

The Height of Land
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*His words ring in my ear as a call to duty.
I see his dear, brave face before me now.
I feel his lips upon my cheek.
The smoke of the camp-fire in my blood.
The fragrance of the forest is my nostrils.
Perhaps it is God's will that I finish the work
of exploration that Hubbard began.*

-Dillon Wallace, *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*, 1905

In 1903, Leonidas Hubbard and two travel companions, Dillon Wallace and George Elson, departed the town of North West River for Ungava Bay. Their journey led them North across the Labrador Peninsula. Traveling via canoe, their route demanded both long paddles throughout a network of rivers and portages across heights of land. Hubbard was an outdoors writer from New York City. Although he regarded canoeing with passion, he had little practical experience in the bush. Their expedition was plagued by poor judgment and bad luck. Soon after departing, they took a wrong turn and spent much of the expedition trying to get back on course. With food supplies running out and cold weather approaching, Hubbard decided to turn back. He did not, unfortunately, act quickly enough—the explorer died of exhaustion just 30 miles from North West River.

Determined to keep the memory of her late husband alive, Mina Hubbard urged Dillon Wallace to write an account of the voyage. *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* was published in 1905 to commercial success in America, but it did not leave Mina satisfied. She sensed that Wallace's narrative favored the author over her husband. Historians have speculated that she grew increasingly suspicious that he had played a hand in her husband's death. Perhaps spurred on by pride, perhaps feeling the lure of the North herself, Mina resolved to complete her husband's expedition. She enlisted the help of George Elson—who had been a part of the previous voyage—along with two Cree natives. This journey, Mina believed, would clear her husband's name.

Hubbard's widow arrived safely in Ungava Bay on August 29th, 1905. She had become the first person—man or woman—to complete the journey.

Like Leonidas, Mina, her two Cree guides, George Elson, and Dillon Wallace, I too have felt the urge to paddle Labrador's northern waters. I am drawn to their story by an urge I can only begin to describe. To walk where few have walked before; to sit beneath the aurora; to wake each morning to a desolate horizon; to know that my life rests completely in the hands of myself and my companions; and to cultivate intense brotherhood with one's companions; these feelings completely overwhelm me.

"Perhaps it is God's will," writes Dillon Wallace, "that I finish the work / of exploration that Hubbard began" (from *The Lure of Labrador Wild*, 1905). For those who hear it, the call to travel north becomes insufferable. In the summer of 2012, I gave in. Five companions and I journeyed over 800 kilometers across the Canadian tundra following the Hubbards' route down the George River. Who can say what voice utters this call? It speaks to our most vulnerable selves. It teases out desire for adventure, pride, or love. It never grows silent.

The photographs in *The Height of Land* attempt to capture in image what I cannot put into words. The selection explores the daunting physical and spiritual commitment it takes to cross a body of land and the importance of companionship in an uninhabited country. Some images exhibit bodily or emotional duress and may leave the viewer wondering 'why did someone choose to spend large quantities of time and money to finish this trip?' The space opened between the image and the viewer's understanding—this is where the lure of the north speaks, insistent and patient, waiting to address anyone who hears it.