



Caribou, Cumaway, Fuchsite, D'Alton Lakes

Wabadowgang Noopming Forest Route Reconnaissance

AKA Wabakimi Spring Rendezvous

May 29 to June 8, 2022

Participants: Dave McTeague (Milwaukie, Oregon) (Report Author)
Mary Jean Blaisdell (MJ) (Independence, Iowa)
Debbie Doyle-Sargent (Thunder Bay, Ontario)
Art Timmerman (Conestogo, Ontario)

Lessons Learned:

- Unexpected events may occur, two medical evacuations on this trip
- Be prepared for long hard portages in this area (D'Alton complex, FOW Vol. 5 generally); as with little use, portages revert to nature
- Be realistic about your abilities
- Cut back on amounts of food and gear.
- Have a good communication device (our InReach worked well)

Not every trip goes according to plan, and this one is no exception. All of us have worked on Wabakimi Project trips and are experienced expedition canoeists. But that's no guarantee. We planned a loop trip, with a fly-out option if needed.

Vern Fish's group of 5 entered a week before our group. His report documents a rugged and challenging route starting at the bottom of nearby Big Lake. Originally, we planned for both Groups 1 and 2 to enter on Sunday May 22nd and attempt a meet-up on D'Alton Lake or near there. Due to concerns about cold weather and late ice-out, our Group of 4 decided to postpone one week.

The purpose of these expeditions is to demonstrate/document to MNRF, the community and interested paddlers that these canoe routes are in active use; to confirm or correct route maps; and as much as we can, improve the portages. We're also drawing attention to the area's conservation issues.

And to build on camaraderie the Wabakimi Project was known for.

May 29th: [Bruce Hyer \(Wabakimi Outfitters\)](#) arranged a boat shuttle from Mark, with [Forrest Lodge on Caribou Lake](#) to a campsite on the north end across from Little America set of cabins and just north of the 1641m portage to Cumaway Lake.

It took two trips to get our set of four folk to this. Dave and MJ on the first run. Dave set up the tarp in time for the arrival of Debbie and Art. We opted for the boat shuttle to save time in hopes we could get into the D'Alton complex of lakes and spend more time exploring this area.



Being early enough in the day, we proceeded to inspect the portage about noon. Immediately, the old Wabakimi Project kicked in and soon we were sawing and clearing away alders, small trees & branches and blow down across this mostly definite trail which was much as I remembered from my work on this same portage in 2015. MJ attempted to keep pace with Art while Debbie and I moved slower, working away. MJ went some considerable distance down the portage w/o enough water & electrolytes. When she finally made it back to the start around 5:00 p.m., she shared that she was in distress. We rested, gave her some electrolytes, and we proceeded back to camp.

May 30th: Rest day to recover. Art and Dave went fishing. They also found the FOW identified campsite at the southwest corner of the island at the NE end of the lake.

May 31st: We were planning to tackle this long portage today; but MJ said she hadn't slept, and did not feel well enough. So we had another rest day. Art and I set off fishing and visited the empty "Little America" cabins on the other side and trolled/casted, catching northern pike. A gust of wind picked up our canoe while we waited out some windy stormy weather.



June 1st: MJ is not feeling any better and has some concerning symptoms. She decided to tap out. Bruce responded promptly to our InReach request, and a few hours later Mark again arrived with his boat. MJ, packs and my canoe went back to the outfitters. The stormy windy weather make that a difficult trip back down big Caribou Lake; with damage to my new used canoe when the boat encountered a powerful wave. This left us with Debbie's 17 ft. Souris Quetico, which we thought we could fit three of us with all our packs.

June 2nd: A nice enough day, we three set out to cross the **portage to Cumaway Lake**. Art proceeded to carry the canoe all the way across..and return. Debbie & I began the carry using the hopscotch method. We're slow, Art is much faster. The trail is squishy in many spots from the rains. In summary, it was a grueling long day; taking us 7 hours total from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Parts of the trail are lovely with white caribou moss in abundance. [We can see our clearing work and cut logs from 2015.](#) There's no evidence anyone has been over this in recent history—so how does this trail stay so evident?



Exhausted, we load up and push our canoe through a mass of floating logs near the stream outflow; and begin to paddle south on **Cumaway Lake**, which is larger than I expected, and most scenic. We saw the first of many pieces of red flagging tape around the lake edges. What for and from whom?

The three of us and all our packs barely fit into this canoe. Debbie sits on the food box and later floor on a pad, but with no leg room, this is not comfortable and is only Ok for short distances.

We find a very short portage to Fuchsite Lake and the one camp site indicated on our FOW map. It's not a great site and hasn't been used in years, but good enough for two nights.

June 3rd. Art and Dave explore/fish small **Fuchsite Lake**, catching three pickerel. We found the beginning of the portage to nearby Michell Lake, with a blaze; but no actual trail. We opted to continue fishing – with three pickerel caught. (Then fried in Debbie's garlic butter.) More flagging tape. Debbie stays in camp and reads, rests.



Art is very involved with the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project, and always has his binoculars handy; with Dave paddling stern. Art is also placing the bird song recorders deep in the woods in the evening, and retrieving in the morning. He made other detailed observations, including:

--American Toads. These were heard chorusing at Cumaway Lake (May 29 and June 2), Fuchsite Lake (June 2 - 3) and D'Alton Lake (June 4 - 8).

--Miner's stakes and tags: found near the end of the Cumaway portage and near the large campsite on D'Alton Lake.

--Rain: we had at least a bit of rain on every day of the trip!

--Insects: the insects were not really bad until the last day (June 8).

--He's entered his bird sightings in the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas database.

We left some fish remains on a point in clear view from our camp. We observed adult bald eagles watch over their juvenile eagle that enjoyed this bounty with noisy competition from ravens and turkey vultures, putting on an entertaining show.

June 4th. We traverse the short, well maintained portage to D'Alton Lake pond, through a swift to the main north part of D'Alton lake and then through the D'Alton channel, and across to our designated camp site on the east shore. Dave and Art fished the bank to the northeast of the campsite and caught northern pike for dinner.

June 5-9. Art and Dave paddle into the different lake arms and explore, look at campsites, fish a lot, bird a lot and paddle a lot. We catch and release untold numbers of northern pike, while catching just enough walleye to have some fish dinners. Debbie is fine in camp reading and resting. We see even more flagging tape around the arms. (mineral prospectors we now think)

We found the portage to Ruxton Lake that Debbie and Art cleared in 2017. You can see the path, but it's through a tangle of alders and brush. At 828m, it would be an extremely hard slog.

On one of his trips to place the bird song recorder, Art strained his foot, exacerbating his plantar fasciitis. He's now hobbling around too with the help of Bruce's Carlyle paddle.

We paddled to the Big River outflow..a lot of high fast water, and learned later this was run by Vern and crew. We found, but did not walk the first portage. Our last day, we paddled to the SW arm past the Ogoki Frontier outpost (the four guys on Lund boats we'd seen several times were friendly) to Big River waterfall into the lake. Oh, we thought, this is the fishing spot---but plentiful northern pike were only joined by very small walleye.

Of particular note is the large campsite located between the two south arms—which is large, has plentiful tent spots, sitting logs and a nice view. This really nice camp sees more use than any of the others. The Wabakimi Project log benches were still there. We also found the campsite on the west shore near the portage to Ruxton Lake, but could not find the campsite on the island in the north part of the lake (indicated on the maps). Found the portage in the NE corner of the lake that Debbie and Art worked on in 2017. Found and had lunch at the campsites in the NE and SW parts of the lake.

Narrative continued after photos....



D'Alton Lake camp



Lunch spot (camp?) on the west end of the large SW bay island.



Nice campsite, South D'Alton Lake



Big River flows into D'Alton Lake, SW arm.



Outflow of Big River from D'Alton Lake, from a large shallow bay, SE arm.



Miner's claim & post at the South D'Alton Lake campsite



Art blazing the portage at the NE arm of D'Alton Lake. Vern's group reports this route to Cosmo Lake was not passable.



Dave with walleye (pickerel) on Fuchsite Lake



Mary Jean at our Caribou camp



D'Alton camp from the water



So many northern pike, we ate several and they were delicious. The leftovers went into two fish/hash brown scrambles for breakfast.



Michell Lake before the logging occurs.



Fresh logging near D'Alton road.



June 9th. In the morning Debbie informed us she can't sit up-without falling over, and has severe vertigo. Art took a recent Wilderness First Aid course, asks all the pertinent stroke questions-negative for those. She says she's OK as long as she's lying down. She opts to wait and rest. We're concerned. By the late afternoon, we find no improvement, and she says she's ready to get out. We contact Bruce again; who says the Beaver can arrive in an hour and take all of us. We were planning an exit the next day, so yes-we said let's go. We packed up fast and helped Debbie pack as well.

The same red Beaver we've flown in so many times arrives on cue (in wind, rain, waves too) and we take Debbie out to the plane first; then a 2nd trip with all our packs. In short order we're back at Bruce's lodge and he gets Debbie get up the hill. They call in the Armstrong paramedics who determine to take her to the Thunder Bay hospital. They put her on a stretcher. She's talking and conversant. She spent two nights there and is home now. They did lots of test, but no definitive diagnosis. She reports continued improvement now.

Route description We planned a loop...but that didn't happen. Road shuttle to Forrest Lodge boat dock on Caribou Lake. Then a boat shuttle to the camp site on the NE bank of Caribou Lake just beyond the portage to Cumaway Lake. After the long portage, Cumaway Lake south to Fuchsite Lake, and a short portage and swift to D'Alton Lake. We originally planned our exit from Fuchsite to Michell and through ponds-portages back to Caribou Lake, then south through Little Caribou road exit.
Average distance traveled each day: Not far, for reasons explained; except for our extensive paddles to five arms of D'Alton Lake.
Source of non-resident Crown land camping permit or provincial park interior (backcountry) camping permit. Provided by Wabakimi Outfitters as part of using their services. We were provided documentation to that effect.
Outfitter/provider used : Bruce Hyer, Wabakimi Outfitters
Outfitter services provided Lodging, breakfast/dinner, paddle, road shuttle, and arranging boat shuttles & Beaver flight out
Mode of shuttle to entry/from exit Road shuttle, boat shuttle & flight out
Location of vehicle left behind: Left at outfitters
Primary road used, if any, to access Wabakimi Area Hwy 527 Secondary road(s) used, if any, for access/egress to/from your trip insertion/extraction locations: Caribou Road

