



Canoe Head

*paddling advice from
Souris River Canoes*



Issue #8

March, 2013

The Red Rock Store

Ely Minnesota's Baltich family still prominent in area tourism after 73 years

By Wayne Docking

In 1939, world newsprint was sensationally caught up with the impending political explosion which quickly morphed into World War Two. In peaceful Ely Minnesota, Frank Baltich established the area's first bait fish outlet on Camp Street. This was not world news by any measure, but it was certainly significant to the town of Ely, which would eventually get to be known nation-wide as the place to go if you want to catch really big fish or experience an out door holiday in unspoiled, pristine wilderness.

Ely's reputation as one of the nation's premier wilderness paddle centres grew from those humble beginnings. Shortly after Frank opened his bait shop, he decided to rent-out a property he owned on Jasper lake just north of town for visiting fishermen. The cabin would give them a base camp for their fishing forays and allow them to go home and talk about roughing it in real northern wilderness.

Roughing it was indeed what it was, as the rental property was nothing more than a dilapidated trapper's shack down a walk-in trail off the roadway which is now Fernberg Road. Nailed to a tree by the trail was a sign that read:

MINNOWS FOR SELL
25 cents a dozen.
HONK FOR SERVICE.

The 12 year-old manager of the Jasper Lake Lodge was Joe Baltich (later to become Joe Baltich Sr.) One day while busy with his chores, Joe found an impeccably dressed gentleman in a bowler hat emerging from the trail. This gentleman upon asking to see the manager and learning he was in fact talking to him asked to see

the resort permit to operate. As was quickly obvious young Joe knew nothing of such document and asked how much it would cost. The gentleman told him it was \$1.50. No problem. In the "Resort" Joe opened a drawer stuffed to overflowing with money and paid the permit fee. Before leaving ,the friendly government inspector suggested to Joe that it would be advisable that he



Joe Baltich carries a Quetico 17 around at his Northwind Lodge.

hide his money safely to discourage theft. "Good idea," thought Joe as he stuffed a big glass jar with cash and then took it out and buried it. This was his first real lesson in financial management.

By the mid '40s the Jasper Lake Resort had added four more cottages to the property and the Baltiches were busy attending to an increasingly demanding sport-fishing clientele. By 1950, they had added another two cottages and a few more

See "Red Rock" on Page 4

Tie-Down Your Canoe

By Warren Paulson, photos by Lucas Paulson

Previously published in Paddle Manitoba's newsletter, *The Ripple*.



Tying-down your canoe won't keep trees from falling on it, but it will prevent a lot of other catastrophes.

(By the way, this Souris River canoe was repaired.

See www.redrockstore.com/toughcanoe.html.)

My teenage son has a summer job paddling through Quetico Park conducting field research. Naturally, he and his colleagues are experienced paddlers, logging far more paddling hours than I'm able to anymore. So I had to chuckle a bit when he told me of an epic trip that involved them searching for and ultimately losing a canoe that had blown away in a fierce windstorm. (The canoe was ultimately recovered after their trip.)

The loss of one canoe was not devastating for them. Their group was large enough that it simply meant three to a canoe for the rest of the trip, and some explaining when they got home. But it could have been downright annoying if they were a smaller party and it was their only canoe. More importantly, it didn't need to happen.

They weren't being careless. They knew a storm was coming, and had their canoes stored safely upside down deep in the bush. (Canoes are

far more likely to be picked-up by the wind if they are upright.) But, it was quite a storm. Had their canoes been tied-down, however, things would have turned out differently.

If you paddle the busier areas of Quetico Park, you will eventually come across canoe shrapnel at the bottom of a set of rapids. You can imagine the scenario. Stop at the portage, pull your canoe up, carry your gear down the trail... what's that banging noise?

So, how do you prevent it? You tie-down your canoe whenever you are not in it. This, however, is only going to happen if you make it easy. So here's how:

1. Buy yourself fifty feet of floating rope, or 15 metres for you younger folk. (Unless you want to find yourself uncoiling your rope from a propeller some day, floating rope is essential.)
2. Cut it in half. Tie it to the ends of your canoe as shown below.
3. Make a hard-fast rule that this rope is not to be used for any other purpose.
4. To access the rope, just grab the hitch and pull, and you'll have the rope coiled neatly in your hand. It's available for tying, towing, or lining your canoe.

From that point on, you can smile whenever you find canoe shrapnel at the bottom of a portage, or hear stories about canoes flying in the wind.





1. Tie your rope to the eyelets or the handle.



2. Coil the rope.



3. Lay the coil of rope under the handle.



4. Reach through the coil and grab the end.



5. Pull it through.



6. You've just made a cow hitch. It will stay there at the ready.



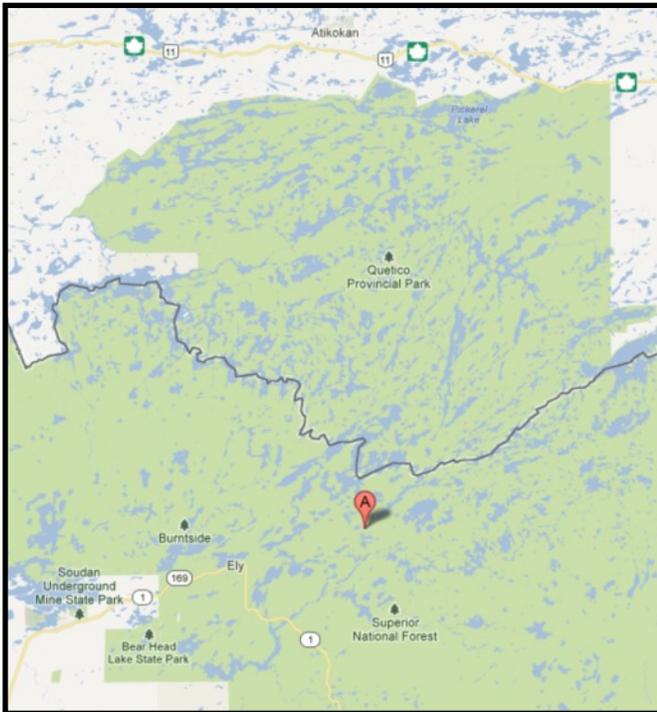
7. To access it, just grab the blob of rope and pull.



8. You now have the whole coil of rope in your hand.

Joe Baltich's Red Rock Store (cont'd)

rental boats to their fleet. They had by now established themselves as bona fide tourist outfitters.



Nestled amidst Quetico Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, you'll Find the Red Rock Store and Northwind Lodge. Source: maps.google.com

With business steadily increasing in the 50's, Joe had an opportunity to join the Ely Police Force. By 1955, he had to split his commitments between the two jobs. Frank continued to anchor the resort workforce at the lake until 1958 when Joe's marriage to Paula brought a new Baltich on board. By now the resort had begun to offer canoe rentals as well as a full range of fishing and lodging services.

Joe Jr. was born in 1960 and began working around the resort at age six. Resort founder Frank Baltich passed away in 1964. He had worked pretty regular hours right up until the time of his death. Joe Sr. and family now ran the resort on their own and having been promoted to Police Chief in 1975, Joe Sr. was truly burning his candle from both ends. He retired from the force in 1986.

By 1982, the Baltiches had changed the name of the resort to Northwind Lodge and had managed

many improvements to the facilities. In 1983, young Joe Jr. graduated from the University of Minnesota at Duluth (UMD) and had returned with a degree in business. The Baltiches had by this time established a system of cross-country ski trails north of Ely and generated a lot of interest not only with the locals but also with skiing enthusiasts well beyond the area.

Seeing an opportunity for winter sales of skis and skiing equipment and a possible expansion of a local passion for cycling, Joe Jr. decided to open a sporting goods store in downtown Ely in 1987. Initially he sold all types of skiing and cycling equipment. Before long, he expanded his product lines to a wider selection of sporting equipment, including canoes.

His canoe of choice back then was Old Town, and he also stocked their kayaks as well. He added Sawyer canoes shortly after. In 1991, Joe married Annette who had recently graduated from university with a masters degree in speech pathology. With the store operating successfully and having a feel for Joe's passion for what he was doing and where he was headed with his sense of salesmanship, Annette decided to forego her planned career and follow Joe in the tourism business.

In 1994, a couple of skiing enthusiasts from Atikokan Ontario visited the Ely ski trails with a dual purpose. They had heard of and wanted to ski the Baltich's trails. They also wanted to talk to Joe Jr. about a possible sales dealership for canoes they were building up north on the boundary of Quetico park. At first blush, Joe wasn't all that interested, but as Keith & Arlene Robinson began to explain that their product was very different from other canoes currently available on the market, Joe started paying attention. Epoxy resin, flexible rib system, built-in scuff strips, substantially stronger bottom, all sounded like something he should perhaps take a look at.

Joe is the first to admit what happened next really blew him away. Keith took a Kevlar® Prospector canoe off the roof of his car, and taking a big boulder he had brought along for the occasion, he placed the rock on the driveway and proceeded to repeatedly ram the canoe bottom down hard on top of it. Joe looked on fully expecting to see the boulder appear through the

bottom of the canoe. but to his amazement no such thing happened. He was even further amazed when on inspection of the canoe bottom he found absolutely no damage whatsoever.

That was it for Joe. He had found the new line of canoes he was looking for. No more convincing was necessary. That first year selling Souris River Canoes, they sold 18 boats. Not bad for a start. In succeeding years, they were to see their canoe sales steadily increase

The year was 1997 when Joe Jr. and Annette moved their operation from downtown to the



Jasper Lake location to take over the Northwind Lodge from Joe's father and mother. By this time, the lodge had a full range of outfitting services and was selling outdoor accessories as well. There was a lot more room here for canoe storage and expansion of other tourist services. Sales were going well, but Joe was restless and believed they could be far better. In 1999 Joe had the answer. He would embark on a program of Internet sales. Within a few weeks he was up and running... well, sort of.

Things just didn't happen quite as he had planned and the path to his door via the Internet saw few footprints. Frustration followed and repeated adjustment didn't result in much change. Anyone who has tried to design an effective website will tell you it's not an exercise for the inadequate. Most people who try to create their own website usually have a fool for a web tech.

It was employee Jackie Hartleban who suggested a new Internet program for Joe to try, and with that format and some upgrading in his Internet skills Joe finally started to see results. The changes were quite startling. Within no time, sales

began to skyrocket, not just canoe sales but sales in all product lines. Let the good times roll. Canoe sales started to hit unbelievable limits of over 200 canoes a year. In 2007 Souris River Canoes built and shipped 543 canoes out of their Atikokan warehouse. Joe Baltich Jr. and wife Annette from the Red Rock Store they had created on the Jasper Lake property sold 324 of those, an unbelievable number for such a tiny store buried deep in north woods America.

Success stories are sometime short-lived and alas this was one of them. As everyone is aware, in 2008 the U.S. banking system began to unravel, taking the U.S. economy and most of their trading partners with them.

No one was unaffected by the catastrophic aftermath of this event, certainly not Red Rock Store or for that matter Souris River Canoes. The road back has been arduous and frustrating to be sure but lights can be seen at the distant end of the tunnel. Progress in that direction is encouraging but the likelihood of reaching pre-2008 sales levels anytime soon seems a bit of a stretch.

Joe Baltich Jr. is a stubborn and well seasoned merchant, and businessmen of his ilk do not readily accept defeat. The building blocks that made him successful pre-2008 are still in place. His company website is well structured and unique and his brusquely opinionated style has captured many readers, both pro and con. Those who appreciate flat-out honest opinions devoid of the window dressing and political niceties that often prevent most of us from saying what we really think, find Joe's website a bit of fresh-air. He knows what he likes and what works and if you're seriously wanting advice from someone who's "been there/done that," you'll keep reading

Souris River Canoes has been most fortunate to have Joe and Annette of Red Rock Store on their sales team over the past 18 years. Together they have risen from relative obscurity to a position of a significant player in North American paddle sports. The reputation of their canoes continues to expand in a very positive direction and they regularly ship to every province and state in North America as well as the occasional shipment abroad.

No one may be willing to bet that Red Rock Store will ever again sell 300 plus canoes in a year but then, with Joe you never quite know.



Don't Miss the Circle Tour

We are once again planning our circle tour of Ontario, New York State, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Wayne will be hauling the big trailer, leaving our factory in mid-May, 2013.

Order and pay for a new canoe before the 2013 tour and receive free shipping to destinations along the route. Just give us a call!

A drop charge will be added on used or discounted canoes. Remember that it takes us about a week to build a canoe, and the offer ends when the trailer is full, so don't wait too long.

Visit our website at www.sourisriver.com/tour2013.html to see the planned route for this year.

Call us at 807-597-1292 or 1-888-226-6386 to order your canoe and reserve your spot!

Please note: The map on our website shows the 2012 route. Our next Circle Tour route may change slightly.



Harbourfront Canoes

For those of you in or near Toronto, Ontario, we will once again be supplying Harbourfront Canoe and Kayak Centre with demo canoes.

Simply contact Souris River Canoes to reserve your spot, and you may test any of several of our most popular models at Harbourfront, free of charge. See our website, www.sourisriver.com/harbourfront.html for more details, and a map.

Harbourfront is located at: 283A Queen's Quay West, off Lakeshore Blvd in Toronto. Visit their website at www.paddletoronto.com.

We currently have one Prospector 17.5 from 2012 at Harbourfront for sale. Contact Souris River Canoes for details.

About Canoe Head

Canoe Head is published quarterly, or whenever we get around to it by Souris River Canoes. If you are reading a borrowed copy, go to www.sourisriver.com/perks.html to sign-up and receive your very own.

Souris River Canoes builds high quality wilderness tripping canoes made from Kevlar and epoxy resin.

Visit our website at www.sourisriver.com

Or, contact us at:

Souris River Canoes
106 Reid Street
P.O. Box 1116
Atikokan, ON
P0T 1C0
Tel: 807-597-1292
E-mail: sales@sourisriver.com