

Fort Chipewyan, whose history on the Peace River delta is directly linked to the fur trade. From this point the wide, brown, Slave River leading north to Great Slave Lake picks up the pace, winding through northern Alberta and across the N.W.T. border. The thundering stretch of rapids above Fort Smith proves quite a formidable barrier to river travellers — but to the pelican of the area it is their home and breeding grounds (the most northerly and only river-nesting site in the world).

Great Slave Lake, huge, deep and cold, provided us with a link from the Slave delta to the Mackenzie River headwaters and the final 1,100 miles of our journey. We flowed with the clear, green Mackenzie waters past Fort Providence and the Jean Marie River; but then at Fort Simpson the water turned brown where the heavily silted Liard River emptied into the Mackenzie from the south.

The Mackenzie and Franklin Mountain Ranges that bracket either side of the Mackenzie were magnificent: sharp peaks and sheer cliff faces; a land rich in black bears, grizzlies, Dall sheep and caribou. But weather patterns fluctuated drastically. August 1st at Fort Simpson was 36°C; August 12th at Norman Wells was 4°C with snow in the mountains. August 23rd at Inuvik was 20°C, warm enough to play baseball in shorts; but by August 29th, Tuktoyaktuk was 2°C with blowing snow, high winds, and ice flows moving in from the Beaufort Sea.

The mile-wide Mackenzie flowed swiftly and smoothly through the Sans Sault Rapids and past the clay cliffs of the Ramparts where nesting peregrine falcons wheeled overhead. Beyond Arctic Red River we were well into the Mackenzie delta where the main river current splits into a maze of interwoven channels. Huge flocks of Canada geese and snow geese were gathering for the autumn migration. Climb-

ing the Caribou Hills en route to the ocean, we were rewarded with a spectacular view to the east of fiery red tundra; and to the west, the delta maze of silvery lakes backed by the Yukon's Richardson Mountains. That very evening on the delta a pod of 25 beluga whales swam up the Middle Channel. We had paddled amongst their species in their southern most breeding grounds in the St. Lawrence, and now, as if in greeting, a few whales from one of their northwestern colonies appeared.

Despite the immense beauty of it all, we were intensely relieved to finish the last few of an estimated 10 million paddle strokes and pull ashore at Tuktoyaktuk. Our Arctic Ocean arrival after 6,000 miles of canoeing was the ultimate highlight of our journey. Of tremendous significance were the many dear friends we met on our voyage; the encounters with formidable natural and man-made obstacles, and the realization that we had crossed a continent from one ocean to another. The finale of this journey has only made us all the more eager to explore more of Canada, in all seasons, and by as many self-propelled modes of travel as is possible.

Our thanks to all the RCMP members that helped us in so many different ways: from allowing us to store our canoe in The Pas during the winter of 1983-84, to accepting our early morning CBC phone calls when the only telephone available at 6 a.m. was in the RCMP's house! From barbecuing hamburgers for us, to giving us a refreshing hot shower or just a place to put our tent — you have no idea how much you meant to us on our journey. If the officers and their families are representative of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police — which we are sure they are — then we should all, as a country, be very proud of the example that you set as thoughtful, caring people. ■