miller of the Humber Valley: A Study of the Early Economy of Canada.* NC Press Ltd, Toronto, 1985.

Lizars, Kathleen MacFarlane. *The Valley of the Humber 1615–1913.* Coles Publishing, Toronto, 1974. (Originally published 1913).

Submitted by Lee Benson

# 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; Mike Jones (905) 270-3256; Ann Dixie (416) 486-7402; Tim Gill (416) 447-2063.

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

Oct.–Nov. **HAVE PADDLE, WILL TRAVEL**
Harrison Jolly, (905) 689-1733, book appropriately.

October & November weekends. Fall whitewater playboating. Call any time before 10:00 p.m. We will be going out nearly every weekend to wherever the good water levels are in Ontario, Quebec, or the Northeastern United States. If you would like to join us for some serious Grade 3 to 4, cold whitewater, give us a call. Limited to experienced whitewater paddlers with fully outfitted craft. Cold water canoe clothing, helmets, and whitewater PFDs are essential. Limit six canoes per trip.

5 October **BIG CREEK**
Mike Jones, (905) 270-3256, book before 28 September.

Never been there before, should be fine fall colors on this placid river. Bird migration will be observed on this leisurely Saturday paddle. Limit six canoes.

12–14 October **PETAWAWA RIVER**
Tim Gill and Earl Silver, (416) 447-2063 or (416) 486-7402, book before 5 October.

Pumpkin pie on the Petawawa for this classic fall trip from Lake Traverse to Lake McManus. Some rapids, all can be portaged, most can be run by intermediate or better paddlers. Limit six turkeys.

20 October **GIBSON RIVER HIKING**
Tony Bird (416) 466-0172, book before 17 October.

A one-day hike in the rugged Ontario shield country around some of the Five Winds Ski Trails near the Gibson River. Hike should last approximately eight hours. All hikers welcome; prepare for fall conditions.

20 October **ELORA GORGE**
Bill Ness, (416) 321-3005, book before 13 October.

Join us for a day of playing in easy Grade 1 and 2 rapids. This is an excellent outing for novices or intermediate paddlers who would like the opportunity to sharpen their skills before the season ends. The trip will be followed by the obligatory ice cream orgy in Elora. Limit six paddlers who are not on a diet.

26–27 October **WHITEWATER FUN**
Barry Godden (416) 440-4208, book before 20 October.

Depending on water levels, the organizer is going canoeing either at Elora Gorge or the Gull at Minden. Elora Gorge is less challenging; the Gull is a more demanding run which requires advanced paddling skills. Fully equipped boats with proper flotation, helmets, and whitewater PFDs are essential. Limit six boats.

26–27 October **UPPER MAGNETAWAN RIVER**
Tim Gill, (416) 447 — 2063, book before 20 October.

An exciting whitewater weekend on the Magnetawan, from Ahmic Lake to Wahwashkesh Lake. The upper section contains a series of Grade 2-3 rapids and some falls that must be portaged. Cold water equipment and floatation advantageous. Fit, intermediate whitewater paddlers should enjoy the challenge of this historic waterway. Limit five canoes.

Late December **WINTER CAMPING**
Howard Sayles (416) 921-5321 book before 14 December.

Warm tent camping for a period to be determined between 20 December and 1 January. The organizer will provide a winter tent heated by a woodburning stove. Campers need winter sleeping bags and pads and other winter camping equipment including skis or snowshoes for daytime explorations. Call Howard to discuss the finer points of one of the best ways to celebrate the festive season. Limit four warmly dressed campers.

# PADDLING LICENSE

At a recent Canada Coast Guard meeting in Toronto, attended by the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association, the results of the joint Ontario/Canadian Coast Guard Working Group on Recreational Boating Safety was released. The results clearly indicate that the Coast Guard, in co-operation with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, will be introducing a mandatory vessel registration system for power boats of ten horsepower and above, as well as operator proficiency courses. When asked the question, "Will this be extended to canoes, kayaks, and sea kayaks?", chairman Charles Gadula of the Canadian Coast Guard outlined that at this time they were not included but there had been discussion by government officials in several provinces to include canoes, kayaks, and sea kayaks due to the high number of paddlers requiring search and rescue assistance. Mr. Gadula outlined that 30% of all search and rescue costs are related to paddling. Many representatives from the powerboat community also feel that canoes, kayaks, and sea kayaks should be included in the vessel registration system to share the costs associated with search and rescue operations.

The Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association has asked the Canadian Coast Guard to provide a detailed breakdown of the search and rescue costs associated with paddling and how these costs could be reduced through better public education. The CRCA has also requested that existing certification programs offered through the CRCA and its provincial/territorial associations be recognized by the Coast Guard.

The Association officially opposes mandatory registration but has outlined that voluntary registration could be promoted trough its network of paddlers. Additionally, as opposed to having mandatory proficiency courses, the CRCA has requested that Coast Guard and local Ministry of Transportation departments support existing organizations allowing them to provide more public clinics to teach people how to paddle safely.

(From the August/September-1996 issue of *Kanawa*, published by the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association.)

# 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:

- Algonquin Outfitters, RR#1, Oxtongue Lake, Dwight, Ontario,
- Rockwood Outfitters, 669 Speedvale Ave. West, Guelph, Ontario,
- Suntrail Outfitters, 100 Spence Str. (Hwy. 70), Hepworth, Ontario.

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

**FREE PADDLING CATALOG** Canoeing, kayaking, and sea kayaking guidebooks, maps, videos, instructional manuals, calendars, magazines, and much more. For a free Paddling Catalog contact the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association, 1029 Hyde Park Rd., Suite 5, Hyde Park, Ontario N0M 1Z0; phone (519) 473-2109/641-1261; fax (519) 473-6560; E-mail crca@publix.empath.on.ca.

**HERITAGE RIVERS CALENDAR** Plan your next adventure with the full-color, large-format 1997 Canadian Heritage Rivers Calendar — 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 short description of each river. Cost $10.95 plus $2.00 p&h and 7% GST. Contact the CRCA, see previous item.

**TEMAGAMI** Smoothwater Outfitters offers unique trips and courses, including Full Moon Canoe Trip, Storytelling Canoe Trip, Women's Quest by Canoe, Bush Survival and Primitive Skills. Also ORCA Canoe Tripping levels 1, 2, and 3 and Advanced Wilderness First Aid. For artists we have a line of art, craft, photo, and music workshops. We also specialize in canoe outfitting with our own line of dehydrated gourmet trip food. For our new brochure, contact Smoothwater Outfitters, Box 40, Temagami, ON, P0H 2H0; phone (705) 569-3539; fax (705) 569-2710.

**CORPORATE ADVENTURE COURSES** Year-round courses that address the challenge of leading and working together in the midst of turbulence and change. Our customized programs are about engaging people to accomplish significant, intentional, real change within their organization. We specialize in Managing Strategic Change for business and governments across North America and the Caribbean. Two of our Senior Partners have extensive wilderness out-tripping leadership experience in guiding, whitewater instructing, and stock wildlife photography. For more information contact Oldring Consulting Group, #34 — 1480 Foster St., White Rock, B.C. V4B 3X7; tel. (604) 541-8424; fax (604) 541-8425; e-mail: ocg@mindlink.bc.ca

**NORTHERN BOOKS** Used, scarce, and select new books on northern, arctica, Canadiana, wilderness, and canoeing topics. Write for new free catalog #14: Northern Books, Box 211, Station P, Toronto, Ont., M5S 2S7, or call (416) 531-8873 and leave a message.

**CANOE ROUTES ABSTRACTS** Ashford Outdoor Media provide detailed canoe route information on Natla/Keele, Taltson, Geikie, and Porcupine Rivers, with more river abstracts in process. Information presented includes trip length and duration, logistics and access, air services and local contacts, listing of maps needed, UTM listing, info on special hazards, canoe and outfitting suggestions, weather and seasonal factors, wildlife and fishing observation, pacing background. Cost each US$7. Contact Beth and Dave Buckley, 6478 Ashford Hollow Road, West Valley, NY 14171-9612, USA; tel. (716) 942-6631.

**OUTER PLACES** All-season wilderness adventures: whitewater canoeing, family canoe trips, lodge-to-lodge canoe trips, winter camping, and more are provided by Outer Places, your custom-service wilderness specialist. Contact us at RR#1, Keene, Ont., K0L 2G0; tel. (705) 295-6777; fax (705) 295-4109; E-mail: Outer_Places@oncomdis.on.ca

**FRENCH RIVER BOOK** Save a few $$ by ordering Toni Harting's book, *French River: Canoeing the River of the Stick-Wavers*, directly from the author: CDN$33 (no tax) if picked up, and ad $4 if mailed (US$26, plus US$6 if mailed). 7 Walmer Road, Apt. 902, Toronto, M5R 2W8, tel. (416) 964-2495; fax (416) 922-4020.

**FRENCH RIVER MAP** The new and improved edition of the 1:50,000-scale map is now available, printed on waterproof/tearproof paper. Sales of the double-sided map — which costs $14.00 (including tax) plus $2.00 postage and handling — are primarily made through the Friends of French River Heritage Park, P.O. Box 142, Copper Cliff, Ont., P0M 1N0. I have a few maps available in Toronto for direct sale at $14.00 when picked up or $16.00 by mail; Toni Harting, (416) 964-2495.

**FAMOUS CANOE STOLEN** Several weeks ago, probably in the last weeks of July, somebody removed my canoe from its customary place in the parking basement of my apartment building in downtown Toronto. It is a twenty-year-old, badly scratched, two-color (red and green), 15-ft-long, open, Pinetree Abitibi canoe, of no real value to anyone because of its old age and very bad shape. But it has great sentimental value to me because it is this canoe that I used in much of my career as a professional outdoors writer and photographer. A finder's fee of $100 will be given to anyone with information leading to the return of my canoe. Toni Harting, 7 Walmer Road, Apt. 902, Toronto, M5R 2W8; ph. (416) 964-2495.

# Where it is ...



# . . . in this issue



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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* (for non-residents US $25 or US $35). 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:_____ ❑ New member Member # if renewal:_____

Name(s):_____ ❑ Single ❑ Family

Address: _____ Phone Number(s):

_____ (_____)_____(h)

City:_____ Prov._____ (_____)_____(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.