Wilderness Canoe Association
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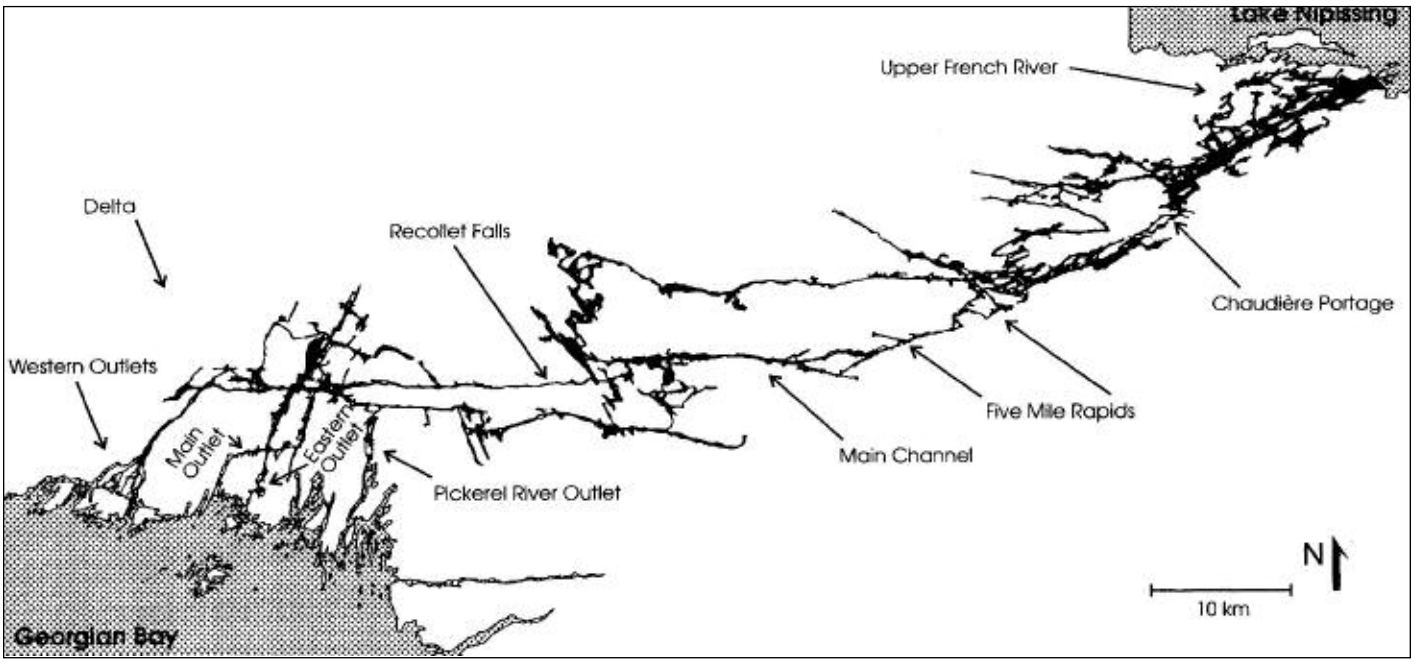


Map 1

Historic Canoe Routes of the French River

Text, maps, photographs: Toni Harting

Situated between Ontario's Lake Nipissing and Georgian Bay, a most unusual river system carries the lake's waters west down an intricate collection of channels and lakes, bays and marshes, rapids and falls. This is the French River, which – in spite of its short 100-kilometre length and its modest 19-metre drop – is a major waterway, owing to its strategic location between the Ottawa River watershed to the east and the Great Lakes to the west. The French River shows so much physical diversity and has such a rich history that it is among the most exceptional and fascinating rivers in the province, if not Canada.

It is quite a young river. Only about 2,800 years ago, crevices and faults in the Canadian Shield bedrock, still rebounding after their release from the crushing weight of the ice-age glaciers, filled with west-flowing water and formed the infant French River. Eventually these early channels developed into an intricate river system. Obviously, this is not a typical river carrying its waters from source to mouth in a single stream, but instead a highly complex network of pool-and-drop waterways (see Map 1). The present river's water level is controlled to a large extent by the operation of four dams erected in 1916 and 1950 in the upstream section of the river to manage the water level of Lake Nipissing.

Before the arrival of Europeans in this part of the country, the Native inhabitants had used the river for centuries as part of a major trade route which carried them across much of northern North America. This situation started to change dramatically in about 1610 when the first white man came from the east, followed by another some time later, then another and still more, until their light-skinned faces became a familiar sight in the region. These European visitors were explorers, missionaries, and fur traders who penetrated deeper and deeper into the unknown, eager to discover other worlds and meet new people. Like the Aboriginal peoples before them,

Entrance to Wolseley Bay

the newcomers travelled in birchbark canoes. They were passionately dedicated to a single-minded search for knowledge, souls, and profit, willingly risking their lives in a fierce struggle to fulfill their dreams. During the more than 250 years of the fur trade, the French River formed a small but vital link in the lifeline between east and west. Its waters were an integral part of the famous and uniquely Canadian fur-trade central mainline, a thin thread of rivers, lakes, and portages stretching like a 4,000-kilometre spine from Montreal all the way to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca.

Surprisingly, very little physical evidence remains to show that thousands of canoes and tens of thousands of people indeed travelled the French River system in past centuries. Several pre-contact Native archaeological sites have been discovered and these should yield interesting information once they are explored fully. But as far as the presence of non-Natives is concerned during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, no campsites, no notes, no graffiti, no marks, no footsteps, no garbage, no graves, practically no visible signs of any kind have been found along the shores of the river to attest to the passage of so many people. The only tangible proof that fur-trading canoeists travelled the French River are a number of artifacts (such as kettles, axes, musket balls, glass beads, guns, awls, ice chisels) found under water by divers below several rapids and falls since the early 1960's.

In several old trip journals, including Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal* and Angus Mackintosh's *Journal from the Enterance* (sic) *of the French River,* brief descriptions can be found of the routes selected by past travellers, mostly dating from the British period after 1760. When studying these narratives, it becomes evident that they do not provide a clear and trustworthy answer to the question of which routes were followed. Place names and locations, in particular, can be confusing because there were no detailed maps of the French River included in these old documents. Thus, while the journals are of limited use in the search for historic canoe routes, they nonetheless provide a rare insight into wilderness canoe tripping during the fur-trade years.

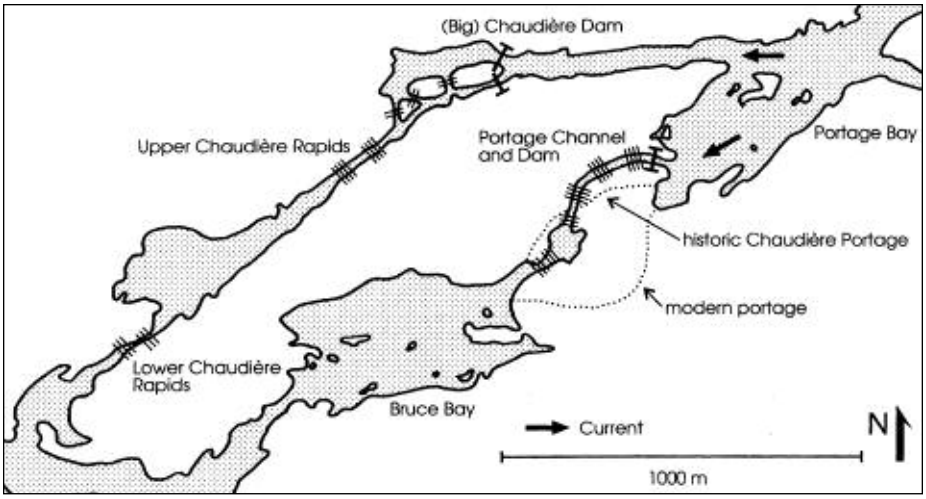
Eric Morse, in his famous publications on the Canadian fur-trade routes, was the first re-

searcher to provide a broad outline as well as some fascinating details of the routes the voyageurs might have used on the French River. There is, however, much to be discovered about the routes of the voyageurs and my work is a contribution toward presenting a detailed description of possible routes. One way to determine how canoeists in previous centuries probably travelled the river, is to imaginatively accompany them in their canoes and apply one's knowledge of canoeing, camping, and portaging techniques, as well as an understanding of the French River system from a canoeing point of view.

In a typical year the fur-trade brigades left Lachine just west of Montreal after ice break-up in early May. They paddled and portaged up the Ottawa and Mattawa rivers and arrived at Lake Nipissing about three to four weeks after leaving Lachine. For the voyageurs coming off the large expanse of Lake Nipissing, the Upper French River was a simple, 19-kilometre flatwater paddle to the start of the river proper.

The first obstacles the voyageurs encountered on their trip down the French River were the unrunnable Chaudière Rapids, located at the top of the Main Channel of the river on the southeast side of Okikendawt Island. Here the travellers were forced to make a 420-metre portage, the longest one on the river (see Map 2).

Various Aboriginal peoples, however, during their history on the river, had discovered a simple, relatively short and reasonably flat trail leading from the southwest shore of Portage Bay to Bruce Bay. Once this portage had been pointed out to the Europeans, travel between Lake Nipissing and Georgian Bay became much more straightforward. As Robert Seaborne Miles, a secretary working for the Hudson's Bay Company, matter-of-factly noted in his journal on 7 June 1818: "Twenty minutes to eleven reached Portage Chaudiere de Francois, carried the baggage (sic) and gummed the canoe and left at twenty-five minutes to twelve." From May until October, it remained the most effective way to move trade goods, fur, and people down and up the French River.

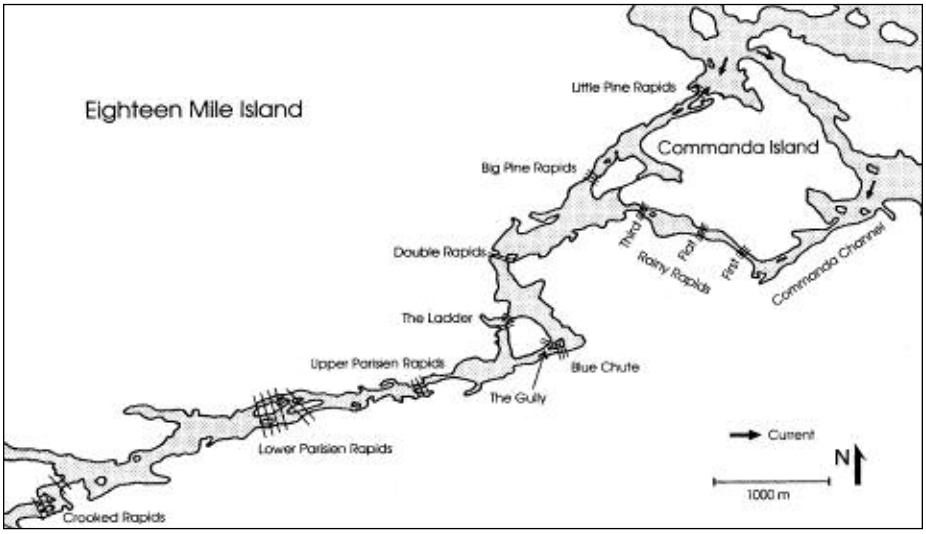


Map 2

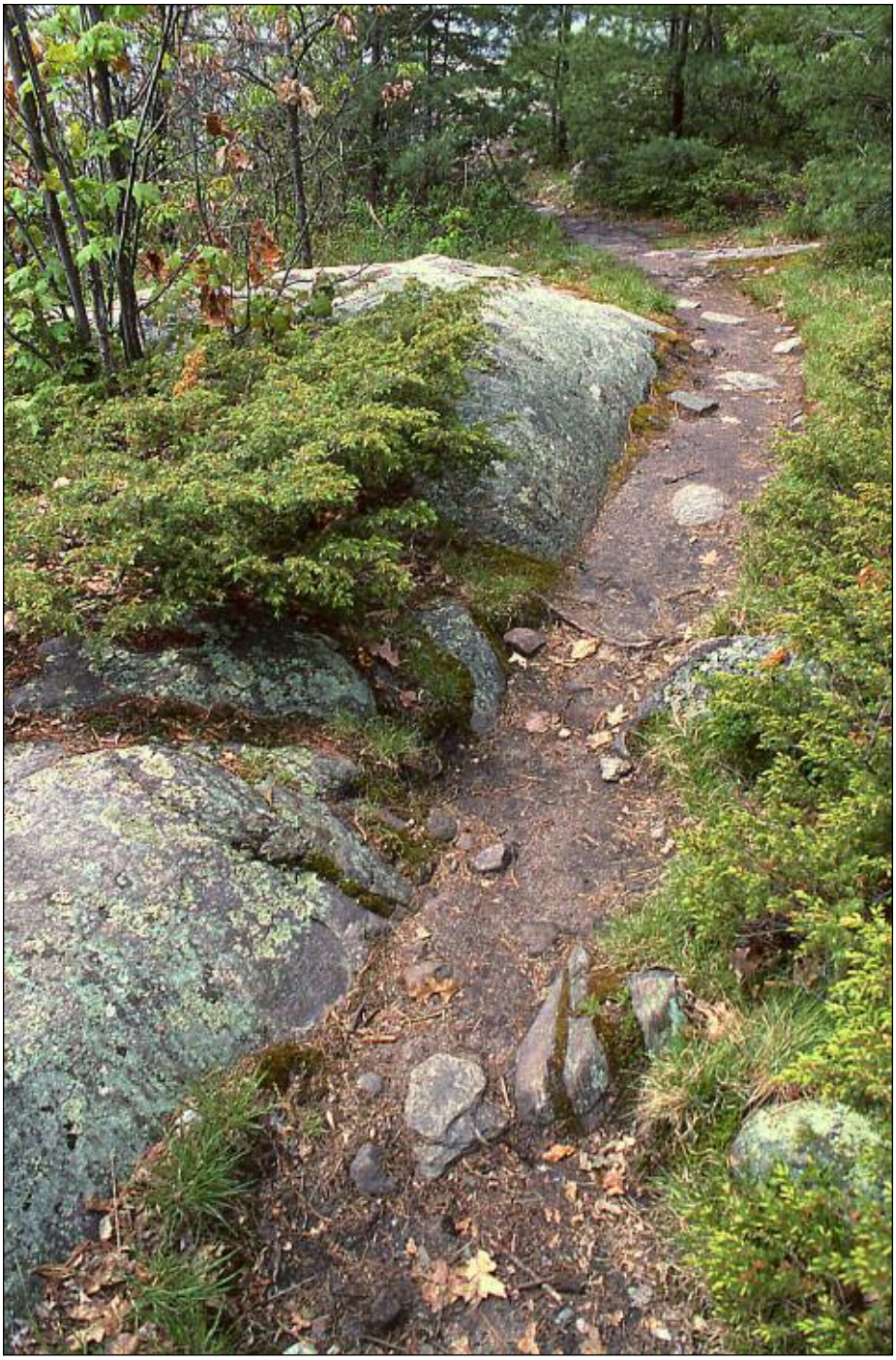
Tragically, the Chaudière Portage was all but destroyed in 1949 and 1950 by the construction of the dam-controlled Portage Channel. The trail is now to a large extent covered by rock debris, trees and bush, while part of it has even been cut away by the channel itself. Only two sections at the beginning and end of the portage are in reasonable shape, looking approximately as they did so many years ago. It is a disgrace that this magnificent, ancient, and historically meaningful trail has been all but ruined in the name of progress. Instead, the Chaudière Portage ought to be part of a national monument dedicated to the unique activities of past travellers who helped to lay the foundations of Canada. [The situation at present, in 2011, is somewhat better. The old trail is being cleaned up and there are plans to restore it to its former glory, including a footbridge over the Portage Channel. (ed.)]

About 15 kilometres below the Chaudière Portage are the Little Pine Rapids, the first of the Five Mile Rapids in the Main Channel running south of Eighteen Mile Island (see Map 3). The runnability of all the rapids in this section, and the rest of the river for that matter, depends to a large extent upon the water level of the river, which is determined by the amount of precipitation and the setting of the dam controls and, thus, can vary tremendously in a short period of time.

At the high water levels in May when the first brigades came down from



Map 3



The portage trail at Big Pine Rapids has hardly changed in hundreds of years

Montreal, the large, heavily loaded ºcanots du maitre, also called Montreal canoes, often would have been able to run these rapids fully loaded, provided they stayed clear of the big standing waves. In low water, several of the rapids in this section would have to be portaged, lined, poled, or waded. Going upriver would also have meant some hard work to get the canoes with their precious cargo safely portaged or lined up the rapids.

Roughly 29 flatwater kilometres below the Five Mile Rapids, the voyageurs encountered the scenic, and notorious, Recollet Falls (see Map 1), which could not be run by canoes at any water level. The voyageurs, therefore, would have had to take out on the left side of the river, just a few metres above the 2.1-metre falls. At high water with a strong river current, this could be very dangerous indeed. If they were not extremely careful, the current could easily sweep their heavily loaded boats down the nearby falls, leading to almost certain death for the unlucky travellers. There are various indications that Recollet Falls claimed quite a few casualties over the years. The original portage trail was about 50 metres long and followed the same route as the wooden boardwalk today. The water coming off the falls flows against the vertical rockface on the south side of the river causing tricky crosscurrents and eddies that require great care when paddling across. Frances Simpson, the wife of the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, George Simpson, on an excursion down the river, gives some indication of the anxious moments the voyageurs in their heavy, deep-lying canoes would have experienced in her diary entry of 11 May 1830:

At the Recollet Portage breakfasted, and the weather clearing up, changed our wet for dry clothes, but on going from the root of the Recollet fall, were very nearly drawn under it, by a strong Eddy; indeed so near, that the Spray from the fall showered over, & gave us another drenching; but by the exertions of the men at the paddle, regained the Stream, and got into Lake Huron at 2 o'clock.

About 14 kilometres below the Recollet Falls the voyageurs came to the Ox Bay / Wanapitei Bay area. Here a crucial decision had to be made regarding the route they ought to take, depending upon the level of the water. If the brigade guide thought that the water was high enough to carry the boats safely down the Old Voyageur Channel, they would continue west from Wanapitei Bay to the point where the Western Channel divides into the Western Outlets. But, if the water level was considered to be too low, the voyageurs would turn south at Wanapitei Bay into the Main Channel and follow it to the Main Outlet, where the Dalles Rapids form the last obstacle before the

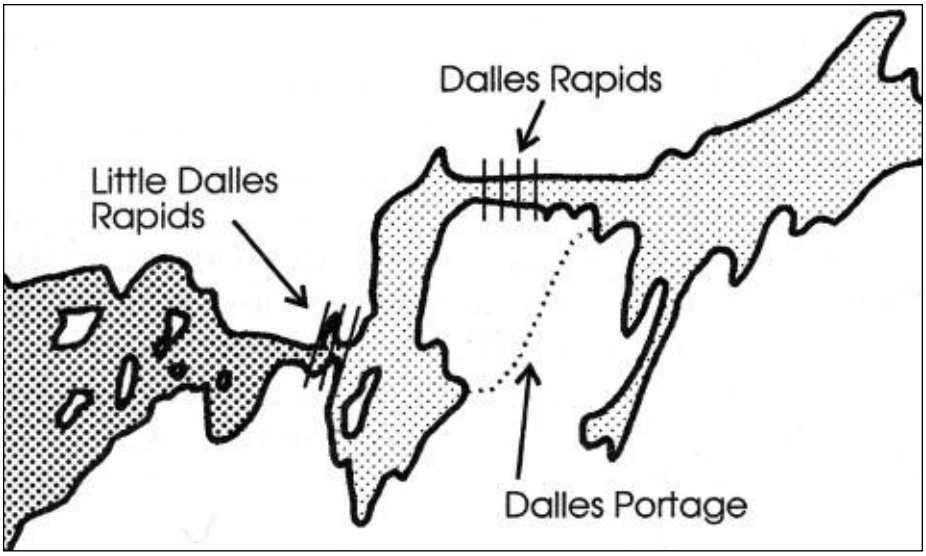
river waters flow into Georgian Bay.

At the Dalles Rapids the canoes could be run or possibly lined down the relatively deep major channel on the south side without much of a problem (see Map 4). If necessary, the voyageurs could follow the 180-metre portage trail that would take them safely around the rapids. This was likely to happen more often when going from the Bay back up to the river later in the year. Lining the canoes up the rapids was another possibility, especially attractive when the water was not too high. When going downriver, the standing waves that can exist in Little Dalles Rapids when the river water level is high would not have posed any real problems for the big canoes.

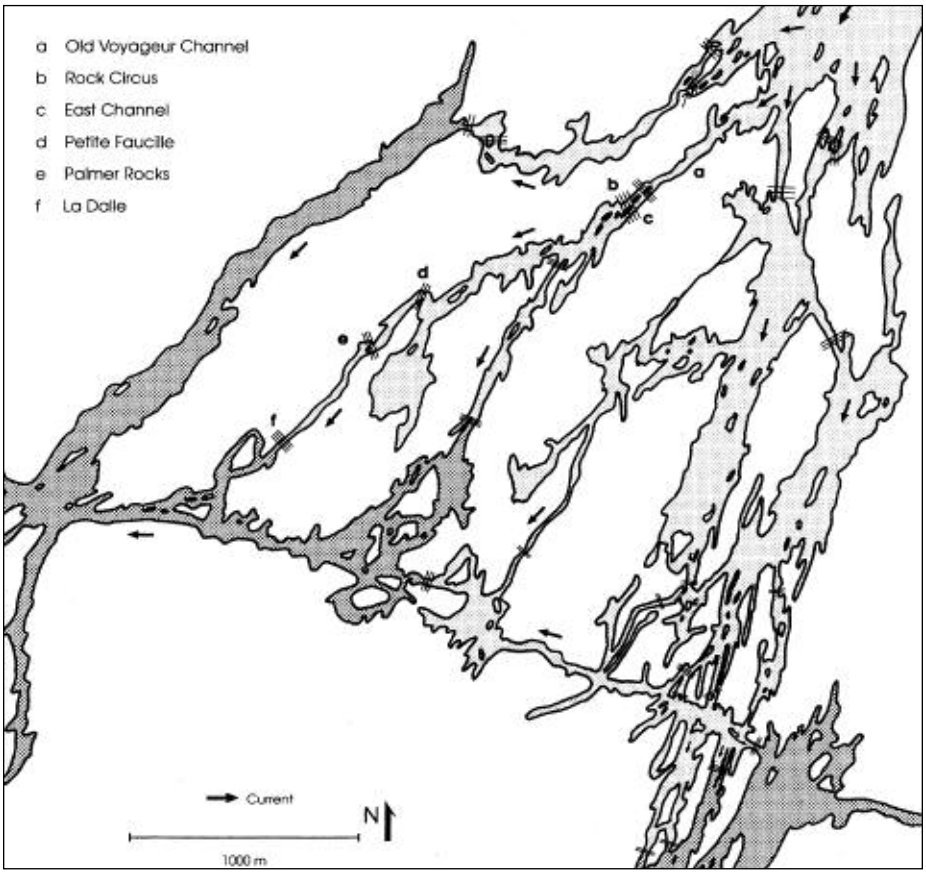
If the voyageurs decided at Wanapitei Bay that the river water level was high enough to run a channel of the Western Outlets, they would have continued west via the Western Channel. The only outlet channel with the right physical properties to be of use to at least some of the voyageurs is the Old Voyageur Channel (see Map 5). In several of the historic narratives this channel is indeed mentioned as the one followed by various fur traders. However, closer study of this route from a canoeing point of view reveals some serious difficulties that would have been encountered by travellers in big canoes, limiting the use of this route to periods of sufficiently high water levels. This would especially have been the case with large brigades going upriver.

Depending upon the water level, there are four places in the Old Voyageur Channel which are potential trouble spots for big canoes. The first is the East Channel of the Rock Circus, a narrow, almost straight passage between sloping rock walls and connected to the western part of the Rock Circus by three openings through which water can flow. In some studies this channel is called La Dalle, but the true location of that section appears to be further down the Old Voyageur Channel.

The East Channel is an interesting passage with obvious possibilities for canoe travel, but unfortunately several rocks sticking up from the channel floor obstruct canoe traffic at medium to low water. Even at relatively high water the big voyageur canoes, lying deep because of their heavy loads, would not have been able to negotiate this channel without running serious risks. The East Channel, therefore would have been used by the fur traders only at quite high water levels. Upriver travel would then have been difficult because of the strong current as well as the steep walls of the narrow channel, which would have made lining up trou-



Map 4



Map 5

Solo paddler in 25-ft North canoe playing in Blue Chute

blesome but by no means impossible.

The second obstacle in the Old Voyageur Channel is the Petite Faucille, or Little Sickle, a tightly curved and unrunnable drop with an average height of less than a metre, where the canoes had to be unloaded and carried over the rocky peninsula to the south for about 20 metres. The existence of the Petite Faucille is reported a few times in the journals of several of the travellers. Muskets and other artifacts found in the late 1960's below the drop on the river bottom are another indication that this route was used by the fur traders.

The third serious obstacle voyageurs would face in the Old Voyageur Channel, the Palmer Rocks, can cause severe problems for passing travellers if the water level is not high enough. They consist of a rock ridge made up of several parts crossing the channel at an angle, and make it practically impossible for big boats to pass in low to medium water levels. Portaging this section is extremely difficult because of the inhospitable terrain.

Finally, a few hundred metres below the Palmer Rocks, the voyageurs encountered a scenic and comfortably

Recollet Falls

straight channel about 100 metres long that could be run at any water level by canoes of all sizes. Going upriver at high water levels, the big boats could be lined up against the strong current by walking on top of the elevated west bank. This may be the famous La Dalle, the Trough or Gutter, mentioned in several of the old trip journals, although it is possible that in the fur trade days the whole Old Voyageur Channel was sometimes called La Dalle and not just any small section of it.

A rare insight into the use of the Old Voyageur Channel is given in the journal written by the North West Company agent, Angus Mackintosh, who on 14 July 1813 travelled upriver from Georgian Bay:

This morning left our encamping ground and proceeded up the river, came to the Dalle a rapid of 50 feet of very strong water where the canoe was dragged up by the line (5 codelines twisted together). Soon after getting up this rapids we came to Le Petit Faucille a rapid and carrying place of 60 feet...

Below La Dalle, the waters flow into the West Cross Channel and the travellers would have to decide whether to go west on this channel or to take the Fort Channel directly to Georgian Bay.

When returning from the western fur country at the end of September or early October, the voyageurs encountered a serious complication. They immediately had to decide on the correct channel to take the canoes back upriver without knowing the actual water level in the river. The choice depended upon their intimate knowledge and understanding of the weather and the topography of the country.

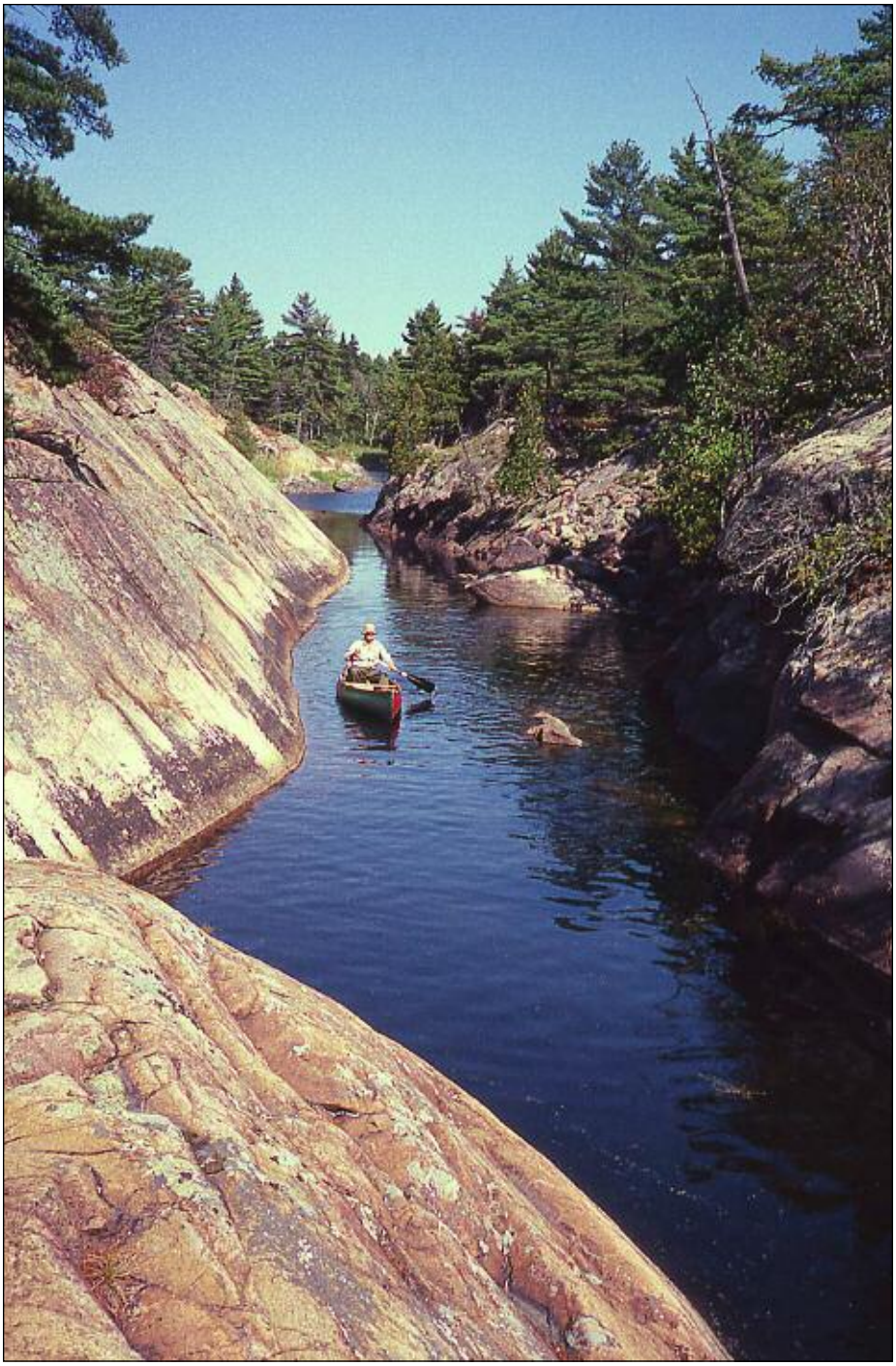
Using the Old Voyageur Channel had several advantages over the Main Outlet via the Dalles Rapids. For one thing, they did not have to travel as far along the treacherous section of the Georgian Bay north shore. They also had easy access to the western end of the West Cross Channel where the Prairie des Français offered shelter in case of inclement weather.

Little or no information exists about other locations along the French River where the fur traders might have camped. There must have been several campsites because of the time it would have taken the brigades to travel the river. The campsites would also have been quite large to accommodate the often considerable number of canoes involved. Fur fleets with sixty canoes or more occasionally have been reported going upriver.

Under the right circumstances, the voyageurs paddling express canoes apparently made it downriver in one day, as mentioned in several of the old journals. But going upriver, especially at high water, would have taken several days. The regular big freight canoes surely would have needed a few days to travel the river because of the cargo that had to be portaged.

What conclusions can be drawn from these observations? Obviously, when

Dalles Rapids



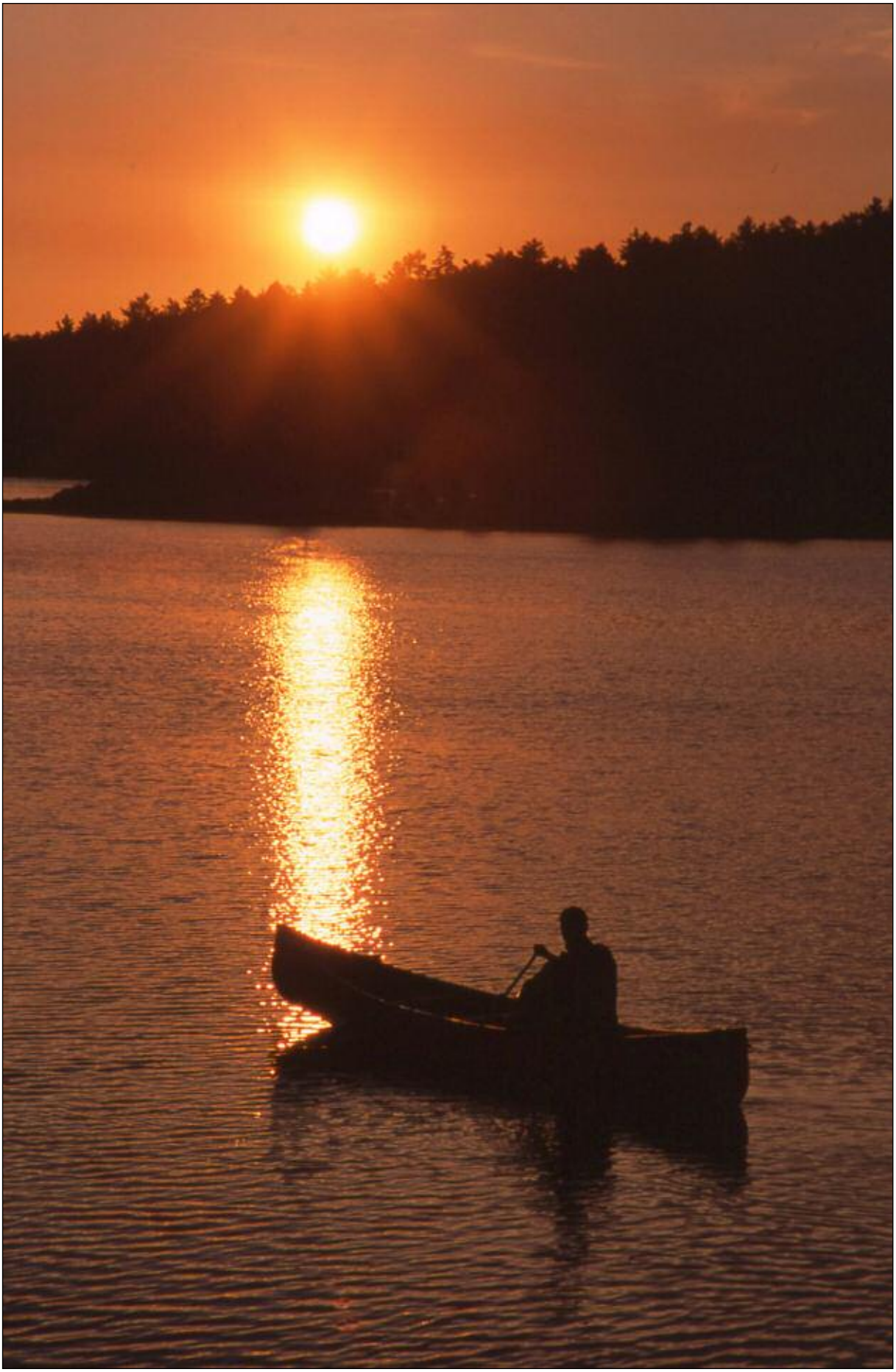
La Dalle in the Old Voyageur Channel

speaking about the French River voyageur routes, one is talking in general terms. The Delta and mouth of the river are complicated and offer too many options to restrict the travellers to one specific route. The paths the voyageurs chose would depend upon a number of factors such as: time of year, weather conditions, canoe type and loading, canoeing experience, brigade size, freight type, down or upriver travel, and destination. But above all, water level was the overriding factor in deciding where to go and what to do on the river. The voyageurs wanted to travel as quickly and efficiently as possible. They were in the business of transportation, of making money, and did not intend to waste precious time sightseeing, loafing around or waiting for each other in traffic pile-ups.

Taking all these factors into account and assuming that the water levels in those days followed roughly the same cycle they do now, a few broad conclusions can be made regarding the routes the fur trade voyageurs might have used. The route from Lake Nipissing down to Wanapitei Bay in the Delta would have been a straightforward following of the Main Channel after first crossing the Chaudière Portage into the river proper. At Wanapitei Bay the large fur-trade freight brigades would go south to the Main Outlet and descend or portage the Dalles Rapids. The Old Voyageur Channel in the Western Outlets probably was used primarily by the voyageurs at quite high water levels and not by the large brigades of fur-trade canoes. Smaller fur-trade canoes and specialized big canoes carrying only passengers, mail, and other important cargo would also have used this channel. These express or light canoes had less weight to carry and therefore enjoyed more freeboard to run rapids and shallow parts. They were also easier to handle in the narrow channels and to portage. The same procedures would be followed by canoes travelling upriver. However, if the water levels in the past were consistently higher than they are now, especially during spring high-water, greater numbers of the large freight canoes could have used the Old Voyageur Channel.

These main conclusions are of course tentative. However, they offer at least a general idea of the situation and may serve to open the door to future research into how the voyageurs really operated during the years of the fur trade, as well as into the behaviour of the French River before modern society began to interfere with its natural flow. This is an important river, and we should clearly recognize the essential role its trade routes have played in Canadian cultures.

From the book *The Canoe in Canadian Cultures,* edited by John Jennings, Bruce W. Hodgins, and Doreen Small, and published by Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc. in 1999.



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

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

Editorial

The whole *Nastawgan* team is very pleased with the many laudatory emails we received on the occasion of our first colour issue. Thanks, much appreciated!

Deadlines

The deadline dates for submitting material for the four issues we publish each year are: the first days of February, May, August, and November. If you have questions, please contact the editor; addresses on the last page.

WCA Activities

Want to view all club activities, learn more about our extensive outings program for members, or organize and post a trip? It's easy! Visit the Outings section of the WCA website:
www.wildernesscanoe.ca

WCA 2011 FALL RENDEZVOUS

Sept. 30 - Oct. 2

Boundless Adventures Camp, Palmer Rapids

Mark your calendars and join us for yet another WCA Fall Rendezvous, this time on the shores of the Madawaska River in Palmer Rapids, from Friday evening September 30 to Sunday afternoon October 2, 2011 at Boundless Adventures Camp, 7513 River Road, Palmer Rapids, ON. http://www.boundlessadventures.org/AboutBoundless/CampFacilities.htm

Come paddle, hike, bike, read, meet old friends, make new ones, and get the latest on the best canoe routes the Madawaska valley has to offer. Members, non-members, and children are all welcome. You won't be disappointed! We'll have a fantastic time.

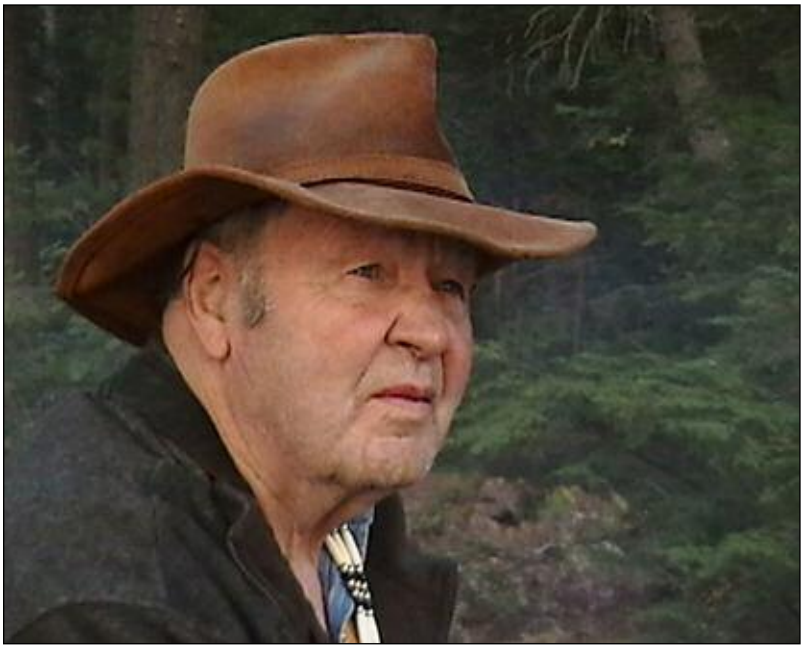
The area is rich in beautiful flatwater paddling options. Here are some:

– Paddle Bark Lake in touring kayaks with Aleks. Canoes welcome.
– Paddle North arm of Kamaniskeg Lake from Hinterland Beach to Barry's Bay.
– Conroy Marsh
– Madawaska River
– Bonnechere River
– Of course, some of Ontario's finest whitewater is located in the immediate vicinity.

Remember to bring your used equipment for the GEAR SWAP.

"MINI-SYMPOSIUM" evening presentations by our members will be shortened to allow more time to socialize. Please contact Jon McPhee at jon.mcphee@rogers.com or Aleks Gusev at aleks@gusev.ca if you'd like to present your favourite trip.

To register and/or to obtain more details, visit the Events Page at www.wildernesscanoe.ca



Kirk Wipper

1923 - 2011

Thanks, Kirk, for everything you have done for the canoeing world.

The Perfect Place

It's got a waterfall or at least a big rapid that empties into this huge pool that's always dead calm. The pool has to be calm because when I'm fishing I like to watch the lure settle where I have cast it. I also like to hear that "plunking" sound the lure makes when it first hits the water. The huge pool will be necessary to hold the quantities of fish that I need to catch. Oh, it's all catch and release, and I may even catch the same fish several times. I just want to be sure that the pool is big enough to hold plenty of fish.

The campsite will also have to be a big one. It will have lots of room to spread out in. I'd prefer a long sloping rock shelf with a few boulders available close by to weigh down the canoe if the wind picks up. Otherwise a smooth rock shelf would be ideal. This minimizes tripping hazards when you are moving about the campsite. At the back of the campsite the spot for the tents would be on soft, dry moss right where the trees begin. Sleeping on moss is better than sleeping on hard granite. The trees are necessary to block the wind as well as to provide downed wood for the fire.

Time would not be a factor. There would be enough time to stay here all summer if I wanted to. Just to have enough time to get every bit of enjoyment out of this perfect place.

Food also would not be an issue. The food bag would hold enough so that I would never have to engage in that most worrisome of chores of the wilderness canoeist. And that is emptying the food bag and counting how many more meals are left in it, then counting how many more kilometres are left to travel, and seeing if the two come close to matching up.

Long-ago wilderness travellers talked of perfect places. It seems that they all had one. Sometimes in their journals they let slip the location of their perfect place. Where they would like to spend more time if they could. Where they were happiest. Where they would like to go back to. But most often these long-ago wilderness travellers kept the perfect place a secret all the way to their graves. You see, they valued it as most valuable of all that they owned. And like all precious possessions, they kept it locked up in the secret vault of their hearts.

I have read of Ragnar Jonsson's, Alexander Mackenzie's, and Samuel Hearne's perfect places. I would have liked to have been with them when they first found their perfect place. I would have liked to have seen the look in their eyes and the smile on their faces when they realized what they had found. But mainly, I would have liked to have seen these perfect places myself.

To see how they compare with my perfect place.

Greg Went

Oxtongue Story

Arnold Hartford

I began paddling the Oxtongue River, from Tea Lake to Oxtongue Lake, when Bill Swift Sr was operating Algonquin Outfitters out of a small cabin near Hwy. 60, east of Huntsville. Renting my canoe from Bill, I paddled from early spring to late fall and came to know the river very well. I accompanied a group of police officers on one occasion, while paddling solo, and was able to be their guide at critical points where problems might arise. My most challenging experience was at High/Gravel Falls, where a German couple had gone over the falls in the early spring. He swam to shore, and joined a second German couple who paddled upstream to the road below a hunter's lodge, to walk out to Hwy. 60 and get some help. The woman refused to come out of the water at the side of the pool opposite from the falls. When my words failed, I just pulled her out by force and stayed with her until an emergency crew arrived, and they took her down to Ragged Falls to transport her to the hospital in Huntsville. That happened about thirty years ago.

In early April of 2002, I rented a canoe from Algonquin Outfitters, and took their shuttle to the Oxtongue River Picnic Grounds, well downstream from Tea Lake, and Whisky Rapids. Usually the water level is low enough that it is necessary to slide the canoe down the narrow path to the water's edge. This time the water level was just below the grass, so much higher than normal. I recall thinking that this trip was going to be very different, with this higher water level, mainly when running the swifts and rapids. I was trying out an asymmetric canoe, for the first time.

I paddled down to Upper Twin Falls and lifted the canoe over the rock ledge on river right. The small ledge below was submerged, so crossing it was easily done. On reaching Lower Twin Falls the rocky ledge extending out from river right was submerged. I crossed it and then ran the chute between the two rock walls to the rock garden that was submerged as well. I intended to camp at the level area just inland from the rock ledge with the large rock at the end of the portage trail. It was under water, so I paddled up the portage trail and camped at the higher campsite that night.

The trip downstream the next day

The pool below Ragged Falls with the red canoe stuck on a rock (near the middle of the picture)

went smoothly. I rested on the barge across from the hunter's lodge, then ran the first and second swifts to approach High/Gravel Falls. With the water level so high, I was able to paddle right into the woods and then land at the rock ledge where the one campsite is located. The weather continued overcast and cold with rain showers, so I had dinner and went to bed early. The thunder of the falls was very loud, and fine spray was flying all over.

Next morning I slept late, then broke camp and prepared to continue. Usually I lower the canoe and packs down the side of a rock wall, to the bottom of a trail beside the pool, below the falls. Then cross the pool, run the swift, and go on from there. The pool was one surging mass of water, ascending and descending the rock wall opposite the falls, and submerging most of the trail at the base of the rock wall. So, I portaged down to the gully, up the hill, and along the trail, which runs beside the river below the pool. I launched the canoe close to the lower campsite, where a curved river's edge provided calmer water. It was cold, and raining hard, with a cruel and biting wind.

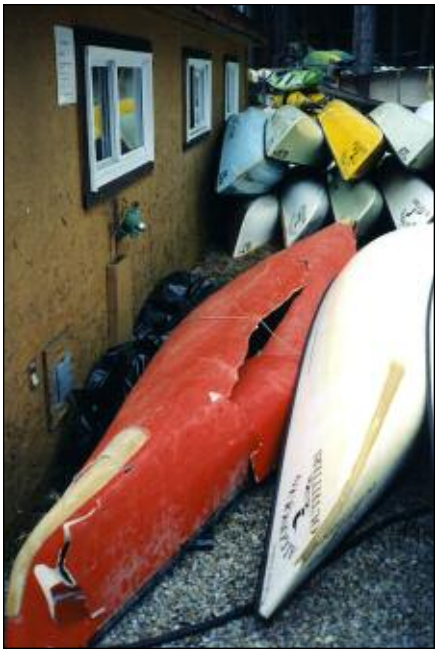
Pushing off, I ran the first swift on river right, avoiding the ledge from river left, and rocketed down and around the corner to the second swift, which ends at the extreme end of the portage.

The next part of the river is a favourite of mine. The river flows slowly between earthen banks, as it approaches the curve above the swift, rock ledge, and pool just above Ragged Falls. To run the swift I usually stay to the right, head to the left around the curve, and land at the edge of the portage trail on river left, just above the rock ledge and pool. This time I started down the swift, and a wave from shore upset the canoe without any warning. The canoe with my pack inside was ahead of me, and I was being dragged along by the current. My ExtraSport High Floater kept me afloat at first, but as the water moved faster, I was being dragged under with more force. I swam to river left with two strokes and disappeared under the water surface. Pulling myself back up to the surface, I turned and swam toward the bank on river right and grabbed for handholds while I was pulled along, but missing time after time. Then my left boot hit a submerged rock and I was able to stop and reach up to a bush. I had almost gone over the ledge, just above the pool. With a mighty pull I dragged myself up the bank, and stood there, soaking wet. The canoe and pack had gone over Ragged Falls. I was on the opposite side of the river to the portage trail and a parking lot where I had left my car. It took me most of two hours, to get to the road into the parking lot.

My first thought then was to get to my car and reach a telephone, before my wife was told that I had perished. I waded and I bushwhacked, as I raced along the river bank to reach Hwy. 60. Then walked quickly to the entrance into the parking lot, being passed by several emergency vehicles.

There I spoke to an elderly couple and asked them what was happening. Their nephew was in a kayak on the river, they said, and they were told a boat had gone over the falls. A local woman reported that a boat had gone over the falls and she called the emergency crew for assistance. I said that the boat was my canoe, not a kayak, so their nephew was likely alright. Then I spoke to men in the emergency crew, explained about my canoe, and they radioed for the search teams to return to the parking lot. I spoke to Gordon Baker of Oxtongue Outfitters about paying for loss of the rental canoe. He said I should go home and come back next weekend to take care of details.

During the next week Gordon called me and said that my Kelty backpack had been returned, and I could pick it up next weekend, which I did. A man named Mike had waded into the river below the falls cataract and retrieved my pack. He opened the pack, discovered my camera, and took a few pictures of his friends and the falls, to finish the roll of film. Then took the pack to Gordon at Algonquin Outfitters, after the damaged canoe was returned to them. The inside of my pack was completely dry and the external frame had only one small dent after going over Ragged Falls at full flood. It was a wonder the pack wasn't pounded to pieces on the rocks, as it tumbled along.



The heavily damaged red canoe

The next weekend I learned that the Algonquin Park workers were on strike. The Tea Lake Dam was wide open. That accounted for the high water level. Two weekends later, I went back to the Oxtongue River with my wife, to paddle it again. The water level was much lower. I needed to get back into a canoe and recover some confidence. We ran all the rapids and swifts and ended our trip just above Ragged Falls, as usual. Approaching Ragged Falls, I looked for the rock that had stopped my descent, along the river bank. It was gone. Washed away, I guess.

To this day, that spring trip still comes to my mind. A narrow escape and a reminder to take more care on a solo canoe trip in the future, when the water runs fast, cold, and deep.

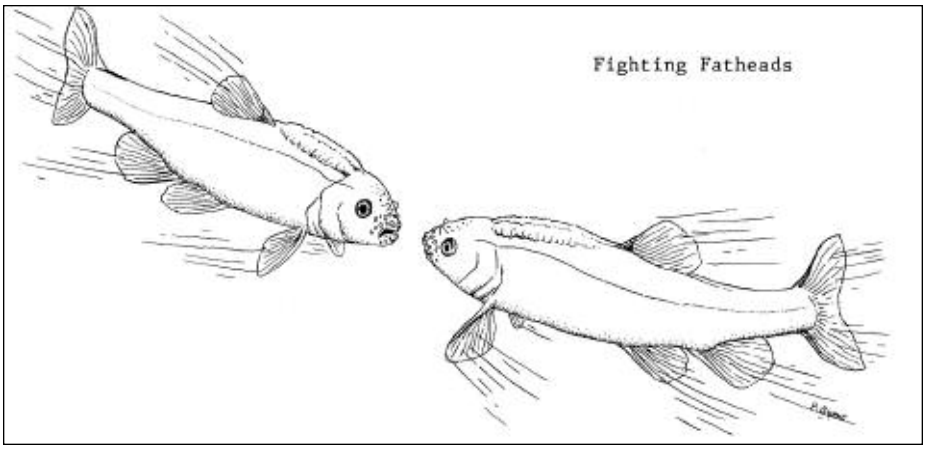
Eggs on the Ceiling

We don't need to tell you that this is the time of year in Algonquin Park when young animals are being brought into the world and raised to independence. And, as everyone knows, the anatomy and behaviour used by some creatures to help in this task are often very sophisticated indeed. The production of milk by mammal mothers and the elaborate nests built by birds are obvious examples.

Still, in the popular consciousness, many other groups of animals are dismissed as very simple or even "primitive" when it comes to the production and raising of young. Fish are a good case in point and it certainly is true that many species don't do anything very elaborate. Female trout, for instance, just clean off part of a suitable spawning bed and, when the moment is right, merely force out the eggs. The nearby male at the same time sends out a cloud of milt or sperm, which fertilizes the eggs in the water as they drift down into the cracks and crannies of the spawning bed. The adults then move on and the eggs and resulting young are completely on their own.

There are definitely exceptions to this simple picture of fish reproduction, however, and some of them are quite remarkable indeed. One of the best examples is afforded by a very common and widespread Park species, the Fathead Minnow. Now, it has to be conceded that minnows being small and hard to see well, don't inspire a great deal of awe or interest among humans. And, when it comes to the Fathead Minnow, at least as far as breeding males are concerned, the emotions most likely to be inspired are pity and disgust. The head, as suggested by the name, is big and fat but, even worse, there are ugly, hard, pointed growths protruding from all over the male Fathead's face. To top that off, there is a spongy, slate-blue wrinkled "growth" forming a pad on its back between the head and the dorsal fin.

These features certainly don't make Fathead Minnows pretty in our eyes, but since they are confined to males (and just in the breeding season at that), we can be sure that they must serve some purpose related to sex. But what could be so unusual about the Fathead's situation that it would develop such unusual structures not possessed by other fish?



The key thing is that Fathead Minnows could never just broadcast their eggs even onto a cleaned off spawning bed. Fatheads live in shallow, shoreline areas of small lakes and ponds with very muddy or silty bottoms. Any eggs deposited there would soon be buried and suffocate, so the conventional means of fish egg deposition is not an option for Fathead Minnows. They might fasten their eggs to aquatic vegetation but there they would be especially obvious to prying eyes and vulnerable to inadvertent destruction by plant eaters as well. What Fatheads do instead is fasten their eggs to the undersides of rocks, or logs, or even floating lily pads. They hide their eggs on the ceiling, as it were, of their oozy, shallow water environment.

Accomplishing this trick is where one of the male Fatheads special anatomical features, the spongy back pad, comes into play. First the male attracts a female, partly by making alternating, vertical, deep purple and light tan bands on its sides appear and disappear (in the space of a few seconds). If the female is sufficiently impressed she will swim closely beside the male, the two vibrate their bodies, and then the male, using his back pad, pushes the female (most often lying on her left side) up to the surface on which the eggs will be laid. Even on her side and being pushed upwards by the male, the female still needs a special, extrudable egg-laying tube to make sure that her eggs make contact with, and adhere to, the chosen spot. When she has deposited her eggs the male fertilizes them and chases her away.

It is then that the male Fathead starts to use the other peculiar part of his anatomy, the strange, horny tubercles that adorn his face. For the five days it takes the eggs to hatch, father Fathead guards them ferociously, using his head as an armed battering ram against other neighbouring males, other minnow species, snails, and even against turtles or human fingers. It also spends a lot of time circling underneath the eggs, often rubbing them with its back pad and frequently stopping to mouth and nibble at them. These behaviours are believed to keep the eggs well supplied with oxygen and to keep them clean and free from fungus. Certainly, egg masses left on their own quickly get infected and very few if any individual eggs will survive to hatching.

Under normal circumstances, with the benefit of the male Fathead's constant care and attention, most eggs do hatch and the young fish start out on their own. At best they will only live two or three years but, at this time of year, they will develop the bizarre features and go through the finely tuned behavioural steps that will ensure the launching of a new generation.

It is remarkable to think that such sophistication can exist in a fish, let alone one that we humans have the conceit to dismiss as a "lowly" minnow. So let's not look down on the Fathead. As a matter of fact, a fish that can reproduce on its ceiling is a creature we should all look up to.

Reprinted from the July 14, 1988 issue of Algonquin Park's *The Raven*, courtesy of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Food for Paddlers

Laurie Ann March has given permission to print this recipe from her latest cookbook, *Another Fork in the Trail* ©2011; recipe ©2010 Laurie Ann March.

Mediterranean Garbanzo Bean Salad

Makes two servings.

I like to think of this salad as a little trip around the Mediterranean because it combines ingredients common in Spain, Italy, Greece, Israel, and Egypt. Za'atar is a flavorful spice blend available through Middle Eastern specialty stores and online spice retailers. This salad can be served cold but is especially delicious when served warm. You can even serve it over cooked quinoa or couscous for a nice dinner.

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil or vegetable oil
1/3 cup shallots, finely chopped
1/4 teaspoon crushed red chilies (optional)
1 teaspoon orange zest
2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
Segments of 1 large orange
1 teaspoon lemon juice
2 cups canned chickpeas (garbanzo beans), drained and rinsed
1/2 cup green olives, pitted and chopped
1/2 teaspoon za'atar spice blend
1 teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground
1/8 teaspoon kosher salt

Photo: Toni Harting

At home Heat the oil in a frying pan over medium to medium-high heat. Add the shallots and sauté for a few minutes. Add the crushed red chilies, orange zest, orange juice, and orange segments. Cook for a few more minutes and then add the lemon juice, chickpeas, olives, and za'atar spice blend. Simmer for a few minutes and then remove from the heat. Stir in the pepper and salt.

Allow the mixture to cool and then measure the amount you will dry. Write this measurement on a sticky note. Spread the salad on lined dehydrator trays to dry. Dehydration time: 8–12 hours. When the salad is dry, package it in a ziplock freezer bag along with your note.

At camp Rehydrate the salad by adding enough boiling water to the mix to make it equal to the measurement on your sticky note. Be sure to account for and add your dried ingredients to the rehydration container prior to adding the water. You can always add more water if you need to. Once the salad has rehydrated, reheat it if desired.

Tips

— If you can't find za'atar, then use a combination of thyme and basil, as they will pair nicely with this salad as well.

— If you'd like to have this recipe for lunch, you can add cold water to the mixture at breakfast and let it rehydrate in your pack as you travel.

— This is also good for dinner served on couscous or quinoa that has been cooked with a little vegetable stock or orange juice or with pitas that have been toasted, drizzled with a little olive oil, and sprinkled with a bit of the za'atar spice.

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

100 Campfires

Towards a Personal Canoeing Philosophy

Text and Photos: David Bain

Presented at the 26th Annual Wilderness & Canoeing Symposium, hosted by the Wilderness Canoe Association and held in Toronto on February 18 and 19, 2011.

I guess that in my 17 years of novice canoeing, I have racked up a little over 100 "tent" nights. For me that's 100 or so campfires and 100 chances to talk, surrounded by silence. Some of the best conversations I've ever had have been around a campfire: a little Scotch, great friends, the vault of the sky above. And, over time, the great group of guys I trip with have sure chewed the fat a lot. And we have slowly, over that time, arrived at a common understanding of why we do this thing, this ritual from other centuries past: canoeing. Because I'm not sure it fits very well into the 21st century. It's an anachronism.

At first it seemed important, to me anyway, to have "an approach" to canoeing, knowing when to trip, who to trip with, and what to take. But I had an incredible lack of practical experience to draw on, so I started to read. I went to the library and used-book stores and I discovered eBay. And over the next five years or so, I read every canoe book I could get my hands on. I read Grey Owl and canoeing history. I read about contemporary canoe trips, Bill Mason's books, and I even enjoyed some canoeing fiction. After reading Jerry Dennis's "From a Wooden Canoe," I caught the bug and collected antique paddles, axes, packs, and snowshoes. I bought a wood-canvas canoe that weighed about 115 pounds, and sold it when I realized that I couldn't get 115 pounds of canoe on top of my Honda Civic.

I even found time for canoeing. After five years, I had been on a total of five canoe trips. These were five days each for a total of 16 nights. And by then I owned and had read over 300 books on canoeing. I think you can imagine where this is going.

I remember being picked up at 2 a.m. for one of those early trips to Killarney. I was at the end of the driveway with my own gear, plus all of the group gear (because, of course, I had read all of those books so I thought I knew exactly what we

needed), and I even had the mixed CD of Gordon Lightfoot music that we would listen to, exclusively, all the way to Killarney.

When we arrived, I started to give advice. I quoted Sig Olson and Bill Mason and Edward Abbey. I set up the tarp. I consulted on the placement of everyone's tents. I had brought canoeing books on the trip with me and encouraged my companions to read them. My first trip had a total of three adults and two 11-year-olds. By my fourth, there were only two of us left. Message received: I had become a royal pain in the ass.

I'm not sure when this particular affliction wore off, if, indeed, it ever did. The four of us who canoe together now have been at it as a group for seven years. One of them is my buddy Mike. He was on my first trip and has been on every trip with me since. This summer will be our 17th trip together. But I still buy and read books about the wilderness and canoeing, even if I've tried to stop being in charge of every aspect of the trip. In all that reading, and through all of the 17 annual trips and all of those campfire conversations, had an approach to canoeing, that was worth actually sharing, emerged? Had we as a group developed any sort of useful canoeing philosophy? Is there such a thing?

I teach Canadian History and English to Grade 7 and 8 students. I guess as the "history guy" on our canoe trips, my contribution was context. So naturally, as the result of teaching about the native people and the Voyageurs for the past 21 years, I had begun to develop an understanding of where canoeing in Canada has come from. If I was an IT guy, I might divide canoeing in Canada into distinct software versions:

Canoeing 1.0 – Aboriginal Canoeing

Canoeing 2.0 – The fur-trade years: the canoe as a truck

Canoeing 3.0 – The recreation years (the afternoon paddle, linen-and-parasol crowd)

Canoeing 4.0 – The early trippers: the wood/canvas – balsam-bed crowd

Canoeing 5.0 – The fibreglass /Kevlar/Royalex/Thermarest crowd

Canoeing 6.0 - Now

I call it Canoeing 6.0.You can call it anything you want, but I believe that if you look critically at the last 10 years, you will see that inevitable change has come to the canoeing community. The average length of a canoe trip has been steadily dropping for years. The rise of sea kayaking and whitewater playboating has made canoeing for many an activity for a few hours in an afternoon, like a round of

golf. And I think that it is fairly easy to see that one of the biggest changes for wilderness canoeing is the exponential growth in communications technology. Look at how much has already changed in the last 10 years.

In Ted Kerasote's "Out There...in the Wild in a Wired Age," he deals with one of the key issues that we face in the early 21st century, the effect that our use of communications technology has on our relationships with others, and on the existing social fabric, or in this case, on the fabric of a canoe trip. In 2003, when the author's partner took a Satphone on a trip down the Horton, Kerasote found the nature of his experience changing. The two of them did not have it only for emergencies. They were expected by those back home to "stay in touch,"

which Kerasote found for him, at least, changed the entire nature of the trip.

When his partner started to call home daily, Kerasote put it this way:

"Even on the Horton, the blessing of uncluttered mental space is no longer a function of remoteness, but of desire." This is important to him because "what matters and what is of little consequence becomes much clearer to me out here. In less quite places, the noise surrounding my life disguises the difference. It is not that the Satphone is innovative. We both use technology at home. It's that it crosses some boundary erected in my mind as to what is appropriate behaviour when you are "out there"."

That was 2003. Today the Satphone, the SPOT, the GPS, the iPod, and the ability to text and blog and use solar chargers while in previously remote areas of Canada's wilderness, have all become second nature. And to some of us, it is frightening the speed with which they have become as accepted on a trip as a new design of sleeping pad or tent. Because unlike a tent or a sleeping pad, the adoption of remote communications technology can fundamentally alter the tripping experience, if you choose to let it. I would never argue against safety. Wireless communication would have saved Hornby and Hubbard, no question. But beyond safety, are there other effects, either positive or negative? Our guest of honour, Eric Morse, presents a slide show at the WCA AGM on 3 March 1984.

In my Grade 8 English class we often discuss social media and networking, which is natural, since half of my student's parents work for RIM. We recently read a USA Today article on the effects of communications technologies on human relationships. Its conclusions? We are in the middle of an enormous shift, and while it is impossible to truly grasp the significance of events while they are occurring, the point that came through loud and clear to my students was that the connections that we now enjoy with those who are elsewhere are weakening the connections we have with the people we are actually with. We've confused continual connectivity with real connection. In the article, Sherry Turkle, author of "Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other," points out that "technology is good at giving you more and more friended people, more and more contacts all over the world; it's not so good at giving you contacts that count." With the right technology we can now blog from some remote arctic river, and we can Facebook from a campfire anywhere in the back of beyond. But at what cost to our wilderness experience?

The group I canoe with has so far adopted the approach that we will take technology (which is limited to cell phones at this point, for us) for emergency use only, on those more and more frequent occasions when we would have service. We want to focus our time together on the company of not only each other but also, and more importantly, the fifth member of our little group, the beautiful location that we have spent all this energy getting to. Some of the places we visit, such as the eastern shoreline of Georgian Bay, are indeed unique. We try to give them our full, undivided attention for the always too short a time we are there.

Are my fellow paddlers Luddites? Maybe, but I don't think so. We use technology freely at home. We choose not to use it when we canoe. Again, this is not a rant against technology in and of itself. It is a cautionary stance against the effect that the use of technology can have on the nature of the canoe tripping experience. If one of us calls home, the rest are in trouble for not doing the same. More than that, the authors whose writings I most admire contain passages that speak to the peace, the remoteness, the isolation of the canoeing experience. How would 21st century communications affect their experiences? I suspect the impact would be significant.

In the 1956 classic "The Singing Wilderness," Sig Olson created something quite different from the "land ethic" of earlier ecologists like Aldo Leopold. Olson created a land "aesthetic," observing that "looking for old pine knots to burn, picking berries, and paddling a canoe are not only fulfilling in themselves, they are an opportunity to participate in an act hallowed by forgotten generations." He goes on to say that the movement of a canoe is like "a reed in the wind, silence is part of it, and wind in the

trees. A man is part of his canoe, and therefore part of all that canoes have ever known." In Olson's "Singing Wilderness," "peace is not to be mistaken for silence, rather it is a oneness with nature that is energizing and sustaining."

Similarly, Paul Gruchow, in "Travels in Canoe Country," writes that a wilderness journey appeals to that part of our being that is "not dependent upon wisdom, but rather those activities that depend upon experience with the physical world... how to steer a canoe into the wind, how to make a fire in the rain, whether that sound in the night is sinister or benign, and to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives, to our sense of beauty and pain." "The connection between the two are forgotten," he writes, "until after we have all day battled a fierce wind and at last, with aching muscles, discover the bliss that descends with last light." The perfect medicine, I think we would agree, for the nature deficit facing so many of our urban youth in Canada.

In the same vein, Robert Perkins, writing of a trip to the Torngat Mountains, mused, after several weeks of solo tripping, about his inability to look at "the whole of things, not just through some system's eye or preconceived notion" but "how to hold the whole picture, not just a fragment of it, how to keep it outside of straight lines." That's the book's title, "Outside of Straight Lines."

I love that.

I also think Pierre Trudeau was right, when in 1944 he wrote the words that we all know so well: "What sets a canoeing expedition apart is that it purifies you more rapidly and inescapably than any other. Travel a thousand miles by train and you are a brute; pedal five hundred on a bicycle and you remain basically a bourgeois; paddle a hundred in a canoe and you are already a child of nature. Now, in a canoe, where these premises are based on nature in its original state, the mind conforms to that higher wisdom, which we call natural philosophy; later, that healthy methodology and acquired humility will be useful in confronting mystical and spiritual questions."

His quote is an observation not only on the benefits of a specific location to travel, but more importantly on the mode of travel. I would like to suggest that another great Canadian thinker, Marshall McLuhan, would have agreed with Trudeau. I don't know if McLuhan ever canoed, but his

famous observation that the medium of delivery of any message has at least as much impact as the message itself, if not more, is equally applicable to canoeing as it is to media.

I think that the way you canoe sends a deep, unconscious message to your brain, and it defines the canoeing experience for you and those with you. Chew up the map and bag lakes in an all-day race to cover territory, and you are not going to be a fan of Sig Olson's assertion that "without stillness there can be no knowing." I imagine that if you take the leash of 21st century communication with you on your journey, you would not embrace his dictum that "without divorcement from outside influences, man cannot know what spirit means." Some of us may in fact have sensed this detachment from the wilderness experience with something as common as a camera. When you are too focused on getting the picture, you can "miss the forest for the trees."

Here is a case in point. I once struggled to focus a shot of a bear swimming in Temagami, with a cheap point-and-shoot digital camera. I knew that I couldn't get a great shot with that camera, but somehow the importance of getting that shot so that I could "remember the experience" became more important than actually looking at the bear with my eyes, using my ears, really "taking in" the experience as it happened, rather than settling for a less than perfect two-dimensional reminder to look at later. I suspect that we all have stories like this that we could share.

I have seen my companions simply put the camera down and try to live in the now, in the present, and take the "mental" picture home, which is a more complete one, since it includes sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. If a camera can detach us from the experience in that way, how much more interference can you expect from a communication device that invites all of the interruptions, separation anxieties, and "noise" of the world you left behind to join you?

The eagerness of writers like Olson and others to embrace the isolation of the Canadian wilderness and leave behind the noise of the modern world, has shaped the philosophy of those I canoe with. Your philosophy will differ, and of course the challenge is to find those to trip with whose approach is compatible with your own. Outside forces threaten. In 2008, potential changes to the Navigational Water Protection Act proposed at the federal level raised the spectre of a time when the historic right to paddle our streams and rivers will be challenged. This issue is ongoing, and may again raise its ugly head. In 2011, registration regulations for canoes, instructors, and trip leaders were proposed by Transport Canada with little or no input from the recreational canoeing community. A recent news story that quoted an Ontario Government offi-

cial as saying that certain areas of Crown Land in the province would be set aside for "fly-in" outfitters certainly set off alarm bells for many in the paddling community.

The comfortable days when canoe tripping was an accepted mainstream Canadian cultural activity may be behind us. Canoeing 6.0, and all the changes that it entails, beckons. Whether W.L. Morton's contention that "the alternative penetration of the wilderness and return to civilization is the basic rhythm of Canadian life" holds true in the future, remains to be seen. In fact, canoeing may come to be viewed as a "subversive" activity, outside of the new mainstream of Canadian culture, a voice in the wilderness, as it were. My group of trippers, certainly, are content to apply the brakes. We will remain, for now, paddlers in Canoeing Version 5.0. The Pandora's Box of "technical improvements to paddle sports" is one that we are content to leave to the early adopters among our recreational canoeing community. Roy MacGregor begins his book "Escape: In Search of the Natural Soul of Canada" with a quote from Melville: "It is not down on any map...true places never are." I suspect that you won't find them on a GPS, either. So what is in your canoeing future? Are you eager to embrace Canoeing 6.0? Are you content to stay firmly in Version 5? Or do you have visions of returning to the "good old days" of wood and canvas? Regardless, I would love to sit around a fire sometime and talk about it. I'll bring the Scotch. And I promise, when that time comes, I'll be the one doing the listening.

See you on the water.

Book Review

Paddle Beads by O. Ross McIntyre, illustrated by Bert Dodson, published in 2010 by www.GraybooksPublishers.com, hardcover, 167 pages, US$29.50.

Review by Toni Harting

I could not write a better, more appropriate review than Cliff Jacobson already has done, thankfully reproduced here:

Paddle Beads is a deeply sensitive, introspective view of how wild places and the magic of canoes shape the human spirit. Masterfully written and rich with life lessons, the author's passion for adventure and his respect for humanity shine through on every page. I simply couldn't put this book down!

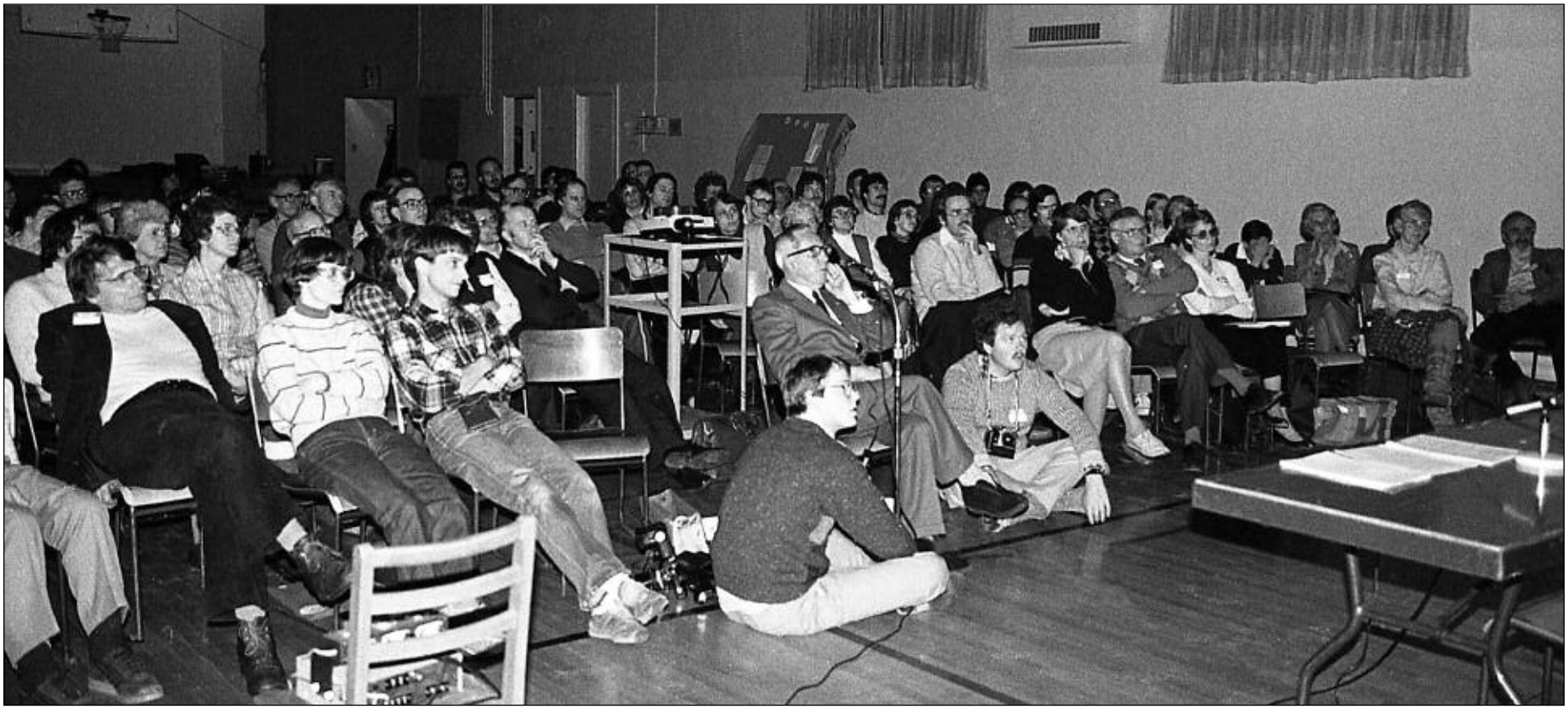
To illustrate the sensitive writing style of the author, the very last chapter of his fine book is presented here:

"Sixty years after that trip in the Boundary Waters, I knelt amidship in a canoe paddled by two of my grown children. We cut outwards from an eddy into the main stream of the Connecticut River, leaning the canoe appropriately to accommodate the change in current. Between my knees was a secure blue box. I lifted the lid and removed the bag within. When we were well out into the current I lifted the bag over the gunwale. I was a bit surprised by its weight. I loosened the bag's neck and the ashes of Jean, my wife, my favorite bow paddler, flowed out into the water and vanished downstream.

"In the years between my first trip in the Boundary Waters and my sad trip onto the Connecticut River I had seen lots of paddles and lots of water. Only with Jean's illness had I observed that droplets of water falling from my paddle blade gave birth to beads that spun across the water, dancing for a moment before rejoining their source. For all of time drops of falling water have released offspring that can bounce on the surface of still water, but before this I had not noticed them. What one chooses to see changes during life and this choice reflects what one finds important at the moment.

"To those of you who care to look carefully at the water falling from a paddle, notice the beads as they roll on the waters surface. The miracle is that they last as long as they do."

REMEMBER ---?



Our guest of honour, Eric Morse, presents a slide show at the WCA AGM on 3 March 1984. *Photo: Toni Harting*

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