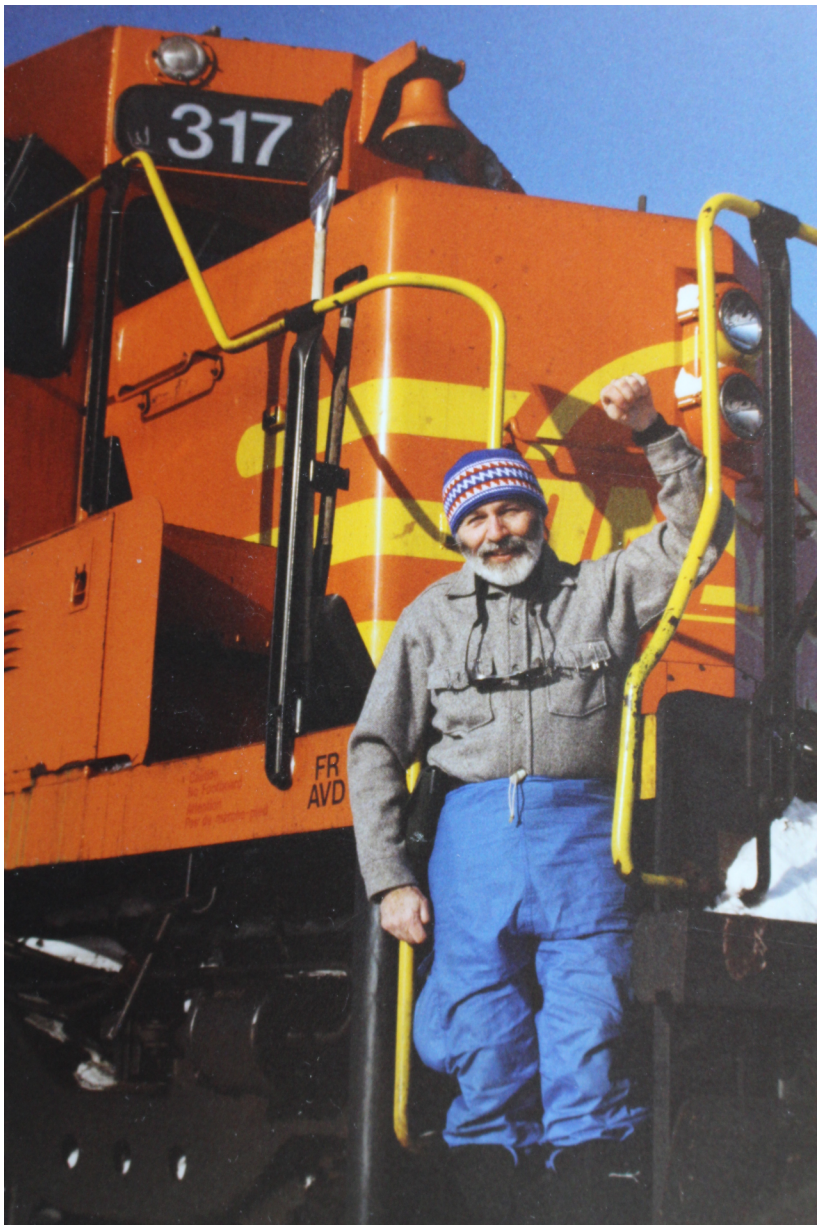


All Aboard

For a Fourteen Day
Snow Shoe Outing

on the

Labrador Plateau

Our Guides

Alexandra and Garrett Conover

The Trip

A 14 day "wilderness outing", exploring the Menihek Hills on the west central-Labrador plateau. The Naskapi and Montagnais Indians have made their home in this country for centuries. Our guides were Alexandra and Garrett Conover, of North Woods Ways.

Travel was on snowshoes over lakes and rivers. Each group member pulled a toboggan with ~ 100 + pounds of supplies and gear. We averaged 5 - 6 miles between campsites. The total trip covered ~ 75 miles.

On a typical day we woke at 6 am, had breakfast, and broke camp by 9 am. We stopped on the trail for a picnic lunch, and would reach our next campsite by ~ 3 pm.

We quickly learned how to work well together, and could set up camp in 2 1/2 hours. We were typically resting and munching snacks by a warm stove and awaiting dinner by 5:30 pm.

The itinerary provided for layover days during which we could explore the surrounding ponds, streams, and hills. Temperatures averaged in the high teens during the day, and from -17 F to - 22 F at night.

We had many sunny days, but experienced wind and white-out conditions during some of the lake travel. A GREAT TRIP!!!

Introduction

This book is a photo recap of a two-week, guided winter snowshoe trip in Labrador. Garrett and Alexandria Conover are a husband and wife team operating a canoe and snowshoe guide service in Maine called North Woods Ways.

This trip included six clients and the two guides. Two of the clients - Shel Abelson and Larry Cohen - are longtime friends who have winter camped and canoed together for over forty-five years. This is their photo diary of the trip.

Shel and Larry traveled by car for two full days over 700 miles from Lexington, Massachusetts to Sept-Iles Labrador, where the group met with the guides for their pre-trip briefing and preparation. The guides reviewed gear and described general travel and camping techniques for the Labrador environment.

This book describes the trip and the approaches used by the guides to provide a challenging, yet comfortable experience.

We hope you enjoy the trip.

The train trip north

On the first day of the trip, the group took a train that travels once each week. The train route was difficult, especially in the icy, mid-winter conditions, so the 300-mile trip from group's boarding point to a hydroelectric power plant where we were dropped off took more than 13 hours.

Further complicating travel were the stops at arbitrary points along the route to pick up local residents. The water supply on the train was frozen, so the train made "pee" stops every 2 hours.

Loading Gear on Toboggans

Each trip participant had a toboggan with a portion of the group's supplies. We used narrow toboggans because they minimize the resistance generated when loaded with heavy gear.

When loading a toboggan, a tarp is first laid on the ground on top of it. The supplies are placed on the tarp, which is then wrapped around those supplies and tightly tied to ensure the load is secure and compact, and that it will not snag when the toboggan travels along tight trails. Each toboggan weighed approximately 100 pounds.

Traveling across wide open areas can be beautiful, but a head wind could add significant physical difficulty and make it feel much colder.

The physical effort of pulling a toboggan can generate a lot of heat, even when the temperature is below zero. It was important to avoid perspiring and generating moisture that could make our clothing damp. So, if there was no precipitation, and the winds were calm, we opened our clothing to ventilate and keep cool. Layering our clothing allowed us to adjust to a variety of conditions, staying warm when the temperatures were low, but keeping cool when it was warmer.

Stopping for a rest. A nice view of how toboggans are loaded and secured.

Some of the waterways connecting large bodies of water are small streams and in some instances contain small rapids.

Even in the cold temperatures, these waterways could present challenges since they were not always frozen.

"HOW **ABOUT A LUNCH BREAK ?"**

TIME FOR ALEXANDRA'S HIGH ENERGY PICNIC LUNCHES

A picnic lunch

Breaks on the trail were a real treat. By break time, everyone had warmed up enough to be comfortable stopping. Setting the table had to be a quick exercise, however. Even though we were warm when we stopped, we cooled down quickly soon after we stopped moving. We usually looked for a location protected from the direct wind.

In this picture, we were on top of about 4 feet of snow, so using our snow shoes, we stomped out a trench around the perimeter of what would become the (snow) table surface. All the fixings for lunch were conveniently stashed on the rear end of one of the toboggans.

Alexandra had a nice, bright blue tablecloth that she placed on the snow as she set the table with our lunch. We sat on our snow shoes around the table with our feet in the trench. Consuming some warm soup and high caloric food, and just sitting was a great break.

TRIUMPH

Time to hit the trail: We had limited travel time in the afternoon before we had to stop each day (around 3 pm) to prepare camp.

Setting Up Camp

A 2 1/2 hour routine exercise for the entire team

This picture shows the "great stomp". Everyone walked around the campsite, pounding the snow so that eventually it would support our weight.

Note the poles from a prior trip stored against the trees. Reusing those polls saved a lot of effort

Pitching the Tents

Two ~ 9 x 12 x 3 foot wall tents

Setting the ridge pole

WHEN SETTING UP CAMP

ORGANIZATION IS CRITICAL

Gathering Boughs

Unloading the toboggans

Cutting Wood

COLLECTING WATER

The Ice was about 3 foot thick.

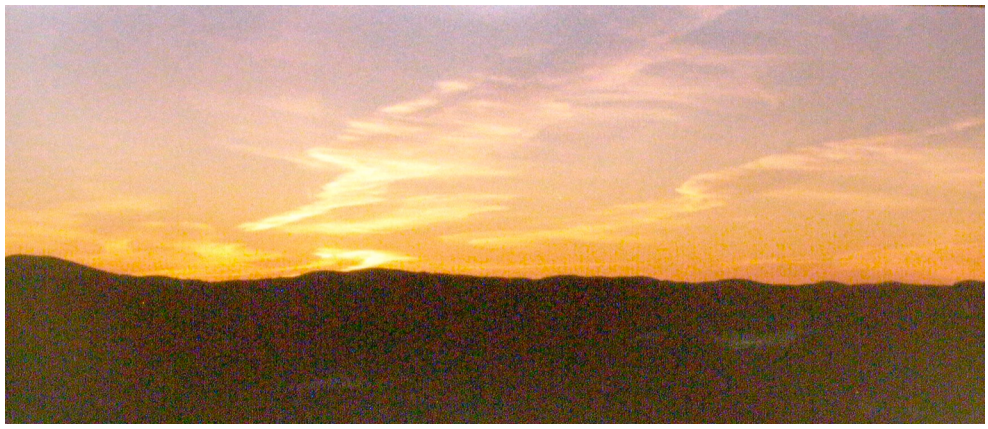
Using an ice chisel it took about half an hour to cut a hole and reach water.

Once we broke through to the water, we used buckets to transport it water back to the cook tent.

Setting Up Camp Is Complete

Time to relax with some warm snacks before dinner

THE END OF ANOTHER GREAT DAY



RELAXING AFTER DINNER. IN THIS PICTURE:

- Larry, Shel, and Alexandra are sitting with their backs to the front door of the tent, and their feet in the pit.

  The stove is to the right in the pit. (Note pot and stove pipe)

- Closest to the camera is another camper looking at a diary. He is sitting on the sleeping platform

Sleeping at - 20 F

And Comfortable

THE FIRST VIEW OF A NEW DAY

"HOAR FROST"

GLIMMERING ON THE TREES IN THE EARLY SUNLIGHT

Hot coffee while we were still in the sack

This day was a Leisure Day

Time to relax before getting up and out to explore the local hills.

TAKING A HOT SHOWER

The water in the pot on the stove was warm.

The camper standing in the PIT will disrobe and use the silver container to poor warm water over his head for a refreshing shower.

The excess water drains through the pine bows in the bottom of the pit.

EXPLORING THE LOCAL HILLS

bolle

EXPERIENCING
WILDERNESS SKILLS

HOW ICE FISHING
&
A RIFLE

CAN BE USED TO SURVIVE

Ice Flows

During extremely cold nights, the thick ice on the water's surface expands. In some instances, the ice would crack with a loud clap, like thunder. The pressure of the ice expanding would force the water under the ice to the surface, where it would flow and freeze as smooth as glass.

Traversing these extremely smooth ice flows presented a special challenge since it was extremely difficult to gain any traction.

Campers resting in front of their tobaggons prior to traveling accross the ice flow

Breaking Camp the last day on the trail

Loading gear on the train for the trip south

The Team

Less
Alexandra

(Taking the Picture)

All Aboard

Time to go home!