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Paul Btoz Bk

*Legendary voyage recreated during seven-month trek*

# Modern-day Huck Finns back on the Mississippi



MISSISSIPPI MASTERS — Standing in front of a map of their journey, Port Credit residents Doug Horton (left) and Andrew Harmelink hold one of the paddles they used during a seven-month trip down the Mississippi River. The Port Credit residents were retracing the path taken by Mark Twain's legendary character Huckleberry Finn.

By STEVE WARBURTON  
Staff Reporter

Mark Twain would be proud. More than 100 years after he sent Huckleberry Finn down the Mississippi River on one of the most famous voyages in English literature, two Mississauga men have recreated the heroic journey with the grit and determination of modern-day *Coureurs de bois*.

Port Credit residents Doug Horton and Andrew Harmelink, both 22, spent seven months on the venerable waterway, travelling thousands of miles through the American heartland to the Gulf of Mexico.

Their trip brought them intrigue and fear, but also a good feeling about their fellowman and themselves.

The once-in-a-lifetime undertaking actually began many years ago, when Horton and Harmelink and friend Rob Fisher, who joined the expedition for two months, got into a discussion of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

"Ever since I read the book I'd always wanted to take that trip and this past year, we finally got around to doing it," says Harmelink.

The preparations for the adventure started close to three years ago, though, when the pair started saving money.

Training was also needed since the longest either had been canoeing previously was one week in Algonquin Park.

And reaction from family and friends had to be dealt with.

Horton, who took the year off from his studies at the University of Toronto to take the trip, says that in the beginning people thought they were crazy but gradually the tables turned as friends and family realized they were serious.

"My family was hesitant and wanted to guide me, but as time went on they knew we were serious and they became my best supporters."

The three began their trip near the headwaters of the Mississippi last

June 7, one week after leaving Port Credit in a driveaway car.

They bought two canoes in Minnesota for the trip, which Harmelink says served them well through the journey, particularly through the winding northern section of the river. Horton and Harmelink also reverted to a raft for a portion of their expedition to recreate the authenticity of Huck and Jim's adventure.

Travelling down the mighty Mississippi also brought the two into contact with many cultures and people. Harmelink says a river revival festival, meals and free showers in river-side houses all made the trip that much more memorable.

Showers were especially welcomed by the two after canoeing as many as 40 miles some days, since most nights meant camping on the riverbank in a tent.

At those times, the two were most impressed with the hospitality they received.

"It's really incredible how friendly people can be if you give them a chance," says Horton. "Meeting the people and talking to them was part of what made this the best trip I have ever had."

Adventure was never far away either for them. Harmelink recalls one night when a foot-long muskrat jumped in their canoe as they pulled it on shore. They gathered their belongings quickly, fearing a bite from the furry creature.

On another occasion, the Port Credit High School grads paddled frantically across a dark lake as wind and storm swirled around them.

"That was the only time I thought we might not come out of this alive," says Harmelink. "But we passed through it and everything went well after that."

The trip cost more than \$4,000 for the twosome, not an unreasonable price if one considers the adventure, and an opportunity to catch up on

river life and lore, says Horton.

Horton and Harmelink ended their voyage in New Orleans at the end of December and have since returned to their old lifestyles — Horton as a stu-

dent looking for work and Harmelink as an apprentice mechanic.

But they say they will always have the memories of chasing and catching their dream.