The Lost Pictograph Expedition
Explorers Club Flag #53
July 25-August 6, 2015
Our field was the south end of Saskatchewan’s northern Reindeer Lake.

The most beautiful in the world.

In the heart of the Canadian Shield, with gorgeous, 2.5 billion-year-old veined rock like this everywhere, polished smooth by mile-and-a-half thick glaciers that scoured the landscape.
And it’s huge—second largest in Saskatchewan, ninth in Canada, 160 miles long and with thousands of islands.

Sixteen expedition members, 12 with The Explorers Club (a 13th pending), flew in from New York and New Brunswick to Friday Harbor, WA, to Vancouver. L-R, Expedition Leader Jason Schoonover FE’86, Garth Ramsay M I’13, Kumiko Yokoyama M I’13, Su Hattori M I’13 (Assistant Medical Officer), Doug Chisholm, Capt. Norm Baker FN’70 (member, HQ Membership Committee), Lee Treloar (member, Canadian Chapter Awards and Honours Committee), Sally McIntosh (membership pending), Anastasia White, Tasha Ramsay, Dr. Lorrie
Hanson M I’13, Dr. Martin Stockwell M I’13 (Medical Officer), Diane Fay, Nathaniel King-Comier M I’10. Sitting: Lynn Danaher FN’05 (member, HQ Board of Directors), dog Liko.

However, formal names are boring. We only go by river names which are far more fun—that being a key ingredient of an expedition. L-R: Capt. Magnus Twat, Chicken Legs, Good Yoko, The Dragon Lady, Speedboat Doug, Drunken Joe, Capt. Hook, Ankleeosaur, Mudstang Sally, Snow Job, The Happy Hooker, Tiny Tush, Camel Legs, Tree Stomper. Sitting: Snorkel Master, dog BF.

The expedition almost didn’t happen. Record wildfires blazing across the forested north of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan caused record evacuations. Smoke from Canadian fires drifted deep into the United States, with reports from Iowa and Kansas.
The only road north was closed. We were blocked.
The fire directly affected expedition member Speedboat Doug Chisholm. He shot this from his Cessna 180 as he flew to check on his cabin on Nemieben Lake. By this time over 20 cabins there had gone up in smoke.
He found it like this, still tucked into pristine wilderness, if the air was thick with smoke.

But this is how it looked the next day. Fortunately two firefighters reached his cabin just in time.
Speedboat Doug: “DNR Compliance Officer Brad Johns (left) with Fisheries Biologist Mark Duffy. When they arrived at my place, the dock was on fire and one sprinkler supply hose had burned through rendering the West Flank exposed to a huge wall of flames. When I had left with my plane, I had left two 5 gallon pails by the dock ... They used those for initial attack on the dock. True grit guys ... Heroes.”

We salute them. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this was not the end of Speedboat’s problems... .
I’m happy to report that the cabin of Explorers Club member Greg Marchildon survived as well. Greg’s co-author of the instant classic Canoeing the Churchill: A Practical Guide to the Historic Voyageur Highway. An inch thick, it covers all the bases—practical to history to exploration maps, etc—it’s going to be on book shelves a century from now. The Churchill is one of the greatest paddling rivers in the world.
Greg’s a prof and has way too many heady positions and awards to mention, including being deputy minister to a premier. That’s when he looks like this.
But when he sheds civilization and grabs a paddle, he looks like this. He met us to meet the brigade in Lac La Ronge, the northern “capital,” while we fueled up on gas and subways. He really wanted to have joined us but papers he had to write got in the way. I sponsored him into the Club.
The month long travel ban was lifted only a week before our launch. Our cavalcade of five vehicles passed devastation of what was once beautiful boreal forest. The 350-mile drive took us from grain fields in the south half of the province, into the forested half in the north with its 100,000 lakes and Canadian Shield. Amazingly, we only required two windshield replacements and had only a single flat tire. I’ve never been up there without blowing a tire. Once it was only three-weeks old.
Making it gave us more than usual reason to celebrate. That major North American affliction, nature deficit disorder, is not something I suffer from. As usual, we solicited virgins to pop the corks. As usual, we failed miserably to find any.
Our major focus was these two sets of Native pictographs drawn and recorded in Canoe Narrows in 1936 by adventurer P.G. Downes, author of the canoeing classic Sleeping Island.
Unlike most pictographs in Saskatchewan which are difficult to make sense of, these were, for the most part, clearly representational. Their compelling nature added to their importance.
They were first noted in 1806 by famed Hudson Bay Company mapmaker and explorer Peter Fidler. Note: “Painted stone in 2 places” on the bottom left. Fidler was a notoriously hasty sketcher, unlike his fastidious opposite at the rival North West Company, David Thompson, that largely unheralded giant of North American terrestrial exploration.
University of Saskatchewan Professor Emeritus David Meyer, arguably the province’s leading archaeologist and a high school classmate of mine, made sense of the map. I like to joke that he racked up As while I racked snooker balls as my generation’s hottest pool shark. While I roared around stubble fields in my ‘48 Chev in the early ‘60s with a bottle of beer in one hand and my girl friend Liz in the other, he followed on foot, amassing a 3,000+ piece collection of arrowheads and stone tools which he recently donated to the university. What a terribly wasted youth.
Unfortunately, the Whitesand dam built on the Reindeer River during WW-II raised the lake level eight feet.

The drowned pictographs became the Lost Pictographs, a thorn in the side of Saskatchewan archaeology. Searches by Professor Meyer and his master’s student Perry Blomquist (a descendent of Fidler, while I’m allied by family), Doug Frey and others in the mid-1990s failed to find the submerged sites. Part of the problem was that the coastline changed as the water rose. Downes neatly sketched (above) his route from a period topo, and placed the pictographs on a small peninsula.
However, a modern topographic map shows that the peninsula has given way to broken islands. Prof. David—one of our advisors along with the Manitoba Museum’s Perry Blomquist, SaskPower Archaeologist Advisor Kit Krozser, and Tim Jones, past Director of The Saskatchewan Archaeology Society to which Speedboat Doug and I also belong—penciled in the peninsula as it possibly appeared. Tim also authored The Aboriginal Rock Paintings of the
Churchill River. A brigade of mine discovered an undocumented one along the Churchill a few years ago that wasn’t in Tim’s book. I thought he’d be excited when I showed him the jpgs—I sure was—but he just smiled, shrugged, though he acknowledged that it was the only new one that’s emerged since he did his master’s thesis in the 1960s.

However, Speedboat Doug subsequently discovered a topo from 1932 made from aerial photographs by the Royal Canadian Air Force. The peninsula is clearer.

Based on this I drew this yellow line where the south side of the .6-mile-long peninsula may have been located. I also assigned sectors of approximately 120 yards for each canoe to be responsible for in the underwater search. Each canoe was equipped with mask and snorkel.

1-2 Drunken Joe and Ankleeosaur
2-3 Capt. Hook and Snow Job
3-4 Speedboat Doug and Mudstang Sally
4-5 Capt. Twat and The Dragon Lady
5-6 Camel Legs and Tiny Tush
6-7 Snorkel Master and the One Woman Party
7-8 Chicken Legs and Good Yoko
Thus was birthed the Lost Pictograph Expedition to not only find the Lost Pictographs, but to document the current condition of as many other early Native renderings already documented and within reach as possible. Our launch site was the Cree and Dene community of Southend in the bottom left. An important stop of interest was Deep Bay Meteor Crater at bottom middle, 14 miles up from launch.

Our first day was a bit of a challenge of 14 miles to paddle to the crater.
Here we took our first full day off to shake down. It’s not often one gets to camp in a beautiful campsite on the edge of a crater. It’s 7 miles across, 720 feet deep and estimates place it at 100 or 150 million years old, give or take 50. It must have scared the crap out of any mooseosaur in the area when it hit. The crater walls, once estimated to be up to 700 feet high have eroded to 200.

We camped on Graham Island, named for a deceased WW-II flier. Speedboat led the team to a nearby plaque he had placed for the family. 3,800 veterans who lost their lives in war are honoured in this manner in northern Saskatchewan. It’s Speedboat Doug Chisholm’s
magnificent passion to offer this service. Having photographed most of those lakes from his plane, no one but no one knows northern Saskatchewan like Speedboat.

Rested and organized, we headed for our search field the next day. This is a BIG lake with its thousands of islands often half to a mile apart and requires extra diligence. Safety, safety and safety are my first three rules of paddling. All the others follow.
It was four miles, or 1.5 hours paddling to a great Precambrian rock shelf for camping. It was in the small, sheltered bay back (north) of the target peninsula. It was this day we spotted a white DeHavilland Beaver, that Harley Davidson of the Canadian air, but didn't think anything of it. Bush planes are common. We didn't know then that it was searching for us... .

Bringing P.G. Downes to life from that explorer’s journals is Speedboat; behind him is the backside of the target peninsula. Here we settled in for three nights.
While the team got settled in, a few of our eight canoes—including The Dragon Lady and I—did a preliminary survey of the search site, resulting in some minor tweaking of the search plan. The coast was a mix of rock rubble and granite drop-offs, shaped by glaciers. (How the hell did my bow get over there...? I was sure those mushrooms One Woman Party found were Boletus...?)
Water clarity was excellent. The sun and wind were cooperating. Visibility reached down 15 feet. We had the advantage of the lowest water year in 10 years. We estimated the tops of the lost pictographs should be only three feet below the surface.
The following morning we suited up. Everyone paddled to their assigned sectors. (I’m cheating; this shot of Snow Job and The Happy Hooker was actually taken on the crater rim.)
Capt. Hook covered well over his allotted 120 yards and stayed in the longest.
Madame Su and I, with the underwater camera and GPS, cruised back and forth along the site coordinating. The teamwork was excellent, everything and everybody falling into place so smoothly and naturally with such commitment it was truly beautiful.

A problem soon made itself evident. Not far below the surface, rocks were coated with scuzz. Whether the lost pictographs could withstand 72 years of immersion was one thing. Whether the scuzz would protect—or eat at the pictographs—was another. It certainly covered them. Vermillion ochre was believed to have been mixed with fish or bear grease to create the paint—
one that is so resilient it withstands the onslaught of extreme weather for centuries. How many,
no one knows. The paintings are believed to be associated with fasting and vision quests.

Unexpected problems require ingenuity and we weren’t short of it. Camel Legs tied two paddles
together so he could reach down and scrape likely faces. It worked fairly well. Tree Stomper
came up with a scuzz buster made of a pole and spruce bows.

The most effective method was another idea of Camel Legs’. By using his booties as scrubs, he
was able to scrape the scuzz off in lines, thus revealing the surfaces behind. We targeted vertical
rock faces suitable as canvases. The water was cold—68F the surface temperature—and two
hours was the limit to stay in at any one time, even in a wet suit. However, even that was enough
time for everyone to carefully sweep their assigned 120 yards of coast more than once.

At the end of the day, we hadn’t been able to locate the pictographs. Whether they were
obliterated by time and weather, or we had somehow missed them, we don’t know. Suitable
sites, ie, with the right vertical faces, were—fortunately—rare.
Two likely sites emerged: Speedboat Doug’s “AC-DC” site, so named from graffiti in lichen. Speedboat felt if a Native considered that a prominent spot for graffiti today, an ancestor well may have felt the same about placing his pictograph there centuries ago:

\[
\begin{align*}
N \text{56} & \text{30'} \text{ 37.44”} \\
W \text{103} & \text{00’} \text{ 22.73”}
\end{align*}
\]

And One Woman Party and Mudstang Sally’s:

\[
\begin{align*}
N \text{56} & \text{30’} \text{ 43.29”} \\
W \text{103} & \text{00’} \text{ 08.62”}
\end{align*}
\]
Satisfied we had done all we could, on the third day we knocked down camp and prepared to move on. While we did so, Drunken Joe and Camel Legs paddled out for a final search of the two targeted sites. Nothing. I’m not 100% convinced they were obliterated, though they could be. Our search was thorough—though certainly hampered by the scuzz. Thus I recommend that future expeditions bring scuba, dry suits (the water is just too cold for wet), scrub brushes and investigate ultraviolet and spectroscopy underwater devices that might pick up the red spectrum even if faint from erosion.

We were disappointed but not heartbroken. We had given our all. And we were still in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Thus we turned to our secondary objective: documenting the current conditions of known pictographs in the area. To that end, we struck off up long, narrow (... a relative term, often 2-3 miles wide) Numabin Bay. Three days paddling up were three sites, HdM s-1, 2 and 3.
Dr. Tiny Tush, who didn’t want to be official Medical Officer and left it to her husband, attends to Capt. Hook’s hoof. We learned Hook’s secret to looking 30 years younger than his 86 years. He brings a leaky tent and, in the considerable rains we had on this trip, enjoys a wet sleeping bag, thus moisturizing his skin. We’ve lost count of the expeditions we’ve done together but we’re sure it’s over 10. He’s always one of our strongest paddlers. He treated me to a bottle of one of my favorite Scotches—10 year Laphroaig.
We lived off the land as much as possible. We were never short of jackfish/pike. Here Snow Job nails one during a break in the search.

Drunken Joe.
I paddled over to unhook Tasha’s fish. She gushed, “I never caught a fish before! I never caught a fish before! I never caught a fish before!” Thus was born The Happy Hooker. (I’m named, incidentally, after a highly respected Hudson Bay Company employee originally from the Orkneys. Magnus Twat died in 1801 along the Carrot River, the namesake of my hometown.) She’s beyond delighted that Hook and I have offered to sponsor her into The Explorers Club.
This is the Happy Hooker’s proud dad, Chicken Legs. Well dressed too. That’s an Explorers Club tie. He’s having a little trouble accepting his little girl being happy about her river name, and we had no trouble teasing him about it. As always, I was delighted with just how politically incorrect my brigades are. Coming up with prospective river names for newbie Anastasia Snow White kept us laughing the whole time. It wasn’t until the final Chinese dinner that we agreed on Snow Job.
Also well dressed in Tiny Tush’s bikini is Drunken Joe.
But as we headed north, the weather headed south. We began to experience the weirdest weather I have met canoeing. One day we were hit with FIVE thunderstorms. Sun, sound-and-fury, sun again, then sound-and-fury, all afternoon— the lightning and pelting rain driving us off the water each time. And fighting the wind the whole time. Sometimes visibility would descend to 50 feet.
I’ve been windbound before—but never for two days. This is an enormous lake. You don’t take chances on it. The days lost caused us to abort our exploration north. Because members had flights booked to both coasts and one to Japan, I wanted two day’s buffer in case we got stormbound again.

With some good weather (never all day), we paddled back in the direction of our vehicles. On the way were two pictograph sites we could definitely suss out.
One turned out to be mismarked on the charts. I was picking my way along the rocks at the base of this cliff opposite heading for my daily bath/swim when I glanced up.

And saw this. Red ochre markings! An “X” and a kind of partial stick figure.
Scrambling up, I found a broken piece with ochre on the narrow ledge directly below. A search at the cliff base found no others although it was apparent a large section had defoliated. Wondering if I had discovered an entirely new site, I hurried back to the brigade and blew my whistle.

We converged.
Camel Legs found where the piece to the puzzle fit. Speedboat had the research reports and a 1995 treatise— with colour photos— of the site which turned out to be HCMT-4. The report was by SaskPower archaeologist Kit Crozser, and she not only described the loose piece but had photos of it. We were happy to conclude that virtually no depreciation of the site occurred during the last 20 years. We replaced the broken piece beneath the ledge where I found it. It’s at:
It was at that campsite that Speedboat made a satellite call home... and learned that his mint 1954 Cessna 180 floatplane had been picked up by a freak twister in La Ronge and dumped
upside down, only the pontoons showing!

That explained the Beaver that had been flying around! It had been looking for us to inform Speedboat about the tragedy!
This is the plane we had flown on a previous Explorers Club Flag expedition half way up Reindeer Lake two years previous (searching for a key David Thompson post). Doug has owned it for 37 years. As (now retired) maintenance chief for the water bomber fleet out of La Ronge, he kept it in pristine condition. He feels it’s a borderline write off, though I expect he’ll give the nod to insurance to repair it. I just find it impossible to imagine Speedboat without that plane strapped to his ass. He lives to fly, loves it. First his cabin. Now his plane. It’s been the summerus horribilis for Speedboat Doug Chisholm.
He had to bail, and called in a boat. Leaving with him was Snorkel Master Lynn Danaher. After several expeditions together, her buggered back just is no longer up for the rigors of a canoe trip.

We pressed on, now down to seven canoes and 14 members. Next stop was nearby HcM t-6—the most dramatic site on the lake.
Speedboat had left his research material with me and we were happy to determine that it was in excellent condition. The blackish mark in the middle was caused by some idiot’s shotgun blast years ago.

Figure 4.7: Reproduction of tracings at the Thunderbird Bay site.
However an associated lichenograph—which gives the whole site the name of the Thunderbird Bay Site—could not be found. This b/w was shot by advisor Tim Jones in 1963.

The closest cliff in profile we could find was this and, although there’s considerable modern graffiti where more idiots left their initials in the lichen, the thunderbird couldn’t be located and appeared to have been grown over. However, other places we saw—still distinct—“1966” and “1968” scraped into the lichens. It takes lichen a very long time to recover.
The weather continued to rot. It was consistently unseasonably cold, wet and windy and then clouds appeared that were of the sort that set in for days. We were bucking tough easterly winds—where bad weather comes from in this country—virtually constantly. The above shot was a respite around a point after pounding against the wind for some miles. Ironically, the atmospheric pressure was high. As I say, the weather was wet, weird and wild.

After bucking winds for days, for a delicious 20 minutes at the very end, we actually had a wind behind us so we could pop up the sail. This also put an end to One Woman Party’s incessant whining, “Can we sail Twat? When can we sail? Huh? Huh?”
Rather than suffer—and we’d completed our mission—we pulled the plug three days early, an unheard of event in the over 40 canoe expeditions I’ve organized. Recognition of one member in particular was in order. When we needed a tree ripped out, boulders moved, moose stew stirred for five hours, firewood, or a plethora of other matters, Tree Stomper was always there cheerfully to do it.
For his enormous contribution to the expedition, I had the pleasure of awarding him an Explorers Club Medallion.

Our route covered 66 miles.
Then it was the eight-hour drive back to Toontown. We had started out with this pre-paddle gathering in our backyard, for beer, wine and the dead colonel’s dead chicken.

Once back, we finished off with a series of soirees. First, Chinese. Toontown has some incredible restaurants.
Then back to our place for wine and music. And a few wee drams of Islay. And another BBQ the next night.

Not all expeditions meet with unmitigated success. Lessons are always learned, progress is always made. I was still walking on water, like I did here on Reindeer in 2006 when Madame Su and Aeneas and Shanghai Jane paddled 125 miles of the lake from near the top down and enjoyed this kind of perfect weather the entire time. This resulted in a six-page spread in Paddler Magazine in the US. However, it doesn’t appear to have brought many paddlers to this giant lake. The size just scares them away. That’s too bad. It’s the most beautiful lake I know—
and with fabulous exploration history, geology and archaeology. This was our fourth time here. We’ll be back... perhaps to scuba those hot sites in Canoe Channel... . In the meantime, I expect the four members who aren’t Explorers Club members to be applying, as they now qualify.

Award of Flag 53
Jason B.R.M. Schoonover, FE '86
The Lost Pictograph Expedition
July 25, 2015 to August 9, 2015

The Explorers Club Flag is a symbol of courage and fidelity. The award of the flag is a significant accomplishment. Since 1918, the flag has been carried to all of the Earth’s continents, as well as under the sea and into the stars. To date, 850 explorers have carried the flag on over 1450 expeditions. A select handful of the 222 Explorers Club flags have been framed and now decorate the Club house in New York. These include flags carried by Roy Chapman Andrews, Bob Bartlett, Thor Heyerdahl, Naomi Uemura, and miniature flags carried aboard the Apollo 8 and Apollo 15.

Your expedition will now become part of the rich history attached to this flag. Earlier expeditions include:

Bernt Balchen 1933 Ellsworth Trans-Antarctic Expedition
John W. Lentz 1990 Canoeing Down the Maymecha R. in N. Siberia
Richard C. Wheeler 1991 Great Auk Project
Emmanuel Anati 1992 Sinai Expedition ’92
Tim F. Taylor 2005 Sherwood Forest, Florida’s Remarkable coral Reef
Tim F. Taylor 2006 HMS Surprise
Tim F. Taylor 2006 Stromatolites: Oldest CyanBateria Records
Nikolaus G. Sandizell 2007 Archaeological Project Mocambique 2008
Arthur D. Mortvedt 2010 Polar Flight 90
Anders Knudsen 2013 Water Filled Cave Systems of the Akumal and Chunyaxche Areas

You can take pride in joining this illustrious group and in your broader membership and participation in exploration.

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Theodore P. Janulis
President

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David G. Concannon
VP for Flag and Honors

Jason Schoonover Fellow Emeritus, 1986

— Fini—