

The French connection

CHASING THE LIGHT



BY BEV McMULLEN

'With each sunrise, we start anew.'—Anon

Sometimes life is full of surprises. It was a chance meeting that landed me in a French River lodge discussing this vital transportation route made famous by the early explorers and fur traders. I was with a group of 12

other modern-day voyageurs in a replica fur trade canoe paddling this colossal vessel into a knee-buckling sunset with a present-day version of Tom Thomson at the helm. We looked like we were right out of a Frances Anne Hopkins painting.

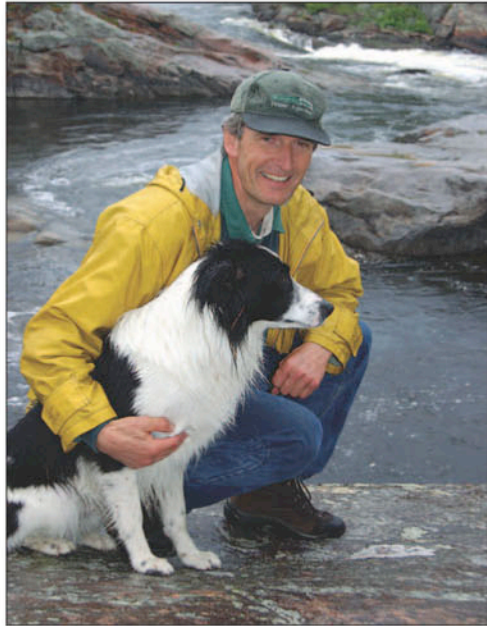
Through my work I met Peter Strachan who promotes the beautiful Lodge at Pine Cove on Wolseley Bay on the French River. It was once a 1930s fishing camp and is now a semi-wilderness lodge located in the tiny community of Noelville about 240 kms from Bracebridge.

The Tom Thomson I write about is British-born entrepreneur Alex Strachan, Peter's uncle. Strachan and his son found the remnants of the old fishing camp and cottages during a wilderness canoe trip. The main lodge had been destroyed by fire in the 1960s and the remaining buildings were dilapidated, but it was love at first sight.

The French river is a peaceful retreat for nature lovers, canoeists, anglers and artists. It



FANTASTIC FRENCH. A glorious Montreal canoe replica sits on a beach waiting to take modern voyageurs down the French River through riveting rugged scenery. This picture was taken at first light using a flash to emphasize the paintings on the canoe. Alex Strachan (left) and his faithful dog, Birken, lead a group to this wilderness setting, which is an absolute artist's paradise.



needs to be discovered and enjoyed by photographers, bird-watchers and anyone longing for peace and quiet.

Along with some friends from work, I was invited to experience the lodge, which is surrounded by cedar and white pines and overlooks the river. Alex Strachan is a tall, willowy outdoorsman, classically handsome in that British royalty way. He is every-

thing from maitre d', owner, painter, avid canoeist, conversationalist and guide.

Resort chef Craig Young was also part of our voyageur canoe trip and treated us to many specialities. We gorged ourselves on lamb, fresh-caught pickerel, salmon and more. The food was divine but the scenery was to die for.

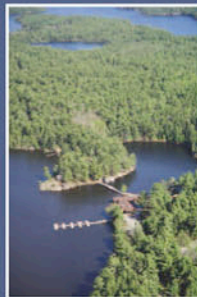
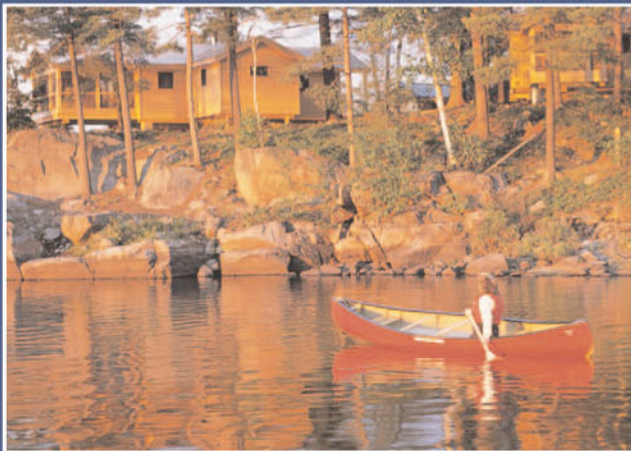
After a stunning sunset, gourmet meal and

great libations the sandman finally carried us off to our beds nestled high on a rocky crag. At 4:30 a.m. I rose and took out a giant kayak to witness a Sunday morning on this historic river.

Not only was the sunrise beautiful but the calm water reflections were out of this world. Added to the stunning scenery was a nosey beaver following my

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Own a Cottage on Pine Cove



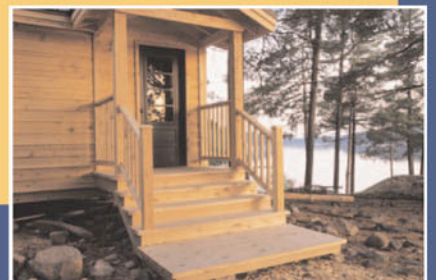
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Wild weather makes the forest come alive

(Continued from page A26)

kayak, and birds and fish jumping everywhere. What completely wowed me and took my breath away was rounding the river bend and coming upon the old 1920s Red Jacket Inn totally restored.

I had my two Nikons with me and used one with a 200mm lens and the other with a wide angle to capture the vast scenery.

I have always been inspired with the French River from when we were kids, as my family used to camp there. What I love about this place is it is not very inhabited, and 100 kilometres are designated as a Canadian Heritage River.

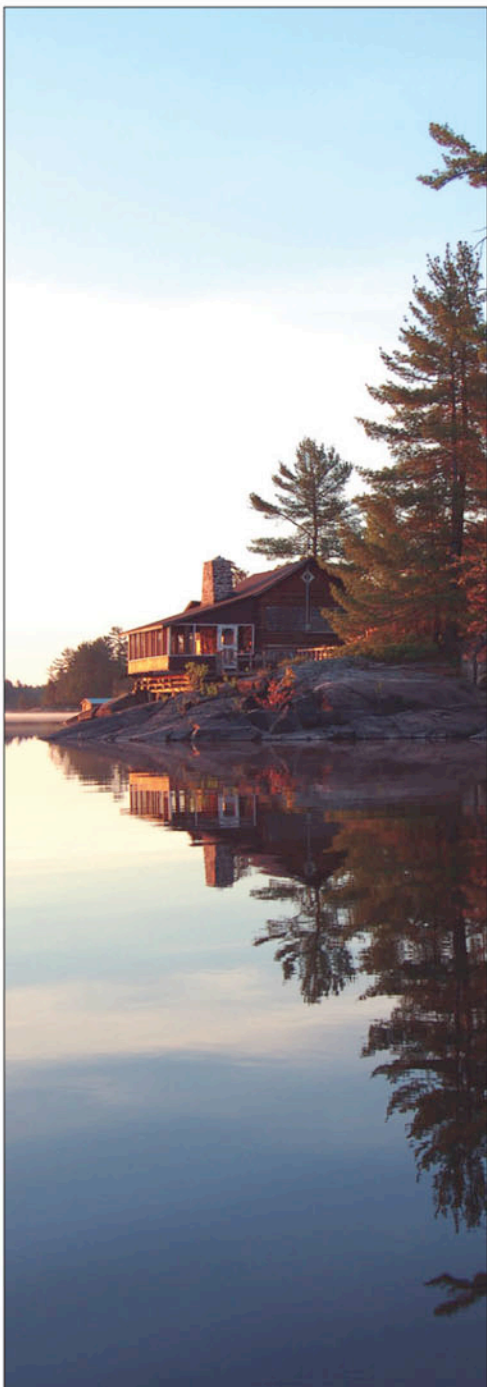
Back at the Lodge our chef created a lumberjack breakfast with the works, including real maple syrup on French River toast. After breakfast Alex Strachan, now flipping his cap to wilderness guide, took us on a river tour with a visit to the Five Finger Rapids. The weather changed and it was a torrential downpour but we jumped into some slickers and with his faithful dog, Birken, off we went in his aluminum boat. Within 15 minutes we arrived at the site of our hike to visit the rapids and narrow gorges through a forest alive with pink lady slippers, columbine and stunning topography. I read that this area has over 450 species of plants and some that are very rare.

I loved the wildness of the weather, the rain making this forest come alive with green and splashes of deep pink and red from the native plants. It is an

artist's mecca and I strongly recommend visiting this area and capturing the loveliness once seen only by intrepid explorers.

Bev McMullen is an award-winning photographer

who specializes in images of Muskoka. Her latest book is *Muskoka Traditions*, produced with writer Andrew Wagner-Chazalon. She can be reached in Muskoka at 705-645-8771.



TWICE THE PHOTO. Early mornings are a perfect time to be out and about with a camera. Capturing the serenity of an undisturbed lake is worth a little less time in bed.

Photo by Bev McMullen

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