RETURN UNDELIVERABLE
ITEMS TO:
The Wilderness Canoe Association
55Lahaye Drive
Whitby, Ontario
Canada
L1P 1L5

wilderness canoe association

NASTAWGAN

The Journal of the Wilderness Canoe Association

CPM #40015547

FALL 2024

Discover the potential for adventure
with a Black Feather guided canoe trip.

Explore. Experience. Grow.

Black Feather
the wilderness adventure company

www.blackfeather.com 1-888-849-7668 info@blackfeather.com

wilderness canoe association

nastawgan

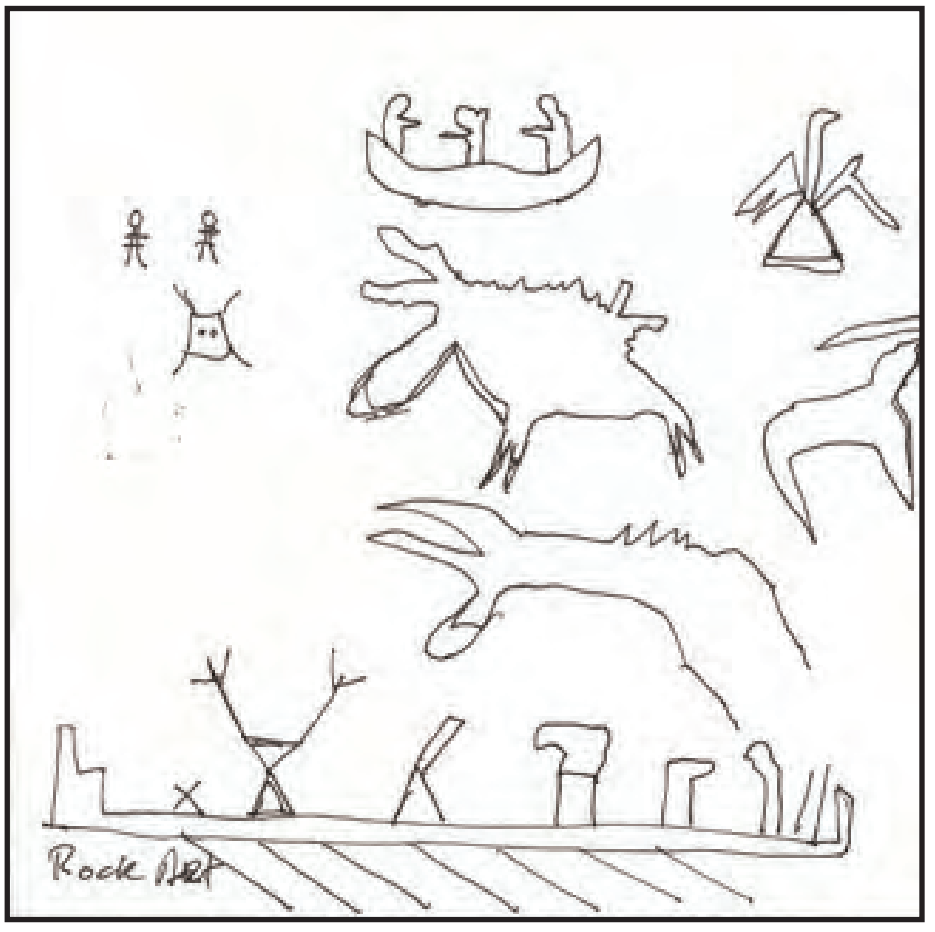
Fall 2024 Vol. 51 No. 3 Journal of the Wilderness Canoe Association

On the Way to Gods River

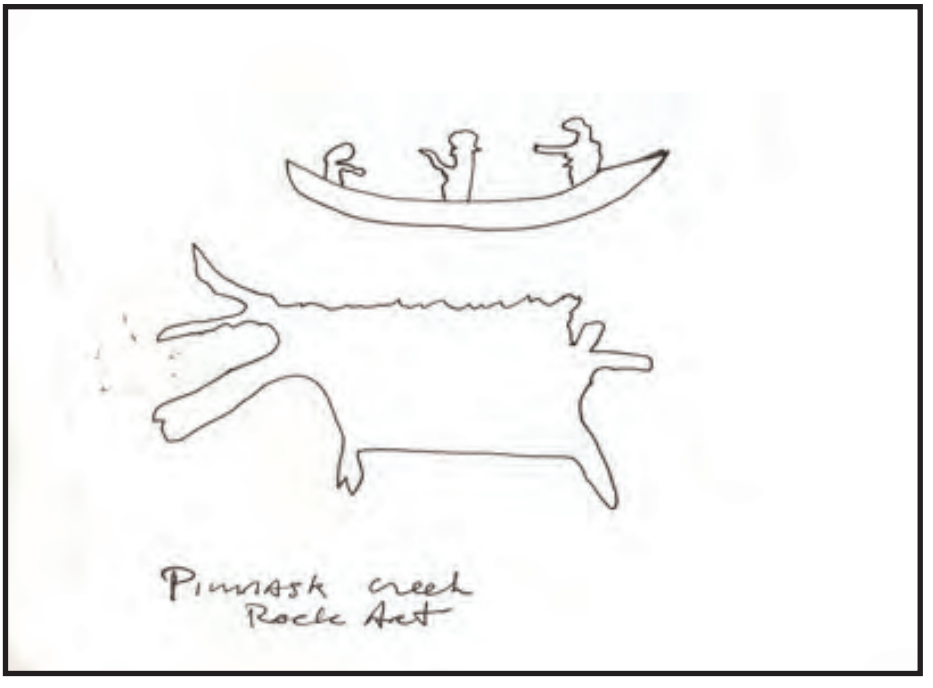
The Gods River Sketchbook

In memory of Pete Spiller
RIP 1943 to 2020
by Jonathan Berger

Pete and I met at Camp Wabun in the early sixties. He was a year or two ahead of me as a camper and thus a year or two ahead of me joining the camp staff. Luck would have it, by summer of 1964 we joined forces to staff the Cree A Section of 14-year-olds. Pete was head staff and I was the guide. We were a great pair. Both of us attended what would come to be elite New England liberal arts colleges. He went to Wesleyan. I went to Middlebury. We both loved sports. Pete rowed crew and I played



Pimask Creek Rock Art



Pimask Creek Rock Art

football and lacrosse. We both took geology! Most of all, we both loved the travel and the camp.

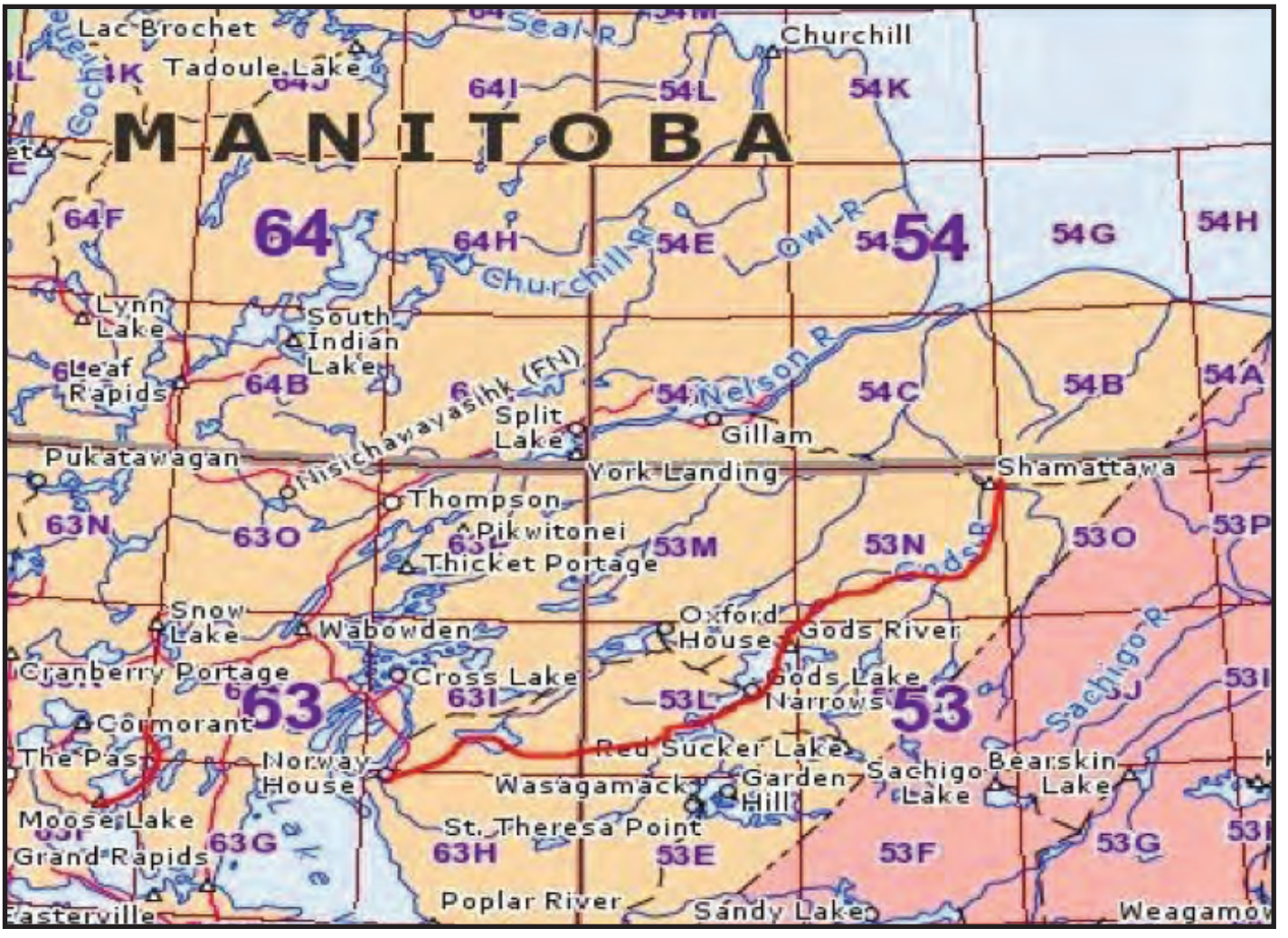
Pete went on to become the head staff for the Wabun long trip. I moved on to Camp Temagami to guide the Rupert. He went to graduate school at Columbia and started a 30-year career with Maersk Shipping, eventually rising to a high office. I went on to the Peace Corps, then grad school, then university teaching, and finally information sciences in E-Discovery. Our paths never crossed, though over the years we had a minor correspondence.

By 2001, Pete had retired from Maersk. He wrote and asked if he could come on a canoe trip with me. I had of course never stopped paddling since I returned from the Peace Corps and was deeply engaged in doing the field work and writing for the Canoe Atlas. So, we set out from Norway House to Gods Lake Narrows via the Ponask Portage route to Gods Lake. That trip, the first of several in the Gods River system, began 17 years of paddling together. We spent our late middle age into our seventies paddling the canoe routes of the Little North and beyond.

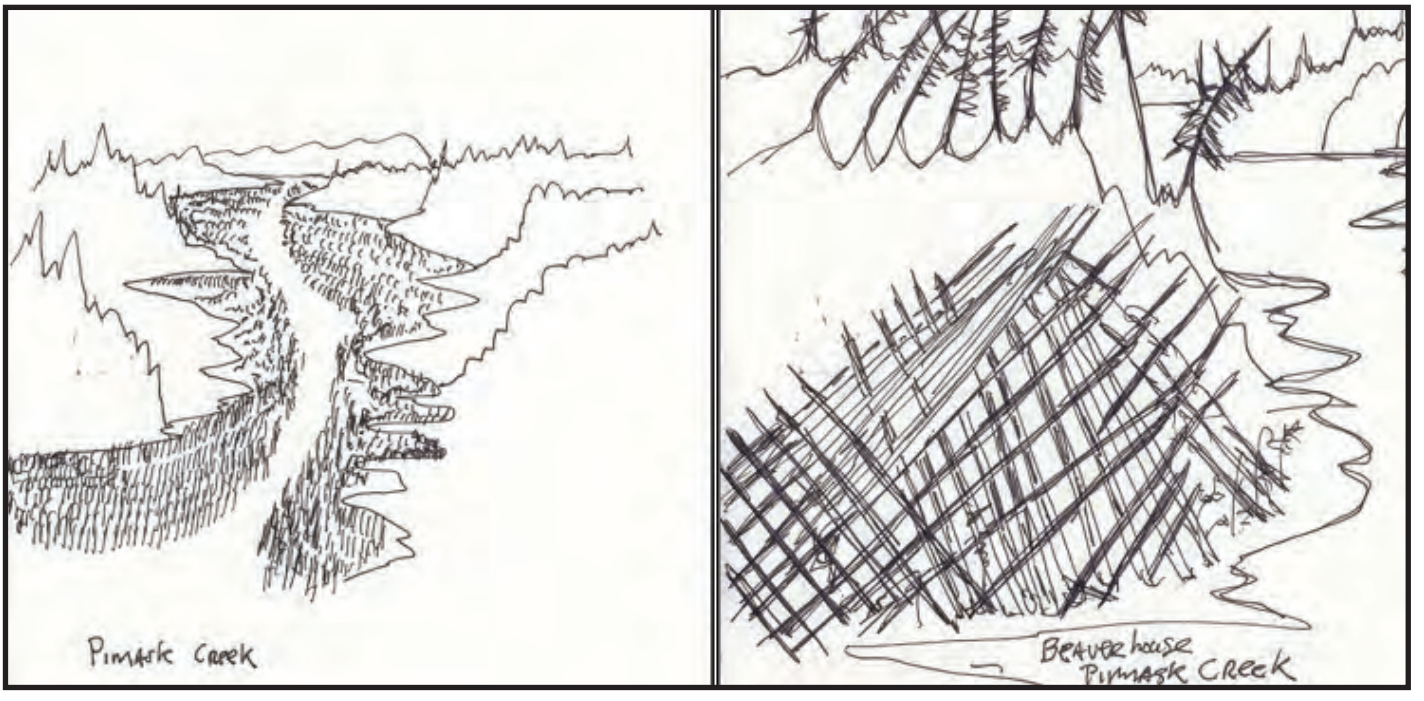
Our travels covered much of northwest Ontario and adjacent Manitoba, some Temagami trips, and one out-of-the box run down the Fond du Lac River in far western and northern Saskatchewan. On that trip the route ran just south of the Northwest Territory boundary and reached far enough north that the sun never set during the trip from Whitford Lake to Black Lake and Stoney Rapids.

We used a style of travel adapted to our ages and needs. In the off season, each of us in our daily lives trained hard every day. We planned a travel pace that we could maintain and our daily goal was always to camp early but go hard and steady through the morning and into the afternoon. We switched bow and stern every day. We rose very early, breakfasted, packed up and went on until lunch. We rested a bit and then went on to a mid- afternoon campsite.

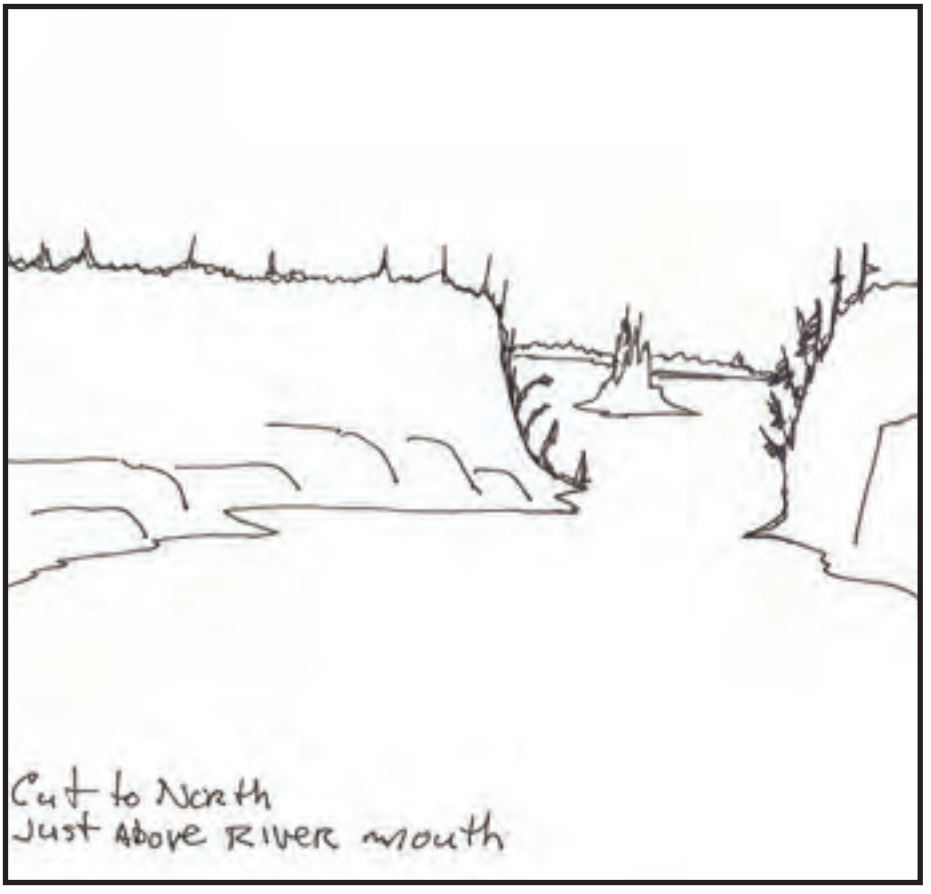
We never took any chances. We passed up all the wide-open crossings to follow the shoreline and on the very big lakes we were never more than a paddle's length from shore. We scouted every rapid and ran only those that we



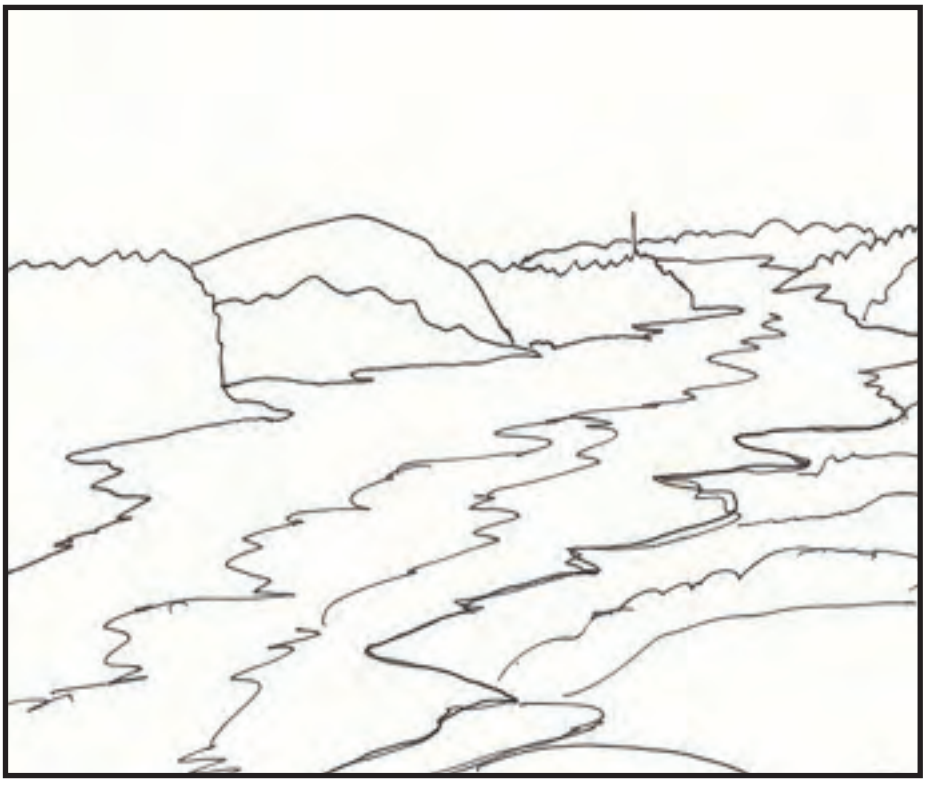
Gods River, Manitoba



Pimask Creek and Pimask Creek Beaverhouse



Cut to North Just Above River Mouth



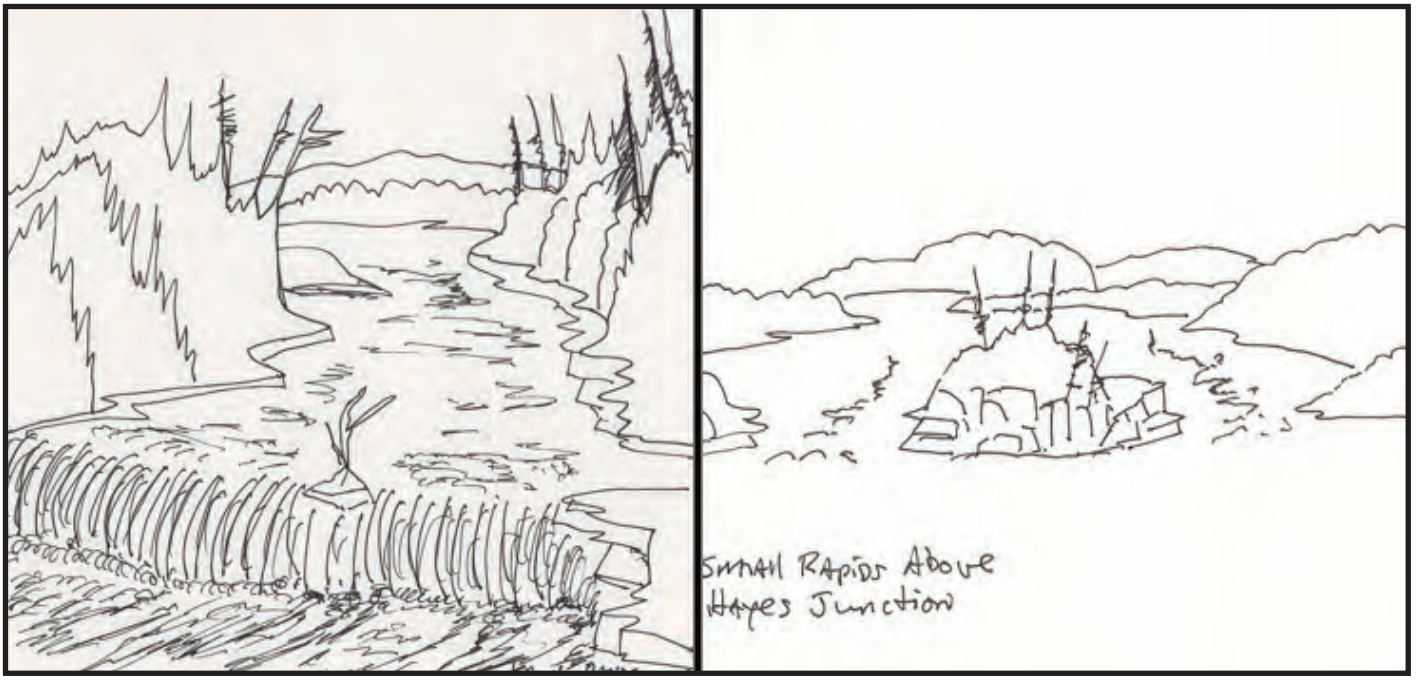
Down River North of Molson Lake

were sure were easy runs. We waded, lined, and carried if there was any doubt. Both of us read the maps every moment we paddled. We consulted regularly during the day as to the navigation. We used the Spot Tracker to broadcast our location. We carried a satellite telephone. We had meticulous trip plans as to where we should be and how to reach us and whom to call to send in a rescue or a critical message (never happened). We staged re-outfits. We carried all manner of first aid equipment (rarely used). We watched the skies constantly and put into shore and found shelter with the threat of squalls, high wind, lightning, water spouts or other phenomena. We never travelled late into the day to conserve energy and avoid low light for camping or travel. If necessary, (on rare occasions) we called in a float plane to fly us around a real bad stretch of water or burn. We used the sat phone to stay in touch with home.

Before the trip started and during the trip I studied the maps and aerial photos for hours on end to be fully prepared with respect to the route and the match between mapped features and the view from the canoe. I spent a lot of time interviewing local travelers who had crossed much of the ground. Sometimes these interviews proved valuable. Other times not.

The study of the imagery was particularly valuable on routes where there was little information about portages and lots of big rapids. Here the air photos or satellite view on Google maps proved prescient. I was able to remotely scout potential portage routes. Of course, nothing matches on-the-ground scouting but at several locations I spotted necks of land that seem to offer bypasses without having to deal with current and big water. When scouted for real, each one proved to be a godsend.

The older we got the fewer of the harder and unknown routes we did. We were ever mindful that it was better to be out there and be safe. If we did trips with lots of rapids, we made sure we had done them before and we were very familiar with the water and the location of the trails. The last trip we did together was in 2017. It was three weeks long and we went all the way from Jutten Lake, located just north of the village of Savant Lake, to Fort Hope via the Savant,



Small Rapids above Hayes Junction

Pashkokogan, Albany, and Eabamet Rivers. We were both over 70. The trip is close to 300 miles. There are lots of rapids of all kinds. Much of the ground had been recently burned. There are several long trails. And yes we had both done the trip several times before with others and once together.

Pete and I made an odd couple. By 2001 I was a lifelong Democrat, a liberal, an orthodox Jew, with an advanced degree in ecology. Pete had become a rock-ribbed Republican with very conservative social views, fundamentalist Christian beliefs, and a far-right political view of the world. He believed that a supreme being had created the northern landscape while I believed that ancient sedimentary, volcanic, tectonic, and later glacial forces allied with changing climate accounted for much of the landscape we paddled through. In deference to our varied thinking on these and other matters we adopted a policy of never discussing religion or politics. What conversations we had revolved around choosing a campsite or lunch site, Wabun memories, meal preparation, map reading, and route scouting. Most of the time we said very little as we both knew what had to be done on the campsite or on the trail and we had our routines and cooperation worked out and were flexible given changing conditions.

We said very little when we paddled except for conversation about the map view and land view and where we were and where we would go. I developed over years of traveling a method of map

Rock Hill Portage out of Logan Lake

Max Lake

Beaver Dam going up stream

reading that allowed me to simply point to our location on the map with very little error. This happened no matter how convoluted the terrain. I just kept track of landforms that we passed without really paying attention. Pete came to rely on this "sense of location and direction" though he read the map and kept his compass out all the time so we could cross reference observations. The process did not go smoothly all the time but worked as we always got back on track if we had diverted from the chosen path of travel.

Pete was my friend. He and I shared our common history at Wabun and a set of Wabun stories. We knew the same people. We saw the travel in the same way, and we shared a great love for the camp. We loved to prepare for our trips and spent hours on food preparation and paid attention to classic items for the outfit. Pete always had a source for hard smoked slab bacon that we could carve up for the morning meal. He liked to buy it. He liked to treat and preserve it. He liked to cook it in the pre-dawn half-light.

We went a lot of places and followed a lot of rivers. Much of our travel was to familiar places with the exception of the several voyages upon the tributaries and main stem of the Gods River in northeast Manitoba. We kind of "discovered" the Gods for ourselves and the decades long evolving set of shared trip notes sent to friends and fellow voyageurs. Both of us had read Sevareid's *Canoeing With the Cree* and I had a copy of Ben and Marion Ferrier's *Gods River Country*. We had a sense of the country from the view of similar types of travelers as us though many years younger than we and whose trips were longer, harder, and more ambitious than ours. On both of those trips the paddlers returned to Norway House by going up the Nelson River, found north of the Hayes. Sevareid and Fort reached the Nelson by a difficult portage route through the Lowlands from the Hayes to the Nelson above tidal influence. The Ferrier party paddled out on to Hudson Bay from York Factory, timed the tides, and braved the vagaries of wind, weather, and darkness to reach head of tide. At the end of our trip, we skipped the run down the last of the Gods into Hayes to York Factory and

flew out from Shamattawa to Winnipeg.

I know Pete especially loved the route from Norway House to Pimask Creek, to Little Lake Winnipeg, to the Hayes, and across the overland route to the Gods River at Gods Lake. We traversed the inland seas of Gods Lake from Wolf Bay all the way past Gods Lake Narrows to the Village of Gods River. We ran the Gods to Shamattawa.

I miss my friend.

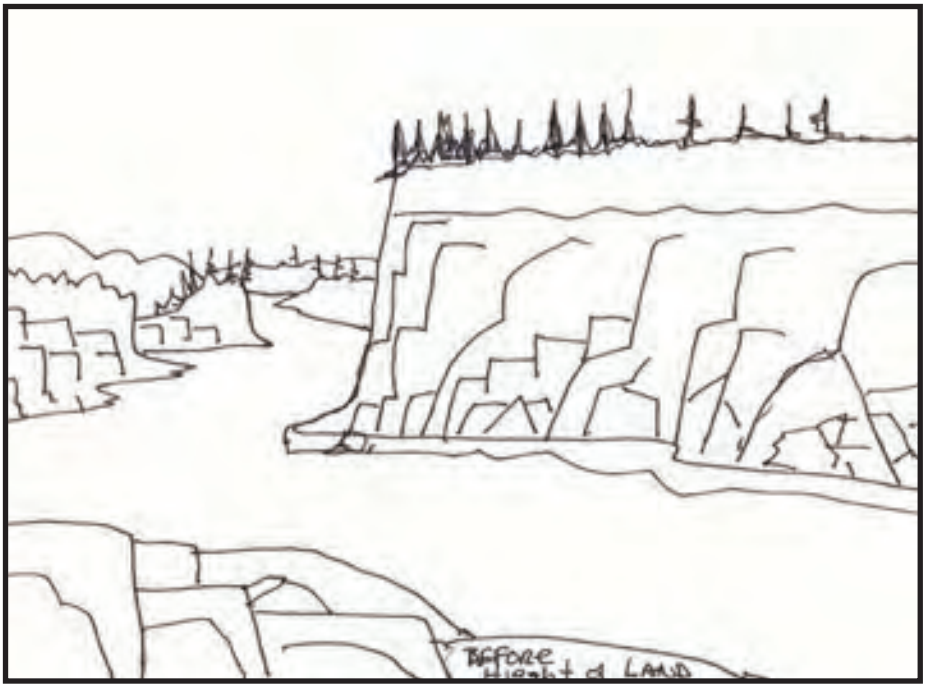
It is in this spirit and memory of my friend that I present the Gods River Sketchbook. Please enjoy your trip down the Gods.

Norway House to Shamattawa Northeastern Manitoba

Route Itinerary

August 2005

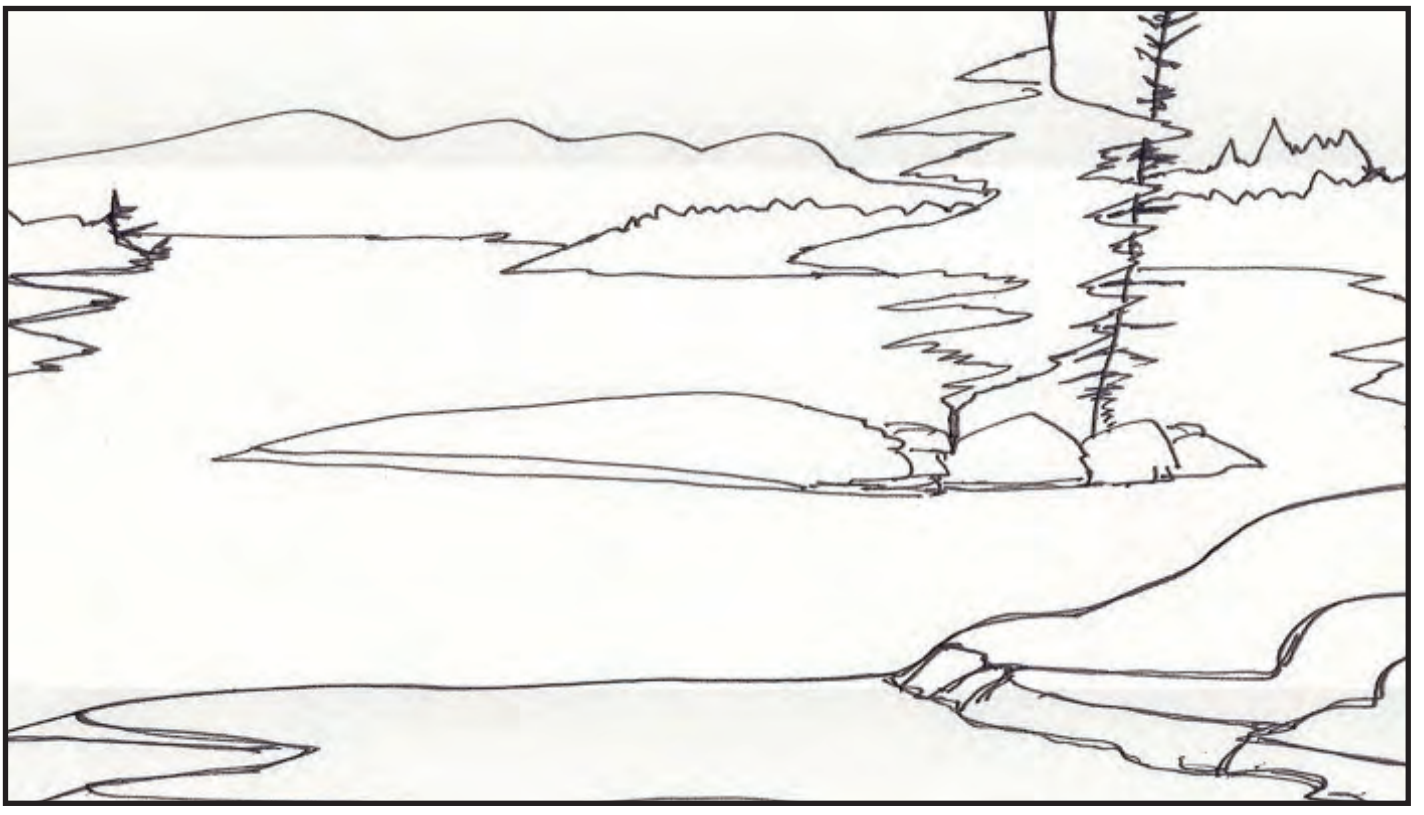
Aug 1: Pimask Creek
Aug 2: Molson Lake Past Lodge
Aug 3: Onamah Rapids: Upper Hayes
Aug 4: Robinson Portage
Aug 5: Max Lake
Aug 6: Lake 207
Aug 8: Asswampiswaum Lake
Aug 9: Rest
Aug 10: Vermilya Lake
Aug 11: Five miles west of Gods Lake Narrows
Aug 12: Narrows: Healy Lodge
Aug 13: Gods Lake: west side; 6 km from Tractor Bay; 18 miles from the village
Aug 14: East Side of Johnson Bay; Gods Lake; 7 miles from the village
Aug 15: Gods River; 1 km above Okemo Rapids
Aug 16: Gods River: Marshall Falls
Aug 17: Rest
Aug 18: Gods River; Sturgeon Falls
Aug 19: Gods River: Big Bear Falls
Aug 20: Gods River: Big Bear Falls: storm bound
Aug 21: Gods River; Cheemun Rapids
Aug 22: Gods River: Red Sucker Rapids; 2/3rd of the way down
Aug 23: Gods River: Pesew Falls
Aug 24: Gods River: 3 wooded Islands: 37 km from Deer Neck Island
Aug 25: Gods River: Deer Neck Island: 12 km from Shamattawa
Aug 26: Gods River: Shamattawa: Fly to Winnipeg



Before Height of Land

We flew to Norway House from

Downstream from Height of Land



Asswampiswaum Lake View

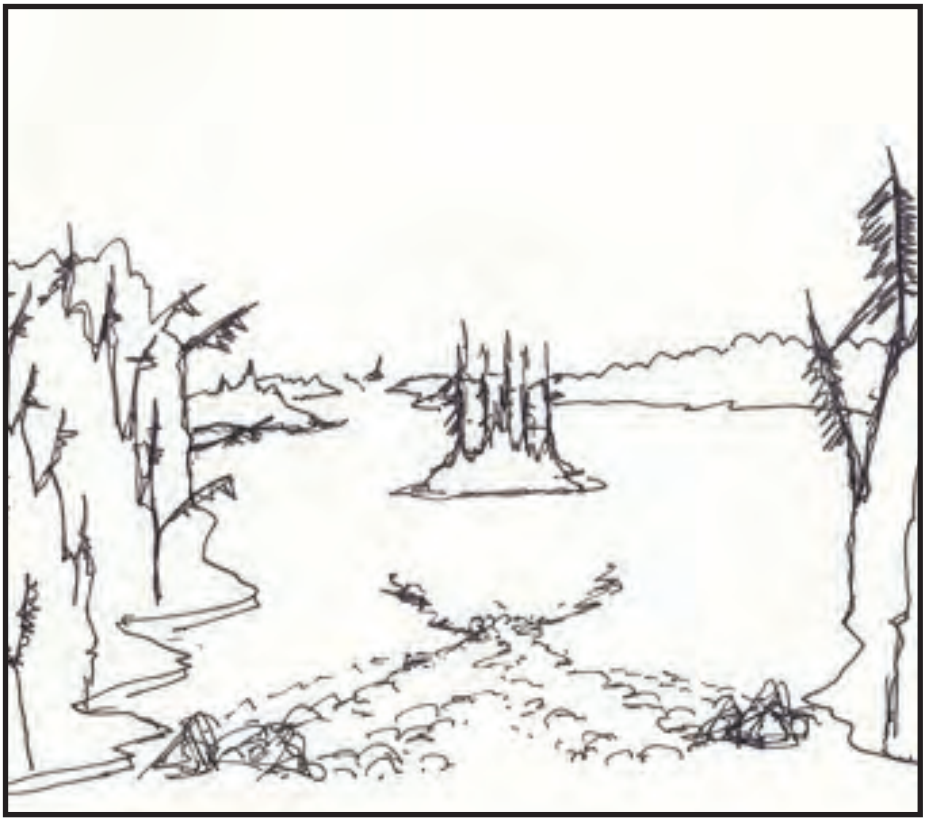
Mink River Portage

Winnipeg. Picked up our canoe, previously shipped to Mr. Wilson who drove us out to Pimask Creek and the start of the trip. He regaled us with stories of the winter road and the reality show York Boat trip to York Factory that he worked on. The landing was a great place to start the trip. We had protected water, easy current, and an easy paddle down to the rock art site and the narrows before the big open water of Molson Lake.

Molson Lake is also known as Little Lake Winnipeg. Every trip we have made on the lake has been a battle with very strong south west winds with extreme gusts and high waves. In fact, we portaged over two peninsulas to avoid wide open stretches. First time thru we landed in the big swell and dragged the boat up. I spread out the packs to dry in the wind and Pete jogged off to the lodge to get a haul to the camp.

The river flowing north east out of Molson Lake is a tributary of the Hayes. It joins the Hayes below Painted Stone Portage and above Robinson Lake. The morning we crossed the last wide bay Pete drank his coffee quickly as we wanted to beat the wind.

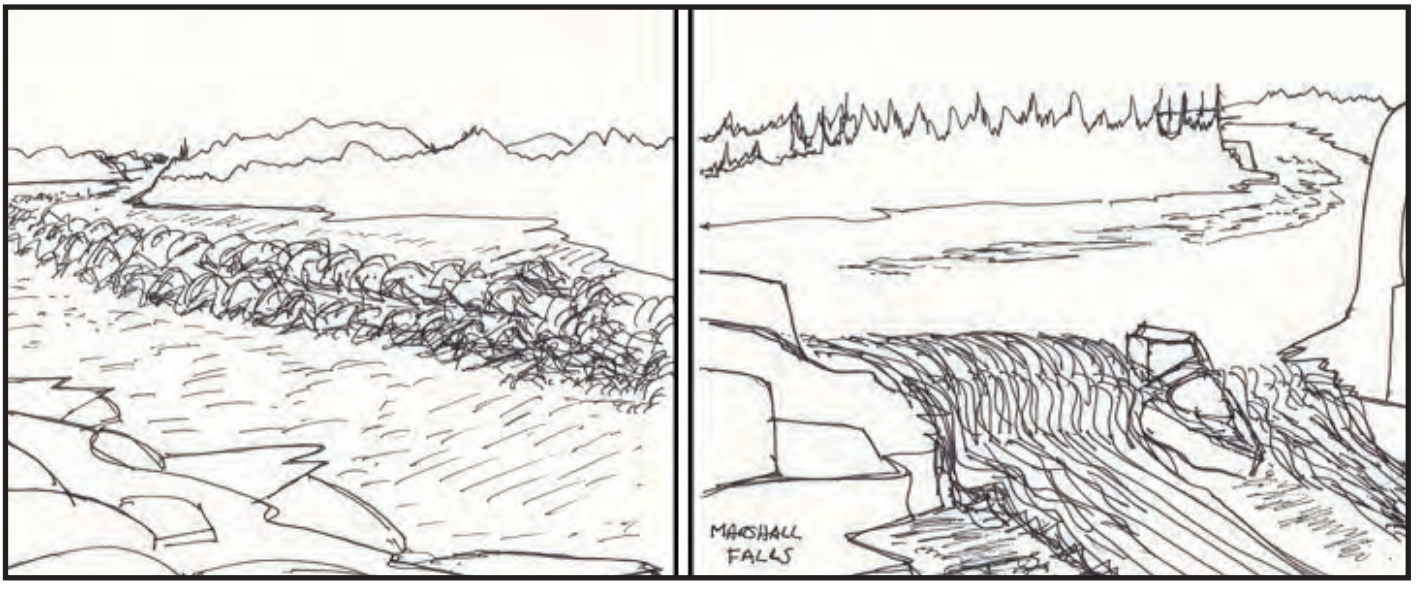
There is a thousand yard well beaten path around Robinson Falls. Along its course we saw relics of the portage railway that dates from the days of the fur trade. We camped above the Falls and took one load over in the evening. Pete stood on my shoulders as we hung our packs up in a tree to avoid the bears.



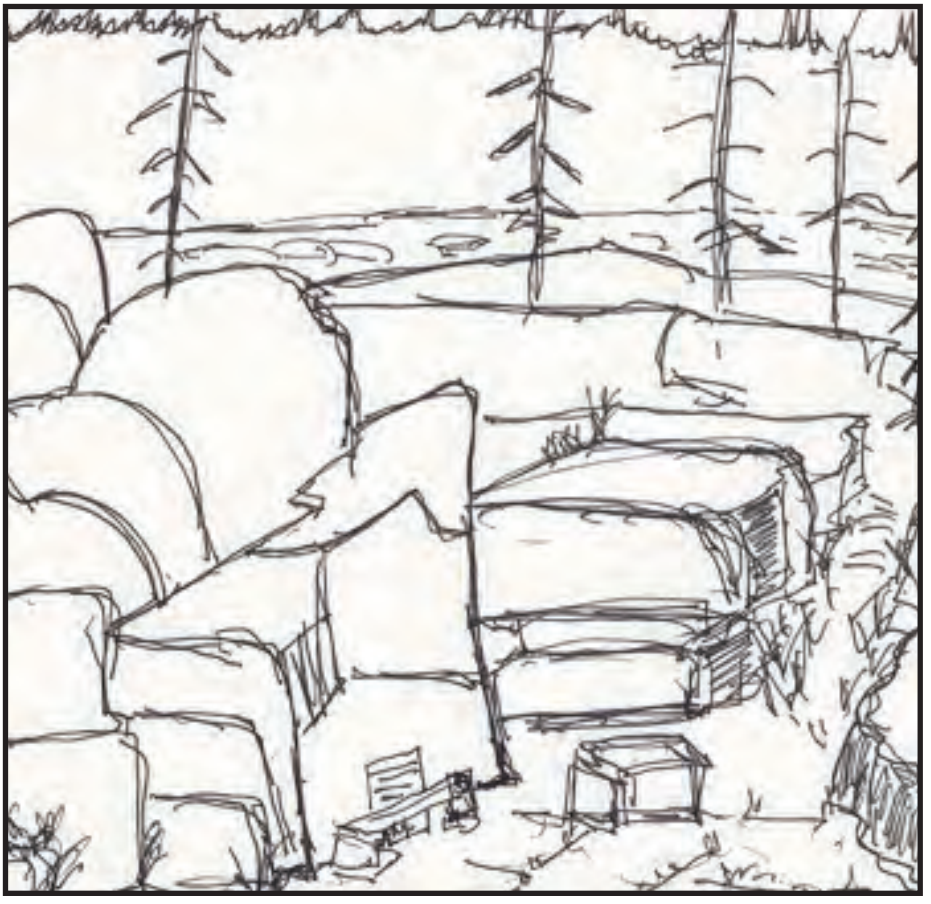
Wesachewan Rapids fall into Gods Lake

From the Hayes at Logan Lake we carried up a stone hill into Max Lake and the start of the overland route to the Gods River. Both Pete and I had read Eric Sevareid's classic *Canoeing with the Cree* and informed each other with Sevareid's descriptions of the country crossed. It was August 5th, my 60th birthday. We headed up stream towards the height of land.

The waterways are narrow and lined



Heavy water on the Gods River and Marshall Falls



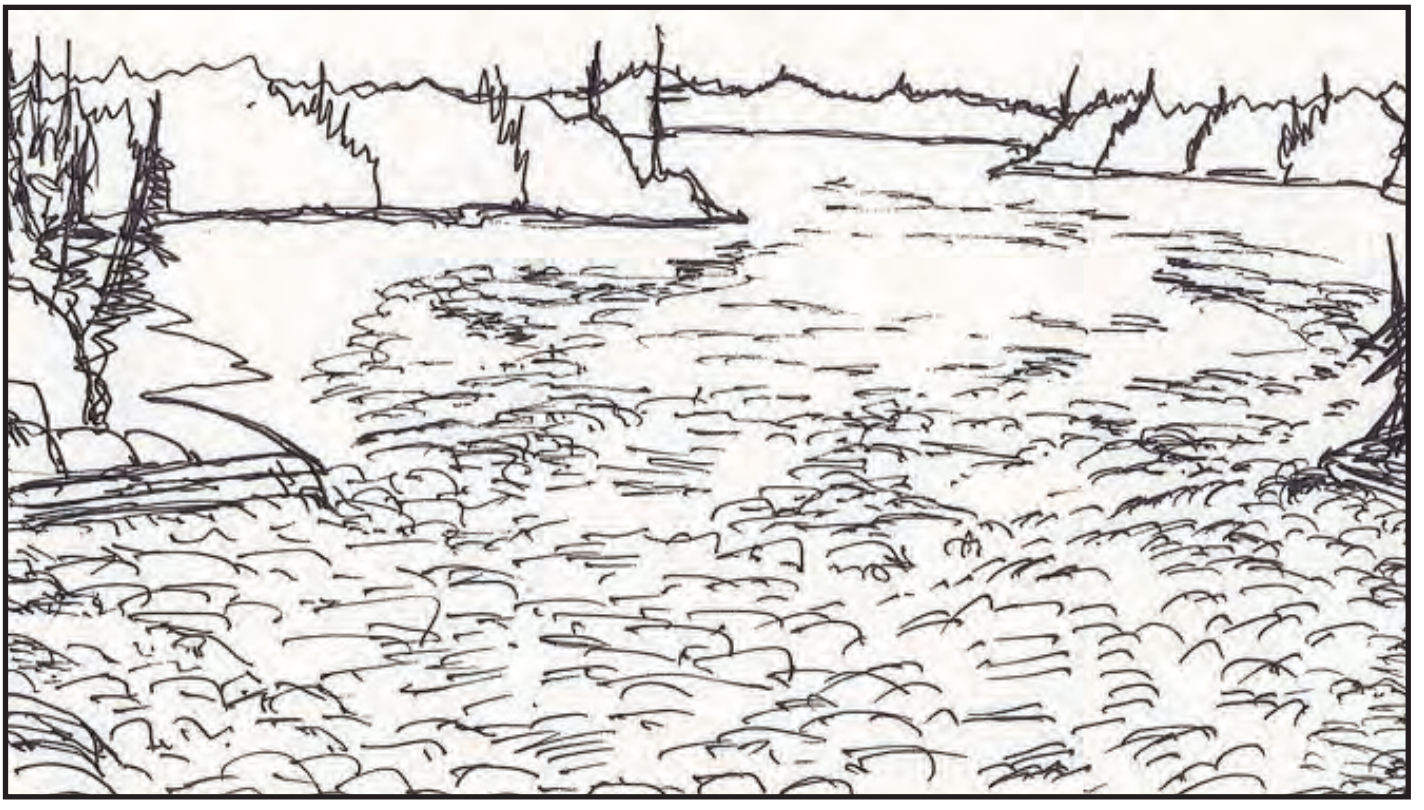
Kitchen where Pete baked the trout

with steep cliffs on the way to the God's River. At the height of land lake Pete, up at gray light, braved early morning skeeters to make the breakfast fire.

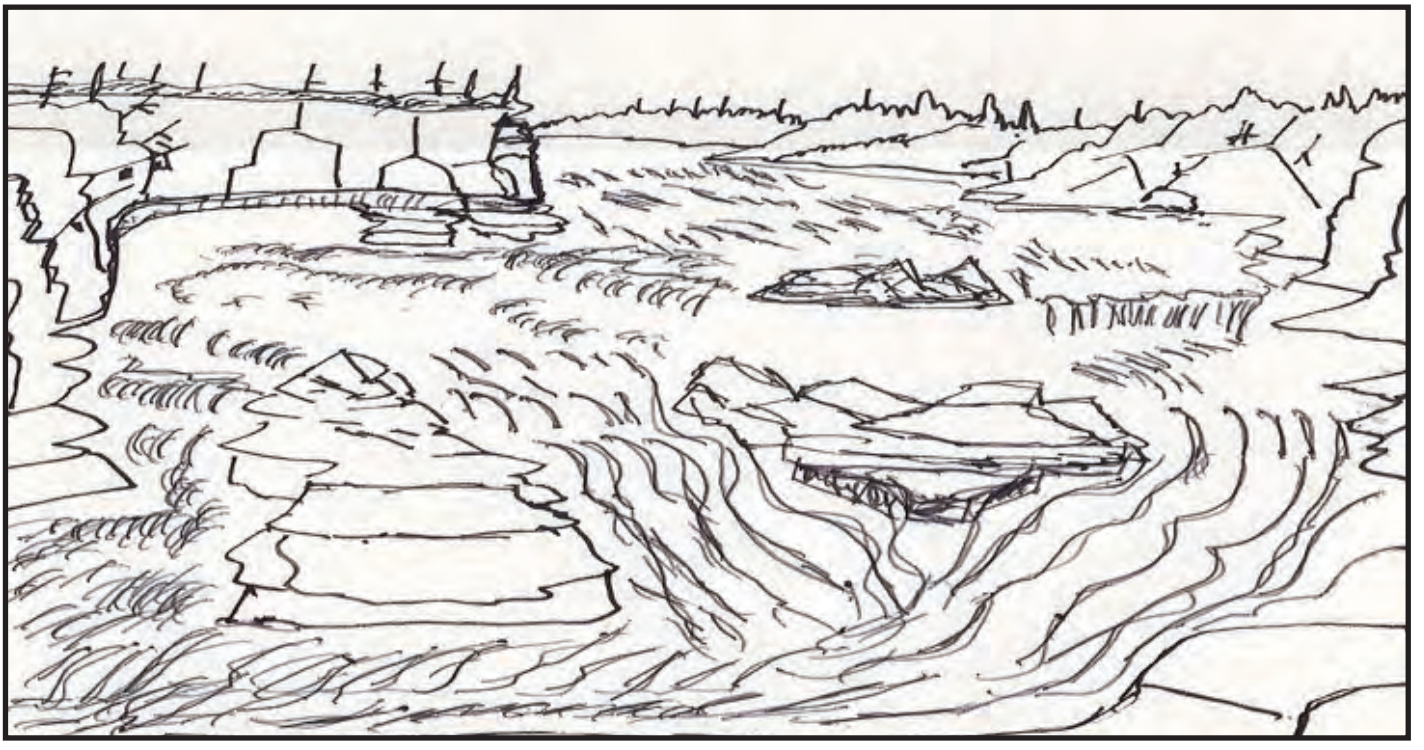
Once over the height of land the small streams and rivers ran fast due to higher water. Tired like Sevareid and Fort and the Ferrier party we rested like they did on Asswampiswaum Lake. We found a narrow island with a beautiful moss and bear berry cover for the tent. Pete mixed up the pancakes and we watched the waves roll by.

A double rainbow the morning we left Asswampiswaum meant freezing cold portages on the Mink River around increasingly large rapids. The Mink pours thru Weshechewan Rapids and drops into Gods Lake after the route passes the wide open Vermilya and Touchwood Lakes. We dodged storms, made warming fires, and threaded hard to see narrows in fog and low clouds.

We got lucky on our trip up Gods Lake to the Narrows and the Healy Lodge. A clear northeaster gave us cool air and barely a riffle though we stayed the obligatory paddle's length from the shore. More than 35 miles of paddling,



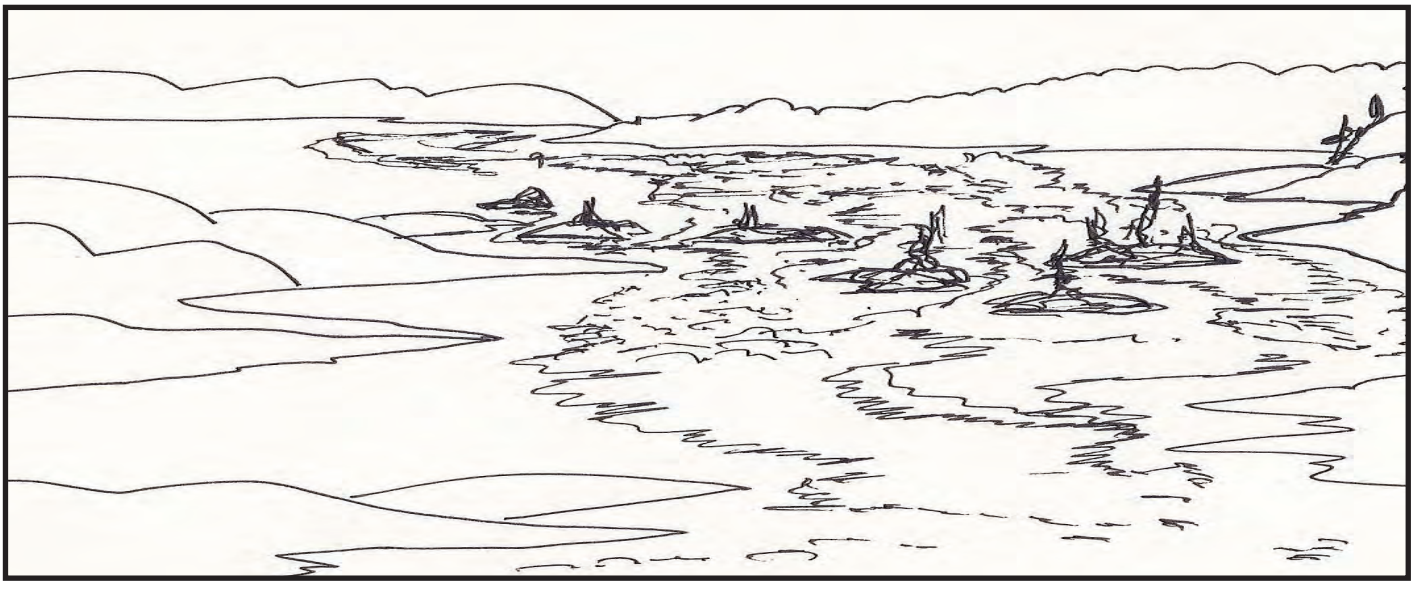
Sturgeon Falls



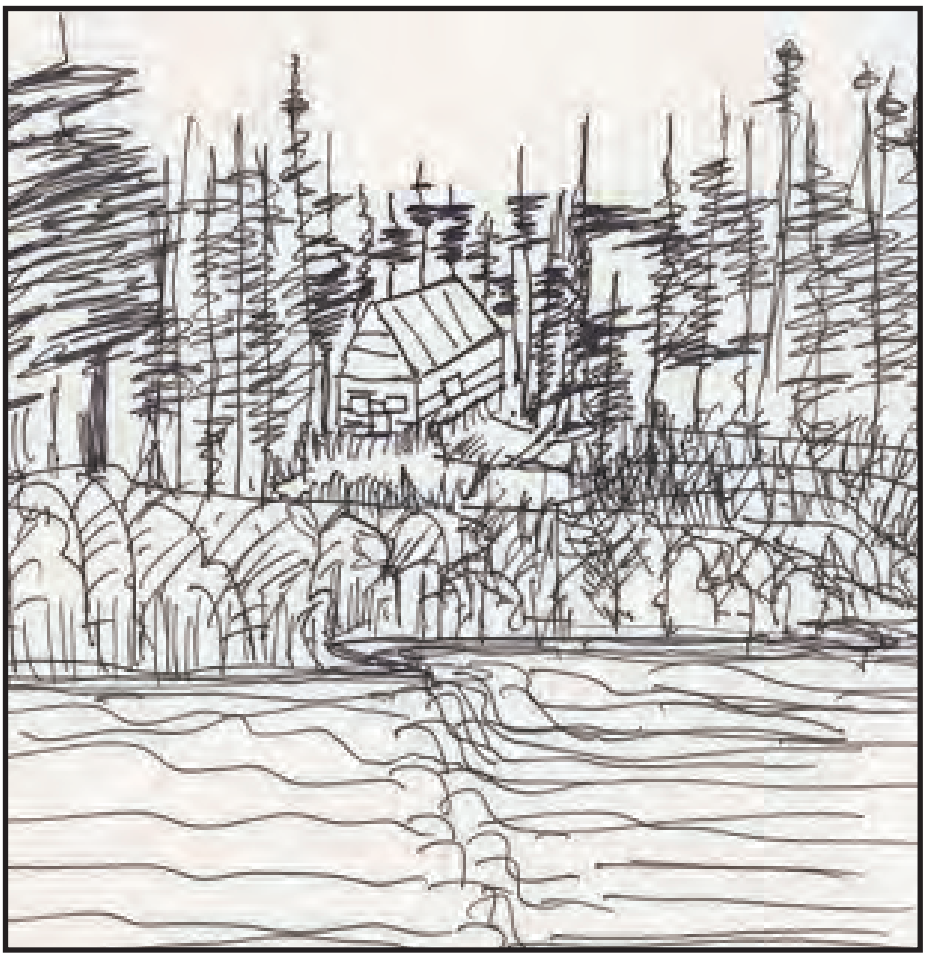
Upstream view Pesew Falls

in one day, took us from the west end of Touchwood Lake all the way to the Lodge. Here we picked up supplies, and chatted with Sam Healy and his Mom Goldie. We stayed a day in a warm cabin before starting up the big lake. Sam looked over our route and suggested we head up the left side to Bayley Bay and Johnston Bay rather than try the middle channel.

It is an inland sea out on Gods Lake. It is quite disconcerting to have for days at a time one view that is off the horizon and melded into the water. Even when it is calm it can retain the swells from wilder weather days before. Gods Lake has the reputation of quick vicious squalls coming out of nowhere. Duly warned we kept a weather eye. Sam told us the real name was Devil's Lake which the early missionaries asked the locals to



Peter Burton's Rapid



Lowland Cabin

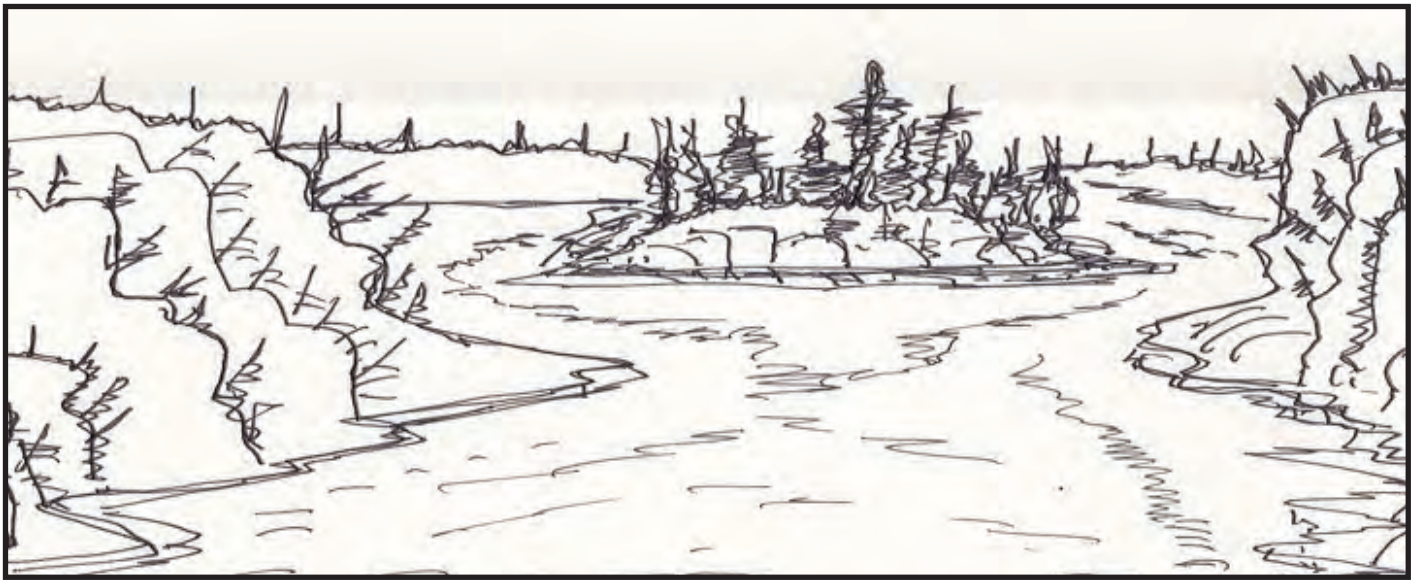
Burned ground on the way to Big Bear Falls

change to Gods Lake. True or not it does have vicious squalls.

Once out on God's Lake Pete and I discussed whether to cut across a wide bay or stick to the paddle's length recommended distance from shore. We stuck with the conservative approach. It seemed as if the water level on Gods Lake was very high. At the Healy lodge the seaplanes seemed to be sitting on the deck of the lodge. As we paddled north the next day just before Big Point, Pete looked at the map and said, "Heah there should be an island around here." I had been tracking very closely and observed that we were actually paddling over it and you could see the tops of the trees under water. No lie! Up at the Point we stopped for lunch and just as we got the food out, a real squall came racing across, Pete let out with a "Here it comes!" and we both pushed our way into the spruce trees simply intertwining ourselves and our chocolate bars into the branches as the rain and wind swept across.

Right below the Village of Gods River the rapids start. Before we started down the rapids Pete went into the lodge and gave Debbie a call. We had battled strong cross winds on our way up from the Narrows and the community had built the fishing lodge right at the first rapids. So we could portage across the lawn and stop for a call and to buy some snacks. There are quite a number of runs on the way to Marshall Falls. At the falls, really just a chute with a big rock point on the right we camped and spent a rest day. Pete caught a very large trout and slowly baked and basted it and layered it with dressing over the grill as we sat around and took in the falling water. Above Marshall Falls is a long set of wetlands leading to a turn towards the falls.

To get to Sturgeon Falls, below the right turn, you have to get through Peter Burton's Rapid and then Shorty's Rapid. We always stick close to shore and so we wove our way down the left shore until we got to a rock point where we climbed out of the alders and decided to have lunch on top. Pete started a quick smudge fire and we munched our bannock. Up on top we sat on the rocks and Pete commented on the flow of the water and the view up and down river. Given



Deer Neck Island

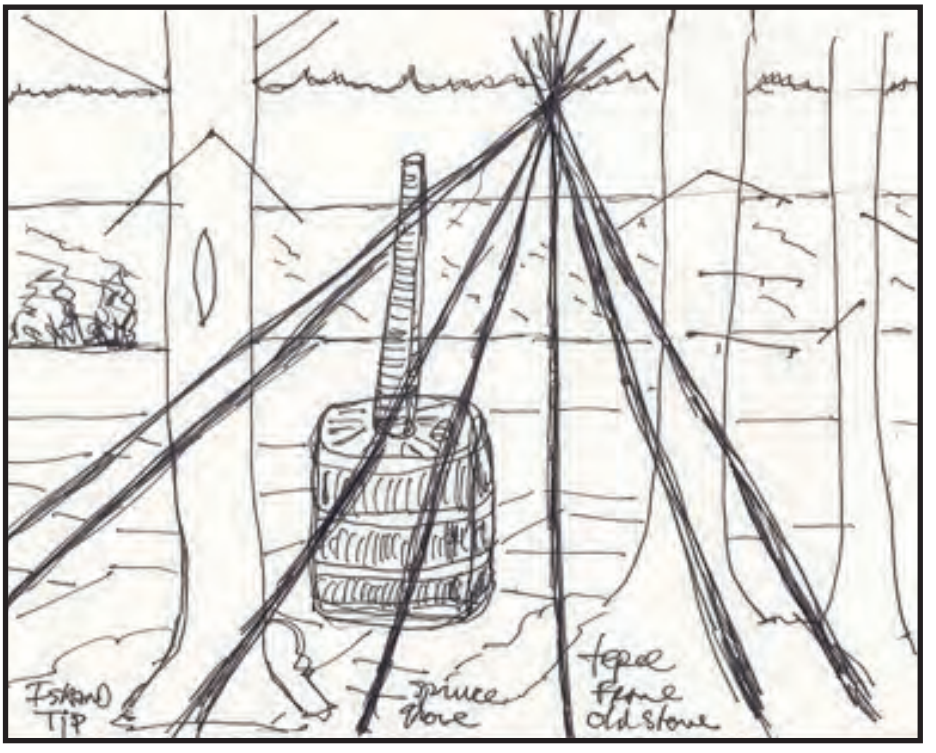
varying water levels it can be quite a run thru Peter Burton and down thru Shorty.

Sturgeon Falls is passed by a flat well-travelled trail on the left side characterized by tall spruce and poplar. The campsite occupies the spruce grove. What a luxurious spot! The trail and campsite combined with a few cabins sited on the shore below Sturgeon Falls mark the end of the upper river and the beginning of the much less travelled route down to the junction with the Red Sucker River.

Below are Moose Falls and Big Bear Falls. At Moose, there is a very heavy rapid that leads to a bay above the falls drop. After two trips down, we both think that there might be a route on the right side across a point to get below the big rapid that allows you to paddle to the left side and intersect a sparse trail that ascends from a steep bay above the larger drop. We however stayed on the left – to avoid a swift current and a wide crossing – and scouted along a game path, across burned ledges to intersect the trail coming up from the bay. It is a bit of struggle with cross country navigation and aging voyageurs. Pete was a real prince as he went ahead on a compass line and scouted the route that allowed us to carry across the trackless burn to a point where we intersected the route coming up from the side bay. Loading up at the bottom, in the side wash, and down the steep wall proved to be a real challenge.

At Big Bear Falls we stayed on the right side and scouted a short trail across very steep and sloping rocks, through burn and over hanging trees to another very steep bay with another load and jump in – balance in the wash – and shoot down event. We cut a very small and compact campsite at the head of the portage. Quiet place with a view and the sound of real booming drop. The banks of the river start to get very steep as the run towards Red Sucker Rapids begins.

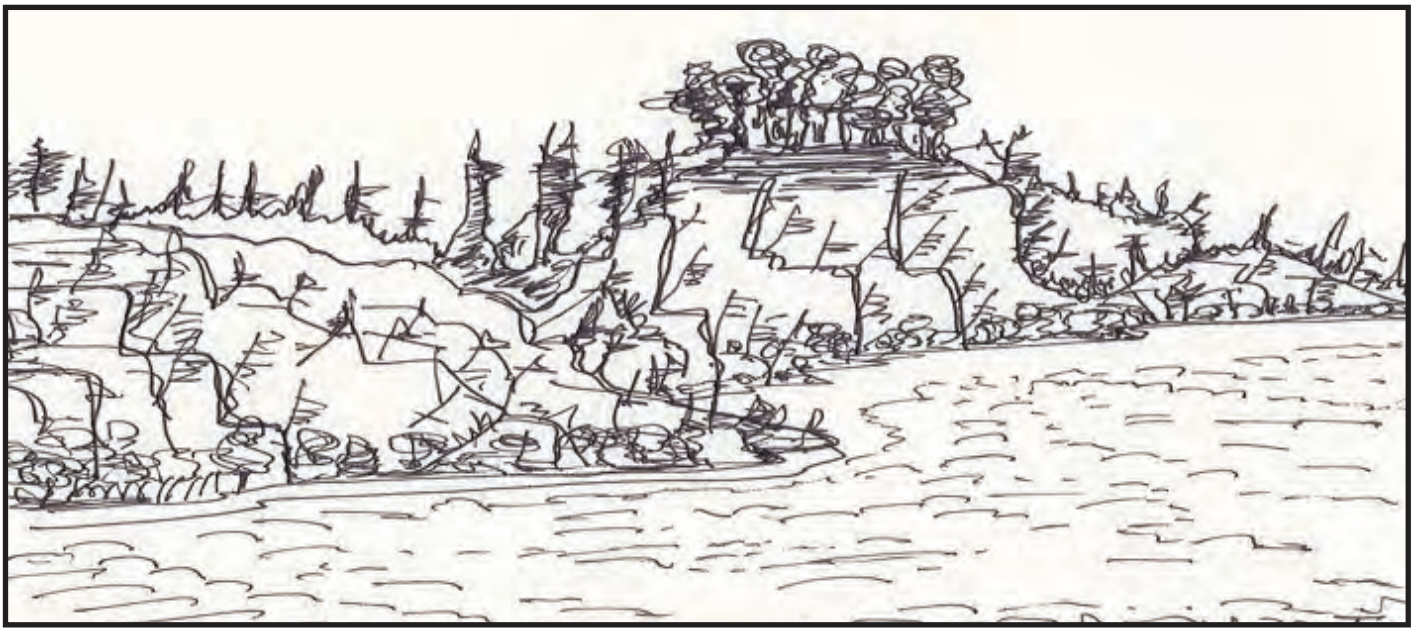
Below the Big Bear Falls we glided thru runs of current past burned shores. As soon as you get into a groove on the Gods an exception pops up. We got to a really large rapids that should have a



Island teepee in front of old stove, Spruce grove

Red Sucker Rapids

portage around it but none was visible. On one trip I cut a trail on the left up and down hill sides to a side bay. On the high water trip I asked Pete if he thought we could wade the side as the water was higher than when we first went thru. Pete opined it was worth the look and I waded down the river next to the bushes. It looked good and Pete who was an expert at this stuff waded by the stern and I took the bow and we walked the canoe down to an outcrop where we had lunch. We loaded in the side bay and put on the life jackets. Pete always had a special yachting jacket, and then we shot out around the corner and down the last of the white water. A few miles down we camped at Cheemun Rapids. It was narrow and cramped but we worked at it and got enough room for the tent and the fire. I know Pete really likes this spot as the



Poplar Hill EnRoute to Deer Neck Island

rapid falls in wide smooth slick. It turns gold in the late afternoon light.

Past Cheemun Rapids the river runs a swift course with waves but no real drops and some meanders. The Gods is trying to lull you to sleep because after a while Red Sucker Rapids starts up. Of all the places Pete and I have paddled thru I have to say he liked Red Sucker Rapids and Pesew Falls the best. To him this section on the Gods and the same on the adjacent Red Sucker were the real north. The area seemed to find a place in his heart. It has everything a bushman craves. You have the big wide river. You have the really high banks, almost but not quite a canyon affect. You have the miles of tumbling white water. There are interesting camping spots along the way. There are side routes behind islands and thru small channels that make it lots of fun. And finally, there is Pesew Falls, just an extended rapid but lots of open rock, and trout, and clear water. I think this place found a spot in Pete's soul. He always had a wide quiet grin of satisfaction about being there.

We wove our way down thru the side channels and the islands to Pesew Falls.

Pete went out on these flat rocks and caught trout. We had a great campsite back up in the bush and we needed it as it poured rain and cold wind swept the river side. No matter Pete had on his thick wool jacket which he oiled and so he was always warm and dry.

Below Pesew Falls we had quite a few miles to paddle to get to the settlement and the air field. We went down a lot of wide shallow runs and tried to find a campsite we had cut on a previous trip down. We found the location but it was quite over grown and decided to push on to a set of three islands that I thought might be acceptable. Pete kind of predicted we would find a site there and low and behold we did just that. The locals had carved out a wide and spacious site in the spruces and all we had to do was get the tent and fly up and cook dinner. Pete was getting anxious or should I say impatient to get to the end and start traveling back south to Debbie. Mother Nature had given us good current and good water depth, would she favor us with a fair wind?

You know you are getting close to the village when you pass the high hill on left shore topped with unburned polar trees. Just beyond that is Deer Neck Island where we made our last camp on the right shore adjacent to the island. Here Pete cooked our last breakfast. How he loved to be up before the sun and revel in the fire light and cook the slab bacon and brew his what I called "raw" coffee.

For the complete sketchbook please refer to our digital Nastawgan.

CPM #40015547
ISSN 1828-1327

Published by the Wilderness and Canoe Association
Nastawgan is an Anishinaabe 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.

Visiting the Canadian Canoe Museum and Fall Gathering at Paddler Co-op 2024

The Fall Gathering took place at the Paddler Co-op this year. About 35 people attended.

Some of us drove up on Friday and made a stop at the new location of the Canadian Canoe Museum. This event was organized by Chris Mayberry.

We started with an hour flat water paddle around Little Lake on the Otonabee River. Back on dry land we toured the museum for a few hours ending with a relaxing lunch at their cafeteria. You can read more about the museum in the Nastawgan 2024 Spring issue.

We arrived at the Paddler Co-op before dark where we took advantage of the 20% discount offered to WCA members for camping (normally 10% discount applies year round).

Saturday morning we got a head count of 17 flat water and 17 whitewater paddlers. Chris Mayberry organized the whitewater folks to paddle the Lower Madawaska River, Snake Rapids (see the WCA YouTube video for a recap) while Gary Ataman organized the flat-water folks to paddle the Conroy Marsh on the York River.

Saturday's dinner was held at a local Ukraine Restaurant in Comber mere called the Heartwood, where we dined on traditional food (Borscht, Cabbage Rolls, and Perogies).

In the evening, back at the Co-op boat house, we watched two presentations. The first was from Erik Thomsen of his 2024 Snake River, Yukon trip, and the second one was of a Baja California Sur, Sea of Cortez, Mexico 2024 sea kayaking trip presented by Gary and Heather Ataman.

Robert James leads a hands-on workshop repairing skid plates

Sunday morning we slept in and had a casual breakfast in the campsite. The Paddler Co-op ran a hands-on workshop on how they repair skid plates. It was a subject useful for both the flat and whitewater people present, judging by the amount of Q&A that took place.

The remainder of the was divided between playing at Palmer rapids and paddling up the Madawaska River from Combermere.

Gary Ataman,
WCA Chair

Mike Wevrick Lecture – Wine and Cheese Social

When: 7-10 PM, Saturday Evening, Dec 7, 2024.

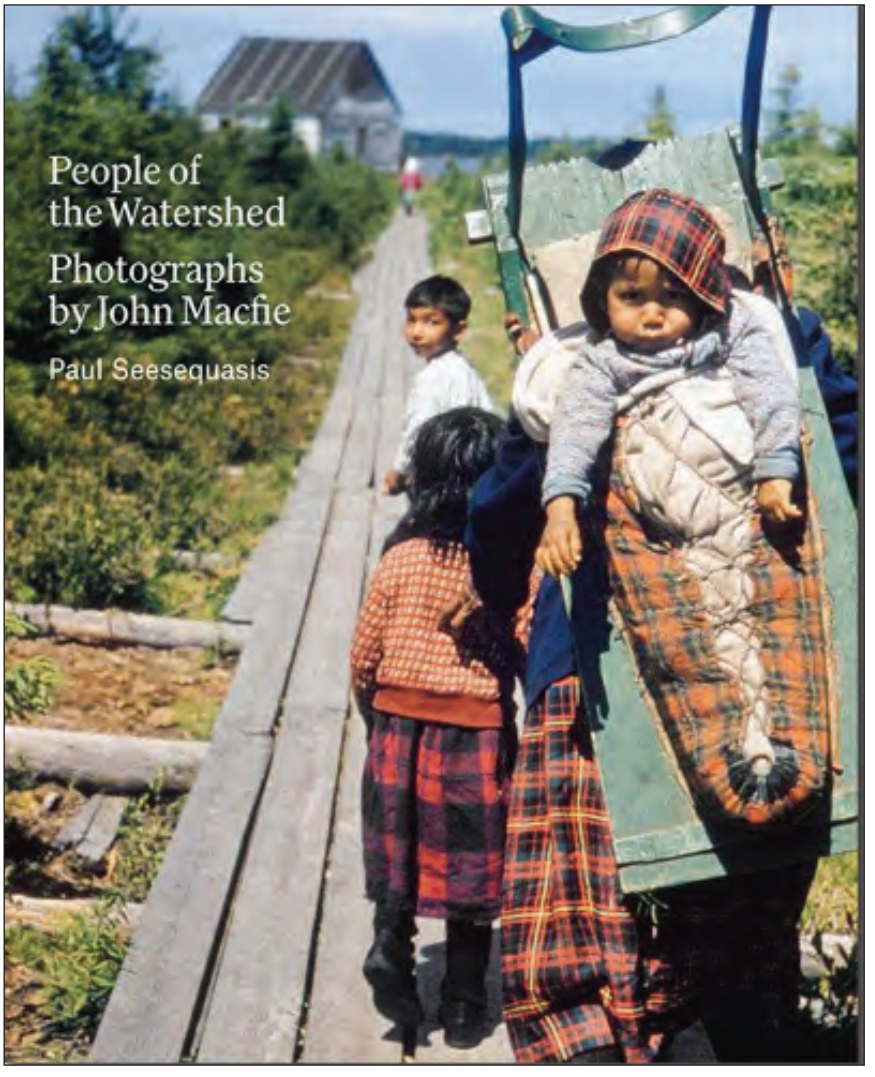
Where: Toronto Sailing & Canoe Club, 1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto
Our speaker is the legendary **Adam Shoalts PhD**. Adam is a professional adventurer and author. Named one of the "greatest living explorers" by CBC and declared "Canada's Indiana Jones" by the Toronto Star.

People of the Watershed

Photographs by John Macfie

The McMichael Gallery, in Kleinburg, has mounted a major exhibit of photographs taken by John Macfie in many indigenous communities in the Hudson Bay Watershed during the 1950s and early 1960s. The exhibit, People of the Watershed, was curated by Paul Seesequasis, author of *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun* (2019).

The photographs capture life on the land when the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Anisininew (formerly called Oji-Cree) people of the region still lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Fur trapping was still a viable way of life and the move to a more sedentary lifestyle in settled communities was just beginning. Travel was still largely by canoe, snowshoe, and dog team; outboard motors and snowmobiles were not yet common. Macfie understood that the way of life he was witnessing was passing into history and was inspired to record that way of life and the people. His photographs, in the words of Paul Seesequasis, "form an ambitious, wide-ranging visual account of the people, the lands, and the life of the watershed" at a time of tremendous cultural change.



From the 1950s through the early 1960s John Macfie worked as a trapline management officer with the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests in Northern Ontario. His territory covered the Hudson Bay Watershed from the Manitoba border to Moose Factory and as far south as Mattagami.

Macfie had an interest in photography and he carried a camera on his work travels through this vast region, beginning with a simple folding Kodak camera, then moving up to a Rolleicord for black and white photographs and a Zeiss Contax for colour slides. The colour film used was Kodachrome, and prints from these colour slides form the basis of the People of the Watershed exhibit.

When he finished working in the north Macfie returned to the Parry Sound area, where he had grown up, and continued working for the Department of Lands and Forests as a senior conservation officer. In 1972 he became the supervisor of the Fish and Wildlife Branch, Parry Sound Region, a position he held until his retirement in 1981.

Following his retirement he researched the history of the Parry Sound District, writing weekly newspaper columns and publishing numerous books. One of these books was *Hudson Bay Watershed: A Photographic Memoir of the Ojibway, Cree, and Oji-Cree* (1991) in collaboration with Anishinaabe scholar and author Basil Johnston. Many of the photographs that appeared in that book in black and white are included in the *People of the Watershed* exhibit in colour.

Late in his life John Macfie donated his prints, negatives, and slides (over 1,200 in all) to the Archives of Ontario for posterity. He died in 2018 at the age of 93.

The *People of the Watershed* exhibit is a wonderful, historic show that will be of interest to anyone who has paddled any of the many rivers in the Hudson Bay Watershed and visited some of the communities depicted, as well as anyone interested in the people and cultural history of the region. The exhibit runs at the McMichael Gallery until November 17; after that it will move on to other venues, most in Northern Ontario.

https://mcmichael.com/event/people-of-the-watershed-photographs-by-john-macfie/

Sandy Richardson

Like Shooting Rapids, Navigating Narrative is a Winding Path

by Gary Storr

My buddy Dan pointed me toward the Wilderness Canoe Association (WCA) in 2008 after he returned from the Outdoor Adventure Show in Toronto with an unassuming brown-bag journal called Nastawgan. It was edited by Toni Harting, a name I knew. His book, French River: Paddling the River of the Stick-Wavers, was on my bookshelf and its pages were dog-eared. I read the journal – the articles were entertaining and informative – and then I put it down and forgot about it. A couple of years later I was blindsided by the synchronous sinking of two paddling publications dear to my heart: KANAWA, a Canadian quarterly for which I'd written and, in the United States, Paddler. Both were deep-sixed respectively by the Canadian Recreational Canoe and Kayak Association and the American Canoe Association. I suddenly felt adrift. Waiting in the wings was a fledgling glossy, uniquely positioned to assume their mantles.

I submitted an article to the new kid on the block and it was accepted for publication. Then I thumbed through a copy of the mag and discovered that no story exceeded two pages in length – including photographs. Nothing went over the leaf. My article was much longer. Concerned, I contacted the editor who admitted that my piece would be trimmed to conform to their format. "Won't that compromise the integrity of the story?" I asked. "Yes … " the editor hesitated. "Then you can't have it," I said and I snatched back my baby. This edit wouldn't be a tonsillectomy: it would be an evisceration.

I reached out to Toni at Nastawgan. He was interested. He seemed satisfied with the prose but he was a taskmaster; he demanded perfection from himself and those around him. Toni challenged me: he wanted the who, what, where, why, when and how and wasn't happy until he got them. He taught me how to be a better journalist, something few editors make time for. I had found a new home for my outdoor adventure yarns. I joined the WCA.

Soon after, I stumbled upon an American special interest group whose mandate was to advocate for threatened rivers across the United States. I contacted Ambrose Tuscano, then editor of the American Whitewater Journal and, for his periodical, rhapsodized about paddling Canada's wild rivers.

At this point I had no additional need for the WCA; my paddling tribe, the Canoeing Legends, provided me with the adventure I craved. I perused the outings page only out of curiosity. But things change. The Legends gradually drifted apart until only a core handful remained. Organizing outings became akin to chasing quicksilver. Finally I gave in and signed up for a WCA day trip. Then another … and another. I paddled the upper Credit River in Ontario and the lower. I paddled the Beaver River to Clarksburg – twice. I ran the Petawawa River in Algonquin Park and explored the West Montreal. I took whitewater instruction at the Madawaska Kanu Centre. There, my instructor declared me to be Dumoine River-ready. Booyah! I signed up for the Dumoine.

Age, however, began to bring with it relic-related setbacks. I fractured a metatarsal bone and wondered why it took so long to heal. My doctor sent me for a bone density scan. The verdict: borderline osteoporosis. I pounded milk and scarfed down cheese. I gobbled calcium pills. A year later, another scan, this one no better. I was hollow-boned … like a bird. If I grew feathers I could fly. But worse, if I fell out of a canoe and broke my leg I would have to be shot.

This spring the Legends gathered for a paddle on the Beaver River. Heavy rains had swelled the flow beyond its banks, the happy outcome being that there were no lift-overs. Later, at Heathcote, the gang dispersed in high spirits. My sternmate and I continued on. My wife Debby would meet us with the car at Clendenan Dam. It was an exhilarating ride but I had triumphed in the past and knew it was a candy-ass run. At Slabtown the grade steepened and the current swept us through tree branches and washed us around bends. Near the reservoir above the dam the river split into three distinct channels. We had only an instant to pick one and into it we flew. At the base of the water slide a log lay crossways in wait. We rammed it, spun a jarring ninety and tipped upriver. In we went.

My partner and I dumped the water from the canoe and paddled into the reservoir in search of my whitewater paddle. We spied it moving toward the dam and dug in for the sprint. In the distance Debby stood above the dam waving her arms and yelling at us to stop. We didn't even come close. With a final sunlit glint my paddle saluted and slipped over the brink. But we were okay; no harm, no foul.

Two weeks later my partner called. She had driven over the Sauble River bridge at Tara and wondered if it was doable. I looked for maps: there were none. I searched for trip logs: there was one brief account in an out-of-print book called The Sweetwater Explorer. The Sauble coursed through private farmlands and couldn't be scouted from the riverbank. I sussed the waterway from every bridge between Allenford and Hepworth. It flowed with gusto but there were no tell-tale signs of danger. It was a go.

"Can we bring the light boat?" my partner asked. The whitewater canoe was difficult for her to swing onto the roof of my car. "Sure," I agreed. "Do we need helmets?" "Naw," I drawled with manimal swagger. "Piece of cake." "See you there!" she chirped.

It was a joyous day, running swifts, but my partner in the bow seat began to have difficulty drawing past obstacles with her bent-shaft paddle; it was like clawing at the sky while falling from a cliff. There was no bite. As with the Beaver, the grade fell away and we picked up speed. The current surged around a curve to the left past half a dozen cottages. As we approached, my bowmate waved to a fellow watching

(Continued on page 19)

Rusk – A Perfect South African Breakfast Biscuit

Submitted by Iori Miller, Inspired by Amanda Scholtz

"We South Africans are very partial to rusks with that first cup of morning coffee! It's what the US calls "double-baked": the result with this recipe is a hard, chunky sweetish "rock" which you dunk in your coffee or tea to soften, then bite off. It doubles as a quick breakfast or an afternoon bite with tea and coffee. It's an all-purpose snack and most houses are never without a tin of them. There are all kinds of variations including health and muesli rusks. They date back to the time when people trekked with oxwagons into the interior, when they needed foods that would keep." (*Zurie, internet source)*

Ingredients:

4 lbs self raising flour
1 lb pure butter firm
2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons salt
3 large eggs, beaten
1 tablespoon vanilla
6 cups buttermilk to mix in (about)

Directions

Preheat oven to 180 deg C., and grease two flat, large cookie trays.

Use the coarse side of a grater, in a large bowl, grate the butter into the flour. Use your hands to rub it in until mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add the salt and sugar. Add the vanilla to the beaten eggs, and stir into the flour mixture (just roughly). Add enough buttermilk to mix to the consistency of scone dough, i.e. soft and somewhat sticky, but not wet. You should need about 6 cups of buttermilk, more or less.

Have a bowl of quite warm water ready and dip your hands into it. Now form large balls of dough but do so lightly. The balls should be about 1/3 smaller than tennis balls (sorry, hard if you can't demonstrate!) Pack these, touching one another, on the greased tins. Do not pack close to the edges of the tins, as the dough will rise considerably.

Baking time depends on the size of the balls – generally about 45-60 minutes. The rusks should be well-risen and golden-brown on top. Don't let them burn.

Cool in tins, but they don't have to be cold to proceed. Use a serrated knife (some people simply break up the soft rusks) and cut into shapes convenient for handling – about 3 inches in length and 1 1/2 inches in width.

They crumble a lot – don't worry, it can't be helped. Put the crumbs out for the birds.

Using the same trays, stack loosely and at an angle, one row supporting the next.

Dry overnight in a cool oven of about 80 deg C, with the oven door wedged open a crack. They must dry out completely.

Next day make sure rusks are dry, cool well, and keep in airtight tins.

(Continued from page 18)

from the bank, mug in hand, and his jaw dropped. He didn't wave back. He knew what the river had in store for us.

Ahead was a wide, raging straightaway with no place to eddy out. Then we saw it – a weir! A natural strand of boulders blocking our route. There was a sickening crunch as Kevlar met rock. We scraped overtop and my partner leaned back, but to no effect. We drove into the river below the dam and swamped into a maelstrom of water and rock. One hundred metres of exquisite pain ensued. My bowmate and I weathered the chaos but the canoe was destroyed.

Eight weeks later I asked my doctor why my ribs were taking so long to heal. He looked at me sternly.

I decided to hang up the whitewater paddle. It's funny how life can be cyclical. Lily dipping is where I began and it is where I belong. But until I grow feathers and exhibit the mental acuity of, say, a chicken, I'll continue to hunt and peck. Too late? Maybe, but show me a bird who cares.

Paddling the Wind River, Yukon Territory

Author: Mike Stacey
Photos: Terry Hartrick and Mike Stacey

Unloading at McClusky Lake, Put-In

Mount Royal in the background, trees and clear water. What's not to like?

What makes two pensioners from southern Canada paddle 300 km down a remote Yukon river? Is it really worth the risk, expense and effort? (Spoiler alert … yup!)

Why wilderness canoe travel? One hopes for physical fitness, mental alertness and spiritual but there are other motivations. Canadians have long "traversed the landscape"[1], beginning with Indigenous peoples finding sustenance and shelter. Newcomers have followed, seeking wealth, souls and refuge from turmoil. And now us, the outdoors enthusiasts, trying to connect with nature and to learn about those who have paddled here before.

1 Ken Wylie, outdoors safety expert, on Canadians' affinity for the outback. CBC Radio, Mar 07, 2023 – TBC.

In August of 2022, Terry Hartrick and I flew from Victoria, BC, to Whitehorse, YT. A shuttle van drove us for five hours to Mayo; a Beaver float plane took us 180 km further north to our put-in and the start of a 15-day self-guided canoe trip down the Wind and (a portion of the) Peel Rivers. This was to be our longest, furthest north and first ever fly-in expedition, through traditional territories of the Na-Cho Nyak Dun and Tetlit Gwich'in First Nations. These lands fall within the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan, covering over 67,000 km2, agreed to in 2019 by Yukon First Nations and the Government of Yukon, which recognized "the region's rugged, unpopulated wilderness character." Travel here calls for respect for the landscape, to retain its value for future generations.

I have long been intrigued by the relationship that people who spend their lives outdoors have with the land. Would travel through unfiltered nature – smelling the trees, feeling rock and soil underfoot and being rocked by the water – spark some insights? I hoped that two weeks on these rivers would provide a glimpse at what it means to live close to nature.

Canoe tripping can be restorative. We accept and adapt to the river's rhythm. Some thrill to navigating turbulent white water; others savour a slow-motion bobsleigh ride that encourages contemplation and mindfulness of one's surroundings. Looking back, maintaining awareness of the river's grade, power and changing currents became, if not quite second nature, a reasonable balance of tension and tranquillity. I aimed for, and occasionally achieved, mental composure and a fluid, responsive physical connection with my boat. Both objectives were tested when the river threw up sudden obstacles!

The Wind River water was wonderfully clear. Scoop up a litre from the river, treat it with a Katadyn pill, and enjoy. Once we reached the Peel, however, the water became murkier, with fine sediments suspended in it. Employing a gravity filter system prior to using the pills worked well.

Despite several rain storms in the mountains upstream the river level did not fluctuate noticeably. There is little vegetation on the watershed's higher mountains to slow down the flow of rainwater into the rivers, causing concern that

Whitehorse to Mayo: shuttle van. Mayo to Put-in: float plane. Put-in to Take-out: paddle.

Mike & Terry – breakfast. Dry bags used to form a wind break. They do call it the "Wind"...

Lunch stop, view of coal deposits on fire, as they have been for years

campsites might be flooded. We watched the river closely in case it rose suddenly, marking evening levels with a bright red ribbon.

We saw some other parties on the river: including intrepid German tourists and a guided group from Canada. We had occasion to assist some of them and were helped out in turn by others – spare gear and food donated to those who had lost kit in a capsize; timely advice received from others with expertise and experience. It was great fun to photograph the dramatic vistas and experiment with Terry's drone kit. With things going well, the world felt to me like a large, round lifeboat, its occupants reliant on each other, spinning alone through space. We felt like part of a complex, awesome environment.

That said, the risks and rigours of wild river travel are real, especially for paddlers who are well north of 60. Varying "discharge rates" generate anything from a gentle slalom run up to a difficult series of twists and turns where effort and skill are needed to maintain control. Obstacles can appear suddenly, making decision-making more urgent. A landing might require a tricky exit from a "pushy" main current to find safe access to shore. Choosing the wrong "braid" could lead down a narrow, steep and twisting channel with "sweeper" trees protruding from freshly undercut banks – being pinned against one could be big trouble! I'll admit to some trepidation when first planning the trip. In the end, our only reportable encounter was when I veered too close to a sweeper, resulting in the loss of a paddle and some of my dignity.

"I think we're ....here." Mike gives the map and inReach a workout.

We tried to mitigate the risks through preparation and obtaining good equipment. Our first canoe expeditions were on slower moving, well-travelled rivers. Terry is an ex-physician with extensive Pacific coast kayaking experience. I had been a mariner (commercial fisher). Both of us have backcountry camping experience, and these backgrounds provided useful skills and knowledge.

Recent advances in outdoor equipment technology have helped. A carbon fibre paddle may not be "authentic" but its light weight was much appreciated during long paddling days! Given the Yukon's legendary mosquitoes, our bug shelter became a favourite piece of kit. We countered weather extremes with Merino wool, down, Gore-Tex and our wonderful dry suits. Our canoes had spray decks and floatation bags. Turbulent water was often managed by finding a path around it or by lining the boats along the shores. In the steep sided Peel Canyon, we crossed an unavoidable two foot high wave train without any drama, the spray decks preventing the boats from taking on water.

I would not have done this trip without having the ability to call for help provided by our inReach satellite transceivers. We could also have used them to contact each other had we become separated and to exchange messages with the float plane company. The inReach enabled folks at home to watch our progress on the internet – in real time! We received updates via inReach on river levels and discharge rates, courtesy of a shore contact who regularly checked an internet-connected current monitoring station.

Before undertaking our trip we knew that we needed to improve our "moving

water" canoe skills to paddle the Wind River safely (whitewater up to Class II). We took all the canoe courses available at our local paddling club, and a moving-water rescue course. We also carefully read trip journals from previous Wind paddlers. On the river, our practice was to always keep in sight of each other and to stay within shouting distance in tricky situations – we thought we formed a small but capable team! Decades ago, we might have relied more on youthful stamina. Now, we prioritized excellent gear and thorough preparation – all part of adventuring during life's third act.

Anyone contemplating wilderness river travel should consider joining a guided group. The guide finds a safe route matched to clients' skills. Following a guide boat gives clients more time and energy to scan the shores and mountainsides for game, instead of focusing on spotting hazards and choosing a line. Critically, the guide prevents avoidable emergencies and deals professionally with those that do occur. In camp, the guided option generally gives clients more time for hiking, fishing, taking pictures, or just "being there", instead of digging latrines, doing kitchen chores, starting fires, monitoring river levels, etc.

Of course, some people enjoy tackling the logistical and navigational tasks typically handled by guides, seeing them as integral to wilderness travel. And there may be cost savings by going "self-guided". However, one needs to feel confident about the groups' skills and their knowledge about a given river to go without the security and expert interpre-tation provided by guides.

Wilderness river canoeing requires a "live in the moment" awareness. Whether planning the next day's activities or choosing your line for the next 30 seconds around a turbulent corner, it's the natural environment that determines your options. For many, even though it comes with challenges along with the rewards, this experience is a welcome change from their daily concerns at home.

Will there be a next river adventure? There are a few moving parts to consider: health and stamina, wallet thickness, spouse and family support, etc. That said, there is this one river that I've heard about …

First Nations travellers may have camped here for many years. Hiking potential on both sides of the river.

Mike scans riffles, lunch stop

Typical camp. Note the red ribbon used to monitor the river's level. Canoes are tied down due to strong winds.

…in this issue

WCA Postal Address
12 Erindale Crescent
Brampton, ON, Canada
L6W 1B5
For general information:
info@wildernesscanoe.ca

http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca

NOVA CRAFT CANOE™

NEW! Prospector 14 Solo

Introducing the newest member of the Prospector family: An ideal choice for independent paddlers seeking a multipurpose tripping canoe without the extra volume or weight. It is lighter and sleeker than its tandem counterparts while maintaining the performance and gear capacity you've come to expect from a Nova Craft Prospector. Ranging in size from the 14' Solo to the 18' tandem, there's a Prospector for every adventure.

LIMITED LIFETIME* WARRANTY

*Inquire for more details.

novacraft.com 1 866 88 CANOE NOVA CRAFT CANOE™