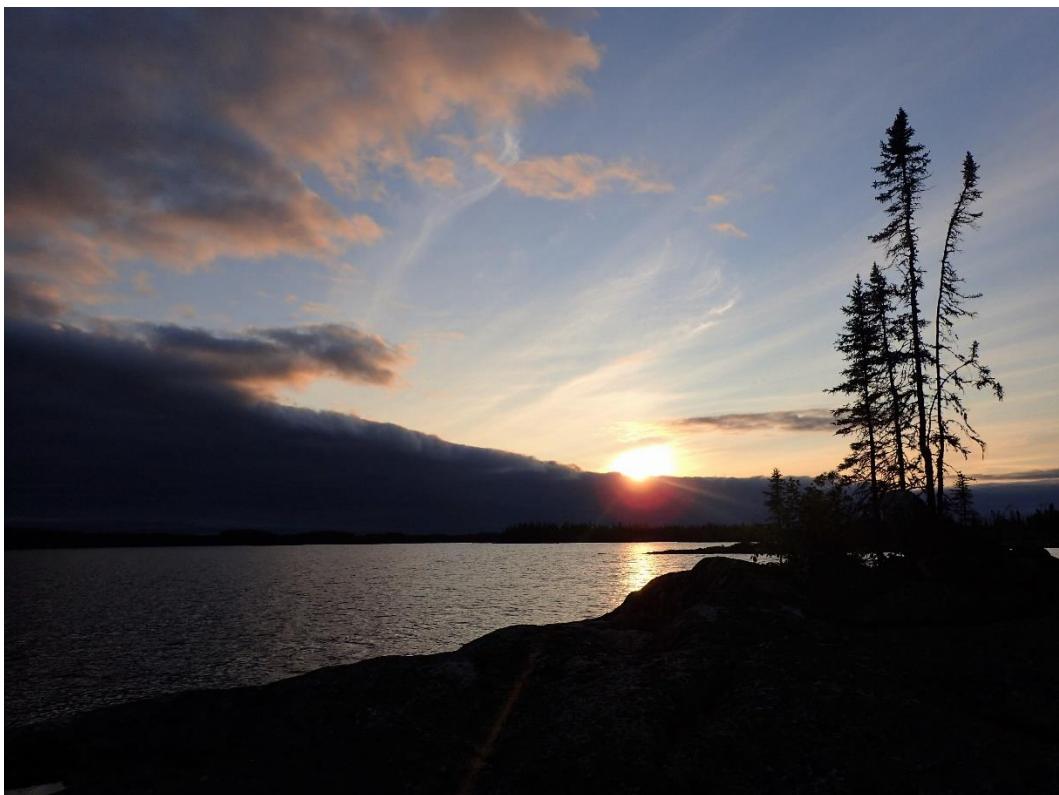


Wabakimi Provincial Park Solo Canoe Trip

August 17th to August 31st, 2021

By John Holmes of Thornbury Ontario

Kenoji Lake to Little Caribou Lake via Palisade and Grayson Rivers, Whitewater Lake, Lonebreast Bay, Smoothrock Lake, Caribou River and Caribou Lake.



Start Point: Fly in to Kenoji Lake on a DeHavilland Beaver float plane. Mattice Lake Outfitters.

End Point: Road bridge at the south end of Little Caribou Lake. Truck shuttle out.

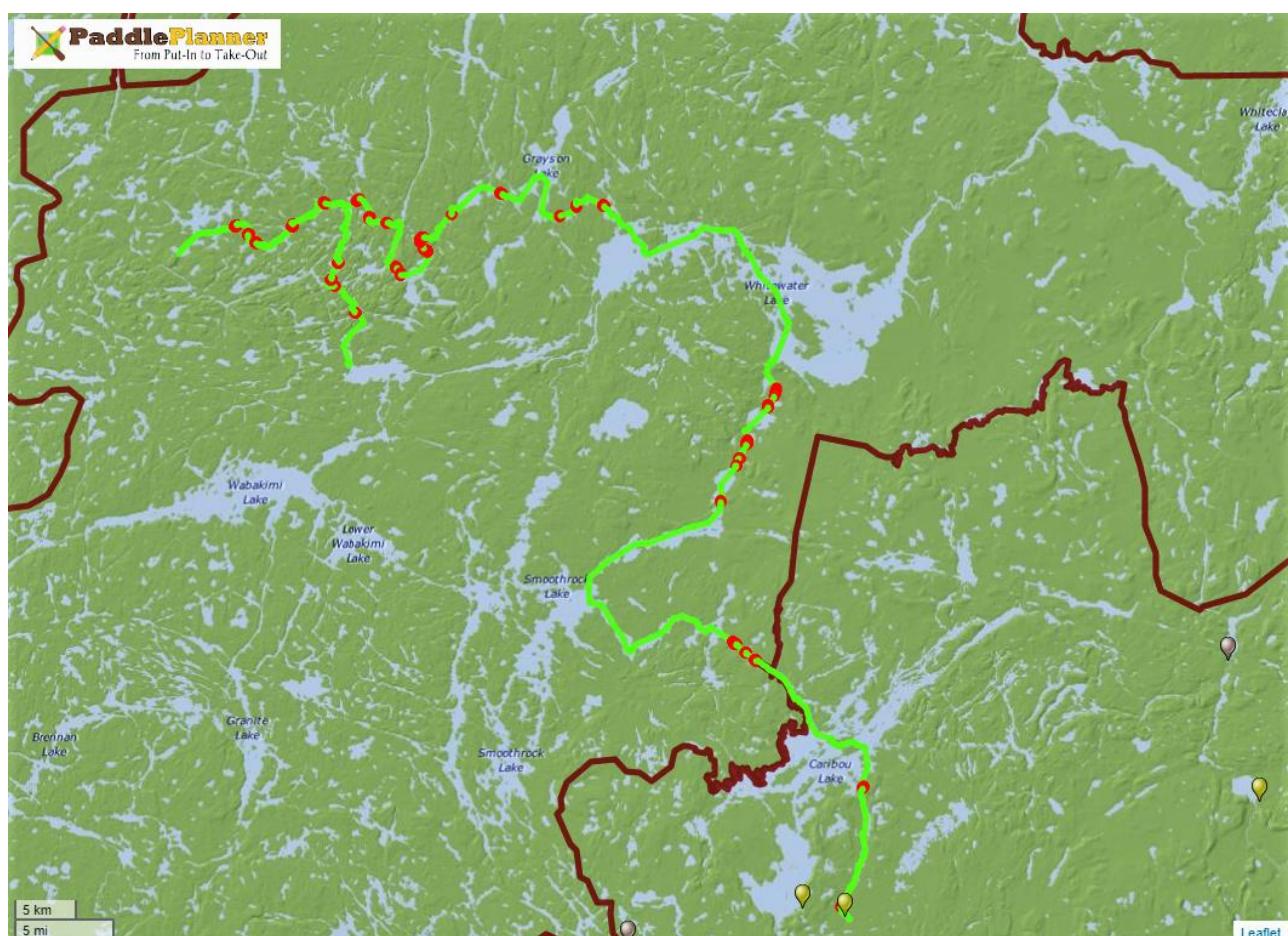
Canoe: Swift 15' Keewaydin solo pack boat. Double bladed kayak paddle.

Packs: 1 Seal Line Canoe Pack, 1 60l food barrel with Ostrom harness, 1 Seal Line day pack.

Tent: MSR Elixir 2 person tent.

Communications: SPOT Gen3. OK message sent each evening to indicate position.

I have long wanted to do a solo trip. After about 25 group trips to Wabakimi PP and the surrounding Crown land area, mostly doing historic portage clearing and mapping with the Wabakimi Project, a solo trip with a more recreational focus was on the cards. What better time than during Covid to do a solo trip? I have done multi day hikes alone, but nothing of this duration, and I was interested to see how I would react to the isolation. Being a bit of an introvert and pretty independent, I was quite sure that I would not freak out due to the isolation and complete self-reliance. It turns out I really enjoyed the experience. All the decisions and consequences are your own, you can set your schedule and pace to how you are feeling, and you can spend time with your own thoughts.



Trip Route (developed on Paddle Planner)

Trip length: 215 km, Trip time: 15 days

Total length of portages on this route: 7km or 14km of portaging if double carrying.

Map Resources: FOW Wabakimi Canoe Route Maps Volume 1, FOW Wabakimi Canoe Routes

Planning Map, Topographic maps 52-I/6, 52-I/11 thru 14.

Garmin 60CSX with topographic maps and route loaded.

Paddle Planner website.

Day 1, August 17th.

The drive north to Mattice Lake Outfitters just outside of Armstrong was uneventful. The road has been much improved over the years and traverses some impressive terrain. There are historic burned areas, huge rock cuts, big hills, many river crossings and lots of forest on the 250km drive north from the TransCanada. With the canoe securely lashed to the pontoon stanchions of the nearly 70 year old Beaver, the pilot and I made our way to Kenoji Lake, just north of Lake Wabakimi. Light winds made for an easy transition on the water, and I paddled away from the plane as the radial engine blasted to life and the Beaver roared off, leaving me alone to start my adventure. It felt

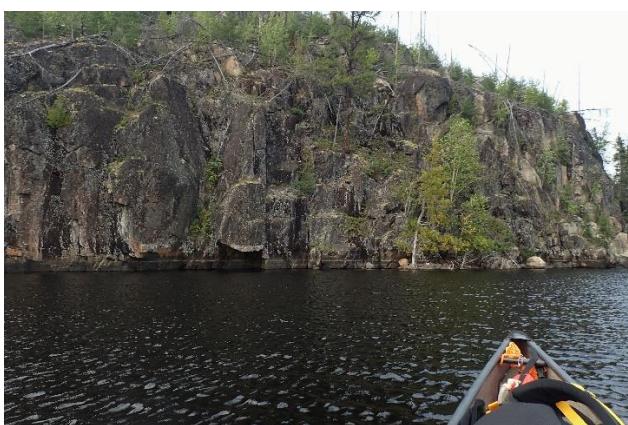


2Beaver pilot preparing to leave.

even hotter up here than it did in Thunder Bay, with the humidex over 40C, and very hazy skies due to the massive wild fires to the west, in and around Woodland Caribou Park.

I headed north upstream on the Palisade River, so named for the areas of the river with high cliff walls. They are a little less grand than I expected, and this is a burned area, so it feels a bit bleak in the oppressive heat and hazy skies. Water levels are low, so

the put ins and take outs for the portages are particularly treacherous, with a band of slick 'black rock' boulders to traverse on each end of the portages. I camped at the point of the river called 'Big Bend', where my direction of travel changes abruptly from north to west. This site is still in the burn area, so there are no tarp options. I found a bit of shade under a sole surviving tree, and waited until after sundown to enter the tent, as it was too hot to bear earlier. I had a long soak in the lake before bed, just to cool off. I also kept the fly on my tent turned back all night, and only needed my sleep sheet for warmth in the early morning hours.



Cliffs on Palisade River and Big Bend campsite

Day 2, August 18th.

Hot and hazy again today. I am glad I brought 2 large Nalgene bottles, along with a 2 liter gravity filter system. They are such an improvement over the old hand pump models. Just hang the bag, sit back and watch gravity do all the work! I drank 4 litres of water while paddling today and was still quite dehydrated when I made camp. I swam at the end of each portage to cool off, and dumped a hat full of water on my head every few minutes while paddling. The first portage (195m) west of Big Bend takes you out of the burn area and back to mature boreal forest. There is a nice campsite at the west end of this portage, with a large slope of rock to the water, lots of shade and tarp

opportunities.

I walked the canoe up a swift out of this unnamed lake. The next body of water is extremely shallow and the bottom is fine mud. My canoe was dragging through the mud and it made for a slow paddle for about an hour. I then headed to a series of 3 portages shown on the map. There are actually only 2 portages, as you can paddle the middle pool. The first of these portages (154m) has some large cedars leaning over the trail, forcing me to slide the



canoe under them. They will need to be cut to clear the portage properly. There is a nice falls on this portage. Another 49m portage , a pull over a beaver dam, an 85m and a 63m portage, and finally a 282m portage into Burntrock Lake. Here the map indicates an alternative to do a 59m portage, a short paddle, and a 172m portage, but I looked and could not find any evidence of those portages. The 282m portage I used is interesting in that it has a section that is an old burn on one side, and intact forest on the other. Plenty of blueberries on this portage as well. I camped at a north facing site with all the Uncle Phil accoutrements; a large rock fireplace, some log benches, a couple of generous tent sites and a stash of cut firewood. I placed my tent on the rock shelf closer to the water in order to catch what little breeze there is and put up a tarp in one of the tent sites. I made the decision to skip the Early Lake / Rockcliff Lake loop I had planned. The heat is making long days impossible, and the extremely low water levels will make travel in those small creek systems very slow and difficult. I also do not want to get caught in those small creeks in a wild fire situation. Up until this morning, the smoke was just high altitude haze, but now I can smell and taste it in the air, meaning that there may be new fires closer to me. I plan to have a rest day tomorrow. I will explore the lake and fish for a while, then relax and rehydrate here before heading back to Big Bend.

Day 3, August 19th.

Another hot night. I had the tent fly off all night and I have not yet used my sleeping bag. The only upside to the heat and smoke is the almost complete absence of bugs. I had a nap in the afternoon, just lying in the shade on my Therma-Rest in a pair of shorts. Not a single bite or even any buzzing flies. Amazing. I spent the day paddling around the southwestern part of Burntrock Lake. I found an area with some steep cliff shoreline that promised some deeper water and better fishing. My instincts were right as I quickly landed 3 nice pickerel. I kept two for my dinner and headed back to my campsite before the heat of the day.



Pickerel ready for cleaning

One thing about solo tripping, you need to leave more time for everything. I am used to having one person clean the fish, someone else gets rid of the guts away from camp while another person breads the fillets and gets everything ready. They pass the fillets off to someone to cook and two people wash up afterwards. When you go solo, it is all on you! The same goes for setting up and breaking down camp. I awoke in the middle of the night to a strong smell of smoke. The wind is from the south, so this smoke is definitely not from the fires in the Woodland Caribou area to the west. These are newer fires, so this confirms my decision to head back east and into larger bodies of water.

Day 4, August 20th.

Today was back tracking out of Burntrock Lake through the Palisade River to the nice campsite I mentioned earlier, the one on the west end of the 195m portage. On the first portage out of Burntrock, I was marvelling at how good the blueberries were and ran into a bear who was enjoying them as well. He sort of barked at me, pivoted on his hind legs and ran in the opposite direction he had been facing originally. He was quite a sight when he was up on his hind legs. He crapped on the trail before he ran off, just to express his disdain that I had interrupted his berry feast. I waited a few minutes and made a lot of noise before continuing. I was a little nervous going back for my other load, but he was nowhere to be seen. I made it to the site by about 1:30 and had lunch and a swim. Still hot and hazy, but the forecast I brought in with me indicates that it should break tomorrow. Hopefully it is not a massive thunderstorm. I have been through some doozies up here over the years. They are not to be taken lightly. About 6:00pm, a party of four set up camp at the far end of this lake. I assume they came from somewhere on Burntrock Lake, possibly Bruce Hyer's lodge. I heard a dog bark a couple of times so it must be theirs. So much for seeing any caribou!

Day 5. August 21st.

I awoke to light rain about 5:30, but it let up around 7:30 as I was eating breakfast. I packed up, crossed the portage, and began paddling towards Big Bend. Wouldn't you know it, the sky blackened and it started to rain. I put on my rain gear and continued on as I did not hear any thunder and the wind was still light. Once I reached Big Bend, conditions had worsened and I heard thunder as the wind picked up. I beached at the Big Bend campsite, flipped my canoe onto a couple of elevated fallen logs and made a wind block on one side with my barrel and pack. I sat under my little shelter as it blew and poured for about 15 minutes. It calmed down and I could see the line of blue sky to the SW, so I knew it would clear shortly. I had a stretch of open water to cross to get to the east arm, so I made a dash for it before the back of the front passed over with its associated wind. I made it across to the lee shore of the arm, and then watched as white caps blew up behind me on the open water. I paddled on and found the blaze marking the 243m portage into Ahleen Lake. The more established route east to the Grayson River, is to head south from Big Bend on the Palisade, then east into the lake just north of Slim Lake, or the route into Slim Lake directly from the Palisade. I decided to try the more northern route into Ahleen and into the Slim River. The 243m portage was pretty rough and overgrown, and I cut a few logs with my Agawa folding saw (best new piece of kit I have bought in a while) to get through. The next portage (180m) was less overgrown, but I did cut a few chest high logs off the trail. The next marked swift was actually a short bit of river just choked with logs and sweepers. I looked around for a portage instead and found one on the east side, about 67m long. This takes you into a small lake with impressive high cliffs to the south.



Cliffs south of Ahleen Lake, west of Slim River.

The sky was blue, and the temperature and humidity had dropped to a nice level. I might even be able to get into the tent before sundown without melting tonight! The wind had really picked up, and I was getting blown around even in these small bodies of water. I crossed the 134m portage (quite overgrown with small trees in the burned area of the portage) heading east, and as I approached the Slim River, I could see the wind and waves roaring up the river, which was acting as a funnel. The site on the corner is very exposed, as it is up on a rock outcrop, and in this wind it would not be pleasant. I found a small shelf just south on the west side of the river, and walked the canoe down to it. It is only suitable for a small tent, but it is nicely sheltered from the increasingly western wind. I had hoped to get farther, but given the weather and the condition of the portages, I

did OK. It is now cool enough to wear more than just a pair of underwear, enjoy some soup, and I actually used my sleeping bag for the first time on this trip.

Day 6, August 22nd.

Today was a pretty big day, with the nicest weather so far. Sunny, light winds and about 22C. I covered about 30km and crossed 8 portages totalling 1700m. Given the light winds, I wanted to cross Arril and Grayson Lakes as they are large lakes. I ended up doing that and going all the way to the body of water east of the south end of Grayson Lake. The Wabakimi PP portage crew cleared the Grayson River route this year, so the portages were free of blowdown. Given the low water, the put ins and take outs were pretty rough, with a couple of very muddy areas and a lot of slippery boulders. The first lift over out of Slim Lake is actually a short portage in these low water conditions. As I finished it I met the group I had seen with the dog. They had been driving out to do a trip in Quetico, and on arriving in the Soo, they heard that Quetico was closed due to wildfires. So they had to find something else and ended up here in Wabakimi. Bruce Hyer flew them into his lodge on Burntrock and they were doing the Grayson into Whitewater, then south and getting a shuttle out of Tamarack Lake. The dog did not warm to me until about the 4th portage, so it barked incessantly. I upped the pace and got away from them to get some peace for me and hopefully the caribou. The portages into Scrag from Slim are interesting in that they climb up over bare rock, giving you a long view over the water in both directions. This kind of long view is pretty rare in Wabakimi.



View from Scrag lake portage looking North West.

I had a nice lunch spot in the shade around 1:00. A little frog sat beside me at lunch. I took a few photos of him, one of which shows the red and white colours of my Swift canoe reflected in his eye.

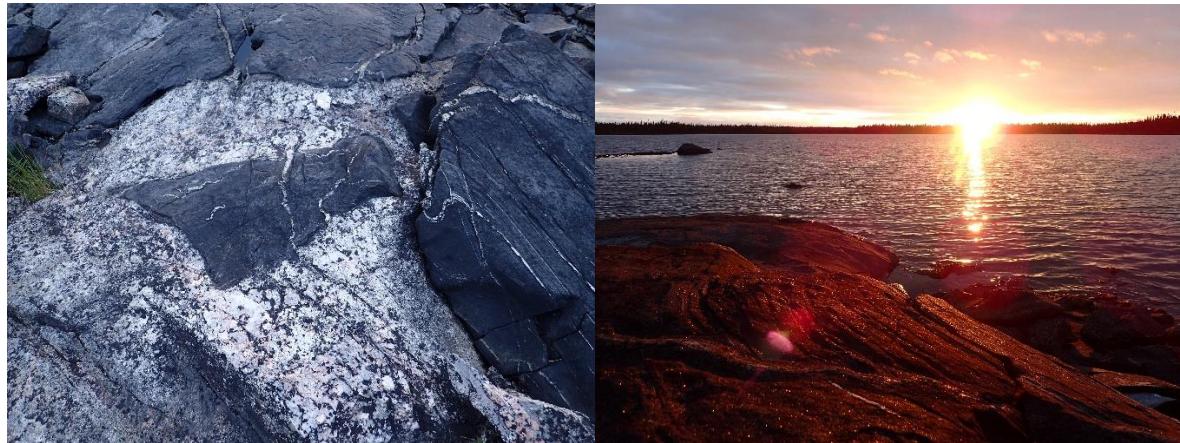


Soon after I began paddling I spotted a moose on the south shore in a marshy area. He was quite wary and quickly retreated into the trees. I made camp at a site on the first body of water east of Grayson Lake. The first site marked is quite exposed, without much shade, so I pressed on to the one at the east end. The map shows 2 short portages with the site on the 2nd (easternmost) portage. The site is actually at the west end of the westernmost portage. It is a great site, with long sloping rock to the water, shade, good tent sites and tarp opportunities.

Day 7, August 23rd.

A couple of short portages right off the bat this morning, both in good shape. The Grayson is a pretty river, with several good campsites and lots of exposed rock. I saw several bald eagles on the river. Due to the low water levels, I had to walk the boat through a few rock gardens and had to keep a sharp eye out for rocks lurking just under the surface. My lovely new solo canoe does not look so new anymore, although painting the bottom of the boat white is a bit of genius to hide the scratches! Whitewater Lake is at a historic low according to Don Elliot. The shoreline has a bit of a reservoir feel to it as it is all rock or sand beaches. The last portage out of the Grayson into Whitewater has about an extra 20m of slippery boulders to cross to actually reach the water, then a nice little swift to drop onto the lake level proper. The campsite directly across from the mouth is quite nice. My map showed the channel to the east to be open, but it ended up being a dead end, so I paddled back around through a narrows to get to the larger part of the lake. At least the detour gave me the opportunity to see an otter, who popped high up out of the water like a syncro swimmer to get a good look at me. They are beautiful, inquisitive creatures. There is a channel shown along the north side of Porter Island which offers some protection from the waves and wind, so I headed east with that in mind. By the time I reached that area, the waves and wind were nearing the limit of my comfort zone, and the sky was darkening. It was after lunch time, and spitting rain, so I set up the tarp at a spot that, while not a marked campsite, has an old rock fire ring and a tent site. I was pretty tired from my big day yesterday, and inertia took over after I had my

lunch and I decided to stay put. After a swim and some journaling, I walked a few hundred meters of the exposed rock shoreline. The geology is interesting, with piano sized chunks of black rock imbedded in a lighter coloured stone, and large veins of quartz running through it. I had great golden light for photos this evening.



Whitewater Lake

Day 8, August 24th.

Waking to low, broody skies and a light ENE wind, I decided to paddle around the south shore of Porter Island instead of taking a chance with the narrow channel along the north shore. Given these water levels, I may have had to turn around deep into the channel, only to find the wind up, preventing me from rounding the island. I was on the water by 7:15 and had no trouble rounding the island. From there, I worked my way along the north shore, hopping from island to island to stay sheltered and close to land. Whitewater Lake is a big lake that demands respect. I made good time and as I reached the narrows that leads to the southern part of the lake and Best Island, I ran into a party of 8 at a campsite. We chatted for a bit about the usual things; canoes, fishing, and weather. It turns out some of them know my friend Debbie Doyle. The paddling world is a small world! They plan to visit Wendell Beckwith's cabin, which is my plan as well. I told them I would take the smaller of the sites nearby, probably the one on the small island just west of Best Island, as they will need a large site. Given that I had no portages today and my speed with a double bladed paddle is about 6km/hr, I made it to the site just after noon. It is a nice site, with lots of flat rock, a western facing view and a good, sheltered tent site. After setting up, I took my fishing gear and headed over to "The Center of the Universe" as Mr. Beckwith called it. It is a fascinating site.



The log buildings were hand built with great skill, and he included lots of whimsical details in the woodwork. Some of the flooring is hexagonal cut end grain pattern. The stone fireplaces and chimneys are works of art. One of the two main cabins still has a good roof, and the roof of the "Snail" is covered in plastic to keep the weather out. The other large cabin and the sheds are all collapsed. Apparently he built the Snail, which

is a small, circular building partly buried in the ground, as a place to use in the depth of winter because it was easier to keep heated in very cold weather. It still has old magazines like Scientific American and National Geographic. Apparently there is a Wendell Beckwith Preservation Society that has done some of the work to preserve the place, but I don't know how active they are now.



I talked to the group that have now made it to the main campsite. We made some more connections and one of them has a device that gives him 2 days of forecast. Possible rain overnight and clear and cold tomorrow. I fished on my way back to my campsite and caught a couple of pickerel for dinner. Apparently the fire ban is lifted, so I had a nice fire using the dry, bark stripped beaver wood lying on the exposed shoreline of my island.



Island camp site just west of Wendell Beckwith cabins.

Day 9, August 24th.

There was a pretty strong thunderstorm between 5:30 and 7:00 this morning. Lots of lightning, but the centre of the storm did not pass directly overhead, and there were no nearby strikes or strong winds. I slept in a bit to let it stop raining and got away about 10:00. It is another broody, low cloud day and the wind has switched around to the SW. I hugged the west shore to stay out of the wind and paddled south, passing a large lodge with a main building and several small cabins strung out along the shoreline. This part of lake has some long stretches of sand beach which are very wide at the moment due to the low water levels.

I paddled into McKinley Bay and decided to check out the alternate portage show on my map in the west arm of the bay. This longer portage would mean that you could bypass the string of three portages along the river. The shoreline was very shallow and reedy, but the ground was actually sand, and not too muddy if you did not walk on the same



3 Beaches on Whitewater Lake.

canoe through that mess of blowdown, so I turned around, reloaded the canoe and paddled back around to the string of three portages. The first portage was quite beautiful, with sections that were a ribbon of earth through an emerald green mat of moss.

spot too many times. I found a cut log and soon found a good trail, so I decided to start carrying it. Unfortunately, the trail died out at about 120m in. It just stopped. Whoever cut this trail did not complete it, as I zigzagged across the area looking for any hint of more trail, but there was not a single blaze or cut log to be found anywhere. I was at least 400m from the far shoreline, and I was not about to bush bash a



I paddled a small pool and completed the next portage. At this point I discovered I had left my spare paddle at the incomplete portage I had first investigated. I did not feel like backtracking, so I completed the third portage, which was very faint and overgrown, and had lunch at a pretty poor island campsite. I could not abandon my spare paddle, so I paddled over to where that incomplete portage would most likely come out. At least this let me properly search to see if the portage exists from this side. I took a compass heading for insurance, and used my GPS to guide me over to the endpoint of the trail I had reached. Again, I found no evidence of any trail work from this side. I found my lonely paddle nestled in the grass and headed back. It was a tough bush bash and I was

pretty tired after completing the round trip. I had heard that the McKinley lake campsite was very nice, so I pressed on and portaged into McKinley. I was rewarded with a fantastic site on a peninsula. The sky had cleared, with a light west breeze, so I had a swim and set the tent up on the flat upper tent site that has a view over the water in several directions. I had hoped to cover more distance today, but I had a little adventure and ended up at a very nice site.



McKinley Lake campsite

Day 10, August 26th.

The forecast I received from the paddlers at Wendell Beckwith's said clear and cold for today. It was cold but not clear! Low, broody clouds with isolated rain showers around as I paddled down McKinley Lake. I stopped at a spot with a winter moose camp. It is one of those raised floors with only a frame for walls and roof. Tarps are used to close it in when the camp is occupied. The small dock made for a convenient spot to stop and put on rain pants as a shower was blowing in. I crossed three portages of 412m, 71m and 46m that were all well maintained. I could not find the 115m portage out of Laurent Lake in to Lonebreast Bay, so I had a look at the river section it was to bypass. All I had to do was slide the canoe over a rather impressive beaver dam, and then negotiate a narrow channel. Much easier than doing a portage! By now the weather had cleared and I was blessed with a light NE tail wind as I paddled Lonebreast Bay. Just before the last marked campsite on the south shore, I saw 3 caribou, one of them quite young, enter the water and swim towards the north shore. I was closer to the north shore, so I sat quietly and watched them cross. They are very quick swimmers and I managed to get a few pictures as they swam and then climbed ashore.



I headed to a cluster of three sites on Smoothrock Lake and camped at a very large site on Grundy Island. It has incredible, unbroken sections of rock stretching along the shoreline, and an elevated area with a large fireplace. I imagine this site gets used as a base camp for fishermen, as it has

picnic table and a grill on the fireplace. I had to use rocks to hold my tent as the whole flat area is just solid rock. There are trees to provide a windbreak, and a place for a good tarp setup.



Grundy Lake campsite, Smoothrock Lake.

Day 11, August 27th.

I made it Funger Lake today, but it was a tough headwind slog in a few sections. A light SE wind to start allowed me to do some of the longer open water crossings on Smoothrock Lake in manageable waves. The southeast leg of Caribou Bay was pretty tough with a block headwind for about 4km. I was paddling at about 80% effort and managing about 2km/hr! I had a rest at a peninsula that creates a lee shore. I could see a small orange object on the beach and used that as my heading. I had a look when I got there and it was an old, deflated volleyball stuck in the sand. My first thought was "Wilson" from Castaway. I didn't feel lonely yet, so I left it there for the next paddler. There is a huge nest near the top of a tree on the peninsula. The bird in it was quite large, and not a bald eagle. It may have been a golden eagle, given the colouring and size. After the peninsula. I turned briefly NE, then had another headwind section before reaching a lee shore. There are some beautiful exposed rock campsites on this section, although a couple of them have some blowdown damage and need a bit of work. The narrows leading into Funger Lake is a pretty obvious place to fish. It even has a cairn marking it. I picked up a couple of pickerel on 3 casts and started to look for a campsite. The best one is just around the corner, on Funger Lake. It has a nice rock slope frontage, and nicely protected tent and tarp sites. There are also a pair of very cheeky chipmunks on this site. They would come right up to me and sniff my hand, but they did not seem to know human food, as they did not take the peanut I offered. I spent a fair bit of time watching them race from bolt hole to sheltered rock to tree stump as they roamed around the site. One of them ran right over my leg as I napped. I felt needle like claws and reflexively flicked my leg. I can still see him

somersaulting through the air, bouncing once on the soft moss and racing under one of his shelter rocks on the shoreline with his tail straight up in the air. There is also a resident tyrant red squirrel. He seemed like an angry psychopath compared to the goofy chipmunks. After a sunny day, some high cirrus has come over, and with an east wind, a weather change may be in the cards.



Day 12, August 28th.

I took a rest day today on Funger Lake. The last 3 days have been long ones, and I am in good shape from a schedule point of view. I slept in and had a leisurely breakfast while watching the antics of my chipmunk friends. The narrows was not very productive from a fishing point of view this morning as I only managed to get a pike. I put him on the stringer and fished my way back to the campsite, hoping for some pickerel. The pike slammed the side of the boat every few minutes. I was about 3m from the shoreline of my campsite, and telling the pike that it looked like his luck had run out when a pickerel hit my lure. I caught 2 more on the next handful of casts. I kept 2 pan sized ones and let the lucky pike go. Looks like I could have just fished from shore, but it was a nice little paddle and I explored a few different areas of the lake. I did some wash, reorganised the food barrel and had a good rest. Late in the day, a couple of solo paddlers slowly passed by far out in the lake.



Day 13, August 29th.

I awoke to the sound of light drizzle, which is not what I wanted to hear. I hoped it would be like the day I departed McKinley Lake, with light intermittent showers that I could paddle through. But as I sat under the tarp eating breakfast, the rain intensified until it was truly pouring, with a river of water flowing off the low corner of the tarp. All I could think of was Uncle Phil saying, "You gotta have a good tarp in this country!" which he said pretty much every time it rained!



I had 3 days in a row of east winds, so it was not a surprise that the weather has turned for the worse. I retreated to the tent after breakfast and the rain petered out by 10:00 or so, with the clouds showing some definition and only a light breeze. I wanted to at least cross the 5 portages on the Caribou River today so I packed up and headed off. It started to drizzle again after the first portage (46m) which has a beach for a landing, a welcome change from the slippery black boulders I am used to. Then a quick paddle to the next portage (115m) using the spare paddle, which is a single blade. That way I can leave my kayak paddle tied to the thwarts so I don't have to detach and reattach it each time. The boat tracks quite straight, with only a slight j-stroke required. The third portage is actually just a swift that I could walk the boat up. I am not the first, given all the paint on the rocks in the swift. The drizzle had stopped and the next small section of water was like a mill pond, smooth as glass. The next portage (66m) was a bit tough. There is current at the landing, and both ends are a field of slippery boulders. There is also a place on the trail where you have to sidle across a sloped section of slippery rock. It had a couple of little pockets in the rock where you had to put your foot to get enough grip to not slip off. I noticed a slight NW breeze had sprung up but did not think much of it. As I paddled away from the landing, the wind started to pick up and within a few minutes I decided I need to make camp. I had passed the first marked site and the next one is on a point facing right into the teeth of the wind, with little or no shelter, so I pressed on. I was paddling directly downwind, and glancing at my GPS, moving at 11km/hr, doing the odd back paddle

to keep from broaching as I surfed down each wave. I hugged the east shore, and the next site was across a bit of open water created by a bay to the east. The whitecaps were getting blown flat and the wind had risen to a gale, so there was no way I was crossing that open water. I surfed to the shore and just bailed into the woods right then and there. I was holding tightly onto the boat as I pulled out the 2 packs. I could feel the wind lifting the now empty canoe as I guided it into the woods and lashed both ends of it to a large fallen tree. The wind was up to 70 or 80km/h now and I needed to get to shelter. Just over an hour ago I was on a stretch of water that was like glass, and now I was in a gale. I was in full rain gear, and warm from my exertions, but I knew that the temperature could drop quickly given the violence of the storm, and once you are cold, it is hard to set up a tent and your mind does not work as well. I took my saw and headed through the brushy shoreline into the woods, looking for a decent spot. It was now pouring with rain and the trees were whipping around overhead, but it was calmer down on the forest floor away from the river. The forest looked like a bomb site, with blowdown everywhere. It looked an impossible mess, but from years of portage clearing, I know that you just need to look past the mess, and sometimes just a few logs cut or moved will give you a good flat area. I found a decent spot and got to work. I told myself to be methodical, make a plan and follow it through. I cleared out a rectangle of less lumpy ground and laid out the tent. It was soaked in moments but I got it set up and secured with all the tie offs. I tossed in my day bag, clothes dry bag and sleeping bag, then headed back to the shore to retrieve the barrel. I took off all my wet clothes and climbed into the tent, using my camp towel to dry out the tent floor. Once into some dry clothes and sitting on my sleeping pad, I just relaxed for a bit and took a breather. I just had to wait it out and the storm weakened after a couple of hours. With the rain stopped about 6:30, I got out and had a quick bite to eat, set up a clothes line and hung my wet stuff up to dry. It might rain again, but it can't get any wetter! I had a long sleep, with fingers crossed that tomorrow is a good day for drying things out.



An hour before the storm, and my forest campsite.

Day 14, August 30th.

I had a good sleep after my bit of weather drama yesterday. It was clear and cool in the morning, with a manageable north wind. I quickly had a bar and some meat sticks to tide me over, packed up all my wet gear and got paddling. The river quickly widens out and enters Caribou Lake. I paddled from island to island and found a good campsite on Beaver Island. It has a big sunny area, with a beautiful view over the lake, so I set up a couple of lines to hang up my wet clothes and tent. A nice hot breakfast and a coffee sitting in the warm sun made yesterday's storm seem an age ago. I heard some bird noises in the woods and went to investigate.

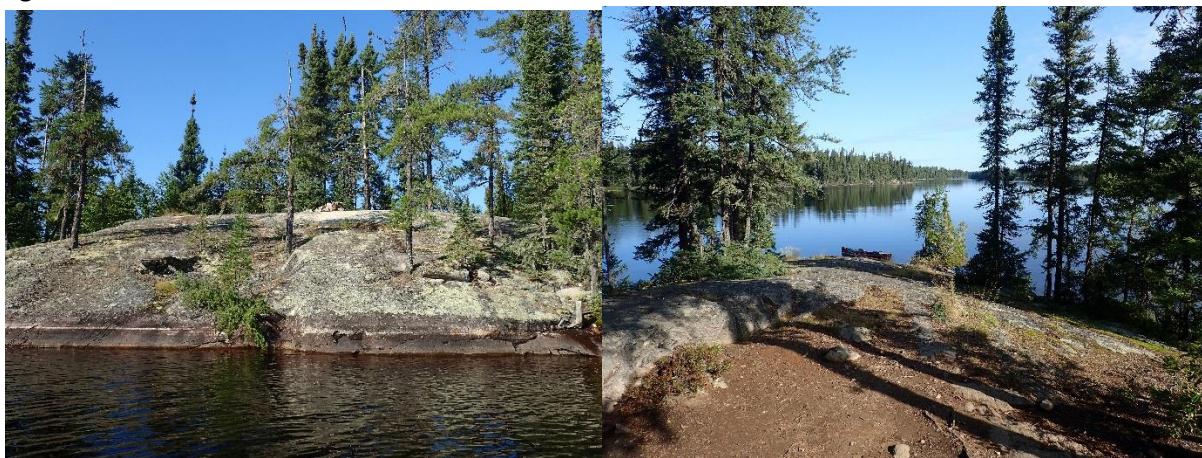


A family of grouse walked right across the path that leads to one of the tent sites. I stayed very still and they passed within a couple of feet of me. The clouds are reappearing, and the north wind is persisting, so I decided to press on and finish the big water section of the trip by getting into Little Caribou Lake. I navigated to the portage, minimizing the length of open water crossings and wind exposure. The portage is well

used, but does have one massive tree down across it. It looks like it may have fallen in the storm yesterday, as the splintered wood looked very fresh, and there was no track trampled into the forest around the obstruction. I bridged the boat onto the tree, climbed under it and pulled the canoe over enough so that I could get it back on my shoulders. Little Caribou is a nice Lake. The sites have huge flat rock areas and good tent sites. I took the first one I came to, that has a huge whale back ridge running parallel to the water, providing a commanding view up and down the lake. There is a landing spot on the north end of the site, and several good tent spots. It has been a short day, so I have time for a swim, some photography and journaling. It is my last night, and I feel I could stay out longer. I have a fair bit of food left, thanks to the great fishing, but I have things to get back to a home.

Day 15, August 31st.

It was fairly cold last night, down to 3C. Quite a difference from the early nights of the trip, where it did not drop below 24C. I had a nice easy paddle down Little Caribou Lake. I checked out some of the campsites and enjoyed the calm, clear weather to end the trip. Around noon I made it to the road bridge for my shuttle to Armstrong. The two solo guys I had seen a few days before were just pulling out as well. We traded stories about our trips and the wild windstorm a couple of nights previous. They had a communications device that gave them weather forecasts, so they were safely tucked into a campsite before it hit. Their shuttle driver, Vince from Bruce Hyer's outfit arrived and mine arrived a few minutes later from Mattice Lake Outfitters. It was good to catch up with Austin again.



Two of the campsites on Little Caribou Lake.

Conclusions:

I really enjoyed solo tripping. My philosophy on solo tripping is to be conservative with regards to safety and to be careful and methodical when using sharps, or negotiating tough terrain on portages, as getting hurt when alone can be much more dangerous.

Notes to self for future solo trips:

Carry more electrolyte powder drinks to get through really hot weather.

Carry more side dish type food to have with fish dinners. (Dried veggies, mashed potatoes, etc)

Bring a camera with a zoom.

Upgrade my communications to 2 way text, with provision to receive weather forecasts.

Notes about paddling in Wabakimi Provincial Park:

1. Trees large enough to hang a food pack or barrel from effectively are hard to come by at many campsites. I have spent about 42 weeks paddling in the area and always use a food barrel that I leave on the ground away from my tent, and have never had an issue with bears. I practice all other bear safe recommendations such as no food or toiletries in the tent, fish guts sunk in the lake, cook away from the tent, etc.

2. Portages and campsites are unmarked. When looking for a portage landing, look for cairns, cut logs, exposed ground or grassy areas. The people who cut them originally avoided wet ground and tried to make the shortest route possible on good ground. The portage trails are marked with axe blazes. Generally each blazed tree will be blazed on both sides, facing the trail user. Also look for cut log ends beside the trail from previous portage maintenance work.

3. You may cover less ground each day than in more developed parks like Algonquin or Quetico due to rougher portages with obstructions and the time required to find them. Plan accordingly.

I added a few more random photos below, followed by some map corrections and notes.







Wabakimi Canoe Routes
Ahleen Lake to Kenoji Lake via Palisade River

