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nastawgan

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Looking east from the ridge, Ranger Seal Lake is to the far left.

Thlewiaza 2017: Exploring Sleeping Island and No-Man's River

Part II

Story by Chris Rush

Photos by Chris Rush and Jenny Johnson

Tuesday, July 11th, 2017

A scary river crossing

On the water we had a lazy paddle on some pretty easygoing river, dragged along immersed in soft boils by a strong current. There was a real forest on the north bank, and real barrens on the south bank – the reverse of what one would expect and quite the contrast. The sun was out, the sky ethereal blue, the air was still, and songbirds chatted on the forested bank as we calmly paddled east in deep water. Paradise.

A lazy morning paddle. No, that's not a bird, or a drone, in the sky…

A while later, we hit the scariest rapid on the river. This is how Mowat put it: "We rounded a hairpin bend to find ourselves facing a stretch of white-water worse than anything Charles or I had ever imagined. The river plunged into a mile-long gorge, splitting into twin cataracts around a whale's-back island of ice and water-polished rock. The western cataract was so clogged with boulders an eel would have had difficulty slipping through. The other was a flume built by colossi down which the bulk of the river thundered over a series of ledges with such cacophony we could hardly make ourselves heard."

More hyperbole? We were about to find out!

The island was about 1.5 kilometers long, with most of the water indeed crashing down the right channel, the left channel a "boneyard," as Curt later put it. So, the right side it would be, the upper section relatively easy if hugging the right shore, the middle section fast water with few obstacles, but the trickiest part was at the bottom – water thundered over ledges and boulders without an obvious safe channel. Going over the last section would truly trash a fully-loaded canoe. In fact, it would trash any canoe.

So the plan was to stay close to the right shore, maneuvering around rocks and over small ledges, hit an eddy before a bigger ledge, spin and front ferry over to the island, check the route from there, and hopefully line the canoe down the left side of the biggest drop.

We reached the eddy without difficulty, turned and headed across the river. The current was strong, forcing us to paddle furiously to make it across before the nasty section at the bottom of the rapid. The river was about two hundred meters wide at this point, and we had about two hundred meters of downstream current to make it across.

I gritted my teeth and we set off after the lead canoe, although as we were angled upstream I couldn't really see them or follow them. Perhaps not seeing the maelstrom below was better? Jenny kept yelling at me to "paddle harder" and "hold the angle." Perhaps she thought I wasn't trying and had a death wish, but she need not have worried – I certainly didn't want to end up going backwards over those vicious rocky ledges at the bottom. Dreading disaster, my arms were almost pulled out of their sockets, I paddled so hard. Heart pounding, we made it to the island with meters to spare, but then looking over at Curt, I felt somewhat embarrassed – he looked cool as a cucumber. Just another day at the office.

We portaged the gear about 150 meters on the island, reloaded our canoe, lined it to the final drop, then managed to proceed with just a short lift-over. After running another big rapid, we set

up camp on the west bank.

Peace at last. It was time for a river bath to wash off the sweaty grime of a tough day's work. As we sat by the river eating, the grayling started surfacing for flies by the dozen, but we were too tired to fish. During a beautiful sunset we walked west on the highest esker for a short distance to enjoy the view.

Wednesday, July 12th, 2017
An easy day

It was a hot, sunny wake-up, baking in the tent once again, at eight o'clock, with bacon and eggs (well, actually dried eggs) waiting in the cook shelter. This was followed by a fun morning of paddling in mostly swift current and long, runnable, boat-scoutable class 2 rapids.

We stopped for lunch on one of the knolls, where someone whipped out some sausage – black pepper crusted this time. Looking around we spotted a pair of seals, one black, the other almost white, sunning on a rock, looking back at us.

After lunch were two long, fun rapids that we blew right through. But it had become too hot to comfortably paddle – 34 degrees Celsius – so we stopped in the lee of an esker to camp. We hiked up to the top of the esker, which afforded magnificent views.

The wind dropped as the sun faded, meaning that the bugs came out in thick hordes, making up for their earlier absence. They were so thick that I had trouble seeing, but brainstorming I pulled out my swim goggles and donned them. It worked like a charm until they started fogging up!

I read some of Oberholtzer's journal out loud in the shelter that night, marveling at the audacity of their trip. They had a much tougher time on this section of river due to the low water, Billy commenting at one point, "even a fish wouldn't swim that channel."

To bed with a loon hooting a lonely song. Tomorrow, we will be entering Edehon Lake.

Thursday, July 13th, 2017
Edehon Lake beckons

When I awoke at 7 a.m. it was already hot, muggy and buggy. I do not relish paddling in tropical conditions, and I travel this far north to escape such torment. Another curious seal popped its head out of the water to join us for breakfast, its big eyes glistening in the sunshine.

In the canoes that morning we were uncomfortable, suffering from heat exhaustion, while negotiating the now very wide river, so full of islands that I soon gave up trying to decide where we were on the map, instead just following the lead canoe and observing the flooded river banks as we drifted downstream.

Nevertheless, an internal alarm went off when I noticed that we seemed to be drifting too far left, as I knew that the river would bend right into the big lake. The satellite images had told me weeks ago that the far right side of the river looked for the most part shallow and

Map

Scouting "Whale-back" rapids.

impassable, but we still appeared to be going too far off course. I decided to pull my GPS out, which confirmed that indeed, Curt and Lee were taking us into a large bay that would have added many kilometers to our route. From that point on we more or less followed the right shore, dodging low, ugly, half-submerged little islands densely covered with willows. Thank God we didn't have to camp on one of them! There was more than enough water to float the canoes on this route, so we made good time. I was apprehensive of the entry to the lake, as the maps had several rapids marked on the two main routes. We stayed in the right channel, eventually turning a corner that led into about fifty meters of easy, big waves churning down a steady gradient. The second rapid marked on the map turned out to be just a few riffles of water, a shallow rapid probably washed out by the high water.

Turning east on the lake, we spotted cabins – actually mostly the big white and orange vinyl tents that mining and hydro companies semi-permanently deface the landscape with.

Several hours later, after a rather uneventful, monotonous lake paddle, we pulled up on the beach I had marked on the map, which was protected by a little natural harbour. It turned out to be a very aesthetic campsite, with grassy flat tent spots protected from behind by a mini-forest of low trees.

Big piles of wolf scat full of fur and even chewed caribou bones told us that the local wolves also like this spot, which I duly named "Wolf Scat Point."

After dinner, wondering where the wolves denned, we followed well-worn caribou trails through the small forest over to a sandy bank, probably an old eroded esker, west of the camp. We explored that and the surrounding area but didn't find any wolves or their dens.

To bed early at 9:30, falling asleep quickly – but not before we heard the wolves howling somewhere in the distance.

Friday, July 14th, 2017
A clearing on the shore…

We awoke to yet another weather change, cheery bright sunshine but with pleasant temperatures, no humidity and a brisk northwesterly breeze. It was a crisp and clear glorious day, but low fog in the distance made the lake horizon appear eerily hazy to the west.

After another filling breakfast – bacon, hashbrowns and cheese – we cruised down the north shore of the lake with the wind more or less at our backs, surfing waves once again. Such a great way to travel a large lake. The water was a beautiful steely blue, so translucent and clean.

We were heading towards the well-hidden outlet, coming after a northwesterly U-turn around a point leading to a small bay. The river then renews its course northeast to Hudson Bay. After about four kilometers of paddling, I spotted a clearing on the shore with a bunch of long, grey, weathered poles lying on the ground, so we pulled over

to investigate. They turned out to be ancient wigwam poles, haphazardly strewn about, partially embedded in the tundra. Poking around we also found a rusty old wood stove lying sideways on the ground.

This was obviously an old Idthen Edlei (Chipewyan) camp, unused for many years. According to Mowat, who apparently got his information from Father Egenolf, the long-time catholic priest at Lac du Brochet on Reindeer Lake, the lake was known as Edohontua. Egenolf's time at the mission bridged both Oberholtzer and Mowat, both of whom received his advice. He told Mowat that the caribou-eating Dene would walk up to the lake from the south, carrying small birchbark canoes on their backs to cross the rivers. At the lake they would slaughter the caribou during "La Foule," smoking their tongues and drying the meat. In autumn they would make bigger canoes out of caribou skin, travel down the river and trade the meat and skins at Churchill for goods at the trading post there. Then they would walk back to their winter homes as the snows fell. Tough people.

Later, yet another bald eagle soared overhead, and at times we passed through the territory of flocks of terns that noisily pestered us. I was wondering where the "heavy rapids" were. In the meantime, we reached a potential beach campsite that I had again marked from the satellite images, which turned out to be perfect – a fifty-meter beach with dry, grassy camp spots on a slight ridge behind the beach.

So we pulled in and set up camp. Behind the ridge was a large boggy clearing, full of birds flitting around and chirping as one wandered around their territory, mostly sandpipers and sparrows.

We settled into a delicious Indian combo dinner of korma and vindaloo. The wind dropped as the sun set, but of course that meant that the mosquitoes were ferocious.

A white tundra swan drifted lazily offshore, repeatedly thrusting its head into the water to feed, with a cloudy, intense orange sunset as a stunning backdrop. It is chance scenes like this, that you just can't make up, that make all the difficulties of northern travel worthwhile.

Saturday, July 15th, 2017
Almost swamped by the wind

It was a sunny, bright-blue-sky day with a strong northwesterly wind that we battled until the river turned east, although a strong current helped. The first few sets of rapids were of the easy class 2 variety, but then we entered a long, skinny lake with the wind nicely behind

The last section of the rapid as seen from the end of the island. Nasty.

Hugging the right shore at the top of the rapids.

The section of the river that we decided to cross. Potentially death lay waiting at the bottom if we didn't make it across.

Esker ridge camp.

us, pushing us through big swells, water spilling over the spray decks as we crashed along. At the end of the lake was a big wall of rocks and boulders – so neatly stacked that it looked like a man-made masonry wall. This guarded the rapid that Oberholtzer had warned about – a capital "B" Big rapid, at least a kilometer long with quite the scary horizon line drop. There was whitewater for as far as you could see. The really big stuff was initially on the left

Black pepper sausage for lunch!

Goggles to the rescue!

side, so we set off on the right, sneaking our way down without shore scouting. Maneuvering was tricky, scooting down pour-overs and dodging holes. Still boat scouting, it became apparent that the big waves near the bottom of the rapid were on the right side, so we power ferried across the main current and continued down the left side of the river. The bottom of the rapid was a long gravy train of big, splashy waves, loads of fun.

The next section of river was to prove difficult, and only because of the wind. The river was split by a two-kilometer-wide island, the main current heading southeast before turning northwest, and a smaller channel heading due north then turning east. The wind was still howling from the northwest, so I kept looking for the small northerly channel, which was narrow and appeared to be protected by a bluff suggesting that it would be a wind-sheltered route.

But the lead canoe was bombing rap-

Watching the sun set.

idly along the south bank of the river and before long we hit the northwest turn, smack into the full fury of the wind, missing the protected channel. Two kilometers of hell followed – it was paddle, paddle, paddle, watching the shoreline move deplorably slowly, an inch at a time, despite the strong current, without which we would undoubtedly have gone backwards. Even with the current it may have been faster to portage this section of otherwise easy river! With relief, finally we could see where the river turned east again, around a rocky point. But rounding the point proved to be probably the most dangerous section of the river yet, the combination of strong current and furious wind had big waves crashing into each other, forming a maelstrom of water. Crashing through this churning mess almost swamped us, the water bashing in over the sides of the canoe.

Thankfully, as soon as we turned east, we started to fly with both the wind and current at our backs –º what a difference! Muscles being pretty much spent, we started looking for a campsite but it didn't look promising as the low, uneven rocky river banks were choked with bushes. Spotting a pair of adjacent big, black rocks on the left bank sheltering a little bay, we pulled over to investigate. It was one of those campsites where you really want to find spots for the tents, meaning that you accept anywhere that you could possibly pitch a tent despite uneven ground, underlying rocks, bushes, gnarly old roots and all. It wasn't hard to convince ourselves that this would be our camp as we knew there were no promising spots behind us, and none were obvious ahead of us on scanning the horizon.

With the wind still quite brisk it was time for a refreshing little bath in the river, following which we managed to cook without a bug shelter for the first time. Lee had been waiting for some fish to use in a chowder for a while, so that's what we had for dinner. The western horizon turned oddly hazy and orange, quite different from the previous evenings, with Lee thinking he could smell smoke. Later we found out that this was from the huge forest fires that were burning thousands of kilometers away in British Columbia.

Before settling into the tents, Lee suddenly and unexpectedly barfed his chowder close to the tents, so, fearing that this "feast" may attract unwanted visitors, we set up our bear warning system – motion detectors – for the first time. We had four of these quite ingenious devices which can be set up quickly to more or less completely surround the tents. They are little battery - operated sensors that pick up movement

Stealing core samples…wait, if they are abandoned, maybe we are just cleaning up…

Consulting the map.

Ominous skies over Edehon Lake.

Wolf scat camp.

Ermine Camp. We thought we had high water levels – check out the spring debris.

A most unusual "wilderness" gravestone fittingly in the middle of, well, nowhere…

Too much applejack?

Stabilizing the tent.

from about 20 – 30 feet away, making a very loud, raucous sound that apparently sends bears running. The downside of this system is false alarms, especially in strong winds, where waving bushes may set it off, or approaching small land animals such as foxes, and, as we found out later, even birds when a small flock of seagulls circled our camp. So when in the tent, if one of the darn things goes off it is always a question of, do I get out of the tent and check it out, or ignore it? We quickly settled into the routine of ignoring them if they only went off once, peeking outside the tent if one went off twice, and turning it off if it went off more times than that with no bears in sight.

The landscape had changed quite a bit today. From nice tundra to the stark, rocky "piers" stacked into the river, gravel-strewn esker banks, the odd stand of trees and even a few small forests, to more tundra with a few bare knolls, to the very bushy, rocky, uneven terrain where we were camped. There were no real hills or even high points any more, which was just as well because hiking where we were was almost impossible. Even heading inland fifty feet to "use the facilities" was almost ankle-breaking.

Sunday, July 16th, 2017
An unusual gravestone

As we crossed the next lake I noticed a "hole" in a sandy bank spilling down the side of an island, so stopped to investigate. I thought (hoped?) it might be a wolf den, but it turned out to be an erosion slump with an empty bird's nest inside.

We walked up to the top of the island to explore. It turned out to be basically a big sand bank covered on top by tundra, with a few stands of rather dense tamarack. Teasingly, we found wolf scat. A startled golden eagle flew off one of the trees as we crested the island, too quickly to pull out the camera to photograph the majestic bird. Then we discovered a most unusual thing. A slab of rock, clearly a gravestone, was jutting out of the tundra, facing the lake. On it was inscribed, "Here lies wilderness MMI." Who had placed the stone? Why? Was anyone buried under it, or was it some sort of comment about what humans are doing to this planet?

Presumably the "MMI" was Latin for 2001? If anyone who reads this knows anything about this stone, I would be interested in learning more about it.

The bugs were thick on the island as there was still no wind, so we were quickly back on the water, paddling across the rest of the lake into a maze of islands where all the rapids marked on the maps were just swift current. The sky started to darken and we heard big rolls of thunder in the distance, but I

Map

was willing to endure a little rain if it brought some wind and thus relief from the pesky flies.

The river resumed as a single large channel, lined by steep banks of loose round stones. We ran an easy class 2 rapid and went ashore at one of the steep banks to change into our rain gear just as the heavens opened and lightning flashed all around us. As we huddled on the bank, seeking protection near the top, a large grey seal popped its head out of the water and peered at us while we waited, oblivious to the raging storm. I jealously looked back at it, completely unperturbed and content in its element.

Checking the maps for the next section of the river got our adrenaline pumping. There were four or five marked rapids, two supposedly "big," one of them marked with a "ledge" near the bottom. Curt was initially excited, only to be disappointed by most of the rapids, two of which didn't even exist. The big one with the alleged "ledge" ended up being a fun, relatively easy, boat-scoutable class 2 rapid ending with a boulder fan with several exit options. No ledge, no problem.

That evening at our campsite, despite the clouds of bugs outside the shelter, we got stir crazy and emerged to toss stones into the river from the upstream battlements, cheer on the grayling surfacing to gorge on the hordes of flies, and revel at an amazing sunset, once again immersed in a hazy, orange glow. To bed with ptarmigan squawking around us, and the pitter patter of thousands (millions?) of mosquitoes buzzing the tent.

Monday, July 17th, 2017
More phantom rapids

I was quite rudely awakened at 1:30 a.m. with the tent flapping like crazy, the howling wind from the north so severe that I quickly jumped out of the tent to make sure everything was secure, to find Lee out doing the same. We had been lulled into a false sense of complacency by the calm conditions when we had finally crawled into the sleeping bags, a mistake you just cannot make out here. For example, we had left the bugshelter up, which could have easily blown away with all the loose stuff left in it. Loose gear has to be tied to something heavy, or weighed down by packs or rocks. I wasn't even sure if we had tied up the canoes – the wind can send a canoe onto the water by itself if you leave it untied to a bush or rock, or without a food barrel in it.

Back in the tent it was a fitful sleep for the remainder of the night with all the wind buffeting. In the morning it was downright cold, especially with the wind chill, so I lazed in my sleeping bag until 8:30. Evidently everyone else felt the same. Gone was the hot, muggy

weather, which I hate, but this was a little too cold, the coldest time of the trip.

To Curt's dismay, two rapids marked on the maps were, one, non-existent, and two, an easy class 1 rapid. I was again feeling bad for poor Curt! Where was all the whitewater? The river bends were at least interesting, with more of those big-boulder pileups from spring ice moving downstream, again looking like a stone mason's work. Two majestic tundra swans honked as they flew overhead.

A few kilometers away, we stopped at a sandy river bank, with low ridges behind it, which looked promising for hiking. We quickly discovered that we were not the first people to think that this was a nice spot – there were two old tent rings on grass benches between the sandy areas that looked like they hadn't been used for many a year. This kind of "discovery" happens often in the barrens and reminds us that, although these areas never teemed with people, it was home to the nomads who drifted with the wildlife, subsisting on what nature could offer. A far cry from how many of these proud people live today, forced off the land into settlements by the government, losing their way of life. A classic example is the village of Utshimasits (Davis Inlet) in the east in Labrador – an inland caribou-hunting people were relocated by the white man to an offshore island in the Labrador Sea, to a life of substandard housing and substance abuse. It reminds me of a comment I had read, by Jean-Pierre Ashini, an Innu from Nitassinan (the ancestral name for their land in Southern Labrador/Southeastern Quebec): "When asked what our job description is, we used to say 'hunter.' Now we say 'unemployed.' "

We decided to set up camp as it was such a nice spot and the wind had not abated. Sunset was magnificent. To bed at 10:30 with the tent flapping in the wind. Because of the wind, we had had a three-hour paddling day, in fast current, on a "real" river without any significant lakes.

Tuesday, July 18th, 2017
Pole-bending wind

The wind howled all night. The critter gitters (the motion detectors) kept going off, false alarms caused by anything blown in their path. I kept going out and, finally, one after another, turned them off. If I was going to be eaten by a polar bear, I wanted to be at least well-rested before signing off as its breakfast.

I finally got up to make some tea,

A beautiful campsite.

planning to set up the primus stove in the shelter of a little gully beside the campsite, but the others were up and suggested erecting the wind/bug shelter to make a late lunch of soup. It turned out to be a bad idea. Just as everything was boiling on the stoves yet another small, isolated storm surprised us, packing winds that must have hit 70 – 80 kilometers per hour, leading to a rather sudden collapse of our "bomb-proof" shelter. All hell broke loose – we stood up, grasping the poles and grabbing the flailing fabric, trying to keep it off the flaming stoves, barking orders at each other. Lee's paddle holding the center of the shelter was bending to the point of breaking, and one of the front supporting aluminum poles had bent ninety degrees. Finally we got the stoves turned off and the shelter down until the storm passed, without burning anything.

Later that afternoon Lee wanted to set the shelter up again and cook dinner. Remembering the lunch debacle, the rest of us promptly outvoted him 3-1. A cold dinner it was – left-over lunch sausage, cheese, peanut butter and tortilla wraps.

After dinner, Curt, Jenny and I went for a long hike on a ridge northwest of camp, finally making it to the highest point visible from the campsite, about three hours away. We saw not one mammal on the way, although ironically we discovered a rock pile, probably the remains of an old hunting blind at the high point, with a panoramic view of the entire region.

I didn't want to leave this forlorn, windswept vista, wondering how an unusual ridge of rounded stones got there, noting other random piles of rocks, small ponds, and the odd, solitary stunted tree. True barrenlands wilderness.

I wondered if the caribou still came streaming through this area, and how many scenes of human life-sustaining ungulate slaughter had occurred at this spot in times past. Finally, on the way back to camp, I spotted a mammal! It was a lemming, running down a caribou trail in front of me, squeaking with displeasure before bolting down its hole.

Wednesday, July 19th, 2017
The last big lake and more phantom rapids

Although we knew we didn't have

Taking the canoes apart. The paddling part of the trip was over, but not the excitement as we would find out the next day.

Loading up.

much further to travel to get to our pick-up spot, we were anxious that we would be windbound yet another day, prompting us to get up early, knowing that the wind often picked up in the late morning.

Our paddling task got worse ahead – the river exited Ranger Seal Lake to the northeast, meaning that we had to paddle into a headwind to cross a two-kilometer-wide bay being churned into big, splashy waves. We were heading for the eastern shore which was protected by a high bank. Some temporary relief from the wind was soon lost as we rounded the point, the wind howling upstream directly into our faces, but luckily the strong current propelled us forward.

The potentially tricky rapids marked on the map were only swifts, dissolving another expectation once again. The river widened, narrowed again, then had us scratching our heads as more highly-anticipated rapids marked on the maps turned out to be phantoms. My heart went out to Curt as I knew he would once again get no challenging whitewater today.

Thursday, July 20th, 2017
The last day of paddling

I had mixed feelings about the northwest wind as we hit the river – we had to travel north into it for a few kilometers. But the silver lining was no bugs, which is perhaps worth the paddling struggle, especially as we still had a strong current to help us.

To Curt's amazement, as we rounded a point following a bay-like crossing, a class 2/3 rapid materialized. With no hesitation we got sucked in, running the rapid while boat scouting, but this was followed by a more formidable bit of whitewater that required a peek from shore. We pulled into a little cove above the rapid, too close to the hazard as it turned out. It was a big class 3 rapid with a ledge on the left that we would have to miss by paddling through some respectable waves on the right. This meant that we had to drag the canoes back upstream to get across the strong current to reach the center of the river.

After dodging the ledge we had to cut to the left to miss a twenty-meter rocky island that split the current, but then it was all fun and games riding a "gravy train" of waves for about a kilometer.

We finally reached the big island in the river that was right before the take-out spot where the pilot wanted to pick us up. It was still about 25 km to the end of the river.

We reached the pick-up coordinates, vainly scanning the ugly shoreline, hoping to spot a nice, deep-river landing site, combined with a good canoe land-

Plane scouting – river center, then left, right…looks good!

ing spot on shore and a decent campsite. No such luck. We went ashore anyway and scrambled up the steep bank, then stumbled through the shin-bruising dense bushes, looking for anywhere to set up camp. What we did find was a lone, large bull caribou with a magnificent rack, probably more surprised than we were at the chance encounter. Finally, a caribou!

Friday, July 21st, 2017
A "rocky" takeoff

The pilot, again Wayne, slowly taxied to our spot no problem, spun the plane around and beached the floats.

After refueling, we loaded the canoes and other gear, Wayne fired up the engine and began to taxi slowly out into the river. I was nonchalantly gazing out the window when a loud bang surprised me, as the plane lurched. Then more bangs. We were in the shallow water and the floats were striking the barely-submerged rocks!

Wayne spun the plane around, and then it got worse. The plane ground to a halt, the left float stuck on the rocks. Wayne turned to us and yelled above the racket of the engine, "get out on the right float." Okay, makes sense…I think. The kid in the co-pilot seat clambered out to join us, telling us to rock the float on his command, while "hanging on tight." Wayne gunned the engine, the turboprop exhaust searing us with hot, rancid air blown into our faces.

Suddenly, the plane broke loose and started inching forward. Wayne yelled at us to get back into the cabin and buckle up. He was not going to stop now that we were moving. We quickly scrambled up the flimsy ladder and clipped our seatbelts on, nervously staring out of the windows. Bang! The plane lurched as it hit another shallow rock. As soon as he felt the time was right, Wayne turned to the right, headed upstream, then rammed open the throttle. More bang-lurch, bang-lurch, but it was clear we were going for it, picking up speed. Curt, sitting in the seat in front of me, braced himself by holding his arms out, one on the seat ahead and the other grabbing onto the cargo strapped beside him. He turned and rolled his eyes, clearly wondering if we would make it. What would happen if one of the floats hit a large, partially submerged rock at this speed? Would the plane turn violently and spin out of control? As the shoreline zipped by rapidly through my window, I too was quite concerned, but thankfully not for long – the turbo otter has such a good power-to-weight ratio that we were soon skimming the water and then fully airborne. We all breathed a sigh of relief.

We landed in Thompson, nervously watching the left float sink lower in the

water as we taxied to the dock. We were up the next morning at 9 a.m. to face the boring, bug-splattering 800-km drive back to Winnipeg.

Postscript

With regard to following the river day-by-day using Oberholtzer's journal and Mowat's book "No Man's River," it was much easier to recognize the terrain from the former. Mowat's version of the river is vastly embellished and inaccurate, especially after Seal Hole Lake. Mowat himself has been quoted as saying, "I took some pride in having it known that I never let facts get in the way of a good story. I was writing subjective non-fiction all along." Fair enough, although it took an expose of his historical and geographic inaccuracies in a 1996 magazine article before he admitted it.

About the Author

Born in the "wilderness" of Northern England, I was rather shockingly introduced to the "real thing" on a boy scout canoe trip in Newfoundland as a new 11-year-old immigrant to that still raw island. I quickly learned that blue jeans and cotton shirts were not great clothing on the water. And those blackflies! But what an adventure for a kid who loved to explore. That experience stayed with me for many years, but other things in life (such as a medical career!) got in the way, until a chance conversation with a good friend (Joel Cyr) in my new adopted city of Montreal. He was supposed to have traveled the George River with his father who unfortunately passed away before they could embark on the adventure, so I jumped in and immediately told him I would love to do it with him. At that point we met Jimmy Deschesnes, a family doctor who worked with the Cree in James Bay and offered to instead take us on the Nastapoka River in Nunavik. Well, that beautiful river had us hooked for future adventures despite almost constant rain, freezing cold strong headwinds, a two-day portage and equally miserable howling wolves. Since then, I have been fortunate enough to spend up to five weeks exploring little-traveled northern rivers most years, getting to know many great people on the way. Instead of letting great memories lie dormant in trip notebooks or on computer hard drives, I like to either make films or compose illustrated trip journals during the long, hard Canadian winters to share with my traveling companions and whoever else may be interested. And I hope to continue meeting many more fellow adventurers who continue to get lured up north...

The crew. Jenny Johnson, Chris Rush, Curt Gellerman, Lee Sessions.

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The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal, *Nastawgan*, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

Elora Gorge

By Matthew Eberly

One of the last rapids of the day, before a short paddle to the low bridge and take-out, is a simple little dog-leg past a gravel bar on river right. Having no surfing wave, and therefore being pointless in low water, the kayakers pay no mind and carry on past without notice.

But this is arguably my favorite feature of the day. The river flows over a shallow slide while curving to the right past the gravel bar, and along short cliffs on river left. Just as the current begins to slow and disperse there is a depression in the cliffs. The pool below is the basic width of the gorge, so that on river right there is a large area of slack water. This provides an excellent S-turn for practicing.

One day two teenage girls sat in their tubes watching from the pool while I did 10 circuits. Starting right-handed I build up some steam and exit the eddy leaning back and to the on-side as the current brings the bow around smoothly in the hot sun. As the waves are small it is easy to maintain control and join the downstream flow. There is a moment of hesitation where the cliffs block any exit to the left, forcing you to align the boat with the river. Then, with a couple of correction strokes the boat is directed toward and across the eddy line simply by bringing my torso around with the paddle hovering over the left gunnel, waiting for the cross draw that never comes. The canoe carves a smooth arc into the shade of an undercut, with just a cross-forward stroke to maintain momentum while sitting upright, and then it is a few more forward strokes to quickly re-enter for a front ferry back to the left.

Once in the main pool some effort is needed to paddle around the witness box and back upstream to where the eddy lines are sharply defined, starting again from the beginning. This circuit can be done efficiently in less than two minutes, with variations in the quality of the top entry having an impact on the approach to the exit; the size, the speed, and tilt required to eddy out in a smooth arc using only body movements. This is the sweet elegance of balance sport.

At work I once participated in developing a quality specification for the inspection of a machine part. Two years of effort to produce a 50-page document with only one fundamental requirement, for a "smooth and continuous arc".

After a few of these river runs I have gathered up a sense of satisfaction and can retire for the day, hopeful to return at the next opportunity.

The Mike Wevrick Lecture and Wine & Cheese Social

On November 21, 2020, WCA members Doug and Lisa Ashton will be giving a virtual presentation on their fly-in trip to Quetico Provincial Park on November 21, 2020, between 7pm-9:30pm. Check the WCA website for more details.

Break Trail or Run the Rapids? A Wilderness and Canoe Symposium 2021 Update

You know those moments on a canoe trip when you land at the portage to carry around a frothing rapids appropriately named *Hell's Gate*, or *Deadman's Doorway* or *Really, Honestly, Don't Run This*, but when you look into the forest, the portage trail simply cannot be found? You stand around trying to read the rapids. You talk to your friends. You consult the experts who wrote the map and the guide books. Then you have a snack and calculate the risks of each route.

2020 has been like this: watching, waiting, reading, talking, and making hard decisions. The Wilderness and Canoe Symposium is in the same boat as many other events for many people. For Winter 2021, we have decided to break trail rather than run the rapids.

Despite (or perhaps because) the second wave of the global COVID-19 pandemic spikes the case numbers to an all-time high, we remain committed to nurture our passion and love for paddling and to keep our Symposium community safe. For this reason, we will be delivering the 2021 event live and online only.

Here are the WCS 2021 trip details:

- We will gather in a Zoom platform.
- Wednesday, February 17 from 6 to 9 pm Eastern Standard Time. **Hold the Date!**
- We are planning for 4 to 6 presentations. **Send speaker ideas to aleks.gusev@gmail.com.**
- Once we have registration and speaker updates, we will communicate to the WCS email list. **To join the list, sign up here: https://www.wcsymposium.com/content/sign-here-wcs-email-updates.**

We know that running rapids can be fun, but not at the cost of our community's health and safety. Instead, you will be able to join from the ease, comfort and safety of your pyjamas, sitting on your couch, with your various pets. Bonuses include access to the bathroom with no line-ups, your favourite snacks at your disposal, and no restrictions to bringing a glass of wine to the event this year. Plus, people who would normally not join due to travel challenges, cost, visas, and general life demands can now access the Wilderness and Canoe Symposium much more easily.

We look forward to welcoming you into our first-ever online Symposium on February 17. Join us and help us sustain our community connections.

Erika & Aleks

Thoughts (and admittedly a bit of a rant) on the wilderness superhero "Look-at-me" adventure narrative

By Bob Henderson

I am a big fan of singer-songwriter Todd Snider's opening to a song: "I'm not trying to change your mind about anything, I'm trying to ease my mind about everything." And this is my personal aspiration here. I am on a rant and a semi call-out to various adventure narrative writers with the grunt and "firsts" and embellishment tendencies. Also, before I begin, I am painfully aware that I am going against my preference to focus on the positive, not the negative. Or using language reminiscent of Eric Fromm, my preference is to focus on what I am obedient to, not that to which I am disobedient. Here I will go against my own grain and focus on my disobedience in a rant, that in the spirit of Todd Snider, I have to get off my chest. Finally, I write this from the perspective that I'm going to die tomorrow. Therefore, I will be more direct, certainly more honest and courageous than I might otherwise be. In short, I will not be worried about pissing people off. I claim the privilege of a curmudgeon.

I've recently read three-and-a-half adventure narratives and have had several discussions with travellers and educators on this topic. Over my lifetime though, I am confident I have read well over 100 adventure narratives, contemporary and historical. I will give them category names as we go along. It seems there are an increased number of grunts, firsts and embellishments with less inclusion of place and culture. I will not dispute the notion of character building of self-propelled outdoor travel, but what kind of character building? I worry that we tend to promote the wrong moral traits. I know that sounds arrogant, but I am concerned, and as Martin Hagglund suggests, in *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom,* "concern presupposes that something can go wrong or get lost: otherwise we would not care."

But first, a telling metaphor courtesy of Diane Ackerman's book *A Natural History of the Senses.*

Have you ever heard of a "love apple"? In the Elizabethan Age (1560-1600) lovers would exchange such apples. You peel an apple and put it under your armpit until it absorbs your scent, then you and your lover make the erotic sensory exchange with mutual inhaling. We've drifted from that bit of sensuality, haven't we? Now we mask our scent with deodorants and perfumes, finding our own natural odour offensive. I can't help but think we've got that one all wrong. I suppose the keyword is "natural." The deodorant has become so culturally ingrained that we've stopped questioning – and perhaps even thinking of – it. A hint for identifying such unnecessary, unquestioned things is this: when there has to be a healthy dose of advertising to promote said idea (i.e., replacing our natural odour – masking only – for artificial ones), then one should question the worth of the idea itself.

Something similar is happening in our relationship with nature. Like covering our natural scent, might we be masking some truer, deeper relationship with nature? Human/Nature relations and actual, potential and latent impulses for self-realization in Nature: that is too broad a topic. So I'll stick to Canadian adventure paddling narratives. I've read a lot of such books and articles over the years and if you're reading this, you probably have too.

Let's look into this.

I want to address the "look at me – you can't do this!" adventure narrative. You won't hear it called that but that is often one of the not-so-hidden messages. Another message is, of course, the almost other-worldly physical energy and mental resilience demonstrated in the "this many kilometres-a-day" thinking. A recent Canadian Geographic Society sponsored group paddled south to north in Labrador. On their first day they travelled 51 kms. In most guiding experiences, one seeks an easier first day to work one's way into the flow of a trip carefully/slowly. The trip is billed as a first. It might well be, but usually you should ask, "Who's to know?" The fact that this one is being videoed and written up might not make it a first. Though this one might be, given that the lay of the land and water runs mostly west to east. Seems an unnecessarily contrived contention.

This rant though has cultural concerns. A friend, Phil Mullins, makes a distinction between wilderness and sustainable approaches to travel. He and I are paddling in the same current. Phil, along with many these days, will wisely tell us that we paddle in peopled/contested landscapes, not "wilderness". An approach that acknowledges that – one that honours local traditions, is place-responsive and aware of our need for a de-colonizing personal journey – will be one trending towards a more "sustainable" way of relationship and character building in nature. Our culture needs such relationality – more inclusion of place and cultures. I like the way he paddles in the currents. It can create a new zest for life.

When our modern North American paddling "explorers" (also a problematic assumption) go down the waterway of obscure (read: artificial) challenges, what for decades I've been cheekily calling "the fluvial virginity syndrome," you sometimes get such endurance-focused, narcissistic narratives devoid of…well…the place of travel. Nature portrayed as sparring partner! The mountain equivalent is the peak-bagging narrative.

I don't doubt that there is a zest for life in such travel. I assume it is an obsession to endure, to overcome, to suffer even. One author of my three and a half narratives put it this way: "revel in the punishment." Pardon me if I've missed some salient spiritual, philosophical insight. When getting to the finish is primary, I see little more than a "joy of grunt." All else is secondary. Does it have to be so physically difficult? One might ask, "is it worth it?" What is wrong or lost along the way? I'll return to this question later. I see toxic masculinity in this punishment: toxic to the body, to indigeneity, and to outdoor educators' efforts, as an expression in a culture realm, to seek some ecologically place z- based consciousness. I think I am supposed to see some glory of respect in the punishment.

Within these adventure narratives, every day and most every page can be the same: blood sucking bugs, crotch-deep in mud, boils on the feet, blisters on the hands: ever-proximal danger. For one such book, I developed, after a while, a strategy of reading the first sentence of each paragraph, but yes, I kept reading because I was interested in the route. However, I was not sufficiently rewarded with route insight. If you do travel about a bit yourself, such person-centered-against-nature writing just gets boring after awhile. One grunt day looks like another. As a reader, you have expectations for some insight in a place-responsive manner. Or, you hope for some insight into the deeper character of the traveller. And to be fair, some adventure narratives do this. I am not talking centrally about those.

And then there is the "explore" label and the claim of discoveries made in wilderness. If there is not a written record about a river when

it is paddled, is that what qualifies a trip as "wilderness exploration"? Such "discoveries" seem to overlook the much-travelled nature of these lands. More than likely, "these rivers-without-chroniclers" were common indigenous peoples' family routes in a planned, trade-rendezvous network (see Conrad Heidenreich's work on pre-contact trade routes). Then there is food gathering, fur trade and trapping travel. People have lived here for millennia. Most of us have gotten long past dismissive attitudes towards indigenous peoples as to call the Canadian bush "wilderness" where "discoveries" are made. I really thought we were past that.

Show me a "new route discovered and explored" and those people, with the right observational skills, will show you tent rings, axe blaze marks on faint trails and the remnants of campfires. Ernest Oberholtzer said of his Anishinaabe guide Billy Magee, "he could feel the trail under his feet, where it once had been." Now that's what I am talking about when I say "observational skills." I am not saying I have those skills down pat, but I am aspiring to them and that demands attention to the land and a pace and respect of travel that allows for such learning. There is "character building" in this quest, too. Do the ego-driven modern "explorers" even have the ability to notice these subtle signs of folks who have previously passed this way, let alone share this knowledge with others who vicariously follow their exploits?

The aggrandized term "expedition" is often used by our modern explorers to describe relatively modest travels. I suggest thinking of your travels against a backdrop of canoe travel history before throwing around words like discovery and expedition. Sure it works sometimes, but often the label is not the best choice. In the early 1700s the Blackfoot would, in the early spring, descend the Red Deer and Bow Rivers to the Saskatchewan to Hudson Bay, to await European trading ships on the shore of Hudson Bay. In some years, they would return empty-handed late in the autumn; the ships having either failed to arrive or arrive too late for a safe return upriver. Now that's an expedition (see Arthur Ray's work). Suffice it to say, if you know something of Canadian paddle history pre and post contact, you'd be careful with your usage of the term expedition. Europeans Franklin, Hanbury and Hearne in the barren grounds come to mind as folks on expeditions. The aforementioned Oberholtzer, an early canoe travel recreationalist, who traveled with guide Billy Magee in Northern Manitoba and areas north into Hudson Bay, was out for 133 days travelling over 2,000 miles (3,220 km). He wanted to be part of the tradition of his hero J.B.Tyrrell who surveyed that country less than twenty years earlier. That's a recreational expedition. William Epps Cormack traversed the Newfoundland interior seeking friendly contact with any remaining Beothuk peoples on an expedition that made sense and had genuine purpose. I'm just saying we shouldn't be throwing around lofty terms, especially for obscure firsts and contrived challenges that hardly make sense other than for the rigour itself. If our modern "explorers" were to learn of such travel histories, their exploits of trips may not seem as grand. I can see both sides. Perhaps within the context of our relatively modern, sheltered lives, folks today are looking for a grand adventure. But let them show a little modesty and understanding of the traditions to which they might aspire.

There is another kind of "look-at-me – you can't do this" adventure narrative: less of the (not always but trending towards) narcissistic endurance/hardship show and more exhilarating stunt stuff which often involves dangerous endeavours for the sheer thrill of it. Honestly, I read much less of this type of literature, so I should take a pass. I will say more in passing that I value few of these narratives, whether they be about kayaking off a waterfall or free climbing. It is more the sentiment that the places don't seem to matter at all that irks me. Here's a passage from one such acrobatic adventure narrative: "And if one is going to travel, the particular place you go matters less than what it leads you to explore within yourself. In the end, a mountain is just a mountain and a river just a river, unless you approach it with open ears and eyes, and especially, an open heart." Then, why not an urban, flooded-culvert paddle run that teaches much about the self? I read into this passage that the place - the river – hardly matters.

There are also "look-at-me, you-CAN-do-this" narratives. I am not addressing these. On average, they can be inspirational and more balanced in theme and perspective. If done well, the "look-at-me" falls off from notice and a kinship or rapport with the author follows. I might add that my comments so far are concerned with the messages that these various narratives give. The folks who write or video them may be good people of course. It's the writing and messages, often embedded unwittingly, that is irksome.

An example or two of writing within the landscape would be useful to further my argument. In 2019, some friends and I arrived at Thelon Bluffs, where there is a rapid. What follows would be my account of that moment in time at the Thelon Bluff rapid, were I to have kept a more detailed journal:

"A standout spot on the river with a high steep bank on river left. We all hiked to the lookout with a light, loving breeze keeping the bugs down. One stayed on the shoreline to fish. We could see the rapid at the bend had some surprisingly big waves which were easily missed on the inside bend river right with about 100 feet of calm water. After the hike and with a big pike, we did an upstream ferry over to river right and followed the calm water, passed the big waves (two as I remember) on the outer bend and continued on. We'd have that fish downriver for lunch. I thought: "how wonderful to get this big vista over the land to the east and see that long view of the river corridor from which we'd come in the west."

This is a simple description of a spirited, joyous, belonging quest narrative, common to your garden variety arctic river canoe tripper experience but seldom shared with the public. Now, what follows is a passage from what can be called "a wilderness superhero-look-at-me, you-can't-do-this" adventure narrative. (I've lifted this directly from the page – no embellishments by me.)

"Paddling through the rain, I approached the start of the whitewater in my canoe. They were deep rapids, free of visible rocks, but with big standing waves that could easily swamp a canoe. Naturally, I decided to canoe right through them. By this point I had a pretty fair idea of what the boat and I could handle. I allowed the main current to suck us down the centre toward the towering whitecapped waves. With my paddle I steered into them. The canoe rode over the crest of the first wave, becoming almost vertical as the bow soared into the open air. Then we plunged into the next wave, throwing frigid water in my face. I exhaled at the shock – there's nothing like a bucket of ice-cold water smack in the face to wake you up. It was an exhilarating roller-coaster ride through these big rapids, the canoe flying up and down as I steered and paddled, with one eye on what lay immediately in front of me and the other on the best course farther ahead. When I'd passed through the last of the big waves, I glanced down and saw that my knees were submerged; a considerable amount of water had accumulated inside the canoe from the wild run. A pack of matches sat bobbing in the canoe. Fortunately, I had extras. I pivoted toward shore and paddled into a rocky area to unpack everything. Canoes can hold quite a lot of water before they sink, as I knew from past experiences fooling around with them in the rapids or big waves. Still, I figured it was prudent to dump out the water before continuing, especially since I knew I was nearing the Thelon's dreaded giant lakes."

As I see it, this Thelon Bluff exhilarating roller-coaster ride, canoe-flying-up-and-down encounter has three possible interpretations in reality. 1) The author [read: I'm not talking about the canoeist here] paddled the calm water on river right but thought it a good place for a big water embellishment. 2) The author got swept up unwittingly in the current and ran the rapid…sort of by mistake. Hence, the "naturally I decided to canoe right through them" save-face measure. 3) The author/canoeist can be taken at his word and intentionally ran those eas-

ily avoidable big waves on river left which I suggest is a foolish move for reasons almost all canoeists of northern waters will understand. I'll likely never know which of these three actually happened, but I am certainly curious.

Another example from the same rapid-running author: I find it quite troubling that a canoeist, claiming a historical frame of mind, didn't stop at the Hornby cabin because of "lack of time." This is a choice place for barren grounds story exploring. Three graves beside their fallen-in 1920s cabin. Trails to search for caribou that never came. Lack of time? You can't stretch your legs for ten minutes? Perhaps the author didn't know of this historic site and would have stopped had the location been more obvious from the water.

Then again, what archeologically minded sort could pass by Lookout Point, again on the Thelon? Here, Dene and Inuit people met to trade, Dene coming from the west and Inuit coming inland upriver from the east. Here, Inuit have travelled to gather wood for sled frames at the mouth of the Finnie River coming into the Thelon's Lookout Point, giving the point its grand vista, both in a physical and a historical way. It is a gathering place packed with tent rings and campfire sites and an incredible 360-degree view. In this case, as in many other trip accounts, the so-many-kilometers-a-day narrative style paddles blindly past a meaningful place – a spot where a reader might enjoy some history and a spectacular view.

For example, take Warden Grove, another famous site: not a) knowing or b) commenting or c) stopping or d) all of the above about/on/at the Warden Grove, an equally storied site, also is troubling. No historian or archaeologist and/or informed paddler would pass by these spots on the river. By the way, option "d," I assume, is correct for Warden Cabin and Lookout Point at least. I'm forced to wonder, can it be worth it…to be so rushed against time as to miss such pillars of northern river storytelling? Again, I am left to ponder. I suppose it would be okay to miss the above if one claimed no interest in such things. However, because the rapid-paddling author does claim heritage sensibilities, then I, for one, am concerned about something being wrong and/or lost. It is mystifying. OR, is the grunt adventure narrative a publisher's prize? One cannot argue that grunt narratives sell. I just see much lost potential for story-telling about peopled/cultural places and about an interesting author perhaps.

Now an example of embellishment. I know of an adventure narrative author who wrote of an eight-day winter outing where he watched a moose being taken down by wolves on a lake. Truth be told, by another on the trip, the outing was three days and they saw a moose on a lake. That's it.

Relatedly, I've had an author friend asked by his publisher, "why don't you tell more stories like…" you guessed it! Answer given to the publisher: "Because many of his stories didn't happen." The publisher has not stopped printing the embellishing writer's work. I could go on. This does us all a disservice. Folks less familiar with time in nature may come to expect such exaggerations – but probably not as often as our wilderness adventure writers allegedly experience them. One's own experiences just don't measure up. It's better in a Disney story. Those bears are always rearing up and growling. Worse, such embellished stories deter the uninitiated from developing a relationship with the natural world, for fear of experiencing the (fictional) dangers celebrated in popular travel writing.

Now here is the rub. Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, in a book titled *Adventure of Idea,* wrote about "adventure" as a civilized virtue, along with truth, beauty and peace. He was outspoken against the inert ideas that have become normalized as embedded in our subconscious. In all cultures there are such ideas that have worked well for us once, but in time, they have become tired/stale/counterproductive, ever wrong. There are and will always be inert ideas among us. He put it this way: "But, given the vigour of adventure, sooner or later the leap of imagination reaches beyond the safe limits of the epoch, and beyond the safe limits of the learned rules of taste. It then produces the dislocations and confusions marking the advent of new ideals for civilized effort." I think the "look-at-me; you-can't-do-this" and its associated values have now, or more certainly are becoming, inert ideas. Although the wilderness superhero adventure narrative is still popular in terms of speaking engagements and book sales, it is and will continue to reveal itself as counterproductive. I am speaking culturally here. It still appears to work quite well for the individual though I can't help think the relational, ecologically minded adventure narrative is ultimately healthier than the ego-driven, individualistic, competitive adventure narrative.

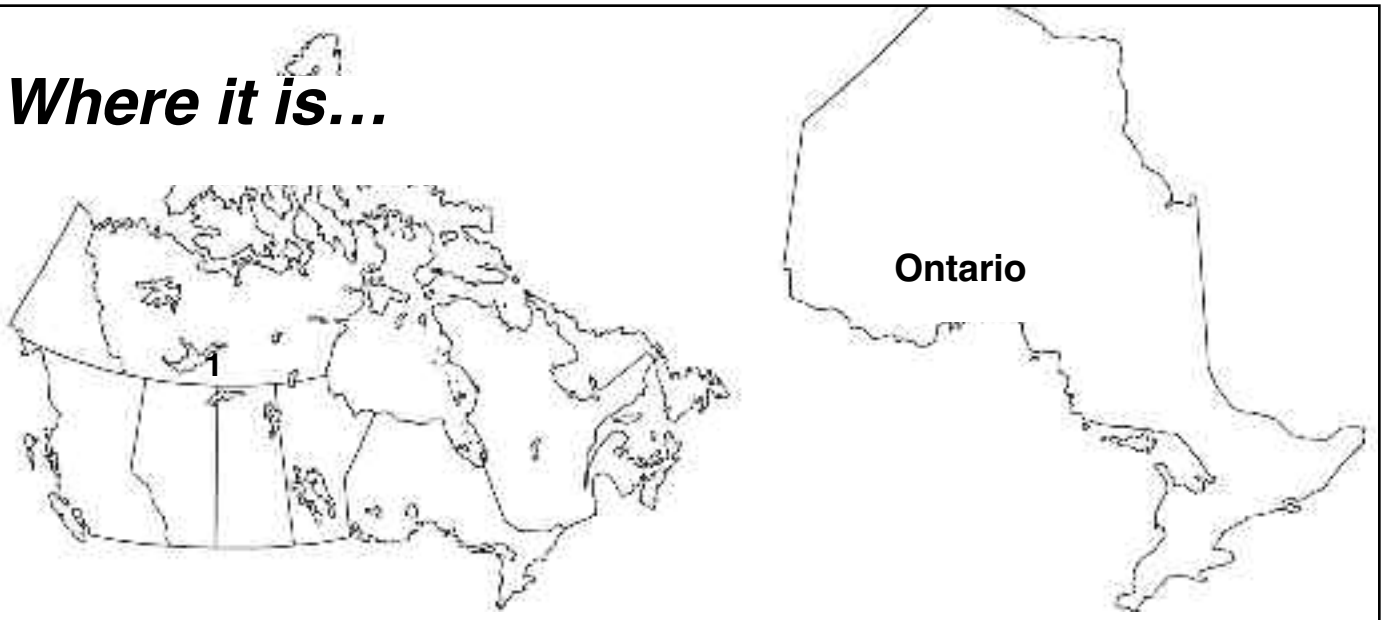
So how about a more ecological, relationally grounded adventure narrative that might even show promise as a healing agent (less toxic) in cultures and for individuals. This narrative would challenge us to remove the superhero mask, and perhaps recover something we've lost. You might call it "the remote/backcountry, spirited, joyous, look-at-me, you-can-go-here-too, belonging/ecological quest – nature as home-place sustainable" adventure narrative. Let us simplify that to: "look at me in this place, you can be here too" or even the more advanced, "look at this place in me – come along." We know what the aforementioned "look-at-me", grunt narratives look like. That is the inert idea following Whitehead's thinking. This relational narrative, although it has always been with us, is harder to pin down for individuals. That is because we are striving for it (or should be – I daresay). It is the adventure "beyond the safe limits of learned rules of taste" not the inert ideas currently enamouring Western Culture. We need to care about who and how we are in relation with the earth. We need to be concerned about the messages portrayed that harm our relationship to nature. We need change. Human-caused climate disruption, social and ecological injustice. I'll leave it there.

It is easy to grasp the "character-building" and "wilderness" stuff of the grunt narrative and journal writing. There is a long history in a colonial past and present. Though it should be getting harder and harder to accept them. It is another thing to grasp the "character building" associated with the belonging quest of the spiritual/relational narrative. They have a long history too: Mary Schaffer's *Old Indian Trails of the Canadian Rockies* (1911) and P.G.Downes' *Sleeping Island* (1943) come to mind. It pains me and many friends and colleagues to see the notion of character limited to specific forms of endurance and hardship. For the Earth's sake, I hope we start to shift toward a "look at this place" narrative and advance to a "look at this place in me" narrative. I wonder if we can become obedient to and thrive in such narratives? I think we can and believe that "culture moves." AND, it is moving in some sustainable directions. Slowly, so slowly. Solutions for a sustainable relationship with Earth assume a constellation of deeply rooted character traits in need of development.

I understand these traits as a new cultural and individual adventure that can be thought of as a latent spiritual impulse. It has laid dormant, but is not lost. We need emergent place-responsive relational adventure narratives. And back to the love apple metaphor. Does the "look-at-me" superhero wilderness adventure narrative, impressive as it is physically and mentally for endurance qualities, mask us like deodorant and perfumes from deeply embedded relational aspects of the self-seeking-a-belonging expression – an at-homeness. Let the true natural odour out!

What inert ideas are embraced in popular wilderness heroic quest adventure narratives? What sorts of beings are mentored when we guide a trip or write a book from such a perspective? What sort of relational presence with land, water and indigenous peoples is being normalized by nature as wilderness and as a sparring partner? These have been concerns for thoughtful travel writing and guiding for decades. I hope I have addressed a widening of this conversation concerning adventure narratives, and spark more accounts focused on "this place in me" with the thoughts above.

Where it is…



…in this issue

WCA Postal Address
12 Erindale Crescent
Brampton,
Ontario, Canada, L6W 1B5

WCA Contacts *http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca*

Editorial Team:
Aleks Gusev: Editor-in-Chief/
Photo Editor
Mike Fish: Assistant Editor/Text Editor
Bob Henderson: Resource Editor
Dave Brown: Text Editor
Peter Jaspert: Layout

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