

MAKOBÉ RIVER

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As I browse through Hap Wilson's "Temagami Canoe Routes" (something which I do regularly and with great pleasure), I have often been taken by his description of the Makobe – Montreal River Loop. It has always seemed a trip which would have something of all the best that the Temagami district has to offer: large and smaller lakes, rugged shield terrain, scenic waterfalls, and a measure of runnable rapids. For me the most inconvenient feature has always been the recommended 10-day length of the trip, an awkward amount of time-off to arrange, particularly in the early season when the water levels are best.

Joan and I managed to solve this problem on our recent trip by making arrangements with one of the locals in Elk Lake to shuttle our car down to Mowat Landing and back to Elk Lake, thereby eliminating what I would judge to be the least interesting side of the triangular loop, the Montreal River section. By so doing we managed to complete our trip, without undue haste, in seven days, including driving time from Toronto and back.

The other two sides of the "triangle" are well worth the trip. The first section is made up of the Lady Evelyn Lake/River system. This area will be familiar to most who have travelled in the Temagami area as it is one of the most popular routes in the district. Beginning at Mowat Landing, one paddles across the Montreal River and portages around the Mattawapika Dam to gain access to Lady Evelyn Lake. This scenic 30-km lake is studded with islands and has a number of eskers along the middle section of its southern shore. Although there are a number of both cottages and lodges on this lake, in May traffic is light and the sense of isolation is sufficient to satisfy even the wilderness purist.

After travelling a short segment of Sucker Gut Lake the route enters the Lady Evelyn River Provincial Park. In the next five kilometres there are a series of three waterfalls which, particularly at high water, are quite spectacular. Configured like a miniature Niagara Falls, Centre Falls on the Lady Evelyn drops 10-15 metres over a broad expanse and then makes a 90-degree turn into a canyon. On the opposite side of the canyon there is an outstanding, flat, grassy campsite which faces directly toward the falls – truly a sensational setting.

Be forewarned, however; Temagami portages, particularly in this area, are no picnic! While usually not overly long, the terrain can be very rugged (just picture rock climbing with a canoe on your back) and the portages typically begin with a "boulder beach" which may be anywhere from 10 to 100 m across. It is in this sort of situation that I appreciate the principle advantage of an abuse-absorbing, aluminum canoe.

Having relatively little experience in upriver travel, I was anxious to try out, in the swiftwater sections, the "one-rope-attached-to-both-ends-of-the-canoe-and-held-in-the-middle" method of tracking which R. M. Patterson describes in *Dangerous River*. I was delighted to find it both

simple and effective – a great alternative to a portage where there is sufficiently open shoreline. As the need to maintain my footing along the boulders commanded a substantial proportion of my attention, Joan was also able to fulfil a useful role by following behind and yelling at me whenever she thought that I was letting the angle get too broad.

Permit me a brief digression to talk about the weather. One of the reasons that Joan and I enjoy tripping at this time of year (first half of May) is that the weather is usually very pleasant with little rain, cool nights, and warm days. The weather encountered on this trip could best be described as "variable"! On days one and two it was swelteringly hot to the point that Joan went for a swim in the frigid waters of Katherine Lake to cool off. A certain member of the party, who shall remain nameless, was heard to remark that a pleasant northern breeze would be a welcome relief. Someone up there listens to remarks like that! After a refreshing interlude of 24 hours of rain, we awoke the next morning to find there was two centimetres of ice on the top of our water bucket, and the clothing we had hung out to dry the previous night was frozen stiff. As we paddled up the lake into a 40 km/hr "northern breeze," which blew fine snow into our faces, I wondered why the sound of the wind seemed so much like a deep voice laughing!

Bugs are seldom a problem this early in the season and this year was no exception. We saw few mosquitoes and the black flies, not yet in their June numbers, seemed relatively sluggish and inactive as if they had not as yet come to realize fully their "raison d'être."

At Macpherson Lake we left the Lady Evelyn system to paddle up Gray's River. Passing through Graymud Lake we were able to appreciate the appropriateness of the name. The lake is so shallow, even at spring water levels, and the deepwater channel so difficult to follow, that progress seems to come at an inflated price. It must be a challenge to keep afloat in the summer but one certainly wouldn't want to have to wade.

After paddling up Grays Lake into the previously mentioned headwind we crossed the height of land via the only long portage on the trip, a 1200-m hike into Banks Lake. The first 200 m of this portage are described as being "quite boggy." This is no overstatement! While carrying my trusty wanigan, I stepped rather incautiously into a puddle and came to an abrupt halt when one of my legs suddenly became one metre shorter than the other. As I was already somewhat cold, wet, and out of sorts, my wife kindly refrained from laughing, thereby saving me the trouble of a messy decapitation.

From there on the route enters the Makobe River and it's "all downhill." The river continues through shield country until it drops into clay belt just before reaching Elk Lake and there are a number of attractive, small waterfalls as well as many runnable rapids. These rapids tend to be boulder gardens, particularly at their lower ends and I doubt that many