



As the shadows grew long and fatigue settled in, it became clear it would be impossible to complete two of the tree carryovers to the first lake on the Chipman Portage before nightfall. There was no question about going back for the second load, the food pack, before finding a landmark that I was not sure I would be able to find when I returned. The first load, which included the tent and sleeping bag, would be impossible to find in the complex terrain if it was left anywhere other than at a distinct spot.

As the shadows grew longer, I realized I would have to make a choice. If the night was spent at the first lake, I would have shelter. If I returned to Black Lake for the second load, I would have food. I would not have time to return to the first lake before the onset of darkness. I could have food or shelter, but not both.

These thoughts were wandering through my mind as I struggled through the thick black spruce undergrowth (jungle) when a wide, well-used trail appeared. This was clearly the lost Chipman Portage, but how could this distinct "highway" have been missed? On the return journey, it was noticed the trail veered to the west and followed the Chipman River more closely than was indicated on the topographical. Upon my return to Black Lake, I found the portage's beginning was more than 2 km west of where it had been indicated on the map.

It was getting very late in the day and the canoe had to be retrieved and brought down to the start of the portage trail. Reuniting myself with the canoe was not a simple task of just following the shoreline. The shore of Black Lake near the Chipman Portage is composed of boulders and thick vegetation. There were two deep, swampy bays to be negotiated and a vertical rock face on the shoreline which made following the water quite out of the question. Striking a cross-country course was the most direct way of reaching the canoe. There were complications: the canoe was 100 metres inland and the lighting had changed, (i.e., I wasn't sure if I would be able to recognize the place where I left the Grumman). After a little concern and effort I found it and hastily brought it to the unseemly location of the Chipman Portage.

It was evident why the portage could prove difficult to find since there are few signs on the shoreline indicating its existence. The shallow bay in which the trail is found discourages close inspection of the shoreline by travellers who might have difficulty identifying the not too obvious opening in the shore brush as being the trail's beginning. The topographical ensured that my search for the Chipman Portage was conducted in a place where it could not be found.

The carryover to the first lake on the Chipman Portage is on a long uphill carry of about five kilometres. The final crossing of the portage was laboriously completed during the last moments of twilight on the evening of 18 July. The woods were utterly still. There was not a breath of wind, and sound carried great distances. A clear, melodious music sprang from the depths of the young spruce forest. It must have been an oriole. It was magical, and I cannot recall ever hearing more pleasant music. It was full reward for the effort of having gone there.

Finally, in the midnight semi-darkness when both packsacks and tripper were finally united, the treasured bottle was passed up to the fire in preparation for the

all-important toddy, and the tent was erected on a damp spot. I found the vinyl-coated nylon spray deck could be employed for another use. By placing it under the mattress, it provided an additional layer of insulation from the damp moss.

The following morning it took me nearly an hour to return to the shore of Black Lake to collect the canoe. The ascent with the Grumman, even after a night's rest, was burdensome. Just going down to Black Lake to get the canoe and return with it seemed to take nearly half a day.

Working through the remaining section of the Chipman Portage was less arduous because the distances between the lakes in the series of lakes which forms the remaining section of the portage were shorter. The brief respite on the lakes provided relief from the carryovers. The crossing of the Chipman Portage was completed at day's end and camp was made on the shore of Chipman Lake under overcast skies.

The paddle up the Chipman River in the direction of Selwyn Lake did not require much effort except for one long carryover on a well-defined portage trail (the Black Lake Chipewyans still use this area). Becoming weather-bound was a constant concern. I arrived at Bompas Lake in the late afternoon as the winds were becoming calm. Rather than make camp at the normal hour in the late afternoon, I decided to complete the crossing of the lake and did so by 11 p.m., concluding a 16-hour paddling day at a seductively attractive sandy beach not far from the portage to Selwyn Lake.

Thirty-five km/day for a soloist in a Grumman is a demanding pace, and attempts to maintain the schedule while fighting a continual headwind proved difficult. On Selwyn Lake, in addition to being windy under overcast skies, conditions became rainy and cold. The synthetic garden gloves I wore to protect my hands from wear and tear proved inadequate insulation from the cold paddle. A backup pair of woven nylon gloves were a great relief.

