CHE-MUN

Spring 2013 The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing Outfit 152

photo: Dave Plante

WOLF PAKBOAT - Wonder what wolf lover and canoeist Bill Mason would say about this lone wolf on Victoria Island along the Kuujjua River on Victoria Island who had a very up close and personal encounter with canoeist Mark Chmielewicz who was with a group of paddlers on the remote river in the far north. The story is inside on Pages 4 & 5, plus a link to a video of this remarkable experience. It is not often you can photograph a wolf with a wide angle lens. And thankfully no one was hurt in the making of that film.

Spring Packet

We are indebted to the amazing Lester (aka Laco) and Lynette for their article in this Outfit and here is the additional info for their story. Check out their YouTube feature.

Hey fellow expedition paddlers. We finally uploaded to YouTube the presentation we did for the Wilderness Canoe Assn in Toronto (Feb 2012). It is an overview of the Ungava/Nunavik Rivers we have paddled and mapped (cartesplein-air.org), with a fair concentration on Parc Pingualuit. We have it linked to our own (LandLTrips) website, and you are, of course, welcome to link it to any of your websites, and to pass this message along to anyone you think of who may also be interested.

Warning: get comfortable - it's 25 minutes long!

http://youtu.be/7qdpk_Ksvf0

Happy viewing & happy paddling,

L&L

Lynette Chubb & Lester Kovac

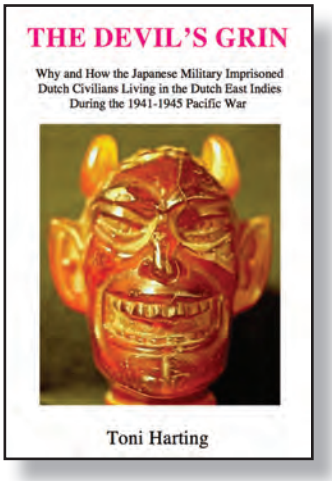
*Super subscriber **Tim Farr** from Ottawa dropped us a note before he heard about the date change for our next trip.*

I was meaning to drop you a line earlier after I received #151. As usual, it was a great read although Canoesworthy becomes more depressing with every edition; I have this sense of a tsunami of development sweeping across the North, and it is only going to get worse with climate change. I look forward to reading your thoughts on the devolution agreement between the governments of Canada and the NWT -- I've read a lot about "jobs" and "growth" and "long-term prosperity" but not much about the environmental considerations at stake. Hope this will get more attention when they start consulting Aboriginal organizations in the second round ...

Also, I'm looking forward to reading your account of "The Tree to the Sea": it sounds like a wonderful trip. Although six years is a long intermission, from your route description and map on the HACC website, it sounds like it could be well worth the wait!

Take care and good luck with your 'charter' issues.

And now for something completely different, as Mr. Cleese would say. Below is info from by Toni Harting - the longtime editor of Nastawagan and the Wilderness Canoe Association - on a book he has written. Toni is a canoeing legend and any of us who know him or of him should be interested in this book from his challenging childhood.



The Devil's Grin aims to provide insight into, and information about, the mentality, philosophy, and motivation of the Japanese, especially the military, before and during the 1941 - 1945 war in the Pacific, as well as their system of civilian concentration camps in the Dutch East Indies colony in Southeast Asia

The book also presents the story of a young Dutch teenage boy developing into an eighteen-year-old man under brutal circumstances as a civilian prisoner of war in Japanese concentration camps in the Dutch East Indies. The story is formatted not as a conventional, detailed memoir but as an information-presenting, journalistic report inspired by, and to a large extent based on, my own experiences, observations, and thoughts as a civilian prisoner of war.

The purpose of this book is to provide an English-language source of information for the general public on the state of affairs in the Dutch East Indies colony, now called Indonesia, when the country was conquered and occupied by the Japanese during the Pacific War. Particular attention is paid to events taking place in the concentration camps where a great many Dutch nationals were incarcerated.

In the extensive collection of written history on this war, the events taking place in the Dutch colony have regrettably not received the attention they deserve. It is therefore my intention that this self-published book will remedy that unfortunate situation to some degree by making it available to as many people as possible as a free-of-charge, digital pdf file that can be downloaded from my website *www.tonihartingg.com*. A limited number of printed books is for sale to people living in Canada or the USA (see the website). Readers are encouraged to freely copy the pdf file in whole or in part for their own informational, educational, and/or other non-commercial purposes, and for unlimited non-commercial re-distribution, provided the following credit line is included: Used with permission. Copyright 2013, Antoni Harting. All rights reserved.

Editor's Notebook

My apologies for the lateness of this Spring Outfit. A very rare event happened in Toronto - the Maple Leafs made the playoffs and I was following them around - to Boston three times in their first round, seven game loss. So things got backed up due to a very Canadian pastime like canoeing.

This will be a very different summer for me as we have postponed our Tree to the Sea trip until next year due to funding and logistical problems. HACC Chief Guide Geoffrey Peake now resides in Zurich, Switzerland and he made me an offer I couldn't refuse - rambling through the Alps and touring around Italy and France for three weeks with some fine wining and dining, with nary a blackfly nor wild river in sight. I will have to learn to get used to it!

We plan to take in the famed Il Palio horse race in Siena, featured in the opening sequence of the James Bond film A Quantum of Solace. And we will see a day of the 100th Tour de France while staying at a friend's historic inn in Provence. Plus we will do some hut hiking and biking to have a few outdoor pursuits.

We are again indebted to Chris Rush for a fascinating encounter with a wolf on Victoria Island. His group captured it on video and stills and should be of interest to wildlife biologists. Wonder what Alex Hall thinks? We will feature some of that trip through that amazing landscape in a future outfit.

Also gracing our pages are Chris' trip mates on that Kuujjua trip, the incomparable L & L - Laco Kovac and Lynette Chubb, who continue their exploration of Ungava. For decades I had heard tales about Eaton Canyon on the now diverted Caniapisau River. It was a formidable obstacle and rarely travelled. Which made it perfect for L&L who specialize in the improbable and seemingly impossible.

Here's hoping you all have a great summer and wonderful trips if you're lucky enough to be headed out. Please think of Che-Mun if you have something particularly interesting or a tale that would interest our knowledgeable readers. I will raise a glass of fine French and Italian wine to you all in July. Ciao!

–Michael Peake

Canoesworthy

Le Nord pour Tous or, in English, "the North for all" is the name chosen by Quebec's new government, the Parti Québécois, for its version of the previous Liberal government's Plan Nord.

"We want to develop the North in a responsible manner to maximize the spinoffs for the local communities and all Québécois," Quebec Premier Pauline Marois said May 7 in Chibougamou.

At $868 million, the PQ plan comes in at about $20 million less for infrastructure than Plan Nord, announced two years ago in Quebec City.

The new plan's regional northern development fund will divvy out the money for the construction of roads, social housing, provincial parks and training centres.

Le Nord pour Tous plan does not change the number of social housing units to be built in Nunavik until 2016, but it doesn't increase that number, either.

Le Nord pour Tous sets up a new secretariat for northern development under the province's department of natural resources, mandated to produce a northern development strategy. That will focus on the social development of northern communities, respect for the environment and biodiversity, and economic development, the PQ said.

The secretariat will also offer assistance to northern communities and set up a round table for First Nations and Inuit.

Liberals called "Le Nord pour Tous" a poor carbon copy of their Plan Nord.

The PQ plan was also criticized for backing away from the Liberals' commitment to protect the 50 per cent of the lands in its North by 2035.

The Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador criticized the lack of consultation leading up to the new plan, with its president, Ghislain Picard, saying "we're the last ones to know."

The Canadian Boreal Initiative called the PQ plan a "step backwards" because the government now plans to protect only 12 per cent of the North as parks or protected areas instead of 20 per cent under the Liberals.

A Nunavik graphic arts designer says the region needs its own flag. Quebec's flag features a blue and white fleur-de-lis, the stylized lily, a traditional coat-of-arms symbol that followed French settlers to New France. Canada's flag displays the red and white maple leaf, a long-time symbol celebrating the nature and environment of what is now Canada.

So why shouldn't Nunavik have its own distinctive flag, asks Thomassie Mangiok, who runs Pirnoma Technologies, a design and computer support company, from his home town of Ivujivik on Nunavik's Hudson Strait coast.

Nunavik doesn't have the self-governance it craves, but at least it could have a flag to remind everyone of what they want, said Mangiok and it could be a powerful symbol to inspire people, Mangiok suggests.

At the recent meeting in Ivujivik, Mangiok presented his concept for a flag to bring Nunavimmiut closer to their "symbolic environment."

The blue and white flag echoes the colours of the Quebec flag — but that's where the resemblance between Mangiok's flag and that of Quebec ends.

Mangiok opted for those colours because these are the chief colours found in the Arctic.

In other respects, his design is also taken straight from nature.

The design echoes shape of a bird, with feathers reaching the sky to show self-governance and freedom, Mangiok said.

The large wings represent strength and the number of feathers equals the number of communities in Nunavik. \The design also evokes the shape of a caribou antlers.

Mangiok hopes such a flag could help overcome the geographic and cultural isolation many feel, referring to a statement in Plan Nunavik which says that Nunavik "has suddenly lost the points of reference provided by its traditional lifestyle, and this loss has greated a wide gap between the generations."

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Alone with a Very Lone Wolf

Story and Photos By CHRIS RUSH

Last August, one week into our Kuujjua river trip, late in the afternoon, we spotted a lone white arctic wolf following us intently along the shore. This was unusual as the wolves we had seen earlier had been couples that howled at us but kept their distance. It cantered along the shore, following us for a few kilometers, probably trying to figure out what we were. I am fairly certain that it had never seen a human before, as the last people to canoe this river were the Baird brothers in 2008, and the Inuit never come this far northeast from Ulukhaktok. After a while, disappointingly, it appeared to have lost interest as I could no longer see it. Later in the day we hit what looked like a nice fishing hole. Mark, in a solo canoe, had so far been shut out of catching big fish, so he immediately beached his canoe with the intention of pulling out his rod before anyone else did. Bringing up the rear of the convoy, my canoe partner John and I had stopped paddling and as we drifted, I looked ashore and saw the wolf pop up over the ridge right in front of our canoe, about a hundred meters from Mark standing on the shore. It stopped very briefly, we made eye contact, and I got the feeling it was thinking about whether or not to jump in the river and confront us. I grabbed my camera and yelled "Guys, photo-op". However,

the wolf pivoted its head and spotted Mark, then took off towards him. Normally I would have immediately headed to shore to help Mark, but he is a vet with lots of experience with big dogs, and he had been regaling us with stories of how to react during wild animal encounters (such as a previous bear encounter he had had, but that's another story…), so I wasn't initially very worried. And neither was the other canoe which included Dave Plante, another vet. So we watched and filmed a very interesting encounter.
The wolf approached one side of the canoe with Mark, who had grabbed a paddle, on the other side. It then circled a few times, once stopping briefly to vomit, then decided to attack. Almost hilariously (at least to me!), Mark yelled at the wolf "I'm not your food", then started swinging his paddle to protect himself, with the wolf snapping at it. Perhaps somehow understanding Mark's words, it then changed focus and attacked the actual canoe, biting the side. Mark, instinctively worrying about damage to the relatively fragile folding canoe (basically PVC plastic stretched over an aluminum frame), then more actively tried to fend the wolf off in an attempt to protect the canoe. It briefly relented, which allowed him to get into the canoe and paddle away.

However, not wanting to let its "victim" get away too easily, it jumped in the water and locked its jaws on the bow of the boat. Mark back-paddled towards us, but seeing that the wolf was not going to let go (maybe it thought it had a "death grip" on this strange canoe-animals throat?), whacked it on the head a few times with his paddle. Stubbornly, it initially wouldn't let go, then after deciding to release its victim, got its teeth stuck on the bow line. So Mark gingerly paddled backwards until the poor thing could free itself. The wolf swam quickly to shore and briefly disappeared. A few minutes later it must have had a change of heart, as it reappeared and continued to eye us. Obviously he still thought there might be a meal in it for him. Instead of taking the shotgun out and dispatching the wolf, Dave set off a few bear bangers which seemed to get its attention as it then took off over the ridge never to be seen again by us. The final damage: an exasperated Mark with some souvenir bite holes in his canoe, adorned with wolf fur.
So, a very strange wolf encounter. I postulate that the wolf either mistook us for "weird caribou" swimming the river, or was very

hungry and was taking a chance on a "new animal" for a meal. Or it was rabid, in which case if Mark had been bitten, we would have had a real problem being hundreds of kilometers from the nearest village.
Here is a link to the video that Dave Plante put together from our footage, so you can make your own mind up about the experience: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwtcv2KbiZ4

Eaton Alive in Ungava

photo: Lynette Chubb

Laco Kovas with the Hammer of Thor on the lower Payne River in Ungava and (right) a panorama of the magnificent and remote Eaton Canyon on the Caniapisau River.

*The following is an excerpt of a slide presentation by **Laco Kovac and Lynette Chubb** of Ottawa about their travels on the formidable rivers of northern Quebec. The pair have been featured in Che-Mun many times.*

As far as we know, our descent of the Charpentier River was a first. We very much enjoy exploring and mapping new routes by taking Canadian topographic maps and marking them with canoeing information as we traverse the landscape. I have now published 12 sets of these maps at KartPlenEr.org, a free database of recreational maps for Quebec.

To access the Leaf River, we drove from Ottawa to the Caniapiscau Reservoir, and flew to the headwaters of the Charpentier at Lac Nedlouc. Once we paddled the Leaf to Tasiujaq we chartered another float plane back to our car. Being limited for time to do this trip, we chose this expensive access. A considerably cheaper route would be to take commercial flights in and out of the airports of Umiujaq and Tasiujaq, doing the complete traverse, which has been paddled quite a few times. Our descent of the Charpentier – 130 km - took 11 days, while the remaining 320 km of the Leaf took us 10 days – a good illustration of the difficulty of a first descent versus the well known, powerful current and "no-portage, train-ride" of the Leaf. We also both experienced our first solo trip together and our first caribou migration together. The tidal currents of Ungava are a major factor at the end of this trip - they rival the Bay of Fundy for world records. The final rapid on the Leaf grows from a benign R-1 or 2 to a deadly R5 or 6, depending on the tide.

George

In 2008 we joined friends to paddle the De Pas and George Rivers, both fairly well known. This trip is accessed easily by car to Sept Iles, train to Schefferville, and a 20 km taxi shuttle to Iron Arm. We paddled the entire 620 km in 22 days, with lots of time for the awesome hiking the open landscape begs for. We strongly recommend budgeting extra time for all the incredible hiking opportunities to be found around every turn of this river. Again, strong currents towed us inexorably out to the tides of Ungava where we rode the ebb quickly to our end point at Kangiqsuallujuaq. From there, we arranged to ship our canoes back to Montreal on the last outbound cargo ship of the season and boarded a commercial flight back to our cars in Sept Iles. We'd do this trip again if we did not have so many more rivers to explore!

Caniapiscau

After the well-known George, we turned our eyes northward, seeking unexplored territory again. Our gaze landed on Chubb Crater, a tiny circle in the Chubb family's 1960 World Atlas that Lynette, as a child, had discovered she shared her last name with. Years ago, we had looked at this remote crater, and, seeing that it gave rise to at least two rivers, we had researched access but after getting a $10,000 quote for a charter flight into it, we had shelved that idea for when we won the lottery. However, much has changed since then: the Crater was renamed Cratere du Nouveau Quebec for a few years before finally being reinstated with its traditional Inuit name, Pingualuit. And in 2004 the new parc Nationale Pingualuit was formed, with regular charter flights organized for access between Kuujjuaq and the Crater since 2007. Air access to the park is now available at MUCH cheaper rates. But getting our canoe there was still expensive.

We decided to solve that problem by paddling our canoe there. We looked at the map and found out that the Caniapiscau River would get us to Park Headquarters in Kuujjuaq where we could store the canoe to await our return for a crater trip the following year. The headwaters of the Caniapiscau used to be accessible by car via the James Bay and Trans-Taiga roads, but the diversion of the river has left nothing but a dry scar of a riverbed to follow, so we decided to access the river further down via a main tributary, the du Sable. In 2009 we again drove to Sept Iles and rode the train north to Schefferville where we took a very short float plane hop to the headwater lakes of the du Sable. Again the unmapped tributary was a challenge, one of the steepest rivers we have ever paddled. I developed this chart, available on our trip website, to compare the elevation profiles of most of the north Quebec rivers I have researched. The blue du Sable section drops fast until it joins the Caniapiscau just above the mythical Eaton Canyon. This was our most difficult but also most beautiful trip to-date.

The Caniapiscau can also be accessed, below Eaton Canyon, via the Goodwood or the Swampy Bay Rivers. Traditional routes follow the less steep Swampy Bay, where an old trading post still stands. We chose the du Sable because we did not want to miss seeing the spectacular but seldom seen Eaton Canyon, after which the Caniapiscau evens out into a series of spectacular drops over falls described by their geological names. On this river we travelled alone again and did not see another human for 29 days. Of our 32 paddling days, we had no rain on only three days, typical Nunavik weather. The Caniapiscau becomes the Koksoak at its confluence with the Melezes. We paddled into Kuujjuaq where we checked in with Park Pingualuit staff to organize storage of our canoe with Air Inuit who would be flying it on an early cargo flight into Park Pingualuit in the spring of 2010.

photo: Laco Kovac

Vachon

So – we were all set to paddle the Vachon from the base of Chubb Crater in 2010. Though we've travelled on our own quite a bit, we do actually enjoy trip companions – both for the company and for the safety factor. Our trips tend to be too far, too long, and too much whitewater for most other canoeists, so it's hard to find people who have the right combination of expertise, time and money. On this trip, we were heading off alone again until about 2 weeks before departure, when Curt and Wes were suddenly free to join us. Having not pre-paddled their canoe north the year before, they brought along a PakCanoe in a bag and built it on site the day before we headed downriver. Those PakCanoes sure simplify logistics! Curt and Wes also brought with them a big gun, which Lynette and I have never travelled with before. We have relied on bear bangers and bear-spray and we have survived to tell the stories... so far... though a photograph of a starving polar bear 160 km inland - up the Caniapiscau - was being passed around the community after we arrived there the year before.

Pingualuit Crater

Finally. A Chubb gets to visit Chubb Crater again! *[Ed. Note: The crater was named after prospector Fred Chubb, who saw it from U.S. reconnaissance photos and actually never got there.*] Our Chubb was all excited and as we flew towards it, the crater rim rose above the height of land like a ridge above the endless plateau of the pond-speckled tundra. Our view suddenly broke over the rim and the perfect circle of deep indigo blue was revealed below us. As we circled the perimeter, the skim of melting ice over the surface sparkled in the sun like a million sequins against the indigo depths below it. The pilot treated us to a full circle before turning back over the Park's Manarsulik base camp on the shore of Lac LaFlamme to approach the sand runway for an expert short landing. As we portaged our gear to camp, we spied our well-scarred but faithful old canoe waiting for us under the first cabin. We were happy that we had budgeted four days to explore the crater before heading downriver and took full advantage of the parks comfortable base camp amenities. We hiked to the crater on the first day to taste the second purest water in the world and on the second day hiked all the way around it – an 18 km route around the top of the rim from where we could scout with binoculars our prospective route down the Vachon River. Curt and Laco hiked in to scout the Puvirnituq's Sanguamaaluk Canyon on our third day. On day four we organized and assembled our gear ready for departure the next morning, and of course, had that last hot shower. The park staff, all Inuit, were wonderfully hospitable, informative and helpful in every way.

photo: Laco Kovac

Lynette Chubb standing alongside the remote and rugged Eaton Canyon on the Caniapisau River.

Vachon

The Vachon started off with what we call "meagres", meaning a very meagre amount of water flowing between the boulder studded drops between shallow ponds, but after a couple days we were finally into paddleable rapids which for the next 200 km pretty well didn't stop. The river stayed relatively small with a steady drop of both fun and challenging rapids as the four of us descended south and east towards Ungava Bay again. I only remember one portage/lift-over past an R5 drop. We saw lots of caribou and waterfowl, only three black bears and as soon as we joined the Payne estuary, seals were sliding off the shoreline around every corner. Luckily no polar bears were sighted, but also, sadly no belugas either, except from the air on our flight in.

The Payne was completely different from the Vachon – it was huge, with such powerful tidal currents that we had to plan to paddle only on the high, slack and early ebb tides. Freshwater was available from streams along the steep fiord-like shoreline and campsites were difficult to find. The Payne is also the site of a number of ancient monuments and archeological sites theorized to have been constructed by Norse Vikings in the 11th century. We were lucky to be able to visit both the Hammer of Thor and Pamiok Island with a number of huge ancient dwelling and cairn sites. We had such great conditions that we landed in Kangirsuk four days early where the four of us were greeted at the boat launch by municipality staff who helped us find an empty house we could rent for our short stay. We were able to make arrangements to go on a boat tour out into Ungava Bay with a local hunter, arrange storage for our canoe and hike the hills around the community before flying back to Ottawa again. We'd like to thank Curt and Wes again for their very amenable company on this adventure.

Over the winter we arranged with Park Pingualuit staff to have our canoe transported from Kangirsuk back to the Crater. It was lashed on top of dead caribou on the komatiks they towed behind their skidoos when they used our canoe as an excuse to go on a caribou hunt. They stashed it for us back at the Crater to await our return in July 2011 to paddle the Puvirnituq River from the base of the crater again, but this time west to Hudson Bay.

Puvirnituq

For our 2011 adventure, we were lucky again to find two wonderful and brave people who agreed to join us on yet another of our Ungava adventures. Dot is an instructor with our canoe club and Chris is a Montreal doctor and expedition canoe tripper. We landed at the Crater to behave like tourists again – it is such a unique feeling to stand on the rim of that 3 km hole and to try to imagine the power of the meteor impact that blasted it out of that solid rock. This time Laco took the opportunity to actually *run* the 11.3 km circle around the crater rim, covering the jumbled meteor blast zone in 2 hrs, 4 minutes & 34 seconds, jokingly claiming a new world record... for now.

Again our faithful old boat waited, quite worse for the wear by now, after 10 years and nine major expeditions, so we spent a few hours patching her up for her last real journey.

This year, the ice was a little later leaving so we launched into the channel that had melted between the shoreline and the ice pack and

headed down the *meagres* of the Vachon before turning north this time to portage up over the height of land to get into the Hudson Bay drainage basin. Here we had our first experience hauling over ice. We learned a lot fast. Most of the ice had been melting in vertical columns called "candle ice" and we learned that the black ice would fracture, bend and sink under us, but the white ice would stay strong enough to walk across. Our drysuits certainly helped our sense of confidence! The canoes slid easily and the only awkward moments were at the edges of the floes. But these edges also gave us a truly magical experience as the candles would break off and tinkle against each-other, giving us a sense of being in a vast hall full of tinkling chandeliers.

We travelled the lee side of the frozen lake where the wind had blown the ice pack free of the shoreline so all in all we had only about 500 m of hauling to do, just enough to enjoy this new experience!

The Puvirnituq was a bigger river than the Vachon, but due to the permafrost tundra, still subject to the vagaries of precipitation levels. We paddled the 413 km of the Puvirnituq in three weeks, charting it as we went - our maps are again uploaded and available at CartesPleinAir. The top canyon featured lots of both fun and challenging whitewater with occasional portages and lift-overs. An advantage of travelling in a group is being able to cooperate to make the carries much easier. Chris learned on this trip that a tiny bit of assistance on the end of a tether attached to either end of his canoe could stop it from weather-vaning in the wind, making carrying it across the open tundra possible. If the terrain was grassy enough, dragging was the next best technique.

The big lakes can be tough to negotiate in a wind and wind is pretty well a ruling factor when travelling the barrens by canoe – though we stalled out for a few windbound days, we managed excellent progress when the weather cooperated. The lower river featured much bigger water with more of a pool and drop character with many beautiful falls to appreciate. Though we spent a lot of time scouting the bigger rapids, many of them were quite a joyride along the shoulders of the biggest waves. Managing to keep to our schedule, we often had the time to set up camp and enjoy our scouting trips as hikes – there were a few sections where the river split around large islands or into different channels and we were able to take the time to explore all the options and decide on the best route. The fishing was astounding and the caribou a never-ending source of entertainment. The foxes were downright cheeky and though we saw many huge wolf prints, only one wolf alerted us to his presence by howling territorially at us from a parallel ridge. A polar bear was sighted in the park, luckily, after we had departed.

This river ended at the community of Puvirnituq on the shores of Hudson Bay, where the 1 or 2 meter tides were no issue at all. We were greeted by a pack of children who joyfully mobbed us at the shore where we landed and then jumped in for a swim while we southerners shivered inside our layers of fleece and Gore-Tex. A local artist, who I caught napping in his stone-dust strewn workshop, snapped up the opportunity to trade for or buy our worn out canoe and we sadly watched it disappear up the road balanced on the back of his grandson's 4-wheeler. We were again welcomed by the community, who celebrated our arrival with a parade and the municipality staff again found us an empty house to live in while we were there. Oh... heaven is a hot shower at the end of a long cold trip... We thank Dot and Chris both for their immeasurable contributions and their wonderful company on this adventure with us.

photo: Lynette Chubb

Laco Kovac on a ridge above the rarely paddled Puvurnituq River with tents below.

Epilogue:

Paddling Nunavik is not for the faint of heart. Whether we travel alone or with companions, we are conservative and cautious, not wanting to risk getting ourselves into trouble so far from help. Though we do carry a SPOT and a satellite phone for dire emergencies, we strategize to never have to use them. We carry all the emergency gear, much of it attached to our persons in the event of ever being separated from our boat. We carry fishing gear and extra rations in the event we can't make our timetable. We invest in good quality equipment which will protect us in conditions which can range from thick clouds of biting insects in steaming mid-summer heat to howling winter gales. But most of all, we take care of and look out for each-other. Small issues or actions can quickly produce big consequences if they are ignored or neglected. If you plan it right, paddling Nunavik can make precious memories for a lifetime. And we doubt we'll ever have to race anybody for the last campsite!

CANOESWORTHY *continued*

Barry Prentice, a professor of supply-chain management at the University of Manitoba, wrote the following in the Winnipeg Free Press.

A proposal to build an ice road from Churchill to Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, has been presented with the endorsement of both federal and provincial politicians. Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation Minister, Steve Ashton, is quoted as recommending seasonal roads: «They are dollar for dollar one of the most cost-effective transportation initiatives you can bring into place.»

The Nunavut ice road provides a case for comparison with one of the several cargo carrying airships that are being proposed.

In prior assessments of cargo airships and ice road trucking, this author excluded the costs of building and maintaining the seasonal infrastructure. Provincial bureaucrats advised that even if no trucks were used to carry goods to the remote communities, ice roads would still be built because of social issues. First Nations residents look forward each year to this brief period when they can visit friends and relatives in the otherwise remote communities. Consequently, airship cost comparisons were limited to the direct costs of ice road trucks.

In the case of building a new ice road connection between Manitoba and Nunavut, the «social road» argument does not hold. This allows the total cost of the 650-kilometre ice road for freight to be compared to a 463-kilometre flight for a cargo airship service.

The economic model for this analysis is set out in a forthcoming paper that compares the costs of airships and gravel roads. Key variables in the model are adjusted to reflect the lower construction costs of ice roads and the higher freight rates charged by ice road truckers.

The airship used in the model is the VariaLift ARH-50. According to data provided by the developer, this all-metal, rigid airship could fly three cycles per day between Rankin Inlet and Churchill. The annual fixed costs of $8.3 million include the aircraft lease, insurance and staff. A hangar that could handle up to 25 airships adds $3.2 million to annual fleet costs. The variable costs per trip are $7,782.

The airship carries 50 tonnes and is assumed to operate 300 days per year.

Freight rates on ice roads are set competitively. In 2013, ice road truck rates are about 2.5 times the rates paid for these trucks on all-weather roads. In addition, fuel surcharges could be higher on a new ice road farther north. In this model, trucks rates are $0.32 per tonne-kilometre, based on an empty return.

Utilization is the key to the economics of infrastructure. The cost of the Nunavut ice road is estimated to be $25 million build, and $12 million to rebuild it every year. The average cost of the ice road is determined by dividing the total public expenditure by the number of trucks.

The volumes moved by trucks in the 90 days are spread out over 300 days in the airship. More frequent delivery reduces logistics costs. Holding inventories for up to nine months can add 10 to 25 per cent to the cost of using the ice road. Seasonal roads also lead to construction delays that could be avoided with year-round airship service.

Roads and airships are more complementary than competitive. Airships can fly anywhere and operate without ground infrastructure. Airships can be a pioneer mode of transport that builds the traffic to the point where the economics favour the construction of an ice road, or at higher volumes, an all-weather road.

Airships could lower the cost of building all-weather roads by relocating heavy equipment and moving bridge sections. Once the road opens, the airship can serve as a feeder system to augment the traffic on the road.

Search and rescue aircraft, personnel and mission-management must be improved to keep the national search and rescue system at current standards for the coming years, the Auditor General of Canada said in his spring report released in April.

Search and rescue operations in Canada's North are conducted first by local authorities, such as the RCMP, Canadian Rangers, and volunteers.

And, if more assistance is needed, federal authorities with greater resources — the military and the Coast Guard — are called upon, with the Air Force as the lead agency for calls on land.

Nunavut and Nunavik are served by two different search and rescue regions, known as SSRs, one based in Trenton, Ont. and Winnipeg, and the other in Halifax, which serves southern Baffin Island.

From these bases, Hercules aircraft, which are more than 20 years old, respond to calls in the North.

And, according to Ferguson's report, these aging Hercules lack modern equipment and take longer to service due to shortages in spare parts.

Of the 13 in service for search and rescue, two at a time are in maintenance, which leaves 11 available for service.

As well, the Griffon and Cormorant helicopters now in use are in too short supply to cover operations for the coming years, with the Cormorants in need of upgrades to be better suited to the North, Ferguson said.

Faced with nosediving caribou herd populations and tougher government restrictions on caribou hunting, aboriginal organizations and governments in Quebec and Labrador have set up a body called the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table.

The new group wants to become "a united and powerful voice that will endeavour to preserve caribou and the deep relationship that aboriginal people have long held with it," said an April joint news release from groups including Makivik Corp., the Innu Nation and the Nunatsiavut government.

The round table's members want the governments of Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, to take "significant and immediate actions" to:

- fully protect the calving grounds from any exploration and development activities;
- give priority for the aboriginal subsistence hunt in accordance with aboriginal rights and existing treaty rights; and,
- create a co-management board that would include meaningful and significant participation form all aboriginal peoples connected to the herds.

And all members agreed they must slow the "critical decline" of the George River caribou herd and the "uncertain future" of the Leaf River and Torngat Caribou Herds.

The George River herd population is currently estimated at about 27,600 animals.

That's about a third of the roughly 74,000 caribou which were estimated to be in the herd two years ago and much lower than the 385,000 caribou spotted in 2001.

The results of the 2011 population survey of Nunavik's Leaf River caribou herd established the size of the herd at 430,000 caribou — give or

CANOESWORTHY continued

take about 98,000 animals. Adult survival rates and the number of calves produced were low, the survey found.

Members of the round table will meet again in early April to make decisions on actions and measures to protect the George River and Leaf River caribou herds.

Meanwhile, a group representing caribou outfitters in Quebec are suing the Quebec government, which placed a moratorium on all hunting of the George Rover herd in addition to limits in the Leaf River.

Chinese miner MMG Resources Inc. has put the brakes on its Izok Corridor zinc-copper mine and port project in western Nunavut, which was recently accepted for an environmental review by the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

The NIRB process begins with a scoping of the project that's up for review, followed by the development of environmental impact statement guidelines.

But now, the scope of the project detailed in the 412-page Izok Corridor project proposal submitted to the NIRB in August 2012 will change.

MMG's letter offers no date for submission of a new proposal.

But MMG said it's "recently identified some additional project design options with potential to improve the economic viability of the project."

These include changes to the mining schedule and production rates, improvements to the execution plan, and the possible addition of a new property to the mining resources.

"MMG is currently initiating a process to further develop and evaluate these options so that they can be considered for incorporation in the feasibility design," the company's letter to the NIRB said.

The changes associated with an updated Izok Corridor project design, including the potential addition of another property, will be located within Nunavut, MMG said.

This scuttles the mining giant's former timeline, which could have seen construction jobs start flowing to people in Nunavut's Kitikmeot region by 2015, with production starting in 2018.

Minmetals Resources, MMG's parent, a global resources company that explores, develops and mines base metal deposits around the world, is owned 75 per cent by the Chinese government, although MMG is headquartered in Melbourne, Australia.

It's one of the world's largest producers of zinc and also produces significant amounts of copper, lead, gold and silver.

The initial proposal for the Izok mine, with an open pit and underground mine under Izok Lake, called for a two-million-tonne per year concentrator, which would also process the ore from the High Lake mine.

As for the proposed transportation route, it was to have been a 350-kilometre all-weather road to connect the Izok Lake mine to High Lake, a second zinc-copper mine, with two open pit mines and one underground mine.

An ambitious project, which seemed too large, costly, and unimaginable to build just 10 years ago, now appears to be bringing a major transportation hub to one of Nunavut's most picturesque places.

The Bathurst road and port project, which used to be known by its acronym, BIPAR, has now lost an "A" and is called BIPR.

But, more importantly, the project has gained two major mining companies as key supporters, who want to see the port and road built for their future mines in western Nunavut.

While neither company, Xstrata Zinc Canada, or Sabina Gold and Silver Corp., knows whether their mine projects south of Bathurst Inlet will proceed, they're progressing with their plans for BIPR — which, by itself, will be a huge undertaking.

BIPR's first stage — which could start as early as 2015 — would see the construction of a wharf to serve giant ice-class vessels (up to 50,000 tonnes), which would deliver fuel and bulk cargo to the port, and eventually serve to transport zinc concentrate to Europe.

BIPR would also include a dock to handle barges serving the Kitikmeot communities, a 200-person camp and services, a 220-million-litre diesel fuel tank farm, a 40 MW power plant (producing four times more electricity than the power plants in Kuujjuaq or Iqaluit), and a 1,200-metre airstrip and heliport, which would see 6,400 round-trip flights during the four-year construction period.

The first phase of the project would also include the construction of 10-m wide, 83-kilometre road, with as many as 27 bridges.

The Nunavut Impact Review Board recently received a new project proposal from the companies, with more detailson environmental issues, wildlife protection, marine and road traffic than an earlier version submitted to the regulator last December.

That new proposal will determine the guidelines for the project's future draft environmental impact statement.

Russian explorers proved it is possible to drive from Russia to Canada across the North Pole, in buses with bloated tires over drifting ice, using a pickaxe to clear the way.

Their two-and-a-half-month hitherto untried odyssey this spring aimed to road test the hand-crafted vehicles on ice and water, conduct a few scientific experiments, and bring together a band of adventurers drawn to the vast and pristine Arctic, expedition leader Vassili Ielaguine said during a stopover in Ottawa.

At the 'speed of a (farm) tractor' or about 10 kilometres per hour and carrying three tonnes of donated diesel fuel and supplies, they traveled more than 4,000 kilometres in 70 days from the Russian archipelago Severnaya Zemlya (or Earth North), after being dropped off by a Russian icebreaker, to the pole and then to Resolute Bay in Canada's far north.

Their two bright red vehicles were built around two-liter Toyota diesel engines and using old parts from prototypes that some of the team had used back in 2009 to drive from Russia to the North Pole and double back.

During this trip, the seven men came across a handful of polar bears, which "did not appear to be aggressive," said Ielaguine, as well as seals.

But it was a group of mustachioed walruses on the Canadian side that left the biggest impression on the wary travelers.

They also had an opportunity to see "exceptional aurora borealis light up the entire sky," he said.

At one point "Heaven helped us," said Ielaguine, describing coming upon a wide chasm that appeared too dangerous to cross and almost forced them to take a long detour, risking that they might run out of fuel.

photo: Laco Kovac

The Payne River, also called the Arnaud flows from 60-mile long Payne Lake in the centre of northern Quebec down to Ungava Bay. Unlike the rocky and rortuous rivers that flow west into Hudson Bay, the Ungava Rivers have long and graceful rapids that seem to extend forver, and create quite an optical illusion when you run them. Lynette Chubb and Laco Kovac have been criss-crossing Ungava for several summers. This lovely shot on a calm and sunny day from above the Payne shows several caribou crossing the river. When the HACC went down we saw a black bear, a polar bear and a muskox with 60 miles of one another.

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