

CHE-MUN

(Ojibway for canoe)

THE JOURNAL OF CANADIAN WILDERNESS CANOEING

OUTFIT 100

CHE-MUN

SPRING 2000



photo: Tracy Perry

BACK IN THE SUMMER OF '62 -- The first two canoeing parties to paddle the length of the Back River in more than a century meet during their mutual descents of the rugged and desolate river. The yellow wood

& canvas canoe of Austin Hoyt and Kit Gregg contrasts with the military-style kayaks of the British expedition. American trip member JOHN LENTZ, recalls that Back River summer beginning on Page 6.

Going Back to the Back

John Lentz looks back on the landmark 1962 trip

Page 6

LastList?- not likely!

Readers comment and add their own great canoeing memories

Page 2

Spring Packet



We were very pleased with the reaction to *Outfit 99* and its listing of canoeing highlights. That list has prompted letters from a pair of prominent paddlers - something we were hoping would happen. The first letter is from **Duke Watson** from Seattle who has a paddling resumé very few, if any, can match. His thoughts and reminiscences are what it's all about. The second letter is from **Bruce Hodgins** who has carved his own legend in Canadian paddling. Enjoy the words of this illustrious pair;

Outfit 99's Millennium List is especially intriguing. I am responding to your editorial invitation with a few suggestions as to additions and amendments. Your caveat regarding selections was well stated; I echo your thoughts on the matter, and further qualify my ideas with the obvious reminder that choices are so strongly influenced by conditions (season, weather, water level etc.).

Adopting your numberings, I offer your following thoughts:

2. The Great Trips - pre 1950.

Of your 27 categories this may be the most difficult one to be specific about, because of the great number of trips to choose from. The historic trips of Samuel Hearne, George Back, Alexander Mackenzie, Peter Fidler, David Thompson, and Simon Fraser, among others, are in a class by themselves. The 1893 trip of the Tyrrells certainly holds its own: but I do not see how the trips of Hanbury, Douglas, Wallace and Hubbard, dramatic though they are, can fit in here.

It is a case of the pros versus the amateurs. Among the great Geological Survey of Canada explorers, in addition to the Tyrrell brothers, A.P. Low ranks at the top. His 1893-4 trip through Un-

gava and Labrador (Rupert, Eastmain, Lake Nichicun, Kaniapiscaw, Koksoak, Churchill Falls, Lake Petitsikapau, Lake Michikamau etc - more than 5500 miles) far outdoes that of Charles Camsell, much as I admire the latter.

4. The Best Rivers.

I have run all three of the rivers which you list and beg to differ. I found the Coppermine was overrated (there is something magic about its name). I must admit that more wildlife was seen on this river than any other I have travelled (many caribou, moose and grizzlies.); but most afternoon we were paddling through dust storms, occasioned by the wind-whipped chalky bluffs. For Arctic or sub-Arctic rivers I nominate the Back and the Hayes.

With regard to the George, we encountered the peak of the caribou migration and it was fantastic. Dramatic scenery and seemingly endless miles of runnable rapids. A close call but I would rate the Kaniapiscaw (before its diversion) ahead of the George. The Churchill, from its headwaters to Hudson Bay and the Nelson also to the Bay, were run before they were despoiled by dams. They were huge, scenic and dwarfed the Rupert.

The two most dangerous and hence challenging rivers in my experience probably are little known to *Che-Mun* readers. They are the Fraser and the Liard. Big and powerful with awesome canyons.

5. The Toughest Portages.

The Grand Portage I first carried in 1935 when it was little used (the Ojibwa mostly had forsaken it and the recreational canoeists had not yet become active in the area). It holds wonderful historic and sentimental charm for me. The Methye Portage is the most pleasant major portage I have ever made. There are, or were, wonderful remnants of Cree

winter camps on the Clearwater end. It is a delightful trail with a picturesque lakelet about one third of the way across, for a rest stop or overnight camp. Although I am not familiar with Boulder Portage you spoke about, there are a number of ones which became all too familiar with and which are far more demanding than either of the others mentioned above. Most of these, like Boulder, are not established portages, so a comparison may be unfair. Nevertheless, the following stand out in my mind:

Unnamed route from Ramah Bay, on the Labrador Sea across the Torngat Mountain Range to the Korok River, 14 miles and 1400 feet of vertical gain.

Devil's Portage and unnamed portage bypassing The Gates on the Liard River. Both were over very rugged terrain and required whacking through stretches of dense bush, as well as roping of canoes and packs up and down cliffs. Combined distance about ten miles and 1200 feet vertical gain.

The Kaltag Portage from the headwaters of the Rodo River, a tributary of the Yukon to the Unalaska River. Eight miles, mostly by compass, and much of it through swamp or muskeg.

19. Most Scenic Spots.

1. Turnback Canyon of the Alsek River.
2. Grand Canyon of the Stikine River.
3. Eton Canyon of the Kaniapiscaw (before diversion). These three canyons feature the wildest, most entrancing whitewater I have ever beheld.

I should continue with thoughts about the Best Campsites, Most Meaningful Canoeing Sports, Scariest Rapids etc., but these issues become even more subjective. Suffice it to say that your article *The Listing: Canoe* was a clever idea and stimulat-

➔ *Continued on Page 11*



CHE-MUN

OUTFIT 100: Our centenary issue is a great point to look back from. So we head back 38 years to a great trip from the last century (Pages 6–8). Shown in Yellowknife after their 1962 descent of the Back River, from left; John Lentz, Austin Hoyt, Kit Gregg and Tracy Perry. Hoyt (right) hoists a mighty lake trout caught at the outlet of Garry Lake.



In late March, at the first-ever Bill Mason art exhibit and sale all 50 paintings were sold within 22 minutes of the show's opening.

There were 80 people lined up outside the Phillip K. Wood gallery in Almonte, Ontario, near Ottawa.

Phone purchases were scheduled to begin half an hour after the doors opened - eight minutes after the last 'sold' sticker went up.

"This is unheard of," exclaimed gallery owner Phillip Wood, who had agreed with the Mason family on a purchase limit of two paintings per person. "I've never seen paintings move like that."

Mason's widow Joyce was relieved at the reception her husband's paintings elicited. "My main feeling is of delight and joy at how well they've been received. I'm glad we arranged it so that one collector wasn't able to buy the whole bunch. The whole point of the show was to share Bill's paintings."

Nonetheless, she admitted there was a bittersweet tinge to the evening. "Selling his paintings does stir things up. It brings things back, even though it's been 12 years since he died. It was difficult selecting the paintings to sell, and even harder setting prices."

The paintings ranged from just over \$400 to just under \$2,000. Mason's son Paul described a selection process which involved the whole family.

Canoesworthy

"We basically looked at all the pictures we have and said 'Ok. Which ones don't we want to sell, for any reason?' Those ones were set aside."— from canoe.ca

A polar bear moving forward but looking back at the North Star has been chosen to symbolize the Nunavut government. The logo, which is now being used on government signs, forms, letterhead and other visual media, was unveiled in February.

The bear was designed by Pangnirtung artist Andrew Qappik who gained fame last year when he helped design Nunavut's flag and coat of arms. The logo also includes a star in reference to the blue star on Nunavut's flag.

The polar bear was chosen to represent Nunavut after representatives from government departments submitted questionnaires to the team charged with its design. Five different designs were submitted to the Nunavut cabinet for approval. It took about six months to design the final product.

Two Iqaluit men will try to re-create the controversial 1909 Peary expedition to the North Pole this spring. Paul Landry and Paul Crowley aren't going there so much to prove that U.S. explorer Robert Peary told the
➔ **Continued on Page 10**

From the Editor

Welcome to the 100th Outfit of *Che-Mun*. We have a bit of a new look to start our new century and I hope you like it. Come to think of it, I hope I like it because as I write this I have no idea how it will look!. We also bid a fond farewell to Paul Mason's *Canoetoons* (he stopped doing them years ago and we recycled mightily).

It's with great pleasure we offer you Part I of an inside look at the famed 1962 trip down the Back River. We are grateful to John Lentz for his time and efforts in putting together this story for *Che-Mun*. The summer of 1962 was an important one for northern wilderness canoeing as Eric Morse

paddled the Hanbury-Thelon route and while both these routes have become almost commonplace today they were unique efforts for their time.

On a personal note, three of Lentz' team had met and first tripped at Camp Temagami, a famed tripping camp in northern Ontario that ceased operation in 1970. I, too, learned to canoe trip at Camp Temagami and my first summer there was 1962, while they were on the Back!

We are also delighted to have received such great feedback from our *LastList* feature in Outfit 99. The letters from Duke Watson and Bruce Hodgins are testament to that.

I had hoped to be able to tell you about an exciting canoe project I was asked to be a part of this summer. A documentary film on my favourite canoeing group *The Voyageurs* (that's Sig Olson and Eric Morse & co.) titled *Back to the Lonely Land*

was to have been filmed on the Churchill River. I was asked to be a part of the TV documentary and eagerly accepted. However the CBC-TV powers that be did not think it was 'a right fit' for them and the project never got off the ground. That is most unfortunate. We all know it is a story worth telling and I can only hope the project will resurface in the future.

On the back cover, we present the 63 covers of *Che-Mun* since Outfit 38 in 1984 when I took over from Nick Nickels. At the end of all those pages there's a shot of my son Tom, 4, my favourite effort of the past few years. So welcome to Outfit 100 and a new century of paddling. With Spring here, it's time to dig out your tripping gear and start inhaling the wonderful moldy aroma of canvas, nylon—and adventure!

Michael Peake.

Journey to the Polar Sea

By Capt. John Franklin.

Narrative of the Great Fish River Expedition

By Capt. George Back.

First Editions on CD.

CD Academia 1999.

When old and new technologies blend effortlessly—it is something to behold. The leap from a 19th century explorer's journal to a 21st century computer screen may seem great. But in terms of conveying the message in an affordable and practical way, which surely was the original purpose of the journals, CD-Academia's new Arctic Discovery series has no peer. Their small catalog has the delightful title of *Antiquarian Electronic Books*.

One of the great programs of the computing age is Adobe Acrobat. This unique piece of software, which works on every computer system, faithfully replicates the look of whatever original it is translated from in an economical way. We have seen it used for catalogues and manuals etc. but its use here as a means of replicating the works of northern explorers Franklin and Back is where it truly shines.

There are two great pleasures about collecting old books. The sheer joy of owning a sensuous, antique creation of paper and leather, with its physical link to the past, is a reward in itself. But surely the information contained therein is what it's really all about. That's where this new technology cuts across all ages and budgets.

Back's Great Fish River Expedition (1833-35) and Franklin's Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea (1819-1822) are two books that would set you back many thousands of dollars in their original form. Even reproductions, such as the famed Hurtig reprints of the 1970s cost more than \$100 - when you can find them.

CD-Academia, a Nova Scotia firm, has scanned the original books including maps and art and reproduced them on a CD. That means you can read the book, page by page, in its original typeface or a modern one. But it's much more than a simple reproduction, thanks to Acrobat. You can jump back and forth between the text and the beautiful artwork



and maps thanks to the quality reproduction (shown above). You can switch between chapters and search keywords with ease. Click on any of the hundreds of sub-headings of subjects on the old style Contents pages and you are instantly transported to that reference. It's an incredible way to obtain the information, without the limits of a high price or, admittedly, the joy of holding it in your hands.

We have looked at the Back River in this Outfit of *Che-Mun* on a couple of levels. A CD like this allows you to put these various trips and stories on this great river into a historical context, to read about whom the Baillie River is named after (yes it is George Baillie) and what Back and his men went through on their descent of the Great Fish in that frigid summer of 1834. It will be a mandatory purchase for all Back River paddlers.

Currently there are five CDs in the series; Franklin's first two expeditions as well as two by Back including his lesser known Expedition in HMS Terror in 1836-7 and Capt Lyon's journal from the Hecla in the 1820s. Prices range from \$69.95 for the first Franklin to \$39.95 for Backs two works. They can be contacted at www.cd-books.com.

My Heart on the Yukon River

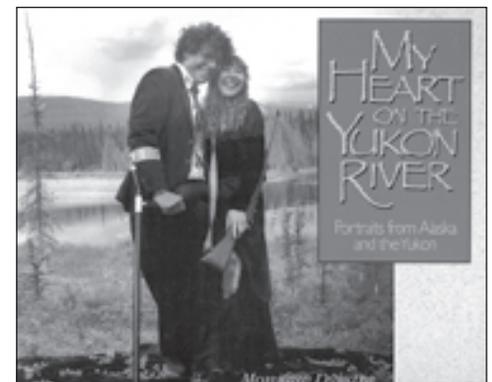
By Monique Dykstra

WSU Press, Pullman, Wash

128pp 1997. US\$24.95

ISDN: 0-87422-157-9

The huge difference between the Canadian and American north is apparent in this unique and touching book. Photographer Monique Dykstra loaded up her canoe with Hasselblads, strobes and batteries and set off to record



the people she met along the sprawling Yukon River in the summer of 1993. You could try the same project on any northern Canadian River but the end result would be a significantly thinner book.

The Yukon which starts out in Yukon and rolls across Alaska has always had a history of settlement along its swiftly flowing banks. There are no major water obstacles, falls or big rapids, so the river is really a highway which affords many people to seek a dream and homestead in the north.

There are some wonderful stories here, very few "boring or average" people undertake this northern life. Dykstra's photos are moving and touching portraits, though often similar in look—featuring that artsy stare-at-the-camera pose.

Families, trappers, dreamers and outcasts—they dot the shores of the mighty Yukon as it stretches to infinity serving as the last outposts of humanity.

Damming Denison?

In early March an e-mail went out from Becky Mason to her many friends in the canoeing world. It was an e-mail of great urgency. She had learned that Denison Falls on the Dog River (formerly known as the University River) which empties into the east side Lake Superior was going to be dammed - and damned fast. What follows is an update on that situation as well as Becky's words.

"Hi Everyone,
"I have tried my best to contact the appropriate people in my opinion to stop the damming of Denison Falls. I have given as much helpful information I could find to two writers/reporters. Each have responded positively and each has expressed an interest in looking into the details. My instincts are to let those two do their jobs and see if they can find out if Denison Falls is going to be dammed and when.

I will not be forwarding your past or future messages along to the public but I may tell the media/public in general terms what I have been told via email.

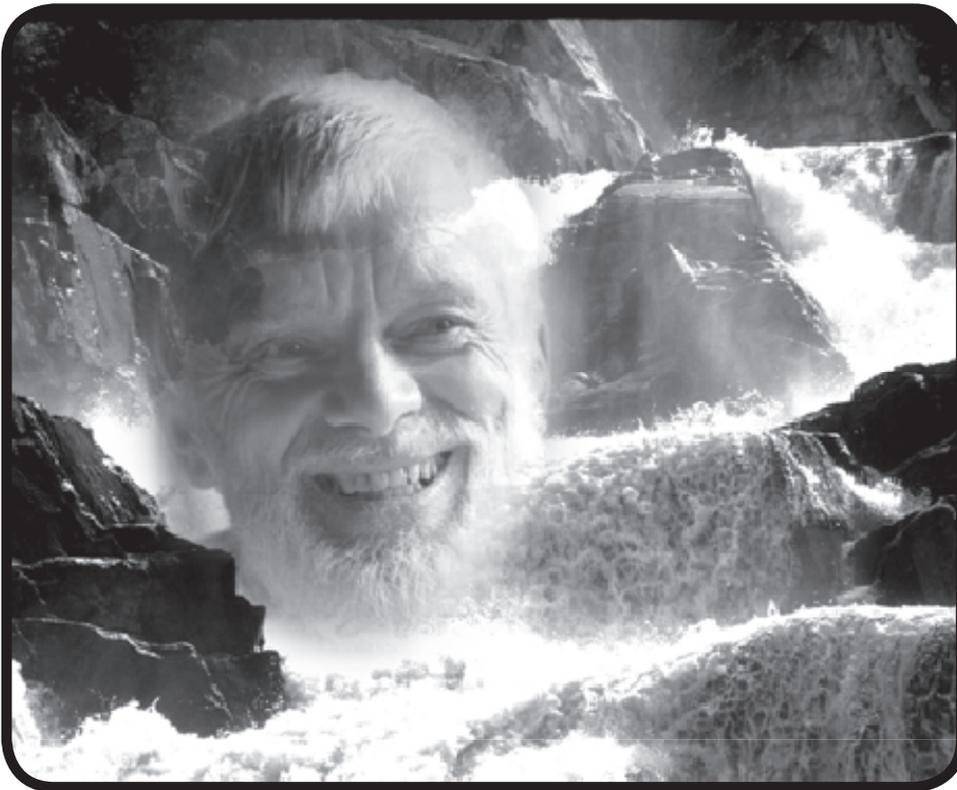
Concerning the Denison Falls damming issue, here is one quote I will stand by, "I was sent a confidential e-mail from a reliable source on March 3, 2000 that Denison Falls on the Dog River (University River) is slated to have a dam put on it. I did quite a bit of checking with my various contacts and most did not know about the issue but the people who

did, thought it was just threatened to be dammed. I phoned my source again and they said the damming will start soon."

"To see a picture of the falls see page 122 in *Path of the Paddle* by Bill Mason. Umbata Falls on the White River is also slated to be dammed but I do not think anything can be done about it

they can easily manipulate them to serve their purpose. It has been found that the natives can make more money and create more jobs by taking people to look at their land in its natural state instead of destroying it. I would like to try and make it a national issue of saving Dad's favourite falls because it was saved once from being dammed and now it's threatened once again by the government at the natives expense."

—Becky Mason



photos: Michael Peake

Bill Mason is inextricably linked with Denison Falls on the Dog River near Lake Superior.

but maybe this whole damming issue of many rivers could be brought to light by talking about Denison Falls.

"It has been suggested to me that the government is purposely pitting the natives against everyone who loves that falls. And that the natives are poor and disadvantaged and losing more land for the government's gain. There are many cases where the government has convinced the natives to do their bidding because

stream for a look. Anyone coming down this challenging whitewater river in the spring has a big walk around these falls. (The Dog drops some 800 feet in its 40 mile length!) The fact that the falls are relatively hidden from view would make it easier for those willing to dam them to do so – or at least that's what they might think.

Che-Mun will stay on top of Denison Falls issue as it develops. Please contact us at *che-*

We have learned that the plan to dam Denison may be underway. This story will be carried on by e-mail and the Internet. These two fast formats are perfect for a quickly breaking story.

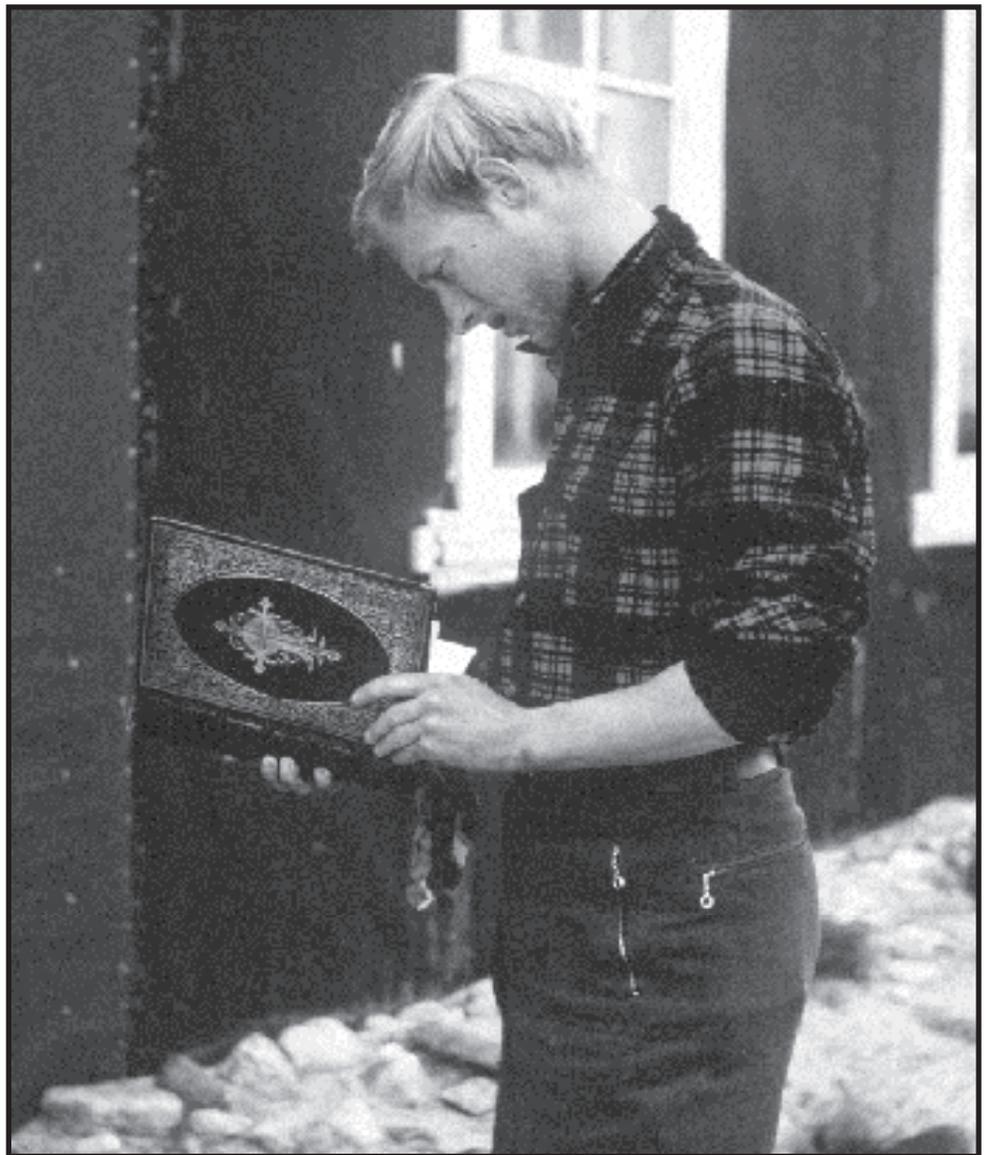
Denison Falls was featured prominently in *WaterWalker*, Bill Mason's superb feature length canoeing film. Though the falls are a ways in from lake Superior they were close enough for the adventurous to head up-

Lookin' Back

Part One

*In the summer of 1962, a group of four young Americans became the first paddlers since HBC Chief Factor James Anderson in 1855, to descend the length of the extremely remote and rugged Back River in the NWT by canoe. The trip remains a landmark and one of its members, **JOHN LENTZ**, takes Che-Mun readers for new look at that northern summer of '62. Ironically, there was another party on the river—four British military paddlers who had their own unique way of doing things. This is Part One of a remem-*

Photos by Tracy Perry



SPIRITS OF THE PASSED -- Austin Hoyt examines a hymn book at the mission in Garry Lake occupied by Father Buliard who disappeared while on a winter dogsled trip in the 1950s.

Classic Expeditions

It was February 1962. I put down Captain George Back's *Narrative Of The Arctic Land Expedition*, and gazed up at the elegant dome ceiling of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. No way - we'd never make it down the remote, turbulent river named for this intrepid Englishman.

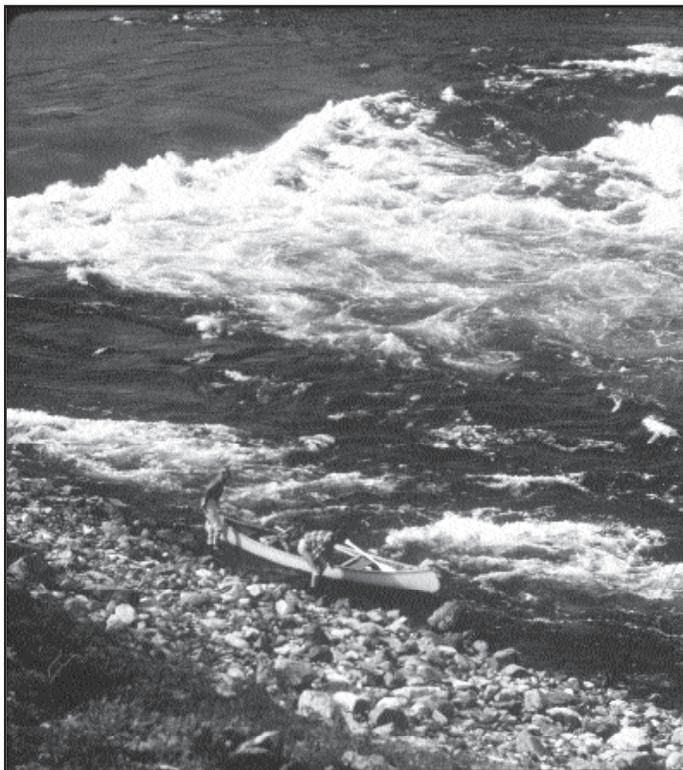
The invitation to join with some paddling companions to challenge the Back in canoes was flattering to receive, but I had to straighten them out. Concerned by the Captain's sometimes harrowing description (the Royal Navy did not offer white-water training), I met the others in Stowe, Vermont, for a skiing weekend. Maybe I was easily swayed from my mission to save the group - maybe some inner voice said to give it a try, but they did the convincing.

I then had the task of appealing for three months leave from the Export-Import Bank, a U.S. Government agency that had just hired me. They could just as easily have said not to bother coming back, since I had only earned a piddling two weeks vacation. Realizing that my immediate boss was a believer in devotion to the job, I drifted by the office of his supervisor who was at least known to drive a Jeep. As we studied a wall map, the big man's reaction was, "Oh my God, the Northwest Territories." Leave granted.

Advice was sought from many quarters. The Arctic Institute of North America took me under its wing in Washington, recommending many layers of light clothing to accommodate the fickle northern summer, as well as an attitude of not bucking bad weather in small boats.

We wrote to Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the venerable Arctic explorer, at Dartmouth College who referred us to a certain Eric Morse. Stef's letter said that Morse, "has been writing about small boat navigation of Canadian rivers". This was a reference to Eric's pre-barrenland travels on the Churchill and Hayes. So began my quarter-century friendship with Eric and our exchanges on wilderness canoe routes (Eric had little use for height of land crossings), equipment, and northern literature.

After our faithful Ford station wagon pulled into the Yellowknife Inn on July 5, the four of us became the objects of some attention. It ran to everything from serious safety lectures delivered by the RCMP to geology lessons from old-time prospectors to skeptical jibes by a gold mine foreman who greeted us at breakfast each morning at the Inn with, "Well boys, how many miles did you make today" During a week of last chance preparations, we didn't make any, but late on July 12 our small expedition finally got airborne in Chuck McAvoy's old 1938 Fairchild.



UPPER BACK PAINS -- Letting down an upper river set of rapids.

Watching as the scraggly boreal forest yielded to tundra, I thought that no one would invite the risks of this expedition without being an inveterate optimist. Our plan to descend the length of the 620-mile Back River had been preceded only by the expeditions of Captain Back in 1834 and Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor James Anderson in 1855.

Both of these early explorers were motivated by searches for lost countrymen. Back intended to look for Sir John Ross who turned up in England, after three winters in the Arctic, following Back's

departure for Canada. An "express" mail packet caught up with Back six months later in northern Saskatchewan, and he was directed to pursue a secondary objective of mapping the Arctic coastline. Back had difficulty in performing an accurate survey due to unfavorable weather conditions and the limited time available. This has been considered one reason why the infamous expedition led by Sir John Franklin was trapped in 1846-48 off the ice-choked northwest coast of King William Island apparently without realizing it was an island. All 129 members perished, something of a

record in the history of major expeditions. Had Back's chart of this difficult stretch of the Northwest Passage indicated that there was a channel, leeward of ice pressure, around the eastern side of King William Island, the Franklin disaster might have been avoided or at least ameliorated.

Anderson's journey in two birchbark canoes was to search for possible survivors of the Franklin expedition. Ironically, Anderson could have risen from being more than a minor figure in the annals of Arctic exploration if he had been equipped with sturdier boats. As it was, he reached Montreal Island, the southern fringe of the Franklin disaster area, to find quantities of the expedition's detritus scattered about, but no human remains. Anderson's canoes began to leak profusely in a region where trees offering repair bark do not exactly abound (ground birch won't do the trick). On August 10, a week earlier than Back had left the coast, the search was called off and they hastened back to Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake

Austin Hoyt, who organized our expedition, had sampled northern tripping on a 1959 kayak journey up the South Nahanni River to Virginia Falls. He was drawn to the Back by the remoteness of the region and the challenge of negotiating wilderness whitewater. Tracy Perry and Kit Gregg were friends who shared a curiosity about the north. All the others were medical students at Boston's Tufts College in 1962, leaving myself, a former fellow camp counselor with Austin and Tracy at Ontario's Camp Temagami, to be the last to sign on.

Our first day on the Back was a combination of

Classic Expeditions

acquainted in Yellowknife. Their purpose was to run the rest of the Back in three kayaks and paddle to Cape Britannia some 60 miles beyond its mouth. A prominent cairn had been erected on the Cape by Simpson and Dease in an 1838 traverse of the Arctic coast. The BCBE planned to search it for a message that might have been left a decade later by the Franklin expedition, but they didn't learn until reaching Canada that the job had been done, without result, a few years before by the Geological Survey of Canada.

As we were all preparing to launch after portaging the cascade below Beechey Lake, I could sense a spat was brewing. Their kayaks had been stuffed with parcels of gear and small packs lashed on top, yet one ugly item - a huge cast iron frying pan - remained. In the confines of a London club it might have seemed essential, but transported to the tundra, where large fires are impossible, the pan was decidedly misplaced. Everyone was ready to push off, though the thing still lay on the beach. Trip leader Bob Cundy, using his best Special Air Service tone of command, ordered Royal Marine Robin Challis to take responsibility for the ten-pound monster. Robin carefully placed the pan on top of a pack, took a few hard strokes to mid-river, then gently leaned into the current - and we all watched it sink straight to the bottom. Bob glared at him, and the BCBE moved out.

We crossed paths with them at various times down river, finding the group in varying states of harmony. Throughout his book *Beacon Six*, Bob made it clear that their attempt at military organization left a lot to be desired. Our style, on the other hand, was that of consenting adults who were at home in a wilderness environment. According to my journal, our first disagreement (over how late to paddle) did not arise until more than two weeks into the trip.

Calories were being burned so culinary style became secondary to pure volume. The favorite was a pancake bloat for supper (three of pan size each) which left some of us barely ambulatory. One of these feasts was in progress on a pleasant evening when I had the strange sensation I was being watched. I then did something unusual in the wilderness - turned to look behind me. What a shock! My eyes met the cold, calculating stare of a massive gray wolf that had stalked to within 30 feet of camp. I let out a shout. My pancake went flying and so did the wolf, but I'll never forget that moment of looking into those wild, yellow eyes.

We tried to divide meal servings into equal



A BEECHY CARRY -- Kit Gregg portages the heavy rapid below Beechey Lake.

portions, a policy that held little benefit for Kit Gregg. At 6' 3" he had the largest frame to fill. From Kit's perspective, it was a case of slow starvation. But at least the sooner the meal was served, the better. Thus, there was no surprise late one afternoon, when Tracy and I decided to photograph a muskox, that the others pulled ashore downstream to make camp. I could see Kit quickly heading inland on his daily quest for willow branches. Wood meant fire, and fire meant food.

With Tracy manning our 16mm Bolex movie camera and I the 35mm still, we carefully stalked the muskox, backing it into a small draw. Then *ovibos moschatus* signaled the game was up by shaking his massive head, wheeling around, and

charging off out of the draw. I figured the photo session was over, but then saw Kit wandering up the back side, peacefully searching for our evening wood supply. Believing it was trapped, the muskox went into a full charge - straight for Kit. I got my friend's attention by yelling, "Hey, Kit", which gave a moment of warning. Suddenly faced with one of life's little challenges, Kit responded wonderfully by not retreating a step, going into a crouch, then raising his arms and bellowing at the animal as if to say, "Don't you dare mess with me." It worked (phew!) as the muskox bolted by him without making contact, then thundered off into the barrens. For some reason, Kit's customary appetite failed to materialize at the evening meal.

Hawk Rapids were not scouted since it only seemed necessary to pick out the best of many possible channels. Tracy and I had a successful run, though we just got by one large boulder. Atop a hill downstream with our cameras, we watched the yellow canoe negotiate the route. I could see they were also going to be surprised by the boulder, but never imagined their reaction. Austin pulled the bow past it, but

as the stern swung hard toward the rock Kit whipped a leg over the gunwale to push off (it helps to have long ones). This technique is not in any whitewater manual I know of, but why argue with success?

When we visited the OMI mission on Garry Lake, Father Joseph Buliard had only been deceased for a few years (apparently went through the ice with his dogs). The building was still in respectable repair, while the Inuktitut hymnals and religious comic books were in good condition. Our night in the mission was enlivened by arrival of the BCBE. I hoped Father Trinel, the last resident, wherever he rested, was in a forgiving mood because that night we partied with

➔ *Continued on Page 11*

A more recent look Back

Story and Photos by
PAUL VAN PEENAN

Researching my 1999 Back River expedition almost immediately led me to a *Sports Illustrated* article from August 1963 describing John Lentz's 1962 expedition down the Back River. I hadn't even been conceived yet when Lentz and his partners made their journey down the largest of the Barrenland rivers - the first party to do so since HBC Chief Factor James Anderson in 1855.

Reading the article stirred up doubt about the sanity of going on this trip. I had very little moving water experience and descriptions of long rapids, capsizing canoes and nasty weather only fueled these doubts and fears. However, I had great confidence in my traveling partners: John Dunn, Ian King and Dave Read, seasoned wilderness travelers all. The planning continued and on June 9, 1999, John Dunn and I were dropped on the beach at Ft. Reliance. Dave and Ian would join us at Muskox Lake three weeks later.

Our goal was to retrace the route first traveled and mapped by George Back from Ft. Reliance to Chantrey Inlet, a journey of about 900 miles. The three weeks John and I spent traveling from Ft. Reliance to the Back River at Sussex Lake involved very little paddling. The big lakes on the Lockhart River were still frozen and we spent most of our days hauling the canoe and a makeshift sled loaded with our gear. My 17-foot Clipper Prospector was an excellent sled, by the way.

Once on the Back River we experienced the same conditions Lentz did: little water and lots of wading and portaging to get from Sussex Lake to Muskox Lake. On June 29, Dave and Ian joined us with 50 days of supplies and we spent two more days toiling down frozen Muskox Lake before shooting our first rapids as the Back's volume slowly increased.

On Canada Day we portaged around Muskox rapid: 1,200 lbs. in 13 trips. "O Canada, my body aches for thee," is the entry in my journal for that day. Like Lentz, we too experienced the fury of the wind on the big lakes of the middle section of the Back River. We were wind-bound several times while crossing the 140 mile section of big open water and relieved to have put them behind us only to face the huge rapids of the now "mighty Back" we had read about. While on the big lakes we met up with veteran paddler George Luste. The week before we had run into Robert Perkins and his partner, Bailey.

The only other people we met were a group of teens and a guide from a YMCA camp in Ely, Minn.

By August 9, 68 days after setting off from Ft. Reliance, we reached Arctic tidewater and Victoria Headland in Chantrey Inlet. This was my first Barrenlands canoe trip but I am hooked.

Unfortunately, even the remote Back River is showing signs of exploration

by multi-nationals. On an island in Muskox Lake we found the remnants of an exploration camp. Barrels of fuel were leaking into the tundra and the river. Buckets and other debris were scattered everywhere. However, on the whole, the Back River remains a remote wilderness domain of caribou, musk ox, wolves and grizzly bears. I believe we must protect these watersheds to ensure the well-being of our planet. Much to my relief, I heard Diavik's huge diamond mine on Lac de Gras had been slowed somewhat but it



Exploration camp garbage litters a site along the Back River in the summer of 1999. Below; paddlers Ian King (l) and John Dunn (r) run the whitewater entering Pelly Lake.



seems that eventually development of these remote regions is imminent.

NOTE: *I'm busy planning this summer's trip which will be another route travelled by George Back: the disastrous 1820-21 Arctic Land Expedition under John Franklin. My aim is to start from Yellowknife in early June, travel up the Yellowknife River to Winter Lake, traverse into the Coppermine River to Point Lake and follow the Coppermine to the ocean. Weather and time permitting, I plan to travel east along the coast to Bathurst Inlet.*

I will need a re-supply on the upper Coppermine and would be interested to connect with any parties planning to travel the Coppermine this summer to see if I can piggy-back my supplies with any of these parties. I will of course be happy to pay for my share of the charter.

This is going to be a solo venture lasting up to 12 weeks, however, I would consider teaming up with some one interested in doing the Coppermine River section while leaving the upstream grunt on the Yellowknife and the coastal section to Bathurst Inlet to me. I can be reached at paddler@istar.ca or by

Canoesworthy

Continued from Page 3

truth about reaching the Pole (they believe he did), but to prove that the 30 to 40 miles per day of travel he claimed to have achieved using sled dogs are plausible. The debate over whether Peary really reached the North Pole has done a disservice to the sled-dogs Peary used and to the Inuit who helped Peary reach the Pole, said Landry.

Neither of the men have been to the Pole before. But Landry has done many trips by dogsled, including an expedition to the magnetic North Pole, during which he achieved travel times comparable to Peary's. While there have been many successful expeditions to the geographic North Pole, few have used sled dogs, said Landry. Only two other expeditions since Peary have used dog teams, Wally Herbert's expedition in 1968, and the Will Steger in 1985.

The Steger expedition was trying to prove or disprove the Peary claim. The group was never able to achieve the distances Peary claimed, and that led one Steger member, Richard Weber, to conclude that Peary hadn't told the truth.

"They went from land to Pole without support. They had massive sleds—1,300 pounds. Peary never travelled that heavy," said Landry. And Peary's expedition wasn't exactly unsupported either, he said. "All of the expeditions back then were what they called siege expeditions," he said. Waves of explorers in the Peary expedition travelled north clearing a trail, dropping supplies and making igloos and then falling back so that another team could go even further to drop more food and then fall back.

Eventually, when they got far enough, Peary made a final dash for the pole with four hand-picked Inuit guides, and his assistant, Matthew Henson, Landry explained. Landry and Crowley will use aluminum sleds weighing only 500 pounds each and having approximately the same weight when loaded as

Peary's sleds. They will also use the same number of dogs to pull the sleds, and the sleds themselves will be shaped in a similar fashion to Peary's sleds.

Landry and Crowley will start out at the northern tip of Ellesmere Island and re-trace Peary's path to the pole. The pair will be re-supplied once at a spot referred to as Bartlett Camp (87°W, 47° N), and will then attempt to match Peary's pace to the Pole and back to Bartlett.

Weber, who skied from Russia to Canada across the polar ice cap in 1988, will also be trying to test Peary's claim this year, but he'll be doing it on skis. Landry said there were nine expeditions going to the pole this year, but one has had to withdraw after a training accident.

The premiers of Nunavut and Manitoba signed an agreement to investigate joint projects in areas of mutual benefit, such as the construction of roads and electrical power lines between the two jurisdictions.

The Manitoba government released a report in November last year on the possibility of a road linking the two jurisdictions. It came up with five possible routes that could link Manitoban communities such as Churchill, Gillam or Lynn Lake with Nunavut communities such as Arviat, Whale Cove, Rankin Inlet, Chesterfield Inlet and Baker Lake.

Another study on behalf suggested a hydro link from Manitoba to Nunavut might be possible. Manitoba exports about \$300 million to this region every year. Nunavut residents pay about \$0.70 per kilowatt hour of electricity, Manitobans pay only \$0.06. Even if a hydro link resulted in Nunavut residents paying \$0.25 per kw hour, it would be worthwhile, a local politician said. He added that Nunavut was the only jurisdiction in Canada without a road link to

Our Back Pages

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Packet Plus

ing to all of us readers. Keep up the good work!

- *Duke Watson.*

We also heard from veteran paddler **Bruce Hodgins** the Trent University prof who co-edited *Canoeing North Into the Unknown* with Gwyneth Hoyle.

We are in the midst of a four month appointment which I have as a Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at Duke University in Durham NC. I write to add suggestions to your wonderful *LastList* (Outfit 99). I agreed with almost all of them and was honoured and flattered to appear, with Gwyneth Hoyle, for our *Canoeing North*. My suggestions, like yours, will have a subjective element.

1. The Most Long Serving "Group Leading Tripping Couple," over the most years, the most trips, greatest diversity and most miles: Carol & Bruce Hodgins, first trip co-led in 1957 and still going. Bruce missed two summers and Carol nine when the kids were small. Total co-led trips well over fifty, all with Wanapitei. Any challenges? Any peers? Who else might be close to this record?

2. Great organizational group leaders or guides, covering so many years, so many trips led, so many thousands of kilometres with so much diversity: Wendy Grater (Blackfeather and now Wilderness Adventure), Shawn Hodgins (Wanapitei, since 1979). There are others who have led more trips on single rivers, or on two rivers such as guides on the Nahanni and Dumoine.

3. The Youth Camp, first and consistently to undertake far northern trips especially to James Bay: Keewaydin on Temagami, since 1913.

4. The Youth Camp undertaking the most northern Territorial Trips of three or more (usually seven) weeks duration: Wanapitei since 1975. All co-ed. Wanapitei's first "Bay Trip," led by John Scott and myself (all male) was made in 1961.

5. Greatest monuments to the Canoe: The Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough and the CRCA Home for Canoeing in Merrickville.

6. Greatest Campsites (highly subjective and personal): Yours were great. Summit Lake YT at the source of the Bell-Port-

cupine, by the NWT border

The "Jackpines" on the upper Clearwater River in northern Saskatchewan.

The treed and rocky island with the lovely sand beach (in our water level), half-way down the Noire, Quebec.

The grassy flats across from Mt. Joy, Soper River, Nunavut.

Any of the three sites by the forks of the Lady Evelyn, Northeastern Ontario.

7. Great Canoeing Photographers: Toni Harting, Michael Peake, James Raffan and Hap Wilson.

8. Greatest Current Canoeing Heritage Authors: Jamie Benidickson, James Raffan and Bob Henderson.

9. The author of Great Canadian Wilderness Canoeing Cookbooks: Author: Carol Hodgins.

10. Scariest Rapids: Shawn and Eric Hodgins each soloed Bloody Falls on the Coppermine! Concerning Rocky Defile, in 1979 Carol and I had no difficulty traversing the tricky entry and then keeping hard to the right. In 1997 we would not run the Thelon Canyon. In 1977, we filled up in Trout Rapids on the Churchill and were tipped by a sweeper in the switchbacks of Caribou Cry leading into the Mountain River.

Lookin' Back continued

familiar activities in unfamiliar places. Portaging from the upper end of Alymer Lake into the Back, then wading four miles of shallows that mark the river's beginning, were routine to anyone who had tripped in central Ontario. But this first encounter with the barrens left us to absorb much that was new: the land itself which seemed a cross between Irish heath and rocky moonscape, that extraordinary change from friendly acceptance to threat simply based on whether the sun was out - and all that space. When our modest whitewater experience began to prove out, life looked good. Not for long. The orange canoe's disaster at Malley's Rapid on July 17 was a life-threatening experience. Our tale has been recounted before, but bears repeating with the lessons, or one might say errors, emphasized.

ERROR #1 - We scouted from the top of the rapid without walking its length.

ERROR #2 - Tracy and I started down first, kneeling on our life jackets.

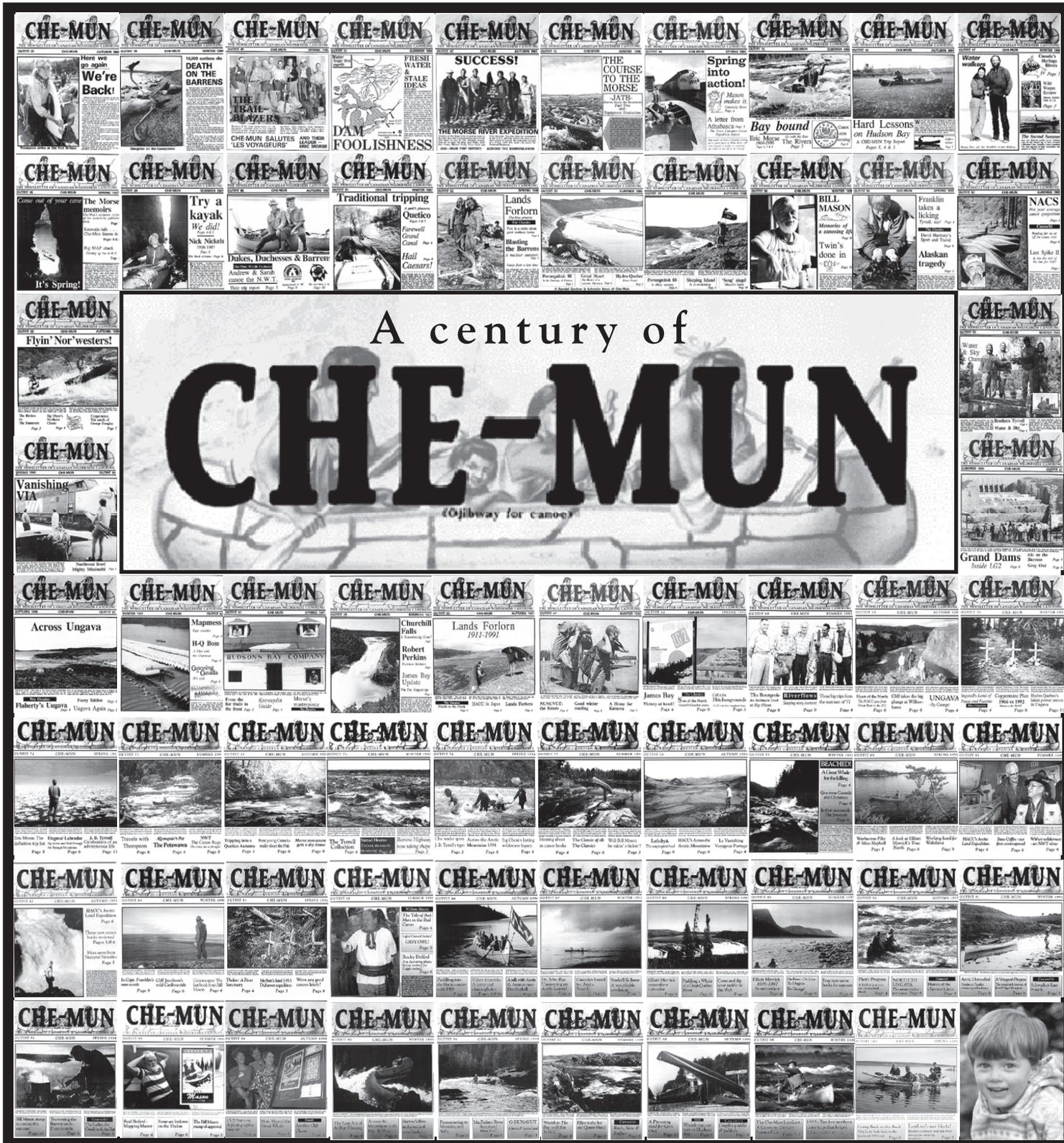
ERROR #3 - We ran with a 30-foot stern line, knotted at the end, trailing behind us.

Our only correct move was not to commit both canoes to the rapid at once. It was good we acquired an early respect for the Back or none of us might have finished the trip. In my case it was a respect for big water never forgotten - for this and the many subsequent rivers I've since descended.

It was impossible to see a three-foot ledge near the rapid's end from that upstream scouting position. Our loaded 18-foot Chestnut lurched over it and plunged into the back curler below, rolling as she filled. When that ridiculous stern line knot caught in the ledge, the canvas and wood canoe was levered under as if the Back was eager to claim its due. I came up spluttering to grab a floating pack. Tracy, astride the camera box, shouted encouragement, but I was quickly becoming hypothermic. My hands were almost numb, making it a struggle to control the pack. Legs were shutting down as well so kicking to break out of the current was impossible. My brain flashed instructions to limbs which were summarily ignored. I looked down to see stones slipping by ten feet underneath. A passing thought was, "That's where I'll be lying before much longer" .

But the cavalry charged to our rescue. Austin and Kit, having walked the rapid, shot out to haul us into their boat. On shore, I was shoved in a bedroll, while Tracy bounded over rocks to restore circulation. Some lesson in how not to run rapids!

At the lower end of Beechey Lake a few days later, we rendezvoused with the four-man British Cape Britannia Expedition, or BCBE as they called themselves. The BCBE had just been flown in, but we had become



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