

CHE-MUN

(Ojibway for canoe)

THE JOURNAL OF CANADIAN WILDERNESS CANOEING

OUTFIT 97

CHE-MUN

SUMMER 1999



LINING THE ELLICE -- Doug McKown and party work down the granite ledges of one of the

rapids on the elusive Ellice River at the very top of the mainland portion of Nunavut. This remote

river offers a great challenge to serious paddlers willing to pay the price to get there. See Page 6.

Winisk to The Bay with the HACC

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Ellice to the Ice and Queen Maud

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Summer Packet



North Woods Ways of Maine is one of the top traditional outfitters in the business. **Garrett and Alexandra Conover** run the small guiding service which is lovingly dedicated to preserving the natural ways of travel. They also enjoy an old fashioned laugh, as the following letter from Alexandra will attest.

“Thought you’d appreciate a new skill I’ve picked up. I’ve discovered on two different summers, on two different occasions that I’ve been able to walk on water.

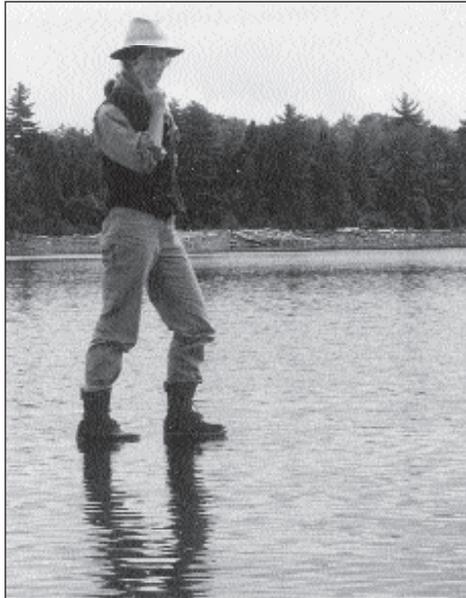
“When the water level of Loon Lake, Maine, is just right and the moon is waxing, and I put my mind to it—I can do it. I’m working on a manuscript right now describing the techniques displayed.

“The accompanying photograph depicts the initial successful try in 1997. Remember, we here at North Woods Ways are technological Neanderthals and only aware of computer generated imaging through oral tradition.

“This is a real snapshot from an untampered negative—just in case some of your friends are doubters as to my waterwalking abilities.”

Gwen Hayball, from Dorset, England is one of our dearest readers and we welcome her lovely letters from across the pond typed, as she told us, on her trusty Smith Corona typewriter purchased in at Eaton’s in Toronto in 1956.

“Enclosed is my cheque for a further two years subscription to *Che-Mun*. Now that I’m unable to make any more trips to Bathurst Inlet, publications like *Che-Mun* and books about other people’s experiences in northern Canada, are all the more important to me. Although my travels in the North were very limited, coming across familiar names in my reading are the means of reliving memorable episodes.



“Visits from Canadian friends are always special occasions as it was when Gwyneth Hoyle gave up some of her precious time to stay with me while on a research trip over here. I admire her ability to organize her time and her writing when working on a particular piece.

“I enjoyed your review of *Barrow’s Boys*. The publisher is new to me but I must get a copy. I don’t suppose you have heard of the term ‘barrow boy’, I think it is Cockney, a London phrase. It refers to the many men who sell things from ‘barrows’, a two-wheeled, open object, an expansion of the wheelbarrow. So seeing *Barrow’s Boys*, I tried to sort out the connection, barrow boys and the Arctic. Having read your review, I think the title is brilliant.

Here’s the final letter in the series begun in *Outfit 96* by Will Lange on this summer’s trip on the Kuujua River on Victoria Island by the Geriatric Adventure Club.

“**May 4, 1999.** A note to bring you up to date:

“Eric, Rob, and I went over to Alv Elvestad’s shop this afternoon and got instructed in the assembly of the canoes. Ours are all red. Really impressive boats. Check their web site: Pakboat.

“Those of you who were looking forward to staying again at the Yellowknife YWCA on the way back this summer will be disappointed to learn that it no longer operates as a hotel. We will be staying instead at the Discovery Inn, whose manager, when she heard the name of our group, was kind enough to offer us the senior citizen discount.

“The charter carrier out of Cambridge Bay has established our maximum payload for the flight at 2400 pounds. This means that my earlier limit of 250 pounds per man (including the man) may have been too high. I figure the weight of canoes, food, wanigan, pots and pans, stoves, tents, and spare paddles to be about 525 pounds. This leaves an average allowance of about 235 pounds, including all clothing and personal gear, paddle, and life jacket. (Please add a paddle and a life jacket to your personal equipment list, and call to see whether you should bring a bow or a stern paddle.) Anything any of us can do to get below that limit will be important. I’ll probably be bringing only a fly rod, for example, and leaving behind the camp lounge and the sneakers, as well. Read the equipment list carefully and do what you can. Not everybody, for example, needs a Leatherman or a tube of toothpaste or binoculars; we can share. And I will have a repair kit with me, including tools and parts for fixing specs, tents, and fishing rods. Far better to cut back on this end, than to have to go through your stuff and do it in Cambridge Bay.

“I’ll be bringing two tents, and have offers from Eric and Jan to bring theirs. Please weigh them, gentlemen, and let me know the results.

“That’s all I can think of at the moment. Stay in



Editor's Notebook

A happy summer to you all. With any luck most of you will be paddling somewhere interesting and won't be able to read this for some time. The end of the millennium is approaching - as if you haven't noticed! This is Outfit 97 of our humble publication and we intend to wrap up the century by getting Outfit 99 out by Dec 31. We believe in starting every millennium with a clean slate so Outfit 100 will be the first published in the century.

Soon we will no doubt be fondly reminiscing about the "glory days of wilderness paddling" - way back in the 20th century. No doubt my three year old son Thomas will think that way - especially if he keeps watching his Dad's old slide shows.

The Hide-Away Canoe Club is active again this summer and I hope you are able to tune in to us at our web site - www.canoe.ca/winiskriver - as we paddle north to Hudson Bay on the Winisk River. The site will stay up for some time - in fact our 1997 trip on the George is still there at canoe.ca/georg-eriver. Just a few days after arriving back from that trip I will head to Merrickville ON for the second annual Canadian Canoe Symposium (see Page 10 for more info). This weekend event shows hopes of developing into a rival for the venerable Maine Canoe Symposium. Gatherings like this really depend on the people who attend and it will be great to have Cliff Jacobson, Paul and Becky Mason, Hap Wilson, Kevin Callan and perhaps the McGuffins all together for a few days. Hope you can make it.

One of the highlights (we hope) of the end of the century will be the unveiling of the movie *Grey Owl* starring Pierce Brosnan and directed by Richard Attenborough. The world premiere is slated for Wackesiu, Sask in September. The film has been delayed which is not always a good sign.

The rumour I heard from someone in the film biz is that they have no ready made audience for the film in the US and the marketing scheme is in disarray. While most Canadian are familiar with *Grey Owl*, and a good many of us are very familiar with him, our American cousins might well think the film is a bird story. We can only hope Lord Attenborough treats his fellow Englishman-turned-native as he did Mr

Michael Peake, Editor.

Northern Newline

Labrador's 5,000 Inuit received a \$255-million land and self-government package, 22 years after filing their claim with Ottawa. The announcement of an agreement-in-principle was met with both joy and sadness by some Inuit - the last Inuit group in Canada to reach such a deal.

The agreement, reached between the Inuit, Ottawa and the Newfoundland government, must first be ratified by members of the Labrador Inuit Association this summer. The exact boundaries of the land-claim area will then be defined before a final agreement is reached, possibly within 12 to 18 months. Some highlights of the tentative deal include:

- 15,800 square kilometres of Inuit-owned land within a larger 72,520-square-kilometre settlement area that's about 20 per cent of Labrador. -

- An Inuit central government to oversee education, health and social services.

- \$140 million from Ottawa to be administered by a trust; \$115 million to implement the final agreement.

- Mandatory benefits agreements between the Inuit and developers of natural resource projects on Inuit-owned lands.

- Three per cent of provincial mining revenues from the Voisey's Bay nickel project; 25 per cent from future mining developments on Inuit-owned land. While an Inuit land claim would move Inco up one rung on its development ladder for Voisey's Bay, the company is still a long way from reaching a crucial deal with the Newfoundland government that is needed before mining can begin.



A large number of large male bull caribou appear to have drowned while attempting to cross Minto Lake, headwaters of the Leaf River in northern central Nunavik (Ungava).

Biologists from Quebec's wildlife service estimate that between 500 and 1000 caribou perished there. Based on observations of the dead animals' antlers, biologists say that the drowning occurred during the rut period, sometime in the last week of October, 1998.

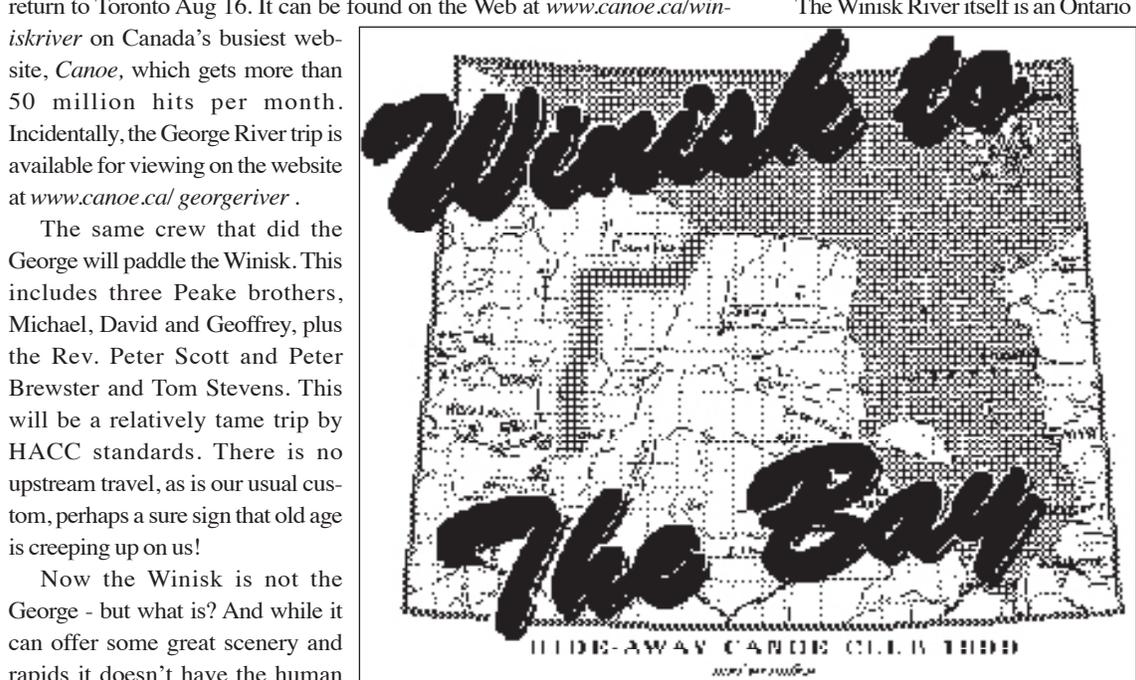
"Surprisingly, 99 per cent of the dead caribou were adult males," noted Quebec government biologist Serge

►Continued on Page 11

All aboard the Winisk Express

The Hide-Away Canoe Club will be onriver.online again this summer bound for Hudson Bay via the Winisk River. As a followup to 1997's live to the Internet trip, *North to Ungava*, down the mighty George River in Northern Quebec we will head west to Ontario and travel the jewel of the far north in Canada's most populated province.

The Winisk River's source is Winisk Lake at the edge of the Canadian Shield in northern Ontario and flows mostly north 250 miles to the flat lowlands of Polar Bear Provincial Park in southern Hudson Bay. The HACC's trip dubbed *Winisk to The Bay* will be online beginning July 29 when we board Via Rail's famous train *The Canadian* and head north. The trip will run until we return to Toronto Aug 16. It can be found on the Web at www.canoe.ca/winiskriver on Canada's busiest website, *Canoe*, which gets more than 50 million hits per month. Incidentally, the George River trip is available for viewing on the website at www.canoe.ca/georgeriver.



The same crew that did the George will paddle the Winisk. This includes three Peake brothers, Michael, David and Geoffrey, plus the Rev. Peter Scott and Peter Brewster and Tom Stevens. This will be a relatively tame trip by HACC standards. There is no upstream travel, as is our usual custom, perhaps a sure sign that old age is creeping up on us!

Now the Winisk is not the George - but what is? And while it can offer some great scenery and rapids it doesn't have the human history which makes the George so compelling. The river was never a fur trade route and had no large role in exploration history.

However, the Winisk was in the news relatively recently. In 1986, the town of Winisk, situated at the mouth of the river, was almost wiped out by a massive ice jam at spring breakup. This was the worst of many near misses and smaller floods and it caused the community to be moved upstream some 20 miles and renamed Peawanuck. So there currently is no town at the end of the river which means if you want to paddle to salt you either have to paddle back up to Peawanuck or arrange a ride with an outfitter. We're hoping to do the latter and combine it with a look around a bit of Ontario's largest provincial Park.

Polar Bear Provincial Park is six million acres of rebounding Hudson Bay lowlands. Recently freed, in geological time, from the oppressive weight of the retreating glaciers, the land around the Bay is rising at the nearly alarming rate of about four feet per century. It's a true tundra area, the most southerly located in the world.

And while it may be Ontario's biggest and most northerly park, it certainly has the fewest visitor facilities - none. That's right, you won't find any picnic tables or interpretive centres here. Just mile after mile of flat shoreline, along with the occasional polar bear. Also residing in the region are the elusive woodland caribou as well as moose, fox, beaver, black bear and many other animals.

The Winisk River itself is an Ontario Waterway provincial park, containing a third of a million acres bordering the river's length. Again, there are no visitor facilities.

Our lead Expedition Patron on this year's trip is **Canoe Frontier**, a new and comprehensive guiding service operating along with North Star Air out of Pickle Lake. Their superb website (www.canoefrontier.com) shows how connected they are to both worlds. **Woods Canada**, our long-time supporter is the other Expedition Patron, and we will be sporting their famous packs, bug jackets and tents.

This trip is a logistical dream. We leave from the venerable Union Station in downtown Toronto. We board the *The Canadian*, the famous cross-country train, and ride in sublime comfort for 24 hours where we will be thrown off the train in Savant Lake. Here our friends from Canoe Frontier will pick us up and head north to the end of the highway in Pickle Lake. From there we fly in to Winisk Lake to begin paddling. We simply reverse the procedure to come home.

We hope to begin filing pictures and stories July 29, the day we leave. As we found on the George River trip, the train is a great place to meet and chat with some very interesting people. We hope you'll find time to travel along with us. Look for a full written account in the next *Che-Mun*.

Winisk to The Bay Sponsors

Expedition Patrons: Canoe Frontier, Woods Canada

Sponsors: Via Rail, Dagger Canoe

Technology Sponsors: Infosat Telecommunications, Nikon, Apple Computer, Toronto Sun, Remy Canada

Placin' Mason in the CCM

By GWYNETH HOYLE

On the evening of June 17, the most famous red canoe in Canada became part of the world-wide collection of water-craft held by the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough. This is the canvas-covered Chestnut Prospector, the favourite canoe of Bill Mason, writer, film-maker, artist and passionate canoeist whose work endeared him to people everywhere who love canoes and wilderness. Mason, with his trade-mark white beard, red checkered shirt and wide-brimmed hat used this particular canoe in many of the photographs in his popular instructional books, *The Path of the Paddle* and *The Song of the Paddle*, as well as in his movies, including his final epic, *Waterwalker*.

Growing up near the shores of Lake Winnipeg, Bill Mason was born with a love of canoes that grew stronger throughout his life. Trained as an artist, he was introduced to film-making by drawing animation for films. In the beginning, his canoe was the means to go on week-end camping trips and to explore farther afield during the summer. Gradually canoes began to appear in any work he was doing and when he reached the level of planning and directing films, canoes became central to his themes. Canoes gave him the freedom to be part of nature in all its aspects, from the wild waters to the silent places. Writing books and making movies were his way of sharing this sense of freedom and joy in the natural world.

While Bill Mason eventually owned a fleet of canoes, the red Prospector built by the Chestnut Company in Fredericton and bought in 1973, came closest to his ideal of the aboriginal birch-bark canoe. With its sweeping bow and rockered keel, it responded to the lightest touch of the paddle and in his own words "was the most versatile canoe ever made". Even though its outer skin was thin canvas, he used it in rapids and on

month-long solo camping trips on the north shore of Lake Superior to paint, or just to drift peacefully with a family member on Meech Lake near his home in the Gatineau Hills. It was more than a vehicle to him, it was a subject, a symbol and a friend.

Since his death in 1988, the Chestnut Prospector has been used only on rare and special occasions by his family. Most recently it was used by his daughter Becky and her husband, Reid MacLachlan, to demonstrate paddle strokes at the Heritage Canoe Festival in Peterborough early in May.

Concerned that the treasured canoe would deteriorate on their outdoor storage racks, and wanting to share this treasure with the Canadian public, the Mason family decided to donate it to the Canadian Canoe Museum. They presented it, along with items of his camping gear, including the open-fronted Baker tent that Bill made famous in his writing, at a special gala evening entitled *The Grande Fur Trade Rendezvous*.

Since the beginning of March there has been feverish activity behind the scenes at the Museum as the staff planned and constructed entirely new exhibits. While previously only one floor was in use, the Museum has now

expanded to the second floor, doubling its exhibition space. Those who attended the gala evening previewed the Museum's new look, with its special emphasis on the historic Fur Trade in Canada. Interpreters in traditional voyageur costume were in attendance at each exhibit, and there was live voyageur music, entertainment and hors d'oeuvres to match the theme. An auction of art and other desirable items generated much excitement during the evening, capped off by the door prize draw for an all-expense paid Caribbean holiday for two. For more information about the museum and its new exhibits, please call (705) 748-9153.

Gwyneth Hoyle is a member of the Canadian Canoe Museum Board of



Bill Mason paddling in front of Cascade Falls in Pukaskwa Park on Lake Superior.

photos: (c) Bill Mason Productions

To Queen Maud by Ellice



Author Doug McKown and partner Donna paddle one of the large granite gorges on the Ellice.

campsites of these ancient hunters. There are no European historical sites along the river. The Ellice was never on the way to anywhere as far as European exploration and commerce was concerned. The entire valley remains today wild, unexplored, rarely visited.

The last day of rapids on the Ellice involved a long series of granite ledges and waterfalls. Like many of the previous rapids, we could run some, line some, and portage some. We were greatly enjoying the beautiful scenery, technical rapids, and spectacular waterfalls. At the second last rapid, Donna and I were turning in at the bottom, when we noticed the rest of the group still at the top, not watching us, but staring down the river with their binoculars.

We jumped out to see what the fuss was about, and downstream, a few hundred metres away beside the next waterfall, was another large Barrenground grizzly. We all watched this bear for a while as he grazed along the shore. He seemed unaware, or at least unconcerned, about our presence, which was good for us since we still had to get past him down the river. We paddled to the waterfall, and, with a wary eye on the bear, we carried out the portage and continued on our way.

The last 25 miles of river is flat and wide as the land gently shelves down to the Arctic ocean. We camped on the shore of a large island. That night, Donna woke up to find that the river had disappeared! The tide had receded, leaving only a small channel across hundreds of metres of wet mud. This section of river could be quite troublesome if paddlers were faced with the normal Arctic headwinds and a strong incoming tide. We were lucky to paddle away from camp next morning with light winds and an ebbing tide.

That afternoon we arrived on the wind swept, barren coast of the Arctic ocean. We had been 21 days on the Ellice river. We had crossed more than 250 miles of the central barrens, saw a great deal of wild life, and enjoyed a beautiful wild river. When the Twin Otter landed on our beach the next morning, we were rather surprised when the pilot stated that they would take us but had to leave the canoes behind. Again, my original agreement with the

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By DOUG MCKOWN

It was a beautiful morning in Cambridge Bay, NWT. Clear blue skies, warm temperature, and calm winds did a great deal in softening the view of the barren Arctic landscape. It was a wonderful July day to begin our trip on the Ellice River in the summer of 1996.

However, if it was such a wonderful day, why was I wasting it by lying on the floor of an airplane hanger trying to fix broken down rental canoes? Unfortunately, this was just one aspect of a number of difficulties we encountered in getting this trip underway. Changes in airline schedules were only the first in a number of problems. We waited six hours in the Edmonton airport while they repaired the plane we were supposed to fly to Cambridge Bay. When we finally left Edmonton late in the evening, we were surprised to find that when you are flying to Cambridge Bay, for some reason that we couldn't quite grasp, you first fly to Resolute Bay. All the flight delays had quashed any hope of flying into the Ellice River that day.

Arriving in Cambridge Bay well after midnight, we slept on the floor of the charter airline hanger, eager to get away early in the morning. At 9 am a pickup truck arrived at the hanger and dumped four canoes onto the pavement. I looked at the canoes and thought, "They must be getting rid of these old junkers".

A few minutes later when our outfitter arrived, I sadly realized that these were the rental canoes we were expected to use for our trip. Of the four canoes, one had a split hull, all the cane seats had no cane, none of the wood had a speck of varnish, some were missing thwarts, there were no knee pads, and the sprayskirts did not fit. The outfitter came up with another canoe to replace the one with the split hull, and had a couple of rough cut chunks of wood to use as thwarts in a couple of the others. He handed us a roll of duct tape to fabricate seats to replace the worn out cane. We spent almost 3 hours trying to rebuild the canoes so that they would be fit to use. We never did get the sprayskirts to fit very well, and it was a good thing we never had to depend on them. There was nothing else we could do since there were no other canoes available in Cambridge Bay, and at this point were we at the

complete mercy of the outfitter.

After this very frustrating work wasting most of the day of our ever-shortening river trip, the pilot of the charter company came up to me and asked, "So where is it you want to go?". I was not impressed. As far as I knew, all the flight arrangements, according to our outfitter, were finalized, complete, and understood. Now was not the time that I wanted to find out that he had never actually talked to the charter company. The question had always been could we fly into the river with a Twin Otter on wheels, and land on an esker that was marked on the map right beside our starting point. None of the pilots had been to this spot and did not know if it would be possible. If not, the entire 520 km flight in would be wasted.



The Ellice offered a great range of paddling thrills and Barrenlands vistas.

After a great deal of discussion we finally decided to go in by float plane first. Our outfitter who was returning to the Thelon in his own Cessna 185 float plane would take one of us and one canoe. Three more of us would go in a Beaver with one more canoe. We would all land on the water, and then decide if the Twin Otter could land. When we arrived at the headwaters, the pilot thought that it looked like it would be possible, but interesting, for the Twin Otter to land on the esker. Two hours later, Donna, Keith and I stood as markers on top of the hard packed esker, which we personally did not think appeared quite large enough to land a Twin Otter. As the big plane roared in low over the ridge, the esker seemed very small indeed.

We watched the plane begin circling, as the pilot tried to decide whether he agreed with us. We

observed with tense anticipation as the Twin Otter finally made an amazingly short and bouncy landing. Finally, at 10 pm, all canoes, paddlers, and equipment were on the shore of a small lake, watching the plane disappear over the rolling hills of the wide tundra.

It had been a frustrating day. However, these are the sorts of things that often occur, especially when you are trying to reach the more remote areas of our country and the Ellice River is certainly remote. The Ellice rises in the central barrens, just north east of the Beechy Lake area of the Back River. The Ellice flows north, on the east side of Bathurst Inlet, along the west side of the vast Queen Maud Bird Sanctuary. At the end of its 250 mile journey, the river empties into the Arctic Ocean at Campbell Bay.

From the top of the ridge beside our first campsite we had a wonderful first view of the central barrens. To the south of our lake we could see the land fading away down towards the valley of the mighty Back River. To the north was the wide valley of the Ellice River, stretching into the lonely, silent distance. The view was so good of course because there was plenty of light, even at 11 pm, and there were no trees at all. The nearest tree was probably more than 150 miles to the south of us in the valley of the Thelon River. A lack of trees is one of the advantages of travelling on the tundra. There are no trees to block

the view, campsites are everywhere, walking is easy, and there is no portaging through deadfall or dense forest. Of course at the same time there is no firewood, no shade, no wind protection, no way to sneak up on animals, and in a thunderstorm you are the tallest thing around. Actually, one of the most difficult aspects of the tundra to get used to is the problem of determining scale with no trees for reference. It takes some experience to tell how tall a hill or cliff is, how far away is a ridge, or even how big animals are.

The tundra is by no means an empty landscape. While, in the shelter of some deep creek beds, we were able to find a few willow shrubs a meter high, most of the ground vegetation exists within 4 to 8 inches of the surface. In this zone there is a great variety of willows, mosses, lichens, and flowers,

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thick and lush covering every inch of the thin soil. The vegetation is a lush and vigorous carpet, hammered into this stunted configuration by the merciless, brutal, Arctic winter. While we did find plenty of interesting plants, we were just a little too late in the season to enjoy the best of the blossoming flowers.

As we cooked our first supper, and set up our tents on the copper brown esker, we were looking forward to seeing plenty of wildlife in this lively Arctic environment. Even so, everyone was quite surprised when Keith called to us and we looked up from our activities to see a caribou trotting completely unconcerned through the centre of our camp.

The morning of our first day on the river, the eight of us, Pam and Don, myself and Donna, Heather and Keith, and Mike and Shelley set off, paddling down the long lake under blue skies, and with a warm, light tail wind. At the end of the lake, expecting to find the river outlet, we found instead a wide flat field of boulders, with a small trickle of water disappearing amongst the rocks. While somewhat disappointing, this was not a complete surprise to us. Like most of the barren land rivers, the Ellice floods during the spring melt. From the time of the melt, the river level drops steadily as the water drains off the shallow soil of the Arctic permafrost.

The trick is to plan your trip to happen just after breakup but before all the water has run away. This is always a bit of a guessing game in the Arctic, as the spring weather is quite unpredictable. We knew before arriving that breakup had been early this year. There is a remote water flow measuring station on the Ellice River a few miles from the Arctic coast. Indications were that the flow volume for our trip this year would be 50% or less of the average values. Low water levels always make paddling at the headwaters of a river a chancy prospect. What followed for us was four days of lifting, portaging, wading, humping and sliding canoes over rocks and boulders. The river bed was a tumbling mass of stones, ledges and ribs of stark, jagged rock. It was hard, wet work, wading, crawling, pulling and pushing, over slimy, slippery rocks.

I kept myself entertained listening to various snippets of conversation around me: Donna cursing yet another banged shin; Shelley complaining

that she just stepped into a hole deeper than her gumboots once again; and Don wondering if that eight inch wide gap was big enough for his canoe to slip through. While a very interesting area, a great deal of this first portion of the river would require serious portaging even at regular water levels. Though the travelling was rough, we still had plenty of time to appreciate the magnificent, rugged landscape. The barrens is a raw and wild land. It is easy to imagine that the great glaciers of the last ice age have only just departed, leaving the raw, newly exposed tundra of shallow soil, and tumbled broken rocks.

Fine weather made dealing with the low water considerably more pleasant. For four or five days we had warm temperatures, clear skies, and light winds. The mosquitoes were only moderately troublesome, easily dealt with by our headnets, and our roomy bug tent for cooking and eating. The water was surprisingly warm and we were able to swim, or at least bathe, most days.

As we proceeded down the river, the water volume increased and we reached a point where we were actually paddling more than we were portaging. The long hours of sunlight allowed us to get the most out of our days. On the rolling, treeless tundra we could stop just about anywhere to camp. In short order we would have the bug tent up or the wind tarp in place.

While one of the couples would start supper, the rest of us had an hour or two to hike, explore, swim or just relax. An evening hike across the tundra, through small creek beds, or across the rocky ridges, made us keenly aware of the variety and abundance of life in this seemingly empty landscape. Caribou tracks are everywhere, the small paths of voles, and lemmings run under the low vegetation hiding from the eagles and Peregrine falcons. Among the shrubs and flowers we heard the busy ground birds, sparrows, hoary red polls, horned larks, and ptarmigans as they rustled and fluttered, searching for seeds. On one rocky ridge Heather and Keith found an entire family of short tailed weasels. These beautiful little creatures never stopped moving, darting among the rocks, boldly approaching to inspect the possible food potential of our hiking boots. In the evenings we could listen to the raucous cackling of the tall sand hill cranes as they flew from lake to lake across the

tundra.

We also enjoyed a great variety of wildlife as we paddled along the river. Canada geese were our constant companions. There were many other species of waterfowl joining us on the river. Mergansers and Jaegers were often about. Arctic Terns hovered over us with their sharp cries. Elegant Red Throated loons, and fat Greater White Fronted geese fled down the river before us.

We scared up a number of Arctic hares along the river shore. With grey summer colouring, they are almost invisible crouching motionless among the scattered, lichen covered rocks. On one of our rare wet days, we finished one of the last long rocky portages, arriving at the shores of one of the longer lakes. Keith spotted movement on the far side of the lake, and our binoculars soon showed us countless caribou moving along the shore. We managed to find ourselves in the middle of a caribou migration. Caribou were following the shore, and swimming across the bays, travelling upstream as we travelled down. We paddled across the lake to camp along the edge of an enormous esker. This camp marked the beginning of our life among the caribou.

From our camp, Michael sat and watched the caribou as they came over the rocky ridge beside our esker. Hundreds swam across the narrows and travelled down the far side of the lake. Many others continued along the esker behind our camp. The caribou continued past us in small groups, and larger herds, constantly, 24 hours a day, for days. For the next week we could watch as we paddled, small groups trotting along shore, lying on the sand flats, swimming across the river, and silhouetted on the ridges. The ankles of caribou have a unique arrangement of tendons that causes them to click when they walk. It is an awesome experience to sit in your canoe a few metres from shore and watch a herd of a thousand animals trotting along the sand, only the clicking of their ankles breaking the silence of the arctic landscape.

There are a great variety of features along the Ellice River. The more distinct regions are the rocky upper headwaters, the wide sandy valley, and the rugged granite canyons. The numerous rapids reflected the nature of these landforms. Many rapids were long, continuous rock gardens, where the river spilled through expanses of rocks and boulders. Because of the low water level, we could paddle directly into most of the rock gar-

➡ *Continued on Page 11*

Bark, Skin and Cedar

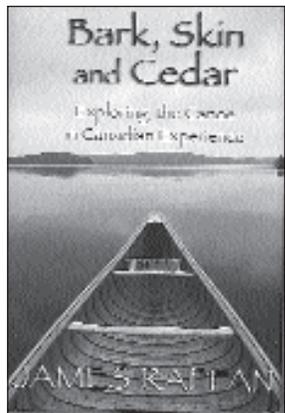
By James Raffan
HarperCollins, Toronto
1999 274pp. \$30
ISBN 0-00-255730-4

The Canoe in Canadian Cultures

Edited by John Jennings, Bruce Hodgins, Doreen Small
Natural Heritage, Toronto
1999 300pp. \$25.95
ISBN 1-896219-48-9

Books reviewed by Michael Peake

Two books celebrating that most essential and beloved (certainly in these pages) Canadian icon: the canoe, have arrived on the bookshelves together. And the coincidence doesn't end there.



Both books celebrate in their own way, the canoe as representing a premier Canadian symbol. They are both the derived progeny of noted universities and each has a definite scholarly and intellectualized bearing.

That said, they will definitely interest any subscribers of *Che-Mun* and possibly scare away droves of ordinary Canadians.

Jim Raffan brings us *Bark, Skin and Cedar* which thoughtfully includes a photo of a canoe on the cover so people won't be confused. A professor in 'outdoor and experiential education' at Queen's University, Raffan is fast becoming the noted chronicler of all things canoeing - Canadian-wise that is.

Raffan is a scholarly Hoover upright. He vacu-

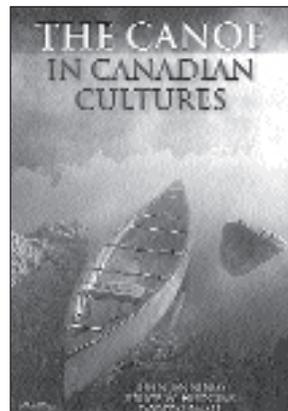
ums up every tidbit, notion, thought, comment and anecdote about his subject and thoughtfully footnotes them for the interested reader. (For the record, there are 272 footnotes in this book)

I happened to sit across the aisle from him at the last Wilderness Canoeing Association Annual Wilderness Symposium. These mid-winter talks are fraught with often great presentations from speakers who are not on the "circuit". That means you can mine a lot of interesting tidbits of info you might not always come across. As a former note taker myself, I was always hindered by the fact these talks are given in almost total darkness, the only illumination being the screen reflection from a variety of variously exposed transparencies.

Raffan had that problem licked. His pen had a light on its tip and I can see why. There was some great stuff to be had here and he is to be commended for getting it all down. As a scholar he gets as much pleasure in citing his references as we do in saying we learned it ourself.

Raffan is great to read. He doesn't have a poetic style but his prose is solid and very enjoyable - and, as stated, superbly researched. He covers everything from dragon boats to summer camps. There are scores of anecdotes and events all of which go into what is the canoe. The book makes a sweep from coast to coast picking up a theme in each area. From the Mic Mac canoes to the selling of the myth. As we saw in a recent book by Jamie Benedickson, *Idleness, Water and a Canoe*, the conception of a canoe to the average Canadian is more of a thought than a thwart. Raffan spends some time getting into that myth making much of which started in the 1920s and survives extant.

The story of CPR publicist John Murray Gibbon is a classic. He's described by Raffan as a mixture of



Pierre Berton and P.T. Barnum. This educated and energetic fellow popularized what became the 'Mountie, moon and canoe' vision that Hollywood, and consequently the rest of the world, gave the Canadian north.

We should be

thankful to Raffan for giving us such a thoughtful and entertaining examination to our beloved craft.

The Canoe in Canadian Cultures might perhaps be titled Canexus II. It is the direct result of the 1996 Canexus conference - 10 years after the first one was held at Queen's University. This is Trent University country and part of the event was held there and some of the writers were Trent people.

Its theme aims to show the canoe as the uniting force among Canada's three founding peoples, English, French and Aboriginal. Almost all of the writing centers on the first of these three.

This book is a series of 18 essays which were given at the conference. I'm please to note that half the writers are *Che-Mun* subscribers. Jim Raffan makes his appearance here as well. (That boy is everywhere!) His book on Bill Mason (*Fire in the Bones*) was launched at Canexus and he presented a paper on Bill. Becky Mason also is included here with some moving thoughts about her dad.

This is of those box of chocolates books. You will pick out the ones that you know you like, try a few on a gamble and spit out the rest, leaving some untouched. I was naturally drawn to the stuff that would likely appear in these pages. There is quite a variety; from Bert Horwood's thoughtful *The Dao of Paddling*, though Gwyneth Hoyle's fascinating *The Dark Side of the Canoe* to Bob Henderson's off the wall *The Canoe as a Way to Another Story*. David Finch's piece on Raymond Patterson of *Dangerous River* fame was fascinating as I knew little about the man who wrote that classic book on early travel on the Nahanni.

Last Voyage of the Karluk

By William Laird McKinley
St. Martin's Griffin Press
1999 168pp. C\$18.99
ISBN 0-312-20655-0

The spectacular recent success of disaster books and movies no doubt caused his little book to resurface 23 years after it was first published.

This first hand account of the sinking of the *Karluk*, the boat used by Stefansson in his epic Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-18, is a fascinating and grim piece of history. The boat was crushed in 1913 at the start of the expedition when

News & Notes

The Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association (CRCA) is preparing to host its 2nd Canadian Canoe Symposium - August 20, 21 & 22, 1999 at their national headquarters in Merrickville Ontario. Last year's event attracted over 400 participants ranging in age from a few months to over 70 years.

The symposium is truly one the entire family can participate in and focuses on hands on seminars and workshops, paddling skills, expert presentations and the heritage of the canoe in Canada.

The CRCA's timber-frame building will provide the backdrop where participants will experience the love of canoeing - attend seminars, listen to renowned guest speakers, learn paddling techniques from leading experts and share campfire stories.

They will even have a chance to carve their very own paddle or attend cedar canvas and birch bark canoe restoration and building workshops.

Children will be treated to their own program including, a Voyageur Canoe Camp, paddling skills program as well as arts and crafts.

On-water activities include paddling demonstrations by some of North America's best paddlers, tandem and solo canoeing instruction, instructor

re-certification clinics and Voyageur canoe races. The event is open to the general public and on-site camping and canoe rentals are available on a daily or weekend basis.

Confirmed speakers for this year's Symposium include: author and adventurer, Cliff Jacobson - one of North America's best known canoeists; Becky Mason of Chelsea, Quebec - daughter of the late Bill Mason; Kirk Wipper - founder of the Canadian Canoe Museum; author and wilderness paddlers, Kevin and Alana Callan, also Hap Wilson and Michael Peake .

You'll have a chance to paddle with Becky and Paul Mason. Cliff Jacobson will be showing his slide show on canoeing the Hood River and getting hitched at Wilberforce Falls as well as giving some of his famous tip-filled talks. Hap Wilson will do a slide talk to illustrate his new book on Manitoba canoe routes. Michael Peake will show two slide shows, *Journey Across the Barrenlands* - the 1985 trip that named a river after Eric Morse and *Arctic Land Expedition* a 50 day trans-Barrens trip retracing the lost route of Dr. Richard King in search of the missing Franklin Expedition.

The event is open to the general public and on-site camping and canoe rentals are available on a daily or weekend basis. (See www.crca.ca for

Our Back Pages

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

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Expeditions

Ellice Adventure continued

dens, scouting as we go. It was very enjoyable, maneuvering around the rocks, watching the other canoes to see who was stuck, and trying to see if anyone else managed to find a better route than the one I was struggling with. These rapids were often quite technical and care was imperative as most of them ended in a steep, rocky, drop, sometimes requiring portaging or lining. The major waterfalls and portages were created by the upthrust granite ridges, providing deep canyons and spectacular waterfalls. From above the high granite cliffs, peregrine falcons would scream and dive at us as we portaged through their breeding territories.

One afternoon was so extremely hot, and muggy that we could go no further and had to stop for a swim break. This day marked the end of the unseasonably hot weather. Early next morning we huddled in our tents as an earth shattering thunderstorm crashed around us. When the rain ended and the thunder faded off into the distance, we arose to find the valley shrouded in thick swirling mists. Wailing out of this white fog came the eerie howl of a lone Arctic wolf. As we scanned the foggy shoreline with our binoculars, the mists cleared and a few hundred metres along the shore, a huge white wolf turned and trotted off across the tundra.

One crisp morning Don called us out of our tent to see a herd of 12 muskox a few hundred yards along the shore. The dark shaggy bodies grazed peacefully, swinging their great horns and plodding through the low vegetation. We also saw some single bulls along the way, perfectly at ease in their chosen isolation.

As the weather cooled somewhat, the mosquitoes disappeared completely and we were never bothered by them again. In the wide flat valley bottom, there were vast expanses of sand bars, and steep sand banks. These were prime denning areas for Arctic foxes. We saw them playing on the sand ridges. The foxes were small and skinny, with pointed ears, bushy tails, and inquisitive little faces.

At the rapids all along the river, the fishing was great. While none of us were

truly ardent fishers, the Arctic char, lake trout, and Arctic grayling were all hungry and eager. Mike and I fished quite a bit, but with no net and light gear, we were never able to actually land one of the big lake trout. They would tease us for fifteen or twenty minutes, then simply turn and swim away, snapping our lines. Don said he could hear them laughing. However, two or three of the mid-sized fish were plenty to feed the entire group, and assuage our pride. Sometimes we could just watch the fish along the way. With the shallow river and clear waters of the wide rock gardens, it was quite distracting to be trying to manoeuvre the canoe among the rocks and see these enormous, metre long fish skittering away from under the canoe in eight inches of water.

One morning we were paddling along the shore of a small lake, into a moderate, onshore crosswind. Donna and I, and Mike and Shelley were in the lead canoes, with Pam and Don, and Heather and Keith about 20 yards behind. The wind must have been carrying our rather strong scent to shore, because just as Donna and I passed a small pile of rocks, an enormous grizzly bear jumped straight up and started galloping along the shore, away from our canoe, but directly toward the other canoes. Seeing the grizzly charging right at her, Pamela, in the last canoe, shouted, "Lookout!". Heather, who was in the front of the nearest canoe looked up for her first view into the face of a charging grizzly! She squawked and the bear looked up for his first view into the face of a terrified paddler! At this point the bear put out all four feet and almost fell over backwards in his efforts to put on the brakes. The bear made an abrupt right turn and was last seen scampering away at full speed across the tundra. Heather was last seen paddling at full speed in the opposite direction.

The interior Ellice River area of the Arctic was never heavily used by the original native peoples. It is not called the Barren Lands for no reason. However, native peoples did cross the area from time to time, following the caribou migrations. Hiking and exploring at some of our campsites, we did find occasional evidence of these travelers of long ago. There were lonely stone tent rings in the grass, and trail marking rocks or inukshuks on the ridges, showing routes and

Northern Newline continued

Couturier in a prepared release. "Practically no females were observed. We do not believe that the absence of females is an indication that they survived, but that they were not present at the time."

This confirms an observation made by biologists concerning the isolation of males at the height of the rutting season. Although caribou are excellent swimmers, they may be surprised by strong winds. In 1984, some 10,000 caribou died when crossing a dangerous section of the Caniapiscau River near Kuujjuaq, an accident many blame on unseasonably high water levels in the river due to Hydro-Quebec's damming opera-



tions.

Mild temperatures across the eastern Arctic have produced ideal conditions for the 1999 sealift, moving sailing schedules for many communities forward by several weeks.

Environment Canada is forecasting early ice break-up throughout Nunavik, the southern Baffin and Keewatin regions, and early-to normal conditions in the High Arctic as shippers prepare to carry out the annual resupply of building materials, non-perishable food and machinery.

Environment Canada's outlook for ice break-up and clearing patterns predicts smooth sailing in much of James Bay, Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait by the first week of July — a month earlier than normal. Across the Arctic, ice break-up is expected to be three weeks early, on average. The extended sealift season is a blessing for the boom-



ing construction industry in Nunavut.

The people of Pond Inlet no longer feel invaded when hordes of cruise ship tourists arrive in their community via Zodiac boats. Residents have turned the annual arrival of cruise ship visitors into a welcome source of cash.

The Nattinnak Centre now offers an on-shore program for cruise ship passengers at \$15 to \$25 per person. This fee includes tea and bannock, followed by a walking tour of the community, or a cultural performance at the centre.

The cultural program features three performances, representing different styles and periods, that reflect the centre's theme of "continuity and change." Passengers hear drum-dancing, ay-ya-ya songs, throat-singing and modern songs from performers dressed in traditional clothing.

Visitors to Pond Inlet will also be guided to the centre's gift shop and the coop store to purchase carving, handicrafts and other souvenirs. The visitors' urge to buy is so strong that by the end of last year's season the centre's tiny boutique was completely cleaned out.

Every year more than 1500 visitors from six to eight cruise ships visit Pond Inlet. Some communities, such as Pangirntung and Cape Dorset, are already experienced in catering to cruise ship



Photo: Doug McKown

ROLL OUT THE BARRELS-- One of the great pleasures of northern camping in extreme location, like the Ellice River shown here, is the ability

to make oneself as comfortable as possible. That means a well-secured tarp enhanced by all the other essentials hidden in those barrels.

Ahead in Outfit 98

Winisk to The Bay

A trip report on the journey to Hudson Bay along the Winisk River with the HACC. We'll travel down to where the polar bears roam on the tidal flats of The Bay

Anyplace Mackenzie

We finally hope to have that report on filming the route of Alexander Mackenzie across the mountains and into the Pacific Ocean.

CHE-MUN

Founded in 1973 by Nick Nickels

The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing

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Web: www.canoe.ca/AllAboutCanoes.

Subscription rates:

One year: \$20

Two years: \$36

Che-Mun appears quarterly

Note: U.S orders in U.S. dollars

A publication of the Hide-Away Canoe Club.

