





Alone against the Arctic

By Allyson Rowley

By the time you read this, **Adam Shoalts '10** might have crossed Canada's mainland Arctic on his own steam. All in the name of adventure – and Canada's 150th.

If Adam Shoalts were the kind of person to keep a to-do list, it would look something like:

1. Finish my PhD
2. Write my third book
3. Trek across Canada's Arctic alone

Amazingly, 2017 has seen him accomplishing all that and more. This fall, he hopes to defend his PhD in history – his thesis explores the impact of Indigenous cultures on Canada's early European explorers. On October 3, his third book, *The History of Canada in Ten Maps*, will be available in stores.

And on May 14, he set off alone from Eagle Plains, Yukon, on a five-month trek across Canada's mainland Arctic. If all has gone well – and there's a lot hanging on that "if" – he's due to arrive at Baker Lake, near Hudson Bay around late September.

An experienced explorer and cartographer, Shoalts is not mapping new territory on this expedition, a 4,000-kilometre journey across the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. "This is purely a personal challenge," says Shoalts. "It's straight-up adventure."

If he's looking for adventure, sounds like he will get it. He will traverse rivers, mountains, tundra, and subarctic forest by foot, packraft, and canoe. He will endure bloodsucking insects, push himself for 13 hours at a time, and subsist on one packed meal a day, along with whatever he can catch and forage. And he will hope the ice melts at exactly the right times and polar bears don't catch him off guard.

Shoalts timed the journey for summer 2017 to honour Canada's 150th celebration. He looked into what happened in 1967 and learned that a canoe race had taken place from the Rockies to Montreal. "Nowadays, you could stop at Tim Hortons every three days on that route," says Shoalts. "It's not the wilderness it was in 1967." That's another reason for his journey – to promote Canada's wilderness, while we still have it.

Adam Shoalts with the McMaster flag in early June at the Dempster Highway, just about to set off on Canada's longest river, the Mackenzie.

Francis Luta



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Environmentalist, historian, archeologist, public speaker, writer: Shoalts wears many hats. But “explorer” seems the best fit. “I was always in love with the natural world,” recalls Shoalts, who grew up in Fenwick, Ontario. He and his twin brother would head into the forest near their house, catch frogs, climb trees, make fire without matches, and walk silently through the woods.

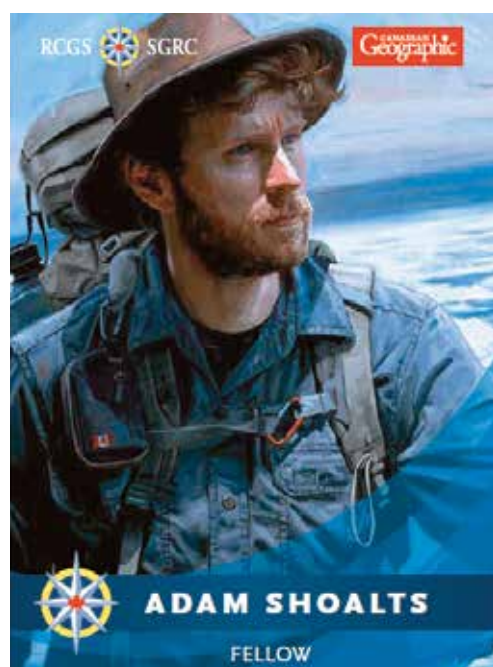
“I still do that today,” says Shoalts. “When I feel lost or unsure, I try to take a moment to remember what it felt like as a seven-year-old and recapture that sense of magic and mystery about the world.”

This trek is the culmination of a lifetime of preparation for Shoalts. He carefully planned his itinerary by studying topographic maps and satellite images, and he travelled to Nunavut and the Northwest Territories in summer 2016 to scout part of the route. “It’s not as though you can google ‘how to cross the Arctic,’” he jokes.

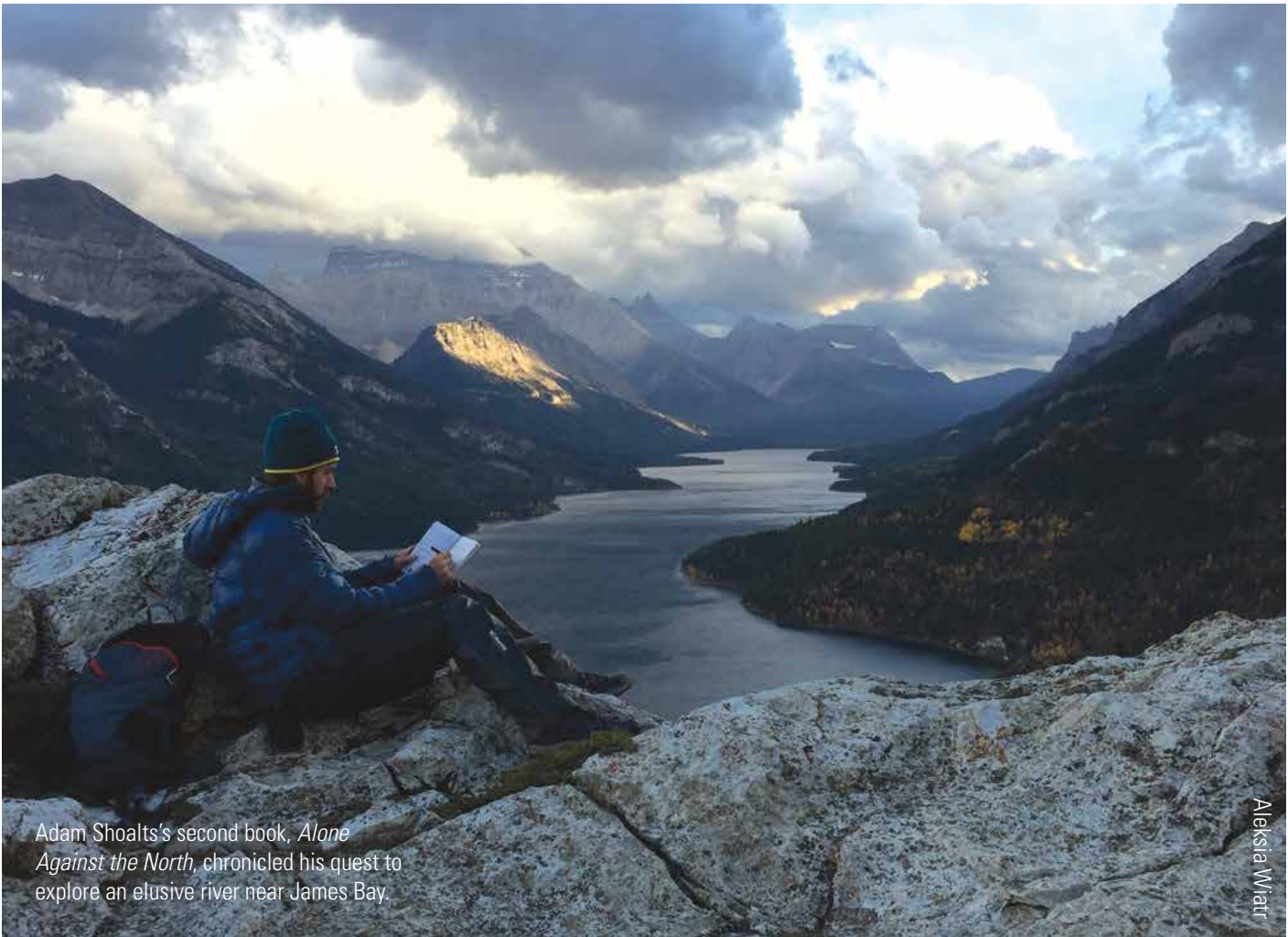
To pay for all this, Shoalts sought out sponsors and set up a crowdfunding campaign. The biggest part of the \$25,000 cost is chartering planes to fly him and his gear to and from the Arctic. Just as crucially, he has arranged to have food supplies dropped off at strategic points along the route.

It will be a race against time – and the elements – to cross such an enormous distance in such a short time. “My odds of success are no better than 50-50,” he admits.

So, did he make it all the way to Baker Lake? Has he arrived home safe and sound? Find Adam Shoalts on Facebook or visit adamshoalts.com.



Shoalts is a Fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society and frequent contributor to *Canadian Geographic*. (Images courtesy of Robert Carter - *Canadian Geographic*)



Aleksia Watt

Adam Shoalts's second book, *Alone Against the North*, chronicled his quest to explore an elusive river near James Bay.



4,000Km, 5 MONTHS