

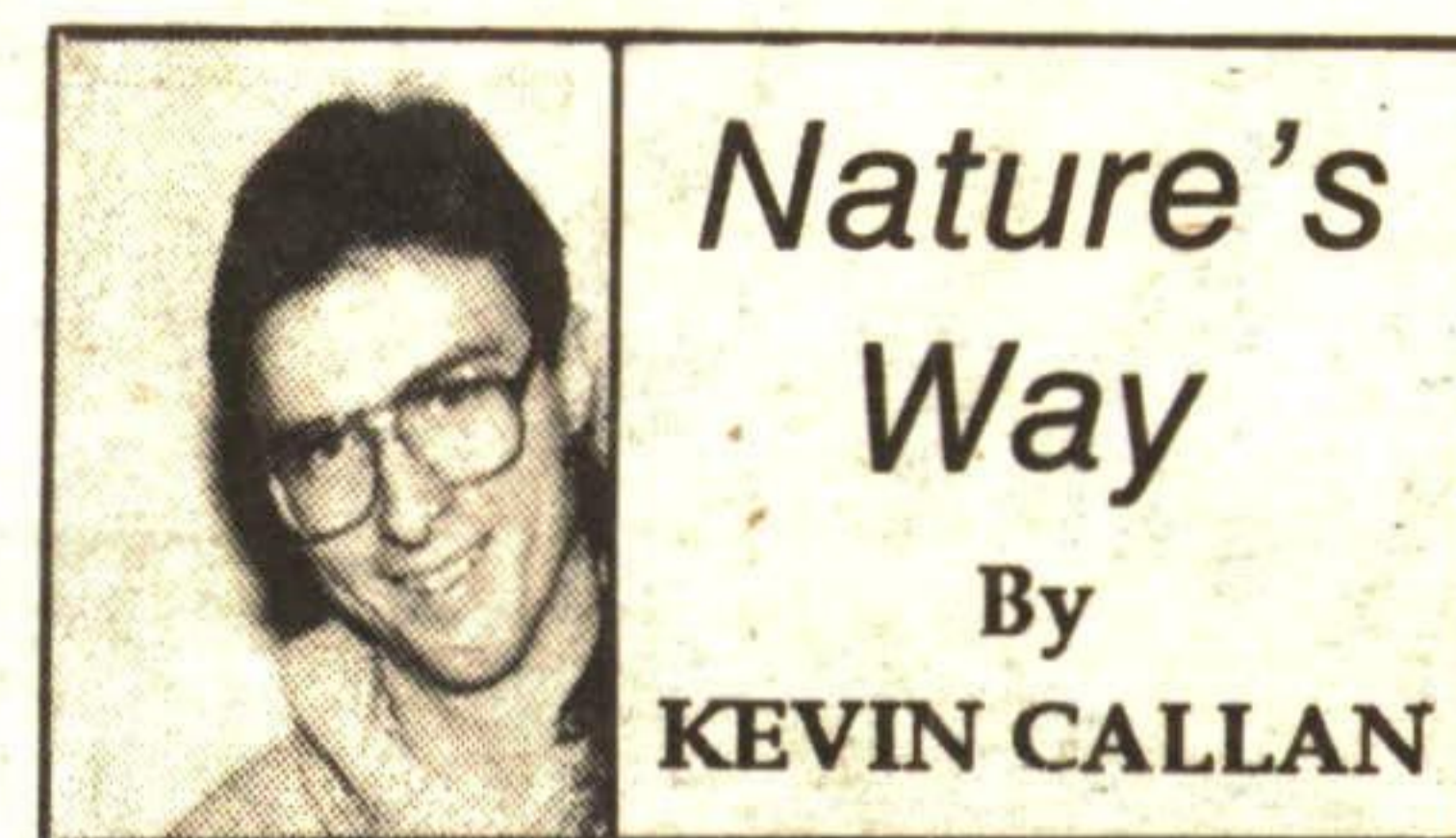
# Spring paddling--bug free

I wouldn't be caught dead paddling Georgian Bay from mid-June to late July while hordes of bothersome bugs are at their peak, tormenting hordes of canoeists. But give me a free weekend in early spring before the bloodsucking mosquitoes, blackflies and deerflies rise from their aquatic coffins and I'll be there in a flash, with paddle in hand.

The Gibson-McDonald canoe route is one of my favorite spring get-aways. The Gibson River with its ragged rapids, Georgian Bay with its scenic splendor, and historic treasures to be explored in the inland lakes makes this route an excellent two to three day jaunt.

The Gibson-McDonald is a circular route which takes the canoeists through a variety of Canadian Shield landscape and is considered to be intermediate level of difficulty. It's just one of the many 'free' canoe routes offered by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Access to the chain of lakes, rivers and creeks can be found at Six Mile Lake Provincial Park and at Georgian Bay Road off Hwy. 69



**Nature's Way**  
By  
**KEVIN CALLAN**

at McDonald Lake.

It takes three days of comfortable paddling, with a maximum of nine portages ranging from nine metres to 230 metres, to cover the entire loop. But I've chose, at times to simply paddle from the Georgian Bay Road access straight into McCrae Lake for two days. Both choices offers free maintained campsites on Crown Land based on a first come first serve basis. No permits are required and sites can't be reserved.

If you decide to venture the entire loop start off at the access point at Six Mile Lake Provincial Park, then paddle southeast towards Echo Rock, then go northeast towards Hungry Bay

(hydro lines should be on the righthand shore). Paddle down Hungry Creek until you come to a control dam and portage on the left shore. Paddle up the marsh and portage across Muskoka Road 33 into Gibson Lake and then westerly underneath Hwy. 69 overpass. Depending on water levels there may be a short portage just beyond this point.

Gibson Lake and River was named after David Gibson, Inspector of Crown Lands Agencies and Superintendent of Colonization Roads.

Follow the Gibson's current to Bottleneck Rapids and portage on the steep lefthand shore. Further down the river you will come to the next rough section on the river, Three Rock Chute. The portage around this scenic falls is located on the righthand shore. After the chute the third and final set of rough water can usually be run, but there is a portage to the righthand side.

The mouth of the river, which is now the Musquash River, was once home to the largest water-powered sawmills in the Muskokas, called Muskoka Mills.

Travel south along Georgian Bay shoreline, past Bone Island to the large wooden cross on the lefthand side. Portage on the left side into McCrae Lake and canoe in an easterly direction to the end of the lake. Paddle left and up a small channel to the steep portage on the left shore into McDonald Lake. Cut across McDonald Lake and underneath the Hwy. 69 overpass to the portage on the left. Portage to the dam at the head of Crooked Bay. Paddle south into Six Mile Lake and then west to Six Mile Lake Provincial Park, ending a journey through one of Muskoka's rich historic landscapes.

For more information and a detailed map of the Gibson-McDonald canoe route contact the Ministry of Natural Resources District Office, Midhurst Ontario L0L 1X0, (705) 728-2900.

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