



Winter 2008

**The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing**

Outfit 131



Photo: Jeremy Harrison

**TAKING A SHOT AT ARTILLERY LAKE** -- Members of the Trans Arctic Expedition gaze across the frozen expanse of Artilery Lake enroute to the mouth of the Back River. The group would follow the route of the HACC in 1985 leading from the Thelon to the Back rivers via the Morse River. Their story of that climb to the Morse begins on Page 6.





# Winter Packet



*David Pelly kindly wrote to properly dispute some comments in the last Outfit's Fall Packet.*

I just read your most recent issue, and feel compelled to write regarding the throw-away line at the end of Dwayne James' letter, which impugns Alex Hall's professional conduct, in my view, without justification. I've known Alex for many years; we share a passion for the Thelon valley and its surroundings. I have seen him "at work" out there with his clients on several occasions, and I'd like to assure your readers that there is no finer canoe trip guide to be found in the Barrens. The fact that every year upwards of one-third of his clients represent repeat business speaks for itself. As does his record of not having a single serious accident in more than 30 summers of operation on the Barrens.

I am quite certain that nothing has ever happened on one of Alex' trips that could not comfortably bear public scrutiny. Indeed the only thing about his trips that he's interested in keeping unpublished is some of their locations – he asks his clients to maintain secrecy about certain rivers and the special places he shows them along these routes. This is, in fact, only a measure of how much he cares about the place. Anyone who is considering a guided canoe trip in Canada's magnificent northern wilderness could do no better than to contact Alex (canoeartctic.com) – I'd say you owe it to your readers to tell them so.

*Owner Lynn Cox updates us on the closing of Canoe Frontier outfitters in Northern Ontario.*

With regard to Canoe Frontier, we had to just let that aspect of our business be "set aside". There is just too much to manage with the air service (in Pickle and Baker Lake), the Shell Aviation fuel business, & our new Bed and breakfast (in Pickle). We did have some good prospects interested in taking over last summer but both fell through. We

## LIVE TO TELL ABOUT IT™

SPOT. THE WORLD'S FIRST SATELLITE MESSENGER.

ASK FOR HELP    CHECK IN    TRACK PROGRESS    ALERT 9-1-1

*We do not run ads in Che-Mun and, despite appearances, this really isn't one, since they are not paying for it. BC subscriber Dave Shakoto sent us a link to this amazing device which appears to be the low cost, convenient answer for northern canoeing trips. The SPOT GPS device is a Canadian made satellite messenger that can track your progress on Google maps and send a help signal if needed. At \$169 US to purchase plus a \$100 per year subscriber fee it would appear to be a perfect compromise of size, price, safety and convenience. Check it out at [www.findmespot.com](http://www.findmespot.com).*

would still be willing to hand off the business to someone who has the passion and willingness to work hard but there just seems to be a lack of young entrepreneurs. It saddens us too that we will not be able to take care of all those canoeists. Many of these guests have become friends. The upside of all of this however, is that we are looking forward to

enjoying our OWN CANOE TRIPS, in the summer time! Virtually unheard of recently. As for folks who contact us now, the float service will still be here in Pickle. It was truly our pleasure flying you and the HACC. Your assistance in our earlier years was a wonderful boost for customers and for our confidence. I hope our paths cross again soon!



## Editor's Notebook

**W**ell, here we are at Outfit 131 already. The issues and the years blur by, and we are coming up to the 100 issue mark since I took *Che-Mun* over from founder Nick Nickels in the summer of 1984 with Outfit 38.

That was the year before the Hide-Away Canoe Club made its mark on a 55 day, 1000 mile trip during which we named a river after Eric Morse. Relatively few people have ventured that way over the years and fewer still on the Morse itself - only a couple of groups that I know of.

Last summer, a group of young Americans on their own epic journey, retraced a big chunk of our route including the passage from the Thelon to the Back River at Garry Lake into which the Morse River drains. The group, which has northern Minnesota summer Camp Kooch-i-ching in common, took to calling our route to the Morse 'Peake's Portage', after three of the Peake brothers who made up half the trip that year.

I guess it kind of goes with Pike's Portage where they started their trip though we never considered using our own name and I am honoured they would do so. Now I think it is probably about time for the Peakes to do Pike's Portage. In any event, Chris Sledzik's story covering the course to the Morse begins on Page 6.

I was happy to see David Pelly's spirited defence of Alex Hall in our Packet. I let stand, to my dismay, unsupported comments casting aspersions on Alex in the Fall Packet. I like to let people say what they want, but that was an unwarranted comment putting Alex in the company of our euphemistically titled villain outfitter 'Barrenland Bob' - who has had a large share of aspersions cast his way lately. I wish to apologize to Alex, whose reputation is sterling and whose judgement is clearly better than mine.

Michael Peake.



*Che-Mun is produced by the Hide-Away Canoe Club and published quarterly. We acknowledge the help of the Publications Assistance Plan in defraying postal costs on issues mailed to Canadian subscribers.*

# Canoesworthy

**A** \$2-million truth commission is underway in Nunavut today to try and solve a long-standing mystery: Who killed thousands of Inuit sled dogs 50 years ago? The Qikiqtani Inuit Association established the independent truth commission, which plans to interview more than 200 Inuit and non-Inuit in 13 eastern Arctic communities in 2008. The commission is investigating controversial federal government policies that affected the Inuit between the 1950s and 1980s. Officials will also comb through hundreds of documents from that era in an attempt to set the historical record straight. The period under review was a difficult one for the Inuit, as many were moved off the land into permanent. Many Inuit blame their current social problems, including high rates of alcohol abuse, domestic violence and suicide, on this part of their history. Some elders have even alleged the RCMP - either acting alone or with the federal government - deliberately murdered up to 20,000 of their sled dogs to help officials control the Inuit and speed up the process of assimilation. For centuries, sled dogs - qimmiit in Inuktitut - had been the Inuit's main source of transportation and a direct link to the land and their food supply. Some elders have tearfully told stories about travelling into a settlement to buy supplies and upon leaving a store, coming across Mounties shooting their harnessed dogs. In 2006, a report by the RCMP found that while thousands of Inuit sled dogs died between the 1950s and 1970s, the Mounties killed them only for reasons of public safety or health. It found no evidence of a sinister plot and suggested that factors such as canine diseases and the introduction of the snowmobile to the Arctic in the 1960s could have also led to the rapid disappearance of sled dogs. Many Inuit who lived through the transition to settlements still have a hard time talking about it.

**T**wo adventurers from Australia say they'll be coming back to Nunavut this spring to finish what they started three years ago: their attempt to trek across Victoria Island, the world's ninth-largest island, on their own.

Chris Bray and Clark Carter want to make the first-ever documented and unsupported trip across the 1,000-kilometre span of the island, which spans the NWT and Nunavut.

During their first attempt in 2005, they struggled with bad weather, equipment breakdowns and threats from wolves and polar bears as they paddled and walked across the island.

After 58 days, they had made it only one-third of the way across.

Three years later, Carter said he and his friend are keen to return north and try again. In May, they will travel to Cambridge Bay, located on the southeastern shore of Victoria Island, and travel the remaining 660 kilometres toward the island's western coast.

In preparation for their second attempt, Carter and Bray, 24, redesigned the specially-designed amphibious cart-kayak hybrids which they used to pull their 200 kilograms of gear during the first trip.

The old carts were "essentially fancy aluminum kayaks with fold-down wheels," according to the pair's website. But their wheels kept getting stuck in the mud and tundra. Bray said the new carts have 11/2-metre tall tires covered with bullet-proof material.

Bray and Carter are currently testing the new carts in their home country, by pulling them along rocks near the beach. Carter said the improved tires are holding up well so far.

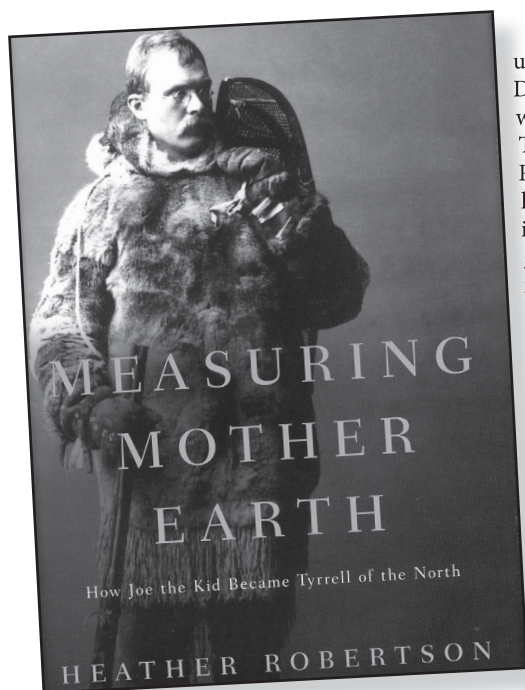
Bray said they also plan to bring their carts to Canada by airplane instead of by truck, in order to avoid delays they faced in 2005.

The two plan to film their trip, called the 1,000 Hour Day Expedition, and document progress on their website.

At more than 217,000 square kilometres, Victoria Island is about double the size of Newfoundland. The western third of the island is part of the Northwest Territories, while the rest is in Nunavut's Kitikmeot region.

◀ CANOESWORTHY continues on Page 11





## Measuring Mother Earth

By Heather Robertson

McClelland & Stewart, 348 pp 2007

\$34.99 ISBN: 978-0-7710-7539-1

Of Joe the Kid, as author Heather Robertson calls J.B. Tyrrell, was in need of a good biography. Previous efforts have been few and weak. This half of the pair of peripatetic siblings, was a shining star in Canada's geological and survey history.

Having always seen him referred to by his initials, J. B., it was a bit odd to see the name Joe throughout Heather Robertson's well researched and lively story, though with a cumbersome title. Born in 1858 at the time of McClintock's discovery of Franklin's boat remains and the publication of Darwin's controversial theory of evolution, young Joe was a natural discoverer from the beginning.

Born in Toronto, along the banks of the Humber River, part of a historic and long portage to the wild northlands, Joe was quick to get into the geology game. He was soon employed by the Geological Survey of Canada under crusty English headmaster type Dr. Selwyn and shortly slogging his way through Canada's vast untracked wilderness under the field command of the diminutive but hugely determined George Mercer Dawson.

A chance discovery of the heretofore unnoticed maps and journals of the fame David Thompson in Ontario's Archives was a turning point. Joe soon realized that Thompson was "Canada's Marco Polo" as Robertson so aptly puts it. He would make it his mission to bring Thompson's astonishing work to a wider audience. That meant going where Thompson had gone - no mean feat to try and cover the 55,000 miles of trails the famed Mr. Astronomer did. But Joe did much of it and using Thompson's notes was able to breathe life and insight into those faded journals. He also lucked out in knowing the man who owned Thompson's Narrative and who'd been trying to get it into published form. Tyrrell would end up doing that with the 1916 publishing of Thomson's *Narrative* for the Champlain Society and rightfully putting David Thompson into greater public focus. One great man helping another, it would seem.

Much detail is rightly given to he and his brother's famous 1893 journey *Across the Sub-Arctics of Canada*, as their book was called. This epic trip is described in detail including some great stories of the three Montreal-area native French brothers, who were their superb canoeists. They even ran Grand Rapids on the Athabasca River to see if it could be done. It could.

Robertson makes a good point about early explorers and natives, who pointed to the north's vast mineral riches. These were largely ignored in favour of the more obvious fur wealth. A couple of centuries on, the mines of the north continue to explode in value and numbers while the beavers are to their dams.

Tyrrell was also famous for making the discovery of a dinosaur bones in Alberta, which eventually spawned the Royal Tyrrell Museum. After failing to strike it rich in the 1898 gold rush, he would later make his fortune from a gold mine in Kirkland Lake.

This book is full of detail, some of it superfluous, but it does introduce us to a wide ranging cast of northern characters whose names keep resurfacing. People like Dawson, Selwyn (see next review), McConnell, Bell and many other names familiar to us now from their northern reports. One surprising omission in Joe's circle of friends is George Douglas. They must have known one another as they led parallel lives, maybe more digging is needed. J. B. Tyrrell lived his later life as a celebrated

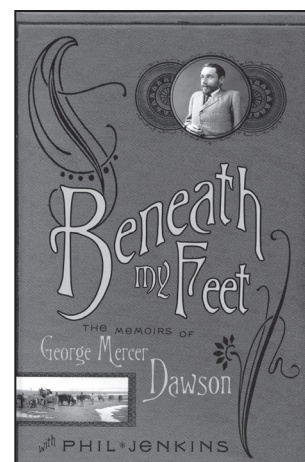
## Beneath My Feet

By Phil Jenkins

McClelland & Stewart 368pp 2007

\$34.99 ISBN: 978-0-7710-4388-8

We have been fortunate indeed these last few years to be handed many biographical bricks for the great wall of Canadian exploration history. Major and minor figures continue to be the subjects of worthy biographies and this tale is another. The story of George Mercer Dawson is a part



of many a northern biography. He was the Chief Geologist of the Canadian Geological Survey from 1875-1901, in what may be called its greatest era of exploration and discovery.

The son of a famed educator and geologist, Sir William Dawson, the young George was crippled by a form of tuberculosis which left him stunted but unbowed. He put a young J.B. Tyrrell through his paces in 1883 and set a tough schedule for any man to follow.

He was also an accomplished photographer for the GSC. Skilled in the newfound art form, he left many valuable images of our frontier now found in the Archives of Canada.

Author Jenkins has taken up the task of presenting Dawson's life in book form, something Dawson had intended to do but he died after a short bout of bronchitis in 1901 at the age of 51. So the book is written in the first person using 95 per cent of Dawson's prodigious writings with some rearrangement for effect.

Yet while we have the bonus of the man's own words, we are missing the structure and form that a true biography would give the tale. There are a great many details of trips that could have been distilled. However, his accounts of hunting buffalo, visiting the wild Queen Charlotte Islands and mapping a large chunk of the northwest is heady stuff. A fascinating man from an amazing era.



## Arctic Spectacles

**The Frozen North In Visual Culture 1818-75**

**By Russell A. Potter 258 pp**

**McGill-Queens University Press, 2007**

**\$39.95 ISBN: 978-773533336**

The Victoria age of romantic and dangerous world exploration preceded the era before photography and mass communication began to shrink and more fully communicate the story of Earth itself and those who ventured on and around it.

This fascinating book looks at the visual depictions of Arctic Victorian exploration to a public enthralled with its terrifying, yet exciting, reality. Author Potter, takes us inside the world of the conveying the Arctic to the public with lantern shows and panoramas, the virtual reality machine of its day. These were large circular paintings which viewers sat in the middle of a large circle while it revolved around them.

The book is nicely illustrated with many fine paintings including Landseers' famous *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, which features a fanciful pair of evil-looking polar bears ripping apart the remains of a deceased English Arctic explorer. It caused a sensation and used bears from a London zoo as models.

Much of the entire era's attention is focussed on the disappearance of John Franklin. The book nicely addresses the very nature of "Britishness" and how the stiff-upper-lip crowd were viewed by their fellow countrymen in the land of frozen savages. Potter provides us with an extremely interesting and literate view of the English world coming smack into the natural realities of a raw New World in an age before movies and photos removed the artistic interpretation that was so beautifully coloured with wondrous fears and mysteries.

## Black Spruce Journals

**By Stewart Coffin**

**184 pp Heron Dance Press, 2007**

**\$19.95 ISBN: 978-1-933937-40-3**

It is a great pleasure to be finally reviewing this book. It took the illustrious Stewart Coffin quite a while to get this published and we are so glad he did and thanks go to Rod MacIver for doing it. *Che-Mun* readers have seen and heard about various pieces of this book over the last few years but it is finally here.

I first became aware of Stewart Coffin's unique name when it was always popping up in various research and trip reports. He'd always been one of the first people there. I distinctly recall his article in *Canoe* magazine on lining years ago. Something about his nonsense prose and paddling resumé told me this was important reading. It was. The art of lining a canoe is one of the most vital skills a northern paddler can learn.

A true Yankee, Stewart began paddling with his late wife Jane in the wilds of Maine. He made the big jump to the Kazan River in 1966, which is featured in the book's longest chapter. He then did the George River the next year and went on to become a Labrador aficionado along the lines of Herb Pohl. Stew was paddled with some of the legendary canoeists including Bob Davis, Dick Irwin, George Luste and Garrett and Alexandra Conover.

Coffin also excelled as a photographer, as did his father. I vividly recall his excellent article on black and white photography also in *Canoe*. There are some very fine examples of his beautiful and thoughtfully composed photographs in this book. Many have been featured in *Che-Mun* over the years.

This is a rich history of true wilderness canoeing by people who really know how to do it. The only accidents and horror stories are those that happened to others; like the green group of students who were stranded at the lip of a major falls on the Moisie. The Moisie is Stewart's favourite river having paddled it seven times! Some of the other rivers covered include the Wacouno, Naskaupi, Romaine, Ugjoktok, Magpie, Ste. Marguerite and Ashuanipi.

*Black Spruce Journals* is a must volume for your library as it is reminiscent of an era now gone, told by a man who thankfully is still with us to tell the tales.

## Mapping a Continent

**Historical Atlas of North America-1492-1814**

**By Raymonde Litalien**

**McGill-Queens Press, 2007 \$89**

This beautifully illustrated book is a treat for the eyes. Translated from the French and with superb reproduction on wonderful paper, *Mapping a Continent* spans three centuries of mapping the New World.

Back in an age when maps were equal parts imagination, artistry and science, this book beautifully conveys how all three played a part in charting this continent.

This project was generated by the Quebec Archives and Library and is naturally rich with French maps and history, covers the continent with resplendent cartography. The last year of the book includes David Thompson's famous 1814 huge map of the Northwest Territories, shown in its faded glory over two large pages. A fascinating book for map and northern history lovers.



From the sumptuously illustrated *Mapping a Continent* showing a 1677 map of Canada by Pierre du Val based on the unprinted work of Samuel de Champlain.





**FIRE ON ICE - A fragile fire on a frozen lake enroute to the Back River via the Morse for TAE members Chase Edgerton, Sam Harrison, Robert Woodhull, Chris Sledzik.**

## Across Pike's and Peake's in Search of the Sea

*Trans Arctic Expedition overcomes obstacles to reach the Morse River and the Arctic Ocean*

**Story By CHRIS SLEDZIK • Photos By JEREMY HARRISON**

For as long as paddlers have explored the terrain of Canada's lakes and rivers, the northern regions of the arctic have held a special mystique for explorers. Adventurers seeking lands of untarnished beauty and untouched wilderness retreat to the remote regions of the arctic seeking the tranquility of natural beauty and the sense of accomplishment that comes from traversing long desolate stretches of God's country. Six men set off on such an adventure in the summer of 2007 seeking these glorious rewards while raising money and awareness for WWF-Canada. The Trans-Arctic Canoe Expedition started their journey in the Northeast end of Great Slave Lake with a travel itinerary including over 800 miles and two months of hard work and persistence. The group was assembled by Jeremy Harrison from a long list of eligible candidates affiliated with Camp Kooch-i-ching, a wilderness canoeing camp in International Falls, Minnesota. Harrison, the oldest and most experienced of the group at 47, set off on the arctic adventure with his twin sons, Sam and Alex, 18; Chase

Edgerton, 23. Robert Woodhull, 18, and myself, 23. All of us knew that the trip would be exhausting both physically and mentally. The extent of our hardships would be unveiled slowly over the course of seven weeks, but our dedication to the cause fueled our every step.

We used the facilities of Camp Kooch-i-ching just south of the Canadian border to prepare for the trip in late May and early June. We packed the food and tested the equipment excited for the trip to begin. One pre-trip activity, however, elicited an anxious fear rather than excitement as it showed the audacity of our plan. I remember laying out the maps that charted our proposed journey. Simply organizing the cluttered papers was a task in itself, but once we highlighted the path we would travel we stepped back awestruck and nearly horrified. Laid out side-by-side the maps spanned four large tables in Camp Kooch-i-ching's library. Lakes, rivers, portages and streams would take us across the seemingly mythical lands of the arctic. We were in for an adventure.

Most of the route we had planned seemed feasible, eliciting elated emotions spurred on by a positive attitude. Leaving Great Slave Lake via the well-travelled Pike's Portage would be an invigorating start to the journey presenting us with an opportunity to bond as a group and increase physical stamina early on in the trip. Paddling north through Artillery



Lake would bring us to the Lockhart River, which would then lead us into the Hanbury River. Travelling downstream on these rivers in the Thelon River watershed would prove relaxing and full of wildlife. Caribou, wolves, grizzly, musk-oxen, snow fox, wolverines, ptarmigan, and moose are just some of the creatures we would witness on our journey.

Once onto the Thelon we could take our time approaching what was certain to be the most difficult portion of the trip—a portion that had been navigated only once before to our knowledge. As the Thelon River reaches one of its most northern points 40 km east of Beverly Lake around the Ursus Islands and starts to bend eastward gracing the edges of the Akiliniq Hills, we would begin an exhausting and treacherous 90 km trek up river and over land to reach the Morse River. Named for legendary canoeing explorer Eric Morse, the name was given by the first group of travelers to ever paddle the river. Led by the Peake brothers in 1985, a group of six men battled to make it over the Akiliniq Hills and into the Arctic Ocean Watershed that would lead them to the Back River and eventually out to Chantrey Inlet—this was our goal as well.

For convenience sake our group referred to this chain of portages and pull-overs as Peake's Portage. A play off the commonly referred to Pike's Portage that we travelled at the start of our trip, the similarities between the two passages ended with their names. The short route off of Great Slave Lake on Pike's Portage took us over short stretches of well-beaten trails between the relatively large lakes. Apart from the frequently travelled portage trails, Pike's Portage is not a height-of-land portage spanning two watersheds. A portage system that travels between watersheds presents the difficulty of travelling up-hill as well as forward. The edge of a watershed is located at the highest point, and in order to cross into the Arctic Ocean watershed we had to ascend the heights of the Akiliniq Hills fighting upstream to reach the Morse River. In the end it took our group five days to cross the land between the Thelon and Morse Rivers. We used a combination of techniques to ford Peake's Portage: paddling and pulling upstream; carrying fully loaded boats; sliding the Royalex Nova Craft Canoes through shallow waters; and other portaging improvisations to get to the end. We fought against the terrain and the elements as we surpassed over thirty portages to reach the Morse River marked by a two-meter cairn assembled by the Hide-Away Canoe Club over twenty years ago. To best capture the hardships and happenings we endured over the five days, the remainder of this piece highlights each day spent on Peake's Portage interlaced with excerpts from the journal I kept on the trip. This combination of immediate and post-trip reflection on the experience gives a consummate synopsis of the journey and its physical and mental impact on us as trans-arctic travelers.

#### **Day 0 - July 9, 2007: Last day on the Thelon**

The current in the Thelon River enabled us to make quick easy miles providing us with much-needed rest for a few days. The first few weeks of our trip had been plagued with ice, 130 km of which we walked across with loaded canoes behind us in tow. Finally free of the fro-

zen lakes, we made up some time on the Thelon which afforded us enough time to rest up before reaching the start of Peake's Portage. Below are a few excerpts from my journal from our last day on the Thelon showcasing the anticipation for the hard days to come, as well as describing the beauty of the area we travelled through.

"We seem to be moving away from the greener parts of the arctic and into the Akiliniq Hills in the Thelon Bluffs. The Akiliniq Hills are no more than 300 ft. high but seeing them for the first time marking our proposed pathway tomorrow was glorious. The small hills look like mountains amongst the flat arctic terrain and stand against the horizon as a mix between rolling green pastures and soft rocky ascents. The sun started to shine as we made dinner after an afternoon rest in the tents sheltering ourselves from the rain. As the skies cleared, the sun lit up the Akiliniq Hills giving a differ-



**At the Morse River Cairn, now a few feet shorter than originally built in 1985. L-R: Robert Woodhull, Chase Edgerton, Alex and Sam Harrison, Chris Sledzik and Jeremy Harrison.**

ent view on the next few days of portaging—though difficult they will provide beauty and a change in daily activity and scenery. We went over maps again to set out exactly what we will do tomorrow and look forward to making it past what has been renowned by the group as the crux of the trip—the most difficult part thus far, yet a challenge we are up to. We will be referencing Michael Peake's log, a member of the only other group to have made the journey we are about to make towards the Morse. That group that made the trip over 20 years ago was the first group of white explorers to travel the Morse and with persistence and determination we will be one of the few others. We must

proceed with clear direction, physical diligence and mental tranquility."

#### **Day 1 - July 10, 2007: Headed towards the Morse**

Despite enormous amounts of mental preparation, the first day into Peake's Portage was shockingly strenuous. The morning consisted of upstream paddling and pulling through the shallow stream that flows almost due south into the Thelon. I remember the pains of wading through the icy waters of the arctic stream on unstable footing and slippery rocks. Members of the group complained of their feet going numb as we lined the canoes around protruding rocks against the swift current. There was no break once we reached the head of the stream. Two monstrous portages overwhelmed by boggy moss and mosquitoes laid ahead of us on the day. One of the portages was a steep up-hill hike that spanned just over 2 km. Overall we made around 15 km on the day, satisfied with the distance covered considering the intense challenge of the travel conditions. The journal excerpt below again describes the beauty of the land and how the uniqueness of our journey served as motivation to continue—the mind-set remains: "every step forward is a step in the right direction."

"We left the Thelon today traveling upstream for the first time since passing over the Hanbury portage (height-of-land) into the Thelon Watershed. We will be portaging and paddling upstream out of the Thelon watershed on this journey towards the Morse until we reach Morse Lake over the height-of-land portage putting us into the Arctic Ocean watershed, a big step in our long journey across the Arctic, making these difficult porta-

◀ continues on Page 10





# Twelve Days to an Even Keele

*Following is a heartfelt story by Cathy Macdonald submitted eight months after her Keele River expedition with Canoe North Adventures run by Al Pace and Lin Ward in Orangeville Ontario. They sent us this piece and we asked to run it. Always nice to see when someone new to northern paddling 'gets it'.*

## **Lessons Learned in a Canoe!** *Reflections on the Keele River Expedition August 2006*

By CATHY MACDONALD

I think it's safe to say that my husband, Jamie and I are at the "Is that all there is?" phase of middle age. We are constantly busy with such things as work, kids, volunteer commitments, elderly parents, meetings, and socializing - but we struggle to find real meaning in all the commotion.

So as I was approaching my "big" mid-life birthday with a dream of touring the Tuscan Countryside, Jamie signed us up for a 2-week wilderness expedition with Canoe North Adventures. I suspect this is because it is something he had always wanted to do, so thought it would be the perfect birthday gift for me!

I considered the prospect of paddling the Keele River located in the Northwest Territories. Let's see... paddle hard all day, no showers for 12 days, do our own cooking in some kind of soot-covered pot over a fire, lug around heavy gear, sleep in a sleeping bag on the ground in a tent surrounded by bugs and wild animals, with all the experience of a weekend or two paddling in Algonquin Park. How perfect does that sound??

I had several months from signup day to departure for my trepidation to build. Might I get "up close and personal" with a grizzly bear? Would my inexperience let the group down? Was I fit enough for the physical demands of the trip? A practice session on the Grand River in the spring with Guides Al Pace and Lin Ward eased my mind somewhat as "eddy turns", "draws", "cross-bow draws" and "lean downstream" became part of my vocabulary - although they weren't yet a big part of my skill set!

Well, it turns out there's a lot one can learn in a canoe. Over the course of this expedition I learned a few things I expected to learn, and many, many more that I didn't.

Jamie and I were the least experienced paddlers in our group of ten so naturally, whenever we paddled in the same canoe, we seemed to lag far behind the others. He suggested that I paddle just a little harder but my arms were already feeling like rubber! Then one day, out of the blue, (well, with a little coaching from Lin and Al), we GOT IT. It was all about finding the current and allowing ourselves to be carried by it, rather than fighting it - "going with the flow", so to speak. Suddenly everything felt effortless. Great life lesson learned!

Then there was this issue of confidence. I didn't have much - fast water paddling was just so far outside my comfort zone. But here's what I learned - confidence is the sum of good teaching (thanks Al

and Lin!), experience (say, paddling 375 km. of river) and an enthusiastic cheering section. I couldn't have asked for more encouragement and support than I got from our wonderful paddling gang. The amazing thing was that by the final days of the trip, Jamie and I had abandoned the safer gentle water on the inside of the river bends in favour of the "big bouncy water" on the outside of the curves - with whoops of delight, I might add. Riding those waves, feeling the icy water spray on our faces, was more fun than any roller coaster ride. Exhilarating!

One day we had a hiking adventure that truly stands out as a memorable learning experience. The plan was to hike several hours along the nearby Ekwi River valley until we reached the Godlin River where we would be rewarded by a shower in an ancient hot spring gushing from the mountainside. We had discussed before setting out that this was a challenging hike, and that teamwork and possibly a little luck would be required if we were to reach our destination. The group decision was that if any portion of the hike seemed to be too much for even one hiker, we would turn back together.

As we tramped through the woods, singing loudly (and poorly!) to deter any wildlife from venturing near us, we came upon our first obstacle. The fast-moving Ekwi had to be crossed in order for us to continue up the valley. So with hands grasped tightly to one another, we waded nearly waist-deep through the bone-chilling water in a single line, each of us protected from the swift current by the person upstream, until we arrived, breathless, at the other side. We sure appreciated the value of teamwork at that moment.

The second obstacle proved even larger than the river crossing. This one was more of a mountain climb - on a "goat path" only inches wide in places with a sheer drop on one side down to the rushing river below. This little section of the hike didn't make any of us jump for joy, but for two in the group who had a more serious fear of heights, it was nearly heart stopping. We knew turning back was an option, but at the same time, that hot-spring dream was awfully appealing. Much handholding and encouragement ensued and a rope was rigged up the steep hillside for climbers to hang on to. In the end, though, it was the summoning of extraordinary courage and inner strength by our two apprehensive hikers that allowed us all to proceed. We returned to camp that evening, exhausted from our daylong hiking adventure, full of respect and admiration for those who dared to push their personal limits. And, yes, the incredible experience of bathing in the ancient hot spring perched high over the Godlin River was a memory for life indeed.

Spending time on the river clearly taught all of us a bit about having fun - something we seem to forget in the day-to-day rat race of city life and "to do" lists. But it all started to come back to us on the banks of the Keele. There were hilarious moments as we tried to write group poems after a particularly hearty selection of cocktails at Happy Hour, or attempted to crush opponents at euchre under the midnight sun. On the night of my 50th birthday, Jamie baked a chocolate cake in the dutch oven which we devoured while watching a black bear

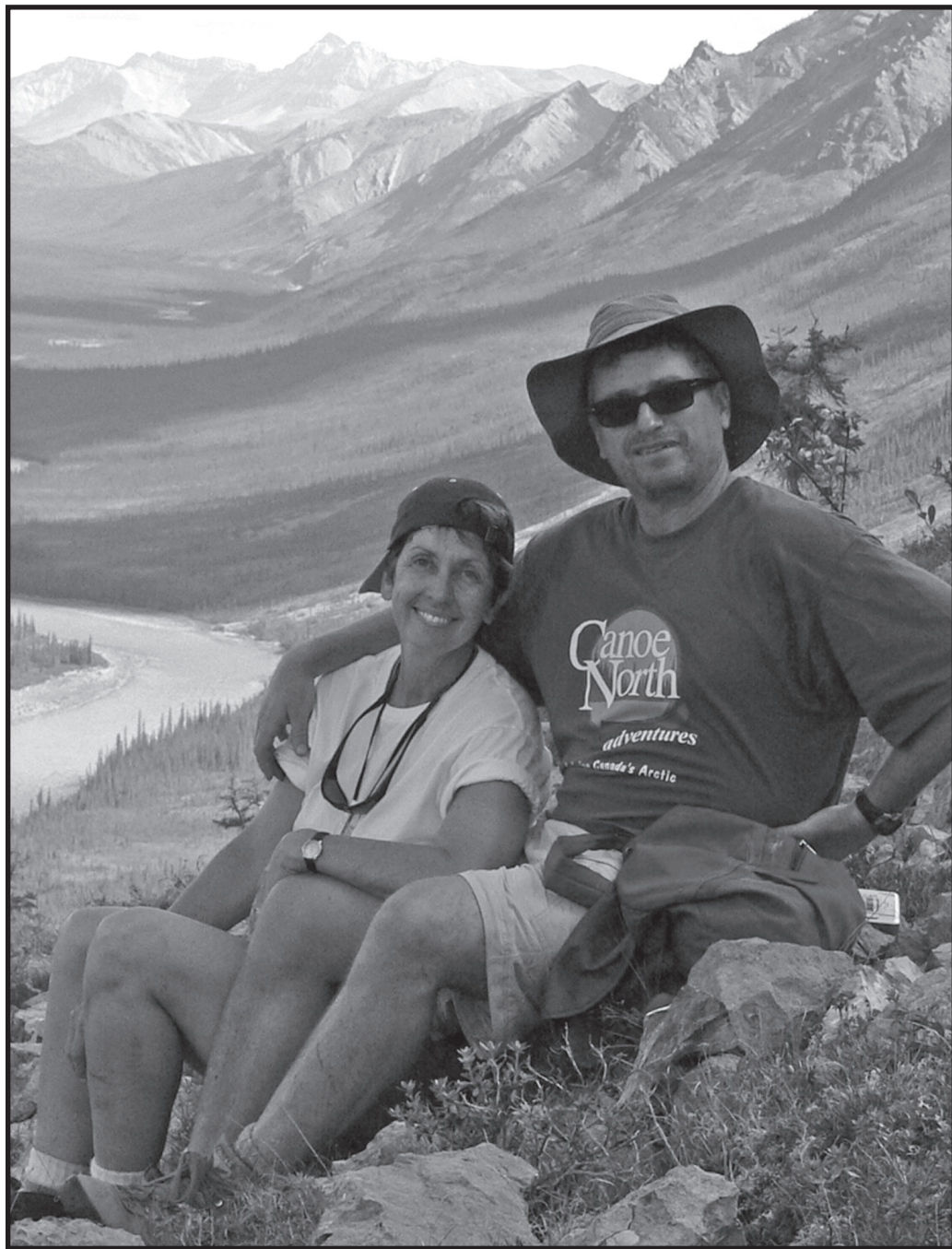


walk along the river's edge! I recall spontaneous "bocce rock" tournaments at our riverside campsites, and the excitement of swimming with a brave few in the icy waters of the Keele. Hearing the whoops of delight from "the guys" down at the fishing hole as they caught (and released) another huge bull trout was unforgettable! And I'm not sure I have ever laughed as hard as I did watching one of the more reserved members of our group perform a striptease - from a discreet distance, of course! - as he waded into the pristine water to wash. (Perhaps we have to blame that one on Happy Hour as well.)

But by far the most important lesson I learned over that marvellous two weeks was to slow down and appreciate the world and people around me. I remember our last night on the mighty Mackenzie River, when one of my co-mates and I were finishing our drinks by the fire and talking about some of the challenges and frustrations in our lives. We looked up and just above the trees on the horizon there was a huge yellow moon perfectly reflected in the shimmering water. It was breathtakingly beautiful. All thoughts of problems and frustrations faded - I felt like a part of something much larger, and all I really had to do was "go with the flow", not fight the current.

So I don't really know what I was looking for as I set off on the river last August, but I think I found it. In the year since we have returned home from our paddling trip, Jamie and I have noticed subtle changes in our outlook on life. We are no longer satisfied with the mundane, or the busy treadmill that takes us nowhere. It makes more sense to slow down, consider what we really want, and then set about going after it. Our confidence buoyed by achievements on the river, and inspired by others on our trip, we try to push our own limits. Brave enough to venture outside our comfort zones, we dive into new challenges, and sometimes even succeed!

When life gets too hectic, or presents us with setbacks, Jamie and I endeavor to find that same sense of inner peace that surrounded us



**Cathy and Jamie Macdonald of Toronto living a great moment in the Keele River valley.**

that magical night under the moon on the Mackenzie River. And we have promised each other that if we should ever feel that calm, that confidence, that inspiration slipping away from our lives, we will know that it is time for another wilderness encounter with Canoe North Adventures.



### ***Across Pikes and Peakes* continued**

ging days well worth the pain and anguish through each and every tiny pothole. It is also a wonder to think that no one has seen the sights we will be seeing for the next week for over 20 years, as we are only the second group to travel the Morse River. The Akiliniq hills are glorious in the sun and traveling over them gives a sense of pride to us as explorers of the north. Using maps and a log it's hard to say we are venturing in uncharted territories but the pure notion of lands that are traveled by so few makes the journey a special one. We paddled upstream today and lined the canoes for almost five miles before reaching the potholes that start our portaging adventure. We made it over two portages, one of which was a straight up-hill battle to a small pond on top of a hill which we are now camped beside. There will be more uphill portaging in the next few days as we break out of the Thelon watershed and into the Arctic Ocean watershed, but the ascents will be worth it as the remainder of our trip will be a downstream venture on the Morse and Back Rivers.... I look forward to venturing further into the gorgeous territory taken for granted by so many knowing that the beauty is there for us to behold and for no others. Any paddler who enjoys the vast reaches of nature can appreciate the uniqueness of the pleasure that comes from witnessing lands only a canoe or kayak can take you to. We treasure the opportunity to see the broad gentle sweep of green mountains soaked in sun and adorned by lofty clouds and blue sky as true treasures of Mother Nature, this time not being missed out on by man, but taken in all their splendor."

### **Day 2 – July 11, 2007: Navigation difficulties in the barren land.**

One of the biggest differences between Peake's Portage to the headwaters of the Morse and other portages is the lack of trails. Though we benefitted from the open expanses of the barren lands that allowed us to see for kilometers, the absence of distinctive land forms made navigation difficult. We used compass readings and GPS technology (a luxury compared to the technology of previous travelers in this region) though little mishaps in direction were still bound to occur. These little mishaps, while minimal in actual time and effort lost are magnified at the time of the situation. When compounded with the humid day, furious mosquitoes and 70 kg worth of gear on your back the situation can seem much more frustrating than it truly is. Despite the difficulties, however, we were able to complete 8 portages covering around 11 km. The portion of my journal below describes some of the frustrations of portaging in these conditions showcasing some of the mental frustration experienced during these long and excruciating days.

"Most of the ground is made by walking interspersed with short periods of paddling across potholes—small ponds and lakes linked together in a portage system. Peake refers to the portage to the Morse as a link of potholes existing more in the imagination than in actual geographical congruence and we saw exactly that today. We start each portage slowly ascending a hill without the guidance of a trail, aimed at an ambiguous horizon point we determined from a compass reading or ascertained from topography in the background. Traversing the barren beauty is a mental challenge as it is unsure whether your direction actually coordinates with your intended direction or not until about 100 meters before you reach the water. The portages still slope gently upwards as we increase our elevation to reach the Arctic Ocean watershed. The terrain is gorgeous and you can truly get the feeling of being on untouched mountain lakes surrounded by not only uninhabited, but untouched natural beauty.... I'm writing outside as the mosquitoes, though fierce in number, don't seem to be biting as tenaciously as mosquitoes that are more acclimated to human populations. The scenery with the sun still high in the sky soaking the pasture green hills on this oasis of gentle beauty is

serene and humbling. The land is vast and rolling as the clouds in the sky gracefully compliment the subtle peacefulness of the barren land. I will not soon forget the landscapes on this portage path to the Morse as the Akiliniq hills seem to repay our hard-fought efforts on the trail with impeccable wonders for the eyes."

### **Day 3 – July 12, 2007: Mental toughness prevails.**

As the days passed on Peake's Portage our bodies grew sore and our minds weary. The days were difficult and though group morale was still high, the long strenuous days started to take a toll on our attitudes and demeanors. Striving forward on the third day of our journey toward the Morse, we maintained our persistent mind-set pulling out an array of techniques to overcome the cumbersome terrain that lay between us and the Arctic Ocean watershed. Though we only travelled fewer than 13 km, this day was one that tested us physically and mentally, presenting us with obscure landforms to surpass. We confronted shallow streams, short stretches of land, and narrow winding channels and ended the day having completed nearly ten portages in ways we never would have imagined. The journal entry below describes some of the innovative techniques we used throughout the day and gives a glimpse into the mind-frame I kept to keep a positive attitude.

"We continued our trek across the Akiliniq hills today towards the Morse River, facing a slew of portaging obstacles and difficulties testing the group's mental and physical prowess.... We pulled out all the portaging tricks including the six man carry and a six man slide with loaded boats as we pushed and pulled the boats through a set of potholes strung together by the shallow stream. The days trek, set on a relatively flat expanse of the Akiliniq hills, proved to necessitate a variety of techniques, the last of which we resorted traditional portaging. Making good ground and even heading down some hills towards the height of land portage which we will hopefully cross sometime tomorrow. The barren land remains a compilation of simple beauty matching gentle green slopes with rock hills and clear blue water. In the sun the rolling horizons and clouds are wondrous and leave us no question as to why we are putting ourselves through these incredible hardships. We spend a solid 8-10 hours each day grueling on the trail making tough but necessary miles to continue our plunge into the vacate, untouched wilderness. Spirits are tested as the difficult days continue but are lifted as we remind ourselves that we are making good progress through all of our efforts. We remember our cause and the fact that the land brings its own rewards."

### **Day 4 – July 13, 2007: So close we can taste it.**

After three excruciating days on the chain of portages that forces us to carry our gear most of the way, this day provided us with the less strenuous option of paddling. Though some of the paddling was upstream and included a fair bit of tracking the canoes from the shore, overall the day took considerably less effort than the previous three days. We stopped around 4 p.m. debating a night paddle across the 10 km lake that lay between us and the final stretch of portages before the Morse. Having already made over 16 km on the day and facing a stiff head-wind on the lake, we decided to stay put for the night and face what we hoped to be the final day on Peake's Portage in the morning.

"The day consisted of two portages we elected to take to shave off miles from upstream battles, both of which were easy after the conditioning of the last few days. The scenery in the narrow and shallow rivers was amazing, hosting sand bottoms in crystal clear waters that make the water fade from a deep blue to aqua green. The water meets the eye at sandy or rocky banks above which lie either wind-swept dunes or rolling green hills. God's country is isolated and ours: a rewarding treasure for our travels thus far. We are





*still anticipating our first musk-ox sighting and were intrigued by the sight of tracks and fur scattered throughout the day's journey, but have yet to behold one of the lumbering black creatures in person.... We're so close to the Morse we can taste it and I believe it is the built up anticipation that is driving us so hard, and leaving disappointment in the fact that we could not make more miles in the evening. We know we made a practical decision, and as hard of a day as we have had no one should be disappointed about the day's progress."*

#### **D**ay 5 – July 14, 2007: Through to the Morse.

We finished Peake's Portage today arriving at Morse Lake with plans to layover tomorrow near the cairn constructed by Morse and his crew over 20 years ago. We accomplished 9 portages today along with a hefty amount of paddling through headwinds over an 8 hour span that seemed to throw everything head-long at us as we neared the Morse River. We crossed the official height-of-land portage in our second portage of the morning officially leaving the Thelon/Hudson Bay watershed into the Arctic Ocean watershed that flows through the Back River into Chantrey Inlet. The portaging and pulling over only grew more difficult as we paddle a small stream full of jagged rocks that could have easily torn a hole in one of our Royalex boats. We chose to portage around most of the streams putting in only in potholes deep enough to ensure that we wouldn't scrape our heavily loaded canoes. The terrain changed drastically after the height of land portage, as the gentle sur-

roundings of the Akiliniq hills (which we sadly left behind us after four days of glorious splendor) changed to jagged barren rock territory. The banks were lined 15-50 meters in from shore with large boulder fields holding sharp rough rocks seemingly untouched by Mother Nature's usual smoothing elements of water, wind and erosion. The boulders ranging in size from full size cars to softballs appeared to surround us taking on all shapes and creating what looked like an impassable barrier. It is easy to understand why this area is so uninhabited as even animals would have a difficult time traversing the boulder fields that laid between us and the Morse. We portaged through the difficult terrain with careful steps through the blustery wind, having to two-man the boats over our head at certain points. We utilized the mule-lead technique in the nastiest of winds, having one man hold the bow painter of a canoe while the other man portaged the boat. This technique proved crucial especially during the last passage, which was by far the most difficult of them all.... We decided that tomorrow we would take the first rest of our trip, now 27 days in. After 5 days of 30 portages and plenty of stream pulling and pull-overs our bodies and minds were exhausted, but once in the Morse we were relieved and even felt a mid-trip "trip-high" signifying that we had past the crux of our trip leaving the most difficult of tasks behind us. Apart from bad luck with wind on Gary Lake and potential mishaps on rapids along the Back River, little stands between us and Chantrey Inlet. Though we're merely half-way into our journey, we rest as if the trip is nearly complete. "

#### **CANOE SWORTHY** *continued*

**A** team of international scientists have taken cores from the sediments of a Pingualuit (Chubb) Crater lake and found the deep crater has lived through two ice glacial ice ages.

The researchers traveled by increasingly smaller planes, Ski-doo's and finally sleds dragged on foot to arrive at the Pingualuit Crater, located in the Parc National des Pingualuit in northern Quebec. The crater formed about 1.4 million years ago as the result of a meteorite impact, and today it hosts a lake about 267 meters deep. Its unique setting – the lake has no surface connection to other surrounding water bodies – makes it a prime candidate for the study of lake sediments. Scientists study lake sediments to determine environmental information beyond historical records. Most sediments of lakes in previously glaciated areas have limitations – they only date back to the last ice age. Glaciers typically carve out any sediments in a lake bed, meaning any record before the ice age is swept away.

However, the unique composition of the Pingualuit Crater Lake led scientists to speculate that the sediments beneath its icy exterior might have escaped glacial sculpting. So last May they hauled equipment on ski-doo's and slogged through sub-zero temperatures for three weeks so they could core sediments and collect data from the lake. An echosounder indicated that the lake bottom may have more than 100 meters of relatively fine-grained sediments altogether.

**P**roponents of the Bathurst Inlet port and road proposal say they've made a big step forward in the project, by submitting a draft environmental impact statement to the Nunavut Impact Review Board. All 5,000 pages and 10 binders of the impact statement from the Kitikmeot Corp. and Nuna Logistics, which are jointly proposing the port and road project, arrived at the review board's offices in Cambridge Bay in January. The \$270-million proposed project would bring fuel and supplies from a deep sea port at the bottom of Bathurst Inlet in Nunavut, along a 211-kilometre road southwest to diamond mines in the Contwoyto Lake

area of the Northwest Territories. The proponents hope the road and port will allow for more supplies to be shipped year-round to the diamond mines, as well as open up opportunities for mineral development in Nunavut's west Kitikmeot region.

If it gets all the necessary approvals, the road and port would employ 260 people during construction and 57 people in its operation. Construction could begin as early as next year.

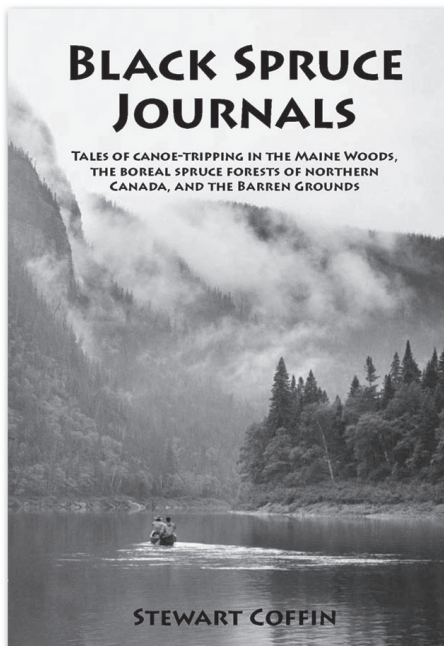
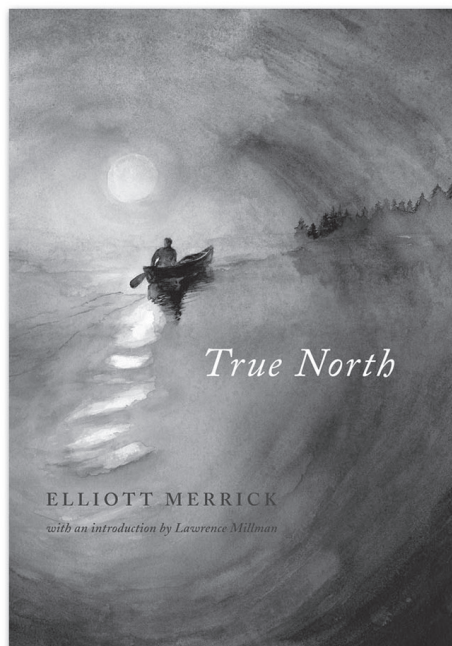
**A** new approach aimed at protecting Nunavut's caribou herds is in the works. The Nunavut government has begun developing a caribou management strategy in light of growing interest in mining and other industrial development in the territory.

The strategy will cover three main areas of concern: "It will work to conserve caribou populations for future generations, provide the minimum necessary interference with the many Nunavummiut that rely on caribou, while not unduly interfering with the development of Nunavut's economy."

The territorial government will work with the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. to develop the strategy. Nunavut residents will also be consulted.

Quttiktuq MLA Levi Barnabas, who represents a High Arctic riding that depends on the Peary caribou herd, said he especially wants to make sure elders take part in any caribou strategy consultations. Barnabas said there are elders' societies in every community in the territory, and their members know the animals best. The strategy's first draft will be reviewed during a caribou workshop in Iqaluit later this month. Netser said the final strategy should be completed one year from now.

Earlier this year, the federal government said it will move ahead with plans to place the Peary caribou, Canada's most northerly caribou herd, on the endangered species list. Other Caribou herds with a presence in the territory include the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds.



For the first time, Che-Mun is offering for sale to our subscribers a selection of superb northern canoeing books published by Heron Dance.

They are available by mail through Che-Mun. Just send a cheque to our post-box payable to Che-Mun and your order will be mailed to you promptly.

We've done our best to reduce the cost of postage.

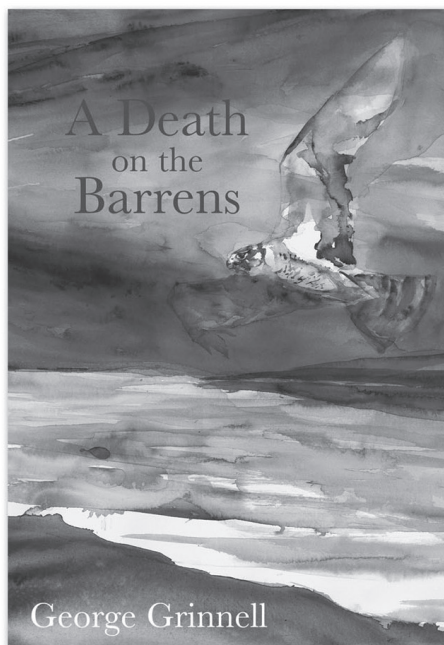
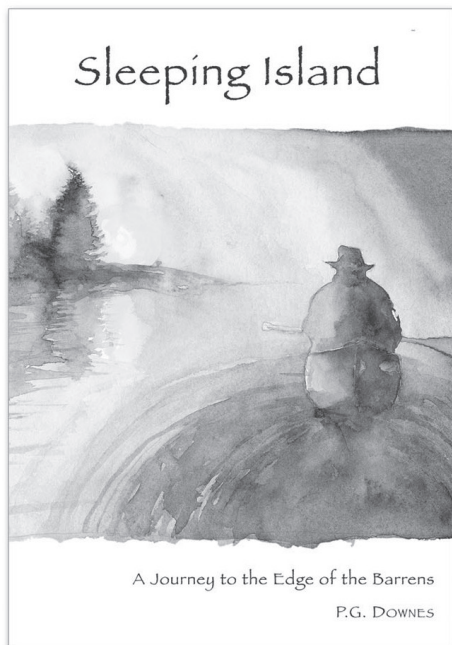
Each book is \$19.95 except *Death on the Barrens* which is \$24.95.

Total mailing cost to be added to your order.

One Book	\$4
Two Books	\$6
Three Books	\$8
Four Books	\$10

No taxes.

Payable in the currency of the country you reside.



## **Che-Mun**

Box 548, Station O  
Toronto, ON Canada M4A 2P1  
E: [che-mun@rogers.com](mailto:che-mun@rogers.com)  
T: 416.221.3225

## **Che-Mun**

Founded in 1973 by Nick Nickels  
NEW RATES: \$25 per year  
US subscriptions in US dollars  
Published by the Hide-Away Canoe Club

## **Che-Mun**

The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing  
Please visit our Web Site:  
[www.ottertooth.com/che-mun](http://www.ottertooth.com/che-mun)  
Michael Peake, Publisher.