

(A Land That Followed) Its Own Order and Rule

Great Whale River 1997

By Bill Seeley
Guide

Dedicated to Christine for her unending
patience and the memory of George Heberton
Evans III for being an inspiration to generations
of wilderness paddlers young and old.

There is a story, hammered out long ago on a now ancient manual typewriter, that hangs under the bow end of a canoe in the Matthew Ridgeway Lodge at Keewaydin Camp on Lake Temagami, Ontario. It is framed, but the six by eight inch stationery sheet, unprotected by glass, is faded with time,. The canoe above it is inscribed, *2000 Mile Mojo Trip: Hudson's Bay, Great Whale River, Belcher Islands*. The story reads:

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Belcher Island Trip - 1915

July 15 - September 22

CAMPERS: Chess Kittredge, Phil Barnes, Al Kittredge

GUIDE: Jack Green

The group traveled via Cochrane and the Mattagami, Kapuskasing, and Moose Rivers to Moose Factory by canoe and headed to the Great Whale River which runs into Hudson's Bay from the peninsula of Labrador. Few white men had ever seen the mouth of this river.

By sailboat, with canoes lashed to the sides, they reached Charleton Island--tired and seasick. Picking up the steamer, they journeyed on, stopping for a goose shoot and a stop at Strutton Island.

Arriving in Hudson Bay they were in the land of the "Esquimaux" and saw seals and whales. Here they decided to stick with the steamer and not go up the Great Whale River. After a look at the mouth of the river they proceeded on to the Belcher islands where they arrived far behind schedule.

After bartering with the natives the group headed south on August 30th arriving at Moose Factory on September 7th. They then faced the upstream paddle of the Moose and Abitibi Rivers in rain and wind. Arriving in Cochrane they were greeted by telegrams from home concerning their safety!!! September 22nd found them at Bear Island. Keewaydin was closed for the winter so the group headed for home, tired, late, but having completed the longest trip in Keewaydin

history [then only 22 years old], over 1900 miles by train, canoe, sailboat, and steamer!

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Jon Berger's trip notes, which we used to navigate the river, open with the following quote from George Beste's 1578 account of the voyages of Martin Frobisher:

How dangerous it is to attempt new discoveries; either for the length of the voyage, or the ignorance of the language, the want of interpreters, new and unaccustomed elements and airs, strange and unsavory meats, danger of thieves and robbers, fierceness of wild beasts and fishes, hugeness of woods, dangerousness of seas, dread of tempests, fear of hidden rocks, steepness of mountains, darkness of sudden falling fogs, continual pains-taking without rest, and infinite others.

How pleasant and profitable it is to attempt new discoveries either for the sundry sights and shapes of strange beasts and fishes, the wonderful works of nature, the different manner and fashions of diverse nations, the sundry sorts of government, the sight of strange trees, fruit, fowls, and beasts, the infinite treasure of pearl, gold and silver, the news of new found lands, and many others.

Jon Berger adds:

Speaking to me over the centuries, Beste vividly describes the two pulling forces of joy and hardship to be found on a long and unknown trip.

I can only concur that the lure of the Labrador wilds, which has drawn explorers and adventurers over the centuries, is the lure of the unknown which carries with it the rare and often forgotten pleasure of the infinite possibility of both tangible and internal discoveries.

It is hard to say exactly where this story begins. Perhaps it begins in late August of 1992 at my friend Tim Wood's apartment in the south end of Boston. I was en route to Brooklyn, on my way home from my first summer as the guide of Keewaydin Camp's* Hudson Bay Trip. As I recall, an imitation kerosene lamp burned dimly on a small round oak table, and a bottle of Bushmill's Irish Whiskey slowly faded to neglect as the clock over the stairwell chimed hours lost to our attention. Goose Bay and the Atlantic Ocean seemed remarkably close to Kuujjuarapik and Hudson Bay on the pages of Tim's atlas. (Thank you Nuala for your patience.) That night launched several years of planning, still in the works, for a monumental journey from the Labrador coast to Kuujjuarapik/Wapmagoostui via the Naskapi, Kanariktok, McPhayden, and Great Whale Rivers. That planning was instrumental to the trip herein described, both for the logistics worked out by Tim, and for a dream unleashed in the wee hours.

Perhaps this tale was born with Nicky Adams on a midnight boat ride with his father to deliver the child of a proud Native American family, or with Faulkner's tale of a small boy's trip to a flagstop hunting camp to carefully

track a bear, both read canoeing in the Ontario wilderness as a boy during summers past. Perhaps. But certainly it starts in a dark and musty lodge on Lake Temagami, where the colonial flag of Ontario still hangs amidst records of countless Canadian canoe trips dating back to 1903. There, under the watchful gaze of an old Bull Moose and the 42 1/2 lbs. lake trout caught by Henry MacCloed in 1913, a 12 year old boy first looked up at the bow of a canoe that read "2000 Mile Mojo Trip: Hudson's Bay, Great Whale River, Belcher Islands", and dreamed of a mysterious and far away shangri-la where Inuit and Cree hunt whales, seals, and caribou under pewter skies on the eastern shore of a great frozen sea.

JUNE 23:

Danny, Steve and I left camp at 1pm, just after lunch, so that we could run some last minute errands before picking up the boys at North Bay Airport. The sun was out, but the threat of late afternoon thundershowers hung in the air. Our main mission was to find powdered tomato sauce and dried tomatoes in order to lighten the loads. We would have only one food drop and 21 days of canned spaghetti sauce fixings can be quite cumbersome. Unfortunately we were SOL so the boys would be stuck with canned goods for the duration. Heavy Loads!!! We puttered about in North Bay and I called Christine. Wal-Mart is always the highlight of this trip. This year we needed rope, and what Steve, with a big grin, always refers to as Alaskan Birch Bark--lamp oil for the breakfast fire. Queen Elizabeth II was due in town in a couple of days and there was a convoy of deep blue horse trailers carrying the black stallions of the R.C.M.P. (The Canadian Mounties, Steve) parked long the shoulder of Route 17. We were hoping for a glimpse of them performing exercises, practicing in preparation for the arrival of the Royal Family. No such luck. A cook who had once worked for Ojibway* was apparently preparing the Queen a meal. But we were to miss the festivities as we would be camped somewhere along the James Bay Highway en route to points north and east. I gracefully bowed out of the all you can eat Chinese food buffet (our first real task as summer mountain-men) after only one plate in order to leave room for dessert. Ice Cream and Cookies!!!

Tom Taber and Jimmy Carr were already in attendance at the airport when we arrived. Tom's folks had arrived in a black 1997 Fleetwood to collect their 20 foot v-stem freighter canoe from the Temagami Canoe Company. That would be quite a sight to see, the Cadillac of the bush on board the Cadillac of the road. A pair of German F-16 training jets were on the runway with their engines out for an overhaul. North Bay is a NATO jet fighter training base. The engines looked like cruise missiles to my untrained eyes. I called Christine again. The boys arrived only 12 minutes late, and this year there were no stragglers left behind in Toronto. It was the first time in six years that no one had missed their connection. We arrived at Boat Line Bay at 10pm and proceeded up the lake in the pitch black under overcast skies. I rode with Danny and we spent most of the ride dodging the wake kicked up by Matt in the Gully Gust. At night the running lights reflect off of the windshield making it tough to see so one must trade off between visibility and being visible which makes for a harrowing ride. We cut close by the buoy at Witch's Point and into open waters without incident. We put the boys up on Fifth Avenue in the old Temagami Wigwam platform tents and I was off to bed just about midnight.

JUNE 24:

We woke the boys up at 7 with the first breakfast bell. As the

summer progressed this wake up would seem luxurious. The guide headed for his last shower for the duration. Eggs and bacon for breakfast. The outfit was complete, including the cheese and bacon, by 10 am, so we dispersed to prepare our personal gear. As per usual the guide was dead last to get ready to go and scurried into lunch a couple of minutes late. We had a good crowd to see us off including the Ojibway staff. Danny and Matt drove us down. Steve and I had loaded most of the gear down the day before en route to pick up the boys. The bus was waiting for us when we arrived at 1:30 and was packed and ready to go at 2:20. The boys climbed aboard and we were off, six canoes, 12 wannigans, 80 lbs. of flour, 12 personal rolls and all of our re-outfit all crammed into a yellow school bus. We stopped in New Liskeard at the A&P to complete our outfit with some items not available at camp. The guide and the staff compromised, taking an even amount of diced tomatoes and peeled tomatoes for the spaghetti and the chili. We were on the road for real at 4:30pm.

We stopped again at Rouyen-Noranda, a nickel mining town in Northern Quebec, for a break and to pow-wow with our driver, a young french canadian gentleman from New Liskeard named Yves, about how far we needed to get that evening. Steve and I had a motel in mind so that we could get on the road quickly in the morning (if we camped the bus would have to be unpacked and then packed again). Yves had a book listing motels and prices on the road. Mattagami was priced like a tourist town, and so out of the question. But there was a mining town called Joutel 13 m off of the road and 30km from the gate at Mattagami. Yves did not believe that the town had survived the closing of the local gold mine. His brother-in-law had been employed by the mine and left Joutel when the company laid everyone off. We decided to try it all of the same. In Amos we called ahead and confirmed the presence of the establishment. We made Joutel at dusk, 10:30 p.m. The motel appeared closed, and not just gone fishing. Perhaps Yves brother-in-law was correct. Across the street at the gas station they suggested that we simply ring #1 and ask the proprietor to open up for us, which he did gladly. There was some loose debate over the price of the rooms. But, the "expected tour group" quickly faded from his memory, and we were in place a half hour later. Each room had two twin beds, a sink, and sealed windows. We shared a bathroom at the end of the hall. The door knobs had long since succumbed to the rambunctious tenor of weekend evenings in a mining town and been replaced by cabinet sized sliding bolts. These were more for show than anything else as one could simply reach in through the hole where the door knob had been torn out and undo the bolt if he or she did not feel like simply pushing the door in. The adventure began early, eh boys. We watched a little CBC in the "common room" across from the bathroom. I disappeared to call Christine from the local pay phone at 11 and when I returned everyone had squirrelled off to bed.

JUNE 25:

Rain rolled in while we slept. The day promised to be sloppy George. The boys were raring to go though, and we were off at 7:30, 20 minutes after the wake up call. Our first stop was the hardware store in Mattagami for rope and two compasses (Steve and I, like good, confident, and stalwart wilderness guides had left our compasses at home). I discovered that if you travel in Canada you should bring your compass and your Visa card because they do not take American Express. I settled on the cheaper, military-issue style compass which gave Steve a chuckle because all of its bells and whistles promptly fell off.

We stopped at the gate to the James Bay Highway to sign in and gather some maps indicating the whereabouts of roads and the scarce amenities provided on them for travellers. No date of egress was required. The whole procedure was pretty informal. And the guy behind the desk was as poor an English speaker as I am a French speaker. I collected an extra copy of each of the maps to send back to Danny and then we were off.

The rain abated a bit for our first stop, the falls on The Rupert River Warren Chivers refers to in his 1949 trip notes as *Oatmeal Rapids*. The visit was in keeping with the old Keewaydin adage commemorated in Heb Evans book The Rupert That Was that holds that it always rains on Keewaydin at Oatmeal rapids. The river drops 100 feet here in a magnificent cascade. Hydro-Quebec has placed a scenic overlook on the south side of the river just below the steepest part of the drop. The old campsite lies buried beneath it. The bridge is as odd a sight from the road as it is from the river where, in 1992 and 1993, we rounded the bend above the falls, after some 30 odd days alone in the bush but for the re-outfit pilot and a handful of Cree camped at the abandoned village and former Hudson Bay Company post on Lac Nemescou, and were confronted by the dark, rusted, single corten steel tower of the small suspension bridge that spans the falls. The road is as empty and isolated as the surrounding bush (we saw no one on the river below the road either). The bridge does have its own raw beauty, but it seems oddly placed there in the bush, and it pales in contrast to the falls flowing under it. I suppose that there is no stopping progress (a truism and tautology if ever I heard one, eh Russell). On the east side of the road there is an abandoned Hydro Quebec survey camp. It was operative in 1991 when Steve first came down the Rupert, but was abandoned in 1992 and 1993, and does not appear to have seen any activity since then. That first year the boys were invited in for an all you can eat feast and a tour of the operation. Hydro Quebec was doing volume studies and analyzing soil samples. I can only guess that what they found was unfavorable. In any event, our only company was a sanitation crew cleaning out the outhouses, and they were as surprised to see us as we were to see them. We took 15 minutes for the boys to have a gander while Steve and I reminisced about the Rupert trips and the portage that crosses the highway (no crosswalk Danny). In 1991 the road was busy with freight heading north, but in 1992, 1993, and 1997 we saw no such evidence of Hydro activity to the north. In fact what we did see was equipment and crew quarters being hauled south on wide load flatbeds.

The stopping place at Km 381 was simply a gravel clearing with a corrugated tin garage, two gas pumps, and a set of prefabricated barracks. It was quite a hovel of activity. The day was still overcast and had turned raw. We made lunch while Yves took a break. The woman pumping gas had told him that the road was a mess beyond LG4 due to a wet spring. The adventure had begun.

The bridge at Conglomerate Gorge on the Eastmain River was

massive. The falls that still tumble through the deep chasm despite the dam upstream were shrouded by low clouds and heavy mist. I wandered out onto the bridge for a picture as the bus inched along behind me. The whole scene was eerie, haunted by the ghost of canoe trips past and a river that once roared through the gorge. The empty banks of Conglomerate Gorge are an emblem of the change Hydro Quebec has brought to the land. We stopped again where the road crosses the creek above Lac Vieux Comptoir. Danny Carpenter describes a low hill, perfectly round, directly in the path of a long canal that drops into the lake. It appeared only briefly out of the mist, but the valley was just as it had been described, a narrow channel flowing between barren gneiss hill towards the humped back of a pingo (or drumlin?).

We made Radisson just before 5pm. My information was that Air Wemindji was at LG2 so we drove past town and straight for the Hydro site at the dam. In the fog and mist the massive spillway which appears on much Hydro Quebec literature was sublime. As the road approaches LG2 it runs along a verdant valley that has obviously been recently reforested. Signage at a well-placed roadside pullover provide information about the planting and a spectacular view of the spillway. We did not stop as we wanted to reach Air Wemindji before closing, but my curiosity was piqued by the oddity of an apparently cleared and replanted valley bottom. The fog obscured everything around us so it was hard to get one's bearings. At a large gravel wall the road split and Yves took the right fork which switchbacked up a 150 foot hill. The boys fell silent as we climbed beside the gravel embankment into the clouds. Suddenly, upon cresting the hill, the gravel gave way to the grey, cold water of the La Grande Reservoir less than one meter below the lip of the earthwork dike. The bus came to a stop at the water's edge before attempting a tight K-turn. Visibility was less than 100 yards. The reservoir was obscured by the fog and mist. It seemed as if we were parked at the edge of an unknown ocean. The mystery was solved. The valley is the old riverbed.

The road across the dike was closed to traffic so we turned back towards Radisson. Yves took us on a spin around town on Boulevard de Grosselliers (named after one of the two fur trappers who, along with Prince Rupert, founded the Hudson Bay Company) but there was no sign of Air Wemindji. The town is centered around a large pine paneled complex that looks like a huge ski chalet. It is the same architecture used for the new buildings in the local Cree settlements paid for by Hydro Quebec. It apparently houses a hotel, a hospital, all of the schools and the bulk of the city services. In keeping with all good company towns in the north "double-wides" fan out from the center of town in all directions. A strip mall runs along the east side of the ski-chalet complex, housing all of the towns commercial interests. The town was very clean and modern in comparison to Joutel, Mattagami, and the stopping place at Km 381. It was after 5 so the local tourist information stand was closed. There was an Esso station across the street. We tested the old adage that one can always get accurate directions at a local filling station. This was the first of several occasions on which Yves was instrumental as an interpreter. On a cold, wet Wednesday afternoon in June there was not a lot of English spoken in Radisson. Without Yves's help the journey out would not have passed so smoothly.

The filling station was run by two french Canadian women, a young woman with short cropped blonde hair, and a wink for everyone who walked in the door, and a middle aged woman who, by her wary glances, appeared to be the younger woman's mother. The gas station doubled as both a hardware store and a grocery store. They located Air Wemindji's phone

number for us and offered Yves their phone. The dispatcher was out of the loop. He could not understand that we had already paid for the re-outfit flight and that all we wanted to do was drop off the food that they had been hired to fly in to us. He thought that we wanted to be flown into the re-outfit site that evening and wanted to know how we would be paying. He kept repeating that pilot would return from the airport at 6 and that we could discuss our plans with him then. There was no breaching this impasse so we opted to wait for the return of the pilot, René.

At 6 the dispatcher professed to a knowledge of English and the phone was passed on to me. René had not returned yet, but, as luck would have it, he was standing behind me paying for gas. René remembered the name "Keewaydin" from the flight manifests for July. We followed him to their Radisson base which was simply a house for the pilots. One entire wall of the living room was a flight map of the Labrador peninsula. I located the drop site for them on the map and circled it in magic marker to which they added "Food; July 14". The dispatch still couldn't get it out of his head that we did not want to fly in as well. I guess nobody much drives in off the road to LG4 and paddles out. There was some more discussion of finances so I left him the number of the TLA and told him to have them radio Danny at camp if there was a problem. It was only then (oddly) that he seemed to understand that we had already paid.

Air Wemindji is at La Grande, which is the airport serving LG2 and Radisson. It is located just north of the road to LG4, 30 km south of Radisson. We met René there to drop off the food and put the cheese and bacon in the freezer. It is a big operation. There were two Cessna Caravans on the runway and one in the hangar. Steve asked why they did not fly de Havilland Beavers or Otters which are the usual workhorses of the north. Caravans are turbo prop jets and cost a little more to operate. René told us that they had fuel dumps all up and down the coast and that the Cree and Inuit had a tendency to "borrow" their fuel. They had changed over to jets because the fuel was not as useful in the motorboats and snow machines of the locals. (Steve confided later that he hoped that the bush plane outfits in Alaska didn't hear about this strategy because there were two such fuel dumps en route to his winter camp. We changed the date in the book to July 14. René said that he would probably fly that day since he was familiar with the spot and had accepted the food for us (so he knew what was there). He told us to expect him after 4pm (because that would give us plenty of time to get there). Steve and I thanked him and told him there would be a pot of coffee waiting for him.

We were on the road again by 8pm. We made the Sakami Reservoir by dusk. There is a stopping place without services here where the road crosses the water spilling "upstream" into the La Grande reservoir. We stopped for a break and a look at the rapids which were swollen with spring runoff and the days rain. The sky was an even pewter Danny and the late dusk had that northern air about it. The mist had stopped falling, the temperature was plummeting, and a stiff wind blew from the west. There were sports camped at the stopping place so we drove on a couple more kilometers to a hidden Cree camp that Yves eagle eyes spotted in the bush on the north side of the road. The road was soft and Hydro Quebec was running oversized loads out from the camps at the east end of the reservoir system. That was impetus enough to call it a night before it got dark. Several of the boys joined Yves in the bus which we had unloaded to make a flat dry spot for Yves tent. The rest pitched on a field of Caribou moss 50 yards west of the bus. Steve and I pitched on the sand right in front of the bus. We

chatted with Yves over corned beef and cheddar sandwiches before trailing off to bed. He told us that he had a fledgling landscaping business and a seven month old son in New Liskeard. The experience in Radisson seemed to have bonded him to our cause and now he was in for the adventure.

JUNE 26:

Steve and I were awakened by the low rumble of the diesel engine of the bus just beyond the back window of our tent. Yves was giving it a quick tune up. Steve and I peaked out the back window at the bus and caught a glimpse of blue sky among the clouds. They were breaking up in the high wind which was a welcome sight as we hoped to be on the water by dinner. We loaded the canoes back onto the bus and were off without breakfast. At km 208, where we had stopped for a leak, we were passed by a pickup truck headed in the opposite direction. The driver pulled a u-turn and invited us to a spaghetti breakfast. We gracefully declined his kind offer.

We made LG4 at about lunch time. I called Christine for the last time for the duration. LG4 is a barren, sandy, windswept place. The highway past LG3 meanders through small, granite-topped mountains, a geographical attribute that we would become quite used to as the summer unfolded. The road is a narrow ribbon of gravel that stretches out to the horizon as it makes its way through the mountainous transitional forest of the northern Quebec taiga. The light was thin and the day cold at LG4. With the wind none of us took off our coats. Here several trailers and a corrugated tin garage stand on a wind-swept patch of imported sand and gravel. There are no trees to speak of. A sign marks the egress from the stopping place. It reads, "BE ADVISED: There Are No Services On The Road Beyond This Point. Beware of Heavy Trucks And Machinery. Travel At Your Own Risk." Yves had a chuckle at this. He turned to me and said, "Have you seen any services before this?" Yves had the veal cutlet special at the cafeteria. The boys ordered fries and coffee, and there was a moment of uncertainty when someone accidentally pocketed the cook's cigarettes. Luckily they were returned to their rightful owner with haste and not a small amount of humility. The only inhabitants that we saw at this lonely outpost were two young women who seemed to be running the restaurant. I would imagine that the rest of the locals work the road crew and were out on the job keeping the soft gravel highway from deteriorating into the bush.

The rumor that there was no gas at LG4 turned out to be the stuff of myth. We filled up the bus and two 10 gallon jerry cans for the run to KD1. We set Steve's GPS to chime at the map coordinates of the road north to our put in. Then we were off. We saw our second bear of the trip just past LG4. We had heard at LG4 that there was gas at LA2 so, at 3pm, when we passed the turn off to the last of the La Forge dams we ventured north to the gate. No luck. We were turned away. The road was remarkably close to our turn off. Just down the Caniapiscau road we passed the La Forge airport (which is a good sized operation) and Steve's GPS went off indicating that we had passed the declination of the access road. The road was narrow and the shoulders soft. It took us a half a mile to find a spot to turn around. It was a reforestation site. The tree planters looked on in disbelief as this yellow school bus pulled along side them, and the guide got out to survey the density of the local sand and gravel. We figured the road we needed to be the one that crossed the dam. Back at the security gate we were joined by a dynamite truck that the security guard simply waved on by. I have to

confess that her conversation with Yves was utterly incomprehensible to my high school french. But the looks they were trading did not look amicable. Eventually she shrugged her shoulders and turned to me, speaking in very broken English. "You are free to paddle both the La Forge River and the La Fontages reservoir above the dam." Steve and I shook our heads no and I pulled out a map to indicate where we wanted to go. Her eyes went wide. She said, "Ahhhh...bon...allez," with a look of confusion that read "Why would you want to do that!?"

We drove in across the dam. There was still snow in the shadows of the south wall of the spillway. There was an overlook above the dam on the hill to the north. We pulled in for a peak. The reservoir was empty below the dam and the barren gravel and granite of its banks and floor stretched to the south and east as far as the eye could see. Apparently LA2 holds the emergency water for dry years. It was finished only last year. Below they have cleared and dynamited the floor of the LaForge Reservoir in what I can only guess is an attempt to reduce the effects of mercury poisoning caused by rotting organic debris in the reservoirs of earlier Hydro projects on the Eastmain and La Grande Rivers. There were also bunkers on either side of the dam housing lasers that are used to monitor the height and stability of the dam for the first couple of years.

There was a schematic map of the reservoir system at the overlook. Steve, Yves and I used it to locate our spur road. It appeared at first that it had been flooded out by the new reservoir. That was bad. I went back to the bus for our 1:250,000 maps. While I was gone Steve and Yves figured out that we had been mistakenly looking at the LA1 map. When I returned they kept me in the dark for a while to see if I would figure it out. Yves was overjoyed by this ruse. The intrepid guide was oblivious to the end.

Meanwhile the boys were gallivanting on the observation ramp cantilevered out over the reservoir. The whole site was done in a de-constructivist postmodern french architectural style (no kidding). There were multicolored information panels on local flora, the labrador caribou herd, and the reservoir system. The whole plaza was constructed of extruded aluminum screen and brushed aluminum displays and benches laid out in intersecting arcs like a 3-d Malevich print. It was a bizarre sight this far in the bush. Our outfit may have comprised all of the visitors to see the plaza all year.

There are 24 dikes in the KD system. KD1, at the north end of the La Fontages Reservoir is 55 Km from the dam. The road was not as well kept as the Caniapiscau road (which is called The Trans-Taiga Highway). We were not always able to maintain the 35 mph Serge Theoret boasted. It was very soft and narrow. The grade was steep and several times it seemed a bit dicey when we crested a hill. But, there were tire tracks on it from after yesterdays rain. We made KD1 at about 6pm. The long shadows and deep blue of the water were unmistakably northern and triggered a familiar conditioned response, it was time to make camp. Yves wished us good luck and commented that he hoped our notes were more comprehensive for the remainder of the trip than they had been for the drive up, which struck me as odd. The adventure had gone without any major hitches so far. Then he was gone and Steve and I had jumped off the edge of the world one more time.

The boys made spaghetti and corn bread. We pitched a fly in case the morning turned out to be gray. Jon and I strolled down the road for a look at the dike. The landing is a couple hundred yards west of the dike at the end of an access road that takes out at its southwest end. We found wolf, fox, and bear tracks on the road prompting us to bush our leftovers well away

from camp. The guide retired early to address his journal which was already behind.

JUNE 27:

The wind was gusty from the west all day yesterday and it blew hard through the night. The morning threatened rain, but by the time the boys emerged for pancakes a fly was needed. Peter cooked pancakes for everyone. Bob McCoubrie had provided us with a pint of mapilene which contributed to a delicious batch of maple syrup when supplemented with molasses and a touch of brown sugar. It was a genuine feast in celebration of our first morning in the bush. After breakfast Steve and I retired to concoct canoe pairs. We had an afternoon pow wow to discuss the rules of the road and pack up the loose food. The guide did some repair work on his personal outfit as his duffel was coming apart at the seams. We had chili for dinner and contemplated the possibility that this cold gale force wind from the west was normal fare for this part of the world.

JUNE 28:

The gale blew through the night, often accompanied by heavy rain. Steve and I awoke at 6 am (although I was a little lazy about getting out of the sleeping bag and did not emerge until 6:25). A headwind blew all day long. But, by the time we got off the campsite the sun was poking through scattered clouds that would stay with us all day. Jon and Phil stayed close on the guide's tail throughout though and it was all Bear and I could do at times to stay ahead. Jon Berger, whose route is a little different than ours above Lac Maurel, says that he finds no sign of the Cree above Lac Bienville. We were therefore heartened to find a damp trail here. It was marked on the river right by a dilapidated, 18 foot, high-prowed, Cree-Yamaha boat and a plywood high water dock. Start in the willows at the point where the riverbank straightens away from the lake. The trail forks away to the left staying parallel to the river. Many caribou trails lead off into the bush, but none offer an alternative to the sloppy portage George. Serge Theoret marks the trail on the left, but we did not look there, figuring that he walked on the shore rocks. The v-stem marked the path of the Cree.

We had our traditional first lunch out, pork and beans, at Serge Theoret's 25 meter portage mid-way through the eastern of two rocky channels. We scouted the western channel later, but it proved too shallow. Lyle made us his "famous mashies". I think that the secret ingredient was mustard. We were treated to hail during the noon break which Steve and I sat out in the anemic shelter of a tamarac tree. We were able to line the channels and avoid the lift-over portage.

We slugged it out into the gale force wind all afternoon (which turned out not to be too long). We were stopped in our tracks in the channel beyond lunch before even reaching the main body of Lac Martignon. Steve and I walked the south shore at the mouth of the channel to have a look at the tempest ahead and the possibility of a campsite. We found the forest littered with intersecting caribou trails, but the ground was too wet for a campsite. We did find the desiccated remains of a recent caribou kill though. This was the second bit of evidence of local wolf activity today. There was a clump of caribou fur on the portage trail as well. We made it across the lake to a sloping caribou moss park on the north shore where, at 5pm we stopped to wait out the wind. At 7:30 we decided to stay. The boys pitched a fly rig and Jon cooked corned beef and cabbage soup. Phil established himself as the resident engineer by constructing a fireplace that I am sure will stand as a monument to our trip for years to come. I remember, during the years that we traveled in the Rupert River watershed, how fun it was to come across the remains of a fireplace left behind by one of Heb Evans trips in the mid-sixties. Perhaps one of Phil's many fireplaces will someday serve to mark our campsites for some future Keewaydin group. The boys capped an excellent, albeit windbound, first day en route with a pot full of hot cocoa.

JUNE 29:

The clouds hung low and thin this morning. They threatened to break up all through breakfast before finally conceding as we pushed off about 9 am. The terrain along this stretch looks decidedly alpine. Sparsely treed and barren hilltops intermingle with densely treed valleys. Each bend in the river, or new lake, brings a new picture postcard vista into view. One expects to find alpine goat herders on the slopes of the short, steep mountains. There was not a cloud in the sky at 9 am and soon all shirts

were off to the sun god. And, believe it or not, the wind from the west was manageable.

There was a Cree camp marked by a canvas wall tent on the river right at the top of the rapids leading out of Lac Martignon. This would be the last sign of habitation we would see until below Lac Bienville. All day long we were in and out of the canoes, wading shallow rapids as we slowly snaked our way closer to the big lake. We made Lac Montjau by 11 am. This is a beautiful lake flanked to the north and east by lush mountains. The deep blue of the cloudless sky was mirrored in crystal clear water. Serge Theoret's campsites are marked by pristine beaches along the east shore of the lake. We had lunch at the west end of the shallow channel leaving the lake to the northwest. Serge's portage follows a dry creek bed west of the main channel of the river and is a little shorter than our route. We walked the rocks of the main channel to a sloping rock on the river left. Here we jumped up into the bush following the caribou trails that parallel the river to Lac Vilmorin. It is a short 300 yard portage. Steve and I found several piles of bleached caribou bones on our scouting trip. We told the boys to walk in pairs so their loads would not be spread out at the other end and keep the river to their right as they walked. Remarkably we all ended up in the same spot. Jon and Phil found Serge's trail and took their second loads that way. This set of instructions would prove to be the portaging paradigm above Lac Bienville. Simply climb up the bank and, while keeping the water in view, find an appropriate caribou trail. We found no evidence of any fellow travellers along this route.

We followed the eastern channel out of Lac Vilmorin. Nearly the entire run down to Lac Maisonable is a set of shallow wades. We lined the first set and then just jumped in. The day turned, briefly, magnificent. There is a large dune, back up in the spruce, where the river turns back to the west. It stands out like a sore thumb in the lowlands, the remnant of long past glacial activity. (I looked back to mark the progress of the boys here and the afternoon clouds had lined up in an odd set of 12 wispy, inverted "C"s, Steve). We ran the next rapids (a dog leg left), but had to line the following one (which Serge Theoret marked as a CI). In general the rapids were too shallow to finish up even when they could be run at the top. The last two rapids of the day were long boulder fields which bottomed out at the end. Mid-way through the first the sun-bleached skull, spine, and ample antlers of a drowned caribou stood straight up out of the water, its pelvis wedged between two rocks below the water line. It had been picked clean by local carrion. Who knows the story to be told here.

We camped 500 yards beyond the next western bend in the river on an exposed rise on the south shore. It was Sunday so Lyle cooked up canned ham, green beans, and rice. Peter made us brownies with the baker's chocolate he had brought along. The boys pitched a fly against the now threatening evening sky. After dinner a hole broke in the clouds, like the eye of a storm. A good omen. As the light of day fades away tomorrow's first obstacle churns in the distance. The temperature is dropping. Another excellent sleeping night.

JUNE 30:

The sky was ominous at 6:30 when I came down to the morning fire. But the coffee was boiling. I forgot to wake up Peter and Jon on my constitutional this morning but the boys are so efficient that they were

still not the last ones down. A scotch mist hung in the air through breakfast. And it began to rain in earnest as we pulled off of the campsite. We were hoping to make up some time today as the route opened up into a set of small lakes. But, although the rain stopped early, our plans had to be set aside.

The first set of lines brought us to the northeast bend in the river. Rutsen and I pulled ahead and I got out to scout the next rapids. A long rock spit splits the set down the middle. The sight was disheartening. A kilometer of shallow rapids stretched out before me as the river dropped seven meters in three quarters of a mile to Lac Maisonable below. My heart sank a bit. It would take all morning to maneuver through the lines and short steep ledges. But at least the task was fun. We chose the right side of the long spit. It is possible that the left side is more passable, although it would require a couple of liftovers.

We made a short portage on the left side of the river just past the steepest rapids and then made lunch. The sun came out. We ran out the bottom of the rapids into Lac Maisonable. Lac Maisonable is beautiful, deep, blue, and flanked by high alpine hills. It looked as if several campsites could be made here. We saw many geese on Lac Maisonable, a couple of which were molting. The quantity of molting geese was not as large as we had seen in previous summers further south on the Eastmain and Rupert rivers, or in Ontario. It seemed that we were seeing nesting pairs and their young here, not flocks of migrating fowl. I am not sure why this is.

After lunch we duked it out with a moderated headwind to our first real rapids of the summer. We shot two easy rapids on the left shore (close enough to graze your knuckles, eh boys). The second involved a little pivot turn around a large underwater rock. A little technical fun. The wind kicked in earnest as we crossed the second body of Lac Maisonable. We slugged hard into it. But the guide made an error. He was following the contour of the land, not his compass, and certainly not his maps (thinking that he was following a long slender north/south island when in fact he was following a bubble in his map case (really) he led the troupe nearly a mile astray). So we slugged hard to get back a spot where we had already been. We ran a shallow chute out of Lac Maisonable, and, as we were taking off our life vests a cold, cold rain shower swept through. We huddled in our rain gear against the coldest rain I ever remember. To top it off, it was a sun shower. Tom dropped his knife into the river here.

The wind on Lac Forestier was too strong for us to manage. The left shore was burned and so offered no shelter or campsite, just a steep treeless mountain. The south end of the lake was shallow and the lake really appear out of the shallows until well past the large island. We saw a long sloping rock on the long point on the east shore and hunkered down for the short paddle into the brutal wind to get there. The wind pushed us into the shallow islands and shoals on the east shore. Everyone got hung up en route. There was no campsite. We pitched a fly against impending rain (most of which missed us) and cooked dinner in hopes that the wind would subside. No luck. We had spaghetti and peas. Tom and Phil made bannocks.

A bit of caribou moss caught my eye southeast of our position while the fly was being pitched. I wandered down the shore to have a gander. I found a lush, flat, open, caribou park, with a game trail stretching five feet across running right through the. There is a creek that flows into the lake here making this a game gathering ground. There were fresh wolf tracks along the shore that accompanied my walk. After dinner we scurried across the bay and made camp. It was late, 9 p.m. There is a shallow bay the creek

flows out into the lake, and a deeper bay fifty yards from the campsite. Bear and Kirk joined Rutsen and I in the shallow bay while the rest of the boys carried their loads across the shore rocks. The kitchen straddled the game highway. It is getting too dark to write. Through the tent door a scraggly tamarac stands silhouetted against a pink sky over the kitchen. All told it was an excellent day.

JULY 1:

The alarm went off at 5am this morning and it was COLD!! Steve and I had decided to move the wake up call up a bit to facilitate our progress. The trip is designed around what seemed, on the drawing table at least, an easy average of 12 miles a day, or 20 kilometers. As of this morning, in five days we have traveled 40 kilometers or 24 miles, which makes an average of 6 miles a day. That is simply not enough. The problem is a combination of new territory, lots of lining, and a consistent afternoon wind. The territory will continue to require scouting, and we cannot change the landscape. So beating the wind to our destination seems the obvious place to look.

The weather has been fairly consistent over the past five days. The mornings have been shrouded in a thick overcast which behaves like a river mist: the wind which comes up mid-morning and rises through the afternoon, presumably pushed by westerly weather patterns off of the Bay, clears the nights humidity off by noon, leaving fair weather clouds, high blue sky, and eventually, late afternoon thundershowers. The afternoon sky is colored pewter to the west with the rising humidity evaporating off of the many lakes of the west end of the Labrador Plateau. And the wind comes up strong at 4pm on the nose.

I do not know how he did it, but Steve was up like a shot, and out of the tent right at 5 am. The coffee was boiling when I arrived to cut the bacon. I woke the boys up just before 6. The channel between Lac Forestier and Lac Maydieu was deeper than the previous days' river. We ran a good deal of the shallow rapids, although we had to line a bunch as well. We also began to see caribou antler sheds through this stretch. The number of sheds we saw above the first gorge on the Great Whale is uncountable. The factor in Kuujuarapik/Wapmagoostuui told us that the herd is only 80,000 head strong (which is small compared to the Alaska herd which numbers in the hundreds of thousands). A little later in the season the caribou must be thick in the bush here.

Lac Maydieu was, not surprisingly, beautiful. It too is deep, blue, and flanked by small mountains. We ran all of the CII's marked by Serge. They did not sport the volume of the rips by the same name on some of the bigger rivers. I wish that the technical markings indicated some combination of volume and technical difficulty rather than simply focussing on the latter variable. It would make advance scouting on the maps a little easier. I suppose that the terrain offers an indication, but, for those of us who are new to a particular part of the world it would be nice to know whether one was preparing to encounter big, BIG water, or just technical rips.

From the southern end of Lac Maydieu we could see the burned hill across Lac Forestier from last night's campsite. There is an interesting geological feature at the south end of the lake. The long point extending SW to NE from the west shore in the southern part of the lake is a long, glacial, gravel shoal, much like a small esker on which several thousands of years

of sediment have grown to support a thin spruce park. Serge Theoret's beaches were three kilometers west of the narrows in which he marked them. The last large bay of the lake offers a panoramic vista to the south that rivals all of the previous views. A huge mountain with a sheer north face rises 125 meters (close to 400 feet above the lake) to the southwest. The terrain is remarkable through this stretch. The lakes generally sit in long flat valleys surrounded by small, but steep mountains in all directions. The mountains boast only 15-1600 foot peaks, but they rise sharply, without foothills or long ridges, and so the terrain appears quite mountainous.

We had lunch on a steep sandy beach on the east shore just above the mouth of the channel leaving the lake. The boys made the fireplace in the shelter of some willows at the north end of the beach to get out of the wind. There were wolf tracks all over the beach, and by all indications they were as fresh as this morning. The wolf had apparently leapt off of the lip of the sandy bank 15 feet above the shore while moving at a good clip and chasing a caribou (by the tracks in the sand).

We lined the first and the last drops in the south-north channel between Lac Maydieu and Lac Ferey and ran all of those in between. Shirts came off in the east-west channel. Out of the wind the air temperature was actually quite balmy. We lined and ran the first rapids in the canal and then ran the second two. They were all easy CI's. The two CII's below Lac Ferey were easily run. It was time to camp, but unfortunately our dry mountainous terrain had flattened out to swampy lowlands. Serge Theoret's "5D" campsite got an F on closer inspection (only a marginal reduction). It appears that he camped on the beach wherever he could. Although that is a good bit of low impact philosophy, there simply was not enough room on this beach for the boys and all of our gear. We travel a little heavier than Serge. (Furthermore sand gets into everything and the bugs tend to be horrendous). This site was backed by a wet marsh which promised to be an evening mosquito gathering ground. We pushed on.

The bay around the bend proved to be more palatable. Steve and Rutsen followed the South shore and the rest of us paddled across to the north to scout a rise deep in the next bay. Kirk whispered to me that he thought that he saw a wolf running along the beach of the dog-leg island on the SW shore. The glare of the afternoon sun made it tough to pick out at first, but sure enough, there was a silver timber-wolf, loping towards us along the shore, with a gait that made it appear to float on air. We had the wind in our faces so she did not notice us at first. Then she stopped to look at us twice before scampering up into the bush. Steve and Rutsen, meanwhile, had pulled up to that island because it looked like it had a campsite. They waited a short while, and then, figuring that the wolf had had enough time to cross the shallows on the back side of the island to the mainland, landed, and Steve followed the wolf up into the bush. Now, this story is told with the benefit of Steve's intentions. From my vantage it looked as if Steve had followed the wolf into the bush for a better look. The next thing I saw was Steve, running for the canoe with one eye looking back over his shoulder, while Rutsen, not waiting to look, pulled away from shore, prematurely from Steve's perspective, briefly stranding our stalwart staffman.

Meanwhile Kirk and Bear had paddled over for a look at the fresh tracks. Steve now warned them away. Apparently Steve had come across the wolf guarding a beautiful kitchen area, crouched ready to spring, with its teeth barred. He (claims that) he stared a bit, with his paddle out in front of him, and then, careful not to avert his gaze, backed out of the woods slowly before breaking into a sprint when he reached the beach. It seems that he

had been teasing Rutsen a bit and it took a bit of doing to convince Rutsen that he was indeed crying wolf. Once convinced though he did not have to cry twice. Evidence again I suppose that wolves don't attack people. We surmised that she must have had a den on the island.

Tom spotted a campsite several hundred yards away on the north shore in a deep bay. We scouted it and the boys followed. It was little soggy, and not quite as flat as the past few, but the kitchen was perched on a tall bit of shore granite with an excellent view of the lake. It was among the few times all summer that we had granite under the kitchen and that we didn't have to continually dowse the fire fireplace. Kirk made lentil stew. Jon and Jimmy made bannocks. Phil constructed another monumental public works for us. Lyle showed us his delicate expertise in producing the fluffiest rice I have ever tasted in the bush. Wolves howled all night long in the near distance, probably passing on the word that there were visitors in their territory.

JULY 2:

I have marked “[Swamp vs. Hills]” at the beginning of my notes for July 2. I cannot recall the intent, but the landscape did change at this point. Here we met the old route from Naskapi territory east and north of Schefferville. This ancient route crosses the height of land from the Caniapiscau River at Lac Roman. The dam at the north end of the Caniapiscau Reservoir has changed the landscape on the east side of the height of land. Serge Theoret told me in winter correspondence that he found the route too dry in 1989 when he tried to drive in to meet it on the Caniapiscau Road. The old route looks a little deeper and appears to hold a little more water on the map. It seems that our mountain river meets the main channel draining this part of the plateau into Lac Bienville here. The mountains become fewer and further between (although they become larger), and there is more swampy terrain along the banks.

We ran the CI at the mouth of the channel out of the campsite lake. There were two campsite possibilities below this run. Serge’s CII below is the second rapids and immediately follows the first. It is in fact an impassable small falls. We portaged on the right 50 meters over a rock spit into a deep bay which is part of the spring run-off channel. A picturesque spot. Probably lots of fish if you have the chance to stop. We floated through the swifts in the second channel and out of the swamp into hilly country again in the body of water east of Lac Marin. We saw another wolf on the large island just off the south shore here. This one watched us a while, hid, then came out and crossed the shallows to the mainland, hid again, and finally re-emerged to watch Steve paddle away. Lac La Forest was another deep, beautiful lake. We ran out several short chutes around the back side of a small island to reach it. The lake is long, and there is noticeable current in its shallower west arm. Again, campsites could have been made in several spots along in this lake, particularly on the north shore of its west arm.

We had lunch just below the rapids into Lac Pontier. They were nothing more than a small rip. There are two large boulders, the first exposed granite of note, on the large island. Large glacial erratics boys. They really stand out and catch your eye in contradistinction to the low marshy shores of the channels between the lakes here. This our first stop on running water. Pete pulled his rod out and caught a mystery fish on his second cast. It was as long as my arm, literally, with a blunt triangular head. The meat was pink. The fillets were ample. It turned out, on later research, that this was one of Jon Berger’s fabled land-locked salmon. Pete had a grin that went ear to ear. We figured it at about 10 pounds, but regardless it was 28 inches long.

After lunch Lyle and I paddled out for a picture of the lunch site which was perched 15 feet above the river at the end of the steep boulder. We rescued the snagged lure that Jimmy had lent to Pete to catch the salmon. The second obstacle of the day was a 300 yard CII that we chose to portage à la mode on the right shore. The caribou were kind enough to make us a straight trail. I would camp here next time, in the middle of the rapids where a deep pool is formed by a channel around the shore side of a large boulder. The trail comes to a small cliff here. The site is scenic and the fishing should be excellent. We took a leisurely pace after lunch in celebration of our first fish, and the first salmon ever for a Keewaydin section I would imagine. Along the way we bottomed out in the narrows between the islands on Lac Pontier. The lake is very shallow. We had to paddle around the west side of the islands. We ran the CI’s in the channel out of Lac Pontier and into the route from Lac Roman. There is a large gravel hill at the confluence marked on the map with a deep depression at its summit. It is a large pile

of glacial till this must have been the meeting point of two large glacial spurs [RESEARCH] to kick up such a gravel heap. It is 120 feet high and barren of vegetation.

The channel into Lac Chastenet is flanked by two mont roche (Kirk), rounded granite hills with steep cliffs on the downstream side of the glacial flow where the weight of the glacier climbing over their tops crushed them. Lac Chastenet itself is flanked by steep, densely treed hills. We found Serge's A+ campsite on the isthmus separating the main body of the lake from the west arm and egress to Lac Magne. It is a picturesque caribou moss park on a hill above a sand beach. The view from the top of the hill is of both the east and the west part of the lake. Pete made bread. Steve and I made chili. And Phil made a rice concoction with onion soup mix and cheddar cheese. The kitchen was on a slight slope which enabled the section to sit on the hill above the fire and converse with the chefs. There were wolf prints on the beach when we arrived. Phil, Pete, and Russell sat up chatting over a sqaw wood fire. Steve and I remarked again how odd it was that this land is so mountainous, yet the waterways drop so gently. It is even more picturesque than I imagined. Each day brings another geographic surprise.

JULY 3:

Russel just brought me a yeast doughnut from a batch that Peter whipped up to fight the bite of a cold and rainy day. It is July 4th and I was not diligent yesterday, so my memory will have to do. Yesterday's east wind is still blowing and a heavy mist hangs in the air, often turning to an icy light rain. The wind is gusty. The mist collects on the tent flies and then a gust blows through, and the tent shivers, like a dog shaking water off of his coat.

The morning of July 3rd was hot. For once I did not even need my wool jacket (although I wore it against the mosquitos which accompanied the balmy air). After waking the boys, while the sun was still out, I took a stroll to the top of the sand embankment behind the campsite. From the caribou trail that ran along its ridge I could see all of the lake to the east, the large mont roche rising sheer out of the southwest corner of the lake, and the lower hill, thick with black spruce on the west bank of the northwest arm where we were camped. The solitude among the dwarf pines in the stillness of the sleeping campsite bespoke the isolation and raw beauty of this trip. My little jaunt had the essence of a revelation.

The horseflies and mosquitos kept us moving and a low, thin, pewter overcast was upon us by the time that we pushed off the campsite. We were off at 8:03 Springgate Standard Time (SST). We ran the right shore into Lac Magne. There appeared to be a structure at the summit of a tall mountain to the west of Lac Magne. The map marks it as a fire tower, which is an odd bird this far out in the bush. The tower no longer stands, but a low barrack, which resembles a large boulder from this distance is still extant. Lyle and I scouted the wrong shore of the 700 yard horserace out of the lake. The left shore was too shallow so I was unable to get a bird's eye view of the long rapids. We had to wade the canoe back out to the deep water current. The run was an easy horserace down the east shore, away from the big waves on the left shore.

Serge's hydro cabin was not to be found at the mouth of the channel leading into Lac Maurel. We did find a clearing and two survey marks from a 1982 Hydro Quebec survey. The spot was marked at "six meters" by a large yellow plastic sign indicating that one should contact Hydro Quebec in Montreal for further information (?).

Lac Maurel is one of two large lakes that we had been concerned would cause us some difficulty if there was any wind. This did not turn out to be the case. In fact, we paddled the lake's east arm with an east wind at our back and current pushing the water at a good clip. The south shore of the east arm and the lake itself is very much like Temagami. All along the shore gently sloping granite gives way to open spruce forest ideal for camping. We were buzzed by a dark colored jet helicopter flying no more than 75 feet above the treetops. We would see the helicopter again flying around Kuujjuarapik but I never found out who operated it. I could think of no explanation for its presence. We were also buzzed by a Beaver soon thereafter. We were buzzed a third time later that afternoon by a second Beaver, making that the third day in a row that we had been buzzed by a low flying Beaver. The chances of that being a mere coincidence is slim in such a remote and unused region. We must be on the flight path of an outfitter travelling between his outpost and the airport at La Forge. He must be checking on us out of samaritan courtesy (or simple curiosity, or even territorial protectiveness). The helicopter was painted a dark olive drab and its front observation bubble was surrounded in dark one way glass. Who knows.

The wind came up a bit when we made the main body of the lake so we stuck to the southern shore. Treeless gravel mountains rise 90 to 100 meters above the lake to the north. In the dull pewter overcast they looked cold. By all appearances the treeline had been kind enough to dip down to meet us here and the north shore was above it. There is an abandoned fuel depot at the southwest end of the lake. We stopped here for a gander. Perhaps this is Serge's abandoned hydro cabin. It is marked on the map as a single building several hundred yards north of the winter road to the fire tower. The pipes connecting the gas tanks to the waterfront were all intact. But it appeared that the pump had been removed. There were probably 250 fifty gallon gas drums on the site and 9 elevated 500 gallon tanks. There was a cabin that could easily sleep 20. There were kerosene runway lanterns scattered everywhere. These look like little cartoon bombs. They are round, metal reservoirs for fuel with a flat side and a wick. One would presumably clear a runway on the ice and mark it with the lanterns. The fire extinguisher was still on its large steel wheeled carriage, but the hoses and nozzle were gone. There were even wooden boardwalks in place to facilitate servicing planes in the spring when the springy tundra moss and grass floating above the permafrost had thawed. It did not appear that any salvage crew had visited this site when it was abandoned. We found a piece of shattered plywood lying around as garbage to fix Jon's wannigan. There was no sheltered spot to tie up the canoes so we decided to push on a bit before lunch.

An esker runs the length of the north shore of the west arm of Lac Maurel, forming a long barrier island (and reef when it is underwater). The landscape to the north along the first couple of kilometers of the west arm is like a moon-scape. Low, grey-brown, gravelly hills extend as far as one can see to the north. We had lunch in the first southern bay of the west arm, just west of a small creek that flows into the lake of a prominent gravel hill. The canoes were moored in the mouth of the creek but we put the fire out on the open gravel shore so the wind could clear way the horseflies. A short, gnarled tamarac marks the spot. We paddled six miles after lunch in one quick clip with a brisk tailwind. Lyle and I tracked 20 yards off the esker the whole way. We stopped for a break at the large sand spit on the north shore just before jumping off the map. We followed Serge Theoret and the south channel to Lac Louet. Jon Berger followed the north channel. He mentions no compelling reason for this choice. Perhaps the ubiquitous west wind favored his route that season.

Follow the main channel of current through the esker. The esker turns to sand, spruce, and putting green hard moss and lichens here (just like an esker is supposed to look, eh Steve). The lake gets really shallow as one approaches the channel to the west. A brisk wind kicked up from the northeast, cutting across our path. The boys seemed non-plussed, but, between the wind and the late afternoon glare, Steve and I had to carefully navigate the shoals to reach the channel. We floated through the swifts entering the channel and then set out to find a campsite amidst the rapids at the bend to the northwest.

The wind seemed to be blowing in a storm. The large east/west island at the bend looked promising. There was nothing above that on the north shore. Jimmy spotted a wolf that we could hear howling as we approached the rapids. I went ashore and scouted the length of the island. The east end was inhabited by a flock of nesting starlings who took the opportunity to dive-bomb at my head and chirping up a brouhaha. I took this to mean stay away so we camped half way down the north side of the island

in the middle of the rapids. The rapids was easily run, skipping Serge's CIII in the southern braid. The center braid did not even have a rip. Just deep, swift water. We pitched a fly against the impending rain. The island is littered with caribou runs and antler sheds. We had spaghetti and the five trout that Jimmy and Peter caught from the gravel bar out in the current beyond the landing. The smallest one was about 18 inches. We spit roast the smaller ones and butterfly-filletted two to cook on the rocks of the fireback. The boys attention span waned after the fillets and so Phil, Jimmy, and myself ate two of the spit roasters and saved the last for breakfast. The temperature had dropped to well below that of an ordinary refrigerator so we figured that the extra fish would keep. Steve and I conspired to surprise the boys with a rest day for the 4th so we read by candlelight into the wee hours as the temperature continued to fall.

JULY 4TH: INDEPENDENCE DAY!!:

COLD AND RAINY!!! Steve Lyle and I hummed the national anthem with hats over hearts when Lyle joined us for coffee at noon. Steve was up early. I was up at 6:30 but did not quit dozing until 10:30 when Steve went to start the coffee. The last of the lads did not emerge until 1:15 p.m. We had Red River for breakfast and Pete's doughnuts for an afternoon treat. Russell managed a split pea soup crew with Phil. Rutsen and Pete made sugared swivel from the rind of a bacon belly. Kirk, Russel, and Phil caught 6 speckled trout, three of which were keepers. Kirk's was landed on a fly. Some of the boys manned the fire, but mostly it was a day for the tents and the sleeping bags, curled up against the cold. It reminded me of the 4th of July in 1983, camped in the plenerium bay at the south end of North caribou Lake in Ontario Danny. But no snow. All old it was a nice rest for the seventh day.

JULY 5:

COLD AND RAINY AGAIN!!! Steve and I rolled over at six against a chill deeper than yesterday's. The rain had persisted, light and icy, for two days. We watched the sky out the tent window for signs of clearing but there were none. Every once in a while the green of the tent walls would produce an optical illusion, causing us to see a complimentary blue in the grey of the clouds. But it was nothing more than an apparition. We got up at 10 to start coffee and cornmeal pancakes for the lads. The cold is the factor that weighed against our moving today. It is frigid. The temperature has not broken 48 degrees on our thermometer for 36 hours. That and the steady drizzle that is a dangerous combination.

Lyle was, as always, the first one down, followed soon thereafter by his tentmate Phil. We each had a cake and then the boys began to trickle in. Phil had dried a fish the night before and we picked at it all morning, eventually eating the dried the skin which tasted like air-puffed pork rinds (right Phil). Steve and I holed up in the tent most of the afternoon. I read the bulk of Huckleberry Finn (Huck is playing Tom now Steve). The wind turned west over coffee and we can only hope that that will bring a change in the weather. If not, tomorrow will be a long, cold, raw day. Luckily we have picked up two days in the absence of an advertised stiff west wind that is ordinarily prevalent in this region.

Pete, Phil, and Russell caught trout today. Phil made us cornbread for dinner. Steve presided over a chili dinner (chicken this time Bob). The northern weather adds to the drama, but it is a bit worrisome because it is hard on the boys on travelling days. Tomorrow the weather will break for sure. As it stands we are no worse for wear and tear (except for a couple of chilly toes).

JULY 6:

It was raw again at 6 am. The campsite sits perched 15 feet off of the river, on a flat caribou moss plateau that stretches nearly 2/3 of the length of the island along its north shore. A heavy scotch mist blew across the rapids from the northeast, and then in under the fly. Below us on the river morning fog obscured visibility. The coffee took an hour to boil. I did not sleep well last night. The cold rain would not quit. The possibility of a long cold and wet day kept me tossing and turning. We collapsed all of the canvas duffels into the wannigans to protect the flour and the bacon against the rain before pushing off into the damp.

We ran the CI rapids easily along the north shore of the islands. The CIII, marked on the Theoret maps below the island is actually on the east side of the large south-north island. Steve went ahead to scout a backdoor run around to the west of the island while I packed up the jewelry. No go. Steve was explaining the preferred portage route through the shore brush on the left bank when Jimmy and I arrived. The bush was a little thicker here. We followed a light caribou trail to open ground below the steep ledge. We ran through the swifts below to the next marked obstacle (the guide again becoming confused trying to navigate without the aid of his compass, eh boys). This run is a small falls, and was certainly a class above the steep drop above. The Theoret maps mark it upstream just below the last rapids. Shift his markings down a rapids through here and the marks are correct. Steve and I took a stroll along the open hillside to see whether we could bush a portage across the ridge to the deep bay to the west. This route would enable us to avoid a 500 yard rapids below. The swells looked large from our vantage and with the weather it seemed that avoiding them would be prudent. On a nicer day one could easily run out the rapids after a short liftover portage.

The walk was picturesque. There is a 360 degree view of the surrounding countryside from the top of the ridge. The clouds were lifting. They were exhibiting the sort of furrowed differentiation that sometimes entails a clearing wind. We found a deep caribou trail to follow over the ridge and down to the neighboring bay. Russel and I eased down the shore to the lip of the first drop of the CIV while Steve and the boys bushed out of a small bay to the west above the rapids (in the future I would opt for the latter). The weather was not quite yet decided and it misted on and off while we portaged. Peter decided to mimic a mountain goat and chose a steep path to the gravel flats above the portage bay. It was still cold, but for the first time in days the heavy mist abated, and we even got a glimpse of blue sky through break in the clouds.

We kept to the north through the islands at the north end of the channel. In the narrow channel between the hammerhead island and the mainland we saw a huge osprey nest. The nesting pair were both circling above the nest, trying to distract us from the young hawk below them. The rain had given us an extra foot in the swifts and we were able to run the small

rip into the east arm of Lac Louet. It was lunch time. The high gravel hill on the right below the swift was not too sheltered. As I headed out around the point into the wind Phil hollered, "Hey, how about that caribou moss behind us?" Sure enough, the prettiest spot of the summer sat ripe for the taking (as we were Ceasar's, Bear, and there were none to tell us otherwise). With all of the rain the caribou moss was lush, like uncut grass. Between the mist and the moss the sheltered campsite seemed like a greenhouse. The lunch wood was wet so it took a packet of matches (give or take) to get the fire started. Rutsen, Pete, and Tom pitched a fly and Jon set to his usual task: cutting the meat and shredding the cheese for lunch.

We had a leisurely meal. The sun finally broke through for good and all of our rain gear was shed. I scooted back up the hill to get some pictures of the osprey nest. I was carefully poking around in the brush when I heard a screech to my right. To my surprise the nest was twenty yards from my position, just down the hill, and so sat at eye-level. I had come over the hill behind the nest without realizing it. I made sure to keep my distance. No need to mess with those angry talons. I was able to get a nice picture of the osprey soaring around the nest.

The wind came up strong with the clear weather. We paddled out of the bay towards the main body of the lake. When it came into sight we saw that the lake was angry, its surface frothed with breaking waves. There is a lot of current in the shallow southern end of Lac Louet. We stayed south of the islands where the current was able to push us along against a lighter breeze. We made our way into the wind along the southern shore of the northwestern most island, staying well within the shelter of the islands. I struck out overland to have a look at the lake. The water was choppy, but the gusts did not look too bad, and it was only a kilometer across to the point at the mouth of the west arm. We snuck around the east end of the island, and then, vested, out into the fray. The wind was west-northwest and blowing across our bows. The waves, on the other hand, were coming from the north as well as the northwest, pushed around the point out of the west arm. It formed a cross-hatch pattern of waves. Luckily the apex of the crossing pattern was exactly the right angle to shoot us right across the lake. The crossing was quick and easy. But around the next point the wind was hard in our faces. There was no possibility of making camp on the point (nor in the islands) so we slugged on. It looked like all of the campsites in this lake are on the north shore. Russel and I sank the bow seven times in the big chop from the headwind.

We slugged ahead 2.5 km to a sandy beach where, at the north end of the cove, in the shade of a small, bald, sandy hill, we found a caribou moss park suited perfectly to our liking. We built a fireplace, fetched some wood, and then the outfit was out to dry. Loose gear was spread everywhere. Lyle made us a ham feast to remember (it was Sunday after all). Pete put in the finishing touches with a chocolate cake (thanks Pete!!). Kirk and Bear pitched up on top of the gravel hill amidst the braided caribou trails and the dwarf black spruce. The rest of the lads were less adventurous and pitched around the kitchen area. Sunset was magnificent. The view from the hill of the lake and the orange glow reflected against the mountains to the east was breathtaking. Once again, the dropping temperature marks the setting sun. It is time to retire to the tent, nestled amidst the tamaracks and the spruce, and burrow into my bag to enjoy the world's best sleep huddled up against the bite of Quebec's arctic air.

JULY 7:

Today is my 31st birthday. It was 38 degrees in the tent at 5:15 am. But there was not a cloud in the sky, and the wind was from the southwest, so the heat was not far behind. By the time the oatmeal came off of the fire it was too warm for my wool jacket, and by 8 it was simply shorts weather. The stroll to wrestle Kirk and Bear from their night's slumber was very pleasant and the view of the lake from the hill was once again spectacular. On the way back down the hill I apparently walked too close to a birds nest. Two chickadee sized birds with yellow breasts swooped at my head for a warning.

We followed an esker through the narrows down to the first (and only) rapids of the day. The long channel along the esker was apparently a nesting ground for some dark brown ducks that resembled stubby goslings. Two of them gave us a fly-by, two feet off the deck, splitting Pete and I and Jon and Russell who were only 20 feet apart. We could have touched them with our paddles. The north bank was comprised of a sparsely treed gravel esker with moss and dwarf spruce. The south bank was forested, lush, littered with glacial erratics, and looked like a campsite bonanza. The channel is of the same geographical makeup as the west arm of Lac Maurel. In fact it is the same esker (which runs all the way to, and along the north shore of, Lac Bienville).

At the second pinch we stopped for a break and drifted through high sand and gravel banks. Current gave us a decent push all along through here. The sky was deep blue and crystal clear overhead. The weather had given everybody a boost despite its downside, hovering swarms of horseflies. In the distance, along the western horizon, waited a distinct front line. We ran the 1 Km CI at 72 [degrees West]. The water was high. The top of the rapids forms a wide, steep, flatwater dip, akin to a tall amusement park slide. We ran the right shore all of the way down, practicing moving slower than the current. There was a brief moment of chaos when Jon Connor's canoe kissed the guide's forming a small traffic snarl. We eddied out twice to scout, but the run was easy and we were able to stay dry in the flatter shore water all of the way down.

The current is heavy in the channel below the rapids. The sand banks rise 20 meters where the esker disappears into an unnamed lake for awhile, and are capped with good sized black spruce. We had lunch on the south shore in a shallow bay on a sandy beach. The guide took a birthday bath. The water was C-O-L-D!!!

Just below lunch we got a glimpse of the communication tower on top of Mont Amistapiskwapustach. The tower had been brought down, but we could see that it was still attached to its boom as it lay horizontally across the top of a large cabin. we were making good time so we hoped to find a campsite in the north end of Lac Wasatimis. Follow the current through the lake separating Mont Amistapiskwapustach and the 460 meter peak to its northwest. We passed a shore cabin apparently associated with the communication tower, drifted for a bit to enjoy the lazy summer afternoon, and then started scouting for a campsite at 3pm. The hydro camp looked abandoned, but I would bet that the view from the top of the mountain extends beyond Lac Bienville to the west and Lac Louet to the east.

Peter and I checked the west shore of the lake north of the connecting channel to Lac Wasatimis. There were no campsites on the rocky rises. We were chased off from the gravel islands en route by nesting terns. The channel into Lac Wasatimis was barren of campsites. The shore was low

and swampy. Phil spotted a caribou moss rise on the west shore where the esker channel flows into the lake. It seemed steep at first, but as we passed it would have made a decent campsite.

We camped at the end of the next channel on an open caribou moss park on a flat rise. It was 4pm. The heat was blistering. We mixed up a walloping pot of freshie and went about cooking dinner at a leisurely pace. We had corned beef and cabbage soup. Pete made strawberry turnovers that were the best birthday gift of all time. I do not know how he did it, but they were wrapped in the most tender pastry crust. Jon made the traveler and Tom cooked us french fries. It was quite a feast.

As the sun sets there is thunder to the southeast of us. It looks like the storm is coming our way. The boys are pitching a fly. It would not be the end of the world to sit through some more weather. The two days of east wind have put us four days ahead of schedule. The temperature is dropping. At least the heat will break.

JULY 8:

Steve and I were lazy today. we did not get up until after 6 am. The sky was clear blue overhead. The front-line that we had thought would bring thundershowers last night had inched forward, but it was still at least 50 miles to the south and moving east to west. Perhaps it is some effect of the La Forge 1 Reservoir whose main body lies directly south of our current position. It was a scorcher. No wool this morning Danny! And we were moving slowly. The sun had zapped us yesterday. Unfortunately today would be no different. One of the can openers had found its way into a wannigan and we were unable to locate it when we packed up the kitchen leaving the guide a little cranky.

Deep in the bay to the west of the campsite a large esker separates a small lake from the channel. The lake sits 10 meters over the channel. It is a curious geographic feature. The esker resembled the sand spit across from our Lac Louet campsite. It was long and flat topped, resembling a makeshift runway in the bush. This sort of gravel ridge would become our preferred portage route below on the river.

We found good current all through the channel connecting Lac Wasatimis to Lac Bienville. Once again the channel offered many good campsites. It was really beautiful. Spruce lined gravel hills and braided river. We could not identify Serge's 5D campsite though.

We made Lac Bienville in good time. This is the summer's first major landmark. According to the notes we pick up the path of the Cree here. There are rumored to be seals living in the lake, an aside in the notes that was confirmed in our conversations with the Cree in Wapmagoostuui. Also, I have to imagine that lake trout fishing is phenomenal in the deep, north body. We gave a traditional offering of tobacco to the lake, following the lead of the Cree and the voyageurs. The Bear had provided us with excellent weather again. The Loon had offered us a tailwind from the east which, from all accounts is unheard of here in the land of the west wind. Each morning Steve and I offer a small piece of bacon to the Bear and the Loon. The Bear's piece goes to the fire, following a Cree word, Amitch-stihaumut (I do not know the syllabics, sorry Steve), which translates appropriately to, "throw a piece of meat on the fire for good luck." The Loon's piece is tossed out into the lake from where we have drawn the mornings water. The superstition has treated us well over the years.

The wind from the east had not come up yet when we reached the lake. So, we took advantage of the gentle breeze and hurried across to the

first set of islands just southwest of the outlet. The lake is shallow through here, so, as the wind came up we had to carefully pick our path, in the channels between the many gravel islands, to avoid hanging the canoes on shoals of sharp rocks. 10 kilometers from the outlet we picked up the east-west esker that separates the north from the south body of the lake. The wind had really come up from the northeast at this point. We had hoped to scurry along the north side of the esker with the wind at our backs. But the waves were too big. We did get a good view of the 52 mile span of the lake though. It stretched farther than the eye could see to the west and the northeast. Mont Amistapiskwapustach was in full view to the east.

We had lunch in a sandy bay on the south side of the first island, just before turning the corner around to the south side of the barrier archipelago. Out of the wind it was really hot. I strolled across the isthmus forming our beach for a picture of the big lake. A string of small islands running south to north hovered on the horizon as if they were a chain of barges floating above the lake. And the waves in the deep north body were as big as I am. The north body was deep blue. It is deep, mostly clear of islands, and is ringed to the north by small mountains. It reminded me of Big Trout Lake in northwestern Ontario (albeit three times the size).

We paddled in the lee of the esker all afternoon. An east wind blew as a good breeze among the islands and scurried us along at a good clip. The southern body of the lake is thick with small islands. Serge Theoret's map route through the islands is tailor made to avoid a west wind. Once in among the islands there is little worry of becoming windbound (although a stiff breeze would still seriously hamper one's progress).

We camped below Ile Mayna on the esker. Phil and I glanced over our right shoulders during a 4 p.m. rest break and glimpsed caribou moss on the esker. We paddled 1/2 km back into the wind and found a clear, flat, caribou moss park. But, like the rest of the esker, it was littered with bowling ball sized stones. Glacial till I suppose Danny. The tamaracks we had become familiar with above the lake were missing, but there were plenty of tentsites along the surrounding 400 yards of shoreline. We drew wood (or perhaps I should say that Rutsen and Jimmy drew wood, as they always seemed to be on the task), set up the kitchen, and then had a look at the lake on the maps. I pulled out all of the pertinent 1:50,000 scale maps and showed the boys our projected path

Phil was the executive chef for the night. He made us spaghetti. Jon turned his coffee cake into sticky buns (on purpose). The meal was delicious. Even I had a slice of the dinner bannock. There are still clouds to the south. The front-line is slipping along from east to west. But we have gotten closer to it. Occasionally we can see it dumping rain on the mountains 10 to 15 miles to the south. No one tried for lake trout off of shore (that would have been a coup, eh Danny). And we have yet to encounter fresh water seals. At 9:30 the temperature has started to drop. It is currently a seasonable 60 degrees and promises to plummet again for a good sleeping night.

JULY 9:

It was a hot and sticky morning. The wind has now been blowing from the east for three days. Last night I woke up like a shot. The wind was blowing hot out of the northeast in strong gusts. I stepped out of the tent for a little constitutional. The northern lights were out in full force. All of the colors of the rainbow were exhibited overhead in quick firebursts and shimmering waves. It seemed as if the wind was driving the show. Furthermore, although it was the middle of the night the sky to the north was

bright, like a late dusk. Given the humidity, the heat, and the bright northern sky, I have to imagine that on cool nights the skies are ablaze. It was the best show, bar none, that I have ever seen.

Russell and I lingered a bit to check the campsite for abandoned items this morning. We had not found the missing can opener so I made a little fuss over a forgotten spool of fishing line (sorry Phil). We paddled the inland passage along the south side of the esker all morning to keep out of the waves kicked up by our tailwind. All through here the esker provides open caribou park campsites, the best two spots appearing at the west end just before the lake opens up again.

There is a channel that passes between two steep mountains just north of our projected path. We crossed to the north for a trip through the channel. A steep cliff along the south side of the southeast island looked like it would have made for a good side trip as well. The steep eastern end of the island was impressive. There are small cliffs and jagged granite outcroppings all along the side of the mountain here. Steve and Bear stopped for a sip of water from one of the mountain's cold cascades of melting ground water. Their canoe was dwarfed in silhouette against the side of the hill.

We had lunch in the first southern bay of the channel on some large flat rocks that had been scattered haphazardly in a pile by the glaciers. A Cesna Caravan bearing the colors of Air Wemindji flew over while we were boiling the water for the macaroni and cheese. It was flying low and we could see the wheels in the pontoons. Judging by its trajectory and height we assumed that it was heading for a Cree fishing camp that we had missed in the southern body of the lake.

The banks of the channel were not as steep, nor as close together, as they appeared on the map. But the shelter from the wind was welcome. The rolling waves we encountered during the last crossing would have made for a tough afternoon. The terrain below the channel was Temagami-esque. The water was crystal clear and blue and the hills were densely treed. The rain that had threatened from the southeast for the last couple of days had come ominously close and just after lunch some heavy grey clouds seemed perched to pounce. We snuck around the south side of the southern island and found a sheltered caribou park on the ridge just west of a small narrows (still on map 33 P/2). A caribou trail ran along the top of the ridge directly to the narrows separating our island from its tiny compatriot. It was a dead ringer for the narrows that separates Devil's Island from Devil's Mountain at Ojibway.

We pitched a quick fly but the impending thunderstorms never came. Just heat thick with humidity. Steve's thermometer read 104 degrees in the sun. A stinker. The boys went for a swim in the channel (apparently not too deep). Pete started bread and a peach cobbler from the dried peaches. Steve and I stepped aside, trying to keep out of the way as our campsite expertise is rapidly becoming superfluous to the operation of the section. Luckily we still hold the maps!!!!

Bear made an excellent chicken-lentil stew. Tom made the traveler (which we will have the day after tomorrow because, unbeknownst to the lads, we hope to be sunbound tomorrow). The temperature finally stood down a bit at 9 p.m. At 8 the wind just plain died. There was not a breath of air moving. The lake was still as glass. The wind did try to come up again at 9, and from a new direction, but the heat quickly stifled the breeze. It is odd but I think that this is the first still evening of the summer. It has heightened the oppressiveness of the heat. It has cooled down a bit, but for the second night running no long johns will be required for sleeping.

We are 18 km from the rapids separating Lac Paimpont from Lac Bienville. Lac Bienville has been nothing like the lake I expected. The shallow lakes and channels above, and the plethora of long, narrow islands, raking east to west along the southern part of the lake, led to me to surmise that Lac Bienville would be a shallow, treeless lake littered with gravel islands and esker ridges. Instead it is a deep clear lake, populated with lush, spruce-treed islands and caribou parks. The best camping is on the esker, but the north and south shore looks as if they too would have campsites. The islands tend to be too thickly forested. We have been able to find grade 'A' campsites above sandy beach landings on demand. The east wind, although a boon, seems anomalous here given all of the notes that we have accrued and our experience to the south. And the heat is a real surprise. Even the tourist map says that the mean temperature in July should be 50 degrees fahrenheit (and our notes predicted snow). The daily front to the south is a troublesome meteorological feature. It must be an effect of the wind and the Reservoir system to the south. Luckily this the southernmost section of the trip. There must be lake trout in the northern body of the lake. Perhaps next time that will be the focus of our visit here.

JULY 10:

I was awakened at 8:30 am by Phil asking Steve how to make the coffee. We suggested that he avoid the heavy sun since we were, in fact, sunbound. Phil and Peter made pancakes and an excellent pot of coffee. Steve and I emerged a little before 10 to join them. The day held no pressing tasks (except a glance at the lake to see if the wind had changed - it hadn't!!!). It was a proper summer day. The weather changed in the early afternoon. Thunder clouds blew in over the ridge from the north (of all places). It **really** appeared as if we would get some rain. But, although the temperature dropped to a pleasant 70 degrees, we did not even get a drop. The caribou moss is getting really crispy. We keep all of the pots full of water to constantly douse the ground surrounding the fireplace.

Pete made oatmeal cookies. Jon made split-pea soup. And he and Phil made an outrageous gingerbread bannock. Some of the boys went for a paddle after dinner. Jon, Russell, Steve, and I shot the shit by the fire. The clouds are still blowing in over the ridge, but they promise to dissipate at dusk. The heat had broken but the weather has not changed. We have been overtaken by the front-line which is indeed slipping across our path from the northeast. Maybe it will rain tomorrow and we can have a reading day. We are still way ahead of schedule.

JULY 11:

Once again we eschewed open water for the inland passage. Today we would finally say good-bye to Lac Bienville. The wind had turned to the Northwest, but it provided no respite from the heat. The morning cool faded to 100 degree heat by 10 am. The lead edge of the time zone bumps the heat up an hour. Bear and I discussed the book he was reading, Siddhartha by Herman Hesse, while we meandered through the islands and narrows above Lac Paimpont. There is a camp in the large bay below the islands on the west shore. It was boarded up. There were four cabins on the cleared point, one of which was in poor repair. A metal motorboat lay

capsized in the shallows on shore. I suppose that the water might have come up since the proprietors were last in attendance, but it is more likely that this is a fall camp and that the early summer shallows are well above the water line by freeze-up. We were cautious in our approach at first. We did not want to meet an outfitter who would claim exclusive guiding rights in the region. But, as we got closer we could see that the place was abandoned. Furthermore, tucked in behind the southernmost cabin, there was a tee-pee style smoke hut, leading us to believe that this was a Cree hunting camp.

We had lunch on a spit of granite below a hydro survey-marker on the west side of the mouth of the channel between Lac Bienville and Lac Paimpont. We found the marker's companion downstream at the start of the main rapids of the drop between the two lakes. I assume that this marks the site of the first proposed dam of the Great Whale project. After lunch we bumped down the shallow swifts on the left side of the islands, following our notes. I might scout the right side in future years. An open caribou moss rise follows the river along the east shore down to the top of the big rapids. One could run and line down the left shore and line or liftover the last ledge of the rapids. But be WARY!! The last ledge is powerful, steep, and stretches all of the way across the river. This year the water flooded the shallows left of the ledge. With no experience for comparison I cannot say if the shore route is ordinarily viable. Steve and I found a portage trail here. The first actual portage of the year. It is sloppy George. Nishe would have had a giggle. The trail takes out at the first sloping rocks, right at the top of the rapids. We walked the trail out to Lac Paimpont while the boys waited in the shallow water along the shore alders. There were caribou bones on the landing and caribou fur in clumps along the trail. Somewhere nearby, and recently, a wolf or two had rested sated for the evening.

We were hoping to find a nice, spacious, fish camp below the rapids at the end of the trail. But the terrain was simply mucky. The first muskeg swamp that we had come across. There were the occasional footprints of a lone individual on the trail, probably recent, and at least since the last rain. It was both exciting and disheartening to come across the path of the Cree, and human presence, after two weeks alone deep in the bush. The camp above may or may not be the culprit as this trail may be evidence of centuries of inland travel from Wapmagoostuui. (We also surmised, from the order of his drawings, that the camp above Lac Paimpont was the one mentioned in Jon Berger's notes). The trail forks at about 100 yards. The right fork is the old trail. We followed the left fork first, as I mentioned, in search of a campsite. When it became apparent that this was a swampy winter trail we bushed across to the old trail. The trail is a wet 250 yards.

Steve and I walked along the shore to the end of the left fork. Nothing. But there was fresh wolf scat on the beach and an aluminum skiff hidden under some brush up in the woods. Very odd. We pitched camp on the rise upriver from the portage landing. The caribou moss was crispy so we dowsed the firepit well. It was 100+ degrees at 4 p.m. when we finally pitched camp. I came to the conclusion here that I had forgotten my fishing reel (I later found it, on the bus ride home, in the bag where I kept my lures and bug dope--retarded!!). Tom Taber lent me his (thank you very much Tom) and I joined Bear, Phil, and Russell for some fishing at the other end. I waded about in the shallows on the shore side of the big water but I was unable to hook even a regular sized trout. The boys fished the outlet 1/4 mile downstream of the big ledge, where they could swim as well. Bear caught another of Jon Berger's land-locked salmon. The guide mis-diagnosed the catch as a huge walleye. Russell caught a 15" speckled trout. He asked if

it was a keeper Danny. The fishing has been good to us. At the other end a spaghetti dinner was nearing completion. My notes mention a beaver sighting at dinner. I do not recall, but I have to imagine that it was the winged kind, not the fur bearer, as we saw no evidence of the latter until much further downstream. Bear's fish was a little longer than the last (51 fingers Danny). It was more fish than we could manage. Bear, Phil, Lyle, and Russel and I hovered over the fire trying to finish it after the chores were done. Definitely a feast!! The night was warm and nearly still, but the sound of the rapids lulled us to sleep all the same. Another good day in God's country.

JULY 12:

Steve and I were shooting the breeze in the tent at 9:30 am when Pete and Phil strolled by en route to making breakfast. Pancakes, syrup, apples, and coffee. By 10 am the heat was upon us in earnest. The campsite did not provide enough shade to keep anyone in their tents. They were ovens by 11. The boys were off to lounge in the sun on the wide shallow bank of the river below the rapids. The river seems to have come down considerably in the heat of the past few days. Its flow has receded from the alder banks to reveal the heavy gravel slope of well worn stones that usually lies just beneath the surface in shallow current. Steve and I stayed behind to do some homework (we both wished that our laptops were a little smaller, a little more durable, and solar powered). I am still a little confused about the Lowenheim-Skolem Paradox Steve.

Now the waiting begins. The plane is due on Bastille Day, July 14. The problem with getting ahead of schedule in this context is that there is no way to change the location of the food drop. It is too bad that René wasn't coming up the river instead of across land. It was clear from my conversation with him at La Grande that he did not understand me when I indicated our path so that he could locate us if we were late. By parity of reasoning I didn't think that he would go down river looking for us if we had gotten ahead.

The fishermen returned from Acapulco empty handed (due to the afternoon sun, eh Kirk). I pulled out my maps while Bear whipped up a cheese bannoc and Kirk cooked his mythical, and much prophesied 2nd run of back to back spaghetti (the boys had been abuzz about the prospect of two spaghetti meals in a row all week). I pulled out Jon Berger's notes and marked their contents onto my 1:50,000 maps. The walk down the river seemed straight forward enough. But these were famous last words as neither the maps nor the notes did justice to the volume of the river below.

The flour store was running low. No pancakes tomorrow boys. After dinner Russell caught a 12" speckled trout which we gutted and split (pulling the spine out from the belly), and roasted on a grill made of alder twigs. It was number 24 Danny!! The cheeks were just right. Russell and I were fast at it after dinner, picking his trout clean with the help of Pete and Tom when Phil came to douse the fire pit and put the kitchen fly for the night.

The sun is low, and the temperature is just starting to break, at 8:30 p.m. Orange rays of humid sky cut across our spruce park. I am reminded of Rutsen, buried deep in the feathered branches at the base of a black spruce, hiding from the sun, playing a never ending harmonica rendition of "(O' My Darling) Clementine" at dinner.

JULY 13:

At 7:15 am it was already warm enough for shorts. Steve and I cooked a slow breakfast. No need for hurry. Only the portage separates us from our destination, Lac Paimpont. The task today is simply to scout out an appropriate campsite for the food drop tomorrow. The approach must be deep and the shore not too rocky. The boys were eager to be done with the day and get back to the business of lounging. I restrained them as long as possible and then simply released the flood gates. With any luck we would not be settled again until noon. I went across with the canoe first. The boys had been a little absent-minded with all of the down time and I figured it was best to save the kitchen gear until I could give the campsite a proper sweep (in the absence of any other distracting gear. This morning, much to my delight, nothing had been left behind.

I noticed, as I rigged out my canoe for the short walk, that one of the life vests had been pulled off Steve's canoe. On closer inspection it was the bow jacket, and it had been torn apart. It was wet with sticky saliva. A pawprint was punched into the discarded foam. It had 5 claws and was in the shape of a wolf-print. Very odd behavior for a wolf. The vest was ruined, so we packed it in with the garbage to be given to the re-outfit pilot. It was one of my personal vests so I was a little disheartened. I suppose that the animal was responding to the smell sunblock (some of them are quite flowery) on the vest.

Pete and I loaded up and crossed the river to check out a plank and a gas barrel on the east shore of the island at the bottom of the rapids. There was a dilapidated plywood dock, and there were lots of cut trees in the woods above. The clearing south of the dock was pretty large, probably 50 x 30 yards, but overgrown with low brush. Maybe this was the site of a Hydro camp. Pete got spooked by a rustling tree (bear or grouse Pete) so we headed back to the canoes. We crossed to the east shore and meandered south, settling on a spot just above the narrows leading to the southern body of the lake. The campsite is broad, flat, and spacious. It is nestled between a hill to the west and a long ridge to the south and east, which form a natural bowl. There is a hydro survey marker here. After the fly was pitched and the wood gathered we all went for a swim. The deep water of the channel was chilly. But the waist-deep shallows over the shoal along shore were really pleasant. A brisk dip in the channel followed by a seat in the shallows was just what the doctor ordered. Tom and Phil went fishing, and Phil caught a 14" speckled trout. A school of spawning (white?) fish teased the boys (who had fashioned rough spears) in the shallows. No doubt they were drawn by the remains of the pot wallop. The boys spent a good part of the afternoon trying to chase the fish ashore.

Lyle cooked what I would have called "mashed-potato-explosion", although he called it shepherd's pie, for dinner. It was fantastic!! Pete made a brown sugar bannoc. Phil and I split the fish and smoked it over the fire. The boys were, as usual, amazed at the thoroughness of the guide's bone-picking expertise when it comes to split-roasted trout. Steve and I watched the afterglow to the NW (really almost due north George) until about midnight when Steve drifted off and I lit the candle to finish Smilla's Sense of Snow. I am sending back the finished part of my library with the empty plastic rigs. We will pick up the reusable part of the outfit at La Grande at the end of the summer. The northern horizon never lost the dim glow of twilight on this trip. And it burned orange well past midnight tonight. Steve said that in his home town of Selawik, Alaska they call the twilight northern horizon the elven glow because it never fades to dark. The night was breezy. The days north

wind had come back to the NE at dusk. But, although the weather pattern hadn't changed, the temperature had fallen into the low 50's. A good night for sleeping.

JULY 14:

BASTILLE DAY!!! RE-OUTFIT DAY!!!! At 8:30 am a plane flew over at a high altitude. It was not ours. We had a big run of Cream of Wheat and two runs of coffee for breakfast. The day was cool. A nice breeze blew out of the north. There was not a cloud in the sky. René had offered to come late in the day, "...just in case you are behind." There was nothing to do but wait for the plane. Who would have known that we would be four days ahead of schedule. Sometime in the afternoon a wolf (or perhaps a lynx by Steve's trained ear) whined at us from up on the ridge. Finally, at 5:30, we heard the high-pitched whine of a Caravan's jet engine. He flew right by us at a couple hundred feet. He apparently thought that we would be at the cabins back on Lac Bienville. Then he came back to Lac Paimpont to look for us

He circled our position twice to see how deep it was (to test the waters so to speak), and then he simply dropped in over the spruce on the point 350 yards to the west. He taxied up to us in a spray of water and cut the engines just before running aground on an offshore boulder twenty yards off the beach. A Caravan is a massive plane. It seats 12 including the pilot. Our 23 days of food was dwarfed in the cabin of the plane. Steve and some of the boys waded out to greet him. Tom and I paddled a canoe to serve as a wheelbarrow. All told it took 20 minutes to unload (including a neighborly chat of course). He asked after our luck with lake trout on Lac Bienville Danny!! We gave him our mail and our garbage, and then he was off. Just like that we were alone in the bush again.

We spread the fly out in the kitchen area, spread the wannigans out along its edge, and separated all of the food into breakfast, lunch, dinner, and baking. 23 days worth of food fit into 11 wannigans and ten 24 x 10 inch duffel bags. It was tight but we cached no food for the "winter party". We were a little heavy on food due to ease of the past five days though. Lyle came to me with the garbage baby on his head like a chef's hat to inquire into the identity of the "poor sap who would be stuck with the cans this time around." Needless to say the hat fit well. Steve, Phil, Jimmy, and Pete made ham, rice, cheese-bannoc, and green beans for dinner even though it was not Sunday. (Re-outfit day always feels like a Sunday, eh Danny!!). It was delicious. Steve and I sat up into the wee hours and watched the "elven glow" to the north. It was like the night before the last day of school in the spring. We were sleepless in anticipation of coming weeks on the Great Whale River.

JULY 15:

I wish that I could recall all of the details of the landscape and describe them here. Each corner brings a new surprise, and the geography is all novel to our naive Keewaydin eyes. I envy the patience of the 19th Century naturalists. There is so much to see, so much to remember. I suppose that they had the luxury of a seat in the canoe from which they could sketch while being paddled by a crew of Matiss. Still, the photograph does not seem to capture the detailed richness of their vision (at least not when

the camera is in my hand). Perhaps this will be the summer to develop such patience.

It was 8 am when we disembarked from our weekend getaway. It was nice to have a mid-season break of our own, like the lads back at camp, but we were all raring to go. It was already too warm for anything but shorts. No snow this summer, eh Lyle. Last night Steve turned to me over dinner and exclaimed, "I cannot even remember what it was like to be cold those first couple of days!" A hot wind was blowing straight out of the south. We ran the swifts into the main body of Lac Paimpont and then slugged along a good cross-wind to the mouth of the river. Once again the guide's compass drew a blank and the way through the islands appeared more confusing than it should have. As soon as we felt the bite of current again (there is current in the shallows throughout Lac Paimpont) we stopped to offer the river a little Kool Aid as offering (the voyageurs had no powdered drink mix Pete). After an appropriate interval of respectful contemplation we embarked on the second half of our journey.

The north shore of the river is treeless for the first eight miles, the treeline having been so kind as to dip down to greet the river traveler. The Laurentian Shield, upon which the taiga rests, is more apparent once one hits the river. Spring floods have torn away the vegetation where it lay thin over sloping shore rocks. A large boulder embedded in the side of a hill on the south bank caught my eye as it was the first bit of rock to appear on the river and stood in strong contradistinction to the gravelly caribou moss parks that line the waterways above. An esker runs the length of the treeless portion of the north shore. It is littered with 20 foot, perfectly rounded, gravel hills [RESEARCH]. Further downstream these hills turned to islands as they were the only part of the esker extended above the surface of the river. We rounded the corner into the first narrows, and ahead stood two mountains. The river opens up to meet the mountains, which are separated by a steep ravine and a deep bay. The river appears to be the treeline itself along here. To the north is the esker, treeless, and cut at sharp angles by the river. Beyond stand barren hills and mountains populated by shrubs, low growth, and the occasional dwarfed black spruce. To the south the spruce forest is lush. We meandered along the esker enjoying the view.

The day promised not to be too difficult, which was nice given the blistering heat. Only the strength of the south breeze kept us cool at all. By the time we reached the narrows that separate the two big islands at km 11 Kirk was getting a little giddy with all of the esker spotting. At least that is what I took all of his giggles to mean!!! We followed Serge Theoret's marks through the channel between the islands. But we would have done better to follow Jon Berger's advice and follow the river along to the north (although the lush banks to south provide a path of equal distance). Our path bottomed out in a liftover portage where the river became shallow and choked with rocks. Steve and Phil opted out and paddled around to the south. It took them a little longer but they avoided wading 30 yards off shore to find deep enough water to float the canoes again. I would choose the north channel to see the treeless landscape.

We had lunch on a broad sandy beach on the north shore 2 km past the big islands. Serge Theoret camped here. Lyle made pork 'n beans with mashed potatoes, the standard first day out lunch. It is always an occasion Danny!! We ran the easy CII north of the next big island. Strong current pushes you right along to the next set at the bottom end of the island. Steve and I got out to scout a trail. As above Lac Bienville portaging is a multiple choice endeavor. Follow the caribou runs. The two main chutes of the rapids

could be run, but not with an outfit like ours. They are big, strong, steep V's. One would have to pull like a madman to avoid a messy bit of rock and froth at the bottom left (where the water wants to push you). We lined the bottom chute. The top could have been lined in lower water.

The portage directions were a little complicated. Phil was apparently flabbergasted by their complexity. I think that what he said was, "What?! Did you hear that!?" We eased down to a point some 30 yards above the first chute where we bushed through the willows and alders and found a caribou trail that paralleled the river. It crossed a stream, and less than 100 yards inland, petered out in a boulder field. The boulder field led us back to the river. We kept the purple flowers to our right and a broken topped spruce to our left. This led us to the clearest path through the shore alders back to the river, right Pete. We climbed the big hill west of the boulder field for a magnificent bird's-eye view of the rapids. The southern route around the island is passable as well. It has a 200 yard portage past two steep ledges.

We lined out down the south shore. The rocks in the shallows are sharp, but the pull of the rapids to the left seemed more daunting. The runoff below is long and moves quickly. There was an unoccupied cabin on the east shore of the wide peninsula below. Be wary of the broad 2 meter falls below. It is steep and appears out of nowhere. The river is placid above and neither the spray nor the roar of the cascade are apparent from above. Portage 100 yards on the flat rock spillway left of the falls. The rapids are scenic. The falls are wide and steep, and the water churns an emerald green through the main chute. We made camp across the river from the portage on a gentle slope of caribou moss in the first wide bay past the runoff. It was an A+. The view of the falls was excellent, and, as per usual, there were so many tentsites that everyone got a 1/2 acre building lot of their own. There was evidence of the hydro company here. One might camp on the large sand and gravel rise just below the falls on the north shore. But our site was really the most sheltered and spacious. The banks on the other shore showed old survey marks tagged "1981", and there were square holes in the ground cover cut 18" by 6" deep, that must have been places where soil sample plugs had been pulled. It takes a long time to generate a new layer of soil over the sand and gravel here boys.

All in all it was a good first day on the river. Lyle made us spaghetti, John made cornbread, and Phil made the traveler. Russell chopped wood for 3 HOURS!!!! The cloud cover we had been expecting with the south wind finally caught up to us after dinner. The temperature was 90 degrees at 5pm. Rain has been on the horizon for two hours now at 9:30 p.m., but so far it refuses to fall on us. It is sticky and hot. Not only could the woods use a dowsing, but we could use some cooling off.

July 16:

It was raining this morning. The rain came on about 11 last night. It never came down hard during the night, rather slow and intermittent. I was glad for the rain, but it did not bring on the cool air we had hoped for. No sleeping bags were needed last night. And the humidity was high. We were swimming in the moisture suspended in the air around us.

At about 5:30 am the rain storm turned into a thunderstorm. At 5:45, when I finally dragged my groggy head to the kitchen fire there were several thunderstorms sounding around us. The low clouds enveloped the kitchen. The wind was still from the south. We got the boys up at 6:15 but did not pack up. If

the weather broke we would roll. The rain began to fall in earnest at 7:30, and, with the exception of once when the sun peaked through at 11, continued into the afternoon.

Russell and Phil went fishing upstream at the falls and pulled a 16" speckled trout out of its north side. Russell and Phil both lost lures to a salmon that we watched as it got away with the loot. Too little drag. Jon and Tom headed back with them when the sun appeared at 4 p.m. The storm broke up into huge billowing thunderheads streaming fast and low across the landscape. They got five more, including Jon's first catch in his long tenure as a Keewaydin camper. It was a fat 18" speckled trout. There was a fillet for everyone at dinner. The guide manned the frying pans while Russell cleaned the beasts and Phil hacked off ample fillets. Bear made cornbread for Steve's chili. It was a feast.

The wind has turned to the north but the humidity is still thick. The temperature is beginning to drop now at 9 p.m. as the sun dips behind the horizon. The kids are excited to be on the river. Kirk and Bear have pitched their tent in the shadow of a huge abandoned osprey nest.

JULY 17:

A heavy mist lay over the river at 5:30 am when I finally emerged from the tent. It hung low and blew across the campsite fast from the west. We were on the water easily by 8 am. We ran the rapids in the channel SW of the campsite. It was an easy run in the black water on the right side. Be wary of the shoal below. We paddled north around the islands, then eased down the right shore to the CIII below at the end of the next channel. This is Rapides Kawispukach. Jon Berger mentions a run on the left shore but we did not see it. In higher water, or lower water, the far right channel might be run. In our water a shallow shelf formed a keeper that stretched 2/3 of the way across the channel and a large rock obstructed the shore run. The quick pivot needed to thread the needle and avoid both obstacles seemed a little risky. We portaged 200 yards on the open caribou moss just 20 yards inland on the right shore. When you clear the alders look for a tall skinny tamarac at about the bottom of the rapids. A large sloping rock lay beneath it our year. The shore willows at the bottom of the rapids are the toughest hazard on the trail. They actually lifted the canoe off of my head they were so thick.

The outrun is non-existent. We paddled through crazy esker lands below this. The most dramatic feature is a huge dune shaped esker that rises 20 meters from the water level and is capped with a small grove of dwarf spruce. The channels below sport swift water with an occasional rip. In deeper water this section would have been nothing but swift current. Rapides Nipayustimusich, which appears in a 1 km E/W channel on the 1:50,000 maps, was easily run down the right shore in flat water. It was not a big rapids but one could see that higher water would produce big waves in the narrow channel. A couple of hundred yards below a shoal kicked up some froth. This gave some perspective on the speed of the current as the froth came on quick. There is good current to the south bend in the river. There is an unmarked rapids at the end of the peninsula that looks like a right hand (palm down and facing south). The weather was threatening. A cold mist hung in the air obscuring visibility. We lined the top on the right shore over a smooth, shallow ledge, but it could easily have been run. Also, the rapids could be portaged across the peninsula at either of the pinches.

The wind kicked up strong from the southwest when we reached open water again. We had to slug hard to get back into the deep channel and the

strong current. The wind dragged against the river, forming large rolling waves where the current was strongest. It reminded me of the passage in Heb's book The Rupert That Was in which Nishe Belanger's bowman complains of a wet lap due to the Mattawa guide's propensity to use the heavy current of the river as a power assist against the prevailing west wind. It is a good trick. And the rolling waves make the heavy current easy to pick out. But, today luck was not on my side as I led Jon and Kirk right up onto a shoal trying to cut the western bend too close before Rapides Atikwatawapitch.

Steve and I scouted the usual route, game trails on the north bank. But the way was choked with alders, willows, and deadfalls below the first drop. The rapids consists of two drops marked CV and CIV respectively on the Serge Theoret maps. A more courageous group could portage down to the outlet of the runoff channel that cuts in from the backbay to the north and run out the right shore. But the water looked too heavy for us. A dogleg turn to the left forms a good wave where the heavy current crashes into the shore. Steve spotted a caribou on the barren ridge to the north while I was tramping around in the choked undergrowth. The rapids reminded me of Smoky Hill Rapids at the bottom of the Rupert (albeit a little smaller).

We stopped for lunch in the dry channel behind the small island at the top of the rapids. The right side of the river provided no easy portage and we were loathe to try to run out the bottom third of the rapids. Steve and I consulted the map. It looked as if an easier route would be to bush a portage across the ridges to the south to a long bay that stretched back to the east from below the rapids. Meanwhile Phil had caught a trout for us in the big eddy below a large rock spit between the first big drop of the rapids and the confluence of the overrun channel to the north. We cut the spine out and roasted it on green alders stretched across the fire. It was delicious.

Steve and the boys bumped across to the southern shore to scout the portage while Phil and I closed up the kitchen. The trail takes out straight up the first ridge, and continues, as the crow flies, to the second ridge from which one can see a natural path down to the left to the water deep in the bay. The trail was about 500 yards. It may well have been the longest to date. Unfortunately our communication chain broke down (as the game of telephone tends to do). Tom, Lyle, and Jimmy missed the portage instructions. Lyle and Jimmy opted for the default instructions, following the common logic of all of our prior portages, "Keep the water in sight and find a safe landing well below the rapids, we'll meet you there." Tom bullied his way across to the bay through heavier brush and a stand of spruce, ending up 200 yards west of our landing. Tom bumped over to meet us once he was found. Lyle and Jimmy paddled around. It was a brief scare for the guide and his partner, but the terrain to the east is barren and the end of the peninsula was only a couple of hundred yards away. There was only so far that they could have gone. In the end the boys just got to do a little extra portaging. The preferred route stays in the open terrain and crosses pretty much due south to the little northern spur of the bay.

Two kilometers downstream we lifted over a CIII on the rocks on the right. Again, a run could have been made here but we did not want to play with the waves and the aerated water in the middle. We camped just below the rapids on a rise on the north shore. The boys got six 16"-18" trout in less than a half an hour (Jon, now among the expert anglers, contributed to the catch). We made trout chowder.

It had been overcast all day. The morning river mist rose a bit, but hung around all day as low clouds. It broke up a bit in the afternoon, but never enough to call "clearing skies". Black clouds blew in at 6:30 p.m., but proved benign. Jon is making us gingerbread. A caribou antler shed marked our tentsite this

evening. The tentsites are set in a large caribou moss bowl 20 feet above the river. A scotch mist hangs in the air as Steve and I peruse the 1:250,000 maps for the rest of the trip. Apparently we passed an old and abandoned settlement today marked on the 1:250,000 maps as Chinusaw Pachistiwakan. But we did not notice it. Perhaps that is a surprise for the future.

JULY 18:

The scotch mist was thick this morning when I arrived, a little late, to the fire at 5:45 a. m. But it was not too cold yet. The wind had turned to the north during the night and had brought with it a mild chill. But it was nothing like July 4th and 5th. We decided to make a day of it as the mist seemed simply to be low cloud cover. Russell was the first one down to breakfast, a change from our usual first visitors, Lyle and Phil. The mist came on in earnest as we left the campsite at 8.

The rapids below the campsite looked a little formidable from above, so, given the heavy mist and the plummeting temperature we opted to sneak down the right shore and portage 50 yards over the tall gravel bank at the bottom. The sand and gravel of the esker was loose, the bank was 30 feet high, and this turned out to be an arduous route. On the way back for my second load I stopped for a look at the rapids from the vantage atop the esker. There is a run left of center, keeping close to the whitewater kick at the top. It would have been a straight shot. But better safe than sorry in inclement weather, eh Danny. I also noticed that I had snagged the line from Tom's reel, which was still attached to the rod in the stern of old 60, on some great Canadian brush. This made following the trail easier for the lads, but the ensuing tangle of line was irretrievable. Sorry Tom. Luckily it was a short portage there was still plenty of line left on the reel.

We stuck to the south side of the esker below. The wind turned out to be a little Northeast and provided a tough crosswind for the right handed sternsmen. The mist was so heavy here that visibility dropped to about 1km. It was actually very picturesque. Our channel seemed to just appear out of the mist. The rapids below, the east-west slash on the map, was marked a CII, but in this water it was more of a CIII. We portaged on the long sloping shore rock on the river right.

The channel and swifts below were very pretty. These are the first "dunelands" to use Jon Berger's name. You run straight at a tall gravel hill before turning north into the long paddle to the flatwater stretch above the first gorge. The wind kicked up a gale just as we crossed the map making the going tough. We limped along against a stiff crosswind to the big bend just past the long island. All day we were in and out of barren lands. Here they became really contoured to the south. In the mist the effect was eerie. Tall, sharp sand hills covered only sparsely with vegetation, slipped in and out of the mist. During a rest break, when the channels finally turned the wind to our backs, Bear and Russell drifted across my path. My head was down, buried in maps. The collision cracked one of the ribbon-thin ribs in the bow of their canoe. The damage was negligible, and certainly would not effect the sea-worthiness of the vessel. But all the same it was a bother. Foghorns next time, eh guys.

With the wind now at our backs, and a little current to boot we drifted 2km in short order, and then paddled out into the wide and shallow stretch above the gorge. Out of the mist rose tall mountains, like the shoulders of some beast lurking in the distance, leaning back, braced, trying to hold up the flow of the river. The view was magnificent. If only we had had Whistler along to paint it. In the mist the mountains were the very definition of sublime. They rise to the

west and southwest 100 to 150 meters, forcing the river to take a sharp jog to the north and forming a large lake to the south. The river basically crashes through the mountains.

The cross-wind was brutal so we slugged through the sand bars to the north side of the wide shallow channel and hugged the south shore of the spruce islands. The crossing was no easy feat in the heavy wind (the going was shallow Danny). The bay containing the start of Serge Theoret's portage route is apparent from a good distance, even on a day like today where the contour of the land blurs in the absence of shadows. It sits nestled between two tall hills, due west of the approach. We paddled into the bay, passing a low sand bar the size of a football field which was as smooth as glass, unmarred by the footprints of birds or the wave action of moving water, and out of both the wind, and the now driving mist for lunch. Our design was to camp somewhere along the portage trail, maybe at the first pond 300 yards up the mountain from the bay. There was a Cree camp on the point at the mouth of the bay. A frame for a wall tent accompanied an outhouse and the usual detritus, stood alone, looking out over the river. The camp looked to be fairly active. There several old outhouse holes as I recall indicating a busy history. The spot was too open to make camp on a day like today. Tom started a fireplace and he and he and Russell went in search of the suddenly elusive dry spruce needed for the fire. The mountains were barren of anything but willows and the occasional dwarf spruce. Anything dead was rotten. We really could have used a duffel full of last night's dry wood on this one. Jimmy and I felled a large shore tamarac to get the fire started. The center was rotten but we got some billets off the outside of the chico.

The boulder strewn bed of the spillover channel from the first pond above empties into the bay like a granite avalanche. The individual stones are each at least five feet around. The scale is massive. Steve headed out, up the rock-field for a gander, as the boys and I wrestled with the wind, the thick mist, and wet wood. And there was the added ever present danger that one of the cold and wet feet crowding the sputtering fire would kick it into the drink. Lyle made a second fire for warmth (and to protect the lunch). Jon played in the floating mud. Satisfied that lunch would come off without any further hitch I started off to join Steve and scout the portage when the boys announced that he was returning. There was no campsite. There were no trees above the pond. No shelter from the wind driving mist. Oh well. While the boys made lunch I took off for the pond and the hill above to look out on the gorge.

Steve had saved the first glimpse of the gorge for me. I had spent years planning this trip. I hiked 300 yards up the hill to the first pond. The boulders in the spillway were too large to make for easy going so I stuck to their south bank where an occasional small stand of trees made for some shelter from the wind and mist. The pond itself is a small alpine pond that is set snug in the valley between two peaks. It is obscured from the trail by the steep headwall that marks its eastern end. There were the remains of an outhouse and a 5 gallon bottle of chainsaw oil just below the pond. But, evidence of past winter occupation aside, this would not have made a hospitable home.

The vegetation ended abruptly twenty yards below the pond at the foot of the headwall. I could not resist a peak at the gorge (sorry Steve) so I hiked to the top of the peak north of the pond. The mist had abated briefly and the wind was howling. It was eerie alone at the top of the gorge. The wind erased all other sounds. The bald topped peak, the highest of the gorge, was like an isolation chamber. I perched on top of a large boulder alone with my thoughts gazing out over the abyss. It was exhilarating. Below stretched the blue-green froth of the rapids of the gorge churning soundlessly. I could see the river as far as the 16 meter falls two miles to the west, and the course of the gorge was clear from the

steep cut in the mountains below. The portage looked like a clear walk along the top of the ridge marking the southern side of the gorge. The terrain was steep, treeless, and littered with huge glacial erratics. The valley that held Jon Berger's potential southern portage route cut deep and out of sight behind our portage ridge. I understand now why the barrens of Northern Quebec and Labrador have been referred to as the land God gave to Cain. I sat on my perch for twenty minutes and soaked up the sights. The overcast and mist lent a green tint to the landscape that matched the hue of the seething river below. The solitude, the wind, and the utter isolation of the barren terrain can barely be put to words. I could have sat there as captive as a hypnotized audience all afternoon.

In another universe where the sun had been shining and the breeze a little less stiff I would have set up camp on the point and spent the afternoon scouting the ideal trail. But the prospect of a real blow accompanied by heavy rain seemed to mitigate against this prospect. And the boys were getting pretty cold by now (although I do not think that the novelty of a warming fire had worn off of Lyle yet and Jon Connors was having a ball on the floating bog of muck left behind on the shoreline by the receding summer waters). We paddled out of the bay against the wind upstream to scout a low ridge of caribou moss for a campsite. I think that a better plan would have been to stop at the east end of the first island if the weather was bad. We did not get this far back upstream but found an excellent spot on the back side of the island just west of the narrow channel that splits it in half. The site was in a sheltered bay and sported our usual bed of caribou moss now softened by the day of rain. It took a lot of looking to find the spot though. And it was soggy going in the bush. Jon and Phil, Bear and Pete, and I pulled up the channel to cross the island while the others portaged with Steve. Bear and Jimmy made us split pea soup. Jon, Tom, Pete, and Russell went stalking the elusive chico of dry spruce (few and far between on this site eh Russell). We pitched a fly and had cocoa for dessert. Bear made both the bannocks. A gust of wind pulled a grommet out of the fly while the boys were doing the dishes.

The caribou moss was damp and swollen, making an excellent mattress. Steve and I remarked that any port in a storm has turned out to be a good port on this trip. The boys had kept in good spirits throughout the cold and wet. All in all it was a good northern day. The sun poked through somewhere in the distance around nine lighting up the entire sky. The humidity was so thick that the campsite lit up like fog near a neon sign.

JULY 19:

The 5 am wake up call was accompanied by low clouds, but from the warmth of my sleeping bag it looked like it was breaking up. It was cold!! The temperature had not broken 45 degrees yesterday and the morning was in keeping with that theme. At 5:30 we got up to make breakfast and see if the clouds would burn off for us. My fingers ached with the cold as I cut the bacon. It took an hour to boil the coffee water. But we were in luck. The wind had turned to the north and the day turned crystal clear. We collected some more wood in case the barren grounds of the gorge provided none, and we were off by 9 am.

Those of us who had pulled up the channel paddled to the slash at the west end of the island and lifted over a small spillover channel. The other three canoes were there to greet us and we paddled across to a different setting. The portage bay glistened in the morning sun, still sporting the heavy damp of the day before. We portaged 300 yards out of the bay to the first pond on the south side

of the spring freshet channel, paddled across the pond, and then hiked en masse to the top of the peak to the north. This is the highest peak of the gorge and offers, on a clear day, an unfettered view of 360 degrees of landscape. We could see for miles.

The gorge is flanked by mountains to all sides. There were no trees between us and the 5 meter falls at the two mile mark. The low pine forest and rolling sand hills to the east were quite a juxtaposition to the barren mountains to the west. Three large rapids tumble through the big north bend at the top of the gorge. The water was emerald green from above. We scouted our portage route from here. It looked as if we would be able to duck around behind the ridge forming the southern wall of the gorge and stay out of the north wind. Steve and I went ahead blazing trail while the boys leap-frogged the gear along behind us. Our route followed a winding valley from the pond to the second ridge to the south of the gorge. We built a cairn here to mark our turn to the west. We stopped for lunch at the second pond, leaving all of the gear except the jewelry up on the trail. Steve and I went back for our canoes here. The boys had taken to portaging in pairs, partly as a buddy system (although the open terrain kept all of them in sight most of the day), but also as an aid against the wind which we were unable to escape. The bowmen kept a hand on the bow of the canoes to keep them from swinging in the crosswind. It was an excellent display of teamwork.

Steve and I skipped lunch and headed downstream to scout the rest of our route. The going had been slow so far. The terrain was open to the wind and littered with 5-6 foot boulders that made walking treacherous. The easiest walking was in the wind along the tops of the ridges. I bumped over the highest ridge for some pictures of the upper gorge. Here I found a rusted can of tomato juice and a wooden stake. We surmised that this was one of Serge Theoret's portage markers and decided to go with the grain and use the top of the ridge as a trail from here on down. We stayed just south of the top (to avoid the vertigo of the drop to the river) and made a nice trail down to the pinch above the 16 meter falls. We marked a break spot with a cairn just across the spillover stream from the third pond on a broad flat rock. I would imagine that this whole stretch of flat plain above the 16 and 5 meter falls, although 20 feet above the river, is under water in the spring. Then Steve and I walked the gorge for some sight seeing.

I ran out of film above the big drop and hadn't brought any more along on this jaunt ensuring another photo trip with the boys after lunch. The river narrows to a flume 10 meters across just above the 16 meter drop. The camel back mountain that we had been using as a sightline for our trail all morning is directly across the river from us here. We stopped for a break to marvel at the billowing surge of water below the 16 meter falls. The mass of water seethed ephemerally like the billowing of a late afternoon thunderhead. Once again I was hypnotized by the spectacle. The view back up river how far we had trudged and the elevation had dropped from the peak above the first pond. We were 40 meters below the first pond, and 70 meters below the vantage point peak, with 20 more meters to drop to the campsite. We had come 2.5 km (about a mile and a half) as the crow flies.

We wandered down to the bluff overlooking the 5 meter falls in hopes of a campsite. But there was no shelter to be found and what had looked like a flat plain from a distance was littered with rounded stones the size of soccer balls. Unfortunately it would have to do. We blazed and cairned our way back to the boys and had them shuttle everything down to the first break point. There were overripe cranberries everywhere and bear scat to accompany it, some of it very fresh. No caribou through here apparently, but the wolves were still with us. The wind proved quite a hazard for the sternsmen and a lot of extra energy was

expended keeping the bows turned to the west. We took a walk to the 16 meter falls with all of the boys in tow from the cairn at the stream crossing. We walked out onto the stone outcropping that pinches the river into the 16 meter falls. I took a section photo of the boys with the big falls in the background. Steve saw a bear walking one of the ridges to the south while the rest of us were sightseeing.

The wind was really too much to deal with so we left the canoes at the top of the hill above the stream and resolved to return to them at dusk when the wind died. Unfortunately the wind never died on the ridge. It blew hard from the north all night. As the portage unfolded, following the first ridge off of the river here, the view to the west opened up revealing the lower gorge. The river flattens out and the mountains close in as they rise out of its banks. We made camp on the bluff overlooking the 5 meter falls. The tents were clustered tightly in the swampy willows along the stream that meets the river here. We put the kitchen in the lee of the bluff where the terrain dips down to meet the stream. Kirk, Rutsen, and Tom collected flypoles for us as a bit of superstition to ward off any potential rain. Jon made both of the bannocks and Pete made us cocoa.

When we arrived at the campsite Kirk and I took our cameras to the edge of the bluff and awaited a break in the fair weather afternoon clouds to illuminate the river for a photo. Steve joined us for a while but the wait was long. The north wind was cold but the event seemed worth it. The sunset later was the best of the summer. It was fiery red on the underside of the clouds stretching down the gorge to the west. All told a lovely evening.

This is where the southern overland route comes back to the river. It does not look to offer any improvement over the trail we took (excepts that it is a bit shorter) There is no water in the stream it follows and the ponds were too small to make for a respite. And you would miss the view. We could have pushed through to below the big water of the upper gorge today if we had set our minds to it. The time spent blazing could have been utilized to move loads. The best plan would be to set a course on the map and walk in pairs, keeping together as a group, following the back side of the tall ridge overlooking the gorge. The clarity of hindsight is a privilege of sorts I suppose. Jon Berger indicates that the gorge could be traversed in one day. I think that he is right. It is only five miles from end to end. But it would be a hump. And the wind on the open ridges is impossible. A better bet would be to lunch on the bluff over the 5 meter falls and camp at the head of the last falls. Still, it would be a long day. I was glad to have seen the interior of the gorge but I suggest the Indian Portage Route to the north. Portaging through the gorge requires one 5 km stretch of portaging the last 2 km of which walks over steep and difficult terrain. It is pretty country, but the bulk of the barren lands can be seen from the mountain at the top of the gorge. A day of sight seeing might suffice for a view of the gorge.

JULY 20:

I expected to be socked in by a heavy river mist this morning due to the proximity of the 5 and 16 meter falls. But it was clear as a bell at 5:30 am. It promised to be a beautiful day. I walked to the edge of the bluff and had a quiet moment with the 5 meter falls in the morning light before rolling. The sound and the view of the churning river is mesmerizing.

We packed up and then went back to get the canoes. There is nothing like a mile portage to start the day. Rutsen and I brought up the rear, pausing briefly for a last look at the 2 meter falls at the midpoint. When we reached the campsite Steve and I set the boys to cutting a trail through the willows across the stream and wandered ahead to bush our way through what we thought would

be the last kilometer of the portage. The going was rough as the banks became steep and tall. The trail was traversing a 60 degree grade at times. Across the river a sand bank, 20 yards tall and flat-topped ran the length of our present portage and apparently the length of the rapids below. We gazed longingly at it as we cut the trail along the steep mountainside. Our trail reached the flatwater between the falls by cutting through the springy moss and labrador tea 100 feet above the river.

We hacked a portage along the left bank along the left bank beginning at the end of our campsite ridge, down to the creek, and along through the labrador tea to the flatwater between the rapids. The footing was tough. The undergrowth tended to grab onto your feet and pull you down. It was 11:15 when we reached the end of our portage, 4 km from the portage bay above. There is 200 yards of flatwater between the rapids and the falls. The river takes an abrupt turn to the south at the 2 meter falls below opening up a broad flatwater shallows above the falls. We loaded up in a strong eddy and the goal was to ferry across river to a narrow shore eddy from which we could ease our way down to the flatwater above the falls. I crossed first, front ferrying high across mild chop from the runoff of the rapids above to the top of the eddy on the far shore. the current was not too strong and Jimmy and I had to actually drift downstream a bit to get reach the eddy. Steve barreled straight across the river and easily paddled into the eddy some 50 feet below us. Jimmy and I eased down to the next eddy and he held on as I got out the cameras for a shot for the brochure. I signaled the second pair to come on across. they both followed the guide and decided to front ferry across (as per instructions). But their angles were not sharp enough eddying out. Peter and Kirk dropped a gunnel but righted the canoe. Bear and Russell went in at the eddy line. I stowed my cameras quickly and silently guided the boys into the eddy (which they easily made as they were right there). But there was nothing that Steve or I could do for the canoe. It ran the falls upside down, like the Monitor. It tried to eddy out above the falls, but no luck. Over it went, and it got stuck in a short drop, the only obstruction that would have given it any trouble, on the south bank. I could not believe what had happened as Bear's older brother had a similar, though scarier experience on the Rupert River four years earlier.

Jon Connors sat Bear and Russell down, got them to shed their wet clothes, and got them into some dry wool. The river was cold Danny. Phil and Tom took off down the shore spotting loads. I followed them on the opposite bank. Their tent, a duffel full of GORP and FD fruit, and a paddle floated ashore on the south bank below the big surf. Their double packs, another paddle, and Bear's cup were bobbing in an eddy on my side of the river. Thank goodness we were able to retrieve their personal gear. Two weeks is a long time to be without a tent and sleeping bag.

We left some of the lads to spot the swamped canoe and portaged our canoes down to where we could ferry back across to the boys. We encountered a groundhog en route. He blocked the trail, frozen with fear. Luckily we were able to walk around him. back across the river we were able to work our way upstream by bumping up through the shore eddies to the end of the portage along the shore rocks on the south bank. Steve and I had been communicating with the three crews on the south bank by elaborate pantomimes, conveying the message that we wanted them to portage, and not fiddle with the canoe, while we crossed back over to them. First I pointed to my eyes, then to them, then I raised my paddle over my head with both hands signaling stop, and pretended to sit down. Steve then made like he was portaging. I stood on the bluff, leaning on my paddle, looking at the canoe in disbelief for 15 minutes before portaging my canoe. The boys got a late start but still beat us down and were waiting when we

arrived

There was nothing we could do for the canoe. It was crushed where it sat under six inches of water and looked more like an elongated, partially inflated inner tube than a canoe. We tied a stern line to a rock to use as a grappling hook but we could not free it. Nor could we lever it off of the rocks of the river. We could not even free the bow to retrieve the numbers. Bear, Jon, Steve and I snacked on GORP as we worked with the canoe. Bear was in good spirits although he could not stop apologizing. A big macaroni and cheese meal was waiting for us downstream.

It was 3:30. Russell and I headed downstream on foot to scout a campsite. The sand bluff that we had hoped to walk down the gorge continued on the far shore and appeared to be flat enough on top for a campsite. Our bank was steep and thick with spruce. We had entered the long and straight stretch of the gorge. Birch now grew in scattered clumps on the mountains on either side of the gorge. It appeared as if the river were tearing through a series of round top mountains whose sides had been shorn by the river. The thick spruce and stands of birch, along with the barren rocks of the shorn mountainsides reminded me of a mountain called Noon Peak that I used to hike with my family in New Hampshire as a Child. The current is strong and fast but the bulk of the drop is at the falls. The rapids below the falls were heavy but could have been run on the left side in this water.

Russell and I found no campsites so, at 5 p.m., we loaded up and headed downstream. Russell and Bear walked the shoreline because as yet we had no room for them in the mojo positions of the boys canoes. This stretch of river is very scenic. The barren lands above give way to a narrow, winding river. The rapids rips below the heavy rapids following the 2 meter falls could have been run in our water (with some scouting), although the wash was a little heavy for our full loads. But, with Bear and Russell on the shoreline, and the memory of this afternoon's debacle close at hand, we decided to line all of them. Jimmy was the dry foot expert, dancing around in his pig boots, picking a trail for the canoes from my bow. We stuck to the shallows on the left shore. Around a blind bend the river straightens out. We eased down the shore line, staying out of the current as much as we could, occasionally bumping out to run past some shore shallows. The river narrows to 20 yards here. The barrens returned on our side of the river. We passed a creek entrance and pulled up to an exposed rock shore at the top of the next major drop. We were counting on the high barren bluffs for a home. But there was nothing too accommodating in the vicinity. The best bet was across the river on the portage bluff we never reached. A lumpy, but flat, campsite could be made anywhere on that ridge. It is so flat on top that it resembles a train track embankment. I kept expecting the a CP freight train to pull alongside and blow its whistle, like it often does on the evening run alongside the Moose River trip around Jackman, Maine.

We settled on the bluff above the large drop marked SV on the Serge Theoret maps, above the shore rocks. The boys found tentsites on an intermediate ledge about halfway up the bluff. The staff site was more of a lazyboy recliner, but as any (lumpy) port in a storm goes, this was a port. We were a short portage from the end of the fray of the upper gorge. Below our maps marked several miles of swift flatwater and a set of big rapids to mark the end of the gorge. Sunset was as picturesque as the night before. The rapids stretching out to the west and the mountains in the background tossed and odd scale to the setting. The mountains are too tall to be so close given the width and volume of the river. The scale of the setting has changed overnight from flat, broad and sandy to steep, narrow, and rocky. I can't help but notice the metaphor for our current demise.

As a word of advice, the banks of the river turned to sloping shore rocks immediately below the 2 meter falls (in our water). Although steep at times they are easily portaged with a little caution. Both Serge Theoret and Jon Berger suggest the left shore along this stretch. I would attribute this to their preference of lining to portaging. They both lined the right shore. A 2.5 km portage would by-pass all of the rapids below the 2 meter falls utilizing the low bluff on the right shore. If you were to run the passable stretches below the 2 meter falls the left shore is your best bet (although a 40 yard portage would replace the 200 yarder here at our campsite). Accidents are accidents, and on a trip of this sort nothing is to be taken for granted. But, our accident was a fluke and should not discourage the intrepid from the river.

All of this aside in future years I would stick to the left shore if the shore rocks below the falls are exposed by the level of the river. The trail on the bluff on the right is a well traveled bear trace (judging by the amount of steaming fresh bear scat we encountered) and is easily walked well past our current position. But it is unnecessary. In our water the walk on the left was tough, but it was the last of the long walks and beat tempting the river twice.

Steve is a little shaken up by the days events (although he would never admit it). It is amazing how quickly things can turn. Yesterday we took a lazy sight-seers approach to the terrain of the gorge. We hadn't a care in the world and had our eyes on the Little Whale River and Umiujaq for next summer's festivities. Today we are minus one canoe. And the result is that we have to bush food and gear to make room for two mojos. The river seems daunting. I shook visibly while cooking dinner. I am sure that the feelings will pass with the adrenaline, but the drama is currently high. Tomorrow we will cache all non-essential food (for one of our accompanying bears no doubt). We will keep 16 breakfasts, the bacon, 16 macaroni meals for lunch, the cheese, three large jam rigs, all of the baking, 2 split pea meals, one canned ham and rice meal, two chili meals consisting of a bag of kidneys, a can of tomatoes, a can of paste and a can of tomato sauce a piece (I wish we had the tomato powder now), all of the FD beef and vegetables, and as much pasta as we can take. The boys swear that they will make the cocoa fit. I am glad that we had three macaroni meals stowed away in another wannigan. We lost all of the spices except the pepper for the bacon so the boys will have to get used to pepper-flavored food.

The moon is full. The night is cold and clear. It is 11 p.m., well past my bed time. Perhaps next time through we will try the Indian Portage Route to the north. The clouds to the east are illuminated in pewter, the default hue of the sky this far north, by the silver dollar sized moon. The elven glow is bright to the northwest and the northern lights are low to the north. We are down one canoe, but other than the allure of the unknown, which momentarily weighs heavy on our souls, the world is in perfect order.

JULY 21:

Today a new friend joined us on the river, the jackpine. The trails at the bottom of the gorge were littered with them. Also, we had begun to see moose scat in the bush along with bear and caribou. The wolves seemed to have remained above in the barren grounds. It was overcast and cold when we woke up. But the clouds were low, moving fast, and separated into ridges, showing a glimmer of blue sky every now and again, which was a good sign. We got everyone up but left them unrolled for the moment. I whacked out a trail through the willows to bypass the steep chute and heavy runoff while the boys ate and then we sent those not on crews ahead with the canoes while we

organized the provisions.

The wannigans were repacked, minus #8 and #2, by 10 am and we were off by 11. Kirk and Bear blazed a second trail down past the strong eddy below the rapids. The overcast and cold had us cautious. The eddy was a little close to the heavy wash of the runoff. We ran out the long swift set of rips to the flatwater stretch below. The sand bluff on the right shore is mirrored on the left shore below the SV to the bend in the river. We stuck close to its gravel banks. Above one of Air Wemindji's Caravans circled the falls of the upper gorge. I was sure that they had seen the swamped canoe and were having a quick look to see if anyone was in distress, but they circled twice in the vicinity of the 16 and 5 meter falls, and then flew on without coming down the gorge to buzz us (although with all five canoes out on the river together we must have been visible). Maybe it was just a good photo shot for a sight seeing flight. I never found out as there were no pilots around when we stopped off to pick up our rigs on our way home. Maybe it was René just checking in on us.

We found the remains of canoe #43 washed up on a shoal below the slope of the first sharp hill of the lower gorge. I stopped on the shoal and waded to the canoe where I was able to retrieve the carrying bar, the tump line, and the bow and stern lines. When Steve arrived we cut the numbers and the K's off of the canoe to present to Danny and Brooks back at camp. This is the traditional way to retire a canoe although I have no idea of the origin of the practice. It was a somber moment.

This stretch of the gorge is a deep and lush ravine. The river flows deep and fast. Birches and tamaracks grow to three to four stories tall. Grasses grow on the flood plains. It is a bit of geography we had not yet seen, and by all evidence appeared to be an isolated ecological anomaly for this clime. We stuck to the right shore, following the Theoret maps, for the proper approach to the falls below. We were able to stay in flatwater and swifts on the right shore all the way down to the lip of the falls. It was good exercise for the recently gun-shy. We reached the falls at 1:30. A campsite could be made at the lip of the falls on the north shore with an ample flat rocky kitchen and tents in the shelter of tall spruce. We had lunch here.

Steve and I found a 1300 yard portage to the bend above the large island below. It was marked at the far end by a chain saw blaze, and sporadic saw cuts and blazes along the trail which was cut shallowly into the earth in places. The trail takes out up the steep gravel bank north of the lip of the falls. We followed a game trail along the lip of the bluff to the pond where we dipped into the woods to the left and followed the edge of the high bluff above the runoff below the falls. This stretch is memorable for its old jackpines, short, gnarled, and thick trunked. The trail shades to the right and crosses over the second hill before dropping back to the river just around the bend from the falls.

We ran the outside bank of the long bend around the island down to the next bit of heavy water. It is possible that we could have run out all the way to the end of the gorge, but the glare of the late afternoon sun was directly in our eyes and I could see a couple of canoe crunchers. The footing was not so good on the shore as the gravel of the steep bank was loose. We climbed the bank and portaged another 350 yards. Steve lined out the rapids to save his aching feet. Lyle and I hauled the canoe 40 feet up the loose gravel bank and had a walk with the boys. Again, one could camp here if necessary. We lined the rapids where the river bends back to the north to avoid some big waves (remember the limbo under the deadfall boys), and ran out the last broad, shallow CI past the return of the northern Indian portage route and out of the gorge. The last falls of the gorge and the rapids below are ore akin to the land above the gorge, although the angle of descent is accentuated.

The sun was low in the sky, but it was shining and the day had turned into a glorious summer day. Steve pulled out his blue blockers and I snapped a couple of photos. We reached Serge's "hydro camp" at 6:10 p.m.. There was no sign of habitation in the bay he indicated, but the terrain was ripe for camping. I put it to a vote (since the afternoon was gorgeous) should we stay or push on. The gang was undecided so we left it to the presence of a loon to our left to decide for us. We stayed. It seemed a good omen to be greeted below the gorge by a loon as they are not as prevalent here as they are further to the south. It had taken us three and a half days to descend through the gorge. It could have been done on the run in a and a half without difficulty I think, as long as the weather were on your side. I am not sure that you could do it in a day unless you ran some of the heavier rapids in the gorge. The landscape of the gorge is incredible, but the uncertainty of the trail had taken its toll on me. I was glad to be out of the fray for a couple of days. We camped on a Cree site in the eastern of two deep bays on the south shore just below the gorge. The site was marked by a teepee of tent poles stowed for the summer and a tent circle laid out in dried spruce twigs. It was a lush jackpine park. Just what the doctor ordered. And Pete made us a date cake.

The dusk sky was clear as a bell. The wind turned to the east. The temperature dropped to a good sleeping chill. The end of the first big obstacle has raised the boys spirits (and the guide's). Now 14 days down and we will reach Kuujjuarapik on the 4th of August. I cannot wait to talk to Christine.

JULY 22:

The night was cold. When we awoke a heavy mist lay on the river. The dew had frozen on the night's cobwebs in the spruce and jackpine and Rutsen, Lyle, and Bear had ice on the outside of their boots. A partial overcast was stretched above the mist. And there was not even a breath of wind.

We paddled all day under a weird and uncertain sky. The wind came up from the west and cleared the fog away. The river drops a meter every kilometer for 24 miles here. The first narrows featured some rambunctious boils spitting mild whirlpools. Steve got caught in one and spun a bit, but there was no gunnel dipping. They were pretty benign. But the current was strong. The early morning threatened rain. A dark, heavy overcast compressed to form nasty threatening clouds. The storm was slow moving though, and travelling at right angles to our path. So we managed to paddle past it. All day long there appeared to be rain to the east while thick and billowing fair weather clouds remained just out of reach to the west. Jon Berger's "dune lands" begin as low sand hills covered with nothing but caribou moss and jackpine. A half mile back from the river rise tall granite ridges. The river cuts through a wide, flat valley of sand flanked a mile to either side by the indigenous granite. The morning was grey, overcast, and uneventful. We easily made 30 km by lunch with the swift current.

We paddled the main channel through the braids which are extensive here due to the terrain which is primarily sand. There is an extensive burn on the first main island in the braids. This burn extends west and was present on the south bank of the lake sections we paddled after lunch (where the valley narrows and the rocks return to the river bank). We took breaks at the 10 km marks. The river opens up into the first of two lake sections just before lunch. There is a camp deep in the north bay on the west shore. We did not investigate but could discern a plywood cabin and several fuel tanks. Steve has a friend who comes south from Alaska to hunt caribou on the river. We surmised that this was

probably the camp given the long stretch of unimpeded river and the low banks offering easy access to the surrounding taiga. A large mountain rises to the NE with a sheared granite face on the lake side. This is the only part of the "dune lands" with actual dunes. The shores of the bay are high sand bluffs, and the SW point where the bay meets the river is comprised of several hundred square meters of actual dunes 20 to 30 feet high. It was 11:45 so we decided to stop for lunch. In later years we would try to reach this spot for our re-outfit, putting it closer to the mid-point of the trip.

Serge Theoret marks a campsite here. Truthfully any spot on the west shore of the bay would do. Phil built us a sturdy fireplace, in the shelter of the willows, just west of the sand, on the rock spit at the end of the point and set about lunch while the boys explored the dunes. The frozen boot crew huddled about the fire warming their toes. I have to confess that my legs were a little wobbly after a whole morning at sea. After three solid days of portaging it was odd to not have stepped ashore for four hours. Tom discovered several spruce racks for canoes, a 24 foot v-stem canoe, and two 12 foot motorboats at the west end of the dunes. We found an abandoned pot buried in the sand near our kitchen. The boys wanted to take it "just in case" and later, when one of our bails broke I wished that I had accommodated that desire. The sun crept closer during lunch, and the brisk, chilly breeze from the northwest seemed to indicate that it would win out before the afternoon was over.

We paddled the deep channel right down the middle of the next lake section avoiding the shallow sand bars marked on the maps. There were two Cree camps, on the north bank, at the foot of the knob hill midway across the broad stretch of river marked by the telltale teepee frames. We eased down the left shore into the next small gorge at 2 p.m.. The CIV was just a steep ledge followed by a heavy rapids that flowed around a steep hill. In another year we might have run the rapids below, but we had decided to steer clear of heavy whitewater with the mojos and all. Steve and I found a tree cut with a chain saw, and a three pole tripod, marking the start of the portage which by-passed the steep ledge. We were in an old burn here. The end of the portage looked as if it had been a fish camp at one time. We opted to continue the portage up over the open terrain of the hill to the gravel bank below the rapids. The total length of the portage was only 250 yards. The last 10 feet were a little difficult as we did not stop to cut a proper path through the willows. The boys are still a bit confused as to who is responsible for which load. We have moved to a half-load rotation. With the mojos the responsibilities do not divvy up into proper canoe pairs. Tomorrow morning I will have to rearrange the roster to make everything a little more clear.

Seven kilometers downstream we came to the 3m falls that Berger marks as the top of the second gorge. The current was stiff and so the days west wind proved insignificant again. The burn and the sand had given way to rolling hills and a thick spruce forest. Once again the river surprised us, changing its appearance. The late afternoon sun left everything deep green and deep blue: a classic northern afternoon. We had hoped for an easy liftover portage so we snuck down the left shore to the rocks at the lip of the falls. The river was shallow here and we were well out of the main current. I hopped ashore on the left bank, looking for a game trail or a bit of forest amenable to a new portage trail. No luck!! The forest was thick and the bank steep. I discovered a cause and effect relation between the depth of the springy muskeg moss and the lack of trees. This is the hard pitched battle of the boreal forest: the sphagnum moss vs. the black spruce. The spruce spread their roots shallowly as far as they can go, trying to gain purchase in the shallow sandy soil, but, as the forest matures the sphagnum moss encroaches on the soil, encompassing the roots, until there

is not enough stuff for the spruce to hold fast to. The winter winds then spin their magic. The moss was plush and about knee deep in the flat below the overflow channel. So we were damned if we did and damned if we didn't. And really there was no way around the thick shore spruce. Upstream an old blaze had marked a deep game trail. Although the trail climbed straight over the 100 foot hill, it seemed our best option.

We paddled back upstream, past a 60 feet of granite cliff that was peeling off the side of the hill (it is featured prominently in Jon Berger's drawings), to the mucky bay just around the bend at the trailhead. Steve and I took off up the hill with axes and double-packs so that we could blaze and portage at the same time. The afternoon was getting on into evening and the prospect of a double load after cutting trail was not high on my wish list. We followed what appeared to be the most heavily used game trail to the top of the hill and then across a short (20 yard) muskeg field. The swamp was dry so there were no soggy feet. We found a cairn on the far side of the muskeg! A good sign. But our luck ran out here. The trail was faint beyond the cairn, and within 50 yards we could no longer determine where it went. And, to compound our difficulties, the far side of the hill fell back to the river in a series of sheer, ten-foot ledges. It was no easy task finding a sensible route down. I imagine that the path of the Indian continues in a west-southwesterly direction and takes out in the backwater bay below the falls. We opted to cut a switchback trail down the steep hill to the bottom of the falls. We found a bobber hanging in a tangle of line in the shore willows so at least we knew that we weren't the first to come this way. The boys leap-frogged the loads along while Steve and I cut the portage.

The trail starts at the east end of the last bay on the south shore before the river turns abruptly to the falls. The bay is shallow and grassy. The trail itself marches straight up over the rise to the cairn/iniukchuk. Twenty yards past the cairn it fades left a bit until the grade of the hill softens. We switched back several times and then crossed three sandy clearings to the flat rocks below the falls. There are several large jackpines in among the sandy clearings. Jon Berger portaged on the far side, but, short of avoiding our put-in in the heavy wash of the falls, I don't see any advantage to this route.

We camped in a jackpine park in the swiftwater just below the portage put-in. There was wolf scat in the kitchen. We were not the first to camp here. There was a fire ring on the sloping shore rocks and a buried firepit on the beach. The charred logs in the fire pit appeared to be the refuse of a recent cooking fire. The fire ring on the rocks was more the mark of a snack (trout?) than a meal. The sky was dark to the northwest, so, although only a few drops had come of it, we pitched a fly against the always-impending rain. Phil and Russell went fishing. Lyle set up the ingredients for corned-beef and cabbage soup. Jon made molasses bread because we had no ginger left for its cousin, the latter's namesake. Jon also made the traveler. I went out for photos of the falls and to see the fish. They got three in the eddy below the overflow channel.

Russell got the fish that almost got away here. The story is worth recounting because its getaway route was overland. Russell caught a 12 inch speckled trout and tossed it into an enclosed shore pool to keep while he continued to fish. The trout, ever the frisky one like its brothers, jumped and squirmed and jumped and squirmed until it was free of the pool. But this left it on shore. So it jumped and squirmed some more, finally landing in a crevice between a small boulder and the shore granite. Now there was a little water seeping into the crevice with the rise and fall of the eddy, but nothing to write home about. Russell, having glimpsed the trout's dash for freedom, arrived at the scene fast in pursuit of his trophy. The trout's demise as part of dinner seemed all but set in stone. But, its slippery skin proved difficult to grab. Each

time Russell thought he had him, the trout would slip away again. This went on for quite some time. Russell alternated between zeal for a well earned snack and fear for the demise of the fish given the dry-ness of the crevice. Eventually his hunger overcame his concern and he victoriously extracted the spelunking fish.

The falls itself is a sharp ten foot drop. It falls like a glass veil over a smooth shelf fifty yards across on the river right. The river left is a set of cascades that tumble past a small island. There is a cave behind the veil visible through the clear water of the falls. A steep one hundred foot hill flanks the falls on both sides. We finished dinner with a half-fillet apiece at 9 p.m.. Russell sat outside of our bugscreen in the waning light of dusk for a chat. The temperature is mild and the sound of the falls is easing me into sleep as I write.

July 23:

It was crystal clear at 4 am, but overcast and threatening rain at 5. We had no time to wait it out. Rain or shine we have to move for the moment. Our campsite was in another set of esker-lands. This one was set deep in the headwaters of the second gorge. The river winds through small, steep hills here. But, the current is not stiff and the banks are thickly wooded. This gorge had the appearance of a gentler river. There were several campsite possibilities in the vicinity.

Jon Berger mentions a portage route around the top half of the gorge that leaves the river from the deep northern bay below the falls. I would guess that it actually takes out from the northern end of the long narrow bay above the falls. We did not look for it as his notes said that the upper gorge was not difficult and that a second route by-passed the bigger water in the lower portion of the gorge. I would guess that the route by-passes 12 kilometers of river, returning to the river just above the next major falls.

The route, as mentioned, was manageable all the way down to the 5 meter falls. We took a long day down and camped at the first lake of the lower portage route. Our day could have been significantly shorter had we abided by what would become our favorite maxim, "*we can always walk.*" There is good evidence of travel through here, and not of the fly in sort. We found blazed trails, a cabin foundation above the third rapids, and fire rings. There was even a recently abandoned camp above the second rapids. This was heartening as, in our new travelling configuration, blazing fresh trail was taking up a worrisome amount of time. The fewer further hitches the better. Our days would go much more efficiently if there was a sprinkling of old trail to follow.

The first portage of the day takes out in a deep bay at the lip of a very steep rapids. This is the start of the gorge proper. There is an unmarked rapids that precedes the CIV. We lined its right shore. The river is not itself through here. It looks like a much smaller river. You enter the first canyon of the gorge just above the rapids. The water turns swift and deep. Phil and I saw 5 loons and watched an osprey stalk some baby mergansers where the narrows of the northern bay meet the canyon. The osprey circled and shrieked at us at the north bend of the river to let us know that our unwelcome interruption of his feast had not gone unheeded. The five little ducks quietly scurried away.

The first narrows of the gorge flows through boils and strong shore eddies that gave me a touch of the willies. We hugged the right shore, within reach of the steep bank. The first line was an easy affair in our water. And we were upon the first portage in no time. It should be walked among the birch and tamarac below the sand bluffs. There is a game trail 10 yards in from the willows at the crook of the bay that would take you across the overgrown boulder field. Look

for the break in the willows. We followed a game trail up onto the bluff. This added 200 yards to the portage and forced a treacherous descent down the steep sand and gravel bank on the far end. But the view is magnificent. I would imagine that in higher water this route would be preferable as it would be easier to get below the wash of the rapids on the bluff than along the shore. Our trail climbed the bluff at a shallow angle and traversed the top of it for only a hundred yards. There is a sink hole 20 yards in diameter just back from the lip of the bluff. A curious geological feature. The whole run is no more than 300 yards,

We added ash to the list of flora spotted on our trip. Their drooping limbs were a welcome sight at the top of the portage, like an old friend after all of the spruce and tamarac above. The river remains a dove below the first rapids. We easily ran the island rapids. I think that the way to approach the next set is from the left shore. Jon Berger lined and portaged the right side but we were able to line most of the left with only a short liftover. A trail could be more easily cut on the left as well. Above the rapids we found a hastily abandoned Cree camp. A Coleman stove was still in place on its four spruce posts and the tent had simply fallen to tatters around it. Bits of it hung off of the dilapidated teepee. The Cree seem to prefer teepee style canvas tents to the wall tents of the west side and James Bay. Perhaps we are simply still far enough inland that these are travelling camps, not family hunting grounds.

The runoff at the bend below the third marked rapids was easily run close to shore. We paused in the next deep bay to survey the river. There is an old log foundation on the point on the river right here, and there was a swift to run below. We stuck to the left shore and were able to line and run our way down to the lip of the deep left bay in the long fourth set of rapids. There is a trail here. It is a half mile portage that follows the lip of the bluff on the left shore to a creek bed that leads back to the river. It begins just above the bay and follows the shore to an open spruce park on the far side, where it cuts up onto the bluff. The boys swam and made lunch as Steve and I scouted the old trail and re-cut it. We climbed the bluff about 30 yards further east than the old trail does to avoid some overgrown patches of trail.

When I returned to the lunch kitchen the boys, dish crew excepted, were sacked out on the shore rocks!!!. It has been a long couple of days since the start of the first gorge. The sun was out and the river not as threatening as above. I guess they had finally reached adrenaline overload and crashed. I was glad to see them that relaxed.

A search and rescue squad flew over us on the 900 yard portage. It was comprised of a Caravan on floats followed by a Buffalo. We had seen the Buffalo recently. It is a big belly lander with an orange tail stripe. They were flying low. It was a sobering sight. Maybe they were evacuating a mine survey from a fire. You always hope that there isn't a plane down. The thought crossed my mind that someone had reported our crunched canoe, but they would not have sent the Buffalo out on such a trip. We were in plain view as they flew over and we never heard another word about it. Perhaps it was simply a fire detail.

At the bottom of the trail Steve and I became perturbed. The next portage, past a "steep and turbulent rapids," takes out on the right. A steep granite hill rises 200 feet off the left bank, eliminating the possibility of a second trail. We would have to cross what looked like some good current to get to the portage below. I would suggest a long portage on the right shore past both obstacles in future years. The top of the bluff is flat. It is a spruce grove like all of the river bank through here. It is open yet sheltered from the wind. Furthermore, in high water another half-mile portage would by-pass the sixth rapids as well. There is no need to be shy here. The trip is a walker from here on down. Even though the crossing turned out to be perfectly safe there is no need to do it.

The crossing came off without a hitch (except for some white knuckles). The portage on the other hand was a rugged rock-hopper. There was an afternoon wind and the boulders are tall and poorly spaced. The trail simply bumps over a willow choked point on the right shore. The wash in the eddy below rose and fell five feet making loading treacherous for both the canoes and their occupants (sorry Phil!). The run below is picturesque. The far shore is steep and barren, culminating in a 100 foot sheer cliff. And the water is threatening. A massive boil 50 yards across blocks the left third of the river as the current bends around the barren granite mountain. We snuck down the right shore in the narrow band of current slipping by. I got out on several occasions to scout the water below. Once the seemingly solid shore tumbled into the water as I stepped across it, a small boulder narrowly missing the stern of stalwart old 60. Luckily the canoe was pushed away instead of under. Phil informed me that he had it under control anyway. We stuck to the right shore all the way down to the CIII below, sneaking in and out of the eddies and shallow shore bays between short steep chutes along the way. This was a fun run once the granite gorge had been left behind. Unfortunately we could not squeak by the CIII below. There was no shore route. The shore rocks were too sharp. So we each bushed our own portage 150 yards through the willows. This was not the ideal plan. The bluff would have served us better but were too tired to handle the formality of a proper portage. Russell found a deep hole to step into and twisted his knee a bit but the injury seemed more an expression of frustration than anything else. He had taken off with my canoe and stumbled on a Samaritan task.

The river below the sixth rapids was deep blue in the late afternoon sun. We ran the wash to the flatwater current below. The left bank rises 350 feet over the river a kilometer below the sixth rapids where the river narrows to a slender bottleneck no more than a hundred yards across. The river cuts through granite domed mountains. The black spruce were lush green against the deep blue river. Below the deep western bay at the pinch there was a clearing with a teepee frame. There were stakes driven deep into the sand bar to hold gill nets in the swift-water narrows. Whitefish I suppose. Across the way a grave site faces the setting sun to the west from low on the bank. I looked up to the rise above the campsite and caught a glimpse of a wolf. He was no more than 50 yards away, 20 feet up on a rock ledge. He stood a yard at the shoulder. He scurried up the rise and loped along beside us for a while with a smooth easy gait. Steve and Jimmy had had their eyes on him for quite a while when I noticed him. Apparently he was eyeing some ducks across the river (I guess that that is the special tonight). Kirk saw him return for a last look from way up the hill before disappearing. Later, while writing this, we heard pups yelping no more than a couple hundred yards from our tents and the call of others from the pack in the distance. It is somehow comforting to be under the watchful gaze of a wolf pack. All morning there had been fresh tracks on the beaches. We have been privileged to quite a few wolf sightings this summer.

The trail to the overland route takes out straight up the steep mountainside on the west bank just past the first of the two creeks marked on the 1:50,000 maps. It is marked by blazes on two small tamaracks that flank the trail. Phil and I had scouted ahead to find the trail. We were looking for blazed in the tamaracks and a small rock point. Phil pointed to what he thought were the blazes just past the right creek. But I wanted something more substantial. In the dim evening light in the shade of the mountain the marks looked like ice scars. We eased down to the falls but found no blazes. Meanwhile Steve found the trail marked by the blazes that Phil had correctly spotted back upstream. We did get a nice glimpse of the shear 5 meter falls though.

The trail follows the north side of the creek to the top of the first rise. The

creek itself is dug deep into the rock of the granite face that marks the first rise. It spills out over the exposed rock below this to the river. In a low water year look for the trail 150-200 yards above the falls. The trail is steep. Jon Berger camped at the cut in the rock, taking his water from a pot sized cistern just before the creek cascades to the river. There was not enough room for six tents so we just kept walking. The trail fades towards the north from the open rock face and then fades slightly back to the west as it ascends to the top of the peak. I stopped here for a picture back upriver in the waning light. Unfortunately the falls below were obscured by the spruce. We called the peak halfway. Here the trail fades back to the right, crossing two muskeg patches before descending back to the first lake. The trail was well worn but needed a little refreshing so I dropped my loads at halfway and blazed the second half. I was, as a result last over the portage just as the dusk settled into twilight. Phil had preceded me and had, along with Kirk, scouted the lake for a campsite. Although they had found garbage on a rise on the far shore they had opted for something closer to the portage (a couple hundred yards along the south shore from the portage). Phil returned to the portage with 60 to await the sore feet of the guide. Steve and the boys were well along the road to making a home when we finally arrived. Jimmy made us a speedy spaghetti while Phil and Pete whipped up our two bannocks. Twilight faded to dark just as the dishes were closing up the wannigan line. The staff site was a little lumpy but the boys fared well. I drifted off to sleep to the sound of wolves in the distance.

July 24:

The boys found a recently killed caribou that had not been quite picked clean this morning as they ran through their morning chores. I guess that would explain the proximity of our canine escorts during the night. I hope we did not interrupt a trip for leftovers. It was all I could do to drag myself out of bed at 5:32 am. My feet were raw from yesterday's walks (they had spent the day soggy in swamped boots George). And they needed a bath. I could barely walk. One more day of portaging and I can keep them out of my boots to heal for a while.

The sky was especially uncertain this morning, and the wind was from the west. The last couple of days had begun overcast, but the sun had won out each time. Today it did not look like we would escape a soaking. We let the boys sleep in 15 minutes and I awoke them at 6 am. Rutsen and Jimmy had slept through the morning role call yesterday so we played a game of math trivia to ensure that they were awake. We were hoping to reach the river again by lunch so we could paddle all afternoon and make up some time. It would be nice to have some leeway with the weather. That meant six portages before noon.

The first portage leaves the lake at its westernmost tip and bumps 400 yards to the next one. The trail is well blazed and obvious most of the way. Look a bit to your left when you reach the boulder field. The trail crosses a survey line which led us to believe that there were plans to dam the second gorge as well.

The second portage takes out 100 yards east of the west end of the lake on the north shore. It is a 150 yard straight shot into the next lake. You are still climbing here. The third portage, directly across the pond, is blazed 20 yards due north to the crest of the ridge. The forest is open spruce and caribou moss and once the next lake is in sight, 200 yards away and 90 feet below, the blazes disappear. Take your canoe partner with you so you aren't too spread out at the far end. The next trail drops 120 feet from the northwestern bay of the lake to the last lake en route back to the river. There are two steep trails that flank cascading creek. Either trail will do. We found the one on the east side of the creek better worn, but the one on the west side seemed to have a gentler grade.

The long southern arm of Last Lake is flanked on either side by high sandy banks, scrub spruce and northern ewe. This gentle landscape gives way to 200 foot granite peaks when the arm opens up to the main body of the lake. These are the backs of the Falaise Kakchaw which rises 500 feet above the Great Whale River. The wind came up strong from the southwest. The day turned from mild and heavy overcast to stormy in a heartbeat. The unloading at the northeast corner of the lake took place in heavy seas. There was no choice but to wade in in order to hold the canoes off of the shore rocks. The trail is well marked. It is a ½ mile walk around the east end of the Falaise and back down to the river. The trail crosses a creek, cuts directly across a wide clear cut swath of forest, and then sticks to the south edge of the forest on the sandy rise before descending to the river through two large Cree camps. The hydro company has clear-cut the ravine that separates the Falaise from the campsite bluff, perhaps the hoped precursor to a large dam. The trail is well blazed though. Just be careful not to lose it crossing the clear-cut.

The Cree camp at the top of the first bluff is comprised of a tent ring, a wall tent frame, a spruce teepee (maybe a winter shelter), and a large stash of tentpoles leaned against one another in a teepee. Lyle and I were trying to stay ahead of the boys. We were carrying the lunch wannigan and the jewelry respectively. We settled on the lower bluff for lunch. There were three large tent rings at this site, the largest 20 yards in diameter. Some of the exterior circus stakes were still in the ground. The day had turned windy and there were visible whitecaps out on the river which is 700 yards wide at the gorge mouth. We kept the gear here, 10 meters above the river. The first camp is 20 meters further up the bluff. All told the trail drops about 60 meters to the river. There were wolf tracks on the beach.

The going had been a little rough since the first gorge. The trail is not particularly dangerous or difficult (although the lack of trail had slowed us up at times). It was simply that, short a canoe, four wannigans of food, and our weather days, Steve and I were getting a bit washed out. The discrepancy between the difficulty of terrain above and below the first gorge had drastically altered our interpretation of our time table (although, to be honest, we were keeping almost exactly to Jon Berger's itinerary). Our trepidation was beginning to wear on the boys, as was the constant push. Jimmy Carr had already pulled me into private consultation about a break. Our last real rest had been re-outfit day. Our last ½ day had been the rain-out at the head of the first gorge and that hadn't really been a restful afternoon. I pulled out the maps to assess Jon Berger's Indian Portage Route and compare it with the downstream pull. It appeared that there would be two nearly impassable points if we stuck to the river. Trails could be cut if one had the time to climb the 300-500 foot banks. If these banks resembled our current terrain that would entail portaging over and around small mountains. Furthermore, if the path of the Cree went overland we could count on few or no trails to start with. The going would be slow at best for the home team.

The overland route, on the other hand, would eliminate the threat of unknown current and treacherous shear-cliffed gorges promised in the Berger notes. Furthermore there would be no waterfalls (which, no matter how well laid out on the map always wear a bit on the guide's nerves). But the one mentioned by Jon Berger seemed bizarre given our knowledge of the James Bay Cree. They hated to walk. This route featured a six-mile portage, followed by several other "long ones", marking a roughly northwestern path from a point six mile downstream from Falaise Yakachaw. I think we were swayed by our tender feet to examine the possibilities for an alternative way overland across the Big Bend. We studied the maps carefully. There were four possibilities as Steve

and I saw it. The trail obviously traversed the six mile height of land between Lac Kawaukuwiw and Lac Fagnant. A northern run followed a series of smaller lakes across some mile-plus portages to a creek that meandered down to the river two kilometers downstream of the last rapids in the big bend. This looked to be roughly the Berger route. A second route that ran south, and then generally due west, from Lac Fagnant traversing a series of small lakes that turned into a creek which could be followed down to the last falls on the Denys River. The third route followed a south-southwest path to the Denys 16 kilometers or so further upstream. The last left the river from the long bay Southwest of Falaise Yakachaw and met the Denys River at Lac Denys. The latter seemed the most obvious since it followed a good sized smaller river. But we were missing a map and had no information on the Denys river. Although I had read A. P. Low's accounts of his trips from Fort George to Great Whale in 1893, 1898, and 1903, I had not put them to memory. If the trade route had not been kept up through the forties and fifties, like many of those around James Bay, the going could be rough once we reached the Denys. The going so far led me to believe this was the case. This eliminated the third route as well because there were six rapids and a falls between our route and the Great Whale River. Too many unbound variables.

Steve and I had already settled on the overland route so we decided to leave the last decision to the shores of Lac Fagnant. We would simply scout for the trail. If neither option panned out we were certain we could bush our way down to the Denys from there. It looked as if it would take 9 to 10 days and we had 11-12. So it was settled. There was only one clue that we missed. On the 1:250,000 maps there were lake names between Lac Fagnant and the river. The lakes of the southern route were named in french. The lakes of the northern route were named in Cree.

We decided to stay put for the afternoon so the boys and the old men could have a break. Phil, Tom, and Russell went fishing and brought back three trout from the last rapids of the gorge. There was a pretty cascade a kilometer upstream on the far side of the river. I strolled the sand bluff back upstream, a hundred feet above the river, to have a peak at the gorge. The gorge cuts through steep mountains here, but it is neither as steep, nor as alpine as the first. The bottom of the last gorge would be runnable if one chose that route. There is a jackpine park just back from the lip of the bluff that would make excellent camping if it were not so far from the river. As it is it just looks like a baseball field with a couple of fat jackpine playing the infield.

It rained all afternoon. It was as if it had been waiting for us to decide to re-route to rain. All told there has really been only one tough spot to date and that was the crossing above the second-gorges 'steep violent rapids" at the granite mountain. But even that had more bark than bite. But this aside, it still feels good to have committed to the Indian Portage Route, and canoe camping, instead of technical river running. Our trip is designed to emulate the voyageurs, not a cable thrill show. The third gorge can wait for another year. The chance to see the Denys river and an old trade route is enticing as well. It is the history that makes the bush so enticing. That is what made the Rupert so mystical. Steve and I made lentil-chicken stew and I fried up the fillets for the boys. Jimmy made chicken gravy. Pete made a biscuit bannoc by leaving out brown sugar and substituting baking soda for baking powder. Jon made the traveler as per usual. It was an excellent repast.

July 25:

I awoke well past midnight to thunder rolling down the canyon. The booming voice of the storm echoed off the rivers 500 foot banks. I rolled over and listened to the evenings symphony from the warmth of my bag. The canyon amplified the wanderings of these heavy set storm clouds which were racing inland off the Bay, and confronting the ridge of mountains which form the gorges of the river. We were camped in the clouds, at the top of a low, but rebounding ridge that forms the western edge of the Laurentian Plateau. The shores of Hudson Bay are rising, bouncing back from the years of compression under the oppressive weight of the Laurentian Ice Sheet that once covered all of the Labrador Peninsula. I cannot remember exactly but I think they are rising at an inch a century, threatening to some day leave our ultimate destination high and dry.

It sounded like the Boston Pops doing Tchaicovsky's "1812 Orchestra" on the Charles on the 4th of July. It is 11 a.m. We are temporarily windbound on the far bank, a mile catercorner across the river from last night's campsite. The sun has come out. We received next to no rain from the storm, but the wind pushed hard against the current this morning, forming huge rolling waves. We could make no headway. And the deep water channel containing the heavy current which might have helped push us along, runs along the base of the sheer Falaise Kakachaw. There is no shelter there, no place to pull out in the event of inclement weather or crossing winds. An orange and black butterfly, 4½ inches at the wings, with a brown and white underside has settled on my left hand to watch me write. From my perch, sixty feet above the beach below, I can see Steve wandering out to the point to check on the wind. The view back upstream towards the campsite a mile away accentuates the awesome scale of this stretch of river. The last rapids of the gorge is dwarfed against the tall banks, but the very fact that it is still visible from a mile away speaks to its size.

We were off at 8 a.m. this morning to a low ceiling. The sky was uncertain but the scotch mist had more of the character of a rising river fog than rain. The wind was still from the west. We ran out of the eddy bay (the eddy is nearly a kilometer across) on the south shore and along the base of the 450 foot Falaise, still in the lee of a tall outcropping a kilometer past the campsite. The Indian portage route was shrouded in the clouds to our right. There is a "flow rate chronometer" [Research and Explain] 10 feet off the river, on the right bank, just as you round the bend into the main current. In the wind the current was kicking up big rolling waves. We slugged along, our progress sandwiched between the wind and the waves, until the first Falaise fell 450 feet sheer to the river with a slight overhang. With no shoreline to retreat to we decided the weather was too inclement for us. We turned back upstream, crossing the river to the shelter of the cascade bay, formed by a high crooked sand spit. The wind was not so bad on the north shore of the river, so we eased downstream another kilometer until the wind again turned us back. We were just 2 kilometers from the campsite.

The shore is sandy on the north side of the river. We settled in on the beach, just east of the wind-swept narrows, and waited on the weather. Birches and ash are common on the gentler slopes of the north bank. We stopped just beyond a birch grove that would make a good port in even the lightest storm. There were soil samples cut out of the bank, further evidence of a dam site. There were fresh wolf tracks all over the beach. Steve found a set that wandered to the end of a point just to our west, stopped just out of sight, then turned and hurried away at a run.

Peter and Phil made a huge, fish-shaped fireplace comprised of maybe 1,000 fist-sized rocks. And, form followed function as it kept our cooking fire out of the gale. They had a productive windbound morning. After lunch the wind

settled right down. We launched again at 1p.m. The current gave us the boost we needed. We made 35 kilometers after lunch. The river runs almost due west here through a steep, wide canyon. There were shallow shoals on the north side of the river, at about kilometer 8 and 10 (above the islands above the portage), where several cascades tumbled out of mountain lakes down to the river. The banks consistently hold to just shy of 500, rising occasionally to 600, feet over the river. They are forested in black spruce and intermittently sprinkled with stands of birch and ash in wetter soil where creeks have formed ravines. The scale of the landscape is indescribable. The river narrows at times to 200 yards. It is spooky to paddle along the sheer side of the canyon. The height of the banks is just too ominous.

There are two camps in among the islands 4 kilometers above the "mid-cliff falls". These appear to be quite active. The first is on the east end of the first island. It housed a good cache of v-stem canoes, canoe de nords, and small outboards. The camp below, on the downstream side of the following point, had a cache of new lumber for a permanent cabin. This sort of camp on the Rupert or in Ontario would not have surprised us. But here, after so many weeks alone in the bush, with only the faintest hint of human activity marked by crude and traditional camps made from just the resources of the local flora, we initially guessed that this must have been a fly-in operation. It turned out to be the eastern end of the influence of Wapmagoostui. Apparently there is an east/west divide separating the bush here into Cree and Outfitter territory respectively (by recent treaty I might add). I suppose we had crossed that divide. The north shore is littered with large clear jackpine parks above the islands. There is no camping below the falls. This is an ideal spot to stop if the afternoon has gotten long.

Russell needed a break to "stretch his weary mojo legs" and we drifted a bit while he wandered ashore at the first camp. While he was "exploring" we spooked a bear on the south bank and watched in amazement as it sprinted 510 feet up the 60° grade of the south wall of the canyon. Russell was sorry to have missed the show.

We stayed far left at the approach to the portage. The rapids was marked as an SV+ by Serge Theoret. The current is swift and the rapids steep, but the approach is easy. The portage leaves from the low spot in the long peninsula 50 yards south of the falls. It walks straight up the hill 50 feet, fades left 30 yards, and then plummets straight down the back side of the peninsula 70 feet. It is hazardous George. The sandy soil of the descent does not lend itself to sure footing. There are several graves on top of the rise overlooking the falls. This would make a nice lunch stop if your itinerary could accommodate it.

A burn begins on the rise and continues 40 kilometers downstream to the Falaise Yakachaw and the mouth of the Big Bend. We had hoped to camp on the rise over the falls but any possibility of this was destroyed by the fire. It was very recent, maybe even the past spring. The sun was getting low. The bank on the north side of the falls was too craggy for a camp. We pushed on. Phil and I scouted a couple of clear open spruce parks, but they proved either too steep or too high up the bank to be practical. We were on the verge of despair when Steve spotted a clearing out of the corner of his eye. We had just passed up a narrow sand spit on the south shore. It would have been immediately swamped by even the lightest rain. We beached our canoes in the mucky shallows on the north shore and scampered into the swampy bush for a look. Twenty yards back from the river, between two deep swampy bays, three kilometers from a sharp bend to the northwest, there is a long narrow rise marked by a contour on the 1:50,000 maps. It is an open caribou moss park. The deep greenish-yellow color of the ground cover is what caught Steve's eye. The burn encroaches on the northwest end of the rise but the swampy environs must have kept it from

spreading. It was perfect. It could hold a group ten times our size. The only downside was that it was far from the shore and that there was no easy spot to dip a pot to collect water. A canoe had to be dispatched for this purpose whenever the need arose. We had a fine dinner of spaghetti (I believe) and the usual ginger bannoc a la Connors. It was a long day all in an afternoon and we were tuckered out. We left the pots and dishes till morning (after an anti-bear rinsing). We saw another grave site on the north shore three kilometers below the falls. This is a good sign that we have reached a well used part of the river. We had reached the hunting grounds of the Wapmagoostuui Cree. Hopefully this means that the overland route will be blazed. On my last trip from the tent I looked up to see 180° of monochrome northern lights. A good omen if ever there was one.

July 26:

Steve's Birthday!!!! We awoke at 4:30 a.m. to heavy thunder. It was a boon. We got to sleep for another hour. The powerful thunder echoed down the canyon again last night. Maybe the phenomena is caused by our elevation. We are still 600 feet above sea level on the river. Maybe the thunder is actually occurring on the river, within the walls of the canyon, as the storm clouds traverse our position. In any event, we needed the sleep.

We got up at 6 and woke the boys just before 7 a.m. The rain had once again blown through quickly in the early hours of the morning, but it had left low clouds on the river. The canyon walls themselves rise to 1200 feet above sea level and they were currently in the clouds. The burn is extensive and complete along the canyon walls and the soil is quickly eroding off of the river face of both banks. It is recent by the looks of it because the charred trees are still standing. When we finally shoved off at 8:15 a.m. the clouds were sweeping south along the river, cutting across the ridge where the river turned sharply to the northwest. The four kilometers of shallow swampy narrows in which we had camped quickly gave way to steep canyon walls again. The burn had cleared the river of vegetation. The canyon walls rose sheer off the river, bare and craggy. They had an odd orange-brown tint that was surreal after weeks and weeks of lush boreal, and thin alpine, green. The height and steep grade of the canyon walls was accentuated by their barren-ness. This was again the land that God gave Cain. There was no disputing it.

Steve and I began to worry that the burn might encompass the Cree portage route. At this point, although a bit alarming, that twist seemed just another wiggle in our adventure. Quebec is a beautiful place, but she makes you work hard for the privilege of experiencing that beauty. The grave sites of yesterday had, ironically I suppose, turned our mood to optimistic. We might well find a blazed path forty miles across the base of the Big Bend after all. A mile downstream from the campsite we found further cause to raise our spirits. There was a sizable Cree camp, untouched by the fire on the east shore, on a long sand spit just past the northwest bend. We went ashore for a look. This one had none of the trappings of a fly in camp. We found three tent circles, a bear skull, a wooden duck decoy, and a sturdy, free-standing cache platform made of "local timber". The platform stood a good ten feet off the ground. Downstream a couple of kilometers was another camp. Then another. This stretch is littered with camps. Some of them had been burned, so it appeared that our theory about the age of the burn was correct, it must have come this spring, after last winter's bush camps had been abandoned for break-up (incidentally, we were unable to gather any information in Kuujuuarapik regarding this blaze, further

confirming our suspicion that these were Cree and not Inuit camps). If there is a portage route around the upper portion of the second gorge one could easily travel from this point all the way to the first gorge and beyond without seeing any of the river's more treacherous water. The old 1:250,000 maps of Lac Bienville mark a village on a lake just to its southwest called Uchikwachikanan. We met a carver in Wapmagoostuui who claimed to have been born there around the time of the First World War. There is another marked 24 miles downstream from Lac Paimpont called Chinusaw Pachistiwakan. Next time through I will have to do a little research on these sites.

We paddled along all morning without obstruction, past prominent cliffs, and steep domed mountains that were perched right on the river. The cliffs give the canyon scale but it was the barren granite domes that stole the show. We had lunch on a sandy beach in the shadow of Mont Kapitiscimusciwasi. We had already made 25 kilometers. A strong northwest wind had blown upriver at us until it cleared the clouds away (at about 9:30). Since then we had had only the company of a light breeze, an occasional fair weather cloud, and the blistering heat of the sun. After lunch even the guide stripped off his shirt.

The current is not as strong below Mid-Cliff Rapids. But it still pushes at a good clip. After lunch it picked up as the river narrowed for a couple of miles. At the head of the Big Bend, where the narrow channel empties into a broad section of river, we encountered the oddest phenomena to date. The current flows back to the north in a kilometer wide eddy which is formed by a small island and a set of shallow shoals. The river opens up, stretching nearly straight as an arrow for seven and a half miles to the end of the long blind west-southwest bay beyond Falaise Yachisakw. It is often less than a yard deep. There are eight Cree camps between lunch and the Falaise, three above the narrows and five at the northern bend at Falaise Yachisakw. It was somehow comforting to know that we had re-entered a world sometimes populated by fellow travellers who followed much the same (if not at times, though modernized, more arduous) routine as ourselves.

The biggest treat of the day came late in the afternoon, when we followed the river north into the Big Bend. I should preface this part of the story by saying that Steve and I were hoping to find an occupied camp. The river, as I mentioned, gets shallower towards the end of the canyon, and the sand spits seemed ideal for sturgeon fishing (which is done by stretching nets across the current in sandy shallows where sturgeon feed on vegetation stirred up from the river bottom). The old village of Nemescaw on the Rupert was placed for its proximity to a stretch of the river whose depth and bottom resembled our current locale. Steve and I had come across Cree families in the past at this time of year. They had usually been out in the bush stocking up on smoked sturgeon. The number of camps in the vicinity pointed to this as the primary hunting and fishing grounds for the Cree of Wapmagoostuui. Furthermore we had *good* reason to believe our experience would be repeated. You see, we had only vague information about the 40-mile overland portage route that cut across the Big Bend. We knew where it started, and that there was a six mile portage in the middle, but the rest we had inferred from the lay of the land. Now, granted, that narrowed the field of possibilities to two branchings of the same general route, but it still would have been nice to come across someone in the bush who could tell us about the condition of the trail and point out the exact locations of the portages. Therefore we were certain to run into someone.

Well, stranger things have happened. So, when we rounded the corner, and I saw canoes cached on high racks (to keep them out of the snow drifts) ahead on the east shore, I started scanning the bank for the smoke or heat haze of a curing fire. The camp was set low, on a floodplain, so we could see only the

tops of the canoes on the racks from the vantage of our approach. Nonetheless my gaze fixed on what appeared to be the head and shoulders of a person, standing just beyond the lip of the bank, in an orange hooded sweatshirt with her (the chores in a Cree camp follow a strong division of labor) back to us. My heart skipped a beat. The wind was in our face. No one at the camp would ever hear our approach. We would just have to wait until we landed, and hail them from the beach.

It wasn't until we rounded the point, and could see the whole camp, that I conceded that it was not a person. It was in fact a scarecrow of sorts, an orange garbage bag full of twigs strung on a tall post that Steve thought served some sort of function during goose season. The camp was impressive. It probably covered 5 acres of open taiga. The ground was as flat as a putting green, and, with the exception of an occasional clump of scrub willow, was carpeted in lush caribou moss. There were three canoes, one 24 foot canoe de nord, three sleds, and two snowmobiles, along with an uncountable number of goose decoys made of various materials, most notably chain-saw carved spruce stumps, store-bought plastic, and most ingeniously, stuffed panty hose. There were five frame structures, several spruce pole caches, and an uncountable number of tent rings. And there were caribou trails everywhere. During the fall, when the caribou return from the tundra, this spot must turn into a city. We found caribou hide-stretchers. Each of the canoes was a small cache of non-perishable supplies unto itself. The boys marveled at the short shafts and long blades of the Cree paddles. There was some fairly freshly split wood, indicating that someone had been here since the spring. Unfortunately, no one was there for a late summer holiday.

The current picks up again, and the river deepens. The last 10 kilometers of the day passed much more quickly than the previous 35. The geography flattens out almost immediately. The last mountain north of the camp is a barren granite rise of 150 feet. Beyond that the rises shrink to 50 foot granite knobs. The river takes on more of the character it had above the first gorge. We camped on the right bank, on the second sloping rock upstream from the island rapids. There was a caribou moss park just waiting for us. It was a little lumpy, but not a bad last stop before the start of the big walk. The kitchen was ideal, and in keeping with George Heberton Evans III's famous maxim, the campsite sported the number one criteria, "a good swimming rock, deep enough for at least shallow diving." The most notable feature was the way the granite had been pushed right to the surface. There is very little top soil. The landscape is almost alpine.

Lyle and Peter made corned beef and cabbage soup. We had cheese rice. And the boys fried up some bacos à la Lyle from one of the bacon ends we had been saving (for just such an emergency I might add). Jon lent a helping hand. Phil made the most delicious date cake of the decade (because it is Steve-the-birthday-boy's favorite apres dinner delight in the bush). Kirk whipped up the traveler. Pete capped the evening off with a fine cocoa mix.

We did a little food inventory while dinner was simmering. Jon and Lyle discovered that we had 10 more days of lunch and dinner. One of our meals will have to be a big soup with a mish mash of luncheon meats (Klik, Spam, and Royal Canadian). Steve and I scouted the far shore with his spyglass, using the topographical maps to identify the likely start of the portage. Last night I dreamt that we had come across a Grange Hall at the next rapids. Luckily the maps of the crossover route to the Denys River were available there in a trade route file. Unfortunately for my dream there was a gas leak in the Grange Hall and the building exploded. I guess that we embark with a little trepidation on the guide's part. One blaze will set my mind at ease.

July 27:

It rained through the night, and we had an intermittent drizzle and low clouds to help us through breakfast. There was no need for the fly though. The trouble was that the wind had changed to the south. It did not feel like the usual: morning rain off the bay that would dampen us with a mist and blow over by noon. I figured that we were in for a day of it.

I have to confess that at this latitude I find the rain psychologically (if not physically) colder. The possibility of a chill following a soaking sends me looking for an excuse to pull over. It just never seems that rain will be followed by a warm spell. When we are pressed for time it creates a real dilemma. One doesn't want to fall behind because there is no guarantee the rain will stop any time soon. Nor does one want to push on through frayed wits and soggy portages. In any event, that is what was running through my mind at 5:15 (when the alarm went off) and 5:43 (when I finally dragged myself out to what turned out to be a loud yet almost unnoticeable drizzle). The tent fly fooled me Steve!!

I cut the bacon in record time and roused out the boys at 6 a.m. After breakfast we re-aligned the squads for the big walk. The canoe party affiliations were redistributed so that everyone carried a load and a half. We were now trimmed for speed. We simply split up Bear and Russell's double pack. Their duffels are now carried like tents on top of other doubles, and a pair of tents were given to the lighter wannigans. It was a bit confusing in that the lads now had two sets of responsibilities--portage loads and canoe loads—and the two need not have overlapped. This is compounded by the fact that the boys all carry enormous backpacks for all of their loose gear. These make fantastic shoulder pads for carrying the canoes of course, but there are 12 of us and only 5 canoes. So, there are seven extra loads to be piled high upon the shoulders of wannigans, tents, and food duffels. It is an exercise in balance, particularly for those who hold to the Waubeno theory that a tumped load should sit high on your shoulders, not low on your rump. Well, at least we will all be strong as oxen after this one Rod.*

We were off at 8 a.m. en route to a big adventure, Jon Berger's lure of the great unknown packed into each paddle stroke. We paddled across the top of the island rapids to a long and winding bay above a narrow falls far to the left (west). There, in plain view, just south of the tall hill overlooking the falls, we found a blaze marking the start of Jon Berger's Cree Portage Route. Only the rain that had begun to fall in earnest held us back from raucous celebration. The trail leaves the river at the northern end of the bay just south of the big hill whose sheer walls funnel the water into a small narrow falls. The scene is quite picturesque. There is no current to speak of at the trailhead.

Steve and I donned our canoes and wandered into the bush at a swift canter with Jimmy "The Bloodhound" Carr breaking trail. The walk bears left towards a swampy ravine. We walked right off it. Steve and I threw our loads 100 yards into the adventure and tramped around in the ravine bottom for twenty minutes, getting thoroughly soaked in the process. We were working on a theory about where the trail must go. But the trail was working on its own presumptions. We found it again up on the north slope of the ravine. It was overgrown, and the blazes were obscured by young spruce. But it was a deep trail where there was soil to support it.

Steve and I took our axes and re-cut the ancient route, following blazes up over the mountain. The trail skirts the south side of a small granite knob 100 feet above the river. Two blaze lines cross the ridge. We stayed on the low road

to avoid the slippery exposed rock. The view from the top of the bald knob is spectacular. I stopped for a photo despite the rain. The terrain on the backside of the mountain is wet. The last 100 yards walks across springy muskeg moss and a craggy willow swamp. The trail reminded me of the Ontario side where years of walking have cut a footpath several feet deep into the swelling moss. Often the trail braids around trees that have grown up in its midst and so have to be avoided. A creek drains the long narrow lake above into the river below the falls. It screams "Speckled Trout!" Danny. Some other year we will take the time...

The view downriver shares the appearance of the plateau above Lac Bienville. The vista is long and mountainous, the rolling hills thickly covered in spruce. Steep and craggy hills rise up another 250 feet to the west. They are sparsely treed, but thick with the greenish-yellow tinge of caribou moss. Russell slipped and took a dive again. He and Bear do double duty with Steve's and my canoe when the going gets obscure and we have to cut trail. He was very frustrated by both the wet and the extra burden. There was some discussion about the fate of our lunch wood given the ambiguity of the load burdens. Luckily Phil agreed to add it to his own.

Lyle and Jon wandered ahead with a set of maps to start on the next trail while Phil, Jimmy, Steve, and I collected our loads. The trail is a short 100 yards, crossing only one contour line (30 feet or so) into Lac Mugnol. They had found two blazes, but no more. There were spawning fish jumping in the bay by the landing. The trail is faint on the north side of the creek. Blazes mark its start and reappear on the far end marking the far landing 30 yards north of the mouth of the creek.

Lac Mugnol rests deep in a canyon. The banks rise 60 meters off the lake at places. In the rain and mist the sight was eerie. Phil and I paddled ahead to find lunch, and maybe a place to sit out the rain. We found both of these on the next portage trail. It begins on the north slope of the far western bay of the lake, just above the west end of a long skinny island. The boys pitched a fly against the rain and we had the usual, macaroni and cheese. We made a fireplace out of small stones collected from the ridge above the trail. There were no stones along the lake shore. The bay is shallow and swampy. We found a couple of rusted cans partially buried in the caribou moss along the trail above our camp. We appear to be on a route that has seen a lot of action over the years.

Steve freshened the blazes along the trail while we prepared the meal. He reported back that, although a steep climb, it was a beautiful hike. The campsite sits atop the first rise, some 75 feet above the lake (with the kitchen below a little closer to the water, George). The water of the lake is crystal clear. You can see the bottom in the shallows. The water is a deep blue hue (shaded green in the overcast) like Lake Temagami where it is deeper. There is a small, very recent, burn on the facing slope. Erosion has exposed the underlying granite in the burn which highlights the rugged beauty of the terrain.

After lunch we dug in against the rain. Kirk, Bear, and Jon made a drying fire on the back edge of the fly while Steve and I used the kitchen fire. I took a small stroll to check out the lay of the land and discovered a dry pond bed just off of the trail, in the dip before the next rise. It was a perfect rectangle and would have made an excellent wiffle ball field. I retired to read and have a nap at 4pm. At 6 Phil arrived at our door to ask about the ham meal he was preparing. The rain had been falling hard since noon and the temperature was plummeting. The wind had come up from the west. The repast was delicious.

The clouds are blowing across the landscape fast from the west. Perhaps the evening will bring us a clear spell. Phil dubbed the first lake "Link Lake". It was a link to our route west, and it looked like a link of sausage, he explained.

He also reminded me that we saw an active beaver lodge on Link Lake. This seemed a good sign to me. We had seen little of the resource that drives the James Bay economy above, perhaps testament to the lack of human occupation as well.

Dinner was the usual Sunday affair. Phil and Pete made ham and cheese-mashies, Jon made a ginger bannoc, and Pete stirred up a thick batch of cocoa. It was just the cure to lift the spirits of a cold and wet crowd of travellers. The damp got to me this afternoon and the dwindling days seemed long between here and Kuujuarapik. The warmth of my bag drove away the damp but nothing cures the blues like a full belly. For that I give the boys thanks. It is 9 p.m. The light is dwindling. The wind is whistling through the spruce in rushing gusts. The larks are singing. During dinner the clouds broke briefly exposing high blue sky. The west wind is working hard to clear the tempest for us. But we are still socked in one half day into our adventure.

July 28:

Rutsen's Birthday!!!! It was raining at 5 a.m. so we rolled back over for another hour of sleep. The west wind did not clear out the rain. It poured all night. But the temperature started to come up as we cooked breakfast. The wind had turned to the north-northwest. The weather was changing.

The impending break in the clouds had not arrived at 8:45 when we started the portage. The trail walks through the pass separating the mountain to the north from the mountain to the west. Phil took old 60 half-way while I packed up the jewelry. This one is a climb. But the trail is there. It is prominently marked by light grey, lichen-like, moss and northern ewe that grows right down the middle. The wind was howling at the top of the pass. The clouds were whipping by, low, and separated into long ridges by the impending high pressure system. It felt like you could just reach out and hitch a ride (if you were heading east).

The next trail takes out of the southern bay of the lake just across from the peninsula that separates it from the north part. The trail can be found at the base of a small granite domed hill. There is good camping on the peninsula. I wished that we had pushed on. But, hindsight is well-suited to wishes. The boys were excited. We had found two fully blazed trails in a row, enabling us to run like we had above the first gorge. They are chomping at the bit in light of the impending fine weather.

The second lake would accommodate camping as well. The portage out of this little lake follows the north side of a creek essentially downhill to a long, oddly shaped lake called Lac Kuskipis on the 1:250,000's. We appeared to have crossed the height of land. And with this landmark the terrain changed. Caribou moss and granite gave way to sand and gravel. I suppose a better description would be sand and cobble. The banks and hills surrounding this lake were made of round, fist-sized stones embedded in a medium of sand, like a mineral tapioca pudding. And the forest it supported was burned to the ground.

The map marks the next lake as a depression lake. There are a series of "sunken lakes" along this stretch, the deepest two contour lines below its surrounding environs. I suppose that this is an artifact of the sandy environs. We will have to send down to research to discover the glacial origins of this odd chain of sunken lakes. We found the next portage marked by an old rusty can hung in a tree. On closer inspections there were blazes on the burned trees that still stood. Steve and I grabbed our axes and passed our canoes to Bear and

Russell (to a collective groan). We started into the bush, which was a vast, flat, and open plain littered with burned spruce, stripped bare, but still standing. The beached and weathered wood and the sandy plain melded together in the grey overcast. There were no discernible features to the landscape. We followed blazes and an occasional sled track (dragged across an exposed spot beneath the snow in late spring I suppose) 250-300 yards to the second ridge on the 1:50,000 maps. The trail runs just about due west to this point. We crossed a land bridge of sorts, a ridge separating two deep sink holes to reach the second ridge.

The blazes gave way completely to sled tracks at the second ridge. But they headed off to the south. The wrong direction. There is no discernible contour to the land, just sink holes and land bridges. And the dead spruce obscure the way. Steve and I trudged along in search of another blaze. They are hidden on once very young spruce poles. We had no luck. So we employed our compasses and headed off, following the ridge line as best we could just north of west in search of the next lake. Steve and I split up, circumventing the next sink hole, Steve sticking to its north side and I to its south. At the far rim there was still no sign of the trail, not even a consistent caribou trace. Just sand and cobble, cobble and sand, sand and cobble, cobble and sand. And it was flat. But oddly enough a single tall black spruce and a shorter white spruce stood side by side, having survived the fire. We used these, which stood halfway between the second rise and the lake, to spot the trail. The boys had brought all of the loads to the rise and had constructed a cairn to serve as a trail marker. Follow the ridge to the ravine above the first sunken lake. We were across by noon. Be warned that the blazes we left will not survive. Those trees will soon fall. In another year the portage should be marked by cairns all the way across.

The first sunken lake straddles two maps. It was deep and emerald blue, like Lake Temagami. There is a short portage that bumps over the rise into the next lake. We are not going downhill quite yet. The undergrowth had returned but the spruce were few and far between. This lake is really just a shallow extension of Lac Kawaukiuwu. A liftover through a willow thatch put us onto the lake that is for all intents and purposes the launching point of the Long Walk. The wind was whistling. There were no trees to slow it down. This is a gathering point of some sort. There were rusty cans on the low slope to the north of the willow thatch—including an old tin of Magic Baking Powder. I counted 5 fifty-five gallon drums on the beach which stretches north along the eastern shore of the lake. There were five more in the swampy shallows east of the beach, and one visible on the far shore of the bay. We also found a carved tent-rope clasp, a figure-eight shaped solid piece of wood with two holes drilled in it to grab a ¼ inch rope when it was pulled tight through it. It was charred from the last fire, but not badly. I took a stroll but found nothing else but cut trees and a beaver trap. Nonetheless this evidence of winter gathering put a lift into my step.

The wind was too strong for lunch on the beach. Bear and Kirk brought salvaged drum for a wind break which, along with a canoe and two wannigans was mildly effective. It appeared that we might be windbound. Even the guide had macaroni for lunch against the impending late afternoon. After lunch we struggled against a gale force wind out onto the main body of the lake. The sky had cleared. The water of the lake was clear as glass and deep. One could easily see twenty feet into its depths before the emerald color obscured the bottom. The far shore rises 50 feet to a level plateau. It is green-yellow with what appears to be caribou moss and there are no trees on either the west or the south shore. The wind, from the northwest, raised three to four foot swells on the main lake. We could not cross.

We pulled up on the lee side of the last point, less than a kilometer from the islands on the far shore. The lake is separated into two halves by an odd

shaped outcropping of sand and gravel. It rises in places 30 feet above the lake. The sandy channels it forms are plagued by sandbars. But it supports a small spruce forest. Phil and Pete built another big fireplace. Tom read a bit. Bear and Kirk made a four foot pyramid of sand. The guide did some wash. The boys found ATV(?!?) tracks in the sand. Jon and Russell went fishing. The wind did not die down. At 5:30, when Jon and Russell returned, we turned tail back to the shelter of the eastern bay of the lake.

The wind had turned a bit back to the west. The paddle back was a breeze, so to speak. We made an excellent camp in the shallow northwest corner of the eastern bay in a flat caribou moss park. The site is in something of a bowl formed by the fifty foot banks which are here, miraculously, forested. The boys collected rocks for the fireplace from along the shore using a canoe for a wheelbarrow. The wood crew, Bear, Jon, and Russell, found more ATV tracks up on the ridge behind the campsite. There is a lot of activity here. Perhaps we will find a camp with people at it in the north end of the lake tomorrow. It would be nice to solicit directions. Tom is doing some repair work on his outfit. His tent-fly needed some tender loving care. Pete is making chocolate bannoc for Rutsen's birthday. He brought some baker's chocolate along for just the occasion. Lyle and Jimmy are making spaghetti and green peas.

I took a walk to investigate the tracks up on the ridge. They were accompanied by footprints in the caribou moss. I walked down to the point where I spotted the lone gas drum from lunch. The spruce forest, an apparent anomaly in these parts, is lush. It was quiet in among the open glades. The crunch of caribou moss beneath my feet seemed almost unbearably loud. There was a small camp on the end of the point beyond the drum. One small teepee frame in a tiny clearing. It is an odd location. Not much shelter from inclement weather I am afraid. I scurried back so as not to miss the festivities surrounding the birthday. The wind is still howling out on the lake. It is 7:30 and the temperature is dropping. But the sky is clear and promises an abundant sunset. This is beautiful country here at the top of the world, in the long orange shadows of a late northern afternoon. The blues have washed away, leaving only the slight trepidation of the unknown.

July 29:

All day overland today. It was cold and clear this morning. We pushed a bit and the boys rose to the occasion. We were off the campsite by 7:15 a.m. We were on the fly. The wind blew due west now. But it was no impediment. We stopped for a last look before making the crossing. There was a cabin out on the end of the prominent point at the eastern end of the northern shore. No smoke rose from a morning cooking fire. There was no one home. We found no blazes on the far shore. There are no trees. Only moss, sand, and cobble. But we did find shotgun shells and some rusted cans at the southern end of the middle bay at the lakes westernmost extremity. It was 8:15. We simply followed the rise to the north of the boulderfield over the barren terrain.

Loons flew over us low in the morning sky back on the big lake. A good omen. One could camp on the western point in the first lake if one wanted. It would be tight for a section of twelve and one would need to bring wood in from Lac Kawaukuwiw. The lakes west of Kawaukiuwu are all sunken lakes although only the two westernmost are marked as depressions on the maps. We portaged from the base of eastern side of this peninsula 300-400 yards to the southwest into the next lake. The terrain was wild. There was nothing but cobble and sink holes as far as the eye could see. The depressions are not visible until one is

right upon them. There is no significant rise in the landscape. There are no trees, nor any evidence that there ever were trees. With the exception of an occasional glacial erratic the rolling sandy terrain is essentially flat. The flora of the region is essentially caribou moss, the grey lichens that grow on the trail (they are probably a species of moss), what look like juniper bushes to me by their blue berries, northern yew, ground brush that looks like a waxy leafed strawberry plant, and, along the slopes of the depression lakes, ash and alders growing low to the ground like creeping vines. These latter are the oddest features. They are certainly the trees we know from all over the bush. But their trunks grow only 4-10 inches tall and their branches spread along the slopes parallel to the ground. They look like pear bushes growing on a lattice.

We paddled to the far end of the irregular crescent lake that was to serve as the end of the road so to speak. We landed in the middle of the western shore just south of the small point. Steve and I climbed the fifty foot embankment to the open plain. There was an occasional clump of alder brush and the odd lone spruce sapling, but otherwise we were alone on 16 square kilometers of the 45 square kilometer barren plain that surrounds Lac Kawaukuwiw. It is a rare geological sight for those of us accustomed to the lush boreal forest to the south. Steve said it was somewhat reminiscent of the area north of Labrador City, but that that terrain had been wetter. I suppose that this is what the world looks like north of our position, above the treeline. There was a small sand hill to south and west, and a larger one four kilometers to the west. The most prominent landmark was the 1093' peak fourteen kilometers to the west.

We collected the boys at the top of the second rise from which Steve and I had been scouting the terrain. Steve took out his GPS. He programmed our route into it so that it marked a 200 yard swath marking our rough approximation of the trail to Lac Fagnant. If we strayed from his broad path it would chime. I know that a GPS is not as romantic as a sextant reading and a compass bearing, but the tall granite peak to the west was directly across Lac Fagnant from our position. We could simply have walked towards the valley along its north slope, keeping the low mountains to the east at our backs. There appears to be a tower on the peak. It is marked as a survey point. Who knows, maybe there was once a survey camp on the mountain.

We held an executive meeting at 9:40. It seemed there was nothing to do but set a bearing and start walking. A different kind of crossing, eh Danny!! We had a quick snack of dried fruit, a brief orienteering lesson, and group orientation (to the far peak), marked a mountain to the east for the return trip, taped the GPS antenna to the starboard side of Steve's canoe, hung the unit from his bow thwart for easy reading, and set off in a caravan on a sight line due west with the guide, oddly, at its vanguard.

The plain is surrounded by mountains, which to the north and east, I assume, roughly mark off the banks of the river. We stopped at one kilometer on the nose for a break at the bidding of the guide's back. The GPS was tracking our progress with excruciating accuracy. The wind was whipping across the plain so each canoe had a bow spotter. Bear had mine (sorry if I was a little cranky) while Phil carried the jewelry half load (easy lunch access Danny!!). Steve was off before any of us were quite rested. He has always driven low slung Detroit muscle from the General Motors Company, so the vision of him tacking into the wind with an external antenna flopping around off the side of the canoe was somehow appropriate (and drew irresistible giggles from the guide). He was quickly a quarter mile ahead. We all saddled up and scurried on at a canter to keep him in view. The sandy terrain recorded evidence of his passage by way of footprints which made visual contact, really just a psychological nicety, not a real necessity.

The second spur brought us to just beyond the 2 kilometer point. Here we returned for our second loads, the bowman marching back to the beginning en masse and the sternsmen keeping to their half-loads. The plan was to push the shared loads ahead to the lunch stop at about 4 kilometers and then meet the bowmen back at the 2/3^{rds} mark to bring everything else along. It was 11 a.m. Hopefully no one would have to miss a step. The third kilometer dips off of the open plain, crossing a last barren ridge, and then descending across the 750 foot contour onto terrain that has more ground cover. The willow bushes get bigger. There are now ballfield sized open stretches of caribou moss sheltered by waist-high willow thickets. There were caribou remains in several of these openings. Most of them were old kills, their bones bleached white with age, but one was a recent kill, the bones still red with marrow at the joints.

We were heading towards the tall sandy rise that we assumed was the western shore of the largest of three ponds on an east-west axis from our trailhead. We had lunch on the shore of the easternmost, and smallest, pond at almost exactly 3 kilometers. The loads stayed up on the ridge-line. Jon and Bear collected fire rocks and helped me get started as the boys trickled in. The pond is surrounded by a floating bog which made getting water something of a task. Each trip required a new approach as the last was submerged by the weight of the previous one. I cannot remember why, Lyle, but your name is highlighted in my notes here. Perhaps for your acuity at keeping those patriotic Converse All-stars dry!!

The last lad arrived at lunch at 1:30. Phil spelled me from the task of cooking when he arrived so that I could take a small break from the heat of the fire. We were all walking again by 3:30. The spruce reappear as you cross the 750 foot mark. Around the back of the large sand rise the forest returns in all of its previous glory. I have to relate a story here that is a bit off-color. The day was sunny and hot. I had gotten a little sweaty and this had led to a small case of jock itch. One of the boys, who will go unmentioned to Chad Nelson, had some magic elixir out in his daypack for just such an occasion—the dreaded medicated Gold Bond Powder. I say dreaded because, much to my horror this stuff is not baby powder, but a strong mix of menthol and talc. Needless to say that did not resolve the situation. The poor guide required a mossy swim, but alas, the pond was hundreds of yards away.

After lunch cross the southern tip of the sand rise ridge. Our trail wound around the sandy rise and followed its backside, a long narrow ridge. The willows are joined by alders in the bottom west of the ridge. We lost Steve's trail here. He and Jimmy had wandered ahead to break trail but their blazes, given the nature of the local flora, were often obscure. We gathered the boys again, a kilometer and a half past lunch, and Bear and I wandered off, loads in tow, to search out the trail. The rest of the lads leap-frogged along behind us. Eventually we saw Jimmy scampering up the slope of the ridge 250 yards from where we had lost the trail. There is a swampy marsh which is mostly dry here. Cut just north of west along the western base of the ridge, traversing a dip that is choked with alders. The ridge will rise at the far side of the dip. Keep to its southwestern edge (by traversing the radius of the arc in the ridge that generates the dip). The open spruce forest reappears beyond the second ridge with, of all things, a clear two track road. Bear and I collected the boys up again at the base of a tall scraggly tamarac on the second rise. We arrived just in time to see Steve and Jimmy disappear into the spruce.

Bear and I found Steve and Jimmy's track at a small Cree camp on the road. There is a teepee just over the rise from the tamarac. I suppose this is a good spot to stop for easy access to the open ground beyond. The road winds

its way through twenty foot black and white spruce and open stretches of caribou moss. No willows here boys. Jimmy and Steve dropped a "midpoint" at the first large pond west of the ridge. Bear and I stopped for water and then pushed on. We found Steve's canoe 400 yards down the road, but no sign of Steve. The trail had begun marching northwest, away from the easternmost bay of Lac Fagnant. He and the GPS were on a jaunt. They had gone off in search of the lake, which we figured to be just over 1000 yards west of our position.

Bear and I collected the lads again. Phil was stalwartly manhandling the jewelry as I recall. The forest is beautiful through here. Dark green stretches of spruce are complemented by bleach white open stretches of caribou moss. The deep blue light of a clear afternoon sky painted a brilliant landscape in which we were, at this point, lounging in wait of Steve's return.

We had some dried fruit to strengthen our resolve. Steve had reported back that the open forest ended at a swamp just 300 yards to the west. That left only 800 yards of portage to cut. It was 5 p.m. Steve and I wandered off to find a way. No Luck!!! The swamp is an impenetrable bog. There was no easy way to mark even a straight line between two points among the tangled spruce and tamarack. And the pools between the hillocks of peat were thigh deep. We dickered around for twenty minutes in search of solid ground, but there was no daylight to run towards, the line held solid.

Luckily, the boys had just started to follow us when we turned back. The lads have really risen to the challenge the last couple of days. They are exhibiting a sense of independence, responsibility, and cooperation that is everything Steve and I had hoped for (at least when we are in earshot). We continued up the road to the fourth pond. It was frustrating to be so close to our destination yet never getting any closer for all of our effort. The trail enters a thicker forest for a bit, and then crosses another open clearing at the next pond. The pond is the third large pond, and the first one west of the trail. We decided to call it a day. It was 6 p.m. We had been on the trail for eight hours. We had traveled a total of 8 kilometers. The campsite was one of the nicest all summer. The pond is deep and surrounded by open caribou moss. I scouted the terrain on its western shore and found the bog right where it should have been obstructing tomorrow's progress just as it had today's.

Peter made us a fireplace with Jimmy's help using a large boulder as a fireback. Jon and Jimmy made chicken-lentil stew with cheese mashies. Pete made a coffee cake and Lyle made the traveler. The guide took a stroll down the road to see what lay ahead. It maintains a uniform distance from the lake. There are large, fresh wolf prints on the sandy stretches of the road. A kilometer from the campsite I climbed "vantage hill", as we came to call it, for a look. The hill was a barren sand rise, perhaps some sort of moraine. The view was magnificent. I could not find our cooking fire. Not enough smoke I guess. But I could see the lake. It was a kilometer away across a thick forest. A rocky rise stood between myself and the lake at about the mid-point. It would offer us no help though. It looked like a large (huge really) stone dropped by a passing glacier in some by-gone time. I had my street shoes on so I wandered ahead a bit further. There are two clearings that support large Cree camps along the base of the ridge that supports vantage hill. But between the clearings the forest was wet and tangled. Steve thinks the trail may lead to a creek to the north that will be passable. We will see.

Peter was stirring cocoa to go with the meal when I returned to camp. A strange bit of humidity blew across us as a low threatening fog while we ate. After dinner we heard a plane out over Lac Fagnant. The temperature will fall below freezing tonight. There is not a cloud in the sky and the wind is from the northwest. Goodnight.

July 30:

Steve and I were up at 5. Last night was chilly at bedtime but this morning it was overcast, humid, and in the upper 60s. Steve turned to me as he reached for the alarm and said, "Let's go south!" We had been struggling with the decision to follow the long walks to the northwest or the lakes and creek to the southwest. The maps offer us no clues (as I have already indicated, that was not entirely true—it is just that we did not know that there were only two long walks on the northern route). There is a clear route marked partially by the named lakes to the south, and a clear route marked by the named lakes to the north (these lakes are named on the 1:250,000 maps and not on the 1:50,000 maps). The northern route mixes French and Cree names while the southern route is marked solely in French. The northern route would be easy if the forest remains open. But the evidence here points in the other direction. The southern route will be manageable if the creek is paddleable. That is a wildcard, but the contour lines look to favor us. It does not tumble until the last mile. If the terrain is anything there like it is here a mile portage will be a chore to cut, but not so difficult as five mile portages or several mile plus portages. If all goes well enough, we should be 3 days from breakfast to the Denys River and then two days down to the Bay. That would give us some extra time.

We can now relax a bit. Steve made Cream of Wheat, bacon, and his rich and aromatic cowboy coffee for breakfast. I always feel moved to tell a story about Steve's coffee. Now, I am a big fan of my morning cup in the bush. And whether this is a matter of taste or a factor of distance from home, I cannot tell you. All I know is that nothing tastes sweeter. Often I do not speak, but sit with my cup outstretched, watching patiently while the water comes to a boil and the agitated grounds work their magic. One morning, several years ago, Steve and I were making breakfast in a dense fog on Lac Mistassini. There was a fire and we had had to make a decision about whether to wait on a rain or change venues. Time was tight on the Eastmain-Rupert trips. We arranged a trip to Baie de Poste on Lac Mistassini for myself and one of the campers to check on the forecast and the extent of the burn. There is a sports camp run by the Cree at the north end of the lake and, after drinking enough tea to convince them that I would not hire out their Otter, Koben Christiansen and I took the 65 mile trip down the lake. The round trip took eight hours and we got a late start so we were gone a day. Well, to make a long story short we rerouted and paddled halfway down the lake only to be stopped by a drenching rain which, in conjunction with the fire it put out, produced a thick fog. Well, while we made breakfast we could hear several boats circling in the fog along with the English words they were employing in reference to the fog, and the narrow misses as they searched for our campsite. Steve and I remained appropriately quiet. When they finally emerged from the dense humidity they were surprised to find us at the camp (I suppose not too pleasantly either). The spot was a government camp set up for Cree and campers alike in an effort to draw tourism to the region, not a Cree camp. We invited them ashore for some coffee and pancakes. They accepted the former but not the latter. Now Steve had been learning Cree, using a dictionary that he had been given at the village of Waskaginish at the mouth of the Rupert River. He wasn't quite adept yet, but he could pick out bits and pieces of sentences. The Cree were all young adults, probably in their early twenties. They all accepted a pannican and then began chatting among themselves in Cree. They did not stay long. They were not really interested in passing the morning with us. After we finally helped them embark Steve turned to me and

said, "I cannot be sure but I think one of them said that my coffee tasted like muskrat."

This morning the coffee tasted like fine french roast. We started the day with a journey west to try one last time to find a direct route. Mind you, we had no idea how this all ended. As far as we knew this road wound all the way around to the north end of the lake some 8 or 9 kilometers away. We were just looking for a way home. We had hoped there would be a dry ridge following the 700 foot contour line down to the lake. There was no such thing. Just bog, bog, and more bog. Steve and I jogged ahead with Bear and Russell for a view from Vantage Hill. The prospects of a direct route looked more promising from here. Still, though the view was magnificent, there was really no obvious trail. Bear and Russell went back for the boys while Steve and I scouted ahead to check on the creek that crosses the road. It was 1 kilometer away. It was choked and serpentine but it supported a good volume of water and a good deal of current. We decided to scout southwest from Vantage Hill to the large rock outcropping and, if that did not work out to try to paddle out the creek.

There was a revolution brewing back at Vantage Hill. At the top of the hill we had seen rain en route from the west. When we returned its arrival was immanent. We instructed the boys to pitch a fly against its onslaught as they trickled in. Steve and I propped our canoes up on wannigans and tucked ourselves away for a quick breather before taking Bear and Russell with us southwest towards the lake. The bog is vast. It stretches across at least 3 square kilometers along the eastern shore of the lake. This time we crossed 600 yards of it. It was sloppy George!! We trudged and trudged, and finally reached a rise of dry caribou moss. But the rock was nowhere in sight. There were no discernible landmarks, just spruce bog. I walked ahead a bit, frustrated by the weather and the terrain, towards a small, sandy caribou moss clearing, and there it was, the rock rise. As usual, Steve had walked us right to it, blind but for his compass.

The view from the hill was not encouraging (although it too, like the climb and the rock itself, was picturesque). Russell had a break while we surveyed all 360°. There was no easy way through, even way back up the trail. The creek it was!! The climb back down was much more difficult than our ascent had been. The moss and granite was slick. We stayed a bit west of our original trail on the way back (in order to stay out of the deep bog) and made the road 200 yards west of Vantage Hill.

The trail veers off of the road 100 yards south of the creek and crosses a grassy field. Stay on the west periphery of the open forest and find the creek. This avoids a serious tangle just below the ford. Jon and I worked on lunch while the boys portaged their loads. The blackflies were horrendous. Russell declared it a bug net day!! I went back for my load when the water boiled and the boys saved me some macaroni. Phil and I filled the role of sweeper for the run down to the lake. After all of that searching the creek was nearly clear, and it took only an hour to reach the lake. The occasional tangle was easily lifted around on the grassy bank. Had we stayed on the path we could have made it last night! There were chain saw cuts in among the tangles but it was hard to tell if these were drift logs from the spring freshet or had been cut on the spot. This was definitely the canoe route. The trail from Portage Lake was 10km all told. 6 miles!! Our feet were raw but our spirits were high.

The boys were excited to reach open water again. But the lake was shallow and mucky, and the wind was brisk from the west. We slugged ahead through the narrows to the channel leading south. But a burn stretched out in our path. So, after struggling in the stiff breeze we had to turn our backs to the wind and find camp on the east shore of the lake. It was not yet 3, but who could

tell what lay ahead to the south. The open creek had turned our thoughts to the southern route (with the aid of our raw feet).

We camped high on a bluff in a caribou moss park in the northeast corner of the east arm of the lake. Another excellent sight (if not a little far from the water). Bear made a delicious pot of chili with onion soup and green beans on the side. Pete made us a sprouts salad comprised of his last four runs. Jon made ginger bread. We discovered that there was one run fewer meal of rice than I had thought, meaning that we had none left. And it rained intermittently all afternoon. At 8 p.m. it is raining, and the temperature is dropping. Another chilly sleep. Tomorrow we will roll the dice and see whether or not our southern route, nearly due west of here, down an unnamed creek to the last falls on the Denys River, is the old canoe route east. We think that Jon Berger's route is the winter route. The walks are a little long (given our impression of the James Bay Cree) for a summer route. And the road would only be accessible after freeze-up. One good sign is that the lakes on our route are named. So someone has been that way. Our lakes bear French names. Jon Berger's bear Cree names (a hint we should have heeded). Perhaps ours is a trapper's or a surveyor's route. In any event, the route is on the big map. That is a good sign. Most of the lakes off of the river are unnamed. And the Denys is an old trade route connecting the north to the south... Tomorrow we will see!

July 31:

Low clouds hung heavy over Lac Fagnant this morning, blown in like a river mist off of the bay. And the wind that came with them was chilly. The air was sea air, and fall seemed soon to be upon us at this northern clime. We were off the campsite at 7:45 a.m. and on the run. There was one more significant height of land to cross and today was the day. After that we were into the Denys River watershed and it would be downhill for the rest of the way. We'd have to see how our creek treated us.

Right off the bat the route had the upper hand. Directly south of the island at the east end of Lac Aupasich we found evidence of a recent kitchen fire, some garbage, and a can in a tree. We thought that that was a good sign, but if there were ever a trail here it was burned through and through. Steve and I slugged ahead in the cold damp air while the boys dragged the gear along behind us. In the soft gray light it was hard to discern the shallow blazes recently cut by yours truly into the fire-hardened, wind-weathered blow downs. On trails like these Bear and Russel double-load with our canoes and Steve and I return for our wannigans. This particular trail stays up on the ridge to the east. Our trail is not exemplary. We were just trying to keep out of the swamp, and to avoid the most tangled stretches of blow-downs. One could just run, keeping the swampy low ground between the ridges to your right. The burn was recent and I would imagine that our blazes are down as we speak.

Across the small lake that followed we simply climbed straight over the mountain. A better plan would be to start at the west end of the lake and walk across the south side of the steep rock outcropping. Our trail was manageable but it was steep and in a rain, or damp conditions, would be treacherous. We had to mark the trail with cairns. We were able to drag the canoes through the shallow mucky creek, over wild roses, into the following, small, intermediary pond. That was a bonus, eh Phil! At the southeast end of the pond we found an ancient blaze on a rotting stump, but again, no trail. And once again, the region has been thoroughly burned. This put us into Lac Mac Isaac. We paddled off of the map into the first narrows and then caught up to Steve back on the map who

was having a leisurely time of it as we finished the portage. The clouds cleared away here, like a good morning fog. Lac Mac Isaac flows, with good current, to the south off of the map border. This seems to be the preferred route to the Denys. We lacked the appropriate maps at the time but upon return to the south research demonstrated that the only major obstacle that separated us from a clear creek to Lac Deny was a ½ mile swampy portage. Phil fended off of the stones in our path as we had a short snack of gorp and dried fruit. The banks of the eastern portion of the lake were low and swampy, but the late morning sun on the lush green forest was picturesque. Lac Mac Isaac proper is reached by lifting over a pinch at the shallow narrows at about 76° 45', West. In higher water this could easily have been lined.

Lac Mac Isaac proper is surrounded by steep mountains. Its north and west shores are bound by sheer cliff faces. And, in contrast to its eastern arm, it is a clear blue lake with a panoramic view of the communication tower on 1093' Mountain and the surrounding terrain. One could easily make a campsite at the west end of the lake. A push to here would have been the best plan last night. We had lunch at the west end in the bay on the north side of what we would come to call Portage Mountain. En route we passed two gull chicks hiding on the water. They were downy and grey and had their beaks pressed flat to the water. Their parents made quite a ruckus overhead. Steve and Jimmy went to scout the southern bay for its portage possibilities while Phil and I made lunch. They returned before the fire had even been started. We decided to cut across the north side.

We paddled up the shallow creek 40 yards to a blaze that pointed us towards a four-corner post that sported freshly stamped trap-line tags. Blazes led south up the 300 foot mountain and west along the its base. We went west. The blazes gave out 250 hundred yards in. The trail sticks to the low end of the hill and then crosses a low pass before tumbling down a steep ravine on the far side to Lac Slim. The second half of the trail is a mountain stroll along exposed granite. The first part is in the forest, but with the exception of 50 yards of swamp is lovely. At the far end we found a cut pine pole driven into the moss as a marker. We surmised that we were still on a trail. Our spirits were high.

It was nearly five when we finished the portage. Lac Slim is a beautiful lake. Its banks rise 300 feet, cut sheer into the granite to the north and east. It is only a couple hundred yards wide at its widest. The late afternoon light was sharp and clear and had not yet faded to the deep shade of indigo that marks dinner time. But the land once again held the upper hand. The creek to the south was shallow and rocky so we called the day done on a clear ridge separating Lac Slim from the next small lake to the south. We camped in the shadow of the bald granite peak of Portage Mountain. The campsite is on a burned sandy rise that is beginning to grow back. There is a second granite rise to the west. The clearing is choked with young spruce and willows and littered with small boulders. One can see the next lake 200 yards from the kitchen. Another caribou moss park.

Lyle made us spaghetti, Pete made a chocolate icing for his bannoc, Tom made the traveler, and there is moose scat everywhere. I blazed a trail to the water while the boys cooked. Pete capped it all off with cocoa at 9:20 p.m. Leaden clouds lie to the southwest in a blanket across the sky, but we still sit under the deep open blue of dusk. One can only hope. The temperature is dropping. Let's pray that the trapper's blazes stick with us down to the Denys. This appears to be an ancient and neglected route. A little exploration adventure for our last 4 days.

August 1:

Last night rain blew in from the northwest. It was driven by a good wind and its pellet-like pelting on the tent fly drove Steve and I deeper into our bags. But today we had to move. When we did the Rupert River trips earlier in the decade we used to laugh and joke that Heb was always on the run at the end of the summer. "What an adventure!" we'd say, "chasing Nishe down the river until dusk had faded to that northern dark in which the woods are still illuminated but with a diffuse light that admits clear vision only as long as your forearm. 'The boys were tired so I whipped up a batch of fudge as Nishe set the drying fires for the days damp and wet socks.'" Well now we were in their shoes. The modern fabrics are not as amenable to flame, and though we could be a day and a half late and still catch our plane, the lure of the unknown loomed a little large.

One year an ancient Cree man named George Jolly, who remembered paddling the supply brigades for the Hudson Bay Company which moved freight from Waskaginish to the headwaters of the Rupert at Baie de Poste on Lac Mistassini (he was 80 years old by his own admission, but still as strapping as he was when the winter photo of him, taken in the late twenties, that hangs in the band offices at Champion Lake, Waskaginish, and Wapmagoostuui), told us that the weather in August always follows its first day. A scotch mist fell in rain-sized pellets through breakfast.

The boys were slow this morning getting up. The sun tried to offer its encouragement to the travel weary. While Steve and I waited through an extra cup of coffee (thanks boys) the rain stopped. The clouds set up like a river mist getting ready to rise. But they then settled back into rain-sized pellets so we pulled our collars up and hunched towards the fire. It was not until after breakfast that what had appeared an all-day rain gave way to the puffy, gray cotton of a dense fog rising into a crystal clear high pressure dome. But the temperature never warmed up. It was sweaters and long-johns all day long. And while the threat of rain seemed to subside with the march of time, the clouds did not dissipate. We paddled all day with the cold scattered clouds of fall.

Despite the slow start we were off by 8 a.m., and across the portage 11 minutes later. The day was still damp and had the smell of the Bay to it. We were able to paddle out of this lake through swampy lowlands via a shallow creek. Here we found the first strong evidence of the north's great currency, the beaver. The creek was choked with ancient beaver dams and mammoth lodges. At one particularly extensive and efficient dam we had to unload and bush our way along the creek bed through thick willows ten feet tall for 50 yards. The last 100 yards of creek must be portaged on the right into the next lake. Again, portage 50 yards on the right out of the lake onto the next creek and 50 yards on the right into Lac Tremblay. The creek is flanked by high, 100 foot, exposed granite hills between the lakes. I suppose that really they are mountain peaks and it is only our altitude that makes them appear hills. We let the canoes down empty into Lac Tremblay which is long and narrow, and generally oriented northwest to southeast. It is named on the 1:250:000 maps. The temperature seemed to reach a low at this point as Phil and I paddled easy into the wind, down Lac Tremblay, waiting for the caravan to come back together.

The fact that the creek was paddleable was a godsend. Steve and I had been fretting since the decision to choose this route that the creek would be shallow, dead-fall choked, or a long cascade. The creek drops 250 feet in 18 kilometers (11 miles). That's about 23 feet a mile. Of course most of that drop occurs in the last two miles but still it was a worry. If the creek were not paddleable it would be Herculean effort to reach the Denys River. Who knew what lay ahead, but so far it had been a stellar day.

We portaged the loads out of Lac Tremblay, again lining the empty canoes, and pulled up for lunch on a caribou moss rise to the east. This too would suffice for a campsite. Lac Tremblay is flanked by rock hills but is burned at the north end. The sun made an occasional appearance at lunch. The boys were cold from the brisk headwind off the bay that howled down Lac Tremblay. Out of the wind it was chilly but not so cold as on the lake. Our lunch site was picturesque.

The creek below Lac Tremblay is a mountain creek which tumbles through narrow steep-walled lakes and connecting cascades. The stretch between Lac Tremblay and the bell-pepper shaped lake was crowded with shallow lines and sections where one must portage the loads. In low water this would be a tough route with lots of portaging. West of the bell pepper shaped lake, in the long narrows, there are several steep cascades. The one I remember most vividly was a narrow pinch between two boulders followed by a steep two foot ledge and a 50 yard runout. Phil and I stowed the fire irons to shorten our beam and dropped right through. In a little more water this stretch would be a fun little run.

The stretch of creek that crosses the map from N/2 O-W to N/3 E-E is deep and wide with no obstacles. It is a little like the eerie canal--lush, deep, and sluggish. We saw an otter on this stretch. We ran several swifts into the long lake with the island in the middle of it. We collected up the caravan and had a snack of dried fruit before slugging on into the wind. This is a beautiful mountain lake with bald granite peaks rising to the north and west. We found a campsite on the north shore of the southern bay at the west end. In another year I would love to have a hike and look out towards the bay. I would bet the Denys and the Great Whale are visible from the tallest peak.

We dubbed the lake Mountain Lake for its grand peaks and the alpine feel of the terrain. The environs this evening, with the thin light of evening glistening off of an early dew, made all the summers work worth it. All told it was a fun day of lining the swift chutes of a mountain creek. It isn't every Keewaydin canoe trip that gets to make a remark like that! The temperature never rose out of the 50's. We have finally climbed over the mountains into the Hudson Bay clime, and now that we are on our way down the wind is cold. It was 48 degrees when I climbed into the tent at 8:15.

Our campsite is in a perfect caribou moss park on the east end of a granite ridge separating Mountain from the next lake. Lyle helped me make a chicken-lentil stew, our last of the trip (much to Steve's unrepressed glee). We put in a handful of mushroom soup mix and some grated cheese which, along with a bacon end, seemed to make up for the lost salt. Jon made a molasses bannoc, with a sweet sugar icing posing as its cream cheese brethren. As usual, Pete, the master of ceremonies, capped it off with a regal cauldron of cocoa. (Peter made the traveler as well.)

The food seemed to warm the boys up. There was a lot of hollering and carrying on after dinner. The strong wind blew the bulk of the late afternoon rain right past us. But the dense morning clouds would still not give way to clear skies. We are still at 600 feet above sea level so almost any clouds are low clouds for us. At 9:30 a cold wind is blowing from the west and today's scattered clouds have packed in to cover the sky again. It promises to be a good sleeping night here on the banks of Lac Lucerne de Nunavik. Each time I look out at the mountainside I half expect to see Heidi and Peter bringing the sheep home to Grandfather over the ridge.

August 2:

A fine scotch mist hung in the air this morning Danny, buoyant

on the brisk west wind. This one was off the ice pack. But the alders had remained dry (or had been wind-dried) for my walk to awaken the lads. The mist sucked the heat right out of my fingers. The boys were a little reticent to extract themselves from the warmth of their bags and did not arrive to breakfast until 6:45. Blue sky poked through just past 7 but this time it was only a tease. The mist blew back in just after we pushed off at 8.

I do not recall exactly, and my maps simply mark "portage and line" west of Mountain Lake. The connections between the three major lakes of the morning were fairly clear. In general portage around the cascade at the west end of the lake and line the creek to the next one. If the water is high enough all of this can be run. Phil and I stopped at the west end of North-South Lake (the one that looks like a travelling vicar in a wide brimmed hat) so that I could put on my rain gear. We pulled up under a large tamarac that completely sheltered us from the heavy mist. The lakes west of Mountain Lake were beautiful. They have sheer granite banks that rise 150 to 200 feet off the water to bald granite domes. The mist punctuated the northern clime and altitude of our position.

The morning went well. We planned to drop 200 feet to the Denys River before sunset. We crossed the first contour line west of Third Lake without any difficulty. We were sorry to leave our mountain lakes behind, but the creek itself had steep walls at times. On a nice summer day this would have been glorious scenery.

We were in and out of the canoes all day (emphasis on out!). Between the second pond and the spearhead shaped lake (carrot-shaped Phil) we were able to paddle without obstruction which was nice. Below here Phil and I (the smallest two individuals in the group (sorry Phil)) talked Steve and Jimmy into following us through a set of chutes. We left no paint but Jimmy and Steve were not so lucky. Sorry Steve. The smooth rock ledge was deceptively shallow.

We stopped for lunch at the north-south jog in the course of the creek at 11:45 a.m. We were a couple of hundred yards past the spearhead-shaped lake. The light rain was cold but the activity of lining had kept us warm. At lunch, without any movement, the cold got under our skin. We all crowded around the fire except for Phil and Russel who went fishing for some of the brook trout we had had our eyes on all morning. The largest catch was just 6". No keepers Dan.

After lunch we were off and at it again. The paddleable sections of the river seemed to be behind us now. The creek enters a miniature "canyon" 250 yards below lunch. Phil and I were up ahead as usual. At one point the river narrowed to about four feet and shot through a fissure between two 25 foot granite walls. Phil and I were able to run this cascade, minding the fire irons, and drop the yard into the deep pool below. Where the creek flows in from the north the river narrows to a canoe's width and drops sharply in a 50 foot falls, the water shooting out five feet off the precipice before tumbling to the ground. We cut a 250 yard portage crossing two contour lines. The trail takes out up the smaller creek and continues around the back side of the first of two steep granite hills. It drops back down to the river through the ravine separating them. We tried the creek side, but the alders and willows were old and thick. There is a game trail that goes this way and with a little more time and a sharp machete one could manage it. But our alternative is an easier walk (although one still has to crash through the willows and alders to reach the creek again.

Peter was on our tails when Steve and I reached the thick growth creekside the first time and groaned with frustration at the prospect of turning back. But, to his credit, he never once mentioned the cold and damp and led the charge around the backside of the hill. While the boys leap-frogged the loads down to the river Steve and I hiked the second hill to look for the Denys. It was

just over a kilometer away. The overcast afternoon was getting prematurely dim in the deep ravine of the creek. We could not see any major drops ahead, but nor could we really make out the path of the river in among the steep hills. But we could see the far side of the Denys whose banks are 350 feet high!!!

The creek was steeper, and completely choked by small rapids and steep cascades, below the portage. It was a trial by fire for the boys as we got stretched out in our zeal to beat dusk to the Denys. This time I was glad the water was at its present height. Any higher and it would have been a wild ride. The next to last 350 yards pass through two ponds and are manageable, but the last 100 are braided. Steve and I walked the north shore in search of a portage that could double as a campsite. Our overland route was complete!!! Eight days and forty miles to the Denys River. The boys were so excited that they forgot about the cold and damp day and surreptitiously lined the rapids while Steve and I were chatting about what to do next.

It was too late to go on any further. Phil and I crossed the river to scout the far shore. The creek meets the Denys at a deep wide spot (400 yards long and 150 yards across) between a rapids and the Denys' last falls. It is a nice secluded enclave. But there is no obvious campsite. The far side was too steep and too damp. I had scouted the east shore to the bottom of the rapids above while the boys were lining. It too was steep. The rapids themselves culminate in a three foot ledge on the west shore. The east shore flows along a 50 foot cliff to a steep mountain where the river makes an abrupt jog to the west to meet the ledge. There was no appreciable shoreline below the mountain, but it looked as if one could make tent sites on the second ridge 100 feet above the rapids. Phil climbed the hill to have a look and reported back that it would more than do so we called it a day. The ever resourceful Phil Varty located a kitchen area just behind the willows at the lip of the first ridge, between the hillside and the creek.

It was getting dimmer by the minute. The day had gotten colder, and the damp that hung in the air now clung to our bones. We sent the boys off to pitch their tents with instructions to return with fly poles and firewood. Jimmy had come down with a bout of the cold chills, so I started a warming fire while Steve pitched our tent. Tom went for rocks and we built our fireplace around the fire. We collected squaw wood from the shoreline to keep the fire going until the boys arrived. There were bundles of willows washed up on shore. Tom then went for fly-poles and firewood. He played a pivotal role in a cold, cold run at making camp. We had spaghetti and a double run of green beans accompanied by 2½ pounds of cheese. Peter made icing for the bannoc utilizing the only thing we have in great supply, brown sugar. It was dark, chilly, and damp when the traveler came off of the fire at 9:30, but with full bellies the boys were in good spirits as they rough-housed their way up the steep bank back to their tents.

August 3:

The Denys River!!!! It was cold and wet this morning. No reprieve just yet. The walk up the hill to get the boys was a hike. And it was soggy George. But it was well worth it. The view up river to the rapids and down river past the falls was magnificent. Alas, it was another spot for the catalog of vistas I had reached this summer without my camera. Perhaps the memory is richer.

After breakfast we set out in search of a portage around the 10 foot falls below. We started on the north shore, at the lip of the falls, hoping for a classic Cree trail which would just bop past the heavy water. I would say that a trail right along the shore may have once been the preferred route. It is the obvious location. But the going is thick with alders and deadfalls now. Steve and I hiked up over the mountain to see if we could get around its backside. It was a walk!

But no luck. The return to the river would be too steep. If ever there were a trail on this bank it was either choked or burned.

The 10 foot falls is no more than 40 yards across in a spot where the river tumbles between two small mountains. The run off is short but the river continues on in a shallow rapids below. From our vantage atop the northern hill we could see that there might be a short trail around the back of the smaller, southern mountain across the river. That turned out to be our trail. It put us out 200 yards below the falls.

A. P. Low writes of a well walked trade route connecting Great Whale River with Ft. George which he traveled in one of his survey expeditions at the turn of the century. We did not find it. But the area appears to have burned repeatedly in the ensuing years (later research revealed that the Cree, at least at the turn of the century, by-passed this section via a chain of lakes to the south). Our trail leaves the river from the grassy bank at the east base of the mountain. Walk around behind it to the saddle between it and the higher hill beyond. The portage continues over the saddle, across a small burned plateau, and then down to the ravine on the far side to the river. It is 450 yards in all. The ravine is a bit wet. The going is clay and grass, and there are occasional deep holes to avoid. But it is not a bad walk.

We were a little sluggish in our scouting and it was 11:30 when we finished the trail. We pushed on a bit before stopping for lunch. There was an icy cold mist blowing off of the bay. My hands were particularly numb from the weather. There are several miles of unmarked, shallow rapids to run below the falls. Phil and I ran out a bit and then stopped to get some photos of the lads coming down. When we turned to follow the mist was falling in earnest just the summer side of sleet. We ran horseraces for the next half an hour without a break. The temperature hovered just above freezing. We stopped for lunch on a small rock ledge just below the only swift too shallow to run. Lunch was a cold endeavor and there was no shelter from the rain. I paced to keep warm. The mist kept falling through lunch, but it quit as we put in to make the last 10 kilometers back to the Great Whale. It felt like we were dragging anchors. We paddled past elevation markers for Hydro, and a big caution sign which looked like part of a winter road. Perhaps it marked a perennial soft spot in the ice. The Denys River boasts high banks of granite hills here in a miniature pantomime of the Great Whale. The current was moving at a good clip, and the leaden feeling to our paddles was the force of the current working with us. We made the confluence in short order once we cleared the long rapids. The view back upriver on the Great Whale is magnificent to the mountains in the distance. The terrain is large in northern Quebec.

There is a Cree camp on the north bank of the Great Whale River just west of the island at the confluence. It would make an excellent campsite. It is marked a la mode by a teepee frame and looks as if it gets good use. The approach to the first set of portages below. The Denys is a simple affair. The river is deep, wide, and sluggish, and the take out is well above the falls (200 meters) in the bay to the west just past the small willowed island. This is the first familiar looking portage of the summer. There are abandoned gas cans and skidoo parts littered about a bushy clearing. My notes say: "Stay left. The trail takes out 100 yards past the small willow island on a grassy bank marked by the usual detritus." We were off like a shot. Thirty minutes all told to complete the ½ mile portage. This was an accomplishment as the trail rises 150 feet. Peter sniffed trail for me to the halfway mark, keeping right on it like a bloodhound when it crossed barren granite and became obscure. The trail meets a swampy creek in a soggy low spot at the top of the mountain. It was not ideal for camp George. No swimming!! We pushed on even though the light was becoming

dim. The second part of the trail takes out 500 yards upstream to the west where it begins to meander. We found a fire ring, 100 yards up the hill, overlooking a field of swamp grass and low alders.

The boys took a canoe upstream in search of rocks for the fireplace while the guide hacked out a route through some of the deadfalls around the campsite. Jon made the fireplace. Peter and Tom made bannocs. Steve and I made spaghetti. Kirk, Bear, and Rutsen helped around the fire. The mist stopped as dinner came off of the fire. But it stayed cold. Peter served up the last of the cocoa. It was (with luck) the last evening in the bush. The boys hung around the fire till just past dark.. Spirits were high. Although it did not seem possible, the long push was coming to a close and we might just reach our destination on time. The spot was damp, but magnificent all the same. Everyone retired in an upbeat mood with the bay on their minds.

August 4:

Kuujjuarapik/Wapmagoostui!!!!!!! It is just past midnight on a Monday night. We are camped on the banks The Great Whale River, fifty feet above the high tide mark. North of us the lights of the village are bright. Although street lights are standard fare for the villages on the Quebec side of the Bay it is still a little peculiar after 42 days in the bush. Overhead the aurora borealis burns in its eternal dance. Who knows how many have contemplated their flickering ebb and flow from this very spot over the centuries? The Milky Way stretches across the ink black of the southern sky. One has to see it to believe how many stars are visible in the night sky in the bush (even with the diffuse light of town in the background). The wind is blowing out on the Bay, one half mile to the west, across low dunes and a cranberry bog. The village rests on the north shore of the mouth of the river on an open plain along the base of a barren granite mountain. The barrier islands of the Manitousuk Sound are clearly visible to the north. The sun came out after a four day hiatus to treat us to a lovely lavender and orange sunset. The goal is won. The trip is done. For good old Section A.

It was chilly this morning, but warmer than the past three. The sky remained overcast. Every now and again we would get a peek at blue sky through breaks in the clouds. Steve and I were quiet over coffee this morning. The last pot of coffee in the bush is always a solemn occasion. Our only chatter consisted of a scripted, "Looks like a change in the weather pattern," each time a sliver of blue appeared above. It appeared that the wind had turned to the north. But it was not enough to clear the humidity. Our good fortune did not last. The mist was back with us before the end of breakfast.

The trail starts soggy (but not too deep). But soon thereafter it takes out up onto the bald top of the mountains that comprise the west shore of the gorge. The trail is well worn but can get obscure where it crosses the granite. The mist fell in earnest as we came out of the trees. It was like a real alpine climb. The clouds wholly enclosed the mountain top. We might as well have been at 14,000 feet. The young bucks charged ahead, eager to make the village this evening. But in their zeal they misplaced the trail while crossing a barren stretch of rock. Steve and I followed them 300 yards due west to the very top of the mountain. The trail stays well to the river side of the peak. We all put down in the mist and Steve and I conferred with the maps a bit before setting out in a fan in search of the trail. We found it where it returns to the woods at the north end of the treeless peak and blazed our way back to the gear where we found Tom, smartly, huddled under an overturned canoe against the wet.

We came back to the trail at about 1400 yards. The trail begins its steep descent back to the river just a couple of hundred yards further on. Tom and I stayed off of the official trail because we saw Kirk, before us, quickly drop to his posterior, and slide 30 yards to the bottom of the first pitch. We marked half way at the top of the drop. The mist abated revealing that the view from mid-point is excellent. I am sure, had we not been in the clouds, that our trek to the top of the mountain would have been well worth the climb as well.

I only fell twice on the way down. The trail drops back down into the woods again to a soggy flat along the river before meeting a caribou moss rise from which it drops to the river. One emerges from the forest midway between the last two falls of the gorge. The gorge is narrow here and the river rages just to the right of the trail, only 30 yards across. The trail walks 700 yards along the shore. The trick is to find the flattest path without getting too close to the river. The shore rocks make a flat shelf right along the river. In this year's water one could walk on the low shelf just five feet over the roaring gorge/channel. On several occasions I walked (or slid) on my backside to traverse treacherously slippery steep spots. Tom and I represented the rear guard. We reached the small bay below the last falls with our second loads at 11:15 a.m. There is a Cree camp on the bank above the bay. This would make the best camp for one's last night. It is a long half-day from here down to the village.

The banks are 300 to 500 feet high below the gorge. The river cuts through some solid granite mountains. The paddle to Chutes Qurtulug was a long, cold hour and a half. Two miles above the last gorge the river jogs slightly revealing an 800 foot barren granite outcropping to the northwest. It is the most foreboding sight of the whole trip. One can only infer whether or not it towers above Chutes Qurtulug (unless of course you have the guides maps in your lap). The day was cold and grey. There was a light breeze off the bay. The sweat worked up on the portage trail had long since faded to a chill. We stopped above the confluence of the Kwakwatanikapistikw River for the boys to gather up as the caravan had become a little spread out along the way. The mojo canoe was lagging behind a bit, perhaps in hopes to stretch out the last afternoon in the bush. The approach to the portage is in fast current, and blind. But it posed no real threat in this water. The corner is sharp and there is a good rip separating the left shore eddy from the main current at the end of the point. Scurry back west and hug the shore past the old gage house to the steep grassy landing at the lip of the falls. There is a canoe rack at the top of the bank that housed two 24 foot Nor'wester canoes this season (and by the looks of them every season).

We had a cold lunch before embarking on the last portage of the summer at 2 p.m. The falls are picturesque and can be glimpsed from the shore rocks 100 yards east of the portage landing. The river tumbles through a narrow pinch over a large boulder in a 15 foot shear falls. We had a slice of cheese, a piece of bannoc, and a handful of dried fruit apiece before embarking. It is ½ a mile up over the hill (just two contour lines here Steve) and back down to the water. But the fun does not stop there. The boys dropped half-loads at the small campsite 100 yards in from the river. There is a rapids below the last marked rapids. It is probably manageable along the south shore, but it was cold and we were tuckered out so we walked the extra 1000 yards. The long V-shaped ledge marked on the map is produced by a shoal that runs parallel to the current, marking off a long eddy bay where the trail meets the river. The froth of the rapids is yellow and the water muddy with the lowland clay that has finally risen to meet us.

The sun was still obscured and the temperature was cold. Other circumstances would have enticed us to put in and run out the last bit of quick water. The tide was low and going out. It is possible that high tide tempers the

bite of this chute. In any event, the waves were deep enough that the big boys would have taken a couple crosswise over the gunwales, Danny. The guide hobbled in with his last load at 4 p.m. The little stones that make up the heavy shore gravel are tough on tired feet, George! The temperature was a frigid 49 degrees by our key-chain thermometer but the guide refused to lose the opportunity for a last bath in the clear glacial waters of The Great Whale River. I waded in...all the way up to my ankles for a splash bath. The water was icy!!!

The stretch above the Chutes Qurtulug had gone slowly so we figured at least an hour down to the village. But the tide was going out. We ran several sets of shallow swifts over low tide shoals, and past tall muddy islands stranded high above the water line. Suddenly the maps looked incorrect. My judgement of our progress did not agree with the maps which showed us just around the bend from the village. Up in the distance a Cree picnic party caught sight of us and took to their Nor'wester canoe to head back to the village (perhaps to announce our arrival). On the other side of the narrows on which the Cree had been camped the village came into view two miles in the distance.

The first thing that one sees is the old fuel depot (which serves as the fresh water reservoir currently) at the southwest end of the village, way out on the sand spit that separates the harbor from the bay. The north bank appears low and sandy from the distance. Of course it is anything but low. It is 50 feet tall. Power lines come into view along the lip of the bank with the fuel depot. We enjoyed an easy paddle to the first landing, marked as the eastern "village Esquimaux" on the map.

This is the Cree side of town. There were 50 Nor'wester canoes on spruce racks along the beach of the wide sandy bay. An old timer crested the bluff as we landed. He ambled down to greet us. He enquired with an enormous Cree grin where we'd been. His english was sparse. After hearing the distance we had come he asked, "How many sleeps?" His grin only widened with the deepening sparkle in his eye each time the boys answered. He was soon joined by a middle aged gentleman on a four-wheeler (the vehicle of the north apparently) and two younger men in a pickup, one of whom I had met in Albany at a conference celebrating a paddling trip by umiak to New York City in 1994. I am sure he did not recall me though. He was quite a celebrity on that occasion. They were very interested in chatting with the boys, but not so forthcoming as to the whereabouts of the Northern Store. We discovered later that the old HBC post sits on what is now Inuit land. Perhaps this was the source of their reticence. We did learn that it was open till 7 so we were not in such a hurry as we had supposed.

We chatted a bit longer and then shipped out for the Inuit side of town. We drifted down a bit, around the next point, to the next landing. This one was marked only by a couple of ice fishing houses and a gravel four track road. Phil and I scampered up the high sand bank to see the sights, and there was the Northern Store, a little east of the landing marked "poste de traite" on the maps, which is the site of the old Hudson Bay Company store. It is back from the bank a couple hundred yards like all of the new corrugated tin Northern Stores that have gradually replaced the red-roofed and white clapboard Hudson Bay Company stores across the north since 1989. The bay was right there, less than a mile to the west. Phil and I took a quiet moment and then hollered down to our compatriots that we had arrived. Steve and I visited the chief factor at the store (actually he is now referred to as the store manager, but we still regale him with all of the old glory). The store is well stocked. It even features a basement section of lawn furniture and camping gear. The factor's name was Charles and he remembered the Mike Ketchel and Section B from their Berens River-Lake Winnipeg trip in 1995. They too had lost a canoe, so who knows what he

thought about our outfit. We had hoped to camp in his yard, which, as always, was fenced off from the local dogs. But, it was a small enclosure and he had two young daughters, so we didn't even ask. He surveyed his land with us, marking off the boundaries of company property. We usually stay with the Northern Store because it is a large creditor in the north and there tends to be less local mischief on their property. Charles was, as is always the case with employees of The Company, a truly generous individual. We opted for a spot on the bank in the lee of the assistants house. Charles said that we should expect no trouble. Despite, or perhaps, oddly, because there are two bars in town there is rarely any trouble.

We hauled the gear up from the shore and Steve went shopping for dinner. The Cree and Innu children arrived immediately. Steve is a high school teacher in an Innu village in Alaska. He was in his element. The boys found a shower and a sauna in the new gymnasium complex and were all off for a good clean. Steve and I put ours off till the morrow. After a hot dog dinner Steve and I sat out on the steps of the store and chatted with Charles between his trips home with dinner and the evenings entertainment (Disney Videos). He explained that the village was divided into three distinct municipalities: a Cree settlement of around 700 people; an Innu settlement that is a little larger; and a Hydro town of a little less than 400. The Cree and the Innu divided up the river bank into an east and west end of town. The hydro complex was an old DEW base on the north side of town. Each had its own schools and police force. The cross-wind air strip marked on both the 1:250,000 and 1:50,000 maps no longer exists. Only the north-south run is maintained. The length of the strip is explained by the old air force base. Apparently they used to fly big jets in and out of Great Whale on their way north in the late fifties and early sixties and as a result there was a fighter complement stationed here. Also, again according to local lore, the U.S. Air Force still owns the air strip and the old hangar by NATO treaty, which it maintains from a distance, under lock and key. There is an old American football field up behind the hangar, and concrete bunkers are scattered along the ocean shore and up in the mountains.

The village is nestled on a triangular, two square mile, sandy plain, between the base of the mountains, the river, and the Bay. It has housed the Hudson Bay Company since they moved south from Little Whale River in 1756. Apparently there is renewed interest in damming the river and the Cree are asking for a billion dollar settlement. This is the northern headquarters of the Hydro company so this winter they expect to host referendums on the expansion of the Quebec hydro-electric project. My understanding is that Labrador Hydro plans to put a second dam on the Churchill River just up river from Goose Bay. I would imagine at Muskrat Dam, a pinch deep in the canyon of the lower river where ice dams often last into August, but I am not sure. It appears that the La Forge project is nearing completion, which would wrap up the La Grande complex. I guess it is time for the company to look to the future. I have not heard not heard the outcome of the winter's negotiations.

Kirk and I took a stroll across the cranberry bog and the dunes to the sea to dip our toes, taste the brine, and look north to Bill of Portland Island, the southernmost island of the Manitoonuk Sound. En route we discovered the plywood and astro-turf greens of a truly Scottish golf course overlooking the sea (there is apparently a course at the air base at Goose Bay in Labrador as well). It was quite a juxtaposition, albeit northern, to the last two weeks of mountains, portages, and long evenings. But with a short step our feet were wet. We had reached the great frozen inland sea.

Epilogue: August 5, 6 and the Trip In

Steve and I slept in well past 5 a.m. this morning. At 8 a.m. we contemplated getting up to make the coffee. We had to get the canoes down to the airport so that they could go out as freight today rather than baggage tomorrow. The boys were all up without coaxing by 9 a.m. Our wood supply was short so we had Cream of Wheat instead of pancakes. At 9:30 Steve and I left the lads behind to consolidate as much as possible into 5 wannigans so that they could go out with the canoes. That left only the jewelry and Steve's wannigan behind. We wandered down to the airport. Charles had indicated that he had a freight run coming in that afternoon and we figured we could get our gear in on the deadhead return run. We found Mike Shields, an Inuit man of slight build, maybe 5' 6" tall, in his mid thirties I would guess, in his office. He is the Air Inuit freight contact. Although we had prepaid the freight run he was not surprised to have heard nothing of it yet. Particularly since we were coming down the river. He had a double door Hawker Sidley 748 arriving at 7 p.m. that was going back empty. Just what the doctor had ordered. He copied our paper work and we sent for the canoes and the gear while he prepared the waybill.

At camp the gear was only half packed which caused some concern and a flurry of activity. Charles ran us down in the Hudson Bay Store's little 10 foot cube truck. The canoes are 17 feet long. You do the math. We had to tie their stern lines to the top of the truck to ensure a smooth ride. It took two trips. When we returned to the freight bay the flight had been bumped up to 2 p.m. The early bird gets the worm. A Canadian Air Dash-8 and the Air Inuit 11 a.m. sched were on the runway as we weighed in. The boys had to secure the canoes against the wash of the propellers as the planes taxied away from the hangar. The pilots thought that that was hilarious and they were having a belly-laugh as the boys scurried about to protect the canoes. I called Christine from the airport. Some of the boys were still waiting when I poked my head out for one last look at the canoes. I guess they had mistaken our request that they stick around a bit to be sure that nothing else needed to be done for a request that they stick around until they heard otherwise. Steve and I checked out the gymnasium for a shower and a sauna after lunch. It was a treat for Steve. He is on a bi-weekly schedule for hot water at the gymnasium in his Alaskan village.

After my shower, clean of woodland dirt, I set out for a stroll up the coast to have a peek at the Manitounuk Sound. I walked out of town, past the hangar, past the public works garage, where they store the grader, the bulldozer, the backhoe, and the dumptruck that, so far as I could tell, constantly patrol the streets from about 9 a.m. to about 6 p.m., past the junkyard stacked high with about 30 years worth of cars, and out onto the dunes and low hills north of town. I cut across the cranberry bog just south of the end of the road, and made it to a point just south of the Maver Islands about 5.5 kilometers from the campsite. There are a number of camps along the road. The terrain is divided between dunes and low granite domes (50 feet high). Apparently some of the Cree and Inuit, tired of town life, have moved back out into more traditional camps here in the bush beyond town. The standard camp is comprised of a wall tent with a pot bellied stove whose chimney is fixed into place by a tall spruce pole where it rises out of the middle of the tent. Probably a cold place in the winter time. I climbed the rock hill that marks the end of town to survey the land. There is a quarry cut into the mountain northeast of the dump, but other than that low spruce and grassy cranberry bogs dominate the terrain. There is even a compound of small, white clapboard buildings perched on the ocean side of the north slope of the first hill. They looked pretty well boarded up but were well kept. They had the appearance of an old Revillion-Frere trading post competing with the Hudson Bay

Company. I never got the full skinny on who had built and who maintained them when I returned to town, so that interpretation will do for now.

Most of the boys got rides out to the dunes on four wheelers. Beyond there the road turns to a two track, but it still sports stop signs and caution markers. My understanding is that the two tracks continue far to the north but that the official road goes only about as far as I walked. On the far side of the second rock point beyond town I paused, wishing that I had brought a coke or a canteen, and took in the local scenery. Bill of Portland Island looms large. The Manitounuk Sound stretches 40 miles (as far as the eye can see really) to the north. The effect of the Laurentian Ice Sheet is readily apparent in identical westward slope, or angle of ascension, of the barrier islands and the mainland. I sat in the wind for a half an hour listening to the crash of the waves. If the August weather is like this always (which the notes of the 19th century British explorers and Hudson Bay trappers lends me to believe) it would be a long trip south to Kuujuarapik from the mouth of the Little Whale River.

I walked back along the shore to the water depot and the iniukchuk erected facing the sea from the mouth of the river. There are some seaworthy sloops pulled up on shore down there. I wondered at what they might be used for. When I got back to camp the sun was low. The boys were working on a trade with a 92 year old Cree carver who had taken up the art of the Inuit. Steven was a great friend of the lads while we were in town. Like most of the other Cree he was more interested in the boys than the guides. He took some time and taught Tom and Rutsen how to work the soapstone. Unfortunately he wanted more than the boys had for the carving. I could not tell if he thought he was being worked on the price or if he really just wanted to sell to a dealer from Montreal who apparently comes through once a year. The latter is more likely because the boys had managed to put together a decent sum. The boys settled on a better deal on a more authentic carving of an Inuit hunter from the band co-op store. The stone was better and the quality of the workmanship was better. The Inuit also had a warehouse of handi-craft to be shipped south, most of which was whale skin with the striped cream wool of Hudson Bay bunting.

A Cree man named Noah stopped by to ask where we had been. Steven was his grandfather. He showed us the old Cree portage route across the Big Bend which followed a more northern path than we chose. Two more 6+ mile portages connect Lac Fagnant with the Great Whale River by his lights. The trail runs through Lac Chinusas on the 1:250,000. They were impressed that we had found a route down to the Denys. They said we should be sure to write that one down because they did not know of anyone who had ever gone that way. So lads, that mountain creek may be territory never glimpsed by any but your eyes.

The two track we followed continues on around Lac Fagnant. It is the winter road that the Cree use to get into the bush. I guess that they do not use snow machines, but instead keep hundreds of miles of plowed two tracks open throughout the winter to get around in the bush. The whole portage route from Lac Fagnant to The Great Whale River follows that winter road. It makes sense. That way no family needs a four wheeler for the summer and a snow machine for the winter. It probably saves them money.

Steve, Bear, Russel, Kirk, and I went for coffee up by the airport after dinner. There was a television, a phone, and a bathroom. All the amenities of the city. If I recall correctly the big news was a Garth Brooks concert in Central Park. We got to see a little of the Montreal Expos game but it was a blow out so the grill chef turned to HBO. The movie was not memorable.

At the campsite Tom was hanging out with a new friend he had made in the village. The Cree gentleman wanted to know if there was work at the camp. We encouraged him to write Danny and Brooks in the off-season. The northern

lights were spectacular. We sat back and watched the show for an hour or so. It extended 180 degrees from east to west and 110 degrees north to south. It rippled red and lavender along the edges. It was the most pronounced set of curtains that I have ever seen. I returned to the tent at midnight. The boys had really settled in to the fabric of the town. They had all gotten rides up the coast this afternoon. The band office had supplied each of them with a hat and a shirt. Mike Shields was putting Peter up for the night in his house. It almost seemed a shame to go.

The wind came up strong overnight and the sky turned overcast. We got the boys up to roll at seven to save the tents. The breeze had turned, exposing our leeward side of the house to the full brunt of the gale. The sea was angry. Jimmy and I had planned a morning round on the links but were told that it was simply too windy!! We collected the boys down at the airport at about time to go. The waiting room was packed with French Canadians flying out on the Canadian Air sched that preceded us. Our flight was full, several older Cree gentleman taking up the couple of empty seats left over. Steve and I made no headway with the stewardess. She was simply one of the crew, a French Canadian brunette. I think that Steve was taken by the jumpsuit. In any event, she would have none of our mischief. Air Inuit is a little more makeshift than Air Creebec. The plane was doing double duty as a freight run so we were crammed into the back half of the fuselage. We still got a good view upstream before the clouds obscured our panoramic vista. It is quite an experience to board a plane, no matter how rough and ready, after a summer in the bush.

Yves was waiting for us at the freight hangar at La Grande. He was wearing a beard too. He and I waited for the luggage to come from the main terminal with the freight, but Steve and the boys had already unloaded it. I collected up the errant mail, and off we went to get the lads who were malingering curbside in front of the terminal with all of our gear (Yves had loaded the canoes and wannigans that had come down the day before—I guess he had arrived a day early). We drove straight through the night and arrived at Boat line Bay as the morning light was breaking in the east. Steve and Jimmy took a ride with Yves to new Liskeard to do some grocery shopping and pick up a rack of donuts. When they arrived at Tim Horton's Mike and Dana had commandeered the baker's dozen we had called in. I guess Dana thought he would get me back for ordering "his" slice of pumpkin pie at a truck stop south of Cochrane in 1993. But I wasn't there this time. The rest of us were put up in a couple of tents for a long morning nap. When Steve and Jimmy returned we piled into the canoes and raced up the lake to get our favorite campsite, "Temagami Lodge" on the old Islands of Temagami map, before the day drew on and someone else settled in. We slept off the drive all afternoon and spent the following day cleaning the outfit and preparing for the "last supper" of rump roast, mashed potatoes, and onion-cheese bannoc. A lazy day well spent on the home lake.

The next day whipped by as we waited for Mike and Dana to pass with Section B.

They passed in traditional silence, saving their greetings for the Main Dock at Devil's Island. We loaded up at 3:30, when they had finally passed out of sight to the north, and waited just south of Seal Rock, out of view of camp. I drifted out for a view of the camp and a glimpse of Section B's progress. When the flash of their paddles on the horizon disappeared behind the main dock at Keewaydin we eased up the shoreline, and then pulled out into view, taking the last two miles five abreast with a good boost from a sturdy tailwind. The seas were a little rough but that last paddle always zips by. And before we knew it we were surrounded by Danny, Brooks, 7/7, a sea of parents, and the Keewaydin family,

the canoes were on the Lodge racks, and we were home!

(Footnotes)

* Keewaydin Camp's Ltd. Is a wilderness canoeing camp located in Temagami, Ontario. Without their trust and support this tale could never have been told.

* Keewaydin camp runs a family resort on Lake Temagami in Ontario called Ojibway of Keewaydin.

* Rod Cox is a Keewaydin legend. He worked for the camp from 1934 through some time in the mid 1980's, taking years off only during the Second World War. He was a huge man (and still is). There is a famous photo of him carrying two young campers on top of his wannigan.

