

# CHE-MUN

(Ojibway for canoe)

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CHE-MUN

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photo: Michael Peake

CLASSIC CANOE -- With a morning breeze barely ruffling the North West Company flag, a 36-foot Montreal canoe heads out into the wild

and beautiful Lake Superior. It's a scene this lake saw many times in the heyday of the fur trade. This picture was taken during the filming

of *Backcountry*, a new PBS show on the outdoors. This episode was on the voyageurs and their colourful era. See page six for more details.

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the Backcountry  
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Arctic  
& Amazon man  
Don*

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# Fall Packet



**E**lliott Merrick, the author of *True North* is now in his 80's and best known for the time he spent in the north in the early 1930s. In an earlier letter, he urged us to look at the mineral development happening in northern Labrador. This issue features that plus more from Elliott on Page 11.

"Thank you for your letter. I'm very glad of the back issues and all the fascinating northern stories and items. What a blessing that Hydro-Quebec has received such a checking! As you say, they'll need watching; those birds never quit and we have plenty like them in the U.S.

"Of course, I was much touched by the review of *True North* in *Che-Mun*. I feel very lucky to have known Labrador and the North West River in the days of isolation, when we received two dogteam mails each winter and no one came in or went "outside". Somehow, we were all to ourselves in a world of our own, a world of spruce trees and snow and the long, white lakes.

"I'm sending you a copy of my *Long Crossing* in case you'd like to review that one too. It hasn't sold very well and so naturally I wish more people to know about it. The Hubbard-Wallace tale has often been told. But I think the three journeys and the three books have never been interwoven and interpreted as here. It is certainly the greatest canoe saga ever to come out of Labrador. I wanted to put it together so that young people coming on, who have never heard of it might understand its odd sides and interactions.

"For instance, Mrs. Hubbard never mentions Wallace's name in her book, though he was busily making the long crossing also that summer of 1905. And he does not mention her in his book, either.

"In my father's day, Dillon Wallace was widely known as the Great Northern Traveler, a hero of considerable proportion. In reality, he was such a bungler, he was dangerous."

**W**e're never sure how some people find out about *Che-Mun*. One interesting avenue was described in a letter, with an accompany cheque for a two year subscription, from **Monika Rohlmann** in Yellowknife.

"On our trip down the Thelon River this year we found an issue of your newsletter in a cabin maintained by DIAND (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) - Water Resources Department. We greatly enjoyed reading your newsletter in the comforts of the cabin and made a note to write to you upon our return to Yellowknife. Interestingly, we had never heard about you organization before."

**C**harles Bethea from Traverse City, Wisconsin gave us a bit of a shock when we read his recent letter to *Che-Mun*.

"Cancel my subscription. With its enticing stories and too-much-to-be-done-in-one-lifetime destinations, *Che-Mun* is a threat to sanity, employment, finances and marriage.

"(Okay, my wife has left the room.) Enclosed is my re-subscription cheque. I have been a steady reader since #42. No long trips this year but four 4-8 day jaunts in Algoma. Water levels high and the blackflies the worst ever. (And therefore the number of people was down). Keep up the sensational work."

*Readers like you, Charles, keep us motivated.*

**G**eorge Grinnell, from Derry, New Hampshire, delights *Che-Mun* with occasional letters written on the letter-head of his defunct Naskaupi River Fishing Camps in Fremont Lake, Labrador. He penned the following with his latest subscription renewal.

"I enjoyed your information about Grey Owl. I have flown my airplane over Bear Island, Temagami, where Anahero lived with her father. I also ran out of gas at Mattawa where they later lived. No problem, landed on the river and five gallons got me to Trout Lake.

"Your feature article about Labrador reminds

me that well over 100 years ago, Henry Youle Hind wrote in London in 1863 a book entitled "*Exploration in the Interior of the Labrador Peninsula*". The maps therein were not very accurate and I'm sure would not have helped Hubbard on his ill-fated expedition. The only copy of this book that I know of is at the Salmon Club on the Moisie River.

"It is quite interesting that in 1863 much of the information about Labrador was guesswork by the ocean fishermen and sealers. It mentions that sealing was dangerous and that many men froze to death as they did in 1914 when Wesley Kean lost over 100 of his men.

"At 85 years of age, I've slowed down but am still getting around. Last March I flew to Atlantic Canada in my Cessna 182 for the seal viewing and in April flew with a friend to Alaska in his Cessna Caravan. A new route this time; Dorval Airport in Montreal to clear customs, Moosonee for fuel and a visit to helicopter pilot friends, Churchill, then 900 miles over the barrens to Yellowknife and on over the Mackenzie Mountains."

**G**reat to hear from **Dick Irwin**, from Abercorn, Quebec, a longtime reader and paddling veteran.

"Had a great trip last summer. Paddled from Nain to George River. Labrador had a mild winter last year but lots of snow and a late spring. An onshore wind kept lots of ice in along the coast. The mountains were half covered with snow and were very beautiful. Saw lots of whales, caribou, seals, icebergs etc. We also hiked in the Torngats.

"We had high water ascending the Palmer River so it was tough going. In mid-August heavy rains brought water levels on the lower Koroc River up to spring flood conditions. Met kayakers Andy Rudzitis from Montreal and Alfred Duller from Austria at Ramak Bay. They had some great polar bear stories to tell!"



## Editor's Notebook

**A** chill is spreading over the land as snow and cold weather again arrives early in eastern North America. And unlike winter, the fall issue of *Che-Mun* is somewhat late arriving but we hope you'll be happy with this full offering.

We are honoured to have the written and photographic contributions of the esteemed Elliott Merrick, of North Carolina, but best-known for his years in Labrador and his book *True North*. Those of us lucky to hear and see Mr. Merrick in person a few years back at the Wilderness Canoe Symposium in Toronto were touched by his eloquence and memories of a northern world now largely lost.

This is scheduled to be the first issue of *Che-Mun* to be put on the web. While plans are still being finalized, we are hoping to be able to reach some of you and many new readers through the web page of my employer, The Toronto *Sun*. Their website is one of the most popular in Canada and its name - or in web-speak - address, is most propitious. It's call CANOE, that is "www.canoe.ca" - and it's the location of many media outlets including the *Sun* newspapers.

Some of you have found us at the "www.gorp.com" site in the States where the Arctic Land Expedition story has been displayed for a while. This new medium is growing with great speed and offers benefits to those using it wisely. We'll give you the full lowdown in our next Outfit.

We feature our trip with the Backcountry crew in this issue and what a great time that was (see page 6). We weren't able to do the full-fledged arrival at Old Fort William (too expensive) but Lake Superior treated us royally on our paddle from Grand Portage to Thunder Bay. It was wonderful to be able to carry Grand Portage again - all nine miles of it.

There are few portages more crucial and famous. The historic path remains worn deep and, thanks to the National Park Service, is in great condition and very true to its original purpose.

When my brother Geoffrey and I last struggled over that trail in 1981, through snow for the first three miles, we never dreamed that the next time we carried through those historic tall pines and maples of northern Minnesota we would be filmed by an American PBS crew.

Michael Peake, Editor.

## Newsline

Countdown to April 1, 1999

**NEW PARKS** -- Ottawa announced the creation of two new Arctic National Parks - after getting much criticism on their lack of parks creation.

Prime Minister Chretien announced the moves before a convention of world environment people perhaps forgetting that Ottawa can no longer unilaterally declare parks in Nunavut without approvals of the communities affected.

The two parks named are on Bathurst Island, in the High Arctic, and Wager Bay, a long inlet off the north-western coast of Hudson Bay. The proper procedure is for Ottawa to make public their intention and have the land withdrawn. The Wager Bay site has been under discussion for many years. The deep and scenic bay with strong tides, has been a tourist destination for several years, primarily people sea kayaking and hiking. There are population of caribou, polar bear, wolves and falcons in the area, as well as an abandoned Hudson's Bay post.

The country has been divided into 39 natural regions. The Wager Bay area is classified as "Central Arctic Tundra". The site on lonely Bathurst Island is noted as the breeding ground for the endangered Peary caribou is zoned as a "Western High Arctic" region.

The process to become a full-fledged park is a long one. The well-known Auyuittuq National Park on Baffin Island does not officially reach full park status



until

1999.

**MINE SIGN.** . . Echo Bay Mines and the Kitikmeot Inuit Association signed the first impact and benefit statement under the terms of the Nunavut Land Claims agreement.

The deal guarantees 60% employment to the Inuit in the company's Ulu gold mine site just north of the Hood River, about 75 miles north of Echo Bay's Lupin mine at the north end of Contwoyto Lake. The Ulu mine is undergoing exploration and the company hopes to have it producing gold by 1998. Ore from Ulu will be transported to Lupin for processing during the winter months by ice road.

Ottawa also just approved the huge BHP Diamond mine north of Lac de Gras on the Coppermine system. The deal must still pass native approval and environmental tests.

# Surprise summer solo and height hop-

The northern summer of 1996 produced some interesting trips. We are happy to present a couple of them.

One of the most ambitious trips was that planned by the two Georges. George Luste, Toronto professor, symposia organizer and northern tripping expert paired with George Grinnell, recent author of his experiences on the fateful Moffatt expedition of 1955 (*A Death on the Barrens* see Che 84). The pair set out from Yellowknife on June 7 with the idea of heading to Bathurst Inlet via the Back and Western rivers and then paddling the Arctic Ocean to Coppermine and proceeding up the Coppermine, making their way back to Yellowknife.

The almost four month trip would be a tough one indeed but plans were soon changed after the pair spent 10 days among the ice floes of eastern Great Slave Lake. Grinnell developed severe intestinal problems and had to leave the expedition before they had reached the gruelling Pike's Portage at the eastern end of Great Slave.

Hopping along on frequently disappearing ice floes which had been somewhat amusing to Luste with two people became "frustrating" with one. George met sled dog trainer Dave Oleson who has a "remarkable" setup at the mouth of the Hoarefrost River. Dave lives there with his wife and their baby and he's currently building a three storey log cabin.

George was faced with dealing with the rugged Pike's Portage, a series of carries climbing to Artillery Lake. George admits Pike's "almost did me in." Carrying three crushing loads—real "loaders" said George—over the first three mile portage which rose 600 feet. That first night George said he "crawled into the tent with no dinner - completely exhausted." His one consolation was that he was getting in great shape and waking up feeling refreshed every morning.

He was paddling a new specially made composite canoe built by Russ Miller. The 17-foot boat with a 16" deep hold was really meant for two paddlers but George reports it handled very well. He made his way through Artillery Lake by skirting up the east side while all the ice was on the western shore. Amazingly he made it to the shallow Back headwaters only one day behind

schedule. At Beechy Lake he headed due north to Bathurst Inlet Lodge with the help of a 4 mile portage into the Western River which drains to the northern sea. He arrived at the famous lodge on July 18 after a gruelling 17 hour day and met fellow *Che-Mun* subscriber and northern history buff Gwen Hayball, an octogenarian from England who is a frequent correspondent to this publication. George described her as delightful.

George then continued along the Arctic coast to Coppermine. This is a trip that is definitely not for beginner. All of George's ocean experience in Ungava and Labrador came into play as he threaded his way west for 16 days which included 6 days of being windbound. The trip ended in Coppermine in mid-August. Not even the highly experienced Luste was about to tackle the Coppermine upstream, alone, late in the season.

All in all, another epic Luste trip. When asked to summarize the experience George thought for a moment and responded, "I'm really glad that I did it. . . but I don't know if I'd do it again."

George's day job is with the physics department of the University of Toronto. He also organizes the annual Wilderness Slide Symposium in Toronto. His real love is canoeing and wilderness and he operates *Northern Books*, which specializes in rare and out of print books. You can contact them at Box 211, Station P, Toronto, ON M5S 2S7 or 416-531-8873.

We also heard from James Murphy from Fargo, North Dakota who's a frequent and insightful contributor.

"Herewith is a brief summary of Ivan Robertson's and my northern travels this summer.

"We flew out of Stony Rapids on June 28 to Ivanhoe Lake near the headwaters of the Dubawnt River and followed it to Labyrinth Lake and then bushwhacked (literally) over the height of land in Hostile Lake in the Taltson watershed. Thence down to Fraser and Gozdyz lakes, this was a pretty area with some messy trapper's cabins but no sign of previous canoeing, perhaps because of the marginal water conditions in these streams.

"Headed up out of Gozdyz with the usual walls of willow and beaver dams to contend with, over height of land Number Two into Vermette

and Rennie lakes.. These are beautiful lakes right on the edge of the treeline. Instead of following the easy Elk, we perversely turned east out of the north end of Dammant Lake over height of land Number Three and into Sinclair Lake.

"At first this just involved much hopping from one tundra pond to another. We had hoped to find a decent stream into Foster Lake but even in flood conditions this section would be a boulder-choked mess. Once below Foster, however, this turned into a beautiful little river seemingly favoured by moose, which took us to Sid Lake. We could have easily cut over to the Thelon here through Mantic and Jim lakes but continued to Mary and Mosquito lakes instead.

"We surprised everyone at Tukto Lodge by cruising up during and brief but intense squall. The owner didn't seem very happy to have two very scruffy, low budget guys intrude on his guests' very expensive solitude and isolation. But he did give us a cup of coffee, let us call home on the satellite phone and sold me a NWT fishing license. We thought the water seemed high and were surprised when he told us the water had gone out on the main lake just two days before. We took advantage of the dead calm after the storm and got all the way to the north end of Mosquito Lake that night.

"More tundra pond hopping and low water over height of land Number Four to Lake 275 and the stream which forms the southeastern border of the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary. We started seeing lots of caribou in this area including several groups of a couple of hundred mainly cows and calves, one of which crossed the stream right in front of us. The low water was a real concern as we headed over our last (Number Five) and easiest height of land to the Finnie River but two things convinced us to keep going. We knew that Dubawnt Lake was still covered with ice and Outlet Bay is no place to go without maps!

"There was more water coming out of Lake 256 than was coming down the Finnie so for the first 30 miles we walked and dragged the canoe down the river. Things got a little better and the scenery was spectacular, lots of peregrines and a herd of 18 muskox but the Finnie is strictly a runoff river with no large headwater lake. It

would be an exciting whitewater run very early in the spring when the snow is just melting but you would have to fly in on skis rather than floats as the lakes at both the access and egress would be frozen. Any other time of year it is a drag. The western branch of the Finnie had no water in it at all. It was wonderful to see the deep channel and powerful current of the Thelon and we easily made up for our previously slow and rocky pace.

“We enjoyed having a copy of David Pelly’s new book with us (*Thelon: A River Sanctuary*) but he seems to be too cautious not to step on anyone’s toes. Come on David, wolf poisoning by the government was an incredibly stupid idea. And he is way too optimistic about the effects on wildlife of native hunting with high-powered rifles and snowmobiles in the ‘game sanctuary’.

The Thelon is no place to go seeking solitude these days. We spoke briefly with three other groups, all of whom were flown into the Hanbury-Thelon junction. Notes in the log at the Water Survey cabin near Thelon Bluffs indicated 30 people had already been through by July 22. Perhaps there will be a permit and quota system like Quetico and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area up there if crowding persists.

Note - Tundra Tom (Great Canadian Ecoventures) and Lynx Lake Lodge seem to be abandoning canoes up there. There were several at the survey cabin and even more on a point on Beverly Lake. Judging from the poor condition of the seats and thwarts they have been there for some time. Because it’s cheaper to buy new ones that they probably have no intention of transporting them out. I’m not in favour of regulations but there are problems on the Thelon which are being caused by canoeists. We should be preserving pristine wilderness, not despoiling it.

“Light zephyrs pushed us easily down Beverly, Aberdeen and Schultz lakes and our last day was exciting, shooting Aleksektok Rapid and the last 57 miles into Baker Lake. Truly one of the great canoe rides in the north. In retrospect, we had a good but overly ambitious trip given the amount of time we had - 685 miles in 31 days.

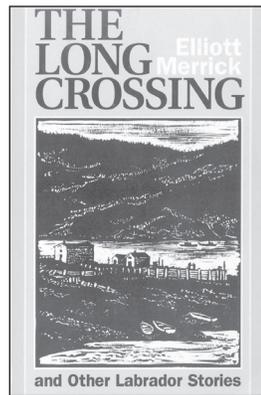
“It’s very easy to get excited about those thin blue lines and the map library in January. It’s another thing to deal with what’s actually out there and try to get home on time. Ivan made me promise only easy trips from now on, but hey,

## The Long Crossing and Other Labrador Stories By Elliott Merrick. University of Maine Press, 1992. 136 pp. ISBN: 0-89101-074-2

*Books reviewed by Michael Peake*

This book came to us quite a few years after publication via the author, the noted Labrador writer Elliott Merrick, who complained the book was little noticed when it appeared, probably the result of an academic press and low promotion budget.

*The Long Crossing* is Merrick’s take on perhaps



the most famous tales of Labrador canoe adventure—the Hubbard-Wallace expedition in the early part of this rapidly dwindling century. The Hubbard tale is one of nine stories which make up the book, but the dominant one in size only.

This topic was already deftly and sensitively handled by James West Davidson and John Ruge in their superb book *Great Heart* in 1986. Merrick doesn’t really add anything new to this three expedition tale of heroism, stubbornness and pride.

The interesting thing about this book are the other short stories included. They bring to life many of the characters already familiar to Merrick readers from his first effort, the classic *True North*. Merrick also produced six other books including *Northern Nurse* but his first remains his landmark effort.

Given the passage of time and the recent and large scale events happening in northern Labrador, Merrick’s world has almost completely disappeared, except for the wilderness which, although shrinking, remains the lure that drew Merrick there and continues to attract us today.

Merrick’s point of view is what is most important here. He is able to connect the reader to a world which has gone but those ideas and sensibilities linger still. His closing paragraph at the end of the Hubbard-Wallace tales tells the tale.

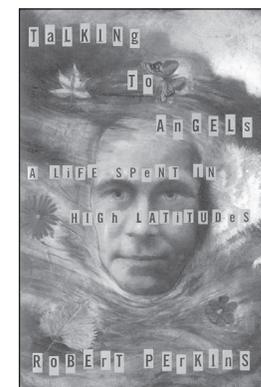
“So ends the saga of three expeditions and the four erstwhile friends, Leonidas Hubbard, Dillon Wallace, George Elson and Mina Hubbard. Perhaps the kernel of the story is not in the three books at all but in the guides, those men of Indian, Eskimo, Scottish and French admixture who find the way and give their loyalty. These are the men who carry the load. In a black night of wind on a wild shore, they are not dismayed. They seldom write of bad ice rapids or the lonely campfire in the snow—nor of the leaders they have led home.”

## Talking to Angels A Life Spent in High Latitudes By Robert Perkins. Beacon Press, Boston, 1996. 106 pp. US\$18 ISBN: 0-8070-7078-5

Only one of the three short stories included in filmmaker/author Bob Perkins’ latest effort relates directly to the north but we though it is of interest to *Che-Mun* readers because of the author and his uniquely personal style.

Perkins spent several weeks in the NWT Water Resources cabin/freezer at the bottom of the Baillie River near its confluence with the Back.

Spring is a season canoeists always just miss.



The arrival of spring in the north and the great, grinding break-up of mighty rivers are natural tours de force many of us have envisioned trying to experience. Perkins managed the feat by supplying daily weather forecasts to the outside world by radio.

He is able to observe, given his keen powers, the ebb and flow of the many natural forces which surrounded him as much as the melting snow. His experiences and thoughts on grizzly bears, musk-ox and wolves—both alive and dead—are what make this fascinating reading.

In fact, Perkins seems to be able to melt with the snow into the awakening landscape and explain some different ways of thinking about the land and our impact on it—and vice-versa.

# Paddling the Backcountry for PBS

By MICHAEL PEAKE  
Che-Mun Editor

Canoeing and photography have always gone hand in hand for as long as I have paddled. Being a photographer was a natural pairing with wilderness canoeing. But canoeing and being photographed was a novel experience in this year's paddling adventure.

There was no Arctic trip for the Hide-Away Canoe Club in 1996. We had decided to re-do a smaller, yet historic, route from Quetico Park to Lake Superior along the Voyageurs Highway a.k.a. the Boundary Waters.

But plans were altered somewhat when Dave Getchell of *Backpacker* magazine called in the spring to inquire if I would be interested in taking part in a new PBS series on the outdoors called *Backcountry*. I was familiar with an earlier show done by the same group called *Trailside*.

Getchell assured me the new show would be less formal, more in the documentary-style. The series would also be hosted by John Viehman, executive editor of *Backpacker*. He said they were looking for a trip along a historic Voyageur route and I told him about what we already had planned and thus began the long road of talk and planning that led to the filming of two shows last September near Thunder Bay.

The idea of going from Quetico to the big lake was quickly abandoned as being too far for the maximum 12 days required. When I suggested that my brother Geoffrey, HACC Chief Guide, accompany me they liked the idea of a pair of brothers doing the trip and added John Viehman's brother Tom, a Minneapolis contractor.

My only previous experience of doing an outdoor trip with a film crew was from 1982 when I accompanied a Himalayan climbing team who were trying to scale 25,000 foot Mt Gongga in Tibet. The film crew were top professionals yet a hindrance. In order for them to do their job properly - everything went slower which when you're trying to climb a Himalayan peak, is very tough.

With this behind me, I was apprehensive about the canoe trip. After all, I reasoned, they were paying me for this, so enjoyment was secondary. As it



**SUPERIOR SUN-SETTING** -- The cast and crew of *Backcountry* gather around the beach campfire on the magical final night of shooting on the shores of Lake Superior

turned out it was a great canoeing experience made all the more enjoyable by the fun and professional crew. *Backpacker* hired the Boston production firm of Chedd-Angier who have a lot of experience making shows for PBS.

There was a crew of seven plus the four paddlers who would do the 30-plus miles east along the Boundary Waters to the famous 8.5-mile Grand Portage which leads to Lake Superior.

The American authorities were quite strict about boat and people limits in the Boundary Waters. There were no special favours granted. Our group would have to paddle their own canoes, TV gear and all, and camp separately since there were no more than 9 persons allowed per site. This worked out well as the on-camera paddlers, the Peakes and Viehmans, kept to ourselves, camping and cooking apart. As a group of two brothers we hit it off well. Tom is a big, fun-loving guy and we all enjoyed a lot of laughs - usually at someone's expense.

The *Backcountry* crew assembled from across the continent at Clearwater Lodge in northern Minnesota. This beautiful, log structure, run by

Bob and Marti Marchino, is a popular entry point to the Boundary Waters. The shoot would cover two shows for the prime time series, divided into two six day sessions. The first show would feature just the four brothers as we paddled along the international border towards Lake Superior.

Everyone involved had done some outdoor pursuits. The crew were a well-seasoned team. Cameraman Darcy Marsh - a Canadian - has freelanced all over the world from Olympics to the Iditerod dog race which he's covered eight times. Soundman Scott Simper, is much younger and travels the world recording sound for films - when not climbing mountains. Steve Howe who did the smaller digital camera shots from under the canoe and elsewhere is also an experienced climber. Dave and Annie Getchell are a great husband and wife team. Dave co-ordinates the million lose ends and Annie was a production co-ordinator on this shoot and is taking her turn as host in upcoming episodes. Producer/director Kate Raisz called the shots with great humour and wisdom. And John Viehman, the front man for all

## Trips

this was a relaxed and easygoing fellow tripper. All this was a bit of a shock. I was expecting a lot of attitude and difficulty and was tremendously relieved not to find it anywhere. I hope that will show up in the final production.

The route from Clearwater to Grand Portage was pretty straightforward. We were following the traditional way west before 1803 when the route from Superior to Quetico changed and arched north to bypass Grand Portage and the new tax levy being imposed there. The thrifty Scots of the North West Company sourced out another native route instead of paying more.

As the result of their pre-planning which included a scouting trip along the route, the Backcountry folks had a basic "script" to follow but were quite flexible to adaptations. All the portages have names and historical associations. Geoff and I had read up on things to refresh our memories. We had done this trip before in 1981. The main idea of the show was to have a pair of American brothers and Canadian brothers and to show the differences in paddling styles in the both of us. We brought all our usual camping equipment - except the canoe. They were to provide us with an Old Town Tripper. This they did - but to our great shock (for a very good reason that will soon become apparent) we found ourselves with an XL Tripper, the 20-foot, 105 pound model. The Viehmans - and the crew - were equipped with the lightning fast Wenonah M3, a 20-foot long three-seater.

The first three days went well with both some sunny and rainy weather which included a spectacular rainbow that emerged just as we were camping on the island between North and South Fowl Lakes which the Pigeon River drains. We took a day there to investigate some of the beaver lodges that first drew the fur traders here and also climb 350-foot-high Goose Rock at the head of the Fowl Portage, which takes you to the Pigeon River.

From there it's a leisurely day's paddle to the takeout at Grand Portage. When they drew up the show, the plan was to film us heading off down the Grand Portage trail and then head back up the Pigeon River a short distance to Partridge Falls where a logging road comes in. Chief Guide Geoffrey argued that if you were doing a show about peo-

ple pursuing active outdoor adventure you should CARRY the portage for real - just as we did in 1981. The difference then is that we were 15 years younger and had a Kevlar boat and not the killer XL Tripper. Since it was Geoffrey's idea he said that he would take to boat for the entire distance - and he did. We were able to pare down the food load and send some of it back with the crew that weren't coming - since this nine-mile portage is definitely a one trip carry! But such was the spirit of the outing, everyone who was able came along the historic trail.

It turned out to be a perfect day for the big portage. Sunny and slightly cool, a great opportunity to enjoy this scenic trail that heads, mostly downhill, to the recreated Grand Portage fort on the shores of Superior.

Throughout the previous few days, cameraman Darcy Marsh constantly reveled in us walking through the muddiest part of the trail which he, in turn, would gleefully film our sopping boots. I scored a silent coup when I spotted him bent over and waiting - the sure sign of a boot-sucking, sock-soaking mudhole. I confess that I stepped a little harder than I had to into that mud and doused Darcy with some brown wet stuff. It felt good.

Geoff amazed everyone and took the boat - plus a light pack - the whole distance. We gathered for the final shot and Darcy arranged for us to walk through the middle of the barricaded fort and out their front gates to Lake

Superior. We all traipsed through that hallowed canoeing ground and a couple of takes later we hit the lake. Geoffrey continued right into the water and all that was left showing was the bottom of the Tripper and our tiny HACC flag.

The next day we met the crew of voyageurs for the second show which would feature the voyageurs themselves. Outfitter Peter Labor of *Naturally Superior Adventures* was awaiting our arrival with a 36-foot replica of a Montreal canoe and a fine crew of hand-picked voyageurs - in real voyageur outfits. Some of these guys - and one woman - worked at Old Fort William, the Canadian re-creation of the North West Company fort in what is now Thunder Bay. They are all avid historical paddlers—they don't even use matches or lighters to make their fires - using a tinder cloth and sparking flint.

Peter Labor paddled the strategic stern or gouvernail position and the amusing Shawn Patterson paddled the bow or avant. The Peakes and Viehmans would now become mere milieu, the middle—and lowest paid—paddlers of the fur trade as we paddled from Grand Portage to Thunder Bay. This was a boon to Geoff and I since it was the only part of the traditional north shore fur trade route that we hadn't done. It was also our first time in a Montreal Canoe. Not even Geoffrey would try and portage this baby - at 600 pounds!

For the benefit of the film crew we did the traditional tobacco ceremony before heading out on the big lake. The natives sprinkled an offering of tobacco on the waters and we have often done the same. On this half of the trip the film crew did not paddle their own boats. We had a large inboard and a 25 h.p. runabout that was nimbly handled by Dave Getchell. The only setback to paddling like this was we had to camp where the big outboard could be safely moored which meant deep in the recesses of Superior's folded shoreline. Definitely not the place a wilderness paddler would want to be, except in a storm.

Our second day out saw a rising wind from the east and as soon as we exited out snug harbour we were in the teeth of it. Geoff and I have had some hair raising moments in our years of canoeing but one of the scariest came on the north shore of



Cameraman Darcy Marsh and soundman Scott Simper prepare to get a water shot along the Voyageurs Highway in the Boundary Waters.

## Trips

*Continued from Page 7* Superior 12 years ago. If we had been in a normal canoe we would not have paddled Pigeon Bay which also marks the international border halfway across its breadth.

Being one of 10 people in a 36 foot-long boat does give you a good sense of security but on Superior security is never an emotion to feel when your on the water in any type of vessel in rough water. The six-foot-plus waves rolled in nicely on our right quarter and we had to keep the speed up and there was a certain amount of bailing during the crossing as the boat has a fairly shallow draft. The film crew was right beside us for much of the way bouncing along in the tin craft. While I'm sure they have some good footage it will, as usual, probably never recreate the true feel of the moment.

Aided by the firm voice of our lone female voyageur, Natasha, we learned and sang many of the famous voyageur songs; En Roulant Ma Boule etc., time and time again for both the camera and ourselves. One spontaneous song session was during the rough crossing. Geoffrey started a chorus of Stan Rogers' Barrett's Privateers, which carried us across the threatening waters

with greater meaning than the song ever had before.

Not long after lunch we were degraded—in the voyageur sense—when the waves got too big and pulled in and investigated the shoreline, waiting for the weather to change. Geoff started a batch of his famous cinnamon buns which were duly filmed by the camera crew, perhaps in the hope they might get to taste one early? No way. Once we launched, the buns had a place of honour amidships - still in their Coleman oven - wafting deadly aromas back to a salivating crew.

In a couple of hours the weather finally improved and we were treated to perfect calm and sunny conditions for the rest of the trip. After another crummy campsite we were determined for our last night to be spent in a more appropriate location. With the seas just right we scouted, via the motor boat, a nice spot on the west end of Pie Island just below Thunder Bay.

This was a stroke of genius and no one minded having to paddle seven more miles to enjoy the classic Superior gravel beach, western exposure and steep cliffs which rimmed this gorgeous spot. The shallow bay allowed us time to work on underwater shots while Peter and Geoffrey

whipped up a sumptuous feast. All the food supplied by Labor was first rate. Since there are no portages, he carried some lovely heavy luxuries; meat, fruit, juices. The last night Peter prepared a fabulous fish chowder with real cod fish - obtained from a secret source down east. Geoffrey did an oven-baked macaroni and cheese and we all feasted. Peter later produced a chocolate fondue with fresh fruit to top it all off. Whew!

The final night's shooting was a campfire scene where we all sat around discussing things in the glow of a crackling driftwood fire. A glorious yellow rimmed horizon faded to deep purple as the stars began their twinkling, faded just slightly by the silver sliver of a crescent moon. Then, as if on cue, a roaming pack of wolves began to howl. This was magic. Superior was showing us her best.

I took the chance to spend another night sleeping under the big canoe which was wrapped by a massive tarp and pitched facing the water. In the cool and lovely morning we did our last shots and headed back to Thunder Bay, sure we would be fighting the wind, paying for our luxury campsite—but no—it was a glassy ride all the way back.

## Personality

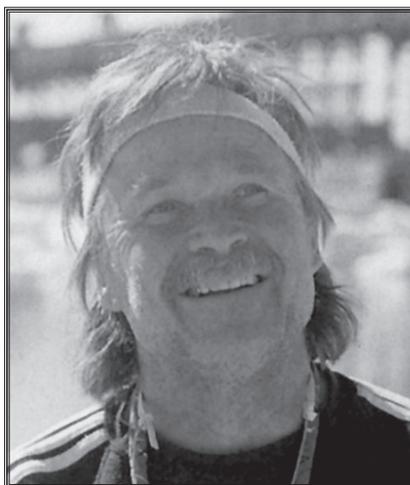
### Don Starkell

# That Arctic-to-Amazon Man

My kayak was covered with an inch or two of ice, my double blade had to weigh 20 to 25 pounds, I could barely hold it in front of me and I struggled to within half a mile of land but I couldn't get through that slush. I still wasn't beat 'cause I could still crawl over the slush and get into land but I had to keep my kayak with me.

I got out of my kayak to try and haul through this stuff and went in to my waist and tried again and went up to my crotch. I said, I can do this for a while but I'm going to get hypothermic. You don't eat for five days you don't have the ability to produce heat and your blood is thickened and your not getting proper flow of blood to your fingers.

I sat in that kayak for 25 hours. The only rea-



son I didn't die - and I could have died a hundred times that last night - it

was easier to die than live. I felt, that yes, I'm in agony, I'm in pain and I'm dying and all that but so many times I was fighting with myself, should I release myself and go into my final sleep, which I could have done so easy. It was easier to do that than go through the pain I was going through. I said to myself that I don't care how painful, my life is going to have to be taken. I'm not going to release it.

The miracle of all miracles was getting frozen in that ice out at sea actually turned out to be the blessing of my life. Because when I left that hole in the ice, that's what the airplane saw. If I'd made it to shore, they never would have searched there. If I had been able to walk out and been successful, they would have had to knock my arms and legs off.

What happened was like almost something pre-

# Personality

**D**on Starkell, 64, has written two intriguing canoe adventure books in the last decade. These books are remarkable in both their scale and extremes. *Paddle to the Amazon* (1987) and *Paddle to the Arctic* (1995 and both published by McClelland & Stewart) tell of epic trips that stretched Starkell's luck and endurance to the limit.

The final year of his three summer Arctic trip, in 1992, saw him miraculously rescued after being frozen in on the Arctic Coast for five days. He lost most of his fingers and some toes from that encounter but has managed to almost fully regain his paddling form and strength and continues to paddle to this day. His paddling partner on some of that trip, Victoria Jason, wrote her own book that was harshly critical of Starkell and his style.

A veteran marathon racer of considerable skill, Starkell has also made many enemies in his travels. He is an extreme man which also makes him extremely interesting. Che-Mun spoke with Don Starkell in his Winnipeg home in late October.

**Che-Mun: What are some of your favourite paddling experiences?**

**Starkell:** In 1967, on the Centennial Trans-Canada Canoe Pageant, I wasn't wanted on the Manitoba team. The captain wanted an all Flin Flon team and he did everything possible for 104 days to get me off that team and I wouldn't break. They used to spit tobacco juice in my boots and gum too and the only time I was put in the bow was on stormy days and when we went into a city they wouldn't put me in the canoe so there'd be no photographs of me. But I didn't go there to get my picture taken. But I'm proud to have been the member of the four Manitoba teams which have won similar big boat races over the years. And I'm the only paddler who's been on all four teams.

I ended up captaining the Manitoba team in a big race a few years later in the British Columbia Centennial. That was a great thrill, I didn't take the medal off for four days. It made me feel so proud especially since we beat the guy who was the captain of the 1967 team.

**Che-Mun: You come under quite a bit of criticism on your both your personal and paddling styles from your former partner Victoria Jason in her book *Kabloona in the Yellow Kayak*. Would you want to go canoeing with Don Starkell?**

**Starkell:** Yes, I kind of think I would. I'm not an ogre. I have been portrayed as being someone who goes out there and tries to grind someone into the ground . . .

**Che-Mun: Victoria Jason.**

**Starkell:** Ya, that's garbage. She had paddled a little bit in a canoe. When I first met her I wouldn't even go up north with her. I trained her for 700 miles and she could paddle 40 or 50 miles non-stop.

That's the first time in my life I did a canoeing experience with someone who literally shit on me. It irks me because I sacrificed so much to take her up there with me. I had to reduce my speed terrifically. I had to change my plans and go two weeks earlier. But when you're a team you give and take.

I respect her for her first year but the second year something went to her head. . . I didn't read her book entirely but there's one thing that really bugs me. I gave her a presentation knife that the Russell knife people gave

to me. Victoria didn't have a decent knife so I gave her this knife and told her to respect it and take care of it 'cause it means a lot to me. I was up there two days with her and after we had to take the snowmobile lift I noticed that the Inuk who was driving had the same exact knife. She had given it to him as a gift. I couldn't believe it.

Then there was the comment that came out that she used her brains and I just used brawn. Well that's crappo! I wouldn't have gotten to the Amazon without being able to add two and two together.

She said that every community I went into I alienated everybody I met. And one of the most important things in my life is to respect people and respect cultures. I'll admit I'm hyper when I'm doing something but I try my best not to hurt anybody. When she's jumping around an hour or two before we're leaving on something that's going to take so much will-power and so much energy and she doesn't seem to have a worry in the world. Like I'm thoughtful and pensive and caring and I'm quiet because I'm psyching myself up for what lies ahead. And I saw her there jumping around - she proved before she didn't have the energy. If you psych yourself up for something you have to do - a long work project where your going to have to put out for eight hours pulling a big load you have to get your mind in a certain focus for that. It's more powerful than any muscle you'll ever grow.

**Che-Mun: You were raised in Manitoba, the home of another well-known canoeist Bill Mason. Did you know him?**

**Starkell:** I remember meeting him in 1955 at the YMCA in Winnipeg. I was running around the track and he asked me why and I said I was training for a canoe race. He told me that he was into canoeing too but his real thing was photography and he told me he was going down east to be a photographer. I was into photography at the time myself and I was gall-darned good but I didn't have the guts that he had. I looked at him and said "are you prepared to starve?" And he told me that he thought he'd be okay.

I remember saying many times to people that Bill Mason as a far as a paddler, he a strange kind of paddler. As far as technical paddler, I've never seen anything like him in the world. But that's not my kind of paddling. I don't even like canoe instruction.

Many years later after the Amazon book came out some publicist wanted to get us together. They told me to get a paddle for him and I told them that Bill Mason would surely come with his own paddle. And they said he wouldn't have one and to get him one. Of course, Bill showed up with his own paddle.

Bill came down to see us and our Orellana {*Ed. Note - their heavy 21-foot long canoe*}. Bill had a pretty neat system for picking up a canoe and he liked to demonstrate it. He got it up on his thighs and put it down and said, 'Not this baby!' And then he jumped into the second seat of our canoe like he'd been there for five years - and it's an awkward seat to paddle. We were quite honoured to have him. I really respected Bill.

**Che-Mun: On your last days of the Arctic expedition you came very close to death being literally frozen into the Arctic Ocean and you had what can only be described as a miraculous escape.**

**Starkell:** I don't know if it came out in the book. At the end I was definitely dying. I got to within half a mile of land when the ice stopped me. .

# News & Notes

**DAMN THE NORTH . . .** The Northern Quebec co-op, FCNQ, is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The FCNQ is already a supplier of fuel to many Nunavik or Ungava communities. Now the FCNQ is looking at the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant near Puvirnituk.

The plan is to harness the fast-flowing waters of the Puvirnituk River some 32 kilometers downstream from the community. The proposed station could produce four megawatts of electricity a year. This production would be enough electricity to supply Puvirnituk's entire annual needs, four times over.

But it will cost millions to build such a hydro-electric plant, so Puvirnituk's co-operative is looking at a partnership with Hydro-Quebec. This formula of building small hydroelectric-producing dams has been tried, with some success, in the James Bay Cree communities.

Hydro-Quebec is expected to decide in the very near future on whether or not such a partnership is possible. Then, the people of Puvirnituk will make the final decision on whether to proceed with the project.

Puvirnituk has not yet signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, and has never recognized the land regime established by this deal back in 1975.

**MORE UNGAVA . . .** Leaders of the Makavik Corporation which oversees the Inuit interests in the money from the James Bay and Northern Quebec

Land Claim Agreement were in Nain, Labrador recently to talk about Nunavik's claims to land in Labrador. Last year, Makivik Corporation took out advertisements in many publications to announce their unresolved claims to land extending even beyond the mineral-rich region around Voisey's Bay.

After their recent get-together with Makavik, Labrador Inuit aren't convinced about Makivik's motives in claiming their territory.

This nagging overlap claim couldn't come at a worse time. The Labrador Inuit Association is engaged in heavy negotiations aimed at reaching a land claim settlement with the federal and provincial governments before the end of March.

More than 280,000 stakes for mineral development have been claimed in Labrador, some even on the outskirts of Nain. So the Labrador Inuit Association says it's essential to get the land claim settled as soon as possible.

The organization also wants to work towards the creation of a national park in the north of Labrador, the Torngat National Park.

**CALLING ALL CAMPERS . . .** Camp Hurontario the noted all-boys camp near Twelve Mile Bay on Georgian Bay has been a respected canoe tripping institution since 1947. The camp is hosting their '50th Reunion - The Halfer' in Toronto next May 10 at the Inn on the Park. They are looking for their widespread alumni to come and celebrate. They are also looking for the addresses of their alumni and invite anyone who knows this info to fax them the names. There will also be an overnight at the camp on September 6.

Hurontario, started by Taylor Statten and Trinity College School instructor Birnie Hodgetts, is based on the small group philosophy that six or seven boys could learn campcraft and outdoor skills more readily than large sectional activity at other, larger camps. They have remained relatively small over the years amid the rocky islands of Georgian Bay and their northern outpost near Chapleau.

If you are interested in giving or getting more information contact: Andrew Hall at 416/487-0853 - fax 416/487-4687 or Pauline Hodgetts at 416/488-2077 or fax 416/486-0865. You can also visit their web site at 'www.interlog.'

## Our Back Pages

*The following back issues of Che-Mun are available at \$5 each including postage. Those denoted by an asterisk are photocopies of the original issue.*

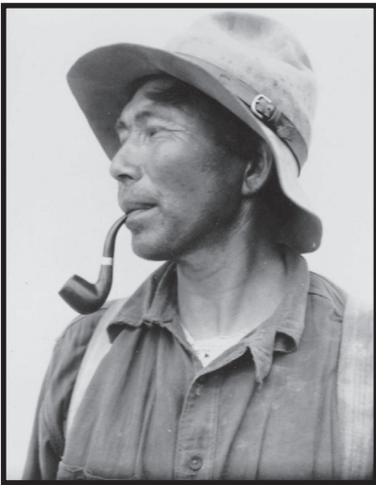
Outfit 38 - Voyageurs trip to Old Fort William  
Outfit 39 - Caribou drown in Quebec, Cross-Canada canoeing\*  
Outfit 40 - Eric Morse and The Voyageurs\*  
Outfit 41 - Grand Canal Project - Thlewiza River solo  
Outfit 42 - The Morse River Expedition Part One  
Outfit 43 - The Morse River Expedition Part Two  
Outfit 44 - Bill Mason & the Dog R., Athabasca letter  
Outfit 45 - Pipe River by Eric Morse, River flow chart  
Outfit 46 - Hudson Bay to Ungava, Stew Coffin report  
Outfit 47 - Heritage Rivers, Trans Canada Expedition  
Outfit 48 - Freshwater Saga - Morse R. memoirs, slide fest  
Outfit 49 - Queen Charlottes kayaking, HBC sell-off  
Outfit 50 - Royal couple canoe the Hanbury/Thelon\*  
Outfit 51 - Traditional canoeing through Quetico Park  
Outfit 52 - Lands Forlorn review, Atomic Arctic proposal  
Outfit 53 - Chubb Crater in Ungava, Hubbard & Wallace  
Outfit 54 - Povungnituk 88 - Ungava, Sleeping Island rev.  
Outfit 55 - Memories of Bill Mason, Twin Otter gone  
Outfit 56 - Canoeing stamps, Hanbury review, WCA slidefest  
Outfit 57 - North American Canoe Symposium, book reviews  
Outfit 58 - Churchill River trip, The Lonely Land rev.  
Outfit 59 - Tyrrell brothers, Water & Sky, Alberta Pulp wars  
Outfit 60 - Via Rail, Missinaibi River, James Bay, HBC exit  
Outfit 61 - Inside LG2, Aki on the Barrens, Grey Owl

Outfit 62 - Across Ungava via Kogaluk & Payne rivers, Flaherty's book  
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Outfit 70 - Great Bear to Coppermine, Ungava photos  
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Outfit 72 - Eric Morse River List, Ungava Journey, J.B. Tyrrell  
Outfit 73 - Petawawa River, David Thompson map, NWT regs  
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Outfit 75 - Tyrrell pictures, Hearne's route, Heritage Rivers  
Outfit 76 - HBC money, MacDougall Pass, Sig Olson, Tyrrell  
Outfit 77 - River stamps, Exploration of N. Canada, Book reviews  
Outfit 78 - Across the Arctic Mts, LaVase Portage, Food drying  
Outfit 79 - Book reviews, Thompson journal, Great Whale stopped  
Outfit 80 - Warburton Pike, Wabakimi Park, Merrick's True North  
Outfit 81 - Arctic Land Exped, David Hanbury, Diamond development  
Outfit 82 - Arctic Land Expedition report, Book reviews, Nunavut  
Outfit 83 - Jacobson's Caribou River, *Canoescapes* rev, Franklin's journal  
Outfit 84 - 1955 Moffatt Exped., Winisk R., John Rae's effigy & Cloak-boat  
Outfit 85 - Rocky Defiled, Grey Owl movie, Bill Mason bio, Canoe Museum

# Labrador - special concerns for a special place.

With 245,000 mining claims staked, 21 percent of Labrador faces an uncertain future. Labrador is a prime destination for unspoiled, remote, rugged rivers such as the Notakwanon. But these rivers may lose some of their attraction because of exploration and mining unless preservation of the environment is made a priority.

A company called Diamond Fields was formed in 1993 to explore for diamonds in Labrador. They never found diamonds, but from the air, two



A face of the old Labrador: Bert Blake, trapper and guide extraordinaire.

company prospectors saw a rusty-colored streak in a hillside rock outcropping. Test drilling in late 1994 confirmed the find, reputed to be the richest known copper/nickel/cobalt discovery in the world, and its size is still being defined. The area is known as Voisey Bay, and it is only 30 miles north of the Notakwanon river mouth at Merrifield Bay, between Nain and Davis Inlet.

Geologists think the deposit was created when the earth's tectonic plates separated and molten magma rose from its core. They

believe it is likely that there are other deposits in the area. Word of the discovery spread rapidly, and

exploration is proceeding at an unprecedented pace. More than 245,000 claims, covering 21 percent of Labrador, have been staked for mineral rights since the find.

Cartaway Resources has staked the largest land package of claims (29,720) in all of Labrador. Drilling is being conducted near many lakes and rivers in northern Labrador. Cirque lands (south of Okak Bay), Cabot Lake, Ikadlivik Brook, Notakwanon River, and Kyfanan Lake are being explored or drilled.

Airborne surveys of the Notakwanon River have identified three areas with mineral potential, and geophysical surveying is scheduled for 1996. Cartaway says that they plan to drill four holes at the Notakwanon River.

Production in Voisey Bay is expected in 1998. There is an ongoing claims dispute over the land by the Innu and Inuit of the region. Both groups have laid claim to the land where they have fished and hunted caribou for generations.

Newfoundland and Labrador premier Brian Tobin said he hopes Voisey Bay will be a model for the rest of the country when it comes to

developers and governments dealing with aboriginal people. The government has not been prepared to approve the Innu request to delay exploration activities in order to collect baseline environmental data or to conduct a full environmental review of the impact of exploration and development activities.

Peter Penashue, president of the Innu Nation, spoke at a recent Aboriginal People and Mining Conference. "We will not tolerate the hit-and-run antics demonstrated by companies like Galactic Resources, which declared bankruptcy after poisoning a river in Colorado, leaving the American taxpayer to foot a hundred-million-dollar clean-up bill. As

aboriginal leaders, we need to remember that the decisions we make today will affect not only us but our children and their children." One of the large shareholders in Diamond Fields was head of Galactic Resources.

Another concern of many people is the increasingly crowded airspace in what purports to be a wilderness.

Increased exploratory helicopter flying related to the Voisey Bay find has been added to the numerous NATO jets that have been using northern Labrador as a training site for 17 years. Those flights have long



Another classic Merrick view: a trapper's home in Northwest River, Labrador in 1930.

photo: Elliott Merrick



photo: Michael Peake

A BOY AND HIS BOAT -- Though not known as a solo boat, this 36-foot Montreal canoe appears to be in good hands as Geoffrey Peake takes a spin during the filming of the *Backcountry* TV show. We were hoping to have a picture of Geoff portaging but he declined.

## Upcoming Events

- ✱ The 11th annual Canoeing and Wilderness Symposium is on for Jan 31 & Feb 1, 1997 in Toronto. The theme is 'Historic Journeys.'
- ✱ The fourth biennial WaterWalker Film Festival kicks off at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa on Feb. 28 & March 1.
- ✱ The second annual CRCA Canoe and Kayak Show will be held in Ottawa April 25-27, 1997.

# CHE-MUN

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