



*Our campsite at the Ekwi River confluence; July 9*

## **Tsunami in the North Keele River Trip July 2007**

**Text by Marilyn Sprissler**

**Photographs by Marilyn Sprissler, Bob Bignell, Allan Jacobs**

Following several years of intensive summer canoe trips, I welcomed Bob Bignell's suggestion of a more leisurely canoe trip, a far-north river with great scenery, relatively easy paddling and great hiking. The Keele River has its headwaters in

the Mackenzie Mountains near the Yukon – NWT border and flows eastward from there to the Mackenzie River, travelling through towering mountain vistas for most of the river's length, only coming down to the lowlands of the Mackenzie Valley in

the last two days. The Keele has no technical rapids per se; however, it flows extremely fast, has some sections with quite high standing waves, and has several major boils. It is rated a class 2-3 river by some outfitters, probably because of the speed and the boils.

Five of our group of six had paddled together on previous trips: Bob Bignell, Allan Jacobs, Linda Gordon, Hendrik Herfst, and Marilyn Sprissler. Joining us was Jean-Claude Lessnick. With the exception of Hendrik, all were WCA members.

### **General Logistics**

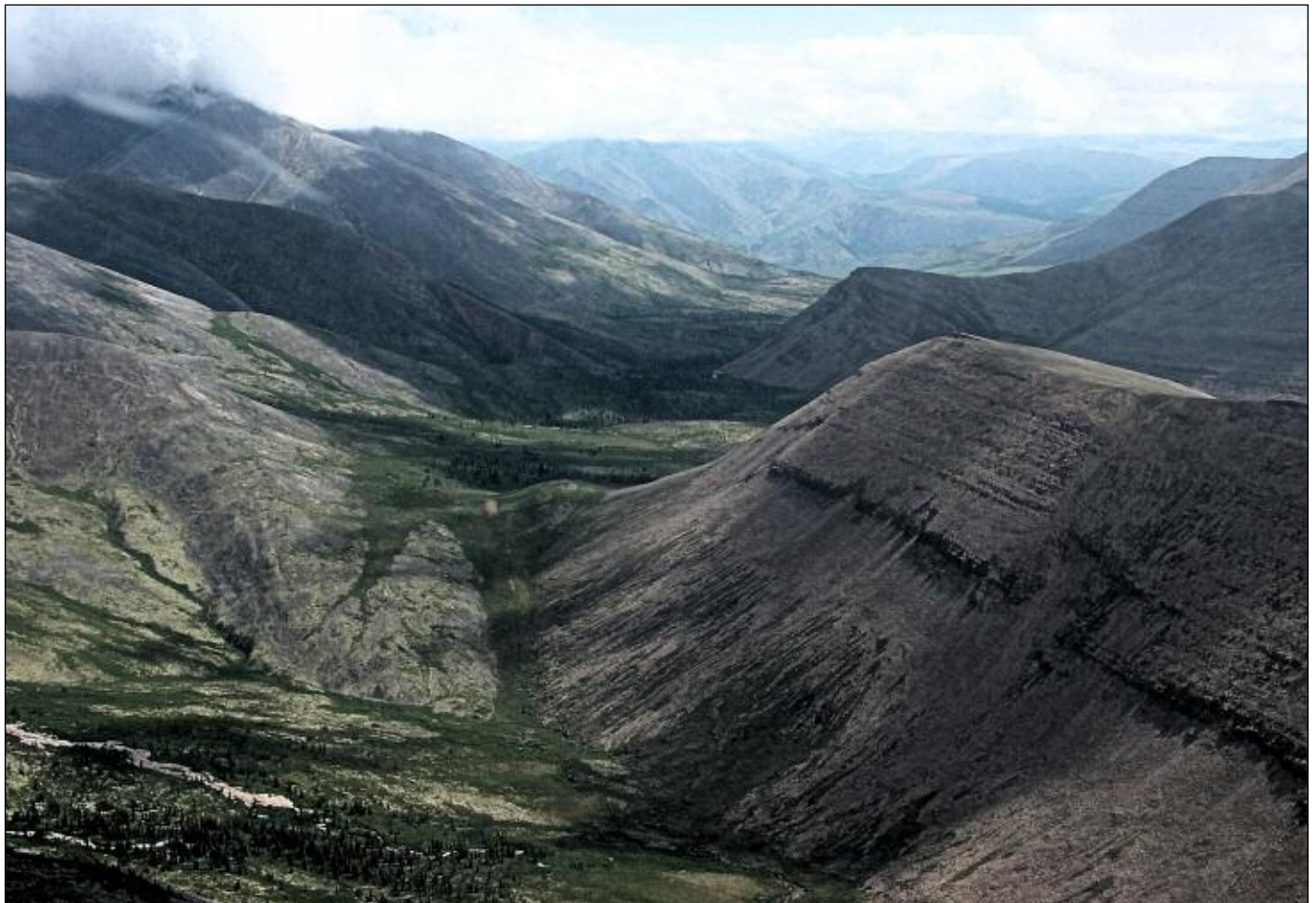
This approximately 235 miles trip can comfortably be done in two weeks, but since our plan was to allow lots of time for hiking, fishing, exploring, and relaxing, we planned on 19 days (July 3-21), including our fly-in day. Our origi-

nal plan was to meet in Norman Wells, take a charter flight with North Wright Airways (<http://www.north-wrightairways.com>) to the Keele, starting just below the confluence of the Natla and the Keele, paddle down the Keele to the Mackenzie, and then paddle downriver on the Mackenzie to Norman Wells, thus eliminating an expensive flight out and providing us with an opportunity to experience the Mackenzie River. However, upon learning from Rick Meyers, a local outfitter, that on one or two days out of every week, it is almost impossible to paddle downriver on the Mackenzie because of high winds out of the north, we decided to paddle on the Mackenzie only as far as Tulita (previously named Fort Norman) and take a boat ride the rest of the way.

With the new airline regulations only allowing 50 lbs for checked luggage, it

is becoming ever more difficult and expensive to fly with canoeing gear, so Hendrik and I drove my Dodge Ram truck to Yellowknife, taking with us quite a lot of gear. We were able to leave the truck parked at the Yellowknife airport free of charge for the entire three weeks because the ticket meters there had been out of order for a couple of years. To get from Yellowknife to Norman Wells, it is necessary to fly since there is no summer road access, so we flew with Canadian North who still allowed two 70 lbs pieces of checked luggage. The remainder of the gear we shipped with us via Air Cargo.

We arrived a day before the rest of our group and were picked up in Norman Wells by North Wright staff and shuttled around by them so that we could pick up last-minute items. In addition, we rented one canoe and sprayskirt plus



*View of the Mackenzie Mountains as we flew in; July 3*



*View of the area around Delthore Creek on our first hike; July 5*

some other gear from Rick Myers. Rick was extremely helpful and also advised us about the normal wind and weather patterns in the area, so at the last minute we changed our plans to include a pick-up by Rick in Tulita. This turned out to be an excellent decision.

Our pre-trip knowledge of possible campsites and highlights was limited, since we had been unable to find much concrete information ahead of time. But at the cabin where we spent the night we had the good luck of meeting two young fellows, Rob and Taylor, who had extremely detailed information about the trip since Taylor's dad has run many trips down the Keele River (<http://canoenorthadventures.com>). So Hendrik and I spent several hours with Taylor poring over maps, getting information on campsites, hot springs, boils of note, and other assorted tidbits of information.

### Days 1-3 Getting Started

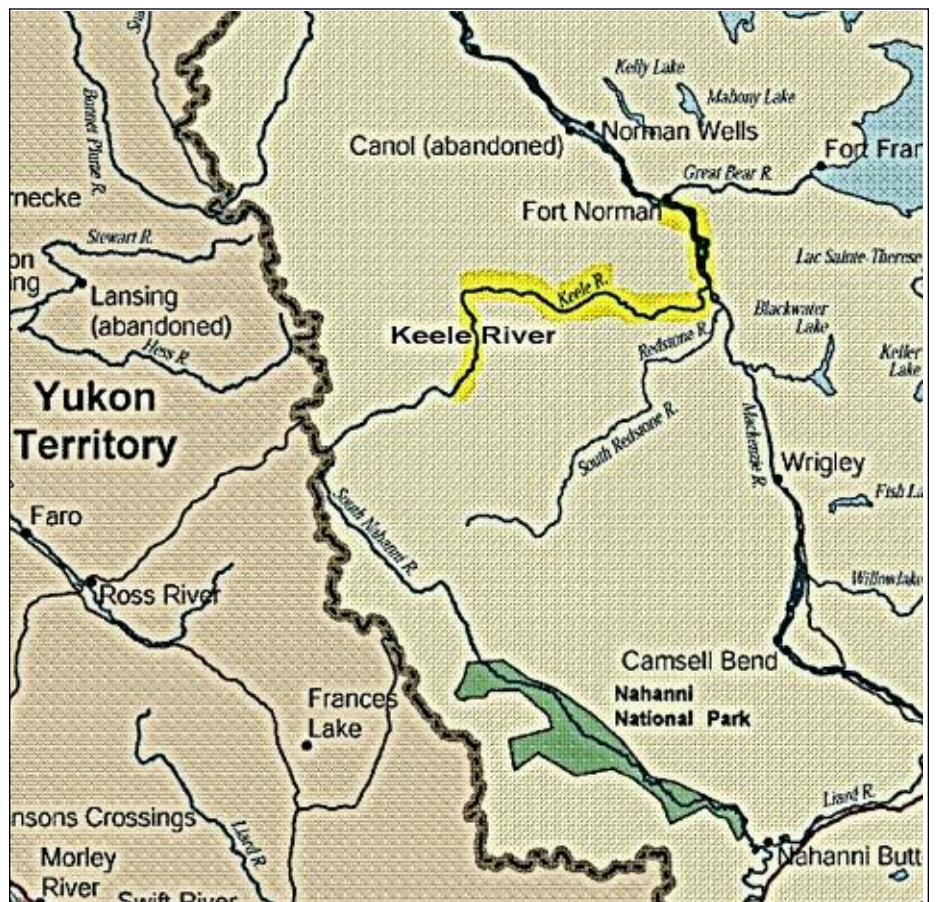
After innumerable delays in Norman Wells, everything was finally loaded into the North Wright Twin Otter and we took off. It was a fairly short flight, about 30 minutes, during which we flew over some spectacular terrain – first the

Mackenzie River, then some low flattish areas, then some of the Mackenzie Mountains, which are threaded by braided rivers in the valleys. The mountains were all extremely dry and barren, consisting mostly of sand, gravel, and rock. We were thrilled to spot two herds of Dall sheep on the high plateaus. Our landing was noteworthy as we swooped in and bounced like a rubber ball throwing water up in all directions: first bounce about 20 feet, next about 15 feet, then a series of gradually smaller, reverberating bumps till we were finally taxiing smoothly on the river. Everything was then ejected from the plane with lightening speed and within 15 minutes the plane was in the air again and we were left standing there.

After a considerable delay while we assembled our two Pakboats, organized everything, and loaded all three boats, we were finally able to push off down the river. Our first planned campsite was not far down the river by Delthore Creek

and Mountain and we already had a good current of about 5 mph to help us, so in less than an hour we were able to pull in and set up our campsite.

We stayed at this first site for two more days enjoying hiking, fishing, reading, Sudoku, and generally having a wonderful time in the mountains. Our whole group did a little hike up Delthore Creek, had a lunch, and then returned. The following day two of us hunted for a crossing point of the rushing, icy Delthore Creek and finally found a spot that was not as dangerous as most of it. We managed the crossing using makeshift staffs and then climbed almost 2000 feet on Delthore Mountain and were treated to sublime views and a panoply of wildflowers. We maintained contact with our base camp (and the rest of our group) via VHF radios, another of Bob's great ideas. On the return trip we were treated to a close-up view of a magnificent bull mountain caribou with a huge rack.





*View on the hike up Delthore Mountain at about 2,000 feet above our campsite; July 6*

#### **Day 4-6 Shezal Canyon, Orchids, Nidhe Brook**

As we continued paddling downriver, the current picked up a lot more speed. It was now flowing at about 9-11 mph and we realized that the Keele and all the creeks and rivers feeding into it were in full flood. This made for extreme speed heading down the river.

According to our source of information, Taylor, the water was normally very clear and good for drinking, but due to the flooding we found it very silty within a couple of days. Also, a couple of the giant boils that Taylor had warned us about were non-existent.

Taking advantage of our extra time, we stopped and hiked up various creeks, including the creek coming out of the Shezal Canyon. We didn't make it to the canyon itself as it was quite far upstream but were treated to numerous

wildflowers, especially dryas, on the gravelly meadows.

On a couple of other hikes we discovered a lot of orchids. Everywhere along the upper river are stupendous views of huge mountains, some sweeping from high alpine right to the water and many with beautiful colours. At our Day 4 campsite we stayed on a gravel island, which would probably not be an island at normal water levels. We had Fortress Mountain for our side view and Mountain Plateau across the river from us with a giant multi-coloured talus slope falling from mid-mountain all the way to the base. To top it off, we discovered, after much searching with binoculars, a few Dall sheep high up in the alpine.

**Day 5** saw another late and lazy start. The combination of having lots of time

and daylight till 2 a.m. meant our time was totally flexible. After spotting a helicopter going back and forth, we assumed there must be a mining camp nearby and sure enough, shortly after we pulled over there were some geologists, drillers, pilot, cook etc., a total of 15 at the camp. They were looking for copper for a company named Kaska, wholly owned and operated by First Nations.

At the camp was an airstrip and all the amenities – long distance phone free to anywhere in North America, wireless internet by satellite (\$75 per month for both!), satellite TV, etc. etc. They were all very friendly and invited us to their kitchen and offered us fruit, drinks, cookies, etc.

The “large waves” that Taylor had mentioned, we did not see. The mountain scenery continued to be fantastic, dry and rugged. One of the areas looked a lot like hoodoos.

We camped at beautiful turquoise Nidhe Brook; you could see a very distinct line where the clear blue Nidhe joined the silty, muddy, flooding Keele.

#### **Days 7-8 Boils, Hotspots, Tufa Mounds near the Ekwi**

One of the few sections that requires some care (large boils and waves, cross currents) is located just above the Ekwi confluence (UTM coordinates 0543000, 7105884). There are three possible ways to go down – left is by far the most difficult and requires some scouting; right involves staying close to river right and doing some rock dodging. Near the bottom you can get out and line past a very large whirlpool, which is at the bottom. For the third route you can take a stringer, which is off to the far right. It is very simple and the only thing to watch for is gravel at the bottom. This avoids both the big whirlpool and finishes just beyond a boil. This stringer route may not be negotiable at normal water levels.

Just where the Ekwi meets the Keele on river left, there is a beautiful campsite (downriver side of Ekwi) but it is very difficult to access. We reached it with a lot of difficulty, partly because

the Ekwi was also in full flood and partly because of gravel bars blocking access to the eddy. Too late we realized that the best way to reach the eddy was to stay mid-river (on the Keele) till just below the campsite and then quickly get over to river left and eddy in. Definitely a case of ‘too wise too late’!

We had been given detailed and fairly complicated instructions by our very knowledgeable source on how to reach the “secret” Godlin River hotsprings and the tufa mounds, and therefore planned on a layover at this campsite. The hot-springs are actually well known by hunters in the area.

The recommended route involved taking a canoe and working our way up the Ekwi (river left) until we reached cliffs that came to the water, then ferry

across with the canoe, and continue on that shore until we came to another cliff, then ferry back. We were then supposed to climb up a small embankment using a rope etc. This entire part of the recommended instructions was impossible to do because the Ekwi was roaring down in flood and it would have been completely impossible to ferry anywhere at the speed it was going.

Instead, we had done a short reconnoitering trip the first evening to see if crossing the cliffs, which drop straight into the Ekwi, might be feasible. We decided it was worth a try, so that is what we proposed to do. Four of us got up at 6 a.m. (Bob, JC, Hendrik, and myself) and headed out on a major hike to seek the legendary Godlin River hotsprings and tufa mounds. By shortly after 8:20

a.m. we were on our way. It turned out to be an extremely difficult and long hike which included climbing approximately 2700 feet, traversing a number of cliffs, some using ropes, a lot of scrambling, and a lot of route-searching. We didn’t get back till 8 p.m. that evening. We covered in total about 8.3 miles.

In this epic hike we did a combination of wading in the water and bushwhacking until we reached the cliffs. We then ascended the cliffs to a point where we felt we could cross. There are actually five or six cliffs altogether, which sweep down straight into the ice-cold and very-fast-flowing Ekwi River. It was extremely difficult going and very treacherous climbing. It took us a couple of hours to cross this section. We then came down for a stretch and



*A brief snack-stop near Shezal Canyon; July 6*



*View of the Ekwi River on our quest to find the Godlin Hot Springs; July 10*



*Cliff-crossing en route to the Godlin Hot Springs; July 10*

us. They were really close! What a thrill! We later saw them again when we were down and they were high, looking down on us.

We struggled with yet more cliffs and ended up using the rope to get myself and Bob up. On the way back we used the rope to descend one very steep cliff. Finally we reached the Godlin River area, which was our first goal, but we needed to cross the river to reach the hot springs, according to Taylor's instructions. But it too was in flood and was impossible to cross, so unfortunately, we were out of luck. Later, we found out from Fred Clement in Tulita that it's very often impossible to reach the hot springs.

We took along Bob's VHF radio in order to call in about our progress, but apparently the signal does not travel through mountains. As in all of our hikes we saw many, many flowers: grass of Parnassus, one-sided wintergreen, one-flowered wintergreen, hawkweed, harebell, green kidney lichen, mistletoe, plus numerous others. This hike was phenomenal, definitely one of our trip highlights, even though we did not reach the hot springs.

### **Days 9-12**

As we leisurely made our way downriver we stopped in at a hunt camp on river right, a friendly camp catering to very well-heeled clients. Susan, the cook, kindly invited us to stay for lunch since it was still pre-season and they were just making preparations for the guests. From this camp, you can almost touch the Canol Heritage Trail.

The next few days we continued making our way downriver, hiking, fishing, relaxing as we went. Every creek beckoned to us with excellent hiking, much like the Nahanni. We spotted grizzly, caribou, and wolf tracks, dippers playing in the creeks, numerous soaring ospreys, a glaucous gull and scaup. The river became gradually braided as the valley broadened. At one point we could see haze from a forest fire, but we never got close to it.



*Godlin River hike – confluence of Ekwi and Godlin rivers; July 10*

### **Day 13 Boils, Boils, Boils**

We continued paddling downriver, not expecting any scary moments (since our ‘source’ had not mentioned anything in this area), but there were two spots that were very bad – we had a narrow escape on the first and came within a hair’s breadth of dumping on the second. Both were giant boils. The first one occurs at approx. UTM 548, 281 where the river makes a sharp turn to the right. There is a cliff on river left and shallow gravel on river right. Our mistake was to try to avoid the shallow gravel and we thus, thinking it was just standing waves, headed right towards where the boils were in mid-channel. All three canoes had to paddle extremely frantically in order

to get away from the seemingly ever-expanding and very scary-looking boils.

The second set of boils was again totally unexpected (location approximately 597, 247). You would think we had learned our lesson, but no...exactly the same scenario happened, just in the other direction: the river makes a sharp left, cliffs are on river right, and gravel on river left. This time, Hendrik and I got caught in them, did a couple of 360s, and flipped completely on our side at one point showing off the bottom of our boat. Hendrik in the stern did a massive brace on the right and simultaneously I in the bow did a massive brace on the left and magically the boat did not flip but returned to its normal upright position. Bob, who had an excellent view of

the bottom of our boat, was sure that we’d had it. Such confidence!

I don’t think I’ve mentioned the extreme speed of this river. A dump would have been very bad mainly because of the river speed. There were almost no technical rapids in this river, but because it was in flood, there were a lot of waves (2-3 feet in height perhaps) and boils in many places. Most of the boils were quite manageable though. Apparently the normal speed of the river averages about 5 mph (according to Taylor), but our experience in the flooded river was that it was flowing at anywhere from 8-11 mph. With paddling, our speed was quite often showing between 13 and 16 mph.



*Near our campsite was a most spectacular dryas field; July 11*

### **Days 14-15 Confluence of Keele and Mackenzie Rivers**

We passed Red Dog Mountain, the last of the mountains, and gradually the terrain becomes quite broad and flat and the river is very braided. There is quite an extensive bluff section that we paddled past under heavy rains. At one point just as we approached very high cliffs on river left, a pile of dirt and gravel crashed into the river. It lasted at least about 30 seconds and was quite amazing.

When we finally arrived at the mouth of the Keele, the Mackenzie was quite a sight. It was glassy smooth, very fast current, and it extended as far as we could see in both directions and almost 0.6 miles in width. We crossed to the other side, explored an unoccupied native hunt camp, and then stopped for the

day very shortly after. Campsites on the Mackenzie are few and far between.

### **Day 16 Tsunami!**

After a rather late start, we paddled for a couple of hours on river right about 100 feet offshore, admiring the high bluffs. We then gradually crossed over to river left, had lunch, and continued on.

We were on river left, maybe 50 to 100 feet offshore, when all of a sudden we saw a wondrous sight. Way across the river on river right one of the high large bluffs collapsed! This was the most amazing thing I have ever seen in my life; the bluff was probably about 300-400 feet wide, 150 feet deep, and about 100 feet high. The whole thing slumped downwards and pushed into the water! After the initial giant chunk, there were many smaller chunks that continuously

released from the bluff. We were all sitting watching, in awe of this spectacle, when after about 3-5 minutes Allan



*Marilyn, relaxing in another gorgeous dryas stand; July 15*



suddenly yelled: WAVE! GET TO SHORE!" In horror we saw this racing, frothing, foaming wave just in front of Allan. It was coming upriver towards us at a speed of at least 16 mph.

We all paddled towards the shore as if our lives depended on it. Allan and Linda just made shore when the wave struck them. Linda had hopped out and was on the water side of the boat and Allan was on the land side. All we saw was them and their canoe go flying. The last thing we saw were Linda's feet up in the air.

Hendrik and I reached shore, threw ourselves out, and tried to haul the canoe up and out of the way, but it was extremely sucky muck and willowy undergrowth. We didn't get far before we were stuck in the muck since our canoe was fully loaded. I yelled, "RUN!", grabbed

my camcorder, which was sitting loose in the boat, and we both ran as fast as we could. I made it about 20 feet and Hendrik about 10 on to land when the wave hit us. Fortunately we were high enough that the wave only travelled another 20 feet or so, just washing around our knees.

The wave picked up our loaded canoe and hurled it up and way over, a total of maybe 50 feet from where we deserted it. Bob and JC had a bit more time and were at a slightly different angle when the wave hit, so although the wave threw their boat up on shore also, it just washed around their knees.

Once the wave had passed, we collected ourselves, found that Linda and Allan were okay even though both they and their canoe had been tossed over. Allan's canoe did get punctured by a

branch when it was thrown, but it was not a serious hole and he was able to patch it later.

Everyone was pretty shaken up by the experience and by the thoughts of what would have happened had we still been in the middle of the river or, much worse, on river right admiring the cliffs. Had we been anywhere out from shore the wave would have dumped all three canoes and with the current and debris in the water it would have taken us the rest of the day to rescue ourselves. Had we been under the cliff or within a couple of hundred feet of it, it would have been 'game over'...

As we stood on the shore discussing the wave, we saw two other waves racing upriver at a different angle. They were a bit smaller, but just as fast. A third wave went in a slightly different



*The tsunami had thrown our boats 50-100 feet up on the shore; July 18*



*The giant slump that caused the tsunami; July 18*

direction, up and to our right.

We then dumped the water out of our canoes and hauled them back to the river, one at a time. It took all of us for each boat, since they were completely loaded.

### **Post-Tsunami**

The second last day of the trip was quite leisurely as we didn't have much distance to cover. Due to the amount of rain over the last couple of weeks and especially the last few days, there was an enormous amount of debris in the river and the Mackenzie was extremely silty. We spent a fair amount of time searching for a fresh stream so that we could fill a small barrel with fresh water. Of special note was a small section on river right. We noticed what looked like coal seams in the low bluffs and then saw a couple of spots that looked like campfires burning. We stopped to look more closely, and sure enough, to our astonishment, we found a few spots that were spontaneously combusting, exactly like the Smoking Hills phenomenon on the Horton River.

Also of interest was the almost complete lack of boat traffic on the Mackenzie. We had all expected it to be a boat highway and were pleasantly surprised at the relative solitude, seeing only a couple of barges, two small boats, and the Coast Guard. On our last night out we stayed on Police Island – our advice from Taylor was dead on – it was the only possible spot to camp in this entire stretch of the river. Everywhere else was swampy or bluffs.

Our final paddling day saw us again crossing the river left to right (about 1.3 miles wide at this point). There was a wind out of the north, which built steadily. Once on river right we needed to pass a very long section of bluffs. Still somewhat unnerved from our earlier experience, we looked at them carefully and noticed that these were composed of mostly rock, not soft dirt like the large mass we had seen collapse. We fought hard to paddle downriver the rest of the way to Tulita, since the wind was blowing hard and the swells were now very large, but eventually our efforts paid off and we arrived at the town dock and

surfing in to shore on the backs of the waves. Rather a dramatic end to our trip.

Several people came down to the beach in their trucks to chat with us, among them Fred Clement. He gave us the news that because of the high wind and waves, Rick Myers would be unable to make his way upstream to Tulita with his boat to pick us up. Instead, Fred would take us to Norman Wells with his far more powerful jetboat. He kindly invited us to camp in his pleasant, grassy backyard, instead of on the very undesirable gravel beach. So after some frenzied packing – we had to take the two Pakboats apart and it was pouring rain – and several trips with his truck, we were up at Fred's place. We spent the evening chatting and storytelling inside Fred's large tipi, which he uses for smoking and drying meat and fish and for barbecues.

Tulita is a very friendly little town of about 450-500 people, most of whom are Natives. It is situated where the Great Bear River comes in to meet the Mackenzie. Great Bear River is clear and has a beautiful deep jade colour. Just across the mouth

of the river is a striking mountain and in almost any photo you see of Tulita this mountain is shown in the background. There are three large oval marks on the mountain and local legend explains that these marks are actually giant beaver pelts laid out on the mountain.

While in the tipi Fred told us a legend about Yamouri. Supposedly there were three giant beavers who were eating the people so Yamouri killed them and hung the beaver pelts on the mountain. And the 'smoking hills' area we passed yesterday is supposed to be the remnants of his bonfire.

### **Return to "The Wells"**

The final day consisted mainly of packing Fred's jet boat – a job that took a lot of time and careful placement of gear. Apparently in a jet boat, most of the weight should be forward. So first we packed every nook and cranny of the front of the boat with whatever would fit there, then we put barrels in the rear holds, packs in the middle, canoe along

the middle, and then finally we squeezed ourselves in.

We then drove the boat fully loaded down to the beach, where all climbed into the boat. Another driver backed the boat quickly into the water, Fred gunned the engines into reverse, we swung around and then we were off. This took mere seconds. The wind and waves were high and there had been a lot of discussion earlier about when the wind might lessen.

This was the wildest, roughest motorboat ride (actually jet boat ride) that I have ever been on – bar none! And apparently a jet boat gives you the smoothest ride possible. Fred was truly an expert boat driver. We rode along the shore, only about 10-20 feet off the shore, crashed and drove into and around the waves. I've never seen anything like it! We were constantly thrown into the air and from side to side, but eventually we made it after almost exactly two hours. We were met by Rick, who took us via several trips to the Mackenzie

Hotel. We spent most of the rest of the day sorting and packing to organize for the return flight from Norman Wells to Yellowknife.

### **Summary**

This was one of the all-round best trips I've ever been on! It had all the components that make a memorable trip: spectacular scenery, large variety of birds and flowers, good company, great hiking, great campsites, huge variety of terrain, excitement, serenity and solitude.

Many thanks are due to our young friend Taylor for his trip advice, Rick Myers of Norman Wells for his help with outfitting, transportation and weather advice and Fred Clement of Tulita for his generous sharing of his backyard, stories in his tipi and the wild jet boat ride!

For a chart of campsite locations, distances, elevations, and weather, please contact Marilyn Sprissler; ask the editor for her email address.



*Lunch break on the shores of the Mackenzie River near Tulita; July 20*



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**Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association**  
Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning “the way or route”

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

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

## Editorial

During the preparation of this issue of *Nastawgan*, a quite scary situation developed. At a crucial moment in the production process, several promised articles, three of them major ones, had to be cancelled for some reason by their writers, which left barely enough material for an impossibly small eight-page issue. So an urgent alert went out to various old and new contributors, and within two weeks the crisis was over because of the fine response by several of them. There was now enough material for a more familiar 28-pager, what a relief!

Well, that's the WCA spirit! We don't hesitate helping each other to get off a rock we're stuck on, so we also help the struggling editor get out of a nasty situation. Thank you, well done! Of course, this also shows that there is quite a lot of good material slumbering among the membership, just waiting to get out and be published. Don't let your editor have to beg you for material, just sit down with pencil, pen, or computer and write it the best you can. Your editor will help you make it into a *Nastawgan*-worthy piece. And because of your contributions, our treasured *Nastawgan* will be all the healthier.

## Annual General Meeting 2010

The coming AGM will be held on February 20, 2010 in a great location near Midland, Ontario. More info will be available in the Winter 2009 issue of *Nastawgan*.

## Deadlines

The deadline dates for submitting material for the next issue in 2009 and the four issues in 2010 are: the first day of November 2009 and the first days of February, May, August, and November 2010. If you have questions, please contact the editor; addresses on the last page.

## Letter to the Editor

Hi, Toni

A very belated thanks for your review of my *Lands Serene*. I regret I had not informed you that you received an early copy, a copy with typos. Of course you noticed the most egregious errors – the figure captions that had slipped to the next page. At the time of your review all typos had been fixed. Anyone buying the book then or now will receive a typo-free copy. At any rate, it is my fault that I did not inform you that the corrections had been made, but I wanted you to let you know at least now that they are fixed.

Regards,  
Peter



# Picnic

The first annual WCA Summer Picnic at Minden Wildwater Preserve (July 25-26), was a roaring success. Water levels were indeed roaring, thanks to incessant summer rain, providing plenty of thrills and spills. John McPhee and Bill Ness organized a whitewater clinic and there were lots of WCA boats full of participants eager to retrieve the results of hilarious dumps, riding big fun surfing waves below Otter Slide.

The highlight of the flatwater paddle around the Poker Lake loop, with wildlife and bird enthusiast Ray Laughlan, was hundreds of pink flowering delicately fragrant Rose Pegonia orchids. This excursion through lakes, forest (there were 10 portages), and marshes left us with a peaceful aura that lingered on through the weekend.

The films at Minden Hall included the Hood River and a kayaking excursion in Luango National Park in Gabon, Africa. All that delicious baking sure was appreciated by wildwater appetites! Overall, a relaxing and fun weekend sharing stories and smiles with old and new paddler friends.

Jay Neilson



photo: Aleks Gusev



photo: Aleks Gusev



photo: Sara Rykov

# Out There

We've been out there a few times when we probably shouldn't have been, and I keep kicking myself each time we do it. And then the next time it happens, I'm wondering why we did it again. You know what I mean by being out there. It's attempting to run a rapid that looks doable from shore, but looks far less certain when you are out there in the middle of it.

I know why wilderness canoeists lean towards the 'let's-paddle-it' option when deciding how to get around a rapid. It's the amount of work that has to be done when the paddling option is rejected. It is far less work to run a rapid than any of the other choices available to the wilderness canoeist – lining, portaging, lifting over, walking the canoes down.

Wilderness canoeists with experience know that you can get around anything. I know it. We have pushed canoes up 100 metres above the river to get around gorges. Have never regretted that effort. Still remember (and it has been a long time) the time I knew, I really knew we should carry, but I thought that we could bring the canoes down empty and just portage the duffle bags.

Close. Very close. Oh, not to swamping, we did that for sure. But close. So close I could feel them calling for me. Riding the swamped canoe down, holding on to the center thwart. I remember it well. How alert I was. How my mind was racing. How conscious I was of my surroundings. Can I make it down to the bottom of the rapid? Concentrating on keeping my head above water. Making sure that I stayed upstream of the canoe so as to not risk a pin between rock and canoe. Didn't see anything except water and the canoe for a long time.

Shivers. Not from the cold water. Shivers from them asking about me. Now? They didn't want a reply. If they did, I would tell them that I wasn't ready. Their answer would be that whether you are ready or not doesn't really matter. We make exceptions when you come to us.

Got away that time. I try to keep the memory buried deep, but it surfaces. Often. Mostly when I am near any moving water.

I shiver then. I'm afraid that I will have that fear the rest of my life. It's another reason to portage the canoes when there is some doubt. That load will be lighter than the one I carry every day now.

Greg Went

# Food for Paddlers

In the July 2009 issue of *CanewsLetter*, the journal of the Ontario Recreational Canoeing and Kayaking Association ([www.orcka.ca](http://www.orcka.ca)), Gordon Haggert presents this

## Traditional menu item of the voyageurs:

In 1801, Alexander Mackenzie, the first European to travel to the West Coast and to the Arctic Ocean, wrote his famous book: *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence Through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the years 1789 and 1793 with a Preliminary Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Fur Trade of that Country*. It is a day-to-day diary of two exciting trips across the continent with first-hand observations and descriptions of everything he saw and experienced. Canoe trippers might be interested in a traditional menu item of the voyageurs at Grande Portage. Mackenzie wrote:

“The mode of living at the Grande Portage is as follows: The proprietors, clerk, guides and interpreters mess together, to the number sometimes of an hundred, at several tables, in one large hall, the provision consisting of bread, salt pork, beef, hams, fish, and venison, butter, peas, Indian corn, potatoes, tea, spirits, wine &c., and plenty of milk for which purpose several milch cows are constantly kept. The mechanics have rations of such provision but the canoemen, both from the North and Montreal, have no other allowance here, or in the voyage, than Indian corn and melted fat. The corn for this purpose is prepared before it leaves Detroit, by boiling it in a strong alkali, which takes off the outer husk; it is then well washed, and carefully dried upon stages, when it is fit for use. One quart of this is boiled for two hours, over a moderate fire, in a gallon of water; to which, when it has boiled a small time, are added two ounces of melted suet; this causes the corn to split, and in the time mentioned makes a pretty thick pudding. If to this is added a little salt, (but not before it is boiled, as it would interrupt the operation) it make a wholesome, palatable food, and easy of digestion. This quantity is fully sufficient for a man's subsistence during twenty-four hours; though it is not sufficiently heartening to sustain the strength necessary for a state of active labour. The Americans call this dish hominee.”

*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](mailto:youngj david@rogers.com).*

# Wilderness First Aid Training

November 28-29, 2009

Provided by Lee Chantrell & Paddler Co-op

**Location:** Toronto Sailing & Canoe Club, 1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto

**Cost:** \$175.00 + GST

**Registration:** By email to: [aleks@gusev.ca](mailto:aleks@gusev.ca) and cc: [info@paddlerco-op.com](mailto:info@paddlerco-op.com)

**Payment:** Send cheque (payable to Paddler Co-op) to: Paddler Co-op, 6535 Palmer Road, Palmer Rapids, ON, K0J 2E0

**Meals:** Course participants are responsible for their own lunch meals, snacks, and drinks. While it's possible to get food from nearby King St. W. and Queen St. W. establishments, it's much more convenient to bring your own.

**Clothing:** Wear comfortable, layered clothing. Part of the training will be conducted outside, so bring warm clothes in case of cold weather.

**Facilities:** Club washroom facilities are scaled to handle large events and include hot showers and changing rooms.

## Schedule November 28

08:30 – 09:00 Meet & Greet with Coffee & Tea

09:00 – 12:00 Course

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch Break

13:30 – 17:00 Course

## Schedule November 29

08:30 – 12:30 Course

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch Break

13:30 – 16:30 Course

Lee Chantrell is a Paramedic with a wealth of experience in outdoor leadership and managing risk in remote wilderness environments. A former expedition leader in Nepal and the Alps, a river operations manager on the Ottawa River, and more recently a practising Advanced Care Paramedic, Lee integrates his teaching expertise with practical medical training and well-honed incident management skills. Lee is a member of the Wilderness Medical Society, with his Outdoor Emergency Medicine program being endorsed by both the National Safety Council and the Emergency Care and Safety Institute. Lee is a passionate instructor and certified educator who brings a professional, practical approach to the wilderness first aid training.

## WCA Wine & Cheese Fall Party 2009

The Wine and Cheese is a great opportunity for all members, old and new, to meet past canoeing friends and make new ones. Even if you are not a member, this party is for you. You can find out who belongs to the WCA, what the club is all about, hear about recent outings, and get new ideas and tips for planning future trips. On top of all that, you can enjoy interesting presentations, and sample tasty snacks.

The party takes place on Saturday, November 28, 2009 at Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club (TSCC), 1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto. There is free parking.

For more information, cost, program, etc. please go to the WCA website.



# Return to La Vérendrye

Tim Farr

This article was prompted by Peter Wilson's "Living the Dream" (*Nastawgan*, Summer 2009). I too retired this year after 29 years in the federal public service, most of it within the Public Safety portfolio, including a very frustrating five years in the review body responsible for CSIS.

Originally I had planned to return to the Arctic to commemorate this long-awaited event, but the state of the economy and the cost of air charters to and from the Horton forced a reality check. Even a straightforward trip to Wabakimi fell apart because of scheduling problems, so I finally settled on La Vérendrye because of its proximity to Ottawa and a curiosity to revisit my canoeing roots. La Vérendrye represented a return to home waters, because this is where I first developed my passion for wilderness canoeing almost forty years ago.

## A brief sketch of the reserve

Réserve faunique La Vérendrye was originally created in 1939 as a hunting and fishing preserve, then renamed to commemorate the 200th anniversary of

the death of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye, one of Canada's most renowned fur traders and explorers.

La Vérendrye is part of a network of 22 parks and 15 wildlife reserves administered by la Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (Sépaq). It's the second largest reserve in the province, covering an enormous area (12,589 square kilometres) straddling Quebec's Highway #117, which runs between Montreal and Val-d'Or. It is important to note that this area is not a park, so you will see plenty of evidence of logging and recreational use. Since the reserve is only about 250 km northwest of Ottawa, it's a relatively easy drive, comparable to a trip to Algonquin Park.

What makes La Vérendrye so special is the incredible amount of water contained within its boundaries. Two immense reservoirs (Dozois and Cabonga) regulate water flows and permit hydro-electric generation along the Ottawa and Gatineau rivers, and the headwaters of both the Dumoine and Coulonge rivers are located within the reserve. With over 4,000 lakes and rivers, it's a canoeist's paradise and so it's not surprising that this

area has a long association with canoeing.

La Vérendrye is part of the homeland of the Algonquin, who used to roam the north and south shores of the Ottawa River and its tributaries. At the beginning of the 17th century, their control of the strategic Ottawa watershed, alliance with the French, and growing involvement in the fur trade provoked the Iroquois, who began raiding up and down the Ottawa River and drove the Algonquins from this area.

During this period of instability, the Hurons and Nipissings – who were middlemen in the fur trade – developed canoe routes through La Vérendrye which bypassed the lower Ottawa River. These were used as a temporary detour to bring furs to Montreal.

Later, after the wars between the French and English ended and the Treaty of Paris guaranteed aboriginal people their traditional hunting territories not already ceded to the British, many Algonquins returned to their ancestral areas.

They became increasingly involved in the fur trade, building the canoes which transported the furs and trading rolls of



*Lac au Barrage*





*Carrière Creek*

birch bark used in their construction. In fact, much of the information which ethnologist and scholar Edwin Tappan Adney collected concerning the construction of fur trade canoes came from the factor of the Hudson's Bay Company post located on Grand Lac Victoria in La Vérendrye.

There are nine Algonquin communities located on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River watershed. Those most closely associated with La Vérendrye include Lac Simon, Kitcisakik (Grand Lac Victoria), Mitcikinabik Inik (Barriere Lake) and Kitigan Zibi (River Desert) First Nations. The second of these communities – Kitcisakik – does not have the legal status of a reserve.

Some of Canada's most famous birch-bark canoe makers came from these communities, including William Commanda of Kitigan Zibi and Patrick

Maranda of Mitcikinabik Inik. Maranda's craftsmanship is featured in the iconic photograph of Pierre Trudeau dressed in a T-shirt, kneeling in the stern of a birch-bark canoe.

#### **The trip begins**

We started our 110-kilometre loop at Lac au Barrage on 5 July 2009 after picking up the necessary permits at Le Domaine, which is essentially a truck stop, visitor's centre, and float plane base located 50 km inside the reserve's southern boundary. This is also the terminus for many of the popular weekend canoeing circuits on Lacs Jean-Pere, Poulter and Antostagan.

I cut my canoeing teeth soloing on many of these routes as a teenager, blessed by wonderful parents who drove me to and from Le Domaine and then after I had obtained a driver's license,

allowed me to borrow their car for up to a week at a time. Later, I used to take either my son or daughter out of school before the summer recess, and whatever skills they've acquired as canoeists were honed in this area. As a result, it's always special to check-in at Le Domaine because it holds many happy memories for me.

First stop was La Vérendrye Canoe-Camping, which was formed in 1993 as the result of a partnership between la Fédération québécoise du canot et du kayak and Sépaq. Here, you can rent canoes, arrange shuttles, purchase canoeing and camping equipment, or simply discuss routes and the conditions you're likely to encounter. Staff also keep the portages cleared on many of the more popular routes and maintain and clean the campsites.

I was pleased to find that my name

and the details of the car I drove and the colour of my canoe and tent were still registered on their computer system. Unfortunately, prices had gone up considerably since the last time I visited. Fees to use the reserve include a camping charge of \$8 per night, per adult; a special permit of \$81.95 to fish in the reserve for seven consecutive days; on top of a Quebec non-resident fishing license (\$62 annually or \$41.50 for a temporary, seven-day license).

Lac au Barrage is a further 30 km north on Highway #117. Turning west off the paved road at Route #28, you drive approximately six kilometres on a very rough logging road which skirts Lacs Larouche and du Portage. Lac au Barrage is one of several parking sites within the reserve where it's relatively safe to leave a vehicle unattended, due to its distance from the highway. After get-

ting the canoe into the water and the usual fuss loading canoe packs and food barrels, then experimenting with their weight distribution, we were underway just before noon.

This trip was the 17th I had made with my close friend, canoeing partner, and bowman Ted Baker, in what has become an annual ritual. Ted is without doubt the most accomplished campfire cook I know, and it is a pleasure to watch his slow, rhythmic strokes eating up the water. After so many years canoeing together, we trust each others' judgment, we know our strengths and weaknesses, and our camp routine has become almost effortless due to clearly understood and long-established roles.

A successful canoe tripping partnership is like a marriage, requiring patience and good communication. Petty grievances if left unspoken can

ruin a relationship. But when it works – as ours does – it's wonderful and something to be treasured. Our annual canoe trips, which have taken us across northern Ontario, to the shores of James and Hudson Bays, and as far north as the Barrens, are truly the highlight of the year.

Lac au Barrage is the source of the Coulonge River, whose course we would be following on the first day. It's possible to make a two-week, 250-km trip south all the way from Lac au Barrage to the Ottawa River (consult Hap Wilson's "Rivers of the Upper Ottawa Valley" for more details). However, our journey would take us west, starting with a short lift-over into Lac Grand, then onwards across Lac Nichotéa.

*Nastawgan* readers will recall how much rain fell in Ontario and Quebec this summer, so we encountered unusu-



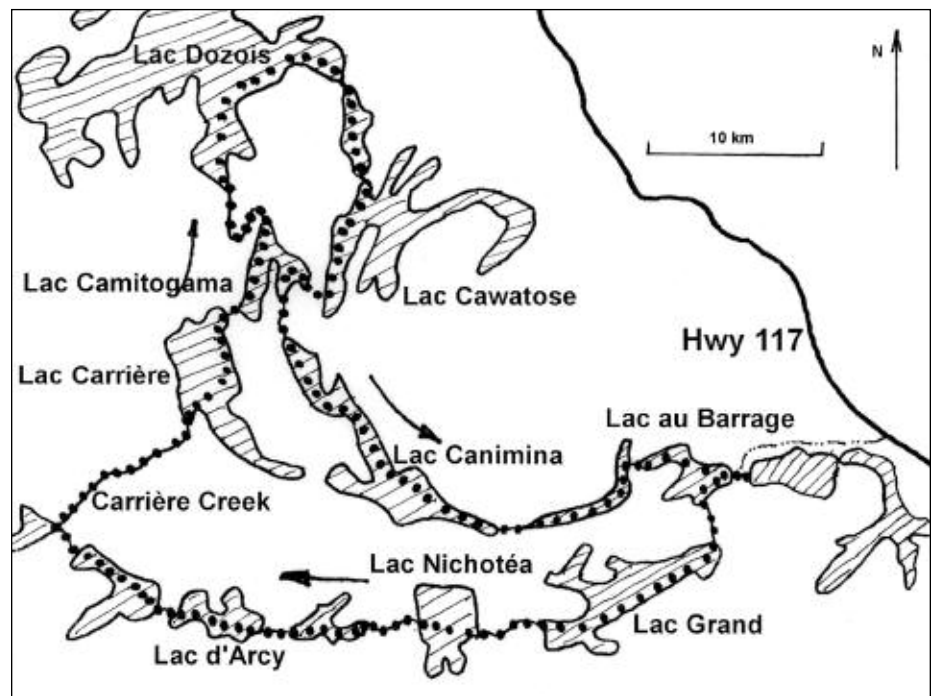
*View up eastern arm of Lac Camitogama*



*Island campsite on Lac Camitogama*

ally high water levels. In the first of what proved to be several surprises, we were able to run straight through the old control dam and over the lumber slide at the western end of Lac Grand, rather than taking the usual short portage. This dam is one of several reminders of the Coulonge River's long association with the logging industry – in fact, the last log drive took place in 1984. As a child growing up in Ottawa, it was common for me to see great rafts of logs gathered in the shadow of the Parliament Buildings, and there remains evidence of logging activity throughout La Vérendrye to this day.

Long after the original stands of white pine were cut, the area continues to be harvested for pulp and veneer. The rough logging roads, which crisscross the reserve, are an eyesore and a disturbing reminder of the destruction taking place,





*"The most accomplished campfire cook I know"*

although most of the activity is confined to the winter months.

The countryside we were passing through was literally dripping with water, to the point that some shoreline vegetation had drowned and was toppling into the water. The second-growth forest includes white and yellow birch, sugar maple, hemlock, white and black spruce, plenty of cedar, and the occasional stand of white and red pine. There are also some 40 species of mammals in La Vérendrye including moose, bear, wolf, and of course beaver; over 150 species of birds; and the lakes and rivers are teeming with walleye, pike, and lake trout.

I am always cautious crossing Lac

Nichotéa, because its saucer shape means that the lake can get rough quickly and in accordance with the first law of wilderness canoe tripping, you will always be paddling into a headwind. On this crossing the waves weren't too bad but the squall lines on the horizon quickly forced us into our rain suits. Stopping in the lee of one of the islands three quarters across the lake, we surprised a loon on its nest. The bird dived and swam straight under the canoe, giving us a brief glimpse of a torpedo-like shape rocketing through the water.

Then we pushed onwards through Lacs Desty and D'Arcy, leaving the Coulonge River route at Lac Giroux, and

turning north towards Baie Nord-Ouest.

The further into the backcountry you go, the fewer the campsites and the wilder the bush. Similar to Algonquin, campsites and portages are usually marked with yellow signage, but there are very few places where one could make an unscheduled stop (even if permitted), without having to expend significant energy to clear a tent site.

We chose to camp on the portage which leads into Lac Strobile. This actually marks a height of land, with the water to the south of the portage draining into the Coulonge River system, while on the other side, water flows north into the Dozois Reservoir.

It was a buggy campsite and not particularly attractive, due to the presence of a logging road running across the portage behind us. However, an evening stroll revealed plenty of wolf scat and moose sign along the road's gravel margins. During the whole time we were there, only one truck passed, leaving a plume of dust and one very surprised trucker who caught a momentary glimpse of us from his cab.

Our route now left the chain of lakes which drain into the upper Coulonge River, and took us down Carrière Creek. This is a beautiful trip for those who like an intimate encounter with nature, but the creek requires plenty of lining, wading, and a succession of short portages, before reaching Lac Stimulus. From this point onwards, the creek is navigable and becomes a succession of oxbows, somewhat reminiscent of the Wakimika River in Temagami.

The banks are lined with marsh grass, wild iris, pickerelweed, and cattails, and we half expected to see a moose around every bend. Eventually, Carrière Creek spills into a large lake of the same name, which offers some of the finest campsites in La Vérendrye.

### **Reliving past adventures**

Lac Carrière was the site of one of my most frightening experiences in a canoe, this time with my daughter. We had arrived at the creek's outlet and were anxious to reach the beach campsite, which lies halfway up the lake's eastern shore. It was a beautiful day and discounting the whitecaps rolling down the lake in the direction we were heading, we de-

cided to chance it rather than waiting out the wind. Big mistake.

As soon as we cleared Carrière's southwest bay, we had the full strength of the wind coming straight behind us and it became clear that the whitecaps were breaking on top of metre-high swells. My daughter – who would have been fourteen or fifteen at the time – handled herself like a veteran, but we were soon surfing dangerously out of control, and from my position in the stern I could see that the waves running past us were well above the gunwales of the canoe.

I've often wondered what would have happened if we had foundered in that wind, because the lake is five kilometres long at that point, with an unimpeded run straight to its northern shore. In "Path of the Paddle" Bill Mason describes how to fashion a sea anchor out of a cooking pot, but at the time we were simply too busy trying to stay upright and control the canoe in such heavy swells.

We barely made it across to where a narrow esker forms an island half-way up the lake. We both sprang out of the canoe just before it was driven ashore where it would surely have been trashed by the high waves. However, the rewards of this particular site far outweigh any difficulties getting there.

This is one of several natural beaches which occur throughout La Vérendrye. In this case, there's a sandy beach on both sides of a small peninsula almost linking the mainland to an island, with the beach narrowing to a spear point aimed directly westward into the setting sun. The beach sand also has a curious pink color above the high water line which rivals anything the Caribbean has to offer. It's a great place to swim and lounge, with a panoramic 360-degree sweep of the skyline and some of the most fantastic sunsets imaginable.

### **Back to the present**

On day four, we completed the remainder of the paddle up Lac Carrière and then portaged into the western arm of Lac Camitogama, which lies like a wish-bone below the Dozois Reservoir. This lake is relatively shallow and boasts large stands of wild rice, which make it attractive for waterfowl. At Camitogama's northern terminus, a river of the same name perversely loops southwest before

hooking back towards the Dozois.

The weather was not great, and we were continually hit by sudden showers, which would force us to don rain suits, before the sun would temporarily break through the clouds again.

Canoeing downstream on the Camitogama River, paddlers will encounter the wreckage of a log cabin slowly being enveloped by the bush. This is one of several structures built within La Vérendrye by local Algonquin families, and it can be disconcerting to come across signs of human habitation on a canoe trip. But before rushing to judgment, paddlers should acquaint themselves with the sorry history of the Barrier Lake Algonquins, who saw both the federal and provincial governments renege on a 1991 trilateral agreement, which would have given them the Natives a meaningful say about resource management within the reserve. Recurring roadblocks on Highway #117 and internal divisions within the Barrier Lake Algonquins are sad reminders of Canada's treatment of aboriginal peoples.

### **Dozois Reservoir**

The final portage on the Camitogama River skirts a sharp drop, with sentinel stumps of flooded timber visible in the reservoir's waters below. The Dozois Reservoir is a monster: 61 km long and 34 km wide, capable of holding 2.6 billion cubic metres of water. Built between 1945 and 1948, the creation of the reservoir and its associated dams led to extensive flooding and water levels continue to fluctuate, wreaking havoc with the shoreline.

Canoeists rounding the southeast headland must exercise extreme caution, because this huge body of water is completely unforgiving when a wind blows up. It's also important to stay well clear of the rocky shoreline, because the energy created by the swells coming ashore creates very confused seas, which could easily swamp a small boat, let alone our Swift Kipawa.

Our trip, while tiring, was relatively uneventful, with Ted spotting a sow bear and two cubs, which we surprised rooting along the shoreline. By late afternoon, we had entered the eastern arm of



*The author on Camitogama River*

the reservoir and a fishing lodge was visible in the distance. This would be a good place to seek help in an emergency, but the prospect of talking to a crowd of walleye fishermen did not appeal to us, so we decided to press on.

At the back of this inlet, it's possible to make a very nasty portage over blow-downs and through plagues of deerflies and mosquitoes, to emerge tired and sweating at the north end of Lac Cawatose. We found a campsite used by moose hunters soon after entering this lake, and gratefully downed paddles after almost ten hours on the water. However, since our routine normally involves a glass of scotch or wine in the evenings, we were soon relaxed and capable of joking about the day's adventures.

On our fifth day, we paddled through the rather confusing pentagonal hub of Lac Cawatose, taking pains to correctly exit into one of two bays leading south. There is a portage located on the western

shore of this bay, which takes you up and over a small ridge and back down to the eastern arm of Lac Camitogama, which we had left just twenty-four hours ago. The weather was too sunny to waste cooped-up in a canoe, so we decided to stop early and camp on the island directly across from the portage.

This is vintage La Vérendrye, with a small footprint for a tent nestled among the blueberries, and a path leading to a high rocky knoll where the fire pit was located. It was a gorgeous site, with rose-pink blossoms of sheep laurel splashed across the hillside, and a rock shelf at the water's edge perfect for swimming and collecting water for the evening meal. We spent a peaceful afternoon reading, watching the resident pair of loons and bathing in the cool waters – the sort of day which makes you glad to be alive and in the bush.

The next morning we prepared for another long haul, portaging south out of Lac Camitogama into the northern arm

of Lac Canimina. This is also a big lake: two distinct sections joined by a narrower passageway, with the lower half of the lake requiring a six-kilometre paddle across open water. We were heading east, and once again we had to contend with headwinds for most of the day.

As the lake nears its eastern limits it becomes increasingly shallow, ending in a crescent-shaped sand beach. It used to be possible to slide a canoe over the small outlet, which flows from Lac Longeville, but beavers have now dammed this passage, raising the water level by at least a metre or more behind the dam.

Despite the natural beauty of this site, it also is the scene of a tragedy. In Stephen Herrero's book "Bear Attacks – Their Causes and Avoidance" he writes of an event, which occurred here in July, 1983, when a group of boys and their leaders were camped on Lac Canimina. Despite having hung their food packs well away from their tents, not only did a



*View of Dozois Reservoir from portage*



*Huge flock of loons*

black bear manage to pull the food down but also went through the wall of one of the tents, pulling a twelve-year-old boy outside where the boy was subsequently killed.

When my kids were younger, we would lie in the darkness and I would recount this story to them, with suitable embellishments and dramatic pauses to listen to the deer mice foraging outside. Ted is not so gullible, however, so I contented myself looking at the tadpoles basking in the warm water and following the moose tracks, which led across the beach and disappeared into the beaver pond behind our campsite.

That evening, we were treated to the rare spectacle of 22 loons gathered together, fishing for baitfish in the lake's shallow waters. I have seen such large flocks in the fall, but never in mid-summer. It was another reminder that even familiar countryside can yield unexpected pleasures.

### **The circle completed**

On day seven, we did two short portages, which took us out of Lac Canimina and into Lac Longeville, which as it names suggests, is a long narrow lake somewhat resembling an inverted "L". Many canoeists pass quickly through Longeville without taking the time to appreciate its beauty. I've done this route many times, but what I always remember is one magical trip in early September, when the mists were rising off the water and shafts

of sunlight were peeking through the tendrils, creating an almost hallucinogenic experience as my canoe floated through space.

After approximately five kilometres, the lake hooks north. One route links Longeville with Lac Kanamini, while another connects with Lac au Barrage, via a short portage from Longeville's eastern shore. As portages go, this was a breeze; there was even a short length of split cedar walkway spanning a bog halfway across the trail. By noon, we had humped the canoe and our gear across, and paddled to one of the campsites at the northern end of the lake to spend our final night under the stars.

It's always sad as a canoe trip winds down. Yes, it's nice to look forward to reconnecting with loved ones and the prospect of a comfortable bed, but there is also the gnawing realization that the world of technology and office politics, both large and small, are about to overwhelm your life once more. But hold on, I'm retired! I don't ever have to drag myself back to work again!

On that note, two happily retired canoeists spent their last afternoon together eating through the excess food, repacking and sorting gear, and finishing the novels they'd started a week ago. And in what I hope is a harbinger of continued good fortune in the years ahead, we saw our third bald eagle in as many days, slowly riding the thermals and saluting the end of what had been another outstanding trip.

### **Postscript**

Some final thoughts for *Nastawgan* readers interested in visiting La Vérendrye. This is not the canoeing country depicted by the Group of Seven, so don't expect granite points and craggy pines, and be prepared to see plenty of evidence of human use, starting with the aboriginal peoples and continuing through the epochs of the fur traders and loggers to the resource extraction and recreational activities of the present day. But also consider that in eight days we saw only two other parties of canoeists: some boy scouts whom we quickly outpaced on Lac Grand, and a second party from Camp Nomingue whom we passed heading in the opposite direction on Lac Caminina. While you will certainly encounter the occasional fishermen on most of the lakes (invariably overdressed in bib rain pants or a floatation suit), the backcountry appears virtually devoid of people. And whether as a result of increased environmental awareness or the efforts of La Vérendrye Canoe-Camping staff, this was the first trip I've ever done where we encountered zero – I repeat zero – litter in any of the campsites we visited.

For further information about canoeing opportunities in this area, contact La Vérendrye Canoe-Camping, telephone 819-435-2331 or email [info@canot-campgng.ca](mailto:info@canot-campgng.ca) or visit [www.canot-kayak.qc.ca/la\\_verendrye/siteEn/index1](http://www.canot-kayak.qc.ca/la_verendrye/siteEn/index1).

# French River 1821

Nicolas Garry was a future Deputy-Governor (1822-1835) of the Hudson's Bay Company who made his first canoe trip from Lachine to the interior in 1821. The following excerpt from the *Diary of Nicholas Garry*, published in the Proceedings and

Banks. At 8 o'clock we came to the Rapids des Pins. Hitherto we had always ascended the Rapids which is less dangerous both in Appearance and in Reality. Now we had to descend and were broken in by rather a terrific one. The Guide stands on the Gunwale at

the Musquitoes and black Fly we embarked at half-past two,--- beautiful moonlight. At 7 we came to the Portage of the Reçolet where the Canoe is only transported a few Paces to avoid the dangerous Part of the Rapid. A Canoe with 11 men was lost at this Rapid a few years since. The Crosses are still standing on the spot where they were buried. The River continues to run through rocky islands.

Perhaps the worst Part of Canoe travelling is the Want of Comfort, which attends your Encampment at Night. In most Difficulties and Privations in Life there is always a something which is pleasurable to look forward to, when Comfort and Ease will refresh you and give Relief to your Sufferings. Here the approach of Night and in other Cases of Rest is rather a matter of Dread than of Desire. The Night is passed under the Suffering of Bites and Stings, and if at last, worn out, Sleep should close the Eyes the call to embark now awakens you to the renewed Attacks of a Host of bloodthirsty and insatiable Enemies; a Digression occasioned by the Bite of the Musquitoes, Sand Flies, Spiders, etc., etc.

At 9 we breakfasted, and at ½ past we embarked. After paddling for two Hours we came to a narrow Channel forming a Rapid, and the Banks of high Rocks on each Side so confined as scarcely to allow the Canoe to pass; it had the Appearance of a Canal cut in the Rock. After it [we] came to a short carrying Place but the Water being high the Canoe was towed. At 2 o'clock Lake Huron opened upon us with the Appearance of a vast Ocean.

This excerpt appeared in Toni Harting's book *French River, Canoeing the River of the Stick-Wavers*, published by The Boston Mills Press in 1996.



*In 1821, these Reçolet Falls looked the same as they do now in 2009*

*photo Toni Harting*

Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, second series-volume VI, meeting of May 1900, describes his experiences during his trip on the French River:

Wednesday the 20th June... We now entered the Rivière des François and came to the Portage, La Chaudière des François, so called from the Number of Small Holes in the Rocks having the Appearance of a Kettle. The Rivière des François is about 75 miles in Length and has more the Appearance of a Lake, forming an innumerable Number of Low rocky Islands, so that you never see the

the Bow to ascertain the Course of the Rapid, he then stands in the Canoe and directs the Steersman how to Shape his Course. The Rapidity with which you descend is wonderful and, I should say, certainly at the Rate of 15 to 20 miles an Hour. To every Rapid is attached a melancholy History of Canoes lost and the Crosses or Burial Places you meet with everywhere prove that they are but too true. It was now nearly dark when we came to the Rapid of the Parisienne which we likewise descended and encamped on a small island at the Foot.

Thursday the 21st June. After passing a restless Night from the Attack of





## **Killarney Provincial Park**

*Photos by Allan Crawford  
September 2008*



# WCA ACTIVITIES

## FALL 2009

### WANT TO ORGANIZE A TRIP AND HAVE IT PRESENTED IN THE AUTUMN ISSUE?

Contact the Outings Committee before November 1

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@gmail.com; Scott Card, 905-665-7302, scottcard@sympatico.ca; Mary Perkins, mary.perkins@sympatico.ca, 905-725-2874

Our ability to offer an interesting and diversified activities program depends on our trip organizers' generous donation of their time and enthusiasm. We appreciate the important contribution these members make to our club. If you are an active paddler, please help us. Become an outings organizer.

*WCA outings and other activities may have an element of danger of serious personal injury. You are responsible for determining if your equipment, skill, and experience are adequate to participate safely in a club activity. Participants are ultimately responsible for their own safety and well-being when participating in club events.*

*All moving-water trips rated intermediate level or higher require participants to have fully outfitted whitewater canoes (thigh straps, air bags filling the boat, throw bag, secured spare paddle), and to be wearing helmets and weather-appropriate clothing (wetsuits or drysuits for winter, spring, fall trips).*

Below is a summary schedule of our upcoming club outings and activities. Full details and descriptions can be found in the outings section of our website.

#### All Season **HALIBURTON COUNTY CANOE ROUTES**

Ray Laughlen, 705-754-9479, rlaughlen@gmail.com ----- There are many canoe routes in Haliburton County that offer superb lake tripping. As I live in Haliburton and have a flexible work schedule, I visit these areas frequently, especially during the week. If you would like to paddle with me, give me a call. Outings are suitable for novices.

#### September 18-20 **FALL TURKEY TRIP ON BIG EAST LAKE**

Gary James, 416-512-6690, gary.james@sympatico.ca ----- Join us once again for this Fall Festival weekend canoe trip. We have booked a group campsite on Big East Lake near Haliburton off HWY 118. As food is the theme for this trip, there is only one short portage to the lake. The lake is small in width but big enough to explore for the day. The permit fee, and the Saturday dinner of turkey with all the trimmings will be a group effort for the purchasing and cooking, with the cost split among all participants. We are limited to 8 tents and 16 people. Please consider sharing a tent on this trip so we can maximize the number of participants.

#### October 2-4 **WCA FALL MEETING AT MKC**

Please join us at the fall meeting for a weekend of paddling, renewing old acquaintances, and making new friends. By popular demand, we are returning to the Madawaska Kanu Centre in the beautiful Madawaska Valley near Barry's Bay. There are many opportunities nearby for flatwater, and, of course, whitewater paddling, as well as hiking, biking, and sightseeing. Bring any experienced gear or boats that you would like to sell or swap. See the newsletter and website for details and registration form.

#### October 5-20 **COULONGE RIVER**

Jay Neilson, 613-687-6037, jneilson@nrto.net ----- Exact dates and route will be determined by organizers and participants. There should be spectacular fall hardwood scenery on this remote two week tour that starts in the La Verendrye Wildlife Reserve. Basic whitewater skills are required to enjoy the trip, and there will be some portaging so you will need to pack for this. Due to the time of year, participants must anticipate cold weather and water, and be suitably outfitted to deal with both.

#### October 18 **BURNT RIVER**

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005 or bness@look.ca, book by October 11--- --An opportunity to work off the calories from last week's Thanksgiving dinner. An easy flatwater river trip from Kinmount to above the village of Burnt River. The Burnt always has enough water to be paddled. Pretty scenery and a few short portages make this a good late season outing. A great day out for families or anyone wanting to enjoy the fall woods from a boat.

#### November 13-15 **KOLAPORE HIGHLANDS HIKING WEEKEND**

Join us (Diane Lucas, Rick Sabourin, Bruce & Beth Bellaire, Barb & Dave Young) for a weekend of hiking (or the remote chance of cross-country skiing) the weekend of Nov 13th to 15th. We will stay at the farmhouse at Highlands Nordic in Duntroon (www.highlands-nordic.on.ca), and will hike in the Pretty River Provincial Park and at Kolapore Highlands. Accommodation is dormitory style and the cost dependent on the number of participants but should be around \$50/person. You will provide your own food but a pot luck dinner will be organized for Saturday night. If you are interested please contact Diane Lucas at 905-826-0875 or lucasde@yahoo.com.

November 28 **WCA WINE & CHEESE FALL PARTY**

The very popular end-of-season Wine & Cheese will be held at the same venue as last year, the Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club (TSCC), 1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto. For more information, please go to the WCA website.

November 28-29 **WILDERNESS FIRST AID**

This course, taught once again by the eminently qualified Lee Chantrell, in conjunction with Paddler Co-op, comes highly recommended by all who have taken it. It will equip you with the basic skills you need to deal with a wide range of medical emergencies that could be encountered in the outdoors. If you are a regular outings organizer, this course qualifies for reimbursement under our Organizer Recognition Program. Please see details in the newsletter or on the website. Special thanks to Aleks Gusev for organizing this educational event.

November-?December **BLACK RIVER ICEBREAKER**

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005 or bness@look.ca, call anytime ----- It's not unusual for us to get late season rain, which brings the rivers up. However, at this time of year it's often very cool (a euphemism for cold) and the days are

short. One of our favourite day trips at this time of year, if we have water, is the Black River near Washago as it winds through the Black River Wilderness Park. It's just an hour to an hour and a half drive for most of us in south central Ontario. The car shuttle is only 10 minutes long and the car never far away if you get cold. And best of all, it has a whole bunch of Class 1-2 rapids packed into that short distance. If the weather and water are really good, we can combine it with a short but challenging Class 2-3 section of the Head River nearby. We have a regular group of late season fanatics who enjoy it. As this outing is very much water and weather dependent, we make our decision to go a couple days in advance. If you want to be put on the call list, let me know.

January-March 2010 **WINTER POOL SESSIONS**

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005 or bness@look.ca ----- We have a tentative booking at our usual Scarborough pool at Albert Campbell Collegiate (Finch at McCowan) for Sundays from 5:00 to 6:30 pm, with 10 sessions from January 10 through to March 14. Assuming last year's rental rates still hold, a whole winter of paddling pleasure will cost you only \$100. Sorry, but I don't have dates & fee confirmations from Toronto Parks & Rec yet due to the

recent civic workers strike. I will post an update on the on-line trip listings when I get the confirmation. Whether you're an experienced boater looking to refine your technique or a new whitewater paddler looking for help with your roll, this is a great opportunity. Open canoes, C-1's & kayaks welcome. Call me as soon as possible to book a spot as space is limited. I do have a few extra boats that people can borrow on a first-come, first served basis.

**ADDITIONAL TRIPS**

Check our website at [www.wilderness-canoe.ca/trips.htm](http://www.wilderness-canoe.ca/trips.htm) for additional trips. Members may submit additional trips to the Outings Committee anytime at [bness@look.ca](mailto: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](http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca/bulletin.htm) for private, non-WCA trips or partner requests.

**NEED A PARTNER?**

If you're a tandem canoeist in need of a paddling partner, whether for a single trip or on a more regular basis, our website provides a valuable resource to help you connect with other members who want to get on the water. If you need a partner, please submit a message for posting to our website giving details.

## We Welcome Pets

The following is my humorous pet-related story from one summer. I was registering at a small motel on Michigan's Upper Peninsula on the final night of a seven-week Canadian-American summer tour. I was looking forward to a reunion with our six-year-old yellow Labrador Retriever the next evening, who unfortunately could not be with us due to a three-week Arctic canoe trip that was part of the journey. I had a great laugh at the small notice on the registration desk:

"We welcome pets. Pets don't smoke in bed and set fire to our blankets. Pets don't steal our towels. Pets don't play the TV too loud. Pets don't have noisy fights with their travelling companions and break our furniture. If your pet can vouch for you, you are welcome too."

George Drought

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