

MY TOP FIVE LESSONS FOR NEW WHITEWATER PADDLERS

5. Take some lessons ... improving your technique and skill will help you have a lot more fun!
4. Replace your foam blocks; buy roof racks. Without them someone else always has to carry you or your boat one way on the shuttle. With roof racks, you too can learn how to tie three or more boats on your car and help out!
3. Respect the advice of experienced paddlers in your group ... running a rapid is always your choice, but if your group suggests you don't tackle a run, it's probably good advice!
2. Don't bother even trying to explain your interest in this sport at the office ... they'll think it's rafting and they'll think you're nuts!
1. Pick up the phone and pick it up often to sign up for WCA outings ... you'll have great fun, learn a lot, and meet a great group of new friends!

Leslie Dutton.



GREAT ISLAND

It's in Manitoba. On the Seal River. About half way between Shethanei Lake and Hudson Bay.

After leaving the esker that has the Bill Mason memorial, you wind your way through an island section, go around a corner, and there it is. Right in front of you. Big and ominous.

We got there fairly early in the morning on a grey, overcast day. The head of the island was shrouded in mist and darkness. Joseph Conrad stuff. The island looked forbidding as we paddled up to the beach.

Even in the gloom, noticed right away the great camping here at the head end of the island. Nice sand beaches and plenty of driftwood. The climb up to the first plateau revealed even more superb camping spots. And just behind them, the plateau opened up into a park-like area with widely dispersed trees. Osprey nest in one of the trees.

The literature says that Great Island was a meeting place between the Indians of the forest and the Inuit of the tundra. Can see why. Great Island rises about a hundred metres above the surrounding country. Really a significant landmark. Would be a meeting location that no one could miss.

Several fire rings on the first plateau used by more recent travellers. They attest that Great Island is still a preferred camping spot.

Had lunch and explored the head end of the island. Looked for signs of past visits by man. Maybe tent rings, maybe remnants of an old cabin, maybe just a piece of canvas once used for tent material. Anything that would say man was here and he stayed a while.

Found only old bones. Caribou and moose. And some caribou antlers. Those who visited Great Island before us must have recognized the special place that it is. They took their garbage with them.

After lunch we pushed off into the south channel going around Great Island. Thought about making it a short day and staying, but knew that the answer had to be no. We needed to push on. We had already used up all the planned rest days during a bad storm on Shethanei Lake. We were windbound there for three days. This meant that esker hiking and fishing times for the rest of the trip would have to be managed carefully.

More to see once you leave the head end of Great Island. The south channel goes through a very scenic canyon area. Lots of rapids. For the most part runnable. Fast water where rapids are absent.

In the south channel there's also Bastion rock. A huge monolith rising from the water in the middle of a canyon stretch. Impressive from canoe level. Wanted to stop to take in the scenery, but the water was moving. Shot us right by before we could get the three canoes together and make a decision to pull over.

Nine Bar Rapids at the end of Great Island. Called Nine Bar because on the map there were nine slashes indicating the rapids. Three kilometres in length. However, at the high water levels we had this year, you could pick your way down the sides of the rapids and avoid the big rollers in the middle. At the end of Nine Bar Rapids we saw the north channel around Great Island come back to join us.

As we floated past the last bit of the island took a moment to say goodbye. Deep in my heart I knew that I would never be back, and I wanted to thank the island for the privilege of being allowed to visit. The island said nothing, but then the great ones never do.

Greg Went