

# Reception was 'overwhelming'



"I was told about it, but I didn't expect the jubilation. We started up the river. It was very quiet, like waiting for a gun to go off. We'd hear some clapping, and then quiet again. Then we could see all of the people. It was overwhelming for me: so many people and all so happy."

Sieve Ogden of Waverley, describing the arrival of himself and his 16 companions who paddled in 40 days from Quebec City to Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, arriving last Saturday afternoon.

The 16 men and one boy, who all volunteered to make the trip, a modern retracing of a trip made routinely at least once a year between Quebec City and Sainte-Marie in the early 1700s, when Sainte-Marie was an outpost of Jesuit missionaries among the native Huron Indians, were as happy to be home as their relatives, friends, co-workers and supporters were to see them.

As the four canoes approached the landing area in Sainte-Marie Park below Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, two soldiers from the Historic Naval and Military Establishments saluted them with musket volleys. People lined the far riverbank, the dock, the bridge embankment, and the bridge crossing the highway separating the park and the historic site. The hundreds of people who had been waiting in the heat of a cloudless July afternoon, spectators and those of the over 350 who took part in Shondecleu earlier in the day, left their picnics and chairs and pressed forward to meet the paddlers where they landed, until the crowd was shoulder-to-shoulder, those in front standing ankle-deep or more in mud and river reeds.

"Hello Friends of Sainte-Marie. Is it good to be here!" said Bill Byrick, co-ordinator of programs at Sainte-Marie, and one of the paddlers. Byrick said the trip was an incredible experience. He was sure that the Jesuits of the original Sainte Marie and their helpers felt as he and his companions did as they finished their long and sometimes arduous trip to Sainte-Marie, to be received by their friends. "Those original paddlers were incredible men. These guys were only going to work: once they got here, their work began. Many of them made the trip twice a year for a number of years."

Following a brief welcome, which included a prayer given by Fr. James Farrell of the Martyrs' Shrine, and the singing of songs and giving of speeches by the paddlers, each of whom kept to the character of the person from history who he was portraying, the paddlers continued under the highway and landed on the banks of Sainte-Marie, and attended a formal welcome outside the main gate.

Official welcomees included Premier William Davis, Minister of Tourism and Recreation Rueben Baetz, Simcoe East Solicitor-General George Taylor, Simcoe North MP Doug Lewis, chairman of the Council on Franco-Ontarian Affairs Roger Regimbal, Midland Mayor Moreland Lynn, and Friends of Sainte-Marie chairman Sandra Flint.

## Paddlers happy to finish trip

Members of the Destination: Sainte Marie group seemed last Saturday to be as excited that their 40 day trip by canoe from Quebec City by way of the St. Lawrence River, the Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing, and Georgian Bay, was over, as by the fact of the experience itself.

Father Stephen Sommerville, who assumed the character of an Italian priest, Pere Bressoni, said, "It's good to be back. As soon as I get home I'm going to sit in every chair in the house. I spent all of the time on the trip sitting on the ground."

Bill Byrick, who took the character of Robert LeCoq, a business agent who made the return trip 18 times in 10 years, said, "I'm glad that I went but never again." It was physically rough

but mentally worse, he said. "I was amazed at how comfortable the rocks were," he told a friend. "You find one with a hollow in it and just snuggle in."

Less pleasant memories for Byrick are five foot waves near Trois Rivieres on the St. Lawrence, a portage around the Lachine Rapids during which the paddlers took 15 hours to proceed 17 miles, and more five foot waves on Lake Nipissing. They wore life jackets all the time, even when they were being filmed by a film crew. The risk wasn't worth it, Byrick said.

Father Sommerville said their last week on Georgian Bay was "beautiful." The paddlers didn't have to put on shows for people and they could paddle at their own speed, he said.