**Trip Summary**

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| Entry-Exit Lake/River | **Entry: Burntrock Lake** | **Exit: Little Caribou Lake** |
| Length Of Trip | **90 miles**  (km, mi) | |
| Trip Dates/# Days | 9 / 11 / 21 - 9/ 19 / 21 \_\_9\_\_\_  (date range) # (days) | |
| Trip Leader Name | Joe Tousignant | |
| Number Of Paddlers | 2 | |
| Portages | 30 approximately | |
| Portage Length Range | 5-888 meters (m, yds, rods) | |
| Topo Maps Used  Other Maps Used | Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters topos with additional and excellent notes added by Bruce!  FOW Wabakimi Route Planning Map, folded  Ontario Parks paper map (used at home only) | |
| Access Points | Burntrock Lake, by fly in, to  Little Caribou Lake, Truck shuttle out | |
| Route followed (provide map if possible) | Burntrock Lake, Palisade River, Slim Lake, Scrag Lake, Grayson River, Arril Lake, Grayson River, Grayson Lake, Whitewater Lake, Ogoki River, Berg River, Smoothrock Lake, Caribou River, Caribou Lake, Little Caribou Lake | |

**Trip Arrangement Details**

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| **Route description**  (one way, circuit, paddle in/out) | One way, fly in paddle out |
| **Average distance traveled each day** | 10 miles  (km, mi) |
| **Source of non-resident Crown land camping permit or provincial park interior (backcountry) camping permit** | **Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters** |
| **Outfitter/provider used** | **Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters** |
| **Outfitter services provided**  (lodging, canoe rental, outfitting, licenses, permits, shuttles, flight) | Dinner, lodging, breakfast, parking, permits, flight, maps and plan, great notes and advice, pickup in my vehicle, dinner, lodging, breakfast |
| **Mode of shuttle to entry/from exit** (road, rail, float planes) | Float plane to entry point, road access point vehicle pickup |
| **Location of vehicle left behind** | **Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters** Lodge |
| **Primary road used, if any, to access Wabakimi Area**  (Hwy 527, Hwy 599, Graham Road) | Hwy 527 |
| **Secondary road(s) used, if any, for access/egress to/from your trip insertion/extraction locations** | Shuttle from Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters at take out point on Little Caribou. |

**Day \_\_1\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/11/21 Flight from Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters Lodge at about noon, to Burntrock Lake. Bruce upgraded the flight to a Turbine Otter so we could take our two solo canoes and join a flight of 4 guys staying at the Burntrock Cabin (who didn’t bring their own canoes). He was able to give us a great price since the plane was picking up a group leaving the cabin the same day. (3 groups in a two-way trip). My Daughter Caroline and I quickly catamaraned up our two Kruger Sea Winds and beat it for a nice campsite on the Palisade River about 8.5 miles away, below a 210M portage, located at N 50 50.319 W 089 42.938. It was a cool, windy, overcast day. The campsite was a nice small one, the firepit was exposed on the lake but the two tend pads were protected. Easy to catch walleye below any falls on the river! Great first day, didn’t see a soul once we left the dock on Burntrock. The 4 portages were cleared of all but 1 tree we had to do a canoe over/person under on the 60M portage. That was the ONLY blowdown on the whole trip. One spot on the Palisade was marked “P or Wade” (Between the 250m and 75m). We floated through it with no problems. The campsite we used is located right below the falls and 210M portage. There was a moose skeleton there, and fish to be caught. We enjoyed a couple walleye for dinner. Good first day! |

**Day \_2\_\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/12/21 Woke up to a chilly, overcast day. I went out in front of the camp and caught and released 6 walleye and 1 pike in just a few minutes. This campsite is small and intimate, with maybe two tent pads. The little island it is on didn’t burn, although the portages close by did. There is plenty of blowdown on this site, to supply all the firewood you would ever want.  We eased out of camp after a leisurely breakfast. At the top of the first portage going east, 150m, there is a 3 star campsite on a large exposed rock, with a small tent spot in the woods. So far, the campsites here all look to be little used and are small. No way a large group would have room. Still haven’t seen even a footprint, much less any people. The put-in at the east end of the 150M portage is very rough and rocky, but we would learn this is just the norm for portages in the river systems here. No biggie. The fishing below the 150M portage is great.  A few miles downstream, we were headed south on the Palisade in that 3 mile n/s section. On Paddle Planner and on the FOW canoe route map (but not the Parks paper map) is shown a route that cuts off to the east to join the Slim River. If you do NOT take this turn to the east, you would continue to a couple 100M portages and then turn east to Slim Lake. The portage on the “shortcut” to the east going to the Slim River DOES NOT EXIST. Yes I found cut surfaces on two logs, but the portage was completely blown down and nobody has messed with it for years. I wouldn’t think it would ever be a high priority to spend time on this redundant portage.  At the second 100m portage before turning east into Slim, there is a cache of about 5 unused looking aluminum boats. This portage is around some pretty mean rapids, at least for me. We ran the swifts dumping into Slim lake no problem. We stayed at a good little site on the northeast side of Slim on the peninsula. It was probably a large site with lots of tent pads, but nature is taking it back and it has several blowdowns. We managed to put the tent on a semi-level spot and didn’t have a lot of options. The site was burned around the perimeter. We liked it anyway, lots of firewood available! N 50 48.470 W 089 37.410. 50386 on paddle planner, more or less. |

**Day \_3\_\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/13/21 Woke up to a beautiful, cold, foggy morning, but it burned off to a beautiful clear day with a light breeze. We got a late, easy start. The “Lift” shown on my topo going east out of Slim towards Scrag, was navigable in our 28” wide solos but few tandems could make it between these rocks. The next portage is low and flat, and likely marks the divide between the Slim River and Grayson River systems, I think. The 200m portage into Scrag is a “heart attack hill” going over the burned off granite hill. Scrag Lake is very shallow on this north end heading to the Grayson River and Arril Lake, we kicked up mud with every paddle stroke.  It is worth noting that around noon today, we paddled out of the burned area, about halfway across this north bay of Scrag Lake the burn stopped on the north shore. Nice to have a change of scenery!  Moving out of Scrag, there is a shallow area that you might be able to walk through or run, or might need to portage. I have conflicting notes on whether we portaged it or not! It is shown as line in H20? On Bruce’s map.  My topo showed two portages getting out of Scrag (A 50M and a “take Portage), but they are one and the same and shown as a single 193M the Parks paper map.  The next 450M portage was cleared each of the last two years judging by the age of the chainsaw cuts through a burned area. Bruce tells me he had some chainsaw-toting guests take care of it this season. Hat’s off to the portage crews, we luv ya!  We beat, dragged, lined, walked, and stumbled through the creek rather than taking the next 65M portage. Probably should have just portaged it!  The campsite on the island on April lake is nothing more than a firepit on a rock, and a small open moss covered area where you could put a tent. Nobody has been there in awhile.  We saw fresh wolf and bear tracks on the 400M portage to Grayson. There is one Merrell sandal left by previous visitor on the west end of the 400M portage. There is a hard hat face shield hanging in a tree on the east end of the portage, as well as half an aluminum square stern canoe. I think it was left when they couldn’t complete the junk removal on Grayson this summer.  We paddled around the point on Grayson and stayed at a nice campsite halfway down Grayson on the west bank. It started to rain tonight. |

**Day \_\_4\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/14/21 Woke up to a good hard rain this morning so we hung around and didn’t break camp until late morning and leave around noon.  So we exited out through the south side of Grayson, on Bruce’s advice NOT to take the more eastern route to get to Whitewater. It stopped raining about 2 pm.  The 250M portage is a boulder field, but manageable. Reminds me of the Meadows Portages in Quetico. Could be an ankle breaker if you aren’t careful.  There are a couple campsites, 5394 and 5395 on paddle planner site, that have been obliterated by fire and subsequent blowdowns.  Next, there are two very easy, short portages separated by a small bay. On the upstream end, there were moose bones piled up on the cairn marking the portage. There is a firepit and tent pads all around this nice little glade. We had eyes on getting to Whitewater Lake, though.  The next 250M portage is a bit tough on the downstream end. One of those low portages where you have roots, rocks, deep holes, and other obstructions each step. Just another day in paradise though!  The last portage to Whitewater Lake is about 150M. It wasn’t difficult but some of the corduroy was pretty slick. There was a couple aluminum boats on the upstream end of this portage.  We still haven’t seen a human or human footprint since Burntrock.  We had a thunderstorm come through as we finished the last portage. Big fat rain!  So here on night 4, on the island in that bay just below the 150M portage, was the largest and best campsite so far of the trip in my opinion. It has a nice big firepit and rock table, with a great view. In fact, it really is two adjacent campsites, both with landings, firepit, and tent pads. Plenty of fish to catch below the falls. If I wanted to get flown in and base camp at one spot for the whole trip, this might be the destination. Not that I’m into that kind of thing…this is just a really good spot!  So far, we have never had to go out to catch fish after getting to camp. Rather, we just fished in fishy looking spots along the rivers, and “spoiler alert”, we ate fish every night of the whole trip! |

**Day \_\_5\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/15/21  We had an easy day, going down the west shore of Whitewater Lake. We paddled past the Whitewater Lodge, which appeared to be deserted this time of year. The campsite on the west shoreline on the little point looked good.  It’s a pretty long portage into the Ogoki River. It was the first time, in a long time, that we actually dropped a canoe and a pack and went back for the others, and leapfrogged our way. There was a couple boats stashed on the upstream put-in to the Ogoki River.  The water levels were low but this is a big river here. Upstream progress was not impeded by the river flow, however. We stayed on the east side after putting back in, to stay in the Berg River side. There is a short portage shown on Bruce’s map about a mile upstream of the long portage from Whitewater. We just carried the boats along the shoreline. At high water, I don’t know what you would do going upstream as I didn’t see a portage up on the bank itself.  The campsite a mile further south, at the junction of the Berg, is in a really neat area. My daughter thought it was an adorable little campsite, and it worked for us!  The Highbush Cranberries were ripe on the riverbanks, and we enjoyed a few handfuls of these tart little treats. |

**Day \_6\_\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/16/21  Shortly after leaving the campsite, we entered the Berg River per se. Today’s paddle was amongst the most scenic of the whole trip for me. It was unlike anywhere I’ve paddled in BWCA, Quetico, or Woodland Caribou. A wide, flat, slow moving river with a sandy bottom, in the middle of a wide grassy meadow. It just had a different feel to it. Maybe just because it was the largest river I have paddled on in the boreal.  A mile or so upstream, we portaged around the Oatmeal Cookie Rapids. The portage was kind of brushy with a couple tight corners, but not bad. I think a lot of people run the rapids in the downstream direction, so this portage gets let use. If everybody would do a bit of twig-snapping on their way through, it could help things. There is a campsite on the portage close to the upstream put in, with a nice firepit and good stash of firewood.  The next rapid a quarter mile upstream…we lined it going up and most would run it going down from what I could tell.  There is a single boat looking abandoned at N 50 42.018 W 089 25.020 on the shoreline below double falls.  Great walleye hole below double falls. Caroline caught a small walleye here but drug in a large pike that wanted it for dinner as well. We let the pike go.  There is a single boat at the upstream end of the double falls 100M portage.  I can’t remember if we lined through or portaged the 100M portage around Moose Look Chute. It was today when we saw a fresh wolf track on the portage, and shortly after spotted a young wolf watching us from the far riverbank.  We did take the portage around the rapids coming of Smoothrock lake, for sure. We used the nearest campsite to the portage. It is a 5 star, for sure. Rain set in again, and we set up our CCS tarp and cooked under it, and enjoyed the evening. |

**Day \_7\_\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/17/21  We had rain last night and a couple showers today, but the day was best defined by the 15-30 mph WNW wind. Not ones to be windbound, we catted the Krugers together and attached lines bow to bow and stern to stern to keep it all firmed up. Smoothrock was “sporty” to say the least. I, for one, would never have wanted to be out there in a typical tandem canoe. Even the whitecaps had whitecaps. We made really good time and put down a lot of miles today, with some wind at our stern, finally.  Up until this point, we haven’t seen a human or human footprint since we left the dock on Burntrock. But as we were flying downwind and to the east on Smoothrock, we saw three people in a fishing boat headed west, upwind through the 3’ swells. I think we were better off than they were.  We put down some miles and ended up on the east end of Caribou Bay. No portages today!  The campsite was a 3 bedroom….it had a great central area and three or more tent pads located far away from each other…great for a group with a few snoring guys! |

**Day \_8\_\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/18/21  We worked hard today to get from Smoothrock to a campsite on Caribou Lake on Crown Land.  Interestingly, the walleye were not biting below the rapids on the Caribou River. We trolled up a few eating sized pike in Smoothrock and Caribou lake as we paddled into some fierce headwinds. Caribou Lake is big, bigger yet when the wind is blowing 15-30 in your face! We ended up in a good campsite on the northeast shore of Beaver Island. Being on Crownland, it had a different feel to it. It wasn’t really lakeside, but rather tucked up in the woods. There was an old homemade fish basket and a piece of plywood laying around, but it did make for a nice table. The amount of trash, including a pile of nails, was uncharacteristic of anything we saw at the tidy sites in Wabakimi, where no more than a small handful of stuff could be found anywhere. Here, there was even a grill and griddle left behind.  So, in my planning this trip thus far, I’m not sure what happened. Perhaps it was fierce headwinds most days, rough portage take outs and put ins characteristic of Wabakimi, my advancing age, or who knows maybe the calculations on hours per day from Paddle Planner were off or I screwed up the settings…overall most of our days were longer and harder than I expected. We got into camp later every day than we usually did in the past. We did manage to bank a day over the first few, because fortunately I realized early on there was no way we were going to make it from the northern side of Caribou Lake to the takeout on the last day, in time to meet the 12 pm shuttle as thought. So the plan at this point is to “use” that banked day on a campsite on Little Caribou when previously I hadn’t planned to stop there at all.  There are 4 portages from Smoothrock on the Caribou River to get to Caribou lake. The first 80M was as easy as they get, with great landings on both ends. There was even a nice little campsite in the middle of the portage. The next 100M was beautiful as well. The next 80M was rough, while the last 100M one was average. But the last two had extremely rocky put ins, among the worst we experienced the whole trip. Just part of it, but worth noting. |

**Day \_9\_\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration**

**(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

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| 9/19/21  I have maps and compass and know how to use them. However, I typically follow a track on a gps just so I can spend more time fishing and sightseeing and less time navigating. Did I mention that all my batteries died a couple days ago? Yeah, evidently, I didn’t pack new batteries. I had put new ones in the gps before the trip and they lasted five days. But I think I hadn’t put new batteries in my little waterproof case, they were leftovers/used from previous trips.  No big deal, just made it a little harder to get around all those islands on Caribou. But we didn’t get lost or disoriented.  So we head for Little Caribou, again in some fierce southern winds.  Btw, we caught our walleye and pike dinner for tonight, without much effort, near the portage to Little Caribou on Caribou lake.  The last portage of the trip was from Caribou to Little Caribou. It is a good up and over, and will make you breath hard! Somebody drug a plastic boat the whole way, leaving little blue plastic shavings… Anyway, headed south I think it best to take a right at the fork, as this puts you on the lake a little further south into deeper water. I could be misremembering that part though.  We were paddling hard into the wind on Little Caribou, watching some weather build up behind us. I texted Bruce on the InReach to confirm our 12pm pickup the next day. Facing a stormy evening and breakdown of camp during the rain the next day, Bruce suggested we make a break for it and come out a day early. So we just put the hammer down and made for the takeout a day early. A soft bed and cold beer beckoned! So we paddled out, meeting our ride at about 4 pm. We made it back in time for an excellent hot meal at the lodge. This change in plans, coming out a day early, really worked out well. One, we didn’t have to pack up a wet camp. Two, we had planned to take out and immediately head for Duluth. THAT would have been a long, long day and a long drive. Instead, we got cleaned up, fed, and spent our final night in Ontario in Wabakimi Canoe Outfitter’s lodge. It made for a relaxing trip to Duluth the next day while allowing us to get home as we originally had planned.  Overall Trip Comments:  My daughter and I have done many trips together, a few to BWCA, the majority to Quetico and a couple to Woodland Caribou. All those trips have been loops of some type, from BWCA access points to BWCA or Quetico, or using a truck shuttle from Red Lake to get to Woodland Caribou. Because of the border closure, we were resigned to doing BWCA this fall. Then BWCA shut down due to the fires, but the border was open! 10 days out and all I had was vague misconceptions about Wabakimi, and a paper Park map, so I gave Bruce at Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters a call. He offered a deal I couldn’t refuse, for our first fly-in trip. I immediately joined FOW and ordered a planning map and the Canoe Routes guide…but there was no way I was going to be able to freelance this trip with the time constraints involved. Bruce offered a top-notch package—including meals and lodging at his place, maps, a suggested route, the fly in, and the truck shuttle out. Now, I don’t even WANT to freelance our next trip to Wab. I’d rather stay at his lodge anyway, you know Armstrong isn’t exactly a town that caters to the needs of canoeists, outside of the outfitters. Our next trip? Well, it will be to Wabakimi. Woodland Caribou spoiled us with the solitude and the fishing. I appreciate the rugged beauty of the park, but now realize I prefer the less fire impacted places in Wabakimi. Over the coming winter months, we’ll get a plan together for a Spring 2022 trip. I’d like to take a train in, paddle out trip more along the lines of the 14 day trips we are used to. Or maybe we will get a good deal on a fly in again. I’ll surely use Bruce’s lodge on our first and last nights spent in Ontario, and have his help in arranging transport to and from the park. And get his maps and route planning advice!  His knowledge of the conditions in the park is invaluable. You know, just knowing or finding out if any particular route is open and passible, can be difficult. I don’t have much interest in finding myself 100 miles from the takeout, on a route with portages that are impassible due to post-fire blowdown or too much time between tendings. I’m also leery of leaving a vehicle unattended in the Armstrong outback.  I’m not trying to preach here on the benefits or drawbacks of using an outfitter vs. freelancing a trip. To each their own! Having been to Woodland Caribou a couple times, I will freelance my next trip there. They have a Super 8, the Howie Inn and restaurant, and a Tim Hortons. As well as several drive-in options to get to the park outside Red Lake. Wabakimi and Armstrong are just NOT like that! We will use Wabakimi Canoe Outfitters again and look forward to it.  -Joe  October, 2021 |