

Float Plane Trip to the Arctic Circle in August, 2005

by

Matthew A. Nelson



Franklin Lake, north of the Arctic Circle

Float Plane Trip to the Arctic Circle in August, 2005

by

Matthew A. Nelson

On May 14, 2005, while flying my 1947 Stinson 108-1 Voyager, I had the opportunity to perform one of those engine out, emergency landing procedures that all pilots endure sooner or later when the instructor pulls back the throttle and tells the pilot "You just lost an engine, where are you going to land?". Only this time, there was no instructor with me, and the engine wasn't turning at 500 or 600 rpm. It wasn't running at all. Fortunately, I was near Brazoria County Airport (LBX) near Angleton, Texas where I had just entered the downwind traffic pattern for runway 17 when the engine just stopped, shattering my ear drums with the silence, which was only broken with me continuing my prayers of asking God for His help. Those prayers had started just a few minutes earlier after I departed LBX on runway 17. About four miles away, over the town of Lake Jackson, I suddenly experienced a rough engine and/or prop vibration at an altitude of 1500 feet. The engine quit momentary, so I switched from my right nearly full tank to the full left gas tank (although I had earlier checked for water in the fuel) and headed back to LBX. Although the vibration never left, the plane flew well enough that I thought I could safely land on runway 17. Although my direction of flight was opposite of the normal runway traffic, when the engine quit I turned towards runway 35 at a 45° degree angle, pushed the nose forward to hold a constant speed of 80 mph, and surprised myself how calmly I made my radio call: "Brazoria County traffic, Stinson 8706 Kilo has an engine out and I'm coming in on (runway) 35." A hovering helo pilot asked my position, and I said, "Abeam the numbers on the South, about 1000 feet to the West." He responded, "I'll watch out for you." I radioed a quick "Thanks" and tried to do an engine restart. No luck. All I knew for sure was that I was coming down and was going to have to use every bit of piloting skill I had ever learned. Once over runway 35, I banked left, my left wing tip was about thirty feet above the grass, then I rolled back to the right directly over the center line, landed, did a slight bounce, and settled the plane down, and then had enough momentum to continue to roll about three hundred feet to a cross over between the runway and the taxi way, turned onto the cross over, and came to a safe stop about halfway between the runway and taxi way. I made sure everything was off, stepped out of the plane while the helo pilot hovered nearby, and started shaking. God and my new Guardian Angel, Jack Clodfelter, both were watching over me.

After performing that emergency landing safely and luckily, my plans to fly it to Alaska with Let's Fly Alaska / Air Escorts (www.letsflyalaska.com / www.AirEscorts.com) during the summer of 2005 quickly evaporated. With my available funds for the Alaska trip quickly diminished because of engine repairs, but with vacation time still on the books, I looked around to see where else I might go. Even before I obtained my single engine seaplane (SES) rating in

2004, I had been watching the web site of Adventure Seaplanes (www.adventureseaplanes.com) located at Surfside Seaplane Base at Lino Lakes, Minnesota (about a thirty minute drive from the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport). Their Arctic Explorer Tour intrigued me. From their web page, I quote:

- Maximum 4 Seaplanes
- (Churchill, Baker Lake, Arctic Circle)
- 35-45 Hours flight time
- Fly your plane or we may supply one for you
- See Beluga Whales, Polar Bears, Moose, Caribou, Musk Ox, Wolves
- Unbelievable fishing for Grayling, Arctic Char, Lake Trout, Walleye & Northern Pike
- This is a TRIP of a LIFETIME

“Wow, flying a float plane from Minnesota to the Arctic Circle should be a blast!” I thought. Not only is Adventure Seaplanes one of the few companies in the United States that rents seaplanes to qualified pilots, even more unusual, pilots are also allowed to fly the planes into Canada. Thinking that I could handle the Cessna 172 or the Piper PA-11, I called up owner Brian Schanche. Yes, there were still openings for the August trip. Even though I had over forty hours flying seaplanes in three years, I had only flown five hours since I obtained my SES rating last year. About 20 of my hours were obtained in Cubs or Supercubs, and only 5 hours were gained in a C-172. By the time the details of the trip were finalized, Brian astutely assessed my lack of proficiency in flying seaplanes and decided that I would fly with him in his Cessna 185, switching off with a German by the name of Wolfgang Fischer. Our trip was scheduled to leave on Saturday, August 13th.

But the week leading up to the 13th gave me the highest of the highs and the lowest of the lows. After completing a very successful mission, the crew of the space shuttle STS-114 mission was scheduled to land on Monday, August 8th. This was the first mission since the ill-fated Columbia mission two-and-a-half years earlier, and there was no way that I was going to miss watching the landing on the NASA channel, scheduled around 3:30 AM. But the landing attempts that day were waved off due to potential weather problems at the Cape, so the mission was extended one day, so on Tuesday I sat holding my granddaughter Camyrn as we watched Discovery land at Edwards AFB, the first space shuttle mission in her life. Shortly afterwards I drove to work, feeling absolutely ecstatic all the way. That same morning my good friend Mike Gentry left a phone message for me at work; I figured that since his job is to provide the media with astronaut and space mission photographs, he had called to tell me about some terrific photograph regarding the shuttle landing. Wrong. Mike’s message told me to call him; when I did, in tears, he told me that Butch Head, our mutual and very good friend and even better person, had been killed as a result of a car wreck the day before. Butch and I had met during the trip to Russia in 1992 to watch the launch of Soyuz TM-15. His father had been a close friend with Gus Grissom, of

the original Mercury Seven astronauts. He should have worked for NASA as an official space historian, because nobody knew the facts of space program better than Butch; he could easily recall the names of every American and Russian space crew member and on what mission they had flown. Oh, my heart was heavy that day. Within one hour I went from being on top of the emotional roller coaster to the very bottom.

On Wednesday afternoon, the STS-114 crew returned to Houston's Ellington Field. I stood near the front of the roped off area, listening to the crew's excited speeches and watching their gestures as they shared their adventure with the crowd, refueling my own dream of going into space. One of these days those dreamlike sparks are going to ignite into the combustion of the main engines.

Before I boarded the plane to Minneapolis on Thursday, I assisted in the removal of the Ku-Band antenna that we have in our lab, the antenna that is just like the ones that fly on the space shuttles. Twenty-six years of my life have been devoted to the space shuttle's and space station's Ku-Band systems.

Later that evening, Brian Schanche's girlfriend Lori picked me up at the Minneapolis – St. Paul airport. We went to a restaurant, where we met up with Brian and a French couple who often came to the States to fly around the country in either wheeled planes or floatplanes. On Friday, we packed the planes and I met the other men who were going on the trip, all anxious for the Saturday morning departure. I sort of got to know Eric Weaver and Kirk Spangler when we ate dinner together on Friday evening, along with Wes Moore, a flight instructor that works for Brian. Interesting enough, Wes received his seaplane training from Mike Kincaid, the owner of Mountain Lakes Seaplane (www.seaplanerating.com) from whom I received my last hours of training when I obtained my seaplane rating last year. Eric has a Winnebago that he kept parked at Surfside. On this night I slept on a couch in the RV. Eric gave a white blanket to use; the next morning I asked him if I could take it with me on the trip to use along with my not-so-great-in-the-warm-department sleeping bag. Wrong choice on my part! I put it in Brian's plane where it haunted me like a ghost for the rest of the trip.

Saturday, August 13th

Everyone going on the trip met at the Surfside Seaplane Base about 6:30 AM. Nine guys, four fully loaded seaplanes. Craig Johnson was there with his Cessna 206 (N932DB) fit with amphibians (floats with wheels, so the plane can either land on the water or on runways); Bruce Johnson (Craig's brother) and Bruce Hendry were his passengers. Mike Andrews flew another Cessna 185 (N2397E) with Gary Wilson as his passenger. Eric owns a Cessna 180 (N2990C) that Wolfgang Fischer started off the trip flying right seat. Initially, Brian was going to have three seats in his plane; Wolfgang and I would either fly left seat or sit in the back, while Brian would always fly right seat. Prior to the trip, however,

Brian took the back seat out of his 185 and decided that Wolfgang and I would switch off between his and Eric's planes. Brian and I flew in his Cessna 185 (N185AS). Wolfgang had arrived in Minneapolis just a few hours earlier from Germany and Brian knew he would be exhausted, which is why I started the trip flying with Brian.

All seaplanes at Surfside are lifted in and out of the water using a modified 4X4 that has had the back removed and the wheelbase replaced with extension tubes that are about twenty feet long. The tubes are rolled under the struts of a plane between the floats, and then a hydraulic mechanism with spreader bars is used to secure the plane, and operates much like a forklift. (I should have taken a photo but didn't.) As a result, the floats themselves are clean, and don't show much of a water line like most seaplanes that are always docked with the floats still in the water.

By 7 AM, all five floatplanes were in the water, and most were gassed up and ready to fly. Oh, yeah, I hadn't mentioned the fifth plane, a Cessna 150 (N23191), flown by Kirk. He is a pilot for Southwest Airlines and is based out of Orlando. Eric and he are good friends; Kirk keeps his plane at Surfside and had vacation time that he had planned on spending with his son, but his son had just graduated from college and had started a new job about three days earlier. So Kirk was just hanging around and talked about accompanying us to the Canadian border. He had had a problem with his electrical system the night before, and had let it charge overnight, but hadn't fueled the plane yet. Pilots of floatplanes often sit on one wing to gas up, and then slide across the windshield to the other wing. On this particular morning, Kirk accidentally scored the top of windshield, and then used a piece of that magical Duct tape about two-feet long to cover the scratch mark.

Single file, we all slowly taxied down to the south end of the lake. Two or three other planes departed before Brian and me. Since the plane was heavy, Brian gave it some nose-down trim prior to takeoff; we accelerated onto the step, and as the north end of the lake came closer, Brian expertly popped it off the water by quickly pulling the manual flap handle to 40° and shortly afterwards he gave me the controls. I think we climbed to 2000 feet and headed north, over the well-kept farms and some of the 10,000 lakes that Minnesota boast on their car license plates. About an hour after takeoff we flew over the farm where Brian's parents live. I could see them waving at us. Shortly afterwards, Craig announced that he had a low voltage light and could not clear it, so we diverted over to Ely Seaplane Base. With Brian coaching me, I did my first landing in a C-185. In fact this is the first time I have ever flown a 185. We spent about two hours on the ground while mechanics worked on the 206. Gary borrowed a vehicle from the airport and brought us all back some hamburgers. After some part swapping of alternators and voltage regulators we left, with the planes refueled and our stomachs full. Set the flaps for twenty degrees, check that the area is clear, lift the water rudders up, give it full throttle, bring the nose back, push nose forward

a little, climb onto the step, rotate, once airborne adjust the prop and throttle to 25 square, go to ten degrees of flaps, and once the climb rate is established, bring the flaps all the way up. For me, it is not automatic yet, and I simply need to fly a bunch more in seaplanes and high performance airplanes to improve my seaplane flying skills.

Maybe it was 1 PM or maybe it was 3 PM – it doesn't matter, but we landed at Crane Lake and taxied to Sand Point to clear Canadian Customs. Sand Point is located on the northern side of Crane Lake that is shared by both the United States and Canada. Brian paid the \$25 for a gun permit because he had a 12-gauge shotgun on board, a bear gun and/or a survival gun that is also required by Canadian law. After clearing customs, we walked a short distance to a souvenir shop where I bought a sweatshirt with several floatplanes on front, and Brian bought some ice cream for us.

Kirk decided to go with us to Red Lake, Ontario. Once all of us had cleared Canadian Customs, it was time to leave. As I flew over the thousands of lakes I wondered about the toughness of the men and women whom had settled this country, or at least parts of it. Perhaps we could fly for a hundred miles or so and not see and signs of man's presence. But the scenery is beautiful, so once we settled into a level altitude and a straight course, I could relax and enjoy it. We kept in contact with each other by radio. Prior to landing at Red Lake, Mike announced that he was experiencing a low voltage light in his plane, which is kind of unusual for the same problem to occur in two different airplanes on the same day. There is something to be said for traveling in groups. Coming in for the landing, I upset Brian when I pulled power just prior to touch down on a rough water landing. Rightfully so. Most of my experience is in wheeled airplanes, and pulling power is something you just prior to landing. He took over the controls and averted a potential disaster. I was angry at myself the rest of the evening.

Sitting next to the fueling docks were a couple of yellow Norseman aircraft owned by Green Air. These planes look a lot like the DeHavilland DCH 2 Beaver, but they have 600 horsepower engines, as opposed to the 450 HP in a Beaver. I talked to one of the pilots and he said he like the Norseman over the Beavers. These planes were built in the '30s. I don't think they were built at Red Lake, but Red Lake calls itself the Norseman Capital of the world. After fueling the planes, Brian went looking for a place to stay, since he hadn't planned on staying here this night. He found some rooms at the Red Lake Inn that only cost \$22 a night. Not fancy, but clean. We all then went at dinner at the Red Lake Lodge.

Eighteen-year old Kayla was our waitress that night. Gary asked how old she is. She did a good job of serving ten guys steaks and fish and drinks. At dinner, Bruce Hendry suggested that we all give a brief introduction to ourselves. He is a retired stockbroker and lives in Minnesota. Craig has a contracting business, and built wastewater treatment plants; his brother Bruce is a lawyer specializing in international law. I think Craig lives in Wisconsin, but his brother

lives in Minnesota. Both Gary and Mike live in Minnesota, and work in separate commercial heating and cooling businesses, and have known each other for several years. Mike lived in Alaska for nine years, but wasn't a pilot then. Gary travels the world in his business, and physically, he is a very big guy. Wolfgang is now the principal of a German high school. He used to teach math and physics. Eric Weaver is from Florida; a year earlier the restaurant and hotel that his family owned was wiped out in a hurricane. For nine years he had put in 100 –120 hour weeks, so now was in semi-retirement. As I previously mentioned, Kirk Spangler is a pilot for Southwest Airlines. Brian has over 6500 hours flying, loves the outdoors and is an expert hunter and fisherman and pilot. He did a good job of making the trip happen.

Sunday, August 14th

Our day started with breakfast at the Red Lake Restaurant. Gary, Bruce Hendry, and I shared the same booth. Bruce or Gary started a mini-tradition of flipping coins to decide who was buying. I think Gary lost the toss. We flipped coins three days in a row, and Bruce didn't lose. I did, but don't remember if I bought one or two times. Gary asked the young waitress her name. Kaila. Does she know the other Kayla? Oh, sure. How old are you? Fifteen. Seems like I had heard this conversation before.



Norseman taxiing at Red Lake



Norseman on display at Red Lake

Mike, Gary, and Brian disappeared to see if the airplane mechanic located across the lake could find the source of the low voltage light. Before he left, Brian told me to walk down the road a ways and see the Norseman on display. As I walked down the street, I noticed several hand-painted banners hanging on the streetlights. They depicted life in Ontario, with several scenes showing wildlife and seaplanes. One that caught my attention was titled, "The Flying Bandit". I wondered what stories were behind that banner. Thirty minutes later I walked back to the motel, having exercised my shutter finger many times photographing the Norseman and the banners. Eric and Kirk sat around a table on the motel's outside deck; I went across the street to the Red Lake Restaurant to buy the three of us some coffee, and ended up buying a couple of books about flying that were on display near the cash register. Just couldn't help myself.

Later in the morning we migrated to the dining room at the Red Lake Lodge. Seems like some guy named Mr. Red Lake owns the town, the inn, the lodge, the restaurant, and the museum. It rained while we drank coffee. Wolfgang told me that he had learned to fly in Peru during the four years he worked there teaching math and physics at a high school. He has over a thousand hours as a pilot and received his commercial and instrument ratings in the United States. In addition to having his seaplane rating, he also pilots his own plane in Germany. He spoke of flying in South Africa, which is one of my own dreams. During the trip he wrote extensively in his journal, so he could tell his wife about it. She is gradually going blind, and he wanted to share with her in great detail our adventures. Because of his fluency in Spanish, and the fact he is such an easy going person, I would like to fly with him to South America in my Stinson sometime. And it wouldn't bother me to fly with him around Germany and Austria in his airplane.



"Flying Bandit" banner



Kaila's banner (on right)

Around noon, Brian came back and said that Mike and Gary were going to fly over to Winnipeg to fix the low voltage problem. After we ate lunch, he said he was going to take a nap. That left Sunday afternoon to do some exploring around the town. So I did. My camera decided that it needed more batteries – of course I had all kinds of time before I left to make sure that I had fresh ones, but failed to do so. Not many places were open, but those that were didn't have the right batteries. After wandering around town for about an hour, the Kodak film store opened. (Now I can't remember his name – that's the trouble when one doesn't take notes and waits two months to write a story.) He had the two-hard-to-find batteries that I needed, and something else: a bookstore. On a shelf behind the counter, laying like a panther ready to pounce on me, there was a book that caught my attention: The Flying Bandit. Having just seen the banner with the same title a few hours earlier, my curiosity needed an answer. The owner explained to me how this guy robbed banks in the Sixties and used his airplane to fly away. In fact, the guy owned a Stinson! Now that doesn't mean that every

Stinson owner is a bank robber. Let me be clear on that point! Then he graduated to robbing a gold shipment in Winnipeg that had originated in Red Lake. After he served his time, eventually he ended up being president of the Red Lake Chamber of Commerce. Unfortunately, I don't remember the robber's name either because I no longer have the book. The bookstore man told me I needed to visit the museum; after I left the store I heard a horn honk. He gave me a ride to the museum. Walking into this new building, the first things I saw were more banners. The lady there explained to me that a local high school teacher had started the project a year before. Along the wall were photographs of the banners on display on the main street, as well as a little biographical information on the artist. It turns out that Kaila, our waitress this morning, had painted one. When I left the museum, I walked back to that restaurant, but it was closed. I hoped to tell her how much I admired her banner. By this time it was nearly four o'clock. I read about half of The Flying Bandit in the lobby of the Red Lake Inn while waiting for the planes of our group to show up. During the afternoon, as I wandered around town, I missed seeing the planes take off, but noticed they were gone when I came back from the museum. By now, the weather had cleared. Around 6 PM everyone started showing up. They had tried to contact me, but couldn't find me since I was in the rambling mode. Off to the West of Red Lake is a place called Fletchers, and that's where Brian, Wolfgang, Eric, Kirk, Craig, and the two Bruce's had gone. Although I hated to have missed more flying, I had enjoyed the afternoon being by myself. While we were eating dinner, if I remember correctly, Mike and Gary flew in from Winnipeg, with their low voltage problem resolved. Once again, we ate dinner in the Red Lake Lodge, and then we went our separate ways for the night. Brian knew of another place about twenty miles away called Vermillion Lodge (I think) where he would have liked for us to stay, but we sort of mutually agreed that Red Lake was probably a better choice in terms of logistics and airplane maintenance.

Monday, August 15th

Today was the first day that I flew with Eric (What a fun guy to fly with!), so Wolfgang flew with Brian. Although I flew left seat in Brian's plane, when I flew with Eric I always sat in the right seat. We taxied to the north end of the lake and took off towards the west, then headed in a northerly direction towards God's Lake (they all are). Kirk always left first since he had the slowest airplane. Throughout the trip we always kept in radio contact with each other and tried to maintain visual contact. Shortly after take off, Brian led us over Vermillion Lodge, and from the air I could easily see why he wanted to stay there. We climbed to about 2800 feet and continued on to God's Lake. It was on this segment of the journey that I took the photo (next page) of N2397E, the Cessna 185 flown by Mike. Eric often gave me the controls, so we would switch off flying. When he needed to use his video or digital cameras to film one of the other planes he would tell me the direction to move so he could line up his shots. By the end of

the trip I was more adept at handling the Cessna 180 while Eric did his excellent photography.



Mike and Gary flying a Cessna-185

He also has the best toys and is good at using them: On the left yoke he had the new Garmin 396 GPS receiver mounted, which was connected to a satellite radio/music receiver from which he could download some weather and cloud information, and an i-Pod filled with his own music, wired to the plane's intercom. He used his laptop for route data and flight planning. He kept a DC-DC converter plugged into the plane's cigarette lighter socket to charge the digital camera and the laptop. At 35, he has that youthful exuberance and self-confidence and the skill level and familiarity with his airplane that makes him a good pilot. My Introduction to his abilities occurred enroute to God's Lake, when he decided to take the controls and fly low along some lake. Low, as in ten feet above the water, diving between the trees and pulling out at full throttle, commanding the airplane to go exactly where he wanted, while he played a song from his i-Pod about a wild cowboy roping and a riding, naturally at a high volume. With Eric at the controls, I never felt any apprehension after the first couple of times, but I also know that he flew at a much higher skill level than I will probably ever have. We arrived at God's Lake behind the others – we could hear them on the radio but couldn't spot them, and even sometimes when we were flying on the deck we were out of sight radio range. Then we had us an air show. Kirk took off in his Super-150, flew over us fairly low, and then performed one float landings while Eric held the hammer down on the video camera. Brian and Wolfgang took off and circled us a couple of times, then Craig and Mike took off in their planes.

For lunch, we stopped near Gillam. A lady driving a pickup with a huge fuel tank in back came out to where we docked and gassed up the planes, and then the ten of us clamored into and onto the truck for a ride into town to eat. We didn't secure Eric's plane well enough and found it had drifted away about one

hundred yards. He walked into the water to grab it, and then he taxied it to the dock. Prior to takeoff, he took off his shoes and turned on the plane's heater to help dry them out. It was somewhat uncomfortable, but we had such an exciting ride that afternoon that I paid little attention to the cabin warmth as we flew down the Nelson River to York Factory and to Churchill.

Hey look! Somebody named a river after me. Well, maybe I could be related to whomever the Nelson River is named after; perhaps he and I share the same grandfather thirteen generations back, as I do with Edwin Hubble, the astronomer that discovered telescopes. Or was that Galileo? At any rate, Eric and I had fun flying low over the river. We both wanted to go under one of the bridges, but had no desire to deal with the Canadian Federales wearing red coats, Smokey the Bear hats, black shining boots, and running with a German shepherd named Rin Tin Tin, so we didn't. What a crazy name for a dog! Sounds like something somebody would dream up in the Fifties. But today wasn't in the Fifties, and we weren't flying fifty feet. Eric told me to hold the plane steady while he shot videos of Kirk. As the river curved, so did I, keeping the altimeter on the mark, thrilled but nervous at flying about ten feet above the water, climbing only when necessary, and weaving a flight path with Kirk that may have looked like a strand of DNA. We passed a herd or a school or a group or a covey or a gaggle or a bob or a colony or a crash or a harem or a pod or a rookery or whatever you call a bunch of seals. [For other interesting names of animal groupings see <http://rinkworks.com/words/collective.shtml>]. There were some great geological formations that would have been fun to closely examine, especially if we had a geologist with us. I think Brian and Craig flew behind us; every now and then we saw Mike. Most of my memories of flying over the Nelson River consist of me concentrating on flying the C-180 while keeping track of Kirk in his Super-150.



Kirk's "Super-150" over the Nelson River. Photo courtesy of Eric Weaver

Somewhere near where the Nelson River entered into Hudson Bay, Brian took the lead and headed south a few miles, to the mouth of the Hayes River. From a vantage point of about five hundred feet or so, York Factory of the old Hudson Bay Company looked as white and as impressive as the Taj Mahal, standing out in contrast to the gray ocean water, gray clouds, and dark foliage. This place was very active during the fur trading days. The trappers brought their furs here, and from here, they were shipped to England. At one time there stood many buildings, but now only the three-story square building remains.

From the air it looks very interesting, and hopefully, sometime in my life I can tour it. Dr. George Erickson, a retired dentist from Minnesota, wrote a good description of the place in his book, True North. He flew around Canada in a Piper J-3 on floats a few years back and wrote good details of his adventures in the book. It turns out that our flights to the Arctic Circle followed very similar routes that he described in the first part of his book. Dr. Erickson will sell signed copies of this book. Details are listed at the end of this story. In 2002, I bought this book, and reread it after going on this trip. Now, I can relate to the story much better.



York Factory



Polar Bears south of Churchill. Photo courtesy of Eric Weaver and/or Kirk Spangler

Even as we circled York Factory, the rain splattered over our windshield. A few miles to the north, the rain diminished, but the grayness of the clouds had not, and the ceiling had dropped to about two hundred feet. Horizontal visibility was OK. Brian, Mike, and Craig flew ahead of Eric and Kirk, north towards Churchill. They reported seeing polar bears. It took a little while, but then we saw them, and I had my first real lesson in precision and formation flying. On our Eastern side we had the Hudson Bay; on the West we had marshy flat lands; to the North we had beaches, and to the South - well that was behind us so it didn't matter. Except for the polar bear mounted at the old Anchorage airport terminal building, I don't remember ever seeing one. We probably saw about one hundred of these magnificent animals. Kirk circled some bears; we began to circle behind him. Eric and Kirk have many hours flying in sync with each other; they are like two dolphins. Always, they communicate, constantly giving position reports. They watch out for each other, because their lives depend on it. They know each other's flying skills, and they respect each other. And I had the good fortune to fly with them! Trim the nose a little high. Keep the RPMs up. Maintain a constant altitude and speed. Maintain a constant bank angle. Watch out for the other guy. Eric had me fly while he captured the bears on video tape and silicon chips. My film shots of the bears didn't come out nearly as well as did Eric's and Kirk's. As the C-180 and the Super-150 waltzed through the air, my flying proficiency improved, at least for these invigorating moments. Kirk claims that he had his window open, and one time he could hear one of the bears loudly growl at him over the noise of the engine. I have no reason to doubt him.



Eric and Matt flying in Eric's plane. Photo courtesy of Eric Weaver and/or Kirk Spangler



The freighter *Ithaca* shipwrecked near Churchill. Photo courtesy Eric Weaver

Near the town of Churchill there is an old shipwreck of the freighter *Ithaca* that lies in the bay. Once again, Eric gave me the controls of the plane while he photographed it. We flew over the airport and the people in the tower directed us to the seaplane base, where shortly after securing the planes for the night we were met by a young girl driving a bus to take us into town. But instead of stopping, she drove us through town, to a park, where we saw some beluga whales. We drove past several empty tundra buses that looked like the skeleton

remains of bombed out buses, because they had no sides. With their huge tundra tires about five feet high, I thought of Ivan the Terrible, the bus in Antarctica that meets the incoming planes, only Ivan has walls and a top. In November, tourists fill the tundra buses to watch the polar bears come into Churchill, and perhaps wander through the garbage dump. I am glad we saw them in the wild. Perhaps they are not as big in our photos as they are in those of the people riding the buses, but I don't care.

The bus driver took us to the Seaport Hotel, and then went behind the counter to assign us our rooms. Wolfgang and I shared a room that night. We all met in the dining room for a good dinner of ribs. After dinner, I used the computer in the lobby to check my email, where I read Bob McCullough's account of Butch Head's funeral. I would have been there had I not gone on this trip. He had died a week ago on this day, and I felt sad reading about his funeral. Goodbye, good friend.

Tuesday, August 16th

One of the things I like best about travelling is meeting interesting people. Bill Layman was in the lobby of the Seaport Hotel chatting with Craig prior to breakfast. He had just returned from a month long canoe trip on the Kazan River (if I have my facts right – he may have been on a different river), but at any rate, he is a top notch canoeist and outdoors person. I think he even went over some maps with Brian. I think he was waiting to catch the train to Winnipeg. Although he was on his way home, Bill was ready to turn around and go fly with us. He easily strapped on his "light" backpack, which weighed about 50 pounds, and looked like a keg of beer. It's a waterproof container. Typically, the "keg" might weigh 85 pounds. Perhaps I listened to Bill for fifteen minutes at the most; I would very much enjoy hearing his stories for hours.



Bill Layman

“Bill Layman and Lynda Holland live in La Ronge, Saskatchewan in Canada's north. Bill's mining exploration company and Lynda's work as an educator put them in close contact with the Athapaskan Dene who lives along the edge of the tree-line. Now both largely retired, a fascination with these people's ancestral lands has seen Bill and Lynda venturing by canoe each summer for the last decade into the so-called "Land of Little Sticks." Recently these trips have taken them further afield onto the barrens and the land of the Inuit.

Bill writes for *KANAWA*, the paddling magazine of the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association and for a number of Web sites about their canoe trips. For the last two summers he has been doing a daily internet journal, live from the river and complete with pictures, using a Globalstar satellite phone linked to a handheld Hewlett Packard PDA. Diaries of their Dubawnt River (40 days 750 miles) and Thlewiaza River (55 day 1000 mile) trips, as well as other articles about the Coppermine, Kazan, Thelon, and other northern rivers can be seen at www.out-there.com.¹

While eating breakfast together, Craig told me about some of his work as a contractor building waste treatment facilities. When I asked him how he started doing that work, he told me that when he graduated from high school he needed a job and went to work as a laborer for a construction company and eventually worked his way up the ladder high enough to start his own company. He may not be doing much of the type of labor that he did as a young man, but he certainly gained the experience to know what it takes to do a job right. He goes around the world on exotic hunting trips. One of them had taken him to Mongolia; when we were all introducing ourselves a few nights earlier, Bruce Hendry said he had never met anyone whom had gone to Mongolia, but here at the table sat two of us.

Rain squalls passed over us in the morning; while we waited, Brian suggested that we walk to the museum at the Churchill train station. It's not a big one, but I found it interesting. Swampy Cree life and fur trapping exhibits and polar bears are on display.

Eric and Kirk and I went into a hardware store. Kirk needed some clothes, since by now he had decided to go all the way to Chantrey Inlet with us. One of the contributing factors was that while in Red Lake he had tried his ATM card and money started spitting out as if he had been playing the slots and won in Las Vegas. I bought a better raincoat. I had one in my backpack, but that was in Brian's plane. Then we all went back to the planes, where we had to fuel up using a hand pump screwed into a 55-gallon barrel. Brian had prearranged a fuel

¹ Required Copyright Notice

http://www.equipped.org/bill_layman.htm

Unless otherwise noted, the entire contents of this Web site are

Copyright © 1994 – 2003; First Published: January 21, 2003

Douglas S. Ritter & Equipped To Survive Foundation, Inc.

All Rights Reserved; the photo of Bill Layman was also on this webpage

drop. While fueling the planes, a guy came out to fuel either a DeHavilland Beaver or a Norseman – I can't tell the difference. He had access to the electric pump, so his task was easier. Brian gave him a hand while a half a dozen Danish fishermen waited to fly in this magnificent airplane.



The “Beaver” or the “Norseman” at Churchill

When we took off around noon, I felt my stomach that looks full on the outside begging for something to fill the gap on the inside. Fortunately, Eric shared some ham sandwiches that he had bought at the restaurant, quieting that persistent beggar. Over the western shore of Hudson Bay we did fly, taking great delight seeing many white beluga whales. Actually, these animals are not part of the whale species, but that of dolphins or porpoises. It didn't matter to me. I still enjoyed flying over them, as did the rest of the gang. But once again, Eric and I and Kirk lagged behind, as we choreographed our own ballet in the sky, “Dances with Whales” – perhaps somebody ought to make a movie with that name. Onward we flew, hugging the coastline, sometimes over the gray cold water and sometimes over the rocks and sand and tundra's edge; what distant oceans had the whales travelled, where's their destination, questions that even the ancient mariners asked, and look at that abandoned hut – single hut, not *kanata* which means a collection of huts from which the name Canada is derived²; hey, a caribou just passed under our right float, wondering about the biggest mosquito he had ever encountered; as he wondered we wandered North, no, not to Alaska but to Rankin Inlet, Eric, please hand me my camera, I can't because I put it in the back, OK, just look at that beautiful water now, from three thousand feet little islands of clouds and the azure color of the water look like we are flying over the

² Round the Globe in Old and New Paths, M'Collester, Sullivan Holman. Boston: Universalist Publishing House. 1890. Pg. 11.

Caribbean Ocean, an unexpected pleasure of blues, cobalt, sapphires, once more evidence of the exquisiteness and splendor of the handiwork of God.

By the time we arrived at Rankin Inlet, the other three planes had already landed and had their fuel tanks filled. Eric circled around the planes and talked with the other pilots on the radio. "Why is he landing downwind?" I asked myself, but kept quiet because I thought he wanted to do it for some reason, and he is more experienced than I am. Good splash down anyway. He told me I should have said something. We all make mistakes. No harm was done except that it would have been his turn to buy (everyone else who drank) a beer that night if we were heading for a place that sold it. While he sat on the plane filling the tanks and I turned the pump handle mounted in the 55-gallon barrel, a man that Brian had met a couple years ago drove up. He told Brian that he owned a fish camp located about eighty miles to the West, and that we were welcome to stay there for free. Actually, he wanted to sell the place, and hoped by us staying there that Brian would buy it. Whatever the reason, the timing was just right and I was glad that he came along when he did.



Arctic Skies Outposts fishing camp

After Kirk landed and fueled the Super-150, we all headed to the Arctic Skies Outposts. Once again, the Super-150 and the 180 performed their aero waltz. Upon arrival, we flew low over the water near the camp to check for rocks and floating logs, hazards that can pop holes in the floats. Before we left Churchill Brian had all of us put on our breathable chest waders; I was glad that I had it on, because when I stepped off the float near the shore I fell in chest high water. The fleece shirt I had bought at the Seaport Hotel is the only thing that became wet, and that quickly dried.



Craig Johnson's C-206 at Arctic Skies Outposts



Eric Weaver's C-180 and the C-185 that Mike Andrews flew (back)

Sometimes, besides water, you just fall into things. For being out in a remote area of the tundra, we couldn't have found better accommodations. It had a float plane and/or boat dock, several cabins, and a huge main room complete with food supplies and cooking gear. Gary found a generator inside one of the cabins that he started and plugged in an extension cord that ran to the big room. There was propane in the tanks, and even a barrel of avgas that the guy offered to let us use. We found boats and motors and for some, the fishing started that night. Declaring in advance that this was "Trout Taco Tuesday", Brian caught our supper, as did Craig, his brother Bruce, and Bruce Hendry. (At least that's how I remember it.) Hungry mosquitoes swarmed around us, but I still managed to take some decent photos of the sunset. Eric put his chef skills to use as he cooked the fish, making bar-b-que nuggets for an appetizer. Even for a minimum fish eating guy like myself, I must admit that the nuggets tasted good and the two fish

tacos I ate tasted even better. In all my years of eating tacos, I had never once before eaten a fish taco, let alone two. Given a choice of beef or fish tacos, I would choose beef, but given the choice of eating a fish taco or going to bed hungry...well, these were good enough I have no complaints. Eric is an excellent cook.



Sunset at Arctic Skies Outposts

Brian took a couple photos of me standing in front of the main Arctic Skies Outposts building, wearing my Seattle Seaplanes long sleeve shirt. I started off the trip wearing my Mountain Lakes Seaplane baseball cap, and had no problem wearing the shirt I had bought from Jim Chrysler, owner of Seattle Seaplanes. Flying with Jim Chrysler and Mike Kincaid gave me the foundation to go fly with Brian to the Arctic Circle. Now, I'm wearing my Adventure Seaplanes hat that Brian gave me, and had I been able to fly with Alan Crawford in his C-172 on floats here in Texas on Veteran's Day weekend, I would have gone flying with him wearing my current hat. I respect most of my flight instructors equally, and don't mind wearing something with their company's name on it.



Matt Nelson at Arctic Skies Outposts wearing Seattle Seaplanes shirt

Craig took a nasty fall off the porch of the main cabin; the next day he showed us a bruise about three-inches wide; by the end of the trip it was the size of a saucer and quite red. If it hurt as bad as it looked, I feel sorry for the guy.



Moonrise at Arctic Skies Outposts

Just before we all went to our cabins, somebody noticed the full moon rising over the water. My photography doesn't do justice to the actual event, but it does remind me of the beauty of the moonrise. Content, I went to my cabin, lit a mosquito repellent coil, and quickly went to sleep.

Wednesday, August 17th

Calm waters, hot coffee, warm oatmeal, good company. For two or three hours I dinked around the camp, not doing much that I remember. Bruce Hendry asked me if I wanted to go fishing with him in one of the boats. We weren't gone a long time but Bruce certainly knows how to drive a boat. He told me stories of his younger years when he had owned his own C-172 and had flown it to Alaska a couple of times. His flight hours totaled about 1000, about twice what I had. Neither one of us had any luck fishing, but that was OK, too. Shortly after going back to the dock Wolfgang came in with someone else, quite happy that he had caught his first fish. In his life!

For lunch, Mike gave us some sandwiches he had made. Brian announced that it was time to go fly fishing, or go to the fish flying. Not in those exact words, but his meaning was clear. Mike and Gary opted to stay behind and fish out of a boat; Bruce chose to hike around the area, and Wolfgang wanted to

write in his journal. Craig and his brother Bruce, Eric and Kirk, and Brian and I wanted to keep the airplanes happy and fulfill their destiny and dreams of flight, so that's exactly what we did. Flight time from the Arctic Skies Outposts to the river where we landed perhaps lasted thirty minutes; the next few hours or so bought us extra time in our lives, for as the saying goes something like this: "God doesn't take off from the days of your life the number of hours spent fishing (and flying)".



Bruce Johnson with a Grayling



Kirk Spangler with a Grayling



Arctic Char with a yellow heart on its back



Eric thinking of taking a nap!

Fishing is what we came for and fishing is what we did. On my very first cast I hooked a grayling about 15" long; within twenty minutes I landed eight fish. The biggest one that I caught was an Arctic char, about two feet long, and near the back of its neck there was a yellow mark shaped like a heart. At one point, Brian told me to step back to give Kirk a chance, so I walked down stream about ten feet and landed another one. But Kirk was no slouch either, using his small

telescopic rod. He managed to catch several fish, as did most of us. Eric may or may not have landed fish – I don't remember, but one time he caught one and the fish broke his line and escaped, and I instantly felt a tug on my line. When I reeled the fish in, we saw that in addition to my lure, Eric's lure was hanging out of his mouth. We caught many more fish than we took back for supper, because of the catch and release policy, but also because there was no sense in killing the fish if we weren't going to eat them. After the fish I caught warned the others not to bite at these shimmering shiny things, they understood so my luck changed. Eric decided to take a nap and I wandered up towards the other guys to see how they were doing. Brian, Craig, Bruce, and Kirk had caught several. While Brian filleted the fish, Kirk fished nearby. He caught one and had released it on a rock. He asked me to take a photo with his camera. The fish started flopping around so Kirk grabbed it and threw it away from the water, and I managed to photograph the fish in midair.

Three or four hours later we hiked back to the planes and loaded up. It was amazing to see all the rivers and lakes in the area, each a brilliant blue (as opposed to a dumb blue?), reflecting the color of the clear blue sky. Although pretty flat, the landscape beneath our wings told stories of millions of years of rivers eating granite for breakfast and their endless quest to flow to the sea, and their nostalgic efforts to return home by evaporation into the clouds and then heading homeward bound in raindrops seeking their way back into more rivers. **(Ecc 1:7) All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.**

Once again, we all enjoyed Eric's cooking of the day's catch. Wolfgang made sure that he ate some of his fish. I think Mike and Gary had also caught more fish. Bruce Hendry told of his observations of the eco system in the tundra and he also saw an arctic fox. He said it was like a miniature forest that only stood eight inches tall. Most everyone else but me drank a beer or two; naturally, the conversations of ten men out in the boondocks covered the gamut of topics, such as flying, fishing, hunting, sports, cars, and wonder of all wonders, women, who really are the wonders of all wonders.

Thursday, August 18th

And I must admit, when I woke up this morning, the idea of meeting a dozen of those wonders never occurred to me. By the time you the reader finish reading about today's activities, you will have a better idea of what I am writing about.



Kirk's Spangler is flying his "Super-150" over the Kazan Falls



Cub over Kazan Falls (2003), courtesy of Adventure Seaplanes

Coffee. Breakfast. Clean dining room. Load planes. Take off. Take off to where? Kazan Falls, that's where. Wider than Niagara Falls. Not quite as well known, and for that great reason, not very many tourists, either. Look at the musk ox, perhaps thirty of them. Fly past Thirty Mile Lake, communicate, fly in loose formation over the falls, and do it again, and again. See that colorful tent – who belongs to it? So we land a mile away (seems like a strange word when flying a plane on floats) – OK, so we splash, secure the boats, grab fishing gear,

and hike. Hike past an old refrigerator – where did that come from? Hike over the tundra and cross small streams until we reach the river. Wow, that water moves fast. Wolfgang stops near a rocky overlook. Wouldn't be fun falling into that. Catch up with Eric and Kirk, who are having fun taking photos of each other, framing their faces with an old picture frame that Kirk found. Brian and Bruce and Craig Johnson fish, maybe Bruce Hendry does too. Some where along the way there's Mike. Meet up with Gary. Walk to the falls sign. Hear the roar of the falls in the distance. Take photos. Place a caribou antler on our heads and take more photos. Who are those people Kirk and Eric talking to? Seven – count 'em – seven young ladies. High school girls on a 45 day canoe trip, heading to Baker Lake. Initially, thought colorful tent belonged to them, but not sure now.



Gary Wilson at the Kazan River sign

The sign reads:
THE KAZAN RIVER

1990

“The Kazan River Valley is the home of the Caribou Inuit, the first people to live year-round on the treeless barrens. Here they have depended for generations on the vast caribou herds that migrate seasonally across the river. The Kazan was unknown to Europeans until 1770, when it was crossed by Samuel Hearne, and unmapped until 1894, when it was surveyed by renowned Canadian scientist J.B. Tyrrell. Today, this wild river, cascading through the rugged Precambrian Shield, offers experienced canoeists spectacular whitewater and view of abundant wildlife, as well as insights into the way of life. For these outstanding features, the Kazan River has been proclaimed a Canadian Heritage River. “

The sign is written in English, French, and Inuktitut (I think).



Musk oxen, photo courtesy of Adventure Seaplanes



Gary with six of the girls from the Manito-wish YMCA, 2005 Canuck Expo.



Eric flying Laura over Kazan Falls enroute to Thirty Mile Lake to retrieve her camera.

Each of the seven girls are members of the Manito-wish YMCA out of Boulder Junction, Wis. They started canoeing when they were ten years old. Now, they were nearing the end of their month-and-a-half long journey. When we met them, they were about to portage around the Kazan Falls. Big Brother Gary asked them their names and soon had his photograph taken with six of them standing around him. Laura, the seventh girl had taken off walking with Eric. At 24, she was the elderly lady of the group, and was serving in a leadership role. A day or two earlier this group had camped at Thirty Mile Lake and Laura had left her camera on a rock near the river. Eric offered her a ride in his plane to retrieve it, which she eagerly accepted. After Gary and the girls had their photographs taken, three of the girls expertly turned over a canoe and stood under it. The two girls on the ends helped the one in the middle balance it, and then they stepped out and the one in the middle started walking with her sixty-five pound load. Twice more the scene repeated itself, because these girls had three canoes to

portage. While Eric flew Laura to pick up the camera, Gary helped portage the packs of the girls – not once but twice. Brian said that Gary has a hundred pound heart in his two-hundred and eighty pound body. It didn't take long before we could see Eric's plane flying around the falls.

On my way back to the planes, I walked by a caribou carcass and naturally had to photograph it. By the time I arrived an hour later, Eric was chatting with Laura, ecstatic that she had flown over the Kazan Falls on her first float plane ride and happy to have her camera back. Since it was a yellow water-proof camera, she easily spotted it from the plane on a rock near the river. While talking to the other six girls near the falls, we learned that another group of girls were canoeing to the Chantrey Inlet and should be near the end of their 90-day expedition. Laura asked to look for them, and on the off chance we might find them, she wrote a note to them and gave it to Eric. She said her sister was travelling in this group. Tired Gary came trudging back, we said our goodbyes, and boarded the planes again. Laura gave Eric a big hug.



The town of Baker Lake

Within minutes we were airborne once more to Baker Lake. Even without any charts, we could have found it without difficulty, because the Kazan River flows into it. The town of Baker Lake has a tower-controlled airport where Craig landed his C-206 for fuel; the rest of us landed on the lake and taxied to the sandy beach. Brian told the man in the tower that five Cessna floatplanes were inbound; the slow talking air traffic controller took forever issuing landing instructions. On final approach, as Brian waited for the controller to finish his long-drawn out words, he told me to keep the airplane ten feet above the water

and fly towards the shoreline so we wouldn't have to taxi far, but I didn't hold it as steady as I should have. We did a slight bounce on the water; irritated, Brian took over the controls. Once again, dumb me.

We were still securing the planes when this native guy drives up and very casually asks if we have fishing licenses. Since he offered to sell them on the spot, and the paper we filled out had little boxes for individual letters, we sort of had the impression that he is the local game warden. Guess what! We sort of felt obligated to buy this piece of paper from him. I think I threw my Nunavut fishing license out just a few days ago (in November). When five floatplanes with U. S. registry fly in, talk on the radio, and a bunch of guys jump out, it didn't place a heavy burden on the game warden's deductive reasoning skills to determine that some of these guys might be thinking about fishing in his territory. So we bought licenses. Soon afterwards a fuel truck arrived. Brian and Wolfgang and I walked to the trading post, which I expected to be very small. Nope – it was a super market with Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut. Brian gave me \$20 to buy a pizza. Then he left and walked back to the planes. I added another \$20 or so and bought some chicken and maybe another pizza. That stuff didn't last long.



Baker Lake Museum (with red roof). (2003) Photo Courtesy of Adventure Seaplanes

One of my regrets is that I didn't go into the museum at Baker Lake. There is a sign or plaque that tells about Charles and Anne Lindbergh stopping at the town on their way to the Orient in 1931.

Despite the fact that my floatplane flying skills need to be improved, I really enjoyed flying with Brian in his C-185. He is such a good pilot, and has such a vast knowledge of the country side. We flew together for hundreds of miles over the Canadian Shield, and I relished every minute. Besides having a

good visual on the screen of the Garmin 296 GPS receiver, he kept his aeronautical charts handy, making notations as we flew, and pointing out different land marks and rivers to me. Obviously, I am glad we did not encounter any emergency and/or survival conditions, but had we done so, I am fully confident that our chances of survival would have been greatly enhanced by having him along. When we crossed over the Arctic Circle, he reached over and shook my hand.



Chantrey Inlet Lodge. Photo courtesy of Borealis Paddling Expedition

From Baker Lake we flew almost due north, crossing over and then flying along the Back River (*Thlew-ee-choh*, or "Great Fish River"³) enroute. The Back River flows into Franklin Lake, which was our destination; within a kilometer of the inlet into the lake stood the Chantrey Inlet Lodge, a rugged assortment of abandoned buildings that became our campsite for the next two nights. It was great staying here, although I thought the Arctic Skies Outposts was in a little better shape. On the bottom of the Chantrey Inlet Lodge sign, the words, "Northwest Territories Canada" had been painted. By those words alone, I knew that the lodge had been built before this area of the Northwest Territories called the District of Keewatin (or Keewatin Territory) had a name change to Nunavut around 1996.

By the time Brian and I arrived at Franklin Lake, Craig and Mike were already securing their planes. Eric, Wolfgang, and Kirk were nowhere to be seen, but having flown with them I figured that they were just doing more extensive sightseeing. Brian and I taxied the C-185 to about 100 feet from the shore line where the Chantrey Inlet Lodge lives. As soon as I stepped off the float I saw a fish that looked to be two feet in length. About ten feet from shore my old tennis shoes that I wore over the boots of the waders bogged down in the mud. In order

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Back_River

to make it to shore, I had to leave the shoes behind. I never saw them again. My prize pair of \$11 shoes! But the plane still needed to be unloaded, so I gingerly walked back to the plane and brought more essential junk back to the shore line. Soon everyone had their gear in, so we made our portages from the lake to the cabins. Then it was fishing time.

Although the others walked on the right side of the lake (as viewed from the camp), I chose to go to the left side. I didn't have any luck fishing but enjoyed my own little exploration among the rocks. When the three stragglers showed up, I wandered back to the camp. I noticed that they were unloading their gear, but so had we, so I thought nothing of it. Then Eric and Kirk took off again. "What was going on?" I wondered. It wasn't long before Kirk and Eric landed; five young women emerged from their planes. This was the group of canoeists that the first group we saw earlier in the day told us about. When I arrived home I wrote a quick two page story of this trip while it was still fresh in my mind. Although some of the next three paragraphs have redundant information, I have decided to insert them here.

"["I've got canoes" Eric Weaver, the seaplane pilot of Cessna 185, tail number N2990C, gleefully radioed to Kirk Spangler, the pilot of "Super 150 Chick Magnet, N23191". After circling a couple of times around the two canoes filled with five astonished women, the two seaplane pilots landed just north of the Arctic Circle on the Back River, near the entrance to Franklin Lake, which flows into Chantrey Inlet south of the Arctic Ocean. Huddling together like the herds of musk oxen they had seen on their 1200-mile canoeing odyssey, the bewildered young women probably discussed having their 12-gauge shotgun ready to use if necessary. Eric landed first, and grinned as he read the names of Beth Halley, Karen Stanley, Emily Stirr, Nina Emery, and Meg Casey off a sheet of notebook paper. Beth grabbed the note from his hand and finished reading their special delivery air mail from Nina's sister Laura, whom Eric had flown around the Kazan Falls earlier in the day. Amid the hoops and hollers, Kirk landed and paddled his Cessna 150 over to the group. Except for scheduled food drops approximately every three weeks, the five courageous women of the Borealis Paddling Expedition (BPE) had not seen any other people during their nearly ninety day journey across the Canadian wilderness and tundra. (www.borealispaddlingexpedition.com)

Eric's co-pilot, Wolfgang Fischer from Germany, was sworn to secrecy not to say anything about seeing these women when the three pilots left them behind and flew over to the Chantrey Inlet fishing outpost, about seven miles away. Wolfgang came in the lodge and told me that he needed to sweep out his cabin – he was actually cleaning out a bunkhouse for these girls; a few minutes later I asked him where Kirk and Eric were going and he gave an evasive answer. About a half-hour later I was chatting with Bruce Hendry when the planes landed and shortly thereafter the five women walked into the lodge. Sitting in a circle and not being shy about sampling liquid refreshments, these highly educated women told us about their accomplishments and dreams. Their adventures included watching a bear rip to shreds one of their tents. Bruce talked a little about one of his adventures when he was a young man, hitchhiking to Central and South

America and riding down the Amazon River. A short time later I walked out of the lodge in time to see Kirk and Bruce Johnson walking up with four fish. After landing, Kirk walked over to Brian Schanche and told him that we need fish. Brian handed Kirk his fishing rod and Kirk landed a three-foot lake trout on his fourth cast.

That night, Brian and former chef Eric received high compliments from everyone about the tastiness of the fish. As a full moon rose over Franklin Lake, I talked to Meg and Emily, telling them how much I admired them for going on their expedition. Hearing the laughter of all these young women sure sounded better than hearing the stories of the nine other men I had been travelling with over the past week.]”

(Lev 11:9) These shall ye eat of all that *are* in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat.

(Psa 8:8) The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, *and whatsoever* passeth through the paths of the seas.

Friday, August 19th

After we all ate breakfast together, Eric and Kirk flew the five girls back to their canoes; the rest of us fished. Using a “five of diamonds” lure, I caught eight fish, each around two feet long. The two Bruce guys don’t look too sad (below). We followed the shore line to where the Back River enters Franklin Lake. Gary decided to go for a swim/bath, and most of the other guys followed, but I had no desire to go swimming with naked guys, so I turned my back on them and fished some more. Wolfgang caught another fish, a lake trout that was maybe 30” long. He was quite happy.



Bruce Hendry and Bruce Johnson with Lake Trout at Franklin Lake



Brian holding Wolfgang's Lake Trout at Franklin Lake

We all made our own way back to the lodge; as I was coming in I couldn't help but hear another plane come in. Two guys landed a two million dollar Cessna Caravan on floats; the owner is seventy years old and had made a lot of money and had worked hard for many years building up a crane rental company. Now, he was off enjoying life and spending his money. He owned helicopters and a jet and said that he was planning on flying the jet to Los Angeles on Tuesday. The two men came into the lodge shortly after I did and had lunch. For those people that had gone to the plane, he gave them tee-shirts printed with his company's logo. Somebody – probably Brian – handed the old man a fishing rod and he caught five fish in eight casts. He said that this was the best time he had had on his whole trip. An hour or so later they took off for Gjøa Haven on King William Island, which borders Chantrey Inlet on the northwest.

These guys reported avgas was available at Gjøa Haven. Later that afternoon Kirk and Eric took off in Eric's C-180 to buy some. They have their own stories to tell about their experiences with the Inuit people living there, especially the children. Remembering what Bruce Hendry had said about the tundra having its own miniature eco system, I used up an entire 36-exposure roll of film (the kind of technology used before digital cameras! Ha! Ha!) while photographing some of the plants and small flowers and berries on the shore of Franklin Lake.



Left: Flower in the tundra, about the size of a quarter.



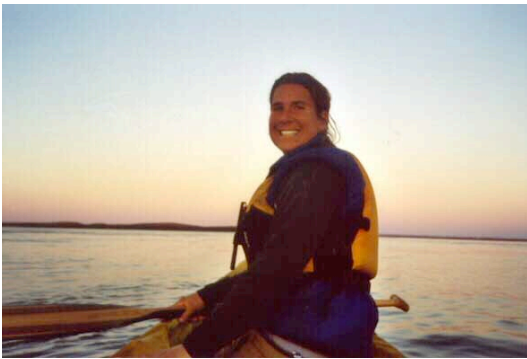
**Eric sitting on top of his plane.
Photo courtesy of BPE.**

A boat had been found with a little gas in its tank; the motor started after about ten pulls and avgas kept it going the rest of the day. Eric later remarked that he had been so busy at Franklin Lake that he never even put a line in the water. Not so for the rest of us. As far as I know, the other nine of us did well. Craig and Bruce Johnson are good fishermen; they were always catching good-sized fish. Brian caught the largest one, a forty-one inch lake trout. Mike didn't do too bad himself.



Borealis Paddling Expedition entering Franklin Lake on the Back River

Late in the afternoon Gary and I went out near the rapids where the Back River enters the lake; before we had fished much we heard our names shouted, and there on the rocks stood Beth, Karen, Nina, Emily, and Meg. They went back for their canoes and were chatting with us about ten minutes later. Gary and I fished for about an hour, and I landed my biggest fish ever, a three-foot long lake trout. Gary started out-fishing me, and then we went over to where the girls had set up their tents for the night. Gary went back out fishing in the boat and caught a bunch more big fish, while Karen and Beth paddled me in one of their canoes around the calm lake as the water reflected the purples and pinks of a setting sun. I sat in the “duffer” seat in the middle, slightly embarrassed about my lack of canoeing experience, while I watched Beth’s and Karen’s strides on the paddles that were natural as breathing. **(Eze 27:26) “Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters”**



Karen Stanley



Beth Halley



Two of the ladies from the Borealis Paddling Expedition at the Chantrey Inlet Lodge. Courtesy of them.



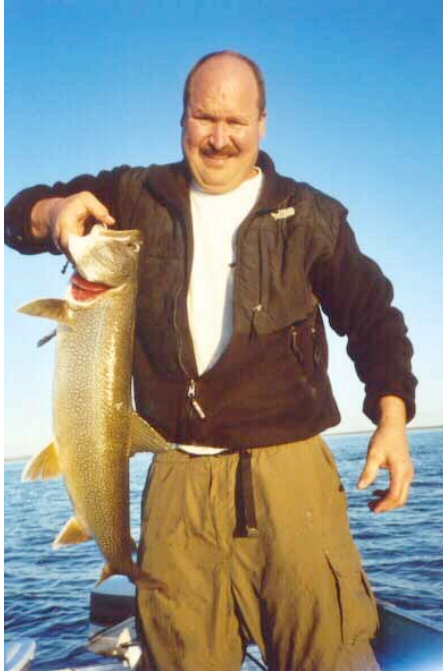
Craig Johnson. He provided the photo.



Brian's 41" Laker.
Photo courtesy of Craig Johnson



Mike Andrews
Photo courtesy of Craig Johnson



Left: Gary Wilson and one of his Lakers



Bruce Hendry



Matt Nelson with 3-foot long Lake Trout on Franklin Lake

While we circled the lake, Emily, Meg, and Nina cooked the guys a coffee-cake over a small burner. Earlier in the day I gave them decals from the space shuttle missions of STS-107 and STS-114, pointing out the names of the women on those missions. One of these girls stuck a set of these decals on their wooden

backpack cabinet used to hold their pots and pans. Somehow during the conversation they said that in preparation for the trip they had gone to Bill Layman's house to study his detailed charts of the area. All these little circles.



All 15 of us at the Chantrey Inlet Lodge sign. Photo courtesy of Borealis Paddling Expedition

Thursday night I had slept in one of the bunk houses that had a half of a dozen beds, and the two Bruces stayed in the same cabin. Today, Bruce Hendry gave me a bad time about me snoring loud enough to wake the dead, so I decided to sleep this evening in a bunk I found near behind the kitchen area. But with another moon rise coming over the lake, and having a window to watch it, and not being real sleepy when I turned in, I stayed awake quite awhile enjoying the serenity.

Saturday, August 20th

Our day started off eating the delicious coffee cake that had been cooked the night before. After loading the planes and receiving hugs from the girls, we all departed Franklin Lake. Three of the planes headed south; I flew with Eric in close formation with Kirk, who flew north in his "Super 150 Chick Magnet" and performed a glassy water landing on Chantrey Inlet. We then turned south and headed to Franklin Lake, looking for canoes. Several minutes later we spotted them and did a couple of fly-bys; Kirk landed near them on one float. All five women stood in the canoes waving at us. I think Eric waggled the wings on the C-180, our way of waving goodbye. By the time we arrived in Minnesota on Monday, the following write up appeared on the web page of the Borealis

Paddling Expedition (these women had a satellite phone which they used to leave messages that were later placed on their web pages):



Kirk landing his Super-150 "Chick Magnet" at Chantrey Inlet

"Bums and Fishes, Part 3: They Came from the Sky

Emily

08/21/2005, Back River, Nunavut; GPS Coordinates: 67 deg. 6 min. north;
95 deg. 17 min. west

Preface: The events I am about to describe are true. The title is a reference to a song sung at Manito-wish and should in no way be associated with the ten wonderful people we met in the past week. If anything, we ourselves are the bums, but the trout we ate was incredible.

No joke; there we were. Our two canoes rafted together facing the Cessna 185 boat plane that had just landed a few hundred feet away on the glassy waters of Franklin Lake. Only moments before, the plane had come over the ridge behind us, almost without a noise and had circled a few times before landing. We sat in astonishment wondering who it was, if the pilot was just curious, or if they were bringing news from the outside world. Unsure, brimming with excitement and slight apprehension, we drew together as the plane taxied forward and decided to paddle up to it and meet whatever was in store for us.

I don't think any of us would have ever guessed at the incredible series of coincidences that came together to shape the next few days. "I'm looking for five women," the pilot said, as he stepped out onto his float. His smile growing as he read each of our names and

handed us a note, laughing at our disbelief. Beth read the note out loud immediately, not even stopping to ask questions until she reached the end which was signed "with love, from the 2005 Canuck Expo." Laughter and questions filled the air until it was established that the two men in the plane were part of a group of ten men in five planes that were flying over the tundra on an adventure trip (see www.adventureseaplanes.com) They had run into a group of girls from Manito-wish at Kazant Falls, and had been instructed to keep an eye out for us on the Back River since they were heading up our way. The fact that in the vast expanses of the tundra, news had just reached us from a group that included our friends, sisters and campers was astonishing. We had just received airmail from the Kazant to the Back, delivered by our new friends, Eric and Wolfgang, pilots from Florida and Germany, who had just dropped out of the sky.

While all the explanations and introductions were taking place, another plane, which we would soon come to know as a Super 150, came up the river from the east, buzzing crazily close to Eric's plane and our boats before landing. A man in waders got out, sat on his float and paddled his plane over to us and so it was that we met Kirk, another pilot from Florida on the northern edge of Canada. The Adventure Seaplane group was staying about seven miles down the river at an old fishing camp and we were promptly invited to join them for dinner. It may seem that we have been receiving dinner invitations left and right, but such is not the case. We have not seen any other canoeists for 86 days and the only people we have seen we had anticipated meeting at all of our re-supplies. To have ten of the most generous and welcoming people drop out of the sky right next to us, bearing notes from our friends, was incredible. Meeting anyone up here in the northern reaches of the Canadian tundra is special in and of itself, and you immediately share the unique connection of the land you are traveling through for a call at home for any period of time.

Meeting the group of seaplane adventurers was an unexpected gift. Not only did we have the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the tundra from the air, after being escorted by our pilot friends to dinner, but we had the opportunity to see our enthusiasm and love for the land reflected ten-fold through different means. I have never heard of a float plane adventure trip before, but as we soared above the Back River, zooming over the astounding hydraulics and the rapids out of Franklin Lake, I was convinced that there could be no better way to experience the Arctic than by seaplane, except by canoe, of course.

The planes landed and we caught our breath, and found ourselves wading through murky waters, to scattered outside buildings reminiscent of Tuckto Lodge. The buildings that had once made up Chantrey Inlet Lodge were now the temporary lodging for a group of pilots, chefs, fathers, husbands, adventurers, fishermen, professors, lawyers, inspectors and guides who shared their space, stories, intrigue and encouragement with five young women from Wisconsin and Connecticut. Over an amazing dinner consisting of fish tacos, Oreos and popcorn, we talked to Bruce, Matt, Brian, Bruce, Craig, Gary and Mike, who like Eric, Wolfgang and Kirk, shared a love of flying and a love of adventure. We were delighted to swap tales of our current trip and past travels and we were excited to

make connections of colleges and home towns. It truly is a small world, even above the Arctic Circle.

The following day after being transported back up the river to our regular life, we began the much slower journey back to the lodge. While we had attempted to scout the rapids from the plane, a rare opportunity to say the least, it still took us the rest of the day to make our way down the river through incredible whitewater and over calm stretches of flat water before coming once more to the white buildings of the old Chantrey Inlet Lodge. We set up our camp and while Nina was fly-fishing with Bruce, Karen and Beth took Matt for a paddle, and Meg and I chatted with Mike, Wolfgang, Craig, Bruce and Brian as we baked them a coffee cake for the next morning. That evening, as we enjoyed another amazing meal of fish, the moon glowed huge and orange above the horizon at the cabin next door and again we watched the stars and the northern lights play in the sky. When it came time to leave the next morning, we packed up our boats, paddled over to where the pilots were loading up, getting ready to head south again. We said the final round of good-byes, hugging Gary from our boats as he stood waist deep in the water, Brian's words "Run for life" echoing in our ears. I think it is fair to say that anyone you meet while traveling above the Arctic Circle will definitely remain a friend for life, whether you meet again in the future, or simply carry the energy of the memory with you to share with others along the way. It is difficult to express how genuinely touched the five of us were by this chance meeting on the Back River. It could not have come at a better time. Being able to share our stories with such interested and appreciative listeners put an incredibly positive twist on the bittersweet ending of our journey.

The night before we met our friends, I stood outside watching the sunset, willing it to last as long as possible and for the day not to end. The thought of being so close to the end of our trip was overwhelming and it hurt to count the small number of days left. Our time on the Back River has been beautiful. A huge river, carving its course out of smooth bedrock on one shore and rolling green hills, dotted with caribou and musk oxen on the other. The best thing about our meeting with the Seaplane Adventurers was not only their incredible generosity, but the opportunity to share with them the ability to dream big and always be thinking of new beginnings. As we left that morning, we had not paddled far before the roar of engines filled the air and the planes took off one-by-one, tipping their wings and buzzing over us as they climbed into the air. Leaving us alone in the tundra again, looking at each other in disbelief for confirmation that all this had really happened. We tried to sing to lift our spirits, holding on to a bit of hope that even though we had watched each plane disappear over the horizon, that one might come back. Sure enough, the humming sound reached our ears before we could spot the two tiny dots that we knew were Eric and Kirk, coming to say a final farewell that we knew would be good. Eric's 185 came in first with Kirk's Super 80 close behind. As the planes approached, they split, circling around each side of us, while we stood in our boats, waving and belting out the song from Top Gun, "You've Lost That Loving Feeling" at the top of our lungs. Eric flew over Kirk, one plane 100 feet above the other, while Kirk did a full circle above us, skimming along the surface of the water on one float. One final pass from each plane, Kirk's arm waving out the window, and they were gone. We kept singing as the planes were lost in the endless blue sky.

A heartfelt thank you to our seaplane friends, we truly enjoyed meeting each of you.”⁴

(NOTE: This is but one of the many journal entries on their web site. Great reading, highly recommended.)



“...we stood in our boats, waving and belting out the song from Top Gun, "You've Lost That Loving Feeling" at the top of our lungs.” BPE

For my part, you are quite welcome, and we all enjoyed meeting each of you as well. After leaving these adventurous canoeists, we headed south to Baker Lake. Trying to describe in words the number of lakes we crossed, or their multitude of colors and shapes is a difficult thing for me. Just as I was fascinated by the colors, I also thoroughly enjoyed seeing the reflections of clouds on the surface of the lakes. One day I told Karoline that we must have seen a million lakes, but she found that hard to believe. Brian mentions 100,000 lakes on his web site. Whatever the count, it's a bunch. **(Isa 41:18) I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.**



Clouds reflected in the lakes while flying to Baker Lake

⁴ <http://www.x-journal.com/journal/borealis/?xjMsgID=5603>

Our welcoming committee at Baker Lake consisted of a dozen or so kids and a million or so mosquitoes. We donned our head nets before we even opened the doors of the plane. Craig bought us chicken at the trading post and afterwards, the kids wanted to do what they could to help fuel and secure the planes. Our pied piper, Gary, led them away towards the museum so they could all have their photographs taken, which sort of relieved the anxiety of the plane owners because the kids kept walking on the floats. One boy about nine helped me hold a rope to keep one of the planes from drifting out to sea, not knowing that the plane was still tied up. George Erickson captured the essence of these modern day Inuit kids with this paragraph in True North, while he was at Chantrey Inlet:

“A small child ran down to the river, holding high over his head the primary symbol of change for the Arctic, if not the world—a bundle of twigs tied into the shape of an airplane. Though his grandmother might tell him that geese fly off to the Old Woman Who Never Dies every fall and return with the promise of spring, this child-of-the-airplane will also learn the facts of migrating birds. Airplane held aloft, he flopped onto a nearby caribou hide and flew his bundle high, his body cushioned in caribou hair, his mind far off in the sky.”⁵

Shortly after takeoff, Kirk spotted three canoes. The first group of girls from the Manito-wish YMCA, 2005 Canuck Expo that we encountered two days earlier was crossing Baker Lake a few miles south of the town with the same name, their final destination. Eric tied his plane nose-to-nose with Kirk’s plane. He was non-committal when asked if we had seen the group of five canoeists; but when he asked one of them to place a decal of the Borealis Paddling Expedition on his airplane, the cheers erupted. They marveled about the quickness of the “Polar Airmail Express”. They declined the offer of Snickers due to a peanut allergy, but quickly devoured the two packs of Oreo™ cookies that Eric had bought at the store in Baker Lake. It was kind of funny when the girls saw the cookies. They all looked back at Laura, questioning if it was OK, but she craved them as much as they did. One of the girls said that she had been talking about eating Oreos™ all morning.



Borealis Paddling Expedition decal. Photo courtesy of Eric Weaver.

⁵ True North by George Erickson, The Lyons Press, Guilford, CT. (2002) Pg. 101.



Anticipating the Oreo Cookies! Photo courtesy of Eric Weaver.



Chomping down the Oreos™ at Baker Lake with the girls from the Manito-wish YMCA, the 2005 Canuck Expo.

Southwest of Baker Lake are the Dubawnt River and Dubawnt Lake. Bill Layman and the girls of the BPE had both told us that we needed to see the Dubawnt Falls. So that's where we all headed next. Although we were told that these falls are more spectacular than the Kazan Falls, I personally liked the Kazan Falls better. However, I am still glad we flew over them. And then we flew over Dubawnt Lake! Sixty miles of lake – glad that our planes had floats. We flew over a fishing camp, and I think this is Tuktu (the native word for "caribou") Lodge's Outpost Fishing Camp that Emily mentioned in her journal entry. On one of the earlier BPE journal entries, Nina wrote,

“A Day in the Life on the Shores of Tulemaliguak

Nina

07/08/2005 , GPS Coordinates: 63°, 22" North, 101°, 7" West

Dubawnt Lake, Tulemaliguak, in Inukituk, is the sixth largest lake in Canada. Straight across it is 60 miles from where the Dubawnt River flows in at the southwest corner and Outlet Bay where it again heads north.”⁶

As I mentioned before, I encourage everyone who reads my story to read the all the journal entries of the BPE on their web site. It’s a great adventure story.

As we flew towards Kasba Lake, our stopping point for the night, we could see the glint of the sun being reflected from the many lakes. Once again, I almost blew it, as I reduced power on Eric’s plane just prior to a rough water landing. Once again, the owner of the plane kept us from having a bad day. Having done that twice on one trip, the experience is seared into my mind; hopefully, I will never ever make that mistake again. I don’t think I will. Sorry Eric and Brian. Thanks be to God and to Jack Clodfelter, the Guardian Angel He gave me.

Kasba Lake Lodge has its own gravel runway, where Craig landed with another low voltage light, and a dock for floatplanes and boats. We were lucky that we could stay there, because the place had officially closed the day before. Although I had never heard of it before this trip, the lodge is known for being the place to go for trophy fishing of Lake Trout, Arctic Grayling, and Northern Pike. Brian had called ahead and made arrangements. One of the guides still there cooked us two batches of fish, but Eric is a much better chef. The caretaker for the winter had been divorced about six years ago; he planned on home-schooling his fourteen-year old daughter who was staying with him. His goal was to teach her about caribou hunting, but she seemed squeamish. It ought to be an interesting winter for the two of them, because they hadn’t spent much time with each other since the divorce. We were each charged \$84 Canadian for the rooms and dinner and breakfast, which considering the location, was a good price. It’s too bad that I can’t remember any of the colorful phrases that the guide uttered the next morning. Without being dirty, his words came from the heart of a poet. It wouldn’t bother me terribly much to land either a seaplane or a wheel plane at Kasba Lake Lodge and spend a couple days fishing there, and have him for a fishing guide.

Sunday, August 21st

Craig was able to start his plane and brought it over to the dock; shortly afterwards we all took off. On this day I flew with Brian. Brian chuckled that it was Craig’s time to buy the beer tonight, since he took off with his water rudders down. Brian had to do the same type of take off that he did at Surfside, popping the flaps to 40° in order to go airborne. The water was even rougher than it had

⁶ <http://www.x-journal.com/journal/borealis/?xjMsgID=4690>

been the night before. As we journeyed south, more and more our odyssey took us over massive forests, replacing the tundra that we had flown over the last several days.

For lunch and fuel, we stopped at the town of Thompson located on the Burntwood River. Brian complimented me on my good glassy water landing. Ah, hamburgers! It was noon, we were hungry, and my meat conditioned body was in withdrawal after eating fish for the past several days. But then I negated my good landing. After Brian refueled his plane, he moved it to another dock, and tied the left float to it. He climbed in and moved to the right seat and started the engine. I was supposed to untie the float and jump on board, but I hesitated a second too long and the plane passed me. Brian circled back after me and told somebody on the radio that he almost left me behind. He may not wish to fly with me again, but that doesn't change my opinion of wanting to fly with him some more.

My takeoff was decent, we turned south, and after a while Brian took off his headset and took a short nap. Along the way we passed two different heart-shaped lakes. Eric woke us all up when he blasted some German beer-polka music over the radio. He laughed as he told of Wolfgang dancing in the cockpit! Mike and Craig led in their planes; Kirk and Eric landed near some other fishing lodge. We climbed to 6500-feet for smoother air. Not only was it smoother, we also had a good tailwind: Our ground speed according to the GPS receiver was 158 mph - typically we were around 110 or so.

The next place we landed was Kenora, the home town of Lori, Brian's girlfriend. Like Red Lake, this is another town where I really could enjoy living. While we fueled we talked to a pilot that flew DeHavilland Twin Otters exclusively. He learned to fly in one, and had flown one for tourists around Thailand before the great Tsunami of 2004. It probably won't surprise anyone when I say that I had steak for dinner instead of fish! Brian and I took off before Craig; he had a hard time going onto the step, so he went back to the dock and Brian and I landed. After Bruce Johnson jumped out, Craig was able to fly off the water. Bruce rode with us on the next segment, which was to the twenty-two acre island and lake home that Craig owns on the Lake of the Woods. What a fantastic place!

Brian buzzed both Mike's and Craig's planes that had already landed. Then we landed, and waited for Eric and Kirk to show up. Although my camera's automatic setting didn't have a high enough shutter speed, I kind of like the affect of the photo of Kirk's plane on the next page.



Kirk's Super-150 landing at Lake of the Woods



Craig Johnson's log home on Lake of the Woods

The house is built like a ski lodge. If I had to live away from the Rocky Mountains, I could force myself to live there. Since my house is already a 1000 miles away from the Rockies, I could easily live at Craig's place. We all chilled for the night. Using his laptop computer, Eric showed us some of the many digital photos he had taken on the trip. (He had also done this at Chantrey when the girls were around). Craig made good on his beer debt for leaving the water rudders down. One of the bedrooms has bunk beds in it; Bruce Hendry and Bruce Johnson and I ended up taking it. Bruce H. probably had strong reservations against it, but the next morning he said that I really hadn't bothered him with my snoring.



Brian, Bruce Johnson, and Mike Andrews relaxing at Craig's place

Monday, August 22nd

Today is the sixty-third wedding anniversary of my parents. Unfortunately, my dad is no longer around to celebrate.



Wolfgang and Mike folding the American flag at Craig's place

After Bruce Johnson, Kirk, and I washed the breakfast dishes, Craig took us for a short boat ride. The planes were made ready; our German friend Wolfgang helped Mike fold up the American flag. Craig's plane wouldn't start, but either Brian or Mike used their battery to start it. Eric and I took off with Kirk to Crane Lake. This was the first time I had ever entered the United States in a small aircraft. Eric kept in constant contact with air traffic controllers in Canada and in the U.S. We landed at Crane Lake near the U. S. Customs office. Eric showed him registration for the plane and the gun permit he had for the shotgun

and the agent examined my passport and asked me if I had bought anything in Canada. I told him about the few things I had bought and he quickly dismissed us. Then it was ice cream time. Perhaps we were there for an hour.



Brian, Eric, and Wolfgang at Craig's place

Once airborne, Eric headed down some river, playing his roping and a'riding music. We all flew over the farm of Brian's family and Gary asked if we could fly over his farm, which wasn't too far away. A couple hours after leaving Crane Lake we were back at Surfside. I kind of wished we were back on the Back River. Once we started unloading the planes, Bruce Hendry gave us all a very poignant DVD of his cancer survival., and Brian came up to me with the white blanket I had borrowed from Eric. During the journey, it had often irritated him because it was always in the way. He said he was giving me "The Blankey Award".

Next time I fly with him I won't bring it along. Bruce Hendry hopes to fly around Baffin Island, and Brian has talked about doing a trip there, as well as some of Canada's other lakes, such as the Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake. Hopefully, someday it will happen, and I will be along for the ride, and will also be a better seaplane pilot. But I sure learned a lot on this trip, had a great time, and thoroughly enjoyed the company of everyone on the trip.

August 23rd – August 28th

Over the next few days, I wandered around Minnesota and Michigan. I stopped Wednesday night at Manistique, Michigan, where I took the photo of the lighthouse. The next day I drove over the impressive Mackinaw Bridge and to Big Rapids, where I had lunch with my friends Bob and Nancy McCullough. He showed me his 16th generation of space tomatoes, grown from seeds that had flown on a space shuttle mission many years ago. I spent that night in Chesterton, Indiana, at the house of Bob and Joyce Gaylord, which was also

very pleasant. All of us mourned the loss of our friend Butch Head. This story is dedicated to him, and to Jack Clodfelter.



Lighthouse at Manistique, Michigan



Ozark Air Lines DC-3 at Bloomington, Illinois

On Friday, August 26th, I drove to Bloomington, Illinois, to see this Ozark Airline DC-3, and then to Moline, where I picked up my wife Karoline and my daughter Cheri and my granddaughter Camyrn at the airport. During the two weeks I was gone I hadn't shaved. Camyrn came running up to me but quickly decided she didn't want to have anything to do with this white bearded guy that wasn't Santa Clause but sounded like Pop. She had the same reaction when I shaved it off a couple months later. My other daughter Michelle met us in Aledo, Illinois, where my sister Karen and my mother live. We all left for home on Sunday, the 28th. My plane left out of Minneapolis, so I had to drive back there.

On the flight home I saw great billowing clouds that looked like mountains, especially over Oklahoma City. These clouds were part of the weather system that after the next day everybody else called Hurricane Katrina.

Post Trip

One thing bugged me – why did the name of Franklin Lake seem so familiar? After I came home I read in True North that Sir John Franklin led an expedition looking for the Northwest Passage beginning in 1845, using the ships, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*. Over the years I had heard of the Franklin expedition, but didn't know much about it, and hadn't made the connection that Franklin Lake was named after him. Then I realized I had found a much bigger circle, this time one that spanned between the Arctic Circle and the Antarctic Circle. Sir Franklin used the same ships that Sir James Clark Ross had taken to the Antarctic in 1839 – 1843.



Mt. Erebus, Ross Island, Antarctica

The first time that I read True North and read the names of *Erebus* and *Terror* three years ago, I wanted to find the connection to two volcanoes on Ross Island, Antarctica with those names. Mt. Erebus is very familiar to me, because I saw it often during my trips to Antarctica, especially in 1996, the year I Wintered-over. But I never did any research, until now. With the help of the Internet, I found some interesting tidbits. Sir James Clark Ross explored Antarctica from 1839 - 1843. He named Mt. Erebus and Mt. Terror after the ships under his command, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*. Both Ross Island and the Ross Ice Shelf are

named after him. Sir James Ross's second in command was Francis Crozier⁷, who was also on Franklin's Expedition. His signature is on the Franklin document on page 54 of this story. *Cape Crozier* on Ross Island is named after him. It was here that some of the current documentary, "March of the Penguins" was filmed. McMurdo, the place where I Wintered, was named after Lt Archibald McMurdo⁸, one of the officers aboard the *HMS Terror*. Why anyone would want to name ships "Terror" and "Erebus" is beyond my comprehension, but both had been warships during the American/British War of 1812, and the *HMS Terror* was in Baltimore Harbor at Ft. Henry striking terror on the Americans, inspiring Frances Scott Key to write his famous song.⁹ In December, 1979, an Air New Zealand DC-10 crashed into Mt. Erebus while taking tourists on a sight-seeing tour, killing everyone on board. As far as I know, no bodies were ever recovered from this mountain. Ironically, "Erebus" can be loosely interpreted to mean, "where the dead stay".

Sir John Franklin's expedition had been well stocked with provisions to last until 1848, but except for some whalers reporting seeing them in Melville Bay in 1845, no further word was ever heard from them. Each of the 129 men died on the expedition, and now it is surmised that most died from lead poisoning, as the food they took with them had been sealed in metal cans whose seams had been soldered using lead. Researchers have also determined that his ships were probably destroyed by the pack ice, or possibly, by bad storms.

Perhaps, as mentioned in the Book of Acts, something similar occurred: **“(Act 27:41) And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.”**

Sir John Franklin had made previous expeditions looking for the Northwest Passage. The first one was in 1818, under the command of Sir John Ross. In 1819-1822, he explored the Coppermine River in Canada's Northwest Territories on an overland expedition. Franklin's second overland expedition occurred on the Western side of Canada, where he explored the MacKenzie River and the Beaufort Sea in the 1824-1826 timeframe.

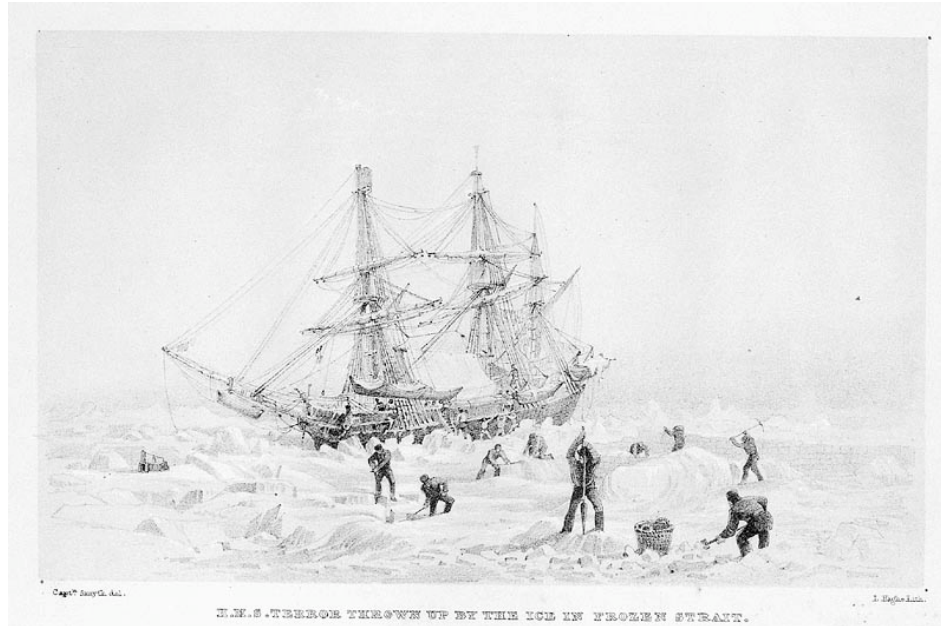
[Side notes: Sir John Ross commanded another expedition that lasted about four years, between 1829 and 1833. He is given credit for discovering the Magnetic North Pole on June 1, 1831 on the Boothia Peninsula, which is located on the Northeastern side of Chantrey Inlet. Sir James Clark Ross sailed on the 1818 and 1829-1833 expeditions with his uncle, Sir John Ross.

⁷ <http://ireland.iol.ie/south-aris/irishexp.htm>

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McMurdo_Sound

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Terror_%281813%29

Sir George Back¹⁰, for whom the Back River is named, had sailed with Franklin in 1818, 1819-1822, and 1824-1826. In 1809 he had been taken prisoner by the French, and was held until 1814. While in prison he learned how to draw. During 1834-1835, Back explored the river that now bears his name. From 1836 until 1837, he commanded the *HMS Terror* on another expedition in Hudson Bay, during which time he made the drawing of *HMS Terror*.



HMS Terror, drawn by Sir George Back¹¹

In 1837, the ship was locked in pack ice, and although the ice severely damaged the ship, Back sailed it back to Ireland, where it remained on a beach until rebuilt so that Sir James Clark Ross¹² could explore Antarctica, with the *HMS Terror* and the *HMS Erebus* under his command.]

After Sir Franklin's expedition failed to return, in the years that followed, many other expeditions were made to find out what happened. Sir James Clark Ross led the first one in 1848-1849, and his uncle Sir John Ross led another one in 1850-1851. Here are some brief accounts of a few of the other searches:

"In the summer of 1850, several of the ships converged on Beechey Island, in Wellington Channel, where the first relics of the Franklin expedition were found: the graves of three men who had died from natural causes in 1846. But no messages had been left there by the Franklin party to provide further clues for the searchers.

In 1854, explorer John Rae discovered further evidence of the Franklin party's fate. Rae, in fact, was not searching for Franklin at all, but rather exploring the Boothia Peninsula

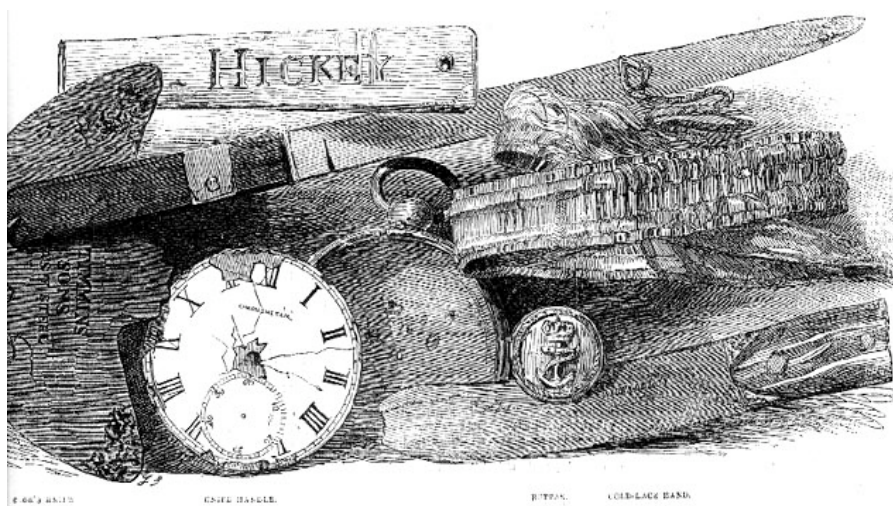
¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Back

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:HMSTerrorThrownUpByIce.jpg>

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Clark_Ross

on behalf of the Hudson Bay Company. On this journey, Rae met an Inuit who told him of a party of 34 to 40 white men who had died of starvation near the mouth of the Back River. The Inuit also showed him many objects that were identifiable as having belonged to Franklin and his men.¹³

Lady Franklin commissioned one last expedition under Francis Leopold McClintock to investigate Rae's report. In the summer of 1859, the McClintock party found a document in a cairn on King William Island left by Franklin's second-in-command, giving the date of his death. The message, dated April 25, 1848, additionally reported that the ships had been trapped in the ice, that many others had died, and that the survivors had abandoned the ships and were trying to reach the Back River. McClintock also found several bodies and an astonishing amount of abandoned equipment, and heard more details from the Inuit about the disastrous end of the expedition."¹⁴



Some of the items recovered from the Franklin Expedition, found during Dr. Rae's Expedition in 1854

The items shown above were displayed on the Nov. 4, 1854 edition of the "Illustrated London News" after Dr. Rae's expedition in 1854. On the next page there is a copy of the document that Lt. W. R. Hobson, a member of Admiral M'Clintock's expedition, found on King William Island. This island is located on the NW side of the Chantrey Inlet. (In 1859, the name McClintock was spelled M'Clintock.) My friend Buck Buchanan and I deciphered much of what is written on the paper; a few blanks were filled in by Mr. Andrew Davis, the Curator of Manuscripts at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England, and by Admiral M'Clintock in his book, The Voyage of the 'Fox', published in 1859. For me, this paper is absolutely fascinating, especially in light of the previous passages. On pages 57 and 58 are the words to "A Ballad of Sir John Franklin" by George Boker written in 1850.¹⁵ Then, on the following page, the words of another ballad called "Sir Franklin" are quoted.

¹³ <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/franklin/iln.html>

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Franklin

¹⁵ <http://www.ric.edu/rpotter/sartain.html>

Handwritten notes on the Franklin document:

28 of May, 1847

*H.M. Ships Erebus and Terror**Wintered in the Ice in**Lat. 70° 5' N Long. 98° 23' W**Having wintered in 1846-7 at Beechey Island in**Lat 74° 43' 28" N., Long 91° 39' 15" W.,**After having ascended Wellington Channel to Lat 77° and
Returning by the West-side of Cornwallis Island.**Sir John Franklin commanding the Expedition**All Well**Party consisting of 2 Officers and 6 Men
left the ships on Monday 24th May 1847.**Gm Gore, Lieut.**Chas. F. Des Voeus, Mate*

25th April 1848. H. M. ships Erebus and Terror were deserted on the 22nd April, 5 leagues NNW of [this] having been beset since 12th Sept. 1846. The officers & crews consisting of 105 souls – under the command of Captain F.R.M. Crozier, landed here in Lat 69° 39' 42"N., Long 98° 41' W. [This] paper was found by Lt Irving under the Cairn supposed to have been built by Sir James Ross in 1831

4 miles to the Northward where it had been deposited by the late Commander Gore in June–May 1847. Sir James Ross' pillar has not however been found and the paper has been transferred to this position which is that in which

Sir J. Ross pillar was erected --.

Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June 1847 and the total loss by deaths in the Expedition has been to this date 9 officers & 15 Men¹⁷

(signed) F.R.M. Crozier
Captain and Senior officer
and start on tomorrow 26th
for Backs Fish River.

(signed) James Fitzjames
Captain HMS Erebus

Admiral M'Clintock wrote in his journal about the Franklin document (which he later published as The Voyage of the 'Fox'):

“About 12 miles from Cape Herschel I found a small cairn built by Hobson's party, and containing a note for me. ...he had found a record--the record so ardently sought for of the Franklin Expedition—at Point Victory, on the N. W. coast of King William's Land. That record is indeed a sad relic of our lost friends, and to simplify its contents, I will point out separately the double story it so briefly tells. In the first place,

¹⁷ Buck Buchanan helped decipher most of the handwritten text, which was substantiated by Andrew Davis, the Curator of Manuscripts at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England, and by Admiral M'Clintock in his book, The Voyage of the 'Fox', published in 1859.

the record paper was one of the printed forms usually supplied to discovery ships for the purpose of being enclosed in bottles and thrown overboard at sea, in order to ascertain the set of the currents, blanks being left for the date and position...”

“There is an error in the above document, namely, that the “Erebus” and “Terror” wintered at Beechey Island in 1846-7, -- the correct dates should have been 1845-6... We find that, after the last intelligence of Sir John Franklin was received by us (bearing date of July, 1845) from the whalers in Melville Bay, his Expedition passed on to Lancaster Sound, and entered Wellington Channel, of which the southern entrance had been discovered by Sir Edward Parry in 1819.

“There is some additional marginal information relative to the transfer of the document to its present position (viz., the site of Sir James Ross’s pillar) from a spot four miles to the northward, near Point Victory, where it had been originally deposited by the *late* Commander Gore. This little word *late* shows us that he too, within the twelvemonth, had passed away.

“In the short space of twelve months how mournful had become the history of Franklin’s expedition; how changed from the cheerful “All Well” of Graham Gore! The spring of 1847 found them within 90 miles of the known sea off the coast of America; and to men who had already in two seasons sailed over 600 miles of previously unexplored waters, how confident must they then have felt that that forthcoming navigable season of 1847 would see their ships pass over so short an intervening space. It was ruled otherwise. Within a month after Lieutenant Gore placed the record on Point Victory, the much-loved leader of the expedition, Sir John Franklin, was dead; and the following spring found Captain Crozier, upon whom the command had devolved, at King William’s Land, endeavouring to save his starving men, 105 souls in all, from a terrible death by retreating to the Hudson Bay territories up the Back or Great Fish River.

“A sad tale was never told in fewer words. There is something deeply touching in their extreme simplicity, and they show in the strongest manner that both the leaders of this retreating party were actuated by the loftiest sense of duty, and met with calmness and decision the fearful alternative of a last bold struggle for life, rather than perish without effort on board their ships; for we well know that the “Erebus” and “Terror” were only provisioned up to July, 1848.”¹⁸

Admiral M’Clintock wrote about the “Esquimaux” (Eskimos) having a habit of raiding any cairns that they found that had been built by the sailors, and had done so for many years. He was surprised that the Franklin document had been found at all. The passage of the document that refers to Sir James Ross’s pillar is somewhat confusing to me. Initially, I thought that it referred to a monument that was placed at a cairn that was built by Sir James Ross on the Boothia Peninsula when the North Magnetic Pole had been discovered in 1831 on the expedition led by his uncle, Sir John Ross. But since this document was found on King William Island, I don’t know what is meant by the Sir James Ross pillar.

¹⁸ The Voyage of the ‘Fox’. Francis M’Clintock. Könemann. Hungary 1998; 1st pub. in 1859. Pp. 190-194

"A BALLAD OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN," FROM SARTAIN'S MAGAZINE, MAY 1850¹⁹



A Ballad of Sir John Franklin.

BY GEORGE H. BOKER.

"The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around."
Coleridge.

WHITHER sail you, Sir John
Franklin?
Cried a whaler in Baffin's
Bay.

To know if between the land and the pole
I may find a broad sea-way.

I charge you back, Sir John Franklin,
As you would live and thrive:
For between the land and the frozen pole
No man may sail alive.

But lightly laughed the stout Sir John,
And spoke unto his men;—
Half England is wrong, if he is right;
Bear off to westward then.

O, whither sail you, brave Englishman?
Cried the little Esquimaux.
Between your land and the polar star
My goodly vessels go.

Come down, if you would journey there,
The little Indian said;
And change your cloth for fur clothing,
Your vessel for a sled.

But lightly laughed the stout Sir John,
And the crew laughed with him too:—
A sailor to change from ship to sled,
I woen, wore something new!

¹⁹ <http://www.ric.edu/rpotter/sartain.html>

All through the long, long polar day,
The vessels westward sped;
And wherever the sail of Sir John was blown
The ice gave way and fled.

Gave way with many a hollow groan,
And with many a surly roar;
But it murmured and threatened on every side,
And closed where he sailed before.

Ho! see ye not, my merry men,
The broad and open sea?
Bethink ye what the whaler said,
Think of the little Indian's sled!
The crew laughed out in glee.

Sir John, Sir John, 'tis bitter cold,
The scud drives on the breeze,
The ice comes looming from the north,
The very sunbeams freeze.

Bright summer goes, dark winter comes—
We cannot rule the year;
But long ere summer's sun goes down,
On yonder sea we'll steer.

The dripping icebergs dipped and rose,
And floundered down the gale;
The ships were staid, the yards were manned,
And furled the useless sail.

The summer's gone, the winter's come,
We sail not on yonder sea:
Why sail we not, Sir John Franklin?
A silent man was he.

The summer goes, the winter comes—
We cannot rule the year:
I ween, we cannot rule the ways,
Sir John, wherein we'd steer.

The cruel ice came floating on,
And closed beneath the lee,
Till the thickening waters dashed no more;
'Twas ice around, behind, before—
My God! there is no sea!

What think you of the whaler now?
What of the Esquimaux?
A sled were better than a ship,
To cruise through ice and snow.

Down sank the baleful crimson sun;
The northern-light came out,
And glared upon the ice-bound ships,
And shook its spears about.

The snow came down, storm breeding storm,
And on the decks was laid;
Till the weary sailor, sick at heart,
Sank down beside his spade.

Sir John, the night is black and long,
The hissing wind is bleak,
The hard, green ice is strong as death—
I prithee, Captain, speak!

The night is neither bright nor short,
The singing breeze is cold,
The ice is not so strong as hope—
The heart of man is bold!

What hope can scale this icy wall,
High over the main flag-staff?
Above the ridges the wolf and bear
Look down with a patient, settled stare,
Look down on us and laugh.

The summer went, the winter came—
We could not rule the year;
But summer will melt the ice again,
And open a path to the sunny main,
Whereon our ships shall steer.

The winter went, the summer went,
The winter came around;
But the hard, green ice was strong as death,
And the voice of hope sank to a breath,
Yet caught at every sound.

Hark! heard you not the noise of guns?
And there, and there again?
'Tis some uneasy iceberg's roar,
As he turns in the frozen main.

Hurra! hurra! the Esquimaux
Across the ice-fields steal:
God give them grace for their charity!
Ye pray for the silly seal.

Sir John, where are the English fields,
And where are the English trees,
And where are the little English flowers
That open in the breeze?

Be still, be still, my brave sailors!
You shall see the fields again,
And smell the scent of the opening flowers,
The grass, and the waving grain.

Oh! when shall I see my orphan child?
My Mary waits for me.
Oh! when shall I see my old mother,
And pray at her trembling knee?

Be still, be still, my brave sailors!
Think not such thoughts again.
But a tear froze slowly on his cheek;
He thought of Lady Jane.

Ah! bitter, bitter grows the cold,
The ice grows more and more;
More settled stare the wolf and bear,
More patient than before.

Oh! think you, good Sir John Franklin,
We'll ever see the land?
'Twas cruel to send us here to starve,
Without a helping hand.

'Twas cruel, Sir John, to send us here,
So far from help or home,
To starve and freeze on this lonely sea:
I ween, the Lords of the Admiralty
Had rather send than come.

Oh! whether we starve to death alone,
Or sail to our own country,
We have done what man has never done—
The open ocean danced in the sun—
We passed the Northern Sea!

Lord Franklin²⁰

I was homeward bound one night on the deep,
Swinging in my hammock I fell asleep,
I dreamed a dream and I thought it true
Concerning Franklin and his gallant crew.

I dreamed we neared the English shore,
I heard a lady weep and deplore,
She wept aloud and she seemed to say:
Alas, that my husband is so long away.

With a hundred seamen he sailed away
To the frozen ocean in the month of May,
To seek the passage around the Pole,
Where we poor seamen do sometimes roll.

Through cruel hardships they vainly strove,
Their ship on mountains of ice was drove,
Where the Eskimo in his skin canoe
Was the only ones that ever came through.

Now my sad burden it gives me pain,
For my long-lost Franklin I'd cross the main.
Ten thousand pounds I would freely give
To say on earth that my Franklin do live.

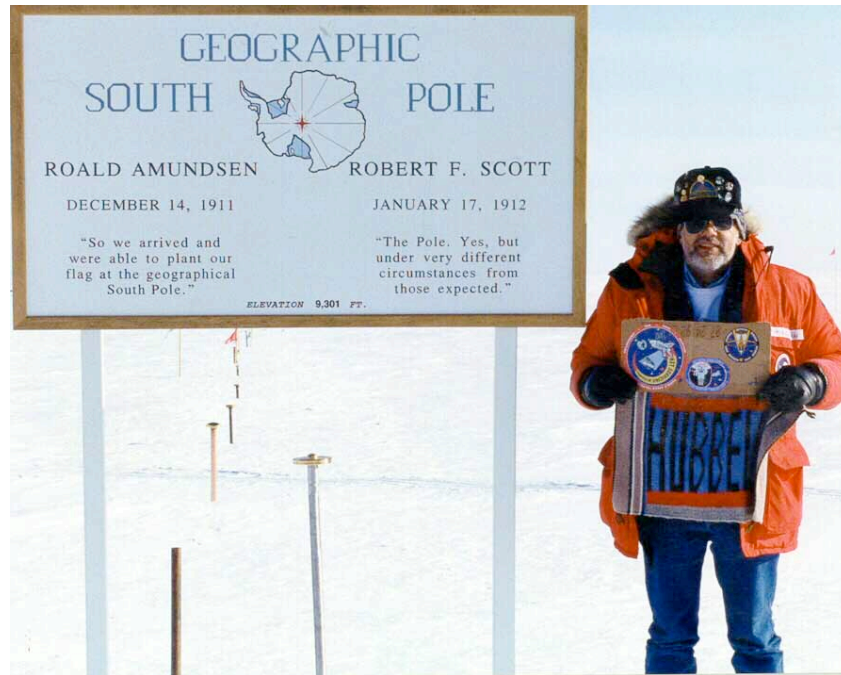
In Baffin's Bay where the whalefish blow,
The fate of Franklin no man may know,
The tale of Franklin no tongue can tell,
Lord Franklin along with his sailors do dwell.

While we were at Franklin Lake, the name Gjøa Haven kept coming up: It was the final destination for the Borealis Paddling Expedition, and where the Caravan pilot and Eric and Kirk flew for avgas. It wasn't until researching material for this story that I learned how significant the place is. Sixty years after Sir Franklin tried to locate the Northwest Passage, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen actually sailed through it, in 1906. He left Norway in the Summer of 1903 on the ship Gjøa and in October settled in for the Winter at the Inuit harbor called Usksugtuuq. Amundsen named it Gjøa Haven, meaning "Gjøa Harbor" in Norwegian.²¹ He and his crew stayed there for a couple of years, and this is where he learned how to drive dog sleds, which he used when he beat Robert Scott to the South Pole in 1911. Even though I have inserted this same photo of

²⁰ There are a few versions of the ballad. I don't know if it's copyrighted, nor how long it has been around.

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gjøa_Haven%2C_Nunavut

me standing at the South Pole sign in other stories that I have written, I have decided to include it here, since it is one of the better photos I have of the sign.



Matt Nelson holding Hubbell rug and mission decals from STS-61, the first Hubble Space Telescope repair mission. The astronomer Edwin Hubble and I share the same grandfather, Richard Hubball (1626-1699), thirteen generations back.

After returning from the South Pole, Amundsen is quoted as saying:

“Few people of the present day are capable of rightly appreciating this heroic deed, this brilliant proof of human courage and energy. With two ponderous craft - regular "tubs" according to our ideas - these men sailed right into the heart of the pack, which all previous explorers had regarded as certain death ... These men were heroes - heroes in the highest sense of the word.”

- Roald Amundsen, writing in 1912 of the *Erebus and Terror* expedition to Antarctica.²²

There’s that word “Erebus” again. While writing this story, it dawned on me that I had seen the Erebus Chalice in the Chapel of the Snows at McMurdo. I did a search on the Internet and found that Kathleen Heideman, a poet who is on the ice now (Dec., 2005) has posted photographs of this chalice, plus a small write-up. She gave me permission to include them in this story (next page).²³

“In 1841, Sir James Clark Ross, aboard the HMS Erebus, led an expedition to what is now Ross Sea. On board the ship was Lieutenant Edward Joseph Bird, who carried a silver and gilt William IV style communion chalice. Bird attained the rank of admiral,

²²http://www.coolantarctica.com/Antarctica%20fact%20file/History/antarctic_ships/erebus_terror_Franklin.htm

²³ <http://www.orebody.com/ice/press/index.php?paged=4>; The two photos of the Erebus Chalice on the next page were from the link under the title “View Images: Chapel of the Snows”

and when he died the chalice was passed through his family as an heirloom. In 1987 the Bird family, commemorating the 75th anniversary of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's ill-fated 1911 expedition to the South Pole, had the chalice engraved and dedicated, and offered it for use at the Chapel of the Snows. The chalice was first used in services in the chapel on Christmas Day, 1987. The chalice is housed and displayed during the austral winter at the Christ Church Cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand. At the beginning of the Antarctic summer the chalice is presented in a ceremony to the McMurdo chaplain, for transport back to the Chapel of the Snows. (Source: Keith Dreher)"



Erebus Chalice at McMurdo, used by permission of Kathleen Heideman



Erebus Chalice in Chapel of the Snows, used by permission of Kathleen Heideman

As I close this journal, I once again thank Brian Schanche for taking me and God for giving me the chance to go and for protecting me when I did the emergency landing in the Stinson. Had that not happened, I probably would not have had this great trip to Red Lake, Gillam, the Nelson River, York Factory, Churchill, the Arctic Skies Outposts, the Kazan Falls, Baker Lake, the Back River, Franklin Lake, Chantrey Inlet, Thompson, Kasba Lodge, Kenora, Lake of the Woods, and Surfside. I greatly enjoyed meeting the people with whom I travelled, and the ladies of the Manito-wish YMCA Borealis Paddling Expedition and the 2005 Canuck Expo.

True North was a national best seller in Canada. You can buy a signed copy by Dr. George Erickson for \$15.00, including shipping. He also has 167 photos of his trip on a CD, which he sells for \$7.00. His address is:

Dr. George Erickson

4678 Cedar Island Dr.

218-744-2003

tundracub@mchsi.com

Eveleth, MN 55734

I want to fly back to the river and fish, fly back to the Back Fish River.





“Were not here for a long time - but for a good time.”

Brian Schanche

“I want to fly back to the river and fish, fly back to the Back Fish River.”

Matthew Nelson

Photo courtesy of Adventure Seaplanes. Give 'em a call!