

...in every situation from the city there are exciting rivers to test every level of the paddler's skill. Many have such strong drops and such imposing holes as to be restricted to kayaks, but most can be run by open boats, at least after the spring runoff.

Partly because we wanted to see a new and truly beautiful part of the province and partly because we had heard so much about the rivers of the region, we chose the Lac Saint Jean area north of Quebec City for our week of rivers. Our choice included a four-day run down the Chamouchouane, and day trips on the Chicoutimi, the Belle and - just west of Quebec City - the Jacques Cartier. We had planned at least one more day of paddling but gave it up in order to watch part of the national closed boat championships at Jonquiere. (At least that was what we told one another; the truth was that we were all worn out from a couple of days of heavy paddling, about which more below.) We were pleased to conclude that this famous white water course could in fact be run by open boats, though not in the style of closed boats. It was amusing to think of how the spectators would react to the stodgy deliberate skill of the canoeist dipping in and out of eddies compared with the slapdash of the kayakers shooting across rollers and backing through gates.

We selected the rivers to run mainly on the basis of information in the excellent book by Gilles Fortin (see box at end of article). Detailed descriptions of each river can be found there, so my comments here can be more general. There were four of us, all running solo, two in Blue Holes, and one each in a Mad River and an Old Town. The summer of 1984 was a wet one, so water levels at the end of July were higher than normal, at least "moyenne" and perhaps "haut-moyenne" in Fortin's terminology.

The classic run on the Chamouchouane (which means "Where the Caribou Cross" according to Fortin but "Where One Watches the Bear" according to the notes from the Federal wild river survey of 1973) begins north of Chibougamou at Mistassini Post. However, this is a long trip (400 km to St. Felicien) and begins with four days of upstream work. An attractive alternative is to start where Highway 167 crosses the Chamouchouane in the Chibougamou Game Reserve. This option includes the best of the whitewater, but loses the truly wilderness portions of the trip (one is never far from a logging road, even in the Reserve). In either case, it is worth taking out at the southern limit of the Reserve for thereafter the country becomes populated and the river very wide. This gave us a trip of 120 km which can be



done in three to five days. (Good campsites are scarce along the river, and finding one of them might indicate that an early supper is in order.) Note that it is necessary to have a permit to camp in the Chibougamou Game Reserve and that one can be obtained by writing to the Ministère du Loisir, Direction Regionale, 3950 boul. Harvey, Jonquiere; the fee (without fishing) is \$1.50 per person-night.

The Chamouchouane is a big river, nearly the size of the Ottawa, and the rapids are powerful. Nevertheless, all of the rapids are conceivably runnable except those above and at Chaudiere Falls. The rapids on the upper reaches are mainly Class II/III drops through huge boulder fields that are very difficult to scout. They have steep pitches and sharp eddy lines (just how sharp our companion in the brand new Old Town found out quickly), and they can extend for a kilometre or more before the river quiets down. In between, there is generally a good current, riffles or long Class I rapids, depending upon water level.

# a week of rivers



Care must be taken at Fer a Cheval rapids, which we found runnable except for one ledge that is easily lined or hauled over on the right. Further downstream, but well above Chaudiere Falls, there are two large rapids, about 500 m apart, with long, strong tongues leading right into them that should be runnable at lower water. We were able to utilize a technical highwater route to paddle around the upper one, and to use a combination of running and lining on the lower (in both cases on the left). More accurately, three of us took the running/lining option on the lower rapids, but the big tongue was too much of a temptation for the fourth. His plan was to ride the tongue down and then move into the eddy above the final rocky drop. The river had other plans; the tongue was so strong that, once in it, he could not move toward the eddy and was carried (shot!) all the way down. Fortunately, either he or his canoe found a way through and he ended upright with surprisingly little water in the boat.

The highlight of the trip down the Chamouchouane has to be Chaudiere Falls and the canyon below it. Commonly shown as a three kilometre portage, the carry can be cut considerably by carrying around the first drop and then paddling the half kilometre or so of relatively flat water to the park that extends from above to below the falls. At this point, the portage, perhaps 1.5 km, is entirely on a road. But don't hurry. You will want lots of time to look at the falls, and at the huge potholes it has carved, some with water surging in them to indicate that some how they must connect to the falls itself. The total drop over big and little Chaudiere is at least 40 metres.

Below the falls is the canyon section, 15 kilometres of steep banks, waterfalls, and Class I rapids that takes little more than an hour to run. It ends in the delightful Class II Rapide Pas de Fond. And from here to the lake out there is nothing to slow the canoeist but the occasional rapid, the sheer beauty of the scenery and an occasional dip. Fishing is said to be good in the Chamouchouane though we did not try it. We saw some small mammals and lots of birds, but no large animals.

After taking out from the Chamouchouane, we again drove by beautiful Lac Saint Jean to the Provincial campground at Kenogami, east of Hebertville. Using this camp as base, we knew we could do a number of nearby rivers. The next day turned out to be the highlight of the trip. We had selected the Chicoutimi River which sounded very exciting and had only one confirmed portage. While it was a long run - 40 km - it did end right at the campsite, so it sounded feasible. And feasible it was.

Of that 40 km, perhaps 5 were flat and at a maximum 10 km were Class I rapids. The remainder, some 25 km were steady Class II and III, dropping down pitches that were quite visible to the eye. By the end - after some nine hours of paddling time - we were both exhilarated and exhausted. I can well remember looking downstream, realizing that my boat was heading for a hole, and