



Spring 2009

The Journal of Canadian Wilderness Canoeing

Outfit 136



photo: Michael Peake

A MASON BUILDER? Legendary Canadian filmmaker Christopher Chapman, 82, sits at his film editing suite in his house near Uxbridge, Ontario. The creator of the Oscar-winning short *A Place To Stand*, was also the man who helped to launch the career of Bill Mason. In 1957 he cast the little-known Winnipeg paddler to be the lone figure in a film commissioned by the Quetico Foundation to promote the remote and threatened provincial park. The film, simply called *Quetico*, was the first incarnation of the Bill Mason persona that would become famous to Canadians over the next half century. See Page 4 for more info on the story of Christopher and Bill and an exclusive offer for CHE-MUN readers on how to get a hold of a DVD of the elusive film *Quetico*.

Spring Packet



R.M. Patterson scholar **David Finch** wrote with some news.

Thanks for reviewing the R.M. Patterson diaries that were recently edited and released by the University of Alberta Press - we are quite pleased with the job Richard Davis did on this collection.

More news: *The Dangerous River* is back in print, complete with the missing chapter, an index - which it did not have before, more pictures and a map that RMP himself drew in the fall of the year that he and Gordon Matthews stayed over

and tried to find the gold. The publisher of this volume is Touchwood Editions, the company that has once again put all of Patterson's books into print.

Also of interest to the Nahanni public is a "new" movie, which is in fact one of the oldest and first movies made about that river. Released in 1957, *Headless Valley* by Mel and Ethel Ross, is a colour film about their adventures taking an aluminum canoe and kicker from Fort Nelson down the river of the same name to the Liard and then down it to the Nahanni and up it to the Falls and then retracing their steps. This fascinating couple is still alive, and in the 1950s and 1960s did several adventures which they turned into movies which they then took the films on tour all over North America - including to Toronto - where Ethel ran the film projector and Mel did a live narration of the account. Each is a "story" with twists and turn. I got out with a tape recorder and caught Mel's narration and it has been mated to the images and is available on DVD from the Provincial Archives of Alberta



THANK GOD WINTER'S OVER! -- In an attempt to cure a vicious bout of cabin fever, paddler Paul Chivers lays down a gutter brace during an early spring first descent of Jane Street in North Bay, ON © Paul Chivers.

for about \$25. Also, the biography of R. M. Patterson is going out of print, so the publishers have asked me, its author, to make a few minor updates to the text and it will then come out as a Touchwood Editions book too. That should happen this fall. Finally, for the hardcore R. M. Patterson fan, a limited edition print run of his final book is available. *The Emperor's Horseman* was Patterson's final book, in which he revisits his youthful infatuation with Napoleon's estafettes - couriers. This book is not about Canada, or about canoes, or even about recent history, but it is a great book of adventure stories told by one of the best story-tellers. Probably the most extensively researched and certainly most re-written of all his books, it is available only from David Finch for a fixed price of \$50 - Canadian or American, and that includes postage anywhere in North America. To order this book please send payment to David Finch at 518 - 13th Avenue N.E., Calgary, AB Canada T2E 1C4 or writedaafinch@gmail.com.

The following email was received by Che-Mun in response to missive we wrote to many MPs in support of reviewing changes to Canada's Navigable Waterways Act.

As a life-long paddler and avid outdoor enthusiast, on a personal level I am deeply concerned with the amendments to the Navigable Waters Protection Act proposed in this Conservative budget. The powers being granted to the Minister could adversely affect the ability of Canadians to enjoy their waterways as they have for generations.

Given the current exceptional economic circumstances, the much-needed stimulus measures in the budget must pass, but the Liberal Party is committed to closely monitoring the impact of these changes to the NWPA.

Indeed, it was the Liberal Party that obtained extra hearings on the issue and achieved a 5 year review that ensures that these measures need not be permanent. Furthermore, the Liberal Party is also of the view that we need to revisit the entire Environmental Assessment Act to make sure that it is comprehensive, robust and efficient.

The right to explore this great land through its rivers, lakes and streams is one that has been passed down through the ages, and I, for one, intend to ensure that my children and their children don't have that right taken away.

I wish to further thank you for sharing your concerns with me, and look forward to hearing more from. Also, I will be in contact with you in the future should other related issues arise.

Justin P.J. Trudeau M.P.



Editor's Notebook

First off, I must deeply apologize for the inferior photo quality featured in Outfit 135. Unfortunately, despite searching long and hard for someone to blame, this was my error!

There are a few items in this Outfit which have a common thread – the revival of old material in our digital world. This is evident in our cover story and trying to get *Che-Mun* readers a copy of the seldom seen movie that helped launch Bill Mason into his film career - *Quetico* - by Christopher Chapman. And the Scott Polar's venture into online photos (right). Also we feature a review of *Headless Valley*, a delightful film made 50 years ago on a trip up the Nahanni.

There's another connection to this revival. On the opposite page there's a letter from the son of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau relating to changes in the navigable waterways act. Upon receiving this staff-generated response to my email, I wrote back and asked them to ask Mr. Trudeau whether he would like to see a homemade movie of his father's trip down the Coppermine River in 1966.

I recently digitized a number of old video tapes I have had kicking around unwatched for years. There were some real gems there, including *Quetico* - which launched me on my search for Mr. Chapman. But there were also copies of Eric Morse's trips including the Coppermine, Hanbury-Thelon and a couple of spring outings down the Petawawa which also featured Trudeau and Blair Fraser. I sent Trudeau the Younger a copy of each after he indicated he would like them.

Despite being cinematically simple, these grainy films are an eye into the past with some pretty famous canoeists paddling the far north. There is even one shot of Trudeau and Morse doing a small rapid together. The trips also feature Angus Scott, the late father of our HACC member Peter Scott - so it all just sort of ties together.

Michael Peake.



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

Canoesworthy

The business plan for an all-weather road linking Nunavut and northern Manitoba is nearly complete, meaning construction could begin in the next five years. Plans to build the 1,200-kilometre road are currently on track, Nunavut transportation officials told business leaders at a Kivalliq Chamber of Commerce meeting in Rankin Inlet. "We're working with Manitoba and the Kivalliq Inuit Association, and we're working to complete the business case study," Alan Johnson, the Nunavut government's manager of transportation planning, told CBC News.

"It's 80 per cent complete, it will be completed in a couple months. And with that study, then we're able to advance the program to the next stage." Johnson said the next stage will be to conduct a detailed routing study for the Nunavut-Manitoba road. Once built, the road is expected to start in Gillam, Man., connecting through Churchill and then up to the Nunavut communities of Arviat, Whale Cove and Rankin Inlet. Officials say the road is expected to cost about \$1.2 billion.

Polar exploration is a peculiar pastime and one that came to say a lot about the British national spirit in that age: stiff upper lips; even stiffer frostbitten fingers and toes; and a general unflapability in the face of the greatest adversity. Perhaps it had something to do with British food.

Until recently, these musings would have required a trip to Cambridge University, but in March the institute launched a Web site offering the public access to 20,000 newly digitized photos documenting the history of polar exploration from 1845 to 1982. Many of the pictures on the site (www.freeze-frame.ac.uk) are too fragile to otherwise be shown.

It was Norwegian Roald Amundsen who first reached the South Pole in December 1911, followed by Robert Falcon Scott and his four comrades a month later.

One photo shows Scott writing in his journal in his expedition's cozy wood-sided winter quarters, a month before he left for the South Pole. Books line the shelves, as do pictures of his wife and children. He holds a pipe, looking much as any English gentleman might in a study on the other side of the world. Given what we know happened next, the image is almost unbearably poignant.

Another photo shows Scott and his comrades at the pole three months later -- five men in voluminous arctic wear, faces sun-blackened. Scott's eyes are downcast, as if he were thinking of the uncertain journey back to safety. A British flag flaps in the background. None of the men survived the return trip. In the outpouring of grief that followed back home, the Scott Institute was founded.

Harbour seals living in a string of lakes in Nunavik may soon be listed as an endangered species. The decision will depend on what the federal department of Fisheries and Oceans hears the deadline for opinions on whether the freshwater harbour seals should be considered as endangered under the Species at Risk Act.

The seals, officially known as the Lac des loups marins harbour seals, make their home in a string of lakes 150 kilometres inland from the Hudson Bay coast. The lakes located east of Umiujaq and north of Kuujuaaraapik are known in Inuttitut as "kasigiaksiovik" (place of harbour seals), in English as the Upper and Lower Seal lakes, and in French as les lacs des loups marins.

These inland seals are the only known population of harbour seals in the world to spend the entire year in lakes and rivers, without any time in an ocean. Researchers say the seals separated from ocean-dwelling harbour seals between 3,000 and 8,000 years ago. Since then, they've developed into a unique sub-species, which reproduce earlier in the spring than harbour seals who live year-round in the ocean.

Cree say the seals are smaller and darker than marine seals and that their meat tastes different. Inuit

• CANOESWORTHY continues on Page 11

Bill's Mason

Bill Mason was a great creative force. But no one develops in a vacuum and it may have been fellow Canadian filmmaker Christopher Chapman, who worked with Bill in the summer of 1957, helped to mould so much of what would become Bill Mason's iconic film persona.

By MICHAEL PEAKE

It was a decade-long leap of incalculable proportions. Ten years after two young men collaborated on a small canoeing film in northern Ontario they found themselves seated in April 1967 in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles at the 40th Annual Academy Awards. They were both nominated for different films in the same category - Live Action Short Subject.

Their partnership began in along the solitary shores of Quetico Provincial Park in September of 1957. Two young filmmakers, one, Christopher Chapman, already on his way to success, and the other, commercial artist Bill Mason, who had dabbled in film but would shortly discover it was the life he wanted to pursue, as the subject of Chapman's film.

It was Chapman who won the Oscar, for the landmark film *A Place to Stand*, and the gold statue rests to this day beside his front door. Mason's film *Paddle to the Sea*, for which he was not technically nominated but rather producer Julian Biggs, is also a classic and it was Mason who yelled words of support of Chapman as he got the award.

The pair were the entire cast and crew of the film *Quetico*, an 18 minute short, commissioned by the Quetico Foundation of Toronto to support the message of saving the beauty of Quetico which was still under a logging threat. Chapman was given free hand in the project and began shooting winter scenes in 1956.

Bill Mason, perhaps the iconic figure in Canadian canoeing was a man of great talents



Christopher Chapman with his Oscar for *A Place to Stand*. It sits with his prize from an earlier film, *The Seasons*, by the front door of his house (opposite).

and interests. Yet, it was this meeting with a much quieter and introspective artist, Christopher Chapman, that can be said to have had a tremendous effect on the life and career of Bill Mason.

For it was from the much more talented Chapman that Mason learned much about the art of filming, especially in a small, remote and self-contained way. The pair arranged to meet in Quetico after Mason finished up with his

summer-long canoe guiding at Manitoba's Pioneer Camp. On his way to meet Chapman in mid-September, Bill stopped to get a haircut and it was a very shocked Chapman that greeted him on the other end to find his film's subject - an anonymous north woods paddler - had a bright headband of untanned skin, only recently cover by hair. Like any great artist, Chapman improvised, using ashes from the campfire as back country makeup and for many of the shots, Mason's glowing head was covered by a hat or sweatshirt.

The pair were ferried by plane into The Quetico, as it is oft-called, by Ontario's then-Department of Lands and Forests. Chapman, now 82, recalled that summer, 52 years ago, at his beautiful country home set in the rolling post-glacial hills north-east of Toronto in an interview over the Easter weekend in 2009. He recalled how he and Mason piled all their camping and filming equipment into a shiny new Plycraft wood canoe and headed out for a week.

"We didn't have a radio," Chapman recalled, "When we wanted the airplane to pick us up we would paddle the canoe in a spinning circle to attract their attention."

The film, which debuted in 1958 was well-received at the time yet is a rarely viewed item these days. Though financed by the Quetico Foundation, who sold it sporadically at the park, the copyright fell to Chapman and unfortunately was never able to get wide distribution. *Quetico* is very notable today for two reasons; the beauty and simplicity of the work - and the fact it



marked the debut of the Bill Mason so many Canadians would come to know.

The short film, which begins with a brief narrations and voyageur songs, follows a canoeist (Mason) through the rapids and portages of the park. The film has an original, lush orchestral score by Leon Zuchart and is very redolent of the 1950. With no words from Mason, just the occasional voice-over announcer, the film is an elegiac memento of the wilderness jewel that is Quetico.

"The Quetico Foundation gave me the freedom to do the kind of film I wanted," Chapman recalled. "I was afraid they wanted a gung-ho, all words sort of film. I wanted to capture it in people's minds."

"I had quite a battle with them. There was a long period of not being able to get any money. I had to put quite a bit of my own money into it."

Chapman set out looking for a lone subject for his film "I'd heard about this guy, Mason, and I remember going to his door in Winnipeg and the door opened and I looked down at Bill - he was quite small - not at all what I expected. But he was so excited about the project as he had seen my film *The Seasons*."

Chapman was the son of a famed and well-to-do Toronto architect Alfred Chapman. A poor student, Christopher was immediately drawn to the artistic world. "I was useless at school," he confessed.

On a whim, he bought a movie camera and began working on the new medium. His first film about nature called *The Seasons*, was a hit and was his entree to more work and ultimately *Quetico*.

He was very busy with films for the next decade when Chapman got the job that would make him world famous. He was contracted to make a film for the Ontario Government's pavilion at Expo 67, which marked Canada's centennial.

He shot more than 40 miles of film all around the province without any real idea of how he would present it. A quiet and unassuming man with a kind smile, Chapman is a true artist who reaches inside himself for inspiration instead of reaching out to others.

When it came to putting the film together - he was stuck - thousands of feet of film hanging from spools - a mounting deadline - unable

to proceed. "I looked into my movieolas and nothing meant anything to me whatsoever. I knew it was there but I just couldn't connect to it," he said. He went to the roof for a while and it came.

"I went downstairs and every piece of film was cheering when I walked in that room."

His idea for that Expo film, *A Place to Stand*, was so revolutionary and startling it not only won an Oscar but caught the attention of Hollywood including that of international superstar Steve McQueen who was awestruck by the method of multiple images moving across the screen. It was a landmark style that made the jump to Hollywood very quickly in Norman Jewison's *The Thomas Crown Affair*.

Along with the famous song, written by Dolores Claman, who also penned the iconic *Hockey Night in Canada* theme, *A Place to Stand* was the precursor of the IMAX process and the multimedia look.

And at the height of his creative and personal success, with Steve McQueen asking him to direct his feature film, *Le Mans*, Chapman turned his back on what would be a dream chance for most people. But that was not the way he created things. Big time filmmaking is a highly collaborative process, and Christopher Chapman collaborates best with himself. He knew that and went back to making the smaller films he enjoyed. He never had another success like *A Place to Stand* - but probably didn't care.



Christopher and his wife Glen, stayed in touch with Bill Mason and family over the years. He was Bill's touchstone who relied on him for advice from time to time. When you look at the film *Quetico*, you will see many shots that Bill Mason used in later years. It is also quite something to get a look at the young Bill Mason, who at 29, still barely looked 18. And with no beard! But all the other pieces of the Mason canoeing wardrobe were present - the jeans, the belt-knife, the ragged hat - a look that Mason would continue on with for three decades.

Another thing that Christopher Chapman opened Bill Mason's eyes to was environmental issues. Mason learned about the effects of pesticides and the new breed of persistent poisons being developed. This too became a hallmark of Bill Mason films.

Christopher Chapman is not the type of person to grab glory. He laughed at the notion he was a major influence on Bill's career. But the facts seem to be there and in many ways they were a perfect partnership - two lovely souls pursuing their dreams.

Much of their relationship is recounted in James Raffan's superb biography of Mason - *Fire in the Bones*. Chapman spoke at the memorial service for Bill Mason in Ottawa in 1989. Shortly before, after their last meeting, he wrote to Bill one last time.

"If I have done anything for you then that means everything for me, for I have watched you with so much admiration accomplishing what you believe in and using your talents to the full. You know you are unique and have touched millions - and that touch will never end."

Che-Mun urged Glen and Christopher to help more people to be able to see his film *Quetico*. You won't find it on YouTube or anywhere else unless you bought it at the Park. They have agreed to provide a DVD of the film, and on our suggestion, have it autographed by Christopher. Both *Quetico* or *A Place to Stand* can be purchased directly for \$25 Canadian or \$20US for American orders each - which includes postage.

Cheques payable to/and mailed to:
Christopher Chapman Limited
c/o B.G. Chapman, P.O. Box 275
Uxbridge, ON L9P 1M7
E: barbaraglen@interhop.net
Mark Subject: 'Quetico'



The stark and dramatic landscape of the Kuujjua River attracts paddlers who want the ultimate in remote canoeing.

Story and Photos by JIM BAIRD

My brother Ted and I flew from Toronto on July 9 of last year ending up in Cambridge Bay Nunavut on Victoria Island, which is already well above the Arctic Circle. From here we would fly up to 71 degrees 36 minutes north in a float plane. Although deceiving when looking at most map projections, this latitude would put our drop-off further north than Point Barrow at the northern most tip of Alaska. We experienced continuous sunlight up until the very end of this five week expedition. Victoria Island is split between the territory of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. We planned to paddle 220 miles on the Kuujjua River and connecting streams beginning at the Nunavut border. Then we would paddle another 70 miles on the Beaufort Sea, finishing at the community of Ulukhaktok (formerly Holman) NWT. We wanted to undertake the most remote challenging and extreme trip we could find and our research told us we had found the right place.

While in Cambridge Bay we walked out of town a bit and came upon a chained

dog team near a small plywood cabin; each dog had a Caribou carcass tossed in front of it for food. We figured that whoever owned those dogs must have been a pretty hardcore hunter. We learned that the Inuit lived nomadically in snow houses until the early 50's. We also learned that a man named David Kaymayook owned the dog team we saw and that in 1948 a strange disease, unexplained by modern medicine, hit his small community near Creswell Bay on Summerset Island. The disease would rot people's limbs totally off their bodies before they died. Kaymayook contracted the disease when he was 16 years old, and it started to rot off his feet. His mother was forced to hack off his gangrenous foot with an ulu while in their snow house. He was rescued and flown out to a hospital in Edmonton where both of his legs were amputated below the knee; he was then fitted with two wooden legs. This man is now known as the best hunter in Cambridge Bay. We learned it was not long ago that the people of the north lived a life of adventure and hardships unfathomable for most to comprehend today.

After flying for two hours the extreme headwater lake of the Kuujjua was visible. We were pretty nervous while our pilot checked if the lake was deep enough

to land on. He buzzed around the small lake in tight circles with the plane totally on its side looking straight down out of his side window. We landed and unloaded the plane wading our gear to shore in waist deep water. Once our Pakboat was assembled and camp was set up we headed out on the lake to take a few casts. I took the first cast and immediately the fight was on, a ten pound Arctic char burst through the surface, walked across the top of the water and jumped right over our boat! I'm yelling "Get the net! Get the net!" as Ted was scrambling around trying to find it. The fishing was unreal. By far the best I have ever seen; we fished for a long time using barbless hooks, which are now required by NWT law.

The connecting river through the five headwater lakes was very shallow and we had to drag our heavily loaded Pakboat. We hit ice on one of the lakes and the cold breeze coming across the ice chilled our bones. After the lakes we got into the eastern arm. It was very shallow; we ended up dragging for 25 km wearing several holes in our boat that we easily patched. Near the end it was so shallow that the two of us could barley drag the canoe. I pulled the 100 pound Ostrom Pack out to lighten the load. This enabled Ted to drag the boat while I dealt with the weight of the pack for the remaining 8 km's to the main river; it was exhausting and our Achilles tendons swelled and burned for a couple days afterward. To this day I am amazed that we dragged for so long; trudging on and on. Afterwards it didn't seem so bad because we were excited to be there and be part of a landscape that was so new to us. We zoned out and kept going almost happy to put our strength to the test.

We saw lots of Muskoxen and Caribou and were woken up several times to the sounds of herds crossing the river in front of our tent. You can smell the muskoxen before you see them some times, they smell like goats. Their closest relatives are big horned sheep. We only saw a couple of the now scarce white Peary Caribou but we saw over a 100 barren ground caribou and an equal number of muskoxen. On one day we counted thirty muskoxen.

At one point when paddling down river I noticed something on top of a steep hill at the bank. It was a wolf, then I realized there were four wolves. We paddled up to them and saw that they had a kill; blood stained their white coats. The Alpha was curious and crept right to the bank, less than thirty feet away from us as the

others stayed on top of the hill acting skittishly. One wolf started howling and a fifth wolf joined the pack. We drifted by and they started to follow us. Ted and I kept looking over our shoulders to see if the wolves were still on our tail, not feeling the least bit scared of course. After about a kilometre the pack was still following us and the river was getting shallow, we got hung up on a gravel bar near shore. The wolves neared us and we were in a vulnerable position so Ted fired off a bear banger just to be safe. They ran away terrified at full speed. It is a special thing to even catch a fleeting glimpse of a wolf but to have the chance to study them up close like we did made all the cost and planning associated with our trip worthwhile many times over. The experience was priceless.

On one of the few warm days of the trip we saw a fox swim across the river. Ted climbed out of the canoe to go have a look at it and I followed when he didn't

return. Within about twenty minutes of slowly crawling up on the snoozing Fox we managed to get within a couple feet of her. She was aware that we were there and would open her eyes to have a look at us from time to time. It seemed obvious that she had never seen humans before and had no reason to be afraid. Ted went back to the canoe and cut a piece of Trout for the Fox to eat. I held the piece of fish in front of the fox's nose and she sniffed it and then took it right out of my hand! She got up and trotted a few feet away to devour her treat. The experience of being able to

closely interact with a wild animal like this was something I will never forget.

One of the many ancient campsites we stumbled across differed from the rest. It had a square stone hearth and a small stone arrow head which we left there. I believe this camp was used by the Palaeo-inuit and probably dated back about 4500 years! It was an amazing feeling to be standing there imaging the goings on in that camp while looking across the land which has remained in a similar state since the passing of these amazing people so long ago. We hoped that we would return home with a small idea of what their lives were like.

We would find an incredible fishing hole and think that we were the first to discover it only to find nearby a gathering of tent rings. We always stumbled across these ancient camps in places with great fishing or where game was plentiful. Most of the sites we saw consisted of tent rings and bone fragments, but we also saw stone blinds inuksuit, and stone fox traps. Most of these sites were between 400 and 200 years old. At one site near the mouth of the Kuujua at Minto Inlet we found the very



Jim and Ted Baird survey a set of rapids on the Kuujua River on Victoria Island.

old skull of a Bowhead Whale. My thoughts drifted to the feats of the Thule Inuit who lived in the Arctic when temperatures were milder than at present. They traveled large distances seeking trade and pursuing sea mammals in ocean going Umiaks. The Thule introduced sealskin floats to the Arctic and used them to effectively hunt the Bowhead Whale, which are 20 meters long and weigh over 50,000 kg. The Bowhead is the biggest animal sought out by any hunter-gatherer group ever. Yes, Thule hunters have bragging rights over prehistoric mammoth hunters.

There were some technical drops and some big water rapids on the river. The Kuujjua is considered an expert level white water river, and combined with the remoteness of the region, the skill challenge is no picnic. One rapid we ran we probably should not have. The drop was in a canyon and had a technical route to a tongue on the main chute. We used a slow approach to line up and then just crashed through the big stuff bracing; it was a wild ride. We had low water by the end of the trip and we only had to portage once and line twice, not bad if you don't count the 30 km of dragging.

The main canyon of the Kuujjua is a sight to see. The gray canyon ramparts shoot up vertically for hundreds of feet and then step back into 2000 foot mountains. Rock pillars stand sentinel at the canyons entrance, testimony to the countless years erosion has aided in sculpting this magnificent land formation, accelerated no doubt by the immeasurable weight and movement of ice sheets during the Wisconsin Ice age. For a couple of people from the south the view from the top of the canyon was reminiscent to that of a far off majestic planet. We also climbed to the top of a river side mountain which gave us a magnificent perspective of the surrounding landscape. We saw the river winding below and spilling into a lake while we gale force winds scoured the mountain top. The desolate tundra mountains provide great scenery along the river and are often dissected by rugged canyons. Rough legged hawks nest on the canyon sides and add a touch more mystique to the river as their shrill cries echoed off the walls as we passed.

As we paddled the final stretch of broken rapids we saw a group of Sea gulls totally devour a family of ducklings. We hoped this was not a bad omen as the weather quickly took a turn for the worst. Winds picked up and sleet started pelting our faces. We reached the coast, climbed out of the boat and looked out over Minto Inlet to see whitecaps breaking to the horizon. Ted and I waited for four days and the weather remained the same. We began to think that it was just always miserable

like this here. In our restless days waiting for the weather to break Ted found the sun bleached skull of a small polar bear with two large holes in it – fatal bite marks from a larger bear's teeth puncturing right through the animal's head. We were reminded that life in the Arctic is harsh and only the strong survive.

Finally Ted and I decided that it was now or never, the weather seemed a little

better and we could at least make it a good distance before we had to paddle past an enormous stretch of towering cliffs that lined the shores of Minto Inlet on the western coast of Victoria Island. The dangerous cliffs provide only two or three places to take out in over thirty kilometres. The first 10 km of paddling took us about seven hours as we headed into gusting headwinds. After rounding a point we began paddling alongside the cliffs. All of a sudden the weather worsened and the waves grew much larger in size. We could not have turned around and paddled with the waves as we would have started surfing then breached and dumped. I was terrified as I could see the



There is little chance of running into other travelers while hiking the rugged hills along the Kuujjua.

waves coming in way over Ted's head as he paddled in the bow. We wore our durable Kokatat dry suits and kept our satellite phone, survival gear, colored smoke signals, and G.P.S. waterproofed and strapped to our bodies. We managed to get off the sea and spent an uncomfortable night camped more or less on the side of a cliff. We ended up having to pump our drinking water out of a puddle that had goose poop in it.

That night we realized that we may not be able to make it out by our own means and we would probably need to charter a boat or plane to get us. We knew that a boat couldn't land on the shoreline of our present campsite where jagged rocks were being pounded by crashing waves that splashed thirty feet in the air. We decided we could make it three kilometres down the coast to a large sheltered bay that would permit the landing of a boat or floatplane. We wanted to retain our strength for the longest amount of paddling time. We loaded our boat first and then ate our breakfast standing waist deep in the ocean while holding onto our canoe trying to keep the bow pointed into the waves that were partially sheltered in our immediate location; it was not easy. We made it outside of the breaking waves and were now travelling way up and then way back down in ten foot swells. We were giving it all we had and were just barely inching alongside the towering cliffs in a blasting headwind. After paddling all out for an hour we had only made it one kilometre and were running out of gas. We realized that we could not make it to the sheltered bay without seriously endangering our lives. We headed for a small break in the towering cliffs. When we got close to this spot a wave picked us up and



surfing us into shore. Constantly breaking waves then repetitively smashed our boat against the jagged rocky shoreline, snapping a chine rod, tearing the outer skin and severely bending other pieces in the internal frame of our Pakboat. Both of us were swimming in the ocean as the waves took our feet out from under us. We were frantically trying to unload so we could get our boat out before it was damaged more. After this experience we decided that we had had enough and that at this rate it would be faster to walk to the finishing point of our trip at Ulukhaktok. Ted pulled out the satellite phone and called our contact Jason the R.C.M.P. officer in Ulukhaktok. We wanted to see if it was possible for a boat to come get us if we chartered one, we were still 103 km from the community. We considered portaging the remaining 2 km on top of the cliffs to the sheltered bay. Ted and I even had to consider the possibility of leaving our gear behind and undertaking the grueling hike back to the last big lake to charter a plane. Jason told us that they were getting hammered by the storm, and that no one could make it out in a boat. He told us that even if it was an emergency the Hercules from Winnipeg could never make it up here in the fog and winds. Jason then said that the weather should break in a few days and to sit tight. He told us we could call back in the morning and he'd have an official weather report. We were worried about our dwindling food supply. That night we prayed for the weather to break; we were both scared we would end up

needing a very expensive rescue.

The next morning when we awoke the winds seemed to have calmed. We called Jason back for a weather report. Jason told us that a favorable weather system had been forecast for the next four days and blue skies were blowing our way. This was the most uplifting news we had ever heard. We sprung to action, broke camp, patched the Pakboat and splinted the broken chine rod with a piece of our tarp pole; it seemed as good as new. Ted and I took full advantage of the good weather and paddled the remaining 103 km of our trip in thirty-six hours arriving in Ulukhaktok ahead of schedule. On the last day we caught a tailwind and paddled 63km in twelve hours, agreeing that both the weather breaking and the time we made was due to the answering of our prayers.

When we realized the situation was totally out of our hands we turned to a last hope and asked a force greater than ourselves for help. Through this experience we gained a deeper understanding to why the Inuit of past times had such a profound spiritual relation to the land and the intricacies of nature. The far north rewarded us with the knowledge and understanding that we had travelled to this untamed land seeking. In the end, we were content that we had been granted the ramification of our inner quest which surpassed our expectations of adventure and duress.

Starting at Old Fort Nelson, the Ross' used a kicker, or small, old out-board, to make their miles in their square sterned 17-foot aluminum canoe. They carried 22 gallons of gas. On many rivers this would be an affront to wilderness travel. But it blends perfectly with the Nahanni's brief modern history. Perhaps the most famous traveler there was Albert Faillie who for decades made the motorized trek up the river and has filmed for the 1960 NFB short *Nahanni*.

Mel and Ethel met Faillie on their way up river at Nahanni Butte. He gave them invaluable advice on how to run up the rapids. They spent time with Dick Turner and his family on the way out. You would be very hard pressed to make it up the Nahanni any other way. On the way to Virginia Falls, they set out on an extensive hikes with a minimum of equipment - plus the camera gear.

In a remarkable aspect of their story, considering the deathly tales of goldseekers on the river, they discover what they believe to be a solid gold deposit. They are shown working the malleable metal and stuffing their only pair of socks full of the stuff to pack out. I won't reveal the outcome but it mirrors that great film *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

The pair even construct a raft of sticks and air mattresses to paddle their way back down to Virginia Falls with some wonderful footage. This is a truly unique and fascinating film. The 1950s was when

the north began to be opened up and they saw the signs of that happening. We are given a glimpse into the isolated native villages along the way, painting a wonderful portrait of a time now gone with their quaint Hudson's Bay Company posts and even joining in on a dance in Fort Liard. So in a way, Mel and Ethel surely did come back with gold.

Headless Valley/The Pan-American Highway - 2 DVD set

By Melvin and Ethel Ross

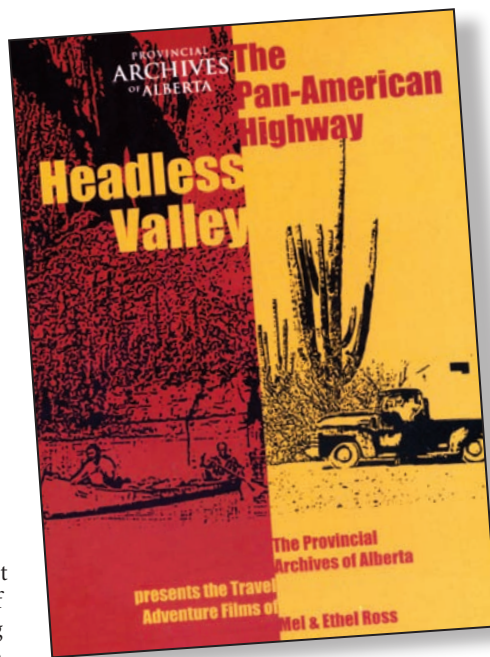
Provincial Archives of Alberta 2009 \$22.99

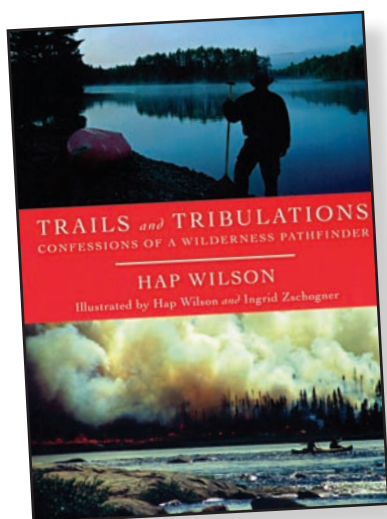
In what we hope will be the beginning of a trend for many such institutions, the Provincial Archives of Alberta have digitized a long lost gem from a half century ago onto DVD.

This two disc, good quality transfer, showcases the work of a remarkable couple who, well before it was either practical or easy to do so, recorded their trips and shared them with people across the continent.

Melvin and Ethel Ross, a Calgary couple bought a 16mm movie camera to record some of their remarkable adventures and would travel widely to show their silent film which Melvin would narrate in front of a live audience. The was blogging fifties style!

There are two films on this DVD, one of their trip down the Pan-American Highway but of great interest here, is their 95 minute film titled *Headless Valley* which follows the couple in a motorized canoe down the Liard River and up the Nahanni in the summer of 1957. It is a remarkable piece of work. While clearly not of "commercial" quality the film features a great deal of patient technique showing them tracking and paddling their canoe which could only be done by setting up the camera and paddling away and then back again. A single canoe trip is a difficult journey to document with photos so it is very clear how much work went into the making of this. Since they did their show "live" it had no soundtrack and we are most thankful to David Finch, noted Nahanni scholar for recording Mel a few years ago reading the narration.





Trails and Tribulations
Confessions of a Wilderness Pathfinder
 By Hap Wilson
 Natural Heritage/Dundurn Press
 216 pp. 2009 \$26.99

Hap Wilson is a well-known canoeing figure with something of a reputation for being a free spirit. He has sampled a cross-section of canoeing-related employment: wilderness guide, pathfinder, outfitter and wilderness author and artist.

In these, Hap's canoeing memoirs, we find that interesting things have followed Hap along the way - or is it the other way round? First known for his superb Temagami canoe routes map in the 70s, Hap has paddled and snowshoed about 60,000 km of wilderness routes.

He seems to have encountered a rogue's gallery of paddlers. Reading about the many strange clients Hap had, I felt more than ever happy to have been able to stick with mostly the same crew year after year. A common thread is people's lack of respect for the wild and traveling in it.

He also had a typical encounter with the man we call Barrenland Bob, though Hap's name is Bushwack Bob. He confirms the terrible things people has said about this outfitter who remains active in the NWT - incredibly!

This books is a breezy read and offers a wide variety of tales in northern Ontario, Manitoba and the territories. Hap is occasionally a little sketchy on some details but I guess it's OK for an artist to be sketchy.

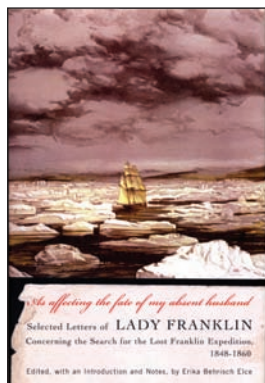
As affecting the fate of my late husband

By Lady Jane Franklin. Edited by Erika Behrisch Elce. 222pp. McGill-Queen's University Press \$39.95

This is something different and yet another thread in a finely woven tapestry of the famed Franklin Expedition and its incredible repercussions on northern travel.

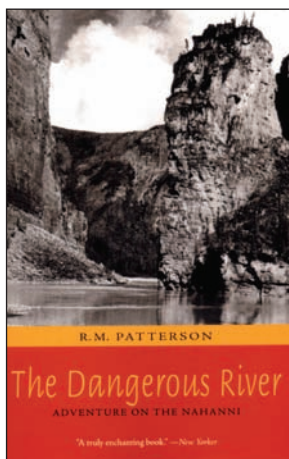
It was Lady Franklin who pushed for the huge search for her missing husband. Reading her actual letters to people of influence of the time gives a fascinating window into a very different world.

With a comprehensive introduction, the books features dozens of letters to noted British politicians including Benjamin Disraeli and others. It also gives a good idea to what went on behind the complex scenes of 19th century exploration.



The Dangerous River
 By R. M. Patterson
 Touchwood Press 2009 \$19.95

The legend of the Nahanni lives on as you can see elsewhere in these pages. The foundation book of all things Nahanni is *Dangerous River*. This book has seen several editions but this new one includes



a new chapter, left out of the original and a hand drawn map of the area made by R.M. Patterson.

Always a great book to read, one you can return to again and again over the years. We certainly welcome new angles and insight into any classic tale such as this.

Lands Serene
 By Peter Kazaks
 Booksurge Publishing 244 pp. 2008
 \$24.95US

Peter Kazaks is a California-based occasional northern traveler who has produced two interesting and personal books that look back on a couple of his canoe trips. He has the good fortune to be an old school buddy of George Luste, the peripatetic Toronto paddler who has done a wide variety of challenging and historically-based trips over four decades.

Lands Serene was a two man beauty of a trip; starting north of Yellowknife and heading into the south end of Great Bear Lake via the Camsell River. They then battled huge amounts of ice paddling to the northeast corner of that mighty lake to the Dease River and followed the title-inspiring *Lands Forlorn* route of George Douglas to the town of Kugluktuk at the mouth of the Coppermine River.

Their trip was done in 1989 at Luste's suggestion. Two years later our group found a note George had left for us tied to a post in Douglas' cabin when we did the Lands Forlorn route starting at the mouth of the Dease. That was certainly a surprise!

There are no great photos unfortunately but the narrative is interesting and it is an insider's view of a big canoe trip including the personal dynamics of which there were a few. It's a lovely remembrance of an exciting summer and a great source of trip into in a rarely traveled area.

Just before press time, and we were late with this review as I had misplaced the book prior to Outfit 135, Kazaks contacted us to let us know that a couple of annoying typos had been corrected in the new version of the book which is now available at Amazon. He's lucky to be able to have corrected his typos. The ones in *Che-Mun* live forever!



CANOESWORTHY *continued*

say their pelts are darker, soft and shinier than ocean seals and that their heads have a different shape. The seals' diet includes whitefish, lake trout and brook char. In the winter, they breathe through cracks and air pockets, and, because no birth has ever been observed, it's thought they give birth early in the spring under the ice.

There are anywhere from 100 to 600 of the seals remaining, although records from the 19th century suggest a larger population before hunters started to use rifles. At the moment, there is "clearly a small population" of the Lac des loups marins harbour seals, says the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada assessment.

The seals were endangered in 2007, although they haven't been officially put on Canada's species at risk list. But there's some urgency now to deciding whether or not they should be listed.

That's because hydroelectric projects pose "a real threat" to the survival of these seals, notes a consultation book on the Species at Risk Act web site. The impacts expected from hydroelectric development include the disappearance of under-ice chambers and ice-free areas as well as changes in prey and increases in mercury.

And Hydro Québec, Quebec's power corporation, wants to keep the door open to future power projects along the Nastapoka River watershed, which includes the Seal lakes. The borders of the future provincial park Tursujuq also include part of the seal's habitat.

Canada's new Arctic research station will be built in one of three high-Arctic communities in Nunavut located on the Northwest Passage, Indian and Northern Affairs minister Chuck Strahl announced. Cambridge Bay, Pond Inlet and Resolute were suggested after consultations with both Canadian and international scientists, Strahl said in the territorial capital of Iqaluit. "The station needs to be on the Northwest Passage, it needs to be in the High Arctic, it has to have good transportation because there's going to be a lot of activity there."

The announcement came as some scientists are criticizing the federal government's funding strategy for the Arctic. Some have said the money - which includes \$85 million in the recent budget to upgrade existing facilities in the North - focuses too much on infrastructure at the expense of actual research. Still, Canadian scientists need to hold up their end when it comes to funding, said David Hik, a biologist and head of Canada's International Polar Year secretariat.

Although the funding gusher that accompanied IPY - \$156 million from Canada alone - isn't likely to continue, Hik said scientists still need money to continue their work and replacement programs haven't been announced. The research facility would be a sizeable structure of up to 5,000 square metres, Strahl suggested. It would include not only labs, but also housing and eating facilities as well. No budget has been determined for the station.

Strahl said the new centre will become the hub of a network of already existing research institutes in the North, including the Aurora Research Institute in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, the Igloodik Research Station and Environment Canada's Eureka weather station on Ellesmere Island.

Although the long-term survival of Manitoba's polar bears remains in doubt, their distant cousins may be making a modest comeback in the province. Grizzly bears, which are officially listed as extirpated in Manitoba - no longer existing in the region - appear to be making forays into the northern fringe of the province, according to provincial wildlife officials. Grizzly bears, which are officially listed as no longer existing in Manitoba, appear to be making forays into the northern fringe of the province.

The large brown bears, which share a common genetic ancestor with polar bears, have been spotted along the Caribou River near the Nunavut border, at Dymond Lake just west of Churchill and along the Broad River inside Wapusk National Park, which is better known as a polar-bear denning area.

The small number of confirmed grizzly bear sightings does not mean Manitoba has a resident population, as officials do not believe grizzlies are breeding inside the province. "We have sightings every year, but we certainly have no evidence of cubs," said Watkins, who believes Manitoba's grizzlies are temporary visitors from Nunavut.

Unlike polar bears, which are adapted to live on ice and subsist almost entirely on seals and other marine mammals, grizzly bears live on land and eat mostly plants. As a result, grizzlies are not believed to be as threatened by climate change as polar bears are, though the grizzly has been hunted out of much of its North American range. The grizzly bear's historic range included almost all of the Canadian prairies, as the animals were once found as far southeast as Winnipeg. But the plains grizzly had all but disappeared by the 1880s and Manitoba's last official member of the prairie population was shot and killed in 1923.

In any case, the barren-ground grizzly that thrives in Nunavut and the hunted-out plains grizzly are not actually different subspecies, Watkins said. Even polar-bear behaviour may be changing. Watkins said the ice-faring bears have been observed eating muskrats and other small land animals in northern Manitoba, but he cautioned against attributing this observation to longer sub-Arctic summers that are reducing the window for polar bears to pursue seals on the ice of Hudson Bay.

Reports suggest a business plan to build a 1,200-kilometre road linking Manitoba to Nunavut for the all-weather road is nearly complete. It would start in Gillam and run through Churchill and up along the Hudson Bay coast to the Nunavut communities of Arviat, Whale Cove and Rankin Inlet.

News of the road development was released a week ago at a recent meeting of the Kivalliq Chamber of Commerce in Rankin Inlet. Nunavut officials say the road is expected to cost about \$1.2 billion. Construction may begin as soon as 2014. Such a road has been discussed for several years. In 2005, the Manitoba and Nunavut governments and the Kivalliq Inuit Association launched a \$1-million study to look at three proposed corridors which a road could follow.

It also looked at the social, economic and environmental impacts of a road into the far North. Many believe a road is needed to connect isolated northern communities to the south to ease the transportation of food, building materials and other goods such as equipment used in mining. Others fear a road will only increase human access to fragile wilderness areas. It's estimated an all-weather road would cost \$8 million to \$11 million a year to maintain.



photo: Jim Blair

The desolate coast of Victoria Island as seen by the Baird brothers, who had a tough time negotiating this rugged coastline as they finished their trip on the Kuujua River last summer. Their trip story begins on Page 6.

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