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*Sitting in Mommy's seat – Knee Lake.*

## A Letter To My Son: The Hayes River

By Bear Paulsen

Dear Dashwa,

In my twenties I explored Northwest Ontario, just as your grandfather did. Dick, my dad, travelled up the new Red Lake Road in 1955, shortly after the dust from that new gravel road settled. In those days few people explored the Ontario bush. In order to have the same feeling of remoteness as my dad, I've ventured further north, canoeing in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as all three Territories.

Your grandfather was not a writer. I cherish the three pages he wrote to his family before passing away from cancer as I turned twenty-two. Here are the words that most speak to me. "I leave you God's world which I always felt closer to by traipsing around, especially where there were very few people." Canoeing in Canada forms an important connection to my dad, and when I'm deep in the bush I feel closer to him.

I hope the experiences shared in this letter begin to form a sig-





**Camp on the upper Hayes.**

nificant part of your life, as did my childhood trips. Camping as a child embedded the need for wild places in my soul. As an adult, in a world that continues to grow more connected, I find it refreshing to disconnect. Long wilderness trips rejuvenate me and make me more creative. However, if you don't choose to canoe or travel in Canada, that's fine. Choosing your own path makes life a fascinating experiment. What's important to me is offering you the opportunity to feel as comfortable in the wilderness as I do.

Your mother, Claire, and I decided your first Canadian canoe trip would be on Manitoba's historic Hayes River when you were nine months old. You weren't a greenhorn – as a newborn you spent eighteen days in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) during a chilly and wet October. Then as a three-month-old, you winter camped for nine days, again in the BWCA. Those trips

we primarily base camped, and we looked forward to travelling on this one.

I'd wanted to paddle the Hayes for two decades. I'm a steady consumer of fur trade history, and the river's importance to the Hudson Bay Company, along with finishing the trip at York Factory, made it compelling. The river's geography suited our purposes well too, spending the first half of the trip primarily on lakes would allow us to settle into a rhythm before we reached the significant whitewater later in the trip. Your mom and I have paddled the north together in the past, but bringing you added a very different dimension.

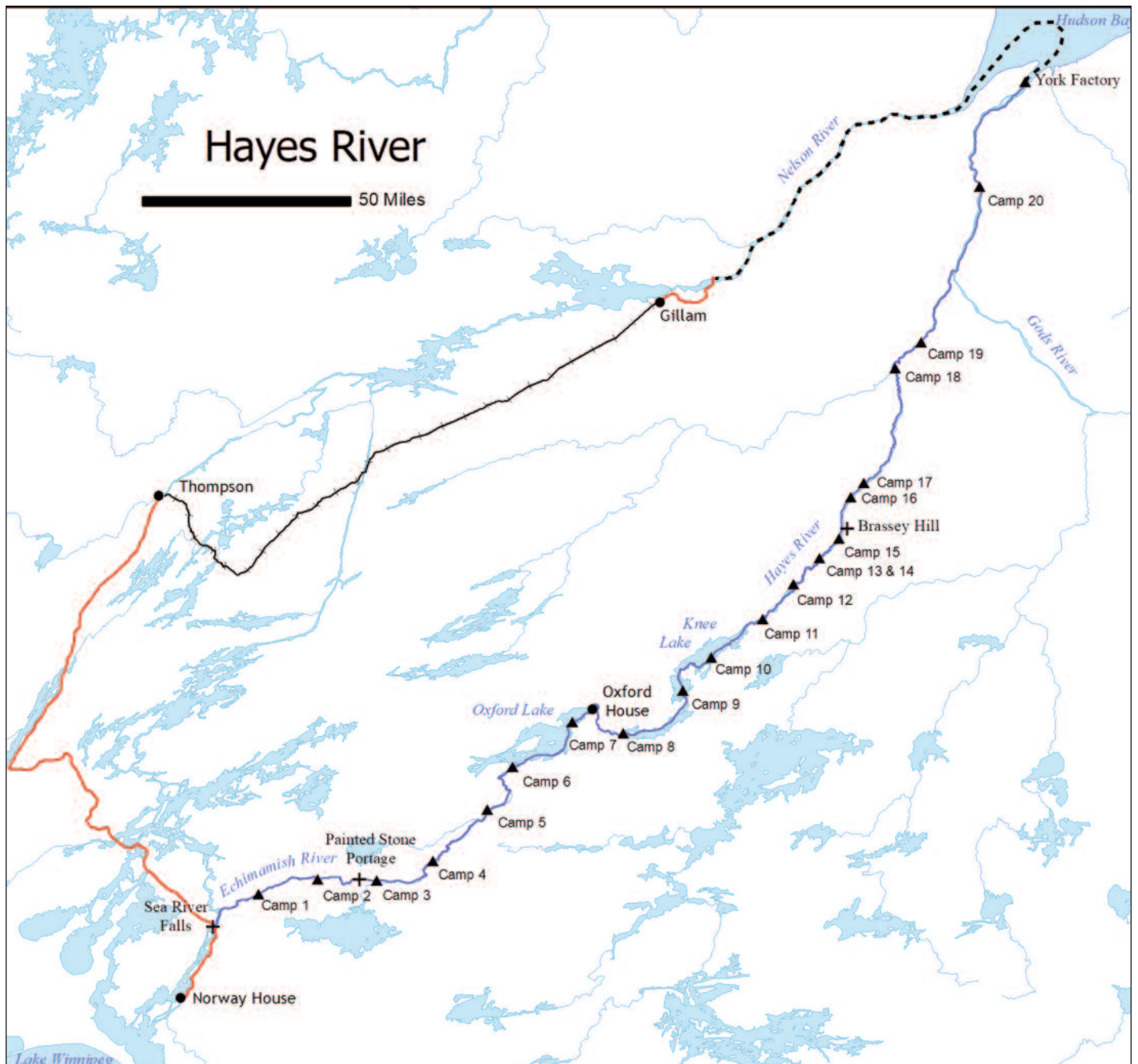
Our first memorable experience happened at the border. We entered the customs building to register the shotgun we carried for polar bears. After completing the paperwork, I inquired about a stamp for your new passport, which rarely happens when entering Canada by vehicle.

The border agent stamped your passport, and enthusiastically suggested that the three of us pose in front of Canada's Maple Leaf Flag for a picture. That experience set the tone for the trip.

We stopped in Winnipeg to pick up a gift for York Factory from friends. The year before, at seven-and-a-half months pregnant, your mom and I paddled Manitoba's Bloodvein River and leapfrogged a couple from Winnipeg a few times. Caleigh and Ryan had YF branded on their paddles, denoting they'd visited York Factory. As I planned this trip I contacted them with questions, and they asked if we could deliver an important item to York Factory on their behalf.

The following morning we arrived in Norway House and met Brock, a friend of Caleigh and Ryan's, who delivered us to Sea River Falls on the Nelson River. From there he would shuttle our minivan





**Hayes River map.**

to Thompson, where we would find it at the end of the trip after a jet boat ride from York Factory to Gillam and a train trip from Gillam to Thompson.

We waved thanks to Brock as we set off down the sea-green Nelson. When you awoke from your nap we stopped for lunch near High Rock, and there my pre-trip concerns began melting away. You happily sat in the shade picking dry moss. The crunchy moss bespoke drought and a lack of insects. A fierce

bug population had been one of my two significant pre-trip concerns. The other was whitewater, which low water would make milder too.

Over the next few days a rhythm developed. After breakfast and packing we paddled for an hour. Actually, I paddled, and Claire did so when you allowed. She primarily served as your entertainment, providing toys like sunscreen tubes, sunglasses, and glasses cases. Eventually you began rubbing your eyes, then Claire

and I sang either Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" or Jerry Vandiver's "Leave No Trace," your bedtime songs. Each of your REM cycles lasted forty-five minutes. Your mom timed your naps, careful we did not disturb you during the light sleep, hopeful you'd sleep longer. While you napped Claire and I paddled together, propelling the canoe as tandem should be, with two paddlers.

After napping and then nursing you played for a while. When you got fussy,



**Lunchtime standing practice.**

you were passed to the other parent for new play horizons. In the stern, you pulled on the bungee cords securing my camera and sponge, fascinated by their springy nature. Both the stern thwart and bow gunwales provided solid points to grab for standing practice. As we paddled, you grunted and harrumphed your success at remaining upright, your hips gyrating like a tiny Elvis impersonator.

By the trip's midpoint we'd found

your three favorite toys along portages. First, a pair of sunglasses: you wanted to play with ours, but the play often involved nearly throwing them overboard, so the found sunglasses were perfect for you to dangle over the gunwales. Next, a beaver jawbone: bleached white by endless sun. I'd never considered teething on a bone, but you chomped away at it. Last, a fleece glasses case: a soft club to strike anything in reach.

In the early afternoon we would stop for lunch. Sometimes those spots had plenty of shade and nice views. Other times your frustration and tears at the lack of compelling play options dictated more expedient, though less desirable, locales. The most memorable lunch was on the third day. Your Mom presented me with two small foil bags of green and black olives marinated in spices to celebrate Father's Day. They were a perfect surprise, since everyone knows olives are one of the four food groups. I'm certain we're related since you devoured as many olives as I did.

Father's Day is a strange concept for me. I celebrated it with my dad, but he passed nearly thirty years ago. Lately, I've observed it with your grandpa Dwight, Claire's father. But, at forty-nine, I never expected anyone to celebrate my fatherhood. I thought I'd passed the age for having a child. Your mother, in her wisdom, wanted a child and gently encouraged me to reconsider despite my age-related reservations. Your bright blue eyes, ready smile, and ebullient belly laugh never fail to melt my heart. Those are all the reassurance I need to know I made the right choice.

After lunch you would supervise your mom while she did your laundry. On the advice of another adventurous mother, Leanne Robinson, Claire brought fifteen lightweight blankets to be used as diapers. They were folded into a diaper shape, attached with a snappy, and enclosed with a waterproof diaper cover. You needed five diapers and several wipes over a day. Claire put your dirty laundry with some powdered, biodegradable soap and water into the Scrubba – a dry bag with a washboard of bumps on one interior side, a vinyl window on the other, and a purge valve. She kneaded the Scrubba, emptied it into the woods, and repeated the process a few times. Then the diapers, diaper covers, and wipes dripped from branches until we set off, when they covered our packs.

As we ascended the upper Echmamish and our paddles churned through muck, we understood the HBC's need to construct dams, especially during low water. We passed a few remnants, cribs of rocks that once supported vertical logs, rotted away by water and time. Those dams evoked York Boats rowed



by Orkney men travelling to York Factory loaded with odorous pelts. Now that the beaver population has recovered, we paddled and pulled over a succession of rodent-constructed speed bumps. Later in the day we crossed Painted Stone Portage and moved from the Nelson's watershed into the Hayes.

At Robinson portage, the longest on the Hayes, I excitedly inspected HBC trolley wheels sinking into the riverbank. The rusted metal showed little structural deterioration. Along the trail we found three more sets of wheels and a few lengths of track. The effort involved in

transporting the heavy iron hundreds of miles through the bush to this remote spot is stunning. These pieces of pitted metal bespoke the importance of the Hayes to generations of HBC men. I imagined being the proverbial fly on the wall as Sir John Franklin, David Thompson, Lord Selkirk, and an endless procession of other historic figures walked the path we now trod. We carried Real Berard's beautifully hand illustrated map and read Sir John Franklin's description of Robinson Falls as he travelled up the Hayes enroute to gaining his epithet, *The Man Who Ate His Boots*, as

an arctic explorer. It's hard to conceive of a remote river that hosted a longer and more fascinating succession of important figures than the Hayes.

The next afternoon, as we exited Opiminegoka Lake, we met two fishermen staying at an outpost cabin on nearby Max Lake. They inquired where we'd started, where we were headed, and how long we'd be out. They couldn't believe we had an infant with us, nor that we could carry enough food for three weeks. They feared we'd starve and offered us all the food they had with them, which amounted to a couple bags of



**Conservative parents walking a rapid.**



gorp. We politely declined, but after numerous entreaties finally accepted their gifts. It felt ironic to receive food donated by two guys who didn't know they were on the Hayes River, let alone that it ran all the way to Hudson Bay.

They asked how fishing was. We replied we weren't fishing, further baffling them. They cautiously inquired if we ate fish and our affirmative answer normalized us for them. I didn't explain that your grandfather was a passionate fisherman. Those trips to Ontario were fishing trips, but that gene did not rub off on me – only the desire to be far from people did. Fishing bores me, and fishermen, your Grandfather included, always want to stay where the fish are biting, stifling exploration and travel. Your grandmother, Sheila, loved to travel, as do I. Once, in a moment of frustration, I accused her of simply collecting new places for her lifetime travel list. Now I find myself guilty of the same tally, ex-

cept instead of European cities, my collection contains the lakes and rivers of Canada and other wilderness areas. The fishermen asked whether we'd eat walleye if they caught them. Our positive reply sent them motoring off in search of our dinner. A few hours later we were setting up camp and heard the whine of an outboard. They presented us with four walleye fillets which we cooked into a chowder.

At lunch the next day we took our first swim of the trip in Windy Lake. The cool water felt wonderful. We'd been working hard to take advantage of six days of beautiful weather. Before you were born we could've comfortably maintained this pace with time for leisure. But now we struggled to move at our normal speed while caring for you. Later that afternoon we did a short carry around Wipaniapanis Falls. Claire set you down on a flat spot amid the tangled, exposed roots of a large spruce. You smiled

as you gnawed on a spruce cone while we crossed the portage. Your happy demeanor made you an easy baby to travel with.

Early on the summer solstice we headed directly toward the rising sun for a rendezvous with junk food. The combination of a recently installed Tim Hortons and the Northern Store at Oxford House supplied us with chocolate caramel ice cream bars, doughnuts, two greasy breakfast sandwiches, and as a nod to healthy eating, strawberries. You ate the strawberries like apples, painting your face in bright red streaks of fruity goo.

After lunch a couple days later, strong south winds buffeted us as we entered the large northern bay of Knee Lake. We clung tightly to shore, and splashed in the foot-and-a-half whitecaps. You settled in for a nap as threatening clouds advanced. A few raindrops fell, then escalated into a heavy downpour, our first



**Beaver jawbone.**





***Buried in the sand on Knee Lake.***

rain after a week and a half of travelling.

You woke amid wind and rain and expressed displeasure at your cave-like accommodations under the spray skirt in the bow. And to top it off, unbeknownst to Claire, her map case caused rainwater to pool and drip onto your legs. We paddled another ten minutes before reaching a protected area where I could manage the boat alone, and by then you howled. Claire slid off her seat onto the floor and tightened the spray skirt cockpit around her neck, which allowed you to stay warm and nurse, protected from the rain. After you were satiated Claire changed you into dry clothes and passed you to me. I placed you under the spray skirt that Dan Cooke of Cooke Custom Sewing had modified for us. He'd sewn a normal CCS spray skirt and added a Lexan arch and triangular vinyl windows; the additions raised the rear of the skirt and created a space where you could sit or stand and we could make faces at one another while you played.

The next morning we set off under blue skies on a glassy lake. You took a long nap and when you woke we'd almost completed the northern bay. An opportune beach caused an early midday stop. After lunch we stripped and waded in. The large lake's cold water bit our flesh, and you notified us that it was below any reasonable bathing temperature. We traded off holding you while the other dove in and quickly exited. Then I sat you on the water's edge and buried your legs in the sand, and you gleefully threw handfuls of sand.

From there we delighted in an endless succession of class one and two rapids. You were calm in rapids, the sounds of roiling water probably soothed you. Up to this point in the trip my concern remained about the steady rapids from Knee to well below Swampy Lake, even in the low water conditions. I worried the rapids would last unbroken for long stretches, lining would prove difficult with you, and mostly that you would be

unsafe. Instead I found myself as before you were born, joyous in the whitewater, dancing around the rocks and waves communicating seamlessly with my beautiful lifetime bow paddler.

That night we camped on a portage next to a large rapid. After dinner you and your mom went to bed while I finished sealing the packs. You were both asleep when I climbed into the tent and began journaling about the day's events. Over the rapid's roar I thought I heard a noise, but wasn't sure. A few minutes later a shadow passed by the tent. Or was it a peripheral hallucination? I wasn't sure. I paid close attention, but noticed nothing else. After breakfast the next morning as I packed loose items in preparation for a portage, I noticed a hole in one of the Nalgene's and examined it. There were four holes, placed exactly where a bear's incisors would puncture the bottle! The noise and the shadow were not hallucinations! As with the lack of bugs and the low water levels, we





***Crunchy moss near High Rock on the 1st day.***

were fortunate the bear did no other damage.

We camped on the north end of Swampy Lake that evening. The rains the previous days had excited the mosquito population and we set up our bug shelter for the first time. After dinner we settled in for bed, singing your bedtime songs. In the months prior Claire encouraged you to put yourself back to sleep when you woke at night. First she'd

ceased attending to you when you cried before midnight, then waiting until 1 a.m., 2 a.m and 3 a.m. – this helped you go back to sleep on your own. Simultaneously, she'd shortened the Milk Bar's operating minutes from unlimited, to ten minutes, nine, eight, and so on. Though, at times the Bar's proprietress fell asleep and failed to enforce the revised schedule. Our current problem was now, instead of the Bar sleeping in a

separate room, you, the voluble customer, slept tantalizingly close to the Bar. Steadily all sleep training was forgotten, and the customer saw no reason to go back to sleep on his own, instead demanding his favorite sleep aid, an open Bar. On this night especially the Bar was forced to be open far more than it was closed, exhausting the proprietress.

The Milk Bar's proprietress and customer both slept in, resulting in a delayed breakfast. In the late morning we set off down a stretch of moving water heaven. Through a light mist we ran endless class ones and a few twos while you slept. I love communicating with Claire about our course through rocks and waves. "See the triangular rock that's partly out of the water? Let's go left. What about the breaking wave to the right?" And so on. The longer we've been together the more we understand each other's shorthand, making rapids a lovely physical and verbal dance. All day we enjoyed countless rapids. I felt a final sense of relief. The whitewater, the large lakes, the bugs, all my pre-trip concerns had evaporated like morning dew.

Sometime after we left Swampy we lost track of our exact location. Claire, a GIS specialist, made 50,000-series maps on waterproof paper she navigated with. I've always used the smaller scale 250,000 series and carried those. Your grandfather would cut out the relevant portion for the trip from a 250,000 series and seal it with packing tape. He sized the cutouts to fit into our tackle boxes. When he passed away, I found dozens of 250,000-series maps, each missing the area he'd visited. He was a true child of the Depression. More enjoyable to look through were the cutouts, a bread crumb trail of the places he'd camped in Ontario over forty years. I enjoy the challenge of using the less detailed 250,000 series. Even more, I like surprises, since not all rapids and falls are marked. There is a feeling of the unknown, of exploration, as long as I proceed carefully. Now that my worries about your safety had been allayed, losing our place on the map added to the adventure.

Gazing at maps in camp the following morning we opted for our only layover. Regardless of our exact location we had extra time. We ate a leisurely breakfast,



played with you, read, napped, and luxuriated in our stationariness. Though your grandfather is a large part of the reason that we're out here, your grandmother is the reason I'm writing. As I mentioned, my mom, Sheila, loved to travel and see new things, and she kept journals while she was abroad. Your grandmother used words creatively, sometimes combining words to unique effect and inventing new ones. She delighted in coining names. There would be no "Milk Bar" without my mother.

The following morning we descended a couple rapids before arriving at a more significant drop. After scouting, we decided to inventively line it and set you down on shore with a stick to play with. I waded into the strong current holding the canoe, and turned it ninety degrees around a rock so it was parallel to the flow. I checked that Claire was ready, and let the canoe slide into the current while Claire snapped the lining rope over my crouched body. She scrambled down the slippery shore rocks following the fast moving canoe. She reached the water's edge and payed out the rope. The canoe passed through a large wave at the bottom of the pitch. We'd expected the current to hold the boat away from the wave, but the effect of the tether was to turn and ferry it closer to the wave which would fill or flip the canoe. For a split second we both gravely watched the canoe slip toward the wave. Claire reacted instantly, running in the water along the uneven shore away from the wave, holding the end of the line. In moments she stood in ankle deep water pulling the canoe away from the wave. Once the canoe was on shore she collapsed, breathing fast, adrenaline coursing through her. You were calmly playing with your stick when I scooped you up and brought you to her. Though Claire had done everything we'd planned and reacted perfectly to what we hadn't anticipated, she emphasized she had no interest in repeating her performance. Ever since we started dating, your mother has continued to impress me with her wits.

You fell asleep as we paddled downriver. Our relief at how fast you settled into your late nap was abbreviated when we arrived at a small falls, necessitating a short carry, certain the commotion would wake you. Claire held the canoe

in the current, while I unsnapped the spray skirt and unloaded the gear. Soon everything was on the downstream side of the rock, except you and the daypack you reclined against. Claire and I looked at one another and had the same idea. I picked up the bow and Claire the stern. The canoe resembled the litter of a king, while you, our ruler, snoozed. We reloaded, even spinning the canoe around so the opposite side of the spray skirt could be snapped and the Lexan stay put

into place. We paddled a small rapid at the base of falls, then silently celebrated, eyes locked, smiling broadly at each other, as you slept soundly.

After a short distance we reached the area we estimated to be the base of Brassey Hill. We stopped and quietly unloaded again while we sunk to our ankles in clay goo. We hung the wet laundry, half a dozen blankets, a few wipes and diaper covers, in the surrounding spruce. You woke as we tied the lining ropes to



**Grandpa Dick at McDougall Lake, 1960.**



trees. With the kid carrier, water, and lunch, we set off for the summit of Brassey. As we climbed I chuckled, imagining the reaction of other paddlers, should they pass while we were hiking, on seeing our equipment strewn around the poor hillside landing with the added effect of the forest festooned with your laundry.

Brassey towers above the river by 300 feet, the highest point between Molson Lake and Hudson Bay. Real Berard on his Middle Track and Hayes map reported, "it is said that 36 lakes can be seen" from the summit. That provided the motivation to enjoy lunch on the peak. We climbed, circumventing many deadfalls on the steep incline. Soon the terrain began to alternate between gentler slopes and steep ravines. As we approached the summit, the vegetation grew denser. I hoped we'd emerge to a relatively open summit. My doubts grew as our pace slowed in the thick brush and

mosquitoes harassed us. Soon there was nowhere to gain elevation. Claire paused, resulting in you crying, since you never like to stop while moving. I walked a few hundred feet east believing I saw an opening, but found none. I did the same to the north and found more thick brush. You cried more insistently as a growing cloud of mosquitoes enveloped us. We'd seen nothing more than a couple blue slivers, and no lakes. Then I found a few old sawed-off stumps and a rusted barrel stove. Laying nearby were some fuel drums and crumpled sheet metal. Looking around more I saw three survey markers, two ground mounted and another on a tripod.

As we descended we caught a glimpse of the Hayes, our best view on the hike. Given the lack of visible stumps, the crown wasn't clear when Berard was compiling the map. I suspect during his research Berard found a reference to thirty-six lakes in an HBC-re-

lated journal. We hurriedly got on the water, relieved to escape our mosquito retinue. We stopped for lunch at the confluence with the High Hill River. Our lunchtime view of Brassey was better than any sight we'd had on the hike.

Later, just as you awoke hungry from your afternoon nap, at the head of a long, gentle rapid, we saw splashing in a distant backwater – a moose! I tried to shush you but failed. You wanted only one thing, so I passed you forward as we slid into the current. Claire placed you on her lap and pinned you with her chest so you could nurse but not move, quieting you but leaving me to paddle the rapid alone. As we closed the distance a calf materialized next to the cow. The river traced the arc of the letter C. Initially we moved further away from the pair, but near the bottom we swung back, very near them, so close I could hear the cow growling over the rapid. You contentedly sucked, while Claire took pictures from



*Layover day. Dashwa with a face full of bug bites.*





### **Portaging.**

her crouched position of the nervous brown cow and wobbly red calf.

Paddling the next morning, we saw behind us the sky had turned a deep shade of purple. The wind increased and pressed us forward, its power growing. Thunder boomed, we paddled fast, then faster still, desperate to find a place to weather the storm. The rain drenched us, falling in sheets. We hadn't put the skirt on since we'd expected to portage, leaving you exposed to the weather. You did not appreciate being pelted by the rain, and when the hail started you howled. Within minutes we arrived at Whitemud Falls and scoured the two islands for campsite. Lightening cracked and we threw everything out of the boat in a mad

rush. I ran off in search of a tent spot while Claire comforted you. I found a space across the island, and we set up the tent while you sobbed nearby.

I made multiple trips to the head of the island to gather the remaining equipment, strewn about by our chaotic unloading. When I'd finished you were sleeping peacefully, dry and fed. On occasions throughout the afternoon, I thought I heard your cries in the steady rumble of the falls. While I don't enjoy listening to you cry, it doesn't bother me most of the time. Crying is natural, like laughing. However, this time I had allowed you to be frightened, and felt guilty since I could've prevented your fear. Irrationally, I worried you'd be

afraid of storms.

The next morning, on Canada Day, we dropped off the Canadian Shield and into the Hudson Bay lowlands, ancient rocks replaced by hundred-foot-tall banks of slippery clay, rapids replaced by steady current. In a few places landslides had deposited groups of jumbled spruce unceremoniously into the river. We saw endless molting geese in the lowlands, fleeing in terror along the banks, trying to escape the fast approaching canoe monster. Adults and goslings speed-waddled downstream in a mass of flightless birds, a chaotic feathered version of steeplechase over tree trunks and shoreline cobble. A few times I focused on the movements of a single bird, but couldn't





***Nap time on a rainy day.***

for long – the individual’s movements drowned amid the tumultuous flock of panicked geese.

Later we entered a slower section and, cruising around a bend, came upon a moose in the river. Claire took pictures and I alternately gazed at the moose and made faces to entertain you. Then we ran aground on the only rock in the river. Solidly, ridiculously aground. We carefully shifted and wiggled, trying to free ourselves without alerting the moose. That failed as you became dissatisfied with the state of affairs and wailed to alert us and the moose of your opinion.

The moose departed and we remained leaning steeply to starboard. More aggressive shifting brought more crying, but finally freed us.

The next morning, amid a steady rain, we met the Fox River. Soon after, we stopped early and portaged across a mud flat to a campsite. During your nap bright rays of sunshine gleamed through the dripping forest. Your mom and I decided it was time for target practice. Other than a middle school experience with a .22, Claire had no training with firearms. I set up a stump as a target, and familiarized her with the 12-gauge. She chambered a

round of birdshot and from eighty feet away knocked over the stump. I congratulated her and reset the stump for her next shot with a slug. Since she’d experienced the recoil, I expected her to flinch and miss. The echo exploded down the valley, but this time the stump stood unmoved. Claire expressed disappointment at the perceived miss. I wasn’t certain, having seen a bit of wood fly. We examined the stump. She’d hit it dead center. It’s disconcerting how competent your mom can be.

On our last full day we sped along the widened Hayes. As the evening progressed we watched for campsites on the high ground to no avail. When sun met the horizon, long past your bedtime, we decided that the “high” ground on the shoreline mud flats would suffice. Often the final night’s campsite leaves something to be desired. This one left a lot. We perched the tent on an island of gravel, surrounded by a moat of gooey mud. We gave thanks that you weren’t yet walking.

We rose early on July 4th, aiming to arrive at York Factory near high tide. You settled into a long nap while we paddled through the morning chill. During your snooze I saw motion at the edge of the woods. A wolf materialized, then strolled along the shoreline. The wolf moved away as our bow ground into the shoreline mud but continued to maintain about one hundred feet between us. After a few minutes we no longer merited the wolf’s full attention. It barked, ran, and snapped at bulldogs chomping at its hindquarters. After fifteen minutes of mutual observation we headed downstream to keep our rendezvous with the tide, and to our surprise the wolf followed us along the shore! After a mile, a shallows forced us to the opposite shore, we rounded a bend and bid the wolf adieu. Could there have been a den nearby?

A couple hours after high tide, the stark white cupola of York Factory appeared. The Depot gleamed on a background of purple and gray. We unloaded and climbed the stairs. A man on a riding mower with a shotgun in a scabbard gregariously introduced himself as Paul from Parks Canada. You were reserved, since Paul was the first person in three weeks that interacted with you. His assistant, Ross, arrived on a four wheeler



towing a trailer, and graciously shuttled our gear to a fenced camping enclosure where a polar bear visit would not pose a threat.

After dinner we joined Paul and Ross for dessert. While eating through their cookie inventory Paul inquired, “Could I borrow your boy?” By this point your good nature had returned and you sat on Paul’s lap while he Facetimed with his wife. We could hear her exclamation from across the room, “Where did you get a baby at York Factory?” Paul nonchalantly replied that some canoeists paddled in with him. Her reply of, “That woman is a saint,” made us both smile.

The next morning we strolled through the Depot examining rusted fur trade era artifacts arranged on plywood tables. Ross explained the HBC had built the Depot with an inner courtyard to allow light from both the outside and courtyard walls since no lighting or heat was allowed due to fears of fire. Other build-

ings in the complex were permitted both comforts, but the furs and trade goods represented too high of value to risk a conflagration. We climbed into the cupola and gazed at the expansive mudflats exposed by low tide. Among the thousands of signatures covering the wooden walls, the pencil autographs of two men, Sir John Rae and Sir George Simpson, caused my imagination to soar far higher than the cupola. They were historical contemporaries but such different men, each remarkable in his own way.

Afterwards we headed to the staff housing with your first paddle to have it branded. Ironically, the gift for York Factory that we picked up in Winnipeg from Caleigh and Ryan was a YF brand. Caleigh and Ryan had arrived at York Factory a few years prior and were told the brand was missing. On returning home they expressed their disappointment to a friend who was a metal worker.

When we’d contacted them for information they’d asked if we would deliver the new brand they’d made to York Factory. We’d presented the new YF brand to Paul and Ross the previous evening, playfully inquiring whether the old one was still missing. Your paddle has a YF on both faces of the blade, one with the old brand and another with the new one.

Your paddle represents a bit of history, both the history of the longest operating company in North America as well as a part of our family’s history. My dad used to tell me bedtime stories, some of those about his Canadian trips. Stories and shared experiences bind a family together. This trip and others will create lasting family memories. Sharing time in the wilderness with those I love is my favorite way to spend my life. Regardless of what your passions are, I hope you will look back on these trips with fondness.

Love, Dad



**Bear incisor punctures.**





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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 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.

## Allan Edward Jacobs 1938 – 2021

Allan passed away at his home in Kensington Gardens, Toronto on Wednesday June 30, 2021 at the age of 82. Carol E. Roup, Allan’s loyal and loving companion, was by his side.

Allan was born on August 7, 1938, to Edward John Henry Jacobs and Elsie May [Harris] Jacobs in Toronto, Ontario. He received a B.Eng. in 1960 at the University of Toronto, a Master of Mathematics from the University of Waterloo, and a Ph.D. in Solid State Physics from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Allan was employed by Brookhaven National Laboratory in Long Island, New York, the Atomic Energy Commission of Canada and for many years as a Professor of Physics at the University of Toronto.

Allan was what many would describe as an intellectual genius, with a near photographic memory for music, art, and history. He had a passion for marathon running, skiing, hiking, paddling, and international travel, and completed the Toronto Marathon in 1979. A consummate scientist, Allan cared deeply about the environment



and was civic-minded, always striving for a better and more just society. He had a gentle, kindhearted, and caring personality. As a child, Allan developed a deep love of the outdoors having spent his summers camping and fishing on the Naiscoot River with his family, and later at his family’s cottage on Georgian Bay, Ontario in the same area. Allan was most proud of having achieved the elusive “Thirteen,” having paddled each of Canada’s ten provinces and three territories. Allan completed the Thirteen at the age of 75 by paddling the Bow River in Banff, Alberta with his brother, Roger on a trip they had long planned and completed together in July of 2014.

A long-time WCA member, Allan played a key role in creating the Routes section of the MyCCR website. He was an avid northern tripper and enthusiastic supporter of the Wilderness Canoe Symposium. Allan will be missed by many of his friends in the WCA community.

*(adapted from the obituary printed in the Toronto Star and provided by Allan’s brother Roger)*

Aleks, thanks for publishing my story about the Rio Grande River. On another note, I’d appreciate it if in the next issue of *Nastawagan* you would mention that Toni Harting’s book, *The Devil’s Grin*, remains a free download on my website [www.cliffcanoe.com](http://www.cliffcanoe.com). It’s really an excellent read! I encouraged Toni to write that book for many years. Regrettably, only

100 people have downloaded it. As far as I know, my website is the only source. It’s riveting enough to be a movie. I won’t forget Toni. He was wonderful. Best, Cliff Jacobson

Jon, I read with glee your *Nastawgan* article about my favorite lake: Makobe. I

preceded you by about 5 years in the green canoes to your north. Makobe was my favorite trip although I never exited by the Makobee. I was always startled by the clear water and, for some reason, really liked the long ‘easy’ portage from the Grays River. I stayed at the heron-nesting island at least three times! Thanks for a nice read, Tony Way, Dallas, TX.



# How To Paddle Great Slave Lake Or Rivers In A Jar

by Carsten Iwers

Returning in 2015 from the Coppermine, flying from Yellowknife back to Edmonton, I was intrigued by the size of Great Slave Lake. Knowing that so many have navigated this ocean-like expanse of water, I wondered what it would be like to paddle along its shores. Half in jest, half in earnest, a year later, when I decided to paddle a good part of Great Slave, the email I wrote to people I know in Yellowknife, informing them of my plans, was headed: How to paddle Great Slave.

What a stupid question!

Searching myccr.com for the terms “canoe sailing” yielded about 60 results. “Wind bound” in contrast got more than 250 hits. I am not a professional sailor, but from my humble experience, a sail can dramatically change a paddler’s situation for the better. I dare say that some of these wind-bound days could be turned into days with a good number of miles covered. Take quartering tailwinds for instance. They can prove to be exceedingly annoying, especially going solo. Whereas such winds become a blessing if you have a sail. Upon returning from my (sailing) trip from Yellowknife to the height of land north of Aylmer Lake, I think in retrospect that this particular trip would not have been nearly as enjoyable and would not have ended in such a timely manner without my sail. It crossed my mind that a sail is like a “river in a jar.” With favourable winds, you unscrew this jar by setting sail and enjoy all the things that are usually to be had only on rivers: free miles and thrills, hair-raising moments and close calls included. I had to pinch myself more than once as I effortlessly sailed along the shoreline. On a lake that felt very strange. My rate of cruising just didn’t feel right while looking at the expanse of motionless water all around me.

So what is possible when a 15.5-foot folding canoe is rigged with a 25-square-foot lug-sail? Now, the slightest tailwind, just gently stirring up the surface, can get you going at 3-4 kmh already. A bit of a drag, but such calm conditions can be enhanced by assistive paddling. The most pleasant cruising speed is about 5-6 kmh. Which translates into no worries, no real work and yet a noteworthy pace. Actually, a pace I cannot match with my paddle in hand. Upon reaching 7-8 kmh things are starting to get different, challenging to say the least. You are constantly working on the main sheet and rudder. But it is still reasonably safe, pleasant and fast. When reaching the 9-10 kmh mark you are approaching hull speed and things are starting to become worrisome. First whitecaps are forming around you and with a sufficiently long wind fetch the waves are starting to swell. More and more often you will find yourself surfing down into deep wave troughs, trying to maintain a proper direction, trying hard not to screw up. Despite the exhilarating speed, this is somewhat nerve-wracking and if this condition is about to persist, it is probably wise to seek a safe spot ashore. Kevin Patterson, in his book *The Water In Between: A Journey at Sea*, gave good advice: “The point when a lot of wind becomes too much wind is a difficult but very important moment to identify.” Or, to quote Max Finkelstein: “Better to be on shore wishing



**Lug sail on Artillery lake**

you were out there in the storm, than out there in the storm wishing you were on shore.”

With a proper sail sheet (sporting a camber), with a lee board in place and everything nicely rigged, you can even sail into the wind. Maybe 20 degrees on either side – to make an amateurish guess. This course is way more demanding, exerting and dangerous! Even when sailing into the wind at a mere 5 kmh you may already wish you were ashore. For a paddler, moving forward with the wind in his face is a baffling experience. I just wish I could be a better sailor for that.

So, if I were now being asked “How to paddle Great Slave” I’d say: bring a sail and know how to use it. And even if the odds are unfavourable and the wind just doesn’t cooperate at all, the mental support of having a sail on hand, just in case, while plodding along mile after mile to the song of the paddle is, to me, worth the extra effort in terms of added bulk and weight.

Mounting a lightweight sail rig to a collapsible canoe has a few peculiarities. It took some time to figure it all out. For those who are interested in the details, there are a few pictures online at [www.northof60.de/gall/sailing/](http://www.northof60.de/gall/sailing/).



**Batwing sail on Liverpool Bay**



# My Paddle Adventures During Covid Summer 2020

Story and Photos by Emmy Hendrickx



**Crowe River: dragonfly emergence.**

No fancy tripping or extensive portages this year. No fancy rapids, or out with small or large groups. But a great year with a whole different kind of paddle adventures. I paddled this year on about 20 new lakes and rivers that I never heard of or have been on. As with so many others, Covid19 changed a lot of things, personally and work wise, and my emotional well being was not the greatest I have to admit.

In October 2019, I got re-introduced

to Geocaching. For people not familiar with what that is, it is sort of a treasure hunt. And it is popular with millions of people all over the world. I had tried it 5 years ago, but I just didn't quite understand the game or find any joy in it. This time I got introduced to more aspects of Geocaching than just looking for coordinates and finding a traditional container. There are mysteries to solve that can take hours to get the correct coordinates and then you need to get out and find that

container. Earth caches teach me about certain features in nature. Adventure labs and Virtual caches provide a different way of learning about the history of an area than by reading up and learning in town. There are events and CITO (Cache In, Trash Out) but due to Covid19 a lot of these events were cancelled this year. Then there are a lot of statistics that I enjoy. There are challenge caches that motivate me to reach for new goals. But what interested me most were geocaches hidden on rivers and lakes and only accessible by canoe or kayak.

## May 2020

### Seymour Lake

Never heard of this lake before, but I was informed about a bald eagle nest with young here. Received specifics from fellow geocachers when and where to go/launch. Start early! So there I was at 6 a.m. at Nappan Bridge for my first Geo Paddle. Solo canoeing in my tandem Souris Quetico 17 ft canoe, enjoying the peacefulness, the osprey nest, and my first boat geocache at Grayfish Cove. Enjoyed several times seeing the bald eagle and eventually the bald eagle's nest.

In August, I went back to this lake and explored past Hardy Island into the Trent River. Surprisingly calm on the lake.

## June 2020

### Indian River from Warsaw to Warsaw Conservation Area

Another fun aspect of Geocaching is being the first one to find a cache and claim a FTF, a First-To-Find, another fun way to keep myself motivated. This time I was off to Indian River in Warsaw. A nice little river from Warsaw to Warsaw Caves Conservation Area on the Indian River. Much better prepared this time, with a more comfortable seat in the middle, GPS preloaded before I left, and extra weight to help with balance and wind. It was a tough paddle as the wind



**Chippewa Creek with Geocaching Paddlers.**



had significantly increased by the time I started. A big plastic beetle with the container attached and I was the FTF. I wasn't able to explore the caves as too many people were near the boat launch. I paddled back up the river, richer with another experience.

### **Crowe River near Marmora**

The Crowe river is much wider and had a stronger current, so I stayed on one side of the river and would do the other side on my way back. Saw some local boys catching a fish and saw a few minks. There was an island with a flooded forest in it, like a mini Minesing exploration. The strong current caused some issues when I had to stand up in my canoe to reach for a cache. Using my bow and stern lines, I tied up my canoe and carefully climbed out and up the shoreline. But then reaching the container was another challenge as I had to lean over to reach it.

But another smiley, the little smileys that show up on the map after you claim a geocache as found on the map. Took an easy lazy paddle back and enjoyed seeing the emergence of a dragonfly on a lily pad.

### **Ouse River towards Trent River/Rice Lake**

Another day solo out on the water. Started south first on the Ouse river. It was pea soup to start in, lots of weeds and algae, but it cleared up. I love exploring the small creeks on the side of the river. The nature is just extraordinary there, so far away from civilization while being so close. When I am there, I really can find peace and calmness in my heart and true happiness, especially with all the stress at work and surroundings with the Covid19 infections. It is like a recharging of my batteries, getting new energy for another couple days in the big world. I went south first as I wanted to grab the newer geocaches put here in the river, first because they were newer (FTF) and supposedly easier to get to. Afterwards I paddled back up the river and thought I would explore the caches on the north part of the Ouse River. This was the warning the CO put out for these caches:

*"This is a T5 geocache (T5=Terrain 5, geocaching is graded in Difficulty levels*



**Chippewa Creek.**

*and Terrain levels) for a good reason. Please don't complain if you have trouble or hurt yourself. There are 2 log jams to find this last geocache. Getting here is a little tough. You have to maneuver around downed trees or get out and balance on the logs. Can a canoe get in here? There is NO way I'd take my good Kevlar canoe in there and get it all scratched up"*

After reading this, you can understand my hesitation as I was here in my good Kevlar canoe. I went just up north to check it out. But it was easier than I thought. Saw a couple of deer in a pasture ahead of me. Yes, there were downed trees, but I was able to paddle around them, even with a 17 ft canoe. I

never had to go out or climb over the trees or get out of my canoe to pull it around. I was able to get to the last cache without wet feet. But what a feeling of accomplishment that was.

**July 2020**

### **Chippewa Creek – end portion of the Welland River, West of Wellandport**

This time I went out with a group of paddlers. Most paddlers were in kayaks. I paddled solo and it was tough keeping up with them. But people were grateful for my canoe as I could stand in my canoe and reach the caches which were higher up in the trees, and I was faster to get out and grab a cache. More teamwork. Great



**Twenty Mile Creek: playing limbo.**





*The old Maple tree.*



*Martindale pond was much wider and easier to paddle.*

creek for adventure. Once we reached the end, we had to paddle back to the take in and continue further east. At this point the kayakers just took off, and it was tough to stay with them. But I met up with some other stragglers as we chatted and kept each other company. But by 4 p.m. I was near my car and glad I was done. This was a super long day for me paddling and geocaching.

### **Round Lake and North River – North of Havelock**

Due to road construction I wasn't able to launch into the river. Instead, I started from Round Lake. A bit windy, but geocaches are mostly close to shore. North River was very picturesque, like the Ouse River with lots of small creeks to explore. Blue herons, eagles, lots of frogs and little birds. Great wetland flowers. On my way back the wind had picked up on Round Lake so I got my sail out. But trying to solo my canoe parallel with the wind direction and holding a sail was a struggle. Instead, I held my sail, partly open. I kept going backwards, but I was not paddling. Definitely an advantage and a lot of fun.

In August I went to the other side of Round Lake to North River. It is wider there, more meandering with curves and ends up in a lake that has several cottages.

### **Pigeon Lake and Big (Boyd/Chiminis) Island near Bobcaygeon**

We started from the Lakehurst area. Another group paddle, but I was solo in my canoe. We had to cross Pigeon Lake, which was extremely busy with motorboats that didn't even slow down near kayaks and canoes. Around the island there were large groups of boats partying. Luckily, most of the caches were around the other side of the island and on the island itself. But on that side there were lots of lily pads. And a 17 ft canoe has a lot of friction area to slow down, so bend down and paddle hard. Huge workout for me. But meeting new geopaddlers, and I found my 2000th cache on the island.

### **20 Mile Creek – South of Vineland**

A windy creek, but my first paddle with a partner this year. Lots of laughs as we had to help the kayakers over muddy shall-



low areas. Playing limbo under logs. But it was so much easier steering with a partner.

### **Martindale Pond – St Catherines**

This was much easier, a big pond, no motorized boats, paddling around the pond and into a creek where people were fishing. Martindale Pond itself is a race field for kayaks and solo canoes. Must be an immensely popular area as it had a big walking bridge to watch from and a viewing area.

### **Holland River, between Holland Landing and Bradford**

As this river was close to home, I was able to do this river in parts and teach a friend how to paddle and geocache after work or before a PM shift. This river consists of a West and an East arm, so with a little shuttle easy to do in one day. There was some motor traffic but much less and not as fast. We had to do some swamp walking in order to get some of the more difficult caches. But it is a bigger river, no small creeks to explore or they were covered in pea soup or lily pads.

## **August 2020**

### **Spence Lake – Bracebridge**

This was a surprise paddle today. I showed up at work this morning to hear that my schedule got adjusted and I was actually off. As it was a weekday, I decided to go north bound, to Muskoka. Had no idea where I was going. Had not researched it properly. But it was a lake and there were about 25 caches. When I arrived, there was a kayak just coming in from a paddle. He told me it was an easy quiet lake with no traffic. What a treasure this lake was. Love the log art floating in the shallow part of the lake. Found a stump in the lake that had sundew growing on it. A surprisingly relaxing paddle.

### **Welland River – Welland**

A big rural river, no rapids, an occasional motorboat. An easy paddle with lots of laughs, going from one site to another. With geocaching we explore the banks, bushes and trees. A great river to paddle with family and young kids. Grassy areas to pull out and have a break. There is one



**Holland River: getting close to the reeds.**

huge log jam near the old railroad bridge and a small rock dam. There are several areas to launch your canoe.

### **Otonabee River – South of Peterborough**

Went out for a morning paddle. Nice landing and parking area. We went up the river to see how it would go. Into a nice creek and found a nice Earth cache here. It was really interesting to learn that there is a difference in shorelines on both sides. On the south side there was a steeper shoreline with logs and rocks and deeper water. The other side was sandier, shallow and showed more erosion. What is the cause? When we turned around and paddled the other side of the river, we got shocked by 2 high speed motorboats almost floating atop of the water, hardly any wake waves. But the captains were wearing helmets on their boats.

About a kilometer from the car, the rain came down hard and flooded the canoe fast. Barely made it to the boat launch before thunder broke out.

In September we went back to Otonabee River and also explored Squirrel Creek. But the water there was really low, and it was a tough, hard paddle to get through muddy areas. And it was just digging and pushing. No way we could get out and pull the canoe. Traffic on the main river is crazy here. We were just out of the water and a large number of super fancy boats came racing by for some kind of event.

### **Grand River from Glen Morris to Paris**

Normally we have our lunch break here when we do a WCA trip with the Ashton family in June. Today we started here. Nice to be on a familiar river, but much



**Big Forks Creek: obstacle course.**





**Big Forks Creek: looking for a cache on an old bridge.**

lower water levels. Collapsible ladder in the canoe. Rest of the group were in kayaks. We climbed some crazy trees on the shoreline. There was some current, but it was more a matter of knowing how to steer and avoid the big rocks. We even found a spring coming out of a rock.

#### **Waterford Ponds – Waterford**

A fun paddle in a pond, crossing roads to go to the next pond, or going in a culvert to Indian Lake and under a bridge to Middle Pond. We paddled to the end of the ponds where the weeds, lily pads and logs were. This was a fun day with marsh-whacking, tree-climbing, tunnel-diving and lots of English accents. There were odd pink things in the water on top of algae. It was like a deposit on the algae that dissipated, when you touched it. There is a gravel pit that you can observe from the pond and an Earth cache regarding the glacial moraine here. We found a very rare, amazing tree for Ontario, a bald cypress – *Taxodium Distichum* – quite a sight.



**Lunch with Fellow Geocachers.**

## **September**

### **Big Forks Creek – Welland**

This is a big creek of the Welland River, with its own boat launch. There were a lot of challenge caches here and puzzles to solve beforehand, to find the right coordinates. Paddled with another lady and her friend who were also active in GirlGuides. It was nice to hear their stories. Sometimes getting out of the canoe to grab a cache, we had to watch out for poison ivy. Deeper into the creek, there were more logs that required good steering and team work. Log limbs were also part of this adventure.

### **Eels Creek – Burleigh Falls**

This was one of the nicest places I explored this year. We shuttled the cars and went down Eels Creek. There is some current here and some small swifts. With a new partner in the canoe, unfamiliar with river reading, we sometimes just carried over the canoe. As the day went on, I helped and guided the rest of the group. We had a huge portage around some

amazing twin waterfalls. It took some time to figure out where to go and where to cross and we ended up bushwhacking with a canoe. Definitely an area I would like to go back to, maybe earlier in the year when the water is higher and using trail tape to find a more direct path to cross. And some time to really enjoy the waterfalls here.

### **Ramsey Lake – Sudbury**

A sunrise paddle in Sudbury. A quick early morning paddle to some islands and around and back. Nice pink rocks.

### **Cedar Lake – Little Esson Lake near Wilberforce**

This was a nice paddle on a quiet lake with lots of cedars. No fall colours here on the lake. This is part of the Geocaching Capital of Canada. There are some amazing cool land caches here to enjoy. Not just the plain Tupperware container with a log inside. Tea with Turtle, Pirate Paradise, Damsel in Distress, a huge Mouse trap. A great area to explore. Not just this lake, but many others, plus hiking trails and the sculpture forest.

### **Fairy Lake – Acton**

A sunset paddle. Drove here for some relief from the stress at work. And of course the geocaches were hidden in the end areas with lily pads and the other part were the logs, and trunks decorating the end of the pond and making it more difficult to paddle through.

### **Black River – Sutton**

I had avoided this nearby river as there were only some older caches. After new caches showed up and a cache I needed to complete a challenge (canoeing and tree climbing) I went up and started in Sutton. Nice launch, and parking behind the bank in Sutton. A couple days later, I started from Baldwin. There was supposedly also a boat launch near a trail. But it was a steep, rocky path down. And once I had my canoe and gear safely down, I realized that getting into the river was another meter drop straight down. I would advise that if you want to launch here, go with a partner to help.

A great year of paddling and new adventures, new explorations and feeling more confident in solo paddling. Looking forward to a new season with still more rivers and lakes to explore.



# There Has To Be A Reason: Riviere Eau Claire

Story and Photos by Tony Way

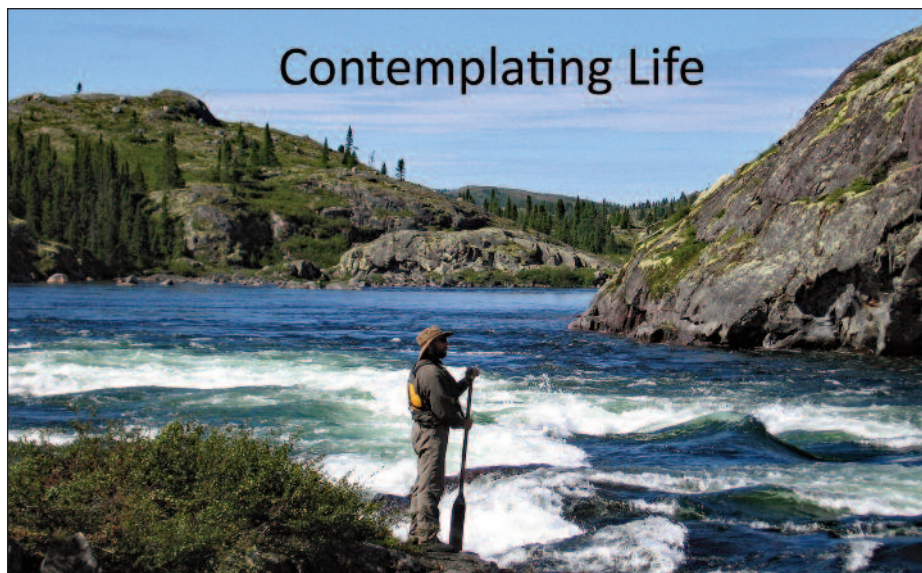
There has to be a reason why I paddled the Riviere Eau Claire (Nunavik, QC) with my brother John in 2007. Back in the 50s (I used to be young!), Keewaydin Camp (Lake Temagami, ON) got me hooked on northern tripping (Dumoine and Harricana Rivers). In the 60's, A.P. Lowe's 1898 "Traverse of the Northern Part of the Labrador Peninsula from Richmond Gulf to Ungava Bay" entranced me with the Ungava Peninsula (Nunavik, QC). John and I could not pull off that trip then, but in 2007 Wanapitei CANOE made the offer. I signed up with a local paddler, Tom Osler, only to learn at the last moment that the trip was not filling. John said that after 46 years he was willing to try again for the Eau Claire. A North Knife River (Manitoba) trip mate, Tom Randgaard, jumped in, and Wanapitei signed up Noah Waisberg, so with guide Fred Ingram we finally had a trip.

*Day Minus 8: Arrive Toronto Airport. Find one Chota boot missing from pack. Buy new waders. Find missing boot. Have excess baggage.*

*Day Minus 7 – Minus 4: Spend week at Madawaska Canoe Centre with Tom O. for whitewater review. Learn more than I remember.*

*Day Minus 3: Talk all day on drive from Bear Lake ON to Matagami QC. Meet Fred and Noah, find John and Tom R. Eat caribou steaks. Learn that the Cree from Great Whale River are planning get-together on Richmond Gulf with former GWR neighbors in Umiujaq.*

There has to be a reason for the Riviere Eau Claire. Two billion years ago, a giant meteorite may have carved out the eastern Hudson Bay arc and thrown up the escarpment that creates Richmond Gulf (that's what the locals called Lac Guillaume-Delisle). Four hundred and sixty five million years ago, a meteorite created the Clearwater East crater followed by another meteorite 260 million years ago creating its twin, Clearwater West, thus making the double Lac Eau Claire. Seven thousand years ago, the last ice cap melted and allowed the Ungava Peninsula to rise from the



**Eau Claire means Clear Water!**

sea, trapping the landlocked seals of the Seal Lakes east of Lac Eau Claire. Shortly after, the caribou and whales returned, bringing with them first the N-Dene (Dorset) and then the Algonkians and Inuit. Three hundred years ago, these folk brought the European traders, including the now-abandoned Hudson Bay Company post on Richmond Gulf (1700s and 1900s). Today, the Cree from Whapmagoostui (they called it Great Whale River) still follow Lowe's route to Lac Eau Claire on snowmobiles, and the Inuit from Kuujjuarapik (they also called it GWR) have made a new home on the Richmond Gulf peninsula at Umiujaq.

More recently, Quebec has created the Tursujuq National Park stretching from Richmond Gulf through the Eau Claire to the Seal Lakes. In 2007, John and I finally paddled that river.

*Day Minus 2: Drive the James Bay Road from Matagami to the Trans-Taiga Road and turn right, and keep driving for the rest of the day to Mirage Pourvoirie.*

*Day Minus 1: Watch the sky all day. High wind and rain ground us. Noah dips in La Grande River, others shiver. Wander the Land of Little Sticks.*

*Day 1: Fly over La Grande Reservoir 4, Great Whale River, and watch the lichen woodland merge into the forest tundra.*



**Below high island portage: Chaotic post-glacial drainage.**





**Lake Trout on the upper R. Eau Claire: Caught and released.**

See mesh of islands joining E & W. Eau Claire craters. Marvel at clearness of Clear Water. Remember that Keewaydin section just paddled below. Pull out from Mirage Base in 40 kph headwind. Skirt first rapids with short A.P. Lowe portage from north to south river-heads (chaotic post-glacial hydrology). Debate whether water beast is otter or seal (Cree report no seal on Eau Claire). Watch black bear across river from camp. Hike up to erratic boulders on treeless ridge.

There has to be a way to "Clear Water". Access to the Eau Claire was not through Radisson! After driving 544 km up the James Bay Road, we turned east just short of Radisson and went another 358 km on the Trans-Taiga Road to reach Mirage Pourvoirie/Outfitter on La Grande River. This is the Land of Little Sticks, open lichen woodlands and winter home of the Leaf River caribou. Mirage Outfitter had not only the last gas on the Trans-Taiga but also the first (and only?) float plane to the Ungava interior. Then came 295 km flying over La

Grande Reservoir 4, the Great Whale River, and the roadless forest tundra of the lower Ungava (a folding PakCanoe kept flying costs down!). From the air, the Eau Claire crater lakes are amazing: encircled by islands and separated from each other by a sieve of waterways. Clear Water is not just a name but a description: beach and bottom are seen as one. The West Eau Claire Lake could be Norway: tundra on top, taiga below, rugged hills behind near shore islands and, again, startlingly Clear Water.

Day 2: Frosty night. Tom O. catches first lake trout, Tom R. catches brook trout and many more. Fred sterns John, Tom R. & Noah through C3 rapids. Traverse upper lakes and 2 portages into late camp. Hike the hill behind.

Day 3: Push off into C1 rapids. Short carry over tall island with 3 falls. Stop at island chute for camp, more lake trout, and bath. Wonder if brother will die from local mushroom.

Day 4: Brother still moving, so we are too. Paddle canyon and broad bottom

land. Run 3 C1-2 rapids and portage 3 chutes. Tom R. catching brook and lake trout at every stop. Follow caribou trails up hill behind camp.

Day 5: Push off into a swift. River narrows into canyons, chutes and cataracts. We hump up and over 6 portages. Finally see green paint and a Keewaydin fireplace (they're 6 days ahead). More brook trout, no more lake. Noah bathes while the rest rest.

Day 6: Penultimate portage: 40 m up, 2.5 km across open land, 120 m down (beautiful Keewaydin campsite in between). Inadvertently put in at upstream rock garden & must wade out in rain. No campsite for next 1.5 hrs. but our bear reappears. Cold and desperate for light we find tough campsite up high mud bank (RL) at head of outlet rapid (long & unmanageable). Immediately to bed!

There has to be a reason for the Tursujuq National Park creation. The launch to the Riviere Eau Claire was from Mirage Base on the fjord-like arm of the lake to the river. This river begins with two heads and splits and joins for 90 km, dropping 238 m through canyons and bottom lands, and chutes and falls: a drop and pool river with ever bigger drops. The surrounding hills are littered with grand erratic boulders and break into open tundra for wonderful walks. Willows guard the shore, but the open spruce forest makes good portaging, except for the slippery lichen. At least 8 of the about 26 rapids/chutes/falls are runnable. Most of the carries are not too bad, some are. We often had wonderful vistas after a 20-80 m climb and interesting clammers down for 30-120 m. Only the last two are 2.5 km long. Fortunately, none were marred by the ax. There were few signs of others except the Cree who came to the Richmond for a reunion with their Inuit neighbors. Birds were few and the caribou tracks were empty, but there were black bear (the Ungava Grizzly is long gone), otter, and trout beyond count.

Day 7: Rest in the drizzle. Hike up 3 ridges. See portage route opposite and Richmond Gulf below long outlet rapid. White Cree tents cheer us more.

Day 8: Up and Over! Find Keewaydin portage at rapid head: 60 m up mud bank, 2.5 km across open plateau, 120 m down rock ridge. Cree meet us: awaiting Inuit from Umiujaq (were neighbors in



**The R. Eau Claire Trip: Flying In – Paddling Down – Flying Out.**





**Looking Down-River: Taiga, Tundra and Trippers.**

GWR): 6-8 large wall tents, one teepee, one "long.house" and nice latrine with view.

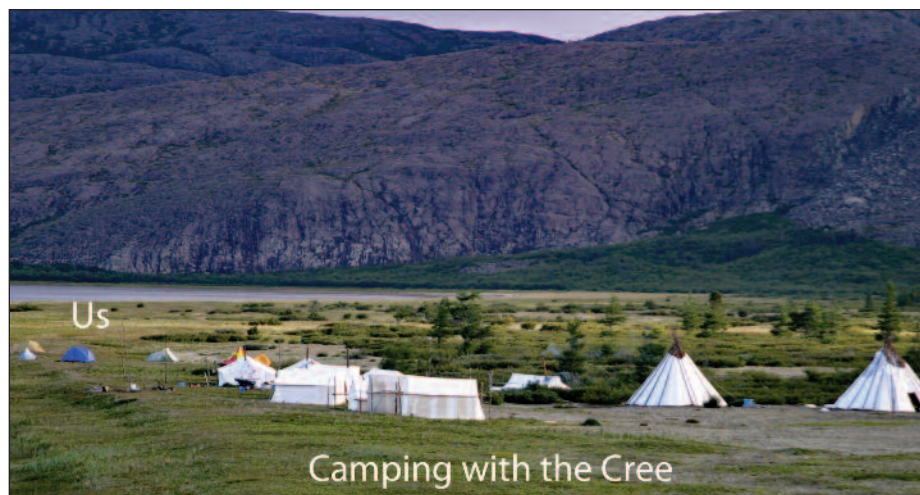
Day 9: Richard & Leslie from GWR motor us to old HBC post (family cemetery). Cree invited us to come closer, so we move camp.

Day 10: Twin Otter deposits more GWR Cree & gear. Johnny Rupert takes Jimmy George and us to tall escarpment on west side of Gulf. Help him set up camp for a "vision quest". Tour "Wiachuan Jr" River as it tumbles into Gulf & see Wiachuan (Riviere de Troyes) cascade in distance (A.P. Lowe's route)

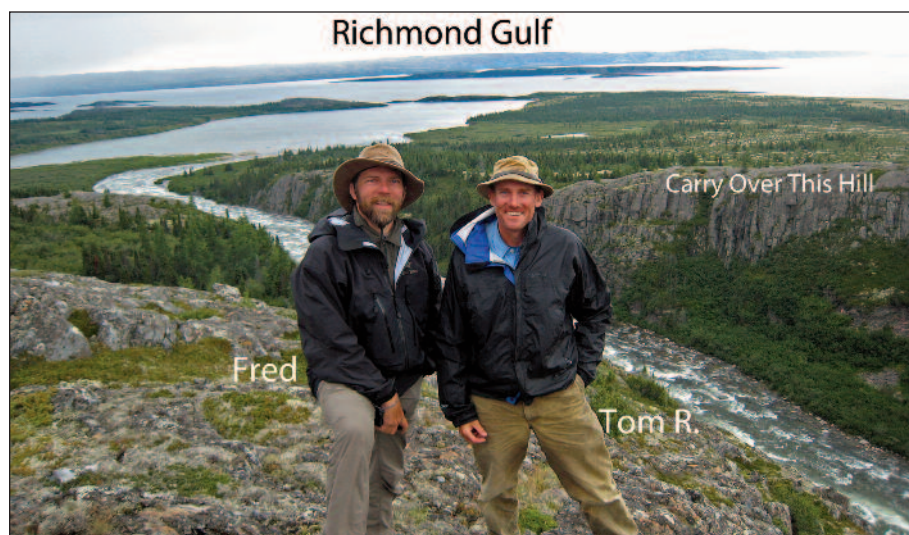
But the jewel of the land was the glass Clear Water showing the rocks within its falls. However, the rain gods also live here! Their vassal winds roar eastward across the Bay, carrying its waters up into the highlands to fall back on a place that is as much wet as dry. The returning water promises dammed power, not just showers. Tursujaq National Park may protect the inland seals from dams, but not all this land. Come see it before others do!

Day 11: Fly up Wiachuan canyon while pilot snaps shots of walls 40 m away. Review Little & Great Whale Rivers. See dead tree rafts on La Grande Reservoir 4. Overnight at Mirage (good place!).

Days 12-14: Out the Trans-Taiga. Detour to Radisson but no time for 4-hour dam tour. Eat caribou again in Matagami. Arrive back at Tom O.'s Bear Lake cabin. Fly Home to Dallas with extra boots.



**Cree Rendezvous on Richmond Gulf: Our encampment on the left.**



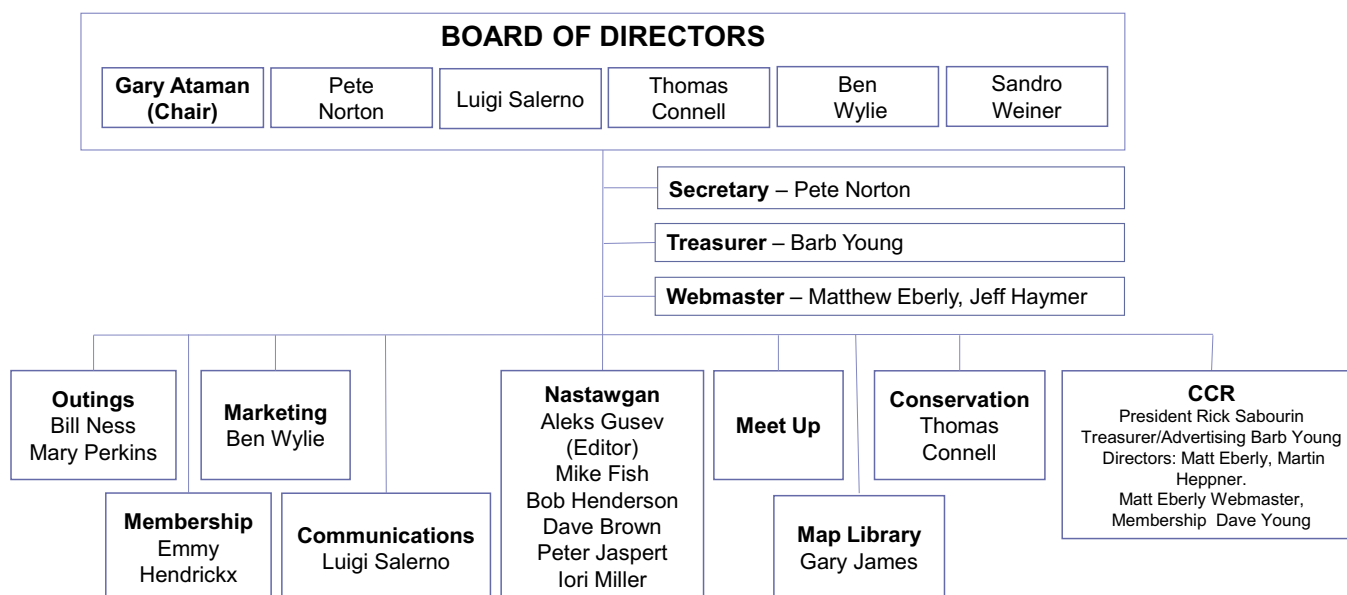
**Out to the Gulf: Un-navigable outlet run and navigable hump portage.**



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