



Our group at chutes Chaudières spa pool

Ashuapmushuan River

Story by Dawne Robinson

Photos by David Robinson and David Young

The summer of 2012 will go down as the ‘summer of no water’. For the first time, I really felt personally impacted by the effects of global warming. Like many white water paddlers, we spent much of last spring searching for water as a result of record-setting temperatures and dry conditions. By the time summer arrived, the situation hadn’t improved and our paddles were in dire need of humidity. There appeared to be very little that one could float a boat in close to home, so our eyes turned towards la belle province. We wanted a relatively short, intermediate-level trip of 7-10 days on a river with strong current and lots of wave action, yet one that had

easy access. Alas, southern Quebec was suffering the same fate as Ontario and our original plan to run the du Lièvre had to be modified. We eventually found lots of water in the Ashuapmushuan River.

The ‘Ash’ (we gave up on trying to pronounce it properly) is located northwest of Lac St. Jean in the Saguenay region of Quebec. Depending on what source you read, the name translates from an Innu, Amerindian or Montagnais word meaning “place where one lies in wait for moose”. The river starts at Lac Ashuapmushuan and flows southeast into Lac St. Jean near Saint-Felicien. The lake eventually feeds into



Downstream from chutes Chaudières

the fiord of the Saguenay River and finally into the St. Lawrence River near Tadoussac. It forms the northern boundary of the Ashuapmushuan Wildlife Reserve and, although it is an undeveloped river, it is very accessible from Highway 167.

The Ash is definitely an intermediate

level trip and end bag flotation is important. In the high waters of spring flood, I suspect a spray skirt would be essential. Rapids range in entertainment value. Some are quite technical and interesting to strategize over. The river is often wide and offers multiple approaches, depending on your mood and skill level. Others

can be likened to riding in a rodeo. Large crashing waves can come at you in all directions. In this maelstrom of activity, having loose hips is an asset. Still other rapids have a mesmerizing smoothness to them as you ride over their rollers. The river is indeed beautiful with its varied landscape of hills, canyons, rocky shores and sand benches.

Our group was eight in number – Barb and Dave (Davey) Young, Diane Lucas, Rick Sabourin, Johanna De Bruin, Malcolm Jones, my husband Dave (Daver) and I. Since keeping a journal is an arduous and painful task not to my liking, I am basing this trip report on Barb's wonderfully detailed journal notes. Our priorities for this trip were to have a maximum amount of fun with a minimum amount of daily work. We hoped to hit GA or GB campsites and give ourselves reasonable days of canoeing. G for Grand = large and A = better than B. Based on our analysis of campsites available, we came up with the following schedule. The kilometres noted may be off by one or two depending on which map you are referring to (they are not quite the same). We accounted for seven nights but planned an additional rest day at Chutes Chaudière. We tried to plan the longer days near the beginning of the trip where there are few serious rapids to negotiate and few or no portages.

- Camp 1 – km 192 GB campsite
– 20 km canoed
- Camp 2 – km 164 GB campsite
– 28 km canoed
- Camp 3 – km 137 GB campsite
– 27 km canoed*
- Camp 4 – km 114 GB at end of 600 m
portage – 23 km canoed
- Camp 5 – km 93 GC at end of 700 m
portage – 21 km canoed
- Camp 6 – km 84 GA at end of 1750 m
portage (350 m portage just before)
– 9 km canoed & 2 km carried
- Camp 7 – km 65 GB campsite
– 19 km canoed (last campsite)

* This campsite is GB in low water and may not be available if levels are high. There are other options at km 130 and km 128 as well as one or two before this.



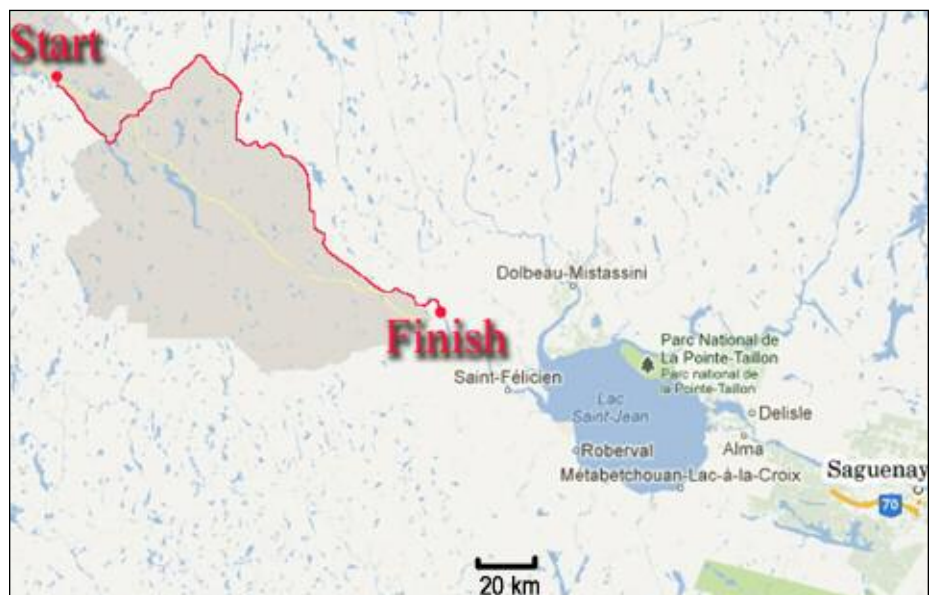
Malcolm and Johanna

July 7/8, 2012 (Saturday)

It's a full day drive (about 12 hours) from the Toronto area to the Lac St. Jean region, so given that we felt we should try and canoe the first 20 kilometres on the put-in day, it made sense to drive to Roberval (it is within one hour of the shuttle site) the first day and leave from there the next morning. Rick's fluency in French was a wonderful asset to our trip organization, so he booked a motel in Roberval where we stayed that night and also arranged the shuttle to our put-in through the ZEC (Zone Ecologique Provincial Park Office). We arrived by 9:30 a.m. the next morning at the Reserve office (km 33 on the highway) and while some of us loaded the canoes and gear, a few people shuttled cars to the takeout and drove back in one car, leaving it parked at the Reserve office. The takeout is at km 45 on the river, which is only about six kilometres from the southern park entrance where we checked in. Parking there is good and since you need a key to unlock the gate to the road, there is little danger of vandalism.

After doing the shuttle to the put-in, we had lunch and launched the canoes from a roadside bridge into the Chaudière River. We joined up with the Normandin River shortly afterwards and after a two-hour paddle in slow current, we passed through the first set of R1 rapids and came to a more significant R3. Daver and I and Barb and Davey,

pulled out on river right to scout and the others pulled out on river left near the portage trail. Daver's opinion was that the 400 metre rapid was runnable but it was difficult to scout and he couldn't see its entirety from where we stood. The group on river left did some scouting and decided to start portaging. The wind had been steadily picking up and





Malcolm and Johanna

caused a tree to crash down very close to the boats on river right. Barb took this as an omen and decided that she and Davey would paddle to the other side and portage as well. After checking out the portage and realizing how unattractive it was (the second half had a lot of blow downs from logging and forest fire), Daver and I decided to take our chances on the rapid. I'm clumsier on foot and definitely safer in my thigh straps! We paddled left of the small island at the top and eddied out. We got stuck on a rock briefly and then went left, centre and left again without any problems. As it turned out, the rapid was quite doable and it was unfortunate

that scouting from two sides led to a bit of miscommunication and unnecessary labour. Ironically, we had decided to start higher up on the river specifically to do this rapid.

Afterwards, there was a long paddle with a strong tail wind so we made good time to our chosen site at km 190 where the Normandin River empties into Lac Ashuapmushuan and Lac Denaut before the rail bridge. This is in fact where most people start their trip on the Ash, probably to avoid the nasty portage our group endured earlier in the day. Unfortunately, there was a canoe and tent on the site and no friendly wave from the paddlers on shore. We were

working from two different maps, one of which showed another G campsite further down. A few of our group continued downriver to find out if it existed. The paddle to the second site was about one kilometre downstream on the right in a bay. We had to paddle through some reeds to get to it and I do believe I heard some swearing from certain boats at this point. The shoreline did not look promising but once we found it, the site turned out to be good. We arrived later than we would have liked at around 7 p.m. but managed to get the tents set up and a meal into us before it got too dark to see.

July 9, 2012 (Monday) - Day 2 on river

We took some time this morning to reorganize communal kitchen gear and launched at 10:45 a.m. We headed out into a strong wind, which required some muscle to paddle into, then stopped for a short break out of the wind at approximately km 185 where the Ash begins. We ran an R1/2 then a short R2/3 (*Rapide des Cedres*) over a small ledge which we didn't scout. Davey and Barb went over backwards after having the canoe bow get stuck on a tree on river left. Shortly after, we had lunch on an elevated campsite on river right with a great view downstream. *Rapide Quartier de Biche*, which came next was a very long and entertaining run. The first R2/3 consisted of large haystacks and was scouted on river left from the portage trail. The next R2/3 was also long, although a bit more exciting, and could be easily scouted from the portage trail on river left. We all ran this without incident. A long section of R1/2 followed with some issues of canoes getting stuck on rocks. In higher water however, this river-wide rapid has been known to swamp canoes.

Our group arrived at our preplanned campsite area at around km 165 (river right) but discovered the couple from the night before had usurped us once again! We were forced to continue on to another GB campsite (km 163) noted on river left. We found a large group of teenage boys camped there from Trois



Malcolm and Johanna paddling through a sea of horsetails

Rivières and stopped to chat with their two camp leaders. They directed us back to another potential site upriver close to an island but we were unsuccessful in finding it. Rick walked along the shore and found another site just downriver from the large group. It was a spacious elevated sandy bench and after another long day, it was good to be there. We all enjoyed a swim or wash before supper and relaxed under a beautiful moon and star-lit sky. We could hear the camp group but they were not bothersome. As for tamer wildlife, we sighted an otter, bald eagle and terns.

July 10, 2012 (Tuesday) - Day 3 on River

We launched at 9:45 a.m. and found ourselves amidst a lengthy section of R1/2 right off the bat. A long section of rapids, *Sault Mazarin (Rapide Petit-Giroux* on the other map) at km 155 followed. We paddled the upper section of the R1/2/3 without any problems, then the river turned to the right and we saw a portage on river left. The river had lulled us into some complacency at this point so the decision was made to keep going and look for other portage take-outs to scout the end of the R3/4 rapid. That's about the time that this magnificent stretch of water took charge. Although the maps showed two more portage opportunities on river left, we didn't see them. Since Rick and Diane were well ahead and still upright, we continued towards the end of the rapids. There was a definite slope to this rapid and everyone descended with a slightly different line. We all experienced high levels of adrenalin regardless of our chosen route. Barb and Davey were back paddling a fair bit since the rapids were becoming more serious and challenging to navigate. They ran the rapid mostly down the right and centre as it seemed rocky on the left side. Malcolm and Johanna passed them at some point. Once the three boats were through and eddied out on river left bailing, Daver and I came down back paddling through the huge haystacks. By slowing down significantly, we managed to get through without getting wet. This strat-



Beautifully striped rocks at the bottom of Rapid des Iles

egy was used frequently on the Ash!

Davey, Barb, Daver and I and started out down the huge fan of a shallow R1/2 rock garden at the end of the rapid and soon ran out of water. The river went both left and right around an island but due to its shallowness, we were forced to get out of our boats to push them through the rest of the way. Barb and Davey went down the right hand side and Daver and I headed to the left. We looked back to see that Malcolm and

Johanna had parted ways with their boat. Apparently, they had been dumped by a rock shortly after starting out. Fortunately, Rick and Diane were in the process of helping them. We had lunch on the rocks after the group reassembled to give Malcolm and Johanna a chance to change out of their wet clothes, thaw from the cool breeze and regain their egos.

After lunch, we saw a mother bear and two cubs and ran more R1/2s and



Dave Robinson doing a backflip at the bottom of Chutes Chaudières



Barb and Dave Y at the put in below Chutes Chaudières

an S2/3 ledge (km 146). We stopped and scouted this. Two of the boats maneuvered over without issue but the others got stuck and had to wiggle around a bit. It was a quiet paddle for the rest of day. We passed a GC campsite on river right which had five canoes parked and continued to our predetermined site at km 137 (GB EB – meaning large site in low water). This turned out to be a large sand bar just past an island on river left. There was another potential sand bar on the right of the island. We arrived around 4 p.m. and set up tents in the sand using techniques of either tying lines to a canoe or to buried logs. It clouded over in the evening and rained a bit overnight.

July 11, 2012 (Wednesday) - Day 4 on River

We were off by 9:45 a.m. and eased into the day with some R1/2 and EV (eau vivre = swifts) just past the campsite. We saw a wolf on the left riverbank and watched it run nimbly up the steep bank. There was a head wind until km

128 where the river turns a corner to the left. At that point the sky darkened and rain threatened so we stopped, put up a tarp and had lunch on the rocks while the worst of the rain passed. We quickly moved through some R1/2s and arrived at the series of rapids known as *Rapide des Isles* at km 115.

This rapid is quite long and difficult to see from the top. It is made up, as the name would suggest, of a series of small islands and rock outcroppings where the river splits here into several channels. We walked the portage on river left, taking one pack to the end to the campsite and then scouted on our way back. At first glance, this series of rapids looked very intimidating and discussion ensued about the comfort level of running them. By breaking them down into sections, however, we were able to see ways for everyone to get through safely. We started the journey by paddling to the top of a small rock island and then got out on the rocks to scout some more. From there, three canoes lined the island on the left hand side but Dave and

I decided to run the first drop to the right of the island. We then paddled a short distance, lined around another small drop, did an 8-person lift over a smooth rock shelf and then canoed the last 100 metres.

You have the option at this site of protected camping in the trees or camping on the smooth granite rocks lining the river. This shoreline is a feast for the eyes. Glittery mineral patterns swirl through the rock and the view from here opens to a spectacular vista. It would have made a good lay-over spot. During supper, there was a substantial downpour but we stayed dry under the dining tent and any concern over the weather was allayed by the consumption of copious volumes of whisky sours. Barb's attempts at staying sober (she paced herself since she was cooking) were unsuccessful. Davey eventually led her gently away to her tent where I suspect she spent a dizzying night coping with sounds of thunder louder in her head than those outside. I confess to having a similar experience

last year on the Clearwater River with Davey's cocktails.

July 12, 2012 (Thursday) - Day 5 on River

We woke to a hot morning and slow start. Barb was still feeling dizzy, and Johanna and Malcolm's boat required a seat repair. There was a long search for Davey's big tarp pole, which we eventually found in a puddle where it had rolled off the rocks. It was 11 a.m. before we got on the water. We ran through *Rapide du Fer a Cheval* which had a S2/3 ledge on the right but which we were able to avoid by running river left. After almost continuous R1/2s during which Rick spotted a bear, we had some head wind and began to work up

a sweat. We stopped on a large rocky outcrop for lunch and swam in a quiet pool at the top end of the rocks. A few of us jumped out into the current which was deceptively fast. It required some effort to return but in the process Johanna found a very new looking throw bag at the edge of the rock. River salvage!

There was a section of flat water that flowed past islands with large gravel bars until we arrived at *Rapide des Deux Portages (also called Engoulement)*. We stopped at the first portage on river left, climbed through bushes then along a short trail which was high above the river. From here we could get a look at the first R3/4 drop. It looked intimidating due to the high volume of water but

wasn't technical. Staying to the left of the waves on the big V was a safe route reminiscent of riding a roller coaster. We then paddled to the second portage on river left and pulled into a sandy beach. We walked the 250 metres to the 3C campsite at the end of the trail and decided there was enough room for four tents, as well as the dining tent. From the campsite, we climbed over rocks down the rest of the portage trail to a lovely beach (this was a 3B campsite on the map) then over more rocks to a secluded swimming area. Dinner that night was cooked over a fire on the beach. A thunderstorm boomed overhead while we were eating but there was not much rain.



A nautical toast to the end of the trip



Enjoying lunch after long portage

July 13, 2012 (Friday) - Day 6 on River

We woke to a very hot, humid and overcast morning with no wind to speak of and were off by 10 a.m. We noted the GC campsite on river left. This was where we had intended to stay before we found the 3C campsite to our liking. We ran some easy R1/2s and then sang our way through a long stretch of flat water. Around the corner, *Riviere Biche* entered from the right. After about an hour and a half of paddling, we came to *Petit Chaudière*, ran the R1/2 at the top and then found an easy 350 metre portage trail on river right with a slight climb at the beginning and some boggy spots covered in part by boards and logs. Davey scouted the rapid, which had an R3/4 drop ending in another R5/6 drop. We belatedly discovered a sneak channel on river right that could have been run due to the relatively low water level. I hate portaging unnecessarily but tried to assuage the bitterness with knowledge that there was some danger in dumping above *Chute Chaudière*.

After a short paddle, we came to the start of *Chute Chaudière*, ran the R2 at

the top very cautiously and pulled out for the long portage on river right. The sign for the portage was hidden in the trees. The plan was to take a light pack for the first carry along with the lunch barrel so that we could survey the trail and have lunch. Later Johanna rightly complained that the lunch barrel (which she had carried) was not exactly light. An eager group (D&D, B&D) started out immediately without changing shoes and were thus ahead of the other four. We had Davey's GPS and Davey's head which had memorized the map for this section and found our way quite easily to the campsite which was unoccupied. The map shows a portage trail in addition to the road but we never found the trail and used the road for the portage except for the very last section where a trail turns to the left off the road at a parking area. This is the access to the GA campsite. We were very happy to see the campsite free. Since the Chutes are easily accessible by road, we had worried that there would be car campers using the site. On the road portage we did pass a sign for a Sentier (lookout) but Davey correctly surmised that this

trail was not the one we wanted and left an arrow on the road to warn the following group not to take this trail. On the way back for the second carry, Davey and I took the trail which led to some interesting rock formations scalloped by the high waters of many spring floods. On the return journey, we saw the other four who had made a wrong turn when they turned right at the fork in the road.

On the second carry with the canoe, Davey's strategy of setting short goals a section at a time, allowed him to complete the whole portage (1.7 kilometres) in one go. He impressed his wife Barb who commented that he still had it for an old man. I guess she had forgiven him for his whisky sours. All in all, it took three trips for most people to get all the gear. The road was definitely uphill in places but well graded and much easier than anticipated. The map indicates this portage is 1.7 kilometres but that is for the total portage down to the campsite below the chutes and 1.4 kilometres to the GA campsite. We had lunch at the pavilion near the top of the campsite and after a well-deserved rest, set up tents. Most people went for a swim in the pool at the bottom of the chutes. The dining tent was erected and supper constructed. Just as we were about to eat, a huge thunder and lightning storm arrived with heavy rain. Meanwhile, the camp group had come through around 7 p.m. and ended up camping at the top end of the campsite beside the pavilion (they later moved down to a site below the falls). Diane ran with leftovers to the camp group and the boys made quick work of them. Even though the campsites were mostly slanted or lumpy, they didn't interfere with anyone's sleep that night. The long portage had taken its toll on all of us.

July 14, 2012 (Saturday) - Day 7 on River

This was our rest day and it turned out to be pretty amazing with hot and sunny weather and lots of time to explore the falls. *Chute de la Chaudière* is a spectacular waterfall. It cascades in three sections over a distance of approxi-

mately 2.9 kilometres. The first drop of 6 metres is followed by relatively quick water and is edged on river right (our side) by flat rocks that are easy to walk along. The next section falls about another 7 metres into turbulent water that quickly drops again into an absolute maelstrom of activity more than 15 metres below. It's an awe-inspiring sight.

We spent most of the day at the bottom of the Chutes in our personal spa pool or under the large tarp Daver had set up beside it. We needed this since it was so hot and sunny on the rocks. Oddly, most of the injuries of the trip occurred on our rest day. The rocks were smooth and wet in spots leading to many slips. Daver found that he could swim across the current at the bottom of the Chutes to the large rock at the centre of the main drop. To accomplish this is a major feat since if you don't angle correctly you get swept down a long way.

Later Rick, Diane and I joined Daver. From the top of the rock you could see the water from the Chute surging towards and around you. It was the most amazing moment of the trip for me. The sheer power of the chute was overwhelming and to be in the middle of it was certainly worth the effort to get there. The camp boys and their leaders came to the Chutes to swim and after Daver described the rock climb to them, they were occupied for hours. One boy described the sensation as "facing death itself". To cap off this wonderful day, Rick and Diane cooked a pineapple upside-down cake over a fire on the rocks. We made sure to eat it when the boys were not around.

After supper, the camp leaders came over for a chat. They had more time left on the river than we did and were ending at Lac St. Jean. While discussing the rapids, one of the leaders, Bruno, said

they had run *Rapide Mazarin* with empty boats. For *Engoulvent*, they ran the top drop on the right, then lined a bit before doing the final section of big haystacks. We had only run the top so were impressed by their level of skill in a canoe. Bruno informed us that the boys were already trained for the most part and had to be in their second year of camp before being allowed on an Ash trip. The information made us feel a little better.

July 15, 2012 (Sunday) - Day 8 on River

We woke at 6:30 a.m. to a very hot morning. We carried the packs over the rocks to the bay at the bottom of the rapid (200 m) where the men had carried the canoes down the evening before. After setting off, a short R2/3 on the right side of an island appeared and then after a bit of flat water, the scenery



Taking a break



The Admiral, now Tea Miral hard at work

picked up as the river narrowed and rock cliffs appeared. There was a long stretch of R1/2 and a small R2/3 at *Rapide de L'Épinette Blanche*. We had plenty of fun rock dodging here.

Some more R1/EV followed to keep us moving so we made good time. The sky clouded over and the temperature dropped so that it was more comfortable. We decided to continue to our pre-determined site at km 65 since it wasn't much farther. As we approached the site, we saw people fishing but were able to use the 'luxury' campsite located high up on the bank. It came complete with a new outhouse, dining pavilion, small creek and lots of flat campsites. It rained a bit before supper and we ate almost all the food since there were no boys to pass leftovers to. The water from the creek was much cleaner here with less tannin and silt to plug up the water filter bag.

July 16, 2012 (Monday) - Day 9 and Final Day on the River!

The last morning was almost continuous

whitewater, mostly R1/2s but with a long section of R2/3 at *Rapide Pemoka*. The river narrowed again with rock cliffs on either side to yodel against. It eventually widened and the slower current forced us to work for the last five kilometres to the takeout. As we landed, I planted a tea towel flag and toasted the crew with Captain Morgan and some poetry. A nautical ceremony was in order since Malcolm and Johanna had given me a pirate hat at the beginning of the trip. As the golden letters of "The Admiral" emblazoned upon it unfortunately now spelled out "Tea Miral" due to the loss of some letters, the formality of the situation was somewhat diluted. A salute by Daver with a bear banger capped things off. All that was left was a short carry to the parking area and a trip to the ZEC station to get the remaining car. We drove back along another river valley for five hours to a motel in Trois Rivières and had a celebratory dinner before heading home the next day.

If you are looking for a trip that is relatively short and has easy access, but

one that has lots of whitewater action mixed with leisurely moments, the Ash is a good choice. The river is beautifully untamed and courses through a varied landscape of gentle hills with sand dunes and deep rocky valleys with powerful rapids and spectacular waterfalls or 'chutes'. The surrounding area by contrast, is very pastoral and agricultural in nature. This is blueberry country and if you time your trip well, you can take advantage of it. Considering its ease of access, the Ash is certainly not crowded. The main drawback in my mind is the proximity of the logging road that parallels it for part of the way. Although you couldn't see the road and could only rarely hear it, it's a psychological thing for me. I prefer more complete isolation but that said, most of the time I could forget about the road and feel like I was far away from civilization.

Of course, a canoe trip is never complete without campfire discussions about the location of the next trip. We ended up coming back to the same area

again later that summer to paddle the Mistassibi, a shorter but more challenging river. It appears that this area of Quebec does not suffer from the lack of water experienced in other parts of southern Quebec and Ontario. Typical flow on the Ash is between 200 and 300 cubic metres per second (cms) in the summer and 1,050 to 2,400 cms in the spring. I think our levels were well below 200 cms but they were more than adequate. In August, we found those on the Mistassibi were in fact high for the time of year. As for global warming in this region, it hasn't yet come between paddlers and their water!

Costs:

The section we paddled is in the provincial park reserve so it was necessary to pay for a permit. This cost \$9 per person per night and totaled \$576. We're not typically used to having this constraint, but it did have the advantage of making it easy to arrange shuttles. Most paddlers apparently do their own shut-

tles since the roads are good all the way but we wanted to save time. The cost for the shuttle was \$431.50 to use a mini bus and trailer hook-up. It will take 5 canoes, gear and 10 people. If we had needed an extra vehicle, one of our cars would have been driven up and shuttled back at an additional cost of \$215 plus tax. As it was, the total cost of our shuttle and camping fees was \$1158.38 with taxes or \$144.80 per person.

We also debated about arranging a shuttle partway along the river to avoid the long portage around Chaudière Falls but decided in the end that we didn't want the pressure of having to be there by a particular day. In previous years the cost of the shuttle was about \$308. Having a shuttle here would not actually be worthwhile. Human power is much cheaper, at least in dollars, if not sweat.

Contact information:

Address: Bureau Administratif & Accueil Sud, Kilometre 33, Route 167, C.P. 40.
Phone: (418) 256-3806.

Rick spoke with Jocelyne Gauthier at the park Reserve office. She also arranged the shuttle for us with a local contractor. The canoe trailer belonged to the Reserve and the shuttle supplied the vehicle and driver.

Maps:

We worked from two sets of maps. One set was from cartespleinair.org. <http://192.77.51.51/~cleduc/Canot/cartes.html> 06 Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean Ashuapmushuan Eric Leclair PDF(5.6M) 2012-03

The other set of maps was purchased from the reserve and was mailed to us along with our reservation information. There was a difference of a kilometre or two between the two sets of maps with the other ones being more accurate according to the GPSs. The reserve maps however, had more accurate campsite markings.



Barb and Dave Young descending Rapide Pas de Fond



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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.

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

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.

2014 WCA Annual General Meeting

Black Creek Pioneer Village

Story by Geri James

Photo by Fred Argue and Larry Hicks

On Saturday, March 1, 2014, over 40 members of the WCA attended our Annual General Meeting at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto. Spanning more than 30 acres of pristine country landscapes, the Village is a living history experience featuring heritage buildings originating in communities across south central Ontario that have been faithfully furnished with original furniture and artifacts. The Toronto Region Conservation Authority generously provided this space for the WCA AGM as recognition of the WCA's volunteer support of Paddle the Don in Toronto.

Down to Business:

After enjoying a video of Paddle the Don 2013 while drinking coffee and devouring the excellent pastries provided by the bake staff at Pioneer Village, the business part of the meeting began and was designed to inform members of the work of the WCA over the past year and initiatives for the coming year. Our Chair, Dave Young, provided an overview of WCA activities, including events such as the Fall Meeting, Wine and Cheese, Outdoor Adventure Show, Paddlefest as well as an update on the Trillium and MEC grants and membership. Membership is strong and stable, and attendance at events has been good. Dave also presented a report from Jeff McColl our

Conservation Chair and thanked all the volunteers for their hard work in helping to sustain and promote the WCA.

Our Treasurer Barb Young provided additional financial details, which show that the WCA remains financially sound. Our Outings Chair Bill Ness provided an overview of outings activities in 2013, which continue to provide members with great opportunities to paddle or participate in other outdoor activities. Mary Perkins, Outings Committee Member and WCA Coordinator for the Paddle the Don, talked about the 2014 event on Sunday May 4, and supported the case for the WCA continuing to volunteer at this paddling event. Dave Cunningham presented and had approved the necessary changes to our constitution to allow the club to meet the new regulations for Non Profit Organizations. The business part of the AGM ended with confirmation of the continuing board members: David Young (Chair), Gary Ataman, Dave Cunningham, Mary Bernadette Farley, Geri James and Diane Lucas. Minutes were taken by our long-serving secretary Bill King.

Now for the Fun Part:

The social part of the meeting consisted of three activities: a guided tour of Black Creek Pioneer Village, a hike along the Black Creek Trail, and lunch at a nearby

pub. For the tour of the Village we divided into two groups, each led by a very knowledgeable tour guide. The guides escorted each group around the Village to visit the Tinsmith Shop, where we hammered tin into a snowflake ornament, the Halfway House, where we learned to dance in the ballroom, the Doctor's House, where we discovered torture-like medical tools used in the 1800s, the General Store, and the Town Hall where volunteers dressed in the fashion of the times. A big thanks to our tour guides for an educational and fun event.

Following the tour, Gary Ataman led a hike along the Black Creek Trail. Conditions were not ideal, as they were icy and cold, but that didn't stop most of the group from participating. After the hike, many of us headed off to a local Irish pub, where we overwhelmed the wait staff with such a large group that Fred Argue and Doug Read stepped in to take orders and clear tables. Good food and Irish beer provided a fitting end to an informative and fun day.

Thanks to Fred Argue and Larry Hicks for the great photographs. Thanks also to the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, and particularly Arlen Leeming, Project Manager, Watershed Planning, for providing an amazing venue for our AGM this year.



Downtime on Great Bear Lake

Story by Jason White

Photos by Jason White & Paula Talesnik



picked as our destination for the simple reason it provided an affordable flight back to Yellowknife. As it turned out, this period of waiting for the flight home would become as much of an adventure as any other part of our much longer journey. It was here we would discover a bowl of cookies and make a new furry friend whom we could tell no one else about.

The longer trip is worth mentioning in passing as it at least explains how we came to find ourselves camped on this island. Having flown from Toronto to Yellowknife, on July 1st we set up our pakboat at the boat launch in Yellowknife and pushed off heading north. We paddled the North Arm of Great Slave until Marian Lake, where we ascended the Marian River, descended the Camsell River and had paddled another 10 days along the eastern shore of Great Bear Lake.

Exactly 6 weeks later, we found ourselves pulling our canoe ashore at Plummer's lodge, looking rather disheveled. The flight back to Yellowknife was weekly, every Saturday, so our Tuesday arrival meant we had about 4 days to kill. The fishermen and guides were out fishing for the day, so the grounds were mostly empty. Accommodation was the first item we needed to figure out. The lodge supervisor quoted us \$270 per night for a cabin, but as we were in the habit of paying \$0 per night we decided it better to push off and find a suitable spot to camp in the area. The mainland wasn't great for camping as there seemed to be a resident wolf population and there was an apparent grizzly lurking about, which fishermen had seen just the day before.

We decided to explore a collection of small islands just north of the lodge, which looked okay from a distance. As we circled through and around them however we were disappointed, they were all low lying and marshy with long watery walks to suitable high ground. They were spots we never would have chosen for a single night on our trip. Nothing we passed over could even re-

On the beach with Pakcanoe

In August 2013 my paddling partner Paula and I found ourselves camped for 4 days on a small island above the Arctic Circle on Great Bear Lake in the

Northwest Territories. We had just finished paddling 42 days from Yellowknife to Plummer's fishing lodge on the Dease Arm of Great Bear. The lodge had been



Campsite on the island

ally have been referred to as a site, they were spots you'd be hard pressed to consider even if it were getting dark and you were desperate. But seeing as \$270 per night wasn't an option we continued northward to the very last island, which began to look more and more promising as we approached. Also as we approached it appeared there was a large animal on the island.

'How exactly will this work?' asked Paula referring to the caribou occupying the only suitable island in the area. I explained that we'd simply land the canoe and the animal would swim off somewhere else and then we'd live happily on the island for the next 4 days. This was more or less how things played out. Even before touching shore the caribou sensed our intentions, ran to the far end of the island and began an open water swim south to the islands we'd passed by and towards the lodge.

Our new island was pretty great, especially compared to what we'd seen in our search. It was higher and drier and had no serious marsh around the edges. About the size of a soccer field, it was composed mostly of rocks with a tundra carpet on top and about a dozen small trees along the south edge. It took a bit of effort to find a flat spot, but after that we were set and the location offered everything we needed. The south shore made more sense as it was closer to the lodge and better sheltered from the north wind.

On a trip like the one we'd just completed we had moved campsites every day. Every day had had a sense of purpose as we moved towards our destination. Now that we had arrived it felt a bit strange to have lost that sense of purpose. There was nothing in particular that had to be done or accomplished each day. I missed the movement and purpose but was still glad we had some summer camping ahead of us. For many people 4 consecutive days of camping could be the longest trip of their summer, more than can even be managed on a long weekend in southern Ontario. Therefore, we were lucky to have the time in this sort of location, on Great Bear Lake, above the Arctic Circle. So lack of purpose or not, it was hard to complain, it was a nice setting to spend some time.

Although unable to afford a cabin we did sign up for dinners only at the lodge



Paddling around the island

and this gave us an opportunity in the evenings to socialize with other humans and eat roast beef. The first evening in particular we felt a bit like rock stars. The guides and fishermen alike were pretty impressed we'd paddled all the way there from Yellowknife.

Around 10:00pm that first night we paddled back to our island. It was a perfectly still evening and around midnight lying half asleep I began hearing distant splashing in the water eventually followed by harder contact on watery rock. Something large had swum across the

water and had just arrived, but not on our island, it was the island just south of ours. That island totally sucked and nothing could possibly have been content stopping there, so the next sound I anticipated before it began, which was a return to the sound of deeper water swimming as the creature began its next hop towards our island. I was tired and mostly just annoyed that something was going to force me out of the tent. Paula was asleep and I knew at a minimum it was probably a good idea to confirm it wasn't that grizzly bear. When the sound



View of the Lodge from the water



Phil by the tent

seemed close enough to our shore, I poked my upper body out of the tent. Arriving from the same spot it had departed earlier in the day, was the caribou, returning and silhouetted by the moonlight as it rose out of the water on the edge of the shore. I'm sure it was a pleasant visual to behold but 'not a bear' was my main conclusion to the event and I fell back asleep.

'That caribou came back last night'

I mentioned the next morning in the tent. I got up and walked to the highest point in the centre of the island and did a quick scan around but there were no signs of it - I concluded our island had been just another stop over point on its journey somewhere else. However while making oatmeal for breakfast a large caribou walked into camp between our tent and the oatmeal. Paula was at the tent and I was at the oatmeal. His nonchalant pres-

ence was a surprise in the way that large animals are when they materialize seemingly out of nowhere.

We named him Phil and this began 3 days of living with him on the island. We settled into routines, reading, cooking, napping, or eating vegetation. Phil it seemed had identified us as non-threatening. When he'd swum off that first day, he essentially must have made the exact same rounds of the area we had. He'd likely swum past all the swampy islands, made it to the mainland, discovered an airstrip, people, a pack of wolves, maybe a grizzly. He did some simple risk-benefit analysis and concluded that the island he'd left behind was still probably the top choice in the area even if he had to share it with us now. So he'd come back.

Or in simpler terms the island was just more comfortable and it was as obvious to him as it was to us. The 3 of us found ourselves together in this spot for essentially the same reasons, safety, comfort, shelter and because it didn't cost \$270 per evening.

At this point we were living a sort of double life, one foot in civilization and the other in the wild. A 20-minute paddle separated us from a gourmet dinner using napkins and chairs, to sitting cross-legged and cooking over a twig fire. The other part of our double life was Phil - he would have been a good story to share at dinner but we never quite felt comfortable mentioning him to others at the lodge. For the most part the lodge was a fishing lodge and had attracted fishermen, but there was a planned muskoxen hunt the following week and we just weren't certain about the hunting status on caribou. As it turned out there had been a hunting ban on caribou but at the time we were unaware and it just felt safer if Phil was kept a secret.

I had ventured around the island many times, seeing what was in the far off corners. I'd also paddled around it many times too while fishing. So it came as a bit of surprise that on the fourth and final day there was still something rather significant to discover on this very small patch of land. Phil had 2 spots he preferred to spend his time, both on the south shore. We were camped on the south shore as well but central, whereas Phil really liked the corners. He tended to nap on the east side, which I suppose is why I must have missed the area on my walks, not wanting to disturb him. Seeing as he was dining on



Jason photographing Phil

the west side I decided to check out that final unexplored corner while he wasn't there. Upon reaching the far corner a few things immediately jumped out at me – the first being a very clear patch of ground that was perfectly level and comfy looking. This spot would have been perfect for camp, and it could have easily held multiple tents. We had struggled to find a level spot at our site! There was also a small sand spit by the water which would have been perfect for landing the canoe, whereas our site had slightly awkward mid-size rocks on the landing to contend with. I hadn't noticed the sand spit from the water, a few reeds blocked its view but standing on shore it was obvious. There were also 3 antlers lying about on the ground. However, of greatest interest was a set of rocks arranged in a circle, forming an old tent or teepee ring. Some of the rocks seemed as though they had been placed a long time ago, sunken into the ground and covered in lichen, while other rocks looked to have been moved about in more recent times.

I suppose it made sense that others in the past, both caribou and people, had recognized the comfort and convenience of this island. It became easy to imagine native people hundreds of years ago being told the cost of the lodge per evening and making a hasty retreat to this haven just as we had done. It was a cool feeling, but perhaps a tad annoying to have discovered the best camping spot on the last day. At this point it really wasn't worth moving our camp. Plus it was Phil's sleeping spot. The best we could do was make note of it and if we ever found ourselves in the area again, make use of it, if no caribou was sleeping there.

Saturday morning, Aug 17th, we packed up our gear for the last time, and waved goodbye to Phil as we paddled off. He was seated by the circular ring of rocks and seemed slightly indifferent to us, which was normal, but because of the circumstance his indifference hurt a bit more this time. In fairness however he was probably less aware that we weren't merely leaving for a meal but heading to a plane and wouldn't be coming back this time. The sadness of this early morning paddle was offset slightly by the bowl of cookies set out in the dinning area at the lodge. I loaded my pockets full of them, oatmeal raisin, this being the only way I knew how to cope with my feelings.

The interesting thing about those last



Phil

4 days, spent on an island with a caribou named Phil, was once back home they tended to be the things we talked about the most when asked about our trip. Perhaps the time on the island was just freshest in our minds, or easier to sum up neatly. Whatever the precise reason it was at least interesting to realize that one of the highlights of our summer had come while merely waiting for an air-

plane. It was a point in the trip for us that had involved no ambition whatsoever, no km-per-day quota or mandatory ground to cover. I was glad that we'd had no choice in the matter of waiting; had the flights been daily or within our control we likely would have left promptly. Therefore it was a nice change for us to have stayed still, just as Phil had done, instinctively, on his migration south.



Plummer's Lodge

Toni Harting Paddled into his Final Sunset

By Ria Harting

Toni Harting was a stubborn character that tried to avoid conventions as much as possible. He also was a most compassionate supporter of others and a good listener. His top aims in life were knowledge and understanding.

He could be extremely patient while on photo safari and could wait hours for the light to strike a subject just the right way. He could sit for hours at the edge of a river just observing yet, as soon as he had a fishing rod in his hands, he would become very impatient and throw up his hands after two minutes.

It has to be said, he was probably the world's worst dresser. Clothes for him had to be convenient, unrestricting and cheap. Far better to spend the money on camera equipment, books or newly discovered restaurants!

He loved nature's beauty and his photographs continue to be witnesses to his skilled observations.

He loathed talking about his illnesses and considered his ailments and afflictions to be nuisances. But, on the whole, Toni adapted to his physical restrictions by focusing on what he was able to do and how he could enjoy each day. And so, over the last decades, paddling had to be replaced by more in-depth readings of other paddlers' voyages. More recently, active photography became what he called "mind photography" which involved conscious observation of beauty around us. And, finally, Toni had to put down his red editor's pen just days before he started his final life journey at the end of November of last year.

Of course he had regrets, but on the whole he was content with what he had accomplished. He was especially pleased about being able to finish his most recent book based on his experiences in the Japanese concentration camps during World War II.

He was not afraid to face the end of life. It was a natural process for him,

which he entered into with curiosity and wonder.

I consider myself very lucky as Toni's permanent bow partner and look back lovingly on an amazing life with him.

Thank you to all the WCA members who expressed their support to me during these past quiet months.

Ria Harting



The Horizon Line: A Dialogue on Toni Harting's Nastawgan legacy

Story by Erika Bailey

In 2014 I had just discovered the Wilderness Canoe Association (WCA) and the Nastawgan, although I have paddled all my life. This surprised me. How did I not know sooner? Surely there must be others like myself, not yet aware of these forums.

To understand better where *Nastawgan* is going, and how it can reach more people, I met with Aleks Gusev in April. I provided tea. He furnished the snacks – lots of snacks.

As he stretched out, his hand rested on a copy of Toni Harting's *French River*¹. Throughout our interview, Aleks employed the book as a sounding block to emphasize his points, tapping or thumping drumming his fingers on its cover.

For anyone who knows Mr. Gusev, his warm curiosity makes it as easy to ask him questions as it is to run a class three rapid sideways.

I wanted a bit of history, so I asked Aleks how long had he known Toni.

"I am so bad with mapping dates. I relate better to events. Eight years?"

"What's your first memory of him?"

"Toni was past his paddling days when he walked into my life." Aleks sips his tea. "The image of Toni, for me, is this: he's sitting in his *man-hole* in semi-darkness at his makeshift desk. Very comfortable, very spacious, with a lot of shelves," Aleks slowly chops the air, "so he can reach out for this or that.

"His computer," he gestures over the pastries and cheeses. "His bed is always there. Another table with drawers with his images and slides.

"It is difficult imagining him out of there, until I see his photos."

What brought Toni and Aleks together?

"I gravitated through my interests. I wanted to contribute. We must have become very good friends by the time he wished to divest some of the journal's responsibility, to focus on his book.

"I sort of started shadowing him. We ran a couple issues together. It became obvious to both he and I that," Aleks shrugs, arms open in a *'what can you*

gesture, "I was the only one left.

"He would say," (changes voice into Toni's deep, serious tone) "'Gusev!' and this is a great quality – someone who is very opinionated, 'listen, I've been doing this for thirty-five years. This is why this works, this is why this doesn't.'"

"Editing was his big strength. Together, we would work the content. What would be a good fit, what would not. My approach was that the content should be teaching something new, no matter who wrote it."

The cat interrupts our conversation and Aleks murmurs something in Serbian. I am certain he just called my cat a marshmallow.

"Toni knew a lot of people. He had the ability to say," (Aleks turns into Toni again), "'Erika! I heard about this trip. Can you work on it for me for the next issue?'"

"Editing was so different back then. Toni would bring to the printers his cutout columns all arranged on the page in a manual way. He would bring text on a disk. And he would sit with the person and work through the whole issue."

"Photographs were his strength. His one big thing was always correct alignment of the horizon line."

"Over the years, I've embraced how to look at photos," Aleks tips his head to squint an imaginary photo his palm. "Toni had that ability so *see*."

"Ria² was just telling me today, how he had that uncanny ability to find a good place to sit in a campsite. She'd look around, and there'd be Toni in some kind of nest. He'd just sort of walk towards that spot."

"So when he looked at a page, he wouldn't just read it, he'd see it. He could pick out the tiniest edits."

I wanted to learn more about Aleks' involvement now.

"Editing is not my strength. Attention to details: It was never my desire to improve that. To me it is more about getting good content and people. I think that is



why we made a good team."

"What do you think it would have been like to paddle with him?"

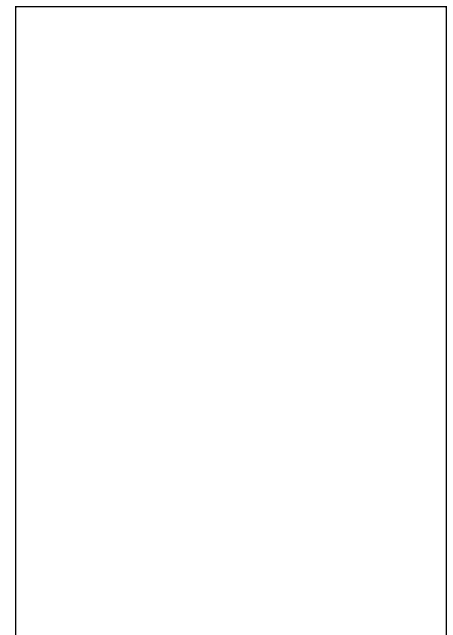
"It might be totally different than I'd imagined, to be honest. But *still*, I would have loved to have tried, had there had been an opportunity."

Aleks sips his tea again, "I miss him a lot. I don't have anybody to talk to anymore."

"What do you miss the most?"

"He brought experience, number one. Organizational skills. His method, the quiet, competent way of doing things."

"Toni insisted that there shouldn't be any write-up about himself. It's more about the place, and maybe the people in context."



However Aleks thinks differently. “I want to be respectful of his desires, but is there something for the reader to learn?” he gestures to the recording machine. “People might reflect on himself or herself about how one volunteer put together a quality product for such a long time.”

“What do you think is *Nastawgan’s* legacy?”

“I learn about so many places. Even if I never get to see them or if I do not remember details, I can go back to reread. It’s that tradition. It’s so unique in Canada, if not North America.”

“Toni had his guiding principles and that carries on. At the end of the day, *Nastawgan’s* the journal for the WCA. It’s about travel in the wilderness, predominantly by canoe or kayak or rafting. And it’s about sharing. For the reader, it’s about learning.”

Knowing Aleks runs a more-than-full-time career, and maintains a very active family, social and canoeing life, I wondered how does he balance it all? What challenges does he encounter?

“My biggest challenge by far is carving out time to do it justice. Those half-baked ideas in the dark recesses of my mind could come to light, but in the pace of my world, there is just not enough quiet time to allow them to percolate to the surface.”

“There are so many communications back and forth, that there’s possibility of something slipping through the cracks, or not doing things in a timely fashion.”

“Also, being a better editor, especially doing the last edit like Toni did; he’d find fifty mistakes where I’d find only ten or twenty.”

“We have a really great person who does the lay-out. I determine the order of the stories, how many pages, and the cover shot. Peter does the rest. He has a lot of experience and a good eye.”

It struck me just how many people Aleks knows, and knows well. During our short acquaintance, I’ve watched him connect, nurture, and cheer on his friends.

“Contributors of the *Nastawgan* are not always writers. It’s usually an effort for somebody to sit down and write. Most of those articles are something someone wrote for the first time.”

“Having had an experience with Firefly Creative Writing³, I realize editing and writing are a talent, a craft. I found myself thinking: How does this thing work? What did they do that helped me say what I wanted to say and sound so eloquent? You have to recognize the correlations between the thoughts and the words so that they ring so powerfully.”

What’s next for *Nastawgan*?

“Making an online version more rich in content beyond the thirty two-page maximum; to allow people to comment and add to that conversation. We do this in the Canadian Canoe Routes⁴ forums, but comments would focus on the article.”

“I would like to read more trips from closer, smaller rivers that don’t require tons of dollars’ investment.” Leafing through Toni’s book, he comments, “I don’t yet know how to find these stories. I guess this is a reminder to newer paddlers: You can have fun, write an article, even if the trip is close to home.”

“Digitizing the issues – we are almost there. But also making them searchable so you can easily look for a river.”

“Something that we have done with some success is advocacy on conservation. For what we represent as a group and as individuals, that does have a place here. It’s about education. We get the chance to think about what we can each do, starting in small ways.”

“It is easy for the paddlers to see the connection⁵. The question is, are the young people who will eventually occupy positions in government and mining companies, would they embrace conservation more than this generation does?”

We pondered this, and about how *Nastawgan’s* voice fits within the broader dialogue of environmentalism. Then we brought it back to the journal’s

future.

“If Toni were to come visit again and see the journal in five years’ time, what do you think would make him really happy?”

“That would be a good conversation to have in five years’ time.”

Apparently Aleks inherited Toni’s pragmatism.

“I think for one, he would be immensely proud that the *Nastawgan* tradition continued as a recognition of the role he played. Then he would always say, ‘Aleks, I am really good at this,’ ” Aleks taps Toni’s book. “In five years, is it still written for the right reasons? But mostly Toni would impart, through me, a lot of values, experiences and techniques. Maybe to the next person who follows in my footsteps?”

“And he would be genuinely interested in some of those routes. He had a couple of areas that he really liked and he spent a lot of time there. This book is a representation of that.”

“One of the big mysteries for me is how he was able to make ends meet. He had photography and exhibitions, but, to me, they offer marginal income possibilities. Ria worked. They were very economical, very careful. That was not apparent in any conversation that he was dissatisfied in any way; on the contrary. I guess he did things he wanted, at the end of the day. He paddled with the love of his life for how many years? Thirty? Forty? He was present in so many people’s lives.”

“There was no expected financial reward. He was happy within the confines of the life they had. And so, he was at ease with himself, very content. The only one thing he wanted to do was finish that last book. And that he did.”

I asked Aleks about his wish list for the *Nastawgan*.

“Someone to edit. I would manage the content. I need help to explore a partnership with a student who would value this contribution as a volunteer, who can build their editing skills through a school curriculum; the editing, video, photogra-

phy, and who knows what else?"

"We want to attract a younger audience. I want to further discussions with outdoor educators, to encourage like-minded young people to write. There would be better young readership when there is balanced content coming from more generations."

"To that end, including more video presentations. Maybe an award for a young paddler going out on a trip, who works towards a story from the beginning of the season, and submit it to the Symposium, as a platform. They could connect with a broader WCA audience and with their peers."

"Would you like to share any final thoughts, a parting message?"

"In many ways, those late 1960's, 70's, 80's, those to me were magical paddling years. Toni was right in the midst of that. We were all so fortunate. There was no one like Toni to edit for thirty-five years – all that content, photographs, people that came through his life. He made the right decisions," he knocks the table twice.

"Navigating through however many issues of the Nastawgan, Toni was always so gracious. It was such an art."

Erika Bailey is an international transition advisor at the University of Toronto. In her spare time, she is a writer, personal coach, editor, and quite a bit of tea-drinker; all bi-products of being a story-listener. She recently published her master thesis, *Paddling as Place: Experiential Learning of Place and Ecological Identity* – an arts-based narrative into the experiential learning on canoe trips. Erika has canoed all her life, a gift taught to her immigrant parents by her Poppa – Omond Solandt.

¹Harting, T. (1996) *French River: Canoeing the River of the Stick-Wavers*. Erin, ON: The Boston Mills Press.

²Ria Harting, Toni's wife.

³www.fireflycreativewriting.com a writing coaching business I connected Aleks to.

⁴<http://www.myccr.com>

⁵ Cites example: Genesee Keevil (2014) Peel under Pressure, *Nastawgan*, 41(1), 30.

Yours to Discover
by Roni Furst

At age 21, a new friend introduced me to canoe tripping. I was hooked immediately - the more isolated, the better! In late 1991, the planning started for a remote trip - but where to go? Calls were made to all the northern Ontario MNR offices, any and all route descriptions were asked for, a choice made, and a trip enjoyed.

Some time later, the binders containing all the route reports were re-purposed. But, what to do with the information? Too valuable to throw out, but no room to keep them. So, I started the digital transformation. After all, how long could 75 routes take? Various words and phrases needed to be updated and measurements converted to metric. While I was at it, I figured I might as well put important details at the beginning, add the 1:50,000 maps and organize by areas.

"Well, you're doing all this hard work, why don't you publish the book?" said my family. "But it's MNR intellectual property..." to which, their reply was "So call them!" And after few calls and emails, including a proposal to make a book, MNR was onboard. "Carry on, keep us updated. Oh, here're a couple of files you might find useful."

Upon visiting the WCA Symposium a few years ago, friends asked what was new since we'd last met and the book project came up. One question led to the next and more inquiries about what was overheard and how could they help?

The news went out at general meetings, a discussion started on MyCCR, private emails were sent and received. More brochures arrived by mail, to be scanned and the originals returned to the owners. Hand written names on reference maps were edited to be legible, road and lake names updated, a file with names of places and lakes started, along with their GPS co-ordinates. Numerous hours were spent at the Reference Library pouring over more than 32 maps at a time. Lists were compiled of current transportation and lodging services available in route areas.

Who Needs a Resupply?

Story by Dwayne Wohlgemuth

Photos by Leanne Robinson and Dwayne Wohlgemuth

My partner Leanne and I wanted to paddle from our home in Yellowknife to the Arctic Ocean. We also wanted to canoe at least two months without a resupply, so that meant not going through any communities. Which route would we choose? It would need to have plenty of fish, begin from somewhere near our home, and provide some exciting white water. We chose the Coppermine, which has trees until the very end. The warmth of fires and the wind protection of trees can make any first Arctic trip seem a little less Arctic. We would end in Kugluktuk. But why end there? Peter Clarkson, a former Mayor of the Town of Inuvik, once hiked from Kugluktuk to Paulatuk. All prudent hesitation aside, we immediately planned to add a three-week hike to the end of our two-month canoe trip.

How would we get to the Coppermine? There are plenty of routes, and we decided to take one of the most direct and one that has a special, local and traditional significance. Hoz'iideh eto, the Barrenland Trail, was used by the Tlicho people to reach important caribou hunting grounds at the northern limit of the forest. This route is still used by several paddling groups each year to reach the Barren Lands, and parts of this route have been described in past *Nastawgan* articles written by Herb Pohl and Mike Robinson.

Including the hike, our route would cover 1350 km, of which 480 km would be on foot, also without a resupply. We owned only a 16-foot canoe so we would have to be almost as judicious with gear and food on the canoe trip as we would later on the hike. We weighed every single article of clothing, gear, and food. We spent much time in the winter and in the sunny days of May drying fruits and vegetables, either over our pellet stove or in our greenhouse. We bought and returned two dry bag backpacks before finding a third that fit underneath the canoe's yoke and was



Pike on the Marian River

reasonably comfortable and durable. We purchased two new Western mountaineering 0°C rated sleeping bags which when combined with our two down layers were as small as one of our previous sleeping bags.

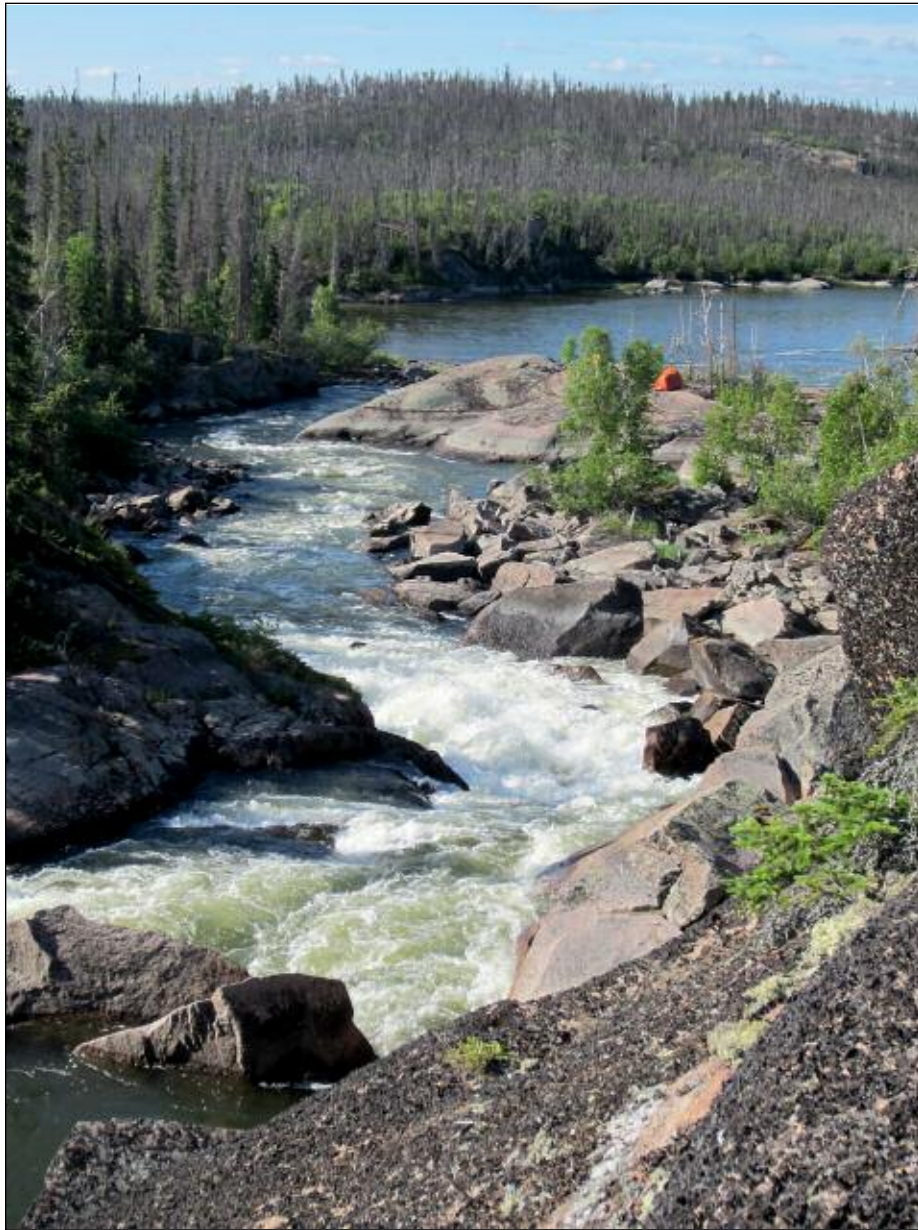
We carefully measured, weighed, and packed two months of food supplies into two 60-litre canoe barrels which, when full, weighed 100 pounds each. This amounted to about 1.7 pounds and 0.5 litres per person per day. Fish of course would add plenty of additional calories. We planned to add fish on average to every three out of four lunches and dinners. The rest of our gear was packed into a 90-litre dry bag backpack and two small day packs. Our gear, not including paddles and lifejackets, weighed 350 pounds. This was sufficiently light for us to carry everything in two portages, beginning on day one.

Our breakfasts would consist of oatmeal or granola, dried fruit, nuts, and peanut butter. Sourdough bread, dried vegetables, and fish would provide our

lunches. Dinners would be the most diverse with a carbohydrate choice of rice, spaghetti, quinoa, or couscous. A liberal portion of Northern Pike, Trout, or Arctic Greyling would be served either grilled, smoked, fried, battered and deep-fried, floured and fried, or in a stew. For the occasional Arctic Char, sushi would be an option. Some protein was packed for those days we couldn't catch fish: ground and dried Alberta deer meat, deer jerky, beans, and nutritional yeast. A spice kit and our own



Pike on the Marian River



Emile River

creativity would help to ensure adequate variety for our contemporary palates. Cattail, cranberries, blueberries, and other berries would be special



treats from the land, and a good number of plants would be harvested for tea. One 100-gram bar of dark chocolate every two days would also provide a chocolate fondue dessert option with harvested berries or dried fruit.

Given the extent to which we would rely on fish, we carried two fishing rods along with spare line and a sufficient tackle box to compensate for losing a few hooks. Most of the tackle would be kept in our dry bags and only a tiny kit would stay tied in the boat where it could easily be lost in the case of a spill. And if we couldn't catch fish, the backup plan was a weight loss pro-

gram. We had enough food along that we wouldn't starve. Luckily, we had completed many multi-week trips in the area north of Yellowknife, and we had always caught plenty of fish. We knew we could catch them with the right techniques and a dedication to throwing in a hook whenever we felt we were in good fish habitats.

The upstream portion of our route began on Russel Lake near Rae, and followed the Marian and Emile Rivers. This route could be comfortably completed in 2 to 3 weeks, but we took 5 so that we could enjoy plenty of fishing, swimming, and exploring. At the beginning we gorged on Northern Pike from the Marian River that were more appropriately sized for 10 people, but later while crossing large lakes we began to eat more reasonably sized meals due to our success with a couple spoons and techniques that always caught small lake trout. The occasional Arctic Greyling, smoked over a smouldering birch wood fire, provided precious delicacy and variety. But the most intense experience during this upstream portion, one might guess, had nothing to do with the fish, the canoe, or the water.

On day nine, while scoping a portage trail, I was charged by a black bear. In a bright moment of wisdom that my parents would be proud of, I left my bear spray in the canoe. But I had brought my air horn. After two attempts by me at backing away, three separate charges by the bear, and the same number of blasts on my air horn, the bear was crouching five feet away from me. At that moment my air horn died because it had become too cold. The expanding gases cool the canister and temporarily render it useless if used for too long of a duration. Realizing that intimidation was the only tool I had, I screamed and waved my arms high in the air as I took a big step towards the bear. Luckily it hadn't been taught not to run from humans. I chased it for 30 feet until it reached the bottom of a large pine tree. The bear stopped and looked indecisive, so I decided at this point to again try backing away. Two hours later my heartbeat was finally back to normal, and as one might guess, I never again left behind my bear

spray. Paddling along the shoreline afterwards, we spotted the tiny adorable cub who was responsible for the mother's behaviour.

With a total of 32 portages, we eventually reached the highest point of our canoe trip at Grenville Lake. With some arm-twisting and bribing, we had convinced four friends to fly here to join us for the Parent River and the Coppermine River. We would spend three weeks with them including the entire downstream portion of our trip. Just in case one of them was hit by a bus prior to joining us, we planned not to rely on them for anything. But in the end we did take advantage of their flight to send some excess flour and dried meat back to Yellowknife that we had not required.

With the arrival of four other paddlers at Grenville Lake, we quickly realized that the most difficult challenge of our canoe trip would be neither the distance nor the white water nor the challenges of nature. After five weeks on our own independent schedule, Leanne and I had to compromise and negotiate with four others whom we hardly knew. Suddenly a watch and consideration of time were introduced to our schedule, and we could no longer get up with the sun, eat when we were hungry, and paddle until we were tired.



Christine Wenmann catching grayling



Coppermine River - Caribou Crossing

Our days were now regulated by an electronic gadget. We were forced to wait until the clock told us we should be eating, and until the sleepest amongst us had finally risen and had their morning coffee.

Most of us hardly knew each other at the beginning, so we began from scratch. We switched paddling partners every day for variety, to get to know each other better, and to force us to improve our communication skills, especially while running the foaming rapids. Leanne and I shared our bail bucket and sponge at the end of the rapids because all the others had forgotten theirs, and we chuckled when the evening chef forgot to include the fish that was caught during the day. But finally we found an abandoned cabin with an old dirty foam mattress that made ideal sponges.

The Parent River was a rocky ride that provided some glorious white water but only a few fish. We used much of our packed protein during this week, and hoped the fish would be more plentiful on the Coppermine. Upstream of Parent Lake we portaged most of the rapids, while below Parent Lake the rapids were sufficiently deep to bump and grind or to run without incident. The water was ice cold and crys-

tal clear. Images of the vast rolling tundra became etched in our memories. But the views of the tundra quickly disappeared during our last day on the Parent River as we descended into the trees of the Coppermine River valley.

The Coppermine River seemed a giant. It was a massive twisting snake of water in comparison to the narrow rocky Parent River. But with the much larger river, our scouting was nearly over, save for one serious rapid a few kilometres below Rocknest Lake. Our portages were almost over as well, with



Arctic Char Sushi Coppermine River

only one remaining at the very end at Bloody Falls. We feasted on Arctic greyling and savoured the views of moose, muskox, and thousands of caribou swimming the river.

After saying goodbye to our four good friends in Kugluktuk and sending our canoes home on the barge, we embarked by foot on August 6th towards Paulatuk. With soft feet from a summer of canoeing and out of shape legs from sitting in the boat, we were about to begin a hiking trip that was at least five times longer than any hiking trip either of us had ever completed.

Our gear and food weighed a total of 140 pounds; in addition to the basics it included an Alpacka pack boat, a fishing rod, and a homemade wood-fired rocket stove rather than a fuel stove. One of us would spend as much as a half-hour in the evening to gather sufficient twigs for our dinner and breakfast meals. But even in the middle of the Arctic tundra, we could avoid carrying fuel and still rely on wood for cooking and rely less on breakable hardware.

For this portion of our trip we were uncertain about being able to catch fish. This was foreign country to us, and the folks who had completed this trip before us hadn't fished enough to provide any meaningful information. Instead of carbohydrates and heavy food rations, this time we relied on high energy food. We carried plenty of protein and fat and there was less space for the flavourful dried vegetables and fruit. We carried one fishing rod and a miniature version of our previous tackle box. In the end we only caught three fish – all trout – which was enough to add a full two days or so to our food rations. We would fry the fillets, and then roast the backbone to not miss a single scrap. Even the heads were boiled so the cheeks and fatty jaw muscles could be eaten.

For the first week we fair-skinned redheads roasted under the scorching sun and in the still calm of temperatures that reached nearly 30°C. We walked on top of the eskers for the cool breeze and to avoid the bugs. We dunked our heads in the shallow streams, and we cooked on top of the highest kames we could find. We



Hiking an Esker - Kugluktuk to Paulatuk

searched for south-facing, windy hillsides so that we could have naps in our tank tops, and we woke especially early to enjoy hiking in the cool mornings. We climbed on top of any erratics we could find and relished the views of pingos while the black flies kept the

random caribou always on the run.

Then the weather returned to normal, the bugs disappeared, and we no longer lingered during our breaks. The cold Arctic wind howled through our tent, and we cursed the summer mesh we had so valued during the first week.



Hiking the Inman River

All of our layers were needed to keep us warm at night. Only dry ravines created by seasonal streams that happened to be perpendicular to the wind were sufficient for reasonably warm camping. On August 23, we had our first blizzard, and that night was perhaps our warmest given the fluffy snow that we could pack around the tent to shut out the ever-present Arctic wind. We were forced to abandon our shortcut through the hills and stick close to the coast where the temperatures were above 0oC and the snow was disappearing. We began to feel we were racing against the weather, and our prudent planning had not included maps for this area. We stayed far enough away from the coast to hopefully avoid any bays and channels, and we followed a direct route governed by our compass bearings. We caught an occasional view of the ocean and hiked more than 35km a day during a string of clear, cold and sunny days with our compass and the Arctic Ocean to guide us.

The blizzard brought a festive gift basket a few days later. In one day we gathered about 3.5 litres of puffballs. We fried a lot of them that night, dipped them in salt, and filled our tummies to the brim. The remainder would be incorporated into our meals for the following few days.

As we neared Paulatuk we slowed



August 23 Blizzard Tuklut Nogait National Park



Blizzard No. One

our pace and took a day off to eat the last morsels of our food and enjoy an extra day before hiking the last few kilometres into town. Unfortunately, the day we awoke to hike those last 10 kilometres, another blizzard was upon us, arriving just in time to teach us about the rashness of eating all of our food. Paulatuk was only a couple hours away and we were out of food, so we kept going in spite of the cold wind driving wet “nails” into our cheeks. We arrived in Paulatuk wet and colder than we had ever been on the trip. Only then did we learn that the Paulatuk Northern Store does not open on Sundays. Neither the church nor the RCMP building nor the hotel was open. We sought shelter from the flying icicles in a sea container beside the Northern Store so that we could add dry layers, and we soon realized that we were inside the Northern Store dumpster. An abundance of discarded but still entirely edible food was right at our feet.

We eventually found a house with a few generous folks who put us in touch with the hotel manager and we paid \$350 for one afternoon and one night at the hotel. The time was spent gorging on Northern Store discards, drinking coffee, watching movies, and relishing

the joy of successfully completing a 26-day, 480 km trek after two months of paddling, which brought us to a total journey of three months and 1350km for the entire trip.

Dwayne Wohlgenuth lives and paddles in Yellowknife, NWT, and seeks to harvest from the land, pack less food, and take the routes less travelled. He became self-employed largely so that he could have more time in the summers to paddle. He especially enjoys picking cattails and berries. Dwayne’s presentation “Canoeing and harvesting from the land” generated a lot of interest during 2013 Wilderness and Canoeing Symposium.



Puffball mushrooms

Self-Publishing for Paddlers

By David W. Brown

Many of us who venture out regularly with paddles in hand enjoy photographing our trips and sharing the results with friends. In the “old” days, that entailed filling a carousel or two with 35mm slides and projecting them on a screen or blank wall. Nowadays, folks are more likely to share photos on a laptop or even a smartphone. As the years go by and the stockpile of photos grows, the likelihood of looking at older shots diminishes. The advent in recent years of a number of self-publishing print-on-demand companies provides a wonderful alternative. These include Blurb, Lulu, Snapfish, ibook and others.

Inspired by friends who had self-published books about canoe trips, a bike trip and a wedding, I decided to assemble a book of my favorite photographs from more than four decades of Canadian canoe trips. I chose to use Blurb and began the process by watching a number of tutorials available online at their website for subjects including book layout and cover design. Their online bookstore allows viewers to preview thousands of self-published books on every topic imaginable and see how others have designed their books.

Before embarking on the comprehensive book project, I chose to put together a small book about a single trip to begin learning about the bookmaking software and to see the final product. I should clarify at the onset that I would categorize my computer skills as modest. Begin by downloading the free software for book layout. Next choose one of the five possible sizes for the book (7 x 7 inches, 8 x 10 inches, 11 x 13 inches and so on). Import the materials that will fill the pages—digital photos, maps, journal entries. Then, page by page decide with a click and drag what goes where. Dozens of templates are provided for layout out of photos, captions and text, or you can easily cre-

ate your own custom templates. A simple version of the software will even lay out the photos for you. Online help is available for dealing with complications you may encounter.

A simple book could be made in a matter of hours; I spent the better part of a year working on the larger book.

Once satisfied with the layout and text, upload it to the company. You’ll then decide between three options for the cover and five options for paper weight and finish. It makes sense to order a single copy initially to proof carefully before ordering multiple copies. A volume discount doesn’t begin until 20 copies are ordered. My first book, 32 pages, 8 x 10 inches

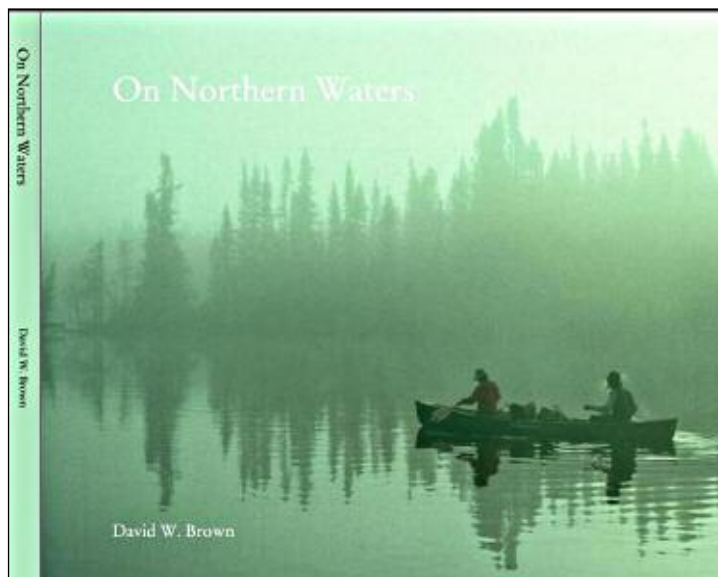
cost \$24 apiece in softcover and \$34 in hardcover.

Since most of the photos I wanted to use in my next book were slides, I had to begin by scanning the selected slides. A friend had a high quality scanner I could use; the service is

also available commercially. Adobe Lightroom is a very useful program for storing, cataloging, sorting and photoshopping images, and newer versions have the Blurb bookmaking software embedded. My second book was 120 pages, 11 x 13 inches and cost about \$95 each in hardcover.

Once your book is uploaded, you can elect to make it available for viewing and purchase to a private group of friends or to the entire world. For me, making money selling the book was at the bottom of

the list of reasons to make it. I found the whole process immensely enjoyable and satisfying. The finished product makes great presents for paddling companions. And I know that more people will find their way through the pages of my book than will explore the thousands of old slides filed away on bookshelves upstairs.



Way Down North: Dene Life – Dene Land

René Fumoleau

Novalis, 2010; 126 pages; \$29.95

Reviewed by Sandy Richardson

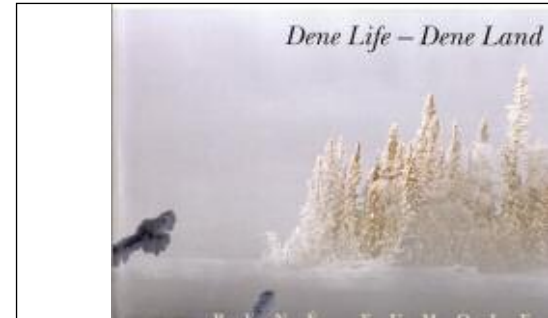
René Fumoleau was born in France in 1926 and came to the Northwest Territories in 1953 as an Oblate priest. He has lived there, working with the Dene in a number of communities, ever since. Now retired, he lives in Lutselk'e. As well as being a priest, René Fumoleau is an historian, author, storyteller (Readers who attended the 2004 Wilderness Canoeing Symposium, may remember him in this capacity.), poet, filmmaker and photographer. He first came to national attention in 1975 with the publication of *As Long As This Land Shall Last* – the definitive study of treaties 8 and 11 between the Dene and the Canadian Government in the early twentieth century. He has also written two books of prose-poetry about his time living with and learning from the Dene: *Here I Sit* and *The Secret*.

As a photographer, René Fumoleau is self taught. He began taking photos in the 1960s so that he would have some pictures to show his family on a visit home to France. His camera became a near-constant companion for the next 30 years. He photographed both the Dene going about their lives, and their land Denedeh.

René Fumoleau's photographs have been exhibited in Ottawa and Montreal, at the World's Fairs in Vancouver and in Japan, as well as in Yellowknife. When he retired in 1994, he stopped taking photographs, gave away his camera, and donated his collection of over 14,000 slides and photographs to the NWT archives. (He is still working with staff there to write captions.)

Way Down North is René Fumoleau's second book of photographs of the Dene and their land. (The first, *Denedeh: A Dene Celebration*, was published in 1984.) In *Way Down North* he shares some of the best of his images, taken over 3 decades, organized by the seasons.

To come



Included are both gorgeous and evocative landscapes and intimate portraits of the Dene going about their lives during a time of great cultural change. This is a collection of photographs that could only be made by someone who lives immersed in the land and the culture of Denedeh.

These are real photographs, from transparencies, all printed full-frame. No digital trickery here; nor is any needed. Fumoleau's photographs demonstrate a keen eye and technical mastery. One particularly striking image, taken across a lake at the Arctic Circle on the summer solstice, is a multiple exposure shot of the sun approaching the horizon, almost disappearing, but then rising again; there are 12 exposures, one taken every 10 minutes from 11:20 p.m. to 1:20 a.m. – perfectly exposed and composed within the frame. But this book is much more than merely a collection of fine photographs. As George Erasmus, former president of the Dene Nation and national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, says in the preface to the book: "At the heart of this book is the land – land understood not as art form and metaphor, but as the living foundation of all living beings. ... These images are formed by a kind and perceptive eye, by compassion and keen intelligence, and by love of the land." The more time you

spend with these images, the more you will find in them.

Way Down North is an outstanding collection of photographs that will be enjoyed and appreciated by everyone who has visited, or is interested in, Denedeh. It is the perfect book to savour in front of the fire on a cold winter night.

The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife has mounted a display of René Fumoleau's photographs to accompany the publication of this book. Some of these can be seen at the Centre's website: <http://www.pwnhc.ca/exhibits/fumoleau/index.asp>.

On Northern Waters

Story and photos by **David W. Brown**



Al Stirt and Wendy Scott lining the canoe on the Nastapoca river



Ann Ingersoll and Ed Sturges sharing a laugh



Dick Irwin (bow) and Walter Lohaza (stern)

In the upstairs bedroom of our home are three sets of bookshelves. Lining twelve feet of those shelves are three-ring binders stuffed with slides and topo maps and spiral notebooks with daily journals from our annual Canadian canoe trips beginning in the early 1970's. A small percentage of the photos have been published in a variety of magazines, and I've enjoyed putting together slide shows after each trip to share with friends and community.

I'm now at a point in my life where I can look forward to many fewer trips ahead of me than I have behind me. Opportunities to share slides from those early trips are now infrequent. And I know that the ultimate repository of these slides, maps and journals may well be the bottom of a landfill.

The transition from film to digital photography and the development of many self-publishing companies have made it feasible to assemble a book like this as a do-it-yourself project. My goal was to select some of my favorite photos in one place in a format convenient to share with family, friends and other wilderness paddlers. The most painful part of the process was rejecting 98% of my photos from inclusion in this collection.

The Canadian north is changing rapidly with the ongoing search for minerals and the demands for more hydro development. Valuable deposits of rare earth elements have been found recently just east of Indian House Lake along the Quebec / Labrador border. An extensive mine complex has been constructed at Voisey's Bay along the Labrador coast since our first visit to that area. The George River caribou herd has declined drastically in the last twenty years for reasons that are unclear. The recent designation of some areas as national parks, while preserving them from development, has imposed some restrictions on access and travel. I feel incredibly fortunate to have traveled as extensively as we have, to have enjoyed water safe to drink directly from the rivers and lakes and fish safe to eat without concern for contamination and to have seen hundreds of caribou flowing across the land and water. It is somewhat ironic that the 350-mile long railroad line built to transport iron ore from one of the largest open pit mines in the world and the roads built in conjunction with one of the largest hydroelectric projects are developments that have allowed us to access these otherwise remote areas in an affordable way.

Wilderness travel is not a risk-free activity, but with good judgment the trip itself will be less dangerous than the drives to and from home at each end of the trip. Few understand why we return to the northern waters each summer and subject ourselves to the rigors of such travel. My hope is that this book will give viewers at least a taste of the rewards, perhaps encourage a few to begin their own explorations and help more to appreciate the values of free-flowing rivers through undeveloped landscapes.

Craftsbury, Vermont January 2014

Crossing the Rubicon

There are four of us. All standing on shore next to a sizable rapid. No one is talking. We are all looking at the rapid.

It's a pretty big one. There's a couple of waves out in the middle that will keep you for sure. With some maneuvering it looks like it might be possible to skirt the rapid on this side. There's a rock shelf that will push you out pretty close to the keepers, but if you get past the shelf you should be able to get through the rapid.

The problem is the lead up to the rock shelf. There are three big boulders that you have to get around before you can line up for the shelf. Each of the boulders will require maneuvering and momentum changes.

It's now been about fifteen minutes. We are all still looking at the rapid. There's no portage trail on this side of the river. It's either on the other side or the high water this year has buried it. The portage may even be on the rock shelf

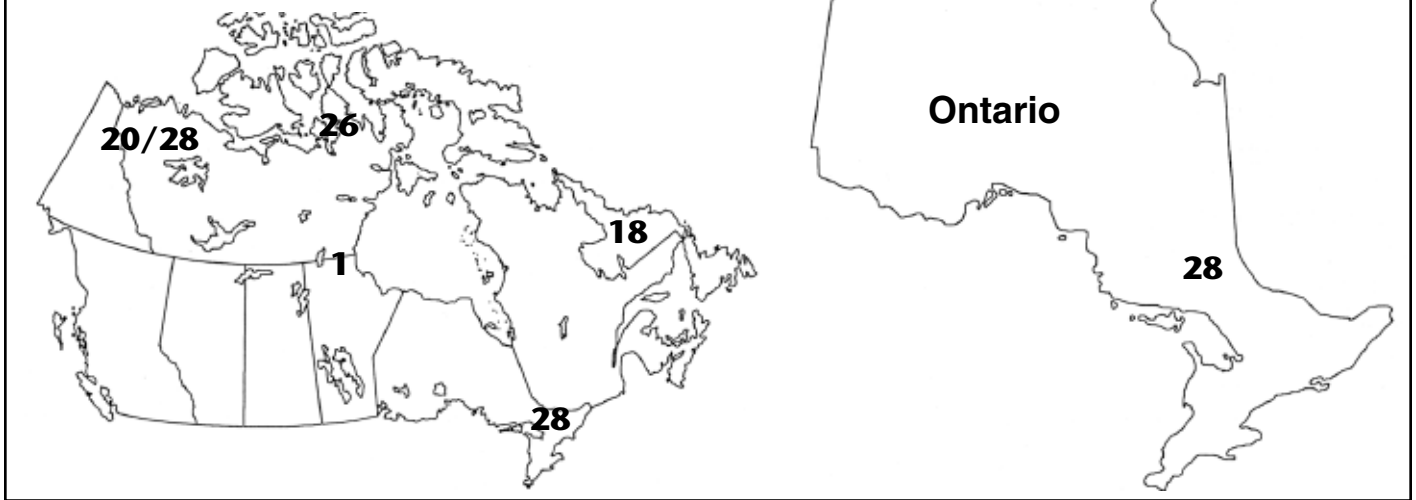
that's now under water. If we do decide to portage, it will be a tough effort through the bush. Lining the rapid will be just as difficult. The shoreline bushes overhang the water and it looks deep even close to shore. It will be tough to get the lining ropes around the bushes.

"Crossing the Rubicon" is credited to Julius Caesar when he took his army in 49 B.C. across the river into the region of Italy controlled directly by Rome. It was considered an act of insurrection to do so, and any commander who crossed the Rubicon with his army was subject to the punishment of death. Crossing the Rubicon was an irreversible decision. A point of no return. Once you did so you could never go back. I'm now in the first canoe. We're lined up as best as I can figure guessing from the shore. Approaching the first boulder. We can't go back now. Our die is cast. We are crossing our Rubicon.

Greg Went



Where it is...



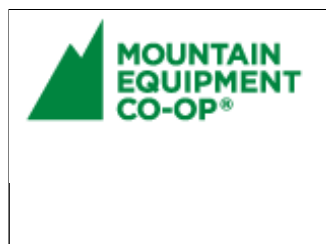
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