

LITTLE JACKFISH RIVER TRIP REPORT (NIPIGON FOREST REGION OF NW ONTARIO)

This report documents a Wabakimi Project canoe trip down the Little Jackfish River from Mojikit Lake to the road bridge for the Jackfish road in August of 2014. Led by John Holmes.

The flow of the Little Jackfish River is regulated by the Summit Control Dam at the southeast corner of Mojikit Lake. Flow rates can vary between 50 and 350 cubic meters per second. Flow rates can be checked at <http://www.opg.com/generating-power/hydro/northwest-ontario/river-systems/Pages/nipigon-river.aspx> . It is strongly advised to contact Ontario Power Generation before conducting a trip on this river to advise them of your plans. They can provide predictions of upcoming changes to the flow rates or place restrictions on changes to the flow rates during your trip. Campsites should always be situated above the high water mark, and canoes and equipment must also be placed above the high water mark, especially overnight.

August 2nd.

Our party of 4 were flown into Mojikit Lake by Mattice Lake Outfitters before noon. Many thanks to Don and Annette Elliot for allowing us to stay overnight in their outpost camp, as strong thunderstorms were predicted that evening. We went out fishing in the afternoon and had a nice walleye dinner in the cabin for a luxurious start to the trip. Strong thunderstorms with heavy rain and strong winds blew through in the evening, as predicted.

August 3rd.

Low broody clouds and moderate north winds greeted us in the morning. After cleaning up and sweeping out the cabin, we paddled east towards the end of Mojokit Lake, where a narrowing bends south towards the dam. We stayed close to shore and sheltered behind islands due to the choppy water and reached the dam by 10:30. Our early start allowed us to get off of Mojikit Lake before the winds rose further in the afternoon. The dam is protected by a cable and line of buoys to prevent boats from getting too close. A portage around the dam is marked with a sign on river left, and is well maintained by OPG.



SOUTH SUMMIT DAM OUTLET

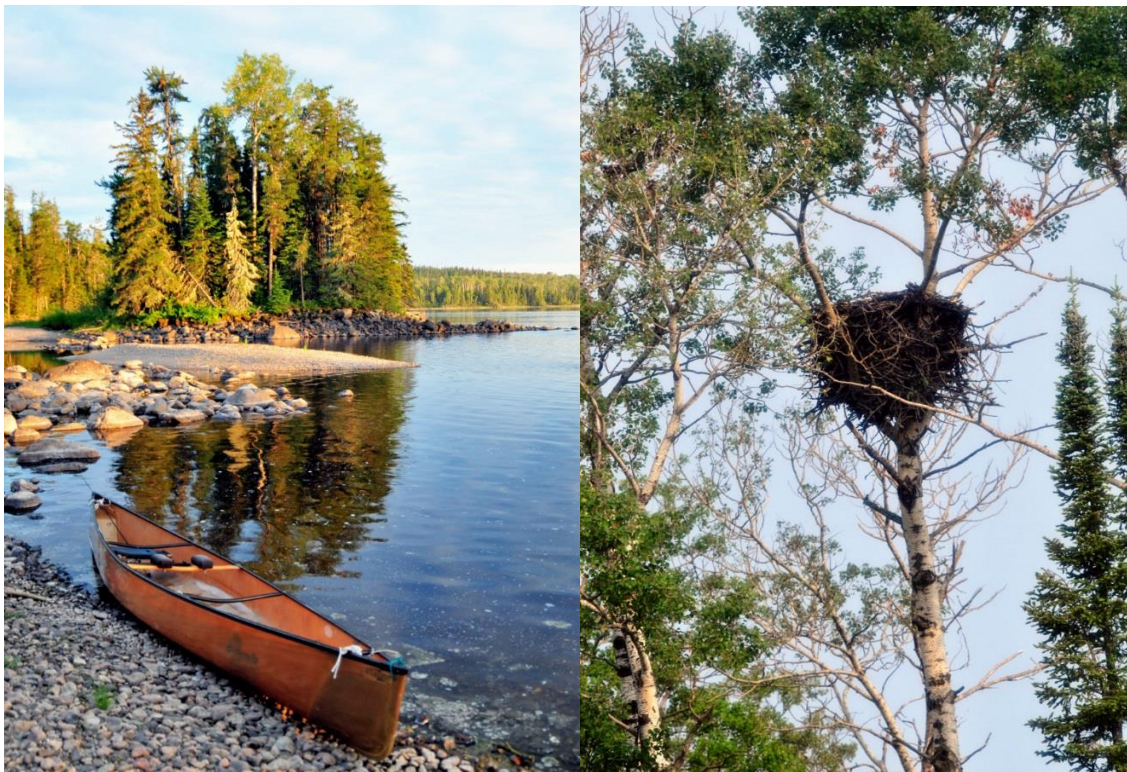


PORTAGE SIGN WITH PHOTOBOMB SQUIRREL

The 206m portage crosses a large cleared area beside the dam that is used as a helicopter landing pad. There is a small utility shed and a dock on the outlet side of the dam. Slightly further down South Summit Lake is a remote water level sensing device. There are some cleared areas where one could camp, but they are quite exposed and not ideal. We saw several pelicans on the water below the dam.

The 347m portage at the south end of Summit Lake bypasses Stork Falls. It starts in a small bay on the east side. The grassy area at the start of the portage is most likely flooded in high water. The portage was marked with blazes and an old ground trail was evident. We spent about an hour cutting back the brush and dead fall. The downstream end of the portage is a small sand beach. The trail continues a little further for a safer high water put in, as the beach is flooded in high water and the current may still be strong at this point.

A campsite exists just around the corner from the end of the portage. An aluminum boat is cached here with an old motor and tank underneath. It has been damaged by a fallen tree and does not look like it has been used for a long time. A very large eagle or osprey nest exists on the west shore.



NORTH END OF STORK LAKE

LARGE EAGLE OR OSPREY NEST

We had good luck fishing below the rapids and the stone beach in front of the campsite was good for swimming. We stayed here for 2 nights.

August 4th.

This morning we packed a lunch, fishing gear and our cutting equipment and headed down Stork Lake to find the portage into Moule Lake. The portage crosses about 2/3 of the way down an island on the west side of the lake. The downstream end of the portage lands in a grassy, swampy area which is not navigable in low water. In high water the portage would be about 60m, but in low water you need to walk along the north shore of the bay, making it 125m long. It took about 30 minutes to clear out the portage. The light rain cleared as we broke out the fishing gear and tried our luck shore fishing below the rapids at the south end of the island. We were quite successful and took a few back with us for dinner. We saw some fresh wolf tracks in the soft mud by the start of the portage.



WOLF TRACKS

SITE ON WEST SIDE OF STORK LAKE

Paddling back to our campsite, we spent some time looking for more campsites on Stork Lake. We found 2 very nice sites. The best is the more northerly one on a blunt point on the west side. It is on a huge solid rock outcrop that rises high above the lake. There is a flat grassy area on top with an old rock ring and some log benches. Trees bordering the tent areas provide some shade. Lots of blueberries and raspberries here. The downstream site is on a sharp point on the east side. An A frame of poles exists for a tarp shelter and there is a rudimentary loo back in the woods. This site catches the breeze nicely but is a bit exposed in rough weather.

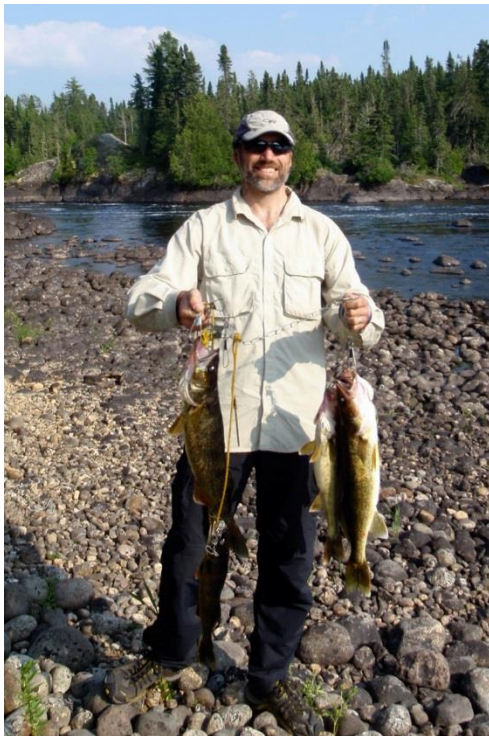
August 5th.

We packed up and moved on today in warm, hazy sunshine with a SW wind. After carrying the short portage into Moule Lake that we cleared yesterday, we paddled through some shallow rock garden areas into the larger part of the Lake. The notes we had from the 1964 trip indicated that there were no campsites on this lake, and we did not find any either. There is a steep shoreline of rough boulders to the treeline, which is very dense with cedars. We did find an overturned fishing boat on the west shore on a beach. It would be submerged in high water

and looks like it has been undisturbed for a long time. There is no nearby road, stream, portage or cabin, so it is sort of an odd place to find a boat. Possibly it is used by someone who flies in, as a floatplane could pull up to the beach.

After spotting some flagging tape and cut logs on river right, in a bay just above the moving water at the south end of the lake, we followed an appallingly bad trail over a steep ridge and down to the other side. It was marked with small flags on stiff wires, and was cut on very steep and treacherous terrain. I assume it was marked by prospectors or whoever occupied the island on the other side to do water testing, as it was definitely not cut by canoeists or anyone with trail building sense! I found a trail around the shoreline on the far side, and followed it east around to a nice campsite. From the campsite we found a proper blazed trail back over the ridge which would have been the original portage. This 254m portage bypasses a large drop off and rapids and leads to a small pool above another set of rapids that leads to Zigzag Lake. A trail around the west side of this pool gives foot access to the 299m portage into Zigzag Lake. This portage is signposted and maintained by the owner of the outpost fishing camp on Zigzag.

The fishing below the upper set of rapids was phenomenal. I expect the large drop off prevents the walleye from getting upstream. We caught and released several over 23 inches and kept smaller ones for our dinner. Out of fish breeding already, so we used crushed crackers!



NICE WALLEYE



PINKISH FLESH ON PAN SIZED WALLEYE

Exploring the small island between the rapids, we discovered that there is a campsite on the island. Some sort of water testing well exists on the island, and there is a lot of cut logs and a large cleared area, possibly cut for a helicopter landing. Lots of blueberries here.



TESTING WELL



CHAIR CUT FROM A LOG



FISHING BELOW THE RAPIDS, SOUTH END OF MOULE LAKE

August 6th.

We awoke to another warm and hazy day, after some late afternoon thunderstorms yesterday. We will spend another night at this site between the rapids, clearing out the two portages and fixing up the campsite today. There seemed to be several branches to the portage to Moule, so we scouted out the best one and cleared it before lunch. After lunch we had a short paddle across the pool to the Zigzag lake portage, which required very little maintenance. On the other side, we met some American fishermen who are staying in the outpost camp. They had been coming up every year for 7 years, and had never walked around the pool to below the upper rapids. They have missed some great fishing there! After clearing out and measuring this portage we explored the lower rapid before heading back to relax and have another fish dinner.



PANORAMA OF UPPER RAPIDS, MOULE TO ZIGZAG LAKE. NOTE MASSIVE DRIFTWOOD PILE.

August 7th.

Moved on today in more good weather. We carried quickly over the portage into Zigzag Lake and headed south looking for campsites. The shore is steep and bouldery, with dense bush above the waterline, so out of about a dozen landings we only found one potential site on a large point on the east shore. It is not a developed site and would need some work. We passed the outpost cabin (now unoccupied) which is on the north shore of the western branch that heads into Crescent Lake. We passed a group of 5 otters playing on a sloping rock before taking the eastern branch, which curves south again to the next portage. There is a campsite on the eastern shore, about 500m before the rapids. It is quite elevated, and a bit of a struggle to lug all the gear up to, but it is flat and protected and surrounded by blueberries.

We set up camp here and headed south to look for the next portage in the afternoon. Again we found the portage on river left (east side) just above the rapids. The trail is much rougher and must not have been cleared in some time. In places there is evidence of an old road, and we found an old truck wheel and tire, and an enormous battery. While scouting out and flagging

the trail for cutting, we had a juvenile black bear run across in front of us. We spent about 4 hours cutting out this portage, which measured 530m and had a very old and damaged cached boat at the downstream end. There is also a post with a prospectors claim nearby. Both portage landings are very bouldery in low water, so care should be taken. We caught a few fish on the paddle back to the campsite, and had a nice swim before cooking dinner on the shoreline, with a fire in the boulders in the evening.



SHORELINE, SOUTH END OF ZIZAG



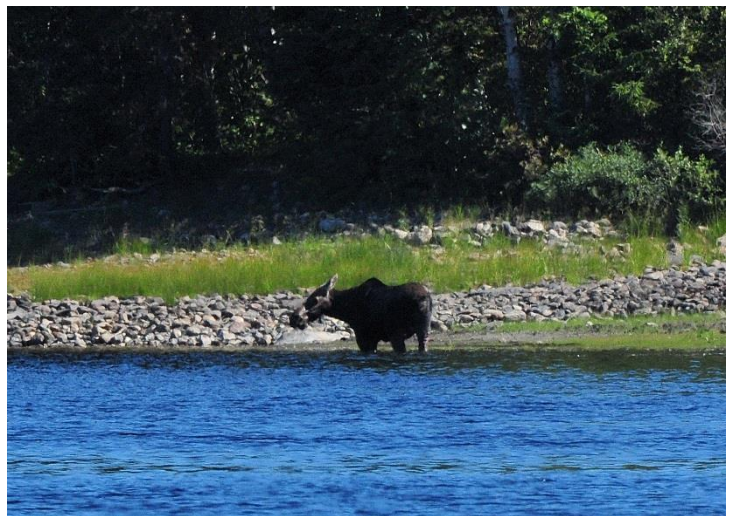
MINING CLAIM

August 8th.

This campsite will be home for another night, as it is the last lake which the floatplane can land on to swap out a new crew for me. I'm sad to see them go as I have never had such a strong and fit crew. I'm usually the youngster on the trip, but I am the oldest this time. We took lunch and cutting gear and carried over the portage in order to scout the next one. We managed to find the portage landing on river left, and scouted it. It goes to a small pool that is marked on the map, but it is still swift water, and only 300m long. Hardly worth reloading the boats and unloading them 5 minutes later, especially since it may not be passable in high water. I made the decision to cut the whole length of it and bypass the pool. There are some very old blazes on this trail, and very few on this center section, with a lot of alder growth and downed trees, so it will be a fairly big job. We scouted and partially flagged the portage, then headed back to the base of the rapids to have some lunch and fish for a while. After passing back over the portage back into Zigzag, we spent the afternoon organizing our gear, swimming and relaxing. Fished in the early evening and had a late fish fry before turning in. I called Phil on the sat phone and he indicated that one of the incoming crew has not arrived in Thunder Bay yet.

August 9th.

The plane came in at 9:30, an hour early, so it was a bit of a scramble to get out on the water. Fortunately we were mostly ready and the pilot needed to do a couple of flyovers to scout his landing area. Only 2 crew members coming in, so I will be solo in one canoe, and carrying the portages will take quite a bit longer. The changeover went smoothly and since it was so early, I made the decision to pack up camp and move down to the next stretch of water over the 530m portage we cut on Thursday. Returning to the landing for my second trip over the portage, I spotted a moose on the shore further up Zigzag Lake. We camped on river right, on a large rocky point with good shore fishing spots and a nice breeze. A very hot afternoon so we swam from the warm sloping rocks to cool off after setting up camp.



ROCKY POINT CAMPSITE IN MORNING FOG (SOUTH OF ZIGZAG). MOOSE ON ZIGZAG LAKE.

August 10th

After an early breakfast, we packed lunch and cutting equipment and headed down to start work on the portage. I flagged the first section to the small pool fairly quickly, so Art and Debbie could start cutting. It was mostly alders and small stuff that can be hand cut, so I worked the chainsaw later to take out any deadfall or blowdown. The middle section along the small pool was harder to flag, as the blazes were much older and few and far between. The trail became more evident again from the far end of the pool to the end of the portage and I was able to flag that fairly quickly as well. I returned to the canoe, donned the chainsaw gear and we cut until about 3:00, with a quick break for lunch. It was another hot day, especially in chainsaw chaps and a helmet, so we returned to camp for a much needed swim and a rest. Dark clouds gathered and we watched a fairly strong thunderstorm from underneath our tarp. It stopped raining in the early evening, so we built a fireplace on the whaleback rock and cooked dinner there.



¹DEW SOAKED WEB



BLUEBERRIES

August 11th

The cold front brought us a cooler, overcast day. Very pleasant weather to work in. We paddled back down to the portage and completed cutting it by 2:00. The center section was heavy work, but we finished off the last section fairly quickly, and measured the portage at 828m. After returning to the campsite, Art and I paddled up to the base of the previous rapids and caught some fish for dinner. It was a fair bit of work, as we had to paddle up the current, and drift over a hole that you had one chance at per pass. We managed to catch enough for dinner, and even caught a red horse sucker, which I had never seen before. Apparently they are edible, but full of bones, so I put it back in the water.

August 12th

A nice cool night brought us a foggy morning. The fog burned off to reveal a deep blue sky, with no signs of the haze and humidity of the last week. We packed up and carried the 830m portage, which took a couple of hours with only 2 of us capable of carrying canoes or large packs. Fortunately, we only had a short paddle to the top of the next rapids, where we created a very nice campsite just at the start of the fast flow. At this low water level, we were able to paddle the canoes carefully around the point to the campsite, but in high water I would suggest landing the canoes on the upstream side of the point, as the current will be very strong. This is a very dramatic set of rapids, with a massive rock ridge forcing the river to jog east, before it banks back south against an eroding sand and gravel bank. Views from the portage trail over the rapids and south over the next body of water are very impressive.



RAPIDS AT 50 CU M/S. HIGH FLOW IS 350 CU M/S!

I scouted the portage after we set up camp. It starts a safe distance back into the bay before the rapids. This portage has been used more recently, and was quite easy to find as it is well blazed. The downstream portion of the trail had quite a bit of blowdown, and required a lot of cutting to open it back up. It measures 408m in length.

One section of the trail has disappeared as the bank has eroded, and needed to be recut further back. The picture below, shows the damaged area. In high water, the flow must be undercutting the soft gravel bank, causing it to collapse.



UNDERCUT BANK



OLD AXE BLAZE

We saw some interesting snakes at this campsite, including what we believe to be a red sided garter snake. Apparently they do not normally range this far east in Ontario.



RED SIDED GARTER SNAKE



COMMON GARTER SNAKE

August 13th

A very cold night last night, with a slight frost. The sun burned off the fog pretty quickly and we packed up to move on. A beautiful clear day with a NW breeze. We carried the gear across the portage and paddled south towards the Jackfish Road bridge. The character of the river is quite

different in this section, with an earthen bank instead of the uniform boulders that make up the shoreline further upstream. The portage is on river left (east side) and starts before the bridge comes into view. It is 253m to the road. To continue on, you must turn west and cross the bridge, then follow the fishermen's trail south along the opposite shore. The total length of the portage is 606m. The bridge is an impressive old Bailey type, with one support built of massive cribbing filled with rubble. Look for snakes in the rocks on the SW corner of the bridge. There is a campsite established on the NW corner of the intersection of the river and the road. We were picked up here and driven out by Clem Quenville, an Armstrong outfitter.



PICKUP POINT AT BRIDGE



LARGE GARTER SNAKE

Overall, this was a very interesting and enjoyable trip. The upper reaches of the river and small lakes do have a bit of a reservoir feel to them in low water because of the exposed boulder shoreline. However, the fishing is very good and there are some beautiful campsites and impressive rapids, as well as abundant wildlife and ample berries if your timing is right. It also provides a 3 or 4 day (now that the portages are cleared out!) route south from Mojikit Lake that allows canoeists to be extracted by road to Armstrong, saving them the expense of a float plane flight out.

Many thanks to Don and Annette Elliot of Mattice Lake Outfitters and their pilot Cam, Tom Aaltomaa and Heather Brown of Ontario Power Generation for restricting changes to the dam flow during our trip, Clem Quenville of Armstrong for shuttling us out at the end of our trip, the crew; Mark Dandrea, Jeremy Brunssen and Dave Steinhoff from week 1, and Art Timmerman and Debbie Doyle from week 2. And of course Phil Cotton, founder and lead organizer of the Wabakimi Project (www.wabakimi.org) for organizing this and many, many other trips.

