wilderness canoe association

nastawgan

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John & Sonja sliding down a beautiful black V

Paddling the Bloodvein River

Story and photos by Cindy Chandler

The Bloodvein River is a Heritage River that flows from the headwaters of Red Lake, Ontario to the east side of Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba. It is around 300 km long. The first 100 km or so are a series of lakes and some arduous portages. As whitewater enthusiasts we decided to start with a fly-in to Artery Lake and paddle the remaining 210 km through some 77 sets of rapids over 13 days. We brought with us Hap Wilson's description of the rapids (his book on Manitoba Rivers) and a friend's previous itinerary, that combined was very helpful with our plans and travel. We had planned to do this river in 2021 but a week before departure, the aviation company Blue Water Aviation gave us the heads up that no flights, people, or canoes could go in due to the massive ongoing forest fires. In fact, they were evacuating canoeists who were currently on the river. Disappointed but glad not to be on the river at that time. But the spring and early summer of 2022 brought significant rain, giving us high water that was sometimes too much to run loaded boats. We also had some less experienced paddlers so felt we needed to be conservative with our decisions on running or not. Get Hap Wilson's book on Manitoba Rivers with great descriptions of the

Just the beginning of a tricky rapid

rapids and call Blue Water Aviation for your fly-in.

Since this was our summer vacation, we decided to take a leisurely drive 2263 km from the Ottawa area to Bissett, Manitoba located about 2.5 hours north-east of Winnipeg. Bissett is a welcoming community with a great little community campground where we could camp and sort through our gear for a 6 a.m. flight the next morning. We can't say enough about Blue Water Aviation and their excellent service. They offer a shuttle service, dropping off our trucks at the bridge takeout that crosses the Bloodvein about 10-20 km before Lake Winnipeg. They were very accommodating in allowing us to notify them if we were going to be earlier or later than planned, and as luck would have it, we were a day early, so after we sent an Inreach message, "Tanya" had the trucks waiting for us at the bridge as promised.

Scouting the rapid from a higher elevation

Lining a drop river right

Competitive afternoon event with great prizes

Most beautiful campsite & river view

Scorched earth from 2021 fires

Saturday July 30th

Up at 4 a.m. to get the last-minute things packed and head over to catch our flight.. Rather than nesting the canoes, we chose to charter two flights. It was a beautiful morning and fortunately we were flying early. There was a fishing derby later that morning and we were told it makes for a little tricky take-off and landing with the many fishing boats in the water. The flight is only 20 minutes to Artery Lake. Since the beach drop off was underwater due to the high water, we dropped off in the lake less than 500 m from our first campsite. We planned to stay there for the day and search for the pictographs on Artery Lake then head downriver the next day. Well, we think we found a couple of pictographs but determined that the high water may have covered some and others were very faint. We checked out the marine railway on the first rapid #10 which was not far from our camp-

Typical scenery on the Bloodvein

site, ran the rapid and headed back to camp looking forward to starting downriver the next day. One of our canoeists, an avid fisherman, caught a large pike with his first cast and that certainly set the tone for him this trip. Late that night a huge thunder, lightning, rain, and windstorm blew in and was relentless in the morning. Begrudgingly, we crawled out of our tents and waited for someone to say, let's hold tight to see if the weather clears. The whitecaps were horrendous on the lake and would not have been a fun start to the trip. By noon, it was still roaring so we settled in for the day, keeping a fire going, reading, napping, and playing cards.

Monday Aug 1st

Weather had improved – sunshine in the morning and a few showers off and on throughout the day. The trip has now officially begun! Lots of wildlife sightings

Camping in the burn and no bugs

Nice campsite beside a C1

today, bald eagles, golden eagles, otters, cow moose and calf, snow geese and pelicans! Who knew they would be so far north. They are very large and seem to be in groupings of 20 or more. When they took flight, their wingspan was huge, and you could hear the flap of the wings as they took off and flew overhead. We ran a few rapids today and lined around a canoe-eater rock outcropping. Little elevation but very pretty area with the rock shore interspersed with some swamp areas and we camped 1.5 km past rapid #20.

Tues Aug 2nd

Another day of mixed weather. At least the winds were calm. Again, we were able to run a few rapids but lined and portaged more in this section. The portages were relatively easy with the longest being 440 m, rocky and steep, beginning to end. Today we saw evidence of last year's forest fires. We travelled about 16 km to camp at what Hap Wilson calls X-Rock rapid #25 and yes, there is a distinct vein in the rock marking an X. Very typical Canadian shield scenery and drop and pool rapids.

Wed Aug 3rd

What's a canoe trip without headwinds? Today we had strong westerly headwinds but no rain and long stretches of flat water mixed with a couple longish portages (440 m & 275 m). Goose Rapids was not runnable but did have a memorable portage. The area was quite burnt, and the rough portage was marked with flag tape up and over a steep elevation. We diligently followed Hap Wilson's river description but had to make allowances for the high water. We portaged our gear over the "fishhook" at Goose Rapids and ran the technical rapid with empty boats. All good until the third boat hit the diagonal wave near the end and catapulted the stern person John out of the boat. The bow person Sonja – petite and mighty – had an amazing brace to stay upright but she had no idea she was alone, and we could hear her shouting "keep the boat straight!" However, the boat swamped and over she went. Our destination today was to camp at Round the Bend Rapid, which was a beautiful, play rapid and excellent campsite. Lots of wildlife viewing again today and John caught three pickerel, which we had for breakfast.

Thurs Aug 4th

Less wind today and a mix of sun, cloud,

and rain showers but the temperature was warm. The scenery was the nicest so far. It really felt like a river, as it was much narrower with rocky shores and very little evidence of burn. A couple of portages, runnable rapids and lining seemed to be what we were encountering each day. The marked campsite below CI #37 was not really evident to us, but with a little ingenuity by all we made a decent, comfortable site for the night. Today we saw the most amazing display of pelicans on the river and in flight.

Friday Aug 5th

Today was a little later start and we got on the river at 9:45 a.m. We were able to run more rapids CI & CII, and take easy portages or lining around falls. We have now estimated that we are approximately 110 km away from the takeout. The intended destination today was to camp at Okogie Falls, which was described as a great site on the portage or on the upper bluff. We did not find the portage campsite and the site on the bluff meant a long walk to the river for water. We agreed to paddle five km further to Kautunigan Lake to another marked campsite. We think we found it and although not ideal, a little bushwhacking made home look good. The next two days look like numerous rapids to contend with but we are ahead of our planned itinerary so fingers crossed we can run more than we need to portage.

Sat Aug 6th

How many of us have had this happen? We leave our campsite and no more than two km around a bend is the actual marked campsite, which looked like an upgrade to where we were last night! The next hill over, we spotted a black bear on the hillside watching us very carefully before he waddled on up into the forest. A couple of CIs and swifts were a nice diversion today from the flat water paddling, and we stopped to check out a well-maintained hunt cabin. We decided to have a short day and camped at Chap Falls, which is a very nice campsite. The rapid itself is a CIV suggested as a play rapid, but at this water level there were some large holes requiring tricky moves and even the experienced paddlers passed on the play. It was nice to have a shorter day. We have a tradition that each boat brings a surprise event/game to the trip and when appro-

Staying out of the big waves

First day, first catch made John happy

Plaque on bridge at take-out

priate, reveals a surprise, which always adds some entertainment. Today was perfect for the ladder game one of our friends made. First we painted rocks that we would toss to accumulate points. The prize was your choice of a mini beverage courtesy of samples they had collected on the side of liquor bottles. Lots of laughs!

Sun Aug 7th

We are making good progress and travelling on average 18-20 km each day. There has been good current and today looks like we can run most of the rapids. We are still encountering lots of wildlife, moose grazing in swamps, black bears, snow geese, otters and so on. Perhaps feeling a little overconfident, we decided to take a tricky line at CII rapid #54, thinking how bad can this be, and doesn't higher water make things easier to run? Well, the first hole we ended up in we were seriously side surfing and after what seemed like a long time, we slipped out the side only to end up in the next, bigger hole. Now we are full of water, bracing, leaning and just trying to paddle out. Over we go, but fortunately a nice big eddy to swim into was not far away. It made for good conversation the rest of the day analyzing what went wrong. A short, wet paddle to a very nice campsite located between rapid 55 & 56 was a great place to settle in for the evening.

Monday Aug 8th

Today is sunny and warm with 16 sets of rapids to make life interesting. We encountered technical CIIs that required scouting first and 1.5 m drops, CIIIs with 1.5 m wave trains needing a good brace, complex CI/II followed by ledges not runnable in high water, possible sweepers to be aware of and landing in very strong currents at the brink of the rapid. We paid close attention to our guidebook, especially the notation "Do Not Run". Our intended campsite at the end of the day, described as having a scenic view, was destroyed by fire. Now we were in quite a large area that was ravished by last year's fires. It looked like a war zone. Even though we were filtering our water it still had a smoky taste to it. We did not see any wildlife in this section and the portages were destroyed. Some portages had flag tape, which

helped with direction, but there were many burnt trees to step over. With the high water the entry to some of the portages was very close to the top of the drop, and strong current made for some quick jumps out of the canoe to land. Every day we have been able to run some rapids so that keeps the spirits high! The scenic camp on river right one km past rapid #73 Kakasannapeekak Rapids was totally burnt but we were able to set up camp across from it. Even still, many trees were burnt, and soot was getting all over everything.

Tues Aug 9th
Another day of ferocious headwinds. We paddled 16 km to camp at Rapid #78. It was tough paddling but we did have runnable rapids CI-CIII. This section of the river was designated as scenic but unfortunately again the burn has altered that. The river is getting bigger again as more side rivers and creeks empty into the Bloodvein. We camped at a nice little CI rapid #78 with a surfing wave to play on.

Wed Aug 10th
Sunny and hot but no headwind today. This area had escaped the fire and now you can call it scenic. Had lunch at a very pretty spot where the Leland River comes in. The river is still drop-and-pool and we realized there must be a good current as we ended our day at Namay Rapids by midafternoon. We found a big, open rock shoreline and good tent sites, which were slightly elevated above the river. This campsite was the best of the trip. Swimming and a little boat play after the drop was our entertainment for the rest of the day. A couple of us made mention that we thought the river level was dropping, which of course started a good debate. You could watch the features of the rapids grow and recede, specifically a surf wave that was there one minute and gone the next. Strong eddy fences and boils were interesting to watch change.

Thurs Aug 11th
It's our last day paddling and we have 15 km to go to the bridge takeout. With four more rapids to go we ran the CIIs easily, lined the CIII and casually enjoyed the CIs and swifts. We were at the bridge by 2 p.m. and on the road back to Bissett, which was about a 1.5-hour trip.

A view upriver untouched by fires

Overall, this was a wonderful trip and we would highly recommend putting this on your bucket list. On average we paddled 20 km/day in five to six hours. We chose to do some shorter days rather than full-day layovers. The bugs at this time of year were non-existent other than some annoying little flies that hung around the bottom of your boat to feast on your ankles, fishing was good, water warm and virtually no one else but you on the river.

Guy, Cindy, Sonja, John & Ed loading the plane (photo credit Cheryl)

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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.

2023 AGM

The Annual General Meeting was held online on March 14, 2023 with about 30 members in attendance from Canada and the US. It was announced that this is the 50th anniversary of our club. The plan for this year is to continue ramping up our in-person events (by members for members) and to create the WCA history page on the website.

Club membership was around 500 members as of Dec 31, 2022. Members are from nine Canadian provinces and two territories, 31 states from the United States, three European countries (UK, Germany, Switzerland), Cayman Islands and New Zealand.

The Fall issue of Nastawgan was delayed with the loss of our long-time printer, but we managed to secure a new print house and seem to be back on track.

We had three new members join the board; Lachlan McVie, Terry Brayman and Erik Thomsen. We would like to thank; Luigi Salerno (Round Up monthly newsletter & Zoom events), Sandro Weiner (Zoom & In-person events, Instagram) and Pete Norton (secretary) for their efforts and commitment to the club.

Our Conservation Committee has been actively assisting members in some of their conservation efforts, and participated as a stakeholder in important topics involving other land and water management studies.

Remember, anyone can post an outing and it's a great way to find lifelong friends!

Gary Ataman,WCA Chairman

2023 WCS

38th Wilderness and Canoe Symposium (third consecutive held online) was attended by 823 registered participants who were treated to three superb and memorable presentations:

Chris Forde and Dana Starkell *"Paddle to the Amazon"*
Michael Peake *"Canoeing with History"*
Kara Zegar, Harri Seeley and Ava Carrere *"Clearwater River to Hudson Bay"*

As Erika Bailey mentioned in her closing comments, we are looking to create a 'long runway' to explore the possibility of returning to in-person or possibly launching our second hybrid event (the first being the phenomenal presentation in 2019 from Lesley Johnson (ON) and Kristen Tanche (NWT): "*I hold Dehcho in My Heart*".) The preliminary survey results point in the direction of the hybrid event, most likely to be held and York University. Please continue to send your programing suggestions and general feedback to wcsymposium@gmail.com.

Aleks Gusev

50th Anniversary of WCA

The Wilderness Canoe Association had its beginnings in 1973. Over five decades there have been many changes but the core goals of the club have remained the same. We plan to compile the WCA history in a document that will be accessible and searchable on our website. We are also planning some online Zoom sessions to capture some of the stories first hand from veteran WCA members. If you have some history you would like to contribute please contact me at chair@wildernesscanoe.ca. Sandy Richardson, one of our early members, has written a wonderful piece on the beginnings of the club. Thank you Sandy.

Gary Ataman, WCA Chairman

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 the Editor for encouragement, tips & tricks!

The Real Beginning of the WCA

Sandy Richardson

It was sometime in the spring of 1974, I think, during preparations for a trip on the Nahanni River, that I came across an application form for the Wilderness Canoe Association in Margesson's, a camping/outdoor store on Adelaide Street in Toronto. (Dave Margesson, I later learned, was one of the founders of the WCA.) It was the name of the group that attracted me: the Wilderness Canoe Association. It promised to be more than just a social club for weekend paddlers. I sent off my $5 and looked forward to joining a group of serious canoeists interested in exploring our vast wilderness heritage.

In due course, I received a welcoming letter and a copy of Volume l, Number I of Beaverdamn, the Wilderness Canoe Association's "interim" newsletter. I learned that the association had been formed in late 1973 in Orillia. It had wonderfully ambitious aims encompassing education, safety, and the environment, and even bringing a test case before the courts to preserve traditional portage rights. But something was missing. Among all these lofty ideas there was almost no mention of members actually doing any wilderness canoeing. Only one club trip (already past) was listed and no up-coming meetings. That was it; no further newsletters or other communication followed.

Now I was not the only one who had found an application and joined up; in fact, many of my paddling buddies had as well. We were all disappointed that a club with such a fine name could be such a bust. For most of us that is as far as it would have gone – another wasted $5. But not for my friend and work colleague Gord Fenwick. Gord, as some of you may recall, was not one to take anything lying down. After months of hearing nothing he was on the phone to the secretary, eventually forcing her to call a general meeting even though the chairman and many of the executives could not be found or were no longer interested. That meeting, arranged largely by Gord, was held in early 1975 at Seneca College in King City.

About 25 people attended the meeting; some were folks who had joined on speculation, like myself, and others who were canoeing friends whom Gord and I had invited. At that meeting we replaced the old executive. Gord volunteered to serve as chairman and I as vice-chairman. Pat Armstrong and Alex Stoddart from the original executive board stayed on as secretary/treasurer and membership coordinator, respectively; and Pete Emmorey sent word that he would continue as newsletter editor, although he was not present. (Dave Margesson was not present and did not wish to continue as a member of the executive board, but offered assistance if needed.) More importantly, we set a new direction for the WCA, replacing the grandiose but unrealized aims of the founders with a more practical emphasis on an active programme of member trips and regular communication through a quarterly newsletter. Before we left the meeting, we had put together a calendar of six trips (three novice and family trips, and three trips for experienced paddlers) for the spring, arranged for a newsletter to come out in March, and agreed to meet again in the fall to assess how things were going.

Things happened quickly that "first" year. The club mounted a display at the Sportsman's Show, thanks to Dave Margesson who let us use some of his space, to showcase the club and attract new members. To keep informed on matters of interest to wilderness canoeists, the WCA took out memberships in and engaged with a number of other organizations, including: Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Sierra Club, Algonquin Wildlands League, National and Provincial Parks Association, Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, Canoe Ontario, and the Ontario Voyageurs Kayak Club. The initiatives we had set out at the meeting went well. The newsletter came out regularly and on time. Our first trips were well received and more were listed in each newsletter, including a 4-day fly-in trip on the Dumoine River that summer. New members stepped forward as trip organizers. Hiking and winter trips were included, making the WCA a club for four-season wilderness travellers. Membership had grown to 125 by the fall. At the fall meeting, the club executive was increased to six members; the secretary/treasurer position was split with Pat Armstrong remaining as secretary and Glenn Spence taking on the role of treasurer. Because of resignations, Ralph Kitchen took over as membership coordinator, and Roger Smith as newsletter editor. With Volume 2, Number 4 (December 1975), the newsletter changed its name to The Wilderness Canoeist and moved to a tabloid format that allowed us to include photographs. The club adopted a new logo in the spring of 1976 for use on the newsletter, brochures and stationery; designed by Barry Brown, it gave the club a much more professional look. (This logo was recently modified and is again the WCA's logo.)

The rest, as they say, is history.

Although the WCA existed on paper in 1973 and 1974, the real beginning of the association we know today was at that meeting at Seneca College in 1975. The WCA has certainly grown and changed over the last five decades: membership has increased about 20-fold to around 500 today (the membership fee has increased as well); the average age of members has probably doubled; the number and range of club trips has grown; the WCA journal has changed its name (from Beaverdamn, to Beaverdam, to The Wilderness Canoeist, to Nastawgan), and format (from a simple photocopied and stapled newsletter, to a newsprint tabloid then a bookstock tabloid, to a magazine, now glossy and in colour), as well as growing in size and quality; new activities like slide shows and the annual wilderness canoe symposium have been introduced; and we have taken on an active role in conservation issues. However, the course we set at that 1975 meeting has remained the guiding principle behind the WCA.

Water and Canoe Tripping: A Messy Fluid Situation.

By Bob Henderson and Chuck Rose

The Water of [Big Trout Lake] Hasn't Changed: We Have. To Filter or not to Filter: It Depends. Water Water Everywhere but Nary A Drop to Drink……Without Human Intervention.

I cannot recall a specific moment in time when water quality issues became a peculiar conundrum for my career as an outdoor educator and more simply as a canoe tripper. Perhaps this is because the transition from freely drinking water on the pristine water systems of Canadian canoe routes to filtering water before drinking the same said water happened slowly. I feel like it snuck up on us and we went from water quality in the wilds being hardly an issue (go back centuries) to an issue of choice (I hardly remember this time of choice) to an issue of much less choice to no choice (consult your risk management plan).

By now you can tell I'm on the side of drinking freely from pristine water systems on your canoe trips. With help from fellow canoe tripper and water scientist Chuck Rose, we will lay out a position in defense that "natural" water can be trusted. In short, water hasn't changed, we have. Yet again, Chuck and I are not addressing water modestly and/or certainly heavily affected by human polluting factors.

Take Big Trout Lake in Algonquin Park or Argo Lake in Quetico or the Yukon's Big Salmon River or … why not the Upper Clearwater River in Northern Saskatchewan. Good name! I'd freely dipped my cup into all these pristine waters back in time before it was suggested I not. We also boiled water and drank lots of tea if water quality was in question. The threat, barring industrial or agricultural waste, is *Giardia*/beaver fever (other microorganisms such as harmful algae blooms and *Cryptosporidium* are nearly always even less of a risk). We don't explore algal blooms or

Laurentian University students on Icelandic plateau hiking trip

Crypto in this paper.

We agree of course, politely, supported by evidence-based work that *Giardia* can be an issue. In pristine waters, *Giardia* numbers generally measure so low (1 cyst per 100 liters) that infection is highly unlikely; though we are not negating the lake water beaver fever thing. One stool potentially contains 300 million cysts which are infectious forms of *Giardia*. Other qualifiers are also important. Indeed, highest percentages of *Giardia* reported cases culturally-wide occur from fecal-oral transmission connected with poor hygiene. Infant day care is a common site of *Giardia* transmission. Shit happens…. in many forms. Better hygiene practices on the trail (more hand sanitizing and hand washing) and more knowledge of water quality threats would be wiser than a blanket policy of "filter it or don't drink it". An understanding of our use of the word "wisely" is forthcoming. An upset stomach, diarrhea and gas can occur for many reasons. Too much baking powder in the bannock mix is one issue. Rehydrating food improperly may be another; the freeze-dried farts are real. The volume of contaminant-receiving waters also matters – many lakes have trillions of times more dilution potential than mountain streams.

Diarrhea or other digestive issues on a trip doesn't necessarily mean *Giardia* or other issues are easily corrected with water filtering. In the case of *Giardia*, it doesn't show for two weeks or so. For a proper diagnosis, a stool sample needs to be sent to a lab for confirmation. I've experienced a small number of students on trail claiming *Giardia* within a day of stomach and bowel issues making *Giardia* the quick "go to" generic label. This is misguided. Dare I say, water filters have not been part of my canoe tripping gear with students for over four decades to the present, both summer and winter. Traveling in pristine water systems is important in my selected route choices. I count myself lucky to live as an outdoor educator and canoe tripper where I have this option. So what did we do on those student trips? (I'll keep personal trips out of this). We would drink from clean water. In boggy stagnant water sections we'd have clean water in water bottles while traveling. If camped in shallow, questionable root beer-colored tannin waters you can leave a canoe on the ready to fetch water from the deeper water away from shore (step one), then boil the water (microbes are killed before the water hits boiling temperature, no need to over boil) and drink tea. I have a tripping friend who drinks copious amounts of tea three times a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. He also drinks from Big Trout, Argo Lakes etc. In the 60s/70s/80s when we all generally drank the PRISTINE lake water, I never thought of the veracious tea drinker as exercising a safety practice. Perhaps it was? I thought that he just liked tea.

Another interesting point for water and the canoe tripper is the "slurp and run" principle. Repeated tap water drinking or our urban and rural community water sources are a "slurp and re-slurp" or "slurp and stay" phenomena. You are not likely to be so unlucky as to be infected by a water-borne pathogen on a single wilderness swig or overnight camping stay. The risk of repeated drinking from the same source over a long period is a bigger issue. Of course, community water sources are treated. Less of a need to treat wilderness location travel through water "slurp and paddle on" sources.

You might say, "What's the big deal, using water filters anyway. Why not add a little safety insurance: always err on the side of precautionary?" Here are some responses to that. Practically, water gets warm quickly on hot summer days when in containers. Less satisfying. Also on the hottest days of summer (it is over 30 degrees Celsius as I write this) it is easy to not keep up on the water filtering and therefore not drinking enough. This is a crushing irony on Big Trout Lake: heat stroke on the lake. Water, water everywhere but nary a drop to drink. On those hot-on-the-water days, one must drink freely and cover up with wet and re-wet clothing. Swim often. Finally, to the filter or not to filter with the usual response WHY NOT! Chuck and I respond Why? To many of us, drinking straight from the lake is the essence of wildness. Precaution, sure, but what is the insidious message? Don't trust nature! Trust the store. Buy the filter or iodine tablets. Human intervention is simply a wise precaution. Trust human intervention, put something between you and nature. But isn't something lost?

The trouble is, "wise" isn't so straightforward. We Canadians used to trust the pristine water of Big Trout, Argo Lakes and rivers such as The Big Salmon and Clearwater. These waters haven't changed: we have. Now we shift from the practical to the philosophical. We suggest what is lost is a joyous direct connection with nature, why we are there as likely as not. Drinking water from a lake or river is one of our remaining animal/body/nature unions, a wilding spirit that we are seeking in the first place but rarely articulate. Such language is hard to find for us. Perhaps the quality/need we are speaking of is one deeper than language. When we wear masks to fend off nasty air particles in a near future as a precautionary approach, we might say, well we filter all our water so what is the big deal. Our point: it isn't just precautionary. Isn't it also alienating/unnatural and at least, spurious as relating to and in relationship with pristine waters on canoe trips. Again something is lost between the water and us when the filter is brought into play particularly when not necessary for precaution as policy alone.

There is a kind of sham about water, drinking it and the water filtering process. Here are a few stories along that flow of thought.

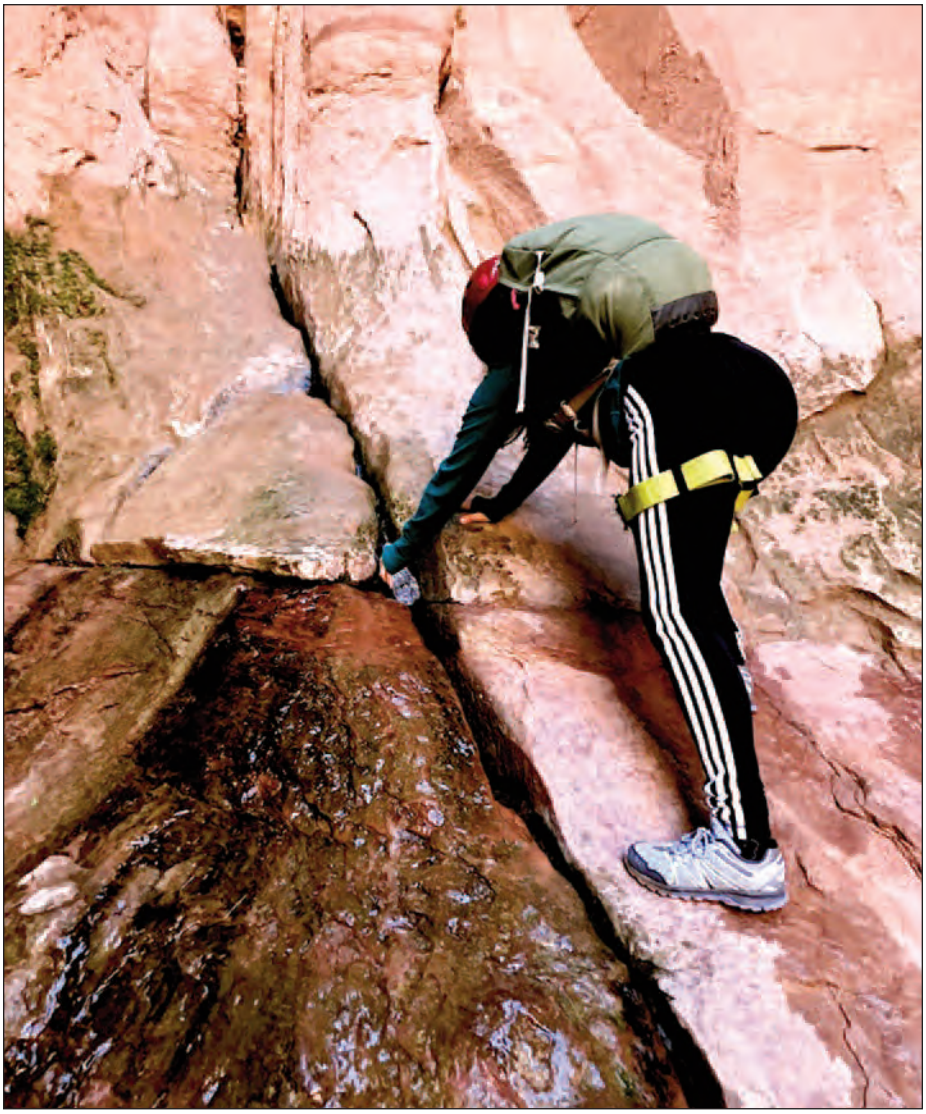
I watched a hardworking co-guide on a far north mountain whitewater river filter water into a large blue standard tripping barrel. Serious work even with a serious pump. It was a hot, calm day. Once the barrel was filled he was certainly thirsty and reached into the river for a glorious gulp of cold clean water while the filtered water started the process of warming up in the barrel. Not to mention: do we really know what's going on with plastic and water? I asked him, "what gives?" He matter-of-factly responded, "the clients always get filtered water – part of the risk management plan." Hope you appreciate the sham here. To my mind, the clients are being denied the "real" quality experience for an inferior experience. And, strangely, the clients are unwitting. Are they being denied, in a subtle way, a key part of why they want to be there in the first place? One person's sham can be another's common sense.

A friend tells the story on Lake Temagami (cottages and camps/lodges abound its estimated 5,000 km shoreline and 20,0000 ha) of a youth tripping group on the edge of heat stroke or heat exhaustion. Certainly – to her mind – heat distress. She met them on the water passing by. She encouraged them to drink and soak their clothing and stop to immerse themselves in the water – less swimming could mean more medical treatment at this point. Apparently, the crux of their issue was that one of their two water filters was faulty. They were having a hard time keeping up with their fluid needs in the heat. Seems to me, a paradox here. The precautionary risk management plan said to always filter all water. However, their loyalty to the plan was compromising the safety of the group. Yes, I would drink Lake Temagami waters unfiltered, particularly in weighing the health threats of heat stress.

On a Utah canyoneering trip, Chuck's instructor told the group of mainly college students that we could drink directly from a local spring; amazement filled the faces of some that had apparently never heard of such a thing. Cold water on a hot summer's day. Magical. Chuck does treat other people's children with more caution – filters – than his own.

Finally, while in Iceland on an upland plateau for an overnight hike with young adults, our Icelandic guide encouraged the Canadian hikers to fill their water bottles from the seepage areas of fast flowing rivulets. There was general dismay, then trust and a joyful picture taking session soon ensued of twelve bodies lying flat on the terrain placing their faces into the stream in delight. When in Rome… The joy involved a complex array of emotions I suggest denied in stories above. Firstly, this experience of undenied, free drinking was new and exciting to them. Even a first. Trusting the guide/trusting nature. The water, clean and fresh, involved no human intervention. Not a small point. The sham here is that I fear they would not have trusted me, a fellow Canadian, either in Iceland (fair) or in Canada.

Personally, we are glad to be mostly water, mostly bodily naturally filtered water in Canada or elsewhere. Water is water when pristine in our lakes and rivers but should be filtered when not, say where too many cottages, lodges and towns abound, and sheep and cattle fill the hills and industries are present. This is pollution BUT pollution is NOT in all water. Precaution is NOT always necessary. We need to be thinking about what is lost with human intervention in the name of precaution. Particularly when a central motivation in the outdoor travel experience is a relationship with nature.



Hiker collecting water from the desert spring

Perhaps the students in Iceland, the guide on that northern river and Bob and Chuck on Big Trout Lake are joyful with a feeling in some back recess of the brain that understands the magic and mystery found in the following D.H. Lawrence short poem "The Third Thing":

"Water is H2O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one, but there is a third thing that makes it water, and nobody knows what that is. The atom locks up two energies but it is a third thing present which makes it an atom."

Maybe the day will come in our lifetime (decades away if we are lucky) where we will be masking or in an air filtered bubble due to air quality issues. Perhaps sooner in New Delhi or Rome or Toronto than where we may live now. But for NOW as with water as with air, there will be "more pristine" safe places for unfiltering nature and wilding ourselves to the joys of being freely in nature. Drink hearty where you can. It is wise to wild ourselves back into a truer nature when you can. Heck, isn't that in part why you go?

Thanks to Mike Crowtz for adding ideas for this "treatment."

The Last Trip

Story by Tony Way

Photos by Tony Way, John Drover, Hilary Spriggs, Andrew Lederman

Sometime just before the Covid pot began to bubble, I got a notice from Wanapitei Canoe of an exploratory trip on the upper Pelly River. Since I had paddled the Yukon in 1961 from Whitehorse, passing Little Salmon, stopping at Carmacks for fresh bread, on past the Pelly River to Dawson and eventually Circle, and since I had never done a mountain river, I signed on. Immediately, I got a call from Shawn Hodgins: "Are you kidding?" Together, we had canoed the Lunan-Quoich and skied in the Temagami area so he knew that I was almost 80. I said if he could pair me with some muscle, I would go. But, just after plunking down my money, the Covid pot boiled over. Alarms went up, barriers came down and the trip was off "until next year." That was not to be either. Finally, after two years, we got used to our pandemic, the Yukon opened and the trip was on for 2022!

Having started white-water with Keewaydin in 1955 (Dumoine) and '56 (Harricana), I had been paddling northern rivers off and on for almost 70 years (Yukon, Noatak, Clarke-Thelon, Bailey, North Knife, Eau Claire, L-Q) so I was used to being ready to go. But now, aging was becoming exponential and the difference between 80 and 82 seemed more than 2 years. My wife, Barbara, being a better far-see-er than I, suggested this might be my last trip so I tried hard to get ready by walking, paddling and carrying. Nevertheless, I set out with some trepidation, but a 20-minute baggage hike through YVR and a 6 km uphill hike to the Whitehorse Beringia Exhibit suggested that I was ready for everything. But everything is not anything

My memory of Whitehorse is thin, but it still has the SS Klondike II, the Skyscraper Log Cabin, and the Old Log Church. Our '61 put-in campsite has been built over. Whitehorse bustles now; it even has streetlights! Snowfall was extra heavy last winter, so I was surprised by snowbanks on the hills.

SS Klondike II, Whitehorse (back then)

In Whitehorse, the returning canoe haulers reported threatening forest fire just after Ross River (they skirted the road-closed sign), so we took the longer road through Watson Lake and its Sign Post Forest (look it up!), also driving around the "road closed to fire" sign. The flight from Finlayson showed us the tundra tops of the Selwyn Mountains before dropping down into Summit Lake. This water is squeezed between high, spruced ridges. We enjoyed graylings the first night as well as a Trumpeter Swan family, a pair of Pine Grosbeaks, and some calling wolves.

Day two was for rest but some of us saw that a high ridge would overlook our Summit Creek outlet. The steep 230-meter climb through the trees and brush took over 20 exhausting minutes with many needed breathing breaks along the way. The crest offered another overlook further on, but tired we turned back down. On my first down step, my right knee went side-ways and down. "What the Hell!" It did it again whenever I stepped down. This was a problem since down was where I needed to be. As images of travois and stretchers skittered through my mind, the steep slope offered the alternative of a butt-scoot. Thus, between hobbling and skidding, the hiking party led me back to our canoes. As two of the doctors, John Drover and I "diagnosed" a kneecap dislocation since I could walk flat or uphill, just not downhill. At dinner, I announced the obvious: while I could hobble along with paddles as canes, I could not carry other than my day pack. Everyone said "Okay," perhaps because that was better than having to carry me. In other words, I had become walking baggage.

The run down Summit Lake Creek started clear with some nice class 1 and 2 rapids. Shawn had said that there wouldn't be many portages, and there weren't, just endless beaver dams, windfalls and log jams. As Shawn's bowman, I tried to help at the first pull-over, but quickly realized that my job was to get out of the way. So, with 2 paddles as canes, I hob-

Watson L. Signpost Forest: Hilary Sprigs, Tony Way, Shawn Hodgins, Don McIver, John Drover

bled through the brush. Working on the principle to make omelets when the eggs are broken, I became the action photographer of the crew's huffing and puffing. This was appreciated later when they saw what they were too busy and tired to film. Despite the rigors, cheer remained, especially that night with John's single malt whiskey.

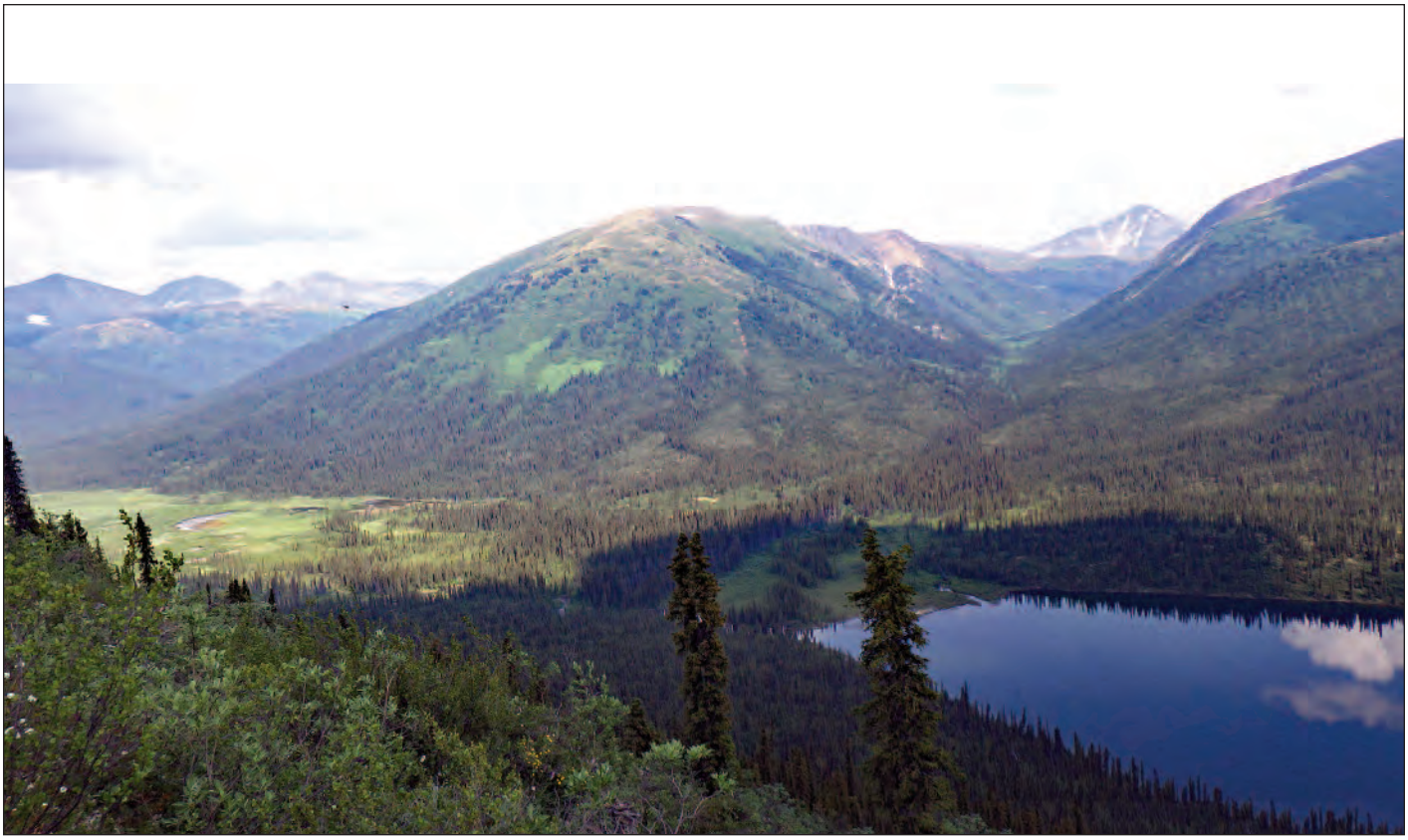
After two days, and only two unnecessary dumps (nothing lost other than pride), our two-canoe-length-wide creek merged with another to become three canoe lengths wide. No more rapids, just runs through glacial till and cut moraines. Even the pull-overs abated some. With the wider view, we now saw Bald Eagles and the beavers themselves. After an impending thunderstorm, Richard offered us his four types of home-made port wine. I savored the Traditional and brought out some dark chocolate to complement it.

On day six, we finally emptied into the Upper Pelly. Even the logjams were gone now, just good running water. Shawn "borrowed" me to Pete, our guide, so he could better assess the top of Wolf Canyon (so named by our bush pilots). Pete and I found that we had known many of the same girls on Lake Temagami from many decades ago. While he took special care of me, I soon learned that he was a solo paddler, and I was not to use my paddle until commanded.

The map showed an almost four km curving canyon with a dozen hashes dropping down 20 m. Shawn had anticipated a sequence of let-downs, so we loaded and headed off through the brush, looking to descend past the first rapid. It was a long way down to no shore and not far from another cataract. So off we trudged to the next overlook. This looked no better. By the third overlook, we lost all hope and aimed through the woods to the canyon end. With my two paddles for canes, I mostly kept up. But, after an hour's slog we realized that a mid-portage camp was inevitable, especially since we had lost track of our two canoe carriers.

We settled on a nice semi-open forest site served with a sufficient trickle of water. I planted myself in our communal circus tent while Hilary slowly fetched water for filtering. The rest, led by Andrew's GPS, bushwhacked back to retrieve more gear and our two errant canoe carriers. By late afternoon, half our stuff, including all our crew, were lugged 1.4 km to camp. My thoughts of sleeping rough evaporated with the arrival of my pack. More important than my tent was the second tranche of dark chocolate to brighten the moods of our exhausted portageurs. That night we celebrated our hellacious carry with my Collin Street fruitcake and rum. Maybe, if I couldn't carry a load, I could at least lift spirits. Shawn, by this time, was

Pine Grosbeaks



Summit Lake Outlet to Creek

Time To Get Out: Kim Huisman, Richard Timmons

All Together Now: Pete Gwyn, Don McIver, Kim Huisman, Andrew Lederman, Shawn Hodgins, Richard Timmons

Mid-Portage Camp

bushed. He had had Covid in the spring, and amongst the other two doctors, we considered Long-Covid likely.

The next day was another carry day. A scouting party, again with Andrew's GPS, located our put-in 0.6 km further on. Then, all but Shawn and I went for the last load, including the canoes. I was told that this was not fun as the way was riddled with dense brush and swamp.

Our last carry day wasn't too bad. It was a little tricky for me as the end was downhill which was what I could not do. A bottom slide through the brush was not possible, so I just turned around and walked backwards as that was just the reverse of walking uphill which I could do. I laid out the last of my dark chocolate at the end for the carriers, and we decided to call it a day sitting at the debouche of Wolf Canyon.

Day nine began with wet tents as the rain finally began. I resumed Shawn's

bow. He felt better now. The river was fast and smooth, so we just talked, often more than we paddled. We were exiting the Selwyn Mountains. At one point, we rounded a mountain that looked like the blown-out side of Mt. St. Helens, just smaller (yes, there were volcanoes here, compliments of the West Coast sliding north). Then we turned right at the fault-line and into the Tintina Trench (think San Francisco Bay trench). Now we were north of the late Cordilleran Glacier (remember, Beringia was ice-free!). The Pelly here carved into the glacial out-wash which was covered with meters of yellow loess, the rock flour blown by the cold down-wash from the southern ice cap (kind of inverts your mind, doesn't it?). Also gone were the camping gravel bars, just high cut banks. Finally, we found a beautiful plateau, only 10 m above our heads. That lift cratered Shawn. I talked with our guide Pete, our assistant Kim, and Richard, and so big Richard became Shawn's bow muscle and I went with Kim, Shawn's niece.

The next three days ran fast and wet, but not unpleasant. The rains began in the mornings but usually cleared by about lunch so our wet-packed tents were dry for sleeping. Once we noon-napped on a warm gravel bar. One night, I shared some photos of the Yukon from 1961 and passed around salty smoked Swedish licorice (seconds were had!). Another night, the ladies broke the air with a series of songs. I contributed Thais: One Time in Alexandria.

On the last full day, the rain began after launch and never quit until after dinner. We did find a wet sandy gravel bar for our last stay but putting up my tent in the rain boded a wet bed. Finally, I deemed the circus tent large enough to erect my mini tent inside. With Don's help, we planted the tent in wet sand with a dry interior. Don even rushed my inflated dry mattress through the rain and slipped it into my abode. A good night's rest was now assured. To signal our imminent passing from the Yukon, I told the foretelling Cremation of Sam McGee (there was some appreciation). Less appreciated was my announcement that this was to be my Last Trip as I was breaking parts faster than I could repair. At 82, I no longer had the strength, agility, or even balance for wilderness trips. "Oh no, you can keep going" was the de rigueur reply from the younger ones (everyone else). "Shawn", I said, "have you ever had anyone over 85 on your trips?" "No," said he. If you are lucky, aging is inevitable.

Mid-Portage Well

Our last travel day went fast and dry. We exited the river just as the Hoole rapids joined the Pelly rapids. This offered some excitement as a miss in the current meant a pick up way below. While waiting for our rides, I suggested to Shawn that he get a medical check be-

Mid-Portage Canoe: Richard Timmons

Barely Good Enough to Travel: Tony Way

Getting Ready To Sing: Kim Huisman, Hilary Spriggs, John Drover, Shawn Hodgins, Pete Gwyn, Tony Way

fore starting his next two trips. Our bush pilots came for us as chauffeurs. We passed alongside Little Salmon Lake and River and stopped for lunch in Carmacks where I found that my memory said the Yukon ran the other way. So much for relying on ancient recall! After four hours we were back in Whitehorse, in time for a final dinner.

Shortly after arriving home, Shawn emailed that he was dropping out of his next 2 trips. "Smart move!", I wrote. Next, I learned that my kneecap had not dislocated but my anterior cruciate ligament had separated and needed to be replaced. Then Shawn emailed that he did not have Long-Covid, he had widespread pancreatic cancer and his wife Liz was taking him home. Shortly after my surgery, Shawn, at 61 years, was no more. Over the decades, Shawn had re-connected me with my Keewaydin 1955 and 1956 trips on the Dumoine* (1 mo.) and the Harricana* (2 mo.). Then he fulfilled my Ungava dream*. He took me back over the Temagami ice and we found together the Quoich inuksuit cluster. And now he returned me to the Yukon. How strange that this was to be the Last Trip for both of us.

My memorial for Shawn is adapted from that for Captain Eudemos of Olympos:

The canoe was paddled into the last camp and beached there to leave no more
as there was no longer any hope from weather or daylight.
After the light of the dawn had left Shawn,
there was buried the trip of a life
as short as a day, like a broken wave.

*References:

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Nastawgan Fall 2021 Vol. 48 No. 3 pp 14-17: There Has To Be A Reason: Riviere Eau Claire

Last Day: Pete Gwyn, Kim Huisman

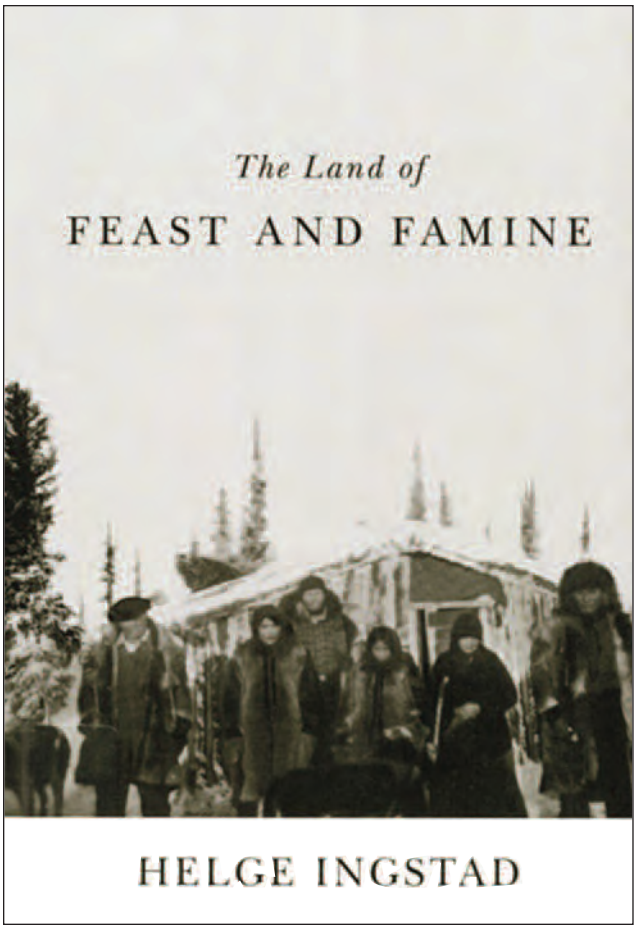
Shawn Hodgins: January 30, 1961 – August 22, 2022

Three Books Review

By Bob Gainer

This is a review of a trilogy of Canadian books by a part-time Canadian and two other Canadian authors on the Thelon river and wildlife sanctuary. Thelon is the English name for the Dene name "The-lew-dezeth", the river that runs through the "Central Barren Lands," a unique area of tundra that supports an exceptionally rich abundance of vegetation and animal life.

So much so that a Wildlife Sanctuary was created around it in 1927, ostensibly to protect the few remaining muskox from the fate of North American bison, but also to protect northern animal and plant life in general. I spent parts of five tourist seasons at a lodge on the upper Thelon as an assistant guide, assistant pilot, and camp flunky (assistant manager) about 20 years ago. The only reason I justified the expense of these weeks away from my regular calling (operator of a small-town veterinary clinic, part time environmental biologist, and teacher) was because I was completely besotted with the place; it had stolen my heart and soul, my love of biology, my mid-life crisis, its remoteness and adventure, the most exciting time of my life (yadda yadda yadda I hear shouted down the hall from my wife).

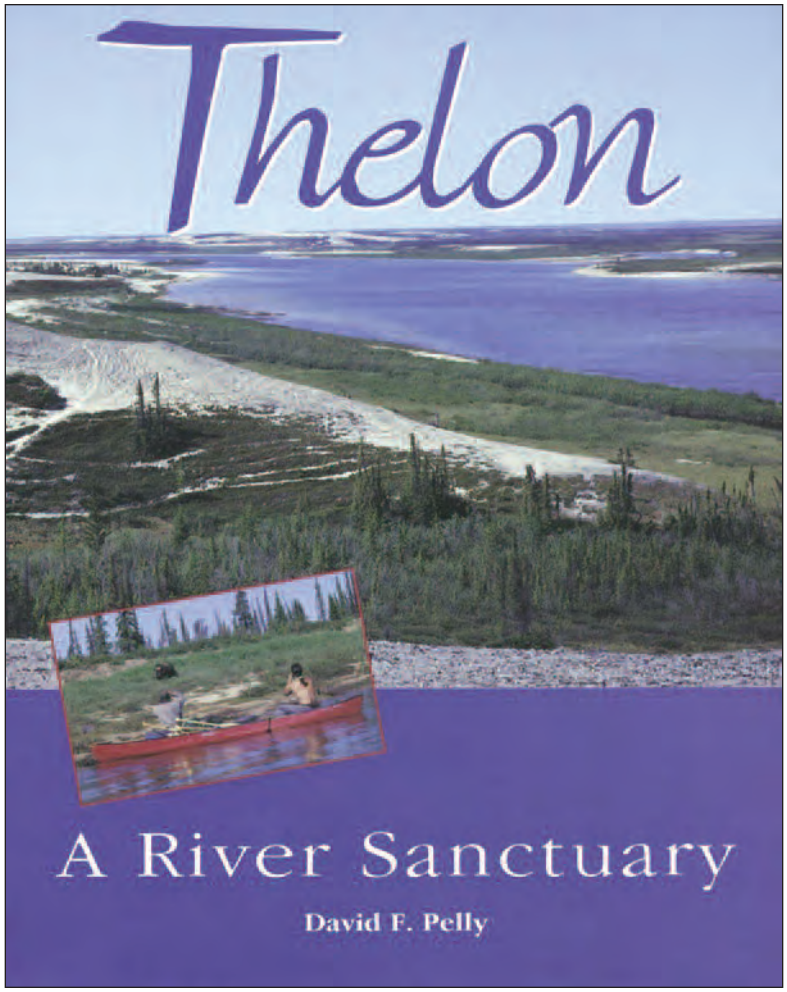


Ingstad's book originally came out in Norwegian in 1931. Ingstad was remarkable as are many of the characters associated with the Thelon. Many of them for whatever reason seemed to be otherwise regular, normal members of society. In 1926, he left his established law practice in Norway and travelled to this area to be a trapper, probably after reading a few books by Seton, Pike, Jones or Hanbury. His first year was spent with Hjalmar Dale, a fellow Norwegian, learning the tricks of the trade. Dale was probably the most capable human at surviving the Thelon as ever existed, almost as tough as a native with the added benefit of being well trained in the use of modern inventions like rifles, tents, stoves, axes, matches, and experienced with their use.

Very little is known of him except that in the several years he was in the Thelon, he never needed assistance from anyone, and several people, especially federal government employees, needed assistance from him. After Dale left for the Thelon, Ingstad spent another year around the east arm of Great Slave Lake, spent a year by himself with the "Ethen-eldilli" (Dene caribou eaters), who made several forays into the barrens in search of white fox furs and caribou meat. It was a bad year for caribou and they barely survived their trips. His last year in the region he spent by himself and his dogs in a tent in a cove of trees out in the barrens on the upper headwaters of the Thelon River. It was a good year for caribou and he and his dogs ate well and he trapped lots of white fox furs. In the spring, he took his furs to Fort Resolution, paid for a flight south to Edmonton (one of four trappers, they were the first of their kind to hire an aircraft for such a flight) and was back in Norway four years after leaving. In 1960, he returned to Canada when he and his wife established that L'Anse aux Meadows was Leif Erickson's Vinland 1,000 years ago.

Ingstad's book, *Land of Feast and Famine*, is based on what the natives and trappers all said about the barrens. "When the caribou are there it is survivable, when the caribou are not there it is not". The English title probably came from the translators that helped write the English edition who knew Jack Hornby, who planned to write a book with that title after he spent a winter in the Thelon during Ingstad's stay, only that winter the caribou didn't come and well, he and his two companions didn't get to write the book, but Ingstad did. Hornby was the best example of someone who thought they were tough and tried to prove it by defying the dangers of the Thelon. Ingstad was lucky with his winter out on the Thelon and enjoyed himself immensely: "With a chill brilliancy all its own, the sun would sparkle through the snow-covered branches above my tent in the little cove" is what he remembered after leaving for Norway.

David Pelly's book further explains to me the mystery of why everybody that has ever experienced the Thelon has been like me, and most of the clients I guided – fascinated, smitten, besotted, and irrational about the place. In my CSEB 2020 book review of Ernest Thompson Seton's *Arctic Prairies*, Seton described his trip to the region differently but with the same idea: "I found what I went in search of, but also found abundant and better rewards that were not in mind, even as Saul son of Kush went seeking asses and found for himself a crown and a kingdom". Also, as cited in my CSEB 2022 book review of Tomson Highway's *Permanent Astonishment*, Highway says that he was able to make a success of his life as a writer and musician despite residential school and other societal hardships because he was born in a snowbank in January on the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan four corner intersection and was raised in the area, the greatest start in life he could possibly have had. It is true, people can think of the most God-forsaken place on earth to others as their "soul paradise". Who are some of the "likewise smitten"? David Pelly devotes a comprehensive review of the much more smitten than myself, who really had to walk the walk not just talk the talk (like, ahem, moi), or portage and paddle or dog sled and brave the winters or live off the land and support a family. He starts with the original Ethen-eldilli, Dene "caribou eaters" who were based on the Thelon River for approximately 7,000 years. The last few hundred years, caribou Inuit from the Back River area (Hanningajurmuit) and the Baker Lake area (Qamanittuaq) made use of the lower Thelon drainage similar to Farley Mowat's "People of the Deer" on the Kazan River. The first non-native to enter the region was William Stuart from the Hudson Bay Company at York Factory with the assistance of the Chipewyan (Dene) woman Thanadlethur in 1715 followed by Samuel Hearne and Matonabbee in 1772. In the late 1800s, Warburton Pike and Buffalo Jones entered the western edge in search of muskox. In 1899, David Hanbury traversed east to west followed by JB Tyrrell a year later. The distance, remoteness, and harshness made the traverse barely survivable for non-natives. A few more adventurers, including Seton, made expeditions to the western Thelon area and a few NWMP made patrols, but the next group attracted to the area were the white trappers. White fox fur at the time was expensive and the tundra was full of them. The attraction of trappers to the Thelon was like gold fever, which led to the creation of the Thelon Sanctuary in 1927 to protect the few remaining musk ox. Of course, its creation was "Treaty Like", that is, there was no native consultation or contractual negotiations or obligations by the federal government.



Now biologists and game wardens and archaeologists ran the scene, with the assistance of aircraft, until it was part of the most surveyed area in the Northwest Territories. Also surveyed were minerals and several proposals for mines, some of which have been developed in the Rankin Inlet and Baker Lake areas east of the "Central Barren Lands". Of course, diamonds and uranium are rumoured to be in the Central Barren Lands but there have been no developments yet.

In 1962, Eric and Pamela Morse canoed the west-to-east route at their own expense. They were pushing recreational canoe tripping to new frontiers. Today, hundreds of both guided and unguided canoeists dominate the human presence in the summertime. In the winter, there are occasional dog sledding or snowmobile expeditions for recreational purposes. There are one, sometimes two, tourist lodges (not the one I worked for) operating on the upper Thelon. The sole remaining lodge is Lynx Tundra operated by Dan Wettlaufer. The most successful guided operation by far was Canoe Arctic that started in 1975 and lasted to 2018; Alex Hall, the owner, operator, cook and bottle-washer, who guided hundreds of clients, died of cancer in March of 2019. (His guiding service is now operated by Dan Wong of Jackpine Paddle.) Alex and David Pelly were good friends and more than anyone, I can imagine were smitten with Thelon love.

(to be continued)

…in this issue

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