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Stephanie Potter, explorer/photographer/author, embraced by caribou antlers

From the Heart of the Snake

Story by Stephanie Potter

Photos by Stephanie Potter, Tom Potter, Teresa Socha, Bob Jickling

I find myself sitting in calm water, deep in North Eastern Yukon's daunting mountains. My paddle feels heavy but familiar, and the canoe, solid and cold beneath my knees. The frigid water runs crystal clear, provoking mixed feelings of excitement and uncertainty. All is silent, except the pounding in my chest. Without fully processing the situation, I gaze out

over the monster lurking ahead. Questions and memories race through my mind, mixing in a blur. As we inch towards the thundering drop, my mind goes blank; instinct takes over.

Imagine standing in the middle of Banff National Park 150 years ago, without the millions of people that visit the area each year, the big hotels, the ski resorts, the roads, the railway lines, and even the endless hiking trails. What's left?



Drop-off at Duo Lake

A human soul, enclosed in breathtaking, wild, open spaces and untouched mountains. Fortunately, there are still places like that today. Where the Snake River slithers cold and clear for 240 kilometres along the west side of the Yukon / North West Territories border, is one such place. This awing branch of the Peel River Watershed has become the setting for one inspiring canoeing adventure.

The Peel River Watershed is one of the largest and naturally intact, although

unprotected, ecosystems left in North America. This ancient, 77,000 square-kilometre region is about thirteen and a half times the size of Prince Edward Island. The unbounded mountain ranges of the Watershed frame untouched taiga forests and subarctic rivers as it collects the waters of well-known tributaries such as the Ogilvie, Blackstone, Hart, and the “Three Rivers,” as the Wind, Snake, and Bonnet Plume are affectionately known. The Peel River Watershed creates a sanctuary for many species requiring its

wilderness to survive, such as woodland and barren-ground caribou, wolves, wolverines, grizzly bears, dall sheep, mountain goats, beavers, lynx, martens, whitefish, arctic grayling, and the vulnerable peregrine falcon. The heart of the renowned Peel beats with the life it homes. This vast land is a primordial, cultural wilderness, and too, an important fish and wildlife harvesting area for First Nation peoples.

Although this stunning Northern Yukon landscape is special to some, it faces devastating threats to its delicate ecological balance. The ecosystems are fragile, and in this northern climate they are sensitive to industrial development and resource extraction. Demand for oil, gas, coal, uranium, and other minerals leave them vulnerable. There is intense pressure to succumb to the world’s greed, and incrementally dismantle this ecology. With a nation hungry for instantaneous gratification, financial wealth, and a thriving economy, it seems to forget the spiritual power and ecological importance of natural spaces. It can be quick to strip an area of its natural integrity.

Currently, most of the Peel River landscape is unroaded and pristine, with no protection from industrial development. So far, the Yukon Government has offered this land to mineral extraction companies at extremely low prices, leaving the area at the fingertips of destruction. If continued, new roads, railways, mines, and pipelines could annihilate the much-debated habitat. To save this wild land, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), the Yukon Conservation Society (YCS), and several First Nations are fighting for its protection. Their combined efforts have pressured the Yukon government to issue a second, one-year withdrawal from mineral staking in this region. Many others, in the Yukon and around the world, are supporting this fight. As Joni Mitchell’s song, Big Yellow Taxi exclaims, “Don’t it always seem to go / That you don’t know what you got / Till it’s gone.” The urgency to protect the Peel River Watershed is merely one of many reasons



Waving goodbye at Duo Lake

for travelling the Snake River, but the landscape itself made the trip an amazing and unforgettable experience.

I was born and raised in Thunder Bay, Ontario, a city perched on the North Shore of Lake Superior. From the day I was born and carried out of the hospital doors in 1994, my parents introduced me to many outdoor activities. Thanks to keen parents and many opportunities, I, too, have become one who loves the fresh open air, and have come to the realization that the outdoors has been etched into a piece of my puzzle.

I have been canoe tripping since the age of three. Beginning with Quetico Provincial Park and moving to Wabakimi Provincial Park, my paddling has grown stronger. In 2008, our family of four and two paddling Yukonners packed up and headed northeast of Whitehorse to the Wind River, (see *Nastawgan*, Spring 2009). That trip, my first Yukon adventure, stole a piece of my heart, and seeded a whitewater weed that flourishes within me. It also inspired a return to the Yukon two years later and our trip down the Snake River.

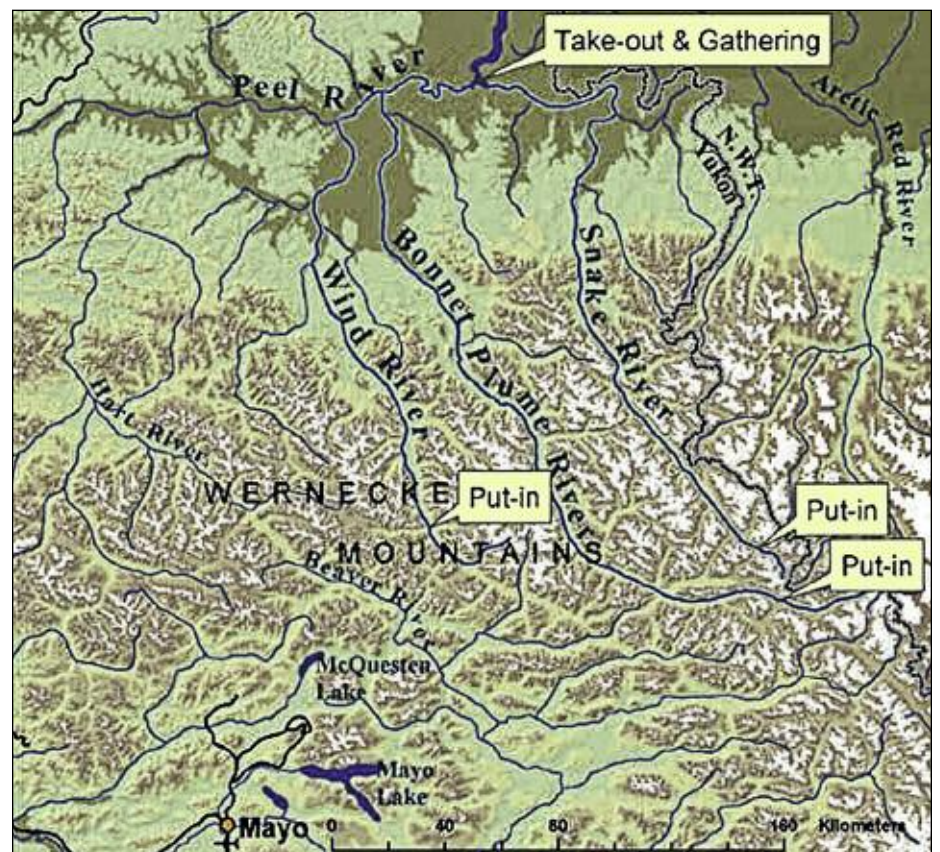
We take the plunge. Raging water pulls us towards rocks and holes. Butterflies swarm my tummy and my heart pounds deeply in my chest. I hear the calls from the stern and pull the water with all my might. "Cross bow draw, okay, forward hard, hard draw, hard draw!" My head explodes with the thunder escaping from water crashing over the rocks, and adrenalin races through my veins. The Snake spews white foam and throws countless full bailers of water over my head. With no time to do anything about it, I ignore the icy cold water gathering around my knees. My eyes stay glued to dangers lurking ahead. My arms begin to ache from pulling our little green canoe past this monster. Questions begin to flash in my mind. "Will we be able to make it out? If things don't go right, will the canoe make it through in one piece? Will the others standing on the edge be able to help us? What will happen if we can't pull this off?"



Andrew on the portage from Duo Lake to the Snake River

Getting to the headwaters of the Snake River was an adventure in itself. On July 15, 2010, my family of four including Mom (Teresa Socha), Dad (Tom Potter), my brother (Andrew, who turned 13 during the trip) and me (15), and two of Yukon's paddling veterans, Bob and

Wendy Jickling, had an early start for the long drive from Whitehorse to Mayo for our afternoon flight. This takeoff was not from the sauce found on sandwiches, but from a short section of the Stewart River running through the small town, hidden in the midst of Central Yukon. After en-





Stephanie fly-fishing at the confluence of Snake River and Reptile Creek

during an hour and a half of turbulence, the small but spirited Single-Turbo Otter made an alarmingly fast descent into the heart of the Mackenzie Mountain Range and onto Duo Lake. Here, we unloaded our heavy packs and three canoes, and left our pilot to enjoy a few minutes of fly-fishing off the wing of his working companion. When all was prepared for his departure, we paused to wave farewell. With mixed feelings, we watched our sole connection to everyone and everything we had left behind disap-

pear into the distance. We soon stood alone on a small rise surrounded by towering mountains. In this short moment of disconnection, there was an instant of nervousness, doubt, relaxation, and excitement, a bag of mixed emotions. How will this river compare to my previous paddling experiences? Will the challenges be appropriate? What happens if we get into trouble? Can I even begin to paint a picture of the experience yet to come?

Our time spent alone in the sparse

sub-arctic bush began with soggy tents, wet packs, and drenched canoeists. A day and a half of rain made the hilly three-kilometre portage from Duo Lake to the Snake River a trail of mud soup. To spread the work out, we hauled three heavy boats, two bursting dry bags, a bundle of paddles, and a couple of fishing rods over the hill and down to the river on the first day. The second day, in voyageur style, we carried the rest of our possessions and supplies over the portage in short sections. This method, carrying the gear several hundred metres and then returning for the next load, gave us frequent short breaks and kept the gear and campers closer together. It also allowed us to point out or warn others of deep mud, fresh blueberries, caribou, and new wolf tracks. Although these days were exhausting, they made slipping the boats into the Snake River extremely rewarding. From the muddy pile of packs, canoes, and exhausted campers at the put-in, to the take-out point at Taco Bar, where the same six smelly canoeists got picked up sixteen days later, the Snake River drops about 1120 metres over 240 kilometres, an average gradient of 4.7 metres per kilometre.

While slithering down the Snake, we were all greeted by the firm hands of challenging lessons and exciting experiences as well as unforgettable memories. One day, just minutes on the river, we came across a swift set of rapids. The first two boats waited in an eddy to watch the last boat, come through. Riding a high, Andrew let go of his paddle to wave a hello of excitement. Unprepared, he was not able to make a draw when needed. Scrambling to turn the boat back to the right direction, Andrew and Dad slid past us and disappeared around the next corner, leaving Bob yelling: "See you at Taco Bar!"

For me, seeing the need for speedy reactions and the consequences of missing a manoeuvre was a moment of realization: "We need to be careful out here, and solid whitewater paddling abilities are important." The experience in the wilderness of our previous canoe trips



The three canoes

was greatly appreciated. Throughout the sixteen days on and around the river, my love for paddling flourished. I became a stronger bow paddler and took a new leap forward by taking turns paddling from the stern. Seeing this new, rarely explored world from the stern seemed to deepen my appreciation of and connection to the ever-changing environment of the Peel Watershed. In this delicate area where growth is restrained but bursting with life, I learned to see through a new heart and a new pair of eyes. The Snake River, along with its brothers and sisters, has been here from a time when a human life was but a speck of dust. Formed by Mother Earth's movement, shaped by the paintbrush of glaciers, and breathed to life by the ecosystems that call it home, the Snake River has become a breathtaking environment in the threatening hands of change. I was given the chance to love it, and I accepted it with open arms.

The Snake River meanders its way through a landscape difficult to capture with words. Its beauty to the eye is stunning, yet it homes something more. It plays a soothing chorus in the background, plucking the notes from the strings of my heart. I now sit here thinking, "How can I describe these feelings?" Let's start with a visual. Picture this: a cool day, the wind whispering in the bushes, the hum of a mosquito, three boats loaded with all of our needs, mountains cutting shapes in the clouds, a cold, crystal-clear river winding through a never-ending valley, and ear-to-ear smiles of excitement, nervousness, success, fatigue, and anticipation lining everyone's faces. When I think back to the Snake, it's these moments that play back in my mind. Although the river and the wilderness that surrounds this area presented many challenges, such as finding campsites, encountering limit-pushing rapids, long portages, fatiguing days, challenging weather, and stressful decisions, none became too overwhelming.

In general, the Snake begins as a surreal mountain river of cold, clear water. With tight corners, wave-trains that hide boat-splitting rocks, and sneaky strainers



Looking down the Snake River valley with Wendy

and boils, one has to be on their toes and ready to react. A note to those who enjoy big, rolling waves: "Sometimes they're bigger than they look!" Through one set of rapids, the boys, paddling a big, yellow boat, got themselves into one of these wave trains. Large waves can be fun, yet this set was a bit bigger than expected. Waves poured into their open boat. With a consequential swimming pool growing in the bottom of their boat, they made a run for shore, desperately trying to keep the gunnels facing the sky.

As they successfully pulled up alongside the rest of the boats, Bob's face, lined by a big grin, broke out into song. "We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine...!" So, unless you want to live the rest of your trip tagged with a classic name such as "The yellow submarine," avoid the oversized wave-trains in an open boat.

The cold, clear, rapid-strung waters of the Snake River were those that hummed the accompaniment to the majority of our trip, although the start and the end



Stephanie carrying the pinhole camera and tripod to the summit of the 14-hour hike



At the summit of the 14-hour hike, looking down the valley of the Snake River

differed slightly. For the first two to three days on the river, the Snake is a low-volume, rolling, twisting mountain stream. At Reptile Creek (about 10 kilometres from Duo Lake) the water content doubles. Here, the Snake is very narrow, running continuous class-two rapids through tight canyons, sharp bends, and endless bushes. During the mountainous part of the river there are few trees and plenty of camp sites on endless gravel bars. When the Snake leaves the mountains (145 kilometres from the headwaters), it slows drastically, eating up muddy banks. The water darkens, and sticks and trees find their way towards the Peel River, especially when the waters are high. These slow, less scenic hours found at the end of the trip can make for a long, exhausting two or three days. From the end of the mountains, large trees appear above on the muddy banks and lying dead in the middle of the river. The forest be-

comes buggy, offering fewer decent campsites. For those planning a trip down the Snake, I suggest you don't rush your time in the mountains and savour days to rest, read, and hike. Once the mountains are behind you, push on for about three long days to meet the Peel River and fly out at Taco Bar, or continue on for a further three days to Fort McPherson.

The Snake River is known for its hiking opportunities. Because the water's edge is so close to the surrounding mountains, a bird's eye view of the Snake's watershed is "easily" attained. With no trails apart from those etched in the mountainsides by the wildlife they home, hikes are a whole new adventure. The terrain is variable, from alpine meadows to sheer cliffs, and the vastness of the Snake River and its surroundings always have new journeys in store.

One 14-hour hike, a day's paddle be-

yond Reptile Creek, led us up over pathless valleys. We climbed in the sun and the rain, through thick willows and racing streams; we passed many jagged rock faces and daunting summits; we grew closer and closer to an unexplainable magic. Whether it was through menace expressed by dark piercing summits, or love gently blowing through lush, peaceful alpine meadows, I was bound to remember those endless exhausting hours. I felt my connection to this wild place grow.

We left camp in driving rain at about 10 in the morning, first ferrying across the Snake River to begin our 14-hour adventure on foot. From here, we hiked, climbed, and scrambled up and down banks, through tangles of dwarf birch and alder, and splashed our way through crystal-clear streams. We paused only to refill water bottles and devour a short lunch. Still well short of the summit, the

day neared the dinner hour and our tummies began to rumble; we soon came to the daunting realization that lunch was the only food that made it past camp. The snacks had been forgotten. So, with empty bellies and courageous hearts, we continued our trek to the summit of a high mountain pass, listening to Bob's dry, meaningless encouragements; "It's just up there, only around this corner!" Nine hours after leaving camp, we finally came face to face with what we had been seeking. We were standing at the height of a mountain pass, looking over a small lake at the convergence of five valleys. With closed eyes, I could paint a peaceful picture of herds of caribou and other wild beings feeling at bay in this valley. Now, when I close my eyes, no matter where I am, I can still feel my excitement, smell the clean breeze, and see the breathtaking landscape of serenity.

Standing on crumbling rocks and patches of snow, surrounded by sky-high peaks, my brother and I were asked, "So what do you think?" The only answer we shared was speechlessness. Our voices had been lost in the silent echo of the valleys washing over its visitors. I was one of few people that had the opportunity to stand on the heights of that pass. Here, we sat, recuperating and taking in the inspiring view. We also captured some of the sights and feelings with a pinhole camera. Then it was time to return to camp. With toothpicks to hold our eyelids open, we placed one foot in front of the other and headed back to where our hike had begun. When "home" was finally beneath our feet, it was midnight. After a speedy dinner, we thanked the Yukon for leaving the lights on all summer before laying down our heads. We were asleep before our exhausted heads hit the pillow.

This experience on foot, a once-in-a-lifetime journey, was filled with emotions, suspense, fatigue, and learning. I felt that living an adventure of such power affected me more deeply than I could imagine. Although I was only away from camp and the river for one long day, strong connections between the land and me were



All six of us

formed. Now, these connections tie me to the vastness and heart-stopping beauty of the Snake River Watershed. After returning home to Thunder Bay, I noticed how my relations with the Yukon and my growth as a person have not weakened. I now feel my ties to nature that surrounds me in Thunder Bay are strengthening, and my love for canoeing and the outdoors is flourishing. Having such experiences in my pocket has instigated more adventures and learning. Trying new ways of doing can move you forward with new ways of seeing and living.

For our family trip, the Snake River

and its surroundings were very appropriate. The river and the land it meanders through presented us with challenges, yet ones that we could safely navigate. The weather was often less than favourable, but it was a factor we were very well prepared for (it's a must), therefore, imposing a lesser impact on the day. As for the length, sixteen days was good, but I wouldn't have wanted it to be much longer, or shorter. This length allowed for about four to five rest-and-hiking days, the other days were spent flying to and from the river and paddling. When the trip neared the end and the speed of the



Bob and Wendy taking on the last big set of rapids before leaving the mountains



Bob and Stephanie taking on the same rapids

river slowed drastically, the days seemed to become harder as attention spans dropped. As fatigue built, the nights seemingly got shorter and the days, longer. If carrying on to Fort McPherson, more rest and rain days should be added so physical and mental rest is available. For me, the length and structure of our trip was ideal.

It was here on the Snake that I lost a piece of my heart during a dance in the arms of a beautiful, wild place. When I stepped out of the plane and lay my soaked feet on solid ground the first day, I knew that there was no other place in the world that I'd rather be. Living a

dream is not meant to be easy. It takes time, effort, courage, dedication, and support. A special adventure as my Snake River trip was to me, is not a daily occurrence, but a goal that is worth pursuing. I was living in, and travelling through, what I could call home. This safe welcoming place was my tent, campsites found on steep gravelly banks of a speedy mountain stream, the heart of a canyon where glacier rivers and silty streams blend into the river, the countless tributaries before the Snake swallows up the muddy banks and begins to cook up a batch of mud soup. I felt peace in these surroundings. Many people label home

as a warm, dry area enclosed in four solid walls, but my definition is never limited to this plain, emotionless description. Would you be able to call a down sleeping bag zipped up in a soaked tent on the side of a rocky bank, with no sign of human habitation within hundreds of kilometres, home? To me, these places offer as much satisfaction and safety as what city folk might describe as "home."

I have been lucky enough to find moments where I can slip away from the chaos that life presents each day and into a world of serenity. It is here that I have planted my feet and left parts of my inner self to flourish. With the help of these moments, I will grow and shine. Once again, I thank the Yukon and the Snake River for leaving the lights on all summer and offering my friends and family an amazing adventure through its wild land.



Tom and Andrew taking on the same rapids



Stephanie in the cockpit of the plane on the flight back to Mayo

My pinhole camera

Paddling the Snake River was a journey of a lifetime that I will cherish forever. During the trip we captured many treasured memories, stories of special events, paintings of breathtaking scenes, and many pictures. Most people travel with a “regular” camera and spend plenty of time snapping away with digital features, returning home with hundreds, or thousands, of pictures to throw onto a computer, possibly used to make a book or a photo album, and show the best to friends and family. After a few months, the majority of these pictures have been forgotten. Certainly, this is exactly what happened to our hundreds of digital pictures. But we also did return home with a handful of black-and-white prints meaning more to us than merely an image of a scene. These pictures illustrate a relationship with both the landscape we had photographed and with the intricate shapes of light marked on the paper. Taken with a pinhole camera, these grayscale photographs were developed in groups along the way. This method of photography captured a different side of the landscape, and illustrated a tranquil way of life.

A pinhole camera is a simple camera, (often made out of a wooden box, a stove pipe, or a cookie tin), operated manually without a lens, using solely a light-proof box and an aperture the size of a pin. With light-sensitive paper, our exposures ranged from thirty seconds to three minutes. During the evenings we would develop the pictures taken over the course of the day using light-proof containers and different developing chemicals to bring the picture to life on negative prints. When added, the length of the set up, the exposure, and the developing of each individual picture took about 15 to 20 minutes. Due to the size of the photographic plates we only brought 25 of them, limiting our photographic choices and opportunities and forcing us to evaluate our shots carefully. Over a 16-day trip, we returned home with approximately 13 successful pictures out of 25 shots.

Pinhole photography made me stop and think before doing. During the expedition, I found that I was always on the lookout and had to see a photo-op before it arrived. This type of photography not only expanded my photographic horizons, but through the freedom of a new way of doing, gave me new ways of seeing. After finding the perfect scene and lighting, and spending the time to expose and develop the paper, the final images encapsulated a powerful relationship between photographer and landscape. Through pinhole photography, another piece of me was left wild and free in the valleys of the Snake River. The eye of a pinhole camera, a life-changing hike, and 16 short days away from “civilization,” all nurtured a relationship with this remote and breathtaking vastness.



Andrew, Stephanie, and Bob taking a pinhole picture



The negative copies of the pinhole pictures hanging to dry on the bug tent



Pinhole picture: three canoes



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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-out

Twenty-seven years since 1985, minus three looking in from the outside, makes 24 and that is a long time to be editing *Nastawgan*. It's therefore time for me to go and hand over the editorial duties to a new Editor-In-Chief. Those 24 years have been an unforgettable and most creative time that has seen our journal grow from a special kind of club newsletter to a full-colour journal admired by a world-wide canoeing community, as always without any advertising on its pages.

Starting with this Spring issue, the new Editor-In-Chief will be a person known very well to the WCA member-

ship: Aleks Gusev, who has been a very impressive, powerful, creative, and active Chairman of the Board of the WCA for several years and who will now apply his hard-working persona to the benefit of our *Nastawgan*. By handing over the editorial cut-and-paste keys to him I could not have found a better, more dedicated person than Aleks to take *Nastawgan* to ever higher levels of near-perfect quality. I am deeply grateful to the membership and the various past Boards of Directors for the trust they have always shown me and the freedom they have given me to do the editor's job the way I saw best.

And I am also deeply grateful to the editorial team who have done, and will surely keep on doing, a marvellous job in assisting their “boss” in creating a journal we all can be very proud of. I will surely miss your contributions and comments and screwed-up deadlines. But I am happy to announce that I will remain a small part of the editorial team by taking on the responsibilities of the Photos Editor, a job I really look forward to. I thank all WCA members for letting me be their Editor-In-Chief for such a long, wonderful time.

Toni Harting

Editorial-in

Thank you, Toni!

After many years at the helm of *Nastawgan*, Toni Harting is getting ready to pass the editorial torch to me. Fear not – Toni's doing fine for an old guy, although he appears more reluctant to dash naked into the clear waters of Killarney Lake these days. Ever pragmatic and not the one to dwell on the past, Toni wants to focus on completion of his latest book, luxuriate even more in the company of his lovely wife Ria, and cuddle with his feline friend Alfie.

Nastawgan, as we know it today – printed in full colour and available online – is a worthy achievement and easily the best canoeing publication in North America, if not in the world. A labour of love and countless hours spent on reading, arranging, re-arranging, communicating, cajoling, pushing, probing, thinking, thanking, learning, loving, and above all taking pride in a job well done. Toni

is leaving a legacy that we collectively cherish and will continue to nurture.

Although determined in his decision to relinquish the Editor-in-Chief role and thus pass the responsibility and the opportunity to me, Toni will remain involved with *Nastawgan*. I'm certainly counting on him to provide his generous and indispensable advice in his signature, tell-it-like-it-is manner. Toni will also continue to edit your photographs for *Nastawgan*.

In the background, the transition has been taking place for some time. It will continue over the next couple of issues, as both Toni and I gain confidence in me. We're blessed to have a great editorial team in place and an enormous wealth of experience and inspiration for future articles in you – our readership. Toni, thanks for getting us here.

Aleks Gusev

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.

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

Book Review

Pogamasing, the Story of a Northern Lake by Andy Thomson, published in 2011 by Why Knot Books, Erin, ON, ph. 519-833-1242, hardcover, 304 pages

Review by Toni Harting

Over the years, quite a few WCA members have paddled the Spanish River, north of Lake Huron, starting with either the west branch from Biscotasing (see the trip report on page 13 of this issue), or the east branch from Duke Lake. About 13 km downriver from the point where the two branches meet, the railroad crosses the river, and 1 km downriver from that point a historically important portage exists on river right. This 600-metre portage leads to a small number of buildings of varying sizes on the eastern shore of Lake Pogamasing, an about 16-km-long, rather narrow lake that is quite symptomatic of what happened during the development in many parts of the Canadian wilderness in the past century and a half. I quote from the

book: "I was amazed to learn how Lake Pogamasing, a medium-sized and remote lake, was connected to so many significant developments in Ontario and Canadian history. A number of the major players were present at the Pog: the Anishnabe, fur traders, railway builders, surveyors and lumbermen. As well, key developments in our country's history left an indelible mark on our area. Events and milestones, such as the Robinson-Huron Treaty, the building of the first transcontinental railway across Canada, the demise of the fur trade, the Depression, the Second World War and the development of the wilderness for recreation all had an influence." Each of us paddling the Spanish and who has the least bit of interest in the country they're paddling through, would do wise to consult this profusely illustrated book and learn in exquisite detail about Lake Pogamasing and its fascinating history. Indeed, a genuine treasure of a book for everyone loving the Canadian North.



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.

Gary James suggests some **Bill Mason films** that you can watch for free:

<http://www.nfb.ca/film/waterwalker>
http://www.nfb.ca/film/path_of_the_paddle_solo_whitewater
http://www.nfb.ca/film/path_of_the_paddle_doubles_whitewater/

OUTINGS COMMITTEE REPORT FOR 2011

The WCA Outings Committee is composed of Bill Ness (Chair), and Mary Perkins. Their collective role is to encourage members to make available to others in the club opportunities to get together to paddle, ski, hike, camp, and just plain have fun together. The WCA and the Outings Committee would like to thank all those who volunteered their time and enthusiasm to make these outings available to their fellow club paddlers.

In 2011, there were a total of 40 outings, social events, and group learning activities offered. This compares to 56 in 2010, 47 in 2009, 49 in 2008, 53 in 2007 and 2006, and 58 in 2005. These activities are categorized as follows, with the four previous years in parentheses for comparison:

Type of Outings: Flatwater: 10 (15,7,9,13) — Whitewater: 21 (25, 31, 24, 27) — Sea Kayaking 0 (2,0) — Skiing: 4 (1,5,2,5) — Winter Camping: 0 (1,4,0,1) — Hiking 1 (1,1) — Nature 1 (3,1,1,1)

Duration of Outings: (Does not include educational or social events): Day: 19 (18, 18, 14, 27) — Weekend: 12 (21, 25, 14, 21) — Longer: 5 (7, 4, 8, 5)

Educational Activities: Winter Pool Sessions, Intermediate Whitewater Clinic, Whitewater Training Day, Introduction to Moving Water.

Social Event: Paddlers' Pub: Attendance at last January's Paddlers' Pub was an abysmal 18, with no participants from other canoe/kayak clubs or the general local paddling community, despite wide publicity. Consequently, this event has been discontinued. Many thanks to Mary Perkins for her efforts in organizing this event.

Paddle the Don River May 6, 2012

Join us for the annual Manulife Paddle the Don River day on Sunday, May 6, 2012. This 2-3 hour paddle starts at Ernest Thompson Seton Park (enter via Wilket Creek Park on the west side of Leslie Street, north of Eglinton Ave. East) and winds its way south for about 10 km to the Keating Channel at Lake Ontario. Members of the WCA will be helping out as volunteer weir-watchers along the way.

The river is flooded for this event so there will be moving water, swifts, and rapids. There are three weirs; the first two must be portaged and the third may be run. Bring your whitewater canoe, paddling gear for cold water, and a camera. The river offers a unique view of the city landscape, city wilderness, and maybe wildlife.

The takeout is located at 170 Villiers Street at the northwest corner of Villiers Street and the Don Roadway. Here you will find free entertainment and food and drink for purchase (or you can bring your own lunch). A free shuttle bus will take you back to the start where you can pick up your car and drive back to the takeout to pick-up your canoe.

This event is free, but you must register on-line in advance. It fills up quickly, so register early. You can also help raise money to support regeneration projects within the Don watershed by completing a pledge form from the following website.

Participants MUST sign-up at the Paddle the Don website <http://www.paddledon.ca> to receive registration news and updates. Further information on this event is also available on this website. (You can also contact Gary James at gary.james@sympatico.ca and 416-512-6690 for assistance only.)

FOOD FOR PADDLERS

We had paddled with Dave and Dawne Robinson on several WCA day outings previously but not on a trip. This past summer they joined us on our trip on the Clearwater River. We enjoyed their company very much as well as the new expanded menu. Shepherd's Pie was a big hit and we had a perfect evening to enjoy it – beautiful campsite, no bugs, and lovely weather.

Shepherd's Pie (6-8 servings)

- 2 pounds ground lamb
- 1 package Zo-Fu shredded dehydrated pork (found in Chinese grocery stores), optional
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 tbsp rosemary
- 1 tbsp dried parsley
- 1 tsp sage OR 2 tbsp soya sauce OR 2 tbsp Bovril, optional
- 2 red peppers, roasted, chopped
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 pint of cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 medium red onion, chopped
- 1 bunch green onions, chopped
- 3 carrots, shredded
- 1 small package frozen peas
- 1 small cauliflower or broccoli, chopped
- 1 small package frozen peaches and cream corn, optional
- 1 jar French's french-fried onions (found in the condiment section of the grocery store)
- ½ pound of cheese (asiago, parmesan, or feta)
- 3 packages Idaho mashed potatoes, choose plain, cheese, or garlic according to taste

Preparation in advance: Brown ground lamb in a skillet. Add garlic, rosemary, and parsley as meat is cooking. Cool mixture then dehydrate. Veggies are chopped up relatively small but if you want to save time, just use a frozen chopped veggie mix instead. Cook veggies until tender, then dehydrate.

Prior to serving: Rehydrate the lamb by covering with water and heating. For variety, add Zo Fu to the lamb mixture as well as sage or soya sauce or Bovril as the meat is rehydrating. Rehydrate the veggies by covering with water and heating. Prepare the potatoes according to the package instructions.

Note: If constructing 'pie' buffet-style, lay down meat first, then veggies then potato layer. Next add a layer of cheese and then the French-fried onions. If you have a large enough outback oven or Dutch oven, layer in one pot and slightly brown top of potatoes before adding final onion and cheese layers.

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



Spanish River, West Branch

Andrea Fulton

Intro:

Route: Biscotasing to the Elbow. Some canoeing with lots of wading and lining.

Date: August 27-Sept 5, 2010

WCA members on the trip: Dave and Mary Cunningham, Bill and Hsioh-fan Stevenson, Andrea Fulton, Gary James. Photos by trip members.

Day 1: Toronto to Windy Lake Provincial Park.

We arrived at our “patch of dirt with a picnic table” in the dark to find Dave and Mary already set up and enjoying a night cap at our shared campsite. Gary and I were quick to join in. The park, although unexceptional, served its purpose for our one-night stopover enroute to the train station in Cartier. Provincial Park rates are getting to be unreasonable at \$46.25 for a campsite and \$12.50 for each additional vehicle. In my book that is a bit much to camp on the ground and to find “comfort” in an outhouse even if it does have running cold water!

Day 2: Biscotasing to the Island Campsite.

We were up early to secure our breakfast reservations for six at the Hwy. Rest Stop. To our surprise, this restaurant was closed and out of business! We needed to look no further than directly across the street in the “town” of Cartier to find the Pine Grove Restaurant. Look for the only other building in the area as well as an adorable free-range, pot-bellied pig stationed in the parking lot. Our big breakfast was delicious and the proprietor / waiter Teddy was a real character. He “stole” my Blackberry and my hat when he passed by our table and wondered, based on my two-dollar tip, if I was looking for “something more” than just breakfast? Too funny!

Full of food, we travelled further up the street, turned left, and continued



just a short distance to arrive at the unmanned Cartier train station in time for our 10 a.m. departure. Spanish River Outfitters (SRO) from Fox Lake Lodge arrived and made good on their promise to deliver our Ontario Provincial Park Permits (\$10 per night per person), our train tickets (which we collected on the train), and to co-ordinate the shuttle of three cars from Cartier to Fox Lake Lodge and delivery to the

Elbow for our convenient getaway at the end of our trip. SRO staffers were very friendly and efficient.

The train was delayed in Sudbury so we kept busy by relaxing in the glorious sunshine. We ate our boxed lunch in the shade of the train station, which has washroom facilities but no running water. The train finally arrived in Cartier, over two hours late, at 12:15 p.m. I expected the Budd car to be at-





tached to a longer train and was surprised to see that the train was only three cars in length with two air-conditioned passenger cars and one baggage car. Our canoes were loaded with the help of VIA workers who lifted them into the train and carefully stacked the canoes three high, fully loaded with all our gear. The VIA Crew were all friendly and good spirited.

The train ride to Biscotasing revealed good views from the train of the river and of the shocking lack of water! There were approximately 20 other people on the train, most of whom were fishermen anticipating a great catch of pike, pickerel, and bass. When we arrived at Biscotasing, we were competing with at least three other smaller canoe groups for campsites. We were the last to put in our canoes, after taking some time to check out the “town” of Bisco which is basically comprised of nothing more than a small General Store with an LCBO, and a large truck full of beer bottle empties. We paid our \$1 per person canoe launch fees and were on the water at 3 p.m.

The weather was fantastic, but as we rounded our first turn into Biscotasing Lake the warm southern head winds came to challenge us. We hunkered down to brave the whitecaps and the strong gusts of wind that took away Dave and Mary’s map. Along the way we stopped briefly to gather firewood, before finding a great campsite on the island on the northwest side (just north of the km 155 mark on the map) near aptly named Windy Point. This is a great site, with a high (if a bit unstable) kitchen table / cooking area, and quite a few tent pads.

Day 3: Biscotasing Lake to Bizett Rapids.

To avoid a repeat of yesterday’s headwinds, we all decided to get up early and get on the water before breakfast – 8 a.m. to be exact. Fuelled by only coffee and half an apple, we arrived safely at the Bisco Dam and settled in for a swim off the dock. Note that there is a shortcut to get over the dam that can be found at the end of the bay to the right of the docks. We portaged Lillie Falls and Lillie Rapids although we did watch others line the latter. We also portaged Stovedoor Rapids. Lots of glorious sunshine.

Our campsite at Bizett Rapids was nice enough, but it presented its own unique challenges, including a “goat trail” down a very steep and lengthy rockface to reach the water, and few tent pads. It did, however, have a nice cliff-top firepit for our evening campfire as well as an enchanted moss-covered location for the treasure chest, which was located just the other side of the portage trail.

Day 4:

Lot of lining today through Bridge Rapids and the West Branch Logging Bridge. The footing was manageable but tricky in places. Gary and Andrea teamed up to help our trip partners through the rapids. What fun! Sites from Bizett Rapids to our campsite at Cavana Lake were not great. Few would be suitable for a group of our size with four tents.

Day 5:

We can only imagine what this river would be like under normal water levels. It is really beautiful here – tall pines, rugged, jagged rocky shorelines, and sheer cliffs. We swam a lot today. Our lunch spot at the bottom of the rapids was very nice and the deep-water swimming was great and refreshing. Since the day was so hot, we swam again at a very small island that housed a fish drying rack. Great spot; so much sun!

Day 6:

We portaged the C3 rapids and then the rain came. It rained and rained and rained. We were soaked to the skin upon arrival at our campsite for the evening. Gary, bless him, pulled off a “Presto / Change-o” trick and “poof” our tarp was set up! I kid you not... I swear the tarp was up in 60 seconds flat. We noted that the water was slower-moving along this stretch and swimming / bathing was unpleasant due to the mucky bottom and leaches.

Day 7:

We awoke to foggy skies. The weather warmed a wee bit and we were blessed with some pockets of sun. Today was a long day of paddling: on the water at 9:30 a.m. and off after 5 p.m. While we were able to run a few swifts, the late-afternoon paddle through flatwater was long and boring. We bypassed the portage to Pogamasing Lake, although we’ve heard that this lake makes a nice day trip. We saw remnants of old logging bridges at Sheahan. We camped at the site just south of Pogamasing right



at the swift. It is up high and has several nice tent pads.

Day 8:

Rain and rain and more treacherous lining. This was supposed to be a white-water trip. Damn that dam! We pulled the canoes out a day early at the Elbow and drove all the way home to Toronto.

Memorable Moments:

Andrea accidentally plunging face-first in a small pool while lining mid rapid. The SUN!! OMG –Four days of unremitting, cloudless sunshine. I never, ever thought that there could be such a





thing as “too much sun.”

Lots of fire wood and lots of birch bark.

No bugs.

Two noisy white cranes making an early morning racket and then flying off together.

The conversation with the hunters on bear baiting (they perch in a blind in a tree and bait the area with chicken parts) – despicable!

Hsioh-fan can really “rock a portage!” You GO girl!

Group dynamics and team work.

Hearing the train periodically while in the “wilderness.”

Great gourmet cooking (slow-roasted salmon with roasted tomato and pearl cousous, Rock’in Moroccan Stew, fresh-baked biscuits and scones, beef stew....yum!).



Not so Great Moments:

Hearing the train at 4:30 in the morning!

Leeches – everywhere. Ick.

Healthy, shallow lakes do not make for good swimming.

Water levels were soooooo low.

Few suitable campsites for a group with four tents

Headwinds!

Andrea picking up small boulders while lining and chucking them out the way in a desperate and futile attempt to raise water levels.

Too much rain.

Scouting the “rapids” – there really weren’t any.



The Road to Damascus

It was early in September when I got my epiphany. A September many, many years ago. I had just gotten out of the army and it was three-plus weeks till school started. Too late to get a short-term job so I started to think about what else I could do. I had some army mustering-out pay so it seemed like the right time to take a trip. But what kind of trip? A cross-country road trip? A camping trip to the Rocky Mountains? What about a canoe trip? I lived in Michigan back then, and Ontario was just a border hop away. And the map showed that northern Ontario had many rivers that flowed to James Bay or Hudson Bay. The Winisk, the Albany, the Attawapiskat, the Ekwan, the Missinaibi, the Fawn, and many more all flowed north. Away from roads and ending in salt water. I talked with a buddy and a canoe trip seemed like the best choice. We settled on the Missinaibi River. It had road access to the put-in and train service back from tide water at Moosonee. Those logistics would hold trip costs down.

Little did I know the work, the danger, the misery that a wilderness canoe trip would involve for the inexperienced and the unprepared. We took our little pup tent (no rain fly), some cans from my mom’s pantry, an old aluminum Grumman canoe that had been laying about the neighbour’s yard for years, and we lit out. Not quite like Huck Finn, but not too far off from it.

After a stop at Sault Ste. Marie for some maps and some more groceries, we put in at Missinaibi Lake and started our journey. About the same time the rain started. It would rain for 14 out of the 18 days we were on the river. The tent and sleeping bags (who knew how to keep stuff dry back in 1971?) both descended into a soggy morass. So did we. We struggled around the rapids. Our maps did not have the portages marked on them. We made many poor guesses as to which side of the river the portage was on. Sometimes the choice was made too late and we had to live with it, struggling the canoe and gear down the wrong side

of the river and without a good trail. We had no tarp to protect us from the rain, and many evenings on shore were a hard effort to light the fire and keep it going during driving rainstorms. The tent never did properly dry and it provided no oasis from the elements that were lined up against us on that trip.

We made it out at Moosonee. Took the train back south to Cochrane. We were wet, dirty, hungry, and almost beaten. Yet we were filled with amazement at the extent and the beauty of this wonderful country that we had just paddled through. It would fill my vacation allotment for the next 40 years. And, over time, we would get better at staying dry, at being fed, and at overcoming all of the many obstacles.

But never would we get enough of the country. No never. We had been struck while on our road to Damascus and nothing would ever be the same.

Ever.

Greg Went

Beware the Bear....Spray!

Beth Bellaire

On the near-North rivers that we have travelled, we have “met” several bears, but all have been of the black variety and luckily not too threatening. However, even these milder cousins of the grizzly or polar bear can prove problematic, if not downright dangerous at times, so many paddlers choose to equip themselves with deterrents. Some bring flare guns or signal horns. Others bring bear bangers. There is even a laser-sighted slingshot that has been designed to chase away a nosy woodland neighbour.

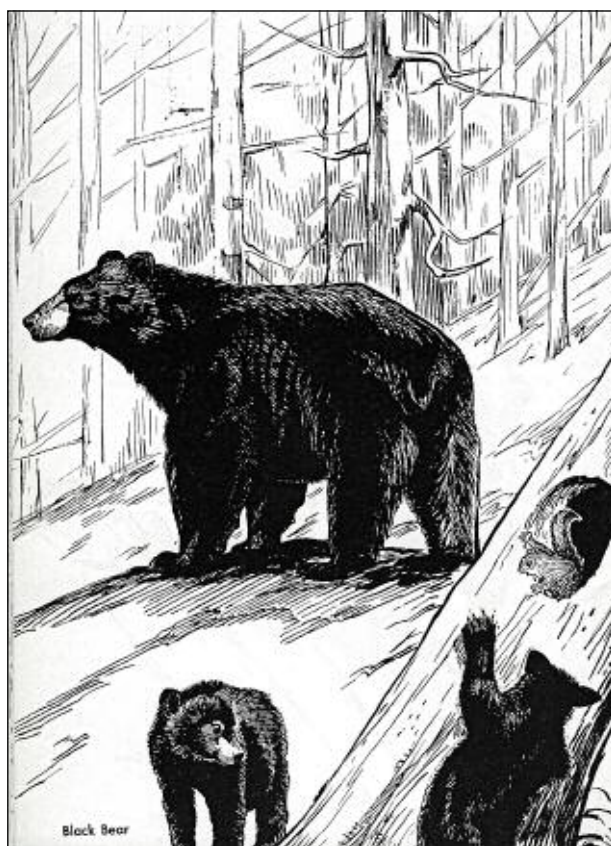
But the one weapon that many arm themselves with is bear spray. Although spray may very well be a last best defense between you and a bear, I hope the following tale will serve as a warning to be careful where you use it.

On this summer’s trip on the Clearwater River in northern Saskatchewan, we knew we would probably have some bear encounters, so one of our trip’s members, Dave Robinson, offered to bring along some bear bangers and a couple of cans of bear spray.

During the trip, we had seen a couple of bears while we were passing through, but then one evening, after we had stopped for the day, we had a magnificent sighting of a bear standing on his or her two back legs, giving us a good once over as well. Although this fellow was on the other side of the river from our campsite, we were all too aware that bears are great swimmers, so a few of the group became a bit spooked by this

evening visitor.

Since Dave had come prepared, he shared one of his cans of spray with the other couple who took it into their tent for night-time protection. My husband, Bruce, and I were not as worried, but we were tired, so after



the excitement was over, we soon said good night and prepared for bed.

However, I had barely got into the tent when I felt the strangest sensation in my throat. I do have allergies to cats, and the constriction I was feeling reminded me of the reaction I sometimes have to the furry feline, but it was much more intense. I quickly felt a panic coming over me, my throat and eyes were burning, and I started to cough uncontrollably. Within seconds, Bruce was also

coughing. We had no idea what might be happening. Had we unknowingly put our tent over a circle of puffballs that were now releasing their poisonous spores? Was there some strange fungus underneath? Whatever it was, the need to vacate the tent became overwhelming, so out we burst: wheezing, hacking, and coughing.

It was only after we had cleared our lungs, caught our breath, and calmed down that we found out what had happened. Dave had decided to make sure his second can of spray still worked since it was old, from a previous trip. Being a very careful camper, he had walked to the far edge of the campsite, stood facing away from the tents, and released a small squirt of the spray into the air.

Well, I guess that mist was carried by a wandering puff of wind back through the site and right into our tent. We had been sprayed!

So our caution is: if such a small puff of bear spray could cause so much discomfort,

imagine how frightening it would be to spray a bear as it pushed its nose into your vestibule and have that spray blow full-blast back into your face – a likely scenario given the close quarters of the encounter. From my experience, I know I will not consider using bear spray while in my tent. In fact, I would be very cautious using bear spray at all.

I might check out that laser slingshot, though!

27th Annual Wilderness & Canoeing Symposium

Five hundred paddlers and other lovers of the outdoors were treated to the 18 presentations made at the incredibly popular Wilderness Canoe Symposium. The event was organized by George Luste and sponsored by the Wilderness Canoe Association, and was held in Toronto on February 17 and 18, 2012. The following presentations were made:

Cory Trepanier Caledon - *An Artist & Filmmaker in the High Arctic*

Bill Buxton - *Chasing Roots: Northern Sask by Birch Bark Canoe*

Noak Inukpuk - *Umiujaq, Our People & Richmond Gulf*

Eric Leclair - *Puvirnituuq River: An Ancient Travel Way*

Lester Kovac & Lynette Chubb - *Paddling Nunavik*

Dave Brown - *Canoe Travels: Eastern Hudson Bay Coast*

Chris Mayne & Paul Chivers - *Northern Shores: The Photography of Canoeing & Northeastern Ontario*

Virginia Howick & Juliet Dana - *Coming of Age in the Barrenlands*

Sara Seager - *Remembering My Canoeing with Mike Wevrick*

Kenn Harper - *An Introduction to Inuktitut*

Kaitlin Breton - *Beluga Whales in Nunavik*

Phil Haigh & Matthew Busenhart - *The Keewaydin Way: Canoe Trip to Richmond Gulf*

Don McMurtry - *Following David Thompson*

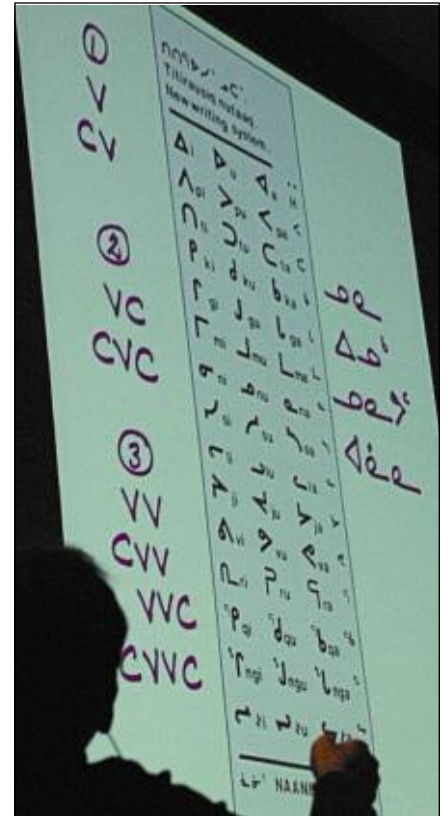
Alexandre Bevington - *Trans Can EUAda - Across Canada, Four Canoes*

Ron Beal - *Flora & Fauna Adaptations Along the Horton River*

Dorrie Brown - *The Mosaic That Is Labrador*

Francis Penashue - *Stories from Living on the Land*

Elizabeth Penashue - *Mista Shipu: Spirits of the River & the Animals*



The Bonaventure River

A Whitewater Playground in the Gaspé Peninsula

Story by Dave Young

Photographs by Barb Young and Dave Conolly (Maine)



Arrival at Lac Bonaventure



Lining through the "Embacles"

As a high school teacher, I was never available to paddle rivers in June, so the Bonaventure River was not part of the list of rivers we thought of paddling. Retirement is a special time of life when weekends disappear and "holiday" is a word that is hardly ever spoken (it seems to have lost most of its meaning for us somehow). And so, with our new-found "free time" we planned our June 2011 trip on the Bonny. Rick Sabourin and Diane Lucas joined us, Barb and Dave Young, as they were able to arrange "holidays."

This wonderful river trip is best done in early June, just after the snow pack melts in the Chic Choc Mountains. The river's source is in these mountains, not far from the town of Murdockville in Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula. It flows south for 127 kilometres to the Bay of Chaleur and the Atlantic Ocean. The town of Bonaventure is at its mouth.

Several WCA members had already paddled this river, so we were able to get information from Anne Bradley and others. There are also threads on the CCR Forum and two other trip reports in the Nastawgan archives that helped us plan our trip. To reach the source (Lac Bonaventure), you must be shuttled on logging roads. We used Steve Bujold, a local fishing guide, hunter, trapper, and canoeist to shuttle us to the lake. He also provided us with a place to stay at a cabin/chalet on the Petit Cascapedia River near New Richmond. If you are planning a trip on the Bonny, I would highly recommend Steve. His service was excellent, his prices were good, and we enjoyed his company.

The night before we shuttled in, we

arrived at the cabin. The Petit Cascapedia was really moving as it hurtled towards the sea. We started to realize then, just how fast the Bonny would be. On June 6, Steve picked us up at the cabin at 8:00 a.m. and we arrived at the put-in about three hours later after traversing a maze of logging roads.

Steve knew exactly where he was going and when and where to take a short break. As part of his service he would move our vehicle from the cabin down to the harbour in the town of Bonaventure later in the week. By the time we reached Lac Bonaventure, it was sunny and calm. It didn't take us long to have a bite of lunch, pack up, and begin our journey.

It started as a calm, peaceful paddle with beautiful scenery and NO BUGS! The lake is not large and soon we were at the outlet where a 1.5-km-long creek/river begins which connects to Petit Lac Bonaventure. We were not expecting what followed. The descriptions mentioned riffles and R1s, however this was anything but tame. The current was fast and strong and the R1s were now R2s. Thrown in to make things more interesting were many overhanging branches, sweepers, and debris. It was a long set with no break in fast, cold water. More than once, the backend of the canoe got pushed into branches, but fortunately both canoes reached Petit Lac Bonaventure without serious damage. Also, with canoeists intact, I might add. As we came into the calmer water, there was a sense of relief.

Then and there, we decided to get a little more organized for whitewater. We headed for shore where we donned dry suits and wet suits (one or the other — not both), lashed-in packs, and made sure lining ropes and throw bags were readily available. We also managed to leave (lose) a Tilly hat and a pair of prescription sun glasses. Age has its benefits/detriments (retirement



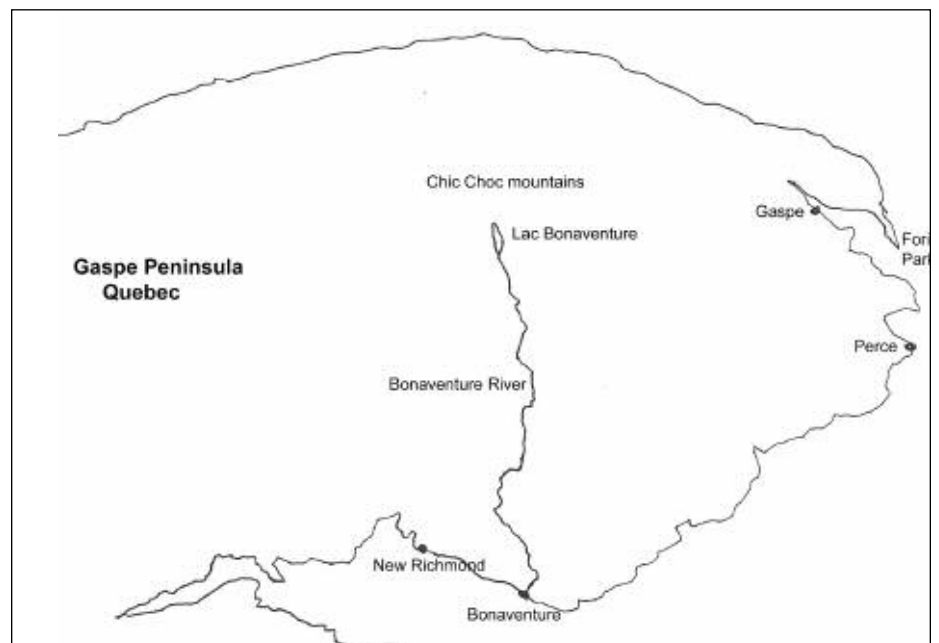
Polers from Maine

good, memory bad!).

Petit Lac Bonaventure is barely a lake and in no time we were into the river proper and following the fast current around bends and over rapids. We knew we were headed for the “Embacles” or logjams and were cautious because of this. This area of the river is a twisted carnage of logs, branches, vines, and islands. Once we were in the mess, it was impossible to follow maps or descriptions of routes. We just chose paths based on least resistance and hoped we would make it through to the other side. After about two hours of small portages, lift-overs, lining, wading or tracking, and a tiny

bit of paddling, we emerged on the other side of the “Embacles.” During this time, we encountered recently cut logs in some of the areas, which helped our progress somewhat. We wondered how this had happened.

It wasn't long before we found out the answer. It was getting later in the day and we had begun to look for a campsite when we happened upon a collection of 13 canoes. Camped on the side of the river was a vast array of small tents and 13 people. We stopped to chat. They were mostly from Maine and they were poling down the river in full-length canoes. With only one person in each canoe, they had extra space





Rick and Diane concentrating

for things like a chainsaw, folding chairs, and a full-sized barbeque. As it turned out, they had been coming to this river for up to 15 years and knew it very well. Using their chainsaw, they had helped to make the way through the “Embacles” easier (although we still found it trying). What had taken us two hours had taken them much longer,

so they were impressed that we had made it so far in half a day. They could tell us where we were on the river and where the next camping spot was. We headed downriver and 20 minutes later we found a place to camp for the night.

We arose the next morning and had a leisurely breakfast. Part-way through our meal, the Maine group showed up.

They had some concerns about the camping for the next night, since it would be in the canyon section and there was limited camping available.

After a short discussion we agreed on a plan for all of us to camp in the same general area. We packed up and left about an hour after they had left our campsite. The next few hours were some of the most enjoyable paddling we have ever experienced. It was fast-paced with almost continuous rapids. There were few eddies, and rests had to be taken along the shore. The technique for stopping was an eddy turn followed by a bush grab. We were reminded of our early spring trip on the Opeongo River in Algonquin.

By lunchtime we had caught up to the Maine group, who had stopped for their lunch. We decided to stop at the same gravel bar for our lunch as they departed, having finished theirs.

We had been travelling through a large burn area during much of the day, but as we approached the canyon, the scenery changed since the canyon had been spared from the fire.

We were now looking at fully treed hills on either side of the river. The rapids became a little more serious with some approaching R3 status. As we rounded a corner over a more serious drop, we caught up to the polers again. One of them had dumped in the rapid. We were now approaching some ledges in the canyon and it was nice to have a guide to let us know what we were approaching and how to run it. We followed the Maine group, dropping over a couple of ledges and eddying out above another. As we did so, Mike from the Maine group was scrambling along the bank to let us know our campsite was directly above us on the shore. With some luck we had eddied exactly where we should to camp there!

The next few hours were spent setting up camp and getting to know our neighbours. We had drinks and snacks and scouted the next rapid from a trail



Barb and Dave approaching the canyon

along the shore. After some discussion it was agreed that all would line the next rapid. At this water level, there was no discernable safe path through it. Immediately downriver from it would come The Three Steps, which the Maine group said they usually ran on the right and then the middle. The next morning we all pitched in with the lining of 15 canoes. There was lots of co-operation with each other, but we did get made fun of. We were decked out in our dry suits and wet suits and wearing our helmets as we prepared for running down the rapids.

They were mostly dressed like models from an L.L.Bean commercial with long-sleeved shirts, long pants, baseball caps, and boots. At one point one of them asked the others if they should put on their “helmets.” They they all took their ball caps and turned them sideways. It was all in good fun, but we got their point.

The leaders of their group headed downstream to scout The Three Steps. We were impressed with their ability to control the canoes with poles and balance. They planned a route, set up safety and photo opportunities, and then began a kind of assembly line descent of the rapid. Two men stood in the water at the top of the most serious



Luxury camping of the Maine group at the canyon campsite

drop and eased canoes down the “step” on the left side of the river. One canoe after another descended with no problems. Our big tandems just followed at the end of the procession. I think our canoes were a little harder to catch and slow down, but soon we were at the bottom of the most serious of the drops on the river. The two very experienced men at the top of the rapid then soloed down making it all look very easy.

We had mixed feelings about this experience. It was nice to be through a section of the river that we had approached with some trepidation, but we felt a little sense of disappointment that we had not planned our own descent through the rapid. The canyon continued for a while longer, but the rapids became less intense. We stayed with the Maine group for a little while just to watch them make their way downriver. One of their group was a man they referred to as “Gramps.” He had begun poling when he was 60 years of age. He was now 76 and standing in a canoe in perfect balance, poling through rapids. All we could do was watch and admire him and think of the possibilities that our own lives might have, as we grew older.

Our two canoes could travel much faster downriver than the group of 13, so we soon left the Maine group behind. We still had to be careful, but we knew that the major drops were behind us. As the river continued to sprint towards the sea, it separated around sand and gravel bars and turned sharply from time to time. Sometimes it got very narrow and fast near the tops of



Diane scouts R3/R4 rapid below the campsite



More scouting; same rapid looking upstream

the islands. We became more comfortable with the pace and armed with the knowledge that the toughest rapids were behind us, we decided to remove our helmets. Not long after that we were again flung into bushes by the current and had to duck and put up our arms to protect our heads from getting bashed. Barb took a couple of direct hits before her partner in the rear was able to straighten out the canoe enough..., so the helmets reappeared to protect us from wood rather than rock.

It was getting later in the afternoon and we decided to stop on a sand/gravel bar to make camp. It took a little grooming with paddles and hands, but we soon had relatively rock-free and level spots for our two tents. We got up the tarp in the middle of the island as a slight rain began to fall. Later that night someone caused me to spill a little wine that puddled under my seat....dampness ensued....and required some backside hanging over a small fire. This was a useful, if not slightly dangerous drying technique. It was Rick's birthday, but alas it was celebrated without a cake.

That evening it rained a bit. We awoke to an overcast sky with heavy

mist over the water. Visibility was poor to none! We took our time having breakfast, but the mist refused to lift. We knew that there were no major obstacles to encounter, but with the fast current and twisty turns, we were reluctant to take to the water. Finally, at 11 a.m. we decided to give it a go. We deemed that Rick had the best eyesight and he and Di led the

way as we slowly drifted and back-paddled down the river. It was very eerie to paddle this fast-moving, gurgling river with only 10 to 15 m of visibility. You got the impression you were heading downhill and into danger, even though we knew the river was relatively benign at this point. After half an hour of tense, slow paddling we decided to take a break and wait some more for the mist to rise. It would show signs of lifting, even to the point of showing a little sunshine, only to fog-up completely once again. We waited, we ate, we waited some more, and finally got back into the canoes and headed out. We had a little wobble in a boil, Rick and Di grounded out in a swift, but otherwise we had no problems. By 1:30 p.m., the mist had lifted and sunshine prevailed...yahoo!

The river had straightened out somewhat and the current was still strong. Before we knew it, we were at km 48 where a nice flat campsite awaited about two metres above the river level on river right. We soon had camp set up with a clothesline to dry our damp stuff from the night before



Every corner has its own lumber pile

and our towels from our swim/cleanup. This was the only camping where we experienced a few bugs...nothing serious...but enough to drive us under the dining tarp for snacks, reading, or supper.

The next day was clear and cool, but the sun warmed us quickly. By 10 a.m. we were on the water. The river now was wider and straighter. It was still moving quickly and there was a wind at our backs. We were enjoying the serenity and relaxed atmosphere and the sunshine as we floated and paddled down the river, when all was rudely interrupted. Three CF18 fighter jets came swooping down on us doing some low-level "top gun" type of flying, following the twists and turns of the river valley. The speed was amazing, but the sound was overwhelming. Within seconds they were gone. All that was left were two canoes and four knee-knocking canoeists.

By noon, we had covered an easy 20 km and had reached a footbridge, which spans the river. It is used to connect to snowmobile and hiking trails from the other side. There were good camping opportunities here, but the day was so nice and the paddling so easy that we decided to continue our paddle/float downstream. We were not sure which day Steve was going to take our car to the takeout, but we were hoping it was there, since we knew we could easily finish the trip today. We tried to get through to Steve by satellite phone, but had no luck. At the CIME (a company that provides guided trips and shuttles on the Bonaventure) site, we tried to get a beer and snack, but they were not yet ready for restaurant business. We were able to call Steve and leave a message about the car. After resting for a while, we continued to paddle the remaining eight km to the Bonaventure town wharf. We were relieved to see that our car had been delivered and in no time we were



Backside-hanging

packed up and off to the Grand Pré hotel for some clean-up followed by a very good meal in the local Rendezvous Restaurant. It had been a great five days of paddling. We spent the next four or five days touring around the Gaspé coast, including Percé Rock, Forillon National Park, Gaspésie National Park, and then back home.

If you are lucky enough to be able to paddle in early June and want to experience a truly beautiful, clean river, then the Bonaventure is for you. It is very accessible and affordable and almost without carries...a paddler's dream.



Rick and Diane in the morning mist

A GoPro Hero video camera for paddlers

Aleks Gusev

It was when I saw Justine Curgenvens' movie "This is canoeing" in the fall of 2009 that I first became aware of the small and wearable POV (point-of-view) cameras. Three years later, they're less than \$300 and thus have become affordable to most of us. Presentations at the 2012 Wilderness Canoe Symposium confirmed it – POV cameras have gone mainstream and are here to stay. In fact, they'll be smaller, better, and more affordable as time marches on.

GoPro Hero is a really small camera – it fits comfortably in the palm of my hand. The "Outdoor" version comes with a myriad of various gadgetry meant to assist you in strapping the camera to your body, head, helmet, kayak, canoe, car, paddleboard, etc. It comes with the waterproof housing that is certified to a depth of 60 metres. The camera has neither viewfinder nor LCD

display screen. This may seem awkward at first, but you'll quickly get used to it. The lens has a very wide angle (Hero 2 offers 127° or 170° wide angles). Plus, no display screen means longer battery life. Your bigger challenge is to learn to move your head around slowly, rather than in jerky motions. The jarring motion of your head will result in fuzzy and/or dizzy video footage, often unusable.

Mounting the camera on the bow plate offers a fantastic point of view, both looking ahead or behind, facing the bow paddler. For best results, you should make a small monopod to raise the camera high enough (12-14 inches) but not too high (it will interfere with the bow paddlers' cross-bow draw and sway too much for comfortable viewing). If you want to get fancy, the monopod can be made from two pieces that screw into each other to obtain a higher

viewpoint. This setup is effective on flat-water in calm conditions.

At the stern plate, I simply affixed one of the flat mounts that came with the original package. The male part is such that you can mount the camera facing backwards (most frequent setup), or forward (looking into the PFD of the stern paddler). The backward-facing position is particularly effective when you're the lead boat in the group.

Pakboat owners should consider fixing the hand-made monopod behind the bow paddlers' seat. The preferred setup is such that the bottom end of the monopod rests in the small cup that is fixed to the middle pole, and it's also attached to the back end of the bow seat. This setup provides two connecting points and the monopod must be long enough to clear the bow paddlers' helmet/hat. If you want to extend it further, consider securing the top end of the monopod with two guy wires to the top side poles.

Elevated camera positions will give you an amazing perspective. For really spectacular results, I use a telescopic monopod and attach the camera to the narrower end. Start recording and hold the pole in one hand, straight up, while you paddle with your other hand. You'll love the end result. Strong arms help!

There's no end to improvisation and therein lies the biggest catch of all. Shooting video with GoPro is easy enough and you'll find many opportunities to use it. Eventually, you'll develop your own style and preferences. But, it's what happens after, that separates us amateurs from the real pros. While video-editing tools are becoming more and more user friendly, serious video editing is often a daunting and very time-consuming process for the uninitiated. You'll quickly find that your data storage space is pathetically inadequate and new external hard disks will start to mushroom at the periphery of your desk. Consider investing right away in the home network storage solution that is offered by stackable, mirrored hard drives.

The extended version of this review with more photographs and videos can be found online at MyCCR Photography Forum.



Caves, Cliffs, (Canoes) 2011 Fall Hiking Weekend

Okay, there weren't any canoes; I just wanted to pique your interest. This was one weekend where we would have had difficulty utilizing our usual mode of transport. We did, however, have lots of caves and cliffs to explore and clamber over.

Saturday, November 5, saw 16 of us (and one dog) hike a combination of the Kolapore Uplands trails and the Bruce Trail on a glorious day. That evening the farmhouse kitchen table at Highlands Nordic in Duntroon groaned under heaps of food and good cheer. Many of the hikers groaned as well as we squeezed around the table to devour the feast.

On Sunday, a smaller group found the Best Caves and the Keyhole on a Bruce Trail hike in the Singhampton area. Thus ended the third annual hiking weekend where, I believe, we had the best weather yet and the biggest turnout.

Submitted by Barb Young on behalf of the organizers (Barb & Dave Young, Diane Lucas, Rick Sabourin, Beth & Bruce Bellaire)

P.S. January 14 was our third annual cross-country ski day. The organizers enjoyed powder snow at Duntroon and an excellent meal that evening. Where were the rest of you couch potatoes?



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