



*Long Sandy beach for refuge and map check at Otterhead Bay*

## My Memory of the Lake Superior 1967 Centennial Canoe Voyage

By Craig Macdonald  
Photos by Dr. Bob James

### Introduction

Memories are strange things that get altered and dimmed by the passage of time. However, many of my memories of our two incredible canoe voyages on Lake Superior fifty years ago have remained clear and vivid. These trips were made to fulfill a dream of the Canadian Camping Association and its provincial affiliates. The dream was to undertake a series of geo-

graphically, but not necessarily temporally connected, self-sustained canoe voyages across Canada to celebrate the nation's centennial birthday. The trips were to be made by youth camps using older campers supervised by canoe tripping staff. Each camp was assigned a section to complete sometime during the summer of 1967.



*Launching canoes on the Kaministiquia River, Fort William (now Thunder Bay)*

Understandably, no youth camp came forward to volunteer to paddle the huge and dangerous Lake Superior section. So Kirk Wipper, owner of Camp Kandalore, volunteered to sponsor the completion of this section using Camp Kandalore staff alumni. He offered the loan of two Chestnut twenty-five-foot wood-canvas canoes, truck and trailer, camping gear and food to Nor'westers willing to undertake this task. Nor'westers were Camp Kandalore staff alumni who had a special interest and expertise in canoe tripping and woodsmanship. Any shortfall of Nor'wester volunteers was to be made up by interested and suitably skilled Camp Kandalore staff who could be made surplus to the camp operation close to the end of August. These staff had to be willing to stay beyond their camp contracts to complete the trip. After the trip, Kirk was to estimate the food costs per person. Participants were asked to pay this amount as well as cover their own food purchases while in transit on the roads.

It is unlikely that Kirk Wipper looked at a map to accurately estimate the true magnitude of the undertaking before making his commitment to the Canadian Camping Association. By early August most of the participants had been selected. At this time, I reconfirmed my commitment to the trip, and Kirk asked

me to look after its navigational aspects. I was provided with the appropriate hydrographic maps in duplicate. However, there was a small but not insurmountable glitch. No detailed map covering the area south of Batchawana Bay had been purchased. With these maps, I plotted a reasonable route and where possible, a more protected route in the event of stormy weather. After calculating the total distances for both, I concluded that the completion of the trip was almost impossible within the allocated time even with the best possible weather. Our starting date had been left much too late because most of the participants would have to return for the start of school. This limited the number of days that could be spent paddling on Lake Superior to complete the trip. When informed of this fact, Kirk's response was, "We have an obligation, men, do the best you can!"

I proceeded to make a waterproof map canister that would store a very large roll of maps. This was made from a heavy cardboard tube closed on the ends with wood plugs. One plug was permanently held in place with copper nails. I prepared a paper listing of the distances for dozens of waypoints for both an inner and outer passage through the islands and across bays. This paper was glued to the outside of the tube to facilitate rapid distance cal-

culations. The storage canister was then given several coats of varnish to make it waterproof. While the maps were in use in both canoes, they were carried separate from the canister and protected by placement in a clear plastic bag.

During the previous summer, a small group of Nor'westers had volunteered to study what equipment and supplies would be needed to make the trip. In September of 1966 my younger and late brother, Rod Macdonald, wrote the Federal Department of Fisheries to obtain more information about canoe travel on Lake Superior and the schedule and identification of inflowing rivers to be treated with lampricide. In November, the Department wrote back that the lampricide applications were entirely weather-dependent so that application dates and locations could not be accurately determined in advance. However, they did name Eric Morse of Larumac, Quebec and John Mitchell of Toronto as sources for Lake Superior canoeing information. They also suggested that we could tie into three local events if we were to reach Sault Ste. Marie between late June and mid-July.

During the winter, Sandy Keith wrote some detailed notes on a suggested list of camping items. Interestingly he suggested that we take walkie-talkies with a range of at least 50 miles, flares and a directional-finding device like those that were starting to be carried on some light aircraft. Unfortunately, in 1967 these electronic devices would have been difficult to acquire, so no further investigation was made. Sandy provided a series of drawings illustrating several configurations of paddlers and equipment in the canoes assuming that we would be traveling with six persons in each canoe. Sandy also included drawings of several canoe-sailing methods for both a single canoe and a pair of canoes lashed together on pole spreaders to form a catamaran.

We also received some copied memos and reports about the proposed federally and provincially sponsored voyageur canoe race and pageant from the Centennial Commission. The proposed race was to start at Rocky Mountain House, Alberta and end at the Expo 67 site in Montreal, Quebec. Eight provinces and two territories each provided a racing team. According to Norm Crerar, who



captained the Manitoba team, the event was originally conceived by Gene Rheume of Flin Flon in 1963 as a race from Edmonton to Montreal using two-man canoe teams and 100 paddlers. In 1964 a proposal for this race was drafted by Norm Tyson of Flin Flon and sent to the Centennial Commission. Under the guidance of Arnie Charbonneaux of the Centennial Commission, this event soon morphed into a community-based voyageur canoe pageant as well as a race in larger canoes.

The Commission was concerned about canoe safety on Lake Winnipeg and Lake Superior. The problem with Lake Winnipeg was solved by rerouting the race through Lake Manitoba. The canoes would be portaged from Delta 30 kilometers to Portage La Prairie for a descent of the Assiniboine River. This new route completely avoided the most dangerous portions of Lake Winnipeg. (The Quebec and Alberta teams actually portaged this distance in four hours with the canoes on their shoulders while the others used carts and wagons.)

However, Lake Superior could not be circumvented because it was an essential component of the voyageur route. Traditionally the voyageurs had used much larger, 36-foot canots de maitre for paddling on Lake Superior. The problem was that almost no information could be found on paddling Lake Superior since no long-distance canoe trips had been undertaken on the lake since the fur trade era. Eric Morse and his wife Pamela had paddled a portion of the Lake Superior route during 1960 and were seemingly the only ones that had traveled any great distance by canoe on this lake in the modern era. For this reason, exploratory surveys were undertaken for much of the route including Lake Superior during the summer of 1965.

The Centennial Commission had Commodore Carl Monk, an Ontario conservation officer, and crew undertake a trial survey run in 1965 from Lake of the Woods to North Bay. However, they had to terminate the trip at Blind River due to stormy weather. On Lake Superior, they were accompanied by R.C.M.P. patrol boats for most of the route and were occasionally overflown by Ontario government aircraft to ensure their safety. Carl Monk, who worked for the Ontario

Department of Lands and Forests, had grown up in the west Lake Nipissing area of Ontario in a fishing, hunting and trapping family. Carl's canoeing mentor was Len Cote of Sturgeon Falls, a famous dogsled musher who was the old-time game warden of the Nipissing Crown Game Preserve, Marten River, Ontario. Years later Carl Monk, along with Jerome Knap, wrote the book *The Complete Guide to Canoeing*. Carl was placed on paid leave to work for the Centennial Commission. His transfer was facilitated by Deputy Minister of the Department of Lands and Forests G.H.U. "Terk" Bailey who was an avid wilderness canoeist and a member of Eric Morse's canoe group. Some of Eric's other members included Eliot Roger, Sigurd Olsen, Omand Solandt, Blair Fraser and Pierre Trudeau. Lands and Forests staff were directed by "Terk" to provide blanket support to the Centennial Commission and its paddlers for any undertakings in the province of Ontario. One of the key pieces of information that we learned from Carl's report was that the water off several points and headlands on Lake Superior could become dangerously choppy from reflected

waves and therefore had to be given an unusually wide berth.

Carl was provided with a "Nestable" canoe for his route survey run in 1965. This was a group-paddling canoe manufactured by the Chestnut Canoe Company of Fredericton, New Brunswick. The canoe had a length of 19 feet, beam of 51 inches and a depth of 19 inches. All commodores agreed that this canoe design had to be improved and lengthened for training runs with provincial racing team participants in 1966. So the Chestnut Canoe Company embarked on a project to build 10 larger canoes with high ends, imitating the style of the old voyageur canoes for the Centennial Commission. These canoes were built over an old, modified 25-foot, double-end freight canoe form that the Chestnut Canoe Company kept in storage. The depth of the freight canoe was reduced and the ends were altered to produce a bow and stern typical of voyageur canoes. The canoe canvas was painted to look like birchbark although the light pink-brown colour failed to provide an accurate imitation. As in the days of the voyageurs, the canoe ends were painted white to serve as backgrounds for crests



Heading out on the Mission River to cross Thunder Bay

and logos. These “Centennial” canoes were 25 feet long, 51 inches wide, 19 inches deep and weighed 235 lbs. dry. Between August 6 and 15, 1966, the provincial racing crews paddled these new wood-canvas canoes down the Fraser River from Fort Ste. James and across Georgia Strait to Victoria. Between August 23 and 30, a second trip was taken by the same group of paddlers and canoes from Lachine through Lake Champlain and down the Hudson River to the Statue of Liberty.

After trial runs in the summer of 1966, the Centennial Commission opted for fiberglass versions of the Chestnut Centennial Canoes to be manufactured by Moisie Cadorette at Grand Mere, north of Three Rivers, Quebec so they could withstand tougher use. The five seats in the Chestnut Centennial canoes were weak, too low, and not designed for six paddlers shifting paddling sides. The Cadorette canoes came with two seats and four benches, so that all six paddlers had their own seat. This facilitated the rapid shifting of paddling sides for racing. However, these sturdy fiberglass canoes were much heavier (around 400 lbs.) for portaging. Their benches limited the space for carrying a sizeable cargo needed for food and camping gear. This problem was solved by limiting each paddler to a small personal pack and by carrying the rest of the gear either in support

vehicles or in boats.

After committing to fiberglass canoes, the Centennial Commission declared its wood-canvas Chestnut Centennial canoes surplus. Kirk Wipper, ever the opportunist when it came to canoes, acquired a pair of these surplus Centennial Canoes. During the summer of 1967, they were used by senior Camp Kandalore boys to cover a portion of the Centennial canoe route between Fort Francis and the Winnipeg Y.M.C.A. Camp Stephens on Lake of the Woods. After this event, these canoes were used on our Lake Superior adventure.

The seat arrangement in the wood-canvas Chestnut Centennial canoes proved unsatisfactory for canoe trips because there was no place to store large canoe packs loaded with food and camping gear. For this reason, the fifth seat at midships was removed to provide the necessary space. The low, recessed seats with the struts were an annoyance when baggage had to be stored under them.

It was recognized that six paddlers and full equipment would be a serious overload for these canoes in rough conditions on Lake Superior. While some of the crew members wanted the crew number reduced to four to lighten the canoes and make it easier to change paddling sides, Kirk Wipper was insistent on crews of five with two of the crew paddling side by side ahead of the sternsman. It was al-

ready known that Rod McLeod would likely have to leave part way through the trip. Therefore, part of Kirk’s rationale might have been that with a crew of five, there would be less impact on the forward progress of the trip if a couple of paddlers had to leave. There would be no need to wait for replacement paddlers. However, Kirk assured us that there would be replacements waiting if they were ever needed.

Paul Reynolds did the menu and most of the food packing. During this process it became apparent that some of the food should be cached part way along the route to lessen the load in the canoes. Wooden storage crates were constructed for this purpose. After a quick lesson from Charlie Haultain on how to use the back of a heated frying pan to steam out wet canoe canvas to make a good am-broid repair to rips, we were ready to start our trip. A brief ceremony was held with the crew and Camp Kandalore campers the night prior to leaving.

With a careful read of the following text, you will come to realize that 50 years ago we lived in a simpler and more self-reliant era. Back then, the Trans-Canada Highway along the north shore of Lake Superior had just been opened in 1960 so there was smooth pavement but very little tourist infrastructure, including gas stations. There were no cell or satellite phones, no G.P.S., no P.F.D.s, no reliable weather forecasts, no vehicle seat belts, no closed-cell foam pads or thermarests, no broad-spectrum credit cards or debit cards and no canoe splash covers. A canoe trip on Superior today could be made be much more easily and safely.

### **The Road Trip to Fort William**

We needed to proceed as quickly as possible, if we were going to have enough time on Lake Superior to complete this trip. The plan was to place the two Centennial canoes one over the other on a specially-made trailer. This trailer was to be towed behind one of the camp’s trucks carrying all the crew, food and equipment. The tow vehicle was a worn-out G.M. suburban school bus (a low-sided panel truck) that still retained its original yellow paint with a four-forward-and-reverse floor gear shift. Both the truck and trailer had been used on the earlier Fort Francis-Kenora expedition. The ca-



*Our Egyptian cotton Kandalwood Tents pitched on the tip of Thunder Cape*



noes and most of the supplies were loaded the day prior. Arrangements were made to sacrifice sleep and arise at 3:15 a.m., load the remainder of the gear, eat breakfast and go.

Unfortunately, the truck would not start so we had to push it to a position where Gord Day could put a battery charger on it. This delayed our departure until shortly after after 6:00 a.m. The plan was to rendezvous with Dave Purdon and Rod McLeod, who were coming up Hwy. 69 behind us by car and would hopefully overtake us somewhere on Hwy. 17, before we arrived at Sault Ste. Marie. Our canoes were so distinctive that they would be almost impossible to miss even at stops – as long as the trailer was kept within sight of the highway. Both Dave and Rod were familiar with the canoes, having paddled in one of them for some publicity photos at Camp Kandalore a few weeks earlier.

The day was cool and dull. We encountered a heavy rainstorm on Hwy. 11 at Powassan Ridge, but the sun came out at North Bay. At the junction of Hwy. 11 and 17 north of town at the stoplights, we encountered a huge crowd of stranded teenage hitchhikers returning from Expo 67. Many were sleeping in the ditches. However, most were standing out on the highways, carrying signs for many points west, including far-away locations such as Victoria B.C. and Whitehorse Y.T. Dozens were also still heading east.

The city limits of Sudbury were reached by 11:00 a.m. when just opposite the Sorrento Hotel, part of the truck's clutch assembly fell out onto the highway. We walked to the nearest garage, and the mechanic drove out to look at it. After a quick check, he told us that he would not touch it. Our driver Dave Merrifield had the truck with trailer still attached towed to Monahan's Garage in Copper Cliff west of Sudbury. We were told that this garage had the best capability of making a timely repair of any garage in the Sudbury area. This was fortunate because the garage was located directly on Hwy. 17 and west of the Hwy. 69 and 17 junction, allowing Dave Purdon and Rod McLeod to spot our distinctive canoes on the trailer that we left parked close to the edge of the highway.

The crew was concerned about



*Crossing the mouth of Black Bay*

whether we had enough cash to cover the secondary expenses due to mechanical breakdown. In those days there were only gas cards, so to save cash, the crew walked the six miles across Sudbury to the garage in Copper Cliff. Fortunately, shortly after our arrival, Dave and Rod spotted our canoes and made a successful connection.

We made long-distance, collect phone calls to Camp Kandalore to get authorization for the vehicle repair and to work out some mutually agreeable scheme with the garage for payment as this was Saturday and all the banks in Sudbury were closed.

The garage made long-distance phone calls to Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay and Toronto with the hope of receiving clutch parts by train or bus. However, not a single part was available without the expensive option of buying the entire clutch assembly.

With this discouraging news, we drove to the railway stations in Sudbury to see if it was feasible to travel to Fort William by railway. (Years later Fort William and Port Arthur were amalgamated to create the city of Thunder Bay). That night, the crew tried to get some sleep in the back of a fruit truck, while a second shift of mechanics continued to work on the truck through the night. After two hot days without refrig-

eration, the steaks we carried were starting to turn green on the surface. Because the crew was running into considerable unplanned personal expense, we asked the owner to borrow his Coleman stove to cook our steaks and voluntarily swept his pavement and on-ramps for his trouble. And to pass the time of day, the crew also made visits to view the "Big Nickel", a go-cart track, and some railway construction on the opposite side of the highway.

In a last-ditch effort to repair the clutch, a machinist made a replacement for the broken part Sunday evening and then our mechanic re-assembled the clutch. Mr. Monahan, the garage owner, was quite concerned about our trip and provided extraordinary service to help us get underway again. The trial run was a success, but the truck had to be taken back to the garage to straighten the steering rods that had been bent by the careless tow truck operator. We loaded the truck and reconnected the trailer, but the engine would not start, due to a battery so weak that it would only hold a charge for a short period. With all of the crew pushing both the truck and trailer we managed to jump-start the motor to get underway again at midnight Sunday.

This truck failure had cost us two days of time, placing completion of our Lake Superior trip in jeopardy. We were very



Fishing Camp, "Marion G"

tired and facing an all-night drive. Apart from the truck repair and towing expenses, our aggregate cash had been reduced by more than \$100 – in those days a lot of money. We left Copper Cliff in a somber mood and frustrated about the poor condition of the truck, including its questionable tires. Dave and Rod traveled behind the truck with two additional persons in the car, then at around 3 a.m., they went ahead at Thessalon to drop off the car in Sault Ste. Marie. A short time later, in a graveled construction zone near Desbarats, the main beam of the trailer snapped in half. Since the break was behind the safety chains, the trailer came loose on the highway in a great shower of sparks and nearly tipped over. Fortunately, nobody was coming in the opposite direction. The trailer then veered in another direction and finally came to rest at the very edge of a steep embankment. If the trailer had rolled over the edge, the canoes and trailer would have been destroyed. While some of the crew directed the traffic around the site with flashlights, the rest lashed up the trailer beam back together again with rope and pieces of wood. We repaired the electrical wire for the tail-lights that was ripped out, and we were underway again at 4 a.m.

On arrival at Sault Ste. Marie we picked up the remainder of the crew from

the car and made arrangements to store the truck and trailer in the O.P.P. parking lot at the north end of the city. After a short wait at the welders until they opened in the morning, we made arrangements to have the main beam re-welded and strengthened while we had breakfast.

Dave Merrifield was now so tired that he could not drive further. Rod McLeod took over. There were now eleven people and additional equipment crammed in the truck, plus all our food and gear. The two truck seats had capacity for only seven persons. The remaining four persons sat at the back, crammed on home-made wooden side-benches with the food and equipment piled in the back up to two feet from the truck roof! The truck was now so overloaded, that all the long, steep grades had to be climbed in the second of four forward gears. Rod had to pull off the highway many times to let a long parade of cars pass. On the way west we made a short side trip to examine Marathon Harbour and to drop off several boxes of crated food at the local O.P.P. office to reduce the load carried in the canoes. The additional space created in the truck made the ride easier beyond Marathon for those in the rear. Marathon was selected as a re-supply point because when paddling eastward from Marathon, there was no further road access for many days of canoe travel.

Leaving Marathon, an acrid smell of burning rubber and white smoke came up through the truck floor around the gearshift. The driver quickly stopped the truck and poured several cups of coffee through the hole surrounding the gearshift. This may have helped cool the overheated transmission, but little else. Shortly thereafter, we discovered that a very tired Rod had accidentally left the truck emergency brake on and the smoke soon dissipated. At this point Dave Merrifield took over again, being somewhat rested by a short sleep.

The welding on the upper crossbars of the trailer broke loose and tipped the upper canoe on its side just west of Schreiber. These crossbars proved difficult to lash back into position with rope. However, after a considerable delay, we made a successful trailer repair and were on the road again.

By chance, we met a friendly Mr. Earl when we both stopped at a snack bar just short of Nipigon. Mr. Earl would play an important role later in the trip.

After a long, hard drive we finally made it to Port Arthur by 9 p.m. and had a glimpse of the Sleeping Giant formation and Thunder Bay in the ensuing darkness. We were told that all the accommodations were booked around Port Arthur and Fort William due to Expo 67, so we headed out to Kakabeka Falls Provincial Park to camp. On arrival we found that the park staff had gone home for the night and a quick check of the campground proved that it was full. We quickly unloaded the trailer and equipment in the picnic area adjacent to the falls and drove back to the town of Kakabeka Falls for some dinner. We arrived at the restaurant just before it closed at midnight. This was the best meal that we had had in several days. By the time we returned to the park, we were too tired to set up tents, so some of us slept in the truck while the rest slept on picnic tables under clear skies. It was cold that night, and by first light there was some frost on the grass. We arose at 7:30 a.m. and had a quick look at the falls and the Kaministiquia River that we would be paddling later that day.

After breakfast, we made several phone calls from the town of Kakabeka Falls, including one to the Department of Transport to notify the lighthouse keep-



ers that our trip on Lake Superior would be underway shortly. Other calls were to local newspapers and to the C.B.C. to arrange a television interview at our embarkation point adjacent to the New Vickers Road Bridge. Returning to Fort William, we drove out on the delta to gauge the height of the waves and strength of the wind for our crossing of Thunder Bay. We then worked out our seating arrangements and pack placements so that we would appear organized in front of the TV camera. After a lunch of sandwiches, Rod gave a good TV interview on the purpose and details of our trip. Our departure down the Mission River channel of the Kaministiquia River delta was included in the filming. Dave Merrifield left with the truck and trailer to obtain a new battery, to re-weld the trailer crossbars and to reposition the truck and trailer at the O.P.P. parking lot in Sault Ste. Marie. From there, he took buses to Huntsville and obtained a staff pick-up ride back to Camp Kandalore.

### **Our First Trip on Lake Superior**

We departed at 1:30 p.m., crossed the main channel of the Kaministiquia River and paddled one and a half miles down the Mission River to its mouth. As would be expected, this was largely an industrial area with low, flat, flood-prone banks but high enough to hide any view of Lake Superior.

One canoe was sterned by Rod McLeod (paddling left) with Bob James (paddling left) and Bruce Grantier (paddling right) at the quarter, Andy Bain (paddling left) at three quarters and Peter Mills (paddling right) in the bow.

The other canoe was sterned by Dave Purdon (paddling left), with John Sparks (paddling left) and Jim Stockbridge (paddling right) at the quarter, Craig Macdonald (paddling left) at three quarters and Paul Reynolds (paddling right) in the bow.

We encountered a headwind as we passed the breakwall of the booming grounds at the mouth of the Mission River. The tip of Thunder Cape on the other side of Thunder Bay was our destination. Fortunately the afternoon was sunny with no fog.

We used the foot of the Sleeping Giant for navigation because our true destination was below the horizon for

quite some distance while crossing the bay.

It was likely that once we got further out in the bay the wind direction was going to shift as we became more exposed to the main body of Lake Superior. It would have been a mistake to head directly for the Welcome Islands because it would have placed us more broadside to the waves when crossing the most exposed portion of the bay. In the fair weather we were having, we could expect the waves to build to their maximum between 2 and 4 p.m. Therefore, we wisely made our crossing in a sweeping arc of approximately eighteen miles to the north of Pie Island, so that we could paddle downwind with the largest waves. The crossing took over four hours. Believe me, there were many rearward glances at the huge whitecaps that continued to build behind us. We all hoped the good weather would hold for the crossing. At this early stage in the trip, given the weight of our load, we really did not know yet how much rough water these canoes could handle.

During this first big crossing, we experienced the disadvantage of having five paddlers in the canoe. Without leaning out over the gunwales, the quarter paddlers had to stagger themselves on the seat, one forward and one further back to

avoid interfering with each other's paddling. Safely switching paddling sides in heavy seas was almost impossible with the configuration of packs and five people in the canoes. Therefore, in rough water we had to resign ourselves to paddling long distances on one side without relief.

Crossing Thunder Bay, Rod McLeod's crew timed themselves at 28 strokes per minute while Dave Purdon's canoe sustained 34 strokes per minute. Eventually Rod's stepped up their pace to around 33 strokes per minute.

Thunder Bay was the only place on Lake Superior where we had to cross a major shipping lane. My fear was that we would encounter the captain of a big freighter who lacked the common sense to slow down and reduce his ship's wake. Fortunately no ships crossed our path and we saw very few boats of any size during the entire trip.

The massive 800-foot-high cliffs of the Sleeping Giant are the highest in Ontario and were certainly impressive when we viewed them from the water. Dave Purdon spotted an eagle soaring above the cliffs the following morning. Since the surf was too heavy to land amongst the large stones on the windward side of the point, we paddled around to the backside for a safer landing



*Lunch on Clark Island*

to our campsite on the very tip of Thunder Cape. The view across Thunder Bay that evening was impressive with the twinkling lights of Port Arthur and Fort William and the silhouette of Mount MacKay and the Nor'westers in the background.

That night we enjoyed a comfortable and much-needed sleep with the sound of surf pounding on the beach. A brisk southeast wind sprang up at 2:30 a.m., but by dawn the wind had died down. However, canoe loading that morning was difficult due to the swells created by this wind. While leaving, Dave's canoe was thrown back on a rock. Fortunately, the blow was squarely on the keel with no damage, and the canoe lifted off with the next incoming wave. From here we paddled straight out to the lighthouse on Trowbridge Island to ensure that the three additional lighthouse keepers along our route would look for our passage. The lighthouse keeper's wife served our crew crumpets and tea while I scaled a small cliff to obtain spruce poles for our sail. These poles also proved useful for steadying the canoes and keeping them in position while loading and unloading.

Our route next took us past the famous "Silver Islet" mine, discovered in 1868 by Thomas MacFarlane. The island was barely 100 feet in any direction and its highest point was only about eight feet above the water. Extensive crib work was built to prevent the waves from completely washing over the island and flooding the mine's shaft. Due to the efforts of mining engineer W.B. Frue, Silver Islet became one of the world's richest silver mines, producing over a half a million dollars in one year. All that was left when we passed was a pile of broken rock rubble and an old stone chimney.

We had lunch on Clarke Island out in the middle of Black Bay. The rocks that form the island have been pushed up vertically and are fractured by weathering into large, square blocks. The stone itself was quite attractive and consisted of broken, angular bits of stone trapped within larger stone (breccia). The higher rock masses were "blanched" with the droppings of herring gulls. Desiccated bodies of dead gulls lay strewn about, detracting from the aesthetic quality of

lunch and the surrounding beautiful scenery.

During the crossing of Black Bay, Rod McLeod's group veered strongly to the left on their own course adjacent to Hardscrabble Island. According to their interpretation of the map, they were certain that our canoe was headed wrongly. After finding themselves traveling up a blind bay on Edward Island, they finally altered their course and rejoined our canoe that had been waiting for them. The horizon became increasingly hazy, making navigation even more difficult past Edward Island. It took some time to convince some of Rod's crew that we were heading to the adjacent mainland and not to a group of isolated islands. A mistake here would have sent the canoes down Black Bay and potentially on a futile side trip of nearly 60 miles. Rod's canoe stayed close at hand for the rest of the trip, although they questioned my course for the next two days. Map orientations and route explanations had to be given at almost every rest stop as we threaded our way through a myriad of islands.

In the middle of Magnet Channel, Dave Purdon's arm began to hurt badly due to dealing with big waves coming in at an oblique angle. Part of the problem was that neither steersman was given a suitable "long-shafted" stern paddle for controlling the 25-foot canoes. The other problem was that we could not easily switch paddling sides to relieve arm strain. With five people in a canoe, the load placement had to be changed with each shift to maintain adequate canoe balance. To solve the problem, John Sparks took the stern and Dave switched with Jim Stockbridge to paddle on the right-hand side of the canoe.

All this switching did not turn out well because John Sparks had great difficulty steering the canoe with his short paddle. It took the combined efforts of John "jaying" and Dave "drawing and sweeping" on the other side to keep the canoe headed down on the big waves and across on the smaller ones. Rod McLeod's canoe was not quite as heavily loaded and fared much better. For the first time they took the lead and for a long while were able to rest one of their crew continuously without being overtaken.

The weather deteriorated. It was now dull and threatening rain. For the night, we stayed on Magnet Island at an outpost camp belonging to a commercial fishing operation based in Dorion at the head of Black Bay. The manager told us stories of a group who was trying to retrace Alexander Mackenzie's route and hadn't eaten in several days. When he gave them some cooked fish, they savagely downed it and asked for more. He also talked about the Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant and the canoes that had passed through a month earlier.

We obtained a good sleep in his cabins although we could not sleep in the beds because they were much too short. These people were tiny and even their chairs, tables and cabin doors were small. The camp's fishing boat was typical of those seen at Port Dover or Killarney. It was completely covered to prevent large waves from crashing in and sinking the boat. During the night it rained heavily and remained dull and cold until we left the Lamb Island lighthouse late the following day.

This area displayed a marked transition in flora. Back in Thunder Bay, an abundance of deciduous trees indicated a milder climate. Here the great boreal forest sweeps down right to the shores of Lake Superior. Many species of ferns and orchids can be found here, including the rare Bog Adder's Mouth. Many types of liverworts are located in the "tundra-like" biomes that checker this area.

The Arctic alpiners Bistort and False Asphodel are found growing on the windswept sides of islands where the climate is too tough for many other plants. Primula, juniper and wild chives are also present.

The windward sides of these islands can only support stunted balsam fir and black spruce. Their trunks were coated in lichens, and their scraggly branches were hung with clumps of long-stranded beard moss.

Due to worsening visibility, we were barely able to make out our route. From Tunnel Island, our course was sighted between Swede and Gourdeau Islands, by recognizing very slight shifts in hue on the horizon as various landforms. As we passed into more wave protection from islands, we were able to sail from Rex Island almost to Black's Wharf. This was



an unoccupied commercial fishing camp and where we stopped for lunch.

That morning we passed through the agonic line where there is no magnetic declination. A short distance later, we paddled over some areas of extreme magnetic disturbance. A few of our crew had fun with their compasses. However, it should be noted that the compass was never used for navigation during the entire trip.

Heading out across Roche Debout Channel, we again encountered very large swells, this time broadside and to our bow. We took some photos showing only heads of the paddlers in the other canoe, while the rest was hidden behind the crests of these large swells. Many paddlers in both canoes started to feel slightly seasick, especially if they lay on their backs during rest stops. This was due to the lateral pitching combined with the rising and falling of the canoe with the passage of each swell. Also, many complained of sore lower backs from the rocking action of the canoes. This was partially relieved by placing keyhole life jackets on the canoe seats to elevate one's position and reduce the twist in one's back while reaching over the gunwale to paddle.

It was necessary to swing way out in the lake around Roche Debout and Agate Points to avoid the steep waves piling into the shallow water and breaking over the shoals. Along the shoreline of this area, we saw many wave-cut caves.

We reached Lamb Island by late afternoon, fighting a headwind all the way. About half an hour earlier, a pulp tugboat owned by the Saint Lawrence Corp., Nipigon, swung in close to the canoes to take a movie of us. The action of turning the boat in toward us heightened their wake and, along with the wind-driven waves, nearly swamped us. This was the only large boat that we saw on the lake during the entire trip.

The Lamb Island lighthouse keeper, Angus MacDonald from Nova Scotia, had watched us arrive with his high-power telescope. The unusual head flop that Andy Bain made with each paddle stroke caused Angus some concern. At the appropriate moment, Angus quietly asked a group of us, in a serious tone, whether Andy was O.K. because in the telescope it looked as if Andy was close

to his last paddle stroke and might expire!

Angus invited us in for tea and told us that he had seen our departure on C.B.C. television. We talked to him about the countercurrent we had been paddling against. He said that it was even worse opposite the south side of Saint Ignace Island and that scientists had been out studying another current between Owl and Paradise islands that reverses every five minutes. Angus advised us to select our rough-water route on the north side of Saint Ignace Island. This would avoid most of the current and the possibility of being held up for as much as three days by a storm if we took the more exposed south side of the island. Angus also advised us to go between Moss Island and the western shore of Nipigon Strait as the lake was getting quite rough. Angus gave his home province's Centennial Nova Scotian crew a three-hour lead with the same advice. The current adjacent Moss Island was strong enough to bend the weeds. Angus also radioed the Battle Island Lighthouse informing them that we would be taking the inside passage and therefore not to look for us.

Before we departed, Angus showed us the wharf that he had built by himself with just an axe. The logs were squared and dovetailed to fit perfectly. The timber was cut from the island and moved by water. Lifting the timbers into place must have taken massive strength. However, I have neglected to tell you that Angus was one of the largest men that I have ever met. His massive arms were larger than my two legs put together.

We camped that night below a navigational beacon on the west side of Nipigon Strait. Peter Mills had been in deteriorating health. Long fits of coughing during the night made it impossible for him to get a restful sleep. The congestion seemed to be deep within his lungs. I suggested that he get out of the tent and try sleeping outside. Here, he was better able to catch his breath, but he was still getting far less than an adequate rest.

We arose at 5:30 a.m. to a screaming tailwind. After breakfast, we prepared to sail because the strait was relatively narrow and protected from the main body of Lake Superior and its huge waves. Loading canoes in this high wind was difficult. Long poles had to be used by bow-

men to prevent the canoes from sweeping around with the wind. The landing area was a long, sloping rock. To prevent people from sliding into the water we placed large clumps of moss on the wave-dampened portion of this slippery rock to improve traction. We used poles to create a catamaran with the two canoes. A 12'x12' Egyptian cotton tarpaulin served as a sail. This tarp was tied between two vertical masts placed in separate canoes. Under the sail, the canoes moved at a tremendous clip until the wind suddenly stopped just five minutes after finally getting underway. As the haze and fog cleared, it became apparent that a powerful thunderstorm was approaching. We quickly dropped the masts, and the canoes were pulled together so that the sail could form a tent over the canoes. A drenching downpour followed with flashes of lightning on all sides. It was uncomfortable being so far out on water and exposed to lightning, but there was nothing that could be done to improve our situation.

After the worst of the storm, the rain slowed down to a drizzle. I spotted a large bull moose, standing in water and feeding on weeds along the western shore. He did a few dives before spotting us and retreating to shore. Although within a week or so of the first rut, this bull was unresponsive to my female moose-call imitations. Andy Bain made an unprintable joke about my efforts that gave everybody a good laugh.

When we reached Pointe du Gourgane, the wind picked up again so that we could sail for a few minutes. However, when we entered Nipigon Bay, the wind died and then turned against us. The fog lifted enough that we could make out the dim profile of Vert Island to the north. By Caribou Point, a very strong east wind was blowing. Having paddled hard against this wind and making almost no progress, we crabbed the canoes sideways into shore for shelter just short of Cape Nano.

After a lunch of sandwiches, we waited for the wind to drop and collected a few agates on the beach. Beaches in this area of Lake Superior have a type of agate found nowhere else except in Australia. The lighthouse keeper Angus MacDonald on Lamb Island had a profitable side-business of polishing these agates and selling them to dealers.



*Sailing, 3rd day, Swede Island*

Finally, the headwind died down and we set out on a very long paddle, paralleling the north sides of Saint Ignace and Simpson Islands. Although foggy, the weather remained calm for the most part. Toward the end of the day the fog lifted enough to reveal a fantastic “chandelier” sky. Pleasant heat waves pouring off Saint Ignace Island occasionally buffeted us. While paddling over the cold water of Lake Superior, the air temperatures had been in the high 40’s and low 50’s F. These warm drafts were at least 70 degrees F.

The shoreline was almost featureless and locating our position was made difficult by local shore fogs caused by the interaction of the cold air above the water and the warm air over the land. We never saw the communities of Red Rock or Nipigon, nor most of the north shore of the channel. We stopped around sunset on Simpson Island for dinner.

The western sky gave the appearance of an incoming storm that would have left us stranded for at least a day on an island without a good place to camp. We decided to keep paddling until we found a better location to stop for the night. This venture was potentially the most

dangerous of the trip. We distributed flashlights amongst the canoes because soon we would be paddling in the dark. The combination of a thick fog and heavy overcast made the night as black as coal. A strong surge from Simpson Channel was drifting us sideways while two sets of light swells were coming from Simpson and Steamboat Channels. We headed more towards Salter Island than originally planned to minimize our lateral drift, thereby keeping us clear of Barwiss Rock. The Barwiss Rock beacon was lost in the fog and never seen. We were navigating through the black of night solely by the direction of the swells. The crews remained silent so both sternsmen could hear any necessary course corrections. We also reduced our paddling speed to about three quarters of what it had been before dark. This silence allowed us to hear if any waves were crashing over unseen shoals should we stray off course.

Mid-channel our crew got a brief scare, when unexpectedly our canoe struck an unseen pulp log that thudded several times along our keel line. Shortly after warning Rod McLeod’s canoe to watch for possible pulp logs, they spot-

ted one in the dark directly in front of their canoe. Fortunately, they had just enough time to steer around it. Back then twelve-foot pulp logs were still being towed in large booms to pulp mills. Some would escape and become serious navigation hazards. Now, all pulp and sawlogs are transported to the mills by truck.

After about two hours, a breeze arose creating small whitecaps. What with the increased wind and wave height, it became apparent that landing amidst rocky shoals to search for a potential campsite in the dark would be foolish. Rod’s canoe stayed quite close behind ours for the rest of our night paddle.

When the flash of the Rosspoint Point Beacon eventually became visible in the fog, we headed directly for it instead of relying on the swells for guidance. After about an hour of paddling, the light from the Rosspoint Point Beacon suddenly kept jumping to the right. This was truly alarming. At first we thought the canoes were turning to the left, pushed by obliquely approaching waves between the long intervals of flashes. But, we soon realized that the fog had lifted to reveal a second flashing beacon on a small, unnamed island further on that was perfectly out of phase and flashing with the same interval as the Rosspoint Point Beacon. With this understanding, we ignored the Rosspoint Point Beacon and steered towards the more southern beacon to keep clear of the shoals along the north side of the channel.

We reached the Rosspoint wharf just before midnight. It had been raining for some time, so we decided to stay at the Rosspoint Hotel up on the hill to the west rather than pitch tents on the beach. While unloading and rolling over our canoes on the beach to keep out the rainwater, we were met by a local fishing boat captain who was surprised by our arrival. He had brought his own boat in from Superior Shoal several hours earlier because it was too rough! He was relieved when we told him we had followed Angus MacDonald’s advice and paddled on the north side of Saint Ignace Island.

After cooking our own breakfast in the hotel, we departed the following day in unsettled weather. While threading our way through some sandbars between



Nicol Island and the mainland, we encountered a noticeable current flowing west. It was here that Dave Purdon snapped his paddle. This channel no longer exists because a road causeway has been built out to the island. Heading eastward, we encountered a cold headwind and driving rain. When our party paddled out beyond the shoals of Cat Island, a screaming gust of north wind suddenly developed. Immediately, the signal was given to head upwind. Dave managed to get his canoe turned quickly but Rod was not quite as fortunate. Even when paddling as hard as possible, Dave's canoe could only hold even while Rod's canoe was blown slightly backwards. The wind soon abated enough so both canoes could make slow forward progress. However, it took over an hour of exhausting paddling before we reached the shelter of a small island just west of Collingwood Bay for a well-deserved rest. I am quite certain that if we had delayed our turn upwind by even a few minutes, at least one of the canoes would have swamped. After the wind calmed down, a yellow Department of Lands and Forest pontoon piston otter aircraft circled us at low altitude and then flew off. Possibly somebody from Rossport, concerned for our safety, had phoned the nearby provincial air base at Pays Plat, or the pilot had just spotted us and out of curiosity flew around to take a closer look. We will never know the reason for this overflight.

By the time we finished lunch, it was safe to cross the bay to Schreiber Point. It was in this area that Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), a world-famous geologist, found compelling evidence for his theory of continental glaciation. The weather had cleared by the Petits Ecris Islands, where again the lake's countercurrent was quite noticeable, this time as eddies and ripples amongst the rocks rather than bent over weeds. We were concerned about countercurrent because we had not planned for it. This and the frequent headwinds were significantly slowing our forward progress.

That night, we camped on the sand spit of the Aguasabon River (translation — where the fishing net is brought to shore). This river formed an important canoe route connection with Kenogami Lake and James Bay via the Albany

River. The headwaters of the Kenogami River have now been diverted to flow down south through the Aguasabon River to supply additional water for the Chicago Drainage Canal. The beach was deserted except for a small shack set up by scientists from the International Geophysical Year Project to measure the earth's gravity here and at Superior Shoals out in the middle of Lake Superior. One of the scientists told me that they had already determined through this research that the earth was slightly pear-shaped rather than round. For some reason there was very little suitable driftwood on the beach for building fires. To have enough firewood for breakfast, we had to break off armfuls of dead branches from scraggly spruce that were unusually rough on the hands.

After our departure the following morning under clear skies, the wind finally shifted to a steady but gentle tailwind, perfect for sailing. It was a beautiful day and we had a floating lunch five miles offshore from Ashburton Bay while under sail towards Pic Island. We used paddles to pass food around between the "catamaranned" canoes. The uneven roll of the swells was too much for a rigid attachment of the canoes without using a lot more lashed crosspoles to withstand the torque. Our simple solution

was to use only two heavier crosslogs and rest them on the gunwales and laps of the people occupying the quarter and three-quarter positions. Each time the wind stiffened, our 144-square-foot sail propelled us forward at a rate that created a crosswake between the separated canoes higher than the gunwales.

Pic Island is a distinctive landform, rising steeply on all sides to 715 feet above the waters of Lake Superior. It was made well-known to the public by the paintings of Lorne Harris. We first saw Pic Island while off Schreiber Point and it would remain in view for four and a half days, almost to Otter Head. It was frustrating to see this landform hardly change size or appear any closer after hours of paddling. From Pic Island our course took us between the Slyboots Shoals, where the wind died and forced us to paddle the remaining distance to Marathon. We landed at an aircraft dock in Marathon after making an attempt at getting through a log boom amidst choking sulfide fumes and a two-foot-high blob of foam and sludge from the pulp and paper plant. We were then taken by company truck to the recreation centre courtesy of Mr. Earl and the company town of Marathon. The town was run by the Pulp and Paper Division of the Continental Can Company of America.



above - Craig Macdonald, below and from left to right Bruce Grantier, Jim Stockbridge, Bob James, Rod McLeod\*, Paul Reynolds, Peter Mills, Dave Purdon, Andy Bain\*\*, John Sparks\* (\* deceased, \*\* the group lost contact with Andy Bain more than 50 years ago).

In the recreation centre we had a place to shower, swim in a heated pool, prepare our meals and roll out sleeping bags for the night. At supper, we were interviewed by Mr. Earl, who was also the local newspaper reporter for the Port Arthur News Chronicle. As it turned out, Mr. Earl knew Peter Mills' father through the Y.M.C.A. Our food supply, cached at the O.P.P. office out on Highway #17, was retrieved and repacked. We sat out the morning, while Peter Mills was checked out by a doctor. The diagnosis was not good. The doctor said that he probably had bronchitis (later found to be a recurrence of pneumonia). So both Peter and Rod left the trip at this point to take a bus to Sault Ste. Marie. It is interesting to note that the late Dr. Bob Govan, who was a Camp Kandalore canoe trip mentor for both Rod McLeod and me in 1959, ran a medical practice in Marathon a few years later. During the morning Mr. Earl accepted Dave Purdon's broken paddle blade on behalf of the town of Marathon. The blade bore a small scene on the lake with the canoes,

signatures of all the crew and a message of gratitude for our excellent reception.

The second leg of our journey was along the wildest and most inaccessible coast of Lake Superior. The crews were now shuffled. Paul Reynolds could set a consistent stoke in the roughest water, so he was switched to Rod McLeod's canoe to paddle in the bow while the rest of Dave Purdon's crew remained intact. I moved to the bow position, this time paddling on my stronger right side, while John Sparks moved up to the three-quarter position paddling left. Jim Stockbridge stayed at the quarter paddling right and Dave Purdon remained in the stern paddling left. Each person now had his own seat so we could now easily switch sides when it was necessary to provide relief to the arms.

Depending on the direction of wind and wave, sterning these Centennial canoes could be very straining especially without a long-shafted paddle.

After a brief delay for Mr. Earl to photograph us in the canoes, we departed from Marathon around noon. The canoes

were now lighter and noticeably faster. Even with a headwind, we reached Ogilvy Point in record time for lunch. The tip of the point was made up of several low rock islands largely devoid of trees due to the power of storms on Lake Superior. Many of the plants were nestled in small cracks in the rock and were in full bloom despite the lateness of the season. Of particular note were many delicate hare bells with their blue-colored, bell-shaped flowers.

Further on we passed the large sand spit at the mouth of the Pic River. Just upriver lay the ruins of H.B.C. Pic River House. This post serviced much of the north shore of Lake Superior, including the Pic and White Rivers whose canoeable tributaries extend north to the continental divide.

Two miles off Plater Harbour, we encountered our first serious crosschop. Large swells were coming in broadside from the west, while "fresh" breaking waves were being driven over top of the swells by a brisk south wind. Although it was sunny, most of the crew were wearing raincoats to block the cold wind and to prevent being soaked by the splash and spray. Both canoes bounced around out there, and Purdon's canoe being more heavily loaded took four large waves clean over the bow gunwales.

We made camp for the night near Willow River on a beach of basketball-sized boulders. Great care must be taken when landing on a boulder beach like this because large canoe-damaging rocks sometimes lay just below the surface of breaking waves. It was our practice, in surf, to come in to shore on a wave and then let the wave overtake the canoe. After the wave broke, the bowman and the paddler occupying the three-quarter position jumped out of the canoe on opposite sides and grabbed the gunwales to pull the canoe ashore before the next breaker swamped the canoe.

This large boulder terrace did not make for a comfortable sleep even with some evergreen brush placed under our sleeping bags. If taking a canoe trip along the north shore of Lake Superior, one should be forewarned that good campsites with safe landing spots are uncommon. Much of the shoreline is jagged, uneven rock. In a few locations on the Michipicoten Peninsula and along Lake



*First lunch past Marathon*



Superior Park, the shore is sheer cliff to the water. Where the shore is not bedrock, it usually consists of raised cobble terraces which are also poor for camping. The chance of finding small-sized gravel suitable for tent sites is increased by the presence of nearby streams. However, the best camping is on sand beaches. These sand beaches are usually found near the mouths of the larger rivers, so they are relatively rare.

The following morning we departed in fairly calm conditions and took the inside passage around a couple of islands. By Sewell Point a brisk tailwind had arisen so most of the crew wanted to sail to avoid the labour of paddling. The problem was that in front of us, the wind would be coming from an increasingly offshore angle as the shoreline curved to the east. The whitecapping waves behind us looked steadily more menacing. I was strongly opposed to sailing because conditions looked too risky. Dave Purdon and Paul Reynolds shared my concerns. Together we were also the oldest members of the group. Incredibly, this issue was put to a vote and we were defeated 5 to 3. The belief of the majority was that if it got too windy or rough or we started to get blown too far offshore, we could simply take the sail down. However, in our four previous sailing experiences we had always taken this big sail down when we became becalmed and not in a strengthening wind.

We landed the canoes in a narrow rock channel on the windward side of an island just past Sewell Point to cut stringer poles for the catamaran. After experiencing some difficulty in getting out of the channel, we prepared to sail. We then paddled out offshore to begin our sail while the wind steadily increased. What happened during the next fifteen minutes was the closest call to disaster that we had on the first trip.

When the sail was raised, it snapped open with such force that it nearly took down the masts. The canoes surged forward at an alarming rate. We quickly took the sail down and reefed to three quarters and daringly (foolishly) hoisted again. As soon as the reefed sail opened it had to be immediately taken down, this time during a very strong wind gust. In a panic, one of the mast stays was released before the other could be untied. As a result, one



*Falls of the Cascade River*

mast, with sail attached, fell forward into the water between the canoes and its upper end lodged under Dave Purdon's canoe.

At this point things happened so fast that I can't remember the exact details. However, I do remember the stringers failed, the canoes came together and veered off to the left. While the canoes still had forward momentum, the force of the water on the partially submerged sail and mast drove the right gunwale of Bob James' canoe downward to water level and partially locked it against the side of our canoe. Only the quick action of both Bob James and Andy Bain leaning over the high side of their canoe saved the canoe from rolling over. A river of water was now flowing along the top of the lowered gunwale threatening to sink their canoe if it tipped any further. There was also the possibility of the partially-submerged sail plowing water into the canoe because both canoes were still being pushed forward by the strong gust of wind. In the meantime, Bruce Grantier, standing upright on the bilge of the

canoe, managed to yank the sail and mast free from under our canoe, allowing their canoe to roll back up level again.

The poles and sail were now stowed in the canoes and we headed for the closest land. Struggling against a steadily increasing wind, both canoes finally made it to the shelter of a rocky island close to the southern entrance to Oiseau Bay. Landing on the southern tip of this cliff shoreline was difficult. Although in the lee, the big swells coming in from the west were heaving the canoes up and down. We tied keyhole life preservers to the gunwales to prevent the canoes from smashing to pieces. Paul Reynolds and Bruce Grantier scaled the cliff with tether ropes and managed to secure them on a boulder. The crew formed a human chain snaking up the side of the cliff. We took the packs one by one and passed up to the top. With the use of the poles and tether ropes the canoes were then inched along the edge of the cliff and taken out in a gap I had found between the rocks. The terrain on top was so hostile that we could not pitch tents. Instead we rolled the ca-



*Cascade River, Otterhead Bay (a favourite place of Bill Mason)*

noes over parallel to each other. Using the two sailing masts as weights, we stretched the 12'x12' sail between canoes and propped it with paddles to serve as a roof. The sleeping area was uneven but with the use of life preservers, packs and clothing we managed to smooth it somewhat. We looked at the sand beach of Oiseau Bay, just a mile away to the east, as a much better place to camp for the night. However, the water was still rough enough to make relocation an unattractive option.

We had paddled only nine-and-one-half miles from Willow River, making it the shortest day of the trip. The following morning we arose at 5:30 a.m. to relatively calm conditions. The Michipicoten Peninsula is much more exposed with significantly fewer islands for protection than the north shore. Onshore waves have 300 miles of open water to build by wind, so we referred to them as "Duluth Specials". The rugged scenery was beautiful. Up behind English Fishery lies Tip Top Mountain, 2,120 feet above

sea level. At the time of our trip, it was thought to be the highest point in Ontario. The clear weather that we were having since the Aguasabon River at Terrace Bay would continue for the remainder of the trip. However, the nights and early mornings were quite cold. Paddling in any sort of wind during the morning required heavy clothing to stay comfortable.

From here on, Lake Superior's fair-weather wind maximum forced us to change our cycle of travel. The season of fall gales was soon approaching. It was necessary to arise while the stars were shining so we could depart at dawn when it was calm. Each day, it got too rough for travel around noon, so we would land, have a big meal, rest until 4:30 or 5 p.m., then paddle until sunset. The entire crews were now changing sides with each rest and braving seas that would have certainly swamped the earlier five-person crew arrangement. It was now not uncommon to have several successive waves sweep up to the top of the gunwales and trickle over inside the canoe.

Past Sewell Point, all winds were from some rearward quadrant. The great waves that rolled under the canoes were too fast to surf. The bows were lightened so the canoes could break away clean from the waves that were overtaking them. The bowman in these situations did nearly as much steering as the sternsman. He would draw on either side, pulling the bow straight for big waves and then quickly across if the course required it. Staying in one's seat and keeping in stroke was difficult for the bowmen. The cargo was centered in the canoe as much as possible to reduce the bow and stern plunge.

We left the island at Oiseau Bay at dawn and stayed closer to shore, utilizing as many islands and shoals for wave protection as possible. By Triangle Harbour, it was rough and Bob James was having increased difficulty in keeping his canoe under control. The waves were steep and whitecapping on all sides, forcing us off the lake at the beach adjacent to the Cascade River. The waterfall on this river drops directly into Lake Superior and was photographed, painted and popularized by canoeist Bill Mason a number of years after our trip. This beach has been a stopping point for thousands of years. There are signs of countless blackened cooking stones and campfire rings that lie buried in the sand.

Back in the woods behind the beach, I discovered a tiny trapper's cabin built in a style unique to this area of Superior. The cabin walls had been built entirely from 12-foot pulp logs salvaged from the beach. These logs had been debarked naturally by grinding on the rocks. Each corner consisted of two 2"x 8" planks nailed together at right angles and then stood on end. A spike was driven through the plank and into the end of each pulp log, forming the walls. The rafters were also made of pulp logs notched to the top of the walls and nailed to a plank at the peak of the roof. These dry spruce logs were light and could be handled by one man. Since this land has become a National Park, I'm not sure if any of these cabins still exist. The shorelines in this area were littered with swashlines of jumbled pulp logs that had escaped from log booms and washed up on shore. Apparently one man in Marathon with a workboat had a profitable business of refloating these



logs and selling them back to the company.

After lunch, Dave Purdon and I followed the old portage trail behind the cabin. This trail led up over the first ridge. We left the portage and walked through the woods to the Cascade River and climbed a high hill on the other side to obtain an excellent view of Michipicoten Island. We then followed the river downstream to view the lip of the falls into Lake Superior before returning to the beach. That evening, we rounded Otter Head and our day ended in a small bay short of Canadienne Point. The point had a bad reputation and the crew did not want to risk anything so late in the evening. The camping spot was relatively low with the tents pitched on the smooth, grassy, abandoned roadbed that ran from Pukaskwa Depot to Otter Cove. That night under clear skies, it got too cold for a comfortable sleep in my sleeping bag. By morning there was an inch of ice in our cooking pots. Apparently down in Sault Ste. Marie the temperature dropped to a record low of 27 degrees F.

Our first hour of travel was through a mist coming off the water so dense it obscured the sun. Navigation was accomplished by orienting with the vague smudge of brightness in the mist. After rounding Canadienne Point we decided not to take a short side trip to visit historic Pukaskwa Depot and the ancient cobblestone pits on the Pukaskwa River. This was done with great regret. However, the group was still trying to cover as much daily distance as possible in the hopes of reaching Sault Ste. Marie.

According to local natives, an archeologist collected a small load of artifacts from the bottoms of these pits. The artifacts may have explained the function and origin of these mysterious pits, but the archeologist drowned in Lake Superior on the return trip and the artifacts were never recovered. "Pukaskwa Pits" occur at several locations on Lake Superior.

About noon we were forced off the lake by rough conditions three miles short of Ganley Harbour. By late afternoon we were back on the water and paddled all the way to Pilot Harbour where we camped for the night, in good sheltered terrain. Earlier that day we passed the second of only two boats that we saw

while paddling on Lake Superior. It was a small-roofed outboard motor boat that was bobbing up and down while slowly creeping forward into the big waves. There was a look of disbelief on the faces of the people in the boat when we paddled by them in the opposite direction at twice their speed. The following day, after encountering increasingly rough water, we decided to make a landing on the last boulder beach before Point Issacor. An examination of the map revealed not a single safe landing spot for five miles along this shore. As it turned out, this was one of the wisest decisions of the trip.

This is probably the most dangerous stretch of shoreline, on the Canadian side of Lake Superior for the above reason. A large rock highland bends out to the lakeshore east of Ghost River, where sheer cliffs drop 100 feet straight to the water. Rounding Point Issacor, these cliffs gradually increase to about 300 feet. Four miles east of here they culminate in an 800-foot-high ridge in which the first 500 feet are sheer cliff. Behind the fifth

continuous mile of cliff, Bare Summit reaches 1,264 feet above the surface of Lake Superior. Directly in front at the cliff's edge the water is 27 fathoms deep.

It looked as if the group was going to spend an uncomfortable night amidst the rocks of this steep boulder beach. Suddenly there was an abrupt reversal in the direction of the wind. I could not believe what I was seeing. After the waves settled down, we relaunched the canoes. The lake remained quite choppy so Point Issacor still had to be given a very wide berth.

Along this section of shore are steep slopes of broken rock that reach the water. A notable example of this can be found where the Eagle River tumbles down into Lake Superior. Large blocks of talus can be found at the terminus of rockslides that extend upwards more than 200 feet. As we paddled past, small rock fragments broke loose from the cliff and clattered downwards in a series of free falls, bounces and slides.

That evening along this spectacular shore, we encountered the largest wave of



*Lake Superior shoreline near Point Isacor*



*Michipicoten Harbour at end of trip*

the trip. Dave Purdon's canoe took the brunt of it. This "monster" was probably created by three different sets of waves riding over top of each other. Anyway, this freak "rogue" wave came from nowhere. It suddenly mounded up under the bow, nearly throwing John Sparks and myself backwards out of our seats. After a precipitous up and over, the canoe plunged into a huge hole many feet deep. The bow of the canoe that had been fully airborne, hit the water at the bottom of the hole with a resounding crash. Fortunately, I was partly on my knees at the time, so the bow seat did not break. However, my knees, seat and back were certainly sore from the crash.

That night we camped in Dog Harbour. Do not think that all these tiny harbours along this coast are inhabited. They are only natural places of refuge. Dog Harbour was possibly the best campsite of the trip. This protected harbour contained a long sandy beach, ample firewood and a grassy plain on which to pitch the tents. Adjacent to the harbour lies the University or Dog River that, at the time, vied with the Pukaskwa for having the best rainbow trout fishing in Ontario.

Before noon the following day, the trip reached the Perkwakwia Point Lighthouse at the entrance to Michipicoten Harbour. Nobody was there, possibly because the light had been automated, but anyway, we left a message saying that we were suspending the trip until further notice. We then paddled across to Michipicoten Harbour. Here, we were greeted by a horde of little French speaking children running up and down the beach eager to look at the men who had come from the lake in canoes.

This turned out to be the end of our first trip on Lake Superior. We had run out of time.

### **The Return Trip to Camp Kandalore**

Further explanation should be given concerning the termination of our first trip on Lake Superior in 1967. By the time we reached the Cascade River, it became obvious that depending on travel conditions, there was likely insufficient time to complete our paddle on Lake Superior to Sault Saint Marie. Commencing at Pilot Harbour, three days prior to ending our trip, we had nightly group discussions concerning what could be done. Unfortunately,

Andy Bain and Jim Stockbridge had to leave the trip as soon as possible, so they would not miss any school. The first road access after Heron Bay and Marathon was at Michipicoten Harbour, just under 300 miles from the start of our trip. We had traveled hard for eleven days enduring exceptionally long hours of paddling, often in cold, difficult conditions, without stopping for a full day of rest. This took its toll, particularly on the younger members of our group.

At what turned out to be our final campsite at Dog Harbour, Bob James, Bruce Grantier and John Sparks all expressed an interest in leaving the trip. Only Paul Reynolds, Dave Purdon and I were prepared to continue, which was not enough to crew even a single Centennial canoe. The following day, when we reached the beach at Michipicoten Harbour, another group discussion ensued. Jim Stockbridge offered to stay on the trip despite missing school, provided everybody else agreed to continue until replacements could be found. After much discussion, the entire group agreed to Jim's offer. We would be paddling past an isolated coastal area of Lake Superior Provincial Park. Depending on weather, we would need one or two days of paddling before we could reach road access again that would allow replacements to be made. Access was to be made at Agawa Bay or preferably at Montreal River where we could also purchase more food to complete the trip and receive a cash loan to pay for the return bus fares needed for those leaving the trip. Depending on the weather, the estimated paddling time to reach Sault Saint Marie was four to six days plus another day of road time to reach Camp Kandalore. Five replacement paddlers were needed if both canoes were to reach Sault Saint Marie.

At Marathon, a letter had been sent to Kirk Wipper, notifying him of the departure of Rod McLeod and Peter Mills and the likely need for replacement paddlers. However, the letter was sent to the old Camp Kandalore address at Dorset rather than to Minden, unfortunately delaying the letter's arrival until too late.

On our departure from Camp Kandalore, Kirk Wipper assured us that there would be someone to answer the camp phone in the event of an emer-



agency or if replacement paddlers were needed. On phoning, the telephone operator told us that the camp phone had been disconnected. Additional calls to Kirk's home phone and to two other key camp staff went unanswered. Reluctantly, we had no practical choice but to terminate our first trip at Michipicoten Harbour.

Bob James hitchhiked down to the O.P.P. Station in Sault Saint Marie to pick up the truck and trailer. Meanwhile, a number of us hitchhiked to the stores in Wawa. I went to the Provincial Department of Lands and Forests office in Wawa to notify them we were terminating our trip and requested that they pass the message on to the Federal Department of Transport. All of us were able to get a ride back to Michipicoten Harbour except for me because the additional business delayed my departure. As a result I had to walk nine of the twelve miles back to the canoes.

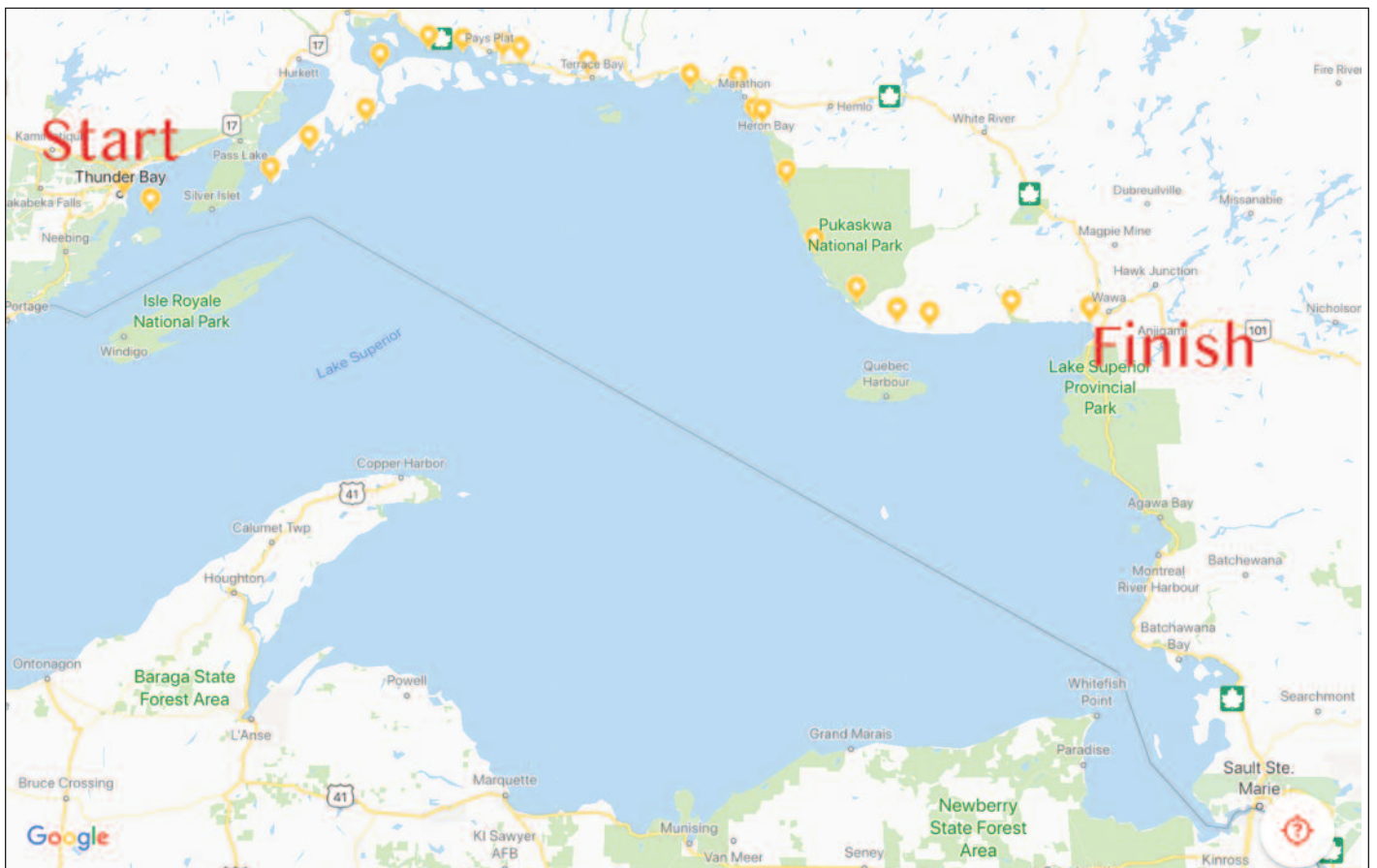
One of the local representatives of the village of Michipicoten, whom we happened to meet, was impressed with our efforts on Lake Superior and said the

village would throw a banquet for us followed by an official reception if we wanted it. The idea of food sounded good. But in view of our need for departure as soon as possible and not having completed the trip, we declined his offer, feeling it was best to leave quietly.

That evening, we had our last campfire dinner directly on the beach. The little children who had met us on our arrival stayed with us. They were poorly dressed in dirty clothes and obviously had been left without parental care. Talking to them in French, we learned that they had barely eaten anything all day. One child came down to the fire with a can of soup and some potatoes. Jim Stockbridge taught this child how to cook his food over the fire. We gave these children all our remaining food, and they stayed with us until late into the night. After dark, it had become unusually calm and foggy on Lake Superior with only the repeated honk of the diaphone at the lighthouse to break the silence.

Bob James arrived with the truck and trailer at 1 a.m. Dave Merrifield had the

truck battery replaced and the upper rungs on the canoe trailer rewelded and strengthened, so there were no further problems with our transportation. Everything was loaded by 2 a.m. and we departed immediately. I took over driving the truck for the return trip. It was a long and hard drive through a dense fog before it dissipated just north of Sault Saint Marie. We stopped at 5:30 a.m. for gas and hamburgers near Thessalon. I continued driving until Sudbury. From here, a rested Bob James took over and drove to North Bay and then Bruce Grantier drove the remaining distance. We reached Camp Kandalore well after dark. Fortunately we were able to find the key to the locked entrance gate. After a considerable time groping around in the dark, we found the main power switch to the camp. This was not the greeting we were expecting. Four of our crew members pushed on by car, leaving shortly after midnight for Toronto. The remaining four cleaned and packed away the equipment and departed the following afternoon.





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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.

## 2018 Mike Wevrick Lecture and Wine and Cheese Social

When: 7 PM, Saturday Evening,  
November 17, 2018

Where: Toronto Sailing & Canoe Club,  
1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto

Admission: \$20/person, guest welcome.  
Pay online to guarantee your seat.

We are limited to 105 people per fire regulations. Includes glass of wine/beer, sampling of cheeses and crackers, draw prizes and great presentation by Guest speaker: David Lee, the Passionate Paddler.

Most of us have passions in life, while some are still looking. David Lee, however, found his with canoeing. Inspired by canoeing icons past and present, and intrigued by the endless lattice work of waterways in this country, he let his passion engulf him. With this, he takes every opportunity to head out with his canoe and paddle to experience, explore, and seek new adventures. Known as ‘The Passionate Paddler’ online and within the canoeing community, he has

paddled many routes across North America and continues in his relentless pursuit to experience new waterways, explore lost ones, and even create his own. Passion can be all consuming, and in this respect, David can be considered a lost soul to canoeing. Join us to learn about David’s latest project to recreate a long-lost canoe route in north-central Ontario.

Space is limited, visit WCA website to register.

### The Devil’s Grin

Cliff Jacobson wrote a touching article how one of his close friends and paddler, Darrell Foss, fights the Alzheimer’s disease. How does one know when it’s time to quit? This question is, or could be, relevant to many of us. Share your thoughts and experiences on this topic!

Reading Cliff’s emails often reminds me of Toni, as they were close friends and shared mutual respect for each other. Cliff writes “On another note, I encourage Nastawgan readers to download and read Toni Harting’s short, riveting book, “The Devil’s Grin”. I just loved it—in-deed, I encouraged him to write it. It’s on my website ([cliffcanoe.com](http://cliffcanoe.com)) as a free download. Just click on “Cool Stuff” and Toni’s book will come right up.”



### Thank you, Harold!

Many WCA members have known Harold Jessup from numerous outings held at his campground in Palmer Rapids. This is a place where many of us learned, and later perfected, our first whitewater strokes. There was something about this place that made paddlers feel welcomed and at ease. Harold would drop by every so often from the nearby farm where he lived with his wife, driving his iconic red Jetta, to sell firewood and collect the camping fees. I remember reading about “Jessup Campground” as the best place to learn whitewater in Southern Ontario on the pages of the very first *Nastawgan* I ever read in late ’90. Our family has many fond memories of meeting new friends there, endless jumping off the “piano” rock, beautiful sandy beach, our first canoe flips. This is how, and where, we fell in love with Madawaska Valley.

Harold passed away on Saturday, September 22. His family and friends are planning to celebrate his life at the memorial event to be held at the campground in the spring. Good-bye, Harold and thank you.

### 2019 Wilderness and Canoe Symposium

Next WCS is planned for the 22-23 February, 2019. Save the date!

In the meantime, continue to send feedback and presentation ideas to [gusev@gmail.com](mailto:gusev@gmail.com) under Subject line “2019 WCS”. We hope to see many of you at Monarch Park again!

### 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](http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca)

### Articles Wanted

Consider submitting your story – they are all worth sharing, no matter how “big” or “small” your trip was. Glad to help, if help is needed. Reach out to Aleks Gusev, Editor, for encouragement, tips & tricks!



## Status Quo by John Barker

Fourth day out.

Good weather, good water, good group. Did a couple of tricky rapids that resulted in one canoe needing a bit of loving care. Now that we're in camp, that will come. Gary made a nice dinner that we were able to enjoy because of a gentle breeze that kept the bugs at bay. Time for a stroll.

I always enjoy taking a little stroll after dinner. Whether it's up a hill behind the camp, or along a stretch of sandy beach, or even just fighting my way through the dense northern muskeg for 50 yards – as long as I can't see the camp any more, I've established separation.

This time, I'm in deep bush. The northern-most part of Southern Ontario (north of Parry Sound, south of Sudbury). Logs covered with moss. Cedars close together. It's a bit difficult wrestling my way through, but also neat to consider that the chances are good that I am the first human to step over this log.

And there's an anomaly. A short weathered tree stump with two short branches. Covered with moss. It seems out of place.

And then I realize it's at the end of a small clearing, maybe ten feet square.

And I realize there's a slight mound in the earth on one side of the stump.

And I realize it's not a stump. It's a cross. It's a grave marker.

I'm a hundred yards off the river; there are no paths, and no reason for anyone to travel this way. I may well be the first person here since when it was built. By the look, it's been undisturbed for perhaps a hundred years.

A small part of me wants to dig through the moss, move the rocks, and find out any trace of information that exists about the person that might be here.

A bigger part of me knows the right thing to do. Appreciate. Reflect. Say a small prayer. Leave.

## Food for Paddlers Salad a la Robinson

Dawne Robinson is an amazing chef and the following creation was served on our Bonaventure River trip this summer. She was inspired by Cabbage Salad recipe contributed by Barb Burton for the Winter 2009 issue of *Nastawgan*.

### Recipe

#### Dehydrate the following:

- 1 bag of shredded carrots
- 1 bag of shredded broccoli stems
- 1 container grape tomatoes, halved
- 1 red and yellow pepper, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, sliced
- 2 green onions, sliced
- 1/2 red onion, chopped (optional)
- 1 package imitation crabmeat, sliced

**Mix together** in a ziplock bag and take along on your trip

**To prepare**, barely cover the dried mix with cold water and wait until the vegetables are almost rehydrated (about 30-60 minutes). *Dawne takes along a large plastic jar with a lid that she uses to rehydrate her meals. She prepares this in the morning so that the food is well rehydrated for dinner.*

**Add the following:** capers, pumpkin seeds, almond slivers, cranberries, raisins

#### Then add the following dressing:

- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 2 packages Club House Pasta Salad Dressing mix

Alternative dressing: President's Choice Roasted Garlic Sandwich Spread for a creamier dressing

This meal was served to our crew of 12 paddlers.

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



## The Campsites of the North by Greg Went

Hard granite to sleep on tonight. My favorite. After all day in the tenuous grip of a wilderness river, cold, hard granite feels like the softest of mattresses to me.

It takes lots of hard work during the day paddling and portaging to make kilometers. End result of all the labor is that there is not much tossing and turning in the sleeping bag after the day's work is done. Knowing that you are safe on hard ground is all the lullaby needed for blissful sleep.

Wooded campsites come a close second to granite as my favorite campsite. Campsites similar to those found in parks or recreation areas further south. Trees for shade and wind protection. Compacted soil to sleep on. Lots of possibilities for tarp set up.

Another good choice for the night's rest is esker or shoreline sand campsites. On sand you can burrow down into it and conform the sand to your body. Rolling over in

the sleeping bag on sand does not bring you into contact with the uneven rock that you will know so well at the granite campsite. And if it rains the porous nature of sand means that no streams of water will find their way under the tent. The extra cost for the comfort of the esker or shoreline sand campsite though, is the sand that you will carry with you for the next few days of the trip. No matter how careful you are in handling gear or food, sand will grit your peanut butter and pool in your tent for days to come.

Thinking of the campsites that we have unrolled our sleeping bags on over the years. They have varied in lots of ways. Views, surfaces to sleep on, access to firewood, deep pools to fish in, protection from the weather. I never complain about the current campsite or compare it to others that we have been at. I am just grateful that I am here at a campsite in the north.

# Playing on Water, Snow and Ice: The Play of Bill Mason

Paul Heintzman, Leisure Studies, University of Ottawa

## Introduction

Thirty years after Bill Mason's death, the writings and films of this legendary Canadian canoeist, filmmaker and artist remain popular. While Mason is well known for his canoeing and his painting, the focus of this article is his play, whether it be on water (canoeing), on snow (telemark skiing) or on ice (hockey).

The article is based on Mason's writings and films, primarily the books *Path of the Paddle* (1980), *Song of the Paddle* (1988), and *Canoescapes* (1995); quotations of Mason's letters and other writings found in James Raffan's (1996) biography of Mason; and Mason's feature film, *Waterwalker* (1984). These sources reveal four themes concerning Mason's play ethic: play as a central life interest; primitive travel; adventures with others and solitude in nature; and joy.

## 1. Play as a Central Life Interest

Play was not a secondary or subsidiary component of Mason's life. Rather it was a central life interest. From his earliest days he was fascinated with canoes and canoeing. In *Path of the Paddle* Mason wrote that "The happiest time of my whole childhood was when my father rented a canoe for a week. ... We could go paddling whenever we wanted and stay out as long as we wanted" (1980, p. 5). Mason's (1980) writing about his canoeing as an addiction provides evidence of play as a central life interest for him:

"Canoe addiction can affect your whole life. My first job after leaving art school was with a commercial art house. I liked my work and I liked the people, but every spring just before break-up time I would go into the boss's office and give two weeks' notice so I could take off for the bush to go roaming by myself in my canoe from break-

up to freeze-up. The boss always ended up firing me for letting him down in the busy spring season. I could never quite figure that one out. He wouldn't say much for the next two weeks, but on my last afternoon he would casually drop by to say goodbye. We would play a little game in which he would hint that he might be able to fit me in again at the end of the summer and I would allow that although I would prefer freelancing, it would be sort of nice to see the boys again. This little ritual went on for about six years, until I found out that I could earn a living making films either about canoeing or with canoes in them." (p. 5)

Reinforcing this notion of canoeing as an addiction he writes: "...every fall about freeze-up time you go through a withdrawal period as you watch the lakes and rivers icing over one by one..." (Mason, 1980, p. 4). Even when death was imminent he wrote, "Sure, I would love to be around a lot longer. There are so many things to do and rivers that need canoeing" (Mason, 1995, p. 9).

Although known as a legendary canoeist, Mason's play was not limited to canoeing. When writing about his passion for creating, he noted "I am unhappy when I'm not creating, unless I'm doing something active, like running whitewater, or skiing, or playing hockey" (Mason, 1995, p. 10). And even his play could distract him from painting! Recounting an experience of telemark skiing near Roger's Pass he wrote:

"Telemark skiing presents a problem. I enjoy the thrill and challenge of cross-country and telemarking skiing so much that it cuts into my painting time. I should have been sitting on the saddle sketching and painting among the peaks. Instead I spent a riotous day of telemarking with my friends. I often envy Turner's single-mindedness of

purpose. However, I'm sure I have had a lot more fun than he did!" (Mason, 1995, p. 52)

He was equally fanatical about hockey. On a visit to Buckingham Palace he was heard to remark, "Gee, wouldn't this be a great spot for a hockey rink!" (as quoted in Raffan, 1996, p. 218). And as he was approaching death he commented: "And what a shame that a sparkling hockey career is terminated right at its peak. (Last year I got more goals than Gretzky did!)" (Mason, 1995, p. 9).

## 2. Play Characterized by Primitive Travel

Mason's play was focused on those activities which allowed him to be close to nature so that he could discover "the natural world and the Creator who put it all together so long ago" (Mason, 1980, p. 3). Mason's (1980) preference for primitive travel is illustrated by the parable he tells in *Path of the Paddle* concerning hiking, canoeing and motor boating. He explains how with slower modes of travel we have time to discover the natural world. Later in the book he writes, "I would much prefer to paddle, portage, track, and wade up some unnavigable waterway to the base of a spectacular waterfall, pitch my camp, and sit there drinking in their beauty, than travel there by road. It isn't the same. The falls you have to work to get to are always the biggest, the best, the most spectacular, even if they aren't as high" (1980, p. 194). To illustrate his point, he recounts an experience in Banff National Park:

"Recently I was in Banff, Alberta. I wanted to climb a mountain but had only one free day, and I didn't have any transportation. Therefore my choices were limited to nearby Sulphur Mountain or Mt. Rundle. Sulphur Mountain has a gondola lift; Mt. Rundle



doesn't. I rationalized that if I took the gondola up Sulphur Mountain, I could spend all day in the high country. Then again, if I climbed Mt. Rundle, I suspected it would be a good feeling to look down over the lip from the peak, having got there under my own steam. I chose Mt. Rundle. I got up long before daybreak and set out early to allow lots of time. I made it almost to the peak before the clouds lowered and it began to snow, making it dangerous to continue. But I did make it to the lip and was able to peer down the vertical face of the cliff. I couldn't see a darn thing, of course. All I saw was the cliff dropping away below me into the clouds. But I knew what was there – a six thousand foot (1850 m) drop – and I had gotten there on my own. It was a very good feeling – a feeling I never would have had if I had taken the gondola up Sulphur Mountain. As I sat there in silence, I was very glad there was no easy way up Mt. Rundle.” (p. 194)

### 3. Adventures with Others and Solitude in Nature

Mason's play was composed of both thrill-seeking adventures with others and quieter, solitary experiences in wilderness. He loved adventure from a young age. Describing his experience as a boy afloat on a raft he built, he wrote: “I loved the feeling of danger, excitement and adventure” (Mason, 1988, p. 1) and later he continues: “I've always loved doing adventurous things, sometimes walking that thin edge...” (p. 2). Running rapids had a thrill for him: “When you feel that canoe being picked up by the current and you look downstream and you see the rapids disappear around the corner, like, the feeling that comes over you, you just can't explain it.” (Mason, 1984). But a sequence in *Waterwalker* indicates that satisfying play involved more than running rapids:

“Most canoeists I know, there is no way you'd catch them travelling upstream against the current. And there are times when I crave the company of my white water cronies and the thrill of running rapids. The problem is that there is

no slowing them down. All they want to do is get to the next rapid. And when I go with them I find myself getting caught up in that too. I enjoy a good time as much as the next guy....

If there is anything more fun than horsing around in rapids I'd love to hear about it. But after a while I look forward to getting back to my painting and sketching. And for that it has to be alone.” (Mason, 1984)

### 4. Joy

Mason's play and life in general was characterized by a deep sense of joy. In *Path of the Paddle* he writes about the joy of his canoe trips, “The **joy** of these trips that I experienced as a young man is now only equalled by having my family who share my enthusiasm accompany me” (1980, p. 7, bold added) and of being in the wilderness, “Out there it is possible to rediscover the joy to be derived from just looking, listening, and thinking” (p. 59, bold added). His film *Song of the Paddle* (Mason, 1978) is an excellent illustration of the joy of a canoe trip with his family. His joy is confirmed by Ken Buck (2005) who informs us that Mason's cartoons usually “expressed joy and happiness...and being alive” (p. 82) and by Chapman who in the forward to *Canoescapes* reports receiving cartoons from Mason showing “himself jumping up and down with joyous abandon. This was Bill. When he was excited, he was ecstatic” (Mason, 1995, p. 8). Chapman also describes Mason's “profusion of joy over our natural heritage...” (Mason, 1995, p. 9). Mason, himself reflected on joy as follows:

“Life. Is it merely a sentimental delusion, a ‘pathetic fallacy,’ to think that one sees in the animal a capacity for joy which man himself is tending to lose? We have invented exercise, recreation, pleasure, amusement, and the rest. To ‘have fun’ is a desire often expressed by those who live in this age of anxiety and most of us have at times actually “had fun.” But recreation, pleasure, amusement, fun and all the rest are poor substitutes for joy; and joy, I am convinced, has its roots in something from which

civilization tends to cut us off.” ... (as quoted in Raffan, 1996, p. 80).

### Conclusion

Buck (2005) claims that “Few people of any nation have been so influential in creating a sense of responsibility for the environment” (p. 12). Mason's play ethic, which was central to his life, including his sense of adventure, his desire to discover nature, his example of primitive travel, and foremost his joy of life, was a significant factor in his ability to create a sense of responsibility for the environment within the Canadian population. He was not a somber environmentalist. As Raffan (1996) notes, Mason embodied a spiritual excitement “that drew people...when he began to reach a wider audience through film.” (p. 80). Increasingly parks and wilderness are focusing more on ecological integrity and less on recreation (Theberge & Theberge (2002,)) yet Mason illustrates the importance of looking at play and conservation as a unity.

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# Knowing When It's Time To Quit

Story and photos by Cliff Jacobson

Stuff happens as we age, and it's not all good. Darrell Foss, 75, one of my closest friends, has Alzheimer's disease. Darrell has lived with this disease for about five years now and he's done everything possible (medication, memory clinics, mental exercises, etc.) to slow it down. He's been persistent in pursuing every possible light in the tunnel. He has made considerable progress, so much so that his closest friends have trouble believing that anything (other than getting old) is wrong with him. Most of the time, he remembers things better than we do!

Darrell and I have known each other for nearly 50 years, and with rare exception, we have canoed somewhere together every year. We've built dozens of wood-strip canoes together, mostly solo models. Around 1980, Darrell designed a 14.5-foot model dubbed the "DF Solo," which became a Canoe Magazine recommended U-build it project. Shortly afterward, Darrell, Bob Brown and I re-designed the DF and sold it to Mad River. They named it "Lady Slipper" after the beautiful Minnesota state orchid. Early sales were mostly to women so Mad River changed the name to "Slipper" hoping the boat would earn wider appeal. The little "Slipper" became

immensely popular, and despite newer, more sophisticated designs, it is still a good choice – if you can find one!

For decades, Darrell Foss, adventure-writer Larry Rice and I have paddled one or more rivers together each year – naturally, in the small solo canoes we cherish. We've canoed the Green, San Juan (a dicey run in these little boats), Missouri, Rio Grande and more. The Rio Grande is our all-time favorite: we've done it twice (Feb. 2011 and 2015/220 miles). The river offers solitude, exquisite beauty, remoteness, impeccable camping, challenging rapids (lots of them!), a unique social experience (you'll meet Mexican ranchers along the way), and a pleasant respite from the winter ice-box in Wisconsin where I live. We love this river so much that this year (2018) we decided to do it again.

We put in at Lajitas and for the first two hours we floated silently along in a gentle current and bright sunlight. Then came a "slightly dicey" Class II rapid. Larry and I were paddling Northstar "Phoenix" solo canoes with full spray covers. Darrell had his ancient but sturdy "Slipper," also covered. Larry ran first, I a dozen canoe lengths behind. Darrell followed last. The rapid ended quickly and I eddied in on a gravel beach near Larry. We looked back – no Darrell. Then we saw it: Darrell was waist deep in water and his yellow "Slipper" was pinned, belly up, on a boulder. It looked like it would break in half at any moment.

It took about 30 minutes to rescue Darrell, his boat and gear. The "Slipper" suffered serious damage (delaminated Kevlar in the side-walls) but luckily it didn't leak. However, much of Darrell's gear was wet, which came as a surprise because he was very meticulous about packing. The large waterproof dry bag in his pack was reliably watertight if properly sealed. The problem was, it "wasn't." This was not Darrell's MO.

Darrell was visibly shaken – as is everyone who has just capsized – so we

expressed no deep concern. Yes, it was just a Class II, but it was a bit edgy. We reasoned that a capsize here could have happened to any of us, so we just smiled and continued on.

Day two: Ahead was a tight left bend with a strong current that threatened to slam you into a cliff. Larry, in the lead, was beached ashore on the inside bend. I followed suit and ferried in behind him. Darrell came third, but instead of following suit, he just kept going as if he didn't register what was ahead. We yelled and motioned him to "ferry in," but he acted like he didn't know what to do. Then, capsize and another rescue.

Two upsets in two days. This wasn't like our friend at all. Heck, Darrell did the San Juan River with us in his little "Slipper" and he had no problems at all. And many of the waves on that river flooded over his boat! By comparison, the small rapid, in which he had just capsized, was nothing. We rescued Darrell, boat and gear without incident. Fortunately, the canoe wasn't damaged. Darrell changed clothes again, but now he was pretty freaked out, though he was trying hard to hide it.

An hour later we were threading our way through Santa Elena canyon. There are no rapids here, just determined current and high rock walls. Still, one needs to stay alert. About a mile past a dicey constriction known as "Rock Slide," Darrell capsized again, this time on a sweeping bend with slight current. Another rescue! Larry and I looked knowingly at one another. Something wasn't right.

When Darrell had dried out we had a pow-wow. We shared our concern, honestly.

"I guess I just can't do this anymore; I kinda freeze up in rapids, not sure what to do," said Darrell.

Then he suggested that we drop him off at the public landing below Santa Elena canyon (three miles away), then continue on without him to Rio Grande Village (five days away), our original



Darrell Foss



# The Hendrickx Experience

Story by iori Miller

Once again Emmy Hendrickx assembled a motley crew of canoeists to venture out on the Saugeen River during the May 24 weekend. A few of us were repeat enthusiasts, but I think Emmy has paddled this river in May in the last twelve years – at least! You might ask-why? Why return to the Saugeen? I think it's a great way to start of a summer of canoe expeditions.

*“What sets a canoeing expedition apart is that it purifies you more rapidly and inescapably than any other. Travel a thousand miles by train and you are a brute; pedal five hundred on a bicycle and you remain basically a bourgeois; paddle a hundred in a canoe and you are already a child of nature.”* – Pierre Trudeau

The Saugeen River is to Lake Huron

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end point.

“No way!” We replied, in unison. “We stop where you stop. We stick together. Period! No debate.”

Darrell was really down, blaming himself that we had to abort the trip. But Larry and I were upbeat. We said we were thrilled to make this last trip with him – that the end will eventually come to us all – and that lucky is the paddler who makes his last trip with friends, real friends whose allegiance is first to one another, then to the wilderness experience. We emphasized that we do these rivers more to be together than for the challenges they offer. A canoe trip is a canoe trip, but friends – like love – are forever!

Shortly after Darrell's last capsizing, we found a beautiful campsite in the canyon. We stayed two days, ate well, drank hot buttered rum, took photographs and shared the beauty and wonder of the canyon and our last canoe trip together. Yes, it was a long drive from Viking-land to Texas. But we had a ball and we wouldn't have missed it for a minute.

Consider yourself lucky if your last canoe trip will be with good friends who care about you!

what the Grand River is to Lake Erie. Both are significant rivers that have enough volume to be paddled that they can be paddled any month when water's flowing. That can't be said about many of the rivers flowing into these lakes. Both of these big rivers can carry monster volumes of water and can be dangerous when in spring flood. The water level for this year's paddle down the Saugeen was a good foot higher than last year's. We were all quite impressed with the extent of this year's flood damage. A significant amount of ice appears to have pushed its way out of the Saugeen's river banks this spring.

Before leaving for the river, I took the time to read Kevin Callan's account of his own Saugeen paddle (*Top Canoe Routes of Ontario*, 2011). A lot of my experience with the river mirrors his. This river empties a vast region of farmland and at times the scenery is monotonously repetitive. The water from this watershed is nothing I'd dip my cup into, or subject my water pump/filter to. Cows abound, and many of their fields abut the banks of the river. Unsurprisingly, each of us brought a large amount of water to drink, cook and clean with. Yet surprisingly, there is a lot of wildlife along the river.

Last year's experience of paddling the Saugeen left Emmy and me muttering for months later about the Soggy Saugeen. On the second day of last year's adventure it bucketed down. This year's experience felt like it was going to be the same with the overcast first day, but really the only rain we saw was late in the evening of that day. The other two days, however, were wonderful and sunny. Typical spring Ontario climate! The highlight of the trip was the visit to a bald eagle's nest near Port Elgin. This year's "show" was spectacular. Both adults were flying about and appeared to be very aware that they and their nest were on display. With the brilliant sunshine made for great shots of the birds and the nest. It is located on the south

end of a big island, in a huge tree that is easily visible to paddlers. The nest is definitely old and very well established. It's huge. As Emmy will attest, the site is also a great place to harvest fiddlehead ferns for dinner at home.

As with most things in life, there are sweet oranges and sour lemons. The eagles were the highlight for me, and the river's garbage was the lemon. You see, Emmy likes to paddle on the May long weekend every year. At the same time, the people of the area like to host an annual raft, canoe, and tubing paddle event. It's marketed as a BYOB event (Bring Your Own Boat), but it is also the other kind of BYOB event. I have paddled Saugeen River for two years in a row now, and I'm not sure I'd do it again on this weekend. We were disgusted by the number of beer cans just thrown into the river or on the shores by partiers that gather on the islands. If someone did this on their front lawns, I'm sure these folks would be quite pissed off. It reminded me of a sign I once saw:

**“Beware of stupid people in large groups.”**

One of the locals I talked to said that worst offenders are not locals, but visitors who come in from afar for the event. We were ten in our group and each of us filled the better part of a green garbage bag with empty beer cans from one party site where we stopped. It was quite the downer, as they used to say. I can only paddle a few of these “rural” rivers each season.

We had a great group of paddlers this year. For any new members to the WCA looking to improve their paddling and camping skills, this is a great trip to start with. This year's crew consisted of 5 canoes and Roo, a ball-obsessed dog. There was a real diversity of participants, from 11 years old to people well into their 60's. We compared gear, swapped recipes and shared snoring. This is one trip that I say can really be a family event. And it's a great event to gently start your tripping season.

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