

McGuffins gear up to spotlight Superior issues during adventure; Adventurers lead journey along lake's northwest shore

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The Goulais River husband-wife wilderness adventurers will begin paddling through familiar waters this weekend.

A year ago, Gary and Joanie McGuffin, acclaimed authors and photojournalists, were among the expedition leaders of an 18-day journey down the remote George River, which winds through northern Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The floating contingent of artists and environmentalists will be smaller Sunday, when a three-canoe expedition sets out for a 200-kilometre journey along the northwest shore of Lake Superior, but the theme remains unchanged.

A year ago, world-renowned wildlife artist Robert Bateman headlined their expedition of famous North American and United Kingdom artists seeking to focus attention on the beauty and significance of Canada's boreal forest ecosystem - the greatest intact expanse of wilderness and wetlands in the world.

The expedition produced the landscape paintings and photographs that are the foundation of a two-month exhibition which opened recently at the Wildling Art Museum in Los Olivos, Calif.

The 40-piece exhibition, which includes eight photographs by the McGuffins, expects to shift next to the Denver's Wilderness Experience Art Museum, the largest wildlife gallery in the United States, and then a yet-to-be-finalized showing at the equally prestigious Bell Museum of Natural History in Minneapolis.

The exhibition, which includes scientific background on the boreal forest, will reach the Smithsonian Institution of Natural History in 2008.

The upcoming two-week Lake Superior coastline expedition, from Silver Islet at Sleeping Giant Provincial Park to Rossport, is expected to generate additional paintings and photographs for the travelling exhibition.

The journey will be within the confines of the boreal forest and "will draw attention to the issues and concerns of Lake Superior," said Gary McGuffin.

The journey, a familiar one the local adventurers have paddled at least seven times in the past 15 years, will be through an area environmentalists are lobbying to have designated as Canada's fourth national marine conservation area.

The expedition, similar to that of a year ago, is supported by the Wilderness River Expedition Art Foundation (WREAF), which provides artists with an intimate, intense and real experience of the wilderness to inspire their work. WREAF considers the vast boreal forest, which contains half the Lake Superior watershed, as "unappreciated and threatened by unsustainable development."

The McGuffins, and Robert Mullen, an artist and conservationist, are the lone returnees from the 10-member George River expedition.

They'll be joined by Quebec wildlife artist Patricia Peppin, California woodcut print artist Andrea Rich, and Steve Bruno, manager of the Ontario Tourism Strategic Partnership.

"We're hoping that several high-profile exhibitions will give us some momentum, some buzz with the public, in advance of the Smithsonian," said McGuffin.

"Our objective is to focus attention on the boreal forest and there is no bigger educational stage than the Smithsonian."

The McGuffins, who usually spend between four and five months annually in the wilderness, have collaborated on six books through the years. They have three more in the works.

Their stories and photos have been published globally, in outdoors and nature magazines, for a quarter century.

Their most recent book, *Wilderness Ontario*, a compilation of their major journeys of the past 15 years, has just recently been released.