

MISTASSINI TO EASTMAIN POST -- ANDY SMYTH -- 1972

Additions to KKK trip reports (1967-1970) and my previous notes (1969)

North Bay

We camped for four days while we did the outfitting and other pre-trip details. It's probably the best place in North Bay -- about five miles from town (up the Airport Road) and cost us only \$2.50 per day for the whole group. We did almost all our outfitting at the Loblaws across from Regina Street near Northwest Canvas. They were very helpful, even to calling competitors to find items they could not supply. Canoes were shipped by Chestnut direct to Chibougamau. Food and supplies were shipped to Chibougamau by Central Truck (located on the Airport Road). They have runs to Chibougamau on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It takes two days for supplies to get there. Cost was \$4.28/100 lbs. It is possible to go from North Bay to Chibougamau by bus in one day, but we drove to Val d'Or and took the bus from there.

Chibougamau

We arrived about 10:00 PM and found no hotel accommodations available. We ended up sleeping on the floor in the Indian Welcome Center for \$2.00 per person. The people (all Indians) and the place were both very nice. All eight of us, our supplies, and our four canoes were taken in one load to Mistassini by Leo Chabot in an enclosed 16 ft. truck for \$55. The ride was a little rough and very dusty, but a good arrangement. Leo can be found at the Union Taxi Stand on Maine Street. Since Leo is so well known, they did not check us for a Mistassini Reserve permit (which we did not have) at the barrier. We did have a supposedly necessary permit to travel north of the 52nd parallel obtained from the Deputy Minister's Office; Department of Tourism, Fish, and Game, Hotel du Gouvernement; Quebec.

Rupert Bay

There is a nice campsite in a cove about two miles before the portage. It has flat tent sites in sandy pine and good swimming. It is located on the west shore just at the junction of the two maps (73*49' 51*00').

Rupert Split

The campsite here is not as nice as it used to be, since most of the trees have blown down. Still OK though.

Rapids at turn before Bellenger

The only good campsite we came across in this area was an old Indian fishing camp on the north shore about a mile from the portage. Much better than what we used before the end of the portage.

Four miles above La Bardeliere

We camped at the Indian site again and looked for alternate trails again. ... with no more luck than before. The views from the second hill back is really great if you want to struggle over to it. You can see almost to La Bardeliere. Your portage trails here are now well used. We shot the first rapid, portaged the second, and let down and shot the third, avoiding the 500 yard portage. Possible only in low water, but if you can make it to the turn around the point, you can shoot the second half easily.

Lac Mesgouez

Possible campsite on rabbit ear point just below 'M' of Mesgouez. Parts of Mesgouez very shallow in low water. We had to hunt for passage at two of the narrows and at a chain of four good-sized islands, even though there looks to be plenty of water. Below fly-in fisherman's camp on island -- rapid on right side cannot be run tight left in low water, but it can be run starting in center and near right.

Start of Misticawassi

Best campsites: one on left shore in flat pines just after turn off Rupert. Second on left about two miles beyond shortly after branch to left.

Second day on Misticawassi

The first of the portages going around three miles of rapids is practically obscured due to the burn and the new growth. We could follow only the first 150 yards and then had to scout out a route to the end. We made a few rock markers to indicate the way and put a few blazes on grey trees, but if you take it check it out first or you are bound to get lost. The second portage is hard to spot now also, but as you look across the pond is to the right rather than directly across. The trail here is also fading out, but more obvious than the one before. We camped several rapids (about 2 miles) beyond on a flat area on the right. A good place with excellent trout fishing.

Third day on Misticawassi

Flat Indian campsite two miles from end of z-shaped water on north shore across from club shaped peninsula looked quite nice. Excellent trout fishing from left shore at rapid (falls) marked on map. (Ten chain portage on right) We took a three-pounder here and many others. We camped at start of 400 yard carry two portages beyond. Not much wood close by, but otherwise OK.

Misticawassi Lake to water that resembles Norwegian Fjord

Steep ravine on 75 yard portage as indicated, but at least several canoes can put in here rather than continuing another 30 yards. Next portage: instead of turning south and portaging into triangular pond and then out again, it is easier to turn north and follow wider water all the way to creek entrance at far end. Portage takes out of end of shallow bay on right and heads about due east up hill and down other side over burn on trail of your own making. Relatively easy, and better than unloading twice which you do going the other way. 75 yard portage over island between two small falls has very bad unloading and bad rocky footing at start. It leads directly into "Norwegian Fjord". All the decent campsites in this area are located about three miles beyond the portage at or beyond a very marked narrows. The first (and probably the best) is at the narrows on the right and is in a flat stand of jack pine. We camped there this time. Last time we camped on top of a small cliff half a mile beyond on the right. It is somewhat difficult to get your loads up, but we did it for the fun of it. This site is also OK. The third site is just beyond this on the left at the start of a small bay. It looked good from the water, but we did not check it out. There is practically nothing decent in any other part of this five mile stretch.

"Norwegian Fjord" to Neoskweskau

First portage out of pond is only about 35 yards on the left. Then go right over beaver dam and follow water to northern end. Portage here goes up hill to the left a bit (we put in several blazes) and then down across level area; from here aiming point is left side of small stand of jackpine on next hill and then down to water. This bypasses first small pond and puts into second. Portage is about 300 yards, and except for first part is across burn with no trail. It's easy to get tangled if you don't look ahead. The next 200 yard portage leading to circular pond is pretty well obscured, so check it out before taking it. The last portage in this set goes up hill from the sand landing on the circular pond, then down and a bit to the right before entering trees to approach creek. This avoids deadfalls in creek which you would hit if you went straight to the water. Total length is about 110 yards. Creek was very shallow but full of trout which would run ahead of you as you stirred them up. There were about 30 sitting in one tiny spring hole on the left just several hundred yards from where we put the canoes in. The creek was clear to the delta where it enters Tide Lake (Lac de la Marée), but from there we were plagued by continuous muddy water or rocky shallows, even though the map and the eye said there was plenty of water. (We had very low water conditions at this point.) We looked for a campsite beyond Neoskweskau, but found nothing decent until we reached the portage. There is room for only several tents at the beginning, but we were all able to find sites at the end. They were not the best, but better than anything we had seen to this point.

Rapids before Nasacauso

Both are quite easy. First located just beyond Point au Boleau goes with good current for 0.50 to 0.75 of a mile. Second is located just before eastern end of large island.

Reoutfitting Island to Prosper Gorge

First swift about two miles from campsite, just after creek enters on right. Falls needing 200 yard portage on right follows quickly. We had to carry an extra 35 yards on shore to get enough water for the canoes. Rapid below was run on left. At narrows below this water was running very fast with at times very bad whirlpools on right and some on left also. We all had smooth runs, but very careful attention to changing conditions was needed. There were times when you could not get through. In the rapid in the islands at the end of the big island we took the back channel (right shore) all the way through, and encountered no trouble, even in low water.

Route through Prosper Gorge

Leaving the falls we crossed over as soon as possible to left shore and then landed the canoes and walked back up to the falls. The main volume of water and most spectacular view of the falls are on this side. We shot the rapid 0.50 mile below on the left after scouting and then pulled in to the bay on the left. We then crossed over to the right shore. The current here was very swift, and we had to get across very quickly to keep from being swept too far down. Another time it would probably be better to shoot the rapid and cross over without stopping, as you would not then have to work out from the left shore. The next rapid commences almost immediately. We went slowly down the right shore for a ways and then elected to let down a portion near shore rather than risking a fast, rocky shoot with several turns farther out from shore. High water might make it easier to shoot, but it would probably also increase the current cross over. Portage around second falls is as described, but nearer 500 yards. We took it in the heat and black flies, which made it miserable.

At rapids 0.50 mile below we portaged left shore on rock about 100 yards, but we had to scramble up and down a rock ledge which was difficult with a load. The route on the right across the peninsula while longer is probably easier. We ran the rest of the rapids (mostly just fast current) with no difficulty. We missed the end of the Prosper portage and ended up camping on the right about a mile below the double islands shown on the map. Not good at all, but better than anything else we had been able to find (or saw close by the next morning.)

Portage before Village Lakes to Lichteneger

Excellent trout fishing at top of first (250 yard) and second (600 yard) portages. In an hour or so we landed 18 trout and had strikes on almost every cast. There is now an abandoned survey camp of A.B.B.D.&L. (Montreal engineering consultants) on point on left shore about two miles

from start of lake. Six large tents, still up, with one full of equipment, and spoiling cans cans of food scattered all over the ground outside. Portage into Lichteneger started out OK, but deadfalls became more frequent as it got going up hill. The last 150 yards was a criss-crossed maze of blowdowns which reached its worst on the hill going down. The worst are chopped out now, but the trail is still not completely clear. Dunmore Keewaydin took the first two portages into Village Lakes, but they did not take this one. They must have another route or portage here. There are no good campsites in the first [part of Lichteneger. We were looking. We finally found a decent place on the left about a mile after the turn to the north is made. It is on the end of a sharp point just beyond a long narrow hooked bay. There was a cooking area by the water and tent sites on a slightly sloping moss area covered rocky area back in. Not great, but much better than anything else we saw in the area.

Half-mile portage on Clearwater

Take bay to the right about 400 yards above the chutes, as in report. In low water there is no water going through to next pond. We had to lift over and then wade and walk shore for 20 yards to get enough water for the canoes. Old sled still at start of trail in 1972. Trail goes well for a short way, but then a newly blazed trail (Matthew's work) goes off to the right of the old trail on higher ground and eventually circles back to the left to meet the old trail shortly before the hill starts down. This new trail avoids a completely impassable blowdown which covers the old trail. If you start down a ravine and begin to run into trees across the trail, you have missed the cut-off. It starts about 50-100 yards before. Trout fishing along these chutes was the best of the trip. The best places are reached by crossing to the other side from the campsite and then working your way back upstream 0.25 mile or more, fishing all the way. We took 23 trout, many running 1.502.5 pounds and two three pounders.

Remainder of Clearwater

Two rapids below -- diagonal runs through island -- in low water the right hand (main) channel was a six foot falls, with no possibility of running, and other channels were too shallow. We portaged about 15 yards across the island just a bit before this main channel. In low water we carried the first drop and the beginning of the second in one carry, putting in just after sharp drop. Total distance might be 200 yards. Several canoes missed my turnoff and went the whole 700 yards. From where I put in there is about a 0.25 mile canyon-like section. The first 250 yards is easy, with one horse-race. Then the current speeds up and runs into a sharp narrow drop-off of about four feet with several big waves and several more maneuvers below ending with a 90 degree sweep to the left and calm water. It is probably best to stop and scout where the water starts speeding up toward the drop-off. A decision has to be made whether to approach from the right or left. If you don't like the looks of it, you can cut back to the portage on the left. At falls below this we again found excellent trout fishing -- both below the falls and in pool above last drop. From here to end of portage around S-shaped water was as in previous write-ups. Long rapid below -- low water conditions -- top section shot rather easily on left; middle section shot on left just far enough out to round several rocks and points after scouting; rest was shot in center, crossing over to very close to right shore for final exit (only possible exit in low water --

rest is shallow gravel bar.) Then rapids are as in previous reports to Great Bend, except in low water Clearwater River channel must be followed a good way through twists, turns, and small rapids into what would normally be deeper water and a straight paddle.

Portage around falls below 4-part rapid

The shorter trail (left fork) was taken even in very low water because it was clear, while right fork was impossibly covered with deadfalls which get worse the farther you go. We had to lift down and lift over the ledges, which was difficult and time consuming, but still better than cutting out the portage. We were able to shoot the very bottom easily enough.

Akoutgo Rapid

Portage had numerous deadfalls as did campsite at end. Now most are cleared.

Conglomerate Portage

Burn starts at campsite at top of hill and extends at least half way across. Trail to second Indian campsite at stream still good, although it will probably get worse as more dead trees begin to fall. Campsite at start still quite good, though burn obviously detracts. Campsite at Indian site 2/3 way across still very nice. Dunmore boys dammed the stream and built a bridge. Beyond this campsite there are numerous blowdowns. Matthew cleared the worst, John and I cleared many more, and there are still some left. The short trail to the water is reasonably clear, but the long one to the end is in very bad shape. The first part (which is all I looked at) is overgrown and thick with deadfalls. In the rapid below we were able to shoot the whole thing on the right with little trouble. (We had had enough rain by this time to raise the level of the river.) A hydro crew was in this area cutting trees. It looked like they were trying to make a ski slope of a high rocky hill on the left. It would be a good guess to say they were responsible for the burn.

Clouston Portage

Another burn starts just as trees are entered after first black bog and extends almost all the way to Island Falls on the left shore. Trail is OK, though desolate most of the way. Your bag still marks the entrance. Again trees will fall eventually and make it hard. Burn ends temporarily about 0.75 mile from end, but then at start of downhill stretch the hydro has dropped trees all over the place a helicopter landing site. We cleared the worst of these. Then as you near the water, a cut line has dropped trees all over the real trail, making it easier to follow the line to the water than to recover the old trail. It is OK except for the bank running to the water which is very steep. (Additional note) There are two large Hydro camps above Clouston Gorge, both on the right side of the river. The first is about four miles above the gorge and the second just above the rapid

before the gorge. Both contain about ten large tents. The closest one to the gorge has been occupied more recently.

1.5 mile portage below Island Falls

The portage is pretty clear most of the way except for the downhill stretch which was thick with deadfalls. Many, but not all, are now cleared.

Basil Gorge

Trail is pretty good except for a stretch of blowdowns about $2/3$ way across. Matthew has cut a way through, but there are still obstructions.