



REFLECTIONS

— CHARLES L. SOMMERS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, INC. —



Clifford J. Hanson Memorial Scholarship Announced

by Dave Hyink and Mike Holdgrafer

Charlie Guides employed by the Northern Tier High Adventure Program have again found themselves to be the fortunate recipients of the sixth scholarship endowed under the Northern Tier Seasonal Staff Scholarship Program.

Earlier this year, **Hayden “Tink” Groth** (1969-70) and **Owen Gibbs** (1967-70, 2009-10) endowed a scholarship to recognize and honor **Cliff Hanson** for his dedicated and distinguished service to the participants, staff and programs the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base, BSA. Cliff, a Deputy Regional Director of Region Ten, St. Paul, Minnesota, was the seventh Base Director, serving from 1957 to 1970. During that period, Cliff oversaw significant growth in the summer canoeing program, which set the stage for the ultimate expansion to Atikokan and Bissett.

Cliff is fondly remembered by all who knew him as a man who took a genuine and personal interest in everyone with whom he came in contact. He was a father figure to his staff, a cheerleader to Crew Advisors, and a bigger-than-life leader to Scouts. Cliff’s words, “You’re gonna be wet, you’re gonna be cold, you’re gonna



Clifford J. Hanson



Lorri Hanson (L) with brothers Bruce and Dale (R-L), accepting the honor bestowed upon their father, Cliff Hanson. Dave Hyink made the presentation (second from left).

have more bugs chewin’ on you than you ever thought existed...and along about the third night, you’re gonna wish

that momma was there to tuck you in between some nice white sheets...” will forever resonate in the Lodge.

At the 2010 Rendezvous, Cliff’s sons, **Bruce** (1957-63) and **Dale** (1957-70), joined by their sister, **Lorri** (1978-81), were present to accept the memorial scholarship in recognition of their father, Cliff. For all of those alumni in the audience at the Grand Ely Lodge that evening, it was a special moment to recognize a special man. Thanks to Tink and Owen for ensuring that Cliff’s legacy of dedicated service is carried forward in generations of deserving staff. ■

SUBMISSIONS TO:

REFLECTIONS

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or email in MS Word to:
reflections@holry.org
with the subject line
“Reflections.”

Please submit photos in
high quality .jpg format.

**DEADLINE for next issue:
NOW.**

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NAME	OFFICE	TERM EXPIRES	HOME TELEPHONE
Mike Holdgrafer	Director, President (Exec. Comm.)	2013	██████████
Chuck Rose	Director, Vice President (Exec. Comm.)	2011	██████████
Alex Nepple	Director, Secretary (Exec. Comm.)	2011	██████████
Nigel Cooper	Treasurer (Exec. Comm.)	2011	██████████
Pat Cox	Director (Exec. Comm.)	2011	██████████
Allen Rench	Director (Exec. Comm.)	2012	██████████
Michael McMahon	At Large (Exec. Comm.)	2011	██████████
Owen Gibbs	Director	2013	██████████
Steve Niedorf	Director	2013	██████████
Chris Wolfe	Director	2013	██████████
Steve Pratt	Director	2012	██████████
Dick Shank	Director	2012	██████████
Steve Spencer	Director	2012	██████████
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MOVING? Please let the Alumni Association know so they can update the Alumni database. Please provide your new address, phone number, etc. We will include your e-mail addresses in the member directory. Send your address changes or additions to P.O. Box 428, Ely, MN 55731-0428 or go to www.holry.org and click "Update Information." **The US Postal Service will forward your newsletter to you – HOWEVER – they do it at the Alumni Association's expense!** The statement "Address Services Requested" on the newsletter tells the USPS that we want them to forward your newsletter so you don't miss an issue. It also provides us with your new address. For each issue we have between 50-100 address corrections that we pay \$0.80 a piece to the USPS for this service. Please help us reduce this cost to the Association!

Editor's Campsite – Hol-Ry

by Mike Holdgrafer

The calendar says it is fall, but other than looking at the date, it has not felt like fall. Sure, every day we are losing daylight. But, when I can leave the office and not even have to slip on a coat because it is so warm, it sure does not seem like fall. The local weathermen speak favorably about the unseasonable evening temperatures for football games under the lights. For some, I guess that is better than the temperatures being unseasonably cold. Maybe my outlook is warped. When the leaves begin to change colors, I like to think there should be some nip in the air. But, these unseasonable temps have not been unique to the southern plains. I watched my beloved Packers romp all over the Dallas Cowboys the other night and the fans looked pretty comfortable seated in the bleachers surrounding the "un-frozen tundra" of Lambeau Field. I remember when I was younger and watched the national weather maps, looking for big cold fronts to push ducks down from the north to the picked cornfields of Iowa. Oh well, maybe things will cool down before I find myself kicking up pheasants in Kansas milo fields.

The silver lining to this warm spell has been that the general contractor building the Sandy Bridges Program Center has been able to make good progress and construction remains on target for completion next May. I guess I need to repeat two words, "next May." I know, this is a construction project and how many times have we seen projects at the Base be delayed, even by years? The single most amazing aspect

of the Sandy Bridges Program Center has been that from the moment it was determined that the current Dining Hall had to be replaced, until now, this project has proceeded without serious disruption. Okay, I know what some of you will say. "Mike, you just cursed the project." It is like the pitcher tossing a no-hitter; his teammates ignore him in the dug-out from about the seventh inning on. I'm not buying into this for this project. It's been well-managed from the outset and I am looking forward to checking on its progress later this winter. Until then, I have been content to check out the photos posted on Facebook both on the SAA Facebook page and the Northern Tier Facebook page, as well as receiving updates from Kevin Dowling.

When I think back to the late 1970s and the transitions of buildings that occurred every year or sometimes even mid-season, it is hard to believe from where we have come. I remember when the current Sauna building was not completed and we transitioned the old Sauna building back into use as a shower and sauna facility. The problem was, the old Sauna building had been de-commissioned the prior fall and was scheduled to be demolished as a corner encroached on the then BWCA (now the BWCAW). The solution was to re-plumb a temporary cold water line to the old sauna and hook up the gang showers and a couple sinks. There was no hot water. Don't ask about where the gray water went. Toilets were portable latrines that had to be toted up to the A-Go-Go and dumped every couple days.

At least these didn't have to be portaged. Either Mark DeLinde or one of the Olivas, Bob or Jim, or maybe even both, likely built stalls for the port-a-potties.

At least the electrical system was left intact, which meant the sauna was still functional. This was good news, especially since everyone's contract had that infamous clause about performing "other duties as assigned." Part of staff training, as well as any time spent on Base, was working on projects. Who can forget the trail staff, under the direction of Henry Bradlich, hauling gravel in 5-gallon plastic buckets stuck inside the frame food packs up the Flash Lake trail? It looks like a highway today. But, not in the late 1970s when the Bradlich Ski Trail System was in its infancy. No matter what project you worked on, there was always an element of manual labor, and at the end of the day or the project, whichever came first, a hot shower was welcomed.

Sandy's solution was simple; take a sauna, lather-up and rinse off with a cold shower. In those days, water was still pumped from the lake to supplement the developing well system, so in late May to early June, the cold water

was...well, cold. Intrepid staff sometimes realized it was just as easy to run down to the lake and jump in after a sauna. Fortunately, the new facility was opened for use a few weeks into the season. Later that season, the lack of water became an issue. I doubt that Pacific Pump, the manufacturer of the portable fire pumps on Base, ever intended for their pumps to be used to fill a railroad tanker car with water. But that's another story.

We have come a long way. There was even a time when the BSA considered whether it should continue to operate the Base. Instead, we stand on a new threshold in anticipation of the Sandy Bridges Program Center being completed. Imagine a dining room where 250 people can be served, together with conference rooms and a new Trading Post with a Voyageur's Sweet Shop. The opportunities that the new building will bring, coupled with the relatively new Bay Post, Tent Drying Building and new Female Sauna and Shower built under Doug Hirdler, are staggering. Staff training in 2011 will be incredible with the resources at our disposal.

This assumes my optimism has not cursed the project. I do not think it will.

– Red-Eye, Mike ■



President's Canoe

by Mike Holdgrafer

This past March, Pat Cox stepped down as president after six years in the stern of the SAA canoe.

Pat was the third president of our Association and like every chief executive, he steps aside and leaves his indelible impact upon us in more ways than one. Now, it would be easy for me to focus upon his challenge pledge to fund, in part, the Sandy Bridges Program Center. After all, a person can contribute their time, treasure and talent to the causes they support, and often, the contribution of treasure is easily recognizable and usually, the most remembered aspect.

But, I want to focus instead on Pat's contributions of time and talent. Some of you may not realize it, but Pat is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Taxmasters, a company that provides services to assist individuals in resolving their income tax problems. Starting a company, building it and nurturing it requires incredible time and dedication to ensure success. During this same period, he was raising his son, Jonathan. Now and then, he also supports a racing team. Throughout this time, he was also there to lead our Association and to provide his talent, which was no small deal given the many directions in which his time and talent were spread. This was quite a life-balancing act.

Pat's loyalty, whether to family or friends, is unwavering. This same loyalty extends to the Northern Tier, our Association and to every Charlie Guide. This loyalty was reflected in his stalwart leadership as president.

On July 10th, Pat headed in a new life direction when he married Cara Clement, in Houston. I was tempted to say he headed down a new portage, but I was afraid that may sound like a typical male comment depending upon your perspective as to portages. Anyway, it was a beautiful ceremony and reception, and that proud Aggie, clad in a tuxedo, had a huge smile on his face standing hand-in-hand with his lovely bride, Cara.

Even though Pat stepped down as president, he remains on our Board of Directors and we look forward to his continued leadership and service for years to come.

I have now been the president for over eight months and my mission is simple; to build upon the foundation of leadership, initiated by Dave Hyink, nurtured by Allen Rench, and cemented by Pat. For the SAA members at the past Rendezvous, you heard me discuss some of the objectives I see as we continue forward.

Since our formation as a non-profit corporation, we have continued to support the *(continued on page 8)*

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.

2010 Rendezvous a Huge Success

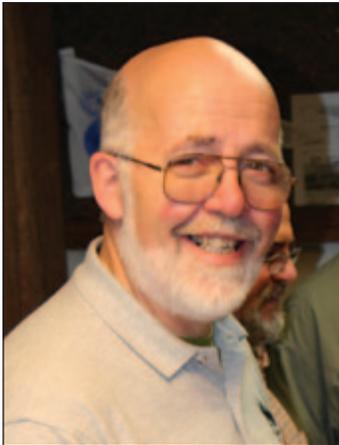
Where does one start to describe this past September's Rendezvous? We don't. We'll let the pictures do the talking in this issue. All we'll say for now, is that the weather was perfect, the turnout was

great, the banquet was a huge success, the auction was fantastic, and "Thank You" to Allen Rench, who again organized the event. We trust Allen will elaborate in a future issue about the Rendezvous in his

own words. For now, sit back and enjoy some of the photos. Other alumni members have posted photos on their Facebook pages.

As we look ahead to the next Rendezvous, please con-

sider what you may be able to help with to make the next Rendezvous better and bigger. For those of you who made it this year, "Thank You." ■



Don MacDonald



A Cooper (Not Nigel or Cyd).



A little Hanson.



All dressed-up and stuck on base.



Brenda Ryther and son.



(L-R) Allen Rench, Nigel Cooper and Bill Erickson.



Cory Kolodji auctions photo contest work.



Chuck Rose paddling a canak.



Crazy Joe Keppert and Lorri Hanson.



Allen Rench – Rendezvous Organizer



Dennis Wogaman makes a bid.



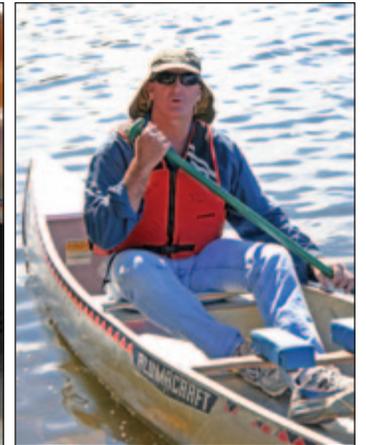
View from the canoe yard.



Everyone got in on the fun!



End of the season.



Mike Breen



Lucy Diesslin meets the newest member of the Dowling family.



Larry Hanson and Cory Kolodji



Rendezvous Hol-Ry



Steve Hudson, Dave Greenlee and John Thurston



Steve Spencer and his handcrafted, donated cedar-strip canoe.



Tom Whitney – Keynote Banquet Speaker



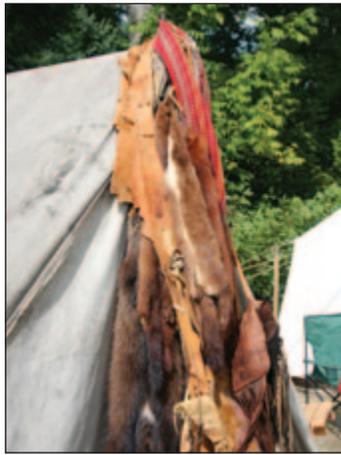
The Hanson family chows down.



Brenda Ryther, Mike Breen and Eric Edwards.

...and even more memorable images and moments from Rendezvous 2010...





President's Canoe *cont'd.*

(continued from page 3)
 programs of the Northern Tier. This will not change. In addition to this, I hope to expand upon the benefits we provide to our members. For example, under Pat's leadership, we partnered with the Philmont Staff Association and have jointly supported an exchange program through which members of both associations can take Philmont treks or Northern Tier canoe trips. This is being expanded to the Sea Base and its youthful alumni association.

But, my question to our members is, what else can the Association provide to you?

One area may be to create or make available other opportunities for life-time trips. Sandy Bridges used to talk about a possible trip to Churchill, Manitoba, to view the annual polar bear migration, long before it became popular with "Tundra Buses." I met recently with Marshall Hunt and part of our discussion was about the Wabakimi Provincial Park and Wabakimi project and whether there may be an opportunity for members. Another opportunity may be like that proposed by Bill Erickson to join the 2011 Thompson Brigade.

We are also going to review our communications to our members, including *Reflections*, emails, blogs, the Facebook page, and holry.org, to improve our effectiveness in communications. Increasing our membership will also be a priority objective.

I also cannot forget our financial health. Nigel Cooper has done an outstanding job, as Treasurer, in managing our finances, which are rock-solid. But, this Association has relied upon Crossing Portages' campaigns to fund operating

expenses and other projects. It is now time to launch another Crossing Portages campaign and refresh our financial position for the future, except that in lieu of running a five-year solicitation, the intent is to launch a three-year campaign in January.

Finally, I want to address the spirit of volunteerism. Throughout this issue of *Reflections*, you have read or will read about SAA members who stepped forward to help. Throughout my brief tenure as president, others have stepped forward to volunteer their services and I will be seeking you out. For example, Mike Breen (1973-77) has volunteered his efforts to help educate Northern Tier staff to protect themselves against the harmful effects of the sun. Sun block? Sunglasses? Right.... We never considered the sun to be a danger in our youth, yet it is an important message that Mike has agreed to help promote. Others have also indicated a willingness to help, like "Crazy Joe" Keppert (1975-79).

My predecessors all promoted involving more volunteers. This will continue. The Board will emphasize recruiting more members to lead tasks, projects and other opportunities. All of the Directors will be tasked to promote the spirit of volunteerism. There is a lot of great talent within our Association. As we soon turn the calendar into 2011, we will be reaching out to you for ideas, help and leadership.

By the time you receive this issue, the holidays will be upon us. Warmest wishes to you and your families, wherever you may be in the world, during the upcoming holiday season.

— Mike ■



General Manager's residence from Moose Lake Road.



Lakeside view of General Manager's residence.



Moving the Welcome Cabin.



View of work past the entrance signs.

Base Building Boom

by Mike Holdgrafer

By the time this issue of Reflections is issued, Carol Dowling and her husband, Kevin, will be warming themselves before the fireplace and planning for their first Christmas in the newly-built General Manager residence on Moose Lake. In late May, construction began on the new residence upon the parcel of land once owned by Cherie Sawinski and her late husband, Sandy Bridges. For many years, the parcel remained vacant until late last year when the BSA decided to invest in building new General Manager's residence. The home was designed with two levels. The upper level, which appears as the ground level from the Moose Lake Road, will provide the General Manager and his family with very comfortable housing overlooking Moose Lake. An outdoor deck extends toward the lake-

side from the upper level.

The lower level of the multi-use facility has a separate entry for guest rooms. In addition, the lower level has larger rooms in which to entertain guests and groups, including social gatherings of the Sommers Alumni Association. Complete with a 2-car garage that opens on both the road-side and lake-side, boats can also be launched from a landing ramp on the premises. All-Phase Construction of Ely was the general contractor.

The Sandy Bridges Program Center is moving along at a brisk pace due to this fall's unseasonably mild weather with a continued projection of completion by May 2011. Kraus-Anderson Construction Company, one of the Midwest's oldest and largest commercial general contractors and construction

managers, was selected to build the 12,880 square-foot facility that will house a Dining Hall, conference rooms and a new Trading Post, yet to be named.

To recap the status, in early June, the Welcome Cabin and stockade tower were removed by Low Impact Excavators to the parking lot. Two water wells were also drilled in anticipation of the construction. On July 19th, a Conditional Use Permit was issued by the Lake County Planning Board and near the end of August, the building contract was signed.

To see more photos of the project to date, go to www.facebook.com/NorthernTier or facebook.com/CharlesLSommers.

As for the current Dining Hall, it will remain in place until next fall. The final disposition is yet to be determined. ■

Reflections of an Old Fart

by Owen Gibbs

With all apologies to and contrary to Thomas Wolfe's notion, one can go home again.

In May 2009, my life changed when my wife suddenly passed away. My children were grown and doing well on their own, thank heaven. So, for the first time in over thirty years I had no responsibility to or for anyone.

My internal compass twirled until it pointed north. As all of you know, there is a special place in the world where young people learn by experience about such things as responsibility, leadership and teaching, while getting paid, albeit in my day, not too much, while enjoying summers in the Northwoods, being "wet, cold, and wishing mothers were there to tuck us between two clean sheets." The idea came to me to go back to the Base. The place where I grew up, where, for better or worse and depending on who you talk to, I grew into the man that I am.

I sent an e-mail to Kevin Dowling, the new Base Director, asking him if he could use the services of a broken down old guide for the summer on two conditions. First, that I don't get paid. Second, my being there as a volunteer could not result in a student not being hired. In a moment of weakness, Kevin told me to come on up.

In the somewhat Jurassic age when I was a Charlie Guide, we were a bit of a misanthropic lot. We celebrated few connections to the world outside our wilderness haven with the exception of trips into Ely. Then again, what sort of a young man chooses to sit on *(continued on page 11)*



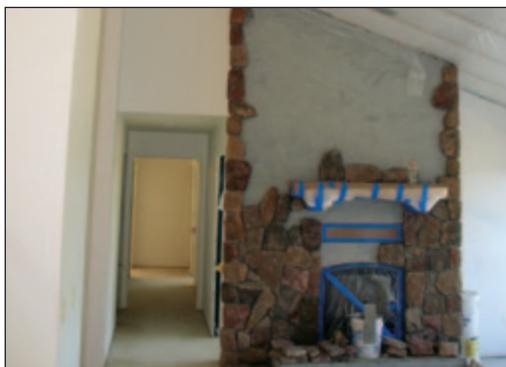
Foundation and stem wall work.



Slab work with erected steel.



Erected steel.



Fireplace stonework in progress (early September).

2009 Northern Tier Seasonal Staff Scholarships

by Mike McMahon

In 2009, the SAA along with the Northern Tier Advisory Committee awarded twenty-one scholarships to Northern Tier seasonal staff. This past year's awards totaled \$16,500 and brought the total scholarship awards to \$230,500. Staff members become eligible for the scholarships after completing two years on the seasonal staff at one of the Northern Tier bases. Each staff member is eligible to receive up to \$3,000 during their careers. The scholarships are sent directly to the financial aid office of the staff member's school for payment of any expenses related to his or her education. 2010 scholarships are currently pending and will be announced by the time this issue of *Reflections* is published.

Until the recent addition of the Clifford J. Hanson Memorial Scholarship, the Northern Tier Staff Scholarship fund had five designated scholarships. 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. The 2009 Chris Breen Memorial Scholarship was awarded to **Laura Reding**.

The Terry J. Wall Scholarship was established by Dr. Terry 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. The scholarship recipient is selected by the professional staff. **Bryan Patterson** is the 2009 recipient of the Terry J. Wall 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. **John Duke** exemplified this leadership in 2009 and was awarded this scholarship.

Drew Augustyn was deservedly awarded the David Hyink Scholarship. This scholarship recognizes David's outstanding service as a founding member and first president of the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association and is awarded to a Northern Tier staff member who exemplifies outstanding service.

The Butch Diesslin Scholarship Butch's outstanding service as a founding member and first secretary of the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association. The scholarship is awarded to a Northern Tier staff member who exemplifies outstanding service. The 2009 Butch Diesslin Scholarship was awarded to **Michael Bentdahl**.

Second-year staff members who received \$500 scholarships are: **Drew Augustyn,**

Brian Austin, Bradford Bennett, Katelyn Berg, Brian Belvins, Laura Cotterill, Dustin Counts, Adam Gangle, Erik Huemiller, James Johnson, Matthew Kostle, and Corynne McCathie.

Third-year staff members who received \$1,000 scholarships are: **Michael Carter, Doran Ford, Bryan Patterson, Colin Phillips, Laura Reding, and Josef Simon.**

Staff members who have worked at Northern Tier for four or more years and received \$1,500 are: **Adam Baxter, Michael Bentdahl, John Duke and Scott Wickham.** ■



Laura Reding



Bryan Patterson



John Duke



Drew Augustyn



Mike Bentdahl

Alum Erik Simula Featured in Award-Winning Film

by Chuck Rose

Erik Simula (1982-84) paddles slowly down the Pigeon River in his homemade birch-bark canoe. As he looks at the camera, he explains that on one river bank is Minnesota; the other is Ontario, Canada; and he is approaching the nine-mile portage to Lake Superior. An interpretive ranger at Grand Portage National Monument, Erik and his dog Kitigan are almost home. He had taken the summer of 2009 off to paddle around Minnesota's Arrowhead region for one thousand miles. About two weeks previous, Erik had stopped at the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base for lunch and a visit with a new generation of Charlie Guides. Erik's story, at least the end of it, is told in the new video *This is Canoeing* by

British filmmaker/paddler Justine Curgerven. The film also shows Erik repairing his canoe

page back in May 2010, can be found at arrowheadjourney.wordpress.com.



Erik Simula in his Hand-built Birchbark Canoe.

PHOTO CREDIT: JUSTINE CURGERVEN

with a mix of charcoal, pine pitch and bear grease; portaging around Partridge Falls and setting up camp for the 107th time of the summer. For those who would like to read more about his trip, Erik's blog, which was highlighted on the SAA web site and Facebook

The award-winning *This is Canoeing* includes a dozen different segments varying from ten to twenty minutes in length and covering just about every way to paddle a canoe including competition whitewater (featuring teenage champion Hailey Thompson),

canoe ballet, and expeditions in northern Canada and Scotland. Especially entertaining is 4-year-old Dougie MacGregor's whitewater trip down Algonquin's Petawawa River, with his dad in the stern, and the humor of Kevin Callan, a featured author at CanoeCopia. The cinematography varies from gorgeous wide angle shots to middle-of-the-action helmet cameras. Justine's previous film series, *This is the Sea*, feature sea kayaking from around the world and has also won multiple awards. Her films are available at www.cackletv.com and many other sources. Anyone who has seen Bill Mason's film *Waterwalker* or would like to see *The Voyageurs* one more time should love *This is Canoeing*. ■

Reflections of an Old Fart *cont'd.*

(continued from page 9)

his can and read a newspaper rather than going to the Yugoslav National Home or Elna's to mingle with the natives, or better yet to harass the tourists? We had no newspapers, Mr. Gore had not yet invented the internet, and television was an unacceptable substitute for great conversation or singing another rousing verse of "At Charlie's We Do It for Nothing or Less!" The only radio that mattered was the two-way to Two Harbors (JL63428). We learned about the assassination of Robert Kennedy days after it happened from a semi-driver who delivered a load of food to the Dining Hall. As best as I can figure, I was on Bent Pine Creek when the first lunar landing took place and first heard about it sev-

eral days later. These things, like many others (as the 1960s were somewhat tumultuous), were important, but somewhat irrelevant to most of us. What mattered was taking our crews on their trips, bringing them safely back, and hopefully teaching them something about the Northwoods and themselves along the way.

As I made my way to Ely in the summer of 2009, I wondered what today's staff would be like. No one today is disconnected: cell phones; e-mail; Facebook; and other ways of staying in touch with everything beyond the Fernberg control our very being these days. I knew that substantial changes had been made to Charlie's, not the least of which was the inclusion of young women as both Staff

and participants. I pondered over what this new generation of young men and women was going to be like. I was not disappointed in my revelations over the next few months.

Working in the canoe yard I was able to be on the Base Staff while having the opportunity to work with the Interpreters, as well as the participants and advisors. This was the best of all possible worlds for me. It soon became clear to me that although there were many changes the Base as I knew it and loved it thirty-odd years earlier and the Staff was amazingly similar.

There was a love of place and dedication to purpose that was just as strong in this new generation of young men and women as there was during my youth. With very few

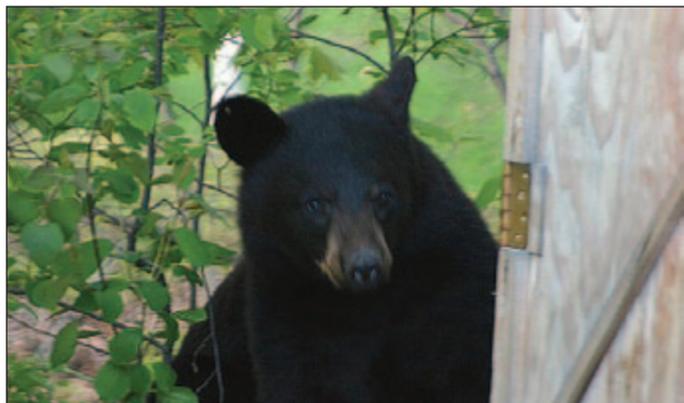
exceptions, the Staff of this generation would dovetail neatly with those of a past time and generation. These days I sleep comfortably knowing in my heart that the traditions I inherited from those that passed this way long before I, together with the values of character, honor, respect, friendship and humor that we shared years ago, will be carried-on into the future by Charlie Guides for generation after generation after generation.

I had, if fact, come home again, and it was good. Hol-Ry! ■

Editor's Note: Owen returned to the Base in 2010 for a second consecutive summer. Please see the article in this issue titled, "Alumni Give and Receive at Northern Tier."

Black Bears – A Gift From the Creator

by Monte Fronk



Lucy nosing around.

It seems that society has taught us to fear bears. Those of us who live in Minnesota know that our black bear population is alive and well. Coming up through the ranks in Scouting, we know too well the lectures we received about black bears before attending numerous camporees, summer camps or attending the Charles L Sommers National High Adventure Base. Most of these lectures were probably filled with a lot of misinformation in order to put fear into young Scouts about being attacked by bears. When we go into our local outdoor equipment stores, what do we see but man's fear of bears evidenced by racks filled with "pepper spray" to harm black bears' eyes. Bells can also be purchased which are to be attached to packs to let bears supposedly know you are in the area, except that black bears have a great sense of smell and know we are in their territory long before they hear any bells tinkling.

How many times do we see black bears make the news with hysterical people saying to the camera that the black bear was after them or was making threatening gestures and they feared for their lives. Yet, the scared black bear has only done what its instincts tell them to do, which is to retreat

and usually, that means climbing up a tree. Instead of leaving the scared black bear alone, people keep surrounding it and calling 911 until law enforcement feels it has no choice except to kill the bear to ease the worried minds of citizens.

In my Ojibwe culture the black bear is a gift from the creator; an animal that was given to the Ojibwe people and made to be one of the seven original clans to which we belong. As a member of the "bear clan," our clan in original Ojibwe encampments was the one that camped on the outside edge of the camp. Bear clan members were the protectors of the camp and the other clans. We were like the Marines of today; we were the "first to fight" if other tribes tried to attack the camp to obtain hunting lands or food supplies. Many Ojibwe, like me, continue to be protectors by choosing public safety careers such as firefighters, EMS, emergency management and law enforcement.

While attending Vermilion Community College in Ely many years ago, I had the honor of studying black bears with Lynn Rogers, a world renowned black bear biologist. Lynn, known as the "bear man," was working for the U.S. Forest Service at that time.

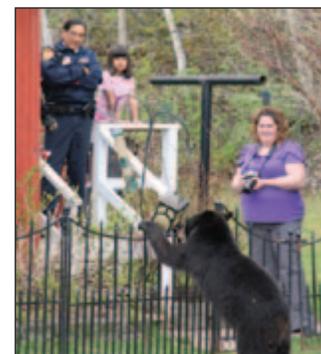
His understanding of black bear behavior is truly amazing and better than the "dog whisperer" on the Animal Planet channel. Those of us, who, as students, worked with Lynn, will never forget crawling into a mother bear's den in middle of winter with only a flashlight and someone holding your feet to pull you and a cub or two out. In the springtime, we had the privilege of watching sows nurse their cubs and then seeing these research bears teach their cubs the skills needed to survive in the wild before she severed her familial ties with them. We learned the different sounds a black bear makes to communicate different things in their natural environment and why it charged a person when it felt threatened. As we improve "Leave No Trace" camping practices in Scouting, which is standard at every National High Adventure Program operated by the Boy Scouts, the concern of black bears decreases. Teaching proper bear bag hanging greatly increases your enjoyment of the great outdoors.

In all of my camping experience as a Boy Scout since 1980, whether at the local level or at any of the three National High Adventure Bases that I have attended, the critter I remember causing the most havoc was, in Ojibwe, "accibaan," the trickster, or as more commonly known, the raccoon.

Where I live on the 1855 Mille Lacs Reservation in District IIA, called Chimingising, our home is known in the community as "Bear Path" because we have a den not far from our home. Our bears know they have nothing to fear coming for a visit and having a snack from our bird feeders. We have had

seven bears that have gifted us with their presence over the years and this year it was "Lucy" as you can see in the photo(s) accompanying this article. When the bears come, I also put down "asemaa," an offering of tobacco to the creator for having my clan animal come to my family.

My neighbors came to our home when Lucy was visiting their yards and expressed their concern about her safety when crossing a busy street and possibly getting hit or worse. I then contacted our Tribal Conservation Officers who are great advocates to bear safety and protection, and just hate it when fellow officers have to destroy a young bear because of public misinformation. They came over with their DNR live trap and set it up for the night. The next morning when I checked on the trap at 6 a.m., Lucy was curled up taking a good nap. She awoke and stared at me for a while, then scratched her ear and felt no fear. Soon, the Tribal Conservation Officer arrived and transported Lucy to her new home on remote tribal land in Aitkin County. By this time, my family also arrived and my seven-year daughter enjoyed seeing Lucy again before telling the bear "good bye" as Lucy was taken to a new home range on a different part of the Reservation. ■

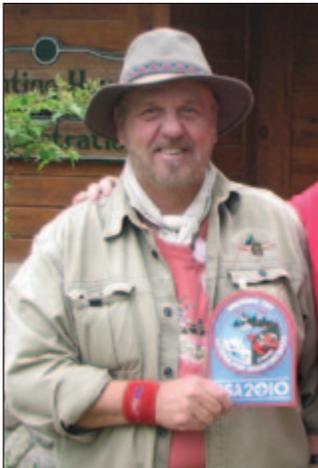


Lucy after a bird feeder.

Alumni Give and Receive at Northern Tier

by Dick Shank

Many alumni have given financial support and “sweat equity” to support the mission of the Sommers Alumni Association and Northern Tier. The four SAA members below have given time and service above and beyond during the past several years, and have benefited youth now and in the future. They have benefited as well, as you will see.



Chris Bursch

Chris Bursch recently retired from a career as Recreation Therapist, working with mentally ill, dangerous, and psychopathic patients at St. Peter State Hospital in Minnesota. He stated he felt “snow deprived” in the winter of 2004, and was looking for a Scouting volunteer opportunity. The lifelong Scouter and Owatonna MN resident knew of but had never attended Northern Tier; that changed with a phone call to **Joe Mattson** that year. Chris had experience using an industrial weight treadle sewing machine given him by his mother, and had trained himself putting together Frostline camping gear kits popular in the early 1970s. He was quickly put to

work at Northern Tier repairing tents and packs.

Chris has been a canoeing enthusiast since early childhood. His troop commonly went to the BWCAW, using a commercial outfitter and self-outfitting. He worked as the youngest-ever waterfront director at Many Point Scout Camp of the old Viking (now Northern Star) Council, and serves as Assistant Scoutmaster for his local troop. He has also served as Camping Director for the City of Bloomington, Minnesota.

Chris has returned as a volunteer for weeks at a time to Northern Tier every summer or winter since 2004, focusing on equipment repair. He also participates with seasonal staff training in June, teaching advanced camping skills to new and returning Charlie Guides. In the tradition of Sandy Bridges, he’s always testing new equipment and techniques, and sharing them with colleagues and current staff. Though not himself a former staff member, Chris surely qualifies as a “Charlie Guide” by his contributions to Scouting and Northern Tier.

Bob Rench’s personal and family connections with Northern Tier go back over 67 years. He first saw the base as a kid in 1953 traveling with his dad, who was an Explorer Post Advisor in Tulsa. Bob attended as a Scout in 1956 and again in 1961, and guided 1962-1965. His younger brother **Allen Rench** also guided multiple years (Staff 1975-79), and is past president of Sommers Alumni Association.

Following his Northern Tier experience, Bob served 38 years in the U.S. Army,



Bob Rench

including 11 years active duty. He served as a helicopter pilot, logging 10,000 hours including 2200 hours of combat flight during two tours in Vietnam and Iraq 2003-4. He retired as a Major, and continues to work as civilian helicopter flight instructor for the U.S. Army. Bob is an Eagle Scout and has served as Assistant Scoutmaster in his home community.

Bob first volunteered at Northern Tier doing roof repairs after the blow down in 1999. In 2009 he returned again, because “I knew I could contribute.” With no prior experience, he devoted three weeks that year to stove repairs. He repaired, refurbished, and tested all the hundreds of single burner stoves as well as the two burner Okpik stoves, and in the process became an expert, able to troubleshoot and repair virtually any problem. He returned from his home in Alabama this year for two weeks, attacking a mountain of stoves with skill and enthusiasm, and in the process saving Northern (continued on page 14)

Jackpine Bob Cary’s Gifted Hands

by Mike Holdgrafer

As I noted in the 2009 Spring-Winter edition of *Reflections*, the Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association, Inc., has been fortunate to use the artwork of “**Jackpine Bob**” Cary since its founding and this has continued through his daughter, **Barb Cary Hall**, following Bob’s death in June 2006. One additional comment I should have noted in the prior acknowledgement was that many of the pen and ink drawings used in editions of *Reflections* were the work of Bob’s gifted hands. For those of you not familiar with Bob, he was also a spirited storyteller, as well as a prolific writer, authoring several books and writing weekly columns for the *Ely Echo* about the North Country. Bob was also a long time supporter of the Northern Tier and his influence continues to touch the Northern Tier and our alumni association to this day. At the most recent Rendezvous banquet, participants were given a print of one of Bob’s drawings of a fur trader paddling up to a landing at a fur trade post, a drawing Bob undertook many years ago for a joint meeting of the committees for Northern Tier, Philmont and the Florida Sea Base. For more information about Bob, go to www.jackpinebobcary.com. We remain indebted to Bob and Barb as to continued use of his art work. ■

Alumni Give and Receive at Northern Tier *cont'd.*

(continued from page 13)

Tier thousands of dollars in replacement costs.

No one's seen Bob put hot sauce on pancakes yet, but there aren't many other foods that don't receive liberal enhancement with an assortment of blazing condiments he always keeps nearby. Northwoods' guy with a Southwest palate!



Rolland White

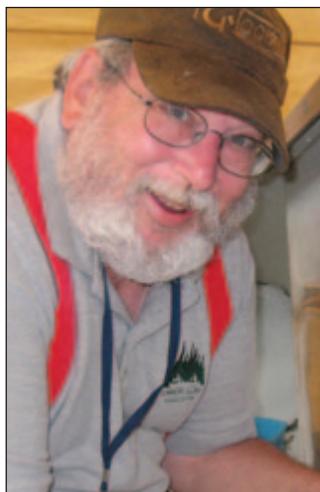
Rolland White (Staff 1963-64, 1967) returned to Northern Tier in 2009, the first time in 42 years. He had just retired from an international career as a chemical engineer and project manager for offshore oil facilities in the Middle East, Africa, India, Brazil, and the former Soviet states Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. He and his wife had settled in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, and he returned to the base during Training Week 2009. "I wanted a chance to relive past good memories and connect with one of the formative periods of my life; to pass it on to others if I can."

Rolland grew up in Redfield, South Dakota and was active in Cubs, Boy Scouts and Explorers. He achieved Eagle Scout rank. His first

connection with the base was as a Council contingent participant, guided by **Barry Bain** (1957-62), who he states was regarded as quite a character at the base. His second trip resulted in an invitation from Cliff Hansen to apply as a Swamper. His swamper trip was with **Bill Bradlich** (1958-63). **Cliff Hanson's** son, **Bruce Hanson**, was an usher at Rolland's wedding.

Rolland spent nearly two weeks at the base in 2009 and again in 2010, devoting many hours to the Lodge renovation project that began in 2004. The way he states it, "I just do windows," but he's expertly sanded and refinished frames for hundreds of panes. He also brought back for current staff a presentation of his awesome experience canoeing 1,200 miles from the Yukon to Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories in 1965 (see previous issue of *Reflections*.) This year he gave a Seminar Day presentation on Robert Service, Poet of the North. Rolland plans to return next spring, and hopes to see other alumni as well.

As a 14-year-old Scout in 1963, Louisiana native **Owen Gibbs** (Swamper 1966; Staff



Owen Gibbs

1967-70) hated his first trip to Sommers Canoe Base. He returned "for some reason" now forgotten in 1965 and clearly had a different experience. After four excellent years as a Charlie Guide he moved on, influenced by **Marshall Hunt** (1965-68, 1970, 1985-89) to attend Trinity University in San Antonio. Ironically, Marshall transferred from that school the same year, but Owen graduated with history and English majors. His long work career included land management of oil fields, build management for cellular networks in the U.S. and U.K., and oil land title work. His only return to Northern Tier in that time was the 1998 Reunion.

Unfortunately, near the time of his retirement in 2009 Owen's wife died. His concerned daughters helped him to survey his options, and his thoughts returned to Northern Tier. Owen and **Hayden Groth** (1969-70) arrived at the Sommers Base in June 2009 to volunteer help with general maintenance; he didn't leave until August 27th that year. His interest in interacting with crews and working with canoes evolved into a full time canoe repair operation, which he moved from the shop area to the center of the canoe yard. He had no prior experience. "This was all on-the-job training." Crews were routinely able to see damaged canoes being carefully repaired for return to service. Owen learned riveting and numerous other repair techniques, and has become a master of aluminum and Kevlar restoration. He has repaired more than 200 canoes since his arrival, and notes the most common issues are rib replacement in aluminum canoes, hull

punctures, deep scratches, and seat repairs to Kevlar canoes, and yoke and yoke pad repairs to both.

Owen returned this year, again to spend the entire season as a volunteer. "I'm glad to see that the traditions I inherited have been passed to the current generation of Charlie Guides. A big part of me was formed and forged here; I thought I might return and give a little bit back." And so he has. ■



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

Déjà Vu and New Technology at the Lodge

by Mike Holdgrafer and Dick Shank

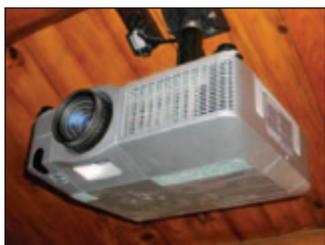
In part, we could just reprint last year's article about restoring the Lodge windows, except we need to recognize **Robert Wagner** (1988) and **Chuck Rose** (1980-85, 87-89) who volunteered their time to help this past June, along with **Rolland White** (1963-64, 1967). Not much excitement to report there. But off on another direction, we have begun to install technology to make the Lodge a state-of-the-art museum and interpretive center, thanks to the financial support of **Jim Sowell** (1965-69). In early October, AVI Systems from the Cities installed a commercial-grade, 4000 lumens LCD projector, together with two electrically retractable screens. We are currently reviewing a proposal to install two flat screen monitors with touch-screen capability for interactive use and will engage a lighting consultant to review the lighting in the Lodge, with the hope we may be able to use LED lighting in some areas.

Last year, the radiant heating system was upgraded. The fireplace will be upgraded to increase its efficiency in the next few months, such that the Lodge will be a more efficiently heated structure this winter. Except for one thing; next spring we need to recaulk all cracks and chinks where cold infiltrates and heated air escapes to improve

the Lodge's energy envelope. Trust us, these leaks do exist when you stand inside and look along edges for light. Plus, it has been five years since the last protective coating of exterior sealant was applied. These projects are on the calendar for 2011 during seasonal staff training commencing a few days before June 1st. We also have a few windows left to restore.

This is clearly the exciting phase of restoration. As always, we will keep you abreast of developments. We still appreciate and encourage any member to help with the Lodge restoration.

If you are interested in lending a helping hand next June, please drop Dick or Mike an email at Richard.Shank@allina.com or mike.holdgrafer@dtag.com, respectively. You will be able to dine in the new Sandy Bridges Program Center. In the past, lodging is on-Base, but 2011 looks like a banner year which means more staff during the seasonal staff training, so let us know far enough in advance so we can house you. **Butch Diesslin** will take us fishing one day and we'll have one evening when we go to the Ely Steakhouse. There's plenty of room, fellowship, opportunities and minnows. If you need other testimonials, please let us know. ■



Newly installed 4000 Lumens LCD projector.



One of two retractable screens.

Ten Feet Tall

by Roy Cerny (1964-70)

It was early June in the summer of 1967 when we were undergoing our guide training week at the Sommers Canoe Base. We had all braved the cold water and practiced swamping our canoes in the lake and paddling them back in. We had been issued our kettle pack gear and each of us had put the finishing touches on the logos on our paddles and fixed up our Seliga canoes with fresh paint and varnish and in some cases fiberglass patches. The older more experienced guides enjoyed sharing tales of the past summers canoe trips with the newest guides just hired that summer. Sharing experiences was important in the learning process. The highlight of training week was the guides' trip.

The sixty or so guides hired each year would be divided up into groups of six to ten with an older experienced guide appointed as the leader. The groups all tried to outdo each other in the length and difficulty of the training trips that would go out for five days after the initial training week. The trips were like an intensive boot camp for guides. The camaraderie developed during the trips was unlike anything you could imagine. The guides taught each other by example and sometimes you had to place a lot of trust in your fellow guides to get you out of a tough or dangerous spot. The trips were intensive in physical and mental training that the staff would need to handle the scout groups that would soon be coming to the Base to start their canoe trips. The Base put over 3000 Scouts on the trail each summer and each guide was responsible to make each

group's trip as memorable as possible. The guides had to show the Scouts how to cook, navigate, paddle, and stay safe. They had to share stories about the voyageurs, the Indians, the loggers, the explorers that all had an impact on the area. They had to show them how to fish, how to recognize plants and animals in the area, and how to take care of themselves in the woods. They taught them how to be courteous to others and to leave no trace of their presence in the woods.

Each guide would develop his own persona. The guides grew beards and let their hair grow long so they would look like mountain men. It was a time of butches, buzz cuts and flat tops so the guides did indeed stand out in a crowd. The outfits the guides wore on the trail were as individual as their personalities. Some wore cutoffs, some wore lederhosen, others dressed as voyageurs complete with knitted hats and colorful sashes. One guide wore a tuxedo and a top hat and insisted on being called the Bourgeois. I wore a leather fringed war shirt decorated with rattlesnake rattles and leather breeches. Hats and headbands came in every style and color. We each were memorable in our own way. We were colorful, brash, and each of us enjoyed immensely the role we played.

I took my first canoe trip when I was sixteen in 1959 and I still remember Jim Thomas who was my guide. He was everything I described above and more. He was big and tall and wore a black Stetson. He could carry a pack and a canoe and never rested (continued on page 19)

Paul “Nobby” Kumasaka – Outback Archdeacon



Archdeacon Paul “Nobby” Kumasaka wearing a Biretta.

Anyone who has been fortunate to have been a Charlie Guide knows that she or he is a part of a larger, globe-

spanning family that covers generations.

Earlier this year, **Butch and Lucy Diesslin** received correspondence from **Father Paul “Nobby” Kumasaka** who resides in Lake Cargelligo, New South Wales, Australia. Nobby was on the staff at the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base in 1980 as an International Staff member, a program strongly supported by the late Sandy Bridges and his spouse, Cherie. The presence of individuals from across the globe enriched the

lives of everyone who came in contact with them and carries forward to this day.

Nobby reported that his beloved Lake Cargelligo completely dried-up this year due mainly to ongoing drought conditions in the Outback, exacerbated, in part, by the politics of water rights. Tourism also dried-up, as one would expect, and the stench of thousands of dead fish probably did not help matters. “Cargelligo” is a corruption of the Aboriginal word, Kartjellakoo, meaning “he had a coolamon,”

a shallow wooden dish.

There was also good news from Nobby. In February, he was made an Archdeacon in the Anglican Church during a Collation Service at St. Alban’s cathedral in Griffith, NSW. Humbled to take up the task, Nobby will represent the Bishop on administration, train clergy and lay persons, and be a liaison to seven parishes, and sixteen churches therein, separated by at least 100 kilometers in the Outback. All Nobby asks is that his friends pray for him. That, we will. ■

Nuisance Bear Bagged at Base

by Mike Holdgrafer

Anyone associated with Sommers Canoe Base is familiar with stories of black bear encounters whether occurring in a camp site or on the Base. Some are firsthand adventures while others are retold versions. It always seems like the bears in these stories seem to grow larger with each retelling. Bear in mind, no pun intended, that bears featured in most stories also start out larger than actual life simply because bears tend to seem bigger at night when many encounters occur. Plus, there’s another corollary to bear size. The size of a bear is inversely proportional to the amount of clothing the person encountering the bear is wearing; that is, the less clothing a person is wearing when they leave the tent to investigate what’s going on in the middle of the night, the bigger the bear.

The “Bear Loop” quickly rekindles memories of border lake campsites you tried to avoid while guiding. The strategy was simple: travel through these lakes and do not camp

overnight on them; leave them to the “tourists” in non-Sommers groups. But, sometimes you could not avoid camping on a “Bear Loop” lake. It seemed like when you stepped foot on these campsites you were instantly instilled with an ominous presence before you even scouted around for a place to hang your food packs, assuming there was such a feature and/or you followed this policy. Somewhere in the woods there was a black bear contentedly napping until dusk. It would then awaken with the mosquitoes, shake off its slumber, and begin its nocturnal investigation of Bear Loop campsites until it found some unsuspecting canoeists who had failed to safeguard their food. It was then that an *ursus americanus* smorgasbord took place. An otherwise quiet night, punctuated by a loon’s wail or tremolo, would be displaced by yelling and kettle-banging from the campsite. If you happened to be camping within earshot of the commotion, you selfishly



Nuisance black bear hide.

had one thought, “Better them than me.” Your second thought may have been, “I wonder if that was the Sommers’ crew we saw camping further up the lake?” Bears, food packs, hanging food packs and not hanging food packs, have led to many stories over the years.

Despite ongoing education and other efforts to avoid attracting black bears to the Base, from time-to-time unwelcome visitors have shown up in the latter part

of summer. As natural food sources decline, these bears are unable to ignore luring odors emanating from the Dining Hall or Commissary buildings, even when the talent of the cooks was less than marginal. Many staff members have met these generally nocturnal visitors when least expected. Often, both parties are equally surprised and bolt in opposite directions and the story ends there. Unfortunately, some of (continued on page 18)

Navy SEALs Descend on Northern Tier

by Calvin T. Gabriel

A properly executed Northern Tier portage is a thing of beauty. Non-Scout groups can spend an hour at a portage half-heartedly moving a random flotilla of gear, load by load, leaving flotsam behind when they eventually paddle away. Not so with Northern Tier crews: Everyone knows their responsibility as the canoe approaches the landing. The bowman silently hops out when the water is knee-deep and steadies the canoe for the duffer and sternman to exit. Together they lift the two massive packs and help each other get loaded. Finally the canoe is thrown up and the three canoe-mates set out together down the trail to the next lake, where they reverse the order and calmly paddle away with the rest of their crew. Efficient. Smooth. No wasted effort. No lost gear. Just three people in each canoe working as a team to move in a single pass over a rugged Quetico portage almost 200 pounds of gear—everything they need to survive and thrive for a week in canoe-country wilderness.

I was carrying my crew's lead canoe on one of the tough B&B portages at the bottom of Agnes Lake, focused on keeping my footing over the rough terrain. We hadn't seen many other people in the Quetico, but that day there was another group portaging toward us so it didn't surprise me when I saw a man standing on the side of the trail, waiting for me to pass with my canoe. It did surprise me when he said, "There's a couple of Navy SEALs up ahead." What's going on, I wondered, almost breaking stride. Then he asked, "Are they with you?" Suddenly I

realized what he meant. Up ahead were my two canoe-mates, Alex K. and Shaun Y., one carrying the heavy kettle pack and the other carrying a massive bag—affectionately known as a "grey whale"—holding all our gear. At first glance these packs seem to equal the weight and exceed the size of the young Scouts carrying them, but carry them they did, often with smiles on their faces as they joked with or encouraged their buddies. Navy SEALs indeed.

Earlier in the week, on Day 2, we had nine portages leading into Kahshahpiwi Lake, culminating in mile-long Yum Yum Portage. That string of portages was among the most challenging I've ever encountered. I had heard stories from other troops about Scouts taking one wrong step and sinking up to their hips in moose muck, a diabolical concoction of mud and decaying marsh vegetation that almost looks like it could support your weight. I was a little dubious that moose muck could really suddenly go hip deep...until it happened to me in a swampy area leading to Yum Yum Lake. One misstep on the "trail" and I'm all the way down to my right hip in moose muck. I was carrying a grey whale but managed to extricate myself without taking it off through extensive application of the principles of physics and the engineering of fluids and semi-solids. Others in the crew had similar encounters with moose muck; most of us were streaked with mud that day.

I know some were at the limit of what they could do physically on those portages, but everyone kept getting

back up. We stuck together, spirits remained high, and I even heard laughter on the trail. When we finally reached the end of Yum Yum Portage we felt triumphant. Only then did Interpreter Scott Hess reveal to us that the string of portages we had just finished was notorious and collectively known as Yum Yum Heaven (actually, I might have that last word wrong).

Later in the trip when we were on the Yellow Brick Road—a broad, sandy, and almost flat portage trail—Crew Chief Kevin C. said, "Now THIS portage I really like." But I challenged him, "Do you really? When you're back home and your friends ask you what Northern Tier was like, will you tell them about the Yellow Brick Road or Yum Yum Heaven?" He knew the answer and I could see his perspective change.

That night as Chaplain Aide Derek L. was leading us in Thorns and Roses I read one of my favorite quotes from Sigurd Olson's *The Singing Wilderness*. He watched his son accomplish a long and challenging task all by himself and saw that "his face was beaming, and in his eyes was a glory that comes only once in the lifetime of a boy, when he knows he has measured up at last." I told my Scouts I saw that glory in their eyes when they set down their loads at the end of Yum Yum Heaven: They knew they had measured up at last.

But Northern Tier is not just about triumphing over impossible challenges, as deeply satisfying as that can be. Near the end of our trip we quietly night paddled

down Agnes through billows of mist as loons called. We spent a couple of hours at Louisa Falls enjoying the warmth of a campfire while the sun rose, then we played in the natural bathtub halfway down the falls. As you swim around with PFD and boots on, the falls thunder down on your head with incredible force; the pummeling cascade takes your breath away and invigorates you. The crew was alive with an unbridled joy as we played in the falls. I heard Kevin call out, "This is the best thing ever!" Austin K. laughed and agreed with him.

The next day we portaged across the border from Canada into the U.S. As we paddled the long series of lakes back to base, a bald eagle flew over our heads carrying a freshly caught fish in his talons. We could see his family waiting in their huge nest high in a tree just ahead of us. Two juvenile eagles couldn't contain themselves as they saw Dad and breakfast flying toward them. They hopped out of the nest and called excitedly while jumping around. Mom tolerated all this patiently and stepped to the side when breakfast arrived. The aches in our arms melted away as we marveled at what we were experiencing: A traditional family of eagles enjoying take-out sushi right before our eyes as we paddled along.

Portaging can be tough and paddling can be tiring, but they brought us to a wild and beautiful land that couldn't be reached any other way. Yes, Navy SEALs did descend on Northern Tier that week. I was proud they let me call them my crew. ■

Nuisance Bear Bagged at Base *cont'd.*

(continued from page 16)

these bears are too persistent for their own good and become a recurring nuisance.

This past August, a healthy but hungry, un-collared black bear tore away all of the casement windows on the staff dining room in an effort to rummage through the Dining Hall. When the windows were re-hung and screwed in place by the Ranger, **Todd Hoak**, a few quiet nights led everyone at the Ely Base to get a warm and fuzzy feeling the problem was resolved. More appropriately, the hope over the years has been that the offending bear has moved down Moose Lake Road to find easier pickings. This was especially true when there were more resorts around prior to the wave of resort sales to the USFS in the late 1970s. But, the Northern Tier staff's warm and fuzzy feeling was replaced by the return of the warm and fuzzy bear, which decided to repeatedly tear apart the building vents to enter the Commissary.

During one successful encounter from the bear's viewpoint, Todd observed the bear in the Commissary licking the paper on individual sugar packets until the granulated treasure therein was released. This bear with discriminating taste buds also enjoyed brown sugar, granola cereal and Hudson Bay Bread, but not the kind with nuts in it; the bear left the nut-laced version alone. Efforts to prevent further intrusions failed and the bear continued to wreak damage to satisfy its insatiable sweet tooth.

The decision was made to contact the local Minnesota Department of Natural Resources officer, which granted permission to legally take the bear as a nuisance animal.

This was not the first time in recent years the Northern Tier had to follow this path. Only a few years ago, then General Manager, **Doug Hirdler**, fired a single shot from a 16-gauge shotgun resulting in the nuisance bear taking off and never returning.

On an unseasonably cold, blustery September night, Todd waited patiently for the nightly visitor. He would not be disappointed. Around 1:30 a.m., the black bear arrived at the Commissary, ignoring Todd, who stood about ten feet away armed with a 30-30. As Todd stated, "It was like the scene from the movie the Great Outdoors [where the late actor, John Candy, encounters a bear at the family's cabin] except there was no window or door between the bear and me."

Todd's story sounded similar to another story. Decades earlier, **Sandy Bridges**, who was then the Ranger and lived in the Hanson House, shot and killed two young bears with a 30-30 he carried when trapping. One bear tried to come through the front door while another tried to come through the rear. Neither was successful.

The report of three rifle shots was heard across the Base. As it turned out, the 2010 Rendezvous was taking place that same weekend. Like a page out of history, the fur trade re-enactors promptly went into action that early Saturday morning when the deceased bear was delivered via a Bobcat loader to the encampment adjacent to the shop area. The bear weighed in at 276 pounds before it was skinned and field dressed by the re-enactors. By mid-morning, a hind quarter was being smoked while a stew of bear meat was simmering over a pit fire in front of another tent. The



Voyageur re-enactor smoking hind quarter.

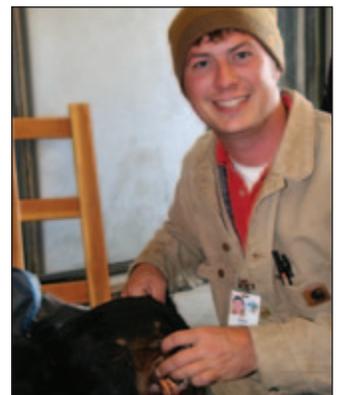
remaining meat was butchered by the Northern Tier staff for later consumption. One re-enactor removed some of the leg bones for use as handles on hand-crafted knives. Samples of cooked bear meat were provided to participants of the 2010 Rendezvous and the 2010 Wilderness Fishing Invitational hosted by the Northern Tier. For most, tasting bear meat was an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Whether some will do so again is left for their own story-telling.

Even in this bear's unfortunate death, other lessons will be shared with future Northern Tier staff and participants. With the head and paws intact, the hide will be sent to a taxidermist to be tanned and later displayed on the Base for educational purposes. A sign will accompany the displayed hide describing the American black bear; the importance of taking steps to avoid attracting bears; and the unfortunate circumstances leading up to the taking of this nuisance animal.

For now, the story about this nuisance bear and how Todd bagged it will be added to the lore of the Base. Years from now, perhaps this bear will get a little bigger also.

Post Script: Live trapping the bear in this story was not an option as compared to the black bear in Monte Fronk's article in this

issue entitled *Black Bears – A Gift From the Creator*. Historically, removing food and other "smellables" from cabins and securing buildings against intrusion at the Northern Tier have resulted in few nuisance situations, and even then, most nuisance bears move on once the bear realizes it cannot easily get to food. The Northern Tier emphasizes everyone following these sound practices to avoid man/bear encounters. If you come to the Base, whether as a returning alum or with a crew, you are encouraged to visit the North American Bear Center to learn more about the black bear, including ongoing research and educational outreach. More information about the North American Bear center, including live den cams and web cams, can be found at www.bear.org. It's a great resource for individuals of all ages. ■



Ranger Todd Hoak with nuisance black bear.

The Perfect Crew

by Roy Cerny

Every guide (or as they call them now...Interpreters), at Northern Tier High Adventure Base likes to brag a bit. It was the same for the guides back in the 1960s when the base was called the Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base. Each of us back then touted our cooking ability or our fishing prowess or the feats we accomplished in the woods with an extraordinary crew. We all wanted to go the farthest or paddle the fastest or do unusual things with our Scout crews. Most crews were an average bunch of Scouts but occasionally you would encounter an exceptional bunch of boys.

Every guide dreamed about getting assigned the perfect crew.

To take a record-breaking trip, the crew, including the guide, had to total nine people. That put three people in each of three canoes and meant that all the gear could be carried across portages in one trip. That number was the most efficient for traveling, for campsite setup and for portaging. They would all have prior training in canoe paddling, map and compass orientation, and be experienced campers. The Scouts needed to be built like linebackers so they could shoulder the loads on portages. They would all arrive with small lightweight down sleeping bags and stuff sacks so personal packs could be easily packed with three boys to a pack. If all these factors came together and the crew was willing, they could plan the ultimate super long trip.

It almost never worked out that way.

I thought I had that crew once. They were from Texas

and they were big. All of the Scouts were bigger than me and I wondered what football team they played on. We planned a long trip as they assured me that they could handle anything I would plan out for them. In the morning when we began loading up the canoes I was prepared for a great time. When I said, "Let's load up and get underway" they stated that they didn't have all their gear brought down to the waterfront yet and they all ran back up to their tents to get the rest of it. "Oh oh," I thought as I counted the personal packs. They came back down with their sleeping bags that were rolled up tight but were the size of 30-gallon oil drums each packed in a waterproof duffel bag. The guys were so big that their oversized sleeping bags wouldn't fit in the Duluth packs where I had instructed them to pack them. We spent an hour or so trying to repack and reduce the volume of the gear but the bulky bags defied getting jammed into the packs. The duffels just had to be stacked on top of the other gear in the already precariously loaded canoes. The gear was piled so high in my canoe I couldn't see ahead to steer so I had to raise up in a crouch once in a while to check to see where I was headed. This didn't bode well for the long trip we had planned. I am sure the boys had a great time but portaging was tedious because we had to walk all the trails twice to get the extra gear. The Scouts were lazy in camp and loved to sleep in. After a couple of days we resorted to shortening our trip route to stay on schedule.

Later that summer I had a crew from Brainerd, Minnesota. The Scouts were all small in stature, but looked tough and wiry. There were only five boys and the adult leader so the crew was only seven counting me. "Not the ideal number for a crew because we still needed to take three canoes," I calculated in my mind. They brought no fishing poles and announced to me that they wanted to set a record for the longest trip any of the crews had ever taken. I was impressed with their desire but tried to discourage their plan because of the small size of the boys and the less than ideal number in the crew. They explained that they had been training hard for this trip and knew they could do it. After much dis-

cussion about the hardships of the trip I finally relented and we sat together in front of the map board and laid out our proposed route. Our trip was ambitious, circling the western half of Hunters Island but digressing northward into Upper Sturgeon, Cirrus, and Quetico Lakes and returning through Beaverhouse, the Namakan River and Lac La Croix...a distance of about 250 miles and over 50 portages. We quickly packed up the food and pulled out our canoes and got paddles and life jackets all down to the waterfront for a really early start in the morning. After the evening campfire the Scouts hit the hay early for our morning start. As soon as breakfast was over the boys ran for the
(continued on page 21)

Ten Feet Tall *cont'd.*

(continued from page 15)

our eyes. He could cook up a seven-course supper in the rain standing in front of the fire in his underwear singing joyfully some silly ballad. He could find his way with only a compass and map through fog so thick you couldn't even see the bowman in your canoe a few feet away. He knew how to tie the canoes together to make a catamaran and to rig a sail out of the dining fly so we could sail twenty miles up Lake Agnes running before the wind in only two hours. He knew where the fish were and what to use to catch them and showed us how to fillet them. He showed us moose tracks and deer droppings and pointed out the nesting bald eagles and the heron rookeries. He could do no wrong in

our eyes. He was TEN FEET TALL! Yes, I'll never forget him. He took me on the trail as a boy but brought me back a man.

Sigurd Olson spoke to our group of guides that year when we had all returned from our guide training trips. He was old and frail and trembled badly from Parkinson's disease but he used the words ten feet tall to describe how we were regarded by the Scouts we served. I never have forgotten what he said. I can name only a few of the hundreds of Scouts that I have introduced into the boundary waters over the years, but I know they all remember me. I hope I have lived up to their expectations and I am thankful that I had the opportunity to turn them into men. ■

My Most Memorable Trip

by Jason Reis (1996-98)

Karl Huemiller (2004-08) once asked “What is the best trip you have gone on in the BWCAW...?”

Oh, I can only think of trip that grabs my memory like no other. **Lion Templin** (1996-98, 2001) and I had decided to start our third season at Sommers with a spring trip opener. Lion wanted to make a go at the border run from the Base to Lake Superior. Having never done it before we figured seven days would be plenty of time. Boy, we were in for a shock.

We met up in Duluth and piled into my VW Bug “Made-line” with my little white trailer in tow. We arrived at the Base and made it up to the Base a couple of hours-plus. Needless to say, you do not speed much in VW toting a trailer.

We were some of the first staff to arrive for the summer, so we rustled through the Baypost and Commissary trying to find the last bits of equipment and food we needed. But being the first has its pros and cons; we had first pick of any equipment, but we just had to dig to find it. Unfortunately, none of the season’s trail food had arrived and we struggled to round up anything we could find. I think we had uncovered and packed some MREs from the Vietnam War. The dust on them should have been a warning but we were daring. We also took into account that there is Grand Portage to cross at the end; nine miles of an unknown portage, at least as to us. We stripped down our packs to the absolute bare essentials. I think we had two smaller Duluth packs with which to start. One was for our

personal stuff and the tent, and the second for everything else.

We hit the lake late, I want to say noon or one-ish. We were not sure if we would get all too far but the two of us, seasoned as we were, sure put most normal crews to shame. By early evening we had made it to Otter Track, some 23 miles. You would think that after that first day we had learned that we could take it easy. But, we still kept the torrid pace and after being gunned down by countless motor boats on Saganaga, we set up camp around 5:00 p.m. on the east end of Gunflint, a 36-mile day. That night, we took out the maps and saw that we had paddled almost halfway in only one day and one half! That was also the night we decided to try one of the more “questionable” MREs, pork with mushroom if my memory is correct. It was like licking slime off a hot stagnant lake. It was horrible. Instead, the MRE cracker pack (brick), which was normally looked down upon, became our staple delicacy for the rest of the trail. It was pretty sad now that I look back on it.

The next morning, after sleeping in, of course, we crossed the Height of Land portage between North Lake and South Lake. Voyageurs of old thought of this point as a major crossing. This is where they noted that the water to the east flowed to Lake Superior and the Atlantic, while water to the west flowed to the Rainey River and ultimately, the Arctic Ocean. Also, the voyageurs considered the crews that crossed this point heading west to be

of a high status. Crossing it meant you went from being a “pork eater” (newbie) to “winterer” (seasoned woodsmen). I give Lion a lot of credit as he researched the traditions associated with this portage and we went through a ceremonial celebration.

The next few days are honestly a little fuzzy in my memory as we did not work nearly enough to break a sweat. We would sleep in and make camp around in the early afternoon. Since we stripped our supplies down for Grand Portage, we did not have much to keep us busy. With idle time on our hands, we started discussing ways to take two canoes and try to turn them into a submarine to patrol Moose Lake, which sounds totally absurd, but it made for a hilarious conversation at the time.

There were a couple of things to note on these days. After Gunflint, the topography really changes. In the west the land is soft and with more rolling features. In the East, in marked contrast, there are the linear hills that slope up from South to North, and the peak seems to end in a steep drop-off, almost like hundreds of gargantuan wedges, just one after the other. We also found some light rails from what I would have assumed was either mining or logging operations back at the turn of the twentieth century. I want to say those were at North Lake, but I do not recall with any certainty.

The other thing that hit us was we had one horribly, windy and rainy day, when, I believe, we were trying to cross

the second Moose Lake. You know you have gone pretty far when you are crossing lakes that have the same name as lakes you have already been on during your trip. Anyway, we were encountered a stiff head wind crossing Moose, North Fowl and South Fowl Lakes. It was only 12 miles, but we dug deep with every paddle stroke to go forward. Of course, you cannot stop to take a breather as you would be pushed back to the other side of the lake. This was where I really saw Lion’s true self come forward as he started a paddle cadence and chanted it loud so we were in sync with each other digging deep with each stroke. I know several of the waves crashed over the gunwales and we were trying like mad to find some relief in the leeward shoreline, but it just seemed like no place was safe from the wind and white caps. Fortunately, the lake was shorter and luckily there is a one or two mile portage where we took an early lunch and rested. When we reached the end of the portage, we feared having to again face a roaring headwind, but to our surprise we found the wind had tapered enough to take the white caps off the waves, which was enough to make us happy. While it was only five hours of paddling, it felt like we had done a full trip. I think that was the first time on the trip we were truly challenged.

It is now the second to last day and the Pigeon River was ahead. It started with a nice one mile portage to pass some rapids. The down river was easy paddling, so we decided to really relax and soak-up the splendor of the Northwoods.

Since river canoeing is different than the lake stuff, there really was not much in the way of navigation...or places to go for that matter. We found this out when we rounded a bend and came across our first mother moose and its calf that were crossing the river at a narrow spot. There was not time to react so we just froze and let the canoe drift with the current. Luckily, the moose must have thought we smelled awfully bad and bolted with her calf. After recovering from that near heart attack, we crossed a couple of other obstacles. Low and behold, when we rounded another bend, our stomachs sank into our boots. The Pigeon was really narrow and this time "Momma Moose" was on our left and her calf was on our right side. We were the one place everyone tells you to avoid. "DO NOT COME BETWEEN THEM," echoed in my head. What could we do? We could have panicked and startled them, but this seemed to be a bad choice, so, we again made like ice and froze. I think I even held my breath to keep from moving. Unlike last time where the cow and her calf ran off, this cow just slowly walked through the grass up to the tree line on shore and waited. The calf stood there just about until we could have petted it and then it dashed up the other bank as we drifted by. There was a long silence after that before we both needed to loudly talk to each other.

We also underestimated the amount of effort and time the Pigeon required. Again, it was only 12 miles but we took it just a little too easy. After a few more portages around rapids, we finally hit the Grand Portage Trail Head and Campsite, but it was late and evening was settling in. We quickly set-up

the tent and warmed up our last MRE meal. Then, we figured we had better hit the hay as 8.9 miles with a double pack and a canoe was going to be a treat!

During our pre-season trip, it had been cool most nights but that night the bottom dropped out and it was freezing; no joke! When I woke up and started putting my trail socks and boots on, I had to flex them to crack the ice that formed in the fabric so

I could get my toes in. One of Lion's biggest demands and a major goal for the trip was that he was going to carry the canoe the whole way across Grand Portage. To some people, they would have thought "fine by me" but it took me a little while to convince myself that I could live without that honor. I donned the two packs, one front and one back, and off we went. We expected a mediocre trail and

were very surprised to find a trail that was in excellent condition and care. Heck, there were decked areas over some of the marshes which were very nice. This allowed us to make excellent time. Every now and then we'd take up to a 30-second break, but we never set anything down. Otherwise, we were moving and shaking. Somewhere in the middle, we took a 15-minute *(continued on page 22)*

The Perfect Crew *cont'd.*

(continued from page 19)

dock with their personal packs and we were quickly loaded and on our way a couple of hours before any of the other crews were ready to go. In five minutes I knew this crew was something special and we would probably be able to pull off the trip we had planned. The boys steered the canoes like pros, knew how to navigate and orient their maps and were so fast I struggled to keep up with them.

The very first night we made it to the north end of Canadian Agnes just at dark. Most crews take two or three days to get that far. It was a clear night so we slept under the stars not bothering to take the time to set up tents. The Scouts sacked out immediately after a quick supper. Our meals had been planned out to take the least time to prepare and we didn't expect to do a lot of fancy cooking or baking because we needed to spend time on the water...up to 12 or 14 hours a day paddling to go the distances we had planned. The weather cooperated with only one short shower one evening. We never set up tents on any night and we crawled under the dining fly to escape the rain on the one night that was wet. We were up before dawn and the sun was just

peeking over the trees as we pulled away from the campsite the next morning with our bellies full of warm oatmeal.

Night two was in Upper Sturgeon. Night three was in Cirrus Lake. I was really proud of the Scouts and the crew could scarcely believe we had already covered 100 miles...over 30 miles a day!

We arrived in Cirrus early enough to investigate the sound of a waterfall on the north side of the lake. The map showed a rapids, but upon investigation we found a beautiful series of falls and rapids that dropped about 125 feet into Cirrus Lake. Night four was spent in Beaverhouse Lake. Day five was an easy paddle on the Namakan to the sand beach by the Indian village on Lac La Croix. We had covered so much distance so fast that we had seriously considered making a run over to Namakan Lake but decided we wouldn't chance it in case the weather or wind went against us. Night 6 was at Wheelbarrow Falls on the Basswood River...a 40-mile day! We were ahead of where we had planned to be so we took a layover day and caught up on some sleep and cooked a fancy supper. The boys did some exploring of the falls. On day eight the entire crew

dog-trotted the one and a quarter mile long Horse Portage, and we crossed it in a record setting pace of 18 minutes. We camped our last night on the sand beach campsite on U.S. Point and made it back to the base by the middle of the afternoon on the ninth day.

Dave Hyink, my good friend and fellow guide, was able to take a crew on this same route later in the summer but they ran into headwinds on Lac La Croix so he routed his crew through some small lakes to the south before getting back into Crooked Lake. This made his trip a few miles longer than the one I took with my Brainerd crew. He however, paddled every day and did not take a layover day. Technically my crew did the trip in seven and a half days, so I feel like we still set a record.

After the long trip, I was really worn out and my next trip that I took out a couple of days later was the shortest I ever took. We covered only 50 miles on that one but cut many portages to small, unknown and unvisited lakes to make it interesting. We must have walked at least 15 of the 50 miles that we covered. You always have to give the Scouts something to brag about and it makes good story telling fodder for years to come. ■

My Most Memorable Trip *cont'd.*

(continued from page 21)

snack break to partially make up for the meager breakfast we pretended to enjoy earlier that morning. Then, we were off again. When we saw Highway 61 we knew the big water was close. We hit the shores of Lake Superior in about three hours from when we started. Stashing our packs, we paddled out onto the big water and just soaked it in. In our minds we had done it. All that was left was to call our ride to make sure they were on their way to pick us up.

But, like any good trip and abiding to Murphy's Law there was still one more *little* thing.... We walked over to the Grand Portage Fort and National Monument and looked around, before asking the Ranger where the location of the closest pay phone (in this pre-cell phone era). That was when we got "served!"

"Oh, the closest phone, mmmm, well, hmmm, I think the closet one has to be the casino down the road, that way, about one mile," said the Ranger with a smile. Lion and I just about dropped dead there. In our minds the trip was already over. I mean, my boots had thawed and now I could feel the pain of walking 8.9 miles across Grand Portage, and it hurt. Intrepid to the end, we stashed our canoe and packs, and strolled our sorry selves down the road. We must have looked like a sorry two-some. It took us probably an hour to make the walk there and back. Luckily, about 30 minutes later our ride arrived and all we had to do was to overnight in Duluth and relax!

There are many other canoe trips that I remember, but none was a notable and memorable as truckin' along the border trail with Lion. Thanks Lion! ■

Ely's Winter Festival

by Monte Fronk

On a sunny afternoon in February 2010, the home town of our beloved Charles L Sommers Canoe Base is alive with activities. Ely's Winter Festival has taken over the downtown area with works of art in local businesses, dog sledding, snowshoeing excursions to pictographs, music concerts and the famous Mukluk Ball.

For many Alumni like me, not only do we enjoy the Base during the summer months, but winter provides an opportunity to enjoy Okpik adventures into the cold crisp air of the BWCAW, digging out quinzes, or snowshoeing across freshly-fallen snow. The quiet stillness of an Ely

winter is something to behold.

I had driven up to Ely from the 1855 Mille Lacs Reservation for which I work for a meeting at the Bois Forte Reservation the following day. I stopped and visited old friends in town. I was joined by one of my Boy Scouts who had attained the rank of Eagle Scout and is now a student at my old college, Vermilion Community College, for a nice steak dinner at the Ely Steak House. Afterwards, I enjoyed a visit to the Ely Steam Bath for a sauna and visit with the locals to share a few stories.

One of the most unique aspects of the Ely Winter Festival is the beautiful snow carvings in Washington Park.

I strolled along and admired all the intricate sculptures, knowing the considerable time it takes to carve one of these to completion. As I strolled among the sculptures, I found one carved by our own employees at the Base. This was the most fun one I discovered. As a local entry, it listed the Scout Law, which we alumni try to live by everyday.

So, if you get a chance, come to Ely for the Winter Festival to enjoy the clean fresh air of a winter's day and the wonderful snow sculptures.

Editor's Note: In 2011, the Winter Festival will be held during February 3-13. More information can be found at www.elywinterfestival.com. ■



Snow Sculpture – Man Opening Bear Mouth



Snow Sculpture – Bear Family

2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade

by Bill Erickson

On June 1, 2011, a brigade of as many as twenty North Canoes will leave Invermere, British Columbia for Ft. Astoria, Oregon. We will follow the route traveled by David Thompson and will arrive at Ft. Astoria on July 15th, 200 years to the day Thompson arrived. This 1,000-mile, 46-day trip commemorates one of the many accomplishments of David Thompson, arguably the greatest cartographer in North American history.

All but six days of the trip will be in the United States and the organizing committee of

which I am a member is looking for American participation. The 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade offers SAA members the opportunity to be a part of a historical recreation that is related to our canoeing heritage. Although I attempted to gauge interest by the SAA to sponsor a crew, I wanted to take this opportunity to let SAA members know that *you can participate for all or a part of the duration on an individual basis*. The estimated cost is \$35 to \$50 per day. If you are interested, please contact me at wcerickson@gmail.com.

To summarize:

Dates: June 1 to July 16, 2011
Where: Invermere, BC to Ft. Astoria, OR

Canoes: 6-man North Canoes
Number people needed (for a crew):

- 10 people min. each day
- 450 people days
- Four people who can do the entire trip
- Minimum time on trip: 1 week

This is not a float trip.

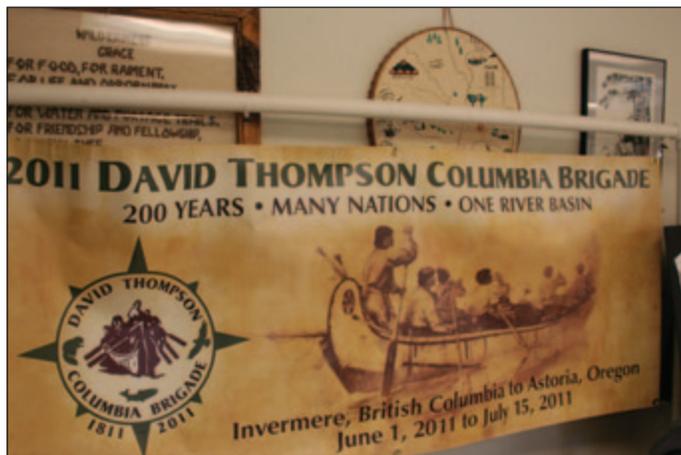
- Average distance paddled per day: 28 miles
- Typical day: 8 to 10 hours paddling

- Conditioning: Paddle at 40-50 strokes a minute, some portaging
- For a significant portion of the trip, we will be paddling against the wind in one of the world's premier wind surfing areas.

Estimated Cost:

\$35 to \$50/day/person

For more information on the 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade, go to: http://voyageurbrigade.org/thompson/2011_Thompson_Columbia_Brigade/2011_David_Thompson_Columbia_River.html ■



Things You Don't Want to Hear Your Guide Say

from the book Kerplunk by Patrick McManus

“Anyone here bring a compass?”

“Does this tree look familiar to anyone?”

“Lucky for you, I just sharpened my jackknife. Now let me look at that leg.”

“I know there used to be a trail here?”

“Boy, I’ve never heard a sound like that before.”

“No, I still don’t know what happened to the bait. Now shut up and eat.”

“That waterfall wasn’t here last time”

“We had better sleep with the food; there are a lot of bears around here.”

“Nobody run. That only excites them.”

“Run.”

“Look, I said I’d come back for you and I mean it.”

“If everybody will settle down for a few moments, I will demonstrate the technique for bailing a canoe with a coffee can and two thermos cups, okay?”

“Two bits of information. Number one: We have just run out of toilet paper! Number two: There’s a lot of poison ivy around here.”

“Okay we’ve got Richie’s vote. Now all those in favor of cannibalism raise your hands.”

“Uh-oh!”

In the Next Issue

- Interview with Kevin Dowling
- 2010 Scholarship Recipients
- Crossing Portages
- Staff Training Opportunities



Broken Paddles

We are always saddened to hear about the passing of SAA members and alumni. We heard about the following three individuals from a respective family member:



Ray White

C. Raymond (“Ray”) White: In early June, the SAA was notified by Curt White, Scoutmaster of Troop 1467 in Forks, Washington, that his father, Ray, who served as a Charlie Guide at Sommers in the late 1950s had passed

away. According to Curt, Ray often talked about the Base, the trails he loved (and some trails not so much) and friends he guided with over the years. “He would often play us the canoeing songs on his accordion and show us the Sommers song book and maps of the Northern Tier, many of which had song lyrics written on the back (I still have them all) and the names and numbers of the crews he guided.” Curt has his father’s cook book, kettle pack notes and patches, with Ray’s paddles hung on his wall. He is also restoring Ray’s light blue Guide’s canoe and hopes to bring it to Sommers some day. “I’ll probably sing a few of those songs along the way because you just can’t help yourself when you’re paddling,” he said. “I’d like to thank Scouting and the Sommers Canoe Base for making that part of my father’s life so memorable and special. He carried that ‘swagger in his step’ and song in his heart all

the days of his life.”

Robb McClary, of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, died on April 13, 2010. He was 61. A long-time administrator for several cities, Robb reveled in his children and grandchildren, loved taking weekends at Lake Wappapello and playing music with a band, Mid-Life Crisis.

Charles LeRoy “Chuck” Childs II, 64, of Sulphur, Oklahoma, died suddenly on May 13, 2010. Chuck grew up in Scouting and sports; became an Eagle Scout in 1963 and worked as a waterfront director before coming to the Base as a Guide. He went on to a distinguished military career. Chuck returned to Oklahoma and was an adult volunteer with Scouting in Ardmore, Oklahoma. ■



Robb McClary



Chuck Childs

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.

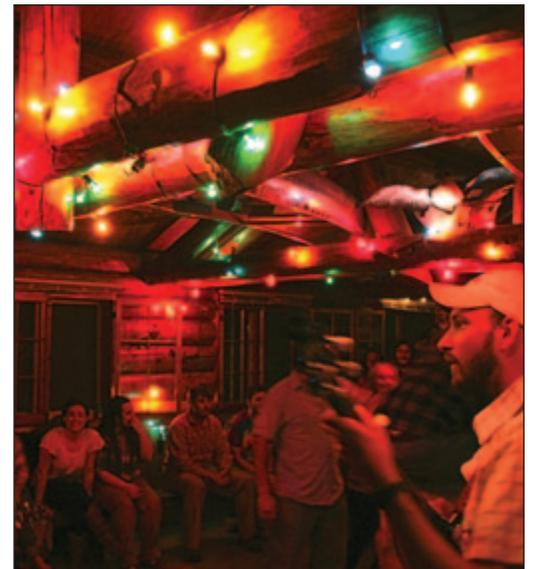
When?

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.

Second Annual Wild Paddle Ball Held



During the past 2010 seasonal staff training, the staff again held a Wild Paddle Ball. These images were taken at the dance.

Hidden Portage

A nameless lake, between Fran and Bell, Quetico Provincial Park, Wednesday, August 5, 1998.

Well before noon, Dan Stephens and the group of eight Scouts he is leading carry their canoes down the slope into the northeast end of a lake with no name. They are glad to have the portage behind them. Fran Lake had been crystalline in the mid-morning sun. In the faint breeze it had been like crossing mottled blue lapis. But the seventy-six-rod portage out of Fran was difficult to find, overgrown, uphill, and bug infested. The morning left the group hungry and ready for lunch.

These remote crossings are tough, Stephens thinks. Joe Mattson from the Sommers Canoe Base had told him the next one—from no-name lake into Bell—was well concealed and might take some time to find. Now Dan squints across the azure sparkle, trying to discern its whereabouts.

The Scouts blow and wave away the bugs. The pests are thick and persistent, and the paddlers are anxious to get onto the water and be rid of them. Aside from the bugs, it is practically paradise. The lake ripples under a light breeze. Occasional pillows of high cumulous clouds float like gauzy cotton across an azure dome. The wide, diamond-shaped waterway stretches out in front of them, bordered by cedars and pines that grow in thick profusion to the lake's edge. In a few places there are tiny gaps in the green where giant slabs of igneous rock drop into aquiline. It is typical terrain for this part of the Quetico, haunting and resplendent, where everything but the water has a sharp edge.

At twenty-two, Dan Stephens is spending his summer

up from Athens, Georgia, as a group leader for the Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base/Northern Tier High Adventure Scout Camp. It is not Stephens's first time guiding. Six foot two, 165 pounds, he is lean and tall, with a serious, quiet look that conveys intelligence, a core of inner strength, and an abiding love for wild places. His long, unkempt hair hangs over his collar. His chin sports a ragged length of beard that makes him look more Amish than Eagle Scout. He wears a black T-shirt under his blue and black PFD vest. The high-tech personal flotation device is a constant requirement for the group—one of Dan's few absolute rules. He wears green khaki nylon hiking shorts and lightweight shoes. He doesn't have the look of an Eagle from Athens, but he is one.

This group of eight from Chattanooga have appreciated both his expertise and his Georgia drawl. When they arrived in northern Minnesota, none of them expected to find a southern boy in the Canadian woods. Instead of a Yankee, their guide has a disarming southern smile and more skill with a paddle than any of them have ever seen. He can canoe all day, find and set up camp, catch, clean, and cook some of the best-tasting fish they have ever had, and he's a leader. His abilities, appearance, quiet demeanor, and habit of journaling toward the end of the day haven't gone unnoticed. There is admiration in the young Scouts' eyes. They appreciate their Georgian guide and depend on him more than they realize.

But the morning of portaging and paddling has tired his

crew and he can tell they're getting edgy. Before reaching Fran they had crossed a shallow lake that in places was only six inches deep. Dan and his group leaders—Jerry Wills and Tim Jones, the only two fathers—had to get out and slog their canoes through moose muck. The fathers didn't say it, but Dan could see the pull had wearied them.

Since leaving Sommers Canoe Base on Sunday he had pushed them. The group's entry permit into Canada was for Tuesday, August 4. They had to be at the Cache Bay Ranger Station their third day out, so they had paddled seventeen miles the first day, crossing Moose, Sucker, Birch, and Carp lakes, and then camped that first night on Robbins Island in Knife Lake. The next day they paddled fifteen miles along the international border, up the thick length of Knife, entering Ottertrack at the Little Knife portage and leaving it at the Monument Portage, where the group took photos of the marker at the U.S.–Canadian border. That evening they camped on a small peninsula at the southwest end of Saganaga. The next morning they paddled twelve miles up the southwest end of Saganaga and into huge Cache Bay, finally making the Ranger Station in the early afternoon.

They were thankful for reaching the station with plenty of day still before them. They enjoyed visiting the outpost, where the Scouts could buy souvenirs and where Doug and Janice Matichuk, the husband-and-wife ranger team, were friendly and informative.

Dan shared their route with

the rangers as the two fathers listened in. Janice said it was a beautiful string of lakes. But she warned them about sticking to the portages, some of which were well concealed.

"A few weeks back a kayaker couldn't find a trail and decided to bushwhack it," she said. "Disappeared."

She waited for the words to penetrate.

"The others came back and got us. We went out and found him, but it reminded me how thick these woods can be, particularly this year with so much rain."

From the looks of the sky northwest of the station there was more rain coming their way. Their next stop was Silver Falls portage, over a mile across open water in Cache Bay. Dan didn't want to get caught in the open, and it was going to be a rough paddle across the bay.

They said their goodbyes and started out over the lake. The wind came up ahead of the storm, and their narrow crafts struggled across the whitecaps. If they didn't paddle, the blow pushed them backwards or whipped their canoes sideways and threatened to capsize them. They dug in hard against the wind, with no alternative but to muscle their way across, their limbs burning from the effort. Thankfully, the heavy rains passed north of them, showering the portage but leaving them dry.

The Silver Falls portage was a breath-stealing 130 rods from Saganaga Lake to Saganagons. It was never an easy portage, and now it was muddy. At its start they had *(continued on next page)*

(continued from previous page) to scale some large slippery boulders. Then there were plenty of ups and downs, ferrying packs, gear, and the canoes down the muddy trail. The cataract thundered beside them. The trail was difficult and long, all of it picturesque, but none of it a cakewalk. By the time they reached its end they had descended over 500 vertical feet from the trail's start back on Saganaga.

The fathers more than carried their load. But at five feet, six inches, and 210 pounds, Jerry Wills was struggling. The barrel-chested Tim Jones, six feet, four inches, was more than equal to the task, though he, too, slipped and slid for much of the descent, balancing a canoe over his head, his heart pumping and his lungs working hard. The kids—seventeen-year-olds Shawn Jones (Tim's son), Matthew Thomson, and Jake Span, eighteen-year-old Justin White, and the younger Jesse Cates and David Shel-labarger—pitched in as if they were born to the task.

Stephens considers it his best group this summer. But no doubt about it, the Cache Bay crossing and Silver Falls portage had taken a lot out of them. After pushing hard for three days, they were ready for a break.

At the bottom of the falls, Jerry Wills rested near the entrance to Saganagons Lake, entirely spent. He lay down near the outlook, appreciating the open vista, thankful for the momentary respite. He was glad to have that portage behind him and glad to know they wouldn't be returning this way. There wasn't a snowball's chance in hell he could scale back over those rocks—even without equipment.

Jerry spent the vast majority of his days settled in a desk

job at the Oak Ridge National Laboratories. Before the trip, he had mild indications that he might have been in better shape. Now the rigorous paddling and exhausting hauls were taking their toll.

In a little less than a week he would return home and complain to his wife about chest pains and tiredness. He would finally acquiesce to a doctor's visit. A week after that he would undergo emergency open-heart surgery. But today, he lay down and rested, thankful for a chance to doze.

Dan took the kids to the bottom of the waterfall, and they waded into the torrent. They gripped each others' hands for support while Tim Jones held a rope ready on the nearby shore, should anyone be swept away. The kids loved feeling the power of the white water. The rush and foam was like an ablution, for the moment washing away their fatigue.

From the side of the falls, Tim Jones worried. He had noted that Dan was pushing them incredibly hard, but this was the first time he had thought Dan was unnecessarily risking the safety of their kids. Watching the boys wade through the foaming spray, he saw plenty of potential pitfalls. The water was riled and unclear. The boys staggered through the torrent across underwater rocks. It didn't take much imagination to see how one of them might be swept away by the current.

Tim Jones remembered the collective prayer they had shared with parents and friends before their Chattanooga departure. They had gathered together and asked the Lord to guide them and watch over them on their long journey north and into the woods. Now the recollected prayer beside the Quetico cataract calmed him, though he

still held vigil with his rope.

Once they were back in the canoes and onto Saganagons, everyone eased up and reveled in the amazing scenery. They had found the most beautiful campsite they'd yet encountered, and after they set up camp, Dan let the kids do some fishing. For this part of the trip, they were luckless. But they were fortunate in scenery, location, and their perspective on the western sky. The sunset that evening had been a florid red wonder.

When they got up this morning, Dan knew he was going to drive them hard across Saganagons, Slate, Fran, and an unnamed lake. Then they would ease up at Bell Lake, set up camp, and relax for the rest of the day. He could tell they were ready for some serious R&R. It was going to be another perfect day in the Quetico woods.

Somewhere near the southeast end of this lake lies their next portage, a twenty-one-rod distance into Bell. They have crossed enough portages to know by sweat and effort the length of a rod—16.5 feet, or about one canoe length. From what Doug Hirdler told them, the portage is flat. That would make this a reasonable, short carry, once they find it.

This is Stephens's first time paddling the Man Chain of lakes. Over ten miles north of the border, deep into the heart of the Quetico, it is not a well traveled place. He has been warned about this particular portage.

"It's near the southeast side of the lake," Mattson told him. "There's some downed trees and a dead one with a big fork. Look for those. And then you have to take a very middle waterway kind of route," Mattson explained, in language only a guide could follow. "If you go right through the middle you can find it. It's the kind of

portage we've waded through, tying a rope on and bringing the canoes across shallow connecting water." Stephens knows some of these trails are often little more than overgrown foot paths, but he's developed a method for locating concealed portages, and he has a knack for orienteering in woods.

It is their fourth day out. From the start it seemed as though they were old friends—close enough, at least, to allow young David in the middle of Stephens's canoe to lead them across no-name lake to the portage into Bell.

Dan calls to the young Scout. "Hey, David, want to guide us?"

"Sure," Dave agrees, excited by the prospect.

Dan tosses up his compass and the yellow and blue Fisher map. He likes to give his Scouts a chance to guide. It builds orienteering skills. And all summer his groups have been constant in their requests to have Stephens show them their map coordinates, where they've been and where they are going. It is a persistence that wearies him.

All of his groups have a maniacal hunger for map reading, as though the small outline of lakes, swamps, rivers, portages, and topographic lines with numbers might somehow explain wilderness, or articulate their experience of wild places. If he can teach David to identify their coordinates, maybe the young man can answer the questions about where they are and where they're headed. Besides, Dan is hungry and wants to get down to the end of the lake. Giving up the map and compass frees his hands for paddling. Once they cross over the portage into Bell it will be time for lunch.

Dan looks around. The other two canoes are twenty

yards behind but gliding up fast. He turns to his own canoe and sees Tim Jones in the bow, ready with his paddle. David sits in the middle, perusing the map. He leans toward them and whispers, "Get your bearings and we'll race 'em."

"Yeah," they respond, eager for the contest.

"Just a second," David adds, returning to the map. The young Scout hesitates, then points the way to where the end of the lake narrows in the distance. "See that point down there?" David says, squinting across the blue water, looking down to take another reading from the map. The others have paddled up beside them. "That's where we're headed."

Dan turns and considers the other canoes. In one, he watches Shawn Jones, Matt Thompson, and Jake Span paddling up beside them. In the other he sees Justin White, Jerry Wills, and Jess Cates coming up behind. The struggling Jerry is not a strong paddler. The canoe full of seventeen-year-olds will be the competition. But with Tim's whitewater experience and his own strong paddle they should be more than equal to the task.

"Okay," Dan says, grinning. He waits until his point man has paddle in hand. Then he lunges with his own flat blade, surges forward, and declares, "Last one there has to fix lunch!"

Suddenly all three canoes are leaping toward the distant shore. It's not much of a contest. The leader's canoe prevails. The three seventeen-year-olds aren't far behind. Jerry Wills rests in the middle of the third canoe, making slow progress across the water. They lag more than a football field behind.

As the far side comes into view Dan is sure he sees the portage opening, a path of

rocks so clear and level they look like cobblestones. He doesn't see the dead tree fork Hirdler described, but woods change. It could have toppled.

This far into the Quetico, finding an infrequently traveled portage on your first try is more luck than skill. They're often marked by nothing more than foot-wide openings in brush or trees or a few extra rocks running into water. On occasion, apparent openings turn into moose trails that dissipate into wilderness after twenty yards. And this year, with the plentiful rain, the lakes, ponds and rivers have all risen, further obscuring the portages.

Dan feels lucky today. The path looks clear, and he can already taste the gorp (a trail mix of nuts, chocolate chips, and dried fruit), Kool-Aid, bannock bread with peanut butter, and granola bar. He tells his two canoe mates to unload their gear and get ready to portage.

As soon as they land, the bugs start in. Near the water, out in the open, the slight breeze makes it tolerable, but once on the trail it will be difficult to breathe without inhaling the dark pests. The Scouts have already smeared on Deet. Dan Stephens doesn't use bug goop. In his summer of guiding he's learned about the sweet smell of new groups. It takes a while for shampoo and soap to wear off hair and skin, and until it does his new recruits are beacons for the bugs. If he stays upwind, he won't be bothered.

He hikes twenty yards up the path and it disappears. "Damn," he mutters. "Another moose trail."

He returns and with a group sigh they reload their canoe. Dan glances up the shoreline and sees what appears to be the portage opening at the

edge of a cedar swamp. They cross the distance, beach their canoe, and again unload.

The seventeen-year-olds have beached their canoe near Dan's and are unloading. Jerry Wills is approaching. Dan hoists his canoe over his head and starts in. Tim Jones gathers their packs and falls in behind Stephens. David carries the paddles, poles, map, and compass.

This time they get a little farther, but thirty yards in, the trail starts to fade.

"I can't believe it," Stephens says, incredulous. He looks around and sees a nearby cedar with low hung boughs. In one swift move he slides the aluminum craft up onto eight-foot-high branches. He is happy to be out from under the load. The canoe hangs there, held up by graceful green arms.

Tim looks ahead and sees Dan parking his canoe, realizes it is another dead end, and turns to tell the others not to unload or follow them up the trail. He retraces the thirty yards to shore. Jerry Wills and his companions are still in their canoe.

"Looks like another moose trail," Jones explains.

The others shrug, knowing the real portage must be nearby. Jerry Wills unfolds his map and takes a closer look.

Back in the woods Dan turns to David and asks, "What's the map say?" In part it is a rhetorical question. Dan Stephens has stared at Fisher Map F-19 for the last two days. He can close his eyes and read its title—*Saganaga, Seagull Lakes*—and its accompanying key and assorted lake locations with enough clarity to trace it in sand.

One thing he has always found disappointing is the way the map's landscape relief ends at the Canadian

border. North of that line there are no indications of swamp-land, topography, lake depths, or elevations. Just yellow and blue swatches depicting land, lakes and rivers. Enough, he has long realized, to easily guide him in a canoe, but insufficient to give him an idea of the country they're about to enter until they cross into it.

"The map shows it's right around here," David finally answers.

"I'm gonna do a cloverleaf," Dan says. "See if I can find it."

The young Scout nods. "Okay," he says. David turns and starts back to the shoreline. They are familiar with their guide's method for finding obscure portage routes, though none of them have ever followed him into the woods.

Still sitting in the canoe, Jerry Wills reviews his map. But when he sees the young Scout walk out and tell them Dan is searching for the trail, he rebukes their young guide, at least to himself. *Bushwhacking*, he thinks, displeased with Dan's decision to strike off and look for their trail through woods as dense as these. He has watched Stephens disappear before, and never worried about it until Janice Matichuk's comments back at the Cache Bay station.

"It's easy to get disoriented in this bush," he remembers hearing the ranger say. "Make sure you stick to the trails."

Well inside the woods, Stephens peers at his watch. He has practically perfected the cloverleaf method for finding wayward portages. He walks straight into the woods for one minute. He glances at his watch several times, shifting through the shadowy trees. Overhead branches block the sky. The heavy network
(continued on next page)

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 of thick tree roots forms an obstacle course. A half-minute into his hike he squints down at his watch and trips, wrenching an ankle. "Damn."

The bugs are starting to swarm. He needs to find that path.

If you know how to wend through swamp trees, one minute of walking can take you a considerable distance. He does not notice it, but he can no longer hear his friends back at the shoreline. In his short time bushwhacking he has covered well over fifty yards.

Dan Stephens has been careful to register distinctive

points in the terrain. A particular cedar tree, broken near its base. A wrangled fin of large granite boulders bordering one side of the swamp. After one minute he picks a clear point of departure, and then makes a sharp ninety-degree turn to his left. Stephens is sure he will cross the trail. He hikes in that direction for another minute, but it fails to appear. He returns to his departure point, hikes in the opposite direction, but after another minute still doesn't find it.

"Goddammit." They'll have to paddle further up the shore.

He doesn't look forward to returning through that swamp.

He angles to his left to where the fin of boulders borders the trees. The rocks will be easier walking, and though some of them are large enough to require light climbing, that way is preferable to being eaten among the shadowy, root-plagued cedars.

He is almost a football field from his starting point, considerably astray from the angle at which he entered. From here he can see less than ten feet into impenetrable brush. The bugs are starting to annoy him.

He carefully climbs over a near rim of rocks. His wrenched ankle feels tight. He comes

to a large boulder, ascends it, and from that vantage point looks to the next low rabble of stone. If he leaps carefully, he thinks, he can just reach that one in the center. He tenses. He springs. In the microseconds it takes to cross five feet of air, his stomach registers the miscalculation before he does. And then his feet fall short of the center stone and he topples headlong into granite. ■

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