



Parsesseux Falls

Fear and Redemption on the Pimisi Run Revisiting the Mattawa River

Gary Storr (for Mireille)

It was during the drive home from the Chapleau River that our whitewater teacher and fellow Canoeing Legend, Graham, tossed us a challenge: “What do you feel when you’re entering a rapid?” he asked.

A simple question indeed, but I was struck by its complexity.

There is anticipation, yes, and exhilaration...but there is also doubt. Am I capable of tackling this rapid? Can I position myself for the biting lateral to river left at just the right moment? Will I remember where the rocks are...or where they aren't? A rapid never looks the same from the riverbank as it appears



Petit Paresseux Falls



from a canoe once you are lured irrevocably into the seductive dance. And it never forgives.

While I cobbled together a response based on what flashed through my mind, Dan answered from the gut, simply and honestly. "Fear," he said.

I realized that my sensibility, though not as extreme, lay on the same sliding scale, hovering somewhere between anxiety and mild trepidation. But just the same, fear is fear. The only quantifier is the number of butterflies.

Less than a year later, Dan and I were cruising up the highway to Samuel de Champlain Provincial Park on the Mattawa River. When we pulled into our campsite we found Graham already comfortably ensconced in a camp chair nursing a Corona. A half-dozen empties were scattered across the picnic table like fallen conquistadors. Settling in, we helped him vanquish the rest.

We were here for only one day, ostensibly to practise our paddle strokes, to pluck the wings from an updraft of metaphorical butterflies. But there was a darker, unspoken purpose: Graham and I were also here to grapple with demons.

A couple of hours drive east of the midpoint on the Trans-Canada Highway in Ontario lies a stretch of asphalt connecting North Bay to the town of Mattawa. Tumbling eastward alongside this highway is the Mattawa River. At a point 10 kilometres west of Sam Champlain Park the river widens, lapping south to nestle the highway. This is Pimisi Bay and it is here the rapids of what I call the Pimisi Run begin. They end with a raucous ride through the haystacks of the Campion Rapids back at the park.

Rivers are the places of spirits, and a year earlier the Mattawa had been the path of my undoing. As rowdy tourists, my wife, Debby, and I had dared to challenge the sanctity of our temporary digs. We had been savaged, I suspect, by the same ubiquitous and mercurial forces that cause the leaves to tremble in the trees and send down swirling patches of sunlight to dance at our feet. It was an excursion we would never forget: it comprised most of the hair-raising elements of a skydive gone awry. One evening we'd stood helplessly on a tiny island as the skies blackened in the west and unleashed

a monsoon that bore down on us like a hawk on a shivering deer mouse. Our camp had been uprooted. Then, near the end of the Pimisi Run, we had wrapped our canoe spectacularly around a boulder at the base of a rapid. A two-hour self-rescue ensued that found Debby waist-deep downriver hauling on a rope, and me under the canoe straining upward with all my meagre might, while the rapid boiled angrily beneath my armpits. The following morning there was a black bear encounter. It was immaterial to me whether we were suffering the howling souls of bible-thumping theologians or the spitting wrath of ancient manitous. All I knew is I would be coming back. I was going to make this right.

Graham, on the other hand, was obliged to thumb through the recesses of his gray matter to recall the circumstances of his pantsing on *La Petite Rivière*, as the Mattawa was known to voyageurs. Thirty years earlier, in a time before finger-jabbing liability and rampant litigation, school groups still savoured the freedom of outdoor adventure. It was on one of these outings that young Graham and a chaperone, a hulking cop named Big Bob, wrapped their aluminum canoe.

“It wasn’t just wrapped,” Graham recounted with thinly veiled glee. “It was banana-peeled. We couldn’t get it off the rock so we left it there.” Apparently the

passage of time had somehow morphed the experience into a warm and fuzzy memory. The bit about where it had happened, though, was gone.

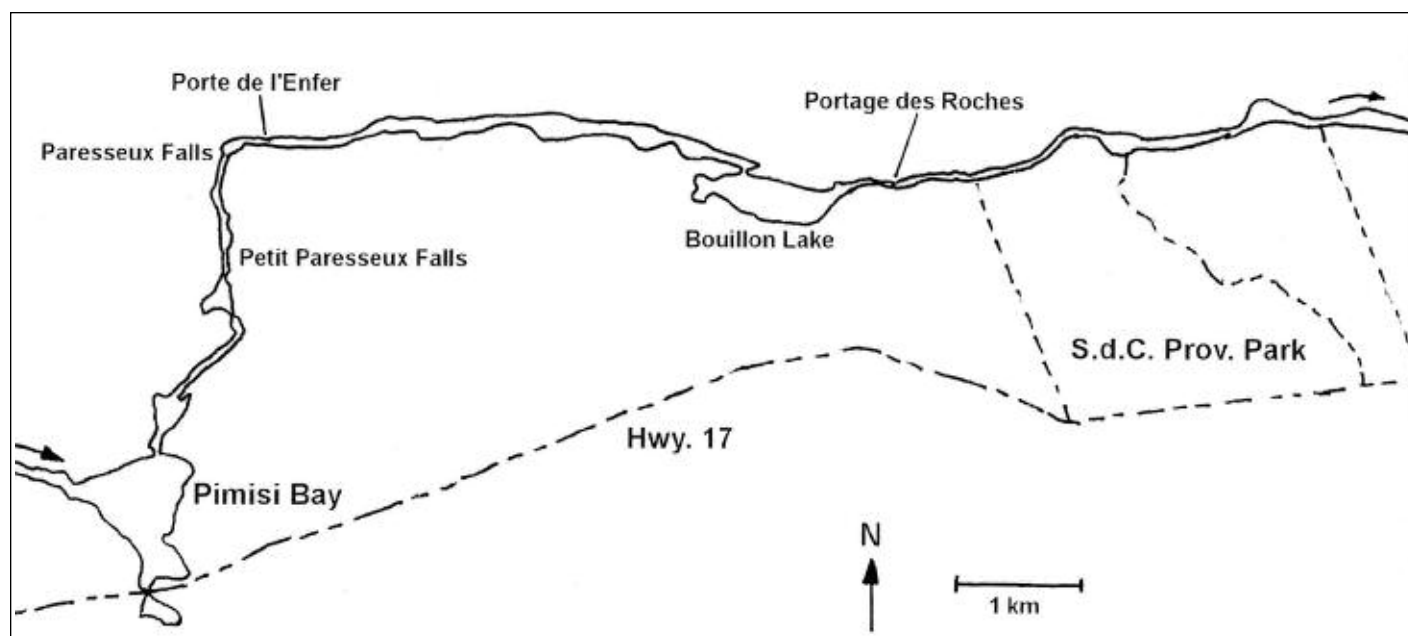
One morning, a few months after Debby and I had been chastened by the river, I sprang from bed with the startling but pleasing awareness that I felt no discomfort in my back. I raised my elbows tentatively and turned at the waist. Nothing...not even a twinge. Hallelujah! My lower back pain was gone, my L4 was A1!

That day I wafted a few puffs of smoke into the ether and signalled a meeting of the Canoeing Legends. Happy to convene after a lengthy layoff, the crew assembled around the table with assorted maps and six-packs eager for an evening of camaraderie. A route was chosen, the itinerary set, and a booking made. Never had we been so efficient.

But the Mattawa continued to gnaw at the back of my psyche. I proposed to the group a weekender as well, touting it as a prime opportunity to brush up on our whitewater skills. Graham and Dan bought into the notion. So here we were, quaffing brews in a family campground pounding with obscenity-laden rap lyrics. The primal beat summoned wardens like ants to a picnic and the revellers were rounded up and summarily bounced. Not exactly our style of camping but what the hell, I was getting another chance.

The mood was electric on Saturday morning as the tires of the pickup truck thrummed on the highway beneath us. The butterflies had yet to awaken. We had arranged a shuttle with the outfitter on the Kiosk road and Logan was our man. Despite his stocky build, he’d hucked our heavy ABS boats onto the racks as if they were ultra-light Kevlar. Watching him, I felt a spasm in my back. At our urging, he was describing how to negotiate a gnarly stretch of whitewater that, had Debby and I attempted it, would have given us fits. While scouting that particular rapid, we had encountered three paddlers snorkelling at its base for gear they’d lost earlier in a stupendous upset. This time, they’d left their boats at the top of the portage. “Got it!” hollered one, surfacing with a rod and reel. Debby and I had elected to walk.

“The river was running at spring levels all summer so that section would have been a Class 3,” commented Logan. “Normally it’s a 2. There’s a big rock in the middle that dips underwater to the left and becomes a ledge. You have to kiss the rock because it’s the only spot the canoe will clear the ledge. Then you catch the chute to the left of the last boulder and you’re out.” Rubric that was certainly mumbo-jumbo to Graham and Dan was crystal clear to me, although admittedly, I hadn’t seen that route.



Pimisi Run section of Mattawa River



Logan was cozying to his topic and I could see Dan, who is both a consummate woodsman and flatwater canoeist, begin to squirm in the back seat like a man being led to the gallows.

“Me and my buddy, Matt, are kayakers,” Logan continued. “Whenever we run this river we try to figure out how to shoot the falls, but there’s a big rock right in the middle.” I’d seen the big one, Paresseux Falls, and wondered if Logan had boofed his bean too often on the eddy-outs. “One time, I was spotting for Matt at the base of a waterfall and he landed upside down in the whirlpool. There was this flat rock at one side and he kept getting dragged over it every time he went around. The rule is you don’t throw a line until your buddy asks for it but Matt didn’t ask so finally I shouted if he wanted the line and he was like, ‘Yeah, give me the line.’” Reckless behaviour, like fear, varies by degree but who were we to judge? We were surfing the same wave.

At Pimisi Bay Logan helped unload the boats and suddenly we were in. The first sets of rapids drew us gently, nurturingly, acclimating us to the pull of moving water. We could hear them sometimes before we saw them and my stomach would begin to stir. What we thought was the wind rustling in the treetops became the fresh, metallic cascade of silvery water streaming past rocks, pouring over

them. At the north end of Pimisi Bay we heard our first murmur of whitewater. It grew louder as we approached.

Voyageurs discarded their poles here when travelling upriver and appropriately the trail is called *Portage des Perches*. As was the custom, the carries were named and not the rapids. Dan and I went first and rode it through unscathed. Graham was paddling solo and soon found that for this endeavour an entirely different skill-set was needed. He tried to catch an eddy but missed and found himself floating sideways down the rapid. This was not the preferred method of execution but it was a simple Class 1 and the river let him off lightly.

He fared better on a tiny switchback, making it look easy. He splashed over one ledge, then another, spun through a hair-pin turn and shot out to the left. Dan and I were up next. Misaligning our entry, we banged and scraped at the top but slid through. Our performance earned us demerits and held us back in the ‘finesse’ category.

But as we progressed, we bumped less frequently and our confidence grew. We experienced a transformation that manifested itself first in our musculature, easing the way we moved with our boats, our very grips on the paddle. As we turned our blades to draw the canoe one way, then another, the river insinuated itself into the core of our being. We were be-

coming one with our canoes and, by extension, with the water. We were becoming *rivermen*.

That is, until we rounded a bend and heard a resounding roar downriver. For us, it was massive. It was leonine and horrific. It was the Petit Paresseux Falls and we were going to run it! Logan had told us how. But first we were going to scout it from the riverbank, the *Portage de la Prairie*, and then I was going to empty my bladder. An ounce of prevention averts a pound of disgrace.

Graham ran it first. I stood poised on the boulders below the ledge with my camera and waited. Presently he appeared at the top and, flying by the seat of his pants, began to pick his way between the rocks. Manoeuvring past the last bit of scrabble, he lined up for the boulder and drew left in time to slide over the ledge. Maintaining his line, he caught the chute around the last rock and was out. It was pure ballet.

Dan and I scrambled back to our canoe and pushed out into the river. Backpaddling in the calm where the water gathered thick and black as molasses, we chose our point of entry. Then with a burst of power, we stroked until the rapid gripped us and pulled us in. There was no turning back. We dipsy-doodled this way and that, calling it as we saw it, until it came time to position ourselves for the drop. Moving laterally, we flew over the ledge and drove into the river sending up a plume of spray that drenched us both. Then, like Graham, we rode the chute and were out. It was a triumphant moment and I was ecstatic but somewhere inside the burgeoning *savoir faire* masked by our idiotic grins we knew the real test lay ahead. We bobbed in the pool at the base of the rapid and let the adrenaline burn off. I had a date with a rock and I meant to keep it.

The rock in question, my rock, was six kilometres downstream at the base of a rapid bypassed by the *Portage des Roches*. En route we paddled placid waters and passed beneath granite cliffs topped with towering pines. We took lunch on a tiny beach below majestic Paresseux Falls. Soon after, we approached the *Porte de l’Enfer*, or Gates of Hell. A cave in the riverbank that voyageurs believed to be the home of a man-eating demon, it was a fitting

metaphor for our *raison d'être*. After all, weren't we here to confront our demons?

We rode *Les Epingles*, a shallow swift that dropped us into Bouillon Lake, then rounded a bend to the left and heard the ominous whisper of water churning against rock. This time it didn't fill me with dread or send chills up and down my spine. On the contrary, the rapid appeared to be short and unremarkable. It was a shallow run, choked with glacial detritus smoothed by thousands of years of moving water. Even the portage was chock-full of rounded boulders, an indicator of higher water levels in the past. It was a technical run and required scouting.

We boulder-hopped along the path, taking stock of each rock in the river. When we reached the bottom I could see my rock, alone...waiting. It was larger than I remembered it – more of it was showing above the water. It looked hungry. Graham gazed upon the scene, drinking it in. Finally he spoke.

"Oh, yeah," he exhaled. An ancient memory had lifted its shaggy head and



shaken itself off. "This is the place. I remember standing on that island over there and fishing my gear out of the river. And," he said, turning back to the rapid and pointing directly at the rock that was my

nemesis, "that's the rock."

I was numb. Thirty years apart, same rapid, same *rock*. Now I was nervous.

Again, Graham chose to run it first. The sheer number of obstacles was daunt-



Paresseux Falls



rent twice more in desperation and with only inches to spare the bow moved. It caught the chute and miraculously, Dan brought the stern around. We had done it!

As we paddled to the riverbank Dan shook his head. "I thought for sure we'd messed up," he said. Relief dripped from his words.

Graham was in his canoe staring up-river, contemplating, analyzing. "Is it okay if I try again?" he asked. We shrugged.

"Go for it," I said.

Hoisting his canoe, he marched back to the top of the portage. I scrambled out onto the rocks and fiddled with the settings on my camera. After a few minutes he appeared, backpaddling, drifting to river right, but something was wrong. He was over too far. There was precious little time remaining for him to manoeuvre into position. Then it hit me: he was *tired*. He shouldn't be doing this, not now. We heard his voice carry over the current, moments before he hit.

"Crap!" he yelled.

Before the rock could claim his canoe he crawled out onto it, dragged the boat around behind him and let it go, empty, into the pool below. Disgusted, he climbed down from his perch into the river and followed his canoe. Paddling toward us, he noticed my camera.

"You didn't get pictures of that, did

Porte de l'Enfer

ing and Graham gave it a valiant effort but in the end he was too far to the right. He ran up the low side of the rock, pivoted, then slid off sideways into the river. Technically he'd made it but none of us had the *cojones* to call the run a success.

Dan and I grinned anxiously at each other, then made our way back to the canoe. It was a straight shot through with a little push and tug to avoid rocks lurking under the surface. We drove our canoe forward to where two sharp stones protruded on a line with our rock, preventing us from making our move until the last moment. Quickly we flew past them. We had one and a half, maybe two canoe-lengths to claw our way three feet to the left. I drew repeatedly with machine-like determination as the face of the devil loomed ahead. Three feet remained, two, then...*air draw*. I had missed the water! We were going to hit. I jabbed at the cur-



"my rock" on the far left

you?” he demanded sheepishly.

“Better yet,” I smirked. “I got it on video.”

A few weeks later, Graham and I were enjoying a beer in his backyard. It was a warm Sunday afternoon and we were basking in the sunshine. In our minds we were back on the Mattawa.

“I shouldn’t have run it tired,” Graham confessed. “If it had been more difficult, say a Class 3, I’d have tried harder. Fear would have been the motivating factor, knowing there was potential for a major screw-up. But I knew I wouldn’t get hurt so I got lazy.”

There was that word again. Fear. I offered to go back with him someday, to try again. He stared off into the distance and took a long pull on his beer.

“Yeah, maybe,” he said quietly, as if I were no longer there. “Maybe someday.”





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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 Wine & Cheese Fall Party

The Wine and Cheese is a great opportunity for all members, old and new, to meet past canoeing friends and make new ones. 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. On top of all that, you can enjoy interesting presentations, and sample tasty snacks.

The party takes place on Saturday, November 27, 2010, at the Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club (TSCC), 1391 Lakeshore Blvd West, Toronto.

There is free parking.

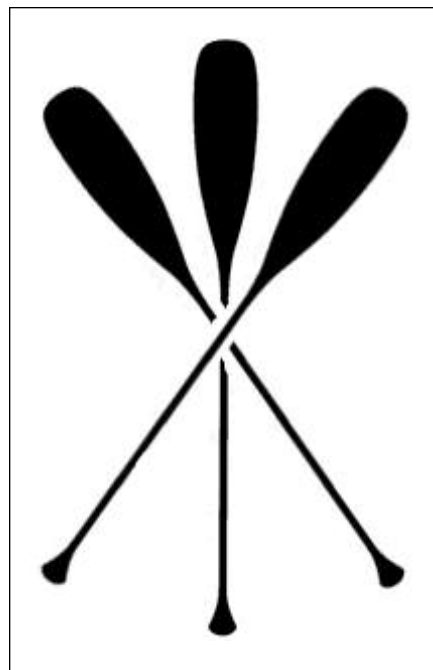
For more information, cost, program, etc. please go to the WCA website.

Deadlines

The deadline dates for submitting material for the next issue in 2010 and the four issues in 2011 are: the first day of November 2010 and the first days of February, May, August, and November 2011. If you have questions, please contact the editor; addresses on the last page.

Editorial

The **WCA photo competition**, announced in the Spring and Summer 2010 *Nastawgans*, is in trouble. By the end of August we had received only one submission of three photos from one contestant. Obviously, for a viable contest we need many more submissions and therefore the closing date has been moved to 1 November 2010. So, there is still time to 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 the WCA photo competition. Do it now; fame and fortune (who knows?) can be yours!



News from CCR

The major innovation is the monthly (or so) *CCR photo contest*. Personally, I found the entries so impressive that I would not dare offer even one of mine!

Links to the winners and some runners-up for the first three contests follow:

<http://www.myccr.com/SectionForum/s/viewtopic.php?f=33&t=35250>

<http://www.myccr.com/SectionForum/s/viewtopic.php?f=33&t=35491>

<http://www.myccr.com/SectionForum/s/viewtopic.php?f=33&t=35958>

And some great *trip reports* have been posted in our Forums; especially noteworthy are:

[i]hooligan[i]'s report for the *Kanairiktok River* in Labrador:

<http://www.myccr.com/SectionForum/s/viewtopic.php?f=104&t=35133&sid=c7287b26fb038513c5f8e1caa55d16e6>

and [i]Mihun09[i]'s report on the *Broadleaf River* in Manitoba:

<http://www.myccr.com/SectionForum/s/viewtopic.php?f=114&t=33514>

Submitted by Allan Jacobs

WCA Activities

Want to view all club activities, learn more about our extensive outings program for members, or organize and post a trip? It's easy! Visit the Outings section of the WCA website: www.wildernesscanoe.ca

The Lower Mattagami River Project

The Lower Mattagami River Project proposes redevelopment of the Smoky Falls G.S. (generating station), and extension of Little Long G.S., Harmon G.S., and Kipling G.S. Work on the commercial feasibility of the project has been completed and OPG (Ontario Power Generation) is in now in the process of discussion with Aboriginal peoples addressing Environmental Assessment requirements.

The project will allow a significant amount of new energy to be produced without creating new dams on other rivers. In addition to the electricity that will be provided, new development on the Lower Mattagami offers the poten-

tial for a commercial relationship with First Nations.

OPG received Provincial Environmental Assessment (EA) approvals to proceed with the Lower Mattagami Project and is in the process of securing Canadian Federal Approvals under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA).

The Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex is made up of four generating stations on the Mattagami River. The four stations are (from south to north): Little Long, Smoky Falls, Harmon, and Kipling. They are about 70 kilometres northeast of Kapuskasing and about 150 kilometres upstream of Moose

Factory and the Town of Moosonee.

Smoky Falls was built in 1931 and right now it has a size of about 50 megawatts. One megawatt produces enough electricity for almost 1,000 homes. This station is older and smaller than the others and does not make effective use of the water passed through by the other three plants. OPG wants to replace it with a generating station that could use all of the available water efficiently. This would mean building a new generating station next to the old one. There would be new manmade structures such as an approach channel, intake, and tailrace. The new generating station would be able to pass more water and would have a size of 250 megawatts. The original dams and spillways for the station would remain.

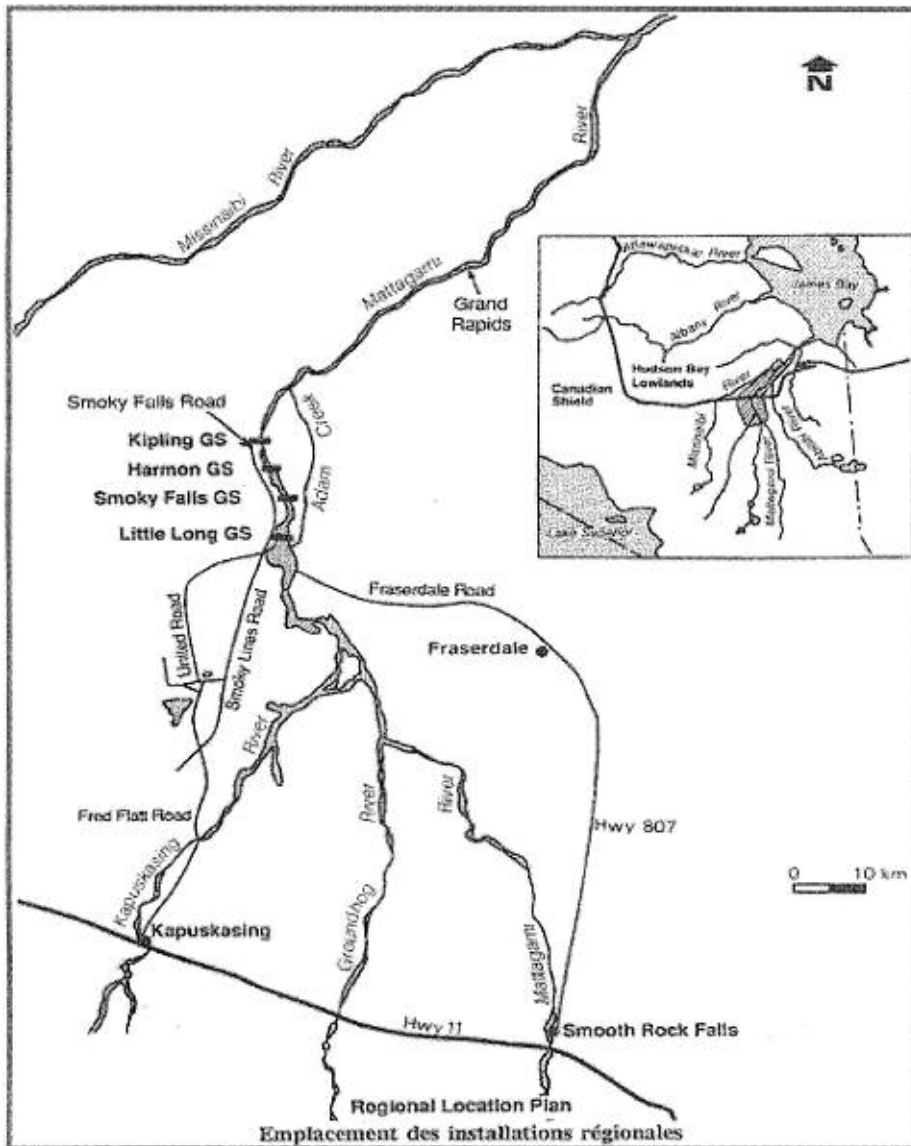
Little Long, Harmon, and Kipling were all built in the mid-1960s. Each station has two generators to make electricity. Little Long has a size of 135 megawatts. Harmon is 140 megawatts and Kipling is 155 megawatts.

Since the proposed new Smoky Falls dam would now be able to use more water efficiently, OPG also intends to add a third generator to each of the three existing generating stations. Then the stations could use available water with the best possible efficiency and produce more electricity passing the same volume through each facility. Little Long would then have a size of 200 megawatts. Harmon and Kipling would each be about 240 megawatts. Together the whole project would add nearly 450 MW of capacity to the provincial system and make even better use of an existing resource.

Once construction work is started it is estimated that it would take about four years to complete all the work with a peak work force of about 600 people.

Information courtesy Ontario Power Generation

(An article on the Mattagami River is presented in the Winter 2005 issue of *Nastawgan*)





BUGS

Many photographs of canoe country bugs, such as blackflies and mosquitoes, show the small or large groupings of these animals settling on tents, clothing, or gear, or trying to crawl into various unprotected places on your body as they look for blood.

I was searching for something different and was therefore very grateful when my wife, Ria, obliged me by letting herself be bitten involuntarily near the outside corner of her right eye. Just one blackfly bite led to a formidable swelling that completely shut her eye, showing very effectively what these little pests can do. And this from a tiny blackfly only about three millimetres long!

A folk remedy used to lessen the impact of such an attack prescribes pressing a soaked tea bag to the swelling and letting the tannin in the tea do its work. It takes about an hour for most of the swelling to disappear without unpleasant side effects.

Both photos are tightly cropped close-ups, concentrating on the affected part of the face, thus adding to the impact of the images by eliminating much of the surrounding area. Because the midday sunlight was hard, I positioned Ria in such a way that the light illuminated her face without creating too many dark shadows.

These shots are good examples of the power of seeing and recognizing everyday happenings missed by many less observant people.

Excerpt from *Shooting Paddlers* by Toni Harting, Natural Heritage Books, © 2000.



FOOD FOR PADDLERS

I've met Dawne and Dave Robinson several times now. For the past two years they have presented at the Fall weekend with very professional, entertaining stories of their trips on the Stikine and the Romaine rivers. Dawne has forwarded several recipes, the second of which is featured below with this introduction from her: "Here's another favourite recipe we've stolen from our friend, Dave Hibbard."

Chicken Enchilada Pie

- 12 tortillas (these things last forever - makes me wonder what's in them)
- 2 cans chicken (or use dehydrated version)
- 1/2 cup chopped almonds
- 1 lb grated cheddar cheese
- Pre-mix: 3 tbsp chicken bouillon, 2 tbsp cornstarch, 1/2 tsp each of chili powder and garlic powder
- 3 cups water

Combine chicken, almonds and 1/2 of the cheese in a separate container. To make the sauce, combine water and the Pre-mix (chicken bouillon/cornstarch/seasonings) and boil for one minute. Add 1/3 cup of the sauce to the chicken mixture. Using a greased outback oven, layer the tortillas, chicken mixture, a little sauce, and repeat. Top with the remaining cheese and pour the remaining sauce over top. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes.

For a vegetarian option, replace the chicken mixture with re-fried beans (you can buy a dehydrated version). Layer tortillas with cheese, beans, rehydrated green pepper. Add salsa. If you have dehydrated sour cream (we get ours from boxes of Lipton Instant Stroganoff), it adds a nice touch.

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.



THE FEAR

Packing. The usual occupation for all free time for the month or so before a wilderness canoe trip. Mostly a very pleasant experience. Pulled out the camping gear and seeing if it was tough enough for another trip. The tent? Old but serviceable. Duffle bags? Sorted through them looking for those with no holes, or at least small holes. I line all of my duffle bags with heavy-duty plastic liners. A double layer of protection. Years ago I found a construction supply company that supplied clear plastic bags used for removing asbestos from buildings undergoing renovation. Mil thickness beyond measure. Only problem was that you had to buy a roll of a hundred bags. Too many bags for most people. But a lifetime of canoeing later, and I can see that the roll is slowly being used up.

Cooking gear? Have bits and pieces from multiple sets purchased over the years. For each trip I search through the gear trying to match the cooking needs for this year's trip with the number of people on this year's trip. Usual number is four. So that means four cups, four plates, four spoons, a medium fry pan, a medium and a large cooking kettle.

Finally, all items to be checked against the gear list. A master list developed over years of making sure all the essentials for survival are in the duffle bags. When there is no resupply, there can be no mistakes.

Noticed also that the fear was back. It happens before every trip. The "Why am I doing this?" fear. The "I am too old for this" fear. The "How much more of this do I need?" fear. Lots of fears. They build slowly towards the day the trip starts. Almost to the point where you think "Maybe it is too much. Maybe I should just do a trip closer to civilization. Maybe I am too old for this."

I don't think that I have been on a wilderness canoe trip yet where the fears did not show up shortly before the trip was to start. Now that I know they are going to come, my defences are ready for them.

I tell the fears that I need this. Badly. I need wilderness in my life. I need to test myself against the elements. I need to cover ground by my own power. I need to see what is around the next bend.

The fears do not go away until you are in the wilderness. At the end of the first day after the tents are up and the first dinner is cooked and consumed. When the realization hits that you really are back on another wilderness canoe trip, the fears give up the fight for the year.

They will be back. Next year when you are preparing again for another wilderness canoe trip.

But that's next year.

And I will be ready for them.

Greg Went

Churchill River

Patuanak to Sandy Bay, 2009

Text: Allan Jacobs Photos: Stephen Catlin and Allan Jacobs



Bob, Linda, and Allan at Patuanak

Group

We were a WCA group: Linda Gordon, Bob Bignell, Stephen Catlin (who came over from OZ to paddle with us), and myself. Our prime motivation to paddle the Churchill was the vital role it played in the fur trade, without which, Canada,

if it existed at all, would be a very different place.

High points

- Paddling the fur-trade route, making the same portages, running the same rapids, ...



Stephen, Bob, and Linda at the start of the Dipper portage

- The Dene (chief, elders, and others) at Patuanak who came down to say hello, give advice on the rapids, and offer the use of their island for camping.

- Missinipe BBQ and fireworks on 1 July (quite a show for a hamlet with 29 permanent residents).

- Holy Trinity Church at Stanley Mission.

- Nistowiak Falls.

- Simultaneous sunset and moonrise at our campsite on Drinking Lake.

- Walking the Frog Portage and dipping a boot into the waters of the Saskatchewan River.

- The HBC Archives in Winnipeg.

Low points

- Drunken louts from Macklin SK camping beside us.

- Screaming, drunken teenagers at the provincial campground in Missinipe.

- The shooting of a bear that had been wandering around the Missinipe campground.

- Too much rain and too much wind.

What to expect

- The native people (Dene upstream, Cree down) use the Churchill heavily, as do fisher-folk based at lodges.

- Most major rapids are bypassed by a marine railway or a log ramp. The many smaller rapids are fun runs for the most part.

- The first few days below Patuanak offer few rocky outcrops suitable for camping; and we found that stretch quite buggy (no-see-ums as well as black flies).

- Several excellent guide books are available, but we often had bad luck finding the campsites.

- The Churchill is spanned by only two bridges.

- It is not much paddled; in a little over five weeks on the river, we met only two groups more than a few days from Missinipe.

Some features of our trip

- bald eagles, zillions of them
- beaver lodges, ditto - beavers, ditto (four-legged water bombers)
- boreal forest
- brown reeds (look like beaches from afar, disappointingly)
- beaches few
- bugs not so bad after the first four days
- black-headed gulls (though none of us can tell a Franklin's from a Bonaparte's, I favour the latter)
- campsites few and small, on the whole
- Pink Lady's Slippers, masses of them at two campsites
- pelicans, somehow both majestic and comical. Some had bumps on the tops of their beaks (present only during breeding season, says Google), some not. We saw hundreds of them but not one feeding
- very little wildlife (two bear cubs at Snake Rapids, not a single moose) except for beavers
- no fishing, our personal choice, but we were not averse to accepting gifts.
- very high water

Here follows the much condensed journal. The full version of this report is available at Canadian Canoe Routes [HYPERLINK http://www.myccr.com/SectionForums/viewtopic.php?f=112&t=33690](http://www.myccr.com/SectionForums/viewtopic.php?f=112&t=33690)<http://www.myccr.com/SectionForums/viewtopic.php?f=112&t=33690>

After a lengthy shuttle from Missinipe, we arrived in Patuanak and set about assembling the PakCanoes. Several of the local people, including the chief (who called himself the mayor) came down to chat and offer advice and assistance. The first, but far from the last, rain of the trip came down so we dropped things and had lunch in the local shelter. We paddled to the island and camped in a cloud of bugs.

The next few days saw us portage and run several rapids, camp in more clouds of bugs, get forced-in by wind, pass through a marshy region, and, of course, get rained on. I should explain that we were taking it easy, having lots of time to reach Missinipe, where Linda would



Allan, Linda, and Bob resting on the upper Churchill

leave us. We ran Knee Rapids without scouting, Linda and I ahead. Suddenly realizing what we were up against, I shouted: "LINDA, IT'S A LEDGE!", to which she replied, softly: "I know." We corkscrewed some going over it but stayed completely dry; runs like that are meat for a PakCanoe. Our campsite below Elak Dase IR was buggy but had a good view and a wealth of Pink Lady's Slippers.

After our next site (on Sandy Lake, where the beavers, perhaps resenting our

presence, bombed us all night), we ran Snake Rapids (yes, there are snakes in Saskatchewan). Just as Max Finkelstein had done, we pulled in and camped at KamKota Lodge, not neglecting to buy ice cream, shave, do laundry and all that.

The camp staff went around at maybe 10 pm, asking everyone to observe quiet hours. The guys beside us, from Macklin SK, were not to be told by two women how to behave; they shouted and carried on until well past midnight. Some people would say that they used far too



Shelter on Sandfly Lake



"a very large stone, in the form of a bear..." (Alexander Mackenzie)

many f-words; scarcely a sentence (when the speaker was sober enough to construct one) or sentence fragment lacked one. I disagree. They used only a few, each spoken however rather too many times.

Two more days of wind and rain got us to Sandfly Lake. En route, I mistook some pelicans for white cabins much farther away; each of us made the same mistake several times on this trip. It was at this point that I coined the word *pelicabins*. The island where we camped had masses of Pink Lady's Slippers and the rock mentioned by Alexander Mackenzie: "... a very large stone, in the form of a bear, on which the natives have painted the head and snout of that animal; and here they also were formerly accustomed to offer sacrifices."

Two days' rest (one planned, one forced by the wind) on the island were followed by a day with lots of portaging, more wind, and more rain. The sun came out the next day though, and after running Silent Rapids (which has several nasty boils and whirlpools) and another swift not so serious, we entered Black Bear Island Lake and camped.

The wind was already up when we got off and it got worse as the day progressed. We ran some gentle rapids (yes, rapids in a lake), then turned east into a stiff head wind. Getting what shelter we could, we struggled to the site mentioned in the guide. Good thing too, for we had gone as far as we could; there was no way we could cross the bay beyond it. The view was good from where we camped but the site was exposed to the

wind, and so we set up the tarp to get some protection. After supper, a spectacular storm came up, enveloping the four of us "in thunder, lightning and in rain." It was not your standard thunderstorm, for the rain was pouring down in a very small chute; the sight made me recall my six years in central Illinois, listening to the radio every April and May for tornado warnings. The bulk of the storm missed us though and we saw no evidence of twisters forming.

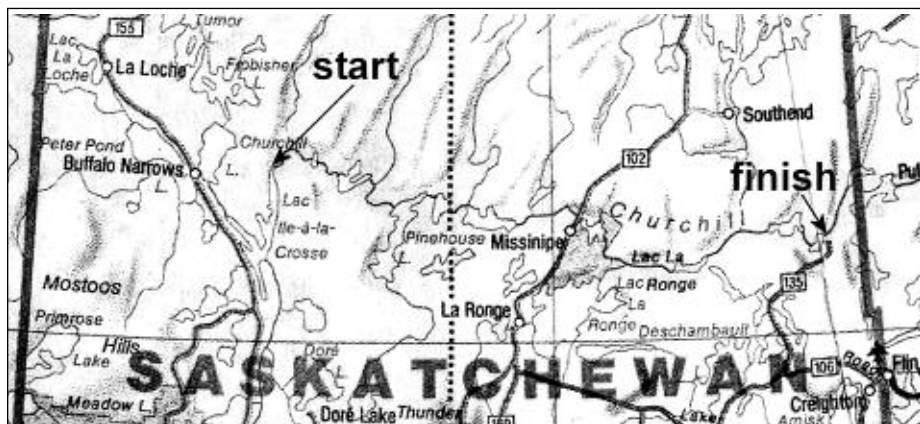
The next day saw another struggle against the wind and we had to pull in above Birch Portage. Two paddlers dropped by the next morning, the first we had seen in 16 days on the river. One had done several trips north of 60. The other had paddled in the Churchill area every summer since reading Sigurd Olson's *The Lonely Land* some 20 years earlier. Six youngsters from Lanigan SK did Birch Portage at the same time as we; we would see them several times over the next few days.

We continued down Trout Lake, in deteriorating conditions (wind and rain). Not finding the guide sites, we camped at a poor site with nothing to recommend it but, first, its existence, and second, its ability to hold three tents. There was a fire pit in the water, another indication of high levels.

We avoided Trout Portage (the youngsters told us later that it is indeed nasty) by paddling upriver to McIntosh Lake. The portage to Stack Lake itself was in great shape, with much of it fitted with a boardwalk for the convenience of the guests at the lodge on McIntosh. We ran the easy rapids below Stack and camped at the start of the Rock Trout Portage.

More rapids got us to Mountney Lake and then Nipew Lake, the latter with a lodge and many boats. We camped on Hayman Lake, above Great Devil Rapids. It would have been a great site had not the ground been so damp from all that rain. In preparation for the last day or two, we all got cleaned up using the bathing nook to the north end.

We played it safe and portaged Great Devil, in light rain. After running Little Devil, we entered Devil Lake to, guess what?, a head wind too stiff for us to attempt reaching Missinipe. After a struggle, we camped above the bridge. Devil Lake had lots of canoe and motorboat



traffic, I expect because of the campground on the east side.

Having full confidence in the PakCanoe's ability to handle big water (I must say that we had spray covers and that Linda was in the bow), we ran down the centre of Otter Rapids, in huge waves, the biggest I've ever run; they would have swamped any hardshell I've ever been in, even with spray covers. We did bail some though after eddying out at the bottom. Stephen and Bob did a C1+ run on the far left. We were happy not to see the jet boats reported as running Otter; neither did we see body surfers.

We arrived at the Missinipe campground around noon. It was a busy place, with, sad to say, PWCs. There we met Ely, a paddler from Sachigo in northern Ontario, where he teaches. We unloaded, set up (I was unsure whether to be alarmed or reassured by the baited bear cage at the site), then went into town for ice cream and all that. We were struck by the use of golf carts rather than ATVs for getting around town, the first time any of us had seen them used this way. I understand that carts are actually more expensive but they are sure quieter and less damaging to the environment.

The BBQ started at 2 pm (\$2 for it plus the pancake breakfast, which we missed); our waistlines grew considerably. But after three weeks on the river, we decided to have supper at the restaurant. The only beer offered was domestic Pilsener; for those who prefer dish-water, there was Kokanee, Bud Light and Coors Light. A bear caused some excitement when it walked by the restaurant, heading toward the campground, and more when it returned.

About 20 teenagers (we were told that most come from La Ronge) were well out of control before the fireworks started, chugging vodka from the bottle. The fireworks were spectacular, given the size of the resident population; I'm not sure though that the staff were fully qualified.

On the way back to the campground, we learned that a conservation officer had tried to lure the bear into the cage by our tents but had failed and shot it; the body was gone when we arrived. One of the families told us that the bear had



Needle Falls

eaten their child's birthday cake, which they had left on the picnic table by their trailer; I wonder how much that incident had contributed to its death.

The teenagers continued screaming and drinking into the small hours.

Next day, we met with Ric Driediger (Churchill River Canoe Outfitters), did the finances, and arranged Linda's shut-

tle to La Ronge the next day. Concerned that Bob might have trouble paddling a 17' PakCanoe solo, I asked Ric about exiting at Sandy Bay. He advised us to use the services of Slim's Cabins if we decided not to continue to Pukatawagan, advice that we were glad to have when the time came. I did a load of laundry and shaved. Linda packed up and moved



Bob starting supper; Black Bear Island Lake site



"The Gathering Storm", Upper Churchill

into one of Thompson's rooms for her last night in Missinipe; she hosted us in her room after another supper at Thompson's.

Evening brought more parties in the dock area, with some fireworks, but most of the residents at the Animal House had kindly gone home.

After breakfast, we walked back to the campground, where one of Ric's people picked Linda up for the shuttle to La Ronge. We said sad goodbye to Missinipe, a place we all really liked, not

as sad though as the one to Linda a bit over an hour before. Stephen and I realized right away that Bob, with his double-bladed paddle, was just as fast as us if not faster on the lakes, provided there was no wind. And he had no problem in the rapids. But the wind caused him considerable difficulty; the usual remedy, sitting in the bow seat and facing the stern was not possible because of the PakCanoe's construction. Often he had to go well off course to get shelter, sometimes even paddle backward.

This reach of the Churchill is well used by both motorboats and paddlers. We took the one-portage route past Robertson and Twin Falls. The river at the bottom of Twin Falls was turbulent, with eddies and vicious whirlpools but we got through OK; I expect that the high water made things worse than usual. We passed some native sites of obvious spiritual significance to them. But the wind came up again and the rain threatened once more, so we pulled in where we could, at a campsite on Cow Island. Next day, we wound our way through the maze of islands, entered Mountain Lake, paddled past Amuchewaspimewin Cliff ("Shooting-up Rock"), and continued to Stanley Mission, where we bought a few things, but couldn't buy what we really wanted, namely fuel. We crossed the river to the

church (oldest building in Saskatchewan, oldest church in Canada west of the Red River) and spent quite some time there. It's beautiful from the outside, but I found the interior strange; it is constructed of wood but made to resemble a 14th century church, arches and all, a little piece of England in the wilderness.

We bypassed Big Stanley Rapids and camped at the start of its smaller sibling, using the roller ramp to get the boats out of the water. Saskatchewan Parks had gone to considerable effort to prepare the portage and the campsites, both the site we used and the one at the foot of the rapids. At the latter was a very friendly, church-based group from Meadow Lake SK; they invited us over and gave us fish and potato supper. After a good chat, we returned to our site for soup and dessert. Motorboat parties came through for some time after we hit the tents.

We got hit by heavy rain as we paddled Drope Lake but we were used to that by now. In the fast channel before Nistowiak Lake, we passed two guys in a canoe heading upstream, both paddling mightily on one side, then both swinging wildly over to the other; well, maybe many of us made such a comical sight when we started out. After lunch, where we got hit by a big storm, we paddled over to the mouth of the Rapid River and walked up to Nistowiak Falls. Shame on you if you rush by and not see it.

We returned and continued downstream in rapidly worsening conditions; a stiff crosswind came up and the campsite search began once more. A struggle got us to the portage at Potter Rapids; the very friendly people at the lodge (Angler Rapids) there kindly helped us portage all our stuff through their site. More rain hit us as we fought to load the boats in the turbulent, surging water below the rapids, with gradually moderating stuff below that. The sun came out later; at our site on Drinking Lake, we were rewarded for a tough day by simultaneous sunset and moonrise.

It was dry-out time (again) and we got a late start. We took the Inman Channel to Keg Lake, stopping to take photos of the pictographs. The campsite search began again; as usual we failed. After the Keg Falls portage (easy but



Linda starting the Rock Trout Portage

time-consuming since there is room for only one boat at the start), we turned left toward Grand Rapids, picking our way through the ledge above.

We portaged Grand Rapids the next day; the trail is well defined but not well used. On heading out again, we found that the wind was up so we pulled into the bay and had lunch. The wind relented some and we tried again. We were fully exposed on entering Trade Lake and so we just headed to the south shore, where we found a native site on a beach.

Next day, a stiff bow-quarter wind came up; we got some shelter left of the chains of islands but Bob had a tough time in the gaps. We pulled in at the Frog Portage, located near the end of Trade Lake where the river turns north. Connecting the watersheds of the Churchill and Saskatchewan rivers, it was an important fur-trade link between the pelt-rich Athabasca country and the Lake Winnipeg – Hayes River route to Hudson Bay; it is still heavily used by the native people. We took photos of the plaque (down and rather badly shot up), then walked the quite impressive marine railway to Lindstrom Lake and dipped our boots in the waters of the Saskatchewan River.

The highly recommended site just downstream had been burned over but we found a small grassy spot and tented, cheek by jowl again. Suppertime saw more rain.

The river had clearly risen overnight, tribute to the rain we had been experiencing; we learned later that it had been rising for weeks and would continue to do so for days yet, at least at Otter Lake. It was another bad day, with heavy rain (the worst that any of us could remember when on the water) and very stiff winds; the latter caused Bob a lot of grief. Need I say that we started looking for a site early? Again we saw no evidence of the campsites mentioned in the guide. We continued along the shore, checking out anything remotely possible. Bob got stuck in a bay and required three tries to get out. Things were looking pretty grim when he noticed a fire pit on the left. Stephen and I were able to clear the brush and high grass out of one area, enough for our tent; my folding saw made a good grass whip. Bob got stuck with a really bad spot, the



Holy Trinity church, Stanley Mission

worst in a lengthy paddling career.

Conditions were little better in the morning: strong head wind, big waves, and black clouds, but at least no rain. They ameliorated somewhat in the early afternoon but by then we had decided to

stay over; we recognized the consequence of our decision, namely to give up on Pukatawagam and to exit instead at Slim's. As we lounged about, five paddlers from Saskatoon dropped in. They had paddled from Patuanak to



Bob and Allan on the trail to Nistowiak Falls



Rapid River below Nistowiak Falls

Missinipe another year and were doing the remainder of the Churchill to Pukatawagan (more precisely Pawistik). They had had the same experience as we in finding guide sites but somehow had found an unlisted site upstream from us. After chatting for a while, they continued downstream. We would run into them several more times.

The next morning was clear and calm. At the portage around Kettle Falls (well named), four native people, in a Misty River with a 40 hp motor, came through, on their way to Southend. It appears that the Pelican Narrows – Frog Portage – Reindeer Lake route is still well used by the native people. The confluence with the Reindeer River was a



Nistowiak Falls

non-event, but the “fast water” in the channel below was a solid C2. On entering Iskwatam Lake, we chose the southern route, reputed to be the easier. After a lengthy search, we found a site on a small island; my folding saw came in very handy in clearing space for the tent.

Running and lining got us through the several rapids at the end of Iskwatan and two portages got us to the downstream end of Wapumon Gorge, where we met the Tooners again. Both parties stopped for lunch and photos of the falls, quite a sight; the others fished, with success. Since they were not pressing on, we loaded up (one of the worst put-ins ever) and took off, with some help. The river immediately below the gorge was rather nasty, with huge surges, but we were able to sneak through between some rocks. We took the left (west) channel and entered Wintego Lake.

We looked hard for another site but found only brush and clouds of bugs. We reunited with the Tooners and camped with them; they had found nothing at the guide site. They gave us some fish for supper.

Like the Tooners, we portaged Wintego Rapids. Too late, we saw that we could have run it, easy pickings for PakCanoes with spray skirts. The sharp right turn brought us to a series of three rapids. We ran the first set; running the second was out of the question, and lining it would have been far too dangerous, so we portaged to the bay before the third rapid. We portaged that one, a monster; even from several hundred metres upstream, one could see huge bursts of spray rising every ten seconds or so. We took the north, shorter channel around Duncan Island. At the next rapid, the Tooners went right, portaging we think; we didn't see them again. Instead, we landed at the island and scouted both the trickles and the rapid in the left channel. We spent a lot of time bushwhacking, trying to get a good view of the rapid, but gave up and returned to the boats. Stephen and I ran the tongue on the left while Bob watched. Embarrassingly, we missed the planned eddy turn into the bay below the point, but we straightened it out and went down; I gave the all-clear to Bob at the last possible moment, though one boil caused some anxiety.

We turned east, then south toward Brown Peninsula. The wind was up again, in our faces of course. Leaving Bob in a sheltered spot, Stephen and I crossed to the east side and looked hard for the guide site, to no avail. We returned to the west side, picked up Bob, and headed south, moving over to the east shore. We turned into the bay and found the abandoned cabin right where the guide said it was. It was surrounded by waist-high grass; no way to camp there without a major clearing effort, which would have left the area badly scarred; we were told later that the owner had grazed horses there. Having no choice, we set up the tents inside the cabin; it was in very bad shape, with one entire side gone, big holes in the roof and a floor very weak in places. I don't know that it will be available for next year's paddlers. A big, bad storm hit us in the night and some stuff got wet that need not have.

The next day was by far the worst of the trip, cold with a stiff wind and plentiful rain. Bob had a rough time dealing with the head wind. Verging on hypothermia, we pulled in for shelter at the top of a bay before the lakey area and the turn south toward Reeds Lake.

We left under threatening skies, 32 km from Slim's, expecting a repeat of the previous day. All went well, though, except for the wind, which caused problems in the open stretches. The crossing was difficult for Bob but the channel heading south was sheltered. A good current got us down to the upper part of Reeds Lake okay, but then we were exposed to the wind again and Bob had to struggle once more. We crossed to the east shore and passed several lodges, unoccupied at the time.

After lunch at the narrows (lots of current and boils), we entered Sokatisewin Lake and began the search for Slim's; we regretted not asking for directions either from Ric or from the motorboats we had met on the river. Eventually we flagged down a motorboat and got instructions, something like 'stay right and you can't miss it,' rather unclear in view of the several bays on the right. Much later, Stephen spotted a flag on the right and we were on our way.

The people at Slim's were highly ac-



Rapid River above Nistowiak Falls

commodating and paddler friendly. I believe it was Bruce who said that only three or four canoe groups come through each year, but they hadn't seen the Tooners, who were by then half a day ahead of us, we think. Somehow it came out in the chat I had with her that Sandy had paddled the Churchill the year before with Jason Schoonover, with whom

I had corresponded regarding the William; small world indeed.

We rented a cabin at a very reasonable rate, cleaned up and started repacking. Slim's arranged a shuttle to Flin Flon, where we would take the overnight bus to Winnipeg. But Rte 135 was flooded out, not surprisingly in view of the weather we had experienced. Not



Below rapid on the Inman Channel, above Keg Lake



Bob, carriage, and boats at the north end of the Frog portage



Allan and Bob waiting for the wind to die



Start of Kettle Falls

knowing when we could get through, we didn't call either WestJet (to reschedule our return flights) or Hendrik Herfst in Winnipeg; he paddled with us in 2005 on the Back and in 2007 on the Keele and we wanted to see him again. But Stephen did phone Ric to say that we were off the river. Fortunately we had no rain overnight and all the gear we had left out stayed dry.

The morning was spent drying things out and repacking; again we lucked out with the weather (we sure deserved it). Bruce came by and gathered us up; he had good news and bad news: the washout had been fixed but another one had opened up. After a lengthy wait at the washout, we got through and arrived in Creighton (just across the border from Flin Flon) and the Greyhound station. We sent nearly all our gear back by BPX. After a so-so supper, we returned to the station and hit the road at 8 pm.

The mine and smelter in Flin Flon have devastated what was surely once a beautiful area. With rocks, water and trees, it must have looked like Temagami; now it looks like Sudbury in the '50s. During a stopover in The Pas (the name does not come from the French; it is rather an abbreviation/corruption of the native word for the place), Bob and Stephen were able to get through on the phones and rearrange our return flights from Winnipeg, with substantial charges. We passed through Cranberry Portage in the evening, to me a sad sight. The portage was on the "Upper Track", the route (used by the native people between 1670 and 1774) linking Cumberland House to the Nelson, through Namew Lake, the Goose River, and the Grass River [Source: Eric Morse]. At the relief stop in Swan River, I was pleased to see a large, lighted swan outside the Super 8 motel; someone had gone to a lot of effort and considerable expense to set it up.

After another stop (in Dauphin), we arrived in Winnipeg on time at 7 am, somewhat bleary eyed since none of us had slept well. A large taxi got us and all our stuff to the airport. It was too early to check in so we went to the Four Points Sheraton next door for a hearty

breakfast, replenishing our fat supplies.

Bob left for his WestJet flight to Hamilton. Stephen and I had decided to stay and see something of the city, especially the HBC Archives (which contains also some NWC Archives). We spent the afternoon there, apart from a lunch break. Not knowing what else to do, I asked where I could find information on Peter Pond, having selected the name at random from my small memory bank of names of early visitors to the Churchill. The staff, all great people, got out the original manuscript of Cuthbert Grant's English River Book, his journal for 1 April to 31 May 1786; Grant was a subordinate of Pond. They invited us to leaf through the manuscript, but there was no way that either of us would touch something so precious.

I gawked for a long time at reproductions of Peter Pond's maps from his 1792 trip on the Churchill and Sturgeon-weir (Île-à-la-Crosse to Cumberland House). One map showed Grand Rapids, with the ledge upstream clearly marked, and also the portage around it, on river left as it is today. Other maps showed the Frog Portage, Birch Portage, Knee Lake, and Primeau Lake; Primeau's house was located roughly where we saw the settlement on Primeau. And I spent a lot of time looking at publications and other treasures of the Hudson's Bay Record Society.

All too soon the Archives closed. Stephen and I hoofed it down to The Forks, which Hendrik had shown me three years before on my return from the Seal River. The water was way up and the path was closed but we went down to the river anyway. We should have had supper at the Forks, but we returned downtown, looking for a restaurant but finding only the Pony Corral. Downtown Winnipeg was a bit of a disappointment; the sidewalks get rolled up at 5 pm or so. We returned to the Sheraton and got ready to leave the next morning.

After another big breakfast, we started home, to the drudgery of laundry, cleaning up, replacing gear, and all that. I had another big meal that evening, the fourth in two days, but found that I had still lost 10 pounds.



Saskatooners on the Kettle Falls portage



Stephen and Bob at the end of the portage above the monster



Stephen and the monster

Crickets: A Midsummer Night's Dreamboat

Who has not drifted off to sleep at this time of year listening to the pleasant chirping of crickets outside our tent or cottage? It is one of those familiar, comforting sounds of warm summer nights that tell us all is well with the world and help us forget our worries.

Most of the time we are as content as anyone else to accept the summer singing of crickets as the soothing background it is. Once in a while, however, our thoughts wander to the individual performers and we try to picture just what is going on out there in the black warmth of the night.

If you hear a cricket calling close by, for example, you can be sure that it is a male doing his best to attract females. The male produces the sound by "stridulating" — rubbing his wings together rapidly in such a way that special, hardened bumps on their surfaces give out a remarkable loud burst of "music."

The volume of one of these songs

can be as much as 90 decibels, and the reason why a male puts so much energy into his singing is not hard to guess. The louder his song, the more attractive he is to females and the greater the distance he can pull them from. And it really does work. Female crickets sometimes literally run towards calling males and they mate immediately upon arrival at the source of the sound. For a female cricket, a song in the night signifies Mr. Right — no questions asked.

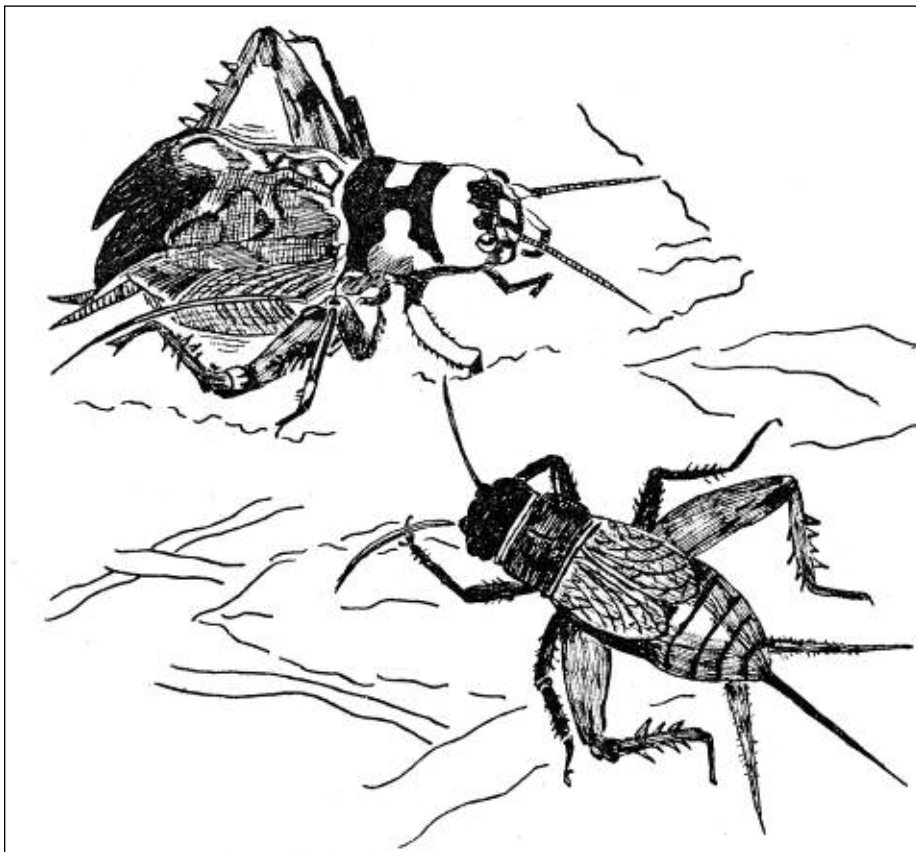
You may find this a little strange because the females of most animals are normally very fussy about the males they accept as mates. Generally speaking, females choose the strongest and fittest males so that the superior qualities of those males will enhance the survival prospects of their offspring. The apparently indiscriminate females of crickets seem to violate this general pattern, but in fact they don't. For them, any male that sings has already provided ample proof of his superiority

and there is really no need to check him out any further.

The reality of life for male crickets is that they live in a very crowded and competitive world. At times it may seem that many crickets (perhaps too many) are singing you to sleep, but believe us, the ones that sing are only a small minority of the crickets that are actually out there. The ones that sing are the cream of the crop, the ones that are tough enough to seize an exclusive singing territory and defend it from a host of pretenders to the grass blade. Any male cricket that comes closer to a singer than about a metre will be viciously attacked and quite possibly injured.

No wonder, then, that females readily zero in on singing males and have them father their young. No wonder, either, that many males, apparently sensing that they can't compete with the territory holders, refrain from singing altogether. As long as they keep their wings firmly shut, such males can wander at will, often very close to the singing males, without being attacked. As a matter of fact, they deliberately stay close to the singers (and are called "satellite males" as a result) because this gives them their one chance for success. Being silent, they can't attract females themselves, but once in a while they will waylay and forcibly mate with a female running in towards the calling male (Hey, it's dark out, crickets can't talk, and the boss will never know.)

Now, the fact that each calling male cricket is surrounded by several silent satellites raises a very interesting question. Perceptive readers will already be wondering how such a pattern could persist. If males that sing achieve more matings, they should leave more descendants (who would also be singers), and they should have long ago come to totally predominate in the cricket population. It shouldn't matter that satellite males sometimes steal matings; as long



as they father fewer offspring than the singing males, they (the silent ones) should dwindle more and more with each generation until, for all practical purposes, they have entirely disappeared. How, then, can we explain the continued presence of both singing and silent behaviours among modern crickets? There is in fact only one possible answer. Notwithstanding our first impressions, the two types of behaviour must in fact give rise to equal number of descendants. The only way for that to be true would be if singing crickets live shorter lives than silent crickets. If a singing male achieved four matings a night, but lived for just three weeks, he would leave the same number of descendants as a silent male who had only two matings a night but lived for six weeks.

But why would singing males, undoubtedly the strongest, toughest, and most desirable of all, have shorter lives than their weaker competitors? There are apparently at least three reasons. To begin with, a singing cricket is exposed to sudden sneak attacks by satellite males who may try to take over the top spot. Even if the singer beats off the attacker, he may be injured and have his life shortened as a result.

A second serious risk run by calling crickets is that they attract, not only females, but predators as well. Crickets partly avoid this problem by being active only at night, but studies in the U.S. have shown that cats are very capable of honing in on the sound of crickets. Cats aren't a factor here in Algonquin, of course, but it is very likely that other night-time predators are a threat.

The most insidious danger of all faced by singing crickets is that their calls attract parasites. The females of certain flies are just as responsible to the cricket songs as are female crickets. When the flies arrive at the source of the sound, however, they deposit larvae on the doomed singer. The larvae burrow inside the cricket, feed, and grow for about a week, and then emerge to pupate and transform to adult flies. You

won't be surprised that this is rather hard on the male cricket; in fact, he invariably dies as the fattened-up larvae emerge from his body.

Of course, in the greater scheme of things, it doesn't really matter how a singing cricket dies as long as, on average, it is at an earlier age than for silent crickets. In that way, even though it attracts and mates with many more females in a given night than any silent satellite male, this advantage is cancelled out by the singer's shorter life, and the two types leave equal numbers of offspring over the long haul.

In actual fact, things are even more subtle than this because individual males are capable of switching back and forth from one strategy to the other depending on the circumstances. If cricket numbers are low, for example, individual males can space themselves out and all adopt the singing strategy. If the population density increases, on the other hand, many of the same males may face such stiff competition that they will do better by becoming silent satellites.

We find it intriguing to think about these things when we turn in on a mid-summer night, and we recommend it to you too. What better way to lull yourself off to sleep than by listening to their songs and pondering eternal cricket verities. The male you hear chirping away unseen in the darkness is, for the local females, a dream cricket come true. Irresistibly they are drawn to his songs and mating takes place out there in the warm summer night. On the down side, it is true for some crickets that "the way to your lover's heart may lead to someone else's stomach," but don't lose any sleep over this. After all, there is a strong cricket tradition of living for today and not worrying about tomorrow. You know, "if music be the food of love, stridulate on!"

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Book Review

PADDLING WITH A NATURALIST by Brett Hodnett, produced and distributed by www.iuniverse.com, 2010, soft-cover, 127 pages, US\$13.95.

Review by Toni Harting.

For many of us, an important aspect of wilderness canoeing is the opportunity to get connected to the countless elements that make up nature. The priceless flora and fauna we encounter on our trips give each outing an extra measure of importance and a true sense of life. To help us better recognize and understand the beauty we see around us, several books have been produced that on the whole do a good job. Hodnett's book is the latest in this group and probably one of the best. The author, a long-time WCA member and frequent contributor to *Nastawgan*, takes us a few days paddling in Algonquin Park and shows us many things taking place and living in and on the water, the portage trail, and the campsite. Although the book is rather small, it presents a surprisingly wide range of subjects, discussed by a very-well-qualified observer (the author has a Bachelor's degree in biology and a Master's degree in botany) in an open, clear, and efficient writing style. Do you want to know how leeches digest their blood dinner, how dragonflies mate, how frogs manage to survive winter, or why some trees have leaves and others have needles, it's all there and much more in this charming book that, in its short 37 chapters, gives us a wealth of insight into many marvels of nature we can discover as wilderness canoeists

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