wilderness canoe association
nastawgan

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Afternoon light on Hogan Lake

A Winter Ski Crossing of Algonquin Park

Story by Buck Miller
Photos by Eric Batty

In February of 2018, I crossed Algonquin Park with friends Eric Batty and Ryan Atkins. Mountain bike racing is ultimately what brought us together. Eric and I used to race against each other from 1998 to 2001. Fast forward twenty years and we decided to cross Algonquin when we reconnected at a regional bike race. I had just spent five years living in Moosonee, on the James Bay coast and relocated to Huntsville. The lack of crown land in Muskoka had me feeling a little down by not being able to access true, remote adventure opportunities so I vowed to find more challenging things to do. After chatting with Eric, we started looking at routes and timelines. This was Algonquin's 125th anniversary so we thought a proper crossing would be a solid homage to this famed park.

The route choice came from my location in Huntsville and my

Buck heading North on Smoke Lake

parents home in Deux Rivieres, on the north side of the park on Trans Canada 17 and the Ottawa River, about 45 km north of the Brent access to Algonquin. Eric and I combed over maps on the phone, debating the best possible route. We decided that the crossing had to be done in good style. Border to border at minimum and obviously no support or food drops. Starting inside the park wasn't good enough. I consulted closely with the grandmaster of Algonquin, Craig MacDonald. Craig holds a wealth of knowledge and any long-in-the-tooth historians or travelers of the park know his name. In an afternoon together at his house, I left with a series of hand-drawn maps in pencil, on lined paper. Craig went in-depth about the thermal incline of the lakes, which lakes are spring fed, which lakes turn the water over from the bottom to the top the earliest, thinning out the ice slowly, as winter passes and even where the traditional snowshoe trails were. It was a lot to take in and after our meeting I felt more confident in our route choice. Craig acknowledged that we'd have a hard time but agreed that we had picked a good route for winter travel having avoided the Nipissing and Petawawa Rivers as best we could. During my research on winter travel in the park, most trips sounded arduous, with leg-deep powder and open water everywhere with early attempts ending in failure and later crossings sounded too easy with some reports of folks traveling up to 25 km in a day with the hard crust from the warmer sun and still cold nights. We decided to leave February 1st, 2018 expecting a mix of slow, deep snow and decent ice.

We kicked off on Troutspawn Lake Road, 2 km south of Shawandasee Lake, which is the lake of entry to the park for us. From there we would head through Fen, Hilly, Small and Bluebell Lakes where we'd make our first camp. We slept right on the ice and brought 12" galvanized nails to anchor the Seek Outside tipi. One avalanche shovel among us was enough to dig down a little ways and pack what snow was left with our skis. We boiled water on the Seek Outside titanium wood stove and settled in for a good night, all anxiously wondering what the next 10 days would bring. Our first day we put 12 km behind us and skied on a firm crust with little powder. Dinner was dehydrated alpine aire meals, two each before we sat around the stove for a time before bedding down.

Day 2 started with a 1.4 km portage into Mikado Lake under a grey overcast sky. We started on the skis, not wanting to snowshoe at all if we could avoid it. The south end of Algonquin has never appealed to me (too busy) and I almost had to force myself to enjoy the peace and quiet that surrounded us. I was in a self imposed jail of wilderness of which I could only be free once I was at least one day travel north of the highway 60 corridor that cuts through Algonquin. The portages so far were wide, and even in the winter you could see signs of their heavy use. A big 2.4 km portage with some serious elevation and deep snow brought us to Smoke Lake. Smoke is road accessible and has many nice cot-

tages dotting the shore. We hit the ice and headed north to cross the highway. I was in a bad state when we were nearing km 15 of travel for the day. Having no GPS or smartwatch on me, only a map and compass, I was completely at the mercy of Ryan and Eric telling me how far we've traveled, and I got a sneaking suspicion that the lads were dragging out kilometers in order to get more and more out of me. I started this trip with enough time and fitness to comfortably handle 10 km a day for 170 km overall. So why was I completely wrecked? We crossed the highway and were happy to not hear or see vehicles for the next 150 km and have only snow and ice under our feet. The team took pity on me and we camped another 2 km further on Canoe Lake under heavy snow. We got in the tent and hovered around the stove. The guys asked me how much food I had with me to eat on the fly each day. I showed them a bag about 15 L full. They laughed, and pulled out bags at least double the size. Luckily they had more to share. I ate and ate that night.

Here's an excerpt from my bush journal on day 3: "slept hard, I'm still pretty cracked. Yesterday was horrible. My feet are sore, my toenails are too long and we're still 10 days from the end. Looking forward to getting deeper into the park today." Apparently I wasn't thrown off too badly from my first unraveling. Today's route took us through Joe, Little Joe, Lost Joe and Baby Joe Lakes, also known as "The Joes" by paddlers. We found a series of hiking trails to skirt a ton of open water, some dead-ended on us and others went far off course but after a little bushwacking we ended up on the very steep and off-camber (outside edge of trail is lower than inside edge) trail into Burnt Island Lake. We had to all team up and pull 3 guys to one freight toboggan to get through here. It was too steep for snowshoes so we were on foot and mostly a sweaty mess. Hot maple aid water in our thermos was choked down and we all took a break to cool off. I opened the map and looked ahead to Burnt Island Lake and Carolyn Island. It looked like a nice place to spend the night so we struck out and made it there under heavy snow with enough time to make camp in the daylight and get a bunch of firewood. We had lots of clothes to dry. The lads in lightweight quick-dry technical gear and me in my wool pants, shirts and sweater, certainly the old man of the trip both in age and in gear selection.

The next morning we woke to a beautiful sunny sky and a crisp -30º C. While trying to dry some of the condensation off my -40º C marmot sleeping bag I managed to burn a hole the size of a small cantaloupe in it. In my mind I was

Buck on Shiner Lake

Big Trout Lake

Rest stop from fighting a headwind on Lake la Muir

Sunrise, Big Trout Lake

Friendly Fox, Cedar Lake

tending to a serious matter while holding the bag close to the stove, but I may have been opening an Oh Henry bar to try and melt into my oatmeal. We'll never know the truth. Ryan and Eric couldn't believe the stink of melting down feathers. They left to pack up what they could into our 10' poly freight toboggans from Whiskey Jack Outdoor Co. I took every single gear patch we all brought with us and shoe-goo'd the hole shut. It held well and is still in good repair today, although it looks terrible. A late start to the day, but we set off all happy with the weather and we had much to laugh about. Coming into Otterslide Lake we saw something small on the northern shore. Eric thought it was an otter. It was not an otter. It was a dude, about 6' tall, on snowshoes with a homemade pulk. We were going to the same area to check out Otterslide Creek which has been passable in some winter conditions but certainly wasn't today. We turned back from the potential shortcut because of open water, thin ice and blowdown to make our way east over to Happy Isle lake, and ended the day on Shiner Lake after 16 km. The Otterslides could have saved us one whole day's travel. Our solo traveling friend camped a little ways off and came by to check out our gear and use our open hole in the ice to get some water. He didn't bring a chisel or an axe on his trip. We didn't know if we'd see him again as his route was rather whimsical. We broke camp early the next morning and that was the last of him we would see.

We were really happy with our gear up to this point. Our skis (Altai Hoks) have permanent skins on them so we had to be careful to avoid slush, but with a good drywall knife they scrape down nicely and still provide more efficiency than snowshoes and give great float in powder. Their only downfall was the universal binding that we used with normal winter boots. While they're convenient, having ski boots and bindings would have been much better after 6 to 8 hours a day moving time. The Whiskey Jack Outdoor Co. freight toboggans would tip a little on their sides on steep off-camber trails but otherwise performed really well, and we all used the tailing cord to help the guy in front when things went sideways. They didn't have hard poles but a strap with paracord to pull. On the downhill sections we'd simply hold the reins like a horse and either sit on it or let it slide ahead of us. To tow, we would put the strap around the bottom of our packs so the weight of the toboggan was dispersed nicely from our hips to our shoulders. We all had Tubbs snowshoes but only used them for roughly 12 km of

Eric on the 42 km (single day push) ski out to Deux Rivieres

Dragging the toboggans in the bush

the trip. The Tipi tent and very small titanium wood stove was awesome. We could only burn small branches but it was easy to set up and take down with the stove pipe being a rolled sheet of titanium that fits inside the stove for transportation and the total weight of stove, tent and pipe was less than 9 lbs. I brought a bulky ice chisel for water every night instead of boiling snow. It was cumbersome but well worth the time savings. On the ground, I brought an old MEC tarp and we slept on Exped Downmat 9's.

Breaking camp on day 5 would bring us from Shiner Lake to Big Trout Lake. We were boiling water on top of our not-so-air-tight stove for breakfast and our hydroflasks. It took a while but we got the hang of it and we were able to leave camp before 9 a.m. Leisurely, sure, but this was a vacation for us. Happy Isle and Merchant Lakes were beautiful. The sun was high with a clear blue sky, making the snow so bright and the trees on distant shores something beautiful. With no nagging injuries, our morale was high. After a 1,840 m portage we came to the big swamp in the east end of Big Trout. Moose tracks were everywhere, with fresh urine and red maple clippings. We crossed very few moose tracks so far to our surprise. The winding swamp through beaver grass and small tamarack and spruce trees was a highlight. For a second, if I didn't look to the far shore and see the elevation, I almost felt like I was back in the James Bay Lowlands. Ryan and I skied ahead while Eric took some shots with the camera. Eric's job as the team photographer isn't easy. Bare hands on cold aluminum camera bodies and playing a game of catch up constantly is a tough gig but his photography is nothing short of professional. The headwind we met once out of the swamp was tough: 50 kph winds with snow squalls moving around us all the way to our camp at the northeast end of the lake by the carry to Lake La Muir. It was a 15.5 km day. The evening was so calm and clear, Eric called us out of the tent to take a look at the cold sky. The sound of trees snapping and cracking from the bush was the only thing to break any silence.

Day 6. Today we would start with a big 2,590 m walk on snowshoes to get us into Lake La Muir and we'd get a real test on thin ice. The Little Madawaska

Tending to our feet in the tent

starts here. We each had a throw bag from our canoes with us, set up on top of our bags with immediate access. We generally stayed far enough apart so that if one of us went in, chances are the other two could get a throw bag to the unlucky swimmer. The Little Mad was thin. The kind of dangerous thin where it was frozen over, but you could hear water moving under our skis. We tried to stay on the south side but the bush got too thick and we had to be too far to the center to pass. Our ski poles could bust through the surface with a not-so-hard whack. We considered heading for the bushline but with freight toboggans and no trail, the cost time scared us off. Our pounds per square inch were really low with the big skis and the toboggans, so I decided to make my way across first while the lads waited at the ready. Uneventfully, I made it but it wasn't without a bit of puckering. From the north we were able to weave around the cedars and deadfall on the creek edge. Some open water and slush showed up as we neared Hogan but all was well. We knew our next test would be tomorrow. We made camp on Hogan after 17 km and we were happy to have the Little Mad behind us.

Day 7 we woke up to -23º C and a light snow. We started with another 1,945 m portage into Manta Lake. I enjoyed all the small lakes we passed through, all I could think of was trying to fish for speckled trout in these little places. Ice fishing isn't legal in the park, but I did have an emergency fishing kit that I really wanted to deploy but I held back. Manta, Newt and Sunfish all passed by quickly. In the bush, the work is hard and slow going but the time flies. We all have to help each other up the steep climbs. We peel layers like an onion to keep the sweat off. It was tough going but we didn't miss the huge trees and animal tracks. The lakes are slow, our minds wander and our eyes get lost in the endless white of snow on a lake on an overcast day.

Today's last test was leaving Sunfish. We anticipated bad ice and we found some, but with so much beaver grass and swamp we made easy work of the open water and soft holes we found and got to Catfish Lake late in the afternoon. We passed by Turtle Rock, a place of historical significance to the Algonquin people. Even in the winter, it looks like a big turtle. I remember Craig MacDonald telling me of a dig on an island in this lake that turned up many ar-

Lake la Muir

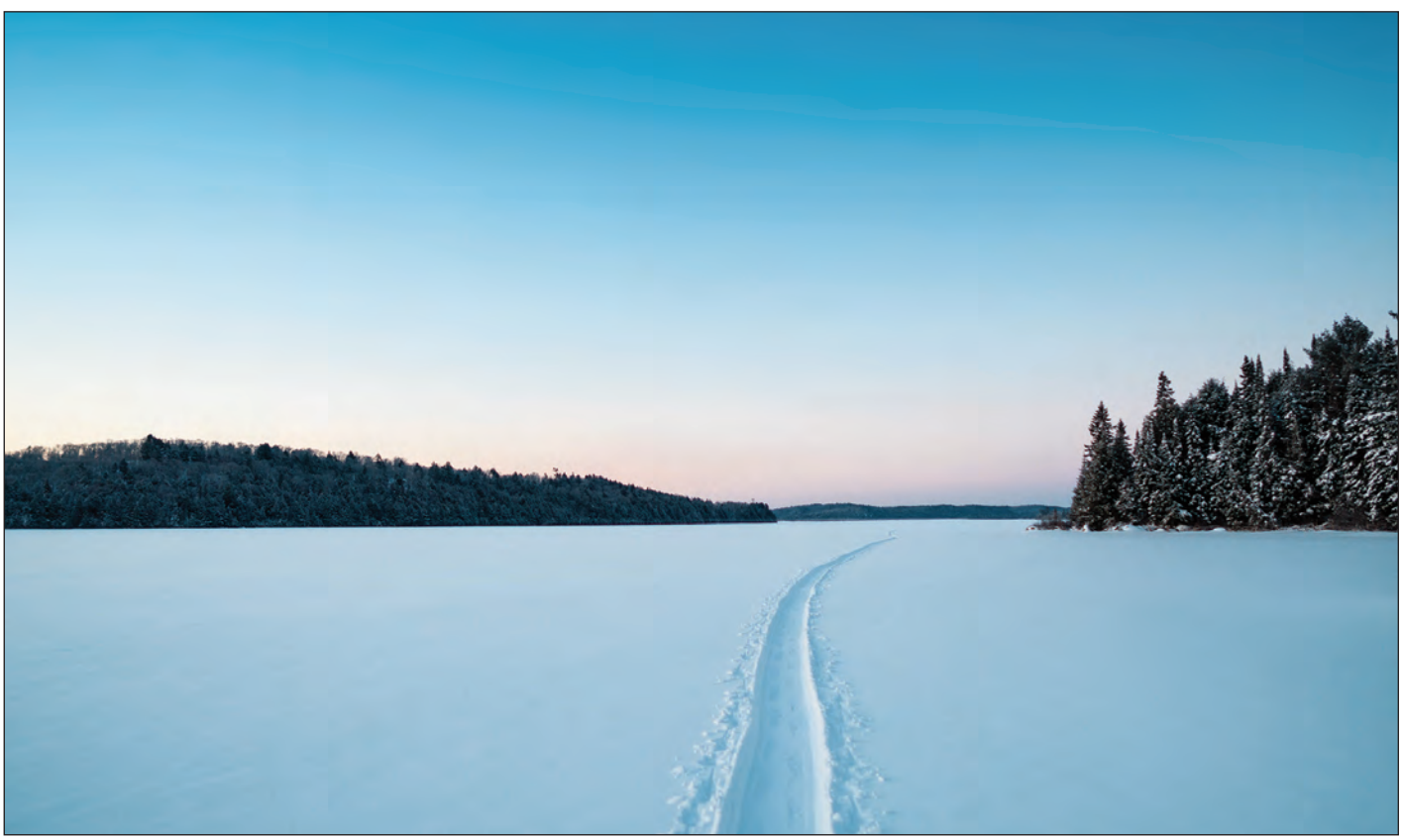
tifacts, in a location he wouldn't disclose. We headed to the northern bay of Catfish and made camp after 13 km.

Day 8, we woke up to -22º C and set a leisurely goal of 9 km to Brent today starting with an overland compass shot. We got to Lanter Lake after 3.5 km in as many hours through some fiercely tight bush. We found some small openings but it was tough going. Finally onto Lantern and into Ravenau for a sweet downhill that brought us on to Cedar Lake where we would make an easy crossing and make camp with time to rest before the chores of camp started. Overnight we discussed the possibility of going from Brent to Deux Rivieres in a day, straight down the unopened road. At 42 km long I thought it was insane. We're on bush skis, very wide and short. The idea of a marathon on the last day of an already hard trip was crazy. Ryan, who is literally one of the fittest humans on earth (google him) was happy to entertain such masochism. Yet, I agreed with one condition. That we have a rest day. In total, we would still save 2 days and I would get to heal up my overworked tendons and muscles before the marathon. We all agreed that day 8 would be spent at camp, mending our sore feet and getting rest for a big day. My mom and dad decided to drive up by skidoo and say hello. He offered us a cold beer, which no one wanted. If only it were a thermos of moose stew.

The final push was made at 8 a.m. on day 9. We ate every last bit of oatmeal we had, all the trail mix, absolutely everything we could to get enough calories in us and hopefully lighten the load for what was sure to be my hardest day on skis. The morning was cold and the skidoos had the road into Brent packed down hard. Our Altai Hoks are literally the worst skis on hard surfaces. They were terrible to control and the first 10 km passed with misery. But my prayers to the pagan mother earth were heard. Snow started falling heavily and it didn't stop. This was like rain in the Sahara to us. Our bodies were gliding, we weren't slipping and sliding, losing control. The snow sent the morale through the roof and in a little more than 6 hours, we made it to the Ottawa River and my parents' back door after 51 hours of moving time over 9 days and 165 km in total.

Packing camp and letting the stove burn its last bit of wood

Yesterday's tracks, Burnt Island Lake



Sunrise on Hogan Lake

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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 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.

Covid Update

As you all know, the WCA has suspended all in-person outings scheduled for **2020 and 2021**, taking into account evolving public guidance on risks of COVID-19 transmission between individuals from different households, and the unavailability of liability insurance for the members and the organization for COVID-19 infection.

The Covid-19 lockdown has introduced one benefit with the introduction of virtual WCA Zoom presentations and workshops. Past presentations have involved people from Canada, the US, and even Europe. Check out our WCA YouTube Channel for past presentations.

Our Monthly Roundup Newsletter keeps members engaged with the clubs' virtual activities. Check out Monthly Roundups on our website.

The summer of 2021 saw some club members organizing private trips with family and fully vaccinated close friends, and all reports indicate they went well.

The WCA board voted in September 2021, to restart events in **2022** based on the gradual increased percentage of fully vaccinated people and the easing of some Covid-19 government restrictions and continuing reduction in Covid 19 cases at the time.

To safely launch these WCA in-person outdoor events, all participants would be required to:

- Be fully vaccinated.
- Follow club and Covid-19 guidelines checklist.
- Sign off on an event Release of Liability and Waiver of Claims form.

The WCA guidelines can be found on our website under CLUB ACTIVITIES >Participant Resources and Organizer Resources pages.

A few months later, the Omicron variant has added a new challenge, and the WCA executive committee is monitoring the situation closely. This variant appears to be more contagious than previous variants, while South Africa (location that this variant was first detected) hospitalization data seems to indicate the variant is less severe overall.

Currently, the WCA plan is to allow members to post WCA in-person 2022 outdoor events based on current health care and government guidelines and the assumption that by the spring of 2022 we will be back to a low-risk outdoor situation. If the Covid-19 situation worsens, we would put the members' posted WCA events on hold, postpone and/or cancel.

Moving forward, we will closely monitor health and government guidance and this decision is of course subject to change per circumstances.

Contact us at info@wildernesscanoe.ca if you have any questions or advice.

Gary Ataman
WCA Chair

37th Wilderness and Canoeing Symposium

Symposium will take place on Wednesday, 16th February, between 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. (EST). Once again, more by necessity than by choice, it will be a virtual event hosted as a Zoom meeting. As you have come to expect, it will be an entertaining evening with lots of opportunities to learn new things, e-meet old friends and find a few new ones. Sincere thanks to all of you who helped with program ideas and/or as volunteers in different roles. Details at www.wcsymposium.com. I look forward to seeing you soon! Aleks

Diversity

You may have noticed that, more often than not, several longish stories carry the day in the recent *Nastawgans*. While those stories are certainly worth reading and quite inspiring, it would be really great to read a few shorter articles on a variety of topics. For example, what gear is on top of your trip packing list, good book review, how do you plan and prepare for both short and long wilderness trips, your favourite photo and/or memory, etc. Please sharpen your pencils, my friends, and start writing. If your story is selected for the Spring 2022 issue, not only will you become a world-renowned author, but you'll also get a prize from WCA – a Sunsbug, 1-person pop-up screen tent! Full disclosure – you need to pick up your prize in person from me at my Bell Rapids cabin (3 minutes by car from MKC on the Madawaska River). Bring them on! Aleks

More on Kazan Falls Cairn

Contribution by David Pelly in the Fall issue of *Nastawgan* (Kazan Falls, 1974) found its way into the hands of John Martin, one of the trip participants. John told the story of this trip at the 2013 Wilderness and Canoe Symposium in the presentation titled "Following Tyrrell: Reindeer to Baker Lake, 1974," and he wrote the cover story under the same title in the Spring 2014 issue of *Nastawgan*. Below is an edited version of the interesting correspondence that ensued between John and David in recent weeks.

Hello David, (cc Aleks)

I was amused to see my picture on page 23 of the Fall 2021 *Nastawgan*. That was a terrific 1974 trip organized by George, and the only long northern adventure I've ever had, sadly.

I'm writing because I recall that the Kazan Falls cairn was there when we arrived, having actually been "built" by Kazan trippers in 1973, so we probably should not get the credit. The little 1997 book *"Arctic Cairn Notes"* published by Betelgeuse Books (Toronto) has all the notes (some by you!) that had been left at the cairn up to that time. This book mentions on page 125 that we started the cairn, but my log mentions "last year's party" and says "the group last year left a cairn with their names on a stick". I don't remember the names of the 1973 canoeists, but it seems we knew about them. I think maybe they flew into Kasba Lake to start their trip? If you have any information, I would be glad to hear it.

See below a copy of the log page referring to the cairn – it mentions a "Jim Baker" and the log is a bit confusing in that sentence – I later found a note in the log that confirms that Jim was a geologist. Also, three of my pictures taken at the top of the falls include the cairn with a stick with our names on it. I don't see the stick with the 1973 names mentioned in my log, which is strange…I wonder if you ever saw their stick there, and if anyone recently has photographed the entries in the surveyor's notebook you left there, that would be interesting!

George and I worked on particle physics experiments at Fermilab outside Chicago in the 70s and 80s. At that time there was an annual canoe race around the 4-mile accelerator on the magnet cooling ponds. That short story was published in the Winter 2017 issue of *Nastawgan*.

John Martin

Hello John,

Thank you for writing. I hope seeing your 1974 trip celebrated once again in the pages of *Nastawgan* brought back good memories. I think it serves the WCA membership (especially the younger cohort) well to be reminded what a pioneer George was.

As for the cairn, you are correct. The original "stick" was placed there by Fred Gaskin, George Dobbie, Jack & Susie Purchase in 1973. They erected the stick by placing rocks around its base. I wonder, was it still standing upright when you arrived there? (That would be a minor miracle!)

For sure, George must've spoken with Fred Gaskin, who lived in Galt, Ontario, and was part of our circle of canoeists. I sought advice from both George and Fred prior to my first barrenlands canoe trip (Back River) in 1977. Gaskin's 1973 party started at Snowbird Lake, and paddled to Baker Lake. Fred wrote an article about their trip for *Canadian Geographic* (vol 93/3, 1976-77, p.46). I recall George telling me that your gang built a proper cairn, and placed Gaskin's stick in it, along with a "Beaver Nut" can containing your group's note. Others subsequently added notes to the collection in that can, including me in 1982. I don't know anything about Jim Baker, but my guess would be that he spent those two summers in the area as part of one of geology teams engaged in mineral explorations.

My first visit there was in 1982, when the can was still more or less intact. Next time was 1988, by which time the can had seriously deteriorated (as had Gaskin's stick), so I transferred the notes (after drying them in the sun) to a new waterproof container. I also reported the fact to the museum in Yellowknife. Those wheels turned slowly, but in 1991 I was authorized to collect the notes (and the Beaver Nut can) for deposit in the archives, and that is what led to the publication of *Arctic Cairn Notes*. In 1992, I returned a laminated, bound copy of the notes to the cairn, now protected in a hard-shell, waterproof case. In hindsight, it would have been a good idea to include a photo of the original Gaskin stick in the permanent record at the cairn and also in *Arctic Cairn Notes*. There's also a bound surveyor's notebook for the recording of new entries. I imagine it's getting quite full by now!

Best regards,

David Pelly

Paddling Home

Story by Leslie Hoyle
Photos by Bill Elgie, Leslie Hoyle
Map: Bill Elgie- Logo Art: Evelyn Elgie

End of the first day on the Credit River

The hotel in Port Credit was bamboozled by our arrival by canoe

A few days after the moving truck took the piano, furniture and other stuff of life to our new home, we left the piles of boxes behind and went back to start our 510 km odyssey "Paddle to Perth". This is the story of our 28-day canoe trip as my husband, Bill Elgie, and I "moved" via canoe from Georgetown to Perth, Ontario.

We were asked "Why are you doing this?" many times. This is a familiar question for canoe trippers from the unindoctrinated. The short answer: because we could. At one point during a lockdown (you know, one of those winter days when one is fantasizing about the next season's canoe routes) it occurred to us that it might actually be possible to paddle door to door from our old home to our new home. If it's possible, we thought, we should do it. The long answer is that we thought that it would be a good transition journey. Slow travel would give us time to reflect on our twenty-two years in the old place, and look towards our new lives as we approached our new home. We would literally say goodbye to the land as we paddled through the Great Lakes Lowlands, and say hello to the new geography as we paddled through limestone into the Canadian Shield. Besides which, our plans for a big wilderness trip in the Northwest Territories to mark our retirements fell apart due to the Covid 19 pandemic so local adventure was the name of the game.

The second step of idea realization is to tell everyone you know what you plan to do. Much head shaking and many dire predictions about paddling Lake Ontario notwithstanding, we planned the route. Two days down the Credit River from the Norval Outdoor School near Highway 7 and Winston Churchill Blvd. to Port Credit, followed by eighteen days of paddling along the shore of Lake Ontario and through the Bay of Quinte. A day off in Kingston before heading up the Rideau Canal for a week, then veering off onto the Tay Canal, and from there up the theoretically paddle-able Jebb's Creek into Otty Lake and a 1.5 km portage to our new home. It seemed simple enough.

The first big challenge was planning where to stay each night. We shamelessly took advantage of friends and colleagues situated advantageously along the way. For many, we were their first visitors in over a year, and our hosts were excited about playing a part in our journey. We also planned to camp when we could and make occasional use of B&B and hotel accommodations. We had driven this route on Highway 401 many times, but it is a totally different thing to experience by canoe. We looked forward to discovering urban and rural, rather than wilderness, Ontario.

Finally the big day had arrived! We walked our gear from the empty house down to the river and camped for our last night on the property. Dear friends came to see us off and, along with our two daughters (one headed back to Vancouver), sang The Old Irish Blessing

– with harmonies! – as we paddled away. Bawling my eyes out for the first kilometer of a canoe trip was a first for me, as was paddling south of Norval. In all the years we lived in Norval we always went north and paddled downstream to home. It was a lesson about discovering one's own backyard.

The first two days we paddled down the Credit River in our old ABS Mad River Explorer. Based on normal late July water levels, we had predicted walking much of the river 45 km from Norval to Lake Ontario but we lucked out with plenty of rain the week before the move and we paddled most of the way. By halfway through the first day I felt the stress of packing, moving, preparing the canoe trip and leaving our community fall away like rain off a tarp. The second day it pummelled rain which brought the river level up even higher. We even had to scout rapids a couple of times, running easy moving water all the way to Port Credit. The nice thing about the Credit River is that you wouldn't know you're paddling through one of the most populated and urban parts of Canada. Kudos to Credit Valley Conservation for preserving surprisingly long stretches of beautiful natural spaces in Mississauga.

In Port Credit, thanks to logistical support from our daughter who had our car for the month, we switched the ABS boat for our 17 foot, Kevlar/carbon fibre Bluewater Freedom Tripper which has great lines for speed on flatwater. One of our concerns about the trip was the big water of Lake Ontario. We had paddled big lakes before but Lake Ontario is in another league with potential for ocean-like swell and big chop. Our strategy was to be on the water by 7 at the latest most mornings to beat the wind and the heat. We also had a spray deck but we only used it once – as we paddled around the Pickering Nuclear Power Plant where the wind fought the current of the plant outwash to create unusual waves in the weirdly hot water.

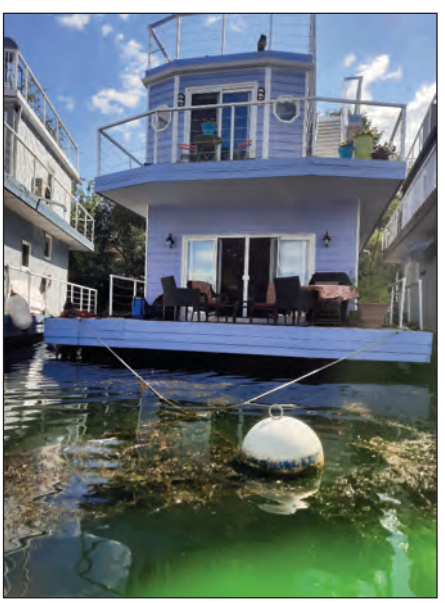
By paddling for about three hours in the still early morning, at about 5 km per hour, we put much of our distance for the day in before morning tea break. Another hour of paddling before a nice long lunch in a shady park, and then it wasn't long before reaching our destination for the day. We were also very lucky not to have had daytime thunderstorms and big wind during the weeks we were on the most exposed sections of Lake Ontario. We had enough time in the overall plan to lose time for wind if needed. We paddled about 20 km per day, on average, which didn't feel rushed.

"One of these things is not like the others." Etobicoke Yacht Club

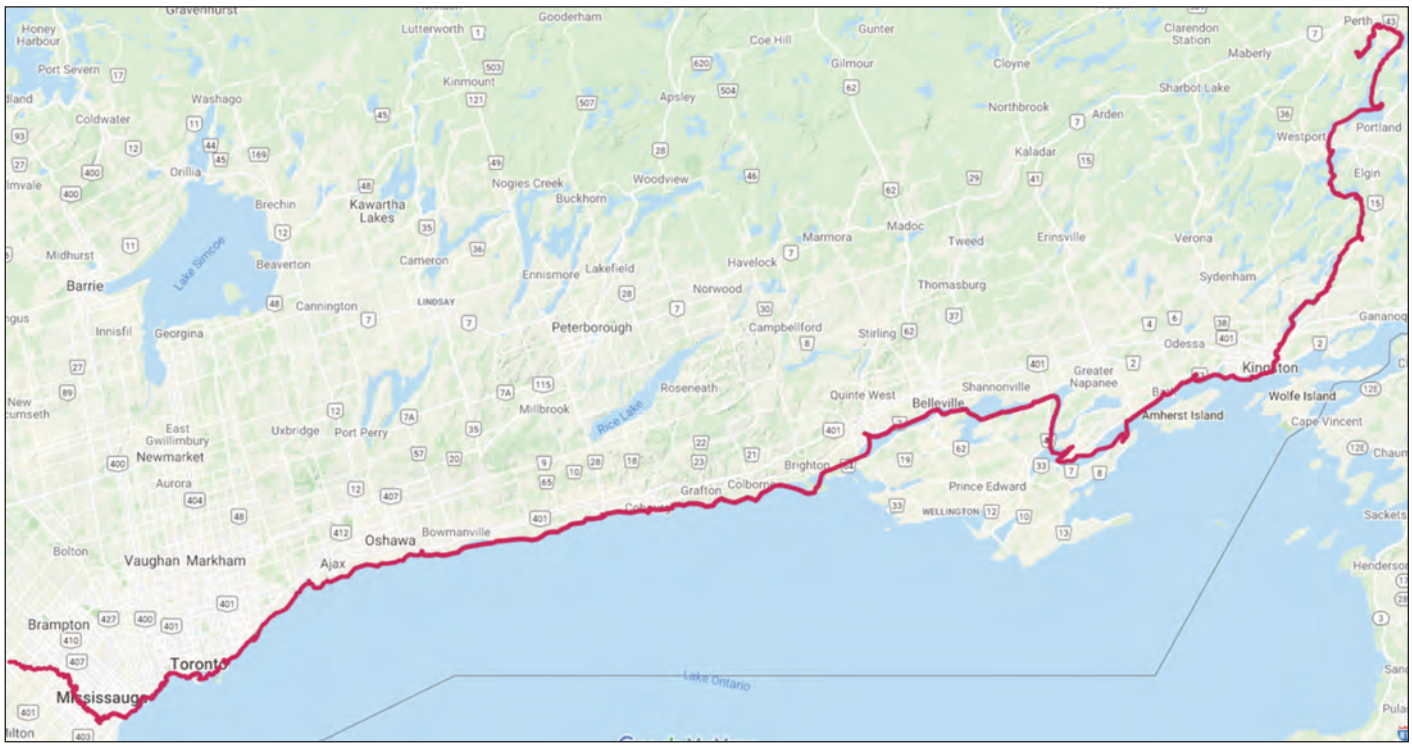
We were advised by an experienced sailing friend to go around Centre Island and avoid paddling through Toronto Harbour. Possibly made cocky by our success thus far, we thought we'd like to see the city skyline close-up from the water and disregarded this wisdom. Warning: even if the big water seems pretty calm the Western Gap which leads into the harbour will be a disaster from the wakes of fast motor boats bouncing off the hard sides of the narrow passage. Between the ferries, water taxis, pirate theme boats and huge yachts, all of whom slow down for no one, and the planes taking off and landing from the Island Airport; not to mention the sinister feel of gathering rain clouds, it was quite a stressful ride. We were still married at the end of the day, but the GoPro video was unpostable.

One of the most interesting places we stayed was a floating purple house in a neighbourhood of floating houses tucked under the Scarborough Bluffs. We had no idea such a place even existed! We spent one night on a friend's sailboat, and one night camping on a bit of rocky shore at the bottom of a cliff when other plans

Logo art by Evelyn Elgie



The fabulous floating purple house, Scarborough Bluffs



Route Map

Sunrise on Lake Ontario (near Ajax)

didn't work out. At our age we didn't need the stress of "stealth camping" every night but it was fun to do once. Two shoreline Provincial Parks were en route on Lake Ontario: Darlington and Presqu'ille. The Parks were very busy but it was nice to have predictable amenities and good swimming.

A most unusual thing about this canoe trip was that we had internet and cell reception for most of the journey. We used a cell phone to map and track our distance travelled and checked email. At our grown childrens' request we set up an Instagram account (@paddletoperth) to post our progress for family and friends. Being readily contactable was a mixed blessing. It was fun to meet up with friends, we could adapt plans and let's not neglect to mention obsessively checking the weather radar. It was good that we were available to advise when our daughter had a breakdown with (our) car. However, on the days when we camped in places without wifi or cell reception it was also a blessed relief and a reminder of one of the reasons we normally go canoe tripping in the wilderness.

Being in a canoe, rather than a motorboat or a car, invites conversation, especially in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) where the sight of a canoe loaded with

tripping gear is uncommon. We had many interesting conversations with strangers, including one gentleman who encouraged us to paddle the river of his place of origin, the Congo. Also, as a result of having the Instagram account we made connections with new people along the way. We received lots of encouragement and great local advice. We were invited for brunch to the home of a municipal counselor near Chaffey's Locks, and even had one lady paddle her kayak with us for part of the last day. Renewing connections with old friends and making new ones was a fulfilling part of this particular canoe trip.

Food on an urban canoe trip can be unpredictable, usually in a good way. Upon paddling into Port Hope we considered the lunch options: sit on the porch of the very charming lakeside cafe we just discovered or pull the not-very-fresh bagels and peanut butter out of the barrel. Hmm, tough choice. Another day we got into a trailer park and found a funky Alice in Wonderland themed food truck. Then there was the time we were camped at a vaguely sketchy and almost empty trailer park and an old codger rocked up in his John Deere golf cart at sunset. "You the people in the canoe?" We allowed as how we were at which point he handed us a heavy plastic bag. "Have some walleye." and off he went.

A big difference from our normal wild trips was the relative absence of printed maps. Directions were pretty straightforward – go downstream to the big water, then keep the land to your left. Turn left at Kingston and follow the buoys up the canal. In Kingston we switched boats again, picking up our canvas and cedar Prospector, purely for aesthetic reasons. The traditional, beautiful wood canoe seemed to fit the vibe of the historical 202 km canal joining Kingston and Ottawa, in use since 1832 and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In the Rideau Canal if we ever thought we'd save time by leaving the buoy-marked route for a shortcut we soon found ourselves dragging through the ubiquitous Eurasian Milfoil. This invasive species of water plant was introduced in North America in the 1940s and is damaging water ecosystems throughout Ontario by displacing native plants, reducing diversity and affecting wildlife habitat, not to mention clogging up the water for boats.

Urban portaging in Trenton

Urban camping in Cobourg

Lake Ontario shoreline

Unloading in Port Credit Harbour

In a lock on the Rideau Canal

Departure

Jebb's Creek, Day 28

We printed maps from Watson's 2021 Guide to The Rideau Canal found at rideau-info.com to plan our camping at the locks. Fun facts: A seasonal lock pass for a 17 foot canoe is $77, which allowed us to go through the locks. Camping at a lock is $10 per night (best deal of the trip) and two of the lock stations had showers available for camping boaters. The challenge of paddling the Rideau Canal is that there are very few places to pull over and swim from shore or have a private moment in the bushes since the vast majority of the shoreline consists of homes and cottages. However, there was ice cream. Life's a trade-off.

At one point we were being interviewed for a TV news piece about our big trip. The young producer said "So you've been married 31 years and you're on a 28-day canoe trip: what do you talk about?" (Subtext: what could you possibly have left to talk about after all that time?) We thought that was hilarious. We couldn't wait to get on trip to have time to talk about the important stuff of life. Or just not talk. And of course, there's always that important question "Where and when are we stopping for lunch?"

The most difficult day of the trip was Day 28, the very last day. The entire week on the Rideau had been extremely hot and humid and the last day especially so. We packed up our camp at Upper Beveridges Lock and paddled up the Tay Canal. It was a trick finding the entrance to Jebb's Creek, and we started walking through ankle-deep water immediately. About 10 beaver dam pull-overs later we were out of drinking water but we had made it to Otty Lake! I've never paddled so fast in my life as the last kilometres down Otty Lake to our community shared dock. A few friends were there to greet us and encourage us on that last 1.5 km portage to our house. After such a long journey it was an emotional homecoming.

I must admit that I derived great satisfaction from the reaction of a woman on a houseboat ahead of us in a lock whose jaw actually dropped when she asked how long our trip had been and I answered "We're on Day 26." It seems like most people don't have or make time for long canoe trips anymore but we highly recommend the practice. Whether the trip is wilderness, rural, urban or a mix, it's good for the soul to take life down to essentials.

"Please let this be a normal field trip!"

Portaging around a four lock change in water level

Still water on the Rideau

Landmarks in the Land of Little Sticks

By Paul Gifford

Editor's note: Another version of this essay is found in Paddling Pathways, forthcoming in Spring 2022. By YNWP, Regina, SK.

Edgeland

Nueltin Lake, Manitoba is big by any standards. It is 23,000 square kilometres. From the air, Lake Ontario looks like a big body of water, whereas Nueltin looks more like a bowl of islands than a body of water. As we approached it from the air, I wondered how we would ever find our way out of it.

This was July 22, 2005, and we had until August 15th to get to Hudson Bay. The first leg of our journey was an obscure historic route between Nueltin and Najanilini Lakes – 50 km, as the crow flies, but a lot further on the ground. It took us two weeks. Whereas, the last 50 km of the trip – blasting down the middle of the lower Seal River, we managed in one day.

But it's the first 50 km I remember not just because it was difficult, but also because it forced us to linger longer on the land we were travelling through, and then to think about where we were, and who had been there before us, and how the place had come to be.

This was really our reason for choosing this route. Four of the six of us were teachers. Two of us taught an integrated high school Canadian history, geography, and literature course together. So, we were very interested in the natural and human history of where we were going, and in how people imagined this place.

While the caribou walk along the eskers and then swim across the creeks and rivers, we would do the inverse – paddling along the rivers and portaging over the eskers. The first two eskers we would portage over, but a creek cut through the third one. It's called Rock Creek, because it is so strewn with boulders that canoes can barely fit in it. It also meanders through a massive peat bog that is too soggy to stand on. And the creek is too deep to stand in (it could be bottomless for all we know, as we never touched the ground beneath it). So, we pinballed among the boulders, the bow person getting out and pulling the boat past, the stern person shuffling to the bow, then the former bow person becoming the stern person. On that day we travelled 1 km. And the 50 km between Nueltin and Nejanilini took us two weeks. And it meanders through a soggy, sink-to-your-knees peat bog "the Mother of all peat bogs", we called it.

In retrospect, it would have been better to travel it in the winter on snowshoes, which is how people used to do it. It is as much land as it is water, and often it is some amalgam between.

Our trip was the definition of slow-going. "OK, at this rate, we will be at Hudson Bay by Christmas," someone said, which is when it occurred to me why few people travel this route in the summer, then and now. Winter is definitely the time to do it. And snowshoes are definitely the vehicles with which to travel.

The Edgeland Library

On the trip I was reading *A Brief History of Fire* by the wonderfully named Stephen Pyre. He later wrote a 600-page called *Awful Splendor: A Fire History of Canada*, and if this isn't the last word on the history of fire in Canada, I really don't care to read the last word. But it does put things in perspective. In addition to bringing *A Brief History of Fire* on the trip, I also brought *Ice: The Nature, History and Uses of this Astonishing Substance* by Marianna Gosnell. Additionally, I carried a pre-release copy of *Wood: Craft, Culture, History* by the appropriately named Harvey Green. Plus another dozen books or so. And a stack of back issues of Beaver Magazine. And a file folder full of photocopies of microfiche from the National Archives of Canada.

I packed it all in a wooden wannigan and called it "The Library of Little Sticks." In the middle of the first portage over a gargantuan esker, the library got other names: "That Goddamn Box" and "Gifford's F-ing Books." But after a few days, in our long, subarctic evenings inside the group bug tent, people dipped into the library and it became a part of us all.

Ragnar Jonsson, Nueltin Lake 1983

The Chipewyan (Denesuline) people have lived along Hudson Bay for millenia. They lived by moving between the two biomes – north onto the barrenlands in the summer, south into the woodlands in the winter. Here they could hunt the Qamanirjuaq Caribou herd, which moved between Hudson Bay and Great Slave Lake like a massive, meandering river, a living one. We would pass within 20 km of a 2,000-year-old caribous hunt camp beside an esker we portaged across. More than forty archaeological sites that predate 1492 have been located in the Land of Little Sticks. More will be found.

The natural history and the human history here are written on the land, but you have to know what you are looking for to see it. And in our historically and ecologically illiterate modern condition, that meant taking a lot of reading material on this trip. Reading words so we could then read the land.

In retrospect, I would call it The Edgeland Library – in recognition of where we were and how little we knew of it. Living briefly as we did on the edge of one world, staring into another.

People began to read the books. It was an end-of-the-day ritual to pitch a big bug tent, so that we could gather in the evenings to cook, eat, mend ripped clothing, and tend to sore feet and hands. Without the big tent, the blackflies – which came pouring out of the tundra the minute the wind dropped – would have forced us to retreat into our three differ-

Typical lunch spread

ent sleeping tents. And the library would have stayed closed. Whereas, once the bug tent was set up, I placed the wannigan right in the middle of it, opened its lid and began setting things out that I thought might interest people.

"The Library of Little Sticks is open," I'd announce. And so, we read about where we were while we were there, which, if you know anything about experiential education, is how you remember history and geography. It is how the brain makes landmarks that anchor stories to it – the stories of people in places doing things, or having things happen to them.

We found a wood stove by our camp. More precisely, it was an oil drum that had been turned into a wood stove. No stove pipe. So, whoever made this, they were where we were partly because there was wood for fire. They were also here because of the Twin Falls and the creek and the fish. And this wasn't far – by land, on snowshoes – from a caribou crossing, a nearby esker. Twin Falls was also a kind of hub of waterways, which, especially frozen, would take you in any direction you wanted to go. If you knew how to live off the land (or with it), then this was a good place to live.

We decided it wouldn't be right to camp there, beautiful as it was. And so, we swam in the creek and had lunch by the falls, and we took only one thing from the site – an eight-by-eleven inch piece of green canoe canvas, which one of us sewed into a cover for his journal which he wrote in at night. And he wrote about this place, because that night we had figured out who had lived here.

Nueltin Lake

We came across his name quite a few times in our reading: Ragnar Jonsson. Born in Sweden in 1900, he moved to Canada in his late teens and lived in Northern Manitoba, making ends meet. Then, in 1938 (a year before the war), he moved out onto the land by himself. Right here. Not just here, though: Ragnar Jonsson had a dozen camps like this one, and he moved around The Land of Little Sticks, trapping by dogsled in the winter, but only enough to trade for the provisions he needed to live out there. And he could hunt and forage as well as anyone, so he didn't need much. In the summer he paddled on the rivers and he sailed on the big lakes. There is an island named after him in Nueltin. One of his sled dogs was named after the lake.

When we got back from the trip, I picked up a copy of Bob Henderson's 2005 book, *Every Trail Has a Story*, and in it, in chapter four, which is set in The Land of Little Sticks, Bob writes about Ragnar Jonsson, whom he had the honour to meet in 1983. It would be Ragnar's last summer out on the land. We would have loved to have met him, especially out here at his Twin Falls camp. We might have had tea with him and got him talking about his life, the land, where he'd been, and whom he'd known. That would have been memorable. Ragnar Jonnson had probably travelled on the ground more than anyone who travels all over the world today, but gets there by airplane. And can you imagine the map in Ragnar's head?

Two Stories from the Edgeland Library

If you look at a map of the Canadian treeline, you'll see that it basically runs along the border between Manitoba and Nunavut – right through the middle of Nueltin Lake – where it begins to dip south as it moves east toward Hudson Bay. The forest leaned away from The Bay as we moved closer to it. And we leaned away with it, hugging the treeline, but staying close enough to the barrenlands to get a sense of it. It is an edgeland.

We followed the treeline, in part because that's where the water is and in part because we wanted to stay close to the trees while getting a glimpse of what the world would be like without them – the barrenlands to the north of us. The edge of the forest was our handrail, in orienteering terms. We needed the trees to provide wood for our physical comfort – for our tent poles and pickets, and for fuel for our fires – but also for psychological comfort. We'd all grown up canoeing in the forests of central and northern Ontario.

The "Little Sticks'' phenomenon is paradoxical in the context of how large the land looms. The trees are Lilliputian – rarely taller than four feet, mostly less than three – and thus they cast little shadow. In fact, the trees were in our shadows, and that made us feel like giants. Meanwhile we could see the curvature of the earth in all directions. And gigantic eskers looming east and west of us. And the constant presence of the wind coming off the barrenlands, the size of which we knew. Thus, we felt at once too big and too small for this place, like how the Little Prince must have felt poking out of his planet into the vastness of outer space.

Samuel Hearne had been advised by his Chipewyan guide, Matonabbee, to travel to the Land of Little Sticks in the winter. Hearne had made two failed attempts in the summer, and had only to tell the story because Matonabbee miraculously found him alone, on the verge of death, and rescued him. After which Hearne never travelled anywhere without him. Not only did Matonabbee advise Hearne to go on this next trip in the winter, he also warned him to stay inside the treeline, and never stray too far from the forest.

On this third attempt, Hearne with Matonabbee and his family entourage got to where they wanted to go and lived to tell the tale which is recorded in a book we had in the Library of Little Sticks. *Journey from Prince Wales in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean* was published in 1795, more than two decades after the epic trip, which itself took a year and a half (two winters) – from December 7, 1770 to June 30, 1771. Famously, Hearne didn't find either of the things he was looking for – a mother lode of copper at the mouth of "The Far-Away Metal

River," (The Coppermine River), or a navigable western outlet for the Northwest Passage. When he got to Coronation Gulf, where the Coppermine reaches the Arctic Ocean, and stood atop a ridge overlooking it, he wrote about what he saw: "This was no Northwest Passage. It was a rocky suburb of Hell." He and Matonabbee turned around and went back to Hudson Bay.

But here's the thing about exploration: while explorers often fail to find what they were looking for in the first place, they find a lot of other things along the way. And this was especially true of Hearne's journey. His book was the first written account in English of this part of the world. His detailed observations of the plants and animals of the tundra were used by Carl Linnaeus and Charles Darwin, and so Hearne influenced the system of classification of species and the theory of evolution and natural selection. And Hearne was generations ahead of his HBC and Royal Navy peers in his willingness to learn about indigenous culture and their use of well-honed technologies and deeply informed understanding of the land. He learned Chipewyan, knowing the language was itself a key to the door of what he wanted to understand. Matonabbee was to Hearne what Tenzing Norgay was to Hillary. Hearne's legacy was not that he got to where he wanted to go (there was no peak on this mountain), but that he learned about where he travelled.

White Rock was our own little Northwest Passage. Slowly, we made our way across this interface between land and water, and along the edge between the trees and the tundra, and into the conflict zone between two cultures, which still lay in front of us, and would be the most difficult part of the journey, not physically but morally. We would learn what happend at Duck Lake Post.

After we found our way out of the White Rock Creek quagmire, which again was a wonderful, if arduous, experience, we got windbound on Croll Lake. We awoke in the morning to the sound of the wind and saw the size of the waves on the lake and realized we were going nowhere that day. Which, to be honest, I quite enjoyed. Maybe we couldn't canoe, but in a wind like that the blackflies can't fly. So we lay out in the wind and sun and read. The library opened. We read about an upcoming landmark – Duck Lake Post. *Night Spirits* is a well-written, worthwhile read, but it's a hard read. It's a tragedy. I read it that day. As if the wind made us stay in one place so we would know where it was; where we were about to go. That night was cold but the northern lights came out. We had all seen them many times from the south. You look north and watch them dance on the horizon. But these were right overhead, in the middle of the sky. We were in a different environment and needed to understand how that was influencing our experiences.

The next day we paddled out of the south end of Nejanilini Lake into the Wolverine River. It is a lovely body of water. Known for its fishing – specifically, arctic greyling – it is a canoeist's dream. Neither big nor small, neither fast nor slow, the Wolverine has a steady, singing current (you can hear it); clean, clear water and stunning shorelines.

After lunch, we loaded up and paddled across Duck Lake into Little Duck Lake and just where the water picked up speed to re-enter the river, we saw the abandoned HBC post we were expecting to see. Closed as recently as 1954, we knew we would find ruins.

On the east bank of the river, appropriately the Hudson Bay side, the classic rectangular, wooden- peaked roof, peeled paint (white with green trim) of the HBC. I had long romanticized this era in Canadian history. Like the subsequent logging era, there are enough wilderness heroics and crazy tales to make it good entertainment. But it is not something to be proud of. I used to proudly wear a woolen HBC hockey sweater. Instead of a number or name on the back, it says Est 1670, the incorporation date of the company. I don't wear it anymore. I don't wear it because of what we found that day.

On the other side of the river, the west bank, were the traces of a Sayisi Dene camp. Had I not just read *Night Spirits*, I would have happily wandered through this archive in ignorance. But I had just read the book and the place brought me to tears. Imagine what it felt like to be a descendent of the people who lived here. The history of the HBC and, equally appalling, The Government of Canada's response to what the HBC did, is shameful. The first part of Truth and Reconciliation is truth. The truth is sometimes hard.

Edgeland

In short, the market for silver fox pelts, upon which the HBC's Duck Lake had become entirely dependent, crashed. Silver fox was no longer in fashion. So, in 1954, the HBC closed the post, there being no more money to be made from it. And the Dene were left on the other side of the river having lost their economic base. So, the Department of Indian Affairs flew a plane into Duck Lake and the government official told the Dene they could be taken to Churchill, on the barren shores of Hudson Bay, near Fort Prince of Wales. This was not traditional Dene land. And Churchill was home to many Cree and Metis people, who were traditional enemies of the Dene. The Dene lived on the outskirts of town in a slum. As a result of the government relocation, more than half of the Dene in Churchill had died by 1973. For the full story, read *Night Spirits* by Ila Bussidor and Ustun Bilgen-Reinart, 2006.

Taken together, the landmarks comprise a larger map, and a story, and a way of remembering where we were and who was there before us.

Note: On August 16, 2016, Carolyn Bennet, the Minister of Indigenous and Native Affairs, offered an apology to the

The Library of Little Sticks

Sayisi Dene people for their forced relocation from Little Duck Lake to Churchill, MB in 1956. $33.6 million has been offered in compensation.

Place Cells

In 2014, the Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology was awarded to three neuroscientists who had discovered the navigation system inside the human brain. The scientists found five different kinds of navigational neurons – brain cells devoted to wayfinding. First, they found place cells. A place cell is a brain cell, an individual neuron, which fires off an electromagnetic signal when your brain recognizes a landmark. The flickering of the place cell is the moment of recognition. A little lantern is lit in the darkness of the forest. When one place cell fires, it ignites another place cell, and another, and so on – the forest lit with dozens of lanterns. Wherein, you know where you are. Because we learn one landmark in relation to another. This is the ecology of navigation. It is also the ecology of learning and remembering. All of this takes place in the same part of the brain – the hippocampus.

Simultaneous to the igniting of place cells in the hippocampus, grid cells fire up in the entorhinal cortex. Unlike place cells, which fire one at a time, grid cells fire up all at once, as a network. Imagine 100 of them, itching and marking an intersection on the grid. If place cells are the map pins, grid cells comprise the map itself. This puts the place cells in their places.

Head-direction cells (HD cells) spin the grid to keep it oriented to the land as you change direction. Thus, orienting the map. It's a combination of a compass and an organ that knows how to use it. The map in your head adjusts continuously as you move. Including when you speed up and slow down – from walk to run, run to walk. This is when your speed cells ignite. Speed cells essentially adjust the scale of the map to accommodate your changing pace. So, like on your smartphone, speed cells zoom in when you slow down and zoom out when you speed up. As long as you don't speed up too much. There is an evolutionary limit to how fast you can go before your entire navigation system stops working – freezes, in our screen-bound way of thinking. Which is why we can only make a mental map when we are walking or canoeing – somewhere between barely moving to about 6 km an hour. And not on a straight path, or a path cut by someone else, or behind someone who is navigating for you. So, the antithesis of a mental map maker is someone in a car driving on the 401 with the windows up and the music blaring. Somewhere between the car and the actual navigator is the jogger wearing headphones plugged into their iPhone, which they occasionally look at to see where they are (or, more likely, how much longer you have to keep running).

Lest they run off the edge of their map which is where, if you are paying attention, your border cells kick in. When the navigator is approaching the limit of their known world, as in a ship during the Age of Exploration, or when the hunter is about to cross into someone else's land, it sets off a series of play cells that specialize in marking the edge of your map. These are called border cells. Without them, many navigators would have never lived to tell their tale.

Taken together, border cells, speed cells, head-directions cell, grid cells and place cells comprise a mind-bogglingly complex navigation system. And this may be why people don't seem to have paid much attention to its discovery. But even if we think we don't need our brains to navigate anymore, what will it be like not to ever know where we actually are? What is it to be nowhere in particular, or to come from somewhere with no landmarks, that looks like it could be anywhere. And, finally, in the context of this generation of young people, is it possible for a child to develop a coherent sense of self when they have no cohesive sense of place? We know not, but we are about to find out.

Memories

Neuroscientists are still figuring out how it all works, but basically there are neurons that allow us to see where we are on the land as if we are a bird in the sky. The bird's-eye view, but of ourselves. It's a kind of out-of-body experience, or maybe a moving back and forth between the first-person narration of our story, and some third-person narration of it, the way a novelist shifts the point of view chapter by chapter. Also, we incorporate the different perspectives in the company we keep while we move through a place.

We are, each of us, our own storytellers. To our memories we select some beads and discard others. Our brains will encode some landmarks as play cells and not others. Probably the most important thing is to go there, to encounter the ground truth of what the land actually is with you in it. Where the aurora sits, how the flies rise as the wind falls, and what has happened to the land's people.

I do not think I have a clear and continuous map in my head of that canoe trip 15 years ago. I like to think of it that way, but it is not how I remember it. Looking back – looking at all my paper maps (there are a lot of them: 1:250,000, 1:50,000 various historical maps) – there are blank spaces in my recollection. I know I was there but I don't remember being so.

Recollection, re-collecting the pieces. The trip is more like a meandering thread, the way you lay down a string on a map to measure the distance of a curving route. Along the thread, beads represent the landmarks I recall. There are loops in the thread where the beads are clustered. The recollections.

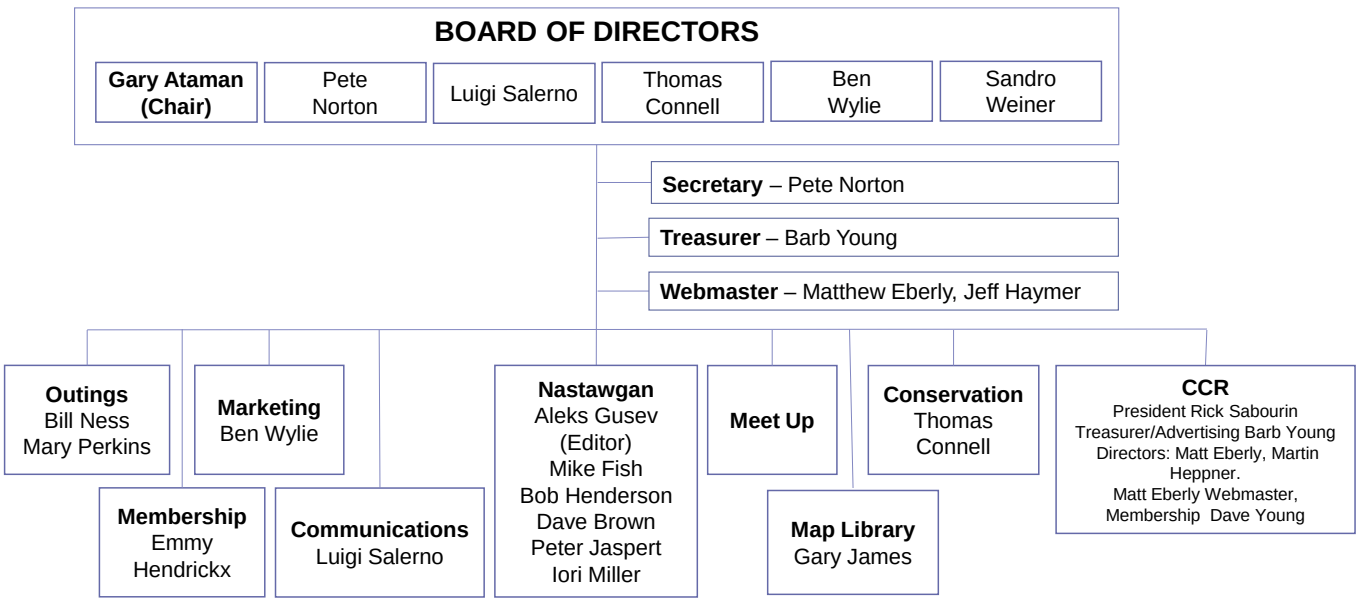
There are long stretches of the thread where there are no beads at all. And yet I know I was there. Of the lower Seal River I do not remember much except for the singular impression I had of it: it was big and that it was fast, that as we got closer to Hudson Bay, the trees got smaller until there were none at all.

I remember the first esker, the peat bog, the boulder strewn creek, the expanse of Nueltin and floating islands, the bug tent reading sessions and the windbound places. I remember the way the trip made clear the successes and failures of various interstitial spaces between ecosystems in the edgelands; between the seismic forces of fire and ice, land and water, and between cultures – indigenous and settler. I remember coming to know that the natural world was much better at negotiating these spaces in equitable ways. I remember Duck Lake Post and for truth and reconciliation to even have a chance, I must never forget.

For more information on Place Cells, see "The Hexagonal Theory of Memory" in The Atlantic. January, 2019.

…in this issue

WCA Governance Structure



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