

Trip Summary

Entry-Exit Lake/River	Allanwater River (Allanwater Bridge Station)	Pikitigushi River (Mud River Station)
Length Of Trip	411km (gps measured & includes distance of double carrying portages)	
Trip Dates/# Days	2021/07/27 - 2021/08/12 <u>17</u> (1.5 days lost from 14 hour train delay and float plane fuel delivery from another train issue) (date range) # (days)	
Trip Leader Name	Dustin Van Heck	
Number Of Paddlers	1	
Portages	59	
Portage Length Range	24m - 1445m (map listed distances)	
Topo Maps Used Other Maps Used	<p>On trip: Laurence Mills (wabakimimaps.com) and backroad mapbooks on GPS unit</p> <p>All map/portage references throughout the report are specific to the Laurence Mills Maps</p> <p>In planning: Laurence Mills Maps, FOW map books 1, 3, 5 and planning map, official park map (purchased from Ottawa's World of Maps), government topo maps (52J/01, 52J/08, 52I/05, 52I/12, 52I/06, 52I/11, 52I/14, 52I/15, 52I/10, 52I/07 - also brought and marked up for forest fire contingency, but never used on trip), trip report (https://albinger.me/2018/11/09/down-the-pikitigushi-river-from-cliff-lake-to-lake-nipigon-days-3-4-5-from-the-bear-camp-to-windigo-bay/) for information for Pikitigushi River between logging road/bear camp and Mud River Station</p>	

Access Points	Train from Sudbury Junction Station to Allanwater Bridge Station and return by train from Mud River Station to Sudbury Junction Station
Route followed (provide map if possible)	Allanwater River to Brennan Lake to Wabakimi Lake (via Allanwater) to Lower Wabakimi Lake to Smoothrock Lake to Outlet Bay to Whitewater Lake (via Berg River and Ogoki River) to Whiteclay Lake (via Ogoki River) to Raymond River system to Cliff Lake (via Pikitigushi River system) to Pikitigushi Lake to Mud River Station (via Pikitigushi River)

Trip Arrangement Details

Route description (one way, circuit, paddle in/out)	One Way
Average distance traveled each day	24.2km (incl. rest days), 27.4km (excl. rest days)
Source of non-resident Crown land camping permit or provincial park interior (backcountry) camping permit	Ontario resident - permit booked through Ontario Parks reservation website Crown land permit: N/A as Ontario resident
Outfitter/provider used	Wabakimi Outfitters
Outfitter services provided (lodging, canoe rental, outfitting, licenses, permits, shuttles, flight)	Float Plane fuel delivery
Mode of shuttle to entry/from exit (road, rail, float planes)	Rail
Location of vehicle left behind	In Sudbury at friend's house (local Sudbury friends advised about against leaving a vehicle at Sudbury Junction (gravel lot station on outskirts of town) - it is only staffed a few hours before and after train arrival and departure)
Primary road used, if any, to access Wabakimi Area (Hwy 527, Hwy 599, Graham Road)	N/A

Secondary road(s) used, if any, for access/egress to/from your trip insertion/extraction locations	N/A (Vista Road, Road 702, Caribou Lake Road, Airport/Pikitiigushi Road, Obonga Road, Pishidgi Lake Road, &c.)
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Day 1

Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration (include highlights, hazards and gems):

Allanwater Bridge to McEwen Lake (to meet float plane) back to Allanwater Bridge to Termite Lake (took west branch of Allanwater where it splits early on), camped at site below falls on west side of lake in view of falls.

7.9km detour for float plane + 27km from Allanwater Bridge to campsite - 8 hour travel time (excludes float plane detour)

Portages: 63m, 190m, 102m, 125m (skipped), 170m, 41m, 250m/57m (impassable with canoe), 292m (unfindable - portage along shoreline), 193m, 245m, 221m, 209m

Weather: Sun and clouds, hot and humid, calm to slight breeze, no noticeable forest fire smoke

Animals of note: Bald Eagle x3, 2 cow moose (one sprinting along shore), loons, mergansers, common goldeneyes & other ducks, frogs, toads, red squirrels, next to no bugs

Bruce Hyer had advised of low water levels in the park generally, as this was my first trip in the park and surrounding area, I have no comparison, but was an estimated 2-3 feet below the pollen line, for the route through to Whiteclay Lake, the rest of the route looked closer to one foot below the pollen line. Low water caused no issues of any real significance on the entire trip.

After a 14 hour train delay due to freight derailment, track washout, and sinkholes between Sudbury and Parry Sound the night before my scheduled departure, I was dropped off at Allanwater Bridge at 11:30pm. After finding my way to the Wabakimi Outfitters Lodge and portaging my canoe and gear along the railway, I camped on their lawn as coordinated with Bruce and turned in around 1am.

Due to some unfortunate honesty, I was unable to take my stove fuel on the train (later finding out it is more of a don't ask, don't tell policy according to the baggage workers), I had to coordinate a last minute floatplane delivery of fuel (the duration of my trip was under a fireban) at McEwan Lake south of Allanwater Bridge (due to low water) and was finally on my planned route after losing a day of and half to train delays and fuel delivery.

Met group of 4 canoes on first portage who had driven from Canmore, Alberta (plane and train did not allow their large dogs). Passed group on second portage and didn't see the rest of the trip, but they had planned to take the east branch at the river split. Portages before the split were all clear and had no issues of note. 125m portage around noted C1 was skipped as nothing more than a swift in the low water (I have limited to no whitewater experience and even less knowledge of rapid class judgment, and only ran swifts or very small rapids that had very obvious lines, no technical maneuvers, and appeared to be completely free of obvious rocks to hit as I was solo as well). First 170m portage after split had wrecked fibreglass boat at downstream end.

The third portage on the west branch after the split noted as 250m/57m had the second part of the rapid littered with large blowdowns.

I managed to get a pack through, but a canoe would have been extremely difficult, so I ran the second half of the rapid empty, with a small touch of one rock. The last portage on the east branch before they joined up again (noted as 292m) had a very obvious start of the trail, but eventually faded out completely in thick forest and blowdowns. Could not find the trail for the life of me and ended up portaging along the cobble to boulder shoreline on river left, which included wading through two ankle deep sections crossing various braids of the river before passing all sections of rapids and getting back to the main part of the river with enough water. Some parts were very close to the rapids and portaging this way may not be possible in higher water. The remaining portages to Termite Lake were clear and nothing of note. I arrived at my campsite at 8:30pm after a long, hot, stressful couple days just getting to this point.

Great campsite with great view of the falls and room for probably 2-3 small tents (I had a solo tent and a eureka no bug zone)

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Day 2

Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration (include highlights, hazards and gems):

Termite Lake to Below Brennan Falls on Brennan Lake

35.5km - 9 hour travel time

Portages: 75m, 304m(blocked with blowdowns halfway, detour back to river edge along cobbles), 168m

Weather: Morning thunderstorms to sun & cloud to afternoon thunderstorms to sun & cloud, brisk west tailwind all day, warm, no noticeable forest fire smoke

Animals of note: Massive garter snake, loons, common goldeyes & other ducks, bald eagle x2, red squirrel eating blueberries

The first 75m portage off of Termite Lake was clear and easy around a large rapid with large standing waves at the end.

The next marked swift on my map was nowhere to be found, but also had more than enough water through the narrowing. The next set of swifts/rapid(?) on my map marked as “run with care” and appeared as more of swifts, but water was too low and the the river too rocky so I waded the canoe through pretty easily. The next 304m portage into the first open part of Brennan Lake had several large blowdowns and one area of significant blowdowns that I could not pick up the trail after routing around, but I found an obvious side trail that got back to the river’s edge and I again finished the second half of the portage along the cobbles and boulders. I noticed a few red marks of canoe paint that seemed more likely to have been where people had put down canoes, but it was again possible this could be drowned out in higher water.

After the second more open part of Brennan Lake, there was signs of a relatively recent burns in the narrows with the forest in various stages of regrowth.

There was a strong tailwind the rest of the day that enabled me to get up to 7km/hr at times. Midway along the last open section of the lake there were thunderstorms forming in the distance but it was still sunny above, so I paddled even harder, hoping to reach the portage before they hit. I took the northern route around Brennan Falls. The rain had started as I made it to the two swifts. I ran the first, grazing a few rocks that were hard to see in the rain and my haste to beat the storm. The second swift I made through cleanly. I reached the 168m portage to below the falls as the thunderstorm hit and passed before I finished the portage. There was one awkward blowdown to get over on a downhill section, and required a bit of wading through low water sections at the end before getting into enough water. I paddled to the bottom of the falls and hiked up the other portage for better views of the falls.

I camped at a site on the north tip of the nearby island that was covered in blueberries. Only negative was a bit weedy for swimming.

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Day 3

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Brennan Falls on Brennan Lake to Wabakimi Lake via Granite Lake and Allanwater River

31.0km - 10 hour travel time

Portages: 405/135m (Granite Falls), 343m, 210m, 141m, 366m, 160m

Weather: Overcast (or also smoky?) to clear evening, cool, gusty cool north wind

Animals of note: Massive garter snake, loons, common goldeyes & other ducks, bald eagle x2, red squirrel eating blueberries

There was one easy fun swift I ran before turning north down Granite Lake. There was a strong north headwind that made it slow, tough-going to the portage around Granite Falls. I approached finding the start of the portage cautiously as my map mentioned swifts in advance of the brink of the falls before the start of the portage. But I didn't encounter any swifts or feel that close to the falls before finding the start of the portage beginning on a rock shelf marked by a blazed tree and also found a survey benchmark from 1925 there (something always fun to find as a civil engineer).

The portage was clear but had more hills and elevations than any other on the trip except maybe one, which seemed to be very rare on the whole route. There was an abandoned outboard motor about midway along the portage that seemed to have been there for a while.

After Granite falls I carried on to a 343m portage around Black Beaver Rapids. It was an easy clear portage around a nice set of rapids.

The next three portages were around Little Sturgeon Rapids and were clear but with steep put-ins in moving water. The 141m portage had a tricky approach to the portage through some swifts around a bend to eddy out to the take-out before the real rapids.

The 366m portage had an interesting rock in a tree pointing the way that I dubbed “the Allanwater Arrowhead” that someone must have wedged there, as it seemed too high above the river to have gotten there during spring flooding.

The last rapid and portage of the day was 160m around Sturgeon Rapids and it’s associated ledge. There were some beaver mandibles at the put-in at the end of the portage.

I had my first cast of the trip below the rapids and caught my first walleye of the trip that I kept for dinner. As the river opened up into Wabakimi Lake the wind really started to pick up and I had to tack my way through the crosswind as I looked for a campsite along the south shore between the river and Lower Wabakimi Lake, finding a large open rock site suitable for several tents. I ended up sleeping in my bug shelter as it was a clear night and I had set it up in the flattest spot.

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Day 4

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Wabakimi Lake to Smoothrock Lake

24.8km - 7 hour travel time

Portages: 233m, 470m, 251m, 10m (north channel, not on map), 309m

Weather: Cold, rainy, breezy

Animals of note: Loons, gulls, squirrels, kingfisher

I made my way across Wabakimi Lake to the north shore towards Lower Wabakimi as it started to drizzle building to a consistent rain that lasted throughout the cold day. Some easy swifts at the narrows and I was onto Lower Wabakimi Lake. As I neared the first portage at the end of the lake, I smelled and saw smoke coming from an island which turned out to be a group of 4 campers selfishly having a fire in the midst of a complete fireban during all the forest fires that were devastating the region. It took a few shouts for me to be noticed over the music they were also playing under their tarp. They claimed to have a cold child, but weren't even hanging out around the fire and had clearly been set up from the night before. It took me a while to get over the fact that someone could have put all the effort in to get to somewhere and yet still be so selfish and reckless.

The first three portages were straightforward around rapids and nothing of note. There were 500m of swifts noted on my map but in the low water there wasn't much current.

The river then narrowed into 3 channels around a couple islands with my map noting to liftover or line the north channel in low water, but in the low water it was about a 1m tall of jagged rocks without any flow through the channel. There appeared to be a rarely used way through along river left. Maybe about 10m long but the end of it was especially precarious, down a 45 degree knife edge rock slippery from the rain.

The last portage of the day around a small cascade was a hard to follow trail that I initially ended up taking a wrong turn and following a game trail that tapered out into deep moss in the forest. After doubling back and sticking closer to the river I found my way back to the trail but lost the trail again but managed to find a steep put in that worked well enough.

The river began to open back up as I made my way into Smoothrock Lake as the rain let up. The contingency I built into my route gave me the option to paddle entirely around the lake's inner island for a day or head directly towards Outlet Bay. To make up for the lost day at the start of the trip and because I had been cold and wet all day, I decided to look for a site at the north of the lake and get camp set up and get dry and warm before the rain started up again. I found a nice little island and set up camp for the night. It was a nice, fairly open site with a large flat rock landing and room for several tents.

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Day 5

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Smoothrock Lake to Confluence of Berg & Ogoki Rivers

29.1km - 8 hour travel time

Portages: 353m, 80m, 90m, 82m, 45/358m

Weather: Overcast & significant smoke haze, brief downpour, to Sun & clouds, windy, cool

Animals of note: Loons, mergansers, bonaparte's gulls, spruce grouse, beaver, common goldeneyes, blue jays, kingfishers

I woke up to relatively clear skies but by the time I was on the water, lots of smoke at blown in from the north, noticeably reducing visibility even a few 100 metres away. I navigated through the chain of islands into Outlet Bay and battled a decent headwind to the narrows in the middle of the bay.

The wind wasn't as bad after the narrows and I carried on to the north tip of the bay after pulling over to grab a bite to eat. As I reached the end of the lake I mistook a campsite for the start of the portage and after exploring trails at the back of the site that kept fading out, I concluded that the portage must start a little further down the shoreline. This was a nice site with a massive firepit, but had an empty 20lb propane tank and rusty burner left at it, which I had to assume came from one of the lodges somewhere on Smoothrock.

I found the portage about 100m down the shoreline, and made my way into the Berg River. This was surprisingly the only buggy portage of my entire trip. My trip overall was one of the least buggy trips I had ever done for the time of year which was also unexpected for being my most northern trip, but I reasoned that this had to be due to the amount of smoke from surrounding

forest fires in the area. I managed to surprise a spruce grouse on the trail on my return trip, which took off into the trees.

Before the first portage of the river there were two fun sets of swift and a chute that my map indicated was runnable. It appeared easy enough and I ran it with no sign of any chute in the low water. The next portage was 90m around a “big drop - do not run” which was a definite portage around a rocky cascade. There was a boat cached at the downstream end of the portage.

I checked out a beach campsite at a widening in the river that was covered in moose or caribou tracks, but decided to carry on down river as the sun had come out when I first got on the river.

As the river narrowed again, it started to drizzle and I pulled over to get out my rain jacket, just in time for a downpour that lasted only 10 minutes before the sun came out again.

I carried on through a meandering section of the river to the next portage/rapid, noticing another boat cached in this section.

There was supposed to be an 82m portage on river right around a C1 rapid but after not being able to find it I ferried across the river to scout the rapid and ended up running an obvious line left of centre.

The next portage was a 45m/358m that I intended to portage my packs entirely across then have a look if I could run the rapid, but the second part of the trail faded out amidst lots of blowdowns. The first part was a easy swift that was barely there but the second part of the rapid looked like it might have a clear line but I couldn't tell if it was extra rocky at the end or just some standing waves, so I decided not to risk it and lined this section.

The smoke haze had since cleared up and it was a beautiful, relaxing paddle to the confluence with the Ogoki River. When I saw the campsite on the opposite shore of the Ogoki, I knew I was definitely staying there. It was a nice gnarled rock shelf with gorgeous views over the rivers. It was a relatively large site, but had limited flat areas for tents and was a very open exposed site, which was fine for the current weather.

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Day 6

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Confluence of Berg & Ogoki Rivers to South shore of the middle of the west half of
Whitewater Lake

16.1km - 4 hour travel time

Portages: 330m/320m/81m

Weather: Overcast & cool to sun & clouds, calm

Animals of note: Toad, ducks, mergansers, gulls, bonaparte's gulls loons, bald eagles

I didn't have much river to go before reaching Whitewater Lake and with only one area of rapids and portages for the day I had a late start enjoying the site on the river. A couple kilometers downstream from the site was a long section of swifts but with the low water, it was more of a shallow boulder garden that I ended up walking the boat down for about 250m before the water was deep enough again.

A bit further downriver and I reached the start of the first 330m portage around the rapids at the mouth of the river. There were a few boats cached here. This portage had been maintained recently with some freshly cleared blowdowns but a few more still crossed the trail that were a bit big for a handsaw, but were easy enough to get around/over.

I skipped the 330m portage and paddled this section as the only reason it seemed to exist was to connect the three portages into one single portage, but this may be different in higher water.

I portaged the last 81m along the flat rock edges of the river around the last section of the rapids, unclear whether I was on the actual portage or not, but at the water levels, it seemed the easy

path. I fished for a while below the rapids somehow catching nothing and then carried on into Whitewater Lake.

As I was back on my planned schedule with some rest days available, my plan was to go as far down Whitewater Lake as conditions permitted unless I found a really nice campsite I wanted to relax at. As I turned off the river and the lake opened it up it was mostly blue skies, and the lake was shockingly calm.

I made my way along the south shore, which had numerous obvious spots to camp as the shoreline was mostly open flat rock shelves gradually sloping up toward the treeline. Around 2pm, I found a great campsite towards the middle of the western part of the lake on a north facing peninsula with a 180+ degree view of the lake. I set up camp then enjoyed the gorgeous weather, swimming, reading, and hanging out in the sun and enjoyed a beautiful sunset as the smoke and clouds began to blow back in.

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Day 7

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

South shore of the middle of the west half of Whitewater Lake to South shore of Best Island
- Whitewater Lake

24.2km - 5:45 hour travel time

Portages: N/A

Weather: Smoke haze, hot, windy, evening thunder storm

Animals of note: Loons, mergansers, bald eagles, frogs, killdeer

I woke up to a hazy sunrise as heavy smoke had blown back in making it the smokiest day yet that I could faintly smell for the first time, but still no breathing effects. I had contemplated taking a rest day, but figured I'd take advantage of the building tailwind, not knowing when it could switch to a headwind on the big lake.

By the time I was on the water, making my way to the channel to check out the Ogoki Lodge, it looked almost like an overcast day although I was pretty sure it wasn't actually cloudy.

I quickly checked out the unique architecture of the lodge before carrying on, skipping the portage route, opting to paddle through the island studded middle of the lake since I was in no hurry and had a nice tailwind to take advantage of.

As I made it through the island section, I noticed the landscape begin to change from the rocky shoreline in the west of the lake to much more of sand beaches in this section. I stopped at a few of them to look for more caribou tracks but didn't see any.

As I made my way to Best Island looking for the landing to the Wendell Beckwith Cabins the wind had really picked up and I ended up overshooting the actual landing, but on my way back I noticed a pristine looking can of Bud Light in the rocks above the water line. I could even see the top and it was unopened. What a find! I found somewhere to land the canoe without it getting bashed on the rocks in the rough conditions to grab the beer but unfortunately it was actually empty as it must have developed a little pin hole leak from rubbing against the rocks. What a disappointment. I carried on and found the trail to the Beckwith Cabins and spent some time checking the three buildings out. The largest cabin's roof had finally caved in, but the other two were still in decent shape. It was cool to find National Geographic magazines from the 60s in them.

I was back on the water with an even brisker tailwind and waves starting to break that I was flying along as I looked for a campsite for the night. I made my way around a 300m long sand spit jutting out into the lake at the southern tip of the lake, which acted like a really nice breakwater and made camp in the trees at the back of the 2km long beach.

There were enough trees in the area to get a good sheltered camp set up and the entire beach was covered in loads of fresh caribou tracks along the entire beach right at the waterline. As I was setting up a motorboat that was fishing around some shoals came ashore and walked over to my camp. They were the owners/operators of the Wilderness North lodge at Striker's point. They asked about my trip and I asked about how business was going as most of the lodges I had encountered to this point had been closed. They said they just had their first guests of the season from Ontario and were looking forward to the border opening (still on schedule for August 9) as the bulk of their clientele were American. After dinner I followed the caribou tracks down the beach hoping to come across them, but as some unexpected rain began, it turned into a beach jog back to camp as I hadn't fully set up for rain.

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Day 8

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

South shore of Best Island to Small Island to Island 2km off Strikers Point - Whitewater Lake

11.3km - 3 hours travel time

Portages: N/A

Weather: Clear, sunny, calm, hot

Animals of note: Frogs, pikes, walleyes, bald eagles, hawk, killdeer, loons, crows

I made breakfast as I watched the sunrise and again considered taking a rest day on this site taking but the weather was so nice and calm I figured, I'd just mosey my way down the lake fishing along the way and find another campsite along the way closer to the Ogoki River I would later be heading down towards Whiteclay Lake.

I fished around the shoals just offshore from my site that the lodge owners were fishing at the night before and caught a couple nice pike before carrying on trolling for a walleye for dinner on the glass-like lake.

I checked out a few areas along the southeast shore of the lake but they were all just open sand beaches that didn't appeal to me. I had caught two walleye before reaching a small island that was about 2km from either side of the mainland. I paddled around the island and even bushwacked across the island trying to find the best place to set up camp on the island as it was marked on my map, and it turned out the only place to set up a tent was a little beach on the southwest side. It was a very small area and may be even smaller in higher water as I had clearly set up my tent below more regular waterlines and there were some stagnant pools of water that had become disconnected from the lake, but it was a nice location, and I found some old corncobs and rib bones that made it clear people had camped here before.

When I went for a swim jumping off some rocks I found some either moose or caribou mandibles in the water. I assumed caribou given what I had read about them giving birth on islands and the fact that it was 2km from shore seemed a bit far for moose. I had found a leg bone on the other side of the island as well when I was looking for a site.

After dinner, the smoke had begun blowing back in obscuring the sun almost two hours before sunset.

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Day 9

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Small Island to Island 2km off Strikers Point - Whitewater Lake to Ogoki River Falls

20.1km - 5:20 hours hour travel time

Portages: 350m, 250m

Weather: Significant smoke haze, hot, humid, slight breeze

Animals of note: loons, ducks, killdeers, bonaparte's gulls, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, toad, otter, walleye, pike

I woke up to significant smoke haze which was extra noticeable being well from off from the mainland. Multiple float planes were taking off and landing as I passed by the lodge at strikers point.

In advance of the first portage, I saw a couple trumpeter swans, something I'd never seen in more wild areas, just in farm ponds. As I approached the first portage, I decided to aim for the 350m (low water) portage across the island. The river splits around this island with rapids on both sides. There was also an 800m portage on river left indicated on my map. As I approached the split in the river I couldn't see any indication of the portage landing as the river was really swirling with cross currents as the flow split, and I could see why this portage was only recommended in low water. I made the decision to take the left side, as it looked to be more of a straight approach and was calm enough at the start to see most of the rapids that weren't too big. I ran about two sets of rapids as an otter bobbed in an eddy watching me. The next rapid was too large for my comfort and I pulled into an eddy about 2/3 down the island and found a trail that connected to the main portage trail.

The downstream end of the 800m portage had a motorboat and aluminum canoe that had been crushed by a huge fallen tree.

After the turbulent end of the rapids after the portage, the river really got low and I had a portion that required me to walk and drag my canoe across the sandy bottom for a short stretch.

Shortly after there was enough water again and after passing a random cabin, I was at the portage around some falls. It had a handful of blowdowns but was easy to navigate.

I found a knife on the end of the portage, that I later found out, Joe Robinet had also come across and left there when he had passed through. I ended up taking it home, cleaning it up and gifting it to a friend.

I set up camp on the mostly flat rock shelves and since it was really hot, paddled across the river to swim and fish the outflow of the falls. I ended up catching 12 walleye and a pike in just an hour of fishing, keeping a walleye for dinner.

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Day 10

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Ogoki River Falls to Picket Lake (Raymond River)

35.8km - 9:00 hours hour travel time

Portages: 240m

Weather: Warm, rain to sun and cloud to rain, smoky, calm

Animals of note: loons, common goldeneyes and other ducks, bonaparte's gulls, killdeers, trumpeter swans, bald eagles, american pelican, beavers, otters, kingfishers, canada geese

I woke up to the rain continuing from the night before. I had a slow breakfast as I didn't really want to break camp in the rain, and managed to catch a lull in the rain when I finally did. One benefit of being in a much wilder park than say Algonquin was not stressing over getting a late start and having more competition for a set number of sites at your destination lake. The paddle of the rest of the Ogoki River before Whiteclay Lake was very peaceful and rain free, and I noticed more mature birch stands that seemed to grow much taller and straighter with less low branches than the birches I was familiar with in more southern forests.

Near the mouth of the river into Whiteclay Lake, I had maybe my biggest surprise of the trip to date. Far ahead of me I saw a big white blob in the water, which I assumed was likely another swan, as I didn't have my glasses on with the rain. I dug them out of my pack and as I got closer it was a pelican, which I had no idea were even in Ontario!

When I reached Whiteclay Lake for the 15km paddle down the lake, it was very low visibility with really low clouds and started downpouring on and off for most of the paddle. Fortunately it was warm enough that I could just accept being wet all day rather than put on rain gear to just delay it soaking through eventually.

It was interesting paddling down the lake as I recalled either reading a trip report or youtube video mentioning that there wasn't anywhere to camp on the lake, yet I noticed several obvious sites as well as a nice sheltered one among a grove of cedars where I stopped to switch over my maps. It was one of the few campsites I had seen nestled in amongst the trees and not on the fringe of the dense forest.

I carried on to the end of the lake where my 10 days of downstream travel would end as I began heading upstream on the Raymond River. I became a bit concerned as I reached where the mouth of the river should have been yet I was running out of water still hundreds of metres from shore. The water was ankle deep and appeared to be a vast sand flat. I knew water levels were very low in the park but this was the first issue I had run into. I got out and walked the canoe as far as I could before emptying my bow ballast and rearranging my packs until I bottomed out again. I decided to leave the boat and try to find out if I could find the start of the river, hoping I wouldn't have to struggle up the small river to the height of land. I walked across what ended up being a little peninsula between the lake and the river and saw the river that looked like it had plenty of water. I returned to the boat and ended up finding the main channel. It turned out I had just tried to cut the corner and should have stayed more to the left to find the main channel, where there was enough water.

I was relieved to have enough water as long as I didn't veer out of the main channel. The weather had cleared up and the river ended up being really nice and was teeming with waterfowl, birds, beavers, and otters. I soon reached the only portage of the day, a 240m around some falls noted as "muddy." I had to carry over a boulder field that would have probably been submerged normally before reaching the trail into the forest. The portage was in rough shape with serious muddy parts, sinking knee deep at times, and heavy sections of blowdowns.

I had hoped to make it past Pickett Lake earlier in the day but by the time I reached the lake it was 7:30pm and I was tired and hoped to dry things out a bit before heading to bed. The shoreline of Pickett Lake was almost entirely marsh grasses with the exception of a lodge. As no one was there and it appeared to be closed for the season. I set up my tent on the boardwalk pathway, not getting much time to dry anything out before the rains started again and I tucked in for the night.

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Day 11

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Pickett Lake (Raymond River) to Cliff Lake (Pikitungushi River)

35.6km - 10:45 hours travel time

Portages: 660m, 283m, 98m, 140m, 685m, 785m, 1379m

Weather: Cool, overcast, north breeze

Animals of note: black bear, common goldeneyes, ducks, loons, trumpeter swans, toads, killdeer, moose, owls

Today I woke up early and was on the water by 8:30am for my longest day of portaging with seven portages totalling ~4000m. This wasn't a long day by Algonquin Park standards but with double carrying on this trip and knowing these would likely be the roughest portages of the entire trip, it was definitely going to be a tough one. I had paddled a km away when I realized I forgot my fishing rod on the beach as I was loading up. I was annoyed at myself, but glad I hadn't gone very far before noticing. As I approached the first portage of the day, I saw a big black bear on river left. I silently paddled as I got closer, coming within 20m hoping to get a picture, but he bolted off as soon as he noticed me. It was the first bear I had come across on a canoe trip in 14 years. I found the portage landing nestled amongst a grassy and alder covered shoreline, and noted that although the 660m portage was noted as steep, and was the steepest portage I had done on the trip yet, it wasn't all that steep.

I also came across a fresh pile of bear scat, full of blueberries, wondering if it was from the bear I had seen minutes earlier.

Otherwise, the portage was clear other than some typical large blowdowns that were easy enough to get over and some more bouldery sections. A short paddle later was the next 283m portage with a very muddy landing that I managed to shimmy into without getting bogged down in. Nothing of note to the portage, just the usual narrow overgrown path with the occasional blowdown that I had become accustomed to on the river. After the portage the shoreline was getting noticeably more rocky with some sections of cliffs.

The paddle down North Annette Lake was really nice with a handful of nice looking places to camp that looked like the first nice area to camp since Whiteclay Lake. I skipped the next 98m portage by dragging over a ~2m tall beaver dam.

The next 140m portage required a rocky crossing of the river to find a suitable low water put in.

The next two portages (685m and 785m) separated by a small pond, crossed the height of land between the Hudson Bay and Great Lakes watersheds, which wasn't at all noticeable. They were also across portions of floating bog. They were some of the hardest, most miserable portages of the trip. There were significant areas of blow downs, mud, and on the bog sections, every step was a mystery of how far you would sink or if it would support you. I had several falls, tipping over with the canoe on my head as one foot would punch through. Fortunately these areas were pretty vegetated and were soft on the canoe. I marked with flagging tape around some of the sections that had impassable blowdowns and through the boggy areas where the trail was hard to follow.

My energy was drained from the portages and I struggled to keep my eyes open as I paddled down Butland Lake yawning as I went. The first half of the lake was annoyingly shallow, limiting me from getting full paddle strokes. At the end of the lake was the final 1379m portage. It was much of the same as the previous two portages (less the bog sections). It was a battle to stay focused on my footing as I was just physically and mentally drained at that point. My shins were burning from being scratched all day along the narrow trails and I regretted not wearing pants. I had a few more falls on the portage before.

After one more liftover of a little ledge I was into Cliff Lake.

I found an amazing campsite as I was planning to spend two nights here. I set up the bug shelter and hung up the tent to dry out a bit before setting it up. As I set up the tent, I heard some major splashing and ran out to the shoreline and saw a giant moose trudging through the water across a bay from my campsite. We locked eyes before he headed back into the woods. I then swam and did laundry as my entire lower half was covered in mud. Finally having dinner by 10pm before journaling and tucking in for a cold night.

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Day 12

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Rest Day - Cliff Lake (Pikitigushi River)

13.3km - 7:00 hours - paddling around entire perimeter of lake for pictographs and clifftop hikes

Portages: n/a

Weather: Sunny, warm, south breeze.

Animals of note: loons, squirrels, chipmunks, walleyes

Cliff lake was a major point of interest on my trip and even with the train delay I still managed to get here for an off day on my 29th birthday, and everything aligned for an amazing day that exceeded all my expectations. I slept in until 7am as the sun rose behind my campsite burning the fog off the lake. I had a lazy breakfast while reading and was finally on the water at 11:30am. I planned to paddle the entire shoreline to see all the pictographs, hike up to the top of a few cliffs, and fish a bit. I didn't expect however to spend 7 hours out doing so.

I paddled south along the east side of the lake under blue, smoke free skies, keeping an eye for any sign of pictographs.

After scouring the east side of the lake and finding loads of well preserved pictographs, faded pictographs, and indecipherable markings (only a few below) it was 2:30pm and I hadn't caught any fish for lunch so I hiked up one of the taller cliffs and made some bannock for lunch with lots of blueberries that were along the clifftop.

I made my way up the west side of the lake and found my favourite pictograph of a thunderbird below. I hiked up the highest section of the cliffs opposite the bay where I had camped, before heading back to camp to clean one of the walleye I had caught on my way north up the lake for dinner.

I had a fish fry for dinner and a dehydrated cheesecake dessert before bed to celebrate my birthday - A canoe trip tradition three years running.

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Day 13

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Cliff Lake to Derragh Lake (Pikitigushi River)

27.0km - 8:45 hours travel time

Portages: 81m, 545m, 250m, 89m (lined), 144m

Weather: Cool, sun and overcast, gusty south wind

Animals of note: Owls, beavers, loons, bonaparte's gulls, ducks

I woke up to fog covered cliffs before having breakfast and breaking camp. I headed south down the lake, eyeing the pictographs again as I paddled along.

The first portage was an easy 89m portage to a small pond that was clear with some rocky and muddy sections. The next portage was a 545m portage into Bad Medicine Lake. This portage had some steep and precarious ups and downs around a deep gorge in the river. One uphill was up maybe 5m vertically but was at maybe a 60 degree slope that I was practically on all fours struggling to keep the canoe on. The put in at the end was also a very steep approach to the water. All in all it was a rugged portage but was more enjoyable than the three portages north of Cliff Lake.

The paddle down Bad Medicine Lake was very reminiscent of the Barron Canyon in Algonquin Park with high rock walls and lots of rock piles at the bottoms. The 250m portage out of the lake was nice and easy with the odd blowdown and a noticeable amount of maples on it. The river before Ratte Lake was very shallow and had a lot of blown out beaver dams on it.

The paddle south down Ratte Lake was slow going as a strong wind had picked up. As the lake narrowed into the river again, I had to fend off two gulls that kept bluff dive bombing me. They must have had a nest nearby. The series of small lakes were nice but uneventful. I skipped the 89m portage by running the start and end of the small rapids and lining the chute in the middle.

I checked out the downed plane on Wash Lake before the last 144m portage into Derragh Lake, followed by a couple easy swifts. I found a campsite amongst some cedars on the west side of the lake. I set up the bug shelter to sleep in and did some laundry before making dinner and doing some reading and journaling before bed.

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Day 14

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Derrough Lake to northern extent of biggest meander (Pikitigushi River)

38.5km - 11:30 hours travel time (includes 60mins of portage maintenance around logjams)

Portages: 1445m, 450m, 55m (logjam2), 70m+90m (logjam3), LO (logjam)

Weather: Overcast, cool, calm to warm & sunny, evening drizzle

Animals of note: loons, ducks, bonaparte's gulls, killdeers, golden eagle, bald eagle x4, beaver x2, kingfishers, bluejays, canada jays, kestrels, toads

I woke up super early to get an early start, knowing there may be afternoon thunderstorms. This was also one of the more unknown sections of the trip with outfitters discouraging me from going this way and only one phenomenal trip report

(<https://albinger.me/2018/11/09/down-the-pikitigushi-river-from-cliff-lake-to-lake-nipigon-days-3-4-5-from-the-bear-camp-to-windigo-bay/>). I knew there were some significant logjams to deal with and wasn't sure what opportunities to camp I would encounter as well as if I would have issues with low water. It was an overcast morning that looked like it could rain at any time. I ran some unmarked swifts where the lake narrowed just before the 1445m portage to Pikitigushi Lake. This would be the longest portage of the trip and only one of two longer than a kilometer, something that felt strange when I am used to considering a 3km Algonquin portage as long.

This portage was in rough shape with three distinct sections: the overgrown start with low bushes thrashing my legs, the middle that was thick with alders, often unable to see my feet, and the last portion of mud, creeks, and streams with thick mud, sections where a muddy stream was the trail, and some actual creek crossings. It took 1.5 hours to do my two carries which wasn't a bad pace.

The lake was surrounded by steep hills and was shrouded in fog as I paddled across and as it narrowed into the river again I saw a golden eagle on a beach that went into a dead tree that I managed to get quite close to and recorded its call and it taking flight

I was soon at the 450m portage through the "bear hunt camp." It was empty of the canvas prospector tents I had seen in trip reports and videos (likely due to the border closure). The trail was a gravel driveway and parking lot to the logging road, where I detoured to the bridge to see the rapids. As I made my back up the road to find the trail back into the bush, I mistook an opening and game trail for the portage and struggled through the bush when it faded out, until I found the proper trail. On my way back the opening was super obvious in hindsight and directly across from the bear camp driveway. I marked it with some flagging tape to make it even more unmissable.

Soon after the bridge the river geology changed significantly to sand and gravel from exposed rock of the Canadian shield. It reminded me of the Big East River through Arrowhead Provincial Park with massive eroded sandbanks. I speculated that this might be the shoreline of glacial Lake Nipigon similar to the glacial Lake Iroquois (Lake Ontario) shoreline of sand north of the GTA that runs through one of my project sites at work. The coming massive logjams also made a lot more sense in this context. Before the trip I had wondered if they might have been leftovers from the logging river drives of the past, but with the easily erodible sandbanks, you could see all the trees in various states of being undermined and falling into the river.

I was soon at the first known logjam (N50.388383, W88.616083). The previous trip report info was still valid and it was an easy paddle through openings on river right.

About 50 minutes and 4.3km later I was at the second known logjam (N50.376870, W88.593450). The trail on river right that had been indicated in the previous trip report gps tracks seemed to have been more eroded away as it where it led bank down to the river was about a 3m steep drop that was too steep and sandy to get up or down, so I back tracked and went through a thinnish stand of mostly dead small spruce to a more gradual slope back down to the water. I had taken my pack across the first carry to make it easier to scout and find the best way through, however even with just my pack there were some spots between trees that I could barely squeeze through, and definitely wouldn't be able to with a canoe. I ended up cutting down about a dozen trees, most of them dead, to be able to get through and re-flagged the route. I hoped this path, being a bit further back into the forest, would remain protected from erosion for a longer time to keep this canoe route viable. Pictures below viewed from downstream to upstream along the portage.

It took about 20 minutes to complete the ~55m portage with the maintenance, and 7km and 1.5 hours later was the third and most substantial of the known logjams (N50.393210, W88.562720).

This logjam entails about a 70m portage along the edge of river right that was still passable but eroding away into the river at points with several large blowdowns that were easily passable. This portion ends at a steep put in, to an opening in the midst of the log jam. Pictures below viewed in the upriver direction along the portage.

The remainder of the portage is ~90m over the log jam itself. This is one of the more risky and dangerous things on a portage as the risk of injury is high. Logs that look locked in place can suddenly shift, logs that look stable can be waterlogged and sink when any weight is applied, logs can be rotten and break, and slips and falls can easily occur causing leg injuries such as sprains, trapping a leg in between logs, and stab wounds from broken off branches on the logs. This is all amplified with the weight of gear and the decrease in balance the weight creates as well. A fall could also damage gear or the canoe itself. To minimize these risks I first crossed the logjam with no gear to scout a route across that I was comfortable with and that seemed stable to take with gear. I then did 3 more trips across in ascending order of gear weight: food barrel, gear pack, then canoe. The wet footprints on the logs made it easy to keep to the same route, but made it slightly more slippery with each traverse. Fortunately the logs were generally large and mostly locked firmly in place but logjams are dynamic features and continually shift. I managed to get all my gear across safely without any falls and was by the logjam in about 40 minutes. I found one large log that had clearly been felled by axe, so maybe the river was used for log driving.

I was by the logjam after 40 minutes at around 5:30pm. My optimistic goal for the day had been to get by all the logjams but with about 17km to the next logjam, that didn't seem likely. At this point I was just going to paddle until I either felt like stopping or came across a really nice place to camp. It was clear by this point that there were endless raised sand and gravel bars to camp at on the inside bends of the river, so I wasn't concerned about the ease of finding a suitable place to camp. I came across one more obstacle (N50.40053, W88.54536) on my paddle, a two foot diameter tree that had fallen across the entire river at about the water line. I ended up dragging the foot across beaver dam style and almost fell in, in the process. It seemed like a prime spot to eventually form into a full on logjam as more logs get hung up on it. By 7pm I found a nice spot on a sand/gravel bar that was about 2 feet above the waterline. With some creative tarpology including some beaver chewed sticks and the canoe for stakes, I set up the bug shelter to sleep in for the night again.

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Day 15

Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration (include highlights, hazards and gems):

Northern extent of biggest meander to Railway to waterfall upstream of railway (Pikitigushi River)

28.4km - 9:00 hours travel time (includes 60mins of portage maintenance around logjams)

Portages: 60m (logjam 4), 300m

Weather: Overcast, cool, calm to warm & sunny, evening drizzle

Animals of note: Brook Trout, Spruce Grouse, Ruffed Grouse x2, white-winged crossbill x2, bald eagle x5, golden eagle, beaver x2, otter, canada jays, blue jays, boreal chickadees, kingfishers, pelican x~30, common goldeneyes, ducks, killdeers, pelican skeleton

I again woke up early with the hope of potentially reaching Lake Nipigon to camp on as I was a day ahead of schedule, assuming the weather would be cooperative. I was on the water by 8am and the paddle was much of the same, fun meanders carved into high sand banks. It was an amazing day for wildlife sightings as well.

Around 10am I saw some brook trout jumping and figured I'd try my luck. I hadn't caught any fish in the river since Cliff Lake, but caught one on my second cast, and didn't have any more bites after that. 15 minutes later I was at the fourth logjam where I cleaned it and kept it for dinner.

I had thought the third logjam would be the worst but it turned out the fourth was (N50.37973, W88.53411). The portage again was on river right on the eroded bank side that was just hanging on. It looked to be further eroded than the 2018 trip report but looked more cleared out of deadfall and live growth. There were a handful of trees across the path that I managed to either crawl under or over with a pack on but I figured it would be easier to clear some of them out to make it more passable for the canoe. This path on the bank will likely erode away soon and will require a new path to be cut further back in the forest to remain passable or be portaged over the logjam itself. It took about an hour to get past the logjam including the time spent clearing it.

I was relieved to be clear of the logjams and the biggest uncertainty of the trip. I had one final portage around a waterfall about 5km north of the railway. On the way I came within 5m of a bald eagle on a beach as I rounded a tight bend in the river, scaring the hell out of both of us as it immediately took flight. I also saw an otter just before the waterfall.

I didn't take any pictures on the portage around the falls but it was an easy to follow trail but had some sizable blowdowns that I had to route around that I marked with flagging tape, running out coincidentally just before the end. The end of the portage came out of the dense bush onto a braided area of sand and rocky low flow channels. I surprised dozens of pelicans that were hanging out on rocks below the falls and in the pools in and below the falls.

I made it to the railway by 3:15pm and scouted out the way up to catch the train in two days. I was hoping to carry on to Lake Nipigon and spend my last two nights out there, but I had done limited advance planning of the area and only had a bit of topo mapping and my gps mapping. The wind was also picking up and a storm was moving in with thunder in the distance. I decided it was probably for the best as I didn't want to miss the once a week train due to weather. I backtracked upriver to camp my last two nights below the falls and have an easy off day before the long train home.

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Day 16

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Pikitigushi River - Waterfalls north of railway

0km - Rest Day

Portages: N/A

Weather: Rain all morning, cool, calm to Sun, warm, breezy

Animals of note: Countless pelicans, hawk, bald eagle

I woke up at 7am and unfortunately the overnight rain continued. I was hoping to enjoy my off day not in my shelter but I was glad not to be on Nipigon for the storm. I had a couple coffees, eggs, and bacon for breakfast and read until the rain stopped and the sun came out around noon. I first did laundry with biodegradable soap back in the woods for the clothes I was going to wear on the train, and then had a sponge bath myself. Thought that make my trainmates ride more enjoyable. After that I did some fishing and swimming in and around the falls but had no luck. I spooky some more pelicans out of the falls and found another skeleton before wading downriver for some more fishing but again no luck.

I made the last of my bannock for lunch and then played in the low flow channels making some rock dams and connecting separated channels. I took down my tent that had dried out so it would be dried out for the train home and organized my gear as well to make packing up in the morning easier and tucked in early for the night.

Please include the following information in journal entries:

- Evidence of recent human activity
- Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention
- Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention
- Location(s) of cached boats
- Number and location of campsites
- Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest
- Locations & details of wildlife sightings
- Locations & details of human encounters
- Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps*
- Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps*

Day 17/18

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

Pikitigushi River - Waterfalls to Mud River Station

5.6km - 1:20 travel time

Portages: N/A

Weather: Sunny, warm, strong west gusts

Animals of note: Pelicans, killdeers, kingfishers, black bear, pike, snake

I woke up before my 6am alarm, a bit overanxious to make it to the train at 11:30am. I finished breakfast and had 2 extra meals leftover, hopefully not needing them unless another serious train delay happened. I packed up as the overnight rain finally ended and was on the water at 8:20am. I paddled lazily and quietly downriver hoping for some final big animal sightings and was rewarded with the second black bear of the trip. I drifted slowly by him without him ever noticing.

I soon made it to the tracks and after two trips up the steepest slippery clay hill of the trip, through a property with three cabins, I was at the side of the tracks at 9:40am. It was sunny and super gusty so I hung up the bug shelter to dry at the edge of the trees at the side of the track. As I finished up a CN pickup passed by, waved as it passed, then stopped on the bridge and backed up to me. He ended up just asking if I was lost or fishing. I told him I was just finishing up a canoe trip and waiting for the train. He said the fishing here was good and he would often stop here to fish, which surprised me given my luck on the river the past several days. I figured with at least a couple hours until the train showed up, I would go down and fish a bit, but only ended up catching one tiny pike. The train only ended up being an hour late arriving at 12:30pm and I loaded up and was on my way back to Sudbury.

The train ride back was uneventful and actually made up so much time it stopped in Capreol one stop north of Sudbury for an hour. I arrived in Sudbury at 5:15am and my friend soon after drove my car out to me and I was on my way home.