

**The David Thompson Explorers Club Flag #51 Expedition -
Phase 1- June 16-20, 2013**



Who was explorer David Thompson?



Joe Tyrrell, no small explorer himself, described him as the "greatest land geographer who ever lived." And the most crucial turning point in his incredible career took place here in Saskatchewan. Let's set the scene:

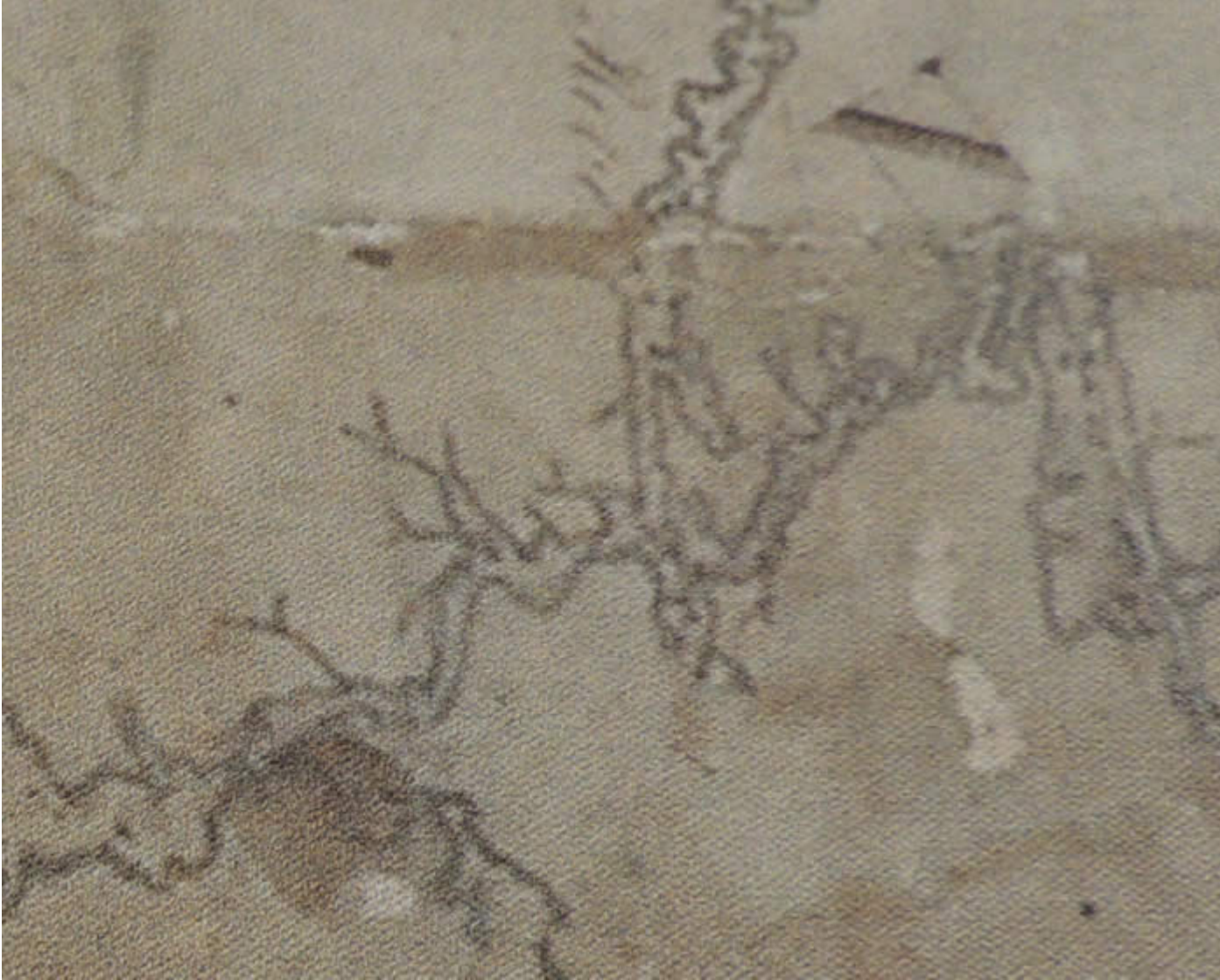




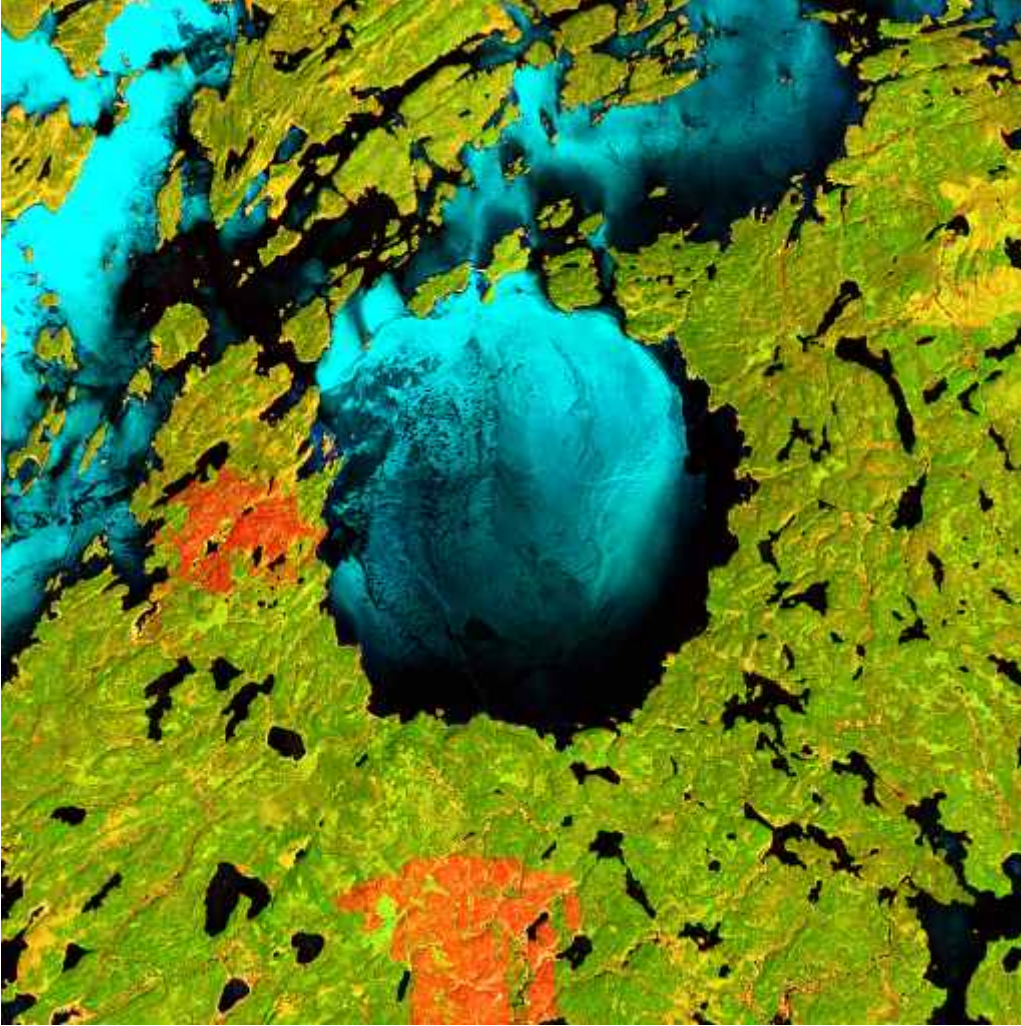
The southern half of the province is all flat grain fields and potash mines. But the top half is made up of 100,000 pristine lakes and rivers—one of the last great wildernesses on the planet—a thin population of mostly Cree and Dene natives, uranium, gold and diamond mines but otherwise virtually unchanged since the halcyon days of the fur trade and exploration. Then—this was where it was at. The southern half, with few furs (and little wood for either homes or fuel to heat them, as believed then), had no economic value.



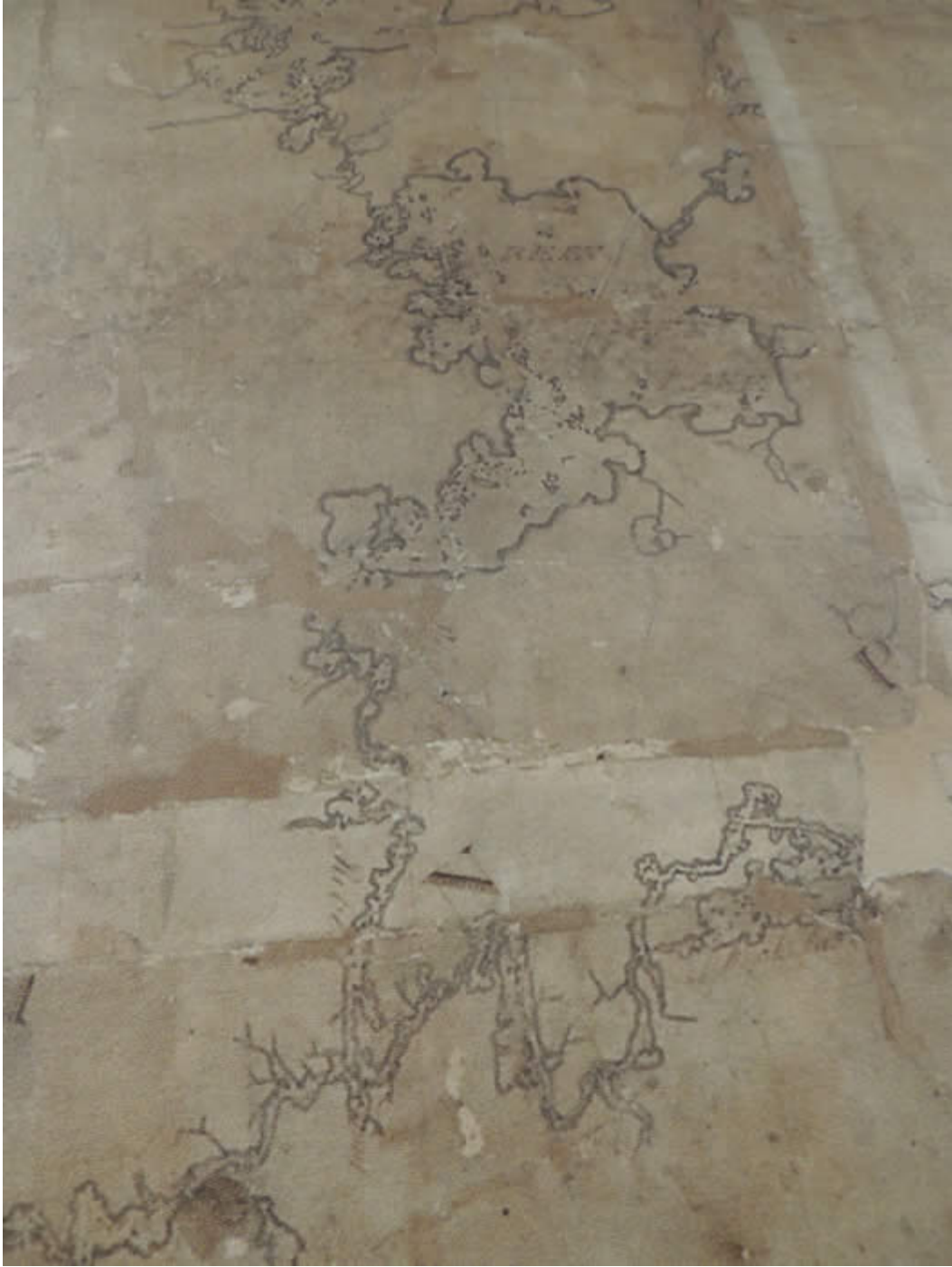
And here's where it's at in this Blah Blah. At the top is Wollaston Lake, which leads north to Lake Athabasca and, ultimately, the Arctic Ocean. Not shown is the river connecting the bottom of Wollaston with huge, elongated Reindeer Lake. At 140 miles long Reindeer is North America's 10th largest lake; with 2,500 islands, it's one of the most beautiful; in 2006 I paddled its length, penning an article for *Paddler* magazine and some photos from that appear here. From its bottom flows the Reindeer River down to the Churchill River - "the main highway of the fur trade and exploration" - which pours across the bottom of the picture. That junction, that Confluence, is an important part of this expedition and blog.



This rendering, which looks like an anatomy drawing by Da Vinci, of the Confluence is from Thompson's own famous 1814 Great Map (more on this later). In the fall of 1796 David "The Great Mapmaker" Thompson and his boss in the Hudson Bay Company, Malcolm Ross, with three canoes left **Fairford House** situated here and paddled north up the Reindeer River, hoping to find a viable route to the rich Lake Athabasca fur country.



Reaching Reindeer Lake, they paddled right by Deep Bay meteor crater, shown here in a sat shot. It's at the very bottom of the lake.



Thompson even included it his famous map.

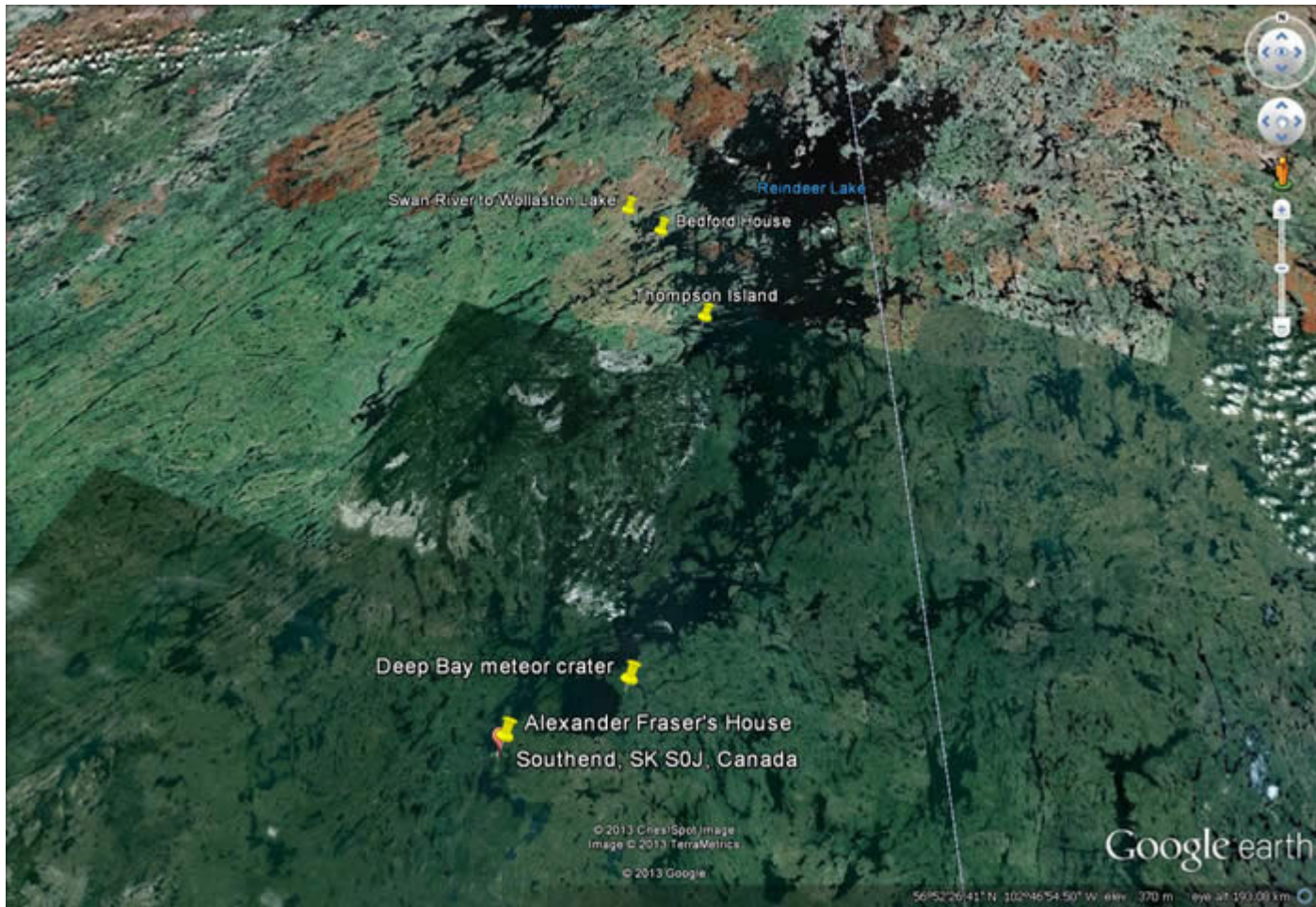


The bottom of the circular crater bay is obliterated on his map by time. I'm sure he had no idea what he was drafting onto his map, though he possibly wondered at the high sides. (I've been there twice.) With Thompson's enormous curiosity, one can imagine his jaw dropping to the bottom of his birch bark canoe if he only knew.



The only other lake as beautiful as Reindeer is Lake Huron's Georgian Bay.





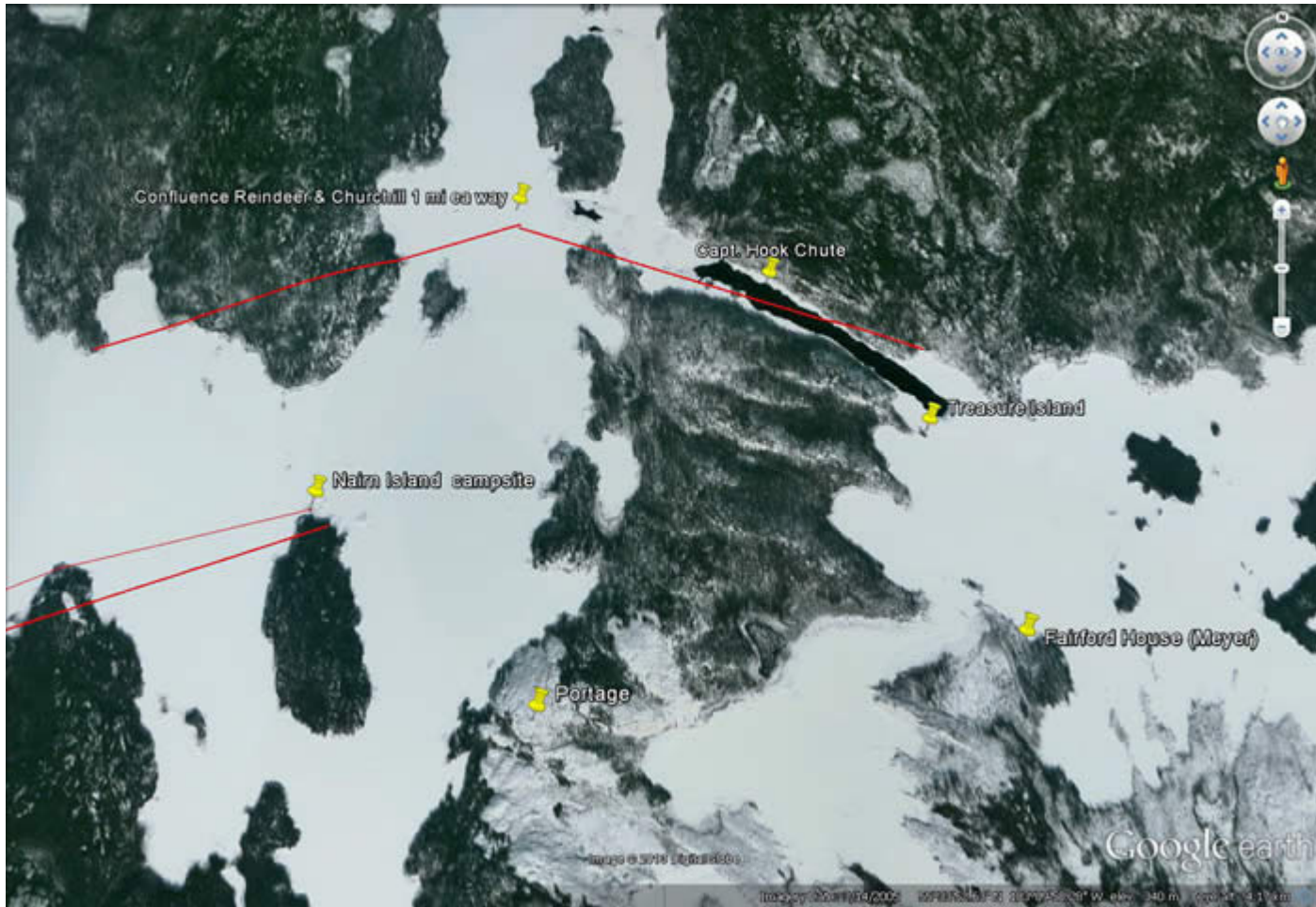
After being stymied by low water in the Swan River between Reindeer and Wollaston Lakes they were forced to retreat and build **Bedford House** nearby on the western side of Reindeer Lake to wait out the winter. It was the winter of Thompson's discontent for he reached the end of his patience with Ross and the HBC who, apparently, wanted to limit his explorations - for in the spring, in May 1797 he snowshoed the 80 miles down the lake to the mouth of the Reindeer River and to Alexander Fraser's rival Northwest Company House and changed companies.



It was the most momentous decision David Thompson ever made. He subsequently continued on to map *a million and half square miles* in a career that took in an incredible 52,000 miles of paddling.



His life's work culminated in his famous 1814 Great Map which is ensconced in the Ontario Archives at York University in Toronto. So accurate was it that it was used by the government for 100 years. It was an achievement that confirmed him the greatest of the terrestrial mapmakers and land explorers of all time.



The goals of this two-part expedition are to find the last two HBC posts Thompson stayed at. **Fairford House at the Confluence** we are confident of rediscovering as its 1974 discoverer, David Meyer, has generously pinpointed it on a map for us. David's a retired archaeological prof and a major fur trade and exploration researcher who has contributed to both the *Atlas of Saskatchewan* and the *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*. We, incidentally and coincidentally, graduated from high school in Carrot River in the same class (though he was the one with the straight A+s while I excelled as the top pool shark of our generation). This will actually be the second part of our search, July 20-August 4.

Fidler placed the post just back of a little bay!



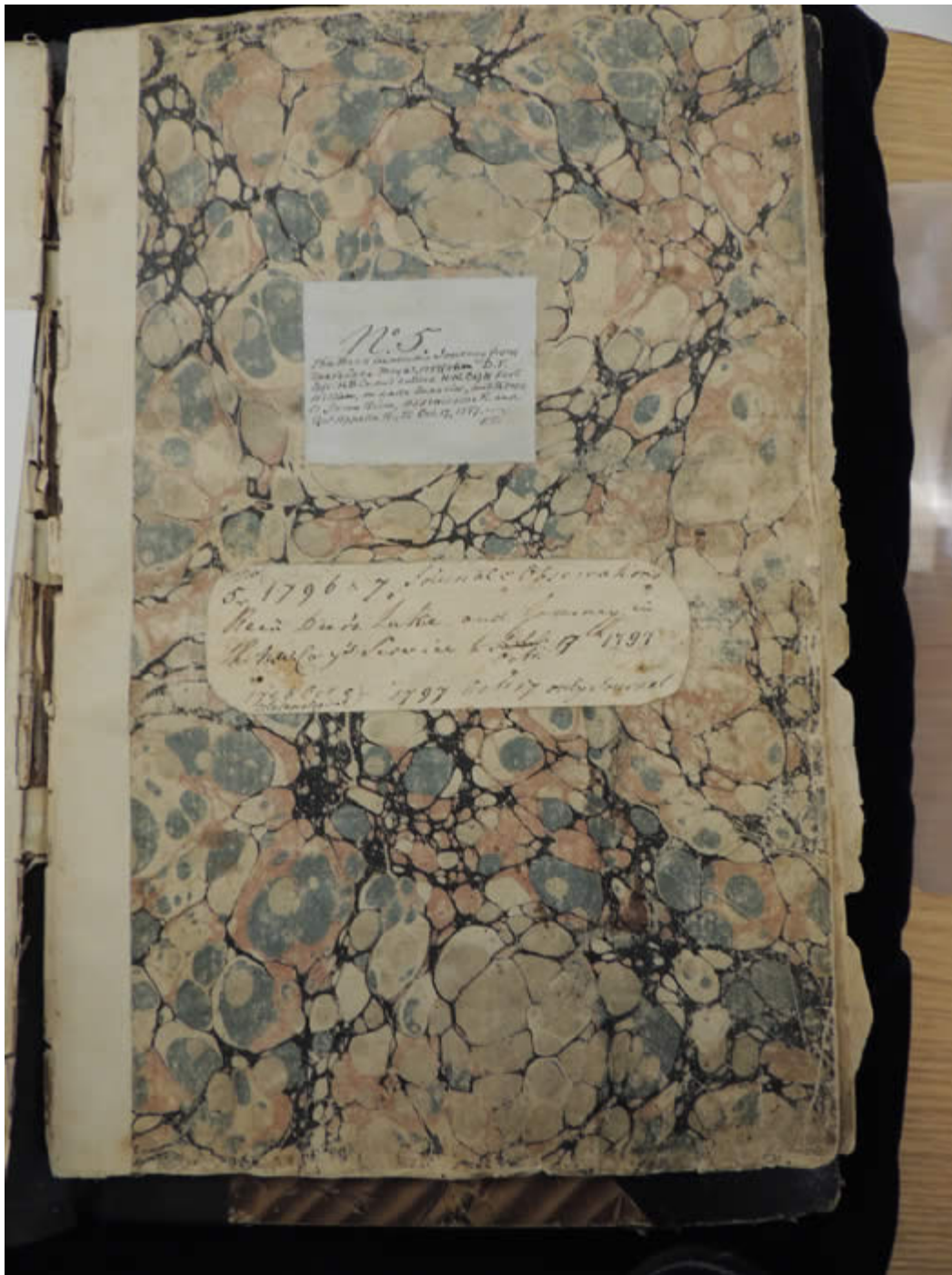
Excited, I fired up Google Earth. I don't think I blinked until I had honed in, unmistakably, on the site! Grabbing the phone, I called Doug Chisholm. Doug is famed in Saskatchewan for assisting families place bronze plaques on lakes, points, islands, bays and rivers honouring deceased veterans, and authoring *Their Names Live On* about it. No one knows north Saskatchewan better than Doug, and I know him from helping out with promotion during the early stage of his magnificent passion (which you can learn more about from his Woodland Aerial Photography website at <http://www.woodlandaerialphoto.com/>). I also knew about his deep interest in early exploration and the fur trade—an interest I fully share, having been leading cost sharing (up to) 12-person brigades here since the 1970s. We had already tossed about doing a search for both posts together, which sparked my research in the first place.



When I blurted out my find, he casually informed me that he had the map already! David Meyer's colleague Dale Russell, the other major scholarly researcher and a fellow contributor to the *Saskatchewan Atlas* and *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, had been feeding Doug notes, maps and information to help in his search! And this included the all important Fidler map! Indeed, Doug had flown there three times already on short expeditions but he had mistaken the nearby Swan River Post for the Bedford. He'd never told me any of this! But out of this Dale became an important mentor to me as well and, as Doug pointed out, we all arrived at the same conclusion about the actual site independently, which definitely has value.

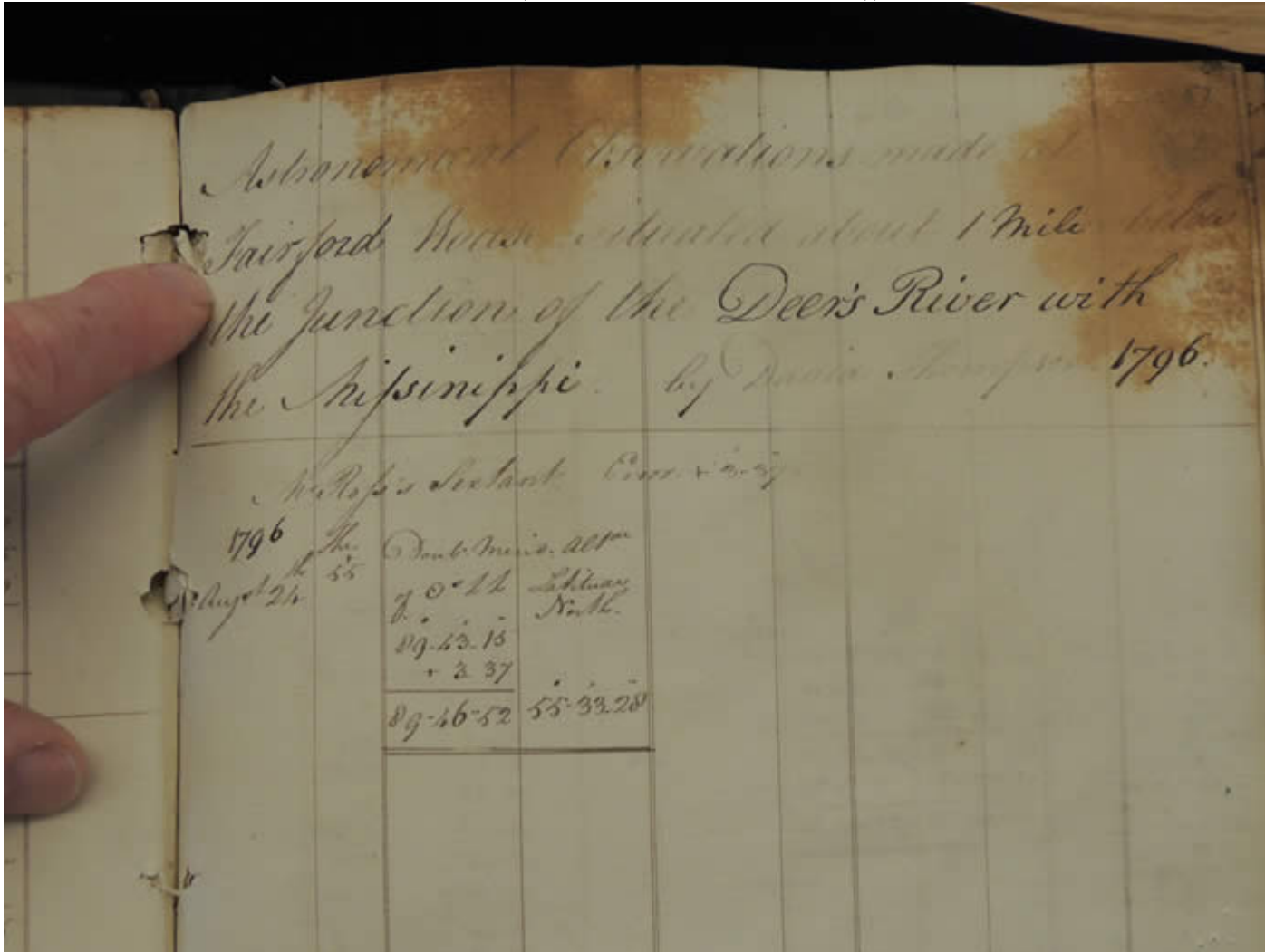


Thus was our expedition launched. We would fly up together with tent and gear. I applied to Club HQ in New York for a flag, the committee saw the value in the exploration, and awarded Explorers Club Flag #51 to carry with us. Flags have been carried everywhere from the moon by Neil and Buzz to the bottom of the Mariana Trench most recently by Jim Cameron. I also flew to Toronto and the Ontario Archives at York University.



No 5 1796 – 7 Journal & Observations
Reindeer's Lake an Journey in
The N.W.Co's Service to Oct 17, 1797
1796 Oct 9
Meteorological) – 1797 Oct 17 only Journal

I was delighted to be given access to original David Thompson Journals. (Here I have to take a jab, har har har, at **James Raffan**. He's also a fellow Explorers Club member and the author of several high profile and outstanding books on the fur trade. He admitted to me that he had to crank through "kilometers of reels" before he was given access to original material. I alluded to him that, the Archives staff all being female, it was because I was more handsome.) In these I found a wealth of information, such as Thompson's astronomical readings. (Permission from the Ontario Archives was required, and received, to publish all the research photos seen here and they ask that I credit them and include the following information so other researchers can easily find the same source: "Journal and Notebook No. 3" [1793-1797] (Archives of Ontario, F 443-1))



A Meteorological Journal kept at Bedford House
 Burns Lake 1796-7 by David Thompson.

Latitude 57° 23' N Longitude 103° West. 1792-4. 01-35 W

1796					1796							
Date	Hour	Ther	Wind	Sea	Weather	Date	Hour	Ther	Wind	Sea	Weather	
Oct 9 th	11 AM	46	SW	1/2	Clear	Oct 20 th	7 AM	22	SE	1/2	Cloudy	
	noon	50	"	1/2	"		noon	30	"	1/2	"	
	2 PM	54	"	1/2	"		2 PM	33	SE	1/2	"	
	3	50	Calms	"	"		3	28	"	1/2	"	
	4	42	W. S. W.	1	Cloudy		21 st	7 AM	14	NW	1/2	"
	11 AM	32	W. S. W.	1	Cloudy		noon	27	"	1/2	Snow	
	noon	25	"	1/2	"		2 PM	23	"	1/2	Cloudy	
	2 PM	27	West	1/2	"		3	10	West	1/2	Clear	
	3	22	Calms	"	"		4 th	7 AM	10	"	1/2	Cloudy

While the latitudes were both dead on (well, Bedford was a bit off), the longitudes, understandably, were less accurate and both fixed a point significantly further to the west. Still, they were a help in confirming we were in the ball, er, lacrosse park. I could have brought the Journal with this info in on inter-library loan from HBC Archives in Winnipeg but I went to the Ontario Archives to get as close to Thompson as I could. And the best way would be to see and hold his original Journals, to study his handwriting, to see exactly how he laid out things - and to see his Great Map - all with raw eyes. But there was another reason. I remember when I was doing genealogy and a court house in Missouri claimed they had sent me copies of *everything* they had. Well, when I got there I was stunned to discover the lazy clerk had been lying through her false teeth. I found *bundles* of records on my ancestry she was too lazy to xerox - including the invaluable signature in pencil of my ggg-grandmother Almira who was born in 1836! If you want something done right, do it yourself.... Here, I didn't know what, if any, surprises I might find that weren't in the reels. That James had to use. James Raffan. The guy who runs the Petersborough Canoe Museum. Big time author.



One major curiosity was the relative accuracy of Thompson's and Fidler's independent readings. Thompson's was 1.4 miles off while Fidler's was 7 miles off the mark, though it appears that it was a throw away reading as only the "103" degrees is written on his map. In his favor, Fidler's latitude was spot on while Thompson's was, inexplicably, half a mile south of the line. I say inexplicably because Thompson was a major anal retentive about numbers and record keeping and he shouldn't have made that mistake. Being a bible thumper and teetotaler, he was known as a bit of a pain in the ass around the campfire, much unlike the much more gregarious Alex Mackenzie who enjoyed a good party. He was the first, in 1793 just three years earlier, to reach the Pacific overland (via the Churchill River), several years before Lewis and Clark. The same discrepancy to the left, or west, occurred with Thompson's shoot at Fairford. This isn't to be wondered at since the accuracy of early chronometers left something to be desired.



I wanted to know what was going on in Ross' head, and the full circumstances and I was helped in this by Dale. Immediately after our June expedition, he contacted his brother Jeff who was visiting in Winnipeg asking him to research the HBC Archives, which he kindly did. Dale reported, "*Altogether, there were two buildings and a warehouse. Hard to say how many chimneys - it would seem there was only one for each house. It is not clear if they made trenches for the canoes or not.*" And here's what Jeff summarized from Ross's Bedford Journal regarding the establishment of Bedford:

"NOTE (from Jeff's previous emails): Ross had returned from the aborted trip up Swan River on Sept 12/96 to find the house was half up [seemingly 20 x 24 or 26 feet]. They finished the warehouse on Sept 20. Ross had mentioned building chimneys on Sept 23/96 and then they moved into the main house on Oct 1/96. Throughout there are only vague references to men working at building.

Oct 11/96: the people moved into their House last night

Oct 14/96: Cutting greass [grass] for Covering the Canoes with to prevent the wet snow geting at them

[the early traders mention digging trenches and covering the canoes with grass, etc. for the winter. Later traders seem to have only covered them and (^Ross's group) don't mention trenches. It would seem that Ross's men did not make trenches, but it is not at all clear]

Oct 15/96: the men repairing their chimney on account of smoke

Oct 17/96: men working indoors at their bed places

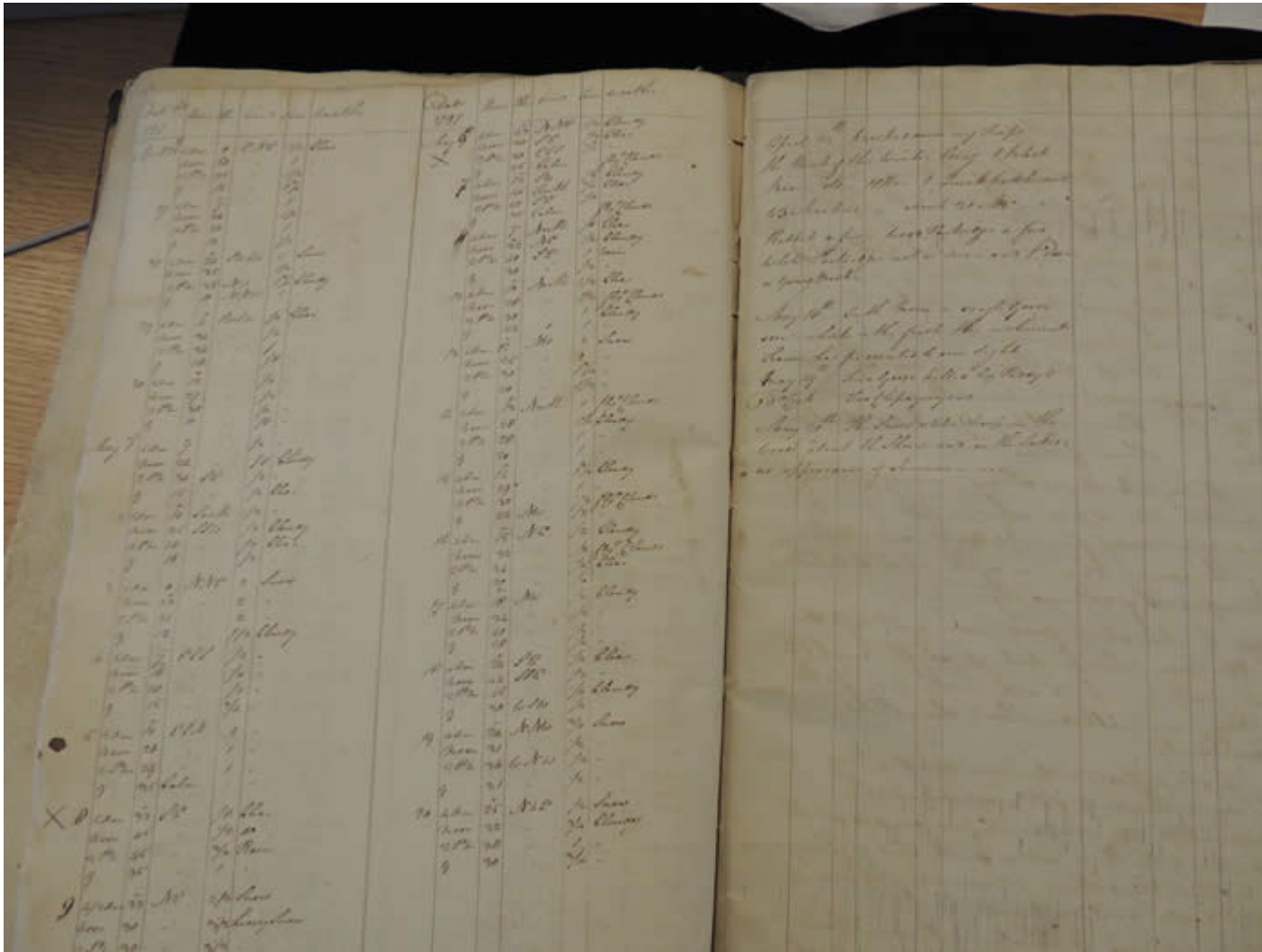
Oct 19/96: gets birch for making stages

- [making fish-drying frames]

Oct 20/96: puting by the Canoes

- [i.e. for the winter]

Oct 22/96: getting more birch for stages. Myself, Thompson, and Park making snowshoe frames."



I burned to know what was going on in Thompson's head that last momentous winter. His Journal (above from the Ontario Archives) began with 8 pages of precise, 4-times-daily meteorological observations. The season started with a pleasant autumn and even Nov. 1 it popped up to +35F. But it dropped and rollercoasted from two days posting lows of -49F, to a Christmas high of -11, and January dipping to the coldest reading of 50 on the 20th. March came in like a lion but by the 31st it was a lamb of +44. "Rime," or hoar frost, was frequently reported. It was a tough winter, as Ross recorded in his Journal for the "15 English men of us and two women and 3 Childering." That Ross reported building multiple chimneys gave us something more to search for because that's all we expected to find - mounds of boulders from the fireplaces, and perhaps indentations where cellars were dug, if possible as this is Canadian Shield country. There are very few Thompson Journal notes, since Ross was keeping the main record. However, the glimpses of Thompson we get, according to Dale, in Ross' Journal reveal a "difficult man." I'm not surprised.



Dale provides background on the crucial, climactic period in the spring:

“Fraser (NWCo) had meant to come up from the south end to Bedford in the fall of 1796 but couldn't get a pilot. He showed up on April 6/97 with 5 men so he could intercept as much of the HBC trade in winter furs as possible. Apparently, he remained after Thompson left, although Ross makes no further mention of him, according to my notes.

Fraser's presence undoubtedly precipitated the break and one can imagine hushed conversations between the two men in the woods as they negotiated a deal. The final break must have been with considerable tension and bad feelings, but it was never recorded.

“Thompson mentions that Bruce and a young Canadian left with him for the south end of Reindeer on May 23/97. They walked over the ice. It is clear from other entries in his fieldbook that there were also several Dene with him. Ross himself says that Thompson left with 2 Frenchmen and two Indians.”

April 25th knocked down my traps
the Hunt of this winter being 1 black
bear - 1 otter - 1 quickhatch and
23 martins - about 21 [?] -
Rabbits a few - wood Partridges a few
white Partridges not a [?] and 1 Deer
a young buck -

May 10th In the morn a single Goose
seen which is the first this inclement
Season has presented to our sight -

May 13th Two Geese killed by Paddy &
D^r Cook - Two Chapaywians -

May 20th The Snow still Deep in the
woods about the shores and on the lakes;
no appearance of summer -

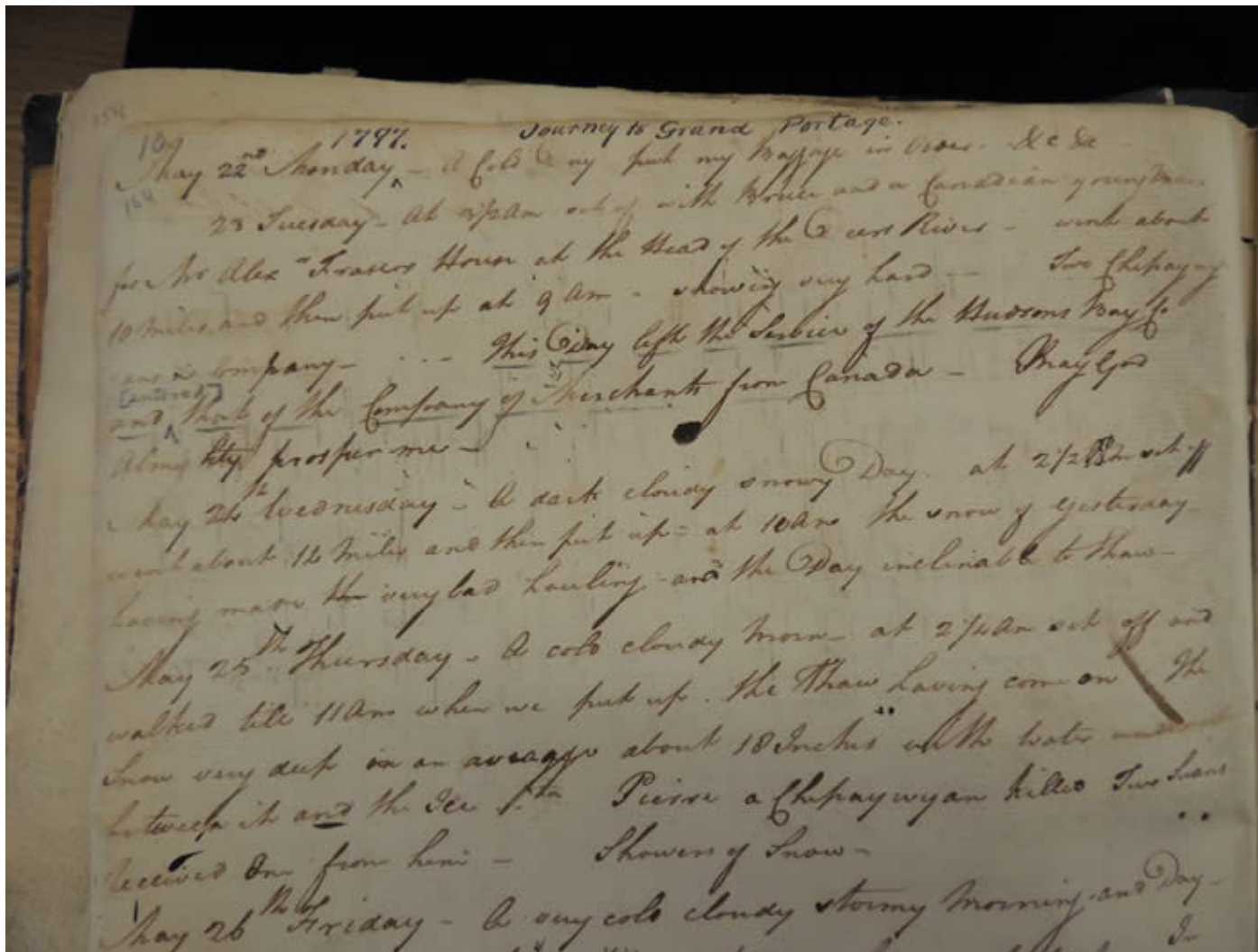
Thompson picked up his Journal April 25:

"April 25. "Knocked down my traps. The hunt of this winter being of black bear, ?, 1 otter, 1 quickhatch (wolverine) and 23 martins, about 21 ?. Rabbits a few, wood partridges, a few white partridges, not a ? and 1 Deer a young buck.

"May 10 In the morn a single goose seen which is the first this inclement Season has presented to our sight

"May 19 Five geese killed by Paddy & ?, two Chipawwyans." Paddy, of course, was with him on the first adventure north towards Athabasca when he almost drowned in what is now Thompson Falls on the Fond du Lac, and then almost starved to death because they lost most of their equipment. Kasdaw was the other, and is perhaps the other Chip. I've been there, and tried to reconstruct in my mind the event, which was difficult.

"May 20 The Snow still deep in the woods about the shores and on the Lakes; no appearance of summer" and it trails off, the last of his very short Journal from Bedford. A new page - a new Journal - opens overleaf which outlines the crucial days of decision and which includes the most famous sentence he ever wrote, the last line on 23 Tuesday. It's underlined by a later researcher, perhaps Tyrrell who resurrected Thompson's Journals from obscurity, edited and published them a century ago:



“May 22 Monday – A cold day - put my baggage in bow etc etc”

*“23 Tuesday - at 3 1/2am ? of with Bruce and a Canadian young man for Mr. Alex Frasers House at the Head of the Deer River – went about 10 miles and then put up at 9am – snowing very hard. Two Chipayways in company – **This Day left the service of the Hudsons Bay and** (^entered – added in pencil by a third party) **that of the Company of merchants from Canada - May God Almighty prosper me.***

“May 24 Wednesday A dark cloudy snowy day. at 2 ½ ...off went about 12 miles and then put up at 10am. The snow of yesterday having made for very bad hauling and the Day inclinable to thaw –

“May 25 Thursday A cold cloudy morn – at 2 ¼ out off and walked til 11am when we put up. The thaw having come on. The snow very deep an average about 18 inches with water between it and the ice. Pierre a Chipaywyman killed Two Swans received one from him – Showers of snow.

“May 26 Friday – A very cold cloudy stormy morning and Day – at 2 in set off – went in ? 10 1/2am when we put up. In the evening the clouds cleared away from NW to SE and we had once more a sight of the reviving Sun – a sight which I believe we had not seen for upward of 23 Days before –

“May 27 Saturday – a clear sharp frosty morn – at 2 1/2am set off and walked till noon when we put up at the Birch Point - sounded some water – wind still northerly – for the last 3 miles of this day we walked without snowshoes – saw several geese and ducks.

“May 28 Sunday – a sharp frosty still morn and fine Day. The wind Northerly then veered round to SSE and a small gale – at 2 ¾ am set off and walked til 11/ ½ am when we arrived at the House...Three Hen/hew/? At The House and a small tent of Chipawwyman walked all this Day without snowshoes – saw many geese - ? and dried the Bundles we brought with us...The ? Trout paid 2 beavers of Mr. Simon Frasers Credit – gave him a note specifying the same and that ? in meat is yet unpaid –Two or 3 martins for 5 Inches of the narrow ? – 1 beaver whole and 2 half or a pair of leggings of the above common ? – gave the Trout ? inches of

Tobacco a flint and ½ pint of grog – Paid the two Chipaywyans who guided us here and who hauled two sleds – 2 pints of pure Rum in grog...the Trout afterwards traded his leather Frock and a moose leather skin for Rum....”



He paused here at what is now Southend at the bottom of Reindeer Lake, now a town of 904 in the 2011 census, and the start of Reindeer River. (Here with mostly Bangkok friends when we paddled the river in 2008.) He remained settling in and hunting til June 6 when he struck off *“from the House into the lake No 1/4 m. & down the main river...to the point on which stand the ? Houses of ? Frasers”* to arrive June 11 *“to the junction of the Deer River with the Misinippe. The Deer River has now the least water in it, that I have seen it have, yet it is still a fine deep navigable River every where and exceeds the English River (Churchill) singly by much in quantity of water it throws out”*

He was now fully a member of the NWC and at the Confluence would have turned right – and not left to the HBC’s Fairford House – but rather towards Frog Portage to continue the journey to the lakehead to meet his new bosses, who would confirm his desire to do what he burned to do: explore for the rest of this career (which would, in economic terms, extend the NWC's trading reach).



Dale Russell: *“Ross didn't leave Bedford until July 2/97, when most of the ice had gone out, although they still had serious troubles with ice coming south.*

“I have no further mention of Fraser (Ross did say he was expected to summer at the south end). Thompson doesn't mention him at the south end where he spent May 28 - June 7. Ross doesn't mention him at Bedford nor at south end of Reindeer where Ross stayed overnight on July 8. Ross left 2 men there with goods who were to rendezvous with him later in the summer on the Churchill.

“I expect Fraser remained at Bedford and left shortly after Ross once the ice was better cleared out. Since Fraser had walked up the lake on the ice, they would have had to build canoes at Bedford- unless he got his men at the south end to send one or two up after the ice went out. I suspect the latter.”

Of special interest is that Ross didn't paddle down until July 2 for it took that long for the ice to go out! Today and for anyone's memory, the ice is invariably out a month earlier.



Doug and I flew the 170 miles from Saskatchewan's northern "capital" of Lac La Ronge June 17 in his mint 1954 Cessna 180. As the retired maintenance chief for the water bomber fleet, and with the majority of his 5000 plus hours in the plane he's owned for over 35 years, I had complete confidence flying over so much (beautiful) wilderness and drinking water (and we drank right out of it of course). Doug lives to fly.



It had clouded in by the time we reached the Bedford Post site after 1.5 hours in the air.



We set up camp at a tiny beach with a bit of a clearing 10 minutes away. That's my new blue Wanderer II tent from MEC, our second. Excellent tent.



We phoned Dale. Although 73-years-old, his voice was as excited as a 10-year-old's to hear from us and that we were in the field. It makes one's day when you know you've made someone else's.



Our prime target search area was approximately 150X250 meters. After setting up camp, we did a preliminary survey of the field but left the main exploration for the following day. That evening, we roughed it with beef tenderloins, followed by Lagavulin-16 and Cohebas before hitting the sack. Because of the latitude, it was light virtually all night - and all night it *poured!* I feared for our expedition. But the rain propitiously cut back by the time it was bacon-and-eggs and coffee time.



"Mowing the lawn" in a systematic fashion in this crap proved impossible so we split up and did the best we could. In most sections it was like being an ant in a field of pick-up-sticks. You could hide a fire engine in this jungle and we were looking for mounds of rocks from those fireplaces, all that would be left after 200-plus-years of forest fires and time.



The search was made much more difficult because the site proved to be a major glacial dumping ground. Whereas a mound of rocks from a collapsed chimney - when the rocks had to be carried in from a stream or shore - would stand out like a sore thumb even if moss covered, the damn things were *everywhere*! I nixed this assembly of rocks as the site because they were flat to the ground and the surrounding ground had erratics everywhere. The cabin sites would have been cleared of rocks, on flat ground, and not in a drainage path when spring melt came.



In fact, an esker ran atop the ridge back of the bay.



The view from the ridge towards the small bay. Between the pick-up-sticks, thick larch and spruce scrub and - at lower levels - Labrador tea, the sloging was bloody tough. Everything was wet of course.



And got more so as massive explosions of thunder began to tremble the water and lightning pealed across the blackening sky. We retreated to take a break and wait it out.





When it came we were pummeled by hail, cold rain and wind - and Doug had forgotten his rain gear, though he didn't mutter a single complaint. If you can be cold, wet, tired, miserable and stuck out in the middle of nowhere - and a level of you still enjoys it, you have the makings of an explorer. That, or else you're nuts. Or both.



Afterwards, it was back into the jungle. Note my soaked pant leg. This row of rocks was the only possible human construction I found - but, again, the surrounding terrain was littered with those damned erratics and I couldn't see a purpose for the row. They would surely have removed erratics from cabin sites so they weren't stubbing their toes in their moccasins.



In the end we struck out.



We were pooped and disappointed. A distinct possibility exists, Dale warned us, that it's underwater. A dam built on the Reindeer River in 1942 raised the lake level 10-15 feet. We had covered the target area thoroughly, and expanded considerably out from it. The bread crumb trail on my GPS looked like that of a drunk voyageur after he'd been paid off for the season and had dived into a keg of grog. The GPS also showed that I'd pushed through almost 3.5 miles of this rough country.



Flag #51. In over 50 years it's been on expeditions from the South Pole to Greenland to Panama - including two cave expeditions with old friends the late **Jim Chester** and **Ron Zuber**.



The next morning it was clear and before we flew out, we did several low sweeps over the sites and Doug shot high res shots which we will study, looking for human anomalies. We may have lost this game, but the season ain't over. There's the possibility the site could be further back than we checked out. They weren't here for the view, but being deep in the jungle gave them a full radius for conveniently scoring firewood.



Mission unaccomplished, we swung over to Swan Lake Post which operated in the early part of the last century. Landing, we found rusting tin cans and excavations for homes and out buildings and the like. Amazingly, the site hadn't grown in, but we were close to the land of the little sticks. Few trees were of any great height.



Flying back, we passed the Wathaman River, infamous for its rough rapids.



At the top is the donut shaped Gow Lake meteor crater, an important early aeronautical nav aid.



As a columnist for *Westworld Magazine* in the mid-'70s, I interviewed archaeologist Tim Jones - *the expert* - for a piece on the Hickson-Mirabella pictographs cliffs in this channel, with the highest concentration in the Canadian Shield.



I always wanted to see them...and I didn't want to paddle. The major portage is forever long. Doug hadn't seen them close up either - which must be the only site in the north he hasn't - and the winds for landing were right up the chute, favorable.





We also dropped down to Bill Layman and Lynda "Dutchy" Holland's Bob Lake. They're famous for their marathon canoe expeditions to The Barrens. Lynda, as a major Dene researcher, has published books on them; and both appeared on an episode of John Lovelace's *Wings Over Canada*. We knew Bill'd been up the Swan River, the one that turned Thompson and Ross back, and we wanted to learn what it was like. "It was hell. The lining upstream against a fast and very cold current went on forever, and this was a high water year. One step you're in knee deep water, the next you're up to your fucking neck." Reminds me of parts of the William. Dutchy startled me by bringing out a 1987

hardcopy of *The Bangkok Collection*, which she had read twice. I've said it before, I'm always flattered by how many times people have read it (and its namesakes, *Thai Gold* and *Nepal Gold*) more than once. Bestselling author Jack DuBrul still has the record, as far as I know, with 12 reads. He loosely modelled his Philip Mercer series protagonist and best buddy loosely on my Lee Rivers and Snake, as well as some of the humour and even scenes (which I don't mind, it's flattering, if it initially took me aback. Yank authors are into suing for things like that but I'm a Canuck, and I like Jack). Naturally, I signed Dutchy's book.



We were going to drop down to **Greg Marchildon's** as well. As another major scholarly researcher of the period and co-author of the instant classic *Canoeing the Churchill: A Practical Guide to the Historic Voyageur Highway*. I had sponsored him into The Explorers Club. I was hoping to enjoy cracking open that bottle of Scotch newbees traditionally buy their sponsors, toasting them into the Club and bonding in fine manner, but he obviously knew we were in the area and he was hiding. At least there was no boat at the dock.



So we flew on to La Ronge.



A requisite stop was to Robertson's Trading. The sign in the window ain't a joke. La Ronge is a bit on the wild side. One of the local hotel beer parlours is called The Zoo with very good reason.



It's one of the wonderful, rare general stores that's a partial museum, rich in regional character. Want an air tight stove? A cast iron hand pump? Skillets big enough to feed a lumber camp? Here with Scott Robertson, a close friend of Doug's, who helps keep native crafts alive by providing an outlet. The pile of white birchbark baskets to the left of Doug are \$50 each. But not all of it's for sale....



Those trader guys in that TV show, *Canadian Pickers*, flew up and it was apparently hilarious. Scott wouldn't sell them anything they wanted. Nope. Nope. Nope. With a "ding" after each of Scott's s Nopes. Mind you, if you want buckskin with beads (almost anything, that's for sale. (I miss Ribtors in Cowgary that had been around for a century, what a place.)



Their butcher, Guthrie Winn, has won so many blue ribbons for his sausages and they line the wall. Last time I was here I bought a muskox roast. I wanted another. He was apologetic. “Nope, I haven’t had any in a year.” “Yeah, that’s the last time I was in. Whadya have that’s exotic?” “Camel.” Camel? What the hell is camel doing in Lac La Ronge? He explains that it comes out of Hill Food in Vancouver. I know the place! I used to buy horse there 15 years ago; you see, a horse almost killed me when I was eight, so I relish eating them. Horse steaks are pink, major lean and tough, probably because it's old and it's either my plate or the glue factory. Back to the camel, Guthrie says off handedly: “I’ll sell it to you for cost, \$13 a kilo.” (That's cheap! Mind you, it's dead. But also camel doesn't seem to be a big seller amongst the Cree and Dene.)



Remembering **Exotics Chairman Gene Rurka's** delicious camel at the Exotics Table at The Explorers Club Annual Dinner at the Waldorf in New York in March, I bought 4 kilos in 2 roasts. We'll surprise dinner guests half way through the meal....



So I was still so happy I was walking on water. Phase 2 of the expedition starts July 20, with a 12-person brigade paddling to the Confluence searching for Fairford House.