

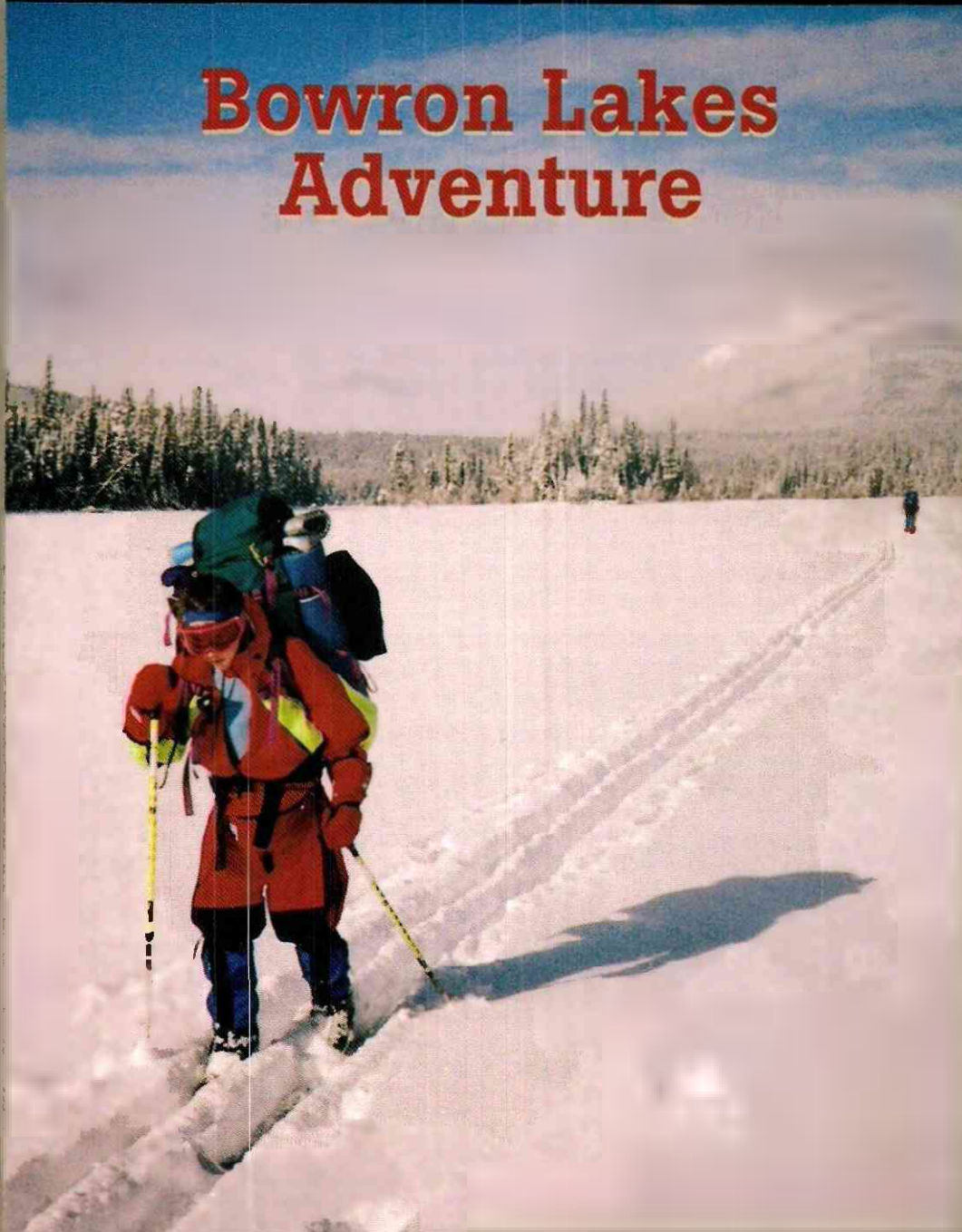
the leader

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Amory Award Winners

Bowron Lakes Adventure



FIRE SAFETY • WINTER CAMPING • CO-ED SCOUTING

1994 Amory Adventure Award

BOWRON LAKES WILDERNESS CHALLENGE

from the 31st St. Cyprians "B" Venturer Company

"Practice doesn't make perfect, but it helps."

This was just one of many lessons Venturers from the 31st St. Cyprians "B" Company, Calgary, AB, learned during their Bowron Lakes wilderness ski and canoe trip last year.

The expedition won them first prize in the 1994 Amory Adventure Award. Venturers Matt Sniatynski, Scott McRae, Steve Billups, Michael Dyer, Carl Kinton, Gavin Duggan, Justin LeBlanc, Kerry Showman and Paul Brooks, were helped by two advisors, Clint Brooks and Mike Dyer Sr.

Wilderness Dream

For months a rectangular chain of connected waterways called Bowron Lakes in northern British Columbia had fired our imaginations. Some Venturers wanted to ski them in February; others wanted to canoe them in July.

"The idea of breaking trail on cross-country skis for 116 km and surviving in the dead of winter seemed an incredible challenge," said advisor Clint Brooks. "Perhaps they could canoe the route in summer, but the winter skiing... NEVER!" The planning and physical training would be too much for teenagers.

The rest of us disagreed and set to work. "Hope for the best, but plan for the worst." We repeated these words often during the next months while pouring over maps, drawing up equipment lists, honing survival skills and packing.

The trips required different physical training. Skiing emphasizes lower body

strength and endurance while canoeing focuses on upper body muscles. Our preparations involved many weekend skiing trips and mid-winter canoe rescue lessons in a pool. All members are excellent swimmers, but we needed to learn more about cold weather survival, hypothermia and first aid.

The winter ski trek was the most physically exhausting and dangerous part of the adventure. Extremely cold temperatures, high winds and blizzard conditions, combined with the remote location demanded that we take every imaginable precaution.

Both trips proved expensive. Our fundraising efforts focused on Trail's End popcorn, bottle drives, cheese sales and helping at a Christmas tree lot. Several businesses donated material or equipment. We built a sled (Beaver lumber provided wood and hardware) to carry most of our gear.

Illness and unavoidable work opportunities kept several people from taking part in both trips. But everyone participated in the planning, training and work-up. Finally the day arrived for our ski trek.

No Going Back

Leaving Calgary in the early morning of February 18, we drove to Bowron Lake. Here we loaded our sled with tents, stoves, fuel and food. Grey clouds hid the sun; a strong wind swept the snow-covered lake. Bouncing with enthusiasm, we set off. Several hours later we took shelter behind some sparse bushes and hungrily ate a snack. After skiing over a frozen marsh we hit our first patch of open water. Carefully our lead skier probed around to find an ice bridge strong enough to support

us. Crossing safely proved relatively easy. Pressing on to Swan Lake, we set up camp where Justin (our chef that night) made tortellini and tomato sauce. Delicious.

Next morning the temperature dropped to -19°C as we set out. Four lakes and one broken pole later we arrived at our campsite hungry and tired. After a hearty supper, we climbed into cold sleeping bags wearing all our clothes to keep warm.

The third day dawned even colder. An overgrown portage route deep with snow led to the Caribou River. Here, open patches of flowing water barred the way. Our group hugged the shoreline for several hours before arriving at our new campsite. A roaring fire and a hot meal lifted everyone's spirits.

More Than Expected

Despite our training, the six day winter survival trip turned out more difficult than expected. The sub-arctic temperature bit hard. Breaking trail in deep snow while pulling a heavy sled was very difficult. Struggling through thick underbrush to avoid open water on rivers and lakes made travel beyond 16 km a day impossible.

Half way through the trip we abandoned the sled and transferred the load to our already full packs. This placed more demands on our equipment. Within days two skis broke and five bindings were damaged. We repaired everything with a small repair kit and pressed on.

Originally the company planned for a six day trip. Low temperatures, deep snow and open water stretched the wilderness trek to eight days. This forced us to ration food.



We woke up on our last day with still 26 km to go. The weather: strong wind, blowing snow and -30°C temperature. Could we make it? As we skied across the final lake, a collection of strange sounds followed us — squeaks from broken poles, clicks from shattered ski tips and groans from overloaded packs. With every step the rhythmic 'clatter' blended together into a pleasant symphony. Ten hours later we reached the van.

What a feeling. We did it! The trip was tough, but worth it.

Dip, Dip And Swing

Seven people went on the summer trip using three canoes and one kayak. Our adventure began with a 2.4 km portage in the pouring rain. With canoes over our heads, we skipped down the winding path toward the first lake, enthusiastically swatting mosquitoes. Cold rain water ran down our arms. Little did we know it then but rain would follow us during much of the trip.

At the end of the portage, Kibbee Lake spread out before us. After sliding the canoes into the water and loading our packs we set out. The paddling was easy. Soon the rain faded into a soft drizzle. Hours later we set up camp and went to bed.

Next day the rain woke us as it streamed down our tent flies and gurgled into puddles. We set out on the lake pelted by enormous water drops. Hour after hour with paddles dipping into the cold water, the spectacular scenery of these lakes awed us. Waterfalls cascaded down steep rock walls while eagles soared overhead. "What incredible beauty!"



Scouter
Clint Brooks
tests our sled.



Happy campers
unpack after
another
challenging day.

Our third day marked a great event: It stopped raining! As the sun broke through the clouds late in the afternoon we pulled back our dripping hoods to greet the sun's warm rays. As if promising better days ahead, a bright rainbow arched over the water while two osprey beat a hasty airborne path through the air. That evening a great calm fell over the lake, which resembled a flawless mirror reflecting the perfect details of a gorgeous sunset.

During the next days we paddled and portaged around the park drifting with the current here, slipping into deep portage trail mud pockets there. In no time at all we reached the end of the trip.

Indelible Lessons

What did these two experiences teach us? We learned that maps and books are useful only as a guide, and that taking a break from life is a good thing. Perhaps more than anything else, the trips taught us about the true spirit of Scouting. ^

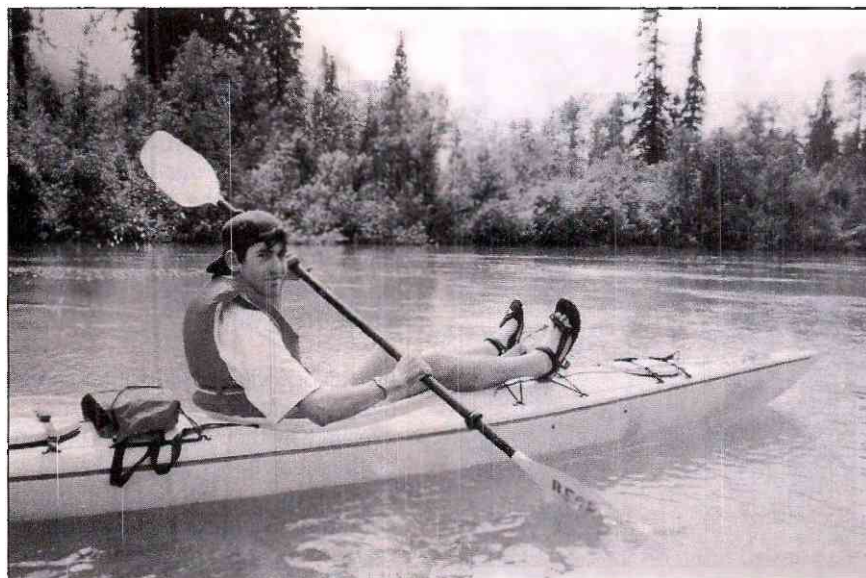
— the 31st St. Cyprians "B" Venturers
come from Calgary, AB.

1994 AMORY ADVENTURE AWARD WINNERS

This year Venturers from the 31st St. Cyprians "B" Company, Calgary, AB, won first prize for their twin season, Bowron Lakes trek. Calgary's 83rd "B" Venturer Company, earned second place honours for a twelve day adventure in the Paria Canyon, Arizona, USA, while Venturers in the 416th Company from Etobicoke, ON, earned third place for a spring backpacking trip through the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, USA.

Congratulations to all Venturer companies that entered. Detailed accounts of the second and third place award-winning adventures will appear in future **Leader** issues.

Deadline for 1995 Amory Adventure
Award entries: January 31, 1996.



Sometimes the pace slackened. Gavin Duggan puts his feet up and enjoys the beauty unfolding around him.