



**WINTER 2004**

**THE JOURNAL OF CANADIAN WILDERNESS CANOEING**

**OUTFIT 115**



— Troy Gipps

**INTO DEEPEST LABRADOR --** Jim Niedbalski heads up fateful Susan Brook into the heart of Labrador 100 years after Leonidas Hubbard, Dillon Wallace and George Elson. Hubbard would later die in the attempt. Niedbalski was part of last summer's landmark Hubbard Memorial Canoe Expedition which retraced the famed route a century later. They are the first group to complete this route. See their full story starting on Page 6.

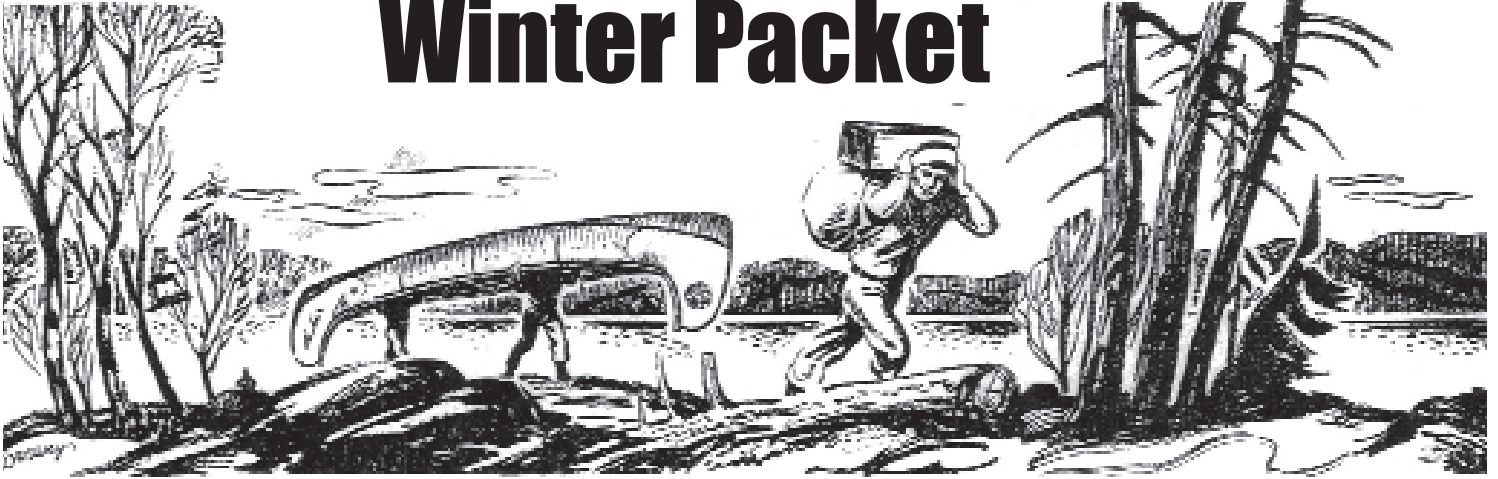
## **Still Lured by the Labrador Wild**

**Page 6**

## **Some 'Big Trip Tribe' observations**

**Page 2**

# Winter Packet



*Our coverage of the tragic disappearance of Daniel Pauzé and Susan Barnes in Labrador last summer produced the most thoughtful reactions we have ever had to an article. Here are some of those comments leading off with the words of an incomparable northern traveller - Garrett Conover.*

Although I didn't know either Susan or Daniel, they are "our tribe" of travelers and thus the whole thing is very compelling and close. Those of us who favour ambitious trips in the better remnants of remaining wild lands are so very cognizant of the wild-card called luck. "We spend our careers honing physical and judgment skills and accruing more and more empirically gained expertise, but always knowing that the wild-card in the deck exists with undiminished power no matter how skilled we become. The fact is, good and bad luck can emerge for any of us at any time. At times, and for some, that can happen in an overpowering war, whether we are crossing a street or crossing Ungava.

"Because we are alive we get to accept this bargain, or deal, or fact because we have no choice. We do it all the time and usually fairly unconsciously. Within the "Big Trip Tribe" this is so acceptable and a natural part of the package we usually don't even mention it among ourselves, it is simply understood.

"This is where perception and care, so eloquently identified in the final paragraphs of your essay, emerges as a point of relativity, and takes on a form that questions responsibility. Anyone with a passion for engagement with the wilds in serious long-term ways is always struggling to find a language to describe the interest and drive and passion for those who regard such travel as "adventure", "fringe", "dangerous", "crazy", or "odd". We are forced

into "defense of thesis" mode by the puzzlement of ambient culture with no interest in such voluntary difficulty and no means of understanding what fuels the passion that makes such outings "fun" and "rewarding" for the practitioners.

"When tragedy strikes, we are all forced to re-evaluate our thoughts on this and answer to those who just don't get it. It's a good exercise. And sobering to be reminded with no holds barred how thin the margin is between good luck - and bad.

"My personal thinking is always rocking and shifting with new tides of data and ideas, and an event like this causes a bit of a surge and heightened awareness. So thank you, for your thought-provoking article

"Since 1991 I have carried a signed typed card in my wallet laminated to be waterproof.

"In the event of death in the wilds I wish to be left near or at the site or hidden in accordance to the best judgment of my companions. In the event of traumatic accident resulting in hospital care, the physicians, law, and all authorities should be aware that I do not wish to be kept alive by artificial support systems if a return to consciousness is unlikely."

"I realize that the current maze of legality, the maze of investigations and all that stuff would probably preclude any such wishes being realized. And that the likelihood of cancer, disease, accidents or violence are far more likely scenarios than being lucky enough to be in the wilds at the end; but at least anyone involved with my remains would know what I thought about it.

"On a much more upbeat note, we had a fabulous 59-day snowshoe and toboggan trip on the De Pas and George rivers from February 16 through April 15 last winter. Splendid beyond

belief and so fun and uneventful that I'm not even going to type up my trip notes."

I was just checking out *Ottertooth.com* and read your articles on the disappearance of Daniel and Susan.

"Daniel was a friend of mine and a fellow Canadian highpointer. He contacted me after reading about my climb of Ishpatina Ridge (which was featured on *Ottertooth.com* 2 years ago). Since then, I've met with him many times to discuss his trip to Labrador and we even planned on doing some western highpoints together in the near future.

"I had originally planned to climb Mt. D'Iberville/Caubvick last year with 3 other group members but my plans fell through when the coastal ice prevented our longliner from getting through to Nachvak Fjord. Daniel asked me to come along this year, but I decided not to go since I was moving to Calgary... where I am now. (In case you're wondering, I'm not the "other" partner Susan replaced. That was someone else.)

"He sent me many emails including his acquisition of one of your canoes and seemed incredibly excited. His last words to me were, "This will be the toughest trip I've ever done... If I survive." Those words came immediately to mind when I received some e-mail from his brother Michel in late August regarding the RCMP search which had begun for his brother and girlfriend. He even made up a 'rough' webpage which you may have seen already at [www.geocrat.ca](http://www.geocrat.ca). It's sad to hear about their disappearance and I'm very sad for their parents. Having a pair of worrisome parents myself, I can only imagine what they're going through right now... especially with the Christmas season

*Continued on Page 10*

Shortly after the last issue of *Che-Mun* came out, the Canadian Canoe Museum closed its doors in Peterborough.

This shocking situation continues and the famed repository of so much of Canada's paddling history is struggling to get its financial house in order and re-open again. The CCM who received millions in grant and sponsor money at the start, have done a superb job in creating a great looking destination but something isn't working properly.

This is the latest word in January from the Board - "Much has been done in restructuring the Museum since it closed last October, and in developing a plan for financial viability. The next several weeks will see intense work toward implementing the plan. The reopening of the Museum will depend upon the success of this work. There will be public announcements at significant stages along the road. Watch the Canoe Museum website at [www.canoemuseum.net](http://www.canoemuseum.net) for further information as it is available. And thank you for your support."

We came across a lovely little Web site on a cross country trip by a pair of young Scots, Abigail and Duncan Thomson from Edinburgh who, with little canoeing experience, have made their way half way across the continent and are overwintering before starting up again next year.

The name of their site - [www.canadabyland.org](http://www.canadabyland.org) - should be familiar, it was the phrase used by countryman Alexander Mackenzie upon reaching the ocean near Bella Coola in 1789.

## Canoesworthy

They wrote in an e-mail to *Che-Mun*, "Before we came to Canada we had office jobs in Edinburgh, UK. Duncan (age 31) was a mathematical programmer for a small company

making navigation software for marine vessels, and Abi (age 30) having just finished a degree worked in a bank. Both of us are now unemployed. We're supporting ourselves by renting out our apartment in Edinburgh through a letting agency. We don't know what we'll do if/when we reach the Pacific, but for the time being, we're happily spending winter in a small rented apartment in La Ronge: Abi and Duncan Thomson, P.O. Box 263, La Ronge SK, S0J 1L0.

"This year's plans are to leave from La Ronge as soon as Lac La Ronge's ice recedes (mid May to early June is the locals' prediction), rejoin the Churchill and over the Methye Portage. Then to Fort Chip, Peace River and the Fraser." We sent them a bunch of back issues to give them some canoe-based winter reading.

Nunavut's new film, television and media development fund is providing seven Nunavut production companies with a total of \$500,000 to kick start their film or video projects. Ann Hanson's Nuna Media is to receive \$41,000, money Hanson said will make it easier to find more financing for her ambitious \$7.5-million IMAX project called "Inuit - the People." Based on Inuit legend, the 45-minute film will explore the traditional Inuit view of animals and the environment.

Drumsong Communications, a joint-venture between filmmaker John Houston and Rankin Inlet's Natsiq Productions, receives \$100,000 for its

*Continued on Page 10*

## From the Editor

I knew that someone would know and I knew it would be one of you. *Che-Mun* subscribers are an amazing bunch - a collective pool of knowledge that I love to tap.

The question was; where is the Ptarmigan Rapids on the upper Dubawnt River that J.B. Tyrrell took a photo of? His 1893 photo appears on Page 12 of Outfit 114. It turns out my guess was very close.

I had surmised it was the long curving rapids coming out of Hinde Lake. Thanks to Brain Gnauck of Marquette, MI it seems I was just off by a few miles. He notes Ptarmigan Rapids as the two double-bar rapids about four miles out of Hinde Lake. He sent a copy of his annotated map and even a photo of them doing the rapids (into a bright morning sun). In my journal they were noted as the first set we scouted then ran but I had no name for them. That was before

the days of in-depth historical research. Many thanks, Brian.

The HACC has begun to prepare for another trip after missing last year. It will be a shorter, more southerly route than usual but a key cog in the fur trade route and a trip done in 1958 by Eric Morse.

Our working title is **Crown of a Continent: The Methye Portage**. The plan is to begin where Eric and three others did in 1958 - Ile-a-la-Crosse, the starting point for the famed Lonely Land Churchill River trip done in 1955 by *The Voyageurs*. But Eric headed west this time up into the very top of the Churchill River system in order to do the 12-mile Methye Portage into the Clearwater/ Athabasca systems and finish in Fort McMurray.

We're not sure if this will be another online trip yet and there are a couple of other variables but it sure is nice to be able to start planning for real again. We'll have more on this in Outfit 116.

And finally, I would like to thank all of you who took the time and consideration to respond and react to the passing of the Labrador canoeists, Daniel Pauzé and Susan Barnes. I was touched by the thoughtfulness of your comments.

Michael Peake



*Che-Mun is the official journal of the Hide-Away Canoe Club. It is a private enterprise which publishes four issues per year. We acknowledge the help of the Federal Publications Assistance Program (PAP#10704) for postage cost to issues mailed to Canada only. We welcome comments and feedback via e-mail at [che-mun@rogers.com](mailto:che-mun@rogers.com). Please visit our Web site at [www.ottertooth.com/che-mun](http://www.ottertooth.com/che-mun).*



## The Man Who Mapped the Arctic

**The Intrepid Life of George Back, Franklin's Lieutenant**

**By Peter Steele**

**Raincoast Books, Vancouver, 2003**

**288pp, \$39.95**

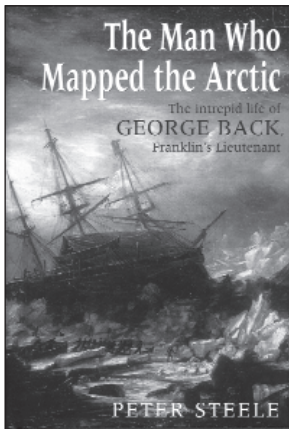
**ISBN: 1-55192648-2**

*Reviewed by Michael Peake*

It appears the Franklin Myth, and those around it, shows little signs of waning as we get deeper into yet another century.

A fine book has emerged on one of the giants of that era, George Back. Intrepid life, indeed.

Like so many of his era, young George was



serving in the Royal Navy before he turned 12 and was imprisoned by Napoleon's army for several years which certainly shaped his character.

Author Steele does a superb job on the narrative of this tales that

spans eight decades, always keeping it interesting. It reads like a great magazine piece and not a stuffy artifact of history. The section on Back's years as a French prisoner were particularly enlightening. Penal service at that time was vastly different than now, and he had the ability to move around the country experiencing different forms of incarceration as well as enjoying the bawdy pleasures of France at a young age. It was a life-changing meeting with an old Navy man at the time, that the teenage Back was told to shape up and harness his obvious talents that began Back's exemplary career as a leader, artist and tough traveller.

Add to that, a constant complainer about

mosquitoes in the north. That makes Back all the more real to us and flies [sic] in the face of the pious and puffy Franklin who could never bear to kill one of God's smallest creatures.

*The Man who Mapped the Arctic* is both a joy and revelation to read. George Back was a very real, and imperfect, character in an exciting era of hardship and heroism. Peter Steele keeps this story in touch with George Back's contemporary times and ours, putting it into context for both eras. In doing so he has done a service both to George Back and his grateful readers.

## Nunavik

**Arctic Quebec in Pictures**

**Photographs by Henrik Wittenborn**

**Province of Quebec, 2003. \$49.94**

**ISBN: 2-551-19632-9**

For years it was simply known as Ungava, which means 'far away.' But Nunavik, a variation of Nunavut, is the appellation that the large and rugged area known as Arctic Quebec goes by now.

There's nothing quite like Ungava, as some of us still call it. As a frequent summer visitor to its interior, I have found it to offer; beauty, hardship and heartbreaking toil and utter joy. This will be a hard book to find for some people as it is published by the Province of Quebec as part of their *Coins de Pays* series (Corners of our Land) and available through provincial book outlets.

It is a beautiful 10 by 13 inch full colour book containing more than 100 pages of photos by the Quebec-based photographer Heiko Wittenborn who has shot more than 10,000 exposures of Nunavik. The photos are from all seasons and in all shades of light. Although the book is entirely in French, it features simply pictures and small captions that most people can make their way through. Although it is certainly not a canoeing book there many rivers featured including the George and a spectacular aerial view of Limestone Falls (see opposite page!) on the

Caniapisau River. Wittenborn shoots of lot of stuff for Quebec Tourism and has clearly great access to all areas of the north. For many people wondering what all the fuss is about, this book will introduce them to the harsh, and largely unseen, beauty of Ungava/Nunavik.

## Ancient Mariner

**The Amazing Adventures of**

**Samuel Hearne**

**By Ken McGoogan**

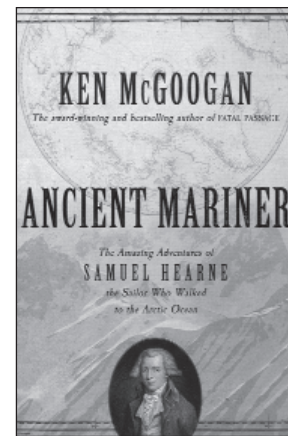
**HarperCollins, Toronto 2003**

**334pp, \$36.95**

**ISBN: 0-00-200098-9**

Ken McGoogan brings his non-fiction novelist approach to the iconic Samuel Hearne in *Ancient Mariner*. The idea of using actual dialogue attributed to long-dead people is off-putting to some but he shows it can work.

Hearne, like George Back was sent into the



Royal Navy at a young age in a very tough time—a century before Back.

McGoogan is great at weaving a tale with style and personal dialogue. He contends Coleridge's classic poem *The Rime of the*

*Ancient Mariner* is based on Hearne.

He also delves into the actual events of the Bloody Falls massacre and two centuries worth of theories on it. Fascinating stuff.

Hearne's epic 2200 mile journey across the breadth of northern Canada is enough for such a book, but there were many other wonderful accomplishments. McGoogan sometimes pushes too hard to spin-doctor Hearne's motives but he brings up all the facts and opinions and it all makes for absorbing reading for northern

# Recognition and responsibility II

By MICHAEL PEAKE

Editor

As you can judge by the Winter Packet letters on page 2, there was no shortage of thoughtful responses to an essay in this space in Outfit 114 on the loss of two canoeists in northern Labrador last summer.

Daniel Pauzé and Susan Barnes never returned from their trip down the Korok River or from the slopes of Mt. Caubvick in the Torngat Mountains. I tried, in that piece, to convey some sense of what it felt like to have advised the pair on their first major northern trip. I was gratified by the response of those, who in many cases, lead such trips and take inexperienced people into the wilds.

Amazingly, and apparently unrelated, I received this e-mail from a man looking to head up to northern Quebec next year in a similar journey - with his two sons. Here's some of the text of his e-mail;

"Me and my two boys (aged 7 & 9) are planning to do the Caniapiscou River from Schefferville to Kuujuaq in the summer of 2005. We have canoed together since each of them was 3 - 4. . . This year I am enrolling them into a whitewater kayak course (too small yet to handle canoe by themselves). I am trying to gather as much information on the Caniapiscou as I can. Do you know of anyone that has done it or knows about it? Also, I am looking for an ultralight 16' whitewater/tripping canoe (and deck) any suggestions where to look? . . Finally, any suggestions for getting sponsorship for wilderness trips and what angle can I take for this ie. kids?"

Given recent events I was somewhat taken aback at this message especially the suggestion of somehow exploiting his kids as an angle for getting sponsorship. But I stayed calm and replied;

"Thanks for your e-mail. I have not done the Caniapiscou and since it has a dam at its outlet, it is not a popular route. Hydro-Quebec releases water from the top occasionally - you may remember the drowning of 10,000 caribou 20 years ago from such a release.

"My conscience urges me to be blunt and say that I do not consider it a wise idea to take kids that young on a trip as isolated as Ungava. I believe it borders on the foolhardy to do it with only one boat and one adult. We have done seven trips in the region so I have some idea of



**Limestone Falls drownings on the Caniapiscou 1984.** the area. Also considering the last people to ask my help on an Ungava trip this past summer - never came back from it - I am particularly touchy on this subject. Also my brother's father-in-law drowned on the Tatshenshini when paddling with his son.

"It is a wonderful and challenging area for experienced northern canoeists. I suggest to find some to share this adventure with."

In light of last summer's events, I was more blunt than usual, something my conscience urged me to do. I was not going to be in a position of second-guessing myself again. Incredibly, this is the response I received from that e-mail.

"Thanks. I am truly foolhardy! You make it more exciting! I will contact Quebec-Hydro and do some research in this area. I am getting the topos within a week and will be studying the river hard! The remoteness and potential danger is why I am planning this trip for the summer of 2005 (almost two years in advance). I did

believe it would take a lot of planning and research and this is definitely turning out to be true. I have done a lot of northern wilderness trips solo (eg. Fawn River to Severn to Fort Severn, Little Abitibi, virtually all of Temagami before I was 25, etc.), but the opportunity to get my kids involved is exciting! I am now 50 and need to get these trips done before my body doesn't allow it any more."

Wow. And no, I am not making this up. It's too far-fetched to be made up. It reads like one of those exercises you do in preparedness training or in an ethics course. In truth, I actually thought it was a joke and not a very funny one. How could any father of young sons display such a cavalier and reckless attitude? My wife's immediate thought was; does the mother know about these plans?

As for sponsors, any ones I know, and I know a few, would run screaming from this potential tragedy and public relations disaster.

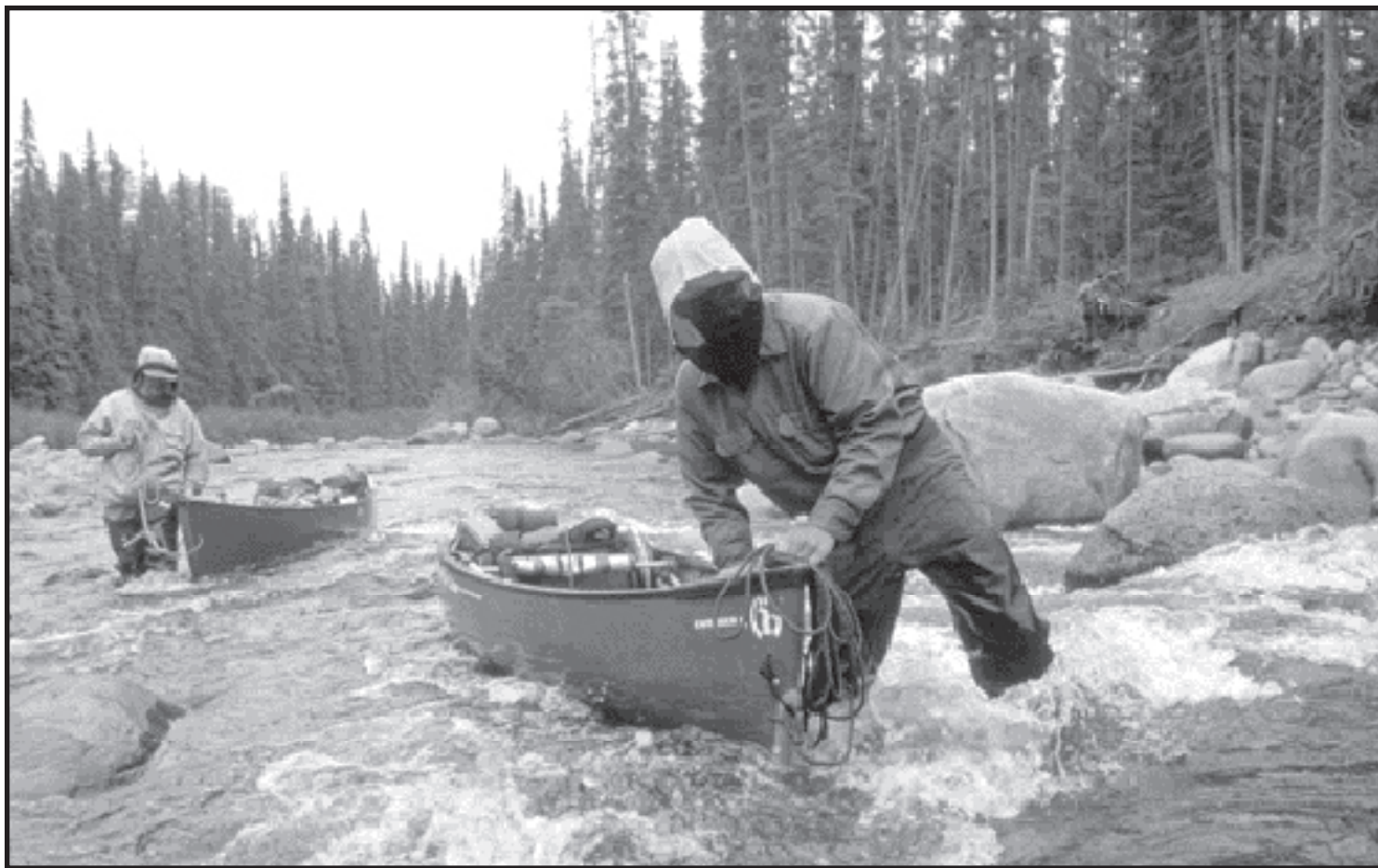
I partly blame it on the X-culture of TV. The extreme thrill shows that dominate much of the media seem to convince people that such risk is acceptable. It's all crap. A few idiots or Jackasses, as the movie of the same name indicates, want to risk life and limb purely for the ego-boosting thrill of being on TV or fighting a severe mid-life crisis.

Now canoeing the north with your kids is a great idea and done very successfully by many. But the idea of two young kids with one adult in a 16-foot boat in Ungava makes me very nervous. I would not do it, which doesn't mean it couldn't be done - safely. My brother Geoffrey would be a perfect candidate to lead such a trip. Why, because he's done a wealth of northern tripping in a leadership position and always displayed an unerring sense of what to do - and when. This guy may be a superb paddler but we won't know until he's done some true northern trips.

I hope that's the last time I ever see his name in print (which of course I can't reveal). Because I would dread reading it in a newspaper story next year.

- Ryan Remiorz, CP

# The Pull of The Lure



**BREAKING THE BROOK** -- Jim Niedbalski and Brad Bassi lean into the relentless and buggy upstream toil involved in tracking up Susan Brook, the wrong route into Labrador, fatefully done by Hubbard, Wallace and Elson a century ago. The group did a 650 mile 50 day retracing of the famed trip.

The only thing more stressful than crossing a big lake in a small fully loaded canoe is worrying about it before hand. Smallwood Reservoir (Lake Michikamau) was our biggest unknown from a planning standpoint and we knew our success or failure on the Big Blue would come down to one uncontrollable factor: wind. We reached the reservoir on the evening of July 20th after completing some fairly technical lining on a nameless river that cascaded into a shallow bay. Smallwood appeared to be about 15 feet low and there was an incredible amount of firewood piled up on her shores. We were greeted by glass conditions that evening and much to our utter and complete amazement very favorable paddling conditions persisted day-after-day and we were able to paddle 75 miles north across this formidable obstacle in just 4 1/2 days!

My memory of Smallwood is marked by spectacular sunsets that threw pink and yellow light onto giant wispy clouds and reflected hues of turquoise and hints of purple and light blue onto her glasslike surface. It was so still at times that it seemed as though the ripples from a single paddle stroke would

stretch to every shore. Although these near perfect conditions graced us, the section was still quite challenging. Aches and pains from the upstream phase still lingered and Caroline was just working into her paddling arms. The sheer size of the reservoir posed mental challenges as well. Distant hills remained distant even after a solid day of paddling. So it was easy to feel as though we weren't getting anywhere.

### The Mighty George

It was a dream that Hubbard never realized and it was like a miracle for us. To ride the back of the mighty George River is to experience a natural amusement park ride like no other. It's a massive, yet manageable, river that is broken into three main sections, each with its own distinct character: the Upper George, Indian House Lake, and the Lower George.

On July 26th we portaged over the height of land that separates Labrador from Quebec, which is only 200 meters wide and one foot higher than the lakes to the north and south. Hubbard Lake, Elson Lake and Cabot Lake (the tradi-



## Hubbard Memorial Expedition

tional starting point for many George River trips) quickly followed. We entered the Upper George on the 27th, paddled five or six rapids and spent the following day windbound, which worked out well because we needed a break. The next day we had the pleasure of watching over 100 caribou cross a fast water section above Lake LaCasse. We then came to the point where the George splits into three channels, each with an impressive gorge. We took the east channel and portaged river-right around the long Class IV & V drop.

August 3, 2003 - Silence and solitude atop a 1,900-foot barren peak above Indian House Lake. A strong north wind prevented forward progress for most of the day, so we took to the hills that rose up from the western shore to stretch our legs and get a better view of our surroundings. The lake is impressive from this vista. But it is what you can't see that truly boggles the mind. It is only on top of the largest rock at the very top of this hill with my nose to the wind that I can remove my headnet and get a moment of peace from the horrendous swarms of black flies that literally fill every square foot of this landscape. It is a winged firestorm of misery that defies mathematical comprehension.

We zipped through the first Class II section on the Lower George, traveling two miles in a near effortless ten minutes! The expedition was starting to feel like a vacation. A full day of toil was required on the Susan to make such mileage and we now found ourselves riding a giant ramp to the sea; content to watch majestic, boulder-strewn hills rise up from the riverbanks as we closed in on Ungava. There would be only three portages in 300 miles on the George. We were able to bypass many of the larger rapids on river-right by either paddling sneak routes or by lining. Our closest call came when Brad yelled, "Ah ... paddle hard, paddle hard!" We powered up and over the left edge of a 5-6 foot wave that dumped enough water over the gunwales to fill the canoe up halfway. We braced and managed to "steer" ourselves to shore.

### The Miserable Shack

The weather had been beautiful for eight straight days and with just 12 miles to go to reach the village we pulled into a small cove to set up camp for the evening. We had read about the strong tidal influence in this part of the river, but none of us had ever actually seen a 17-foot tide, so we didn't quite know what to expect. Now you see it, now you don't! We

could barely believe our eyes. It was as if someone had pulled the plug from the bottom of Ungava Bay. The cove we had paddled into had been completely drained by the outgoing tide. To make matters worse, a storm blew in overnight and the four of us spent the entire next day huddled in an eight-by-ten foot shack as gale force winds drove streams of water through cracks in the walls. Fifty days is a long time to spend with your own shadow, let alone with two or three other people. But we managed to pass the time by attempting to answer age-old questions such as, "Should we have beans and rice or rice and beans for dinner?" and we gained a deep appreciation for the weather resistant qualities of plywood. Conditions improved the

following morning and we timed the tide well enough to exit the cove and set out for the village. We reached Kangiqsualujjuaq in the early afternoon of August 12th after battling a very strong outgoing tidal current that made our final crossing of the mighty George a difficult, yet memorable one.

### Reflections

It is amazing to read a piece of history and then actually have the opportunity to pass through a landscape that has remained virtually unchanged since the moment those early explorers passed through it. There were many times this summer that I half expected to see Hubbard, Wallace and Elson walking just ahead when I looked up while dragging the boat over

rocks or while portaging heavy loads through the nearly impenetrable spruce forests and alder thickets. It was almost as if we were doing the trip with them. There are so few places left where one has the opportunity to feel a true connection to history. Labrador's vast interior is one of those special places.

The story of the 1903 Hubbard expedition is a timeless example of the power of the human spirit in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. It also speaks volumes about the mysterious pull wilderness has on the human heart. If the time I spent in Hubbard's midst taught me anything, it is that the Lure of the Labrador Wild is alive and well and that his story will likely endure for another 100 years.

*Troy M. Gipps resides in Grafton, Massachusetts. He is the Webmaster for [wildernesscanoe.org](http://wildernesscanoe.org) as well as a major in the U.S. Reserve Forces. Readers are invited to take a virtual tour of this expedition on his web site. He can be reached*



Jim Niedbalski, Brad Bassi and Troy Gipps at Hubbard Cairn on Susan Brook.

## Expedition

Story and Photographs

By TROY M. GIPPS

I first learned about the 1903 Leonidas Hubbard expedition by reading *Great Heart: The History of a Labrador Adventure*, by James West Davidson and John Rugge, but it wasn't until the afternoon of July 4th, 2003 that I began to understand how truly difficult the trio's journey into Labrador's rugged interior had been. On that day, Jim Niedbalski, Brad Bassi and I reached the intersection of Susan Brook and Goose Creek and located Hubbard's final campsite among the evergreens. We hadn't made the trip by helicopter or float plane as most of the 20 or so visitors to the site have done since Hubbard's death. Instead, we were the first team in a century to reach the memorial site by canoe.

That evening, I sat on the ground and leaned against the granite boulder beside which Hubbard had taken his last breath and I wrote these words in my journal;

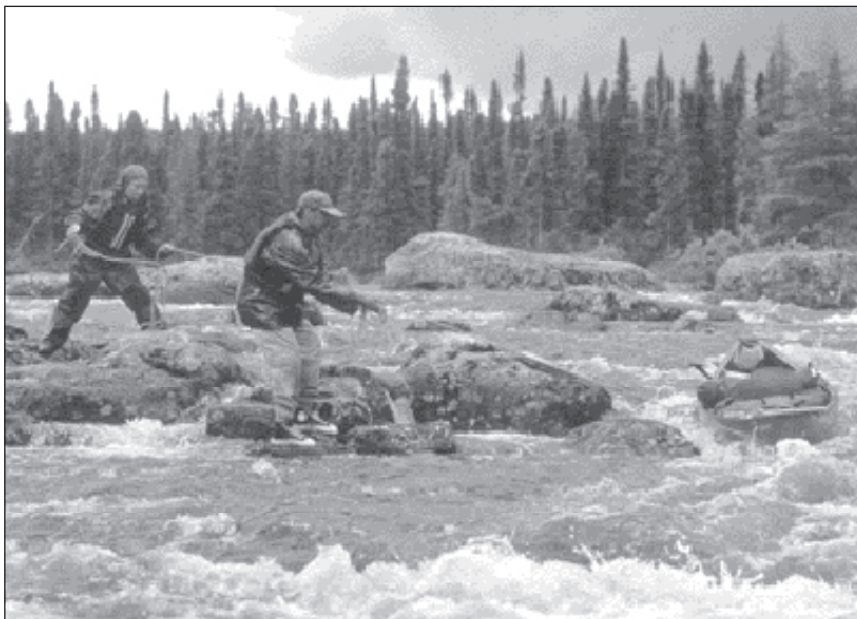
"Our difficult journey up the Susan is behind us. Brad and Jim have sought refuge in their tents from the hordes of insects, but I decided to stay out for a while and write. I have thought about this spot often for the last two years. So little has changed here since 1903 that as we approached I half expected to see the boys gathered in front of their campfire trying to come to terms with the seriousness of their situation. I think it is not such a bad place to leave this Earth. It would have been cold and wet that evening, when Hubbard struggled to write those final words in his journal. But he was not fearful of death. The boys chose a good spot for this camp. Hubbard would have heard the Susan flowing by from inside his tent and the dense forest would have afforded some protection from the raw winds. I feel a kinship with Hubbard, even though we lived in very different times. For it is the timelessness of this place and the inner urge that beckons us to see what lies beyond distant ranges that joins men, regardless of when we live our lives. I salute Hubbard for his adventurous spirit, for his courage both in life and in the face of death, and for his unwavering faith in both his traveling companions and his creator."

The Hubbard Memorial Centennial Expedition was a 650-mile, 50-day canoe trip in Labrador and Quebec retracing the 1903 route of the Leonidas Hubbard expedition up Susan Brook to Hope Lake then northwest to Lake Michikamau (Smallwood Reservoir) and continuing on the 1905 routes of the rival Mina Hubbard and Dillon Wallace expeditions through

Smallwood to Cabot Lake and down the George River. The expedition began on June 24th in North West River, Labrador (which by sheer coincidence was also Wallace's birthday) and ended on August 12th in the Inuit village of Kangiqsualujjuaq, Quebec (formerly George River Post), which is located on the southeast side of Ungava Bay.

We based our planning on experience gained on five previous canoe trips in the Nunavik and James Bay regions of Quebec, dating back to 1992. Although Jim and I had gained some upstream experience during a successful 1999 crossing of the Ungava Peninsula, there was nothing that could have prepared us for the backbreaking

labor of ascending Susan Brook, Goose Creek and the Beaver River. Because of the difficulty we had anticipated on this 150-mile upstream phase we pared our equipment down as much as possible, but we still cursed the heavy loads. Our only resupply occurred on July 17th at Alan Gosling's cabin on Lake Orma Road, which lies 38 miles north of the town of Churchill Falls and seven miles southeast of Smallwood. Caroline Scully, the fourth member of our team, met us at the cabin and traveled with us, after a much-needed two-day respite, on the second phase of the journey that stretched 500 miles downstream to Ungava. Each



Some sharp lining on the approach to Smallwood Reservoir (aka Lake Michikamau).

phase of the trip took 25 days to complete.

We had the good fortune of speaking with Max McLean in North West River shortly before pushing off from a small beach in front of the old Hudson's Bay Company Post, where all three original expeditions began. The building now houses the Labrador Heritage Museum. The museum has a very extensive collection of artifacts and photographs from the Hubbard expeditions. Max is a member of the museum's board of directors and is a direct descendent of Duncan McLean, who was one of the trappers on the 1903 rescue party as well as a member of Wallace's 1905 expedition. His other uncle, by marriage, was Gilbert Blake, who was also a member of the party that rescued Wallace. Blake later joined Mina's 1905 expedition. Max, who is now in his early 80s, trapped along the Naskapi River in the 1940s with his father. He has wise, aged eyes and a hearty smile and his bright white hair covers just the fringes of his head. He was very pleased to see that we had taken such an interest in the land and the Hubbard story. Max mentioned that he would love to go back up the Naskapi, but was simply no longer able due to his advanced age. He seemed happy to have us head into the bush in his place. He confirmed that no one had success-



fully followed the '03 route and seemed very excited about the prospect of our success. "It would be good to see someone follow Hubbard's route to show that it can be done," he said. He shook our hands, wished us well and said that he was going to go have himself a beer. He waved as he pulled out of the dirt parking lot in his pick-up truck. A few minutes later we took our first expedition paddle strokes in nearly four years.

Grand Lake was as still as glass that first evening and only the chirps of frogs and the hum of a few mosquitoes permeated the thin walls of my tent. The next day we reached Cape Law. It was at this point that Hubbard's troubles began. He had been advised at the post that the Naskapi flowed into the end of Grand Lake and from Cape Law it was easy to see how he had mistaken the Susan for the Naskapi. Across the lake to the north was the mouth of the Naskapi River. Several layers of relatively flat, uninteresting hills separated the surface of Grand Lake from the interior. To the west, which clearly looked like the end of the lake, was the Susan Valley. The view was much more mountainous in this direction and I could see deeper into the interior. Therefore, from a strictly visual standpoint, the view of the Susan Valley would have exerted a much greater pull on Hubbard's adventurous heart than the mouth of the Naskapi.



The thrill of downstream rapids is enhanced by the work it took to get there. The George River provided much fast fun for Caroline Scully and Jim Niedbalski.

## Up the Susan

*Hey hey, ho ho. Up the Susan we go, go, go!*

We knew it would be the toughest 20 miles of the summer and by the end of the first day we had gotten a glimpse of what the Susan had in store for us - and it wasn't pretty! The riverbed would rise 1,000 feet in just 20 miles; the shorelines were choked with alders and the air was heavy with humidity. The woods were a tangle of spruce limbs and deadfall, with an occasional trip-ending sinkhole thrown in to make the near impossible task of portaging even more challenging, and the forest was so dense at times that it was impossible to turn the boat while carrying it. All we could do was stumble in the direction the trees channeled the hull and hope to make a first down. Most of our portage attempts ended with a loud crash and the type of word that shouldn't be spoken at a Thanksgiving dinner. It quickly became apparent that we had to stick to the river whenever possible.

Fortunately, the water level, although low, allowed us to spend most of our time in the brook pulling, pushing and dragging our canoes through knee-to chest-deep water. This tactic would not have been pos-

sible without Royalex canoes. Jim and I dragged a Dagger Venture 17 and Brad dragged a Mad River Explorer 15, which he reports to be an excellent solo expedition canoe. He and I paddled the Explorer tandem on the downstream phase of the trip. Much of the riverbed was a boulder field, so the disturbing sound of our hulls grinding over either slightly submerged or fully exposed rocks was a continual annoyance. It pains me to think that Hubbard and his team likely found themselves in the woods more than in the river. Their wood and canvas canoe could not have taken the abuse we put our boats through and without the ability to resupply their outfit would have been incredibly heavy. Take away also maps, plastic raingear, mosquito netting, bug-proof nylon tents, and

timesaving camping stoves and their 14-day ascent of the Susan becomes a true testament to their will and determination. These modern "conveniences" helped our team complete the ascent in 81/2-days.

July 1, 2003 - Today was the type of day I will look back on when I am an old man and wonder, "How in the world did I do it?" Eight hours of backbreaking labor brought us just 2.5 kilometers closer to the junction of Goose Creek. Clouds thickened in the morning then released a soaking mist at noon that persisted throughout the remainder of the day. We each hit the wall at different times. I was so fa-

tigued this afternoon that I found myself stumbling behind the boat, doing all I could to hold on to the stern while dragging my legs upstream against the swift current. Our hourly efforts are measured in feet not miles and Jim and I did our best today to synchronize pushing and pulling to get the boat as far upstream as possible with each step. The bulldogs that tormented the b'ys in 1903 are still very much alive and well (and biting)!

There are certainly no shortages of opinions surrounding the 1903 expedition. Commonly called into question are Hubbard's decision-making skills, his personal preparedness and the very make up of his expedition outfit. These topics spawn lively discussion among paddlers even 100 years after his untimely death. But there was one piece of information in particular that sparked a brook-side discussion within our group. During the 1903 ascent of the Susan, Wallace had remarked that Gilbert Blake told him they could paddle up the (Naskapi) river eighteen or twenty miles. In fact, Blake said he had "sailed his boat that far." The ascent of the Susan couldn't be farther from sailing and within

*Continued on Page 11*

## CANOESWORTHY *cont'd from Page 3*

project, "Kivi's Journey."

The money will allow Drumsong to move ahead immediately with research on the legendary Inuit epic hero who is called, in various dialects, Kivi, Kiviuk, Qiviuk, Qooqa or Qayaq.

Houston plans to start gathering stories of Kivi from elders across the North - many of whom are very advanced in years.

The largest film development award, for an amount of \$200,000, goes to Igloodik Isuma Productions for its upcoming multi-million-dollar production, "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen," and an Igloodik man, Ava.

Rasmussen, the noted polar explorer and anthropologist, was born in Ilulissat and grew up in Greenland, where he learned kayaking and dogteaming. In 1910 Rasmussen and fellow explorer Peter Freuchen established a trading post in northern Greenland.

From 1921 to 1924, Rasmussen embarked on his Fifth Thule Expedition, travelling from Greenland throughout the eastern Arctic to collect and record Inuit songs and legends. The full-length docu-drama on Rasmussen is due to attract interest thanks to the success of the company's Atanarjuat.

**T**hey come from Germany, Japan and the USA to catch lunkers, bask in the glow of the aurora, dip a toe in the Arctic Ocean or run the rapids at Fort Smith. In 2002, the NWT drew 32,833 intrepid tourists.

Some came by plane, most drove a camper or car. They spent almost \$40 million. Business travellers spent another \$25 million. Together, they supported 822 full-time equivalent jobs.

Primed by Raven Tours' Bill Tait, the Japanese aurora viewing business rebounded from the slump of the previous year. About 14,000 Japanese visited Yellowknife and the NWT during the 2002-2003 season. The season before, the number of Japanese tourists to Yellowknife plummeted to about 9,000 because of fears related to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack.

According to Fort Simpson's Ted Grant, the Nahanni can usually count on 1,300 people annually but last season the numbers dwindled to 750. About 35 per cent of Grant's customers are from outside of Canada and 15 per cent are from Europe. NWT Arctic Tourism is working with airlines which fly from Frankfurt to Whitehorse to sell tourists on a side trip to Fort Simpson or Yellowknife.

**D**og sled mushers in Churchill, Manitoba and Arviat, Nunavut are organizing a long-distance dog-sled race they hope will complement the North's great sled races. The race will follow an historic fur-trade run between the two communities along the western coast of Hudson Bay.

Dave Daley, who runs an outfitting company in Churchill, calls the race "The Hudson's Bay Quest." He says he wants to see it run from Churchill to Arviat one year, and reversed the next. Organizers are hoping the first race will be held in March and will join the ranks of other great northern races, such as the Iditarod in Alaska, or the Yukon Quest.

"We're going to have it as a real freighter race where you have to carry all your gear with you, like you had to in the fur trade," Daley says the

## WINTER PACKET *cont'd from Page 2*

rolling in.

"Well, in any event, I guess I just wanted to thank you for writing up those excellent articles and bringing back some fond memories of my friend." — Ken Takabe.

**T**he discussion of the Labrador Tragedy and your Essay has caused me to reflect on the profound influence northern trips have on who I am and the risk that I accept while traveling there.

I was struck by the comment that you made in your Essay. "Did we portray the trip as we should have"? Over the years I have often been asked for advice by folks planning trips in the North and more and more I have been thinking about the way in which I describe my own northern experiences. It is easy to become complacent when you return to the same rivers over and over. As you did, we all have a responsibility to give an accurate portrayal of the inherent risk of northern travel.

In August I had just returned from my 13th trip on the George River when I received an e-mail saying that Susan and Daniel were missing. As most folks I too thought that initially they had just been delayed by weather but as the days passed it was clear that something more serious had happened. I searched the web for new information daily.

This one hit close to home, perhaps because I had just returned from the George or maybe it is because lately there seem to be more and more accidents happening in places in which I travel. A couple years ago I had just returned from a trip on the Soper River to find that soon after we visited a paddler was attacked by a polar bear at Soper Falls. I wish I had some profound conclusion to draw from all this. I can only say that I am even more drawn to the north as the years pass. Perhaps it is because it is one of the few times when life is at its most primitive and the consequences of our actions can mean the difference between life and death". — Greg Shute

**I** have just read your report of the tragedy suffered by Ms. Barnes and Mr. Pauzé. Your treatment of this sad duty is appropriate, respectful and realistic. The event certainly underscores the hard reality that can be wilderness travel.

"In this regard, we must all be aware of the responsibility trip leaders bear toward their fellow travellers. On the other hand, each person who ventures out into the bush assumes the risk for themselves. Frankly, I followed your LO 2001 avidly. It was quite clear from all of the HACC reports that this was an extremely arduous undertaking. So much so that in our little canoe circle, the Torngat Mountains became a euphemism for any particularly tough passage we encountered.

"It is why the HACC is held in such high regard: very difficult trips accomplished safely and on schedule. Or, as Amundsen might say, without 'adventures'. Anyone who has done even modest trips can see from the HACC accounts the amount of planning, preparation and solid effort needed to pull even one of these trips off.

"In your essay, you wrestle with the question of responsibility. For my part, you and the HACC bear none. At least none more than any of us do who promote and encourage wilderness travel. As you say, the wilderness draws us in part with its raw power. It is not malevolent, neither is it benign, it just is."

just a mile or so of her mouth the water had become so shallow that we had to begin pulling the boats upstream. Hubbard responded to Wallace's remarks by saying that Blake was "sorely mistaken about the distance" and he thought the error "was not surprising." In my opinion, this information clearly could have prevented the troubles that lied ahead for Hubbard and his team. I can understand how the mind of an adventurer would stubbornly refuse the notion of admitting a possible mistake so early on in an expedition, but eighteen or twenty miles? That's a stretch! Regardless of your opinion on this issue, it is interesting to note that if the b'ys had turned back at that point or had done a more thorough reconnaissance of Grand Lake before ascending into the interior you might not be reading this article because one could certainly argue that the primary reason why the Hubbard story endures is because he died in the bush. Would the names Leonidas Hubbard Jr., Dillon Wallace and George Elson have made it through history if they had made it to Ungava safely in 1903?

## Seagull Swamp

July 6, 2003 - Today we learned that seagulls don't taste as bad as you might think, especially when marinated in mandarin orange sauce. We were also reminded that humans don't like to be wet. Sheets of soaking mist and rain blow past as we struggled to cook dinner near the edge of an expansive swamp that is the headwaters of Goose Creek. The creek was fairly deep earlier today as it meandered through lowlands but it quickly narrowed. We reached a fork in the creek and followed the southern arm just as Hubbard had done. The trouble came when it entered this swamp. The channel was scarcely wider than our canoes and full of rocks. Then it split again into three or four even smaller channels that disappeared into the bushes. Dragging the boats became impossible so with our last remaining strength today we portaged to this pathetic section of soaking wet moss and crowded our tents as close to the tree line as possible to try to stay out of the wind. There was, however, a glimmer of hope that came in the form of a small bird that perched itself on a tree limb not far from camp and chirped cheerfully as sheets of rain soaked everything in site as we scrambled to keep some-

thing, anything dry. I paused and looked at the tiny cheerful bird and realized that things weren't all that bad. It was just a little rain, well, six days of it - but who was counting.

## Map Check?

Did you ever run around your house looking for your car keys, turning over everything in sight while cursing the clutter, only to finally look in your hand and see that you were carrying the keys the whole time? Finding Elson Lake was sort of like that.

July 7, 2003 - Most notable this evening was the realization that we were camping on the shores of Elson Lake and had passed through Mountaineer Lake this morning! The strange thing about this turn of events was that we were not lost today. We knew exactly where we were. So how can this be? We had been navigating with the 1:50,000-scale maps, as is our standard practice, and we made it to our present campsite on the shores of a lake the map showed as nameless. We noticed that we were only 2 kilometers from the Beaver River by portage so we began to question whether or not it was worth it to follow the 2-3 day route we had highlighted through what the map showed as Mountaineer and Elson Lakes. We wanted to stay on Hubbard's route but after what we had been through the last 2 weeks we had grown very leery of thin single lines on maps. The route we highlighted had several of these lines connecting swamps, ponds and the two lakes. But something didn't add up so we pulled out the 1:250,000-scale map, which we carried as a back up and had used for our initial route planning. With both maps lying side-by-side on the ground the three of us crouched down and studied the lakes closely. Both maps had the lakes named, but something wasn't right. It was the shape of the lakes! The cartographers who had designed the 1:50,000-scale maps had accidentally shifted the names "Mountaineer" and "Elson" to two nameless lakes, which left the actual lakes unnamed. We had planned a bogus route to these incorrectly named lakes and were just hours from creating a lot of extra work for ourselves. Quite a close call! Tomorrow we head overland two kilometers to the Beaver River.

## Beaver River

Portaging to the Beaver River was easier than we had expected. There were a few stands of dense evergreens and a swamp along the 2-kilometer route but more than half of the portage had been cleared by a somewhat recent forest fire. The river was quite a sight to see after the tiny waterways we had been navigating. Wallace wrote that the fishing had improved once reaching the Beaver so our hopes were high and within a few days we had landed a bully mess of brook trout (also called speckled or mud trout), the largest of which was 15 inches in length. The trout on the Susan and on Goose Creek were often plentiful, but were scarcely larger than 6 inches so these larger fish were a huge moral boost. Also, for the first time since Grand Lake, we were actually able to paddle more than a few boat lengths - still upstream but at least we were paddling. There was still some dragging to be done but nothing like we had experienced previously. One of the most enjoyable parts of the entire upstream phase of the trip was a 15-mile "S-turn" section on the Beaver that ended just south of Ptarmigan Lake. We followed the river from there to its extreme headwaters then began the difficult portage to Hope Lake.

## Hope Lake or Bust!

July 14, 2003 - 2,725 meters of hills, gullies, swamps and ponds. Hundreds upon hundreds of greenhead flies buzzing loudly and fiery swarms black flies. The hottest temperatures and brightest sun of the entire trip; reaching 90 degrees Fahrenheit by early afternoon! Nine long hours of backbreaking labor, navigational disagreements and near total exhaustion. It was the single most difficult day of portaging we had ever endured, but when all was said and done we had made it. Hubbard, Wallace and Elson must have felt the same sense of relief and elation when they caught their first glimpse of Hope Lake through the spruce trees. We walked in their footsteps today and there was more than one occasion that I chanted their names aloud as I struggled under the weight of heavy loads. Today was a day like no other to test a man's mettle and a day that I will not soon forget.

## The Big Blue



## New Face on Hubbard



– Troy M. Gipps

Many thanks to Troy Gipps for allowing us to publish - for the first time anywhere - his incredible shot of a rock that stands high above the headwaters of the Beaver River and looks exactly like an old man's face. It is not even featured on Troy's superb Web site of the trip ([www.wildernesscanoe.org](http://www.wildernesscanoe.org)). He commented that the edge of the eye looks like it was chipped from the stone by human hands. It is certainly a unique feature that only adds to the raw and unending appeal of the Hubbard-Wallace-Elson saga.

**Che-Mun**  
Box 548, Station O  
Toronto, ON Canada M4A 2P1  
E: [che-mun@rogers.com](mailto:che-mun@rogers.com)  
T: 416.221.3225 Fax: 416.221.5003

**Che-Mun**  
Founded in 1973 by Nick Nickels  
Rates; One year \$20, Two years \$36  
US subscriptions in US dollars  
Published by the Hide-Away Canoe Club

**Che-Mun**  
The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing  
Please visit our Web Site:  
[www.ottertooth.com/che-mun](http://www.ottertooth.com/che-mun)  
Michael Peake, Publisher.

