

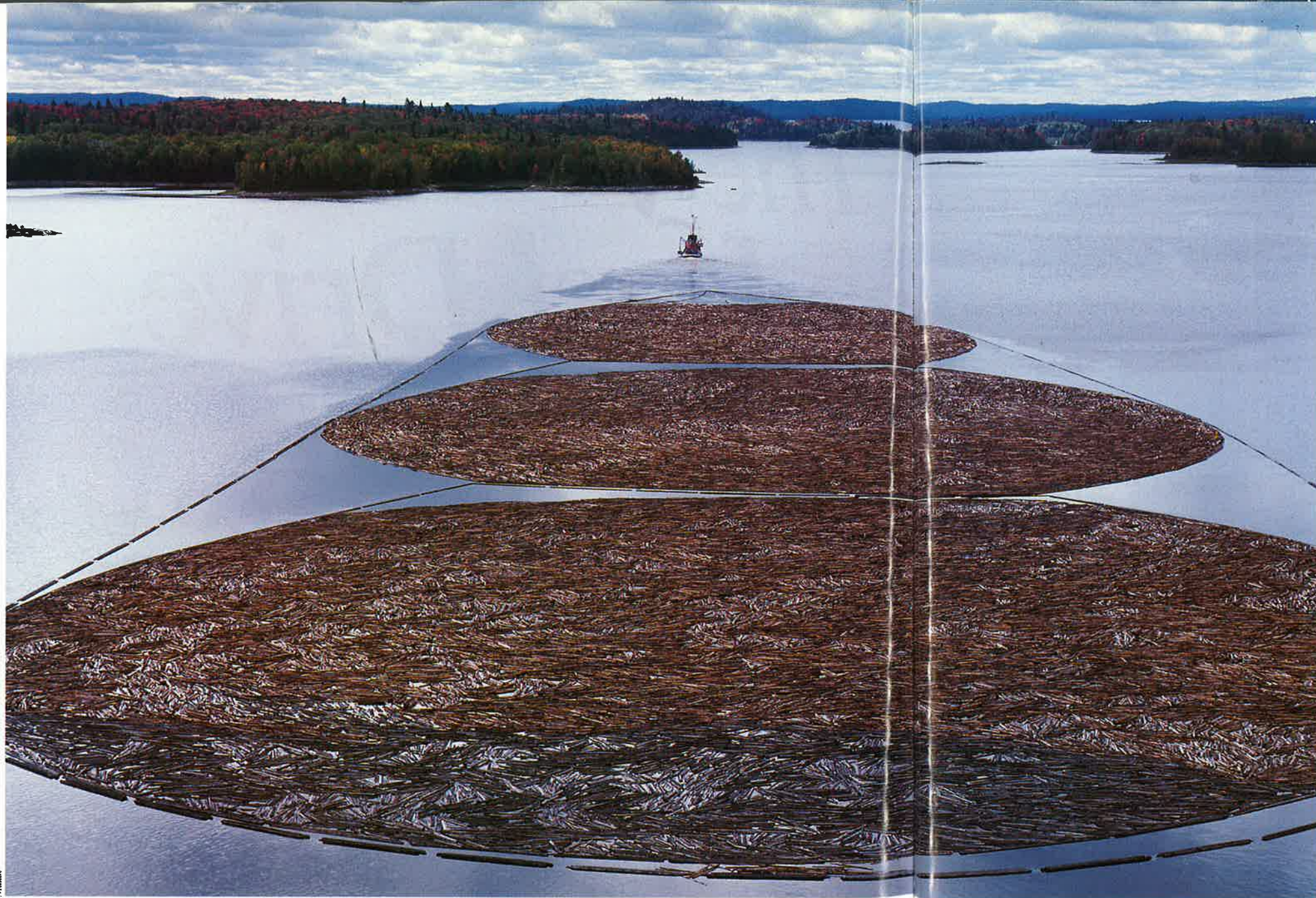
A full-page photograph of a log driver, Garry Picard, balancing on a log boom on the Gatineau River. He is wearing a red life jacket, a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and an orange hard hat. He holds a long metal pike pole. The river is filled with logs, and a small boat is visible in the background. The shoreline is covered in trees with autumn foliage.

The Last Drive

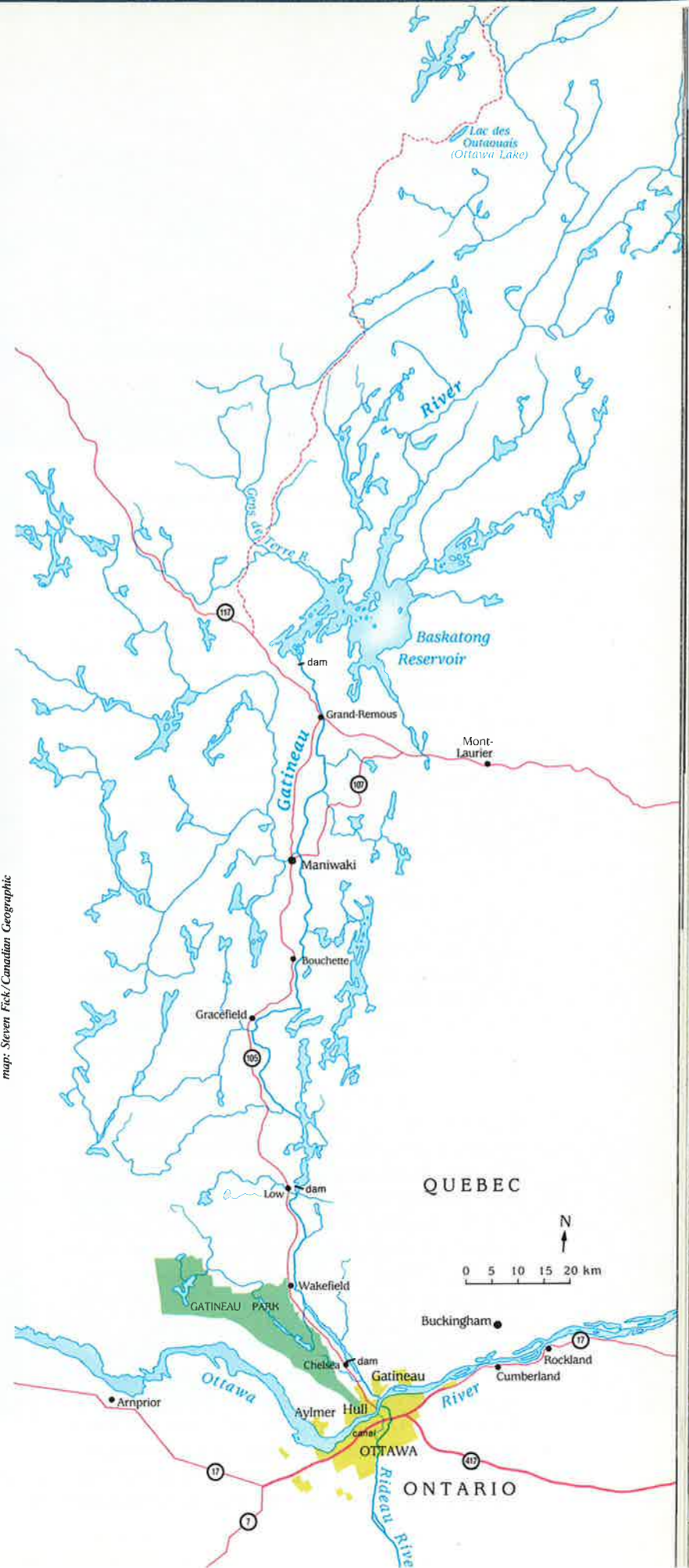
*Environmental concerns end an era
for the Gatineau River's log drivers*

By Shawn McCarthy

For a final autumn, the shores of the Gatineau River echo with the chug of working boats and the shouts of quick-stepping "drapeurs." Pike-pole in hand, life-jacketed Garry Picard moves nimbly along a log boom.



map: Steven Fick/Canadian Geographic



Above: when the Gatineau's current dissolves in the Baskatong Reservoir, logs must be boomed together and towed south. Jean Lepage (right) strains to free a jam.



Pierre St. Jacques

PERCHED OVER the churning water of the Gatineau River, Jean Lepage strains against the butt-end of a medieval-looking pike which he has impaled into a jammed log. Sweating in the hot summer sun, the 25-year-old log driver grunts and pushes, swelling the tattoo scorpion that dances on his bare deltoid. After a short battle, the trapped spruce log catches the swift current into a narrow sluice that will carry it two kilometres beyond Hydro-Québec's Chelsea Dam. Lepage and four co-workers prowl the narrow, wooden walkway and prod logs as a cowboy might drive recalcitrant cattle into a corral at roundup.

Above the sluice, a squat river tug with a front grill resembling a snow plow drives logs into the current.

Only the dull roar of the tug's 90-horsepower diesel engine breaks the silence on the broad tree-lined river. For one last summer, a crew of 80 men work the Gatineau River, poking, prodding and guiding logs some 400 kilometres from northern camps to the Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd. mill on the Ottawa River at Gatineau, Que. A tradition on the river since the 1830s, the picturesque log drive has succumbed to modern environmental concerns and economics.

Like other paper mills, Canadian Pacific's sprawling operation in Gatineau will soon begin harvesting the urban forests of North America to feed its newsprint machines. As a result of regulations in the United States that require newspapers to use recycled paper, the companies will use less so-called virgin wood. This



makes it simply uneconomical to continue the costly drive down the Gatineau River, says Ken Allan, woods manager for Canadian Pacific's Maniwaki division. In recent years, the forest company floated 1.3 million cubic metres of timber a year down the Gatineau to feed its mill. Next year, when the mill's recycling plant is operating, the mill will only require 900,000 cubic metres of pulp wood. "If we had stayed at the 1.3 million level, we would not have gotten off the river," Allan says. "The need for recycling is the direct reason for us deciding to get off the drive."

While the river drive had been the most economic way to move logs to the mill, those savings disappeared with the reduction in volumes. That is because the river operation has high fixed costs, including boats, crews and booms and other equipment. It cost \$4 per cubic metre to send logs down river when the company was harvesting 1.3 million cubic metres of wood per year, says Allan. But CP Forest Products will eventually use new processes that will reduce its wood requirement to 700,000 cubic metres per year. At that rate, the log drive could cost as much as \$7.50 per cubic metre of wood delivered. A reduced harvest would also shorten the work season from six months to just three or four, and Allan fears this might not be enough to keep the work force in the area. "It wouldn't make sense for the people with the required skills to stay on," Allan says. The cost of trucking the chipped wood remains fairly stable at about \$5 per cubic metre, no matter what the volumes. While much of the timber can be chipped at plants now in operation, the company will have to build two chip mills near its logging camps. But those plants are largely automated and will require only five or six operators each, Allan says.

The changes will cost 80 workers their jobs on the river. Another 200 seasonal woodcutters will be unemployed after the company closes down its Ottawa Lake (lac des Outaouais) camp, 140 kilometres north of Maniwaki. André Trudel spent all his working life in the logging camps until transferring to the river operation a few years ago. "We're going to lose a few

both: Stephen Homer



Carefully placed charges of dynamite provide a practical solution (above) to log jams that occur as the water level drops through the warm months. Small jams on rocks and sand bars can grow swiftly into enormously complex tangles of logs (above left).



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jobs but I believe that if we don't change over, the loss of jobs would be even worse," says the affable, bull-necked Trudel, who oversees the operation on the lower Gatineau and Ottawa rivers. "It's part of the deal with our customers and if we don't supply them with recycled newsprint, somebody else will do it for us." Besides, he adds, the use of recycled paper will result in "less stress on the environment. I believe it's the right thing to do."

Canadian Pacific workers loaded the last logs into the Gatineau on September 20 for the month-long journey to the mill. However, small crews will continue to scour the river for the next two years, cleaning up the debris of a century and a half of log drives.

The disappearance of the log drive from the Gatineau is simply part of an industry-wide restructuring that is largely being driven by environmental issues. Newspapers account for nearly 18 percent by volume of the garbage that is hauled to North America's dumps. As communities grapple with the need for more landfill space, the pressure is enormous to cut down on the volume of garbage. As a result, North American newspaper publishers are being told by their readers and by politicians to use more recycled newsprint. In New York, the state threatened to legislate a 40-percent recycled content for newspapers.

Above: the log drive is a family tradition for Alphonse Lepage (rear) and his son Jean, who now contemplate an uncertain future. On the shores of the Gens de Terre River (right), a tributary of the Gatineau, these massed ranks of pulp logs will be among the last to float south before the start of truck transport.

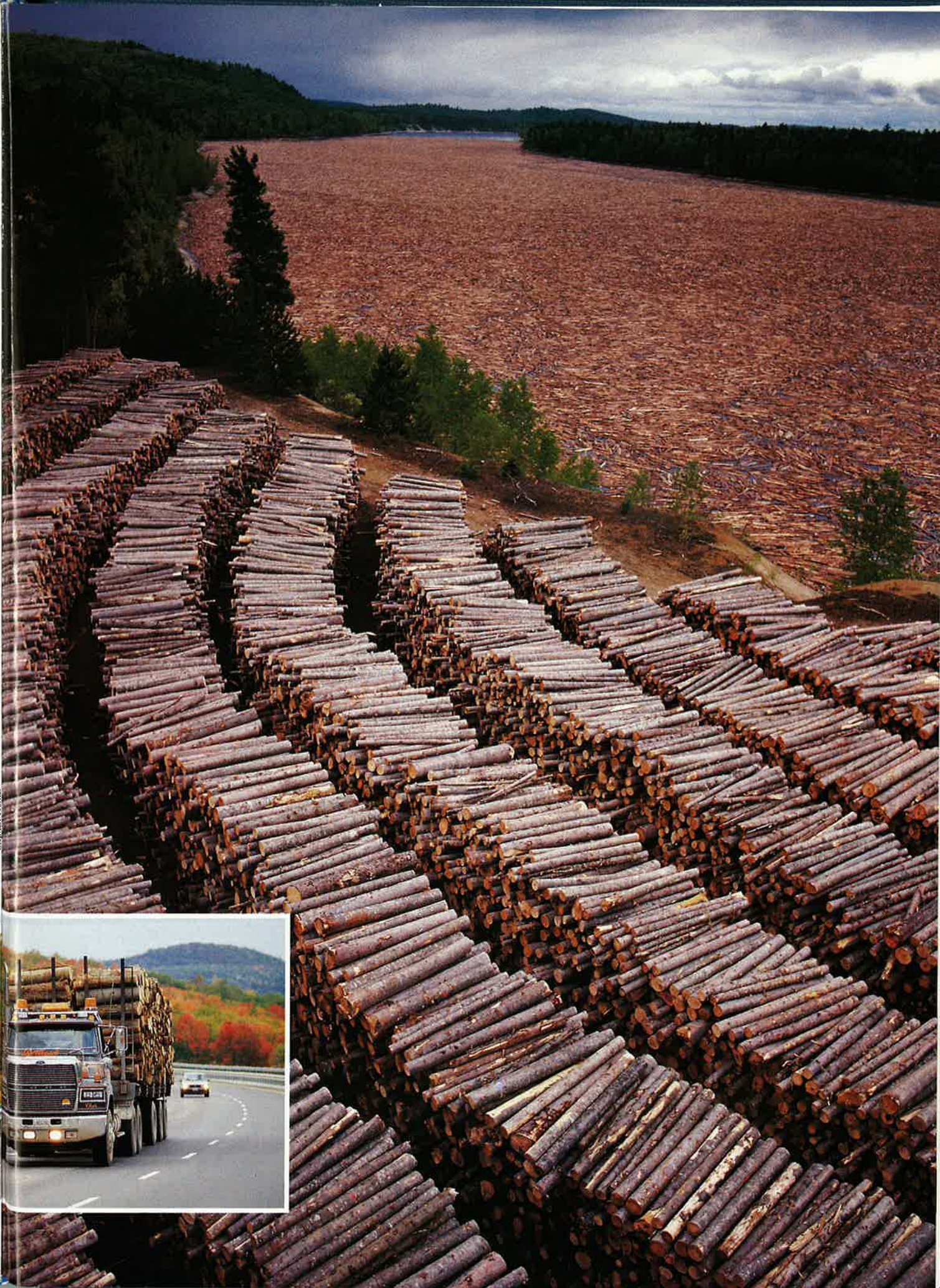
In Toronto, city council passed a by-law that would prohibit daily newspapers from having boxes on the street unless they use recycled newsprint. As a result, Canadian newsprint makers have been forced to invest huge sums to meet the new environmental imperative (see "The challenge," *CG* June/July 1990). Montreal-based Canadian Pacific is spending \$400 million on a de-inking plant and renovations to its newsprint mill in Gatineau and a similar sum at its Thunder Bay operation.

The log drive was once a fixture in the Canadian landscape: the 1973 issue of the \$1 bill depicted logs and a tugboat on the Ottawa River, beneath the Parliament buildings. Today, the drives are suffering the

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Stephen Houzer



Farewell to an era

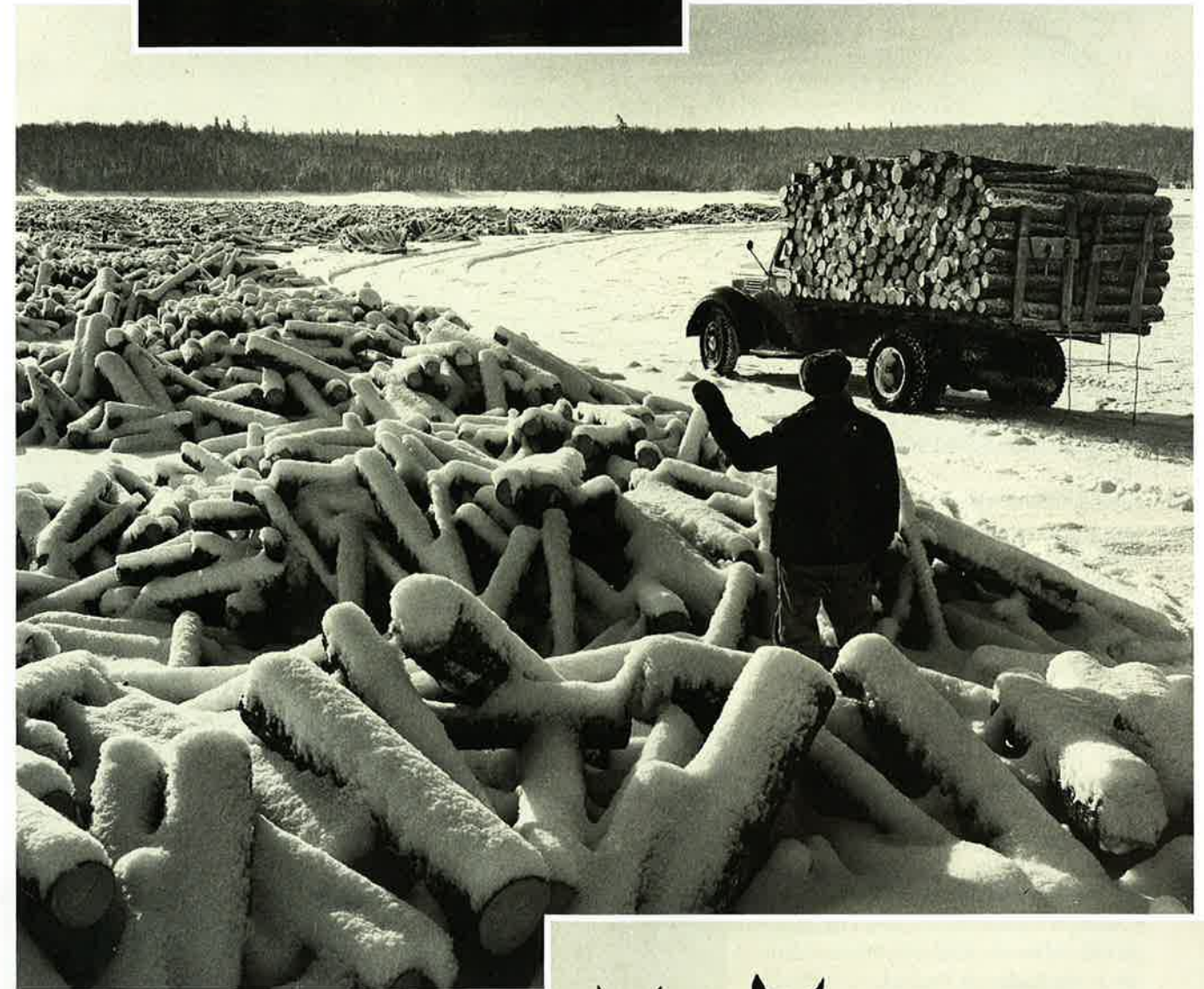


As Canadian as hockey and the Mounties, scenes of river drivers — balancing on floating logs, straining against pike-poles — are receding into history. The images on these pages were taken by Ottawa photographer Malak Karsh in the late 1940s, on the Gatineau River and its lakes and tributaries. Today the work is safer and more mechanized, but the old challenge remains the same: overcoming the tendency of logs to tangle, jam and run aground in the shallows on their long trip from the forest to the mill.

In the 43 years since these photographs were taken, the huge logs have become rarer and methods for handling dynamite have become safer.



The dawn's rays find log drivers walking to work, huge breakfasts consumed and pike-poles at the ready.



Logs were stacked carefully on the lake ice to reduce the chances of jams during the spring break-up.

Horses pulled enormous loads of logs out of forested terrain where trucks could not travel.



same fate as the \$1 bill, which was replaced by the "loonie." The Ottawa River drive, which dates back to 1800, ended two years ago. The largest drive now in Quebec is on the St. Maurice River, which flows into the St. Lawrence near Trois-Rivières. That operation, which floats logs some 650 kilometres through the Quebec bush and serves four mills, will likely continue because the area has few roads. In Ontario, all log drives except one have been phased out over the past decade. The last one is on the Kapuskasing River and serves the Spruce Falls mill, which is struggling to survive in a depressed lumber market.

The Gatineau drive will not be the last time that environmental needs conflict with jobs. But the moral reasons for the change don't make it any easier for the employees. Alphonse Lepage is the foreman at the Chelsea Dam sluice, where he has worked for more than 30 years. His father worked there before him and now his son, Jean, prods logs into the narrow flume.

At age 52 and with little education, Alphonse Lepage is not looking forward to a career change. "It's pretty hard to find work around here," he says. "From the north on down, the wood gives people a lot of work." Roland Tessier has been piloting the tug for 22 years. At 63, he is hoping he can hold on with clean-up work for two more years until he is due to retire. Jean Lepage says the log drive offers a good wage — \$15 an hour — and the opportunity to work outdoors in a beautiful setting. "It's like a tradition in our family. I always expected to work here," he says.

The tradition of local men earning their living on the Gatineau River goes back well beyond grandfather Lepage. In fact, it traces its roots to 1801 when Philemon Wright, a New Englander who had fought in the American War of Independence, arrived at the confluence of the Ottawa, the Gatineau and the Rideau rivers. The Ottawa Valley was home to one of the largest stands of red and white pine in eastern North America. (Those stands have long since been cut and the forestry companies have to settle for the less stately spruce.) Pine was the perfect wood for shipbuilding because it is light but strong, weathers well and is pliable. Despite constant battles with impatient creditors, Wright built a family empire by exploiting the virgin forest and selling the timber to the British Navy and

later to American buyers. In 1806, he floated the first raft of square timber down the Ottawa River to Montreal. But by 1830, the family and other companies that followed it had stripped the Ottawa River banks of the best stands and they cast their eyes on the Gatineau. In 1832, soon after Lieutenant-Colonel John By had begun construction of the Rideau Canal, the province of Lower Canada (Quebec) granted the so-called Gatineau Privilege to three families: the Wrights, Gilmours and Hughsons. Together, those families controlled some 9,710 square kilometres of prime Quebec timberland, an area 1.7 times the size of Prince Edward Island.

The early lumberjacks and drivers who worked the logging camps are celebrated in Canadian folklore and songs. Then — just as last year on the Gatineau — the drive began with the spring break-up, when logs cut over the winter were sent careering down rollways into the icy water. The drive bosses were eager to take ad-



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Where hydro-electric dams cut off the river's natural flow, log drivers (above) organize by-passes. Boats "herd" the logs into tight booms, and men with pike-poles direct them down steel chutes that snake around the dam, like this flume (left) at Chelsea, Que.

vantage of the spring melt because the flooding waters made it easier to float the logs over rapids and shoals. A log jam was not only time-consuming and difficult to break; it was also dangerous.

In a 1964 history of the Ottawa logging industry published by the Gatineau Historical Society, John W. Hughson, a descendant of an early lumber baron, describes what the drivers encountered when a stray log jammed up the flow. "Pressed down by the full force of the current from above, the latest logs to arrive would be the hardest to move," Hughson says in *Hurling Down the Pine*. "But upon the key log or logs, the weight of the whole jam rested. It, or they, were almost immovable." The entire crew would be called in to push and pull the key logs. And they would have to be nimble, for when the jam burst the huge mountain of logs would come rushing down like an avalanche, carrying with it any poor soul who happened to be in the way. Hughson quotes tales from Fowke

and Johnson's *Folk Songs of Canada* that lament the young men lost in a log drive. One tells of a group working to break a jam with their foreman, "young Munroe":

They had not rolled off many logs when they heard
his clear voice say
I'll have you boys be on your guard for the jam will
soon give way.
These words were scarcely spoken when the jam did
break and go.
It carried off those six brave boys and their foreman,
young Munroe.

If young Munroe had been working the final log drive last summer, he would have found a more safety conscious operation but one that still carried an element of danger. More recent lore tells of accidents that cost men their lives, and of near-misses that drive home the need for caution. Alphonse Lepage recalls a young co-worker who was knocked off the platform at the Chelsea sluice and nearly swept down the chute almost 30 years ago. A stray log knocked the man's feet from under him, landing him in the foaming current. "I caught the guy and pulled him free just before he went into the slide," Lepage says. "He would have been crushed at the bottom, but he wasn't hurt. Just in a bit of shock." In recent years, the men have worn safety lines hooked on a rope behind them that gave them some freedom of movement but would stop a fall into the rushing log-filled water.

Dynamite is another occupational hazard. The river

crews blast stubborn log jams to start the flow again, and each time a charge is used, the crews run the risk of someone blowing himself sky-high. Last summer saw its share of jams due to low water levels, says Maurice Mantha, a 40-year veteran who oversaw the entire drive. In late May, some 50,000 cubic metres of timber piled up in a shallow spot near Maniwaki, 140 kilometres above the Ottawa River. Two tugs and eight men wielding peaveys and chain saws worked on the jam for two weeks. Then, as the company opened a series of small dams upriver, the crew set 10 charges of dynamite and blasted the jam free. No one was hurt in that operation, but accidents involving explosives remain part of the lore of the drive.

Today, a series of charges can be lit simultaneously, but in the old days each had to be lit individually. The men who lit the fuses had to scurry away from the site, hoping no one had lit the other charges too soon. Some 40 years ago, one young man blew his arm off when he panicked and ran with a lit charge. There is also a tale of indeterminate vintage of three men who died in a river tug when their cache of dynamite exploded. Smoking was suspected, though no evidence remained. On the Gatineau drive, those stories are told like biblical parables to new workers, Mantha says. The lesson: never relax when you are dealing with explosives.

The effect of the drive on the river's water quality remains something of a debate. Decaying matter from sunken logs clearly deprives the river of some oxygen and may even release toxins such as tannin. But Raymond Lemyre, of the Quebec Ministry of the Environment, says studies have not shown any serious deterioration in water quality resulting from the log drives. Still, concerns about water quality and recreational use led the province to tighten regulations on log drives in recent years. And no new permits were being issued.

"Ending the log drive will be a plus for the environment," Lemyre says, "but the studies I've seen don't conclude there is a big problem with water quality." Fish and other wildlife do not appear to have suffered from it, he notes. Many residents along the river argue the water pollution is preferable to the noise and air pollution that would result from the huge trucks rumbling up and down the valley. "There is an effect on water quality from bark sedimentation but it's not dangerous," says Ross Anderson, a town councillor in Chelsea who often swims in the Gatineau. He says the bigger problem remains the lack of proper sewage facilities, which still leaves some households dumping virtually untreated sewage into the river.

With its long tradition, there is a certain nostalgia that accompanied the end of the drive. But the work-



both: Stephen Homer

ers are not the only ones who will miss it. Local residents find the booms and logs a picturesque reminder of their history. The logs were also a deterrent to the noisy, powerful speedboats that are the bane of cottagers and nature lovers across the country. A speeding boat would not fare well in a collision with a semi-submerged log. Particularly dangerous are dead-heads, water-logged timbers that float beneath the surface and cannot be seen even by a careful boater. Gatineau Valley residents worry that once the river is free of logs, it will be taken over by powerboaters, shattering forever their cherished serenity. The log drive "has kept this one of the quietest rivers you'll ever see," says Bob Phillips, a freelance writer who lives on its banks just above the Chelsea Dam. "There are lakes nearby where you can't even carry on a conversation on shore because of the whine of these obscenely high-powered motorboats."

Tippy, slippery logs are an invitation to horseplay, and it is difficult to say who has the last laugh on a hot afternoon — the prankster who stays dry or the wet, cooled-off swimmer.

That anxiety led the town of Old Chelsea to pass a resolution last July, asking the Quebec government to restrict the river to boats with motors of 15 horsepower or less. Councillor Ross Anderson, who proposed the unanimously endorsed resolution, says he can see a day when the whole Gatineau Valley will be filled with the roar of motorboats and the increasingly popular jet skis. "This is a deep valley, but narrow. Any noise reverberates through the whole valley," he says. Anderson canoes and fishes on the river. He says motorboaters will almost certainly come into conflict with those who enjoy quieter activities. Mayor Judy Grant of Old Chelsea also worries about increasing truck traffic. Canadian Pacific will chip what logs it does need and truck them down the valley to the Gatineau mill. "The highway is going to be much worse, and that's scary," Grant said.

While Gatineau towns mourn the end of the drive, communities along the Ottawa are cleaning up the legacy of logging's long history on that river. Last summer, another Canadian Pacific tug plied the Ottawa River below the mouth of the Gatineau. It towed a barge loaded with a crane used to pull old logs from the bottom of the river. That debris was the result of log drives on the Gatineau and upper Ottawa rivers. Brian Coburn, mayor of the town of Cumberland on the Ontario side of the river, says the logs were a major impediment to boaters who came through the Rideau

Canal but were afraid to travel down the Ottawa River. As a result, the downstream towns lost significant tourist traffic. "They'd come through the canal and then they'd turn around and go back because of the danger of dead-heads," Coburn says. "Every time there is a heavy flood, more logs get churned up from the bottom."

Last year, crews working under summer employment projects pulled some 7,000 logs from the Ottawa River, with the help of a tug supplied by Canadian Pacific Forest Products. This fall, the towns on both sides banded together and set up a long-term clean-up plan. Armed with a \$175,000 grant from Employment and Immigration Canada and a CP tug, the group hopes to pull 40,000 to 50,000 logs from the river over the next year. "I'm nostalgic about the drive. It's part of our history," Coburn says. "But that's over. Now let's get on with the business of cleaning up." ♦

Shawn McCarthy is a reporter for the Toronto Star in Ottawa.