



A rusting tin can on the sand bank of the Blondeau at a marshy widening of the stream helped us find the portage trail. This was the place, according to George Luste, that Eric Morse spent a night in a trapper's cabin several decades earlier. Though the cabin had long since fallen down and a forest fire had passed through the area, the remains of the cabin are clearly visible.

Wollaston Lake was reached on the sixth day of the trip. Our pace could be described as being somewhat leisurely. On the 1981 Luste excursion, we traversed the same distance in five days.

No sooner had we arrived at Wollaston Lake, a little behind schedule, than we found ourselves windbound. Being weather-bound is not an entirely relaxing diversion, especially when attempts are being contemplated to increase the tempo of the trip to make up for lost time.

We watched the whitecaps on Wollaston Lake for most of the afternoon of 7 July, and decided to paddle during the evening should conditions permit. By 1:30 a.m. the wind became calm, and we immediately broke camp and set out on the tranquil early morning waters of Wollaston Lake. Paddling in the dimness of early morning to a yellow-orange westerly skyline on serene waters at six km/hr was akin to a pleasant dream. The sunrise that morning was gorgeous.

By mid-morning, we found ourselves weather-bound on Hungry Island. Lying beyond the island is a large expanse of water. It was important not to attempt the crossing until the weather became settled because at one point we would be an hour's paddle from the nearest shore.

We were already one day behind schedule and were in the process of losing another. Circumstances seemed to conspire against us, preventing us from maintaining a reasonably swift pace. It was not until evening that the winds abated, and we decided to attempt the remaining section of Wollaston Lake. The stress and frustration of being behind schedule, not knowing when the trip could be continued, and the altered day-to-night routine (i.e., lying around all day and paddling most of the night) proved tiring. Though we successfully navigated the remaining section of the lake (Hungry Island to Fond du Lac River), it exhausted us. The tent was hastily erected on a mound of glacial drift not far from the Fond du Lac River.

In mid-July, the Fond du Lac is a gentle river and most of the rapids are of the Class II variety. Though the sedimentary rock found on a large part of the river between Wollaston and Black Lakes formed many ledges, ferrying back and forth across the river in search of an opening for the canoe was great fun.

Manitou Falls is by far the most beautiful spot on the river. Here the river is confined to a narrow channel which divides around a rock island in spectacular form. We wondered if a swimmer could survive a trip through the chute. My guess was that if he was wearing a flotation device and did not get pinned against the island, he might get washed through, no worse for the experience. It would be hard to imagine how a canoe venturing into those turbulent waters could survive.

Early on the 12th day, a few minutes after decamping and just out of sight of our camping place on the Fond du Lac, we came upon a lean bear digging for roots. He ignored the warning cry of a sandpiper as we silently glided to within 10 metres of him. The clicking of our cameras finally got the beast's attention. He seemed perplexed, and

hesitated before determining that flight was his best alternative. Had we been Cree hunters, he surely would have been deprived of more than just a few roots. Later on, at Black Lake, we were told 1985 was a poor year for bears. There was little for them to eat.

Our arrival at Black Lake coincided with a heavy wind, some rain, and overcast skies. Morberg's Camp, a commercial fishing camp which caters to Americans, was still 35 km away across the lake. We were eager to reach it and complete the first leg of the trip. However, the wind was so strong we could not venture out. About 2 a.m. the following morning, the storm showed signs of moving on. We took the tent down and left.

At Morberg's Camp I made preparations for my solo trip to Lynx Lake. A Grumman is an excellent wilderness tandem tripping canoe. Its strength-to-weight ratio is nearly unbeatable. However, it is a heavy brute for an individual to paddle, even with an efficient means of propulsion such as a kayak paddle.

With the help of John Mucha, one of the capable staff at Morberg's Camp, a kayak paddle was constructed from two Mohawk canoe paddles and a broomstick. The shaft was secured to the paddles with the aid of silicone seal and screws to form a kayak paddle of about 2.9 metres long. An unusually long kayak paddle is needed when paddling a canoe because the canoeist has a higher profile than a kayaker (i.e., a higher seat). A shorter kayak paddle for propelling a canoe would require that one blade be lifted high out of the water with each stroke. This creates an awkward paddling stroke and water is dripped onto the hands and into the canoe. The longer paddle remedies these technical problems.

The change from tandem to solo paddling also meant I had to change the use of the spray skirt that is designed for two paddlers. It is not designed for use by a soloist sitting in the front seat facing the stern. Some modifications were possible. The stern cockpit was sealed off with elastics. By placing the kettle on the rear seat under the closed-off opening, the skirt was propped up. This prevented the opening from sagging and collecting water which would seep through into the canoe.

Upon leaving Morberg's Camp, a favorable wind was blowing for the first time in 16 days. Soloing down Black Lake with the kayak blade was a joy. The 25-km journey to the Chipman River was made in smart time, less than five hours. It was a shock to find no sign of a portage trail at the location indicated on the topographicals. Even after searching the vicinity and closely examining the shoreline, the remains of the portage trail that J.B. Tyrrell spoke of in his 1893 writings could not be found! There was no alternative but to bushwack to Chipman Lake.

Heading out with map, compass, and a heavy pack, I found the terrain difficult. The young spruce regrowth was thick; hills and marshy bogs were encountered; there was a scarcity of reference points to navigate from; and my perspiration flowed profusely. It would be physically challenging to traverse this route with the lightest pack; how was it going to be done with my obscenely heavy food pack, let alone the canoe which obscured vision and became entangled in the trees? It became increasingly evident that the completion of the carryover would be a feat of great physical endurance.