

# Canada By Land - by Scots

**Page 6**

Bloody Falls of the  
Coppermine -  
Unravelling an  
Arctic Mystery

**Page 4**

**IT'S A BIG COUNTRY ABIGAIL --** In a view looking down the Parsnip River, from the BC Rail bridge, Scotland's Duncan Thomson works his way up this river and across Canada in honour of fellow Scot Alexander Mackenzie who crossed the continent more than two centuries ago. Along with wife Abigail, the pair showed great pluck and resourcefulness in accomplishing their goal. Read about a section of their two year trip beginning on Page 6.

- Abigail Baldwin-Thomson

# Spring Packet



— Chris Rush

A most interesting renewal letter arrived recently. It contained a sheet of photos and a letter from Montreal subscriber Chris Rush.

"I must thank you for your persistence in keeping the magazine 'alive.'" Since I discovered *Che-Mun* (an online hit about your Labrador Odyssey) I eagerly await each new issue and read it cover to

cover.

"I have enclosed a few pictures, one of which may bring back pleasant memories - it is of the bend in the Korok River just after crossing over the height of land separating the upper Palmer River valley from the Korok. I know, after hiking the route up to see the headwaters of the Palmer,

how relieved you must have been seeing this panorama! Water! - no more portages. (Ed. Note: You got that right!)

"The other pictures I believe to be your ex-property. We found this canoe wrecked in a boulder garden in the upper Korok about three miles from the valley that leads up to Mt. Iberville/Caubvick. We think it must have been Dan Pauze and Susan Barnes' canoe [Ed Note: the pair who perished the summer of 2003 climbing Mt Caubvick] swept down the river in the spring deluge. Do you recognize it?

"I took the pictures in August 2004. The two gentlemen in the photos are Joel Cyr and Jimmy Deschenes, my canoe partners in crime."

*Yes, Chris, that is certainly our old HACC Old Town Tripper, the one I sold to Dan and Susan. I recognize the multicoloured webbing in the drilled bow and even the kneeling pads. I always wondered what had happened to the canoe, I just assumed it had been picked up at some point, though that is a tough thing to do in such a remote area.*

*Their trip has achieved mythic status and will continue to live on, not in the way they would have intended. In many ways, it is a more recent parallel of the Moffatt expedition in 1955. While both were different circumstances, they live on as cautionary tales for all of us who travel the northland.*



— Chris Rush

# Canoesworthy

**A**s Saskatchewan celebrates the layers of history in its first Century, the Churchill River system and its surrounding communities are called upon to host the Saskatchewan Centennial Canoe Quest from June 18 to July 5, 2005.

A total of 31 teams from Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and Scotland will travel this historical route in 25 -foot voyageur canoes from the western border of Saskatchewan across 600 miles of lakes, rivers and portages. This unaided wilderness canoe stage race and pageant will include celebrations in 13 northern host communities.

The event will begin in Prince Albert on June 18th and 19th with opening ceremonies and sprint races. The stage race and pageant will begin in Clearwater River Dene Nation/La Loche on June 20th and finish in Cumberland House on July 5th. Scheduled stops and celebrations along the route will occur in the following communities: Michel Village, Dillon, Buffalo Narrows, Ile a la Crosse, Patuanak/English River First Nation, Pinehouse, Grandmother's Bay, Stanley Mission, Pelican Narrows, Denare Beach and Sturgeon Landing.

The challenge for the teams is the journey itself. The challenge for the viewer is to remain unchanged by the magnificence of what they will see, hear and feel while following our journey as past and present meet on the waters of the Churchill. The event Web site is [www.saskatchewancentennialcanoequest.info/index.html](http://www.saskatchewancentennialcanoequest.info/index.html)

One of the canoe teams is Team Scotland headed by Duncan Thomson, who is the author of this Outfit's feature article Canada By Land.

**N**unavut's language commissioner isn't pleased with a southern dog food company's move to trademark qimmik, the Inuktitut word for "dog."

Qimmik Manufacturing says its name is a tribute to the Canadian Eskimo dog breed. The Ottawa-based company's product, a dog treat, is fortified with Omega-3 fatty acids. The company website describes its biscuits as "high quality, high digestibility, and 100% vet designed and vet tested."

Company spokesperson Ann Yourt said Qimmik meant no offence and has great respect for Inuit culture. But Nunavut's Languages Commissioner Johnny Kusugak doesn't see it as an honour.

Kusugak says this company's move is more disturbing. By trademarking the word, he says no one can use it again to name their business or organization - including Inuit.

"There are words out there that identify who we are. Just like the inuksuk identifies the Inuit, qimmik fits in with that," he said.

Kusugak said it's an especially sensitive word since many Inuit believe their sled dogs were systematically killed by the government in the 1950s and 1960s.

## From the Editor



Virginia Peake 1926-2005

**I**t is difficult, even now, to contemplate this past year. Adding to the loss of my wife Maggie, last July and father Tom in October, is the passing of my mother Virginia Peake April 21, another victim of cancer. And this is the reason we are again late in bringing you an issue of Che-Mun, for which we apologize.

In so many ways Virginia Peake was the spirit of the HACC and the four Peake brothers. Though, like my father, she was not a canoeist - she was incredibly proud and supportive of our many far-flung canoeing expeditions - once she knew we had learned how to do it properly.

She was the Queen of Hide-Away Island and the core of the Hide-Away Canoe Club. Shown here in 1994 at her beloved cottage with her ever present flowers.

It was her illness that caused us to again cancel our planned trip for this summer, the second year cancer had stopped it. But we will continue to paddle, starting next year, just as she would want and expect us to.

During many of our trips' various "close calls" we often spoke of what Mom would think if she could see the predicament we were in at that particular moment.

We called it 'Mum-o-Vision.'

Whether it was a Force 10 wind storm shredding our tents; some dicey lining on a swollen, raging river; or being caught out on a freshening Lake Superior rollers - we would try to be mindful of what Mom would think if she saw what was happening at that moment - often hoping she would change the channel for a few minutes.

I know she is watching from a different place, with an even better picture. And she will always be in our thoughts as we paddle North.

Michael Peake



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## Bloody Falls of the Coppermine

By McKay Jenkins

Random House 2005

276pp \$35.95

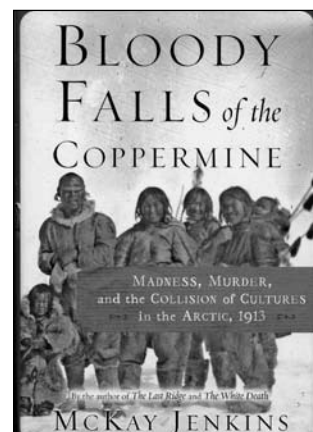
ISBN 0-375-50721-3

*Books reviewed by Michael Peake*

Anytime it is possible to get a book that touches on any aspect related to the George Douglas Coppermine expedi-

tions of 1911-12, I will jump at the chance.

There is relatively nothing new about the incredible pre-WWI period that is of so much interest and activity. Like many true Canadian tales, this one would already have a movie made if it had happened to Americans. The story of the two Inuit men, Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, who murdered the two Catholic missionaries, Rouviere and LeRoux, is a well-known one to many of us - but only in the broad strokes of the story. The many fascinating details lay dormant waiting for American academic McKay Jenkins to find.



And he has done a wonderful job - and given the material - it made his efforts much easier.

Rouviere and LeRoux camped with John Hornby near the Douglas party and

wintered together in the northeast corner of Great Slave Lake. They hired two Inuit guides to help them spread the gospel in a region utterly foreign to the two Europeans. The irritable LeRoux and other circumstances caused the priests to be murdered by one of the Inuit - who continued to wear his cassock and other bits of juicy evidence.

The pair were tracked down by the dogged police work, the stuff of legend, lead by Denny LaNauze of the RNWMP, who learned of the crime two years later. The story is a case of incredible persistence and dogged patience that saw the pair brought to Edmonton to stand trial only to be found innocent. A second trial obtained a guilty verdict.

Jenkins superb research is interwoven nicely into the northern scene of the time. You can tell he is not a northern traveller by some missed geographical references but these are minor quibbles in what is a very interesting and readable book.

The cast of characters includes Vilhjamur Stefansson, Diamond Jenness, George Douglas, C.C. McCaul and the incredible Inuit people of the area. The book is scholarly without being dull. It examines the incipient clash of two very different cultures which were both flourishing in the area at the same time - the last time they would do so.

Jenkins uses his scholarly thoroughness to lay the facts out in an entertaining fashion. He has done his homework and gets an A. He brings life to what surely were larger than life characters.

It is a time less than a century ago but in reality is a much further way than that - it was a brush with the stone age, and as such continues to hold our rapt attention.

## “No James Houston, no Inuit art”

**James Houston, 1921 - 2005**

The Inuit art world was saddened to learn of the death in May 2005 of author and artist James Houston at the age of 83.

Mr. Houston was a person of many talents. A successful writer and gifted storyteller, he produced over 30 books, including several award-winning works for children. He was also an admired visual artist whose popular designs were used by Steuben Glass, his employer for many years.

But history will likely remember him most as the man who successfully introduced Inuit art to the outside world in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Mr. Houston made his first trip to the Arctic in 1948. He was staying at Moose Factory on James Bay when he was offered a seat on an airplane heading further North, to Inukjuak (then Port Harrison) in Arctic Quebec. It was there that he saw his first Inuit stone sculptures, a gift from an Inuit friend. In Montreal later that same year, Mr. Houston showed the carvings to the personnel of the Canadian Craft Guild, who asked him to go North again in search of more carvings.

With funding from the Federal Government, Mr. Houston returned to Inukjuak and the east coast of Hudson Bay, making an additional journey to Povungnituk further North. He returned to the South with more sculptures, convinced unlike others before him that they would be marketable as original art.

An initial exhibition and sale at the Guild in 1949 proved him right, and Mr. Houston once more ventured North, this time accompanied by

his new wife, Alma. The couple visited several northern communities, often journeying by dog-team through hazardous conditions. Wherever they went they assessed the artistic ability of the people, encouraging those with talent to consider art making as a potential source of income. Whenever they returned South, Mr. Houston would promote Inuit art as an exciting new Canadian art form.

In 1951 the Houstons arrived in Cape Dorset, where they discovered a wealth of artistic talent and made many new friends. In the late 1950s, Mr. Houston was instrumental in setting up the first northern printmaking operation at Cape Dorset, the success of which inspired the establishment of similar printmaking studios in communities across the Arctic.

Mr. Houston eventually left the Canadian North, and by 1960 he had become a designer for Steuben Glass in Manhattan. During this time he also began writing works of fiction, many with northern themes. His most successful book, *The White Dawn*, was turned into a popular Hollywood movie. His later biography *Confession of an Igloo Dweller* won praise here at Che-Mun and we especially noted his unique range of life experience; living a harsh and productive Arctic existence, fully understanding and celebrating the Inuit life and being a fixture in the New York society - he loved the contrasts of life.

One northern art expert was quoted as saying simply, “No James Houston, no Inuit art.” While some historians will continue to debate the exact nature of Mr. Houston's role in helping to establish

## The Happy Camper

By Kevin Callan

Boston Mills Press 2005

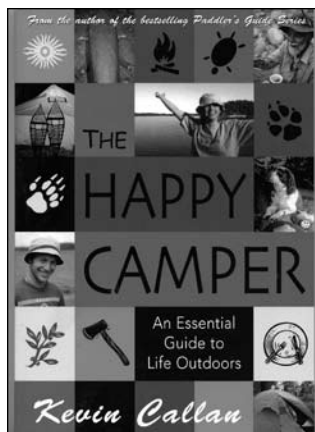
320pp \$24.95

ISBN 1-55046-450-7

I was convinced when I heard the title of Kevin Callan's latest book that he had finally written his autobiography, for there could be no better title.

Kevin Callan truly is a happy camper - both on and off the trail. He continues his prolific nature by producing yet another fine book - and also a baby girl last summer. See below for a picture of young Kayla with father Kevin and Mum Alana - and their first-born - dog Bailey.

In fact, *Happy Camper* is actually a re-write of a book Kevin did a decade ago called *Ways of the Wild*, which was a Newfoundland textbook.



And while there's nothing radically new here, it's up to date which is important and it's all about planning, preparation and a ton of camping tips - all done in the inimitable Callan style - that is lots of bright and breezy writing with a good dose of humour - much of it self-deprecating.

He covers it all; planning and prep, cooking, knots, map and compass, weather, winter camping and much, much more. The book is liberally sprinkled with nice colour photos - in fact they are all colour, which is a good indication of the popu-

larity of his books.

The book was well received by the canoeing community on Richard Munn's superb [www.mycr.com](http://www.mycr.com) website. The eagle-eyed users there spotted an error in the first couple of days the book was out. We here at *Che-Mun* know all about small errors - or do we?

The mistake was in reference to a particular name of a Coleman propane stove - that was actually a white gas model. And I noted it well since it is a Peak-1. Yes, this is one Peake who worships

## Andy Brown: National Geographic photographer was also a long time Che-Mun subscriber

Andrew Brown, a retired National Geographic writer, editor and photographer who traveled the far corners of the world from the 1930s until the 1990s reveling in his craft, died of colon cancer Feb. 4 in Maryland. He was 92.

In 1950, Brown paddled 578 miles of remote wilderness rivers in Labrador, Newfoundland, to become one of the few to photograph Labrador's Grand Falls of the Hamilton River, now the Churchill River; at the time, it was North America's second-largest waterfall. He was a frequent visitor to the annual WCA Wilderness Symposium held each winter in Toronto.

His many adventures included chronicling Adm. Richard E. Byrd's final expedition to Antarctica in 1956 and editing the works of noted scientists Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey as they wrote about their experiences with chimpanzees and mountain gorillas.

Brown wrote 20 articles under his own byline, most illustrated with his own photographs. He relished the dual roles of writer and photographer that many staff members handled in the magazine's early years.

Armed with camera, he traveled 573 miles by snowmobile in the Oregon Cascades to chronicle weather research on snow packs to predict the next summer's potential river flows. Brown savored northern climes, adventure and brook trout. In his articles about life in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Ontario, Quebec, Norway, Sweden and Greenland, he captured the faces of life and work in city and forest, from simple country living to the techno-

logical transformation from wilderness to modern industrial society.

His greatest skill, said his son, rested in a quiet sense of humor and an inquisitive mind that encouraged strangers to talk candidly of their lives and how they made a living.

Brown edited more than 100 articles submitted to the magazine by outside writers. He also was on National Geographic's research and exploration committee and helped identify scientists to tell their stories.

Robert Poole, the magazine's former executive editor and a fishing buddy of Brown's, said that as an editor, Brown was involved behind the scenes in one of the Geographic's most famous expeditions, the 1963 mission that put Americans on top of Mount Everest.

"One reason it happened was that Andy had communication with people sponsoring it," Poole said. "Andy pushed for National Geographic involvement. That meant the magazine had not one, but three stories on it."

The expedition resulted in National Geographic's first television documentary. "They had a movie camera on the mountain," said Poole of the 1965 broadcast. "Andy had the wit to see this was good story."

Andrew Hutton Brown was born in New York and graduated from Harvard College in 1934. His career began on the editorial staff of the National Geographic in 1936.

# Divide conquered

By DUNCAN THOMSON  
*From Canada By Land, was the apt name for a cross continent trip commemorating their fellow Scots traveller Alexander Mackenzie who did the route from Montreal in 1789 and wrote those words on a rock in the Pacific Ocean. In 2003-04, two Young Scots, Duncan Thomson and Abigail Baldwin-Thomson, decided they wanted to paddle across Canada and didn't let lack of experience slow them down any.*



Duncan and Abigail share a snug and soggy camp near the divide on James Creek in what the author accurately describes as a 'trench of trees'. It was tough going through wet and wooly British Columbia.

## **Story and Photos.**

"You go ahead and get ready to grab the nose of the canoe. I'll perch on the rock and feed the boat through."

"But she'll never fit through there. Let's just portage." Abi replies.

"No, the rocks are too slippery; we're more likely to injure ourselves 'playing it safe'. If we tip the boat on its side it'll squeeze through."

"At least keep hold of the lining rope in case we can't hold her. This isn't the place to kill the canoe and lose half our gear!"

But Abi needn't worry: fate has a different end planned for our red, seventeen foot Kevlar Trailhead Prospector canoe and half our gear. But let's not jump ahead.

"Don't worry, Abs. After all, we're following in the footsteps of Mackenzie, aren't we? It'd make a great story if we lost our canoe exactly where he did." All the maps produced in the wake of Alexander Mackenzie's famous 1793 expedition to cross North America mark this

spot with 'Canoe Wreck'd'.

"Smart Ass." Abi works her way around a few smaller rocks to the right and back into the frothing pool below. Already in water up to her waist she mutters "This is a very bad idea."

"It'll be fine. I'll lever the canoe around; you lean forward and get it. Okay, are you ready? Here it comes!"

I'm kneeling, straddling a large rock facing the jet of water compressed by an even larger rock opposite only a half a metre away. I lean to one side, tug on the nose of the boat, coaxing it towards me. It's caught by the current, lurches forward and jams between the two rocks.

"Can you reach it?" I cry, struggling to hoist up the nearside of the canoe to work it through.

"She needs to come about another foot; then swing her to me."

I ease off, letting it slide through a little. Leaning forward to pivot the boat, I momentarily lose my balance, and jolt upright to re-secure

## From Canada by Land

myself. But the boat, still on its side, is free, and grabbed by the current, it's projected over the lip. I try to catch a gunwale on its way past, but it hauls me down off my pedestal into the deep pool. Abi, one hand curled over a supporting stone, arches forward to grab me with the other before I'm sucked under and I'm, somehow, still holding the rope attached to the canoe's tail.

"See, that was fine; no need to portage." I smugly state. "We'll still get down this creek by tonight."

"You moron."

Alexander Mackenzie is to blame. Him and the UK's Channel 4 who were serendipitously broadcasting a television documentary about his second expedition while we were sitting on the couch in Scotland, watching telly and eating pizza.

"That's so cool!" It's a phrase I haven't been able to improve upon to describe the saturation of elegant resolution I felt while tracing a finger through the complex maze of wiggly blue lines on the Canada plate of my Times Atlas, from one side of the country right across to the other, like a set of incomprehensible mathematical equations reducing into a single expression of such profound simplicity: canoeing's Euler's Theorem?

We had never canoed before-though we've done some hill walking and camping, we've never been the sporty types-but we wanted to travel. We'd always assumed it would be at a speed faster than 5km/h, but exploring a story, a landscape and its cultures-witnessing the creation of a nation from the cobbles of Cartier's Vieux Montréal to cosmopolitan Vancouver-would surely prove more meaningful than hanging out in dingy hostels. And of course, once you've got the gear, paddling and living in the wilderness is cheap, almost sustainably so using a modest monthly income from renting out our Edinburgh flat. So we took a crash course: we read *Song of the Paddle* by Bill Mason and hired a canoe for three hours on Loch Tay in Scotland.

"Think you can do this for two years, six hours a day?" One of us asked. That should be plenty to get us through six provinces, even with unforeseen delays like a three week hold-up in a BC town.

"Sure."

On a freezing, raining and breezy first day, April 26 2003, our assuredness plummeted along with our core body temperature as we weaved up the Ottawa River like the novices we were, bouncing off the banks, yet to master the J-stroke. A week's rest in the capital, and a Buddhist resignation to take each day as it comes, without looking ahead, revitalized us, and with very modest daily distances, the months and sections-June's majestic Lake Superior, July's sticky Quetico, August's dispassionate Lake Winnipeg, and September's gnarled Saskatchewan wilderness-drifted past our shiny red canoe far too quickly.

"And what about winter?" our family asked. "Canada's cold in winter."

"Don't worry. When it gets chilly, we'll pull in to one of the towns en route and find a room. It'll be fun."

And it was, in La Ronge, Saskatchewan: fun and cold, for eight months until the ice on big Lac La Ronge finally broke in late May.

Our second summer was spent whizzing over the Methye Portage and grunting up the Peace River. At its top we faced our first significant route choice of the whole trip.

Should we head left and faithfully follow our ancient mentor, Mackenzie, whose grave in Avoch, Scotland we'd visited before leaving, by fighting our way up the Parsnip River and down difficult James Creek, or should we turn right up the more recently established, and undoubtedly easier Pack route to the Giscombe Portage to cross the Pacific divide?

After his previous unsuccessful attempt to reach the Pacific coast by descending the "River of Disappointment" (Mackenzie River) in 1789, which instead leads to the "frozen" (Arctic) ocean, Mackenzie was at it again. On his second expedition he ascended the Peace River in May 1793 and turned south up the Parsnip River at its confluence with the Findlay (an area which is now flooded by the W.A.C. Bennett Dam's creation of vast Williston Lake in northern BC). He and his men guaranteed the Parsnip River's significance in Canadian history by failing to find the "carrying-place of about a day's march for a young man" (the Giscombe Portage) they'd been told lay waiting to usher them to "another great river" (the Fraser) which would, Mackenzie correctly believed, "discharge itself into the sea". They were unaware this rumoured portage was accessed via an unobserved side river, the Pack, so instead they continued all the way up the Parsnip, "anxiously looking out for the carrying-place", only quitting the river near its top to cross the Arctic-Pacific watershed on three small, perfect lakes-Arctic Lake, Portage Lake and Pacific Lake-in BC's Rocky Mountains which lead to James Creek, which Mackenzie named the "Bad River". It was on his descent of this small river that his ambition to become the first man to cross the North American continent north of Mexico was so nearly scuppered. At its base is Herrick Creek, a tributary, via the similarly sized McGregor River, of the great river: The Fraser.

Simon Fraser also travelled this way, but a brief reconnaissance expedition in autumn 1805 revealed a "large and navigable" branch off the Parsnip which Mackenzie "likely [...] did not see" because "he used to indulge himself sometimes with a little sleep". This was the Pack River.

The Pack River and Giscombe Portage remains the most efficient route between the Peace and Fraser River systems, and it's the route most of today's trans-Rockies paddlers choose to follow; indeed, it was the path we had always intended to take too. The advantages were clear: a mix of short, fairly easily ascended river stretches and small lakes ending at Summit Lake. Then cross the divide on a well maintained, well used portage/hiking-trail which terminates on the banks of the Fraser River at the Hubble Homestead interpretation centre, complete with its sweet shop and pinafores.

There's no practical justification for taking Mackenzie's original watershed route and we could find very little information about it. We knew of only one person, Chris Taggart, to have travelled its entirety in recent years, though later, long after making our choice, we speak to Lyle Dickieson in Prince George who successfully lead a bicentennial celebration expedition that way in 1993. We'd consciously not read

## From Canada by Land

Mackenzie's journals for ourselves-we wanted to see things through our own eyes, and besides, naïve ignorance was a strategy which, thus far, had worked for us so we were sticking with it.

The only information that the internet volunteered on Mackenzie's Parsnip/James Creek route was that BC had created Arctic Pacific Lakes Provincial Park, not just because of its historical significance, but because "the park protects very high value fall and spring grizzly habitat". And our maps told us that it's twice as high an upstream climb from Williston Lake to the watershed via the Parsnip as via the Pack, and since the former heads back towards the mountains, it's also significantly longer and more isolated (whereas the Pack route is shadowed by the large Hart highway.)

By the time we reached the southern end of Williston Lake, we were seven eighths of our way from Montréal to Vancouver: we'd experienced remoteness and black bears-a-plenty on the western shores of Lake Winnipeg and since leaving La Ronge, almost three months ago, we'd spent only one week paddling with the current-most had been against it-so we were physically strong. Curiosity-the desire to explore and discover for ourselves-combined with a feeling that we'd cheated the Rockies by comfortably cruising through their heart in less than a day on man-made Williston Lake and a desire to stand on the exact spot, "the highest point of land dividing these waters", where Mackenzie realized they were "now going with the stream", made the Parsnip's obscurity, difficulty and remoteness irresistible: we were heading back into the mountains.



Garry on the Parsnip River was one of the colourful locals the pair ran into.

At the southern end of Williston Lake, passing under a new logging causeway bridge that spans the mile-wide lake-end, we faced our last chance: to our right, clearly defined by steep, welcomingly high banks, the inviting Pack River; and over there, somewhere across this wide-open delta plain, strewn with decapitated tree root systems and canoeing dead-ends, lies the Parsnip River. Three wiggly, hesitant kilometres later we'd found the Parsnip River channel which quickly elevated us out of Williston Lake with a short, shallow shingle rapid. It's typical of what was to follow very regularly for the next fifteen kilometres: frequent swifts and small rapids demand that we jump in and out of the boat to wade the canoe because

the river is too shallow near the edge to gain any purchase with our paddles though we scuff, thunk and whack them against the cricket-ball sized pebbles trying. My beloved cherry wood beavertail split in the effort, but at least that plastic Mohawk proved useful for more than digging latrines. Given sustained effort over the seven or eight working hours (for us) of a late summer's day, we were reassured-even on a feisty little river like this, as we had been against the relentless current of the huge Peace River-by how much progress you can make in a day, though we calculated that if it continued with this vigour all the way to the watershed we would run short of both food and fuel before reaching Prince George in the Pacific drainage basin. But in late-August, after a scorching summer, the low water levels we encountered meant we had it easy on the Parsnip compared to Mackenzie, who for June 6th

wrote of a four mile length: "The whole of this distance we proceeded by hauling the canoe from branch to branch. The current was so strong, that it was impossible to stem it with the paddles; the depth was too great to receive any assistance from the poles, and the bank of the river was so closely lined with willows and other trees, that it was impossible to employ the line." We'd successfully tried the same technique briefly this season on the flooded La Loche River in Saskatchewan, and it's not much fun.

The Parsnip is quietly beautiful, from the high, near vertical, sandy cliffs cupping each eastern corner near its base, to the jade-green glacier water glistening around gravel islands tufted in alder trees and willow. The bank flora alternates between tangled willow with wild parsnips and strong, mature forest so dense that only thin needles of

light puncture its canopy, leaving the dimly lit floor foliage thin enough to enable camping. But who'd camp there? Our wilderness appreciation was overshadowed by a fear of grizzlies. When a cracked bear-spray canister had squirted in Abi's face on the Peace River, she'd spent a few beetroot-faced minutes gasping uncontrollably, her eyes bulging like a helmetless cosmonaut on a space-walk:

"Is that all?" she had cried moments later. "Wouldn't be much good against a charging grizzly, would it?"

"Don't worry my darling, apparently they're very shy. We'll probably never see one." I honestly reassured. But on the Parsnip, as something slid



## From Canada by Land

across the river two-hundred metres upstream, stepped out shaking itself like a dog onto the white sandy bank opposite, and walked nonchalantly into the trees behind, I felt my skin constrict, chest freeze solid and fingers throb from a jump in blood pressure more suited to someone who frequents Scottish establishments serving deep-fried pizza, mars bars and ice-cream. We'd encountered many black bears scuffling past our tent on Lake Winnipeg, and we'd accepted them as companions in the wilderness, but now I was as afraid of grizzlies as Abi (who declared that "no matter how low our food stocks get, we're not opening the tins of tuna"), so much so that when we camped that night on the pebbled bed of a dry channel around an island, I spent ten minutes positioning the tent ("a foot this way; no back towards the riverbank a little; no back towards the island; hmm, angle it this way slightly"), balancing the ursine-forest feng with the bruin-island shui.

"Yes, Duncs, that's it: now he'll never see us."

"Sarky cow".

A couple of days upriver, where the current is very mild (ensuring we definitely won't run out of porridge), a road-sign planted in the river bank catches our attention, so we pull ashore to investigate. Abi hollers her Tibetan-style, plaintive anti-bear cry, we arm ourselves with all our anti-bear toys and head along a grassy path into the bush a short distance.

"Hmm. Probably just goes back to a logging road. Let's forget it." We anxiously concur. BC's interior wilderness is chequered with logged clearings. Even with replanting, the exposed and exploited soil must be losing fertility as Scotland's now barren tundra testifies.

Back in the boat, just pushing-off, a huge bear appears above us on the bank. Only this one was wearing blue coveralls, had a large calibre rifle slung over his shoulder and the largest hands you've ever seen.

"I thought an animal was being slaughtered." Gary teasingly says to Abi. "Come in for coffee. Bring your gun."

"We've got this," we say, gesturing to our bear spray, looking for reassurance.

Patting the shoulder-stock of his canon he replies, "Out here, I don't go to the john with less than this." And he's serious.

Garry tells us that 15 years ago, when the river was much higher, he navigated his way up from here all the way to Arctic Lake in his small power boat. He hasn't been up there since, but given that we know nothing about the river's character above, it's reassuring to know we shouldn't need to portage across fields of muskeg, as we thought we might.

It was exactly in the area of Garry's trailer, just downstream from the Table River, that Mackenzie, like us, had a chance encounter with the few seasonal residents of the Parsnip valley. From the Sekani, he too gained reassuring information, learning of "a large river that runs towards the

midday sun [the Fraser], a branch of which [Herrick Creek] flowed near the source of that river which we were now navigating [the Parsnip]; and that there were only three small lakes [Arctic, Portage and Pacific Lakes], and as many carrying-places, leading to a small river [James Creek], which discharges itself into the great river".



Duncan negotiates a beaver dam near top of James Creek.

Waking up the next morning to a heavy frost at the wide pebble flats surrounding the Missinka River and Wichcika Creek inflows, we eat our porridge watching the morning mist evaporate into the blue skies beyond. This is to be the most momentous day of our expedition. Only ten metres wide now, the river drifts from the north side of the tightening valley to the south, the mountains tops looming a kilometre above on both sides.

The squirming flow, now smaller still, twists as it has all day. But ahead, as the river sweeps left towards a deep side-valley, a two metre wide, water-filled trough leads straight-on. The map shows that this is our route. Gentle Arctic Creek ushers us away from the Parsnip towards a different world, guiding us through translucent bush cover and over a few small beaver dams. And as we round a bend turning north-east, the sheer curtains of foliage open,

exposing a vast landscape of such clarity, in this sun-soaked evening light, that, over twenty kilometres away, the Parsnip Glacier and the Rocky Mountains which cradle it are so close we can feel the warm, revitalizing chill of a droplet melting from the ice.

With a quiet geological resonance that tickles our bones, it whispers to us: "My destiny is to find the frozen ocean; yours lies elsewhere. Go." Obeying, we turn away from the glacier, turn our backs to the Parsnip, the Peace, the Precambrian shield, the Great Lakes, the Atlantic, the upstream struggle, our old-selves and turn south, looking through the mountain funnel lying ahead

## Graves of the Traders

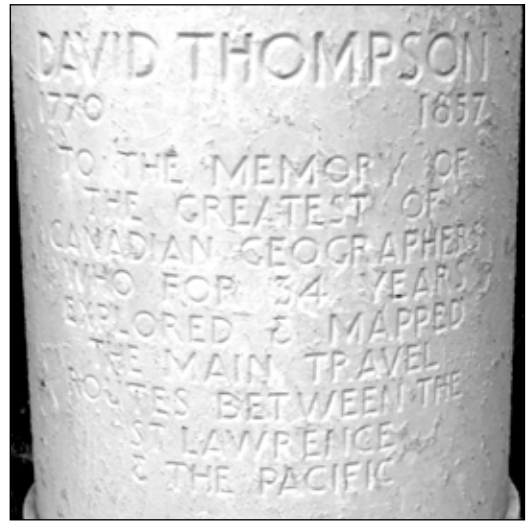
### Mt. Royal Mystery

As the HACC returned from the annual Maine Canoe Symposium (the 20th) we made our regular stop in Montreal to sample some smoked meat and history.

That meant a visit to that Mecca of Meat, Schwartz's incredible deli on The Main.

To walk off such a fine meal we repaired to the nearby historic Mount Royal Cemetery where so many fur trade figures are buried.

Sean Peake made his annual pilgrimage to the grave of David Thompson (left) the incomparable geographer. The grave unveiled by J.B. Tyrrell in 1926, is missing the top sextant which kept getting stolen, and is now safely in the cemetery office. Sean has been toiling 12 years to edit Thompson's full journals. We also found a bit of a mystery when we discovered the relatively plain small grave of legendary Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson (d. 1870) with a just small plaque and no naming of the HBC. Yet just to its left (below) is a large tombstone commemorating the life of one of his chief factors, John Rowland (d. 1854) of Fort Pitt on the S. Saskatchewan River (Sean is at Simpson's grave in background.) There's a story in this unusual discrepancy to be sure. Simpson's stone looks very new and unworn. Do any of our resourceful readers know any-



## From Canada by Land

across Arctic Lake, the most beautiful lake on this adventure. This is it. We're going through the vortex.

After camping overlooking emerald Pacific Lake, we were on the water by 8:30am, early for us, heading for the outflow of the lake: the dreaded "Bad River". There's nothing spiritual about this spiteful monster. Let's start with some map stats: length: 16.5km; vertical drop: 85m, but closer examination warns that in a one kilometre-long section the creek plummets 100ft, or 30m. But for now, lifting over a few small beaver obstructions, and one six-foot giant, we comfortably paddle the pooled creek with the ducks, down through pine, grass and muskeg.

At the base of the big beaver dam, shimmering like oil on water, pink-red-green-purple, our first salmon encounter confirmed we'd crossed into the Pacific basin. Maybe coho, probably sockeye, we frequently saw these tragic creatures as we took to wading, carrying our packs to accompany the lightened canoe over the shallow shingle beds.

"What are we doing here?" Abi despaired. "We should be at home having babies." But this wasn't the time for an existential crisis, except in the sense of ensuring our own survival—a large, fresh grizzly print reminded us that if the salmon were spawning, the bears were down from the hills expecting food.

"Don't worry; we can get down the creek in one day, by tonight." I confidently predicted after we'd struggled our way down a third of the creek's length, under and over numerous fallen trees. We had stopped for a snack at Mackenzie's "small round lake of about one third of a mile in diameter". Looking back to the high white cliff above Pacific Lake's north eastern flank to monitor our progress I'd concluded we were travelling quicker than expected. But at the outflow, the creek bed changes from gravel to irregular rocks. The footing's difficult and the boat was suffering, but we accepted its sacrifice of gel-coat and epoxy for a speedier descent. Though there are fewer sweepers than above the lake, progress became slower and slower. From fatigue, rock slime and the growing weight of the rucksacks we were carrying, slips and stumbles were too regular, so we threw the gear back in the canoe which then grounded endlessly.

Now back to the steep bit: the pebbles become rocks; the rocks, boulders; ankle deep becomes knee-oops, I've slipped again—chest deep. An increasingly determined current surges behind our cold legs. Boulders strewn across the river bed have us hopping and wading across the flow to shepherd the canoe through the obstacle course, though we're relying on the boat for support, and I'm relying on Abi to grab me as I fall into the frequent deep pools. In the higher, colder water he would have encountered, this is surely where Mackenzie's crew lost control of the boat, and unable to reduce its speed ("the foreman seized on some branches of a small tree in the hope of bringing up the canoe, but such was their elasticity that, in a manner not easily described, he was jerked on shore in an instant") they "came across a cascade which broke several large holes in the bottom of the canoe". It took then two days to patch the wreck.

But the worst lasts for only three corners, or six hundred metres, after which we briefly brave paddling. It's only a mile to Herrick Creek and we've still got an hour of daylight left.

"I knew we'd get down James Creek in a day. It wasn't even that bad." I

smugly, but foolishly say.

At a fork in the creek, while lifting over a huge log jam to follow the main flow, it starts raining. Heavily. We paddle nervously on. The sky is becoming oppressively black. The stream pools, exiting under another, smaller log jam to the right. Okay, we'll just lift or slide over. But beyond, the creek leads into...I'm not quite sure what...it's dark down there—the trees and undergrowth are so thick you can't see a thing...it looks like it's...like it's a trench-of-trees.

At its base, the Bad River is only two or three metres wide, is set a metre down into its vertical earthy banks, and alternates between ankle and unfathomable depth. It is littered with the fallen debris of so many seasons' storms that the creek is blocked every five or ten metres. Some trunks you can limbo under in the canoe, others you can pivot and skid the boat over, but many, because the stripped branches reach down from the high trunk to form a canoe-proof portcullis, require that you teeter on the slippery rain-soaked log, kneel over to unload the canoe, lift everything across and reload on the other side, before setting off again with the hope that that was the last one since we must be getting near the end now?

We camp on the tiny pebble bank next to where we were standing. Abi is not going any further and she's right. But have you ever tried keeping a fire alight all night when you're soaked, it's not far above freezing, it's pouring (yet the tent remains noticeably flammable), you're down to the dregs of the firewood you gathered in the fading hope of daylight and to get any more you've got to brave the countless pairs of large eyes you're sure are out there waiting for you, and if you had to make an emergency escape in the canoe, you'd end up skewered on a branch, like an olive on a cocktail stick, in the arboreal carnage camouflaging the creek just five yards downstream? A salmon breaking the surface in a frenzied pulse up a shallow river sounds just like a grizzly bear, you know. On a drizzling, dreechit night, imprisoned by the corpses and ghosts of trees and impenetrably tangled, matted bush criss-crossed by a delta of tiny streams we wait for the dawn, praying we can offer more testament to our fate than a wedding ring in a mound of salmon and berry-rich grizzly poo.

The next morning, we awake surprisingly un-mauled and as we suck our last chocolate toffee ("no porridge today: let's get out of here"), the sun forces its way through the spaghetti of branches above our heads. Struggling on, it takes us just one measly hour to free ourselves from out of the heart of darkness.

In a state of endorphin-induced euphoria, while standing on the spacious shingle bar, looking at the fast and free-flowing mineral-blue water of Herrick Creek which will carry us, via the canyons of Fraser, all the way to the Pacific Ocean, I confidently proclaim "Don't worry my darling, if we deal with the Fraser like we did James Creek, taking it one obstacle at a time, it'll be a fast, fun ride all the way to the Pacific."

"You moron".



– Duncan Thomson

**Duncan Thomson and Abigail Baldwin-Thomson demonstrate their defensive grizzly posture at the confluence of James Creek and Herrick Creek in northern British Columbia. The pair also boast a beautiful web site about their adventures at [www.canadabyland.org](http://www.canadabyland.org). We'll no doubt hear more about this quirky and adventurous pair who paddled across Canada in 2003-04 as a tribute to fellow Scot Alexander Mackenzie. They overwintered in Lac La Ronge in Saskatchewan.**

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