



## Northeast Georgian Bay Naiscoot River to Pickerel River

**Allan Jacobs**

*Summary:* Stunningly beautiful area.

*Campsites:* Easy to find for small groups, problematic for larger ones; bring a 2 in. Thermarest or equivalent because you'll be sleeping on rocks more often than not.

*Access points (incomplete list):* Parry Sound (Dillon for example) and Massasauga PP, Nares Inlet and Bayfield Inlet, Naiscoot River, Byng Inlet and Britt, Key River (Hwy 69), French River, Killarney.

*Hazards:* Often big water in exposed areas; shoals, the occa-

sional bear; lots of poison ivy (a far greater hazard than the rattlesnakes – endangered species, timid creatures, loath to bite unless you step on them).

*People encounters:* Expect to see a good many fellow paddlers, most in kayaks. Expect to see also lots of motorboats, sailboats and the like; the latter are forced by the shoals to stick to the boat channels. Suggestion: Get the nautical charts. In any case, boaters are far better behaved (they slow down for paddlers!), and so are much less of a hazard, than those farther south on the Bay. You will see lots of cottages near the boat channels; most are real cottages, though, not



## JOURNAL

### 15 July 2010 (Thursday)

We drove up from Toronto, stopping at White Squall just north of Parry Sound to pick up the rental boats (fibreglass for Linda, plastic Tsunami for me). It reflects mostly on my abilities of course, but I found the Tsunami hard to handle. And I found it slower than Linda's boat, a fact I ascribe of course to the different material. I asked whether they sell French River permits but the answer was no; we were told that we could buy them at the Hwy 69 site (French River bridge) or at Key River Marina.

We continued on Hwy 69, turned off onto Rte 529, and parked where it crosses the Naiscoot (permit required).

It took us 1 hour and 40 minutes to paddle down the river to my brother's cottage; we stayed there overnight with him and his wife.

### 16 July

What with family chatter and a hearty breakfast, we got on the water only at 10:45. The river mouth was seriously fogged in but the wind was down and we had no problem getting through the shoals south of Head Island; by the time we got there, the fog had gone. We have often taken the exposed channel between Head and Inside Head, but we decided this time to take the shallow pas-

summer homes. They are few and far between away from the boat channels. One measure of the quality of the experience is the number of PWCs observed; we saw nary a one! My Deep River paddling buddy Bruce calls them pukes.

*Topos:* 41 H/10 (Naiscver) and 41 H/15 (Key Harbour).

*Permits for camping on crown land:* Not needed for residents of Canada unless you camp in French River PP: [http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Cr ... 70045.html](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Cr...70045.html)

*French River PP permits:* Available at the French River Visitor Centre (Hwy 69 bridge over French River); I haven't confirmed that they are available at Key River Marina (Hwy 69 bridge over Key River).

*French River PP fees (at the bottom of the page):*  
<http://www.parkreports.com/fees/backcountry/2010>

*Route description:* Rte 529, Naiscoot River, Naiscoot mouth, Norgate Inlet, Magnetawan mouth, Dead Island, Key Harbour, Pickerel River mouth,

Magnetawan mouth, back to Rte 529.

*Participants:* Linda Gordon (my paddling partner of many years) and me, WCA members on a WCA trip. (This is the Linda who, when I once shouted that I couldn't find my gloves, replied "Well then, use the ordinary ones.")

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sage east of Inside Head Island; it was deep enough to get the boats through, barely.

In the bay beyond, we passed three kayakers heading south (told them about the passage), then a party (likely paddlers) camped on the shore south of Duquesne Lodge. The lodge burned down (I think in the fall of 2008) and is being rebuilt; we saw no one working, though.

We crossed Norgate Inlet and headed up the inside passage, where we saw a bear, almost adult; it just stood there looking at us. We turned left through Lessop's Hole where we met some fishers; I freed a woman's hook (stuck on the bottom); we didn't tell them about the bear, for fear they would bother it.

We headed out into the Bay, where we met a stiff breeze and a building sea. I was feeling faint from being slouched down (first time for that experience) and so we pulled in and had lunch. I spent a long time adjusting pedals and the back rest; all was OK for the remainder of the trip.

The wind and the waves continued to grow so we started looking for a campsite; there was no way we would try to cross the Magnetawan mouth in those conditions, even go as far as the McNab Rocks where we had camped in 1999 on our trip north from Dillon.

We rejected one spot but then found a place, set up, and had supper. The sun was blazing hot so we sat in the shade of trees to the north of the island, doing Sudoku (Allan) and reading (Linda); the spot has a nice view of the Magnetawan mouth and the west end of the South Channel. We turned in around 8:30.

Night 1: Coordinates 260/650 (NAD 27). Class B site, except for lots of poison ivy. Two tents. Island south of the Magnetawan mouth, west of Duffy Island.

## 17 July

It takes us a long time to pack those boats, especially when we have to do so one at a time, and we didn't get away until 8:30. The wind was already up and the crossing of the Magnetawan mouth was moderately tough, even in the shelter provided by the centre rocks.

Once across, we went inside

Lombiere Island, breaking away from the boat channel (which goes close to shore, is exposed, and is heavily used). We got some shelter near the Cunninghams but were pretty well out in the open after that. Things got ever tougher as the day wore on; we got past Sandy Bay but then it was game over and we had to go to shore, where we had lunch. We might have been able to camp there but it was Reserve land.

We were thinking that we might have to paddle a considerable distance back south to find an allowed spot (the topo shows that islands in the area are not part of the Reserve). Fortunately, Linda spotted a small island a few hundred metres away. We were able to pull into a small bay on the north side, well away

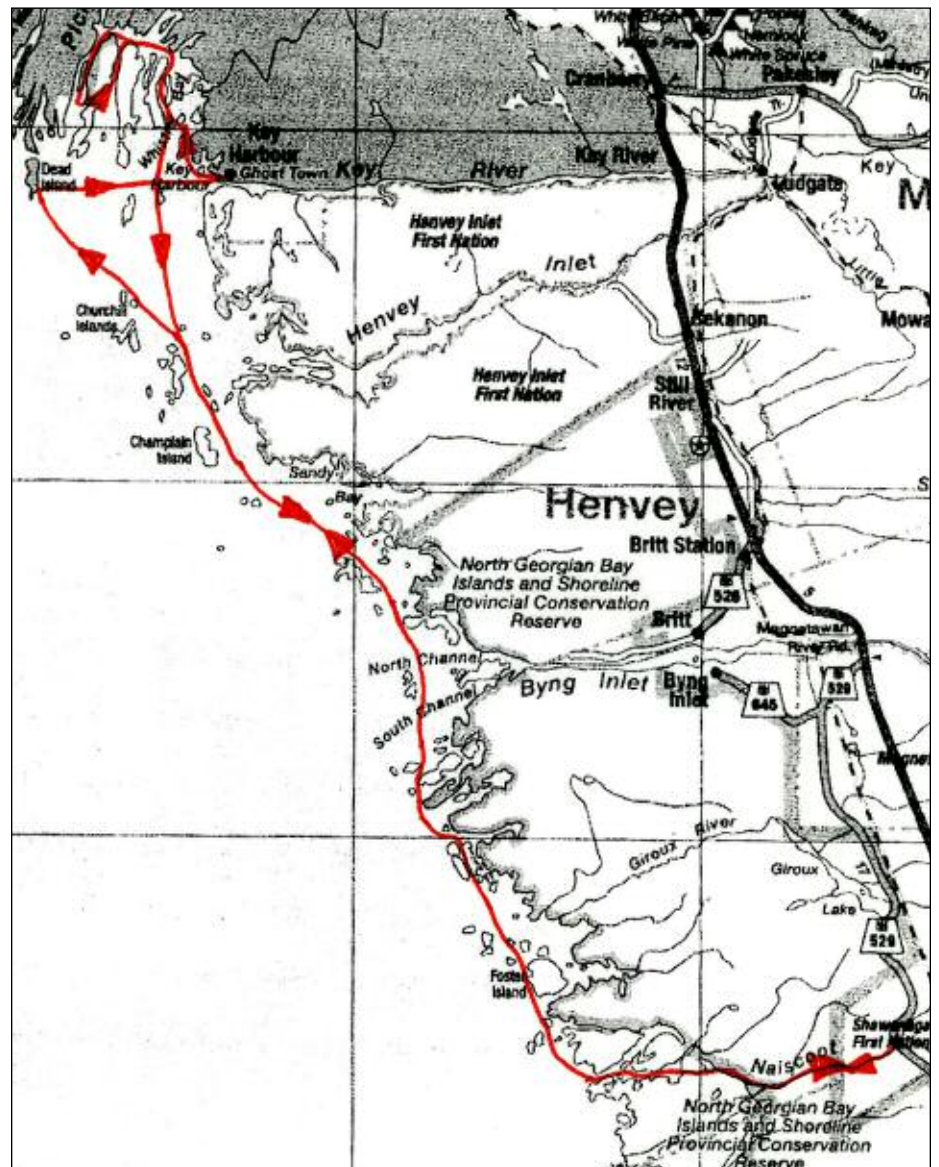
from the campsite, which lies to the east end of the island; it was only noon.

It was then that we decided to give up the original idea (paddle four days to Killarney, visiting the Bustards on the way, then return) and instead just wander around, enjoying ourselves.

Bad news time: I discovered that I no longer had my camera; it was too windy to go back to the lunch site and check.

We lounged around in the shade, went for a wash. The wind was very strong all day and we had to wait until 8 or so to put up the tents; we had to place them in less than optimal places but even then they were exposed some. We turned in at 9.

Night 2: Coordinates 227/734. Class B site, except for lots of poison ivy.







Maybe four tents in calm conditions, two in the stiff west wind we had. Island site with good bathing area on the south side.

### 18 July

After checking the previous day's lunch site fruitlessly for the camera, we headed north and a bit west, passing through gorgeous scenery well west of the boat channels; I recall seeing not a single boat or cottage. Neither of us had been in that part of the Bay before; it is where I would spend more time next visit. We reached the south end of Dead Island (where the GPS told us where we were), spoke to two kayakers there, then paddled, in awkward waves, the 5 km east to Key Harbour, where I expected to buy French River PP permits at the marina there.

Well, I blew it. The White Squall guy said that Key River Marina (on Hwy 69) sells permits; he did not say Key Harbour Marina (on the Bay). In retrospect, how could I have been so stupid? Partly because of the hour, we decided not to paddle the eight miles up and

back. But we did make use of the opportunity to buy ice cream from the really nice people at the marina.

The pilings and buildings in the harbour area date back to the days when it was used as a trans-shipment facility

(Georgian Bay ships to the rail line east of Hwy 69), first for iron ore, then for coal. I think that it is Ghosts of the Bay (by Andrea Gutsche, Barbara Chisholm, and Russell Floren) that offers a more detailed history of Key Harbour than the





link: [http://www.ontarioabandoned-places.com/k ... arbour.asp](http://www.ontarioabandoned-places.com/k...arbour.asp)

We headed west, then turned north, and started looking for a campsite, finding one on an island just south of Puddick Island; my map says that all that area is outside the Park. We set up and I had a nap. A light rain started, then let up enough that I began cooking supper, only to start again.

We hit the sack around eight; a light rain continued overnight. Night 3: Coordinates 190.9/829.7. Class A site. Plenty of sites, nice (but small, one at a time) inlet for loading and unloading. No poison ivy seen.

### 19 July

As we lounged around in the morning, ten paddlers from Montreal, in six kayaks (four tandem, two solo), passed close by; they had started at Britt. Linda spoke briefly to them in French.

After lunch, we paddled north through Whistler Bay, then turned west toward the mouth of the Pickerel

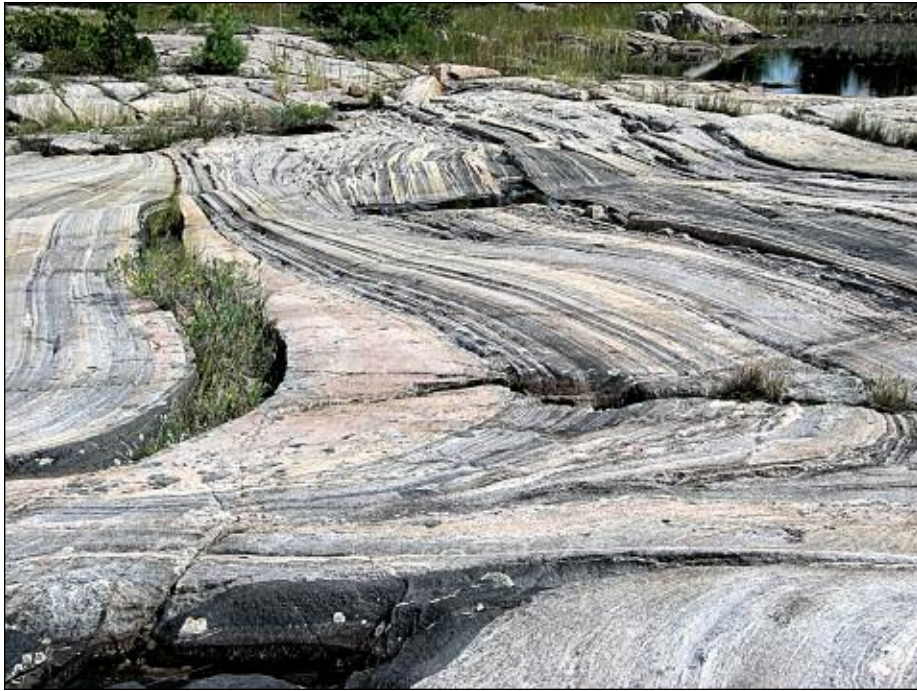


“River.” We followed the channel through Bowens Bay (where we verified with cottagers that we could get down to the Bay). After a km or so, the channel

turns hard right (west); the dead-ahead channel marked on the topo is impassable. We paddled to the south end of Genessee Bay but decided to turn back







maybe as far as Nares Inlet, where we had camped on our 1999 trip. We talked also of maybe turning east at Charles Inlet and paddling up to the forks (about 5 km from the mouth).

Not long after we headed south, I blew it again, this time missing the turn to the inside passage to the area north of Norgate Inlet. The outside route is OK in a mild wind but then you have to work your way through the shoals at the mouth of Norgate.

We passed Duquesne again; this time people were working there. In the bay north of Inside Head Island, three motorboats went by, obviously looking for the inside passage. We found the way but they didn't follow.

Guess what? The wind had been building and was quite strong by the time we emerged from shelter. We had to go well out to avoid the shoals at the Naiscoot mouth, making for, shall I say, interesting paddling. We crossed the mouth and paddled through what we call Bass Bay (not at Toporama), then Ethel Bay (also not at Toporama; no one knows why it's called that). It was too early to head for the cottage (we weren't due for another two days) and conditions were too tough to try for Charles Inlet, so we pulled in at an island that I knew was used by paddlers.

when we saw the conditions out in the open. As we headed back north, the Montrealers passed by, heading south, too far away for a chat. We took the eastern of the three Genessee channels, shallow but passable; again the centre channel is blocked. We went up the channel west of Dokis Island, through the east part of Bowens Bay, did a U-turn south to pass between Dokis Island and Puddick Island (amazing rocks on the east side of Dokis, south of the cottage) and finished up by making a wavy return to the campsite.

Night 4: Same place as night 3.

## 20 July

We packed up and headed south, in mild wind and waves and more gorgeous scenery, the latter not as good, though, as that farther west; and the direct route south is used more by motorboats. South of Free Drinks Passage (sic!), six solo kayaks passed us, heading north, well too far out for a chat. Lunch was at a small island near Potvin Point.

Conditions looked OK so we decided to cross Magnetawan Bay. It was not nearly as tough as the northbound crossing a few days before. On the way, two float planes passed low overhead, maybe from Parry Sound and carrying sight-seers. We passed the site of night one, looking for something better, but re-

turned to what we knew was OK when a site promising from the water failed inspection.

I immediately started looking for my camera, which I found right away. There followed more lounging under the trees, then supper and sleep.

Night 5: Same place as night 1.

## 21 July

We had a vague plan to head south,





After a walkabout, we found a clean path (no poison ivy) to the large, well-used and clean campsite (cum thunder-box). We set up and relaxed in the shade.

Good thing we got off the Bay when we did; it was wild out there!

Night 6: Approximate location 325/551 (I wrote the GPS coordinates on another piece of paper, which of course I lost). Class B site (would have been Class A but for the plentiful poison ivy and the awkward access). It's on the island (or something close to one) just north of the inlet. Lots of tent sites; canoe access is on the north side; kayak access is better on the east side. Good view of the bay from the west side, OK bathing area on the south side.

## 22 July

We decided not to head south, the wind

having cost us so much paddling time the previous day; it was cottage time. We loaded up, went around the outside of our island and went for a walk over to the "Painted Rocks", which are written up in the tourist literature: <http://www.rainbowcountry.com/regions/pointe-au-baril>

The area is well used for camping.

We returned to the cottage through Chicken Liver Channel (no one knows why it's called that), a day early. On the way, we pulled at a cottage to chat with my cousin's son Jim and his family. We met also Jim Fritzsche (former tight end with the Philadelphia Eagles, physically imposing but highly personable; the phrase "gentle giant" comes to mind).

## 23 July

Cottage life.

## 24 July (Saturday)

We put all the gear into my brother's motorboat and we paddled up the river, 1 hour and 30 minutes; he passed us on the way. We helped him get some furniture from Nares Inlet back to his boat, said goodbye, loaded up, and headed south to White Squall to return the boats. On the way back, we stopped in off the highway for lunch at the Tim Horton's (not the one in Nobel); on the way out, I bought the boater's exam book, in case I need to use the cottage motorboat on another trip.

All the way back, we watched the poor sods heading north. But then we had our own bundle of grief trying to get onto 401 west from 400, then crawling along 401; what a nasty way to end a beautiful trip.





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**Published by the Wilderness Canoe Association**  
**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.

## Editorial

It's already two years ago that I became the interim editor-in-chief of our quarterly journal *Nastawgan*. And now the time has come for me to hand over the responsibilities of creating this beloved journal to another editor-in-chief who will be supported by a small group of dedicated editors responsible for specific tasks. On the next page you will find the ad for this important volunteer job. Have an honest look at what the WCA means to you, and if you think you have the capabilities to be a good editor, contact the Board to discuss the most satisfying job you can find in the whole WCA!

## Deadlines

The deadline dates for submitting material for the four issues we publish each year are: the first days of February, May, August, and November. If you have questions, please contact the editor; addresses on the last page.

## WCA Wine & Cheese Fall Party

You can find a short review on the Wine & Cheese, which took place on 27 November 2010 in Toronto, in our website, [www.wildernesscanoe.ca](http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca).

## Wilderness Canoe Symposium

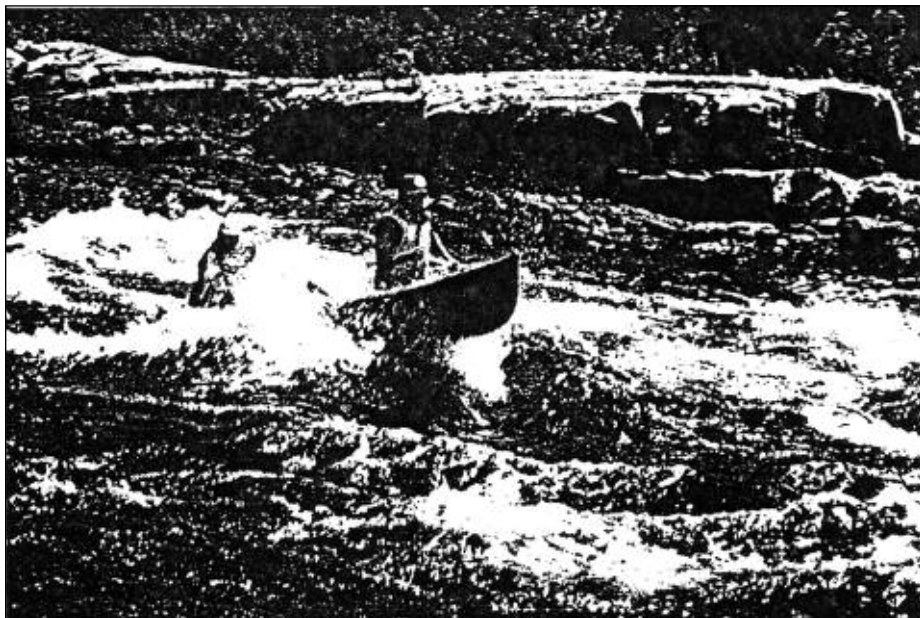
The 2011 Symposium will be held at the usual place, Monarch Park Collegiate, in Toronto, on 18 and 19 February 2011. For information and registration, go to [www.wcsymposium.com](http://www.wcsymposium.com).

## WCA Annual General Meeting 2011

The AGM will take place on Sunday, 13 February 2011, at the Kortright Centre for Conservation, Vaughan, Ontario. Meet and greet 9-9:30; AGM business meeting 9:30-12:00; hot lunch 12-1. The afternoon will be a fun geocaching (GPS treasure hunt) activity, with a stop at the model energy home. Details and registration form in the WCA website.

## 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](http://www.wildernesscanoe.ca).





# Nastawgan Editor(s) Wanted

As mentioned in the Editorial on the previous page, our wilderness canoeing journal should have a new editor-in-chief supported by a small team of editors by the middle of next year. In order to accomplish this, volunteers need to come forward from the WCA membership willing to undergo a training period of approximately half a year, covering two or three issues of the newsletter. This will prepare the trainee(s) to take over this important, demanding, rather time-consuming, un-paid, but ultimately highly satisfying job to produce a journal worthy of the WCA tradition. Being involved with the creation of this world-renowned outdoors journal offers the most amazing and gratifying experiences, because you'll have direct access to information and people closely involved in what the WCA is all about: understanding, enjoying, and protecting the canoeing wilderness.

To take advantage of this opportunity, you need a good knowledge of the English language and you must have a knack for soliciting new and relevant material, both amongst members and others. Familiarity with the wilderness canoeing universe (environment, people, organizations, WCA) is needed but will improve while on the job. Good organizational skills and the ability to delegate and coordinate are required. And you must feel comfortable working with computers, text as well as images. While it would be convenient for the editor(s) to reside in Toronto, the current state of computer technology does not make that a mandatory requirement.

If you think you could do a good job as the editor, or maybe as a member of the editorial team, please submit your name and credentials to the Chair, Aleks Gusev (see back page for addresses).

WCA Board



*From a recent letter to the editor:*

Your article [in the previous issue] on Bugs, specifically black flies, caught my attention. Over about fifty years, I have endured bites from the creatures, and have been able to minimize the number of bites by using Deet applied early in the day, every day, on perfectly dry skin. The accumulation of repellent has been effective most of the time. But every now and then a bite causes swelling, as depicted by the photographs you took. Several years ago, while look-

ing through a Lee Valley Tools catalogue, I noticed the Therapik, which was advertised as effective for insect bites. I bought one at LVT, and I always carry it with me. The light bulb, behind a fine mesh, gets hot enough to cause denaturation of the protein in the skin around the insect bite. The effect of the poison that causes swelling is reduced almost immediately, after a few seconds, and, little or no swelling occurs. A teenage girl I was with, was bitten, just like your wife on the eyelid. I applied the Therapik. Relief was immediate, and no

swelling occurred. The Therapik works on mosquito bites as well. To date, the battery has only been replaced once, and I never leave home without it, to quote a common phrase. A special note I will add is that I do the 'burn' much longer than suggested. I continue until all the pain is gone and the heat has had enough time to cause the effect of the poison to be eliminated. My wife says that I really torque it, and she is absolutely correct.

Arnold Hartford

# Food for Paddlers

The third in a series of recipes forwarded by Dawne Robinson. Dave and Dawne travelled the Thelon River this past summer and entertained us once again at the Fall Meeting with their presentation.

## Granola Bars

3 cups (750 mL) rolled oats

1 cup (250 mL) any chopped nuts (pistachio, almond, peanut, cashew)

1 cup (250 mL) raisins or chopped dried fruit (cranberry, raisin)

1 cup (250 mL) seeds (pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, flax)

1 cup (250 mL) Semi-sweet chocolate chips (white, chocolate)

1 can Eagle Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk

½ cup (125 mL) melted margarine

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Line a pan with greased foil and press the mixture into it evenly. Place on a bed of low coals. You can also use a greased outback oven. If so, bake at 325 F (160 C) for 25 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from heat, cool slightly, and score bars. When cooler, peel off foil. Cut into bars.

*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](mailto:youngj-david@rogers.com).*

# Bug bites



# WCA Photo Contest 2010

Although there were only eight entrants, the quality of most of the twenty-eight submitted pictures was quite good indeed, sometimes even excellent. We decided not to hand out first, second, and third prizes, because we want to promote participation in the contest and not necessarily for the photographers to be selected the best, second best, etc. Congratulations to all the winners!

The ten selected photos are reproduced on these three pages, with the names of the photographers. To see the photos in glorious colour, go to our website [www.wilderness-canoe.ca](http://www.wilderness-canoe.ca), log in (members only), and open the present journal. The photos will be exhibited at our show booth and on other occasions where we want to promote wilderness canoeing and the WCA.

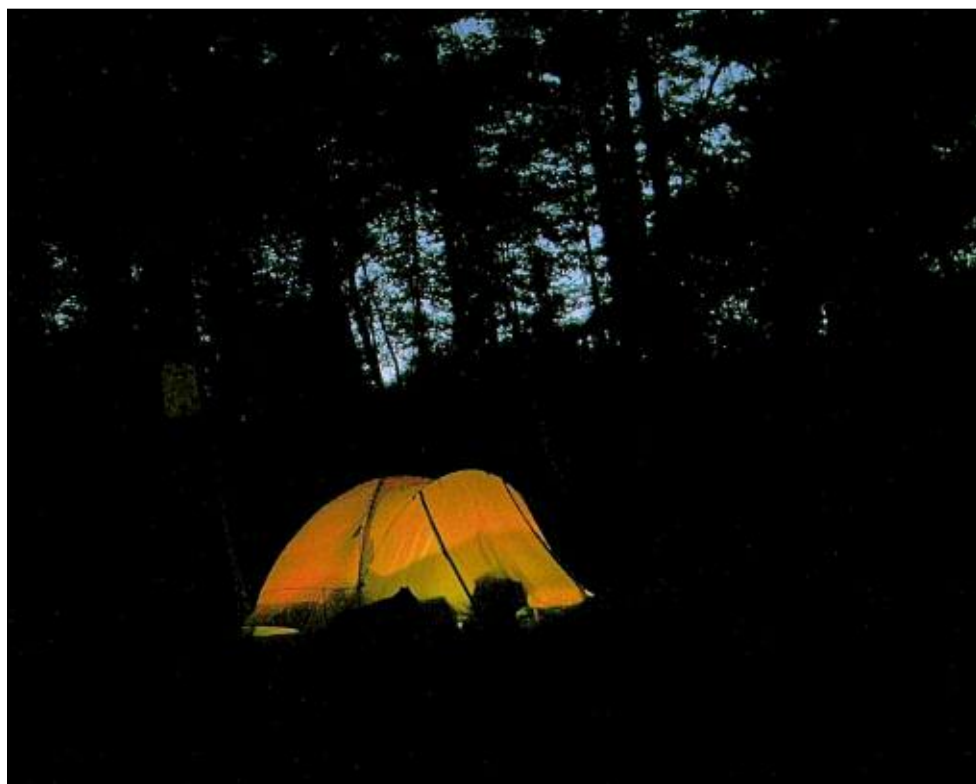
The ten winning photographs were presented to the members present at the Wine & Cheese Fall Party on 27 November. Besides much well-deserved applause, the makers of the photographs also received a signed copy of the photography book *Shooting Paddlers*.

If there is enough enthusiasm, we could very well have a photo contest again next year. Please send us your comments!

WCA Board & Toni Harting



*Sarah Hooper*



*Osmond Solomon*





*Gary James*



*Dave Cunningham*



*Jay Neilson*



*Larry Durst*

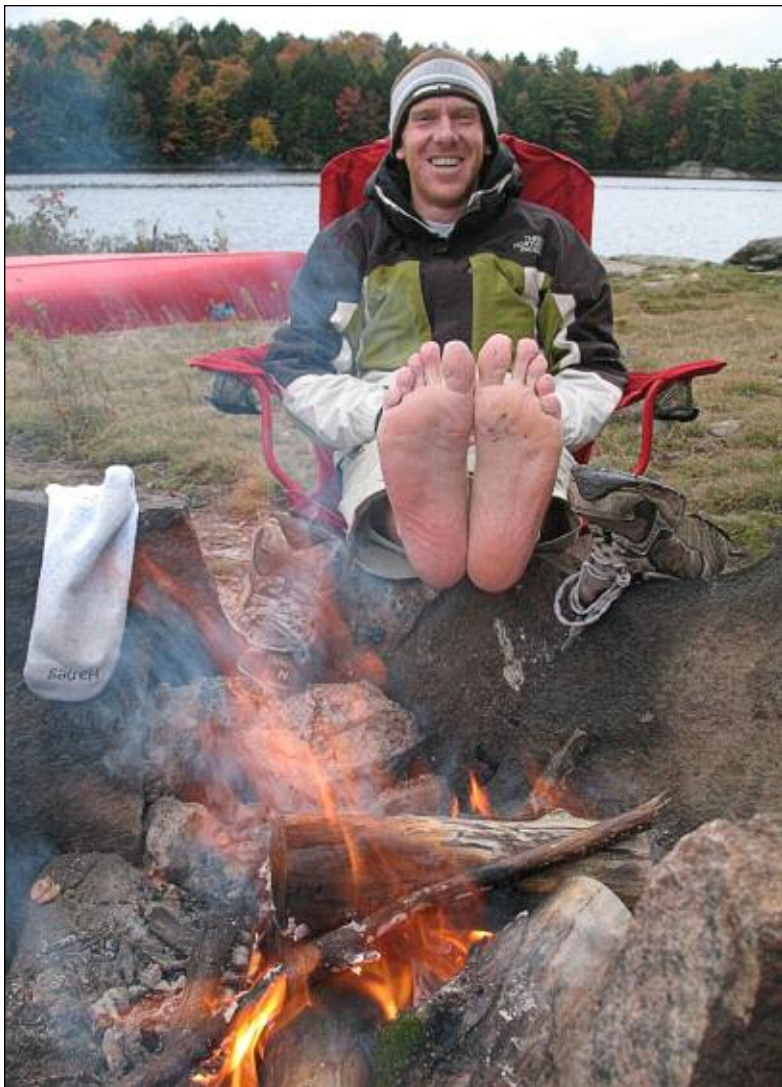


*Brett Hodnett*





*Larry Durst*



*Ginger Louws*



*Dave Cunningham*



# Book Review

**RIVER ROUGH, RIVER SMOOTH, Adventures on Manitoba's Historic Hayes River** by Anthony Dalton, published by Natural Heritage Books (Dundurn Group), Toronto, 2010, soft-cover, 276 pages, \$32.99.  
Review by Toni Harting.

Few, if any, of the members of the WCA will have experience with York boats, the flat-bottomed wooden craft used during the fur trade in the days of the Hudson's Bay Company. They transported goods and fur up and down the Hayes River from York Factory on Hudson Bay to Norway House just north of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. In 1994, the writer of this well-written, information-packed book participated in a trip in a modern replica of such a boat from Norway House to Oxford House, somewhat less than halfway down this historic fur-trade route. The trip was organized and executed by members of the local Cree First Nation.

The crew lined the unwieldy boat down rapids and hauled it over long portages, just like the traders did many years ago. One of the first of the many obstacles they encountered was the very narrow and shallow Echimamish River which leads, via the Painted Stone Portage, to Robinson Lake and the upper Hayes River. There are many more of those intriguing and historically significant names in the book, and one is constantly amazed at the strength and resilience of the fur-traders who regularly visited those places in the past and had to perform quite brutal work getting their big boats across the more than 45 rapids and falls in the river. Once Oxford House had been reached, the modern-day trippers abandoned the boat, which had been damaged in an accident, and cancelled the rest of the trip. The au-

# A Party of Six

In Lynn Lake, Manitoba. Two-day drive to get here. We're now sitting outside the office of La Ronge Aviation waiting for their plane to arrive. It's a Twin Otter that's now taking some fishermen to a lodge at the south end of Big Sand Lake. We are next to fly out.

La Ronge Aviation has some picnic tables set up that we're hanging around. Nice view of the lake from here. No one says it, but from where we are now you can also see the dock where the Twin Otter ties up. The dock is empty now.

We've flown a Twin Otter twice before. We feel it is the best compromise when trying to get people deep into the Canadian wilderness. With a Cessna or a Beaver you may be restricted to one canoe on the floats and two people plus gear for each trip. A group of four would require two trips, and a group of six needs three trips. It adds up to a

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thor returned home. He came back to Oxford House in 2000, but now as part of a six-person, three-canoe expedition that canoed the 380 km from Oxford House to the end of the river at York Factory on Hudson Bay.

This book tells the story of this 650-km, two-part trip in considerable detail, giving the reader much fascinating information on the country and the fur-trade of long ago. The writing is lively and the book presents an impressive amount of research; there are numerous references and notes as well as a handy index. A considerable number of colour and black-and-white photographs illustrate the book. There are also two simple large-scale maps. However, this kind of a book requires detailed maps to explain the course of the river and the location of its obstacles such as rapids and portages.

hefty sum when you figure that you are paying mileage both ways to the drop-off point.

A Twin Otter is a much bigger plane. You can load three canoes, all the gear, and six canoeists all in one load. While the cost per mile for a Twin Otter flight is higher than for the smaller planes, it can get your group there with your canoes and your gear—all in one trip. It brings the airfare cost for each person down to a more manageable level.

The real difficulty is getting the six people to make up the Twin Otter load. Six people matching up in terms of vacation time, finances, personalities, and desire to do the particular river trip. All at the same time. It's tougher than it appears.

Hours later.

The two pilots have off-loaded all six of us, our canoes, and our gear at the junction where Big Sand Lake meets Wolf Lake and they are now taxiing out to deeper water for the take-off. With a "bon chance" and a wave they are soon aloft and we are left alone. The drone of the Twin Otter quickly fades and each of us realizes that we are truly on another wilderness canoe trip. The Seal River this time.

No one is talking. We are all contemplating, giving gratitude, and just enjoying the sheer miracle of being in the wilderness with days of adventure ahead of us.

The silence is overpowering. I try to imagine what each of the six of us is thinking, but it's not possible. I also think that it's really prying. Not my business. Each of the six of us is here in the wilderness to fill a need specific to that person. We are not a party of six on a wilderness canoe trip, but really six parties of one.

Greg Went



# Posse of the Paddle

text Frank Stella

photos Linda Simpson



*The following is a short trip report by Frank Stella, one of the true characters of the WCA. He has been a member of the WCA for years and only this past September made his first canoe trip. The style of his writing is certainly unique and has a distinct charm. It may rub some readers the wrong way but I wanted you to learn Frank's thoughts because the great joy of finally holding a paddle and sitting in a canoe instead of just reading about it is so obvious that it should remind many of us of the elation with which we step in a canoe at the beginning of the paddling season. (ed.)*

The week of September 6 to 12, 2010, paddling on Lake Opeongo in Algonquin Park, was long in coming! In a way, it began a long time ago, on that May of 1967, when I arrived in Canada. The lure of paddling silently on pristine lakes, on a glassy surface, under a blue sky, was etched in my mind through viewing many pictures of the expanse of Canada, the Land which I would soon discover, adding to the myth of the Canadian wild.

I recall asking in those days about canoeing clubs, and one Saturday of that May I learned of a War Canoes Club in Scarborough! The very notion of a "war canoe" made no sense to me. Of course

I knew of General Custer and the Sioux riding on bare-back Mustangs, but had never heard of a Militarized Indian Navy! When I was shown a large boat, which did not seem to me very Indian at all, I decided to give up my enquiries.

Time went on, and work and family life took over my attention, and was only in 1986, that I learned of the Wilderness Canoe Association. However, when I was told that canoeing in the wilderness meant capsizing and drowning yourself down turbulent waterfalls, attempting to stay afloat in mighty rivers, up in the barrens of the Land, I thought that life was not worth risking in the company of a few daredevil fellows. My wife, not an avid outdoors herself, although a native of the Land, supported my view!

The years went by. While maintaining membership of the WCA, I did some camping with my family, and enjoyed hiking, but a lingering thought of one day I might be doing some real canoeing, remained stashed in the back of my mind.

Then, one day some time ago, I was informed of a two-day instruction session for beginners, in mid-July. After some consultation with Bill Ness, who eagerly encouraged me to give it a try, reassuring me that I would not be looked upon as a Mithras of the Paddle, and would not risk becoming the laughing stock of some younger bratty upstart, I signed on for my initiation toward becoming a professional Paddler.

That, however was not to be! The two-days course never got off the ground, and I sadly accepted it as an indication of the Saint Protector of Paddlers, that perhaps I was to wait for my Destiny to unfold!

Linda's call to join a beginners' outing for a whole week during this late summer, shocked me out of my fatalistic musings. And that is how the Great Adventure began, which will remain, in





my mind, as one of the highlights of my Canadian years.

This Posse of the Paddle was made up of Master Paddler Fred, the lone paddler who had me certified, on my recommendation, as a suitable aspiring Paddler; Eric, an experienced kayaker; and I; plus Linda, our Valiant Leader, with her Companion Denis, also a proven Master Paddler. We all arrived on time at the appointed place, early in the afternoon, on Monday, September 6th. Linda, our Supreme Leader, promptly took charge of the Posse, and in no time, with the boats loaded to the brim, we set out on our adventure. The test of Fire, or should I say, of rumbling waves, suddenly came as soon as the wind took off, with myself sitting in a tiny nutshell, dangerously dancing on choppy waters.

After reassuring myself, that the water temperature was such that hypothermia was not to be my fate, with a silent prayer to Great Spirit Manitou, I energetically plunged my new otter tail paddle in the salvific water of Lake Opeongo. Rain ensued, with the boat taking in a trickle of water, but when a few hours later we reached Base Camp One, I was elated: Paddler, at last!

The next days were pretty much the same. However, by mid-week weather improved and it was a day of rest, with Osiris rising above shining waters, under a starred world, with a Loon lullaby cheering our open-pit fire, into the night of a glorious day. That was when Master Paddler Fred, with one of his bon mots, right in the middle of one of my elaborate stories, said: "Frank, you must have been inoculated with a gramophone needle!" That's how I received my Nobel Prize for Storytelling of the Canadian Wilds!

Thursday was a perfect day, with a blue sky which reminded me of Modugno's rhyme: *Volare, volare, nel Cielo dipinto di blu!*

After a portage, where I could contribute my Hiker's skills, we reached Big Crow lake with its tall White Pines. It was a day of unbridled joy, basking in the beauty of Nature, without the noises and fumes of our beloved Toronto, Manhattan of the North.

There is a bond, I think, between our



Humanity and the Watery World, which may go back to the time when Life emerged from the Sea; encrypted in our DNA, as a funny Fellow named Jerome K. Jerome (\*) prophetically mused in 1889. Pierre Elliott Trudeau echoed the Theme, in praise of Bill Mason, a genial fanatic, as he puts it, who said: "... may every dip of your paddle lead you toward a rediscovery of yourself, of your canoeing companions, of the wonders of nature, and the unmatched physical and

spiritual rapture made possible by the humble canoe." (\*\*)

Next summer, I will be out there again on Canadian waters with another Posse, in celebration of a truly Canadian ritual.

(\*) *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome - 1889, Cox & Wyman Ltd.

(\*\*) *Path of the Paddle* by Bill Mason, 1984, Key Porter Books





# The Owyhee River

Greg Went



You've never heard of it. You don't know where it is or in which direction it flows. You don't know if it's worth doing. Hey, you don't even know how to spell the name of the river. It's the Owyhee. And there's one more question. A big one. Would you want to invest your limited vacation budget to canoe a portion of it?

You search the internet and you come up with the Bureau Of Land Management site that gives the following description:

"Floating along the Owyhee River in Oregon, you pass through astonishing high desert canyon lands with thousand foot rhyolite cliffs and sand castle rock formations. Visitors will marvel at the variety of birds and mammals, including river otters, bighorn sheep and golden eagles. The Owyhee River's fragile ecological balance requires the utmost respect from its visitors. The Owyhee River's

floatable sections are very remote and contain numerous technical and challenging rapids. This river is not for the inexperienced float boater! Once you enter these deeply carved canyons, you will be a long way from help. Emergency access is extremely difficult, and cell phone coverage is nonexistent within the confines of the canyon. You must be prepared to handle all problems and emergencies on your own. To properly prepare, floaters should contact the Vale BLM Office to obtain information well in advance of a planned float trip. A waterproof river guide that includes a river map identifying rapids may be purchased from the Vale BLM office (541-473-3144)."

Those who canoe wild rivers know that there is a great difference between wild rivers in Canada and Alaska and those in the lower 48. In Canada and Alaska you

have your pick of wild rivers to canoe. River after river to choose from. Most rivers there see at most just a few canoe groups travelling down during any given summer. Some of the more popular rivers may see more traffic, especially those that have been designated wild rivers. But if you pick a lesser-known river, chances are still pretty good that you will not see another party during the entire length of your trip. It's a combination of time, cost, and logistics. Travel on many wild rivers requires two-plus weeks or so of vacation time, lots of money for a charter flight to put-in or take-out, and the always-difficult task of coordinating the schedules of all the trip participants.

The reward for overcoming all of these obstacles is solitude. You truly are on your own. You share the beauty of the country only with the members of your party. You are away from all the trappings of civilization. You rely on yourself.



In the lower 48 this opportunity does not often exist. Almost all of the wild rivers in the lower 48 require permits. Rivers like the Rogue in Oregon, the middle fork of the Salmon in Idaho, and the Green and Colorado in Utah require permits that have to be requested sometimes years in advance. On some rivers the demand is so great that if permits were allocated in the order received, there would be a five or ten-year wait for an individual permit number to come up. On those rivers, the administering agencies have instituted lotteries to determine who gets to travel the river this year. You apply for a permit and you take your chances on the luck of the draw.

If you win and draw a permit you are granted access for specific dates and only those dates.

But while it is great to see the marvelous beauty of these rivers, the permit process takes away something that only true wilderness travel can provide. On these permitted rivers, you know, you absolutely know, that there is a party on the river a day in front of you and another party a day behind you. The feeling of isolation that you are on your own in the wilderness just cannot be nurtured and helped to grow when you are armed with the knowledge that so many others are so close. It takes away from the wilderness experience. You are not on your own a long way from everyone else. You are just another tourist looking at the pretty scenery.

A lot of the permitted rivers in the U.S. are also very suitable for travel by raft. This has resulted in the growth of businesses catering to clientele who pay for guided raft trips down these rivers. Some of the rafts are enormous and can go through “big” water. We’ve all seen adventure clips of those long sausage rafts going over Lava Falls on the Colorado River and other huge obstacles. The rafts carry almost all the comforts of civilization. At least they haven’t left much behind at home.

Enormous ice chests containing chilled drinks, fresh salads, and even steaks are common on these guided trips. I have even read about advertised raft trips that included gourmet meals for the entire trip accompanied by hired orchestra members playing music at the

evening meal. It’s almost as if the goal of these guided trips is to see how much of life in the city can be carried on a raft trip to wild country. Completely opposite of what the goal should be. That of removing yourself from your routine in the city. Experiencing the wilderness on simple terms. You bring all that stuff and you spend your time carrying it, packing it, securing it, loading and unloading it, and setting it up and taking it down. The next thing you know, the day is done and what have you experienced? You have experienced your stuff, not the wilderness.

In addition, the economics of scale have resulted in raft groups continuing to grow in size. Bigger groups mean more revenue to the raft operators with not much of an increase in cost. Sometimes these raft groups have up to 30 people. In one raft group. Many of the experiences desired by travelling in the wilderness just cannot be gained by going in such a large group.

Imagine my surprise then when I read a short comment about the Owyhee River in *Outside* magazine. In their “It’s

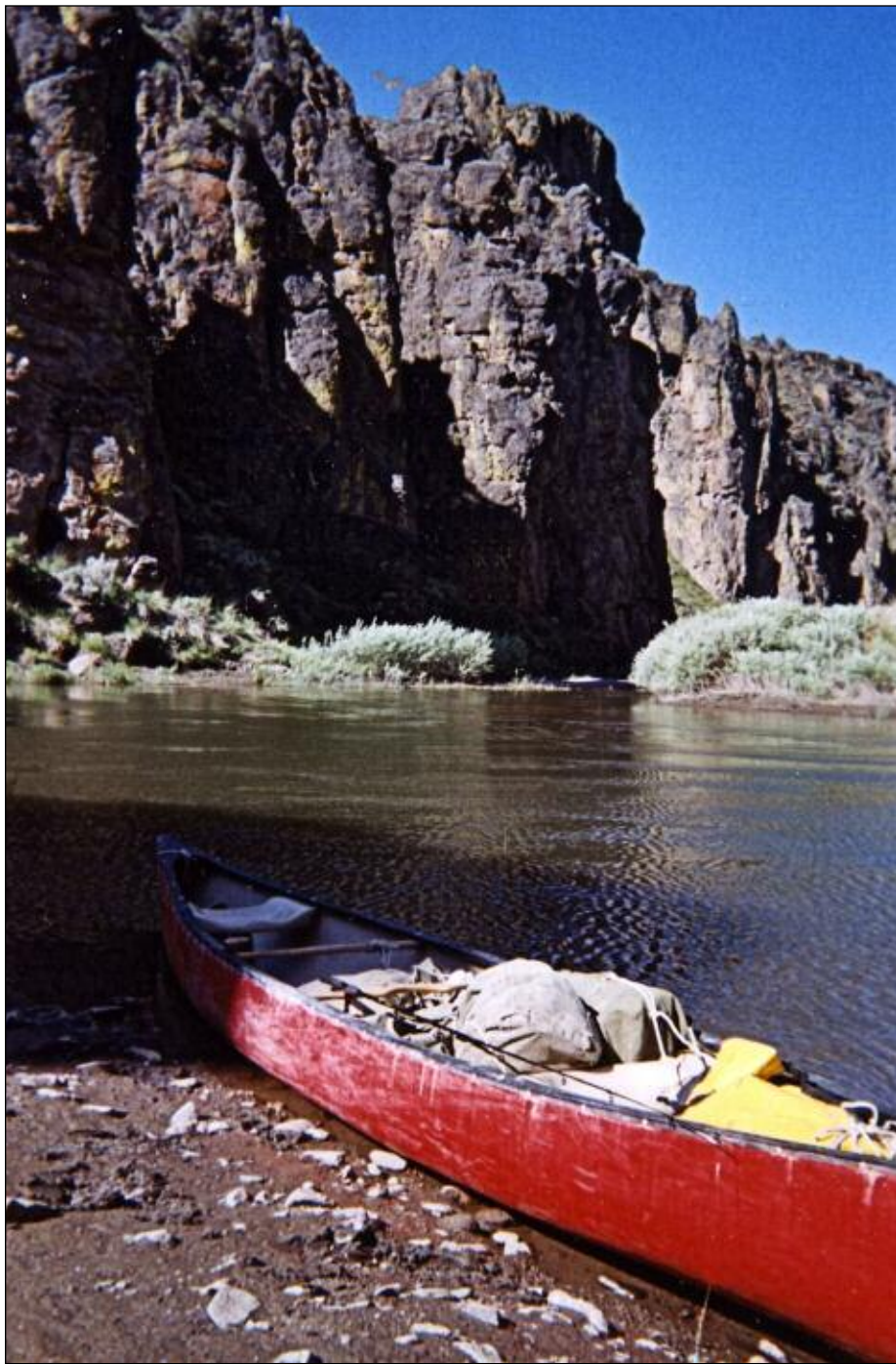
still wild” section. The article says that the Owyhee flows through the most isolated area of the lower 48 and is as wild as it gets. And it does not require a permit. A puzzled look came upon my face. I couldn’t believe it. A wild river in the lower 48 that embodied the characteristics of a Canadian or Alaskan wilderness canoe trip AND did not require a permit? It wasn’t overrun with rafting groups? (Registration of your trip is required on the Owyhee but a permit is not necessary).

I did a Google Earth search for the Oregon/Idaho/Nevada border. What came up were big, flat tablelands and then suddenly the earth was cut as with a knife. It was the Owyhee. Working its way down through the lava and creating deep gorges on its way north. The Grand Canyon on a smaller scale.

The 120 miles from the upper reaches to Lake Owyhee has been enacted into law as a component of the U.S. Wild and Scenic River System since 1984, but the Owyhee River is still surprisingly little known. I had never even heard of the







river before I read the article in Outside magazine. How could others without a lifetime of exploring wild rivers know any more about it? And the question kept nagging at me, Why was a wild river in the U.S. so little travelled? Why didn't the people who travelled down the Owyhee spread the word about it? It would take our trip down the river to finally learn the answers.

It's interesting how the Owyhee got its name. Owyhee was the traditional

English spelling for Hawaii at the time. It turns out that the Northwest Company in their exploration up the Snake River in 1820 for furs and trade sent three Hawaiian trappers to explore the Owyhee country. They were never seen again. The trading party named the river in their honor. The name stuck and should have sent a signal warning sign to me. Three very tough critters didn't come back from the Owyhee.

The Owyhee flows northwesterly

from Idaho and northern Nevada towards the Snake River in Oregon. The upper Owyhee has three branches (the South, East, and North forks) that join together to create a further wild section called the middle Owyhee. The middle section of the Owyhee goes all the way from the junction of the three forks to the town of Rome, Oregon.

Rome, Oregon, is where most commercial raft trips start. The commercial outfitters do a 48-mile section of the Owyhee from Rome downstream to the Birch Creek take-out that is raft-friendly and works in terms of getting the number of rafters, days of travel, ease of entry and exit, and the bottom line of their balance sheet to all add up.

The upper and middle Owyhee are not so accommodating. They are difficult, not raft friendly (if truth be told they are not friendly to open canoes either), and it will take canoe parties many days to travel the 84 miles to Rome, Oregon. But the payback is that the upper and middle Owyhee has it all. Deep canyons, wildlife, pristine campsites. And it is true wilderness. No roads outside of the launch and take-out points come down to river level. Travellers are on their own.

Mostly though, the Owyhee has fish. Lots and lots of fish. I have never experienced better fishing on any other wilderness canoeing trip that I have been on. And that includes Canada and Alaska. One time eight casts yielded eight fish. It is no understatement to claim upwards of 150 fish on the trip for each of us. Maybe more. After you have caught enough fish to sate the hunter-gatherer that exists in all of us, you tend to lose count. Every pool below a drop held fish. Even the smallest riffles generated fish wherever we cast our lines. The fish were mostly small mouth bass (biggest 16 inches), whitefish, and rainbow trout (biggest 22 inches).

The Owyhee is fed primarily by snow and is unsuitable for any rafting after the spring melt is over. The river drops to such low levels that rafts cannot get through the many obstacles. This means that by early summer the rafters would be gone for the year. The guidebook even says it: "Best rafting is over by the middle of June." But what about canoeing it then? Would the river be canoeable at



lower levels after the melt was over? The Rome river gauge was 900 cfs when my son, Victor, and myself started our trip on June 19 this year, and 590 cfs at the end eight days later.

While travelling the Owyhee doesn't require a permit, it does require fire pans, a leak-proof portable toilet, and packing out of all trash including fire residue. Decomposition in a desert environment can take many years. Bits of charcoal, and assorted refuse would be there for the next travellers even if they came next year or the year after that. While the vastness of Canadian and Alaskan wilderness canoeing lands has not forced such stringent regulations on wilderness canoeists to those areas, in the lower 48 with its greater numbers of people and less wilderness, the regulations become mandatory. Leave no trace that you passed by.

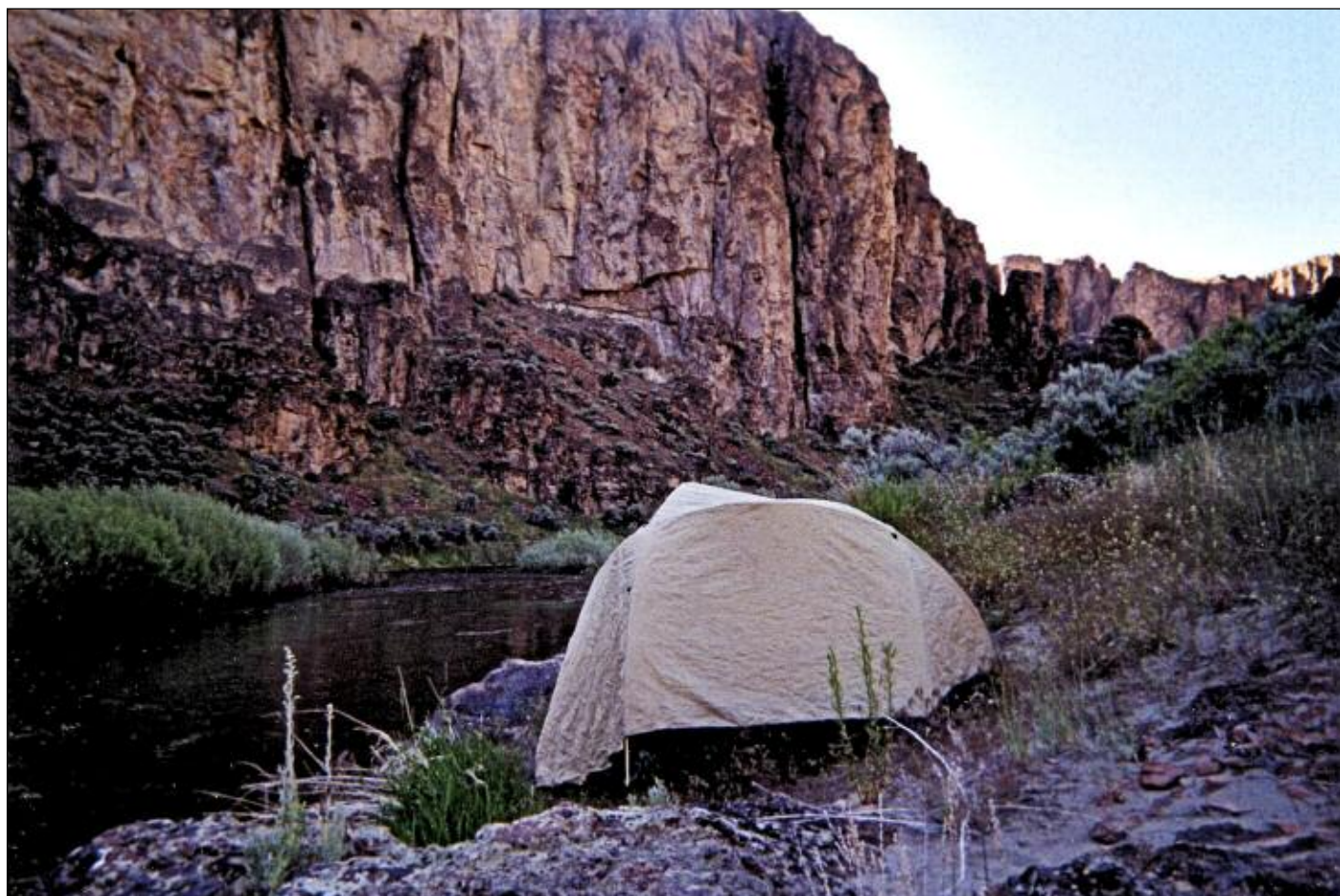
The drive to the put-in from the southern U.S. involves travel on America's loneliest road (U.S. 50) and goes past many "Next gas 78 miles" signs. You

leave the pavement at the Duck Valley Indian reservation on the Nevada/Idaho border, and from there to the put-in, travel is on a dirt road. There are at least two put-ins each on the East and South forks of the Owyhee (no access points on the North fork). Most of the put-ins require four-wheel drive to access. The guidebook (available from the BLM for ten bucks) is fairly accurate when it describes the dirt roads to the various put-ins. If anything, they understate the condition of the roads. When the guidebook says 4-wheel drive is necessary to access a given put-in, it means it. The roads are not maintained and rocks and ruts will deflate the most intrepid of 2-wheel drive vehicles that attempt to access a 4-wheel drive put-in.

The East fork and the South fork access points are relatively close together. You take the same road from the Duck Valley Indian reservation for quite a ways before the road splits with the road to the right going to the East Fork of the Owyhee and the left heading to the South fork. The split in the road is well marked

and the bullet-riddled sign has withstood the latest assaults on it. After failing to negotiate the 4-wheel drive access road on the East fork to Garat Crossing, we backtracked to the road junction between the East and South forks and got into the river on the South fork at the 45 Ranch access point. The last 15 miles to the river took an hour and a half to drive. It tests the limits of even high-clearance 2-wheel drive vehicles. Our opinions were unanimous in the belief that particular piece of road had never seen a road grader in its life. Even the very word "road" must be used loosely. That "road" could only be eased over in broad daylight. If nightfall came you shut off the car engine and waited for dawn. No one was going to come behind you during the night there.

The land surrounding the road is designated by the BLM as wilderness (we saw the signs along the road marking the wilderness boundary) but it is leased for cow grazing. There are two gates to go through before you hit the 45 Ranch. (The unwritten rule of back-road travel







in the American west is that you leave a gate in the same position that you found it.) The gates are managed by BLM leaseholders just trying to keep their cattle in places where they can graze the best.

It's best to not ask me my opinion on the Bureau of Land Management policies towards cow grazing. In the U.S., the words BLM and cow go together in the same sentence. Even though the BLM charter states that it is to manage public lands for the benefit of all the people, they have a huge bias towards ranching interests. It seems that if there is enough range fodder to support one cow on a particular tract of BLM land, there will be a cow on that land. Or two.

Our first glimpse of the Owyhee River from the top of the tablelands confirmed what the guidebook said. The river is a deep gash in solidified lava flows. We were then faced with our next problem—that of getting the vehicle down from the top of the tablelands to river level. There is nothing scarier than a descent of 1000 feet on a non-maintained dirt road with switchbacks in a vehicle with a canoe on top. At one point we had to back up our van for a bit to have another run at finishing one switchback. There was a conservation easement at the ranch that allowed public use of the road and launch site. The 45 Ranch is a working ranch and would be our last contact with civilization till we finished the trip

at Rome, Oregon. One bit of local fame that the ranch manager shared with us is that the 45 Ranch has the distinction of being the most isolated ranch in the lower 48. (By that time we were becoming used to a lot of firsts associated with this trip and the lower 48.)

The one other 2-wheel access point on the South Fork is at the YP Launch, but it would have added 45 more miles to our trip and 18 more marked rapids. All in all, we figured we'd rather spend the time fishing than getting around 18 more marked rapids. In retrospect, with the difficulties we had with the rapids we did come to, it was a wise (or lucky) decision.

At the put-in there was a registration book under a waterproof cover. The previous trip was March 10, 2010. Probably a group of rafters riding the snow melt. It was also the only other trip registered for the year. No travellers between March 10 and June 19, which is when we launched. Music to the ears for those who enjoy wilderness canoeing. And also a confirmation that the river is extremely lightly travelled.

The river is quite small and shallow at the 45 Ranch put-in. Our goal was the 84 miles to the take-out at Rome, Oregon. We hoped that all the difficulties that we had in reaching our start point would be handsomely paid back with good fishing, beautiful scenery, and easy travel. Sadly, it was not to be. Oh, the scenery and

fishing passed the test, but easy travel was as big a misnomer as exists. We were soon to find out.

It was some 46 miles to the junction of the three forks of the Owyhee (called the upper Owyhee in the guidebook), and a further 38 to Rome (called the middle Owyhee). Nineteen marked rapids in the 84 miles. An average of one rapid every four miles. Not too bad. One signal sign that it might be more difficult than it appeared at first glance was that 13 out of the 19 rapids were in one 20-mile section. Almost all rivers have at least one tough section, so from the experience of our previous wilderness canoe trips I wasn't too worried.

### Day 1

The first miles on the South fork of the Owyhee were a very enjoyable fish-filled, class-1, river-running lark. The easy rapids (there were many; almost every bend had at least a riffle) were fun to negotiate and every stop was another opportunity to land fish. From the pictures in the guidebook, all sections of the Owyhee were beautiful, but our trip on the upper portions of the South fork exceeded even those high expectations. Beautiful thousand-foot cliffs border the river the whole way guarding against ATVs (that seem to be overrunning the American desert). Those cliffs keep the ATVs from finding their way to river level and indeed we found no traces that the ATVs had ever succeeded. The junction where the South Fork joins the East Fork of the Owyhee is especially scenic. There is a high sand bank pushed up by the competing branches of the river that would provide a great lunch or camping spot, and the pool below the sand bank was loaded with small mouth bass. There was a huge colony of cliff swallows directly across from the sand bank that provided entertainment until we called it a night.

### Day 2

Progress slowed as we met the first of the marked rapids. The difficulty of the rapids amazed me. "This is a class 3?" came to my mind several times. When that class 3 was followed by two more also marked class 3, I began to feel that whoever was doing the grading was seriously underestimating the difficulty of



the rapids. At least a full class understated. They were long, with no paths through them and with huge boulders and holes to match behind them. Honestly, not one could be run with an open canoe. Well, we portaged and lined three or four of them and then stopped for the night. Fishing as usual was beyond compare, but the guidebook-marked rapids ahead started to worry me.

### Day 3

We passed the one abandoned homestead that we would see on the trip. Deep, melancholy feelings welled up inside me. I always feel for the hardy pioneers who tried to carve out livings in such isolated places. The privations that they must have endured. Loneliness, poor food, no medical care, no education for the children. The guidebook said that it was called Five Bar Ranch and was homesteaded by Alma and Irvin Loveland. Probably good pioneer stock. Probably had to give it up because they couldn't make ends meet raising cows. Probably the long winters also had a hand in the decision. Still though, it's sad whenever I walk around these abandoned homesteads. I feel that I am visiting the death of someone's dream.

There were no marked rapids this day and with fish in abundance we were lulled back to our complacent mentality. Camp was on a gravel bar just a couple of miles downstream from Five Bar Ranch.

### Day 4-8

The intensity of the river changes abruptly at where the East and South forks meet the North fork of the Owyhee. This is the start of what is called the middle Owyhee. The next 20 miles of river would involve 13 marked rapids with three class 4's and one class 5+. Difficult and very dangerous to canoes. The river showed its true strength here. Thirteen marked rapids that took the better part of four days to get through. All rapids were underrated. All rapids required portaging or lining. All rapids were dangerous.

Rafters like to name rapids on the Owyhee, providing what I consider very distinctive and suggestive names. Day four gave us Half-mile Rapid (we all

know what that means), Raft Flip Rapid (again another one pretty easy to figure out), and Shark's Tooth. That rapid was very interesting. A series of jagged rocks stretches completely across the river with water foaming through the individual "teeth." It reminded me of the famous Five Finger Rapids on the Yukon River except on a much smaller scale. Very scenic location and it provided a bit of humor as I suggested that lining around it was the same thing as flossing your teeth with the lining rope acting as dental floss.

Day 6 brought the one class-5+ rapid called the Widow Maker. Aptly named to be sure. The rapid went on and on and took the whole day to get around. From one vantage point I could see about a mile of river before it bended away. Filled with three waterfalls with the last one foaming around the bend. Did this rapid ever end?

After three or four more drops the rapid finally ended. My GPS said that we had spent all day overcoming one rapid. I won't say conquering it. Just surviving it. One day to get around one rapid! I had never seen anything like it. Never have I worked so hard to get around one rapid. Never have I seen one so difficult to bypass. But the Widow Maker was the climax.

There were only two more marked rapids between the Widow Maker and our take-out at Rome. Canoeists should

consider taking an extra day here since the remaining distance can easily be covered in one day's travel. On the last few miles to Rome the river opens up somewhat as the canyon walls recede back. The takeout is at a BLM campsite where Highway 95 crosses the Owyhee. The BLM has a list of individuals who can provide shuttle service from there back to your car.

To sum the trip up, the Owyhee did not require a permit but it does require lots of skill, work, and endurance to overcome. The fishing was remarkable. And I can see why. Most of those fish had never seen a lure. How could they? Even the most determined fisherman (and I count myself in that category) has to draw the line somewhere. And I think the Owyhee is the line. A mean one, the Owyhee. Possibly the meanest. And I've seen some real mean critters.

Our opinion is that the Owyhee might be easier as a canoe trip at lower water levels. There might be more dragging, but getting around the many obstacles should be easier. Wading and lining might become options where the river funnels through sheer walls. At the levels we had, our only option was to portage over the walls. Would I do the trip at lower water levels? I don't know. What you are really asking is "Would I do the Owyhee again?" I don't know. Ask me again during the depths of winter. I'm at my weakest then.









# WCA Trash-Can Turkey

Few outdoors activities are more enjoyable than cooking and devouring a turkey in canoeing country with a group of likeminded paddlers. That's exactly what sixteen WCA members did when they gathered on 24 to 26 September this year with one huge turkey and all the necessary tools at a large campsite on Big East Lake, part of the Haliburton Highlands Water Trails near Bracebridge, Ontario.

On Friday and Saturday we had a little rain and high winds, but Sunday turned out great. The fall colours were wonderful, close to perfect. Friday the campsite was like a busy harbour with canoes arriving at all hours. Saturday, the oven location was chosen and another tarp placed over it to protect the coals (and the chef!).

To hold the turkey, I had cut a wooden post and screwed that in the middle of the base, a round plywood board slightly smaller than the opening of the trash can, which would be put upside down over the turkey, protecting it from the fiery coals at top and bottom. Post and base were wrapped with lots of heavy duty aluminum foil. This trash-can method was a new one for us, so we were extra careful.

The process started around 11 am, allowing for the early night-fall and wishing to have everything cleaned up at a reasonable hour. The turkey was prepared, paraded with honours to the oven, and impaled on the post. One can of beer was added to a tray under it,



and another one was handed to the chef. The trash can was lowered and it did not fit. The can was removed and the turkey was adjusted and lowered further on the post.

One limitation with this cooking method is not having the opportunity to check the turkey, without breaking down the oven. We had an 18.5 pound turkey to cook and were not really sure about the appropriate cooking time. All of the Google and YouTube instructions suggested a shorter cooking time than

listed on the turkey (due to the higher temperatures). In the end we decided to use a cooking time closer to the one on the package.

At the appointed hour we broke down the oven and removed the can. We had slightly over-cooked the turkey. It was golden brown, but had fallen apart and slid down the post. The pole-base method really helped here as I was able to lift the turkey up to an area away from the hot coals to carve it.

The canoe table had been set and the feast began. There were many delicious side dishes: green beans, turnips, cranberries, mashed potatoes, gravy, stuffing, baguettes/bread, rice dish, kasha, bow-ties, shrimp and sauce, and an excellent pear-gorgonzola-walnut-cranberry concoction with honey drizzled on top. Once we worked our way through this we had deserts of pumpkin pie with whipping cream and a bundt cake.

A few of the campers decided they needed exercise and canoed off into the sunset around the lake. Some hiked back in the forest. The remaining ones transferred the hot coals to the fire pit and started a fire. Drinks and marshmallows followed, along with tall tales of this year's adventures and ones to come.

Gary James

*Photos by: Andrea Fulton, Gary James, Ginger Louws, Kathleen Vorbrodt*





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