

# Friends of Wabakimi Trip Report

May 27 – June 3, 2017, Week #1

Participants: Dave McTeague, Andre Witwer, Bill Pyle Leader: John Holmes

## Day 1, Sat. May 27:

Depart Phil's at 0730 and stop at Tim Horton's for breakfast before driving to Mattice Lake Outfitters. See two Black Bears on the drive toward Armstrong, one was a small one about fifteen feet up in a tree! Arrive at Mattice Lk. at 11:15 AM. Take canoes off of truck and unload gear. Duane and other staff help move gear to dock and pilot starts to secure canoes to the Otter Aircraft. Check in with the office to secure valuables, turn in truck keys and try to obtain Crown Land Permits. Crown Land Permits weren't available, so Sandy gave us an invoice for the rental of two canoes and two tents. We depart Mattice Lake at 11:48 AM and arrive at Rushbay Lake at 12:02 PM. The pilot flew south from Mattice Lk. and then northwest up the Collins River so J. Holmes could photograph important narrowings of the river which will be explored during week number two.

After unloading canoes and gear from the Otter we paddle to the campsite on SW shore of Rushbay Lk. This is the same site that we used in 2011. Other parties have used it since then because the fireplace rocks had been rearranged and wood logs were strewn around the site. Camp was set up, ate lunch and John held safety briefing. Departed to NE end of Rushbay, approximately 2.75 km paddle, to explore and look for first portage to the small lake from which the longer portage starts north to Vale Creek. J.H. finds evidence of trail at far end of the potential portage, so we work our way from west to



east to link up with the known trail. We work with Sierra Saws for an hour before leaving at 5:00 for the paddle back to camp. Fight west wind on return paddle and reach camp at 6:00. Temperature low 60's F. and Black Flies are a bit pesky. Eat and have cleanup done by 8:30. Willows and Birch have small leaves. White Throated Sparrows are doing their nice songs! This is a nice camping spot to use for the week! Into tents by 9:15.



## Day 2, Sun. May 28:

Sky clear, wind calm and temp. 60 F. when we depart at 9:00 AM for the 2.75 km paddle to the first portage at NE end of Rushbay Lk. Have first portage cleared in 30 min. and move canoes and gear to small lake by 10:00. Paddle along north shore of small lake looking for evidence of portage to Vale Ck., find nothing. We go to the most likely start point of the portage, divide into two groups and start to look. After looking for thirty minutes, we hear thunder in the west and J.H. whistles us together to return to camp. Arrive at campsite before any rain. We have lunch and do some camp craft, assemble a bench under the tarp before rain begins. D.M. catches two Northerns for dinner off of the campsite's rocks. Temperature 55 F. and slight north breeze in evening. Large flock of Canada Geese moving north and mosquitoes starting to hatch.

### Day 3, Mon., May 29:

Temp. 50 F. in tent and light rain off and on during night, stops by 6:30 AM. Drizzle and fog as we depart at 10:00 AM for the Collins Riv. area to explore the portages and swifts downstream. First swift is about 1.5 km from campsite and is runnable both up and down river. There is an Eagle's nest with one sitting on nest, river left about 150 m. past the swift. The next four obstructions aren't marked on the Wabakimi Park Map, it only shows one long portage. Obstruction #2 needs a short portage cut on river left. #3 is a log jam with a shallow area and some rocks that make it un-runable. There is a grassy area on river left between the channel and the woods with good footing and fairly dry, approx. 20 m. Obstruction #4 is a runnable swift downstream, but not upstream because of a narrow channel running through logs on both sides. But, there is a grassy open area on river left of about 20m. that can easily be portaged. It is a short paddle to the next set of rapids, where the marked long portage starts. It is on river left a short distance from the start of the rapids. The landing is poor and there is a huge chainsaw blaze on a dead tree about 10 m. back from the landing. The way to the blaze is across treacherous boulders and no fun! This portage trail is very evident with lots of cut logs which a crew must have gone through within the last few years. Length is estimated at 180-200 m. to a landing at the northwest end of next small lake. There is lots of rubble and rock slide on the south shore of the next pond. We will return later in the week to complete clearing and measurement of these portages. Return to camp about 2:00 for lunch. Improve the fireplace before big rainstorm and strong winds begin approx. 4:00 PM. Rain ends by 6:00 and we eat and cleanup before rain begins again around 8:00 PM. A Loon, Beaver, Sea Gull and Mergansers have made appearances.



### Day 4, Tue., May 30:

Temp. 50 F., foggy and light northwest breeze at breakfast. Depart at 09:30 AM to find portage to Vale Cr. out of small lake northeast of Rushbay. First portage from Rushbay to small lake is measured at 152 m. river right. We pick a likely spot on the north shore of the small lake and pick a heading of 010 deg. toward a point on the map that is the west end of the pond on Vale Creek. We move north following game trails and easier paths looking for evidence of the portage. J.H. moves our search a bit further east following the west end of the slope's contour line and finds a better route to Vale Creek, arriving at 11:45. We spend some time looking for evidence of the north end of the portage trail, but find none (later do find it). After taking a break we work back south finding and flagging the best route. J.H. is the point man while the three of us string out along the route so he can adjust the best trail. After moving south about 200m. Andre finds cut logs and the portage trail! We flag the trail all the way to the small lake's shoreline and come out at a point approx. 75 m. east of our start point. Have lunch and canoe to the actual start point to start working north. Work until 4:00 PM and get about 60 % of cutting done. Fight headwind on return paddle and wind increases during evening, temp. 45 F., N wind 15-20 mph, light rain begins at 8:30, but we are nicely sheltered.





#### Day 5, Wed., May 31:

Light rain with a strong north wind all night, temp. 40 F. in the tent at 7:30 AM. Everyone stays in tents until 8:30 as the wind increases to 20-30 mph and gusty. Whitecaps and rollers on the lake, so we are wind bound. We eat a late breakfast and fish for a short time off the rocks. Each of us catch a small



Northern, except D.M. who catches 2-3; J.H. cooks them for lunch along with rice soup. We clean the dishes and spend the rest of the afternoon splitting and gathering firewood, some of which we burn in the evening fire. Grouse have been drumming for the last few days and one wanders into our tarp area about 9:00 PM. It flies to a branch in a Spruce tree about 8 feet off of the ground and stays for about 10 minutes. We watch it until it finally flies away and we all go into the tents for sleep.

#### Day 6, Thur., June 1:

Clear sky, temp. 50 F., light south wind. Depart for Collins Riv. at 9:00 AM. Arrive at first portage about 10:00, clear and measure 47m. riv. left. Next obstruction is not runnable, grassy area river left measures 24 m. Next obstruction is runnable down river with a river left grassy area which also measured 24m. Next swift is runnable down river with a portage, river left, of 59 m. upstream. Arrive at long portage and have lunch at the edge of the river and the boulder field to the chainsaw blaze. We extend the portage west from the chainsaw blaze along the original portage to a much better landing. Finish clearing and measure at 241 m., river left. Depart at 2:30 PM for return up river, fishing as we go. D.M. keeps two Northern for dinner and we arrive at camp approx. 5:00 PM. Nice evening with 55 F., clear and light breeze.



Day 7, Fri., June 2:

Partly cloudy, calm and 39 F. at 7:00 AM. Depart at 9:00 and paddle to the abandoned framed structure that is 650 m. north of our campsite. It appears that someone had planned to build a log cabin back in the woods and never completed it. They must have lived in the native wood framed structure while working on the cabin. Junk was all around and inside of the structure. It had once had plastic or visqueen walls with a tarp for the roof. There was a wood burning stove, bunk, frying pan, buckets and other cans and utensils inside the structure. The log cabin was back in the woods about 20 m. and had four walls almost 5' 6" tall with no door or window cut outs.

We paddle to the portage to Vale Creek to complete clearing and measuring. J.H. re-routes the north end of our flagged route to coincide with the actual original portage, which ends at a much better landing further west of our original route. We do find old historical blazes at this landing! Portage measures 676 m. We eat lunch and depart at 2:00 to fish on the way back to camp. The day is nice with a south breeze and 70 F. No fish caught today, but this week's work has been completed!

