

THELON MISADVENTURE 1997

Carol Hodgins

Before starting on our trip, we had quickly glanced at the article in the Summer 1997 issue of *Nastawgan* by Dan McGuire about the 1988 mishap on the upper Thelon River. Since we were doing our second trip on this river and were starting downstream of the gorge at the junction of the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers, we thought we would have no worries about portages or with the gorge and its non-shootable rapids. Barring weather problems, we had advertised the trip as a leisurely paddle to the west end of Aberdeen Lake, giving us more than enough time to hike, fish, relax, do lots of photography, or whatever hit our fancy. Or so we thought.

Ten of us flew to Baker Lake, NWT, (the geographical centre of Canada) on Tuesday, 29 July 1997. As we

disembarked from the plane we noticed a Ptarmigan Twin Otter with one of its large tundra tires flat. Was this an omen? We found out that it was indeed our charter plane. The next morning we were told our flight would be postponed. Later we were informed that the plane had been flown to Yellowknife and perhaps would be delayed until evening. Next we were told that when the plane returned it would first be used to fly American clients of our Baker Lake Ptarmigan agent, Boris Kotelewetz, to Sila Lodge at Wager Bay, as well as pick up fuel for the lodge. His German clients would then be flown back to Baker Lake from Wager Bay. The next information we were given was that our plane was now being used by BHP mining officials to fly in VIPs for an inspection of the diamond fields and that our

flight would be delayed until Saturday, which was three days away. We were told that BHP had a superior claim, paying a higher fee. (In correspondence with Ptarmigan Airways in the autumn this statement was denied.) We protested.

Without any discussion with us, Boris switched the Ptarmigan Airways contract to Calm Air and then informed us a plane was on its way from Thompson, Manitoba, and we would be flown to the Thelon River by Thursday noon. The plane arrived late Wednesday and then flew three of Boris's American tourists along with the needed fuel to Sila Lodge. It brought the German tourists back to Baker Lake. The pilots reported that the plane had a fuel-injection problem, but that was soon fixed by a mechanic flown in from Thompson. However, the pilots by then had used up their DOT flying time so had to rest. When back on duty they again flew to Sila Lodge, taking the remaining American tourists who had refused to fly in late at night and with fuel drums. This meant another day's delay.

Friday, 1 August: After a 5:30 get-up and a six o'clock pick-up, I and five others (Don Mason, Bill Cormode, Phil Huggins, Fred Najork, and Diana Paterson) went in on the first flight to the Thelon. We took off at 8:35 a.m. The plane did not have large tundra tires; the young pilots were unfamiliar with the area and had never landed on the tundra before. They said we would be flying below the clouds. Although visibility appeared to be good we did go above the clouds for a considerable distance. At one point Diana and I thought we could see the mouth of the Dubawnt River below.

About one half hour before landing the plane began to do a lot of circling. The pilots borrowed my topo map of the area including the junction of the two rivers and asked me where in relationship to the latter had we put in on our 1981 trip. That time we had been

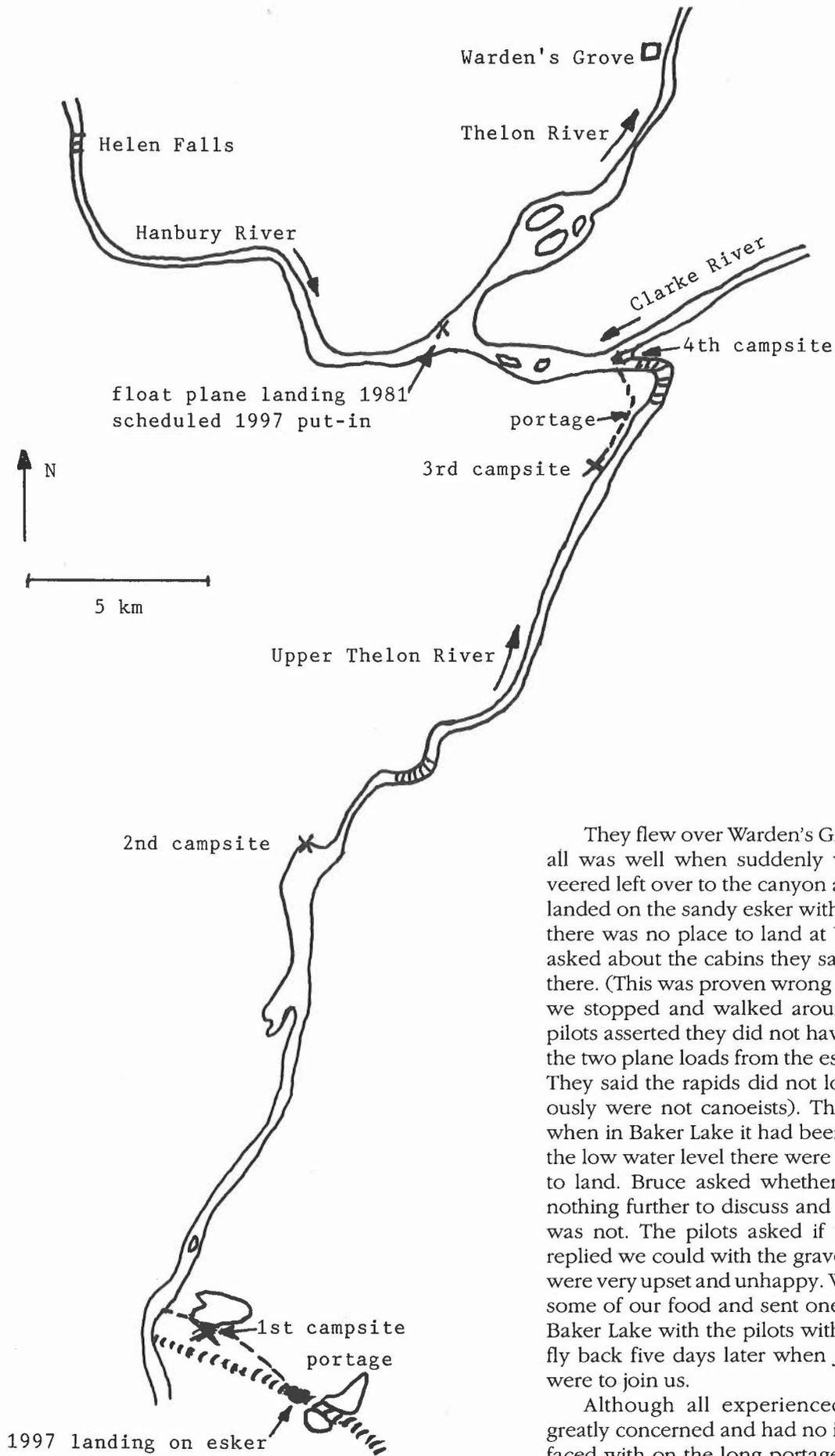
in float planes out of Yellowknife. I told them it was within a kilometre of the mouth of the Hanbury. We continued to circle and I could see very large rapids below. I thought for a moment, could this be Helen Falls on the Hanbury? but assumed not, as the drop did not appear large enough. Therefore it must be on the upper Thelon. We did some more circling over a sandy esker and on the third approach made a good landing.

We checked the co-ordinates of Don's GPS with that of the plane, and the pilots said they were the same except that those given them by Ptarmigan were "over there a bit, over the middle of some water." The six of us were very apprehensive about our location. We estimated, by looking at both the map and the GPS, that we were 30 km upstream from the junction. After unloading, and refuelling the plane from the carried barrel (which was in front of my legs during the flight), the pilots, being somewhat anxious about the take-off from the esker, wanted to leave. They took my map with them to show my co-leader Bruce and the rest of our group where we had been put down. We were upset about it, and let the pilots know. They told us we were only about one kilometre from the river, which we could not see.

After they left we discussed our predicament and what our alternatives might be. We decided we would start the portage, realizing Bruce had one set of maps and the pilots had my topo map of the area. We set out with the GPS. After walking 1200 m and not even being able to see the river we realized we were not nearly halfway. A few of us scouted the route from different directions, one person until the river could be seen from a nearby elevation, another one reaching it. Later the distance turned out to be five kilometres as indicated by the GPS. We returned to our landing spot to await the return of the plane. We hoped that Bruce, upon seeing where we were, would have the pilots land his group downstream of the rivers' junction and then come and relocate us.

This is exactly what Bruce tried to do when his flight had left Baker Lake at 3:45 p.m. He emphasized the nature of the canyon with its rapids to the pilots. He also stated that we had already lost three days of a very limited 15-day trip. He informed them that both Boris and Ptarmigan had assured him that there were many places to land downstream of the confluence, one within a couple of kilometres and, if that was not suitable, one within eight kilometres at Warden's Grove, where it was possible to land. He also discussed the 1978 Russian Cosmos discovery and the arrival of planes of many different sizes to help in the search and evacuation of the people living at Warden's Grove. The pilots agreed they would try and land there, and then go and retrieve the rest of us.





They flew over Warden's Grove and Bruce thought all was well when suddenly without comment they veered left over to the canyon and the rapids and then landed on the sandy esker with us. The pilots asserted there was no place to land at Warden's Grove. When asked about the cabins they said they were no longer there. (This was proven wrong several days later when we stopped and walked around the area.) Now the pilots asserted they did not have enough fuel to move the two plane loads from the esker to Warden's Grove. They said the rapids did not look too big (they obviously were not canoeists). This was all very strange when in Baker Lake it had been emphasized that with the low water level there were more places than usual to land. Bruce asked whether this meant there was nothing further to discuss and the pilots replied there was not. The pilots asked if we could cope. Bruce replied we could with the gravest of difficulty, and we were very upset and unhappy. We hurriedly rearranged some of our food and sent one of our barrels back to Baker Lake with the pilots with instructions to have it fly back five days later when Jon and Shelagh Grant were to join us.

Although all experienced canoeists, we were greatly concerned and had no idea what we would be faced with on the long portages. Since there were no



portages on our planned route and we had been assured beforehand that the pilots had the co-ordinates for landing from Ptarmigan Airways and that we would be put down within a few hundred metres of the river, the group had decided we did not need tumps and barrel-carrying straps, so we left them in Baker Lake. The average age of the group was 57 years and some had problems not conducive to lengthy portaging and certainly were not prepared psychologically for it.

As it turned out we had about ten kilometres to carry, including this initial one and then around the canyon. Some had to portage three and even four times, in order to get all our "gear" across, which meant a total of 50 km. Lynda, Cathryn, Don, Bill C., Fred and Phil had to carry extra for the Patersons and me. They just kept going. Lynda also always helped around the campfire and packed up the kitchen every morning. Cathryn also did a lot of food preparation and dish washing. Bruce did not need help, but had to admit he is no longer as fast as he once was. I gave up carrying the wanagan following my back fracture in 1989, although I have carried a barrel (if not too heavy) since then, and lighter packs are no problem. In a positive way, with the help given by Don and Bill C., we had more than two leaders. Don also was the official photographer. The group was very supportive and stayed together. However, we were not without our tense

times as all were "leaders." It certainly meant for some interesting group dynamics.

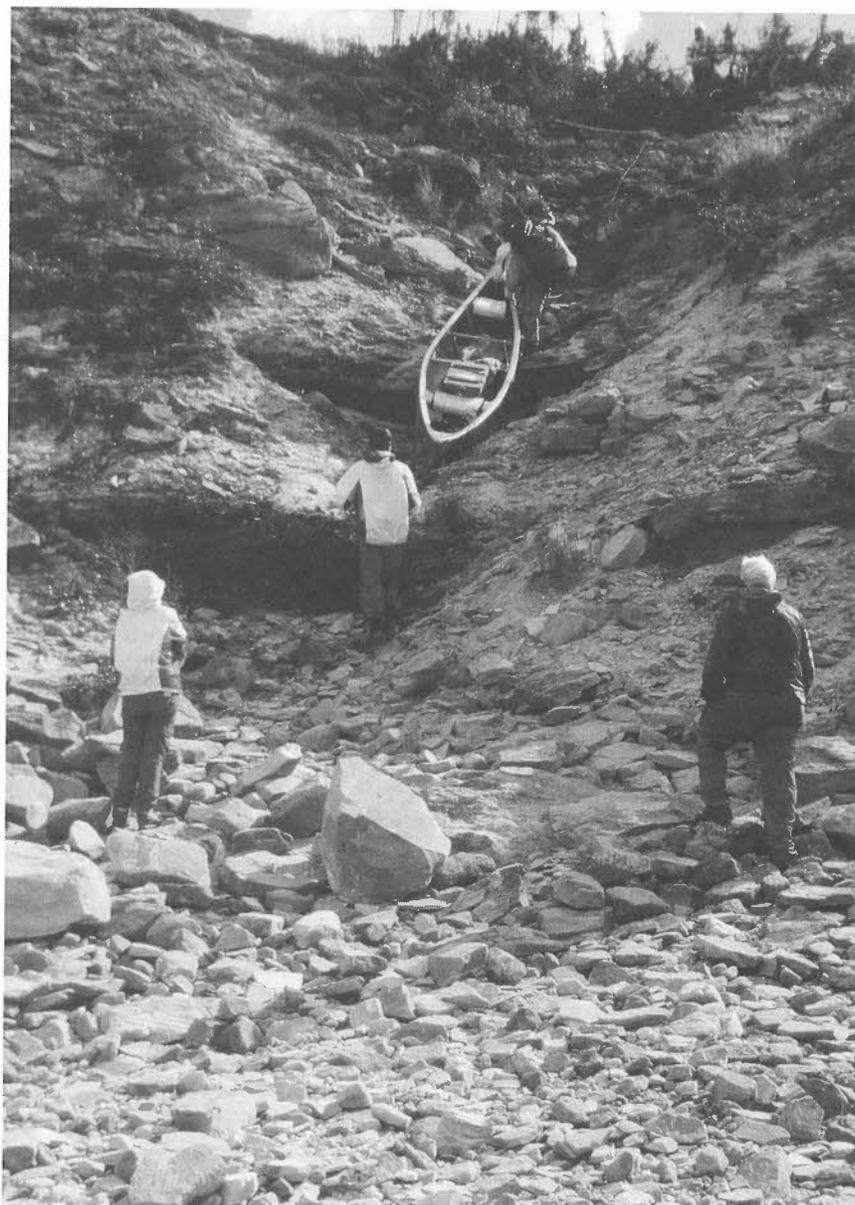
While it had been cold in Baker Lake, on the esker (grid reference 018024 on the 1:250,000 map) it was warm and sunny. We portaged northwest across the tundra arriving at the side of a small lake with thousands of black flies swarming in the low tundra vegetation. Although tired we paddled westward about 500 m to a more suitable camping spot. Cathryn and Lynda scouted out a route to the river while the rest of us set up camp. Bed about midnight after being up since 5:30 a.m. It had been a long and stressful day.

Saturday, 2 August: up at 800 a.m. Following granola and coffee or tea etc. we did the carry in three sections. We had made a decision that to save time we would only have a good-size helping of one item for breakfast, along with our beverage. Furthermore, until we reached our originally planned put-in point at the junction of the two rivers, we would just have the easier-to-prepare meals on our menu. After scouting we marked a portage route with brightly coloured hats etc. so we wouldn't go astray. The terrain was a mix of undulating tundra with clumps of stunted spruce, willows, and alders. There were blueberry, cloudberry, and cranberry bushes although they were past their peak. The banks of the river had areas well forested in small spruce.



We reached the Thelon at noon and following some re-organization with our packs and other gear began paddling down this upper stretch of the river. Soon we saw our first large musk-ox; and while being carried along on a light current we had a floating lunch. We camped at 5:15 p.m. on the left on a sandy beach interspersed with stones. The site looked as if a large bulldozer was in the middle of grading. There was a high bank with a flat plateau on top. Some of us chose the closest sandy spots possible with some flatness. Others moved part way up the bank to nice mossy areas. We were TIRED. Since the weather was beautiful and there was enough daylight, we all set up our tents and had a rest.

Because weight was not to have been a problem on the planned non-portaging trip, we had with us a two-burner Coleman stove, a large and a nesting medium-sized Dutch oven, with one 10-lb bag of briquettes which we were able to mix with drift wood coals, and a reflector oven. I wanted to do some more experimenting with the Dutch oven. Plenty of driftwood was available well up the bank along the high water line. We had our first fire and used both the reflector oven and the Dutch oven. There was shepherd's pie for dinner, oatmeal muffins for breakfast, and we made logan loaf for the next lunch.



Sunday, 3 August:

up at 7:00 a.m. We paddled six kilometres to our first set of rapids following a sharp right turn and a narrowing of the river. A few of us saw a caribou climb the right bank just before we made the turn. We scouted from the right shore about 100 m past the turn. Six members of the group were very experienced in whitewater but we chose to be careful and conservative. Don and Lynda shot the rapids first, Bruce and I

went last. As the final three canoes were about to shoot, Bill C. thought he saw a motorboat coming downstream at a terrific speed. He had not previously seen the caribou. By the time I glanced up I could recognize the large antlers ferrying to the other side. It was a hilarious sight. We paddled close to the right shore between two rocks with a shelf on the left, and ferried centre left through an easy class 2.

What appeared to be very heavy water off the left shore ahead was only a short row of rocks, some jutting out into the river with the water bouncing off. We eddied left. Don had already scrambled up the high

bank to scout the next set of rapids a few hundred metres ahead, the river turning hard to the left. At the rapids the river made a gentle curve to the right and then went left again. There was a short rock garden; as one couple had to get out of their canoe, we knew where not to go. We had to move slightly right before we went around the curve but not very far since there were large keeper holes as the rapids extended about 400 m across to the right shore.

We then had an eight-kilometre paddle to the approach of the Thelon Canyon. We beached on a gravel bank at the upstream end of an island in the centre of the river. Most of us ascended the high bank and walked the short distance across the flat plateau on top. From here we could view the rapids about one kilometre downstream. They appeared very large, stretching across the river where the walls of the canyon were about 30 m high. The only literature we had on the portage indicated that it was on the right. This made no sense to us since the river would be making an almost 90 degree turn left. Why take the longer route on an already long portage?

Cathryn and Bill C. paddled just upstream from the island to an area on the right where the bank was less steep. They then walked along the top on a rough trail, past a campsite, and past the heaviest part of the rapids; here the trail went diagonally down a steep bank to a stream. The rapids continued and they could see some difficulties below. Bruce, Fred, Don, and Bill P. examined the situation from the left river bank, landing the canoes about one kilometre downstream but before the large rapids. They found rock markers up on the bank and followed them across the first major point of land where they could view upstream the full might of the heavy, shallow rapids filled with ledges.

The four continued until they found a gully in the 30-m cliff where it would be possible to lower down the canoes. They then went on, past the mouth of the Clarke River on the opposite shore, until they could see the full sweep downstream of the river circling around a big island toward the confluence with the Hanbury. After having done about seven kilometres, they arrived back ten minutes later than Bill C. and Cathryn, about 6:00 p.m. The information they had collected made us decide to portage on the left around the rapids and not on the right. Following dinner we ferried across to the left bank and skirted close to the shore to a take-out point just above the rapids. Here we camped getting to bed at 10:30 p.m. The scouts were exhausted and the bugs were horrific.

Monday, 4 August: up by 7:00 a.m. Following breakfast we spent most of the day portaging across the inside arc of the canyon to the steep put-in gully. As before, we scouted the route and proceeded in sections

marked with items of bright clothing. It was very windy across the open tundra, which was studded with small spruce and willow groves and a few boggy marshes. In the cross-wind it was hard to single-carry the canoes. Bruce stubbornly tried but gave up for the last section and double-carried, as the others had sensibly decided to do in the first place. At the gully with Bill C. in charge we used ropes to lower down the canoes and steady some of the individuals. I went down part way on my bottom.

From a large, dry ledge we easily launched the canoes into the fast water and paddled diagonally the 1.5 kilometres to the large sandbar island at the mouth of the Clarke River. The Thelon was interspersed with areas of whitewater, small holes, and localized ledges. Most of us had no difficulty in the fast water, but the Patersons inadvertently went straight through a small area with the biggest waves and took in a fair bit of water. The sun was very bright and the temperature relatively high as we enjoyed a dip in small pools of the Clarke. Although we were extremely tired, morale was high with the portaging now behind us. We had a one-pot chili meal for dinner. Diana and I spent the evening reorganizing the food in our packs as my super pre-trip organization had run amok because we chose to eat the easiest-to-prepare meals these past several days. The wind kept the bugs away until late in the evening.

Looking downstream we all sat watching a beautiful sunset. Quoting from Cathryn's log: "Portaged from 9 to 5. My feet are tender with deep blisters. May have rested a total of 30 minutes all day. Had to rope down canoes, gear and people at the end to a wide ledge





put-in... We are all very tired, but did talk, have a drink and eat hors-d'oeuvres before dinner. Then the bugs really returned with a vengeance."

In the Spring '98 issue of *Che-mun*, Carl Traeholt, who was also on the Thelon River in 1997, wrote that his group had shot most of the rapids in the upper Thelon Canyon down the centre, with considerable difficulty. He also mentioned they met a second group which had shot the rapids on a previous trip but decided against it this time. For us it did not seem like a good idea to attempt this whitewater, confirmed by the double tipping described in the McGuire article.

Tuesday, 5 August: because of the previous tiring day we did not get up until 8:00 a.m. Except for a three-minute rain shower, the weather was great. We ran along the right shore through a light rapids and past two islands. Just before the mouth of the upper Thelon we came to a large, fast, shallow rapids in a second (mini) canyon. There were many peregrine falcons soaring overhead and numerous nests were hidden in the cliffs. Don and Bill C. (and me five minutes behind) climbed the cliff on the left and scouted from the top, looking for the passage through the rapids. Don and Lynda shot centre left, bouncing and riding roughly over shallow ledges altering their course and passing through high waves and running out to the right. The Patersons did not wish to shoot. I was convinced there was an easier path close to the left bank. There was indeed, and this the rest of us took with Bill C. and Cathryn running a second time taking down the Patersons' canoe. It was an easy route; a portage would have been difficult.

We soon passed the mouth of the Hanbury on our left quarter. *Finally* at noon, six days late, we were at our planned put-in point. Passing by a couple of large moose we paddled down to Warden's Grove, noting possible airplane landing spots en route. We lunched on the shore and then walked around the buildings, the

upper ones having been built in 1928 by Billy Hoare and Jack Knox. One had a plaque with an inscription to John Hornby. We paddled on past large Grassy Island; the wind became much stronger.

After covering 30 km, we camped on the mainland southeast of the island in a spot that appeared to be an old Inuit site from the appearance of the tent rings. There also was a fire site of more recent vintage. We had a large meal, Thai chicken with rice and vegetables and strawberry-blueberry cake for dessert. We also baked banana bread for the next lunch. Around the campfire we discussed procedures for the remainder of the trip and resolved to cover more distance each day. We had long realized that our original take-out location at the west end of Aberdeen Lake could not now be reached, but we would try very hard to reach Hoare Point at the west end of Beverly Lake. To bed around 10:15 p.m. after the wind died and the bugs arrived.

Wednesday, 6 August: up at 7:00 a.m. Following a large oatmeal-grain hot cereal breakfast we were away by 8:30. The sky was overcast, it was cool yet buggy. Today was the day we expected the Grants to join us. Planes flew over us going both east and west with no recognition. Finally, as we were finishing lunch at 2:30 p.m. on the right downriver side of a very small point with a clear view for approximately five kilometres downstream, we saw a Ptarmigan Twin Otter approaching. We waved frantically as it flew directly over us, continuing on upstream. Twenty minutes later, when we were paddling, this same plane returned, flew low and circled. We could recognize Shelagh and Jon aboard. The plane then carried on downstream, descending to an assumed landing behind a ridge of spruce, beyond a double curve.

We carried on until 6:00 p.m. and being quite tired began looking for a campsite not knowing the location of the Grants, when suddenly we heard the Twin Otter



taking off. It soon flew over us, circled, then flew northward over the trees, circled, returned to us, and circled again, then departed. As the crow flies the distance was very short, but by water it was about two kilometres to a U-curve and then at least an equal distance of paddling after the curve. Again the plane returned, flew low, and circled several times then threw out a blown-up Apuk bag with the message "HOLD YOUR PADDLE LIKE THIS IF YOU WANT US TO LAND AND HELP": (with a picture of a stick figure with arms fully stretched overhead holding paddle crossways). As the plane did one more circle we sat quietly in our canoes, not giving any sign. The machine flew off and we carried on. In a short while we warmly welcomed Shelagh and Jon, who were paddling upstream to meet us. They had been put down on an esker about 100 m from the river. Neither they nor the Ptarmigan pilots had ever received the message to bring in our food barrel.

We camped close by. Fred and Phil baked up a salmon quiche using their five-minute turning method (labour intensive but quiche done to perfection). We had fresh fruit and four litres of wine, complements of the Grants and much appreciated, as well as the home-made cookies from Phil, saved for this occasion. We dined in contentment in the Paterson bug tent. Although most of the group were extremely tired, everybody was in good spirit. We went to bed around 10:00 p.m. as rain began; it continued all night and well into the morning.

Thursday 7 August: because of the rain, we ate our pancakes in the bug tent while

the wet tundra under our feet began to sink, then hurriedly packed up and started our paddle. Although we had seen it so easily in 1981, we missed the Hornby cabin with the three crosses. It was cold and wet, and since we had a long paddle ahead of us the consensus was to paddle on. By late morning we were fighting a north wind which continued until 9:00 p.m. At lunch we decided we would from then on arise at 5:00 a.m. to avoid the afternoon winds. Hot soup was welcomed as we gathered in a sand dune. Later Cathryn and Bill C. split, each to go with one of the Patersons who were finding the heavy paddling very tiring. The sky cleared and the temperature dropped. We had covered 34

km by the time we camped at 5:15 p.m., sharing a gravel bar beside a small creek with some terns. We cooked in the creek hollow. Some of the group camped across the hollow up on top of the bank.

For the next five mornings we got up at 5:00 and were on the river soon after 6:30. On 8 August we paddled 54 km and camped at 2:45 p.m. Saw lots of peregrine falcons and some saw a timber wolf and her cubs. "This is the first day we really had fun," wryly asserted Bill C. Moderate winds and no bugs. Morale remained high.

The following day we took time to climb up and along the top of Look Out Point and view the surrounding tundra. Later we saw a wolverine loping along the shore, a first for most of us. Camped at 2:30 p.m. Jon and Bill C. saw five wolf cubs. Most of us were able to watch two or three of them for quite some time as they frolicked in the sand. We then had a day of overcast



skies, drizzle, and some rain. We were cheered by seeing a couple of musk-ox and later some moose feeding in the river.

On 11 August we entered the big lake where to the northwest the canoeing cross-over can take place to or from the Back River, using the recently named Morse River. At the base of the class 2 rapids we ferried across to the left bank and made a hard eddy turn and paddled into a very tiny, harbor-like, rocky cove. From here we were able to climb the steep hill to the top of the Thelon Bluffs for a panoramic view of the valley, the river, and the open tundra with not an animal in sight. Meanwhile, serious fishing was taking place below. By the time I descended, Bill P. had lost a large lake trout. Jon then caught a large northern pike and Phil soon caught two more. They had never caught such large fish before, so were delighted. Since we could not consume more, fishing ceased. The fish were cleaned and the hovering gulls fed. It was a memorable lunch spot. We then had a large fish meal for dinner with enough left for chowder the following lunch.

That night the temperature dropped and we awoke to find bits of ice on small puddles, heavy mist rising from the river, and a clear blue sky above. We had a few bug-free hours. This was our last day. We entered the Thelon estuary, at the beginning of Beverly Lake. After paddling by several large gravel-bar islands we climbed a steep bank near the end of Hoare Point where we saw five canoes, mostly Old Towns, tethered together, and two stakes marking out a small runway. This confirmed we were at one of our designated pick-up spots. It was now much warmer and as we set

up our tents on the low tundra foliage we stirred up what seemed like millions of black flies just lying in wait for a feast. I was a bit careless and by night looked like I had a dose of chicken pox with 90 bites counted on my face and neck. We had lunch, and later a lengthy dinner prepared by Fred and Phil, down on the gravel shore. We were able to eat and relax in a choice of two bug tents we had brought along.

Following dinner a long retrospective discussion took place. The group felt anger about what had happened to us, because they felt it had been completely unnecessary. The group was not returning home feeling rested. On the trip they had not been able to have numerous fish fries, nor the expected hikes (without a load on their backs), and very little time to just relax. Diana said it would take a month for her swollen knees to settle down.

The next morning our first plane arrived at 10:30 a.m. and returned in two hours for the second load. We had booked in advance to have dinner the last night, all together, at Baker Lake Lodge and some did indeed stay there, others refused. We had a delicious Arctic Char dinner. However, we only dealt with Boris' wife Liz, not with him. Boris did not even make an appearance.

The next morning, begrudgingly we felt, Boris and Liz transported us to the airport. Literally only minutes before our plane was ready to leave did Boris deliver our missing barrel. We quickly emptied the contents into a clean garbage bag and asked to have the food delivered to the Community Hospice Centre where we knew it could be used.





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Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association — Editor: Toni Harting
Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning 'the way or route'

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal,

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

NEWS BRIEFS

NASTAWGAN MATERIAL AND DEADLINE Articles, trip reports, book reviews, photographs, sketches, technical tips, or anything else that you think might be of interest to other readers, are needed for future issues. Try to submit your contributions by e-mail, on 3 1/2 in. computer disk (WordPerfect or MS-Word or text files preferred, but any format is welcome), or in typewritten form, but legibly handwritten material is also welcome. For more information contact the editor (address etc. see WCA Contacts on the back page). 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:

<i>issue:</i>	Winter 1998	<i>deadline date:</i>	25 October
	Spring 1999		24 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 3 1/2 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).

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 \$70 for a whole winter of paddling pleasure. Call Bill Ness at (416) 321-3005 to register. Don't delay — space is limited.

BILL MASON STAMP Finally, after years of lobbying, Wayne Bagley from Windsor, Ontario, saw his dream come true on 15 August 1998. On that day the much-anticipated Bill Mason commemorative stamp was launched by the Canada Post Corporation at the Merrickville headquarters of the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association, honouring Bill's legendary status in the world of canoeing and film-making.

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?

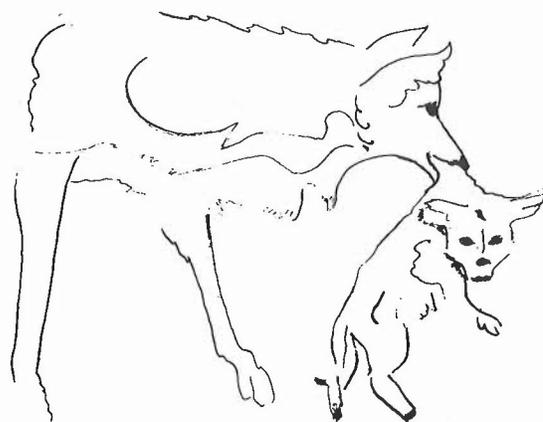
Then come to the WCA Fall Party, also called Wine-and-Cheese Party, on Friday evening, 20 November, at the same location as last year: room 308-309 in Metro Hall, 55 John Street in downtown Toronto (main entrance on the east side of John between King W. and Wellington; there also are several other entrances to the building). An entry fee of \$8.00 per person will be charged at the door. Everybody is welcome, including non-members.

The party will last from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. and features several members who will show slides of some of their trips:

Bloodvein River, Herb Pohl.
Ellesmere Island, Bill King.
Mara/Burnside Rivers, Bill Bignell

A short tribute to Dave Berthelet will also be presented.

Food will be served after the first intermission. For more information contact Anne Snow at (416) 482-0810.



CONSERVATION IN THE ARCTIC

The Arctic Program of the World Wildlife Fund

In the special, wild places which make up the Canadian North, changes are in the wind! You might not have noticed much to be different on your last trip north of 60, but these cool Arctic breezes today carry an increasingly heavy burden of change. Many of these are insidious and hard to detect, yet collectively they are large and threatening to the long-term survival of the wild ecosystems. There are at least three major issues here:

Firstly, toxic chemicals (such as PCBs, DDT, and mercury), are transported in air currents from industrialized nations, then concentrate in the cool Arctic air, and finally end up in the fragile Arctic food webs — food upon which many human communities depend. Scientists are now documenting health effects in Arctic wildlife containing high levels of these toxins, such as hermaphrodite polar bears.

Secondly, exploration for, and extraction of, non-renewable resources, especially metals, has boomed in the past decade. The presentation given by Alex Hall at last winter's WCA symposium in Toronto was startling for most in the room — the huge, yet quiet, mineral-staking rush through much of the Central Arctic, and its implications for the long-term sustainability of intact northern ecosystems and their human communities. Mining is clearly an important development activity for the north, but we still look for the collective commitment to secure local cultural, spiritual, historical, and environmental values before mining takes place.

And thirdly, political changes. These have been equally rapid since the early 1980s. Land claim settlements of huge tracts of northern Canada — Inuvialuit (1984), Gwich'in (1993), Sahtu, Dene & Metis (1993), and now Nunavut — set to become Canada's third Territory on 1 April 1999 and covering about 25% of the landmass of Canada. By this process, major responsibility for ensuring truly sustainable development and conservation of Arctic resources and values is shifting back to indigenous people, the people who traditionally have conducted their lives in these tough landscapes on a truly sustainable long-term basis.

The principles central to most aboriginal cultures are at the core of the work of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF): ensuring that human activities are truly sustainable across many generations; providing for the needs of other species with whom we share this planet. WWF has worked closely and effectively over the past 20 years with Canadian Arctic communities and organizations, ranging from Traditional Knowledge compilation and mapping by the Gwich'in in the lower Mackenzie, to investigations and monitoring of bowhead whale populations by the Inuit of Clyde River in Northern Baffin Island, to research on narwhal, belugas, and bowheads across the Arctic in the early 1980s ("Whales

Beneath The Ice" program). WWF is not an animal rights group, and focuses on conservation of wildlife populations, which includes a place for sustainable use of species. We have a long and significant record of work with northerners.

As the world's largest independent conservation organization, WWF often focuses on areas and issues of global importance. WWF's Arctic Program, based in Oslo, does just that. Recognizing the outstanding opportunities which still remain in the Arctic — to learn from past lessons and to properly conserve the relatively intact wildlife populations and wild landscapes/habitats — WWF Canada is embarking on a three-year intensive conservation program for the Arctic, integrating work we will do with northern communities on wildlife species, protected areas, tourism, toxic chemical effects, and education (both in the North and in the South). This work meshes with corresponding WWF community-based programs elsewhere in the seven other Arctic nations. Our Canadian program is called "Northern Futures." We believe strongly that local stewardship and actions are the only truly effective way towards long-term conservation of resources and values in the Arctic.

Projects which WWF is already supporting and conducting with northern partners in the Canadian Arctic include:

- Developing a means for hunters and trappers to collect information on the health and abnormalities of tissues and organs of harvested species, to assess the effects on wildlife of toxic pollutants in Arctic food webs;
- Inuktitut/Innuinaqtun translation (as well as application of and training in) using WWF's Arctic tourism guidelines ("Linking Conservation and Tourism in the Arctic");
- Refinement, testing, and application of WWF's 15 conservation guidelines for consumptive use of wildlife species (as guidance for communities, land-use planners, co-management boards, governments);
- Publication of the quarterly circumpolar WWF "Arctic Bulletin," the main newsheet for the entire Arctic at present, and which regularly carries Canadian contributions;
- Protection of representative areas within each of the ca. 90 Arctic ecoregions (Yukon right across to Labrador);
- Drawing up a conservation plan for the Eastern Arctic bowhead whale, which will address all long-term threats to this depleted population;
- Supported Nunavut Social Development Council's Traditional Knowledge workshop in Igloodik, which collated views from elders and

youth from each community, to ensure that these values will be incorporated into the long-range planning of the new Territory.

In future issues of *Nastawgan*, my colleagues and I will provide summaries of these and other projects as we secure funding and the conservation work proceeds. We would be very interested to hear from any WCA readers keen to discover more of WWF's collaborative Arctic conservation work. Maybe some of you would

be able to help directly with several of these projects, or get involved in other ways, or simply support the Northern Futures work overall. Please contact me at any stage.

Peter J Ewins, D.Phil., Director, Endangered Species Program, World Wildlife Fund Canada, 90 Eglinton Ave. East, Suite 504, Toronto, M4P 2Z7; tel. (416) 489-4567 X286; fax (416) 489-3611; e-mail ewins@wwfcanada.org

FLOATATION

Don Haig's account of the difficulties he had retrieving his trapped ABS canoe on the Piskanogami: "An ABS boat floats, but just barely" (see *Nastawgan*, Summer 1998) makes it quite apparent that he had no extra floatation in his ABS boat. He was very lucky not to have lost his boat and have to bushcrash home — or worse, get trapped by it.

Shortly after acquiring my Old Town Tripper, I noticed that it only floated a quarter-inch high when filled with water. So I proceeded to add floatation. As described in my article "Extra Floatation for ABS Canoes" in the Summer '81 issue, expanding foam can be moulded in place at both ends of an ABS canoe with very little loss of usable space. Back then I got the stuff from Intertech in Weston, Ontario, which is no longer in the phone book. Their name may have changed (they were on an east-west industrial street running east from Weston Rd. below Hwy. 401), or they may have moved, or you can shop around the marine supply stores. Seventeen years later I can tell you that the floatation has held up very well.

After this is done, very little water will stay in an overturned boat so that it is far less likely to get trapped or damaged — or trap you! Either by skill, cowardice or dumb luck, I have encountered only one occasion in the many years since where my overturned boat ran a bouldery, but short, rapids without me. The other canoeist, the late Dave Berthelet, seeing my boat happily slither its way through the rocks, was quite surprised that my boat came out without damage as he (and I) had seen aluminum boats get stuck and take quite a heavy beating in that kind of situation.

While ABS itself is very tough, I have seen torn hulls in other ABS boats without floatation. ABS boats require more floatation than the manufacturer provides if you plan to (ab)use them in whitewater. Without added floatation your ABS boat, your ticket home in a wilderness trip, suffers a substantially increased risk in an upset in whitewater. Since the things are so heavy, there is a strong incentive to run stuff that might not be run with a boat that did not weigh so much. Good floatation material will only add about four more pounds to the boat.

After adding the floatation, make sure that the centre thwart/yoke is positioned at the proper balance point so that you do not also have to struggle with an

out-of-balance load when portaging. I did this by balancing the upside-down boat on a piece of angle iron. I used the sidewalk to get the alignment right.

Oh yes, less water in the boat makes canoe-over-canoe rescue (a major grunt with a Tripper without floatation) and other salvage efforts much easier and faster, i.e. far more likely to succeed before you get to the next major rapids/waterfall.

George Haeh

PORTAGE FOR WILDERNESS

The Partnership for Public Lands is a coalition comprised of three organizations: World Wildlife Fund, Wildlands League, and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, that have joined forces to work on *Lands for Life*. This is an Ontario government initiative that will decide the fate of 40 million hectares of public land. It will decide what portion of the land will be protected, and what portion will be given over to the forest and mining industries. The Partnership for Public Lands wants to ensure that at least 15–20% of public land is protected, but the process is nowhere near this goal. Recently the Round Tables have completed their reports outlining their preferred land use recommendations. It is possible that the government will make a final decision in October, and the fate of public lands will be determined.

As a means of promoting public awareness and seeking public support to influence the provincial government in its *Lands for Life* decision making, the Partnership is organizing the **Portage for Wilderness**. The goal of this event is to have as many canoes and supporters of wilderness protection as possible at Queen's Park in Toronto on Saturday, 24 October 1998. It will begin at noon and includes a portage around Queen's Park, presentations by guest speakers, and entertainment. The event will be used as an information session; direction for further public involvement will be provided. Please bring your support to Queen's Park!

Contact: Federation of Ontario Naturalists, c/o Andrea Kettle, 355 Lesmill Road, Don Mills, Ontario, M3B 2W8; tel. 1-800-440-2366 or (416) 444-8419; e-mail julie@ontarionature.org

PADDLING THE COAST

Michael Kerwin

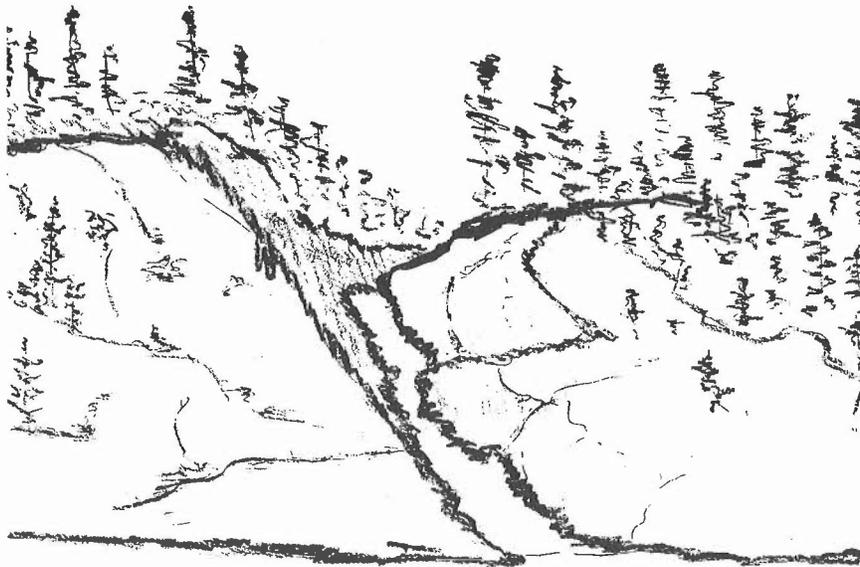
These sketches were made during the summer of 1996 when Jutta Schaaf and I took 18 days to paddle our open canoe along the northeast shore of Lake Superior from Hattie Cove in Pukaskwa National Park down to Michipicoten River.



By the North Swallow River

We had spent the previous night at White Spruce Harbour and were travelling toward Cascade Falls on a beautiful summer's day -- warm, sunny, and perfectly calm. In the small bay next to the mouth of the North Swallow River is an excellent campsite. The site is large and open, providing relative respite from biting insects.

The beach here is quite broad with a delightful view and the bay, formed by two headlands, is relatively protected. As we found on so many occasions during this trip, with no time constraints or fixed itinerary, one might easily want to camp at all the numerous scenic sites within close proximity to each other. As it was, we stopped only for a brief time here before continuing on our way.

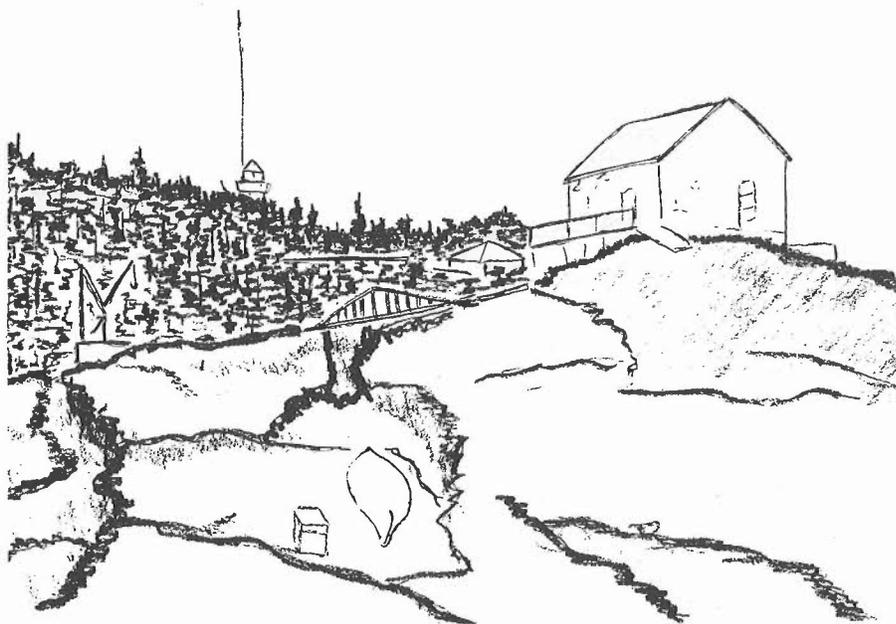


Falls on the Swallow River

The falls are easily accessed by canoe and are located upstream of a slight widening of the river a short distance from its mouth. While not spectacular in height or grandeur, the falls are, nonetheless, quite picturesque. They afforded us an interesting and brief excursion -- a welcome contrast to coastal paddling.

At the light, Otter Island

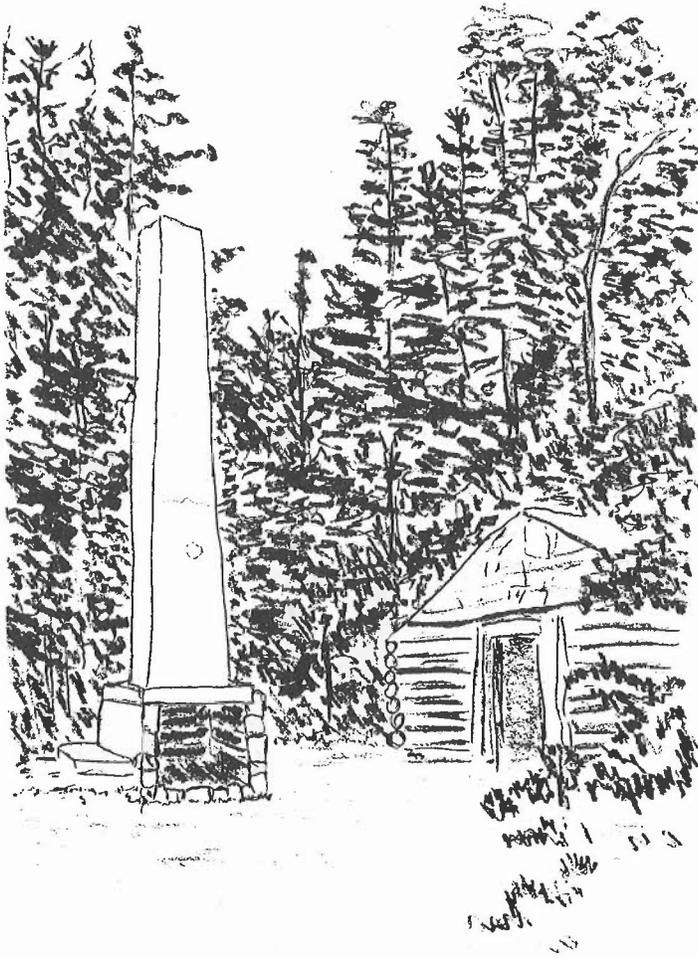
After travelling for four days through a very rugged landscape with few signs of human presence, we were rather taken aback when the navigational light on Otter Island finally came into view. Not only that, but the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker Samuel Risley was on its annual maintenance run and was anchored just offshore clattering and clanking 24 hours a day. The next day we made the acquaintance of the ship's captain, David Fowler, who was most hospitable and gave us a tour of his vessel. As evening approached, we inquired about camping on Otter Island by the lightkeeper's house and were given permission to do so. As we found out, many travellers -- sailors, paddlers, and even a group of winter trekkers on snowshoes -- had stopped in at the house. Although the lighthouse has been automated for a number of years, the light keeper's and assistant light keeper's houses are still maintained and open, affording an interesting glimpse of life at the light and of fellow travellers who have passed before.



Camp near Pukaskwa Depot

Along the north shore of the bay where Pukaskwa Depot is located, we came across a prominent, overhanging rock face about 60 metres in height. On the cobble beach at the base of the cliff was a dry, sheltered area about eight metres wide and 30 metres long. What started out as a lunch stop eventually became a camp. That night, from under the tarp, we watched firelight flickering on the rock face and listened to the rain falling.





Cabin near Le Petit Mort Rocks

Near Le Petit Mort Rocks is a tall concrete chimney by a deserted, ramshackle cabin described by Alec Ross in his book, *Coke Stop in Emo*. We arrived here late morning, getting out to explore the site and stretch our legs. The area surrounding the structures is quite pretty and there is room enough for a small but pleasant camp. The bay here is shallow and sandy and the water temperature is relatively warm -- a welcome change from the usual numbing cold of the lake.

The outfitters at Naturally Superior Adventures, located on a rocky peninsula where the Michipicoten River empties into Lake Superior (RR #1, Lake Superior, Wawa, Ontario, P0S 1K0; (705) 856-2939) provide a reasonably priced shuttle service, free secure vehicle parking, boat rentals, and a wealth of information about the trip. At the time of our trip, they were working on a coastal canoe guide which, when published, will probably be quite useful.

If you plan to travel this section of the northeast shore, you may wish to consult the guide book describing the Coastal Hiking Trail as well as The Coastal Trip. Both are available from The Friends of Pukaskwa, General Delivery, Heron Bay, Ontario, P0T 1R0. The trail book is far more informative than the canoe route description, showing the location of campsites and providing information about the history and natural features of the area.

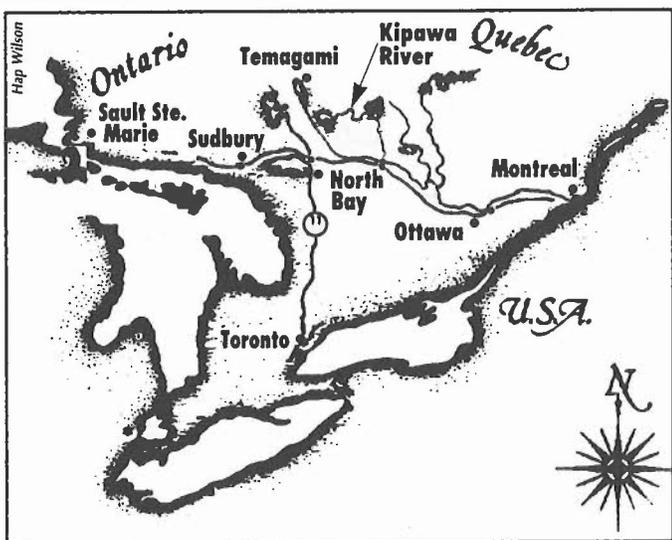
Richardson's Chart Book and Cruising Guide, 1994 Lake Superior Edition, provides a wealth of information about the coast and inland points of interest. Published by Richardson's Marine, the guide is available at some marine equipment and supply stores. It has more information than any other source I've seen but, like all things nautical, it comes at a price -- only \$95.00!

KIPAWA RIVER HYDRO PROJECT

There is a movement by Hydro Quebec to dam the Kipawa River – located in western Quebec approximately two hours northwest of Ottawa.

The river is a popular wilderness canoe and kayak destination and Hydro Quebec plans to divert water from the Kipawa and redirect it by flooding local lakes which run into Lake Temiscaming. The maximum flow of the Kipawa is normally 60 cubic metres per second but after the construction of the dam, it would only be five cubic metres per second, eliminating any whitewater paddling.

To express your concern contact Ms Isabelle Lessard at (819) 797-0608, who is conducting an impact study for Hydro Quebec. For information contact: Derek - email: ritdf@cam.org.



Both items courtesy CRCA
Kanawa magazine July/Aug/Sep 98

COAST GUARD ACCEPTS RECOMMENDATIONS

After several years of meetings, memos, telephone calls, faxes and briefs to the Canadian Coast Guard on the proposed Vessel Registration and Operator Proficiency legislation – the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association has been able to exclude canoes, kayaks and sea kayaks from the mandatory legislation. This is a total reversal of the preliminary brief proposed by staff of the Canadian Coast Guard to the Minister responsible and the Association would like to thank all *KANAWA* readers who responded to the CRCA's request to contact the Honourable David Anderson - Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

The regulations to be passed into legislation will affect boats 10 horse power and above and will hopefully address issues surrounding alcohol and boating – one of the primary reasons for implementing the legislation.

Canoeists, kayakers and sea kayakers can voluntarily register their boat as well as voluntarily take an operator proficiency course but it is not mandatory.

On a related topic – the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association has been reviewing the revised Small Vessel Regulations and how they will affect paddlers. The new regulations will require all boats to carry flares, a buoyant heaving line, a towline 3/4 the length of the craft – in addition to having an extra paddle on board, a PFD that fits the boat's occupant, a sound signalling device and a bailer.

For voyageur style canoes or dragon boats - if the freeboard is more than 1.5 feet - a ladder would be required as well as oars.

The CRCA has been in contact with the Coast Guard with respect to the new regulations and has requested that those paddling within one mile from shore be exempted from the new regulations except for having a proper fitting PFD on board. This would address the concern of many camp owners, outfitters and those who teach canoeing, kayaking or sea kayaking lessons that they will now need to spend thousands of dollars equipping their fleets to meet the new regulations, when in fact they are teaching people to be safe, responsible paddlers in a controlled situation. The exception would be similar to that given to canoe and kayak racing events that allow the participants not to be subject to the Small Vessel Regulations.

Similarly, an exception for self-powered craft from having to have a ladder for more than 1.5 feet of free board has been recommended as well as the inclusion of extra paddles instead of oars.

To review the new Small Vessel Regulations write: Small Vessel Partnerships/Small Vessel Regulations – Canadian Coast Guard - Department of Fisheries and Oceans, 200 Kent Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E6.



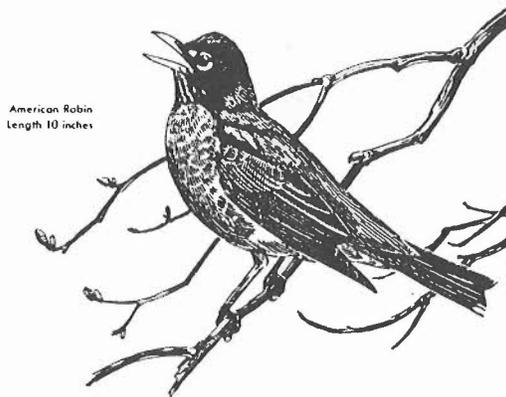
REVIEWS

IN THE WILDS: CANOEING AND CANADIAN ART is an interesting exhibit of over 60 works of art, historic canoes and paddles currently showing at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, until 15 November 1998. For anyone interested in canoes and canoeing as a manifestation of Canadian culture, this show is quite worthwhile. The exhibit spans a period from the early 19th century to the present day comprising works by such well-known artists as Frances Anne Hopkins, Paul Kane, Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, and Alex Colville. Included in the exhibit are two of Hopkins' most familiar works *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs* and *Shooting the Rapids*.

According to Liz Wylie, guest curator for this exhibition, "the manner in which artists have depicted the canoe has changed over the years. In art from earlier days, the canoe was largely portrayed as a ubiquitous element of life in the New World. The interpretation of the canoe image in contemporary art has shifted considerably to become a more complex, even ambivalent one." For the artists in this exhibit, the canoe or canoeing are used as images to convey such themes as nostalgia, freedom, spirituality, the canoe as archetype and as Canadian icon.

A number of programs have been planned in conjunction with this exhibition and guided tours are also available. The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is open every day from 10–5. For information, call (905) 893-1121.

(Reviewed by Michael Kerwin.)



American Robin
Length 10 inches

BIRCHBARK CANOES OF THE FUR TRADE by Timothy J. Kent, published by Silver Fox Enterprises (P.O. Box 176, 11504 U.S. 23 South, Ossineke, MI 49766, USA), 1997, softcover, two volumes total 670 pages, prepaid US\$49.95 or Can\$65.95 plus US\$5.00 shipping. Reviewed by Toni Harting.

In the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, the birchbark canoe played a central role in the North American fur trade, and much has been written about this unique craft that profoundly influenced the course of history. But except for the classic 1964 study by Adney and

Chapelle, there has never been anything like this monumental study self-published by Kent. It is not possible to even mention here all the subjects treated in the book; the author presents an amazing and utterly fascinating insight into origin, manufacture, design, decoration, equipment, propulsion, cargoes, portaging, storage, and much more of this beautiful craft. The list of references has about 320 entries, many of them never published before, and together with the more than 150 photographs and about 200 line drawings they make this major work a researcher's dream come true. (To make one negative comment, the absence of a subject index makes finding specific items in the book a time-consuming and often frustrating job. We should hope that the author can still put together an index and make it available at cost.) Anyone with the least bit of curiosity about the fur trade will find this illuminating publication a must-have.



Cedar Waxwing
Length 7 inches

BUSHWHACKER magazine, published six times a year by The Bear Creek Co., 6517 Concession 7, Tosorontio, RR#1, Everett, Ontario, L0M 1J0; tel. (705) 435-1211; e-mail bearck@interhop.net publisher/editor Boris Swidersky.

VOYAGEUR magazine, published six times annually by Voyageur Magazine, 93 Leuty Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M4E 2R4; tel. (416) 693-5676; publisher and managing editor Marc Allan.

Both these medium-sized (8 1/2 x 11 in. 24–32 pages) magazines present a lot of interesting material on wilderness subjects and especially canoeing that is of interest to anyone eager to hear the swish of a paddle. The articles are generally well written and subject matter is quite varied, ranging from ice canoeing to nude tripping to fruit leather to coureurs de bois. The many illustrations are well reproduced, although the low quality paper (newsprint) should be upgraded as soon as possible. Each magazine can be subscribed to for \$15 plus tax per year, but often they can be picked up free at various outdoor shows and stores.

PONDHOPPING

Exploring the Quebec-Labrador Height of Land

Herb Pohl

Perhaps it's just the feeling of relief one experiences when crossing a height of land — the uphill part of the journey is done — but on my trips from the George River side of the watershed to the headwaters of one of the Northern Labrador rivers, I have always considered the region straddling the Quebec-Labrador boundary extraordinary. There are one or more ranges of bare hills oriented in a north-south direction which dominate an undulating plain dotted with bodies of water. These ranges have been breached in a number of places by glaciers, which advanced from the centre of the icecap occupying the Labrador peninsula during the last ice age. The many eastward-trending eskers and a multitude of erratics indicate the scale of the forces which shaped the land. Visually, there is a raw edge to it all: exquisitely beautiful when the sun shines and the horizon is at infinity, hostile and bleak when rain and fog dominate the scene.

In the summer of 1996 I decided to spend several weeks in the Quebec/Labrador highlands following a course through small lakes and ponds in a generally south to north direction. The idea was to touch on areas with interesting geographical features away from the main travel routes, while keeping the portaging within tolerable limits. Last, but not least, it had to obey a financial absolute.

Retirement had removed the strictures of time in my travel plans and I left Southern Ontario on Monday, 22 July, with visions of a leisurely drive to Labrador City. The weekly train of the Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway to Schefferville leaves Lab City on Thursdays at noon and so I was looking forward to an unhurried observation of the countryside along the way, particularly the stretch of road beyond Baie ComEAU, which I had not travelled before.

Unbeknown to me, my departure coincided with the occurrence of torrential downpours in the region north of Quebec City. The first inkling that all was not right were frequent signs of washouts on Hwy. 138 and finally a roadblock by the Quebec Provincial Police. The message: No point in going any farther, roads and bridges ahead are washed out and it will take as much as a week to repair. Just great!

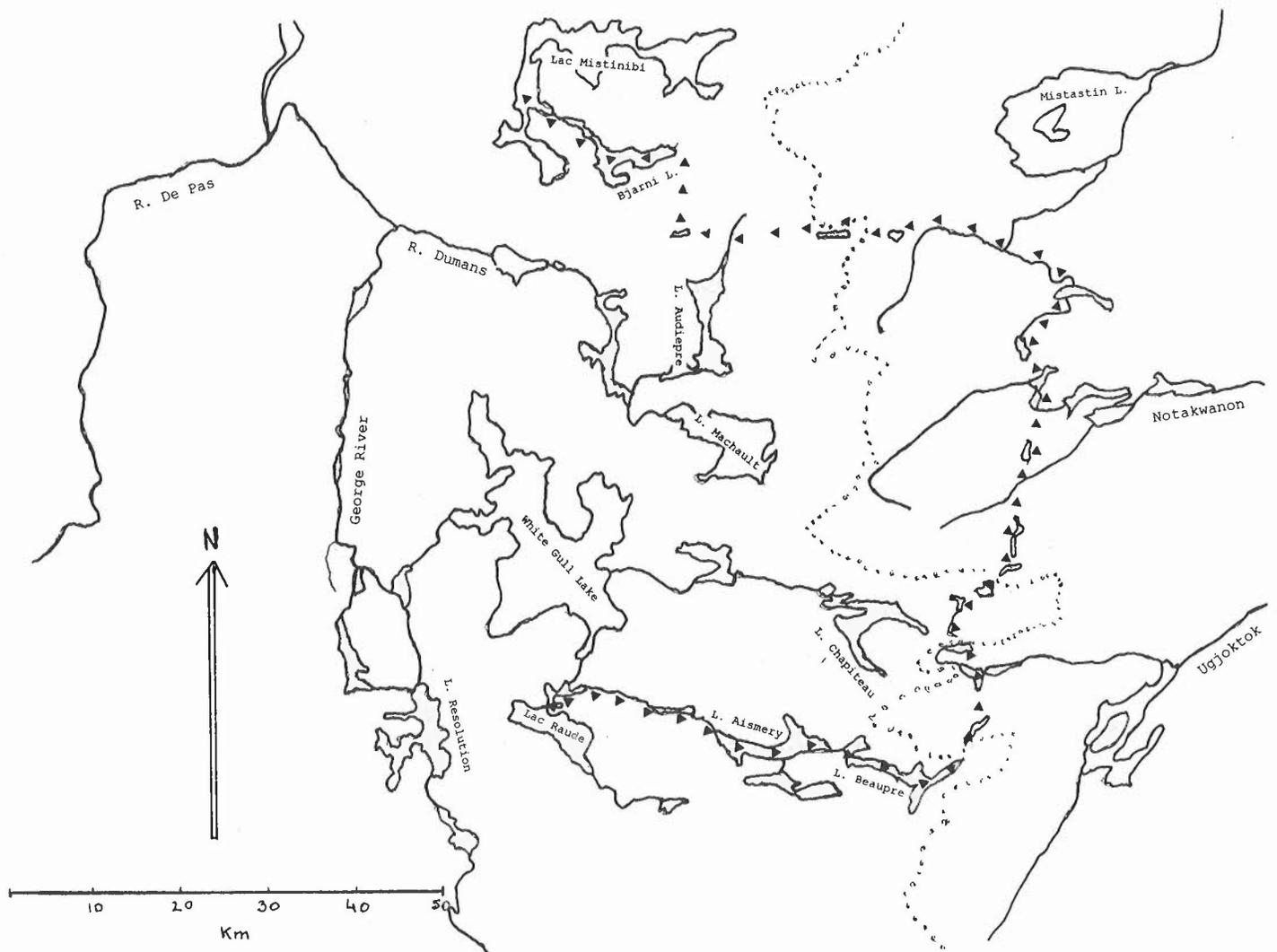
I went on anyway, past more roadblocks, and after some delays managed to reach Lab City in time to load my gear in the freight car. It was with quiet satisfaction that I took a seat in one of the passenger cars on an adjacent track — perseverance had won the day. Well, not quite. In a few minutes the coaches started to move forward, surely just to the next switch and then back onto the adjacent track to hook up the freight car, I thought. Alas, the train merely gathered speed and kept going.



— the esker linking Lac Resolution and Lac Raude —



— the streambed was wide and bouldery —



It seems that I was participating in a historic event. As the conductor explained to me, the authorities were forced to react to the many complaints about the leisurely pace of the passenger train (which always included some box cars with freight). The solution was to separate freight and passenger traffic and I was on the first segregated train. I was assured, in response to my rather sourly attitude to this unexpected development, that my gear would be on its way to join me within hours of my arrival in Schefferville. Somehow I am not convinced that this new strategy by the QNS&L represents an improvement in service — the train chugged into Schefferville at 11:00 p.m., the same as always, and I had to wait two days before my gear finally arrived.

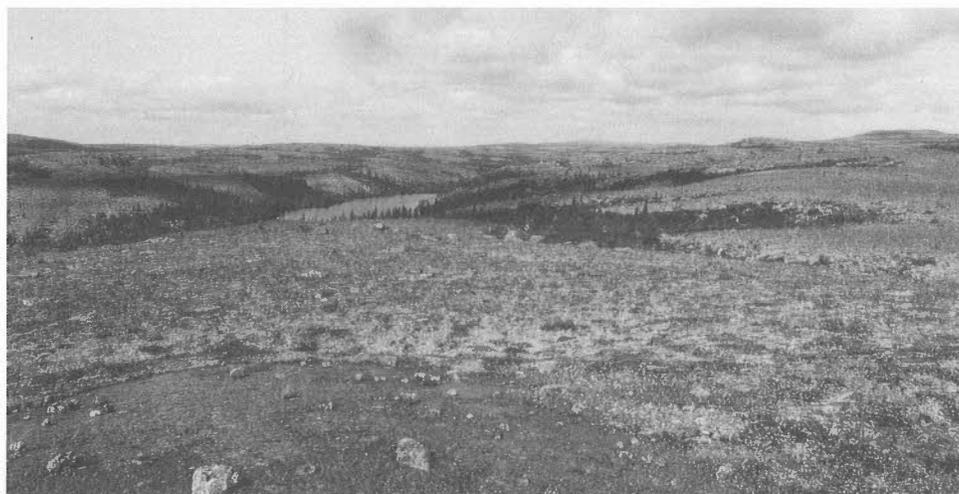
Fortunately I was the beneficiary of the kind hospitality of the people of George River Lodge during the waiting period, particularly Jackie Courtois who went out of his way to find alternate transportation when the promised Cessna 185 failed to materialize. The alternative turned out to be an ancient Beaver operated by Saguenay Air out of their Squaw Lake anchorage. Even then, my promised departure was pushed back from morning to noon and finally happened about the supper hour of my third day in Schefferville. The intervening time was spent in conversation with an interesting collection of other travellers, most of them guides with local outfitters who had many stories and knew how to tell them well.

I always find flying in small planes exciting, primarily because it adds perspective and widens the horizon. In this particular case there was the added intrigue of trying to identify specific landmarks passed on previous trips. Within an hour we had reached the upper George River watershed and approached the esker which connects Resolution Lake to Lac Raude. In 1985 Jim Greenacre and I had portaged across this ancient highway on our way to the Ugjoktok River (see *Nastawgan*, Autumn 1987). At my request the pilot deposited me at the base of the esker on the south shore of Lac Raude; he then quickly disappeared in the overcast. The place had all the prerequisites of an ideal campsite: dry firewood, level tent site, exposure to the prevailing breeze, a nice view from the top of the high esker.

There was only one distraction: numerous very fresh bear tracks. Normally I would have put up the tent — with some unease to be sure, for bears and I seem to go together — but I had been sensitized by the many bear stories told by the guides, some of them rather worrisome. And so, despite the late hour, I shipped out

to the north shore of the lake and a place much less endowed as a campsite. Just as I landed, a little seam opened in the gloomy cloud cover on the western horizon and allowed the dying sun to gild the low hills, a bit of magic which brightened the mind well beyond daylight.

Lac Raude is connected to the lake immediately north of it by a short bit of turbulence. That lake, a thin watery cover over glacial till and nameless on the maps, receives a stream on its eastern end which is the outflow of three large lakes situated immediately west of the height of land separating Quebec and Labrador. My expectation was that this stream would allow relatively easy access to the height of land — a 50-metre elevation change over 20 km to get to the first large lake (Lac



— the high ground is ideal hiking country —

Aismery) and good flow because of the large drainage area. A first look at the river confirmed that I was dealing with a substantial volume of water. There was only one small problem — the streambed was wide and bouldery, and only occasionally was the water deep enough to float the boat.

The end of the first day found me encamped on the shores of what looks deceptively like a lake on the map. After supper I climbed a high, barren hill, more by habit than inclination, because it promised a good overview of the region. To the west the wide, waterlogged valley of the George River was overlain by billows of clouds through which rays of light from the evening sun burst forth in ever-changing patterns. A thunderstorm in the northwest darkened and rippled the surface of White Gull Lake. It was a scene which called for contemplation and reflection, were it not for the presence of a multitude of winged creatures clamouring for blood. Their angry, relentless chorus spurred me on to an early retreat into the tent.

By early morning of the third day I had gained the western shore of Lac Aismery, happy to exchange the tumpline for the paddle. The landscape in this region is dominated by barren, rounded hills which rise a hundred metres or more above boggy lowland. Despite the modest increase in altitude from the valley of the



— eskers converged from several directions —

George River to the height of land, there is a marked change in the vegetative cover — dense growth of black spruce, alders, and Labrador tea is replaced by a covering of lichen among widely scattered tamaracks. The high ground is ideal hiking country, particularly if the wind is strong enough to keep the bugs in check, and I frequently availed myself of the opportunity to explore the area. The reason for that was not only to get a better view of the surrounding countryside, but also to get a bit of respite from fighting the waves generated by a strong quartering wind which blew relentlessly during the next few days — and stopped as soon as I decided to put up the tent. As any northern traveller knows, the biting fraternity's attraction to warm-blooded feeding stations is directly proportional to the length of time they have been confined to their hiding places. This unwelcome behaviour made life at campsites considerably less enjoyable.



— far away on the southwestern horizon a range of high hills reached darkly into the sky —

Of all the bodies of water traversed on this trip, Lac Beauvre is particularly fondly remembered. My campsite was at the base of a large hill which juts out into the lake from the north. During the night a storm blew in from the west; morning dawned wet and dreary under darkly threatening clouds. With some reluctance I retrieved the dry firewood from beneath the boat and started preparing the usual breakfast — pancakes and bacon. Halfway through the process I realized that all around me a remarkable change in the weather was taking place. While the western sky appeared dark and threatening like the gates of hades, a magical brightness was beginning to emerge through the shifting mists in the east. An extraordinary visual spectacle was in the making, I knew. Quickly grabbing tripod and camera I headed for high ground; breakfast would have to wait.

As happens too often, the photographic evidence was far from adequate in conveying the wonder and excitement of the event. Within an hour the sun had assumed dominance and whitecaps dotted the lake. My course from the northeastern end of Lac Beauvre was due north, and despite a number of portages a euphoric sense of well-being lingered. During the next four days I crossed the headwaters of the Ugjoktok and Notakwanon Rivers in quick succession before reaching the region drained by the Mistastin River. In the process, euphoria was gradually replaced by fatigue; the keen appreciation of the glorious wildness of the country superseded by tired indifference.

I was now following a drainage northwards through a series of small lakes to a point where it joins with another creek which flows in from the west. The combined waters of these two streams continue a turbulent northerly course to Lake Mistastin some 15 km away. My course lay to the west and towards a long, shallow groove in the bedrock running westward from the height of land.

Half a day's travel past the juncture of the two streams, I rounded a point in the narrow valley I was travelling in — the day had been squally, the labor hard, and the mood sullen — and unexpectedly found myself confronted by a scene of exquisite beauty. Eskers converged from several directions to a high focus amid shallow bodies of water which shimmered in the afternoon sun. Just a kilometre to the east the surface was dotted with erratics, but here a covering of sand had softened the contours of the wide, treeless plain. Far away on the southwestern horizon a range of high hills reached darkly into the blue sky. And once again, as on Lac Beauvre a week earlier, I tried to photograph a panorama which filled me with awe. The next day I was faced with a portage over a spur of the high hills which had provided such a beautiful backdrop the day before. On the map it seemed a straightforward carry, but bog and rockfaces dictated a much longer circuitous route. Trying to hang onto the canoe in the strong wind was hard work and at day's end I was exhausted and footsore. An hour's search had produced a few



— looking back on 'Loon Lake' from the highest point on the trip (about 700 m) —



— from the top of the portage I had a wonderful bird's-eye view —

meagre sticks of firewood, enough for a quick breakfast at best, and so I settled for a cold supper. During the evening a threatening sky gave rise to a full-blown storm which worried the tent for most of the night, but morning dawned serenely beautiful.

The lake I was camped on was completely land-locked except for a tiny outflow over a high rock ledge. Nevertheless, it was populated by large numbers of fish. During the morning chores a pair of resident loons approached quite closely as we carried on an animated conversation. What made this unusual was that it was the only time on the whole trip that I encountered animals other than a few song birds; no ducks, no geese, no caribou, no bears, no wolves — the land seemed empty. Equally surprising was the total absence of signs of human occupation, old or new, in spite of a careful examination of potential camping spots along the way.

From the top of the next portage I had a wonderful bird's eye view of the glacier-worn groove in the bed-rock running west to the horizon. A number of small lakes dotted the low spots like pearls on a string, their deep blue surfaces streaked by gusts of wind and set off dramatically by the gleaming white of a mini-glacier immediately below my vantage point. For the next two days my downhill progress toward Lac Audiepvre required a number of carries including a couple around bodies of water which were shown as lakes on the map but were actually boulder fields.

Up to this point the weather had been uncharacteristically warm and sunny, but now it underwent a dramatic change. Within an hour the blue sky was obliterated by a wall of fog which rolled in from the east. The temperature dropped from 20°C to just above the freezing point, such that the lakes started to steam. The wind increased to at least 60 km/hr (it blew down the radio tower at Tuktu Lodge on Mistinibi Lake 50 km to the northwest) and heavy rain began to fall. And at this least opportune time I made two mistakes — I



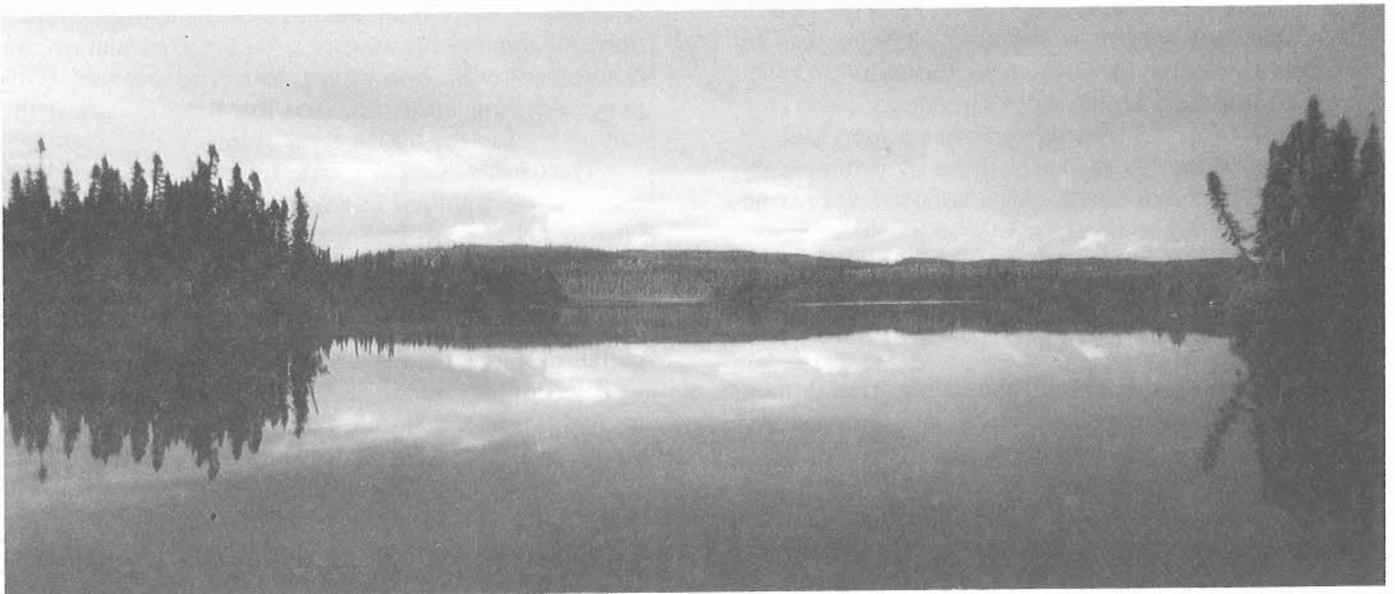
– the big storm is moving in –

portaged into the wrong lake and then passed up a safe campsite — while trying to get back on course. After two more portages, soaked and somewhat hypothermic, I spied a few scraggly tamaracks which provided enough wind shelter to put up the tent. Just then, by some miracle, the rain stopped for a few minutes, long enough to set up camp without everything getting totally soaked. It didn't take me long to crawl into the sleeping bag and thank my guardian angel.

The storm raged on for two more days with slowly diminishing intensity. On the second day my love affair with the sleeping bag was coming to an end and I started to collect firewood which in due course became a wonderful source of heat. Gradually the dull grey monotony of the sky began to show some texture, the rain became intermittent drizzle, and it was time to move on. Late in the day I portaged into the first large body of water in more than a week — Lake Bjarni. The southeast corner of this lake is bordered by high hills.

In the evening gloom their rocky flanks looked dark and threatening. My own mood was equally dark. For the past week the tendinitis in my feet had made walking increasingly painful and reduced my excursions in the countryside. Now I had to decide whether, after two and a half weeks on the road, I should go on.

At the start of this trip I had made arrangements with Alan Tardif, the manager of Tuktu Lodge in Schefferville, to ship one of my packs to their lodge on the shores of Mistinibi Lake. It contained food for two extra weeks of travel. By my original reckoning this would be enough to reach Nain on the Labrador coast, but as I approached the camp, in pouring rain, I decided that the excitement and enthusiasm to continue were gone. The staff at the lodge, and in particular Alan, who flew me back to Schefferville and housed me for five days (for a total cost of only \$150), were absolutely first class. Still, it rankles a bit not to have gone all the way and I may have to go back and finish it.



– the last day in Labrador was serenely beautiful –

GETTING ORCA LEVEL II

Ann Dixie and Lee Benson

The souse hole swirled and swallowed its fast upstream-moving eddy. We watched it, dry-mouthed, as our ORCA instructor drilled us about the hazards of keepers. She then pointed upstream, to river left, to the eddy we needed to catch high enough to allow room to ferry back to river right, below the keeper, but above the wrap rock in centre stream.

Facing Red Pine Rapid on the Dumoine River on Day 3 of this intensive, combined Level I and II solo/tandem whitewater course, our instructor knew we were ready. Our fear was a healthy one, we were told, a recognition of risk, but risk that could be assessed and managed at our skill level. We weren't so sure! We thought back to Day 1 when our egos deflated like punctured floatbags when we discovered how much more we needed to learn. We remembered how unprepared we were for the surprises and challenges that the weekend would bring, and how the intensity of the course had developed more than our paddling skills. We had not known on Day 1 how much the river would come to symbolize a journey: of adventure, of self-discovery, and even of our daily lives. Thinking of all that had transpired — and our dream of reaching Level II — gave us the courage to overcome our hesitancy. But we need to go back to the beginning....

The Gravel Pit: Our first adventure was the rendezvous with our Chalk River-based instructor, Sharon Girdwood. We'd be camping and meeting at a gravel pit on the Petawawa River, right beside Highway 17, bordering the Armed Forces base. Although Sharon's groups routinely camp in a small, treed part of the pit, we felt apprehensive. The participants of our all-women's course had dwindled down to just the two of us. So, our first lesson in risk management was to prepare a safe home base, or so we thought.

We strategically blocked the site entrance with the car to deter other vehicles. We set up camp to look as though lots of *big* people were there by prominently displaying four lawn chairs and a spouse's very large shoes under a circus-sized tarp. As extra safety insurance, we placed a borrowed cell phone at the ready. The only incongruity was the pegging of our two small tents inches apart on a site large enough for 68 scouts!

Discovery #1: Planning vs. Execution. After dinner, a lowly payphone accepted our quarters when we called to let our instructor know we'd arrived. We'd discovered that we were real "techno-plebes" and couldn't make a call on the feature-filled, supposedly idiot-proof cell phone. Undaunted, we fantasized about its potential use as a light-weight bludgeon, or as an "atomizing phaser," StarTrek-style.

Discovery #2: Be Dynamic. On Day 1 we learned to rotate our upper bodies and to add power to our strokes. We learned to stop abruptly, side-slip around obstacles, and to reverse. We "pirou-eddied" — paddled in circles on eddy lines — to learn about alternating the lean of the boat. We eddy-hopped upstream. But most instructive was learning to be dynamic: to put in another stroke when one won't do the job, and to make strokes meaningful by making them short and powerful.

Discovery #3: Expect the Unexpected. Any sense of vulnerability about the exposed campsite had been dispelled by the exhilaration of our accomplishments, and by seeing family groups on the river. Besides, we were just too tired to feel threatened by headlights in the gravel pit when we "crashed" in our tents at 10 p.m.

The next morning we sipped tea and idly watched the comings and goings of the pit. Now that vehicle traffic was familiar, we paid scant attention to a slowly encroaching truck, confident that it would stop at our barricade. But, it came closer and closer. Like the old Royalex magazine ad, but not as funny, the truck kept coming, off the dirt-road, past the car, heading — oh no! — for the canoes. Yells of "stop!" and gesticulations were in vain. The truck kept coming, pushing over one canoe and pinning the other under its bumper.

Sprinting across the campsite, we shouted at the driver through closed windows and over the blare of his radio. The twangy, bouncy, country-and-western music was as out of place with the drama as the driver seemed stupefied by our reactions. Finally coming to a stop, he angrily proclaimed to be the keeper of the site and that we were in the way. Our encampment barrier ignored, he was determined to intrude, using intimidation and anger as his weapons. To avoid escalation, we countered with non-aggression and reason. This peace-keeping effort diffused the tension, saved the canoes — and the ORCA II mission.

The truck's bumper sticker told us he was a Korean war vet. We watched in wonderment as this big man, known as Big Foot, emerged from the behemoth using a cane to balance war-damaged legs. This self-appointed keeper of the camp — probably with little else to do in his life — adjusted rocks in the fire pit, burnt garbage, and added a couple of broken chairs to a weird array of junk already assembled there. He said he was proud of "shooting down a hundred [enemies] a day" and that he could do it again "right there on the beach, right now." Our dismay at the necessity of war was met with the rationalization that he had been given "a pay cheque for pulling the trigger." He added, as though it were an impossibility: "Why, everyone'd have to get along for there to be no war."

Notwithstanding the compassion that we felt for

this man, crippled in body and spirit, who could only talk of destruction and aggression, we resolved to leave the pit that night. Unnerved by our unexpected encounter, we agreed, as frequent solo trippers, that it is not the wilderness, but people who scare us.

Discovery #4: Go with the Flow. We left Big Foot to his tasks and hit the river. But shaken up and enervated by the surge and drop of adrenaline caused by the clash of our different worlds, solo paddling was difficult that morning. Working a new rapid, we struggled against its crosscurrents, and fought to get into its eddies. Gone was the "river dancing" of the day before.

Seeing us struggle, Sharon took us to scout and run a new, longer set of rapids. She did the first solo run and gave us a boost when she used our planned route exactly. Our confidence returned when we ran the rapid tandem and worked with the river and with the flow. We were ready for more solo work. At the end of the day we revisited those earlier crosscurrents. This time, refocussed and Big Foot forgotten, out came the dynamic strokes and the right power, angle, and lean to let us play, not battle the rapid!

Later, on the bigger water of the Dumoine, we felt the magic of getting a back ferry "just right." At first we struggled with an angle which was too tight, but when we allowed the stern to drop, opening the angle, the water did all the work. We flew across the river effortlessly. Just like life. Don't fight it! Go with the flow!

Discovery #5: Paddling is More than Moving Water. In doing the combined course, we scaled a steep learning curve. We did it as a team. Championing each other's victories pushed us beyond our expecta-

tions more than competitiveness could have done. Courage on the part of one fuelled it in the other. Shared laughter brought back energy at the end of the day: enough to do solo canoe-over-canoe rescues, and to paddle, simultaneously, two canoes single-handed. We got to know Sharon Girdwood (artist at the 1998 WCA symposium and wilderness canoeing guide for 15 years), a remarkable woman, as generous with patience as she is gifted with talent and expertise. Acknowledging our strengths and inspiring us beyond our weaknesses, Sharon was a sensitive co-traveller on our continuing journey.

Discovery #6: The Formula! Yes, at the end, paddling both tandem and solo, we hit that eddy, ferried across the river, and avoided the holes and rocks on Red Pine! So what does it take to get ORCA Level II? A super coach, a fun paddling partner, camaraderie, mutual support, grit, and dynamism. Expecting the unexpected and going with the flow. And practice, lots of it. And more solo lessons next year.

Women interested in getting together next year for an all-women's whitewater solo course can contact Ann at (416) 769-0210 or Lee at (416) 767-4596. For more information on paddling skills required for each of the three ORCA levels, see the Ontario Recreational Canoeing Association's publication, *ORCA: In Introductory Handbook for Prospective Individual and Organizational Members*, or contact ORCA at <http://www.canoeontario.on.ca/orca.htm> or at Canoe Ontario, 1185 Eglinton Ave. E., Ste. 104, North York, ON, M3C 3C6; (416) 426-7170.

THE 9 TO 5 SLOW DEATH

Just got back from another wilderness canoe trip to the Canadian North. Haven't even put away the gear yet, and already planning the next trip. Can't ever let it go.

I just don't understand the grip that this wilderness canoeing thing has on me. What is it about the land that demands annual homage to it? That entices me back year after year. That forces me to leave home and hearth and head to untravelled wilderness. Every May with springtime and the onset of breakup it starts. Pulled north like a magnet. Can't help it.

Members of the fur brigades were similarly hooked. At ice-out they paddled from Montreal all the way to Fort William at the head of Lake Superior. Paddling 16 to 18 hours a day. After the exchange of trade goods for furs and a visit with the brigades coming down from the Athabasca country, they paddled back to Montreal. Making it back before ice-in. Year after year. Putting up with poor food, bad bugs, and hard work. Why? It wasn't the money. They didn't see much of that. And surely they could find easier work than portaging 40 kilo bales around rapids and struggling every second of daylight.

It was the country. The wilderness. That's why they kept coming back. They could not get enough of it. They went because the land was unscarred by man. They went so they

could see the land just as it was after the act of creation was complete and the earth was fresh and clean. Only in the wilderness can this be done.

You let the spirit of the wilderness touch you and you can never get rid of the mark that it leaves. You are forever branded. Always the wilderness will be pulling and pushing and calling for you. To come back. It's had so much of you and still it wants more. You've had so much of the wilderness and yet it's not enough.

How can you possibly appease that part of your soul that needs this kind of involvement? Don't know the answer. I'm afraid that the answer might be that it will never be enough. That I'm always going to have to go back. Year after year. To see and feel and explore anew a land that is new.

At work now and facing the long, wet, and dark winter. Sitting in an office putting up with the petty. The 9 to 5 slow death. I wonder how the minds of some of these people here work. If they work.

Wish I were back on the river dealing with real problems. Need the reality of the river to survive the artificiality of the office. Too much plastic in the office. On both the furniture and the people.

Greg Went

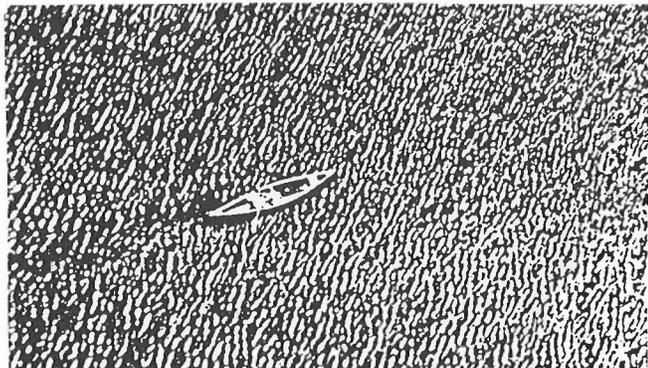
WCA TRIPS

For questions, suggestions, proposals to organize trips, 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) 275-4371, Ann Dixie (416) 769-0210, Peter Devries, (905) 477-6424, Gisela Curwen (416) 484-1471.

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

3-4 October **KILLARNEY PARK**
Gisela Curwen, (416) 484-1471, g.curwen@danieltborger.com

We will meet at George Lake Campground and set up our tents there. On Saturday, we will paddle on a day trip into Killarney or OSA Lake to experience the magnificent scenery in fall colors. On Sunday, we will hike to The Crack for one of the most spectacular views in the whole of the park — over Killarney and OSA Lake, where we paddled the day before, and out to Georgian Bay. If you can portage, you can handle the scramble up the rocks to The Crack!



3-4 October **GEORGIAN BAY OR ALGONQUIN PARK**

Bob Bignell, (905) 627-3730, book before 26 September.

This will be a fall weekend canoe-camping trip to experience the brilliance and beauty of the autumn's colors. The exact location will be determined by the organizer nearer the trip time. New members are especially welcome. Limit four canoes.

10-11 Oct **OXTOUNGE RIVER**
Larry Durst, (905) 415-1152, book before 3 October.

We will paddle from Tea Lake to Ragged Falls, camping over for one night. The river varies from meandering to swifts and the scenery from marsh to rocky outcrops with two spectacular falls. Autumn colours are a bonus on this trip that should suit all levels as there are only a few rapids and they can all be easily portaged. Limit five canoes.

10-12 October **PETAWAWA THANKSGIVING WEEKEND**

Peter DeVries, (905) 477-6424, and Ann Dixie (416) 769-0210, book before 3 October.

The classic fall trip from Lake Traverse to McManus. There are some rapids but all can be portaged and most can be run by intermediates or better. Limit six boats.

21 October **BLACK LAKE LOOP**
Rob Butler, (416) 487-2282, book before 14 October.

South of Dorset on Hwy. 35, this 25-km loop has several portages between small lakes. A perfect trip for novices; there should be a fine display of fall color. Limit five canoes.

25 October **ELORA GORGE**
Mike Jones, (905) 275-4371, book before 18 October.

The Grand River through the Elora Gorge usually retains good water levels during the fall. Suitable for intermediate whitewater paddlers. Limit six boats.

WANT TO ORGANIZE A TRIP AND HAVE IT PRESENTED IN THE WINTER ISSUE? Contact the Outings Committee before 20 October!

THANKS INSTRUCTORS

I have taken numerous canoeing courses and this year finally attended each of the two WCA weekend programs: Whitewater 101 (Ann Dixie, Chris Guilbert, Jon Kirby, Bill Ness, Frank Robinson) and the Palmer/French course (Hugh Valliant and Jim Morris). The organizers and their able assistants provided a first-class experience: low participant/instructor ratio, lots of time on the water, no pressure or macho expectations, patience, stroke improvement, whitewater practice with constant supervision, and an eye to safety. These instructors not only volunteered for two weekends, but like the artist who responded "35 years" to the purchaser's question as to how long it took to paint the picture, we participants all benefitted from the instructors' own many decades of training, practice, and experience. Now it is up to us to practise, practise, and practise. Thanks to all.

Rob Butler

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, Ont.
- Rockwood Outfitters, 669 Speedvale Ave. West, Guelph, Ont.
- Suntrail Outfitters, 100 Spence Str., Hepworth, Ont.
- Smoothwater Outfitters, Temagami (Hwy. 11), Ont.

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

RIVAL canoe wanted, fully outfitted; call Ann Dixie at (416) 769-0210.

MASON WEBSITE A new website entitled CANOEING & VISUAL ART features Becky Mason's art and canoeing plus an extensive behind-the-scenes section on Bill Mason's films, books, and paintings. Website address: www.wilds.mb.ca/redcanoe

CAMPFIRE MEALS The goal of Campfire Meals is to provide tasty and healthy meals for you to take on your next canoe, backpacking, or sailing trip. We offer a variety of meals suitable for a weekend to a 14-day trip. Vegetarian and/or low-fat meals are available. Organic foods can also be provided. We strive to prepare delicious home-made-type meals, which are lightweight and easy to prepare. Let Campfire Meals prepare your custom food packs when you're too busy to do it yourself. For more information, contact Gail White in Barrie at (705) 727-1858 or e-mail: gwhite@planeteeer.com

KUKAGAMI LODGE A little log cabin by the lake ... *cross-country skiing* at your doorstep ... freshly baked, organic whole-grain bread on the table ... a place to relax away from the crowds. Enjoy 28 km cross-country

ski trails in the heart of the Northern Ontario forest. Our lodge has no direct road access; you must ski seven kilometres to get here! We bring in your luggage. All packages include three meals daily. Lots of skiing and snowshoeing. Stay in our warm and comfy cabins for \$70 to \$80 per person per night. Five hours north of Toronto. Kukagami Lodge, RR.1, Wahnapiatae, Ontario, P0M 3C0, phone (705) 853-4929 or leave message at (705) 853-4742.

VOYAGEURS SKI CLUB Do you love to ski, or would you love to learn how to ski? Have you always found yourself skiing less because: you don't like to drive, you don't like to organize trips, you can't find enough friends to go with, or you can't find anyone in your ability level to ski with? If so, consider the Voyageurs Ski Club, an adult, downhill, travelling ski and snowboard club, based in Toronto. We offer a great combination of day, weekend, and weeklong trips in a casual social environment to premier ski destinations. We also offer our own Ski-School, designed to improve anyone's skiing abilities, regardless of your current ski level. Our many skiing outings and numerous social events offer the perfect opportunity to ski and to make new friends. For more information, please call (416) 422-3214 and select membership information.

ARCTIC DOG SLED EXPEDITION A unique opportunity to experience travel in the high Arctic with Inuit who live there and know the traditional ways of their people who survived in this harsh climate for centuries, by knowing how to remain comfortable and safe in even the most extreme conditions. You will learn how to drive a dog team, build an iglu, hunt for seal at a breathing hole in the traditional way. The trip will traverse the Boothia Peninsula from Taloyoak, through mountains, down a frozen river valley, across the sea ice, 300 km in all, in 12 days during April 1999. No previous experience required. Leader/co-ordinator is David Pelly, veteran Arctic traveller, writer, and historian, who now lives in Ikaluktutiak (Cambridge Bay) in the Arctic Archipelago. Cost approx. Cdn\$6000 plus airfare; includes all ground costs, Inuit guides, caribou skin clothing, community feast. For more information, contact David at Box 1097, Cambridge Bay, NT, X0E 0C0, or by e-mail at pelly@polarnet.ca



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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: _____

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Prov. _____

New member Member # if renewal: _____

Single Family

Phone Number(s):
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() _____ (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.