

Moose Factory Journal.... April 2003

Friday, April 11, 2003

This morning, at 8 AM, the temperature already is at 40 degrees. Yesterday we saw 59 degrees. This is the first real excursion above freezing. The melt down is tremendous.

The ice road still works – but only for vehicles with high axles. As the ice melts the surface really suffers – with ruts, slush floating on the surface, and holes. Getting stuck out on the ice is not a good experience. It's been several weeks since I ran the Church Van over the ice. Eventually the ice on The River will 'refloat'. All the surface water will run off, as the ice rises. That's when it is really dangerous. Locals seem to know exactly where that 'tipping point' lies – and use the road up to the last hour. Tourists like myself steer clear.

We use the Old Church this coming Sunday (Palm Sunday.) The crowd (and temperature) are growing; and The Congregation loves its Old Church. Never mind that we can't afford it. One of these days it will come crashing down on us, if something doesn't get done soon.

The Cree are not fastidious about their buildings – any of their buildings. In some ways that is really refreshing; a lot of needless money does not get spent. On the other hand, as in the case of the Church, deferred maintenance just ends up like a high cost loan. A lot of projects, if tended to early, turn out to be cheaper than if delayed.

Sunday, 13 April 2003

Palm Sunday. The Spring Hunt is on. Families were leaving The Island in droves before dawn this morning – all by Skidoo. It was chilly last night, so the surface was good for a while – until the sun warmed things up a bit. The ice road is now closed to all traffic except skidoos. No one is in danger of going THROUGH the ice – yet. The problem would be in getting stuck in the mush and slush on top of the ice. The authorities have no desire to go out there and rescue someone who got stuck. Hypothermia would be only one of the issues to contend with.

Our Palm Sunday celebration began at The Parish Hall – with the Blessing of the Palms. Only, we didn't use palms. Lawrence Chum had gathered in freshly cut cedar branches. They smelled so sweet as the heated indoor air warmed them. We carried them in a sort of procession to The Old Church. The Choir led us – singing hymns as we processed. Naturally we all were in different places in different hymns as we walked. But the Choir more or less whipped us into shape when we entered the Old Church. There we gave all the extra branches away to people who had gathered at The Church and not at The Parish Hall.

The Service included the reading of The Passion. About ten people took part in the reading. Some of the lessons were read in Cree – a good way to welcome ourselves back in to The Old Church – after a long hard winter.

Some of the Elders decided – more or less during The Service – that we should have a sunrise service on Easter. We'll do it at 6 AM in The Old Church – late for me but good for them. I haven't quite got to the point where I want to do it out on the ice, though that day may come another year.

Maundy Thursday, 17 April 2003

Last night, just after G-G's closed, Monica and her son Derek along with sister Mary and her daughter (I think Trina) showed up. (The Rectory is just across the street from G-G's.) They had just bought out the store for the third consecutive night. Monica seems to be the designated

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provisioner for this particular project; Moose Factory is a good place to buy supplies for the outdoors. Tomorrow they all fly to Attawapiskat, and from there they will go by skidoo to Akimiski Island – their ancestral hunting grounds. On Akimiski the family will convene for a week or so, hammer the geese, and elude the polar bears. Monica and sister will be packing all kinds of baggage and supplies for the party, including several guns and just a whole lot of ammo. Security formalities on Wabusk (Wabusk = Polar Bear) Airlines evidently reflect the culture of The North. I doubt two middle-aged ladies with two teenagers would get far in Logan Airport (Boston) with that stash.

Sunday, 20 April 2003

Easter Sunday. Cloudy, drizzle, in the high 30's. Yesterday saw the temperature rise to 54 degrees (Fahrenheit.) Bangor, Maine only made it to 46 degrees. The River was making cracking sounds early this morning.

The Island gets flooded in the spring break up infrequently. But it happens every ten years or so. The flooding occurs when all the ice coming down The River suddenly has nowhere to go, because there continues to be a solid ice pack out in The Bay. The ice coming down river, then, builds up at the mouth of The River creating a kind of dam. As more and more ice comes up against this congestion, the dam gets tighter. Under the right (or wrong) conditions, then, for a while, The River is plugged. That's when the water backs up and floods. Within recent memory the water made it to the front door of The Old Church.

We had our first service at 6 AM this morning. There were ten of us. Bertha was at the keyboard. We sang lots of hymns. Bertha then commandeered the Congregation and drilled us on all the Easter Hymns for the eleven o'clock service. For whatever reasons, attendance was at 70 for the 11 AM Service. (The weather was soggy; the Spring Hunt is on, and many of us are off in our Camps.)

There is considerable surface water on the ice now. A lot of thawing is going on. But the ice on The River has not yet started to break up.

Tuesday, April 22, 2003

Yesterday (Monday) was a day of rest for me. It rained all day. Gwendolyn and I took some serious naps.

Thursday, 24 April 2003

Yesterday I was restless and distracted. Wouldn't you know it?... Sam Sutherland called. A body is being shipped here for burial. I'm puzzled that the health authorities would allow this, given our present worry about SARS.

We went by the house of one of the family members. No one was home. We'll try again today.

Monday, April 28, 2003

This morning I saw geese flying overhead. They were the first I have seen this spring. People are now just returning from The Hunt. Bobby tells me that many never fired a shot. The geese have been camping out south of here – waiting for The Hunt to fizzle out, before they venture north.

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There is now some water on the ice on The River. Breakup has occurred further up The River – ten miles to the south of us. As pressure builds up the current keeps pushing the ice pack out towards The Bay – which is still packed with ice. The ice is fairly stable around The Island. People were walking across the ice yesterday afternoon. Caroline tells me she never goes out on to the ice after March 31. We share the same sentiments. Northern Stores now rations their gasoline supply. It is reserved only for emergency vehicles. TJ's GazBar still has gas, I think. The Church Van is half full and probably will make it to breakup. Bobby says we should see breakup in about a week.

Monday, May 5, 2003

I'm late posting this. The weekend has been busy. My apologies.

Goose & Ice Report: Evidently The Hunt DID yield results. Elsie spent Thursday afternoon cleaning 30. Other families have reported success. However, there are several that had no luck.

The Ice has not moved. It remains in place. The locals seem to know just exactly when it is unsafe to walk on. But I have seen no one out there walking. Reports of cleared rivers to the south of us continue to inch north.

Next Sunday we worship in the Old/Big Church. The warm weather is making it easy (and cheaper) to heat.

The ACW threw a meatloaf supper last night at The Parish Hall. It was superb.