

Botany

*By Canoe Across the Ungava Peninsula
Via the Kogaluk and Payne Rivers
Report supplied by Dr. Jacques Rousseau*

Professor M. L. Fernald's ideas on the persistence of plants in unglaciated areas in northeastern America have for the last twenty years been a storm centre in American phytogeography. As far as Quebec was concerned, the discussion was limited mainly to the Gaspé peninsula and other arctic or subarctic habitats which are found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence region.

The need to study the hypothesis in the light of new facts became apparent. Hence surveys in the interior of Anticosti island, which, was supposed to have escaped glaciation, were made in 1940 and 1942. The great unknown, however, being the interior of the Ungava peninsula, and northern Quebec in general, I decided to give my attention to this problem. To fulfill the plan, three different areas were studied in succession 1) from 1944 to the spring of 1947, the subarctic forests in the limestone area of Lake Mistassini; 2) in the summer of 1947, a survey of George River¹,—which, flowing from the height of the land, north of Lake Michikamau on the Quebec-Labrador boundary, provides a good cross section of the vegetation from the subarctic forest to the arctic barren land; 3) finally, this year a sector of the Ungava peninsula north of the timber line, between Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay via the Kogaluk and Payne rivers².

Except for a traverse by Robert J. Flaherty³, along the Payne and Povungnituk rivers in 1912, no other traverse of the Ungava peninsula north of the timber line had apparently been made. Furthermore, on this summer's trip, only the lowest part of the Payne River touched the route followed by Flaherty.

Planned first as a one man general survey (with emphasis on botany) the purpose of the 1948 trip was gradually widened. I first accepted the suggestion of Mr. Edgar Aubert de la Rüe to accompany me as geologist, and a grant from the Arctic Institute was subsequently obtained to make this possible; Mr. Pierre Gadbois was later added to

the party as geographer from the Geographical Bureau of the Dominion Department of Mines and Resources and finally, Mr. Jean Michéa of the National Museum, Ottawa, joined the group as ethnologist and archaeologist. For my own part, outside of planning and leading the expedition, I concentrated principally on the biological (and mainly botanical) aspects of the survey. It is still premature to report on the technical aspects of our work: each member of the party will later furnish a report on his own activities and observations. Consequently, this note is confined to general observations.

After flying from Montreal airport, by R.C.A.F. to Fort Chimo, a chartered Canso of the Mont-Laurier Aviation Company carried the party of four technicians and four Indian canoeers to Povungnituk trading post on the Hudson Bay coast, on the 14th July, 1948. The aircraft carried all equipment including two eighteen foot canoes. Because of a very early break-up the Canso was able to land on Payne Lake where we made a cache, thus simplifying the problem of transportation.

With the assistance of two Eskimos and their nineteen-foot canoe, as well as a collapsible canoe of the kayak type seating two men, the party left the mouth of the Kogaluk River on July 17th and followed its course until the 27th. Then began a four-day portage of over twenty miles. The area crossed consisted of low hills cut by small brooks and lakes, lying between the drainage basins of the Kogaluk and Payne. The first part of the portage over, the Eskimos returned to their base with their canoe, as had been agreed upon, the three other canoes now being sufficient to carry the remainder of the load.

Reaching the cache on Payne Lake on August 2nd, the party followed the Payne River until the 12th, when the canoeing ended at the Payne Bay trading post on Ungava Bay. A whole week was spent there surveying the surrounding territory.

The two rivers, Kogaluk and Payne, present widely different aspects. As an Indian guide told me one day, "Rivers are like women, each one has her own

character, and we sense it in the early days following the first meeting". The Kogaluk consists of a chain of lakes separated by low falls. The Payne, on the contrary, is a swift river (although not as rapid as the George River), without falls and with very few portages: as there is sufficient water, one can "shoot" nearly all the rapids when going with the current. An outboard engine may be used on both rivers, but, because so little was known of the territory it seemed preferable to reduce the weight of all equipment and to avoid having to portage motor and gasoline. Moreover, such travelling gives one more opportunity to collect biological and geological specimens, since the shores are more easily followed closely.

A striking feature on the whole trip was the almost complete absence of caribou. From the Hudson Bay coast to the centre, not a single fresh track was seen. Old caribou trails only were encountered and moreover, as viewed from the air, these were very rare. From Payne Lake to the Ungava Bay coast, caribou trails were more frequent, though fresh tracks were seldom seen. Only three caribous were spied by the party. Nevertheless, as one would easily surmise, grazing possibilities are very good. The dominant wild life in the interior as far as we could judge, considered from the economic point of view, consists mainly of gray trout, Canada goose and lemming. The extreme abundance of the latter this year is an indication of abundance of white foxes for next year.

It may be a surprise to some to learn that we employed as canoe men, Indians who had never travelled in such country and who were in an area far removed from their own, the subarctic forest north of Seven Islands on the St. Lawrence. This was done because Indians are unsurpassed in canoeing and portaging. They are inland people while the Quebec Eskimos are coastal, and travel in the interior only occasionally for hunting purposes and then by komatik in early winter. Eskimos are unaccustomed to portages and to travelling by canoe on rivers. In less than a day, the Indian canoers from the "bush" had adapted themselves to the tundra and the camp fires of green willows. Even if they were in a country entirely unknown to them they found their way across the barren land more easily than did the Eskimos. When travelling in the interior the Eskimo relies generally on his cairns to guide him; the Indian, on the contrary, relies on the sun. After leaving the Kogaluk River and travelling for four days while crossing the valleys between this river and the Payne, with vision limited because of low hills, we went directly to our cache and lost no time searching for it.

¹See page 93 for an account of this expedition.

²A number of services and organizations have co-operated in making this expedition and that to the George River a success. In the formal reports, due credit will be accorded to all of them. Nevertheless, in this preliminary note, I am happy to cite particularly the Royal Canadian Air Force, Geographical Bureau, National Museum, Defence Research Board, Arctic Institute, Government of the Province of Quebec, City of Montreal and the Hudson's Bay Company.

³Flaherty, Robert J. Two traverses across Ungava peninsula. *The Geographical Review* (New York), 6: 116-132, 1918.