

**\*\*Please note that these journals are in the process of being updated on a continuous basis.\*\***

June 1, 2006  
DAY 1

## **REALLY FABULOUS DAY**

Today marked the beginning of one heck of a trip. We barely slept last night—so hard to focus on sleeping!

Karen and Heidi Baumbach picked us up at 6:00 AM. After a few short delays and frantic, last-minute emails, we kissed the cats good-bye and bravely left Lacombe. Much sleep was caught up on while we drove to Jasper. Tried to stop at Taco Bell, but no luck.

Tami's parents met up with us, and 10-minutes before Jasper we had our first bear spotting for the year—first ever for Anita! A beautiful mother black bear with the smallest and cutest cub I've ever seen! They were feasting on dandelions and crossed the road in front of us to feast on the other side. I took many pictures with Anita's camera. The little bear kept hopping up on his hand legs because he was too tiny to see things over the grass. He copied everything Mum did.

Finally we dragged ourselves away from the bears and found a good, calm place to “put in.” It took about an hour to make sense out of the great explosion of colorful gear, find a place in the canoes and put the covers on the canoes. Eventually everything found a place in the canoes (we have too much stuff), a couple group pictures were taken, a beautiful prayer was offered by Karen and, with great cheers and whooping, we were, unbelievably, off on our journey!!

To say we were paddling into a spectacular day was an understatement! The sky was bright blue with dramatic, fluffy clouds, the mountains soared all around us and the current floated us swiftly along. We **all** had huge grins on our faces and couldn't believe it was happening.

A half hour downstream, Anita and Mark were ahead of us when three or four elk jumped into the river and splashed and jumped around right in front of their canoe while making their way across the river. Once again, Anita's eyes were about popping out of her head.

We stopped in a side stream filtering water, munching on lunch material and enjoying the sunshine. I curled up in my seat and fell instantly asleep with the sun on my face. All too soon we were off again—jumping out of the canoe once to cross a shallow section and then a lake to knock off.

This was a very shallow lake with a sandy bottom. There was a huge motor bike track in the dunes along the right side and a train track on the left. At the far end of the lake, just past the mine, we found a campsite on a long, sandy/grassy beach with a gorgeous view of the mountains.

Lentils in tortillas made a great supper. The new tent was erected, the violin played along the water's edge and the day was finished.

What an incredible start to our trip.

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June 2, 2006  
DAY 2

## **BACH IN THE MOUNTAINS**

Thankfully we all slept well **and** long enough—eventually wakened by the hot sun pouring into the tent. Breakfast for me was three-berry oatmeal and hot, French vanilla chocolate. Two and a half minutes with the skipping rope and I was dead! Somehow I got ahead of schedule and while waiting for the others, the Ipod was pulled out. I scrolled to Bach Overture Suite #4 and the surroundings immediately became alive—even more than before. There is **nothing** like listening to the trumpets, oboes and strings while basking in the glory of the mountains. Wow!! One could get drunk from so much beauty.

We pulled out into another awesome day with a super strong current. For some reason, it took many of us half the day to remember that spray skirts, if zipped up, will keep water out! There were many sets of glorious rapids, some of which dumped great waves right into my lap!! Poor Anita had the same trouble and soon we stopped to bail out their boat. Anita got a small amount of water in her camera, but it should be okay.

Before we knew it, David announced that we had paddled 35 km. Time for lunch!! Boy, that was fast. We opted for a floating lunch so we rafted up and ate. It's amazing how fast you are going without paddling at all. We stopped at a creek to filter water, but it was pretty bad tasting water coming down from a pulp mill.

After paddling again for a while, we all rafted up a second time to relax for awhile—which turned into a lovely, long nap. We were all spread-eagle, arms and legs out, soaking up the glorious sunshine. About 15 km passed in this fashion. Suddenly, I was awakened rapidly as we were closing in on some good-size rapids. With just barely enough time, I turned over on my seat, grabbed a paddle and hit the rapids. Once again, a wave landed in my lap before I remembered to pull up my spray skirt!!

We stopped to bail again and a bathroom stop. Just as we pulled out, the clouds began to gather and little rain drops started to fall. We paddled the rest of the distance in the rain. I tried out my new neoprene gloves—very nice and warm and dry.

At the 75 km mark was a bridge. Immediately after, there was a provincial campsite called, “Sundance.” It seemed to be a pay-job so we unloaded, set-up camp, bathed and had fun in the rain.

For supper we retreated into the woods and cooked bean burritos under the blue tarps. David made an apple/cinnamon damper that was most tasty. A breath-taking rainbow appeared as we headed for our tents while a sunset in the opposite direction also filled the sky.

All-in-all, another fabulous day, and we are still on schedule. ☺

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(There's a sketch on this page of mountains.)

June 3, 2006  
DAY 3

### **A LITTLE TOO MUCH EXCITEMENT**

The air was chilly this morning as we woke up and stumbled around camp—a little later than usual. Baja-Brew was on the menu for breakfast and the Barber “Violin Concerto” started the day for me on the Ipod. It seemed to take everyone a long time to get ready but eventually we had prayer and we paddled out.

Rapids and more rapids was the theme of the morning. We paddled hard and made good time. The scenery became more dramatic with towering cliffs and rock formations. Often we came across huge islands and a couple canoes would go one way and a couple on the other side. It was always interesting to see which side ran faster.

It was shortly before we stopped for lunch that I noticed an animal-shaped, brown figure on the bank where we were heading. The size being that of a horse meant it was a moose and she stared straight at us as we came closer. A small figure moved at her side and, behold, we were seeing a tiny, baby moose! How awesome!! He was so tiny and so cute. Meanwhile, as we gawked at the pair, we were trying to battle through some bad rapids and execute a turn at the same time. We did scrape on some rocks and then, sadly, had to say good-bye to the moose without a picture as we were already rounding the next bend.

We were pretty ecstatic about the sighting but saddened that only one other canoe was behind us. A good lunch spot appeared shortly. Two canoes had pulled in ahead of us. We went through the usual routine of turning from one current going one direction into another current going the opposite direction near the shore (crossing the eddy line). I'll never understand exactly what went wrong but we hit the eddy line and over we went. I couldn't believe it was happening. I was so shocked that I didn't even feel the cold water. Unfortunately, for the first time I was successfully (thanks to Anita) strapped into my spray skirt so I couldn't exit the canoe!! Thankfully we were so close to shore (in about a foot of water) that I could hold my head above water by pushing with my hand in the mud.

Oh, what a chilly, wet mess we were! David bailed, I shivered and the sun came out only when it felt like it as we sat in our wet clothes eating lunch. My lunch had been completely swamped and my crackers were the consistency of wet mush! Oh, boy!!! A few of our clothes

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dried during lunch, but I'm sure it will take several days to dry out my neoprene socks and boots—both of which I was wearing.

On we paddled, feeling slightly more dry and, at some point in the afternoon, we stopped for a break under a bridge. Some guys camping there in an RV took pity on us and donated watermelon, rock melon (cantaloupe) and cherries to our cause! The friendly chaps even set off some fire crackers as we paddled away. There were, after all, pretty soused!

We were almost nearing time to camp when we ended up in a spot of trouble—a **big** spot of trouble. Floating merrily down the river, Mark and Anita were rafted with David and me and we were all having a lovely time. Not enough attention was being paid to the river. Suddenly, a rock (mostly submerged) appeared out of nowhere. We separated. David and I missed the rock by the skin of our teeth but Mark and Anita didn't. As David and I were carried rapidly away by the current, we watched helplessly as their canoe slid onto the rock and began to tip. Then the force of the water began to push each end of the canoe around the rock. AHHH, that was one of the worst moments ever—the sound of their canoe bending and cracking and scraping on the rock. Thankfully, Mark and Anita popped out of their canoe like corks and began to do battle with the river. By some miracle, they turned the canoe around so that it was headed down stream and stopped it from tipping over completely. If they had not been successful with what they did, the canoe would surely have been bent in half at the middle.

It was a very scary and sobering moment as we all limped ashore and pulled up to assess the damage. Poor Mark was just about beside himself as we tipped the yellow canoe over on the grass. There were two definite stress marks where the Kevlar had bent and begun to crack. The inside of the boat looked fine, however. It appeared that it was the very outside layer that was damaged.

Due to the frazzled nerves of our party, we camped shortly after that and settled in for the evening—showering in the forest under the solar showers and cooking gado-gado spaghetti for supper. While supper cooked, I played the violin. I stumbled through the Beethoven Violin Concerto and parts of the Scottish Fantasy.

For some reason, we can't ever seem to finish supper before 10:30 PM. What a day! Hopefully, the next day will be smoother.

June 4, 2006  
DAY 4

## **AN ABANDONED CANOE, A WOLF AND A BEAVER**

This morning we got off to a slightly earlier day. The sky was clear and blue and it was quite warm already. The river was now running a little slower and the rapids were calming down as well. David's shoulder that he injured while canoeing a few years ago, is bothering him a bit so we didn't paddle really hard but did keep a steady pace.

We passed the cutest, tiniest, little cabin, a log cabin with a sod roof. There were trees growing on the roof that were taller than the cabin itself!! We were going by so fast we couldn't stop to have a look. Again, we passed a mother moose complete with her baby. It must be that time of year.

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The sun was getting quite hot. Some of us were burning despite liberal amounts of sunscreen which led to throwing on sun shirts or bug shirts to cover up. Lunch today was way better, at least for me, as it was dry and hadn't gone swimming! It was just before we stopped for lunch that we passed a red canoe, fully loaded, but jammed under some dead branches of a willow tree. No owner was anywhere in sight and it struck us as quite strange. Even the paddles were still in the canoe!

A few hours later, people on a motor boat coming down the river towards us stopped to ask if we had seen a red canoe. The poor guy had fallen out of it yesterday, tried to swim after it but couldn't. He had swum ashore and caught a ride into town for the night. Now he had found a couple of guys willing to drive him up and down the river looking for his canoe. He was quite excited to hear that we had seen the canoe, still upright, a few hours previously. Tonight he stopped by our camp to say thanks. He is canoeing for three weeks alone.

Our campsite tonight is awesome—almost like an African waterhole in that there animal foot prints **everywhere**. We scattered our gear everywhere it seemed—an explosion of gear on the beach. Some of us swam in the **cold** waters of the river, washed hair and clothes and cooked leisurely.

It is Michael's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday today, so we built an awesome fire to sit around and celebrate. As we sat there, Anita, who was opposite me, asked, "What's that?" as a galloping animal darted out of the bushes and ran right by us—just 35 feet away. To our shock, it was a HUGE WOLF! Mostly white, big, heavy and moving quickly. The moment lasted about 10 seconds. Two people were holding cameras but were so shell-shocked we never thought to snap a picture. We were quite wide-eyed for a while. A slap on the water and a beaver went by. We chose an awesome camp, and we are still standing around the fire wondering what will come along next. ☺

June 5, 2006  
DAY 5

## FIRST TOWN VISIT

We all woke up tired today and feeling very slow—too much partying with wolves the night before! We only had 15 km to go until town—a distance that we could fathom right now. Half way there, we came upon a black bear on shore feasting heartily on something. The "something" turned out to be a very dead and stinky carcass of some kind. Ahhhh, the smell!!!

As we paddled on, I came up with a silly theory. One tends to have a lot of time for such things while paddling. You see, while we were in town, a baby moose came swimming down the river, right through the **really** strong current, then jumped out just downstream from the canoes that we had parked under the bridge. And so, possibly, the wolf last night heading in a hurry to feast on that carcass, which was the mother of the baby moose? Moose as little as him don't go running or swimming around without mum. I know . . . , highly unlikely, but it entertained my mind for a while.

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In town, we stopped first at a gas station to use “real” restrooms and fill up our water bottles and containers. Then David and I walked further into town to the IGA (grocery store) to pick up a few needed items. Anita had lost her hat in the river on day three (the bad luck day). I needed bananas, sweet potatoes, avocados (the essentials of life) and ice cream, of course. We called and left a message for Wendy and gave a list to David’s mum as they are joining us in a couple of weeks. Some fuel bottles and stuff were left behind.

All told, today was the toughest day of paddling yet—mostly because we were tired, it was cold, windy and raining off and on. The river was running slower and slower, we were fighting a head wind and not very many animals were out and about. Many of us were starting to feel very sore in our shoulders and arms. I, especially, was struggling as I had given my feather weight, racing paddle to Mark to use all day because his wrist was bothering him. One of my biggest fears for this trip has been that either Mark or I would end up with some kind of bad strain injury from paddling. So, I did battle with Mark’s paddle which weighed a ton, but I’m glad I did.

We did see two adult moose today—a moose is always exciting. Eventually we clocked our miles for the day and pulled in on the back of someone’s cow farm. There was a beautiful spot to set up the teepee—up on the ridge. It looked quite dramatic there and we all piled in to make supper—corn bread and chili. I did my best to fiddle up a storm as we all sat around in our sponsored, wool, long underwear and wool toques.

After our fantastic, gourmet supper (as always), we all bunked down in the teepee—slumber party style—and slept like logs.

**June 6, 2006**  
**Day 6**

## **FUNNY WEATHER AND FUNNY WATER**

This morning we managed to get up earlier—mainly because we were all together in the teepee and no one could get away with sleeping longer! For some reason, it didn’t help us get away any faster—possibly because the boys insisted on making endless amounts of omelets for breakfast with all the eggs they bought in town yesterday. They were very yummy, but we were also very late leaving—about 10:00 AM.

The air was quite chilly this morning and the river running very slowly. Whenever we all rafted up to take a break, it felt like we were hardly moving. Everyone today was showing signs of wear and tear—some exhaustion setting in. After nibbling on our lunch in the sun that was now very hot, we all fell dead asleep. I had the nasty job of waking everyone up so that we could start paddling again. Conveniently, it began to rain just then and everyone jumped up in a hurry. The wind and rain continued off-and-on the rest of the day. Between showers, there were periods of hot sun.

All day the river snaked back and forth in squiggles across the farmland making it time-consuming to get anywhere. At times, the water was dead quiet; at other times we were riding the currents and rapids again.

We wanted to accomplish our 70-75 km today, but it was slow going. At 6:00 PM, we were still slogging away. For some reason, we never think to look for campsites before the goal for the day is

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accomplished. When we finally began looking for a campsite, we couldn't find one anywhere. Everything is either too lumpy, too brushy, too steep or too swampy. We kept holding out in case the perfect place magically appeared, and time marched on!

About 45 minutes later, the perfect place actually did appear and it totally made the evening for us. At the back of a farm were grassy, rolling bluffs. We have each pitched our tent on a different bluff or level. Supper was made and eaten right on the edge of one bluff where we watched a beaver pattering around on the opposite side of the river.

If I happen to roll out of our tent tonight, I will likely roll off the cliff three feet away and plop thirty feet down to the river where there is a very strong current. How awesome!

**June 7, 2006**  
**Day 7**

## **SWIMMING BEAR**

Before we went to bed last night, a group decision was made to sleep an extra hour in the morning and depart at 11:00 AM. Some people were starting to run a little ragged. The only problem was that apparently I needed to sleep until about noon because when David woke me up at 9:30, it felt like an elephant had walked on me all night.

Soon after 11:00, we pulled out of our lovely campsite and headed to the ferry a few km away. As we paddled, I watched a black log dive into the water on the other side of the river. Both David and I seemed to be watching this log float across the river. Eventually we realized that logs don't float across rivers against the current!

Two canoes immediately made a bee line for the swimming log. Shortly, the log developed two ears and then a nose. We appeared to be closing in on a swimming black bear. He was almost at shore as we moved closer just in time to watch him jump out of the river, shake vigorously, check us out and then disappear into the brush. He was quite a large bear once we could see all of him.

We pulled up to the ferry landing hoping to bum a ride across the river and back, just for fun, but as soon as we arrived, the ferry went on strike for the next half hour. Oh, well, we found a garbage can to dump unwanted stuff and a water pump to fill **all** our water containers with **clean** water. The river currently looks, and smells, like cow farms and cow pee. Fresh, clean water is a great delicacy!

The rest of the day was a bit like a military march. I had the job of counting 30 paddle strokes per side, then David would switch sides when I did—instead of him always yelling out “switch.” All day, I was inventing creative ways to count to 30—it got old really fast.

Today we also began a new paddling routine because it's getting so hard to stay on schedule with the river running so slow. After much discussion, it was agreed to paddle 50 minutes, then rest for 10 minutes. This seemed to help us stay on track. We have developed a problem, however, as we seem to have two faster canoes and two slower canoes. So, by the time, Mark, Anita, David and I wait for the others to catch up, our 10 minutes is also up. Hmm!

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Considering we started late, our mileage for the day, 50 km, wasn't too bad. We pitched the teepee on a sandy beach, swam in the river while the sun was still shining and ate delicious bean burritos for supper. For the first time, Nick put some "ammo" in his shot gun and a very loud hour was spent shooting across the river. At the first shot, several beavers dived into the water thinking they would be safer on the other side. Anita was one of the first to line up for shooting lessons. Even Mark had a go. Canada geese began to detour around our camp, and little swallows almost flew into us in their confusion to leave camp safely.