

MINDEN WORK WEEKEND

For a number of years during summer weekends on the Gull River and winter canoe rolling sessions in the swimming pool we had talked about the marvellous opportunities for whitewater training the Minden Wild Water Preserve offers for paddlers of both open and closed boats. We had all benefited from the man-made whitewater course and we realized that we should be putting something back in to show our appreciation and to ensure that it continued to operate.

Finally early last October we turned our good intentions into actions. Saturday morning saw the group of us standing outside the Training Centre shovels in hand, watching the backhoe operator fire up his machine. Our first assignment: to relocate one of the outhouses.

Once the backhoe had roughed-out the new hole, it was our job to finish it off with our shovels, and then to build a wooden crib-work over the top so that the machine could lift the structure from its old spot and deposit it gently in its new exalted location. Working under the experienced guidance of Michael Twitchin and Linda Reiche of the Ontario Wild Water Affiliation, we completed our new housing development well in time for lunch. We looked upon our creation with a pride that few others will ever know, save a handful of Tridel executives.

After a brief repast it was Paul Bunyan time for our group and we spent our afternoon gleefully sawing, splitting, and piling wood. Geez, it's fun to wield a chain-saw. Makes you realize why loggers like clearcutting. When you get one of those suckers roaring away in your hands you just don't want to turn it off.

All afternoon the sky had been growing increasingly dark and menacing, so we fixed up a big tarp to eat under. It would have made a lot more sense for us to have just eaten in the training centre, but then none of us have ever claimed to be particularly bright. As I gobbled down my chili and

mused aloud, "I wonder when it's going to rain," the clouds suddenly burst and it came down in torrents. As the winds tore at the billowing tarp, and we huddled beneath it, we looked longingly out through the sheets of rain at the warm dry training centre in the distance.

In spite of the weather we spent a great evening drinking coffee, as well as more potent libations, and exchanging whitewater tales of terror.

From Mike and Linda we heard about how difficult it was to get whitewater paddlers to volunteer a little time to do the type of work that we were doing which was so necessary to help keep the Preserve's facilities in good order. In fact, we were surprised to learn that the WCA was the only club that had sent a group up to help them out during the entire season. To be frank we felt that this was a damned poor showing by the whitewater fraternity. Perhaps the Preserve's board ought to get a little more vocal in telling those individuals and clubs that use the Gull frequently that they have a moral obligation to help maintain the facilities.

The following morning dawned cold and windy. Following a good hot breakfast we all assembled to be given our final duties. Some of us went down to the river to take in the slalom gates while others got the drier duty of dismantling the playground equipment.

When these chores were completed we all were issued with green plastic garbage bags for a final sweep and inspection of the premises to make sure everything would be shipshape for next spring's opening.

After all the great times we had spent on the Gull, paddling its superb whitewater, it made us feel good to return a little something in appreciation.

If you're like us, a whitewater paddler who's enjoyed using the Minden Wild Water Preserve, won't you join us next time? Circle 3-4 October on your calendar, and call me at (416) 321-3005 to let us know you'll be coming along. Thanks.

Bill Ness

THE ROAD MAP

Looking at the mail piled up on a corner of the desk. One unopened packet is from the provincial government. Pretty sure it's the road map requested a month ago. A freebee for the tourists. I try to get a new road map every year. Part of the ritual.

You do wilderness canoeing and you have rituals. Food preparation rituals, packing rituals, exercise rituals, and airline ticket rituals. Rituals prepare body, mind, and spirit to enter the wilderness. It's a lot like entering the sanctuary of a church. Also a holy place.

The road map has been sitting on the desk for two weeks now. Afraid to open it up. Deeply afraid. The map will show new roads. Maybe not many, and maybe not paved, but always new roads. And always stabbing further and further north. Slowly squeezing the remaining wilderness up against Hudson Bay.

Not much wilderness left now. Can feel the pain, and hear the crying, and see the tears as the new road crosses yet another river and extinguishes the word wilderness from that river's character.

There could have been such an opportunity for future generations, but it would never have worked out. There would have been oil or gas or timber or something some interest group would have wanted. Not enough of us to match numbers with them. So many of them and so few of us. More recreation for the majority. More hydro. More pulpwood. More minerals. More jobs. Why should you few be so privileged?

The answer has to be that no one has the right to make all the decisions for all time. Some of the decisions belong to the children and the children of the children.

When my boy was little he would say "Just be" when he wanted to rest. He didn't want to play or read or draw anymore, he wanted to "Just be."

That's what we're asking for the wilderness. To let the wilderness "Just be." Let the children make some of the choices. It will give us the chance to change one heart at a time.

There are enough tears for the world without having to shed some more when I open a road map.

Greg Went