

# Solo Canoeing the Lower Churchill in Saskatchewan - August 7, 2011



July 29, a day after I made my film acting debut (can't tell you much, the producer wants a lid on publicity, but I had a bit part as an OLDER MAN with bad hair and beard and a worse attitude with a couple of great lines and it was great fun; our '73 VW camper had a far larger role) I headed north on a much looked forward to **week's solo canoe trip on the Churchill River**. There is nothing that irons out wrinkles in the soul ruffled by civilization as getting back to Nature.



I hitched a 30-mile ride up Long Bay which juts north from the river with the good folk from Slim's Cabins, arguably the largest outfitter on the river. I wish I had a picture of Sandi Woods aka Capt. Hook who was with us on the 2008 lower Churchill trip, whose family owns the 5-star operation. But when I got back, she was in Toontown. She looked great. And her dad, Jim, whose handshake could crush a rock, only charged me \$40 for parking for the week. That's Northern hospitality. A "favour" returned. Thank you Jim and Capt. Hook.



Besides plush cabins here - this is HQ - they have satellite cabins scattered well into Manitoba where Jim flies guests in his Cessna 180. Lots of Yanks are guests and Slim's having a banner year.



Talking about rocks - get a load of these garnets. They're not unknown in the Canadian Shield - Joe Tyrrell in 1896 wrote about a proliferation on a rock we found on the Mudjadik in 2006 - but some of these are bloody huge.



I'm a big fan of visual jazz - abstract art - and nowhere is it better displayed than in the Canadian Shield, the granite roots of mountains at one time believed as high as the Himalaya.



The winds were favourable - the first time in three - if there was a wind. I had near perfect paddling conditions in our Bell Yellowstone Solo. Man, is that thing fast and manoeuvrable - like a sports car. I can clip off 3 mph without breaking a sweat. With wind and current giving me a lift, my GPS said I stoked 8 mph at one point!



This is my favourite season to canoe. Both berries and mushrooms are in season. Blueberries, bunchberries, Saskatoon and *Boletus* or, as the wops call it, porcini. And there were a lot more, pincherries and low bush cranberries come to mind. Because I often tented in blueberry patches, I was happy to have my .12 gauge bear spray along and although the lads at Slim's warned there were a lot of black bears around, I saw none. Which is rare on the Churchill. They don't overly worry me anyway.



I was here to relax and recharge my batteries for another year. Here I am in my favourite place - my hammock - with a good book and the campsite I spent a leisure day doing nothing but kicking back, reading or flipping through my botanical books. One doesn't get an opportunity for solitude and reflection like this in civilization.





One of my books identifies this as an Indian Pipe. It's 4- inches tall and delicate.



In the city, you can't see the full glory of clouds. Here they dominate, an always changing tapestry.



A few minutes later, different, with My Left Foot. And you, on your computer, can only enjoy a portion of the sky in these pictures.



Man, it don't get no better than this. Peace and quiet and tranquility and solitude and surrounded by beauty and the paddling is lazy. I didn't even mind having been eaten (left foot) by a bloodsucker. Hell, I've eaten enough of Nature - ducks, grouse, deer etc. I adamantly don't want to be cremated or buried when I croak. I want to be laid out in the bush to be recycled. Gawd knows, it's the only fair, decent - and natural - thing to do.



Campsites are most often 5-star on the Churchill.



I had caught a 3 pound jack here and had him on a chain and was about to fillet him when I thought I should snap a picture. As I headed up the slope to the tent for my camera he kicked - and rolled down the steep slope into the river! Someone is going to catch a jack with a metal chain dangling from his bottom lip and will have a story to tell. For me? I made a few casts and nailed these walleye..



The Churchill here - near the Manitoba border - is powerful, big water. Somewhere in here is that jackfish with the metal beard....



While relaxing in my chair, a family of 12 mergansers dipped around the corner. They're an *extremely* wary duck, unlike the grouse around two campsites which were almost pets.

I remained motionless and got a rare chance to study their behavior through binocs.

They're a beautiful, magnificent, intelligent bird.



Canadian sunset. Goo' night! I slept 10 hours a night on average!