

# KAZAN SOLO

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In the fall of 1995, I started seriously considering the idea of challenging the wind and ice of the Inuit Ku (River of Man) — if I could manage to get four weeks vacation. Trip reports and books on anthropology and ecology spurred my enthusiasm until I was almost obsessed with the idea. Farley Mowat's book *People of the Deer* made this area come alive for me.

On 14 July 1996, the huge jet plane landed on a makeshift air strip on top of an esker at Kasba Lake Lodge. The Lodge had earlier made me a deal I could not refuse, and when I arrived the manager rolled out my canoe and gear. He had picked them up a month earlier at my home on his way north to the lodge. The 16-foot, home-built, fibreglass canoe used on previous trips, outfitted with airbags, a Perception solo seat for kneeling, and a sail I had made at the last minute, looked fine.



When I left the dock a 4:30 in the afternoon, I had the peculiar feeling that everyone doubted my ability — and so did I after struggling in a headwind around islands and bays until 8 p.m. However, I soon was in the flow of the Kazan and the first expected portage didn't materialize. (Because of my attitude, skill level, and the water levels I experienced, I managed to run every rapid on the river except the exit rapid out of Thirty Mile Lake; when I got there, I was not on the side recommended as the easiest route.) A short portage at some falls and two short portages around two cascades immediately after dispelled a lot of myths of long, exhausting portages through knee-deep muskeg. I used as a guideline a travel report "Travelling the Kazan" by Anne B. Spragins-Harmuth which was published in *Nastawgan* (Summer 1991).

I sailed and hiked and took pic-

tures of many inukshuks, ancient tent rings, and graves. With the silence of the canoe, I could sneak up to and observe herds of muskox and caribou. Wolves, snow geese, sandhill cranes, and sunsets were beautiful sights in the distance. The tundra which covered the ground like an aromatic carpet, was very soft underfoot and filled the lungs with fresh air.

My Magellan 2000 GPS position finder guided me through some very difficult terrain and around bays and islands to the hidden outlets of the river. I thought of it as imperative to my survival, but on the fourth day of my trip it fell into the water, rendering it useless. Even though I had taken a map and compass course just prior to my departure, my knowledge wasn't as strong as I'd hoped when faced with this situation. Luckily, I met and joined in their campsite two trippers who had ended their two-week excursion on a beautiful sandy

peninsula and were waiting for a plane from Kasba Lake Lodge to return them to civilization. I appreciated their hints on compass navigating and accepted their kind offer of their remaining food, which added greatly to my limited variety. The next morning, I proudly sailed off at a good speed, only to be windbound a couple of hours later when the wind changed.

I wasn't to meet anyone for two weeks after that, until I reached the water resources cabin a few kilometres above Kazan Falls. A Parks Canada archaeological survey crew out of

Ottawa was there, documenting ancient Inuit signs of habitation, such as tent rings, graves, stone blinds, and Inukshuks. I was invited to have a vegetable soup for lunch with them as they had made the cabin their restaurant. There was no meat in the soup because the party was waiting for supplies, which were being picked up in Baker Lake by two Inuit. Little did I know that I would later be windbound in a tent with them for

