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The Wilderness Canoe Association  
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Canada  
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CPM #40015547



# NASTAWGAN

*The Journal of the Wilderness Canoe Association*

FALL 2022



# **Join WCA**

**Membership entitles you to participate in WCA trips and activities, receive the Nastawgan journal, website access, arrange outings and vote at association meetings.**

**We prefer that you join or renew your WCA membership online at  
[http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca/join\\_wca](http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca/join_wca)**

**If you sign up for a one-year membership your expiry date is always March 31 of the following year.**

**Multi-year memberships are available.**

**Individual \$35/year**

**Family \$45/year**





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nastawgan

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*Aerial view of a logjam; a drone was deployed to help scout for the safest bypass; photo credit: Robert James*

## Bon Adventure!

by Isadora van Riemsdijk

Robert James' first trip posting as a relatively new member required persistence. Rob had been the last-minute recruited replacement for a Fall 2019 Rivière Coulonge whitewater trip. But when he signed up and tried to post his own multi-day whitewater trip less than two years later, the Covid-19 lockdown in May 2021 forced him to postpone it.

Sandro Weiner's five-day WCA spring trip down Rivière Bonaventure in 2019 from Lac Bonaventure to the Baie des Chaleurs proved inspiring to me – it made for some great stories and pictures. The river is fast, 127 km long with nearly non-stop class 1 and 2 rapids and some class 3 ledges. It features crystal clear water, no portages, no park fees and... no bugs. Cautions





*Clear cold water; photo credit: Yiu Yin Chang*

included logjams, sweepers and icy cold water. Not for the faint of heart or solo tripper.

Unfortunately, there was a severe flood in December 2020 and the outfitting company (CIME Aventures) providing shuttles and excursions along Rivière Bonaventure, declined to provide the 3.5 hr shuttle service and warned us of extreme danger due to logjams and flood debris. We eventually deduced they also faced staffing shortages and a legal conflict over the river use with the vibrant local recreational salmon fishing industry. CIME was confining their operations to short guided trips and their campground rentals.

In early 2022, after countless cold calls and internet searches, Rob connected with a ZEC Bonaventure staffer (ZEC: Zone d'Exploitation Contrôlée, i.e. Quebec conservation authority) who not only confirmed that the upper section of the river was still navigable (others had accomplished the descent

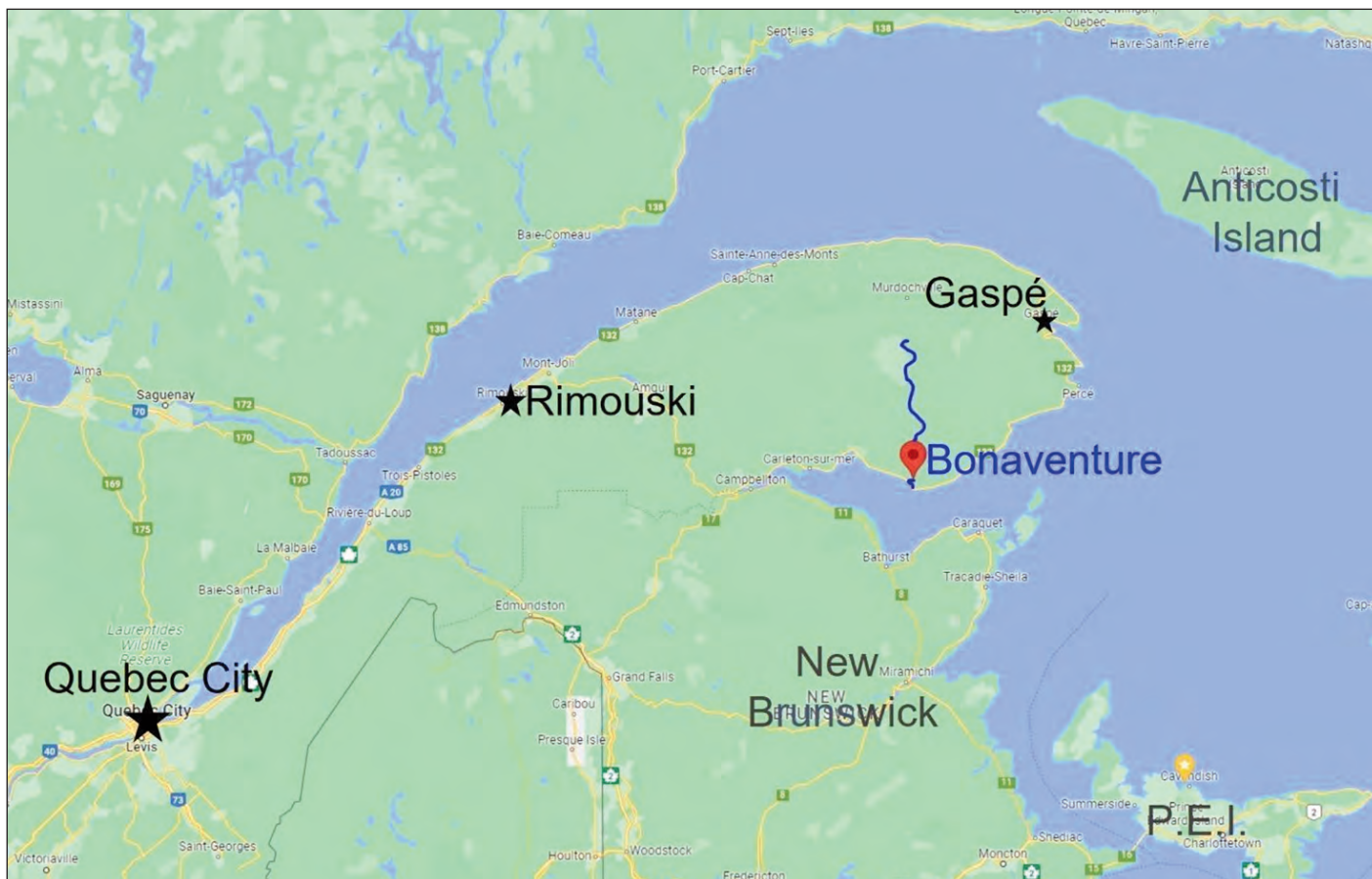
the previous year) but also found a local person who was willing to provide a shuttle through the network of logging roads, pairing our group with a second client that had been asking the same questions. Rob also connected with Yann Barriault of Eskamer Adventure (<https://eskamer.ca>), an “adventure” company based in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, about two hours away on the north shoreline of the Gaspé peninsula between the Chic Chocs (Parc National de la Gaspésie) and Forillon National Park (“Land’s End”). Eskamer did their insurance homework and committed to providing the shuttle service. As word gets out, I’m sure they’ll be getting more calls to fill the void left by the departure of CIME for services to the upper section of the Bonaventure River – a river well known by professional guides in Ontario, Quebec, Maine and the eastern seaboard.

The next hurdle was finding an experienced tripping team to make up at least 3 boats. After some beating of the

bushes and a cancellation, a team of six was finalized – Robert James, Sara Gartlan, Yiu-Yin Chang, Isadora van Riemsdijk, Tom Baker (1st WCA trip!) and Tom Beakbane (2019 Bonaventure trip alumni). Carpooling logistics for participants and canoes from Hamilton, Toronto, Aurora, Parry Sound, Ottawa, and Montreal took more work and patience but in the end two loaded cars with three canoes headed east. Bonaventure is 1,500 km from Toronto.

In the face of the “unknown” condition of the river (reports of “severe” logjams) and a strong preference for a relaxed travel pace, Rob chose to make the trip six full days with hike opportunities and a rustic cabin stay at CIME at the start and finish. Launch day, Yann Barriault of Eskamer met us at CIME to shuttle us to the headwaters at Lac Bonaventure. Trip teamwork kicked off with an exercise in spatial relations. Seven people worked out how to securely tie three different makes and models of canoes to the custom roof-





**Trip Map**

rack of the expedition sized van. The rack was a wee bit too narrow for two canoes to sit side by side.

The roads to Lac Bonaventure were, for the most part, much better than expected – well marked and smooth gravel. We breathed a sigh of relief; we had been told that the roads were in very bad shape, suitable only for a 4x4. The “other” part involved sections where our driver gingerly navigated past some streams and deep ruts. We sometimes got out of the van to cut down some of the trees that lay across the road and towards the very end, just kept walking ahead of the van, shoving debris out of the way. Yup! a 4x4 is definitely recommended!

The river was high and fast, as expected, and the job in the bow was a busy one. Paddlers were on constant alert for fast, sharp bends, with currents pushing boats hard into walls or sweepers while dodging sleeper rocks. We stayed close together as any upset could easily result in vanished baggage or an



**Log Jam and sweepers; photo credit: Yiu Yin Chang**





*Sweepers; photo credit: Yiu Yin Chang*



*Teamwork for a swamped canoe; photo credit: Yiu Yin Chang*



*Cutting a passage through a sweeper; photo credit: I. van Riemsdijk*

impossibly difficult long upstream access to a pinned canoe.

Evidence of the big flood was everywhere. Campsites were hard to find and usually smaller and rougher than expected. Log pile ups were frequent, increasing in size until they were the size of small apartment blocks as the river drained into the ocean. The trees still seemed to be marching off the banks and toppling into the water as though they were being pushed from behind. We stopped a half dozen times just ahead or behind dangerous sweepers, taking turns (but mostly watching Tom Beakbane and Sara Gartlan) attacking tree trunks with sharp folding saws until they were severed and the group could drag the timber aside. There was evidence of people ahead of us. Other sweepers had been dealt with so we had a sense trees were falling every day. In one case a very rough liftover path beside a complicated jam had been established. In another, there was red “tuck” tape flagging just ahead, alerting us to the danger of a big jam by a dense forest that took us a while to decide how best to negotiate safely. Rob launched his drone to help scout.

On the third day we proved why a group is necessary for a trip like this. We decided to finish the day early in a high canyon at a well established campsite above a class three ledge fed by a high thin waterfall tumbling down the other shore. We unloaded our gear and spent a lot of time scouting to run the ledges in empty boats. The high water level and fast current made for canoe-rolling angled, curling waves. Since there wasn’t a pool and easy eddy at the bottom, we sent the best paddlers first with the rest of us stationed at the bottom with video cameras and throw bags. It was a good thing we were prepared as despite near-perfect execution of the line, the bow lost grip of her paddle before the last ledge and over they went. Both throw bags were deployed with accuracy and both paddlers retrieved, one towing her boat and one sporting a massive thigh contusion. Their two paddles ended up mid-rapid, wedged nearly upright in rocks, cheekily just out of reach. Before the canoe could be sorted with new paddles, a throw rope had been deployed to



dislodge one of the paddles and we helplessly watched it speed away never to be seen again. It was the expensive one, of course.

A second canoe tried their luck with a slightly different strategy on the same line. They slowly and carefully executed their plan but were caught by a canoe-rolling side wave after the second step. Throwbags were deployed again to good effect and this time the only injury was a badly bruised hand with lacerated knuckles. Prizefighter bandages coupled with a Michael Jacksonesque single glove were fashion accessories for the rest of the trip. Undeterred, the uninjured paddler from the first attempt climbed back into a third canoe with a new partner and found success by executing a liftover at the second ledge so as to be perfectly positioned for the last. Cheered but now chilled, we headed in for some wine and burrito and pudding supper. Our early stop had evolved into a full day, and we ran out of time to explore the possible hike up the waterfall.

The Fates smiled in their spinning and a similar composite paddle to the one lost was found a short distance away. Its green shaft and wooden T handle was spotted in a pileup of flotsam on a steep bank at a point of particularly swift current. With a brilliantly executed canoe stop and scramble, the paddle was extricated and used with pleasure for the rest of the trip.

The second-to-last day had us dodging long narrow motor canoes of fly fishermen casting colourful lines for salmon. Late afternoon found us at a CIME-maintained picnic area at the base of a swift with a lovely flat sand and gravel bar, forest sites, latrines, firewood and a big covered picnic table. Score! We wondered about needing to pay for it but a passing 4-wheeler assured us that the gravel bar area was a “site sauvage” and fair game. In any case if CIME wasn’t there by this time in the afternoon, they wouldn’t be. A young CIME guide on group “sweep” duty did make an appearance afterwards, checking in with a friendly chat, making sure everything was tidy. There were a few mosquitoes out so we camped and made supper on the beach, catching a faint breeze. There were a few more efforts at swimming in the



*Logjam bypass; photo credit: Yiu Yin Chang*



*Massive logjam; photo credit: I. van Riemsdijk*



*Beaver dreams; photo credit: I. van Riemsdijk*





***Bow draw at class 3 ledge; photo credit: Robert james***



***Throw-bags deployed at the bottom of the third and last ledge; photo credit: Robert James***





**Local beer in Bonaventure Pub; photo credit Tom Baker**

swifts but you had to plan for the current sweeping you well down the gravel beach.

The last day started leisurely with blueberry pancakes and maple syrup followed by an optional four km hike along logging /ATV trails to a lovely waterfall (Chute du Ruisseau Blanc) graced by a covered picnic table at its apex. There was another, reportedly even lovelier, waterfall one km further away (Chute du Ruisseau Creux) but we spent so much time photographing the first that we ran out of time. Upon return we piled into our canoes for an easy 13 km paddle to CIME's campground. Once there, two canoes decided to push on for another nine km to complete the descent to the ocean. This meant paddling through the river's mouth, around the lighthouse at the point and surfing the ocean rollers onto the campground beach on the other side. Luckily it was 6 p.m. by this point and the water and wind were calm. We were picked up by the others and after some varied attempts at looking civilized (or at least dry), we fetched up at a high-end pub at the wharf called Kano where we ordered seafood and pitchers of local beer. The restaurant was tastefully decorated with canoes and painted wood paddles. A fitting end to a long-planned trip!

An interesting side note – the Eskamer shuttle driver picked up an unexpected customer on its way back.



**Chute Du Ruisseau Blanc; photo credit: Robert James**

The paddling team that had also inquired to the ZEC staffer for a shuttle had been unintentionally left adrift by our transfer to Eskamer. Running out of other options, they attempted to self-shuttle and blew a tire on the rough road. With just a donut as a spare, they were "up the creek without a paddle." The couple eddied in to meet us while we were settling into a rough impro-

vised campsite on the river that first evening, at the end of a long day. We followed them and their green canoe paint for the rest of the trip, meeting up again only by chance at the river's mouth. When we met and compared notes, they were intrigued by the idea of the WCA as a source of potential trip partners; there are now two new prospective members!





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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 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.

## Shawn Hodgins, January 30th, 1961 – August 22nd, 2022

We at the Wilderness Canoe Association are very much saddened to hear of Shawn's passing. Extracts from his obituary:

Shawn Hodgins, founder/owner/operator of Wanapitei CANOE, died peacefully on August 22, 2022, with his beloved wife and paddling partner, Elizabeth (Liz) McCarney and family friend Leslie Kirke by his side, following complications from his brief and courageous fight with pancreatic cancer.

Shawn's quiet strength made him a quintessential leader – for decades he guided some of the most ambitious and challenging white-water expeditions in remote Northern locations. He calmly led with grace and confidence, allowing his trip participants to enjoy the serenity of the natural world and focus on the transcendental beauty of the moment. Shawn also had a sly sense of humour – for example, every time his esteemed friend Peter opened his trip barrel on the Mountain River, NWT, Shawn would secretly hide another rock in the bottom – Peter was baffled by his barrel gaining weight throughout the trip; Shawn took great pleasure from this bafflement, as did the others on the trip! It's a story that is often shared.

Shawn loved raucous conversations around a campfire, a

dining room table or a kitchen counter, discussing Canadian history and politics, and maybe a little gossip. He generously shared his encyclopedic knowledge of the Canadian North with others. As a respected ambassador of Canada's North, Shawn was loved by many white-water canoeists, wilderness enthusiasts and northern expeditioners from across Canada and beyond.

He spent his life paddling the wild Canadian waters, and more recently expanded his routes into Central America, the Caribbean and Europe. Shawn had a formative influence on many young trippers, teaching them wilderness skills, which helped them build invaluable confidence and self reliance.

Shawn paddled white water like an artist. He was greatly influenced by Camp Wanapitei, the Temagami wilderness and Trent University, and perhaps most of all by Liz, his wife of 27 years who always brought out the

best in him, and whom he loved deeply. Shawn leaves a huge hole in the hearts of his family members, many close friends and those in the canoeing world.

He led his final trip on the Pelly River in the NWT in July of this year and now "lies on the marge of the old portage, with peace for company."



## Mike Wevrick Lecture – Wine and Cheese Social



**When:** 7-10 PM, Saturday Evening,  
November 19, 2022

**Where:** Toronto Sailing & Canoe Club,  
1391 Lakeshore Blvd. West, Toronto

Our speaker is the legendary **Hap Wilson**. David "Hap" Wilson is a Canadian naturalist, canoe tripper, author, illustrator and photographer. He has

published numerous Canadian canoe-route guides and books about wilderness life.

**Sign up on line:**

<https://wildernesscanoe.ca/content/mike-wevrick-lecture-wine-and-cheese-social>

We are planning to have a simulcast Zoom call for members out of town.



# Paddling the Teslin River, YT, 2021

Story by Mike Stacey

Photos by Terry Hartrick and Mike Stacey

## Background

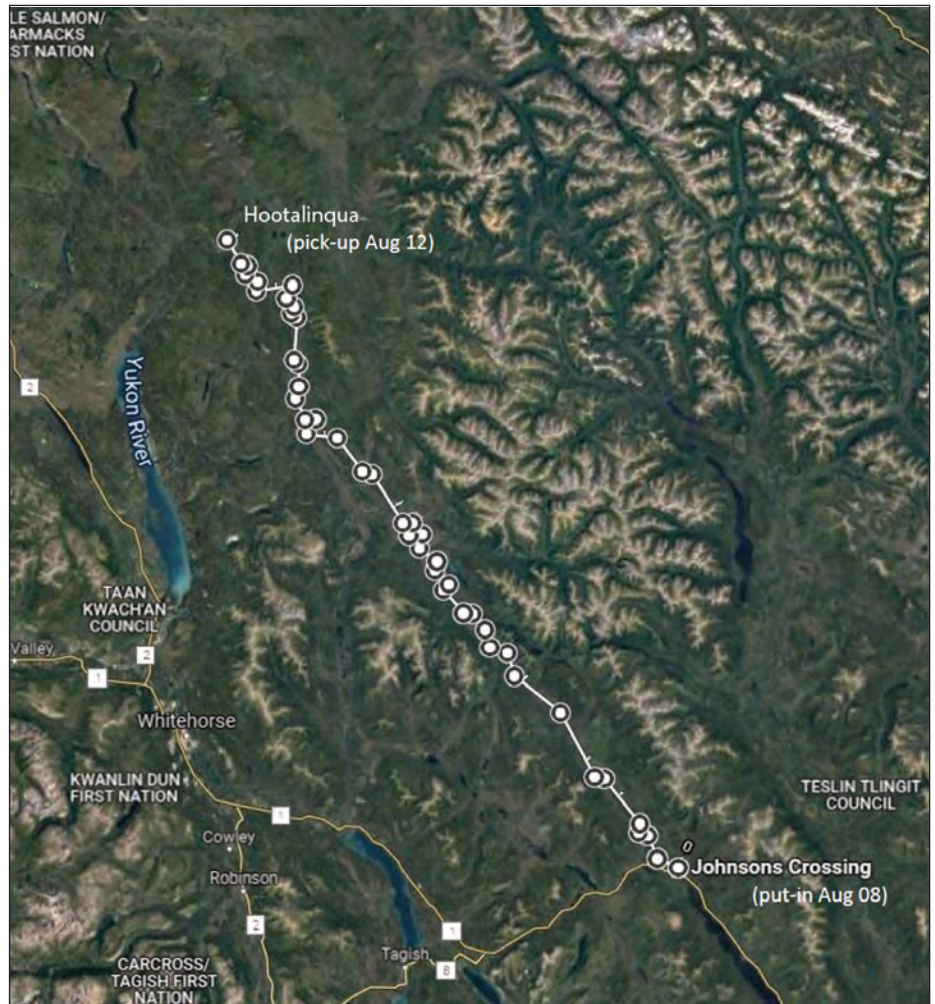
Looking back, the paddle down the Teslin River in the Yukon Territory was a straight-forward exercise – a mid-summer canoe trip with easy access, wonderful solitude and a steady favourable current. Even considering the tendency to let difficulties fade from memory, I recall the journey as being peaceful and rewarding, while calling for the usual situational awareness and prudent execution.

The trip was planned as a 306-km, seven-day paddle, starting August 8, 2021 at Johnson's Crossing where the Alaska Highway bridges the Teslin River close to where it exits Teslin Lake. After being shuttled there by Up North Adventures van, we were to paddle 200 km to Hootalinqua, at the junction of the Teslin River with the Yukon River, then a further 106 km down the Yukon River to a take-out at Carmacks, which has road access.

On August 7, we checked our rented canoes and purchased gear that hadn't been allowed on the air flights (e.g., bear spray). There were lots of boats and stock to choose from as few paddlers were out on the water, partly due to very high local water levels and lingering Covid uncertainty, although recreational travel had been approved.

## Day 1 August 8

After the 1.5-hour drive from Whitehorse, we arrived at the put-in. We checked and loaded our gear, rechecked our maps and set up the spray deck. At 1400 hours we started north downriver under patchy clouds, light SE winds and a 21°C temperature. This was Terry's first expedition by canoe, after switching from his customary touring kayaks, adding another interesting dimension to the journey. On this first day, conditions were perfect. As long as we were moving even the mosquitoes were not an issue.



Route Map

We soon noticed the absence of civilization's trappings. Tracking lost luggage and the challenge of travel under Covid-required regulations faded away, replaced by the sights, sounds and smells of the outback boreal forest. Noting the river's flow, feeling the loaded canoe's motion and taking in the natural surroundings quickly became top of mind.

Shortly after we had started paddling Terry sighted a large, light brown bear crossing a small tributary stream on river right, 100 m up from the Teslin, probably a grizzly. It paid zero attention to our passing.

After several hours paddling with a steady current, we checked out a campsite that *Rourke's Guidebook for the Teslin River* noted as suitable for high water levels. It was located in trees on river left with a small creek entering the river beside it. We decided against camping there because of fresh tracks left by a large bear slipping down the muddy slope from the campsite to the water's edge.

Another site one km further along on river right, also wooded and three metres above the shoreline, proved very satisfactory. This site may have been what Rourke's called "Good camp...100 Mile





**Author at Up North Adventures**

Landing...easy landing” and indicated old cabin remains (not sighted by us).

By 2000 hours, when we secured the canoes, the day had cooled and the wind had veered to the S and SW. We had travelled 36 km in five hours, helped considerably by the current, encountering no unavoidable hazards.

Several Teslin River campsites had rough improvements, like tables, and all

were usefully wooded or forested. Several campsites had fire rings. Our bug netting was sometimes deployed and found helpful! “High water” campsites like this one, three metres above the water, are welcome finds when the river level is high. Though the “improvements” indicated regular use by recreational paddlers, we saw no other people on this journey.



**Journey starts**

## Day 2 August 9

Morning brought cooler 6°C weather, sun and calm winds. The mosquitoes were plentiful but fortunately not particularly quick or agile. The upriver sites that we had viewed (aside from the site featuring recent bear activity) had been low-lying and buggy. The hanging bug net helped us to cook and eat in relative peace. I plan to upgrade this net to a Eureka! NoBugZone CT 11 for future trips. We lit no fires on this river due to the high wildfire hazard. The bug netting was critical to mitigate the mossies, especially in the absence of campfire smoke.

During the trip, we passed several fish and game processing camps on the shores, indicative of usage by First Nations hunters and fishers, although none of these sites was currently occupied. The Teslin River runs through traditional territories of the Teslin Tlingit Council and the Tagish First Nation, who along with the Southern Tutchone and Northern Tutchone First Nations form the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. For a deeper understanding of these peoples and the land I recommend the large format, hardcover publication “*Kwanlin Dün – Our Story in Our Words*” © 2020 Kwanlin Dün First Nation. I discovered this book after our trip. A pre-trip read would provide great context.

A noon departure had us paddling into light to moderate NW headwinds under a clear sky. In late afternoon we experienced some faster currents in shallow waters. They sometimes pushed us towards riffles, occasioning hard paddling to avoid grounding. At times I misread the current’s effect, and I had to get out and drag the canoe to deeper water. The canoes weighed 50 lbs / 23 kg and were loaded with about 300 lbs / 136 kg, including paddler, retaining 8” / 20 cm of freeboard. The Nova Craft website gives the Supernova’s capacity as 850 lb / 386 kg.

The cutbanks showed the thin layer of topsoil. This valley is in a “discontinuous permafrost” zone. Warming temperatures are causing the permafrost to thaw in places. Apparently wildfires destroy foliage allowing the sun to warm the ground.

Eventually the contrary headwinds





**Typical cutbank**

faded and we found ourselves in a faster, steady current. This made for a less strenuous paddle, much appreciated after a tough start. For our second night we found another very good “high-water” campsite on river right, with an abandoned log cabin 20 metres back in the trees. The *Rourke* guidebook suggested this had been a trapper’s cabin. The cabin door faced north, perhaps because rain often arrived with SE or SW winds.

We had travelled about 30 km in good weather and the evening continued fine with a high overcast sky.

### **Day 3 August 10**

Another fine morning: 8°C, high overcast, light SE winds. The river current looked to be about 6-7 km/hr at our mid-morning departure. We had favourable

light winds under mixed cloud and sun all day! The river was wide, with no memorable obstacles.

It was a great day for animal sightings. We saw several cow moose feeding in the shallows. Very peaceful...although one solitary cow did watch us closely as we drifted by. When I was abeam, she took a single assertive step in my direction. I had tried to be inconspicuous so as not to alarm her but in hindsight I should have backpaddled earlier to give her a wider berth.

Our practice upon meeting wildlife was to cease unnecessary movement and noise and drift by. The cow with a calf had been completely submerged, but once her head was clear of the water she quickly sized us up and guided her calf away into the bush.

Around mid-day, with our “speed

made good” from 8-10 km/hr, we came across a large raptor that I believe was a golden eagle, in shallow water. It took off with a slow but powerful flapping of wings, passing by a few metres away. Awesome.

We stopped for lunch at Sheldon Creek, which would be a fine high-water campsite on another trip. Numerous animals had left tracks on the mini-delta. The weather was mostly cool enough that dry suits were very comfortable. Bug head nets came in handy when off the river.

At 1830 hours we made camp at O’Brien’s Bar, an excellent site, clear but with sufficient trees for setting up tarps, etc. Abandoned mining equipment generated conjectures on how the various pieces might have functioned. The ground was bordered on two sides by the





*Trapper's cabin*



*Campsite in the afternoon sun*

river and the views were great. Ledges visible across the river appeared to be old river beds, some 25 metres above the present level. I've heard that miners looked for gold on these old river bottoms.

#### **Day 4 August 11**

An early wake up was rewarded by the sun peeking through medium overcast clouds, light E winds and finding that the bugs had taken the morning off. Again, we departed in mid-morning. We had been monitoring a wildfire "at the junction of the Yukon and Teslin Rivers" for several weeks, to ensure we would have good air quality and could avoid active fires. This would be the critical day, as we approached the confluence of the rivers.

We had lunch at Mason's Landing, featuring an easy sand bar landing with several abandoned log structures. There was evidence of the site's use by locals: a motor boat, petrol cans, lawn chairs, etc., though no one was about. We had seen moose again that morning, so this gear may have belonged to hunters.

By early afternoon we began to see smoke rising from the hills ahead and saw that the forest on the immediate shores, mostly black spruce and white spruce, had recently burned. In some places the topsoil itself had been burned to a white/grey ash, exposing tree roots. It made for a sombre float down the river, reflecting on the power of the fire, and we were glad that it had been extinguished by recent rainfall and cooler temperatures. Apparently one effect of forest fires is that the permafrost can melt more under burned areas because the (previously mentioned) absence of foliage allows the sun to warm the ground. The Teslin River Valley is an area of "patchy discontinuous permafrost." The more I learn about wildfires, the more I realize that the outcomes, positive and negative, are complex.

By late afternoon we reached the Yukon River confluence, looking for a campsite co-located with Hootalinqua, an historic site on the far (left/west) side of the Yukon River. Hootalinqua was a significant ship building, commercial and administrative centre for settlers and



miners in the late 1880s and early 1900s. It has been a major meeting and trading place for indigenous people since long before then.

A moderate S wind generated one-to-two-foot waves coming from our left side as we paddled hard to cross the Yukon, reaching the left bank at 1800 hours. The wind did not drop much that evening and kept the area free of mosquitoes! We set up camp alongside a permanent roofed shelter with fire ring, picnic tables and outhouses nearby (maintained by the Yukon government and volunteers) and set out to explore the abandoned structures of Hootalinqua, which included a telegraph station.

Several buildings remain from the original settler community, maintained to a basic structural integrity condition. Firefighters had laid out their gear in case the fire reached the area. Pumps and suction hoses were ready on the shoreline and sprinklers were fastened to the roofs of critical structures. The nearest active plumes of smoke that evening were about five km away.

The TravelYukon.com website states Hootalinqua means “running against the mountain” in the Northern Tutchone language; it was ...“a popular site for trade ...[amongst] the Tlingit, Southern and Northern Tutchone people.”

That evening we made use of the first-class picnic tables, spreading out gear and dinner, fanned by a pleasant breeze from the water that brought the odd whiff of smoke. We were confident that the fires were small enough and far enough away not to be a danger, enabling another solid backcountry slumber. Position 61° 35.14'N, 134° 54.19'W.

## Day 5 August 12

In the morning we considered our options in light of the strong winds just experienced. Did we want to paddle two days to a take-out at Little Salmon Village or Carmacks, on a wide and fast Yukon River, then running at a very high level? The weather forecast via InReach proved persuasive: south winds at 21-57 km/hr, becoming 21-45 km/hr at 1700 hours that day.

Accordingly, we used InReach to arrange for an Up North motor boat to pick us up and take us back upriver to



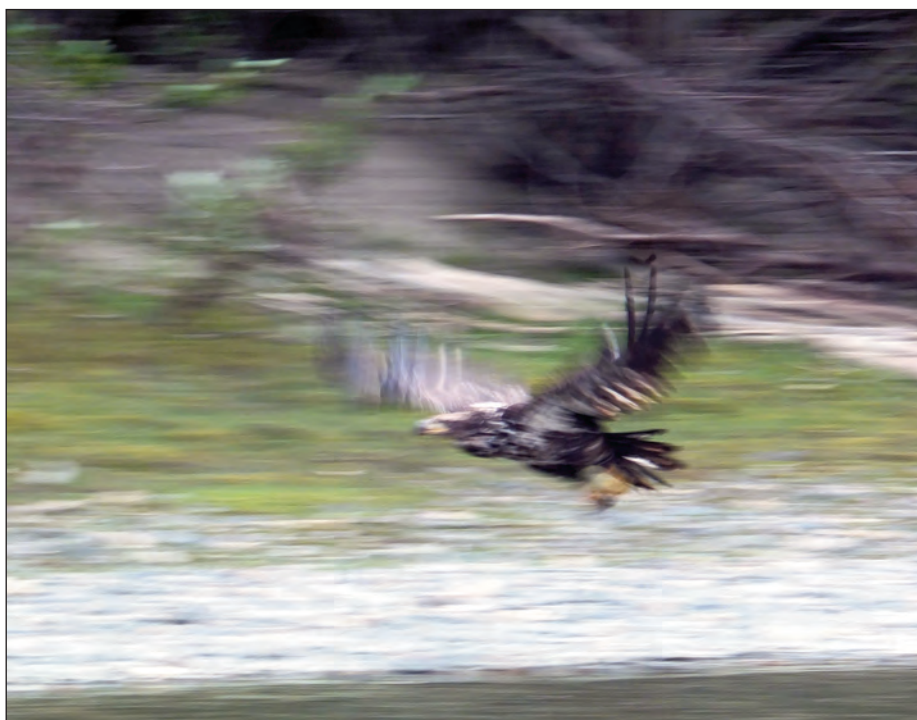
*River valley*

Whitehorse. We weighed the disappointment of shortening our time on the water against the likelihood of a rigorous, challenging paddle through an area some of which we had seen on a previous trip. A bonus – we would see the Thirty Mile part of the Yukon River and the famous Lake Laberge, from the water, albeit at a fast rate of speed!

The shuttle boat's ETA of 1900 hours gave us more time to check out

Hootalinqua, all the while enjoying the scarcity of bugs. The steady winds contributed to these pleasant conditions, perhaps why it had long been favoured by indigenous travelers. Interestingly, we saw few deer or horse flies during the entire trip.

In late afternoon a party of four paddlers in two canoes arrived, having also paddled down the Teslin River. They were young, temporary foreign workers,



*Eagle take-off*





**The Burn**

just finished tree planting and vegetable picking contracts and were now savouring a Canadian canoe adventure. We shared information with them (and some spare supplies), congratulating them on their choice for an end-of-work celebration.

Mark Stenzig, owner/operator of Up North Adventures, arrived in a well

equipped 30-foot landing craft. He reported four-foot waves on Lake Laberge on his passage north from Whitehorse – good to remember for future canoe trips.

The transit up the river made an interesting and brisk denouement to our canoe trip. On the passage through the Thirty Mile River section of the Yukon River we noted campsites with picnic

tables and outhouses (installed by Canadian Ranger volunteers). Some were almost awash. We arrived at the boat landing on the southwest side of Lake Laberge at dusk and were back in Whitehorse by shuttle truck before full dark.

### **Reflections on the Teslin River Trip**

The “two paddlers in solo canoes” model worked well for us, providing some safety redundancy while allowing enough independent movement and photography opportunities. Our practice was to always be in sight of each other and to stay closer together when conditions were in any way hazardous. We carried FRS radios for chats (never used!) and we each had InReach devices in case of emergency or long-distance separations. We encountered no unavoidable dangerous obstacles. The high water level meant limited but sufficient campsite choices, while the steady moderate current was most welcome. The absence of other people on the river was definitely a plus. Seeing the wildlife was gratifying; seeing the wildfire aftermath reminded one of nature’s sudden power.

The tempo of the river and the wilderness surroundings were peaceful and restorative. As I write this, in January 2022, we are planning to take further instruction to boost our river paddling skills, while we research our next river.

### **Trip Summary 2021 Aug 08-12**

*Route:* Down Teslin River from Johnson’s Crossing to Hootalinqua (on the Yukon R.)

*Distance:* 200 km

*Duration:* 4 camping nights; 4 paddling days + 1 shuttle day

*Current:* 3-8 km/hr

*River flow stations:* Teslin Lake at Teslin 09AE002; Yukon River at Whitehorse 09AB001

*Paddlers & boats:* Terry Hartrick and Mike Stacey in two 15’ Nova Craft Supernova solo canoes rented from Up North Adventures, Whitehorse.

*Access:* Scheduled airline from Victoria to Whitehorse; van to put-in and from take-out (take-out van was replaced by a motor boat).



**Burned topsoil**





**Smoldering hillside**

## Reference Material

1. “*Rivers of the Yukon Territory – Teslin River*” by Mike & Gillian Rourke, Rivers North Publications ©1983 Mike Rourke, revised 2014. Cerlox bound soft cover guide book with map sketches.
2. “*Kwanlin Dün – Our Story in Our Words*” © 2020 Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Coffee table size hard cover presents indigenous history and knowledge of the land.
4. Water levels and discharge rates are at <https://wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/> The site is cumbersome but it’s worth the effort to extract the data you need.
5. Wildfire maps: <https://cwffis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/maps/fw>



**Up North Adventures pick-up boat**



# 4 Tips to Carry Heavy Canoe Pack Loads Lightly

By Bill Ostrom

Let's face it...canoe packs and barrels can be heavy. But that's no reason you can't enjoy portaging and getting deep into the wilderness.

Can you eliminate the weight in your pack? No, sadly you cannot! But you'll be happy to hear that you can load and adjust your pack to carry weight more efficiently, so it actually feels lighter!

Let's dig into a bit of the science to understand what you can do to enjoy portaging more.

## A Quick Intro to "Load Carriage" Science

To be right upfront with you...I'm a gear freak. I use it, design it and am always testing and evaluating gear. My dad got me out canoe tripping as a kid, and I feel my life is not complete without paddling and a long canoe trip each summer. At least one!

My love for designing canoe packs started in 1987. Then working with Queen's University and the Canadian Armed Forces in the mid-1990s expanded my knowledge of "load control" and "load carriage," i.e. strategies and designs that increase comfort and safety when carrying a heavy load.

Your goal is "load transfer" – getting the weight of your pack close to your body. Specifically, transferring the weight from your shoulder straps to your shoulders and down your spine to your hips. Your hip belt also transfers weight directly to your legs.

In general, an internal frame canoe pack will have better load control than a soft pack. And a pack that fits you well will have better weight transfer.

Here are 4 easy tips to make any canoe pack or barrel feel lighter on the portage, regardless of what type of pack you have.

## #1 Pack Your Canoe Pack for Better Load Control

How you pack your canoe pack is the single most important step in load control. Your goal is to get heavier gear closer to your back and higher in your pack.

Here's how you do that. Divide your pack into three equal load zones. In Diagram 1, you see the three load zones. In Diagram 2 you see how to load gear according to weight (as much as possible).



So...what goes where?

It is important to build a platform in the bottom zone of the pack using light- and medium-weight gear. In general, light- and medium-weight things like your sleeping pad, light clothing, tent (no poles or pegs) and sleeping bag go in the bottom, yellow zone of the pack.

Consider using compression sacs for all your soft, bulky gear, and packing gear into smaller parcels. (We even stuff our tent into a compression sac.) Avoiding large bulky items gives you more flexibility in loading your pack and controlling weight placement.

Your heaviest, most dense items go in the zone closest to your back (blue zone). For example, liquids, fuel, stove, tarp, tent poles, repair kit, first aid kit, or wet gear.

For the "light" zone farthest from your back – pack your lightest, least dense gear. For example, sleeping pad, crocs, fleece, toilet paper, and kitchen utensils.

The same packing principles work for your canoe food barrel. Create a layer of food on the bottom, e.g. dehydrated suppers. Then pack the heavy, dense cheese, salami, and liquids closest to your back. Then light bagels and rye crisp farthest from your back.

Experiment with this strategy of loading your canoe pack and pay attention to how you feel. Read further for three more important tips for a comfortable portage.

## The Science of Centre of Gravity (CoG)

So, let's take a step back and talk about what we mean by CoG, and why it's important for a comfortable portage.

With reference to the human body, COG is measured (this is a very simplified description) by having a person stand, hands down their sides, in socks or bare feet.



Science has determined that a person's theoretical CoG is near the belly button, halfway between the lower back and belly. This can vary slightly depending on things like gender or body shape.

Why is our personal CoG important? Consider that CoG is your balance point, your equilibrium point. It is where your mass is concentrated. It is also a fulcrum point.

A fulcrum point is defined as a pivot point or where a lever turns. For our use, the fulcrum point is our waist area.

It is also your CoG and where you place your pack's hip belt. For good load control, all weight from your pack needs to be transferred to your shoulders, down your spine and to this fulcrum point, i.e. your hip belt onto your legs.

### The CoG in Your Pack Matters!

CoG is a big deal for portaging. Loading your pack as described above is all about getting your canoe pack's CoG as close to your back as possible.

The further away your canoe pack's CoG is from your back the more energy you use to transfer it to your back. Put simply, you will feel less comfortable and more tired if your pack's CoG is further away from your back.

### #2 Compression is Key to Load Control

If your canoe pack has compression straps - put them to good use!

A smaller, more compact load will make your portage more efficient and comfortable!



WHY? A larger, bulkier load will be further from your back. The further the load is from your back the more energy you use to pull the weight forward.

As mentioned previously, one important way to compress your load is to use compression sacs to compress soft gear like clothes, sleeping bags etc.

It is also critical that you tighten all the compression straps on your pack. Be aggressive, smaller is better!

### #3 Use Your Canoe Pack's Load Lifter & Stabilizer Straps

Check out your canoe pack or barrel harness...do you have load lifter straps on the shoulder straps? How about hip belt stabilizer straps?



The yellow straps on the shoulder straps in Diagram 4 are called load lifter straps. They are attached to your shoulder straps and are threaded through two buckles attached directly to your pack.

Pay attention when you tighten these. As you tighten, notice how the weight of your canoe pack transfers to your shoulders, down your spine to your hip belt. This is load control! - getting your pack's weight closer to your body's CoG.

The hip belt has three adjustments that can help with

load transfer, i.e., the centre buckle and the two hip belt stabilizer straps. By tightening all three straps you are transferring weight from your pack to your hips.

The chest strap (sternum strap) can be adjusted both horizontally and vertically. This strap helps with personal comfort and to stabilize the pack on your body.

### #4 Got a Tump?

We've all seen photos from Asia, South America and Africa of people carrying heavy loads on their heads. Directly down the spine to their CoG!

Closer to home, Voyageurs carried a standard load of two fur bales of 180 lbs using only a tump. A press was screwed down compressing the fur bales into more compact loads. Sound familiar?

The human body is perfectly constructed to carry heavy loads directly on the head, transferring weight down our impressive spine to our hips and legs, our strongest limbs. Very efficient!

So, common sense needs to be used here... I am not suggesting that we carry our canoe packs on our heads. Nor am I suggesting that we eliminate shoulder straps and hip belts and use a tump only.

But we can look to the research and science behind those cultures and use it to our advantage on a portage. It might simply be using a tump more frequently when carrying heavy loads over longer portages.

Be aware of your limits, many of us no longer have the neck muscles of the Voyageurs. But it can be used as a tool.

Feeling Better About Portaging?

Portages can help you truly get away from it all on a canoe trip. Follow these tips for a more comfortable carry so you can enjoy all that a portage has to offer.

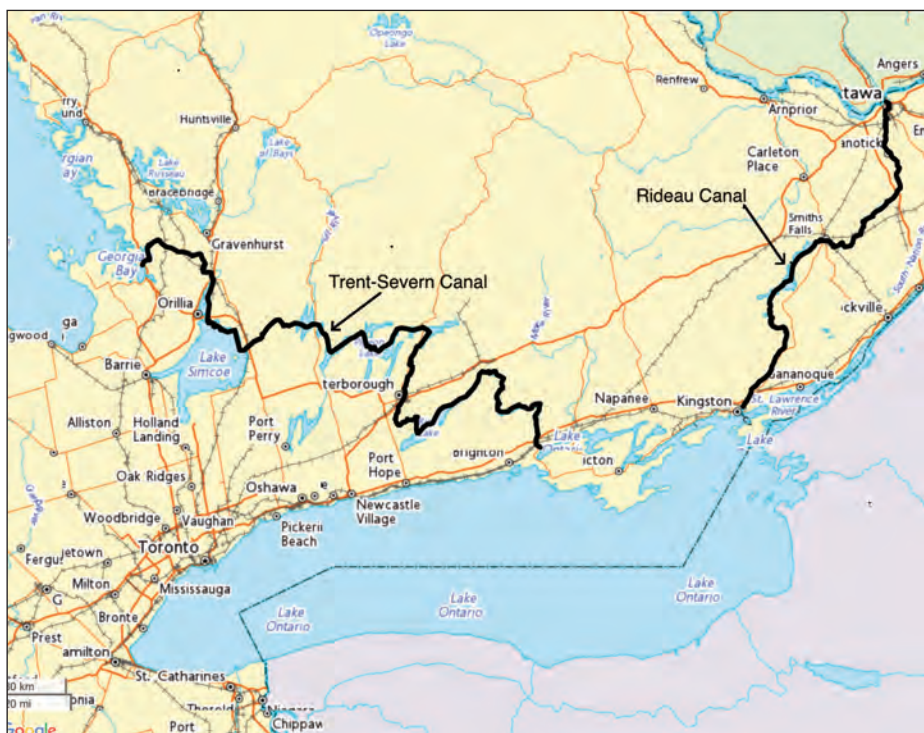
If you're still struggling with a heavy load, reach out and I can see if I can help

Bill Ostrom  
Canoe Pack Designer, Ostrom Outdoors



# Tripping Ontario's Two Great Canals

Story by Iori Miller



**The two canals**

Many serious paddlers look a year or more ahead when planning the contents of their bucket list. But how many were able to follow the plans they made for the summer of 2020? Probably very few. The Covid-19 pandemic hit Canada mid-winter and by the summer travel options changed from one week to the next: the Quebec-Ontario border was open, then it was not; the Atlantic bubble was slammed shut throughout; Labrador and the Territories only allowed for essential goods to cross their borders all year. It was impossible to post trips on the

Wilderness Canoe Association's website because of insurance reasons, so many of us planned short trips on weekends just with members of our own 'bubble', or with immediate friends whom we trusted to be minimizing their contact with others

So, in order to still have something in our lives in 2020, many of us were forced to look closer to home for our adventures.

During that summer, governments everywhere were begging people to minimize their number of physical contacts.

Since crossing even provincial borders was hard, I decided in July that the time was perfect to finally paddle the Rideau Canal. In August I had been planning for over a year to undertake a paddle of Quebec's majestic Moisie River, but the pandemic's circumstances nixed that. When that plan began to look impossible, I decided, "why not just keep paddling canals?" So, in August I set out to solo a good chunk of the Trent-Severn Canal, about 240 km from Georgian Bay to Lakefield, near Peterborough.

A year later, in the summer of 2021 and still mired in the Covid pandemic, I did finally paddle the Moisie River, but I also re-paddled half of the Rideau Canal and completed the last 120 km of the Trent-Severn Canal – the portion between Lakefield to Lake Ontario. Obviously, I have developed an appreciation for paddling these canals, and this has led me to make an argument here for why wilderness canoeists should also paddle these historic waterways.

The Rideau Canal and the Trent-Severn Canals are managed by National Parks Canada. The original reasons for each construction were in fact, never met, and today the principal purpose of each is recreational.

## 1. The Rideau Canal

The Rideau canal was originally built for military reasons. During the war of 1812 with the USA (their 'Revolutionary War' with Britain) the Province of Quebec (the first name for Canada) recognized that there was a risk moving goods east and

	Rideau Canal	Trent-Severn Waterway
Total Distance	202 km/126 mi	386 km/240 mi
Construction Began/Ended	1826/1832	1833/1920
Number of Locks (Direct, side routes not included)	45	44
Max Boat Length/Width (metres)	27.5/8.5	25.5/7
Draft (feet)	5	6
Suggested Start	Kingston	Port Severn (Georgian Bay)
Suggested End	Ottawa	Bay of Quinte (L.Ont.)

## Canal summaries



west on the St. Lawrence River so close to the US border. So, barely a decade later, it was decided to build a canal that would allow goods to move a more north-south route and avoid most of said border. The Rideau Canal was constructed by the Royal Engineers and utilized a route through the Rideau Lakes and connected to the Ottawa River. Remarkably, the canal was built in only 6 years! However, there never was another American invasion and the canal was actually used more to transport trade goods and immigrants into the vast lands to be settled in Ontario's interior.

## 2. The Trent-Severn Canal

The idea of the Trent-Severn Waterway was conceived around the time of the Rideau Canal's completion, but it was meant to serve more of a commercial than military value. Initially, the purpose was for a route to move goods back and forth from the lower great lakes to the upper lakes. While avoiding the problem of Niagara Falls, it was also thought it could deliver goods in and out of central Ontario. Unfortunately, boat sizes quickly grew beyond the size of the locks being constructed, roads and railways infiltrated the province, and the Welland canal was constructed with the capacity to handle the larger ocean-going vessels that plied the great lakes. With these changing conditions the canal was built in fits and starts between 1879 and 1920 and has only ever existed for recreational boat use.

Between the two canals there is almost 500 km to paddle. Generally, one can camp mostly at the locks themselves, although there are a few stretches where the distances between locks is over 30 km and thus beyond the average paddler's daily abilities. With careful planning, however, a provincial park or marina with camping facilities can serve to ameliorate the problem of where to rest for the night.

### Why Choose to Paddle the Canals?

I had always thought it would be fun to paddle from Lake Ontario all the way up to Ottawa. In a summer where most people were sticking close to home, and few wanted to join anyone else on a trip

where they might catch Covid, I decided it would be just fine to solo the Rideau Canal. In the end, some friends (fellow WCA members, Marcin Komorowski & Agata Wisniowska) joined me for the adventure ... and brought their two shiny little dogs (Kropka and Misiu). Covid pandemic aside, the toughest part was a tortuous week of record hot July weather! Sunny skies yes, but really rough on the pooches.

As someone who enjoys the whole of backcountry camping, generally, the longer the trip the better. In contrast, many who paddle the canals only go for a day or two. But paddling end to end is an accomplishment: seeing the whole thing is experiencing a piece of Canada's history in a way no book can deliver. For a novice canoeist/camper, perhaps someone desiring a paddle beyond a simple overnight in their local conservation area, or provincial park, completing 5 nights (or more) on one of these canals is a significant step toward a serious backcountry adventure.

Even for the inexperienced tripper, paddling a part or whole of either canal is very easy to plan: just go to your local supermarket, stroll down the breakfast aisle, the lunch aisle, and the dinner aisle, casually planning as you walk — when you get home toss your meals into



*The Rideau canal*

a canoe barrel — all you still need are the few camping essentials like a tent, sleeping bag and a stove. A good road map and a cell phone (google maps) can get you from A to B, no problem. Although I would also recommend some cash and a bicycle lock (to leave your canoe locked to a tree), because some of the canal's locks are located just a short walk from grocery stores, coffee shops, and even pubs! It's not a pub crawl — it's a pub-paddle! But be sure to wait until after you've stopped to camp.



*Camping at the locks*





**Opening and closing of the lock gates – the old way.**



**Opening and closing of the lock gates – the new way!**

Paddling sober is required under Ontario's laws.

The people who run the canal locks are of all ages: some are career employees; many are summer University students. They are all friendly as they know it's part of the job: all the people using the canals are tourists, and all are there to enjoy themselves. As the canals are part of Parks Canada, the employees on the locks are very knowledgeable about Canal history and they are happy to share it. Some of the canal locks are still operated by the original gear mechanisms, yet some have been modernized.

One thing to mention: if you are new to canoeing and would love to try a longer trip, paddling the canals is a GREAT way to start. You can camp anywhere on the lawns of the locks for a mere \$5 per person/night (just beware of Canada Geese poop as they love the locks too), and if you arrive before Lock closing time, and pay ☺, you'll get a key or combination to the washroom. Camping never gets easier! Also, for a small price (for example, in 2020 a 16' canoe cost  $\$8.99/\text{ft} \times 16' = \$144$  to pass through the locks for the whole season, for both canals) you too can cruise through the locks themselves with the

bigger boats. Personally, I generally chose to stretch my legs and portage my canoe, but in some cases the lockmasters just let me ride on through for free.

If your schedule is to do the whole canal system in 10+ days, you don't have to carry all your food from the be-

ginning. You can buy some fresh food on the way! But I wouldn't advise anyone to expect to be able to buy all their food every day. No. Best to always play it safe; have enough to get yourself through most of the way, and if you finish with extra, so be it.



**Passing through the locks**



## Experience Needed

The canals are like any lake or river paddle. You should have some experience with day paddling and canoe camping. You probably should take topo maps, or charts, and a cell phone for emergencies (most areas on the canals have decent cell phone coverage). Any hiking app, like *Alltrails*, comes in handy to track your route and daily distances, but Google maps will help you navigate as well. If you set out to paddle the full length of a canal you should have some knowledge of your abilities (strength, endurance, meal preparation, staying dry over a period of days, etc.)

Here are the itineraries I might follow if I were to do either Canal again. You should plan yours according to your own abilities and time available.

## A Few Final Notes Based on My Experience

Generally, camping at the locks along the Canals is painless and quite comfortable (glamping!). As I said before, if you arrive before Canal closing times you will be told how to access the washroom facilities on site. They are closed to the general public when the canal locks are closed for the day,



*Passing through the locks*

but available to campers once the paltry fee is paid. In a few, they don't recommend you drink the water from the taps. I always carry a water filter on any trip. The one thing you must pre-plan is the distances between the locks. Sometimes they are too far to paddle in one day, so I looked for

Provincial Parks or somewhere that had camping (see the Island Marina on my Rideau itinerary). I successfully 'bush crashed' once because the campground I was depending on was closed during Covid, and two times I pre-vailed upon friends with cottages on the route (not showing). At \$5/night at

Days	Rideau Canal	Daily km/Total	Trent Severn Canal	Daily km/Total
1	Kingston to Lower Brewers Lock (#20)	20/20	Port Severn to Seift Rapids (lock #43)	25/25
2	Jones Falls Lock (#39-42)	20/40	Couchiching Lock (#42)	24/49
3	Newboro Lock (#36)	19/59	Mara Provincial Park	22/71
4	Murphy's Point PP	19/78	Gamebridge (#41)	29/100
5	Old Slys Lock in Smith Falls (#26. 27)	24/102	Kirkfield (#36)	18/118
6	Merrickville Lock (#21-23)	21/123	Fenelon Falls (#34)	19/137
7	Rideau River Provincial Park	23/146	Bobcaygeon (#32)	30/167
8	Island Marina	19/165	Lovesick Lake (#30)	35/202
9	Black Rapids Lock (#13)	16/181	Lakefield (#23)	23/225
10	Ottawa! (#1-8)	22/203	Ashburnham (#20)	17/242
11			Wildcamping at mouth of Ottonobee	32/274
12			Hastings (#18)	30/304
13			Healey Falls (#15)	21/324
14			Percy Reach (#8)	20/345
15			Glen Ross (#7)	18/363
16			Centennial Park/Trenton	23/386

## Sample canal itineraries





**Rideau canal - portage platform**



**Rideau canal - NO portage platform!**



**Fishing at the locks**

the locks the overall cost is cheap!

Many people who canoe the Canals just buy a season pass to pass through the locks. The pass works for both canals during one season. If you are like me, you actually want to get out of your canoe and stretch, so I chose to portage the locks. Along the Rideau Canal there is an easily accessible platform and sign provided at the beginning and end of each “portage route.” But not always so for the Trent Severn! Along that canal it sometimes requires as much as a 3’ climb in and out of a canoe. Overall, the Rideau Canal is MUCH more canoe friendly.

Besides dodging the Canada Geese that frequent the lawns of the Locks, there are often numerous people who turn up to collect a dinner of freshwater fish. It appeared to me that many of these people were not following guidelines as I saw many fishing until they had a full pail of fish. Two friends fishing often meant two pails of fish taken.

Generally, I didn’t find the lakes along either canal too big to deal with ... except Lake Simcoe. This big lake is relatively shallow, and there is over 15 km of open water required between the north shore and the ‘big ditch’ section of the canal on the east side of the lake. When I paddled it, a friend texted me that the wind direction and speed would be favourable for my NW to SE traverse. In the end, I endured 34 km/hr wind gusts across the lake from the west that pushed me off course, and I ended up wind bound in Lagoon City. The waves I rode were 3 to 4 feet high, and when I did flip over I was lucky that I was only about 100 m from shore. I ended up getting a shuttle 10 km south, and back onto the canal at the Gamebridge Lock.

Most of the bigger lakes along the Canals can be ‘cheated’ during high winds by sticking close to shore and strategically planning what time of day you cross. I think Lake Simcoe’s an exception. Either budget a potential windbound day for it, or arrange a shuttle to avoid it altogether. I was rather lucky that it only left me with a humble smile and the realization that weather Apps are not always to be trusted.



Lastly, the Rideau is an older and more simply designed Canal. Paddling it from Kingston to Ottawa takes you initially through a lot of agrarian and cottage country, but the last day or two is through a lot of Ottawa's suburbs. Be prepared to see both sides of the canal/Rideau River lined with monster homes and power boats. In contrast, the cobbled together Trent-Severn Canal system connects Georgian Bay with Balsam Lake of the Kawarthas and follows its waterways all the way through the Trent River to Lake Ontario. The locks themselves on this route are often more elaborate, and some are technical marvels quite complicated in their design. There is plenty to see and experience on these canals throughout the entirety of each. These are not wilderness routes, but they are rich in history and beauty, and paddling them during the Covid Pandemic was safe and a lot of fun!



*The Big Chute marine railway, Trent-Severn canal (boats are carried!)*



*End of the paddle on the Rideau canal*



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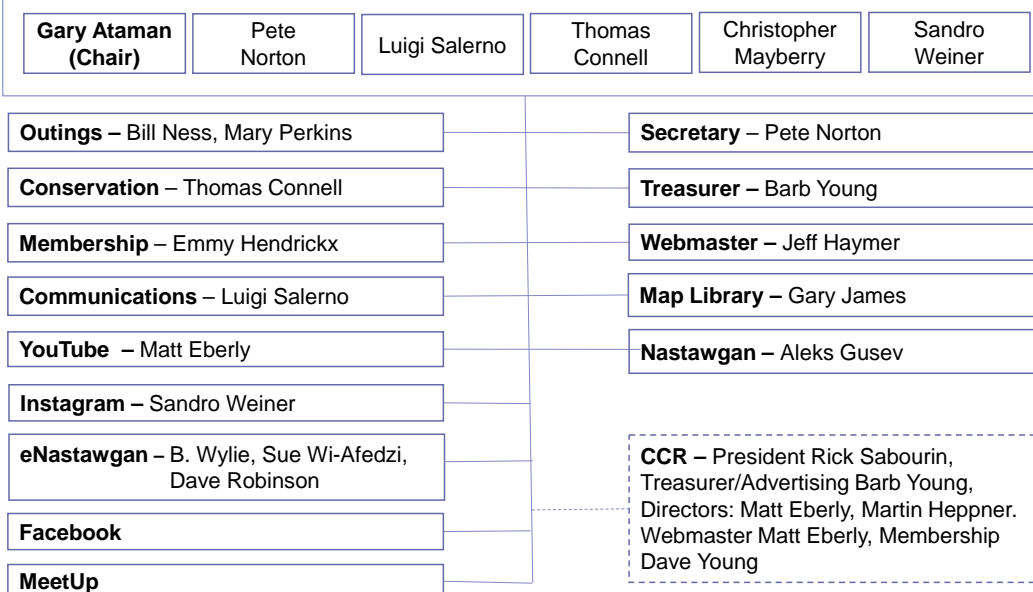
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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**WCA Postal Address**  
12 Erindale Crescent  
Brampton, ON, Canada  
L6W 1B5



<http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca>

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gary Ataman, (Chair)  
chair@wildernesscanoe.ca

Luigi Salerno  
luigi\_salerno@hotmail.com

Thomas Connell  
tggconnell@gmail.com

Sandro Weiner  
sandroweiner@gmail.com

Pete Norton  
pt.nrt@gmail.com

Christopher Mayberry  
cjmayberry11@gmail.com

Secretary  
Pete Norton  
pt.nrt@gmail.com

WCA Outings  
Bill Ness  
bness@look.ca

Treasurer  
Barb Young  
youngj david@rogers.com

Communications  
Luigi Salerno  
luigi\_salerno@hotmail.com

Webmaster  
Jeff Haymer  
webmaster@wilderness.ca

Membership  
Emmy Hendrickx  
emmy.hendrickx@bell.net

Conservation  
Thomas Connell  
tggconnell@gmail.com

Nastawgan Editor  
Aleksandar Gusev  
aleks.gusev@gmail.com

### Editorial Team:

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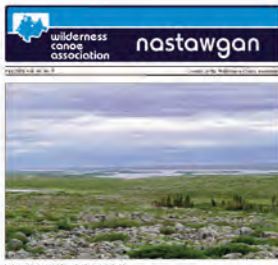




### Hiking the World's Longest Esker

Story and photos by Dwayne Whelgmuth

1957. The first time I hiked the world's longest esker, I was 19 years old. I was a student at the University of Minnesota, and I was on a field trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. I was with a group of about 20 other students and a professor. We were hiking the esker, which is a long, narrow ridge of glacial till that runs for about 100 miles through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It is the longest esker in the world. We hiked it for about 10 miles, and it was a great experience. I was with a group of about 20 other students and a professor. We were hiking the esker, which is a long, narrow ridge of glacial till that runs for about 10 miles through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It is the longest esker in the world. We hiked it for about 10 miles, and it was a great experience.



### Thlewiaza 2017: Exploring Sleeping Island and No-Man's River

Part II

Story by Chris Rush  
Photos by Chris Rush and Jerry Johnson

Continued from the last issue. The second day of our trip, we hiked the esker, which is a long, narrow ridge of glacial till that runs for about 10 miles through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It is the longest esker in the world. We hiked it for about 10 miles, and it was a great experience.



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### Cat River Canoe Trip

Story and Sketches by Jon Berger

19 September 2017. The Cat River is a small, scenic river that flows through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It is a great place to go for a canoe trip. I went with a group of about 10 other people, and we had a great time. The river is very scenic, and the scenery is beautiful. We hiked the esker, which is a long, narrow ridge of glacial till that runs for about 10 miles through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It is the longest esker in the world. We hiked it for about 10 miles, and it was a great experience.



### Canoe Ungava: Crossing the Ungava Peninsula with No Single-Use Plastics

By Beth Jackson and Eli Walker

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### Flat River

Story by Dwayne Whelgmuth  
Photos by Dwayne Whelgmuth and Rory McIntosh

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### Where the Rivers are Wild: A Journey Down the Lower Missinabi and Moose Rivers

Story and photos by Erik Thomson

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### My Memory of the Lake Superior 1967 Centennial Canoe Voyage

By Craig Macdonald  
Photos by Don Baker

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### Mountain River

Story by Mike Ross  
Photos by Brandon Spafford and Alisa Gove

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### From Labrador to Chisasibi on James Bay

Alisa Gove

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### Back Door to the Hood River

Story by Bob Dale

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### Lockhart River - Pike's Portage Canoe Trip

Journal Excerpt: July 15-August 6, 2015

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### Up the Grandin River and down the Johnny Hoe River

Story and photos by Dwayne Whelgmuth

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### Palmer Rapids - a home away from home

Alisa Gove

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### Artillery Lake Ice Walk

Story by Murray Auloff and Glen Neveggard  
Photos by Murray Auloff

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### Chapleau River 2013

by Richard Griffin

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