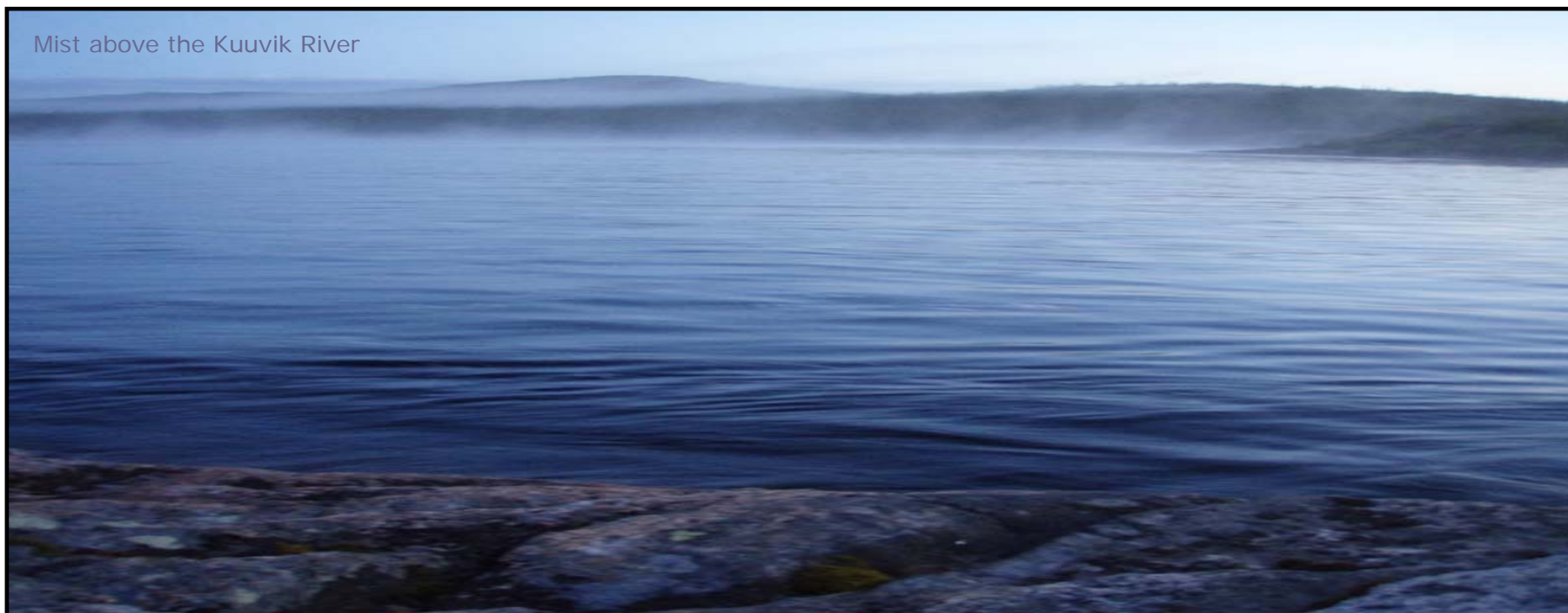


International Polar Year 2007 Kuuvik River Expedition, Trip Summary

Early November 2007, Koben Christianson

In July of 2007 a North American team of four paddlers traveled along the Kuuvik River through the Arctic wilderness of Nunavik, Québec, Canada. After paddling the full-length of the Kuuvik River, known to Canadian colonial administrators as the Larch River, the team arrived at the modern Inuit settlement of Kuujjuaq, near the shores of Ungava Bay. Supported by forty institutional sponsors, the canoe trippers succeeded in tracing a voyageur route that was mapped in the summer of 1896 by Mr. A.P. Low, one of Canada's greatest explorers.



The International Polar Year 2007 Kuvik River Expedition, a canoe trip, took place in order to (a) raise public awareness of Arctic Canadian history, geography, and earth system science (b) commemorate the unparalleled legacy of northern Québec geo-science knowledge bequeathed by A.P. Low to future generations of Canadians & (c) help convey the reality and significance of climate change to Canadians and the international community.



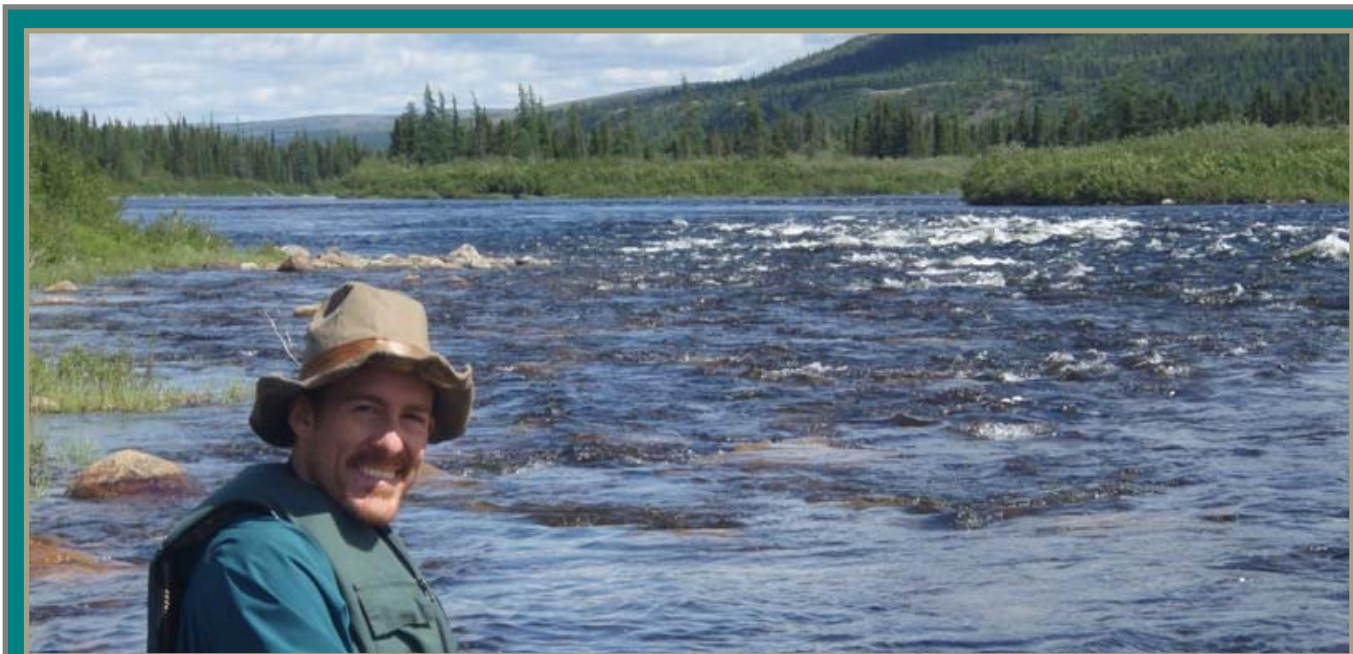
The Kuvik River headwaters, viewed from a Nordair Aviation bush plane in the sky above. The point of land on the right side is the day one campsite. Prior to landing on the water, we saw two black bears walking about on the left shore.

Specific to the institutional framework categories of the International Polar Year, the purpose of the 2007 Kuvik Expedition was to enable “education, outreach & communication”, while the Expedition’s IPY project themes were “the state of the polar environment”, “change in the polar regions” and “the polar regions as vantage points”. The Kuvik River Expedition, now accomplished, is part of a multi-year commitment to retrace select northern journeys that were completed by the Canadian geo-scientist Mr. A.P. Low. The first instalment of this informal commemorative expedition series took place in 2005, via the patronage of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society and other select sponsors; for details see www.saintdenysriver.info . Drawing from the successes of that 2005 expedition, the Kuvik River Expedition realized a unique canoe journey of about 350 kilometres (215 miles) through marvellous and rarely travelled wilderness territory.

For the purposes of trip navigation, the Government of Canada provided the Kuuvik River Expedition with a complimentary set of twenty-one modern topographical maps that covered the full-course of the 2007 route. Also, prior to the start of the trip, the Expedition reviewed duplicates of A.P. Low's trip report and field maps from his 1896 descent down the Kuuvik -- this documentation informed preparations for the trip by serving as a historical-scientific-geographical reference. Additionally, to make the 2007 Kuuvik River Expedition possible, a representative of the Kuuvik 2007 team obtained journey advice from representatives of the Larch 2005 trip (same river different name) in Toronto and Vancouver. Furthermore, when the complete Kuuvik team was in Radisson, Quebec, prior to the bush-plane put-in, they benefited from the words of a Larch '05 representative, who helped the Kuuvik 2007 team mark-up the maps via conference call; thanks are due for this kind service.

The Air Inuit Company was an important sponsor of the 2007 Kuuvik River Expedition. Without the support of

Air Inuit the quest would not have been achievable. They provided the Kuuvik team with a full-package of complimentary air transport services within Quebec, which got the Kuuvik team to and from the canoe trip theatre of operations. Another important sponsor, Olympus, donated photo and audio equipment to help record the journey.



Kyle next to a set of upper Kuuvik River swifts

The Patagonia Corporation agreed to provide the 2007 Kuuviik team with product, and did what they could to supply the team with some quality gear. Vuarnet equipped the Kuuviik 2007 team with excellent sunglasses. Wal-Mart Montréal provided the team with a free shopping-spree, and thus supplied nearly all the food for the Expedition -- their dolphin-friendly "tuna in a bag" was a favourite team lunch. Nordair of La Grande, Quebec offered free piloting services and the use of their Turbo-Otter aircraft to get the team to the top of the Kuuviik.



Iggy and Tom negotiating the river current

Petronor of Val d'Or Quebec gifted the Expedition with 4 drums of Jet-A fuel, which juiced our float-plane flight.

Valhalla Pure generously donated some important wilderness survival gear.

Scarpa America presented each Kuuviik river tripper with a complimentary pair of their super SL M3 boots.

West Marine in Vancouver supplied the team with free VHF 250 walkie-talkie radios -- the radios were especially useful for keeping the team in contact before and after staggered whitewater runs.

The Kuuviik River, set amid grandeur



The [Suunto America](#) corporation provided the Expedition with a GPS enabled ultra-light wrist-top computer -- this was helpful for noting changes in elevation and barometric pressure. [Global Solar Energy](#) and [PowerFilm Incorporated](#) gifted the Expedition with dependable portable wilderness solar panels, which our team utilized in combination with an *XPower Powersource Mobile 100* that was donated to the Expedition by [Xantrex Technology](#) -- this nifty energy system re-powered our satellite telephone, walkie-talkies, wrist-top computer, and cameras. The Kuuvik River team thanks the [Globalstar](#) corporation for providing us with a Qualcomm GSP 1600 satellite telephone. [ACR Electronics](#) of Florida sent the Kuuvik Expedition a waterproof AquaFix 406 emergency satellite beacon to have with us on our July 2007 river trip; thankfully we did not ever have to use it.

The [Temagami Canoe Company](#) made four “wannigans” (boxes for transporting food and gear) that reliably served the team during the course of the canoe journey. [Desgagnes TransArctik](#) marine shipping of Quebec City is providing the Expedition with complimentary barge services, which will return the team’s two boats to Montreal from Kuujjuaq before the 2007 sea-ice freeze.



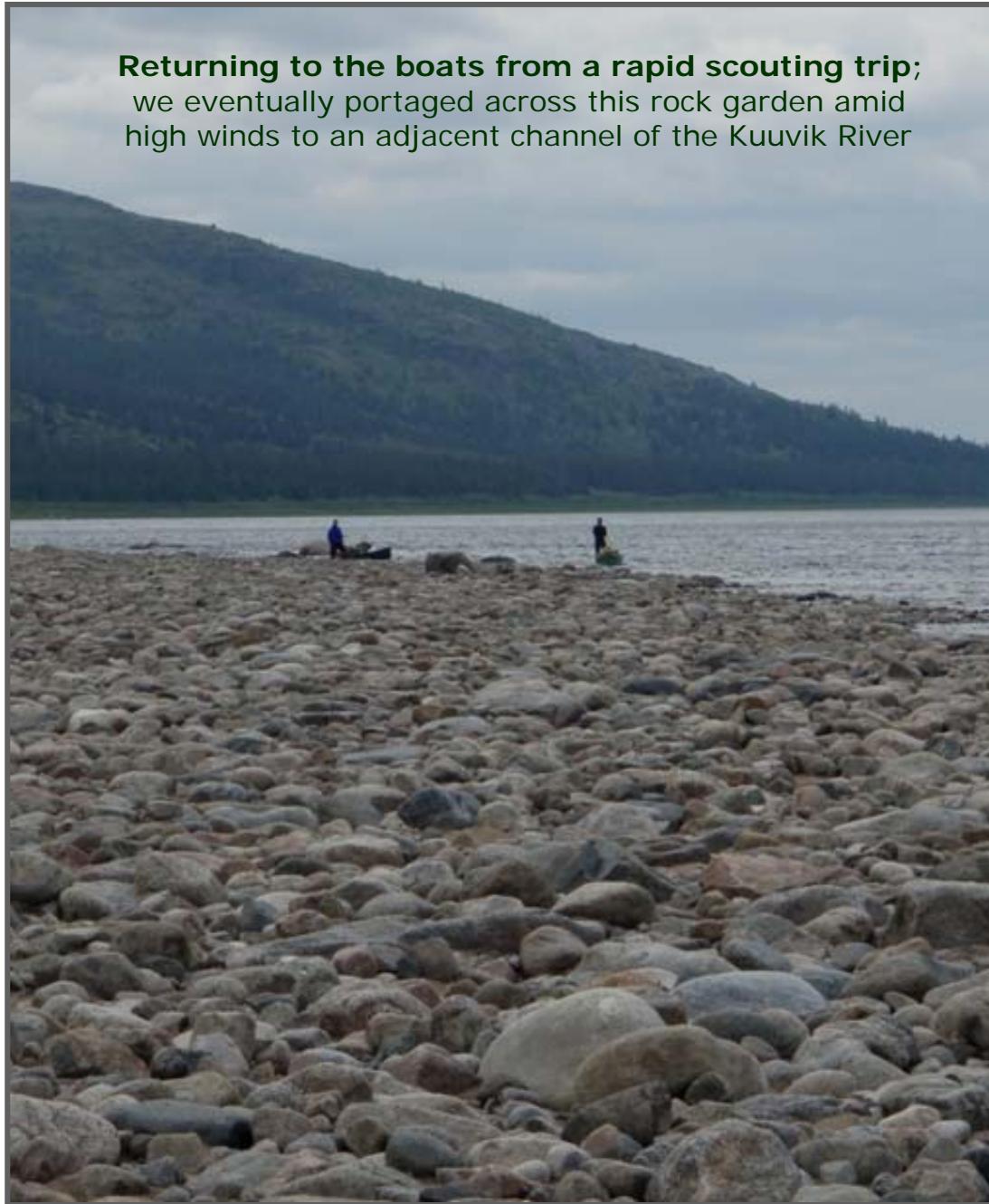
Paddling a course of whitewater haystacks

Above a long stretch of Kuuvik quick water that we lined river-right, this descent took four hours in total



The [Moleskine](#) Group of Milano, Italy, gifted each of the Expedition participants with a distinctive notebook for documenting their personal trip observations in writing. The [Arctic Portal](#) web-development team from Iceland has built the International Polar Year 2007 Kuuvik River Expedition website, your source for trip documentation information. The [Holiday Inn](#) Montreal Airport sponsored the Expedition's hotel facilities while we attended to logistical activities before and after the canoe trip. [Reimer Express](#) Lines and [Groupe Kepa](#) gifted the Expedition with the overland road hauling capacity required to get boats, and gear, to and from Montreal. [Home Depot](#) in Vancouver gifted the material for a canoe-shipping crate and miscellaneous tripping equipment. [Café Santropol](#) provided the team with meals, the Fort Chimo Hotel sponsored the team's lodging in the settlement of Kuujjuaq, and [Expert Travel Financial Security](#) granted the team insurance for emergency search and rescue evacuation.

Returning to the boats from a rapid scouting trip;
we eventually portaged across this rock garden amid
high winds to an adjacent channel of the Kuvvik River



The Canoe game company of Seattle sent the Expedition two MVP travel editions of its classic strategy game. The plan was to utilize these if we took a rest-day or were wind bound. Unlike the 2005 Saint Denys River Expedition, however, the 2007 river trip involved elaborate canoe tripping each and every day. Thus there was no time to play the game, though it seems like it may offer great amusement potential for some.

The International Polar Year 2007 Kuvvik River Expedition only happened because a lot of people were interested in helping to make it happen. A fully-executed northern Canadian river-trip expedition cannot occur without a considerable investment of time, attention, and essential logistical support. The Kuvvik Expedition occurred because of thoughtful sponsors. Hopefully the trip will help to generate broader awareness of *the International Polar Year*, *the geo-scientist A.P. Low*, and *the riddle of climate change*.

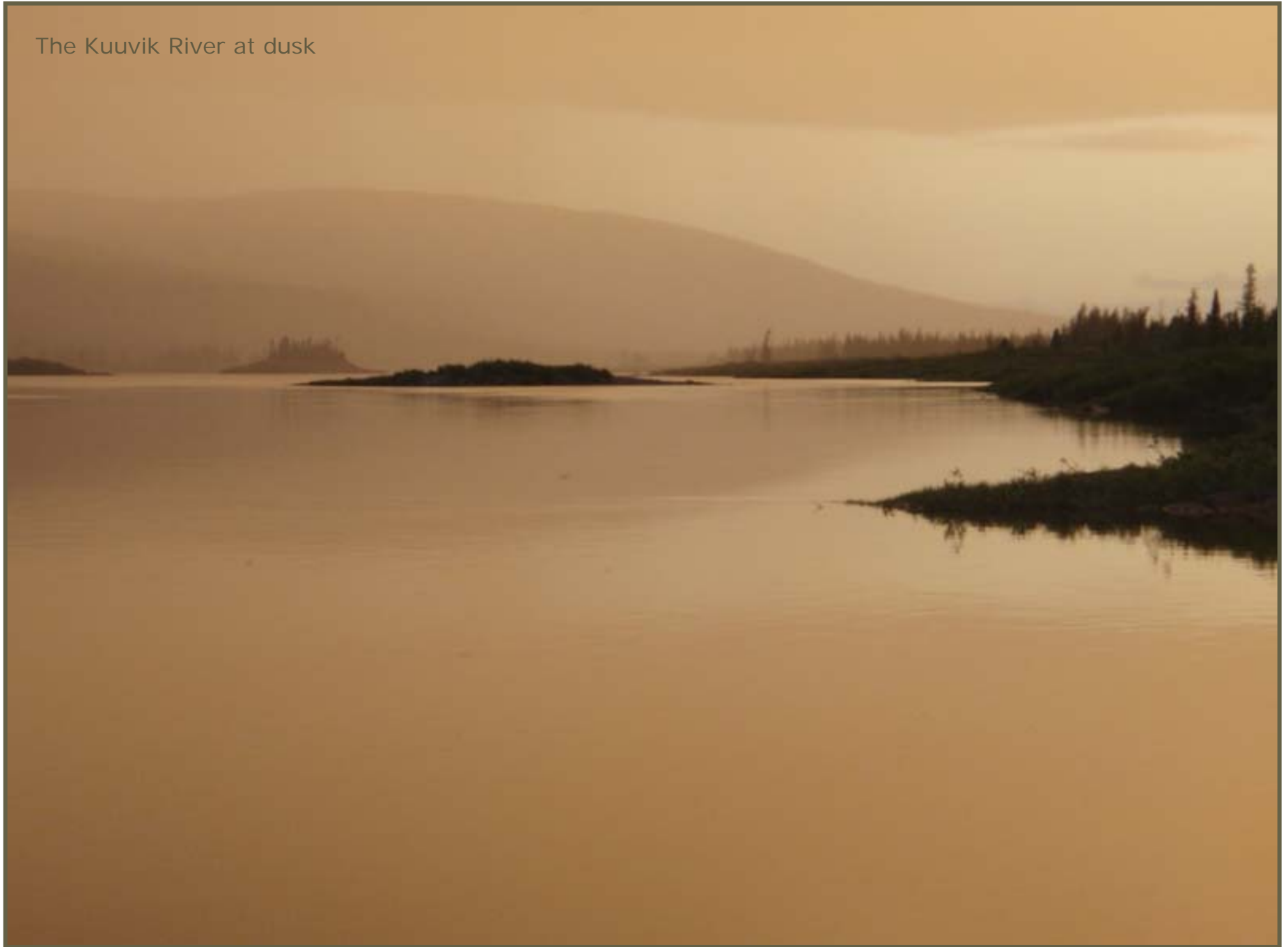


A Kuuviik feeder channel portage; being cautious amid tricky conditions

The initial gathering of the 2007 Kuuviik team was at the Trudeau airport in Montreal. From there we flew to La Grande, Quebec. In La Grande we sorted and prepped our gear in the Nordair hangar for several days. During that spell of time the *Auberge Radisson* hosted a dinner for the team, while our lodging was supplied by our bush pilot and the University of Laval, which loaned the team a house. The Expedition flew north on July 10th, piloted amid storms by Nordair's CEO and his Parisian co-pilot. Our team landed late in the day at the top of the Kuuviik. From there we paddled for weeks before we encountered other people again.

The upper portion of the Kuuviik is run-after-run, day-after-day, a great stretch of river for whitewater canoeing. For the first ten days on the river, at least with water levels the way they were in July 2007, most of all the fast water is runnable in a wood-canvas canoe without a spray cover. The Kuuviik has some superb whitewater runs.

The Kuuvik River at dusk



In the summer of 1896 the Canadian geo-scientist, canoeist, hockey player, A.P. Low travelled the Kuuvik with a retinue of five others. One fellow scientist was with him, whose role was to make a systematic collection of plants and natural history items. Then there was Low's personal helper, whose job it was to carry A.P. Low's geological surveys, keep the meteorological observations, and take care of common tasks for the Expedition. Additionally, there were three hired indigenous canoeemen -- Low relied on the bush skills of these guides, and their stamina and strength, to help achieve his mission to comprehensively map the wilds of northern Quebec. A.P. Low's 1896 Kuuvik expedition tripped in Peterborough cedar canoes, each of these was capable of shipping three people and 1000 pounds. The scientists sat in the middle of these canoes, where they could document their methodical reconnaissance activities while the others paddled.

A.P. Low did not make the first recorded descent of the Kuuvik. That was in 1824, when a Dr. Mendry was sent by the Hudson Bay Company to start a trading post near Ungava Bay. The 1824 trip made a route map; Low got a copy in 1887 during a visit to Moose Factory in Ontario.



About ten days into the Kuuviik descent the river changes character -- per tributary inflow and differences in topography -- to become a much broader and faster northern waterway. Navigable rapids are fewer, yet the scenery is more dramatic, as the tundra permafrost landscape flanking the river gains some serious elevation. An inflection point for our 2007 trip happened on Day 15. That morning I chose not to scout a rapid-run, my bow solo scouted for our boat, the choice gave me the time to make a trip documentation audio recording, and was likely influenced by tiredness, and a tinge of hubris too. Once in the rapids I cut too close to the left side of a chute to avoid some heavy haystacks on the right and thus tagged a boulder, hard, flipping my boat into the Kuuviik. Subsequently, I had to sew up, and ambroid, a silver-dollar sized tear in the canoe's canvas. Tom got the boat to float again by making a new rib-cage for the centre of the boat, since I broke all the centre ribs -- the new rib-cage that Tom built, with split wood and string, saved the need to call in a team airlift extraction.

From then on we had to be very careful with the mended canoe, to be sure that we could make it to Kuujjuaq. We lightened its load by moving gear weight to the second boat. And given that Kyle is lighter than I, he took over steering the mended boat, while I went over to paddle bow in Iggy's boat. After the flip, we paddled on for about three hours before making camp above another rapid. The next day would bring a further surprise.

The day after, subsequent to running the rapid below camp, we made the last portage of the trip -- carrying the mended boat across two people to each side, like a coffin. We then raced along the speeding river to its confluence with the Caniapiscau River, from where the two merged rivers would hasten our team to Kuujjuaq in less than 24 hours. This is how Low, reporting on his summer of 1896 trip, described the last section of the Kuuviik River in his 1898 field report: "***The river is very rapid along the last course of eight miles above the Kaniapiskau, having a fall of forty feet. It narrows to about 300 yards and rushes along in a much narrower valley than formerly, between high banks of clay faced with boulders, to the forks.***"

Before arriving at the intersection of the Kuuvik and the Caniapiscau, after consulting with my stern, I stowed my paddle and got out a camera to visually record the Expedition's final stretch of travel on the Kuuvik River. It was invigorating to see the Caniapiscau in the distance. Then, quite surreally, we heard the loud whir of a helicopter, which soon rose up from the cover of a terminal deposition of rocks near the outlet of the Kuuvik. After hovering for a moment, it nosed down and swooped up the river channel about fifty feet above the Earth. After passing us it banked around, zoomed up the river channel again, and buzzed our boats for a second time. Seconds after the second pass, I turned to see a rock dead ahead, I reached for my paddle yet it was too late. I was in the drink again. This time it was a harmless flip; a refreshing swim for the last several hundred yards of the Kuuvik, going with the flow to the Caniapiscau, and then swimming with the boat and gear to the shore. I did lose one of the Olympus cameras though, the Stylus 770. I regret this. It was a fine piece of equipment.



Nunavik sunset, 25 July 2007, the next day our team paddled into Kuujuaq

I had thought that A.P. Low was kind of a slacker for not paddling during his canoe trips. Now I can better appreciate the importance of concentrating fully on either trip documentation or canoe navigation. After our encounter with the helicopter, our team had one last night in the bush, we awoke the next morning to paddle in to Kuujjuaq. On the way, after negotiating the tidal rapids, which mark the upstream influence of Ungava Bay, we were greeted by a lone beluga whale. It was neat to see a beluga whale pass so close to our canoes.

Montreal Science Centre, Friday 27 July 2007, after our team's post-trip celebration dinner at Gibby's restaurant, the Kuuviik Expedition was officially finalized and we canoe trippers went our separate ways.

