Road Trip!

Rendezvous 2011
Altered Contours

CGSIC and ION 2011
GPS—Greater than the
Sum of its Parts

A Colonial Surveyor
in President Jefferson’s
Public Lands
The North American Land Surveyors and The 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade

By Denny and Delores DeMeyer

The Koo Koo Sint and Paddle Song with other voyageur canoes on the banks of the Columbia River in Pateros, Washington.
In 1811, David Thompson, surveyor and fur trader for the North West Company reached the Pacific Ocean, adding the Columbia River as the final leg of the Fur Trade Highway from Hudson’s Bay and Montreal to the Pacific Ocean and becoming the first person to survey and map the Columbia River from its source near Invermere, British Columbia to its mouth at Astoria, Oregon.

On June 3, 2011, ten 25-foot voyageur canoes left Invermere, British Columbia on a six week, eleven hundred mile trip to Astoria, Oregon via the Kootenai, Clark Fork, Pend Oreille, and Columbia Rivers. We arrived in Astoria, Oregon on July 15, 2011, 200 years to the day after David Thompson’s arrival in 1811.

Two of the ten canoes were entered by a group of us called the North American Land Surveyors. Our two canoes were named the “Koo Koo Sint” (Coast Salish for “stargazer” or “one who looks at the stars” for David Thompson) and “Paddle Song” named for David’s wife of 56 years, Charlotte Small (from a book called Woman of the Paddle Song).
The North American Land Surveyors were sponsored by provincial and state surveying societies of Alberta, British Columbia, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and other local, regional and national surveying societies and private companies. Besides entering two canoes in the nine-to-ten canoe brigade, we also contributed to the brigade by providing tents with colorful exhibits, brochures and maps in many of the communities, as well as serving on the Geocache committee (all were NALS paddlers) that had six large “Meet & Greets” with the public along the way. We had purchased a black powder flint lock musket for each of our arrival ceremonies into the communities.

The Koo Koo Sint was a veteran of the 2008 David Thompson Brigade. This 2008 brigade of fifteen to twenty (depending on portions of the route) 25-foot voyageur canoes paddled from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, to old Fort William on Thunder Bay, Ontario between May 10 and July 12 of 2008. The Koo Koo Sint was entered by the members of the Alberta Land Surveyors Association and participated in the first portion of that trip from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

My wife Delores and I were fortunate enough to be invited to paddle with those Alberta Land Surveyors (ALSA) in the Koo Koo Sint for the entire two weeks. It was an unforgettable experience. So much so, I persuaded my wife Delores to allow me to purchase the canoe used by the ALSA for the 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade (2011 DTCB). We picked up the Koo Koo Sint on our way home from attending the ALSA Centennial Conference in Banff, Alberta in April 2009.

The North American Land Surveyors
On our return, we immediately began plans to participate in the 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade that would paddle from Invermere, British Columbia to Astoria, Oregon via the Kootenai, Clark Fork, Pend Oreille and Columbia Rivers. Delores and I were already on the board of directors of the United States David Thompson Bicentennials (2007-2011) Partnership, headquartered in Sand Point, Idaho. This committee met quarterly and sponsored annual conferences on David Thompson. We became members of the 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade Executive Committee shortly after our return from Alberta and began attending meetings in Calgary and Edmonton. Delores and I were appointed co-chairpersons of the com-
munity contact, logistics and recruitment committees. This involved personally visiting with the mayors, chairs of the Chambers of Commerce and other local officials of 18 of the 33 communities along the route. I always introduced myself as a land surveyor first and then told them about our brigade, our need for a place to camp, and our appreciation if they could provide a meal for us. As chair of the logistics committee, we were responsible for finding places to camp as well as places to pull the canoes in and out of the water along the route. Also on our list of requirements were places to portage around the 14 dams we would encounter in Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Locking through the dams (where available) was not an option for us since we were not powered by a motor (a requirement for locking through most dams). Being chair of these committees allowed me to speak as a land surveyor to a large number of different organizations that included mayors, local officials, the tribes of the Kalispel, Colville and Spokane Indians, the National Park Service, Washington and Oregon State Parks, and many Port officials.

Early support for the canoe was vital and came from British Columbia and Canada Lands Surveyor Robert Allen, a longtime friend from Sechelt, BC who became assistant chairperson and assistant canoe team captain for our two canoes. Help also came from Gord Thomson, retired executive director of the BCLS of Langley, BC with his wife Floss, as well as Monroe and Ellen Kinloch (team captain of the ALS canoe in 2008) of Sheridan Park, Alberta. John Haggerty, an Alberta and Canada Lands Surveyor and his wife Elke from Grand Prairie, Alberta graciously donated their 24-foot travel trailer to use as a base and cooking facility during the entire brigade. It was truly a life saver for us. The greatest help by far

The Koo Koo Sint and Paddle Song on the Columbia River queuing up with other brigade canoes ready to leave Port Kelly, Oregon.

Happy paddlers on the Clark Fork River between Thompson Falls, Montana and Clark Fork, Idaho. NALS assistant chair; Robert Allen, in yellow vest.
was my wife Delores, who agreed to be the chief cook and camp mover during the entire six weeks.

Early in the process we realized the trip would be expensive, so Robert and I put together a list of surveying organizations and companies to contact for support. Our efforts paid off with the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, together with the states of Oregon, Idaho and Montana and the Western Federation of Professional Surveyors eagerly offering to help. Since we were a multi-province and state effort it was decided to call ourselves the North American Land Surveyors and developed a logo that incorporated a sextant to accent David Thompson’s method of surveying. Requests for donations and support continued. Eventually almost thirty sponsors stepped forward and resulted in a 26” x 10-foot banner that was displayed at every campground and in our exhibit tents.

Kootenai Falls near Libby, Montana. We portaged the canoes on trailers between here and Thompson Falls, Montana.

Pull out on the Pend Oreille River in Ione, Washington. We portaged on trailers from here to Kettle Falls, Washington for our trip down the Columbia River.
Our efforts to get paddlers signed up for the journey was so successful we soon found the need to purchase an additional canoe in order to accommodate everyone. This used (new to us) canoe was purchased in Idaho, painted and named “Paddle Song”. Eventually more than fifty paddlers signed on for all or portions of the trip, most of them land surveyors. They came from as far away as Hawaii and Ontario. A total of nine of us completed the entire trip with the part timers broken up into six sections:

1. Invermere, British Columbia to Thompson Falls, Montana, 6 days
2. Thompson Falls, MT to Kettle Falls, Washington, 6 days
3. Kettle Falls, WA to Wenatchee, WA, 7 days
4. Wenatchee to Pasco, WA, 6 days
5. Pasco, WA to Vancouver, WA, 7 days
6. Vancouver, WA to Astoria, Oregon, 4 days

David Thompson

Why did we do this? Basically it was to honor the man who may very well be North America’s Greatest Land Surveyor; David Thompson. Thompson was born in 1770 in England, practically orphaned at 2 years old and entered the Grey Coat School in London at age 7. He was only 14 years old when apprenticed to the Hudson Bay Company and landed in Hudson Bay in 1784. He would never
return to England. When only 17 years old he spent the winter by himself with the Peigan Indians near Minnesota. In the winter of 1788 he suffered a badly broken leg. This resulted in a long convalescence in which he learned practical astronomy (early definition of surveying) from the Hudson Bay Company’s chief surveyor and astronomer, Philip Turnor. Shortly after learning surveying, he left the employ of the Hudson Bay Company and joined the rival North West Company, largely because they encouraged his passion for surveying and mapping. He was insistent on “knowing where he was”. His travels over much of North America between 1784 and 1812 resulted in the production of his famous “Great Map” of northern North America that measures 10 feet x 14 feet. Thompson’s maps continued to be the maps of choice for exploration and settlement well into the 1840s.

After leaving the employ of the North West Company in 1812, Thompson received a surveyor’s ultimate honor when appointed by the British government as their “Chief Surveyor and Astronomer” for the establishment of a portion of the international boundary between the U.S. and Canada from the Lake of the Woods to the Eastern Townships of Quebec. He served in that position from 1817 to 1826.

Sadly, David Thompson was practically a pauper when he died in 1857 at the age of 86 years in what amounted to his daughter’s attic. There are few descriptions of the man, who since that time has become largely unknown and forgotten. In an address to the Royal Geographical Society of London, the Canadian geologist, cartographer and mining consultant Joseph Burr Tyrrell (1858-1957) described Thompson thusly:

“He was plainly dressed, quiet and observant. His figure was short and compact, and his black hair was worn long all around and cut square, as if by one stroke of the shears, just above the eyebrows. His complexion was of the gardener’s ruddy brown, while the expression of deeply furrowed features was friendly and intelligent... he has a very powerful mind, and a singular clarity for picture-making. He can create a wilderness and people it with warring savages, so clearly and palpably that only shut your eyes and you heard the crack of the rifle, or feel the snow-flakes on your cheeks as he talks.”

“No known picture or portrait of North America’s greatest land geographer exists. The man that mapped over 1.5 million square miles of North American and traveled over 55,000 miles by foot, canoe, horseback, snowshoe and dogsled is largely forgotten”.

Our land surveying profession had an opportunity to remedy this by “honoring one of our own,” and so participated in the 2011 David Thompson Columbia Brigade.

Denny DeMeyer has owned and operated a small private land surveying business in Lynden, WA for over 27 years and is a long time member of the Surveyors Historical Society and former chairman of the Land Surveyors Association of Washington Historical Society. Denny and Delores, his wife for almost 40 years, have been promoting the surveying profession by commemorating historical surveying events and anniversaries since 1985.