



# nastawgan

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*Running Beam Rapids (CII), approximately 20 kilometres north of Mattice.*

## Where the Rivers are Wild: A Journey Down the Lower Missinaibi and Moose Rivers

Story and photos by Erik Thomsen

The cold subarctic gales, driving rains, unrelenting headwinds, the ruggedness of the lands, the turbulence of the waters – the Missinaibi and Moose Rivers in northern Ontario may well put you on a threshing floor and strip you down to your rawest emotions. Isolation, desolation, fear, and at times, utter despondency; nature here is unforgiving, uncompromising, and is capable of testing the upper limits of

your endurance and fortitude. You may question why you do it.

But it is here that you will find colours you have never seen and Gods that you never knew existed. Swallows will flicker as they feed in the dimming dusk, the Aurora Borealis will dance through the northern sky as it has for aeons and you will edge closer to answering the great questions.



*Rising mists over the Missinaibi at dawn of our first day on the river. This photograph was taken from the public park on the east bank of the Missinaibi in Mattice.*

On these mighty rivers, yet free and untamed, you will find a glory that binds all, through the ages, who have ever gazed over the expanses of the wild and endeavoured to solve the mystery beyond.

It was under a purple pre-dawn sky, on an unseasonably crisp July morning that I sat on the grassy banks of the Missinaibi in Mattice, Ontario, consumed by that very sense of mystery. Amongst the early morning bird song and through a swirling mist, I watched the river abidingly as the ascending sun crept slowly above the horizon. In a few hours, our group of four longtime friends would finally launch our canoes and begin our 316 kilometre journey to the isolated Cree community of Moosonee, on the edge of James Bay.

For many years I had traced the course of the Missinaibi and Moose Rivers on my topographic maps. I had pondered the sweeping breadth of the

mixed boreal forest that surrounds the glacier-scoured shores of Missinaibi Lake, in the heart of the Chapleau Game Preserve. From there, the headwaters of the Missinaibi, I followed its narrow serpentine flow northward, past the train bridge and abandoned Hudson's Bay Company post at Peterbell, over the notorious, raging waters of Greenhill Rapids, and beyond the town of Mattice. I envisioned this rolling river and its rapids cutting deep through thick stands of black spruce, balsam fir and tamarack.

Continuing north and northeast, I contemplated the immense, earthshaking power of Thunderhouse Falls – the place where the river begins its dramatic, roaring descent off the Canadian Shield and into the Hudson Bay Lowlands. I thought of Algonkin shamans who practiced rituals here over millennia, the traders and Bay men who used the falls as a meeting place to

exchange their goods, and the many doomed canoeists who had been caught in the alluring flow of the river above the falls before being drawn into its deadly maw.

Beyond Thunderhouse, I studied the Missinaibi's sudden confluence with the Mattagami to form the Moose River, and I wondered about the expansiveness of the sky – this is a region known for its vast, low-lying, impenetrable muskeg and stunted vegetation. In the lowlands, it is the mercurial multi-tonal sky that prevails as the dominant feature of the landscape.

At last, I traced the ever-widening river further north to Moosonee and Moose Factory, further still to James Bay and ultimately to the Arctic Ocean itself.

As I looked over those maps, I thought of the bald eagle soaring high above the spires of its lonely domain; the timber wolf roaming wild and free



through the dank hollows of the dark northern coniferous taiga and this place of shadows; the woodland caribou running as unconstrained as the river itself. I thought of the power of the moon and how it heaved the cold ocean waters of the Bay 15 kilometres inland and up-river. I thought of the smoky-white beluga breaching the briny waters near the mouth of the Moose, and the mighty polar bear rambling along the desolate, cobble coastline in the southernmost extent of its global range. This is how our rivers were meant to be.

Over its magnificent, free-flowing course, the Missinaibi takes its travelers back 8,000 years to the retreat of the three-kilometre-thick Wisconsin Ice Sheet, which covered all of Ontario during the last ice age. With the melting of the glacier, the uplands of the Missinaibi region became habitable to hunters of the central plains, and over



*Paddling under gloomy skies at the bottom of Black Feather Rapids. Though not visible in this photograph, Black Feather Rapids is a massive boulder field; lining/wading may be necessary depending on water levels.*





*Second of three drops at Thunderhouse Falls (low water levels). Note the suspended driftwood at the top left of the frame; at high water, the river crashes over most of the exposed rock visible in this picture.*

millennia, the migration of these hunters followed the retreating glacier further north.

At the time of European arrival and settlement in the 16th century, the river was well utilized for hunting and travel by Michipicoten Ojibwe in the south and Moose Cree in the north. By the late 1770s, and for 140 years thereafter, the Missinaibi and Moose Rivers became one of the most important canoe routes in the North American fur trade as the most direct link between the posts on Hudson Bay and Lake Superior.

But unlike many other famous, historical routes – the Ottawa, the Mattawa, the French – signs of modernity here remain sparse. Bridges span the river only four times in its course, and beyond the town of Mattice, the

river is virtually devoid of development and exploitation. Incredibly, photographs, ruined Hudson's Bay Company forts, and gravesites survive to this day. These age-old relics serve to remind the traveler, unequivocally, that every moment of his journey in this precious land is fleeting.

It was with these thoughts that our journey down the Missinaibi finally commenced on that chilly morning in July. Gazing down this vast, sweeping artery is a clear, ancient pathway, shrouded symmetrically by stately emerald palisades atop sloping grassy shores. The landscape is simple, if not austere. The dark river winds far into the distance, over turbulent rapids, falls and boulder fields.

It took our group two days, paddling almost 60 kilometres from Mattice, into

stiff southerly headwinds, to reach Thunderhouse Falls. Arriving there in the dim iridescent glow of the late afternoon, we were greeted by a large golden eagle perched, like a sentry, atop the twisted skeleton of a dead tree. Under the ominous flight of this majestic creature, we continued down the 1,650-metre portage trail towards the cliffs that overlook Thunderhouse canyon.

Thunderhouse is comprised of three voluminous, cascading drops that collectively measure upwards of 15 metres. The dark, yellowish waters of the Missinaibi, in high water, crash over those drops with a violence that would perhaps rival any wild river in the province. Below the falls, the river settles placidly into a glorious canyon set 35 metres below the forest. The canyon



is punctuated by a lone pillar of gneiss, known as Conjuring House Rock, which towers 20 metres out of the water.

We set camp on the brink of these cliffs and gazed contentedly over the serenity of the lower falls, Conjurer's Rock and the canyon's east wall for a long time. We admired the reflection of the dying sun as it glimmered off the foamy waters below and gave audience to the canyon even as darkness took hold and the northern winds began to swirl.

The wind came quickly and with scant warning. Dark clouds swept across the purple twilight; foliage began to roar and trees began to sway and crackle; our fire raged in a wild, uncontrollable frenzy; heavy drops of rain battered our tents as thunder crashed above. The canyon, in a glori-

ous, untamed fury, had come alive, as if to warn us of the challenges ahead.

The next day, through steady rains, we continued our descent off the Shield and encountered our next major obstacle – Hell's Gate Canyon. The massive cascading falls that characterize this secondary canyon are dangerous and caution must be exercised on approach of the portage, given the speed of the river and obscured trailhead. Once ashore, we struggled through the knee-deep mud that glazed much of 2,300-metre trail. Unfortunately, both the deteriorating conditions and thick, twisted brush shrouding the trail discouraged us from exploring the canyon to any great extent. Thus, forward we travelled on to the river and to the high clay bluffs of Bell's Bay, where we laid our shelter for the night.

While we dreamed of warmer days

ahead, the next day brought no reprieve. For most of the morning, we waited for the weather to improve, but failing that, decided to launch our boats under a lull. Within two kilometres the rainstorm intensified, and with no obvious place to gain shelter on the scrubby, waterlogged banks, we forged ahead. After 10 more kilometres – our rain gear saturated, and a hypothermic chill affecting us all – we finally staked shelter at the mouth of the Coal River. Here, with a depleted morale, we waited for the rain to abate again, before getting back into our boats and pushing to camp at Pivabiskau River.

For 120 kilometres and three days of travel past Thunderhouse Falls – and despite it being early summer – we endured cold temperatures, soaking rains, desolate skies and steady headwinds. Our battered muscles struggled for



*Paddling upstream through Thunderhouse Canyon to view the falls.*





*Sundown on the Moose River at our rocky island campsite. This vantage, which follows the river to the north, demonstrates the austerity of the Hudson Bay Lowlands.*



*Staying warm on the Moose River as night takes hold.*



every centimetre of progress. Those days invoked harsh lessons on the dispassionate and fickle indifference of Nature and the futility and meagreness of humanity within it.

It wasn't until our last afternoon on the Missinaibi, before its confluence with the Mattagami, that the conditions began to improve. That afternoon, the sun gleamed through the clouds and warmed our skin for the first time in almost a week. The next day, though the headwinds remained persistent, we fi-

places – and was speckled with wild islands and gravel bars. The trees and vegetation, sitting atop the distant banks of the river, grew short, clearly influenced by the long, harsh subarctic winters of the region. At times it was possible to be 400 metres from shore and resting in just 20 centimetres of water. In other instances, the river became deep and susceptible to large waves.

The day grew late – it was our eighth evening on the river and the sun

We climbed from our canoes, pulled them onto the land and began to stake out our shelters. I erected my tent in a protected groove near the middle of the island. This location afforded a supreme southerly vista across this expansive low-lying portion of the Moose. The river here stretched for a kilometre from bank to bank and distant shores were visible for many kilometres to both the north and the south.

Upon building my shelter, I escaped into the brisk northern air to explore the



*Racing the sun on the Moose River to Moosonee.*

nally paddled onto the Moose River with large swaths of blue sky overhead.

Almost immediately after reaching the Moose the landscape changed dramatically again. The river widened significantly – almost a kilometre in

was suspended in the sky. At around 9 o'clock we pulled our boats onto a large bar of sand and cobblestone in the middle of the river. The island held no trees, but was crowned with shrubs and offered sufficient respite.

island and collect driftwood for a fire. The sun, at this point, was setting slowly in the most incredible array of orange and pink that, perhaps, I've ever seen. Bank swallows emerged from little holes in the sun-baked riverbank on





*Group picture on the Missinaibi. From left to right: Mike Cameron, Chris Brophy, Lachlan McVie, Erik Thomsen.*

the western side of our shrubby island. Hundreds of them came from their nests and enveloped the air around me to feed on the insects in the cooling summer air.

Before long, the setting sun finally dipped below the horizon, and, one by one, the stars of the universe slowly revealed themselves overhead. We built our mangled driftwood fire high on that sandy, rocky shore, to ward off the chill of night. In that moment, I stood there thinking about the glory that surrounded us in contrast to the toil we had left behind. Above, the northern lights emerged and began their ancient dance.

After a decade of wilderness adventure, it was here, above this rocky shoal in the land of the endless tangerine sky, that I learned about redemption. Things will be taken from you – and the

wilderness is the most implacable taker of things – but I know this: find the strength to endure and every sense will be heightened; persevere and every second will move too fast; overcome and the world will be full of uncommon beauty. Go outside and enjoy this bounty we have been blessed with, for the rivers, here, are still wild.

I think about that day often, and wonder how many others have passed that might compare to it – the sun and clouds in the right place, the water, the breeze, the moon suspended in the dusk. But even with all those ingredients it would be impossible to replicate that feeling of completeness that I experienced that evening, without the moments of treachery that came prior.

Our journey to Moosonee and back

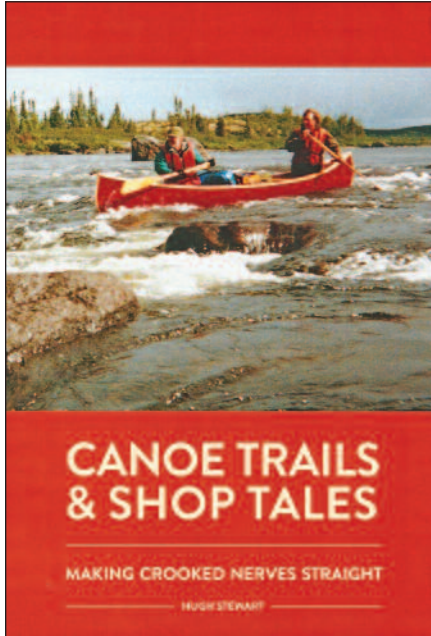
to civilization concluded the next day. The final 60-kilometre leg of the trip took us past the confluence of the Abitibi River and boiling Kwetabohigan Rapids. The riverbanks continued to stretch further from us on each side and the tidal effects of the river, with their elongated swells, became impossible to ignore. On this last day, we paddled again into headwinds, but this time under clear blue skies, and by the time the sun fell, the warming lights of Moosonee appeared in the distance. As we paddled toward our final destination, we skirted the shore of Bushy Island and Tidewater Provincial Park, and there, atop the skeleton of a large dead tree, in the yellow light of evening, a golden eagle sat and watched us, as we paddled into the sky.



## Book Review:

# Canoe Trails and Shop Tales: Making Crooked Nerves Straight

by Hugh Stewart



For a few years, my friend Hugh Stewart has been alluding to his “memoirs project.” In our visits, I was lucky to preview drafts of a few stories documenting his memories of a lifetime of canoe tripping in the Canadian wilderness, serving as a key figure in Ontario’s summer camp scene, and building wood-canvas canoes in his Wakefield, QC-based workshop. The glimpses were enough to get me excited about the prospect of a full collection.

Released in the fall of 2018, *Canoe Trails and Shop Tales* is the first contemporary title for Ottawa-based publisher McGahern Stewart. The label’s Forgotten Northern Classics series also includes a reprint of American adventurer P.G. Downes’ 1942 classic, *Sleeping Island*; a two-volume collection of Downes’ journals; arctic explorer W.H.B. Hoare’s 1928-29 Thelon River journal; the collected journals of Fenley Hunter’s 1928 exploration of the South Nahanni River; and Hal Pink’s little-known biography of Bill Guppy, an early Temagami woodsman. Stewart’s eclectic mix of trip journals and essays about canoe-building, Canadian history and the environment fits right in alongside the

other northern classics.

*Canoe Trails and Shop Tales* is far more nuanced than I ever expected. Stewart, 73, eloquently weaves memories of wilderness travel with unique, clearly articulated perspectives on related topics such as resource management and First Nations in a compilation that’s rich in intellectual grist. Reading *Canoe Trails and Shop Tales* compelled me to start a gift-list of friends (canoe trippers) and colleagues (outdoor educators) who will appreciate Stewart’s outlook.

My favourite chapter is “The Little Sticks,” an account of a 10-week, physically- and emotionally taxing transit of the Barrenlands in 1980. Stewart insists that to paddle a canoe is to become part of the “historical continuum.” More than a simple travelogue, the story contrasts the author’s experience paddling from Reindeer Lake in northern Saskatchewan across the treeline and down the Kazan and Ferguson rivers to Hudson Bay with those of previous travellers, including Downes and J.B. Tyrrell of the Geological Survey of Canada. The same examination of hardship and reward play out more intimately in Stewart’s terse, in-the-moment journal entries from a 1984 expedition on the Petit Mecatina River in Labrador and Quebec, reprinted in another chapter.

Like so many others of his generation, Stewart’s paddling career has been punctuated with journeys on wild rivers like Quebec’s Eastmain and Labrador’s Churchill just before they were silenced by hydroelectric projects. In doing so, Stewart realized the irony of idolizing resource developers of the early days, such as the GSC. “If alive today, our heroes would be hopping about in helicopters, running seismic lines, and interpreting remote sensing data,” he writes. “We are drawn to these travellers because they lived in times in stark contrast to our daily world...Success depended on ingenuity, resourcefulness, and a high level of wilderness travel skills, personal traits worth emulating and expertise worth acquiring.”

Stewart’s memoirs capture a rich, multifaceted life. After studying literature at Sussex in the UK, he returned to Canada to pursue a PhD in New Brunswick. However, his fascination for canoes disrupted his studies. Stewart took to hanging around the headquarters of the venerable Chestnut Canoe Company, learning the tricks of building wood-canvas canoes. Instead of a doctorate degree, Stewart left New Brunswick with several classic Chestnut building forms, purchased when the company went out of business in 1979. These designs became the hallmarks of Headwaters Canoes, which continues to produce traditional, expedition-ready canoes today.

In a remarkably generous gesture, Stewart handed over the Headwaters canoe shop to his young protégés, Kate Prince and Jamie Bartle in 2016. The decision freed up time to finally complete his memoirs, and ultimately reflects Stewart’s desire to perpetuate the defining values of his life. “Some might accuse me of being on a crusade to preserve the craft of building wooden canoes and to promote the skills required to travel in them,” he writes in the book’s powerful final chapter, entitled “Cultural Custodians.” “That could be a valid charge, but as the years mount, I have come to see myself more as a custodian than a crusader.”

Stewart likes to highlight how canoe tripping involves physical, intellectual and emotional stimulation – a theme that runs through each chapter. There’s more to the activity than just picking up a paddle. With this in mind, reading *Canoe Trails and Shop Tales* is like sitting around the campfire with the author himself, talking about journeys past and present – and dreaming of those yet to come.

To order a copy contact McGahern Stewart Publishing at: [mcspublishing@gmail.com](mailto:mcspublishing@gmail.com).

— Conor Mihell



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**Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association**  
**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.

## WCA Board of Directors Activities

The WCA board of directors meets 6 times per year to steer the direction of our organization. Our topics cover membership, finance, events, marketing and communications, *Nastawgan*, website, and more. Attendees include board members and committee members (see chart on page 24).

This year, I was elected as the Board Chair, after being on the board for the last few years. Over that period we gained a few new energetic, younger members and still retained our deep bench of more experienced members. We have a strong team. I thought I'd share a few of our achievements over the last few months.

### *1. Streamlined online membership process.*

Now everyone's memberships expire on the same day, March 31, which saves a ton of administrative effort for the club. Members will no longer miss *Nastawgan* because they forgot to renew their membership in time.

### *2. Implemented a single-step online membership signup process.*

New members now proceed to registration and immediately pay their membership dues and do not have to wait on club's approval before completing the process, as was the case before. This means more happy members, and more club money to be spent on activities and events and less WCA administration.

### *3. Implemented family membership with multiple emails.*

We added the ability for a family

membership member to input up to 10 additional valid family names, phone numbers and email addresses. All these email addresses will receive WCA communications such as outing and general announcements.

### **WCA survey**

On Oct 2, 2018 we put out a WCA online membership survey to all members. The results of this survey were reviewed during our December 6, 2018 board meeting. We have determined that some of the findings can be implemented in the short term and others will need more long-term planning. We plan to summarize the findings and present them at WCA AGM in the Spring '19.

Some of the short-term improvements involve our outreach communication to retain and attract new members. This involves social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, WCA Meetup group, WCA Business Cards, Mission statements, keeping the WCA website current and dynamic, CCR website cross promotion - just to name a few.

### **WCA Logo**

One of the areas we'd like to make consistent is our WCA logo. We currently have different logos used on our WCA website, CCR website, Facebook, Youtube, WCA Meetup, *Nastawgan* journal, business cards, banners, membership forms, general WCA letterhead and communications. Based on the success of the 2018 membership survey participation, we plan to engage the mem-

bership in suggestions for a new WCA logo design that will capture simply and effectively what the WCA is. The plan is to use this one branding logo across all the WCA platforms.

### **History of the WCA**

The WCA was formed in 1974 when a small group of paddlers came together in Orillia to promote the interests of recreational canoeists, safe paddling, environmental protection, documentation of canoe routes, and the preservation of portage rights on private land. Unwritten was the club's most important function, to create a community of canoeists interested in wilderness travel. So that makes this year our 45th anniversary.

I floated the idea of creating the "History of the WCA" document and received some favorable responses. We're asking you, the members, to submit your stories and photographs that capture your part of our WCA history. I envision the document will be put together into some kind of chronological order injected with these firsthand members' stories recalling certain events. Our time frame to complete the first draft will be Dec 2019. Contact us at [chair@wildernesscanoe.ca](mailto:chair@wildernesscanoe.ca) and tell us your WCA story. You, our members, make this a great club to be part of. Please share your stories.

WCA Chair

Gary Ataman

[chair@wildernesscanoe.ca](mailto:chair@wildernesscanoe.ca)



# Wabakimi & Agawa Rock – A Pictograph Adventure

Story and photos by Emmy Hendrickx and Peter Burkinshaw



*Using WindPaddle sail with fully loaded canoe*

During my preparations for the second part of the Northwest Wilderness Quest for Ontario Parks, for a trip to Wabakimi Provincial Park, I realized some of the names of rivers and lakes sounded familiar to me, like Kopka River and Smoothrock Lake. I then realized I had been in Wabakimi Provincial Park before; 23 years ago, in 1995, when I was fortunate enough to be chosen by Outward Bound to participate as part of the Women of Courage program after some personal problems. I remember how in awe I was that summer, leaders and participants who were able to pad-

dle on just one side and keep the canoe straight, while I kept going in circles the first couple of days. I was totally amazed when I carried a canoe all by myself over a dam, survived 3 days alone on an island, built my own shelter, and started my own campfire.

I have been on numerous shorter and longer trips and was always very fortunate to be with people with more experience to learn from and share with. And now in 2018, I planned a trip! And really did it!!! There are a lot of details that go into a successful and safe wilderness trip up North, which include determining the

route, finding portages and campsites making topographical maps (using <http://atlas.gc.ca/toporama/en>), planning daily menus and doing the food preparation, plus organizing the camping and emergency equipment.

Peter, my paddle partner was excited to do this challenge; and while other people were interested it did not pan out that any of them joined us. In the early spring when Peter and I for the first time paddled together on the Humber River, I quickly realized his lack of whitewater and canoeing skills. But as a speaker at the Wilderness Canoe Symposium said:





*Agawa Rock with Misshepezhieu, the Great Lynx*

it is not the experience that is important, but rather the attitude? And Peter sure did. He made up his lack of knowledge of lengthy trips (had done a few 5-day

trip before this) by reading up, detailing, finding more campsites through the internet, learning how to dehydrate food, and even taking a Wilderness First Aid

course. And although he brought only 8 small (half-page sized) maps for our 13-day trip covering over 175 kilometers and 30 portages, he knew exactly where camps or portages were. He remembered details after my topographical maps got a dunking in the water. He helped pack gear, making life so much easier when the barrels were packed the same way every day. And he lasted the whole trip, even though I had tried numerous times to get rid of him. His excitement and enthusiasm made this trip an unforgettable experience.

With the primary goal of the adventure to see pictographs, a visit to Agawa Rock on Lake Superior was part of the plan. Unfortunately my previous attempts to see them found the weather never cooperating; but this time wow, what an experience. Sunny, quiet waters and alone with no tourists, on a small ledge with the deep cold water within arm's reach beside me, so I could sit next to the Misshepezhieu, or the Great Lynx, the spirit of the water. It is said Misshepezhieu could work for or against humans — he could calm the waters, or he could bring wind and storms over Superior by thrashing his tail. Having a few moments of peace provided me hope that the spirits would be with us on our adventure.

The next day I decided that we should take the more scenic route of Black Sturgeon Lake Road, hoping to recognize anything from when I was there 23 years ago. And after an idyllic day at Agawa, we did not mind having a weather-dreary day of rain for driving. But that gave way to fun and excitement when we started going through orange puddles — I love the colour orange! While I drove, the road was three lanes wide and the reddish soil had us laughing and splashing. Of course all good things come to an end, and so when Peter took over driving things changed; the soil turning black, puddles getting bigger, and the road much smaller. Finally when we were only about 30 km away from Armstrong, we found that the river next to the road had flooded the road. In scoping out the water level, I found that it was higher than the bottom of the car doors, so we then did a careful 7-point turnaround of the car and had to drive all the way back to



*Size of the thunderbird pictograph on Cliff Lake*

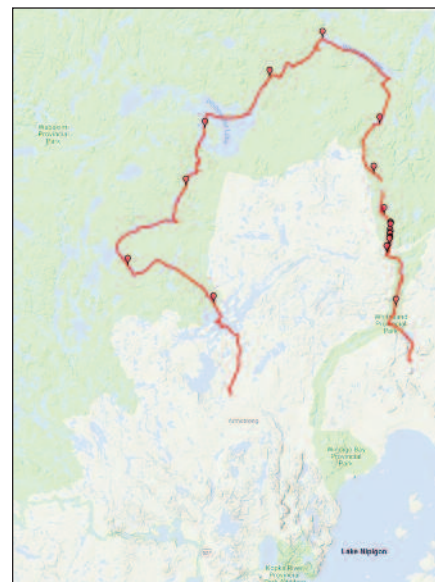


Highway 17. However, seeing moose, an owl flying beside us, and the orange puddles was so worth the 3-hour delay. Thankfully, the spirits were with us; as unknowingly the gas station / hotel check-in closed at 8pm, and we got there with just 10 minutes to spare! After that we then met with the outfitter Clem Quenville, and then finally made some last-minute preparations for the next day and turned in for a short, restless sleep.

**Day 1 (Peter)** – While we were warned to expect low levels of water everywhere, thanks to all the rain in the last couple of days, our first portage was nowhere to be seen – no rocks, no lift-over, no small swift, nothing! This day was our first long day together of paddling, navigating and portaging. While I was sort of worried about spotting the portages, and repeatedly being told how bad these portages could be; I was able to pick out the only one we did do for the day quite easily. (Of course, having the GPS helps, but using it with awareness to the terrain is key.) After doing this portage, we experienced the worst weather for our entire trip while crossing Caribou Lake. We both found it difficult dealing with high waves (some whitecaps) coming at us from one 45 degree direction, strong winds from the other 45 degree direction, and on-top of all that – rain. It got really scary when we ended having waves much higher than gunnels coming at us parallel to the canoe, since we did not understand each other, and we quickly re-oriented the canoe; after which I briefly yelling that I was paddling (note that Emmy's paddling power is like 40% more than mine). After a short break, hiding behind one of the islands, we talked, and we had then to trust the other with role they had in paddling in high waves. I was not familiar with the amount of zigzag Emmy allowed in going towards a destination, so I had to just focus on going straight and not trying to assist in the steering. *[Emmy – I also had to correct him on his bearings once, and had to learn to accept his reading of the GPS, and guide us in the direction we had to go. What a personal growth moment this was for the both of us in terms of both skills and emotions. Yes, I can*

*do this; to be responsible keeping both of us safe, to be confident, and to believe in myself.]*

**Day 3 (Emmy)** – Was an interesting day with sunshine and rain storms. There were dark clouds with very faint thunderstorms. I panicked a bit, even though it was sunny above us with no clouds coming in, as a storm was moving away from us to the southeast, so we went to Bussey Island on Lonebreast Bay. (Side note... Bussey Island is named in memory of Dewey Bussey and John Kelly containing big propane tanks, multiple stoves, and even a fish table. There is also a plaque saying: "He fished it best. He knew it better. His stories will live forever.") Since it was still sunny, we kept going and Peter pointed to an outlet, thinking it was a 100 m possible paddle-through portage. This was a nice creek that meandered through a reedy, swampy area, and gave us a tricky but good paddle, but we stopped once noticing the current was going the wrong direction. Making a U-turn however in the



GPS route Wabakimi trip, June 2018

middle of a swamp with no place to get out, took a bit of maneuvering to finally turn our canoe around. We also decided to switch spots, so using a few fallen logs Peter and I switched positions.



Waiting for the storm to pass on McKinley River





*Crossing the river to free our pinned canoe*

Being in the bow felt just like driving a big bus, having to wait with the turning until you get past the pivot point – I loved it! Eventually we did find the right portage and it was not even a little swift, just some easily-avoidable rocks and we then were on Laurent Lake, so with the wind being good, up goes the sail! It was a pleasure seeing how we cruised with the water splashing up. Considering how light and small it is, the sail worked really well, and was worth the investment! A 65m portage was rocky to get out and VERY buggy, but I saw a most amazing pink orchid lady slipper – wow!! Too bad I got eaten alive trying to take a picture of it. Another short portage, and by the time we got to the end with all our gear and canoe, it got dark real fast. A storm broke loose, thunder and lightning less than two seconds apart, so out came the

emergency blanket and we then sat watching the rapid water going around trees and rocks.

**Day 4 (Peter)** – Our food was dehydrated and bagged into meal portions beforehand, so we just needed to boil water in the morning for tea, breakfast, and dinner. Dinner went in a big Nalgene container, with hot water, soaking it and excess water drained, so it could then be stuffed into a pot cozy and back in the barrel. This method then meant when we stopped for the night, the meal was hydrated sufficiently, still warm, and ready to eat right away; without any worries about the bugs or bad weather for us to try and cook with. On leaving McKinley Lake, our portage was way shorter than the expected 285m. This was due to it being a two-part portage with a very small lake in be-

tween. Emmy scouted out the later portion, and believed that we could paddle the rapid, keeping to the right on the right hand turning creek to get past the very large rock and two logs on the left-hand side. However, it did not quite work out as planned and we got pinned against the logs and rock. Panic almost set in when Emmy bent over in her seat to get under one of the logs, as we were worried about either getting caught up on the log or a gunnel catching the current – either one causing us to flip and get trapped there. (Note it is good to have more than one set of maps, as water can sometimes get into water-sealed pouches.) Once we both took a moment to breathe and calm down, we realized that while the current was stronger than expected, it was not as bad as we imagined. My suggestion of pivoting the canoe on the log's edge and



finishing the rapid, found us either getting the canoe caught in rocks on the far shoreline or the current preventing us from getting enough leverage to turn the bow and accomplishing this. So after taking another few moments to rest, Emmy indicated our only option was for someone to cross the river and then pull the canoe across. Being the “gentleman” I said I would do it, which Emmy finds funny, since up until that point I had been very careful getting in and out of the canoe, so as to not get my feet wet. Soloing back was a bit of challenge due to the current but found it easier than I imagined; and thru all this gained confidence that despite what may happen, we will get through things. And just to “prove” that God was watching out for us, after drying out for a bit and getting back on the water, we then saw an eagle! After several more (walking) portages,

we then got to Whitewater Lake and made camp at the shore by Beckwith’s cabins. Enjoying a fire after a day like this, and seeing the beauty of the sunset, you simply say thank you to God before falling asleep exhausted.

Side note... If you are not familiar with Wendell Beckwith, he was a US born recluse who came to Canada in 1961 (living here illegally until he died), for his own personal scientific research. There are three cabins where he lived year-round, but it is his smallest one called the “snail” which gets the most attention. It is partially built into the surrounding landscape, is curved which attests to his study of Pi (the 3.14159... number), and appeared in the December 1976 issue of *National Geographic*. Since his death in 1980, the site has been left as it was, slowly deteriorated but one can easily see the exquisite crafts-

manship and personal detailed care which went into its construction. [Emmy – I was very impressed by the number of cabins that were there. Besides the main cabin where the tree had fallen on top and the snail, the most known one, there were two additional smaller cabins; an outhouse and a large tool cabin/storage area. Wendell even built a wooden fence and tried growing vegetables that didn’t go due to the acidity of the soil. And yes, the carpentry was out of this world. Every corner was used, with storage space, and the floors were made of hexagon shaped wood pieces. There were sinks with pipes, split double doors with intricate locks, and even with the deterioration it was fabulous to see and explore.]

**Day 7 (Emmy)** – Halfway down White Clay Lake, we took a break for lunch on



Wendell Beckwith’s famous snail cabin





*Efficient use of space inside the cabin*

a sunny rock, in an almost bug-free area. When we landed, we saw approximately ten butterflies, sunning and mating on the warm rocks. During our trip we saw this similar butterfly, a tiger swallowtail, every day of our trip, so we felt it belonged as part of our trip. Sometimes we had to filter water while still in the canoe (which is a great way to do refills while avoiding the bugs.)

**Day 9 (Peter)** – Nothing says wilderness more than having to mark your own path. Thankfully Emmy brought marking tape, which limited our frustration in having that day to deal with our double carrying. We would take most of the gear on the first trip, and then the remaining gear and canoe on the second carry. While it was a “short” long day only having to go from South Annette Lake to Butland Lake, we had to deal

with two portages of 685 m and 785 m in length, with a tiny unnamed lake in between. Those two portages and unnamed lake though are really all part of a floating bog, which was a bit unnerving. Trying to figure out how to load the canoe and get in, and then at the other edge in getting out, without any solid footing near the water’s edge was not easy but we did it. (My thought process to handling it was to treat it like ice.) Despite the lack of firm footing, we marveled at the variety of orchids, pitcher plants and other vegetation.

**Day 11 (Peter)** – A whole day to explore Cliff Lake which is truly a special place; where its remoteness, the awe of nature (some of the surrounding cliffs are over a hundred feet high), and history (pictographs) all come together to highlight what I like about wilderness trips. Today

I was filled with a feeling of serenity, exploring a place that has less people visit it yearly than Mount Everest. I felt a little bit like Indiana Jones, having a sense of adventure and investigating, trying to distinguish and figure out if I was actually seeing a pictograph or just imagining things – between the colours, marks (shapes), and/or lichen (nature). All of this in anticipation of the thrill, that did occur, when I realized we found a pictograph; something drawn a long time ago which has withstood the elements for many generations. Some were easier to spot, being large with a strong contrast to its background. We ended up marking 18 different locations, some small and faint, which gave us a sense of pride. Seeing these pictographs gives me a connection to the past and allows me to witness that spirituality and history impacts the world. [Emmy – *One of the*



most amazing pictograph collections we saw was in the southwest corner of Cliff Lake. Here within a three-foot diameter are multiple pictographs, obviously done at different time periods. It must be a very sacred site to the natives to come back here over the years. In orange is a circle, with floating legs, and other marks around it that are very abstract. Underneath, in purple is a man drawn in detail, with even fingers on the hands. To the right of these is a double cross painted on top of a faded canoe. It really is quite fascinating to see this in person.]

Funny side story... That evening while fishing, I hooked the same fish twice, the first time it broke the line and got away, but the next time I reeled it in. How did I know it was the exact same fish? When we cut it open to cook for supper, we found my first lure in its belly! (God does have a sense of humour!)

**Days 12 & 13 (Emmy)** – Portages from Cliff Lake to Wash Lake and the next day with Pikitigushi River to our take out were our longest days and most strenuous portages; but teamwork works!!! The most worrisome and scariest portage was the Bad Medicine Portage (600m) which involved a steep cliff. The first part wasn't that bad until we hit a steep incline, so we left our gear there and got the rest of our stuff and the canoe. Getting the canoe up that incline needed the use of a pulley system. The cliff edge wasn't as scary – the roaring river with the falls and the rapids down below in the gorge was further away from the path than I had expected but amazing to see and hear. After the steep incline, the trail descended with rocks and a small ledge, extremely closer to the river – and then finally a portion straight down to the water's edge – yes those were scary. However with great team work, lowering the canoe with a rope bit by bit, and the last part of lowering the gear with ropes into the canoe, allowed us to get thru this portage. I am grateful for Peter's encouragement and what he lacked in canoe skills, he for sure made up in strength, and footage on the portages. The last portage P29 (being 1500 meters, yes 1.5 km) was really the most challenging of them all. After getting thru most of it, we then had to bushwhack our way to the



*Daily sightings of Tiger Swallowtails*



*Tagging the trail on floating bogs*





*Lowering gear 7 feet on Bad Medicine portage*





*Crossing another river during last portage*





*Sacred site on Cliff lake, the highlight of our trip*



*Thank you bugs for this Old Babushka face*

end; with us both pulling the canoe while hopping a bog, and also dealing with walking on rocks while crossing a river. We ran out of water to drink and even though we had filtered some, in the scouring heat it was not enough. We were really pushed to our limits here, but Peter kept encouraging me, and was a real lifesaver here. Once back on Pikitigushi Lake, we sat in the shelter of a rock on the other side of the lake, away from the bugs, filtered water, and finally had our lunch before enjoying the last peaceful paddle in the meandering river to our takeout. What a perfect ending of our trip, as even though we had options to get out earlier and avoid this last beast of a portage, it made our trip complete giving us an extremely deep and true sense of accomplishment.

This following poem is from S.F. Olson, and was read to me on my Outward Bound Trip, and now 23 years later I read this same poem to Peter at the start of our trip to Wabakimi, having adapted it a bit to be more personal:

In a canoe, the battle is mine  
and mine alone,  
It is my muscle and sinew  
my wit and courage  
Against the primitive forces of the  
storm  
That is why  
when after a day of battle  
my tent pitched at last  
in the lee of some sheltering cliff  
the canoe up, safe and dry  
and supper under way  
There is an exaltation  
That only CANOE (WO)MEN know

We also want to extend a very big thank you and give a shout out to our outfitter for this adventure, Clem Quenville (wabakimiclem@hotmail.com), who not only provided us with a canoe and shuttles, but also gave wonderfully freshly made battered fish once we were back in town.

A special thank you to Bob Henderson who was kind enough to meet with us and share stories, maps and books with us regarding our trip and specifically Cliff Lake and some of his knowledge regarding the pictographs.



# The Hood River Hypothesis

Story by Carly Rivard

Photography by Joel Koop, Erik Rust and Leah Reid

A hypothesis is an educated guess, a prediction or a proposed explanation for a phenomenon. On September 3, 2014, I made the first hypothesis for my undergraduate degree. I was three days into my first year of university and prematurely stressed. I entered the main building of the university carrying a side satchel bag filled with more textbooks than a public library, my left shoe was only halfway onto my foot and my stomach was growling like a rabid dog. I was on my way to see the Outdoor Education professor in an attempt to solve a “MAJOR scheduling dilemma.” I was eager to take an introductory canoeing course. However, there was time conflict with my biology lab. The professor found me in my dishevelled state at the base of the staircase leading to his upstairs office and the two of us engaged in a brief conversation. After I finished babbling about my predicament, he calmly explained to me that the choice was essentially mine and my decision of whether or not to stay enrolled really depended on how well I could manage my time. *“How well I could manage my time”*... how dare he be so reasonable. After our conversation ended, the professor left me at the base of the staircase where I made this inaugural hypothesis. In light of our conversation I predicted I would not participate in any Outdoor Education courses that semester ... or ever.

In the fall of 2014 I started my biology degree at the University of Alberta, Augustana Campus and as a bright-eyed 19-year old, the only thing that turned my crank more than mitochondria was natural selection itself. However, it did not take me long to realize that the most valuable aspects of my degree were not going to be hiding between the pages of my organic chemistry textbook. Augustana has a Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty. In part, this means that I was required to take classes that are beyond the traditional boundaries of my major. So, as you may have guessed, I did eventually figure out my “MAJOR

scheduling dilemma” and my hypothesis was falsified. As a result, I found myself taking delight in classes ranging from Improvisational Drama to Outdoor Education where I studied personal narratives of the Canadian North combined with a February dogsled expedition in the Northwest Territories. However, even after I had fulfilled my “experiential learning credits,” I continued taking Outdoor Education courses. My heart no longer belonged to mitochondria alone; Outdoor Education had bitten right into my Liberal Arts and Sciences butt.

Therefore, I signed up for Arctic Course during the last semester of my degree. I was off on yet another journey.

Arctic course is a two-part university course which involves planning a canoe expedition during the winter term and then embarking on the journey in summer. Thus, as the winds whipped and the snow flew across the Alberta prairies during the winter of 2018, I and my classmates busied ourselves dehydrating food, preparing gear, and choosing a river. On June 22nd 2018, I joined my nine peers and professors Morten Asfeldt



Unloading the plane at Cave Lake.





Mackenzie Grove (right) and Carly Rivard (left) sharing a belly laugh during the takeoff.

and Les Parsons on a 21-day canoe expedition on the Hood River, Nunavut. On this day – June 22 – our plans finally came into action as the twelve of us set out from Camrose, drove to Yellowknife, and then hopped on a pair of bush planes which took us to Cave Lake, approximately 240 km from where the river opens into the Arctic Ocean.

I wish I could tell you that going to the headwaters of the Hood River felt like going home, but it did not. I come from a land of combines and poplar trees, and therefore arriving on this ice-choked lake in the barrens felt more strange than it did familiar. This is not to say that landing on these remote waters did not feel good. In fact, the unfamiliarity of Cave Lake made our arrival feel great; it was new and exciting, a place to be explored, a place filled with unknowns. It was exactly what I was looking for. The landscape may not have

made me feel comfortable or cozy, yet there was a sense of peace that came with my excitement and nervousness because these two feelings were familiar and signaled adventure – feelings I had come to know and love.

As I stood on the shores of Cave Lake with those blended feelings of excitement and nervousness, I asked myself: What keeps me seeking adventure? What draws me to unfamiliar places? Why do I continue to leave the comforts of home? As I sat down to write this piece, these questions resurfaced. The science student in me was screaming out for a clear and concise answer, a stand-alone reason I could pull out of a hat and identify as my motivation. I was not interested in ambiguity. Much to my dismay, a simple solution has not revealed itself. Thankfully, my liberal arts and sciences degree had taught me that seemingly unsolvable questions are

what the scientific method was made for; when faced with a problem you should generate a hypothesis, run an experiment, collect data, and hope you come to a conclusion. So that's just what I did. And now, I invite you to ponder these questions with me as I follow the scientific method, in an attempt to understand what led me to the Hood River for the last adventure of my undergraduate degree.

#### **Hypothesis #1: I went to the Hood River because I was looking for JOY:**

*No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it...*

– C.S. Lewis

Joy – also described as happiness, bliss, cheer, and in some cases... nonsense. Call it what you want; to be human means you have felt this feeling at one time or another. Initially, I pro-





*Muskox standing on the banks of the Hood River.*





*A midnight hiking adventure near Kingamutt Falls.*

posed that I chase after adventure because I am drawn to the elation that is evoked within me when I step off the beaten path: the sun makes me smile,

the unpredictability of wilderness travel makes me giggle and the simplicity of expedition life makes me feel at ease. I cannot begin to explain how thankful I

am that on the Hood River we were welcomed to embrace these feelings of elation, to laugh from our bellies and sing at the top of our lungs. It was so refreshing to simply have fun. We live in a world which values maturity and professionalism, particularly in university settings. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, in many circumstances it is good and necessary. However, on this expedition, I was reminded that we can all benefit from reacquainting ourselves with the childlike joy of expedition life.

For those who have forgotten, let me remind you what this sort of joy looks like and how it feels. Childlike joy was in the smiles we exchanged with one another, the kind that makes your cheeks hurt, as we blasted into flight and peered out the windows of the Twin Otter. It was in the wonder we felt while watching the wind blow through the hair of a muskox herd that stood high on a river bank watching us float by. It was in the uncon-



*Sailing into Bathurst Inlet community.*





*Happy hikers with heavy loads.*

trollable laughter that escaped beneath the bug-tent walls each night as we relayed stories of trips gone by. It was found in the tickle of the mist which sprayed our faces at Kingaunmiut Falls and was released with the mischievousness of a midnight hiking adventure. Childlike joy made our hearts feel light as we danced spontaneously along the river's edge and lifted our voices in song and while sailing into Bathurst Inlet on Portage Bay.

Joy is also the reason I have always struggled with returning from adventures. When I was 13 I went to Disneyworld and had the time of my life and then cried for a week when I came home. I think part of my struggle comes from the fact that we live in a disillusioned world, which suggests joy

is a feeling meant to be reserved for weekends, evenings, and vacations only. It seems that Karl Marx was correct in saying that "[work] estranges from man his own body ... and his spiritual aspect, his human aspect." However, on the Hood River, I began to question why this was the case. If it was joy that put wind in our sails on Portage Bay, could it not do the same for us in Camrose, Alberta? As Shea, a member of our group explained, coming home does not mean the adventure has to end. Even though our bug jackets have been carefully tucked away, this is no reason for us to stop laughing. Smiles do not have to fade with the stains of our soiled laundry. Instead, we can delight in the fact that each of us returned safely home and now carry

this joy in the form of stories, photos, and friendships, which we are free to share wherever we go.

However, if it was joy alone that I was seeking, I don't think I would have chosen this Outdoor Education course. On Sunday evenings I frequently stream tears of laughter while watching America's Funniest Home Videos, and all I have to do is turn on the TV to evoke such emotion. I knew there had to be something more which is why I began to wonder if I was simply looking for an opportunity to be challenged.

**Hypothesis #2: I went to the Hood River because I was looking to be CHALLENGED :**

*What is joy without sorrow? What is success without failure? What is a win*





Professor Morten Asfeldt helping pull students out of the water and onto the ice.

*without a loss? What is health without illness? You have to experience each if you are to appreciate the other...*

— Mark Twain

You may be wondering how we came to consensus on the Hood River as our expedition route. Why not choose a river that is more accessible, safer, or cheaper

(we are university students after all)? I'm not sure if we were driven by courage or youthful adventurousness, but something seemed to be calling us to head beyond the Arctic Circle. Even well-known rivers such as the Nahanni just seemed a little too close to home or perhaps a little too common. Because none of us students had ever paddled a northern river, we were looking for a river that had it all: lakes, rapids, portages, wildlife, ocean paddling, history, and an opportunity to meet local people. We wanted to explore beyond stereotypical northern clichés which incorrectly suggest that the North is a place teeming with wildlife, void of people, and permanently covered in snow. Thankfully, the Hood River did not disappoint. With lengthy sections of ocean paddling, heart-pumping white water, ice-choked lakes, endless hummocks and enough mosquitoes to make even the most conscious environmentalist consider slapping on a little deet, our experience was indeed full, rich, raw – a source of joy and challenge.



Portaging around Caribou Crossing Rapids.





*Arctic Lupin flowers near the Arctic Ocean.*





*Eric Rust looking out over Portage Bay from atop a mountain near Bathurst Inlet community.*

Our decision to paddle the Hood River was marked by a unique trial, a 12 km portage from Wilberforce Falls to Portage Bay on the Arctic Ocean. We began our move across land above Wilberforce Falls on the right side of the river. The portage from the Hood River to Portage Bay is unusual. Most Hood River paddlers paddle to the mouth of the river at Arctic Sound where they meet a floatplane that takes them back to Yellowknife. In preparation for our expedition, we tried to talk to someone who had actually completed this portage. We only managed to talk to one person who began the portage below Wilberforce Falls and didn't recommend that route. Aside from that, a pilot friend suggested a route from Ragged Rock Falls southeast to Portage Bay because of better walking, but they had only seen the portage from the air and never actually walked it. In the end, we searched maps, journals, and examined the route using

google earth, only to learn that there was no path that appeared clearly better than another. Therefore, once we arrived at Wilberforce Falls, half the group made a 6-hour scouting sortie for a portage route beginning on river right above Wilberforce. Based on what that group could see, the unknowns of other routes, and knowing there was no turning back once we were below Wilberforce Falls, we decided to portage east from above Wilberforce Falls to Portage Bay.

We will likely never know if we chose the best. Although, we also knew that no 12 km portage would be easy. At some point we just needed to pick up the first load and begin walking. So that's just what we did. We picked up our gear and walked for four days, which allowed us to split up the task into approximately equal three-kilometre sections. However, with 28 loads of gear, each person carried either two or three loads each day, resulting in each of us walking between

nine and 15 km daily.

We trudged over hummocks and through thick dwarf birch with our backs bent and legs aching for what seemed like an eternity at times and a fleeting moment at others. Alas, on the third night of our portage we camped on a height of land where we could finally see the Arctic Ocean. Three kilometres and 24 hours later, we put down our last loads and stared out across the waters of Portage Bay. After having seen nothing more than a small stream or two in the last 72 hours, we welcomed the smell of salt water with high fives, hugs, and smiles. However, beneath the joy was a hidden twinge of sadness as we all knew that the sight of the ocean meant our days together were numbered. In less than a week, our adventure would come to an end, and our current physical challenges would give way to emotional ones. Because many of the students on this expedition were either recent gradu-



ates or students heading into the final year of their degrees, the end of our three weeks on the river marked more than just the conclusion of our expedition but also the parting of ways with people we had become close friends with over the course of the last four years.

Band-aids help blisters, Advil helps backaches, and Tide supposedly removes stains, but there is no easy cure for separation between friends. Just as I expected, returning home and beginning life apart from one another often feels heavy, much like carrying a canoe. In an attempt to patch the wounds of distance, I returned to my journal to see if I could relive what once was. As I read through my entries I began to recall more than just memories – I was also reminded of the way I felt as I neared the end of my degree. I was not seeking a challenge, I was in need of a break, some time off, a little R ‘n R. My four years of school were awesome and inspiring. However, they were also filled with plenty of tribulation. Regardless of how I was feeling during the final semester, for some reason I did not book a cheap flight to

Mexico, or better yet a trip to Disney World. So, if not joy or challenge, then what could it be? What was I seeking? As a third proposition, I began to question if I was drawn to the life lessons that seem to manifest themselves by way of wilderness travel.

**Hypothesis #3: I went to the Hood River because I was looking for INSIGHT:**

*Life's biggest tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late*

- Benjamin Franklin

I have found that expeditions are often full of rich teachings that come through both the land and its people. Whether we realize it or not, each person is a source of wisdom. While on the river, we shared our insights through daily group journal readings and morning thoughts for the day – both Augustana expedition traditions. For example, early on in our expedition, Les shared a thought for the day that became a theme for our group. He suggested to us that the opportunity to create our own

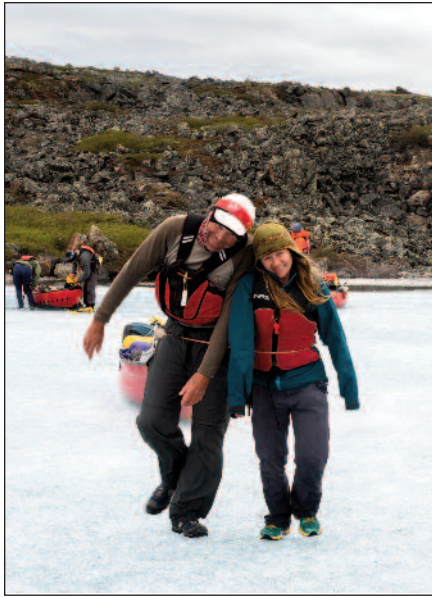
challenges was a privilege because the experience of seeking shelter, food, and water are not trials we face every day as many people in the world do. Furthermore, if we were unable to meet the challenges of the expedition, we have a huge safety net to fall into back at home. As we paddled into the wind, braved the whitewater and trudged along with heavy loads, we used these words to remind ourselves that we had chosen this hummocky path and winding river. Our expedition was an opportunity for joy, challenge, and insight; it was an experience we will carry with us for a lifetime and a source of many stories. However, our life did not depend on the success or failure of this expedition. We would not go hungry or without shelter for winter if we didn't see caribou or catch fish or make our way back to the meat caches on the shores of Portage Bay after a summer on the tundra.

There are of course many challenges in our lives that we do not choose. There are trials that await our group members back home – troubled communities, broken families, and lost loved ones. What



Campsite on the Tundra.





Leah Reid (right) and Les Parsons (left) pulling their canoe across the ice.

did our experience tell us about our everyday urban lives? To echo the words of Eric, one of our group members, through this expedition we learned that we can “soldier on.” Even when you’ve got 90 lbs on your back, the sun is blistering your skin, and the air is thick with bugs, it is still possible to push through. Our experience taught us that if you continue to walk, one step at a time, you’ll likely be thankful you did because as at the end of every gruelling climb there lies a great reward; the satisfaction of a job well done, a sense of community, and

the blissful sight of the Arctic Ocean which – in our case – marked the accomplishment of a goal. Our Hood River adventure made it clear that we can learn through experience. However, as a university student, I am also well aware that there are a variety of ways to acquire knowledge. If experience was the only road to wisdom, then all the hours I spent in the library reading books or conversing with peers and professors would have been a waste of time. Therefore, I began to question if there was still something I was missing. So, if not joy, challenge or insight, perhaps I was drawn to the Hood River seeking human connections.

**Hypothesis #4: I went to the Hood River because I was looking for HUMAN CONNECTION:**

*It's always wonderful to see how beautiful other people's hearts can be.*

- Gift Gugu Mona

Even with the best camouflage, it’s awfully difficult to hide in the woods, especially on the tundra. I have always appreciated how when immersed in the natural world and expedition life, people can’t hide; we are vulnerable together and individually. I have found that this sort of vulnerability provides an opportunity to make new friends, and get to know old companions in a different light. However, this is not what struck me on

this particular expedition, at least not in the way I expected. Instead, our time on the river acted as a corridor connecting me and my classmates to people of the past and those who currently inhabit the North. As one of our assignments, each student was asked to come prepared to tell a story connected to our northern experience. A few times each week we would gather in the bug tent and listen to stories of starvation, nationalism, bravery, triumph, and defeat. Students spoke about explorers such as John Franklin, Samuel Hearne, and of course Robert Hood, the Hood River’s namesake. Others, including myself, told stories of the delicate relationship between Europeans and Inuit people during the early days of exploration. Unfortunately, these were often tragic stories resulting from communication barriers, greed and misunderstandings between people characterised by different languages, traditions and histories. Although we studied accounts from the early 1800’s and 1900’s, these stories are in many ways similar to those which mark headlines today. Perhaps it is time we begin writing a different tale, one full of joy, challenge, insight and human connection?

In addition to our stories, we also had the privilege of meeting local people. After finishing our portage, we spent two days paddling 55 km south to the community of Bathurst Inlet. This community was originally a site for mineral exploration and later became a Hudson’s Bay trading post. Today, the original trading post serves as a lodge which is used to accommodate guests who come to explore the mountainous landscape and learn about the history, geography and geology of the region. The lodge is currently co-owned by the Warner family and the Kapolaks, an Inuit family native to Bathurst Inlet. During our time at Bathurst, we also had the privilege of meeting Page Burt, a biologist who has worked there each summer since 1973. After years of formal education and countless hours spent exploring the land with local people, Page has acquired a wealth of knowledge which perfectly complements her heart of gold. Along with the Kapolaks, she shared with us traditional knowledge in the form of interpretive hikes and an Inuit clothing fashion show.



Bathurst Inlet Lodge.





Group photo at Wilberforce Falls.

The word reconciliation is one that can be found everywhere from newspaper headlines to school assemblies. I am

by no means an expert on the subject, although our time spent with the Kapolaks gave me a glimpse of what I think recon-

ciliation might look like. It was a time filled with peace, as people from two cultures sat in a quaint living room sharing traditions and stories with one another. It was knowledge of flora, fauna, caribou hides and meat stores being passed on by Page during an afternoon hike. It was a welcoming smile and a firm handshake between strangers meeting one another and a hug between friends when we parted ways. Much like the rest of our Hood River adventure, it was full, rich, raw – a source of joy, challenge, insight and human connection.

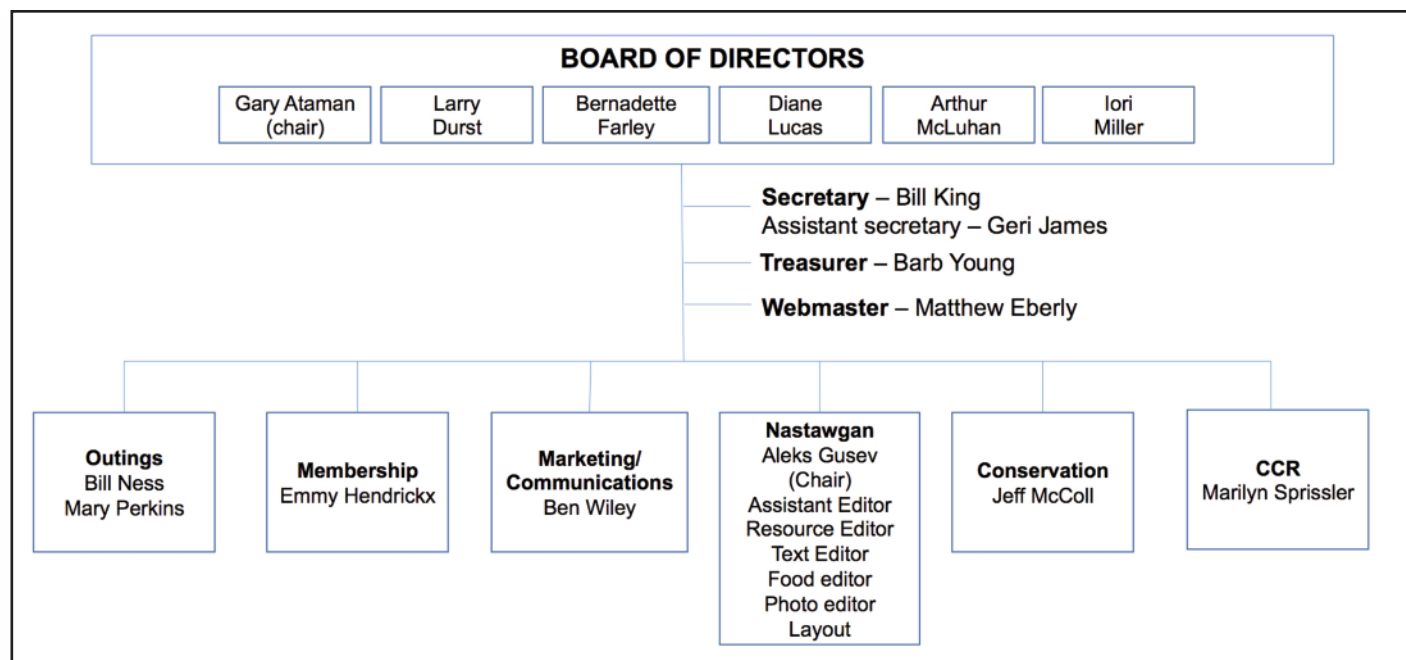
After generating these four hypotheses and looking at the data, now I must draw a conclusion. What did I learn from my self-reflective research? Is it joy, challenge, insight or human connection that keeps me seeking adventure? At their very core, these four elements, at least in part, characterise people's daily existence. I think what sets an experience like our Hood River expedition apart from regular life is that it ties all of these elements together, and in turn leaves an individual feeling whole. This wholeness is unique, what made my Hood River experience so life-giving, and what will always keep me coming back to the wild. For me, wilderness travel is a little snapshot of how life was meant to be lived. This sense of completion is hard to describe, but more easily felt. However, I think the words of Katie Mitzel begin to touch on the wholeness we experienced during those three weeks. She says that, "There are certain places that capture our hearts and minds. They leave us open to deep emotions we have somehow lost touch with – emotions of pure bliss, emphatic joy and fulfillment in the natural world." Each of us 12 travelers now carries this experience as part of our lives. These memories are now forever a part of our story, and the wilderness will always be there waiting for us to return – we hope.

**Carly Rivard** is a recent university graduate and an aspiring veterinarian from Wizard Lake, Alberta. Aside from paddling and writing, she loves downhill skiing, running, backpacking and relaxing with her family at the lake. This expedition was Carly's second trip to the Arctic and she is looking forward to returning to this special place.



Carly Rivard





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<p><b>WCA Postal Address</b>          P.O. Box 91068          2901 Bayview Ave.          Toronto, ON M2K 2Y6</p> <p><b>BOARD OF DIRECTORS</b>          Gary Ataman          (Chair)          gary.ataman@safrangroup.com          905-683-3100 ext 1286</p> <p>Arthur McLuhan          arthurmcluhan@hotmail.com</p> <p>Diane Lucas          lucasde@yahoo.com          905-826-0875</p>	<p>Larry Durst          ldurst@rogers.com          905-415-1152</p> <p>Bernadette Farley          mbernadette.farley@gmail.com          647-648-2247</p> <p>iori Miller          imiller8848@gmail.com</p>	<p><b>WCA Contacts <a href="http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca">http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca</a></b></p> <p><b>Secretary</b>          Bill King          45 Hi Mount Drive          Toronto, ON M2K 1X3          416-223-4646          lyonrex@rogers.com</p> <p><b>WCA Outings</b>          Bill Ness          194 Placentia Blvd.          Toronto, ON M1S 4H4          416-321-3005          bness@look.ca</p> <p><b>Editor</b>          Aleksandar Gusev          416-433-8413          aleks.gusev@gmail.com</p>
<p><b>Treasurer</b>          Barb Young          youngjdavid@rogers.com</p> <p><b>Webmaster</b>          Matthew Eberley          Georgetown, ON          416-700-8815          webmaster@wildernesscanoe.ca</p> <p><b>Communications and Marketing</b>          Benjamin Wylie          416-729-2092          bwylie01@gmail.com</p>	<p><b>Membership and Computer Records</b>          Emmy Hendrickx          emmy.hendrickx@bell.net</p> <p><b>Conservation</b>          Jeff McColl          mccolls@sympatico.ca</p>	

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