



# Alumni Newsletter

## A Time for Renewal

During the John Island 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in June of 2004, several hundred people took the opportunity to visit John Island. Many were returning to the island for the first time since they had been campers, and others were showing children and loved ones the place where they grew up. The two most often heard comments from visitors to the island were: *“I thought it was bigger”* and *“It seems so old”*.

Well, we can't make it bigger, but we are determined to make it a showpiece again.

Many of the most remembered features of John Island – the Dining Hall, the cabins, the Craft Shop, and the even the outhouses are indeed old – most 50 years old. Our buildings have been well used and well maintained, but many are at the end of their useful lives. Many buildings are small, representing the standards of 50 years ago, and other buildings contain technologies that have been improved over the past half-century. We need to modernize our facilities for future

generations while maintaining the magic of a very special place. It's time to plan for “The Next 50 Years”.

The Board of Directors of YMCA Sudbury is developing a 5-year plan that will touch almost all the buildings on camp. Many will be replaced with new structures and new technologies, and others will be extensively renovated. Work will begin on some of the changes as early as this summer. If you wish to add your opinion to the suggestions of campers, staff, parents,

and teachers that we have collected over the last year, please go to [www.johnisland.ymca.ca/alumnisurvey/](http://www.johnisland.ymca.ca/alumnisurvey/) where you can do a short on-line survey to indicate where you feel the redevelopment efforts should focus.

All this work is going to cost money – more than \$1,000,000. We will be asking “Friends” of John Island for their financial support over the next year. We will also be asking many alumni of John Island to help us with our fundraising. If you would like to help in any way, contact Dave Ward or John Schmitt at YMCA Sudbury – 673-9136.



# A PLACE WHICH TO RETURN

MEMORIES OF GROWING UP AT JOHN ISLAND



ROD GLEN

JIC '57-'68

Ian, my twin brother, and I first attended the 'Y' camp on Lake Ramsey in 1956 and then the next year on to John Island. John Island Camp was quite rustic back in the 1950's, although we campers didn't know it then. To us, the island and camp was a wonderful new experience! How can one encapsulate seven years experience at John Island Camp? Forty-Eight years ago does tax one's memory.

1. Mitchell's dock and the sawdust-laden ice house.
2. Elwood Mitchell, the Kismet, and bulky kapok-filled life jackets.
3. The very good camp cooks.
4. Two or more birthday cakes for our cabin (helps to be a twin).
5. Salting off leeches after playing Pioneers and Indians.
6. Al McCann leading sing songs.
7. The daily raising and lowering of our national flag in front of the dining hall.
8. Sunday church service on the point.
9. The relay races with the whole camp running, swimming, canoeing, culminating with building a fire and boiling water.
10. Poison ivy and calamine lotion (four years in a row).
11. Johnny Skilling's innate interest in all things reptilian.
12. Blueberry Island (do they still use that name?).
13. Making an 'X' on the large cans of beans and bursting them open over a fire on our Thursday outings.
14. Canoe trips up the Serpent River.
15. Cabin inspections (raking sand and aligning stones).
16. The man-made islands in the back bay (I have government air photos of these islands).
17. The abandoned lumber camp on Aird Island.
18. American yachts from Green Bay, Wisconsin.
19. The lighthouse at night from Gore Bay.
20. Catching my first big fish. Wow!
21. The generosity of Mrs. Bell that aided in making the camp dream possible.
22. The song-filled bus trips back to Sudbury at the end of July.
23. Friendships.
24. The multitude of other memories!



# THE SUMMER OF 2005 IS FAST APPROACHING....

As the temperature outside in Sudbury dips to a balmy minus 20, the occupants of the YMCA John Island Camp office continue to think warm thoughts! Planning for summer of 2005 programs began last August as the summer of 2004 was winding down.

A few interesting tidbits:

- ∇ John Island employs 65 full time seasonal staff members in the summer, making it one of the largest seasonal employers on the North Shore.
- ∇ Over 100 campers will receive financial assistance to attend camp this year, in keeping with the YMCAs core philosophy of not turning anyone away due to financial need. Over \$50,000 will need to be raised to support the campership program at the camp and we're over half way there already with the help of camp parents, alumni and the United Way.
- ∇ Campers from France, Germany, Italy, The UK, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Austria, and the United States have attended John Island in the last couple of years. This coming summer we are hoping to host 2 youth from our YMCA friends in Egypt.
- ∇ EXPLORE magazine recently cited sea kayaking in the North Channel near John Island as one of Canada's 25 best trips. We've known that for years!
- ∇ John Island offers a special one week family camp at the end of each summer. Many of our families are John Island alumni introducing their children to camp.
- ∇ Our camp director, Colin Veevers recently became engaged to alumna Tammy Prodan. They met as camp counsellors at John Island.
- ∇ This coming summer our second year leadership program will travel the Albany River from Pickle Lake to Fort Albany, a 900km canoe trip. This is the 11th summer for this highly successful program.
- ∇ Dr. Joel Andersen, a long time camp volunteer and camp parent was recently given a special recognition volunteer award by YMCA Sudbury for his years of service. Joel continues to assist with planning and support in our healthcare programs at John Island and Falcona. Joel's daughter Erica is now the full-time Assistant Director of Camp Queen Elizabeth with the London YM-YWCA.
- ∇ If you are still looking for the right session for your child, we'll pay the taxes for Youth Camp C this summer. Check out the website for more details.
- ∇ The first stage of the John Island reconstruction begins this spring with a new centralized washroom building, stay tuned...
- ∇ With great sadness, we've retired 'Ole Ironsides from camp service. New boating regulations have caused us to switch to smaller boats and the camp will be adding a second Stanley into service this coming summer. Earl M continues to serve as a vital camp maintenance and utility boat.
- ∇ John Island has one of the largest leadership programs of any YMCA camp in Canada. This coming summer over 100 teens will spend 4-6 weeks at camp building skills.



# A PLACE WHICH TO RETURN

MEMORIES OF GROWING UP AT JOHN ISLAND



LISA LARONDE  
JIC '60S AND '70S

My first year at John Island was in 1968 or 1969 when I was too young to join a cabin. We spent 5 or six summers at John Island and here is what I remember the most.

Hoping to get through Spanish without being stopped. Waiting for Ole Ironsides at the dock. Seeing Mitch the maintenance man (I think all the maintenance men were gorgeous). Getting a lift on the tractor (and secretly hoping John was driving), sitting on the back

with our feet dangling down, and the adults walking behind laughing and joking.

Standing on the beach wearing rain gear too big and watching the waves crash against the shore the wind whipping through our hair during a storm, but staying there long enough to get a picture.

The wringer washer, the siren, ookpik, getting lost on overnights, the tuck shop, the rain, the kismet, playing camp games during boys

camp (he,he,1234he), ghost stories (I still go to bed with a dirty sock wrapped around my wrist). The endless practical jokes, knowing very early that girls really do rule! And although my mom's title was cook she really was the boss.

*Lisa spent 6 years at camp as Cooks Daughter*



## THERE'S NOTHING LIKE OUTTRIP FOOD!

### SMORES

The campfire is perfect for roasting marshmallows, but mouth-watering smores are even more special.

Ingredients:

- 1 marshmallow
- 2 graham crackers
- 1 piece of chocolate bar

1. Roast a marshmallow just the way you like it - brown, soft, and hot!
2. Make a sandwich by placing your roasted marshmallow and a piece of chocolate between two graham crackers.
3. Eat it!

### BANNOCK

Thought you said you would never eat this stuff again? Come on...just one more time!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- pinch of salt
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. margarine
- ½ cup milk or water

1. Combine flour, salt and baking powder in a bowl
2. Add the margarine and use your hands to mix it all together
3. Add milk (or water) slowly and mix with a fork to form a stiff dough
4. With floured fingers, mix the dough until smooth (don't mix too much - it will get tough!)

5. Roll into 4 balls and then make a long "snake" with each ball
6. Twist the dough along a stick to roast over a fire.

### PITA PIZZA

This has become a popular trip treat in recent years on John Island trips.

Ingredients:

- 6" pitas
- tomato or pizza sauce
- grated cheese
- pepperoni (Optional)
- chopped onions
- chopped tomatoes

1. Spread a small amount of sauce on pita
2. Cover with remaining ingredients
3. Fry in oiled frying pan over stove or fire.
4. Eat hot!

# STAFF FROM THE 50'S RETURN TO THE ISLAND

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of John Island brought together over 200 people from across Canada last May. Two of the camp alumni from the 50's were Bill "Wee Willie" Bavington and Don Mitchell.

Bill, now "Dr. Bill" visited from St. John's Newfoundland where he is on the faculty of Memorial University and one of Canada's leading epidemiologist and public health specialists. Back in the early years of John Island, Bill was the "Maintenance Man". In the '50's and '60's, being the maintenance man meant a run into Spanish every day in the Kismet, maintaining the generator, Coleman lamps for each cabin, and all the maintenance tasks around camp.

Don Mitchell, of the famed "Mitchell Family" of Spanish, was also the camp maintenance man during the camp's first decade of operation. Don is now a retired high school principal living in North Bay but returns to Spanish each summer to operate Mitchell's Tourist Camp. He continues to be a major supporter of the camp, training boat operators and lending his many areas of expertise when needed.



# CONSTRUCTING JOHN ISLAND—NOTES FROM A BUILDER

*Fred Hackett was a member of the Sudbury YMCA Y's Men's Club for several decades, going back to the 1940's. He was an active volunteer with the Club when they built John Island Camp starting back in 1948. He was a career teacher of history and English at Sudbury High School from 1946 to 1982. He is now 84 years old and still an active volunteer in the community. He has given us these notes as he remembers the years building and leading up to the building of John Island Camp.*

## The Early Days

When the tremendous cut of trees in the northern Great Lakes area showed its effects on lumber production, lumberman W.J. Bell saw that it was time to go back to areas which, for various reasons, had been left uncut. This often meant a shorter time to recover the costs of setting up a mill, bush roads, docks, etc. Costs were higher, but sometimes the grade of lumber was higher than that in the first cut of the area. Profits could still be made, but the risks in lumbering were greater.

Stan James, a Sudbury accountant, had been working on the estate of W.J. Bell and he saw, as others did, another use for an accessible forest resource. Summer camps like Taylor-Statten and many Y Camps could use, for recreation, what were no longer viable lumber camps. He took his idea for John Island Camp to the Sudbury YMCA and the Y's Men's Club. The estate co-operated (Mrs. W.J. Bell had survived her husband) and weekend trips of Y's Men began travelling on summer weekends to what was to be a splendid camp serving boys, girls and adults.

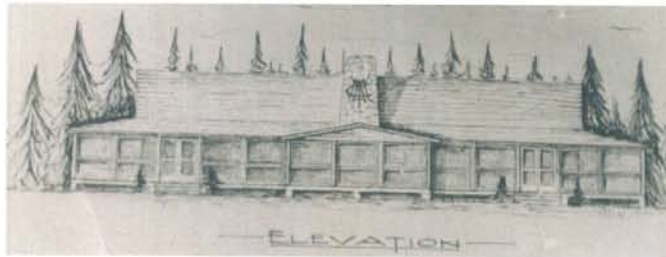
## The Dining Hall Solution

A dining hall is more complicated to build than a sleeping cabin, so engineering training was sometimes brought to bear on new problems (we had lots of engineers!) Gerry Smith had an engineering degree. Al Bell had been forced to withdraw from university during the Great Depression but had more practical training than Gerry, especially in plumbing and heating.

The dining hall called for two arches and two plans for them appeared. Al's plan (if I recall) used repeated Ws, Gerry's relied on repeated Ns. Neither man would give up his design but of course a solution was found. Each end of the dining hall was built with its own design.

## A Big Embarrassment

Sometimes the climate or the mosquito population was under-estimated. One young volunteer builder, not long from England, tied on his nail apron, shoes and nothing else before starting work under a bright spring sun. Before the end of the day he was sitting down very carefully. Some army units in Canada went so far as to see sunburn as "a self-inflicted wound" and thus the basis for charges.



## VOLUNTEERS TRANSFORM PREVIOUS HOSPITAL INTO GUEST HOUSE

Another aging building at John Island Camp has been beautifully transformed into an attractive guest house for the camp. What many of us remember as the hospital on the hill (between cabin row and the campfire area), had suffered the effects of over 40 years of use and has now become one of a growing number of renovated buildings to serve the camp in new ways.

The new guest house contains two separate units, each with its own outside entrance. Visiting and volunteer physicians, YMCA staff, and other visitors will now have accommodation during their stay at the camp.

With much of the work being done by volunteers, the practice of annual volunteer work parties continues to provide valuable skilled labour to keep the camp viable and current.



## LITTLEHALES MEMORIAL FUND CONTINUES TO ASSIST LEADERSHIP PARTICIPANTS

On a snowy March 15 in 1988 a tragic automobile accident claimed the lives of John Island alumna Katie Littlehales and her 17 year old daughter Lindley.

The Littlehales had a long relationship with John Island Camp. They were major promoters of Family Camp when their daughters were growing up. Lindley's sister Nikki was a counsellor and Lindley had completed the leadership training program just the summer previous.

Memorial gifts were shared between the Sudbury Symphony Orchestra, a favorite charity of Katie Littlehales, and John Island Camp. A special fund

was established with the Sudbury YMCA with the interest used every year since to support a candidate in the Leadership Training program at camp. This lasting tribute to the memory of Lindley Littlehales has provided numerous youth with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and become leaders at camp and throughout their lives.

*Gaston Germain (former YMCA President), Jake Littlehales, and Mitch Spiegel with plaque commemorating the "Littlehales Fund" to provide funding assistance to youth in the John Island Leadership program.*



