

Set. 21-29, 2019

Participants; Jeff Nolin, Christina Nolin

We set out for the West side of Wabakimi on the last week of September, 2019. The trip was planned for Ontario crown land, using the Friends of Wabakimi Volume 2 (yellow book) maps for reference. We would start from Fitchie Lake, paddle east to Savant Lake, then north up the Savant River and McCrea creek to McCrea and Pashkokgan Lakes. Then back south on the Pashkokgan River to our starting point.

We sorted our gear in the garage on Friday night, and headed north from Duluth MN on Saturday morning. The weather was decent and the milage went quickly. We arrived at Fitchie lake on the crown land west of Wabakimi late in the afternoon.

The access on Highway 599 north of Savant Lake was easy to locate. The access point is a nice parking lot, with several tent sites on the side of Fitchie lake. There is an outdoor privy, and several fire rings. There is a boat ramp to launch a small boat, but there were no cars in the parking area. No canoes in the wilderness- awesome!



This was a two person trip, with my daughter. I live in North Carolina, but grew up in northern Minnesota and have been paddling the north woods for 50+ years now. My daughter is an experienced canoe camping partner, with perhaps a few less years paddling, balanced by better physical conditioning. We are conservative paddlers, and tend to portage more than some of you on the

challenging rivers. No shame in returning home safely. My canoe trips used to be fishing trips with camping as a required element. Today we take long canoe trips, with a fair bit of fishing along the way.

We put in at Fitchie lake after a long drive, looking for a campsite in the bush, but daylight was running short. The wind settled in the afternoon, and we made our first lake crossing. We found the first portage of 434m to Shallow Lake in the Southwest corner of Fitchie Lake, and found a nice patch of flat rock to set up a tent on Shallow Lake. The campsite is roughly where the campsite appears on the Volume 2 map. (UTM 15U 675830, 5608711.) There was a fire ring, but not much evidence it had been used recently. A tent site was well into the woods.



The second morning was greeted with a cold, hard rain that was not going to stop all week. After a bit of coffee under the tarp, we concluded it was going to be a wet day and packed up. We took the 681m portage to Neverfreeze in the morning. After a couple of false starts walking moose trails, we located the actual portage. The roughly half mile portage was filled with blowdown, and we spent a fair bit of time bushwacking around the larger obstacles. Neverfreeze is a nice lake, although I suspect there is some false advertising. This lake undoubtedly freezes deep in the winter.

We continued on to Seldom Lake. There is a 413m portage identified on the Volume 2 mapset. We paddled down the creek to the portage. Eventually we got to a point where we lined the canoe for



another few hundred meters. The portage itself was very difficult, with large blowdown over the entire portage. We ended this portage and had lunch on a rock on the northfacing shoreline.

A couple more portages of 806m and 122m led us to Elwood lake. We found a campsite just south of the 122m portage (UTM 680473, 5603004) This campsite had been cleared years ago, but the caribou moss was deep and hid any evidence of recent use. There was a moose skull and several large bones at the side of the clearing. It looked like the wolves have taken ownership of this place.



In the morning, we paddled 5 km up Elwood Lake, found the two short portages and arrived at the North Arm of Savant Lake. We found a nice campsite about 1km south of the bay we entered from. (UTM 684837, 5606460) I had hoped to find some lake trout in Savant Lake, however the North Arm is fairly shallow and you would need to paddle south a bit to find trout. We did have a good time catching a lot of walleye and northern pike in the swifts as we paddled north.

The next day, we paddled up the north arm of Savant Lake approximately 14km, and a short portage at the extreme north end of the lake. As we paddled across Jabez lake, we saw a float plane tied off in the weeds behind the large central island. We found a flat rock to make camp on the western shore of Jabez Lake (UTM 688095, 5621444), on the bay leading towards the Savant River at the northern exit. It was cold and raining, but we managed to get a tarp up and a small fire going to warm. It was at this point that we had noticed the Canadian topos identified this lake as Jabel Lake, a minor inconsistency. Later that evening after sunset, a couple hunters in a small fishing boat saw our campfire, and came over to check it out. The group were moose hunters, and the guide, Troy, owns a cabin on this lake. We chatted for a couple minutes, and curiosity got the better of me and I asked if they knew what the name

of the lake was. Troy immediately grew concerned that we were lost in the woods, and very late in the fall as well. We explained the minor consistency in names, convinced him we knew where we were, where we were going, and that we could in fact make it home.



The next morning, we packed up in the rain, and headed east to find the portages to Joshua Lake and McCrea Creek. The lake has a small stream on the extreme northwestern corner. The stream narrows and then turns northeastward at the portage. After carefully monitoring the shoreline, and checking a couple moose trails to make sure we did not miss the take-out, we heard voices in the woods. It was pretty much like we could hear God saying “the portage is over here”. After checking our ears, we came to the realization it was the moose hunters from last night. They were sitting at the take-out 25 meters further up the creek, and encouraged us to head a bit further along the shoreline to locate the trail! We have never experienced the trail magic of voices in the woods telling us “the portage is over here”, and I am sure it will never happen again.

It turns out the trail from Jabez to Joshua lake is a very wide path. It appears to be an old fire break running between the lakes. We paddled down McCrea creek through Jacob Lake and Simon Lake, and found a campsite on the shore of a small pond just before entering McCrea lake (UTM 689286, 5635685) It was not a particularly pretty site, not much more than a piece of flat rock on the shoreline with a big uprooted tree, but provided needed shelter from the wind off McCrea Lake, which is a big lake.

After a good night, we paddled McCrea in the morning. It was relatively calm, which was a great blessing. There is a 187m portage marked on the Volume 2 mapsets, between East Pashkokogan and



Pashkokogan. However, careful inspection of the McCrea Lake topo 52J16 shows a “portage” directly from McCrea at UTM 690500, 5645500. This is curious, since it is not identified on the Friends of Wabakimi maps. It is also unusual for a portage to be listed on a topo, and since the topo is about 100 years old, not something I would trust! But, it is certainly in the “right spot” for a portage, so we headed that direction to check it out. The portage was easy to locate, and in good condition. There is an old Ford truck (circa 1935) on the portage, a work horse that must have crossed over in the winter, and never made it home. The portage was probably a logging road many years earlier.

The afternoon had a severe thunderstorm, which produced lightning, and then marble sized hail. We pulled up to the shore, and held our paddles over our heads for several minutes.

We found a campsite on the Pashkokogan river after it widened (UTM 680103, 5640731). Highway 599 heading to Pickle Lake is close to this area, however there is no access to the road near here, and we never saw anyone. In spite of the proximity to the road, this is still a remote and wild area.







The following day we paddled south on the Pashkokogan River. At one point we were again close to Jabez Lake, a kilometer or so to the east. A few days earlier we had briefly considered a bushwack to shorten the trip by 50km or more. In fact, the scouting maps from the Friends of Wabakimi showed a likely portage, but one had not been located and verified and thus does not appear in the Volume 2 detailed maps. Upon viewing the tall cliffs on the west side of the Pashkokogan river it became obvious why there is no portage.

There are a series of portages on the Pashkokogan River, identified in the Volume 2 maps, just north of Fitchie Lake. The portages are in a detail marked circle "B", consisting of 117m, 801m, and 496m. We found the 117m without problem, and covered it without too much difficulty. The 801m and 496m portages are actually one continuous portage. The trail runs on a ridge east of the river, and is generally on higher ground. The portage had a huge amount of blowdown, and we had to bushwack the majority of the portage. The amount of large trees laying down in deep moss made this a tremendously difficult portage. We ended up crossing the route first using a GPS to keep us on track and flagged it with some pink surveyor tape. We then portaged the canoe, and pack on separate trips. It took a good four hours to complete the portage. We finished the portage in the dark, completely exhausted, and camped at the identified campsite just south of the 496m portage (UTM 679361, 5617883).

We finished the trip up the Pashkokogan River through a series of small lakes leading to Fitchie Lake. The final day was an easy paddle and we reached the access point campground around noon.



The trip was remote, and aside from the fly-in moose hunters, we did not see any other paddlers. The portages were generally easy to locate. A few of the portages had considerable blow down, there are no alternate routes once you get into heavy blowdown, and I would not recommend this trip to anyone that is adverse to the potential for bushwacking a km or more. I was very glad I had a roll of flagging tape in my lifejacket for the portages on the Pashkokogan. I normally only use a map/compass, and do not use my GPS much; but it was invaluable in finding a route thru the blowdown on the Pashkokogan. The trip was rewarding to see areas that have a very small human footprint, with a great variety of creeks, powerful rivers, and a few very large lakes. The walleye fishing on the Savant River was very good.