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Herb Pohl, July 15, 2006

MEETING HERB POHL

Text and photo by Larry Ricker

It had been a hard day's travel for Jose Joven (Hoz) and me with winds and waves building ever since we'd left Pukaskwa Depot that morning. Our chosen destination was a cove known as the Wheat Bin, just beyond Chimney Rock Point—at least, that was the destination we chose after finding out just how rough the lake was getting to be. It was an ever-increasing battle and just as we were nearing the point, I eddied out in a small cove to wait for Hoz to catch up. As soon as he got within ear shot—pretty close with the wind howling and waves crashing—he shook his head and yelled, "I'm done!"

We headed into the little cove, which Hoz quickly named the "Rice Bowl."

We decided to wait and see if it calmed any towards evening, not setting-up camp right away, but instead, whiling away the time snoozing, shooting pictures, listening to the weather band, and checking the height of the waves crashing to shore. We had just decided to go ahead and camp, Hoz going off into the woods to look for a suitable bear tree. Shortly after, a man approached from pretty much the same direction. I assumed, to start with, that it was Hoz returning

but the clothes were all wrong, as was the height and width. About the time I figured out it was someone else, I heard, "Do you know where on the map we are?" "That's Chimney Rock Point," I explained, pointing in the general direction. "The Wheat Bin is just the other side." "Oh, I was hoping I'd make it to the Wheat Bin tonight" was the reply. "Do you guys mind if I camp here with you tonight?" By this time, Hoz had returned and we both consented.

The skies were starting to threaten so I decided to put up my tarp (just in case it rained)—a modern version of a Baker Tent dubbed the "Lean2" by its maker, Dan Cooke. I approached the stranger and told him that, if it started raining, he was welcome to take shelter under the Lean2 with us. Shortly afterwards, the rain started and the stranger took me up on my offer.

Sitting under the blue nylon, we made our introductions. The stranger introduced himself as Herb Pohl from Burlington, Ontario. He appeared to us to be in his 70's and things that he said throughout the evening seemed to confirm this. At that time, the name meant no more to Jose and I than I'm sure ours did to him but knowing names meant we were no longer strangers.

To most people, including many paddlers, a canoe is simply a means of transportation—a vehicle to take one to fantastic scenery and, perhaps, a platform to fish from. To a certain breed however, the canoe transcends all that, becoming part of being, a way of life. To them, the bow of a well-made canoe slicing through the water, whether it be raging whitewater or the glassy surface of a calm lake, is pure ecstasy. The scenery, the fishing, even the camaraderie of fellow travellers take a back seat to the sheer joy of canoe and canoeist flowing as one across the liquid surface.

It quickly became apparent that Herb Pohl was one of those who was so blessed, or cursed.

It turned out that he and Hoz had travelled many of the same rivers and

they compared recollections of their trips. Herb also told of rivers and waterways that neither of us had travelled. I felt like a teenager again, listening to stories of far off places, fascinated, not just by the words but also by his Canadian accent with a strong Scottish lilt and overtones of his original Austrian. He also talked of past trip partners, most of whom couldn't travel any more, either because of personal health or responsibilities for aging spouses. Many of his friends had passed away. He talked of organizing trips and having partners drop out one by one until he ended up going solo in the end.

When we asked him about the craft he was using for this particular trip, he said it was one of a kind. "Did you build it?" we asked. "No, a friend, who has passed away built it many years ago." It was a canoe, "C1" hull I think he said, with a deck. "I know my canoe can handle anything," he said, "I'm just not sure that I can." I commented that even though his friend had passed away, by using the canoe, he was bringing a part of his friend along with him.

He railed a bit about technology. "Computers!" he spat out with disgust, "What good are they anyway. We got along just fine without them before." Digital cameras were also a target. He bemoaned the lack of good Egyptian cotton for pack and gear making. Complained about modern tent design. He was definitely, delightfully, "old school" when it came to clothing, equipment, and methods.

He also talked about aging; "Things don't taste as good as they used to. Sunsets aren't as brilliant; a hangover is just a hangover without a good buzz the night before."

As with many of us who are bitten by the canoe and wanderlust bugs, he experienced the dichotomy of the need to travel versus the guilt of leaving loved ones at home. He was very appreciative of a wife who let him travel throughout the years without complaint, a wife who understood his need for the rejuvenation of soul that travel-

ling in the wilderness provided.

But mostly, it was the trips. Stories related with a melancholy, a far-away look in his eyes. He knew time was running out.

Too soon, as far as I was concerned, the light rain ended and Herb went back to his campsite for supper and to turn in. My stint as a teenager vanished with the rain as I went about my camp chores and settled down to bed.

The lake had calmed considerably by morning but a fog was starting to drift in as we tore down our respective camps. Hoz and I each took a separate break from our preparations to bid Herb farewell. He asked me: "By the way, what do you do for a living?" I told him, "I kind of hesitate to say, but I'm an electrical engineer with a computer company." Herb chuckled, shook his head and said, "Maybe I should know more people like you, eh?" He told me about a camera that someone had loaned him for the trip. "All computerized. I can't figure it out. No matter what I do, it displays 'EE' which, I assume, means 'error'." I didn't get a chance to see if I could help him figure it out.

Jose and I shoved off, eyeing the fog warily, hugging the coast and thankful that the lake was calm enough that we didn't have to worry about reflected waves. Soon, Herb came flying past in his red and white, decked canoe and disappeared into the fog. I managed to take one photo of him broadside to me and then he quickly became a small dot and vanished.

An hour or so later, we passed a group of kayakers heading in the opposite direction. "Did you see the old man by himself?" we enquired. "Yeah, he's about a mile, mile and a half ahead of you" was the reply.

Two days later, July 17, we were windbound at the mouth of the Ghost River in a place known as "The Flats" when we heard on the weather band that a red and white kayak had been found and that they were looking for the owner. With the location they gave—Michipicoten Bay, which was

miles away—we didn't give much thought that it could be Herb's canoe. We thought it was some daytripper that had gone out into the rough water and run into trouble. We, of course, hoped fervently that the owner, whoever it was, had made it safely to shore somewhere and would be located and rescued.

It wasn't until a couple of days later, when we met up with a group of kayakers at the Dog River, that we started wondering about Herb. A helicopter out of the park had visited the kayakers. The theory was that the kayak had blown miles down the shore where it was found. They were looking for people who had seen a solo traveller in a red and white kayak to help them narrow the search.

Hoz thought that Herb's canoe had been red and white. I couldn't really re-

member what colour it was but I knew I had that picture of him paddling in the fog. Thanks to the digital technology that Herb so detested, I was able to take a peek. Sure enough, red and white!

By this time, there was no longer any mention of the kayaker on the weather band. Either they'd found him, or his body or they'd abandoned the search. From then on, we were dogged by the questions. Had it been Herb? Had they rescued the kayaker, whoever it was? The uncertainty clouded the remainder of the trip. It wasn't until July 21, when we arrived safely at the landing in the Michipicoten River, that our worst fears were confirmed. Yes, it was Herb's canoe and yes, Herb's body was found nearby. It was also then that we started to discover what a significant person he was in the paddling community.

Although Hoz and I only spent an evening with Herb, he touched our lives in a very special way and his passing has left a gaping hole. I feel very blessed to have known him and to have shared a campsite with him—we were probably the last to do so—but I also feel deep sorrow to have lost a friend. I can only imagine the loss felt by those who were close to him. His family and the paddling community at large will greatly miss Herb Pohl. But, as long as there are paddlers, the spirit of Herb Pohl will live on. I know he will definitely be part of all my future trips.

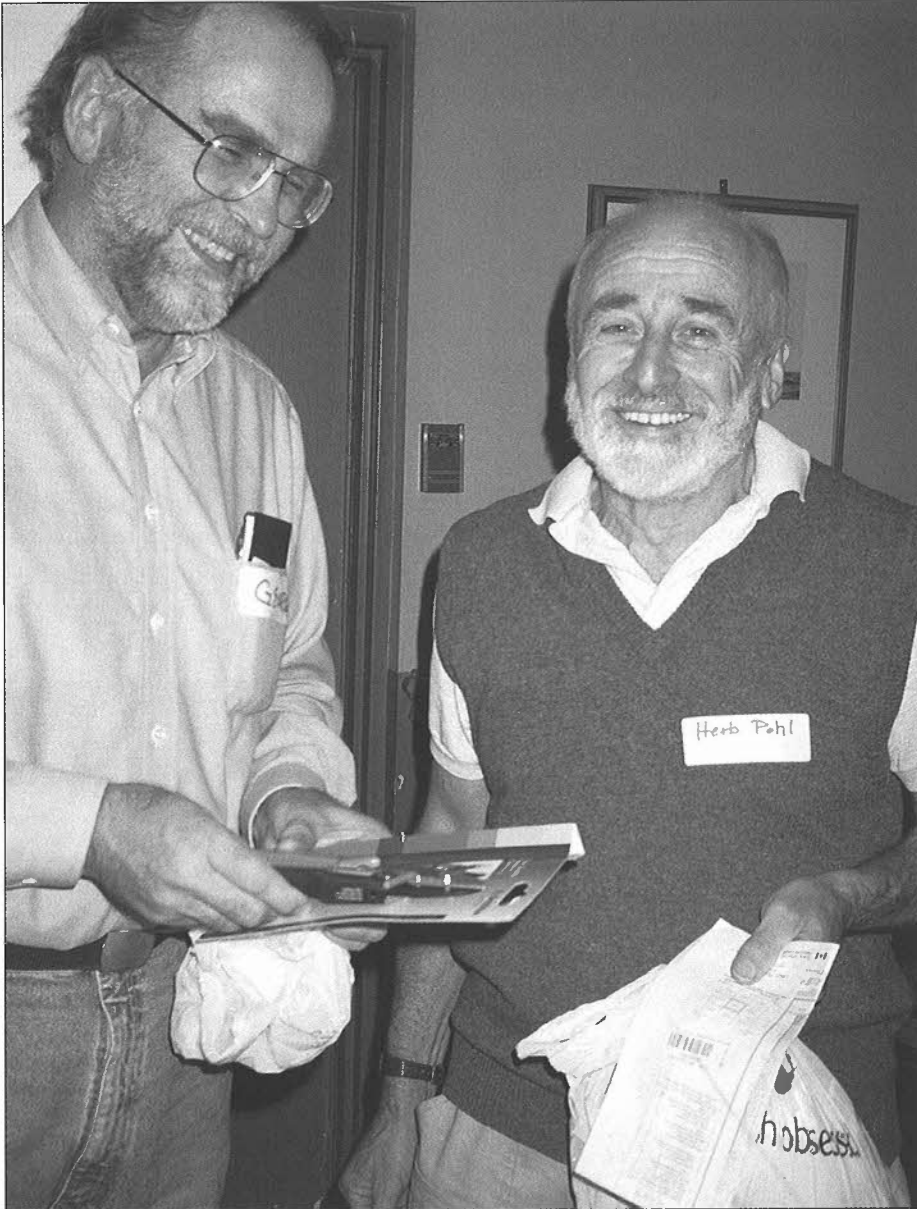
Before we parted the morning of July 15, Herb told me; "You need to do the Nahanni River someday; the scenery is out of this world." Herb, someday I will. And, I'll count on you to show me your favourite spots.



Herb and Loon 2002, photographer unknown, original in Nastawgan, Autumn 2002 appears with original interview of Herb Pohl by Rod MacIver, A Wild and Glorious Land.

HERB POHL AND THE WCA

1930 - 2006



Herb and George Luste—Herb at the 1999 fall party receiving tributes for his warm-tent winter camping skills, photo by Toni Harting

It is no exaggeration to say that the WCA has lost one of its pillars! On July 17, 2006, nearing completion of a solo trip along the north shore of Lake Superior from Marathon to Michipicoten, Herb Pohl went missing. His overturned canoe was found late that afternoon and his body, the following day. The exact circumstances will never be known a factor.

Herb was a member of the association since 1977 and he took the responsibilities of membership seriously. He

waited only until the following spring to begin organizing WCA outings, the first two on the Grand and Oxtongue Rivers. There would be many more! Herb was one of the most consistent and imaginative, four-season contributors to the outings program and served for many years on the Outings Committee.

Speaking of service, Herb was already chair of the association by 1979 and continued in that office for two years during which time the WCA con-

stitution and Board of Directors were developed. He was a director from 1983 to 1987, from 1990 to 1992 and from 1997 to 1999, repeating as chair in 1985 and 1999. How many organizations can you name where the same individual has been chair on three separate occasions over a 20-year period?

In 1987, probably uncomfortable with having an insufficient role to play, Herb created the post of Information Officer, happily responding to letters and phone calls (Herb was reluctant to join the “electronic age”) from members and nonmembers alike, seeking trip-related information. He continued in the job for 10 years, combining it with board and other responsibilities, and was its sole occupant.

Herb was an enthusiastic contributor to the WCA newsletters. His first article, on the Wanapetei River, appeared in the Dec., 1978 issue of *The Wilderness Canoeist* (Nastawgan’s predecessor) and his last, on a Labrador trip which he took with Pat Lewtas, was in the issue immediately preceding this one. In 1982 he wrote the first of what would become a series of articles on his greatest passion, canoe travel (usually solo) in Labrador and northern Québec. Perhaps someone will see fit to gather these articles into a book; I’m sure that they would find a place among the best literature of the genre. Herb wrote with grace, fluidity and style. His wit, so evident in conversation, shone through in his writing. Although he missed few opportunities to give a gentle needle to traveling companions, his jests became, with age, increasingly self-deprecatory. As an expression of the qualms of the aging outdoorsman, it would be hard to better Herb’s comment in his *Mistastin* article that, “there wasn’t a back burner left in this man’s kitchen!” Indeed, if there could be said to be a negative about Herb’s writings, it would be the pangs of jealousy which they induced in lesser mortals, unable to believe that anyone could be so literate in a second language.

Herb was also an excellent and painstaking photographer, always ready

to climb another hill to get the perfect vista. His slide collections, combined with a speaking style to which he brought the same self-effacing charm as his writings, made him a much sought-after presenter, both within and without the WCA.

However, even if Herb had none of these sterling qualities, he would still have had a legion of friends. He was the most social of men and a wonderful conversationalist—an odd paradox for a self-professed misanthrope who always claimed that the reason he so frequently traveled solo was that nobody wanted to go with him. Those of us who were privileged to trip with him knew him to be a charming and supportive companion, confident in his self-reliance but always willing to share.

His many WCA friends join in expressing condolences to his family. We shall not see his like again.

Bill King

Words from Mr. Canoehead or All About the Fall Meeting

I hope you all had a great summer of paddling!

Don't forget that the fall is, in some people's mind, an even better time to paddle. All the summer holiday warriors are back in the city, the parks and waterways are quiet and calm and it's relatively easy to secure a prime waterfront campsite. And of course the most important part—no bugs!

Ah, canoeing in our provincial parks in the summer. There is nothing worse than having a campsite reservation on your favorite lake, but having your mental solitude interrupted as you approach the lake and your stress level rise as you hope you will get a prime campsite, not a mosquito infested swampy spot with no view. But what can you do?

The answer? Talk to one of the members of the WCA to get the goods on where the paddling is best and the crowds the least. That's why I encourage you all to come out to the fall meeting.

What the fall meeting is all about is getting together as a group to share our summer paddling adventures. This year it is just outside of Minden at the Wild Water preserve. We have secured a great speaker—Joe Bourgeois of Akuni Adventures. He's going to share some of his hard-won tripping advice, stories, and what it's like to run your own canoeing business. We will all camp as a group and we have a wide variety of canoe trips planned (lake trips, river trips, white water), led by your very own WCA'ers. Please see the sign up sheet in this issue of *Nastawgan*. The date is September 29 & 30 and more details will be posted on the website. Anyone who's been to a WCA meeting can attest that it's a great time. All of you who have an email address registered with the WCA will receive a reminder email. If you don't have your email registered and would like to do so, please contact the WCA at info@wildernesscanoe.ca.

Last article I mentioned that the Leslie Frost Area now requires camping reservations and permits. I have to admit that I was a bit skeptical of this plan but I'm here to say that I am most impressed. We paddled into this area for a weekend getaway early in the season and the campsites were in excellent condition, the phone staff very helpful and the wardens who visited us to check on our permits, very friendly and genuinely excited about the changes. Looks like this program will be a success and this great area preserved for years to come.

Well that's about it for this issue, but I will leave you with one question to ponder: Why do people put lifejackets on their dogs?



Herb winter camping in Algonquin Park 2005—Photo by Charles Micalles

HERB POHL: A Wild and Glorious Land

(originally appeared in *Nastawgan*, Autumn 2002)

An interview by Rod MacIver

Older men who have followed their passion, embraced the adventure of life and survived, hold a special fascination for me. I learn from them. They give me courage and inspire me. I have seen Herb Pohl a few times over the years at canoe and winter camping gatherings. He is of medium height, slight paunch, sparkling eyes and easy smile. Over the last six months I have gotten to know him a little and a friendship has developed between us. I respect his courage, appreciate his sharp wit, open heart, and kindness. He is seventy-two years old.

At the 2001 Wilderness Canoe Symposium, sponsored by the Wilderness Canoe Association (WCA) in Toronto, Herb stood before the assembled 800 or so canoeists and talked about his Labrador canoe trips, most of them solo. Labrador has an irresistible pull, he said, because it is so wild. He described the land saying: "It is a kind of Eden—but definitely not an Eden where the lambs and the lions lie down together. It is an unforgiving land where the weakest don't make it. I keep going back because there is neither apple nor Eve in this particular Eden." He paused and added, "And I am a sucker for temptation."

Herb showed a series of slides of his Labrador trips, including cross-sections of some of the rivers which he had canoed. Over the last twenty years his trips have increasingly taken him down rivers (and up a few others) with numerous large waterfalls and long portages. The routes he travels take him hundreds of miles from the nearest roads or human settlements.

I dug out some of the articles Herb has written for the WCA publication *Nastawgan* and called him. Herb kindly agreed to an interview, and as Ann and I were traveling home from a recent canoe trip on Lake Superior, I met him in a small town outside Toronto.

He talked about his youth in Austria in the thirties and forties, of his early fascination with the lives of explorers and indigenous people. "I don't know why I had this fascination with out-of-the-way strange places and with explorers when I was a kid. Africa and South America—no one in my early life had the urge to see these places."

Herb's father died when he was three and he moved with his mother to a small farm in the Austrian countryside. Herb left high school before graduating, was injured in a freak accident in World War II, spent five months recovering, and then, after the war, went to work in a steel mill. A friend suggested they travel together to Canada. Herb agreed, thinking he would be back in Austria within a couple of years, but, as he says, "As soon as the Nova Scotia shoreline came into sight, I forgot all about ever going back."

"We had a lot of romantic ideas. I was always a romantic. . . I am a romantic still. When I arrived, everything was adventure. I worked in a gold mine, I worked on the railroad as a gandy dancer. I worked as a faller on the West Coast. I'd get together enough money for bus or train fare and head to the next town. It was just wonderful. Of course, from time to

time I would end up without money. There were days with nothing to eat. And no place to sleep. Box cars or old abandoned cabins would become my abode. But even that was adventure."

After a few years Herb decided to go back to high school. He got a scholarship and went to university. By taking classes at night, he eventually received a post-graduate degree and became head of the lab program for the biology department at McMaster University. He married and had a son. At the age of thirty-eight he discovered wilderness canoeing.

"My first real trip was down the Abitibi River to James Bay. I chose that because the railroad was close enough that I could always bushwhack to the track, flag down a train, and get out. By then I had given up on fellow canoeists. They kept saying they wanted to come along on trips but one by one they would cancel. So I said the hell with people.

My trip on the Abitibi was tremendously exciting. I had no idea how to do anything. My tent weighed close to twenty pounds. I had no mattress or padding. I thought the frame pack I took was waterproof. It turned out it wasn't. I had practice-paddled at least three times the distance that the trip itself involved and was fit as a fiddle. I could do twenty-five miles in four hours and be finished paddling by one o'clock in the afternoon. I arrived at the end, in Moosonee, very excited. I thought it was just wonderful. . . I thought my accomplishment was on a level with a voyage to the moon and back.

The preparation for a long canoe trip is exciting to me—the many hours reading, the hours in the map library. I chose routes that were not generally travelled by wilderness canoeists. The rivers that canoeists talk about the most—the Kazan, the Thelon—I tried to avoid them. I did do the Nahanni and I have no regrets. There is nothing that can compare for visual excitement and for canoeing excitement. It is a wonderful experience. But you are constantly running into people who want to talk to you, who want to compare how long it took you to do so and so. I don't want that. I get into the competitive instinct too, and start thinking I have to do it faster than the next guy. You miss the essence of it.

I want to touch soil that has not been trod heavily, if at all. And if it has been trod, it was by moccasined feet. It is so exciting to find old portages that are not recorded anywhere. By the lay of the land, you think there ought to be a portage trail there, and then when you get there, more often than not, you find one.

When I was preparing for the trip from Great Slave Lake to the Coppermine River I chose a route that looked as if it might be possible. The maps showed no indication of existing portages, but the topography looked as if there might be trails there. Sure enough, in every case an old trail was found. Sometimes I couldn't find the beginning, but somewhere, part way through, there would be a trail that could be traced back. It might be overgrown on either end, but in the middle it was still visible. Or signs of old encampments turn out to be where you think they might be—old teepee poles and fire rings.

On a trip in northern Quebec I tried to find an old Indian route from Richmond Gulf to Clearwater Lake. A.P. Low of the Geological Survey of Canada travelled the route in 1888. I

managed to locate the start of the trail and followed it around rapids and between intervening lakes almost all the way to Clearwater Lake. After many decades of disuse it was still readily identifiable except in rocky or boggy places. There were even old Indian encampments along the way. Perhaps it's just the romantic in me, but every time I come across these remnants of the past I feel as if I am entering a real-life museum, looking into the past. It's tremendously exciting for me.

Another time, on Lac D'Iberville (near the headwaters of the Nastapoca River), I came across a collapsed teepee. What made this one unusual was the large number of poles, about twenty-five or thirty, and the fact that they were all laced together with split spruce roots. It had obviously been used for an extended period of time because all the trees in the vicinity had been cut and the floor of the teepee was deeply recessed into the substratum. There were also some fragments of a canoe. The most intriguing aspect of this encampment was that there was no evidence of Western contact, no ropes, nails, canvas, etc.

The ability of those people to survive on the land with stone-age technology was incredible. There is very little wildlife in northern Labrador, apart from caribou when they are migrating through the region, and the odd bear or porcupine and fish. One can go for days and never even see a squirrel. I mean nothing. And yet these people survived with only the most rudimentary implements: bows and arrows, hatchets, fishing nets. Absolutely incredible!

Curiosity is a lot of what attracts me to these trips. You don't know what is around the next bend. It is exciting to anticipate. But then you hear the ominous roar of the river up ahead and wonder, "Oh my God. What am I doing here?"

When I was younger there was never any question but that I could do what I intended to do. The question was just how long it would take. It is such a wonderful feeling to know that you can manage, that you can survive anywhere, through anything. The few disagreeable experiences you have just make you stronger. Wilderness trips simplify everything down to the most basic elements. You are removed from the complexity of the so-called civilized world. You have many little triumphs—finding a good campsite, escaping a storm, getting your tent up just in time. You build a fire that provides wonderful warmth after a miserable day on the water or portage trail. There are many moments of satisfaction and gratitude.

Like most travellers, I have had encounters with difficulty. It is very cold. You can't find a shelter. You get caught in a gale. The waves are too big and the shoreline is just bare rock—your canoe would get smashed to pieces if you tried to land. So you keep paddling. Things get tense. At the end of it all you manage to pull through. You gradually warm up in your sleeping bag. You are very grateful for simple comforts."

I asked Herb how his experience of wilderness has changed as he has gotten older.

"Not much," he said. "The novelty is reduced, obviously. You are not as excited as you were on your first trip. But the feeling of absolute elation when you look at a wild landscape—not pretty in the groomed garden sense—but undisturbed by humanity—absolutely natural—that elation never goes away."

Over the years I have gotten more nervous about doing things. I am not as confident. My physical ability is not the same. At this stage, rather than enjoying a long series of big rapids, I look at them with apprehension: 'Oh

God,' I think, 'I will be so happy to get through this'."

I asked him, "Does it ever occur to you, If I get through this?"

"Very rarely, because most of the time when you are in trouble you are too busy to worry about the longer term. In 1999 on the East Natashquan (a river flowing into the Gulf of St. Lawrence) I ran through a couple of canyons that the Indians avoided like the plague. The river drops about fifty-five feet per mile—a severe gradient. I started out with the idea of portaging the rough parts, but as I went along I decided that I should be able to line the canoe (walk along the edge of the river pulling the canoe) where I couldn't run the rapids. But as soon as I got around the first bend there were steep cliffs on both sides of the river. I had to keep paddling."

"You were alone?"

"Yes. Perhaps the most intimidating was the Notakwanon in northern Labrador in 1983. The river drops somewhere between thirty-five and forty-five feet per mile. There is a twenty-five mile section of continuous rapids. No let-up. No eddies to speak of. Just a long rock garden. Huge boulders. Very isolated."

At the beginning you start out with a drop and a pool. That was not a problem. At some point it gets continuous. I portaged around a waterfall and was ready to put in but I could hear ominous sounds around the bend.

I walked along the shore to take a look. As far as I could see it was just white. Foaming. Running along like mad. It was too long to portage, there was no place along the shore to line. So I ran it."

"How long did that take?"

"It took much longer than I expected. I found myself in serious trouble. The river got narrower and narrower. The shoreline was inaccessible

because of huge boulders. I had to keep going. I made it through about nineteen of the twenty-five miles and then flipped. There was a big boulder in the middle of the river and a big drop behind it. I lost my paddle trying to get to shore. When I got to shore I had to cut a pole and use a plastic blade I had brought along. I didn't carry a spare paddle in those days. Of course, once you have a spare you never need it.

Every time you flip, and this isn't the only time I flipped, you have a severe loss of confidence. I didn't dare press my luck and go back into that rapid. So for the next two days I portaged through the bush. I tried to follow caribou trails wherever possible. There are a series of tiny little streams running into the river which had given rise to dense growth. The trails invariably disappeared or turned steeply uphill and I was forced to bushwhack through the thickets. I was convinced there had to be a less strenuous solution, so the next time I found a caribou trail I followed it uphill thinking it was going to bend back towards the river. It had to! But it didn't. The trail disappeared.

I had a wonderful overview from the top of the hill. In compliance with Murphy's Law the camera was in another pack and so the only thing left to do was to go back down to the river, this time without a trail.

It was easily my most memorable trip. Many things didn't go according to plan. I started in Schefferville, and worked my way across to the Notakwanon. I went down the Rivière de Paux, crossed over a minor height of land to the George River, up the George a little, then up a tributary of the George to White Gull Lake, and then down another stream. At approximately the halfway point of the trip, on my approach to the height of land that separates Labrador and Quebec,

I burned my boat.

It was a very hot day. I was exhausted from all the portages. I decided to camp. The blackflies were by far the worst of the trip. The entire lake I had just travelled was covered with a solid haze of black flies. All day I was tortured by them. There was no firewood around, so I started to cook a meal on the stove. The blackflies were so bad I decided to forget about the bloody dinner altogether and just make a little smudge fire.

So I made a small fire with some lichen, and then into the tent I went. I stripped down to bare skin to cool off. A few minutes later I heard a crackling sound and looked out to see black smoke billowing out of the front of my boat. The fire burned a foot and a half off the bow of the boat. A little twig must have snapped and flown over in the wind. I had a plastic rope coiled at the front end. Perhaps a spark lit the rope. What else could have done it?

I had a pot of water and I poured that on the fire. It hardly made a difference. I dumped out one of my packs and used the pack to smother the fire. It ruined the pack. As I was doing this, hordes of black flies attacked. I ran back into the tent and pondered what to do next.

I was surprised how calm I was. I couldn't turn around and walk out—there were too many swamps behind me. Going forward, the only way out was Davis Island—an island several miles from land. I went to sleep and the next morning I did what I could.

I always carry an extensive repair kit. I had a liter of resin, and quite a bit of cloth, and mat. I didn't know whether the remaining scorched fabric would adhere with the new resin. I had to put it on in stages. The next day it rained. There were no trees around so I couldn't suspend anything over the damn canoe. At times I would

stand there with a tarp over the top of the fresh resin hoping it would set. I finished the job with a huge roll of duct tape."

"You went down a twenty-five mile rapid in a boat with a makeshift bow?"

"Worse than that, the guy who made the boat was trying to do me a favor by using a lighter cloth to reduce the weight of the craft. It weakened the bottom of the boat to such an extent that it collapsed inward at the slightest provocation. I had to sit in it with my feet pressing down on the bottom so that the boat wouldn't collapse in. It was quite a torture.

Close to the end of the trip, I had an incredible experience. I camped near the mouth of the Notakwanon River. It was a beautiful evening. I was sitting by my fire looking at snow-flecked hills. I had the extraordinary feeling that Labrador was saying goodbye to me. This mistress that I had was kissing me goodbye. It didn't turn out that way—I have been back a number of times—but it was such a strong feeling that night."

I asked Herb if he experiences changes in his thought processes over the course of a trip.

"There is an overture, musically speaking. It takes a few days to get into the first act, to become attuned. It is not an instant process. I don't feel like I am really on a canoe trip until the end of the second or beginning of the third week. Then you are truly out there. Before that, you are still carrying the baggage of civilization. But that doesn't mean that you don't have intense experiences right from the start. It just takes a while to get in sync with everything.

The land makes a deep impression. I feel the most intense happiness, especially when I travel alone. When I look at a carved canyon like the Fraser River in northern Labrador—at the huge, U-shaped glacial valley—I feel

the force that drove the process, both in terms of strength and duration. You see rocks that have been around for two or three billion years—an elapse of time you cannot really fathom. You see trees that have been mutilated by the weather and yet they have new shoots coming out. You see trees that have struggled for decades or centuries, and survived. Miserably. But life prevails.

There is a spirituality in that. To experience the enormity of the sky in places like the flats of land between the Mackenzie and the Coppermine watersheds. There is no evidence there of technological man. At night, you can see the countless stars, the vastness of land and sky and universe stretching for a billion light years—distances we cannot begin to imagine. Humbling. Always humbling.

It takes the burden off. You are not carrying the world. You are not Atlas. You are tiny. Out there I sense how privileged we are to be a part of creation. All these feelings are reinforced by remoteness and by the amount of sweat you shed to get out there."

This summer [2001] Herb and a friend, travelling in separate boats, canoed 250 kilometres over what he described as some of the wildest country he has seen. Before the trip Herb described his preparations to me:

"I have resumed my feeble try at physical fitness—paddling in the morning and lugging a forty-pound pack around in the evening. I look forward to the trip with some anxiety because the portages are many and long and the terrain difficult. Not really the place for an old wreck, but the pull of the land is powerful."

He said that even the forty-pound pack was difficult on his knees. When I suggested starting lighter and working his way up, he said to me, "My God! Lighter than forty pounds. The only thing lighter than that is your wallet!"

The evening before he departed, he again expressed some nervousness about his aging knees and about the long portages he was about to face. The route he would travel included the lower Mistastin River which, he told me, has an average drop of ninety feet per mile. The steepest drop he had been able to paddle in the past was fifty or fifty-five feet a mile. He said that trips like this were okay for guys like me.

I responded that I thought the opposite was true—that the trip sounded okay for guys like him. I wished him the best.

I next talked to Herb just after he got back. He was excited by what he had experienced of the country and pleased with his ability to withstand the demands of the trip. On the lower Mistastin they had to portage about three times as far as they could paddle. Then Herb said,

"But what a glorious experience. . . The country is so wild. . . ."

Adapted with permission from Heron Dance, Issue 32, October 2001.

There is no sense in going further—it's the edge of cultivation,
So they said, and I believed it—broke my land and sowed my crop—
Built my barns and strung my fences in the little border station
Tucked away below the foothills where the trails run out and stop;
Till a voice as bad as Conscience, ran interminable charges
On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated—so;
'Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—
'Something lost behind the ranges.
Lost and waiting for you. Go!

Rudyard Kipling, from *The Explorer*

OPEN WATERS

By George Haeh

It is a testament to the WCA that, so far, we have not lost a member in a River.

But now, two of my favorite WCA people, both white-water experts, Duncan Taylor, a past WCA president and Herb Pohl have been lost in open water: Duncan off Mauritius in 1994 and now Herb in Lake Superior.

I've paddled a number of trips in Lake Superior. It's a beautiful, savage place that is surprisingly remote given that it's within a day's drive of major population centers from Chicago through Montreal. Some of us, myself included, have stated that when our time is coming to an end, the Pukaskwa shore would be a favorite way to pass it, if only in memory. But there's been a bunch of times I've been on the lake feeling everything's coming along just fine while I've happily been paddling myself into the next trap.

The very first time I really needed my compass came crossing a bay when a fog bank rolled in, in the space of about a minute. I just had time to take a bearing to the headland and then laid the compass on the bottom of my boat. Later on I had to bang on the boat with my paddle when I heard an engine coming the other way. A good part of that day was spent gauging my distance from the shore by the sound of the waves. Paddling close enough to the shore to see it in that fog was a poor option, as the water is considerably rougher where the waves have just bounced off a usually vertical shore.

On my first trip, I picked a campsite on a rocky islet that I had to leave in a hurry the next morning when the waves changed direction and the wind picked up.

Two days before I had filled my boat with water attempting a launch from the steep shore of Driftwood Beach and had to move quickly to keep the lake from burying the boat in the sand.

Paddling by the Petit Mort rocks, there was a sudden wave burst just ahead of my boat when the wave patterns peaked over a sunken boulder. I had been heading that way for quite some time and had not seen any waves breaking in that area. I am grateful that I was far enough away when it did happen.

In one of his films, Bill Mason was thrown out of his boat by a peaking wave burst. The film then shows him trying to swim into a pool in the rocks. The waves were filling the pool which then drained back into the lake making it impossible for Bill to swim in there.

In an article in *Nastawgan*, Jim Greenacre writes about falling out of his boat in a sheltered part of the lake.

One time off Pukaskwa, my bladder was near bursting but there was nowhere to get out of the boat. I had to find the calmest piece of water I could behind an islet sticking straight up out of the water and use my bailer.

A big goal of mine was to cross the final gap from Brule Harbour to Michipicoten Beach, completing my coverage of the shore from Agawa Bay to the Heron River. I had passed Noisy Bay and had a tailwind coming up on Smoky Point not too far south of my washed-out first campsite. I was beginning to congratulate myself when I was blown into the biggest waves I have ever seen. My Pinetree Ojibway was dwarfed by these waves and the adrenalin-charged surfing remains a vivid memory.

Ah, the Heron River. I began my Pukaskwa shore trip from there before the park had been established. My first thought on seeing the waves at the shoals formed by the river outlet was that I might have to hitchhike back to my car right from there.

Like Herb, I finished my Pukaskwa shore trip at the Michipicoten River. I had checked in with the Perkwakwia Point lighthouse keeper as requested by the Otter Head lighthouse keeper (who insisted on seeing my boat, not telling me that he would then know which body it belonged to if it showed up without me) and headed straight across the bay to the Michipicoten River outlet. I had a fine, robust quartering tailwind from the southwest and was anticipating getting to civilisation and grilling myself a nice steak. Then, suddenly I was whipsawed between the southwest wave action and the enormous river current. I had to immediately switch over to whitewater wave surfing to ferry the current to the north side where I could approach shore.

In later discussion with a local, I was told that the current had rolled over ore boats coming into Michipicoten Harbour. While other locals have been unable to confirm this story, I still find it believable.

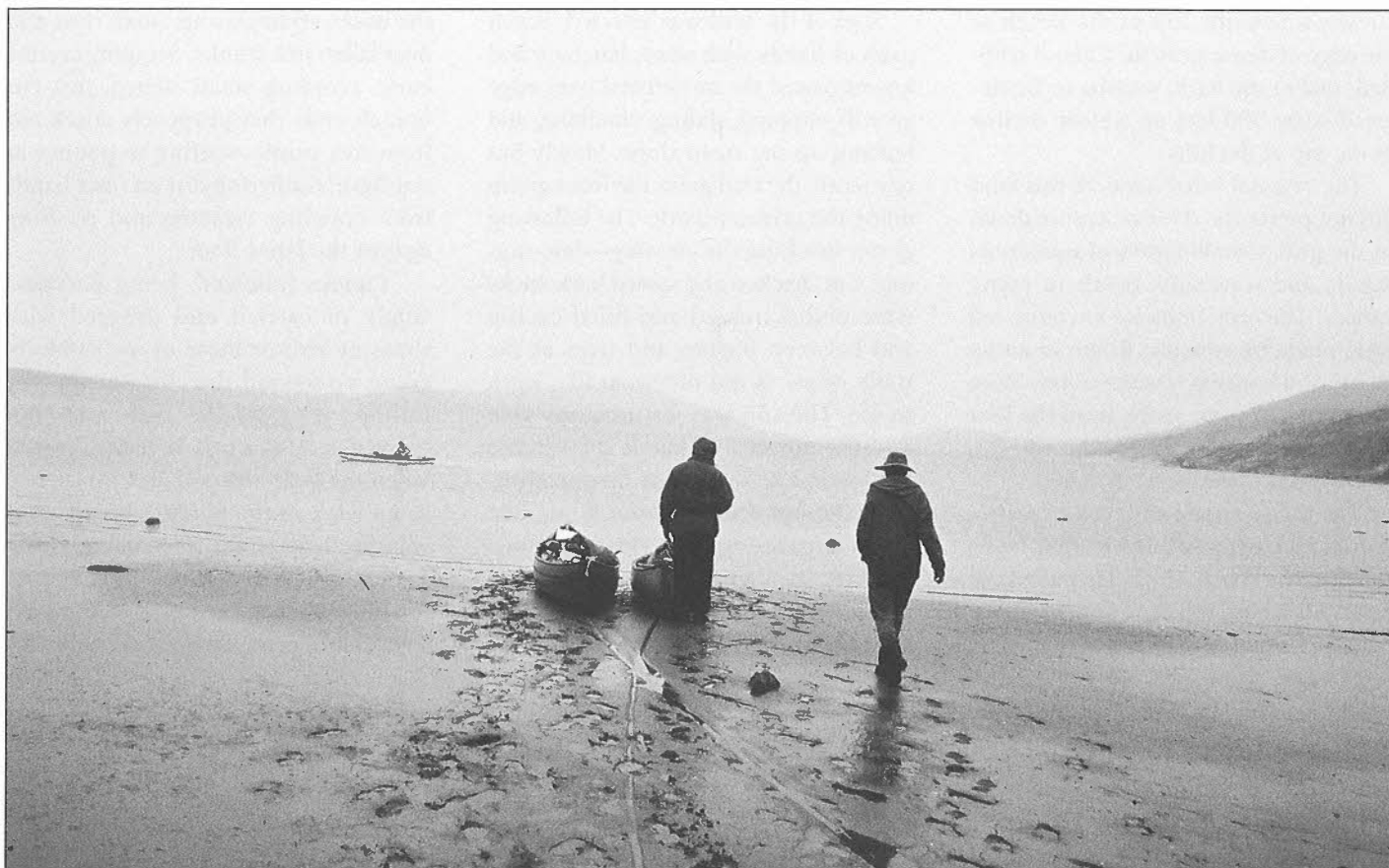
Am I any better a paddler than Duncan or Herb? More likely just luckier.

I don't want to discourage people from paddling Lake Superior but do keep your eyes open. Mishipizheu is stalking you. You might leave a tobacco offering at Agawa Rock and Devil's Chair if you paddle by, as I have done.

THE LAST TRAIL

By Damir Kusec (2003)

Photos by Damir Kusec, Frank Modine, Andrew Gullen



The end of the Last Trail at the Gulf. That's Herb in the distance, waiting for us!

The dining room table was covered with maps, emails and trip reports. Herb's well-traveled finger was pointing out the curves, rapid bars, and bends and routes over land. One could sense the bond and still burning passion for the land that the maps revealed. "This is my last trip to the Gulf!" he said. It struck me! The sense of it was like a sad farewell, as if wanting to check out but not wanting to leave. I did not totally believe it. Low, Flaherty, Twomey and Pohl fired up the images of the gulf, mesmerizing all of us that wanted to go.

"Knock on the sky and listen to the sound."

Zen wisdom

The morning sun illuminated the river, enhancing the green hues, revealing the shoreline that, moments before, was in a deep shadow. Three degrees Celsius! With breakfast chores completed, the boats were quickly packed, after repatriating my canoe from the mouse that spent the night in the bow. With anticipation we slid into the current that had soothed our last night's slumber. Our final leg on the river!

Unmarked rapid, calm pool of the small bay, river right. Scrambling across the joint of the bay and river's edge to the rock outcrop. Touching still, cold tree branches while pushing them aside, crunching across rock tripe and moss to get to the opening on top of the rock. To see the river's path beyond.

Standing gingerly on a small, almost

safe spot at the top of the large outcropping, we surveyed the dancing waters before us. At the end of our view Herb's boat gleamed in the sun, beached on the rocky shore just before the river took a sharp left and disappeared. He had started early, as usual.

The route along river right was chosen. We worked our way down the clear green carpet, its movement helping us reach the loose boulder beach at the final bend where the water committed itself to the last rush, through the hills and shear walls, before being welcomed by the brackish arms of the gulf. The shore landing was less eventful than Normandy, but the battle of the portage was looming. We all knew that this would be the last push. The final carry and then the gulf beckoned with

its draw, stories, and magnificence! Our last river trail!

The red and white boat and the packs were warming up on the rocks but the camera case and Herb were nowhere to be seen. Our gear was strewn across the top of the beach at the edge of dense growth. Canoes emptied, tied to the bark, waiting to be elevated some 300 feet up a steep incline to the top of the hills.

The original inhabitants of this land did not prefer the river as a route down to the gulf. Combination of numerous rapids and waterfalls result in many carries. The only trails we encountered were made by animals. Route scouting and bushwhacking was the norm. More often than not our paths were the first and last time ones. Those who will follow will start from scratch, again!

The dense tangle of green branches parted and army surplus leather boots touched the beach. Herb! He pulled out a sun bleached, weather-torn bandana, lost by a traveler years ago. Others had

walked through these hills. I stashed the offered remnants of the brow-wiping cloth into my life jacket pocket. A memory. A connection to a previous trip. A story to show Emily, my eleven year-old, budding canoeist daughter!

Start of the trail was selected. Seven pairs of hands with saws, hatchets and knives parted the untouched river-edge growth, slipping, sliding, clutching, and bracing up the steep slope. Slowly but efficiently the trail grew, the front group doing the primary work. The following group finishing the clearing—fine-tuning! Cut, hacked and sawed bark sticks were pulled, tossed and piled on top and between bushes and trees at the trail's edges. It did not seem like work to me. The sun was warming my skin and the number of hands distributed the work. The bugs were co-operating. They did not want to sweat it out, like us! We snaked up to a small opening, the first level ground, the staging area for the next push up, to the top of the hill.

The first carry started! Packs, paddles, camera cases and day-packs were lumbered up the trail through tunnels of bushes and trees, swaying shadows, over water-eroded, bare, slippery and sun-hardened slope and then back into the bush, up numerous small rises and over fallen tree trunks. Scraping against bark, avoiding small, sharp, just-cut branch ends that purposely stuck out from tree trunks waiting to pounce at our flesh. Gathering dirt on ones hands from crawling, bracing and pushing against the forest floor.

Canoes followed, being portaged singly or carried and dragged with ropes by two or more of us, carefully going up toward the close-to-the-sky hilltop. A gunwale grab was not sneered at on this run. It was welcomed when the boats slipped and threatened to go back to the boulder beach, as if wanting to be on the river and not land. I am sure that we all would have preferred it too. But the trail was the way! The river beyond the bend at trail's start



Last campsite on Clearwater River

became whiter and danced more furiously the closer it got to the gulf. Running it meant a cold swim or worse!

A small narrow opening in the forest, half way up the slope at the first level ground, was the end of the first part of our carry. It revealed a view of the hills and walls of rock the river had to slide through before its final release into the wide expanse of the bay-connected waters. Water was consumed in vast quantities! Our gear and boats were everywhere, leaving just enough room to sit, lie or collapse our bodies, packs and PFD's on top of the grass. We assessed the route for the next push up. Robert had walked up to the top to scout and was adamant his route was the one. Herb opted out and chose to cross a tree-infested gulch leading to the hill edge where he had earlier left his orange camera case as a marker, on his previous bandana-finding scout trip. It looked like Vietnam jungle to me.

The rest of us longed, at Robert's urging, to have lunch on the top where we could feast on the views of the river, hills and the gulf. Closer to the sky, where the trail was flat and the open hilltops required no saws or hatchets to traverse.

Second carry started with the ease of sparsely forested level ground and then we had to cut short trails through sloping dense growth, only to come out to open sloping areas covered in blueberry bushes and caribou moss. The wind we had as a companion the entire trip welcomed us. The never ceasing wind, often strong, cold, and bone chilling. Sometimes desired, for the bugs would leave us alone and sometimes not, due to the cold and rain it brought, but always with us. Like a lover caressing or scolding, depending on a whim.

When the last of our possessions were lowered onto the bare, hilltop rocks, it seemed bizarre to look at it all so high above any water to float it. Were we canoeing or backpacking? We had acquired more injuries and soreness from traveling by land than by water.

In a flash we scattered in all direc-

tions, grabbing our cameras and windbreakers in one swoop. The view was intoxicating. The almost-bare hills, the rocks, the plateau beyond where we were to go and the gulf. The gulf! That immense body of enchantment and coldness! Revealing itself only partially as its edges, hills and the cliffs beyond were shrouded in the Hudson Bay veil, which was not to go away for us, no matter how sunny it got.

Lunch was served on caribou moss, in the lee of several small trees away from the open hill backbone. Crackers, cheese and salami! Welcome fuel, for we still had to make our way through a sparse forest and cross a large open plateau to the pond, which was to be our source of water and where we would have our slumber at the half way point of the trail across the hills before our paddles would touch water again!

The cold wind and our famished bodies hurried the chewing and swallowing of the food. We slowly got up from the caribou moss blanket and left our semi-sheltered cantina, making our way back to the edge of the hilltop where our gear waited. There seemed to be a reluctance hanging over us, to leave this spot so quickly. But the animal paths before us, winding in our direction of travel, were beckoning.

We had seen Herb in the distance, on top of the other side of the gulch where he had left his camera case and just after, a bear had wandered by it!

The body movement started. We followed a network of game trails, picking the ones that led, more or less, in our desired direction. Mentally we registered markers for the return trips: a tree stump with an old weathered horizontal saw cut about thirty inches above ground; a day old bear scat in the middle of the trail; a black spruce with branches cantilevered over the trail, scraping the arm and leg on the side of the body closest to it; and the edge of the trail where a step six inches in the wrong direction would have us falling into a mini gulch.

The start of a large open sand and gravel wind-swept plateau with low-growth vegetation was our third staging

area. The cold wind, ever-shifting clouds, sun desperately seeking voids in the gray sky cover, crunching sand under foot and the views of the gulf waters were colouring our eyes. We made our way singly, alone, to sense the vastness around us, across the open terrain with its gently rolling depressions, rises and mini ponds. Our aim was a tree grouping beside the pond, just beyond the end of the plateau where, hidden among the trees, smoke from Herb's fire was rising towards the clouds.

The ancient game trails were cutting across the flats leading into the hills behind us and towards the vast waters in front of us. Caribou, bear and wolf signs were evident. A wristwatch placed on the ground beside a wolf track revealed not only the time that the photograph was taken but also the size of the paw depression in the sand.

The last gentle drop at the edge of the plateau had a sea of low bushes covering the rocks and soil allowing us to slide down the canoes to the trees and the pond beyond.

It was late afternoon and thoughts of dinner and gloomy weather brought a feeling of desire for the warmth of a good meal and the comfort of our sleeping bags. After a quick search, a level, moss-covered tenting spot in the lee of the trees was decided upon and the usual ritual of camp making was accomplished. Robert dished out much-appreciated, sweet, candy portions to boost our spirits before we ate larger quantities of pack-weight-reducing stuff.

Beyond the cooking tarp, hot drinks and hearty meal, we longed to stroll the land before the night set in. The small mounds of bare rock, the lengthening shadows, the open plateau and views of things unseen beyond, were calling, wanting to be explored.

After the times we did things together, the moments of solitude were precious, unencumbered and required no talking. The only act was that of absorption into oneself and the land. The silence is best equipment at such times.

I selected several spots where I stopped to view the beyond: one to-



Second day of the portage, looking towards the Gulf, Horn Rock and rock spine (note Herb's boat).

ward the river we had abandoned this morning; one toward the immense gulf with its disappearing islands, and one facing tomorrow's path with an incredible rock outcrop, the end looking like the horn of some ancient beast. Togetherness and companionship were left behind at camp on these walks.

Later in the tent, sitting up in the sleeping bag with the flashlight, the written words put down onto the pages of the journal desperately attempted to capture the feelings of the day, but only with limited success. This experience could not be captured totally in words.

Morning came sooner than expected. The moving-on routine was behind us as we began our meanderings through the sparsely scattered trees, dodging rocks in our path as we made our way to another edge, from where the sloping terrain led us to a narrow, rock, hill-spine a half-kilometer away, at whose tip we would have our last

staging area before descending to the shore below.

But before we would walk on its hard slippery top, we had to hack our way through another dense growth of trees, bushes and moss-covered rocks. During our brief rest at the top of the edge where all our possessions were laying immobile, waiting, with the 'horn' rock ahead of us on our right, we collected our breath and had another tense discussion (dubbed: The Clearwater Debating Society Sessions) regarding paddling or not paddling the gulf. To see the Goulet and the west shore cliffs and to chance the weather. Most of us were not keen on doing it and a motorboat pick-up was being proposed. A call to the Inuit settlement, where we were going to end our sojourn was placed in order to arrange with the locals to come and get us at the abandoned Hudson's Bay Company Post site, several days hence!

Not having resolved the pick-up arrangements with our sat phone call we descended the open slope to the forest below. The overcast sky brought light rain and our carries were now of the wet kind. Bob marked the trail he made with orange tape, but even this did not help us in avoiding dead ends, wrong directions, tougher routes and a harder crossing of the creek that flowed at the base of the rock spine we were aiming for.

Eventually we all scrambled up the slope with the last loads and made our way gingerly along the spine in the rain to the promontory of this rock highway. As the packs and canoes were lowered onto the rocks, not too close to either edge where steep drops would swallow our gear without as much as a burp, we assessed the possible routes ahead and savored the view of ancient, stepped beaches below, broken into two by a pastoral water course that entered the

gulf at the very spot we aimed to finish our carrying tasks.

We saw our yellow-rain-jacket-clad companion down at the bottom, way ahead of us again! He looked like a tiny, colourful growth standing out among the green surroundings.

The chosen route was traversed down slippery, often sharp rocks, to a small clearing that led to the last dense wall of tangled trees and bushes we had to push through! Our trail-making brigade, well experienced in parting the green curtains this land threw at us, started again the work to ease the way down to the bottom.

It felt almost effortless making this last trail, despite not having had lunch yet, the rain, and the seemingly endless willow and alder snarls trying to stop our quest for the bay. Again, the number of hands made work seem to go by much faster than it actually did!

We slid the canoes and carried the packs down to the tall grassy end of our just-made trail and as I turned and looked back it was hard to see where we had snaked our way through the bush. It looked as if the parting of the green curtain that our saws and hatchets had made, closed in after our pass-

ing, so dense was the growth. I wondered how quickly any traces of our labour would disappear?

The carried gear was now at the shore of the pastoral watercourse we had seen hours before, from high above. Canoes loaded, we traversed the narrow creek and hit the beach on the other side where a fire had been made from old driftwood by Herb. It was a welcome site. Its warmth, physical and spiritual, along with John's numerous plastic bags of lunch gorp, nuts, marinated venison jerky and sweets made it a fitting, almost complete trail end! Drinking water was low. All the work we had done lowered my energy, but not enough to stop me from wandering along the beach and yet still we had many miles to go.

After, what memory recalls, too brief a stop, we were reminded by the rain, wind and time that we had to move or be forced to paddle in the darkness before our chosen night's sleeping place, the Hudson's Bay Company Post some ten miles away, would appear across our bows!

Our canoes, fully loaded, were dragged across flat terrain stretching between the creek landing and the wide

expanse of waiting open water. Our boots sank into the wet muck at the shore and we walked on water where the tide would come in long after we had departed these shores.

The dark calmness of the gulf and the smooth, mud flats signaled the end of our last river trail. The boot prints ended in the water beside the canoe bellies depressions, slowly being washed away by the brackish wetness. Our paddles were wet again!

Months later, at the Symposium, we talked about the trip and the possibility of other routes in the area and Herb said: "There is always the North River!"

It did not seem to me that he had closed his tent door to the possibility of going back to the gulf, once again.

It was not yet the last trail!

Trip participants

Andrew Gullen (Toronto), Frank Modine (Tennessee / Michigan), Robert Herendeen (Illinois), Robert (Bob) Schaefer (MD), John Schultz, a very close friend of Herb's (Washington DC/Maryland,) Herb Pohl (Burlington) and Damir Kusec (Toronto)

INTO THE BARRENS

By Greg Went

Loading the canoe by the lakeshore. We flew in to a lodge on this lake. Now we're packing the canoe for a trip deep into the barrens. A fisherman staying at the lodge wandered down to watch us sort and pack. He asked, "Where are you two going?" I pulled out the maps and showed him our intended route. His reply was, "Just you two are going? That far? Alone? In one canoe? What about the danger?" I told him that usually we plan a two-canoe trip, but two of the buddies couldn't make their schedules work this year, so it's just the two of us going.

One canoe makes wilderness trips a lot more complicated. For one, danger levels go up. Way up. Usually if some gear is lost in a two or three-canoe

group, you can make do with the combined outfit that you still have left. With one canoe, every item and every pack has critical importance. If something is lost, there is no spare in a pack in the second canoe. You have to make do with what you have left.

Then there is the problem of getting all the gear in one canoe. Items that you only need one of for a long canoe trip have to be packed in your canoe instead of shared out among two or three canoes. For a twenty or thirty-day trip, all the food supplies take freeboard at the start down to dangerously low levels. I lean towards a heavily loaded canoe at the start and just being extra careful until you can eat your way through some of the food supplies.

As the saying goes, "You can't eat freeboard."

The biggest danger, though, of going alone is the compatibility factor. Getting along with the buddy you are traveling with. If the trip is going to happen, both of you have to be willing to compromise. A very difficult thing. Probably the biggest decision when you are weighing committing to a one-canoe wilderness trip.

Thought about the answer that I should give to the fisherman from the lodge. To the question of going alone. The only thing I could come up with was, "Think of the magnitude of it. To immerse oneself in the wilderness. Alone. Aren't we lucky?"

HERB POHL ACCIDENT ANALYSIS

By George Haeh

Time and Date: July 17, approx. 3 p.m.

Location: Michipicoten River Outlet, Lake Superior

Herb Pohl was found on the bottom, approximately 6 metres (20 ft.) below the surface. This location was directly below where his kayak, windbreaker and paddle were found floating in an eddy.

The eddy is at lake level several yards south of a rocky point that forms the north side of the outlet. Some rocks come to just above the lake surface in calm water to divide the flow into a major and minor channel. A navigation marker has been erected on these rocks.

Wind and Wave Conditions:

A light breeze was blowing from the southwest as recorded by Joel Cooper in his journal. At 4 p.m. the wind increased to 31 km/h and came from 320 degrees at the Wawa Airport. At the accident location the new wind would be from the near north shore. The storm that tore through the Lake Huron North Channel and Mattawa passed to the north of Wawa.

Lake conditions were a one-metre swell from the southwest.

Water temperature was estimated at about 20 degrees Celsius. This is the river temperature; at this point there is little mixing with the colder lake waters.

Excerpt from a letter that I received from David Wells of Naturally Superior Adventures and Rock Island Lodge (upon my request for information about the accident:

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to tell people a bit more about the

two separate incidents that took place just beyond the mouth of the Michipicoten River last week including: the overturning of our voyageur canoe and recovery of all paddlers and the unfortunate drowning and recovery of a solo paddler, Mr. Herb Pohl. I would also like to share some points we may all learn from these incidents.

Both incidents took place late afternoon on a day when there were moderate to high changing winds, resulting moderate waves mostly from the southwest.

It seemed as though a lot of water was being released from the power dams as there was significant current through the river mouth and significant steep and breaking waves where onshore waves were starting to "feel" the lake bottom and meet out flowing river current.

In the first incident, it was within those steep breaking waves that our voyageur canoe, heading out, powered by two adult guides and a group of youth, stalled, took on water, and then overturned. The boat was not overloaded and was fully outfitted to Canadian coast guard standards. Everyone was wearing a pfd (lifejacket) and river water temperature was about 66 degrees. Everyone stayed with the canoe, until rescuers, including two double sea kayaks and two motor boats, arrived. The canoe overturned at approximately 2:50 p.m. and all paddlers were returned to our beach by motor boat by 3:15 p.m, about 25 minutes.

Not much more detail can be given about the group since the canoe was not being guided by Naturally Superior Adventures staff. I do know that the group leader has rented our voyageur canoe in previous years to

lead a number of incident-free trips from Hattie Cove (Pukaskwa Park) to Michipicoten.

The second incident involved a solo paddler who was finishing his trip from Hattie Cove to Michipicoten. Mr. Herb Pohl was an older and highly experienced paddler on the final day of his trip. Brad Buck and John Cameron, returning from helping with rescue of the Voyageur canoe, found an overturned open style sea kayak near the river mouth. Inside he found paddler's gear including a PFD.

OPP and Trenton Search and Rescue were notified and by early evening an air search by Canadian Hercules plane and Traverse City based US helicopter was underway. Two days later, the body of Mr. Pohl was located by an Ontario OPP dive team.

More About the Rescue (information supplied by Mr. Wells):

Joel Cooper and Megan Romano (Naturally Superior guide) and a few guests staying at the lodge, witnessed the voyageur swamping. Brad Buck was immediately called. Joel traveled to the marina to get his power boat and two double sea kayaks were immediately launched to assist with the rescue. They were paddled by NSA staff including Megan Romano, Chelsea Gauthier, Virginia Marshall, Ray Boucher, and Vaughan Chauvin. Brad Buck and John Cannon from the marina came down in the power boat.

Search: After the swimmers were brought ashore, recovery began for the voyageur canoe and personal effects. It took a total of 25 minutes from boat turnover to all paddlers on shore with hot chocolate. During the recovery of the big canoe, Herb's kayak was discovered in the eddy. The initial surmise

was that the boat was been swept into the water and that Herb was stranded somewhere on shore. The shore was searched to Perkwawia Pt. As darkness fell, the USCG and RCC Trenton contributed helicopters and a C-130.

OPP divers recovered the body the next day. (Actually, I think it was the day after as OPP were delayed with another dive-possibly in the Blind River area.)

Conditions during Herb's trip:

Joel's weather journal indicates that Herb had easy lake conditions for just about all of his trip until approaching the Michipicoten. That Herb got from Hattie Cove to the Michipicoten in just seven days testifies to benign conditions as well as Herb's good condition until the end of the trip. (You may want to look at Herb's journal as he did write that he was feeling tired.)

George's Analysis:

The location of Herb's body and effects in an eddy indicates that he followed the Northern shore of Michipicoten Bay and then moved South to the river outlet. His journal also indicates that he was not feeling well in the last days of the trip. (He may just as well have paddled directly from Perwakwia Point to the mouth of the Michipicoten River—a four km crossing. His journal indicates that he had planned to reach his vehicle at 2:00 p.m. The voyageur canoe overturned at 2:50 p.m. The lake was more bumpy earlier in the day so possibly he was pushing himself a bit.)

Approaching the outlet he would be paddling against a quartering headwind from the southwest. A significant portion of the swell energy would be absorbed by the current. Given the wind conditions, it is most likely he crossed the minor current and entered the eddy under his own power in his boat.

How Herb fell out of his boat is a mystery. While the currents are strong,

he was thoroughly competent in such water. Possibly he did not see the eddy and he was not prepared with a proper lean and/or brace. The wind-driven wave pattern could possibly have obscured the eddy boundary. I have had myself an instant flip on a flat spot in Eels Creek.

It is Joel's opinion that a swimmer can swim out of the eddy to shore. Also, the eddy current would take Herb close to the rocks at the head of the eddy where he may have been able to climb out. There is little algae on most Lake Superior rocks; however the higher water temperature at this point may allow for algae. Then again the high discharge level may have been overflowing the rocks at this time.

We cannot ignore that wearing a lifejacket may have made the difference in this case.

While the autopsy did not find signs of a heart attack or stroke, a TIA (transient ischemic attack—a type of stroke) remains a possibility as indicated by one doctor:

I heard, second hand, that the autopsy showed a head injury. Possible causes may include getting hit by his boat when it flipped, hitting the rocks at the eddy line where the boat may have overturned, or perhaps following death by the action of waves against rocks around the eddy.

Acknowledgements:

Joel Cooper of CCMB, Brad Buck of Buck's Marina and David Wells of Naturally Superior Adventures were all generous with their time and provided me with the major part of the information in this analysis.

Joel Cooper is involved in Citizens Concerned for Michipicoten Bay which is campaigning against the proposed gravel quarry that threatens to chew up the Superior Heritage North Shore to provide a higher grade of gravel for the US highway system:

<http://sweetwatervisions.com/Pages/aggregate.html>
<http://www.ccmb.ca>

Without wawa-news.com, I would not have known about these people or learned the facts they supplied.

These are all local people who have been generous both in rescuing wayward visitors and taking the time to protect their natural heritage.

References:

<http://www.wawa-news.com/Newspages/07-19/Freighter2.html>
<http://www.wawa-news.com/Newspages/07-19/OPP-Body.html>
<http://www.wawa-news.com/Newspages/07-18/rescue.html>
<http://www.wawa-news.com/Newspages/07-26/Letter-NSA.html>

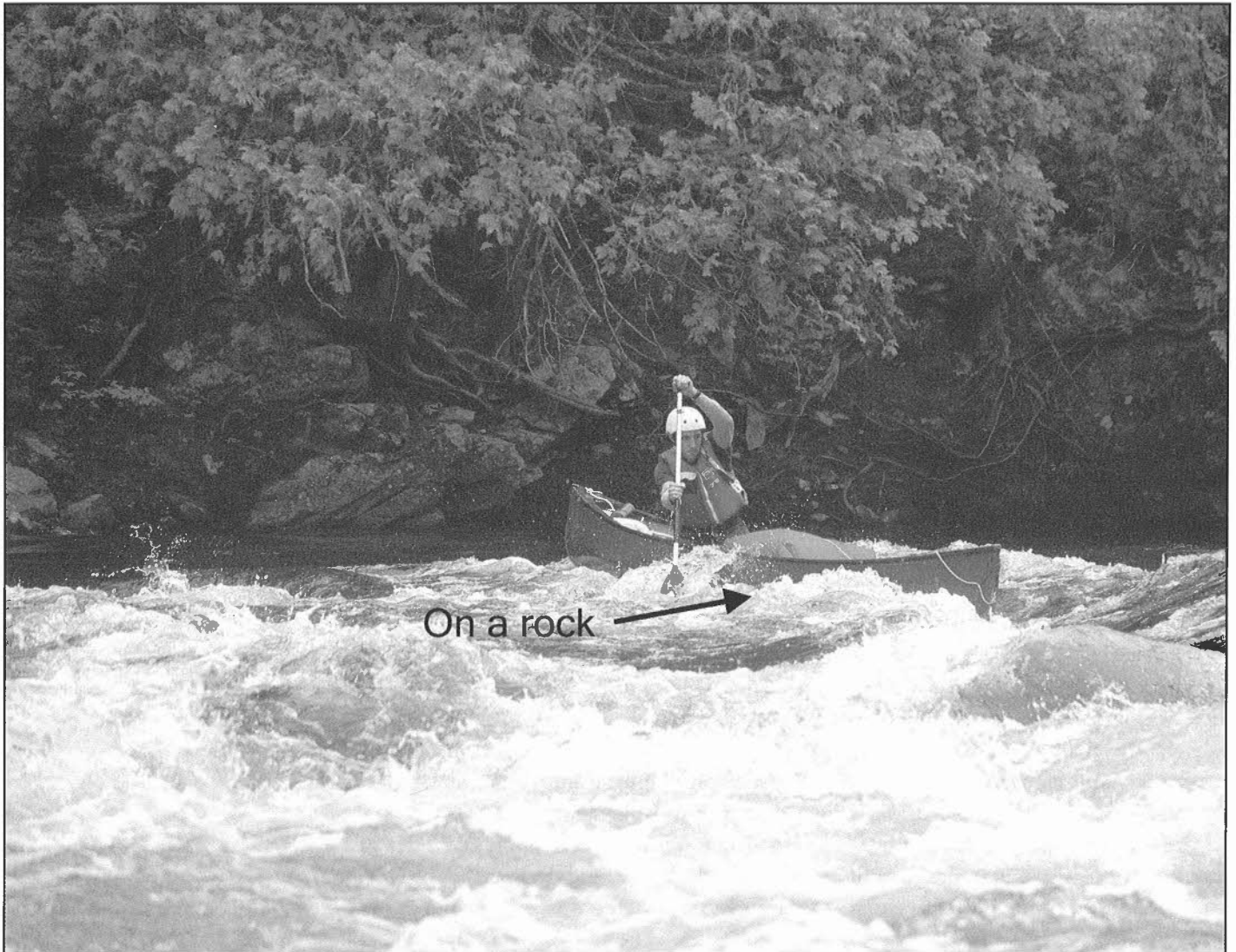
Additional Information from David Wells, Naturally Superior Adventures & Rock Island Lodge, www.naturallysuperior.com & www.rockislandlodge.ca

Tel: 1.800.203.9092—
Fax: 1.705.856.7168

Mr. Wells, in his letter to George Haes notes that there is not an undertow at the River mouth as some have suggested. Undertows are typically the result of water piling up a dumping beach and draining away by flowing down along the bottom. The same action causes rip currents on shallow beaches. The Michipicoten just flows out, sometimes very fast, and collides with lake Superior waves pushed by a 200+ km fetch and focused by Michipicoten Bay to the river mouth. The combination can make for amazing surf conditions and some crazy choppy confused seas...but not an undertow.

RUNNING THE PETAWAWA

By Jay Neilson



Natch Rapid Ledge

After no WCA response for the May long weekend (lucky, as it was raining,) Jay paddled the Petawawa River monsters solo May 28-29, and yeee, met up with two other solo paddler guys from Ottawa, so got to RUN (not portage) the big water. Big Thompson ran beautiful. Did a major eddy turn in the middle of Little Thompson (a first); at Crooked Chute, ran to last take out (of course!) and then the section below Crooked Chute: big rollers and lots of splash—a fun run. Then got totalled on Rollaway, which was running so high

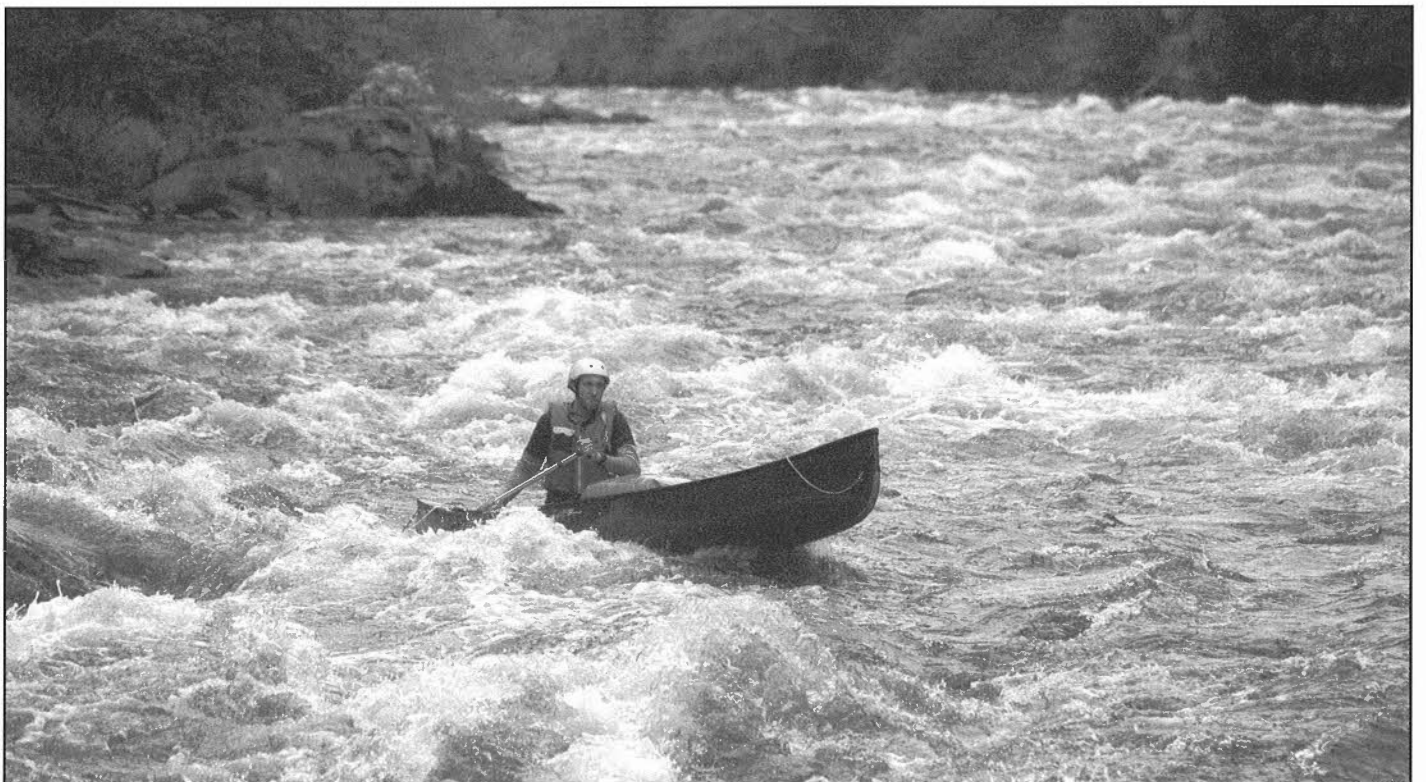
the killer hole wasn't even there. Played it cool on river right, then yanked hard right around the house rock at the ledge and overcooked, ending up backwards, only almost in the eddy, deploying big grabs and ending up sideways onto the curler. At least, got a good look at it. A cluster of rocks probably ate my beautiful Carlisle paddle. Swam remaining big water, the waves thankfully enough to float my carcass over the rocks unscathed; got dragged out before coasting onwards to the Natch ledges. Whew. Natch only runnable on

the right. Three boats in an instructor group from Outward Bound tried Natch centre the next day and all totally swamped. Did not bang a single rock in Five Mile Rapid (another first). Natch Canyon was absolutely gorgeous forever, the spring greens so lovely in the calmness of Running extreme hot, followed by a terrific thunderstorm with lightening. Very heavy rain and big winds—an awesome summer trip and it is still MAY. Yeee, the whole summer still ahead of us.

Happy Paddling



Rollway Ledge



Rollaway Rapid

Artwork by Rod MacIver
Natural Heritage Books.com



Friendship



Pancake Bay

Mistassibi Nord-est River Trip Report August, 2006

By Blair Richardson

In August, 2006, a group consisting of Greg Harling, Liana Nolan, Bob Youtz, Ian Malcolm, Graham Richardson and Blair Richardson canoed this river. We wanted to provide information to supplement Larry Durst's excellent trip description (Spring 2005), which would help those Nastawgan subscribers planning a future trip on this exciting river. First of all, the logging road now crosses the river at kilometer 160, which is less than 20 km. from the headwaters, Lac Machisque. You can access a map of all the logging roads in the region on the MRC website for Dolbeau-Mistassini. (I think that MRC is the Quebec acronym for municipality or township.)

Although we chartered a Beaver from Air Saguenay to fly into Lac Machisque, this choice is problematic. The road in from the Bowater lumber camp, approximately 17 km. long, is in extremely poor condition due to wash-outs. There are several forks in the road, often with no indication of direction to Lac Boisvert. (Air Saguenay did provide us with copies of hand-drawn maps of the road from Ste. Anne de Proulx to Lac Boisvert, with missing detail for the last 17 kms.) The small dock on Lac Boisvert where the float plane moors to load is not visible from the road. There is only a small float plane sign near ground level which is partially obscured by trees. The fly-in cost, three separate flights, was about \$3,640.00.

This year, water levels were below normal, on a river that is typically wide and shallow for much of its course. This meant slow progress, dragging canoes through boulder fans on the upper stretches of the river. There was

considerable wear on the canoe hulls as a result.

We found many good campsites, all exactly where indicated on the map downloaded from the CCR web site. (We thought the classifications and location of rapids on the river were very accurate on this map.) There are also several hunting cabins on the river which are available for use. One had a log book to sign, with a note urging paddlers to record their passage because this would assist in any future helicopter searches for missing parties by the Surete du Quebec.

On the long drive from Toronto/Waterloo, we stopped overnight at La Mauricie National Park, staying in the Riviere-a-la-Peche campground. This is only a short detour from the highway. Reservations can be made at 1-877-737-3783. Along the way, a lack of French language skills in the group turned out not to be a problem. One restaurant even produced English menus!

Overall, this is a really good river trip; the rapids are long, but none are rated above class III. (There are several ledges to line or lift over.) First canoe trip ever with not a single portage!

I have set up
info@wildernesscanoe.ca
as the primary email address for the WCA. All mail sent here will be redirected to me. I can then redirect mail to the appropriate people. I can set up more email addresses as required.

Jeff

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.

WCA MERCHANDISE We have a wide selection of WCA merchandise available for purchase at all WCA events (but not by mail order). Items available include WCA mugs (\$5), crests (\$3), and decals (\$1). We also have WCA clothing in a range of colours and sizes. Each item is a high-quality product that has been embroidered with a colourful WCA logo. At your next event plan to purchase one of these garments and proudly represent your organization.

Golf Shirts: \$30; Fleece Vests: \$40; Fleece Jackets: \$60. (Cheque or cash only.)

For up-to-date information on Products and Services items, go to the Bulletin Board of the WCA website: www.wildernesscanoe.ca.

Survivorman Fans

Les Stroud's Survivorman™ Series Season 1 is available on DVD containing 10 episodes for \$34.99. If you are lucky to be one of the first 250 to purchase, you will receive an autographed copy.

Also on VHS are Les's earlier works: Snowshoes and Solitude, the award-winning documentary about Les and his wife's one-year escape from modern society to live in the Canadian wilderness.

Stranded (is the pilot version of Survivorman™), where Les makes his first two ventures out in the Canadian Wilderness, without food, water, shelter, matches, or a camera crew. Les experiences these 7-day challenges in the heat of summer and the dead of winter.

To order, go to <http://www.lesstroudonline.com/shop.html>

Tripping Canoe for Sale

Pre-positioned on the banks of the upper Thelon, ready for your trip down to Baker Lake. Save on shipping and air charter costs. This is a seasoned, large-volume, 17' kevlar boat, with lots of dents and scratches, but entirely serviceable. Price negotiable. For details, contact: dpelly@sympatico.ca

For Sale

Nastawgan collection: April 1974 - Autumn 2005 \$60.00 obo. Jim Greenacre 416-759-9956

Solo Canoe Mould: length 15 ft., beam 29 in., centre depth 13 in., rocker 2-1/2 in. All-round tripping canoe; easy paddling on flatwater, manoeuvrable in whitewater. \$300 obo Jim Greenacre 416-759-9956



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Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association
Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning "the way or route"

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

itate 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.

A Letter to the Editor

I'm writing this in response to Allan Jacobs' article "Tough Summer on the Back" in the summer issue of *Nastawgan*. It was one of the first things I read upon return from my own "family" canoe trip in the barrens this past summer. Though I don't fundamentally disagree with anything he says, somehow his overall message compels me to write. I have no material quibble with any of Jacobs' recommendations or conclusions, just as I have no real argument with "Father" Bill Layman's regular sermons on the use of PLBs (parenthetically, I need to say that Bill is a friend, whose ability as a tripper I admire), which tie in nicely to the themes of this recent article.

I've witnessed the explosion of barrenlands canoe travel during the past 30 years, since I undertook my first trip north of sixty (coincidentally on the Back River) in 1977. We came home from that trip saying it was "tough." Interestingly, it was said that we were only the seventh group of white men to canoe down that river since George Back in 1834. By the sounds of it, there were this many parties on the Back in 2005 alone—that is remarkable. One thing that has changed, I believe, is that many people venturing into that wilderness today are not nearly so well prepared as nearly all of us who canoed the barrenlands were in the 1970s and early '80s, in the days before PLBs and sat phones. Accessibility has, apparently, led to the notion that canoeing there requires no more serious preparation (or judgement or skill, for that matter) than a prolonged jaunt in Algonquin or Temagami. This summer I encountered three groups of teenagers, each one led by a very responsible twenty-something person with no previous barrenlands experience. As a seasoned northern paddler, I was distressed. As a father, I was amazed at the trust (or naivety) of these kids' parents.

I don't think 2005 was a particularly "tough" summer on the Back River. I think it is more likely that there were more people than usual canoeing the Back, with (on average) less experience than in past years, and the inevitable result is the situations Jacobs described. (It is essential, here, that I make it clear I'm not including George Drought and Barbara Burton in this description; what happened to these veteran travellers was the sort of accident that would obviously give any of us good reason to seek evacuation in an era of PLBs and sat phones. They did so in a responsible manner. Any of us might

fall victim to misfortune, though even that possibility is somewhat mitigated by good preparation.) As Jacobs says, "Barrenlands rivers are too isolated for inexperienced, poorly trained and improperly equipped parties"—that is the real thesis of his essay.

Foul weather is a consistent reality of the North. Count on it. I've waited out some absolutely horrendous storms in the barrenlands—the worst ever was in 2001 on the Simpson River, north of the Back, but in the end it's always been little more than a minor delay in our trip plans. Bad weather, changing water levels, ice, sand, wind, bugs—these are all essential elements of the barrenlands experience. Partly because of them, one cannot assume that the pace of travel will be the same as it is in the south. Just to "leave several days slack for wind delays" is probably insufficient allowance.

Our 30-day trip this summer was my 11-year-old son's fifth barrenlands canoe trip, all of them three weeks or more in duration. He doesn't find it tough partly because he is a child of the land, and partly because I have learned how to keep him (and us) comfortable and safe. Over the years I've continually, inexorably, climbed the learning curve—very steep at first, somewhat less so now. This summer's trip included a rock-pinned, swamped canoe and a threatening grizzly bear in camp (on different days, thank goodness!) neither of which led to any significant loss of time or material, or even the slightest thought of using the sat phone. Such incidents are part of barrenlands canoeing, and as such, should be anticipated. My point, in so many words, is this: travel in the barrenlands is challenging. That's why we go there, in part, because it is remote and fraught with difficulties we don't find elsewhere. Approach it with the respect that this knowledge *should* imply, and you won't come home saying that it was a "tough summer" in the barrens. As Jacobs himself suggests, the challenges come with commensurate rewards.

David F Pelly

www.davidpelly.com

WCA-member David Pelly is the author of *Thelon: A River Sanctuary*.

For a list of his northern trips, go to his website and click on "Expeditions."

WCA OUTINGS

**WANT TO ORGANIZE A TRIP AND HAVE IT
PRESENTED IN THE WINTER ISSUE?**

Contact the Outings Committee before November 15

For questions, suggestions, proposals to organize trips, or anything else related to the WCA Outings, contact the Outings Committee: Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca; Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca; Geri James, 416-512-6690, geri.james@barclaysglobal.com; Scott Card, 905-665-7302, scottcard@sympatico.ca

**WCA outings and other activities may have an element of danger of serious personal injury.
You are ultimately responsible for your own safety and well-being when participating in club events.**

All Season **HAVE PADDLE WILL TRAVEL**

Scott Card, 905-665-7302, scottcard@sympatico.ca—Mowing the lawn this weekend because you don't have any trips planned? I paddle whitewater nearly every weekend from spring break-up through as long as the water remains liquid in the fall (or winter). If you want to get out on a river any weekend, just call me to find out where I'm headed. I go wherever there's good water. Longer trips also a possibility. Trip difficulty levels vary from intermediate to advanced. Open canoe, C1, or kayak welcome.

All Season **HAVE PADDLE WILL TRAVEL, PART II**

Al Sutton, 905-985-0261—I'm on the river most weekends through the season. If you'd like to get away, give me a call to find out what I'm doing. You're welcome to join me. Trip difficulty levels vary from intermediate to advanced.

All Summer **MELLOW SUMMER WHITEWATER WEEKENDS**

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca—Most weekends of the summer I am at the Gull for the day or the whole weekend. If there is decent water, I'll set up camp at Palmer's to do some paddling and catch some rays. It's a relaxed way to spend an all too short summer. Bring the spouse and kids along. If you are looking for an excuse to avoid painting or mowing the lawn, just give me a call & I'll tell you what I have planned. I'm happy to provide a little informal instruction for anyone new to moving water, or for paddlers wanting to work on their roll. Palmers is great for beginners. The run-out at the Gull can be used by novices, but you really need to be a good intermediate to paddle the course safely.

September 2-4 **OTTAWA RIVER**

John & Sharon Hackert, 416-438-7672, or jhackert@sympatico.ca, book before August 25th.—We are fortunate to have access to the most beautiful campsite on the river. The Ottawa is big water and many of the rapids are quite difficult. You should be at least a strong intermediate paddler to safely enjoy it. We recommend that you join us on some of our spring trips to develop and practice your skills before attempting this river. Limit six boats.

September 2-4 **RIVIERE AUX SAUBLES**

Aleks Gusev, 416-236-7079, aleks@gusev.ca, book by August 15—Riviere aux Sables is west of Sudbury, near Massey. This is a long drive from Toronto but well worth the trip for whitewater aficionados, with some of the best technical water in Ontario

(class 2 to 4 with some class 5 falls for the adventurers). Must be at least a strong intermediate paddler. Fully outfitted white-water boats required. Limit six boats.

October 15 **BURNT RIVER**

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005 or bness@look.ca, book by October 6. An opportunity to work off the calories from the Thanksgiving turkey dinner. An easy flatwater river trip from Kinmount to above the village of Burnt River. The Burnt always has enough water to be paddled. Pretty scenery and a few short portages make this a good late season outing. A great day out for families or anyone wanting to enjoy the fall woods from a boat.

October 27 to 29 **SHARK LAKE**

Gary James 416-512-6690, wca@sympatioc.ca, or Anne Lessio 905-686-1730 or alessio@istar.ca, book before October 1. Join us in the Kawarthas for a fall trip from Long Lake down to Coon Lake; about 20 km with 7 portages. Four canoes and /or seven solo tents. A launch fee maybe required.

Sept 29-30, WCA Fall Meeting, Minden Wild Water Preserve. See ad for more information as well as the application printed inside the cover. Contact mike@law.infosathse.com

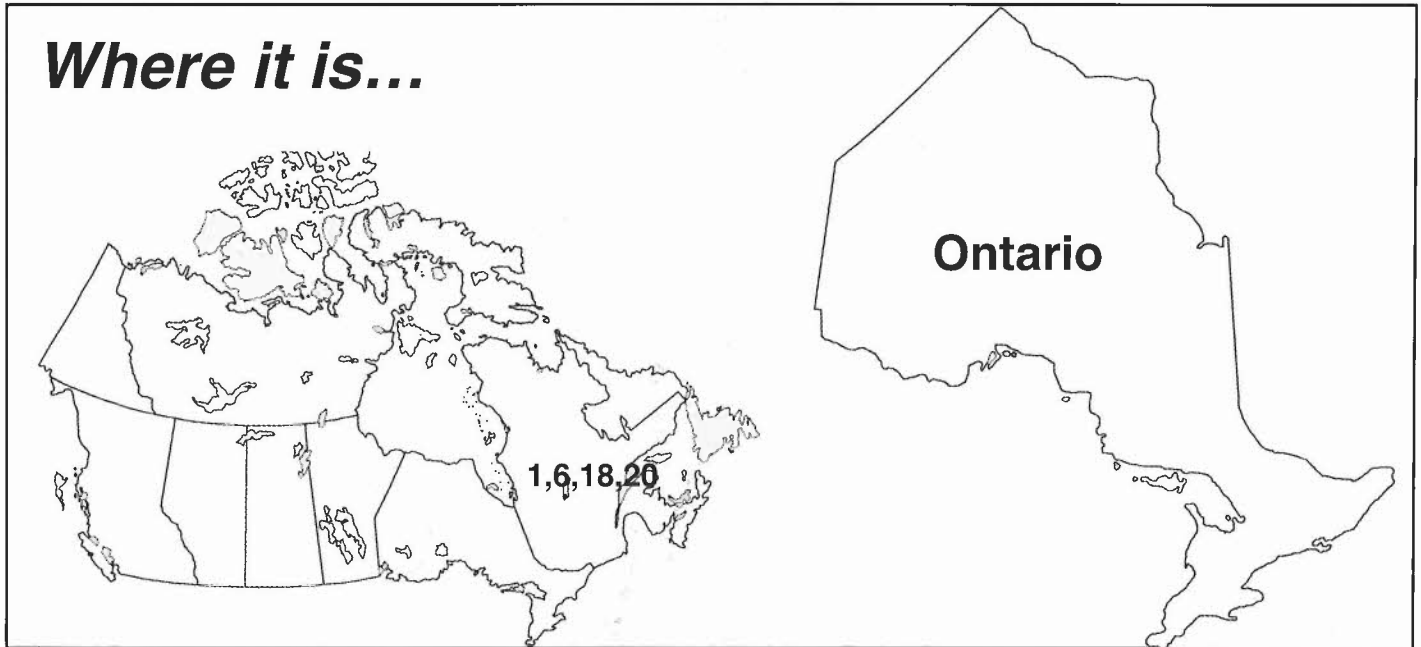
ADDITIONAL TRIPS

Check our website at www.wildernesscanoe.ca/trips.htm for additional trips. Members may submit additional trips to the Outings Committee anytime at bness@look.ca. If you miss the Nastawgan deadline, your trip will still be listed on the website. Also, check the bulletin board at www.wildernesscanoe.ca/bulletin.htm for private, non-WCA trips or partner requests.

January-March 2007 **POOL SESSIONS EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION**

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005 or bness@look.ca—Community groups wanting to rent swimming pools for recreational use in Toronto are challenged with numerous new bureaucratic hurdles, as well as fewer available pools. One now must pre-book long in advance to reserve space. However, we have two pieces of good news for winter pool paddlers. We have a booking at our usual Scarborough pool at Albert Campbell Collegiate for Sundays from 5:00 to 6:30 pm. Dates are January 7 to March 11. As well, fees haven't gone up for us, so the cost remains \$80 per person to cover the whole 10 sessions. Contact me to reserve a spot as space is limited.

Where it is...



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