

NO MORE "HUBBARDS"

In 1903 a group of three men started on an extended canoe trip in Labrador. Only two of them came back. And those two just barely made it. The wife of the man who died completed the trip two years later without incident, which is why Woodswomen now sell tee-shirts with her picture on them... a sort of "see, I told you so" indictment of macho males in general.

Len Hubbard was a writer and editor for an outdoor magazine named appropriately "OUTING", when he conceived his ill-fated trip of exploration up some seldom used rivers to Ungava Bay and, if they were able, back in one season. If they didn't make it by canoe, they expected to snowshoe and dogsled out after the freeze-up.

Things were a little different back in '03 from the way we do things these days... no Gore-Tex, no Primus, no freeze-dried. More like 40# of flour, 4# of lard, 30# of bacon and two "three pound" wool blankets per man. All of this artfully packed into a guide model canoe by Oldtown of Maine and away they went. Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub... and so forth.

To start out with they missed the first turn off and therein lies the essence of why they failed.

For months they struggled along like Columbus... they didn't know where they were... they didn't know where they were going... and when they got back they didn't know where they had been.

At one point they made a thirty mile portage through the woods to what they thought was the next lake in the chain only to become wind bound within sight of their objective.

After that they started back the way they had come, trying to catch enough fish to keep body and soul together, and growing weaker by the mile.

Within twelve miles of a cache of "four pounds of wet flour we had left behind on the way in", and within thirty miles of help they split up. Len Hubbard was left behind to eat his belt and moccasins and to starve to death, alone in his tent, while the other two struggled onward. They both made it to the cache where one started back for Hubbard and the second pushed on for help. The one who went back wandered around in the snow for twelve days before being rescued. They didn't get Hubbard's body out until March the following year and he was buried overlooking the Hudson River about a year after he started out.

So why relive this litany of ill planning and grief? Because it points up so many of the facts that wilderness-wise travelers try to tell the new guys every spring.

Know where you are going! If you can't read a map, or you don't have "local knowledge" along with you don't proceed until you can, or do.

Know your equipment. Don't expect it to do things it ain't designed to. That goes for you too. If you're not in shape at the start, don't expect to "tone up" in the woods. Get in shape before you go. Don't put five pounds in a three pound bag. And, remember somebody is going to have to carry all that stuff sooner or later.

Do not bite off more than you can rightfully expect to masticate. Give yourself some built in "layover days" and expect to use them. It isn't a race, but by the same criteria you don't want to make it a race before the food runs out either.

So, go prepared. Go slow. Go careful. And most important of all... Bring 'em back alive. It's more fun that way. Remember Hubbard.--Al Gustavson