



Marching over the ice pulling our canoes

Artillery Lake Ice Walk

Story by Morten Asfeldt and Glen Hvenegaard
Photos by Morten Asfeldt

On June 6, 2011, the wings of our chartered Twin Otter lifted us from the tarmac of the Yellowknife Airport and the pilot banked the plane north to pick up the bearing that would lead us to a long esker at the north end of Artillery Lake where we would search for a landing site. The sun was shining through broken clouds as the wings levelled and we settled into the sparsely padded Twin Otter seats for the 90-minute flight. A departure for a canoe trip northeast of Yellowknife that early in the season is rare: the land is just emerging from winter and many rivers and most lakes are still ice covered. Nevertheless, it is a glorious time to be on the Barrens. The days are warming, the sun is

reaching its apex, and the bugs are still in larva form. However, it does mean pulling canoes over ice, a straightforward activity on solid lake ice but a challenge on thinning ice near open water. It also means some difficult paddling through densely packed ice pans and broken candle ice, which is much like paddling through an ocean of floating beer mugs.

Our group of 10 consisted of eight students from the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus in Camrose, Alberta, along with us as their instructors. Glen is a geographer and environmental scientist and Morten is an outdoor educator. We came to seek adventure and challenge, to learn about



Scouting our route looking southwest over Artillery Lake

the Canadian North from many perspectives, to learn about leadership and group dynamics, and to immerse ourselves in the place and in our community of travellers. We chose this route intentionally, knowing full well that ice would present many challenges. It is an uncommon canoe route at an unusual time of year and that was part of the appeal.

The long esker at the north end of Artillery Lake where we hoped to land is the same esker where John Hornby and Critchell-Bullock spent the winter of 1924 and 1925 in a gloomy hole in the

sand that they called home. Their story is one of a bleak and uncomfortable winter. As we flew along the esker searching for a landing site, the view through the oval window was uninviting. The sky was grey, the tundra brown and lifeless, and we flew through several snow squalls that had us wondering if the pilot would turn the plane back towards Yellowknife. After crossing the Lockhart River, a landing site appeared. Following a number of tight circles and low flybys, Joe Reid, our grey-haired pilot, guided the Twin Otter smoothly onto the dwarf birch-covered

esker and brought it to a full stop within a few hundred feet.

With engines quiet and propellers at rest, the co-pilot opened the rear doors and we stepped out. It was freezing. The wind was howling, the snow blew sideways, and only a narrow stream of water flowed between the frozen banks of the Lockhart River. Had we come too early? As we stood beside our piles of gear, the pilots wished us well and then climbed back into the plane, started the engines, and taxied to the takeoff site. To do this, they backtracked about 200 metres over the uneven esker making the Twin Otter look like an off-road vehicle with its wingtips rocking up and down and the nose and tail rising and falling through the dwarf birch covered dips and hollows. We chuckled in amazement.

After our first night on the tundra with ice forming on the small lakes and puddles, we loaded our PAKcanoes in the still blowing snow. It was a seven-kilometre paddle down the Lockhart to Artillery Lake and from the plane we had seen that the route was clear of ice and obstructions. The river was calm and the waterfowl abundant, including loons, Canada geese, tundra swans, and long-tailed ducks. On shore, there were ptarmigan still growing into their summer plumage, along with American tree sparrows, Lapland longspurs, and horned larks. A common raven nested on the roof of a nearby cabin at the base of the esker.

Reaching Artillery Lake, we climbed a small hill on the north side of the river to scout our route. To the southwest, Artillery Lake was frozen solid without so much as a shore lead in sight. We expected this and had come prepared to pull our canoes the full 95-kilometre length of the lake. We brought special crazy carpet sleds for our PAKcanoes, each with chest harnesses and towropes. For the next four days, we marched over the ice of Artillery Lake towing canoes toward Pike's Portage for five or six hours a day in one-hour blocks, each punctuated by water and snack breaks. As arduous and bleak as this might sound, it was enjoyable in many ways. We didn't have to worry about headwinds, we could walk straight across bays that would normally require following the shore. We could stop for lunch anywhere and our legs were strengthened for Pike's Portage. We also had many hours for thinking. Here is an excerpt from Morten's journal:



We are crossing a pressure ridge on Artillery Lake

As we walked today I thought about all the people I have told about this trip – some excited for us and some who think we are nuts – and none that would likely choose to be here with us. This begs the questions: why do we do this? What is the appeal or the draw of this sort of adventure? Why choose this sort of monotonous walking on a flat expanse of ice 95 kilometres long and eight to ten kilometres wide?

The walking gives me time to think. Time to think without interruption and without my thoughts being driven or directed by someone else's agenda. It is selfish thinking perhaps, but refreshingly cleansing, as well.

The wilderness is where I was transformed from a child to an adult. It is here that I found my confidence; it is here that I have felt strong and worthwhile; it is here that my identity was formed and shaped. It is here that I return to maintain my strength, to revisit, reshape, and sometimes rediscover my identity, to seek the confidence that carries me through the challenges, tensions, and foggy days of everyday life.

It is a return to the simple life where my energy and focus can be devoted to the most essential elements of living: eating, sleeping, staying warm and dry, being present in place and community. The extraneous distractions of phones, emails, hockey scores, and the latest news are absent.

Life on the ice of Artillery Lake is monotonous, yet life giving – even in the rain. The rain is a source of life for brown vegetation that is on a quest to capture all the heat and moisture it can in order to turn green for the short growing season in this barren land. And there is an element of this place that is bare, especially if you are hungry, cold, and wet and there are no caribou or trees in sight. However, just like George Back, Helge Ingstad, Warburton Pike, generations of Dene people and a century or so of recreational travelers, I come seeking renewal, inspiration, and rediscovery in wilderness tripping.

One of the challenges of travelling on a frozen lake is finding water near camp. The first night we camped where a stream flowed into the lake, which made getting water easy. The next two nights we could-



Water seeping up through the candle ice

n't find a stream when our legs were begging to stop. By this time we had discovered that if we chopped a small depression in the ice, water would seep up through the ice that was beginning to candle. Candle ice results from the process of melting, or rotting. As the ice goes through a series of freeze-thaw cycles, long, vertical finger-like cylinders of ice are created. In the early stages of this process, the ice can support substantial weight but once the fingers of ice are no longer well bonded together, the ice disintegrates under your feet. As we neared the south end of Artillery Lake, we began

to encounter more and more rotten candle ice and developed a keen eye for changes in ice colour. White ice was generally safe and the darker ice that was taking on the colour of the cold deep water was best avoided.

On June 9, we passed the south end of Crystal Island in late afternoon and Beaver Lodge came into view on the east side of the lake. Beaver Lodge is a large smoothly rounded hill that rises a few hundred feet from the lake's edge. Directly across Artillery Lake is a smaller hill, known as Rat Lodge that rises from a long finger of sand that reaches into the





the Lockhart River into Great Slave Lake where the “exhausted animal yielded its life” to the hunters. In spite of Beaver’s death, Maufelly informed Back that “its spirit...still lingers about its old haunt, the waters of which obey its will; and ill fares the person who attempts to pass it in his canoe, without muttering a prayer for safety: many have perished; some bold men have escaped; but none have been found so rash as to venture a second time within its power.” As was the practice in 1833, it remains the practice today for Aboriginal people to give a prayer and offering for safe passage when passing Beaver Lodge.

View of Beaver Lodge looking northeast

lake. Beaver Lodge and Rat Lodge are central figures in a local legend that, according to one version, goes something like this:

There once lived a beaver the size of a buffalo that wandered about the countryside tormenting the Aboriginal people. Rat, his collaborator who lived across the lake, often accompanied Beaver. At one point, the Aboriginal people had had enough of Beaver’s tormenting and decided it was time to slay the beast. They quietly snuck up to Beaver Lodge and

began to dig him out—which is evident by steep cliffs on the southwest side of Beaver Lodge today. However, the digging alerted Beaver, allowing him to flee to Rat Lodge seeking refuge. Upon arrival, Beaver was surprised by Rat’s chilly reception. As the story is told to George Back, by his guide Maufelly, in early September, 1833, Rat directed Beaver to swim “to some rocks to the south, where he would be safe from his enemies.” Reluctantly, Beaver made his way down the “cataracts and rapids” of

As we approached Beaver Lodge that sunny afternoon in June, pulling our canoes across ice that seemed solid enough to support a tank, this story was running through our heads and from deep within our bodies we had the urge to put forward a prayer and present an offering for safe passage. However, not knowing how the rest of the group would respond to these legend-driven feelings, we said nothing. With Beaver Lodge now dominating the horizon, Morten asked two of our group to walk ahead so he could get a photo of



Laura falling through the ice



Route finding on Artillery Lake

them pulling their canoe with Beaver Lodge in the background; he imagined using the photo to complement the telling of the legend. No sooner had he focused his camera on the pair when Laura fell through the ice. At first, she fell through to her waist and a moment later she dropped through another ice layer and had to hold herself up with outstretched arms. Her partner, Mitch, was quick to respond and pulled her from the icy hole with a ski pole. Aside from being cold, wet, and surprised, she was fine. However, thinking about the legend, shivers ran up our spines. Later that night, we walked to the top of Beaver Lodge to place an offering of matches and submitted a prayer for safe passage.

On June 10, we continued southwest, passing Timber Bay. By now we had discovered that we could not walk for long periods on the ice in our rubber boots or runners because it was too painful for our feet; we had to wear hiking boots. We all now understood what George Back meant

when he wrote on June 10, 1834, the day he and his men began to pull their heavy wooden boats from Timber Bay northeast over the ice of Artillery Lake: *“on account of the badness of the ice, which was literally a bed of angular spikes, of many shapes and sizes, but all so sharp as to make mere walking a painful and laborious operation.”* After only six miles of travel, Back and his crew had to cover the wooden runners of their sleds with iron, as the wood was “peeling, or otherwise, much injured.” A full 187 years have passed since Back wrote those words. Today, our boats were lighter, our aspirations more humble, and our journey not one that people will likely read about 187 years from now. Nevertheless, we visualized Back and his crew and marvelled at their travel and mapping accomplishments as we shared the ice with them that day.

The narrow stretch of water between Timber Bay and the south shore of Artillery Lake is shallow. Roger Catling,

a long-time resident of Reliance at the east end of Great Slave Lake, had suggested that this could be an area of thin ice. Roger was right. We had been walking south towards summer for three days now and covered 85 kilometres; shore leads were beginning to open up in places. For this reason, we tended to travel down the middle of the lake where the ice was thickest. However, as we approached Timber Bay we saw open water but had a hard time determining if the open water reached from shore-to-shore and if there was safe passage down the middle. After much discussion and hoisting Graham, our smallest member, onto the shoulders of Nils, our tallest member, for a better view, we decided to head for the south shore. As we proceeded, the ice became more and more uncertain to the point that we were running between patches of white ice, and over thinner dark patches that heaved as if we were running across a trampoline. On occasion, a foot would go through. Finally, we



Struggling through pan ice just before the Hoarfrost

reached open water and launched our canoes paddling 400 or 500 metres before pulling our canoes onto the ice. We then navigated carefully until we were beyond the shallow water and back on solid ice.

By midday on June 11, we reached Pike's Portage. The last eight kilometres at the south end of Artillery Lake are narrow and shallow, forcing us in and out of our canoes many times as we jumped across open leads of water. Reaching Pike's Portage marked the successful end to our journey over the ice of Artillery

Lake and the beginning of what we expected would be an ice-free series of lakes before reaching Great Slave Lake.

The two of us, Glen and Morten, sat looking out over the shifting ice of Artillery Lake as the students scouted our first portage. When they returned with directions, we shouldered our loads and made the first of nine carries enroute to Great Slave Lake. As we sat sipping hot drinks and rubbing lotion into our sunburned faces that evening, we noticed a significant increase in the temperature.

We had become accustomed to the cooling effect of the large ice mass of Artillery Lake that had made us pull on extra sweaters and warm toques. Now, camped on the edge of an ice-free lake, the warming effect of the land dominated.

On June 13, we camped at the south end of Harry Lake with the longest portage before us. To this point, the eight portages had been short, ranging from 100 metres to 1.5 kilometres and all downhill, aside from the short but steep uphill out of Artillery Lake. Scattered

around the well-used Harry Lake campsite were several dilapidated contraptions used to ease the five-kilometre portage. Tomorrow, we would carry our loads downhill to the sandy shore of Great Slave Lake. A few of our crew used rope, duct tape, and zip ties to patch together a wheeled device for tomorrow's task. Loaded, they wheeled their invention 20 metres down the trail before it collapsed. Laughing at their own defeat, they hoisted their loads.

Two distinct heights of land on this last portage afford a tremendous view of Great Slave Lake. Cresting these heights on June 14, we were greeted to a great expanse of ice. It didn't look good for paddling. Remarkably, by the time our tired bodies had carried the last load that day, Charlton Bay had become nearly ice free. On June 15, we enjoyed the trip's first layover day by sleeping in. We spent the day sunning ourselves on the beach, exploring an old cemetery along the portage, climbing the hills to the south, fishing, and following wolf prints in the

sand. Throughout the day, the ice receded.

On June 16 we donned our spraydecks and headed for the mouth of the Lockhart River. We paddled north along the shore in a light breeze before rounding a point that would take us northeast. Rounding the point we paddled into a cold wind off an ice-filled bay. Fortunately, a north shore lead gave us passage and we enjoyed the afternoon exploring Back's Old Fort Reliance and an abandoned Denesoline village. Perched high on the bank of the south shore, at the mouth of the Lockhart River, are a number of recent graves where people from Lutsel'ke, the nearest community, continue to be buried today.

With the breeze now at our backs, we hoisted sail and enjoyed being pushed southwest towards Reliance. Roger Catling was expecting us and we hoped to camp that night near his home. However, the southwest wind jammed the gap between Fairchild Point and Belle Ile with ice, forcing us to camp. The next day, with the ice gone, we arrived on

Roger's doorstep at noon to hot coffee and freshly baked cookies as well as the warm welcome of Roger and his children, Winnie and Gus.

We enjoyed our time with Roger as he regaled us with stories of his wolf-hunting life. Our students asked many questions, prompting more stories from Roger. Before paddling down Police Bay to see Gus D'Aoust's old cabin and trading post and then across the bay to see the old RCMP station turned fishing lodge, a few of us loaded into Roger's powerboat to scout the ice in McLeod Bay; it was choked with ice. There was no opening in sight, and while there was solid ice in the centre of McLeod Bay that we could pull our canoes across, we couldn't get to it because of all the rotten ice. We would have to backtrack and then portage over Fairchild Point to the north shore of McLeod Bay where an open lead appeared.

After backtracking 10 kilometres and completing a short but difficult carry over Fairchild Point, we found a gently sloping granite slab that welcomed us to a beauti-



Trying to paddle through candle ice along the north shore of McLeod Bay



Toura Lake – Pike's Portage

ful island campsite with a promising open lead reaching towards the Hoarfrost River and the Olesen's homestead. As we left Reliance, Roger handed us a mundane-looking cardboard box that contained homemade caribou sausage that we grilled over an open fire. As the sausage sizzled and popped, students were fishing from shore or sitting on the smooth warm granite, talking about how much their wilderness experience had been enhanced by visiting Old Fort Reliance, the abandoned Denesoline village, seeing evidence of past travellers as they walked the well-worn path of Pike's Portage, and visiting with Roger Catling. For many, it was a surprising irony. So often we think of wilderness as a place where nobody has travelled or lived and certainly not where some continue to live.

The paddle along the north shore of McLeod Bay was stunning. While the ice made for some difficult travelling, we made progress toward our goal of reaching Taltheilei Narrows and learning about living and traveling as a group. Here is

another entry from Morten's journal:

We left our campsite on the north shore of Fairchild Point at 9:30 a.m. and paddled in ice-free water most of the way to the Hoarfrost. It was a beautiful paddle through a maze of small islands of smooth granite; granite that has been made smooth by glaciers of the last ice age and thousands of years of weathering. In places, the rocks sloped gently into the water and the water was so clear it was difficult to know where rock and water met. In other places, it was dramatic. It was idyllic until we rounded a point and found an ice-filled bay.

The first half of the bay went well by paddling through the floating pans and pushing them out of the way or smashing them to pieces. At about the mid-point of the bay, I needed a knee break and Graham and Eric scouted ahead to determine if we should continue on through the ice or make our way overland. After an extended group discussion with a near equal split between those who wanted to portage

versus continuing on through the ice, we all took one more good look at the ice route and decided to give it another try...and we made it. In fact, not only did we make it, it was great fun and I felt a strong sense of commitment to the cause by everyone as people pushed and smashed the pans of ice to make passage for the canoes, which often meant wading knee-deep in the cold clear water or jumping on a pan of ice to break it into moveable chunks. It was a great adventure; it was part of what drew us to this route.

On June 18, we arrived at the Hoarfrost River and spent the following day visiting the Olesen's, who are good friends. Some of the students had been there in the winter on a dogsled expedition as a part of another Augustana course. By trip's end, our time with Roger and the Olesens were highlights of our trip.

On June 20, we pushed away from the sandy beach in front of the Olesen's homestead and headed west. We had seven days to paddle the remaining 183 kilometres to

Taltheilei Narrows. After 10 hours of hard travelling on the 20th, we had covered 23 kilometres. A highlight that day was seeing 13 muskox and a cow moose and calf. On the 21st, we travelled for 12 hours covering three kilometres in three hours to start the day, followed by 21 kilometres of ice-free travel in the afternoon. On the 22nd, we had another long day covering three kilometres in the morning which included two portages over points of land that were too ice-choked to travel around, and 14 kilometres of mixed open water and ice in the afternoon. Travel on the 23rd was painful beyond belief. We made only five kilometres all day because of densely packed ice that required a total group effort for each metre gained; we were exhausted both physically and mentally. In a small patch of open water, we rafted our canoes together and sat in silence before finally expressing how we were feeling and acknowledged that we were not going to make it to the landing strip at Taltheilei Narrows as planned. We would have to call a floatplane to come and get us. While we still had three possible travel days remaining and 115 kilometres to go, which is achievable under ideal conditions, we also needed two days to wrap up our academic experience before heading home. After accepting that we

would not reach our intended destination, we pulled our canoes up on a gravel beach and went for a walk to a hilltop and looked out over an ice-filled McLeod Bay. Some sat silently, some napped, and others laughed and joked about our situation, but we all felt a sense of relief from simply acknowledging our fate and accepting the powers beyond our control.

The following day we made a last effort to reach the Barnston River. It took us all morning to travel one kilometre at which point we camped in an ice-free bay where a floatplane could land. Ironically, as if we were never meant to leave, ice filled the bay within an hour. That afternoon, we relaxed, read, slept, fished, and some hiked four kilometres overland to the Barnston River.

As we researched this route, Dave Olesen, who hesitates to give advice about ice because it is so variable from year to year, risked a prediction that, based on more than 25 years of living at the Hoarfrost, McLeod Bay is “on average” ice-free on June 25. Since leaving the Hoarfrost on June 20, there had been no significant wind. As we struggled along the north shore bashing our way through the endless fields of candle ice and pushing ice pan after ice pan aside to create an

opening for our canoes, we wished for a north wind to open a lead of water. The north wind never came until June 25th, less than 24 hours before the plane was scheduled to pluck us from our icy world. As if Dave had had a crystal ball, the wind began to blow out of the north at 2 p.m. on June 25 and by 6 p.m., only four hours later, McLeod Bay was ice-free as far as the eye could see. We were stunned. The passage to Taltheilei Narrows was wide open but we were out of time.

The following morning a Twin Otter touched down in a great shower of white spray, and taxied into shore where we stood by our pile of gear. There was a mix of emotion as we looked forward to going home and yet hadn't reached our journey's geographical goal. However, we knew this was an uncertain route this time of year and that ice and the pace of the advancing season would ultimately determine our progress. As it turned out, it was an average spring and ice did determine our progress. Nevertheless, we found what we had come seeking: adventure and challenge, new knowledge and perspectives about the Canadian North, insights into leadership and group dynamics, and an immersion experience in this place and in our community of travellers.



Pike's Portage in the background



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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.

A Story behind the Story

"From the Heart of the Snake," a story by Stephanie Potter, published in the Spring 2012 *Nastawgan*, caught the attention of many readers who wrote to express their appreciation for this young women's writing style, love of pinhole photography and the appetite for adventure. *Nastawgan* published Stephanie's first story about the trip to Wind River in the spring of 2009. It was the work on this story that brought two writers together – Toni Harting, an accomplished writer at the sunset of his career, and young Stephanie, who is just discovering her love for the art of writing. Watching Stephanie blossom into an inspiring writer is a matter of immense pride for Toni, whose encouragement and support nurtured Stephanie along the way. Here we pick up a thread from the two letters Toni received, first from Stephanie herself, and then from her father, Tom:

"Dear Toni, I just received the copies of my article in the mail today. It feels great to have them in my hands and to see the words and photos flow so well together on paper. Your kind words that were attached are greatly appreciated and I would like to thank you tremendously

for supporting me as I started my writing career, one that I have become very fond. Without this support, I don't know if this love would still be hidden. Thank you once again for all the hard work, commitment and support that I have been so fortunate to receive from you. It has been a great learning experience and pleasure to work with you. I hope that the future brings you the best. Stephanie."

"Dear Toni, thank you so much for the support, encouragement and guidance that you have given to Stephanie in her writings of the Wind & Snake articles. It is rare in life to be blessed with such support. The process of publishing has been both challenging and inspirational for Stephanie; as a parent it has been profound to watch her grow and mature through this process. We are extremely proud of her and equally appreciative of the interest you have taken in her writing, your helpful feedback, nurturing and support. You have made a lasting impression and extremely positive difference in Stephanie's life – for this we are extremely grateful."

Tom G. Potter"

Don't find yourself up the creek without your Nastawgan!

To all members of the WCA:

Thank you to all those members who have renewed their memberships regularly on or before the due date. This saves the extra work associated with tracking and following up with unpaid memberships.

Unfortunately, we have noticed a decline in timely membership renewals and are trying to determine why. Membership renewal has been made easier by allowing online payments. We have also included the renewal date on the mailing label of the *Nastawgan*. Despite this, members are renewing late and/or forgetting to renew altogether.

We believe/hope that members want to continue to be part of the WCA and do not want their memberships to lapse, so we're looking for ways to help them remember.

We will highlight the renewal date on the cover of the journal and send e-mail reminders. The board would welcome any other suggestions, ideas, or comments members may have. Please contact one of us (contact information is found on the last page of the journal).

The WCA Board

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.

Events Calendar

Fall Meeting will be held at the Madawaska Kanu Centre on 29 and 30 September 2012.

Wine & Cheese Fall Party will take place on 17 November 2012 at TSCC.

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

New Editor-in-Chief, New Chair

The bad news: Aleks Gusev has stepped down as Chair of the WCA Board. The good news: Aleks Gusev has become the Editor-in-Chief of *Nastawgan*. It has fallen on me to take over the reins of the Chair, so that Aleks can devote more time to his new position. I think that all who know would agree that Aleks has done a spectacular job as Chair and that his successor has enormous shoes to fill. My feet are small, but I will try to carry on some of the initiatives that he started and seek his advice about new issues as they arise. With the help of the rest of the executive, I hope that we can continue to keep the WCA a vibrant and meaningful canoeing organization.

Sincerely,
Dave Young
WCA Chair



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 Annual General Meeting

On Saturday, March 3rd, 35 people attended the WCA's Annual General Meeting at the Koffler Scientific Reserve (KSR) at Jokers Hill, north of Toronto. The AGM is one of our key annual events, and provides a great opportunity for current and prospective members to learn more about the workings of the WCA, provides input on our future direction, allows us to socialize with other outdoor enthusiasts, and learn about and plan future outings. The agenda covered the regular AGM business, with updates from Chair Aleks Gusev and Treasurer Barb Young, as well as from Bill Ness of the Outings Committee and Jeff McColl on Conservation. Bill King, long-time WCA Secretary, ensured we followed all the necessary AGM protocol. The group engaged in lively discussions about the relationship with Canadian Canoe Routes, current environmental issues, and how to keep the WCA vital with new members, including ideas around social media and other communication strategies.

The Koffler Scientific Reserve is owned by the University of Toronto, which generously allowed us to use KSR for our AGM. After the business of the AGM was finished, Professor Arthur Weis, Director of KSR and Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Toronto, talked about the history of KSR: it was built as an equestrian centre by the McLaughlin family, of General Motors fame, and donated to the University in 1995 by the Koffler family, founders of Shoppers Drug Mart. Professor Weis also talked about some of the fascinating research being conducted at KSR, including cutting-edge research on climate change and its effects on biodiversity, ecology, and evolution.

After the talk, Professor Weis led a hike through parts of the 350 hectares of KSR, which is blanketed by a mosaic of wetlands and forests, including Ontario's largest remaining stand of old-growth hardwood. In this Ecological Observatory, scientists monitor, measure, and analyze natural processes as they unfold, and perform intensively manipulative experiments that subject theories about the environment to scientifically rigorous testing. Although it was one of the windiest days this season, everyone thoroughly enjoyed the hike in this beautiful natural environment.

After the hike, we got in our cars and drove a few kilometres to Kettleby, where we had lunch at Dorio's Bakery Restaurant. The food was great and the owners went out of their way to make us welcome by arranging seating to maximize socializing. After lunch, some people returned to KSR to enjoy their public hiking trails.

The Koffler Scientific Reserve offers instructive and entertaining learning experiences through special events, including informal guided Nature Walks and more intensive Natural History Workshops. A system of public walking trails offers an opportunity to experience an important piece of Ontario's natural heritage. To learn more, please visit their website at www.ksr.utoronto.ca.



Food for Paddlers

Andrea Fulton sends along this recipe adapted from www.epicurious.com which was mentioned in the Spring 2012 Nastawgan. Despite low water levels on the Spanish River, a high level of good food was enjoyed by the group. This is one of Andrea's favourite dishes and it works well for the first night's dinner for six hungry trippers.

Wild Salmon with Pearl Couscous, Slow-Roasted Tomatoes, and Lemon Oregano Oil

Ingredients:

For tomatoes and lemon oregano oil

6 plum tomatoes (1 lb), halved lengthwise

1 1/4 teaspoons sugar

3/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

10 fresh basil leaves

12 whole fresh oregano leaves plus 3 tablespoons finely chopped

2 teaspoons fresh lemon zest, removed in strips with a vegetable peeler and finely minced

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

For couscous

2 teaspoons olive oil

2 1/4 cups pearl (Israeli) couscous (12 oz)

1 3/4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth (14 fl oz)

1 cup water

1/4 teaspoon salt

For salmon

6 (6-oz) pieces wild salmon fillet with skin (preferably center cut)

1 teaspoon olive oil

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup Kalamata or other brine-cured black olives (3 oz), pitted and quartered lengthwise

Preparation:

Prior to trip, roast tomatoes and prepare oil: Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 250°F. Toss tomatoes with sugar, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and arrange, cut sides down, in a small shallow baking pan. Heat oil in a nine to 10-inch heavy skillet over moderate heat until hot but not smoking, then cook garlic, stirring occa-

2012 Paddle the Don River Day

Story by Gary James

Photo by Matthew Eberly

Weir watchers needed! The call went out for assistance and 28 of you responded. In addition, we were supported by 41 Scouts, marine auxiliary police, and auxiliary coast guard officers.

The 19th annual "Canoe the Don River" event was organized by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority on Sunday, May 6, 2012. The WCA members and Scouts had been asked to assist by helping canoeists in and out of their canoes at each station along the river. For most of the year, the Don River water levels are very low and too shallow for canoeing. The snow, spring melt-off, and rain are held back by the G. Ross Lord dam. We were worried that this year there might not be enough water to float the canoes downriver.

However, the dam was open and about 535 paddlers (plus our team) took part in canoeing 10.5 km from E.T. Seton Park to Lake Ontario. As is often the case, some people were not prepared to deal with the moving water. However, the majority of canoeists made it down the river safely to the big party at the end.

sionally, until pale golden, one to two minutes. Stir in basil and whole oregano leaves, then pour oil over tomatoes. Roast tomatoes until very tender but not falling apart, 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 hours.

Transfer tomatoes with a spatula to a large plate, then pour oil through a fine-mesh sieve into a small bowl or measuring cup, discarding solids. Stir in chopped oregano, zest, juice, and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper.

At camp, cook couscous: Heat two teaspoons olive oil in a three quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat until hot but not smoking, then toast couscous, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and pale golden, three to five minutes. Add broth, water, and salt and simmer, covered, until liquid is absorbed and couscous is al dente, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, 10 minutes, then stir in 2 1/2 table-

\$73,000 was raised towards supporting environmental projects in the Don Watershed. The feedback from everyone involved has been good. Please circle Sunday, May 5, 2013 in your calendars for the big 20th anniversary event. I will be calling for even more help, so let me know if you are interested! This is a great event to support the river, city, and promote the WCA. For more information see <http://paddlethedon.ca/>



South of Eglinton, a multiple-vehicle collision prompted emergency services to establish a major detour for several hours

spoons lemon oregano oil. Season with salt.

At camp, cook salmon while couscous stands: Arrange salmon, skin side down, on six individual foil sheets, drizzle with olive oil, rubbing it over tops of fillets, and sprinkle with salt. Seal the foil into packets and grill over medium campfire until salmon just cooked through, 12 to 14 minutes. Divide couscous among six plates. Lift salmon flesh from skin with a slotted spatula and transfer a fillet to each bed of couscous. Put two tomato halves on each plate, then sprinkle salmon with olives and drizzle with some lemon oregano oil.

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.

Mushrooms of the North

Story by Konstantin Hadziristic

Photos by Radmilo Anicic

We were in that country where you cannot describe the beauty of the land without using the word “sky.”

Five of us were on the 250th km of our trip down Quebec’s George River in our 16-foot craft, in the far north of Canada. We had only 180 km to go to Ungava Bay. Already seasoned paddlers on our 12th day, we drank water straight from the river and managed to keep up our spirits despite the indescribable onslaught of blackflies and mosquitoes.

Beaten by rapids, wind, and a few true northern cold showers, we finished a long day of paddling – over 50 km – on the right side of the riverbank, under Pyramid Hill, scanning the densely overgrown shore for any signs of a suitable campsite. Our goal was to spend the next day hiking on this side of the river; the apparently abandoned cabins of Pyramid Hill Lodge on the opposite shore didn’t interest us. Unfortunately we couldn’t locate the only marked campsite on that section of the map, or it was too small to accommodate our two small and one large living-room tents. And so, wet, tired, and freezing, we used up our last reserves of strength to paddle across the kilometre-wide, incredibly fast river, to get to the Lodge before nightfall. We hoped that we would find space between the cabins for our big Eureka tent, which we needed in order to change and make a hot meal without the interference of bugs.

Yet it turned out the lodge was not abandoned at all, and there was a surprise waiting for us – the May family, Inuit descendants and the owners of the Lodge. They had, that very day, closed the Lodge, but they welcomed us as guests, and, with true Northern hospitality offered us a wooden cabin of our own, for free. We needed light and they lent us their lovely antique oil lamp and brought us firewood; we needed hot tea, and instantly a large teapot materialized. In half an hour, we had a fire

going in the small stove in the middle of the cabin. The oil lamp lit clothes, hung about haphazardly, and our glowing faces on the four wooden beds. Our footwear covered the gravel floor – the best solution for small houses built on permafrost.

We conducted all of the necessary communication and logistics with their son, Henry, a remarkably open, friendly, smart, and curious 11-year old boy. He didn’t hesitate to talk to us, in perfect English, about his life, the beauties and hardships of the North, his school in Kujuaq, how to grow up in the open air. In just a few moments, he had completely captivated this group of bearded, gray-haired men. His dog followed his footsteps, and he too soon accepted us and showed his indescribable friendliness.

Just when a serious topic of discussion came up – which barrel to open and what to prepare for dinner – Henry told us his mother was offering us the humble leftovers of their dinner, if we weren’t disgusted by caribou meat. Wow – caribou meat as an appetizer! None of us had had the pleasure. Then came the real surprise, of the night and maybe of the trip as a whole: the “leftovers” consisted of five large caribou cutlets garnished with sautéed mushrooms. There was more than enough food for these five hungry wolves from Ontario.

By morning, the question arose: How could Mrs. May serve mushrooms if the family had been here at Pyramid Hill for several weeks? As the only one in the group with a cursory knowledge of mushrooms, I knew that mushrooms



Mushroom of the North



Henry May up close

don't keep long. Stories are told and books are written about the toxicity of some mushrooms. It is very hard for an amateur to tell bad ones from deadly poisonous ones. I knew that wild mushrooms vary greatly from locale to locale, from season to season, and because of that, I'd never tried to eat them in Canada. The golden rule is to first research a type of mushroom, observe and study all the variations of colour, size, shape, various stages of development, similarity, and difference with other kinds, and then, when the 'personality' is established, pick only under the guidance of someone experienced, and finally to eat only with someone who's native to the region. Only then can you add that one to your friendly list.

Of course, Henry was there to reveal his mother's secret: he had picked them for his mother. He was immediately ready to go for a walk to show me where and what he picked. He astonished me when he began to pick them one by one and assess each one as 'good' or 'very good.' Finally, he simply concluded that there were no bad mushrooms there.

The next day, when we returned from a spectacularly wet, insect-y, and tiring hike on Pyramid Hill, and after a delicious appetizer of sashimi from the day's freshly caught salmon (a gift from Henry), we prepared our regular meal, richly enhanced by mushrooms we collected and prepared.

We chose only a variation of 'porcinis' (commonly known as **penny bun**, **porcino** or **cep**) from the fungi family Boletus Genus, of which I had previous knowledge. I knew they were a delicacy, and so we focused on them and thus enhanced our Far North menu for the rest of the trip. The George River supports a forest, and so a very thin tree line follows its path all the way up to the Arctic, providing shelter to various kinds of mushrooms.

Following our ideal trip, I tried to do some of my own research on the mushrooms of the North. I read various travel diaries and accounts of trips in the north, by canoe and kayak, but nowhere did I read that someone ate mushrooms there.

There is, however, a scientific work



Our own mushroom dish

as an example: “Edible Plants of the Arctic” by A.E. Porsild, who says: “Many different kinds of edible mushrooms and puffballs occur throughout the Arctic, especially near the southern fringe of the tundra where, in midsummer and early autumn, bushels of these

fungi may be collected. Thus far no poisonous species have been detected north of the tree-line

To many explorers of the North, information about the mushrooms that grow there, their quality, and methods of preparation, would be useful. That

way, this ‘fruit of the earth’ could be added to the plain, everyday meals from the barrel – aside from fish and berries.

As Walt Whitman thought: “Now I see the secret of making the best person: it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with earth.”



Farewell to Mays

PAKcanoe Modifications for Barrenland Travel

Story by Morten Asfeldt and Mitch McCambly

Photos by Morten Asfeldt



PAKcanoe with crazy carpet sled attached

The use of folding canoes such as PAKcanoes is increasing in the Canadian north because of increasing aircraft charter costs and new safety practices that make flying hardshell canoes more difficult and expensive. However, PAKcanoes are not perfect in design, durability, or

outfitting and require a number of modifications in order to make them a functional and dependable wilderness-tripping canoe. This article explains modifications made for an early season trip that required us to pull our canoes the full length of Artillery Lake, NWT, carry over Pike's Portage, and navigate through ice pans and flows of candle ice on Great Slave Lake. (See article on page 1)

can't know for sure – because we didn't try it – we believe that the rubber hull would have been absolutely shredded by the ice had it not been protected by the sled. As it was, the foam pad that lies between the aluminum frame and rubber hull was destroyed on all five canoes.

After a fruitless search for actual crazy carpet material, we located a suitable low-density polymer plastic at Hobblestone Plastics (www.hobblestone-plastics.com) in Blackfoot, Alberta. This plastic is less than one millimetre thick, costs about \$20 per canoe (without shipping), and the finished sled weighs five kilograms. A thinner and lighter plastic would likely suffice but this was the best we could find.

To make the sled, we set an assembled PAKcanoe on the plastic and cut a piece that stretched from the top of the bow-deck plate all the way to the stern of the canoe. After cutting the front of the plastic so that it wrapped around the front of the canoe, we trimmed the plas-



Attachment point for tow-lines on crazy carpet sleds

Crazy Carpet Sleds

The crazy carpet sled serves two functions: to reduce friction and to protect the hull. The friction between the rubber bottom of the hull and the ice is much greater than one might imagine. Without the sled, it is nearly impossible to pull the canoe over jagged and abrasive spring ice. However, with the sled, two people can walk at a comfortable pace for many hours pulling the loaded canoe. We averaged 25 kilometres per day.

The second function of the sled is to protect the hull from abrasion. While we



Paddling short stretches of open water with the crazy carpet sled attached

tic so that it reached up the side of the canoe about six inches. Once trimmed, we installed $\frac{3}{4}$ inch brass grommets in order to secure the sled to the canoe by tying a rope across the top of the canoe from either side.

We designed the front of the sled so that we would attach our tow ropes to the sled and not directly to the canoe. We did this by installing a pair of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch brass grommets, which we tied a loop of rope through to create an attachment point. This system worked very well.

On a few occasions, we encountered short stretches of open water and simply launched our canoes with sleds attached. This was workable on short stretches, but the canoe is very slow.

When not using the sleds, we rolled

them in a bundle of two or three per bundle and loaded them into a canoe. Overall, we were very happy with our invention and recommend a similar system if you anticipate having to pull your PAKcanoe across ice. Without the sled, pulling the canoe over the ice will be very exhausting as the friction is many times greater than that of an ABS canoe. In addition, you risk a great deal of damage to the hull.

On Great Slave Lake we found ourselves bashing through ice pans for 10 days and were surprised at how durable the PAKcanoes were in these conditions. The only wear we noticed was on the spraydeck attachment patches that are glued to the side of the hull. However, the wear was minor.

Portage Yokes

The portage yokes that we purchased with the PAKcanoes do not work. The problem is that once the yoke is attached and the canoe shouldered, the yoke comes off because the width of the beam



Wear on the spray-deck attachment patches from bashing through ice-pans



The new yoke installed



Original PAKcanoe Yoke. Bottom: New Yoke



New yoke with strings attached to prevent forward and aft movement

increases due to the canoe's flexibility. To solve this, we designed a yoke that reaches around the outside of the gunnels, which keeps the beam from in-

creasing in width.

The yokes are constructed from aluminum with a spring that squeezes the hull material below the gunnel and each

yoke weighs 1.9 kilograms. (To save weight, we brought only three yokes for the five canoes on the trip.) Once squeezed, the yoke cannot slide off and the right-angle end pieces prevent the beam from increasing in width.

This system works, well although the spring does not squeeze tight enough to keep the yoke from slowly sliding forward and aft. Therefore, we attached a piece of cord to the yoke and tied the cord to the frame forward and aft and this stopped the movement.

The shortcoming of this system is potential abrasion on the hull where the aluminum rubs the hull. We glued rubber to the yoke to prevent this but the rubber came off. We imagine two possible solutions: use a better glue, or glue a reinforcement patch onto the hull where the hull is squeezed by the spring.

Knee Pads

Given the rubber floor of the PAKcanoe, it is important to have knee pads to protect your knees from rock strikes. One solution is to wear flooring or shingling knee pads available from most hardware stores. While these are effective and work well in the bow, they are not effective in the stern because of the stern seat placement. In order to maximize legroom in the stern, the stern seat needs to be mounted as far back as possible, which results in your shin resting on the aluminum frame. To solve this problem, we created a knee pad that covered the aluminum frame and eliminated the need for flooring knee pads.

The knee pads are constructed from Evazote winter sleeping pad foam (1.5 centimetres thick) that was friction fit between and under the aluminum frame. A tight fit is critical. The foam was glued together with LePage's Pres-Tile Green Contact Cement and this proved to be an extremely effective solution.

Spray Decks

The spray decks from PAKcanoe are excellent. They are very durable, attach easily and securely, and are attractive. However, they have three shortcomings. First, the velcro straps that hold the spare paddle on top of the deck are mounted too close to the gunnel, resulting in the paddle grip sticking out beyond the gunnel and interfering with the



Knee pads installed

paddler's stroke. To solve this, we sewed a new velcro strap onto the spray deck behind the bow paddler so the paddle rests well within the gunnel. A second problem is that the pocket for the paddle blade on the right side of the deck is mounted too far aft and a normal sized paddle (56 to 58 inches) not only sticks out beyond the gunnel, but, if it were straightened out, it would reach into the cockpit of the stern paddler. Therefore, we did not use the spare paddle apparatus on the right side and modified only the spare paddle apparatus on the left side. To solve the right side problem, the paddle pocket needs to be moved to the front half of the spray deck. Finally, the closure system that closes the cockpit around the paddler's waist does not close securely. We have not solved this problem.

Securing the Aluminum Frame

The aluminum frame needs additional support to maintain hull rigidity. To do this, we applied a plastic zip-tie around the frame at every frame junction. While this is a great improvement, the frame requires realignment from time to time.

While hardshell ABS canoes have some distinct advantages over PAKcanoes in terms of durability, load-carrying capacity, and ease of use, these modifications increase the functionality and durability of a PAKcanoe, making it well suited for remote wilderness canoe tripping. For suggestions regarding PAKcanoe repair kits, see "Technique Tips" in *KANAWA* magazine, Winter 2006/2007.



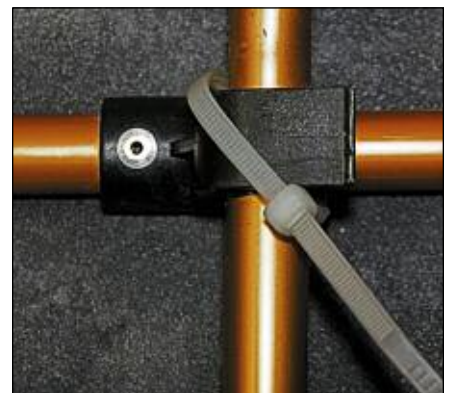
The original spare paddle apparatus on the right side. Paddle grip points towards the stern



The modified spare paddle apparatus on the left side. Paddle grip points towards the bow



Cross-sectional view of knee pads. Note the hole in back where the aluminum frame goes between the layers

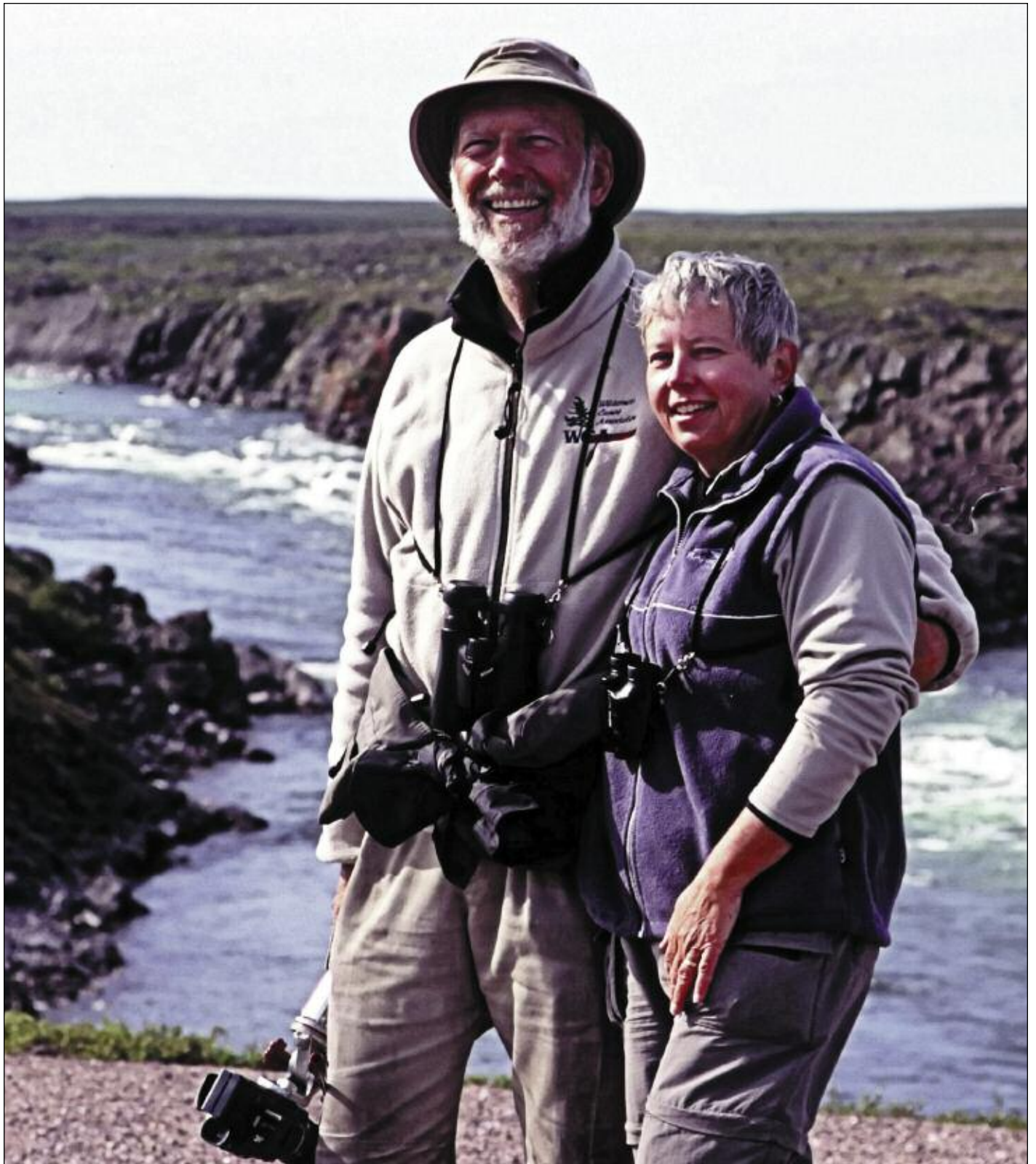


Plastic zip-ties used at every frame junction. Remember to bring enough so that they can be replaced if you have to disassemble the canoe during the trip

People that matter:

George Drought and Barbara Burton

By Bill King



George Drought and Barbara Burton on the Dubawnt River in 2004, photo by Ron Bruch

In the Winter 1996 issue of *Nastawgan*, George Drought wrote a charming and provocative article, "Personal Glimpses: 40 Years Later," in which he recalled his very early days in Canada as an apple-cheeked 18-year-old in 1956 (see the following link:

http://images.ourontario.ca/Partners/WCA/WCA0123421_017.pdf). While he had graduated from an excellent English public school, the famous Wellington College, George's knowledge of Canada was confined to geography classes and library researches. When I asked him, "Why did you come to Canada?" he replied, "I wanted to see what it was like." Well, he lost no time finding out. A scant one week in the country, George borrowed a canoe and took off for a solo trip on the Gatineau River. Bear in mind that, while he had some sailing experience, George had no experience of camping or of small, self-propelled watercraft. Indeed, George was so green that his first exposure to the call of the loon had him reaching for his axe in self-defense. Now that's adventurous!

George has learned a lot since then. He has had careers in the Canadian military, as a professional photographer, driving instructor, wilderness guide and instructor, author of guide books, and videographer. Among other accomplishments, George wrote guides to the Madawaska, Petawawa, Pukaskwa, and Wakwayokastic rivers. He is proud of the six children prior to his current marriage and remains in close contact with them.

Meanwhile, in Hamilton, Barb Burton was busy growing up. The daughter of a Coast Guard officer, she, her brother, and her mother were often on their own for long periods while her father was occupied with ice breaking or Arctic supply. Nonetheless, it is her father, who had a passion for fascinating photography, pressing Arctic wildflowers, and collecting Inuit art, that she credits for her own drive to explore and immediate love of the Arctic. She mentions as specific pleasures the tinkling of the ice as Arctic lakes break up, the wildflowers of early Arctic summer, the herds of caribou and muskoxen, the evidence of previous occupation by Inuit hunters and their fami-

lies, and the contact with present-day Inuit communities.

A natural athlete, Barb gravitated to physical education at university and into a career as a phys-ed teacher and guidance counsellor. One of the "benefits" of the job was that she got to take students on a variety of outdoor activities, including flatwater canoe trips. She also did outings with the Barrie Canoe Club. Barb confesses that she was initially terrified at the prospect of running whitewater. (How many of us would say the same?) Her confidence was not improved by a nasty swim down the Gull Rapids! Nonetheless, it was at Minden, where his daughter was competing, that Barbara first met George. She was introduced by one of the wonderful Labrador Retrievers that George always paddled with. Some of you may have made their acquaintance as they scrounged your food at Palmer Rapids, or marvelled at them diving for rocks.

By the mid-80s, George was a seasoned whitewater paddler and canoe camper and gradually ingratiated himself to Barb with offers of equipment, instruction, etc. In the course of time Barb became, herself, a Level 3 whitewater instructor.

In 1987, Barb fulfilled George's prophecy that he would "grow on her" by marrying him.

Even before making the "ultimate commitment," Barb and George had put their canoeing lives together by founding *Wilderness Bound*. From modest beginnings, their guiding company grew to provide trips in three provinces, the Northwest Territories, Baffin Island, and at least one American state, in addition to courses in paddling and river safety. Barb, who, bear in mind, was teaching full-time, looked after the food planning and preparation while George was responsible for trip research, logistics, and equipment. She recalls being picked up from school on Friday afternoon, driving to, say, Palmer's Rapids for a course, returning late Sunday evening for the cleanup and appearing "fresh" for school on Monday morning.

It was in 1992 that George decided to add videography to his wilderness skills

and was soon toting along on Northern trips: a professional-quality video camera with 40X magnification capability, a large and very heavy tripod, and solar panels to recharge the batteries. Eventually they produced documentaries and/or video footage on nine different rivers including the Hood, the Mountain, and the Back. Their northern adventures came at more than a monetary price. They twice had to be evacuated from the wilderness, first when George, having injured his knee, sustained a life-threatening pulmonary embolus, and the second when the gas tank on one of their camp stoves exploded, burning both of them seriously.

It was after a presentation at the WCA Symposium that we first made friends, leading to my first trip with them on the Hood River, 20 years ago this year.

Whether or not I had any influence, George and Barb joined the WCA in 1993. It didn't take long for them to make their presence felt! Not content with his contribution to *Nastawgan*, George joined the WCA Board in 2002 and became Chair in 2003, a post which he held for four years, almost, but not quite, surpassing his protégé, Aleks Gusev. Having supervised their transition from Hamilton to Huntsville, Barb served her turn on the Board in 2009-2010, in the process organizing two memorable AGMs at Wye Marsh/Sainte Marie Among the Hurons and Kortright Centre.

Now in failing health with ALS, George is confined to a wheelchair. Short-term memory is a problem, but ask him to identify a butterfly (a boyhood passion) or to recall a portage location or the route through a rapid and his eyes light up. He is very fortunate that Barb's energy and vigor allows him to be looked after at home.

The WCA has benefited immeasurably from the participation of this very special couple. They will leave an enormous legacy of wilderness lore to supplement the fond memories of their many friends in the Association.

Postscript: George Drought passed away peacefully on Friday, May 18, 2012.

"Old Canoes"

By O. Ross McIntyre

From the book "Paddle Beads"

For a canoe to be old, someone has had to love it. Sure, there are those that are designed and constructed to resist abuse. There are photos in magazines that show them being tossed off tall buildings or being bruised by automobile bumpers. But how many bumpers will a canoe take? And if you really loved a canoe, would you throw it from a rooftop?

Hidden in the trees and bushes of innumerable shorelines, there are relics of unloved ones. Now I won't claim that every derelict that resides there was unloved, since some loved canoes die prematurely. But it is likely that the fragmented Grumman lying in the woods below the falls, the canoe that like a 50 pound bomb went off just in front of the bow paddler – that is peeled back on itself like two halves of an open pea pod – was unloved. At least not loved enough for the paddlers to tie it up before they went to scout the rapid. Or maybe the paddlers loved neither their canoe or themselves enough to make a prudent landing above the falls.

That strange white thing, looking like a slowly flapping and twisted sheet beneath the water, stuck in the boulders of the very first rapid of the route, was retrieved. "Hey, it's not cloth, it's Kevlar." There was enough of the deck left to show the name of the company that made the canoe. It took several of us to haul it out. We carried it back into the woods, putting the hulk next to the rusted ghost of an office typewriter abandoned when the logging company moved out. I saved one fragment of the hull that has since resided in the corner

of my Wanigan. It serves as a reminder that Kevlar, though strong, is not indestructible.

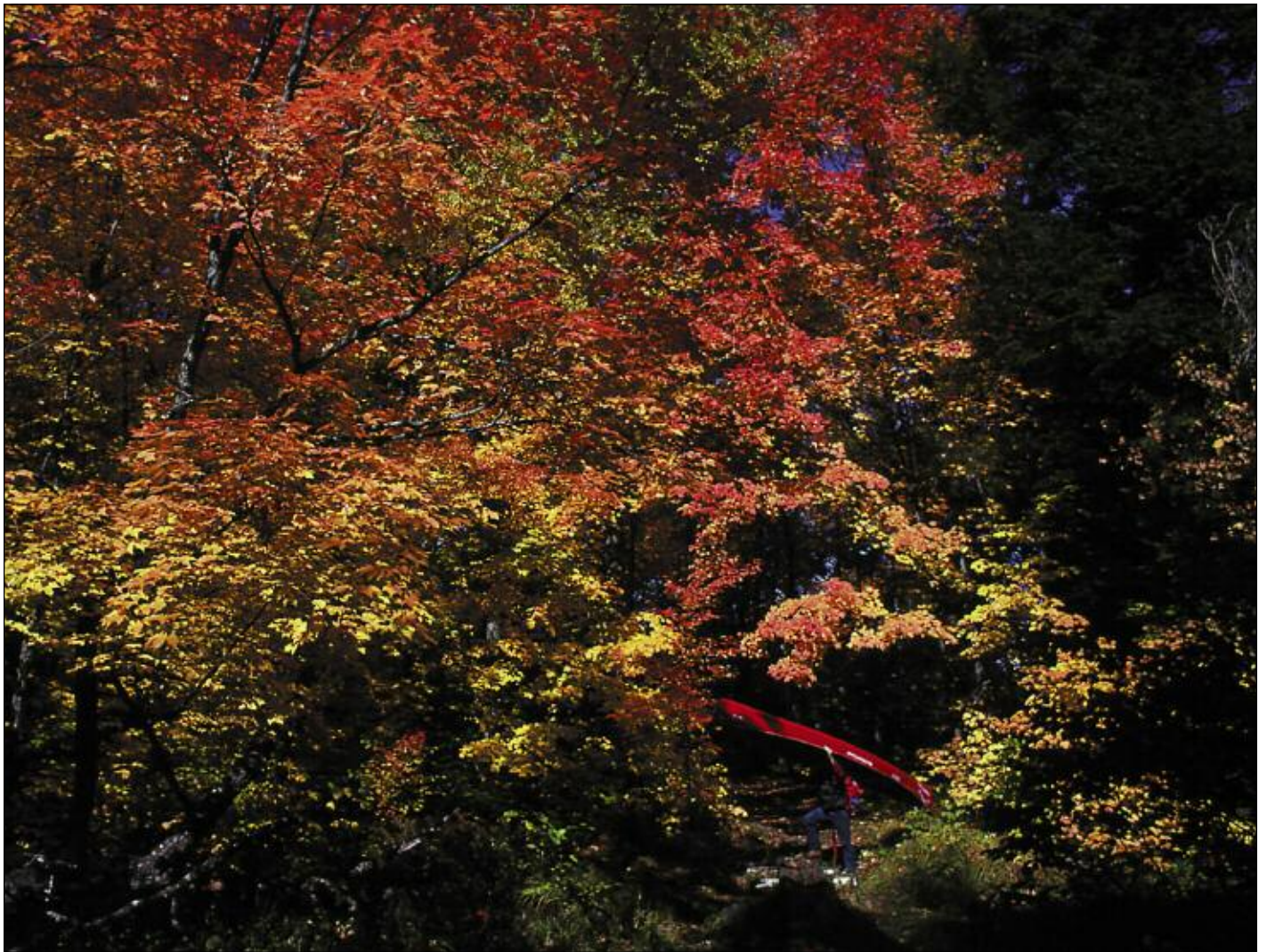
There are other canoes, beyond the lily pads in the weeds, down where the prevailing winds push floating detritus from the lake. Pick up a corner of old rib and plank, the canvas rips, and what remains in the hand is no stronger than a ripe mushroom. Behind the lakeside lean-to, up on some wobbly sawhorses, is another, this time with spoons, a museum piece, but the canvas over the hull is coming off, the gunwales are black with rot. It is going, maybe already gone.

Why is this one here? It is at the end of a portage to a small lake, hidden back in the woods. Well-supported on a peeled log rack. Ah! That's it. The small lake has a camp on one of the islands. The people who own the camp cross the lake and take the portage to the large lake when they depart. They do this because the float plane can land to put them on their lake but it cannot take off from it with the load of passengers. Now, they haven't been to their camp in a couple of years, maybe more, and the canoe shows it. Soon it will be gone, and people will say, "It wasn't their best canoe, anyway."

One especially good way to arrange for the early death of a canoe is to have two people own it, or for the owner to let another use it on indefinite loan. That's how my brother's Old Town wood/canvas got a hole bored through the stern planking. "Wanted to be able to get the water out of it," said the person who had planned to insert a cork in the hole after the water had drained.

For the canoe to last a really long time, I think it has to demand a bit of attention from its owner. An owner who likes the smell of tung oil when rubbed on ash gunwales, who keeps its bottom out of the noonday sun, and puts it away under cover. These are canoeists who make their own paddles, decorating them with motifs that derive from ancient canoe culture, and whether traveling in plastic or canvas canoes load them in the water, not on the beach. Their canoes will be left overturned on the ground the way that others have left theirs, but look carefully. These canoeists have propped the bow and stern of the overturned canoe so that it rests on a piece of wood, not earth or stone.

They and their canoes grow older gracefully. One owner I know had radiation treatment for a cancer that had spread. For years his response to treatment was as smooth and true as the path his paddle made for him. Around the fire he didn't mention his health, only this trip, the previous one, or one for the future. The leak in the very top of his dome tent responded to the inverted pie pan he put there. When his cancer came back, he didn't complain. He and his boat traveled alone through the salt water of the north, his journal then as inspiring as his campfire stories were earlier. And when he died, his paddles and canoes survived in the hands of those who knew would take care of them – those who could look at an old canoe that had been loved and while listening to its voice could hear the stories that it held.



The Possibles Bag

“Remember the code of those who muzzle load. Keep all of your necessities in a possibles bag.”

Every frontiersman, trapper, and explorer of the 1800’s had one. A possibles bag. In it was a collection of items that would help him manage his day-to-day travels in the wilderness. To cope with any emergencies that might happen. To help ensure his survival. The possibles bag itself was usually made of animal hide and kept on his body, probably with a leather or hemp strap. I don’t know much about it, but my guess is that the possibles bag had to be light and the items in it had to have a range of uses.

Thought about what the bag might have contained. String, rope, pins, nails, something to sharpen a knife with, fish-hooks, flint and steel for fires, snare wire, powder and shot, tobacco. Probably other items too.

I now carry a small, clear, waterproof bag on our wilderness canoe trips. It holds the first aid kit, compass, a GPS unit, a small pair of binoculars, sunscreen, mosquito repellent, the match container, and a flashlight. Probably not many items that were in the frontiersman’s possibles bag would be in the duffle of a modern-day wilderness canoeist.

But every time I open my small, clear, waterproof bag I think of these long-ago

frontiersmen and trappers. I imagine them travelling through the wilderness with their possibles bag. I imagine them keeping it close to their body. I imagine them gaining comfort from feeling it close about them.

I keep my waterproof bag close to me at all times. I make sure that I carry it on all portages. It’s the first bag into the tent each night after it is set up. I give my small, clear, waterproof bag the same importance that I am sure they gave their possibles bag.

After all, when you travel in the wilderness, anything is possible.

Greg Went

Padding Canada's Historic Gateway Where Mattawa and Ottawa Rivers Meet

Story by Erhard Kraus

Photos by Dorothee Gross & Peggy Ray



Imagine that you are stepping on the very stones that Champlain, Brule, the early Jesuits, Mackenzie, Thompson, and other major historical figures of early Canadian history had once walked across. We rarely get in such close touch with our own history, and yet it's possible as part of a canoe trip.

The Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers form Canada's historical gateway, a water way that may be as historically significant as the old Roman roads in Europe, the ancient Nile River route bringing the treasures of Africa to Egypt, or the Incan roads of South America. Two hundred years ago, the route may have started in Montreal, then up the Ottawa River to a smaller side branch – the Mattawa – where it turned left to travel towards Lake Huron and then further inland. Only the arrival of the railroad in the 19th century replaced the need to use this gateway, and eventually plane and automobile made this water route insignificant.

Today, the Mattawa River is a well-known fun trip for the locals of North Bay and other nearby towns, and its easy rapids and intact wild nature make it a choice destination. The Ottawa River has been dammed and, instead of a river with steady current, it has been turned into a sequence of large lakes. Even so, its undeveloped shore on the Quebec side makes paddling a wonderful nature experience. So, in August 2011, four of us did just that: Dorothee, Herbert, Peggy and me.

In August 2011, we started at Pimisi Bay, half way between North Bay and the town of Mattawa, and thus were within a few hours' reach of the Mattawa River's highlights: two beautiful water falls (Talon and Paresseux) and the Porte d'Enfer, an ancient Native ochre mine. We then proceeded down the river past the benign ripples of the Epingles and carried across the Portage des Roches, just like the ancient canoe crews had done for centuries. We made camp upstream of the Champion Rapids, great place to explore

View down the Mattawa river, from the cliffs at the Talon Portage

up and down from the rapids, and stayed for a few days, taking advantage of the road access to the river in order to attend a wedding in Ottawa.

The Mattawa in this section shows its origin in a major geological fault: the mountains have split apart and deep waters lie between high cliffs. The river is small, and often widens into lakes with dense forests on the sides. It has a steady flow and is passable throughout the paddling season. Spectacular waterfalls need to be by-passed via the ancient portages, and the handful of rapids may be paddled at high water or lined down the rock-strewn shallows.

Some of the campsites are noted as traditional stopping places of the voyageurs – at the Portage de la Prairie, CAMP 1 on the map, and at Elm Point, at the place above Champion Rapids, CAMP 2. There is a nice historical display at the office of Champlain Park – but it's a long walk from the water. The shore in Mattawa village offered a picnic table (but no washrooms) for our lunch stop, and we chatted with some local folks. They warned us that the upcoming railway bridge over the Ottawa River, just below the forks, has powerful eddy currents when the water is high – but for our trip it was a pretty harmless stretch with the river at low summer levels.

That day became a long paddle as we continued down the Ottawa River. We were looking for a good camp site and discovered one at the mouth of the Edwards River, CAMP 3. Just like at Elm Point on the Mattawa, the little stream has carved out a large level area that was once used by groups of voyageurs. We pitched tents a bit upstream from the major camp sites: big enough for two tents, with the clear rushing stream running about 15 metres behind the tents – just perfect.

The next morning we resolved to paddle fewer hours per day to keep everyone happy – and it was a good decision since a weather front with heavy thunderstorms moved in during the early evening. We arrived at CAMP 4 early enough to cook and eat dinner before the skies opened up. That camp site is at the landing of an old logging operation, but much of the area is covered with poison ivy. We had to be careful where we put the tents, marking off 'safe' areas with twigs.

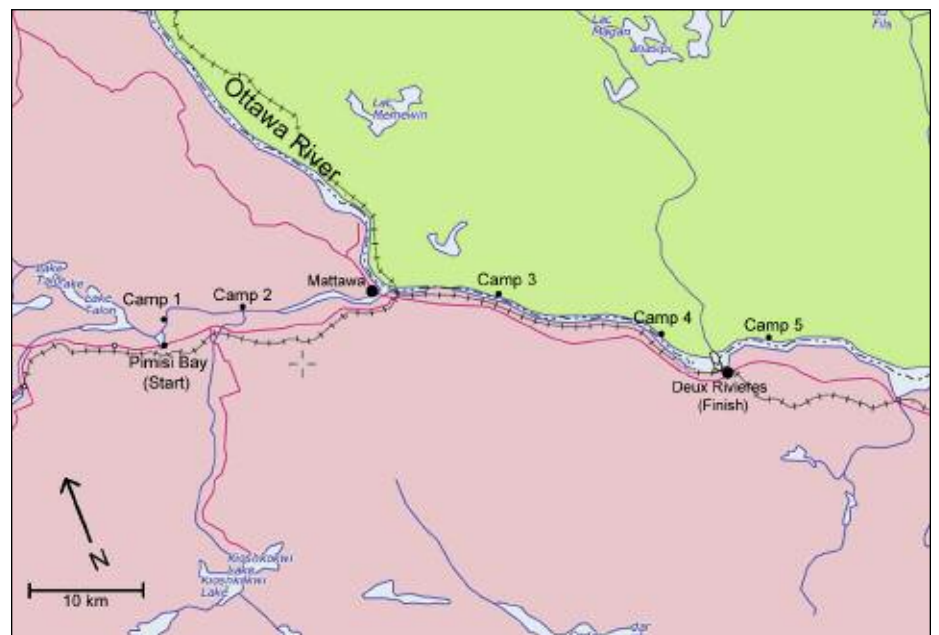


Be careful where you step on some of these old portages

The next morning, we proceeded to Deux Rivieres, and checked out the Hill Top Camp that Kevin Callan has described in his book, “Top 50 Canoe Routes in Ontario”, as the ‘lap of luxury’. Tongue in cheek, as we discovered. The Camp was not really set up for our type of camping, and the local store has shut down.

Just a bit further is Antlers Campground, well-run and in a nice setting. We talked to some of the campers and soon

were invited to their waterside “pavilion” to enjoy coffee and their generous northern hospitality. Eventually we moved on, intending to paddle down-river, camp for two nights and then return to Deux Rivieres for the pick-up. There were nice lunch spots along the next few kilometres, but nothing suitable for tents until we came to CAMP 5, situated at a sloping rock, with two small tent spots high up the slope. It was ideal for us: picturesque, big enough, yet cozy, with a good





Ottawa River, near Deux Rivieres



Kitchen under the tarp – Herbert, Erhard and Peggy

place to put up the tarp for the kitchen. The next day, we stayed put. In the morning, three of us paddled across the river (a large lake, really) and explored the creek that tumbled noisily over the rocks.

The last day, we paddled back to Deux Rivieres, called the shuttle for the pick-up and just waited for it to arrive. Back at the outfitters, the cars were waiting faithfully to take us back to ‘civilization’, but not before we had our trip celebration at Myrt’s Diner in the village of Mattawa. It had been a great trip!

Logistics and general travel hints:

Shuttle services and canoe rentals: Algonquin North provided the shuttle service and parked our cars while on the river. They are a friendly family business, the grown-up sons are seriously into canoeing, and we got excellent service. I strongly recommend them.

Supplies along the way: Mattawa has stores, but Deux Rivieres was a bust. The former town looks significant on the map, and it once held several hundred people. During the 1950’s, it was flooded



Evening mood at the upstream landing at Portage de la Prairie



There's easy portaging along the Mattawa

by the new dam at Rapides des Joachims, and has been getting smaller and smaller since. A few houses remain, but the store has closed, the Hilltop Cottages (a place that Kevin Callan mentions as an overnight stay) have seen better days, and only Antler's Fishing Lodge is very much alive as a public camp ground.

Portages: From Pimisi Bay down to Champlain Park, you have to handle about 5 portages – some of which you can avoid by running or wading. In Mattawa, there is the Hurdman dam with a 300m portage – and then no more as you paddle down the Ottawa River to Deux Rivieres. Past that point, the next one is at Rapides des Joachims, with a 2.5km carry – ouch! Kevin Callan's book is the latest publication with descriptions. An older book by Reid and Grant, "Canoeing Ontario Rivers", has a bit more background on the special natural features there. That latter book is out of print but try your local library for a copy. **Nature beside the river** is wonderfully intact, especially on the Quebec side. But the TransCanada Highway runs within a few kilometres of the river, and one might hear the noise of the trucks. On nights with air moving from the south, it was quite noticeable. Poison ivy is encountered frequently where logging has broken the forest canopy, especially at sites where horses were once used. Know how to recognize it and stay clear.

Camp sites are a bit rare and typically small. Some 'camp sites' turned out to be fishermen's lunch spots, with no level ground suitable for pitching a single tent. My advice: if you find a site early in the day, make camp, and avoid paddling into the evening to the disappointment of a planned site being non-existent.

Restaurants for your pre trip lunch or the final trip's dinner, a good restaurant in Mattawa is *Myrt's*, on Highway 17. We ate there on Sunday morning before

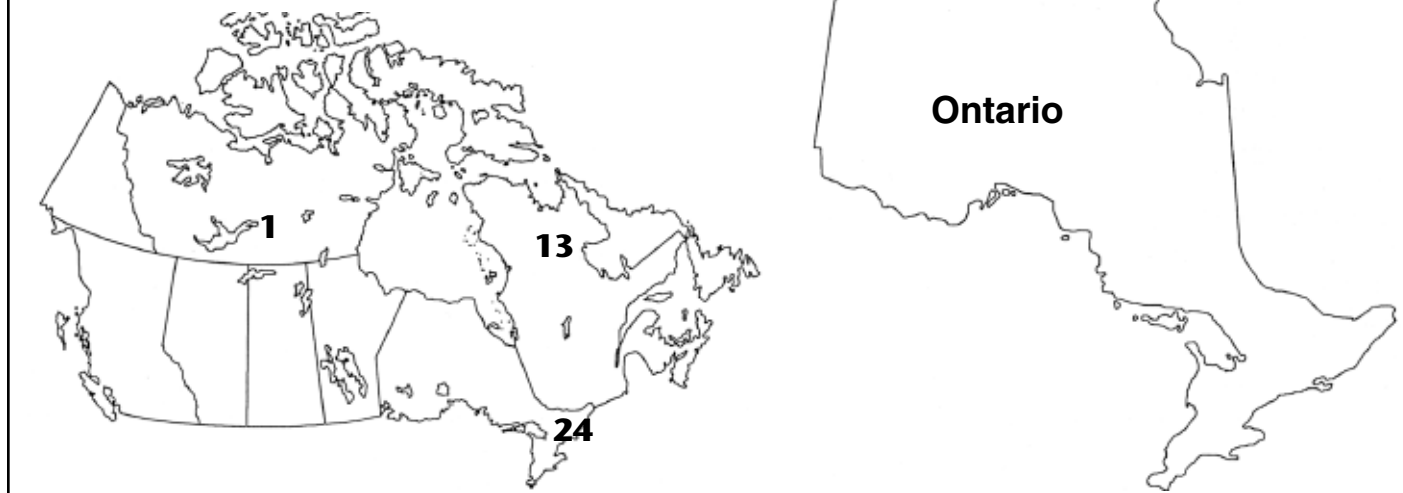
heading out towards Ottawa; the place was full of local folks. French was the language that dominated the room, the breakfast was good and reasonably priced, and this good impression was maintained during two later visits. It's an excellent place to celebrate when you have finished your trip!

Further information:
Canadian Canoe Routes Forum



River camp site in the Samuel de Champlain Park

Where it is...



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