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nastawgan

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Arctic Bearberry seemed to be the dominant plant on top of cobble esker, and in the fall it turns vivid red. This photo was taken near Starvation Lake.

Hiking the World's Longest Esker

Story and photo by Dwayne Wohlgemuth

The barrens are known for horrible black flies. Unfortunately for me, 2019 was a cold summer and a sparse bug year on the tundra and this memory was too fresh in my mind while planning for my 2020 solo hike of the Thelon Esker. Somehow I thought I could survive with just a head net. This means I sit in my tent for most of the first two afternoons sewing my light hot weather shirt into a proper bug shirt. I also realize with dismay that it has ventilation holes on the back where the black flies can crawl in. I sew every hole shut, sew my head net permanently around the base of the neck, and sew the elastic that I removed from the head net around the cuffs of the shirt. Luckily I brought a huge roll of thread.

The Thelon Esker stretches about 800 kilometres, mostly across tundra, from near Dubawnt Lake in the east to the Acasta River in the west. It is entirely within the Northwest Territories. I learned about it from reading a blog published by Dave Olesen, a bush pilot who lives on McLeod Bay of Great Slave Lake. Even most people living in the Northwest Territories don't know that the

Camping on the esker a day's hike east of Sifton Lake. I often pushed further to make one more water crossing at the end of the day and then I'd camp and let the boat dry.

world's longest esker is in their Territory. After reading Dave's blog about flying researchers along the esker, I knew I had to hike the entire length. Perhaps hiking the esker would make Canadians more aware of this geological gem. I immediately sought official approval from my spouse Leanne – she would have to be a solo parent while I was gone – and began formulating a plan.

A breakfast of mostly cloudberries with a little bit of granola.

The esker's eastern end is about 20 kilometres west of the Northwest Territories/Nunavut border just west of Dubawnt Lake. The esker runs in the northwest direction across the Thelon River, the Radford River, the Hanbury River, Clinton-Colden Lake, and the Back and Icy Rivers. North of Seal Lake, the esker turns and runs in a more west-northwest direction. It crosses Hardy Lake, Ursula Lake, Exeter Lake, Yamba Lake, Eda Lake, and crosses the Coppermine River at the north end of Lake Providence. It continues westward, crosses the Starvation River, passes north of Starvation Lake, and crosses Whitewolf Lake, the Winter River, Rawalpindi Lake, the Emile River, and finally Irritation Lake before ending near the Acasta River. Certainly some of the canoeists reading this

have passed by this esker on a NWT canoe trip!

I fly to my starting point – a little over 600 kilometres from Yellowknife – on the 26th of July. The closest community, Baker Lake, lies 350 kilometres to the northeast. A circle centred on my position, with a diameter of 900 kilometres, encompasses only two communities with a total population of fewer than 2,500 people. I feel pretty tiny and alone as the plane disappears, but I am still elated. I take a quick waypoint of my starting point, shoulder my pack, and begin walking.

I drop into an unexpected heat wave. A little thermometer dangling from my pack records a few days over 30C. The heat and bugs could have made me call Dave back on a rescue mission, but my newly sewn bug jacket combined with socks over my hands allow me to enjoy the esker while thousands of black flies crawl multiple layers deep over my clothing. The odd windy hour allows me to relax on top of a tall esker peak or dive into a crystal clear esker pond. I lose much of my appetite in the heat and bugs and refrain from cooking. I subsist on granola, snacks, and large doses of blueberries and cloudberries all eaten within the confines of my tent. I am thankful for my food planning that included only one cooked meal per day. Hiking in the crazy heat and burning sun of the afternoons would be the perfect recipe for heat stroke, so I hike early and late in the day. Without an alarm, I simply rise when I first awake. I have poles in hand, hiking as early as 3:15 a.m., and rarely later than 5:30 a.m. Most of the days' kilometres are finished before 10:30 a.m. when I pitch my tent for a 4-to-6 hour afternoon rest and a break from the bugs. After a few days I realize that I need to consume more salt. I put a generous serving on my granola and berry breakfast and on my supper of peanut butter and berries. My taste buds go wild, confirming my salt shortage.

The esker is my river, a relatively easy path across otherwise boggy tundra or sharp jumbled boulders. I balance on the narrow peak of a cobble esker that drops 55 metres down at 45-degree angles on both sides. In some places there are two or three separate ridges that weave across each other like a poorly braided ponytail.

The gaps in the esker are the portages where progress is slower and more arduous. An eroded gap – a stream crossing – requires a steep climb down, a change to sandals, and a fight through 3-metre-tall willow and dwarf birch growing intertwined through each other like cobwebs. A platoon of hungry black flies crawls up my sockless legs.

Esker complexes – those wide expanses of glacial deposits with various features – dazzle my eyes and urge me to rest and scan and capture a few photos. These complexes contain multiple ridges, expanses of sand, elevated ponds trapped by ice cores within the esker, a tree or a dozen along a sheltered pond, and surprisingly sudden transitions from cobbles

Some of the steepest and most impressive cobble eskers were west of Seal Lake.

My little red packboat took about 50 deep breaths to fill, and I completed 54 crossings with it during the hike.

to sand. A field of undulating sand, perhaps a hundred acres in size, is dotted with boulders, the odd stunted spruce, and a lone muskox. The muskox rises and walks beside me, 75 metres away. For a few minutes I'm not alone.

I arrive at the Thelon River late on a hot windy day after numerous swims. I scan the river and imagine seeing a group of canoes floating downstream, but this year's travel restrictions due to Covid-19 have left the tundra hauntingly empty of human travellers. The wind-blown

I encountered dozens of shed caribou antlers and antlers with skulls attached. Sometimes a dozen in a day. Unfortunately, there aren't many caribou left and I saw only six live animals during the entire 41 days.

A bridge esker, with water on both sides, led me out toward a crossing of an unnamed lake perhaps 30 km west of Dubawnt Lake.

whitecaps prevent me from crossing, so I swim again and then pitch the tent. The next morning is calm and the Thelon is behind me before 6 a.m. I take five swimming breaks today before crossing and camping beside the Radford River. I wish I could drop a canoe in the water and float downstream to Baker Lake instead of continuing on my always-weary legs. But I persevere and continue northwest, reaching the Hanbury River in another day.

One of my toes begins to swell and turn pink, and I assume it's a mild infection from a blister. I consider the general antibiotic I brought, but I refuse to use it so early in the trip. Instead I heat water to as hot as I can tolerate, and soak the toes on that foot for 10 minutes. I continue the ritual every evening for the better part of a week until the swelling and colour have visibly diminished.

On August 7th I arrive at Sifton Lake where I stashed my first food drop during the flight out. I am excited for more food but worried that the increase in weight – a 20-day resupply – will slow my pace. My meagre appetite and no-cook policy have resulted in plenty of leftover food, so my pack is even heavier than planned and likely exceeds 70 lbs. But the heat wave is mostly over and my appetite is returning, so I'm excited for the larger ration. The black fly population is noticeably shrinking, so I decide to start cooking suppers on my twig stove that I made from a metal coffee can. The esker's abundant bolete mushrooms now enter my rations, and I often fry and eat three full pans of mushrooms in advance of my normal supper.

After two weeks I have yet to use my rain jacket or to see a grizzly. A brown shape appears in the afternoon, hunched over a berry bush and facing away. I sneak quietly to the far edge of the esker and manage to pass around undetected. Two kilometres later I spot another grizzly bounding towards me along the esker ridge. I

I climbed almost all the high esker peaks, and my GPS told me later that I averaged over 720 metres of elevation gain and descent per day. This particular peak is about a day's hike east of the Thelon River.

The Acasta River where I ended my hike. I felt uneasy entering the forest at the end of my hike due to limited visibility, more difficult navigation, and no distant landmarks that were continuously visible. This is where Herb Pohl departed the Acasta River and turned east to follow a route along the esker.

stop and immediately launch loudly into the song I've learned, by a friend and fellow Yellowknifer Ryan McCord. The bear disappears into a hollow. I keep singing and scan all directions, watching for the bear. I figure it'll be less than 30 metres away when it rises out of the hollow. My bear spray is in hand with the safety off. But after a verse and a chorus I spot the bear running away from me to the north, chased by two cubs. I relax a little, but I stand lead-footed and singing until the bear is a half-kilometre away.

West of Sifton Lake, smoothly undulating glacial till gives way to a land of bedrock, deep lakes, and sharp rocks. A few shallower lakes are riveted with dagger rocks. Clinton-Colden Lake absorbs the esker, forcing me around the lake and across numerous bays. Bedrock and bog slow my pace and I dream of again finding the esker. The wind is kind though, usually blowing from the east or northeast and taking mercy on me and my 710-gram inflatable packboat. I occasionally reduce the distance around the lake by making longer water crossings. I planned for a maximum 500-metre crossings, but complete some as long as 1.75 kilometres to reduce the distance I have to hike off-esker.

Before this trip, I'd never been by myself for more than 5 days. I send daily InReach messages to my Garmin Map Share page for friends and family to read, and sometimes I feel as though I'm cheating and not really on a solo trip when I can text family and friends every evening. I stay positive, and though I miss my family, I wouldn't say I feel lonely. I take great pleasure in being able to follow my own body rhythms of sleep, hunger, and energy levels.

Cool, windy, and misty weather arrives on August 13th. I hike for the first time without my bug shirt and with full rain gear. I write an expression in my journal that I begin to use on these occasional days: there will be better days for making extra kilometres! I am a few days ahead of schedule which allows me to relax more when the weather is less friendly.

On this rocky land, sparse esker

beads dot the tundra with long gaps in between. As I reach my first crossing of the Back River, the esker finally reappears in force with sky-piercing ridges and well-beaten caribou trails. The Back River is tiny here and the rapids are shallow boulder fields. I cross the Back a second time, and then the Icy River, a tributary of the Back. These latter two crossings are slippery affairs over rocks a metre in diameter with holes large enough to swallow and break a leg.

As I approach Seal Lake the esker is tall, flat-topped, sandy, and provides easy travelling. I spot four wolves here: 1 lone adult and a couple kilometres away another 2 adults and a pup at a den halfway up the slope of the esker. Wolves on the NWT tundra are sparse now with the precipitous decline in caribou. The Government of the Northwest Territories is spending more than a half-million dollars a year to fly around by helicopter and kill the few caribou that are left.

Later in the same day, a grizzly spots me and slowly circles downwind. When it is approximately downwind, it turns in a flash and is gone. I hike for more than 10 kilometres off-esker around Seal Lake to reach a reasonable crossing of the lake. On the lake's west side, the esker is reborn with a vengeance, rising high in multiple stony ridges providing views of sandy esker fans and ponds. A lone bull caribou watches me from below. To the caribou I appear as a dark shape on the top of the ridge, silhouetted against a bright blue sky. Certainly every critter within a few kilometres must see me.

North of Seal Lake the esker touches Tarpon Lake and then mostly disappears until the west side of Hardy Lake, a distance of more than 30 kilometres. Tiny sections of esker provide 5 minutes here and there of easy walking but mostly I'm walking across humpy-lumpy tundra, bog, and bedrock. A herd of 27 muskox including 7 calves meanders and grazes

The last morning of hiking there was a deep frost but the Arctic Bearberry bushes closest to the big rocks didn't get frost crystals because of the heat given off by the warm rock during the night.

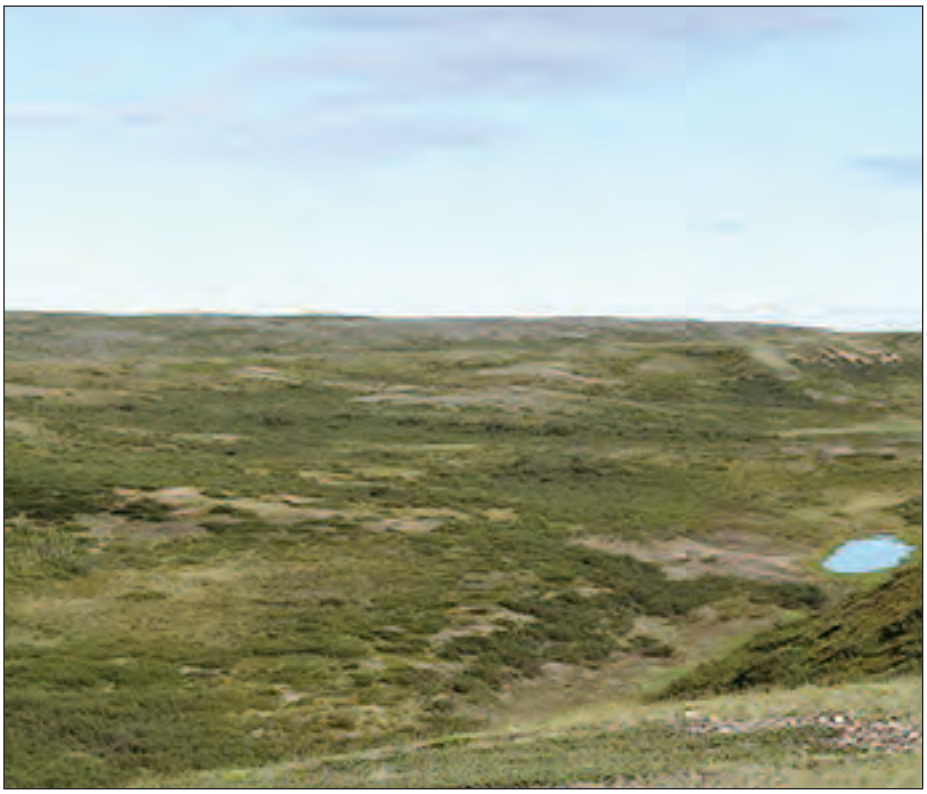
near my campsite one evening. The next evening I camp on the open tundra and pray a storm doesn't come. I am travelling alone with a lightweight hiking pole tent, so I take all reasonable measures to camp in the shelter of the esker where I'll be protected from gale-force winds that arrive from the north or east. The south and west winds seem to be mostly gentle. Luckily, the night is calm.

West of Hardy Lake I enter the

The most remarkable bear scat I've ever seen, on the esker between Lake Providence and Starvation Lake.

The Starvation River at the outflow of Starvation Lake. Starvation Lake is named in commemoration of Sir John Franklin's Coppermine Expedition in 1819-1822.

North Slave Geological Province, an area of rich mineral resources and with an intense history of prospecting and mining. The signs are left on the land: an old, long abandoned winter road; an old tire tube; a few bits of random garbage; and abandoned bundles of prospecting stakes. Even researchers leave stuff on the land. I find perhaps 4 or 5 sites where grizzly bear scratching posts were erected to collect grizzly hair for DNA analysis. The 4x4 inch posts wrapped in barb wire will survive at least a few hundred years lying on top of the dry sandy esker.



Sometimes there was only one ridge, but often there were two and sometimes even three, side by side. This is the same unnamed lake 30 km west of Dubawnt Lake.

I hike north around Ursula Lake, and recognize that the lake has a fitting name. I see 3 more grizzlies in 4 days. I watch one grizzly swim, shake, and dig for ground squirrels. Later it walks closer and spots my tent during my afternoon break. The bear spins on a dime and is gone. The next bear makes me the most nervous. I take out the monocular to check on a suspicious brown rock perhaps 300 metres away on the esker, and sure enough, it's a sleeping grizzly. I weigh my options, and decide to circle downwind off-esker to avoid her. Unfortunately she decides to move and comes down the esker. I don't know if it's a random choice or if the bear heard or saw me. I realize I can no longer hide so I stand still and again begin to sing loudly. The bear disappears behind a rise in the land and I sing an entire song while constantly scanning to see if the bear heads off in another direction. But I don't see it, so I backtrack up the edge of the esker to have a better view. I soon see the bear, laying down in the hollow perhaps 70 metres from where I had been. It looks at me, stands, and begins walking an arc downwind and towards me, slowly climbing up the edge of the esker. Soon the bear is perfectly downwind and about 25 metres away. Nothing I do makes the bear flinch, but when it catches my scent it's like a firecracker exploded in the bear's head. She spins and keeps running for as long as I watch her. Water splashes in all directions as the bear gallops topspeed across a shallow lake studded with sharp boulders. I wince, imagining how much that must hurt the

For some reason, it seems the animals still follow the same path even when there are no obstacles elsewhere. This path is on Whitewolf Lake.

bear's feet.

Canada's first diamond mine, Ekati, is located on my path just west of Ursula Lake. I stop on the haul road, as instructed, to meet a few workers and receive my okay to cross. They gift me a paper bag of fruit and cookies and are happy to chat for a few minutes. They agree to go find a laptop to empty my full GPS, and refuse to take any cash for my request for "…a pound or two of chocolate." I wait in the sunshine for their return. I had dreamt of a hot meal and a shower, but Covid-19 rules eliminate that possibility.

After Ekati I again have a long stretch without much esker. It disappears into Exeter and Yamba Lakes, leaving me to hike around. But my next goal is near: The Tundra Ecosystem Research Station at Daring Lake where I will obtain my last food drop. I arrive at an empty research station, as expected. Most research projects have been cancelled this summer due to Covid. I decide to take an entire day off for the second time in 29 days. This is the only building I will sleep in during the entire hike, and it comes with wi-fi, sirius satellite radio, practically unlimited power thanks to a large solar PV array, and a kitchen. I charge all my devices, organize my food for the last section of my hike, and enjoy a short skype call with Leanne and our two boys.

My pack patiently waited while I took a swimming break in a warm pond on a windy morning east of the Thelon River. Note the big trees in this area.

The author in a typical cloud of black flies. I wore socks over my hands most of the time.

West of Daring Lake the esker is generally low and unimpressive all the way to Lake Providence on the Coppermine River. A large abandoned caribou hunting lodge on the eastern shore of Lake Providence reminds me that I've only seen 6 caribou during this entire trip. There should be thousands of caribou here at this time of year in late August, but there are only caribou trails and the odd antler shed, gnawed on by wolves and rodents. All outfitter hunting of caribou was discontinued in 2010. The caribou populations have continued to be hunted and have continued to decline since that time. It seems they can't breed fast enough to overcome the pressures of winter roads, snowmobiles, gps collars that tell us where they are at any time, and high-powered rifles. Climate change throws in another unquantifiable challenge.

West of Lake Providence I enjoy a continuous and scenic esker. Braided cobble ridges rise high above the Starvation River, which flows along the south side of the esker for a few long stretches and spills out of Starvation Lake in a cascading waterfall on its way to the Coppermine River. Now, in late August, the Arctic Bearberry bushes have turned a deep red and they dominate the tops of the cobble esker ridges in deep contrast with the grey granite rocks.

The first truly cold night arrives and I awake the 29th of August to frost on the inside of the tent. Everything outside is coated in a thick frost and even the ground is crunchy. My water bottle, stored inside the tent, has a layer of ice. But I much prefer the frost to the black flies, and I'm happy to be in the cool fall weather. I am better prepared – mentally and with the right gear – for the cold weather than I was for the heat and the bugs at the trip's beginning.

I stop to inspect another abandoned caribou hunting lodge on the east end of Whitewolf Lake. In one of the two remaining cabins there are a couple cardboard boxes partially filled with freeze-dried Mountain House meals, expired since 2014. I don't think anyone will miss them. There are fifteen bags, 1.8 kg in total. The packages say they're two servings each, but each serving is only 300 calories. I take them all and begin a streak of hot cooked lunches, two bags and 1,200 calories per lunch. Small clumps of trees are reappearing now as I head further west, and I choose lunch spots in

coves in the trees, sheltered from the wind and exposed to the southern sun.

A bridge esker with water on both sides snakes across Whitewolf Lake. The mostly flat-topped sandy esker is perfect grizzly country, but I see none along this lake. As I approach Rawalpindi Lake I follow fresh grizzly tracks for a few hours along sandy esker and my eyes and ears are on high alert. Finally I spot the grizzly, a kilometer away downwind and running. But I still take a short detour south of the esker to increase the distance between myself and the bear.

The continuous and easy stretch of esker that began at Lake Providence ends at Rawalpindi Lake where it disappears under the lake. I hike around to the north, wade across the Parent River, and complete a 750-metre boat crossing with a brisk and cold NE wind. After another 400-metre water crossing and a total of 11 kilometres of off-esker hiking through shrubs and bog, I'm ecstatic to reach the esker again. A stretch of stunning tall cobble esker snakes across the west end of the lake. But then the bedrock rises out of the land and the esker mostly disappears for about 13 kilometres. I take bearings on my compass and choose distant hills as landmarks over the rough country. Eventually I reach the Emile River where an oasis of sandy beaches and scattered trees emerges from the bedrock. A short jaunt further west, I hit a wall of trees and am left floundering without the views that allow for easy navigation on the tundra. In the thick of the trees I come upon a well-used grizzly trail where years of footprints are etched into the lichen like blobs of dark paint on canvas.

Herb Pohl paddled this way in 1994 when he completed a loop from Behchoko. Part of his route roughly followed the Thelon Esker eastward from its intersection with the Acasta River all the way to Whitewolf Lake. His description of this section can be found in the Summer 1995 edition of the *Nastawgan*, available online.

Posts and barbed wire left on the esker by researchers. I guess the funding ran out?

Ice crystals adorn the vegetation on my last morning of hiking. Puddles are covered in a thick layer of ice and the cold increases my pace. The forest is dense and I climb over huge deadfall trees and detour around willows and birch. My hiking poles become nearly useless in the thick brush. The lack of view in the forest makes me uneasy. I pass Irritation Lake and near the Acasta River I find a splendid camping spot on a small lake and pitch the tent. I eat lunch, relax a couple hours, and then grab my pack and inflatable boat to complete the last water crossing and the last two kilometres of hiking to reach the Acasta River. I'm excited to reach the end. My body and feet are tired, and I'm ready to see my family. After 39 days I've hiked about 800 kilometres and completed 54 boat crossings.

Frying puffball mushrooms over my homemade twig stove. I ate a lot of bolete and puffball mushrooms on this hike, often three pans full prior to my regular meal.

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Nastawgan is an Anishinabi word meaning "the way or route"

The WILDERNESS CANOE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit organization made up of individuals interested in wilderness travel, mainly by canoe and kayak, but also including backpacking and winter trips on both skis and snowshoes. The club publishes a quarterly journal, *Nastawgan*, to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas of interest to wilderness travellers, organizes an extensive program of trips for members, runs a few basic workshops, and is involved in environmental issues relevant to wilderness canoeing.

Dear Aleks,
I'm reaching out once again to bring you an exciting and hopeful update about the journey that the museum has been on since we first let you know about the site contamination at the Lift Lock back in May of this year.

Following our announcement back in May, our Pivot Task Force has been hard at work seeking alternate sites and carrying out feasibility assessments of a variety of waterfront locations in the Peterborough area. In partnership with the City of Peterborough, we are pleased to announce to the public that we have identified our preferred site for the new museum project. In the coming weeks the museum will carry out due diligence work on the site to determine its viability as the new home for the museum.

Aleks, we are really excited and hopeful that this site will be viable. The site offers a truly exquisite waterfront location, west-facing onto Little Lake and features a beautiful natural shoreline to support our on-water paddling programing. It is surrounded by a variety of public parks, located along the Trans Canada Trail, and the grounds offer a perfect setting for experiential outdoor learning in an outdoor campus setting.

Not surprisingly, many hours have been invested by a dedicated team to bring us to this point in the search for a new site for our project. Sharing this step on the journey with you brings a great deal of hope to the team at the museum and I hope it does to you as well. It has been a considerable challenge to change course in the midst of a major infrastructure project while also navigating our way through a global pandemic. For a national project like the Canoe Museum, I see this location offering us a perfect combination of features and qualities for delivering on our promise of a vibrant community cultural hub on the Peterborough waterfront.

As soon as the full range of due diligence assessments have been completed and understood, Carolyn Hyslop and I will be sure to come back to you with a more fulsome vision for this project. Your continued support for this endeavor means a great deal to the museum, and to the many others who are also helping us see this come together. I would be delighted to connect by phone or zoom if you have any questions in the days and weeks ahead.

I've attached an image of the waterfront and shoreline at the site (that's Carolyn in the canoe!). We'd love to have reason and opportunity to walk the site with you at some point or even drop a canoe or two in the water there. But that'll have to wait for now…

Best wishes,
Jeremy Ward
Curator
Canadian Canoe Museum

Quarantine Quetico

Story by Lisa Ashton
Photos by Doug and Lisa Ashton

In early 2020, plans were well underway for our bucket list trip to the Nahanni River. The deposit had been made, flights had been booked, new gear was being purchased. And then, Covid-19 struck and life ground to a halt! With travel to Northwest Territories and many other provinces forbidden, we searched for an alternative way to spend our vacation days. One destination that we'd talked about, but never got around to, was Quetico Provincial Park. The two-day drive to get there made it remote enough yet it was still within Ontario, so no travel restrictions would be broken!

Our planning began with contacting our WCA friend, Gary James, who has a wealth of knowledge and a library of articles, books and maps. A park ranger by the name of Lise, at Quetico headquarters, was also an enthusiastic source of invaluable route details.

We departed from Cambridge on August 11th, loaded with our canoe, gear, meals and jerky prepared in our new dehydrator. Our first day's drive took us north to Superior, spending the night in the "big goose" town of Wawa. Day two was somewhat hampered by that annual summer plague of construction but we still made it to the Quetico office in time for our mandatory briefing. The short presentation of instructions for life in the wilderness included tips for what to do in a thunderstorm, encounters with wildlife, and how to poop in the woods. We decided that every wilderness camping area should require this etiquette instruction and then maybe all parks would be as pristine as Quetico! We got our permit and had time left over to shop in the gift store for Quetico t-shirts.

Camp Quetico, a fishing camp just minutes from the park office, made for a perfect pre-trip overnight accommodation with space in our cabin for last-minute food organizing and packing. Their meals were well worth the small amount extra and the staff were very friendly as well as a source of knowledge about the park.

All masked up and no place to go!

Our trip originally was planned as a circle route beginning and ending at Nym Lake, however, we would be hard pressed to get to the renowned Falls Chain area that was capturing our interest. Inadvertently, through researching our accommodations in the Atikokan area, we discovered that Sapawe Airlines flies canoeists into the park. This would allow us to reach the southernmost area of the park and the Falls Chain in our eight-day time frame.

"Put in" day began with beautiful weather. The 1940's DeHavilland Beaver, painted bright yellow, shone in the sunlight but our hopes of a speedy

Travelling for Comfort

Searching for an elusive portage

Evidence of perils along the Falls Chain

Bald Rock Falls

departure were soon dashed by the wind that had picked up, making it too risky to fly. So the flight was postponed to evening but aborted again as the waves were still too rough. We made hasty arrangements with our accommodating hosts at Camp Quetico and spent one more night there.

Third time's a charm! Although the weather reports had suggested that there were thunderstorms scattered throughout the area, we were able to fly. The 20-minute flight was over a very unpopulated area...there was no evidence of anyone....just wilderness! As we approached our destination, we saw a solitary canoe (presumably on the US side of the border), the only one that we would see for days! Our pilot dropped us in Cache Bay at the ranger station dock. When he flew out of sight, we were as alone as we'd ever been on a canoe trip. We had learned that, because of Covid travel restrictions, the numbers of people in the park were severely impacted, as the majority of canoeists are usually American. We gave thought to paddling to the border just to say we'd crossed it but thankfully decided against it, since we later learned that the border is patrolled by drones to ensure national security!

The pictographs in Cache Bay Area were our first stop. These sacred sites are apparently quite numerous in the park. Getting reoriented after visiting the pictographs was a bit challenging; however, with the help of our Garmin InReach we were able to locate our first portage. The unmarked portages in the park proved to be a little elusive so we were thankful that Doug had pre-programmed some waypoints!

Our first night was spent on Saganagons Lake where our new tent was christened by a severely windy thunderstorm. We stayed dry but our tent had a bit of moisture on the floor.

On the morning of day two, we were excited to be heading into the Falls Chain. The second portage was the ominously named "Deadman's Portage". We had read about a treacherous rock face, presumably the reason for the alarming moniker. Arriving at said rock face, I was unperturbed until Doug lost his footing and fell on the rain-soaked, slippery surface. Luckily the pack cushioned his fall. I was not so lucky on the return trip heading

back to collect the second load of gear. In an instant, my feet both went out from under me and I landed on my tailbone and then flat on my back. Thoughts of immobilization, remoteness, trip termination and evacuation flashed rapidly through my brain along with the pain. Once I determined that I could still move, I decided that the best course of action was to get up and continue on before my body had a chance to stiffen up. Needless to say, I was not able to keep up the planned pace of portaging through the multiple waterfalls on the day's route. As luck would have it, there was a beautiful campsite right beside Bald Rock Falls which would have made a picturesque lunch spot but we decided to extend our stay and make it home for the remainder of the day and night. It turned out to be one of the most memorable campsites not only of this trip, but of all our travels. I iced my injury in the soothing, natural whirlpool jets of the falls. We were treated to one of our many spectacular Quetico sunsets as we played cards and sipped our evening beverages, with the falls beside us providing the soundtrack!

The remainder of the Falls Chain proved to be just as breathtaking as anticipated, definitely making it worth the effort to reach the southern area of the park. Our third campsite, on an island in the Southwestern part of Lake Kawnipi, was less memorable. It was, however, a place to call home after an arduous day of portaging and paddling...clean and unspoiled, as are all of the Quetico campsites, with no evidence of recent use.

The next challenge was Lake Kawnipi; a large body of water with sprawling, long-reaching bays. We were travelling in a generally northwest direction and regrettably, the prevailing winds in the area come from the west. Happily, we were able to navigate the great Kawnipi with little difficulty and even had a surprising wildlife sighting of a group of trumpeter swans. Campsite number four had to be the most unique site we've ever come across. It was a small island that Doug had heard about that had a cliff face with a pictograph. Beyond the pictograph, we found a treacherous takeout and climbed up to discover a multilevel site with the "kitchen" and fire pit

Hydro Massage

Pictographs on Island Campsite

The guardian of the campsite

Sunrise on Montgomery Lake

Sunset on Russell Lake

atop the same cliff. As you can imagine, the sunset and sunrise views were spectacular!

The next morning, we headed to the intriguingly named "Have A Smoke" portage. Approaching the landing, we spotted the first other humans that we had seen in five days! Remarkably, it was a couple that we had met at breakfast at Camp Quetico! Day five's route included some scenic waterfalls and portages; Snake Falls, the impressive panoramic Split Rock Falls, and Chatterton Falls which had a couple of campsites nearby. So once again we were able camp with the sounds of rushing water lulling us to sleep.

The morning of day 6, as we crossed Russell Lake, we discussed how to approach Russell Rapids. Would we scout it and try to run it, or take the 80-m liftover? It turned out to be a tiny swift that we were nearly through before we realized that it was actually the rapid. We waved to a couple of fishermen camped on the bank as we floated through. On Elizabeth Lake we found a campsite in time for a quick swim before dinner. Not all of our sites had good swimming ...in fact, even when we could swim, it was generally treacherous getting in and out.

On day seven we met a few more groups and actually found ourselves in the unusual position of feeling like we were competing for sites. To our dismay, the site in Batchewaung Bay that we were aiming for was taken! The available site on an adjacent island proved to be a perfect site for a relaxing last afternoon and evening, with great swimming and an ideal location to view our final stunning Quetico sunset!

Our final day of paddling included a crossing of the rather large Batchewaung Lake which has the potential of causing paddlers to be wind bound. Again, weather seemed to be in our favour, with no wind to speak of. The last portage took us into Nym Lake where we really were back to civilization among many cottages and even some motor boats. After a week of wilderness, with no campsite or portage signs, we were surprised to be guided by a very large park sign to the Nym Lake takeout. One final uphill trudge with all our gear brought us to the parking lot and our car and the end of our Quetico adventures!

The Map

Story and drawings by Jon Berger

Editor's Note:
This story is about the start of a long journey. Which ultimately led to one of the great canoeing books – *Canoe Atlas of the Little North.* Written and illustrated by Jonathan Berger and Thomas Terry, it was published in 2007 by Boston Mills Press.

On a late July morning in 1960, an easy north breeze pushed us the last couple miles down the main body of Lake Temagami to Camp Wabun on Garden Island. Had we been going north it would have been a fair wind in the face. Our section of five canoes, ten paddlers, most 15 years of age except for the older guide and the staff, headed in for mid-season celebrations and a re-outfit for the next two trips in August.

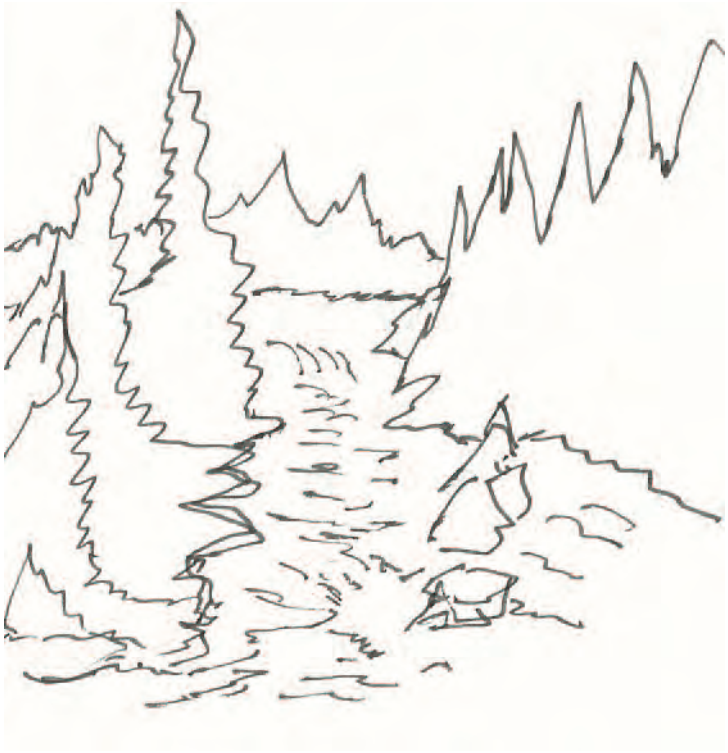
We had been on the water since early July and could push the paddling pace with 5 strong crews. Bent easily at the paddle everyone enjoyed the breeze, the bright sun, and even the darker clouds to the northeast. We were on the return leg of 160-mile trip up to Makobe Lake via the North Branch of the Lady Evelyn River and down the Makobe River, (called Makobee by the locals) and back to Lake Temagami via the Montreal River, Lady Evelyn and Diamond Lakes.

Phil Preston, our staff man, and Reggie Meillieur, our guide, had billed the Makobe trip as an exploratory run which nobody in recent memory from our camp had completed. We were going to go on new ground, follow or open up a new route on a new river. Phil loved that kind of travel. He always planned trips to places he had not visited and he was forever dragging part of the section off on side trips to climb fire towers or local high hills or portage a canoe or two into lakes off the route. On all our trips – side trips or main route – Phil insisted that each morning before we took off we would examine the map, orient ourselves, ask questions, and get from him a briefing on the route.

I am not so sure why but I was always on these side trips which generally meant

Above mini gorge

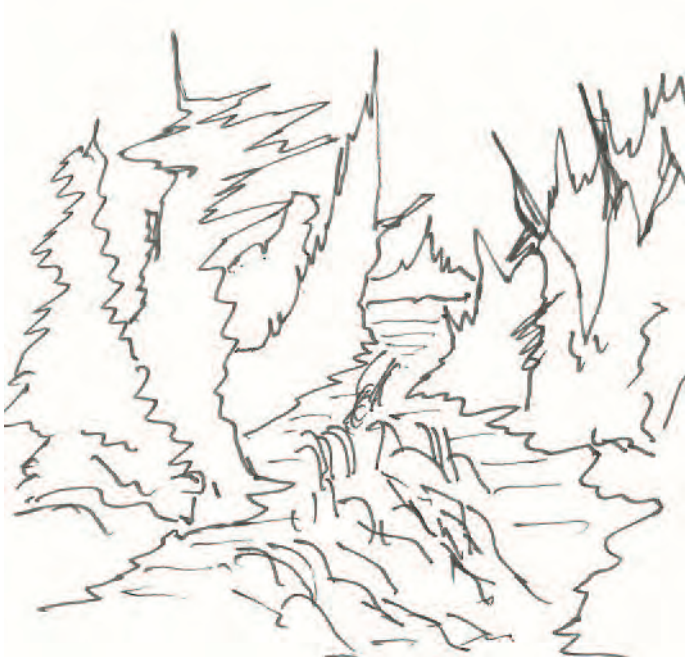
Below mini gorge



Upper Makobe

fatigue and hunger above the barely tolerable levels found in our everyday travelling routine. Fortunately, Reggie stayed on the campsite during the side trips and usually cooked up yeast bread, donuts and a thick bannock so that when we got back, in the usual wet, cold and hungry state, we would gorge ourselves on his treats.

In hindsight from 60 years, this was really a "back-in-the-day" type of trip. You know the kind of trip in lore where you walk through the snow banks barefoot carrying your canoe. In truth, in July 1960, there were no published trip reports or canoe route books with illustrated maps and commentary on the Makobe River. The camp office had no trip reports. All we had was the local topo map that showed the river, prominent lakes along its course, and a few topographic features. No rapids, falls, or portages were marked. We had no idea of the travel conditions nor did any of us, including guide and staff, yet have the lifetime of experience that would allow one to look over a map and intuit with accuracy the travel conditions. Phil's briefing when we left Makobe Lake under a very dark sky accompanied by an east wind was simply that we would follow the river to the hamlet of Elk Lake on the Montreal River and that, "The Makobe means sunshine." Of course it rained almost continuously the three days we were on the river.



Upper river

We made our way down the Makobe with Reggie out front scouting the water and choosing the portages. Going was slow. We ran short easy pitches, sometimes waded, and other times dragged, or carried over obstructed trails. At one point, we carried along the right bank on an elevated trail with bad muskeg only to end up on the wrong side of the river with the need to cross over to an open bedrock campsite. To get across we walked over the top rails of a flume that traversed the little narrows. Here on the open rock amidst the jackpines we camped, wet, chilly, and wondering where we were.

The next morning under heavy mist and more rain we continued down. Going was slow and we felt cold. At one point as we waited in thigh deep water for Reggie to return from a scout, Phil read off the evening menu to keep our spirits up. Finally, with darkness approaching Reggie chose a site on a clay bank from which we could see the flames and glow of the local sawmill's waste wood and saw dust burner. With the dripping canvas tents up we all worked to get the cooking fire and dinner going. Soon we crowded in around the fire for warmth when Reggie suggested that we start our own warming fire. Roland, Art, and I went off for fuel. Someone brought a flaming ember from the kitchen blaze and we hoped for luck that it would catch. Soon we had a blaze going with the only rule that anyone could join the circle around the fire if they brought wood. So was founded the Makobe River Fire

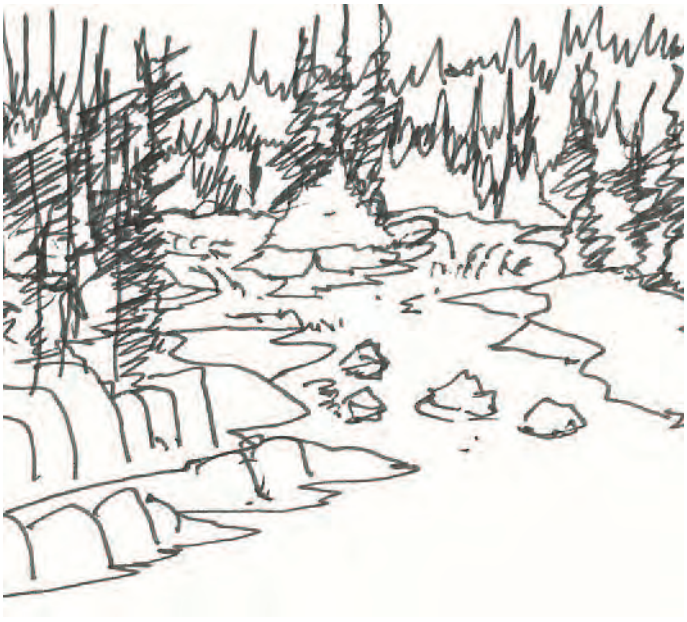
Lighting Society that met every day for the rest of the trip.

Daylight revealed we had camped just above the town. Only two rapids reffff-mained. The sun came out. After breakfast, we hit the local store for goodies and the tradeoff between stuffing ourselves and being sick. The store was on the river bank near the mouth of the Makobe and from there we had about a hundred miles of unobstructed, big river and wide open lake paddling to get back to the camp.

My recollections of the river are colored by the many trips down I made in later years as a guide at the camp. It became my favorite trip. Putting myself only in the mind of a cold 15-year-old, I recall the Makobe on its upper reaches as a very small waterway lined with cliffs that made its way through narrow ghuts, pinches, and over mini waterfalls. Below the mini gorges are the lakes and below them the river widens and boulder rapids occur. There were lots of rapids and obstacles. Old dams and flumes from the logging era dotted the river and there were trails of various types and conditions. Some trails on the upper stretches were narrow, steep paths that followed a precipice above falling water. Finally, the saw mill, the bridge, the town, and the broad Montreal River came into view.

At Elk Lake, fresh off the route, I had a jumble of observations. I had a bunch of unorganized recollections and was more interested in the candy and stale cookies bought in the local store than in geographical references. If anyone in Elk Lake had asked me about the route, I likely would have been nearly incoherent. Yet this state of incoherence was capable of startling reversal. Events at the camp following our return from the trip revealed that Mother Nature had gifted me with an uncanny sense of recall.

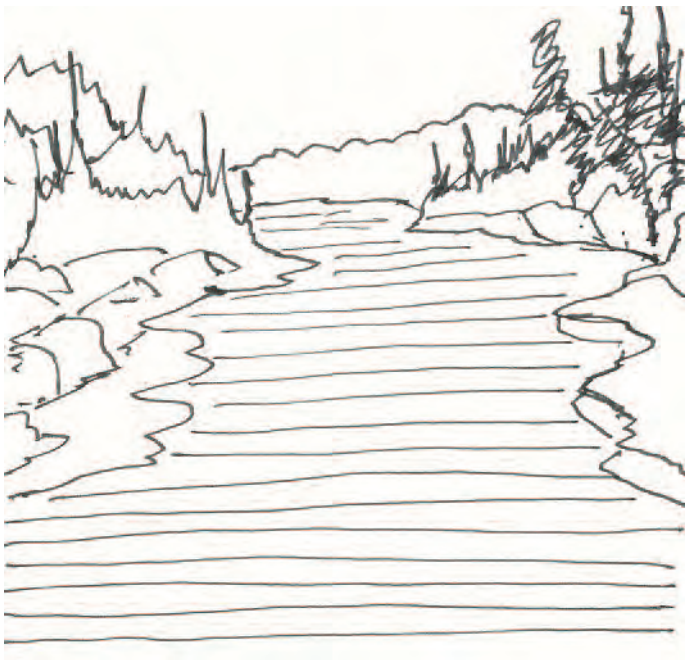
Five days later, we approached Camp Wabun with the north breeze at our backs. We paddled to the beach and unloaded just as the wind picked up and dark clouds scudded across the sky, bringing cold rain that hit in spurts. As we put our canoes up on the canoe racks to the sound of waves crashing on the beach and leaves rustling in the birches, Doug, my staffman from the previous summer, came up and asked me how the trip had gone. I replied, "Great, fantastic! You got to get up there Doug!" To which Doug replied, "I can't go if I don't have a map." In a fit of early teenage naiveté, coupled with a growing love for the travel, I headed off to my cabin to begin drawing a map of the Makobe River Canoe Route for Doug.



Small double falls

The map-making enterprise would have been easier had I used the topo map from the trip, but no, I took a sheet of the camp stationery and with a green-ink pen given to me by my Dad, I started in from memory. My drawing table was rough, built from planks my cabin mate and I scrounged from the wood pile. The table top was pockmarked by dripped candle wax as the camp had no electricity. I had no chair. I sat on the edge of the iron bunk bed and began.

In a flash of pragmatic utility, I decided not to recreate the shapes of the wa-



North view Alexander Lake

terways but to simply link the various features of the route by a line with symbols on it that stood for the river. Lakes became larger or smaller circles annotated with their names, and tributaries became larger or smaller lines intersecting with the Makobe. Rapids and falls were hash marks. North was at the top of the paper and because the river flowed almost straight north, the bottom of the paper was Makobe Lake and the top was the junction with the Montreal River. The sheet of paper represented 100% of the river length. I divided it into parts based on the relative distances between remarkable features. As I noted features, I kept asking myself, what came next and how far away was it from the last point of reference.

The litany went: Makobe Lake with a fall of water into Banks Lake with a fall of water into a series of gorges and falls with a fall of water into Alexander Lake with a fall of water to an old dam, followed by a lot of rapids and portages, with a slowing down when a creek came in from the right side into a mini delta area, after which boulder rapids, somewhat wider, started to appear, after which there was some current and rocks and the Bear River coming in from the left, and the last of the boulder rapids, and then the rapids before the first bridge, on the outskirts of town, then a pond, then shoals and finally the last bridge and the wide Montreal River with farmlands and highways.

The route information just seemed to pour out of my head onto the paper. Sixty years later I estimate I got about 50% of the known marked (as illustrated by the published river guides) data onto the map. The whole job took about an hour and Doug smiled as I presented it to him.

The Makobe map marked the start of my career as a recorder of canoe route information. It also marked the start of a lifetime of day dreaming about canoe routes that continues to this day. From that time on, canoe route itineraries became almost a daily preoccupation. In high school and college, I was constantly scribbling route itineraries on note books when I should have been paying attention to the class. Later in my professional life, I commuted by bicycle to work and took the morning ride as an opportunity to slip into a reverie that usually included canoe routes. It seemed as if I had committed most of northern Ontario and Manitoba to memory. As I got older, on my morning walks, my internal review always devoted some time to trips - past, present, and future.

Now every day, in the gray light of early morning, I walk alone, to the accompaniment of bird calls. I feel the sun come up, I sense the wind direction. I think about the Makobe. The Makobee dream is a good way to forget the pandemic for a while. And while it is clearly better to be six feet apart rather than six feet under, it would be so much better to be out on the canoe routes. Maybe on the next trip part of it will follow a very small river, narrow, with tiny waterfalls and steep trails. It will be Makobe-like and for a flash of a moment take me back to pine-clad narrows with steep cliffs and a small throw of water.

North view Alexander Lake

Montreal river bridge

Making a Shod Canoe Pole

Wood Selection and Dimensional Requirements

by Craig Macdonald

A canoe pole is best made from a thin, straight, black spruce tree that has grown slowly in wet conditions so that its wood has a dense growth-ring structure. A second choice is white spruce that commonly grows on dry, gravel soils. This tree species grows faster and much larger, producing more widely spaced growth rings. As a result of the widely spaced growth rings, white spruce poles are not as strong as black spruce poles. Also white spruce poles are more prone to deep checking, as the wood dries. Since most young white spruce trees have considerable taper, greater effort is required to reduce the lower end of the pole to a satisfactory diameter.

Sawn lumber should never be used to make a canoe pole. Even if the wood can be cut so that the grain stays in the wood along the full length of the pole, sawn lumber is still unsatisfactory. The finished pole will bend under force according to the orientation of the grain. “Edge” grain is much stiffer and bows less under strain than “flat” grain. This variability in pole strength and flex, depending on the orientation of the wood grain while held in the hands, is undesirable. Furthermore, if the sawn lumber pole suddenly breaks under force, the long, jagged ends created at the break can threaten the safety of the canoeist. Breaks in natural poles are safer because they tend to be blunter with shorter splinters.

Canoe poles come in two basic lengths for canoes shorter than 19 feet and paddled by two people. This is because most canoes of this size are not stable enough to allow two people to pole from the standing position. The person in the bow uses a shorter pole that is easier to wield while sitting. This pole has a deeper reach than the average canoe paddle and eliminates damage to the paddle blade when it is repeatedly used to push off a stony streambed. These poles are usually around 7 feet long and have a diameter of approximately 1.75" at the bottom and 1" at the top. While traveling upstream, this light-weight bow pole is primarily used to hold the canoe from being carried backwards with the current while the stern person re-sets his much longer and stronger pole in the riverbed for another forward thrust. This short pole also serves to steady the canoe and to prevent it from sweeping around sideways in the current. In shallow water, the short pole is often used somewhat like a canoe paddle but is meant to contact the riverbed with every

Author with trail axe and two sizes of shod canoe poles.

"paddle" stroke. The pole in the stern provides the primary forward propulsion and steering and is between 9 and 10.5 feet long with a diameter of approximately 2" at the bottom and as little as 1" at the top. Poles any longer than this become quite awkward to transport in the canoe when not in use or when they have to be carried across portages with other gear.

Longer canoe poles up to 12 feet are appropriate for large, stable canoes. Poles of this length provide greater reach and can be used at greater depths. In shallow water, they can provide a more sustained and powerful thrust because one can climb up the pole hand over hand. However long poles are awkward when it is necessary to switch poling sides in the canoe. For soloists in smaller canoes, the 12-foot pole can be used like a kayak paddle so that both ends of the pole are used to thrust off the bottom of the river from opposite sides of the canoe. Also the pole can be turned over end for end while poling on the same side of the canoe. Wooden poles are not normally shod at both ends and were never intended for this relatively new type of poling that is largely done with light-weight, double-shod aluminum poles. When canoe poling with wooden poles, normally only one end of the pole is used for pushing off the bottom. For the most part, people pole consistently from one side of the canoe unless there is compelling reason for changing sides. Usually going upriver, the person in the bow of the canoe poles on the shallower, shore-side of the river with a short pole. The person in the stern poles the canoe on the opposite side. Regardless of whether traveling upstream or downstream, the upstream end of the canoe must always be lightly loaded so that it rides higher in the water than the downstream end.

Selecting a Tree

A tree making a good canoe pole is unblemished by growths and injuries and is as straight as possible. The search for a suitable black spruce tree will require time and is more difficult than it might seem. Wear a pair of rubber boots to make searching easier because you may have to cross some very wet areas to find a suitable tree. Each tree must be viewed from all four sides to determine its straightness and lack of deformity. One must carefully look through the evergreen branches to evaluate the upper sections of the tree. Surprisingly the bottom three feet of the trunk is the most challenging to check for straightness. Most black spruce trees have a slight bend in this section that is difficult to notice. Lay a straight edge like a yardstick on the trunk to make a determination. If you elect to cut higher on the tree to avoid this problem, you must first check to see if the tree has enough diameter for the upper end of the pole.

Preparing the Canoe Pole

Either an axe or saw can be used to cut down the tree. If an axe is used to trim the branches from the tree, the cuts should always follow the direction of the branches. This prevents the pole from receiving damaging chop marks or the removal of chunks of wood at the branch nodes. I prefer to use an arborist's pruning saw for these tasks because there is less damage to the pole when removing the branches, although the process is significantly slower than when using an axe. The saw blade has Japanese-style teeth that cut only on the pull stroke. Leather gloves should be worn for protection and the hand holding the wood should be kept well away from the blade while sawing. Unlike the bow saw where the frame can easily tangle on other branches, the pruning saw usually can be slipped through a cluster of branches without entanglement so the branches can be removed individually and close to flush with the trunk.

I pry the bark off the poles with the upper corner of my trail axe blade. The heads of these trail axes weigh about 1.5 pounds and are equipped with a 22- or 23-inch long handle. These axes are light and easily handled so that one can peel bark off a couple of poles without needing to rest. The bark comes off most easily when the tree is cut in June or July. At other times the bark clings much more tightly to the pole. A jack knife might be required to finish the task when the bark is "tight" to the pole. With the bark removed, the "pin" knots and other imperfections are more obvious. Now is the time when the branch stubs and lumpy wood surrounding the stubs should be filed down smooth with a wood rasp.

Because of the natural taper in the trunk of spruce trees, the lower three feet of the poles often must be reduced in diameter to meet the pole dimensions – identified above – that will work well in fast flowing water. This diameter reduction will decrease the water pressure on the pole when it is used in strong currents. The diameter reduction also provides an opportunity to straighten any crookedness in the lower end of the pole. This is a common problem in black spruce.

One way that both can be accomplished is by first sawing off a short section of the lower end of the pole at right–angles to its length. Next, lay the pole on a flat floor or plank. The pole will roll so that any curve in the lower end of the pole will lie on its side. If you do not have access to a chalk line, tie a string to the top end of the pole and stretch it taut for the full length of the pole. Adjust the position of the taut line until it coincides with the centre point of the pole when measured 3 feet up from the lower end of the pole. If there is any significant curve to the pole above this point made obvious by the string, the pole should be rejected. Curvature of the pole below this point can be decreased when the diameter of the pole is reduced. Mark the centerline as indicated by the string for the lower three feet by using a felt-tipped pen or a sharp-pointed crayon. Extend the marking over the lower end of the pole as a vertical ruled line across its sawn surface. If the lower end of the pole is curved, this ruled line will not intersect the centre of the growth rings. Rule and mark out a parallel line on each side of the marked centre line, each at the width of the pole measured three feet above the lower end of the pole. Follow these guidelines to cut a slab off each side of the pole with a band saw. The wood can also be removed by planing it off with a jointer, power planer, block plane or even by carving it off with a drawknife or crooked knife.

Next, rotate the pole 90 degrees so the pole is lying on one of its flattened sides. Repeat the process of finding and marking the centerline. The intersection of the two ruled lines on the bottom of the pole marks the very tip of the pole when it is sharpened to a point to receive a poling iron. Again, lines parallel to the centerline are marked at the width of the pole measured at 3 feet from the lower end of the pole. When the cuts are completed, the lower end of the pole is converted from round to square and is perfectly in line with the rest of the pole. The four corners of pole are carefully sawn or planed off by eye to form a perfect octagon. Some people find it attractive to leave the lower pole end with octagonal sides. However, I prefer to round all the edges off with a wood rasp to return the octagonal pole

back to round. I believe that a round pole is more hydrodynamic, reducing the water pressure on the pole. After this has been accomplished, "sandpaper" the wood.

Mounting the Poling Iron

Lay the conical, split-jacket, poling iron on top of the lower end of the canoe pole while it is lying in the horizontal position. The tip of the poling iron should lie in line with the length of the pole and flush with the bottom of the canoe pole. Using the iron as a template, trace the profile of the sides of the iron onto the pole with a marker. Cut away the wood following the tracings to create a wedge-shape point. Rotate the pole 90 degrees and repeat the process to create a four-sided point that approximates the angles of the poling iron. Cut the four edges down evenly to create an eight-sided cone and then use a wood rasp to file off the eight edges to create a smooth cone that will fit inside the poling iron.

Before hammering the poling iron onto the pole, rotate the iron on the wood point to determine the position that keeps the poling iron tip best in line with the length of the pole. Mark this position on the wood cone, using the apex of the split in the jacket of the poling iron as a guide for the marker. Do this because the iron must be removed several times for additional wood reductions before being permanently driven on the pole and secured with a short wood screw. Use the mark on the wooden cone as a guide for positioning the iron each time that it is driven onto the lower end of the pole. The iron can be loosened from the pole by holding a large slot screwdriver or cold chisel against the skirt of the iron and pounding it with a hammer until the iron releases. Each time the iron is removed, file off the rub marks and any wood turned up along the leading edge of the skirt. This creates a close fit that will increase the contact with the underlying cone of wood. If strong horizontal forces are applied, a well-seated iron is less likely to loosen on the pole. Before the final installation of the iron, coat the entire pole with boiled linseed oil.

Historical Perspectives

It is likely that canoe poles have been used for thousands of years. Before the development of poling irons, the lower ends of canoe poles were simply sharpened to a point. Every night after use, the "brooming" of the points on the rocks during the day would be chopped off with an axe or rubbed off on a rough stone. These re-sharpened points were then fire-hardened in the night's campfire to make them as durable as possible for the following day.

The development of the split jacket poling iron by blacksmiths working for the Hudson's Bay Company created a huge advancement in canoe poling technology that rapidly spread far and wide. The additional weight of the irons made the poles easier to use in strong currents. A cylindrical plug of metal one eighth of an inch in diameter strengthened the tip of the iron so that it could grab the tiniest cracks in rock ledges for purchase. This is something an unshod wooden pole could never do. The smooth conical shaped skirt of the iron reduced the chance of getting the pole stuck between rocks and eliminated the grinding wear to the wooden pole tip. These Hudson's Bay Company style poling irons were designed specifically for the lower ends of wooden poles used in rapids. They are superior to screwed-in spikes or flat wooden ends guarded by a short section of metal pipe as frequently recommended in modern "how to do" books.

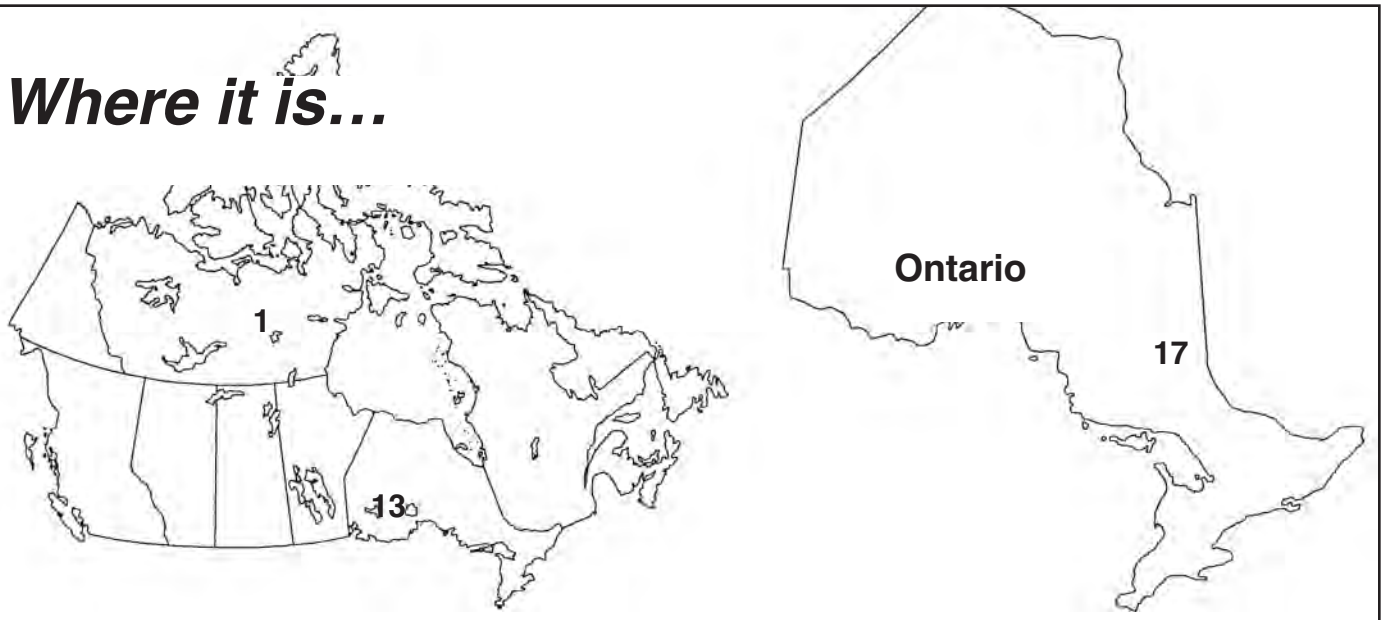
When poles are no longer needed, the irons can be removed from the poles as previously described and saved for future use without needing to carry the poles. Alternately, the lower ends of the poles can be chopped off and placed in a campfire to burn out the wood and retrieve the iron. The poles themselves can be leaned up in a tree for others to use as canoe poles, or once they have seasoned, as firewood. Failing this, the poles will slowly rot away to soil. For several obvious reasons, fiberglass or aluminum canoe poles are not a good choice for wilderness canoeing if the intent is to abandon them during the trip once they are no longer needed. Wooden poles still remain the best option.

Poles that are used on soft mud bottoms in calm water do not require poling irons. The poles are usually made from a straight, black spruce tree where a single stout branch near the bottom of the pole has been retained. To be strong enough, this branch must be at least one third the diameter of the lower end of the pole. This branch extends downwards at a 45-degree angle for one foot. The lower end of the pole is cut off flush with the lower end of the branch. Spruce trees with a suitable branch are uncommon and often hard to find.

As an alternative, a short forked branch can be cut from a white birch sapling and lashed to the bottom of a spruce pole so that the fork points downwards. Suitable forked branches are common in white birch saplings. For best performance, the branches should separate from the fork at approximately the same angle as the letter "Y". Each branch of the fork is reduced to a length of 12" beyond the fork and sharpened. The lower end of the spruce pole and the wood below the fork in the birch branch are flattened to half thickness on one side for a distance of two feet. Both flattened sections terminate as a sawn notch at right angles to the length of the pole. This allows the poles to interlock at the notches when the flattened sides are placed face to face. This strong connection permits the pole to be pushed hard without loosening the lashings holding the forked birch branch in place. Both of the above pole designs are easier to use in mud than a straight pole. Canoe poles of this design are used for propelling canoes through wild rice beds during harvest and for pushing canoes long distances through mats of floating vegetation and muck where wading or paddling the canoe are not practical options.

Hand forged, split jacket canoe poling iron.

Where it is…



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