



Summer 2013    The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing    Outfit 153



photo: Larry Durst

**WATER WALKER** - Nattily attired author Blair Richardson watches Doug Durst, bow, and Neil Campbell negotiate a rapid on the William River in northern Saskatchewan. Blair's story starts on Page 6 and details his group's trip in late June 2013 along the many rapids of the William which flows north into Lake Athabasca and features world class sand dunes at its mouth.



# Summer Packet



The venerable Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough, ON, under the guidance of Executive Director James Raffan, has been sprucing up their web pages and has many ambitious plans for their future. A couple of items this fall are worthy of your attention.

The Inaugural George Luste Lecture will be taking place on Sunday October 27th from 2-4pm at The Canadian Canoe Museum. Author John Lentz will present his wilderness paddling stories in a presentation entitled "Five Decades of Wilderness Paddling: People and Places".

John Lentz has logged twenty-one major Canadian paddling expeditions, plus two in Siberia where canoes and catamarans were employed. He has been a member of the Explorers Club, New York City, since 1963.

His river trip articles have been published in a variety of magazines, including National Geographic, Che-Mun and The Beaver. The George Luste Lecture is a Member's Only Event, and one of the many perks of becoming a Canadian Canoe Museum Member. If you're not a Museum Member yet, don't dismay, Individual Memberships are \$30 and can be purchased over the phone or in person.

Contact Christina Skuce: christina.skuce@canoemuseum.ca or call: 705 748 9153 x 211 if you are interested in

supporting the Museum through its Membership Program and attending this great event!

Also at the Museum a week earlier, this year's Beaver Club Gala will be hosted by none other than writer, adventurer, musician and star of the hit Discovery Channel show *Survivorman*, Les Stroud. Les will



John Lentz led the first modern group down the Back River in 1962.

bring his celebrated speaking, storytelling and musical skills to The Canadian Canoe Museum's iconic annual fundraising dinner. Already known to be a fabulous evening of fine food, good company and great auction items, this year's Gala is sure to be even more entertaining with *Survivorman* as the host. Learn more about Les at his web site; [lesstroud.ca](http://lesstroud.ca).

The 6th annual Beaver Club Gala will take place on Saturday, October 19th at the Peterborough Golf and Country Club. Cocktails are at 6:00pm, dinner will be served at 7:00pm. Last year's event sold out quickly, so email [info@canoemuseum.ca](mailto:info@canoemuseum.ca) today to reserve your table, or purchase

tickets online by clicking here. Tickets are \$200 per person, or \$1600 for a table of 8.

Proceeds benefit the educational and public programs of The Canadian Canoe Museum. Charitable receipts will be provided for the maximum amount allowed by the Canada Revenue Agency. Tickets purchased on-line and by phone may be picked up at the registration desk on the night of the event.

A hightech rowboat is the latest challenger to tackle the historic Northwest Passage and of course you can follow it online.

Mainstream Last First ([mainstreamlastfirst.com](http://mainstreamlastfirst.com)) is the unusually titled expedition which features four rowers who set out from Inuvik on July 1 with the hope of making it to Pond Inet on the top of Baffin Island by the end of September. That would be 3000km of human powered travel, 24 hours a day when conditions allow.

The Irish-based crew, sponsored by a green energy company, have found it slow going due to high winds and as of late August they had not made it to Kugukutuk. Sea ice this summer is much heavier than last year, despite the popular conception it is disappearing faster. And the worst ice is ahead.

The crew of two Canadian and two Irish men are a seasoned group of travellers including canoeist Frank Wolf who has done a number of northern films on his trips.

They post some nice photos and regular updates on their encounters with grizzlies, owls, sea junk, old DEW Line sites and the ever-present wind which is their nemesis.

The trip is focusing on climate change and ice loss in the north and they are taking scientific readings as they row.



## Editor's Notebook

As you will see on Page 12, we did get to some rapids and rivers this summer. They were, however, in Europe, specifically France, Italy and Switzerland.

I joined HACC Chief Guide Geoffrey Peake and wife Leslie and son Brendan for a superb three week tour of some great sites in sunny Europe. Certainly the historic Il Palio horse race in Siena was a highlight as was the frenetic Tour de France when it passed through Provence.

In all, I was impressed by Europe's approach to living. People in everyday life seem to be able to get along with little hassle or drama. And almost every event is a family one, kids and older folks were everywhere in the large crowds.

Provence was a revelation. Of course, it offered superb towns and villages overflowing with scenic delights and wonderful markets. I was quite taken by the rugged Verdun Gorge area in southeast Provence where the river rafting photos were taken. Of course, wilderness in Europe is very scarce but what they have they show off well.

Another great product of Provence is the author of *Yukon Dreams*, reviewed on Page 4. Damien Tremblay hails from Avignon but is now a Yukoner who has just produced a wonderful book on a place very different than his homeland.

As for next summer, we are going to take another shot at our *Tree to the Sea* canoe trip which would go part way down the remote Tree and over to the never-paddled James River which parallels the Hood River. So that means we will be looking for some sponsorship help if any of you reading this are interested I would be happy to talk you into it!

I was recently able to see some photos of the James River thanks to John Sperry from Utah whose group paddled the Hood in July and hiked up part of the rarely-seen James River canyon. And there is actually a group from Wyoming who is doing the entire Tree River this summer, by-passing an unrunnable stretch via a long lake to the east. It will be interesting to hear their story from that trip. Hope to bring it to you.

— Michael Peake

## Canoesworthy

Two American fishermen who vanished on a remote Nunavut lake are presumed dead and the search is now a recovery effort, say the lodge owners. The two men were on a fishing trip on Dubawnt Lake, the largest lake in the Barrenlands, about 250 kilometres southwest of Baker Lake.

On Monday, they failed to meet the plane that was scheduled to pick them up. Their boat was found out of gas five miles from their camp. Ookpik Aviation of Baker Lake spent the last two days flying around the massive lake, searching for any signs of the men.

Paul Kotelewetz of Ookpik Aviation said they combed the entire area Wednesday, searching all the islands and beaches around the lake.

"The lodge that the guys were basing out of was on the lake there and they were seen from camp, trolling and fishing," said Kotelewetz.

"We're assuming that possibly one guy went overboard, and the second one, in an attempt to save the first, met the same fate."

Curt Enns, owner of Tukto Lodge, said the men were last seen fishing close to the lodge on Monday. He says they were not accompanied by a guide by their own request.

In a news release, he said that law enforcement officers told him search efforts have been called off and the focus will now be on recovering the bodies. The Detroit Free Press reported that 70-year-old Earl Zellen and his 40-year-old son Matt left July 21 and were reported missing on a lake in Nunavut.

The Canadian Mint has an eye-catching new product: a special issue, five-dollar coin, which features a design, in pink and silver, by Nunavik artist Ulaayu Pilurttuut, called "Mother ice fishing."

"Pilurttuut's design celebrating her latest amautik. Rendered style, it captures the humour commonly ancient practice," the special issue coin

The coin's design Montreal. Some 6,500 order from the Can-

Pilurttuut, who now School Board in Kuuj-Kangiqsujaq.

Made in 99.99 per cent silver with a diameter of 28 millimetres and a metal weight of 8.5 grams, the coin incorporates a niobium insert struck into the coin's silver core.

The niobium, generally used in superalloys, superconducting magnets and to strengthen steel, is coloured using an oxidization process.

The ability to make unique colours directly from niobium make it an interesting metal for coins according to the Canadian Mint. The other side of the coin of the features an effigy of Queen Elizabeth II by Susanna Blunt.

Nunavut hunters could soon be firing on a once-threatened species. In the 1960s the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) estimated the population of Ross' geese at 100 thousand. That population has now reached 3 million.

The CWS is now concerned about the impact foraging geese have on the tundra in the Queen Maud Gulf in the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut.

This summer the CWS approached the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board with



shows a joyous mother catch with her baby in her in a contemporary Inuit lighthearted spirit and associated with this said information about from the Canadian Mint. was unveiled in June in of them are available to adian Mint. works for the Kativik juaq, originally comes from





## Yukon Dreams

By Damien Tremblay  
Parasalene Publications 2013  
damientremblay.ca

**D**amien Tremblay moved from France to the Yukon in 2004 to follow his dream of being a landscape photographer. The young artist also writes and has produced a thoughtful and fascinating account of the lore of the Yukon.

Writing and observing as only an outsider can, Tremblay takes the reader through a selection of writings and media on the Yukon and what it means to Canada. This book is like a great lecture; literate and well-sourced, he weaves a very readable tale.

Of course there is a selection of his photos which are more artistic than journalistic. He reminds me of the style of Ansel Adams with his deep black and crisp whites set on a pristine landscape. Tremblay also includes some superb archival pictures which is the great treasure of the Yukon. Since it had great American historical exposure, the Yukon was well photographed and written about by many of the thousands who passed through a century ago.

Tremblay has done his research well. This is not a book about someone rhapsodizing on the pretty wilderness. This is a highly readable examination of the myth and reality of the Yukon as seen through writers, filmmakers and modern media. Of course, the Bard of the Yukon, Robert Service looms large here as does

Pierre Berton and his mother Laura. The Gold Rush also gets a deserved attention which includes Chaplin's movie of the same name.

Tremblay recounts many of the Yukon's famous characters and events which include The Lost Patrol and Albert Johnson, the Mad Trapper. He blends in sources, thoughts and ideas throughout the book in an entertaining fashion.

There is a chapter on cabins which are a classic symbol of the north and a stage for much of the mental anguish and joy that can accompany living in such an extreme climate.

**C**anoeing is naturally a part of the story even though it was not until the 1970s when paddling Yukon Rivers became popular.

Tremblay writes, "Ken Madsen in Paddling in the Yukon, writes a compelling entry about



**Canoeist, Pelly R. 1922. Yukon Archives, Claude & Mary Tidd Fonds # 7521**

him. Telling just enough to arouse the paddler's interest, he names evocative, distant rivers: "the watershed will be spectacular – somewhere between the gray moonscape surrounding the Blackstone and the colourful mountains around the Wind, Bonnet Plume and Snake." Furthermore, he enjoins: "if you want to find out about it, go there." All the triggers of the naturally curious canoeist's psychology are pulled. There is more than lure in Madsen's words, there is a promise. Incredible beauty, adventure and challenge are guaranteed. A wild Peel River watershed offers more than the unknown; it offers hope."



**Author Damien Tremblay's photo of a windbound canoeist on Dezadeash Lake, in the St. Elias Mountains.**

the Hart River. He chose to not describe the river, which goes against the main purpose of the guidebook. Its description is left as a 'blank spot' meant to spark the reader's imagination. He specifies that the river is unknown, even to

The book is a must for Yukon fans and anyone any northern paddler who thinks these thoughts and has seldom seen them better expressed. I have no doubt we will hear more from M. Tremblay.



# Who Killed the Royalex Canoe?



photos: Michael Peake

**The wonders of Royalex may soon be disappearing according to word on the street. The HACC has primarily used Old Town Trippers and they have given us as much great service as we have given them abuse. Time and time again Royalex just stood up to some tortuous tripping like here in northern Quebec. We trust a replacement will be found that is perhaps lighter but just as strong.**

By KAYDI PYETTE  
RAPID MEDIA

PolyOne, the publicly held company who produces the most revolutionary material in canoeing, is closing plants and ceasing production of Royalex.

According to its press release, the plant shutdowns will produce \$25 million in annual savings for the Avon Lake-based company, which ranks as North America's largest compounder and one of the region's largest resin distributors. The closings are expected to be completed by the end of 2014.

Although the PolyOne press release doesn't say specifically that they're stopping the production of Royalex, Bill Kueper of Wenonah Canoe, Inc. told Rapid Media that, "The morning following the press release we received a phone call from PolyOne detailing the termination of the Royalex enterprise." He says that given the relatively small size of the Royalex business worldwide, he's not surprised PolyOne didn't detail this in the press release.

"At this point we're all hoping someone else will buy the line, but there's no surety of it yet," says Tim Miller of Nova Craft Canoes. Royalex canoes represent a substantial portion of his business.

If the Royalex line isn't bought, what happens next is anyone's guess. According to Miller, there are no reasonable material alternatives to Royalex at this time—the next best option could be a three-layer polyethylene canoe, which would be stronger but also heavier.

"There's nothing else like Royalex," he adds.

PolyOne's decision doesn't come as a complete surprise. When PolyOne bought out Royalex-producer Spartech Corp. last year there was discussion among canoe manufacturers that PolyOne may cease manufacturing the material. "For the size of PolyOne, Royalex is a tiny portion of what they do," Miller says. "Still, it'd be a very sad day if they close the plant and Royalex doesn't go anywhere else."

Aluminum was the choice for most canoe trippers until 1978, when Old Town Canoes and Kayaks touted the durability of its Royalex Tripper by tossing one from the roof of its Maine factory—it escaped unscathed. Due to its near-indestructibility, Royalex became the go-to material for whitewater boaters, summer camps and remote expeditions. (Conor Mihell reports on how Royalex was a game-changer in Canoeroots article "Royalex Revolution" here: <http://www.rapidmedia.com/departments-canoeing/item/848-royalex.html>)

While canoes come in plenty of materials that suit the needs of flatwater paddlers just fine, whitewater paddlers are particularly worried by the news. "I learned to paddle rivers in Royalex canoes. Without it, we're going to have to change the way we all paddle whitewater," says Scott MacGregor, founder and publisher at Rapid Media. "On the other hand, this may be a the kick in the ass the canoeing industry needs to find a material lighter, stronger and even more durable." While MacGregor remains optimistic, he's also ordering spares of his favorite Royalex whitewater canoe models.



# Paying the Bill on the William



Left to right; Neil Campbell, Doug Durst, Blair Richardson and Peter Durst demonstrate the teamwork of lining down a rocky ledge in the William River.

By BLAIR RICHARDSON  
Photos by LARRY DURST

It was the moment that we had all been awaiting! We paddled round a bend and, looking way down river, we could see a massive wall of sand, coming right down to the water's edge. Finally, we had reached the beginning of the Athabasca Sand Dunes, a series of dune fields which stretch 100 kilometers along the south shore of Lake Athabasca, in Northern Saskatchewan. This is the largest active sand surface in Canada and one of the most northerly in the world. The outstanding scenery is combined with a unique ecosystem, containing many rare and endemic plants.

An area of nearly 2,000 square kilometers was officially designated Sand Dunes Provincial Wilderness Park in 1992. As the park publication informed us, the dunes began to form around 8,000

years ago. "Meltwater from retreating glaciers flowed through spillways into glacial Lake Athabasca, depositing sand sediments. Two of these spillways are now the William and MacFarlane rivers. As the glacial lakes shrank, these sand sediments were exposed and were formed into dunes by strong winds. The sand is recycled by wind toward the land and by water toward the Lake."<sup>1</sup>

We can certainly attest that the William River is one of the Park's exceptional scenic features. For about 25 kilometers, the river is a narrow ribbon dividing two dramatically different landscapes. The east bank is mostly jack pine forest, typical of northern Saskatchewan, while the west bank is lined with massive dunes. In places, walls of sand rise 20 meters or more from the water's edge, interspersed with clumps of hardy trees and other vegetation, which have survived the wind's relentless push of sand into the River."<sup>2</sup>

Our group consisted of John and Judy Quaife, from St. Paul, Minnesota; Larry Durst from Markham, Ontario; his son, Peter from



Toronto, his brother, Doug from Regina, Saskatchewan; Neil Campbell from Buckhorn Lake, Ontario; Elsie Carr-Locke from Toronto; and Blair Richardson from Oakville, Ontario. Many months earlier, we had decided to paddle the William, wanting to paddle again in Northern Saskatchewan and wanting to experience these unusual sand dune formations. (Some of us had paddled the Fond Du Lac River, also in Northern Saskatchewan, in 2010.)

Our main source of river information was Laurel Archer's book entitled *Northern Saskatchewan Canoe Routes*.<sup>3</sup> This gave us very detailed information on river conditions, campsite locations, rapids classifications, flora and fauna, area geography, history and geology, and access points. We knew from our experience in 2010 that river details in the book were very accurately described. We had other trip reports, obtained from friends in Waterloo, and Larry also spoke by phone with another Saskatchewan canoeist who had done the William a while before. This information helped with the

typical questions that had arisen in our planning. We also contacted Ric Driediger, an outfitter and guide whose business is located at Missinipe (on Lac La Ronge), who helped us with the options for flying in.

In February 2011, Neil, Elsie and Blair met in Oakville and worked through the planning issues, and the tentative plans were vetted afterwards by the others in the group.

The two route options (from Laurel Archer) were to start at Carswell Lake, where driving to the put-in was possible (with permission), or to fly into Hale Lake. We thought the Carswell Lake route (at 100 kilometers in length) was too short, given the long drive from Ontario. We opted for the Hale Lake route, which was about 200 km in length. This meant flying in from Buffalo Narrows, the closest float plane base to Hale Lake, at an estimated cost per person of \$1,700.

The proposed itinerary was to leave Toronto on June 11 and drive to Doug Durst's home in Regina, arriving June 13. June 14, drive to Buffalo Narrows, check in with Barry O'Brien at Voyager Air, unload gear and do the weigh-in. Early morning June 15, fly into Hale Lake. Spend 15 days on the River, including allowances for a rest day, a day to hike on the dunes and a wind-bound day. June 29, fly out from Cantara Lake, drive to Regina and stay overnight at Dursts. June 30, leave for Toronto, with overnights in Kenora and Wawa, arriving home July 3.

At our February meeting, we prepared a group equipment list, a menu, a budget and designated assignments for each person:

1. *Weatherman* (Neil) – monitor water levels in Saskatchewan and

keep group posted, because we had been warned by Ric Driediger that water levels might be low

2. *Trip Researcher* (Larry) – interview other paddlers to augment route information

3. *Artificer* (Peter) – assemble group gear, pack it before trip and pack up each day on the trip. We estimated requirements at three waterproof packs or barrels for group gear, including one for tents and bug shelter

4. *First Aider* (Judy) – evaluate first aid kit, removing out-of-date items and replacing them

5. *Travel Agent* (John) – plan travel to and from Buffalo Narrows, confirm daily itinerary, vehicles, motel reservations and times for the rendez-vous en route

6. *Emergency Planner* (Neil) – obtain personal information describing each person physically, as well as next of kin and phone numbers; prepare travel plan to be left with Voyager Air; obtain satellite phone

and spare batteries; determine phone tree for family contacts and determine trigger date for search and rescue

7. *Bartender for Happy Hour* (John)

8. *Quartermaster* (Elsie, with help) – once group approves the menu, assign all food to be dried and send recipes; buy food, pack and label all food in six barrels

9. *Le Bourgeois* (Blair) – annotate NTS maps; make float plane bookings; plan daily itinerary on river and lead decision-making on



The unique and spectacular Athabasca Sand Dunes along Lake Athabasca were a major attraction for the group.

river

On Wednesday, June 15, we were up at 4:45 am, and arrived at the float plane base by 5:30 am. We were airborne by 6:00 am, along with our 800 pounds of gear, in a turbo Otter and a Cessna. After a two-hour flight, we landed in the north-eastern-most bay of Hale Lake. We paddled to the nearest shore, a sandy strip of beach, and began preparing a leisurely brunch. To our surprise and delight, a Woodland Caribou doe and calf came down to the water's edge, paused to look at us briefly, then disappeared into the trees. The next day, we paddled north to the outlet.

At first, water levels on the river seemed okay, but we had to work our way through 15 km of rock gardens, lifting canoes very often, for the rest of the day. The rocks and big boulders very slippery and it was tiring work; Judy slipped, badly tearing a leg muscle. On the following day, we were in and out of the canoes, searching in vain for a runnable route through the rock gardens. We did run a Class III ledge, which had just enough water. That night, we camped in an old burn area, on a sandy table. On Saturday, while on a break, we watched a black bear on the far shore, about 500 meters away.





He stood on his hind legs, looking in our direction, then he loped off into the trees, pausing to look back at us. The rapids were infrequent but long. In the sun, we had slathered on the sun block, revelling in the warm weather. At camp that afternoon, we sat in the shade, sipping Neil's lemon zinger tea and watching the river roll by. A good day's paddling, about 25 kilometers in total.

Sunday was another blazing hot day, breezy, with no black flies. We did some ledge lift-overs, then came to the section where the map notation said "continuous fast joy ride 6 kilometers". Instead, it should have said "joy walk", as we wandered all over the river, trying to find a channel with enough water to float our boats. Still, we managed another 24 km of travel that day.

Monday was again hot and sunny, with a following wind, as we ran rapid after rapid, mostly class I and II's. Tuesday was warm and sunny, too, but around noon, dark clouds rolled in and rain seemed imminent. The smell of smoke in the air was strong. Later the sky cleared and the sun returned: another day with lots of rapids, some Class III's and IV's that we scouted, lined or ran. Our planned camp site that day had been burned and was unusable, so we carried on until 4:00 pm, which was a longer day on the water than usual. After a swim, at Happy Hour, we discussed and agreed upon

a plan for each of the remaining seven days. This was to allow us plenty of time to explore the dunes, while giving us extra time for the lake section if winds became a problem.

Wednesday was a short day, covering only 10 kilometers. We started off with RII, RIII, RIII, and RII, running after careful scouting. On the last ledge, John and Judy had a spot of trouble: a rock jarred John's paddle loose from his hand. Taking on water and realizing they were about to capsize, John put out his hand and did a low brace on the river bottom! We stopped for a short hike on the dunes and then continued: RII, RIII, RIV and then RII. There was enough water and we didn't have too much trouble. At camp that day, Judy wore shorts for the first time and revealed a dark purple bruise, which covered the entire back of her leg above the knee. We realized that she had really downplayed the extent of her injury from the fall.

Thursday was the last day for running rapids – long, long sets with enough water to keep the boats afloat. It was a warm, sunny, breezy day. After lunch, we hit the braided channel section and camped at "Knee Camp", a big sand bar on a curve in the river. We paddled only 11 km travelled that day. Elsie had twisted her ankle while tracking the canoe

and it was bruised and swollen.

Friday was our hike day. After a leisurely breakfast of bacon and eggs and three pots of coffee, the expedition got under way. We paddled across to river left, then scaled the steep sand hill. We walked around for an hour or so, exploring a very different environment. A strong wind was blowing, covering everything with a fine layer of grit. The undulating sand stretched to the horizon; Doug said he could see Lake Athabasca, about 10 kilometers distant. We all took many photos. The surface was not entirely loose sand: as the park brochure said, "In many of the dune fields, there are large flat areas where the wind has blown away the loose sand, creating a somewhat firm carpet of stones

and sand. This process, called deflation, leaves a desert pavement where stones form the surface cover. Often, these stones have a shiny appearance from being continually polished by wind and blowing sand."<sup>4</sup>

We were intrigued with the variety of plants encountered. The park brochure states over 300 species of plants grow in the park. Of these, 50 are rare in Saskatchewan and 10 are endemic, meaning that they are found nowhere else in the world. "Why these five broad-leaved herbs, four willows and one grass occur only here is an evolutionary puzzle yet to be solved."<sup>5</sup> Saturday presented three challenges:

1. Encountering possible low water levels in the remainder of the braided channel section;
2. Finding the east branch of the river which leads to Lake Athabasca and avoiding the big shallow delta; and
3. Crossing Thompson Bay, wind permitting.

As it turned out, we met all three. There was sufficient water in the braided channel, although we hopped out of the canoes quite a few times. We had no difficulty finding the east channel, which flowed deep and fast between undercut banks on both sides. We reached the lake about noon and elected to wait for the strong wind to subside; we could see big breakers off shore over the sand bars. (It was a reminder why float planes won't land offshore, preferring instead to land inland at Cantara Lake to pick up canoeists.) We snoozed on the sand, in the lee of the wind; it was a glorious, sunny day. Starting at 4:00 pm, we crossed Thompson Bay on an easterly bearing. It took three hours. There were big swells as the lake got progressively calmer. Dinner was at 9:00 pm!

The sound of waves crashing on the beach woke us on Sunday.



**At the end of the William River, John Quaife and Judy Geck enjoy a smoky Lake Athabasca sunset.**





The wind had come up during the night, so we declared a wind-bound day. Neil headed off to scout for the portage to Cantara Lake, while we consumed our fourth pot of coffee. We could see white caps on the lake all the way to the horizon. We packed up and had dinner at 6:00 pm. The wind was still blowing, but we judged it safe enough to paddle offshore, beyond the breakers. The north shore was completely obscured by smoke from forest fires. Around 8:00 pm, we landed on the beach, having spotted the beginning of a portage into the woods. However, it disappeared in a burn area, so there weren't going to be any blazed trees!

**O**n Monday morning, we headed up the trail. When it disappeared, we bushwhacked through the sparse woods and dried-out bog to Lake Cantara, where we found two big aluminum fishing boats on a small sandy beach. To our surprise, leading away from the beach was a well-used portage directly to Lake Athabasca! So we retraced our path, loaded up the canoes and brought them along the shore for a kilometer or so. The portage was not visible from the water, although the two trees

on either side of the beginning of the ascent inland were blazed. There was only a steel rod anchored in the sand, with a small bit of plastic tape tied on it. The ascent, although short, was very steep, with loose sand footing. It took four of us to manhandle each canoe up to where the trail flattened out. By 2:00 pm, all the canoes and gear were deposited at the Lake Cantara put-in. The designated "A" campsite was on the northern shore, on a small promontory. That afternoon, John and Judy caught six small walleye which we fried as an appetizer before dinner. We had Happy Hour inside our bug shelter (North Face Mesh Room). The winning entry for the "name the bug shelter" contest was "Big Al", as in albatross. This was a reference to the fact that, mercifully, biting insects had been very scarce on the trip, and thus Big Al had not really been needed.

Tuesday was a real rest day, at last! Another warm, sunny, breezy day. Larry stumbled out of his tent, bleary-eyed, and headed towards the trees to relieve himself. "Bear!" he shouted, arousing everyone very quickly. The bear changed direction and ambled away, perhaps deterred by the sight of Larry before his morning ablutions. We phoned Barry O'Brien to confirm pick-up for the following day. The

order of the day was making fish chowder, featuring the big northern pike that Doug had caught the previous evening. It was about 40 inches long and John estimated its weight at 9-10 pounds. Peter said they had beached the canoe as a last attempt to land the big fish, because the net was too small.

Wednesday brought light rain and cooler temperatures. The two planes arrived about 8:00 am. The Cessna backed to shore at our campsite, but the turbo Otter taxied to the north east bay, because of the wind and waves. It was a 2 ½ hour flight back, averaging only 80 kph against headwinds. We passed over very large burn areas, as well as a long rock garden section on the William. We left Buffalo

Narrows after a lunch at the Courtesy Inn, where the local RCMP officer told us who had won the Stanley Cup. We arrived back at Doug's house in Regina about 10:00 pm.

The trip presented the challenges of low water, which were more than counter-balanced by the natural wonders of the park and the solitude of a northern wilderness. Some general observations about our experience: first, Northern Saskatchewan seems to have had several dry years in succession, allowing widespread forest fires to rage unchecked.

We complained about camping in old burns and about the low water levels on the William. Second, despite our efforts, it was not possible to ascertain water levels before we got on the river. We commented that if the actual levels had been only six inches lower, the river would not have been canoeable through the rock garden stretches. Thirdly, we encountered no one on the River. (We did see two fishermen at a distance on Lake Athabasca.) It seems the river is very seldom travelled in any season. Fourthly, there was lots of wildlife to observe. We saw moose in profusion and a wide variety of birds, gulls and hawks. Lastly, winds on Lake Athabasca are indeed a serious factor to be reckoned with; the shallow water enables even light winds to create big waves.

#### References

1, 2, 4, 5 Robin and Arlene Karpan, "Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Wilderness Park" Government of Saskatchewan brochure, 1997.

Laurel Archer, "Northern Saskatchewan Canoe Trips, A Guide to Fifteen Wilderness Rivers", Boston Mills Press, 2003.



**And in a more active mode, John Quaife and Judy Geck running a set on the William River.**



## CANOESWORTHY *continued*

a proposal to deal with the over-population of geese in Nunavut. The recommendations include declaring Ross' geese overabundant in Canada and legalizing a spring harvest.

Nunavut Tunngavik Vice President James Etoolook sits on the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board. He says a hunt could lead to business opportunities as well as a local harvest.

Speaking in Inuktitut he said, "they are good source of nutritious food, and the feathers could be used. Some people could start thinking about economic opportunities. There are plenty of geese today."

Ross' geese are small and white, with black wingtips. They are often called a miniature version of the more abundant Snow Goose. The species breeds in the central Arctic and winters primarily in central California.

The CWS says the population of Ross' geese rebounded due to restrictions on hunting.

**I**nuit knowledge and culture have played major roles in the design and function of the \$142 million High Arctic Research Station planned for Cambridge Bay, Nunavut.

Architects working on the project, which will be one of the largest buildings in Nunavut, unveiled their plans to the community last week.

In 2010, the federal government chose the hamlet for the site of Canada's newest research station, called CHARS.

Montreal architect Alain Fournier told community members that the design team considered Inuit culture and philosophy in almost every aspect.

An outdoor space recalling a Qaggiq, a massive communal igloo, will welcome guests to the station. Inside it is another public space for locals and researchers to sit and have tea.

The grounds include five buildings: the main station, maintenance and field house, two tri-plexes, and a dorm for visiting scientists. The facility is also environmentally friendly with solar panels and composting toilets.

Fournier said every detail was influenced by people who know the land the best.

"For instance, all the main entrances are located in such a way that they are scoured by the wind so snow won't accumulate. It's common sense, but it's common sense based on tradition."

The nod to tradition isn't going unnoticed.

"Having traditional knowledge incorporated in the facility is the most important thing. For youth, it will be an opportunity of identity, [to] know who they are," said community member Bernice Llyall.

Formal blueprints will be ready in about a month. Then, the design team will return to the hamlet for further consultation.

Construction is scheduled to begin next summer to transform the rugged landscape into a world-class research hub.

**M**ore than 4,000 kilometres from home, the mayor of a small Nunavut community can now find pieces of his town's history in a new Norwegian museum building; the Fram Museum's new Gjøa building.

Dedicated to the exploration of the Northwest Passage, the

building is dominated by the 47-ton sloop named Gjøa that carried Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen through the first-ever navigation of the passage from 1903 to 1906. But appearing alongside the ship are artifacts from Nunavut's Netsilik Inuit — items Amundsen collected during the two winters he spent at the small hamlet that eventually became known as Gjøa Haven after his ship.

"Amundsen gathered everything," said Geir Kløver, director of the Fram Museum. "Blubber lamps, drying racks, he even brought back two kayaks and several sledges. It documents the culture."

But although Amundsen was the first to navigate the Northwest Passage and gathered the world's largest collection of Netsilik artifacts, his story has largely been a "footnote" in Canadian history books, said Alberta-based author and historian Stephen Bown, who wrote a biography of Amundsen last winter. Bown said this is because Amundsen documented his journeys in Norwegian and that the explorer's story will soon become better known now that the Fram Museum is translating the diaries of Amundsen and his crew into English.

When Amundsen first arrived at Gjøa Haven in the fall of 1903, the hamlet was deserted. The explorer put down anchor and set up observatories so his crew could take readings to determine the location of the magnetic North Pole, which moves over time. For a month, they made camp, manned the observatories and recorded weather conditions, including daily snowfall and temperature.

But then, a new learning opportunity presented itself.

In November of 1903, five Netsilik Inuit appeared on the horizon and Amundsen walked out to greet them with members of his crew. Though neither group could fully understand the other, both were excited to meet and an alliance was born that would last the next two years.

During that time, Amundsen traded with the Inuit and hired them as general labourers and teachers of Arctic survival. Word of the Europeans and their great ship spread throughout the region and soon large groups of Inuit began to gather.

"There really was no Gjøa Haven before he was there," Bown said. "Most people at that time were very nomadic and so the very existence of Gjøa Haven is because of Amundsen's ship."

The skills Amundsen learned from the Netsilik are largely credited for his later becoming the first person to reach the South Pole, which he accomplished in 1911.

And the Netsilik are believed to have benefited from the interactions as well through their acquisition of materials and manufactured goods including cloth, wood, steel and firearms, which they otherwise wouldn't have had access to. Sallerina said this aid is still remembered and celebrated in his community where people are very aware of Amundsen's role in the founding of Gjøa Haven.

There, the explorer's observatories remain preserved, guests can stay in an Amundsen hotel, a number of plaques throughout the city describe the explorer's accomplishments and a new community hall is adorned with photos of Amundsen.





## CANOESWORTHY *continued*

**T**he Crees of northern Quebec re-elected Matthew Coon Come as Grand Chief, after almost 6,000 Cree voters went to the polls Thursday in the second round of voting.

This will be Coon Come's second consecutive term. He has served as Grand Chief for a total of 18 years and as National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations from 2000 to 2003.

His opponent in the run-off was the current Deputy Grand Chief Ashley Iserhoff. A run-off election became necessary in both the races for grand chief and deputy grand chief when no candidate received 50 per cent plus one in the vote.

The voting process was complicated by two telecommunications failures. During the first round of voting, a broken optic fibre cable cut most telephone and Internet service to five of the Cree communities. This caused difficulties in the tabulation of the votes. This year's election was also to have featured voting by telephone in addition to paper ballots.

During the second round of voting yesterday, internet service was down in three communities.

**A** Yellowknife woman travelling solo by kayak in the Arctic has had to cut her adventure short. Diane Hache, 57, set off from Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T., in June.

She paddled through snow and heavy winds for most of July but her kayak sustained damage, so she stopped in Paulatuk in the first week of August.

"I was on a survival mode I think the moment I left Tuktoyaktuk," she said.

"It is so frustrating. Since I landed here the weather is just awesome, it's warm. I don't have to put on three to four layers to sleep at night."

Hache said anyone she ran into while paddling was helpful but also surprised to meet a woman paddling alone.

"They look at me, and then they look around and say 'Where are your partners?'" she said.

Hache said at one of her camp sites she saw plenty of polar bear tracks. It was the only place to stop for miles so she put up an electric barrier for protection and hoped she wouldn't have to use her gun.

When she did finally see a bear, it was on shore and she was in her kayak. Hache also encountered four rowers from Vancouver who are also travelling the Northwest Passage this summer. (See Page 2).

At one point some stormy weather left her with wet gear and a wet sleeping bag.

"All of a sudden I turn off a point — there's a camp. I said 'There's somebody looking after me up there, for sure!'"

Hache said she paddled 980 kilometres and is about halfway from reaching her goal of Gjoa Haven, Nunavut. She said she'll pick up where she left off next summer.

Other than having to call off her trip early, she has no regrets.

"It has been a tremendous experience," she said.

"Three years ago when I did the Mackenzie, I thought that was the highlight of my life, but it's nothing compared to pad-

dling the Arctic Ocean."

In 2009 she paddled the Mackenzie River from Fort Providence, N.W.T., to Tuktoyaktuk, an accomplishment she is very proud of. The year before she paddled from Yellowknife to Enterprise, N.W.T.

Hache said she'll leave her kayak in Paulatuk over the winter, where it will be repaired before she returns next summer.

**P**angnirtung's first bowhead whale-hunting party in 15 years met with success Aug. 6 with the landing of a bowhead whale measuring more than 41 feet long.

The hunt had been postponed by ice and weather conditions in Cumberland Sound.

But people in Pangnirtung say that, under sunny skies and in calm waters, 35 hunters in six boats successfully landed the bowhead west of Kekerten Island less than a half an hour, after spotting a group of bowhead in Cumberland Sound.

After being shot twice, the bowhead whale began to sink. The hunters had to very slowly raise the whale by hand until it surfaced and they could attach flotation devices.

The hunt was led by Simeonie Keenainak, captain of the hunt and noted accordion player, former RCMP constable and teacher, with Charlie Qummuatuk as co-captain. As co-captain on the community's last bowhead whale hunt in 1998, Keenainak recalled overseeing the harvesting of a similarly large bowhead whale.

Bowheads can measure more than 18 metres, or about 60 feet, in length, and live for more than 200 years.

After securing the bowhead whale to the flotation devices, whalers then floated the bowhead whale in for butchering at Kekerten Territorial Park on Kekerten Island, about 50 kilometres south of Pangnirtung and the site of a 19th century whaling station.

At about 8 p.m. Aug. 6 gunshots were fired into the sky from the tops of the hills at Kekerten, a traditional signal to indicate the whale was within sight and would soon be landed.

About 150 to 200 people from the community headed to Kekerten to join in the celebration of the hunt last night, with many remaining on the island.

Until recently, Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientists claimed there were only several hundred bowhead whales in eastern Arctic waters, preventing their harvest in Nunavut.

Estimates of the bowhead population then jumped from 345 in 2000 to about 3,000 in 2003, then to 7,309 in 2007, and, in 2008, to 14,400, with an outside estimate of up to about 43,000 bowhead whales in waters off Nunavut.

Each of Nunavut's three regions has been able to harvest a whale in recent years with hunts last year in Kugaaruk, Taloyoak and Arctic Bay.



photo: Michael Peake

So there was no canoe trip this summer for the HACC. Instead, Che-Mun Editor Michael Peake went to visit HACC Chief Guide Geoffrey Peake who now lives in Zurich with wife Leslie. They are avid cyclists and skiers and are enjoying the Swiss life where they work at the Zurich International School after living 5 years in Shanghai. We toured Italy and France and even got some whitewater shots in here on a crowded Verdun River in the beautiful Verdun Gorge in Provence. The area is rightfully popular and the local rafting company does a very good business. And you are never far from some great food, markets and sites in this beautiful part of the world.

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