

Barb Hermansen: Her Story

The Last Woman to Raise
Children on the Athabasca River

Authored by

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Foreword

How do you express the inexpressible? That is the challenge presented by trying to put someone's life story down on paper, especially when that life story covers a dynamic period like the last 50 years in Alberta's north. Aboriginal peoples living in northern Alberta have witnessed dramatic and fundamental changes to their lifeways since contact with Europeans during fur trade times, but particularly so in the last 50 to 60 years. Prior to 1960, people in northern Alberta lived freely and from the land, much like their ancestors before them. In the 1960s and 1970s, the changes occurring around them, wrought by a combination of government policies and industrial development, would radically alter their ability to live 'the bush life'. Barb explains that her feelings for the land and her pain at being forced to give it up, and thus being prevented from passing it on to her grandchildren, cannot be put "into words". To share her knowledge and life, both for her descendants and others, is now one of her main missions. It has been my honour and pleasure to have listened to her story. I only hope to have done it some justice.

Sherri Labour, MA
Traditional Knowledge Facilitator

Barb's Story

I was born in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta and raised along the Athabasca River at Mile 64. Being Métis, I want to maintain my history and keep our traditional knowledge alive to share with others.

My father, Edmond Ducharme, was born at the Lac La Biche mission in Alberta. The Ducharme family made their living from trapping, hunting and fishing. Growing up in our small family, when our work was done, we would enjoy my father's fiddling. Edmond was a true Métis. His grandfather, Antoine Ducharme, was a Michif, a French-Cree Métis who came from Winnipeg, Manitoba. He homesteaded on the south shore of Lac La Biche at a place that later became known as Plamondon. Antoine Ducharme remembered covered wagons arriving from Michigan, some of which contained members of the Plamondon family.

My mother, Annie Ducharme, was a Scottish-Cree Métis. Her grandfather came from Scotland, and homesteaded at MacDonald Island in Fort McMurray, Alberta. She was born at a lake called Wolf Lake south of Lake Athabasca, and was raised around Big Point and Old Fort. She also attended Holy Angels Residential School in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta. I remember her sewing by a coal oil lamp, and dancing the famous Métis Red River jig with a passion. She was a hard-working woman, but that did not stop her from square dancing and jigging in true Métis style.

I married Arne Hermansen from Bergen, Norway at the age of 15. We lived and raised our children, David and Kelly, at Mile 72 on the Athabasca River. David was home-schooled until he was 13, while Kelly completed pre-school at home. They were both taught how to survive off the land. As a Métis person, I have deep roots, and I am passing this down to my children, David and Kelly Hermansen, as well as to my grandchildren, Tyler, Kayla and Ava Hermansen.

Barbara Ducharme-Hermansen



Editorial Notes

First, a note on spelling, with particular regard to placenames and family names. In the case where the spelling of names may have changed due to their translation into English and/or by the nuances of the local dialect (e.g., Sven Pedersen becoming Swan Petersen), local phonebooks were used to check spellings. It is assumed, since people spell their own names for the phonebook, that these listings and spellings are accurate and up to date. Historical records and resources were also checked for some names (e.g., spelling of family name and placename 'Klausen'). In those cases where no family name with similar spelling could be found, names are spelled phonetically (e.g., Helison). These are marked with the notation [ph]. A last note regarding the spelling of words from Aboriginal languages - a few Cree and Dene words have been used in the text. They are spelled according to the way they sound in English. They were checked with Barb, who is fluent in Cree, but not Dene. All such words have been italicized in the text.

Second, a photo and map gallery have been added as appendices largely to simplify the presentation of these materials. Many more photos could have been added beyond the 50 that have been included here. While it is impossible to present a photographic representation of person's life, it is hoped these photos, most of which have been collected by Barb over her lifetime, will help give the reader some insight into her experiences. Four 11x14" maps are also included, illustrating some of Barb's knowledge regarding the areas she lived in, including historic trapline and placename information, as well as extensive use and occupancy information related to her life in the bush.

Last, but not least, it should be clear that this document is based on information provided by Barb and that it is from her memory and point of view. It is wonderful that she has been so willing to share it with the rest of us!

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The Place and Time

The Athabasca River is one of Canada's most famous and historic water routes into the north. Like local peoples, early explorers and fur traders used the river in both winter and summer as a 'highway'. The part of the river being discussed here stretches from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan (see Figure 1 below). At the south end, Fort McMurray, situated at the confluence of the Clearwater and the Athabasca Rivers, served, as it still does today, as a historic connector between Edmonton and the Athabasca country. To the north, at the river's mouth, is Fort Chipewyan, the oldest continuous settlement in Alberta, once renowned for the quality of its furs. During Barb's time growing up and raising her children on the river, in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, bitumen became the resource of interest.

In the early 1960s, Fort McMurray was still a small settlement. By the end of the decade, the town was already beginning to grow. A photo taken from the air in 1967 shows just how small the town was back then (see Photo 1 in the Photo Gallery at the back). During this time, Barb was living with her parents on their trapline at Mile 64 on the Athabasca River. Later, she moved downriver to Mile 72. This is where she and her husband built their home and raised their children.

River mile markers were used by barge companies working along the river. (Figure 2: Placenames, which can be found in the Map Gallery at the back of this booklet, shows some of the mile markers that Barb is familiar with.) Even today, trappers who lived along the river, and other local people who use the river, often refer to different locations along the Athabasca by their mile markers. Companies like the NT (Northwest Transportation) company used to bring freight to people living along the Athabasca River and on Lake Athabasca. NT barges were still running in the early 1970s. (See Photo 2 in the Photo Gallery for a picture of an NT barge taken from Mile 72.)

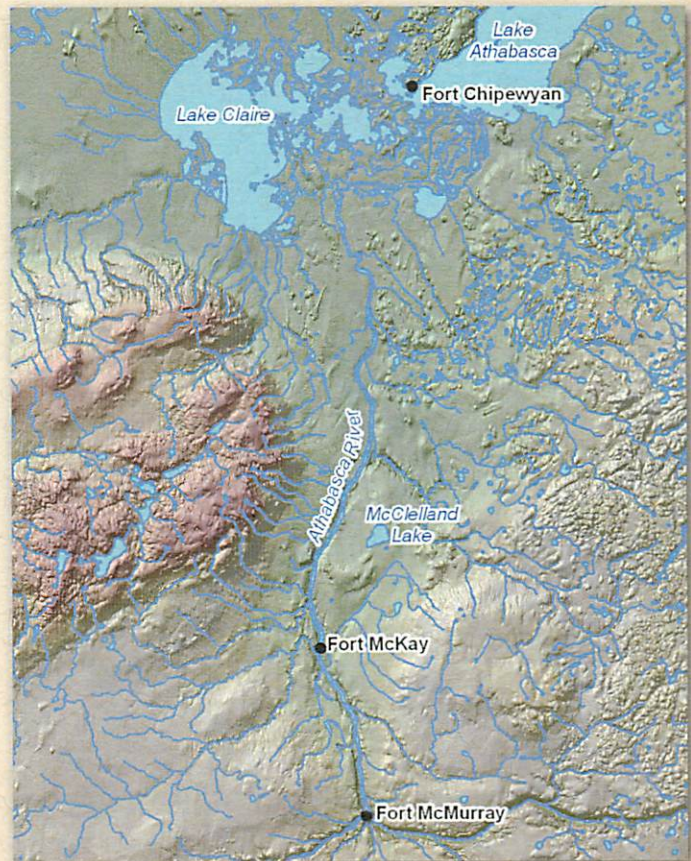


Figure 1: Regional Reference Map

All My Relations

Barb's story is, in essence, the story of Alberta's north. Her life is representative of its past, present and future. Barb is a proud Métis woman; her ancestors include Cree, European and Métis peoples. In her family tree she counts some of the first settlers in Fort McMurray and Métis ancestors who fought in the Métis Resistance in Manitoba. Her European relations can be traced back to Scotland. Her Métis and Cree relatives came from various places in northern Alberta, including Wabasca and Fort Chipewyan. She is related to people in both Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan. A recent photo of Barb can be seen in the photo gallery (Photo 3).

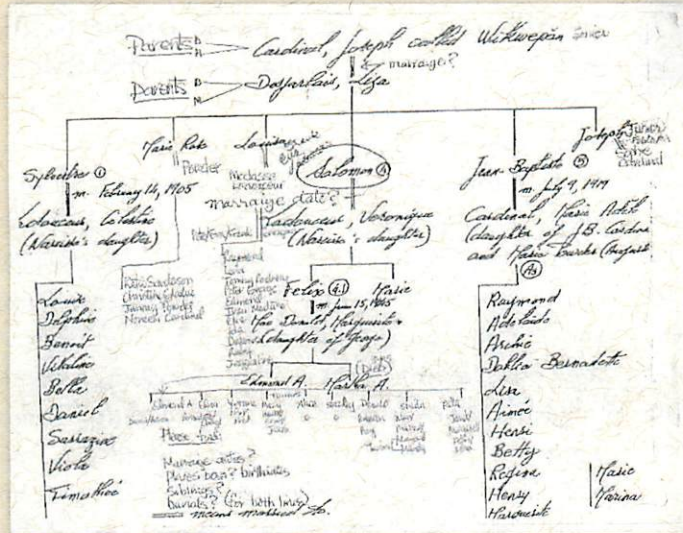


Figure 3: Family Tree

Annie was born in 1925 and married Edmo Ducharme in the Catholic Church in Fort Chipewyan when she was 16 years old (1941). (A brief life history of Annie Ducharme, excerpted from Fort McKay's traditional land use study, is included at the end of this booklet.) Annie's ancestors include both MacDonalDs and Cardinals. The original MacDonald man came from Scotland and first settled in Winnipeg, and then moved on to Fort McMurray where he married a local woman, Josephine Tremblay. 'Mac' (MacDonald) Island was named after this family. There were 12 children born to the MacDonalds - Kenneth, Don, Harry and George were some of the sons. George was Annie's father. He was a veteran of World War II. He married Sophie Cardinal from Fort Chipewyan, sister to well-known Elder Joe Sam Cardinal. Barb's Grannie Sophie stayed with her parents on their trapline on the river in the late 1950s. By the early 1960s, she had moved to Fort McMurray. She is shown in a picture taken at the mission in Fort Chipewyan with two young girls (Photo 5).

George's brother Harry was known as 'Granpa Harry' to Barb even though he was technically her mother's uncle. Granpa Harry was born in 1906, married Mary Cardinal from Wabasca in 1931, and spent most of his life on the Athabasca River. A picture of Granpa Harry can be seen in the Photo

Family Roots

Barb's parents were Annie and Edmo (Edmond) Ducharme. Barb was born to Annie's sister, and was adopted by Edmo and Annie soon after her birth. Barb never really got to know her birth parents, so, for her, Annie and Edmo are 'Mom and Dad'. Her adoptive mother and father lived their whole lives on the Athabasca River, gaining their livelihood from the land as trappers and 'bush people'. An early picture of Barb with her parents is included in the photo gallery (Photo 4).

Gallery at the end of this booklet (Photo 6). In this photograph, he is sitting on the far left with Barb's father Edmo, and her grandson, David, at far right. The picture was taken at the old Oakley house at Mile 72.

***Moose Gets Married** – Granpa Harry always spoke respectfully of animals. Fall time was when people got their moose and dried meat for the winter. The bull moose gets velvet on his horns, which they need to clean off before mating season. It often rains for an extended period around this time, helping the moose shed his velvet. Granpa Harry must have been impatient with the rain one hunting season because he remarked that just because 'moose wants to get married', he did not have to make it rain.*

Edmo Ducharme was related to Cardinals from Fort Chipewyan, though different Cardinals from Annie's family. These Cardinals are descendent of men who fled to the north to avoid persecution after the Métis Resistance. Another one of Barb's Cardinal ancestors, Joseph (*Wikwepan*) Cardinal, is buried in the cemetery at Big Point, on the south shore of Lake Athabasca.

With her former husband Arne, Barb is proud mother to two boys, David and Kelly. Through her sons, she has three grandchildren: Tyler, Kayla and Ava. It is for her children, grandchildren and other future descendents that she has decided to share her life and history with others. Family photos can be seen in the Photo Gallery (Photos 7 to 14).

The Loss of Loved Ones

Barb's father passed away when she was 23; her eldest son David was just 5 years old. She was living at Mile 72 at the time, and her parents had already moved downriver to around Mile 109. It happened at Easter - March 26th, 1978. Barb had been expecting her parents to arrive at her place, and they did not show up. At around two o'clock in the morning, four men - Stanley Shortman, George Burdynski, Frank LaCaille and Wade Thacker - showed up at the Hermansens and asked Arne to come out of the house so that they could speak with him. Barb knew then something was wrong.

The day that they were supposed to travel to visit with Barb for Easter, Edmo told his wife that he was not feeling well, saying, "We'll travel tomorrow." So they stayed home. There were other people who had homes nearby and who were staying there at the time as well - the Shortmans - Ted and his son Stanley, George and Leona Burdynski and her adopted parents Ernie and Helen Courtorielle, as well as members of the LeCaille and Thacker families. George came to visit Edmo and Annie that evening. Edmo went out to chop some wood and then came back in and played the fiddle. Soon after that he sat in a chair and passed away there. This was at about ten o'clock at night. Four of the neighbouring men then left to go to Barb and Arne's place upriver at Mile 72 to notify them. Annie stayed behind to prepare the body. She washed him and laid him out.

By the time that everyone had come back downriver on snowmobile, at around six o'clock the next morning, Edmo was laid out and dressed in a white shirt and dress pants. He had told his family he did not want to be buried in a suit. He is buried in the cemetery in Fort McKay. Some of his wife Annie's ashes rest there beside him. She passed away on August 17th, 2001.

Barb's adopted sister, Betty Laboucan, had a child that was also adopted by Annie and Edmo. This little girl is also buried in Fort McKay. She died on May 20th, 1962. Barb still remembers this event very clearly. They were at the Firebag cabin when it happened, and they traveled all the way to Fort McKay to lay the baby to rest in the graveyard there. The baby's name was Linda; her father was from Fort McKay. She was only seven months old when she passed away. Edmo loved this little girl very much and took her passing very hard. His body was laid to rest not far from where the baby is buried.



Trapping

Trapping has been a harvesting activity for Native peoples for centuries. Furs are good for clothing and bedding, among other things. The meat of some furbearers, such as muskrat and beaver, is still a favoured food for many people in northern Alberta. With the advent of the fur trade in the mid-1700s, trapping became an economic form of livelihood for northerners, and would remain a mainstay of the bush economy in the north until the mid-1970s.

Trapline Ownership

Before the government trapline system was put in place, trappers could essentially 'go anywhere'. Trapping areas were not defined by straight lines in those days. People would go where the animals were. Trapping and hunting was managed by local peoples and according to local traditions. People would get together in the bush and sort out who would go where. Trapping areas were often shared between brothers or male cousins, and handed down to male family members. This practice has not been lost; many trapping areas in the region are still held by descendants of families who have inhabited and lived in the region for centuries. Figure 4: Historic Traplines illustrates some of the historic trapping areas and traplines along the Athabasca River in the area where Barb lived. It can be seen in the Map Gallery at the end of this booklet.

The Alberta government instituted a registered fur management area (RFMA) or trapline system in the 1940s. Edmo Ducharme got his trapline from Laurent Boucher, a relation of Mrs. Petersen's (either brother or son), around this time. Edmo took Mr. Boucher some ducks and let him know that he was interested in taking over his trapping area. Laurent knew that Edmo was competent and would take good care of his area, so he gave him his trapline (which would eventually become RFMA 2331).

After people started having to pay for their lines, they would get angry if someone 'trespassed' in their trapping area. In the 1950s, trappers were paying \$2 for their traplines.

When Barb and her husband were first married in the early 1970s, they tried to get several different traplines before they succeeded in securing one. They inquired about RFMA 2346 and were informed that this line had already been sold. (RFMA 2346 is located near Poplar Point, approximately 35 kilometres downstream of where they eventually did settle.) At the time, a non-Native gentleman by the name of Jack Pluews held the trapline. He was a former park warden. His cabin was not on the river like most peoples', but inland on the south side of Ronald Lake. (Photo 15 shows this cabin.) In the 1940s, this trapping territory was worked by the Boucher family.

They also tried to purchase RFMA 592, an area historically trapped by the Trippe de Roche family, but were told they could not get it because Arne did not yet have his Canadian citizenship. They were interested in this line because it was adjacent to Barb's parents' trapline. They could travel along the Firebag River to visit with them. This line is also adjacent to the MacDonald family trapline.

Barb and her husband stayed in an old Trippe de Roche cabin that was on the MacDonald trapline through the fall, winter and spring of 1971 to 1972. In 1971, they started to build a cabin on RFMA 592, right beside a little creek. They dug a cellar, floated spruce logs down the Firebag River, and peeled and stacked them, working all one summer. When they heard they could not get the trapline, they just left the logs there.

They eventually were able to purchase a trapline on the west side of the river. They purchased the northern part from a non-Native fellow named Ken Pratt in 1973. Mr. Pratt had bought it from the Oakley family. A year later they bought the southern half from Alec Oakley's son Henry. Henry Oakley had gotten this trapline after Swan Petersen passed away. Fish and Wildlife allowed both lines to be merged into one trapline (RFMA 1275). The Hermansens built their main house at Mile 72 along the Athabasca River, where both the Petersens and the Oakleys had homesteaded previously.

Historic Trapping Families

Since the first wave of Europeans coming into the region as fur traders and explorers in the mid- to late 1700s, non-Native people drawn to the bush life have settled in Alberta's north. The first waves of Europeans, those that were ancestors to the region's first Métis, were largely from French, Scottish and English origins. Two centuries later, another wave of European men came to live on the Athabasca River during the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these came from northern European countries, such as Sweden and Norway. Like their predecessors, these men married local women, and their descendants too became part of the region's history.

Boucher, Trippe de Roche, Desjarlais, L'Hommecourt, Beaver, Marten, MacDonald, Ducharme, Cunningham, Grant, Oakley, Petersen, Klausen and Faichney – these are just some of the families that lived along the Athabasca River between Bitumount and Point Brulé (see Figure 4: Historic Traplines). Some of them predate Barb's time on the river, but all are alive in the oral history of the area. Just north of Hermansen's Main Cabin on the river, there was an old cabin that belonged to a Desjarlais man. He was trapping there before the Petersens and Oakleys moved there, probably in the early 1900s.

Old Man Petersen, locally known as Swan (from Sven), came to the Poplar Point – Point Brulé area around the time of World War I and hid in the bush there. He did not want to fight in the war. He married a Boucher woman and settled at Mile 72. Barb remembers visiting them, and his wife giving her candy. Barb was only three years old, but remembers that there was just one big room, and she sat on the bed with Mrs. Petersen. Mrs. Petersen was a large woman, ordering a coat at one time that was 50" wide and 50" long. Petersen's relative, Laurent Boucher, gave his trapline to Edmo Ducharme (RFMA 2331). This is the trapline Barb grew up on. One of Mrs. Petersen's boys is buried at the cemetery north of the Main Cabin at Mile 72. Mr. Petersen passed away in the 1950s.

The Oakleys also homesteaded what was later to become RFMA 1275. The wife, Clara, was a Cunningham, and was from southern Alberta, around Drumheller or Calgary. (There are also Cunninghams buried at the Big Point cemetery on the south shore of Lake Athabasca.) The Cunninghams are thought to be of Irish extraction. The husband, Alec Oakley, originally settled at Mac Island in Fort McMurray with his parents. His mother was 'pure Cree', and his father was white, so Alec and his siblings were 'made in Alberta' Métis.

They first built a place just north of the graveyard, and then later moved south to live at Mile 72 when Mr. Peterson passed away. One of the Oakley children is buried in the graveyard.

The MacDonalds, relations of Barb's, also lived along the Athabasca River. Granpa Harry spent most of his life trapping on the Athabasca River. In addition to RFMA 1661, Granpa Harry also used to have a trapline just north of Fort McMurray. He also used to make his way to Fond du Lac at the east end of Lake Athabasca to visit his brother there. His descendants still live along the Athabasca River today, and his trapline is still held by the MacDonald family.

The Boucher, Trippe de Roche and L'Hommecourt families are of Dene heritage and are today members of Fort McKay First Nation. Dene families like the Fletts and the Cypriens are today settled in Fort Chipewyan. These families have long lived along the Athabasca River, in places like Point Brulé and Poplar Point.

Moise Boucher, who had two brothers, one named Jonas, had a cabin at Poplar Point. Moise Boucher was father to Annie, Victoria, Maria, Theodore, Willie and Raymond (*Matsi*). Descendents of his can be found in both Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay.

Jonas Boucher used to canoe and camp on the Firebag River. Jonas was father to Alec Boucher, who was husband to Alice (nee Marcel?) Boucher, a well-loved Elder who lived in Fort McKay. Alice was auntie to Elder Charlie Voyageur from Fort Chipewyan. Jonas Boucher was also grandfather to Elder Mary Tourangeau from Fort McKay.

Moise *Sigak* Marten and his family used to have a home at the mouth of Lobstick (Redclay) Creek on the Athabasca River. One of his daughters is a resident of Fort Chipewyan and a member of Mikisew Cree First Nation.

There is a story that his father buried some money up in the hills behind this place. There used to be several families living at Lobstick Creek on the Athabasca at one time.

Moise L'Hommecourt, Norbert *Kiye* L'Hommecourt's father, had a trapping cabin on Lobstick Creek. The L'Hommecourts used to trap up into the Birch Mountains in the springtime. The old cabin was right behind a newer one built by James Grant who passed away in the 1980s; it was still standing in the 1970s. (Photo 16 shows how James Grant's cabin on Lobstick Creek looked in the summer of 2010.) When Barb was 16 years old, during the second year of her marriage to Arne, they stayed in the L'Hommecourt cabin and trapped in this area. This was before they got their own trapline. She remembers that this was a real 'trapping' cabin; it was not very high. You had to kneel down to put on your coat; you could not stand up inside it. There were, however, lots of beavers in the creek behind the cabin.


Bob Grant and his wife raised their family at Mile 87. The first home they lived in was built by Elymer Helison [ph]. The newer cabin, which is still being used, was built by son James. Mrs. Grant is now about 87 years old and living in Waterways in Fort McMurray. In the late 1950s, the Grants lost a son on the river; he disappeared and the body was never found. One of the Grant sons, Johnny, still holds a trapline on the east side of the river, across the river from the old homestead.

Adelaine and Boniface Trippe de Roche had a cabin on the river not far from where Harry MacDonald's sons Fred, Norman and Harvey had a cabin. (Adelaine was sister to *Kiye* L'Hommecourt.) The current MacDonald trapline cabin is still located in the same spot. Barb and her husband stayed in the Trippe de Roche cabin in the second year of their marriage. In the mid-1950s, 'Granpa Harry' MacDonald also used to have a cabin about a half-mile up river from the Trippe de Roche place.

Edward Trippe de Roche, son to Adelaine and Boniface, still holds a trapline at Poplar Point. Theodore Boucher, son to Moise, also used to trap near here at Poplar Point.

Barb's parents, the Ducharmes, had a trapline just north of McClelland Lake. Edmo purchased this line from Laurent Boucher in the 1940s. Felix Beaver and his family had the trapline south of the Ducharmes and north of Bitumount. One of the daughters, Elder Emma Fiachney, who is now a resident of Fort McKay, still holds the trapline. Her son also has a trapline nearby. Emma's husband Ian Faichney had a cabin on the east bank of the river inside an island known to locals as Ian's Island but later built another one north of the old fort site.

Klausen's Landing, approximately five kilometres downstream from Bitumount on the west side of the river, is named after a family that homesteaded there in the 1940s and 1950s. The son, George, was raised there. It was always known as 'Klausen's', but when it started being used as a barge landing to bring fuel to Birch Mountain Tower, it became 'Klausen's Landing'. The name stuck. The road to Birch Mountain Tower was put in with a dozer. Barb remembers her father talking about a drilling company called Boyle [ph] Brothers that were working in the area south of Klausen's Landing in the 1960s, putting in cutlines.



Life on the Firebag

A firebag is a small bag that people carried with the makings of a fire. It could be flint, tinder or even coals kept in damp moss. It is from this tool that the Firebag River gets its name. Barb grew up on a trapline that extended from the Firebag River to the Athabasca, and included all of McClelland Lake. Figure 5: Ducharme Trapline in the Map Gallery at the back illustrates some of areas Barb talked about on this trapline.

Firebag Cabin

Some of Barb's fondest memories of her childhood are of time spent on the Firebag River. The family would travel to the Firebag cabin in March for the spring beaver hunt and spend lots of time there in the spring and fall. The Beaver family, whose trapline was just to the south, also had a cabin on the Firebag. Barb's son David canoed the Firebag River in the 1990s and saw that the bank was eroding and that the Ducharme cabin was falling into the river. Barb has pictures of the place as it looked when she was young (Photo 17 in the Photo Gallery at the back is one example). It was situated on a high bank at an oxbow bend, with a beautiful view of the river.

Visiting

When people lived on their traplines year-round, they loved to have visitors. It was a real pleasure to welcome friends and neighbours for tea or an overnight stay. People were happy to see one another, even if they had just seen each other the day before. Barb remembers how happy her mother would be when the Beaver family came to visit, rushing around and preparing tea. "It was a good life," Barb says, "People were happy." She observes that maybe they had time to be happy then; nowadays it seems no one has any time.

On the big river, the Athabasca, Norbert *Kiye* L'Hommecourt would often drop by. They would know it was him coming when they saw his dog team. He used to travel a lot with his dog team.

Neighbours

The Ducharme and Beaver families were very close. Edmo used to call Emma (Faichney, nee Beaver) 'daughter', and Emma calls Barb 'sister'. Their cabins were a mile apart on the Firebag River, and 14 miles apart on the Athabasca. Emma's parents treated Barb 'special'; they would take her everywhere with them – to Old Fort Hills, the Firebag and the Cree (Marguerite) Rivers, and around McClelland Lake. Felix Beaver travelled way up north when he was 14 years old, trading with a Jewish man (Ben Halley? [ph]). He married Mary Anne Boucher when he was in his 30s. At this time he already had the trapline along the Athabasca River. Emma's mother Mary Anne saw lots of heartache; she lost five children. Emma's sister Edna is buried in the graveyard near Mile 72.

Felix Beaver drowned on the Athabasca River in early October 1970. He was in a canoe just below Fort McKay with some other people when they hit a snag. He told them to get out while he tried to hold the canoe. His body was found by his partner Edmo the next June between Klausen's Landing and Mile 64. His body did not even look like it had been in the water that long. It was not bloated or misshapen, nor had it lost any hair.

Trails and Travel

Trapline trails were used to travel from place to place, not only on the trapline itself, but throughout the whole region. The Ducharmes used any one of a number of different trails to travel between their cabins on the Firebag and the Athabasca Rivers, staying over at different campsites along the way. The Sled Island and Firebag trails were the two main east-west travel routes, while trails along the Athabasca, Firebag and the old 'Chipewyan Highway' - the trail that is now the Fort Chipewyan winter road - were major north-south routes in the region (see Figure 5: Ducharme Trapline).

Barb recalls that it was 19 miles from the cabin on the Athabasca River to their place on the Firebag, and "we always walked this every year, every spring." When McClelland Lake was frozen, it was easier to shortcut across the ice. In summer, the trail around the north end of the lake was taken.

The Sled Island Road is named so because, in wintertime, people used this trail to cross the ice to Sled Island on the Athabasca River, where they would get the materials they needed to build dog sleds.

Dog teams were the primary mode of travel in the wintertime well into the 1970s. Barb's father Edmo bought his first snowmobile from Ray Thacker in 1978; he still had a dog team at the time. He passed away not long after. He gave Barb and Arne four dogs when they were first married. Barb has fond memories of naming her father's sled dogs. She called the puppies of one litter after animals, naming them Wolf, Mink, Badger, Fox, Weasel and Skunk.

Edmo often put his trail blazes on four sides, or all around a tree. At the intersections of trails, he would sometimes bend small trees. These crooked trees would be easy to spot while travelling, no matter the weather. It was hard to get lost on his trails because they were so well marked.

Families who lived along the Athabasca would often travel upriver to Fort McMurray to shop and trade in the summertime. This trip might take up to two weeks to complete. People took their time, camping, hunting, fishing and berry picking along the way. They would travel by canoe, sometimes in groups, sometimes just one or two canoes traveling together. Barb noted that none of this history is in the Heritage Centre in Fort McMurray.

Crossing the Athabasca - One winter, about mid-December, the Ducharmes were going to visit the Oakleys across the river at Mile 72. Edmo did not trust the ice on the river - there was a little bit of snow covering it. He proceeded across alone, checking the ice with his axe. His axe went through, and then so did he, and he did not even move. Annie was in the sleigh, wrapped up with her daughter Betty, who was still a small child. She thought she and the sleigh were going to go through the ice as well. Edmo got back on the ice and rolled away from the hole where he had fallen in. He told his wife to get out of the sleigh very slowly and get on the runners at the back. He went towards the shore on the other side, where the ice was safe and told his wife he would call the dogs. And that's how they got to the other side safely.

Campsites

There were a number of places where the Ducharmes would camp as they traveled their trapline. Moose Creek camp, located on the east bank of the creek at its intersection with the Sled Island Road, was one of their main camps. From this camp, the family hunted moose, trapped, picked berries and gathered medicines. They would stay there for a week or so in the fall and spring as they travelled between their places on Athabasca and Firebag. Barb's parents built her a swing at the Moose Creek camp to encourage her to stay close to home.

Bear Dance - Along the trail to the Moose Creek Camp there was a large tree that Edmo called 'Bear Dance.' Bear Dance Tree was a trail marker along McClelland Creek, about halfway between the Firebag cabin and the house on the Athabasca. When she was a little girl, Barb's father would tell her a story of how Bear dances at this tree, and she remembers that tree to this day.

Two other campsites were Eight Lake and the 'plywood shack'. Barb remembers staying at Eight Lake, picking berries with her mother, while her father hunted ducks. The 'plywood shack' stood at the corner of the Chipewyan Highway and the Sled Island Road. Barb believes that the old shack was left there by surveyors who were doing work in the area.

Barb often stayed in Fort McKay with her parents in the summertime. They would camp along the riverbank in Fort McKay for months at a time, just down the hill from where Chief Jim Boucher's house is located. They lived in a tent while they stayed there. They were staying there around the time the bridge across the McKay River was finished in the mid-1960s. At the time when the Great Canadian Oil Sands (GCOS) project started in the early 1961, they were staying at the mouth of the Steepbank River. GCOS later became Suncor.

Athabasca River Home

The Ducharmes' place along the Athabasca River was at Mile 64. This house was built in the 1940s using horizontal log and dovetail notch construction. It was close to good drinking water, fishing and hunting, and the major travel route of the region – the Athabasca River.

A freshwater spring comes out of the 'limerock' near the Athabasca cabin. The Ducharmes used this spring for drinking water and as a refrigerator. The spring never froze over in winter, and was cold enough in summer to preserve meat in. In Barb's words, "My mother would put meat in sealers [jars] when they killed a moose, and into the creek.... The creek was ice cold. And I believe they probably kept it for three weeks in jars." The limerock is all over the shoreline near the Athabasca River cabin. Fossils can be found just about anywhere. Barb remembers collecting them when she was young.

Mysterious Rocks - One time, Barb's mother Annie was fishing from the rocks near the 'old shack'. She was fishing there quietly when all of sudden it was like someone had started throwing rocks into the river near her. She did not see anyone there, but assumed her husband was teasing her. When she questioned him about it later, he stated that it had not been him. (Barb explained that Edmo was an honest man and that he would never lie about such a thing.) This led her mother to believe that something had happened at this spot long ago.

In a time when dog teams were the way to travel in wintertime, large quantities of fish were required to keep them fed. The family would set nets at an eddy just upstream of the Athabasca cabin for whitefish. Whitefish were used to make 'hang fish', which were left whole, speared by the tail and then hung to dry. About 10 fish would be put on one stick. About 2,000 to 2,500 fish would be needed to feed the average-sized dog team. There were enough fish in the river back then that the family would be able to fill their catch in two to three weeks during the September run.

Moose start moving down toward the Athabasca River in the colder months. Edmo used to hunt moose across the river from his cabin at Mile 64 when they came across from the foothills of the Birch Mountains. Barb explained that in November and December the moose would be 'just like cattle' around the Crooked Lake cabin near the foot of the Birch Mountains. By the end of December they start moving closer to the Athabasca River.

There were so many caribou in the early 1950s that Edmo could not set his traps; the caribou kept knocking his snares down. Some say that caribou left the region because people got 'too greedy'. They have been not been seen south of Lake Athabasca since the mid-1950s.

Just downstream of Mile 64 is a place called Bear Island. In July, this island is full of bearberries (a red willow with white berries). In the wintertime, Annie and Barb would go across the river to a little slough to set snares. It was a good place to catch rabbits.

In the 1940s, the Castor family had a store just to the north of where the Ducharmes lived at Mile 64. He would stock supplies for local trappers. There was an 'old shack' still standing at the site when Barb was young. She recalled that her older sister Betty using the Castor cabin in the 1950s. Her parents also lived in this 'shack' before moving to the cabin on the south side of the creek.

By the mid-1970s, Barb's parents had sold their trapline and moved north to Point Brulé because there was too much oil and gas activity in the area. Photo 18 in the Photo Gallery shows Edmo and Annie packing their household goods downriver during the move.

A Mother's Teachings

Barb's mother Annie was skilled in many things. She would make pieces of furniture to furnish their homes, like small tables and shelves.

As a trapper's wife, she had to be proficient in preparing furs for market. Food gathering and preparation was a constant task. Butchering and drying moose meat, catching rabbits and chickens, fishing, berry picking and canning were all important chores in a bush woman's daily life. Harvested fruit, like blueberries, cranberries and rose hips, had to be put away for winter. Berry picking was good near both the Firebag and Athabasca cabins. Annie would get spring cranberries near their cabin on the Firebag, and harvest blueberries and cranberries in the jackpine areas along the east bank of the Athabasca River.

Barb got seven years of schooling in Plamondon, but most of her education was gained from self-education and from her mother on the trapline. She learned her sewing and beading skills from her mother. She remembers Annie gathering the plants that she used for dying her sewing materials. In her biography in Fort McKay First Nation's 1996 traditional land use study, Annie describes how she learned about dyes and sewing from her mother. (See section at the end of this booklet for a short biography of Annie Ducharme). As a young woman, Barb learned to take a wild chicken gizzard, peel it and then put the inside of it on a string around your neck. Some people believed that this was a way to ensure that you would be a good sewer when you get older.

Lady Slippers – Lady Slippers are today known as a rare plant, but when Barb was growing up, they were plentiful. She liked them so much as a little girl she used to pick them and put them under her pillow. Lady slippers were like a magic word to her.

Barb's mother knew a lot about medicines. On one occasion, Barb's parents took her to see a doctor in Lac La Biche for a cut she had on her leg. The medicine the doctor gave them did not work. When they got down to their trapline, Annie went in to the woods to get some bark and used that to treat the wound. Barb's leg healed within two weeks.

Annie also used traditional medicine to protect the family from an Asian flu epidemic that went through the region in the 1960s. She would get heart medicine from around the Firebag River, but would also get medicines from pretty well all over the trapline – along Moose Creek and the Sled Island Road, as well as around McClelland Lake (see Figure 5: Ducharme Trapline).

Another time, when Barb was a young woman, her mother helped her with some 'woman's troubles' she was having. She went to talk to her mother about her problem. Annie said, "Wait, I'll give you medicine." Sure enough, she was okay in a couple of days. She was 21 years old at the time.

Barb learned a lot about medicines and bush food from her mother. She learned that kinnikinnick (bearberry or stoneberry) makes a good tea to treat gout. As it cleanses your blood of toxins, it is also good for bladder or urine infections. In the springtime, her mother used to cook kinnikinnick berries with a little bit of sugar and lard. It is a good treat to have in the bush when you do not have much. Kinnikinnick can also be mixed with tobacco and smoked. The kinnikinnick is dried in a cast iron pan before mixing with the tobacco. She learned that plaintain seeds can be used to thicken soup, and its leaves can be used to treat a bee sting. That clover makes a good tea, bluebells are good heart medicine and white alfalfa is 'rabbit food'.

Barb remembers harvesting sap from the inner rind of big poplar trees by removing the bark and then scraping the tree. This was eaten in the springtime. These same trees would be harvested for firewood a couple of years later. They also tapped birch trees in the spring to get 'birch water', which was used as a syrup. The time to tap trees is when there is still snow on the ground, but before the leaves start coming out on the trees.



The Hermansen Trapline

Barb married Arne Hermansen in 1970 when she was 15 years old. (Photo 19 shows them as a young couple.) Barb and Arne had two weddings. One when she was 15, and one in Fort McMurray when she was 31 (1985) so that they could be 'legal'. The Hermansens started living in the bush together soon after they were married. As a wedding present, Edmo gave them four of his sled dogs. Arne had one dog, and had been given another by a friend of his. With six dogs, they now had a team and could start living and travelling in the bush. Their second spring together, they nearly starved. Arne had spent some time in the bush, but he had not grown up in the bush as Barb had. She finally told him that they were going to her parents' place upriver on the Firebag. (Photo 20 shows Barb standing in a posed photo with a duck in the Firebag River.)

The Hermansens spent a couple of years trying to get their own trapline. (See section on Trapline Ownership above.) They finally managed to get RFMA 1274, which had been homesteaded by the Petersens and Oakleys before them. Barb remembers having to leave her eldest son David in Fort McMurray with a babysitter when she and Arne first started trapping. He was just a baby then. She said, "I'm telling you, that was hard!" Barb was only 18 years old.

Barb left her trapline home in 1986 to ensure that her boys got an education. She predicted that they would not be able to live as she and her parents had. Kelly, the youngest and his grandmother's Annie's 'boss', was five years old. He and his brother David had lived their whole lives on the trapline up to that point. Barb had picked out a special place on her trapline where she wanted to be buried.

This section describes Barb's married life on the trapline, and some of the places she considers home (see Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline).

The Main Cabin

When Barb and Arne first moved to their trapline, they lived in the old Petersen-Oakley cabin at Mile 72 (see Photo 21). In the early 1980s, they started building their own home, which was a large, two-storey log cabin. They moved in in 1984. This home would become their main living area, while all other cabins on the trapline served as hunting or trapping cabins. Barb kept a large garden here, and there were several outbuildings to store food, tools and skidoos, as well as the wood needed to heat their home. (Photos 22 and 23 in the Photo Gallery show the Hermansen homestead and newly built home.)

Barb also had an area where she could smoke and dry the meat obtained by her hunters. She would also put up meat in 'sealers' just as her mother had taught her. She planted lilac bushes along the riverbank in 1984.

Old Growth – There are poplar trees along the Athabasca River at Mile 72, just in front of the Main Cabin, which have been cored and dated at over 400 years old (see Photo 24). Some of these trees were lost in a tornado that knocked them down as it came downriver. The trees on Bird Island, just to the south of Mile 72, were all 'chopped off' on top. This was in the 1970s.

Inside the Main Cabin are many historic items, some of them mementos passed on by family and friends. The wood stove in the kitchen was the Oakley's cooking stove (Photo 25). The bear trap over the stove in the living room was given to Arne by Boniface Trippe de Roche. This heating stove was bought by Barb and Arne and came all the way from Vermont (Photo 26).

While the Hermansen family may be the last family to live on this trapline, they stand in good company in a long line of trappers and homesteaders. Prior to their tenure, the Petersens and the Oakleys held traplines here. Not far from this site, north of the Main Cabin, but south of the graves (see Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline), is where an old Desjarlais cabin was once located. Desjarlais was trapping here before the Oakleys. There are delphiniums at the Main Cabin that were planted there by Mrs. Petersen in the 1920s (see Photo 27).

There is a small cemetery located about a half kilometre north of the Main Cabin. The Oakleys had once had a cabin north of this cemetery; they were still living there in the 1950s. There are several children buried in this cemetery, including Edna Beaver, a sister of Emma Faichney's, an Elder living in Fort McKay; a young boy that was a relative of Mrs. Petersen's, and an Oakley girl, Louise, who died at age seven.

In the 1970s when the Hermansens first started living at Mile 72, the footings of the old Desjarlais place could still be seen on the forest floor, along with some old cans. When Barb moved there in the early 1970s, Oakley's old barn near the cemetery was also still standing. In the hill behind the Main Cabin there is a cave dug into the hillside. Barb once found a band-aid in there with salve still on it. She thinks the Oakleys kept this as a cache site.

The Main Cabin is connected to the rest of the trapline through a network of trails, most of

them hand-cut. (Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline shows some of the trails maintained and used by the family.) When Barb and Arne bought the trapline, they built and rebuilt a number of cabins, and re-opened many of the old trails that had originally been built and cut by Alec Oakley and Swan Petersen. From their Main Cabin at Mile 72, the Hermansens could travel to many different places, including Cranberry Lake, Big Lake, Moose Cabin, Crooked Lake and Kelly Lake.

Gardening

Gardens were an important part of trapline life for Métis peoples. Both Barb and her mother before her kept sizeable gardens. Vegetables put away for the winter had to last until the next harvest. Barb's carrot row had to be about 60 feet long to have enough carrots to last the year. In her garden at the Main Cabin, Barb had perennials like rhubarb, strawberries, red and black current, and raspberry bushes. In her vegetable garden, she planted staples like potatoes, turnip, carrots, onions and cabbage every year. Her cabbages would grow to about 10 pounds and would be put up as sauerkraut. (Photos 28 and 29 show Barb and David in the garden at Mile 72.) Barb would also grow things like brussel sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes and sunflowers. Moose meat, chicken, fish, and sausages would be prepared and put away. Barb would have put up hundreds of jars of fruit, berries and vegetables by the time her harvest was complete.

The Lake Cabin

For the first few years on their newly acquired trapline, the Hermansens spent a lot of time clearing old trails, trapping, and repairing and rebuilding old cabins. The cabin at Big (Oakley) Lake is one of these. Arne built the Lake Cabin in the mid-1970s using logs from a cabin nearby that was previously owned by Ken Pratt. Mr. Pratt was a trapper who was in the area in the 1960s. Photo 30 shows the Big Lake Cabin as it appeared in the summer of 2010.

Big Lake is called Oakley Lake on a lot of maps because it was located on the Oakley trapline and the Oakleys had a cabin there in the 1950s. The Hermansens called it 'Big Lake' simply because it is the biggest lake on their trapline. When they built their Big Lake Cabin, a historic Oakley cabin and barn were still standing to the southeast, near the middle of the east side of the lake. The Hermansens used to stay in this old cabin when David was a child and they were first trapping on their line (Photos 31 and 32 are of Barb and David at Big Lake). Barb and Arne chose to build their place closer to the north end of the lake. Barb took photos of Mr. Oakley's old horse-drawn mower and rake that were still standing in the hayfields in the 1970s (see Photos 33 and 34 in the Photo Gallery). Mr. Oakley used to keep about five horses. He used to cut grass for his horses at Moose Cabin, First Creek and Cranberry Lake.

Just to the west of Big Lake is Sandy Lake. These lakes are part of a complex of waterways, cabins, trails and trapping routes that the Hermansen family used to make a living. From the Lake Cabin, the Hermansens would set traps in all directions, harvesting beaver, fisher, mink, weasel, lynx, wolf and fox. Arne would go off with the dog team or on snowmobile towards the Birch Mountains, while Barb would make a circuit on snowshoes north of Big Lake towards Sandy Lake and home again. (Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline shows some of the trapping routes around the lakes. Photos 35, 36 and 37 are scenes of Barb trapping near Big Lake in the 1970s.) She would set traps at each beaver house. This circuit would take her all day to complete. The pelts would be taken south to market in the spring; the meat would be used to feed the dog team.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, Barb and her husband guided out of the Lake Cabin, welcoming visitors from all over Europe.

Thin Ice – One winter when David was still a small child, Barb and Arne started out from the Lake Cabin, intending to go to Crooked Lake. They were travelling along Big Creek with a snowmobile and sled when they suddenly went through the ice. Arne was riding on the backboard. They had to return to the Lake Cabin to thaw out; both Barb and Arne had gotten wet and their wrap-around moccasins had frozen to their pant legs. They had to put their feet in warm water to get the moccasins off. They were very lucky as David was bundled up in the sleigh at the time. Arne managed to grab him just in time.

They would start out from the Main Cabin at Mile 72, walk the eight miles to the Lake Cabin, and stay there to hunt for 'trophy' moose with their clients.

Barb's grandson Tyler, who is now a teenager, goes to the Lake Cabin every fall with his father David and his grandfather to call moose. From the time that Tyler could walk, he has hunted there. (Photo 38 shows a picture of Tyler as a young boy in the bush.) Knowing what the future holds, he is trying to get his first animals on his grandfather's trapline. As the eldest grandson, the trapline was meant to go to him.

Squirrel Cabin

Squirrel cabin is an historic trapping cabin site located west of Big Lake in the foothills of the Birch Mountains. This was one of the many cabins built by Alec Oakley. It is recorded on Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline.

Bush Trails

Alec Oakley's trails were always big and wide to accommodate his horses. Just to the north of the Main Cabin is a wide trail that Mr. Oakley dug into the hill so that the grade was sloped right for his horses.

The trail from Mile 72 to the Lake Cabin was opened in the 1920s. The trail to Cranberry Lake, which goes around some small ponds to the southwest, was cut in the late 1940s to early 1950s. Cutlines have since been put in around here. There is an old cutline that used to be a winter road that goes from the Ells River in the south all the way to Wood Buffalo National Park in the north. If the river was not good in the early fall, the Hermansens sometimes used this trail to go to Big Creek, or to visit James Grant.

When Arne and Barb took over the Oakley trapline, they opened up the old trails between Big Lake, Moose Cabin and Crooked Lake. The trail from Big Lake to Cranberry Lake that goes by Moose Cabin is full of big meadows favoured by deer. When going trapping from their home on the river to Crooked Lake, they would stay overnight in a tent near Eymundson Creek, and then go on to Crooked Lake and stay there for a couple of nights. They used this trail a lot in the late 1970s, travelling by snowmobile. Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline in the Map Gallery illustrates the network of trails that were used on the trapline.

Furs for Sale

The Hermansens made a good living from trapping. Furs from the fall hunt would be taken to Fort McKay around Christmas time by dog team. Barb and Arne would then have to take a bus to Edmonton to get their furs to market. Their average fall harvest would include about 40 beaver pelts, as well as some lynx, fox and mink furs. There were no marten in the area in the 1980s; they came in later. And fisher only started showing up in the 1970s. The Hermansens would travel to Fort McKay and Edmonton again in mid-winter and after spring break-up to sell their winter fur harvest. There were basically three harvests – early fall, mid-winter and spring – to meet the deadlines for the Edmonton fur auction. Barb remembers once getting a silver fox at the north end of Big Creek. Arne also got a few arctic

fox up there. Photo 40 shows Arne with some of his furs at the old Oakley place on Big Lake.

There are stories that the Oakleys used to 'smuggle' moose hides into Fort Chipewyan by putting a second floor in their boat. Forest rangers would limit the number of hides that people could sell. The usual practice was that people living on the river south of the Firebag would go upriver to Fort McKay or Fort McMurray. People living north of the Firebag River normally went to Fort Chipewyan to trade for goods.

Crooked Lake

Crooked Lake is a small, long, narrow lake on Eymundson Creek near the Birch Mountains (see Photo 41). Alec Oakley built the cabin that is still standing there (Photo 42 was taken in the summer of 2010.) Mr. Oakley had a distinctive building style. Corners were dove-tailed and logs were hewn on the inside so that the interior walls were flat (see Photos 43 and 44). He used a special axe to do this. Arne and Barb put a tin roof on the Crooked Lake cabin in the late 1970s, which is the reason it is still standing today. (Photo 45 shows the tin roof on the Crooked Lake cabin.) A small kitchen cupboard that used to belong to Mrs. Petersen is still inside the cabin. In the 1970s, the area around the cabin was clear and there was a view of the lake (see Photo 46). Now brush has grown up all around the cabin.

The first year that Barb and Arne went to the Crooked Lake Cabin to trap, Arne got very sick and could not do anything. Barb set about 50 rabbit snares on the Moose Cabin trail from which she got 25 rabbits. She also got some chickens. Arne swelled up and had boils. Barb decided that he needed help, so she took him by dog team to her parents' place across the river at Mile 64. Her mother treated Arne, using spruce gum and beaver castors. She used a hot knife to melt the spruce gum with lard.

River Travel – Arne used to say that his wife Barb was the only person he would lend his boat to because she knew the river so well. She could travel the river in the dark with just a spotlight. Travel on the big river was safe most times of the year. During spring break-up however, there would be about two weeks when it was impossible to travel. The ice would come up the riverbanks, sometimes halfway up the trees. (Photo 39 was taken in 1974. It shows the ice from break-up under the trees along the banks of the Athabasca River.) Fall freeze-up was less dramatic, but people still had to be careful when venturing out onto the newly formed ice.

Barb remembers how she used to break trail for Arne and the dog team, running the six to eight kilometres from Crooked Lake to Cranberry Lake on snowshoes. There is a cutline that goes straight across from Cranberry Lake and can be used in the wintertime to get to Crooked Lake. Barb would leave Crooked Lake and would be at Cranberry Lake before Arne and the dogs caught up with her. This was not traditional practice for a man and wife team. Usually, with Native men of the time, the man would be the one out front breaking trail for the dogs.

Alec Oakley died in the Crooked Lake cabin in 1971. He was found by Ian Faichney and his son Bruce, who walked into Crooked Lake from Klausen's Landing, knowing that something was wrong when Mr. Oakley had taken longer than was supposed to return. The body was not found until about seven to ten days after Mr. Oakley passed away. No matter how white Barb was able to make the plywood floor of the cabin when she scrubbed it, the outline of his body remained. Mr. Oakley's daughter Muriel lived at the Crooked Lake cabin as a young girl.

Moose Cabin

Moose Cabin, so called because it is good area for hunting moose, was also built by Alec Oakley. It is located about four to five kilometres north of the Crooked Lake Cabin. The cabin was located beside Big Creek, near hayfields surrounded by tall poplar trees (see Figure 6: Hermansen Trapline). These hayfields used to be harvested by Mr. Oakley for his horses. Barb and Arne would often stop at Moose Cabin when travelling between Crooked Lake and Big Lake. Barb once found a penny there dated 1945.

Cranberry Lake

Cranberry Lake is located about five kilometres southwest of the Main Cabin (see Figure 6). It was always called Cranberry Lake because it is a good spot to pick cranberries. Sandhill cranes always nest to the east of Cranberry Lake. Barb's

mother used to tell her that the sound of a sandhill crane call is a sure sign that spring has arrived. Photo 47 shows Cranberry Lake from the air; it was taken during fieldwork in the summer of 2010.

Kelly Lake

Kelly Lake is named after Barb and Arne's youngest son. It is located on the northern part of the Hermansen trapline (see Figure 6 and Photo 48). Arne cut a trail there and uses it for hunting buffalo and moose. The trail to Kelly Lake goes north of Kelly Lake and may have been part of an ancient trail system along the river. (Archaeological investigations funded by Teck found many artifacts along ancient trails systems nearby.) The lake is small, deep and round. Barb used to pick berries here in the fall. The Hermansens took their son Kelly to this lake when he was very young and named it after him.

Guiding

In the late 1970s, Barb decided to start guiding. She and her husband Arne worked as guides for hunters throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s; she continued guiding after she moved to Fort McMurray with the children. At first, a German friend of theirs helped them get clients. He would bring over friends from Europe. They then got a booking agent in Edmonton. After a while, they went out on their own, advertising in safari hunting-type magazines distributed in countries like Norway, Sweden and Finland.

When they first started guiding, they sometimes used James Grant's cabin on Lobstick Creek. It was a cabin Barb was familiar with; she had visited there many times. If she was guiding people on a spring bear hunt she would take them over to a spot between the Athabasca and Firebag Rivers. There is a little lake there where bears go to eat joint grass (see Figure 6).

Most guiding was a fall hunt for moose. The Hermansens would use the Big Lake and Crooked Lake cabins for this hunt. Clients would arrive in Fort McMurray, be brought downriver to the Main Cabin in boat, stay there overnight, and then walk into the Lake Cabin. Barb remembers welcoming hunters from many different countries, including, Norway, Finland, Italy, Germany, Sweden and Spain.

While she was living in Fort McMurray, Barb would take clients south of Fort McMurray or north of the Birch Mountains to Eagle's Nest Lake (referred to as 'Old Wives' Lake' in the history books). Barb stayed there in 1991 with a hunter from Norway. She saw the remains of some 40 to 50 year old cabins there (see Figure 2: Placenames). She remembers walking to Claire Lake and fishing there near the forestry holding camp and dock. Her client caught a big jackfish and Barb cooked it on a stick over the fire for him.

Barb would stay about 10 days in the bush with her clients. Hunters were often looking for the animal with the largest set of antlers. Barb had a trapline around Maxwell Lake in the 1990s; she partnered with Pete Hoffman. He still holds the trapline. She had to give it up due to access issues. It did not work for her because the only way to access the trapline was to walk in from the Birch Mountains. The lake itself is too small for planes to land on, so she was unable to fly clients in. She also guided from the Ronald Lake cabin one year (see Photo 15).



Stories and Special Places

Kiyass - Long Ago

When Cree Elders are speaking, an English listener will often hear the word *kiyass*, meaning 'long ago'. Barb remembers how her father and Felix Beaver would sit and visit and drink tea and share stories. More often than not, Edmo would be the one listening while Felix spoke in Cree. Barb still remembers some of Felix's story about a grizzly.

She used to love to visit and stay with the Beaver family. Mary Anne, Felix's wife, would tell stories of 'long ago'. Barb would comb Mary Anne's hair to get her to tell stories. She remembers one about a fellow and his unique hat. Years later Barb figured out that the hat was made from the heart sac of an animal.

"There's Always a Sign"

The old timers always knew when something was going to happen. One time Edmo dreamt someone was walking on him. He only saw the person's lower legs, which were clothed in jeans. He told Barb to tell her husband Arne to be careful because he wore jeans. Not long after one of Granpa Harry's sons, Norman MacDonald, passed away. He always wore jeans.

Another time, Edmo dreamt of a white horse chasing him. The next day Felix Beaver came to visit and asked Edmo if he had scared him. He had sent Edmo the white horse to tell him he was coming to visit.

In the same spring that Granpa Harry caught three mice in the same trap at the same time, three children passed away – Linda Ducharme, a Faichney child, and a MacDonald child. This was in 1962.

Special Places

The people who lived in and around McClelland Lake tell of how it is a special place. Special creatures and beings live in this area, some of who have helped humans in times of dire need. Felix Beaver used to talk about a giant snake that he had seen on the Firebag River; it

moved between the Firebag River and McClelland Lake. Elder Adelaine Trippe de Roche used to tell a story about a creature she had seen in a long, deep pond near the Athabasca River, moving first 'this way' and then 'that way'.

There are deep, pothole lakes around McClelland Lake. Barb has seen one, on the northwest side of the lake, which is three to four hundred yards in diameter, and very round and very deep. The story is that a meteor as big as a car fell in the lake and made this lake, which is why it is so deep.

At one time, there used to be fish in McClelland Lake. But, one year long ago, Felix Beaver found a lot of fish bones all around McClelland Lake. After that, there were no fish in McClelland Lake. Any fish that may be there now are as a result of a government fish stocking program.

Bitumount

Bitumount is a provincial historic site and site of one of the first oil sands plants in the region. It is located on the east bank of the Athabasca River near Lafont Island (see Figure 2: Placenames, and Photo 49). It is on Emma Faichney's trapline. During Barb's time on the river, Bitumount was taken care of by a

watchman - Ernie Eakin. He was a dear old man who passed away in Fort McMurray at '95. Barb used to take care of his financial matters for him. He was at Bitumount for about 40 years, from about the 1940s to the 1980s.

Chipewyan - Cree War

Sometime in the 1800s, there was a fort on the east bank of the Athabasca River a couple of kilometres north of Bitumount. Barb remembers her parents talking about this place and about a battle that happened there between the Chipewyan and the Cree. The Chipewyan used to be on one side, and the Cree on the other. The battle happened when there was snow on the ground, but the river was frozen. It told how the snow on the river was 'red with blood'. Quite a few people got killed there. Barb feels that this site needs to be protected. As she said, "There is lots of history on this river. Lots."

Barb's mother Annie used to pick rhubarb from the old fort site. A very old and big jackpine stands on the riverbank in front of the site, which is only accessible by the river. There also used to be a small settlement with several houses around the old fort. Nobody can live here for long. Ian Faichney had a cabin below here (see Figure 2: Placenames).



Changes

In her time, Barb has observed many changes. Her dad Edmo predicted that there would be big changes to the land once oil and gas activity started. When GCOS started up in the 1960s, he said that the vegetation around the plants would be brown for 50 miles around. One indicator of air pollution is the length of 'Old Man's Beard' or 'Witches' Hair', a type of lichen that grows on trees. It grows longer in areas where the air is clean, but its growth is shortened by air pollution. Barb has observed this shortened growth on her parents' old trapline (see Photo 50 in the Photo Gallery).

The biggest changes that have happened have happened to the water levels in the Athabasca River. There used to be big floods on the river. This happened fairly regularly in the 1950s and up to the 1970s, but never happens now. During spring break-up, Edmo and Annie's place on the Athabasca used to get flooded out frequently. Water would sometimes be half-way up the walls of their cabin. Ice would be pushed up the high banks and end up melting there under the trees (see Photo 39). During spring break-up, willows growing along the sandbars and banks of the river would be cleared away by the ice and flooding. Now, the willows never go away; they just keep spreading. Places like Sled Island and Bear Island were called islands because they were surrounded by water. People could get around them in boats. Now a person can walk across to them from shore.

Barb has a hard time describing the hurt she feels inside when she sees all the development around where she grew up. It was heartbreaking listening to her as she explained

that she knew that it would be impossible for her grandchildren to enjoy or experience the wonderful life that she had had on the trapline. She could barely talk about the fact that she knew it would be "all gone soon". She has shared that she does not even want to look at the clearing and disturbance on both sides of the Athabasca River. She tries to imagine how the land will look 10 years from now, and predicts it just be a "sand pit." She thinks of her grandchildren and is heartbroken that there will be "nothing" for them. She understands, in a way that those who have not made their living from the land cannot, what the removal of the trapline will mean and what is being taken from her descendants. They will never experience the life she did - a life of independence and freedom - a life that teaches self-respect, builds self-esteem, confidence and self-reliance. A good life.



Annie Ducharme Biography

The following is reproduced from *There is Still Survival Out There: A Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study of the Fort McKay First Nations*, 1996 (2nd ed.), published by the Arctic Institute of North America. Annie was interviewed by Fred MacDonald in 1994. She passed away in 2001 and some of her ashes lie in Fort McKay. Barb was raised by Annie and her husband, Edmo (Edmond) Ducharme on their trapline between Mile 64 on the Athabasca River and the Firebag River.

I trapped over forty years south of sled Island on the east side of the river. My late husband and I lived there summer and winter. We made our living off the land. We ate the wild meat and picked berries. We used moose hides for all the things we needed to survive in the bush – mitts, parkas, jackets, gun cases, small bags and also dog harnesses. We got our thread from the moose. It was sinew and was very strong. I remember my mom used moose hair for her fancy sewing work, making flowers on slippers and jackets. She used to draw the flowers by using dye from berries, willows and some willow roots. We also used porcupine quills for our fancy sewing. Mother would colour them the same way as the moose hair – we would get our willow from around the rivers and lakes for dyeing our new moose hides and re-dyeing our old, faded moose items, too, so they looked like new again. We would scrape the bark off the willow, then boil what we took from under the bark to make the dye. A lot of times – if we ran out of tobacco – we would go up to the jackpine area and pick some small red leaves. That was kinnikinnick, better known as bearberry, and we used it for our tobacco.

I would dry meat so we could keep it longer and make it lighter for packing if we had to go some place. We did a lot of moving around to where the hunting and fishing and berry picking was good. We also got our syrup from birch sap. After we collected the sap we would boil it until it turned yellow. Now and then we would add a little sugar to sweeten it. I made all of our own jams from the berries we picked – blueberry, raspberry, cranberry, and Saskatoon berries. I also picked chokecherries and I would crush them by pounding them. Then I dried them. I also dried saskatoons for longer keeping. I used some of these dried berries in my bannock for special days.

We never went to the store very much – just to get supplies which were mostly flour, lard, baking powder, sugar, salt, rice, beans, shells [ammunition] and snare wire. I would make our soap using fat from moose and bear with a little ash from the stove – soap for the dishes, clothes and everything else. I also made blankets out of rabbit skins. We would sew them all together. We would tan caribou hides so they were safe and I would also tan wolf hides for blankets. I would leave the hair on. For our mattresses, I used moose hair. The older folks would use moose hide to build their teepees and tents, and they would use spruce boughs for the floor. When we ran out of tea we would make some muskeg tea out of Labrador leaf found in muskeg areas. I used to make my own clothespins out of willow by splitting one end about half way down.

We never went to see a doctor when we were sick. I got medicine from the bush and from around the rivers and lakes. We would all get our medicine from the bush. The most common medicine was rat root. For heart trouble we would pick a certain small plant in the fall after all the leaves fell. This plant grew in sandy areas to about fourteen inches in height. It had light blue flowers in the summer time. For appendix problems, there was a plant that grew along the river banks. It's about twelve inches high and brown in the fall when we picked them. For a chest cold I used to get some balsam bark, mix it with rat root, boil it, and then drink it. It was also good for asthma and for [breathing].

When we travelled the river we had to paddle or use a sail if it was windy. Sometimes we would have to track the boat by pulling it from shore with a long rope while another person stayed in the boat to steer it.

I surely would like to see this country stay like it is – with no more logging or oil drilling. It used to be good in the old days but now everything is polluted, even the small birds are dying and so are the fish. The water is not fit to drink any more. When I was trapping I used to get beaver, rat, squirrel, mink, weasel, fox (red, cross, silver), coyote, lynx, marten, fisher and otter. All these furs were sold for money to buy stuff from the store. We got all of our meat to eat from the land in those days. Now you have to watch what you eat and where it lived.

The Last Woman to Raise Children on the Athabasca River

Photo Gallery

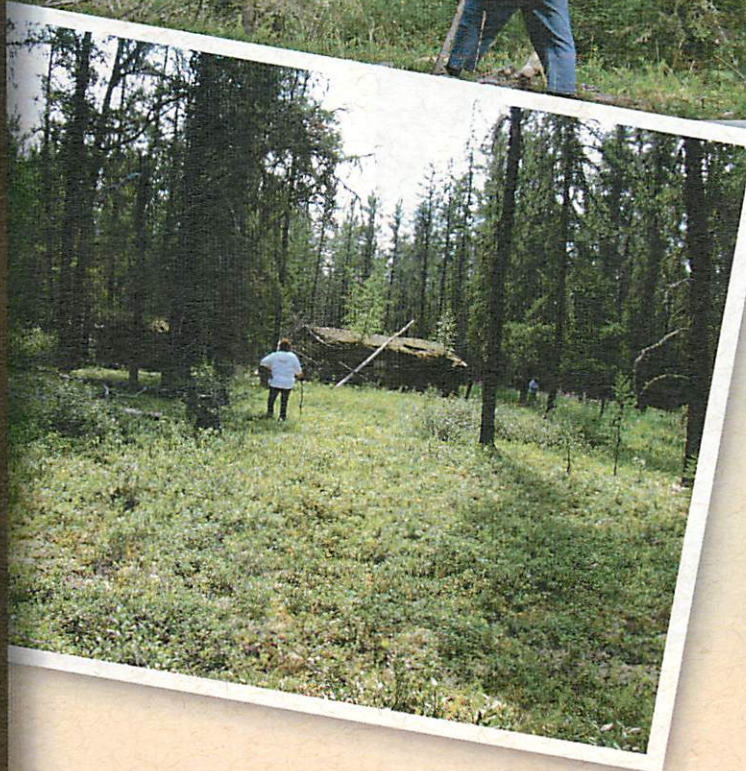
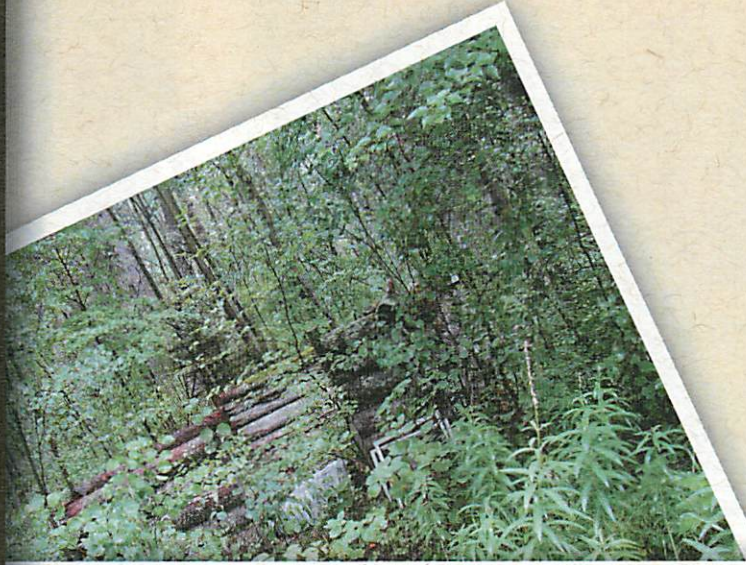




Photo #1: Fort McMurray, 1967



Photo #3: Barb Hermansen



Photo #2: NT Barge



Photo #4: Barb with her parents



Photo #5: Marjorie, Sophie and Mary Cardinal



Photo #6: Grandpa Harry Sitting at Oakley Place with Rolf Hermansen, Edmo and David

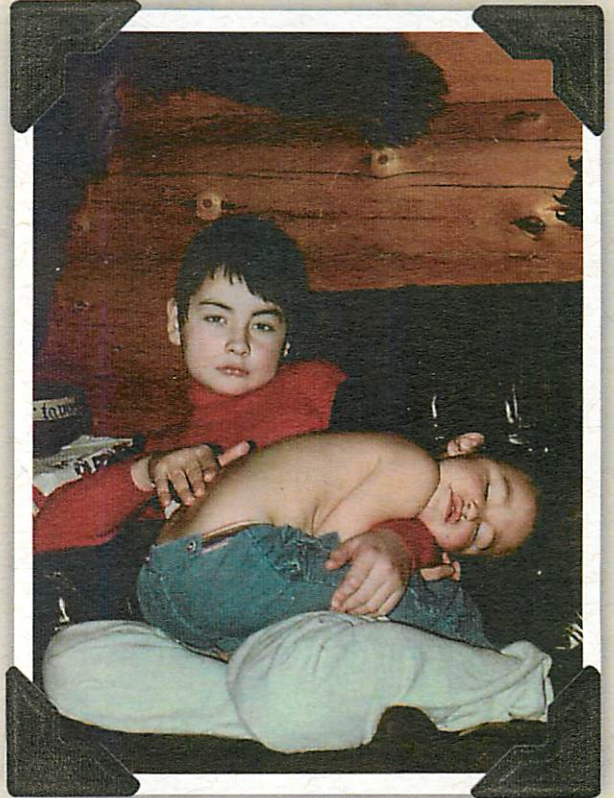


Photo #7: David and Kelly at Home at Mile 72



Photo #8: David and Kelly - Easter

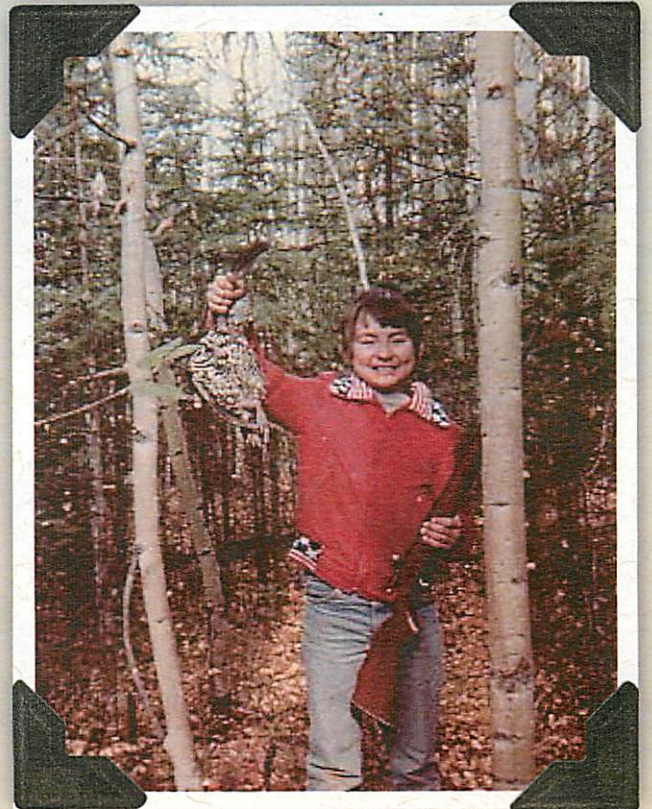


Photo #9: David with a Chicken



Photo #10: Kelly with a Fish



Photo #11: David with Tyler and Kayla



Photo #13: Annie with her 'Boss' Kelly



Photo #12: Kelly with Ava



Photo #14: Barb and Kayla visiting the Fort Chipewyan Museum



Photo #15: Cabin at Ronald Lake



Photo #16: Grant Cabin on Lobstick Creek, 2010



Photo #17: Firebag Cabin

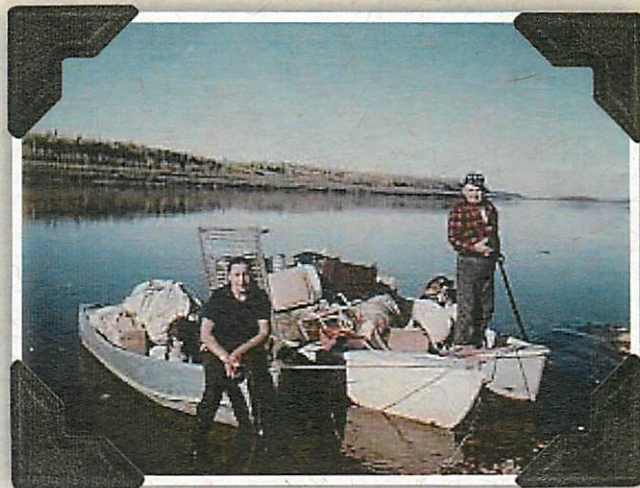


Photo #18: Move to Point Brulé



Photo #19: Barb & Arne as a Young Couple

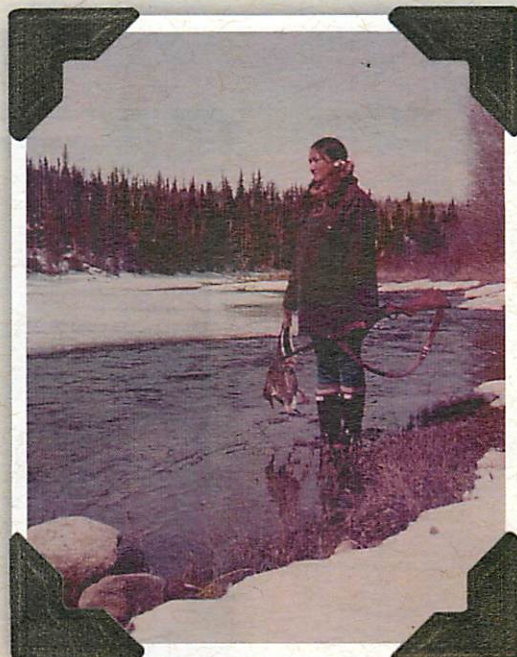


Photo #20: Barb with Duck



Photo #21: Annie & Kelly in front of Old Oakley-Peterson Place



Photo #22: Hermansen Homestead, Mile 72, 1982

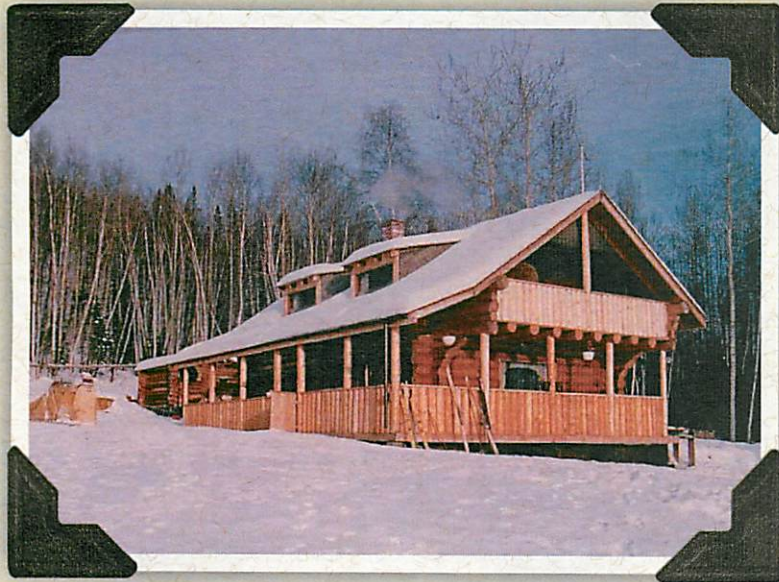


Photo #23: Main Cabin, 1985

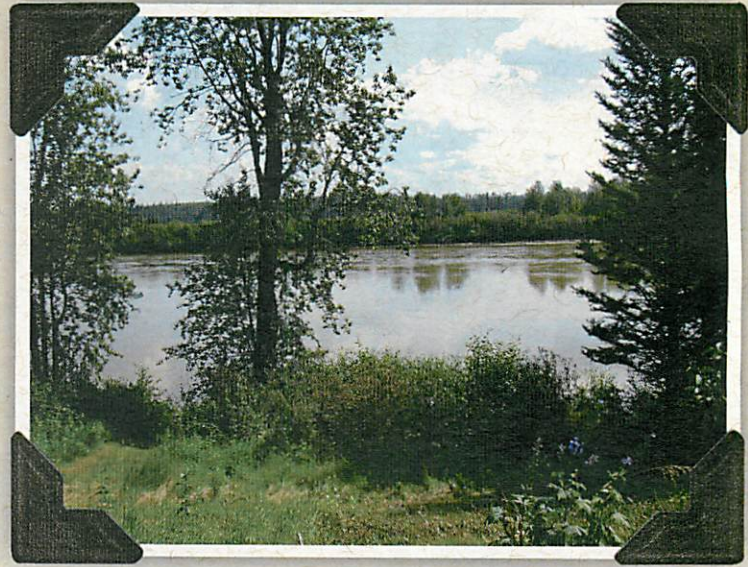


Photo #24: Old Poplars, Mile 72



Photo #25: Oakley Wood Stove

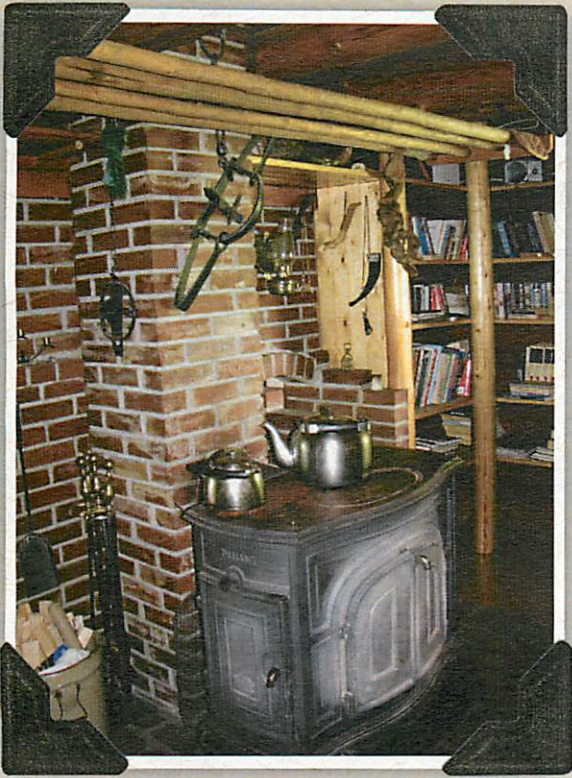


Photo #26: Vermont Stove & Bear Trap



Photo #27: Delphiniums, Mile 72, 2010

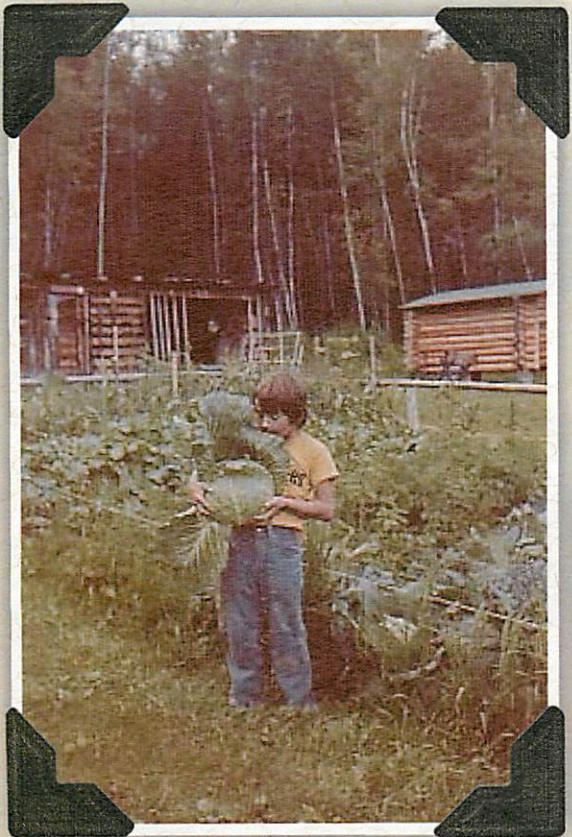


Photo #29: David with Cabbage, 1980



Photo #28: Barb in the Garden, Mile 72, 1980



Photo #30: Big Lake Cabin, 2010

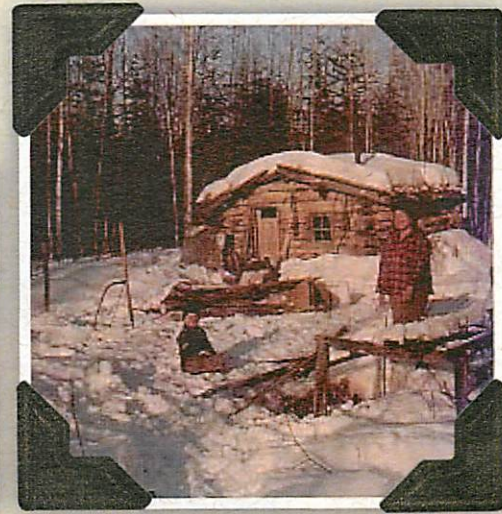


Photo #31: Barb & David at Old Oakley Cabin, Big Lake, ~1976



Photo #32: Barb & David Canoeing, Big Lake

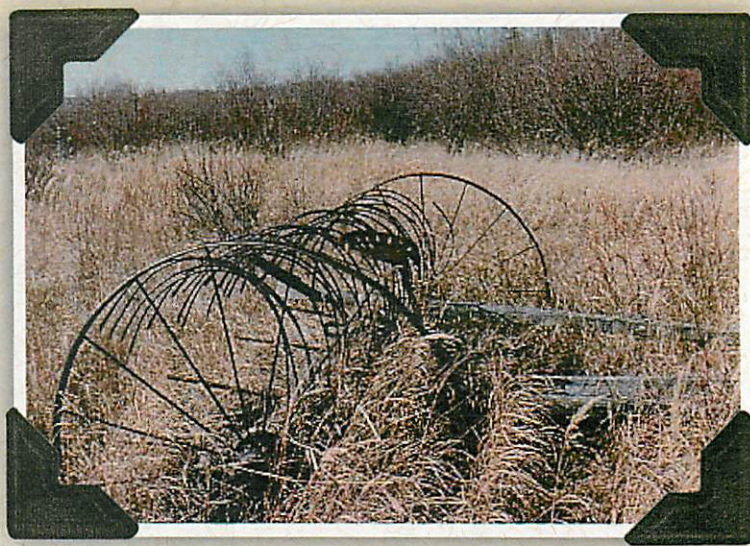


Photo #33: Oakley Mower



Photo #34: Oakley Rake



Photo #35: West of Big Lake, Trapping with Dog Team

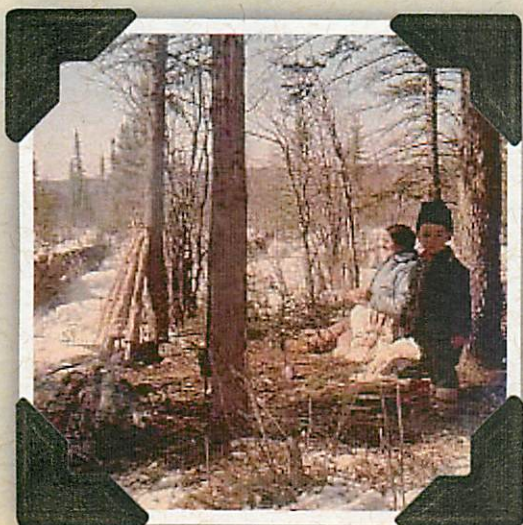


Photo #36: West of Big Lake, Trapping with David



Photo #37: Muskrat Trap, Big Lake

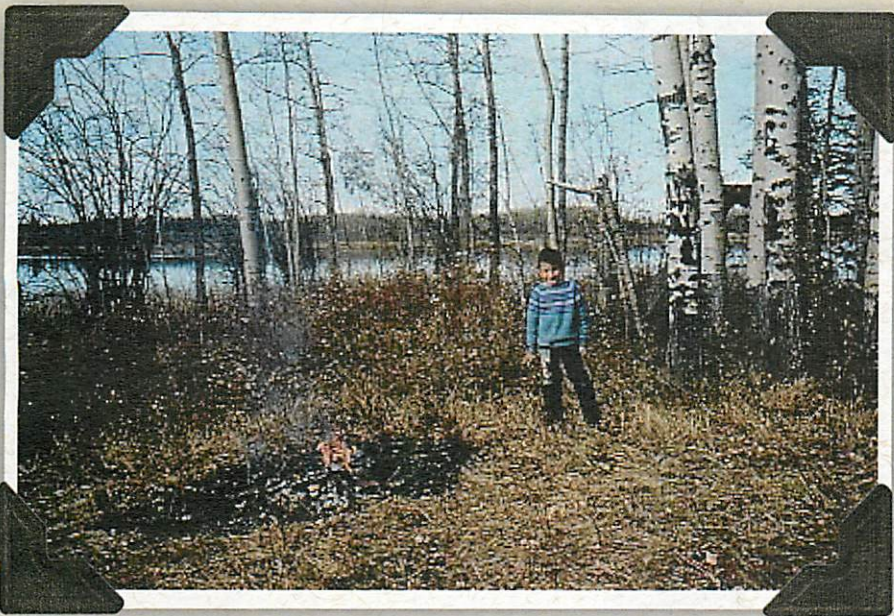


Photo #38: Tyler in the Bush



Photo #39: Ice Breakup, 1974



Photo #40: Arne with Furs, Big Lake



Photo #41: Crooked Lake



Photo #42: Barb at Crooked Lake Cabin, 2010

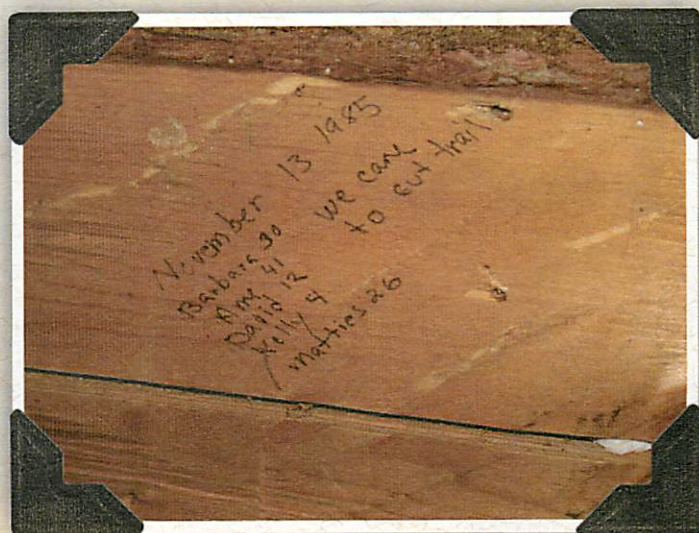


Photo #43: Crooked Lake Cabin Walls 1

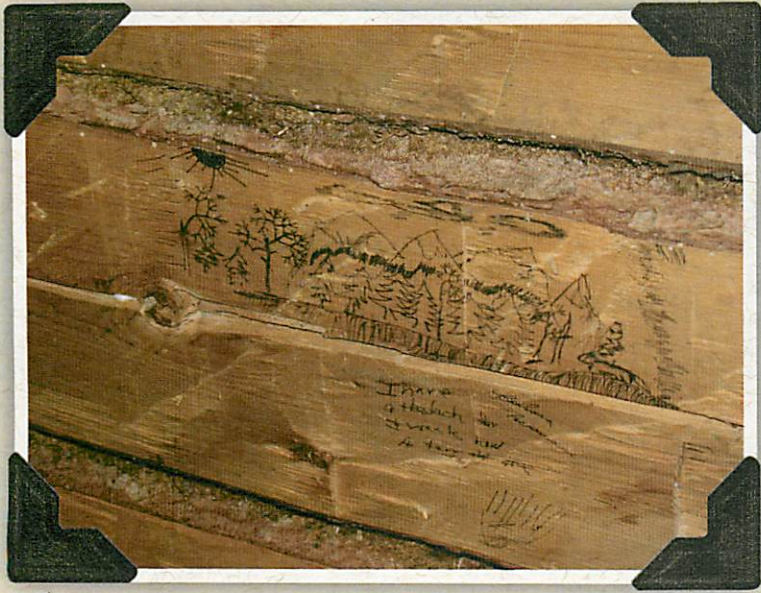


Photo #44: Crooked Lake Cabin Walls 2



Photo #45: Crooked Lake Cabin Roof

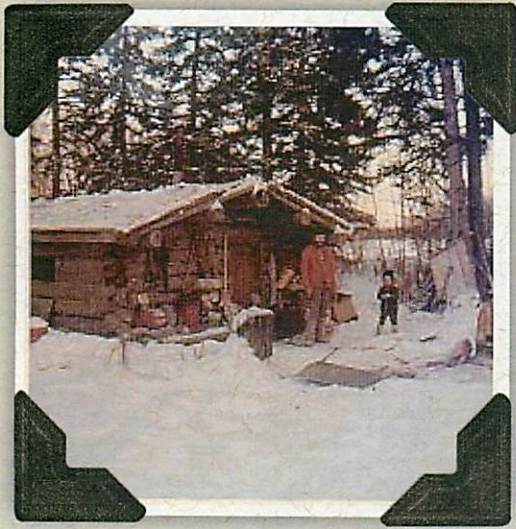


Photo #46: Crooked Lake Cabin, 1976



Photo #47: Cranberry Lake



Photo #48: Kelly Lake

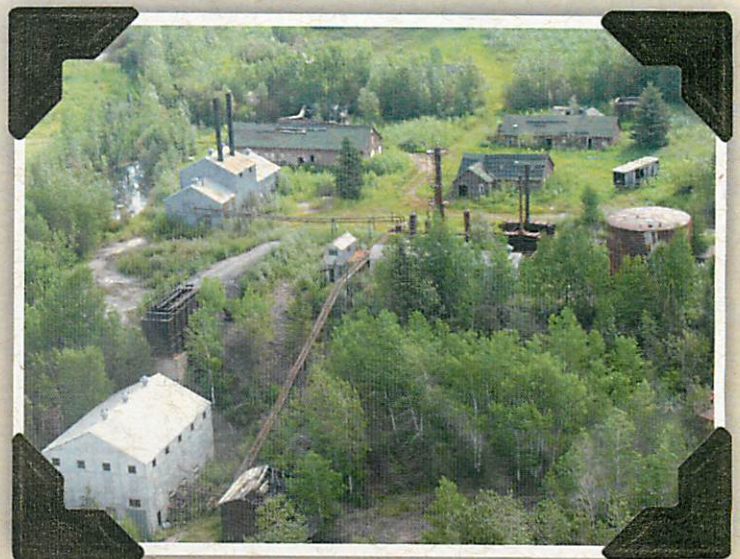


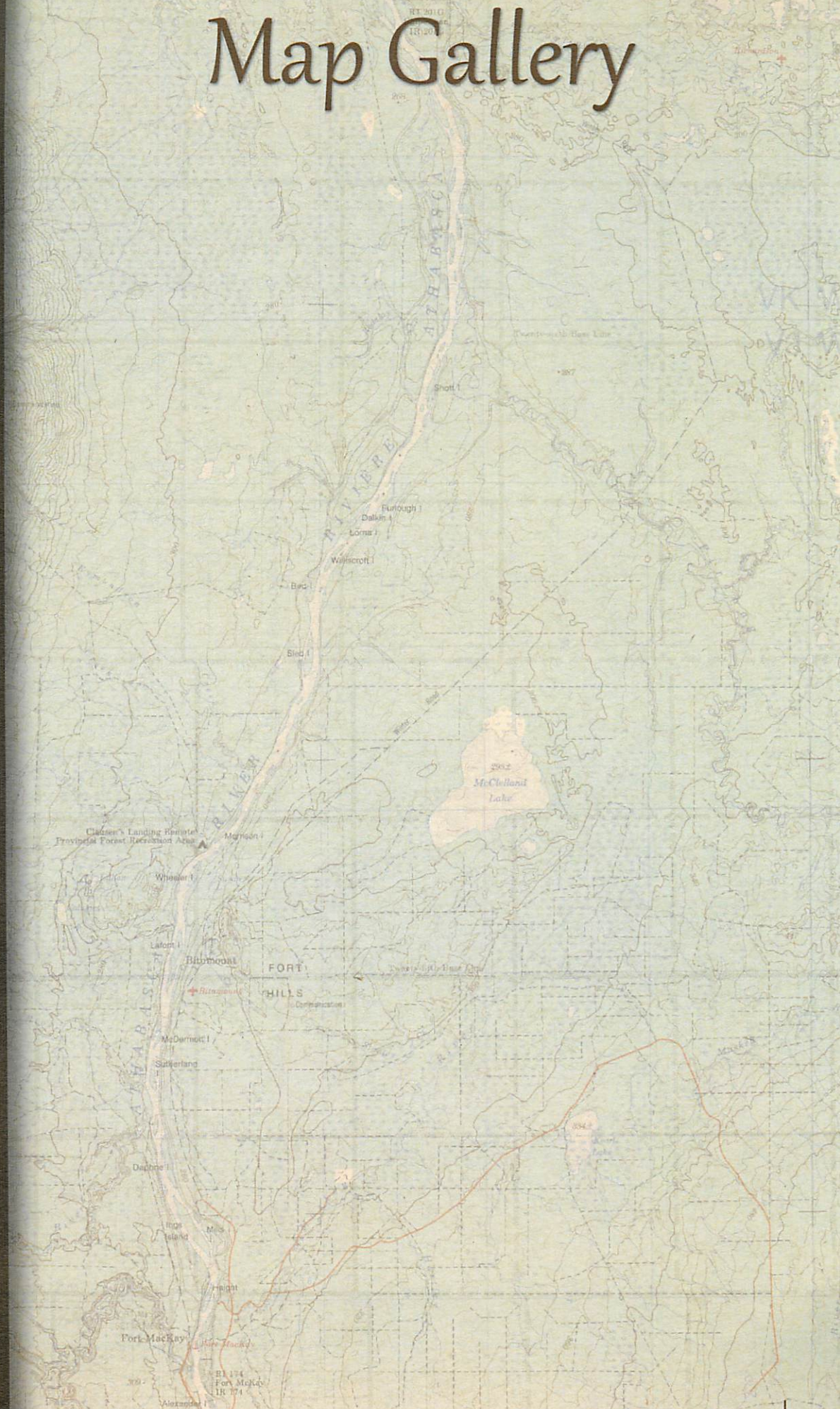
Photo #49: Bitumount

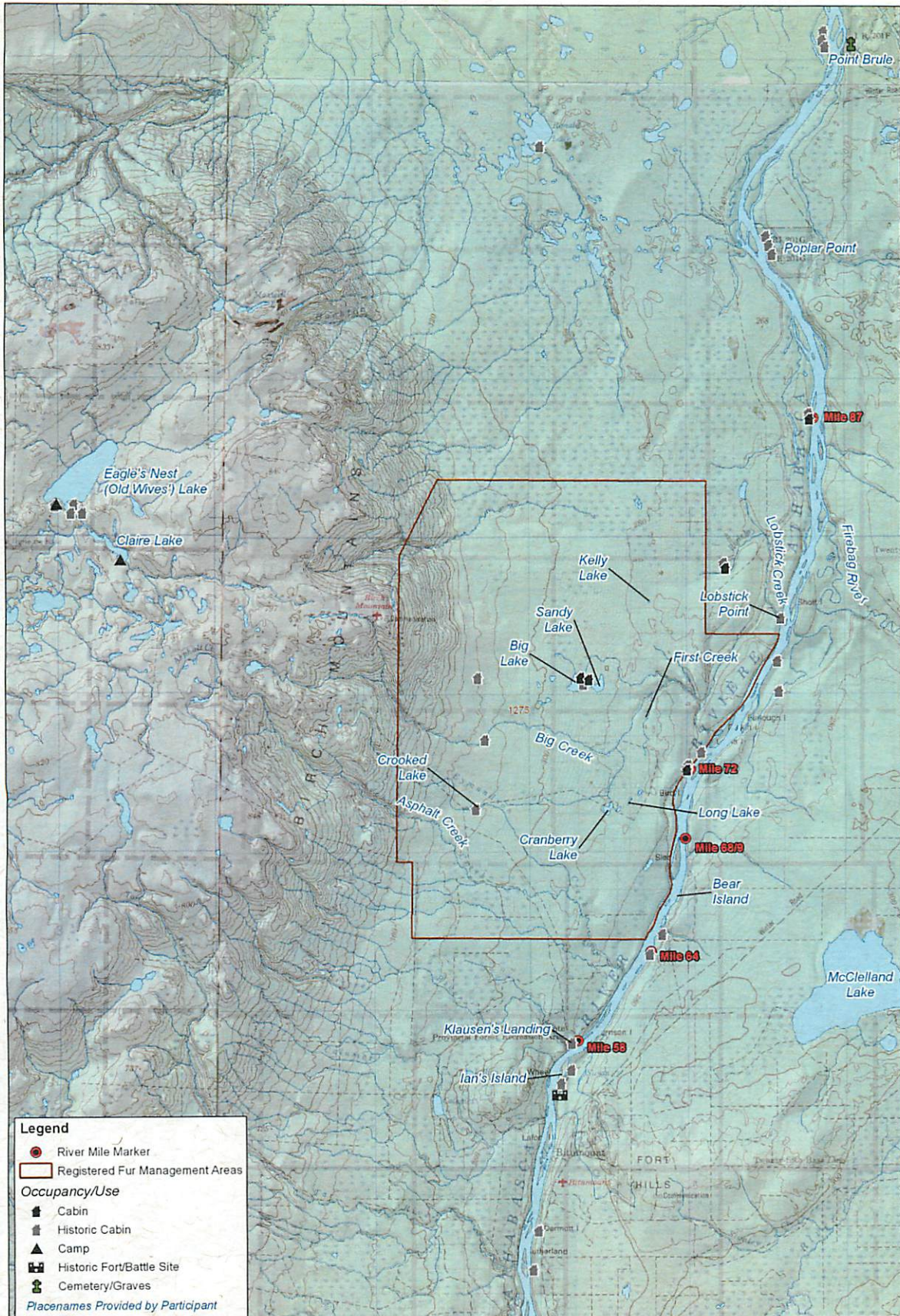


Photo #50: *Witches' Hair*

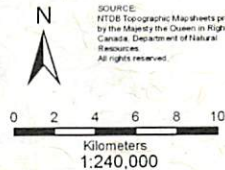
The Last Woman to Raise Children on the Athabasca River

Map Gallery



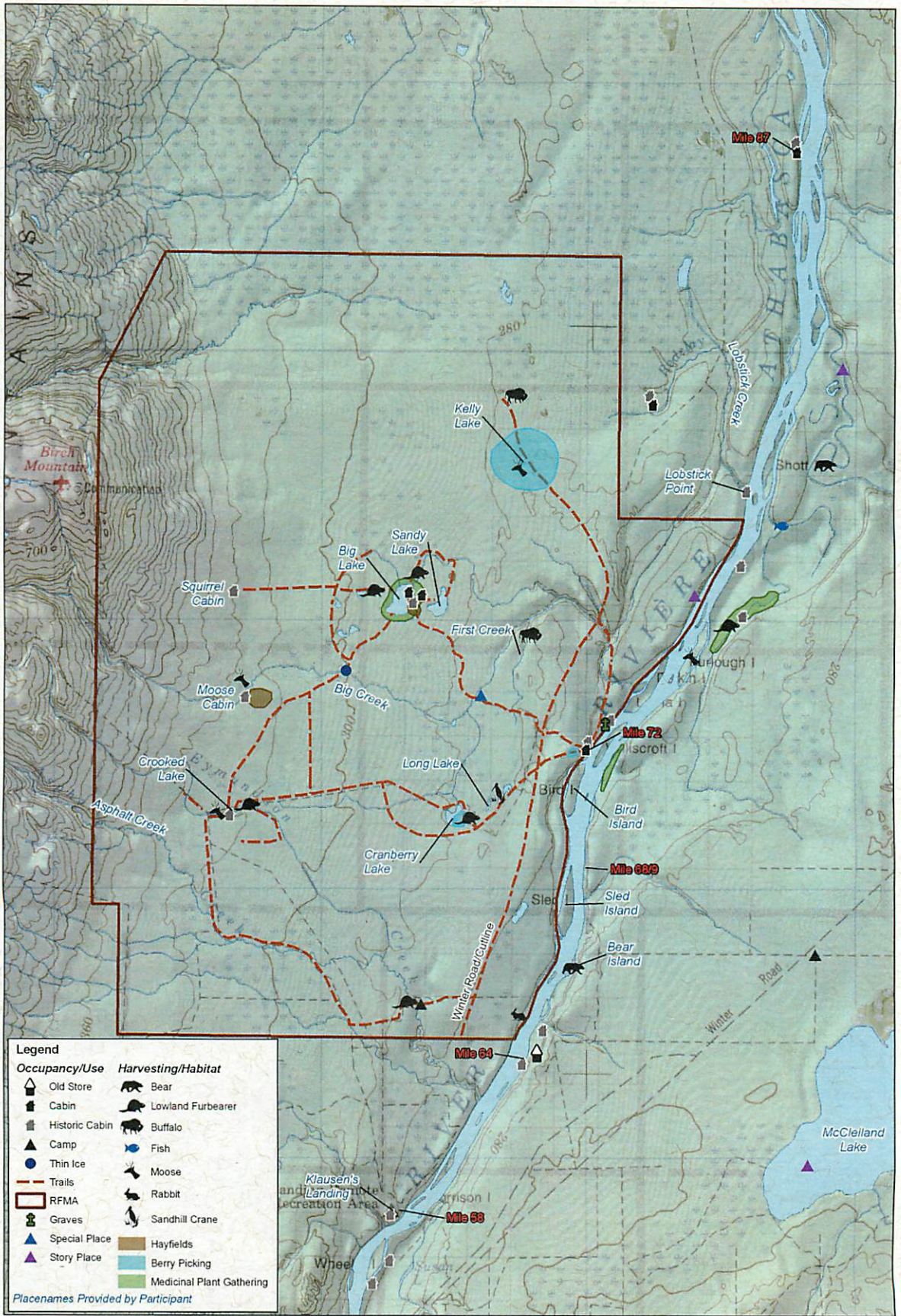


**Figure 2:
Placenames**

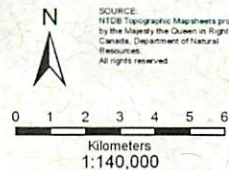


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PROJECTION	UTM Zone 12	DATUM	NAD 83
DATE	05/Jan/11	PROJECT	1983
DRAWN	ML	APPROVED	SL
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**Figure 6:
Hermansen Trapline**



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PROJECTION UTM Zone 12	DATUM NAD 83	
DATE 05/Jan/11	PROJECT 1983	
DRAWN ML	APPROVED SL	PATH © Copyright 1983R. C. McNeil, T. G. L. McNeil Self-membered, Silver Birch Energy Group