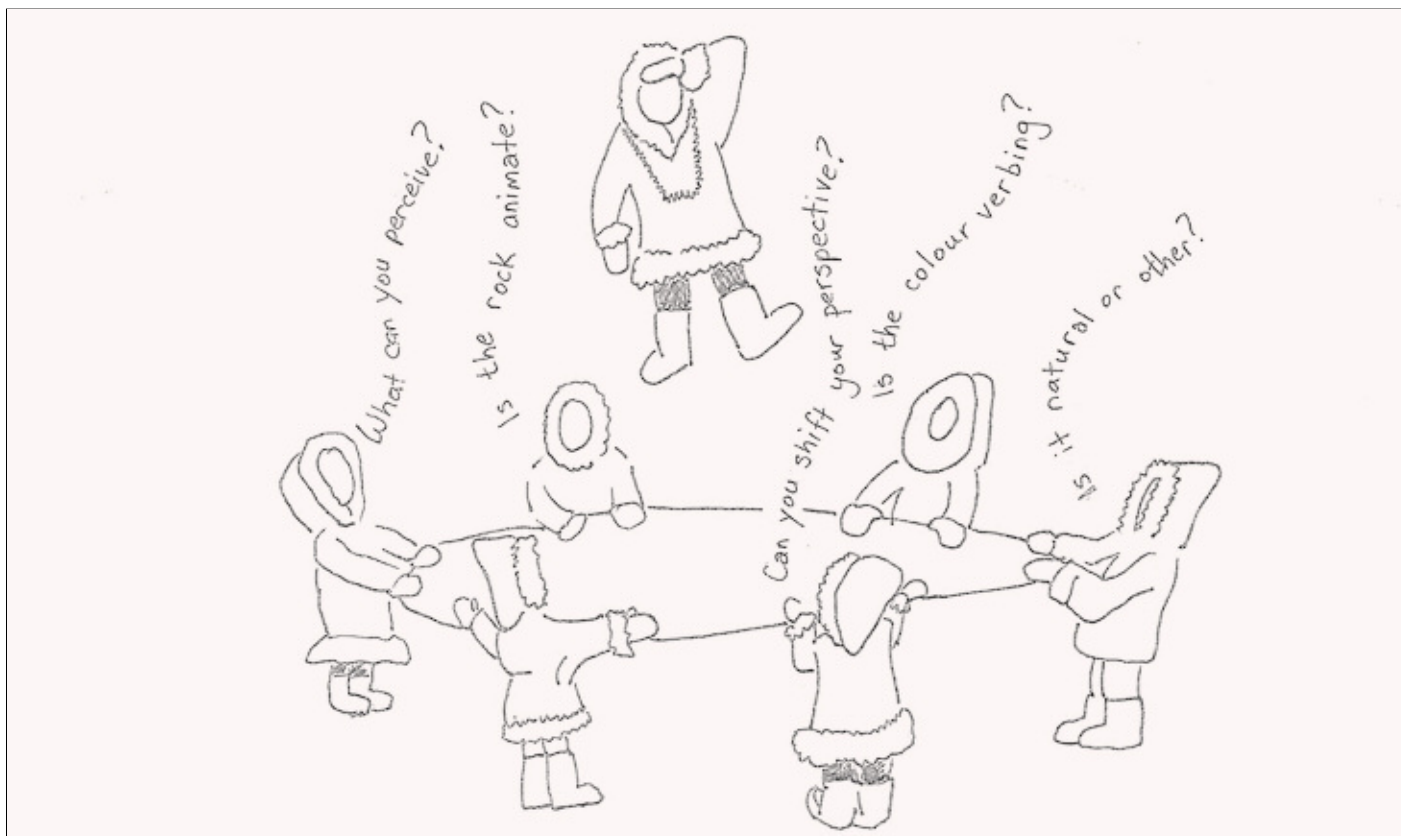




nastawgan

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Quarterly Journal of the Wilderness Canoe Association



Paddling In and Out

by Zabe MacEachren

The English language has limitations regarding the terms available for describing the places we canoe. Initially, I consider the title “Paddling in and out of the landscape” or “Paddling in and out of the wilderness.” But the perception and ultimately our understanding of what is landscape or wilderness, is the very ground I aim to paddle into. This article, like my presentation at the WCS 2013, explores the notion that our language influences our reality, and shapes how canoeists come to understand a place. To read on means you will venture into indigenous terms and ideologies, then paddle out through the computer gaming world of today’s youth. I explore the activities and terms used in the outdoor education of canoe tripping that shape our ways of engaging us in the places we travel, both real and virtual.

Terms like *nature*, *wilderness* and *landscape* convey various unique perceptions of the world. People tend to choose and use the terms they are most comfortable with or that best match their understanding of a specific time and place. My work at Queen’s University with teacher candidates in an outdoor and experiential education program means I encourage outdoor educators to become critical thinkers and explore the terrain of ideology. I try to make future outdoor educators question why they use one term over another and how their choice of activities will shape the understanding of the people they teach.

Working as a university professor in outdoor education can be like balancing a tippy canoe as you pole up stream questioning common ideas. Engaging in theoretical ideas can be a



messy, miserable, yet necessary task when trying to understand what is happening, even in the world of canoeing. The ideas I share have served me like a life jacket to bring me back to the surface to breath after submerging in new confusing perceptions. Some practices can act like islands, which I can take refuge behind on long windy lake crossings, when paddling in and out of the wilderness of ideology.

At the beginning of the school year, I use an optical illusion with teacher candidates, which requires them to only focus on one image of two possibilities in order to aid their understanding of outdoor education. I ask them to focus upon only one image – either the two faces or the vase. They are to attend to only one image until they hear me say “shift,” then they are to focus on the other image. I then say “shift” at various time intervals.

Some students find this exercise easy, but for others it is hard to control their perception upon command. I follow this activity with an explanation about the Inuit blanket toss.

The blanket toss game arose from the need of Inuit hunters to find elevation in a flat landscape. Elevation aided them in spotting their game in the distance. Somehow it was devised that one hunter could climb on a stretched skin blanket and be tossed into the air by those who encircled the skin and held it taunt. Trying this experience brought them the desired new perspective on the world while frequently also bringing them joy. I suggest that this blanket toss activity serves as a metaphor for what outdoor education is about. An educator’s role is to help others face any fear they may hold of getting on the blanket, then supporting them when getting onto the blan-

ket and finally encouraging them to look outward and see the world in new ways. New perceptions only arise when one is not gripped solely with fear or dizzy with the sheer fun and novelty of being tossed up. Ultimately the person being tossed can develop a practice of seeing things in a new way while also finding joy through the process.

Educators and canoe guides cannot control what people perceive, but they can choose their words and interactions so they might support and guide others into new ways of seeing and knowing. Trying to stay open and learn something new can make people feel vulnerable, especially as aging establishes in us repeated patterns of understanding things in singular ways. To be able to let go and see things in a new way can be scary, perplexing and difficult. Educators aim to help others find a way to relax old pat-

terns of understanding so they can perceive something in a new way. They aim to rekindle a childhood sense of curiosity in exploring novelty and perceiving new things, and ultimately experiencing true joy in the process.

My professor, Neil Evernden, explained that a fish never knows it lives in water until it is out of the water. His book, the *Social Creation of Nature*, explains the way the development of the term *nature* resulted in many different understandings of the world. He tries to wrap our mind around the way the world was perceived previous to the introduction of the term *nature* (and also wilderness, environment etc.). Trying to be in the world without using any of descriptive terms for places is a great exercise. Evernden elaborates the ways the idea of pollution can only exist when a person perceives themselves to be separate from the world — otherwise why would we

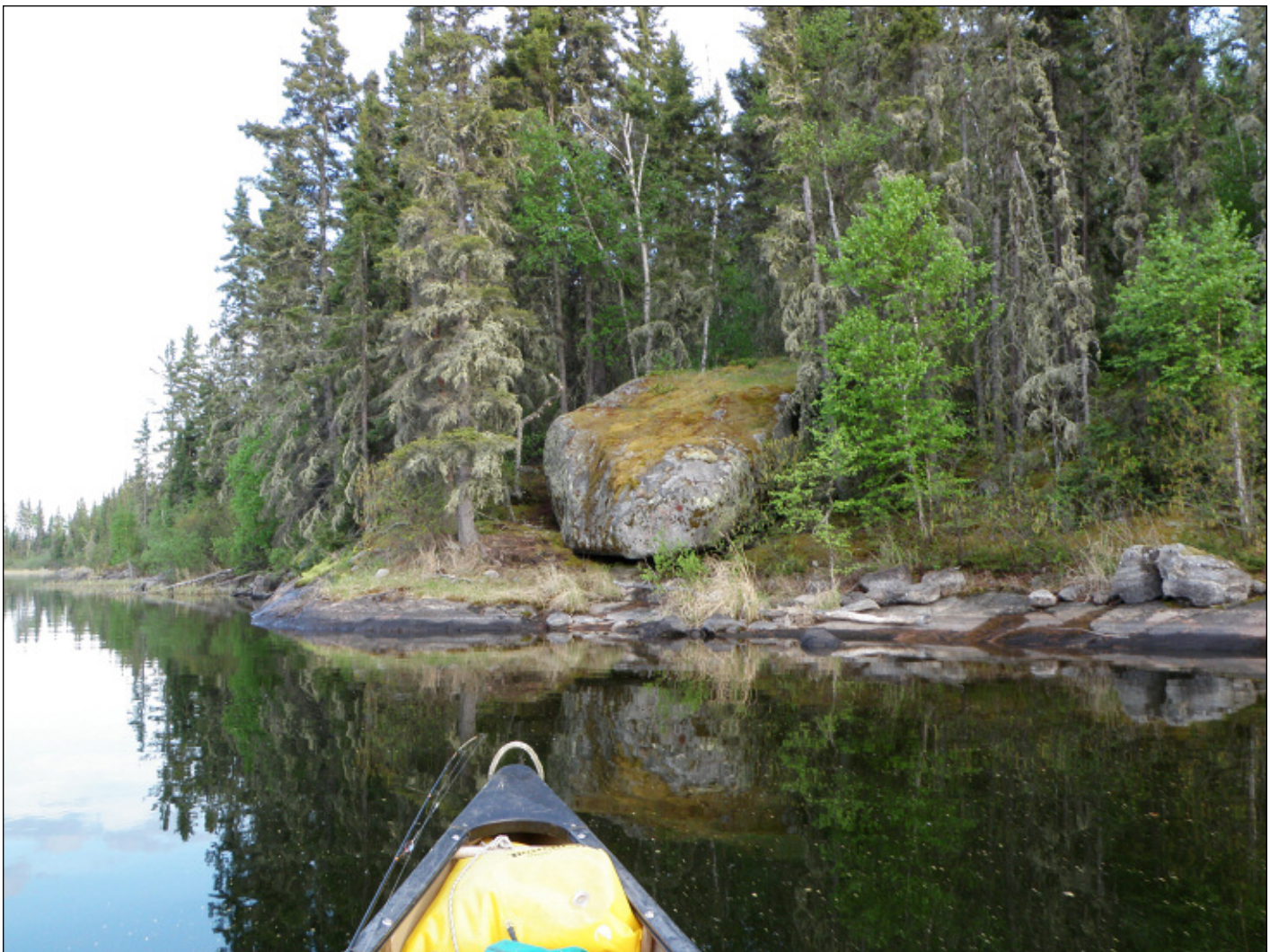
create pollution and then pollute ourselves? I frequently ask teacher candidates to consider if they are nature? And to consider the way they can shape experiences and understanding of the world through the way they offer novel activities, use innovative language or introduce the use of terms from indigenous cultures. To perceive ourselves as nature means we need to engage in activities that allow us to perceive ourselves as part of and not separate from nature. I stress that as teachers or canoe guides we need to be careful with the terms, stories, and activities we use with others because each embodies a different way of understanding in the world.

Each of these terms: *landscape*, *wilderness*, *environment*, and *nature* — if I had used them in my title it would have made you perceive what I was going to discuss differently. What follows are some activities from the bag of

tricks I use to help me guide my students in critically thinking outside the box of routine perceptions. It is like blanket tossing up some conceptual ideas.

My first real opening to the power in language to shape our reality came from trying to learn the Ojibwe language, Anishinabemodé. In Anishinabe, words are animate or inanimate, somewhat like how in French terms can be masculine or feminine. Some words, like *guitars*, are a little easier to comprehend as animate because guitars can “sing.” I could also recognize *birch bark* as animate because I identified it as the skin of a living tree. But wrapping my thoughts around why rocks and stones were animate was a pretty big conceptual leap for me and I assume it might be for most other people including canoeists and non-Native language speakers.

Awareness of the idea that rocks are perceived as animate by Anishinabe





speakers means that paddling by a particular rock on the Churchill River creates a great moment to ponder a new reality. According to local stories a rock moved from the middle of the river up onto the land one day (see *Canoeing the Churchill River* by Sid Robinson.) Was I capable of believing this? Is understanding such ideas that much different from believing many concepts from a bible or other practice of faith? What does it take to perceive such reality? How immersed and fluent a Native speaker must I become to comprehend that a rock is animate in some manner or can move?

I was accompanied to my first pictographs by an Anishinabe friend. He instructed me to “feed” the rock with tobacco. He shared his reality when he told me how the handprint was where the spirit had entered the rock. My young mind wanted to be open to understanding such ideas — but embracing such per-

ceptions is hard work when one only speaks English. Undertaking such tasks can feel like you are on the steep slippery portage crossing the height of land of rocky ideology.

To keep my ideological muscles fit and active I keep a bowl of rocks, collected from many canoe trips, on a coffee table at my home. The bowl ignites many lively debates with friends and professors who visit. I have used it with an environmental law professor to try and describe how laws would be different if we were all speaking an indigenous language instead of English, because we would find it hard to hold concepts of ownership with so many animate things in the world. After an argument with a geology professor I have assembled a reading kit for a course on animate rocks. It includes the description of how Andy Fisher entered the Queen’s geology program because he had never lost his child-

hood fascination with rocks. He dropped out of his undergraduate program when he realized becoming a geologist meant he was expected to smash rocks in order to examine them. His repulsion of this act led him to transfer to the field of psychology and specifically eco-psychology. Today he leads vision quests (see his book, *Radical Ecopsychology*). My own partner is a geologist. He keeps my scientific mind sharp by explaining to me in great depth the chemistry of metamorphic rocks. I try to keep his mind pliable by reading to him children’s stories like *Rocks are Lively*, *Rocks in his Head* and *If I had a Rock*.

Another practice I have on canoe trips is to “verb” the world with colour. In the Anishinabe language colours are verbs not adjectives. Initially verbing colours did not make sense to me, but with some reflection and blanket tossing my ideas, I recognized how plants are actually

“greening” through the processes of photosynthesis. I now watch a sunset and aim to perceive the world as also pink-ing, orang-ing, bluing and purple-ling. With a little bit of practice it can be easy to identify with the idea of the world pulsing out rainbows of colours.

Similar to language, many stories from oral-based cultures and indigenous peoples serve as a practice of engaging us with different realities. I routinely attend and expose my students to oral storytelling practices that return them to that place of the imagination that existed before television and even the printed text. A good example of the way stories can, through our imagination, encourage different perceptions of the world resides in a popular children’s book by Frank Glew. “*That Chickadee Feeling*” is a story about a very bored child who is taken into the forest by their mother to discover what a chickadee feeling is. Glew care-

fully expresses and chooses his terms to describe and confirm the child’s experience of a chickadee landing in his hands: “We were one.” (pg. 15)

My own favourite tale about the power that stories have to immerse us in a different reality of the world occurred at a summer camp I directed for Native youth. I was informed by staff that someone was stealing cookies at night. To respond in a culturally appropriate manner, I asked the elder I worked with what she thought I should do. She replied with a story.

Once when I was young I asked my grandfather “what would happen if I took something?” He told me that “someone always knows when you take something.” I went off and thought about what he said, but I didn’t understand who would know. I asked my grandfather again. “Who would know if I took something?” He replied, “They will know.” As she

said this line she reached out and patted a tree and replied like her grandfather must have. Repeating the line “They will know.” (*Marie Allen, personal correspondence*) Reflecting upon this story made me realize how fortunate Marie was or any child would be if they grew up immersed in such stories where trees are capable of watching. Stories of an animate land that can watch over us and provides for our needs makes the land come alive like a nurturing parent as it shapes and influences our consciousness.

A child growing up immersed in such stories and legends that describe the “why” associated with plants, animals and landforms means the land they walk through becomes a noisy place. Everything they encounter will remind them of a story, a lesson, and a way of perceiving the world. When I see the hills around Thunder Bay, I frequently recall they are the tracks left by Nanabojó the



Sleeping Giant. This idea serves as a momentary memory of living or being in a world of myths – reality for a few seconds that the land may indeed be animate.

Many times I have found myself with Native people, who are offering tobacco, coins, cloth, and matches as gestures, a form of payment to the land for what it has provided. Like many people, I was not raised with such practices, nor encouraged to speak directly to the land as a way of saying grace. Over time, with a continued effort to be open to such ideas, I am now quite comfortable with such practices. Today I even discuss and introduce this practice with educators and then leave time and space for them to decide what feels appropriate. I encourage them to consider what the gesture is about. Many teacher candidates like the gesture, but today substitute bits of chocolate or coffee as appropriate contemporary offerings.

I heard a medicine man tell a group of students that many people come to him asking for help curing their bad dreams. His advice is to “eat wild food to change your dreams.” Hearing this idea I recalled the handful of dreams I have always remembered, due to their intensity and vivid images, of being a bird flying. Connecting what the medicine man stated with where these dreams had occurred made me realize they had all happened on duck hunting trips the night after I had eaten duck and wild rice soup. Wild duck is the only thing I have ever eaten in my life that has actually flown, is this wild food idea connected to why I can still recall the feel of water on my webbed feet as I landed in my dream? I now echo the medicine man’s words in

my own way when I encourage country food, such as fish, to be eaten whenever possible on canoe trips. Eat creatures that come from deep dark waters and perhaps this may lead to deep introspective thoughts and dreams.

With teacher candidates in Queen’s Outdoor Education program I offer a wide variety of curriculum activities to sample and then have them reflect upon which best exposes them to a way of being in the world they want to emulate. Here are a

few favourite experiences that invigorate this reflective practice and serve to engage students as if they are being blanket-tossed around until they glimpse a new perception of the world from their usual understanding.

Have educators attempt to make fire by friction. Ask them if this is a primitive act or a primitive art form? Ask them to elaborate on what makes this recapitulation of an ancient primal moment in human evolution good education? Have them explain why we should ask a child to engage in such experiences during an era of matches and abundant electrical power?

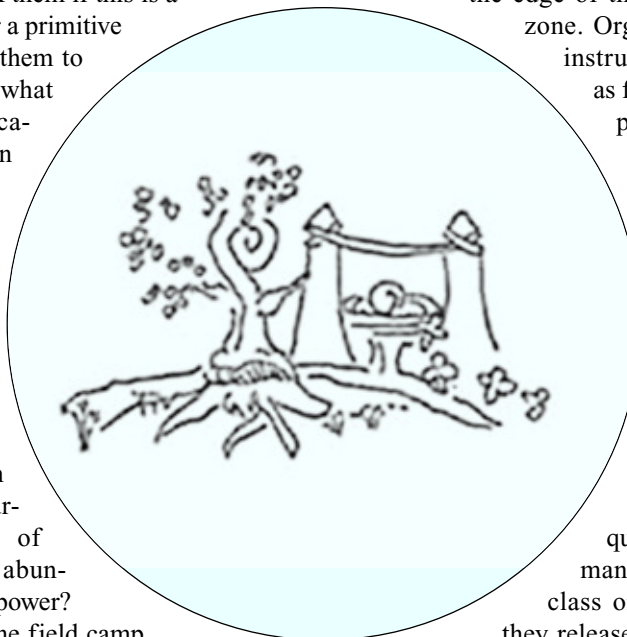
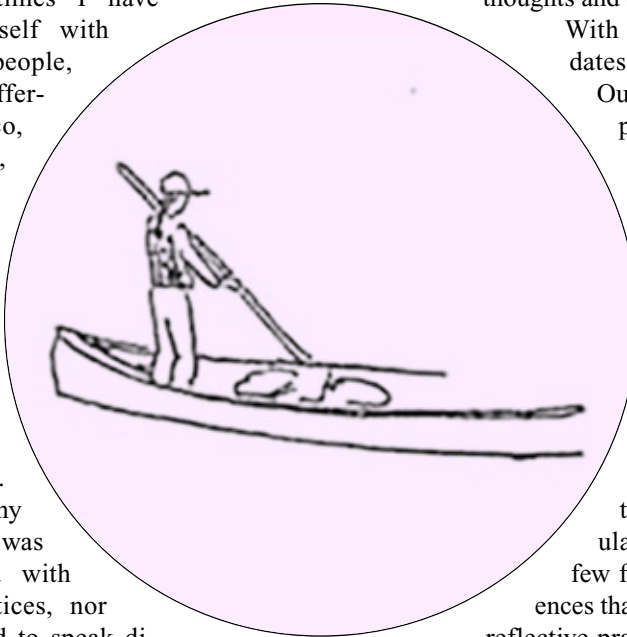
As part of the field camp for students I organize a canoe scavenger hunt instead of a day of canoeing. The aim of the day is not to get somewhere by canoe, but to experience many different things. Originally on the list was the activity “take a 20 minute

mini-solo.” After an interesting *en-counter* with some angry *landlords*, my list now states “have a discussion on the concept of land ownership.” This substituted activity has sparked some amazing discussions (and at times venting) regarding available public wilderness spaces, park regulations, and alternative concepts of land ownership that exist in other areas of the world. Some students have written papers about how this discussion was their most significant learning experience at field camp. Who ever knew that trying to determine “who was the first person to ‘own’ land and who gave them the right to own land,” could be so thought provoking? How would the world change if everyone started discussing similar topics around campfires? How have we come to hold the ability to think that land, water, and air can now be owned? Change will only come through new dialogue on such topics.

The field camp I offer to outdoor education students involves organized campfires: a quiet tea-sipping one, a typical gathering of songs and skits, and a final evening of reflection. The third evening is what I dub the deep ecology campfire. It is designed to get people high on the ideological blanket toss; taking them to

the edge of their comfort zone. Organizers are instructed to use as few words as possible and to aim to “get people up drumming and dancing around the campfire.” This evening frequently leaves many in the class on a high as they release their long-caged inner animal.

For a few students it is a struggle to allow themselves to participate without first understanding what meaning is to be found by engaging in such behavior? What will they learn by imitating ani-



mals? Are they appropriating another culture if they drum? Later reflection might mean that I tease out of them explanations for why they are able to sing television theme songs the night before, and mimic Hollywood stars, but cannot enjoy pretending they are local animals? I prod their ability to articulate why they did or did not want to drum or dance? What in this campfire activity scares or intrigues them? What in their own schooling resulted in their personal struggle to attempt to get on the ideological blanket toss and to try to perceive something in a new way?

Personally I struggle to get on the blanket toss with much of today's technology and the proliferation of electronic devices that have infiltrated the outdoor world. A few years ago I simply discussed the merits and problems of promoting the outdoors through virtual camping experiences and tried to get student's to critically examine what skills were being lost as technological devices like GPS were becoming ubiquitous. But now I have decided I need to be a bit more proactive in both criticizing and embracing technology. The change of perception occurs when watching teacher candidates take a virtual trip to such places as the moon and Mars, and I was informed that this form of travel has less CO² emissions. Today's teacher candidates readily move between the virtual and reality in their chosen activities. Was I the only one questioning the merits of various devices I wondered? I was quite taken aback when a teacher ran a primitive skills class and ended with everyone participating in virtual archery. I realized I needed to get blanket-toss to be able to understand and perceive why technology was attracting youth like the outdoors once did. My

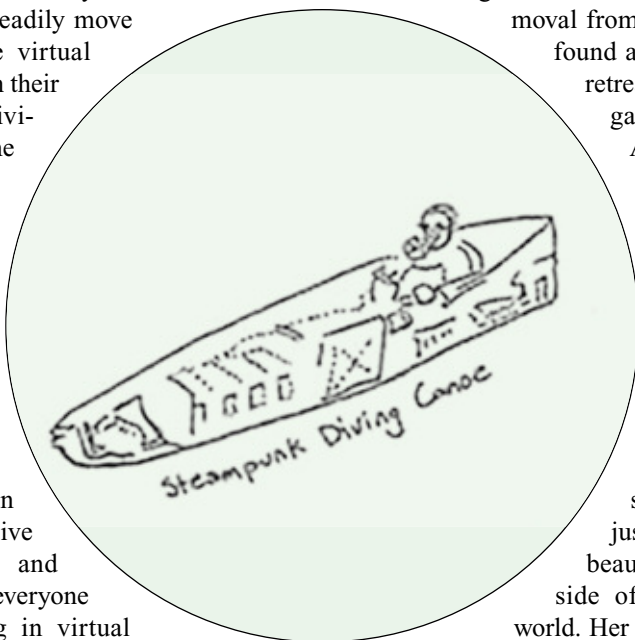
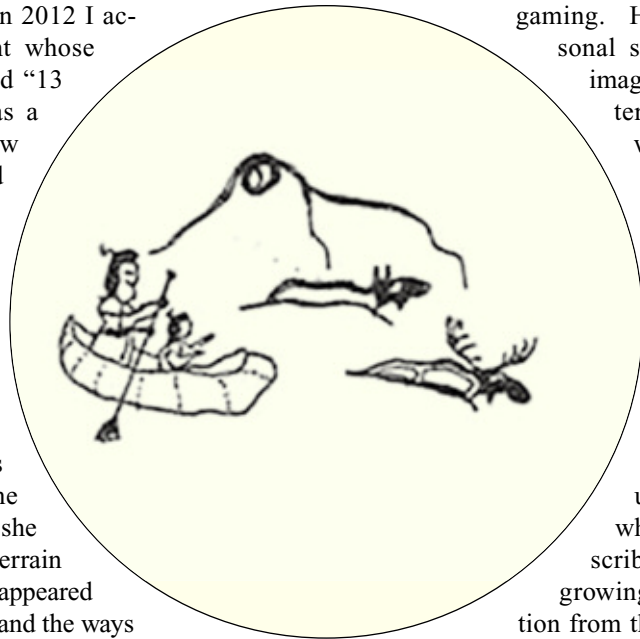
teacher- student relationship would do a 180- degree turn.

I look for a variety of skill sets in the students that are accepted into the OEE program. In 2012 I accepted a student whose application listed "13 year old boy" as a language. I knew she was an avid video game player, but her application clearly stated that she had her feet in both the real and virtual worlds. This student was about to become my professor as she led me into the terrain of canoeing as it appeared in video gaming and the ways technology was altering today's youth and their idea of place. In her eco-autobiography assignment she describes the stages of her changing relationship with the world as she developed. First she had a normal childhood playing in her big backyard, then she entered her 'pink pill stage' where she was placed on antidepressant medication. Her next stage involved her own self-removal from drugs as she found a safe place to retreat – the video gaming world. At this point in her presentation she described a scene from one of her video games. She emphasized how she spent hours just roaming the beautiful countryside of her gaming world. Her description of gaming surprised me because it resonated with why I love wandering in the outdoors. Her final eco-autobiography stage had her being sent to camp

where she would rekindle her love of the real outdoors and desire to work in the area of wilderness therapy, perhaps with youth addicted to video gaming. Her personal story and images of entering the world of video gaming recalled for me a theory I find quite useful when describing our growing separation from the world, yet desire for seeking a sense of oneness. I shared this theory with my student and she in turn elaborated my understanding by providing me with a crash course into video gaming. Indeed the 30 pages of PowerPoint slides and video clips she brought to my old computer kept crashing my system when I tried to play them. She also gave me approval to discuss her story.

In a nutshell, the theory that her video game description recalled for me came from Morris Berman's writing about participatory consciousness in *Coming to Our Senses*. This is his term for being at one with the world – engulfed in nature so you have no term for it. He describes that some past cultures and all young children have this sense of participatory consciousness. Unfortunately some kind of repression happens to most of us as we develop (typically from schooling) and we take one of three paths. Most people become repressed, but don't really know it. A few recognize their repression and try to break through it like the mad artist stereotype. A few lucky people are able to move through the repression relatively unharmed.

Berman's theory uses visual art categories to elaborate three ways of relating to the world. Smooth sublimation is described using children's art, because it is carefree and lacks a sense of perspective.



Indigenous art is also used because of the way everything is intertwined and invisible energy lines are frequently used. Berman also highlights some Japanese art styles because they depict humans engulfed in the world. Such paintings convey tiny, hard to notice people versus the front and centred portrait head shots that dominate today's visual world; as if the only thing that matters is our head and not our body or the place we exist.

My video gaming student description of finding relaxation in being lost in the beautiful landscape of the video world seemed to be what Berman was describing, yet how could this be? It was a virtual world. Was her gaming world somehow allowing her to have a smooth sublimation into a sense of participatory consciousness or oneness with the world, even if virtual was used as a means to access the real world she now trips in?

When she agreed to find me some images for my presentation I asked her to find me the ones that were, if possible, related to canoeing. She brought one image of a flying ship and shared how this was a recurring element in the longest and well-known franchise called Final Fantasy. She said it was "steampunk-inspired." "What is steampunk?" I inquired. She quickly googled steampunk and pulled up more images to help me understand this counter-culture movement that makes things by hand. "It holds nostalgia for the pre-industrial revolution time, hence the term *steam* before *punk*," she elaborated.

After our conversation I did what all good canoeists would do. I googled "steampunk boats" and got a lot of examples. When I specifically googled "steampunk canoe" things got really in-

teresting. I realized that youth may be spending more time imagining and designing steampunk canoes than actually paddling a canoe. I am not sure what this means for canoeing's future or how such youth would ever be satisfied with a real canoe that just floats and needs to be paddled versus one that can submerge like a submarine or grow wings and fly.

My student-professor also shared some of the history and/or environmental mindset embedded in the development of these games. She explained that Stoshi Tajiri, the creator of Pokémon, grew up in the rural suburbs of Tokyo. He created Pokémon to give

urban children the chance to hunt for small insects like he had loved to do as a child. Aware of my interest in making things, she told me about the very popular game called Minecraft. With very simple tools a player must mine the earth of dirt, wood, and stone, and begin to create things. Individuals might make such things as homes. As more and more time is spent mining and making things whole cities result; each building resulting from hundreds of people spending hundreds of hours a month paving over a virtual wilderness to create a virtual city.

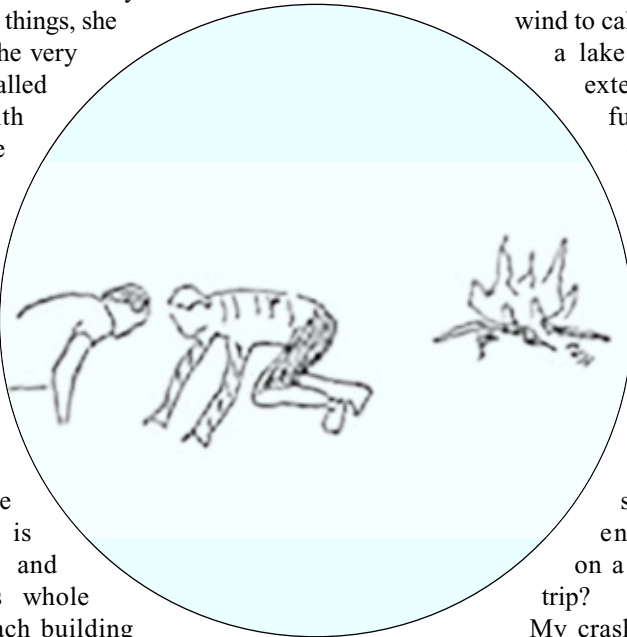
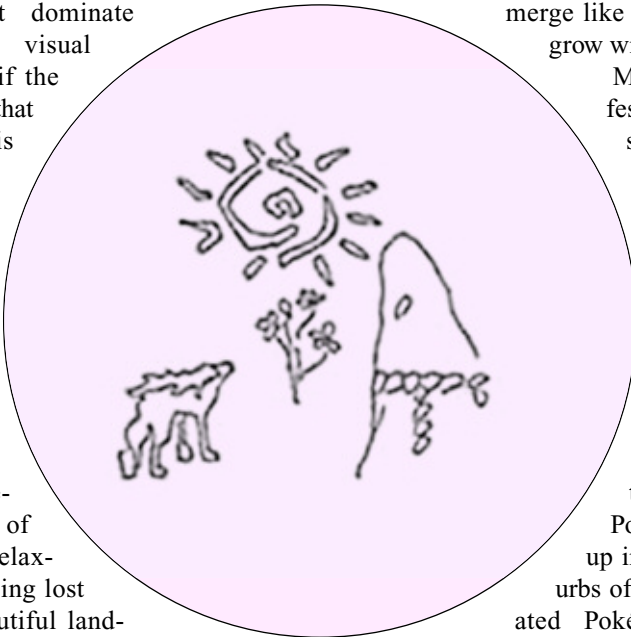
I was shown a video clip of another game that had very realistic mountain scenery. I was informed that the attrac-

tion of this game was your ability to move all over the terrain which had few trails. She emphasized the way technology has improved making some games very realistic to just wander about in. "Virtual wilderness" I say to myself as I watched the screen. I was told that many people can become 'lost' by just virtually climbing around in these computer games as they seek new views to admire. As I watch her demonstrate moving around on virtual mountains I wonder how much time is being spent by gamers taking virtual versus real walks in parks. I also wonder how such virtual experiences affect real skills at navigating and finding one's way.

In the game, Okami, a player needs only wave a computer wand like a brush stroke around a dead tree to make it come alive and blossom. Video games are no longer just about destroying things. By making certain brush strokes (with their game control wands) they can also animate the landscape by creating lily pads to land on when crossing rivers. Video game designers are offering players a sense of controlling a place that cannot be found in the real world of canoeing. I know I can't just wave my paddle in the air and expect the

wind to calm down on a lake. To what extent should future camp counselors worry about the ease of control that video gaming has been offering youth versus what is encountered on a real canoe trip?

My crash course in video gaming included a virtual canoe trip with a successful fishing outcome. My instructor moved her remote control in a reeling motion to actually set the line on the virtual fish she caught. This experience included calm background music and an optional fast





water
paddling
option. A

YouTube video I watched later offered advice on the way to handle the white water portion of the virtual river. It advised to just ignore the white-water and the outcome will be you will pretty much float down the middle and avoid the cliffs and therefore you could continue to score points by shooting at targets. I wonder what such a gamer would focus on if paddling in real white-water.

My recent forage into the realm of virtual canoeing leaves me unsure of what to think and perceive about this world. It is as if I am dizzy getting off the ideological blanket toss and need to find my legs under me. I am glad I experienced this gaming world and had a guide to introduce me to it. I am not sure how much I want to make it a part of my life and future perspectives. I am going to continue to expose myself to it enough to it so that I can ask some critical questions about what this means for young people who have decreasing outdoor time and increasing screen time. Will the next generation spend more time virtually canoeing instead of real canoeing? How will this alter their sense of being in the world when so many of their messages are shaped through the medium of digital technology that someone is ultimately programming?

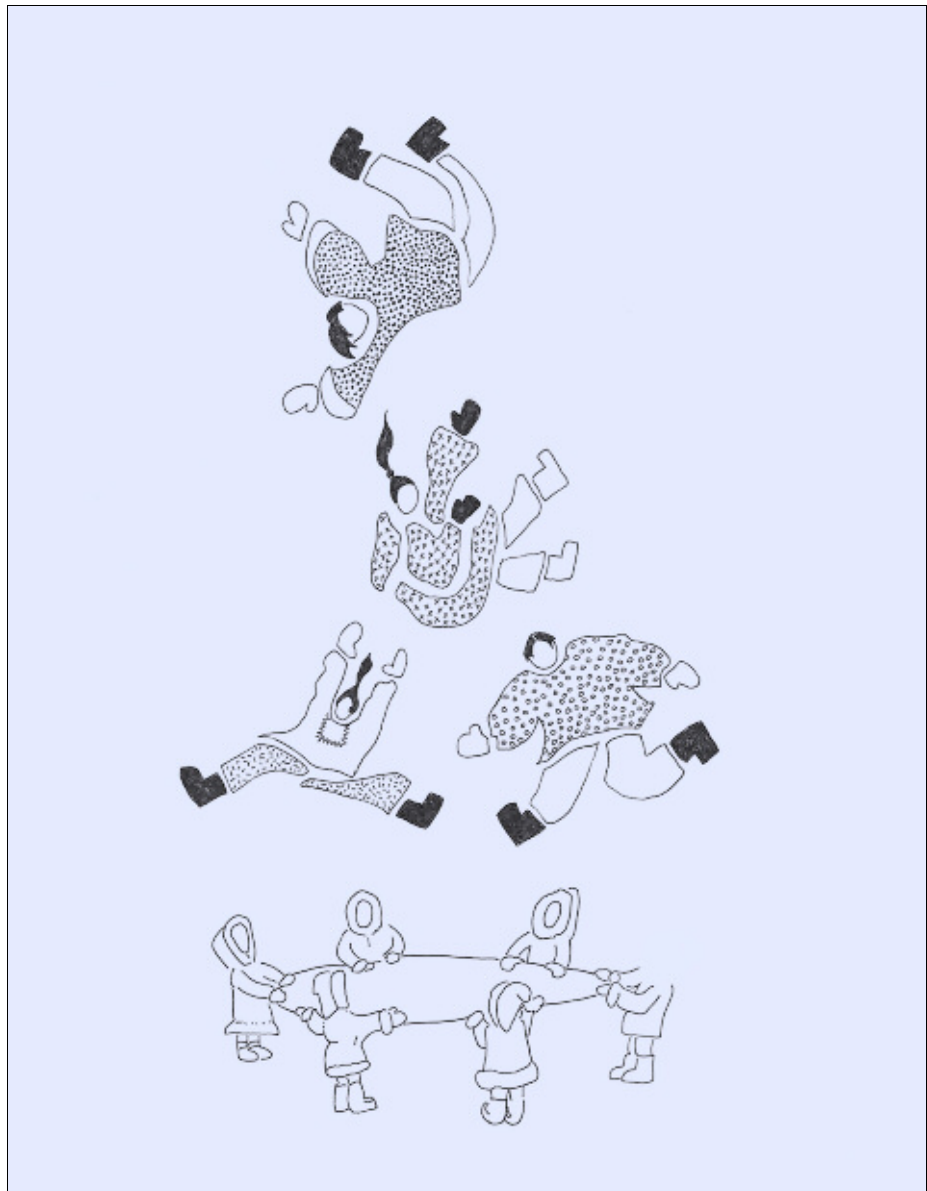
One can never be too sure if anyone is steering the big canoe we are all in, and who knows what one is really doing or heading towards. One can never be too sure of what will emerge

when the mist lifts. I still have some hard work ahead of me.

I need to portage and paddle and find that lake of quiet introspective. Watch the colours change as we transition between more dusks and dawns of understanding. I go canoeing so I can practice taking in new perspectives of this world, especially those perspectives that may bring me joy and brief moments of clarity. Through it all I just keep paddling in and out – of different realities and different ways of knowing.

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Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning "the way or route"

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal,

Nastawgan, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

2015 Wilderness and Canoe Symposium

We're pleased to announce that next WCS will take place on 20th and 21st February 2015 at the usual location – Monarch Park Collegiate. Online registration will start in early September. Please forward your program suggestions to aleks.gusev@gmail.com.

WCA Activities

Want to view all club activities, learn more about our extensive outings program for members, or organize and post a trip? It's easy! Visit the Outings section of the WCA website:
www.wildernesscanoe.ca

Contributors' Guidelines

If you are planning to submit any material for possible publication in *Nastawgan*, you would do the editors and certainly yourself a great favour by first consulting the *WCA Guidelines for Contributors to Nastawgan*. These guidelines should be followed as much as possible by all contributors, so that the editorial team can more effectively edit your contribution to make it fit the *Nastawgan* style. The latest draft of the guidelines is available on the WCA website.

WCA Fall Rendezvous

When: October 5th / 5th, 2014

Where: Madawaska Kanu Center

How: Visit WCA website to register.

Don't forget about our annual Fall Meeting this year. We will be gathering again at the Madawaska Kanu Centre on October 4th and 5th. It is a great opportunity to meet old and new members, and members to be. Catch up on stories of the summer. It's a really fun weekend to relax and just enjoy yourself.

There is an opportunity for beginners as well as the more advanced flat-water and white-water paddlers to enjoy themselves. And if you think it is too cold to paddle, then the hiking (biking, driving) is fabulous, with the fall colours in full glory. Or just relax around the fire or on the deck and enjoy a glass of wine.

The food alone is already worth the trip to go and meet fellow outdoor adventurers. Claudia, the owner, will be showing her art as part of the Madawaska Studio Tour to check out.

There will be a short presentation or two on Saturday evening and perhaps some other surprise presentations. Bring your pictures and stories to share with others.

There are options to set up a tent or sleep indoors. There will be options to paddle both white water and flat water on Saturday. Sunday options include hiking and paddling.

Looking forward to meet you there. Check it out at <http://www.owl-mkc.ca/mkc/>

More details and register on the WCA website. Contact Jon McPhee if any questions Jon.mcphee@rogers.com

Nastawgan Articles

You! Yes, you. You're right. I'm talking to you. Of course you can! What, your trip is not important enough or far enough or long enough? You say! Well, why don't you let me be the judge of that? Here's a shout-out to all of you good people in WCA family! I'm looking for more content, with special preference for the articles from members that didn't contribute in the past. Call me to discuss your ideas, share an opinion, and ask for advice. Aleks Gusev, Editor-in-Chief

Annual Wine & Cheese

We're pleased to announce that popular W&C event will take place on 15th November at Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club, thanks to Martin Heppner. Guest speak will be Kevin Callan – the Happy Camper himself. Visit WCA website to make a reservation and find more details.

Luste Lecture

WCA, in partnership with the Canadian Canoe Museum, is pleased to announce that 2nd annual Luste Lecture will take place on Saturday, 25th October. Event will be held at the CCM featuring Fred (Skip) Pessl as a guest speaker. Skip will share the edited version of the original Moffat Dubawnt film, preceded by his introductory remarks. This is event you don't want to miss.

Is There a Library in Our Future?

By John W. Lentz

As many paddlers are aware, The Canadian Canoe Museum (CCM) is in the early stages of moving to a new waterside location in Peterborough, ON. While much remains to be done on the preliminary stages of project design and financing, one vast improvement over the CCM's current digs will be the presence of a library and reading room.

So the answer to my title question is a decided, "Yes!"

The CCM already has nearly 2,000 titles covering a range of canoe-related topics. But what will be the sources of the library's expanded holdings? I suspect they will mostly be WCA members and firms in the book trade. To start the ball rolling, I have agreed to donate about 1,000 volumes from my Arctic & Canadiana collection. Among the publications already committed by others are complete runs of *Nastawgan* and *Che-*

Mun, both of which will be indexed by river that should make them helpful reference tools.

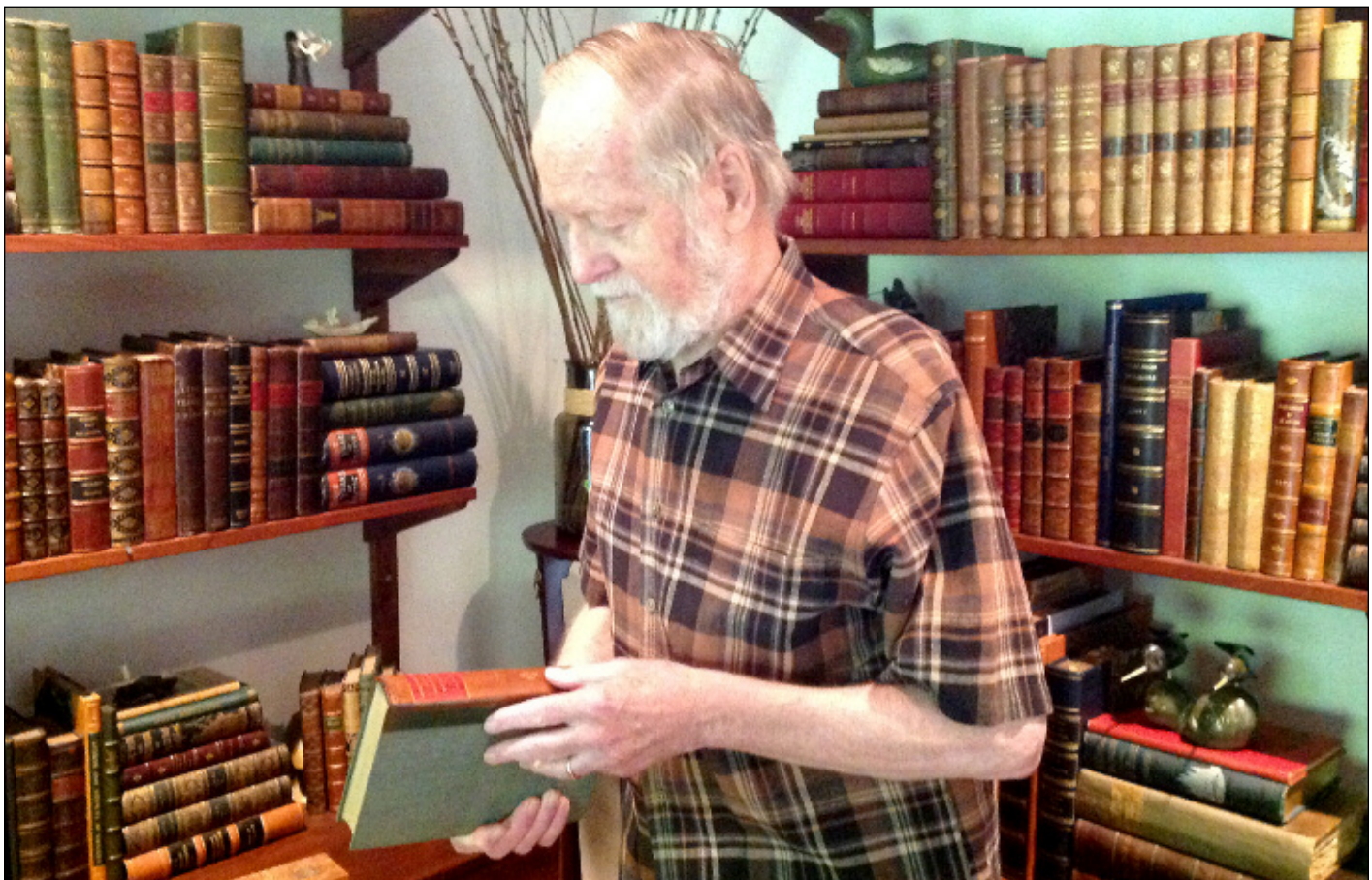
In my own case, apart from many of the usual books, I will be contributing a South Nahanni River archive containing newspaper and magazine stories on the region going back to 1929. One attention-grabbing headline from 1947 read, "Wolves Big As Ponies Roaming Nahanni Valley". Have you paddled past any of them? Also offered will be an 1843-70 series of articles on pre-Confederation backcountry Canada from *The Illustrated London News* that includes some fascinating canoe depictions.

Following a significant (and possibly far-reaching) decision, the CCM library will ultimately be open to identifying and receiving contemporary canoe trip correspondence and journals from private collectors. However, before rushing to ship

in your file on last years' heroic run of the Credit or French, be aware that the CCM will be vetting everything in this category for "significance". You will be asked to justify why the materials should be preserved for future generations and whether they are in reader-ready condition. Please don't offer a shoebox full of loose papers, and don't be too disappointed if your offering is not accepted.

It's too early for paddlers to offer specific canoe trip file material as the CCM is currently shaping acceptance criteria. When these have been developed, an announcement will be made on its website.

All of us in the fraternity have a unique opportunity to contribute toward the further building of what will be a unique and potentially stunning Canadian institution. It's a great way to say "thanks" for all the Canadian wilderness has given us.



John Lentz, amidst his books, looking at Hanbury's, *Sport And Travel In The Northland Of Canada*, that will be donated to The Canadian Canoe Museum.

Who's Walking There?

Story by Iva Kinclova

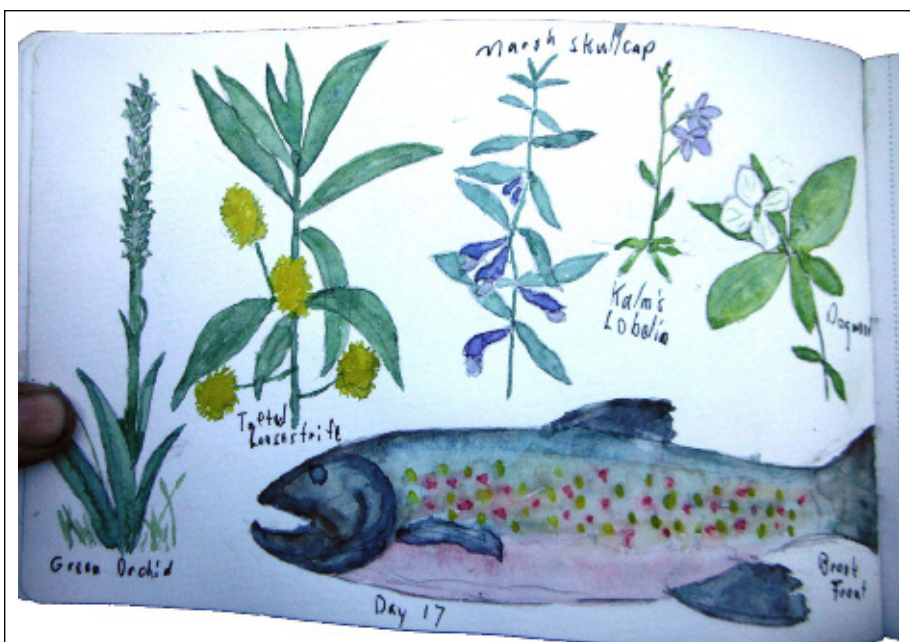
Photos by Tova Christensen



Frank, the fisherman and artist, in union with nature

"Bear!" I sat up and heard it again. "Beaaaaar!" It was not a dream. The urgency and adrenaline in the sound of the man's voice coming from one of our tents

was coaxing my mind to wake up. It was 1:30 a.m. and our group of six paddlers were camping on a wide sandy beach 220 km from the Hudson Bay coast.



Franks daily journal

As I threw on pants and a bug jacket, I felt briefly guilty about potentially coming three seconds too late to my fellow paddler's rescue. But since I was hearing no sounds at the moment, my mind reasoned that he was either already dead or the bear was gone; and I, in either case, might be more useful without a significant blood-letting by mosquitos. I put on my 'armour' – a life jacket filled with emergency tools, among them a bear spray and bear bangers. While stumbling out of the tent, I firmly directed Sara, my tent mate, "Start packing, we are leaving." The flight response made immediately perfect sense.

Once standing upright, I did simultaneously two things. I started screwing a banger into my bear banger holder and searched to understand what had just happened at our campsite. My brain retrieved from my memory the action of unscrewing a cap of a cartridge and then screwing a cartridge into a pencil-like holder. I wanted to get a bear banger in a ready position in case it would be needed to scare the bear away. I unscrewed a small part at the end of the holder and then dropped it to the ground. As it landed in the sand, I realized that I shouldn't have done that. I was supposed to just remove a cap from the cartridge. I bent down and picked up the little part with a hand shaking so much that I could barely grip it between my fingers. The shaking was due to adrenaline racing through my veins. The potential for a real-life enactment of any number of the attacked-by-a-bear stories caused me to release it. "Darn it", I thought, "I should have practiced this in the dark and many times over! It's impossible to remember a simple thing like this while being swept by an adrenaline-tsunami."

From the calmness of movement of people on the moonlit beach, the bear, if it indeed had made an appearance, was not here at the moment. Jim reported that he heard an animal sniffing around his tent and observed his tent fly shake a few times. When he was certain enough that it was not the wind moving the fly, he

bravely decided to ‘wind’ the bear and swung an elbow towards the intruder. At the same time he let out a yell, the one that woke me up. Then hurriedly, he unzipped the inside of his tent and saw a part of the disappearing animal. Next, Stew, who slept in another solo tent, commented that he had heard the animal tinkering with pots on the beach and then sniffing around his tent. He froze and lay still until Jim’s yell came.

We investigated the beach for footprints and found claw marks in the sand right beside Jim’s tent. No, Jim definitely wasn’t dreaming. The evidence was in the sand. And about 20 m upstream from the tents, we found another well imprinted paw mark. It was the biggest bear paw footprint I have ever seen. We identified it with the help of Stew’s animal guidebook as belonging to a polar bear.

The identification was quite a surprise. We did not expect a polar bear to be so far away from the coast. But this conclusion was consistent with Jim’s feeling that he has seen a polar bear. It made me realize how fragile we were, in the dark, in polar bear country, without a firearm. That was scary. A close encounter with any bear would raise my adrenalin levels, but the fact that it was a polar bear put my mind into overdrive. We had discussed bringing a fire arm several times on our pre-trip conference calls but all of us in the group ended up accepting the theory that polar bears come only about 100 km inland. To deal with the last 100 km in polar bear land, we planned to paddle a really long day using the strong current at the end of the Winisk River. This plan would save us the hassle of carrying a gun for the whole 750 km on our trip down the Pipestone and Winisk Rivers.

Not being polar bear experts, but mere city folks who love roaming the northern lands, we were not 100% sure that we were dealing with a polar bear based on one footprint and a claw mark. But we agreed that we should behave conservatively and assume that a white bear had just visited our camp. Now a fair bit past the unconscious flight reflex, I felt that our best way to remedy the situation would be to leave the bear’s territory. But my suggestion was met with the objection that it was pretty dark and it was going to be dark for at least another



Jim, Stew and Sara enjoying a full fish belly on the Winisk River

three hours. The idea of making a big a fire and taking turns being on a watch seemed to go over better.

So we collected wood, but then instead of taking turns watching over the campsite, we all stood around the fire. It seemed that further debriefing of what just happened was necessary. Stew asked about a polar bear ‘protocol.’ I suggested: “Make noise, throw rocks, stay together as a group and appear big. And if it comes really close, then punch it in the nose. This seemed to have saved a few people visited by polar bears in their tents.” I shivered, imagining how scary and paradoxically comical it must be to

be so close to such a powerful animal. The little human and the big white bear!

After the debrief, we moved our tents close together and then everybody began to turn in. The debrief around the fire relieved enough stress and made the idea of going back to sleep plausible. We certainly needed it. The past day, we had paddled 45 km at an average speed of 5 km/h. We had expected by now that the current would be stronger but the river was fairly still. And we had another 220 km to go and only four days allotted to it.

We arranged ourselves in the tent so that we could pack in a hurry and got two



Sara and Iva running rapids on the Winisk River



The bear beach on the Winisk River

pot lids ready to make noise. I went to bed understanding that this was not our best choice, but I was too tired to take on convincing the group to move. I chose to settle my mind on a thought that this was one of those bear walk-throughs that are harmless. I have experienced them a number of times knowing only from footprints in the morning that I had been visited by a bear.

About half an hour after we had all settled down, I woke up to the sound of footsteps behind our tent. This time I knew I wasn't dreaming. I was only half asleep as a result of our recent encounter and my senses were keyed up by 500 km of paddling and sleeping in the bush. "Who's walking there?" I asked fairly loudly and thought, "Weird, we just went to bed half an hour ago. Why would any-

one need to be out there now?" But there was no answer.

I sat up, looked down and experienced one of those moments that last a second but feel like an eternity. My automatic-pilot-survival-brain mechanism immediately kicked in as my conscious mind attempted to throw in a brief complaint, "My god, I've never wished to be that close to a bear." And in that moment of focus, my body concentrated all the gathered adrenalin into the loudest yell that I ever came from my mouth, "Beeeaarr!!!"

I looked out through the fly that I had left pinned open (for easier escape and ability to see out) and saw a small polar bear walking away from our tent. It was about five metres away as it looked back, calmly, slowly, curiously, and kept on walking. It was elegant, with a long nose (a mark of a polar bear), walking lightly with an expression that seemed to indicate that it was in a different realm of consciousness. I wondered, what it was thinking as this scared person continued yelling, "And it's a polar bear!"

Sara yelled too and banged the pots. And we all made an instantaneous unspoken decision to pack up and leave, of course, at a record speed. Strangely, my fear was now replaced by pride (of how loudly I had yelled) and almost elation from all the excitement.

It was 3 a.m. when we started paddling in the moonlight. We stuck together, roused and shaken by our imagination while the actual bear visit had produced only a few footprints in the sand. There were no rapids or channels in the next 100 km so we were presumably not going to make our shock any worse by running rapids in the dark. I kept checking the shore for signs of movement, thinking, "Are we being hunted?" We all debriefed again what had happened and discussed the possible motivations of the bear.

Sara told me that the bear had looked into the tent as it was passing by. We figured that I hadn't seen it look in at that moment because I was looking down getting ready to yell. I thanked my guiding spirits for not having made me look at it at that moment. I couldn't have imagined being any more scared. But then I was also curious about what would have happened if I had seen the bear just



Tova Christensen, our bird expert, inspecting a typical drop on the Winisk River

outside of the tent fly. I wondered what would have happened if I hadn't yelled. The bear seemed just to be passing by. Mind you, this was the second time. Or was it a different bear? We didn't know. None of us experienced both sightings.

Thankfully, nobody blamed anybody. But obviously we had to figure out how to deal with this sudden apparent enlargement of polar bear country. We knew that we were not prepared to sleep any longer in the dark in polar bear country and had to adjust to the circumstances. So we left beaches to the bears to walk on and resorted to upper floors of the vegetation, level areas up on high banks. We placed our food barrels away from tents and canoes. We cooked away from tents. Sara and I slept armed with rocks and pot lids. This seemed like a very straight-forward, no-nonsense and effective solution. But no matter how I reasoned with myself that we would very likely not see a bear until we got to Peawanuck, I was firmly gripped by fear. So much so that I was afraid to turn over in my sleeping bag so that the noise of it didn't scare me. Two night later, the last morning on the Winnisk River, when I woke up with Sara, we were both coughing. The combined lack of sleep and physical exhaustion paddling 50-60 km/day was taking its toll.

I was grateful when we arrived in Peawanuck, a community of about 400. All locals had a polar bear story to tell and I felt safer knowing we were with people who had lived with white bears for centuries. It also helped greatly to learn that polar bears didn't hang around the village.

We heard all kinds of stories. Just after we arrived on the beach, a Cree man talked about a bear that recently had attacked his uncle in a camp. Another person mentioned that children are told at school that they shouldn't pet the female bears when they walk through the village in the spring when moving from the sea ice on the land. A local nurse shared with us that she drove to work when it was dark, a distance of about two blocks, in order to avoid a possible encounter. George Hunter, a former chief of the Cree in Peawanuck, explained that polar bears are very curious and like to check out things and poke at them. Another person said that they hunt



We caught only one rainbow trout, but it was a beauty!

slowly, and keep coming back.

From these stories and my web research conducted after my return to 'civilization', I settled on the idea the our bear was a female, checking out the country, poking around, most likely looking for a den. Polar bears diet consists predominantly of seal and when they come on land when sea ice melts, they rest and do not eat; pregnant females come on the land to den and give birth to a cub during which time they live on fat reserves from seal hunting.

Even though there are no polar bears

or seals on Georgian Bay, I sleep now lightly on the land. It is my way of honouring the power of the white bear and cherishing the adventure of seeing its nose so close to mine.

The participants of our trip on the Pipestone and Winnisk Rivers: Sara Gartlan, Jim Stover, Frank deJong, Tova Christensen, Stew Dodge. We paddled it in July 2013.

Resources: <http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@soar/documents/document/263710.pdf>



Dawn after we paddled for 2 hours in the dark from our bear beach

Steel River Loop

Story and photos by Neil Miller



Staged for put-in at Santoy Lake

In the time it takes to blink your eyes – a tenth of a second or even less – I saw everything with complete clarity. I needed to have my paddle on the right side of the boat pulling a strong cross-draw but then in the blink of those eyes my canoe drove into the cliff face and I was underwater. However, that was Day Five of our trip on the Steel River Loop in the Thunder Bay District of Ontario and like all stories I need to begin at the beginning.

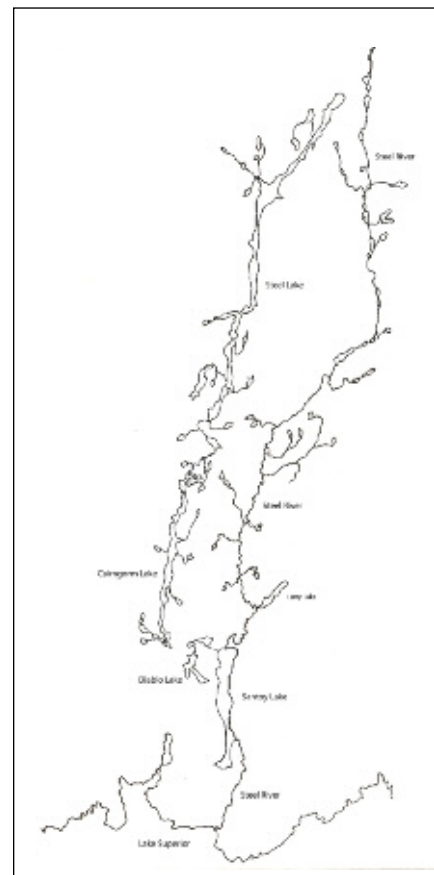
The night before our departure on the trip, we stayed in one of three motels in Marathon. There were two more west of town on Highway 17 bringing the total to five, but with all the contractors working on the highways, mines, paper mills and the railroad these motels filled up by 7:00 p.m. making reservations necessary. We took the recommendation of our desk clerk and went to one of three restaurants in town and had decent steak and potatoes at the Country Kitchen. That this desk clerk had never eaten in any of these three restaurants continues to perplex us. There is nothing within 40 miles east or west of Marathon. In the restaurant, we exchanged interesting and friendly banter with three somewhat inebriated native Canadians dressed in their weekend finest but who only or-

dered a single plate of white bread between them. For us, a canoe trip has always been just as much about the interesting people we meet along the way as the canoeing itself.

The environment of the 152 kilometers that make up the Steel River Loop looks and feels remote and even primeval and that's only part of what makes this loop trip unique. The put-in is only three kilometres off Highway 17, about 720 kilometres west of Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario. About half of the route is lakes and portages and the other half is river. The route ends where it starts so there is no coordination and expense of a shuttle and the Steel River Loop is lightly traveled. We paddled this route in 2003 and ten years later in 2013. On both trips, we had the feeling by the second day that we were deeper into the Canadian wilderness than we really were. In 2003 we saw a single tandem canoe camped on Steel Lake and a single tandem canoe camped at Rainbow Falls. In 2013 we didn't see anybody or even recent signs of anybody. Unlike our first trip, in 2013 we got a reasonably early start, putting into Santoy Lake at 9:45 in the morning. The region was affected by an occluded front, which enveloped us in fog and occasional showers. But more importantly,

it gave us a flat and calm Santoy Lake and so at 11:20 a.m. we took out at the lakeside start of the Diablo Lake portage trail.

There was a faded strip of surveyor tape marking the take-out. The trail up from the lake ranged from very steep-to-steep, then back to very steep and it just seemed to go on and on before we reached the top. Steep and very steep converts to 92 metres in elevation over a linear distance of between 300 and 400 metres, depending upon at what point you consider yourself at the top. The portage trail itself undulates and is mostly rocks and roots, which have allowed vegetation to get a toehold over the millenniums. I surprised myself at the number of times I had to stop and rest along this portage. As if though the trail wasn't tough enough, I knew there was an unpleasant surprise waiting for



Steel River Loop Map

me. Locally, it's called the Devil's Den and it's a 200 metre section of boulders and large rocks with no possible circumvention. This stretch has a very Pleistocene feel. The sun can't get through the heavy foliage so the rocks are covered in lichen and the trees and brush dip down over the trail. Carrying my pack which had a weight of somewhere around 30 kilos, there were portions of the Devil's Den that I dragged myself over on my stomach. On my second trip through this stretch with the boat I was stopping about every 4 metres to re-charge until my partner, Brian, came back and carried my boat the final 250 metres to Diablo Lake. This portage had taken us five hours and ten minutes. One final point about the Diablo Lake Portage: This was *my* experience and will not necessarily be yours. In fact, just to put the most positive perspective on it, two acquaintances in 2004 made this port in a single carry in 81 minutes.

Brian was still hoping we could get through the next three portages and into Cairngorm Lake before we stopped for the night. We had three more hours of daylight and then I was spent. We set up our Camp One on the same island where we had camped our first night ten years before. We were hoping to make this complete loop in six days but, at the end of Day One, we had already jinxed that timing. The three portages from Diablo Lake into Cairngorm Lake certainly weren't brutal like the Diablo portage but they were tough nevertheless. We made it two-thirds of the way up Cairngorm Lake and with the sun set and only twilight for visibility we set up Camp Two on a small island, which had an even smaller bald spot that would just barely accommodate our Big Agnes 3-man backpack tent. There was solid granite under us so we had to weigh down the tent corners and guidelines with rocks while stacking the canoes, one on top of the other, on some thick bushes. In the night, between the sleet storms, we could hear the wind but it never buffeted our tiny camp.

The next morning we paddled into the upper Cairngorm Lake and into the northwest wind that we'd been hearing gusting over the bluffs. We were able to duck behind the islands that populate the end of the lake until we had to strug-



Diablo Lake looking northwest

gle across open water to get into the east-arm bay that ends at the portage take-out. The reeds had grown thick and it took us a little while going back and forth before we found the take-out. The first part of this trail was pretty mucky and after that it slowly disappeared. We had to set our gear down and find the route that we marked with broken twigs. From that point forward it was a fairly easy trail to a pretty little waterfall

where the Steel River – more of a creek – flowed toward Esker Lake. This creek was about 650 metres long, and there were several deadfalls and floating logs where we had to exit and drag over. Some of these were dynamic, moving with our weight, so there were some dicey moments but neither of us went swimming. We had to hug the north shore of Esker Lake because of the wind. This is the side the actual esker is



Looking up at the Devil's Den, Diablo Lake Portage



Lunch stop, Steel Lake

on so it afforded a little protection. The creek picked up when we ran out of lake and ended at a debris dam and waterfall. The portage was fairly obvious but someone had marked it with a rotting life jacket. The trail went up a short incline then down a gradual hill to end at an earthen approach abutment for a fire-road that went over an overbuilt bridge.

This road was not here in 2003, being built (I learned after we returned) a year later. Going up the abutment required both hands and feet because of

its steepness but this was not the problem. The problem was we could not find the continuation of the trail on the other side. We scouted up and down the other side of this road and we found nothing. We finally made our own serpentine trail that ended at what appeared to be a watering hole for game. This scouting had chewed up a couple hours and because there was a large semi-submerged log at our put-in, we had to perform the always-tricky over-the-stern entry into the boats. Two kilometres and one more

short portage later and we entered the bottom of the long and narrow Steel Lake. The wind was blowing even stronger at the bottom of this lake and we had to fight our way over to a campsite on the eastern shore. Camp Three was the roomiest and most comfortable campsite yet and as we ate our FD meal and drank our South African dry red, "Goats do Roam", we discussed the real possibility of being wind-bound the next day. We were going to be pleasantly surprised.

Day Four was clear skies and windless and we enjoyed a perfect fall day's paddle up the 29 kilometre length of Steel Lake. The temperature never went above 17°C and this turned out to be our best paddling day on the route. Steel Lake is a beautiful deep blue lake but it should be noted that there are no places to pull out except at the bottom and the top of the lake. Two thirds of the paddle up this lake there is an island where we stopped for lunch but it was very rough and un-suitable for camping. This island was the same place we stopped for lunch 10 years before. When we ran out of lake, once again mirroring our first trip on this route, we camped at a comfortable spot at the take-out of the first of three portages over to the main branch of the Steel River. The take-out was up a steep rock face but the site was very decent with an excellent fire-pit. As we drank our fourth and final bottle of wine, a Malbec called "Layer Cake", we discussed the necessity of trying to pick up our pace enough to shave off one full day. We sat at the fire enjoying the wine with its perfect mixture of fruity and dry with oaky overtones and Brian thought we could do it. I was not as optimistic but I kept it to myself.

We broke camp and ate breakfast in the deep shadows of early morning and by 8:30 a.m. we were humping our boats and gear down the first portage trail. This was a short trail with a very rough and rocky put-in. After a short 300-metre paddle, at the trailhead of the second portage, there was a flat gravel beach just wide enough for the bows of two canoes. The trail immediately went up a near vertical washout about eight metres in height which was a suitable introduction to the crux portage of the three going over to the Steel main



Very small Camp 2, Cairngorm Lake

branch. There's been some dispute as to the length of this port but we still believe it is every bit 800 metres. Carrying my heavy pack and with Brian out of sight ahead of me, I came to an avalanche chute wash-out and I couldn't see the trail going ahead so I went down the steep 15 metres to the bottom only to find no trail. I backtracked and finally found the trail hidden behind a low tree branch going around a large boulder. On my second trip with the canoe on my shoulders, I began to hear a creaking sound, which became louder and then my demountable carrying yoke shattered in three places on my shoulders. With the boat on the side of the trail I hustled down to the put-in and caught Brian just before he was shoving off. Instead of loaning me his portable yoke, he followed me back and carried my canoe for me. Fortunately, we have the same canoes (Swift Ospreys) so his yoke fit my boat perfectly.

After the third portage we were in the main branch of the Steel, heading south downstream and the first thing we noticed was the high water volume and noticeable current flow of the river. The first eight kilometres were mostly swift river and then it changed to narrow flat-water lakes each one connected by a short rapid. The rapids were Class I and II by virtue of water volume only. There were no major obstacles although we did scrape a few pillows. We were into Day Five and making really good time. Even though we were still a good number of kilometres from the logjams which are the mark of the lower Steel, we began to believe that we really could finish the route in one more day. At around 4:30 a.m., Brian entered a Class II rapid with a hard right turn and disappeared around the corner. From my vantage point this looked simple enough and I followed on. But I had become complacent and I didn't think it through all the way. As I reached the hard right turn with a lot of current speed and force, I had the split second epiphany described at the beginning of this narrative. Quite simply, my paddle was on the wrong side of the boat for turning purposes and I collided with the rocks and dumped. Fortunately all my gear functioned as it was designed with the exception of my map case, which opened



Neil departing Camp 3, up Steel Lake

up turning my maps into goo. I dog-paddled my way to a gravel bar made up of cobble sized igneous rocks. After Brian brought me my pack, I changed into dry clothes as he proceeded to collect all the other sundry stuff including my boat. The entire mini-drama took between 1½ to 2 hours and we were underway again.

A couple of kilometres later we were at another Class II rapid with a marked portage trail around it. Brian made a quick scout and determined we could run it, which we did and then we pulled in at the bottom where the portage trail ended and made camp for the night. Camp Five was tight and we could only

put our tent right on the trail but the sun had set and we knew nobody else was coming along. We were out of wine and my butt was bruised and a little sore when the night came. As the darkness fell, we became infested by some sort of moth. Day Six began with our earliest departure yet. We were killing moths right up to shoving off into the grey of early morning. Because of the increased current, we made it through the Rainbow Falls portage by mid-morning. The take-out to the falls was up a near vertical sandy-clay bank, four to six metres in height, which would become the norm for all the logjam take-outs as well. After a short steep uphill, the trail



Steel Lake, calm and spectacular



Sunset, Camp 3, Steel Lake

ran for about 400 metres downhill to a gravel-bar put-in. It should be noted that the campsite at the falls is flat and would accommodate multiple tents.

The day was partly cloudy and a little humid but the five kilometres of river below the falls were some of the best on the whole route. It ran from swift to Class I and there were no pillows or other obstacles. Below this the river slowed down and began to meander. About 2½ kilometres below a heavily built logging bridge known locally as Dead Horse Bridge, the river started to meander more tightly. We were still enjoying a small current that we had not seen ten years before. Through this stretch and before the major logjams, there are ancient granite cliffs forming a wall on the eastern shore towering more than 130 metres – a spectacular sight. Only several kilometres below the cliffs, we came upon the first major logjam. We had been through here before and we had our own trip report and so we paddled over to where we knew the portage trail was on river right. Brian climbed up the steep sandy clay embankment and yelled back that he found the trail so I exited my canoe and prepared to drag my pack up the six metre face. I had just gotten my pack up on top when Brian returned saying that all he could find were game trails that evaporated into the thick undergrowth. We wasted nearly two hours trying to

find this portage trail and finally Brian said he was going to try the other shore so we both got back into the boats and paddled over. Immediately, he called back that he had found it and after we completed the portage we didn't go very far before we came on another massive logjam. We checked river right again and there was the trail. In ten years, a new fifth logjam had been created in front of the other four. After these two portages it was coming up on twilight so we stopped at a steep little beach on an inside bend and it took a fair amount of work with our paddles to get the tent-site reasonably level but we set up Camp Six. We cooked and ate our food in the dark and made a worthless small twig fire and by 8:00 p.m. we were in the tent. We had been on the water for over eleven hours and we were exhausted.

Day Seven started earlier than any day before it and since we had no more coffee we just packed up, fired down Clif Bars and were on the water at 7:20 a.m.. Brian got 30 metres ahead of me and I could no longer see him. Just as the grey of daybreak was occurring, we encountered the third logjam. This had the same take-out and put-in as the others but the trail was only about 150 metres and we made fairly quick work of it. About nine kilometres below this we encountered the fourth, but this one made very little sense to us. It was the

only one that was marked with a portage sign but the trail ended at more logjams. While Brian scouted ashore, I got in the canoe and paddled around this logjam and the river turned to the right and was clear. Joined now by Brian, we went another 150 metres and there was the remnant of the logjam we had circumvented. Part of it had broken free and gone a little further downstream. We found no trail on either side of the river so we pushed under logs and dragged over logs tight to the river right shore for about 50 metres and we were through.

The fifth and final logjam was exactly as we remembered it and once portaged, we made it unencumbered to the head of Santoy Lake. To our dismay, there was a strong south wind blowing up the lake, which was déjà vu of ten years before. In 2003, halfway down the lake we were overtaken by a monster thunderstorm so we decided to forgo the lunch stop and just keep going. As crazy as this sounds, we both had business meetings in the Detroit area the next morning. Brian's was at 8:00 a.m. and mine was at 10:00 a.m.. The wind was blowing up the lake at 10 to 13 knots with an occasional gust hitting 15 knots. This was the hardest either of us had paddled a solo boat and it took 2½ hours of continuous paddling to get to the take-out. We couldn't let up for a moment or the wind would turn us around and start blowing us back up the lake. When I beached at the take-out, I just collapsed over the thwart.

Instead of a motel and cocktails in Wawa, it was a dinner in the Marathon's A&W and a straight drive through the night. We got back to Brian's house at 4:00 a.m. Thursday morning and he left a 6:00 a.m. for his meeting. I had the luxury of sleeping in until 8:00 a.m. and then I also left for my meeting. For so challenging and fascinating a trip it had such an inglorious ending. I would say the Steel River Loop has a multiple personality disorder but in a good way. Parts of this route feel prehistoric; other sections feel like you're entering the Barrens while others are pure Northern Canada. Lakes, ponds, fast and slow river, this route has something for every paddler and in some places whether you want it or not.

In Search of Lesser Gods: Cyprus Lake to High Dump

Story and photos by Gary Storr

I am standing on a white boulder beach watching the surf crash on shore. As each dying swell slides back among the stones it is swallowed by a following wave. It's November...and night, and I'm shivering under a star-studded sky. I glance up and down the beach, then behind me but see nothing. I have never felt so alone...and alive. I climb back over the rocks to the pack that I dropped under the trees and pitch my tent. I eat a cold supper, wary of what cooking odours might bring, and wriggle into my sleeping bag. My tent fly snaps in the wind; I alternate between sleep and alertness all through the night.

It was a brief yet arduous trek that had brought me to Halfway Log Dump. Without understanding the reason, I had been trying to come here for years. But as each autumn rolled around, I was stricken with a flu bug...or it would rain. Now, on my fourth attempt, I was about to realize my goal. After scarfing down a quick lunch in the Cyprus Lake parking lot, I set out across the escarpment: a grizzled graybeard with forty pounds of gear in my backpack and on my feet, hiking boots stitched by Italian craftsmen from the Dolomites.

The guidebook assured me that I would be travelling the most rugged stretch of the Bruce Trail and, in part, it was that promise that had lured me here. The path threaded over unyielding terrain along the upper edge of a cliff for a half-day's duration, then descended to a beach where I would pass a quiet evening entertaining my thoughts.

East of the Horse Lake Trail the path drops to three oases at the base of the Niagara Escarpment: Storm Haven (where camping is permitted), Halfway Log Dump (where it is not) and my destination, High Dump. A detour over smooth limestone boulders to replenish water bottles is a must at these beaches and I reluctantly broke stride to do so...at the first two. Utmost care is required in negotiating the shifting rocks underfoot – twice my hiking boots saved me from a turned ankle – at a time of year when no one wanders past.

Emerging from the forest at the top of the escarpment I was tempted to lean over and peer at the fallen detritus below, but up here balance was a precarious state. Lemming-like vertigo gripped me on the weatherworn outlooks, drawing me to the edge. From one exposed and precipitous pulpit, I gazed upon swells lapping over craggy, broken coastline and stepped back. For a fleeting, self-aggrandizing moment the bay seemed to heave with unfathomable power, like a living breathing behemoth – at my sole bidding. I was Zeus; I was king of the gods.

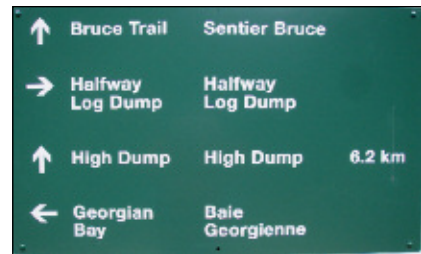
The escarpment stretched eastward in a wide and distant arc and I wondered how far I had to go. No matter how punishing my regimen, it was never rigorous enough. Using my hands to scale rough dolostone, then tottering across swirled and dimpled bedrock, I questioned if I'd have enough strength in reserve for the return trip. The last section of trail leading to High Dump was more forgiving – a carefree whistle along an earthen path – and I was glad for it.

November is a time of dying. The open woodland seemed devoid of wildlife and bird sightings were rare. Gnarled oaks

pushed upward through a floor of decay like hands vying from the grave. For some, this outing would be a soul-sucking undertaking but I was unaffected. Instead, I was pleased with my progress despite a rapidly diminishing water supply. No matter – I would soon be at High Dump.

Coming partway down the escarpment for what I assumed was the last time, a mouldering lean-to greeted me in the shadows. Nearby were two ominous, bright yellow signs tacked to widely spaced poplars. They warned me, like a clash of cymbals, that there was a bear lurking in the area. "USE TRAILS WITH EXTREME CAUTION!" – the notices rang out.

I was momentarily dumbstruck but my inner voice quickly jump-started and regained its facility. Damned Parks Canada – not a single heads-up along the way! Now what? I knew the answer instinctively: Get out. I had no pressing urge to overnight at High Dump waiting for a bear to crash my party. Previous ursine encounters had taught me that at the very least, I would see a flash of black fur as the bear vanished into the brush. Some, however, loiter and scope out the situation. A nuisance bear might bluff-charge me to a distant perch where I



Six km from Halfway Log Dump to High Dump...and six back



Captivating views from the outlooks



View from the scarp

would finger make-believe worry beads as it tore into my kit and gulped down my breakfast...but I couldn't see any point in that. I shook the last drops of water onto my tongue then turned and lumbered back up the escarpment.

There was no cellphone reception down on the beaches and I wanted to tell my wife I was returning to Halfway Dump. At the top of the cliff the call went through. "Change in plans," I said.

Debby chuckled. She was acknowledging my capacity to



View to the west

rise to the occasion – implying that I had what Tom Wolfe called the right stuff. "Call me in the morning," she instructed cheerfully, and hung up. Bewildered, I stared at the cellphone. It was time to get my sang-froid on and ditch the Sturm und Drang. Quickly I took inventory: I had no water, thighs like jelly and, in a worst-case scenario, a black bear stalking me. I checked my watch – it was almost five o'clock. Halfway Dump was a two-hour hike at best. After that I would be walking in the dark. With renewed vigour, I hastened along the path.

Soon thirst began to niggle at me, urging me to act. I tried to ignore it. After a while I noticed that my throat was dry and my shirt was wet. Perfect, I thought, with growing consternation. Another disequilibrium – only this time there was no stepping back from the brink. This was an imbalance from which I could not retreat.

Darkness soon enveloped me and I stopped to forage an apple and a headlamp from my pack. I rubbed my thighs to keep a charley horse at bay. Shouldering the pack again required significant effort. I soldiered on, savouring the fruit, rolling its juices in my mouth until there was enough to take the edge off my craving. Perspiration was my enemy and my back was soaked where my pack pressed against it.

Solo backpackers would be wise to examine a couple of risks before attempting the Bruce Trail in fall. First, will they be travelling after dark? (Unless they are overcome with bush fever and/or bear phobia the answer will be no.) And yes, the trail will be obscured by fallen leaves. The first consideration, if answered in the affirmative, will exacerbate the second. The trail became impossible to follow – I wandered off it repeatedly, backtracking and striking out anew. Blazes were difficult to locate in the darkness. The rugged nature of the path dictated that the next trail marker would be around a bend or up a rise – a nighttime peril in itself. I contemplated making camp by the trail but with burning muscles and parched lips, I pressed on. Dehydrated, I knew I wouldn't sleep. At regular intervals I turned my head, sweeping the flashlight beam through the forest. Trees leapt in and out of the light like hobgoblins but my stalker, if I had one, remained out of sight.

Further along, the path began to widen and ahead I perceived a shape. I stopped to appraise it but its form was vague, dissolved by darkness. I moved toward it. As I neared the spectre the cedars withdrew and I found myself in a clearing. The form sharpened with definition – I knew this monolith, this sentry of night: by day it was a sheet of plywood supported on two sturdy posts...and it marked the road allowance to the beach at Halfway Log Dump. I was only steps away.

I am on a white boulder beach illuminated brightly by a waxing moon. I drop my pack and carefully step over the rocks to fill my water bottle. I drink lustily and fill my bottle again. The surf slaps the boulder upon which I crouch, splashing me with reviving sprays. Sated, I stand and drag my forearm across my chin. I survey the beach but the only bear I see is Ursa Major. After supper I carry my food bag down by the shore and leave it among the stones.

This is an idyllic place. I enter my tent and shimmy into my sleeping bag. Here, among spirits of my own invention, I find what I am seeking. The wind and the waves lull me, pulling me in and out of sleep.

Linguine on the Tatshenshini River

Story by Earl Silver

Photos by Neil Hartling

This is not your regular trip report down a northern river. Rather, it is a guide to the area and the river that may be of interest to others as a potential wilderness experience.

The Tat (short for the Tatshenshini) flows from the southern region of the Yukon into northwestern British Columbia then into the Alaska Panhandle. It is “contained” within three “Parks”: the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary, Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park, and a US national reserve. The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park has been designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and is considered one of the most magnificent river systems on earth. The largest ice fields in the world outside of the poles is located in and around the Tat and so, not surprisingly, the Tat is fed mainly by glaciers and contains a great deal of silt. The river is pushy right from the get go and one has to start a bit lower down since a few sets of rapids at the top end are not suitable for a covered whitewater canoe. Access is by a long dirt road off the Haines Road Highway #3.

We did the river at the beginning of July of 2014 and the water level would have been viewed as high. Within the first few hours or so of paddling there is a long set of class 3 rapids for the experienced whitewater canoeists. There are a couple of small sets of rapids towards the end of the trip that can easily be portaged should they prove to be too technical at lower water levels. When the Tat joins the Alsek for the last third of the journey to the ocean, the river grows in volume by about 3 to 4 times, and like many such rivers, can be rough and unpredictable along with significant braiding in certain sections. Paddling is not technical (except as noted) and the current moves one down the river quickly.

The Human Footprint

Information on how the interior peoples lived can be gained from visiting a site called a “Long Ago People’s Place”.



An aerial view of an un-named glacier and lake which feed the Alsek River

Their site is located on the way from Whitehorse to Haines Junction just off the Alaska Hwy. Met and Harold can be reached at longagopeople-space@gmail.com for an arranged tour of their outdoor exhibits. Their exhibits and listening to the oral history is well

worth it. In Whitehorse there is a small museum on the gold rush era along with a display of some of the wildlife in the area. Whitehorse, by the way, is more like a small urban center on the west coast rather than a northern urban city. It has at least 4 major coffee



Massive glacial bergs on Alsek Lake calved from the Alsek and Grand Plateau Glaciers



The Cessna Caravan for the flight back to Whitehorse at Dry Bay Alaska

houses along with numerous craft and arts outlets. There are many cultural events that take place here and it is the home of a community college.

The Wildlife Footprint

This area contains an abundance of wildlife. We saw many grizzly and black bear signs along with many birds in-

cluding eagles. In fact, we saw three grizzlies, a few wolves and some mountain goats. One does have to be careful travelling down the river and hiking to avoid surprising the big boys and gals. The parks have done a commendable job of ensuring no trace camping, including taking out human waste so animals do not associate people with food. There are surprisingly mosquitoes on many of the camping sites due to the general warming trend in the area.

Information Access

Whitehorse has an excellent tourist center for the Yukon, and Haines Junction has a superb modern interactive center on the park areas in which the Tat is located. The last one is certainly not to be missed. If you get hungry after your visit to the information center, you can always visit the local bakery and coffee shop in Haines Junction. Since you will need air transport for your return from Dry Bay Alaska to Whitehorse, there are numerous charter companies with whom you can make arrangements in Whitehorse.



Linguine 4 Campfire at Gateway Knob on Alsek Lake with glacial bergs in the background



View of Walker Glacier from a terminal moraine. The Glacier has receded over a kilometer in 20 years

Besides the regular topo maps, an artist's rendition is available on the Tat and Alsek Rivers from www.CloudburstProductions.net

Odds and Sods

Because one is travelling through numerous parks that are controlled, you will need to book in advance and pay about \$300 in various park fees. In addition, one needs a passport because the last leg of the trip is in Alaska. This last point merits further explanation. Before going down the river, one has to drive to the customs border crossing down Hwy. #2 and let them know that you will be entering the US. Upon your return to Whitehorse, you will need to report back in. You will also need to take your passport with you down the river. A waste of time in some respects but also an opportunity to view the local scenery.

It is my understanding that about 500 people travel down the Tat each season. By far the most common mode of transportation is large inflatable rubber rafts with some kayakers. From what I could determine, everyone does their share in keeping to "no trace camping". Our haul on the journey was 3 tent pegs, a

dime and a rescued abandoned solo kayak. We saw a few other parties going down the river but nothing intrusive.

There are a number of opportunities along the river to hike up the valleys or to see the glaciers from hilltops. Do not miss the chance to get a bird's eye perspective.

The Ever Changing River and Weather

Given the nature of the river's sources there is quite a fluctuation in flow throughout the season. In addition, over the years, the Tat changed its course in a number of sections over a rather short period of time. The nature of the river is dynamic. For example, towards the end of the journey the river flows into Alsek Lake. When we travelled down, the Lake was so full of pieces of ice as a result of glacial calving, we had to take a back door around the north of a small island. The Lake looked like a graveyard of small and large chunks of ice.

We camped on Alsek Lake for an extra day. The sounds of birds were sometimes interrupted by "thunder" of ice movement and the calving of icebergs. On one such occasion, with no

notice or sound, the river bed rose, along the shore, some 45 to 50 feet within the space of three separate waves. Fortunately all the tents, except one, were situated far enough up the embankment to avoid disaster. The tent



Grizzly footprints in the mud near Walker Glacier

located too close to shore was fortunately rescued by its owner with only minor water damage to its contents.

The weather definitely requires layered clothing. Clothing can vary from winter toques to summer shorts because of the temperature fluctuation. Expect delays going down river due to rain, low cloud conditions and wind. If you are lucky on the flight back (which we were) you can see an aerial view of part of your journey along with the massive ice fields, glaciers, mountains along with various streams and rivers that have carved their way through the rock.

A Personal Note about the Linguine on the Tatshenshini

What is with the Italian pasta connection to the Tat? The not so short story is that I have not travelled down a northern river for some 15 years and based upon a presentation on the river by Neil Harting, at a recent WCA Symposium, I got the hook. Given the length of absence from paddling and my age, I was not certain whether I could handle the physical demands. I also had to overcome my prejudice against rafting to do the trip with Neil's company (Nahanni River Adventures). Fortunately, the first trip out in July was very small. There were only 4 guests on the trip with three rafts and three guides. One of the guides is an experienced rafter but was getting exposure to the Tat for leading trips later on in the season. Rafting, by the way, is a common form of travel down the rivers of that flow out of the Rockies in Canada and the US.

Rafts can carry a great deal of stuff. The amount of gear and food these crafts carry is overwhelming compared to a canoe. Our guides were super organized, very informative and willing to share their know-how and could cook at a cuisine level to satisfy the most discriminating palate. The title of this article is derived from their excellent Italian dishes (Linguine). They also catered to our international palate of Mexican, Caribbean, Chinese, Mediterranean, North American and German; just to mention a few – much for my prejudice against rafting. I do not think that I have ever eaten so well on any trip.

<https://www.flickr.com/groups/2680116@N23/>



Floating through the mist at the confluence of the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers



Photographers paradise among the wild flowers on the Sediments Creek hike



Hikers enjoying the panoramic view above Sediments Creek looking downriver in the Tatshenshini valley

The Lost Paddle

By Greg Wen

It was on our canoe trip down the North Knife River in Manitoba. We were five or six kilometers from Hudson Bay, picking our way down one of the many channels that the river spreads out into. Always the challenge was to pick the particular stream that had the most water to float in. Not as easy as it looked. We constantly had to get out of the canoes and drag them over sand bars to a deeper channel.

We were in the North Knife delta, the largest in Manitoba. A delta is a tidal zone, an area where salt water and fresh water mix. The salt water moves in and out with the tide so no trees can grow there, just bushes that can tolerate the salt. The bushes only grow to one to two meters in height so your view of the land really opens up. When you are in the delta, you really can see a long ways.

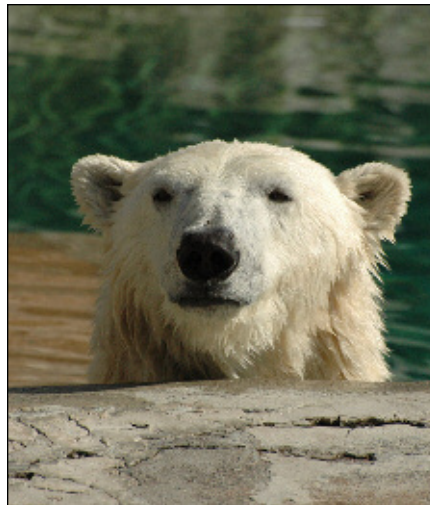
Several channels had rejoined so we were in a wider stream. And then we saw him. A polar bear walking along the right bank. He was easy to spot, the white of his fur contrasting sharply with the green of the shoreline bushes. The bushes were high there, so we only caught glimpses of the polar bear as he weaved in and out of the green. He was probably a hundred meters from us so we wedged the canoes on a sand spit out in the middle of the river and sat and watched the bear as he walked along the shore.

He came abreast of the two canoes and then continued walking upstream. He never once looked out on the river towards us.

We were mesmerized. Our first polar bear in the wild. It seemed like we were watching the bear for about 15 minutes and he got about two hundred meters behind us. Then he slowly slid into the water making no splash as only a polar bear can. We saw only his head as he swam out to the middle of the river. And then it happened.

He turned downstream to follow us. It didn't take long to shake out of our reverie. We quickly went to paddle

mode. I reached for mine. And it was gone. I thought I had laid it on top of the duffle bags. It must have slid off and



slipped into the water (also making no splash), while we were watching the polar bear. I figured that it couldn't have floated too far, but we never saw it again. I had a spare paddle buried under the duffle bags that I quickly retrieved. Never was an item of gear more appreciated.

We paddled steadily and hard until we reached Hudson Bay and the mud flats there. The vegetation right at the river mouth had been eaten down to the ground by snow goose flocks that raise their young there. Nothing green was higher than ten centimeters in height. We could see 360 from where we were so we could finally relax.

Hudson Bay and the shore surrounding it belong to the polar bears. They need the shore to scratch out a living. More so now in summers that have no ice.

We were just passing through and had no intention of lingering. The delta is lacking in shelter from storms that occur all too often, so lingering is not a good choice anyway. The polar bear, by its presence, just encouraged us to be on our way.

We were happy to oblige.

Food for Paddlers

I recently read Ken McGoogan's book "Fatal Passage" which I highly recommend. Ken presented at the Wilderness Canoe Symposium in February 2014 and "Fatal Passage" was reviewed in the *Nastawgan* Spring 2014 issue. The book is the story of John Rae, surgeon and explorer with the Hudson Bay Company who was instrumental in discovering the fate of John Franklin and also the Northwest Passage in his arctic expedition of 1853-54. The book describes the provisions for this trip as "pemmican, flour, biscuits, tea, sugar and preserved milk, but no alcohol except for use as fuel and a small quantity of brandy and wine to be used only as medicine."¹ Rae was a prodigious hunter and fisherman and he and his men were able to supplement these basics with meat (muskox, caribou, ptarmigan, marmots, seal) and salmon. Rae was also able to kill a walrus "whose fat provided enough lamp oil for the entire winter."¹ In preparation for staying over the winter at Repulse Bay, in addition to hunting and fishing, they gathered a large quantity of *Andromeda tetragona* to be used as cooking fuel for four months. *Andromeda tetragona* also known as *Cassiope tetragona* (White Arctic Mountain Heather, Fire Moss) is a dwarf shrub, which Greenland eskimos use as fuel due to its high resin content.² Rae and his men celebrated Christmas with "a meal of choice venison and deers' tongues with a small allowance of biscuit, plum pudding and even a bit of brandy."¹ I think this glimpse into the past provides an interesting comparison to our own trip preparation, which largely depends on a grocery store hunt and a dehydrator.

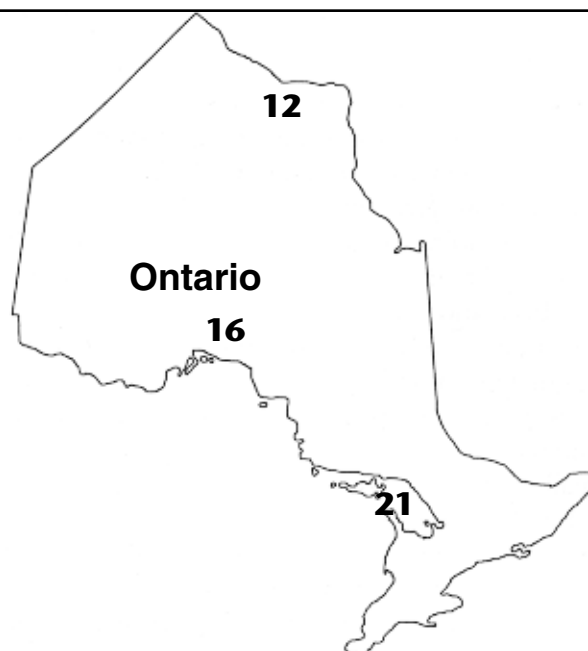
¹McGoogan, Ken. *Fatal Passage - The Untold Story of John Rae, the Arctic Adventurer who Discovered the Fate of Franklin*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 2001. Print.

²*Cassiope tetragona*. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved July 7, 2014, from

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassiope_tetragona

If you would like to share your favourite tripping recipes, please contact Barb Young, 12 Erindale Crescent, Brampton, Ont. L6W 1B5; youngjdavid@rogers.com.

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