



Fall 2014

The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing

Outfit 158



photo: Michael Peake

**CANYON MEMORIES** - At the top of the Thelon River Canyon in July 1985 on our Journey Across the Barrenlands aka Morse River trip. The beautiful sandstone ledges look lovely in the afternoon light. We chose to run and line down the left side of the 4 km long canyon as we heard it was likely passable - and it was - but exciting nonetheless. Especially exciting after we lost one canoe when lining below this spot when the stern rope got away from Michael Peake. Fortunately, the group ahead with Sean and Geoffrey Peake were able to grab the trailing lining rope as the canoe rolled over in the waves. With full spray skirts all done up it took on little water and we continued on knowing what a bullet we had dodged and fully aware we would never forget this place. We revisited in 10 years later - and hung on to the ropes.



# Fall Packet



**UNFILTERED**

**MICHAEL PEAKE**  
CANOE-TRAPPER, PUBLISHER

"We are not pioneers ourselves, but we traveled over old trails that were new to us and with hearts open. Who shall distinguish?" — C.M. Thompson

For more than 30 years, Toronto-based photojournalist Michael Peake and his three brothers traced the ancient canoe routes of northern Canada in the style of alumnus C.M. Thompson, whose words captured the guiding spirit of their *Hide Away Canoe Club*. The Peake family canoe trip in 1981 in the Mistassini region of Quebec, yet nearly made way, they scored opportunities for creative expressions, such as a 50-day odyssey across the subject, to make the first recorded descent of a river that was then just a speck on a map. They named it after pioneering Canadian canoeist Eric Morse.

The brothers were early adopters of technology that allowed them to share their adventures online in real time. Peake also used the Internet to paper and to document northern canoe culture in *Che-Mun*, a quarterly journal he's published for decades since 1984. Now, at 62, Michael Peake admits he's hit a crossroads. He's passed away and his brother Geoffrey, the backbone of the HACC, now lives in Europe. In a recent editorial he announced his decision to stop publishing *Che-Mun* observing that "the time has come to start leaving canoe" — Conor Mihell

I never saw either of my parents in a canoe. The seed was planted for my brothers and me at summer camp. It was very much a traditional *Tongass* boys camp—wood canoe, canoes, birchbark, wigwags and a lot of trapping history.

The senior campers would do a "Wag" trip every year. That seemed so exotic to me, like, "Wow, canoeing to Hudson Bay?" I explored my imagination.

We started reading about Eric Morse and his group of paddlers—the Voyageurs. One day my brothers and I were sitting in an old-style beer parlor in Toronto talking about potential names for our club—Lupines, Headwaters. We finally named it *Hide Away Canoe Club* after our family cottage. We'd stick with that and wait for something better to come up.

Each of us brought different talents but a mutual interest in history was the central key. He shaped our trip around an interesting historical angle and tried to tie it all together.

I got two months' subterfuge every 10 years and had eight weeks' paid vacation. The idea back then was to keep everyone fresh. What a foolish thought nowadays.

Geoffrey got the idea to do the *Moose River* which was a little struggle heading into Gary Lake in the Northwest Territories. He couldn't find any information about it so we built the trip around a first descent. He left me to deal with getting permission to name the river.

The first person I talked to said that to name something after someone, the person had to be dead. I explained I wanted to name a river after Eric Morse. The man paused and said, "Well, Eric seemed to have a river after him." It was *Bonnie Prime* (Morse's Prime) Trudeau. It just felt right.

That was our first real *Bonnetlands* trip. You do a two-week trip and you're always looking forward to the beer, shower and soft bed at the end. You don't do that on a 50-day trip. It changed my view of what a long trip is.

There isn't a day that goes by where I don't think of some memory of a canoe trip.

I asked an Irish guy what he thought of a bunch of white guys coming up from the south and naming a river. He looked at me and said, "You said I was a white guy, I'll tell you what we call it."

We had a bit of luck in the early days of the Internet. It was cool to be able to connect with people who were on the river. A satellite phone was the size of a suitcase. We carried a gas generator in Labrador.

I bought "Che-Mun" for \$100. Back then it was a collection of notes and letters. I had a corker. I mean to it. Maybe buying it was part of my thing. It allowed me to have a voice in the world.

It's nice to have some control over my work. It's going out in a flash of history. I have the chance to go back and create a record of what we've done.

photograph by CONOR MIHELL



I'll put my check into the mail this evening. I only returned from northern Labrador Thursday after a month long stint of research at Mistanipi Lake (on the east side of the George River) where we had an early autumn storm that certainly put a crimp into our excavation plans.

The snow came on the 22nd of September. We were a full two weeks later in 1979 and again in 1991 in crossing from the George over to Nain via the Kogaluk, I wonder what would have happened to us then if we had had such a spate of wintry weather.

When we flew out on October 4th all the little ponds and lakes in the barrens were frozen over, hmmm. Planes and satellite phones have so profoundly changed the equation and I wonder at times who I've become. . .

It was certainly a great honour for the humble and soon-to-be-retired *Che-Mun* Editor Michael Peake to be the subject of some media attention in the United States.

Canoe & Kayak Magazine did a nice little takeout (above) and thanks to Conor Mihell for the write-up and suggestion. And thanks also to my colleague at the Toronto Sun, Craig Robertson, for doing the photo - one of his toughest challenges no doubt.

Editor Peake was also a guest on the Paddle Minnesota show on Minnesota Public Radio hosted by Jim Gallagher. You can catch it online at [kaze.org](http://kaze.org) under the Paddle Minnesota link. Thanks, Jim, also for your many thoughtful questions.

Noted Smithsonian northern studies anthropologist *Stephen Loring* sent along a nice note with his subscription to *Che-Mun*.



**DOWN THE ISLE --** Old friend, hockey buddy and Keele River canoe partner Scott Irwin did it up right this summer when he paddled his daughter Brenlay to the altar for her wedding at the family cottage in Georgian Bay.





## Editor's Notebook

**N**ovember has never been my favourite month. In fact, it's my least favourite. Dark, cold, leafless, no holidays, no paddling, in short nowhere to go but up.

So it's a good time to build a good roaring fire and settle back and catch up on your reading beginning with this little journal of which there will only be two more of.

Or will there?

We are pleased to report that there is someone interested in taking over *Che-Mun*. Nothing has been finalized but the process will continue this winter and we will let you know.

In the meantime I am planning out things and hope to offer an expanded final issue with Outfit 160 next Spring, with what I hope will be a great feature and one I have been trying to get to for quite a while.

In Outfit 158, we continue a review of the trip of the major HACC trips (Part 2 of 4) and this time I found myself reading through my trip journals to catch up on some of the facts and details which have dimmed over time.

I'm always amazed to go through journals from so many years ago which seemed so mundane and boring at the time of writing but are now filled with forgotten facts and feelings that bring the whole experience to life again.

We have included a story, to the right, on the recovered Franklin ship *Erebus* that came to light just after we went to press with the last issue. It was very well covered here in Canada and has been a fascination of ours for years. The fact that the government appeared to be using this as leverage for sovereignty in Canada's north is not surprising and something Capt. Franklin himself would likely well understand.

Wishing you a great Christmas season. The entire HACC will be gathering at my house for likely the last time. Perhaps we'll get another HACC dinner in on Eric Morse's 110th birthday on Dec 29.

—Michael Peake

## Canoesworthy

**S**earchers who found one of the lost vessels of the ill-fated Franklin expedition are so eager to get back to their discovery they are thinking about diving through the Arctic ice next spring to get a closer look at the well-preserved wreck of HMS *Erebus*.

"We're exploring that possibility as we're very anxious to get back," says Ryan Harris, a senior underwater archeologist for Parks Canada.

Searchers discovered British explorer Sir John Franklin's reinforced 19th-century wooden warship in the Queen Maud Gulf in early September.

But winter was rapidly closing in across Nunavut, and after only 12 hours taking pictures and video of the sunken British vessel, underwater archeologists had to pack up and sail out of the Arctic before freeze-up.

The search team has every intention of going back to the site next summer — along with continuing the quest to find the other lost Franklin expedition ship, the HMS *Terror*.

But if there's a way to get back to *Erebus* sooner — and Harris certainly hopes there

is — divers could be going through the ice next April in an attempt to unravel more of the mystery of what exactly happened to Franklin and his crew of 128 men as they tried to find the long-sought Northwest Passage.

"It's not something we routinely do," Harris says of what would be considered winter diving. "It's not particularly complex, but it would mean that we'd be diving with surface-supplied diving equipment, not scuba, for safety."

They would also have to set up an ice camp and rely more on air support — whether it's helicopters or Twin Otters. And the Parks Canada team would likely be working more closely with divers from the Royal Canadian Navy. While winter diving to explore a shipwreck is rare, it's not unprecedented.

One of the questions now is whether that technical expertise can tap into the kind of private-public sector partnership that helped find the Franklin ships.

"I'll be in a listening mode and a position to offer help, but I think this is exciting for Parks [Canada] because they are really going to be able to build off navy capacity in this case," says Jim Balsillie, the co-founder and former chairman of BlackBerry-maker Research In Motion who was heavily involved in the Franklin search.

Balsillie helped start the Arctic Research Foundation, which refitted a fishing boat now known as the Martin Bergmann research vessel, which helped in the search.

Whether or how the foundation might support a winter dive hasn't been determined, but Balsillie says he is ready for suggestions.

They are carefully plotting and planning their next moves in investigating what Harris describes as a "rather complex structure" that is overall "quite remarkably well-preserved."



Parks Canada diver on the deck of Franklin's *Erebus* near King William Island.

photo: Parks Canada

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# In the Wake of Minnesotans



**Sigurd Olson and crew check out High Falls on the Namakan River near the Ontario/Minnesota border in 1954 when the group crossed over to Grand Portage and began canoeing as 'The Voyageurs' led by Sig Olson of Ely, Minnesota. High Falls is being proposed for a hydro dam and is owned by the Lac la Croix First Nation.**

By Jim Gallagher

Sometimes to the consternation of my Canadian friends, we often meet more U.S. paddlers along Canadian canoe routes in the far north than Canadians. As a paddler from the States, Minnesota specifically, I find this curious. The Canadians I know are too well mannered to ever grouse about this, but a BC based paddler I met in Baker Lake a few years ago complained loudly about “all the goddamned Americans” clogging up the Kazan River that summer. In my own defense, I was nowhere near the Kazan that year. Canadians are right to be possessive of their pristine free flowing rivers and wide expanses of wilderness.

Perhaps no U.S. state is better represented by paddlers in the Canadian North than Minnesota. We share the border

lakes wilderness with Canada and we have a common canoeing heritage beginning with the First Nations. Intrepid travelers from Minnesota's past have shown new generations the way north. In 1912, Ernest Oberholtzer captured haunting black and white photos of northern people along Hudson Bay whose way of life has long since changed. Eric Sevareid's *Canoeing with the Cree* (1935) opened the possibility of paddling into the north to scores of young and young-at-heart paddlers. Sigurd Olson's *The Lonely Land* (1961) vividly describes the north and the rhythms of travel by canoe.

More contemporary Minnesota paddlers have left notes in cairns, water survey stations, and on cabin walls all the way to the Arctic Ocean. The people and dates read as historical snapshots in time. The notes from the cairns from along the Thelon, Dubawnt, and Kazan

Rivers in the Canadian Subarctic have been published. They contain messages and signatures from English royalty, rock stars, politicians, well known explorers, Canadians, and many Minnesotans. Fully one third of those who left notes at Tyrrell's Cairn on the Dubawnt River were from Minnesota. More impromptu cairns can be found along the Back River and others – notes left in tobacco cans or lime juice bottles at the top of prominent hills or along portage trails.

In my travels in the Canadian wilderness, it's equally likely that people I meet will be from Minnesota as anywhere else in the hemisphere. On Wholdia Lake near the headwaters of the Dubawnt River, our group was fixing breakfast – just getting a start on the day. We heard a motor boat coming our way. Two bedraggled and bug-bitten fishermen landed next to our canoes. They had spent the night in





their aluminum fishing boat. Their gas cans were tipped up on their sides and they were nearly out of gas. The batteries for their GPS had expired some time during their all-night meander. They were lost and they were from Minnesota. We gave them some coffee and got them oriented on their map. Their outpost cabin was within sight of our camp. They were humbled by their experience. We were secretly amused.

Not all Minnesotans I've met in the north were lost. Most in this part of the world have been purposeful in traveling through the region. I became acquainted with Bob O'Hara, a Minneapolis based paddler, through the chance discovery of his fishing rod case below a rapid on the Thelon River on my first far north trip in 1992. Bob has been traveling north of 60° for more than 45 years. My wife Kay, in the bow of our canoe, discovered the red case bobbing in the foam of an eddy at the base of the rapid. I'll leave it to Bob to tell the story of how his rod case came to be in the water below the rapid. I was counting our good luck at acquiring a 'new' fishing pole and case. Looking closer, we saw Bob's name and address written along the side of the case. After the trip I put my covetous feelings aside, contacted Bob, and arranged to drop off the rod and case for him. We wouldn't meet face to face for several years, but the chance connection through a lost fishing pole led to a friendship and opportunities to travel together in the far north.

Bush plane flights seem to be a catalyst for serendipitous encounters and are sometimes as interesting as the canoe adventure I came to experience. At the end of that first barren lands trip, a Twin Otter floatplane landed on the Thelon River to transport us back to Yellowknife. The co-pilot hopped out on the float to secure the plane on the gravel beach. It took a few minutes to place the memory, but I soon recognized him as Dave Olesen – a

Minnesota transplant to the Northwest Territories. I met him years earlier when we both lived near Ely, MN.

That night, the Twin Otter transported us to Olesen's homestead. The plane circled above the homestead in near darkness preparing to land. Water from the rain falling outside ran in rivulets inside the plane. The plane circled until a very small light appeared below along

yard. We had a fitful night's sleep after weeks of quiet isolation out on the tundra. The warmth of the enclosed space and the periodic howls erupting from the dogs kept us on the edge of real sleep. We were back in the plane by 9 a.m. on our way to Yellowknife, and then home to Minnesota. Dave, Kristen, and their two daughters continue to live on their homestead, raising sled dogs and operating a charter flight service near the Hoarfrost River on the east arm of Great Slave Lake.

A decade later a bush plane flight generated another chance encounter at the beginning of a trip down the Kunwak River – a tributary of the Kazan River. Our chartered wheeled plane was to land on a large flat esker on the west side of Tulemalu Lake, the headwaters for the Kunwak River. At least that was the plan. A trip mate hired a resident of Baker Lake to haul the two canoes we would use to the starting point on Tulemalu. The fellow from Baker Lake and a few of his buddies pulled the canoes, lashed to komatik sleds, behind snowmobiles across early spring ice and snow. The hired fellow said he securely stowed the canoes "on a point near the esker" and provided a set of GPS coordinates.

Fast forward to July, we're in the chartered

Turbo Otter flying over the coordinates for the canoes. My trip mate was deliberating with the pilot through their headsets. Through the roar of the turbine engine their discussion was a pantomime for the three of us in the back seats of the Otter. My trip mate indicated that the coordinates were not on the shore, but somewhere out in the lake. Rather than on a point, we spotted the canoes below stashed on an island among a group of



**Minnesotan Peter Marshall has done many long trips in Canada and was featured in Che-Mun 123 on his epic 122 day, 2700 mile trip from Minnesota to the Coppermine.**

the shore. With the light as a landmark, the pilots lined up and landed on the dark channel in front of Dave's home. After the floats touched water I heard audible sighs of relief from the cockpit. Dave's wife Kristen was waiting on the dock. Kristen, also a Minnesota transplant, wore a winter parka over her nightgown and carried a headlamp in her hand to signal the plane. Our group spent the night in their small cabin adjacent to the sled dog

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# The HACC Collection

*Over our remaining three issues and in response to reader requests, we will recap the major trips of the Hide-Away Canoe Club over 30 years. Here is Part Two of Four.*

## MORSE RIVER 1985

Much has been written in these pages over the three decades of *Che-Mun* about the Morse River trip, properly called Journey Across the Barrenlands. It is the touchstone of *Che-Mun* and the Hide-Away Canoe Club. I think it is the thing we will be remembered for and it is the most special trip for us, not just because of its 1000 mile length but for what we accomplished.

To be able to name a river, as we did after Eric Morse, while he was still alive, was a product of a great idea, good timing and proper execution. To be able to paddle the breadth of the then-North-west Territories (now Nunavut) on three major river systems; Dubawnt, Thelon and Back was a dream come true to our group of Arctic-inspired paddlers. But to do it in the name of a man who had inspired many, while not trying to, and to be able to honour him with a place on the maps of Canada is something that fills us with pride even today.

Divided into two four week sections, four of us (Michael, Sean and Geoffrey Peake with Peter Scott) began on Selwyn Lake along the Saskatchewan-NWT border and canoed and portaged to the Thelon River just below the Hanbury junction. That final day of first half paddling was truly memorable. The front page of *Che-Mun* shows the first tentative move into the Thelon Canyon with its terrifying canoe rollover and save. Getting by an un-lineable and unportageable cliff face where we were soon swept into six-foot standing waves over a massive ledge was to say the least memorable. Hitting the Hanbury-Thelon junction, a true crossroads of northern travel in the late day's sun was magical. And the smell was unique as well, the barnyard like aroma of caribou who has obviously just passed lingered in our nostrils.

Two more paddlers (Peter Brewster and



**HORNBY'S CABIN** - The graves of John Hornby, Edgar Christian and Harold Adlard along the shores of the Thelon River where they starved to death in 1927. To read Christian's diaries there was incredibly moving.

Bill King) joined our group for the final half to the mouth of the Back which began with a leisurely paddle down the Thelon in overloaded canoes to the Ursus Islands where we began the slog north to the soon-to-be-named Morse River. Over four long days we fought over soggy barrens and through twisting streams, ending on a stormy night finally camped on the Morse. As we sat in our wind-ravaged tent with face-to-match we passed around the bottle of Courvoisier which Eric Morse had given us as "Ammunition for the worst night of the trip." We toasted his health and our good fortune to feel so alive and strong and satisfied at the completion of a hard job.

We built the cairn the next day and visited it 10 years later on the way out of another 1000 mile trip. It had been partly demolished, our plastic bottle with a note likely well digested and scattered in grizzly scat along the rolling hills.

Eric died nine months later and five

months after a formal dinner in his honour to toast the naming. We returned the cognac bottle now filled with Morse River water and a million memories.

Times and sensibilities have changed and such a thing is unlikely to happen today but it in no way diminishes it. At the end of the trip we spent several days in Baker Lake and one day we were talking to Tom Iksiraq, the print shop manager who was born along the "Morse" River in 1941. He said they called it the Kuugaryuk (Little) River. He told us people left the area in 1958 in face of starvation. While speaking to Tom, we got the word that the river had officially been named by the NWT Government while we were on it. It was a bit of an awkward moment to be standing next to a man born there 44 years earlier. What did he think of us naming a river after some old white guy? His wise answer, "You call it what you call it and we will call it what we call it"





## Hudson to Ungava 1986

**W**e were back at it the next year and following all the attention of the Morse trip, 1986's Hudson to Ungava, seemed pretty small at first.

The idea was to begin on Hudson Bay at Richmond Gulf and head east. That would mean an ascent of the Clearwater River up into Clearwater Lake and then snake our way over to the headwaters of the Leaf River (Riviere aux Feuilles) which makes a fast run into Ungava Bay.

The plan was to take a boat from our jumping off point of Kuujuarapik aka Great Whale Post on the Quebec coast of Hudson Bay. Four paddlers set off (Michael and Geoff Peake, Peter Scott and Kate Schnaidt) in an outboard and two Inuit guides to run us up the coast. About 25 miles or a third of the way, the motor seized up (no oil in the lower unit) and we were adrift and paddled into Merry Island, a rocky outcrop not far from shore. And there we sat for four days. The way north was blocked with ice anyway and we did manage to get a great shot on the ice floes which ebbed in and out with the tide. They

water Lake which would help get us back on schedule despite being way over budget now.

Once we arrived on the scenic shores of Clearwater – a vast, beautiful lake – we started to do what we were in control of. We headed north and portaged into the Seal Lakes and then down the Nastapoka River which was a good size – scenic and challenging. That evening in camp along the Nastapoka we were treated to a look at one of the famed freshwater seals which inhabit this area – amazingly in a stretch of water between two rapids. We would later see three seals on Lac Bourdel who took turns looking at us.

We were heading on a pretty circuitous route to Minto Lake the headwaters of the Leaf. Many small portages and up and down tiny streams as we threaded across the height of land of northern Quebec. Minto Lake's 60+ miles proved a challenge in increasingly story weather.

We would degrade aka stop for a while and wait the passing weather but sometimes had to give in. We had 220 miles remaining and seven days left on our schedule. It seemed impossible.

We fought our way down Minto and finally into the outlet rapid with 175 miles and four days. That when we activated HACC Push Mode\*. That meant early rising and late paddling to get to our scheduled flight in Tasiujac at the end of the river.

The Leaf starts small and builds fast and



the valley really opens up which combined with its crystal-clear waters and runnable rapids make it a great canoeing river. And a great time saver. The trickiest part of the Leaf is the end where the massive tides of Ungava Bay take hold. We were lucky enough to arrive at the outlet rapid as the tide was receding which is what you want. When it is coming it the whitewater is bizarre apparently and something to see. We paddled late to get to the tiny village of Tasiujaq. A low salmon-coloured northern lights illuminated the now total darkness we were paddling in. We had arrived at the town at 11pm. Unfortunately at low tide that left us more than a mile out! We tried walking but it was incredibly slippery and we just lay in the boats as the gently nudging tide filled the bay and took us to the shore. Made the flight the next morning which was filled with miners heading to Kuujuaq. We felt great relief after stuffing in all our gear on the Air Inuit Twin Otter as they closed the door. Relief turned to torture soon after take-off as the dozen or so miner all lit up their smokes for the mercifully short 25 minute flight to Kuujuaq.



were the only place to get fresh water. And that photo ran in Patagonia's catalogue years ago.

We finally got back to Great Whale after our guides hitched ride with a southbound boat and returned for us. We then had to really scramble and luckily arranged a charter flight from Val d'Or (!) into Clear-

## POVUNGNITUK 88

**O**f all our northern expeditions, Povungnituk 88 stands out as the most physically demanding and relentless. We have done several trips in northern Quebec but this was the toughest, hence the most memorable.

We were attracted to the amazing Chubb Crater at the top of Quebec, now re-branded Pingualuit – a blasted bullet hole in the ancient granite of northern Quebec. The trip was a logistical challenge because there were no Twin Otters on floats operating in far northern Quebec. That problem was solved by a 5000 foot gravel runway at nearby Raglan Lake – now a huge mine – that was in the exploratory phase in the 80s. We obtained permission to land there and work our way down to the crater and then further south and to Hudson Bay.

The trip subtitle was *In the Footsteps of Flaherty* – in reference to the double crossing, by dogsled and canoe, of northern Quebec in 1912 by the noted filmmaker shortly before he made his famous film *Nanook of the North*. We had noticed a discrepancy in his route map which marked his river the Povungnituk (now called Puvirnituq). The only problem was it was well south of where that river is currently situated. We surmised that the map naming had changed and we wanted to follow Flaherty's true route – if only to satisfy our historical curiosity.

We landed at Raglan Lake on July 15 in a snowstorm surrounded by ice-locked lakes which meant no time for sightseeing. The Povungnituk flows south from Raglan and we noted we were paddling on meltwater with ice still stuck fast to the bottom of the lake. At about 2000 feet in



elevation it is as barren as the high Arctic. We managed to get down to where the river turns west and left it to go up the a small river that flows nearer the crater. We cached our boats and hiked 90 minutes in to the magnificent rim of the crater (photo below) and stayed for two nights.

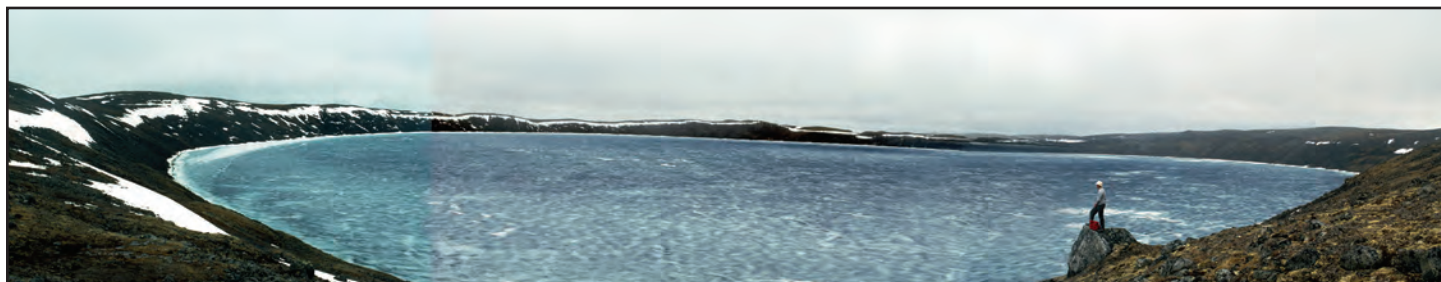
We resumed travelling with some long rocky portages (above photo) heading underneath the crater down to Lac Nantais which was filled with mats of floating ice we had to less pass by to get to the outlet where the Arparlituq River would drop down towards Klotz Lake.

The narrow snow-choked river was fast and twisty. The first day we dropped 300 feet with no portaging and took a rest day as the weather closed in. There were many caribou along this river most of the way down. The next day, another 140 feet of very steep and heavy lining followed and we then turned west at Lac Klotz, just as the wind turned west too. What followed was a tough two week slog into pounding, cold winds that never stopped.

And as we found the falls Flaherty had photographed to prove we were on his route someone pushed the Century Storm button.

The wind switched direction and we suddenly had a lovely tail wind. But we saw the black skies to the west over Hudson Bay and the swirly mamma clouds above and knew we were in for a blast. And we were. Sustained winds of 60 knots for 18 hours ripped our tents, rocked our canoes and shook our confidence. In the town of Puvirnituq 23 freighter canoes were lost and we felt like we could feel the cold breath of doom – or so it seemed. And the date remains forever fixed in our minds 8-8-88.

We had to go into Push Mode again to get to our flights at the end of the river and it was a very tough slog but we made it. It was great to count on the capable Northern Store manager who helped us get accommodation which unfortunately included a mirror where we stared at our ravaged faces and blistered hands.





# The Best of CHE-MUN

*One of the most disturbing and personal events in our history was the death of two paddlers, Susan Barnes and Dan Pauzé in 2003 near the Korok River in Labrador. The tragic tale evoked many thoughtful articles and letters on the subject of northern expedition travel. This is our essay on their disappearance from Outfit 114. Their bodies were recovered a year later - see Outfit 117.*

## Recognition and responsibility

The terribly sad news of the disappearance of two paddlers was felt very strongly throughout the HACC. Daniel Pauzé and Susan Barnes visited me to buy a canoe for their journey that was partly inspired by our Labrador Odyssey 2001 online trip.

It began with an e-mail to me last February from Dan who mentioned he was planning a trip to climb Mt. Caubvick/Mt. D'Iverville which lies on the ragged and remote Labrador-Quebec border south of Nachvak Fjord. It is the highest point in each province, hence the two names.

He wrote that he had seen our Web site and was very interested in our trip and decided, based on LO 2001, to add an element of our trip into theirs. That being, the ascent of the Palmer River from Nachvak and a trip down the Korok. After the terrible events of August, I returned to my e-mail reply to him, just to see if I had responded in the proper way. Thankfully I had. I wrote, “

*“I want to make sure you understand one thing. This trip is VERY strenuous and difficult and I hope you realize that. We have been doing upstream trips since 1985 and are quite experienced at it. The Palmer/Korok route is for a very experienced tripper and one canoe is not the best logistical number to work with. Six is a more efficient group for a trip of this type. I am not sure how many people you are going with.*

*“So please bear this in mind, it is important and I felt I had to make that clear. Having said that, please contact me for any questions you have.”*

Dan responded that he was aware of the challenges and mindful of them. And until, if ever, we find out what happened to them - we will never know if that statement is true or not.

The facts that have appeared leave many questions unanswered.

The fact is the trip was originally planned with two men. Dan's friend dropped out and Susan took his place. It was a factor that certainly played on my mind. And I recall thinking, if only in passing, while taking their photo with their new canoe in front of my house; would these two be up to the task of a very hard trip?

We have found the most efficient and economical group is six. It allows for the most productive use of people and power. It was no accident that we went with that number and we would not have done the trip with a single canoe but probably would with two, though three boats is what we wanted.

My concerns were not life-threatening ones; merely the huge amount of physical labour required to get up the Palmer River and the ability to get down the Korok's rocky course. I mentioned this to Daniel and he replied that the trip was planned to minimize weight - no generators or computers for them, and wisely so.

We traded e-mails on and off through the spring and right up until they left. Most of the concerns were logistical and about the route. In fact, he kindly offered to help get our three Labrador Odyssey canoes back south. The last I heard from Dan was a surprise phone call from Nain in early August. They had elected to get a charter boat up from this last outpost of life on the northern Labrador coast. Dan called to ask for some help after their charter boat left before they arrived at the beginning of August. We looked at their options; they could fly to Saglek as we had, but they had no ocean maps or charts and a lone canoe on that part of the coast was not a good idea.

He was in a pickle - one we had been in before and I gave him some ideas to try and get help. That included making your problem known; to newspapers, radio, outfitters etc. The dynamics of such a thing are remarkably strong in small northern towns. And when I did not hear back from him, I assumed something had worked.

They obviously got plugged into the scene and finally flew into the Korok, bypassing the difficult Palmer section altogether. They flew into the upper Korok since it is closest to the mountain but it was hard to get exact info.

I thought about how the pair was doing while I was on vacation in Georgian Bay. It was the day before the end of our stay there when my office phoned (for the first time!) to tell me the mother of Susan was looking for a Michael Peake who had sold them a canoe. I called right away and found out what had happened and where they had land-

ed. At this point they were a few days overdue and a search was about to begin. I assured the parents they would most likely be found safe since they were travelling the river and it should be easy to spot them. I assumed they had been delayed and not realized they were heading for the mountain.

It is a bit, but not too, surprising would they not be carrying their satphone in such a remote and dangerous area. In fact, they had never used it, which conjures up a number of possibilities. One theory is offered up by HACC Chief Guide Geoffrey Peake, who has 20 years of mountain experience and has hiked in the Torngats. He thinks the pair may have been ascending one of the many large scree (loose rock) slopes that are dotted with snow and have streams underneath. These should be climbed at the edge of the field, not in the middle, where the possibility of a type of loose rock avalanche is real. These mountains are over three billion years old, they have a lot of rocks that have chipped off over the millennia. If that happened, and they were buried under a pile of rocks they may never be found although the search will resume next June.

We are conscious of the image we display in our online trips and other. Also, we are all disdainful of the “X” factor inherent in media portrayal of extreme outdoor sports adventures. We never try to portray what we do as glamorous, dangerous, or foolhardy. And I was left thinking, did we portray the trip as we should have?

Our Hide-Away Canoe Club group is a team of experts, though we hesitate to use the term. But in fact we are a seasoned group of experienced travellers who have done a good amount of remote tripping over many years. Did we make the Labrador trip we did seem too easy? It is hard to get an accurate reading on how you are perceived when you are so involved in something as big as that project was for us.

It is a question I will not take lightly again, in light of the Pauzé and Barnes tragedy. It is a sobering reminder of the harsh price such a wild land can claim. The raw power or a true wilderness is what draws us there-and what leaves some behind,



## CANOESWORTHY *continued*

One of the challenges is to determine how divers can get inside the wreck.

"A couple of us had the opportunity to drop down between the exposed deck beams and have a look around, but we weren't penetrating below the decks at all.

Among the questions, could Erebus reveal anything further about the fate of Franklin himself?

"You don't know at this point. The potential is almost limitless," says Harris, noting that preservation conditions on an Arctic shipwreck can be "astoundingly favourable to the survival of organic materials, even including paper."

Maybe there will be journals from crewmen, with handwritten accounts sealed up tight in a satchel.

Will there be human remains? (None have been spotted so far.)

Will there be anything that helps settle the questions around whether lead poisoning or botulism played a significant role in the sad demise of Franklin's men?

Will there be clues that reveal whether Erebus drifted on its own to where it was found, or whether it had been re-manned, after the ships that had been beset by ice for two years and abandoned in 1848 off King William Island?

Maybe there will be evidence that reveals what the men were trying to do if they did indeed re-man the ship and navigate it into the Queen Maud Gulf.

"Were they just trying to get closer to the mainland so they could proceed on foot? Did they still hold out a forlorn hope of one day navigating to the Beaufort Sea?" Harris wonders.

"Hopefully time will tell."

This summer the MV Nunavik sailed from Deception Bay en route to China via Canada's Northwest Passage, with a full cargo of nickel concentrate making of the first commercial vessels to transit the Northwest Passage completely, and the first to do so unescorted with an Arctic cargo, and with Canadian expertise.

The Nunavik is the most powerful conventional (non-nuclear) icebreaking bulk carrier in the world, and sails from Deception Bay, Northern Quebec year round, transporting product from the Canadian Royalties mine. The Nunavik will deliver 23,000 tons of nickel concentrate to Bayuquan in China.

The route to China via the Northwest Passage is some 40 percent shorter than the traditional Panama Canal route, and as a result, will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 1,300 tonnes.

You could call it Quebec's northern plan, take three. On Sept. 30, the Quebec government took steps to revive Plan Nord, its blueprint for development above Quebec's 49th parallel.

First, the province's energy and natural resources minister, Pierre Arcand, tabled a new bill that will create the Société du Plan Nord, an agency designed to oversee development across Quebec's North.

Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard also announced a new

partnership with Gaz Métro to supply liquefied natural gas to industries and projects in northern Quebec regions which are connected to the province's road network.

The Plan Nord was first launched in 2011: a promise to pump \$80 billion of private and public money into the North over the next 25 years. In Nunavik, the plan included money for new social housing, renewable energy projects and studies to determine the feasibility of a road or rail link connecting Kuujuaq to southern network.

After a Parti Québécois government took power in 2012, they re-vamped and re-named the strategy as Le Nord Pour Tous (The North for All.)

People in Quaqtaq say they're seeing an unusually high number of icebergs floating along Hudson Strait and into Ungava Bay this year.

The Nunavik community is documenting them, too. On a Facebook page called the Iceberg Club of Quaqtaq, you can see dozens of the prehistoric icy-blue beasts.

"We see icebergs all the time, since I was a boy," said resident Johnny Oovaut. "But not in this large number, and all at the same time. Elders are even saying they've never seen it like this."

Starting mid-September, a number of icebergs moved towards Quaqtaq's Diane Bay, where Ungava Bay meets the Hudson Strait.

At certain points during the month, you could see from 20 to 30 of the giant ice sculptures floating out on the bay in front of the community, Oovaut said.

"We love icebergs," Oovaut said. "We use them for making juice and tea. It's a very good thirst quencher because the water from icebergs has no taste — it's completely pure."

But at the same time, Quaqtarmiut wonder what the icebergs' arrival might mean.

"It's an indication that something is happening," Oovaut said.

A feasibility study into a third Quebec railway to the Labrador Trough is back on track. Two companies have joined the Quebec government in a new entity to oversee the technical and economic report.

Quebec's Plan Nord wants to get a better handle on the province's North, including its people and environment.

That's why the Quebec government and some of the province's most prominent universities are working towards the creation of a new research institution with a focus on northern development.

The new centre, which will go by the name Institut nordique du Québec, will involve researchers from Laval university, McGill University and Quebec's national institute of scientific research. The institute won't have a main "storefront," but is likely to maintain a presence in Montreal, Quebec City and Kuujuaq.

"In the context of climate change and with a unique environment to protect, northern development must rely on expertise," said Laval university rector Denis Brière in an Oct. 15 release.

"The institute will benefit from the contribution of valuable partners, including northern communities, which will add their





### *In the Wake of Minnesotans continued*

small islands. As the plane circled tightly over the tiny elongated island we could see three tents on another island below – other travelers in a vast wilderness at our exact landing spot.

The pilot lined up for what was a white-knuckled landing on the narrow spine of the island. Kay and I readied for a hard landing and braced our arms against the aircraft framing behind the pilot's seat. As the wheels touched I looked down at nothing but water out the left window and at chunks of tundra out the right window kicked up by the plane's tires. With the end of the island approaching and the lake beyond, the plane braked hard. The pilot made a quick radius turn and brought the plane to an abrupt stop. Its tail wheel was stuck in soft muskeg just off the crown of the island. Wide-eyed glances flashed among my trip mates and we collectively exhaled.

As we exited the plane we saw three canoes approaching from the nearby island. We could see that the paddlers were a group of young men and, as it turned out, from YMCA Camp Widjiwagan near Ely, MN. They started their journey at Kasba Lake weeks earlier and many miles to the south. They were destined for Baker Lake. Understandably, they were pretty sure we were there for some emergency involving them. What else could explain the plane landing so close to them? They visibly relaxed when we explained that we weren't there for them, but we were simply starting our own trip.

The pilot, anxious to get the plane unstuck, put us to work. Luckily for the pilot, the guys from Minnesota were young, tall, and strong. We quickly unloaded the plane and lined up along the plane's tail section. The pilot fired up the turbine engine and gunned it. Between our pushing and the plane's powerful engine, the plane moved on to hard ground. After a short taxi down the island and a turn upwind, the plane jumped up and became airborne after maybe 30 meters.

Other encounters with Minnesotans were less dramatic. In transit through the small airfields and terminals in remote communities, paddlers are funneled through common points of arrival or departure. To other canoeists, paddlers stand out from other travelers. Sometimes the signs are obvious: river boots on their feet or the blue barrels and portage packs in their baggage. Other times it is the aura of weather-worn faces, wild hair and beards, and the scent of hard work from weeks in the bush that tells where they have been. Once for me it was a chance encounter with a few familiar faces in a crowd of strangers.

At first, I saw two athletic profiles that seemed out of place in the mass of middle-aged fishermen in transit at Kasba Lake Lodge. Apart from these two, it could have been a scene taken from the pages of a Cabela's catalogue with the latest clothing, massive tackle boxes, and quivers of fishing poles. Looking closer, I recognized the couple. Dave and Josie Nelson are Minneapolis based teachers and paddlers. They were about to start their journey down the Kazan River to Baker Lake in late July. Kay and I had just completed a portion of the Kazan and were about to head home. Our paths crossed for a brief few minutes far from home. They continued north and we left with the crowd of fishermen heading south.

The realization of crossing paths sometimes comes well after a trip is completed. Again on the Kazan River, I found what I thought was a relic left by some group perhaps a decade earlier. A point and shoot film camera lay on the tundra just above the second of the series of three cascades on the Kazan River below Angikuni Lake. It was 2012. The film camera was a quaint reminder of the nearly obsolete physical process of capturing images on film. Who shot film photos anymore?

I noticed that unexposed film remained in the camera and the batteries had enough juice to power the camera. As we made our way to the end of our journey in Whale Cove on the Hudson Bay coast, my trip mates and I used up the remainder of the film taking photos of our own passage. Back home I got the film developed. I was curious to see if there was any clue of the camera's owner in the photos. What I saw were photos of the backs of young men in rubber boots and shorts. Suspecting Minnesota roots, I sent a few emails to YMCA canoe camps around the state. I quickly discovered that the camera had been left behind by a group of young men from Camp Widjiwagan that summer. I returned the camera and copies of the photos to the camp. There was at least one person still shooting film in 2012 and he was from Minnesota.

Paddlers move in the wake of those who came before them. Those who precede us in our travels sometimes make such an impression in the small villages that the residents have high expectations for those that follow. This was the case for our group in the remote hamlet of Kugaruuk, Nunavut, on Pelly Bay off the Arctic Ocean. Having completed a first modern descent of the Arrowsmith River by canoe, we paddled from the river mouth around Pelly Bay to Kugaruuk. We were a low-budget group of paddlers from Minnesota – nothing flashy, just guys out on an adventure.

This remote community doesn't get many visitors arriving by water and word of our arrival soon spread through the town. Village residents came to our camp to greet us. A young woman I spoke with asked me, as she scanned the area, "Where are the movie cameras? Where are the banners and flags?" I answered that we had none. Did we have a flag that she could have? "No" I offered apologetically. She crinkled her nose in visible disappointment and trudged off. I was puzzled.

Apparently, a year earlier in 2004, a well-known Arctic explorer from Minnesota traveled through Kugaruuk with much more fanfare than we had. His group had teams of dogs pulling their outfit and a German film crew in tow recording their travels for a documentary film. This seemed to set the expectation for the young woman I met that everyone from the south traveled with equal flair. As you might guess, it's difficult for the average northern paddler to create the same buzz in small northern hamlets as teams of dogs and a film crew.

The peregrinations of fellow Minnesotans to remote corners of the world serve to inspire the rest of us to see what is possible. Certainly this is true for me. Traveling to experience the uncommon beauty of northern rivers is my only purpose, but perhaps I need to bring some little Minnesota flags to give out along the way.



## Unseen CHE-MUN



photo: Michael Peake

**WHEN LEGENDS MEET --** Two of our favourite northern paddlers sheepishly greet each other at the February 1984 AGM of the Wilderness Canoe Association in Toronto. Eric Morse (left) with wife Pamela chat with noted northern solo paddler Herb Pohl who no doubt offered Eric an acerbic comment which Eric swatted right back at him. It was this meeting that spawned the idea for the Morse River expedition - hatched in the mind of Geoffrey Peake shortly after. Herb and Eric remain two of the most influential people we have met over many years of canoeing. Their laughter and their legacy live with us still.

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