



The subject of water had been given much discussion. We all accepted as gospel that to melt snow for water was not only inefficient, but produced a decidedly inferior grade of water. Consequently, on the first night, Craig, who is a skillful ice-chopper, chopped for 20 minutes to get through a metre of ice so we could drink swamp water which tasted as if we had boiled our socks in it. The second night the water was more palatable, but only about 5 cm deep. On the third night there was no prospect of a campsite where liquid water could be obtained, so we reluctantly melted snow. After that we never bothered to chop! The water was excellent, particularly if strained through a J-cloth to remove the twigs and leaves. If corn snow was used, and all the spare pots put to snow-melting, sufficient quantities were obtained in little extra time.

For the next three days we followed the winter road as it cut across the point formed by the Albany River estuary, and then remained inland separated from the bay by one or two "beach-ridges" - former James Bay shorelines left stranded by the gradual elevation of the bedrock. The weather remained clear and cold. The wind blew strongly at times, but we were usually protected by trees, and were thankful that we weren't out on the Bay exposed to the full force of the gale. One or two minor cases of frostbite however, reminded us not to relax our vigilance.

The "turning-point" of our trip, literally and figuratively, came at Cockespenny Point where we decided to abandon the road in favour of the Bay. We followed a side trail that led out to a microwave tower and suddenly, as we crested a small ridge and looked down through a gap in the trees, there was nothing but white as far as the eye could see. It was a dramatic moment and Fred's comment, "Here be dragons," seemed altogether appropriate. While we would have to come back in to shore each night for shelter from the wind and for firewood, we found the going much easier on the bay-ice which was usually covered with a thin layer of snow, packed so firmly by the wind that it seemed more the consistency of sand than the kind of snow to which we are accustomed in the south. Snowshoes were unnecessary. We were fortunate both with the weather and our direction of travel; when the wind was cold it usually was a north wind, and hence at our backs. Our one thoroughly bad day - a blizzard with the snow blowing straight in our faces - was also the warmest, about -5° .

Camping on the shore of the Bay presented its problems: mainly the lack of suitable wood. The relatively young forest lacked much dead wood and we were forced on

occasion to use rather punky poplar for tent poles and to burn alder faggots. This lack of good tent poles was responsible for one of our funniest (in retrospect) contretemps. I had just drifted off to sleep when one of the scissor-poles supporting the sleeping end of the tent broke, giving me a sharp rap across the head. I woke up in a daze wondering who had whacked me and, what's more, why! One of the real dangers with a hot stove in a tent is that of fire. Fortunately, two of the boys were still dressed and were able to run out and perform heroic reconstructive measures. Unfortunately, this resulted in the stove pipe coming apart and filling the tent with smoke. This occasioned an exchange of bad language, but eventually all was put right with nothing more permanent than a candle singe on the tent wall.

If shore campsites caused their problems, there were also rewards. Our loveliest campsite by far was the night when we decided to abandon standing firewood and dig for driftwood, and so camped right in the open on a little knoll overlooking the full sweep of the Bay. First we were treated to a huge, orange harvest moon slowly rising over the Bay, and then to a magnificent display of northern lights which shimmered with an iridescent green.

To the regret of all we eventually reached the point where to follow the Bay any farther would mean a long detour around North Point, while the road cut across directly to Moosonee. But first we had to get to the road! We selected a likely looking creek, whose name translated from the Cree as Skunk Creek. It was the last creek before the road turned away from the Bay, but finding it behind the beach ridges proved more difficult than we had thought. After a number of false starts and retreats we eventually found it, and promptly dubbed ourselves with the name which has become the permanent group title: The Skunk Creek Exploration Society. We stopped for lunch half-way up Skunk Creek and felt ourselves being observed. This was a common occurrence as the road was well-travelled by people picking up supplies from Moosonee on their snowmobiles; and at least one or two a day would pass us. Although they were always elaborately indifferent to us, we were surprised that everyone we spoke to in Moosonee already knew all about our trip. I think that there was a definite feeling of protectiveness toward those crazy Southerners who hadn't heard about snowmobiles. Certainly it wasn't long after we "disappeared" from the road, to go out on the Bay, that the MNR began making daily flights which would pass low over us to check on our position. It was hard to know whether to feel insulted or reassured.