



The Spirits of Chapleau-Nemegosenda

Text by Gary Storr

Photos by Gary Storr and Graham Bryan

“Have you ever read Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*?” I deadpan when people ask me how the trip went. Of course there was no Kurtz, no embodiment of mystery and evil for whom we were being sent—there was only the river itself. There were no ivory traders whose exploits sullied humankind’s lofty moral expectations. We had only the spirits.

It was past midnight when our vehicle lurched into the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve east of Lake Superior, towing a rickety trailer laden with packs and canoes. We peered out the windshield searching for a sign that would point us to Racine Lake. The plan was to camp there and in the morning meet up with our driver who would shuttle us



to the river. No sign. Above the forest canopy the sky was starlit yet inky black; below it, our headlights deepened the shadows—trees leapt at us from every bend. We stopped on the road to discuss our options and from the quarter points of the vehicle relieved ourselves, subconsciously marking our territory. *Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!* Then we climbed back in and carried on.

We'd come to paddle the Chapleau River, a scenic waterway that forms the eastern boundary of the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve as it courses northward from the town of Chapleau to Kapuskasing Lake. There were four of us: Dan Bell, Graham Bryan, Ross Robertson, and Gary Storr, and we were planning to do this trip during the first eight days of August 2008. Our

single-minded intent was to blast through as much whitewater as we could, maybe spot a lynx, and enjoy eight uninterrupted days on the river. We figured on four days to Elsas, a former mill town on the Canadian National Railway line at Kapuskasing Lake, then four days back on a quiet swamp known as the Nemegosenda River, finishing at Westover Lake.

Eventually we found it—a small, hand-lettered sign tacked to a tree at a dark intersection: *Racine Lake*. Minutes later we were at the campground. We quickly pitched our tents, tossed back a celebratory beer, and sacked out.

In the morning, Dan and I arose ahead of the others. We were preparing our morning brew when we noticed a fox sitting expectantly at the edge of

the campsite. It was a tame creature, completely without guile and it filled me with a sense of optimism. The natural expression of a fox is a smile. This was our charm, a sign of good things to come.

After breakfast, we were delivered to a spot partway along Island Rapids by an affable fellow named Sylvain. I'd found Sylvain earlier, hairy and shirtless, at a trailer site strewn with empty beer cans. He cheerfully drove us up a logging road, then pulled over and announced, "This is it!" A bridge spanned the rapids and the road bisected the portage. Leaving us to our task, he waved and disappeared behind a billowing cloud of dust.

The rainy season had extended well into summer and we soon discovered the trails didn't dry up before the next

downpour moved desultorily over the river. There is a decided incongruity in plunging from a dusty, elevated logging road into a wet, northern rain forest, but in our eagerness to start paddling we thought nothing of it. We lugged our gear down to the riverbank, loaded the canoes, and pushed off.

It's like coming home, those first limbering paddle strokes that bring you to speed, then glide you quietly past myriad waypoints alongshore. Your other self melts away and you become "Frontiersman," the guy you'd be if you could do it all over again. We approached the landing to the next portage after only a few minutes, abruptly cutting short the reverie of self-abandonment. "Pack mule," by contrast, bites.

The Chapleau and Nemegosenda rivers tumble across the Canadian Shield along parallel fault lines so what lies primarily underfoot is granite. And granite means challenging carries. Toss in a thunderstorm and not only are the portages potentially crippling, they're saturated. Mud, mosquitoes, thickening undergrowth—it all adds up to a route that appears to be seldom travelled and with the passage of time, grows wilder. I wouldn't recommend it to novice paddlers. That said, there are few places as beautiful.

At the base of the second, unrunnable rapid we took lunch under towering cedars and watched the river burst through the final bend into the calm below our vantage point. Our sole objective was to cover twenty kilometres each day, but after two hours of portaging, eighteen remained. We needed to hustle. What we didn't know was that downriver a dearth of campsites would necessitate lengthy forced marches—long days awaited us. Twenty kilometres wouldn't be an issue.

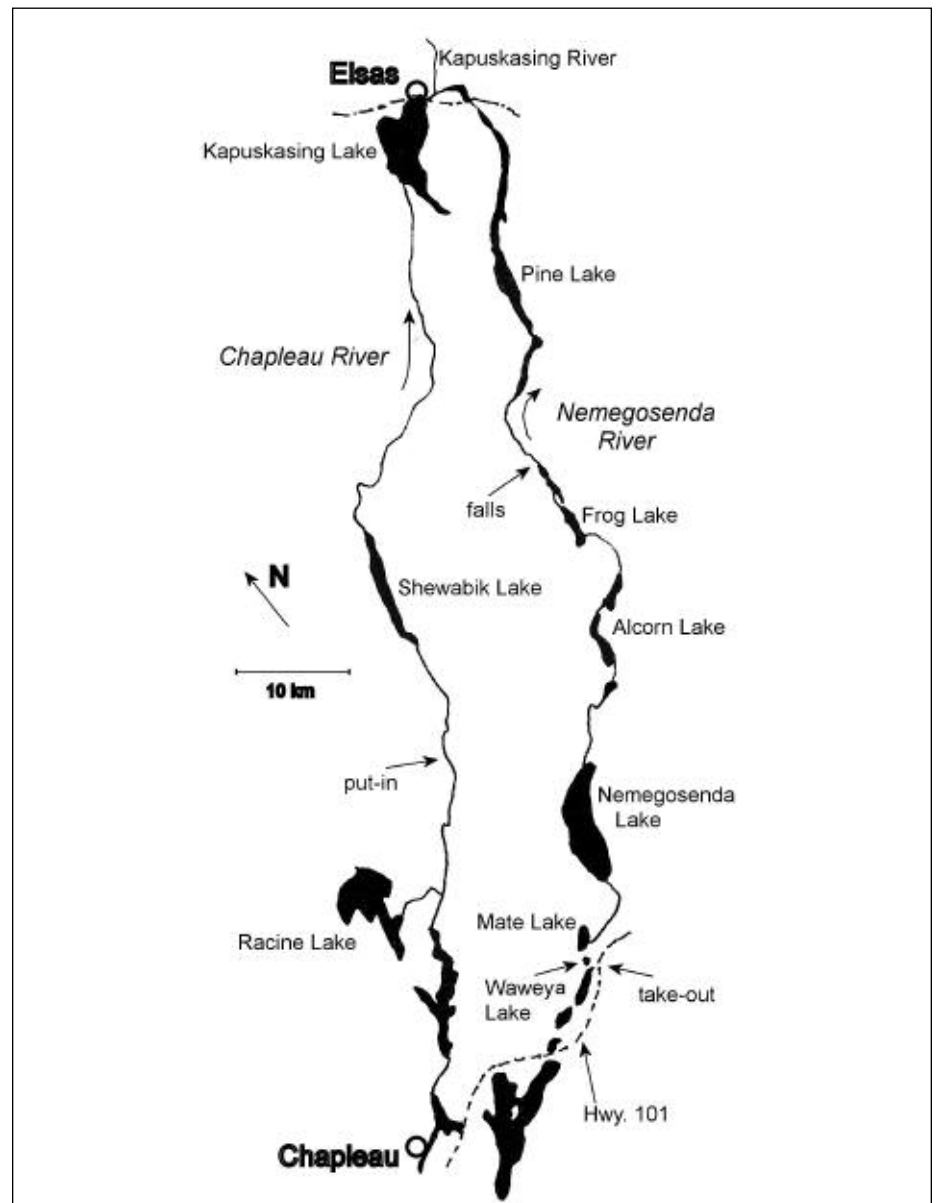
After paddling a placid expanse of reedy shoreline, we at last cut our teeth on a bouldery stretch of white-water. It was an easy run but it was enough to soak us through and whet our appetites for more. Two short rapids followed including one that

obliged us to portage, but a few moments of exhilaration were ample payback for the effort expended in getting there. With raised spirits we paddled into Shewabik Lake and began to look for a place to make camp.

Shewabik Lake is a work in progress—it offers a rare opportunity to observe an active shoreline. An island partway along was bridged over time by wave action and is now a pebbled spit sweeping out from shore. Rounding this feature opens a lake vista to the north, and tucked behind the spit is a shallow bay that for us cradled a bit of magic. Here, a solitary Bonaparte gull fluttered on the breeze, gliding up then swooping unsteadily

across the water, never quite grazing the surface. We supposed it was harvesting dragonflies, all the while indifferent to our gaze. (Our supposition was based on the fact that we were frequently shrugging dragonflies from our shoulders.) These revitalizing glimpses of life's tiny wonders are gateways to a world of simplicity and unencumbrance. We drank in the scene until satisfied, then took up our paddles and dug in to the north.

—The following morning we broke camp and paddled under sunny skies out of Shewabik Lake. Dan, from the bow seat, noticed a rainbow in the mist to our left. It paced us until the mist burned off, at which point we found





ers, whose caprices we were forced to contend with over the remainder of the trip.

Soon after re-entering the river, granite walls rose at our flanks and we found ourselves faced with another daunting carry, this one bypassing a waterfall. We dragged the canoes out of the gorge from the still water near the brink, then muddied our backsides slipping down into the fault below the cataract. Royalex trips, Kevlar dreams. The waterfall cascades through a crook in the bedrock and is hidden from view. The current pushes strongly out from its base but we drove against it in our canoes to see what we'd been made to skirt. Resting in the damp air below the falls we basked in its energy, then ferried across to a rock face etched with faded pictographs.

Grace Rajnovich explains in her book, *Reading Rock Art*, that the circle is the basic shape in Algonkian symbolism—it provides the form of the medicine wheel. Within the wheel are the four realms of the spirit world: sky, earth, underground, and underwater. The base of the rock face where we bobbed in our canoes is a sacred site, one where the realms meet. Not only is it a place of spiritual significance, it's the perfect canvas upon which to convey one's beliefs. Barely discernible on the lichen-encrusted wall are animal figures and the circle itself.

Learning to shoot rapids is three parts book-learning and ninety-seven parts calamity. With all due respect to Bill Mason, when I stare at the photographs in *Path of the Paddle*, I might as well be holding the book upside down—it only begins to make sense when I climb into a boat and start careening off boulders. The point of the exercise, of course, is to not bounce off rocks. My brother-in-law, Ross, good-naturedly partners me in the stern. I shout commands over my shoulder, which he calmly ignores, and this system seems to work fine for us, but occasionally it doesn't.

That afternoon after leaving the pictographs behind, Ross and I watched

ourselves the epicentre of a magnificent sun dog mirrored in the lake. From beyond our bow and stern all the colours of the spectrum arced away to the west.

Indigenous peoples believed rainbows were bridges to the spirit world. At a time in life when every wilderness excursion kick-starts my inner Grey Owl, a belief system comprised of many deities offers an appealing tack. When whitecaps push my canoe

precariously from behind and break over its deck, don't preach of atmospheric pressure and lunar tides—those are the gods of meteorologists. I prefer to imagine the horned lynx, Mishipezheu, making tempestuous the water with giant sweeps of his tail. The rumble emanating from dark clouds overhead is Thunderbird vomiting up his enemy, the Serpent, and lightning, the act of flinging Serpent to the ground. It was these spirits, and oth-





as Dan and our teacher, Graham, appeared at the top of a long extent of whitewater and began to pick their way through the final descent. They were executing flawlessly, guiding their canoe through the undulating chop, when they abruptly found themselves hung up on a rock near the base of the rapid. It was nothing of consequence — they stuck out a foot and pushed away, but I made a mental note and chided them lightheartedly.

Ross and I were up next so we hurried back to the top of the portage and quickly hatched a plan of action. Determined not to repeat Dan and Graham's mistake, we chose our point of entry and smoothly glided in. Gaining momentum, we began to carve a crisp, clean run, slipping through chutes, drenching ourselves until we neared the place that had given them pause. We drew hard to the right where I spied a downstream V, the safe passage between two rocks,

and we knifed toward it. As we prepared to exit triumphantly, I noticed Graham smile and raise his camera.

Suddenly I saw what he saw and a knot formed in my colon. "Shit!" I yelled, as we rammed into the V. It was a ledge, and unhappily for us, one with a significant drop below it. As rivers are given to do, it turned us broadside to the flow and began to tip us perilously over the precipice. Graham later commented that he could see the entire contents of our canoe. Ross and I held onto the gunwales like grim death while the river churned around us, nudging us closer and closer. Then soundlessly we slid over the brink. When we opened our eyes we were right-side up and miraculously, still afloat. But there was no saving face. The current swung our stern downriver and flushed us out the base of the rapid ass-backwards. All we could do was grin sheepishly while Graham snapped photographs.

There were rapids which humbled us and others that lifted us to happy exultation. Some just left us feeling lucky. One such rapid was a split that hurtled past both sides of an island. We moved our gear to the base of the island, then returned to our canoes, scouting the trail on either side. The channel to the right was impassable—there was a small waterfall partway along and the rest was choked by deadfall and huge, gnarly boulders. At the base of the island where the channels collide there was an eddy. We'd have to snag a sharp right at this spot or risk being swept downriver without our gear. We put our heads together and declared it a go.

Graham and Dan went first. Ross and I watched until they were out of sight, then waited another prudent minute before pushing away. We couldn't afford a midstream pileup. It was a spirited run rife with obstacles. Unable to process the sheer number of



rocks in my field of vision, my brain balked and shut down. Working on raw nerve, we scraped over boulders and rode up their sides, scooping vast quantities of water until the base of the

island appeared around the final bend. It was like losing a game of Tetris. We pulled our canoe as close to the right bank as possible, avoiding overhanging branches, and prayed for a suc-

cessful eddy turn. At just the right moment I thrust my paddle hard by the bow and swung the stern into the tiny piece of quiet water. Ross executed a broad sweep from behind and pushed us into place just as Graham and Dan moved aside to accommodate us. It was reassuring to see that their canoe held at least as much water as ours.

At the base of an ominous set of rapids that we wisely chose to bypass, trees lined the riverbanks like walls of a shrine. The hair bristled on the back of my neck—there were ghosts here. A lingering residue of ill fortune pervaded, then quickly became apparent: on our left, the bow of a canoe jammed in the rocks, a reminder of some ancient, undeveloped skill-set; the twisted wreckage of an aluminum canoe stuck in the branches of a tree to our right. More remains lay further downstream. It was a canoe graveyard, hallowed ground, and we allowed ourselves to be carried through it in silent awe. How had these people gotten out of here? Their accounts would surely have been riveting.

We made it to Elsas in three days. We'd run rapids and carried our heavy boats over back-breaking portages. We'd paddled wide, reedy expanses of slow-moving water over which bald eagles soared and saw stands of aspen, their tops unfurled like umbrellas trembling high above the surrounding canopy. It was late when we entered Kapuskasing Lake. Far to the north we saw a cluster of cabins and a railway bridge to the east. We made it there in an hour. While we were having supper the rain began and it rained every day after.

Elsas is a ghost town possessed. Unable to come to grips with its own demise, it's possessed of a tiny spark of *joie de vivre*. The sawmill closed in the 1930s but from its inception the hamlet has sustained itself as a CNR camp. The only access is by canoe, train, or float plane. There are a dozen or so cabins, a former church, and a school, now a private cottage, that





Lester Pearson visited in 1948. The last full-time resident, a hermit named Walsh, died in 2003. Now the hunting and fishing crowd restore life to the former settlement. Operating for a few months each year is a bed-and-breakfast, the Dolittle Inn, and behind it, a pub—a refurbished tool shed. The décor is shanty chic, hockey-and-fishing bric-a-brac accented with draped netting over the bar. Unfortunately for us, the pub was closed, its owners absent. All thoughts of a cold, refreshing beer evaporated. We were generously offered its use by the owner's brother, Dave Quigley, as refuge from the mosquitoes that nightly drove us into our tents before sunset. The shots, however, were poured from our own stock.

The Chapleau River, or Keksquasheshing, Ojibway for “river full of weeds,” flows into a vast lowland. Departing from Elsas, our route led us briefly down the Kapuskasing River, then east across a man-made trench to the Nemegosenda, “river of the big trout,” where we plied wide, lazy

meanderings of glaciated wetland. Moving languorously upstream, our paddles clacked against reeds and stalks of wild rice. Above us, a rail-truck driver waved as he crossed the bridge. Ahead of schedule, we opted for a short, restful day on the river. We set up camp on picnic rock, a solitary chunk of Precambrian stone that rises enticingly from the water. Dave told us his fish finder measured the depth here at thirty feet. The nearest campsite is twenty-five kilometres upriver.

Elsasians call this place Pine Lake, a name that harkens back to a time be-

fore logging. Now, there's scarcely a pine to be seen on the distant upland ridges. From this point onward, the first order of business when landing at a campsite was to pitch a tarp and stand idly beneath it, spilling pooled rainwater off the sides and splashing ourselves in the process. Grey skies lingered overhead, puddling the ground and saturating the forest. Each leaf became a tiny salver of droplets conspiring with its multitude to soak anyone who brushed past. We were drier in our boats than on our campsites and never wetter than on the





portages. But there wasn't a moment when I wanted to be anywhere else.

Seasoned canoe trippers develop a "leg timer"—they know the duration of a portage if given its approximate distance beforehand. It becomes innate in the way a bird knows where south is. In Chapleau, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources destroyed this notion by means of a simple device: they mislabelled all the portage distances on the map. Our leg timers were restored by adding fifty percent to the length of each carry.

Over the next few days we pressed on doggedly across broad sweeps of marsh occasionally cut through with serpentine channels. We waded our canoes up foaming rapids, pushing against shove, banging our shins on the slippery rocks. We ducked the grasp of charred skeletons that reached from intermittent burns along the riverbanks and crawled over progressively higher levels of Shield like gasping tetrapods evolving from the primordial ooze. Our meagre advance was accomplished by a series of hellish portages, each more difficult than the last. "Son of a bitch!" sputtered a fallen comrade as we dragged our canoes through ankle-deep mud awash in

rainwater. Sodden branches thwacked us in the face.

"It can't get any worse," we promised ourselves.

But it did.

One afternoon, we dragged our gear

through a fish camp at Twenty-foot Falls in a torrential downpour, then stood high above the cataract in an osmotic trance, letting its power seep into us. We gathered tentatively around a steel rod embedded in the rock at



cliff's edge, examining it like Kubrick's apes at the base of the monolith. A sudden crack of lightning reverberated across the sky instantly topping up our intelligence quotients and sending us scrambling off the rock in sheer terror. We'd been playing with a lightning rod in a thunderstorm! Either we'd get through this alive or we'd succumb to natural selection. I, for one, wasn't placing any bets.

The next day, near to abandoning hope of reaching a campsite, we refocused our energies on merely locating solid ground. Our access to the surrounding forest was blocked by immense tracts of shoreline fen. The sun moved across the sky and afternoon faded to evening. Then, as we approached the north end of Frog Lake, a clarion call: "Over there! Dirt!" Earthen riverbanks rose serendipitously on both sides. But there was no place we could call home.

Graham, who possesses adventurous tendencies that make the rest of us cringe, noticed a muddy bearslide on the east bank and decided to investigate. Using roots to haul himself up, he disappeared into the forest, then reported back. Up we went. Tramping down wet bracken ferns adjacent to the trail, we made camp. Further along the path lay deadfall shredded with claw marks. Later, the snap of a fallen branch pricked our ears. Was the bear informing us of his presence and advising us to move off? There were four of us and only one of him so we carried on with our camp chores unconcerned.

With fifty combined summers of canoe tripping under our belts, we learned long ago not to let rain dampen our spirits, but supper had to be hurried so we could dive for cover before mosquito hour struck. A tiny zizzing around our ears intensified into a high-pitched, whining hum as throngs more joined the chorus. Soon the forest was vibrant with mosquitoes. We spent this time reading and stretching tired back muscles—we were slowly becoming damaged goods. Meanwhile, a dense layer of



tiny critters blanketed the tents, buzzing at the screens, thirsting mindlessly for blood. God help any man who had to pee.

After the buzzing subsided, I contorted in my sleeping bag listening for night sounds: a barred owl, a racoon, but the world outside our tent was a boundless void, the stillness as black as the night. If we were to receive a nocturnal visitor, I prayed for the bear

and not Wendigo, the giant cannibal of native lore. He would come crashing through the darkness to pick his teeth with our bones.

With increasing bewilderment we found ourselves in situations that normally would have triggered alarm bells. As it was, our learning curve veered sharply to the left, describing the wide, dipping arc of a boomerang as it winged back to clip us in the butt.





That night we set up camp high atop an island near the south end of Nemegosenda Lake. To reach the peak, we tied a rope to a tree above a mud-slide and pulled ourselves up, hauling

our gear behind us. Gaining the summit, we shrank from Thunderbird's fury once more as jagged bolts of lightning sizzled above the pines at the highest elevation on the lake.

Our final day found us lily-dipping on Borden Creek, the last sparkling ribbon of water we would paddle on this trip. Decrepit beyond my years, I squirmed in my seat and took pleasure in watching a pair of cedar waxwings alight on their namesake tree. Soon after, we entered Mate Lake. Failing to regard the magnitude of an esker that divides the lake, we were rudely awakened by the portage leading out of it. Its gradient is so severe that a man with a canoe on his shoulders might bump repeatedly into the base before realizing he was meant to go straight up.

Emerging from the forest at the top of the incline, Dan and I caught our breath, then stepped onto a giant artificial scar scraped from the wilderness. We noticed an animal at its base, silhouetted in profile against the intrusion, its head turned toward us. We paused for a longer look. It was our talisman, the fox, greeting us on the final portage. We stared at each other for a moment, then it turned and trotted off. I smiled, aware that in spite of our trials, this place had somehow gotten into me. We had imposed our wills on forces that had toyed with us and



for a few shining moments acquitted ourselves with aplomb. But even though we had joined the ranks of the flesh-and-blood spirits who had passed this way before us, there were no high-fives. We weren't done yet.

Paddling across a pretty kettle lake called Waweya, we pulled ashore at the place we'd arranged to find our vehicle and *quelle surprise*—it wasn't there! *Heart of Darkness*? Perhaps. *Outward Bound* for grey-beards? You won't hear a word from us to the contrary.

[Another Chapleau trip is presented in the Winter 2008 issue of *Nastawgan* (ed.)]





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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.

WCA Photo Contest

Members of the WCA visit many incredible places on this planet, both near and far. However, we don't often get a chance to share our stories and images with other members. But now there is such an opportunity, because all members are invited to participate in the search for the best photographs made by WCA members.

Select three of your favourite canoe/kayak/wilderness trip photographs (flat water, whitewater, camping, portaging, swimming, anything you encounter on wilderness canoe trips and related activities) and enter them in this competition.

Photographs can be made in traditional analog format (35 mm, medium, negative, slide, color, black-and-white, etc.) and digital format. But all submissions must be in the form of digital files, so you need to digitize the analog originals before submitting them. The files should be in JPEG at 300 dpi at 4 x 6 inch or larger. Please include a brief description of each image and the full name of the photographer, as well as some basic technical infor-

mation on the photographs.

Send your selection to Toni Harting, Nastawgan editor, at: journal@wildernesscanoe.ca. Toni will be the main judge, assisted by several photo-savvy people who are not members of the WCA. The closing date for submission of your entries is 1 October 2010.

Winners will be announced at the Wine & Cheese Party in November 2010. The top ten photographs will be enlarged and laminated to be a part of the WCA booth at public events. In addition, winners will be published in the Winter 2010 issue of *Nastawgan*. The top winners will also receive an autographed copy of Toni Harting's book *Shooting Paddlers, Photographic Adventures with Canoeists, Kayakers and Rafters*.

We're hoping that this invitation may provide a spark for future similar initiatives – perhaps making this a fun, annual event! So, grab your camera and go shooting...!

The Board

Editorial

The production team regrets that in the last issue of *Nastawgan*, SPRING 2010, a different font was used than normal. Steps have been taken to avoid this from happening again. The dastardly culprit of this misdeed has been severely punished.



Deadlines

The deadline dates for submitting material for the three remaining issues in 2010 are: the first day of May, August, and November. If you have questions, please contact the editor; addresses on the last page.

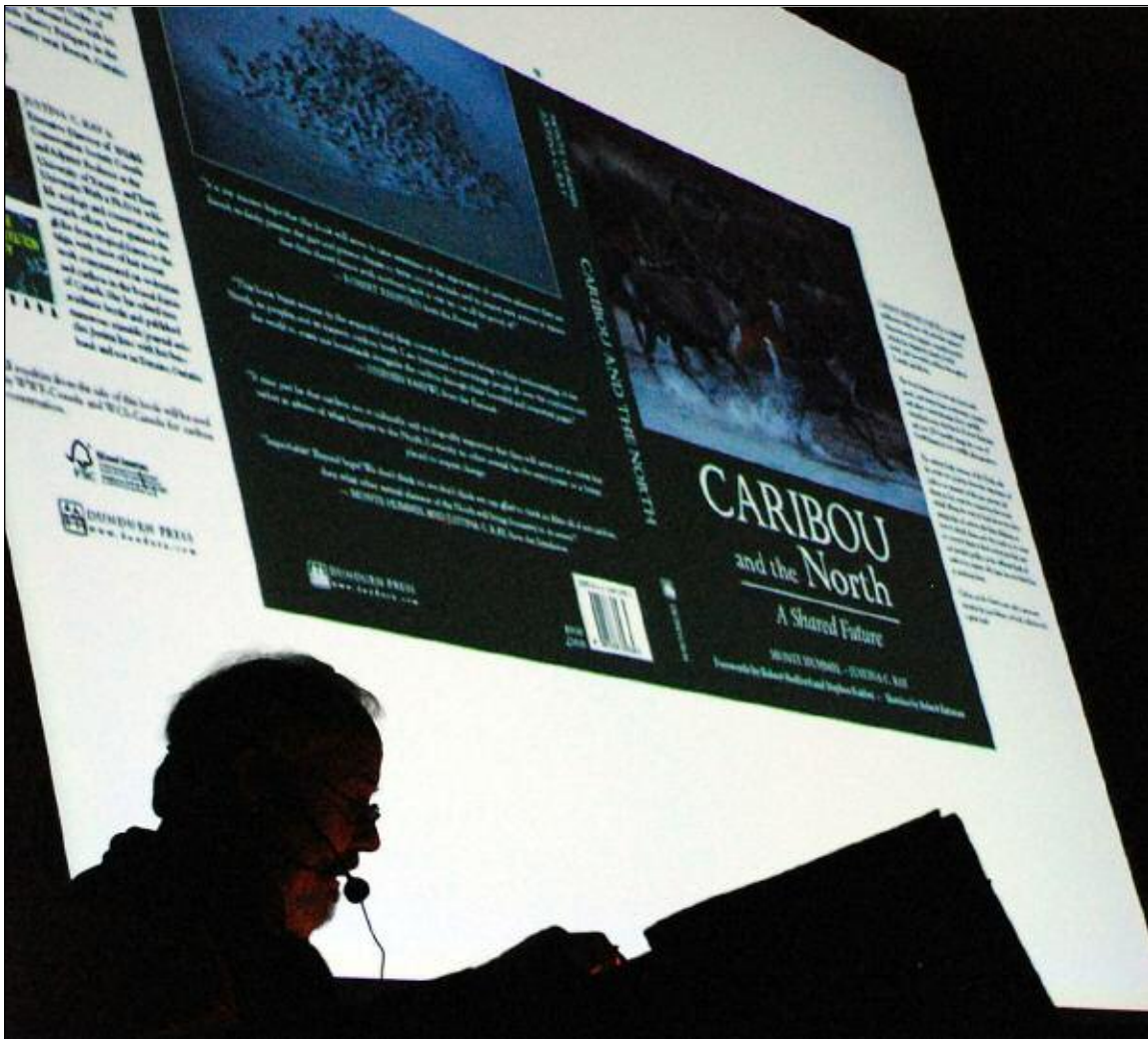


Symposium: Northern Travels & Northern Perspectives IX

More than 600 paddlers and other lovers of the outdoors thoroughly enjoyed the 18 presentations made at this annual symposium, organized by George Luste and sponsored by the WCA, held in Toronto on February 5 and 6, 2010. The following presentations were made:

David Thompson & his Writings	Bill Moreau
Dubawnt River Art Expedition	Christine Persaud
The Raven's Gift and Wilderness Spirituality	Jon Turk
Big Thaw: Travels in the Melting North	Ed Struzik
Arctic Issues: Barren Ground Caribou	Monte Hummel
Blue Covenant: Water Issues for Canadians	Maude Barlow
Pike's Portage: Stories of a Distinguished Place	Morton Asfeldt, Bob Henderson

E.T Seton's Arctic Prairies	John Wadland
Thaidene Nene: Land of the Ancestors	Larry Innes
Journey to Nitchequon: A Fur Trade Family in Ungava	Virginia Barter
Vachon River in Ungava	Eric Leclair
Tale of Two Trips: Romaine's Final Gift	David Lee, Dave Robinson
An Innocent on Baffin, circa 1950s	Terrence Ryan
Rocks & Sand – Sand & Rocks	Glen Hooper
More Lost Ontario Canoe Routes	Kevin Callan
Sacred Headwaters: Paddling the Spatsizi and Stikine	Jay Neilson, Frank Knaapen
50 Mile Portage to the Rae River & Some Paddling Too	Borealis Expedition
Rivers in the Land of Genghis Kan	Hermann Harbisch, Claudia Moessner





ANNUAL GENERAL MEET

20 February 2010



Photo – Aleks Gusev

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**Midland, Ontario
Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons
Wye Marsh**



WCA 2010 Annual General Meeting

More than 40 WCA members turned out on Saturday, 20 February, for this year's AGM at Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons and the Wye Marsh near Midland, Ontario. Restaurant Sainte-Marie provided delicious goodies to start the day, and we had a cozy 17th-century-styled room to hold our business meeting in. Chairman Aleks Gusev had us in rapt attention from the start, showing You Tube excerpts of an amazing grizzly-cub-and-cougar encounter, and "This is Canoeing," a wonderful new film by a British company, shot mostly in Canada

with a lot of familiar faces.

In his Chairman's report Aleks presented a number of highlights for 2009, including the WCA presence on You Tube, and a redesign of the WCA and CCR websites, which he gave an impressive demonstration of. Overall, the club seems to have more people having more fun! Goals for 2010 include completing canoe routes on MyCCR and increasing the number of "green" (i.e. online) Nastawgan subscriptions. Outings must remain part of our core value: "It's all about giving back and paying forward."

Reports followed from the treasurer, membership, and outings. The WCA board for 2010 will see Allan Jacobs coming in, as Jon McPhee completes his term and steps down.

We were served a delicious hot meal, and then headed a short way down the road to the Wye Marsh for our afternoon activity. Naturalist Sarah showed a film on the trumpeter swan recovery program, which has been a huge success in Ontario. She talked about swan behaviour and fielded our questions. We then headed out in two guided groups. The beautiful sunshine and warm temperatures allowed us to hike on the packed trail rather than snowshoe. We even tried out the assistive devices for the trail, both trail runner and kick sled. Our first stop was at the birds of prey collection. We were amazed by the size of the immature bald eagle up close. The wooded trail winds its way down to the marsh proper and the area of water that is bubbled to provide for the group of swans that have not learned to migrate. We met Adele, the swan who goes out on school visits, but who will only allow one naturalist to take her! A tower allowed a distant view over the large area of marshland, and some took the longer hike on the marsh boardwalk.

Back at the centre, Aleks held court for a brainstorming session as we enjoyed hot chocolate and goodies and toured the exhibits of snakes, frogs, etc. that we often encounter on our canoe trips. A few went out for a spring-like cross country ski.

Thanks to all who were able to participate. Go to the WCA website, click WCA on Video, and select WCA AGM 2010 to see musical highlights of the day.

There has been a suggestion that we return here next year, making the afternoon session a guided snowshoe/ski/hike of the Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons historical site, with a visit to the museum and some sort of voyageur-related speaker. Please let me know how that would suit you; any other suggestions you may have are also welcome.

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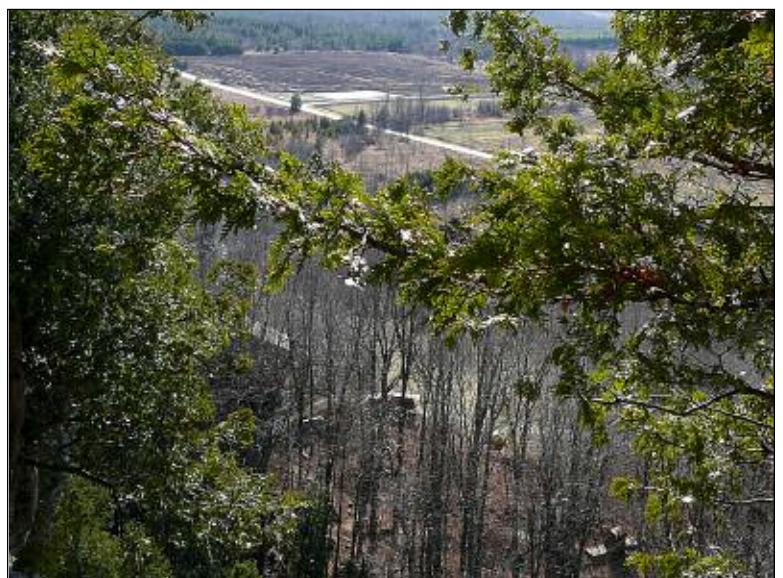


Hiking Weekend at Duntroon

On November 14 and 15, 2009, a small group of WCA members joined together for a fun weekend of hiking, eating, and story sharing. Our home base was the farmhouse at Highlands Nordic and we hiked Ontario's Bruce Trail in Kolapore and the Pretty River Park. We had two new members join us: Val Davis-Kelly and Meir Bester. Val shared the following in a follow-up email:

"Thanks to everyone who organized, drove, planned, booked, cooked, led, welcomed, and just were themselves making this weekend a wonderful experience. I am glad to have met each and every one of you and to have spent some precious time with you hiking through paradise. From the sunshine of Saturday to the damp mist of Sunday, it was a great ride."

Submitted by Barb Young on behalf of the organizers: Barb & Dave Young, Diane Lucas, Rick Sabourin, Beth & Bruce Bellaire.



Quiet, or the computers will eat you

Almost all of us will confess to a certain exasperation with computers. We admire their awesome power but very few of us really understand how they work and we often find them downright frustrating. Still, if you think that we humans have it bad, some other animals have even bigger computer problems.

This really came home to us on our last canoe trip up on the west side of the Park, when we witnessed some impressive computing by a Barred Owl. The Barred Owl is our commonest owl and one that is quite familiar to most visitors to Algonquin as the author of all those crazy nighttime hoots and cackles, sometimes rendered as “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?” On this occasion the owl not only gave us an excellent vocal performance, but also came so close to our campsite that we were able to get our flashlight on it and have a good look. It had been looking down at us for a minute or two when we heard something start to rustle on the forest floor a few feet away. Instantly, the owl’s attention was riveted towards the sound. The face pointed directly at it and the owl’s eyes seemed to stare with a burning, concentrated power that even we human observers found a little disconcerting. And then it happened. The owl silently glided down from its perch, grabbed something

from the leaf litter, and flew off into the forest.

The whole thing was over so quickly and seemed to be such an unequal contest that we couldn’t help feeling a little sympathy for the victim, and wondering what advice we might have offered to it and to all the thousands of other mice who suffer the same fate every night in Algonquin. Is there, in fact, anything that a mouse could do to lessen its chances of becoming supper for an owl and then, a few hours later, being coughed up as a lifeless pellet of fur and bones?

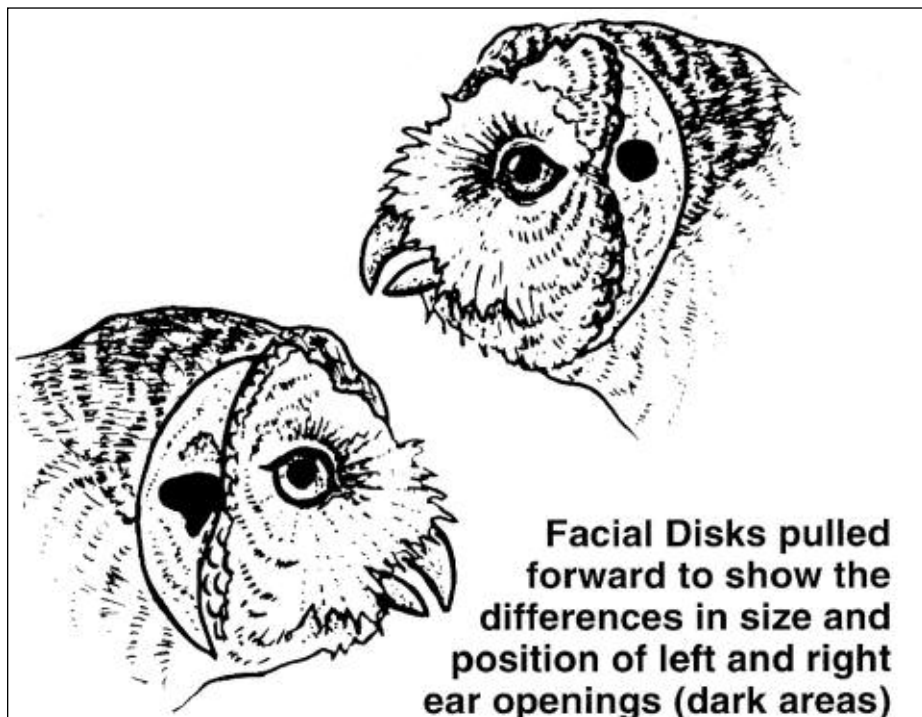
We might suggest staying out of sight because we all know, of course, about the incredible powers of night vision possessed by owls. Our Barred Owl, for example, has eyes fully one hundred times as sensitive to low light as human eyes, and it can easily see in what we would perceive as total darkness. Still, a moment’s reflection will show that owls must be using something more than just vision to catch its mouse on a very dark night, even when we were shining a flashlight into its eyes. Also, as good as owl vision may be, it can’t explain the ability of owls to capture mice in the winter when they are completely out of sight under the snow. Hearing is about the only other candidate, but can any of us really believe that a Barred Owl, sitting ten me-

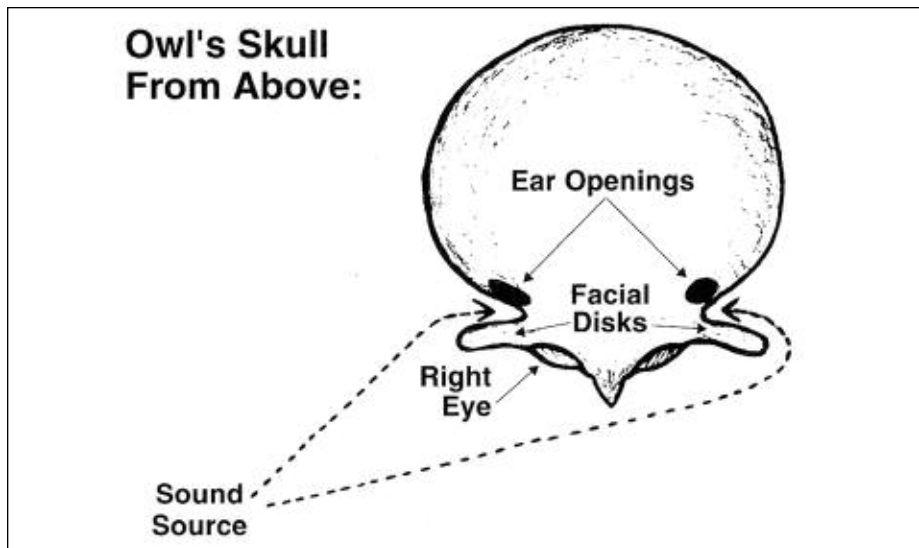
tres up in a tree, could hear a mouse running through a tunnel along the ground beneath the snow? Or, if it could, would it be able to pinpoint the sound source accurately enough to make a successful blind grab?

Well, perhaps we should take a closer look at just exactly how owls do hear. Their ears, like those of all birds, are located on the side of the head behind the eyes. Basically, they are just holes in the skull hidden from our eyes by the owl’s head feathering. There is, however, at least one thing about the ears of owls that is very odd indeed. The external ear openings are way out of alignment! The left ear opening is noticeably higher on the side of the head (a little higher than the eye), round, and downward-pointing. The opening of the right ear, on the other hand, is situated below eye level, is of quite different shape, and points upwards.

Now, it turns out that owls (and many other birds as well) have hearing that is many times more acute than ours. We think this is fairly easy for us to accept, especially since we are already used to the idea that owls far surpass us in visual sensitivity. The far more difficult point is the question of whether owls can really be so attuned to the precise direction of sound sources. We humans have a crude ability to locate the sources of sounds, but we are notorious for our poor accuracy and sometimes quite bad mistakes.

Experiments with owls have shown that their ears and brains work along similar lines as ours – but with some very sophisticated differences. First of all, by placing tiny microphones right inside the external ear openings of an owl and then producing sound from various points around the owl’s head, scientists were able to show that a sound is measurably different when it arrives at each of an owl’s ears. Sounds produced from the same level (say, eye level) but moving in the horizontal plane around the owl’s head arrive in the two ears with the same loudness, but at slightly different times depending how far off to the right or left the sound is produced. Sounds originating from directly in front of the owl’s head arrive at the two ears at exactly the same time but, if they come from below the owl’s eye level, they will arrive with greater intensity in the owl’s left ear





(which opens downward) than in the right ear opening (which opens upwards). Similarly, a sound originating from above the owl's eye level is louder in the owl's right ear than in its left ear.

It seemed reasonable, therefore, that owls might be able to use these differences to pinpoint a sound's origin. The difference in a sound's arrival time at the two ears could tell the owl how far off to the left or right the sound is coming from, and the difference in loudness in the two ears could tell the owl how far above or below the horizontal plane the sound source must be. This idea has been proven by placing tiny speakers in the ears of a tame owl in a laboratory and then playing the same mouse sounds at slightly different times and with slightly different intensities in the two speakers. Because owls instantly turn their heads towards the source of mouse sounds, the speaker-equipped owl told the researchers precisely where it thought each sound was coming from by literally pointing right at it. The experimenters could even make the owl look wherever they wanted, left or right, up or down, by giving it the right combination of differences in time and loudness between the two ears speakers.

Scientists have also worked out the precise pathways in the owl's brain by which sound arrival time and intensity differences are processed. It turns out that the two types of cues are handled by separate "parallel computers" that compare nerve impulses from the two ears. Each computer goes through a four or five step computational process to determine the

horizontal or vertical direction of the sound and then the two types of information are integrated on the surface of the owl's mid-brain in the form of an auditory map that tells the owl where the sound source must be – within an error of just one degree.

Some features of the computer systems are still not understood. How distance of the sound source is determined remains unclear, for example. Another mystery has to do with how the owl's brain resolves what the computer engineers call "phase ambiguity" – a type of problem with nerve impulse speed that could cause the owl to come up with several possibilities for the direction of a sound source. There can be no doubt, however, that an owl's brain includes circuits and programs that eliminate all confusion. Owls in a totally darkened room (where vision is impossible, even for them) can still fly over and capture a mouse using hearing alone – and with complete accuracy.

So, if you're a mouse we would say that things look pretty bleak. You can't even use sound yourself to hear an owl coming because the edges of an owl's leading wing feathers are serrated in such a way that the owl flies in complete silence. Sorry if we got your hopes up but you're probably doomed. Even if you're as quiet as a mouse, you'll still be coming in loud and clear as far as an owl is concerned. One little squeak or rustle from you and the owl will achieve instantaneous "mouse lock-on" with its on-board computers, calculate your precise position, and within seconds be piercing

you with its talons, severing your neck vertebrae with its beak, and then gulping your limp body head-first down its gullet.

Too bad, but hey, you're not the only one to have the odd little problem with computers from time to time.

Why Facial Disks?

Apart from their strong asymmetry, owl ears have another very distinct feature. In front of each ear opening (that is, between the ear opening itself and the eye) there is a moveable flap of skin. The front surface of these flaps is covered with short feathers. Seen face on, the flaps appear as so-called facial disks which, more than any other single feature, are responsible for the "owl-like" faces of owls. It may not be obvious that the facial disks of owls have anything at all to do with their hearing, but such is indeed the case. Among other evidence is the intriguing fact that facial disks are also possessed by the Northern Harrier, a day-flying hawk unrelated to owls but which also uses hearing to locate its prey (in the dense vegetation of marshes and bogs).

Still, it is not immediately obvious just how facial disks might actually help hearing. Some authorities state that the disks serve "to funnel sounds into the external ear openings" but why would this be so when the disks are found in front of the ears? Other people have suggested that the disks help reflect sounds coming from behind the owl's head into its ear openings – an equally unsatisfactory explanation, given the way hunting owls instantly turn their heads towards sounds that they hear.

We suggest that the real function of owl facial disks is to force sounds coming from in front of the owl to take a longer route to at least one of the ears (see diagram). Since we know that the ability of owls to pinpoint their prey through hearing depends on minute differences in the intensity and arrival time of sounds reaching the two ears, anything that exaggerates those differences should immediately prove an owl's ability to determine direction of the sound source and therefore to be a better, more successful hunter.

Reprinted from the July 27, 1995 issue of Algonquin Park's *The Raven*, courtesy of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Book Review

Two Strolls In The Wilderness; A Story of Survival, written and published by Norman Stroll, 2009, softcover, 207 pages, www.twostrolls.com, available at Barnes & Nobel and Amazon, US\$15.26 plus US\$6.44 p&h to Canada.
Review by Toni Harting.

One of the few major rivers in western Quebec that has not been impacted by the extensive water-based power generation projects in the area, is the Pontax River. It flows north from Lac Champion and then west until it empties into James Bay near Washkaganish. The Pontax flows just north of the bigger and better-known Rupert River. A few years ago, the author and his son planned to paddle the upper part of the river, from Lac Champion to Hwy 109, but a short distance before reaching the road they encountered serious problems and were stranded with a destroyed canoe, unable to move. Also because of the cold weather—it was the second half of September and winter was moving in—a life-threatening situation developed where they had to survive on very little food, facing starvation. After several days the two paddlers were rescued by floatplane. This book describes their adventure in great detail, and also presents a list of equipment and gear as well as a small number of very simple black-and-white photographs. It clearly shows that trying to paddle an overloaded,

rather short (16 ft), Kevlar canoe on an unknown northern river in cold weather, can lead to serious complications. The book is primarily of interest because of the passionate and heartfelt descriptions of the crisis situation the two men were in, and their behaviour under stress. The following excerpt gives a good impression of the style the book is written in:

We knew we would most likely hear a plane before we saw it. We just didn't know if we would ever hear it.

Standing deathly still I imagined that every groan of the trees around me was the first notes of what I prayed would become the drone of an airplane engine.

Exhausted, starved from days with little food, cold and wet, I strained my ears to listen. At this critical moment it was only my hearing, not physical strength, that really mattered; we had nowhere else to walk, no more loads to haul, no more food to prepare, no more bonfires to build because the rain had soaked every piece of wood, and so far there were no rescue teams to wave to. It was clear to me that this was very close to the moment when a person with nothing left to give wants nothing else in life but to be kept alive.

And so I stood there shivering. My son had disappeared over a low ridge to my left as though viewing the sky from a vantage point 20 vertical feet higher than

the river bank would enable him to see an incoming plane more easily. On my right the river, which had been our sole means of transit and was now the agent of our impending death, roared mindlessly past, gorged with rain, a degree or two above freezing, obliterating most other sounds, particularly any that might be the music of an approaching airplane.

"I think I hear it!" my son screamed from somewhere over the ridge. "Dad, can you hear it?"

I could not. I was too close to the bank, sandwiched between a steep incline leading up to our tent on one side and on the other by the river. I had stopped to listen a few seconds earlier and squished down ankle deep in the bog. I was standing so close to the river that the spray bouncing off the boulders sprinkled onto my face, its radiating mist forming a corona around my head. My feet were starting to freeze. My wool pants, soaked from the cuffs to the belt buckle, had a flat, almost putrid odor. I began shivering uncontrollably, crossing my arms to warm my fingers in my armpits.

But, whether I heard it or not, if Brad said he did, I believed him. He's tough, rugged like a frontiersman; quiet and analytical and he rarely jumps to conclusions. He reminds me of those fighter pilots who never panic even when their planes are skidding sideways through the sky, coolly focused on running through the emergency procedures for which flight schools are famous. Their concern is not how to accept impending death, but to be sure they have tried every possible means of regaining control. All they want to know is "what else can I try?" That was my son.

If he heard a plane it meant we were saved. I listened with my entire body and there it was; just above the din I heard the low throaty hum of a propeller. Once I fixed on the sound it did not go away. It grew louder by tiny increments.

I cried. I could not control my emotions and I was conscious at that moment, as I tried to pull my right boot out of the bog and perch it on a clump of grass, that I wasn't crying because I knew I would live, but because I knew that my son wouldn't die here, today.

Awaken

Winter unchains its armouries of icy spears,
Lets free its streaming rivers of frozen time,
Banishes to arid wastes those shifting snows,
Returns to us who live, the promised spring.

Birch bark that wrapped tight to trunk
Now released, soft pliable in an early warmth.
Ash which cracked with whip-like fury,
Bares and spreads her tender shoots.

Rising steam and buttery sunlit hollows,
Life pushes up and past the frigid land.
Earth's bosom softens to receive her lover,
Where liquid rivers overflow with promise.

Alex Strachan ©
Caledon, February 2009

Food for Paddlers

Dawne and Dave Robinson have presented at the WCA Fall meetings very professional, entertaining stories of their trips on the Stikine and Romaine rivers. Dawne has forwarded several recipes, the first of which is featured below with an introduction from her:

“This is a recipe which we always enjoy when our friend Andy Hanson comes on our trips. He makes the best buns of anyone I know. All are based on his basic bannock mix. Experience dictates that you should bake more than you need because they will disappear quickly. Andy also recommends you bake downwind from the group or they'll be hovering over you like black-flies. I must confess that I'm guilty of this!”

Basic Bannock Mix

Premix: 3 cups of flour, 3/4 cup milk powder, 1 tsp sugar, pinch of salt, 2 tbsp baking powder.

Cinnamon Buns

2 cups basic bannock mix, 2 tbsp oil or shortening, water, margarine, cinnamon, brown sugar, raisins.

Mix the basic bannock mix with oil and enough water to make a dough that you can knead. Mix and knead it smooth on a clean surface. Roll it out and coat the top with margarine. Sprinkle with cinnamon, brown sugar, and raisins. Roll it up and cut it into 1 and a 1/2 inch slices. Put the slices into a pan so that they are touching each other for soft cinnamon buns. You can bake over low coals (blow off the ash when done), turning once; or you can use an outback oven.

Variations using the basic bannock mix mentioned above:

Pizza: Spread rehydrated spaghetti sauce on top with some parmesan cheese, rosemary with oil, and salt, rehydrated onions, mushrooms, zucchini, grated carrots, sun-dried tomatoes, basil, meat, etc. Mix all dry materials together first, then add the liquid.

Garlic bread: Try adding anything from garlic, oregano, and grated cheese, onion soup mix, potato flakes, oatmeal.

Dumplings: Drop the bannock dough by tablespoonfuls into soup or fruit compote (a little goes a long way in this instance). Mix in small batches and make it a little sticky. Add a little more sugar to the dough for fruit dumpling. This is great with fresh blueberries.

Pancakes: are a runny bannock dough with a little powdered egg added. Crepes are even runnier.

If you would like to share your favourite tripping recipes, please contact Barb Young, 12 Erindale Crescent, Brampton, Ont. L6W 1B5; youngj-david@rogers.com.



GPS

One of the main reasons to do wilderness canoeing is to remove yourself from the trappings of modern civilization. To sample life without electricity or a hard roof overhead. To travel by your own power. To cope with whatever weather the elements throw at you. To live on simpler terms.

Living simpler means that you don't get caught up in buying new items for wilderness canoe trips. Gear that you used ten years ago is the gear that you would need to use today. You should have determined resistance to adding new items to the equipment list. Fanatical resistance to adding new items that use batteries.

Over the last ten years we have added two items to our group equipment list. And that's only after carefully pondering if an item is in keeping with our philosophy of being durable, of great utility, of relative ease of use, and in harmony with wilderness canoe travel.

With approval from all the buddies, we now carry a Magellan GPS unit. The Global Positioning System relies on a series of twenty-four satellites that orbit the earth at fixed positions. The Magellan unit polls the satellites above the horizon (usually five or six) and triangulates your present position.

No more worries about magnetic declination of the compass. No more late-night discussions about where along the shore of the big lake you are camped at now. No more indecision

about how far you need to travel tomorrow. The GPS unit will give you latitude and longitude to within twenty metres, anywhere on earth. You are here. Period.

But I don't know. It takes out all of the doubt when moving around in the wilderness. Is that a good thing? Part of the reason for wilderness travel IS the uncertainty. The danger. The doubt. You can get lost. You can get hurt. You can run into wild animals.

If we give up doubt and uncertainty here, where can we find it? Where can we go if we want to experience it? Without doubt and uncertainty, the world would just be a smaller place.

I know it. I have no doubt about it.

Greg Went

Spring in Carolinian Canada

Prothonotary! Binoculars were quickly raised to the eyes of eight eager WCA members as they sought out closer views of this lovely little warbler.

No, there was no canoeing involved. But a fine weekend was had by all as we explored the wonders of Point Pelee National Park during the 2009 spring migration. When we canoeists do our trips through the warblers' breeding territories farther north, they can be pretty hard to see, hidden in full foliage high in the trees. But on Mothers' Day weekend at Pelee there is very little leaf cover yet, owing to the effect of the still-cold Lake Erie waters. It is much easier to pick out these stunning little jewels of nature in the open canopy.

Friday night our group met at Wheatley Provincial Park, our base for the weekend. Tents were erected and a campfire provided the opportunity for conversation. Plans were made for an early start the next morning—a quick breakfast, pack a lunch and raingear, don't forget your binoculars. We were up at 6 am and on the road for the short drive to Pelee by 6:30 am.

Upon our arrival, the Visitor's Centre parking lot was already full, so we parked along the West Beach and caught the shuttle for the 2.5-km ride out to the Tip Exhibit Area. From there it is a short walk to the most southerly 'tip' of Canada's mainland. Point Pelee's sand spit reaches out into Lake Erie, and its length and shape vary depending on water levels and currents. Science tells us that although the sand spit at the tip comes and goes regularly, the actual land area of the park has been decreasing over the past 50 years. The tip is surrounded by dangerous currents and undertows. Swimming, even wading, in the water has led to many tragedies. But this place is at the crossroads of the Atlantic and Mississippi migration flyways. Like an extended hand, the park's forested lands and sand spit greet tired migrants on their northward journey across the lake each spring. They pause here to feed on insects before carrying on to their breeding grounds. This is what makes Point Pelee one of the top ten birding spots in North America.

Along with the birds, the birders are

another attraction. A walk through the parking lot shows license plates from Quebec and many American states, besides the numerous Ontario plates. People tote scopes and cameras with huge lenses. It can feel a little intimidating, but these birders are very generous with their knowledge. As an inexperienced birdwatcher, you have only to wander the many trails in the park until you come upon a crowd of folk, sidle up to someone in the crowd, and ask "What have you got here?" They will take great pains to show you the exact location of the bird and tell you what it is.

One can tell a beginner by their frequent referral to their bird book. But a wise ornithologist once advised to put the book away and just look at the bird as long as you can, fixing details of its appearance in your mind. It will fly away sooner or later so you want to have as much time to take it in as possible; then you can take the time to look it up.

By 1 pm we had become so hungry that we had to abandon the pursuit and find a sunny, sheltered picnic table to take some nutrition and restore our en-



ergy levels. Birding is not an extremely physical activity but does involve long standing and can cause “museum legs” as one of our group described it. A post-prandial snooze was not enough for some who decided to retire to the car for a longer nap, while the rest of us soldiered on in our search for ever more birds. Mid-afternoon we lost a few more who suffer short attention spans. But we all agreed to meet again for dinner at Paula’s Fish Place and a feed of Lake Erie fish, especially perch. It was a merry meal as we discussed the sightings of the day. So keen was our guest from Norway that she actually left the table in pursuit of a baby great horned owl reported not far away. We placed her order and she was fortunately back before her food came to the table. Homemade pie for dessert completed the repast nicely.

The evening saw us visiting Hillman Marsh and its shorebird cell where we noted dunlin and black-bellied plovers. Some of us had observed these birds breeding on the tundra. As the sun dropped in the sky, the lovely low-angled light was also reminiscent of the light on the Barren Lands. Terns and ducks were present to delight us. The final gift of the day was a tree at Wheatley Harbour, which seemed to be dripping with white egrets like decorations on a Christmas tree.

Back at camp it was early to bed with the sweet knowledge that the next morning would be more relaxed. Most of us “slept in” until 7 am, and then took advantage of the park’s Comfort Station to have a welcome but admittedly erratic shower, followed by a leisurely breakfast, which included some homemade rhubarb pie provided by one of our number. We birded around the campground, strolled the Lake Erie shore checking out the swallows and water birds, and hated to end this “rite of spring” in Carolinian Canada. Parting of the ways came in the late morning as some headed back to Pelee for one last look, while others went on to Rondeau Provincial Park or the Blenheim Lagoons.

The count for this year was 55 species, not the best year but also not the worst. That’s one of the joys of this outing. You never know what gifts Mother Nature is going to present on Mothers’ Day weekend at Point Pelee.

Anne Bradley



WCA ACTIVITIES

SPRING/SUMMER 2010

WANT TO ORGANIZE A TRIP AND HAVE IT PRESENTED IN THE SUMMER ISSUE?

Contact the Outings Committee before May 15

For questions, suggestions, proposals to organize trips, or anything else related to the WCA Outings, contact the Outings Committee: Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca; Mary Perkins, mary.perkins@sympatico.ca, 905-725-2874

Our ability to offer an interesting and diversified activities program depends on our trip organizers' generous donation of their time and enthusiasm. We appreciate the important contribution these members make to our club. If you are an active paddler, please help us. Become an outings organizer.

WCA outings and other activities may have an element of danger of serious personal injury. You are responsible for determining if your equipment, skill, and experience are adequate to participate safely in a club activity. Participants are ultimately responsible for their own safety and well-being when participating in club events.

All moving-water trips rated intermediate level or higher require participants to have fully outfitted whitewater canoes (thigh straps, air bags filling the boat, throw bag, secured spare paddle), and to be wearing helmets and weather-appropriate clothing (wetsuits or drysuits for winter, spring, fall trips).

All Spring WEEKDAY WHITEWATER

Jon McPhee, 905-640-8819, jon.mcphee@rogers.com ----- I like to get out during the week to paddle whenever weather and water are good. Favourite destinations are the Black and Head near Washago, as well as the Hwy 7 rivers. Call me if interested, and I'll put you on my contact list. The Black at Washago is suitable for novices with moving-water experience. The Hwy 7 runs are for good intermediates or better. Drysuits or wetsuits a must, as are properly outfitted whitewater boats.

March 27 MOIRA RIVER

John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca ----- Book as soon as possible. This is our season opener and a chance to recover our skills after a long winter. We will start at Chisholm's Mill and finish at Latta in the morning, eat lunch in our vehicles, and run Lost Channel in the afternoon. This is a good opportunity for new spring paddlers to introduce themselves and demonstrate their competence. The river is not particularly technical and we will only be about an hour from our cars. This trip is open to anyone who doesn't mind swimming in ice-cold water. Tandem canoes must have a centre airbag. Wetsuits or drysuits are required. If winter is later and weather/water conditions are unsuitable, we will postpone the trip. Limit of six boats.

March 27 UPPER CREDIT RIVER

Barb & Dave Young, 905-457-7937, youngdavid@rogers.com ----- Book by March 21. Join us for an early spring run

on the Credit from Inglewood to Glen Williams. Some competence in moving water is helpful. Suitable for novices. A potluck dinner will follow at the home of Barb & Dave in Brampton.

March 28 LOWER CREDIT RIVER

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca, book before March 21 ----- Join me on this classic early spring favourite of Toronto area paddlers. We'll catch the Credit in Streetsville and run down to the mouth at Port Credit. The river is a delightful continuous class 1 to 2 with lots of play spots. However, as sweepers can present a hazard and the water will be cold, participants should have solid basic moving water skills, and wear a wetsuit or drysuit. If we have a late break-up, we'll move the trip to March 29.

April 2 MOIRA RIVER ENCORE

John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca ----- Book as soon as possible. This is a repeat of the March 27 trip.

April 4 ELORA GORGE

Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca, book by March 28 ----- This time of year the gorge should provide a challenging intermediate run, packing a lot of interesting class 2 to 3 whitewater into a short distance. It's a great place to play at this level. Afterwards we can warm up and swap paddler gossip at Tim's down the road.

April 10 BEAVER CREEK #1

John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca, 416-438-7672, book

as soon as possible ----- This will be a challenging whitewater run suitable for advanced-level paddlers with fully outfitted canoes (centre bags for tandem boats) and proper cold-weather attire. If the river isn't open yet, we could switch to the Moira. Limit five boats

April 17 THAMES RIVER

Kevan Baker, 519-245-4926, kbaker@scrca.on.ca ----- Book by April 10. Get an early start on the paddling season by enjoying this day trip down the Thames. If water levels permit, we will paddle from St. Mary's to the Fanshawe Conservation Area. Some moving-water experience is recommended as there are several swifts with small standing waves. Limit six boats.

April 17 BEAVER CREEK #2

John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca, 416-438-7672, book as soon as possible ----- See description above.

April 16-18 BEAVER CREEK, MOIRA & LOWER BLACK RIVERS

Jay Neilson & Frank Knaapen, 613-687-6037, jneilson@nrco.net ----- Book immediately. We'll start out Saturday morning on the upper part of the Moira (Lost Channel section), which is the easiest of the three. Water levels should be well below peak, but as the water is still very cold, full wetsuits or drysuits are mandatory. Suitable for physically fit paddlers comfortable in at least class 2 water. Some of the rapids on the Black and Beaver, should you choose to run them, have "must catch" eddies, and provide

great rock-and-roll class 3 paddling. However, all difficult rapids can be portaged or lined.

April 17, tentative BLACK RIVER (WASHAGO) & HEAD RIVER

Jon McPhee, 905-640-8819, jon.mcphee@rogers.com, book by April 3 ----- See Black River: Washago at <http://www.boatwerks.net/whitewater/running.php>. The actual date will depend on optimal water levels. This section of the Washago Black River is a short run from the concrete bridge on Hwy 169 south of Washago to the first concession road west. It's a short stretch of river, but we will take about three hours of paddling, working the river. It is an easy, fun run where paddlers can practise eddies, ferries, and surfing, with little or no consequences (except for the COLD water). If the water level is suitable and there is interest, we can drive over to the nearby Head River. The Head is small and technical, and has been described as a mini-Beaver Creek. In this short section there are a number of class 2-3 ledge rapids that require precise manoeuvring. This river is best for skilled intermediates. There will probably still be some snow in the bush and the water will be cold. Tandem canoes must have a center airbag. Wetsuits or drysuits and helmets are required. Limit five canoes.

April 23-27 PADDLING THE NEW JERSEY PINE BARRENS

Jonathan Berger, jbphd@bm.net. ----- Book as soon as possible. Designated America's first National Ecological Reserve, The New Jersey Pine Barrens comprises over 1.1 million acres of pitch pine, cedar, and lowland bog forest and fields. The low-gradient rivers are narrow, surprisingly swift, and filled with clean brown-yellow water. The paddling is marked by ducking under curved cedars, open bog-like areas with twisty channels, sandy banks, and bars, and a variety of flowering trees and shrubs. Parts of the rivers cut across sand plains with pitch pine that are strikingly like the jack pine areas so familiar in Canada's north. I propose two trips, both of which I have done many times since my youth. The first is the Oswego from Oswego Lake down to the junction with the Wading River with a take-out at Beaver Branch. There are two short portages around dams and lots of lovely cedar paddling. The Oswego is totally within Wharton State Forest. I estimate six hours of easy going. The second is Cedar Creek which flows east to Barnegat Bay of the Atlantic Ocean. I can inquire as to the possibility of a pick-up on the Bay itself or we can use the

normal stopping place in the Double Trouble State Park at the campground. I estimate four to five hours of easy paddling. Rental boats and shuttles are available at each place and there are motels nearby. There is some camping but since I live in nearby Philadelphia I have never pitched a tent in the area. One thought would be to stay out on the barrier island with ocean beaches and back bay paddling--Long Beach Island in a motel or B and B--and drive to the various put-ins or stay in-land at some place. References: *Paddling the Jersey Pine Barrens* by Robert Parnes ; ; Berger and Sinton; Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

April 24 LOWER BLACK RIVER-TWEED

Jon McPhee, 905-640-8819, jon.mcphee@rogers.com, book by April 10 ----- See Black River - Queensborough at <http://www.boatwerks.net/whitewater/running.php>. This is not the same river as the Black River at Washago. This Lower Black runs from Queensborough to Hwy 7, northwest of Tweed, and east of Madoc. It is 10.5 km of grade 1 to 4 rapids. The more serious ones can be and at least one will be portaged. The river is primarily pool-and-drop, but a number of the rapids are longish and narrow and require the ability to manoeuvre a canoe at an intermediate level in whitewater. There will be some eddies that you must hit, and some definite lines that you must run. The book *Eastern Ontario White Water Rivers* ranks this river as the next step above the Moira. If you are not comfortable running the Lost Channel section of the Moira, you will not be comfortable here. On the other hand, it is a fun run on a pretty section of river. There will probably still be some snow in the bush and the water will be cold. Tandem canoes must have a center airbag. Wetsuits or drysuits and helmets are required. Limit five canoes.

April 24 UPPER MADAWASKA RIVER

John & Sharon Hackert, 416-438-7672, jhackert@sympatico.ca, book before April 17 ----- A day of whitewater excitement for advanced paddlers. The upper Madawaska is a fast-flowing pool-and-drop river with quiet stretches interspersed with some very serious rapids. All rapids can, and some must, be portaged. Wetsuits or drysuits, helmets, and fully outfitted whitewater boats with full flotation are a must. Limit six boats.

April 24 BLACK RIVER-COOPER'S FALLS TO WASHAGO

Bill & Joan King, 416-223-4646, lyonrex@rogers.com, book before April 17 --- -- A gentle moving stream flowing through spring woodlands. A few small riffles and one, or possibly two, portages. Suitable for novices and anyone else who would enjoy some pleasant spring canoeing. Limit of six canoes.

April 24-25 SPENCE'S CELEBRATED SALMON-MOIRA WEEKEND

Glenn Spence, 613-475-4176, book after February 20 ----- Just north of Belleville, these two rivers offer exciting whitewater and fine scenery. The Salmon is the more gentle run, with some small rapids for you to practise your skills. The Moira has larger rapids possibly up to class 3. You can bivouac at my house and enjoy a potluck dinner. These are two of Southern Ontario's finest spring rivers. Intermediate paddlers welcome. Limit six boats.

May 1 UPPER MADAWASKA RIVER AGAIN

John & Sharon Hackert, 416-438-7672, jhackert@sympatico.ca, book before 21 April ----- Please see description above. This is your chance to pick up the Thermos that you left at the lunch stop last week.

May 1-2 SPRING IN MUSKOKA

Gisela Curwen, 416-484-1471, gisela.curwen@gmail.com, book before April 15 ----- We will paddle some lakes yet to be decided, experience the returning birds, and discover other flora and fauna emerging from hibernation. Maybe we will find the first turtles sunning themselves on logs, and listen to the choruses of spring peepers, as in previous years. We'll hike and explore the surrounding area and clean up portages, if needed. Limit four canoes.

May 8 MINESING SWAMP

Ray Laughlen 705-754-9479, rlaughlen@gmail.com ----- Book by May 1. The trip down the Nottawasaga Rive through Minesing Swamp is a slow-paced, relaxing spring paddle. The swamp is a unique area rich in birds and wildlife. We'll enter the Swamp via Willow Creek and follow the river down to Edenvale. A pleasant day's paddle for canoeists of all skill levels.

May 8-9 OPEONGO & UPPER MADAWASKA RIVERS

Jay Neilson & Frank Knaapen, 613-687-6037, jneilson@nrtco.net ----- Book immediately. The Opeongo has long sections of class 2-3 rapids, making it suitable for solid intermediates or better. The

Upper Madawaska is one of the most challenging rivers in Ontario. Water levels will be very high, requiring class 3 rock-and-roll paddling skills, with some class 4 thrills for experts. The big drops can be portaged, but the river still requires advanced whitewater skills. Fully outfitted whitewater boats, and complete wetsuits or drysuits are mandatory.

May 14-16 LONG LAKE LOOP

Gary James, 416-512-6690, gary.james@sympatico.ca, or Andrea Fulton, andrea.fulton@rogers.com ----- Book by May 1. Join us for a trip around some beautiful Kawartha lakes before the bugs come out. Small lakes, flatwater, lift-overs and portages. Located just south of Apsley. Limit of four canoes.

May 15-16 OPEONGO & UPPER MADAWASKA RIVERS ENCORE

Jay Neilson & Frank Knaapen, 613-687-6037, jneilson@nrtco.net ----- Book immediately. See above for details. The water should be a little lower and more suitable for class 2 paddlers who want to take on some class 3 paddling.

May 8-9 BIRDING AT POINT PELEE

Anne Bradley, 519-855-4835 or annebradley@sympatico.ca, book before May 1 ----- Enjoy the spring warbler migration. We will camp at Wheatley Provincial Park and wander the trails of Point Pelee and Hillman Marsh. Flatwater padding opportunities available. Binoculars mandatory.

May 21 -24 MAGNETAWAN RIVER

Alan James, silvergoblin2009@gmail.com ----- Book before May 10. I will be paddling on the Magnetawan River for the long weekend in May and would enjoy some company. This is a four-day trip suitable for experienced whitewater trippers. Participants must have properly outfitted boats and cold weather camping gear/experience.

May 22-24 LOWER MADAWASKA RIVER

Larry Durst, 905-415-1152, ldurst@devoncommunications.com ----- Book as soon as possible. Join us for the 10th annual spring paddle/wine-and-cheese party and find out first-hand why mostly sane, reasonably intelligent and somewhat mature persons subject themselves to the vicissitudes of spring camping. We paddle from above Aumonds Bay to the take-out at Griffith, a distance of only 28 km. The pace is leisurely with only the Sunday being a full day of paddling and most of that spent on the Snake Rapids section of the river. Lots of time to play, chat, and nibble! Rapids will range from

grade 1 to 4 and there are a couple of short portages around falls. The water will still be cold, and the water levels are likely to be quite high. In the past we have had sun, rain, hail, and snow, all on the same day, so participants will need to dress and pack appropriately. Suitable for intermediate-level paddlers. Limit six boats. Book early as this trip "sells out" every year.

May 22-24 PETAWAWA RIVER

Jay Neilson & Frank Knaapen, 613-687-6037, jneilson@nrtco.net ----- Book as soon as possible. Join us on the classic run from Lake Travers to McManus. There will be a potluck dinner and accommodation at our place on Friday night. This is a great opportunity to watch expert paddlers take on Rollway, one of Ontario's wildest whitewater thrills. There are plenty of class 3 rapids for intermediate paddlers on this run. All the more difficult rapids can be walked around, and there is lots of scenery to enjoy from either the river or the trail on this beautiful river. Fully outfitted whitewater boats, and complete wetsuits or drysuits are mandatory.

May 29-30 ORCHIDS ON THE BRUCE

Anne Bradley, 519-855-4835 or annebradley@sympatico.ca, book before May 1 ----- Explore the many facets of the Bruce Peninsula and marvel at the orchids. There's an abundance of natural beauty, from the cobble beaches and cliffs overlooking Georgian Bay to the sandy beaches, bogs, and fens of the Lake Huron side. Flatwater paddling opportunities are available, but foot travel will allow us to see more.

May 29-30 INTERMEDIATE WHITE-WATER CLINIC

John & Sharon Hackert, jhackert@sympatico.ca ----- Book before April 19. This is the thirteenth year of our clinic, which is designed to help improve your basic skills. We will paddle the Lower Mad on Saturday and practise our basic skills at Palmers Rapids on Sunday. The emphasis will be on front ferries, eddy-outs, and peel-outs. Your paddle strokes will be critiqued. You will also have an opportunity to practise self-rescue techniques. Open to properly fitted solo and tandem canoes. Tandem boats must have centre air bags. Wetsuits or drysuits will be needed. We will camp at our cottage.

June 6 SAND RIVER

Larry Snyder and Wendy Champness, 517 351-1970, snyderL@msu.edu ----- Book as soon as possible. Join us for a spring run down the Sand River in Lake Superior Provincial Park close to Wawa. While not large, this river has some technical rapids

and demanding portages, as well as beautiful campsites and majestic scenery: nature at it's best. It is also quite remote and only accessible by train. We will meet on Sunday morning, June 6, at the station for the Agawa Canyon Train in Sault Ste. Marie and load our canoes and most of our gear on the train. We will then drive up to the park and shuttle cars to the take-out before catching the train as it goes by on its way to Sand Lake. We will spend six nights on the river, which will give us plenty of time for bird watching and fishing for speckled trout. Some whitewater experience and bug shirts are required since this is the peak of the black fly season. Limit of four canoes.

June 12 GRAND RIVER

Doug Ashton 519-620-8364, doug.ashton@rogers.com ----- Book by June 1. This very popular annual trip seems to be a great draw for all levels of paddlers, including families. Over the last five years we have enjoyed perfect weather, portage-free paddling, and a social barbeque that has followed our outing. This is a wonderful day to enjoy an easy moving river and to socialize with other WCA'ers. The trip will start in south Cambridge, where we will put in, and then paddle to Paris. We will pass through scenic farm country, negotiate some easy class 1 water, and stop for lunch along the way. Those interested are welcome to join us back at our house in Cambridge for some food, beverage, and social time.

June 12-13 NOIRE RIVER (QUEBEC)

Jay Neilson & Frank Knaapen, 613-687-6037, jneilson@nrtco.net ----- Book as soon as possible. We drive to the Black River Inn after crossing the Ottawa at Pembroke. The Inn's proprietor will shuttle us to 50:50 Rapid for approximately \$75. There are loads of play spots on this section of river, and the weatherman willing, we'll do some body surfing in the hot sun. It doesn't get much better than this.

Early July RIVER SAFETY & RESCUE FOR TRIPPERS

Sara Rykov, 416-588-8246, sara.rykov@gmail.com ----- Contact me by April 1. Exact date to be determined. We are considering a weekend river safety and rescue course with Paddler Co-op for next summer. The course will specifically focus on the needs of canoeists who must deal with problems in remote locations with limited equipment. We think it will provide valuable skills and greater self-confidence for both trippers and playboaters, anyone who ventures in a canoe down a swift river. This is a paid, professionally taught course. Amount including tax will be approximately \$175. If interested, please contact me so that we

can determine if there is sufficient interest. A minimum of six participants is required for the course to go. No maximum. (P. S. This is a great opportunity for our WCA trip organizers to take advantage of their club educational credits!)

July 1-4 WHITEWATER SKILLS BUILDING CLINIC

Jon McPhee, 905-640-8819, jon.mcphee@rogers.com; and Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca ----- Book as soon as possible. This is a four-day workshop on the Madawaska River for novice to budding intermediate whitewater paddlers. We will focus on the basics of moving water boat control and manoeuvres, water reading, and safety. Both tandem and solo paddlers are welcome. The weekend will be spent at Palmer Rapids and on the Snake Rapids section of the Madawaska River, one hour north-east of Bancroft. The location offers some of the best novice to intermediate whitewater in Southern Ontario. In order to be able to work closely with participants, registration is limited to six boats.

July 1-4 OTTAWA RIVER

John & Sharon Hackert, 416-438-7672, jhackert@sympatico.ca ----- Book before June 21. Three days on the Ottawa for big water fans. Must be at least strong intermediate whitewater paddler. Limit six boats.

Aug. 12-15 MASSASSAUGA PROVINCIAL PARK -- WOMEN'S TRIP

Beth Jones, 519-655-3155, missbeth@rogers.com ----- Book as soon as possible, by August 1 at latest. This is a great chance to paddle in one of Ontario's most beautiful paddling areas. We will be exploring the bays and inlets of this Georgian Bay gem where we will see landscapes of exposed granite and windswept vistas. This is a trip for anyone from beginners to experienced paddlers as the portaging is easy and minimal, and the pace is relaxed. There will be lots of time to explore, hike, swim, or work on your paddling skills as you prefer. Limit of four boats.

August 14-15 INTRODUCTION TO THE MINDEN WILDWATER PRESERVE

Jon McPhee, 905-640-8819, jon.mcphee@rogers.com; and Bill Ness, 416-321-3005, bness@look.ca ----- Book as soon as possible. A whitewater skill building weekend for solid intermediate tandem or solo canoeists. We held this for the first time last summer, and it proved to be a great way for intermediates to gain experience on more challenging water. So let's do it again! Limit of 5 boats. Please see full description & prerequisites on website before registering.

Aug. 26-29 ALGONQUIN PARK, WEST SIDE -- WOMEN'S TRIP

Beth Jones, 519-655-3155, missbeth@rogers.com ----- Book as soon as possible, by August 1 at latest. This trip will take us through the wildlife-filled west side of Ontario's most famous canoeing destination. Moose, beaver, and many other species are plentiful in this region, so we are sure to see lots of wildlife, as well as the lovely mixed forests of this area. This trip is a great introduction to wilderness canoe tripping as we will be encountering a variety of paddling environments from small rivers to big lakes. As a bonus, at this time of year that bugs are all but gone! Limit of four boats.

Aug. 28-Sept. 5 SPANISH RIVER (WEST BRANCH)

Gary James, 416-512-6690, gary.james@sympatico.ca, or Andrea Fulton, andrea.fulton@rogers.com ----- Book as soon as possible. We are interested in exploring the West Branch of this beautiful wilderness whitewater river. Details to be determined. Basic whitewater skills are required to enjoy this trip. Some rapids on the West Branch are not runnable, so efficient portaging skills are needed. Limit of four boats.

Sept. 4-6 OTTAWA RIVER

John & Sharon Hackert, 416-438-7672, jhackert@sympatico.ca ----- Book before August 30. Three days on the Ottawa for big water fans. Must be at least strong intermediate whitewater paddler. Limit six boats.

Sept. 6-12 ALGONQUIN PARK -- LAKE OPEONGO

Linda Simpson, 519-620-4430, lindasimpson0327@hotmail.com ----- Book by August 6. Join us in this beautiful part of Algonquin Park. This is a flatwater trip with lots of time built in to explore by paddle and foot: pioneer sites, wild bog with moose and rare birds, and massive 35-metre-high pine trees. There is one 1450-metre portage that we'll do twice that will take us into one of the finest virgin white pine stands in North America. There shouldn't be any mosquitoes at this time of year, and the kids should be back at school, so this should be a peaceful and enjoyable trip. Limit of nine people.

ADDITIONAL TRIPS

Check our website at www.wildernesscanoe.ca/trips.htm for additional trips. Members may submit additional trips to the Outings Committee anytime at bness@look.ca. If you miss the Nastawgan deadline, your trip will still be listed on the website. Also, check the bulletin board at www.wildernesscanoe.ca/bulletin.htm for private, non-WCA trips or partner requests.

NEED A PARTNER?

If you're a tandem canoeist in need of a paddling partner, whether for a single trip or on a more regular basis, our website provides a valuable resource to help you connect with other members who want to get on the water. If you need a partner, please submit a message for posting to our website giving details.

Partners Wanted

Thlewiaza River, Northern Manitoba, Summer 2010. The Thlewiaza is Farley Mowat's great river where he first met the Eden Edehli people shortly after WWII and documented his scary spring ride in No Man's River and Curse of the Viking Grave. Here are two recent summer trip reports: www.out-there.com/bil-thle.htm and gopaway.com/gorp/location/canada/manitoba/pad_thl.htm Contact Jay Neilson and Frank Knaapen at 613-687-6037 or jneilson@nrtco.net. Trip details: <http://jneilson.freehostia.com>

Maguse River, from Henik Lake to Arviat, Nunavut, Aug 21-Sep 11, 2010. Experience Barrenlands Aurora Borealis, caribou migration, and McConnell River Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Fly WPG-Arviat. Canoes are available in Arviat after the Thlewiaza expedition. Contact Jay Neilson 613-687-6037 or jneilson@nrtco.net. Trip Details: <http://jneilson.freehostia.com>

Looking to join a trip, summer 2010. Sarah Jefferson is an outdoor education instructor in the UK who has been awarded a fellowship to travel to Canada. She would like to be able to hook up with some Canadian paddlers to do a major trip. Problem is that she doesn't know anyone here. It would be great if the WCA could give her a helping hand. Her request is posted in the WCA website in the Bulletins section.

For sale

Red solo playboat, evergreen sequel outfitted, \$500. Tandem tripping/whitewater boat, old bluehole Starburst, \$600. Alan James: silvergoblin2009@gmail.com

Where it is...



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