

MOOSE FACTORY JOURNAL

June -- Oct 2005

Friday, 2 September 2005

Last Thursday (25 AUG 05), the 'Polar Bear Express' was headed south -- as usual.

There are two trains that run between Cochrane and Moosonee: The 'Little Bear' and the 'Polar Bear'. The 'Little Bear' runs all through the year: Northbound on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and Southbound on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. The 'Polar Bear' runs only in the summer, and it provides a round trip daily except for Monday. The 'Polar Bear' is for passengers only and goes a little faster than the 'Little Bear' which is a 'mixed' train consisting of passenger AND freight cars.

Both trains have special cars that deliver electrical power to the entire train. These are not engines; they don't pull the train; but they make all the electricity for the train; the power car on the 'Polar Bear' has three BIG generators. Northbound, on the 'Polar Bear', this car is the first car -- behind the engine(s). Southbound, this car, then, is the last car on the train. (At Moosonee, the engine doesn't turn the train around; it just goes to the southern end of the train and pulls out what it just pulled in....)

On Thursday, at mile 118, on the southbound run, one of the generators on the power car caught fire and began to burn. Also, one or a number of hydraulic hoses broke and sprayed hydraulic fluid all over the place. The train stopped.

Any help from from either Cochrane or Moosonee would take hours or days to get there. However, on the train were six members of the Moose Factory Volunteer Fire Department. They were on their way to a baseball tournament way south -- in Espanola, near Sudbury.

Without skipping a beat they detached the about-to-explode power car from the rest of the train, grabbed fire extinguishers from anywhere, got into the burning unit, and extinguished the fire -- all before the fluids really ignited.

The Ontario Northland Railroad (ONR) estimates that these kids saved the train company at least \$300,000 in just the cost of replacing the power car. That estimate doesn't include possible/probable injury to other passengers, damage to other equipment on the train or road bed, or forest fire. Thanks to the Moose Factory Volunteer Fire Department, the power car was operating the next day -- safely.

Last night the newly elected Band Council and Chief for Moose Cree First Nation were all sworn in. The ceremonies, then, were followed by a feast. This year, in all of that, time was taken to acknowledge and thank the guys who had saved the train. Dignitaries from ONR were there -- saying 'Thank You!' every way they could muster.

02 SEP 05 FLOODS & DEVASTATION

I think it was in the spring of 2004, during breakup, that the Attawapiskat River threatened to get really nasty. The danger in breakup comes -- or can come -- from ice building up, getting stuck, upstream from a community. These jams can happen for a variety of reasons. A particularly dangerous situation can develop when the ice in The Bay clogs the mouth of a river. Then the ice, which is backing up, can create a dam. Then, EVERYTHING gets backed up: both ice and water. That will, of course, flood the village. AND, if that dam lets go suddenly enough (and that is what, predictably, happens) ALL the ice goes out of the river at once. Since it is now covering the community, it can work as a gigantic plane, carrying away EVERYTHING.

This was the situation that began to develop in Attawapiskat during that particular breakup a year or so ago. The water was rising and threatening to flood all of the town. (Some of the village was already flooded.) The authorities knew that when/if the airstrip was flooded, the ability of the outside world

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to bring in help would be seriously restricted. Theresa was Chief then. After consulting with the Council and the Elders she made the decision. Attawapiskat was evacuated. Planes brought people to Moosonee. Lots of folks stayed with relatives and/or friends -- and, wherever. Special trains brought lots of folks south to Cochrane, as Moosonee could handle only so many. The motels in Cochrane absorbed the horde. They had to -- by law.

Memories of that evacuation come to me as I hear about New Orleans and the Gulf Coast -- and how people were stuck in their homes during KATRINA, because they could not afford to leave; how wonderful the politicians say they are, while bodies are piling up to rot in the sun and people continue to die in fetid hospitals. What the Canadians do, as a matter of practice, with their First Nations People, the Americans cannot approach with their Blacks (and forget the First Nations People; they're off the map) because the Americans (in power) really don't care. And they never did.

23 SEP 05 CRITTERS

Critters is being strange this year. Near the end of July, on the Attawapiskat River, a polar bear was sighted -- and I think shot. That was just a bit before the canoers came down The River. What a surprize everybody missed.

Evidently the bears here are not to be out done. This last spring -- just after breakup -- Bobby's nephew was out on Shipsand Island. He took a nap on a driftwood log, then awakened only to see two Mommas and a baby headed his way.

Over the last two weeks, while I was off to the south, four bears were shot at the Moose Factory dump. Then another six appeared, and they also were shot. Over in Moosonee similar bear sightings and bear shootings were recorded.

In addition to all that a SKUNK was seen on Moose Factory Island.

Even more recently, various moose have been getting close to people. Stephanie got some pictures of a moose in her back yard. Check it out (!).... (<http://stephanietozer.myknet.org/>)

20 OCTOBER 2005 THE EDDY AT CONGLOMERATE GORGE

An update/footnote on the Eastmain Journal that I did after the Eastmain trip in 1973. ...

I just spent an hour chatting with James Cheechoo. His family had worked their ancestral lands which lie just to the south of The Eastmain and from the Village to about where the new James Bay Highway now lies. James' generation is ten years or so older than me. His is the last generation to remember -- first hand -- the life in the bush.

Somehow we started talking about Conglomerate Gorge. I had remembered the spring in the middle of the portage -- where the campsite was. James also remembered the Gorge -- and particularly the custom of sprinkling tobacco over the water at the end of The Gorge -- so as to pacify the great big eddy that is there. Hopefully this would pacify the eddy enough so that it would not roll a canoe. Evidently everybody knows about that eddy.....

That's exactly what the eddy did when we came through. It rolled Bruce and Sty. And Bruce was the one who forgot his tobacco! The eddy wanted his tobacco and was offended by his negligence!