



POWER FROM THE NORTH

Author: Robert Bourassa
Publisher: Prentice Hall, 1985 (\$17.95)
Reviewed by: Bill Ness

Québec is a vast hydroelectric plant in-the-bud, and every day millions of potential kilowatt hours flow downhill and out to sea. What a waste! (From the book's introduction.)

Canada is the beneficiary of 27% of the world's reserves of fresh usable water, and its rivers account for almost 10% of the flow of the globe's waterways. The province of Québec alone has 30% of this flow, most of it in rivers eminently suited to the production of hydroelectric power. However, at present only about 10,000 out of an enormous potential of 30,000 megawatts are being generated.

In this book Robert Bourassa presents his proposal for what he would term the "rational" development of these resources.

By way of background, and to emphasize Québec's record of success in hydro mega-projects, the early chapters are devoted to a history of Phase I of the James Bay project and the province's involvement with the development of Churchill Falls in Labrador.

While this section of the book provides a convenient and very readable historical overview, it is hardly an impartial appraisal. Not surprisingly, the author emerges as a staunch supporter of hydro development from the beginning, while the Parti Québécois is portrayed as the bad guy who wanted the province to jump on the nuclear bandwagon.

Also, needless to say, the very serious environmental issues that were raised concerning the James Bay project by both the native peoples affected and environmental groups are greatly glossed over.

A 2½ page section entitled "The Native People" largely presents the people who were to be uprooted and have their livelihood taken away as impediments to the march of progress, the people who tried by their legal shenanigans to thwart the powers that be, in spite of the government's generous offers of compensation.

As for the environmentalists, their arguments are summarily disposed of with Bourassa's simple logic:

It is well known today that with regard to the environment the development of water resources is much better than the development of nuclear power or of fossil-fueled power. In fact, the positive impact of the James Bay project has been far greater than any negative impact.

In spite of the author's assurances that the James Bay Energy Corporation is committed above all to protecting the environment and that its decisions are subject to review by various environmental advisory bodies, its response to the drowning of some 10,000 caribou on the Caniapiscau River in September 1984 has raised a stench that continues to haunt it.

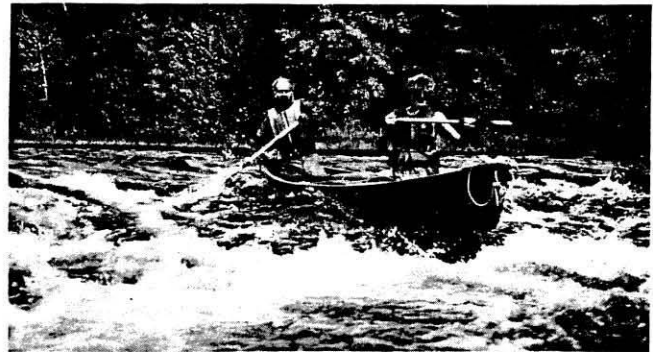
But, the writer of this book is a man of vision, and it is unlikely that he would allow such minor unsavory episodes to mar his grand design. Bourassa wants to capitalize on the current popularity and success of Phase I of the James Bay project to bring all phases of the development to completion without delay, and to begin the harnessing of the rivers on the North Shore. His ultimate goal is the conversion of the rivers of Northern Québec into one enormous integrated hydro generating complex.

The purpose is not to satisfy local needs but to export to power-hungry New England, and to this end no effort is spared in persuading Americans that they should buy cheap, reliable, politically secure power from Québec. New Englanders worried about acid rain, Three Mile Island, and the whims of Middle Eastern despots may well be inclined to agree with his argument.

To complete the rational utilization of Québec's water resources, the author is also proposing the adoption of the GRAND (Great Recycling and Northern Development) Canal plan created by Montreal engineer Thomas W. Kierans in the 1930s which would in eight years convert James Bay into a dyke-enclosed fresh water lake at a current projected cost of five billion dollars. This water would be routed south to flush out the polluted Great Lakes and provide water to the American Northeast and Midwest where it is even now in critically short supply.

From sea level, the water would be pumped to a height of 285 metres via stepped reservoirs or aqueducts, for a total of about 275 kilometres within the Harricana River Valley. From the height of land near Amos, Québec, it could be transferred across a short canal to the Upper Ottawa River near Val D'Or. It would then flow southward and be transferred to Lake Nipissing and then, via the French River, into Lake Huron.

It is tempting to dismiss such ideas as fantasy, yet already the first phase of Bourassa's Power from the North project has become reality. We can be certain that, if he has any say in the matter, the full development of the hydroelectric potential of Northern Québec will continue apace, and for many of the great wilderness rivers of the region canoeists will sing the sad refrain: "So long, it's been good to know ya."



CANOE magazine

Publisher: Canoe America Associates; Kirkland, WA.
Reviewed by: John Winters

No one said the magazine business was easy. Particularly for special-interest types that wax and wane with the moods and fashions of the day. Some survive, not because they are particularly good, but because the topic has staying power and attracts new readers who have a use for what would be stale information to the "old-timer" in the audience. Such a magazine is CANOE.

Its slick, glossy pages can't cover up the feeling of 'déjà vu' that the two-year subscriber gets toward the end of his second year. Indeed, you have heard it before. The dead giveaway is the use of jargon and "in" words to camouflage old ideas and topics. The magazine editors' war cry is, "When you have nothing new to say, say it in a new way." Nowhere is this more obvious than in the so-called "technical" features where subjective comment is laced with a few buzz words and high-sounding but erroneous facts. Naval architects have gotten quite a chuckle out of a number of articles that professed to be "technically" oriented.

Is such writing simply the product of ignorance or do the editors know something about canoeing that they are reluctant to divulge? Perhaps there isn't anything new to say, and while they try to retain old subscribers through verbal subterfuge, they are directing their appeal to the novice who thinks the tenth article on canoe strokes is something new and exciting, or that KEVLAR and ABS really are the cutting edge of technology, or that modern canoes really are a breakthrough in design. We know or should know better.

So, is CANOE a good or bad magazine? Well, it's neither and both. It depends on your experience and gullibility. I am certain that it has a place in the canoeing world, but NASTAWGAN is a far more useful publication, even without the slant and full color.