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Rouge badge of courage

Twenty boys from St. John's School of Ontario battled winds and strong currents to canoe the Rouge River. This is the story of their perseverance:

BRIAN SNELGROVE
 Correspondent

Twenty-one paddles slice through the rough water in perfect harmony. The three wooden canoes lurch forward as the travellers fight strong currents and a biting, westerly wind. Moments later, the canoeists ease onto the sandy beach of Milne Lake Park; wet, cold, and exhausted. They are also triumphant.

The paddlers who landed at the park last Wednesday afternoon are students from Saint John's School of Ontario, in Clarendon. Accompanied by three teachers, the 18 Grade 9 students were completing a two-day school project which had begun under sunny skies at 9 the previous morning. They set off from the mouth of the Rouge River at Frenchman's Bay in Pickering.

Historical trip

"This wasn't really a canoe trip, as much as it was an historical trip," explained headmaster Mike Maunder. "We were trying to duplicate an event which the students read about during one of our history classes."

"In 1794, documents show that William Berczy, the founder of Markham, had tried to establish a trade route from Lake Ontario to Markham," he continued. "In fact, reports suggest that he paddled the Rouge River, identical to the 20-mile course that we've just completed. The students researched the feasibility of this at public libraries, discussed it with local historians and conservation authorities, and talked to government engineers. The school decided to see if we could re-create a feat that supposedly occurred almost 200 years ago."

The journey was not really unique for the students or staff at Saint John's. Every year, for the past six or seven years, the school has embarked on a canoe trip, usually in the early autumn. Previous sites have included Georgian Bay, French River and Quetico Provincial Park.

This is the first time however, that the adventurers have chosen a local destination.

'Ideal location'

"We considered the Humber and Don Rivers," Maunder continued, "but they aren't really canoe routes. Besides, the historical significance and recent political debate surrounding the Rouge River made it an ideal location. The students were very keen on the idea."

The trip was by no means an easy feat. According to the headmaster, who also teaches history at the school, the journey consisted of "approximately six miles of paddling, six of portaging, and six of pulling and scraping the canoes over rocks and through shallow water."

The route took the students north into Scarborough and the Rouge Hills, around the Metro Toronto Zoo, past new subdivisions and golf courses, and finally, to the entrance to Milne Lake.

Billy Bishop headed up the student team which did most of the research for the project, but was unable to take part due to a broken wrist. "I didn't think they would get it done," he said.

"It's extremely rocky. If Berczy did it, he probably used flat, narrow boats, not canoes."

Brian Albisser co-ordinated the four-man student map team and took part in the actual trip. "We thought it would be like a walk around the block," he commented. "It sure wasn't."

"We mapped out the exact route and distance (18.8 miles), the portage locations, the break spots, overnight camping, and so on. One of the portages ended up being three or four miles long through heavy brush. I'm beat. My socks are soaked. You never could keep dry."



Daniel Horner, (left) Russell Marshall, Brian Albisser and Darren Sayers paddle upstream on the Rouge River near Markham. The boys are students of St. John's School of Ontario in Clarendon. They take a canoe trip

every year. This year's was an 18-mile trek up the Rouge River from Frenchman's Bay in Pickering.

"It was great for this group of kids," continued Maunder. "They really pulled together as a unit. Somebody would stumble and fall, they'd pick him up and keep going."

Student Rob Fordham of Markham thought the trip would entail "more paddling. We ended up dragging the canoes and portaging a lot," he said. "I've never carried a canoe before. It's extremely tiring."

The historical significance notwithstanding, the future of the Rouge River has become a contemporary, political issue. "That was the second aspect of the trip," explained Maunder.

"We also study current issues such as urban development. The political process is important and this gives the students an opportunity to assess the pros and cons

of the situation and make their own decisions."

Most students had mixed feelings about their experience from a social or political perspective.

"We saw lots of wildlife - beavers, raccoons, geese, and so on," said Rob. "I think they should leave it as it is."

'Needs cleaning'

Chris Hodgson, another student participant agreed. "They should preserve it," he said. "It's very scenic with lots of fish and birds." Fellow canoeist Brandon McDonald wasn't so sure: "There's tracks and animals," he explained, "but they could change some parts of it. There's also dumps and rusted-out abandoned cars."

On Monday the students had an opportunity to express their views

and learn more about the political issues at a public meeting on Rouge River development at Markham District High School.

They've also invited local residents to come out tomorrow to Grace Anglican Church where the boys will answer questions about their journey. They'll be available from 7:30 p.m.

While the future of the Rouge is still open to debate, the successful trip has not cleared up an equally muddled past. Did Berczy and his men paddle up the shallow, rocky Rouge River?

"No way," said Brandon. "I don't think he could have ever used it as a trade route. It's pretty rough."

"We found a map which showed a sketch of a proposed canal route, dated in 1796," countered the headmaster. "The Governor at the time, John Graves Simcoe,

was against the idea as it would detour traffic from the hub at York (Toronto). The canal never happened, but it is possible that Berczy made the trip up the Rouge."

Berczy's journey

The trip by Saint John's students has demonstrated that debate and controversy surrounding the Rouge is not exactly a recent phenomenon.

"This trip was a combination historical and political awareness event," explained Lynda Hutt, director of public relations for the school. "It really is education in action." Twenty-one cold, weary canoeists would agree. "I'm going home for a long, hot bath," concluded Maunder. "It was a terrific experience, but I wouldn't want to do it all over again tomorrow."



Brian Early (photo above left) lugs two backpacks along a portage. Students at St. John's School of Ontario canoed up the Rouge River to Markham. In the centre photo, Chris Hodgson, Scott Card, Daniel Horner,



Todd Price and staff member Michael Hutt carry a canoe. The 18-mile route included 6 miles of portaging. Getting ready to push off (photo above right) are from left, Daniel Horner, staff member Paul Edwards,



Brian Albisser and Michael Hutt. The boys successfully completed their journey last Wednesday.



Tammy Timms, (left) 11, and her sisters, Shannon, 9, and Danielle, 8, danced in Rock Around the Clock, the finale of Ballantrae Studio of Music's Performance '88. —Jim Thomas

Ballantrae dancers shine

By KATE GILDERDALE

Friday night's Performance '88, which featured The Ballantrae Studio of Music and Dance and Friends, was a delightful program of dance, magic and lively music.

Director Loretana Maiuri had her team of youngsters displaying their talents in both ballet and jazz routines.

The 'Baby Bunnies' with three- and four-year-old students (Michelle Darby, Andrea Hoover, Elizabeth Mariani, Hannah Norrie, Kristina Pyzlak, Dawn Van Seters, Leah Turner and Anna Warren), had the audience smiling with their hopping and skipping and their occasional missed cue.

A breezy jazz routine called *Hands Up* got the evening off to a flying start. Students Jill Avery, Kylie Gornall, Michelle Leonard, Tracey Leonard, Danielle Timms, Shannon Timms, Tammy Timms and Kathy Twiddy ended their dance with a cheery message inviting the audience to sit back and enjoy the show.

Four senior students (Heather Avery, Liane Beam, Michelle Reis and Natalie Reid) performed a softly lyrical ballet entitled *Falling Leaves*, while Brooke Biggs, Stacey Biggs, Joanna Fast, Courtney Morchouse and Jessie Tinker entertained with the exuberant *Spoon Full of Sugar*.

Nine-year-old Rebecca Morrison proved that she could both dance and act in the fast-paced solo *Kiss Polka*.

Both Rebecca Norrie and Kathy Twiddy danced with poise and grace in the flowing *Gavott*, with Nancy Cummings Richardson's talented highland dancers Erin Churchill, Jenny Lunney, Katherine Shearman and Vicky Williamson adding dash and lightning to the stirring accompaniment of bagpipes.

Country Ballet featured Jill Avery, Alexise Dodd, Rebecca Norrie and Kathy Twiddy dancing with energy and enthusiasm to the strains of 'Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' while Shakespeare the Magician wove his skillful magic for the audience.

The final dance was the spirited *Rock Around the Clock* and the evening ended on a high note with cast and spectators joining vocal forces in the Carpenters' *Sing a Song*.

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Two bands compare notes.../C-12

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