



## **Whose idea was this, anyway? The history of the Athabasca River Voyageur Canoe Brigade Society**

In 2011, Hinton locals founded the Athabasca River Voyageur Canoe Brigade Society (ARVCB). Their initial goal was to organize a local voyageur canoe brigade on the Athabasca River. This brigade, held in August 2011, was a resounding success. 150 participants, representing communities from all over Western Canada, paddled fifteen voyageur canoes. The brigade took four days to paddle from Jasper to the Emerson Creek Bridge, downstream from Hinton.



*Athabasca Brigade, 2011*

Early in its life, the ARVCB acquired all of the paddling gear required to promote paddling in the Hinton area. Initially, a generous donation from Shell Canada enabled the ARVCB to purchase a 25-foot voyageur canoe called the *Athabasca Queen*. Later, a grant from the Town of Hinton paid for

another voyageur canoe, the *Athabasca Empress*, as well as paddles and PFDs for both canoes. Funding assistance from the provincial government paid for a canoe trailer, specially designed to carry voyageur canoes. Finally, the Hinton Stokers Kayak Club generously allowed the ARVCB to store their equipment in the Stokers' hall.



*The Athabasca Queen on the water*

The generosity of all these donors enabled the ARVCB to be in a secure position to promote paddling in Hinton. The Society became a regular participant in Parks Day at Switzer Park, offering canoe rides to visitors. Schools from Jasper, Grande Cache, and Edson rented the canoes to introduce their students to the joys of voyageur paddling. Private rentals have occurred as well, with the *Athabasca Empress* and *Athabasca Queen* becoming quite familiar with the paddling routes on Maligne Lake.

In 2017, the ARVCB helped organize one of the voyageur canoe brigades held across Canada as part of Canada 150 celebrations. Up until this point, the *Athabasca Queen* and *Athabasca Empress* were the backbones of the ARVCB fleet. However, a private owner of a voyageur canoe called the



*Gabriel Dumont* heard about the upcoming brigades and got in touch with the ARVCB. After extensive restoration work, the *Gabriel Dumont* joined fourteen other voyageur canoes on the Athabasca Brigade, which covered 333 kilometers between Jasper and Fort Assiniboine. The Brigade ended with a welcoming ceremony in Fort Assiniboine by the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, the Honorable Lois E. Mitchell.



*The Gabriel Dumont, pre-restoration*



*Canada 150 Brigade arrives in Fort Assiniboine*





*The Gabriel Dumont in action!*

Another notable event of 2017 was the realization of the ARCVB's longstanding dream to provide Hinton's public with proper canoe and kayak access to the Athabasca River. The ARVCB, with the help of Paddle Alberta and the Hinton Stokers, purchased a floating dock. They also purchased signs using financial grants designated for river access improvements. The Town of Hinton provided all the labour and equipment required to build the dock. The ARVCB officially donated the floating dock to the town for future use by the general public wanting access to the river at the Athabasca Riverside Park.





*Floating Dock at Athabasca Riverside Park*

In early June 2019, the executive of the ARVCB joined forces with the Town of Hinton and Yellowhead County to host a paddling celebration called “Discover Your River”. This family-oriented paddling event started at the put-in at the north end of Brule Lake and finished at Athabasca Riverfront Park in Hinton. Yellowhead County hosted an official ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Solomon Creek Trail to kick off the event. Although the weather was threatening, it held off: over 100 participants in 40+ watercraft enjoyed a leisurely paddle on the river. This flotilla included an array of boats, including solo canoes, tandem canoes, kayaks, voyageur canoes, and whitewater





rafts. At Riverfront Park, participants and the general public enjoyed information booths, entertainment, and food. A downpour ended festivities a little sooner than planned, but the ARVCB was proud to achieve its goal of giving people the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful recreational possibilities on the Athabasca River.

In 2021, the ARVCB donated the *Gabriel Dumont* to the Northern Rockies Museum of Culture and Heritage. It is now mounted in a permanent wooden display on the museum property. Below it is a distinctive mural painted by local youth and a plaque describing the history of the fur trade and the *Gabriel Dumont*. Mark Deagle Log Building created the log structure which holds the canoe. This spectacular exhibit was organized and financed by the ARVCB with assistance from generous corporate sponsors and personal charitable donations.



*The Gabriel Dumont placed in its new home!*

In 2022, the ARVCB chose to dissolve due to an aging board and a lack of new members. Luckily, they found a willing recipient for their fleet and supplies in the Hinton Historical Society. The Hinton Historical Society plans to continue the ARVCB's legacy by continuing voyageur canoe education in Hinton. They are also making the ARVCB's watercraft available for the community to rent. You, by reading this story, have become part of this- thank you! We look forward to seeing you on the river sometime.



*If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water.*

*~Lorne Eiseley, anthropologist and philosopher, 1907-1977*