



MY BREAK- FAST WITH RANTA

**A TIM HORTONS
RENDEZVOUS DURING MIKE
RANTA'S SINGLE-SEASON
VOYAGE ACROSS CANADA**

PHOTOS AND STORY
BY DAVID JACKSON

My search for Mike Ranta began just upriver of Ottawa. I knew Mike and his Finnish Spitz (named Spitz) were paddling out there somewhere, nearing the final stretch of a long eastward journey across Canada—and I knew he'd be stopping at the Arnprior Marina.

I slept in my car at the docks so I wouldn't miss the man and his mutt. The pair had been canoeing since leaving Vancouver, B.C., by way of the Fraser River on April 1. Mike's simple hope was to inspire and raise money for the youth from his hometown of Atikokan, Ontario, many of whom planned to greet him in the capital city. When my phone rang at 6 a.m., an alarmingly friendly voice asked, "I'm at the Arnprior Marina, where the heck are ya, eh?"

I scratched my head, then heard Spitz bark out a warning. Then another. The small dog appeared ahead of a shout: "SPITZ! ENOUGH!" There was Mike, a hulking man with a birch-bark hat, a stout beard, and the grin of a man possessed by happiness. As we shook hands, Spitz stood back with an irrepressible glare. I offered Mike a quick trip

to Tim Hortons. After more than 3,000 miles of canoeing, how could he say no to donuts? These two had spent the past five and half months in the most remote reaches of Canada, at one point going two weeks without human interaction.

We placed our orders: coffee for me; two extra-large coffees, two muffins, two breakfast sandwiches, and hash browns for Mike. The mammoth meal was less surprising than Mike's complete separation from societal life as we civilized folks know it. It was as if I'd met a voyageur just home from the fur trade, an altruistic soul with the spirit of Canada deeply seeded into his glimmering eyes. People watched in amazement as Mike stood in his knee-high rubber boots, towering over a copy of the *Ottawa Sun*, totally absorbed by a world so foreign to the daily trials of his labor.

He told me stories of vivid dreams during his week of pristine weather on Lake Superior, of coyotes in the night attacking the tent to get after Spitz, and of near misses on log-choked rivers. Mike didn't speak about politics or his latest Instagram post, nor did he ever falter in his perfect temperament and keen disposition. He spoke of putting kilometers behind him, the way Spitz laughed when he blundered, and the connection he



feels to the natural world. Never did he mention miserable rains, awful thunderstorms, or the imminent currents and ocean tides that lay ahead.

In the September dawn glow, Mike's canoe slowly eased out of eerily silent marina, Spitz's howl from the stern the only sound over the headwind on the vacant Ottawa River. I drove away feeling deflated with the relative ease of my car, the warning light reminding me that I needed to fetch my credit card and top off an unquenchable tank. I went on with my Saturday just like everyone around me. I couldn't help but think how Mike was still out there paddling.



ON OCTOBER 31, Mike Ranta, 42, finished his 4,750-mile journey near Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia. He is now crafting the world's largest canoe paddle while applying to the Guinness Book of World Records for the official title of "longest solo canoe trip in a single season."