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OUTFIT 104



photo: Ernest Oberholtzer ©The Oberholtzer Foundation

**ON THE SHORES OF HUDSON BAY** -- This photo of an Inuit family near the mouth of the Thlewiaza River was taken during an extended canoe trip in 1912 by Ernest Oberholtzer. Along with Ojibwe guide Billy Magee, Ober traversed a land that was soon to change forever. They met many native families living on the Barrens, as they had for millennia. The photos are featured in a fascinating new book, *Toward Magnetic North* (See Pages 4 & 5.)

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# Spring Packet



Becky Mason has thoughtfully updated *Che-Mun* readers on the evolving tale regarding the naming of a geographical feature on part of the Dog River system after her father Bill Mason. We have included Becky's letter to the MNR and their response from different, unnamed, individuals.

"At first it seemed that the waterway park was to be named the Bill Mason Waterway Park. Town council was in agreement, MNR okay the idea informally and I got a few letters from the general public and heads of organizations endorsing the idea. As a courtesy call I phoned Bernie Erechook, Band Manager of Michipicoten First Nation's to see if they agreed with the plans.

"Bernie said the Michipicoten First Nation is now strongly against the naming of the Bill Mason Waterway Park. (The Mason family does not want to be against the First Nations wishes and I told them that).

"Michipicoten First Nation had meetings with the MNR and told them they wanted the park named the Nimoosh Waterway Park instead of the Bill Mason Waterway Park (I think it is a fine idea to use an original name)

"First Nation's gathered some research that supports the idea that a French party of explorers around the 16 century that the Dog River was called the Nimoosh. (Apparently Nimoosh in Ojbiway means Dog in English)

"First Nation's has decided they want the Dog River renamed to the original name the Nimoosh and wants the Waterway Park named Nimoosh Waterway Park. (That

sounds very reasonable to me.)

"First Nation's strongly wants Denison Falls to be renamed to Bill Mason Falls. I told them I wouldn't support the idea if local residents express their dislike to it. Bernie Erechook is contacting local government people to ask him if they'd give the First Nations support so Denison Falls can be changed to the Bill Mason Falls."

## ANSWERS

• As you know, hydro development has been ruled out, and other industrial activities are not permitted in a Park. The exception is mining and the flexible approach outlined in Ontario's Living Legacy (controlled exploration in designated high mineral potential areas only) There is not much to update on this front. The provincially significant mineral potential areas have not yet been identified, and the controls for exploration within them are not yet in place.

Tourism development will be determined in the Park Management Planning Process. I honestly can't speculate on what (if any) tourism developments will be approved, but I will speculate that protection of the environment will be a bigger factor than tourism in modifying mineral exploration

• As far as the name is concerned, we will be recommending to Ontario Parks that the name of the proposed park be Nimoosh Provincial Park. Currently, we are looking at regulation of the park (it's at this point the name change would kick in) in the fall of this year. This name will recognize the First Nation People's long history in the area, and

also the Dog River name. The name is supported by local residents who have opinions in these type of matters, Michipicoten First Nation, and ourselves locally.

• As far as the name of the falls themselves are concerned, the Surveyor General's office is responsible for preparing recommendations for the Geographic Names Board for the naming of physical features. They undertook consultation earlier this year on a proposal to change the name from Dennison Falls to Bill Mason Falls. I know that they received some negative feedback from one local resident and I was informed that the request had been withdrawn.

I have not seen anything from the Surveyor General's office on the renaming of the Dog River to the Nimoosh River. I expect that there will be vehement opposition locally. The name of the Dog River was officially put in place by the names board in the 1980's due to the efforts of one local resident and I am sure he will not take another name change lightly!

• Following the regulation of the new park, a Park Management Plan and operating plan will have to be developed. We have committed to Michipicoten First Nation that they will be involved in the development of these plans and that we are open to discussions of their having a role in the operation of the park. I would suggest that through these plans we could identify the Bill Mason Canoe Route (which would have a portage around Dennison Falls) on the Dog River in Nimoosh Provincial Park.



*We are pleased to feature some photos from a wonderful new book entitled **Toward Magnetic North**. Billy Magee and Ernest Oberholtzer (left) are pictured together some years after their historic 1912 trip. One of Ober's photos of a woman in her tent in northern Manitoba that captured an era ending - one which neither the photographer nor his subjects knew was happening.*



**I**t's North Pole season in the High Arctic, and more than a dozen trekkers are now fanned out across the top of the world.

According to outfitters in Resolute Bay, several teams are currently en route to the geographic North Pole. Another team is skiing to the North Magnetic Pole, near Ellef Ringnes Island west of Ellesmere Island.

The first expedition to reach 90 degrees north will likely be a team of Britons guided by Iqaluit resident and polar veteran Paul Landry.

On March 11 the group flew to Ward Hunt Island, just north of Ellesmere, to begin their trek. By May 7 or 8 they hope to reach the pole, where they will be picked up and flown back south. The participants include Fiona Thornewill and Catharine Hartley, who hope to become the first women to walk to both the North and South Poles. They reached the South Pole several years ago.

Another expeditioner, Hyoichi Kohno of Japan, is trying the reverse trip. He was scheduled to fly to the North Pole and attempt to ski south to Ellesmere. From there, as part of his "Reaching Home" expedition, he hopes to walk, ski and kayak through the Canadian North to Alaska, then Siberia, and eventually Japan.

## Canoesworthy

Kohno's trip will last five or six years.

Maybe the most impressive Arctic expedition this spring began not in Nunavut but in Russia. That's where Norwegian Borge

Ousland departed in February as part of an effort to make a solo, unassisted 1,800-kilometre ski trip clear across the ice cap to Canada.

Ousland is already a legend in adventure circles, having skied solo and unsupported across Antarctica two years ago.

A final trekker headed to the top of the world is Dave Mill. Mill, a Scot, left from Ward Hunt Island in mid-April and will try to walk solo to the pole.

Another team — a group of six Frenchmen — is currently skiing to the North Magnetic Pole, which is more accessible than the geographic pole. They hope to make the trip in 42 days. Several expeditions have had to scrub their pole attempts this year.

**W**ith more hunters than beluga whales along Nunavik's coasts, agreeing on a beluga management plan for the region may be an impossible mission. But with the current plan expiring, a new plan needs to be in place by the end of June.

➔ *Continued on Page 11*

## From the Editor

**W**elcome to 104! Our favourite time of year is upon us - the anticipation of coming canoe trips - both big and small.

We, at the Hide-Away Canoe Club, are very fortunate. For 20 years we have been paddling Canada's northern rivers and we continue to do so. This summer will bring *Labrador Odyssey 2001*, the latest in our series of Onriver. Online interactive canoe trips - and our "biggest" trip to date in many ways.

We will be highlighting *LO2001* in Outfit 105 but allow me to tell you a bit about it now. Since 1985, we have been the envy of many paddlers, in having our trips sponsored. Such trips usually feature a consortium of sponsors offering product, discounts and cash. Since 1991, Woods

Canada has been our most loyal and supportive sponsor. This year they are taking a giant leap and becoming the primary sponsor of *Labrador Odyssey*. It also means we will be able to send pictures, stories and video to our Web Site - which is already awaiting you at [www.canoe.ca/labrador2001](http://www.canoe.ca/labrador2001).

Our route is again historical and a natural follow-up to where our first online trip left off—at the mouth of the George River on Ungava Bay. It was there, after Mina Hubbard beat Dillon Wallace to the finish, that the fractious pair left on a boat bound for New York. Shortly after departure, Wallace and his remaining partner James Easton, left the boat, awaited the oncoming winter and took the traditional native route to the Labrador coast home. This involved travel up the Korok River—just east of the George—and then proceeding through the rugged Torngat

Mountains down the Palmer River to Nachvak Fiord and then down the coast. We will take the reverse route beginning at Nain, the last settlement along the Labrador coast. We will take a boat to Hebron, the abandoned 170-year-old Moravian Mission and then paddle north to Nachvak.

The 24-day trip features three distinct travel modes; ocean paddling, upstream travel and whitewater canoeing to Ungava Bay. It marks a return to the type of trip we usually do, but have avoided because of the technological nature of satphones and computers. This *Technology in the Wilderness* theme will become part of the trip's message. We'll kick it off in front of 15,000 Boy Scouts at their Jamboree in PEI on July 9 and plan to arrive in George River Aug 1. We will have full details in our next issue, in the meantime, happy paddling - and planning! **Michael Peake.**

## Toward Magnetic North

*The Oberholtzer-Magee 1912 Canoe Journey to Hudson Bay*

**The Oberholtzer Foundation, 2000**

**128pp. \$50US.**

**ISBN: 0-9703138-0-2**

*All reviews by Michael Peake*

The name of Ernest Oberholtzer has popped up numerous times over the years. The leading American naturalist was a large figure in the wars over conserving the Boundary Waters area of northern Minnesota. A contemporary of Sig Olson, Ober, as he was called, was best known to



canoeists for his legendary 1912 trip in Canada's north.

Investment banker, Jack Wadsworth, a northern paddler of some note, and former camper at the same summer camp as Ober, had heard of the legendary 1912 trip for decades. When visiting Camp Kooh-i-ching for a 75th reunion in 1999, he was amazed to find the negative from that long-ago trip still carefully stored in Ober's cabin. As he says in the book—"A project was born."

Now thanks to Jean Replinger and the diligent work of the Oberholtzer Society we have a glimpse into that remarkable trip 89 years ago. Like fellow 1912 traveller George Douglas, Ober also carried a good quality camera into the field and developed the pictures there. The large format negatives produced a fine image that has held us well over the years.

This book reprints his photos and accompanied by Ober's journal entries bring this journey back to life. Travelling with Minnesota Ojibwe guide Billy Magee, the pair travelled from northern Saskatchewan to Hudson Bay and back in one long summer.

While essentially a great photo book, it also features chapters on the historical importance of the trip as well as interesting information on the camera he used and how the photos were brought to life for a 21st century book. *Toward Magnetic North* is a unique gem from another age.

A warning - this book is hard to find - very hard. Here's how, contact; The Oberholtzer Foundation, c/o Jean Replinger, 300 N. Hill Street, Marshall, MN USA 56258.

Cost is \$50 American (or Canadian equivalent) plus \$6 postage and handling in U.S. or plus \$9 postage and handling in Canada.

## Gone Canoeing Weekend Wilderness Adventures in Southern Ontario

**By Kevin Callan**

**Boston Mills Press, Toronto**

**168pp \$19.95 US\$13.95**

Kevin Callan must be a publisher's dream. The prolific canoeing author steadily produces one solid book after another.

And he's done it again with *Gone Canoeing* in which Kevin continues his theme of



canoe routes in southern Ontario and Quebec with a look a easy and quick summer paddles. While Callan's efforts are essentially guide books, his easygoing writing style,

quick wit and self-deprecating humour make them so much more.

Having a solid narrative to a canoe route - whatever its length - makes a big difference in paddling it. Kevin's been there and done that and that means so much more than route info, miles and portage numbers you might get in some other guides.

He also thoughtfully includes some recipes (which we will try on this summer's outing, Kevin).

## Ungava Adventure

The Payne Lake Project will be undertaking an extended archaeological survey of Payne Lake in central northern Ungava. This effort is headed by George Sollish, a dedicated amateur historian from New York who is fascinated by the area and its reports of Norse settlement centuries ago. (See *Che-Mun Outfit 6* he has conducted some research in 1999 and will be retracing the trans-Ungava 1948 Rousseau route with attention being paid to archaeological sites for the first time.

In August 2002 they will place a total of 12 paddlers in Ungava for approximately three weeks: six each in the traverse party (three canoes) and the lake survey party (two freighters). Much more info, including a plea for support, can be found on their Web site at [www.autogear.net/paynelake.htm](http://www.autogear.net/paynelake.htm).

Their Mission from the Web site:

More than a millennium ago the Norse established a colony on the western coast of Greenland which survived for over 400 years. We know that during that time the Norse Greenlanders sent expeditions south to Newfoundland and possibly beyond, north to high arctic Ellesmere, and west to the Labrador. The intriguing question, whether they also followed Hudson Strait into Canada's interior, has invited much wishful thinking, numerous hoaxes and, for almost a quarter century, little of the careful fieldwork necessary to advance the inquiry. In 1998 the Payne Lake Project was founded to address this deficiency.



Douglas

# 1912

## THE LAST GREAT YEAR



Oberholtzer

In 1912, a door was swinging shut on the age of classic northern land-based travel. The world was on the brink of unprecedented global conflict. Technology, spurred by these forces, produced flying machines that would forever change canoe travel in Canada's north.

It was the final thrust of a romantic and arduous era. Some of these 1912 trips remain alive thanks to superb books that appeared about them. It is amazing that accounts, like the Oberholtzer one (opposite page) can still pop up almost a century later. The Hide-Away Canoe Club has been privileged to follow in the footsteps of two of them – George Douglas and Robert Flaherty.

George Douglas' book *Lands Forlorn* is perhaps the finest example of northern canoe travel at the end of its classic era. When we re-did Douglas' traverse from Great Bear Lake to the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1991, 80 years after Douglas left on his two year sojourn, we could not duplicate the trip before the trip i.e. the traditional way of heading north before the advent of the airplane. *Lands Forlorn* shows and tells of the journey north from Edmonton to Athabasca Landing and the trip down the Athabasca, Slave and Mackenzie rivers that was part of the day's routine to thousands but was a trip in itself.

Many people are surprised at how busy the north was back then. There was a sophisticated transportation system of steamers and stagecoaches. And a lot of people were on the move north in 1912. On the stage ride to Athabasca Landing Douglas' party was joined by noted author

Robert Service who was on his way up the Rat River and through McDougall Pass. When Douglas disembarked at Fort Norman, John Hornby was there, just finishing a trip of several years with Englishman John Melville.

Indeed, a photo near the front of *Lands Forlorn* shows the only photo of another noted trip of that era, the Radford & Street Expedition. Harry Radford, a American on a botanical survey of the north, hired Thomas George Street in Smith Landing to accompany him on a trip across the Barrens via the Hanbury and Thelon rivers. They later hired two Inuit guides who subsequently killed the pair near Bathurst Inlet. A RCMP investigation did not charge the natives who had been aggravated by Radford. Oblate Missionaries Rouviere and LeRoux, who crossed paths with Douglas and were guided by Hornby would later perish by the same fate – which did not remain unpunished.

George Douglas accurately captures in words and photos the look and feel of that era. It is truly a shame that his book has never been reprinted and is a hard-to-find and expensive prize.

Robert Flaherty also produced a book on his northern travels but he's more famous for something else. In 1912 he made a second traverse of the Ungava Peninsula going up the Payne and Vachon rivers and down to the village of Povungnituk (now called Puvirnituk) by what he called the Povungnituk River. We retraced much of that route and found, as we had assumed, the Povungnituk River that Flaherty named is not the one on the maps of today.

His book, *My Eskimo Friend* tells of his northern experiences in Quebec. It is a wonderful book with some exquisite photographic portraits but is also a rare book and never reprinted. What Flaherty is really well known for is the movie he made in the region – *Nanook of the North* – filmed near what was then called Port Harrison (Inukjuak).

All these expeditions. Each coming at the tail end of their historic tradition, met people living on the land – who also were living at the end of an era. The nomadic lifestyle of Inuit and Chipewyans was about to end and Douglas, Flaherty, Oberholtzer each recorded these people and their ancient bond to the land that would be forever changed because they would no longer constantly roam across it.

For many northern paddlers, traveling through the limitless Barren grounds means coming intensely close to the land and not seeing any people. That is quite the reverse of what a 1912 paddler could count on. In *Lands Forlorn* some of the most remarkable of George Douglas' superb photos show Coronation Gulf Inuit hunting ptarmigan with bow and arrows.

His portraits of them show their completely organic clothing, spears, bows – living and prospering with merely what the land afforded them. Within a couple of generations that lifestyle would move as far as Europeans did in 2000 years. It may help answer some of the question about societal stresses in the north.

1912 was a cusp, a portal – a push from the brink of one age of mankind to another. It will not – and can not – happen again.

– Michael Peake

# Thrown for a Steel River Loop



By KEVIN CALLAN

It was difficult to believe at first that the almost sheer slab of rock directly in front of us was actually the beginning of the Diablo portage. It's not as if my wife, Alana, and I thought that a wilderness trail labeled after Lucifer would be a walk in the park. In fact, all our trip planning prior to heading out on the Steel River, north of Lake Superior, gave us good reason to actually avoid this 1000 yard portage that immediately begins with a 1000 foot rise in elevation. In most cases, canoeists will choose to use a logging road north of Terrace Bay to access the main section of the river, reducing a ten day trip to only five days, and, at the same time, avoid some of the most rugged topography en route. By taking the easy way out, however, you also have to organize a lengthy car shuttle rather than loop directly back to your vehicle; the plague of most river routes that I also desperately try to avoid. And besides, our pre-trip research also indicated that the first few days of the

full 170 kilometer circuit allowed canoeists to travel through some of the most scenic landscape the province has to offer.

Alana and I figured such a large chunk of wilderness was well worth portaging through hell and back and decided to take on the infamous Diablo portage despite the warnings by other canoeists who had gone before us. After all, how bad could one portage really be?!

The initial access point for the Steel River loop was the rail bridge close to the shore of Lake Superior (Canadian Pacific Railway brochures of the 1890s advertised this route as a prime canoe destination). But now a government dock is used at the south end of Santoy Lake, located at the end of a gravel road leading in from Highway #17, 4.6 kilometers west of the highway bridge. The take-out for the Diablo portage is actually five miles north on Santoy Lake, between two high mounds of rock, and along the west shoreline. It's poorly marked by a strip of blue ribbon tied to an alder branch and the letter "P" spray painted on the weathered trunk of an old

# Tripping

cedar tree.

Our plan was to first haul our canoe and gear up the almost vertical portion of the trail. Once we had everything up to the summit, Alana and I would then double carry over what remained - a somewhat level but rugged path that worked through a steep-walled ravine for approximately 800 yards. It sounded reasonable. But on any regular portage, walking with at least half your body weight strapped tight to your back is no easy task. Pulling yourself up a 30 degree slope, with loose rocks and fallen trees littering the path, is absolutely suicide.

Somehow we managed to get the first two packs up. Even our hyper Springer Spaniel, Bailey, coped with lugging her ten days of dog kibble to the top. On the second trip, Alana had to deal with the largest of our packs, which she ended up dragging most of the way, and I had the darn canoe to carry. Although the weight of the boat was only 60 pounds (not bad for a plastic model) I felt uneasy blindly walking up a rock ledge with it balancing over my head.

I cursed a lot at first, thinking the profanity would give me some type of super human strength to help me along. But I finally had to give in about halfway. At this point the bow of the canoe was continuously ramming into the trail in front of me. Any forward motion became impossible and I had to resort to winching the canoe uphill by looping a rope around a solid tree at the top of the rise.

An hour later Alana, Bailey and I had somehow successfully gathered everything to the top without serious injury. And, thinking the worst was over, we immediately continued on to Diablo Lake. Little did we know, the worst was yet to come.

With no maintenance done to the trail for quite some time, the correct path became extremely difficult to locate. Even when an obvious route was laid out in front of us, it was either blocked by a pile of jagged boulders or fallen trees. A network of well-hidden crevices also made walking with a full load of gear extremely hazardous.

Surprisingly, by the time the portage was completed we only had to deal with three major mishaps: I fell into one of the trip holes and had the canoe come crashing down on me, leaving a large gash on my forehead; Alana took a tumble and managed to wedge her face between two sharp rocks (we renamed the trail "Face-plant Portage" after the incident); and Bailey had a close encounter with a wild lynx while she rushed ahead of us on the portage (she's been afraid of our neighbors cat ever since).

It took us half the day to complete the dreaded trip across Diablo and we took the first campsite once out on the lake - a small island stuck out in the middle of the west bay. All three of us dragged our gear up to the site and, wherever we happened to collapse, Alana, Bailey and I took time out for a well deserved snooze before cooking up dinner.

Obviously we were slow to start the next day and it wasn't until 10:00 a.m. when we began taking on the first of three consecutive portages leading into Cairngorm Lake. Thankfully the trail wasn't as steep as Diablo. But at times it seemed just as demanding. It measured a long 800 yards and, thanks again to poor maintenance done over the years, the proper trail was extremely difficult to locate. The worst part, however, was getting to the put-in. For some reason the trail ended a couple hundred meters away from the next lake and Alana and I had to push our way through a bug-infested marsh to reach open water.

The second portage, found to the right of a small creek and measuring a seemingly long 280 yards, was easier to find but was extremely wet in places. And once again a number of downed trees cluttered the path and made what should have been a relatively easy carry over into a frustrating and dangerous ordeal.

Finding the take-out for the third portage (200 yards) was the most challenging. A beaver dam had covered the first section and Alana and I searched both sides of the creek for half-an-hour before we discovered a faint path crossing over from right to left only thirty meters from the dam. Eventually we reached Cairngorm Lake and were lucky enough to have a tail wind for the entire 10 mile crossing. Of course, with the south wind came rain. So, rather than set up camp early on one of the islands clumped together at the far end of the lake, Alana and I decided to continue on to Steel Lake.

Cairngorm's far northern bay is where the Steel River begins, flushing itself over a moderate falls found at the northern tip of the lake. The portage, however, is nowhere near the falls. To reach the take-out for the 700 yard carry, you have to paddle to the far end of the northeast bay.

It's a surprisingly easy trail, at least when compared to the previous ones Alana and I had already endured. But the narrow stretch of river below the cascade was a different story. From here to Esker Lake we walked most of the way, wading over shallow riffles and lifting over several log jams blocking the stream.

Once on Esker Lake (an extremely scenic spot) we were forced to pull up on a beach along the north shore and spend some time orientating ourselves. The pamphlet supplied by the government made no sense here. It told of another portage (measuring 200 yards and to the right of another cascade) at the far end of Esker Lake. The portage didn't exist, however, until at least another 1200 yards down river, which made us second guess everything the map told us from here on in.

It was quite late by the time we hauled all our gear over yet another rough carry over. To make matters worse, it still was raining. And, after consulting the map, we knew there was at least another hour of river paddling ahead, plus another portage to deal with (150 yards and marked to the right of a small chute). By the looks of things, we would be setting up camp on the lower half of Steel Lake just before dark - cold, wet, and very hungry.

Alana and I weren't all that concerned though. It wouldn't be the first time we had to cook dinner in the dark. Besides, we were slowly getting used to roughing it. And by now, the rewards for paddling in such a remote place were finally beginning to pay off. That afternoon we had spotted two bald eagles, a family of otter, and a cow moose with twin calves - proof that the upper Steel is truly a wild place.

Alana and I crawled out of the tent the next morning feeling a little anxious about the next day's events. We had the entire 18 miles of Steel Lake to cross, which happens to be perfectly lined up with the prevailing winds. We also had to assume that the scenery wouldn't be all that exciting throughout the day since most of Steel Lake's shoreline was burnt to a crisp by a forest fire only two years previous. Thinking back though, paddling across this gigantic lake was actually a highlight of the trip. We were lucky enough to have a south wind help us down the lake and we made camp near the north end as early as 2:30 p.m.. Seeing the affects of the fire was also a much more positive experience than we expected. The new plant life growing thick

# Expedition

beneath the blackened stumps was a true sign of how diverse this rugged landscape was. As well, only the top of the ridges were severally scarred. Less exposed areas, where either stands of poplar and birch indicated deeper soil or where the fire had burned at night when the wind was down, proved how subtle and highly local a wild fire actually is.

The only negative part of the day was that it continued to rain down hard on us, especially when we stopped to make camp. Our site was on a small island that had little cover and the rain tarp had to be set up away from the fire pit. At first we would snuggle up under the tarp and head over to the fire between bursts of rain to try and dry ourselves out. It wasn't long, however, before the constant drizzle put out are fire and the cold wind made sitting under the tarp unbearable. So we escaped to the tent and spent the night curled up in our sleeping bags, reading our books we packed along: Alana had chosen "*A Walk in the Woods*" by Bill Bryson and I had "*The Tent Dwellers*" by Albert Bigalow Paine. In a way, reading about someone else's misadventures in the wilderness helped make our trip seem less of a disaster.

The storm continued through the night and come morning it was difficult to leave the warmth of the sleeping bags to cook breakfast out in the rain. Actually, we had no need to get up early since the continuous south wind had left us at least two days ahead of schedule. But we were only three portages away from Aster Lake - the turn around point of the trip - and were looking forward to begin the river section of the trip.

It only took us an hour to pack up and paddle the remainder of Steel Lake. It was another two hours, however, before finishing the three portages leading to Aster Lake.

The first and second portage (234 meters and 139 meters, marked on the



right) were relatively easy. It was the second portage (509 meters and also marked on the right) that we spent most of our time on. The trail worked it's way alongside a steep ravine, where getting a good foot-hold was next to impossible at times. The ridge we were walking along had also been heavily burnt over in the previous fire and, apart from the normal problem with downed trees blocking the path, large patches of blueberry and raspberry bushes hid large sections of the trail.

It was beyond doubt that the entire area was a perfect feeding ground for black bears (we counted four piles of fresh bear scat directly at the take-out) and I actually considered lining the rapids instead. A quick look at the strength of the water being flushed through the chasm, however, confirmed that battling bear phobia along the portage would be far less stressful and we walked the trail making as much noise as possible. When returning to the take-out for the second load, I spotted bear tracks beside our food barrel, tracks that weren't there before. I was amazed that nothing had been disturbed. His gait was

straight, not irregular, and went directly towards a patch of ripe blueberries. The bear had obviously ignored whatever temptations our freeze-dried foods provided (after having eaten the stuff for the last four days, I couldn't blame him in the least).

Eventually we reached Aster Lake, turned south, and almost immediately began running rapids. The whitewater was a welcomed diversion. Only once did we have to portage, 180 yards to the left of a technical Class II rapid. The rest of the day was spent negotiating a combination of fast chutes, manageable Class I's, and easy swifts. In fact, the strong current remained consistent most of the way, squeezing itself through walls of granite or high gravel banks. Even when the river eventually broadened out, becoming more lake-like, the scenery still remained breathtaking. Jagged



# Expedition

cliffs provided a backdrop to thick forested banks, left untouched by the past fire, and tiny islands of sand and gravel split the current in all directions. It was a place of awesome beauty, an absolute dream scape. We camped directly across a spectacular cliff face, and celebrated the day with an extra glass of wine. It continued to pour down rain while we set up camp, but at this point in the day nothing seemed to dampen our spirits. Even when Alana discovered we were missing two very important items from our pack - a bottle of biodegradable soap and our second roll of toilet paper - we calmly planned out a strategy. I replaced the soap with alcohol swabs from the first-aid kit and Alana began reading her paperback novel to provide surplus T.P.

Our second day on the river was just as exciting as the first. We spent a good part of the morning fishing between two swifts and caught a mess of walleye and pike. We also successfully ran two technical class II rapids. Both were not marked on our map. But then again, none of the rapids were, and we were now used to checking out each and every bend in the river. The first Class II was a bit more than a mile down from the last swift. It looked possible to line along the right bank but Alana and I chose to run straight through. The only disappointment was that we had forgotten to put away the towel Alana had left on top of the packs to dry and had to title the set "Lost Towel Rapids".

After already misplacing the soap and extra toilet paper during the trip, we thought losing the towel was quite a big deal. That is, until we noticed a collection of someone else's camping gear washed up at the base on the rapid. One noticeable item was a T-shirt reading "I'm not as drunk as you think I am".

Prior to our trip we had been informed by the local tourist office in Terrace Bay that a group of local canoeists paddling the river in early May had dumped in some rapids. They were able to retrieve one canoe and two members paddled out for help. Eventually a helicopter retrieved the other canoeists but left all their gear behind - including their favorite T-shirt I guess.

Two kilometers downstream from "Lost Towel Rapids" was another swift and just beyond it was the second technical class II rapid.

We checked the run from a rough 75-meter portage on the right, and, after making the decision to attempt it, we rushed back to the canoe and pushed off from shore. Prior to the drop I stood up to re-check our predetermined route while Alana gave Bailey the command to sit (the one thing our dog is good at is sitting still during rapids). It was all over quickly and even though we went a totally different direction than we had planned, only the stack of high waves at the end caused some concern. Thankfully we were able to slow the boat down just before smacking into the haystacks and kept most of the water out.

A quick current continued almost right up the brink of Rainbow Falls. Here, the river opens up just prior to the 70 foot drop and Alana and I inched our canoe slowly toward the take-out for the 400 yard portage on the right.

It's a good trail around the falls, except for a steep section past the campsite marked three-quarters the way along. The site is also well away from the water and Alana and I chose to have our lunch break back near the take-out instead.

A good set of rapids begin immediately beyond the falls, with some sections

even being quite technical. But eventually the river leaves the Shield country and it's current tires out. The banks begin to meander uncontrollably, the water turns murky with silt, and only glimpses of mountainous rock can be seen in brief, distant glimpses.

A good number of logs also started to block our path. Alana and I had to either walk around them, sinking up to our knees in the silty-mud deposited along the shore, or lift directly over them, always being careful not to go broadside with the current.

Our map indicated where we had to actually portage around a total of five massive log jams later in the route. But soon after passing under a logging bridge, Alana and I came to a giant build-up of logs that had obviously been formed since it's printing.

Neither side of the river showed any evidence of a portage, so, for no real reason, we chose to get out on the left bank. Then, I volunteered to get out of the canoe, scramble up the four-meter high bank, and search the shore for a way around the jam. Alana stayed behind to prevent our hyper dog, Bailey, from following me into the bush. Bailey is the greatest canoe tripping dog, and can actually find a portage better than I. But she tries my patience at times, and this was not the moment for her to run into another lynx.

The second I entered the brush I hit a wall of deadfall. The best I could do was detour away from the eroded bank, and head deeper and deeper into the woods. But there was still no apparent trail.

Just when I was about to call it quits and suggest to Alana that we paddle back to the logging road and thumb a ride, I looked down and spotted a Tootsie-Roll wrapper. Usually when I see garbage left behind in the forest, I instantly curse the thoughtless person. Now, however, I praised them. They had left a piece of encouragement, a bit of proof that someone else had actually made it around, and survived. I hurried back and Alana and I began the ordeal of dragging our gear through an entanglement of fallen trees and dense vegetation.

The distance we covered was only 70 yards. The time it took us to haul everything up the incredibly steep bank, cut a trail with our flimsy camp saw, and follow it through like a couple of out-of-shape limbo contestants, was an insane two hours and five minutes.

It was 7:00 p.m. by the time we stopped for the day, and the second we made camp a violent thunderstorm forced us into the confines of the tent. Our site was a small sand spit, as vulnerable as any place could possibly be, and at times we could actually feel the lightening strike the ground around us. But our weariness overpowered any fear we had of the chaos going on outside and we soon passed out with exhaustion.

Around midnight I crawled out of the tent to pee. The storm had moved on by then, leaving a clear evening sky and a welcomed calm. I took a short walk barefoot along the beach, relieved myself, and then sat down by the water to listen to two barred owls conversing with one another across the river. What a beautiful setting. This small, intimate river has so much to offer; it's just a matter of getting my mind set on the good points rather than the bad. So, before crawling back into bed, I promised myself to have a more positive attitude towards what's waiting for us downstream.

Of course, come morning only a short twenty minute paddle brought us to the next log jam. It was bigger than the first, and the 250 yard portage that's supposed to be marked on the right bank had been completely washed out.

# Tripping

## STEELY NERVES *Continued from Page 9*

It was raining again, and the moment we stepped out of the canoe, mosquitoes swarmed us by the thousands. Trying to remain positive, however, I allowed Bailey to go first this time and scout out a trail. And, after considerable deliberation, she actually discovered a somewhat clear path around the worst of it. This time we were back on the river in less than an hour.

Another hour downstream was a third log jam, complete with a rough 75 yard path on the left, and not far behind was a fourth. This one was the largest yet, reaching at least five meters in height. The good news was that it actually had a marked portage (200 yards) on the left. A new collection of logs had blocked the initial take-out, adding another 50 meters to the trail, but it still was quite an easy carry considering.

This was definitely a sign of better things to come and we pushed on with more vigor than ever before. By noon we were paddling "through" the next pile of logs. Our map indicated a 200 yard portage on the right. Thankfully, however, the entire blockage had been pushed aside by Spring flood waters.

Another two-and-a-half hours of leisurely river paddling brought us to the last log jam (this one measured at least 25 feet high), complete with a clear 150 yard portage on the right, and eventually, the entrance to Santoy Lake. Santoy is an enormous strip of blue reaching far off to the south and is bordered by huge mounds of granite. It's a place of incredible beauty but can also become extremely dangerous when the wind picks up. There was

only a slight breeze when we arrived, and Alana and I even considered taking advantage of the calm to paddle the last seven miles to the launch site that evening. One look at the gigantic beach stretching out across the entire north end of the lake, however, and we couldn't resist spending one more night out.

Our decision was foolhardy in a way. We began the crossing as early as 5:30 a.m. but by 6:00 a.m. we were bailing water out of the canoe. To help beat the wind, Alana and I kept close to the west shore. It was the same rugged shoreline that held the dreadful Diablo portage, and the high cliffs did little to protect us from the rough water. Rebounding waves slapped back from the rock and constantly tossed our canoe broadside to the wind.

Almost instantly I began shouting out, yelling obscenities at the wind, the rock, and the gulping waves. The cursing was obviously created by fatigue and not of real animosity. I guess we were just destined to end the trip just as we had begun - in absolute fear. After all, isn't that what wilderness canoeing is all about. It's a pragmatist's paradise. A painful, nerve-racking ordeal mixed together with the most peaceful, uplifting and self-satisfying thing you've ever done.

The Steel River loop was exactly that. Alana and I may never attempt the same trip again but neither of us recent having survived the experience for a second.

## OUR BACK PAGES

*The following back issues of Che-Mun are available at \$5 each (which includes postage).*

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Outfit 48	Freshwater Saga - Morse River memoirs, slide fest	Outfit 80	Warburton Pike, Wabakimi Park, Merrick's True North
Outfit 50	Royal couple canoe the Hanbury/Thelon	Outfit 81	Arctic Land Exped, David Hanbury, Diamond development
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Outfit 52	Lands Forlorn review, Atomic Arctic proposal	Outfit 84	1955 Moffatt Exped., Winisk R., John Rae's effigy & Cloak-boat
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# Canoeworthy

*Continued from Page 3*

To the dismay of hunters, any plan will probably call for a reduced beluga harvest — exactly the opposite of what they had hoped to see as the present plan comes to an end.

To their further dismay, new beluga rules will involve quotas that change every year. This is likely to frustrate hunters, many of whom want to scrap quotas completely.

The quotas cap the number of beluga hunters can take. The Eastern Hudson Bay's quota is 90 beluga, or 18 per community. For the Hudson Strait it's 100 beluga, or 25 per community. The five communities along Ungava Bay are limited to only 10 beluga each.

The only region with ample beluga is the Hudson Strait, through which beluga from the large Western Bay herd migrate. Scientific population studies from 1996 showed 23,000 beluga there, with only 3,000 in James Bay and 1,300 in the Eastern Hudson Bay.

A team of Canadian Rangers patrolled Ellesmere Island this Spring in an attempt to assert national sovereignty in the Far North. The patrol, involving Rangers from Yellowknife and Grise Fiord, was based out of Alexandra Fiord on Ellesmere's east coast. Between April 6-11 team members made daily forays from the base camp, looking for suspicious activity and showing the Canadian flag.

The patrol came only weeks after the release of secret military documents revealing that hunters and tourists may be slipping onto Ellesmere Island from Greenland and poaching polar bears. Greenland has dismissed those fears, though at least one such poaching case was documented several years ago.

Rangers have been conducting the patrols for several years. In addition to concerns about poaching, Canadian Forces worry the nation's claim to the High Arctic could be eroded by foreign commercial activity, including increased shipping through the Northwest Passage.

Another sovereignty patrol is slated to take place this summer on Prince Patrick Island in the Northwest Territories.

Despite high hopes for alternative energy, it may be decades before Nunavut shakes its dependence on diesel fuel to generate electrical power. Diesel, like any petroleum product, is expensive and dirty. It costs a lot to buy and ship to Nunavut, and when it gets here it pollutes the air and likely contributes to Arctic melting.

But for the foreseeable future it will be the only way Nunavut's 26 communities get almost all their electricity. Only three towns in the territory draw energy from sources other than diesel.

On the outskirts of Rankin Inlet, Cambridge Bay and Coppermine, a few lonely windmills spin in the Arctic breeze. In each case, the wind turbines contribute a negligible amount — less than 5 per cent — of their communities' power needs.

Other forms of clean, "green" alternative energy are even less developed in the territory. The power authority said they are keeping an eye on advances in solar energy, and are also looking into harnessing creeks to generate tiny amounts of hydro power.

Larger-scale hydro systems — similar to the mega-projects in

Quebec and Labrador — have been studied for the rivers in the Kivalliq (check out [www.kivalliq.com](http://www.kivalliq.com)), but are decades, and hopefully centuries, away from development.

Nunavut's communities are powered almost exclusively by diesel-burning generators, which each year convert 34 million litres of fuel into electricity for the whole territory.

The cost of a barrel of crude is three times what it was in 1999. Last year Nunavut residents (Nunavummiut) were spared a hike in their power rates, but if oil prices stay high, rates could rise at the end of this year.

Transporting it northward adds about one-third to the original cost, and requires a series of ships, trains and even airplanes to get it to tank farms in each community. And while many Southern companies are doing cutting-edge studies in the field, their breakthroughs often transfer poorly to the Arctic environment.

Windmills, for instance, require lubrication to rotate — and it's hard to keep them spinning when the temperature drops to minus 40 C. They also deal poorly with the gale-force gusts that wrack the North. A windmill installed in Iqaluit many years ago operated for only hours before breaking down. Turbines placed in other communities suffered similar fates. Both the Rankin and Coppermine windmills are less than five years old and are still in the experimental stage.

Nunavut residents can scratch mooseburgers off their menus. Despite rare sightings of moose on the tundra, the gangly forest-dwellers aren't moving into Nunavut. That's the conclusion of wildlife biologists who work in the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regions.

Many years ago a hapless moose meandered to the outskirts of Arviat and ended up on residents' dinner plates.

And every few years Arviat hunters bag one of the big deer on a trip to the treeline, 50 miles distant but in general, harvesters aren't reporting more moose on the barrens. The same is true in western Nunavut. For years, hard-core moose-lovers in Coppermine have travelled south to the forest to bag the big ungulates. Once, in mid-wintered, a cow moose even wandered up to the sea ice.

But moose seem no more common in the central Arctic than they've ever been. Recent reports about climate change have suggested that, as part of global warming, southern mammals are moving into Nunavut.

But those shifts haven't shown themselves yet. In fact, some opposite trends have arisen. One phenomenon which Keewatin barrenland hunters have observed is that muskox are spreading south and east. Over the last several years the shaggy tundra creatures have been getting closer to Arviat on Hudson Bay, and there have been several confirmed sightings of them turning up amongst the white spruce and tamarack of the northern forest.



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