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Author Biography:

D.C. (Chris) Findlay is a former long-time employee of the Geological Survey of Canada. He retired in 1995 after a 30-year career, during which he served in a variety of capacities, including Technical Officer (1958-59), Field Petrologist (1960-65), Resident Geologist, Yukon Territory (1966-69), Research Scientist (1975-80), Senior Advisor (1980-82), Director, Economic Geology and Mineral Resources Divisions (1982-87) and Director General, Minerals and Continental Geoscience Branch (1987-92). He is a graduate of McGill (B.Sc. 1955; M.Sc. 1957) and Queen's (Ph.D. 1963). He was awarded an honorary doctorate degree (docteur honoris causa) from the University of Quebec in 1996. During the latter part of his career he was actively involved in a number of international geological projects, mainly under the auspices of UNESCO and IUGS (International Union of Geological Sciences). He was a founder of the International Deposit Model Program and the originator and first Chair of the International Consortium of Geological Surveys (ICOGS).

Incident at Booth River about 1985

The late Dr. Stuart Roscoe was a senior research scientist with the Mineral Resources Division of the Geological Survey. He was also a pilot and flew his own aircraft around the north on Survey business. In the 1980s his little cream- coloured four-seater Maule "Rocket" was a familiar sight in many field camps in the Northwest Territories, usually because he had dropped in to deliver mail, borrow fuel or cage a meal or a bed.

In July of circa 1985(?) we were at a place called Booth River in the NWT about 80 miles southwest of Bathurst Inlet. The Booth River Complex was the name given to what was thought to be a large layered mafic intrusion that outcropped in the area. The body had been discovered by Inco a few years before, and a limited diamond-drilling program had been conducted. It was of interest because it was unusually iron- and titanium- rich and we thought that it might have potential for chromite and perhaps platinum-group metals.

Stu Roscoe, Ron Emslie, Steve Green, Jon Scoates (?), myself and a couple of assistants comprised the party. Because we were working out of the camp on the river every day to different parts of the area, we were using Stu's aircraft to ferry people out to traverse starting points. During the course of the day we would work our way back to camp.

Stu was a notoriously absent-minded pilot. He had survived several crashes over the years, caused in part because he ran out of fuel. He ran out because he was notably stingy about husbanding his chronically-short fuel supply. He had a habit of switching to an empty fuel tank after landing, so that he would not have to use precious fuel from the "live" tanks while taxiing on the water where he couldn't fall very far in the case of engine failure due to fuel starvation. However, often he would forget to switch back to a live tank before starting his next take-off run. Alerted by Steve Green - who had flown many hours with Stu - I got adept at surreptitiously reaching down between the seats to check that the fuel cock handle was pointing toward the live tank; if it wasn't I so pointed it on the take-off run.

One morning we ran aground on takeoff in front of the camp. One of the floats was punctured and we all had to get out and walk back to camp while Stu ran the aircraft back and up on the beach to prevent it from sinking. Stu decided to fly over to Bathurst Inlet Lodge to get fuel and to repair the float, using the tide to "dry dock" the aircraft. He went off and returned the following day, with the float fixed and with new fuel. A few days later we were running dangerously short of fuel again. We decided to go the Bathurst again and this time I went with him.

Enroute to Bathurst Inlet we overflowed the magnificent Wilberforce Falls. Stu had a new video camera that summer and he was taking pictures of everything that moved and much that didn't. He wanted to get pictures of the falls so I put the Maule in a bank and flew in a series of circles over the falls so Stu could get pictures. After a while though, I tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the four fuel gauges along the bottom of the instrument panel. They all read dead empty.

We headed towards Bathurst. I put my seat back as far as I could and took a picture of the four fuel gauges reading empty. I thought that if we survived, I would make it into a Christmas card to regale the Division. (In spite of the close focal length and the poor light inside the cabin,

the picture turned out; the four gauges are clearly visible, all showing their needles “on the peg”)

We arrived over Bathurst with the engine still running, somewhat to our mutual surprise. But when we flared out to land on the river beside the Lodge, the engine coughed and then stopped. We dropped onto the water and I thought to myself, “my God we’re going to have to paddle this sucker against the current and against the tide; we’ll be halfway to Siberia by nightfall”. But when the floats touched down and the airplane came forward onto its normal water position, the engine caught again. Enough fuel must have remained to slosh forward when the nose came down to restart the engine. We made it to the dock without paddling.

DCF/28/11/04