

Friends of Wabakimi Trip Report

Week #1, May 19 – 26, 2018

Week #2, May 26 – June 2, 2018

Week #1 Participants: Steve Bower, Jim Kerler, Dave McTeague, Leader: Bill Pyle

Week #2 Participants: John Holmes, Jim Kerler, Dave McTeague, Bill Pyle, Co-Lead: Holmes & Pyle

Preface:

“Uncle” Phil Cotton passed away on May 6, 2018. The trips that he had planned are going forward to complete gathering the needed mapping information and as a legacy to his work and leadership. A great deal of work has been done by The Friends of Wabakimi Board, Debbie Doyle-Sargent, Barry Simon, and John and Patricia Cotton to enable this summer's trips to go forward. Thank you!

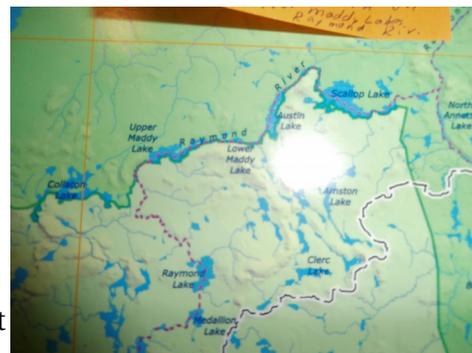
Thur. May 17, 2018:

Bill Departs Sun Prairie, WI at 0740 for the drive to Duluth, MN to pickup Dave McTeague. Meet Dave and we drive to Kendall's Smoked Fish to buy some smoked Trout and Whitefish for Friday's lunch. We drive to the border and enter Canada at 5:00 PM. We drive to Debbie and Sandy Sargent's home on the south side of Thunder Bay for dinner. It is Debbie's birthday and her son, Michael, and his wife, Jennifer, brother, Jim, and husband, Sandy, are also present. They provide a delicious dinner and we bring a decorated cake and ice cream for dessert. We had a great time celebrating Debbie's birthday-thank you! Dave and Bill departed for Phil's house at 9:15 PM. Thanks to John and Patricia Cotton for letting The Project continue to use the house for staging this summer's planned trips!



Fri. May 18, 2018:

Debbie had provided food for breakfast so we ate at Phil's. After breakfast Dave and Bill start to check out and organize equipment. Debbie arrives at 11:00 AM to help finish organizing the food. Dave and Bill go to Canadian Tire and Metro Market for a few needed items. Upon returning, Dave puts some repair patches on the canoes and Bill prepares the stoves and fuel. Jim Kerler and Steve Bower arrive at 4:45 PM. We hold the pretrip meeting at 5:45 PM to go over the route and procedures. Luckily, the ice reports from Don Elliot indicate that our planned starting point at Scallop Lake is ice free! The truck is loaded with the chainsaws, equipment packs, food barrels, paddles and life vests Friday evening.



Day 1, Sat. May 19:

We get up at 0530 and pack personal packs. The personal packs and small cooler are loaded into truck and then we load the canoes. Depart Phil's at 0750 and drive to Tim Horton's for breakfast. The

weather is 46 degrees F. with light rain. Driving north on Hwy 527 the temperature falls to 37-39 deg. F. with rain. We arrive at Mattice Lake Outfitters at 11:20 AM. We unload the truck of equipment and canoes and check in at the office to drop off valuables and pick up fishing licenses and permits. The ceiling is about 2000 ft. and visibility is good, as the rain stopped at the Gull River, temperature only 40 deg. F. with a north wind of 10-15 mph. Elliots load the Turbo Otter and we depart Mattice Lake for Scallop Lake at 12:20 PM.

Don Elliot told us that the plan was to use the dock at Ogoki Frontier's Outpost Camp to unload, if it was in good shape and safe. Well, after a twenty five minute flight we landed on Scallop Lake. The outpost camp's dock was quickly judged to not be in any useable condition because it was partly submerged, so we would need to unload on the water. The pilot positioned the aircraft in the bay west northwest of the camp and untied the canoes from their flight position on each pontoon. Once on the water, he then secured them to the pontoons with ropes at the center thwarts, standard practice. There was a pretty stiff north wind and the temperature was about 40 deg. F. We then began to pass the gear from inside the aircraft into the canoes. Bill and Dave were loading the canoe at the left pontoon and Jim and Steve at the right side. The pilot was helping pass the gear from the inside to the person outside of each side door.

The pilot decided that he would need to reposition the aircraft further out into the bay because of the rate of drift toward shore. By this time we had partially loaded each canoe. He told us to hang on or go inside. Dave and Steve went inside and sat on the seats while Bill sat on the floor at the top of the stairs into the left side door with his feet on the stairs. Jim remained on the right pontoon and hung onto the pontoon strut toward the bow of his canoe with one hand and kept the other hand on the side of his canoe. Despite absorbing much prop blast from the mighty turboprop and inhaling jet fuel exhaust, this proved to be the saving action which prevented the loss of any equipment from the right side canoe! The engine start and initial water taxi was going well until a little more acceleration occurred and water from the pontoons' wakes started to spill over the gunnels. This was more pronounced at the left canoe because the water pressure was angling the bow of the canoe away from the pontoon and the canoe's right gunnel was riding lower in the water and acted like a scoop. Dave and Steve were witnessing the event through the windows and immediately yelled to the pilot to slow down! As he did slow down, this caused the pontoons to produce an even larger wake; which completely filled the left canoe. The loaded equipment promptly floated out of the canoe as we helplessly watched! By the time the pilot had the aircraft shutdown and we were able to get onto the left pontoon, the blue chainsaw case was exiting over the left gunnel! Bill has nothing that can be used to reach it, decides not to swim after it in 35-40 deg. F. water, and will forever feel frustrated that "The Dawg" drowned! The case floated for about 10 -15 seconds but steadily sunk lower and lower as it drifted away! He normally ties the case to a thwart, but hadn't done that because the rope was a little short and the case would need to be repositioned after another pack was put into the canoe.



Steve, the pilot and Bill empty the water from the left canoe so that the floating gear can be retrieved. We can see Dave's day pack and the large equipment pack floating upwind from the drifting aircraft, so we paddle to pick them up. Ironically, one food barrel and two paddles drift under the aircraft and can be hauled in from inboard of the right pontoon by Jim and Dave. When we reach the floating equipment pack it is so heavy that Steve can't safely hoist it into the canoe. So Bill paddles the canoe to shore near the outpost camp while Steve hangs onto it. Steve and Bill then paddle back out to the aircraft for more gear. Meanwhile, Dave and Jim have emptied that canoe of water and are loading equipment. After all the gear is now safely loaded for the short paddle to shore, the pilot says, "I guess

you are missing a chainsaw!” Bill tells him, “Yes and we have a spare in Don's storage building.” The pilot says, “OK we'll fly it to you later this afternoon.” A rough start to the trip but no one is injured and we need to dry out equipment and move forward!

This outpost camp doesn't appear to be used and is in a state of untidiness and needs some repairs, especially the dock. We go inside the cabin to look around and decide to use the deck, front yard's rock, and picnic table for a base camp; instead of fighting off mice, etc. The camp does have an A-frame biffy and a fish cleaning/storage shed! The soaked equipment pack and contents are spread out on the large rock to dry in the cool but improving weather. Elliots fly our spare chainsaw to us at about 4:45 PM via the Beaver aircraft. Dinner is prepared and we sit around the picnic table under the tarp talking about plans for a better day tomorrow!



Day 2, Sun. May 20:

We awake to a clear and cool morning, mid 30's F., with a light west wind. After breakfast we prepare to travel to the east end of Scallop to find the exit of the Raymond Riv. The west wind of 10-15 mph makes the 3.8 km paddle easy to where two channels flow around what appears to be a large island of land. There is a south and north channel and both have about the same amount of water flowing through them. They are both clogged by debris and dead falls, so we get out and explore to decide where the portage might be. We find nothing river left of the south channel, but do find an old blaze on an old downed dry tree, river right of the north channel. We walk and flag this portage, which bypasses the first of two rapids marked on our Section 40 inset number 2. We eat lunch and then begin clearing the portage, which measures 99 m.

The portage ends at the west end of a very small pond. Jim and Steve carry a canoe over the cleared trail and paddle across the pond to see where the channel flows. They discover that the channel is clogged by a large fallen Cedar tree and much debris is caught in the branches. The river water is chest deep and still very cold! So, they explore the edge of the pond by canoe trying to find a way to dry land. This proves futile, as there is no way through the flooded trees to any shoreline. We abandon trying to proceed downstream to the next set of rapids. This part of the route will have to be done in

lower water conditions and warmer weather! We find and mark two campsites at this east end of Scallop Lake. The temperature is now a nice 65 deg. F. and no bugs for the return paddle to camp!

Day 3, Mon. May 21:

We awake to a cool morning of 40 deg. F. with clear skies and a light wind from the SW. Today we explore the west end of Scallop for campsites, find two. Then we proceed to paddle north around the big bend of high land toward the west and then southwest on Scallop toward the next portage into Austin Lake. We eat lunch at a nice campsite, on the west shoreline, before paddling to the end of the lake and the portage.

The rapids can be heard for a good distance out into the lake and the scenery is great at the portage, river left. There is a pretty good climb up the rocks from the water's edge but there is ample room on a ledge, about mid-way to the top, for equipment. Jim and Steve arrive first and Jim looks around the large boulders that are part of the obstruction. Suddenly we hear Jim yell, "There's a bear!" It had been startled and was running off into the woods before any of the rest of us could see it.

This trail is well marked and relatively clear. However, we make a few cuts and clear some debris to improve it. This portage measures 83 m. and there are two cached aluminum v-bottom boats at the south end. We fish on the return to Scallop and keep four Pickerel to augment dinner. The day temperature warmed to 75 deg. F. and we had a perfect weather day!



Day 4, Tue. May 22:

We awake to nice weather with a west to southwest breeze and 45 deg. F. After breakfast we break camp to travel south and west into Austin Lake. After carrying the portage into Austin we eat lunch. One campsite is found at the south end of Austin. Paddling to the west end of Austin, we locate the portage into Lower Maddy Lake. This portage stays back from the river and has many cut logs making it easy to find and clear. There is another cached boat at the west end of this portage, measures 167 m, river left.

The day has warmed to 75 deg. F. as we portage into Lower Maddy and paddle west looking for a campsite. About 6:00 PM we decide on a small site next to a blow down with a nice area next to a large flat rock for a landing. This site turns out to be a descent camping spot. We paddle west from camp to a swift and catch four Pickerel to add to dinner. This swift is actually at the east end of the next portage, which leads into Upper Maddy Lake. The nice warm weather has now produced the first mosquitoes of the season!

Day 5, Wed. May 23:

The night was warm, so we should have another nice weather day! After breakfast we load tools, lunch and fishing gear to travel to the portage between Upper and Lower Maddy Lakes. We find and clear the portage, river left and 50 m. (the next day we extend the west end 22 m. to a better landing). We paddle through a small pond to a pinch point with rocks and some current, very small swift, into Upper Maddy Lake. A nice lunch spot, on a good campsite, is found on the north east shore. We could use this as a base camp, but it is too far from the mouth of the Raymond River to be a convenient location. We fish and look for other campsites while paddling back to the east end of Upper Maddy toward camp. The best fishing is still found just below the swift at the east end of the portage between the Maddy lakes. Six Pickerel are kept for dinner and Dave cleans them on an island in the bay west of our camp. Great fish dinner and nice evening!

Day 6, Thur. May 24:

The temperature is a nice 50 deg. F. in the AM. We have breakfast and break camp to travel west into Upper Maddy. We clear an additional 22 m. at the west end of the portage that we cut yesterday, to have a better landing, not so close to the start of the rapids/swift. This brings the portage length to 72 m., river left. Once in U. Maddy, Jim and Steve explore the entire north shore, from the previously found site westward, and Bill and Dave search the south shore for potential camp sites. We agree to meet at the mouth of the Raymond Riv. on the west end of the lake. Jim and Steve find no other good sites and Bill and Dave find one fair site about 1.5 km east of the river's mouth. This site has been used in the past.

After both parties meet, we paddle a short distance up the river to explore and get a feel for what might be in store for travel up the Raymond. We don't go too far before turning around and moving back into U. Maddy to eat lunch on a rock, east of the river about one half kilometer. After lunch we paddle east to the campsite that Bill and Dave had earlier found. This spot needed a lot of work, especially, for the tent sites. The weather was, once again, great; but, no fish tonight because of the time spent setting up camp!

Day 7, Fri. May 25:

After breakfast we load tools and lunch to set off to find the next portage on the Raymond River. We reach the obstruction and start to search for the trail, river left, where the 1960 Section Sheet 40 shows 500 yards. We don't find much, as the area along the river, both high and low, is a mess. Jim does find evidence of a short stretch of trail at the south end of the portage where access to the river resumes. We use this to traverse a rock face near the river. We flag the best route between the river and the base of the steep ridge/hill. The trail is fairly level until a steep climb must be made to get around the previously mentioned rock face. The temperature is now 75-80 deg. F. as we break for lunch. After lunch we start to clear and work until 4:00 PM. We quit as thunder is being heard in the west. When we exit the river valley a mean looking thunderstorm is building in the west. We get to camp safely and wait for the blast! The storm has high wind, rain and lightning from 6:00 – 9:15 PM. We eat late, but do have Pickerel, as Dave provides! Cleanup and to bed about 11:00 PM.

Day 8 (wk 1), Day 1 (wk 2), Sat. May 26:

We awake to a strong southeast wind of 25 mph gusting to 35 mph., poor visibility of about one mile, low ceilings, and a cool 42 deg. F. Obviously, no flying will be able to happen now! So, we eat a

breakfast of Dave's "famous fishcakes," which he prepares! We then return to the tents for shelter. Bill calls Mattice Lake Outfitters at noon and learns that John Holmes has arrived with Debbie and her brother, Jim; however, no flying is taking place. We return to our tents to read or catch up on our journals. The wind seems to subside a little around 3:00 PM.

Bill calls Mattice at 4:00 to learn that today's flights have been canceled. John, Debbie and Jim will spend the night in one of Mattice Lake Outfitter's cabins waiting for better weather, hopefully, tomorrow. We are told to phone back at 8:00 AM on Sunday. The wind dies down by evening and fog and mist set in. We again have Pickerel for dinner and save some fillets for Sun. AM breakfast!

Except for Friday's evening storms and Saturday's socked in weather, this first week has had great weather for this time of the spring! We had very good fishing and ate many fish dinners, and a few fish breakfasts. The great weather of the week made up for the poor start of losing the "Dawg" and not being able to complete the east portages. We had a great crew and a fun week!



Day 9/2, Sun. May 27:

There is no rain during the night and the wind shifts to the west. It is still foggy and low ceilings when the 8:00 AM call is placed to Mattice Lake. The flights are running behind because of the fog and Bill is told to call back at 11:00 AM, estimated takeoff is 12:00. A breakfast of leftover fish is prepared and enjoyed! The barrels are prepared for the equipment transfer and resupply flight. The north horizon shows a clearing sky and the visibility is good by 10:00 AM. A call is placed to Mattice Lake at 11:00 AM and we learn that the incoming flight should depart at 11:20 AM.

The flight arrives at 11:45 AM and Steve Bower departs and John Holmes arrives. We eat lunch, let John get settled and organize the resupply food, equipment and personal items. We depart with work equipment to finish cutting the portage, measures 355 m. river left. When finished, we fish on the return paddle, and keep three Pickerel to augment dinner. Eat, cleanup and to bed around 10:00 PM.

Day 10/3, Mon. May 28:

The crew is up at 7:00 AM and it is a warm and clear day. We eat breakfast and break camp for the start to push upstream on the Raymond at 10:45 AM. We arrive and carry the 355 m. portage to continue upstream. The first obstruction is a very large fallen tree stretching from the west bank across the entire river. The water is pretty deep, preventing safe cutting. So we cut a trail, river right, through 25 m. of Alders. We eat lunch and press on upstream. Many stretches of a narrow channel with encroaching and overhanging Alders are encountered. Paddling is difficult and we must pull the canoes, by hand, to move through the Alders. After the Alder section is passed we come to a stretch where there are rocks. This might be a place where there is a portage in the woods, river left, but we just wade and paddle to get through. (Section Sheet 40, inset #6 shows a portage with no distance noted)



It is a slow and difficult journey through the Alders and occasional dead fall that must be cut with the Agawa Bay Saw. Where the footing is good, and the water shallow, the chainsaw is used. We finally come to an area of rocks around which we need to portage. There is some high ground, river right, where we can make a camp, so we stop for the night. The weather has been warm, 70 deg. F., and sunny; much appreciated since we were wet from wading. Two tent sites were bush wacked and the small tarp was set up on a knoll about 15 feet above and overlooking the river. We eat and cleanup by 10:15 PM. This has been a long day and we are all beat!

Day 11/4, Tue. May 29:

All of us are up by 7:00 AM and we eat a fast breakfast of Mt. House Granola and oatmeal. The camp is packed up and we get busy cutting a portage, from the downstream to the upstream landing, through our camp on river right- 55 m. John cuts much of it with a Sierra Saw and Bill uses the Dawg for some larger trees and Alders. We carry and are on the water to paddle, wade and pull upstream by 11:00 AM. Stretches of the stream are open and easy to paddle with a few feeble beaver dams that the canoes can be pulled over. However, we encounter a few more Alder thickets and rocks through which we can wade.

About 1:45 PM we arrive at a small rapids area where a 250 yd. portage is indicated on the section sheet, river left. We unload and eat lunch before tackling the work. John and Jim strike out to do some reconnaissance work to find the route. After the route is flagged, cut and measured (374 m.), we carry and continue toward Raymond Lake, time is 5:30 PM. It is easy paddling until we come to a rocky swift that could use a portage, river right. But, we find a little chute on the west side of the stream where we can wade, and then reach good water in the middle of the channel.

We have a nice paddle south to where the lake exits into the river. Here, we encounter very shallow water, 6 – 12 inches, with a rock garden of small slippery rocks stretching from shore to shore! Even at this time of the year, we walk the loaded canoes about 30 m. before we reach deeper water and are able to paddle. A stiff south wind is blowing as we paddle toward a peninsula. Don Elliot had told John to search there for an old moose camp site. We find an old dilapidated structure, two cached boats, but no good place to camp. The time is now 7:45 PM and we elect to paddle to an island at the northeast end of the lake, directly east of the moose camp, to try to find a campsite. No luck there, so we paddle south along the east shore until a good site is found at the southeast end of the lake. The weather is great as we set up camp. Dinner is eaten about 10:00 PM and we are more than ready for the bag after another long day on the river!

Day 12/5, Wed. May30:

A few thunderstorms rolled through the area during the night, but no high winds or heavy rain. Some of us sleep in this AM until after 8:00 AM! John Holmes takes over as leader and cooks breakfast. We spend the morning relaxing, cleaning and bathing. Eat lunch about 1:00 and then head off in the canoes to fish and to do some lake reconnaissance. However, there is an area of showers in the south to southwest sky, so we stay along the south shore for an easy return to camp. The rain moves closer and we return to camp before the gentle rain begins. The black flies and mosquitoes are becoming more active as the temperatures have been in the 70's F. Thankfully, the flies weren't bad while we were on the river! Spring has arrived as the birds are chirping, Marsh Marigolds are blooming, Willow, Birch and Poplar leaves are getting larger, and Tamaracks are a distinctive lighter green from the Black Spruce and Jack Pines. Last week the toads were very vocal in the shallow grassy pools at the water's edge. Eat, cleanup and to bed around 10:15 PM.

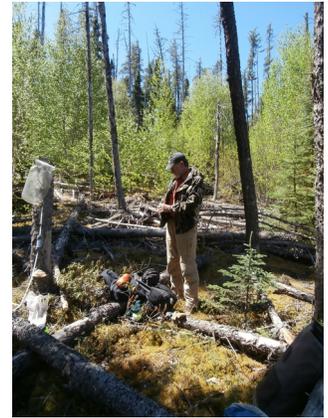
Day 13/6, Thur. May 31:

We experience a mild night with light rain. When we emerge from the tents, about 7:30 AM, the weather is cloudy, calm and 55 F. About 8:30 AM a cold front passes as the wind shifts to the north and increases to a gale with light rain. John cooks a big breakfast and we eat and cleanup by 10:15. We hang out under the tarp until 11:15 AM; we then secure the tarp so it doesn't get damaged by the north wind, that is now blowing at 25 – 35 mph with light rain. The temperature falls into the upper 40's F, so we all retire to the tents. We eat some soup and have peanut butter and jelly wraps about 4:45 PM and then go back to the tents for shelter. We won't get any work done today and will eat dinner later around 8:00 PM. Hopefully, tomorrow will be a better weather day so that we can find and start to clear the portage that goes from Raymond Lake south to Medallion Lake!



Day 14/7, Fri. June 1:

We awaken to a continuing north wind and a temperature of 35 F. Blue sky is approaching from the north and the sky becomes clear by the time we finish breakfast. We load tools, lunch and fishing poles and paddle to the southwest end of the lake to look for the portage. It is found and it has old blazes in a straight line south to Medallion Lake. We flag the route and return to the canoes for lunch. After lunch we cut the dead-falls and clear to a point about 25% of the distance to Medallion (estimate total length of 500 m. - to be measured when totally cleared).



We fish on the return paddle to camp and John and Jim catch and keep three Northern to augment the Mt. House Chicken Breasts with Mashed Potatoes. We have not caught any Pickerel in Raymond Lake. This completes this year's work for Bill, Dave and Jim on the Raymond River. John and Kurt Wick will continue the route toward Caribou next week as a two person crew. Jim remarks, "How present Phil Cotton's spirit has been the past two weeks!"

Day 15/8, Sat. June 2:

Flying weather is good this AM and the plane arrives bringing Kurt Wick and the resupply food barrels. John and Kurt load their canoe and pull the empty canoe back to camp. Dave, Bill and Jim depart in the Beaver Aircraft for Mattice Lake about 11:30 AM. After landing at Mattice Lake, we load our gear into the truck and tell Elliotts goodbye. The drive to Thunder Bay goes well and we arrive at 4:00 PM. One healthy Black Bear is seen next to highway 527 on the drive south. Debbie meets us at Phil's and we help put away the empty fuel bottles, paddles and food barrels. We shower and change into clean clothes! The three of us meet Debbie and her husband, Sandy, at the Neebing Road House for dinner. We return to Phil's house at 8:30 PM. We all miss him!



Week One Totals: 4 Portages Cleared

Distance: 421 meters

Campsites Found: 9

Week Two Totals: 5 Portages Cleared

Distance: 809 meters

Campsites Found: 3

