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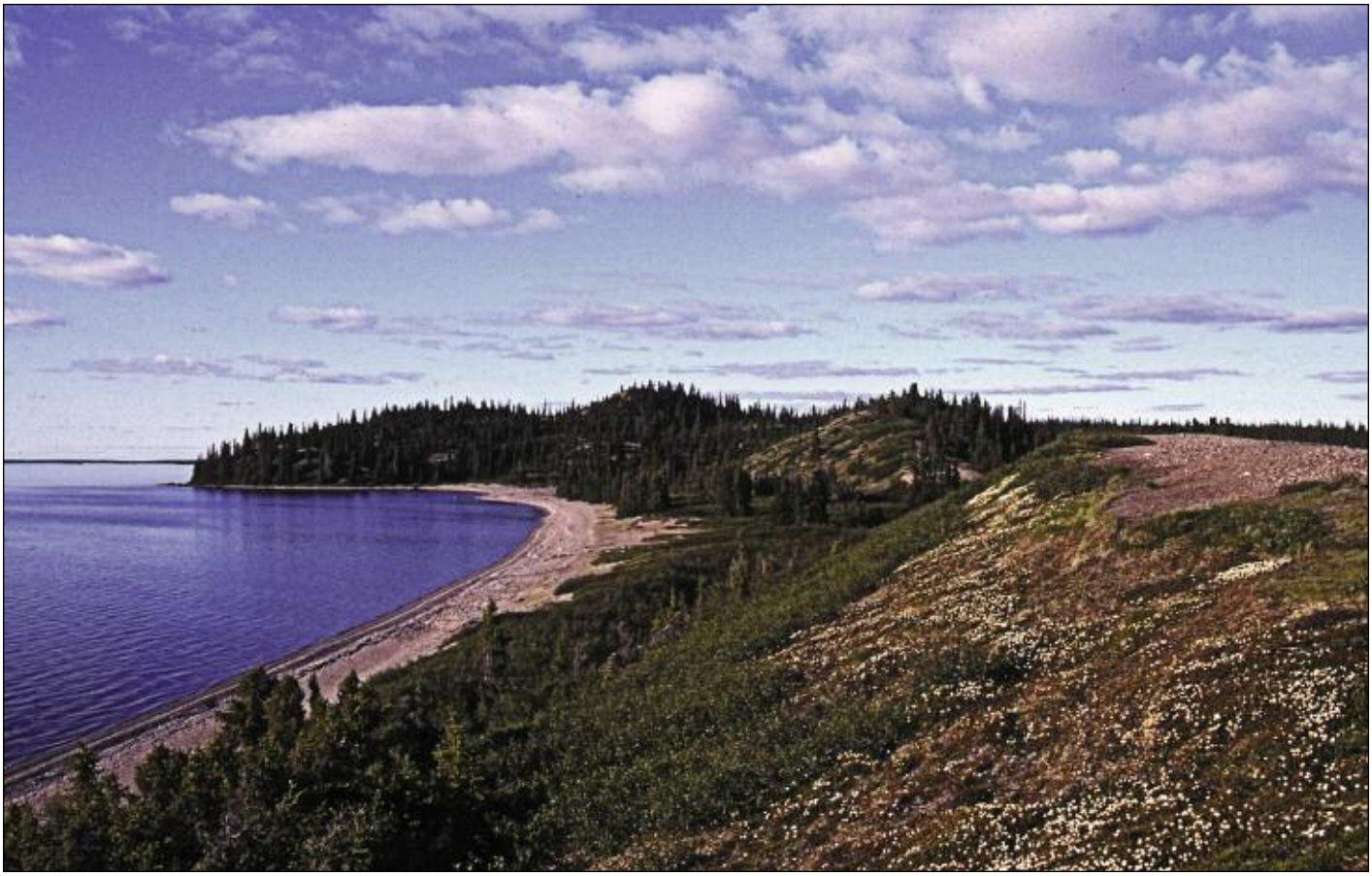


Esker on Kasba Lake

The Kazan River: from Kasba Lake to Baker Lake

Text: Allan Jacobs
Photos: Allan Jacobs and Bob Bignell

General Comments

1. The Kazan River (Inuit Ku, the River of the People) housed a people for generations. But about 60 years ago, in desperate conditions, the inhabitants were displaced and dispersed. Literally no one lives on the river today; all 16 camps mentioned by Tyrrell are vacant. And the culture that sustained the people is also gone. A way of life, hard though it was, is dead. It's a haunted land.

What remains from those times? To the paddler anyway, only stone structures: inuksuit (from the mundane to the spectacular), graves, tent rings, hunting blinds, campfire rings, "fences," and chipping sites. Only well after the trip did I learn of the famine and the relocation; one source is:

Campsite on Ennadai Lake

Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski. *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63.* UBC Press, Vancouver, 1994.

2. We were WCA members Bob Bignell, Stephen Catlin, Gene Chorostecki, and Allan Jacobs. Starting from Kasba Lake Lodge on 6 July 2003 and paddling at a moderate pace, we reached the town of Baker Lake on 5 August, 857 km downstream.

3. My extensive journal, plus detailed information on gear, logistics, campsite locations, rapids (location, class, route through), maps, distances, declinations, weather, ice conditions, clothing, protecting yourself from the bugs, etc., is posted at http://www.myccr.–com/canoedb/route Details.php?routeid=834

4. My Kazan bibliography (look under "Kazan River. Information") is posted at http://www.myccr.com/phpbbforum/viewtopic.php?f-125&t-38105.

I recommend explicitly:

(a) Joseph Burr Tyrrell's report of his 1894 trip: *Report on the Doobaunt, Kazan and Ferguson Rivers and the northwest ...* . S. E. Dawson, Ottawa (1897). Available on microfiche at some libraries. Tyrrell and his party were the first of European descent to meet the Barren Land Inuit in their Kazan home. Readers interested in learning more about Tyrrell might consult Heather Robertson's biography *Measuring Mother Earth: How Joe the Kid Became Tyrrell of the North,* McClelland and Stewart, Toronto (2007).

Beach-tundra site below Dimma Lake

(b) Anne Spragins-Harmuth's report (*Nastawgan*, Summer 1991). Beautifully written, it is the most thoughtful of all the reports, an utter pleasure to read until you come to the disturbing news in the Editor's Comment.

5. Rapids: They are mild on the whole, much easier than on the Coppermine for example. But lots of whitewater experience is mandatory; in such an isolated area, a small mistake can have severe consequences. This is no place for someone with something to prove. Very few rapids can be scouted from shore; you must be able to scout from the boat and to change course quickly in big water. Experience in lining will be a great asset. Many rapids should be run close to shore in case a fast exit is needed.

6. Portages: None long, none tough.

7. Campsites: They're everywhere on some sections of the river and nowhere on others; some are great and others decidedly ugly.

8. Inuit sites: At many campsites and elsewhere you will find inuksuit, tent rings, fences, chipping sites, hunting blinds, fire pits, graves and other evidence of occupation of these lands by the native people. It is unlawful to remove any material. And please do not disturb the sites; aren't we paddlers just visitors to the homes of people who lived here until they were removed?

Let us hope that no one will follow the shameful example of a Russell Polden (on the Back River in 1962): ... *carried the canoe ... over a mossy hill where a cairn had been built. ... On the way back, investigated the cairn, making an interesting discovery. Nearby was a man-made pile of rocks, formed in a closely-knit circle. On examination, I found a skull, a human skull. We presumed it to be an Eskimo grave. After filming the area, I took the skull for later examination. Most interesting.* Source: Robert Cundy. *Beacon Six*. Eyre & Spottiswoode, London (1970).

Would Polden have done the same if the grave had been marked by a cross? And there is no record that the three

others on the trip, one a devout Christian, objected.

9. Logistics: I recommend Kasba Lake Lodge unreservedly; you can use them also to access the Thelon and Dubawnt. They treated us peons just as they treated those paying $US3,495.00 (five days, per person). Next time, though, I'd look at using a PakCanoe, in part to avoid the return flight to Kasba Lake. http://www.kasba.com/

10. Weather: The region is semi-arid and rain is infrequent; in fact, it is technically a desert (Baker Lake receives only 270 mm of precipitation per year). The air is so dry that clothes dry pretty well overnight, though we had a heavy dew some mornings. We had no heavy rain, no bad storms, no really cold days, just a *son et lumière show* or two; rain was light and infrequent. Except for the last night, I used my sleeping bag only as a blanket.

The weather is reported to become foul starting in mid-August. In partial confirmation, the lodge closed and sent out its last flight to Winnipeg on 15 August in 2003; and Tyrrell's party ran into snow on Ennadai Lake on 11 August.

Unlike other parties travelling at about the same time of year, we were not delayed by ice. On Yathkyed Lake in particular, where other parties have been icebound in the last few days of July, we saw none on 24 July.

11. Water: It was clear all the way to Baker Lake town (except at one site well off the main current). It is almost certainly OK to drink, but this is no place to get the runs or worse; so three of us filtered, the other used bleach.

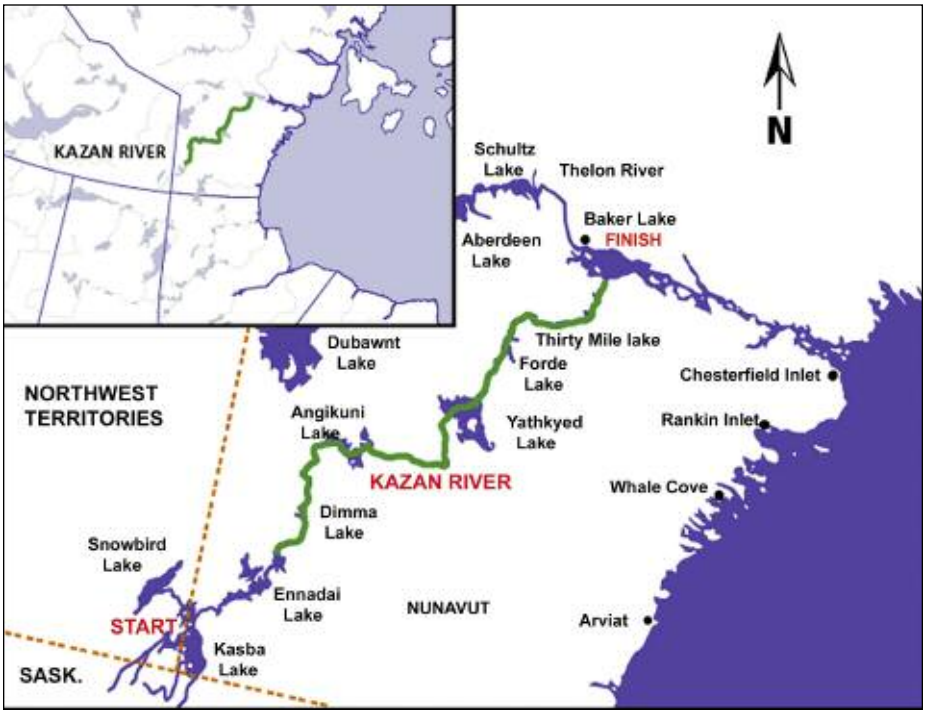
12. Wind: We were windbound on every named lake but Kasba and Tabane, for a total of six days of 31; our getting windbound on Dimma Lake is an accomplishment perhaps unique in Kazan literature. We were forced to pull in early or leave late several other times, and we had some nasty crossings. Well, the wind blew the bugs away.

13. Hiking: The area is flat, with only a few hills; there are several good eskers though. Hiking is tough over the tundra and we didn't do much, even when windbound. Don't miss the hill between Forde and Thirty-Mile lakes.

First cascade

14. Bugs: "If bugs tend to drive you round the bend, this is no place for you." (North River Outfitters). Amen. A good time to leave the tent and tend to your business is 5 a.m. or so when it's usually too cool for the beasts; 6 a.m. is pretty late. It's tough enough for a man; it must be bloody awful for a woman. Tip: wear coloured underwear, preferably dark, to conceal the bloodstains.

15. Wildlife: About 2,000 caribou, five to six dozen muskoxen, two Arctic foxes, two Arctic hares, one weasel, one Arctic ground squirrel, bald eagles, peregrines, herring gulls, terns, Bonaparte gulls, Canada geese, snow geese, willow ptarmigans, ducks; it was our best trip so far in that respect. Apart from two caribou herds on our last river day though,



Map source: Canadian Heritage River System; used with permission

Tundra carry, third cascade

we saw only a few dozen before that, with the largest group five or so.

16. Major-league tip: The massive sand flats to the south of Baker Lake town (and well to the west of it) are not shown on the topos. If the wind allows, I recommend that you approach town from the east.

17. The highest point of the trip for me was the Inuit sites. In spite of the saying that every river paddled twice is another river not paddled at all, I'd paddle the Kazan again, taking more time though to inspect sites. Other high points were the isolation (we saw no other people for 22 days), and the wildlife (about 2,000 caribou and dozens of muskoxen, though no wolves or bears).

18. Low points were the bugs (worst of all our combined 30+ trips north of 60, on a dozen or so rivers, worse even than on the Thelon); the wind (we lost six days in total, roughly par for the course judging from other reports); and the big lakes (mind-numbing slogging and nasty traverses), each of the three the most trying we've experienced.

Journal

Rather late in the game, I decided that *Nastawgan's* readers deserved better than a précis of my online journal, which is available at the link mentioned in comment no. 3 above. I thought that they might prefer to read comparisons of my observations with those of Tyrrell.

We had modern boats and other gear, detailed information on rapids (including routes through them), hazards, campsites, etc. In comparison, Tyrrell knew almost nothing of the river, initially even whether it flowed into Hudson Bay directly or, for example, through Chesterfield Inlet. He picked up two Inuit guides near Dimma Lake, however. And he had the responsibility of documenting the geology of the region through which they travelled; indeed, most of his journal is such a description. His party's progress appears to have been slowed considerably by the need for these observations. I was surprised to discover that today's recreational parties cover the same ground more quickly; see my journal at the link given above. In contrast, our sole responsibilities were to keep out of trouble and to finish on time for the pickup; and we had a satellite phone to call for help if needed.

We arrived at Kasba Lake on 6 July, by air from Winnipeg. Tyrrell arrived there on 5 August 1894 from Lake Winnipeg, which they left on 16 June; they had proceeded up the Saskatchewan River and passed through present-day Brochet (on Reindeer Lake), leaving it on 3 July. I expect that we had much higher water, which makes some rapids more difficult, others more easy.

On entering the river proper, we avoided a serious rapid by using a small channel through bushes on the left side, then ran R1s and swifts to Tabane Lake ("in the Chippewyan language"). It's a blind probe if you head down the rapid; consult my CCR post. *Tyrrell: "Kazan River ... rushes down a series of swift crooked rapids ... to a cascade with a descent of fifteen feet."*

After some mild rapids below Tabane Lake, we entered Ennadai Lake to a moderate head wind. *Tyrrell: "... the river continues as a very rapid stream ... until the bottom of the slope is reached at ... Ennadai Lake."* Lunch was at a great site on a sand spit. We saw a motorboat in the distance. The wind

stayed moderate all day. We paddled from island to island, lee to lee, and camped at a beach site on an island with many caribou trails.

We reached Caribou Point at lunch time, passing a fish camp on the way. As arranged using the satellite phone, Bill flew in from Kasba with Mohawk paddles to replace the wooden paddles supplied by the lodge (good thing too, for later I broke one of the latter on a pry). We crossed to the north shore in moderate wind and waves; there was a patch of shore ice to the north but none on the lake itself. We continued down the shore and camped in a small bay of an esker. To get shelter from the wind, we had to cook in an area where someone, likely fisherfolk, had left lots of tp; thanks guys.

The wind came up overnight, strong enough that we had to stay put. A motorboat went by in the morning. We hiked a bit in the esker complex and saw more ice on the shore. We started paddling at 2 p.m., in moderate wind and waves. *Tyrrell, on Ennadai Lake: "... the party was detained in camp from 11th till the 14th of August by a heavy storm with rain and snow." Later, "... signs of old Eskimo encampments were first found."*

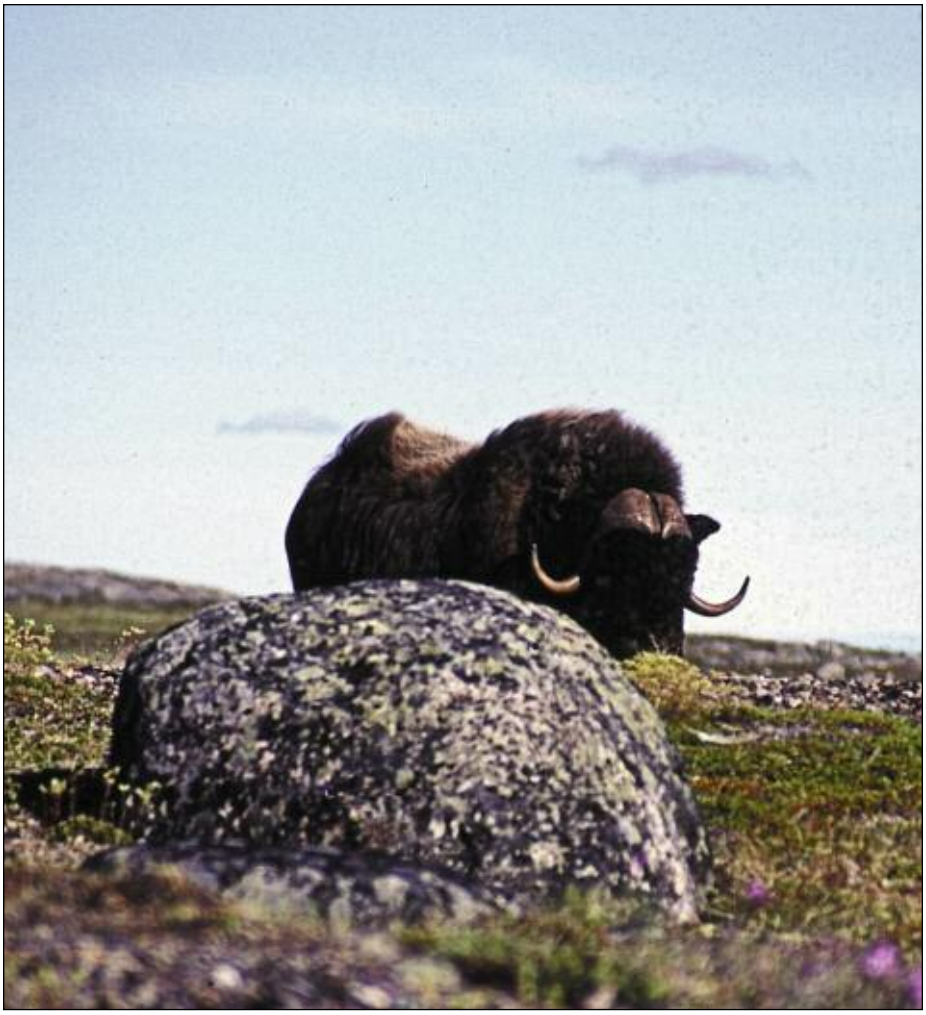
We exited Ennadai Lake (the rough boundary of the Barren Lands and also the rough boundary between Dene/Chipewyan and Inuit lands in Tyrrell's time) on 11 July, in light rain and moderate wind. We went left of the big island and thereby likely missed the Inuit site described by van den Steenhoven and Tester & Kulchyski, the former weather station, and Ennadai Lake Lodge (which appears to be operating again). *Tyrrell: "Below Ennadai Lake, the Kazan River for two miles forms a heavy rapid ..."* After two R1+ rapids, lots of swifts and small lakes, in wind strong enough to be annoying, we found a campsite at an esker on the north shore of a small lake.

Tyrrell: "At a bend in the river ... is a conspicuous high sandy ridge, evidently of the character of a kame or esker ..."

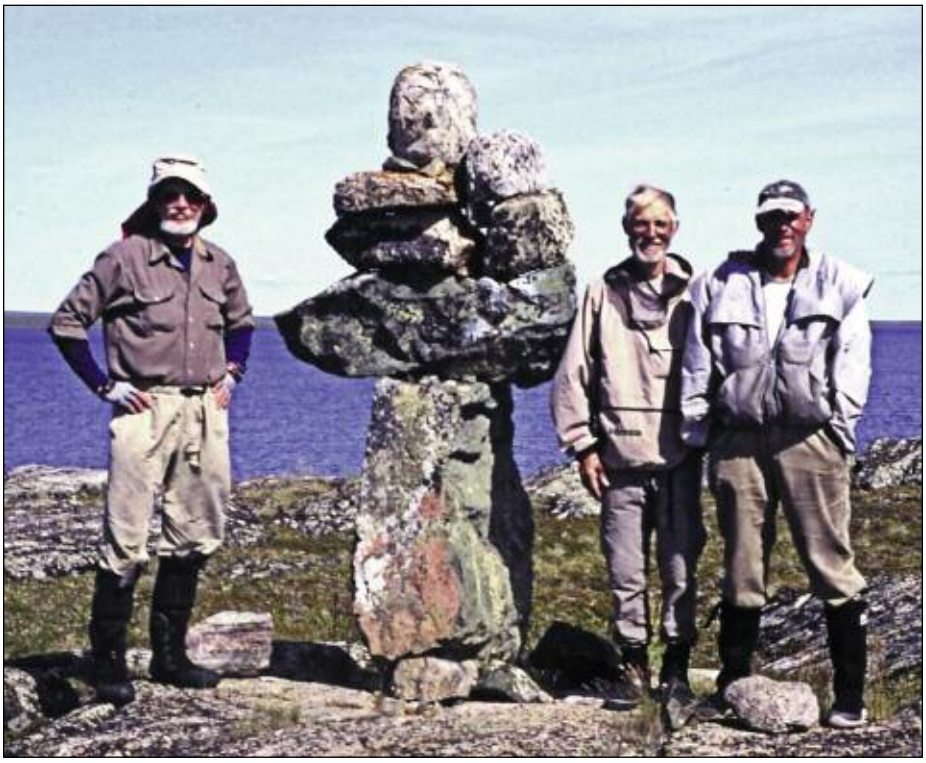
Next day, we continued down Tyrrell's "winding channel" in a light rain, passed through a loch-like lake, ran a serious rapid, and lunched at a beach. *Tyrrell: "A short distance below Sandy Hill Lake, the river bends sharply northward ... narrow lake ... The water discharges on the east side of this lake in a swift rapid down a rocky cascade, past which the canoes were carried."* The rain stopped, the sun came out and, guess what, the wind rose. A tough paddle got us to Dimma Lake and a tougher one got us to its west shore. To my regret, we couldn't visit the island with the grave of Kakook (aka Kakkuk), who travelled with Tyrrell as a guide in 1894. Unable to get around the point, we pulled in at a passable spot and stuck it out for a while, hoping to paddle in the evening (ha!); we gave up and pitched the tents.

Fox dens at campsite

Inuksuit at lunch site, Thirty-Mile Lake



Muskox at first campsite, Thirty-Mile Lake



Mother and child, and visitors

Two full days of the Windbound Dimma Lake Blues. We hiked, fixed gear, and rested, hoping that the wind would drop in the evenings (ha!). On the 14th, the wind dropped enough that I packed up my tent but then it came back too strong for us to paddle.

The wind dropped enough for us to get back on the water on 15 July but it hindered progress all day. There was a boat on the shore of the island where we had seen a helicopter land a day or two before. We found a modern bracelet at a rest spot at the narrows in Dimma *(Tyrrell: "... a narrows close to the camp of Kei-u-teto").* On the road again, we ran swifts before camping at a beach-tundra site; we got the bug tent, which we used also as a weather shelter, up before a line squall hit.

Comment: I place the camp of Hallo, Ahyout, and the latter's son Kakkuk (spelled also Kakuk and Kakook) at the south end of the lake just below Dimma Lake, rather than on Angikuni Lake (Heather Robertson).

The wind was moderate when we started out the next day but it got serious after lunch. The trip down Lake 267 was unpleasant; we got what shelter we could but the boats wallowed badly in a stern quarter wind and waves. After running swifts and rapids, we camped on a mound on river left.

On 17 July, above Angikuni Lake, we saw the first muskox of the trip, then a herd of about 20 at the start of the lake. After a short paddle, we gave up and camped rather than proceed in a bad wind. *Tyrrell: "... the river enters the upper extension of a large lake, called by the Eskimos Angikuni Kamanyie, or Great Lake, doubtless the Titmeg Lake of Samuel Hearne. Many Eskimos were camped in the vicinity, and at one time our two Peterborough canoes were surrounded by twenty-three Eskimo kayaks."*

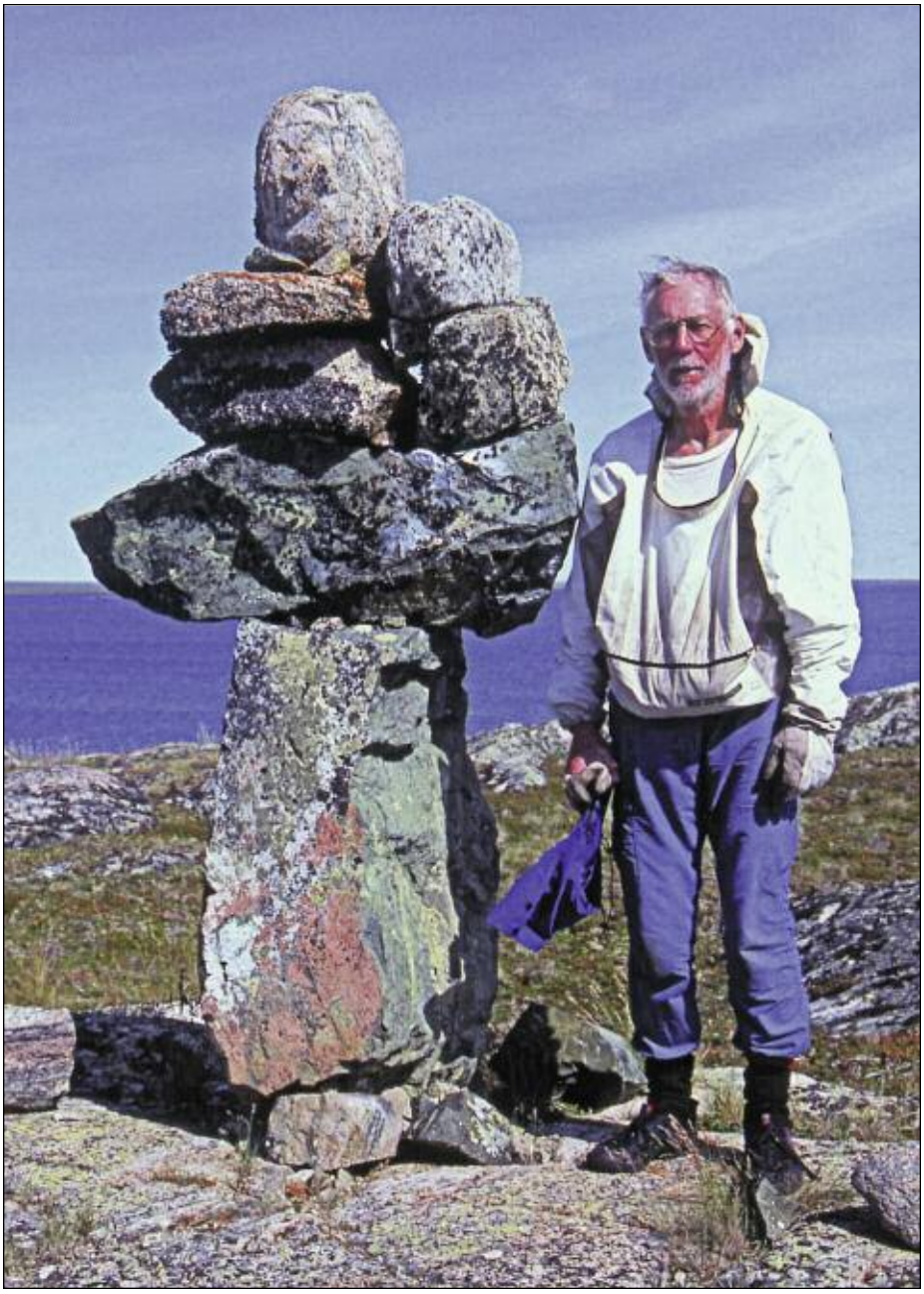
Surprise: The wind was up again the next day. We paddled southeast down the channel (past, I believe, Enetah's camp of 1894) into a stiff wind with a strong smell of smoke, we guessed from forest fires in Manitoba. *Tyrrell: While windbound "half a day" on Angikuni, "The party was visited ... by an Eskimo trader named Anuleah, who makes an*

annual trip to the trading store at the north end of Reindeer Lake." That is, the Kazan Inuit were known to those of European descent; Tyrrell's party was the first to visit them at their homes. Anuleah was given a letter to take to Brochet, for forwarding; it reached Ottawa, safely, in early March the next year! Not far below Enetah's camp, Tyrrell's party was *"detained for the greater part of three days."* They used the time to compile a dictionary of local Inuit language. We passed from island to island, lee to lee. The next crossing looked so bad that we pulled out on an island with an OK campsite and an Inuit site in the centre.

Next morning, we awoke to a dead calm. The lake was like glass (though the surface was dirty) and the bugs were unbelievable. We completed Angikuni and camped at the outlet; light rain fell in the evening. Next day, after a royal ride down the river, we ran many swifts and continued with a good current for the most part. *Tyrrell, regarding the exit from Angikuni: "Where the river leaves the lake, it first spreads out over a wide bed of boulders, becoming very shallow, and then contracts to seventy yards in width, and rushes as a deep rapid and almost straight stream ..."*

We reached the first cascade and camped in the middle of the portage; it's a beautiful spot and we took lots of photos. *Tyrrell, regarding the three cascades: "... the river falls twenty feet ... and then flows with a rapid current to a second fall, below which is a heavy cascade through a narrow rocky gap, where the river enters a gorge sixty feet deep ..."* More paddling and portaging, and tundra carries, got us to a beautiful campsite below the third cascade; there were two big snow patches downstream.

On 22 July, we ran lots of swifts and four serious rapids, doing some lining. Somewhere on this stretch I lost my Tilley hat; fortunately I had spare head covering. We had been watching a storm develop behind us and to our left; after the river turned north, we saw that it was coming our way fast so we pulled off the river at an unmentionable site and prepared to get hit. The storm missed us, but we were set up by then and decided to stay put.



Mother and child, and visitor

A day of more rapids and swifts got us to a sandy island just short of Yathkyed Lake. Some people climb Hill 224, maybe for the view, maybe to see whether Yathkyed is still iced up. We figured that we would find out soon enough about the ice and we wanted to make time so we carried on (any excuse to avoid what looked like a rough hike). After passing the caribou crossing point (where Samuel Hearne crossed over 200 years previously; we didn't stop for a look), we entered Yathkyed Lake, where we were greeted by a stiff head wind (sigh) but no ice (hurrah!). We paddled to the island with the weather station, mostly to get shelter. The wind seemed to drop after lunch and we headed out; but it came up again and we turned back and waited. With nothing else to do, we hiked over to inspect the weather station (damaged in places), then returned, rested, and had an early supper. The wind had almost died by 7 p.m., so we set out again to the north, nervously doing the 10-km crossing in a dead calm, arriving near dusk at an island

Hill between Forde Lake and Thirty-Mile Lake

where we found a marginal site on the east side.

The wind was up again the next day, again in our faces. After lunch at a beach, we managed the crossing to the peninsula and camped; we had decided to paddle around the peninsula rather than portage it. *Tyrrell: "To avoid travelling around a very long point of land, the Eskimos paddle down to the bottom of a shallow bay ... and then carry their canoes for 400 yards ... and launch them again in the river."* This was the buggiest spot ever; Bob figures it is because Yathkyed is the last to thaw. In June about 20 years before, he had helicoptered in and landed on the ice; they had to keep the blades turning to get relief from the bugs.

On 26 July, we rounded the tip of the peninsula (where there's a camp of some sort) and headed downstream in a good current. I think it was on this stretch that Gene lost his Tilley hat. The wind made Lake 141 a real grind. *Tyrrell ran "a swift and narrow, but deep rapid", then portaged "a boisterous rapid over boulders and irregular ridges of gneiss." About five km below "a small oval lake" (I believe this to be Lake 124, centred at 705/905 on map 65P04), he learned that the Kazan "flows into Chesterfield Inlet, that there is a high fall not far above its mouth ..."* The fall is clearly Kazan Falls, which is indeed less than a day's travel above the mouth. Pressed for time (winter was on the way and they were far from Churchill), *Tyrrell left the Kazan on 1 September at "a little bay of quiet water on the right," not far below the oval lake; guided by an Inuit "who knew the way,"* they travelled to the bay via Kaminuriak Lake and what we now know as the Ferguson River. We worked our way through the two rapids below Lake 141, did a fun run, then camped at the south end of upper Forde Lake.

We passed through the narrows and into lower Forde Lake, all the while with a stiff tail wind. Lunch was at a great site, with, however, very noisy sandhill cranes. We might have camped there but a partially consumed muskox carcass somehow persuaded us to continue. A stiff tail wind and big waves forced us to shore after only another eight km. The next day saw a nasty traverse to the outlet, in a stiff stern quarter wind and big waves. We climbed a prominent hill (great view of the Barren Lands – highly recommended!) and had lunch. Of course we encountered more stiff wind later, on an unnamed lake. After getting through more rapids by various means, we camped by fox dens (lots of prints but no sign of life) on the right-hand side. On 29 July, we entered Thirty-Mile Lake, taking the south channel. After lunch on an island with cairns of uncertain origin, the wind came up again and so we pulled in to camp, behind a huge boulder. Well, it turned out that an old, male muskox was hidden by the boulder. He didn't see us right away and did several ground rolls for some reason. Then he spotted us, glared a bit, and rubbed his head on his foreleg, which I've heard is a signal that he was about to charge. I retreated to the boat and pushed off with Stephen; the others figured that he would make a mock charge before the real thing. After a while, and in a snit, he moved off, turning around several times to check us out. We found a tent peg under a boulder, broken sunglasses, and an Inuit campfire site.

We continued down Thirty-Mile Lake, again in, what else, a strong wind. We stopped in to look at a spectacular inuksut ("mother and child") on an island; it contained some very large rocks (hundreds of pounds) that must have

Cairn at Kazan Falls

come from the mainland, nothing of that sort being seen on the island. We proceeded through the narrows; the Fall Caribou Crossing National Historic Site starts just west of there and continues to about five km below the falls. The wind got ever stronger so we gave up and camped.

The Windbound Thirty-Mile Lake Blues. With nowhere to hike, we retired to the tents in the afternoon, preparing for an evening paddle (ha!). A group of Widji men (Camp Widjiwagan) called out as they paddled by; Stephen spoke to them, I carried on snoozing. The wind stayed up so we stayed put.

On 1 August, we got up to a stiff wind and headed out. We struggled to the end of Thirty-Mile Lake, turned the corner, portaged a major rapid, and reached the falls after lots of lining through rapids. The Widjis were camped at the falls and so we stopped short, didn't want to disturb them. We talked briefly with them later; they had started on Kasba Lake, followed the Kazan to near the east end of Angikuni Lake, turned north, went upstream, portaged over the height of land to Tulemalu Lake and descended the Kunwak River, rejoining the Kazan just before Thirty-Mile Lake.

On 2 August, we signed the book at the cairn. A group of Widji women had signed in a few days before; they had paddled the same route as the men, starting however from the north end of Ennadai Lake. We took photos of the falls, the canyon, and ice on the other side. Peregrines made quite a display. The water was high and the falls as such weren't visible from shore; the Widjis paddled a canoe across a small channel to an island for a better look. The portage around the falls is marked with cairns at the start. I see no need to mark the portage; in fact I found the cairns an eyesore. We got everything over (the boats by tundra carry) and camped at the bay. A few 100 metres downstream is a beach sporting something like $10,000 of abandoned aluminum poles and fittings. The wind was up all day, great for portaging but boding ill for the next day.

On 3 August, we got up to a stiff wind and headed out, trying to exit four days early. It was a struggle but the river

Canyon below Kazan Falls

in this area is very scenic.

At our lunch stop, only a little exploring found us a hunting blind and a chipping site. After more wind and big waves, we turned sharply to the right and ran the first of the unmarked rapids. I stood up for a look downstream and so saw a caribou herd of about 1,500 on the bank above the river, the largest herd we had seen to that time anywhere, an amazing sight. We pulled in and shot dozens of photos; once the caribou did a giant swirling move. Another herd, this one of about 300, was standing on a gravel bar about 500 m downstream. After running more rapids, we took a narrow, shallow channel on the left that led to a point with six tent platforms where we camped (bad bugs). The six Widji women were camped on a big gravel island about a km upstream. Stephen phoned the lodge to arrange early pickup in town. A family of native people motored in after we had hit the sack, expecting, I guess, to use the platforms; Bob got up and talked to them. They had been windbound on some islands; they camped about 100 m back toward the mouth.

On 4 August, we got up early, trying to beat the wind; the Widji women went by as we were loading up. We overtook them but didn't pause to chat, figuring again that they liked privacy. The wind came up; they pulled in but we continued. We didn't see either

Hunting blind at lunch stop, lower Kazan

Chipping site at lunch stop, lower Kazan

Widji group again. After an ugly traverse into a stiff wind, we pulled in and had a light lunch. The wind grew worse and we gave up, pulling in at 2 p.m. at a poor site. We sat around, rested, and then had supper. Bob scouted downstream for two km or so but couldn't find a campsite better than where we were; and there weren't many better ones upstream either. A caribou stayed around for hours but left when a mother and calf trotted through camp. By 9 p.m., the wind had dropped enough that we decided to head out. We had a beautiful paddle into the sunset, then saw the lights of Baker Lake town when it got dark. We turned north, getting a bit nervous as the waves got bigger; Bob realized that they were from the Thelon current. Eventually we made contact with land and followed the coast to the northwest. At midnight we found a sandy beach, pulled in, and camped.

On 5 August, we slept in a bit; it was raining lightly and we had gone to bed late. We went around the island, then turned down the channel toward town; we don't know whether we would have been better off going around the other way. We turned left into a bay and then spent two hours dragging the boats through sand bars not marked on the map, the town in clear view all the time, an annoying experience. On our return, I read that John Martin's group had also got stuck there but no other report mentions them. Clear water was eventually reached but well to the west of the airport. Fighting a stiff headwind all the way, we reached Baker Lake campground at 3:30 p.m. It was a good move to paddle the previous evening; if we hadn't, we would not have made town that day. The campground, at the west end of town, has a fire pit, eight tent platforms, two rough-and-ready toilets, and a main building (usually closed).

We set up our tents on the platforms and then walked to town, arriving at the Northern store at 6:10, finding that it had closed at 6. All the art and souvenir stores were also closed by then; the only stores open were convenience stores at the far end of town. The Iglu Hotel was locked up, perhaps because Baker Lake is dry. The recreation centre was open and we made some phone calls; the others had some caribou stew (silly, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to do the same). Stephen phoned Kasba Lodge to confirm the pickup for the next morning. On returning to the campground, we found Louise there; she had opened the

The Tundra Dash, a sporting event:

Competitors start 10 m or more from a closed tent; the distance may be different and handicaps may be assessed by the other competitors. The stopwatch is started when the competitor begins running and is stopped when s/he announces that the tent's zipper is closed from the inside. Competitors are disqualified for adjusting their zippers within 10 minutes of claiming to close them. Competitors are permitted to brush bugs from clothing before starting, to decrease weight. Other competitors may assess time penalties for profanities, obscenities, and blasphemies, or for other unseemly conduct. Ripping the screening, dirtying the tent and contents with boots, and similar mishaps shall not be penalized, being penalty enough in themselves. Competitions may not be held when there is a noticeable wind, when the air is too cool, or under other conditions when bugs are not swarming.

main building and was cleaning it for us. We cooked supper inside. Louise brought over cake, put Inuit music from Greenland on her CD player for us, and showed us her carved wedding ring. Her children also dropped by. We left all our excess food with her. Lots of Inuit children dropped around to say hello. Bob, Gene, and Stephen pulled down their tents and slept inside. I wanted one more night not enclosed by walls; I crawled into my bag (rather than use it as a blanket) for the first time.

We got up at five, ate breakfast and paddled over to the "dock" where the float plane could land. We removed the thwarts, end plates, and seats from one boat so that the other could nest in it. Bill arrived right on time. Stephen and Gene got some shopping done, but the wind was coming up and Bill wanted to get off. The conservation people came over to check us out, then helped us get more fuel. We put two five-gallon cans into the Beaver and took off at about 11 a.m. After about 15 minutes, Bill decided that the wind was way too strong to continue and we returned. With the help of the conservation people we got more fuel. I talked to an Ottawa Citizen reporter on her way to Wager Bay. There was a single canoe at the campground. I spent a lot of time talking to the Inuit children, showing some of them the cockpit. I believe it was in this interval that Alvin opened the Visitor Centre especially for us.

We got off again at about four, into a stiff headwind (our ground speed dropped to below 50 mph at one point). We refuelled at Angikuni Lake where Bill had left eight five-gallon jugs in the morning, jammed the empty cans into the plane, and took off into the wind again. On the way back, Bill detoured so that we could check out the outlet rapids from Kasba Lake. I was rather sad on the flight back to the lodge, leaving the North again; and after weeks on the tundra, I saw trees as ugly, misshapen things.

We arrived at the lodge at 10 pm and crawled out of the plane, legs not so good; we got a lot of help with unloading. After beer and supper, we talked to the staff and the fisherfolk, and just plain enjoyed the lounge (what a great place); someone announced to the assembly that we had paddled to Baker Lake and so we had to stand up and accept applause. And there was music and a singer: I remember especially *"cause I'm leaving on a float plane, ...*" We returned to our cabin (shower! beds! flush toilet!) and repacked.

Part of caribou herd, lower Kazan

On 7 August, we got up, finished repacking, ate a wonderful lodge breakfast, and talked some more with the fisherfolk. We flew back to Winnipeg on the lodge's Convair, changed our WestJet flights with no problem, and headed home.

An OK way to turn 65.

Tundra

Wilderness Canoe Association
WCA
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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

"Whitewater's Greatest Lensmen"

Nastawgan's editorial team announces with immense pride that their Editor-in-Chief is included in a list of 12 of the world's best and most admired whitewater photographers. See pages 3 and 32 of the Summer/Fall issue of Rapid, North America's renowned whitewater magazine.

WCA Wine & Cheese Fall Party

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 19, 2011, at the 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.

Deadlines

The deadline dates for submitting material 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

Contributors' Guidelines

If you are planning to submit any material for possible publication in *Nastawgan*, you would do the editors and certainly yourself a great favour by first consulting the *WCA Guidelines for Contributors to Nastawgan.* These guidelines should be followed as much as possible by all contributors, so that the editorial team can more effectively edit your contribution to make it fit the *Nastawgan* style. The latest draft of the guidelines is available on the WCA website.

Blue Chute, French River ***Photo: Toni Harting***

HONKERS

They bring the season with them,
in flocks gliding down from on high,
tooting their coming with excited hellos,
wings whistling a beat through the sky.

Over my head with a great whoosh-whoosh
they make for the lake down the hill,
to cackle and babble as good friends do
till dusk, when they know to be still.

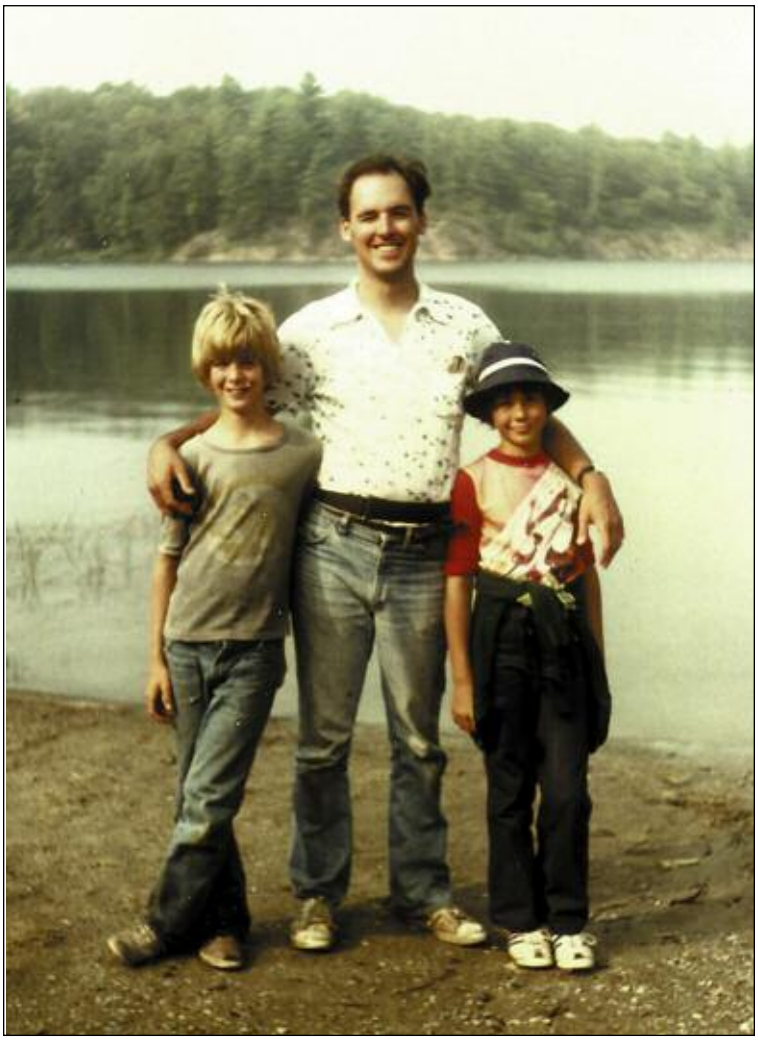
On a winter eve 'tis magic to hear
the faint calls of honkers in flight,
as high above they touch the stars
and wing swiftly through dark of night.

I've also seen a sight so rare
that few men believe the telling,
of wings lifted up by the gold of the sun
setting low cross the land in evening.

Great goose above, you touch my soul
and your song reaches parts of me
that are ancient, pure, and yearning
for before, and what's still to be.

Michael Van Winkle
As Is a Flower, © 2005

Bill and Joan King



Dad and the boys in Algonquin Park, 1976

Grass River, Manitoba, 1984

To discuss canoeing with Bill and Joan King is to be transported to the Far North, on calm or raging rivers, in inclement or glorious weather, in late Spring or early Autumn, viewing rarely seen wildlife and glorious flora, amid spectacular scenery, with close friends or adored family members. Both Bill and Joan have been active Wilderness Canoe Association members and valuable contributors for the past 35 years. Most notably, Bill was on the Board of Directors of the WCA for most of the 1980s, was vice-chair for two years, then served as chairman from 1986-1988. (He was elected in absentia but members knew of Bill's commitment and were confident he would accept the responsibility.) When that term ended, and for the past 23 years and continuing, Bill has been the Board's secretary—a job he most enjoys, as it allows him to host meetings, nourish the group, prepare minutes, and have a say in the decision-making.

Canoe life started in 1975, when Bill felt it was his duty as a father to give his two young sons, Bill and Nelson, the consummate Great Canadian Heritage experience—the canoe trip. A family friend with Boy Scout training also had two sons, and the six spent a summer vacation in Temagami. Bill's first response was not a positive one, but three days after their return, with fond memories of the good times, he was hooked. The experience of spending time with the boys in the wilderness, in simple surroundings, in good company, far away from his demanding medical practice was indelible for Bill, and was the beginning of what has become a lifelong hobby.

Each subsequent summer, from 1976 on, he took the King family to different parks and rivers: Algonquin, Killarney, Lady Evelyn Smoothwater, Quetico, the Spanish, the Albany. Today it is with their seven grandchildren that Bill and Joan are able to spend valuable quality time on the water; this past summer, with the five youngest, the Kings went to the French River.

The Temagami experience also gave Bill and Joan the impetus to join the WCA in 1976, with the idea of meeting like-minded active people who enjoyed the outdoors. The connection worked perfectly, offering a combination of adventurous souls and challenging territory to explore. In the past 35 years, all non-family trips

have been with WCA or Symposium people.

Almost every summer took the Kings and their companions to magnificent rivers: the Churchill twice, the Nahanni twice, the Grass, the Chiniguchi, the Gibson/McDonald, the Winisk, the Thelon, the Dumoine, the Hood, the Ashuapmushuan, the Chapleau, the Mountain, the Back, and the Horton (see *Nastawgan*, Winter 2008). When asked which was most memorable, both Bill and Joan say the Nahanni. "It's the pure majesty of the river and the most magnificent scenery."

Bill and Joan have unforgettable memories of their wonderful summers and, in retrospect, noted some standouts. Bill experienced winter tripping in Quebec at -40 degrees C and hiking on Ellesmere Island. Joan remembers paddling the Black River in late Spring with icicles forming on the brim of her hat and on the drips of her paddle. For the Horton River, the team brought Pakboats. This being a new experience, having to 'construct and deconstruct' the canoes, much like tents, Joan wondered if they would float. They did.

There are fond memories of teaching the grandchildren how to run rapids on the French River the summer of 2010. The Winisk River gave Joan and Bill the opportunity to go out onto Hudson Bay with the former chief of the Winisk band, Jean Michel Hunter, to see polar bears. On the Mountain River, the canyons were so deep, "scouting the rapids was impossible and made running them rather hair-raising, sight unseen." In 2008, the second canyon of the Horton River afforded their longest portage ever—one-and-a-half days. On the Churchill River, filtering the green water for drinking was done through Joan's hat. While it required patience and fortitude, it was not completely successful as one of the party contracted giardia. On the Dumoine, one night there was so much noise, it was impossible to detect what it was. As it happened, the Army was approaching! In Wabakimi Provincial Park in 2006, the storm was so fierce, it was all they could do to ask, "are we having fun yet?"

Descending from Sunblood Mountain, Nahanni, 1989

Perhaps one of Bill's most rewarding trips was in the summer of 1985 when he and the Peake brothers paddled an as yet un-English-named river. They named it the Morse River after Eric Morse, one of the Voyageurs, influential wilderness paddlers of the 1950s and '60s.

For all of their canoeing, the King house was also the meeting place for *Nastawgan* preparation, labelling, stuffing, and distributing. A crew of volunteers made sure the magazine met its circulation date.

Besides the physical challenge and the rugged beauty of places, Bill and Joan both agree it is the comradery of the people sharing the wilderness experience that is most cherished. As Bill says, "people may not agree, except in the wilderness." For all of their remarkable experiences in most awe-inspiring places, when asked what the WCA and canoeing have meant to Bill and Joan, both reiterate, "it's the people." The Wilderness Canoe Association and its members have been fortunate that the Kings chose this organization for their recreation so many years ago.

Bernice Slotnick

Mountain River (with birthday balloons!), 1996

The Rae River

Sarah Hooper

Air Tindi base in Yellowknife, with pilot Trevor, Sarah, Dave, Gene, and Mark in front

When I was awarded a grant from the U.K.-based Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to visit Canada and pursue wilderness canoeing, I never dreamed I'd be part of a team heading out on an exploratory journey above the Arctic Circle. One of the main motivations for my trip was to experience truly remote wilderness canoeing and I certainly wasn't disappointed.

My dream river was to be the Rae. Located in the far north of Nunavut, the Rae River flows north and then east into the Coronation Gulf and the Arctic Ocean. Named by Sir John Richardson after his friend and explorer John Rae, this river has seldom been paddled. The only evidence we found of previous trips was during the last 65 km of our journey and that trip was two years before ours.

It was this link with John Rae, along with a desire to explore new and uncharted areas of the Arctic, which inspired David Plante to plan an expedition on this particular river.

John Rae was born in the Orkney Islands and is considered by many to be the greatest of all Arctic explorers. In sharp contrast to many explorers before him, he was the first to afford the local Inuit the respect which they deserved. He was also the first to adopt their ways of living in order to adapt to the harsh conditions of the Far North. Rae's story is a fascinating one. Although it is now known that he discovered the location and fate of the doomed Franklin expedition and that he was the first to identify the final link in the Northwest Passage, he was credited for neither. A campaign of denial and vilification, led by Lady Jane Franklin with the help of Charles Dickens, left Rae as the only explorer of his era not to receive a Knighthood.

Dave Plante is a veterinarian from New York State and with help from his

friend and fellow vet Mark Chmielowicz, he set about finding additional paddling companions to join this exploratory trip, planned for 5-25 July 2010. Our final team consisted of Dave, Mark, Gene Chorosteki, a retired urologist from the US, and myself. Dave was my stern man and we got along like a house on fire. We both love singing as we paddle! He is a superb paddler and I learned a lot from him as we paddled down long sections of rapids. Mark is as strong as an ox and has a wicked sense of humour, while Gene, at 77 years young and a veteran of 21 previous canoe trips in the Far North (with a story to tell for every one of them), is a glowing advertisement for retirement.

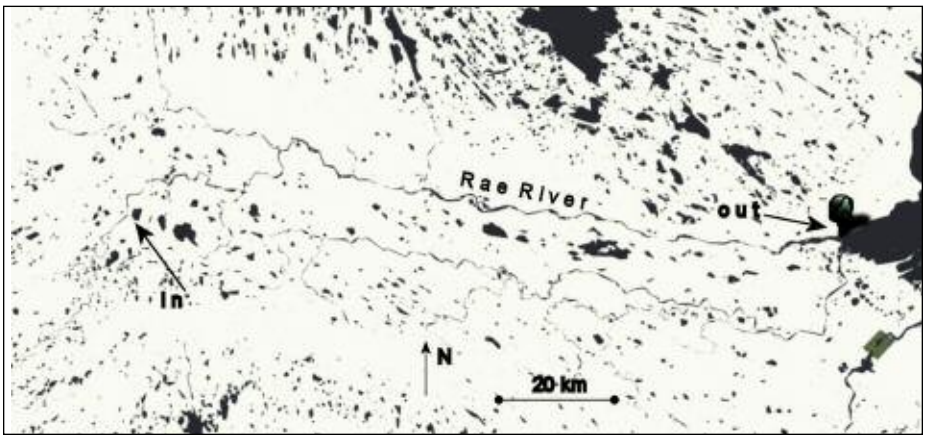
Our Plan

Our journey began in Yellowknife, which is located only 512 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle. From here we had a float plane booked with Air Tindi, which would drop us off close to the river where we would put in at one of two small lakes Dave had identified approximately 67 degrees North. From there a short portage or possibly a paddle down a small creek – we weren't sure – would take us to the as yet unnamed south branch of the Rae River. This would take us north and east joining up with the main Rae.

For me, the plane journey was one of the most exciting parts of the adventure. Just the concept of flying to a river was something I had only ever dreamed about. Add to that the anticipation of not quite knowing if we could land where we wanted, plus a chance that the area we were heading towards would be frozen in parts, and I was already in full on adventure mode.

Now, what you have to understand is that my paddling companions, although looking forward to our river journey, were pretty old hands when it came to flying out to remote rivers and landing in the middle of nowhere. I, on the other hand, was like a small child on Christmas Eve. I was so excited! I couldn't sit still for a moment in the Air Tindi waiting room, checking on every plane arriving (is this one ours?) and bouncing around the place. When our plane finally arrived and Trevor, the pilot, came into the waiting room, I was beside myself. The controller of Air Tindi pointed out on the map to Trevor where we were heading, to which he replied "that's not on my map!" I just about squealed with excitement, oh my

The view from the co-pilot's seat



Civilization departs

goodness, we're off his map! On account of it being my first trip in a float plane, I was allowed to sit in the co-pilot's seat.

The flight was incredible. We flew for about three hours above the Arctic Circle and saw nothing but thousands of small lakes and rivers. It was unbelievable. We weren't able to land on the lake we had originally planned to go to, as it was too shallow. We spotted a couple of other possibilities but they were too 'glassy'. If the water is glassy, then it is difficult for the pilot to judge where the top of the water is. Apparently, they sometimes throw apples out the window to create ripples. We finally found a suitable lake and Trevor was able to land safely, although it was somewhat of a boggy landing zone. We unpacked the plane and then came the moment when the little Cessna flew off and we were left totally on our own. I had been anticipating this moment for months, wondering how I would feel. Scared? Nervous? Excited? Apprehensive? Lonely? Actually, I felt none of those things. The truth is that I felt completely at home and totally contented. I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

Mark with one of the PakCanoes

The Gear: Canoes, Tents, Food, Safety

We certainly weren't travelling light and the two 17-foot PakCanoes, three food barrels, one dry bag for food, wanagin, tundra tarp, six paddles, and four personal packs (plus day packs) weighed in at 740 pounds.

Before we could go anywhere we had to 'build' the canoes. Dave and Mark both own PakCanoes, which are basically canoes in a bag. They have become more popular in recent years on remote trips as they take up less room and help keep the float plane costs down. Dave had made a huge effort with the food. This was no pasta'n'sauce camping trip! The food was gourmet style and our meals included such delights as muskox steak, pizza, lasagna, seafood chowder, freshly made quiche, strawberry pancakes, crème caramel, apple crisp, and key lime pie. And, of course, when we caught char, there was fresh fish for supper and breakfast. We had quite a selection of tents but by far the star of the show was the 'Tundra Tarp – Hilleberg Atlas,' which was our communal eating and socializing area. Without this, I am sure I would have either gone completely mad due to the mosquitoes or spent the entire time, when not on the river, cooped up in my little Coleman Kraz X1.

We carried with us a SPOT device, a sat phone, and a PLB (Personal Locator Beacon). The SPOT allowed us to send GPS coordinates along with a standard 'I'm OK' message to predetermined email addresses and mobile phone numbers. It also has one option for a personal message (ours in this case was: 'OK but windbound') and finally an SOS message. It also has a tracking facility, which you can activate, but this requires the GPS to be on all the time. A sat phone is easy to rent and is considered a standard piece of emergency equipment for such remote northern trips.

The River

Our time on the water varied quite a lot during the trip. We started on a little creek flowing out of the lake on which we had landed. This was a bit of push-and-pull through narrow, shrub-covered twists and turns. It was rather frustrating because every 25-30 metres it appeared to open up into a river wide enough to paddle, only to constrict again around the next corner. Gene later described it as a 'problematic navigation.' Many geese and their goslings, along with two muskrats, looked on in amusement as we struggled to make our way down this waterway. I feel I can say with reasonable certainty that we were the first to paddle here; later that evening Dave named it 'Hooper Creek.' After completing this beautiful little tributary (as I now think of it), we found ourselves at the south branch of the Rae River, which is a clear and wide river. We had a great campsite: four-metre

cliffs on river right with spectacular views of flat-topped rocky hills. The river looked bigger than expected, about 30 metres wide with some grade-1 rock gardens.

The La Plante (as I named this south branch) is a superb river and we spent several days enjoying the varied rapids. Shortly after we began, we encountered 'Damian's Falls,' named after a friend of Dave's from Yellowknife who is a biologist specializing in caribou. River right is a grade-5 drop with an interesting rooster tail at the bottom. River left is a narrow but long grade-4 chute. I dare say they could be paddled; but in loaded canoes, hundreds of kilometres from help, and an emergency rescue meaning a $10,000 plane bill, the only line we were taking was the one on the bank. Besides, we felt like stretching our legs. There are many long sections of technical grade-1 and -2 and short sections of grade-3 finishing with wide boulder fans, which were awesome fun. The water is full of boulders and crystal clear.

Reaching the actual Rae River was a significant moment. Dave had been researching and planning this trip for several years and now here we were. This was the river named after his Arctic hero. The river wide area would seem completely different in the winter covered with snow. We experienced almost 24 hours of daylight while on the river. Although the sun did set at about 12.30 a.m. and rose at about 3 a.m., there was no appreciable darkness in between.

Wildlife

The wildlife we saw was incredible and at times I felt as though I was at home watching a wildlife documentary. There are a few reasons why we may have had so many wildlife sightings. Travelling in a small group meant that we could stop and investigate where we wanted without having to push on to meet a schedule. It may also have been that the remoteness of the area and the lack of people who travel this way gave us the opportunity to see the things we did. Or, we could have just been lucky. Whatever the reason, it was wonderful. We saw arctic wolves, caribou, muskoxen, and two grizzly bears, not to mention ptarmigans, bald eagles, golden eagles, gyrfalcons, and many water birds. My top three encounters are described as follows:

The loaded canoes

Number One – The Sleeping Grizzly

The first grizzly bear was on the side of the river. Although he (or she) looked slightly curious, the bear ran off after a few minutes and left us to our paddling. It was really cool. I got an OK photo and with a bit of exaggeration I could have made a good story. It was at a safe distance and I was happy. The second encounter was far more dramatic. We had decided to have a layover day and camp in the same place for two nights. With our free day, we decided to go for

Hooper Creek

Damian's Falls

Sarah lands a northern pike

a hike. Gene stayed at camp and despite his protests of "I don't think there will be any bother with bears today," we insisted he keep one of the pepper sprays. We had the other one (which I slept with) and bangers in our bags. Not more than 500 metres from camp, we sat on the top of a rock outcrop and chatted away, looking through our binoculars and enjoying the sunshine.

After 10 minutes or so we continued on our walk and after no more than a minute walking Dave said, "Guys, back up, there's a bear!" There was no doubt in my mind from his tone that he wasn't joking. "Where? Where?" I said, backing up. "I can't see it." "You nearly frickin stood on him," was Dave's reply. (I should point out that this does not need any amount of exaggeration to make a good story.) Oh my goodness, then I saw him, asleep on the rocks! We spied our escape route, loaded our bangers, all in hushed tones. Then, I have no shame in telling you that I retreated to a distance, which put two good meals (i.e. Dave and Mark) between the bear and me. At this point, I assumed that we would be leaving the 'sleeping bear to lie' and retreat without waking him. But his proximity to our camp (500 metres) and the fact we were staying there that night meant that Dave and Mark's approach (they are vets after all) was to scare him away. So Dave set off a 'screamer' which sounds like fireworks. That only succeeded in waking him up. Oh my goodness, I was thinking, now we have a grumpy bear! There followed a short discussion between my two companions (something about throwing a rock versus setting off another banger) before Dave set off another banger, which sounded like a gunshot and scared the bear away.

Number Two – The Golden Eagle Versus The Raven

One day, we were watching a golden eagle soaring and circling high above and stopped paddling, quite close to shore, to see what happened next. Before long the eagle made a vertical dive straight towards a family of geese

with several goslings. Much flapping of wings and squawks of distress ensued, and we were left with the eagle landing on the riverbank, looking quite pleased with himself, and a (seemingly) dead gosling nearby. Within seconds, a raven came from nowhere, almost dive-bombed the eagle, and led him high up into the clouds. We watched these two for five or 10 minutes while the raven tormented the eagle in a display that our Red Arrows, the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, would have been proud of. Meanwhile, the little gosling (who we now realized had only been playing dead) toddled off to catch up with the rest of his family. We were totally stunned. Was the raven a buddy of the geese? Was the raven angry with the eagle for a previous misdemeanor? Or did he go after the eagle just because he could? I guess we'll never know.

Number Three – The Wolf Versus the Caribou

After dinner one night, we were taking some great midnight-sun pictures when Dave spotted what he thought were a couple of caribou swimming above the falls. He signaled to me, as I had earlier expressed interest in seeing swimming caribou. Dave quickly walked upstream about 500 metres and started taking pictures. He couldn't understand why the cow and calf were going back and forth in the river. As I started to follow Dave, I heard shouting coming from behind me; an excited Mark was watching the creatures through his binoculars. "It's a wolf!" he yelled. It suddenly became clear that the smaller animal was a wolf, who wasn't nearly as good a swimmer as the larger cow. With all the shouting, the wolf looked up, spotted Dave, and then bolted up the bank of the opposite side of the river. The wolf had been in pursuit of the caribou and she had taken to the river for safety, swimming back and forth in the current to elude the predator. Dave had inadvertently interrupted a wolf's dinner plans! Dave stayed up late fishing that night and the caribou was content to stay put 10 metres from him and rest until long after we had all gone to bed.

Dave loading bangers to chase off the bear

Muskoxen by the river

Sarah by unnamed falls

Kugluktuk

Once we arrived at the mouth of the river, Richardson Bay, campsites were harder to find as many of the locals had dwellings on the little islands and we did not want to intrude. We stopped briefly on one point to get a photo of a large Inukshuk. Historically, these may have been used for navigation, either as a point of reference, a marker for hunting grounds, or as a food cache. Today, they are symbols of friendship and co-operation and were, of course, the symbol for the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.

When we arrived in Kugluktuk, the Inuit village on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, which was our destination, we were already being talked about by the locals. "We don't usually see canoeists approaching from the west," one man told us. "Have you seen any caribou?" and "What is the fishing like at the falls?" were the two most common questions we were asked. We spent our last night camping at the public campsite and were quite the local celebrities. Many of the villagers came to chat with us and the local children (who seem to be up all night, I guess making the most of the daylight while they could), were eager to share fishing stories and show off their quad-bike manoeuvres to us.

Large inukshuk above the river

Home and Reflection

Having spent 15 days on the river and the first 10 without any sign of other humans, I had mixed feelings about heading back to Yellowknife. A hot shower and a flushing loo definitely had an appeal, but I found something magical about being that remote and I really didn't want to leave it behind. Before the trip, I had spoken about it as being a 'once in a lifetime' experience, but now I'm not so sure. There are few areas left in the world, which we can truly describe as 'wilderness' and having been in such a place and felt it, I now have a strong desire, or perhaps stronger than that, a need, to go back there. I've tried, and I think failed, to adequately describe to friends and family how I felt on the Rae River and I can't even begin to try and explain it in a few sentences here. It's a river that I hope you will go to and experience for yourself.

Sarah Hooper, a member of the WCA, is an English outdoor instructor who spends her life in the mountains and on lakes and rivers. In the summer of 2010, she visited Canada, enjoying for the first time during 10 weeks the beauty and thrill of wilderness canoeing. Her story of those 10 weeks will be published in a future issue of *Nastawgan*. Sarah's Rae River trip was the highlight of her Canadian adventure.

Kugluktuk coming into sight

The midnight sun, still well above the horizon

The voice recorder: my favourite tool

Aleks Gusev

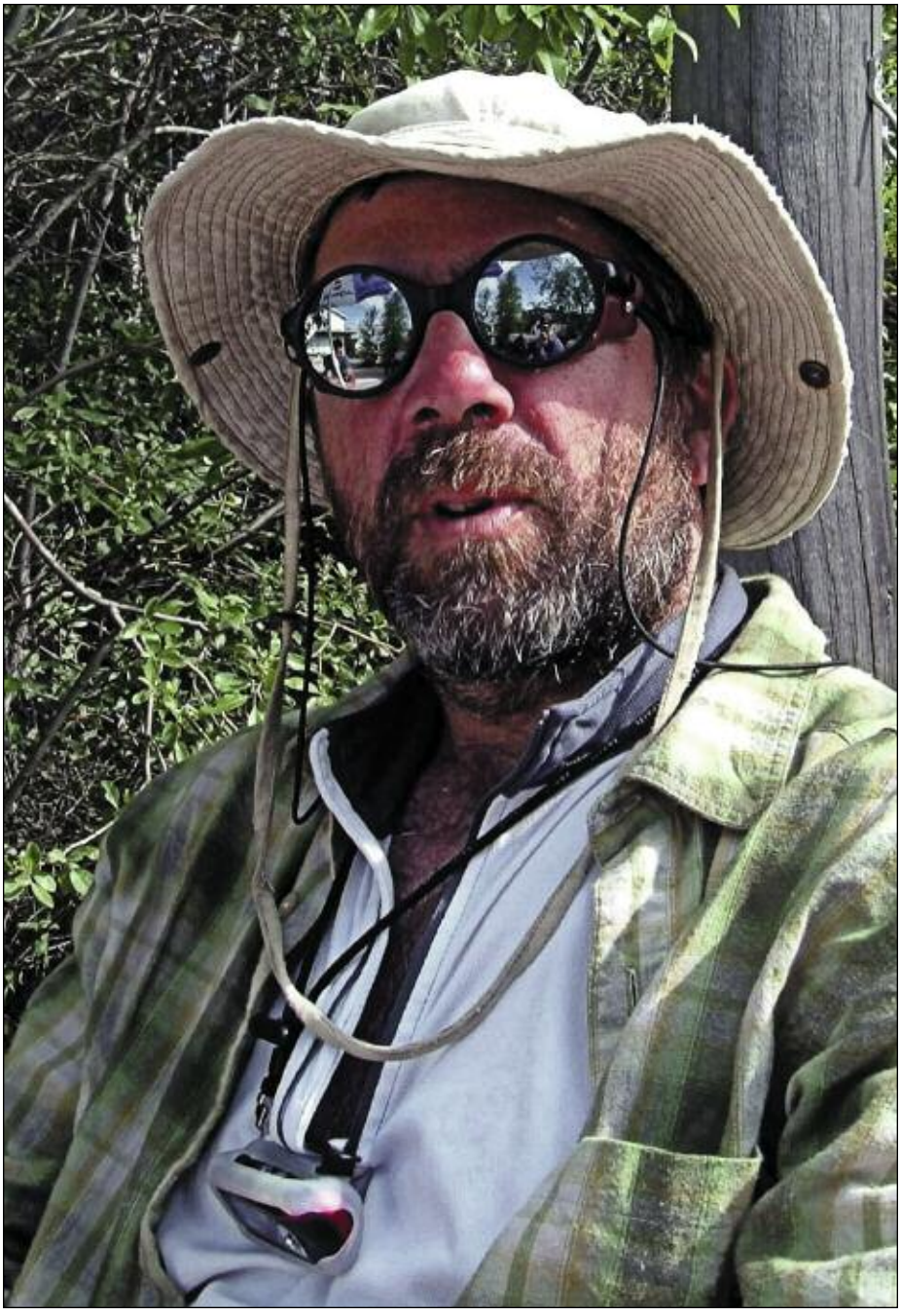
I am a man of many gadgets. They're not collecting dust on the shelf either. On the contrary, most of them have multiple uses. And believe me, I use them.

We take wilderness trips to "get away from it all." Amongst other things, to drown the sounds of civilization and to open our senses to the sounds of the world as it existed thousands of years ago. It would be fitting, then, to relieve ourselves of all the gadgetry before closing the backpack and heading north. When I first brought up the topic of SPOT Satellite Messenger to George Luste a few years ago, praising their ingenuity, small size, and low cost, George looked at me at said: "But Aleks, the last thing I want is for people to know where I am. It's precisely why I'm going in the first place!"

This is the story about a gadget that has brought me more smiles and tears then all of the photographs and films I've shot. It's my trusted voice recorder.

How and when I started to use it on my wilderness trips, I don't remember any more. Given that it's not waterproof, it certainly has lasted me a long time. I'm particularly fond of its design, unlike those boring, predictable, cigarette-lighter-shaped devices concocted by the likes of Sony and Panasonic. True to form, mine was made by i-River, one of the pioneers in this field. You see, I love its non-uniform shape which helps me to operate it in the dark. No way can you mix up the buttons – there are only three and they are positioned like buttons on my accordion bass register: do-re-mi. It's a bummer to have to turn on the light to see where the "off" switch is! Not with mine – I can do it with my eyes closed.

Although it's also an mp3 player, I don't use it to listen to music, books, or other recordings when I'm on a wilderness trip. Its primary use is to capture ambient sounds, campfire conversation, and my own comments. I keep it strapped to my life jacket, so it's always close. If I see a nice stream coming from river right, or a particularly nice camp site, or a good fishing hole, I simply record the time, read aloud the location from my GPS, and describe what I see. The alternative would be to stop, get the diary out, and write it up on the spot. While romantic, it's not always



practical and doesn't serve the same purpose.

I'll never forget the sound of two loons, our welcoming party on Lake Thahikafaluk, headwaters of the Hood river. They sang beautifully, teasing each other to produce even more spectacular cries. Back-and-forth they went for 15 minutes. You guessed it: I have it all recorded! When my friends and I made a movie about the Hood river trip (*"Canoeing to the Arctic,"* a copy of which is stored at the National Archives of Canada), we used about 10 seconds of that audio clip.

My memory is certainly not what it once was, or I think it was. Recorded descriptions of the camp sites, encounters with people and animals, even simple things like describing the shape of the particular cloud, they all bring such vivid memories. I just close my eyes and listen to the sounds of the best days of my life.

The juice I get out of a single AA battery is unbelievable. Never before, or since, have I seen something even remotely similar to this. Once, by mistake, I recorded over 24 hours of nonstop sound. The battery was still showing full! Yes, I worry what would happen if I lose the recorder, or drop it in the water. When I get particularly concerned, I would scribe key information into my diary late at night, while resting in my tent.

I saved the best for last: another important reason why I favour voice recorder sound bites over video clips or photos, I can listen to them in the car! As someone who sits in front of the computer all day (and most nights), I cringe at the thought of having to sit and watch digital photos or movie footage for hours on the screen. In the car, the opposite is true. I love to drive and listen to the recordings from different trips: gurgling of the water, thunder and pat-puttering of rain on the tent canvas, excited yelling as we descend down the Prairie Creek, or "aaahs" and "uuuhs" as I melt in the hot springs below the Splits.

Tip: consider warning your friends before you start recording. We get carried away and sometimes say things that we later regret. But it sure is fun listening!

FISH ON

Casting off the rock ledge that is our campsite. It's a metre to the water's edge, and you can see another six metres straight down into the water. A really deep hole here. We stopped early because it's a great spot to catch fish. And catching fish is one of the reasons to go on a wilderness canoe trip.

Using a Mepps spinner for a lure and getting a strike almost every cast. That sharp tug on the line is what pulls me back on course every year. Back in the city, you can get off track. You can attach too much importance to things of little weight in the grand scheme of life. Things break. The job is hard. Money is always tight. But so far, the wilderness still exists, and there are big fish that have never been caught.

Now early evening. The buddies have quit fishing for the day. My need to catch fish must be greater than that of the buddies. A lot greater. Cast again. "Fish on," I yell to the buddies. Magical words. The buddies stop and look. Can see them smile as I turn and shout to them. Catching fish is a pleasant thought for everyone. Can never have enough thoughts like that.

"I'm Ahab and I'm looking for the white whale," I shout again. The buddies smile for the second time. But this time they don't know that I am not kidding.

Ahab sailed the oceans of the world foregoing profit, friendships, and common sense in his single-minded quest. Am I any less consumed? Just as Ahab was so consumed by his white whale, am I so consumed with my need for wilderness? Who is the more tragic figure?

Cast again. Can see a fish following the lure. Looks like a big one. Many years of wilderness trips have led me to believe that if you go north far enough, often enough, you are going to catch a big one. Maybe the biggest fish of your life. Catching a big fish depends less on fishing skills and more on just being in a place where fishing pressure is low. And nowhere is fishing pressure lower than on wilderness canoe trips.

Got this last one close to shore. Finning slowly in the shallows. It's now decision time—keep him for a late-night snack, or let him go. Always a decision based on the last fish meal, the depth of the ration bag, the kilometres left to travel, the desire for fresh fish. All key questions that have no answer outside of the wilderness.

The answer from the buddies is to keep him. I reach for the fish to get him on shore. Good sized pike. Just before the hands enter the water, the fish gives another toss of his head and dislodges the hook. A flash of colour and then he is gone.

I'm standing there as the recipient of yet another hard lesson of the wilderness: "It's not dinner until it's in the pan."

It's not so much that I mind the lessons; it's just that they always seem to come at such great cost. I guess it's just the wilderness making sure that each lesson is burned deep into your soul.

Cast again. Another fish. This one's also tugging hard. You know, it's really the wilderness on the other end of the line. Pulling me to it. I don't need much encouragement though. The slightest tap on the line is enough. I'm always ready to follow.

Greg Went.

Winter Camping Equipment

Here are a few tips from the photographer, Colin O'Connor, featured in the article Lessons of the Land in the Spring 2011 issue of *Nastawgan*. You can purchase the tent from www.snowtrekkertents.com. These tents are made from egyptian cotton (very light) and use aluminum poles. Snowtrekker sells stoves as well but I would recommend the higher-quality stoves of www.fourdog.com. A great book about traditional winter camping and trekking is The Snow Walker's Companion by the Conovers. It's packed with valuable information.

Defining our Civilization: Club Moss

Club moss is actually a misnomer, they are not actually mosses at all. Unlike the mosses that we talked about earlier, club mosses have true roots, stems, and leaves. Also unlike the mosses, the little green club mosses that I can see on the forest floor have two sets of chromosomes in each cell. Like most other plants and animals, the stage in a club mosses life cycle where they have only one set of chromosomes per cell is the more unobtrusive and less enduring one.

All species of club mosses are in a division of plants called the lycophytes, a widespread but inconspicuous group that can be found all over the world. The lycophytes weren't always so inconspicuous however. Three or four hundred million years ago, before the age of the dinosaurs, and long before there were any flowering plants, lycophytes dominated the landscape. Some were treelike plants over 50 metres tall and seven metres around their "trunk". Surprisingly, these giant lycophytes that lived so long ago have a huge impact on each of our daily lives. Based on decisions we make now, lycophytes may in fact determine our security, peace, and survival in the future.

This is because the remains of these giant lycophytes that once dominated the landscape are now underground, making up most of the earth's coal and oil reserves. Our entire economy and the foreign policy of most nations revolve around the coal and oil these ancient lycophytes have become. As we start wars and become increasingly obsessed over control of these reserves, the lycophytes may have the last laugh. We are releasing literally millions of years of these plants' accumulated carbon over just a short couple of hundred years. And just as a change in climate ended their dominance, the much more drastic change in climate which we are now causing will very likely end the rein of today's dominant life forms. Long after we are gone, who knows what will thrive in the new conditions we created. Perhaps the lycophytes will rise again.

As I walk along the trail, the logs, branches, and entire trees that lay scattered haphazardly on the forest floor, give the trail an earthy feel. I can still hear the drumming of the grouse. With all of the fallen trees laying around there are plenty of platforms for a male grouse to display from. The deadfall also provides many places to hide. It's a funny name, deadfall. A big healthy tree in the prime of its life is actually made up almost entirely of dead wood. Only a small portion around the outside of the trunk is live tissue. But once a tree becomes deadfall and begins to decompose, it is absolutely teeming with life. First the fungi and bacteria invade, replacing the dead wood with their own living cells. Insects move in, and before long mammals, birds, and reptiles will be taking shelter or looking for a meal in the rotting wood.

From the book *Paddling with a Naturalist* by Brett Hodnett, published in 2010 by iUniverse Books www.iuniverse.com, 127 pages, US $13.95.

From a letter to the editor of 29 July 2011 by Cliff Jacobson

I just returned from a month of whitewater canoeing in Norway and Finland, and the first two days were a long portage over the tundra. We paddled three different rivers in Norway and Finland, this time using solo folding canoes (Pakboats). In all we did about 100 miles, with days of gruelling portages on the tundra and miles of dragging the boats over rocks–reminiscent of being young and portaging from Point Lake into the Hood River–a two-day carry. I discovered I'm too old for this extensive portaging now. But remarkably, I made it.

This was some of the toughest, most technical rapids I've run in a solo canoe. We had miles (like as many as seven solid miles) of continuous technical class-3 rapids. One rapid dropped 62 feet per mile and we were in it for a full hour and a half with just one resting eddy. I can't say enough good things about these folding canoes: the constant dragging and slamming into rocks at high speed would have destroyed a Kevlar canoe and cut a Royalex one to the core. But no damage, no holes. Amazing! But the most surprising thing was how these boats ran the rapids: when you pop over a ledge the bow comes up slightly to create additional rocker. And the boat runs dry, even in metre-high drops. The most water anyone took in the drops was about a gallon. A hard boat of the same volume would have swamped. We began calling these canoes "miracle boats." At any rate, I am extremely impressed with the whitewater performance of these folding Pakboats.

REMEMBER ---?

Wilderness Canoeing Symposium, York University, Toronto, 27-28 January 1989. *Photo: Toni Harting*

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