

located to the north of the portage.

Nueltin Lake means about 170 km of paddling almost straight north. Most of the route is unprotected from wind. One can do little more than paddle hard and hope for good weather. Some careful navigation is required to find the narrow spot in the middle of the lake which is a class 1 rapid (14VMB6071). Shortly after comes an outcamp of the fly-in fishing camp at the south end of Nueltin Lake. This was the last operating camp we passed before reaching Eskimo Point, but everybody was out fishing with the exception of an excited, tail-wagging dog. We camped a short distance to the north on 14 July.

Seven days were required from entrance to exit of Nueltin Lake, two of which were layover days caused by high winds. On the active days we averaged thus 35 km, which has something to do with our age (50 and 58). Two men half our age can do 50 km per day in a heavily loaded canoe on a lake.



South branch, south fork of outlet of Nueltin Lake

We took the south branch of the outlet of Nueltin Lake (14VNC0440). An island splits it into two forks. We portaged across the island close to the left fork which carries much less water than the right one. The footing was extremely poor, but we were now north of the treeline and did not have to break a trail through the brush. Two kilometres downstream comes a 1-km-long portage on the right that permits easy walking (14VNC0641). The water level in Nueltin Lake was clearly very high; at a lower level this rapid may be runnable.

At the end of the portage we met four fishermen from Minnesota who had flown in from Lynn Lake and were camped for a week close by. After trading stories for an hour we pushed off across Sealhole Lake to make use of a rare southerly wind. These were the last people we met until we reached Hudson Bay 31 days later.

The west shore of this lake is followed to its northernmost point (14VNC1269). Dragging over rocks was required occasionally. A portage of 100 m in the direction north leads to a pond. The map is unreliable in this area and the landmarks are difficult to reconcile with the map. A conspicuous mountain seen here lies on the west side of Hawk Hill Lake, while an about equally high elevation on the map to the north is completely inconspicuous. Use of the compass is a must.

From the pond one portages 1 km slightly east of north to the bend of the Kognak River. The landscape is extremely featureless. We built a 3-m-high tripod of tree trunks on a hill close to the Kognak River as a guide post. Walking is very poor: swampy areas, bushes, boulder fields. One must scout for the portage route with the best footing, not for the shortest one.

The wind soon grew too strong and we were forced to camp. Two days were needed for the 15 km to the north end of Sealhole Lake. Here begins the portage route from the Thlewiaza to the Kognak River (14VNC1655). It starts with a 200-m-long portage on the east side of an inflowing creek. The boulder-strewn creek bed was not passable despite what the map shows. A small pond is crossed and another portage of 200 m length is made on the east side of the inflowing creek. Several of the narrow spots in the lake shown north of here on the map required wading or lining. The next portage (14VNC1558) is made on the west side of the inflowing creek. By going some distance into the bay on the left we avoided portaging across bad boulders and through bushes. No more portaging or wading is required beyond this point until the watershed of the Kognak River is reached. Here one has the impression of paddling on top of the world. The surrounding land looks lower than the water level of the lake, and one gets the feeling the water may spill over any moment.

Despite the promising name Kognak River there was nothing to remind one of cognac. Black Fly River would be more appropriate, since these little devils were waiting for us at every rapid. They know one cannot run a rapid with the vision reduced by a mosquito net, and they made full use of this knowledge.

A bad debris rapid is found at the entrance to Hawk Hill Lake. We waded it on the left which was very hard

on the canoe. The rapid between Hawk Hill Lake and Mountain Lake could be run. A closed-down prospector camp was located at the entrance of Mountain Lake.

Below Mountain Lake comes a stretch of class 3 and 4 rapids almost 15 km long. We do not like to run class 4 rapids when alone in the wilderness, but the length of this section left us little choice. One of these rapids close to the sharp bend of the Kognak River (14VNC3095) is a death trap. The river banks are quite innocuous, but there is a ledge in the river. We spotted it because there was so much noise and so little whitewater, which is often a sign of a sudden drop. An enormous hydraulic formed below the ledge will keep a turned-over canoe and its crew until doomsday. A short portage on the right gets one around. The rapids end about 2 km further on. Ducker Lake brings a welcome respite. We celebrated here the halfway point of our trip on the 23rd day from the Cochrane River.

A closed-down gold mine is located in this stretch of rapids (14VNC2791).

A class 5 rapid comes below Ducker Lake (14VNC7086). The map shows a dot in the river, which represents a number of rocky islands that split the river into several channels. A 200 m portage on the right was made. A lift-over on the left got us around the next rapid (14VNC8180), but it could probably be run on the right. About 500 m below comes a ledge that protrudes from the left bank almost across the river. However, there is a channel on the extreme right; rock dodging is required below the ledge. Peaceful paddling follows until the Tha-anne River is reached.

The Tha-anne River has a fast current and class 1 to 2 rapids. This sounds great, but one has to go upriver! Several short wades and a crossing were required to get from the mouth of the Kognak River 3 km upriver to a wide spot with essentially no current. Then comes a 1 km stretch of wading to reach Roseblade Lake. No current was found between Roseblade Lake and South Henik Lake. An esker (14VPC0080) offers good camping in an otherwise sad surrounding. A strong current is encountered at a place where the map would not make one expect it (14VNC9589). Shortly after, a north wind started blowing, but we made it to the next esker (14VND9706), where we spent two nights.

One perfect day without wind permitted us to reach the north end of South Henik Lake and the portage to Ameto Lake, which is the beginning of the Henik-Padlei portage route (14VND9035). A fly-in fishing camp is located 5 km west of here on the north bank of the channel connecting North and South Henik Lake.

The portage to Ameto Lake is 500 m long through bushes and across muskeg. In the southern part of Ameto Lake we experienced a strong magnetic anomaly that extended into the nameless lake below the outlet (14VPD0435). The compass needle deviated by as much as 45° from the direction of the magnetic pole. Fortunately the sun was out and we could navigate with its help. The area is singularly devoid of any landmarks. There must be a substantial body of ferromagnetic ore in the vicinity.

Very little water flows out of Ameto Lake. We dragged our canoe over rocks and through willows on the right side of the outlet. This is a real bad stretch for an ABS plastic canoe; one hates to think of what it would do to a less resistant canoe.

The map shows a bay with narrow entrance at the north end of the following lake (14VPD0440), but this entrance consists of rocks without water. A portage of 100 m length leads across a neck of land. The rocks are piled up here by ice pressure which makes them appear almost impenetrable, but the going soon gets much better. One can actually camp here. Paddling across the pond one reaches the 500-m-long portage into the next lake. At its northern end (14VPD0846) starts a trickle of water that guides the traveller to Kinga Lake and Padlei. We dragged the canoe for a while but in the end we had to make a 100-m-long portage. Only 1 km further on comes another 200-m-long portage, followed by 1 km of paddling that brings one to the low point of this portage route (14VPD0848). A 1-km-long portage as bad as they come with rocks, bushes, trees, and mud - well defended by black flies - leads to a pond. At the north end of the pond is a 500-m-long portage on the right to a small pond and then a 1-km-long portage on the left to what is shown on the map as a long, narrow lake. This long lake consists in reality of a string of ponds (14VPD1049). We made six portages in this lake, from 200 m to 1 km. A real lake is reached (14VPD1555). At its outlet is a 1-km-long portage on the left; a pool is crossed to the right side, and another 1-km-long portage is made on the right. About 5 km of paddling follow to a portage of 500 m on the right (14VPD1859). A short paddle brings one to the end of this lake (14VPD1860).

Here one faces a 3-km-long portage. After some scouting and discussing we decided the best way to cope was to portage cross country for about 3 km in the direction 30° magnetic, and then head directly north through the woods to the river. If this is done correctly one needs