

UPPER WANAPITEI RIVER

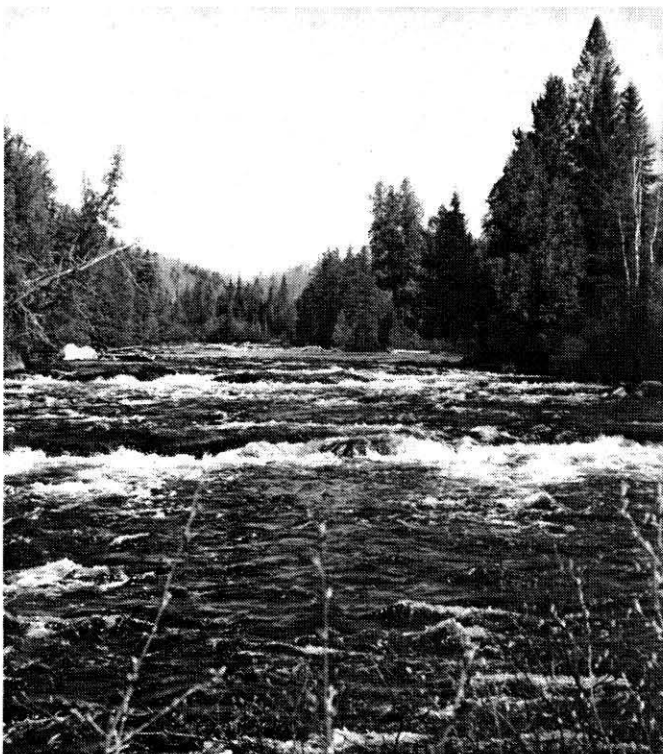
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The Upper Wanapitei was billed as an easy two-day float — the perfect way to extend our May long weekend.

Located just north of Sudbury, the river is one of three running through roughly parallel valleys on the western edge of the Temagami wilderness. The put-in is alleged to be only one hour away from Sudbury, which it is if you start at the extreme end of the regional boundary and drive recklessly over the logging road that runs next to the river. We drove the route between the river and downtown Sudbury four times in two days and not once did we complete the drive in less than two hours.

The first of our four excursions up the logging road started in downtown Sudbury at 11:30 a.m. By the time we had made it to the road, engaged in some necessary road construction, and completed the first car shuttle, it was 3:00 p.m. — hardly the usual time to start paddling. Fortunately wind and sun were on our side and we had a very enjoyable late afternoon paddle through the first eight kilometres of grade I and II water.

The river is little used, and although the route was once maintained by MNR, there are few cleared campsites. Clearings by the logging road that runs along the east bank of the section we paddled provide the easiest if least scenic campsites. There are better potential sites on river right for those with more time to set up than we had allowed ourselves.



A pair of red suspenders hung along the river marked the first take-out. Properly attired, Richard was driven back to Sudbury to pick up his paddle and sleeping bag which he had left behind in his haste to make an early morning start.

The unscheduled drive proved it is not even necessary to prepare food for this trip: simply drive to Sudbury for dinner.

Having traded the Mohawk paddle he had used the first day for his double blade, Richard was in better shape to play in the first Grade III rapid on the route early the next morning. Pat and I carefully planned our route from the portage on river right. Our execution was miserable and we swam the entire drop.

Still feeling silly at not catching that last eddy, we decided to walk the road rather than try the next set. The water volume was lower here on account of a split in the river around an island formed from an old logjam. The route on the left is a series of ledges easily scouted from the road. That on the right starts after the first ledge and can only be scouted from eddies upstream. Both were run successfully by the rest of the group.

From here on the river is a series of flatwater stretches punctuated by more Grade I and II rapids, some long enough to allow for enjoyable playing. The flatwater sections allowed us lots of time to bask in the hot, clear, bug-free weather. Hills on river right marked the ridge separating the Wanapitei from the Vermilion River. A path has been cut by local climbers to one of the more daunting-looking rock faces. The view must be spectacular and should allow glimpses of the Sturgeon River to the east.

We saw no other paddlers and only one fishing camp. The river can only be paddled early in the year and then only after it has dropped below the level of the road. As there is usually little logging in the spring, the road is lightly travelled and does not really detract from the scenery — in fact it provided my best view of a red fox I had enjoyed in a while. The road veers away from the river once, in a section containing the only other Grade III rapid along the route. The portage is on the right and well used. Everyone successfully paddled around the large hole at the centre below the first ledge. I enjoyed that special view from the portage one only gets with an ABS canoe on one's shoulders.

Water levels were good, but close to being too low in some spots. There is a water-flow meter along the river. Ontario Hydro readings for the two days we were there were 39 and 38 cubic metres per second. The water was about one metre below the road at the lowest sections of the road, so the trip should be possible at somewhat higher levels.

To get to the river, take regional route 80 out of Sudbury to Capreol. Travel north of Capreol to the unsigned mining/logging road on the right. Take that one north as far as you can drive. The logging road is shown on the government of Ontario road map.

The Upper Wanapitei is truly part of the lazy person's Temagami, allowing easier access and no crowds. Combined with trips down the Vermilion and the Sturgeon, it is possible to spend from one to five days of very enjoyable paddling as long as you don't forget your paddle.