

How I spent my

Have you ever wanted to travel to distant places, work with strange people doing strange research, experience strange and exotic cultures, share strange ideas with the aforementioned strange people, be on the leading edge of important scientific discoveries, and insert a pointy metallic tube into a tree to extract a cylindrical wooden object? The University of New Brunswick Fire Science Center could give you the opportunity to do all of these things, the latter perhaps hundreds of times.

The UNBFSC, or, as it is affectionately known by those fortunate enough to be associated with it, the &*●% Center, is an interdisciplinary organization devoted to research, education and the development and use of practical expertise in fire-related subjects. The Center is currently involved in several projects, ranging in location from here on our campus to Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda. At present, however, the Center's most ambitious project, and the one this author was involved in, is being carried out in Wood Buffalo National Park. The majority of what follows will be an account of the activities and misadventures of the small group of courageous researchers whose calling was to journey to this strange and forbidding land.

The original group consisted of five members, of which yours truly was one. We were: Dr. Ross Wein, a biology professor and Director of the Center; Dr. Kiyoko Miyanishi, a post-doctoral fellow (sic) and fire ecologist; Mark Lutes, a masters student in sociology, Gigi Pitoello, a recent graduate from biology; and Ken Toynbee, an undergraduate biology student. On June 5, after flying to Edmonton, our courageous crew loaded their supplies into a (somewhat less than reliable, as it turned out) aged Rent-A-Wreck van and set out in a roughly northern Alberta to set up camp and were promptly attacked by swarms of vicious birdlike creatures which, we were later to discover, the locals somewhat euphemistically called mosquitoes. Not having yet discovered the secret of Deepwoods Off, the speed at which we pitched our tents was quite remarkable. The next day, we continued our journey, accompanied by several thousand so-called 'mosquitoes' which had not yet quenched their thirst for human blood, and which we proceeded to systematically slaughter, but not without suffering a few grievous wounds ourselves. Later that day, we arrived at our destination, Ft. Smith, NWT, which was to be the largest community most of us would see for three months.

Ft. Smith is a community of 2300 people located in the Northwest Territories at the interception of the Slave River and the Alberta



border, and close to the main entrance to Wood Buffalo National Park. This town, we were to find, did have some, if not most, of the amenities of civilized life, including a medium-sized college, two grocery stores, a Hudson's Bay department store, several restaurants and take-outs, a museum, three taverns, a dance hall, and last but not least, a tourist information center that boasted hot and cold showers. Unfortunately, we were not always given the choice.

After giving us a brief tour of the town, Dr. Wein, our enterprising leader, procured accommodations for us through the park administration, and we picked up a week's worth of supplies and Deepwoods Off and headed out to our new residence. The place that the Park was so generous as to let us use was a three-room cabin at a place called Cherry Mountain, about 80 miles from Ft. Smith and deep into Wood Buffalo National Park. The site was the location of a fire tower, and the cabin had been the residence of the towerman, but both had been vacant ever since a forest fire had gone through in 1981. So, amid speculation about the origins of the name of the place, we cheerfully made ourselves at home. After having settled in as best we could, we then proceeded to become acquainted with the Park and began the serious business of scientific research.

Wood Buffalo National Park, named after the animals that it was created to protect, is the second largest national park in the world, and has recently been designated by UNESCO as a world heritage site. Its 44,000 square kilometers of largely inaccessible wilderness is home to a herd of over 5000 buffaloes, and contains the last nesting grounds of the rare and endangered whooping cranes. Most interesting to the Center is the fact that low rainfall (● 40 cm yearly), frequent lightning storms, and long hot summer days give it one of the highest frequencies of forest fires in the Canadian boreal forest. The park was thus an excellent place to pursue research on the causes and effects of fires and their role in the local

ecosystem. The Center has related research projects in the park, of which only a few were here.

The first few weeks were spent around the portion of the park accessible by road and doing studies of all distinguished species. This consisted of getting out at an ungodly hour in the morning to a designated region of the park and would

proceed slowly, stopping every few minutes. Dr. Wein, for reasons known only to him, would say "right here". Then, the can of Off around and each carrying the equipment for his or her task, walk a few miles into the woods, and measure the diameter and age of a specimen of every tree found there. Then, following the instruction by Dr. Wein on the field, the particular area and its effects on the flora and fauna, we would return only to repeat this cycle for the next day. This exciting and somewhat tedious was for several weeks interrupted by frequent trips to Ft. Smith for supplies, attend to other miscellaneous tasks, and, incidentally, to use the intertemporal

The information generated by these studies is now being used by Mohr and Charles Dutcher to update the bank on which is stored information on geology, aquatic systems, and other systems of the park. Properly managed data can be used for both management purposes and longer-term biological programs necessary for long-term research programs.

By the end of June, this project was complete, and we began other projects. Dr. Kiyoko Miyanishi's study of willow encroachment in meadows of the Peace-At