

*Having missed out in 1998
on an expedition to Kilimanjaro
with some of his former South African
Bnei Akiva buddies, Dr. Ivan Rendel of Kochav
Yair set out this last July to conquer the Bowron
Lakes in Canada.*

CANOEING THE CANADIAN WILDERNESS

Extracts from a diary

"What sets a canoeing expedition apart is that it purifies you more rapidly and inescapably than any other. Travel a thousand miles by train and you are a brute. Pedal five hundred on a bicycle and you remain a bourgeois; paddle a hundred in a canoe and you are a child of nature"
Pierre Elliott Trudeau, former President of Canada.

I have always had an affinity for bodies of water, be it the sea, a lake or just a gurgling brook. This attraction is genetically coded, inherited from my parents who would always select a picnic spot near the water's edge or a holiday by the sea - perhaps some primeval drive to return to the comfort of the womb; the safety that water affords, when it totally encompasses you. A protective barrier between *you* and the *not-you*.

Intuitively, I found the place that would answer my dream. The Internet led me to the Bowron chain of lakes in British Columbia located in the Caribou Mountains, one range west of the great Canadian Rockies.

I was fortunate in finding Dave, the director

of Whitegold Adventures who would lead us through unknown territory, with humor, song and incredible understanding of our *kosher* way of life.

Besides myself and the guide and his 13-year-old son, the team included my good friend **Michael Samuels**, another former South African and two of my children, **Shevi** and **Nafti**.

Armed with an introductory video about the area and the rules, we began the first portage. Unfamiliar with pushing a loaded canoe whilst carrying a pack on our backs made it physically demanding. However, the beauty of the forest dulled the pain. Shevi and I somehow managed to negotiate our load until we were rewarded with a glimpse of the first lake. Here we launched our canoe for the first time onto the still waters of Lake Kibbee. Unrehearsed we found ourselves first in the boughs of a leaning tree and then stuck in a shallow muddy embankment as the two other boats disappeared around the bend ahead. In gratitude to our ineptitude we spotted a Bald-headed eagle's nest located in the crown of a dead tree - missed by the others, simply



because their canoes were facing the *right* direction!

Before we knew it, the first lake was over and a further 2.4-km portage lay ahead. This time we knew the tricks, our efforts improved from experience. The language of paddling—“draw”, “sweep”, “j-stroke” soon became old hat. We practiced the “man overboard” drill, enjoying the cool water and the fun of trying to alight from the canoes without tipping them over. It is impossible to describe the elation in my heart. I was here at last, isolated in the wilderness, with people I loved.

THE THIRD DAY

We reached a wondrous waterfall cascading down the cliff face, its waters joining the lake in a disturbing flurry. We moored the boats at the foot and gingerly climbed up the side of the falls to reach a perch some 15 meters above. The noise and freezing spray exhilarated us all. The only way to express ourselves was by primordial screaming. No sophisticated lexicon of language could have replaced our sheer glee.

As we continued southwards Dave began to prepare us to face the “Chute”. This is the fastest and most demand-



Ivan carrying his canoe ashore.

ing, *skill-wise*, of the entire trip. The passive Lake Isaac drains into its namesake river by rushing downhill between protruding rocks and making an almost immediate sharp right turn. To manage the turn, the front rower must master a manoeuvre known as a “stationary draw”, whilst the aft paddle must perform a “wide sweep”. This strategy turns the craft sharply. Timing is of the essence to avoid an untimely meeting with the bank that lies a short distance ahead. This all sounds foreboding, but in truth - common sense, minimal skill and practice makes for a rather exciting ride! That night spirits were high in anticipation of the *real thing* amplified by straight vodka.

THE FOURTH DAY

Morning. In no time our canoes were lining up to negotiate the Chute. Our overnight friends observed us in trepidation from the banks above the river. We passed through one by one and, they cheered and waved, as we disappeared from their view and from their lives.

On entering Lanezi Lake, we saw the remains of an avalanche that had brought packed snow down from the highest peak in the region, Mount Ishpa. We disembarked and scrambled up the frozen surface in our sandals. Dave chopped ice cubes to enhance his ailing refrigeration system. The Sabbath chicken

OOPS!

Telfed apologises for the incorrect phone number that appeared in the article “Traipsing with Tresiman in Turkey.” The correct number is 03-5107852.



and newly caught fish desperately needed this rejuvenating boost.

On the banks of the perfectly circular Lake Unna, we set up for *Shabbat*. What could be more restful than a peaceful lake, shared with people who care enough to paddle and portage 90 kilometers? In the late afternoon we paddled across to the pathway that leads to the Cariboo Falls - dramatic aqua-production as tons of fluid plunges, smashing mercilessly on the shining rocks, baked eons ago in the kiln of creation.

THE SEVENTH DAY

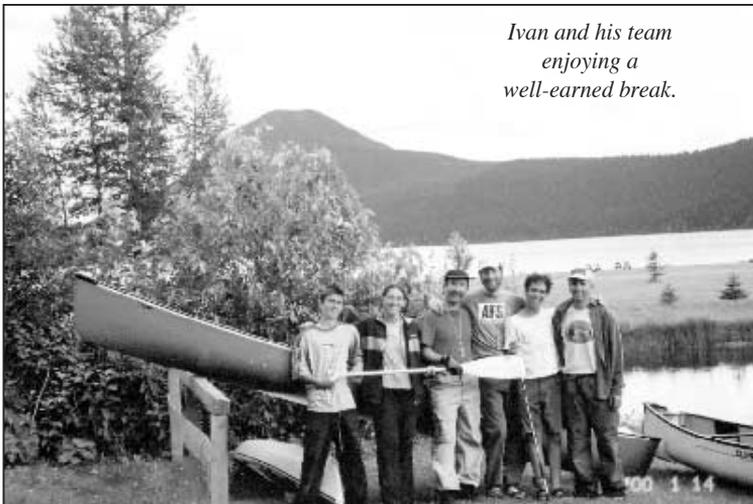
We broke camp very early in order to complete the last 30 kilometers. We felt ambivalent - the desire to fulfill our challenge and yet yearning to stay. Just another day or an hour, like *the reluctant farewell from a newfound lover*. A few more portages conveyed us to the Bowron River watershed, our final leg of the tour. It was hard work with the wind against us, but our spirits remained high. A small ridge bounding the Bowron River rudely blocked the view of the mountains that had faithfully accompanied us all along the way. We navigated slowly, our last

chance to spot beavers and bears.

Shevi guided our canoe through the long sedge grass protruding through the shallow flow. She lay low in the boat to view the breaking trail at eye level. Behind us the stalks flexed, returning gradually to their former upright posture; the effects of man totally erased by the power of nature.

Suddenly the river widened to form Bowron Lake. The river was a spawning ground for salmon that after voyaging thousands of miles across oceans, navigate up streamlets and cascades, to lay uncountable roes in the gravel of the waters in which they themselves were conceived. Another miracle to behold—the tender links in the chain of life incredibly preserved against amazing odds that only G-d Himself could actuate. Here, hungry clans of bears trap the exhausted salmon, just as they complete their biological race.

The view of the finish line obstructed by Devil's Club Mountain. Never breaking pace, we reached the northern shores of Bowron Lake half-expecting a guard of honor to receive us. A few people occupying the sparse caravan park, show cold indifference to our major achievement!



*Ivan and his team
enjoying a
well-earned break.*

Inside, I feel exhilaration, I have conquered, and I have achieved. Will I be the same as I was ever again? I hope not! Maybe someday I will return, and if not, so what, the memories are deeply engraved, always available for reflection.