CHE-MUN

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WABAKIMI WAITING - In late September 1983, deep in the heart of the newly-created Wabakimi Park in northern Ontario, charter pilot Don Plumridge arrives to pick up Michael and Geoffrey Peake. This Outfit features a recent trip in Wabakimi by Tim Farr and Ted Baker. Back then, we had been waiting for Don for several hours and when he arrived here late in the day he told us he could not take us then but would be back first thing in the morning. He was. It was one of our first introductions to charter flying in the north where the cardinal rule is - Be Flexible! So we broke out the Scrabble board and Geoffrey beat his older brother soundly once again.

Fall Packet

It is not every day we get a photo sent to us like the one above. There's only one view like this in the world and we are happy to have been one of the few to have seen it. **Lester Kovac** and **Lynette Chubb,** who have been featured in these pages several times, sent us this shot of the famed Pingualuit Crater in northern Quebec from their travels last summer.

Their trip began at the new airstrip near the crater which was news to us as the only previous airstrip in the area is at the now busy Raglan Lake mine 30 miles north. The crater is now a tourist attraction and marketed as such by the Inuit of Nunavik. Lester's group which also included Wes Rusk and Curt Gellerman started at the crater and descended the rocky Vachon River which runs into the Payne and exits in Ungava Bay at the village of Kangirsuk.

The irony, which was certainly not lost on Lynette, was that this feature was for many years called the Chubb Crater, named for Fred Chubb the geologist who first studied the two mile wide, 800-foot deep hole in solid bedrock that is Nunavik's newest star.

The Hide-Away Canoe Club did the trip in 1988 from the then-dormant Raglan mine to the village of Puvirnituq on Hudson Bay following the 1912 route of famed filmmaker Robert Flaherty. We did a lot of research on the crater, one of the more interesting letters, from the mid-50s, concerned the naming of the feature in an upcoming map being produced by the National Geographic Society which featured the first trip to the site in their January 1952 issue led by the Royal Ontario Museum scientist, Ben Meen.

The bureaucracy of Quebec was anxious that the English name Chubb not be used on the new map which would be in wide use. They opted instead for the *Cratere du Nouveau-Quebec* (New Quebec Crater) which was their newly coined term for the vast portion of northern Quebec now known as Nunavik and for many years as Ungava.

The bureaucrat strongly stressed to the National Geographic Society that Quebec did not wish to name geographical features after people and certainly not someone named Fred Chubb. That letter was signed by a Mr. LaFlamme. I am sure it is just a complete coincidence that the lake closest to the crater is named Lac Laflamme! It is also the headwaters for the Vachon River.

The area is getting more publicity as the Pingualuit Crater is now a provincial park featured in tourism promotions. Infrastructure has been built, which includes the new airstrip, and with it a new raft of lawyered rules and regulations for visitors to the extremely remote and barren site.

I am happy we got to see it as it was. Our only visitor was a lone helicopter which plopped down for five minutes in the cold rain. They were surveying an upcoming scientific expedition. That group was literally blown off the crater in a massive storm on Aug. 8. 1988. Seems nature rules in Nunavik.

Editor's Notebook

I was pleased to see the reactions of all of you to the new generation of *Che-Mun* that burst out in beautiful colour with Outfit 141. Quite a number of you have chosen to the printed version which delays my retirement plans again!

Please bear with us as we straighten out who gets which issue and who expires when!

We are pleased to feature a story by Ottawa subscriber, Tim Farr, the author of several thoughtful letters to *Che-Mun* over the years. Tim's trip through the massive Wabakimi Provincial Park north of Thunder Bay takes me back to when we first paddled it, the year it was named a park - in 1983.

With a strategic rail line running along the southern boundary and also accessible by road, Wabakimi's vast northern boreal forest and rivers are available to all. I recall our first trip when we started at Allenwater Bridge on the Ogoki River right on the railway. However, the train schedule that year was not very canoe friendly and we had to hop out of the train dragging all our gear a few minutes after midnight in the pitch black which also described our tenting situation - just a few feet from the tracks until first light.

What I recall from that Wabakimi trip, still early in our canoeing lives, was the true northernness of the place; thick lichens and the fast waters of the Ogoki running crystal clear through the spectacular fall colours.

Also some bookkeeping news. With Canada Post again set to move our mailbox - and change the number after 26 years - we said enough! So effective immediately we will now use the address of our newly-built home where I hope to be for some time. See Page 12 for the new address.

Located in the middle of bustling Toronto, we back onto a large valley. The leaves have just fallen off to reveal a wonderful surprise. The far side of the valley is devoid of buildings or lights. It is truly a scenic view we get from our back windows. Watching the sun set through the distant hardwoods, it is impossible to believe we are surrounded by millions of people. As the Chickadees and Blue Jays gather our seed for what promises to be a cold winter, I draw tremendous warmth from that scene.

Michael Peake.

Canoesworthy

A group of tourists may initiate legal action against the Government of Nunavut (GN) to recoup the money lost when the GN suspended the outfitter licence of Tom Faess' TT Enterprises.

The tourists lost the money they paid in advance for an adventure tour in Baker Lake with Faess. The outfitter, known as Tundra Tom, received a cease and desist order on Aug. 13 from the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (ED&T), as he was preparing to embark on a trip with clients in Baker. The order informed Faess his outfitter's licence had been temporarily suspended, pending an investigation into a serious complaint lodged against TT Enterprises.

Faess claimed at the time he was not told what the complaint was, or who had filed it.

On Oct. 7, Faess received a letter from ED&T informing him of the department's decision to permanently revoke his outfitter's licence. He is in the process of appealing the decision to ED&T Minister Peter Taptuna.

Vicki Storey is a customer manager for the Great Canadian Adventure Co. in Edmonton. Storey said her company has worked with Faess for more than 10 years. She said the company specializes in adventure travel in Canada, so Nunavut is an important destination for it.

"Regardless whether the complaints were legitimate, the idea of pulling the licence without any investigation has me wondering if the GN has much concern for the clients who were taken off their trips.

"I don't understand why the government couldn't have waited three weeks for the trips to take place, and then investigate Tom if it had a problem with the way he was running his company." Storey said her company doesn't see anything in the information sent by the GN to justify pulling the trips.

She said her company works with about 200 outfitters across Canada and has received at least one complaint about the majority of them.

"Everybody gets complaints, but you have to look at the percentages and the majority of the clients I've booked with Tom have enjoyed their experience.

"I didn't even know it was possible for a licence to be pulled in this manner, without any investigation.

Storey said she still plans to send clients to Nunavut, but she does worry if such action is going to become a common event.

She said tour outfitters that sell the whole world, and might only do one or two Nunavut trips a year, might pull their Nunavut trips because of the action just to be on the safe side.

"That's something Nunavut Tourism should be worried about, but my concern is how my clients are going to get their money back for a trip that was cancelled by the Nunavut government.

"Their trip wasn't cancelled by our company or Tom's company, it was cancelled by the GN and it should be responsible for paying that money back."

"A group of clients seems to be heading in the direction of legal recourse to get their money back."

ED&T Assistant Deputy Minister Gordon MacKay said the GN has no plans to reimburse money. He said the GN is confident the original suspension was the correct move, and one supported under the Travel and Tourism Act.

"We feel bad for people inconvenienced or who lost money as a result of the operations of TT Enterprises," said MacKay.

"But that's why this is a regulated industry, to try and ensure the outfitters who operate in the territory are ones the public, government and the industry association can have a lot of confidence in.

"This is a very isolated and unfortunate incident."

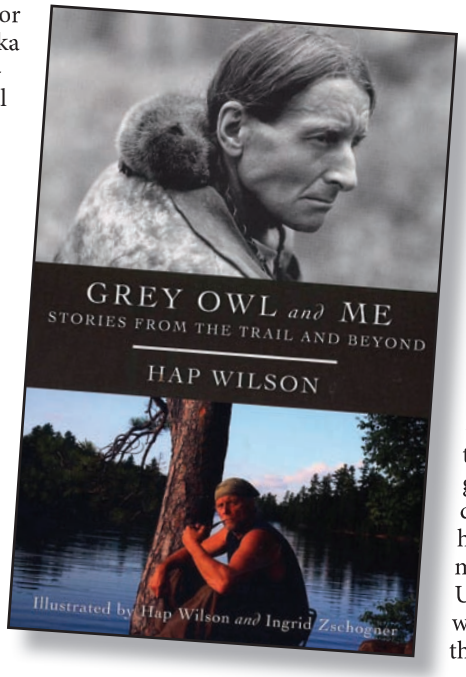
CANOESWORTHY continues on Page 10

Grey Owl and Me
Stories from the Trail and Beyond
By Hap Wilson
Dundurn Press, Hamilton, 2010 $26.99

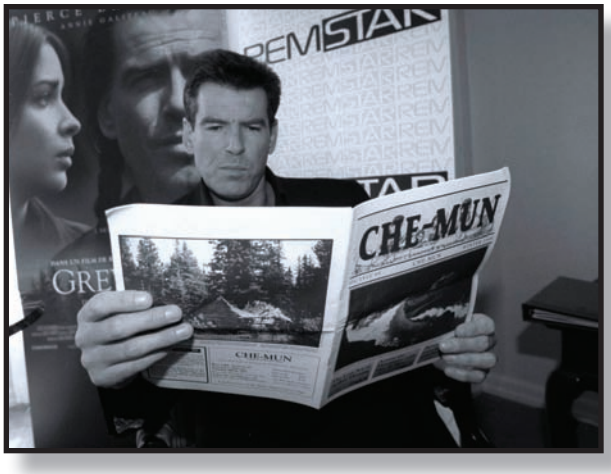
Canada's North has no shortage of interesting characters. Perhaps the most famous, or infamous, is Archie Belaney aka Grey Owl, the celebrated Englishman turned environmental native activist.

No doubt the exploits of Grey Owl, who survived a less than noble personal life to excel in his craft even to the level of speaking before the British Royal Family. The future Queen Elizabeth was a big fan as a young girl.

One of canoeing's more interesting characters in recent years has been the author and activist Hap Wilson. He burst on the scene in the mid 1970s with a beautifully self-illustrated book *Temagami Canoe Routes* - an instant classic. He was in his early 20s and the work seemed like that of a much older man.



Wilson makes the premise in his newest book that he, like Grey Owl, was really a native born to the wrong race. A native friend of his also told him of dreams of him as a brother. Like Archie, Hap too longed to run wild and hunt in loin cloths as a kid and live in a primitive way.



And with the voice of Grey Owl speaking an ever present part in this book's narrative, Wilson takes us through his many interesting both on the trail and off.

One of the most interesting chapters in his account of helping actor Pierce Brosnan become Grey Owl for the 1999 biopic done by Sir Richard Attenborough, who like Queen Elizabeth became a Grey Owl fan after hearing him in the 1930s. Hap was hired by the produces - as his own request - to teach the Brit to paddle, throw a knife and generally be woodsy. He also, along with Canoe Museum founder Kirk Wipper, protested to director Attenborough about how phoney the script they has seen was. Attenborough made some necessary changes though the movie while generally well done was not as hit as there was no market for it in the U.S. as Grey Owl was unknown to them.

I happened to meet Brosnan while covering the publicity tour of the movie and mentioned to him that I knew Hap Wilson. "That f**ker, if I ever get my hands on him I'll kill him," blurted Brosnan. I was puzzled as I had read Hap's largely complimentary account of teaching canoeing to the Hollywood star in a magazine. But I then learned it was something Brosnan said he shouldn't have done. However, Double O Owl (00wl?)was kind enough to pose with a copy of *Che-Mun*.

Hap paints a much fuller picture in the book of that experience, which no doubt will not please Mr. Brosnan, and it is an interesting story of hanging in Malibu with Pierce and his people; smoking cigars, learning J-strokes and enjoying the movie star life. Wilson admits that it ended on a sour note but his reporting skills are strong, (Brosnan DOES have a handshake that would crush walnuts) though it would be interesting to see the other side of the story.

Hap's tales from the enviro-warrior battles are interesting as well. I had heard long go that he had worn out his welcome in Temagami. Twenty years ago there were many protests involving logging the old growth forests there and he tells the tales from the front lines.

Likewise he was also there when angry sealers nearly lynched anti-sealing environmental king-pin Paul Watson in the Magdalen Islands. He always seems to be where the action is and fortunately for us lives to tell about it.

Of course there are tales of canoeing and on the water adventures and a very interesting chapter called Rapid Transit which is all about the process of running rapids including the psychological and physiological effects.

For a guy with a great memory sometimes the missing info is curious. He writes of tripping the Coppermine and how canoeists had to portage miles of canyons. There are only two such places on the Coppermine - Escape Rapids and Rocky Defile. Strange that he wouldn't name the one he describes running, likely Rocky Defile, which has a grave marking an unsuccessful passage there.

This is a truly eclectic book - from riding motorcycles, climbing in New Zealand to his hatred of mice and his many deep thoughts on humans and nature. Wilson's wide ranging experiences mark a life interestingly-led. He is truly a "different" kind of person which is why we would want to read a book about him in the first place.

As he nears 60 and now lives in Rosseau in the Muskoka area north of Toronto, I think Hap Wilson has a few good chapters left in that interesting life. Whatever they are - they won't be dull.

Beating Ballroom A on the Burnside

By BOB HENDERSON

Is it a canoe trip or is it a conference? Can it be both at once? How will fourteen outdoor education academics all used to leading trips work together? What about differences in practice and philosophy between the six countries represented, not to forget 14 dynamic personalities? These were questions certainly on everyone's mind as we gathered in Yellowknife for what we all thought was a first of its kind: a conference as journey where we would share our professional practices and ideas related to educational expeditions.

We, collectively, were tired of meeting at conferences in Sheratons around the world. Personally, it always feels disingenuous as an outdoor educator to gather in Ballroom 'A' in anywhere North America and discuss issues such as, "Can the no trace camping philosophy fit with a you can be "home in the wilds" philosophy. (I still "do" conferences as a fun part of the job, but I'd imagined nothing could match a conference as journey canoe trip). For the record, the conference with keynote speakers and concurrent sessions isn't the only way or the best way for professionals to meet. Here was my chance to test this theory!

The conference as journey idea was that of the eminently qualified Morten Asfeldt who cut his teeth guiding for Nahanni River Adventures in the 1980"s before travelling to many (dare I say most) Arctic rivers with students at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus in Camrose, Alberta. This would be Morten's fifth time down the Mara-Burnside. Along with Morten, co-organizer Simon Beames, a Canadian outdoor education scholar, teaching at the University of Edinburgh; made first-cast fishing; regular sightings of wolves, grizzly, musk-ox, and the Bathurst caribou migration; not to mention days of run-able white water and classic esker camping. Together, Morten and Simon saw this good idea to completion.

Here's how it worked. Thirty invitations were sent out, twelve folks signed on and Morten and Simon would have their canoe trip conference. We were to write two papers to be distributed to delegates before the conference. These papers served as conference session; one a curricular item of practice, another sharing of an important theory that guided our individual use of educational expeditions. English would be our common language. Sessions included re-thinking how we use metaphors to teach, how to use a group writing journal, understanding the body on a canoe trip, the importance of water for life, nature interpretation – how to wisely engage students, finding tools on the land, how to generate group discussion on environmental lifestyle, peppering ritual and heritage into the experience. We discussed our personal view of our carbon footprint in coming here, learned of local political issues (the possible coastal shipping port at Bathurst Inlet), the merits of journey-based and local based outdoor education. Here given all the above, I just scratched the surface. The days were full, exciting, and stimulating; I only "remember" dozing off once…perhaps twice…during evening sessions after a full day on the water and my turn on dinner detail–and my expedition/conference partners are quick to remind me.

Certainly there was a tension between the life on the trail and the need to fulfill our interest for a successful professional conference. That said: it worked! We learned together, had time for follow-up discussion on esker walks, around the bug tent, or in canoes. We had time to expand our practice and ideas with much input from respected "non-distracted colleagues". The mostly portage and lining free Mara-Burnside Rivers afforded ample opportunity for dialogue, critique, and relationship building for future teaching and research collaborations with a canoe partner; something that is rare in "Ballroom A". Fittingly perhaps, these focus interactions while paddling, sometimes led to a surprise wave over the bow for the bowperson when an enthusiastic conversation distractingly led canoes into the standing waves; this too is rare in "Ballroom A".

As for the route, we started just downstream from the usual launch at Nose Lake. We landed on June 27 on a tundra lake still two-thirds choked with winter ice; no problem–it meant no bugs. By day two we had encountered our first of six grizzlies. By day four we were in the midst of the regions annual caribou migration travelling the esker highways besides our camped. By day three, the long shallow rapids gave way to kilometres after kilometer of easily run able rapids–and we learned how to patch a PAK canoe. In total we had two portages en route to the Arctic Ocean, one being the infamous five-kilometre carry around Burnside canyon a few short kilometers from Bathurst Inlet Lodge.

What can be said about a canoe trip academic conference? Simply put, it is a good idea. Distant colleagues who were at best acquaintances are now working colleagues and friends. Many of us are inspired to gather in Denmark for an International gathering in July 2011. Students are benefiting as we broaden our international allegiances. (I had no trouble helping a student seek out a Scandinavian work-term placement). We have a group writing project on the go. We have broadened our base of understanding about outdoor environmental education. Certainly, the eight international travelers learned something very special about Canada, impossible in "Ballroom A."

Bob Henderson is a noted outdoor educator at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON and an author and editor of several books on canoeing.

Wabakimi Wanderings

Story and photos by Tim Farr

I am writing this article while looking at a scarf that used to be given to clients by Canoe Frontier, a wonderful outfitter, now sadly out of business.

It lists many of the major lake and river systems and provincial parks found in Ontario's "Little North"; something of a misnomer, when you consider that its land mass of 1,295,000 square kilometres is roughly as big as the Gobi Desert.

Although we've barely scratched its surface on our annual canoe trips, my friend and bowman Ted Baker and I have started several of our trips from Pickle Lake which markets itself as the most northerly community in Ontario with year-round road access. From here, we've explored the upper reaches of the Albany River and flown north to the Sutton River for the run downstream through Polar Bear Provincial Park to the Bay.

As canoeists who live in Ottawa, even the logistics of reaching this jumping-off point are intimidating. It's a 2,000 km one-way drive which is basically limited to two choices: Highway 17 around Lake Superior or Highway 11 across the top of the province. While the latter is somewhat faster, the former is much more scenic and the views make up for the extra travelling time.

When we were younger and more reckless, we drove this route non-stop in 24 hrs, but a 'too close encounter' with a semi on a dark stretch of highway near Nipigon resulted in a vow never to allow ourselves to become so tired (and foolish) again. It's much better to slow down and break the journey in at least two places, say the Sault and Thunder Bay.

What's the attraction? Why would anyone drive 4,000 km, just to spend ten days canoeing?

The main attraction is Wabakimi Provincial Park, established in 1983. This is Ontario's second largest provincial park (after Polar Bear). Its core area is classified as a wilderness park and it's also bounded by vast expanses of Crown land.

It was this adjacent area that intrigued us, because we used to wonder about canoeing possibilities while studying the Ontario Road Map during those long drives north. Specifically, we were interested in the areas bordering Highway 599 which runs from Ignace on the Trans Canada Highway, north through the villages of Silver Dollar, Savant Lake and Pickle Lake.

Most of this area drains into the vast Albany River system and includes several historic canoe routes. One leads north from Savant Lake and provided a connection to Osnaburgh House, the local Hudson's Bay Company Post on Lake St. Joseph.

Osnaburgh was established in 1786 and was one of Canada's first inland trading posts (although it may have been used as a meeting place since the 1730s). The original building now serves as the focus of a fishing camp owned by the Grace family known as Old Post.

After the Canadian National Railroad line was built, local trade patterns changed and it became cheaper to transport freight north from rail depots in Sioux Lookout and Savant Lake. It was a gruelling trip which relied on teams of horse-drawn wagons and scows on the rivers and lakes.

Even this form of transportation became obsolete in 1956, once Highway 599 was completed to service the gold mines north of Pickle Lake. Nine years later, Osnaburgh House closed, bringing to an end almost two centuries of Canadian history.

Our 18th annual excursion was an opportunity to retrace parts of this old canoe route. We chose to fly-in to the North Arm of Savant Lake to avoid a big lake crossing with a full load of gear, then work our way down the Savant River, crossing two enormous lakes, before looping back upstream on the Pashkokogan River for pick-up off Highway 599.

The journey begins

In previous trips to this area, we had used the services of Canoe Frontier, run by Lynn and Bernie Cox of Pickle Lake. Unfortunately the outfitting business closed in 2007 and the tripping gear was sold off (although its aviation arm North Star Air is still going strong).

Lynn suggested that I get in touch with West Caribou Air, which had purchased some of their fleet and operates from a small float plane base off Highway 599. For a very reasonable price, they arranged a canoe rental, our charter flight, plus a vehicle shuttle back to their Savant Lake base.

Upon arrival at West Caribou, we were amused to see an old friend awaiting us: a green, 17' Dagger canoe named "Clementine" which we had last used on the Upper Albany in 2005. Although its gunwales were a little deformed from one too many charter flights, the Royalex hull was still sound and the canoe appeared seaworthy.

After meeting our pilot we transferred our gear into a Cessna 185 and enjoyed a short flight northeast to Turtle Island in Savant Lake. There is a small fishing and hunting camp located here with a dock suitable for float planes; a good place to safely unload gear and repack before heading out.

On the water again

When we originally made the decision to return to the Little North in 2010, we had no idea that water levels would be at historic lows in Northern Ontario.

For example, Lake Superior was down almost 25 cm from its average and in April, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported that the lake was at its lowest level since 1907.

While our chosen route (and most of Wabakimi) lies within the Arctic watershed, we had real concerns about what this would do to the canoeing. The folks at West Caribou told us that water levels had improved slightly due to recent rains, but they had no information about what we might encounter on the Savant River.

From the air, the southern reaches of Savant Lake showed scars of logging roads and clear cuts, but these were gradually enveloped by a sea of spruce. Save for the glint of a couple of aluminum fishing boats in the main body of the lake, there appeared to be almost no permanent structures. As the lake narrowed into the North Arm, hundreds of islands lay scattered across the water and we could see a deep bay leading off to the northeast. The most striking impression was one of scale: this is truly an enormous body of water and not to be trifled with.

We landed at the vacant fishing camp and loaded Clementine with two food barrels and three canoe packs plus assorted gear. After updating my GPS to the central time zone and fixing our location for future reference, we left the dock on the afternoon of August 4, determined to get well-up the North Arm and take advantage of relatively tranquil paddling conditions.

For two southerners, it's hard not to be impressed by the Little North's distinctive bush. Familiar white pine is nowhere to be seen; instead the forest is a dense sea of black and white spruce, the occasional cedar on the shoreline and sentinel jack pines poking through the canopy. Closer up, the bush is remarkable, similar to what one might expect in a West Coast rain forest. A thick layer of lichen and moss carpets the ground and wispy strands of old man's beard hang from the trees. Bend down closer, and you can almost hear the fungi inexorably breaking down fallen timber, in a constant cycle of growth, decay and regeneration which has been going on for thousands of years.

By late afternoon, we were half-way up the North Arm, so we decided to come ashore on a long spit of stone marked by a well-used fire pit. Traditionally, Ted makes our first celebratory dinner and he did not disappoint with a huge plate of steak, onions and mushrooms washed down with a very decent Shiraz. As Nick said in Hemingway's Big Two-Hearted River: Part I, "I've got a right to eat this kind of stuff, if I'm willing to carry it."

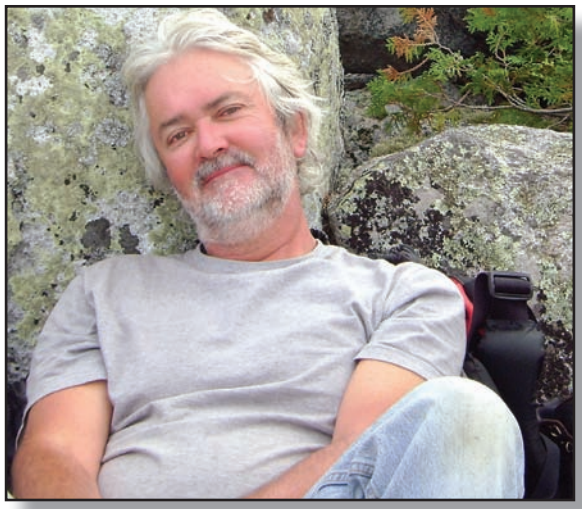
The Savant River

The next morning we awoke to a blustery day, with whitecaps rolling down the lake and surf pounding into the point. After breakfast, we lingered for over an hour hoping for calmer weather, but the desire to get onto the Savant River proper eventually overwhelmed our caution. It was a tough paddle, because we had to keep the bow angled into the headwind and the water was so stained with tannin that it was almost impossible to spot rocks and shoals beneath the surface. At one point we came aground on an offshore reef and almost broached as the wind began to pivot us broadside, but thanks to the miracle of Royalex we were able to pry off and continue with no damage done.

This was an important day, because we would have an opportunity to test the accuracy of a detailed set of maps published by The Wabakimi Project. For Che-Mun readers not familiar with this organization, it is a unique effort to locate and document canoe routes both within and outside the park. Since 2004, groups of volunteers under the leadership of "Uncle Phil" Cotton and Barry Simon have done heroic work cleaning-up

and restoring traditional portages and carefully plotting their length and location on canoe route maps. The maps published so far are a fabulous resource and take a lot of the guess work out of finding take-outs and campsites and anticipating swifts.

According to these maps, we would face 14 portages in the stretch between the North Arm and McCrea Lake. While the distances involved were relatively modest, the condition of these portages was important given the low water levels. Although we had come prepared with collapsible saws and axes to deal with blow-downs, we were hoping to take advantage of the hard work of Wabakimi Project volunteers and others who had preceded us downstream.



Author Tim Farr in repose

Fortunately "Uncle Phil" did not disappoint: the maps proved to be excellent. We ran four swifts and did a short 98 m portage on the first day, before stopping early at Jabez Lake because of the wind. There was another outpost cabin located on the far shore across from our campsite, but like the structure on Turtle Island it was vacant during our stay. It's possible that these camps see more use during the fall moose hunt, but judging from remarks made by the West Caribou pilot, bookings from parties of American fishermen are way down due to the lingering effects of the recession.

The next day we got up early, in order to tackle the eight remaining portages between Jabez and Velos lakes. Ted and I have a time-honored practice of alternating carries, whatever the length or condition of the portage. Generally it all evens out but fate was especially kind to me that day. Invariably, when it became time to portage, Ted would be faced with a bad take-out, longer carry, boggier conditions or the occasional blow-down, requiring nimble footwork over a fallen log. My portages, on the other hand, were shorter, dryer and usually in better condition; but Ted never once complained, demonstrating yet again what a good sport and gentleman he is.

Fellow paddler Ted Baker

Some of these portages show evidence of long and continuous use. For example, there is a broad 174 m carry across a small park-like peninsula which is probably an old York Boat route, complete with a large, open clearing where crews would have stopped to make tea or spend the night. The same sense of history is evident in the fire rings, some of which must be very ancient given their size and the condition of the blackened bedrock. However, there was little evidence of recent human passage, although we saw paint scrapes at some of the take-outs which made us speculate about a canoe party earlier in the spring.

The Savant River is somewhat reminiscent of the Upper Albany, with ledges and pool and drop rapids. Often the river widens into broad, slow-moving sections characterized by dense stands of wild rice. Because of low water levels, we were fortunate to avoid three of the marked portages along this section. However, it's doubtful this route would appeal to hardcore whitewater enthusiasts, because the rapids we chose to run were fairly straightforward, even for sixty-something canoeists like ourselves who are hyper-cautious around moving water.

There is a beautiful campsite where the Savant River plunges 10 m: easily the most impressive waterfall of the trip. Here we found aluminum boats cached in the brush and the spruce framework of an old hunt camp, looking very decrepit without its tarp. It smelled wonderfully 'fishy' and we enjoyed the antics of a very brazen gull awaiting a handout. We also saw a pelican flying overhead which although common in the Little North, was an unusual sighting for two Ottawa residents.

Big lake crossings

It's an easy day's paddle from Savant Falls to McCrea Lake. The first art of this route is northwest through Velos Lake, after portaging over a narrow isthmus via a well-used trail. At the outlet of the lake we scouted a 274 m portage which was in very poor shape, then went back and re-inspected the rapids and decided that they were indeed run able, although we scraped a bit on the shingle. After that, four more portages and a somewhat narrow and meandering stretch of river brought us into the East Arm of McCrea Lake: an absolutely gorgeous body of water which is big enough to appear on the Ontario Road Map.

Canoeists are well-advised to exercise caution here, because it would be easy to become wind bound on a lake of this size. The western shoreline was several miles away, peeking through some large islands which helped to break the wind. We had previously agreed to sit tight if the wind was too strong but we were again fortunate to find only gentle swells. These favorable conditions allowed us to make our way up the eastern shoreline to an island campsite which got us clear of the worst of the exposed reaches of McCrea.

This particular site had once sheltered a cabin, but the structure had collapsed and any salvageable wood had long since been scavenged. However, it did offer beautiful vistas south down the lake showcasing isolated stands of birch along the skyline. The rocky shoreline made for perfect swimming and we enjoyed the chance to get cleaned-up and refreshed, before celebrating an unexpectedly easy lake crossing with a pre-dinner drink.

That night, as the water smoothed and the first stars appeared, we saw a freighter canoe powered by an old kicker, towing another canoe heavily loaded with gear and people. This party was probably from the Mishkeegogamang First Nation, which is officially comprised of two reserves, but includes Ojibway living on Crown land and in small, adjacent communities such as Rat Rapids.

The Ojibway of this area have an interesting history, because they were the first signatories of Treaty Nine which covers two-thirds of Ontario. Over the summers of 1905 and 1906, three Commissioners including Duncan Campbell Scott canoed the Albany and Abitibi rivers explaining the treaty's provisions to Aboriginal groups gathered at various HBC posts. Their first stop was Osnaburgh House where they convinced a respected Elder to sign Treaty Nine on behalf of the local Ojibway. Scott would later go on to become a Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs and one of the chief architects of Canada's racist residential school system. On this journey, however, he seemed to content himself writing very bad poetry and taking some poignant pictures of the Ojibway and Cree he encountered on his travels.

Whatever the eventual destination of the two canoes we saw heading down McCrea Lake; Ted and I appreciated that they had chosen the absolute best time of day to make such a crossing. It was also very gratifying to realize that these were the first people we had seen since leaving the North Arm of Savant Lake. The canoes' passage certainly surprised the resident loons, because we were treated to a splashy territorial display and a chorus of agitated calls repeated by their brethren around the lake. It was a lovely way to spend a Saturday night and we sat companionably in the gloaming as the last of the sunlight illuminated thunderheads far to the south.

The next day we re-entered the Savant River and did a 183 m portage – more like a cart track than a trail – which took us into East Pashkokogan Lake, part of a much larger lake bearing the same name. Here we encountered several fishermen from a local lodge jigging for walleye below the rapids. We both had the distinct impression that our presence was resented: it was almost as if these fishermen had paid for a 'real' Canadian wilderness experience which did not include interlopers in their private fishing hole. However, we soon escaped their boorish behavior and paddled out into the expanses of the lake.

At this point, canoeists have the choice of a long pull north around a headland which divides the lake in half, or a 187 m portage across an isthmus at its base, which provides access to Pashkokogan Lake proper. The former route also offers a connection to Osnaburgh Lake, the Upper Albany and Lake St. Joseph. We chose to portage even though paddling conditions were excellent, aware that any wind could blow unobstructed for miles, creating the potential for very dangerous swells.

On the western side of the portage, we stopped to eat lunch on the boulders scattered along the shoreline, then ventured onto the lake. Pashkokogan is so big that its northern shore is just a faint smudge of blue on the horizon. Far to the west, I had spotted what looked like a sandy beach, and thought it might offer a nice campsite to while away an afternoon. As we got closer, however, we realized that what we thought was sand was actually a shelf of bedrock as smooth as a billiard table, tilted perfectly to form a stone beach.

This was by no means a pristine site; it had hosted many shore lunches over the years. But is also boasted a dolmen stone: the mysterious perched rocks which are constructed by ancient cultures around the world. While I've read different explanations as to their purpose, ranging from altars, to portals to the spirit world, to vision quest sites, it was humbling just to think of the effort required to lever such a huge boulder into position. Although I understand the motivation of fellow travelers who leave tobacco offerings, I haven't yet acquired the wisdom or state of grace to properly pay homage to these sites, so we contented ourselves admiring it from a respectful distance.

To celebrate our luck in finding such a special campsite, Ted treated us to a mixture of iced tea, rum and orange slices which we sipped while studying our maps. We were about to leave the Savant River system and turn south to paddle upstream on the Pashkokogan River; a route which roughly parallels Highway 599 and offers several take-out points accessible by vehicle.

All things must pass

The next morning, at the outlet of the river, we came across an enormous eagle's nest overlooking the shallow waters. It was a reminder that eagles were by far the most common bird we had seen on our trip, with daily sightings of six to eight birds not uncommon. While the young were now fully fledged and no longer in the nests, they were still too lazy or inexperienced to hunt for themselves. On several occasions we saw one of the parent birds bringing back food to their offspring, which would trigger a crescendo of lusty cries at the prospect of another meal.

The Pashkokogan River's current was not strong and so it was easy to make progress upstream. We enjoyed some of the backcountry around Hamilton Lake but were conscious that due to its proximity to the highway, we might encounter boats and people at any time. We were fortunate, however, to find another lovely island campsite just below the final 102 m portage of our trip. Here, because we were ahead of schedule, we spent one idyllic rest day swimming, reading and fishing for tasty walleye in the deep pool below the rapids.

Each canoe trip has its own rhythm; this one had been especially kind to us: no bugs to speak of, virtually no rain, pleasant portages and favorable big lake crossings. As a result, it was inevitable that the Little North would remind us that weather can make all the difference on a canoe trip. On our final day the heavens opened and we were treated to a deluge of truly biblical proportions. Three hours of paddling (and constant bailing) brought us to Mile 42 Access Point where we had arranged to be picked-up by a West Caribou shuttle the next day. Because there was little prospect of any break in the weather, I volunteered to hitchhike down Highway 599 in order to fetch a truck to get our gear (something I hadn't done since my backpacking years in North Africa).

There is nothing as uninviting and miserable as a sodden, disheveled canoeist trying to bum a ride on a road which sees no more than two southbound vehicles per hour. Mile 42 Access is simply a clearing in the bush; not exactly a hive of activity at the best of times. After three fruitless hours, I finally flagged down an Ontario Provincial Police cruiser which reluctantly pulled to a stop. After turning over any weapons (my jackknife), and consenting to a CPIC background check to ensure that I didn't have any outstanding warrants, I was invited to sit in the locked back seat. However, once these formalities were completed, "Sean" from the Fort Frances detachment proved to be a very genial companion, who entertained me with stories about cougar sightings in northwestern Ontario during the 50 km drive back to Savant Lake.

Postscript

Because of the change in Via Rail's transcontinental schedule, Savant Lake is likely to replace Armstrong as the most favorable access point to Wabakimi Park. Canoeists should not overlook adjacent areas, however, because the paddling possibilities are literally endless. For further information about canoeing opportunities in this area, *Che-Mun* readers may wish to consult:

Canoe Atlas of the Little North, Jonathan Berger and Thomas Terry, Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ontario, 2007

The Wabakimi Project: www.wabakimi.org
Wabakimi portal: www.wabakimi.on.ca

CANOESWORTHY *continued*

A Quebec native leader, who led his people through negotiations that would result in the historic James Bay Agreement has died.

Billy Diamond, former Grand Chief of the Quebec Cree, passed away September 30 after he was rushed to a hospital near his home in Waskaganish, Que., near James Bay, following an apparent heart attack. He was 61.

He was partially paralyzed two years ago by a stroke, but eventually learned to walk again.

A profile on Diamond published in the *Globe and Mail* after the stroke described a man whose unrelenting character manifested itself at an early age.

After being sent by his family to attend a residential school, Diamond, then eight-years-old, refused to eat his vegetables. The nuns told him he couldn't get up from the table until he did.

"Well past midnight," wrote columnist Roy MacGregor, "with the little eight-year-old still sitting there with his arms defiantly folded, the sisters gave up. He still won't eat his vegetables."

Diamond decided to become a lawyer, but never made it to law school. However, his skills as a negotiator — and steadfast determination — served him and his fellow Cree well in negotiations with the Quebec government over the protection of native land threatened by the James Bay hydroelectric project.

Ultimately, the James Bay Agreement — signed in 1975 — saw the Cree and other northern native communities compensated for lands lost to Hydro-Quebec.

"Today we have lost a great leader as well as a man of vision and conviction," Quebec Premier Jean Charest said in a statement following Diamond's death. "I hope that native youth will be inspired by his example of commitment, determination and perseverance."

Parti Quebecois leader Pauline Marois, described Diamond as "a man of heart . . . who proudly represented his people" during historic times.

"His contribution was inestimable," Marois continued, describing Diamond as "a model for many Cree." In 1987, Diamond was honoured with the Order of Quebec.

He is survived by his wife Elizabeth and six children. Aboriginal leaders threaten to mount an international publicity campaign against Hydro-Québec unless it listens to their concerns regarding a giant power project.

Innu leaders in northeastern Quebec said Monday they want some concessions before the La Romaine hydroelectric project goes ahead. They're asking for a treaty deal with the provincial government that guarantees their way of life will be respected.

Otherwise, they say, there could be social disruptions, a flurry of lawsuits and an international PR campaign that tarnishes the image of Canada and Quebec abroad.

It would be a throwback to a major protest organized in New York City two decades ago by the Cree against Hydro-Québec's Great Whale power project.

"We're seriously thinking of tarnishing the image of Quebec, of the Quebec government – and of Canada, too — along with Hydro-Québec, because they haven't been shy over the years about tarnishing our rights," Rosario Pinette, director of the Innu group lobbying the government, said at a news conference in Sept-Îles, Que.

Quebec's environmental assessment board has essentially given a green light to La Romaine. It does warn, however, that there could be an impact on wildlife. The project, currently under construction, will cost $6.5 billion and is expected to be completed later this decade. La Romaine is expected to produce more than 1,500 megawatts of hydroelectricity.

"This is an issue that will be settled with respect. It's a political issue," said Chief Georges-Ernest Grégoire, who lamented a "flagrant" lack of respect shown by the provincial government.

Over the course of the past 50 million years, a forest of towering trees thrived on Nunavut's Axel Heiberg island, then died back and was buried under the sandy soil of the Geodetic Hills.

That is, until 1985, when a Canadian Geographical Survey team spotted the rows of ancient mummified trunks which had been swept clean by erosion. Since then, these unique remnants of a much warmer polar past have remained unprotected from visitors. But now Nunavut is looking at how best to protect the fossil forest, which lies outside the borders of Quttinirpaaq national park on Ellesmere Island, possibly by setting up a territorial park.

The park even has a name: Napaaqtulik, where there are trees. Nunavut's environment minister Daniel Shewchuk told the Nunavut legislature's committee of the whole on Oct. 25 that his department is now studying whether to make the fossil forest into a park. But it could take at least 10 more years before the fossil forest becomes a territorial park.

"It is very hard for us to determine when it will become a park, said David Monteith, Nunavut's director of parks and tourism. More than 10 years have already passed since the idea of protecting the fossil forest first came up, but Monteith said the project was postponed until the Inuit impact and benefits agreement was signed off on. "So that is now behind us and now we're kind of eagerly looking forward to proceeding with coming up with something that is meaningful for Napaaqtulik," Monteith said.

Most of the trees that grew the slopes of the Geodetic Hills were enormous Dawn Redwood, or Meta-Sequoia. According to the size of the stumps and branches that researchers have found, this forest was tall, with trees reaching up to 35 metres in height. Some appear to have grown for 500 to 1,000 years.

An all-weather road from Manitoba to Nunavut got a little closer to reality in November. Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger and Nunavut Premier Eva Aariak signed an agreement that called on both their governments to begin consultations on a cost-benefit study of the project.

The cost of making the all-weather road a reality won't be cheap; a 2005 study estimated it at $1.2 billion.

But Aariak said many people living in area along Hudson Bay "expect" the road to be built.

"With the high cost of transportation and high cost of goods and services, I think it is necessary," she said.

Selinger said a key challenge for the project will be whether Ottawa contributes funding.

"One of the problems of climate change is that winter roads just don't last as long anymore," he said.

"So some communities get cut off from the goods and services they need. If we're going to develop the economy, we need the proper

infrastructure and a road is a key part of that."

The proposed road from Manitoba would start in Gillam, run through Churchill and up along the Hudson Bay coast to the Nunavut communities of Arviat, Whale Cove and Rankin Inlet. Construction could begin as soon as 2014.

Such a road has been discussed for several years. In 2005, the Manitoba and Nunavut governments and the Kivalliq Inuit Association launched a $1-million study to look at three proposed routes. It also looked at the social, economic and environmental effects of a road into the Far North.

Many believe a road is needed to connect isolated northern communities to the south to ease the transportation of food, building materials and other goods as Nunavut's economy expands, and to connect it with the rest of the world. But others fear a road will only increase human access to fragile wilderness areas. It's estimated an all-weather road would cost $8 million to $11 million a year to maintain.

As Quebec's ambitious "Plan Nord" steamrolls ahead, Inuit, Cree and Innu leaders met to discuss the development plan, which Quebec Premier Jean Charest has heavily promoted.

While the Plan Nord's final negotiations continue behind closed doors, Quebec government news releases on projects connected with the plan, as well as other documents obtained by *Nunatsiaq News*, reveal some details of what this plan, expected to be officially announced in November, is likely to give northern Quebec:

- $820 million for the construction and repair of roads;
- $1.5 billion for the construction of new hydroelectric projects in Eastmain and La Romaine and more money to build projects producing more power than the James Bay project; and,
- $1.5 billion to link Nunavik up to Quebec's electrical grid and fibre optic internet network and build a 2,500 km road or railway around Nunavik.

Among the projects also on Nunavik's wish list, which carry a much smaller cost for Quebec: 1,000 houses, an Air Inuit "aeronautical complex" in Montreal, airport renovations, more paving projects in communities and regional subsidies to offset the high cost of living and transportation.

But, by far the biggest piece of the plan nord has no set price tag at all — that's the northern land that Quebec wants to develop through forestry, mining and energy production over the next 25 years.

As part of the Plan nord, Quebec is promising to exclude all industrial activities, like mines and hydro projects, from 50 per cent of northern Quebec and set aside 12 per cent of the territory as protected areas.

In Nunavik these proposed protected areas include eight national parks (of which two have been created) and national park reserves as well as 11 proposed protected areas.

But it's development on unprotected lands and rivers — such as the char-rich Payne River — that will allow Quebec to pay for the new houses, infrastructure construction and other subsidies contained in Plan nord.

As part of Quebec's effort to parcel up the north for development, a major fast-tracked consultation on "biodiversity reserves in Nunavik" is getting underway in Nunavik.

The killing of Inuit sled dogs on Baffin Island more than 50 years ago was likely not the result of a federal government plan to force Inuit out of their traditional way of life, according to an Inuit commission.

The report by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, released on Wednesday, provides a first-hand perspective on the dog killings and other major social changes Baffin Island Inuit faced between 1950 and 1975. Inuit have long claimed that RCMP officers based in the eastern Arctic systematically killed thousands of their sled dogs — known in Inuktitut as *qimmiit* — as part of a government plan to force Inuit to abandon their traditional camps and move into western-style permanent communities.

"Between 1957 and 1975, the number of *qimmiit* declined dramatically," the commission's report states in part. "While some died from disease or were abandoned by their owners, hundreds were shot by the RCMP and other settlement authorities because *qallunaat* [non-Inuit] were afraid of loose dogs."

It has been alleged that about 20,000 sled dogs were killed from the 1950s through the 1970s in what is now Nunavut, the Nunavik region of northern Quebec, and the Nunatsiavut region of Labrador.

The RCMP concluded in 2006 that no organized dog slaughter had taken place. Some dogs were lawfully destroyed because they were diseased, starving or dangerous, according to the police force's own report.

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission's report found that while RCMP officers were often following animal control laws when they shot sled dogs, those laws were often not properly explained to Inuit whose dogs were being killed.

"Many Inuit were not even told why their dogs were shot," according to the report.The commission also found that "the killings went on far too long to be the result of a secret plan or conspiracy, and that the dog killings began … several years before the federal government adopted a formal central policy of dog control."

A box unearthed in a Nunavut community along the Northwest Passage earlier this month contains nothing related to Arctic explorers Sir John Franklin or Roald Amundsen, government officials have announced.

The wooden box, which was believed to have been buried for decades in Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, was opened by the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa on Friday.

The box was purported to contain either documents related to Franklin's ill-fated attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage in the 1840s or items from Amundsen's journey through the passage in the early 1900s.

"The remains of a cardboard box lined the bottom and sides of the interior of the wood box," the Nunavut government said in a news release issued late Tuesday. "Pieces of newspaper and what appeared to be tallow were discovered beneath the sand and rocks that filled the box. No items related to either Amundsen or to Franklin were found."

The box was believed to have been buried more than 80 years ago by George Washington Porter Jr., a resident of Gjoa Haven, below a large stone cairn.

It was said that he carefully placed some documents believed to be connected to the British Franklin Expedition — Sir John Franklin's attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage.

HEMING AND AWE-ING -- In what is a clear case of art for art's sake, we present an encore showing of one of the most spectacular canoeing works of art. Arthur Heming's Mackenzie Crossing the Rockies, 1793, speaks to what art is all about: a representation of the fanciful and fantastic with a sense of the spirit and majesty that actual experience does not convey. In 1793, Alexander Mackenzie and his group made a short sojourn down the Fraser River which proved far too precipitous for the party. They detoured through the mountains and Bella Coola and made the Pacific Ocean nonetheless - and well before Lewis and Clark. We are republishing this inspiring artwork now that we an properly portray it in its glorious colour. The painting sits in the office of Ontario's Lieutenant-Governor in Toronto where a very small number of people get to enjoy it. Pity. Heming (1870-1940) was a renowned magazine illustrator who was shunned by serious art lovers., but not by us.

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