

Chiniguchi Waterway Canoe Trip August 2008

Route: Matagamasi Lake → Silvester Lake → Wolf Lake → Dewdney Lake → Chiniguchi Lake → Laura Lake → Evelyn Lake → Irish Lake → Bonesteel Lake → Wessel Lake → Matagamasi Lake

Participants: Sherri, Dave, Pamela, Ross, Karen, Becky, Sylvia, Brent

Lost in Grundy...

To get a head start on the long drive to the put-in (40 minutes or so from Sudbury) we spent the first night at Grundy Lake Prov. Park. Staying at Grundy proved to be the first challenge of the trip. Brent knew the campsite number but could not remember the name of the specific campground within Grundy that it was in (Grundy has quite a few campgrounds within it). Not picking up a campground map at the front gate proved to be a big mistake as Sherri and Brent drove aimlessly around the various campgrounds looking for the campsite number. A word of warning: Grundy does not have signs at the campground entrances to let you know the campsite number range within – get a map at the front gate!

Day 1 – Rain, swimming in paradise, and a moose...

Soon after starting our paddle it started to rain – surprise, surprise, pretty much the norm for the summer of 2008 – but the rain soon ended, just in time for a swim at Paradise Lagoon. A beautiful spot mid-way along a portage, Paradise Lagoon is a deep and clear swimming hole under a waterfall. What a great way to finish off a portage! It wasn't long after the Paradise Lagoon portage that we saw a moose and then found a camp site on Wolf Lake. The waters of Wolf Lake had a wonderful Killarney-like clarity and turquoise colour and it was a beautiful view from camp while standing among the large old-growth red pines. Ross and Karen prepared a wonderful salmon chowder while Becky explained the bodily impacts of ingesting too much silver polish as a child. Dave began creating the first of his many piles of perfectly stacked firewood.

Day 2 – Head winds, sand in underwear...

The second day of paddling (which was against the wind all day long) took us to the upper end of Chiniguchi Lake where a beautiful beach on McConnell Bay served as our campsite for the night. That night we shared the beach with two other groups but there was plenty of room for all. The water was crystal clear and shallow. It was a joy just to walk along the shore ankle deep in the beautiful water and watch the antics of four young Merlin falcons practicing their new flying skills. Yes, a bit of sand gets in your tent, sleeping bag, shoes, underwear, and everything else, but there is something, well, exotic, about sleeping in a tent on a beach. In anticipation of the “killer” portage to come, we all slept well that night.

Day 3 – Knee deep in mud, hammocks, and malaria(!?) ...

Day 3 started with a 750 metre portage that, on the map, looked simple enough. But let me tell you, a 200 metre stretch of marshy muck right in the middle of the portage has a way of lengthening the time it takes to cross 750 metres. While some found alternate routes by bushwhacking around the muck, others gave in to their inner 12-year old, and walked right through the knee deep mud. Actually, some small, narrow tree trunks had been strategically placed along the muck to provide a platform on which to walk. Unfortunately many of those trees were much too narrow to be of much use and many were buried in the mud and not even visible. One wrong step and it was up to your knees in mud. It wasn't at all easy to escape the mud once it had a hold of your leg and when both legs were swallowed up by the mud at the same time, you needed another person to assist you out. A group of 10-12 year-old boys were on the portage at the same time as us and plowed right through the mud with heavy wooden boxes and canvas packs on their backs and heads. We even had to rescue one of them as he sunk in the mud under his heavy load.

After the “killer” portage there were several more portages to conquer before we could relax at our next site; however, the beauty of the wilderness around us made it all worth while. Day 3 ended on Evelyn Lake where the hammocks came out and we enjoyed some relaxing time before a great dinner. Ross caught a good size small mouth bass but with dinner already made it was released to grow even larger. In recognition of the relentless mosquitoes that bothered us in the evenings, Brent read a bed-time story about the transmission and life-cycle of malaria. Suddenly, no one wanted any more mosquito bites and everyone fled to their tents for the night.

Day 4 – Portages, upside down canoe...

Day 4 was another long day of paddling and portaging, this time making our way along a number of small lakes, creeks, and ponds. By late afternoon we were back on Matagamasi Lake where we set up camp on an island site just beyond the end of the day's last portage. We enjoyed the sun and water swimming and trying to paddle an upside down canoe. Ross demonstrated his skill at “gunwale-bobbing”.

Day 5 – Pictographs, the rain returns...

After four full days of paddling and portaging, the 5th day was a relatively easy two and half hour paddle down McCarthy Bay, across the main part of Matagamasi Lake and finally to the put-in/take-out – with a tail wind to boot! Along the west shore of McCarthy Bay we took some time to view the remains of pictographs on the rock faces. With less than an hour of paddling remaining it started to rain. Even so, we count ourselves lucky that we probably had the only four day rainless stretch so far this summer.

The adventure didn't end for everyone...

A fine adventure was had by all but it had now come to an end. Well, not quite. Dave's truck wouldn't start! Thus began another mini-adventure of standing in the pouring rain with jumper cables, trying to find a working phone, and waiting for a CAA tow truck to find its way along the dirt roads leading to the put-in. (Shouldn't every tow truck have a GPS?) Dave and Pamela ended up spending an unplanned night in North Bay while Dave's truck was repaired. However, all's well that ends well and ultimately everyone made it home safely. This was definitely a "must-do-again" canoe trip.