nastawgan

Autumn 2002 Vol. 29 No. 3 Quarterly Journal of the Wilderness Canoe Association

Early morning on Crescent Lake

EASY TRIPPING IN LAKE SUPERIOR PROVINCIAL PARK

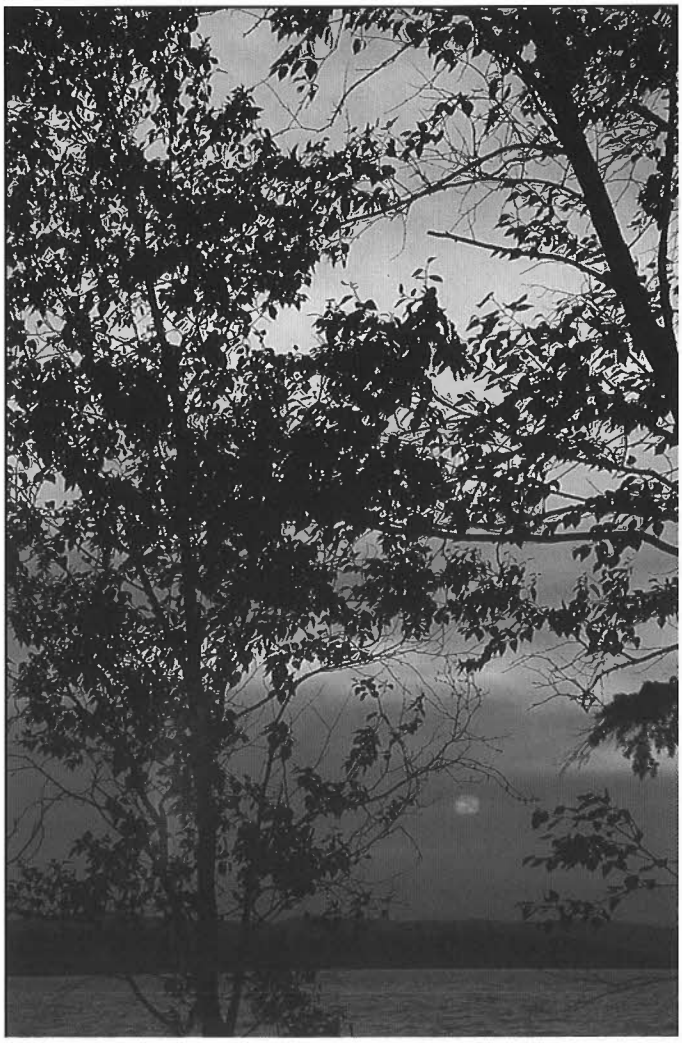
Toni Harting

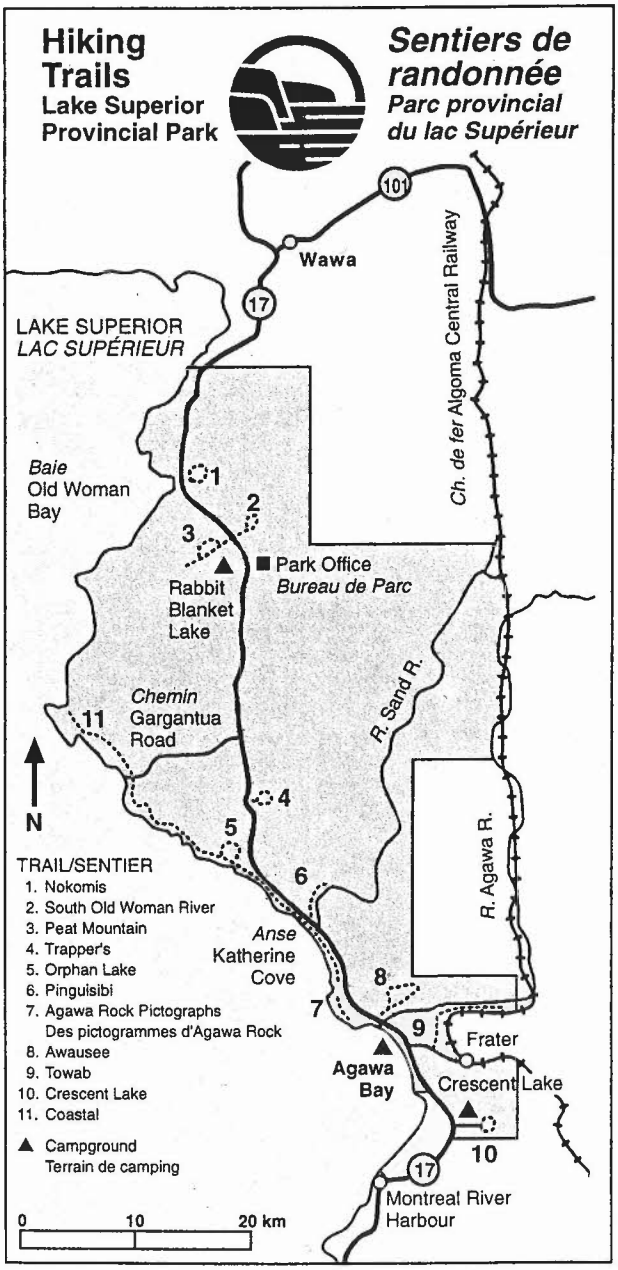
One of the unpleasant but unavoidable realities canoe trippers have to deal with at a certain time in their lives is the sad fact that all that hard work of portaging, wading, climbing, paddling against a cross-wind, careening down rock-filled rapids, is just becoming a bit too much. There's nothing you can do to escape it; you can only try to postpone the moment of truth. Better admit that you're getting older, the muscles tire more easily, and the prospect of a long trip with a lot of physical exertion is no longer so attractive.

Still, you would very much like to travel the Barren Lands and paddle the Kazan or another one of those leg-

endary rivers. The loon's yodel always makes your spine tingle, the honking geese continue to create the most compelling sounds you've ever heard, urging you to load the canoe and forever go where the wild waters are. But you just can't, your body is reaching its limit and you must accept that depressing fact. Sooner or later—for some quite soon, for others later, and for a blessed few, surprisingly late indeed—you will have to settle for the easier stuff, the destinations closer to home, the adventures without an 800-metre killer portage up a steep and slippery trail patrolled by bloodthirsty black flies. In short, you're ready to scale down and go for "easy tripping."

And it's not only you, the golden oldie, who looks for the delight of paddling without the torment of muscle cramps and an exhausted body; there are numerous others who can and should enjoy this manageable kind of less-demanding tripping. Parents with small children, pregnant women, novice paddlers who are learning the ropes, physically challenged people, and those who just don't have the capability to do hard work. These are some of the people that love to paddle but also know they have to stick with the "easy" stuff. It's all relative, of course. What's easy for you is too demanding for your friend. Each one of us has a different limit.



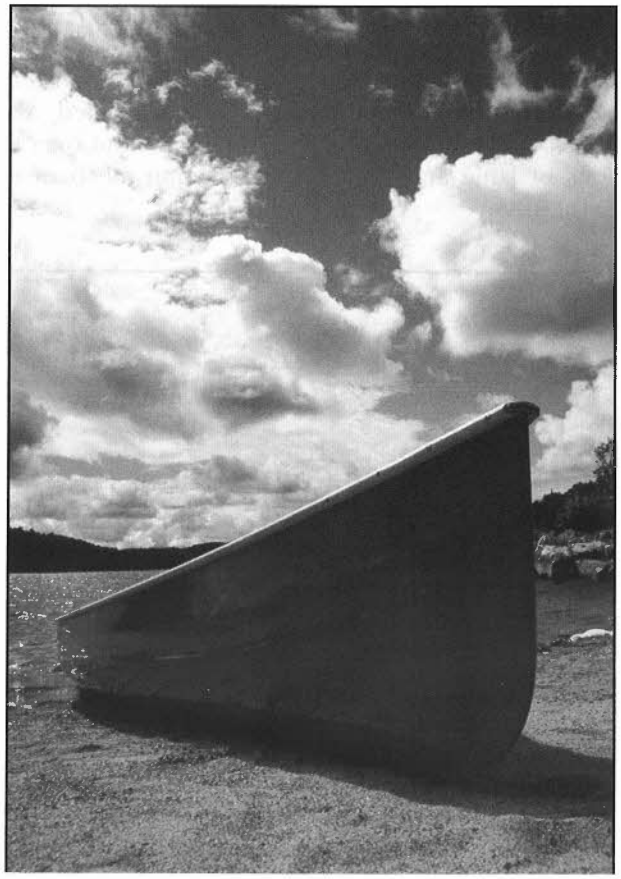


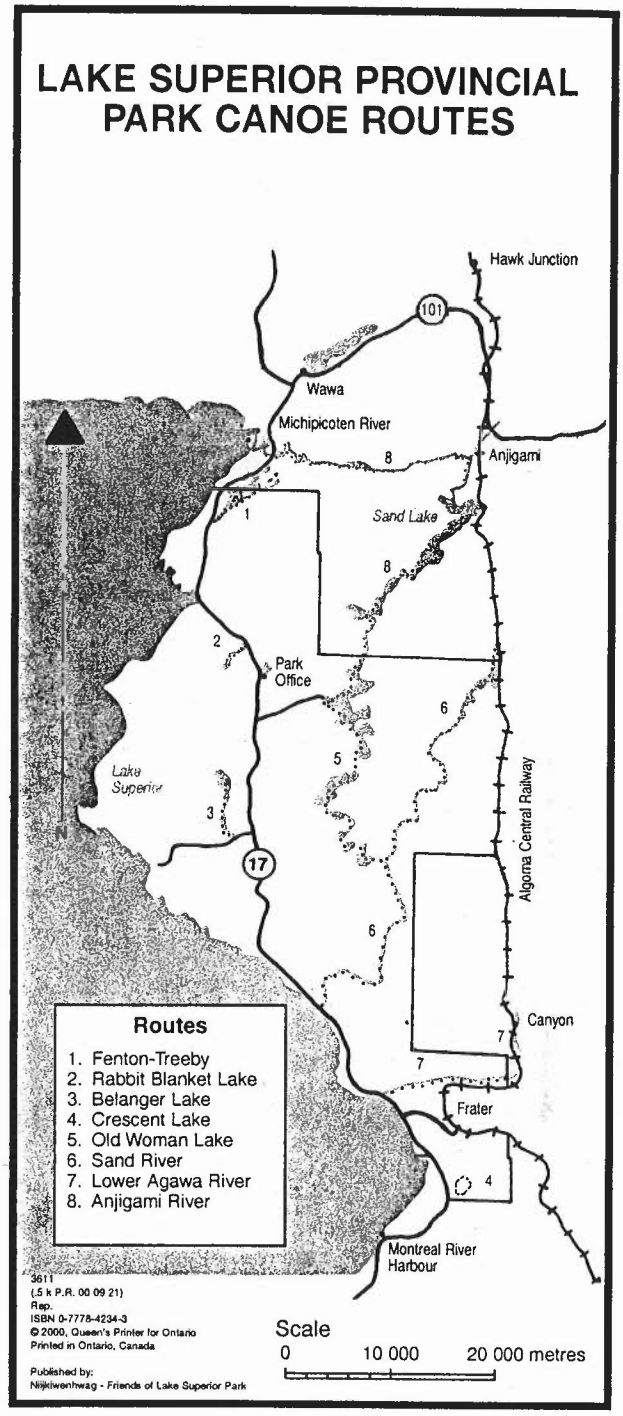
Because I am myself increasingly part of the old-age crowd with muscles and lungs that start to complain much faster than they used to, my wife and tripping partner, Ria, and I are constantly on the look-out for interesting canoe trips that are not too demanding, trips I can handle without risking a heart attack or a damaged vertebra or some other damned nuisance. And to our delight, we discovered that once you start looking for those rivers and lakes and marshes where "easy tripping" is possible, you'll find there are many of those trips everywhere, far and wide, all over canoe country and beyond. Just ask around, study maps, read trip reports, use your common sense and imagination, and you're sure to find numerous short and long outings to your liking that can bring the unique pleasures of canoe tripping without many of the physical demands normally associated with paddling activities.

And so, in July 1998, after looking at maps, information brochures, and guide booklets, we spent a few weeks in an area showing great potential for easy tripping: Lake Superior Provincial Park, located on the east coast of the largest freshwater lake in the world. It is known in circles of whitewater addicts primarily for the thrilling Sand River with its numerous rapids, falls, and tough portages.

But there is so much more the inquisitive paddler can find in this rugged Canadian Shield park than wild water. There are quite a number of beautiful lakes with easy access that will delight every flatwater paddler, many marvellous hiking trails, an absolutely breathtaking Lake Superior shoreline, and well-maintained and spacious campsites. In short, everything the "easy" paddler may wish to visit and explore. And, with a no-motorboat rule on the interior lakes, it's a quiet paddlers' haven without obnoxious waterskis and seadoos!

The 800-km trip by car from Toronto to the southern entrance of the park can conveniently be done in one day. If you stay away from long weekends, you can almost be sure to find a camping spot for the first night in one of the three large campgrounds on Highway 17, the main access road to the park (see the must-have Lake Superior Provincial Park map published by the Ministry of Natural Resources). From the south, these campgrounds are Crescent Lake, Agawa Bay (the largest and busiest one of the three), and Rabbit Blanket Lake. If you're early enough in the day of your arrival and the weather is helpful, it's of course much better to go straight to a put-in point on

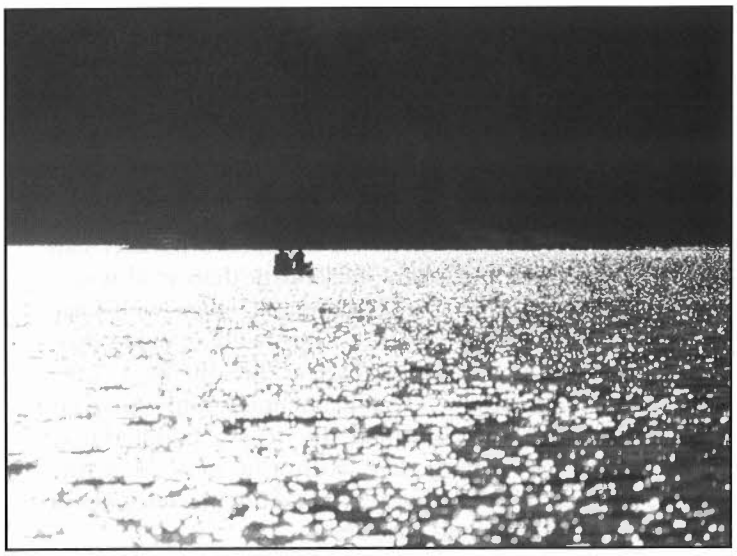




the lake of your choice and find a campsite on the lake itself. Your much-anticipated first breakfast will then be in the quiet interior and not in a common campground.

While still in the planning stages of your visit, contact the Park's office for information and maps: Park Superintendent, Lake Superior Provincial Park, Box 267, Wawa, Ontario, P0S 1K0; tel. 705-856-2284; fax 705-856-1333. To make the recommended park reservations, contact: 1-888-668-7275 and www.ontarioparks.com. You might also consider to become a member of Niijkiwenhwag, The Friends of Lake Superior Park, Montreal River Harbour, Hwy 17 N, Ontario, P0S 1H0.

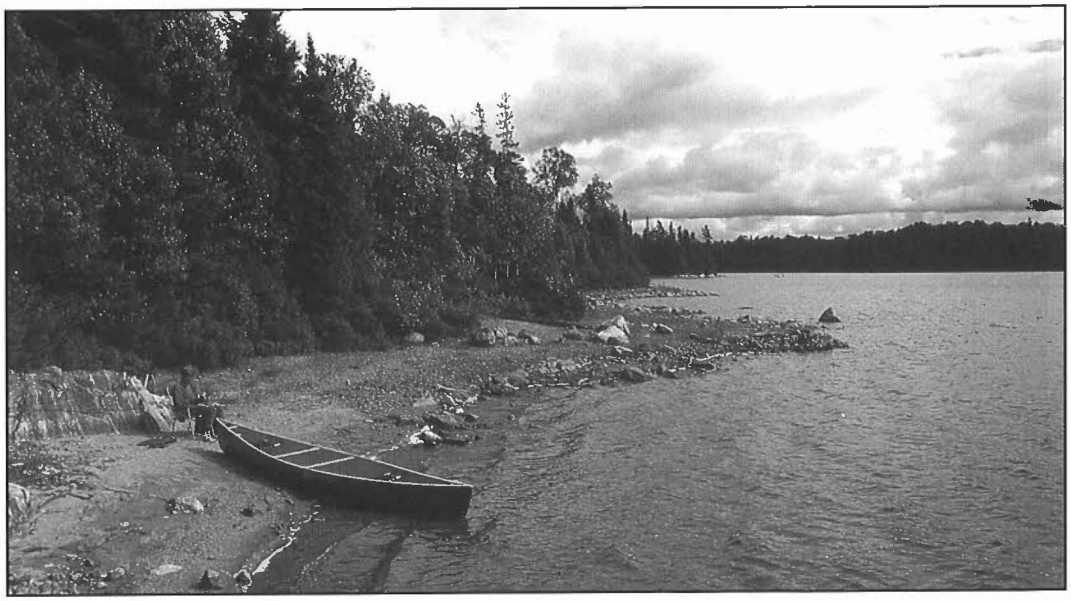
We started our easy tripping holiday by first visiting some friends at Naturally Superior Adventures, an outfitter and trip organizer located on a rocky peninsula where the Michipicoten River empties into Lake Superior just north of the park. We stayed there for a few days and explored by canoe the mouth of the historic Michipicoten, famous for being part of the shortest route used by the fur traders between Lake Superior and James Bay. Although this area is not in Lake Superior Provincial Park, there is much to be admired here, especially the rarely visited and not car-accessible Michipicoten Post Provincial Park (no camping). With its fabulous, two-kilometre-long sand beach and relative lack of people, it's great for nude swimming, but beware of the tricky undertow. And the water of the lake is quite cold. Canoe access to this park is possible from the marina located on the outskirts of Michipicoten River village and from the site of Naturally Superior Adventures.



View from the Peat Mountain Trail *photo: Ria Harting*

After two days of looking around the river mouth area and relishing the fury of a boisterous Lake Superior storm, we finally started our visit to Lake Superior Provincial Park proper by setting up our tent in Rabbit Blanket Lake campground, the most northerly one on Highway 17, using it as a base camp for several trips to the interior and the coast. Ria spent the afternoon of our first day here hiking the demanding 11-km-long Peat Mountain trail, and enthusiastically reported upon her return that she had tremendously enjoyed the 150-m climb and the wide views from the top. There are a number of fantastic hiking trails in the interior of the park, ranging from the challenging Awausee Lookout Trail to the short but historically important Agawa Rock Indian Pictograph Trail. They're all described on the Hiking Trails of Lake Superior Provincial Park guide sheet.

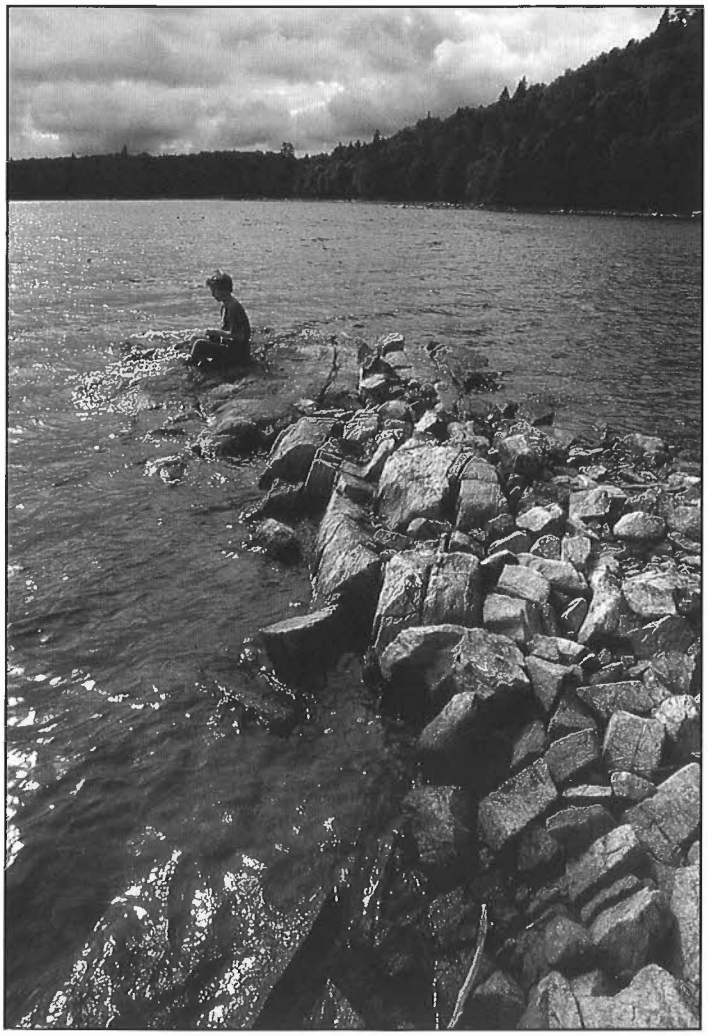
The next day we went by car down a 14-km-long rather rough gravel road to Gargantua Bay on the shore of Lake Superior, where we spent a delightful day hiking and climbing and just looking around. We had planned to do some paddling in the bay, which is reasonably well protected from the western winds (in the fur trade days the bay was sometimes visited by the canoe brigades), but unfortunately the waves were just a bit too rough for a comfortable paddle so we stayed on land and hiked. Also, we didn't relish the required put-in and take-out over the millions of large and small rocks covering much of the beach here.



Campsite beach on Lake Mijin

This really is a beautiful area, traversed by the famous and demanding 55-km-long Coastal Trail, which offers great views of Lake Superior and the park from numerous rocky lookout points. The tent sites in the Gargantua Harbour campground are flat, large, well protected from the wind, and nicely shaded, but only accessible by hiking along the trail or by watercraft. On our walk to and from the campground we collected and devoured handfuls of delicious, juicy thimble berries.

Our first easy canoe trip in the park took place next morning on the Fenton-Treeby Lakes route in the extreme north end of the park close to the highway. Unfortunately this was not a completely satisfying beginning. Although these lakes are apparently quite pretty and varied and the trip—as shown in the Canoeing in Lake Superior Provincial Park guide booklet—looks very inviting and relatively easy, we encountered some serious problems that forced us to abort the trip. Just before the first portage out of Fenton Lake, the lake had become very shallow indeed, only a few centimetres of water covering a thick layer of ooze and mud. With each paddle stroke we dug up a lot of smelly goo, making the going increasingly difficult and slow.



Relaxing on the shore of Lake Mijin

Old dam in the Anjigami River

When we finally reached the portage trail and had a look at the other end of it, we soon discovered that the next pond was even worse, shallow and muddy and filled with water plants, with no clear possibility to canoe over to Treeby Lake. So we went back to the car in the parking lot and left the place, after giving the canoe a good wash. Pity, because on the map this route really looked inviting, but the water was just too low for paddling. Apparently the water levels everywhere were low that year; lack of rain can drastically change things.

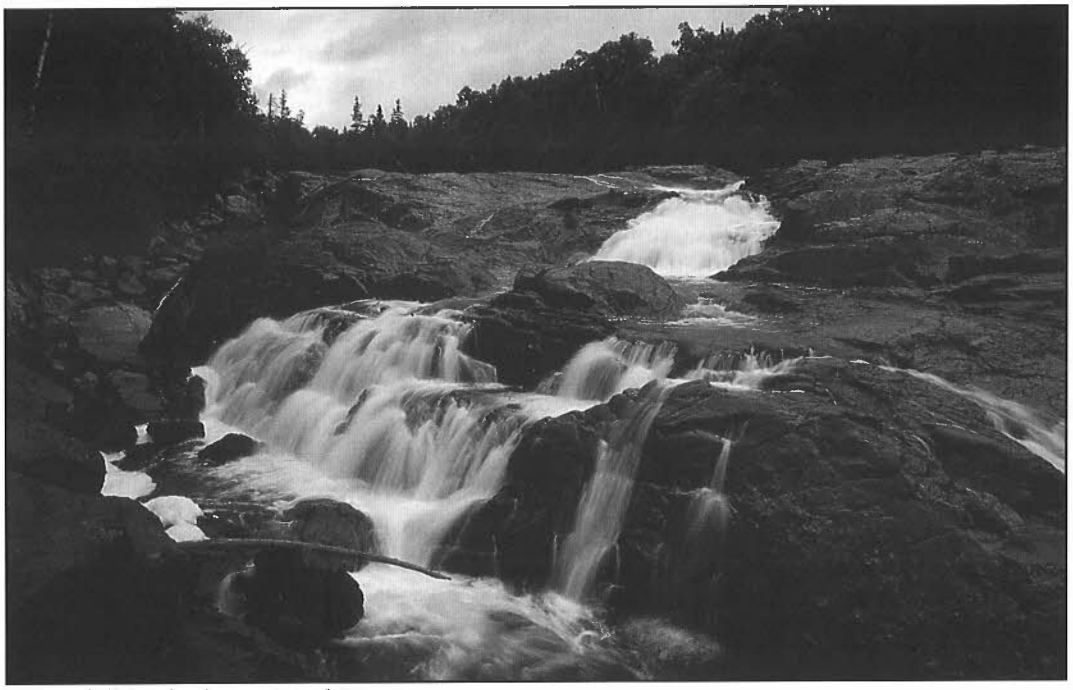
Because we still had more than half a day left, we took this opportunity to have a look by car at various beaches and picnic sites on the shores of Lake Superior that can all be easily reached from the highway. They're great for families with young children to play in the sand and splash in the shallow water. After a few hours of exploring the highway sites we were forced to stop because the rain started to fall with a vengeance; so we sat in the car at our Rabbit Blanket campsite and studied maps and booklets, discussing our plans. When the rain stopped at six o'clock we went for a two-hour hike on the South Old Woman River Trail just across the highway. This is a short and scenic trail, shaded by the forest canopy, following and crossing several times the narrow, rock-filled river. There are some nice, quiet spots on this trail were you can just sit and watch the murmuring water.

The next day the real paddling adventure finally started. We left Rabbit Blanket and went by car to the park office, just a few kilometres south down the highway, to get information, to buy some literature and souvenirs (there are nice articles in the small store), and to pay the camping fees for our stay on Mijinemungshing Lake. This lake can be reached via a good gravel road and offers a comfortable dock as well as a roomy parking lot. There are also some good rental canoes available; ask at the office.

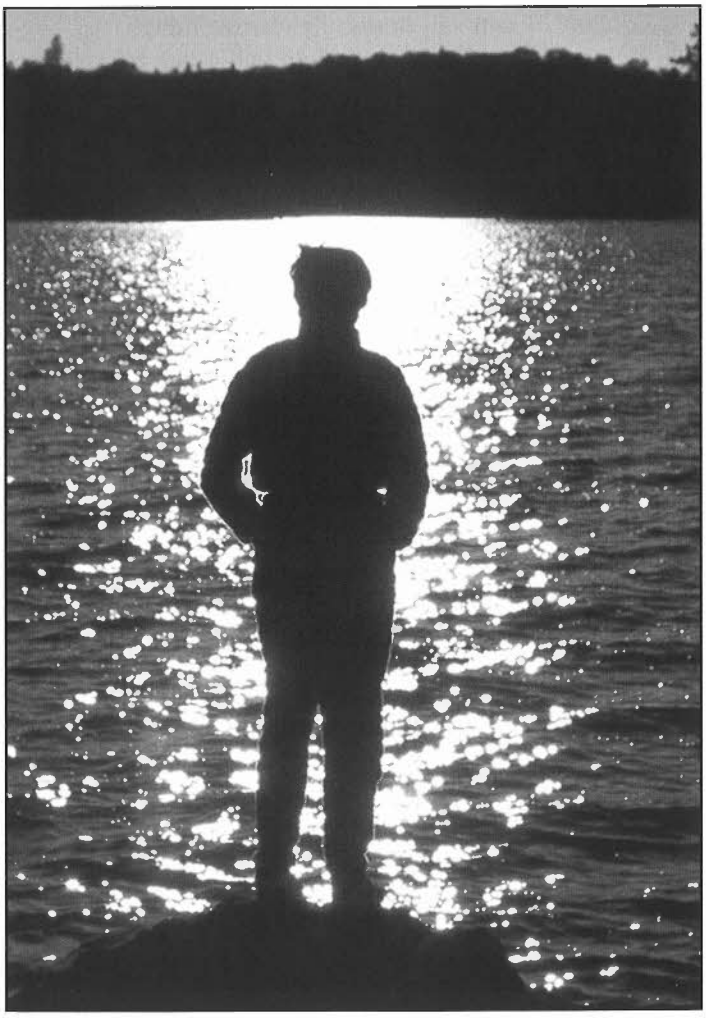
Mijinemungshing Lake (Mijin for short) is one of the jewels in the easy-paddling crown of the Park, exclusively for canoes. Even the park wardens do their occasional patrolling in a canoe. Its complicated shoreline, clear, unpolluted water, and richly forested shores are a joy to experience. I'm grateful to David Verbiwski, who at that

time was Natural Heritage Educator in the park, for much of the following information on logging in the Mijin area.

In the past, especially since 1919 when the Abitibi company received its licence, logging played a significant role in the life of the lake. Between 1919 and 1933, Mijin was part of the waterway system used to float logs down the Anjigami River into the Michipicoten River and then to Lake Superior where the logs were boomed together and transported to the mill in Sault Ste Marie. For that purpose the water level of Mijin was controlled by a small dam in the outflow of the Anjigami River in the North Arm of the lake. The dam was opened in the spring and the logs, which had been cut the previous winter and collected in the lake, would run out of it together with some of the water. However, in 1996 the level of the lake dropped almost one metre because the dam, which had not been maintained, burst and much water rushed out into what is locally called Almonte Creek but is in reality part of the Anjigami River.



Waterfall in the lower Sand River



On Mijin there is still evidence of the logging years. The group campsites on the large island and in the North Arm are both old clearings made by the logging camps. The remains of wood stoves and chimneys and such can still be found in the bushes around those sites.

The lake's shoreline clearly shows the effect of the recent lowering of the water level. Almost everywhere along the shore the vegetation is separated from the water surface by a strip of rocks or gravel or sand instead of reaching right down to it as is normally the case. The dock at the access point also became uncomfortably high when the water level dropped, so a floating loading dock was constructed and attached to the permanent one.

As luck would have it, a short distance from the dock we found a terrific campsite on the first island we landed to investigate, with a small sand beach and nicely closed-in by trees protecting us somewhat from wind and rain. The site has a clear view of the western sky, which made us look forward to some beautiful sunsets.

We camped here for several days and made trips to all parts of the lake, generally enjoying fine weather. There was, of course, also the occasional rain shower, and much of the time we had to content with a west wind. Many bays and marshes were visited and we went as far south as Wabigoon and Mirimoki lakes, a scenic and secluded area filled with shallow ponds, twisting creeks, and water

plants. We almost got lost there in the confusing channels and the low water level made paddling often quite hard. For lovers of marshes, this is a fine place to explore.

As we always try to do when visiting a new area, we had a look at as many unoccupied campsites as we could discover, and found most of them to be nice and usually well located. In general they were clean, probably because the park wardens regularly patrol the area, among other things to check the condition of the toilet thunderboxes.

After four days—climaxed by a sleepless night because of violent lightning storms with ear-splitting thunder and tons of very noisy rain and strong wind; bless the protective trees around us!—we said goodby to this fine lake and set up camp in Crescent Lake campground, the smallest and most southerly one of the three close to Highway 17. This is a cosy and pleasant place with an enjoyable three-kilometre canoe route including four easy portages. The flat two-kilometre Crescent Lake Trail loop offers a good family hike, and the mature hardwood forest it winds through has yellow birch and pine trees that are more than 80 years old.

When the tent had been set up for our last night in the Park, we spent the rest of the afternoon hiking the Pinguisibi Trail that follows the lower part of the Sand River just east of Highway 17. The absolutely fabulous river canyon did not have a lot of water coming down because of the low level of precipitation that year, but nevertheless it was good to be there and savor the impressive sights and the rugged terrain. The name Sand River comes from the Ojibwa name Pinguisibi (pingui means fine white sand, and sibi means river). The east shore of Lake Superior has been inhabited by the Ojibwa for at least 2000 years (and probably much longer), who used the river and trails as they hunted, fished, and trapped in the interior.

Looking back upon our (almost bug-free!) visit to this largely wild and unspoiled park, our only regret is that we did not have the opportunity to roam around its splendid waters and trails a few weeks more to enjoy the many things we missed. Even if one is restricted to "easy tripping," Lake Superior Provincial Park and its surrounding region provide tremendous opportunities for adventure and exploration in a wide variety of environments.

Wabigoon Lake

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Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning 'the way or route'

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal, *Nastawgan*, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

NEWS BRIEFS

NASTAWGAN MATERIAL AND DEADLINE Articles, trip reports, book reviews, photographs, sketches, technical tips, or anything else that you think might be of interest to other readers, are needed for future issues. Try to submit your contributions by e-mail, on computer disk (WordPerfect or MS Word or text files preferred, but any format is welcome), or in typewritten form, but legibly handwritten material will also be accepted. For more information contact the editor (address etc. see WCA Contacts on the back page). Contributor's Guidelines are available upon request; please follow these guidelines as much as possible to increase the efficiency of the production of our journal. The deadline dates for the next two issues are:

issue:		*deadline date:*	
	Winter 2002		3 December
	Spring 2003		2 February

MULTIPLE YEAR WCA MEMBERSHIPS are now possible, albeit with no discount. This will help alleviate much of the (volunteer) administrative work, save your time and postage, and also hedge against future fee increases. Contact membership secretary Gary James for more information.

FALL PARTY

The WCA Fall (Wine and Cheese) Party is a great time to meet old canoeing friends and make new ones. If you are new to the club, or not so new, and even if you are not a member, this party is for you. You can find out who belongs to the WCA, what the club is all about, hear about recent outings, and get new ideas and tips for planning future trips.

Date: Friday, 22 November 2002
Location: Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club (TSCC), 1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto.
There is free parking for 150 cars.
Cost: $10.00

Program:

7:00	Registration and welcome
7:45	First presentation, by Les Stroud
8:30	Meet old friends, and make new acquaintances
9:00	Second presentation
9:45	Coffee and clean-up.

For more information contact Gisela Curwen at 416-484-1471 or gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca

HERB POHL: A Wild and Glorious Land

An interview by Rod MacIver

Older men who have followed their passion, embraced the adventure of life and survived, hold a special fascination for me. I learn from them. They give me courage and inspire me. I have seen Herb Pohl a few times over the years at canoe and winter camping gatherings. He is of medium height, slight paunch, sparkling eyes and easy smile. Over the last six months I have gotten to know him a little and a friendship has developed between us. I respect his courage, appreciate his sharp wit, open heart, and kindness. He is seventy-two years old.

At the 2001 Wilderness Canoe Symposium, sponsored by the Wilderness Canoe Association (WCA) in Toronto, Herb stood before the assembled 800 or so canoeists and talked about his Labrador canoe trips, most of them solo. Labrador has an irresistible pull, he said, because it is so wild. He described the land saying: "It is a kind of Eden—but definitely not an Eden where the lambs and the lions lie down together. It is an unforgiving land where the weakest don't make it. I keep going back because there is neither Apple nor Eve in this particular Eden." He paused and added, "And I am a sucker for temptation."

Herb showed a series of slides of his Labrador trips, including cross-sections of some of the rivers he had canoed down. Over the last twenty years his trips have increasingly taken him down rivers (and up a few others) with numerous large waterfalls and long portages. The routes he travels take him hundreds of miles from the nearest roads or human settlements.

I dug out some of the articles Herb has written for the WCA publication *Nastawgan* and called him. Herb kindly agreed to an interview, and as Ann and I were travelling home from a recent canoe trip on Lake Superior, I met him in a small town outside Toronto.

He talked about his youth in Austria in the thirties and forties, of his early fascination with the lives of explorers and indigenous people. "I don't know why I had this fascination with out-of-the-way strange places and with explorers when I was a kid. Africa and South America—no one in my early life had the urge to see these places.

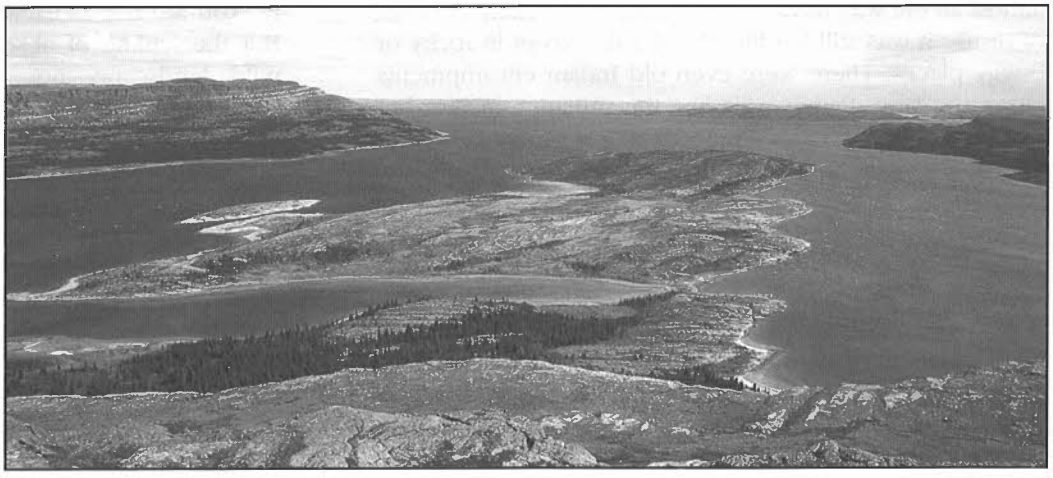
Herb's father died when he was three and he moved with his mother to a small farm in the Austrian countryside. Herb left high school before graduating, was injured in a freak accident in World War II, spent five months recovering, and then, after the war, went to work in a steel mill. A friend suggested they travel together to Canada. Herb agreed, thinking he would be back in Austria within a couple of years, but, as he says, "As soon as the Nova Scotia shoreline came into sight, I forgot all about ever going back.

"We had a lot of romantic ideas. I was always a romantic. . . I am a romantic still. When I arrived, everything was adventure. I worked in a gold mine, I worked on the railroad as a gandy dancer. I worked as a faller on the West Coast. I'd get together enough money for bus or train fare and head to the next town. It was just wonderful. Of course, from time to time I would end up without money. There were days with nothing to eat. And no place to sleep. Box cars or old abandoned cabins would become my abode. But even that was adventure.

After a few years Herb decided to go back to high school. He got a scholarship and went to university. By taking classes at night, he eventually received a post-graduate degree and became head of the lab program for the biology department at McMaster University. He married and had a son. At the age of thirty-eight he discovered wilderness canoeing.

"My first real trip was down the Abitibi River to James Bay. I chose that because the railroad was close enough that I could always bushwhack to the track, flag down a train, and get out. By then I had given up on fellow canoeists. They kept saying they wanted to come along on trips but one by one they would cancel. So I said the hell with people.

"My trip on the Abitibi was tremendously exciting. I had no idea how to do anything. My tent weighed close to twenty pounds. I had no mattress or padding. I thought



View of Richmond Gulf

the frame pack I took was waterproof. It turned out it wasn't. I had practice-paddled at least three times the distance that the trip itself involved and was fit as a fiddle. I could do twenty-five miles in four hours and be finished paddling by one o'clock in the afternoon. I arrived at the end, in Moosonee, very excited. I thought it was just wonderful. . . I thought my accomplishment was on a level with a voyage to the moon and back.

"The preparation for a long canoe trip is exciting to me—the many hours reading, the hours in the map library. I chose routes that were not generally travelled by wilderness canoeists. The rivers that canoeists talk about the most—the Kazan, the Thelon—I tried to avoid them. I did do the Nahanni and I have no regrets. There is nothing that can compare for visual excitement and for canoeing excitement. It is a wonderful experience. But you are constantly running into people who want to talk to you, who want to compare how long it took you to do so and so. I don't want that. I get into the competitive instinct too, and start thinking I have to do it faster than the next guy. You miss the essence of it.

"I want to touch soil that has not been trod heavily, if at all. And if it has been trod, it was by moccasined feet. It is so exciting to find old portages that are not recorded anywhere. By the lay of the land, you think there ought to be a portage trail there, and then when you get there, more often than not, you find one.

"When I was preparing for the trip from Great Slave Lake to the Coppermine River I chose a route that looked as if it might be possible. The maps showed no indication of existing portages, but the typography looked as if there might be trails there. Sure enough, in every case an old trail was found. Sometimes I couldn't find the beginning, but somewhere, part way through, there would be a trail that could be traced back. It might be overgrown on either end, but in the middle it was still visible. Or signs of old encampments turn out to be where you think they might be—old teepee poles and fire rings.

"On a trip in northern Quebec I tried to find an old Indian route from Richmond Gulf to Clearwater Lake. A.P. Low of the Geological Survey of Canada travelled the route in 1888. I managed to locate the start of the trail and followed it around rapids and between intervening lakes almost all the way to Clearwater Lake. After many decades of disuse it was still readily identifiable except in rocky or boggy places. There were even old Indian encampments along the way. Perhaps it's just the romantic in me, but every time I come across these remnants of the past I feel as if I am entering a real-life museum, looking into the past. It's tremendously exciting for me.

"Another time, on Lac D'Iberville (near the headwaters of the Nastapoca River), I came across a collapsed teepee. What made this one unusual was the large number of poles, about twenty-five or thirty, and the fact that they were all laced together with split spruce roots. It had obviously been used for an extended period of time because all the trees in the vicinity had been cut and the floor of the teepee was deeply recessed into the substratum. There were also some fragments of a canoe. The most intriguing aspect of this encampment was that there was no evidence of Western contact, no ropes, nails, canvas, etc.

"The ability of those people to survive on the land with stone-age technology was incredible. There is very little wildlife in northern Labrador, apart from caribou when they are migrating through the region, and the odd bear or porcupine and fish. One can go for days and never even see a squirrel. I mean nothing. And yet these people survived with only the most rudimentary implements: bows and arrows, hatchets, fishing nets. Absolutely incredible!

"Curiosity is a lot of what attracts me to these trips. You don't know what is around the next bend. It is exciting to anticipate. But then you hear the ominous roar of the river up ahead and wonder, 'Oh my God. What am I doing here?'

"When I was younger there was never any question but that I could do what I intended to do. The question was just how long it would take. It is such a wonderful feeling to know that you can manage, that you can survive anywhere, through anything. The few disagreeable experiences you have just make you stronger. Wilderness trips simplify everything down to the most basic elements. You are removed from the complexity of the so-called civilized world. You have many little triumphs—finding a good campsite, escaping a storm, getting your tent up just in time. You build a fire that provides wonderful warmth after a miserable day on the water or portage trail. There are many moments of satisfaction and gratitude.

"Like most travellers, I have had encounters with difficulty. It is very cold. You can't find a shelter. You get caught in a gale. The waves are too big and the shoreline is just bare rock—your canoe would get smashed to pieces if you tried to land. So you keep paddling. Things get tense. At the end of it all you manage to pull through. You gradually warm up in your sleeping bag. You are very grateful for simple comforts."

I asked Herb how his experience of wilderness has changed as he has gotten older.

"Not much," he said. "The novelty is reduced, obviously. You are not as excited as you were on your first trip. But the feeling of absolute elation when you look at a wild landscape—not pretty in the groomed garden sense—but undisturbed by humanity—absolutely natural—that elation never goes away.

"Over the years I have gotten more nervous about doing things. I am not as confident. My physical ability is not the same. At this stage, rather than enjoying a long series of big rapids, I look at them with apprehension. 'Oh God,' I think, 'I will be so happy to get through this.'"

I asked him, "Does it ever occur to you, 'If I get through this?'"

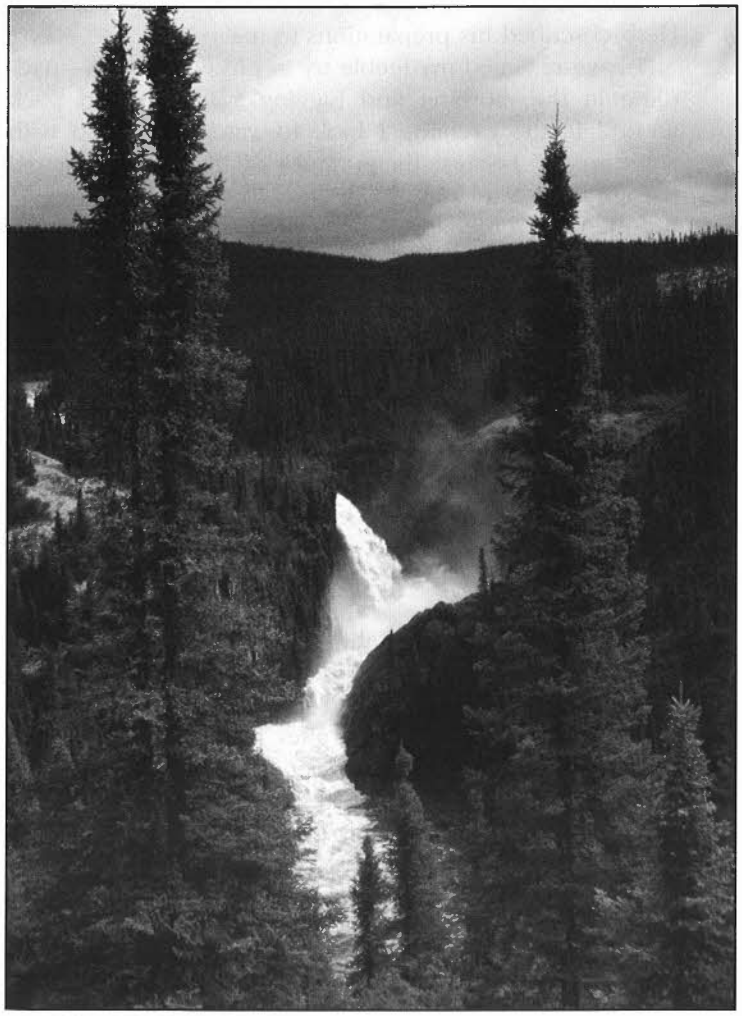
"Very rarely, because most of the time when you are in

trouble you are too busy to worry about the longer term. In 1999 on the East Natashquan (a river flowing into the Gulf of St. Lawrence) I ran through a couple of canyons that the Indians avoided like the plague. The river drops about fifty-five feet per mile—a severe gradient. I started out with the idea of portaging the rough parts, but as I went along I decided that I should be able to line the canoe (walk along the edge of the river pulling the canoe) where I couldn't run the rapids. But as soon as I got around the first bend there were steep cliffs on both sides of the river. I had to keep paddling."

"You were alone?"

"Yes. Perhaps the most intimidating was the Notakwanon in northern Labrador in 1983. The river drops somewhere between thirty-five and forty-five feet per mile. There is a twenty-five mile section of continuous rapids. No let-up. No eddies to speak of. Just a long rock garden. Huge boulders. Very isolated.

"At the beginning you start out with a drop and a pool. That was not a problem. At some point it gets continuous.



Fall in East Natashquan River

I portaged around a waterfall and was ready to put in but I could hear ominous sounds around the bend.

"I walked along the shore to take a look. As far as I could see it was just white. Foaming. Running along like mad. It was too long to portage, there was no place along the shore to line. So I ran it."

"How long did that take?"

"It took much longer than I expected. I found myself in serious trouble. The river got narrower and narrower. The shoreline was inaccessible because of huge boulders. I had to keep going. I made it through about nineteen of the twenty-five miles and then flipped. There was a big boulder in the middle of the river—a big drop behind it. I lost my paddle trying to get to shore. When I got to shore I had to cut a pole and use a plastic blade I had brought along. I didn't carry a spare paddle in those days. Of course, once you have a spare you never need it.

"Every time you flip, and this isn't the only time I flipped, you have a severe loss of confidence. I didn't dare press my luck and go back into that rapid. So for the next two days I portaged through the bush. I tried to follow caribou trails wherever possible. There are a series of tiny little streams running into the river which had given rise to dense growth. The trails invariably disappeared or turned steeply uphill and I was forced to bushwhack through the thickets. I was convinced there had to be a less strenuous solution, so the next time I found a caribou trail I followed it uphill thinking it was going to bend back towards the river. It had to! But it didn't. The trail disappeared.

"I had a wonderful overview from the top of the hill. In compliance with Murphy's Law the camera was in another pack and so the only thing left to do was to go back down to the river, this time without a trail.

"It was easily my most memorable trip. Many things didn't go according to plan. I started in Schefferville, and worked my way across to the Notakwanon. I went down the Rivière de Paux, crossed over a minor height of land to the George River, up the George a little, then up a tributary of the George to White Gull Lake, and then down another stream. At approximately the halfway point of the trip, on my approach to the height of land that separates Labrador and Quebec, I burned my boat.

"It was a very hot day. I was exhausted from all the portages. I decided to camp. The blackflies were by far the worst of the trip. The entire lake I had just travelled was covered with a solid haze of black flies. All day I was tortured by them. There was no firewood around, so I started to cook a meal on the stove. The blackflies were so bad I decided to forget about the bloody dinner altogether and just make a little smudge fire.

"So I made a small fire with some lichen, and then into the tent I went. I stripped down to bare skin to cool off. A few minutes later I heard a crackling sound and looked out to see black smoke billowing out of the front of my boat. The fire burned a foot and a half off the bow of the

boat. A little twig must have snapped and flown over in the wind. I had a plastic rope coiled at the front end. Perhaps a spark lit the rope. What else could have done it?

"I had a pot of water and I poured that on the fire. It hardly made a difference. I dumped out one of my packs and used the pack to smother the fire. It ruined the pack. As I was doing this, hordes of black flies attacked. I ran back into the tent and pondered what to do next.

"I was surprised how calm I was. I couldn't turn around and walk out—there were too many swamps behind me. Going forward, the only way out was Davis Island—an island several miles from land. I went to sleep and the next morning I did what I could.

"I always carry an extensive repair kit. I had a liter of resin, and quite a bit of cloth, and mat. I didn't know whether the remaining scorched fabric would adhere with the new resin. I had to put it on in stages. The next day it rained. There were no trees around so I couldn't suspend anything over the damn canoe. At times I would stand there with a tarp over the top of the fresh resin hoping it would set. I finished the job with a huge roll of duct tape."

"You went down a twenty-five mile rapid in a boat with a makeshift bow?"

"Worse than that, the guy who made the boat was trying to do me a favor by using a lighter cloth to reduce the weight of the craft. It weakened the bottom of the boat to such an extent that it collapsed inward at the slightest provocation. I had to sit in it with my feet pressing down on the bottom so that the boat wouldn't collapse in. It was quite a torture.

"Close to the end of the trip, I had an incredible experience. I camped near the mouth of the Notakwanon River. It was a beautiful evening. I was sitting by my fire looking at snow-flecked hills. I had the extraordinary feeling that Labrador was saying goodbye to me. This mistress that I had was kissing me goodbye. It didn't turn out that way—I have been back a number of times—but it was such a strong feeling that night."

I asked Herb if he experiences changes in his thought processes over the course of a trip.

"There is an overture, musically speaking. It takes a few days to get into the first act, to become attuned. It is not an instant process. I don't feel like I am really on a canoe trip until the end of the second or beginning of the third week. Then you are truly out there. Before that, you are still carrying the baggage of civilization. But that doesn't mean that you don't have intense experiences right from the start. It just takes a while to get in sync with everything.

"The land makes a deep impression. I feel the most intense happiness, especially when I travel alone. When I look at a carved canyon like the Fraser River in northern Labrador—at the huge, U-shaped glacial valley—I feel the force that drove the process, both in terms of strength and duration. You see rocks that have been around for two or three billion years—an elapse of time you cannot really fathom. You see trees that have been mutilated by the weather and yet they have new shoots coming out. You see trees that have struggled for decades or centuries, and survived. Miserably. But life prevails.

"There is a spirituality in that. To experience the enormity of the sky in places like the flats of land between the McKenzie and the Coppermine watersheds. There is no evidence there of technological man. At night, you can see the countless stars, the vastness of land and sky and universe stretching for a billion light years—distances we cannot begin to imagine. Humbling. Always humbling.

"It takes the burden off. You are not carrying the world. You are not Atlas. You are tiny. Out there I sense how privileged we are to be a part of creation. All these feelings are reinforced by remoteness and by the amount of sweat you shed to get out there."

This summer [2001] Herb and a friend, travelling in separate boats, canoed 250 kilometres over what he described as some of the wildest country he has seen. Before the trip Herb described his preparations to me:

"I have resumed my feeble try at physical fitness—paddling in the morning and lugging a forty-pound pack around in the evening. I look forward to the trip with some anxiety because the portages are many and long and the terrain difficult. Not really the place for an old wreck, but the pull of the land is powerful."

He said that even the forty-pound pack was difficult on his knees. When I suggested starting lighter and working his way up, he said to me, "My God! Lighter than forty pounds. The only thing lighter than that is your wallet!"

The evening before he departed, he again expressed some nervousness about his aging knees and about the long portages he was about to face. The route he would travel included the lower Mistastin River which, he told me, has an average drop of ninety feet per mile. The steepest drop he had been able to paddle in the past was fifty or fifty-five feet a mile. He said that trips like this were okay for guys like me.

I responded that I thought the opposite was true—that the trip sounded okay for guys like him. I wished him the best.

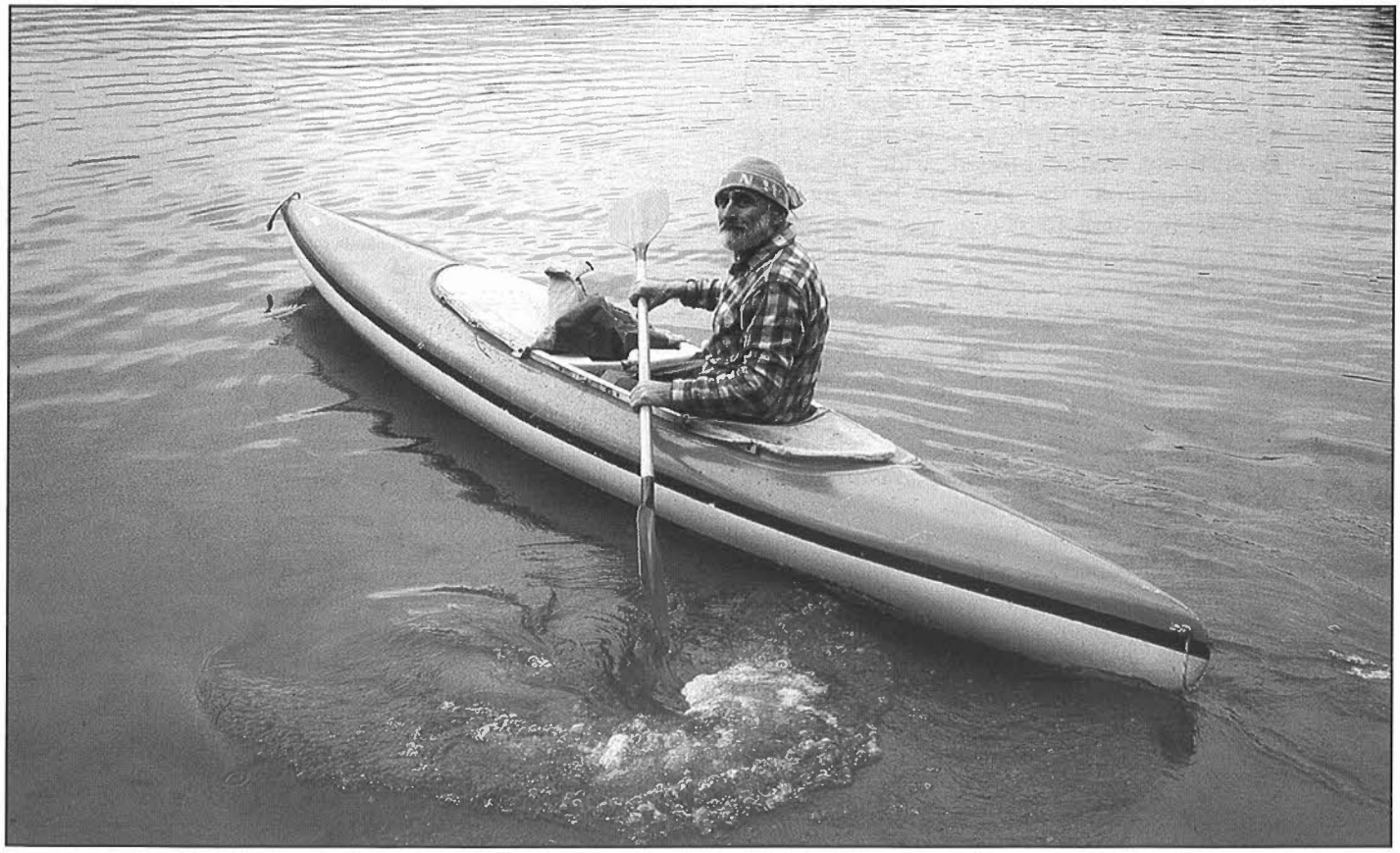
I next talked to Herb just after he got back. He was excited by what he had experienced of the country and pleased with his ability to withstand the demands of the trip. On the lower Mistastin they had to portage about three times as far as they could paddle. Then Herb said,

"But what a glorious experience. . . The country is so wild. . . ."

Adapted with permission from Heron Dance, *Issue 32, October 2001.*

'There is no sense in going further—it's the edge of cultivation,'
So they said, and I believed it—broke my land and sowed my crop—
Built my barns and strung my fences in the little border station
Tucked away below the foothills where the trails run out and stop;
Till a voice as bad as Conscience, ran interminable charges
On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated—so;
'Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—
'Something lost behind the ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!'

Rudyard Kipling, from *The Explorer*



SAUGEEN RIVER

Victoria Day weekend on the Saugeen River can make for an eventful canoe trip. This was certainly true on 18–20 May 2002. Before leaving home on Friday evening, co-leader Anne Bradley pulled a muscle in her right forearm and as a result was unable to paddle on the weekend. She did, however, provide "car support," transporting the heavy packs to each night's campsite. (All participants were reminded that this is not usual WCA style and that this kind of trip support should not be expected in the future!) Barb Maughan, originally advertised as co-leader, did a fine job as sole leader on the river.

Trip participants were: Barb Maughan, leader; and Gary James, Anne Lessio, and Joe Pace Ray Laughlen, who began the trip paddling solo and was joined Sunday afternoon by Roger Pettit. Anne Bradley provided car support, assisted on Sunday afternoon and Monday by Lisa Pettit.

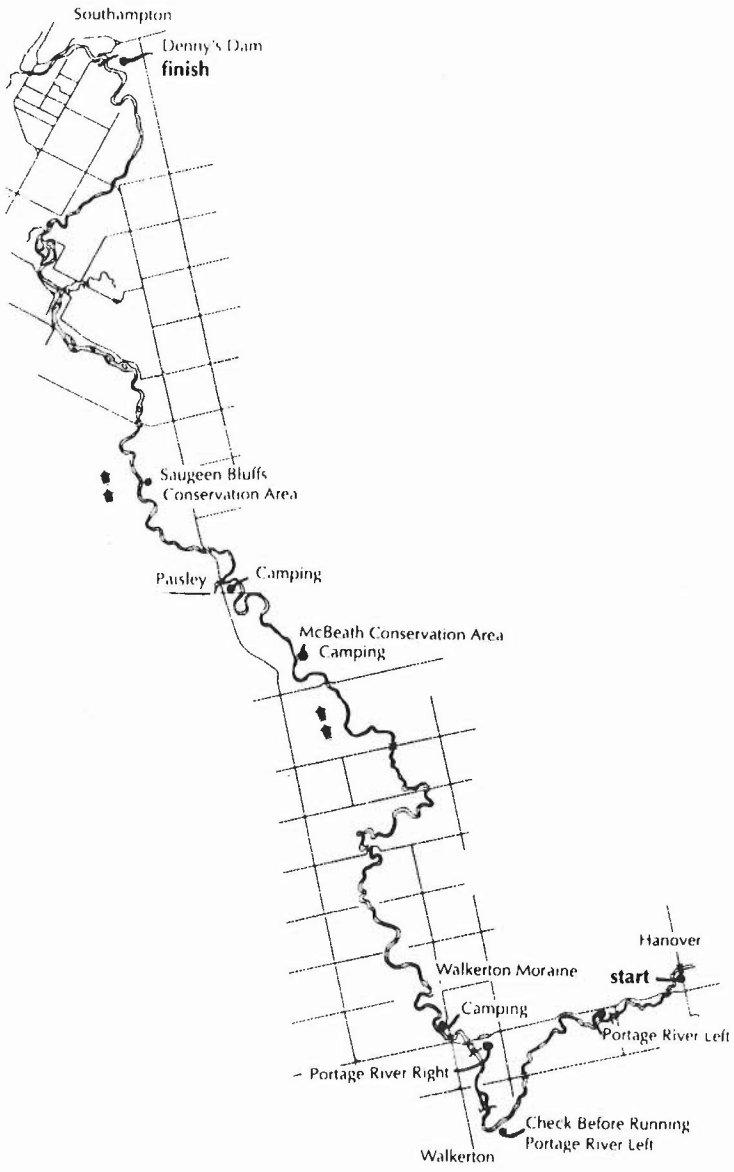
River levels were above average and the flow quite strong. Between Hanover and Walkerton, dams necessitated three portages. Our first night's camp was at Lobie's Park in Walkerton; the second night we stayed at Saugeen Bluffs Conservation Area. This made for a longish second day, partly because of the distance involved, but also because of conditions encountered on the river.

Although our group was well prepared for the weather forecast (cold and windy, with 60–70% POP, lows of 0 C, highs around 7 C), many others on the river were not. On Sunday the WCA-ers participated in the rescue of other canoeists suffering from beer-induced capsizes. Gear was retrieved downstream and deposited with Thorncrest Outfitters in Southampton. The outfitters later reported they'd been kept busy until 10:00 p.m. retrieving people and their belongings from the river.

Our group also encountered a mother out for the weekend with her two young children. Because the children had tired and the wind was so strong, Mom had become unable to make any headway. Joe Pace and Anne Lessio took her equipment into their canoe, Ray Laughlen and Roger Pettit took the small boy, and Barb Maughan and Gary James towed the canoe containing a grateful mother and daughter to the next camping area.

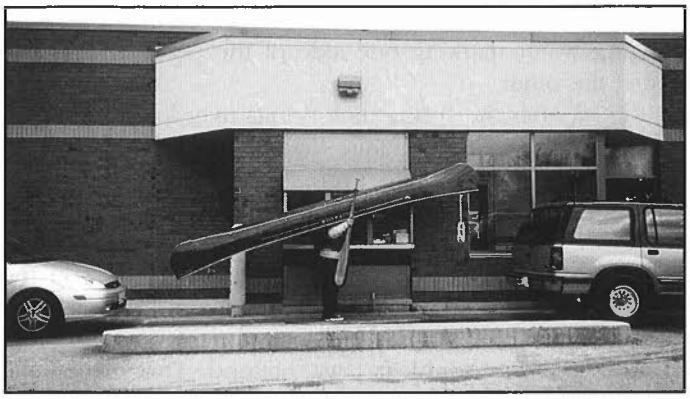
At an unauthorized campsite downriver from Saugeen Bluffs, Barb and Gary stopped to put out a campfire that had been left ablaze. Although our original intention had been to island-camp, it became apparent that these sites are terribly over-used and would not make for a pleasant overnight stay. At one of the dams on the first day, Joe Pace filled an entire bag with garbage. Throughout the trip, our canoeists were gathering up floating garbage from the water.

In spite of all this, the trip definitely had its good points. The organized campgrounds were clean, comfortable, and relatively quiet in spite of this being the traditional drinking weekend. Paddling a pastoral river through farming country makes for an interesting change from trips on the Canadian Shield. Ray Laughlen successfully made the transition to a more relaxed way of canoeing. Bird watching was good. Especially spectacular was the great horned owl that had taken a blue jay and was subsequently forced by mobbing crows to drop its meal. The riverside coffee stop provided by Anne and Lisa during the long second day was greatly appreciated.



(Map courtesy of Andrew Armitage: *The Sweetwater Explorer)*

The highlight of the weekend, however, was docking at the Tim Horton's in Walkerton, and portaging a canoe through the Drive-Thru to order coffees. Maybe we should keep an eye open for canoeists in future Tim Horton's ad campaigns.



Suggestions for doing this trip:

– Avoid long weekends, and therefore the party crowd.

– Go when water levels are high. At lower water levels there is a real possibility of having to wade in some sections. Information on water levels can be obtained at the Saugeen Conservation website: www.svca.on.ca/river

– Start at Walkerton rather than Hanover, thus avoiding the dams and all portages, and making for a shorter second day. Aside from the dams, there is nothing especially unique about the section of river between Hanover and Walkerton. The reason we had chosen to start in Hanover was that it was the traditional spot for early settlers to begin their journey down the Saugeen.

– For information on the history of the Saugeen River, look for a copy of Andrew Armitage's excellent but now out-of-print book "The Sweetwater Explorer."

– Camp the first night at McBeath Conservation Area (no road access), the second night at Saugeen Bluffs Conservation Area.

– Because this river runs through farming country, it is advisable to carry all your water.

– For a fee of $25.00 Thorncrest Outfitters (www.thorncrestoutfitters.com) will meet you at Denny's Dam, the take-out point in Southampton, and shuttle your canoe with gear and two paddlers to the put-in at Walkerton. They will also rent you a canoe if you need one.

– Although this is not a difficult trip, paddlers should have some skill in negotiating in moving water.

– Don't drink and paddle.

Reported by Anne Bradley

THE PORTAGE TRAIL

Dawdling at the top of the chute and slowly making for the rock shelf on the left. The river bends sharply left back of the shelf. Shelf extends quite a ways out into the river. It's pretty clear that we are at the big drop, and the portage is along the rocks on the left side of the river.

Often before big drops the current does not move overwhelmingly fast. Surprising how much time you have to paddle to shore. It's almost as if the river is saving its strength for the awesome display of power that lies ahead at the big drop.

Portage trails get established because travellers have come this way before—nomadic hunters, native people, trappers. All of these earlier travellers were trying to find the easiest way around the obstacle—rapids, waterfall, rock garden. Wilderness canoeists are just the next group in this long line of travellers looking for the easiest way to continue their journey down the river.

This portage trail coming up is the best portage trail you can have. And that's no portage trail. Just a walk on the hard granite down to the foot of the falls. No loose rocks. No growing green to paw and grab for you. No place for gear to hide on the barren rock. Fifteen-metres-wide trail. Raging water marking one side of the portage trail, and bush the other.

Runoff after the spring melt brings river levels up much higher and keeps the granite free from plant growth. This sweeping of the granite occurs yearly and removes all traces of previous travellers. Can't tell if others have been this way before. Maybe a few. Maybe a lot. The nice thing about this type of portage trail is that it gives you the chance to dream that you could be among the first to be on it.

Anyway, you could at least pretend. That's what I'm doing.

Greg Went

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

We've changed the way we handle and process WCA memberships and renewals, as well as some of the people involved in these activities. Processing memberships and renewals efficiently and maintaining accurate membership records is key to the continued success of the WCA.

In March 2002, Gary James took over the responsibility for membership records from Cash Belden, who had been diligently maintaining our membership records for over 20 years. Thanks, Cash. A big thank-you as well to Jan and Suus Tissot, who did a tremendous job of transferring our membership records to a new, more user-friendly computer database. Doreen Vella also deserves our thanks for her efforts in keeping the mail moving along.

Changes that will directly affect WCA members:

1) You will no longer receive a renewal letter when your membership is about to expire. Instead, the color of the label on your *Nastawgan* will indicate your membership status. If your label is white, then you are currently in good standing with membership fees. If the label is NOT white, then your membership has expired or is going to expire and you need to send in your renewal and fee. The renewal form is inside the front cover (wrap) of your *Nastawgan.* Just take off the cover, complete any required information, sign the required waiver, and send this form along with your renewal fee. Please be sure to include the mailing label which is on the front cover.

2) You will no longer automatically receive a membership card. If you require a membership card, please indicate this on the renewal form.

3) We now have an e-mail address that is easy to remember: **wca@email.com**. We are on-line with our website **http://wildernesscanoe.ca**. Please keep us informed of any changes to your name, address, contact numbers, and e-mail address. We will make every attempt to contact you with a friendly e-mail reminder notice about your membership status.

4) The WCA will no longer be sending out membership mailing lists. This is in keeping with member's security and privacy issues. If you would like a member's information, please contact the membership secretary. The member will be contacted and asked to return your call and provide any information.

With the above changes, we will be able to reduce the cost and time associated with processing membership renewals. If you have any questions about any of these changes, please contact the membership secretary at wca@email.com .

Submitted by Gary James

You know you're a whitewater paddler if...

...Your paddle costs more than a week's paycheck.
...You love rainy weekends.
...After paddling a few winters, the Polar Bear Club doesn't seem so crazy to you.
...You can't drive over a bridge without looking for water under it.
...You manoeuvre your vehicle on highways by 'eddying out' behind trucks and leaning into turns.
...A dress shirt and tie no longer bother you because both are more comfortable than a dry-suit neck gasket.
...The only time you ever go to a swimming pool is for roll practice.
...The recirculation created by turning the water faucet on full blast as you're washing dishes fascinates you.
...During the week, your boat never leaves your roof-rack.
...You paid more for a roof-rack for the boat than you spent for anniversary presents (combined).
...You tie down the boat better than you seatbelt-in the kids.
..."Waterproof" means "a little damp" or "might-float."
...Your friends or relatives are shocked when you answer the phone at home on a weekend.
...You can't drive over a bridge without looking for water under it.
...The smell of old polypro doesn't bother you.
...Driving 800 miles for a weekend on the river doesn't seem strange to you.
...Window shade means more than keeping the sun out.
...You choose a new car based on whether or not your rack system will fit it.
...Your boat is worth more than your car.
...You measure major purchases relative to the cost of a new boat. ('Hmm, that new computer will cost me about 2 1/2 kayak units.')
...You're the one with the Bright Sunny Smile on the Cold Rainy Day.
...Every once in a while you touch your paddle, just to touch it.
...Every once in a while you let go of your paddle, just to eat or something.
...You have a bathing suit that's wet from March to October.
...Your Mom has stopped saying "be careful this weekend".
...You've never set-up a tent when it's light out.
...You have friends that you don't recognize without their helmet, pfd, paddling jacket, and boat ensemble.
...You can ID make and model on a car-topped canoe or kayak at a quarter mile.
...Saying "wet, sticky hole" and "blowing a ferry" in casual conversation doesn't give you pause.
...You always have sinus congestion on Monday morning.
...You leave your glasses strap on at night.
...All career, personal, and financial decisions are judged by the criterion of "How will this increase my paddling time?"
...You visit Niagara Falls and think "This may be runnable!"
...You build a two-car garage addition and you still can't park your car inside.
...You feel all mushy inside when your boyfriend or girlfriend gives you a drytop for Christmas.
...You can't look at water in a gutter without imagining tiny runs and miniature waves and holes.
...After a car wreck, the first thing you check for is damage to your boat.
...You think your love interest looks sexy, and he/she is wearing a helmet, noseplugs, a pfd, and paddling gear!
...You think nothing of taking off your clothes beside a busy road.
...You've paddled in a snow storm and had ice form on your helmet after rolling.

Submitted by Leslie Dutton

WATHAMAN RIVER

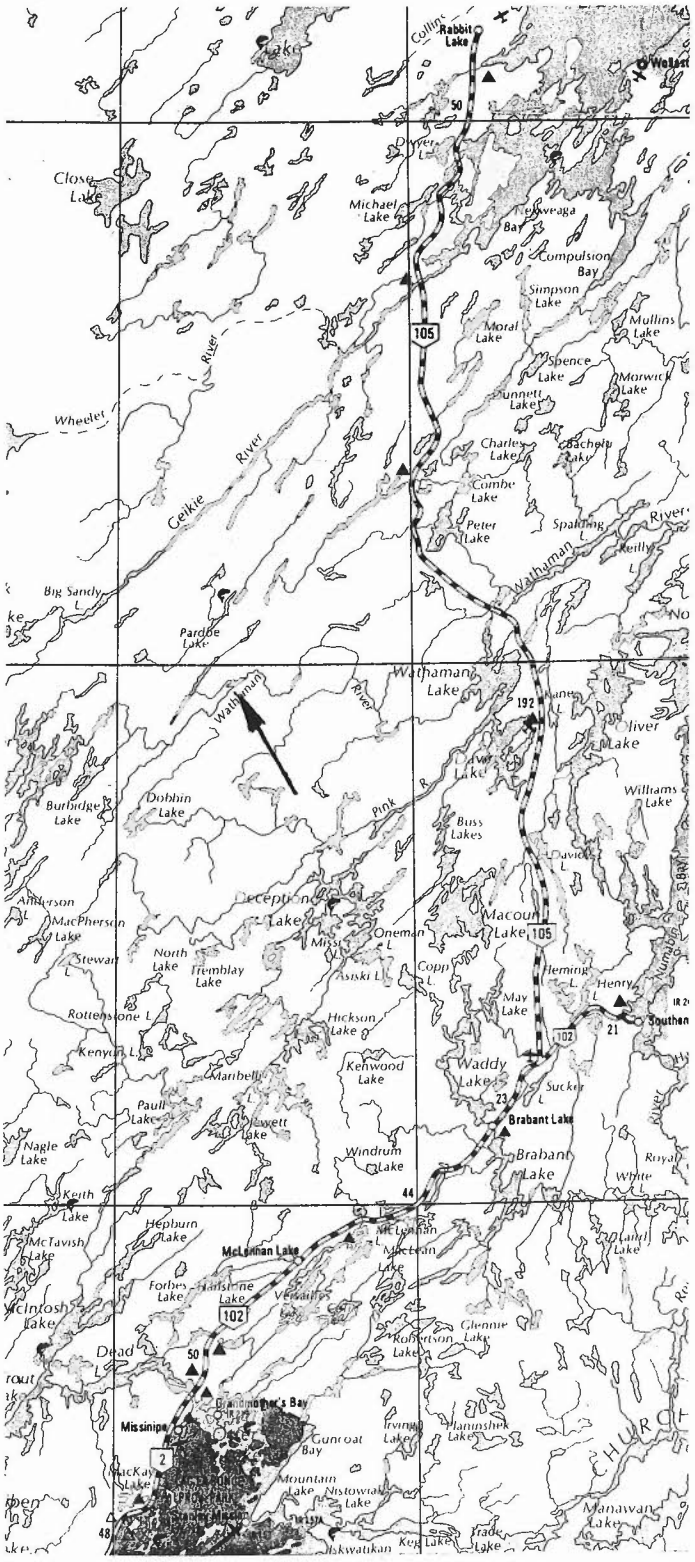
Text: Dave Bober
Photographs: Dave Bober and Ralph Zaffrann

One theory of psychology divides the human emotional psyche into three components: parent, adult, and child. Winter map-dreaming, without a doubt, draws the "child" component out in most wilderness paddlers as vivid imaginations design adventures on remote waterways. On cold January nights the topographic maps are spread out on the kitchen table and potential routes are traced across the magical Precambrian Shield. "This little river sure looks inviting" — and before you know it another trip is planned for the upcoming season by an eternal optimist.

That's how our July 1996 Wathaman River trip in northeastern Saskatchewan came about. Several times before, we had crossed the Wathaman River bridge en route to Points North Landing on gravel road # 105. Now we would find out firsthand what lay upstream on one of Saskatchewan's least paddled rivers. All the better that we could not locate previous paddlers who could share their experiences with us. Man, this would be like exploring! My 17-year-old son, John, who had been enticed with the assurances of fabulous fishing, would paddle tandem with me, and our senior partner, Ralph, would solo.

A single blue or black line on a Canadian 50,000-scale topo map indicates a very small stream. Even when two closely spaced lines appear on a map to represent a growing volume of water, or at least a wider streambed, the question remains: is this tiny river navigable by canoe? The contour lines on newer metric-version maps represent ten-metre (32.8-foot) intervals. Among other things, the Wathaman taught us that closely spaced contour lines crossing a small river can substantially increase your workload and reduce your daily mileage quota to a pittance. Actually, most of the Wathaman is double line on the 50,000-scale topos with only about six miles of single-line stuff at the top. From past experience we have learned that snaky streams, even in the Shield, can often be paddled despite frequent contour lines. Straight sections of narrow river can be troublesome, but frequently you luck out with falls or ledges that can easily be portaged or lifted over, taking out the bulk of the contour line drop.

And despite two or three contours in a very short distance, say two to four miles, you occasionally win a whitewater prize, a long consistent-gradient rapid that is totally runnable, although much too steep according to the book. Sneak routes are common on larger-volume rivers, but small-stream options are limited with very little room to manoeuvre. It boils down to the fact that topo maps are not designed specifically for canoeists— they tell you much but not everything. The river will remain a mystery until you do it and that is precisely what motivates the



A rough little river

adventure seeker.

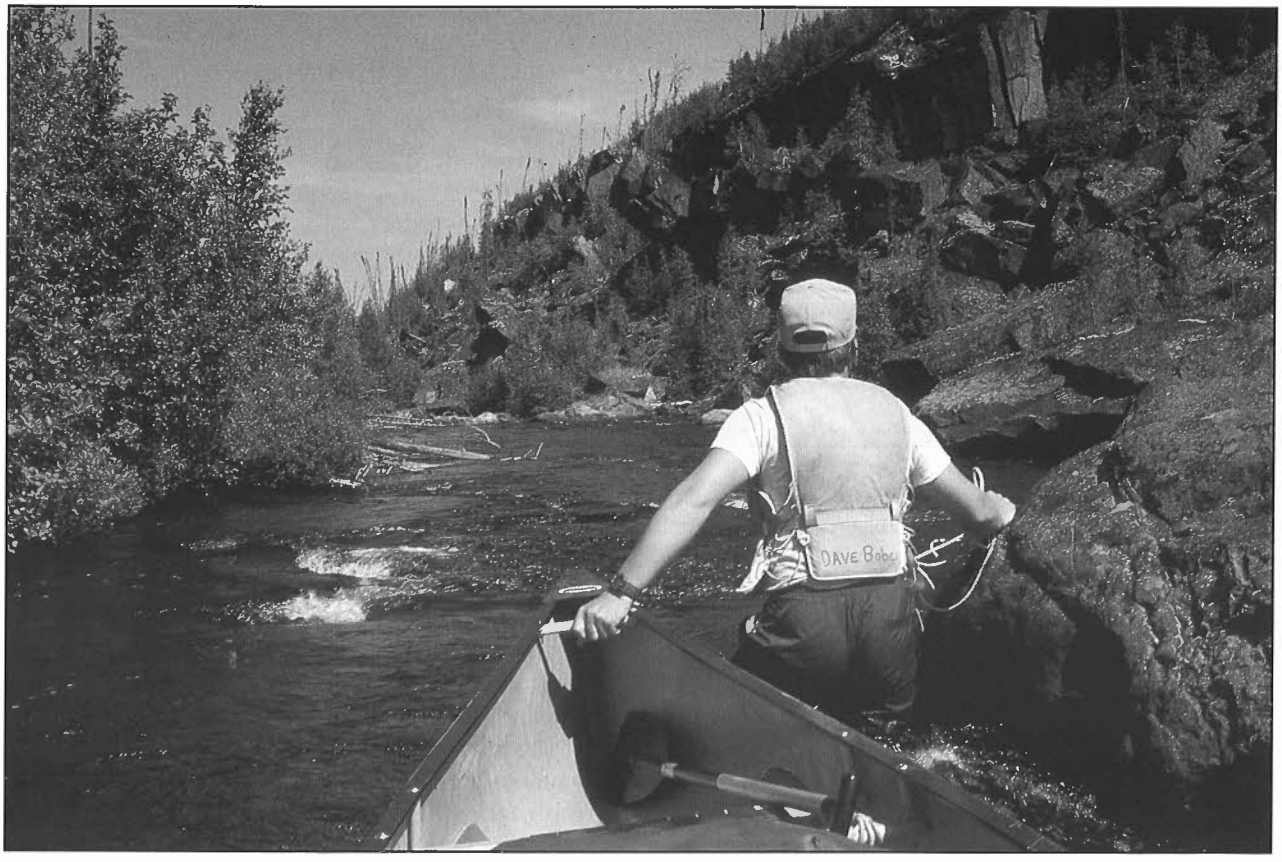
And don't get hung up on hash marks; a rapid with several bars may just be a long class 1, while ledges and falls on remote routes may not even be marked at all! Of course, water levels can drastically alter the difficulty of any given rapid. All whitewater, even on familiar rivers, deserves respect and assessment.

The 85-mile charter flight on the Beaver floatplane from Missinipe to Burbridge Lake, the headwater lake of the Wathaman River, was uneventful as we flew over the Churchill River and the lake-studded wilderness to the north.

Conversation at our first camp was lively: "Should be lots of time to fish—just 112 miles in 10 days—should be a cinch. Those unsophisticated fish have probably never seen a lure before—bet they'll practically jump into the canoe. The first couple of days may be tough but then we can boogie."

Our plan was a laid-back six-four strategy: six paddle days and four days off for sun and fun. Our first look at the Wathaman was less than inspiring. John quipped, "You call this dribble a river? It's a one-by-three creek—one foot deep, three feet wide, and paved with ROCKS!" Dave sarcastically responded, "That's what boulder-bashing royalex canoes are made for—it's bound to get bigger after the next lake." But our tiny stream had a discouraging way of disappearing beneath several rock gardens. A lack of water was further complicated by a lack of forest; rather, the size of the jack pine and spruce—10 to 12 feet high and as thick as a ..... !

In my pre-trip research I had failed to qualify my request for recent forest fire data and was assured there had been no recent fires along the river. The forest at 57 degrees latitude grows very slowly and a burn of only a few years old would have been preferable to the jungle we were forced to drag/portage through. Cutting tiny pines to clear campsites, we counted rings and figured the country burnt off in the mid 1980s. Little did we know then that this almost continuous burn, one of the largest we have ever travelled through, would plague us for nearly 90 miles.



Time to go wading

A feeder stream from the north nearly doubled the flow the next day and a few easy class 1's, followed by a small flatwater gorge, gave us cause for optimism. A long rock garden was waded down without murmur and I could sense friendly vibes from our mini river. "See, I told you this river would be a piece of cake—only a few more miles of single-line stuff and then we can really roll."

A faint glimmer of wickedness was detected in the first rapid below the easy gorge and a taunting laugh was soon heard in the nasties that followed. Grades 3 and 4 whitewater in a tiny river constricting downwards steeply can be downright snarly. Manoeuvring in the 20- to 30-foot-wide streambed with an unfriendly shoreline was limited. Run, wade, or line—our progress slowed to a snail's pace, as we entered some of the roughest country imaginable.

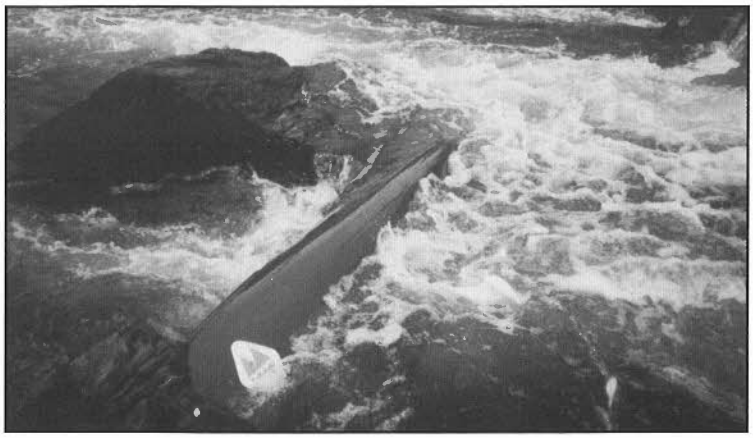
Native trapper's cabin

This was broken Precambrian Shield geology where a flat spot big enough to pitch a tent was almost impossible to find.

Somewhere in this locale a tragedy played itself out in 1967, when two experienced prospectors disappeared in the rugged bush, after their pilot inadvertently dropped them off at the north end of Lower Foster Lake instead of Middle Foster Lake. Unaware of their incorrect location, they set up a base camp and proceeded to hike east to a small lake to look for ore samples. After 10 days a plane was sent out to check on the prospectors and when their abandoned camp was discovered on the wrong lake, the alarm went off. At first, murder was suspected, but an extensive air and ground search found a few clues giving evidence to the theory that they were lost. When the two men left camp, it is assumed, they became confused when nothing seemed to jive with their map. An early June snowstorm added to their misery and soon they became completely disoriented, unable to return to the safety and comfort of camp. Nothing has ever been found of the hapless pair. Another mystery of the Canadian bush.

What happened next to us should NOT have happened. We knew better. Running a slight corner blind, the river sucked us down a five-foot ledge! Too late to back-paddle and no room to eddy-out. The river gloated: one canoe hanging precariously on the ledge, the other capsizing and going for a pin job against a piano-sized boulder. Self-rescue was successful. Thank God, we were OK and the wrapped canoe, miraculously, was hardly any worse for wear. Losing nothing but a jack knife, we got off incredibly easy and with cold drizzle setting in we decided to camp early and unwind. And a desolate camp it was—rough burnt-over country in every direction, our tent sites cobbled with sharp rocks, and a malevolent river screaming in our ears.

The following day was a ditto as we piloted on ultra-cautious mode. Our senior partner suggested we henceforth take one day at a time. Good advice. Immediately below wipeout ledge a grade 3 smiled, followed by two small falls in an inhospitable gorge. The river between major drops was mostly long, unrunnable rock gardens



....going for a pin job against a piano-sized boulder

that called for tricky lining or, when the shoreline became impossible, treacherous wading on slippery moss-covered rocks. Without a semblance of a trail, getting around the falls was time-consuming as we carried high over burnt blow-down or close to the river by crawling over rock faces. A ten-pound jack fish rose to John's daredevil below the second falls, easing somewhat our exertions of the morning.

Some easier river was followed by an impressive 25-foot falls where our morale was immediately boosted by a short portage in good condition. By late afternoon we approached another single-line area where the river dropped two contours in a third of a mile—a wicked grade 3 rapid 700 yards long. Things were definitely looking up and the eternal optimist predicted, "There will be good portages from now on." Later, we came to the conclusion that those two improved trails were the labor of a fly-in trapper who worked a long lake to the north of the river. In three full days of travel we had progressed only 21 miles—this little river was definitely more than we had bargained for.

Day 4 we were hampered not by water conditions but by strong easterly winds, and our pace was again reduced to a turtle crawl on a long lake-like portion of the river. Cold drizzle and burnt-over country in every direction again brought on a feeling of desolation. On flatwater I spelled Ralph off in his solo boat, which gave John someone new to converse with. Even with a double blade the solo canoe was no match for the tandem and after 11 miles of hard-earned progress we called it a day. A heavy deluge overnight did not disturb us, but a busy beaver roused us in the early hours. A scenic lake with a small area of mature, green timber soon welcomed us and we investigated a native trapper's cabin, the only cabin we saw on the entire river. It was strange but a swimming moose appeared to be fleeing the cabin site. The crude unlocked log hut contained the rudiments of a trapper's existence, but had not been occupied in a couple of years.

Burnt-over country again closed in with thick young pine crowding all but the spines of the ridges, where the skeletons of the previous forest still stood guard over this stark land. A few easy rapids followed by a couple of long tough ones, that required tricky lining or tedious wading, put us on edge again, especially after one boat half filled with water. Running a series of rapids, Ralph suddenly waved the "NO GO !" signal and we eddied out above a steep drop. A campsite was hacked out in thick, young pine just in time to escape a vicious thunderstorm.

The lack of a portage trail here at an 18-foot falls puzzled us, and the next morning a narrow 300-yard trail was hacked out. The accumulated rain of the last three days had somewhat dampened our camp outfit and a perceptible rise in the river was noted. A few easy rapids gave way to a long grade 3 littered with alders and willows crowding the shorelines, which were now flooded from all the precip. Deadfall strainers added to the danger and in two hours we had progressed barely a mile. Ralph had some trouble lining his solo boat and a mishap was narrowly averted when the three of us managed to hoist the three-quarter filled canoe from the river's grip.

Our spirits soared immensely as we entered a long lake-like expanse with our first sand esker. That last rapid was an abrupt demarcation line between the nasty broken shield region and the sandier country to the east. During lunch at the base of the burnt-off esker, we hung out our sodden clothing to dry in the very welcome sunshine. This new sand country eased the tension of the last few days but a fierce head wind all afternoon reinforced our conviction that the Wathaman was conspiring against us.

Whitewater action

Lunch on the rocks

Although the total distance for the day was only six and a half miles, we were pleased to find a scenic camp on top of a flat esker, with a few mature pine to break the monotony of the tiny jack pine forest.

Our struggles with the headwinds that afternoon had been alleviated for 15 minutes when a cow moose and her calf waded the shoreline ahead of us, oblivious of our approach. The cursed wind abated towards evening but when we calculated our total distance at 50 miles in six days, Ralph muttered, "This is the river that never quits."

A cheery song sparrow woke us up for day 7 and blue skies and calmer conditions psyched us up for a great 20-mile day. A few patches of mature green timber and a couple of enjoyable class 2 rapids really gave the spirit a boost. The river had picked up considerable volume after mile 44 in addition to the volume donated by the three days of rain. Nevertheless, the Wathaman is considerably smaller than her sister river, the Giekie, 30 miles to the north, and the whitewater which can be run, much more demanding. At a likely spot, John cast out a spinner and an 18-pound jackfish rose to battle. John won and we feasted on fish fillets for two meals. An adrenaline rush was enjoyed by sneaking a class 3+ ledge on extreme river right, followed by a long exciting 2+ rapid. Partially burned country was a welcome change from solid burn, and during the day we spotted five moose. Camping on a prominent esker, we enjoyed the favorite campsite of our trip—pitching the tents among 40-feet-high jack pine.

Our 8th day of travel netted us less than seven miles as the Wathaman sneered at us with two demanding sections where progress was again reduced to a crawl. The first rapid, a long 3 and 4, required considerable scouting, as no portage trail could be found along the rough burned-over shore line. We carried around the upper ledge, did a tight front ferry across a very swift current, and lined the bottom—a serious rapid. Four miles of easier cruising brought us to the Wathaman's highlight—a massive falls that took almost three hours to get around. Both sides of the river were scouted in vain for a trail and we ended up crashing 500 yards through (often over) very thick six- to 10-foot-high pine. Crawling down through several chimneys reminded us of the upper river. The topo map indicated only a rapid here, an insult to these spectacular falls, which really spread out, giving one the impression of a much larger river. A smaller falls a quarter of a mile downstream was easy to negotiate by lining a few yards and lifting over a rocky island. Our tent sites—a jumble of criss-crossed down timber—had to be hacked out again with the axe that evening.

The mid-July sun turned up the thermostat the next day and we were sweating and down to T-shirts for a change. A couple of easy rapids with good portage trails for upstream travel told us we were probably entering a trapper's domain. At Bell Rapids, the first named rapids on the map, the river made a mile-long loop around a prominent bell-shaped hill that could be seen for miles. We did not argue with the 12-bar rapid but thankfully took the decent 500-yard portage through the miniature forest.

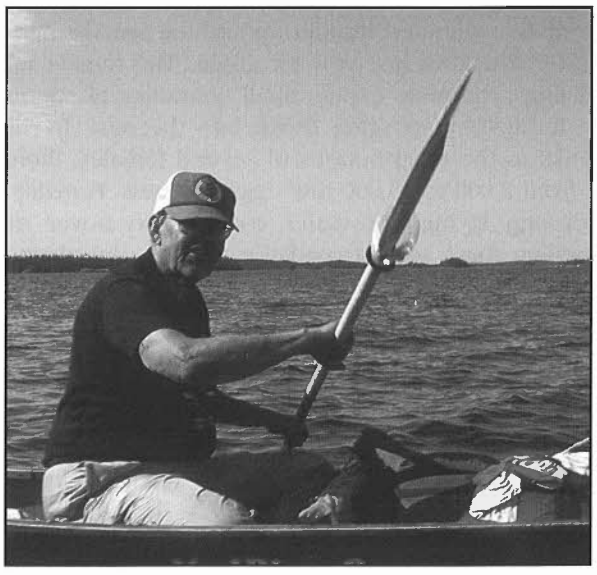
An early camp after 16 miles was in order as we had no desire to tackle the Wathaman's longest rapid, the 18-bar Stuart Rapids, unless we were fresh. Ol' Sol wasted no time in warming up the planet the next morning, and we were sweating an hour later when Stuart Rapids showed up. The mile-and-a-half-long continuous rapid started out innocently enough and we hoped we might be able to run or wade it down. But—no such luck; the rapid got thorny within a quarter mile and soon we were wading a swollen river that was obviously in flood stage. The wading quickly deteriorated, forcing us into thick alders and 10-foot-tall jack pine for another lesson in crash portaging. We were relieved to find a decent trail several 100 yards up the slope, likely a trapper's skidoo trail; but getting the canoes and packs up there was nasty with the blistering heat and voracious black flies. The Stuart Portage took almost four hours to complete but I hate to think how long it would have taken without the trapper's trail. In less than a mile we were portaging the 10-bar Cowan Rapids—with a 15-metre drop we didn't even scout the rapid. The mile-long trail was miserably wet in places; the muskeg, black flies, and heat made for another exhausting carry.

The last drop on the river at the two-part McKenzie Rapids was much easier with only a 250-yard portage. Ralph enjoyed a roller-coaster ride down a side channel on the upper rapid, which really seemed to perk him up. Our mileage for the day was only six miles but we had negotiated three major rapids in flood stage.

At camp number 11 we had a great time diving into a strong current with a powerful back eddy, the last fast water before Wathaman Lake. The refreshing swim was a tonic to mind and body and we could feel the tension of the trip begin to drain away. We had just crawled into the tents for the night when a motor boat roared up, shattering the wilderness silence we'd enjoyed for 10 days. A Native trapper, Robert McLeod, was curious as to who was travelling through his trap line, and we had an interesting conversation regarding the hazards of the river. We thanked him for the use of his skidoo trails around the last few rapids—without them we would have still been up there, thrashing through the toothpick pines.

An early start our final morning took us 14 miles across Wathaman Lake to the bridge on gravel road #105 before noon. For the first time since leaving Burbridge Lake, we were once again paddling in country that had escaped the inferno, and the heavily timbered shoreline was therapeutic to the eyes. Considering the obstacles on the river, we felt fortunate to be only one day behind schedule. So much for our 6/4 strategy—the Wathaman had been a steady slug all the way, and Ralph joked that it should be renamed the "Walkaman River."

Although our journey had been anything but leisurely, the river, one of Saskatchewan's most demanding canoe routes, left us with many indelible memories. The Wathaman is waiting for paddlers looking for a challenge. If you go, carry an ax or saw and clean out a few portages for those who follow.



CAREER PATHS FOR SUNFISH

Of all the blessings enjoyed by us humans nowadays, one of the most precious is the tremendous range of careers and lifestyles that are available to us. Just stop and look through the job ads in any newspaper, for example, and it is immediately obvious how much more varied and interesting our human possibilities are compared with those open to other creatures. A moose may be "lord of the forest" but, actually, it leads a quite rigidly defined existence in a rather small area usually and with a monotonous, hardly changing diet. Even something supposedly as "free as a bird" lives in a largely pre-programmed manner and moves back and forth each year between the same wintering and summering areas.

This sort of thing being almost universally true, it is interesting to note that the animal world does have a few exceptions—cases where individuals of certain species actually branch off at an early age and pursue very different lifestyles. One very timely and close-at-hand example is that of the Park's common member of the sunfish family—the Pumpkinseed. Pumpkinseeds, of course, are the gorgeous little shallow-water fish covered with beautiful rainbow-hued iridescent scales, and which so many youngsters have enjoyed catching when they first tried their hand at fishing. Right now, Pumpkinseeds are especially conspicuous because this is the nesting season. Many shallow shoreline areas have conspicuous "cleaned off" patches five to ten inches in diameter and, if you look closely you can see the male fish in or near the nests guarding them against intruders. It is the males, in fact, which have constructed the nests, by vigorously fanning the bottom with their tails and clearing off the debris so as to expose the hard, clean sand or gravel below.

After that it is a matter of waiting for, or persuading, a female to visit the nest and release her eggs. Courtship consists of displays and swimming in a circular path just above the nest and culminates in egg laying. At this point, the male is oriented straight up and the female, her lower surface touching his, at a 45° angle. The female releases her eggs, the male expels small quantities of sperm, and the fertilized eggs settle down into the nest. Eventually, thanks to the contributions of several females, there may be from 2,000 to 15,000 tiny eggs in a nest. Females leave after egg laying but males continue to hover nearby, guarding them against predators and fanning them so as to improve the oxygen supply. Hatching follows in a few days but the males continue to guard the minute youngsters in the nest for as long as 11 days after that. They chase away predators and retrieve any babies that stray from the nest by bringing them back in their mouths. This care by the male is absolutely essential if the young are to survive and the Pumpkinseed is often cited as a good example of a fish with highly developed parental behavior.

Be that as it may, there is nothing in what we have described so far that even hints at some sort of alternate lifestyle that might be adopted by sunfish. The fact is, however, that, even if male Pumpkinseeds are often thought of as model fathers, most of them are anything but. Far more males adopt a radically different way of life that is called "sneaking." Sneaker males do not build nests and they do not guard eggs or young fish. What they do instead is lurk close by a nest being guarded by an "honest" parental male Pumpkinseed and wait for chances to dash in and add their sperm when the nest owner is spawning with a female. They may get chased away but when the owner is thus distracted, another sneaker may well dash in and capitalize on the situation. The result is that many—often a majority—of the eggs being cared for by honest, nest-building males have in fact been fertilized by sneakers.

One of the most remarkable things about all this is that the two behaviors ("honesty" and "sneakery") are under genetic control, the same way eye color, for example, is in humans. That is, a young male Pumpkinseed is born either a parental or a sneaker and does not change from one to the other during his lifetime.

Parental-type males refrain from sex in their early years no matter what opportunities present themselves, and only start to build nests and mate with females when they are about six or seven years old. By that time they are quite large (seven or eight inches long) and relatively strong and formidable.

Sneakers, on the other hand, begin to show their distinctive sexual behavior when they are only one year (rarely) or two years old. Because they put so much energy into sneaking, they grow less quickly than young, still celibate parentals, and by the time a sneaker is four or five years old it is noticeably smaller than a parental of the same age. The youthful philandering of the sneakers exacts such a toll, in fact, that they rarely live beyond the

age of five years—even though that is before parentals even start to breed, let alone wear out and die of old age themselves.

In the natural world the only behaviors that last any appreciable time are those that maximize an individual's chances of producing young. (Individuals possessing different kinds of behavior leave no descendants at all or so few that they are swamped after a few generations by the descendants of the more prolific varieties.) Seen in this light, sneaking might be the more effective strategy for a young male Pumpkinseed. There is no guarantee that you will escape the many predators that live in our lakes and live long enough to become a parental, so maybe it would pay to start fertilizing eggs (by sneaking) as early as possible. That way, even if you die early you will have fathered at least some of the next Pumpkinseed generation. Probably some 80% of male Pumpkinseeds are sneakers but the minority (honest) behavior of the parentals can never completely die out in this species. This is because only parentals guard young and survival is impossible for Pumpkinseed fry without such care. There comes a balance point, therefore, (when there is about one parental for every four sneakers) at which the two behaviors are equally likely to leave descendants. (If there were fewer parentals there wouldn't be enough for the sneakers to parasitize and trick into raising their young. Some sneakers would therefore start to fail to leave descendants and.parentals would increase until the balance was re-established.)

We think it truly remarkable that sunfish follow two so distinctly different lifestyles but this is nothing compared to what we humans have available. And, of course, we should be very thankful for having more choices than Pumpkinseeds do. It would be as if the only possibilities open to us were being honest fathers that were roped into raising other, unscrupulous males' kids, on the one hand or, instead, leading a short "burn-out" life in which you roared around devoting almost all your energies to fathering children that would be raised by others. Who would want to be faced by such alternatives? ....

But then, on second thought maybe you shouldn't answer that question—your career counsellor might take offence.

Reprinted from the 3 July 1987 issue of Algonquin Park's The Raven, *courtesy of the Ministry of Natural Resources.*

REVIEWS

JOURNEY TO THE POLAR SEA, by Sir john Franklin, published by Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Hungary, 1998, hardcover, 487 pages.

Reviewed by Brett Hodnett.

This book never turns up when looking up canoe-related books, but a canoeing book it definitely is. Written by Sir John Franklin himself, the book tells of an epic journey through Canada's northern interior from York Factory to the Arctic Ocean and beyond. It is a historical gem that presents a first-hand account of interacting with Canada's native peoples, as well as giving a great feeling for all of the difficulties encountered when undertaking a canoe trip in the early 1800s. There is a description of the construction of one of the canoes they used, a brief description of a sport the Crees played called The Cross (Lacrosse), and many other tidbits like this.

Some may find the writing a little dry at times, and certainly understated, but Sir John was a proper English gentleman when he wasn't out adventuring around Canada, and his thoughts and insights are fascinating. And in case reading a first-hand account of a canoe trip by an actual explorer through the uncharted Canadian north isn't enough, his trip also includes starvation and murder. What more could you want?

THE CANOE: A Living Tradition, conceived by John Jennings, published by Firefly Books, Toronto, 2002, hardcover, 11x11 in, 271 pages, CAN$59.95, US$49.95.

Reviewed by Toni Harting.

Opening for the first time a book of this quality is pure magic that does a paddler's heart good. Page after page of wonderful, inspiring pictures of all sizes and shapes, many of them archival images that have rarely been seen before. There is a huge amount of fascinating historical and contemporary information on the North American canoe in this beautifully designed book, presented by 12 writers and a large number of contributors of the more than 400 illustrations, which also include maps and artwork.

The book is divided into three main sections: The Native Craft (Bark Canoes, Dugouts, Kayaks, Umiaks), The Recreational Canoe (Innovations and Mass Production; Paddling for Pleasure in the Northeastern States; The Origins of Canoe Racing), and Preserving the History of the Canoe (essays on the scholar Tappan Adney and the collector Kirk Wipper). It also contains an extensive index as well as four pages of sources and suggestions for further reading.

The Canoe is produced in collaboration with the Canadian Canoe Museum. The publication of this important book is a joyful event in the world of canoes and canoeing.

WCA TRIPS

WANT TO ORGANIZE A TRIP AND HAVE IT PRESENTED IN THE WINTER ISSUE?
Contact the Outings Committee before 10 November

For questions, suggestions, proposals to organize trips, or anything else related to the WCA Trips, contact any of the members of the Outings Committee: Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca; Barry Godden, 416-440-4208; Ann Dixie, 416-512-0292, adixie0405@rogers.com; Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@utoronto.ca

WCA trips and other activities may have an element of danger of serious personal injury. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety and well-being when participating in club events.

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All Season **FROST CENTRE CANOE ROUTES**
Ray Laughlen, 705-754-9479.----- There is some superb lake paddling in the routes out of the Frost Centre near Dorset. As I live in Haliburton and have a flexible work schedule, I visit the area frequently, especially during the week. If you would like to paddle with me, give me a call. Outings are suitable for novices.

28–29 September **ANSTRUTHER LAKE LOOP**
Doug Ashton, 905-654-0336. ----- This will be a relaxing paddle through a string of small lakes in the Apsley area. The rugged landscape and trees in their autumn colors should make this a memorable outing. Don't forget your camera! An enjoyable family outing for all ages and abilities. Limit of five boats.

5–6 October **EELS CREEK**
Anne Bradley, 519-855-4835; Barb Maughan, 519-893-0380, book before 27 September. ----- Leisurely trip from Haultain to Stony Lake with a hike to Petroglyphs Provincial Park. Limit four canoes.

20 October **LONG LAKE AREA**
Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, book before 13 October. ----- There is a group of small lakes in the rugged Kawartha countryside north of Peterborough and just west of Apsley that make a wonderful fall paddle. Multiple routes are possible depending on the weather and participants' interests. There are a number portages, but they are well marked and not particularly difficult. As the lakes are small, and the portaging easy, it can be a good outing for the family.

27 October **ELORA GORGE**
Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, book before 13 October. ----- A pleasant late-season paddle. Suitable for canoeists of any level from novice up whom just want to get some fresh air and easy whitewater before the snow flies. It's close enough to home that, even though Daylight Savings Time has just ended, you won't have to drag yourself out of bed too early to get to the river. As the water will be chilly, you will want a wetsuit or drysuit.

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FOR SHORT-NOTICE TRIPS, CHECK THE WCA WEBSITE BULLETIN BOARD

Suddenly find yourself with a free weekend and want to go paddling? Need a partner for an upcoming trip? Take advantage of our website bulletin board (**http://wildernesscanoe.ca)** to post notices for impromptu trips or partners required. Also, bookmark this page to regularly check for new posted outings. This service is a valuable addition to our regularly published quarterly outings list. We encourage members to use it. However, please note that only members may post notices. As these activities are not pre-screened by the Outings Committee, they are considered privately organized affairs and we can take no responsibility for them.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

This PRODUCTS AND SERVICES section is available, free of charge and on a first come, first serve basis, to members as well as non-members for their announcements regarding items for sale, special products, discounts, services, courses, etc. Contact the editor if more information is required.

DISCOUNTS ON TRIPPING SUPPLIES WCA members who present a membership card will receive a 10-percent discount on many nonsale times at:
- Algonquin Outfitters, RR#1, Oxtongue Lake, Dwight, Ont.
- Rockwood Outfitters, 669 Speedvale Ave. West, Guelph, Ont.
- Suntrail Outfitters, 100 Spence Str., Hepworth, Ont.
- Smoothwater Outfitters, Temagami (Hwy. 11), Ont.

Members should check at each store to find out what items are discounted.

CANOEING VIDEO Classic solo canoeing with Becky Mason; approx. 40 minutes; $39.95 + tax + shipping. Tel. 819-827-4159; fax 819-827-8563; redcanoe@istar.ca; www.wilds.mb.ca/redcanoe

BOOKS Betelgeuse Books, founded in 1981, is a small press dedicated to the publication of high quality work on northern Canadian subjects: the land, its people, its history, and the heritage of wilderness travel and canoeing. Details of current titles are available at our website: http://max-pages.com/betelgeuse

PADDLING ONTARIO ALLIANCE is a dedicated group of more than 20 adventure tourism operators who have joined forces to promote Ontario as the world's finest canoeing and kayaking destination. Respected names such as Algonquin Outfitters, Canoetours, Smoothwater, Wabakimi, and others offer everything a paddler looking for a unique adventure could want: flatwater, whitewater, river tripping, sea kayaking, eco lodges, history, self-guided trips, and more. The Alliance members provide first-class access to destinations in the whole province, offering safe wilderness experiences that excite and enlighten. More information in: www.paddlingontario.com

HERON DANCE A quarterly wilderness journal. Watercolor art, interviews, excerpts from the best of nature writing, essays. Introductory annual subscription CDN$30, renewals $40. Contact: Heron Dance, 52 Seymour St., Middlebury, VT, 05753, USA, or call 1-888-304-3766.

WOMEN'S TRIPS Baffin Island, summer 2003, cultural trip, boat travel and hiking. Pukaskwa Park canoeing, 2003. Contact: Judith Niemi, Women in the Wilderness, tel. 651-227-2284, judithniemi@hotmail.com

WHITE NIGHT WRITERS' WORKSHOP in Hofsos, Iceland, June 2003. With poets, essayists, ornithologists: David Arnason, Robert Bly, Bill Holm, Judith Niemi, John Weier. Contact: Judith Niemi, see item above.

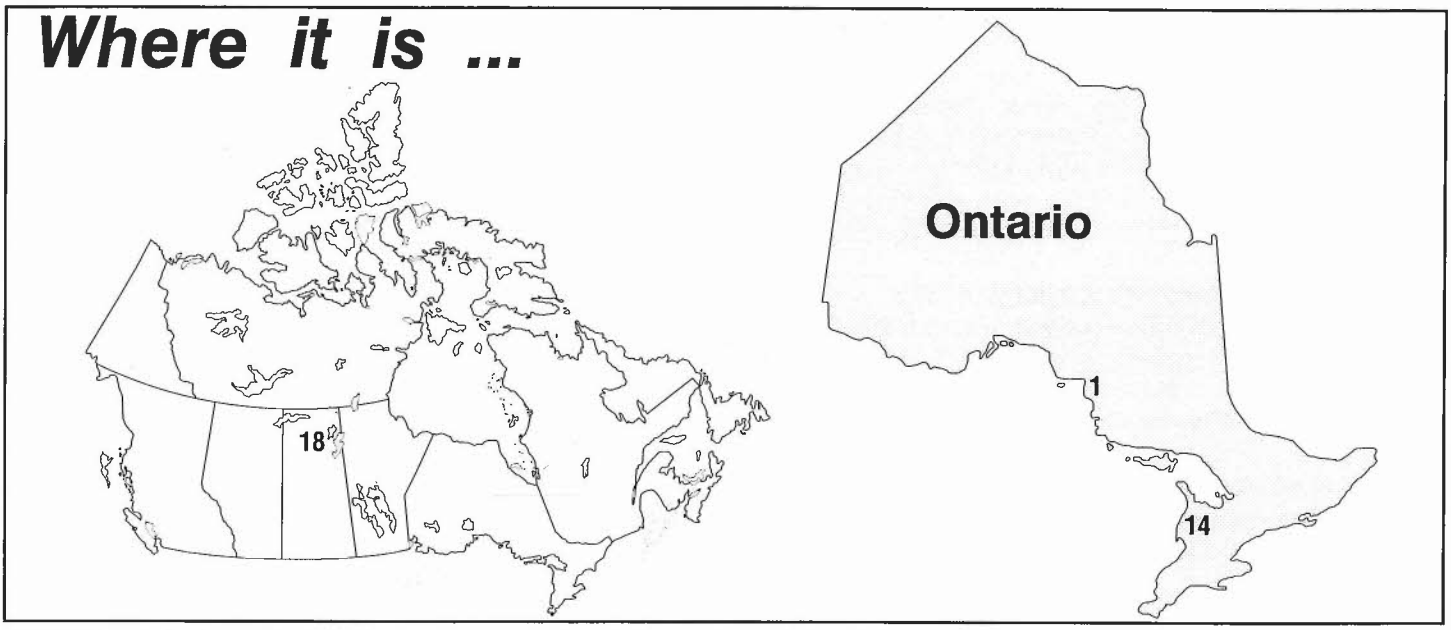
THE LODGE AT PINE COVE is the ideal starting point for a short or long visit to the heart of the French River east and west of Wolseley Bay. The completely renovated lodge has a number of rustic log cabins nestled on the heavily forested shore of the serene cove. The facilities include: log cabins and rooms, restaurant and pub, showers, canoe rental and launch, guided trips, swimming, fishing, complete outfitting, interest tours (astronomy, birding, flora, etc.). The Lodge at Pine Cove, Box 91, Noelville, ON, P0M 2N0; tel. 705-898-2500; alex@frenchriver.com; www.frenchriver.com; www.frenchriveroutfitters.com

CANOETOURS We offer a fine variety of fully provisioned and equipped canoe trips, such as two-, three-, and seven-day trips, single trips, corporate trips, day trips with overnight stay at a lodge, and more. We also have canoes and kayaks for rent. For information, contact canoetours@hotmail.com and www.canoetours.com

BLUEWATER WILDERNESS EXPEDITIONS is a touring service that provides all-inclusive travel packages in the Bruce Peninsula. We offer access to local natural attractions and activities including canoeing on the Rankin River, kayaking on Lake Huron, camping on the rocky shores of Georgian Bay, climbing, wilderness backpacking, and hiking some of the best parts of the Bruce Trail. We provide three-, four-, and seven-day packages to our clients during the summer months. Information: www.bluewaterwildernessexpeditions.com

ELDERTREKS is the world's first adventure travel company for travellers 50 and over. We offer small group (maximum of 16 travellers) adventures based on destination, activity level (from easy to challenging), duration, or activities, such as walking, trekking, rafting, or sailing. Trip extensions and custom-designed trips are also available. In business for over 15 years, we offer programs in over 50 countries from Antarctica to Mongolia and Peru to Iceland. We also offer some trips in Canada.

ElderTreks is also very involved in giving back to the community and to making the tourism industry more sustainable. This upcoming fall, ElderTreks is sponsoring the first prize for Canada's Annual Super Walk for Parkinson's by donating a trip for two, including air transport, to Costa Rica (retail value $10,000). In addition to many other initiatives, ElderTreks also supports environmental initiatives such the International Year of Ecotourism through the International Ecotourism Society. If you would like more information, please contact us at ElderTreks, 597 Markham St., Toronto, Ontario, M6G 2L7; tel. 416-588-5000, 1-800-741-7956; fax 416-588-9839; website www.eldertreks.com



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