



NORTHERN TIER NATIONAL HIGH ADVENTURE

REFLECTIONS



SOMMERS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Terry, Merci et Meilleurs Voeux

Submitted by Mike Holdgrafer

On July 1st, Terry Schocke, Director of Programs, retired after thirty-four and one-half years of professional service to the Boys Scouts of America; the last ten years being at the Northern Tier. Immediately following his retirement, Terry found himself seated on a red painted Adirondack chair looking across Le Lac Supérieur at Nanaboujou Lodge. As he likely reflected upon his professional career and looked



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REFLECTIONS

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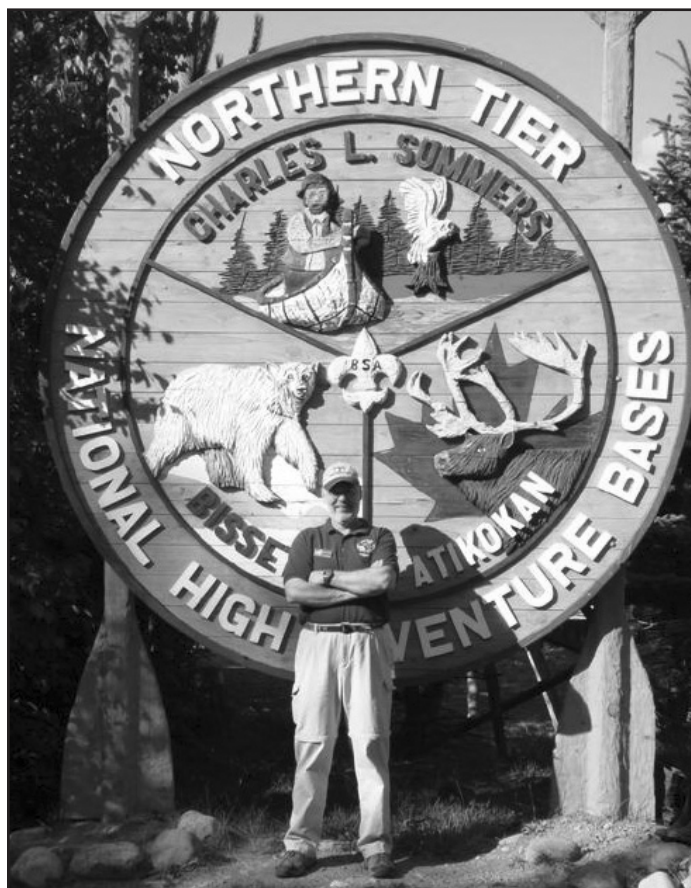
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or email in MS Word or
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with the subject line
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Pictures are appreciated
in high quality .jpg
format or by snail mail.

**DEADLINE for next
issue is - Dec. 15, 2007.**



forward to spending more time with Terri, his wife of thirty-six years, we trust he took pride in his contributions to the Northern Tier program.

As the Director of Programs it is hard not to impact Northern Tier participants. It is sort of like sitting in a canoe and throwing a rock into the lake; the chance is pretty good that the tossed rock will land in the water. The only real question is what kind of splash is made. In the case of Terry,

the "splash" of his presence remains highly regarded throughout the program.

Terry has always been geared towards improving the delivery of the program throughout his tenure. He directed the development of professionally-created Northern Tier promotional materials for the summer and Okpik programs, drawing upon his personal photography skills, which remain in use and are now routinely mailed

nationwide to Scouting councils. He also helped develop materials for advisors such as the Expedition Planning Guide and expanded the horizon of his computer skills to refine the Northern Tier website and make more information available to groups about the Northern Tier. Scouting leaders today can readily obtain materials on-line or an annual CD with information to help them plan and prepare for treks. Terry moved registration, staff and crew rosters and crew evaluations to Access databases and upgraded server technology to meet increasing demand.

The most prominent impact was the development of light-weight canoe rentals, which has enhanced the wilderness experience for thousands of Scouts and Scouters. Terry further overhauled the crew evaluation process and, based upon data from this process, he implemented upgrades to trail equipment including packs, PFDs and tents. Today, canoes and other equipment are routinely replaced with new equipment, such as third seats in Kevlar canoes, to meet the participants' expectations.

For a long time, Northern Tier capacity was driven by total canoes, but Terry promoted that program capacity should be based upon housing
(Continued on page 18)

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Number in parenthesis is years remaining in current term.

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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 to Chuck Rose clrose@stcloudstate.edu. **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 \$.80 a piece to the USPS for this service. Please help us reduce this cost to the Association!

Editor's Campsite

by Mike Bingley

You may notice that there has been a long gap in between Reflections again and, for that, I apologize. We had a major shortage of submissions for a while and it was beginning to look like this issue was going to be a front and back page. This is just a quick reminder that the deadline for submissions for the next issue is October 31st, 2007. I prefer that things come as either rich text, plain text or Word documents with the photos separately (not in the document). Photos should be high quality jpgs or tiffs.

But enough about formats I think you'll find that this issue was worth the wait – we have a true multi-generational collection of articles from various

Charlie Guides here, from stories by the latest crop of alumni writing about their current Northern Tier experiences to trips to the arctic, this issue has it all.

One of the things I love about Scouting and Northern Tier is the connection that we all have to each other. I've found it particularly strong this year: it being our world centennial. Our shared values are what has made Scouting such a force in the last century – it is through our collective memories that we'll make sure it continues in to the next one. Remember the world slogan for our centennial "One World, One Promise" and keep the curvy side down. ■



President's Canoe

by Patrick Cox

A few editions of Reflections back I promised to tell you more about some of the projects that your association is sponsoring and working to achieve. All of these have room for any of the members of the association to participate so everyone is welcome to help. If you think something would be appealing to one of your former peers from back in the day, let them know you read about it – and consider coming along to work with them.

Renovation of the Lodge at the Ely base is one of our current major projects. It is also a project that we have undertaken with the Base management. The entire project will cost over \$50,000 to complete. The end result will be that we have preserved the Lodge for the

next generation (at a cost of just over \$25,000 for the log refurbishment alone) and we will have turned it into a museum of our history with interactive displays that will include photographs taken on trips at all three of the Sommers canoe bases over the many generations of canoeists that have come before and after your days at the Bases.

Those of you who worked at the Ely Base in the early 1970's and prior remember using the Lodge for outfitting and other functions related to getting crews on and off the water. It largely fell into non-use in the 1980's. Some of us in the early 1980's would take naps and gold brick there during the afternoon – I remember trying to find a good spot for a

quick nap only to wake Ben Bartlett who was snoozing in one of the Adirondack chairs in the library. Towards the late 1980's, it began being used for the off-the-water campfires. That use continued off and on into the late 1990's from what I understand. Doug Hirdler, the current Base Director (a position known as the general manager today), is fully supportive of the Lodge plans and has even agreed to help fund this by covering half the estimated \$50,000 cost from his capital improvement budget. The success of this project so far and the co-funding aspect has evolved into the SAA directors realizing what great things can be accomplished at all three bases when we pool the BSA's support and our support for appropriate and mission relevant projects of the SAA and the BSA.

Another new endeavor of your association is the PSA/SAA Exchange Program. This all started as the brain child of new SAA Member and former Philmont Ranger, Lee Huckstep. Lee was a grub who was guided in the late 1960's by Charlie Guide Owen Gibbs. Lee has worked with great enthusiasm to get this rolling. To his credit, the response has been very strong and most spots are full. As of the date I wrote this, I believe there is still room for a couple of people – if you are interested, contact Lee right away. If the one or two openings that were available are filled, he can put you on an alternate list or maybe add another crew if facilities will permit.

There are several great features to the PSA/SAA Exchange Program. For those of you who want to earn the Triple Crown, this trip and the Philmont version that follows will count as participant trips. Lee and our own Butch

Diesslin are working on trying to expand this to include a third leg of it at the Florida Sea Base to make it a program where alumni of all three organizations can earn the Triple Crown. Secondly, all of the fees paid to the Base for the canoe trip part of the program (after paying the cost of the Charlie Guides leading the trip and the costs of food) will go to the SAA to fund scholarships. This new funding source will be tremendously helpful in funding the scholarships we provide to current Charlie Guides.

Some of these endeavors may interest you or some of the ones mentioned in past columns may interest you. If so, let us know. We are always looking for association members who want to pitch in and have a little fun.

Last but not least, we are always looking for SAA members interested in becoming a director of the SAA. Most of our directors are willing to serve for 2 or 3 terms with a few willing to serve a little more. We normally have, at each election, one or two current directors who would like to step aside and make room for new people with new ideas. We don't lose their knowledge or their support as the retiring directors usually stay active and shepherd a favorite project. All of your association directors have a desire to make certain that your board remains focused on doing what is best for the SAA in its mission to help the staff of the canoe bases in Ely, Atikokan and Bissett. We welcome your participation.

Here's hoping to see you soon... Redeye, Pat ■



Work Week Advances Lodge Restoration

by Mike Holdgrafer and Dick Shank

As every Charlie Guide knows, the sky at the end of the portage tends to lighten as you get closer to the water, but sometimes the lightening sky gives way to a swamp. Significant progress on the restoration of the Lodge was accomplished this spring thanks in large part to the continued efforts of SAA members. Unless there is a swamp ahead, it appears the interior log restoration at the Lodge may be concluded by Rendezvous 2008. As we will discuss below in a report on 2007 restoration efforts, exterior log restoration was completed this past April. Further, outfitting the Lodge in state-of-the-art technology and other interpretive displays is also envisioned to commence before SAA members again rendezvous at the Base. Together with the ongoing support of the Northern Tier High Adventure Program, we continue to move forward and ensure that the Lodge will remain a priceless fixture, not only to our members, but also to every person who stands

before the portrait of Charles L. Sommers, a dedicated Scouter and canoeing enthusiast who passionately embraced a vision to outfit Scouts for canoe trips.

Exterior Log Restoration

During the last two weeks of April 2007, Edmunds & Company Log Home Restorations, LLC (Edmunds) employees completed extensive exterior work on the Lodge. The exterior was initially sandblasted prior to treatment with a borate preservative and a log home finish.

The contract called for the replacement of approximately seventeen crown ends and several log sections that had deteriorated to the point where they would continue to rot and jeopardize structurally sound logs and the building. Unfortunately, it seems like with any project, additional problems come to light. The sandblasting and another year of exposure revealed an additional five crown ends and a thirty feet log on the north side above the windows opening
(Continued on next page)

Work Week Advances Lodge Restoration (cont'd.)



Photo #1

(Continued from previous page)

into the main room that needed replacement. There was no reason to doubt Matt Edmunds' professional advice. To keep the project moving forward, the SAA Executive Board Committee agreed to fund the additional cost of this work in the amount of \$4,375 with **Doug Hirdler** committing to reimburse these amounts from the Northern Tier 2009 Capital Improvement plan.

Existing crown ends of logs on the outside corners had suffered from exposure since initial installation in the winter of 1941-42. Crown ends, as shown in accompanying photos, are the overlapping intersection of logs on outside corners, which give the corners an appearance like a crown. The drip line for the initial roof failed to extend past the crown ends and moisture had direct access to the exposed end grain. During the last Lodge renovation in 1990s, some crown ends were trimmed in an effort to bring them back under the drip line and/or treated with filler, but even then the replacement roof failed to extend the drip line past all of the crown ends, con-



Photo #2

tinuing some exposure. In addition, some log sections needed replacement due to excessive rot.

To the casual observer, Edmunds' crown and log replacement is not detectable. Indeed, the work is outstanding (see Photo #1).

The professional crews used chain saws to make plunge cuts to remove damaged crown ends and then scribe and fit new crown ends that were similar in size, configuration and texture (see Photo #2). "The final product was remarkable and blended perfectly into existing crown ends," noted **Dick Shank**, the SAA Director who was responsible for identifying and securing Edmunds for the project and who made a quick trip to the Base as the project was winding up to photograph the work which accompanies this article. Bad horizontal or sill logs were sawn in half lengthwise

to remove the damaged portion and then a replacement half-log was custom-fitted and lap-spliced back in place.

Everyone has been impressed with the work of Edmunds at the Lodge, including **Doug**, who contracted with Edmunds to replace eight crown ends on the Hanson House.

Although the exterior now looks great, there is still exterior work to be done. Edmunds identified four other issues which he recommended the SAA undertake:

- Where water splashes on to the exterior from roof drainage, gutters need to be installed, especially on the lake-facing side.
- The chimney and other foundation stonework need to be sealed with Thompson's Water seal or an equivalent product, to prevent moisture transferring to the logs.
- Moss is growing on the roof. This needs to be controlled by trimming trees around the building. [It was also discussed that zinc strips could be installed to deter algae and moss growth.]
- Rotting wood around the building needs to be removed; for example, firewood racks on the lake-facing side.

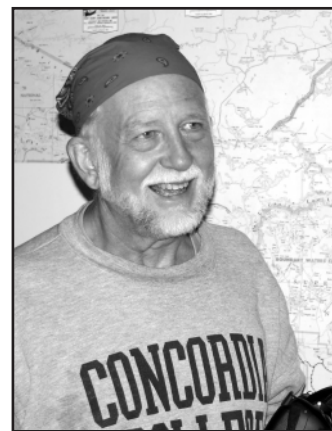
In addition, there are a number of interfaces, either log-to-log, or window or door jamb-to-log, where light can clearly be seen from the outside. These gaps which allow moisture infiltration and heat transversal need to be caulked. Finally, an exterior preventive maintenance plan needs to be developed to ensure that future work is timely completed to maintain the present status of

the restored exterior surfaces.

Interior Log Restoration

Two milestones were passed when the SAA work week ended on June 9th. First, the remainder of the main room or "Great Hall" as some refer to it was power washed by **Mike Holdgrafer** in preparation for finishing. Second, except for touch-up areas, the remaining interior of the first level of the Lodge now has a minimum of two layers of spar varnish on it. This includes the rafters, beams and roof plank-ing in the small room off to the right when a person enters the Lodge from the front.

Under the direction of **Dick, Rob Wagner** (Kansas City, MO), **Jon Dahl** (Spring Valley, MN), **Steve Spencer** (Linsborg, KS) and **Georg Schroeder** (Des Moines, IA) found themselves, at one or more points in





time during the work week, wiping down logs, smoothing surfaces or applying varnish to thirsty logs (Please see the separate article on individuals who assisted with 2007 SAA work week and seasonal staff training!).

The log cleaning removed, in some areas, one to two layers of varnish down to bare pine surfaces. In fact, merely rubbing the surface with a rag could remove old varnish that no longer adhered to the wood. "Where the varnish was removed, we have attempted to match the color of adjacent darker varnished surfaces to bare wood surfaces by using a diluted solution of TransTint Honey Amber dye or in some extreme cases, the un-diluted concentrate," stated **Mike**. "Hand-spraying, followed by wiping it with a rag, expedited the process and created more uniform coloration between existing varnished and un-finished areas on the logs." This stain will likely be used to attempt to alter the color of the existing stained wainscot to more closely match it to the re-finished logs.

Aside from log touch-up work in the middle room, the final leg of interior log restoration is the main room which may be completed easily by a work crew of SAA volunteers in June 2008. **Dick** and **Mike** envision that with scaffolding installed, the final timetable

may be as follows, assuming a work force of eight additional individuals:

June 1: Arrival at Canoe Base. Finish scaffolding and drop cloth placement if not already completed. Remove wall displays (Note: Screws installed in 2007 to promote easy removal). Install temporary 500W and 1000W work lights.

June 2: Log surfaces wiped with stripping pads to remove loose material from power washing and lightly sanded where power washer "feathered" surface. Smoothed log surfaces hand sprayed and wiped with matching stain. Determine use of sanding sealer on some surfaces.

June 3: Commence first coat of varnish starting at the ridge beam & end wall logs.

June 4: Complete first coat of varnish to wainscot. Break for drying.

June 5: Smooth rafters and walls, and wipe with tack cloth. Commence second coat at ridge beam and end log walls.

June 6: Complete second coat of varnish to wainscot. Break for drying.

June 7: Check surfaces and treat blemishes. Determine need for third coat over blemishes, surfaces that have absorbed first two coats and other high use locations.

June 8: Wrap-up.

A fishing day, guided by



Butch Diesslin, could easily be slipped in without upsetting the scheduled and depending upon the turn-out, one or more individuals may participate in swamper trips.

Additional Interior Work

Critical attention has been directed toward exterior and interior log restoration, but there remains additional interior work to be completed. For example, every window unit will need to be re-finished and the wainscot needs to be treated and finished to match the logs. These will likely be addressed in 2008-09, followed by a move upstairs to library, which additionally needs work.

Heating System

During the last renovation, a propane furnace was installed and PEX tubing was installed in the raised concrete floor in the middle room and stubbed into an access panel.

Butch obtained cast iron radiant heaters that were installed into the main room. The PEX tubing was never tied into existing copper supply and return lines to the main room.

Jon Dahl noted that all that was required were two manifolds to tie the radiant floor system into the existing system. This work will be completed to more thoroughly heat the Lodge, along with ensuring that leaking heating lines and fittings are repaired,

along with the door to the combustion room where the furnace is located.

Technology

On June 5th, **Mike** and **Dick** met with a networking consultant from Duluth to conceptually discuss the integration of various technologies in the Lodge to enhance its use as an interpretive facility and conference facility. Opportunities for flat screen technology exist throughout the middle room such that both touch screen and static displays may be presented. For example, the newly-opened North American Bear Center uses over thirty flat screens tied directly to DVD/CD/MP3 players, a low tech solution that Cabela's and many other retailers use. Wireless technology was also discussed, together with linking the Lodge to the Base's existing wireless internet system and telephone line. Given the investment by the SAA and the BSA in the Lodge, security and fire protection are additional systems to be considered.

Conclusion

Significant progress was made this June. As any Charlie Guide knows, the end of the portage tends to lighten and the portage appears to be lightening as to the log restoration work. As discussed in a separate article, opportunities exist for SAA members to participate in Lodge renovation. We will endeavor to keep SAA members up to date with regard to future work, including lighting and interpretive displays. If any SAA member has resources at his or her disposal which may be used or applied to this venture, or simply wants to volunteer personal time, please contact **Dick** at Richard.Shank@allina.com or **Mike** at mike.holdgrafer@dtag.com. ■

Silver Rapids Supper for SAA Members and Guests

by Mike Holdgrafer

Not every aspect of seasonal staff training is work. During this past June, SAA members took a break from seasonal staff training and working on the Lodge to be joined by guests Doug Hirdler, Joe Mattson and their wives, for dinner at Silver Rapids Resort. The guests of honor were Terry Schocke, Director of Program, and his wife Terri. Although Terry's official

retirement celebration from the Boy Scouts of America was scheduled for September 5th, the group toasted his service to the Northern Tier for the past ten years (See related article). The group later re-convened at the Hirdler's lakeside residence to enjoy frozen raspberries picked last season from Sharon's bountiful garden over ice cream. ■



Left to right: Doug Hirdler; Terri Schocke, Terry Schocke, Butch Diesslin, Mike Holdgrafer, Nicole Holdgrafer, Maggie Renner, Linnea Renner



2007 Staff Training

by Cory "Godfrey" Kolodji

Holrue!

Again this summer, I had the pleasure and honor of helping with staff training at the Canoe Base. How cool is that. You should all be jealous. I put on a little living history workshop with some songs, French language instruction, primitive camping skills, dangerous games, and tips on hyperbole.

It is just great to be at the Base and meet all the staff. I can't believe I was ever so young. So much has changed, but so much is the same. There's the same excitement for the trail, nervous anticipation of first crews, and love of scouting. Of course the program and facilities have grown: there are a bunch of new buildings, fewer trees (result of the "blow down"),

the staff is large, there are women guides, and only Canadians guide at Atikokan and Bissett. This last would rankle, but the Canadians to a man and woman are just so likable and competent that you just can't hold their good fortune against them.

Look for a chance to get to know the Base and its Staff again. Come to the next reunion. Join the pre-season alumni work week. Bring a crew! Guide a trip. With all the changes, it still feels like home. And despite all the years that have passed and all the water that has gone over the beaver dam, the staff are still Charlie Guides one and all. "Viva la Compagnie!"

"Viva l'amour." ■

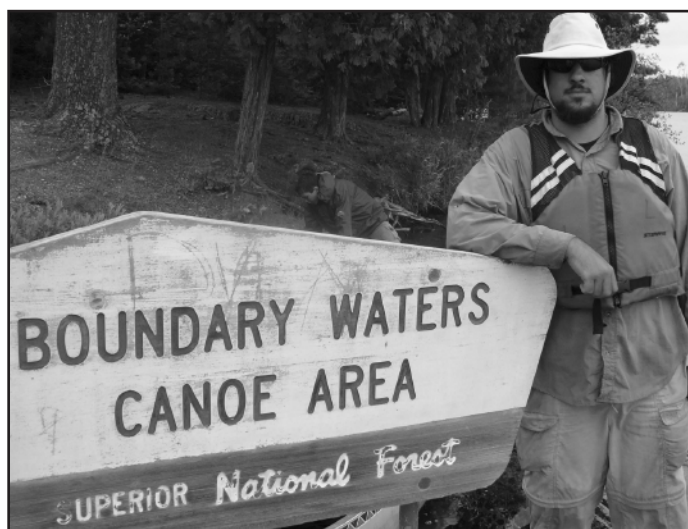


My Northern Tier Experience

by Justin Singleton

The lands of the Northern Tier hold a very special place in my heart. It was in the wilderness near Bissett, Manitoba in the summer of 1999 that I had my first taste of the Northern Tier experience. I was a young fourteen year old scout from central Texas and I had never been part of such a high adventure expedition before. My father, Scott, and my younger brother, Mason, experienced the wonderful beauty of this wilderness with me. I knew, even at such a young age, that the lands of the Northern Tier were a magical place. Where else could you fly in a float plane held together with duct tape, see bald eagles soaring overhead, watch moose playing in the water as you canoed past, catch huge amounts of walleye and northern pike every day, and listen to your interpreter recite The Cremation of Sam McGee with the northern lights flickering in the background?

Mike Bingley, who is greatly involved in Scouts Canada and the editor of this newsletter, was my interpreter on this wonderful trip and I owe him a great deal for making this experience so unforgettable. We called him Bing (yes, like the cherry) and we all looked up to him greatly because he knew what he was doing and we didn't. We thought he was the ultimate wilderness man because he could paddle and carry a pack and canoe on his back all day long without getting tired. I learned a lot of valuable knowledge about wilderness living from Bing and it has proved helpful ever since. Bing was a great interpreter because he made every day fun and exciting, even



when we were being eaten alive by giant mosquitoes or having to paddle in the wind and rain. There is one event on this trip that I will never forget and I doubt that my father and brother will forget it either. I was riding in the middle of the canoe and my father was paddling in the stern and my brother in the bow. It began to drizzle lightly and I had the great idea to stand up in the canoe to put on my rain gear. As I attempted to perform this balancing act I realized that it seemed much easier in my mind's eye than in reality. I remember my father and brother yelling at me to sit down. I said "I almost have my jacket on" and the next thing I

know we are all swimming in moose muck that smelt really bad and was over our heads. Bing had to come back and perform a t-rescue to empty our canoe of the nasty water. That was when I learned that dry bags do not always do what their name implies. A few articles of clothing and a camera got wet and, of course, I received the blame. I have never been able to live that episode down and I expect that I will continue to hear about it in the future. In fact, Bing tells me that he mentions this story when people ask him about his adventures at Northern Tier.

Another memorable event that sticks out in my mind started out as a potential disas-

ter but ended up as a blessing. We had been paddling and portaging for several hours, when soon after lunch we discovered that we were trapped on a lake with no exiting portage, even though there was one marked on the map. After a while of scouting for the portage, Bing decided that we should go ahead and make camp on this lake. Since it was early in the afternoon and there was not much to do, we all grabbed our fishing poles and headed for the water. Before long we had a stringer full of good sized walleye. There had to be at least fifteen of them and I don't think that there was a single person who did not get a chance to reel one in. That night, we ate the best tasting fish that we had ever had in our lives. If not for that temporary loss of direction, we never would have found that amazing fishing spot.

I could write for days about all of the things that I remember from my Northern Tier expedition, but I do not have the time or the writing space. Everyone from my crew talks about the adventures that we experienced at Northern Tier often and I know that we will never forget the joys that we shared back then. I had no way of knowing at the time that this canoe trip would touch me so deeply that I would one day return as an interpreter to continue the great tradition of the Northern Tier. It was in the early months of 2006 that I began to think back on my experience at Northern Tier. I was a junior at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas and I knew that I wanted to experience the Northern Tier again before it

(Continued on next page)



My Northern Tier Experience (cont'd.)

(Continued from previous page)
was too late and I had to get a real job. I contacted Bing and we talked about what it is like to be an interpreter at Northern Tier. As we talked more about it, I knew that this was something that I really wanted to do. I sent in my application and what followed was the greatest summer of my life. Bing asked me to write about my experience as a young scout attending Northern Tier and as an interpreter working all summer at Northern Tier. He gave me several ideas to talk about and I would like to share some of my experiences that pertain to each one.

Comparisons Between Being a Scout on a Northern Tier Expedition and Being an Interpreter

I have noticed many drastic differences between experiencing the Northern Tier as a young scout and experiencing it as an interpreter. One difference that I noticed right away was that I was on the completely opposite side of the spectrum when it came to responsibility. As a scout, I did not fully understand the weight of the responsibility that is placed on the leader of such a high adventure wilderness trip. I did not fully understand this until I took my first trip as an interpreter, knowing that it was up to me to keep the crew safe and on the map. I was nervous and wary of this great responsibility on my first trip, but after this trip I grew to enjoy it. As a scout at Northern Tier I felt that I was safe from harm in the wilderness because I had faith in my interpreter to know what to do. As an interpreter I felt the younger scouts and



adult leaders looking up to me. I received a great deal of satisfaction through teaching my crews the proper way to live in the wilderness, both to stay safe and to protect the environment. I felt that through doing this I was doing my part to pass on to younger scouts the wonderful experience and tradition of the Northern Tier, as it had been passed on to me.

Another difference that I noticed was the great need for patience. As a scout, I was learning how to paddle a canoe the proper way and I must have caused a little frustration for my interpreter in my slow learning. As an interpreter, I realized that I had to be patient in my teaching of the young scouts that I had on my trips throughout the summer. I thought back to what I must have been like as a beginning canoeist and it helped me to take the time to teach my scouts the proper way to paddle a canoe. It was great when the scouts would get the hang of it towards the middle of the trip, and I knew that I had done my job.

Overall, I feel that the biggest difference between experiencing a Northern Tier expedition as a scout and expe-

riencing it as an interpreter is that of knowledge. As a scout, I did not know the proper techniques for living in the wilderness and I relied on my interpreter to teach them to me. As an interpreter, I took the knowledge that I received as a scout and the knowledge that I gained from training at the Northern Tier and used it to teach the scouts in my crews all that I could. I feel that passing on knowledge is a high calling that everyone must be involved in. Through knowledge we were able to enjoy the experiences that we had in the past and through passing on

that knowledge we are able to insure that future generations will enjoy them as well.

My Experiences as a First Year Interpreter

As the time neared for me to leave Texas and make my way to the Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base in Ely, Minnesota, my mind was filled with nervous anticipation. I had never been to this canoe base, as I had taken my trip from the Canadian base in Bissett as a scout, and I had no idea of what to expect. When I arrived on June 1, I was amazed at the beauty of the



country that surrounded the base. I remember watching the sunset over Moose Lake that first night, and I had a feeling deep inside that this place would grow to become very dear to my heart. I remember the first staff meeting that night and how everyone was so excited. I was introduced to the management staff, the chief interpreters, and then to the members of my brigade. I would be spending a great deal of time with the members of my brigade over the next two weeks, as we roomed together, ate together, and trained together. I became very close friends with my fellow brigade members throughout the summer and I still keep in touch with most of them. We were all from different areas of the United States and it was a great experience to get to know people who had different backgrounds than I did.

The leader of my brigade was Kyle Ford, a chief interpreter and a fellow Texan, and I learned a lot from his guidance. He answered all of the questions that I had and was always willing to help me throughout the summer when I needed help. Kyle and I shared a mutual love for fishing and as soon as we discovered this we began taking small excursions to nearby Flash Lake. This lake was a 220 rod portage from the base and it was great to get away for a little while every now and then to do some fishing. My first two weeks on the base were filled with constant training. Much of this training was done collectively and much of it was done in stations with each brigade. Over the course of this training period I learned about the history of Northern Tier and about all of the changes that it has gone through and all of the lives that it has touched since its beginning. It was awesome to see

how many people cared for what the Northern Tier was doing and how they supported it through donations and the giving of themselves. There were many past Charlie Guides that were involved in the training process. I could tell that they cared greatly for this scouting program and they gave their own personal time and skills to help pass on the experience and tradition of the Northern Tier. I also learned how the base operated, what

halfway through the training process, the staff from the two Canadian bases joined us at the Charles L. Sommers Base. It was great to get to know them and we had a wonderful time while we were all together. As the end of our on base training drew near, I became very excited about the upcoming swamper. The swamper is a six day five night canoe trip that you go on with your brigade. I was looking forward to this trip because I would be



was expected of me, and the outdoor skills that would ensure my success as an interpreter.

One of the training sessions I remember very well. It was about how to cook in the wilderness and I was amazed at all of the different foods you could make out on the water, from doughnuts to onion rings, with very few supplies and ingredients. I took this knowledge with me on the trail and my crews were surprised at many of the dishes I showed them how to cook. About



able to put into practice all of the training and knowledge that I had received in the past week and a half, and also because I would finally be able to get out on the water and do what I had come here to do. This trip was an eye opening experience for me. Every possible problem that I could have expected to happen on my trips during the rest of the summer occurred on this trip. These problems included leaving a life jacket at a portage and losing valuable time to go

back and get it, not staying within eye and ear range of our fellow canoes, flipping canoes several times, dealing with rain and lightning, becoming lost for a short period of time, and several others. Kyle took time during all of these “teachable moments” to correct our mistakes and explain to us what we should be doing. Through the experiences that we encountered on this trip, my fellow brigade members and I came back to the base as closer friends and with a feeling that we were well prepared and ready to start the canoe season and begin our summer of memories.

As the canoe season progressed I began to feel more comfortable with my skills and knowledge as an interpreter. I grew to enjoy the traditions of Northern Tier, such as dressing up as voyagers for the closing campfires, and I knew that I would be sad when it was time for me to leave this magical place in God's wilderness. I could feel that I had grown as a human being from my time at Northern Tier and I was amazed at how much I had learned in such a short amount of time. I began to wonder why this was my first year as an interpreter, because at twenty one I could have been doing this for several years. I regretted not having become an interpreter sooner and I made a promise to myself that I would always come here throughout my life whenever I could to help further the Northern Tier tradition and to scratch the itch of the North Woods bug bite that I would undoubtedly get. Overall, my first year as an interpreter at Northern Tier was a life changing experience. I will never forget the memories and friends that I made over the summer and I will always remember it as flying by much too quickly. ■

Way, Way, Way Up North!

by Nathan Prather



"Where are you headed?" shouted a voice in the woods as we paddled by.

"Tuktoyaktuk!" we shouted back.

"Holy #@\$&" came the startled response as we finally saw a man come crashing out onto the riverbank.

That conversation pretty much describes the tone of countless conversations that myself and six fellow travelers have had before, during, and after our trip this last summer. For those of you reading this that have not heard anything of our trip, here is a brief summary and a couple of stories from what, for us seven, will be a trip we will never forget... 3800 Kilometers down the length of the Athabasca, Slave and the mighty Mackenzie Rivers and out on the Arctic Ocean.

The trip had its beginnings more than three years ago as Matt Smith (a Charlie Guide and Bissett Base Director) took a summer off to paddle across Canada from Rocky Mountain House to Pukaskwa Park on the

North Shore of Lake Superior. During and after this trip he and several other Canadian staff began dreaming up a long trip that they could all take. Two years later, that dream became a reality as a crew of six Charlie Guides (Matt Smith, Candace Vinke, Kent Bratton, Brooke Suwala, Scott Reed, and myself) piled into a 25' North Canoe, loaned to us by Northern Tier and the Sommers Alumni Association (MANY THANKS), and pushed off from Jasper, Alberta, just below the headwaters of the Athabasca River in the Columbia Glacier.

After all the preparation and packing (thanks especially to Matt), We were finally off, now all we had to do was paddle 50km a day, a distance far greater than all but a couple of us had ever accomplished in a day, and then repeat that feat eighty or so more times. First things first we had to get through the day one. The scenery was incredible! Paddling out of Jasper National

Park found us paddling between rows of breathtaking peaks. This was a striking change to the lake country of Minnesota, Ontario, and Manitoba. Distance wasn't proving to be too much of a problem as we found ourselves hurtling down the river propelled by the spring runoff, however, trying to keep a fully loaded North Canoe in the main channel soon proved to be an interesting task. On several occasions that first day while cutting across to the main current at 10mph (speeds and distances provided by Kent's GPS) we suddenly found ourselves pushed upon shallow shoals (hidden from view by the glacial silt). It came as quite a shock when the canoe would suddenly list 30-40 degrees, almost toppling us all into the near freezing water. With a little luck, a little skill, and regrettably a little less paint we paddled out of the park and set up camp upon some sand dunes.

From there the trip continued much as planned, the river became deeper so that we no

longer had to worry about shoals, we left the mountains behind and paddled into the plains and hills of Alberta. Even though we were out of the mountains, down in the river basin, the scenery was still wonderful. We soon had seen deer, moose, elk, fox, black bears, and a wolf, as well as countless birds, especially the families of Canadian Geese we found ourselves unintentionally herding down the riverbanks. We visited several small communities, often taking the chance to eat something other than the trail food, which was quickly becoming very monotonous. We spent the days paddling and exploring as we went, enjoying fairly good weather as Calgary and Edmonton just south of us were flooded. Soon we found ourselves entering the stretch of rapids from Athabasca to Fort McMurray.

The Rapids were an interesting challenge. One of the first rapids was Grand Rapids, a class VI+ which required a

1.5 Mile portage. We knew it was going to be an interesting challenge with a 300+ pound, 4 foot wide canoe. However, we weren't expecting it to take us more than two hours to make the first 200 meters! After several days of rain, the 30 degree muddy slope was a monumental obstacle. When we finally reached the meadow on top of the first slope we all quickly decided to camp there amidst the thriving mosquitoes, but only after a quick supper and a refreshing dip in the river. The next day we tackled the main part of the portage. Due to the uneven trail not meant for a boat of that size we ended up having to roll the boat across much of the way on logs. In this way, with lots of teamwork to get around corners and up embankments, we succeeded in getting across and back out onto the water. At that moment we were in unanimous agreement with the voyagers and decided to avoid portaging at all costs. Thus, of the other 15 rapids ranging up to class IV's, we were able either run or line all of them. The high water allowed us to go over or around most of the rocks often leaving us with only large standing waves where, at low water would be impassable with our canoe. We had several interesting experiences, but managed to make it through most of them largely unscathed. I say most because Rock Rapids caught us a bit off guard, and on Mountain Rapids we missed our line (we scouted all of the rapids before getting near any of them) and ended up going straight through several 5 foot plus standing waves. Kent, in the bow, was convinced we were going under, but we were able to get it under control and slipped out of the rapid carefully balancing as we got down

to the task of bailing the more than 500 liters of water inside the canoe. Oh yeah, and during the whole rapids stretch, Matt had another problem to contend with, Giardia. Apparently Candace's water was not treated, which she realized only after giving it to him to drink. It was probably just as well that we had to get out of the canoe so often due to the rapids.

After finishing the rapids we found ourselves in Fort McMurray where we enjoyed a much needed respite. Kent's mother and father drove up from Edmonton and met us with three more weeks of food, not to mention countless extras thrown in by Mrs. Bratton. Scott's father, grandfather, uncle, and aunt (and dog) also joined us for much of the three days there. We were treated to many good meals including a barbeque for us by the Farrell family (friends of the Bratton's that also provided us with a unique tour of the Syncrude oil mine in the Athabasca tar sands). Everyone also got a good laugh as Scott's uncle and aunt took us out to Montana's. The laughing was at me, the biggest carnivore of the group, who after two weeks without any meat was immensely enjoying numerous refills of the all-you-can-eat ribs. Soon, however, we had to get back on the trail rested and refreshed, and with Matt feeling much better thanks to a bottle of pills from the doctor. So, June 23rd found us back on the water amidst high wind, steady rain, and a low temp. of 2 degrees Celsius.

After Leaving Fort McMurray we quickly settled back into paddling... a good thing too because we were fast approaching the Athabasca Delta, the world's largest inland Delta, or so I'm told. We really didn't know what to

expect in this part of the trip, the first night after Fort Mac gave us a good idea. When we tried to find a place to camp we discovered it was next to impossible. Everywhere in the delta area was silty islands, nice relatively flat, but absolutely covered with willow trees. Where the spring floods had knocked down the willows, the determined plants just turned every branch on the downed tree into a new tree growing up. After a night or two of this, we decided that we should try the next day to do a 24 hour paddle (one of the goals several of us had set for the trip) which would ideally see us all the way onto Lake Athabasca.

So, we started what would turn into a 27 hour, 150 km marathon. It was an incredible day... beautiful weather and a definite change in the scenery as the land flattened out into the delta. Early in the day we stopped to get some water and ended up meeting a nice old man that had lived in the Athabasca Delta for the last 30+ years, who warned us, as many had, about the treacherous waves common on Lake Athabasca. As the day wore on we were glad we had prepared to do this stretch all in one shot, we really didn't have much of a choice, the banks of the channel we were taking through the delta were either silty messes or mud walls. We stopped for supper on the sand under one such wall cooking and eating on a couple chunks of sand sticking out of the water under the wall. All the other meals were eaten in the boat.

One of the interesting thing about that night was that as far north as we were it only got dark for a couple hours, and then still light enough to see 20-30 meters. The sun didn't really set so much as dip under the horizon in front of us only

to come back up a couple hours later. We passed all these hours paddling, breaking the monotony with games, telling stories, and even reading a book aloud. Our paddling got noticeably weaker and the breaks longer and more regular as the morning wore on (looking for one more trail mix, or elusive bag of chocolate bars). But all this we decided was worth it as the dawn found us finishing the delta amidst a beautiful LONG sunrise, countless birds and ducks and finally the Lake. After all the warnings about waves on Lake Athabasca we found it instead to be absolutely still. With the lake's horizon on one side so perfect a mirror of the unbroken blue morning sky that you couldn't tell where water and sky met. Only then did we realize that we had another 7 km or so to get out of the marsh and over to a Rocky point... which to us was a rare treat after the constant river silt of the last month. As you can guess what followed next was us crawling up the rocky bank and all falling asleep.

The following days were one of the real highlights of the trip especially for me. First, we decided to camp there on that point for a few days, resting up and allowing us to spend Canada Day in Fort Chipewyan. The highlight for me was fishing on the second day there. I quickly caught a small Northern Pike, but while reeling him in saw movement in the water, Matt and I both stared as we watched a 40" northern cruise through the little bay. Moments later I yelled to Matt "I think I got him!", as I pulled in what ended up being a 46" northern. That would have been in itself enough to make my day, but over the next two hours I ended up pulling in
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eight fish, all between 36"-46". Matt wasn't far behind me grabbing his pole and caught several more before we passed our poles to Kent and Brook, both of whom swore it was a waste of time. Kent pulled in one just over 40" and Brook's I think was 45"... both were ecstatic, with Brook relishing the thought of telling her dad and brother of the fish she had caught. In all, in the space of two hours, 15 Northernns all 36"-46" were caught (I think Candace lost the one she had hooked intentionally, much to kindhearted).

After a couple days thoroughly enjoying out rocky campsite we headed into Fort Chipewyan. We found ourselves sort of local Celebrities, and met lots of wonderful people as we spent two nights on the town beach. Kent, Candace and Matt also took advantage of this time to charter a days flight over to the Athabasca Sand Dunes. Canada Day was quite the celebration, complete with a parade, bingo, and canoe races. Then later, entertainment on the lake as two (I think half-drunk) locals attempted to take their snowmobiles out on the lake. It worked great for one who went flying around the lake leaving the jet-boat that was trailing him for safety well behind... the other snowmobile, however, ended up sinking in the bay. It was however soon recovered and running again, though I think the owner had decided to forgo running it out on the lake for a while (hopefully till it is frozen).

I have spent a lot of time on the earlier part of this section of our trip because the next section, the Slave River was pretty uneventful. Uneventful, that is until we arrived at Fort Fitzgerald. This marked the beginning of an event we'd been looking forward to and preparing for, (and dreading in



some cases) since the trip had first been planned. The next 20 km of river were not passable by canoe, especially not one as large as ours. Four main sets of rapids traversed the river... with names like Rapids of the Drowned, all four Class VI+. Fortunately there is a road that goes from Fort Fitzgerald to Fort Smith. As a group we had purchased a mini-trailer that broke down to fit into a duffle-sized bag. So we assembled our trailer, loaded the canoe, and had five people with the heavier packs walk alongside the canoe helping to balance the canoe and pulling (as much as you can when carrying a heavy pack on your back). The Sixth person we basically harnessed up to a lead in front of the canoe and they got the pleasure of pulling the 400#'s of boat and gear much like a sled dog.

Sadly, seven kilometers into our portage (after we had made it up most of the incline), the trailer's wheels gave way. The bearings quite literally ground their way through the metal

casing and fell apart. Finding a way to finish the portage proved easy enough... A Northwest Territory road crew was working on the road that day and several had driven by, (the portage crosses the boundary of Alberta/N.W.T.) One guy had offered twice already (on seeing us trudging down the highway) to go to town and get his trailer and pull us in with his truck. We had thanked him for the first two offers, but most of us wanted to finish the portage without such aid so we had kindly refused. Now however we had no choice, without the cart there was no way for us to get the canoe across. Looking back several of us wish that we had just loaded the stuff on the trailer and pulled it by hand into town, but alas.

The up side to having our trailer fall apart was that we ended up with most of an extra day in Fort Smith. A local pair of young women, whom we had actually met the day before at Fort Fitzgerald, offered to have us all over for supper and to take us out to the Salt Flats

that border the edge of Wood Buffalo Provincial park which was recently discovered to be the nesting grounds of the Whooping Crane. Anyway, we piled into their two small cars with two more of their roommates and drove out. Two of them had to make a quick run back to town while the rest of us went down to see the Flats. While the Flats were a really beautiful spot, they were also the home of the most thriving mosquito population I've ever seen (and after seven summers with Northern Tier I had thought I had seen my share). Our run down into the flats thus didn't last very long and we all hurried back up to the parking lot only to find the mosquitos equally as bad. So in the end we all piled into the woman's little 2-door hatchback (eight of us) and quickly headed back to town where our hosts were kind enough to cook us supper. After a little restocking the following morning we were ready to head out the last little bit of the Slave River and paddle into The Great Slave Lake.

Great Slave Lake marked the half-way point, and the biggest change of our trip. After getting out on the lake we were lucky enough to have the good weather hold for us for a couple days as was quickly paddled the South shore to try to get to Hay River by our appointed time. We ended up making it without any real difficulties and were soon joined by Candace's younger sister Kristin (who would be joining us from here on) and her Mother. Both had rode the bus up from Calgary bringing with them the remaining provisions for the rest of the trip. And so after a day or two resting and meeting a lot of interesting people including Dave, an Aussie that had been stuck in the Hay River Campground for five weeks waiting on his rental kayak so he could paddle the Mackenzie. Soon however we had to say goodbye to Mrs. Vinke and get down to the chore of somehow fitting seven weeks (600 lbs or so) of food and one more person into our already cramped canoe. At the beginning of our trip we had prepared for this by taking out all the floatation under the seats and replacing it with drybags formerly just filled with air, now loaded down with our supplies. Once we had everything stowed as well as could be, we began the final leg of our trip... The great Mackenzie River... Second Longest in North America only to the Mississippi.

We were however in for a rough start. As we pulled away from Hay River we put up our Dining fly as a sail and enjoyed the tailwind... That quickly changed as the wind shifted to a more northerly breeze. So, soon instead of our nice tailwind, it was now coming straight in at our port side and the waves were quickly building as they now had 100+

miles of open water to the north of us to pick up intensity. Our problem was that the entire south shore was very shallow, so to stay out of the breakers required being out nearly 1/3 of a mile or more from shore. With the waves getting larger and the water temp at near freezing... (the lake is frozen for 7+ months of the year, and is the deepest in North America) we decided to turn back to the last beach we had seen and make a break through the breakers to the beach. A lot easier said than done, especially since the boat was now loaded down a lot heavier with the added supplies. But, with a lot of teamwork and a few anxious moments we ended up pulling up on a really nice sandy beach only about 7 km from Hay River.

For five days the wind continued to blow just as hard or harder, even at night. So we did everything we could think of to keep entertained. Swimming was a popular pursuit... once you lost most of the feeling (for those of us without wetsuits) it was sort of like being at the ocean. The waves were breaking in the 4-5 foot range at times (Scott's driftwood surfboard sadly wasn't quite up to the task). We played games, we played cards, went fishing, we even built a small driftwood cabin, all the while hoping for a break in the wind. Finally at 7 pm on the fifth day the wind let up, giving us a opportunity to pack camp as fast as possible. We ended up paddling till almost 3 am on a very cold morning to get off the lake and onto the Mackenzie River (a heck of a way to break Kristin into the trip).

So at long last we were finally on the Mackenzie River. Sadly we were five days behind schedule because of

being windbound on Great Slave Lake. Thankfully the Mackenzie had more of a current than we were expecting which seemed strange because of how wide the river was at places. We also had to beware of the barges that now traversed the length of the river between Hay River and the Arctic Ocean. These barges are the main supply route during the summer for all the towns north on the river... which at times is more than 300 miles from the nearest road.

The whole length of the Mackenzie stretch of our trip consisted of 200-400 mile stretches of river broken up by small towns spread along the river. So we'd have about a week or so in between visiting these communities. The greeting we received at these communities was wonderful. Quite often we would meet someone shortly after landing that would offer us some form of hospitality. There were too many of these instances to list them all. One example; we ended up camping at one families house as we spent the evening talking around a fire in comfortable chairs (which we all had a newfound appreciation for). As we sat listening our host described the local culture and lifestyle, as well as sharing supper with us and home-made caribou jerky. The biggest shock we probably had in these communities was going in the grocery stores for a bit of variety to our menu (which we were all very tired of by now) and seeing the prices of common things like bread and milk, which were several times the prices we were used to. This of course because it all has to come down river on the barges. And as high as those prices were, the locals all assured us they were worse in early spring and fall when the river was freez-

ing or thawing, but neither travelable by boat/barge or by Semi Truck, which they use in the in winter, turning the Mackenzie river into a giant Frozen highway.

As we continued working our way down (North) the Mackenzie we began to see major changes in the scenery. First we made it into the Nahani Mountain Range, which led into several more small ranges as we followed the river. This stretch was beautiful. We had the pleasure of camping at the mouths of rivers as they flowed out of these mountains into the Mackenzie River. One day we even got out and decided to climb a small "mountain" (more of a really large hill, but its french name translated to "the mountain with its feet in the water"). After about two months of paddling this was more of an exercise than it at first looked to be. While our arms and backs were in great shape our legs had not received nearly as much exercise... Kent in particular was worried that his legs would be in no shape for the upcoming ski season.

The trip continued much the same till around Day 70, Early August, which found us on a sandbar after another night paddle. It was now becoming obvious how far north we were getting. The vegetation was changing, we were in the Arctic Circle, and beginning to feel the quick approach of fall in the North. The weather which had been fairly good to us so far (with the exception of hardly ever offering us a tailwind) was now throwing us some very cool days. This one in particular found us on a very cold windy morning. We ended up windbound again for another day and a half, which was frustrating because we had been hurrying till this point
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and had only just made up the 5-day loss from being wind-bound on the Great Slave Lake. So we spent a day bundled up, exploring our island and having a Mankala (not sure on the spelling of it, a originally African game I believe using pebbles in a playing board we dug in the sand) Tournament. We were all impatient for the next day of paddling which would find us in the Ramparts.

The Ramparts are a 20 km stretch of cliffs that constrict the river from nearly 5 km wide just before them to less than 1/2 of a km wide inside. The cliffs tower 300' on either side making you feel like your paddling through a giant canyon. After successfully managing the rapids where it narrows we were all marveling at the cliffs as we floated through. We even managed to find a gap in them that allowed us to pull over to the side and climb to the top of them offering us a beautiful view of the river below and the cliffs on either side. Also making it very clear that we were nearly in the tundra! What plants and trees were growing there were now much smaller

than they had been only days before. We were then only a week or so from getting to the Mackenzie Delta as it opens into the Arctic Ocean.

After 77 days of paddling we finally found ourselves in the Mackenzie Delta. A daunting warren of channels and islands as the river continually forks into countless channels covering hundreds of square miles. Thanks in part to the barge markers and in part to some detailed maps that an Australian kayaker we had met in Hay River had given us we were able to navigate our way through the mess. One of the highlights of the Delta was the hospitality we received one very cold windy day. With the wind blowing at us and the current dying out in the delta we were about at the end of our endurance one afternoon when we spotted a cabin on one of the islands ahead. I think it was Kent who wistfully said something about how nice it would be if there were someone there and they offered us something warm to drink and a chance to get out of the cold for a bit. What seemed like forever later as we struggled to make the

point we finally got close and saw that the cabin was indeed occupied, there were kids all over. We pulled up to the little dock and were greeted by a mother and here daughter taking care of 8-10 other kids. Sure enough they eagerly invited us up, quickly warmed water on the fire for hot chocolate and even soup with home-made bread on the side (Note: while these things are good normally after 11 weeks of eating the same repeating diet of trail food, they were wonderful). A couple hours later we were all reluctant to leave the warm cabin and venture back into the cold mist and wind.

Day 80 found us once again in miserably cold conditions only a few Kilometers from the Arctic Ocean. With a freezing mist and even a couple snowflakes we decided to stop on a small beach and warm up while we still had some protection from the north wind. We had decided that we were going to fly out of Tuktoyaktuk to Inuvik instead of paddling our way back (freeing up about five days) so we were enjoying not being as pressed for time and distance for a change. We ended up staying there for the rest of that day and the next, giving the weather a chance to mellow out a little as well as giving us a chance to explore the Tundra. The next day when the weather broke we loaded everything up and enjoyed a easy paddle out of the mouth of the Delta and into the Beaufort Sea of the Arctic Ocean.

It's a weird feeling to be paddling a ways off the shore thinking that there is no land over the water on your left side till Siberia. We only had about fifty kilometers of the ocean to cross before we would reach our final destination, but just that much was a wonderful experience. Not wanting our trip to end and still having a

couple extra days we stopped 7 km short of Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T. on a pretty stretch of tundra beach just below Split Pingo (small volcano shaped hills formed by the continuous freezing/thawing of the ice... Only this one was half washed away by the ocean). There we camped for two full days. Took hikes into the tundra exploring... climbed the largest pingo in sight (2nd largest in the world as it turned out), and of course took the chance to go swimming in the Arctic ocean, some of us multiple times. A few of us even went out on a goose/berry hunt with some locals that came by one day. Matt, Candace and Kristin decided to hike into town to arrange for our flights home as well as call home and assure everyone that we had made it and were all right. Their hike turned into a bit more of an ordeal than they had planned though. While it was only 7 km to town they found out that they were forced to walk much further back inland around a couple bays, all across the very uneven tundra. Just at dusk that evening they finally returned, having talked a local into giving them a ride back to the camp-site on his boat.

At long last after 85 days on the water and close to 4000 kilometers of paddling we ended our canoe trip with a short paddle into the harbor of Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. While the greetings we had received all along the river had been great, none came close to the one we received here. We were greeted almost instantly by well over a dozen people all driving or walking down to the dock to see what these strangers in the North canoe were doing and how we had got there. Within moments we met the Deputy mayor, the former Mayor, and many more. One lady (the former mayor's

wife) asked what they could do for us, to which we replied that we were just looking for a good place where we might camp for a day or two and explore the town. She asked us to wait a bit she would check on something and moments later came over and pointed us across the harbor to a brown house, told us to paddle over there while she and her husband drove around. When we got there she unlocked the house, gave us the keys and told us to make ourselves at home! Shocked we entered with them and Brook quickly noticed a picture of the Queen on the wall. The mayor and his wife kind of laughed and pointed to the woman seated beside the Queen on her visit to the N.W.T.... The woman was Nellie Cournoyea, former Premier of the Northwest Territories, and it was her house that we were now staying in. She was currently living

and working in Inuvik, and on getting a call had agreed to share her house with seven complete strangers. Our two days in Tuktoyaktuk were great, aside from the generosity of getting a house (one of the nicest ones in town) we were also given food; bread, eggs, 2 lbs of bacon, home-made doughnuts, juice... the neighbor gave us some dried whitefish, and on and on. We were showed all around town, and even gave a slide presentation of our trip using Kent's digital camera to the local youth.

Our canoe trip may have been over, but our adventure was not. We flew back to Inuvik just in time to enjoy two days of the "End of the Road Music Festival". Met up with our Australian Kayaker, as well as a French couple we had met paddling. Also met a Cyclist that had biked 9,000+ km from Guelph, Ontario all the way up to Inuvik. We sent

our canoe and some gear back on the barges and rented a Yukon (fitting) and crammed all seven of us, our remaining gear, and even the cyclist, John (who didn't feel any need to bike back down the Demster Highway, 500+ miles of dirt road). We got to see the Demster Highway at its peak, with the Tundra and mountains in full fall color. We spent a day in Dawson City, visited Diamond Tooth Gerties, and joined the Sourtoe club (long stories). Then finally drove the Klondike Highway, the last stretch of our journey together, down to Whitehorse, Yukon. From there we went our separate ways, Brooke to hike one of the Vancouver island trails, Kent to Ontario, Scott to Manitoba, Candace Matt and Kristin back to Calgary, where I would join them later after a spur of the moment 400 mile bike trip over to Skagway, AK and back with John.

People keep telling me it was "The trip of a lifetime", well, I hope not. I hope we all have more opportunities to take such wonderful adventures. Whether we do or not, only time will tell, but till then we have indeed had the chance to take an incredible journey. We all had the chance to see and do things that very few people will ever do. And while we had our share of disagreements on our way we had a great group to do it with. I think we would all recommend that if anyone ever gets such an opportunity, to take it. We are all very grateful for all people that made this trip possible. And a very special thanks to the Sommers Alumni Association for their support and for the use of the canoe, without which the trip might never have happened. ■



Bill Erickson Recognized with Hedrick Volunteer Service Award

The George D. Hedrick Volunteer Service Award recognizes individuals whose service and dedication to the Northern Tier National High Adventure Program is noteworthy in terms of both its impact and/or duration. Created in 1995 and given by the SAA Directors, the award honors the late Region Ten Executive and ardent Canoe Base and Sommers Alumni Association supporter.

Background

During the late 1990s, there was an emerging concern that perhaps the quality of canoe trips was being compromised by a lack of continuity between successive years and even between generations of interpreters. Low staff retention rates from summer-to-summer contributed to the problem of a shrinking pool of knowledge gained by experience. Further, for a period of time the balance of trips shifted away from the Quetico Provincial Park ("Quetico") to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness ("BWCAW"). At one time, "Bay Trip" referred to a BWCAW trip to the various bays of Basswood, a far cry from dream of the Nelson and Churchill Rivers. As trips lengthened and the balance of trips re-shifted to the Quetico, the perception of individuals participating in informal discussions was that there was reduced level of knowledge and no effective means of ensuring the knowledge was transmitted from generation to generation of Charlie Guides.

Originally, the discussion among volunteers, including Bill Erickson, was about developing information cards for the

duffer position in the canoe. At some point in time, the discussion evolved and there was a vision that a "guide" could be developed which would provide this knowledge to any level of staff member. But, for such a guide to work, information would have to be captured, refined and recorded for future generations.



Bill Erickson Stepped Forward

While working as a volunteer during the summer of 2003, Bill executed upon a plan he developed which encouraged interpreters to record information, including geo-positions, while on canoe trips. As they came off the water in Ely, Atikokan and Bissett, Bill collected the data and input it into a database. Limited GPS units were sent out with some crews to record geo-positions. Bill pulled together historical, and other published information, together with information he personally collected or solicited from staff and volunteers. He then drafted and prepared the first draft of Charlie's Guide. In

writing, this does not sound like much, but when the volume of information is considered together with research, compilation and writing, it was a significant undertaking. Bill also coordinated the copying, lamination and publication of the first issue, a portion of the costs being underwritten by the SAA. Finally, Bill put together

staff to further supplement the Charlie's Guide.

Bill's efforts have been a tremendous success. A first year interpreter has at his or her fingertips, a comprehensive written resource of knowledge that arguably exceeds that of any single resource available in the past to any Charlie Guide.

Bill has also provided distinguished service to the Northern Tier in other ways. He helped coordinate and direct the funding of an endowed scholarship in the name of his parents which supports one scholarship for the best base staff member as selected each year by the Northern Tier management.

In addition, Bill routinely spends a portion of his summers, as a volunteer, working at the Northern Tier in multiple capacities, including serving as a Charlie Guide and Bay Post Director in 2004.

Bill is currently working on another project to develop comprehensive information about the Northern Tier for individuals and groups interested in coming to the three programs of the Northern Tier. He has also brought crews to Northern Tier as an advisor.

Past Recipients

Bill joins a distinguished group of past Hedrick Award recipients that includes: **Robert "Red" Renner, Allan Batterman, Craig Pendergraft, the late Ed Chapin, Gene Felton, the late Henry Bradlich, Cherie Bridges-Sawinski, Dr. Dick Shank, Mike Holdgrafer, Butch Diesslin, Bob Cary, the late Jack Osborn, and Don Melander.** ■

Listening Point 2006

by Don E. Richard

A small but dedicated group of outdoor enthusiasts visited Sigurd Olson's writing shack in Ely and Listening Point on Burntside Lake on Sunday afternoon of our Alumni Association Rendezvous. This was my third trip to the point and for the first time, the weather was outstanding. The temperature was cool signaling the coming fall, but the sky was blue and the usual rain that has accompanied our previous visits to the point was not to be seen. A trip to the point is an opportunity to look back into the past, and to reflect on our own journeys to the far northland, and this year a trip to the point seemed like a perfect conclusion to a weekend of great tales of the very far northland – an area that Sig knew well and that has drawn the attention of many Charlie Guides.

This year's reunion featured the Hudson Bay Boys, three Charlie Guides, who gave a spirited synopsis of their trip in the summer of 2005 from Grand Portage on Lake Superior to York Factory on Hudson Bay. The Boys knew of the escapades of Eric Severeid. But I don't know if they ever grasped that they were truly amongst kindred spirits. One of the unique aspects of Charlie Guides, in general, and Alumni Association members in particular is the apparent need to travel great distances by canoe. Maybe it is an outgrowth of years of plying along slowly while teaching others to respect and enjoy the wilderness – or maybe it's an outgrowth of too much time staring at maps of far-away destinations. Whatever the case, Alumni Association meetings tend to bring together a large group



with perhaps the highest percentage of canoeists that have ever loaded a canoe in the interior of this continent, pointed the bow toward salt water, and not quit until they were forced to deal with tides, ocean-size waves, and marine mammals.

The Hudson Bay Boys are the new millennium version of the Voyageurs of old, complete with a web-page and hours of digital-video of their trip. They retraced some of the historic route of Severeid and Walter Port and their web-page includes a quote from Severeid's recollection of that trip in *Canoeing with the Cree*. "Such sights as this are reserved for those who will suffer to behold them". This is certainly an excellent quote from the journal of what is still and amazing journey. But after

listening to their presentation it seemed that perhaps the Boys were closer to retracing the route of the *Sans Souci* than even they realized and perhaps the better Severeid quote for their web page would be "Oh we were cocky fools, all right, but the luck of fools seemed to be with us".

The luck of fools has been with many Charlie guides in far off destinations, as well as earlier travelers including Severeid, Sig, and Earnest Oberholster – whose picture is among those that grace the wall of Sig's writing shack. While Sig did most of his writing in the shack, he used the point to reflect on his trips to the far northland. He kept the point primitive, perhaps because it was close to home, but more to provide a reminder

of how wild the far reaches of our environment remain, and why, to this day, we go to great lengths to escape the pull of our cell-phones, lap-tops, PDAs and other connections to the modern world to be a part of that more primitive existence. While those of us who venture out in this millennium take our synthetic fibers and light-weight stoves, the thrill of the far northland remains, and as Sig notes in *Listening Point*: "And so it must be for all of us who have known the back country. No little sanctuaries along the fringes of civilization will ever suffice. We must know the wild in all it entails, the bite of the tumpline, on the portages, the desperate battling on stormy lakes, the danger and roar of rapids and falls. We must know hunger and thirst and privation and the companionship of men on the outtrails of the world, for all these things are inseparable."

Sitting at the point, I thought of my own trip to the far northland – now a 20-year old memory – and the recent escapades of the Hudson Bay Boys. It is good to know that the spirit of the wilderness that Sig tried to capture for all of us in words, and that helped to inspire some of us to set out for far-off shores remains – and is in fact the legacy of Listening Point. I am proud to know that through our efforts in Scouting and specifically our devotion to wilderness canoeing we have been able to pass this feeling of excitement and adventure on to the Voyageurs of this new millennium. I'm confident that their enthusiasm will sustain the tradition of adventure among the ranks of Boy Scouts and Charlie's Guides. ■



Dave Hyink Presented with Distinguished Eagle Scout Award

On February 25, 2007, Sommers Alumni Association Director and Northern Tier National High Adventure Committee member, **David Hyink**, was presented with the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award by the Pacific Harbors Council, BSA.

Created in 1969, the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award is the only distinguished service recognition that depends on one's association with Scouting as a youth. The recipient must have attained the

Eagle Scout rank a minimum of 25 years before his nomination, and over those years he must have rendered outstanding service to others.

Other Distinguished Eagle Scouts among Sommers Alumni and Northern Tier Committee members include: **Ted Carlson, Mike Chicanowski, Steve Fossett, Gary Olson, Jack Osborn, John Parish, Richard Russell, Henry Schreiber, Jimmy Shepherd, and Jim Sowell.** ■



The Base's Doctor

by Mike Holdgrafer

For well over 20 years, Dr. Dick Shank, SAA Director, has participated in seasonal staff training and instructed interpreters as to wilderness medicine. He has also served as Medical Officer to the Northern Tier and provides advice on medical matters. Further, from time to time, he has conducted physical examinations and helped both staff and volunteers with various medical issues. In fact, many of us, including myself, owe a debt of gratitude to Dick for his

unselfish service. As a token of appreciation to Dick, a specially tailored doctor's overcoat was made for him this past June. The front was embroidered with the Twilight Paddlers logo, his name and a Northern Tier program emblem was sewn on. The back side was embroidered with "Holly!" and program emblems sewn on the back. Dick models the overcoat in the accompanying photo, joined by Nicole Holdgrafer. ■

(Continued from page 1)

Terry, Merci et Meilleurs Voeux

since additional equipment could be purchased if warranted. Such is the case today. The diet of summer crews, as well as the staff, also benefited during his tenure. Instead of feeding off-the-road crews canned stew and off-the-water crews chicken strips, Terry engaged a food service company and a full rotating menu was instituted at the Ely facility. Plus, the Trading Post inventory was increased, which improved the profit by three-fold, together with additional registers to, again, meet customers' expectations. Working with Don MacDonald, Director of Canadian Programs, Terry helped develop the successful dog sledding program as a part of Okpik.

Finally, he revamped seasonal staff training to emphasize hands' on exposure in a mentoring environment with returning seasonal staff as training brigade leaders, together with very successful seminar sessions where individuals can choose elective courses to complement areas of interest. Plus, he has continuously reached out to the SAA to assist with training, particularly with regard to the seminar sessions.

Terry and his wife, Terri, will continue to reside on Wolf Lake outside Ely. Whether in a canoe, hiking in the Cascades, cross country skiing or bird watching, Terry has generally found himself in the outdoors with his wife. He is an accomplished photographer having had a photo published on the cover of *Idaho Wildlife Magazine* and being one of thirty winners selected by *National Wildlife Magazine* for a photo contest it sponsored. (see Photos #3 & #4). Suffice it to say, Terry will not be spend-

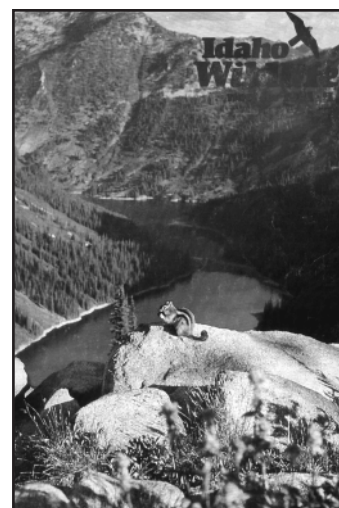


Photo #3

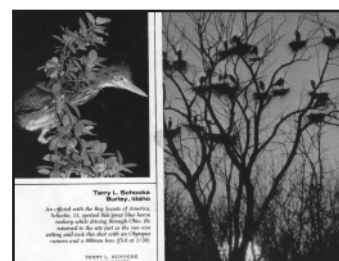


Photo #4

ing his retirement sitting in an Adirondack chair.

Terry always envisioned some day he would be a part of the High Adventure programs operated by the BSA. Little did he know that in the late 1970s, while standing with Terri in the snow near a sign pointing to the then Region 10 Canoe Base, that his dream would be realized almost two decades later. The SAA is grateful to Terry for his accomplishments and service to the Northern Tier. More importantly, we are thankful for his integrity, character and demeanor during his ten years at the Northern Tier. Although bourgeois presence will be missed at evening Rendezvous, we look forward to his continued involvement as a volunteer.

Terry, *thank you and best wishes!* We will see you on the water as you enjoy your retirement!

Your friends in the Sommers Alumni Association. ■

Reunion North: Finland 2007

by Cory and Doris Kolodji



My wife, Doris Kolodji, and I guided in the 70's, and I worked at the Base again in the 80's. Through these years we met hundreds of Charlie Guides from all over the world and made life long friends. Many of the "Internationals" were from Finland. In August I took my family to meet some of these friendly Fins and to get reacquainted.

The adventure began with travel to Sigtuna, Sweden where our great friend **Scott "Scotchbright-Scratches-Plastic" Hedges** (85-88, winter 86) lives with his family. Scott had been in contact with Finnish guide **Mikko "Lemmonpie" Lamminpaa** who had organized some great experiences for us in Finland. After touring Stockholm for a couple of days, we loaded Scott's van and family onto a Viking Line Ferry for the crossing of the Baltic to Helsinki.

Like all good Charlie Guides, we were drawn to the north. So we loaded the van and our families onto a train and headed to Rovaniemi Finland at the Arctic Circle. Still not satisfied, we drove north another hundred miles to visit reindeer herder

friends of Mikko's in Finnish Lapland. We had an exciting visit there with Pentti and Riita which included our first Finnish sauna and a plunge into an arctic stream – invigorating.

Our farthest north point was Inari – the capital of Lapland. Back on the train in Rovonimi, we headed south through the night. We stumbled off of the train at 6 am in Tampere. There on the platform was our old friend **Yussi Lyly** (mid 80's). Yussi led us to his school where we were showered and fed. Doris and I also teach so we enjoyed touring Yussi's school and seeing his classroom as well as the full woodshop found in Finnish elementary schools. We knew Yussi had one child, and when we asked about his next, he explained that the next turned out to be triplets! That's a lot of Scouts.

Clean and refreshed, we headed east to Lahti to meet Mikko Lamminpaa. Mikko edits Finland's prestigious outdoor magazine Retki. He has a long association with the Base including the summers of 84, 87, 2000, and winter 86. Mikko's also been an advisor

for Finnish crews in 88, 90, 97, 02, and 03. He's a one man Finnish invasion. He has been a professional scouter in Finland and just returned with his troop from a World Jamboree pretrip. We followed the editor in chief to his family's summer home farther east on Lake Kuolimo. At the lake we found Mikko's brother and old friend **Antti** (summer 80, winter 81) and met Antti's son **Lauri** who guided for Northern Tier just last summer.

These guys really rolled out the red carpet. We had an elegant supper of fresh smoked white fish by the lake. They've got several buildings on the site; we stayed in an antique two story log building their father had brought in from a distant farm years ago. In the evening we enjoyed the Finish Sauna following instruction in the proper application of the birch switch from Mikko. Next time you're in a sauna you have got to beat yourself with birch leaves. I'm not kidding.

Mikko woke us early. The Fins had arranged for a "church boat" for us to tour the lake in. These boats hold 15 rowers and

were used to get a village to church back in the day. This was the ultimate reunion – six former Charlie Guides and their families on the water pulling on the oars as we glided along together laughing and singing old paddling hits.

Throughout Europe we were amazed at how strong Scouting is. Scouting creates a common bond and comradarie that transcends national boundaries. We were treated like family by Riita in Lapland, because we were Scouts. Belgian Scouts at the airport wanted our pictures, because we were Scouts. A Girl Scout met us in Warsaw and showed us around, because we knew her as Scouts. In the new Resistance Museum in Warsaw there's a whole room dedicated to the role of Scouts in the resistance to Nazi domination. Think of that next time you sing "Viva La Compagnie."

We hated to leave. We could easily have stayed a week. The Fins were so welcoming and hospitable. As so often happens, we were gratified to feel how strong the bonds between old guides are, and how natural these friendships feel even years after they were forged guiding Scouts at the Base in Northern Minnesota. Many thanks to Scott Hedges, who had that wild look in his eye and said "come on Kolodjis lets go". A special thanks to Mikko, Antti, Lauri, and Yussi for making this reunion a success and reminding us that Scouting knows no borders. And finally a thank you to Sandy Bridges who introduced us all to International Scouting. A big Holry! to all the "Internationals" reading this. Come see us sometime! ■

Don MacDonald Heads West



Don MacDonald will be leaving Northern Tier for a new career with Scouts Canada's Cascadia Council – serving Northern British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. Don has been an integral part of the expansion of Northern Tier's Canadian Programs since 1997 when he joined the staff as an interpreter. In 1999, when the Canadian Programs exploded in registration numbers, Don went on the road and recruited an unheard of large amount of Canadian

staff. Through his unique blend of humour, creativity and compassion, the program continued. Some of the original staff that he recruited are still working at the base today, nearly ten years later. Don will be missed.

With that in mind, please send articles about Don and any of your experiences of the Canadian programs for inclusion in the next issue of reflections. Deadline for submissions is December 15th. ■

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