

## MINUTES OF THE 929TH MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

The meeting was held in Room 432, Ramsay Wright Building, U. of T. Tuesday March 17, 1998 at 8:00 PM.

CHAIRMAN: Harry Lumsden

RECORDING SECRETARY: Michael Boyer

ATTENDANCE: 13 Members and 1 guest  
Mary Tasker guest of Ron Tasker

A Motion for approval of the Minutes of the 928th meeting was moved by Bruce Falls, seconded by Ron Tasker.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Chairman drew attention to the upcoming 1998 Annual Conference and General Meeting of the F.O.N. being held at the University of Guelph, May 29, 30, 31 1998. Copies of the program were available.

Jim Bendell, spoke briefly of the ongoing Lands for Life Conferences (see Spring '98 edition of Seasons). Members were encouraged to take an active part by participating in public meetings (call 1-888-371-LAND for dates) and by writing the Premier or John Snobolen, the Minister, with your concerns.

SPEAKER: Jim Bendell

- 1) The Ice Storm of 1998 in Eastern Ontario
- 2) A Trip down the Attawapiskat River

- 1) The Bendells experienced the ice storm from their home near the village of Clayton (adjacent to Almonte) in the Ottawa Valley.  
On January 4 and 5, 1998 particularly, but continuing on and off for four days ground ice accumulated, caused by a north-bound warm front overriding a stationary cold established through eastern Ontario and Quebec. Precipitation super cooled, crystallized instantly on contact and accumulated up to 2 inches or more on any surfaces it came in contact with. One of the striking images described by the speaker was of the explosive sounds throughout the nights as ice together with tree branches and limbs crashed to the ground.

## 2.

Ice covered trees while beautiful to behold, were damaged extensively. Young trees, particularly birch and aspen were arched over or prostrate on the ground. Some like birch would perhaps recover, but others, less supple, would at the least be permanently disfigured. In larger hardwoods, branches were sheared off leaving the stems standing like flagpoles. In elms, oaks and maples long limbs and branches both upright and horizontal were snapped off. Many of these trees would survive but would carry the scars of the storm for a long time. Jim estimated about 5% mortality. He provided some diagrams illustrating the damage in particular species and ranked them in approximate decreasing order of damage: aspen, birch, cedar maples, elms, oaks, pine, spruce and balsam. The conifers fared best with the exception of cedar with its dense foliage, spruce and balsam because of their conical shape, white pine through its flexible branches. Pictures of white pine seemed hardly distinguishable from spruce and balsam.

The power outages were a major inconvenience for most, much more so for certain people like farmers. The Bendells coped. Food was available, warmth was provided by a wood stove, water for drinking could be obtained from friends and for other purposes from beneath the ice in the marsh adjacent to the house. Naptha was used for cooking and lighting. Refrigeration, lack of it, was a problem both food and preserved specimens in danger of spoiling. However, outdoor temperatures were sufficient to prevent complete thawing.

People were not isolated for long. Army reservists, established contact and gave out emergency supplies. Hydro crews and volunteers armed with chain saws, cleared power lines, roadways and buildings in a matter of days. Generators were at a premium, but provided for those with essential needs. Home Depot for example, apparently loaned them out and on return sold them at a \$100.00 discount.

The impact on wildlife was probably temporary. Ruffed grouse, hare and rodent activity was observed after the storm and the resident birds, particularly chickadees, were common. No direct evidence of mortality was found. Questions and comments on the storm are included at the end.

- 2) The canoe trip taken in company with family, was well illustrated with slides. The river is not yet a popular canoe route, native people being their only contact with humans, but it has many attractions as Jim demonstrated. Not least, the river flows easterly through two geological formations, to the west, the Canadian Shield, to the east the limestone plain of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the latter laid down by the Tyrrel Sea during the last glaciation.

### 3.

Starting on the Ottawakan River, near the mining town of Pickle Lake, the route traverses Lake Attawaspikat and follows the river of the same name to James Bay, a journey of about 500 miles, taking about three weeks.

Campsites and trails were not well developed and some ingenuity was required to keep to the portages, to find adequate camping sites and sufficient dry wood for fires.

The river is broad and shallow, quite straight in the eastern portion less so in the west. By August the water is at its low and numerous white water stretches with visible boulders required careful navigation. More hazardous parts were avoided by portaging.

The vegetation is dominated by black spruce and to a lesser extent white spruce with some jackpine and larch. They formed dense closed stands particularly in the western part. Along the river margins, the vegetation often burned by fire or inundated by flood water, was largely deciduous. Green alder shrubs and willows predominated with a scattered overstory of balsam poplar trembling aspen and black ash. Extensive strips marred by fire seemed to be largely a consequence of natives smoking their fish catches along the shoreline. The presence of buffalo berry was noted on limestone and fireweed was common in more recently burned sites. On the ground, dwarf raspberry with its edible fruit was widespread. Pictures of the ground vegetation revealed typical florae, in the west of the boreal forest and in the east of bogs, where string or patterned bogs overlay the limestone karst.

Expecting wildlife to be more prevalent in the east where limestone was prominent, the speaker noted that in a broad sense the reverse seemed true, with the fauna more common on the granite substrates.

The canoeists enjoyed many fine dinners of walleye and northern pike and noted the presence of sandhill crane and some 20 or so species of waterfowl and forest dwelling birds.

Ending the trip at Fort Attawaspikat somewhat east of James Bay, they were airlifted to Timmins and thence home. The canoes were barged down to Moosonee by the HBC and shipped by train. Advice to those who follow? Always "steer for the clear" and keep "the air on your derriere".

**DISCUSSION:**

Of concern was the impact of the storm on ruffed grouse and seed eating birds like buntings, sparrows, chickadees and crossbills.

Since grouse shelter in snow cavities they could become trapped by ice as observed by one member. A conclusion shared by most was, that the birds were normally strong enough to break through or alert enough to avoid it. Since the birds also depend on flower buds of aspen, birch and willow in the spring would the destruction of bud bearing branches lead to food shortages? This can be perhaps better determined in the spring. However, buds if remaining viable on fallen branches might even increase their availability. With respect to seed eating birds, while weeds a principle source of seeds for many, become temporarily unavailable when ice covered, birds probably move from the area to find alternative sources.

Some questions were asked about the canoe trip.

Q. How many portages are there.

A. Perhaps 4 or 5.

Q. Fishes?

A. Predominantly wall eye and northern pike. Often a good size.

Q. Availability of supplies?

A. None of the settlements can supply trippers. Fishing is excellent and some plants like cranberry and raspberry provide a tasty supplement. Otherwise you eat what you bring in.

The speaker was thanked by Ron Tasker.

**MEMBERS OBSERVATIONS:**

Norm Martin - The ice is out in the bay at Belleville Harbor. Lots of American mergansers (about 1000), and among others, 20 common golden-eye.

Ann Falls - At Presqu'le on the past weekend, common ducks plentiful, including canvasbacks scaups mergansers and goldeneye.

Jim Bendel - opened up for comment a question of whether road salt is responsible for observed bird kills. Harry Lumsden, as did others, observed large kills of crossbills and sometimes other seed eaters by roadsides. Salt is perhaps consumed by birds because if is not differentiated from grit particularly quartz and is toxic to them.

It is not yet possible to answer the questions raised:

- i) Do they consume enough to be toxic?
- ii) Does it alter behaviour to make them less wary of traffic?
- iii) Is it a requirement for grit or for calcium (where calcium salts are used)?
- iv) are the birds there for other reasons i.e. the roads are snow free and also provide a source of seeds? Birds seem to move from the roadside when the snow melts. Certainly a question in need of a more definitive answer.

A move for adjournment was made by the chairman, and accepted.

**NOTICE OF MEETING:**

The 930th meeting of the Brodie Club will be held in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Building, U. of T. at St. George and Harbord Sts. on Tuesday April 21, 1998 at 8:00 PM.

**SPEAKER:** *John Theberge*

**SUBJECT:** *Wolves of Algonquin Park*