



Canoeing to York Factory

By Scot Dahms

No road ever led to York Factory. But at one time it was the busiest post and northern headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company. Located where the Hayes River flows into Hudson's Bay, ships from England could anchor downstream while the river gave access to all of Western Canada.

Native Cree also worked at York Factory, and during its heyday the factory town had a church, school, hospital and the largest library in the Northwest. But then the Northern fur trade declined, and in 1957, the company closed the post after nearly 300 years in business.

Adventurous canoeists still make pilgrimages to York Factory, following the Hayes River to where it empties into Hudson's Bay. The huge main building still stands, and parts of the interior look much like the inside of a wooden ship. Many of the people who built the structure were shipwrights by trade and used those skills as best they could.

The walls are covered with graffiti

that includes the names of men who passed through and the years they were there. A note from Frank Hamilton Schoales asks: "Please let me know when this is found."

Frank passed away long ago, but his employee file, including his photograph, is in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg.

In 1912, Ernest Oberholtzer, a 28-year-old American conservationist, retraced the journey of explorer James Tyrrell to York Factory. Ernest was inspired by Tyrrell's account of that journey, declaring it one of the most fascinating things he had ever read.

Ernest's companion for his own well-documented trip was Billy McGee, a 51-year-old Ojibway guide. A friendship had developed between the two men over several summers paddling in the Quetico-Superior region.

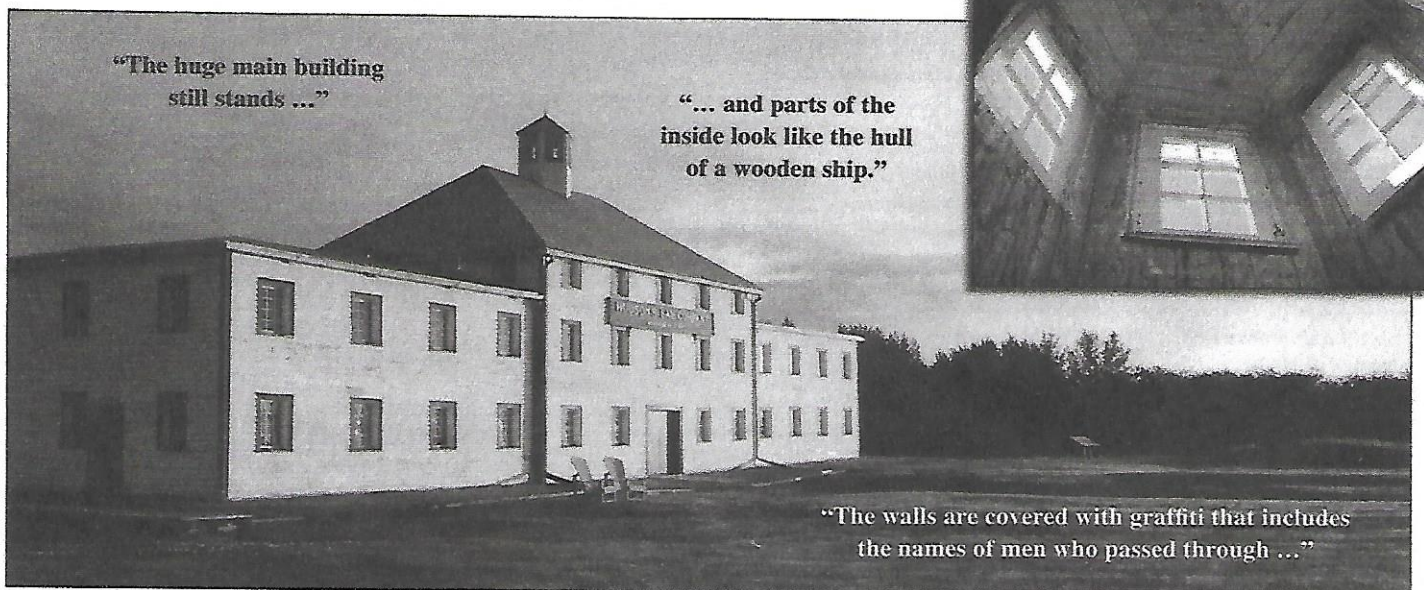
June 26, they set out from the end of the railroad line at Le Pas, Manitoba. From there, they canoed through essen-

tially unmarked wilderness.

First, they paddled north on the Saskatchewan River to Reindeer Lake, a 170-mile-long waterway. As they continued north, they were never completely certain of their location. But when they passed the town of Brochet they found the Thiewiaza River where expected, on the north side of Neultin Lake. Following that river, they arrived at Hudson's Bay on September 12, several weeks later than planned. They picked up supplies at Churchill and set out on the final 300-mile leg to York Factory.

As they canoed down the coast of the vast bay, it was of the utmost importance that they start each day on a high tide. There are no good landing spots between high tides, and with the rivers flowing out and the tides pushing in, the heavy chop could be extremely dangerous. Hudson's Bay Company lost at least 13 ships in those waters.

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York Factory

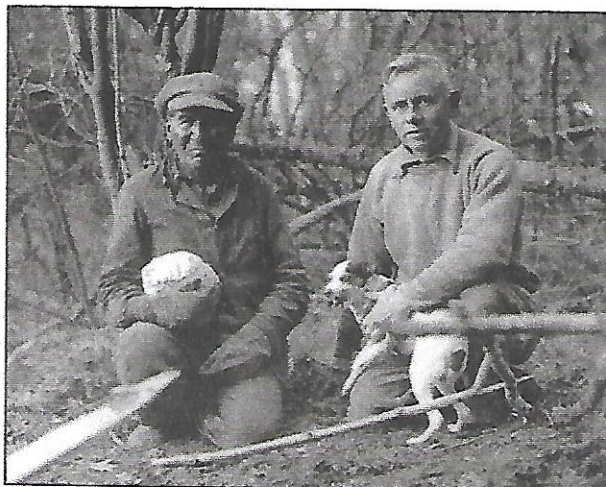
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Ernest and Billy often paddled through the night, following the western shore of the bay. Unable to see much of anything, Ernest described his thoughts at such times as "very doleful."

One morning they could see land on both sides of the canoe. McGee tasted the water and declared it fresh, so they knew they were finally in the mouth of the river. After beaching the canoe to rest, Ernest fell asleep but was awakened by Billy talking to a young Cree who spoke a little English. When Billy asked, he pointed the way to York Factory. They had finally made it, and when they knocked on the door, the man who answered told them they were just in time for tea.

Even though the York Factory post-master advised against continuing south, they did. Having arrived on October 3, they had only four weeks to battle the swift current of the Hayes River to Lake Winnipeg, or they would miss the last steamer of the season.

Upon arriving at Norway House on the north end of Lake Winnipeg, they

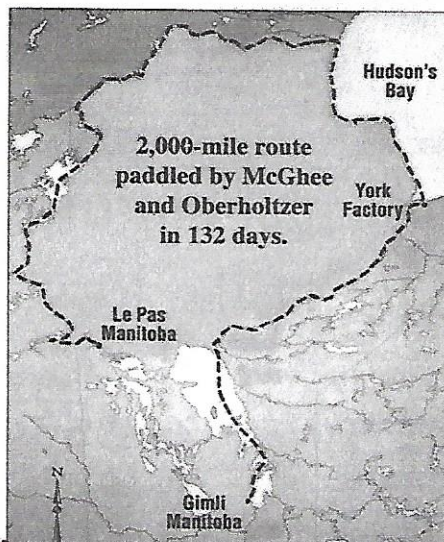


Billy McGhee (left) and Ernest Oberholtzer paddled 2,000 miles from Le Pas, Manitoba, to York Factory and then by a different route to Gimli, Manitoba.

learned that they had, in fact, missed the last south-bound steamer by two days. So they paddled another 260 miles to Gimli, Manitoba, where they could catch a train home. Five months after paddling out of Le Pas, Manitoba, they arrived at Gimli on November 5.

Ernest would call the 2,000-mile journey the single most powerful experience of his life. Those who canoe to York Factory today typically take a less arduous route. Yet all earn the right to commemorate the journey by branding their paddles with the initials YF.

Winnipeg Film Group has produced a documentary with images of historic canoe pilgrimages titled *Journeys to York Factory*. The 45-minute video costs \$20, but you may get a \$5 discount by entering the code FFG; the offer expires December 31. For more information go to the Winnipeg Film Group website at: www.winnipegfilmgroup.com



TRAPLINE CALENDAR

August 2013						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Idaho

Furbearers Unlimited/Idaho Trappers Association Fundraising Banquet September 29, Mountain Home Elks Lodge. Phone: Rusty Kramer (208) 870-3217; idahotrapguy@hotmail.com

Illinois

Northwest Illinois FTA Chapter 17-B convention September 29-30, Carroll County Fairgrounds, Milledgeville, Illinois. Phone: Mike Volkers (815) 443-2366.

Indiana

Southeast Indiana Fur Takers Chapter 7G Fall Meet October 6, Washington County Fish & Game Club, Salem, Indiana. Phone: Charles Davis (812) 801-3033.

Indiana Fur Takers Chapter 7 Fall Rendezvous October 6, and fur sale February 16, 2019, LaGrange County Fairgrounds, LaGrange, Indiana. Phone: Gary Walchle (260) 463-1529 or Joby Morr (260) 242-4140.

Kentucky

United Trappers of Kentucky Fall Meet September 28-29, Bourbon County Fairgrounds, Paris, Kentucky. Phone: Jeremy Taubee (859) 749-9223.

Maine

New England Trappers Weekend August 16-18, Bethel, Maine. Phone: Neil Olson (207) 749-1179 or (207) 875-5765.

Michigan

Michigan Trappers & Predator Callers Association rendezvous August 17-18, Osceola County Fairgrounds, Evart, Michigan. Contact: Joe Velchansky Sr. (616) 894-6214; josephv@frontier.com

New York

Cattaraugus County Trappers Association Sportsmen's Rendezvous August 10-12, Little Valley Fairgrounds, Western New York. Phone: David Allen (716) 257-9045.

Cattaraugus County Trappers Association meets fourth Monday of the month, Cattaraugus County Co-op Extension building, Ellicottville, New York. Phone: David Allen (716) 257-9045 or Brian Davis (716) 945-4223.

Rockland County Trappers Association will meet the first Tuesday each month at Christ Lutheran Church, Airmont, New York. Contact: Brandon Kafka (845) 558-5003; rocklandtrappers@gmail.com

Genesee Valley Trappers meet second Wednesday each month at the clubhouse, 4462 Co. Rd. 32, Honeoye, New York. Phone: Tom Miller (585) 229-4759.

Cortland County Trappers Association meets the third Sunday of each month, McGraw Sportsman's Club, McGraw, New York. Phone: Les Wedge (607) 749-3292.

St. Lawrence County Trappers Association meets the second Thursday each month except July and November, Lisbon Public Library, Lisbon, New York. Phone: Mark Kelley (315) 528-2953.

Independent Fur Harvesters Central New York meet second Thursday each month, Pratts Falls County Park, Manlius, New York. Phone: Mike Kraus (315) 672-3717.

Oswego County Trappers meet the first Tuesday each month, except July and November, Leatherstocking Club, New Haven, New York. Phone: Bruce Hyde (315) 342-6357 or (315) 591-3525.

Fulton Montgomery Fur Harvesters meet the last Monday of the month, Ephratah Rod & Gun Club, Ephratah, New York. Phone: Paul Johnson (315) 429-2969.

Oregon

Oregon Trappers Association rendezvous August 17-19, Waldo Lake Shadow Bay Campground Loops B&C. Phone: Shane Byerly (503) 930-7867.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Trappers Association District 2 Fall Expo September 8, Butler City Hunting and Fishing Club, East Butler, Pennsylvania. Phone: Paul Murray (724) 919-3862.

Pennsylvania Trappers Association District 8 Sportsman Show September 15, Newville Lions Club Fairgrounds, Newville, Pennsylvania. Phone: George McEntee (717) 732-8099 or Terry Swartz (717) 536-3733.

Virginia

Virginia Trappers Association District 5 family picnic September 23, Rileyville Community Park, Rileyville, Virginia. Contact: Bryan Nelson (540) 435-4849; advan-tagewildlifesolutions@yahoo.com

West Virginia

West Virginia Trappers Association 50th Anniversary Convention September 14-15, Gilmer County Recreation Center, Glenville, West Virginia. Contact: John Pingley (304) 641-7908; info@wvtrappers.com

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Trappers Association District 1 rendezvous August 3-4, Forts Folle Avoine Historical Park, Danbury, Wisconsin. Contact: Mark Smith (218) 348-4253; mark.smith725@gmail.com

Send your event three months in advance to: FUR-FISH-GAME, 2878 E. Main St., Columbus, OH 43209; calendar@furfishgame.com