

# HAWKROCK RIVER

Dave Bober

A little stab of envy plagues my heart whenever I read about those individuals able to make a month or longer dream come true in the Northwest Territories. Reading Herb Pohl's "North of Great Slave Lake" in the Spring '95 issue of *Nastawgan* left me drooling for the second instalment; and my friend, Ralph Zaffran, keeps me agitated with his exploits near or above the tree line.

But to my delight, I have attached myself to a small informal group known as the Saskatchewan Wilderness Paddlers, and the last four years we have enjoyed some great two- or three-week June trips. Even in Saskatchewan, June can be challenged by ice, but sometimes we beat the black flies — ester camping minus those tormentors equals heaven.

Canoe traffic in Saskatchewan, north of the Churchill River, is slight and there are still rivers that have not been recreationally paddled, although every navigable stream has certainly been travelled by the Natives and trappers trying to wrestle a living from the bush.

Bill Jeffery, our trip leader, often enjoys a birds-eye view from a plane as he services several northern

communities as a cross-country ski instructor for "Ski Fit North," a program designed for Native youth. Bill is constantly on the alert for prospective routes, often talking with the Native elders. The rest of us put our order in early: 15 to 20 days canoeing, great whitewater, and under \$500 bucks. The Hawkrock and Porcupine Rivers would fill our extravagant order to a T and 2 June 1994 found the four of us (Bill, Joan Jeffery, Daryl Sexsmith, and myself) bouncing up gravel Highway 905 to Points North Landing, west of Wollaston Lake. We were so eager to hit the river that the long, dusty drive hardly fazed us and with Bill at the wheel we really smoked that road.

Points North, a haphazard conglomeration of make-do buildings and hangars, is a freight forwarding depot for several Native communities between Black Lake and Uranium City, as well as for mining interests and fly-in fishing lodges in both Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories.

We were on a roll and within 15 minutes of reaching Points North we were airborne in a Single Otter for the 28-mile hop into Ward Creek, the Hawkrock headwaters. From the air a significant amount of ice smiled at us from Waterbury Lake and our first glimpse of Ward Creek told us it was, indeed, a tiny stream. By 9:30 p.m. camp had been established on a small nameless lake surrounded by young jack pine and a toast offered to health and the river. The bright blue sky, lack of bugs, and tranquillity was almost too much for the senses — only the same morning we had been rushing through bustling Prince Albert and now we were camped in paradise! Sleep came almost instantly; even the nighthawks, loons, and murmur of rapids could not keep my mind focused.

By 6 a.m. everyone was wide awake — June was busting out all over — who could linger in the sack? Early June tripping does possess an invigorating appeal: the newness of life, from the tiny fresh leaflets on the scrub birch to the flurry of waterfowl activity, and a sky that is so blue and clear that you can't help but hum a song in appreciation of being alive with good friends in such a pristine country. Each morning is pure anticipation and it seems the human body and spirit are charged with potent energy, even as the lengthening days rush toward the summer solstice.

The high water of spring was a bonus and our apprehension of finding enough water in Ward Creek soon evaporated as

