



NORTHERN TIER NATIONAL HIGH ADVENTURE

REFLECTIONS

— CHARLES L. SOMMERS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, INC. —



Largest Volunteer Turn-Out Ever for Work Week and Staff Training

by Dick Shank and Mike Holdgrafer



Stockade Post-Setting Crew (L-R): Edward "EB" Hunter, Jack Olson, Dennis LaFollette, Jon Dahl, Dave Sheffield and Dick Shank

Work Week Projects

From Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, Chapter Two, 1876.

Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden. Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank; repeated the operation; did it again; compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence, and sat down on a tree-box discouraged.

In one respect, applying a water-based epoxy stain on the Lodge and then on the re-located gate and tower, together with the stockade, was reminiscent of the task confronting Tom Sawyer. But, any other similarity ended there. In fact, had Mark Twain's fictional character enjoyed the help of this year's stalwart group of volunteers, his dilemma may have been finding the next task for this hard-working group to undertake.

The first project tackled by part of this year's volunteers was the Lodge. **Al Person** (1962-66) arrived from Bismarck, North Dakota to find **Rolland White** (1963, 1964 & 1967) from Hot Springs,

Arkansas, and they tackled the remaining five windows in the Lodge to strip loosened varnish and re-furbish each of the windows. Rolland had completed eighty hours of wilderness first responder training in Winona before arriving at the Base. Al and Rolland were helped by **Bob Rench** (1962-65), who, like Rolland, has pitched in as a volunteer the past few summers.

It was just the beginning of volunteers arriving to help as **Dick Shank** (NT Committee 1984-present), SAA director, coordinated the effort of this industrious group. **Dave Sheffield** (Advisor 1999 & 2000), joined the effort from Oxford, Georgia (Dave's son,

Joe, worked at the Base from 2001-2003). Progressing from sanding, glazing replaced glass and re-varnishing interior and exterior surfaces, the effort was re-directed to filling upward facing log checks with a special caulk and coating the exterior with an epoxy stain. Re-sealing the surface had been recommended every five years by the log building restoration company that refurbished the exterior five springs earlier. Part of the effort involved removing older caulk installed over fifteen years ago in some of the vertical checks that lacked elastomeric qualities and had
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REFLECTIONS

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Please submit photos in
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**DEADLINE for next issue:
NOW.**

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Northbound Towboat Along the Great River Road

Editor's Campsite – Hol-Ry

by Mike Holdgrafer

I pulled away from the Base right after breakfast on Saturday, June 11th. I was joined by my daughters, Nicole, age 9, and Natalie, age 6. The night before, Nicole had reeled in a smallmouth bass from the dock on Moose Lake while SAA members who had volunteered for the work week and staff training were enjoying refreshments and socializing at the GDL (Grand Dowling Lodge). It is amazing what catching one fish does for a child. At the same time, her younger sister had abandoned her leech on a bobber rig after about ten minutes on the dock without a bite. The concept of patience still eludes her.

It was 59 degrees as we left that morning and I imagined that in typical fashion the temperature would only climb into the mid-90s before we returned to Tulsa the following day. I never look forward to seeing the temperature rise as I get further from the Northwoods. By diverting our route to eastern Iowa so I could stop overnight and sort through some of my father's possessions, I hoped to avoid the heat for another day.

I always enjoyed driving "The Great River Road" from Hastings, Minnesota to Clinton, Iowa through towns like Red Wing, Lake City and La Crosse. Between the speed

zones in towns, stops for photos and stopping at DQs, I soon remembered it was not the fastest route back. The scenery of limestone bluffs and the "Mighty Mississippi" more than compensated for the added time. Plus, my daughters were excited to see black and white Holstein dairy cows as we rolled up and down the hills of southwest Wisconsin. By the time we pulled into Clinton, the temperature had only warmed to 63 degrees. The cool spring was stubbornly hanging around the Midwest and I was thankful for the extension.

It felt good to be driving the Great River Road. The ride brought back memories of coming home from college, throwing my gear together and heading to the Base; it was as if the Northwoods would not be there if I did not hurry. Then, with a definite rush to get back to college when classes had already started, I would reverse my course in August. All of us who worked at the Base had a similar experience. There was the anticipation of heading to the Base, whether you car-pooled with another Charlie Guide from Ohio; you took a bus from Missouri or you flew into Duluth from Florida. The other experience, among many we shared, was walking through the parking

lot and looking at the diversity of license plates on staff vehicles from across the U.S., as well as the bumper stickers and condition of the vehicles. I did this several times this past training session walking to and from the shop. Not much has changed in that respect over the decades; no two staff vehicles were the same.

Then again, no two Charlie Guides are the same. Each of us brought different skills and knowledge to the Base; skills and knowledge we shared with each crew while on the water. This diversity is what has made the Northern Tier High Adventure Program successful for almost ninety years. The exposure to this diversity made each of us a better Charlie Guide.

People often ask why I spend a portion of my vacation time in Minnesota in early June instead of heading to someplace like the white sand beaches of Destin. Standing in shorts and t-shirts, they shudder when I tell them about frost warnings, coats and black flies. Explaining to them that at night you can see the Milky Way while listening to the tremolo of the loon, watch and listen to Bald Eagles during the day or stand under a white pine while the breeze rustles through the needles, falls on semi-interested ears. When I go further and try to explain that I am working with friends on restoring a historic building and that I help instruct seasonal staff, I quickly sense that this is beyond their continuing interest. I will not even touch upon explaining the enjoyment in sitting around and knocking back a cold one while sharing stories from past adventures. But, I understand and that is okay.

The one thing that I do share with those that truly take an interest is that I feel younger when I am surrounded by the staff and other volunteers. For whatever reason, I come

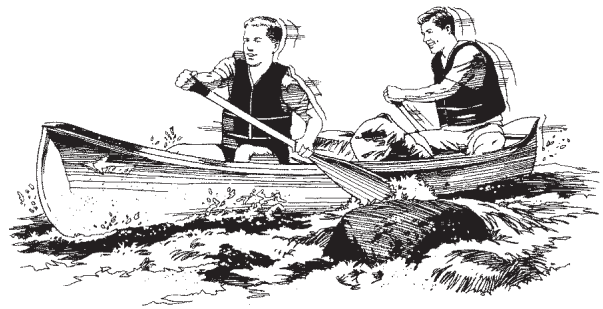
back from the Northern Tier with that perspective. It is comparable, some friends say, to retiring to a college town. Somehow, energy is emanated from these dynamic, young people and for lack of more descriptive terms, it is contagious and refreshing. I think that this spirit also recharges the other volunteers who come back to spend time at the Base. At the same time, as Owen Gibbs knows having spent some significant time working on Base the past few years, you become a welcomed part of their world despite the fact you may be an old fart. Whatever it may be, it can be fun.

Before I sign off on this column, I hope you take some time this summer and pull out your maps of trips you took or dreamed to take. I spent some time recently helping a close friend prepare for a BWCAW canoe trip. Most of their group were complete novices, so trying to tell them about wet-footing was beyond all comprehension. Besides, they were going to be using an outfitter's canoes and whether the canoes lost a little aluminum was their issue.

I pulled together information I had about fishing, portaging, etc. I shared information about pictographs on the Basswood River with him and dug out some slides of prior trips. The best part of this little exercise was that late one night when everyone was asleep, I pulled out my maps and covered the kitchen island with them, recounting each trip and the notes I made on the maps. I poured over the maps, considering a trip with my daughters in the near future. It was 10:30 p.m. Outside, the temperature was 91 degrees. In my mind, I was standing somewhere on the Falls Chain.

Find some time to get to Canoe Country, even if it's in your mind while pouring over maps. It's never too late.

— Red-Eye, Mike ■



President's Canoe

by Mike Holdgrafer

These are exciting times to be associated with the Northern Tier High Adventure Program. In late May, the Sandy Bridges Program Center came on-line. Overnight, the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base was transformed with the opening of this new program facility. In some respects its opening is not unlike the opening of the Lodge in 1942, when it housed all operations before functions found new homes across the Base. The new Sandy Bridges Program Center not only adds the capability to serve 250 people at one setting, but it houses a new Trading Post with adequate storage, a Voyageur's Sweet Shop and conference rooms. It is likely the most significant structure built on the Base since the Lodge, but that's my personal perspective and I leave it to you to decide for yourself when you get the chance to see it. With that, I'll switch sides of the canoe and keep paddling on another topic.

At last year's annual meeting, I spoke about member benefits and I challenged your Board to expand upon the benefits provided to members. In recent years, we have collaborated with The Philmont Staff Association (PSA) to provide opportunities for SAA members to take treks at Philmont and for PSA members to join us on canoe trips in the BWCAW. Earlier this year, SAA members participated in the first sailing adventure

with the Florida Sea Base and Friends Association which **Jack Olson** (1994, 2001) documented in an accompanying article. Being a SAA member allows you to access the Base and rent its equipment, and from time-to-time, we have offered shirts to our members and greeting cards. I know I'm leaving out some things, but you get the point.

Since last fall, director and vice president, Chuck Rose, has been working on discounted publications for our members while Alex Nepple, director and secretary, has been working on an affinity program to get discounted lodging and car rentals. We continue to work on other benefits and solicit your ideas.

Foremost among the tangible benefits is *Reflections*.

By now, you may have heard we decided to cease printing and mailing *Reflections* to non-members. Originally, the Board decided to cease printing and mailing *Reflections* after this issue, but upon receipt of information regarding printing expenses that was received after the June 8th meeting, the decision was accelerated. I think this decision merits some explanation, as it was not one taken in haste or without thorough consideration.

Since *Reflections* was first published, it has been distributed to all former staff regardless of whether a former staff member was a member (continued on next page)

President's Canoe *cont'd.*

(continued from page 3)

of the SAA. Initially, and for many years thereafter, the hope was that by getting Association news out to everyone, it would create interest among non-members to join. We are reasonably certain some former staff likely joined because of this, while many others remained non-members.

Long before I became president, there have been discussions about whether we should continue to circulate *Reflections* to non-members. Now and again, the discussions have also included whether we should go "digital" completely.

Reflections has also evolved over the years. Today's glossy color publication, which is really a magazine, is printed and mailed from Houston by Wright's Printing. For many years, *Reflections* was a black ink and parchment-colored newsletter printed by Rodger's Printing in Ely. Mailing labels were printed on someone's personal computer and then a band of alumni gathered for a label-affixing party. The costs of *Reflections* have been historically adsorbed by volunteers through time, treasure and talent. But, in upgrading the quality of *Reflections*, the costs to print and mail it have gone up and we could not expect that these costs would be covered by donors in perpetuity.

On June 8th, the Board met and one of the topics discussed was member benefits. But, it is hard to discuss member benefits without discussing membership, expenses and revenues. Currently, our membership has peaked and even retreated slightly. It seems reasonable to believe that this will reverse itself. If you look at the staff numbers from the mid-1990s to today, in general we have seen larger numbers of staff each year. We will eventually see more of these staff join our Associa-

tion as they reconnect to their youth. Generally, there is a lag between a person's association with some group in their younger days and then later joining an alumni association related to that group when years older. I am sure there is some name for this, but absent a name we know this happens. We are not going to wait for this natural increase and instead we are targeting the younger generations to join early. More emphasis will be upon social networking to communicate more broadly and more promptly to our members.

Crossing Portages is our major solicitation that funds our operating budget, other than some miscellaneous revenue derived from conservative investments managed by Nigel Cooper, our treasurer. We know we launched Crossing Portages during a time when the U.S. economy, depending upon your personal point of view, is sluggish. The 3-year Crossing Portages campaign; however, is doing okay, but we would like to see it do better. When haven't you heard that from a fundraising effort? To everyone who has participated so far, whether you are a first-time giver or you have participated before, a heartfelt "Thank You" is in order.

We are continuing our efforts to attract more first-time participants to the Crossing Portages campaign. For example, scholarships have been funded since 1998. One of our immediate tasks will be to reach back to recipients of scholarships and encourage them to "give back" to Crossing Portages for the help they received many years ago. We understand recent recipients are going through the phase of settling their lives and careers, but for scholarship recipients in the early years of this program we trust they are in the position to now lend some

financial support. It makes sense for an Association like ours that is built upon a legacy of older generations reaching back to support younger generations. Over time, the mantle of responsibility is passed to the next generation to ensure future success.

As to expenses, Nigel, the Board and I are keeping a watchful eye on expenses and revenues. One challenge is that our support of staff incentives has increased simply due to the larger staffs. This trend will likely continue. This summer, Northern Tier will employ over 240 seasonal staff. In addition to our annual program support provided to staff, next year, it is our intention to re-publish *A Charlie's Guide*, which is the book filled with information as to lakes, campsites, cultural and historical points of interest, etc. In other words, it replaces the map in the Teepee and passes along knowledge gathered over the ages to new generations of Charlie Guides. I don't know what this cost will be, but if someone reading this wants to discuss and possibly support this very beneficial program, email me at meholdgrafer@cox.net. Otherwise, it will be funded from our general operating fund.

Where we see opportunities to reduce expenses we will discuss the benefits, tangible and intangible, and proceed accordingly. This brings me back to *Reflections*.

Shortly after our June 8th meeting, Nigel emailed me and told me that after receiving our printer's invoice for *Reflections*, the cost to print and mail was approximately \$1.55 per issue. Plus, this cost did not include the graphic artist's layout expenses. We printed 1,934 copies of *Reflections* and mailed almost all of the printed editions. Our current membership numbers roughly 450 members from

regular to life members, so all domestic (U.S.) members who had not opted for delivery of an electronic version were mailed a copy. Another 100 copies were mailed as "complimentary" editions (Please note we will be reviewing this list to shorten it or transfer it to all-electronic distribution). Knowing we kept some copies as extras, we mailed close to 1,380 copies to non-members. If we double this for two issues per a year, without adding in the layout costs, sending *Reflections* to non-members cost us close to \$4,300 in total or \$3.10 for two issues. This may not seem like a lot of money, but as an expense item to the SAA, it is.

In the end, the decision was simple especially since non-members can still go our website and either read or download a copy to read. As to our members, I felt you were owed an explanation as to this decision.

I leave you with one final thought that my predecessors have stressed before. Although I have spent some time discussing our finances, the strength of every volunteer organization is found in its members. Each of us brings value to our Association in our own way and this value is what makes us better. For some, writing a check is easier. For others, it is providing time or personal talent, or even connecting our Association to resources that can help make us better. How you elect to participate is not important, as long as you participate. Long ago, someone told me it is not the pounds that make a difference when packing gear, it is the ounces that make up the pounds. In the same way, it is the little things that our members contribute that make us, in the whole, stronger. Is there some little thing you can do to make our Association better? – Mike ■

Largest Volunteer Turn-Out *cont'd.*

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failed, but yet was nasty to remove when it got stuck on the sole of a shoe.

Paul Carter (1993) joined the effort and brought along three of his sons, **Eli**, **Blake** and **Blaine**, from Fairview, Missouri. Before arriving at the Base, Paul and his sons had volunteered in tornado-ravaged Joplin, Missouri. **Jon Dahl** (1968-69) found his way back to the Base after volunteering his efforts a few years earlier. The work crew was rounded out by **Dennis LaFollette** (1975-76) who drove in daily from Babbitt, Minnesota, and **Jack Olson** (1994 & 2001) from the Upper Peninsula (See Jack's article from the Sea Base trek).

As varnish dried between coats, part of the crew found themselves coating the exterior of the Lodge while others headed to the old Dining Hall to inventory artifacts and move them to either storage or a new home. For those of you who remember the council shoulder patch and Order of the Arrow Lodge flap displays, these migrated down to the Bay Post and were quickly installed by the intrepid work crew.

While these efforts were underway, Low Impact Excavators of Ely loaded the stockade gate and tower onto a Lowboy trailer and moved it up to its new home in the crew parking lot, where it was carefully lifted and the positioned on footers. At some point in time, the suggestion was made that perhaps the alumni could build the stockade wall that screens part of the entrance. One-half day later, ten-foot vertical posts were buried into the ground. By noon the following day, stockade posts were affixed to horizontal

runners and the stockade was soon soaking up a coat of epoxy stain. Varnish was slapped onto windows in the Lodge one last time before the work crew returned to re-hang

unexpectedly. As it turns out, Bob is an expert when it comes to Peak 1 stoves and has even built tools to expedite repairs. As an aside, thanks to **Don Lee** (2008-present), who has

and cooking over other stoves. Lesson learned Don.

Just up the road from the Lodge was **Owen Gibbs** (1967-70, 2008 to present), who was busy repairing canoes for a few weeks until he headed back to Texas.

It was an outstanding team effort by everyone involved. Not only was the Lodge work completed while allowing first-night crews to use the main room for orientation, but the stockade gate and tower project went from an idea to completion within days, along with preserving various items and artifacts from the Dining Hall. Thank you, everyone, for your time and effort to make this work week the best one ever!

Seasonal Staff Training

Dick Shank and **Kimberly Renner Bielawski** (1978-85) kicked-off the volunteer effort for staff training by instructing wilderness first aid, while SAA director and vice president **Chuck Rose** (1980-85, 1987-89), lent a hand with kayak instruction. But even before that, **Butch Diesslin** (too many years to list), had pitched in and helped review and provide comments as to the on-the-water training manual.

Christmas came on June 9th and was held in the new Sandy Bridges Program Center. As is customary, Butch led this effort. After all of the alumni members present for both training and work week were introduced, the elves helped Butch dispense canoe paddles, embroidered guide packs and other recognitions to returning staff. More importantly, Chuck and others spoke about the mission of the SAA and the importance of current staff in joining when they embark on careers apart from (continued on next page)



Jon Dahl installing the Council Shoulder Patch display



Paul Carter



Blaine Carter



Dick Shank caulking log checks



Al Person applying epoxy stain

the hardware and windows.

Meanwhile, Bob Rench also split a portion of his time refurbishing Coleman Peak 1 stoves before he had to leave

been the Bay Post and Commissary Manager the past several years and explained the difference between boiling water on some types of stoves



Fred Hodge teaching flycasting



Bill Pepito demonstrates fly knot tying



Dennis LaFollette and Paul Carter



Jack Olson setting a stockade post



Blake Carter staining the stockade



Jon Dahl stroking on stain



Eli Carter armed with a brush

Largest Volunteer Turn-Out *cont'd.*

(continued from page 5)

the Northern Tier. Dick also spoke about the Scholarship Program on behalf of **Mike McMahon** (1962-66), who oversees the Scholarship Program and had driven up from the Cities to encourage participation but unfortunately took ill.

The next day kicked-off a series of seminars hosted by SAA members. In years past, it was a challenge to coordinate the schedule of courses and match them to resources such as meeting rooms and technology. Plus, getting from one seminar to another could be hassle depending upon where the last seminar was held and where the next one started. But, with the new Sandy Bridges Program Center, training became more centralized between the Lodge and the Program Center.

Chris Bursch (Okpik Advisor 2005-06), with over fifty years' of outdoors' experience, conducted four different sessions: storm proofing camp against Canoe Country's weather, "stolen" tricks that work in the woods, and advanced fire starting. The fourth session was on hammock camping and more than a few Charlie Guides used to employ one-man hammocks. Perhaps this will resurrect a faded technique. Chris also joined Butch for a couple nights in the BWCAW following the seminar day.

We already mentioned Don Lee, but his wife **Sandra Lee**, a master birder, joined **Carol Dowling** (Kevin Dowling's wife and, perhaps more importantly, the person who administers our Triple Crown Award Program), to lead a group of staff on a hike through

the Northwoods to identify birds by eye and ear. After all, there are more than bald eagles and common loons on the trail. Sticking with the nature theme, Dick, Sandra and Carol led two portage trail nature hikes to Blackstone and Secret Lakes, with Dick sharing his years of Northwoods' experience as a researcher. Dick, as the Northern Tier medical officer, also performed a number of physicals and helped evaluate several medical conditions for staff and crews.

It's always good to see **Terry Schocke** (1997-2007), former Director of Programs, who helped instruct advanced paddling strokes. He was joined by **Tom Nolz**, a volunteer from St. Paul who helps Dick Shank instruct an annual training day in the Cities for crews headed to the Northern Tier (there will be an article on this someday as many SAA members help with this training each May). Although not present in person, **Mike Chichanowski**, SAA Member and owner of Wenonah Canoe Co., loaned a handful of his team to also help instruct racing strokes, while Butch balanced the session and taught advanced trek strokes. Butch also led a seminar to help interpreters understand North Country weather patterns. Speaking of weather, the alumni experienced unseasonal heat for a few days which was followed by more seasonal Northwoods' weather during their stay, including a few frosty mornings.

Associate Professor Rose returned to the Base following his son's graduation from high school to instruct interpreters as to lake ecology and water quality. He

was joined by **Derrick Passe**, Project Coordinator for the Kawishiwi Watershed Protection Plan. Although not SAA members (yet), **Fred Hodge** and **Bill Pepito**, members of the BSA Fishing Task Force, returned from Illinois and led an introductory session on fly-casting, followed by flytying and knots, with an open house all day to learn about flyfishing. Yep, times have changed and they caught a number of smallmouth from the water-front using a leech pattern fly. In fact, one nice three to three and one-half pound smallie made it to the shore lunch session, where **Mike Holdgrafer** (1977-82, 1990-present) and Rolland taught interpreters how to clean fish and different ways to prepare them, including a few tricks and a little lore. Mike also presented a seminar on the geology of canoe country and the continental sheet ices that transformed it into lake country. He also instructed a session on the northern lights, both the lore and science behind them, with help from Butch on maximizing a crew's night sky experience.

Karl Huemiller (2004-08), SAA director, escaped from Minneapolis to instruct a hands' on session with interpreters as to advanced baking tips. Karl's brother, **Erik**, and their sister, **Adel**, are returning interpreters this season. **Dianne Rench**, joined her husband **Allen Rench** (1975-1979), former SAA president and current director, and drove up from Rochester, Minnesota. Donned in voyageur apparel, Dianne taught a couple sessions on paddle brands and next year she will work with interpreters and help them transform ideas into actual paddle art. While she was off talking about the history of paddle brands and

striving to maintain this tradition, Allen was working with **Nigel Cooper** (1977, 1979-80), founding treasurer of the SAA, in teaching guide tips to this year's staff in the Program Center. Nigel's son, **Collin**, a second-year staff member, was in the audience of one session. More important from a historic standpoint, Collin was going to use Nigel's Seliga this summer, which may be something the Base has not truly seen from an interpreter for decades.

Finally, Rolland did his best to inject the spirit of northern adventure into the souls of some of the staff, presenting a session on Robert Service and his poems about the struggle between man and the harsh wilderness they encountered. Coupled with the pamphlet from The Listening Point Foundation presented to the staff the prior night (and coordinated by Chuck), it is hoped the interpreters will pass along some of these wilderness writings to their crews this summer.

Butch took volunteers to Basswood on two fishing expeditions, and was joined by Nigel and his boat on the second trip, a day where the temperature went from short sleeves in the early morning to coats by 5:00 p.m. Rolland managed to catch a nice 28-inch walleye on Basswood during the first trip, but before Al could snap a photo, the walleye slipped from Rolland's hands and is now smiling from somewhere on a reef.

On Friday night, everyone gathered at the GDL (Grand Dowling Lodge) for beverages and a hearty meal catered from Ely Northland Market. Designed specifically for meetings and social gatherings (and completed through the generosity of NT Committee members **Sparky**



Butch Diesslin after instructing paddling



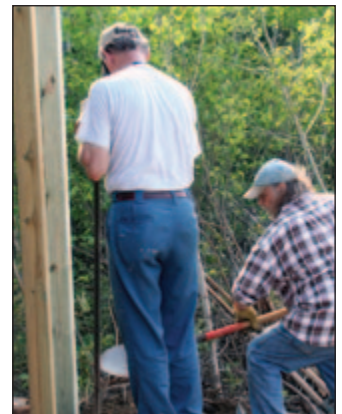
Dave Sheffield coating dry timbers



Dennis LaFollette working on stockade



Rolland White working on stockade



Setting stockade posts

Duroe and Bill Stark), the lower level of the General Manager's residence was the perfect setting to wind-down a fantastic effort by all of the volunteers. Thank you, everyone, for lending a hand!

P.S. Staff training and work

week run concurrently from June 1 to June 10. If you are interested in being a part of the 2012 team, write this on your calendar or enter it into Outlook, now! If we did not get a photo of you this year, we will try next year! ■

Another First for Alumni: Florida Sea Base High Adventure

by Jack Olson (1994, 2001)

In early February, alumni of the BSA's High Adventure Bases gathered at the Florida Sea Base for a first-ever joint alumni associations' cruise. There were twenty-six participants; twenty-one Scouters and five Scouts. That was enough to crew four boats.

The prelude to the trip was an adventure in itself! Because of a severe winter storm just days before travel was iffy, missed connections and delays were the norm. But, everyone made it, albeit by mere minutes before check-in time. Participants came from fifteen states and as far away as Washington.

First on the agenda was a swim check and the issue of snorkel gear. No one had to be fished out, but being an old Navy man, I never thought I would be able to swim ten miles to shore. I did think I would always be hanging on for dear life and not falling overboard.

Our personal gear had to fit in a 12x12x24 inches mesh bag which was stowed below decks in lockers (closets) and corners of compartments (rooms). The kind captain had stowed food items earlier in the galley (kitchen).

I say "kind" with tongue in cheek since **Captain Brian** had a sticker above the ladder (stairway) which asked, "Have You Flogged Your Crew Today?" Actually, he was The Best! He was well prepared with fishing lures and poles (It wasn't his fault a whale took the lure and broke the pole.). He did an excellent job preparing and cooking the fish **Lee Huck-**



The Florida Sea Base Trek Fleet

step, Paul Grasse and Mike Wolfe provided. The running gear (things to make the boat go) was always in great shape. He even had Duct Tape and WD-40! But, the water was rationed, lights had to be used only when needed and we did manage to break his head (water closet).

Without a doubt, the most exciting event on our boat *Misty Shoals* was when the first fish was being reeled in. As it turned out, we shared the big King Mackerel with a shark. Lee Huckstep was fighting valiantly, smiling broadly and reeling in like mad when some one yelled, "You have two fish!" The problem was explained shortly when the Mackerel was hauled aboard. There were three bite marks but the fourth one was effective; more than half the fish was missing. Much discussion ensued to decide the original size. We concluded the original fish was over fifty inches, but

we still had enough for supper.

Three of the four boats set course for Marathon where we would visit Big Munson Island, a deserted island which is the site of the Boy Scout "Out Island Adventure" camping program. After we waded ashore, we did a short but effective service project, picking up trash which the tides had left on the beach and setting up two camp sites. Lunch followed with a guided tour to view mangroves, a ginkgo and even a poison tree. Interesting King Crab shells were along the beach together with chunks of fossilized coral. There is no fresh water on the island, so camping is a challenge, especially in the hot summer months. The Out Island Adventure is supported by small boats from the new Brinton Environmental Center where we went to enjoy a shower in actual freshwater.

Along our course there were several coral reefs where

snorkeling was the order of the day. Proof of the beauty of these reefs with their plant life and fish can be seen in the underwater photos taken by Mike Wolfe, our youngest crew member and the only one to contact the business-end of a Portuguese man-of-war. They seemed to be most numerous where the reef was the most beautiful.

We have all heard the urgent call, "Is there a Doctor in the house?" Twice, **Dick Shank** came running when I fell, both times below decks. Particular care must be taken when the boat is rolling because of a distant storm causing 4-foot swells. Slippery decks (the floor) create a hazard also. They did not make anything flat on these vessels, so it is easy to take a tumble. Other than my falls and a few cuts, bruises and one sting, we let the Doctor enjoy the excursion.

Personally, the most satisfying part of the adventure was when sails were set, the engine was off, and we were moving only by wind power and the skill of the helmsman. Truly, an experience we shared with seafarers from the distant past.

The adventure was capped by a luau the final evening. We enjoyed a fine meal of crab meat followed by a brief ceremony conducted by **Paul Beal**, the general Manager. Crew photos followed with each captain. Seven of the crew received the Triple Crown Award which was originated by the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association and is earned by participating ... on trails, trips, and treks at



Jack Olson takes the wheel



Heading upwind



Lee Huckstep's shark-ravaged mackerel

Northern Tier National High Adventure Bases, Philmont & Florida Sea Base.” (See quote from PSA *High Country* below.)

I went from wearing shorts, a Tee shirt and no shoes to shoveling a foot of snow to get to our home two days later. Quite a change in location! But, I'll keep the memories of the trip for a lifetime. Thanks, fellow crew members and Captain Brian!

From Philmont's *High Country* by Lee Huckstep, April, 2011 issue:

Sea Base General Manager Paul Beal presided over a ceremony in which 7 sailors were presented the Triple Crown Award – the award

*given to persons who have earned a participant's patch at all three of the BSA's High Adventure bases. Before presenting the award, Paul noted that the very first Triple Crown award had been presented at the Sea Base by Paul's predecessor; Sam Wampler, the Sea Base founder. Receiving the award at the place where it all began were **Richard Wertz, Lee Huckstep, Jim Lynch, Randy Saunders, Dave Romack, Steve Aguirre and Jack Olson.***

Sommers Alumni Association members attending were **Kimberly Renner Bielawski, Eric Peterson, Lee Huckstep, Dick Shank, Randy Howerton and Jack Olson.** ■

We Lost a Recently Found Friend

by Allen Rench

If you had the fortune of knowing Tom Widney while he was a Charlie Guide from 1969 to 1971, you would have experienced a young man with a passion for life, adventure and people, and a deep and abiding love for the outdoors. This is what drove him to the North from his native home of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. During the summer of 1971 he was in a tragic automobile accident on the Fernberg Road. It left him an incomplete quadriplegic. He only had limited use of his arms. He spent his first year after the accident at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He was given the prognosis that he would never again be seated in a canoe holding a paddle in his hands, feel the cool of the water on his feet or the weight of the canoe on his shoulders, but only to travel by wheelchair with the aid from others.

As a staff member in the 1970s, I became aware of Tom and his story and carried it with me for decades. Little did I realize that almost forty years later I would have the opportunity to meet and talk with Tom over a cup of coffee and invite him to be the keynote speaker at our 2010 Rendezvous. I was encouraged by Paul Reitemeier to contact Tom to see if he would be interested in speaking. Paul reconnected with Tom through Facebook. He was amazed to discover how Tom had managed to jump back into life and not listen to the world's view of how a handicapped person is to behave and live. You see, Tom realized that he could enjoy all that life had to offer. He had

to approach it in a different way. Tom used the help of his close and dedicated friends to supplement his determination. From his weakness he developed strengths that I still to this day only dream about.

I called Tom in February of last year and wanted to see if he would be interested in being our guest. I wondered if he would accept. I wondered if he might have animosity about the past or the events surrounding his accident. I wondered how Tom might feel about coming back to the Base after such a long time and passing the place of the accident. Once we started talking it was like he had never left the Base. His memories came flooding back. You could feel through his words he was paddling down Moose Lake to Prairie Portage.

Soon, the conversation turned to what he had been doing in the recent years. He kayaked, sailed, canoed, raced hand crank wheelchairs; was an advocate for Wilderness Inquiry and was a motivational speaker. He paddled in the Northwest Territories, Costa Rica, on the Grass River in Manitoba, the San Juan River and many other places, some on his own.

I greeted Tom in the parking lot last September. I was immediately taken back by what a down-to-earth man he was. His wheelchair was a testimony to his travels; the armrest padding taped and re-taped into place. You could just feel he was not a person that would allow circumstances to dictate his *(continued on next page)*

We Lost a Recently Found Friend *cont'd.*



Tom Widney – 1970

(continued from page 9)
existence and he would not allow himself the privilege of self-pity. You could see that there was a real joy in his eyes about his return to his Northern home. There was also a sense of relief because it was not long before he was greeted and reunited with some of his friends. Soon, Tom and friends continued conversations that had been put on hold long ago.

In the afternoon it was time to prepare for the banquet. In the evening when Tom came to the stage all went silent. He started a long selection of slides of his many adventures. He spoke about many of them but he was not there to talk about all those magnificent images. He came there to teach; not in an intentional or overt way,

but with the quiet touch of his experiences and insights. He showed us how to rethink life in the face of adversity, how to always look forward to strive and to achieve. Through his life and experiences he taught us how to live life more fully. Most importantly he taught us how to share our lives.

If you had the fortune of knowing Tom Widney after 1971, you would have experienced a wiser and stronger man, a man with a sustained passion for life, adventure and people, with a deep and abiding love for the out-of-doors and for his God.

Tom Widney passed May 17, 2011 from complications due to stomach cancer. Those who he personally touched are forever changed. ■



Tom Widney – 2010 Rendezvous



Adaptive Adventurer



Bryan Patterson



Tricia Anklan



Jacob McIntosh



Matt Hall

Northern Tier Seasonal Staff Scholarships for 2010

by Mike Holdgrafer

This past year, the SAA awarded sixteen scholarships to Northern Tier seasonal staff. Initially developed in conjunction with the Northern Tier Committee, the intent of the scholarship program is to encourage retention of seasonal staff, season-over-season, with the understanding that experienced staff enhance the program for participants and share their own experiences with younger staff. Since 1998, \$247,500 has been distributed to two hundred ninety-five seasonal staff.

Each staff member is eligible to receive \$1,000 for each season completed after the second year of service at Northern Tier, up to a maximum of \$3,000 during their career. There are currently six endowed scholarships. Funding of the scholarship program arises from three sources: investment income, the Triple Crown Program and individuals who dedicate their Crossing Portages donation to the scholarship program.

In 2010, the first Clifford J. Hanson Memorial Scholarship was awarded to **Bryan Patterson**, Chief Outfitter, who has served on the staff for four years and currently is working on the 2011 staff. Bryan was also the recipient of the 2009 Terry J. Wall Scholarship. Named for Cliff Hanson (See *Reflections* Vol. 18 #2, Sum-

mer-Fall 2010), who as Base Director provided dedicated and distinguished service to participants, staff and the programs of Northern Tier, this scholarship recognizes Bryan for his exemplary service.

The Christopher D. Breen Memorial Scholarship is awarded to the seasonal staff member who embodies the “can do attitude” and “service to scouts” that was the legacy of Chris. The selection is made annually by the professional staff of the Northern Tier High Adventure Program from staff members applying for the seasonal staff scholarships. **Patricia (Tricia) Anklan** was awarded the 2010 Chris Breen Memorial Scholarship.

The Erickson Memorial Scholarship recognizes an employee who has worked in a base-staff position, gone “above and beyond” expectations in support and service to Northern Tier attendees, demonstrated leadership to the program and has exhibited a strong work ethic. **Jacob McIntosh**, Commissary Director, is the recipient for the past year of this scholarship and is on the 2011 staff.

Dr. Terry J. Wall, who participated in the Northern Tier Program in 1970 as a Scout, as well as several times as an advisor from 1981 to 1995, established the Terry J. Wall Scholarship. This scholarship



Paul Narr



Nadia Hassler

is awarded to an Eagle Scout each year on the Northern Tier staff who exemplifies the ideals of being an Eagle Scout. The recipient is selected by the professional staff. The 2010 Terry J. Wall Scholarship was awarded to **Matthew Hall**, OA Foreman.

The David Hyink Scholarship recognizes David's outstanding service as a founding member and first president of the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association. The hallmark of this scholarship is outstanding service and in 2010, **Paul Narr**, Brigade Leader, was recognized by this scholarship for his exceptional service.

Butch Diesslin, a founding member and first secretary of the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, was recognized with an endowed scholarship in his name sev-

eral years ago. The scholarship is awarded to a Northern Tier staff member who exemplifies outstanding service. The 2010 Butch Diesslin Scholarship was awarded to **Nadia Hassler**, Brigade Leader, for her outstanding service to the Northern Tier.

Second-year staff members who received \$1,000 scholarships are: **Patricia Anklan, Andy Folsom, Matthew Hall, Matthew Kaney, Paul Landers, Seth Marple, Jacob McIntosh, Christopher Rollins and Faye Tilley.**

Third-year staff members who received \$1,000 scholarships are: **Drew Augustyn** (this season's Chief Interpreter), **Leo Brett, Corynne McCathie, and Paul Narr.**

Staff members who have worked at Northern Tier for four or more years and received \$1,000 are: **John Duke, Nadia Hassler and Bryan Patterson.**

Congratulations to last year's recipients!

Applications, including transcripts and essays, for 2011 are due no later than August 31, 2011. ■

Did You Know?

That the middle name of **Charles L. Sommers** was "Leissring?" Charles Leissring Sommers (1870-1964) was born outside of Minnesota to George Sommers (1823-1899), who was born in Altoona, Denmark, and Amalie Stern Sommers (1840-1922), who was born in Markbreit, Germany. He had six siblings. With his wife wife, **Rosa Davidson Sommers** (-1947), they had seven children.

Charles L. Sommers was an 1890 graduate of the University of Minnesota. He went into the family business, the George Sommers & Company General Merchandise Mail Order House, started by his father. The company's former mail house, known today as River Park Lofts, can be found in the St. Paul Historic Lowertown District. In 1951, Charles L. Sommers was named an outstanding alumnus by the University of Minnesota. Nine years earlier, well, you know that part of the story.

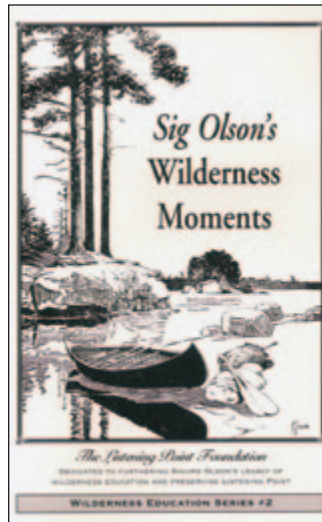
Changes in Scholarship Program Leadership

Since the inception of the Northern Tier Scholarship Program, **Mike McMahon** (1962-66) has been the steady hand that ensures applications are timely processed and, more importantly for scholarship recipients, that checks are issued by Nigel Cooper, the SAA (founding) treasurer, and sent to college financial aid offices. After compiling all of the records from 1998, Mike requested he step down as the chairman after over a decade of service. **Owen Gibbs**, who recently joined the scholar-

ship committee, accepted a request to replace Mike. Mike will lead the 2011 scholarship program, working with Owen to ensure a smooth transition, and will remain on the committee.

Thank you, Mike, for your leadership and dedication that has ensured the ongoing success of the Northern Tier Seasonal Staff Scholarship Program.

If you are interested in joining the committee, please contact Owen at ogibbs51@msn.com. ■



Sig Olson's Wilderness Moments

Dedicated to furthering Sigurd F. Olson's legacy of wilderness education and preserving his inspirational writing cabin, Listening Point, The Listening Point Foundation has produced a series of booklets containing selected reflections by Sig Olson on the North Country. **Chuck Rose** obtained copies of second booklet in this series, which was provided to each Northern Tier staff member as a resource tool this summer. ■

LIFETIME GIVING

What?

Tax Deduction and Tax Savings for you now.

Permanent support for the SAA now and later.

How?

Donate appreciated property where you have substantial gains such as stocks, real estate, art work, etc.

When?

Anytime – as part of your estate planning or to reduce current taxes.

We will work with your attorney and tax advisor to make this an effective tax saving strategy for you and your estate.

Please contact SAA Director Patrick Cox by phone at 281-497-4226, ext. 2010; by email at patrick.cox@txmstr.com; or any SAA director or officer. The directors and officers with knowledge in this subject area donate their time. No fees are charged to the SAA for your donations.

Canoe Voyage

Originally published in the October 2011 edition of High Country, The Philmont Staff Association's official publication.

"The Far Northland ... where you see the loon and hear its plaintive wail"

That lyric from the official Northern Tier song is now embedded in the hearts and minds of the twenty-one Voyageurs who saw the loon and heard its plaintive wail while paddling the famed Boundary Waters August 28 to September 4, 2010.

These Voyageurs were participants in the Exchange Program of the Sommers Alumni Association, the Philmont Staff Association, and the Florida Sea Base and Friends Association. This was the 4th event sponsored by the Exchange Program and the first to include participants from the Florida Sea Base and Friends Association.

Divided into three crews of seven persons each, plus their Interpreter (Northern Tier lingo for "guide"), the Voyageurs embarked from "Charlie's Boat Base" (Northern Tier lingo for the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base located on Moose Lake outside Ely, MN) on Sunday, August 29, for six days and five nights of paddling in the Boundary Waters. Unlike at Philmont where the Rangers leave the crew after the second night on the trail, the Interpreters remained with the crews until the end.

Each crew followed a different itinerary of their own choosing, but each crew did spend some time paddling along the international boundary separating the United States and Canada. The crews

were free to paddle, eat, portage, etc. in Canada; they just could not sleep there without requiring an additional permit and incurring additional fees.

The Voyageurs reveled in the Northern Tier cuisine. The Voyageurs enjoyed real meat – not freeze dried – from "Meals Ready to Eat," essentially the same grub served to American combat soldiers. These meats were teamed with noodles or rice and a variety of just-add-water sauces for most dinners. Those crews with good fishermen enjoyed fresh fish, as well. All crews chowed-down on "Hudson Bay Bread," the signature dish of the Northern Tier. This is a baked goodie with lots of sugar, butter, oats and karo syrup, and when topped with peanut butter and jelly, makes a powerful lunch.

The daily rhythm of each

crew was the same; awake to the sound of the loon, eat breakfast, breakdown camp, paddle across crystalline lakes with water as clear as the finest bottled water, see loons and other wildlife, and then portage to the next lake. Somewhere along the way lunch would be eaten, followed by more paddling and portaging, and then a campsite would be located. Once camp was set up, lounging, fishing, story swapping, campfires and stunning sunsets rounded out the day. And usually, each Voyageur fell asleep to the wail of the loon...and maybe the distant howling of wolves.

The Voyageurs returned to Charlie's Boat Base on Friday afternoon, September 3, and most stayed over until Sunday, September 5. This coincided with the Rendez-

vous of the Sommers Alumni Association, the every-two-year reunion of the SAA. On Saturday, the Voyageurs participated in Rendezvous events, toured the International Wolf Center and Bear Center in Ely, and capped the day off as guests of the SAA at its' rambunctious banquet at the Grand Lodge, Ely.

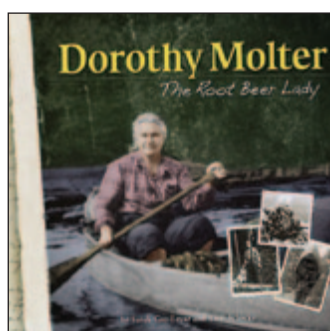
As they returned home on Sunday, September 5, the Voyageurs walked with new purpose and conviction:

"If you're thinkin' in your inner heart there's a swagger in my step, then you've never been along the Border Trail" (Lyric from official Northern Tier song).

Your next opportunity to put some swagger in your step comes in 2012 when the SAA again hosts the Exchange Program. ■

New Dorothy Molter Book Published

by Mike Holdgrafer



In early June, **Terri Schocke**, wife of **Terry Schocke**, retired Director of Program for Northern Tier, pulled up a chair at a dinner table and showed the various guests a new book, *Dorothy Molter: The Root Beer Lady*. The book was passed around the table and each of us had a brief opportunity to thumb through it and

get a quick look at the contents. The book is co-authored by the **Sarah Guy-Levar**, the Executive Director of the Dorothy Molter Museum, and Terri, who is an Ely community volunteer.

Borrowing a bit from a recent newsletter to museum members, the book is laid out in a scrapbook style with excerpts from early vacation journals and correspondence, together with many never before seen photos from the museum's collection and from the Molter family. As Sarah noted in the newsletter, it "is a combination of biography, photo essay and Boundary Waters history." The book was recently released and

is now available on line for \$16.95 from the museum at <http://rootbeerlady.com/store/> along with a host of other items, including Bob Cary's book, *Root Beer Lady*, and Gerald R. Patterson's book, *A Guide's Tale*, an excerpt of which is included in this edition of *Reflections*. So, kwturbeliakin and check out this new work about Dorothy.

As a final note, the SAA is well represented on the museum's board by **Barb Cary-Hall**, **Butch Diesslin** and **Doug Hirdler**. If you have not stopped by the Dorothy Molter Museum to check out the Isle of Pines, give this some thought the next time you head to Canoe Country. ■

Join the Rendezvous 2012 Committee – NOW!

by Mike Holdgrafer

Planning has started for the 2012 Rendezvous. Well, not exactly. In order to plan, we need to have volunteers. So far, we have one volunteer, **Allen Rench**, who has agreed to chair the weekend event. This may not be exactly accurate also, for if we have Allen on board, we also get his wife, **Dianne**. Regardless, Allen, Dianne and the SAA needs assistance to make the 2012 Rendezvous another success. Your involvement is even more important for two reasons.

First, this will be the first SAA Rendezvous where the Sandy Bridges Program Center will be available for use. The Sandy Bridges Program Center shall give us unparalleled flexibility to gather all of our alumni in one setting with the ability to break-out into conference rooms and even out on to the deck. The good news is that by 2012, the Northern Tier staff will know how to handle groups of 250 in the SBPC. The challenge for us is that this will be the first time we will use the SBPC, so planning will be extra important to us.

Second, 2012 will mark the 90th summer during which

canoe trips have been operated by the Boy Scouts of America, starting with the first trip from Winton in 1923. You read that correctly, 2012 will be the 90th summer of canoe trips. Some people may calculate this differently, but this is how it is being calculated for the 2011 Rendezvous celebrating the 90th summer of canoeing adventures.

Like any birthday, there has to be something that makes this Rendezvous stand apart from all of the others besides some lame sheet cake. Bear in mind, we will only be ten summers from the Northern Tier's centennial. This means extra effort will have to be put into next year's event and NOW is the time to begin planning.

So, where do we start? We will need someone to coordinate and plan the banquet dinner, along with the social hour. We need someone to deal with lodging, another person to handle programs during the day, including youth programs. There will have to be volunteers over registration, social networking, marketing, communications, sales, meal planning, etc. I almost forgot, but we also will need someone

to lead the auction effort, both in soliciting items and setting up the sales...and someone to design a t-shirt or maybe run a contest to come up with a design. By now, you get the idea or maybe you have an idea that has not been tossed out there yet.

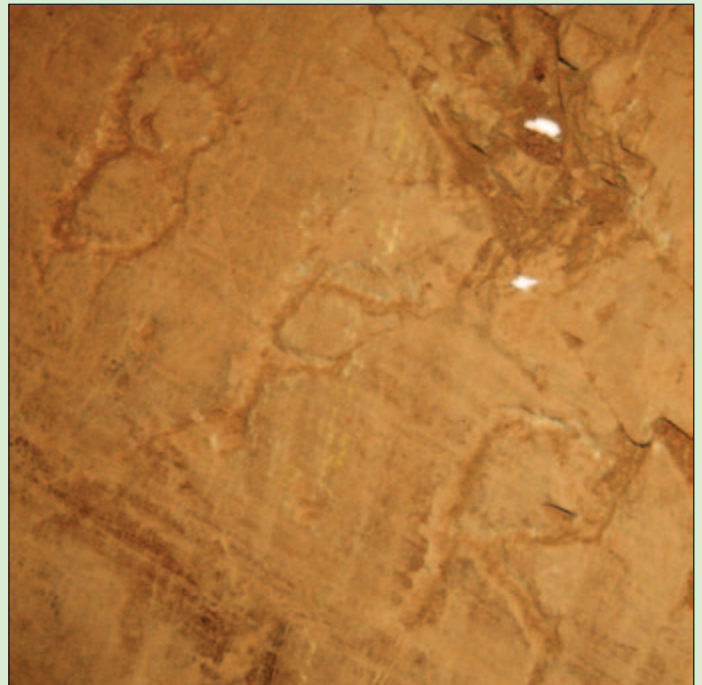
In addition to individuals to lead these areas, we also will need volunteers to help from across the country and the world. Think of this like a portage. We can sit back and watch Allen drag his tail across

the portage time and again, or we can act like a Northern Tier crew on the second to last day on a trip, where everyone pulls their weight and we cross the portage one time.

Before someone calls you, please email Allen at **TheAllenRench@gmail.com** or call him at **507-990-3854**.

P.S. If you are interested in being in a position of SAA leadership, being a volunteer with the Rendezvous is your chance to show everyone what being a Charlie Guide means. ■

The Light of Day



Carved initials in rock

Soon, a piece of Base history never before exposed to the light of day will be revealed. As many alumni recall, there was a time when Charlie Guides would crawl under the Dining Hall and using hand chisels, hammer away at the bedrock to create a storage area. Known as "The Mine," stories about this laborious effort continue to this day. When the Dining Hall is demolished later this year, the bedrock will be exposed. While moving artifacts from "The Mine" to a new storage location during the work week, this piece of Base history became a focal point for an alumni discussion. Maybe you know the owner of the initials? ■

Online Alumni System

The association has an online alumni system. To access it you must have a current email address on file. If you have not received an email from us recently, please let us know your current email address by visiting:

www.update.holry.org

The online alumni system features include:

- Searchable alumni directory;
- Update your own alumni record in the directory;
- Join or renew membership;
- Save trees by choosing to receive mailings and newsletters by email only.

Open for Breakfast

by Mike Holdgrafer

On the morning of May 29, 2011, after two days of intense work and long hours by staff and volunteers, the Sandy Bridges Program Center served its first meal, breakfast, to a weary staff.

In about four years' time, the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base has been dramatically transformed. It all started in early 2007. **Doug Hirdler**, then the General Manager, working with **Luther Tankersley**, Team Leader, Engineering Service, had begun the process to evaluate whether the Dining Hall could be renovated. By September 2007, a task force of Northern Tier Committee members, including **Don Melander**, a retired architect from Duluth, was organized. The first order of business was to engage a structural engineer to survey the structural condition of the building that culminated in a report in early March 2008.

Constructed circa 1956 as a three-season facility by volunteer labor, the engineer laboriously noted many issues arising from the original con-

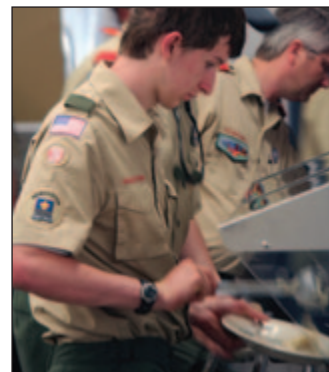
struction and subsequent work to the Dining Hall. As the recommendations of the structural engineer were presented, one inescapable conclusion became apparent: Although the building could be used as it presently was [in 2008] for a few more years, it would have to be replaced. In fact, the engineer opined that should another wind storm occur like the one on July 4, 1999 (See separate article in this issue about derechos), the Dining Hall should not be used for shelter. Some members of the Committee openly wondered how it had survived the 1999 event.

By now, you know the rest of the story as published in earlier editions of Reflections and as reported in Facebook. Doug retired in September 2008 and **Kevin Dowling** assumed the position of General Manager. Since this last September, Kevin has managed the project and dealt with day-to-day construction issues, the architect and the general contractor. Although there were some delays and inevitable open punch list

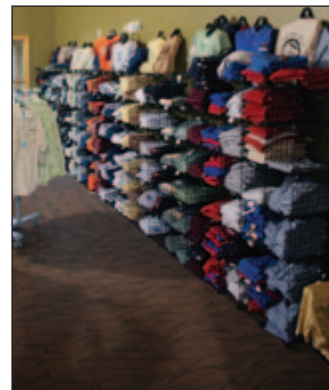
items, the first crews of the season were served dinner in the Sandy Bridges Program Center on June 5, 2011.

On Saturday, August 27th, Cherie Sawinski and her family will join dignitaries and guests from the BSA, the USFS and local government, together with neighbors and members of the SAA, to dedicate the new facility as the Sandy Bridges Program Center. The time of the dedication remains pending as this article goes to print, but announcements can be found on the SAA website and on Facebook. Members of the SAA are invited to attend the dedication. The next issue of Reflections will contain many more images and articles to celebrate this grand event.

Please enjoy the photos of the Sandy Bridges Program Center that accompany this article. As you will note, at the time these photos were taken, there was still some work being concluded on the exterior and the seeded areas around the building were just beginning to green. ■



First Crew Meal – June 5, 2011



The Trading Post expands to new space



View from the SBPC deck



Boy Scout statue by Dr. Robert Tait McKenzie



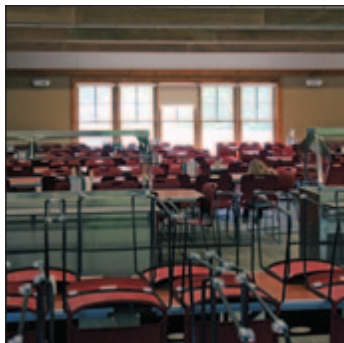
Sandy Bridges Program Center



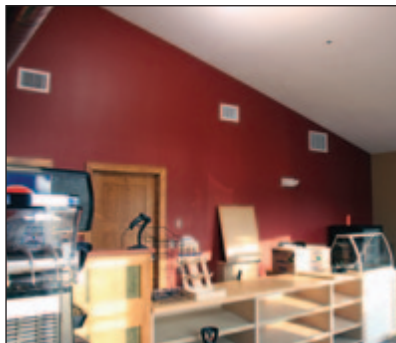
View towards the Baypost



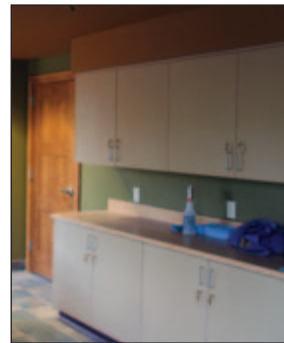
Divisible Conference Room



The Main Room



The Voyageur Sweet Shop undergoes finish carpentry.



Upstairs Coffee Bar and Sink



New Adirondack chairs empty...



...and full!



Deck Entrance



Wash Area



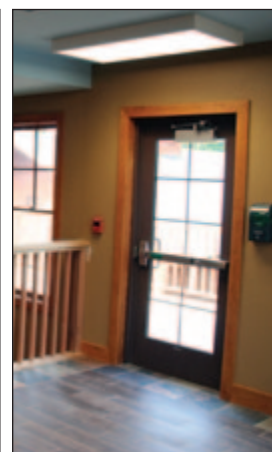
Chow Time – June 5, 2011



Crew Photo Area (L-R) Nicole and Natalie



Elevator and Lobby



Second Floor Entrance

Fall Trout: First Glimpse

by Gerald (Jerry) R. Patterson (1942-43)

Editor's Note: The following excerpt is printed with the permission Gerald R. Patterson, Ph.D. of Eugene, Oregon. Obtaining a Ph.D. in the Department of Psychology at the University of Minnesota in 1956, Jerry currently is the Director of the Oregon Social Learning Center and is considered the world's leading expert on the family origins of aggression and delinquency in children and youth. Jerry is the recipient of numerous national and international honors and citations, has been the principal investigator or co-investigator as to various grant awards, has served on various professional editorial boards and has been professionally published extensively since 1953 to date.

Prior to embarking on this distinguished career, Jerry was a guide at the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base during the summer of 1942, the first summer the then newly-constructed Lodge was in use, and the summer of 1943. He was raised on Robinson Lake, just outside Ely off of Highways 169 and 1.

Although he has published articles in *The Boundary Waters Journal*, in 2009, Jerry published *A Guide's Tale*, an insightful memoir of his wilderness upbringing and family. Now in his eighties, he is still instilled with the adventurous spirit of his youth. For anyone associated with the Northern Tier, Jerry's *A Guide's Tale* steps back in time and recaptures a by-gone era of Canoe Country. With the assistance of **Christopher Wolfe, M.D.** (1969-71, 1975), we are grateful to Jerry for his allowing our Association to republish a portion of the first chapter from *A Guide's Tale*. Jerry, thank you.

From Chapter 1

....

Lac La Croix with its range of glaciated rock makes a dramatic statement. It was not just one small cliff here and there that dropped straight down to the water; there were dozens. There were twisted slabs of rock piled along beaches. Whole ridgelines of great Norway pine ran along the lakeshore to the right of us. We were running parallel to the shore. Bus reached up and tapped me on the shoulder. "Painted cliffs, over there on that island. Indians did it a long time ago." The island to our right looked as if it had been wrenched in half. As we came in closer the cliffs rose above us for a hundred feet. They leaned out a good distance over the water. Pointing with his paddle he said, "Pretty smart. See, they put their paintings where the rain can't get at them." High up above the waterline on a smooth slab of rock, I could see faint red tracings. They looked like finger drawings a child would make. As art the drawings were a perfect match for a setting defined by cliffs, big water, and clean rock shelves

We were thrumming our way through a maze of islands, going south and west. Hank whooped, turned around and pointed, "Hey there she is, Coleman Island. Be there soon." There were dozens of rock-shored islands now, all around us, mysterious and inviting, each different. The two lashed canoes were slicing into a mirror punctuated by rock points and islands. The parallel shock lines coming off the bow and stern stretched far out to each side and gave a

sense of motion but with the a huge body of water stretched before us the shoreline was so distant that you could not be sure that you were moving. Ahead there was the infinite mirror surface pulling us into the gap between the mainland and the large landmass Hank had identified as Coleman Island. As we progressed toward it, the last small island that lay ahead of us seemed to be pulled ever so slowly to the right, creating a growing void directly in front of us. It grew moment by moment to expose the largest body of water I had ever seen. It stretched to the north and the west as far as the eye could see. Grandpa turned and took his pipe away to laugh and show me with his hands, "Ja, big water, BIG fish." To the north, the far distant hills showed as a thin blue line almost lost in sky and water. It was like a drummer sounding a faint call. As a boy, it was not clear what this call meant. It was a sense of being pulled to the North – a sense of space and freedom to move. As a young boy there were no words for this, just a vague mix of joy and restlessness.

We camped in one of the huge bays to the south. The tip of the island narrowed and shelved a flat, polished rock gently sloping down into the water. You could unload a canoe here. You could also take a bath by just walking down the rock shelf until it dropped off into thirty feet of water. We carried the food packs and the kettle pack up to the fireplace to make the kitchen. Grandpa was already building a fire. The well-patched eight-by-ten wall tent was carried over to where Bus and Hank were

standing staring at the ground. "Not too bad Bus, only a few rocks and they are small ones; just right for young boys." The two birch poles were taken from the canoes and two more cut from back on the hill. Two poles were lashed together at their tips to make an A frame at each end. The sidewalls were folded inside and weighted down with small rocks and the floor covered with cedar and spruce boughs. The inside of the tent had the thick moist smell of pine.

Each of us made his own bed roll and placed it in the tent while it was still light. First, the square of canvas was laid on the ground and then a wool army blanket. A second blanket was laid overlapping half of the first one. The free half of the first came up and over then the free half of the second was folded over, making an envelope. Both ends were secured with huge bronze safety pins and then rolled up inside the canvas tarp.

It was too late to fish that day. The sun had already slipped behind the ridge as we finished washing the dishes down at the lake. There is a bush law inscribed somewhere that stipulates that if there is a boy in the camp, he is the one who ends up with the scrubber and the black pots after supper. Sonny and I were hunkered down on our heels at the lakeshore, surrounded by pots and dishes. The men were sitting around the fire with their coffee cups and a bottle. "A lit more, Pa. Tux ka da ha." Grandpa filled each of the cups and then his own. "Pa, what is the name of the big river that comes in here from the north?"



Grandpa was lighting the huge curved pipe. Between clouds of smoke, "Some funny name like Maligne, I think." Hank nodded toward the south end of the lake, "Yeah, that sounds right. Old Martin and I came up here all the way from Robinson Lake when I was a kid. We were gone a month and ran out of food just as we hit La Croix. There was Indian village back there and they told us about the big river."

We could hear Buster talking about network of rivers that ran all the way to Lake Athabasca and to Hudson's Bay. Only one or two railroads crossed all of that country. No one lived there except some Indians. It was open. It was free country. I thought about it that night and for many nights afterward. Later, that great core of free, open wilderness became a place to read books about; a focal point during the dreaming time in my life as a young man. I read everything about the voyageurs and the North West Territories that I could find. The high country to the north eventually became a part of that subtle fusion of values that emerges and defines who you are, and where you are going.

Grandpa and Hank were out of the tent before there was light on the water. "Daylight in the swamp. Come on you fishermen. Coffee is on." Breakfast was pancakes, thick cuts of bacon from a 10-pound slab, and a boy's mix of coffee, with too much sugar plus heavy squirts from a can of condensed milk. This time, the dishes were left where they fell. The morning wind was already in the trees when we pulled out into the main lake. The favored trout hole lay between two islands not a half-mile from our camp. When we arrived there, grandpa reached into his pack

and took out his fishing tackle. It was 200 yards of braided copper wire tightly wrapped around a board that was a foot and a half long and notched at either end. The line at the end was carefully tied to a swivel snap that held a #4 KB spoon. The spoon, by tradition, is silver on one side and copper on the other. In the water, it looks like a small fish. When placed in the water, the slight bow that defined its length converted cold metal into living movement. Like a kayak or a canoe, the KB spoon is one of those beautiful functional things. Its lines are simple; it needs nothing added to it. Four feet back from the spoon, my Grandpa had carefully tied in a small metal triangle with swivels at each apex. The main copper line and the four feet to the KB were tied to two of them. To the third swivel he attached about three feet of green fish line. This was tied off to a heavy teardrop sinker.

I slowed down the canoe as Grandpa dropped the spoon and harness gently into the water on the upwind side. The spoon pulsed ever so slowly as it sank into black water, pulled down by the heavy lead pendulum hanging below it. The big hands moved with surprising speed and precision as he unwound the line from the holding board. He straightened out each kink that appeared in the line. The family trout hole ranged from 40 to 80 feet deep. Two islands marked its imaginary two-mile circumference. Each island was narrow; their rock points were aimed at each other about three quarters of a mile apart. Buster had explained to me that morning that the two islands were really connected by a ridge that ran about fifty feet deep. Lake trout as big as Chinook salmon fed along that deeply submerged reef.

To catch them, the paddler had to move very slowly in a figure-eight pattern back and forth across the reef.

As we moved in the pattern, Grandfather could feel the lead weight touch the flanks of the deep reef. He would grunt and with his right hand bring in copper line and coil it very carefully at his feet. We worked our way slowly into the wind. When he could no longer feel the weight hit along the bottom, he turned, "She goes down now." We had passed beyond the reef so I turned to follow the imaginary line between that point and a point a hundred feet out from the shore of the island. As we did so, the wind caught us broadside. I began to sweep heavily with the paddle to keep on the right path. The speed picked up just as Grandfather was swiftly dropping coils of copper line over the side to keep the KB down along the bottom where the bigger lake trout would be feeding. "Nei, nei, Jeddy, slow, slow." I switched sides then and used a draw stroke to hold us on the imaginary line and slow us at the same time. "Ja ja. Good. Is there." Arms straining, knees shoved against the ribs at the bottom, I inched our way toward the island. Grandfather sat up in the bow, his huge hand holding the copper line across the palm. He sat gently pumping his hand up and down to keep the KB working. He was staring at some point far away, saying nothing. Suddenly his hand shot down into the water. I heard him gasp at the weight of the strike and at the effort of trying to reseat himself.

The coils of line at his feet leaped and pulsed as more line went through his hand. I swung the canoe in a wide circle, with the line slanting down at a 45-degree angle

defining a constant arc. With the slack in the line taken up, grandfather could now reset the hook. He pumped his right arm up into the sky, grunting each time with the effort of heaving on the braided copper line. Then he began to bring up the line a foot at a time. "Big. Ja. Big." As he brought up the line with his right hand, his left coiled it in circles at his feet. Suddenly the line began to come in easily, too easily. "Quick, Jeddy. He come. Paddle hard." The big fish was running toward the pressure
(continued on next page)



Seliga Canoe Available for Trips!

For alumni who do not own but wish to use a Seliga canoe for their next summer trip in the BWCAW or the Quetico Provincial Park, there is a virtually brand new Seliga hanging in one of Butch Diesslin's outbuildings for use. **Tom Beaton** (1970-73), the owner of the Seliga, wants SAA members to know they can use his Seliga, provided they make a donation, of their choosing, to the Sommers Alumni Association.

If anyone is interested in arranging to use Tom's canoe and wants to take him up on his offer, please call **Butch Diesslin** at: **(218) 365-6904**

or email him at: butchnlucy@frontiernet.net

True North – A Tale of Disappearance and Discovery

by Tim King

Editor's Note: The following article was published years ago in Reflections after being published originally in Lake Country Journal magazine. The author, **Tim King** (1968), wrote it as "a somewhat fictional reminiscence of my time as a guide for Sommers in the late 1960s." Tim recently put

True North into a small book of four short stories he refers to as a fictional autobiography. The title story is *Monster on Agnes: The True Wilderness Adventures of a Boy Guide*. It is the story of a marathon paddle – and truck ride – from Kawnipi to the Ely hospital. Passing Louisa Falls in the dark, Tim

saw something and recounts his tale. The other two stories include *Piano Lessons* and *Uncle Williams Casket*. The latter is a tale about a casket-as-canoe and true romance at a late age. It, like the other stories, is largely true. The book is illustrated and designed by Tim's son, Colin King. Tim is selling the

book for \$11.95, plus \$1.00 postage. He can be reached at timking@rea-alp.com and has volunteered to contribute a portion of the sales to the SAA.

Fall Trout: First Glimpse *cont'd.*

(continued from page 17)

point above him. I turned the canoe; the wind caught us and extended the arc in a matter of seconds. "Ja, still there. Big." We slowed. The trout began pumping with heavy movements, forcing Grandfather's hand down in jerky movements as the line went out. "Go with him, Jeddy. Slow now."

The canoe, the line, and the fish moved in concert out to the deeper part of the lake. The fish continued to take line, and then gradually slowed. The line went straight down. We drifted into the big water. The islands were now a mile to the rear. The canoe rose and fell as the big waves passed beneath us. I drew gently against the wind to slow the drift. Grandfather sat staring out over the open water as if he were no longer fishing. Then very gently he whispered, "Koom now, big fella." He began to lift; his right hand trembling now with each tiny movement. He was bleeding where the line cut through the thick calluses. I circled very slowly about the line. The black waves were cresting and sighing as they lifted the figure in the bow. His arm moved smoothly as if part of some terribly significant ritual. "Careful. Soon he sees canoe. Then he runs again." The line no longer pointed straight down but

traveled in short desperate arcs to the right, then to the left. "He goes." The line again pulled the coils at his feet. His left hand deftly prevented the leaping coils from tangling as the line shot out in spurts of several feet. I followed again with the canoe until he slowed, then stopped. The slow dance continued. We both ignored the waves as we stared down the line into the water. After another shorter run, I could see him, a huge silver shadow far down in the black water. It moved slowly in awkward arcs, first on one side, then the other. The fish was dying. I learned later that it was experiencing the effects of rapid decompression. Finally, his head pointed straight up to the canoe; as it came out of the water Grandpa hooked his fingers into the gills and lifted him into the canoe behind his seat. There was a thick piece of beaver-cut log on the bottom of the canoe. He picked it up and hit the fish on the head just behind the eyes. The fish quivered and lay still.

Grandfather's big, thick fingers were shaking slightly as he took his pipe out of the pocket of his wool shirt. "Ja, dots a goo-od fish. Vee go now." He nodded at the other canoe still making figure eights back at the two islands far off on the horizon. He lit the pipe,

turned and looked for a long moment at the lake trout; then he let out the line again and then rewrapped it on the holding stick. A tall, straight figure, he wore a black wool hat billed in the front after the fashion of loggers of his day. In his heavy suspenders, thick wool pants and moccasins, he seemed to belong in this place. It was if he had taken root here and taken on his weathered appearance at this very spot. Huge hands, few words, shy smiles; he was now over 65. This was to be his last trip for fall trout.

Over the next few days, hundreds of pounds of trout were cleaned and rubbed down with salt, and carefully packed in extra big Duluth packs. First, the pack was soaked in the lake and then lined with a thick layer of sphagnum moss. A layer of fish would be added and then another layer of wet moss. When the pack was full it was tied off. I followed Buster as he carried one or them back to the cool dark swamp. He grunted with the weight of it as he hung it on a stout branch. "Heavy. The wind catches it up there and evaporates the water. Keeps it cool just like in the icehouse at home." The packs were wetted down several times a day.

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We boys thought everything to the north was cleaner, purer. We were not alone in that knowledge. In my early teens, the local judge's wife told me that just knowing that the northern forests were there helped her get through the day.

"I'll never go there but that doesn't matter," she said from her rayon covered living room couch. She had a distant look as she felt the north tug and imagined its purity.

We boys intended to go north. Going there mattered! At night we fell asleep facing east or west or south. At dawn we awoke facing north. True, pure north.

Nothing we did during the day mattered unless it reoriented our molecules to where our dreams had ended. Elias was the only adult who assisted us in this molecular orientation. All the others, except the judge's wife, allowed their days of humdrum to orient them. Not Elias.

Elias was so old that he had taught Latin in high school. No adult, or child, any of us knew could speak Latin. Just Elias. With Latin being dead in the schools, they kicked Elias upstairs, to the office of the student counselor, to await retirement.

He had old-fashioned, slicked back hair. He was kind. He understood boys. Each summer he took some of the older ones north. I was too young, but I heard the stories.

"The lakes are a hundred feet deep and you can see to

the bottom.”

“We paddled for two days and didn’t see anybody and we hardly ever wore clothes.”

One group of boys reported coming across upturned canoes in mid-nowhere on a cool, blue lake. There were bright-white girls swimming naked around the silver canoes in the dark water. They were laughing! The boys sat around the crackling campfire late into that night wondering about those girls. They poked sticks into the fire and watched the orange sparks sail starward. A loon may have wailed. And the boys did ache for the mystery of those girls to come out of the dark.

Elias sat by himself on the edge of the firelight, smoking his pipe, his own dreams, mingled with smoke, spiraling into the night.

“Awright boys,” he’d say to close the book of that day, “it’s been a long one and daylight in the swamp will find us soon enough.”

One of the highlights of many of these trips with Elias was bushwhacking. In those days there were lakes where nobody had been for forty or fifty years. Or maybe never. Halfway through a trip, Elias, and the young guide he traveled with, took out the weathered yellow and blue map. On the map, land was lemon yellow. Lakes were blue. Lakes connected by portage trails had dotted black lines marking the trails. Elias and the guide sipped lip-burning coffee, sucked on their pipes, and pored over the map in search of blue unconnected to other blue by dotted lines. They’d point their index fingers into the mystery of the map and then look at each other knowingly through a billow of coffee steam and pipe smoke.

In the morning the boys rose. Fingers of daylight explored the forest edges. A meal of boiled, rolled oats with dried apricots, coffee or cocoa, and then they quietly slipped the green, wooden canoes into the still water, fading into the fog. They were good canoeists and “feathered” their paddles so no splashing noise was made. No one spoke. Elias and the guide led. When they laid their paddles on the gunwales to study the map, the drum-like noise entered the hollow silence, echoing from the invisible, forested shore. Wrapped in the fog the men, too, were invisible to the boys.

And then, canoe by canoe, the boys glided out of the fog into a bay with black water, dark spruce, and the new sun on yellow pond flowers. The young guide, his wild hair flaming red, already stood on shore peering intently into the forested darkness. Elias was knee-deep in water alongside his canoe, smoke rising from his pipe.

“Never touch the canoe on the rocky shore,” he commanded.

The guide strode off, disappearing amongst the spruce immediately. The boys waited in their canoes. They watched silver minnows in the clear, brassy water. A light breeze began to ripple the skin of the bay in places. Someone spoke. The sun inched upward, warming the back of a hand holding the rough wood of a canoe paddle. Someone might answer.

The guide appeared from the forest, waded into the water, shouldered his small canvas pack, rolled the one hundred-pound canoe from his thighs onto his shoulders, and slipped back into the forest. No words were said. He had blazed a trail. The boys came out of the canoes into the

cool water. Clumsier versions of the guide, they shouldered packs, then canoes, and stumbled through the water into the forest. The ends of their canoes dripped sparkling lake water onto the ferns crushed under their feet.

The day passed. Stumbling. Swatting. One boy has a bee sting; another is stuck to his knees in the mud.

“Needs encouragement,” observes Elias.

A bright, wide, grassy meadow in the midst of dense spruce, the gift of beaver long past. Steep climbing amid treacherous boulders – always watching their feet. How much further?! Sweat burning eyes. Shoulders aching relentlessly. Canoe overhead blocks upward and forward vision. Balsam branches scratch and tear and poke. And then, from atop a hill, a bit of blue sparkles between birches. The guide laughs, striding toward the boys.

“Just down there,” he encourages.

The boys brighten, then lengthen their strides; swinging gracefully between the slender trees as the blue grows larger. They splash and laugh in the cool, black lake that has not heard boys yell before. Elias puts his pack among the soft green moss on the shore. He watches. Lights his pipe.

Sometimes I heard stories of large fish caught in those lakes. Or a great mother bear with twins. But mostly I’d learn what Elias taught the boys. They wouldn’t speak it. It was shown when I camped with the older boys. They told it in the deep simplicity of their camps. How they damaged no trees to gather firewood; their carefully organized camp kitchens; the just right placement of the tents. Elias showed them how to

quiet their spirits.

He also gave them instructions in service and history. In the morning, Elias never left a campsite without cleaning it as if it were his home. The last campsite chore, the older boys showed me, was to collect enough dry firewood for the next camper.

“In the evening we wrote messages and put them in a jar or a can for the next visitor to find,” the older boys recalled as we sat around a campfire. “It welcomed them to the campsite.”

Messages told what they saw, or how large the fish were, or that they witnessed the northern lights. The notes were signed and dated, and the writer added his home address. It was traditional for the old-time, north country travelers like Elias to leave those messages.

I spent that last winter repairing a canoe with Elias and the older boys. That’s what they did in the winter when the lakes were frozen and school held them captive. That winter they were removing damaged green canvas from a wooden canoe and replacing it with fiberglass. They let me hold things for them and stand in the corners of their stories.

They named the places they’d been.

“Remember Poohbah, Yum-Yum, Wawiag, Kawishiwi, Kawnipi, That-Man,” they’d recite like Catholics intoning the sacred rosary.

That spring, just after ice-out, Elias went canoeing after school. He never returned. Everyone felt confused and scared. They thought Elias had drowned in the nearby river or a lake. There was a countywide manhunt. Some of the older boys helped drag
(continued on page 21)

Cause to Pause?

by Mike Holdgrafer

This past staff training, **Dave Sheffield** (Advisor 1999 & 2000), one of the SAA volunteers, retold how his crew arrived at the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe base on July 5, 1999, less than twenty-four hours after the Base had been struck by a derecho. At the time, most people referred to it as a windstorm or wind-event, and the term “derecho” only slowly came into people’s vocabularies. For many people caught in the BWCAW on July 4, 1999, the only thing that mattered was that they were lucky to be alive; what the wind event was called was irrelevant although there were lots of adjectives to describe it.

Although this summer is not an anniversary or otherwise noteworthy with respect to the July 4-5 Boundary Waters-Canadian Derecho, recent derechos in parts of Minnesota, Wisconsin and other states give cause to pause and reflect upon this weather event and how future derechos may impact those of us who spend time in the outdoors.

The term “derecho” was commonly unknown until the late 1990s. According to the Storm Prediction Center for NOAA’s National Weather Service:

The word “derecho” was coined by Dr. Gustavus Hinrichs, a physics professor at the University of Iowa, in a paper published in the *American Meteorological Journal* in 1888.... Dr. Hinrichs [studying windstorm events in Iowa] chose this terminology for thunderstorm induced straight-line winds as an analog to the word tornado.

Derecho is a Spanish word which can be defined as “direct” or “straight ahead” while tornado is thought by some, including Dr. Hinrichs, to have been derived from the Spanish word “tornar” which means “to turn”.

The July 4-5 Boundary Waters-Canadian Derecho was a progressive derecho. Progressive derechos are associated with a “relatively short line of thunderstorms (typically from 40 miles to 250 miles in length) that may at times take the shape of a single bow echo, particularly in the early stages of development.” <http://www.spc.noaa.gov/misc/AbtDerechos/derecho-facts.htm> These can often travel hundreds of miles over a narrow path as evidenced by Boundary Waters-Canadian Derecho that originated near Fargo, North Dakota and traveled approximately 1,300 miles in twenty-two hours, terminating in Maine.

In addition to progressive derechos, there are serial and hybrid derechos. Serial derechos are embedded in a massive squall line associated with a migratory air mass and a deep low. You may recall watching a meteorologist on television get excited about bow echoes when warm air masses collide with cold air masses in the spring. Tornadoes may spin-up with serial derechos which often have embedded supercells. Hybrids are a combination of progressive and serial derechos.

Windspeeds during a derecho may cycle during the storm’s duration from near severe limits at 57 mph to over 100 mph. Damage from the July 4-5 Boundary Waters-

Canadian Derecho evidenced the cycling of wind speeds in excess of 100 mph.

As the canoeists on July 4, 1999 realized, derechos can be terrifying when there is no place to take shelter while the forest around you is splintered and flattened. Derechos are more typical during warm weather in the summer when more people are active outdoors. Although derechos tend to be 50-year events (as to a location) across the north-central United States, southern Canada and the Great Lakes area, they are more common than many may think. On July 1 and July 11 of this year, two derechos occurred in parts of

Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois. As summer progresses, the risk of derechos increases in the border lakes region, northwest Ontario and Manitoba, areas that Northern Tier crews and alumni canoe. Finally, there may also be little notice of derechos when exposed outdoors, which enhances the risk. Derecho-producing storms may move at speeds of 50 mph or greater. Visual cues to alert canoeists to this risk, such as darkening skies and gust front clouds, may appear suddenly.

As we know from our days of guiding to now, it pays to keep an eye on the sky when we are out on canoe trips. ■



Chuck Buenger

Broken Paddles

For those of you not familiar with the work week and staff training, each year the SAA conducts a memorial service early one evening at the waterfront. It is simple service. The current staff are welcomed and told about how their wilderness experiences in Canoe Country will bind them unto a family of Charlie Guides; a family that transcends time and place. Thereafter, those alumni who have crossed their

final portage since the prior June were honored.

This past June, Sigurd F. Olson’s passage as to “Broken Paddles” was read from his book, *Listening Point*, before a wreath of cedar boughs was placed upon the sun-sparkling water as everyone reflected upon the moment. The SAA alumni then led the group in *The Far Northland* before everyone departed in silence. (continued on page 23)

True North – A Tale of Disappearance and Discovery *cont'd.*

(continued from page 19)

a lake or two. They never found his Thompson canoe, or his paddle, or the green canvas Duluth pack with the well-oiled leather straps. It was seven weeks prior to graduation and our little town was in an uproar. A lot of kids needed his advice on the merits of college versus the Navy. Then, the summer started and people's lives went on and those who cared to, played baseball.

I was scheduled to take a trip to the north with the older boys that year. We went without Elias. They taught me some of the things he taught them. How to paddle quietly in the early morning. How to collect dry firewood without damaging the trees. I began to find what I was looking for as my being oriented itself to the north. That summer one of my brothers became old enough to become a young guide.

A few years later, I applied for the job. During a March blizzard I received the acceptance letter. There were crossed paddles on the letterhead. Under the paddles it said I was to report for training in early June. The paper was brown and had the color and feel of the straps on a new Duluth pack.

There was no significant moment between that March blizzard and the fresh green summer day I arrived in the north. I spent the next months under the sun and on the water teaching new boys how to paddle quietly into the morning and how to organize an evening camp with Zen-like efficiency. I was learning that I was strong and my heart was free. I found joy in paddling in the rain with the wind at my back or in my face. I learned to locate a portage trail

by intuition.

I always traveled with boys and an older man. The older men gave me, or I took, leadership. Their willingness to accept me as their equal caused me to become their equal. We forged deep bonds of friendship.

But I always traveled with Elias as my guide.

Toward the end of August that summer, an older man and I pored over the map and found a lake to bushwhack into. It was a round, blue pool in the middle of yellow parchment connected by no dotted black lines.

My intuition told me the place to go ashore was in a small dark bay ringed by cedars. I saw the right spot from a distance as we silently paddled, paddled toward shore. I jumped out of the canoe, into cold black water, and waded ashore. I was surprised by an old blaze mark. It had been cut into an aged white cedar some years earlier. Lime colored lichen covered much of the graying scar.

My strength had increased during the summer and it delighted me. I could jog through the forest with a canoe on my shoulders. The trail we followed had been blazed with care but it had been a long time since anyone had traveled this way. Soft moss and fallen trees disguised any sign of previous passage.

I often had to retrace my steps to guide the boys through.

"This way."

"Careful of that root."

"Excellent, good work."

"Why don't you rest a bit here?"

By midday the flies were biting with ferocity. The boys and the man were disheart-

ened. Only the continued and regular reappearance of the blazes reassured them. They still believed in the lake.

The walk down to the lake was on a one-hundred year old carpet of pine needles and duff. Above were the fire-scarred trunks and towering spires of old Norway pine. The majestic silence calmed the boys. Even the black flies were at peace.

A generous red sand beach greeted us at the shore. Every-one swam. Insect bites were soothed and sweat bathed away by the healing waters. On the beach the boys enjoyed a late afternoon lunch and relaxed in the falling sun.

The man and I paddled to an island to learn if it was fit for camping. We discovered an old-timers camp. Under a great Norway pine was a hand-hewn picnic table covered with pine needles and rotting with age. Against one of the pine trunks was a generous pile of firewood. Nailed under the table was a message jar.

I explained the tradition of the message jar to the man. He opened it. It held four notes and the stub of a pencil. The man removed one to read. I did also. I read aloud.

"July 14, 1968. I arrived here late afternoon to this beautiful lake. Fishing good. Caught two lake trout from deep water fifty yards off west shore of island. A larger wall-eye in the rocks just off the north end. Black flies were very bad but now, after dark, are gone. Tonight, there are wolves singing and I heard a beaver slap its tail. Welcome to this place, fellow traveler."

It was signed "Elias Jorgenson." Under the signature was the address: "North Woods." ■

2010 Permit Stats

In 2010, 658 BWCAW permits were issued to Boy Scout troops and Venturing crews. Of these permits, **397 were issued to units that *did not* use the Northern Tier.** The remaining **261 permits were issued by the Northern Tier National High Adventure Program.** In other words, approximately **40% of the permits were issued to Northern Tier crews,** while **60% of the permits were issued by local outfitters or self-outfitted crews.** 380 crews were outfitted by the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base on Moose Lake in 2010. From this number, **69% stayed in the BWCAW** while **31% crossed into Ontario and canoed in the Quetico.**

In the Next Issue

- **Interview with Kevin Dowling**
- **2011 Scholarship Recipients**
- **Sandy Bridges Program Center Dedication**
- **2011 Atikokan to Ely SAA Trip**



Along the Way

by Mike Holdgrafer

Decades ago, when you came to Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base, whether as a participant or staff, there were no museums or interpretive centers in Ely. Along the way, your troop usually stopped at some points of interest between your home and Ely if nothing more than to give the drivers some relief from being cooped-up with a van or carload of Scouts.

I remember my first trip to the Base in August 1973. On the way north, we stayed at the U.S. Air Force Base in Duluth, and slept in barracks that today house Federal inmates being transported through Duluth. I thought my *Voyageur Handbook and Diary* may have some entries about this, but it did not as my entries started when we hit the water. What I do recall, quite

vividly, is that we got a tour of the “Blockhouse” at the USAF base adjacent to the Duluth International Airport. “Blockhouse” is not the correct term; however, for it was actually a SAGE site, as I recently discovered through some online research. SAGE was the acronym for Semi-Automatic Ground Environment. Within this massive concrete structure was housed a then

state-of-the-art MIT-designed and manufactured AN/FSQ7 vacuum tube computer. From radar sites across the U.S. and Canada, raw radar data was converted to digital form and displayed in real time. The SAGE operators could then detect and direct the interception of unknown aircraft penetrating North American air space. For any technical
(continued on page 24)

The Lodge and First Night Orientation

The accompanying photos show the Lodge on a recent June evening, fresh with a coat of epoxy sealant. Also included are some photos from a first night orientation showing the LCD projectors and electronically-controlled screens in use thanks to the generosity of **Jim Sowell** (1965-69). ■



Broken Paddles *cont'd.*

(continued from page 20)

The following alumni were honored in June:

Curtis J. Carley (1959-62), a life member from Albuquerque, New Mexico, passed away on April 6th of last year. We were notified by his wife, Sara, last June. Curt was a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and was a team member on the Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan. He was an accomplished wildlife photographer.

John Tuthill (1973-76), 55, a life member from Bismarck, North Dakota, died on September 24, 2009, at his home from cancer. An Eagle Scout from Aberdeen, South Dakota, John earned an electronics degree from the North Dakota State School of Science in Wahpeton and went to work for the U.S.

Postal Service as an electronics technician until the time of his death. John loved his job, the people with whom he worked, his dogs, the wilderness, camping and many other things. He had a great sense of humor and was always there to lend a hand when the need arose. Most importantly, together with his loving wife, June, they adopted and raised a severely disabled son, Norman. He is survived by a brother, Gary, of Virginia, Minnesota.

Ray Mattson (1962-66 and 1968). Last fall, we were notified by "Little Red," Richard Mattson (1969-70), that his older brother, "Big Red," passed away unexpectedly from a heart condition on November 30, 2010. Ray was active in the SAA as a life member and attended



Curtis Carley



Photo of Mexican Red Wolf by Curtis Carley



Photo of Arctic Loon by Curtis Carley



Reed McPhail



John Tuthill



Jamie Lee



Ray Mattson

many Rendezvous either by driving his motor home to the Base or flying. He designed the t-shirt for the Rendezvous several times.

Initially an educator and then a flight controller, Big Red loved to fly and built his own airpark in Webster, Minnesota, parking his Cessna 182 next to his 1953 Seliga canoe. He changed careers and entered the textile industry, eventually relocating to New Kent, Virginia. He returned to education in 2005 and loved teaching physics to today's youth.

Big Red's picture can be found on page 39 of *The Art of the Canoe With Joe Seliga*. In 1965, he took a trip from St. Paul to Hudson's Bay with Harlen Hansen using a Seliga canoe and the black and white photo was used in the book published about Joe.

Walter James "Jamie" Lee III of Altoona, Pennsylvania was an affiliate life member. He served as an advisor to multiple Northern Tier crews beginning in 1989. An Eagle Scout, Jamie was highly active in Scouting in various levels throughout his adult life.

In conjunction with the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation, Jamie founded The Scouting High Adventure Fund, The Scouting Cold Weather Survival Fund, The Scouting Emergency Preparedness Fund, The International Scouting Fund and the Boy Scout Program Support Fund. All original funding was provided by Jamie, a successful businessman, who oversaw the administration

of the funds and the awarding of grants and scholarships to local Boy Scout councils and youth over a geographic area that included Blair, Bedford, Cambria, Indiana and Somerset counties in Pennsylvania. He was also an AirLifeLine volunteer medical pilot.

Chuck Buenger. Chuck was the Director of High Adventure for the BSA from 1988 to 1992. According to the Philmont Staff Association, Chuck passed away on April 2, 2011, at the age of 82 after an illness with cancer in Texas. He was a long-time supporter and friend of the Northern Tier.

Reed Douglass McPhail, 51, SAA member, died on April 22, 2011. Reed was born, raised and lived in Ames, Iowa. An Eagle Scout, Reed came to the Base in 1978 and spent three summers as an interpreter. He was an accomplished welder and machinist. In his spare time, Reed enjoyed ballroom dancing. As a member and instructor of the Iowa State University Ballroom Dance Club, he met his future wife, Beth, and married her in December 1982. Reed enjoyed everything to do with the outdoors, together with reading, writing and wood working. He is survived by his wife and a son, Matthew. It comes as no surprise that memorials to Reed were Scouting-related, including the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base.

We received notice of Reed's passing after the memorial service and he will be remembered in June 2012. ■

Along the Way *cont'd.*

(continued from page 22)

readers out there, supposedly this system was up for 99.97% of the time over a 22-year period.

Bear in mind that at that time, the Cold War threat was very real and one concern was that Soviet bombers would dash across the pole and attack our country. SAGE operators, under the Air Defense Command of the USAF, directed radar squadrons, air defense fighter and interceptor wings, and missile squadrons across the upper Midwest and as far north as Sioux Lookout. In those days, you could sometimes see contrails in the sky of mock intercepts.

Getting a tour of the SAGE facility was pretty cool for our troop. I remember entering the blast-proof door, which was guarded by USAF personnel dressed in uniform shirts, blue berets and bearing M-16 automatic weapons. Although our Scoutmaster told us in advance to "toe the line," any doubt he was feeding us a line of bull was removed when you walked through the door. The other thing I remember is that the USAF tour guide told us the facility was originally designed to be built completely underground, but due to budget issues, it was located completely above ground. In any event, it could still withstand an indirect atomic bomb blast.

My brief research on-line revealed that the SAGE facility was built in two years, starting in 1956. Approximately 295,899 cubic feet of concrete was poured to form a building that was 153 ft. by 153 ft. by 72.58 ft in height. The cost was over \$5 million dollars, which in the late 1950s was a tremendous amount of

money. In one article I read, it claimed that SAGE likely started the military-industry complex as we know it today as Duluth was not the only facility. Originally established as the Duluth Air defense Sector, in 1969, the center would be part of the 23rd NORAD Region/Air Division. Eventually, improved technology, including the nuclear missile race and the concept of mutually assured destruction, led to the demise of SAGE.

In 1985, the SAGE building was remodeled and given to the University of Minnesota Duluth to house the Natural Resources Research Institute.

The other stop we made was at Mineview in the Sky in Virginia, Minnesota, where atop an overlook, you could watch iron ore mining in the pit to the north-northeast of Highway 53. In 1973, we just happened to be there when there was going to be a blast. We stood lined up with our Kodak cameras waiting for the blast to occur after the sirens or whistles sounded. I got my picture but the Kodak technology of the day and the distance from the blasting made for a pretty poor picture.

Mineview in the Sky is still there today. The open pit we saw in 1973 has been long closed down and has filled with groundwater. The closest mining operations are across the highway. It is a fun stop for kids as there are a couple haulers parked at the facility.

Today, crews coming to the Base have many options available to them, such as the International Wolf Center, the North American Bear Center and the Dorothy Molter Museum. There is the Tower-Soudan Underground Mine and in Chisholm, there's the

Minnesota Discovery Center, which was formerly Ironworld Discovery Center. On the north shore, crews can visit and/or camp at eight state parks including Split Rock Lighthouse, Gooseberry Falls and Tettegouche.

Unfortunately for some crews this summer, they were impacted by the budget impasse between the Democrat Governor and Republican legislature that shut down parts of the Minnesota government, including all of its state parks. Even the issuance of fishing licenses to the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes were suspended while both sides wrangled over the budget. Even the venerable Minnesota State Fair was rumored to potentially be shut down, until both sides realized that meant no funnel cakes or butter sculptures, which drove them back to the bargaining table.

Getting back on-line after getting wind-blown for a few moments, Duluth offers many attractions for crews also, including the Great Lakes Aquarium, the Depot and Railroad Museum, the William A. Irwin iron ore boat, and the Canal Park District with the aerial lift bridge and Lake Superior Maritime Museum.

This brings me to my final comments as to points of interest you may want to consider along the way.

For years, Allen Rench talked about somehow engaging the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota, to be a part of our Rendezvous. Last year, I had the chance to visit the center right as it closed. Fortunately, my daughters and I got a last minute, after-hours tour that included posing for pictures with a Bald Eagle. I trust it is something they remember for the rest of their lives, but I have pictures in case they forget.

If you live in the upper Midwest and/or you travel through the region, check out the National Eagle Center. It is an incredible facility situated on the banks of the Mississippi River with a variety of educational and interactive displays. Regardless of your age, it is worth the stop. Somehow, the BSA should figure out how it can partner with the center. Interestingly, I ran into a former Vermillion Community College student, Scott Mehus, a raptor expert and researcher at the center, who knew Butch Diesslin.

The other interactive adventure is operated by the Minnesota Historical Society in Pine City, Minnesota, on I-35. The North West Company Fur Post is a living history museum where the fur trade is brought back to life on the shores of the Snake River. This interactive facility melds



National Eagle Center Atrium



Bald Eagle Courtship Display

together the history of the era together with the Objibwe and fur trade cultures. Unfortunately, half of the funding for the Minnesota Historical Society comes from the state of Minnesota, so the government shutdown has forced the society to shut down its facilities temporarily, including Pine City.

As you can see, there are a lot of opportunities when traveling to and from the Base to stop along the way and take in some fun. If you know of some points of interest, whether going to Ely, Atikokan or Bissett, I hope you will share them with future readers. ■



The Trading Post expands to new space



Chief Wabasha



Interior Quarters at North West Company (NWC) Fur Post



Interpretive Museum at NWC Fur Post



Living Quarters at NWC Fur Post

The New Base Entrance



The Welcome Cabin's new home



Moving the NT sign



On new footings



Re-located Stockade and Roy Cerny's sign

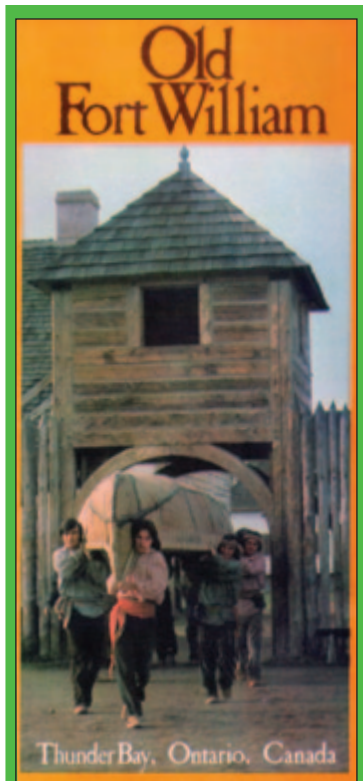
If you have not been to the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base recently, then you may want to slow down the next time you come down the Moose lake Road before you miss the new entrance. Almost everyone will remember the original Base entrance, which was followed by a second entrance that ran past the Depot. The original entrance has been permanently closed with a berm and will be landscaped. The Depot entrance has been closed with bollards that can be removed in an emergency. The new entrance is at the

top of the hill. It opens into a parking lot for crew vehicles with a road leading down the hill into the Base. The Welcome Cabin, Stockade and Northern Tier sign, created by **Roy Cerny** (1964-70), have found new, prominent homes in the crew parking lot. In fact, the new locations were selected specifically to maximize photo opportunities for crews.

Crews now unload their gear and enter the trail system through the re-located Stockade, winding around the Shop building, to arrive at first night cabins instead of marching up

the road through the middle of the Base. Many years ago, Sandy Bridges had a vision to separate the participants from some of the internal Base operations, a “Disneyland effect” as he called it. The use of the trail captures this vision, in part, and truly starts a crew’s wilderness adventure.

Vehicles can still traverse the hill via an internal road to get into the Base and the parking lot near the Sandy Bridges Program Center, but available parking is more restricted. A drawing of the new configuration will be published in the next edition of *Reflections*. ■



Does this look familiar?

One of Sandy Bridges’ passions was the fur trade history. In the early 1980s, he got the idea that the Base needed a stockade and tower. The idea came from what Fort William Historical Park, now one of the largest living history attractions in North America, devoted to re-creating the days of the North West Company and the Canadian fur trade. At the time, it was referred to as Old Fort William. The accompanying brochure is from 1980. ■

Fall Trout: First Glimpse *cont'd.*

(continued from page 18)

On the third night after supper Hank said, “What do you think, Pa – we got enough?” Most of the decisions were actually stated by Hank. But, like the others, this one seemed to present a consensus already formed. “Ja, ja. Ve got plenty, maybe go home now.” Buster started to walk over to his personal pack,” What the hell, might as well finish what’s left of this bottle of brandy. Hank and Junior drifted over in that direction, “Yes sir-ee, that stuff is too heavy to carry. I got a lit bit in my pack too. No use taking it home.” As the two bottles traveled around the circle, the talk became more animated. Hank was usually quiet spoken and spent more time listening than talking. A bottle seemed to open up some hidden place for him. Then you might find yourself in a one-armed bear grip around your shoulder listening to stories he needed to tell. His voice high and coming very fast now, “No bears here. Remember that damn bear last spring, Bus, when we were beaver trapping?” Hank giggled and pounded Bus on the shoulder, “Yeah, I’ll never forget him. We even left the tent flaps tied back so he could walk right in. Know what he did? He cut a hole through the back of my new tent.” Hank was beside himself with glee, laughing and waving the bottle of brandy. “Should’ve seen the look on ole Bus’ face when we came back to camp that night. That bear had piled all the stuff that he didn’t like into the frying pan. Just as neat as you please, stacked up cans like you was in a Safeway store. Yeah, he didn’t like beans. Put a tooth hole through each can then stacked it up in the frying pan. We had to go all the

way into town the next day to get more grub.” The wind was coming up and pointing sheets of flame at the long shadows that ran along the ground and up the tree trunks. “Bus looked for that bear for a couple of days when we got back. He never showed up again.”

The talk turned to hunting and then back to bears. They spoke of another trip where the whole family had gone out for some recreational fishing. They camped on an island in country frequented by large numbers of tourists, and bears in about equal numbers. The bears in North Bay on Basswood Lake are some of the world’s most highly educated. Over the years, they have worked out this technique where they wait at night for the tourists to get into their tents and the fire is almost out. Then one or two bears saunter into the camp. They knock over a few things to let people know that guests have arrived. At this point, there is a lot of running around. Mainly, people are trying to get away from the bears by jumping into their canoes. There is a lot of shouting and such as they paddle around out in the lake safe from the bears. The bears roam around the campsite laying in their week’s supply of store-bought groceries.

Imagine the surprise of the two bears that swam out to the island where the family was camped. They were greeted by men swarming out of the tents firing illegal pistols of many different calibers, and women throwing firecrackers. Now, the bears knew that this was just a game and that it was really their island, so in the time-honored fashion, they ran back into the dark trees to wait until all of this noise died down. But the family did not



“Double-Packing” by Bob “Jackpine” Cary

play that game, instead they got out a half dozen flashlights and two bottles of booze. They hounded those poor bruins from pillar to bush firing their guns, yelling and pounding on trees with sticks. Finally the bears, with what little dignity they could muster, took to the water. Even then, the family got into their canoes and hounded them all the way to the mainland, singing obscene songs and hitting at them with sticks.

Sonny and I left the circle around the fire and went to the tent. The sound of laughter mixed with the sound of the wind flapping the sides of the tent. I wakened in the dark tent to the sounds of battle. It was all around us. There were moans mixed with shouts and in the background deeply felt snoring. The sound rose and fell but did not go away. I could pick out Bus’s voice in the tumult, shouting, “Oh, oh, uh,” then falling off into piteous moans and groans to rise

again later. Hank was shouting the commands, “They are coming. They’re over here. Get em.” I found our flashlight, and Sonny and I crawled over the combatants. The light hit junior’s face and I could see that his eyes were open and staring. “Sorry, Uncle Junior, didn’t mean to...” Then I stopped, for I could hear him softly snoring his gaze still fixed on some spot on the roof of the tent. Sonny and I found a spot under the canoes that was out of the wind. In the distance, we could hear the rumble of heavy artillery and shouts of battle as our uncles prepared themselves for the morrow.

Grandfather was up first. As he came to get water from the lake, he laughed, “You no like music when you sleep?” We broke camp in record time. There was very little talking as we loaded the canoes. The wind was heavy and carried a light rain as the two heavily loaded canoes worked their
(continued on next page)



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way back through the islands of La Croix. The rain did not let up as we motored up the Nina Moose River. Mallards jumped straight up out of the fall-colored reeds before flying off at great speed. It was an incredible trick to watch. It looked as if they leaped up on a platform four feet above the water and then launched into flight from there.

Slowly the talking began. Partridge season would come soon and then duck and deer hunting season. The teasing and joshing picked up. The closer we got to our truck on the Echo trail the greater the activity level. It was dark when Sonny and I crawled under the tarp in the back of the truck. I watched the black silhouettes of tree tops sliding by in an endless band. The two canoes on the overhead rack thundered accompaniment as the trucks roared over the dirt road. Much later, the first

tavern appeared. It was set in a swamp back from the road. There was a small electric sign on top of it marking its location. A huge box-like structure, it had only three cars parked alongside it. I vaguely heard the slam of the truck doors. "Kid, you want anything? A couple beers and we're on our way." I didn't answer. "Naw, Bus, he's asleep. So is Sonny." I heard the crunch of boots on gravel, and then their pounding up the wooden stairs. Far away, a door opened and released a spurt of jukebox music that faded again when the door closed. I was awakened again by flashlights and voices "Sorry kid. God, look at the size of those trout! Lac La Croix, huh?" Hank, leaning forward with his bottle of beer, "Hell Gus, take that one, yeah the big one there. We got lots more. You too Luke. Got all we need for winter. Ain't that right Bus?" The voices and flashlights disappeared, and I

was left with the thick smell of fish, wet moss and the smoky smell from the rain tarp covering the back of the pickup.

Later there were more lights and other voices. Again, the prideful ritual of the fish, the awed voices, and the giving. The family made its triumphant tour of every swamp tavern from the Echo trail to Ely and from there to Robinson Lake. The stories grew longer and the voices louder. The closing of the last tavern was nicely coordinated with the fact that the last fish pack had been emptied. At Robinson Lake, each cabin, had its kerosene lamp in the window. Our log house was the last one. "Night kid," and Buster drove up the road.

I never really heard just how my uncles explained that fall trout trip. Things were very quiet for days, as they usually were after some particularly outrageous deed. There were a lot of sly smiles among the

men. When intercepted by the women, who felt wronged by the whole affair, such a smile would be quickly impaled by a dour look. There were many screen doors fixed. Roof leaks, unattended for months were suddenly repaired. Saws were sharpened. Waist-high grass was scythed. After a week or two, the mood softened and the stories could be told at the dinner table. The women giggled behind their hands, still disapproving but participating according to family rules laid down long ago. Things went on, as they always had.

The web that provided support and yet constrained each of us to remain in our individual role was in play again. Each family member felt supported and sustained by the web. But if you stayed, there were only a very limited set of options. Up to this point there were only one or two persons who had left the basin and struck out on their own. ■