

Real Berard: The Map Maker

by Chuck Rose

Manitoba-with its 100,000 lakes-is a wilderness canoeist delight. Among the attractions for canoeists and those interested in the history of the land are the hand-drawn canoe route maps of the French-Canadian Real Berard. In fact, Berard's maps were one of the reasons that Sommers set up the Northern Expeditions "satellite base" in Bissett, Manitoba. Several maps include the routes that Scout crews travel, but Berard's dozen maps cover areas from Hudson's Bay to the Minnesota border. His maps include sketches of the waterways with notes on interesting places, campsites, obstacles, waterfalls, and rapids. Portages are marked with distances measured in paces. Each map has it's own "theme". Maps such as the Sasaginnigak Canoe Country and Little Grand Rapids Canoe Routes feature native culture. The Middle Track & Hayes River Route and Grass River Canoe Route highlights the fur trade and its pioneers from Pierre Radisson to Samuel Hearn. The Bird-Manigotagan Waterways (which includes Bissett) features the history of the eastern Manitoba Gold Rush of 1910. This gave him a chance for first-hand interviews with some of the participants. Other historical sources he's used include missionary accounts and Hudson's Bay Company archives. but more important, to him are personal interviews with trappers, bush pilots, and prospectors. Though he is trilingual (French, English, and Spanish), he regrets that he does not speak Cree.



Using these maps can be an interesting experience. The "Sas" map was drawn to fit the Bloodvein River, from the Ontario border to Lake Winnipeg. As a result, north on this map is towards the upper right-hand corner. This little detail can become a big problem when trying to navigate between small lakes. It's no wonder that in 1982 (after a few incidents), warning labels began to appear on the maps which read:

Caution: This Canoe Route is to be used for general information: it is not a navigational chart. It was prepared in the summer of 1962 & 1964 and the information recorded including information with respect to the volume of water, reflects only the conditions which existed at the time. Because of the constantly changing nature of the waterway, the Canoe Route should be referred to with extreme caution, and only in conjunction with topographical maps and other available data.

When I worked in the area, the guides would often find "modifications" to the map's routes (whether due to changes in water levels or portages obscured by blow downs). Yet, I've been pleasantly surprised to recognize scenes from the maps such as Lucifer's Boiler on the Gammon River or Split Rock Gap on the Bloodvein. The Little Grand Rapids Canoe Routes map includes a sketch of a Blue Ribbon Baking Powder can and explains that local trappers use the recipe on the back to make bannock (a flying pan bread). Berard's map reads. . .

"If you happen to pass one on your trip, don't hesitate to put it in your packsack. When your canoe is stored and the winter winds are howling, you'll be able to look at this weathered little magic can and relive some of the happy memories of the northern rivers."

One year, several guides started searching for the cans. I found one on a portage to Black Lake but. . .it was a new design, without the recipes. The next one I found had the recipes, but it was the only old fashion can we found that year. Several crew members also took home these souvenirs.

In addition to being a map maker, Berard is an award winning artist, ice sculptor, and short film animator. I was lucky enough to have tea with him in Winnipeg a few years ago. Berard looks and sounds like there's voyager blood running through his veins. He is currently drawing a map of the Churchill River (Mississippi to the Cree) in northern Saskatchewan seeing the same landmarks as Sigurd Olson described in his book *The Lonely Land*. "Sig must have gone during a high water year," he told me. Berard continues to explore rivers for trapper routes and old fur trade sites.

Creating these documents allows Berard to be an artist, explorer, naturalist, and voyager. He enjoys preserving the spirit of the north by recording local lore and history which is left out of textbooks. Use of these maps at the Bissett base has made them part of Sommer's heritage. In teaching Scouts about the north country, these map's pictures and sometimes poetic words are invaluable.