

allowed us to average 45 miles a day, the waterway was now barely navigable. Trudging up the Pigeon River and portaging to and from a system of small lakes, we reached the continental divide between the Hudson Bay and Atlantic watersheds. Now flowing with the current, we continued paddling westward along the international boundary through Quetico Provincial Park where we encountered our first bald and golden eagles swooping into the Namakan River for pickerel. Then it was across Rainy Lake and down the Rainy River to Lake of the Woods. We navigated the tricky maze of this island-studded lake and enjoyed the incredible display of white pelicans soaring in perfect "jet fighter" formation overhead. We travelled northwards past Kenora, then down the 270-mile Winnipeg River into Manitoba.

Shallow Lake Winnipeg, known as the worst lake in Canada for small craft, often dished up choppy, 5-foot, brown-capped seas, forcing us to retreat to land. Sitting perched on an inhospitable shoreline with a 10-foot wall of driftwood fencing us off from dry land, we felt quite insignificant. But our attitude towards Lake Winnipeg changed with the miles. Upon crossing the Narrows we stopped at Matheson Island to explore its white limestone cliffs and caves peppered with fossil remains from the island's former existence as a lake bottom. Lake Winnipeg is a combination of long exposed traverses, moon-shaped sandy bays, and hordes of shrieking gulls and terns. Beyond the lake and up the Saskatchewan River lay The Pas, Manitoba, our destination and first-year termination point.

It was a memorable day when we arrived on September 6th. As we paddled by the town, car horns honked and people waved. To our disbelief, a red carpet came tumbling down the hill and stopped at the river's edge under the bow of our canoe. The mayor, the chief and reeves of the town council

had arranged for a surprise welcome. We were led up Main Street by an RCMP truck with flashing red lights to the canoe's final resting place for the winter — the RCMP warehouse.

**THE SECOND YEAR** On June 2, 1984, we were on our way again from The Pas, facing the silt-brown spring current of the wide, meandering, Saskatchewan River; up past Cumberland House — an important distribution depot in the fur trade — and into deep, dark, Namew Lake. We portaged into the Churchill River system via the Frog Portage and paddled down to Kettle Falls. Miles upon miles of stubby spruce seedling were bursting from the charred ruins of forest fires in the land of the Reindeer River.

Our biggest physical challenge for this second part of our voyage was the trudge to reach the height of land between Reindeer and Wollaston Lakes. Once inland, we were plagued by blackflies and mosquitoes as we paddled up the Swan River, then the winding Blondeau River with 277 one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turns in 13 miles. We finally completed the three-day effort with nine long and arduous portages over muskeg terrain that sucked our boots into knee-deep quagmire. Once into Wollaston Lake, we were on the continental divide, a unique geographical feature of Canada, for out of its northern end flows both the Cochrane River towards Hudson Bay, and the Fond-du-Lac River towards the Arctic Ocean.

From Wollaston Lake, we dropped over 600 feet in 170 miles to Lake Athabasca, through the gem of northern Saskatchewan wilderness, the Fond-du-Lac River. We tumbled down through the foaming rapids of Red Bank Falls and Thompson Rapids, and glided swiftly and silently past the marsh lands of moose territory. After paddling along Lake Athabasca's north shore, we arrived in the community of