Rendezvous Set for Aug. 30 to Sept. 2, 2002

The next Rendezvous is coming. Mark your calendars for the weekend of August 31 to September 2, 2002. One highlight will be the Saturday evening banquet at the Grand Ely Lodge on the banks of Shagawa Lake. Bob Cary will be our entertainment speaker and our Master of Ceremonies will be Pete Sausier (Cory Koldji in voyageur character). Of course, the main highlights will be reliving old memories and seeing old friends (perhaps making a few new ones). Planning is going well with many people stepping forward to volunteer (as listed below).

Banquet Program: Mike Holdgrafer
Kids Programs: Doris Kolodji, Dianne Rench, Laurel Theis
Listening Point Tours: Larry Hanson, Don Richard
Music: Barbara Cary Hall
Photography: Joel Sheagren
Voyageurs: Pete Sausier, Eric Simula, Steve Clouse
Canoe Raffle and General Rendezvous Stuff: LeRoy Heikes
T-shirts: Ray Mattson
Rendezvous Logo: Real Berard

There are plenty of other opportunities to help out. Do you have a nature activity for kids? Are you interested in helping with music or a church service? All offers of help will be put to good use. Contact me at crose@stcloudstate.edu or 320/252-2768.

Our many thanks to Don Melander of Melander, Melander & Schilling who on short notice prior to the Northern Tier Committee meetings prepared his interpretation of the canoe workshop. He has also developed the site plan for all of the historic buildings. His building style and design was presented to and welcomed by the Northern Tier Committee this September. We are moving forward with the log work. A number of Alumni have spent some of their weekends on this project. Our bandanas go off to Chris Clay, Roy Cerny, Knute Nisswandt, Charles “J.J.” Sheeley and Allen Rench. They have helped rack and peel approximately 50 white and red pines. These logs range in from 40-to-50 feet in length and 20-to-28 inches in diameter. They weigh in at over 2,000 pounds each. Chris Clay is coordinating the effort for preparing the timber frame cutting plans. So anyone who wants to can come up and select a log to work on. There is a lot of work yet to be done and plenty of logs yet to be peeled. Most of the logs remaining to be peeled will be used for the roofs. In the coming days before the first snows we will be splitting our supply of 100-inch-length logs. These will be used for the wall in-fill. For next spring, plans have been laid that our primary work week focus will be on this historic building project. We will carry the work out through the summer. So don’t be a stranger, we need your help. I am sure you will be able to try your hand at timber framing at next year’s Rendezvous too.
President’s Message
by Allen Rench

Where did this year go? Looking back on the past 12 months it is just a blur. It seems as if it were yesterday that I was stepping into the shoes of Dave Hyink as president of our association. Let me tell you he does not have little feet. As with any well-organized group it is the dedication and quality of its membership that is the foundation for its success. That is why I am so thankful to be able to work with many of you this year in helping to support the programs of the canoe base. At this year’s Joint National High Adventure Committee meeting, held in Ely, I heard Keith Galoway of the national office speak on the importance “High Adventure.” I am sure he was unaware of the origin of this expression. He spoke of his own personal experiences in the wilderness, of Cub and Boy Scouts taking their first camping or hiking trip, of young men and women meeting outdoor challenges head on. But I don’t think he knew that the term “High Adventure” made its appearance in a 1938 Boy Scout promotional brochure for wilderness canoe trips leaving from Winton, Minn. When I saw that pamphlet, while cataloging some of the base archives, I felt quite proud to be a part of a select group of individuals that defined and honed what “High Adventure” is all about.

In today’s world it is increasingly difficult for current staff members to return four three and four years as many of us did a decade and more ago. This is because of the rising cost of education. Because of this trend, the knowledge base of the staff becomes limited and they need additional support. As Alumni it is critical that we share our collective wilderness canoeing experiences and outdoor knowledge with the current generation of canoe base staff. In doing so, we keep the quality of the canoe trips high and the staff well trained. You ask how can I share? It takes a little desire, wheels, and as much time as you want or are able to give. I want to offer you the opportunity to share your special skills in a teaching environment as we did this past summer. Whether it is cooking, photography, native lore, fur trade history... something that the staff can come away with and share with their fellow scouts. Also, I would love to see Alumni able to go out canoeing with the staff on swamper trips.

So plan ahead for some time on or about Memorial Day weekend. By your involvement “Charlie Guides” will be “Charlie Guides” and “High Adventure” will always be “High Adventure.”

Joe Seliga Chats with Mike Sawinski at the last reunion

Joe Seliga: writing book
by Joe Seliga

We’re in the process of writing a book on building the Seliga canoe. I would like to hear from any “Old Charlie Guides” who paddled the Seliga canoe, and what they thought of the canoe and any interesting things that happened on their trips. These will be used in the book. I also would be pleased to hear from anyone who purchased a Seliga canoe when the camp sold the canoes. I would like their names and canoe numbers, so that I could make changes in my directory.

To contact me, please send any e-mails to my daughter at tinnancy@spacestar.net or mail to me at Joe Seliga, 244 E. Pattison St., Ely, MN 55731.
I wonder whatever happened to...

by Allen Rench

Ever wanted to show family or friends about your Sommers adventures, but, come to find out, you had misplaced or lost your pictures? Ever wondered what happened to all of those staff pictures, crew pictures, base life and hero shots that Roy Conradi, Chuck Crary and all the other photographers took? Well fret no more. They have been living in the various incarnations of the darkroom around the base just waiting to be rediscovered. Doug Hirdler has given the SAA access to and possession of all this base history. To date we have recovered the negatives and contact sheets of the 60s, 70s, and 80s as well as all of the movies too. Just skimming through these pictures causes those wonderful memories of my summers at the base to come flooding back.

How could you ever forget this phrase, “We Must Get Off This Ridge,” from the hypothermia movie? Or even the moments we spent listening to Orin, Cliff, Sandy, Sig Olsen, Joe Seliga and Bob Cary in the Lodge. Remember playing swamp football or working in Charlie’s Mine? It’s all here. This is a massive project but little by little we will be digitizing and archiving our photographic history to be placed on CD.

We hope that in the near future these pictures will be available for your viewing online through our website. Any contributions to this effort would be welcomed. If you have personal photos that you would like to share just drop me a line. Or even if you are in the neighborhood and have a few extra days just stop in and scan awhile. My wife, Dianne, would love you for it. She is anxiously waiting for the day she can regain the use of our basement.

Roy Cerny demonstrates cookery in this archival photo. Despite his apparent appetite for fish in this photo, he recently underwent heart bypass surgery and has recovered well.

Wanted: summer interpreters

You can help the Northern Tier High Adventure Program by finding qualified applicants for work as interpreters now. The base needs more applicants for this summer. You can contact the Joe Mattwon at the base for applications and information (joe@ntier.org).

The minimum age is 16, but there is no upper age limit. Every applicant must pass a physical exam, though, in order to be hired. Many SAA members have worked in a variety of jobs at the base in the past.

Northern Tier sends hiring information to the local councils every year in the spring, but that information may get better attention if a local person calls and encourages them to use it. Making a call to the person in your council who handles the news publications can mean that the Northern Tier ad asking for staff will be used when it otherwise might not have been.

If you participate in your local council, and carry staff applications with you, you’re helping. This is a good time of year to begin mentioning that staff opportunities at the canoe base are coming up. You may pass out more applications than are actually filled out and filed, but each one gives you a chance of finding someone who will thank you for decades, for giving them a great opportunity.

Staff applications are available by calling the base at 218/365-4811 or by writing to PO Box 509, Ely, MN 55731. Staff applications are also online at www.holry.org.

“A View at the top of the World”!

Lodgepole Lar

There was a view at the top of the world! Two sisters sat, looking on the town! Their beauty glimmered and glistened! The sun arose and they twirled like stars! Their golden hue paled, as the moon drifted! No sleep or slumber from days rolling by! Bold from mother nature’s fine fury! But safe shelter, did the sisters abide to each of their children within!

There was a view at the top of the world! Where freedom shined from each sister! The harbor lights danced off their reflection! The torch of liberty burned by their door! Their secrets of 1 & 0s electrified within! Deals were dealt and fortunes founded! Lives were lived and loves were lingering! The pace of the city was endless!

There was a view at the top of the world! These sisters magnified business and trade! Their elegance and grace were persistent! Crystal swirling round in the air! No safety from the madness with no conscience! One sister stood wounded while the world wondered why! Here, 911, her children were dying!

There was a view at the top of the world! Blows from hatred and vengeance again came flailing! Both sisters injured and damaged in the crisp, blue morning’s breeze! Like Joan-of-Arcs pierced by arrows of death! And still they sheltered their children within! While the bravery abounded, rushed, saving and screaming with a deep dying gasp, the first sister fell! The world was wailing with wonder! Then, as within the harbor, the other sister fell! Up on the world, with tears testing of trauma and turmoil!

There was a view of freedom at the top of the world! But where they fell, Freedom is still standing!
“The Beginning of My Canoeing Career,”

An interview with Mike Cichanowski, owner of Wenonah Canoe and Current Designs Kayak

by Chuck Rose

I recently sat down with Mike Cichanowski at his factory in Winona, Minnesota. I brought a tape recorder and let him talk; the following words are his. Mike is also a member of the Northern Tier Advisory Committee.

It all started with Boy Scouts

Our troop at the time was involved in the Camp Hoksila canoe race from Red Wing to Winona [on the Mississippi River]. It was a three-day race, starting Friday afternoon. Our troops in town were particularly involved in that; we'd make our own racing paddles. We raced that thing for a number of years; it was a big event so we'd practice canoeing to be competitive in the race. It was a big deal, sometimes they'd come up with 20, 30 teams and each team would have six people on it where they'd do legs [relays]. We were a canoeing group, either racing or tripping.

So the Canoe Base was a natural thing to do every few years. That was the beginning of my canoeing career. I was an Eagle Scout; I have three brothers, I’m the second oldest. All four of us were Eagle Scouts. My father was involved in our troop, he was never Scoutmaster, but he was always involved in the troop at the district level. And so I can look back and say that my Scouting experience is the reason that Wenonah Canoe is here.

Mike's Sommers Trips

Well, I really can’t remember them to too well tell you the truth. That was about 40 years ago. [Note: he then proceeded to talk for a half hour.] I went along two, maybe three times. There were people from our troop that went before and after me. They were typical trips, we did big loops, you’d start at Sommers, we’d always go up into Canada, Lake Agnes and such, turn around and come back. We had groups of 10, maybe 12. We’d take a guide from Sommers, he’d have a wood boat and the Scouts would have aluminum boats. The guides had green boats, my gut tells me they were Old Towns but they might have Seligas. The guides were very, very careful with them, the boats were treated like God practically. When we were on those trips, those boats never touched a rock. Everybody got out wet, they’d throw you in the lake, show you that you’re gonna have wet feet, show you how to treat the boats. So the kids learned equipment respect. You don’t need a wood boat to teach boat respect. A nice, light weight kevler boat is like a lightweight racing bike, it will last forever if you know how to take care of it.

A brief, inside history of Wenonah Canoes

In college, I changed from a Pre-Fisheries/Pre-wildlife major to Industrial Arts after two years. I found out what I was good at, and that was my big revelation. There’s nothing I really can’t build if I don’t want to, I consider myself handy and that’s the attribute that’s made my company. Right now we have 150 people in both organizations [Mike owns Wenonah Canoes and Current Designs Kayaks] but it took a long, long time to get to that size; the first ten years, it’s just paying groceries, we’re struggling and struggling. The history of Wenonah Canoes is really quite easy. When I was in college, I was building a few, very few canoes, but I was doing other fiberglass boat jobs, repair jobs so I could pay my living expenses. When I was a senior in college, the canoe side became a bit bigger, I also got a couple of jobs doing some contract fiberglass parts and that kind of started it. At that time I called it Midwestern Fiberglass Products. I probably had myself and two part-time friends, and so from there we kept focusing on canoes, more models, new technologies; racing boats, regular boats, cruising boats, and before you know it, thirty years later, you’re building 30 different canoe models and 15 kayak models and there’s no end to it. We changed the name, I don’t know what year it was, but once we got more involved with just canoes and less involved with everything else, we said Midwest Fiberglass just didn’t cut it. We always called the canoes Wenonahs. We only do canoes and kayaks now. This next year, we’re going to ship about 12,000 units (canoes and kayaks). It’s grown vastly bigger than I ever expected. At the same time, the market has been kind to us, the last four years have been unprecedentedly busy for canoes and kayaks. It never used to be like this. We struggled. Canoesport as we know it now is becoming more and more popular. To make a long story short, we got all we can do just holding on. How long is it going to last? I don’t know. Sooner or later it’s going to cool off. We’re in a cyclical market. We used to go contrary to the car business. When car sales were down, our sales were up, when car sales were up, our sales were down. I could track that just like clockwork. And my theory was people would save up for a car down payment, they wouldn’t buy much else, but once they got the car then they’d buy other stuff.

The only thing I’ve done in my life besides building canoes was carrying groceries when I was in high school. When I was building the business we started selling to the Ely liveries. We didn’t push that until about 10 years ago. Our theory then was that the rentals would beat up the boats and actually give us a bad name. But during the last decade we’ve figured out how to make the boats much tougher, and decided that was a wrong idea, we push the livery business very hard. Now we do, extremely well in livery sales, we sell hundreds of canoes a year in the Ely/Gunflint Trail area.

My wife and family have been very involved in the business. I have two daughters, one is a fourth year medical student, the other one has her MBA. Both of them, in high school, were Minnesota state high school champions in cross-country skiing. Both of them were very involved in our Explorer Post here, we sponsored a Post for years and years. It basically was a canoe racing Post, we’d take kids all over the Midwest and take them to the Nationals. My wife has also been involved since we were married 31 years ago.

Other Ramblings

I go up to the Boundary Waters almost every year, sometimes twice, for a trip. A couple years ago, I took the Minnesota State (continued on page 5)
Don’t kick him off, don’t let him up there then buy his property. Boundary Waters, if someone dies take a 100-year mindset in the and see the experience. Now, if you and do some portages and camp from a lodge. You’ve got to go out treat the Boundary Waters as a lake in a lodge and take a day trip. I what they wanted to do was stay a wonderful experience. It’s ironic, Democrats. Some of these people senators, aids, Republicans, ized. There were lady senators, guy senators, aids, Republicans, Democrats. Some of these people had never canoed before. They had a wonderful experience. It’s ironic, what they wanted to do was stay in a lodge and take a day trip. I said that’s the problem. You can’t treat the Boundary Waters as a lake from a lodge. You’ve got to go out and do some portages and camp and see the experience. Now, if you take a 100-year mindset in the Boundary Waters, if someone dies up there then buy his property. Don’t kick him off, don’t let him now, it is a vastly different area. When we were going up there, every now and then there’d be an island with a lodge they were tearing down. It wasn’t the same Boundary Waters as it is now. People come from all over the world to do trips there. I asked the Germans about...
Reflections, page 6

Two Superior summers

7/14/60

Dear Cliff:

I am so proud of your voyageurs. To think that Ralph and Curt and Loren made Lake Superior in three days and with no difficulty at all. Roderick Mackenzie about a hundred and sixty years ago made it if from Rainy Lake to Lake Superior in five days which was considered quite a feat in those days. He would have grabbed voyageurs quite as yours. The group that made Atikokan in two days have something to be proud of too. Both groups show what your guides can do. I would trust them anywhere and know they would come through. You should be mighty proud of the. I am.

Am sorry that when both groups came in I was involved with dinner complications. I will return too late from Alaska to see them again this summer but perhaps some other time. My visits to the base with Mrs. Olson have been a real inspiration to us.

Please thank Roy Conradi for that fine group of pictures. I really appreciated that and Mrs. Olson joins me. Kindest regards to everyone.

Sigurd Olson

Two Superior summers

Mike Holdgrafer (77-82, 91-)

and his wife Michelle have a new daughter, Nicole Lee. She was born Sept. 29 of this year. Concerning parenting since then, Mike says, “No two nights are the same.”

I have changed jobs in order to better myself and my family. I am now the lone Environmental Code Enforcement Officer in Douglas County, Ga. This is a contract position with funds provided by grant through the Georgia Dept. of Nat. Res. Environ. Protection Div. I am in charge of enforcing environmental codes in the county and enforcing state law. My main focus is scrap tires and solid waste illegal dump sites, along with other environmental issues. I still wish I could canoe the BWCA and get paid full time, but this is going to be fun.

Christopher Thurman 94-96

from Chuck & Toni Pease

I just took an early retirement from teaching in the Arctic; 12 years teaching Inupiaq (eskimo) children. It feels good to have my life back.

Right now I’m finishing up my first log house and selling some wood art on the side. Made lots and saved lots of money working for the Northwest Arctic School District. But after my second wife died of leukemia (married 10 years) I had to change my lifestyle.

So I’m living on the Kenai, just south of Anchorage, enjoying this beautiful country, fishing for king salmon, and married for a third time to a beautiful Portagee woman of 33, who had a child from an earlier marriage. And it has been a real pleasure being a father. Glad I was a teacher first.

A group of Charlie’s guides made a trip in 1960 from the base at Moose Lake to Lake Superior. Curtis Carley, J. Ralph Payne and Loren Albert identified themselves as crew 709Z for the trip. They paddled Curtis’s canoe, which he named “Sara Ann” (for a girl he later married). When they completed Grand Portage they loaded the Sara Ann for a paddle in Lake Superior. The trip inspired a congratulatory letter (above) to the base director, Cliff Hanson.

The next year, crew 630Z made a trip to lake Superior via Fort William. Loren Albert, Henry Bradlich and Curtis Carley were the crew. The Sara Ann required several repairs after each trip, particularly the 1961 trip.

(photos by Roy Conradi)

A wood art table by Chuck Pease
Miniature Paddle Brands

Remember gazing at the Paddle display case and seeing all of those paddle designs of those bygone days and imagining the faces that went with them. Well here is your chance to leave your mark once again at the Canoe Base and have someone ponder your logo. With the addition of a second paddle display cabinet in the Lodge there is plenty of room to add your brand to the growing collection. For $25 you can have your very own paddle brand placed on a miniature paddle and put on display. The paddles are eight inches long and the blades are one inch wide. Sketch your logo to size or send in a picture of your artwork and let us do the rest. When completed your design name and the years you served at the base will appear on the paddle to share with a whole new generation of Scouts and Guides. If you didn’t have a paddle brand but had a special canoe name or logo put it on the paddle. OKPIK staff, we have room for miniature skis or snowshoes too. Please staple your art to the order form.

Order Form

Name________________________________________________
Address______________________________________________
City, State, Zip _________________________________________
Phone ________________________________________________
Red Tip: Yes__ No__ Region 10X: Yes__ No__ Years Guided: _____ - _____
Checks payable to: Sommers Alumni Association
Mail to: The Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association
PO Box 428
Ely, Mn 55731

Smirk of the wolf

by Mark Nordstrom

Lately I was walking through a nature exhibit and I looked up to the top of a glass case. There was a stuffed wolf on top of it, looking right down at me with one side of its mouth twisted up and a very intent look in its eyes. It was considering whether or not I was prey or predator, and doing it with a certain whimsy.

There’s a portage on the way into Kashapiwi from the south that goes up a rock face. I think it’s the Yum Yum portage, I don’t remember it exactly. I had gone back to help the crew and then I had let them get ahead, so I could just take a short break and enjoy the woods. I was walking toward Kashapiwi, stalling and trying to avoid getting to that rock in time to help people up it. When I got to that rock face, though, and looked up, there was a wolf looking down at me with pretty much the same, quizzical expression on its face. All the breath went out of my lungs, I went cold, and it disappeared before I could blink my eyes. It happened so fast, I wondered if it had really happened. I thought, how nice it was that the wolf was scared of humans. Otherwise, I know, I’d have been toast, or something else I don’t want to think about - prey.

When I saw that wolf on that glass cabinet, it all happened again. This time, though, I was not cold. I was sweating; I got very warm. I felt silly and looked around to see if anyone noticed how I was reacting - like prey, again, not like a predator. I wished I could have built into myself an ability to react more aggressively in situations like that. I’d like to respond in a predatory way; turn the tables on the thing that threatens me and do it by reflex.

Right now, though, my goal isn’t to build either a prey or predator response. I just want to achieve the whimsy that wolf managed as it considered whether I was prey or predator.
Charles L. Sommers Alumni Association is taking orders for Greeting Cards. Some cards come with holiday messages, others are blank inside. They can be used year ’round to send greetings as well as a message of commitment to Northern Tier programs.

The 2000 card features Bob Cary’s drawing, “Company Coming,” a pair of moose at a winter camp. All cards are printed using highest quality thermography on premium cards of recycled paper. The backs of the cards carry a message saying you are a supporter of Northern Tier High Adventure. This is a distinctive and very handsome greeting card. The cards come 25 per package, including envelopes. A limited number of 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999 cards: “Sled Dogs,” “Commissary,” “Lodge,” “Hanson House,” “Canoe Yard,” and “Gateway” are available at discounted prices. All orders are subject to availability.

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**Special**, save 40%, off original issue price. 1999-1993 (five boxes, 125 cards) Our choice. Will try to honor requests.

____ Tax Deductible Gift to the Alumni Association for 2000

Ship to: ____________________________  SAA Holiday Card Sale
                     ____________________________  PO Box 428
                     ____________________________  Ely, MN 55731-0428
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**FREE SHIPPING**

**Total** ________