

Photographs

No 5

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No 5



N-2002-005

Norman Robinson fonds

Album 5

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Sketch map of Great Slave Lake

On April 3rd 1924, I began a trip with dogs from Fort Smith to Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake - across the lake and up the "North Arm" to Fort Rae, and back to Resolution - over 700 miles allowing for "double tracking" - a distance which we did in about 6 weeks.

It happened this way.

A survey party came out from Ottawa to survey the shore line of the Lake. None of them had ever been in the North before except Mr. Russell, the man in charge. He had only been "inside" once before.

Mr. W. Dugall, the Government Agent at Fort Smith, asked me to go, nominally as Dog Driver - but in reality to give the party the benefit of my years of experience in that Country.

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A further survey was to be carried out later in the year, but this first part was to be done over the ice. Driving Dogs.

Our party consisted of Mr. Russell and three men besides myself.

Mr. Russell was a wiry little Departmental Land Surveyor, from Ottawa. Pathetic eyes like a marmoset, an appetite like a horse and trouble with his kidneys. Charlie McDonald - his assistant - a student from Edmonton University. good all round man.

Walter Jewett - wonderful pianist - student of same University. Once went on a drunk in Prince Rupert - was shanghai'd and taken on board a windjammer where he spent two years before returning home.

Mr. Beth - Cook. Who said he was a Cook. we never found out. Anyway, he wasn't. A simple farmer, two words an hour style and talked as if he was

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chewing hay. Useless.

As is the case with all Survey Parties, we had an enormous outfit to move - a lot of it quite useless. In order to handle it - I decided to take five trains of dogs as far as Fort Resolute, but to handle it with only two from that point as we could double track while the survey was being pushed slowly ahead.

Dogs are wonderful animals and can be used for either carrying loads or pulling them.



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A train of dogs is usually beautifully decorated, if the owner is a well-to-do Indian. "Standing-irons" rise from the top of the collar and usually terminate in a ball of ~~wool~~ ^{wool} whilst ribbons of many colours stream out in the wind. Each dog in the picture has the tail of a silver fox for his "standing iron". On their backs are "Tapees", velvet backed with canvas, beautifully decorated with wolverine floral designs. The driver is usually dressed to match - beaded or silk worked moccasins - ditto gloves or mitts - ditto Moose skin coat - a gaudy silk handkerchief around the neck - a whip carved - painted and decorated with wool. Truly a gay ensemble. Harness is much the same as that of a horse, Collar, back & belly bands and traces.

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Harness is much the same as that of a horse, collar, back a belly bands and traces.



Having loaded our sleighs,
we started the journey to
Resolute. The trail followed
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Until we got to Resolution we could get no fish for dog feed, so were forced to use Corn meal and Tallow. This necessitated an endless performance each night when we camped. Snow had to be melted for water - corn meal mixed - then cooked - tallow added - then the mess cooled & last but not least, one had to stand over the dogs while they ate. Five teams of five dogs each - twenty five dogs in all - could put up a grand melee if they once got a good start.



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but the greatest delay was caused by the shortage of snow shoes.

Our log ran as follows - 1st day 20 miles - 2nd day 20 miles, 3rd day 35 miles, 4th day 35 miles, 5th day 35 miles.

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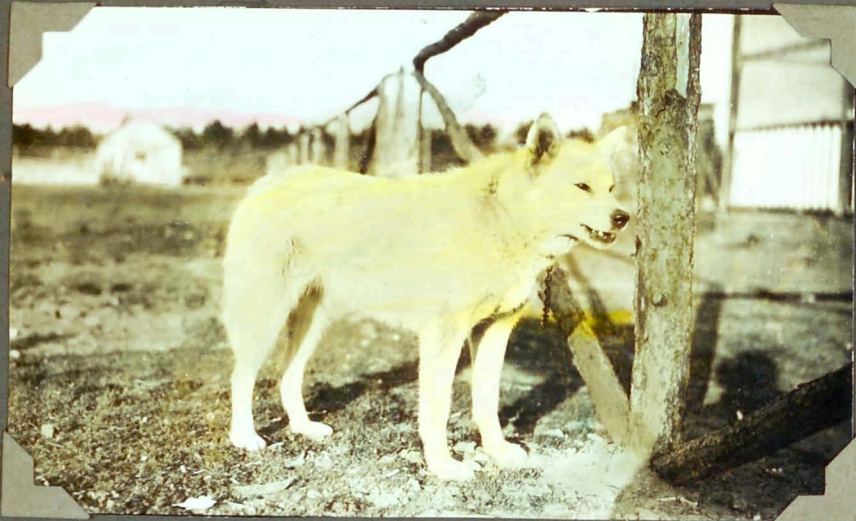
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My leader - there were 6 in my train, Charlie had 5 - was a true Malamute, half wolf, good as a leader, intelligent, but savage and stubborn, and, although we were

genuinely fond of each other, we had many a fight. By the time Mr. Russell was ready, we had hauled everything except the last two loads, so we all pulled out together from Resolution on April 15th 1924.

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survey could only go at 10 miles a day - by hauling loads ahead & coming back for more, we could keep the freight & equipment right up in the lead.

Leaving Stony Island at about 9 p.m. - after a good supper of rabbit - we started for an island called Gros Goulet, with two loads.

Our idea was to follow a chain of islands across the lake - 60 miles - to a point on the opposite shore called Gros Cap.

We had an old trail to follow - but my $\frac{1}{2}$ wolf leader "Merwin" was stubborn - unused to "following" when anyone walked ahead, and wanted to turn back to ~~of~~ our last camp. So Charlie had to run ahead of the dogs and I had to drive both teams, a lot of extra work.

Eventually about 2 or 3 a.m., we reached Gros Goulet, a huge, black rock, with no wood in sight and the

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Temperature around 20 to 30 degrees below zero. It seemed a serious predicament, but by digging around the shore line, under the snow - we got enough wood to bail our kettle. It was too cold to sleep there, so we "cached" our loads & returned to Stoney Island, a nice evenings constitutional of 32 miles.

Luckily we didn't have to waste time cooking. Cooky meal and Tallow for the dogs - we just threw them a few fish & rolled into our blankets. Dogs, provided they are not vicious, are left loose at night, curling up in the snow, with their noses tucked in under the tail - and if snow falls during the night - completely hidden by morning. Even whilst still in harness they can lie down and have a good rest



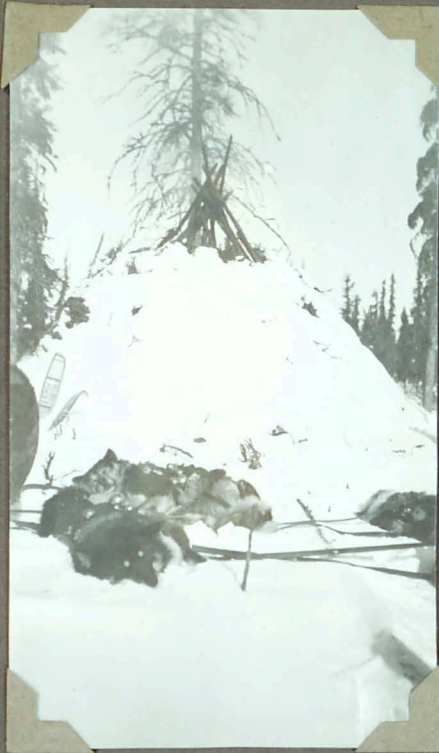
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So we went from Island to Island till we reached Gros Cap. From here we had to cross the big inlet known as the North Arm of the Lake, necessitating one night camping on the ice. But that didn't worry us as we had brought some wood with us for cooking.



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Dangerous and I wanted to test it with my
axe till I found a safe place to take the dogs
over. Jewett intimated that a little thing like
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lost his life when the thin snow bridge broke
away with him. If he had gone through, we
would have had five feet of ice to chop through
before we could reach him & then it would be
practically impossible to locate him under the ice.

Across the North Arm, from Mattonabee Point
to Gypsum Point is about 20 miles.

From the latter Point we were to follow the
West side of the Arm to Fort Rae, but very
soon the ice got bad & it became necessary
for each man to carry a long pole to hold
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A long rope, attached to the head of the sledge &

Page 5-14

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A long rope, attached to the head of the sleigh and

called the head rope - trails out behind. I tied this rope
firmly around my wrist & every time I broke through,
the dogs yanked me out again, but there was no
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Fort Rae, in those days, was a small, although important Fur Post. Many Indians - mostly "Dog-Ribs" hunted the neighbouring territory and many valuable Pelts were brought in.



There were only two Trading stores at that time and the respective Traders had had a little trouble over the only available way in the place, with the result that, owing to the bitter feeling between them - prices of Fur soared sky-high. White Foxes, for instance, were being bought in at 60 dollars (£12) a pelt -

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I met a Priest there - who, although a really good man, had sometime previously - fallen from the arms of Grace into those of a sinner - (young & pretty as a matter of fact). Shelving his cassock, he spent a whole winter with her but was brought back to the fold in quick time and was still doing penance when I met him. Possibly his short view of life in the raft would make him more lenient and understanding where the sins of others were concerned.

Our stay at Fort Rae was curtailed owing to the difficulties we foresaw in making the return journey. The ice was in very bad condition and our only hope of getting back to Fort Resolution

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without casualties, was to find some means of travel other than sleighs. So we bought a skiff (a small flat bottomed boat) and a Canoe. We put steel runners under the skiff and hauled it with nine dogs. We lashed the Canoe onto a small sleigh and could handle it easily with two dogs. Hauling our Outfit this way prevented loss and damage to records of the trip, from being immersed in water.

"Gypsum Point" on Great Slave Lake was our first objective and from there we had to cross the Lake - 66 miles - to Resolution.

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into the water at the same moment, by a huge stretch of ice giving way.

When we got there - the open water was again covered with a thin coating of ice - but silk handkerchiefs - Moose skin gloves - hats - Drowned dogs etc etc, covered the surrounding ice.

There were 23 Indians - male and female and two white people - all going to a dance. All were saved except two - the white people - Mr. Frank Cammell, who was riding in his sleigh, and his little daughter who was riding in his arms.

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The journey to Gypsum Point was far from pleasant. The ice was bad - thin and treacherous but its most unpleasant aspect lay in the fact that it was badly "candled," that is, partially thawed and composed of nothing but thin needle like splinters which cut the dogs feet to pieces. We made shoes for them out of canvas, but I had to let them ride in the skiff in turns - to ease their feet. It was terrible, forcing them to work when they were suffering. Leaving Gypsum Point at daybreak, we travelled as fast as we could, intending to cross the ^{lake,} 66 miles, with only one night's

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camp on the ice.

The ice was bad and every man was carrying a long pole to protect him if he broke through. One could drive the pole through the ice anywhere. It was rotting.

There were many cracks in the ice but none large enough to bother us much.

Our party was spread out in an attempt to find good ice, but the same reports came in from all sides - badly canded and quite rotting although still at least 2 foot 6 inches thick.

Roughly 25 miles had been covered in this manner, in a direct line towards Resolution, when we came to a large stretch of open water.

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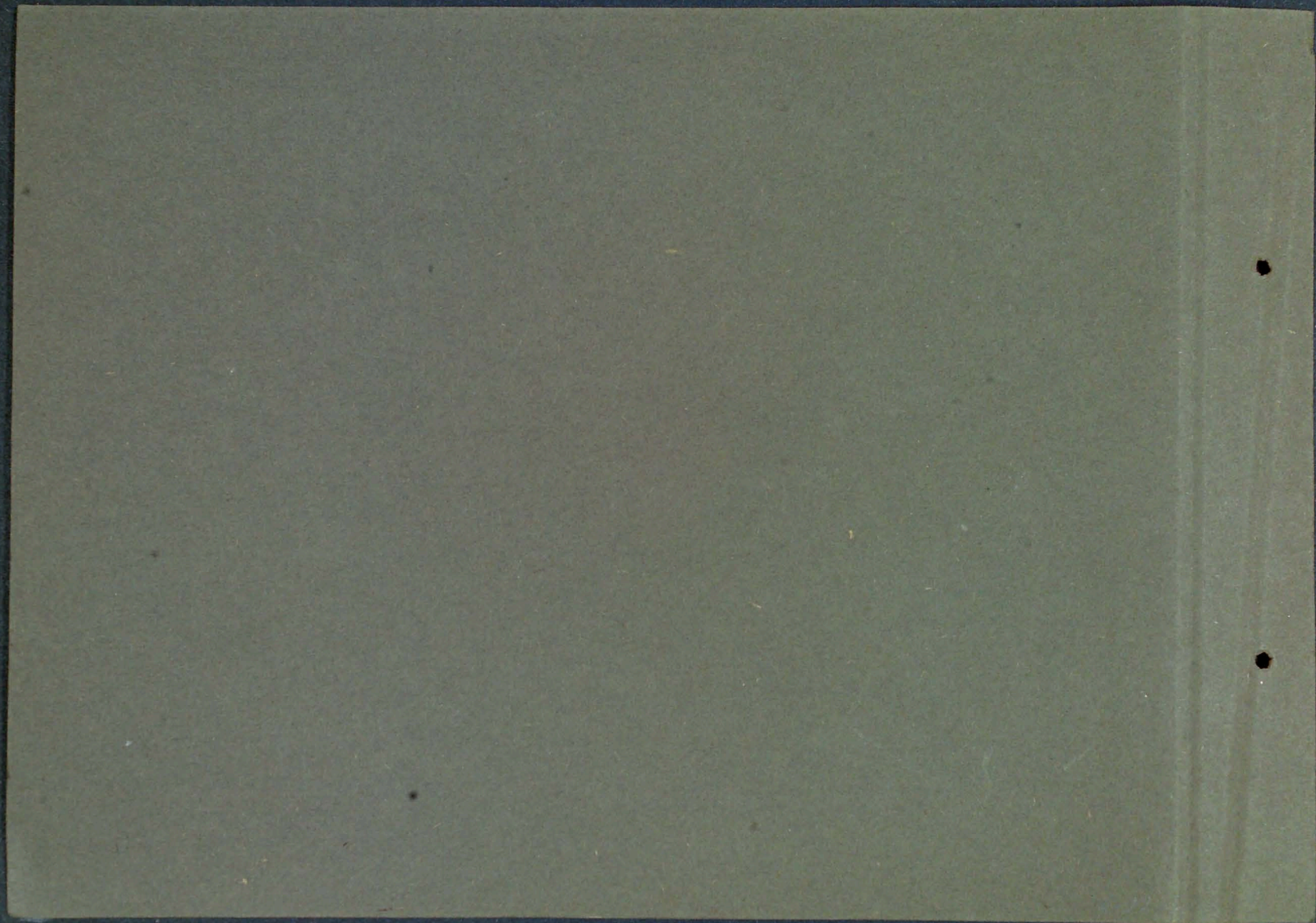
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Naturally - we stopped for a consultation. To proceed further, it would be necessary to cross this 100 yard expanse of water, in the skiff and canoe, but embarking from ice and disembarking onto ice were difficult operations, with the possibility of loss of instruments or records of the trip and even a chance of accident to personnel or dogs.

Jewett and I volunteered to make a dash for it with the Canoe - hauling it or carrying it across the ice & using it to cross the patches of open water, which it seemed certain we would meet, in the remaining 40 odd miles. But Mr. Russell refused to permit an undertaking which he considered too dangerous. Meanwhile, to the East of us, at or near

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Mattonabee Point, which was at least 15 miles distant, we could see. Through the medium of a "mirage", what looked like huge blocks of ice being pushed up onto the shore.

We, later, found out that this was actually happening, although we could never have seen it without the "mirage".

Since Jewett and I were not allowed to go on - I - at the expense of my popularity - insisted on turning back - as I felt sure something terrible was happening - something which I, as yet, couldn't understand.

At last I prevailed over the others and we turned back to Gypsum Point.

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sooty it became almost impossible to proceed. What had been small cracks on our outward journey, were now so large that we had to ferry ourselves across the water on ice floes and every minute conditions were getting worse. We all got wet but noone actually fell through the ice.

at length, after a grueling day, we reached Hardisty Island - 9 miles from Gypsum Point and decided to pull in there for the night, as we were out of wood for cooking. The last mile or so was a succession of cracks - some large and some small. When about 50 yards from shore, my leader Mervin, over anxious and, as usual, stubborn,

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swerved to the right - pulling the other dogs
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(go to the left) she kept on over what I knew
to be exceptionally thin ice and, when she
was only a few feet from shore, in we went,
skiff - dogs - myself & all. "Merivyn" got on
shore & had good footing but could not
pull everything by herself. Still she held
on bravely and I managed to work myself
~~along~~ - hand over hand - along the dogs traces, until
I got a footing, when I was able to give
enough assistance to get the skiff in to
shore. Once the dogs had good footing - they
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Fire was made as soon as possible and although
we all had a cup of hot tea, nobody wasted

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time eating. We were all too tired and just rolled into bed.

Next morning - when we looked out over the Lake, there were two miles of open water instead of the ice on which we had been travelling.

Whilst we had been on it - the ice had been breaking up and we were indeed lucky to reach the Island in safety.

But our plight was now serious. We couldn't leave the Island as the moving ice would crush either of our frail craft, and we were very nearly out of grub. No assistance could possibly reach us until the Lake cleared of ice. We had just enough (rotten) fish left for one feed for the dogs and - as far as we

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could see - there was nothing on the Island.
Anyway - as we were certain to be there for
some considerable time, we first of all, fixed
our camp and made it ready for a protracted
stay.

Then we took stock of our grub, which consisted
of a few dried beans - a little rice - a small
quantity of desiccated potatoes (dried potatoes)
~~and~~ half a tin of lard and a few other odds
and ends - luckily we had plenty of tea, sugar
and tinned milk - enough for nearly a month.
Strict rationing was necessary and, as our Cook
was inclined to be wasteful - I was appointed to
that position at a salary increase of \$1.⁰⁰ (4/-)
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Then we took stock of our grub which consisted of a few dried beans, a little rice, a small quantity of dessicated [desiccated] potatoes (dried potatoes), half a tin of lard and a few other odds and ends. Luckily we had plenty of tea, sugar and tinned milk, enough for nearly a month. Strict rationing was necessary and, as our Cook was inclined to be wasteful, I was appointed to that position at a salary increase of \$1.00 (4/-) a day (which I never received)

Naturally, the first thing I did was to take my

rifle and explore the Island. It was pitifully small but furnished a little grub.

By that first trip I got one rabbit - as far as I know - the only one on the Island - but I also found a few sea gulls nests with eggs in them. That was a thrilling discovery until we found out that the majority of them were partially hatched. But an egg must be good or it wouldn't hatch and a few blood streaks were hardly noticeable when scrambled.

A Loon was our next bag. A loon is a large water bird which lives on fish & tastes like them - after they have gone rotter. I boiled the first one for about 4 or 5 hours and dicked him up. He looked most appetizing, but

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On that first trip I got one rabbit, as far as I know, the only one on the island, but I also found a few seagulls nests with eggs in them. That was a thrilling discovery until we found out that the majority of them were partially hatched. But an egg must be good or it wouldn't hatch and a few blood streaks were hardly noticeable when scrambled.

A loon was our next bag. A loon is a large water bird which lives on fish and tastes like them, after they have gone rotten. I boiled the first one for almost 4 or 5 hours and dished him up. He looked most appetising, [appetizing] but

he certainly tasted different. To add to the joy of that meal - one might as well have tried to chew shoe leather. But we were hungry and short of grub.

Luckily - when I took over the job of cooking - I emphasized the fact that if anyone was dissatisfied with my efforts - he could do the job himself, so noone dared to complain.

Campway - having had one lesson - when we bagged our second, and last, Loon, I boiled him for two days. He tasted just the same & was just as tough as the first.

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Meanwhile we had got some very large Pike, Jackfish, as we called them. Great "bourdeaux", chunks of ice, had been blown ashore, and had formed an ice locked pool, from which these

fish could not return to the lake. We had no hooks or fishing line but we had plenty of wire for snaring rabbits, so we made wire nooses - fixed them on the ends of long poles, and snared the fish. I also shot a few of them.

Amongst other things - we dug out a den of Foxes. There were three young ones which we took with us and raised. When we took them - I am



sorry to say - we had planned a different future for them - in case of emergency.

But luckily - the emergency never arose.

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Seagulls were plentiful and we ate many of them. They were better than the loons, but still

Decidedly "fishy".

The poor dogs suffered most. We gave them all we possibly could, but I'm afraid they went hungry most of the time.

One day - after we had been on the Island nearly three weeks - a strong wind got up and eventually blew the ice further down the Lake, leaving a clear passage between us and the Mainland. Mr. Russell and Charlie McDonald decided to try the crossing.

It was decidedly dangerous as there was still plenty of ice, but they managed it - and late that night - returned with some grub which they had procured at a Trapper's Cabin.

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a good supply of dog feed.

Next day we all crossed over.

Our complete outfit and everyone - except Charlie M' Donald and I - went in the skiff.

They also took two dogs.

Charlie & I had to bring the remaining 9 dogs in the canoe.

Sleigh dogs are used to canoeing and remain lying down whilst travelling in this way, but, on this occasion, waves were breaking over the canoe & whenever a dog got wet, he would stand up & shake himself. As we were overloaded & having a hard time to fight wind and seas, all we could do was to rap them with our paddles & yell at them to lie down, which they always did.

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But, over and over again, we nearly upset.
Once on shore, conditions became better.
As a small boy, I had been taught by a
fisherman, to make hammocks. Remembering
that teaching and having lots of gilling twine,
which we always carry here on the trail - I
made a fish net. Fish were plentiful & from
them until we were rescued, a week later, we
had boiled fish three times a day. No bread,
no grease, lard or butter, no jam, meat or
anything else, not even sugar or milk for
our tea - no salt - just boiled fish, but
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At last, whilst we were having our boiled
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At last, whilst we were having our boiled fish breakfast, we heard a rifle shot, and

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It was Mr. Blanchet - a surveyor from Ottawa who was to lead a further expedition through the Barreys lands during the summer.

On arriving at Fort Resolution and finding no trace of us - he knew something must have gone wrong. His schooner was there in readiness for the summer trip and, even though there was still a lot of ice on the lake - he made the trip across to a spot where he thought we might be.

His guess was correct.

Losing no time in getting aboard - we started back to Resolution.

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I was steering, and my only assistance in finding the correct way to go was watching the flight of some seagulls.

An Island called Egg Island, lay on our Port bow and the Gulls kept flying out and back. So long as I watched them I could guess at the direction, but the Island could not be seen.

M^r. Blanchet came up on deck now and there - took a compass reading and checked my course, but nobody stayed on deck as there was a heavy mist falling and the day was quite cold.

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boots & a wet deck were responsible, but anyway he went overboard.

He was dressed in oil skins & high rubber boots, a bad rig-out for swimming.

The minute I saw him going - I shouted "Man Overboard" - shut off the engine - grabbed an axe and began to cut loose a canoe. Mr. Russell was busy untying dogs & we eventually got the canoe into the water with only one dog still attached.

Then back to Mr. Blanchet as fast as possible. He was going down for the third time, when we reached him, was actually under water as far as I remember - so I rammed my paddle into his chest, waking him up so

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We couldn't possibly get him into the Canoe so we held him alongside till we reached the Schooner, when the boys pulled him aboard & pumped water out of him.

As sooty as he was conscious enough, he called for his black bag & took out a full bottle of brandy.

Needless to say, Mr. Russell and I stepped a little closer, as brandy is scarce in that Country, but, as sooty as he had poured out a good stiff toddy for himself - he replaced the bottle in the bag with no sign of a "Have one".

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As a matter of fact, Mr. Blanchet proved

himself to be a very remarkable man, on that occasion. Whilst in the water, he, first of all, figured out how long he could stay afloat in that ice cold water - with oil skins and rubber boots dragging him down.

He then watched Mr. Russell and I. shipping the Canoe and told us afterwards exactly where we gained a few seconds & where we lost time.

His mind was quite clear till the very last moment.

The remainder of our trip was uneventful but we were all glad to get to Resolute, have a few good feeds and forget the rough life of the last six weeks.

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Preparations were soon completed for our summer trip. Grab - survey instruments - rifles - ammunition - a big 24 foot freight canoe and two "sixteen-footers" etc etc. were all taken aboard the schooner.

Our original party had been augmented by a draughtsman, whose duty it was to plot the survey as it was done. When all was ready - we pulled out on the 200 mile trip to the East End of Great Slave Lake, where there had been an Outpost of the Hudsons Bay Company - now only a ruin.

It was our aim to map the shore line of a chain of lakes, which ran in a crescent shape, away out into the Barren lands.

From Great Slave Lake, everything had to be ^{taken} portaged across to Cartellory Lake - a distance of 11 miles - but necessitating the crossing of five small lakes and, of course, a "portage" between each, where

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From Great Slave Lake, everything had to be taken across to Artillery Lake, a distance of 11 miles, but necessitating the crossing of five small lakes and, of course, a "portage" between each, where

everything had to be carried on our backs, including the Canoes.

As there is no wood - absolutely no wood at all, in the Baurey lands - we had with us small collapsible portable stoves for cooking, but they used Gasoline and a case of that, weighing 60 pounds, was a most awkward pack. The corners of the cases were sharp and the liquid in the tins swished back and forth. A horrible load.

Anyway we reached Artillery Lake without incident.

Camped at the West end of this Lake, were two Swedish trappers who insisted that we would all come ashore and see their garden. Expecting

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But, of course, we complimented the Sweedes on
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A short way East of this Cabin, we passed
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which owe the distinction of being named on
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On the same day that we passed "The Last Woods", July 18th (and my birthday) we had to chop through ice 2 feet thick to make a passage for the Canoes. Of course the ice was rotting and, as a matter of fact, we saw no more of it on the trip.

From Artillery Lake we followed a small river into Lake Clinton-Golden. As there were bad rapids on this short river, we had to make several "portages", and it was here we were on one of these that we saw our first Caribou and two enormous Wolves - white Bayley head Wolves.

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On one occasion, owing to the Lake being rough, we were camped on shore, when we suddenly noticed a

Caribou swimming towards us. Charlie Mc Donald
said he would ride it if I could catch it.
So, taking a long line which we used for "tracking"
the Canoes upstream - Jewett, Mc Donald & I
launched a canoe & took after the Caribou.
He did not seem to mind us and hardly
ever changed his direction, so we had no
difficulty in coming up behind him.
I missed with my first throw - a rocking
canoe not being the easiest place to rope
from, but I got him with the second try.
A Caribou, besides the wide and high horns
of each side - has a spine - a serrated
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I missed with my first throw, a rocking canoe not being the easiest place to rope from, but I got him with the second try. A caribou, besides the wide and high horns on each side, has a spade, a serrated horn about five inches in width which runs in front of his face from skull to

nose.

Instead of the rope going over his horns, it got over this "spade" and around his muzzle. He swam like mad - pulling us without any apparent extra effort.

Arrived by shore, he began to fight the rope, which naturally got slack as we came in & eventually he faced us, when the rope fell off.

If I had caught him by the horns or around the neck, we would have had a careful fight to subdue him - but I am quite sure Charlie would have tried to ride him.

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It was at the East end of Clinton-Colden that

I saw my first Musk Ox - a queer looking animal, chunkily built, about as tall as a well grown calf and covered with long hair. They are very rare now, having been killed in thousands by Esquimaux and Indians. They were hunted with dogs and when hard pressed, would form a square, bulls and cows on the outside, calves behind them. The whole band could then be slaughtered.

So we journeyed on, following Aylmer lake to Lake Mac Kay, but by then it was getting so late in the year that it was necessary to begin the return journey, roughly seven or eight hundred miles - to Fort Smith and then another thousand miles by steamer and train to Edmonton and Civilization.

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