

Canoe Trails Log 2008
Mr. Mark Kennedy

8/2/08

We started yesterday, so I'm starting this one day late, trying to write while in the canoe. Unfortunately, I'm in a two-man canoe and it's hard to write and paddle at the same time. We drove from Vanport – no issues, good roads all the way. When we got to Kipawa, we unloaded the vehicles, changed into our bush clothes and loaded the canoes.

Two motor boats from Mr. Paul Courchesne's Kipawa Outpost business towed us out to an Island on Lac Kipawa: four canoes tied together train-style behind one boat and two sets of four canoes behind the other for a total of 12 canoes. After about an hour we reached a small island off Corbeau Rock and set up camp. This would be our base camp for the next day as well as our final destination for closing ceremonies before returning to Pennsylvania. It was 8:00pm and getting dark. As the sun set, we could see rain and thunder clouds in the west. Lightning lit the skies over the islands in the west briefly turning the sky red – just like God giving us a fireworks display. But the rain clouds passed us by, so we got a nice cool breeze. As usual, Canada weather is perfect for our Canoe trails trips – all the time.

8/3/08

Our plan is to base out of this island until Sunday morning in order to further our training especially with respect to canoe handling. So, after a quick oatmeal breakfast, we set out with empty canoes to practice. I liked not having to take down the tent and load the canoes. Today's training was with empty canoes just to make it a little easier.

There is human activity here on Lac Kipawa. Speed boats and fisherman, fancy cabins and lodges and little hunting cabins. Saw one lady with a little girl (maybe 6 years old?) enjoying their cabin by the lake. They waved at me. My canoe partner is Jay Showvaker. His knee and back hurt. I hope he makes it because it is his second try. He had to drop out last year with a concussion. Chris (Kennedy) is with Ryan Zimmerman, a voyager, and Peter Smith, a new candidate. At this point, their canoe is the slowest in our boys group. Mr. (Jeff) Snyder is our leader and is always encouraging and seems to know his stuff. He has led quite a few of these trips before.

NHL great Eric Lindross bought one of the islands with a nice outfitter's cabin complex on it. We didn't see anyone there when we went past. Lunch is at the backside of our base island, but the candidates didn't get much of a break and are doing solo canoe paddling in the protected lagoon while we cook lunch. Meat and cheese sandwiches, Oreos, and bug juice. I guess the fire is just for mosquito control.

The weather is still perfect – cloudy and breezy and not too hot or sunny. The breeze blows the bugs away for the most part. Gorgeous scenery: lakes, hills, trees and rocks (huge granite formations). You should all try to make this trip.

After lunch we paddled to a narrow isthmus of land to practice a portage. Canoes were empty, so it should have been easier, and gung-ho as I was, I raced Jan and myself to be first in line. Mr. Snyder reviewed the procedures for an efficient portage and then we began. Our first mistake was putting the canoe in bow first. When you carry a canoe, you face the stern and walk the canoe stern-first. Since the portage was a very narrow path, I had to turn the canoe around while carrying it. A voyager (Ryan, I think) helped navigate me through a 3-point turn. Then Jay, who was carrying all our gear (i.e., 2 paddles, 2 pfd's, 2 wool shirts, 1 wool coat and throw cushion) had to identify the path and lead me down it. The path was hard to find and I walked into a tangle of small trees that had grown up through a windfall (kind of like tornado damage to trees). The other canoe teams found the path but getting to it was now very difficult for me. Ryan again came to my rescue and recommended I just plow through a few small trees (and their twiggy branches) and force my way to the path. By some miracle, this actually worked, but by now all the other canoes were down the path and we were the last ones back into the water. First in, last out; it sounds like an inventory system. But we will do better tomorrow.

The paddle home was a beat into a strong wind. Jay and I won the "race" back, but now I'm glad it's over for the day. We paddled about 24 km today, and that was just practice. We'll do it all again tomorrow.

Weather is still gorgeous. We had a little rain (sprinkles) and gradually clearing skies. Now its partly cloudy with a strong sun but with high cool winds. Small waves and whitecaps on the lake reflect the sunlight beautifully and are set off by the trees and granite islands. I actually took a scenery picture – go figure!

8/3/08 pm

Today the boy's team traveled from our camp near Point Corbeau and paddled some 26 km to Ile aux Bleuets (Blueberry Island – Fabre map, 46.5/21.5). We didn't get lost until we left our lunch spot, a pretty island at Fabre 49.5/07, and did a short loop around 2 larger islands in the small bay. There were 2 fishermen there, so it may have been good for fishing. It was big enough but protected from the winds that beat against us from the north for the first half of the trip.

My partner, Jay Showvaker, hurts all over right now, especially his back, but he'll be ready tomorrow. The full truth is we're all really beat. 26 km of paddling is about the max for us. There were no portages to slow us down (or give our muscles a change of pace either!). The last third of the pull we were just hanging on. God was merciful to us in that there was almost no wind after 2pm, perfectly flat waters from 2 to 5pm when we landed on Blueberry Island. Not what we usually experience here but we were glad! A few short sprinkles, some sun, mostly clouds, still warm (70's), cool at night (40's). It's been about perfect.

Am I losing weight? I keep tightening my belt but it's a leather weave style. Is it stretching? I don't feel skinnier.

I tried to take some movies tonight, two at the cooking fire and one of a flock of loons calling on the lake. I hope the camera picked up the sound. Dinner tonight was ham, mashed potatoes & gravy, green beans, and garlic toast – it all tastes great at camp. Dessert is Oreo cheesecake mix (no bake). It's cooling in the shallow water in the lake now.

8/3/08 (later)

What fun! After cleanup (about 8:30pm) we went swimming. No leaches today though. Mr. Martin was a lifeguard in a canoe; Mr. Snyder was a lifeguard on shore. Lifeguards are required when swimming but not for bathing – assuming you stay close to shore. Chris (Kennedy) and I were the first to go in. We had fun and the others soon followed – a few to swim out deeper and most to bathe close to shore. It was a sandy cove with a bunch of flat stones of various sizes scattered about -- very shallow and safe. You had to be careful because some rocks are submerged large boulders and you could swim into them. They are also slippery. I climbed on one and posed with my knee and elbow bent and proclaimed myself the “Mermaid of Blueberry Island”. I don't think anyone took my picture, but that's when more of the boys started coming into the water. I did get some laughs. Then I tried to stand up on the slipper rock and fell—no traction for my bare feet! Fortunately I was not hurt falling on the nearby rock, just a minor scrape. No more standing after that! Everyone else had more sense and there were no problems. We got out of the water at 9pm and most everyone followed. It would get pretty dark by 9:30, so 9:00 was a good time to close the swimming area.

8/4/08

This morning it's pancakes and bacon. Messrs. Snyder and Martin are always helping with the meals and instructing the others who take over. Food is very important on Canoe Trails – you need fuel when working this hard and good food keeps everyone's spirits up. Pancakes take time to cook, but this is a good campsite for it. Later breakfasts will be quicker (e.g., oatmeal). Today we will do a few portages to break up the paddling – I'm actually looking forward to it.

“Someone” forgot to pack us a pancake flipper! Mr. Martin used his leatherman tool to flatten a clotted spoon and that worked well. I know Arianne Gower and I packed 2 full compliments of utensils on pack-up Sunday. Now we have 2 sets of hot pot tongs but no flipper. (Note: we will later be glad for the extra tong!) Well, time to eat.

8/4/08 (later)

Today was eventful! We left camp and headed up the Kipawa River, then east on an ephemeral stream to Lake Gaey. This stream was quite challenging. First, we did a line walk around some rapids – no problem. Then we did a portage around another rapids and another past a huge 10-foot tall beaver dam. The portages had to be bushed out, which means there were no paths and we had to hack a path suitable for carrying a

canoe on ones shoulders. Beware the punji sticks left after chopping down small trees in the path! Then we did a 6-man carry to get past a collapsed logging road bridge that blocked the stream. This was the hardest part because we carry the canoes fully loaded using only our fingertips. "6-man" is the minimum number of people needed. Also, the road embankment was steep and treacherous with the heavy load (watch out for punji sticks!). After that we had to line walk through the rapids and pull the canoes into Lake Gaey. Lots of water in our canoes now because there was no bank to walk on. All of us are soaked, at least waist down and several of us head to toe. I will change socks today.

We camped on a small island in Gaey. There is no breeze (glass-like water) and lots of mosquitoes. Leeches in the lakes too – we caught a few – and crayfish and frogs too. Poor Luke, the bee man, got stung by bees while on PC call. We counted at least 8 stings. He's fine today, but was a little shook at the time. So after dinner, I organized a cruise to PC Island, where "you're free to pee without a bee". Luke was the first to buy a ticket – 2 jolly ranchers for first class – and 7 of us paddled to the nearby island to take care of business. No bees or other mishaps – success!

Dinner was spaghetti with sauce, white bread and garlic, and cherry cheesecake for dessert. Lunch was turkey slices on pita bread – no cheese (horrors!). There will be no more cheese-less lunches and Mr. Snyder has vowed to forever supervise the packing of this food packs. (Note: we would later discover the mother load of all cheeses in one of our food boxes, causing us to rename the trip "Cheese Trails".)

8/5/08

Breakfast this morning is cream of wheat with craisins and brown sugar. A quicker breakfast so we can get back on schedule. We got into camp at about 3pm yesterday because we could not reach our goal camp on Grant Lake due to our portage/rapids obstacles. We were really tired yesterday too – it was quite taxing. A great day, but tiring. Today should be easier but longer.

8/5/08 (later)

Well, today was our toughest yet. We left Lac Gaey (pronounced "Gee") and made the series of portages and beaver dam hoists to Lake Grant. Our goal was to similarly portage from Grant to Ostaboningué, down another stream/swamp/valley. We made it to Lac Grant using portages, 6-man carries, and beaver dam pull-overs. The beavers are very busy on the rivers. Crossing Lac Grant took about a minute (or 30) and we had lunch on one of Mr. Snyder's campsites. Club crackers, pepperoni sticks and Muenster cheese chunks. Mr. Martin has requested an ode to club crackers as part of the entertainment on Friday. So....

Club Crackers so rare, oh finest of breads
With a little white salt on the top of your head
Spread thickly with spiced meat and Muenster cheese spread,
Delicious!

Or perhaps this haiku:

Club crackers so good
Topped off with cheese from the tray
I can't get enough

We did actually recite these poems at the Friday talent show.

It's a good thing we ate lunch. The portage from Grant to the moosemuck pond/stream was only 1-1/2 km, but it took us about 4 hours. Believe it or not, this was an established portage 4 years ago. The lead team cleaned it out and we hauled everything through very difficult terrain. Every one was exhausted. Then we tried to pull downstream to Ostaboningué, but the stream was too brushy and it was already after 5pm, so we camped near a moose hunters cabin. We toasted our wet socks on sticks and turned in. Rained from 2am to 4:30am, but the sun shone for breakfast. We are definitely past the hardest part of the trip.

8/6/08

After an oatmeal and craisins breakfast, we put all the gear on our backs and portaged up the moose hunter's driveway, sort of a rough "quad trail", to the nearby logging road. We were able to put into the stream feeding Lac Ostaboningué at that point and paddled until lunchtime to our camp on an island, also on Lac Ostaboningué. We made sure the candidates carried the canoes up the quad driveway, which was about a half mile long. It was especially hard for some, but they all made it. Everyone was at the log road to cheer them on down to the launch spot. I took a camera movie. I hope it turned out.

After all the hard work yesterday and this morning, we decided to stay on our lunch island and rest, dry out and have fun. Chris made a fishing net with his t-shirt but didn't catch any minnows. Messer's Snyder went fishing. A few of us swam and most people did laundry and rested at "Club Ostaboningué". (Campsite: Lac Audion, 66.5/97.5).

As it happened, our co-ed group is camped just near us on a peninsula that can be seen from the other side of our island. At 6:15, a bush plane buzzed over our site and then landed near the co-ed camp. This is not a good sign. Is someone being lifted out? Sick, injured? I hope for the best, but this does not bode well.

Dinner tonight was chili and rice. Spicy hot chili that made your eyes water and nose run – perfect! A few of us loved it, but most of our campers just nibbled, so we had to bury about 2/3 of what we made, which was a lot in any case. Now we are chopping wood for a potato pancake breakfast tomorrow as well as wood for our next campsite that is unusually short of wood. Chocolate pudding for dessert tonight.

We had a brief storm system move through that sprinkled on us. We saw the big storm in the north but it passed by towards the east and we just got a few drops. Now its perfect, warm, sunny, a few clouds – picture postcard perfect. Even the mosquitoes haven't recovered from this morning's breezes. It's so pretty. I wish Debby and the others were here to share it with.

After the wood cutting work is done, we're supposed to relax again and go to bed early. Tomorrow night on the bald island, Friday night back on Lac Kipawa, then Saturday to paddle back to Mr. Cochran's docks, load up, change into our civilian clothes and drive home. Almost done. I hope everyone is having a good time.

Good news! Mr. Cochran, a friend of the program and from whose house we started, owned the plane. He was just paying us a visit. No worries. After the plane visited the co-ed camp, Andy Zachodni, Bec and Arianne (Gower) canoed over to our campsite with ice cream that Mr. Courchene had delivered. All the boys gathered around and animatedly told their stories of the week so far. There were so excited to be able to relay the stories and apparently had recovered from their aches and pains – at least mentally. Mr. Cochran buzzed us again and flew off. I tried to take of movie of him taxiing the plane.

The candidates were told to work on their skit for Friday night's entertainment. Not much came from their deliberations from what I could tell, but we'll see on Friday. Chris made a fishing pole from a birch tree branch. I helped him bait the hook with a big beetle and a leach. He made a bobber using a piece of wood tied to the fishing line with dental floss. The hook and line came from his survival kit. It was a very good setup. The leach, although hooked through the middle, tried to swim constantly but could not submerge the bobber, and so was a great lure. Unfortunately we could not get into deep enough water to get out where the fish were. We put his baited leach assembly in a cup of water to see if it would last the night and maybe he could troll tomorrow while canoeing.

8/7/08

Potato pancakes and sausage this morning, and then a long paddle on Ostaboningue. Here we go. We paddled down Ostaboningue until we reached the Ostaboningue River, then we portaged to Lac Hunters Point. It was a short portage and we tried to do it quickly before the co-ed team came. We left camp at the same time and canoed together down Ostaboningue a ways. It was good to hear them singing as they paddled – we boys tend to suffer in silence. Anyways, we got on the portage and started carrying everything. Chris was ahead carrying a canoe. Luke was carrying a canoe and a food box, a difficult double carry. I was carrying a personal pack (containing tents, sleeping bags, and personal tools and supplies). When we got to the road, Chris, being a communist, turned left. I would have turned right but thought Chris knew where those going before him had gone. In this case however, neither of us would have been correct because the correct path was a trail through the woods straight ahead and slightly to the right.

After walking about half a mile, I figured out we had lost the group. I called out, blew my whistle, and turned back to tell Luke & Chris. I told Luke first (he had passed Chris by then) and he decided to put the canoe down for a quick rest. Then I told Chris that I thought we had gone the wrong way. He said, “what?!”. So I told him again and he said “WHAT?!” and set the canoe down. I said something about him being hard of hearing. I may have missed some language usage convention here.

We began walking back and were met by a running Mr. (Mark) Burns and Mr. Martin. They walked with us back to the correct portage. Alas, the co-ed group was putting their last canoe into the water when we arrived, so we didn't get through the portage before them after all. “Stuff happens,” said Mr. Snyder philosophically. Mr. Zachodni asked if we saw anything on our diversion. “Not a thing,” I replied. “Boring!”

After we paddled from the portage, we stopped for lunch at a small almost ghost town the Hunters Point, and took a group picture in front of the altar of the abandoned Catholic Church. The town used to be an important lumbering town with about 10,000 people. Now there are probably 100 or so. The co-ed group took their pictures there after we were done (they ate their lunch in their canoes, probably a good idea).

We paddled towards Turtle Island and we were chased by a large thunderstorm system. We outran it for a while, but eventually it caught us, we saw lighting in the distance, and we fled to shore to hide in the woods. It's safer than being on the water! After 30 minutes or so, we were back on the water. Chris built a lean-to to shelter us from the rain using our pfd's and cedar boughs. It worked well.

We finally arrived at our campsite near Turtle Island, a small rock with little available firewood. But we had filled our food boxes with cut wood, so we still had plenty to even leave a courtesy pile. There was even some courtesy wood left from the last time they camped here. Mr. (John) Snyder caught a walleye, I helped cook beef stroganoff and butterscotch pudding, and we popped popcorn. Our site is also loaded with blueberry (huckleberry) bushes, so Ian, Chris and I picked berries to go with the butterscotch pudding. Delicious! Tomorrow we paddle through Turtle Chute and back to our home base island near Courchene Island (on Lac Kipawa) for closing ceremonies.

8/8/08

We started out for our base camp after a good sausage gravy and English muffin breakfast (with rehydrated apricots, carrots, coffee, tea, tang, etc.). We paddled through Turtle Chute, which was a narrow spot in a peninsula where the loggers would blast the logs through on their way to the Kipawa sawmills. We coasted through easily because the water in the lakes was high enough to get us over the rocks. No portages today!

But then it started to rain and be windy. We paddled hard into the wind – the canoes with three men used all three to paddle. Then I had to take a “nature break”, so Jay and I paddled to shore and I elected to come parallel to the shore to hasten my way

out of the stern and into the woods (i.e., bathroom). As I got out, the canoe tipped and a wave splashed into it. We caught the canoe before any more water entered. The waves bounced the canoe against the rocks a little too, but the rocks were small and Jay protected the canoe. Shortly afterwards we were back on the water. The wind was in our face, it was raining, and the waves were against us. I decided to cross the lake, as a few canoes were doing, and get to the lee side of the island (where Eric Lindross' house is located). It was hard paddling; the waves bounced the bow up and down. Jay was scared and I kept telling him to attack the waves and paddle hard or I'd just dump the canoe for fun. I don't think he quite believed me, but I hoped he would find an "extra gear". I also told him how much I enjoyed this challenge, what fun it was, and how it reminded me of yacht racing in bad weather. (If you remember that scene from Forrest Gump where Lieutenant Dan was up in the crow's nest of the boat during the hurricane – that was me.)

Well what do you know, we made it. The co-ed group came the same way and will camp on the other side of the island to avoid crowding. They are all here now, however, getting up the big bonfire, working on skirts and making the stage. Dinner will be catered courtesy of Mr. Paul Courchene. A few dignitaries (the Shaner's, Couschene's, and a few of the "Drifters" – a Kipawa affiliated canoe trails program) will be here too to celebrate. It promises to be a fine evening!

Statistics:

Dates	Travel points	Distances
Saturday, 8/2/08	Loop near base camp on Lac Kipawa	25 k
Sunday, 8/3/08	Base camp to Blueberry Island	26 k
Monday, 8/4/08	Blueberry Island to Lac Gaey	11 k
Tuesday, 8/5/08	Lac Gaey to moose camp on Lac Grant to moose camp on Ostaboningué moose puddle	11 k
Wednesday, 8/6/08	Moose puddle camp to Lac Ostaboningué bee-pee island	12 k
Thursday, 8/7/08	Bee-pee island to rock next to Turtle Island	26 k
Friday, 8/8/08	Turtle Rock to base camp	14 k
Saturday, 8/9/08	Base camp to Kipawa (Paul Couschene's home)	12 k
	TOTAL DISTANCE =	137 k (85 miles)

Maps needed: Lac Grindstone, 31 L/15
 Ottertail Creek, 31 L/14
 Fabre, 31 M/3
 Lac Ostaboningué, 31 M/2
 ??????, 31 M/6
 Belleterre, 31 M/7

Map Key

31 M/6	31 M/7
31 M/3	31 M/2
31 L/14	31 L/15