

Blair Richardson and Austin Marshall in high water

RUNNING THE FOND DU LAC RIVER

by Blair Richardson

Photos by Blair Richardson and Austin Marshall

Introduction

We had planned to do this trip in 1988 but were forced to cancel when one group member injured a shoulder and I relocated to Eastern Canada. The idea stayed alive and a new group was recruited in 2003. It included Austin Marshall from Yellowknife, me and my son Graham from Toronto, Ian Malcolm and his son David from Kingston, and Bill Hosford from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

On August 2, 2003, in the early evening, we launched our loaded canoes into Collins Creek where it intersects Saskatchewan Highway 905 and leads to Points North Landing and Stony Rapids. Our descent of the Fond du Lac River had

begun, after a gestational period of 15 years!

In 1985, I had written to Eric Morse, the author of "Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada Then and Now," asking for a copy of his trip journal. He very kindly did provide a copy, which recounted the 1957 trip of the group known as the "Voyageurs" from Reindeer Lake to Stony Rapids. They covered 400 miles in three weeks. In his letter Eric said, "Though it was nearly 30 years ago, I still have vivid memories of this trip. It was a particularly good one: scenery, rapids, game." The "Voyageurs" were a well-known group in Ottawa. Members were Dennis Coolican, President of the Canadian Bank Note Company; Eric Morse National Director of the Association of

Canadian Clubs; Sigurd Olson, President of the National Parks Association of America; Elliot Rodger, former Vice-chief of General Staff; Omond Solandt, Vice President, Canadian National Railways; and Tyler Thompson, U.S. Ambassador to Canada. The Voyageurs enjoyed media coverage for what was then an uncommon summer undertaking. On Black Lake, they fought headwinds to reach Fir Island. "As we reached the last bay and the wind dropped," Eric wrote, "an aircraft with Roger Phillips and cameraman Hills came in to interview us." (I believe this was a CBC interview.)

Intent of this Report

This report is intended to highlight the Fond du Lac River trip, and to arouse interest in canoeing it. Secondly, it describes our trip with sufficient detail to enable readers to assess whether a trip on the river would meet their expectations (and requirements). Thirdly, it is intended to provide information that would be helpful in planning a trip.

Why we chose this River

We wanted a remote wilderness trip, on a river that featured white water to match our paddling abilities. The Fond du Lac River flows out of Wollaston Lake, northwest to Lake Athabasca. This is far from the prairies, in the northern most part of Saskatchewan, tucked up against the border with the NWT. The river crosses the traditional lands of the Dene and has only a few settlements, along with fishing lodges on Hatchet and Wollaston Lakes and a uranium mine at Collins Bay on Wollaston Lake.

The historical significance of the river appealed to us, mainly because of David Thompson's vivid description of his trip in 1796. He was more interested in exploring than fur-trading and proposed the trip to his superiors in the Hudson's Bay Company who wanted to know if the Fond du Lac River was a shorter route than the Churchill/Clearwater rivers to transport furs from Fort Chipewyan in the Athabasca Country (now Alberta) to York Factory. It wasn't, for reasons that are abundantly clear in reading Thompson's journal. On their return trip from Lake Athabasca,

Thompson and his two Dene guides, Paddy and Kosdaw, nearly died. They were tracking the canoe upriver, past rapids that now bear Thompson's name. In a mix-up, the canoe drifted over a 12-foot ledge, with Thompson still standing in it (the canoe). They lost much of their equipment and Thompson cut his foot very badly. He tore the canvas tent into three pieces to give them protection from the black flies. Ravenous after several more days' travel, they roasted and ate eagle chicks, which made them violently ill. If they hadn't stumbled into a Dene family encampment, they would have died. They arrived safely back at their departure point, Fairfield House, a trading post which is located on the Churchill River, downstream from the confluence with the Reindeer River. One of the most remarkable figures in Canadian history, Thompson spent nearly three decades surveying and mapping over 1.2 million square miles of what were then aboriginal lands.

In addition to Thompson, J. B. Tyrell (who edited the journals of Thompson, Turnor and Hearne) stated that the list of early explorers included Philip Turnor in 1791, Peter Fidler in 1807, A. S. Cochrane in 1881, and Tyrell himself in 1892 and 1893.

The varied geography and natural beauty of the region also appealed to us. Here is Laurel Archer's description:

For the most part, the Fond du Lac flows through the Athabasca Plain, except for a short distance from its headwaters and near its end, where the familiar outcrops of precambrian bedrock and black spruce of the taiga shield appear. This makes for the variety in scenery and river characteristics. The first section of the FdL borders the Selwyn Lake Upland of the Taiga Shield, which lies to the east until just after Hatchet Lake. The River bumps up against the Shield again above Burr Falls, but in a much more dramatic fashion. Where the River intersects the harder rock of the Tazin Lake Upland there are large rapids or falls, as the rock is not easily eroded.

Though bordered on the north and

east by the Shield, its glacial-till features best characterize the River, including Tyrell's ispatinows, (meaning conspicuous hills in Cree), drumlins, and hummocks of moraine. As well, there are many prominent eskers in the area, some up to 80 kilometers long. The soil is sandy and the dryness of the area makes for extensive forest fires. Thus jack pine is the dominant forest along the River. This open parkland commonly has an under story of lichen, blueberry, bearberry and sand heather, among other small shrubs and herbs. Some black spruce occur on north-facing slopes of drumlin and eskers, while bogs are full of stunted black spruce and tamarack. (1)

1. Laurel Archer, *Northern Saskatchewan Canoe Trips: A Guide to Fifteen Wilderness Rivers*, Firefly Books, Boston Mills Press, 2003

Given the remoteness and the presence of fishing lodges, we expected good fishing, too, for walleye, northern pike, and lake trout. Laurel promised: "the best camping there is on one of the most beautiful rivers I've ever paddled." We were hooked!

Planning Resources

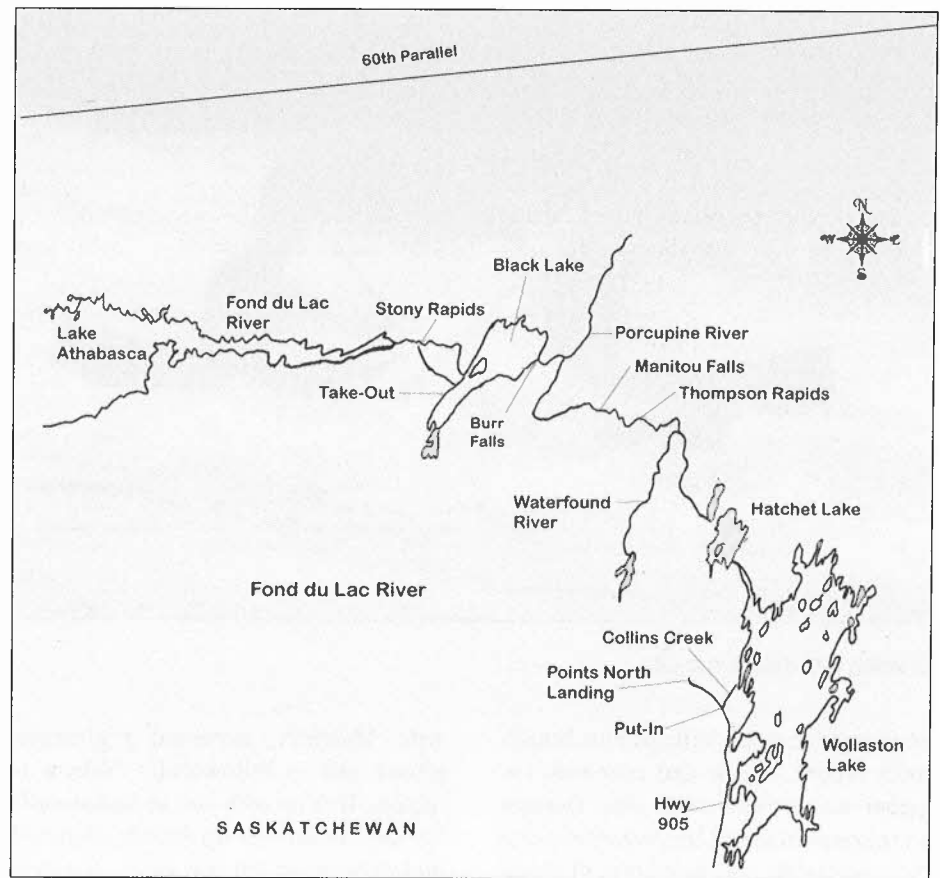
The resource material to help us plan our trip was plentiful. Thompson's narrative was found in the 1962 edition of his journal published by the Champlain Society. It was edited by Richard Glover and contained J. B. Tyrell's footnotes from the Champlain Society's 1916 edition. Nick Nickels, the now-deceased founder of *Che-Mun, The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing*, sent us a photocopy of: *A Wild River's Survey Descriptive Report*, published by the National Parks Service in 1972. Also helpful was Gary and Joanie McGuffin's 1988 book entitled, *Where Rivers Run*, as was Bill Layman's Internet article entitled *Paddling Saskatchewan's Fond du Lac River*. It led us to Eric Munsterhjelm's book about trapping in the area during the 1930's, entitled, *The Wind and the Caribou*, Sigurd Olson's 1963 book, *Runes of the North*, gave another perspective on the 1957 trip by the Voyageurs. The May,

1996 article in *National Geographic* about a trip on the Fond du Lac to celebrate the 200th anniversary of David Thompson's journey contained beautiful photographs of Manitou Falls. By far the most helpful resource was Laurel Archer and her then-about-to-be-published book. Via email, she answered countless questions in detail and with patience after sending the text of the relevant chapters from her book.

Our Planning Process

Choosing the route, especially the put-in and the take-out, was a challenge. We had to juggle the length of time available for paddling, the daily distance to be paddled on the river, the cost of charter flights, and the travel time to and from Northern Saskatchewan. As we communicated back and forth by email, the options and the trade-offs became clearer to us. Also, we benefited from Laurel's advice. Andy Eikel at Points North was very helpful with options and costs. Points North Base was established in 1984 to provide a truck/air freight link to the fly-in communities on Wollaston and Athabasca lakes. It became a major service centre for the region, expediting for fishing lodges and exploration companies. The 6,000-foot airstrip serves the McLean Lake uranium mine as well as the area fishing lodges. Points North also provides meals and accommodations for workers, fishermen, travelers and for those using Points North Air floatplane services. Ric Driediger of Horizons Unlimited, a guide/outfitter located in Missinipe on Lac La Ronge, was also helpful. Kathy Newton, Saskatchewan Government Information Services, gave us details on accommodations en route, as well as road conditions and highway services available along 102/905.

We decided to put in at Collins Creek. This avoided the expense of flying-in by charter and it shortened the distance to be traveled on Wollaston Lake. (There is road access to Wollaston much further south on the Lake.) Points North agreed to provide secure parking for our vehicles in their compound and to shuttle us back to Collins Creek, along with the rental canoe that Ric Driediger was leaving for us at Points North. The take-out



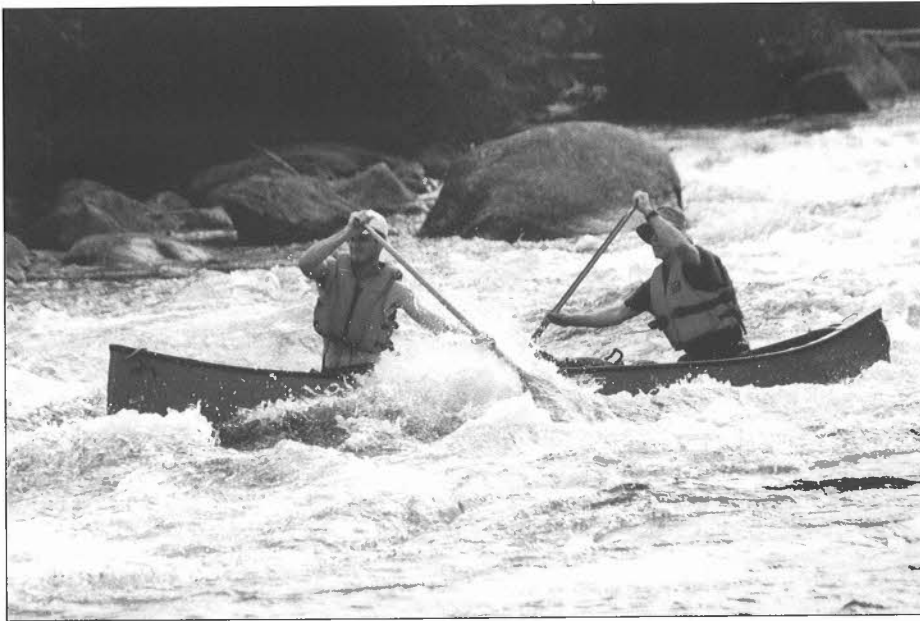
was to be the community of Black Lake, with a shuttle up the road to the airport at Stony Rapids. This would enable us to fly out on a scheduled flight instead of a more expensive charter flight. We arranged with Points North to truck our canoes from Black Lake back to Points North Base for only \$50, a fraction of what air transport would have cost.

The plan was for me to drive out west with most of the food and equipment, picking up Bill in Sault Ste. Marie and then meeting up with Ian and David who would be in Winnipeg. The two-car, two-canoe convoy would drive 780 km to Saskatoon and pick up Graham and Austin who would arrive on flights from Toronto and Calgary respectively. We would then drive 380 km to Lac La Ronge and overnight at the Riverside Motel. The final leg was 475 km to Points North Landing. We would put in either late August 2 or early morning August 3 and take out at Black Lake in time to catch a flight from Stony Rapids back to Points North Landing on August 16. Graham and Austin would catch

flights out of Saskatoon on August 17, so they both would be back at work on August 18. Bill and I would wait in Points North Landing for the canoes to arrive while the others drove on to Saskatoon to make the flight connections.

I was concerned that the schedule was tight with only 12-13 days to paddle 300 km, knowing that we could become windbound on Wollaston or Black Lake. But the flight reservations meant that more time on the water could not be allotted. Laurel's caution about becoming windbound was prophetic.

We planned a 15-day menu. Austin and Bill each volunteered to bring two dinners. Austin, our fly fisherman, also brought his special batter mix for frying fish. We dried some hamburger and Bill brought lots of his own jerky and other treats. Breakfasts rotated through oatmeal porridge, pancakes, granola cereal and scrambled eggs, all supplemented with wonderful coffee made from coffee beans roasted and ground at Cook's in Kingston. Lunch rotated through crack-



Graham and Austin in a CII

ers/bread/bannock with peanut butter, tuna, salami, cheese and hummus, together with crystal drink mix. Dinners were soup followed by pasta/potatoes/rice, vegetable and hamburger/corned beef/shrimp. Dessert was always cookies for those with a sweet tooth.

The food went into labeled Ziploc bags for each meal and for snacks; these were placed into plastic pails with lids and packed into Duluth packsacks. (As our old canvas Duluth packs wear out, they are replaced with Ostrom red nylon Duluth packs.) The plastic pails are not perfectly waterproof, but on the other hand, they make great seats!

We planned to take three canoes: one 17-foot Novacraft ABS with spray cover, one 18-foot Novacraft ABS, and a rental canoe – a 17-foot ABS Prospector from Trailhead. We took three tents and a large kitchen shelter. We planned to use a cooking fire with a primus stove as back-up. Kitchen equipment included a reflector oven, (made in Kingston using Rolf Kraiker's specifications) for bread and muffins and a large fry pan with lid for making bannock. Austin rented a satellite phone in Yellowknife for emergency communications.

Getting to the Put-In

Everything went pretty much according to plan, although Austin didn't arrive on his designated flight from Calgary. His

wife, Margaret, answered a plaintive phone call in Yellowknife: "Where is Austin? Isn't he with you in Saskatoon?" Luckily, he showed up shortly afterward and we were on our way again. The next morning, we had breakfast in the Motor Lodge in Lac La Ronge. It featured sausages made with wild rice harvested locally (very tasty.) While we ate, the local Polaris snowmobile dealer warned us about the condition of the gravel highway, saying he would never take a car on that road. Ian, driving a Nissan Maxima, blanched. However, the gravel road was in good condition and we made good time. We kept a sharp lookout for the B carriers big semi-trailer trucks carrying uranium ore which traveled fast and occupied the centre of the road, never slowing or yielding to oncoming traffic.

After the shuttle from Points North Landing, during which we sighted a black bear, we managed to get on the water about 7 p.m. and were grateful for the good light late into the evening. We made camp after a couple of kilometers and cooked up fresh chicken, potatoes, mushrooms and green beans for our first dinner. What a relief to be underway, finally!

Big Lake Paddling

It was a 14 km paddle to Collins Bay; this stretch on the creek was fun – some

riffles, some braided channel and some shallow sections where we walked beside the canoes. The water was surprisingly warm and we were very lucky that water levels were much higher than normal. On Collins Bay, we could see the mine buildings and the mine tailings on Harrison Peninsula. On the lake, we turned north, pushed by a light tail wind. We stopped for a swim in cold, clear water and camped on a sandy beach. It was a 29-km day.

Red Willow Rapids

We were up early to paddle the big lake piece before the winds came up. Austin took a compass bearing to make sure we didn't miss the outlet to the Fond du Lac River. At the beginning, the river was wide with a noticeable current. We were looking for the boulder garden at Red Willow Rapids but we paddled right over them. It was only then that we realized that the water levels were much higher than normal. After paddling through riffles and a couple of CII's, we reached Tromburg Bay.

Tromburg Bay/Willow Rapids

We headed west across Tromburg Bay in steadily deteriorating weather. The rain and wind from the north had made navigation difficult and we were looking for a small island among several. Luckily, the island had a small cove where we landed. We overturned the canoes, wedging them between the spruces and got a tarp up over the canoes, which gave some protection from the high winds and rain.

Next morning, we took extra time to dry out and fish a little. We were on the water about 11 a.m., heading into rapidly freshening winds. We did appreciate the warm sun! We crossed three progressively larger bays before our lunch stop and after lunch, one smaller bay before turning west into the river again. We ran the first CII and scouted the second before running it (while an eagle circled overhead, a fish clutched in its talons.) We made camp on Corson Lake and with stomachs full, admired the beautiful sunset.

Corson to Crooked Lakes

We got up feeling tired from the previous day's paddling but Graham revived us

with his wonderful pancakes. He says the secret is to stir the batter very little and to let it sit so it rises. After a short paddle, we reached the rapids at the outlet of Corson Lake. To our surprise, there was a big and well-used campsite that had not been mentioned in Laurel's book. She told us later that the omission was on purpose, because of bears drawn to the campsite by fishing offal.) Some of us ran the rapid, a CIII+ with a ledge. We were very glad for the spray cover. Further downriver, we decided to portage a CII, except that there was no portage. The water was so high that side channels were running through the trees. Knee-deep in muddy water, we manhandled the packs up to others standing on an embankment. Bill had reconnoitered and recommended a route through a burn area on higher ground. We left packs along the route to guide us. The footing was very bad, with deadfalls lying every which way in the burn. At the end of the portage, we had lunch on the pink granite rocks overlooking a bay where we could see the gigantic haystacks at the bottom of the main chute. It was a good spot for our fishermen. One more runnable rapid, a CIII/IV, with a small island in the middle and then we were in Crooked Lake. We paddled past a campsite with two boats on shore from the Hatchet Lake fishing lodge and took the next one down the lake.

That evening, we discussed our rate of travel, which was a little slower than planned. I was concerned about possible windbound days slowing us down further. We decided to keep our daily target at 23 km, to get on the water by 8:30 a.m., and to change pairings in the canoes in order to even out the rate of travel. It was decided that we should try and reach the Black Lake community by Friday evening, instead of Saturday morning, thus giving us more time to make our flight from Stony Rapid.

Crooked to Otter Lakes

Who needs an alarm clock? We were up shortly after 6:00 a.m., but just in case we were sleeping in, the bush pilot who was dropping off fishermen at the other campsite then took off directly toward us, flying overhead just above treetop height. We paddled into headwinds on

Crooked Lake, but this changed as we turned the corner and headed north. The river narrowed and we ran a couple of rapids, then rafted up for lunch as we paddled north on Waterfound Bay. We could see the CII/III rapid from a long way away and ran it unscathed after a long scout/discussion. We camped above Flett Rapids with rain threatening, so we got the tents and kitchen tarp up quickly. Sheltered from the ensuing shower, Bill cooked his spaghetti sauce with Korean mushrooms. What a hit! David caught another pickerel and Austin baked strawberry shortcake using the reflector oven. A 34 km day!

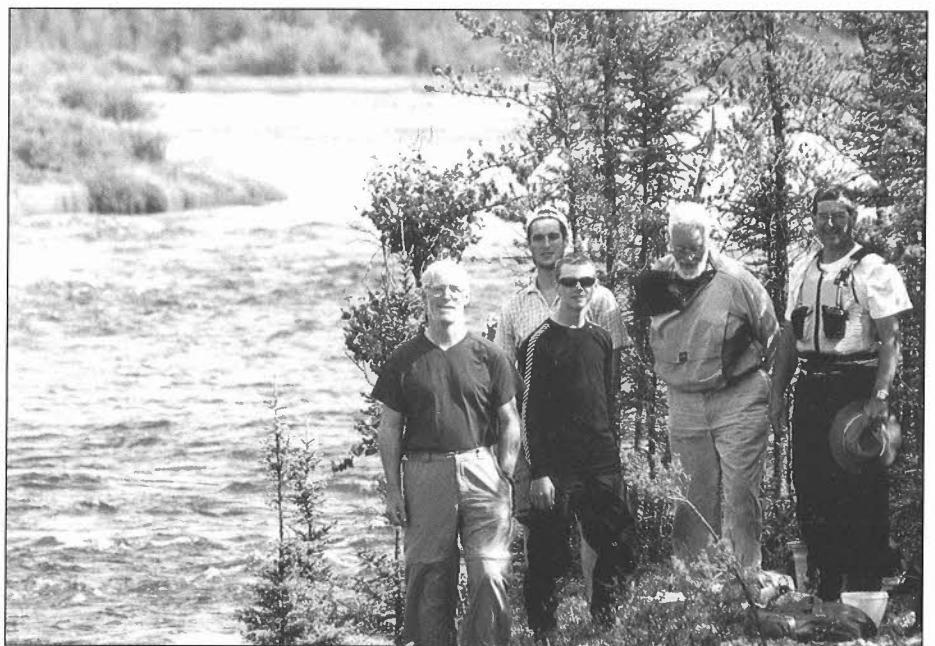
Flett Rapids were rated CI+ and was no problem. We paddled north on Kosdaw Lake, named for one of David Thompson's Dene guides and past Red Bank Rapids. It was a beautiful, sunny day and we stopped for lunch on high sandstone cliffs overlooking the river. We swam, snoozed, fished, and did laundry. The beautiful weather ended abruptly as we entered Otter Lake and we paddled north for 2 km into strong headwinds and driving rain and then turned west. The rain slowly abated and to the south we could see the sunlight beaming through a hole in the clouds – a beautiful vista. We camped on a beach in Otter Lake, one of Laurel's Five Star campsites and watched one of the most beautiful

sunsets ever, the water in the bay as smooth as glass, the birds (loons, gulls and arctic terns) finally silent. That night, Ian woke us all up so we could view the Aurora Borealis streaming overhead.

Thompson Rapids/Manitou Falls

We spent a leisurely morning on the beach, enjoying the sunshine. We baked muffins in the reflector oven and ate scrambled eggs, to which we added cheddar cheese, bacon bits, onions and Italian spices. Graham disappeared with the satellite phone to make a surprise call to his girlfriend on her birthday. Surprisingly, he had turned down our offer of a group chorus of Happy Birthday as a fine way to start the call. She said later it was the best birthday present ever.

We were on the river at noon. I struggled to remain calm about our late departure. Very shortly, we arrived at Thompson Rapids, where David Thompson had had his upset. It is in three sections: CII/III, CII, and CI+, which we ran after scouting. We ran a CI, CI, two CIs and a CII, and then proceeded cautiously, looking for the portage around the CIV ledge. It was on river left in a small inlet and it went up a 15-foot sandy embankment. A good campsite on the flat sandstone shelf overlooked the CIV. It looked fearsome, but



The group after lunch

then so did the portage; we dropped the canoes over a ledge and then we passed the packs down, holding onto each other in a human chain.

We soon reached Manitou Falls, with the take-out a few feet from the brink of the left channel. The falls are truly spectacular: the right channel, about 25-feet wide, barrels downwards, hits a sandstone cliff, then runs over another ledge as it turns left, converging with the left channel. A bend right, then another big drop of foamy, churned water to the big bay below.

Brink and Brassy Rapids

The next day, we passed Pilot's Lodge on river right, then came to Brink Rapid, a CII+ with ledges above the island and a long CII below. These are now "Austin's Surprise Rapids." Austin and I got to shore, but to their great surprise, Graham and Bill went over a double ledge, shipping a lot of water. Ian and David lined and Graham ran it again with Austin in the bow straight down the tongue into the haystacks below.

The scout at Brassy Rapid was difficult because of the high water, long rapid and the curve of the channel. It was really a CII+ and we shipped a lot of water, even with the spray cover. The impact of the big waves opened both of the spray skirts, even though these were secured around our waists. At camp that evening, we agreed the day's highlight was the peregrine falcon sighting.

Hawkrock and North Rapids

The next day, the sky was dark gray as we got on the water and paddled west into a light wind. After Hawkrock Rapids, an easy CI, we stopped for lunch. The rain was pelting down and the temperature was dropping. We decided to stop early that day, so we would be able to brew some tea under the kitchen tarp. The river channel widened and we turned north towards Table Rock. In North Rapids, we shipped a lot of water and bumped as we went over one ledge. We camped at Table Rock; the rain stopped and the wind helped dry everything on the clothesline. After the ham and macaroni and cheese, out came the reflector oven for fresh-baked

muffins with blueberries. Austin then took over and fried the two pike he had filleted. Delicious!

Perch Rapids

For breakfast, Graham cooked pancakes with fresh blueberries. We were on the river about 10:15 a.m., heading northeast through a widening channel. It was hot and sunny with no wind and we soon doffed our shirts. We rafted up for lunch, drifting a kilometer or so. Perch Rapid was a CII with two ledges, which we ran on river left. Below, there was a CI, then two CII's, both with ledges. Shortly after, we spotted a campsite on a point and came around it in fast current, intending to eddy out and scout the campsite. We startled a huge bull moose standing in the shallows and he turned and ran into cover; we could hear his huge rack striking the trees. By 7 p.m., the mosquitoes were gone for the night and the sun was low on the horizon as we watched Austin carefully fillet the fish to supplement our dinner.

Burr Falls and Black Lake

We left Moose Point after a breakfast featuring muffins baked with low-bush cranberries. It was warm and sunny as we proceeded northeasterly to the mouth of the Porcupine River and turned west. The river was wide, with many islands to manoeuver around. From some distance, we could hear Burr Falls and we strained anxiously to spot the portage. Happily, there was a red canoe at the take-out, drawing us in like a beacon. The portage, about a kilometer in length, ran through a bog, up a hillside and then it descended gradually to the river. The afternoon was very hot, but the bugs weren't too bad. We paddled up to the foot of the falls for photos and a few casts and camped on the shore of Black Lake, just east of the outlet of the river. As was often the case on this trip, the event of the day was the weather. As Austin cooked jambalaya for dinner in a pleasant sunny evening, we watched a huge bank of cloud over the north shore of the lake, many kilometers away. It gradually moved in, creating a sunset effect as it hid the sun. Underneath the cloudbank we could see rain falling. Behind us, cu-

mulus clouds were a brilliant white. Bill sat by the shore, capturing the scene in watercolour. All of a sudden, fierce, high winds struck, sending Bill's tent bouncing like tumbleweed. We battened down the hatches while Austin went on serenely with dinner preparations. The winds were very strong with a few drops of rain and then gradually the wind and the white caps on the lake subsided. Around 8:45 p.m., we were treated to a glorious blue and gold sunset, lined with burning orange along the western horizon. We went to bed early, planning for an early start around 5 a.m. on the big lake segment.

At 4:30 a.m., I awoke to the wind blowing strongly out of the northwest. There were white caps on the water, so, back to bed. We made breakfast around 7 a.m. and it looked calm enough for paddling. But, as we consumed another three-course breakfast, the wind rose steadily. It blew all day. We read, sat by the fire, fished, explored, snoozed, picked blueberries, and baked a bannock in the cake tin using the reflector oven instead of the big frying pan. The last hot chocolate disappeared at the mid-morning break. During the evening, the wind picked up again. We decided to pack up as much as we could and go to bed early, so that if the wind abated during the night, we could depart.

Paddling by Moonlight

By 12:45 a.m., the wind had died and the moonlight was bright. We quickly broke camp and got on the water. Navigating was simple. Keep the shore silhouette on the left and travel west. It was magical: the silver moonlight littered the water surface like flower petals, the moon shone overhead, and Mars was its brightest in 250 years (according to Graham.) The Aurora Borealis was spectacular: it felt like a special showing just for us. We bobbed along in a gentle swell, unable to anticipate the wave action. Not long after 2 a.m., a glow on the eastern horizon spread slowly behind us. We stopped around 5:30 a.m. and built a fire for breakfast, enjoying the warmth in our chilled limbs as daylight arrived. Bill announced 21 km as our progress and

everyone was encouraged. Back on the water, we paddled steadily, helped along by the swell. On the far right shore, we could see a lodge and the outlet to Fond du Lac, which leads to Elizabeth Falls. We gradually crossed over to the right shore in calm water and unloaded at the public dock at Black Lake, population 1,300. We made inquiries and some time later, Boniface Robillard arrived in his white Ford Excursion. He enlisted a colleague with a pick-up and soon we were bouncing along a dusty gravel road to the airport at Stony Rapid, 20 km away.

Stony Rapid/Points North

At the tiny airport, Trans-West Air said they could fly us back to Points North in a Piper Navajo, on a scheduled flight, provided we took only 600 pounds of gear. Luckily, it didn't matter that we were a day ahead of schedule. The rest of our gear would be flown to Lac La Ronge for pick-up on our way south. The flight was an hour, for just under \$1,000 for all of us. As agreed, Bill and I stayed behind at Points North base to await the truck transport bringing our canoes, while the other four made a beeline for the Saskatoon airport. (After final photos, of course.)

We were given a room in the ATCO trailer complex. The dinner served buffet style, was excellent. Bill was asleep before 8 p.m.

Trip Costs

The total group cost was just under \$2,700, excluding canoe rental and travel costs to and from Saskatoon. Thus, the per-person cost was just under \$450.00.

Conclusion

It was a grand adventure; for me, the highlight was the night paddle on Black Lake under the Aurora Borealis.



Words from Mr. Canoehead

Greetings all. I hope everyone is enjoying a fine November and are looking forward to the winter season and upcoming WCA events. Speaking of events, a fine time was had by all at the Fall Meeting at the Minden Wild Water Preserve and at the Wine and Cheese at the Toronto Sailing Club. Surprisingly almost 40 hardy souls braved the weather to enjoy the fall colours and to undertake a bit of paddling or hiking in Minden. The Wine and Cheese was a great success, as usual.

Regarding the Fall Meeting, a big thanks goes out to the trip leaders: Bill Ness, Ray Laughlen, Scott Card, and Martin Heppner (and his trusty sub-guide Bob Bignall.) Saturday evening found us all enjoying a hearty catered meal and the presentation by Joe Bourgeois of Akuni Adventures. His fascinating presentation, followed by a question and answer period, dealt with the concept of warm winter camping. If you were not in attendance and would like to experience this type of camping, be sure to check out the outings page as I see one is planned.

An additional thanks goes to Wendy Grater who gave a scintillating talk on a wide variety of adventures that her company Black Feather organises.

Last but not least, the AGM is coming up and we have one of your favourite speakers this year. Look for the application on the cover of Nastawgan and on the website.

Until next Nastawgan, happy padding dreams!

ADVENTURE ON THE UPPER BACK RIVER

by Daniela Kosch-Bell
Photos by Marilyn Sprissler



The group

JULY 4-26, 2005

Group members: Doug Bell, Bob Bignell, Stephen Catlin, Gene Chorostecki, Hendrick Herfst, Allan Jacobs, Marilyn Sprissler

The Back River flows north-eastward from the border of the Northwest Territories through Nunavut for 1000 km, and empties into the Arctic Ocean at Chantrey Inlet. It was first explored in 1834 for the Hudson's Bay Company by George Back.

The Back River has a powerful allure for experienced wilderness canoeists. Long, remote, with vast lakes and over 80 sets of rapids, it flows for its entire length

through uninhabited tundra. It is a river that can consume an entire summer.

Doug and I were happy to do the 'lite' version of the real thing, and to be taken back to Yellowknife by the resupply plane after three weeks, along with Stephen. Linda Gordon would fly in to join the rest of the group and continue on for another three weeks to the Arctic Ocean.

Doug and I had a very comfortable flight from Edmonton to Yellowknife on Canadian North, with hot breakfast served on real china – a holdover from a more gracious age of domestic air travel. Since we weren't involved in the complicated logistics of resupplying at

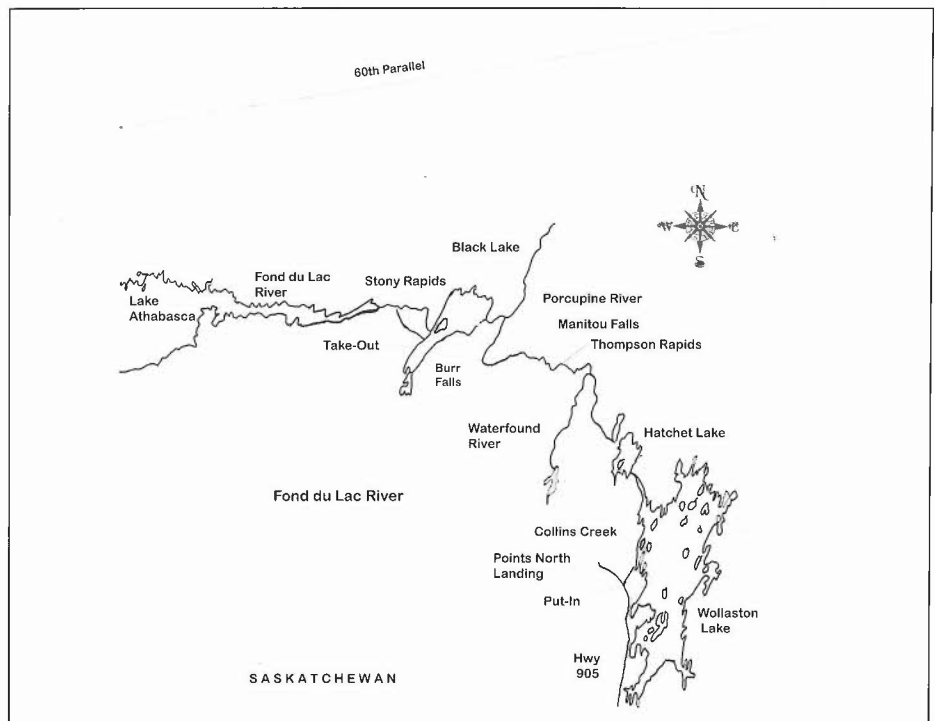
Mission Island, we explored the booming little city. With the same population as our hometown of Huntsville, 18,000, it boasts an impressive skyline of office towers and creative civic architecture. Big money is flowing up here.

July 5

Air Tindi took us to the floatplane base early in the morning. Once there, we had a few hours' wait until a fog bank along the route cleared out. This gave us a chance to look over Bob and Gene's rental canoe, which the staff assured us had been carefully checked out and was all in order. It was wrapped in ragged burlap sacks tied with twine, not inspiring much confidence. The

packaging proved to be more truthful than the verbal assurances. The canoe was not the Pakboat we'd been promised, but an ancient Ally folding boat which was much inferior. Not only was it too small for big Bob and Gene and their mountain of gear, it had no flotation, and several of the aluminum tubes that formed the frame had been left over the winter with water inside them and had burst like water pipes. To his credit, Boyd Warner quickly replaced the canoe with a gleaming, new, red hardshell, which looked very impressive at first glance. A closer look revealed the rocker of a whitewater playboat, an Esquif Canyon. Gene and Bob were a little dismayed, thinking ahead to the long stretches of wide, flat water and strong winds that would turn this banana boat into a weathervane, but it was too late to do anything about it now. The rest of us were glad we'd brought our own Pakboat folding canoes along!

Doug and I couldn't fit into the fully loaded Twin Otter and flew in a Cessna 185 instead. Our pilot was a young fellow from Ontario, an accountant by profession who flew bush planes "for relaxation." We flew under the thick cloud cover and had great views of the landscape. As we got further north and east of Yellowknife, the stunted trees of the taiga slowly gave way to treeless tundra, with more water than land, and caribou trails like long ribbons connecting the lakes. Ice started rimming the lakes, and soon some were totally ice-covered. After two and a half hours in the air, we flew over Muskox Rapids, a stretch of the Back River that we'd originally considered running but did not on the advice of George Drought, who warned us it could be iced in. And he was right, the river was a foaming, rocky channel cut through the icy banks. We started looking for the rest of the group at Jim Magrum Lake, thinking they'd be easy to pick out on the barren tundra, but they were nowhere to be found. After a second sweep of the lake, we saw a lone tent perched on a rocky outcrop below, with a lone figure pointing across the lake. Strange, we were supposed to be in an



unpeopled wilderness. Flying in the direction of the pointed arm, we saw six people waving at us, and landed for a happy reunion. There was a cold, strong wind from the northeast, unfortunately the same direction that we had to travel for the next 530 km

July 6

The clouds lifted by the time the boats were loaded and soon the sky and water were deep blue and perfectly calm. Just before getting into our canoes, I remarked that it would be nice to have a sign from the river gods that they would be kind to us. When I next looked into the water I saw a three-foot-long trout just off the sloping granite bank. It turned and meandered back and forth in front of us. If nothing else, the river gods seemed to be promising us good fishing!

We headed off for the river exit in high spirits, enchanted by the mirror-calm water, drinking in the beauty of the low hills and fractured rocks around us. Our bliss was interrupted by our first rapid, which was unrunnable. The rental boat was lined over a sharp ledge, but the rest of us in our fully loaded Pakboats chose to portage about 200 feet to a good put-in point. This

doesn't sound like much but our food barrels weighed 70 pounds and these rocks were huge, ragged, and sharp, strewn at awkward angles and tippy to boot. We got tired, hot and sweaty and were happy for the calm water for the rest of the afternoon. We made camp after only 19 km of river travel. We'd have to make it up later though, as we planned to put about 40 km a day behind us in order to reach our goal – Mission Island – in 20 days. That would leave four days for being wind-bound.

We felt grateful to George Drought for lending us his tundra tunnel, a large group shelter that can withstand arctic gales and has screened windows to protect us from voracious mosquitoes. We settled in and watched as the clear sky filled with mare's tail clouds.

July 7

Up at 7:00 a.m. and on the river by 11 a.m. By then the sky was covered in low clouds and there was a very strong wind from the northeast, our direction of travel. The river was wide, more like an endless lake, bordered by a cubist's landscape of fractured rocks. Lichens covered the exposed surfaces and beds of mosses, heather and dwarf shrubs;

azaleas, birch, willow and labrador tea, with tiny pink, yellow and white flowers covered everything else. We saw four muskox silhouetted on a ridge, their long coats waving in the wind.

We passed a long series of fuel drums and the remains of an old mining camp on the left shore, and then came upon the same tent we'd seen from the air, on the right. A lone white canoe was pulled on shore. No one was in sight. I boldly walked up to the tent and yelled "is anyone home." No answer. I yelled again, and a head popped out through the door. I explained that we just wanted to say a neighbourly hello before moving on. Robert Perkins emerged a few minutes later, pulling on a purple fleece against the cold wind. Some in our group knew him and had read his books and seen some of the movies he's made about the wilderness. He and his canoe, Loon, were spending their 11th summer on the Back River. He would get his reprovisions flown in to Mission Island on the same plane that was to take Doug and me out. We had a pleasant chat and pushed off.

The wind was getting stronger and the Esquif was falling behind. Bob and Gene were strong paddlers, but having to constantly correct the course of their playboat was tiring them out. We didn't want to go any further as the river was widening out into a large lake for the next 10 km and would have large waves and whitecaps. The shore all along here was littered with sharp rocks just below the surface and we'd seen no

easy landing spots since Perkins' campsite. We were lucky to find an adequate spot for our huge tundra tunnel and six tents and even found a tricky little approach through the boulderfield that guarded the shore. We'd only come 15 km today. Now we'd really have to make up the miles.

July 8

Rain and a strong northeast wind kept us in the tundra tunnel all day. We bless George and Barbara for their generosity in lending us this wonderful shelter.

July 9

We got up at 5 a.m., desperate now to make up the lost distance, and managed to be off by 8:30. We're getting faster and more organized at breaking camp. The wind was still blowing from the northeast. We saw Loon pass us early in the morning. By 11 a.m., we came upon Loon and the familiar tent again, but this time a large white sign was taped to the open wanigan, advertising lemonade for 5 cents, palm reading for 10, credit negotiable. We couldn't pass up an offer like that and pulled in. Robert served us all lemonade and didn't even ask for money. After another pleasant chat, we pressed on.

We were now passing by low ridges littered with dark rock slabs that looked like tombstones, leaning at odd angles and giving the shoreline the look of a ransacked cemetery. It was eerie. A white tundra wolf ran along the shore, keeping pace with us for about a kilo-

metre. Bob and Gene were having an exhausting time in the fierce headwind. Again, it was hard to find a good landing spot through the submerged rocks.

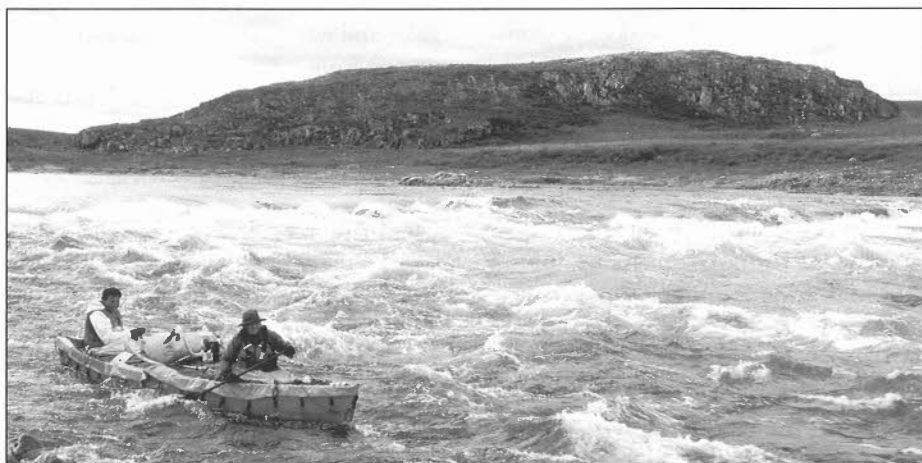
July 10

We ran a set of rapids labelled Malley Rapids on the maps. Reading from George Back's diary of his 1834 trip, his crewman Malley had gotten so seriously lost while scouting this dangerous rapid that Back named it after him. I couldn't square this with the level, easy terrain we were passing through.

We saw Loon waiting in an eddy. Robert must be paddling at night to avoid the wind. The sun was out now and we were happy to have him paddling with us. There were some great rapids, all of which we scouted and found safe routes through. According to Robert, the water levels were higher than normal, which explained the huge waves in the middle of the river and the lack of technical rock dodging.

We came to a long rapid which looked to have an easy route of dark water to follow. Since we couldn't see the end of it, we decided to scout from the canoe. There was always an obvious route through the boulders, and we just kept hopping from dark tongue to dark tongue, riding some high wavetrains, backpaddling and ferrying to pick the next route and then rollicking onwards. This went on for at least three km. It was exciting, not knowing what sort of surprises the river had in store for us, and left us feeling exhilarated when we finally reached flat water again. Robert thanked us for letting him join us; in all these years he'd never run this set of rapids: being alone he couldn't afford to take the chance of running into trouble and so had always lined from shore. We also determined that this must be the rapid Back had named after Malley.

The wind became so strong that we were making little progress, and by 4 p.m. we decided to pull into shore and wait for it to die down. Bob pulled out his fishing rod and hooked a 30" trout on the first cast. He played it like a pro, tiring it out to the point where he could just reach into the water and pick it up by the gills. It was a fat, healthy thing



Sneaking past the big stuff

and it fed the nine of us royally in a big shore fry-up. We relaxed in the sunshine until 7 p.m., when the wind died down enough to continue paddling. At 11 p.m., we set up the tents under a hot midsummer sun and had a great sleep.

We asked Robert why he comes exclusively to the Back year after year. He said he thinks of the Back as his summer cottage, a place where he feels at home. He explores the tributaries, hikes the endless rolling hills, writes books and makes movies here. He strikes us as a gentle, philosophical man with a droll sense of humour, great sensitivity and a rare skill for listening. Hoping to tap into his long experience up here, I asked him if this constant northeast wind was usual. He said it's a law of canoe tripping that the wind always comes from the direction you have to go in. And if it doesn't, you really have to pay for it later on. I also found out that he has never had a bad grizzly encounter but carries a can of bear spray on his belt at all times.

July 11

Hot and sunny. We had a wonderful breakfast of Dutch specialties thanks to Hendrick. There was a current now and we made good time to the mouth of Beechey Lake. Robert bade us farewell at this point, since the wind was now coming straight at us, and was too strong for a solo paddler. He'd wait until it died down, probably paddling at night. We put 15 of this beautiful lake's 50 km behind us and camped on the west shore, in the lee of the wind.

July 12

We'd expected to be windbound on this southeast facing lake, but fortune smiled on us and we awoke to a strong northwest wind and blazing sunshine. The tailwind created a thrilling 35 km stretch of surfing waves for us to ride down. We found a beautiful lunch spot on a hill on the left shore, with wolf dens, a carpet of wildflowers, and long lake views that could win photo contests. We reached the end of Beechey Lake by 4:30 and set up camp. We were all tired, but still managed to pack two loads to the other end of the two km portage around Beechey Cascade



All this in four canoes

Rapids. The falls at the end of the portage were awesome, with room-high jets of white water surging over and around huge boulders. I couldn't believe Al when he told me George Back had actually run his two-ton rowboat through this maelstrom. He must have had lower water levels. Al said the cascades looked just like they did in Back's original sketches.

July 13

Perkins pulled in just in time for breakfast at 7:30 and then set up his tent at the other end of the portage. We finished carrying our gear (two more carries) by 1:30, and set off downstream, tired already. A few kilometers later, I saw the undulating, cinnamon form of a grizzly bear racing along the shore, in Robert's direction. What was his hurry? Lunch?

We now had a constant current, the river bottom sandy and studded with smooth rocks. Since Beechey Lake we'd exchanged the sharp and forbidding angles of ice-fractured bedrock for glacier-smoothed boulders embedded in sand banks. High eskers and green hills created a soft, almost pastoral landscape. We rode some fun rapids, scouting from high on top of sand cliffs, avoiding the class IV waves in the middle and always able to find safe routes on river right.

July 14

Cap'n Al relented today and let us sleep in until 8 a.m. This pace was wearing us down. We set off at 11:15, a more civilized time. The river was starting to give us a break too, finally running at a great clip through high eskers and sand hills. The first 10 km after Angry Tern Island (named for the divebombing birds at our campsite last night) was a wild train ride through constant class I-II rapids. There was no need to scout, just try to avoid the really big waves and holes. Leading the way downstream, Bob and Gene showed us where not to go. By avoiding one big wave-train on river right, they went over a three foot ledge on river left. A huge, back-curling wave was waiting for them at the other end of the foaming hole, giving Bob a (by now much appreciated) bath and dumping a load of water into the stern. It took all their skill and experience to stay upright. Not only was their playboat unmanageable in a wind, their spraycover didn't have its rear opening over the seat, so Gene had to sit on his Pelican camera case behind the actual seat, and thus could never kneel. Bob had no stability either and was afraid of falling right out of the canoe whenever he had to do an aggressive brace.

We motored on at a good clip, passing now through sublimely peaceful

terrain. I could imagine cozy villages nestled into the distant folds of hills, as lovely as any landscape in old Europe. But for the latitude and the mosquitoes, this river, with its crystal-clear water and endlessly-beautiful vistas, would be overrun with vacation properties and real estate developers.

We watched as dark purple thunderclouds gathered downstream. We were used to clouds gathering out of nowhere and knew to watch the space between the clouds and the ground. When this would become foggy-looking, you knew the clouds were dropping rain, and depending on the wind direction and speed, you'd better get your raingear on or get caught in a sudden downpour. But these clouds looked more threatening, and soon lightning flashes and distant rolling thunder made it urgent to get off the river. The wind also picked up considerably. By 5 p.m., the tundra tunnel was proudly standing atop a sandbank and we were tucked safely inside. As with Moses at the Red Sea, the deluge passed by on either side of us, leaving us dry and puzzled by our good fortune. It started to rain during the night and the wind shifted to the northwest.

July 15: Doug's Birthday

The drizzle and strong northwest wind made us decide to stay put for the day.

Ahead of us was a long stretch of sand shoals and it would be too hard to read subtle currents and clues about water depth in this wind. Besides, we all needed the rest. We went for a hike on top of our sandbank. I was delighted to find a healthy crop of *boletus edulis* growing in the sandy soil. The constant wind had cracked their velvety brown caps and their white flesh was firm, dry, worm-free, and delicious. I had no trouble recruiting assistant mushroom hunters, and soon we had enough for soup, dinner, breakfast and a load for drying later on.

I came back with my haul of mushrooms to see two yellow kayaks pulled up on shore. In the tundra tunnel I met Hans and Hans, both from southern Germany. They were kayaking 1,400 km from Sussex Lake to Gjoa Haven, repeating a trip they did in 1979 in 25 days. Championship whitewater kayakers, they were full of amazing adventure stories. After joining us for a lunch of wild mushroom soup, they regaled us with tales of kayaking from Greenland to Cornwallis Island and meeting polar bears and walrus en route, of killing a caribou for food on the Horton with a river knife strapped to a paddle when their float plane was unable to pick them up, of walking away from a plane crash on Baffin Island after the rescue team arrived to start a wild exploration

of the class IV/V McKean River, and other jaw-dropping adventures. Hans Schneller had given a presentation at a WCA Symposium a few years ago, so Al and Bob remembered him from that. Al remembered German he hadn't used since his post-graduate year in Hamburg, and Marilyn, Hendrick and I were also able to speak to them in German. They must have been a little surprised to find no language barrier out in the barrens. They were certainly surprised by our gala birthday dinner that night, with a huge fresh greek salad, a birthday cake with candles, and lots of wine. Their comment was, "so this is how it's done in the Canadian wilderness." They themselves lived on ultra light freeze-dried packages and vitamin pills.

July 16

To make up for the lost day, we were up a 6 a.m. and off by 9 a.m. We had sunny skies and a cold north wind, perfect conditions for drying my surplus of mushrooms, now strapped to the bow in a mesh bag. We had a great current and came 20 km in just two and a half hours. The river braided around sandbars, creating vast shallows that would dead-end in sandflats. It took precise assessment of where the water flowed the fastest and stayed the darkest to avoid taking a blind channel.

We saw a white wolf pulling something heavy up from shore. It stopped when it saw us and when I gave a wolfhowl, it started to furiously drag this thing up over the sandbank into hiding. Must have thought we were competition. It reappeared over the ridge to check us out more carefully and then sauntered back to its meal. A little further on, a lone yearling caribou stood on the shore, watched us for a while, and then trotted off with ballet-like floating steps. On the other shore, an old buck stood with its head hung low, the huge rack seeming too much to carry. It made a melancholy sight as it limped along, another wolf meal in waiting.

The Hanses had told us about a series of rapids coming up that would be challenging at these water levels. There



Our canoes on the beach

were at least five sets, some actually swifts but made 'interesting' by the size of the waves and back eddies. The waves in the center of all these rapids were too big to run, but we found safe routes along the right shore in every case. We had to line some of the rapids, often having to drag the fully loaded Pakboats over sharp rocks, sometimes up to our thighs in swirling water, always aware of the danger of slipping and getting injured. Tired out, we were relieved when we reached the Bailley River, but disappointed when we found no campsites for the next 4 km. It was 8 pm when we finally saw the Hanses' orange tent set up on a hillside. We pulled in to join them. They were happy to see us and greeted us with a thermos of hot tea, helping us set up our tents and telling us how tough we were, they didn't think we'd make it this far in one day. We'd been paddling and hauling canoes over rocks for 11 hours. The Hanses had gotten caught in the sand shallows and lost many hours wading back to deep water. They must have a more difficult time reading the subtle currents and water colour from their low perches in the kayaks.

July 17

Sunny, light winds, puffy little clouds. A perfect day. Before setting off this morning, I mixed up a yeast dough in a large Ziplock bag. We were running low on fresh bread. Stored in the bow under the spray cover, it rose at an alarming rate in the heat. The occasional whack with the butt end of my paddle kept it under control. The mushrooms were continuing to dry in the mesh bag, and the world seemed a comfortable place.

We passed through more rolling esker and sandhill country, and continually had to watch for currents and water colour to avoid ending up in blind channels or stuck in shallows where we'd have to get out and drag the canoes. There was another subtle clue we learned to watch for: the slight tilt of the river as it split around large sand islands. It was barely perceptible, but there was a downhill slope to the side where the water was running the deepest. A channel with a shallow blockage



Fishing break on the river

at its end would cause the water to pile up slightly. It was fun trying to choose the correct route. We came 37 km in seven hours, enough for one day.

July 18

More sunshine, puffy clouds, light winds. This is Big Sky country. Sand, sand and more sand. Four muskox came over the brow of a hill but turned back once they saw us. Doug and I, having chosen a faster channel around a long island and coming out ahead of the group by several minutes, decided to pull in to shore and hike to the top of a distinctive, pingo-shaped hill we'd been seeing for miles. It was the highest point on the river and would have fabulous views.

After 12 days of mainly sitting in a canoe, it was invigorating to walk up this 40-m cone of a hill. A family of Canada geese flapped off from the very crest when we arrived, honking and coursing gracefully over the water-speckled landscape stretching out below us. Turning 360 degrees, we could see the interlacing, silver ribbons of the Back down which we had just paddled and then the blue and brown network of channels and shallows the river made on its journey. Far from being a desert of dry hills, the landscape on either side of the river was a tracery of ponds, lakes and streams,

more water than land. A small, stone cairn marked the very summit, and someone had left a glass bottle there, now stuffed with bits of folded paper. The top ones revealed that there had been several other groups on the river this year. The most impressive message was from a group of four who had brought 22 liters of wine for their three-week trip. The other canoes had kept on going and were now mere dots in the distance, so we ran back down, flapping our arms and laughing like kids.

The wind shifted and picked up at midnight, flapping the tent and making it hard to sleep. It also started to rain.

July 19

A blustery north wind blew cold rain-showers in sheets. Nonetheless, a decision was made to break camp and head on. The strong winds and choppy waves made it especially hard for Gene and Bob to manage their playboat. After just four miserable kilometers, the group decided to pull over and find a campsite. It was a sanddune area, with just enough cover from the large dunes to cut the wind a little. We set up the tundra tunnel first and then our little tents in its windshadow, looking like a big, blue mother bear with cubs in tow. Cold and wet, we found some comfort in the tundra tunnel, making hot soup,

sipping tea and reading for the afternoon. There was some talk of setting off again if the wind let up, but when Stephen looked out of the tundra tunnel to see the Esquif bobbing on the opposite shore, the wind having blown it away, a rescue trip had to be mounted. It took so much energy to paddle back against the wind while dragging the stray canoe that we all decided to stay put for the night.

July 20

A miserably cold wind blew in scattered rain showers all day. More sandflats and route finding, but there was a strong current and we were making good time. There were now large wavetrains where the river bent around rocky outcrops, the outflow always resulting in large boils and strong eddylines. Together with the wind it became a challenge to negotiate these stretches.

We saw the rocky canyon of Hawk Rapids in the distance and prepared for a wild ride. There was so much water flowing over these rapids that all we had were large waves and tricky outflows to contend with. The red, granite cliffs rose about 50 feet on either side of us, and as we passed the mid-section of the canyon, a hawk-like bird soared over the brow to look down on us. It was just like the sketch

George Back had made of this spot 170 years earlier, his hawk possibly an ancient forebear of ours. We had seen no other hawks so far.

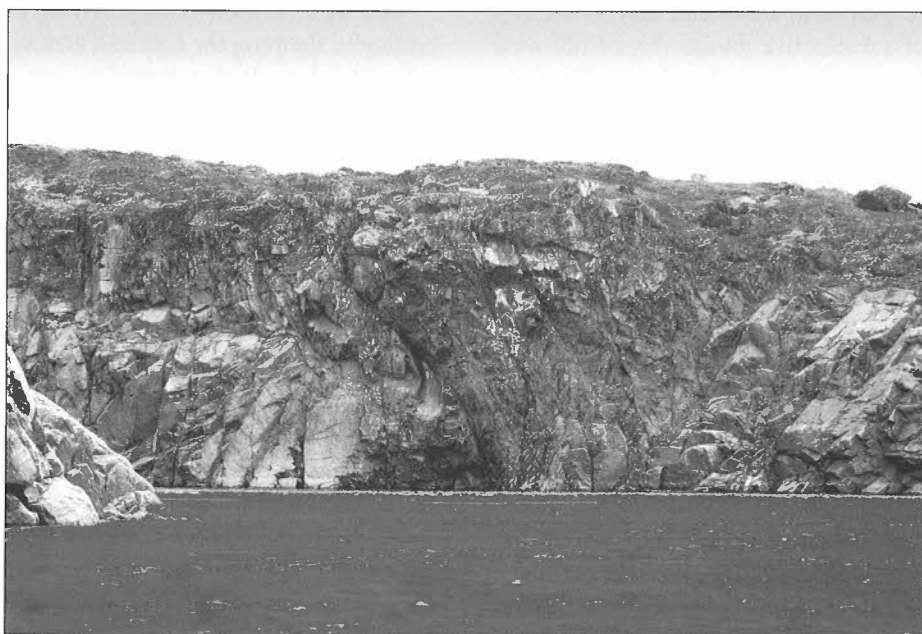
This was the most spectacular scenery of the trip, and after passing through the rapids so nicely, we thought we should stop and catch some trout. The odd dorsal fin slicing through the water's surface here whetted our appetites. Allan and Stephen wanted to push on and find a campsite, so Doug and I agreed to follow them and have the other two canoes meet us there when they'd done enough fishing.

The water was high and running fast, and the river kept bending around rockfaces, creating huge wavetrains, boils and eddies. There was a steep gradient all along this section and although there were no rapids, it proved to be, by far, the most treacherous part of the trip. At one point, the river seemed to stop dead at a rock wall. We just couldn't see where it went! A boulder ledge on river left forced all the water down a steep incline and into the wall on the right, and then it bent right back in a tight U shape. The turbulence this created was phenomenal. We saw Allan's canoe spin around in a circle but they stayed upright and we also managed to stay upright and out of the eddylines as we were tossed

around by the boils.

With relief, the river stopped bending so much and we had a straight, fast run. Just as we started looking for a campsite, we heard frantic whistle blows. We looked behind to see Hendrick waving his paddle in a circle (our signal to turn around), and then saw the capsized Esquif, with the tiny figure of Bob floating ahead of it in the racing current. A neoprene boot and a hat were floating toward us, and we picked them up as we did an upstream ferry to get Bob. Gasping for breath and exhausted, he managed to hold on to our bow as we ferried him to shore. He was wearing a wetsuit and told us he was fine. Upstream of us, Hendrick and Marilyn had reached Gene and convinced him to let go of the canoe so they could get him to shore as well. Downstream, Al and Stephen grabbed hold of the canoe, but had trouble getting into eddies, the upside-down canoe always getting sucked back out into the strong current. We jumped back into our canoe to help them, but about half a km downstream of Bob, they managed to eddy out.

The shore here was a miserable boulderfield with no chance to make camp. It was cold, sunless, and very windy. All the kitchen gear was in the capsized canoe. Not aware of the bad shape Gene was in, we thought they would just walk down to where we were, and we'd go on until we could find a good place to dry out. When they weren't coming, I walked back over the boulderfield to see what was going on. Marilyn and Hendrick had gotten Gene into dry clothes and the three of them were huddled under a sleeping bag. He had stage two hypothermia, was shaking uncontrollably and was very weak. Bob was standing in the cold wind, insisting he was fine. Nobody's dry clothes were large enough to fit him anyway. I walked back down to the capsized canoe and told them we had to get Gene warmed up first. After lining the Esquif back, we realized that the contents of the wanigan, including the Coleman stove, were soaking wet and useless. Stephen ran back over the boulderfield to get his dry campstove so



Entrance to Hawk Rapids

we could get some hot tea for Gene. By the time he came back, Gene was already feeling recovered enough to continue, so one last romp over the boulderfield and we were all on our way.

Bob and Gene had tipped in the treacherous U-bend we'd all had trouble on. They'd swum about four km before we heard Hendrick's alarm. It was a good thing they hadn't stayed behind to fish after all, or we wouldn't have been around to help rescue them or their gear. They were in the frigid water for about 20 minutes, and Gene told us he got so cold he thought was going to die, unable to get to shore or to make anyone aware of his predicament.

July 21

Another cold, wet, and windy day. We paddled 35 km today. Gene and Bob looked very uncomfortable in the Esquif now, afraid this hellish boat would spit them out again whenever the wind kicked up waves or the river made boils. More channel reading, sandbar wading, and turbulent bends with big waves and boiling outflows. A five-foot-wide whirlpool opened up beside us, scaring me mightily as it moved under our canoe, like a living thing trying to swallow us up.

That night I went for a little walk after everyone had gone to bed, to enjoy the post-sunset glow. Looking towards the ridge just behind our tents, I saw a large, dark shape gliding smoothly along the crest, like the back of something very big. Much too big and solid for a bird. I quickly retreated back to the tent.

July 22

More intermittent drizzle and strong gusty wind. After paddling no more than a kilometer from our campsite, I saw a huge, cinnamon colored grizzly bear, closely followed by a smaller, darker one, galloping in the direction of our camp. They disappeared over a sandhill, just as two white wolves appeared, also galloping, just ahead of where the bears had vanished. Were they checking us out last night?

We made good time, being careful to read the currents properly, any miscalculation putting you into a slower cur-



Gentle current, sunshine and no bugs

rent at best and into a sandflat or boulderfield at worst. It became fun to 'read' the river like a book.

July 23

More cloud, wind, and drizzle. During a rare sunny break at noon, we passed by the couple from Idaho we'd met at the float plane base. They were surprised we'd come this far already. They were taking their time, hiking and exploring tributaries.

Bob and Gene had made the difficult decision to end their trip at Mission Island too. Their original plan was to rent our Pakboat for the second half of the trip, but our Ducky had even less cargo capacity than the Esquif and would be much too small and overloaded for the two of them.

That evening, I was desperate to have a bath and wash out some clothes. My hands and feet have been so cold for so long that the river water actually felt warm. I'm getting tough and lean.

July 24

More cold wind, cloud and drizzle. The cold hands and feet are tolerable when I'm paddling and working hard, but once we stop for lunch, the cold creeps in and creates much misery. Those with warmer footwear like to linger and take little hikes, to my dismay.

Once in Pelly Lake, the scenery became especially beautiful, with islands dotting the silvery water as far as the eye can see. The strong tailwind let us make good time to Pelly Monument. Exploring the island, I understood why Pelly's great-great grandson erected the cairn and bronze plaque here to honor "the governor of the Hudsons' Bay Company, and ardent supporter of arctic exploration." This high spot has commanding views of the most pristine and beautiful of arctic landscapes.

Since the waves were building and we still had to cross some very long, exposed stretches, Allan suggested we have the floatplane pick us up here. There was an excellent, sheltered landing site for a plane. Gene had, however, regained his zest and confidence and wanted to push on to Mission Island. We compromised and agreed to paddle to a low island a few km further east, still within backtracking range if the wind should become too fierce to continue.

July 25 - Mission Accomplished

After breakfast the wind died down, the whitecaps diminished, and then it magically started blowing from the northwest, the only direction that would afford us shelter! Someone must have done some divine intervening to get us

to Mission Island.

We quickly broke camp and headed on. We'd soon crossed the narrow, 20-km-long northfacing arm of Pelly Lake and stopped at a long-abandoned Inuit hunting camp. Built on an high promontory, this had obviously been a hunting camp for eons. We saw many ancient tent rings, their lichen-covered stones sunk deep into the ground. The modern descendants of these nomadic hunters had left behind less picturesque reminders: rusted fuel drums, plastic gas cans, bits of disposable diapers, oil space heaters, and most bizarre, what looked like an electric heater rusting away inside the gutted, plywood cabin. The only traditional items were two wooden komatik sleds slowly being reclaimed by the ground, two rusted leghold traps, and many bleached bones and wolf skulls.

I was glad to get back to work after another excruciatingly cold lunch-break. The scenery here was beautiful, with high sand and gravel islands dotting the vast lake, steel grey water with glittering spotlights where shafts of sunlight caught the ripples, and scudding low clouds. Such clear air, clear water, and pristine land. This felt like the last place on earth where there is such a vastness still unaffected by human activity.

Pelly Lake seemed to develop a current now and we saw a constriction in the distance, its disturbed water crested with white spray. This must be Pelly Rapids, where the lake flows into Upper Garry Lake with a significant elevation drop. George Drought's maps indicated these rapids were easy, to be run on the left. Doug and I were enjoying an easy, gliding rhythm and had been paddling ahead of the others all day (much like a horse heading back to the barn). So we sized up the rapids from the water. We saw a steep but smooth drop over a 3 ft ledge, with an obvious tongue being the only safe-looking route through. Large standing waves with white tops formed at the end of this tongue. We whooshed down the smooth initial drop, and then I was face to face with a towering mountain of black water, from the

trough it must have been five feet high. It hadn't looked nearly that big from the top of the rapid. Our wonderful Ducky rode up the rising wall of water, broke free at the top and plunged back down into an abyss-like trough, only to ride back up another wall and do it all over again. We watched as all the other boats rode the wild rollercoaster safely. Bob, now paddling bow with Hendrick in a Pakboat, was buried in a wave that came up to his chest and gave him yet another bath. Marilyn and Gene in the Esquif looked much more tossed around by the waves than the Pakboats did. Everyone came through fine, a big confidence booster and a great sendoff for the five of us leaving the river tomorrow.

Our goal was now only 12 km away, a trifle after what we'd covered to get this far. Yet it seemed an endless paddle. Finally Mission Island presented itself, a high, round pudding on a rim of pure sand, floating in a glittering vastness of silvery water. Paddling to the south side, a long cove of Caribbean sand opened up to view, with Father Bulliard's cabin perched on top like a beacon. A large glacial erratic marked the entrance to this magical cove, the triangular boulder looking, for all the world, like a bishop's mitre. A fitting guardian for the place where the French missionary planted his hopes of converting the nomadic Inuit. The few families who passed by here on their seasonal hunting trips made a disappointing parish. He must have been seduced by the poetic beauty of this spot. The father mysteriously disappeared in 1956. The fact that he is still officially a missing person, and that the thick RCMP file on him is sealed for 125 years makes his case an intriguing subject for arctic researchers.

Once we'd rounded the mitre point, we saw a familiar orange tent and the two Hanses coming down the hill, greeting us with broad grins, hugs and yet another thermos of hot tea. This was a delicious brew of peach essence and black tea, sweet and almost alcoholic tasting. Hans told us to take all of

their supply of this German freeze-dried product, they wouldn't be needing it anymore. They had gotten so delayed by taking the wrong channels in the sand shallows that they now had no hope of reaching Gjoa Haven by August 14, and would fly back to Yellowknife tomorrow. Also, they admitted they'd been inspired by our 'more comfortable approach' to take it easy and enjoy the experience, rather than constantly pushing themselves. I didn't know that was the image we were projecting!

Their impression was that the water levels were much higher than in 1979, when the Back had flowed in a well-defined channel. They also said Hawk Rapids was much more technical then and now it was flooded out. That would explain why no one had warned us about the extreme turbulence and tricky water downstream of Hawk Rapids.

We borrowed Hans's sat phone to call Air Tindi about our changed pickup point. They had a tiny solar battery charger that let them stay in regular, chatty contact with family in Germany, whereas we were concerned about our batteries running low and tried to keep conversations down to telegram briefness.

Back in Yellowknife, we were told that, so far, this had been the coldest, wettest summer they could remember. We later found out that the Back had not been kind to several of the groups canoeing on it this summer. In hindsight, the river gods actually had been looking out for us.

It took a few days to get over our weariness once we were home but then we felt strong and incredibly fit. We were shocked when we got on the bathroom scales and saw how much weight we'd lost, despite eating lavishly. We also thought nothing of paddling 20 km to get a cup of coffee in Dorset (worth every paddle stroke.) It seemed like child's play. An arctic expedition like this is very costly up front and sometimes very tough, but it pays big dividends in the feeling of sheer vigour and well being it leaves you with afterwards. We're already looking forward to the next one!

Movie of the Year **An Inconvenient Truth**

Former U.S President Al Gore's prophetic and compelling view of the doomed future of our planet.

Climate change as a result of carbon dioxide (CO²) emissions is not conjecture or theory, it is a fact. Contrary to some propaganda that it is a natural process and we need not worry, the facts prove that the planet is warming at a very fast rate due to CO² emissions which have increased profoundly in the last 50 years and will continue to do so. Everyone can help. What can you do?

Change a light: a compact fluorescent light saves 150 pounds of CO²

Drive less: for every mile you don't drive, you save one pound of CO².

Recycle more: by recycling half of your household waste you can save 2,400 pounds of CO² per year.

Check your tires: proper inflation can improve gas mileage more than 3%. Every gallon saves 20 pounds of CO².

Use less hot water: use a low-flo showerhead and save 350 pounds of CO². Wash your clothes in warm or cold water and save 500 pounds of CO².

Avoid products with packaging and reduce garbage by 10%: and you will save 1,200 pounds of CO².

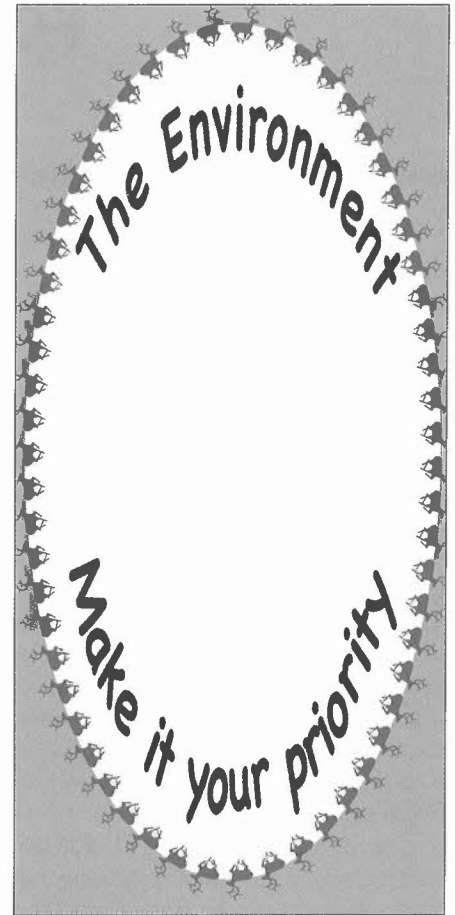
Adjust your thermostat: by TWO DEGREES and save 2,000 pounds of CO² per year.

Plant a tree: because it absorbs ONE TON of CO² in its lifetime.

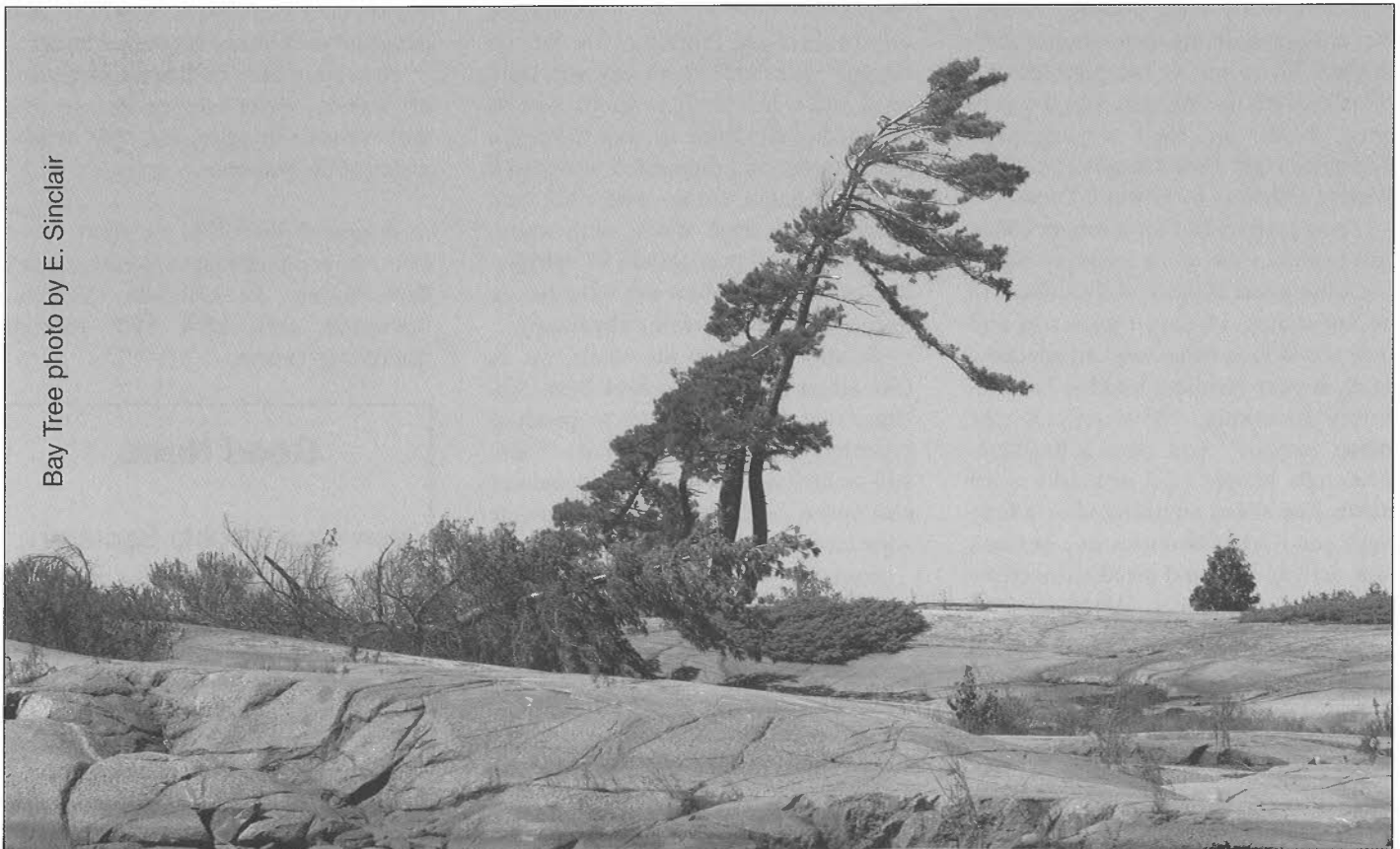
Turn off electronics: when not in use and save thousands of pounds of CO² per year. ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (DVD case.)

Get the DVD
Learn the truth about climate change.



Bay Tree photo by E. Sinclair



FOOD FOR PADDLERS

Easy Meal Preparation for Tripping

The following was submitted by Cathy Gallately, a long time WCA member.

Apparently a canoe expedition, for many, creates an opportunity to utilize and expand their culinary skills. Personally, the last thing I want to do when I'm canoe-tripping, especially after a long day on the water, is to spend hours cooking when I could be enjoying my surroundings. That's not to say I don't enjoy a good meal. When we first started tripping, we used the freeze-dried foods that were available. We were a lot slimmer in those days partly because we were hungry most of the time since the food tasted horrible and we didn't eat very much of it (hmm ... maybe we should go back to freeze-dried foods).

Our introduction to the food dehydrator changed our way of preparing trail foods. At the outset we dried everything imaginable. I recall lugging home a 50lb (23 kg) bag of potatoes and Hans and I spending many days peeling, slicing, blanching and drying them. It took years to use them up and we had potatoes with most everything. We also found a very good book on food drying: *The Complete Light-Pack Camping and Trail Foods Cookbook* by Edwin P. Drew.

Food preparation for a longer canoe trip usually starts with trying to figure out what kinds of meals will continue to be appetizing 14 days into a trip and how much food constitutes an adequate meal. If your paddling buddies have resorted to asking, "What colour's the mush tonight?" you have a problem. Although people will generally scarf down just about anything after a long day's paddling, differences in a person's size, activity level and metabolism create varying requirements. When we size meals we start with a recipe for six and assume that it should be enough to feed three hungry paddlers. This rule however does not apply to oatmeal as there always seems to be plenty left over that eventually finds its way into the fire. (Why do people assume that because I'm

Scottish I enjoy huge quantities of oatmeal at breakfast?)

With the exception of the first meal, breakfasts and dinners are dehydrated and vacuum packed. Simplicity is the reason. Instead of specifically preparing meals for a trip, we cook larger portions for dinners at home. That way we have a meal at home and we also load the dehydrator at the same time. In the field we start re-hydrating meat dishes after breakfast using hot water and a zip-lock bag storing them safely in a container inside the food barrel. At camp, we employ the one-minute-boil method. That is, we bring the contents to a boil for one minute and let stand before serving. It is important to keep all the ingredients a uniform size, especially the meats, both for effective drying as well as re-hydrating. A word of advice, do not rehydrate dried pasta and rice with the meat. The resultant mass is useful only in its application as an emergency canoe repair material.

The secret to drying meals successfully is to remove any fat. I know some of you guys are thinking, "no fat, no flavour", but honestly, it can still taste good and is less likely to spoil. A roast, trimmed of all visible fat, run through a meat grinder and then dried works well for meat-based dishes like chili and spaghetti. A meal made with store-bought ground beef should be refrigerated overnight to allow the solidified fat to be skimmed off before dehydrating.

To add texture to the meals, we do take along additions such as fresh cabbage, carrots, onions, etc. to produce crunchy side dishes and salads. These will be limited by the weight allowances and space available after the requisite wine has been packed in.

Some of our more frequent meals are spaghetti sauce and pasta, chili with corn bread, Hungarian goulash with rice or noodles, Mexican burritos and shepherd's pie. Since the primary reasons for canoeing in the high Arctic are the scenery, the wildlife and the paddling and not necessarily the food, we try not to get overly elaborate with our meals. It's

important to have a meal that: 1) can be made with a minimum of pots, utensils and fuss; 2) is fuel efficient by not having to boil or simmer for hours; 3) is filling and appetizing 4) leaves some room for dessert where one can get creative.

We don't usually dry individual items for later assembly since we find it cumbersome. Many of these items can be purchased already dried at a bulk food outlet. We do however cook rice and pasta at home and dry it. This gives us the opportunity to add spicing and flavouring at home and make our own tastier version of a minte rice side dish. Other staples like bacon are readily available pre-cooked and vacuum bagged, and they are relatively lightweight. Vegetables are also very easy to dry, especially if you buy them frozen and simply scatter them on the drying trays and dry them overnight.

As you can see, our approach is minimum fuss. We start preparing for a trip a couple of months beforehand and since we dry regular home-cooked meals, it really isn't any extra work. Any fresh food items are packed just before we leave.

Next time out try dehydrating some of your favourite recipes and serving them to your buddies. You may be surprised at the response.

If you would like to share your favourite tripping recipes, please contact Barb Young, 12 Erindale Crescent, Brampton, Ont. L6W 1B5; youngj-david@rogers.com.

Good News

New Membership Secretary
Welcome to
Anne Bradley
from all of the WCA

Anne's contact is:
annebradley@sympatico.ca

NAHANNI: A RIVER SONG

By Bob Henderson

In the summer of 2005, the Henderson family and some friends paddled the Nahanni River from Rabbitkettle Lake to Nahanni Butte. It marked a likely end to when family canoe trips were solely determined by parent's plans. Kid agendas have taken over.

Heritage on the river is synonymous with Raymond M. Patterson's 1954 book *The Dangerous River*. Patterson tells of his 1929-30 travels. But he also fuels the many stories that had made the Nahanni the dark river of fear. Added to this were sad Klondike Gold Rush alternate-route stories. Few made it this way to the Yukon Gold fields near Dawson in the late 1890's. Prospecting stories in the 1920's, too, seem to end badly, creating place names such as Deadman's Valley and Headless Creek. I'd thought, what could I possibly add to Patterson's rich treatment and descriptive prose of the river?

Then there was the insurgence of modern travelers gainfully serviced by regular bush flights and commercial operators, Nahanni River Adventures and Black Feather in the main. Books, articles, conservation and park (and now park extension) initiatives all add to the bulk of coverage of this noble and frankly not so dark and fearful river. Again what could I add? But, once on the trail, Patterson's *The Dangerous River* seemed to sing out to us. Quotes from my spring read in preparation were punctuating notes. Verses and stories came alive on the trail and the chorus was the overall sense of sharing (like so many) in the fast flowing canyon and mountainous river. This is a well-traveled river; Headless Creek be damned. More than once I caught myself borrowing the chorus from other river

songs as I sang my way down the river: "And we go on and on, watching the river run." Thus, what follows are some of our 2005 Nahanni songs with the usual heritage emphasis.

First off, I'm one of the rats to whom

by canoe. As rats go, I think we canoeists can be okay for this river particularly if we get involved in current park extension efforts bent on preserving the river's watershed, not just its cosmetic corridor.

Another punctuation-exclamation mark is R.M. Patterson's thought when conveying the plan to go, when all is maps and geography and dreams. Patterson wrote: "Sometime soon I would do that (explore the South Nahanni, traveling upriver from the Laird River). Strangely enough, I never doubted that I could, though exactly what I proposed to use in place of experience has since often puzzled me. "Here is a noble learner's enterprise in keeping with a favourite idea for explaining experiential education. That is, "Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly." (Thanks to Whitehorse friend Dave Brown for that one). Patterson is a learner. He learns and describes tracking up river beaches, tackling a major upstream ferry below Virginia Falls, learning to live and travel through a Nahanni winter and interpreting the crazy Nahanni chinook havoc-



Scow Creek

Patterson's partner referred. In agreeing to join R.M. Patterson, Gordon Matthews is quoted as saying: "Any country, where the Indians are still hostile and you can shoot moose from your bed and mountain sheep with a pistol is well worth seeing before the rats get at it." I hope Gordon Matthews and Patterson might come to accept us modern rats who fly into the country generally, not to mention flying into the river proper. Toronto to Yellowknife in one day isn't bad. It took John Franklin and company, in 1818, over a year to cover this distance

ridden weather. We, as a family, were learners too in this grand country, far removed from our Canadian Shield base. Big water, like the Figure-of-Eight rapids conjured up butterflies flying in formation. We only hoped the formation matched the right river run. We too did an upstream ferry below Virginia Falls to enter Fourth Canyon. It was entered with a degree of uncertainty, shared with R.M. Patterson. Weather: black clouds and blue sky; the uncertainty was invigorating. Patterson had Albert Faille, a well-established trapper and gold seeker to lit-



Exploring Faillie's cabin

erally show him the ropes – the upstream tracking ropes to be exact. We had Patterson.

A few verses from our river song showcase our Patterson connection. We planned a full day hike at Scow Creek. From our camp on the river it looked ambitious. It was. Four thousand steady feet up and down with an on-your-knees finale caused the odd family member to experience a meltdown. Later we'd read Patterson's telling of Gilroy and Hay carrying heavy loads and Hall traveling light. All had their own melt down with upriver paddling work: "They had had enough rivering to do them for quite a while," said Patterson. The prospecting partners hiked up Scow Creek with plans to ridge walk over to the north and west and descend into the legendary Flat River gold strike (an unproven claim). The lighter-laden Angus Hall had his second melt down in frustration with the slow pace of his packhorse partners. He headed off with a rifle and a mosquito net and was never seen again – a stern lesson for the melt down type. I can almost see him now storming off in a huff along that well-defined ridge as the others, wiser and alive another day, struggle on below with supplies. We returned to our spaghetti dinner, thankful we didn't have to: 1) travel upstream; and, 2) devote copious time to hunting. Dessert was a chocolate cake that night as I remember. Not that Scow Creek needed

more than its own rocky personality to be memorable, but the story does help etch the place in my mind.

Patterson shares accounts of building a winter-over cabin across the river from Prairie Creek. Wheat Sheaf Creek, named by R.M. Patterson for a friendly house that lay beyond the seas, is well described as an area rich in hunting, well supplied with game and fine trees for building. We visited the site with expectations of connecting further with Patterson's story. Cabin foundation outlines proved difficult to discern but to our glee, we did discover an old wood stove, surely one that warmed the souls of these two northern traveler dreamers. Such tangible discoveries did add crescendo to our river song. Later we frantically fought the current above The Splits to visit one of Albert Faillie's cabins. I most enjoyed the bench near the edge of the river perfectly located for viewing the sunset. While Albert never did find gold over decades of travels up from Fort Simpson, few would argue that his experience hadn't been golden. The riverside bench helped me secure this view.

The chorus was that everyday connection of Patterson to the river and to us. R.M. Patterson wrote: "Never in my wildest dreams had I hoped to see anything like this." First Canyon, he noted, was two days travel upstream, days he must have experienced as overwhelming for work and visual pleasure, not to men-

tion relief from the mosquitoes in the lower river flats. We floated First Canyon stalling our progress to delight in our passing as much as possible. I'd imagine Patterson, Faillie and others tracking on the beaches, jumping over to the side of the river to the next beach. Hmm, what would they do here? No beach, sheer walls, fast current. Imagine the delight of their down river run at seasons end.

Patterson wrote of his first meeting with the awe-inspiring First Canyon: That passage through the Lower Canyon was the sort of thing that comes to a man perhaps once in a lifetime if he's lucky. The scenery is the finest on the Nahanni and the weather was perfect – clear, with cold nights and blazing hot days. And it was all strange and new: rounding a bend was like turning a page in a book of pictures; what would one see, this time and would this next reach hold, perhaps, some insuperable obstacle? But it never did, and always one found some way around by means of some new trick with the line or the pole. We were lucky too, with weather and good company and no obstacles. I would have changed places with Patterson here to spread more time in this canyon and to sing his true song of exploration.

So the Nahanni song, certainly my song here, is one well connected to Patterson's *The Dangerous River*. Punctuation, verse and chorus, the book meets the river well and provides a lasting testimony to earlier times when Nahanni travels were an up and down full season affair. Indeed, my favourite part of *The Dangerous River* is the winter travel section not addressed here.

In reviewing the overall river song now months later, I am reminded of a lyric by Ian Tamblyn concerning the Yukon River. It fits well. Gold is gone, gold remains. Patterson and Matthews, Faillie and perhaps even the llost Angus Hall in the hills above the river and legendary headless McLeod brothers found little to no gold but gold remains. Patterson wrote of his gold in flowing pages and Faillie's river-edge bench at his river left cabin before *The Splits* sang the gold of countless sunsets with a coffee and a dream for a good quest and zest for life. We all should be so lucky.

WCA OUTINGS

JANUARY - JUNE 2007

**WANT TO ORGANIZE A TRIP AND HAVE IT
PRESENTED IN THE SPRING ISSUE?**
Contact the Outings Committee before February 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 — I paddle whitewater nearly every weekend all year through, as long as I can find water that's liquid. Local mid-winter thaw runs are great, as are winter trips south. 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 **KOLAPORE UPLANDS SKI TRAILS**

Dave Sharp, 519-846-2586 — Join us and ski on a complex network of trails through the beautiful winter woods near Collingwood on an outlying part of the Niagara Escarpment, along the eastern edge of the Beaver Valley. Suitable for strong intermediate to advanced skiers. I am at Kolapore most weekends, snow conditions permitting, so anyone interested in joining me at any time can call me.

All Season **WINTER IN HALIBURTON COUNTY**

Ray Laughlen 705 754 -9479, rlaughlen@gmail.com — Ski/snowshoe Haliburton County area. There are many great groomed ski trails here plus thousands of acres of crown lands to bushwhack. Any thing from a bowl of chili by the wood stove to some 'cold tent' winter camping. I'm willing to provide help with guidance, logistics, organization, equipment etc. Weekends or weekdays.

All Season **ALGONQUIN PARK WARM WINTER CAMPING**

Frank & Jay Knaapen, 613-687-6037 — We will once again be setting up the winter tent on the East side of Algonquin Park. This large tent sleeps up to 6 people on a comfortable straw bed and has an interior wood stove for warmth and cooking. We are flexible if you would like time solo or a guided tour.

January 6 **HIKE NATUASHISH TO UNGAVA BAY**

Lecture by Pat Lewtas, introduction by George Luste. Public welcome. McMaster Hospital (MUMC) Ewart Angus Centre, Room 1A1 8:00 p.m. For more information go to <http://nebula.on.ca/hamiltonassoc.ca> or The Hamilton Association for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art. Herb Pohl was a member of this organization. Also see the memorial at this site.

January 20 **PADDLERS' PUB NIGHT**

Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471 gisela.curwqen@utoronto.ca by January 20 to register so that we can book sufficient space. Meet 7:00 p.m. at Toronto's Bow and Arrow Pub, 1954 Yonge Street

(second floor,) just north of Davisville subway station, on the west side. Join other paddlers for an evening of food and drink and good cheer to chase away the January blahs. It will be a great chance to get together and plan next season's adventures and re-live last summer's outings. This event is jointly organized by the WCA and OVCK, and in previous years has been well attended by members of both clubs.

January 26-28 **SILENT LAKE CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING**

Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca, book before December 30 — Come and enjoy a snowy winter weekend skiing at Silent Lake. We will stay two nights in a toasty warm yurt with a wood-burning stove, and cross-country ski the trails and explore the park right from our front door. Limit six intermediate skiers.

February 3 **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING FIVE WINDS TRAILS**

Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca, book before January 20 — Come out for a day and explore our winter wonderland on the marked, ungroomed wilderness trail system in the scenic Gibson River area. Varied terrain. Limit six intermediate skiers.

February 2-3 **WCA WILDERNESS CANOE SYMPOSIUM**

Allan Jacobs allan.Jacobs@sympatico.ca, Annual conference applications will be mailed soon via snail mail or download a copy from the WCA website. Speaker list will also soon be available.

February 17 **ANNUAL AGM**

Aleks Gusev, aleks@gusev.ca, Mountsberg Conservation Area. Guest Speaker: Robert Perkins, author and filmmaker. Also, tour Mountsberg's birds of prey sanctuary. Lunch provided. See the back cover of Nastawgan for an application or make a copy from the WCA website at wildernesscanoe.ca. Registration for members \$35, non-members \$40 by Feb. 1, 2007. See the in Nastawgan for directions.

February 17 **PRETTY RIVER PARK NATURE RESERVE SKIING**

Bob Fisher, 416-487-2950 or weekends 705-445-9339. Book before February 8. Try a day of cross-country skiing, that's different in the undeveloped part of the Blue Mountains, south and west of Collingwood. The Pretty River Park Nature Reserve has no groomed or trackset trails, but interesting bush trails and logging roads. Great views from the Niagara Escarpment across Lake Algonquin, which dried up about 10,000 years ago. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Orchard Lodge of Osler Bluff Ski Club, lunch on the trail. Limit 6 intermediate skiers.

April 21 BIGHEAD AND BEAVER RIVERS
Fred Oliff, 519-624-2328, foliff@gto.net, book before April 14—
Please join us for these classic southwestern Ontario spring runs; these short sections are not that familiar to those from the Toronto area who prefer to go east for their Beaver Creek fun! The Bighead section drops about 125 feet in the 5 kms from the put-in to the take-out at Meaford on Georgian Bay. The Beaver River is a little longer and we run the section from the lowhead dam (which can be run) from Slabtown to Thornbury. We usually end our fun at the Lecky Canoe restaurant in Meaford. Intermediate paddlers with outfitted boats only. There is a limit to 6 boats. These two rivers will both be done on the same day and are completely water-level dependent.

April 27-29 SPRING TRIPPING IN ALGONQUIN
Andrea Fulton, Email Andrea Fulton, 416-726-6811, book as early as possible. ——— Let's get out there before the black flies do! Join me and my two teenage daughters for an easy weekend trip in Algonquin Provincial Park. This will be an easy flatwater trip with a few portages. I plan to camp Friday night at Arrowhead Provincial Park, just north of Huntsville off Highway 11, and then do a quick overnight trip into Algonquin's interior on Ralph Bice Lake for Saturday and Sunday. Limited to 9 canoeists.

April 28-29 SPENCE'S CELEBRATED SALMON-MOIRA WEEKEND
Glenn Spence, 613-475-4176, book after January 25 ——— Just north of Belleville, these two rivers offer exciting whitewater and fine scenery. The Salmon is the more gentle run, with some small rapids for you to practice your skills. The Moira has larger rapids possibly up to class 3. You can bivouac at my house and enjoy a potluck dinner. These are two of Southern Ontario's finest spring rivers. Intermediate paddlers welcome. Limit six boats.

April 28-29 SPRING IN MUSKOKA
Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca, book before April 10 ——— We will paddle some lakes yet to be decided and experience the returning birds and discover other flora and fauna emerging from hibernation. Maybe we will find the first turtles or the last cranberries, as in previous outings. We'll hike and explore the surrounding area and clean up portages and campsites along the way. Limit four canoes.

May 5 MINESING SWAMP
Ray Laughlen 705 754 -9479, rlaughlen@gmail.com ——— Join us for this slow-paced trip downstream from the Willow Creek put-in to Edenvale. We can check out the heronry, osprey nest, early spring migrants and maybe some furry critters. Suitable for any paddlers.

May 12-14 SPRING CLEAN UP VOLUNTEER WEEKEND
Andrea Fulton, Email Andrea Fulton, or call 416-726-6811 Book as early as possible. ——— Nancy Maddock and Kevin Callan have organized a Spring Clean Up weekend and are calling on volunteers across the province of Ontario to come out this weekend and do what you can to clean up our canoe routes. I encourage all WCA members to do our part! Although there is a prize for the largest group participating, I prefer to minimize campsite impact and will limit this outing to 9 participants. There are other prizes as well for such accomplishments as the most garbage collected, longest portage cleaned, etc. For more information contact paddlerscleanup@rogers.com. Or, if you'd like to join me on my trip, contact me directly!

May 19-21 LOWER MADAWASKA RIVER
Larry Durst, 905-415-1152 or ldurst@devoncommunications.com, book as soon as possible ——— Join us for the 7th annual spring paddle/ wine and cheese party, and find out why mostly sane, reasonably intelligent and somewhat mature persons subject themselves to the vicissitudes of spring camping.

We paddle from above Aumond's Bay to the take-out at Griffith, a distance of only 28 km The pace is leisurely with only the Sunday being a full day of paddling and most of that spent on the Snake Rapids section of the river. Lots of time to play, chat, and nibble! Rapids will range from Grade 1 to 4, and there are a couple of short portages around falls. Water is likely to be quite high and cold. In the past we have had sun, rain, hail and snow- all on the same day, so participants will need to dress and pack appropriately. Suitable for intermediates. Limit 6 boats. Suggest you book early if you really want to come as this trip sells out every year.

May 26-27 INTERMEDIATE WHITEWATER CLINIC
John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca, book before April 21 ——— This is the tenth year of our clinic, which is designed to help improve your basic skills. We will paddle the Lower Mad on Saturday and practice our basics skills at Palmers Rapids on Sunday. The emphasis will be on front ferries, eddy-outs, and peel-outs. Your paddle strokes will be critiqued. You will also have an opportunity to practice self-rescue techniques. Open to properly outfitted solo and tandem canoes. Wetsuits or drysuits will be needed. We will camp at our cottage.

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Andrea Fulton, Email Andrea Fulton, 416-726-6811, book as early as possible. ——— Let's get out there before the black flies do! Join me and my two teenage daughters for an easy weekend trip in Algonquin Provincial Park. This will be an easy flatwater trip with a few portages. I plan to camp Friday night at Arrowhead Provincial Park, just north of Huntsville off Highway 11, and then do a quick overnight trip into Algonquin's interior on Ralph Bice Lake for Saturday and Sunday. Limited to 9 canoeists.

April 28-29 SPENCE'S CELEBRATED SALMON-MOIRA WEEKEND
Glenn Spence, 613-475-4176, book after January 25 ——— Just north of Belleville, these two rivers offer exciting whitewater and fine scenery. The Salmon is the more gentle run, with some small rapids for you to practice your skills. The Moira has larger rapids possibly up to class 3. You can bivouac at my house and enjoy a potluck dinner. These are two of Southern Ontario's finest spring rivers. Intermediate paddlers welcome. Limit six boats.

April 28-29 **SPRING IN MUSKOKA**

Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca, book before April 10 ——— We will paddle some lakes yet to be decided and experience the returning birds and discover other flora and fauna emerging from hibernation. Maybe we will find the first turtles or the last cranberries, as in previous outings. We'll hike and explore the surrounding area and clean up portages and campsites along the way. Limit four canoes.

May 5 **MINESING SWAMP**

Ray Laughlen 705 754 -9479, rlaughlen@gmail.com ——— Join us for this slow-paced trip downstream from the Willow Creek put-in to Edenvale. We can check out the heronry, osprey nest, early spring migrants and maybe some furry critters. Suitable for any paddlers.

May 12-14 **SPRING CLEAN UP VOLUNTEER WEEKEND**

Andrea Fulton, Email Andrea Fulton, or call 416-726-6811 Book as early as possible. ——— Nancy Maddock and Kevin Callan have organized a Spring Clean Up weekend and are calling on volunteers across the province of Ontario to come out this weekend and do what you can to clean up our canoe routes. I encourage all WCA members to do our part! Although there is a prize for the largest group participating, I prefer to minimize campsite impact and will limit this outing to 9 participants. There are other prizes as well for such accomplishments as the most garbage collected, longest portage cleaned, etc. For more information contact paddlerscleanup@rogers.com. Or, if you you'd like to join me on my trip, contact me directly!

May 19-21 **LOWER MADAWASKA RIVER**

Larry Durst, 905-415-1152 or ldurst@devoncommunications.com, book as soon as possible ——— Join us for the 7th annual spring paddle/ wine and cheese party, and find out why mostly sane, reasonably intelligent and somewhat mature persons subject themselves to the vicissitudes of spring camping.

We paddle from above Aumond's Bay to the take-out at Griffith, a distance of only 28 km The pace is leisurely with only the Sunday being a full day of paddling and most of that spent on the Snake Rapids section of the river. Lots of time to play, chat, and nibble! Rapids will range from Grade 1 to 4, and there are a couple of short portages around falls. Water is likely to be quite high and cold. In the past we have had sun, rain, hail and snow- all on the same day, so participants will need to dress and pack appropriately. Suitable for intermediates. Limit 6 boats. Suggest you book early if you really want to come as this trip sells out every year.

May 26-27 **INTERMEDIATE WHITEWATER CLINIC**

John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca, book before April 21 ——— This is the tenth year of our clinic, which is designed to help improve your basic skills. We will paddle the Lower Mad on Saturday and practice our basics skills at Palmers Rapids on Sunday. The emphasis will be on front ferries, eddy-outs, and peel-outs. Your paddle strokes will be critiqued. You will also have an opportunity to practice self-rescue techniques. Open to properly outfitted solo and tandem canoes. Wetsuits or drysuits will be needed. We will camp at our cottage.

June, date TBD **MOVING WATER FOR TRIPPERS**

Jon McPhee, 905-640-8819 & Bill Ness, 416-321-3005 ——— Good moving water canoeing skills can enable trippers to safely and enjoyably run sections of whitewater that they would other-

wise have to portage. These skills can open the door to paddling more demanding remote rivers with confidence. While most whitewater clinics focus on whitewater playboating skills, we thought members would like an opportunity for a weekend clinic at Palmer Rapids on the Madawaska River that would emphasize the challenge of moving water in river tripping canoes, and present situations that the paddler in a loaded boat on a river trip would have to deal with. We also want to ensure that the level of instruction optimizes your learning experience. Consequently, we would bring in a couple of very senior ORCA instructors to teach this clinic. There would be a cost in the range of \$60-\$80 per participant, and you would be responsible for your own equipment, meals and camping fees. A Royalex canoes, as well as proficiency in the basic strokes, are required. The charge covers the instructors' fees only. At this point, as this is a new educational offering, we are putting forward this proposal to see if there is sufficient interest to proceed in organizing further.

If you would be interested in such a clinic, please email bness@look.ca.. Please include weekends in June that you would be available. If there is sufficient interest, those expressing interest will be notified of dates and given the opportunity to commit. If not everyone can be accommodated, preference will be by date the original email indicating interest was received. Members only please.

June 4 – 24 **LOWER MISSINAIBI RIVER**

Gary James 416-512-6690, gary.james@sympatico.ca, and Mary Perkins 905-725-2874, mary.perkins@sympatico.ca, book by Feb. 15. Plans are in the works to canoe the lower section of this famous Canadian Heritage River from Mattice to Moosonee. Dates include time in Moosonee and Cochrane at end. The start and return dates are flexible. Must have some previous whitewater and wilderness tripping experience. Give us a call if interested for details. Limited to four canoes.

June 9 **GRAND RIVER**

Doug Ashton (519) 620-8364, doug.ashton@rogers.com, book by May 31. ——— This popular trip down the Grand River offers a local leisurely day from Cambridge to Paris where it passes through scenic farm country. This trip is suitable for novice paddles with some moving water experience. An excellent family trip without any portaging.

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.

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