

Kazan River, Northwest Territories, 1966

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July 6. Arrived at Lynn Lake, Manitoba, by train from Winnipeg in early morning. In the afternoon, a Chiupka Airways PBY Canso, with Stan Elliott pilot, flew us to the south end of Snowbird Lake. Flight time: 2 hours, 20 min., distance: 280 miles. Snowbird appears to be source of the largest but unnamed tributary of the Kazan River. Paddled 3 miles to outlet of lake. A short rapid at the outlet consists of a fast chute around a right turn, with large standing waves. Approached on the right; found it difficult to scout or line down because of high water and brushy banks. Ran cautiously along right shore. Estimated flow at 1500 cubic feet per sec. Camped on an open hill one mile below on the right.

July 7. Paddled 13 miles down Obre Lake. Ran mild rapid at outlet of Obre. Paddled 4 miles more, camped on east shore of Atzinging Lake.

July 8. Paddled 7 miles to outlet of Atzinging; ran mild rapid there. Then paddled 2 miles through Bourassa Lake, and ran another mild rapid. Paddled 7 miles, mostly small lakelets but some narrows with good current, to a heavy rapid which we lined and waded down on the left. Paddled 3 miles through a lake. Ran several minor rapids in the next 3 miles. Then the river direction changes sharply from south to northeast. Paddled 2 miles down small lake, and came to heavy rapid with 10-foot drop; portaged right 100 yards. Camped one mile below on right.

July 9. In 2 miles, came to heavy rapid with 15-foot drop. Waded down on right 200 yards. Mostly small lakes and slow current remainder of distance to Kasba Lake, with low swampy shores, except 8 miles above Kasba a 2-mile stretch of easy rapids begins. Camped at the first good spot, an open hill on the right (possibly an island) one mile south of the point where tributary empties into western bay of Kasba. Total distance for day: 25 miles.

July 10. Paddled 5 miles across bay to an esker. Lifted canoes 10 yards across narrow part of this esker, avoiding several miles paddle around its southern tip. Paddled 14 miles up western shore of Kasba to narrows, and camped.

July 11. Windbound in morning. Crossed lake in afternoon, 6 miles. Camped at esker point, very scenic campsite (see photos in *Black Spruce Journals*), where we found black flies especially attentive.

July 12. Paddled 6 miles to outlet of Kasba and start of Kazan River. Estimated flow at 10,000 cfs. River was typically 100 yards wide, 8 feet deep, with 3 mph current. In one mile there is a heavy rapid which runs for 200 yards, then turns left and ends in a sharp drop over boulders. Lined and waded canoes down right bank, difficult because of high water and brush along banks. Left bank would have been easier. For the remaining 19

miles to Tabane Lake, the river is mostly narrow, deep, and swift, with many easy rapids. In a few places it widens into a small lake, but there was enough current to follow in such places. Paddled 5 miles through north end of Tabane, around several islands and bays. The outlet is not easy to see, but there is a slight current to follow. Below Tabane, swift water continues one mile to a heavy rapid. Camped just above rapid on right.

July 15. Ran heavy rapid on the left. In one mile came to another strong rapid which we also ran on the left. Then one mile of fast current to Ennadai Lake. This lake is 60 miles long. Camped on an island 24 miles down the lake, just beyond the tree line.

July 14, 15. Paddled to Ennadai weather station, and camped there two nights. Picked up supplies flown in for us by Chiupka Airways. Supplies are not sold at this station, but huge meals are provided by Dept. of Transport at \$2.50 per meal.

July 16. Paddled to outlet of Ennadai. Beginning just below the outlet are 2 miles of deep unobstructed rapids, easily run. The remaining 32 miles to Dimma Lake alternate between deep, swift river and several small lakes with slow current, except for one rapid mentioned below. Camped on the left 16 miles beyond Ennadai Lake. Although beyond the tree line, there are good stands of spruce and larch in this section.

July 17. Paddled only 12 miles because of headwinds. Camped on the left shore of small lake. Eskimo works such as tent rings, inukshuks, and wooden implements start appearing more frequently here, and continue to end of river.

July 18. In 3 miles came to heavy rapid, ran on right. Paddled 3 miles more to Dimma Lake. Prominent Eskimo grave on left coming into Dimma. Paddled 14 miles down Dimma, and camped on left at narrows.

July 19. Paddled 29 miles through several lakes. No rapids, but strong current between the lakes. Estimated flow 20,000 cfs. Camped one mile south of 62 degrees latitude.

July 20. Paddled 28 miles, again partly on small lakes, partly river with good current. Ran one moderate rapid on the right. This rapid was indicated on our map, but marked incorrectly one mile north of its actual location. Camped on left one mile above Angikuni Lake.

July 21. Paddled 15 miles around west end of Angikuni. Camped on south end of large peninsula.

July 22. Windbound. Hiked across peninsula. It appears that one could portage about 1/4 mile across the neck of this peninsula, thereby saving several miles paddle around it. On the other hand, the narrows near the north end of this peninsula is quite scenic, also important Eskimo camp, and probably favorite caribou crossing.

July 23. Windy. Paddled only 9 miles. Camped on southern tip of large peninsula near center of lake.

July 24. Still windy. Paddled only 12 miles. Camped at north end of lake on low land. Willow fuel scarce here, but wind plentiful.

July 25. Paddled 4 miles to outlet of lake. Ran long rapid in narrow section of river, deep and swift, but not difficult. The next 30 miles have strong current, except for two small lakes. At the end of this section, 3 miles below the second lake, we came to a 20-foot falls, and camped on the right.

July 26. There are three drops here which, except for Kazan Falls, are the most spectacular on the river. Portaged the first drop (20-foot falls where we camped) 80 yards on the right. Then paddled cautiously along right shore 1/2 mile to second drop, a 30-foot falls that we portaged 200 yards on the right. Then lined down right shore 1/2 mile to third drop, a 20-foot cascade. Portage here was 1/4 mile on right over the top of a hill. This is the most scenic of the three drops because of the high cliffs. We launched at the foot of this gorge in a moderate rapid, which gradually diminished. For the next 10 miles, river alternates between fast current and mild rapids, all easily run. Then there is a 5-mile stretch containing three strong rapids, all of which we ran after scouting. The last of these is the strongest, and drops about 8 feet. We found a safe channel along the right shore. Then two large islands are passed, the river turns abruptly north, and becomes mostly smooth with fast current. Seven miles past this turn a mild shallow rapid occurs, at which we camped on the right.

July 27. In 2 miles, some islands are passed. Two miles beyond these the river passes through some narrows with fast rips and sharp turns, none difficult. The current then slackens as it enters a 3-mile lake. At the outlet of this small lake a 10-foot drop occurs. We ran the upper part of this drop easily on the left, and portaged over the lower drop 50 yards on the left. In 4 miles the river drops sharply 2 feet over a ledge, which we ran cautiously. Had we approached on the left shore rather than the right, it could have been run more easily. Below here the current gradually slackens as the river widens and enters Yathkyed Lake. Found our second food cache in a steel drum on a prominent point on the left shore, and camped there. This is evidently an important caribou crossing, and site of large Eskimo encampment. No spruce trees were seen beyond here.

July 28. Paddled 18 miles on Yathkyed, staying close to west and north shores because of wind, and camped on large island. View of entire lake from top of island. Willow fuel very scarce.

July 29. Paddled 14 miles along north side of lake to a narrow neck in a peninsula. Portaged 275 yards across this neck, saving 5 miles of paddling around. Portage was low, grassy, and wet, but footing was good. Canoes were dragged across. Paddled 6 miles to outlet of lake. Here we went to the right of a large island and through a narrows, at the start of which was a heavy current and minor rapid. Below this island, the river turns right in a heavy rapid with 5 foot drop, which we ran cautiously on the left. Camped at foot of rapid. No fuel here.

July 30. After 3 miles of good current, the river turns right with a long heavy rapid having 10-foot drop, narrow at the top, very broad and shallow at the bottom where it empties into a shallow lake. We lined down the right shore 100 yards, then ran the remainder. Probably could have run all of it along the left shore. There is fair current down this lake for 3 miles, then the river flows out to the right with fast current. Four miles downstream a long mild rapid begins. The next 4 miles contain several minor rapids and fast current past many islands. We then passed through a shallow lake with good current for a few miles. Then the river breaks into several confusing shallow channels around islands, not shown on our maps. We chose the right-most channel, which proved to be long, very shallow, and slow. After paddling about 4 miles down this channel, we came into a large lake. Camped at prominent outcropping on right shore.

July 31. Paddled 15 miles to end of lake. Chose to exit from lake by what we thought was alternate western outlet, because of wind. Turned out to be not an outlet as shown on map, but dead-end. Camped in marshy area. No fuel.

Aug. 1. Paddled back a few miles, finally found outlet. Ran minor rapid at outlet. In 3 miles, ran slightly heavier rapid on the left. In 3 more miles a minor rapid leads into a small lake. There is some current in this lake, which is 4 miles long. At outlet of this lake, the river narrows and a minor rapid occurs. Then the river becomes very wide for 4 miles, at the end of which it turns sharply left with a heavy rapid, at which we camped after running the upper part on the left.

Aug. 2. We lined down the remainder of this rapid on the left, and lifted over the last drop. Two miles below is a minor rapid, and 4 miles more another just above the mouth of Kunwak River. Good current then leads into Thirty Mile Lake. In some parts of this lake there is fair current, in other parts very little. We followed the south shore because of wind, and had some trouble entering dead-end bays not detailed on our map. Better to stay near center of lake and follow current if possible. Camped on south shore.

Aug. 3. Paddled to outlet of lake. Here the river turns sharp left, and in one mile a very heavy rapid occurs, 15-foot drop. We ran halfway down on the left, then portaged 50 yards, and lined down the final 100 yards. In the next 12 miles, two minor rapids occur. Then the river turns north, and after 6 miles of good current, we came to the head of a heavy rapid that marks the beginning of Kazan Falls. We alternately lined and ran 1/2 mile on the right, and camped. Fuel scarce.

Aug. 4. Laid over a day to visit the falls. The rapid above is about 3/4 mile long, at the end of which the river breaks into many channels and falls 40 feet between jagged buttresses into a gorge. The river then forms into a single channel again and races for one mile through a spectacular gorge, forming great surges, boils, and whirlpools. The gorge has vertical rock walls on both sides 40 feet high, and varies in width from 100 to 200 feet. The total drop from the start of the rapids to the foot of the gorge is said to be 100 feet.

Aug. 5. Ran 1/4 mile cautiously along right shore to just above lip of falls. Then portaged one mile to foot of gorge. It appears that the portage on the left shore would have been about 1/2 mile longer. Water was quite turbulent where we put in. Just below, we had to cross over to run a sharp drop left of center. The river continues very swift, but gradually slackens and runs through a wide bay. It appears that a portage could have been made from above the falls to this bay, and would likewise have been about a mile long, bypassing the above rapids. After this bay, the river narrows for 4 miles with fast current, then widens again with many islands. The river then becomes narrow again with fast current for 4 miles, then widens again with fair current for 5 miles. It leaves this expansion by a sharp turn to the right, and after flowing eastward 2 miles a strong rapid occurs over ledges. The river then becomes very swift for the remaining 12 miles to Baker Lake, and the last 6 miles are particularly rapid with many sharp drops over ledges. We ran all of these close to one shore or the other. Camped at 64 degrees latitude, just above final rapid. Fuel plentiful,

Aug. 6. The final rapid is long but not difficult. Minor rapids continue as the river divides into many channels and empties into Baker Lake. Paddled 6 miles to Big Hipps Island, windbound there a few hours, then crossed 3 miles to small island near west shore, and camped. No fuel here.

Aug. 7. Windbound all day.

Aug. 8. Paddled 18 miles to Baker Lake settlement, and end of canoe trip. Total distance: 640 miles, 33 days. Baker Lake has H.B.C. store, post office, landing strip with scheduled weekly flights to Churchill, and D.O.T. meals.

Aug. 9-16. At Baker Lake, we hired an Eskimo with a 30-foot Peterhead boat to take us to Rankin Inlet. But because of incessant mechanical trouble, we went only as far as Chesterfield Inlet in 2-1/2 days, and lucky to make it even that far. Flights out of Chesterfield Inlet are on a catch-as-catch-can basis, and we were lucky to catch a plane to Rankin Inlet after spending two nights there. Chesterfield Inlet has H.B.C. store, post office, and D.O.T. We could not bring our canoes on the plane, so they were left with the D.O.T. with instructions to ship by water to Montreal, and then by rail to New Hampshire. Rankin Inlet has H.B.C. store, post office, Dept. of Northern Affairs mess, radio-phone to Churchill, and landing strip with weekly flights to Churchill. After spending two nights there, we flew by scheduled plane (with one of its two engines malfunctioning) to Churchill and continued home by train. The scheduled flights down to Churchill are by Transair. Fare is about \$105 from Baker Lake, \$56 from Rankin Inlet.

Canoes used on this trip were an 18-foot Grumman shoe-keel and my little 17-foot fiberglass canoe that was equipped with a removable fabric deck for use on large lakes.

After passing beyond the tree line, our fuel supply for cooking consisted mostly of willow twigs, plus an occasional piece of lumber. The willow became less abundant after Angikuni, and scarce after Yathkyed. But several patches could usually be found during a day's travel, if not right around camp, and by collecting it during the day, and using

sparingly, we were always able to cook. The occasional pieces of lumber are probably left by fishing parties, prospectors, etc. There is no driftwood to speak of. Bring stove.

Black flies and mosquitoes were numerous throughout the trip. They were definitely on the decrease by end of first week in August, and by mid-August they were gone. They are said to come out as soon as the ice starts going out, around mid-June. Bulldog flies were thick at only Ennadai weather station.

Lake trout could be caught with spinners nearly anytime we wished, particularly in rapids. Grayling could usually be taken with flies in shallow rapids. No other kinds of fish were seen.

In the early part of the trip, daytime temperatures were frequently as high as 80 degrees, but this was an unusually warm summer. More typical might be 50s or 60s during the day, and near freezing at night. We had very little rain. Annual precipitation is said to be only 10-20 inches in this region. The rain usually came in the form of showers accompanied by wind, so we seldom paddled in the rain but were usually in our tents. The prevailing wind is northwest.

We used the 8-mile per inch Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys maps. These were adequate, but lack of detail made navigation difficult in some places. We also had a few of the new 4-mile per inch series. These were far superior.

This is a slightly revised and edited version of my original 1966 report, made by scanning a faint copy with OCR and then making numerous corrections. Obviously much of the information is obsolete. Furthermore, I wonder why I included so much minute detail. How many canoeing parties would need it, or even want it? Consider it then just a bit of superfluity, perhaps a carryover from my days of compiling river guides. For a more lyric account, see my *Black Spruce Journals*, one-quarter of which is devoted to this grand adventure.

Stewart Coffin, April 2008

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