

Editorial

The main feature of this issue is the photo essay of the Athabasca Sand Dunes. George Tosh, Frank Roy, Ken Coutu and Dennis Tyson (see below) went to the dunes in the summer of 1990 to photograph, for perpetuity, the uniqueness of the area. The foursome developed a show of slides taken during their trip.

Frank Roy maintains that there are four main reasons to preserve the dunes: their immensity, their fragility, the spectacular braided river, and the endemic plants. The dunes are the largest in Canada. The wind from the northwest is almost ceaseless, pushing the sand relentlessly to the southeast. The area is also very fragile. Plant roots have only a tenuous grasp on the soil; any disruption can leave the sand below open to the wind's devastation.

The William is a braided river. Much as the wind forms the dunes above, the running water carries and shapes the sand below the surface into bars, giving the river an appearance much like braided hair. Frank says that anyone who has seen the river will never forget it.

Frank provided a list of the nine species and one variety of plants that are known to be unique to the Athabasca dunes. These include four willows, five flowering plants and one type of grass. The endemic willows are: Felt-leaved Willow (*Salix silicicola* Raup), Turnor's Willow (*Salix turnorii* Raup), Tyrrell's Willow (*Salix tyrrelli* Raup) and Short-fruited Sand Willow (*Salix brachycarpa*, var. *psammophila* Raup). The five flowering plants are: Large-headed Woolly Yarrow (*Achillea megacephala* Raup), Inland Sea Thrift (*Armeria maritima* ssp. *interior* Raup), Sand Chickweed (*Stellaria arenicola* Raup), Impoverished Pineweed (*Lechea intermedia* var. *depauperata* Hodgdon) and Lake Huron Tansy var. *floccosum* (*Tanacetum huronense* var. *floccosum* Raup). The latter is a variety found only in the dunes area. The last endemic is Mackenzie Hair-grass (*Deschampsia mackenzieana* Raup).

I would like to thank Frank, Ken and George for allowing their slides to be used for the photo essay. Frank was very helpful in describing the ecology of the dunes. Professor John W. Sheard at the University of Saskatchewan, who I am told can identify a lichen at 100 feet, kindly identified the lichens on the cover.



Members of the party to the Athabasca Sand Dunes: (l. to r.) Ken Coutu, Frank Roy, George Tosh, and Dennis Tyson.

Margaret Tosh