

Leonidas Hubbard Jr. (1872-1903)



Photograph from Dillon Wallace's *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905).

As the twentieth century dawned, North America was no longer *terra incognita*. Frontiers had been pushed back, much of the Great Plains and primeval forests had been tamed by agriculture, and society was becoming settled and urban. Yet the pioneer spirit lingered on in such adventurers as Robert Peary, Norman Duncan, Wilfred Grenfell, and others, whose imaginations, fired by nineteenth-century aspiration, drove them to the northern fringes of the continent in pursuit of discovery and inspiration. One such man born out of his time was the explorer Leonidas Hubbard Jr.

Hubbard was born in Michigan in 1872, the son of a restless pioneer father and a loving mother. His childhood was apparently one of parental indulgence, outdoor pleasure, and literary romanticizing. Tales of frontier life and the Indians

stirred him deeply. Most men outgrow their boyish fantasies. Despite an education at the University of Michigan (1893-97), subsequent labour in the hard field of journalism, and even marriage to a woman two years his senior (in 1901), Hubbard persisted in his dreams of glory. His was a simple, dogged, idealistic nature. Lack of confidence was something he did not experience; his faith in his Saviour was complete. A small man physically, he was determined to do a "big thing" and make his reputation. In 1901 he told his friend Dillon Wallace, a New York lawyer, of his intention to enter the Labrador interior, and two years later, on 15 July 1903, after elaborate preparations, Hubbard, Wallace, and a James Bay Indian of mixed blood named George Elson set out by canoe from the North West River post of the Hudson's Bay Company into Grand Lake, the northwest extension of Lake Melville.

Hubbard's plan was to proceed up the Naskaupi River to Lake Michikamau (now incorporated in the Smallwood Reservoir) on the interior plateau. He would then observe both the annual migration of the caribou herds across the George River and the hunting habits of the Naskapi-Montagnai Indians, all of which would provide material for articles in the magazine now employing him, *Outing*. The George River would take him to Ungava Bay. Thus his was to be a canoe trip across one of the earth's most forbidding landscapes. He had chosen the more northerly route into the wilderness deliberately. A way to Lake Michikamau by the Hamilton (now Churchill) River had been explored previously, and A.P. Low of the Geological Survey of Canada had published an elaborate map of the region in 1896. Lake Michikamau itself had also been explored and described by Low. But Hubbard wished to plunge into "a region where no footsteps would be found to guide him," and over which "still brooded the fascinating twilight of the mysterious unknown."

In his 1896 map Low had tentatively sketched from hearsay an inaccurate outline of Grand Lake, at the northwestern end of which was a single river. Some miles inland, the map showed this stream dividing into "North West River," which led westward to Michikamau, and the "Nascaupee River," which flowed from Seal Lake in the north. It was this speculative rendering of the geography of Grand Lake that guided the Hubbard expedition. In the early afternoon of July 16 the men reached what they thought was the mouth of the river depicted on Low's map, and headed inland. This was the error that led to disaster. What they had found was not the Naskaupi but the much smaller, unnavigable Susan River.

For two weeks the men dragged, pushed, and carried their canoe and equipment up the narrow, deep valley of the Susan, wading and tumbling in the water, scraping through thick brush, portaging around shoals, beating off the dreadful Labrador mosquitoes, and enduring the heat of late July.

ward to Athabaska country in 1892. That year he heard tales of routes leading farther north onto the Barrenlands.

In 1893 Tyrrell, his brother, and six canoeemen struck north from Lake Athabaska in three canoes, into an area known only to a small number of aboriginal people. Prior to 1893 there had been forays by traders and missionaries onto the fringes of the Barrens. Samuel Hearne, of course, had traversed the Barrens from Churchill to the mouth of the Coppermine in 1770-1772. However, other official knowledge of the landscape and the main routes through the interior was virtually nonexistent. For much of the 1893 trip, the Tyrrell brothers literally felt their way through true *terra incognita*, paddling the shores of the lakes looking for the outlets of rivers, poking through thin leads of open water along the shore of ice-filled Dubawnt Lake, and following the northward flow of the great river, always hoping but never certain that they would not end up on the Arctic coast. Seriously short of food and soaked by autumn storms, they emerged on the west shore of Hudson Bay at Chesterfield Inlet in mid-September. Although the object of their expedition had been achieved, and although there was no uncertainty as to where the route back to civilization lay, the problems of paddling Hudson Bay in open canoes in late fall were awesome. For five weeks Tyrrell's party fought high winds, storms, snow, and freezing temperatures, finally reaching Churchill on 19 October. Amazingly, just two and one-half weeks later they set off by snowshoe and dogteam for the railway, arriving in Winnipeg two months later at New Year's.

A scant five months after that, Tyrrell, now married, was back in northern Manitoba commencing his second passage through the Barrens, this time via the Cochrane and Little Partridge rivers, Kasba Lake, and on to the main corridor, the Kazan River. His party encountered "The People" — the Inland or Caribou Eskimo — at many locations along the Kazan, and with their guidance, left the main river just north of Yathked Lake and travelled east on what Tyrrell named the Ferguson River in honour of his travelling companion. This put the party on the shore of Hudson Bay well south of Chesterfield Inlet and about one week ahead of the 1893 schedule. With the extra time and good weather, they experienced a much less difficult trip down the Bay to Churchill than in 1893.

The early years in the GSC had given Tyrrell a rigorous training in the skills of exploration which were so necessary to the successful completion of these epic journeys of 1893 and 1894. Such feats require enormous personal drive and leadership ability, vast reserves of physical strength, and a measure of good fortune. It was a period of intensity and accomplishment impossible to sustain for very long. Tyrrell's next several years at the GSC were not particularly happy ones for him, and he finally left his \$1800 per annum position in 1889 at the age of 40.

Once again the North lured Tyrrell, this time in the form of gold. Six years in the Klondike brought Tyrrell an income and capital base which had been impossible to achieve as a civil servant. The Klondike years also developed the business acumen and mining expertise which were to be at the centre of



Tyrrell's activities for the next 30 years as mining consultant, promoter, shareholder, and company director.

Although not as well known as his explorations, Tyrrell's scholarly pursuits are impressive. In addition to his impeccably thorough technical reports for the GSC, in 1897 he made a major contribution to the study of glaciation in North America. In works prepared for the Champlain Society he brought to the attention of a wide audience the works of Samuel Hearne and the man whom he considered "the greatest practical land geographer who ever lived", David Thompson.

Joseph Burr Tyrrell was a large man, well over six feet with a robust physique which, despite the ravages of scarlet fever in childhood and a severe heart attack at 70, was to last for 99 years. He was one of the last explorers to record the extent and nature of the Canadian landscape in the old style. He grasped the significance of the achievements of Hearne and Thompson because he travelled and worked as they had. Before Tyrrell's own life was out in 1957, the kind of exploratory work he had accomplished was being done by large parties supported by bush planes, helicopters, radio communications, air photos, and sophisticated sensing and surveying equipment. The circumstances necessary for the flowering of the kind of exploratory genius possessed by J.B. Tyrrell no longer exist.

FURTHER READINGS

- INGLIS, ALEX. 1978. *Northern Vagabond*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- TYRRELL, JAMES WILLIAMS. 1973. *Across the Sub-Arctics of Canada*. Reprinted Toronto: Coles. (Originally pub. 1898).
- TYRRELL, JOSEPH BURR. 1898. *Report of the Doobaunt, Kazan and Ferguson Rivers*. Annual Report of Geological Survey of Canada 1896. Report F. Ottawa.
- _____. (ed.). 1916. *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western North America 1784-1812*. Toronto: Champlain Society.
- _____. (ed.). 1934. *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor*. Toronto: Champlain Society.

Hugh Stewart
P.O. Box 288
Temagami, Ontario, Canada
POH 2H0