

To Great Slave and Great Bear:  
P.G. Downes's Journal  
of Travels North from Ile à la Crosse in 1938  
[Part III]

Edited and Introduced by R.H. COCKBURN<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT. The narrative of P.G. Downes's trip by canoe, boat, and plane from Ile à la Crosse to Great Bear and Great Slave lakes in 1938, in which he presents a detailed account of his feelings, thoughts, and experiences, as well as his observations on individual men and women, northern lore, and geographic characteristics of the region. The journal will appear as five installments in *Arctic*.

Key words: Ile à la Crosse, Lac La Loche, Swan Lake Portage, Clearwater River, Athabaska River, Slave River, Fort Smith, Great Slave Lake, Mackenzie River, Great Bear Lake, Eldorado, Cameron Bay, Yellowknife, Chipewyans, John Hornby, George M. Douglas, Paul "King" Beaulieu

RÉSUMÉ. Voici le récit du voyage par canoë, bateau et avion de P.G. Downes à partir de l'Île à la Crosse jusqu'aux Grand Lacs de l'Ours et des Esclaves en 1938, décrivant en détail ses sentiments, ses pensées et ses expériences, ainsi que ses observations sur des hommes et des femmes particuliers, le folklore du nord et les caractéristiques géographiques de la région. Ce journal paraîtra en cinq épisodes dans *Arctic*.

Mots clés: Île à la Crosse, lac La Loche, lac du Cygne Portage, rivière à l'Eau-Claire, rivière Athabasca, rivière des Esclaves, Fort Smith, Grand Lac des Esclaves, fleuve Mackenzie, Grand Lac de l'Ours, Eldorado, baie Cameron, Yellowknife, Chipewyans, John Hornby, George M. Douglas, Paul "King" Beaulieu

Traduit pour le journal par Maurice Guibord.

July 28th

Bright & Fair, wind SE. Over to Fort Smith. The 16 mi. portage is made up of two very good sandy roads well back from the river. One is used by the N.T. (Northern Transportation Co.) and the other by Ryan Bros. (one of them [Mickey] is now Traffic Manager of the HBC's Mackenzie River Transport). Both outfits run tremendous trucks & tractors over these routes in the brief summer freighting season. I wandered about the settlement. Smith is a lovely place, quite a contrast to Fitz. I went down to the water's edge to see about boats. I find that there is one due in about four or five days, the *Radium King* (N.T.). I shall no doubt go down on that. Frightfully hot day. Great deal of activity; loading, etc. — particularly vast supplies of sawn lumber — big timbers. The HBC's *Dease Lake* was very active. The HBC has a fancy layout; indeed, the whole town is quite a model one. Watched the loading for a while, then had a meal (65¢). Funny, it did not taste particularly good to me. If I have any virtues up here, it is that food (and this is no affectation) does not make much difference to me. I really am just as satisfied with bannock and tea as anything, though I have a passion for caribou meat. Bought a pair of moccasins with fine red cloth trimmings (\$3). All Indian work becomes more and more dear the deeper one gets into this country. Ended up at the Conibears' — most extraordinary couple. They run a small store and have a beautiful house with blue delphiniums, some of them ten feet high. They are mentioned many times in books and articles on the North. She [Ada Mary] is a remarkable woman — 25 years in the north, one son [Kenneth] a Rhodes Scholar; he wrote a book about Bent Tree Lake [*Northland Footprints, or Lives on Little Bent Tree Lake* (1936)]. Most hospitable. Knew Hornby well. While I am about it, I might make a summary of what I have

picked up on him. Eymensen at Waterways was very interesting; he said H. used to start for Athabaska Landing with a .22 & some salt & walk all the way from McMurray just living on spruce hens. Says he always remembers him because he travelled so light and bareheaded. Everyone admits he was eccentric, but not crazy. Mrs. Conibear says he used to come in any time of the day or night — time meant nothing — and that despite his money he was very parsimonious. Streeter says, "They can say what they want, but he was the toughest little man in the North." It is raining & thundering now. I am under the tarp. Also I feel poorly, very low, probably because I am not moving, and also because I had no mail. I had expected a letter from E.G. Why — why, when I try so hard to make myself independent of everything, of every possible tie, do I fail? Can people ever live alone with their dreams? I have not sold Sequoizi.

July 29th

Rain — cold rain all day, wind strong NW. A miserable day; a cold, fine, misty penetrating rain driven by a cold, stinging wind. So discouraged did not write my diary at first. Nothing to do but crouch under the tarp and let the rain drip on me. Could not sleep last night at all. Was going out to hunt today, but it was too nasty. Talked with some breeds a bit. Our little community will probably all move over the portage tomorrow. Nothing to make entry of today; a miserable, lost day.

July 30th

Grey, overcast, and cold. This has been moving day for

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, The University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada E3B 5A3

most of us, the Yellowknife crowd, both boats, going over in the morning and my going over in the afternoon. It cost 50¢ a hundred pounds on this portage. For some reason I was charged nothing at all, though I made no effort to avoid payment. Isidore Thomas sold me a caribou skin and a bag made from the whole animal (a fawn). Sat around the shed and talked to Sid Porter for a long time. He is foreman there — an old timer. He tells me that Hornby had samples from various mines with him on his last trip and told him, Porter, that he knew where there was stuff much better. Very cold and raw. Talked with Tom Champagne, the breed from Chipewyan, and his bold, handsome wife for a long time. Isidore told me the story of the origin of the name of Nonacho Lake, where he is going to trap this year. The story all revolves about an old woman who had two sons and who wore herself out walking down from the north. She was called "Nonacho." Eventually in the afternoon the truck came, and over the portage we went. A boat also. The mast was ripped out of her as we went under the Smith-Fitzgerald telephone wires. I found the Yellowknife crowd camped on the shore. I myself have moved up out of the sand into the spruces on the hill facing the river. There are several white trappers & breeds camped in this grove also. No letter from E.G. yet. Oh, of great interest: there have been several discussions as to the length of my canoe. I was of the opinion it was 15 feet. I measured it yesterday and found it was exactly 13 feet 4 inches. If anyone has come from Waterways down the Athabaska & Slave through the rapids and to Fitzgerald in anything smaller, I should be interested to know. Saw some beautiful gold samples from north shore of Athabaska that a young chap had — some just studded with small flakes and nuggets; not far from Goldfields — all set in quartz. Also some big chunks of galena from Fond du Lac.

### July 31st

Bright & Fair — and for me pointless. There is a little squatter's cabin not far from me inhabited by a young chap and his younger wife. I was boiling the kettle when much to my surprise she sent out a piece of blueberry pie. A trapper insisted I sleep in his tent last night, as it looked like rain. I seem to be becoming an object of charity. One good thing, now that we are in the Northwest Territories — the dogs are tied up; an ordinance of the Territories. Talked about mining and prospecting for a long time with a chap named Ellis, an old-timer. How they can sling the jargon. We have had constant and heavy gunfire all day. This is because the barge [HBC *Barge 300*] and 400 tons of freight sunk at Simpson [in June] was partly salvaged, and .30-.30s were sold off at \$5 a case (a thousand) — also .22s, for what I don't know. The result has been everyone supplying themselves with ammunition and immediately firing it off. Lead was ricocheting off the rocks in every direction. Fur was certainly poor last year and brought a poor price. The chaps in back of me did not even make a grubstake this year. Lots of the Indians went across to pick Saskatoons. I cannot voice my disgust with some of the types of Chip half-breed or quarter-breed one sees here. They seem to be the worst, foulest-mouthed lot of my acquaintance.

### August 1st

Bright & Fair. Little doing. Lay around mostly. This was the deadline for my mail. Not a letter. Strange. I am getting fed up, lying around. I may have the canoe sent over and push down to Slave Lake in it. I cannot stand the lack of movement. I shall draw this volume to a close shortly and ship it out to follow Vol I, which I trust Mr. Rand has in safe keeping. Some curious and interesting notes on the Slave. I got to talking to several trappers about the river at different stages of water, and about routes, etc. The place where I came between the rocks and saw the whirlpools is a bad one. There is a violent and powerful eddy there, and there is a well known story on the river of a canoe-load of 4 men who were swung around in it helplessly for *four days* before getting out.[!] Last year a fellow coming down with a kicker spent several annoying hours there. It is curious how small habits or customs spring up among the Indians. For instance, here all of them wear light-colored shirts and sew on black fore-sleeves. The moccasins are mitt type with red cloth trimming. Portage moccasins are not mitt; seam is extended to toe, no fine cloth. (Ile à la Crosse same, but beads right down to the toe.) East of Ile à la Crosse the Mackenzie influence on style (like stroud mukluks) seems to vanish. At Lac La Ronge, stetson hats — at Brochet, silk handkerchiefs worn diagonally across the chest. Two more boats bound for Yellowknife pulled in today. There is now quite a little fleet. Had a chat with a chap from Taltson River about selling the canoe: he won't buy it, I know. Now that I am not doing anything I eat one meal a day, as grub is very expensive here. There are many thoughts I wish I might put down as they come to me, but I express myself so poorly, and they are so fleeting. The mental disposition is very different with me, at least, than when outside. Travelling, you are always aware of being alive — or perhaps I should say, aware of the imminence of death: not that you are scared, you are just so keenly aware of it. I fear rapids as every person who knows the country does (it is only fools & greenhorns who don't), but experience tremendous exhilaration *after* successful completion of them. More and more I can glimpse what drove Hornby on, if he was the type of man I picture him to have been: but let no one have any illusions, for by far the majority of white men in this country are cast-off and extremely low-grade humans, and that is true of most of the North. Next year I think I shall go back to Reindeer & north to Nueltin or Ennadai, and I shall go alone. I shall never travel with others as aids again. [As *Sleeping Island* reveals, Downes did not keep this resolution. In a letter of 10 June 1955 to George Whalley, who had written to him about Hornby, Downes quoted the above passage and remarked: "This impression (which is unfair) was very strong because of the particular times and circumstance. Fort Smith then was at the height of the Yellowknife excitement and was full of the typical scrub of the frontier before it is thinned out. My acquaintance had been perforce with some of these. I had a dreadful sense of the violation of this magnificent country by farmers and city bums, that they were getting something that they had not earned."]

*August 2nd*

Inconsequential day; fed up with sitting. Having caribou slip-on "sweater" made. Curled up like a wild animal under my small square of canvas while it poured. Got some maps of Gt. Slave Lake, also Gt. Slave-Providence-Simpson.

*August 3rd*

Blowing & cloudy. I am going to pull out for the north, come what may. Bon voyage, brown book.

*August 4th-6th*

Since leaving Fort Smith on board the *Radium King* — or rather the barge of the *Radium King* — I have made no entries, I am ashamed to say, and so the next few pages are a reminiscence of those days. The reason for my not writing is not obscure: I just felt so poorly that I could not bring myself to write at all. The feeling was both mental & physical. For some reason I felt utterly discouraged. My canoe had not been sold. I had some kind of an infection break out on my leg — and everything was wrong. We got away from Smith at daybreak [on the 4th]. After infinite haggling I got the caribou sleeveless sweater made and was stuck \$5 for it, an outrageous price which I was too tired to combat. I slept on the barge, which was so loaded as to make even finding a space to sleep a difficult thing. I was way forward, and was awakened by the spray breaking over me. I determined not to buy any meals as I had a few bannocks I had baked the day previous. However, as the grub box was small, I decided not to eat at all for a while. A gang of young men was aboard, bound for Resolution where they were to erect a radio station. Also a trapper, J.W. Cooley from Reliance — very well dressed and not at all the conventional trapper type. He has his base of operations between Sussex & Musk Ox lakes at the headwaters of Back's River. We started at daybreak, and it was not long before the weather turned nasty and cold with a strong north wind. Eventually we were forced to tie up at the mouth of the Slave — waves were high, and it would have been unwise to try the Lake as Resolution has a poor landing spot & is very exposed. I felt lousy — & indeed this & the next day I believe I reached the depths of general miserableness & despond.

The next day, the 5th, broke grey & cold; it rained on and off & was as disagreeable a day as one could imagine. We lay to, tied up to the bank all day, as was the HBC boat also (bound for Yellowknife with dynamite). The various young lads played cards all day in the tiny passenger saloon. A miserable cold day and no place to get warm. My chats with Cooley were brief, as he had a cabin & by necessity kept within it, for there is nowhere else to sit. I do not know what the strange infection on my leg is, but anything like that scares & depresses me, as I am so unused to anything in the nature of an ill. The Slave below Smith has even less character than above, being an endless series of cutbanks & island bars, much like the Athabaska. This part is apparently through an alluvial plain — very low and little relief. We took the westward channel through the delta. We lay all one day in the rain and wind;

at evening it began to break up a bit but the wind was still fresh.

The next morning found us on the move and out into the lake. The big boats swing well out from shore, which soon faded to a low green line tapering off into a mirage of trees suspended in air. It was bright & clear to the northwest, though a series of black clouds could be seen travelling to the south of us. Rounding the west promontory, we sighted Resolution, which is on a peninsula and faces southwest. Quite a large settlement with, of course, the R.C. mission predominating with its usual ugly grey buildings. Considerable of a wharf had been built out and we nosed into this about 11 a.m. The unloading took but a short time, and so I had little opportunity or time to look about. Much to my surprise, I was greeted on the dock by a chap who turned out to be one of the clerks I had met at Patchuanak. I must look up his name, as I did not recall it. They had a rather poor HBC outfit here, but I understand it is to be rebuilt in another year or so. There was no beadwork to speak of in the store. The clerk showed me a pair of moccasins by Mrs. [Alex] Ahenakew — the finest beadwork I have seen in the North — all seed beads and beautifully done. I must get her to do me some. Our unloading through, we set out again. I am now the only passenger. Though I have not eaten anything for three days except some bannocks I do not feel very hungry, except when I smell the galley. We had a fine crossing of the lake. It became rough, so they towed the barge. Two deckhands and I stayed on it at the end of a long tow line: one felt isolated, with the ship far up ahead. A fine clear day, and toward evening we were taken in. The two deckhands grumbled a lot at missing dinner; they had rations aboard the scow, but missed a hot dinner. I have missed my great draughts of hot tea — but don't mind that now. The south shore of the lake is very, very low — and of course the opposite shore is invisible: this is a great inland sea stretching to the horizon as far as the eye can see. If it were not for my strange malady I would feel fine, but it hurts me to walk much. The water has become much clearer. I did not mind saying *au revoir* to my passenger mates, though I would like to have seen more of Cooley, a nice chap. He and two others are to be flown in from Reliance on the 25th of August. He made a good catch last year — white foxes, which seem to be on the way back. He has seen no musk-ox in his neighbourhood but many old skulls, and they have been sighted to the east of him. A high range of hills separates the drainage of the Back and Coronation Gulf — really quite high, running east & west. The east side of Slave would seem to be a pretty interesting locality to visit, particularly the falls on the Lockhart (famous for caribou killed there) and the Artillery Lake area. At nightfall we were well across and running down a couple of range lights which have been erected on an island. We anchored here at a spot called "Wrigley Harbour" & were set upon by hordes of "fish flies." We were underway by daybreak.

*August 7th*

Bright & Fair. My spirits have risen with the fine weather of today. A lovely warm day, though the wind is cold. Ran on in

to Providence at 11:30 this morning. There is shoal swift water approaching Providence. The boat swings close to the south bank and then creeps around an island to approach upstream. The Mission barge punched 13 holes in itself here & has been discarded. Just as we came in, the Indians all came out of church. It is a rather bleak, desolate settlement. The men all squatted in one group — the women and the little boys in another; there didn't seem to be many little girls. All in blue shirts. They of course all just watched. We had so little to deliver here that I was unable to get ashore, so simply watched unloading proceedings. The Mackenzie proper has now really begun. It is featured by low clay banks and pebbly beaches. Before long it expanded to a large lake with a range of hills running east-west — the Horn Mts., about 65 mi. north of Mills Lake standing out blue and imposing. Albert [Loutit] [Fig. 19] the pilot, who lives at Providence, tells me they are not rock but sand, which makes one think of a big terminal moraine. They have very even relief, sloping gently to the east. Toward supper we stopped at "Browning's", a farm — at the "Head of the Line" — a fine farm set in the wilderness where we delivered several hundred pounds of flour. This chap has the most amazing garden, with corn, onions, carrots, potatoes, & ships his produce up & down the river (some of it all the way to Aklavik). He is reputed to have made a handsome profit. He told me that this was the driest summer in ten years. His garden looked magnificent. Shortly after this spot the river began to narrow, and as I write now, there is a very swift current boiling along between close, steep, clay walls. I cannot place the spot exactly, but a considerable distance beyond Mills Lake a high escarpment can be seen to the southwest, running, it would seem, SE-NW. This then disappears. I will say I have seen nothing yet which Sequoizi could not overcome. And with care, I believe one might well navigate the river in that little craft, at least to this point. The crew are very decent to me, and of course, like everyone, most curious. After all, they have little to talk about. One of the young chaps invited me down to a cup of coffee & cake — it tasted good, but there was so little of it. (Afterwards it gave me cramps. I do not wish to purchase a meal, for it makes one too hungry to have a big meal; it is very much better to stick to small ones.) Today I had some hardtack and cheese. I do not know what to do about my leg, as I have nothing to treat it with — just get over it, I guess, & try to forget about it. I have perked up a lot & hope I can hold the mood. If I was in my own canoe everything would be O.K., but on a ship & alone, one remembers & thinks of the past too much, & has too little to occupy oneself. We are tied up for the night — this is a feared stretch of the river — and should easily be in at Simpson tomorrow. I watched all day for game but saw nothing. Lots of ducks, however, & a fellow would have something in the pot a good part of the time hereabouts. I should like to slip down this way next year. What a mighty river this is! Some wonderful camping sites above this point — nice sloping gravel shores. It is a good sign to be back at this journal again. I believe today is Sunday the 7th, but I am not sure. I don't think I shall write any more letters to anyone. It looks doubtful that I get back to school on time, for I have the Bear River & Lake to traverse before even



FIG. 19. "Albert Loutit, pilot of the *Radium King*."

thinking of turning south. I shall try hard to make it if I can, even to flying out part of the way.

#### August 8th

Bright & Fair. High cumulus clouds. A day of considerable adventure and not without its excitement. Set out at daybreak, and I was soon up, as I was anxious to see the water between here and Simpson; it is reputed to be very bad, particularly at this extremely low stage of water. The Mackenzie is here narrow and its current swift; cutbanks of clay & boulders. It was not long before the half-submerged barge of the HBC was sighted right in the middle of the river. Everyone was anxious; this is a bad spot, and although the barge foundered after striking a boulder on the *first* trip of the *Distributor*, that was early in the summer, and now there is unprecedented low water. The river here is narrow and rushes along at great speed, though I saw little water that was rough. The channel swings close to Green Island & then comes an oblique shot across to the other side. As we passed the island a severe shock was felt, but we kept on going & started the crossing to the other side. Just as I took a picture of the barge we struck, & the ship rolled crazily — then we struck again but kept on with a roaring, grating noise. Then it was all over — but so quickly that no one had time to do anything. Immediately there was a scurrying about to see if water was entering, but miraculously none appeared to be. The sick lurch the ship made on the second contact was quite upsetting. The boys who were sounding said we had 8 feet. But the bottom is apparently covered with huge loose boulders. The current is so swift that there is little if anything one can do — even after striking you are simply carried along to whatever fate may be in store. The big HBC barge, which was heavily loaded with 400 tons, went down in one minute and a half, split up the center, & the fellows sleeping in it just had time to crawl up on the roof. It seems to be a spot where huge subaqueous boulders abound. (Coming by small canoe, I would suggest taking north side — looked smoother to me.) With the boys up forward on the barge sounding with long poles, we kept on, and soon Simpson was in sight. It is a

most attractive spot; the HBC buildings in a quadrangle stand out, followed by a cluster of lesser buildings. The Liard comes in from the left with sand flats & islands, a large river, and muddy. A very steep and imposing cutbank divides the two rivers. We were soon nosed in to the bank, and an inventory of the damage was commenced. The rudder post was badly sprung. This meant a long delay. In fact, as it turned out, we spent the day in Simpson. Oranges: 90¢ a doz. for tiny, dried-up ones. Bought a nice pair of moccasins, \$3.00, porcupine [quills] & silk work. A bear was shot this morning right in back of the HBC store. This is a fine settlement. Most of the Indians are Slaveys. I chatted with a group most of the morning; one old fellow has been interpreter for the Doctor for 27 years. They asked me to take off my rubbers as my Pelican Narrows moccasins caused great comment. They had never seen that kind of bead work. One of them said, "My, you must have a good wife." The labours on the rudder continued all day — a very hot day, too. The old man whose name I do not recall was quite informative. He talked about a certain Walter Johnson who used to work here but was fired because, as the old man explained, "He fill up three womans, a mother, her daughter, anudder one. Jeez Christ, that man like bull." The hospital here (R.C.) has a wonderful garden with potatoes & even fine big tomatos. The old interpreter told me another curious fact. I saw some Indians setting out in two canoes lashed together, and he replied to my questions: "You say you are not a married man, but you know that sickness women get once a month? — well, I guess maybe you know — well, when Indians start out on trip and any womens like that, they lash poles across canoes and make women sit there so they not be in canoe. Also, when they want kid they puts woman outside, just like bitch. Still they die just like flies." I of course am familiar with the menstrual taboo among the Crees and Chips, but was unaware of this innovation among the Slaveys. When the men were examining my moccasins I spoke a couple of words in Chip which were close enough so that they could understand the Slavey version — they were most surprised. There is a fellow here who had a ruckus with a bear, a deaf man who walked right on to a she-bear & had his face badly torn up. "I told the bear to go away, and that is why she left me alive," is his report. He has killed two moose since, although deaf. The consensus of opinion is that he must have very strong medicine. Cruised about picking raspberries. Later had long chat with an HBC clerk who was at McPherson, a schoolmate of Paul Williamson of Portage La Loche, nice chap. Albert tells me the falls on Hay River are only 8–10 miles from the mouth: it is a great river for fish. Quite a few tents here, perched along the high bank at the north end of the settlement. No real difference in appearance between these Slaveys and Chips. Some quite pretty girls about. Of course the bank is lined more or less with sitting or squatting curious watchers. They are putting in a new rudder. Herculean labours have been going on all day. Very hot during day, and some mosquitos at night. A nice little canoe and assignment of stuff here for a certain Raup of the National Museum, Ottawa, though he & his field party have not themselves shown up yet. Eventually turned in, with it dark, though light in NW; heavy

clouds. [Inspector G.F.] Fletcher's successor, a stout and important RCMP Inspector [D.J. "Tiny"] Martin, is going on down to Norman on the boat. I chatted pleasantly with him at some length. Albert the pilot used to be a special for him. The new rudder is in and we shall be off tomorrow. The Captain, a young chap with a curious accent, tells me he used to sail the Halifax-Boston-N.Y. route. No meat in the settlement at all. Our diesels develop 450 h.p.

#### *August 9th*

Rain & cloudy. Up at eight to find us well under way, and before long the magnificent spectacle of the Mackenzie Mts. appeared ahead of us. From the distance they appeared as covered with snow; until, when we were closer, the glasses showed the rock strata. These are, I expect, of dolomite. Sharply inclined monoclines and abrupt sylcline folds result in this range of mountains first dominated by Mt. Camsell — 6000' — and then tapering off into a high, bold escarpment of 3000' running along the west side of the river, which here makes an abrupt bend to the north after its long westward trend. The mountains, though supporting some tree growth, are in the main very bald and tremendously imposing, particularly after the flat country which has been so interminable. The river here widens out and is full of innumerable islands. We passed a camp of 3 tents with racks of meat drying in front of them. The river now takes on much more life and character. The wonderful scenery has continued. The dolomite peaks are carved in various shapes. We passed the mouth of the North Nahanni, which is obscured by islands but still makes a noticeable gap in the range on the west side. Intriguing country. A group of cabins here. I might drop down this way. Still have seen nothing that Sequoizi might not handle. And I speak now of a stretch which the map characterises as "current swift and seething." Now that we have passed the Willow River the mountains extend to the east side as well as the west and are very grand. Some of the higher ones are clay-white with hardly a vestige of vegetation and with odd, knob-like protuberances so characteristic of dolomite. The banks for miles here are about 80' and perfectly level; they are graded down to the river at a sharp angle — like great railway embankments. The rain has given way to clearing skies and it is very warm. I tremble to crowd my luck, but the infection seems to be much less painful. At supper time we were opposite Wrigley, a tiny settlement of Indian shacks and an HBC post. The doctor from Simpson is due to pay Treaty there tomorrow. His boat could occasionally be seen far to the rear. The current here and above Wrigley for some miles is very swift with large boils, but I have seen no big whirlpools. Albert's name is Loutit. Dave McAlpine, the purser, invited me to supper — a fine, hearty meal, and I ate tremendous quantities. The feast was on the house. The meals are quite worth the dollar per — if you have the dollar. The crew and passengers all eat together. The mountains which dominate the scene are now in the main on the east side of the river and are known as the Franklin Mts. The high dolomite peaks, glistening white, are truly magnificent, and are all kinds of broken, irregular, and fantastic

shapes. One or two distinct hoodoos. An interesting physiographic site: a river entering on the east side, now shrunk to a small stream but with a big boulder delta, beautifully outlined and enormous in proportion to the stream in its present stage. The boulder delta continues on down stream, and then stops abruptly at its extremity and the clay bank resumes — a very pretty example. Dave McAlpine and I had a long chat. He is a person worth remembering and a man of many years' experience in the North: trader at Kittigazuit in Western Arctic, Good Hope, Resolution, Chipewyan, etc. He, like most real northern people, is wrathful about the legislation & political handling of the North and its Ottawa-based plush chair administration. He brought out an extremely important point; that is, the distinction and difference in each location as to game & game resources. That is, legislation over the Territories as a whole is nonsense, and impossible, as the area is so vast and conditions are so different. For instance, you close marten in the Territories — and you have them in abundance at, let us say, Good Hope; you legislate on beaver, but such legislation for the whole territory is ridiculous. The white trapper gets a poor deal indeed in this country. The whole west side of the Mackenzie is now a preserve and closed to the white man, which closes it to prospecting — i.e., by the man who lives in the country and is forced to trap in the winter for a living. The armchair administration is certainly at great fault. McA. says Stefansson is greatly to blame for many of the ridiculous prices paid in the Western Arctic, and gave some examples. McA. was inspector for Lamson & Hubbard — that ill-fated venture. It was thrilling to me to see that great mass of upthrust dolomite at Wrigley — the same rock which Mackenzie spoke of in his narrative. This has been a fine, happy day for me. I have still to see water which is beyond the prowess of Sequoizi. McAlpine knows Dick Finnie quite well. [Richard S. Finnie, whom Downes had met aboard the *Nascopie* in 1937, was to publish *Lure of the North* (1940) and *Canada Moves North* (1942).] Fort Norman gasoline is sold at Simpson at 75¢ a gallon. However, it is said to be too watery to be really satisfactory in kickers. The fuel oil is not used by our boat as it is too dirty and clogs the jets badly. Both of these faults would appear to lie with the refining rather than the oil. Albert tells me that the "River Between Two Mountains" which leads back to the Fish Lakes is not too hard to get up. The North Nahanni is navigable a ways and is then hemmed in by canyons. Inspector Martin says he thinks the [Fort] Nelson [River HBC Post] robbery [of 1936] was an "inside job." He had nothing but derision for [W.H.B.] Hoare [a wildlife biologist who was studying the muskox in the Thelon Game Sanctuary, of which he had become first warden in 1928]. The Nahanni Indians who come in to Norman are very unpredictable; sometimes they show up there, sometimes at Simpson; once in awhile they go over to Dawson. Evening having come on, it is raining heavily. Passed the *Mackenzie River*, paddle-wheel steamer bound upstream, just at sunset. The sun gleaming on the small white steamer with its great stern wheel thrashing up a foaming wake & spouting great clouds of white smoke. Each craft saluted decorously and briefly. The great Mackenzie, rolling ever so silently down to the Arctic sea! What ghosts of

men and deeds! Here and there against the dark spruce — and we are once more in the domain of spruce instead of poplar — a small birch will have changed, and the vivid yellow of its leaves stands out like a beacon. Tomorrow we are due in at Norman. I think likely Sequoizi and I will be down here somewhere next summer.

#### August 10th

Awoke to find it raining, and having no covering, I hopped up and about quickly. By breakfast we had passed what I take to be the mouth of the Gravel River — choked with sandbars but exhibiting a wide valley. A small stream comes in on the east side at this spot. There is no great difference scenically, but the river seems to broaden out and is very clogged with sandbars. The current in the channel is swift. Last night a group of Indians slid up on us when we were tied up. A big 20' freighter with a kicker that sounded like a sewing machine. The one who came aboard had the most curious high nasal voice. I don't know what they wanted — just curiosity, I suppose. The Inspector and I had a long chat on a variety of things last night. Like most northerners he found both the R.C. and Anglican missionaries quite useless. The absolution system robs the Indian of any individual moral sense. He told me one amusing story of a sixteen year old girl at Simpson who has had two children and has another on the way. All kinds of lecturing and advice has repeatedly been given by law & church. Finally, after her misdoings had been laboriously pointed out, she was asked in desperation, "Why, why do you behave this way?" She smiled ingenuously and drawled simply: "I like it." Tried the expedient of pouring some good raw iodine I discovered in my pack and which I have had for years into my 'wound.' As a Chip would say: "Edéw!" The rain kept me more or less inside and the time was spent pleasantly with the Inspector. He is really a jolly person and has the reddest neck in captivity. They had an upsetting time at Resolution a year or so ago. The Indians got very down on the doctor-Indian Agent, a certain Doctor Amyot[te] and it got to such a state that they refused to accept Treaty and bombarded Ottawa with radio-grams: "When are you going to send us a white man?" This Amyot[te] was a Frenchman. Just what the grounds of their complaint was is rather obscure. Some said he would not take care of the children, others had various complaints — anyway, they would not stand for him. Eventually they did get a new man. Martin says he met [David] Irwin at Good Hope. He had three miserable dogs, one which Martin made him shoot. Martin gave Irwin orders to go to Norman, wire, and pull out. He says he was one of the most helpless individuals he ever saw and that he also had a gigantic appetite — a menace to the country, as he simply sponged off everyone. He was sighted at Good Hope going around and around a slough — quite lost. [Irwin's "exploits" were described in his *Alone Across the Top of the World* (1935) and in Franklin M. Reck's *One Man Against the North* (1940).] There was another fellow, named Cruikshank (?) who was drowned in Slave Lake: only his head, in quite good condition, and his diamond ring washed up on the beach and were found. Discussing the Thelon, Martin

says about 140 head of musk-ox have been sighted. He believes the Thelon encompasses but a part of their true range. They are emphatically grass-eaters, and there is a long stretch of meadow-like country stretching from the Thelon NE between Back's River and it and northwest of Baker Lake. They extend up through this area. We got in to Norman early in the forenoon. I was furious at missing the lignite beds — still burning, owing to misinformation from one of the crew. Bear Rock is very impressive looking, much higher than 1300'. After unloading the Norman goods, we went around the bend and up the mouth of the Bear River a short way. Extraordinary blue-green water in the Bear; really astonishing, & a great contrast to the Mackenzie. It is so crystal clear & has such an odd color that the transition is amazing. The *King* took on 200 tons of concentrates — these are ground-up pitchblende — with a few sacks of silver and copper — in stout little 150 lb. sacks [Fig. 20]. The *King* pulled out at five o'clock, and I am now waiting on the stern-wheeler to take me on up to the rapids. Report has it I may have to wait 10 days for the Bear Lake boat at Fort Franklin as she is off cruising for wood. I have not enough grub for that length of time and so shall go on a "little starve" for a couple of days at a time. The captain of the *Radium King* is named Angus MacKinnon, the mate Walter Hall. Norman is not outstanding but has a good location high on the cutbanks a mile or so below the Bear River. [It is of course about ¼ mile upriver from the mouth of the Bear and in fact reaches down to it.] A tiny Anglican church and of course a large, ornate R.C. The Indians have all moved out. I purchased a can of syrup & a beautiful gun case with fine beadwork — Loucheaux from McPherson — from the N.T. trader, a weary little man with gold-rimmed spectacles on the end of his long, bony nose. Had a talk with Tim Gaudet, an old HBC retainer now on pension (b. 1872). Tim says the Barren Ground Grizzly or Brown Bear ranges from Good Hope across to Bear Lake, particularly on the long peninsula of the northwest arm. However, he shot a big bear this spring nine miles below [here] which, he says, was almost red, it was so brown. I saw one pelt at the checkers' camp, of a big brown bear that was yellowish brown with a reddish rusty streak up the back. When Lamson & Hubbard were here, they bumped no. 1 marten to \$65 a pelt. Gaudet was well acquainted with Hornby: "The toughest little man ever in 'dis country. But always lots of life. Even he come in here all tired out from trip, jump

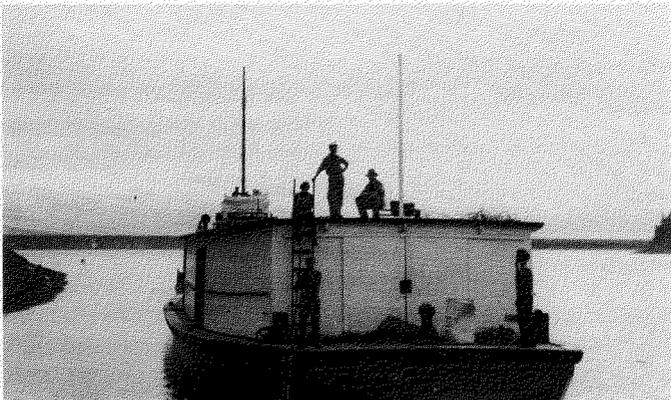


FIG. 20. Barge loaded with concentrates.

around very lively. My, what a reader — read all time. Not enough books and papers for him to read when he come in here. He grow some whisker in 'dis country, I tell you." Talked also with Harvey, the young doctor here. Tells me two old men still conjure here with drums, particularly a blind man named Matzít. Says from 6–800 Dogribs at Rae. The Caribou Eaters center around Snowdrift [near eastern end of Great Slave]. Same story here of incipient T.B. and considerable venereal disease. I hear [RCMP Lance Corporal] Ted Bolstad is at Eldorado; Doc [L.D.] Livingstone is of course at Aklavik (old Eastern Arctic friends). With usual government sagacity, a dock has been constructed on the south bank of the Bear, at huge expense, and is now far above navigable water. The Gravel is reported to be very shoal, with a series of rapids navigable only in early stages of water, but a very long river, 200 miles or more; it swings north and somewhat parallel to the Mackenzie, following the trend of the mountains. The Blackwater, by a chain of small lakes, offers a route used by the Indians to the SW arm of Great Bear Lake. The Fish Lakes at the head of the "River Between Two Mountains" (a navigable river, according to Albert) is quite a gathering spot for the Indians (Nahadinné) in summer and before going back with dogs to the mountains. The upper Blackwater is fine marten country.

#### August 11th

Overcast. The *Star* came in from the oil wells, and Charlie Scanlon came down in one of the Rapid boats from the rapids. The sternwheeler appeared at dawn. They are shifting cargos now — and before long I shall be off up-riber. [At this point, Downes dwells on a personal loss and speculates that it is the underlying reason for his wanderings.] Of course, there are other factors, but how great a part does this . . . play? I know that each year when I get north and by myself, getting harder, more "bushed," more individual, the pictures have more substance, are clearer, and the drive to wander farther alone becomes more insistent. Last spring was almost unbearable. For hours I would sit, and rivers, lakes, and the wanderlust feeling would hold me — that peculiar urge toward freedom and release, to be with one's dreams. All this is most introspective and no doubt unhealthy, but it is part of the picture and in all veracity must go down — just as much as the mountains. Mc-Alpine tells me some excellent fossils are found near Franklin and that the old fireplace is left at the original site (cf. Franklin's Exp. when Richardson wintered here). The S. face of Bear Rock has some very distinctive red oxide patches which, according to Indians, have origin as giant beaver, but I haven't got the story on it. The *Sternwheeler* [Fig. 21] — actual name of the vessel — got underway in the afternoon. We are pushing an oil barge ahead. The Bear River is not large, a few hundred yards wide, but is very swift. It cleared up and became a really lovely trip. The lower river cuts back and forth against enormous clay cutbanks which show bedding plainly and, at one point almost opposite Willow River on the south bank, a good seam of lignite. The lower stretches are covered by rather small spruce. We made steady progress, yet at times very slow

— indeed, almost not moving at all. The water is so lucid that the boulders on the bottom are clear and mosaic-like in 10 feet of water, despite ripples. The Bear Rock and the long-high spur running east of it was visible for a long time. Passed the mouth of Willow River which comes in on the north side (good fishing spot); it is reported to run almost parallel with the Bear. The water is swift, 6–8 mph. current (It takes the *Sternwheeler* 10 hours to get to the rapids and 2¾ hours to come down), but even at this extreme low water stage it is good canoe water. The captain, a hearty, tough old Vancouver tug-boat captain, has been most cordial and pleasant to me. Roars forth orders in great hearty voice. Really a jolly crowd aboard, and very kindly. Captain insisted I have supper — a fine one with *fresh* meat. Two quarters of beef came in. Some of it was a bit ripe and the crew would not eat it, but it tasted fine to me. Played “21” with crew in evening. Tied up at dark. Chatted about cooking with the cook, diesel engines with the 2nd engineer, loading with the deckhands, and the B.C.–Alaskan coast with the captain. Water temp. at surface is 48°. Thoroughly enjoyable. Slept in the galley. Charlie Scanlon told me the concentrate sacks were insured at \$750 per. at first — less now because smaller. The oil (fuel) is now pumped over the portage around the rapids (drop 98' in 9 mi.) via pipeline.

#### August 12th

Heavy rain, wind light N-NW. Got in to camp at bottom of the rapids about 7 o'clock and raining hard. Spent most of the day in Bunk House. Quite a crew here. A nine-mile road has been constructed around the [St. Charles] Rapids: Ford trucks take the freight over. A pump at the shore takes the fuel-oil directly from the barges and pumps it through a pipeline to the other end of the portage, where it is pumped into the oil barge for the boat *The Radium Lad*, which operates above the rapids. Sitting around, I was afraid to be considered offish, so went in to dinner with everyone else — to my later horror, this timidity cost me \$1.60. After dinner we lay about. Father [Joseph] Turcotte and his Indian are also going on to Eldorado. The bunk house reminded me of a boys' dormitory, bunks being doubledeckers. Some of the men slept, some read magazines (mostly westerns), some chatted. In one bunk a huge fellow lay on his back and endlessly imitated a saxophone murdering the “St. Louis Blues.” Another mended a shoe, and off in one corner a cribbage game went on. The heavy rain and the small amount of freight made it a slack day. My fare up was a dollar. I mostly dozed or talked with the Indian about the country. At five o'clock we pulled out for the upper end of the rapids. The road was admirable and passed through a lovely country — small birch and spruce. Got in to the *Radium Lad*, a small diesel tug but not a sternwheeler, and much more modern than my last vessel. Everyone went to the galley to eat, but after my recent experience I decided to stay out in the rain. The Norman Indians are, properly speaking, Rabbit Skin or Hare Indians. One group hunt the headwaters of the Blackwater, one hang about the head of the Bear, and one (30) hunt in the mountains west of the Mackenzie. There is a route from Nor-



FIG. 21. *Sternwheeler* unloading oil below the St. Charles Rapids.

man across the mountains to the waters of the Yukon to a spot called Mayo. It cuts across a 25 mi. portage and lake route to the Gravel. It intrigues me, for everyone seems very vague about it. It is a shame it is raining so hard, as the scene looking downriver is most impressive. After supper I sat in the galley and talked with the priest at some length. He has curious hard blue irises and dark pupils. Despite my prejudice against the cloth in this area — or rather the North in general, he proved extremely interesting. We both agreed on a surprising number of matters. Of course we talked of [Abbé Emile] Petitot's great works on the area. They use the Petitot dictionary. Here are a few facts. There are approx. 4,000 Indians in the Mackenzie district from Fort Smith down; 6–800 at Rae (Dog Ribs), 400 at Norman. The new preserve, the whole country west of the Mackenzie from Simpson down, has been made this year. While 30 mountain Indians hunt it from this point, 370 are unprotected from the necessary, or inevitable, white trapper inrush to the Bear Lake area. Indians hate to leave their own country. For instance, 4 years ago a mountain Indian married a Bear Lake Indian woman. He was forced to live 3 years with her band before she moved off to the mountain country with him, and then she came in after one year, crying to get back. The modes of life are entirely different: the mountain Indians are meat eaters — sheep, caribou, goats — while the Bear Lake Indians are fish eaters. Conditions last year were extreme in this area. The Indians went out [trapping] loaded with debt after a poor previous year, very short in outfits. By Christmas many were in various stages of starvation. Turcotte stopped in with one group who had no dog feed and one fish. He dug holes for nets for them in ice that was five feet thick. It takes six holes per net, and often no fish means moving the net. They were in such extremities that he wired for a plane & food. This came in eventually, bringing a policeman to investigate. Naturally, the Indians selected the only dogs who could pull out of the whole lot to meet the plane. The policeman hardly bothered to get out — saw the dog team, returned to Norman and said there was no need for the whole business — their dogs showed them to be as well off as could be. This past winter, what with the necessity to provide for children & women, meant less fur than possible in one of the poorest fur years ever on record. This year all of them are in debt and are going out with little to nothing. (Incidentally, the few marten pelts the band had were taken in payment for the food.) A hospital is to be established at Norman. It is

Turcotte's contention that what is really needed is a school. With boats & planes in summer, and planes & dogs in winter, hospitals are accessible. But a child is sent to Providence, 450 miles away, to school. He does not see his parents for five years at minimum. Five years later he comes back to Norman, having lost contact entirely with parents & bush life. Again and again the painful drama has occurred. The strange, schooled child comes into the tent. He is spoiled and sees no chair — no bed — none of the luxury he has known as a matter of course. He is unwilling to accept the bush life & conditions and is unsuited for it. So you get the unhappy, useless, weak imitation of the white man — the sullen, disgusted settlement hanger-on, hanging around the fringe of what he has known and enjoyed. However, hospitals appeal to Gov't backing over schools, so a hospital it is, quite regardless of the probability that it may treat no more than 10 patients while 67 children of the band go without school exposure. The Hare name for the Mackenzie is *décho*, for Bear River, *Saś-tú-dé*. The Sikanni of the upper Liard are in a class with the Hottah Lake Dog Ribs for general lowness in scale. Turcotte told me some interesting data on the language. The Slavey has no terms whatever for abstract things like truth, beauty, duty, thanks, faith, etc. It is all related to sensory-perceived objects. The sensory basis is the core of the language. For instance, the color white: anything white will have the vowel sound "ah" — sheep, goat, wool, maggots, snow; all have an "ah" root. Anything seen or which primarily requires seeing has "di" in it — the verb for the action of seeing. Turcotte boiled Slavey down to 60 roots, and believes further refinement would bring it into a primitive, five senses basis. Most interesting, quite in contrast to the Cree. The Loucheaux are very distinct linguistically. The Hottah Lake crowd which move to Rae to trade are reported by T. to have little white contact and to be "full of superstition" and heathenish practices. Hottah Lake is south of Cameron Bay by some 100 miles. Marten Lake, a stamping ground, is said to be very large. Indians go in from Providence and Rae. The Simpson-Rae route would appear to be most feasible in summer. T. tells me that these people are extraordinarily imaginative, hearing and seeing all manner of things. Had a chat with the captain, a genial old Yorkshire sailor brought up in sail. We chatted about the sea at great length. His longest passage 192 days, Vancouver-Liverpool. Have I spoken of the strikingly delicate features of the Slavey and Hare? It is most noticeable among some of them. Brachicephalic, the nose is very thin-bridged, the nostrils delicate and thin, the lips thin — yet very high cheek bones & square structure to the face, but brought out so highly by the bone frame as to give the impression of narrowness and delicacy. Heavy downpour and mist, so no pictures. The river is striking here above the rapids. The south bank (right hand going up) is 100–200 feet deep sheer slope. This is fronted by a green, grassy foreshore. The banks are levelled off on top in a long, flat embankment broken by gullies. The steep slope, where protected from erosion by the foreshore, is a vivid pale yellow — sphagnum sparsely sprinkled with thin, candle-like spruce. Just at the juncture of the slope & grassy foreshore is a dark line of heavier spruce. The gullies are set off in long repeated

parallel lines of dark green against the pale yellow by the spruce that grow in them. The spruce on the south bank, exposed to the north winds, are spindly things; their branches are extremely short & almost uniform to the top, except for a flare of longer branches at the base. Sometimes they have sort of a tuft on top.

#### August 13th

Clear and cold. Up and away by 4 a.m. The high, steep banks have given way to more subdued ones. Clearing this morning and quite cold. Current now runs 8–10 mph. Barren Land caribou do not range here but hit the extreme southeast corner of the lake. Fascinating trip. The Bear is in a low water stage and the current is remarkably swift. How this craft can make progress against it is a wonder. Do it she does, although sometimes the boat just seems to hang suspended. Huge boulders show up clearly on the bottom. This is a beautifully clear, cold day. In the downriver breeze it is very cold, like a fall day. The water is a translucent, sparkling, emerald green. I thought the Reindeer River was clear, but this has even it beaten. The pilot is clever at taking advantage of the back eddies. It takes about 15 hrs. to come up & 2¾ hrs. back. The water never seems to relax its boiling swiftness, and this upper reach has some quite narrow stretches. The river freezes up very late — as late as Dec. 15th good parts of the upper end are open. A fine river for Arctic grayling, locally called "Blue-fish." We crawled and crawled along while the diesel turned over 650 r.p.m. & shivered the whole boat. The engineer, Charles Munro, and I discussed cameras, he having a little Keystone 8 mm. movie model. The banks as revealed by erosion are boulders and sand. I am inclined to believe that the clay, stratified banks of the lower Bear — below the rapids — represent Mackenzie River alluvium, *not* Bear River. I shot pictures right & left. In places the water truly seems to be visibly running at a downgrade slant. The handling of the boat and oil barge is extraordinary — just weasling between huge boulders. By late morning we were at the Lake. Great Bear

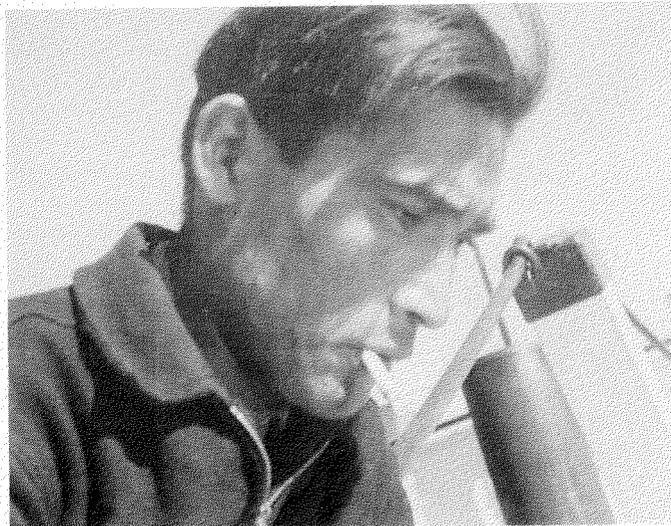


FIG. 22. Målo.

discharges into the river, and on each side the banks give away to low sloping shorelines. The tree growth vanishes to a semi-barrens covered with small willows and grass. A gleaming oil tank desecrates the right bank. Far to the northwest extends the blue, flat high ground of the north shore of Keith Arm; and less high and in an absolutely straight line extends the south shore. Franklin Bay forms a re-entrant swinging around to the west. Across the Bay could be seen the roof of Fort Franklin, an HBC outpost, and further to the east showed a cluster of white tents, the fall encampment of the Bear Lake Band. The boat from Eldorado was in, a tug with a large barge. We discovered she is not due to pull out until tomorrow noon. I wandered about looking for berries, and found few blueberries but plenty of a small red berry that is quite palatable. Two women were in — Indians from Cameron Bay with their youngsters. The latter had on regular dickies — the first time I have ever seen Indians wearing parkas. It was cold — edzá. Went through the endless ritual of "Where you going? Got a job there? Where you from? What you doing up here?" The deckhands busy unloading concentrate and taking on oil drums. Oh, before deserting my last vessel, *The Radium Lad*, entirely, I must note that the cook of it was born on Beacon Street [Boston]! The lad with Father Turcotte is named Málo Beueulé [Fig. 22]. He is 27 and is going to get married next spring. Late in the afternoon I discovered the priest was going over to the Indian encampment, and he kindly invited me to come along. I was delighted, as it meant not only seeing the people, but also a chance to see the site of old Fort Franklin (cf. Sir John Richardson's account). Two big 20' canoes came in time and picked us up. In our canoe were: bow — Father Turcotte, one old lady with child on her back, one man; middle — myself and a huge pile of camp impedimenta and two dogs; then Málo, and another fellow, and still another one steering. The big canoe had a kicker. The other canoe seemed even more loaded — full of youngsters, dogs, and what-not. It is an open, exposed stretch of 6 to 7 miles to the camp. It had been blowing so hard in the morning that they'd been unable to cross at all. The seas now were still very steep and rough. The trip was made without accident, beyond a good thorough soaking in ice cold water when seas broke over me. It was a rough passage and one of the coldest traverses I have ever experienced. The Gt. Bear Lake water is freezing, as is the wind. The old woman in front of me in the bow filled me with admiration. Sitting on the bottom of the canoe, she received several waves of spray & some green water right over her head and face, yet she did not make a sound or move a muscle, and the child on her back slept through it all but for the last little bit. Such fortitude — resignation. I cannot imagine any white woman I know who could stand this at all. A big canoe-load of young men came leaping over the waves to meet us as we drew near. I was shaking from the cold and the ducking but did my best to appear quite unconcerned. Everyone was of course on hand to greet the arrivals. This spot has all the appearance of a semi-permanent camp, with log shacks and raised fish caches [Figs. 23, 24 and 25]. We lugged out stuff up to a log & mud shack which serves as a church. Soon we had a fire going and warmed ourselves up a bit. Eventually the Indians began to

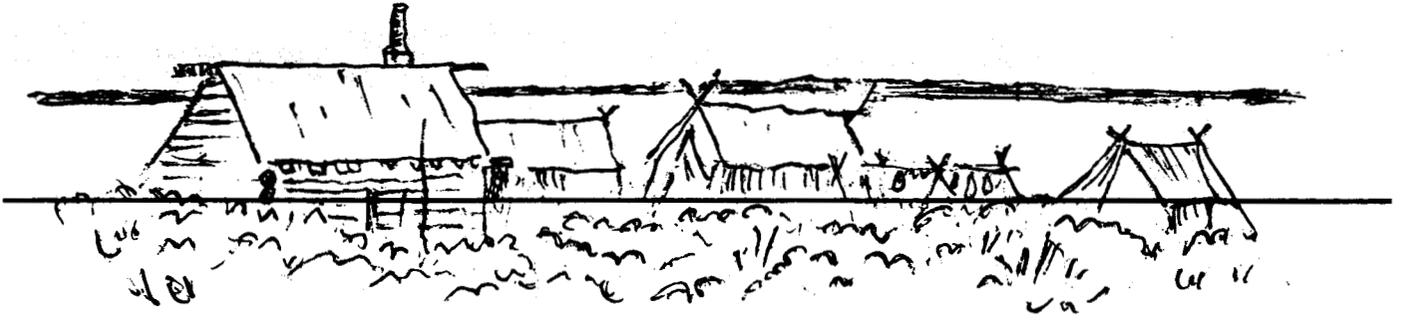


FIG. 23. "Sastudené at their encampment near old Fort Franklin."

come in. But the interior: a rude little muddled log shack with a tiny tin stove at the far end of an altar, two candles flanking a statuette of the Virgin Mary, a large chart showing the way of both the good & the sinners — the latter roasting and attended by dragons & monsters (Protestants are found here) — and some garish pictures of bleeding hearts, etc. One chair, and some firewood. An adjacent room had a small stove, a bunk, and cooking apparatus — this was all. The men & women drifted in, knelt, and went into the back room for confession. They were a strange and pitiful lot. The men all exhibited white blood, there was every type of face, but all of them were lined and drawn with the stamp of such suffering and privation as I have never seen. The women ran more to Indian, or almost Eskimo-type features — very heavy jaw, square chin, very high cheek bones, round heads with short noses, protruberant lips — often upper longer than lower. Some rather old people among the lot. Brutalised, animal faces, and with their white blood, heavy-boned. Later I went out for a walk and got chatting with one young chap who invited me to his tent. He had a fine, new, big tent in which were a couple of old men, his sister-in-law, and his month-old bride, a young girl already thick-hipped and squat. He set me a plate of blueberries & bakeapple berries — delicious — and tea. Then he played the victrola — hillbilly songs, of course. All in all, very decent and friendly. I was touched. I was having a fine time



FIG. 24. "Canoe frame: Bear Lake Indians."



*Rabbit Skin, Slavi, + Dogrib encampment  
Gt. Bear Lake*

FIG. 25.

chatting and joking when Father T. poked his head in and suggested returning, just why I do not know. We boiled up some coffee and then turned in. I slept at the foot of the altar. I was very impressed by the apparent piety of these people; each one had his or her string of beads. When I was at the tent they said grace before eating their evening meal of fish & tea. But how seared and blasted these faces! The name of my host: Belatzohn.

#### *August 14th*

Overcast, clearing in p.m., slight N. breeze. A most interesting and novel day. In the morning Father T. had mass, which apparently was attended by everyone who could crawl, including one ancient, bent-over old man who wore long grey scraggly locks and a fur hat. They jammed & packed themselves into the tiny room, about 60 or 70 men & women and innumerable children of all ages and sizes. As guest, the single chair was presented to me, and I sat at the back of the room. It was the first Mass of my experience. There seemed to be a great deal of singing which was done heartily and in a high nasal on the high notes and, by the men, a roaring, animal-like guttural on the low notes. The women, all of whom knelt on the right side, with the men on the left, were equally vociferous. They constantly crossed themselves, and one woman endlessly and curiously swung a string of beads back and forth, brushing a pasteboard picture of Jesus — a curious, primitive sort of thing. After mass I took some photographs of various men & women; one old chap refused — named Ayah. One girl behaved in a most coquettish manner; she was the prettiest one of the lot, the standard of beauty not being very high. There is a new 22' freighter here. It cost the Indian who bought it at Norman \$575. The experience of seeing these people at mass and confession alters my feelings on the matter of the church among them to a considerable extent. Father T. showed me routes of some of his travels — really astounding, what some of the chaps will and can do in winter travel. The Petitot River-Bischo Lake-Providence trip was an amazing feat. Eventually we all piled into a big canoe with a crowd of the men and set out for the ship. We did stop at Franklin, the HBC outpost. This is located in a small bay in the SW corner of the arm. It was here that the original Fort Franklin as estab-

lished by Franklin's divided wintering party lived. Nothing remains; even the chimney and fireplaces, standing up to a few years ago, have crumbled to the ground. However, it is recognisable, as is the large cellar hole of the old fort. These are a few yards north of the dwelling house of the present HBC outpost. This is a wonderful location for fish. Hall, the HBC man, set nets in the spring and got 125 fish a net in the little narrows. It was a thrilling thing to me to stand here at this spot. The crossing back to the ship was uneventful and pleasant (I sat on the lee side this time). Back again [Fig. 26], we discovered that the ship will not pull out until noon tomorrow! Quite a chat with Ed Lewis, the checker; he is an extremely agreeable young chap — going to Univ. of Alberta law school. These Indians occasionally indulge in dancing. Use four drummers. Dance in a shuffling circle. Drummers start by standing; after warming up the drum heads they then sit & thump away, occasionally going to the fire to warm up the head of the drum. I slept on the barge. Clouding up at night. Sunset a bit after 9. Note on the eating place at Fitzgerald. Employed are a couple of waitresses, one of whom is Alice MacDougal, known locally as "The Lion-Tamer." Ed was a trifle astonished the first time he went there, for on leaving the screen door open, she roared, "Hey, close the f\_\_\_\_\_ door!"

#### *August 15th*

Overcast & raining, then clearing with low cumulus clouds & slight westerly breeze. Awoke to find it sprinkling, so used Lewis's cabin to boil up. Uneventful morning of reading and scratching about. Little to record. The boat was due to pull out, but in true northern style no one knew when. Made some hideous pancakes. Jennings arrived on his way to Port Radium. Reported that the *King's* barge of ore — 20 tons — foundered after striking boulder approaching Wrigley. They managed to beach her at least. The Mackenzie is rising — 3' since I left a few days ago. It is now afternoon, and I am on board the diesel *Bear Lake*. We are pushing a high barge loaded with fuel oil. I share the deck with an Indian and his wife & child. The captain is most genial. He and the mate are envious of my binoculars. The shorelines of this arm are low and regular typical paleozoic relief. I am sitting, using a table in the deckhands' quarters on the barge while a red-hot game

of various types of poker rages — running the gamut from “Seven-toed Pete” to “Pee in the Ocean.” The cook, a nice little Scotchman, had something fall on him and is bleeding internally, but this doesn't seem to distress anyone. He is an ex-um-runner, was a member of the infamous “Ohio Gang.” All of us sat around the galley chewing the fat to a very late hour. According to Father T., Nahanni is a corruption of a word meaning “strangers.” “Ennaki” is “enemies” in Eskimo. Turned in about midnight, but a couple of hours later it began to blow and cloud up, so I shifted from the deck of the barge to beneath a big canoe on the boat. The barge was put in tow. This boat rolls tremendously. David Yukon is the conjuror of Norman. Ayah did a trip from Caribou Point to Franklin in 42 hrs: was 12 yrs. old when first missionary arrived.

### August 16th

Overcast: wind N, light. Slept for a long time and to my amazement found it was 1 o'clock when I was awakened by Larry Noble, an agreeable young fellow from Prince Albert who is working in the mine. The day was uneventful; we are well off-shore and the south and southwest shores have been but blue profiles all day. The Grizzly Bear Mts. are high, smooth, and regular — plateau? The paleozoic type of regular low shoreline continued all day until, abruptly, it changed to the high, lumpy, glaciated Precambrian of the southeast shore of Echo Bay. It is striking: the sedimentary shoreline has the suggestion of cuesta form which parallels the same type of relief on the north side of Keith Arm. The dip in both cases is a gentle one to the west. Very cold; have worn my caribou vest all day. According to Mâlo there is no word “Nahanni,” but is a “Nakanni,” which means “enemies.” The barge slews about at a tremendous rate, almost broadside in fact. This is a



FIG. 26. “Father Turcotte says ‘Good-bye.’”

great vessel to roll — very round-bottomed and deck-heavy, and though no great sea is running, she is almost at beam's end on occasion. The navigation is all by landmarks and by guess and by God; the compass is erratic and unreliable; they have no log at all. My map — 1934 — is quite incomplete, with many islands totally missing. The important Superstition and Mystery islands are not shown at all. A chap named [Sammy] Campbell is supposed to have come via the Gravel [River] route. I write in the midst of the usual poker game with a \$20 pot just changing hands — it is mostly stud- and stud-variations. Mâlo says he has never seen any arrowheads but that old Ayah holds the record for crossing the Lake in winter, 42 hrs. Caribou Pt. to Franklin. He and a companion with two dogs; the other man in front never turning, looking straight ahead, never stopping once the whole way.

[Part IV of Downes's journal will appear in Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 1986).]