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THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO \$1.50

# Ice-breaking excavator reaches fort

THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

After more than a week of slow ice-breaking, the amphibious excavator brought in to mitigate flooding along Thunder Bay's Kaministiquia River reached its destination at Fort William Historical Park on Friday morning.

"It had phenomenal progress (Thursday) night," said Bill Baker, district manager of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The excavator began its work near the Bowater mill on March 13 and was expected to take just over a week to clear a 10-kilometre path in the river to improve the water flow.

Problems with thick ice and slush on the meandering Kam, however, slowed down the rig, and forced the MNR to bring in a local tugboat to aid in clearing the path.

Paul Laplante, the excavator's New Brunswick owner-operator, said he had reached the three-quarter mark at the end of N. Riverdale Road around supper-time on Thursday and then managed to barrel through the rest of the way to the Fort overnight.

"We made the mission," Laplante said Friday.

"With the ice, you never know. You work one day, you make only 300, 500, 500 feet, and the next day you make two kilometres."

Floodwater levels at the Fort have been receding for the past few days. The Kam River, which had overflowed its banks in January, has now dropped more than two metres.

Baker said the excavator and the tug have been sent back down the Kam toward the Highway 61 bridge to clear out areas that have plugged up with broken ice chunks from up the river.

"We're just going to open it, clean the river, and I think after that it's going to be perfect," said Laplante.

The excavator will then head back to Quebec for its next ice-breaking job.