



HORIZONS UNLIMITED

CHURCHILL RIVER CANOE OUTFITTERS

Newsletter – Spring, 2004

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Our office and base camp are located in the hamlet of Missinipe. We are on Otter Lake which is part of the Churchill River. When you're in Missinipe, stop in!

Churchill River Canoe Outfitters' Commitment

Our commitment to you is to provide a top quality program. We are committed to preserving the Northern Saskatchewan wilderness as an intact ecosystem. We are committed to travelling through the wilderness in an ecologically sound manner. We are committed to providing a program where individuals are valued and learning is encouraged. We are committed to helping individuals better understand the environment they are travelling through. This is our commitment to you as our patron.



Robertson Falls, Churchill River

Greetings from the Churchill River

After 7 winters in Edmonton, we are back in Missinipe this winter. It is hard to imagine why anyone would want to live anywhere else. I can put my skis on at the front door and go. If I want to go snowshoeing – then it's the back door. The beauty around us this winter is incredible. Last week we received about 50 cm of snow. That's almost 2 feet for those metrically challenged. Since we rarely have a wind in winter, the trees are hanging full of snow. It's really quite breathtaking. The only thing that would be nice is to have more friends around.

That's why the summer here is also so great! I don't have as much time to enjoy the incredible area we live in – but my office is a revolving door of friends dropping by. What I miss in the winter I get to the full in the summer. I very much enjoy having people stop by and tell of their upcoming or completed adventures. We can share stories of the land and the people who have travelled through this land in the past and the present. We often share stories of our lives at work and at home. Many of these friends share a mutual concern for the preservation of this land.

It is this concern for the land that much of this Newsletter is focusing on. There are threats that we must constantly keep monitoring. None of the threats seem to be imminent. To me, the most worrisome and almost the most devastating is the logging threat. A hydro dam would be more devastating, but this idea is shelved for now. An increasing concern is overuse by well meaning campers. I'll talk in more detail about this later. Mining can be locally devastating to the land. We can always hope gold prices drop to keep this interest away. These are the concerns I see that could threaten the integrity of the Churchill River region.

So, I look forward to having you stop by this summer. We can discuss your adventure. And we can discuss how we can best preserve this incredible land. See you soon!

The Land Before the Voyageurs



Pictographs, Black Bear Island Lake, Churchill River

If I could time travel, I'd go back and paddle the Churchill River sometime before the 1600s. I often try to imagine what it must have been like. I can get a small picture from some of the very early diaries from the first explorers. But even by that time the area had already changed. What might it have been like before those first explorers and voyageurs? From the reading I've done – here's where my imagination takes me:

The land is nearly empty of people. To the south the vast herds of bison can support large numbers of people. To the north the large herds of caribou can also support numerous people. But here along the Churchill River – there are no large herds of anything. Therefore the land is nearly empty of people.

It seems the Dene and the Cree took turns living along the Churchill River. They lived here in small family groups. They learned how to catch moose and woodland caribou. Samuel Hearne, in his diary from the late 1700s, explains how these ingenious people would catch and kill these large animals. The Dene and Cree would also snare and net fish. The fish used to be very plentiful. One of the early diaries talks of so many fish the voyageurs were catching them two and three at a time in dip nets. The local inhabitants also caught the many small animals that live in the region: rabbits and grouse would be the most common. There was lots of food available for small groups of people who had the skills to live off the land.

As we paddle along the river we may meet some of these family groups. They would be living in shelters made of small trees bent and tied in the shape of a dome.

This framework would be covered with either birch bark or animal skins. These would be in a diameter of 2 to 3 metres, and a height of about 2 metres. They may have a small birch bark canoe parked out in front of their shelter. The women would be tending a small smoky fire. Above the fire, strips of fish or other meat are hung on a wooden frame to cure. The men might invite us to stop in. We would share some food with the family: we would give them some – they would give us some. We would then continue on our way.

I expect we would see much more wildlife than we do now. The introduction of guns, extensive trapping and many more people reduced the numbers of wildlife considerably. It would be nice to see more moose, woodland caribou, mink, otter and many other animals that we rarely see now.

When we paddle the Churchill River now, most of the forest is quite mature. In the 1600s we would see the forest in many stages of maturity. Forest fires would have burned unchecked at that time.

On the other hand there would have been less mature forest to burn. These more prevalent forest fires would have kept forest diseases and parasites in check. We would likely see a healthier forest in those days.

I'd love to see the Churchill River before the days of overused camp sites and garbage. Paddling the Churchill River in the 1600s we'd see it at its best. However, since we can't paddle it then, now is the next best time.



Hayman Lake, Churchill River

Naomi Fund Update

As you may recall, last year, after the death of a former staff member and friend, Naomi Heffler, we started a fund in honour of Naomi. This fund is to go towards a young paddler interested in receiving their canoe instructor's certification. Last summer we held a draw for a Beavertail Grey Owl paddle donated by Kevin Schultz, a framed birch bark biting, the artist being Sally McKenzie, and a birch bark basket beautifully hand crafted by Matilda Roberts. Jason Middleton of Saskatoon won the paddle, Jeff Mark of Regina won the birch bark biting and Ed Horn of Candle Lake won the birch bark basket. The draw brought in \$495 plus some other monies that have been donated makes the Fund now sitting at \$695. If you are interested in donating to the Naomi Memorial Fund – contact us.

Naomi's Wave

One of Naomi's favourite places on the Churchill River was the top wave at Corner Rapids. This summer we unofficially named this wave, Naomi's Wave. In honour of Naomi's memory we installed a plaque naming the wave. Howard and Lynn Heffler (Naomi's parents), Laura (her sister), Dave Galasso and Sheila Archer, both good friends of Naomi's, came for the ceremony. After installing the plaque, Leon, Laura, Kevin and Dave all reminded us of the fun Naomi used to have on her wave.



MacFarlane River

Barker Lake Region Update

In last spring's Newsletter I spoke of the need to do something to help preserve the Barker Lake region of the Churchill River. Leon Charles and I presented a proposal to Saskatchewan Environment. Wheels move very slow!! Saskatchewan Environment has admitted the need exists. Similar needs, although not as critical, have also been identified on Otter Lake and between Stanley and Nistowiak Falls. There is now a group meeting to try to figure out the best approach to preserving the region from Nepew Lake to Trade Lake. The Barker Lake region will be part of this total proposal.

In the meantime, Leon is offering to bring firewood to anyone camping in the Barker Lake region. There would be a small fee for this service. This can be arranged through our Missinipe office.

Canoe Route Information

What do you know about the Otherside River? Have you ever heard of the Grease River or the Paull River or how about the Cree River? Well, we at Churchill River Canoe Outfitters have heard of them. Some of us have even been on these rivers. Over the years we have collected very detailed information on dozens of different rivers throughout Northern Saskatchewan. For a modest fee, depending on the number of pages we have to print, we will make this knowledge available to you. Along with these descriptions, we keep in stock topographic maps of nearly every river you can paddle in northern Saskatchewan.

When you've got your route planned, give us a call; we'll be happy to send you the maps and the route information.

Mosquito Cup

Don't forget about our annual Mosquito Cup, **July 31 to August 2**. Together with the Grandmother Bay Reserve we are again putting on the Mosquito Cup event. It's a canoe event designed for the whole family. If you're a seasoned veteran or you've never paddled a canoe – you'll fit right in.

The Mosquito Cup weekend is a fun, competitive event. There are contests in white water, canoe tug of wars and mosquito collecting. It will be great to see you here that weekend.

What do we do?

Horizons Unlimited and Churchill River Canoe Outfitters has such a variety of programs it is sometimes even difficult for our staff to keep track. We'll list these different things below. If you want more information check out our website

www.churchillrivercanoe.com or call us on our toll free number 1-877-511-2726. Here's what we do:

- Cabin Rentals
- Motor Boat Rentals
- Fishing Guides
- Guided Canoe Trips
- Certified Canoeing Courses
- Canoe Guide Service
- Canoe and Canoeing/Camping Equipment Rentals
- Kayak Rentals
- Day Hikes
- Shuttle Service
- Topographic Maps and Route Information
- Manufacturer of Camping Equipment
- We Sell Canoes, Canoe Barrels and other camping equipment.

We are the information centre for canoeing in northern Saskatchewan.

Logging Update

The Land Use Planning Committee for the La Ronge/Churchill River region continues to meet. The impression I get from all those I've spoken to is frustration. Those trying to protect this incredible wilderness we love to paddle through are getting quite frustrated because they aren't being listened to. Those wanting to log this wilderness are being frustrated because things are moving too slow.

Saskatchewan Environment is in the impossible position of both being the protector of the wilderness and the promoter of logging this wilderness. By all accounts Saskatchewan Environment is working hard to having this wilderness logged. Those promoting logging have huge sums of money available for research and

'experts'. Those promoting preserving the northern boreal forest pulled together a small sum of money to hire a forest ecologist to study the northern forest. He is presenting his findings in the near future. Will Saskatchewan Environment listen? They haven't listened in the past.

As I've said in the past, I like using wood and paper products. But how much are we as taxpayers willing to continue to subsidize this northern forestry? Anyone who walks through our forest will realize the trees are too small to be commercially viable. So why are we even talking about it? Because the government has put huge sums of money into northern forestry. Would not this forest be worth far more standing? I have often said that if the government had put half as much money into northern tourism as they have in the forest industry in the past 5 years we would have an industry that is self sustaining, putting money into the government coffers and is environmentally sustainable. Instead we have a logging industry that will continue to need government subsidies in order to survive and is environmentally not sustainable.

There are several people you could write to with your concerns:

Honorable David Forbes
Minister of Environment and
Minister Responsible for the office of
Energy Conservation
208 Legislative Building
Regina, SK S4S 0B3
phone 306-787-0393

Honorable Peter Prebble
Minister Responsible for
Saskatchewan Water Corporation
346 Legislative Building
Regina, SK S4S 0B3
phone 306-787-8734

The Land Use Planning Committee meetings are open to the public. If you wish to be part of their meetings contact Susan Folkerson in La Ronge 306-425-2525 for meeting dates.

NEW!! Topo Maps on CD

We now have available all the 1/50,000 Topographic maps digitized on CD of Northern Saskatchewan. It's so handy! With a few clicks of my mouse I can be determining the best canoe route between Deception Lake and Wathaman Lake. My wife is overjoyed. I used to store hundreds of maps under our bed. Now the underneath of our bed is free to collect dust. Those hundreds of maps are now inside my computer. I use an awesome program called Memory Map Navigator to look at the maps. With this program I can view the maps with as much detail as I like. I can merge maps one to another. I can draw a route out on the maps. The program tells me the length of the route. I can download the route onto a GPS unit or a hand-held computer. I can also print out these maps. If you're interested – contact us.

Have a great paddling season in 2004!

Ric Driediger

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