



This lake presents the longest stretch of flatwater on the trip: 30 km of easy paddling (except for the occasional head wind) down a typical Canadian Shield lake. Both shores are often quite irregular with several deep bays and granite rockfaces interrupting the line of trees. There are some islands and the few sand beaches offer good camping spots.

The first of the two disturbing experiences we had on this trip took place in a bay on the west side, about two-thirds up the lake. While exploring by canoe the area around our south-looking campsite we discovered an ugly blotch on the otherwise pristine landscape. An illegal access trail had been hacked out of the bush — according to my information this had been done long ago by inhabitants of communities in the region — making it possible to haul motorboats and camping gear to the lake to go fishing. The place was a bloody mess, broken boats and gear everywhere, empty beer cans, fish guts, oil cans, you name it, it was there. There was no way we could do anything to help clean it up, just too much garbage. Spoiled our good feelings for a while.

The last section of Steel Lake turns to the northeast and ends in a shallow bay. Here the river proper again begins its run, dropping via three rather rough rapids (portages with some hard work available) into Aster Lake, the most northerly point of the trip.

This is where we encountered our second disappointment, a badly overused, soiled campsite that was a far cry from the beauty spot assured us by previous trippers. We cancelled the planned lay-over day and only stayed for the night, setting up the tent as far away from the muck as possible.

But next day, just below Aster Lake, the real river fun started. Up till now the trip had consisted of flatwater paddling, portaging, and some wading, but the rest of the river would provide us with moving water, including many runnable rapids and riffles as well as long runs of fast current. In places there are lake-like wider stretches without any discernable current, requiring pool-and-drop paddling. An occasional short portage can be made to avoid some nasty spots

