



# nastawgan

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*Rainbow Falls*

## STEEL RIVER

Toni Harting

I called it the "Crotch Cruncher," this wedge-shaped slab of rock, sticking up menacingly smack in the middle of the portage trail. During the numerous centuries that this path had been used by Native Peoples and later by white travellers, the rock's sharp horizontal top-ridge must have threatened the well-being of many who tried to carefully step over it, burdened by an unwieldy canoe or large pack resting on their shoulders. One slip of the foot, a simple loss of equilibrium at the crucial moment when suspended precariously over the sharp rock, and . . . zap . . . instant agony! The Cruncher is a rock true to its name, deserving a whole lot of respect and a careful approach.

And this was but one of the many hazards we encountered on the Diablo Portage, the first one we had to do on our two-week trip down the Steel River in August 1991.

The Steel presents a remarkable 170-km adventure. It

is in many aspects a superb wilderness tripping river: remote, a closed-loop trip with easy access and take-out in the same location on Santoy Lake, lots of flatwater and manageable whitewater, unpolluted (you've never seen such clear water), between 15 and 20 portages ranging from the 1000-metre Diablo killer to an easy five-metre lift-over, excellent to bad campsites, several very scenic waterfalls, few people (saw only six, all fishing in one lake), bugs, rain, sunshine, wind, hard work, easy days, you name it, we had it all. A marvellous river indeed, but you've really got to know what wilderness canoeing and camping is all about. Not a trip for novices without sufficient whitewater and portaging experience.

The only access/take-out point is on a government dock at the end of a gravel road leading from Hwy 17, a few kilometres east of Terrace Bay on the rugged north shore of