

Abstract Submission for 5th Canadian River Heritage Conference

Title of Presentation:

A Thumbnail History of Traffic on the Namakan River: from "time in memoriam" to the present.

Category: Celebrating River Heritage

Presenter:

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The Namakan River, located in the eastern half of the Rainy River District, Northwestern Ontario, is of small to medium flow, 34 kms long, and drains Lac La Croix lake into Namakan Lake. The river takes most of the flow of the upper Hudson's Bay watershed, i.e. Quetico Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, and drains it into the lower Rainy Lake Basin. The presentation will tell the story of traffic and related use on the Namakan River from "time in memoriam" to the present. Reference to the diaries, journals, maps, government documents and visual records of travelers on the river will be used to show who traveled on the river and why.

The river is geographically rare and historically significant. It is situated in Great Lakes/St. Lawrence forest type; it is currently undammed; it was part of the oft travelled "Voyageur's Highway/Canadian Route", albeit likely a subsidiary route to the nearby Loon River. (the latter river forms part of the Canada/US boundary.) In a later era - the river-based logging period: 1900-1940 - major log drives occurred on the Namakan to feed sawmills located at Fort Frances, Ontario. According to on-line dictionaries, the word Namakan means "sturgeon" in both the Cree and Ojibwa languages, suggesting long term native use and settlement on the banks of the river.

The proposed presentation is timely because the Namakan River has been identified by the Ontario provincial government as a high priority location for the development of small scale - "renewable" - waterpower projects.

Author Biography:

Stephen H. Challis is a researcher/writer specializing in historical topics and adult education. Currently he also works full-time in the field of tourism marketing at The Faneuil Group, Winnipeg, MB.