



# Canoehead

*paddling advice from  
Souris River Canoes*



*Issue #2*

*December 2009*

## **Getting your Canoe from Here to There**

This year, Souris River Canoes moved heavily into the direct sale of our canoes to areas not served by our retailers. As the manufacturer, we are able to answer your technical questions and guide you to the perfect canoe for your needs. We can also quickly supply you with our more specialized models like the Skeena or Tranquility that may not be in stock at retailers.



The hurdle we had to jump was shipping. This was two hurdles, really: cost and crating. Last fall we were able to negotiate an arrangement with our shipper that allows us to pass on an incredible deal to our customers. We will ship virtually anywhere in Canada and the continental United States for \$200. There may be a few remote areas where we have to charge more, but we haven't come across one yet.

To resolve the crating problem, we turned to a system used by our largest retailer, the Red Rock Wilderness Store in Ely, Minnesota. Joe has developed a solid and light crating system over the years. We modified his system, then threw a couple prototypes at Ken Faykes, a local carpenter. He has been pumping out crates for us ever since. Each crate is specific to a canoe model for a snug fit. Each crate is made of quality local lumber; you may want to save some for your next building project. Most important these crates have ensured that every one of our canoes has arrived at its destination as pristine as it left our factory.

## **Proper Canoe Lifting**

Proper canoe lifting is all about style, not strength. Anyone over twelve who can stand on their own two feet should be able to hoist a Kevlar canoe on their shoulders. The Red Rock Wilderness Store website has a thorough step-by-step tutorial on proper lifting. Review it, and practice a few times on your front lawn; you'll be good to go for your next canoe trip.

Note that most people will have a preferred side to lift from. It may not make much of a difference lifting a carbon-fibre Quetico 16, but will be come noticeable when you try to shoulder a three-seat Quetico 18.5. Find your best side, and remember to use it. Check-out [www.redrockstore.com/canoelift.html](http://www.redrockstore.com/canoelift.html).

## **Quetico's McKewen Creek**

**By Kevin Callan (Reprinted with permission)**

*Kevin Callan is an avid outdoor enthusiast, a great storyteller, and a friend of Souris River Canoes. Kevin has written several outdoor books and appeared on CBC Radio's "Fresh Air." Check out his website, [www.kevincallan.com](http://www.kevincallan.com) for his latest adventures. Here he talks about Quetico's McKewen Creek, a lesser-traveled jewel of the park. [ed]*



A couple of years ago my regular canoe mate, Andy Baxter, and I paddled Quetico Provincial Park for the entire month of June. There were plenty of highlights on the trip, but one particular spot I'd go back to in a heartbeat is McKewen Creek. It's an isolated part of the park, a tranquil waterway that's situated in the southeast end.

Here's our McKewen Creek journey written up, from Basswood to Kawnipi Lake.

By late afternoon on day seven we had made it to the entrance to Basswood's Inlet Bay. Not far ahead was Prairie Portage, a 130 meter (25 rod) trail marking Quetico's most southern access point. From there a series of lakes running straight along the border of the U.S and Canada would link us to Saganaga Lake, where the two waterways split to form Hunter's Island. And once at Saganaga the route turned northwest, towards Kawnipi Lake, and back towards Pickerel Lake. The problem was, however, Andy and I noticed a line-up of canoeists waiting to use Prairie Portage and we weren't too thrilled about dealing with crowds again. We were also worried that if we continued east along the major route without having an overnight camping permit for the Boundary Waters Country Area Wilderness we would get stuck again looking for a spot to set up the tent. So, it was now Andy's turn to suggest a short cut. He recommended we backtrack a little ways, portage into Sunday Lake, and then head northeast to McEwen Lake and Kawnipi Lakes. That would definitely take us away from one of most the crowded areas of the park, but it would also eliminate some of the most scenic and historically significant places en route. For example, Knife Lake is a gorgeous spot and comes complete with a quarter mile hiking trail to the top of Thunder Point and a visit to Dorothy Molter's Isles of Pines. Dorothy, or more commonly known as the Rootbeer Lady, was a legendary figure for thousands of canoeists who stopped by her island home for a home made bottle of root beer until her death in 1986.

Our decision was made easier for us the moment we saw another large group of canoeists heading towards Prairie Portage, making a total of 12 canoes and 17 kayaks gathering at the take-out. There was no need for further discussion; Andy and I decided on the short cut.

There's two ways to reach Sunday Lake from Basswood's Bayley Bay. The first is to take an easy 450 meter (90 rod) portage from the top end of Bayley Bay, into Burke Lake, and then turn east to take a quick lift-over beside a small creek. The second is a 640 meter (127 rod) trail titled the North Portage which begins from Bayley Bay's northeastern Sunday Bay. Andy and I took the North Portage, thinking

it would save time, which it did; but we also suffered an up-hill battle most of the way across and by the moment we paddled out into Sunday Lake we called it day and made camp on the first island to our right.

The wind had thankfully changed direction by morning and we were able to race across the full length of Sunday Lake, which wasn't much of a blessing since we weren't too keen on what was waiting for us at the other end. A 970 meter (193 rod) portage took us into Meadow Lake and a 560 meter (110 rod) portage took us out. The first trail was relatively flat but cursed with lots and lots of mud. The second was shorter but had a much steeper incline a few ankle-twisting rocks to balance across. The pay back, however, was brunch and a swim at Louisa Falls. The falls itself had an insanely steep 150 meter (30 rod) portage to the right. But once Andy and I carried the canoe and gear up to the top (I think it would be scarier carrying the gear down the hill) we went back to the half-way point and relaxed in the natural Jacuzzi, a glacial bowl formed below the first drop in the 100 foot (33 meters) falls.

The route between Bayley Bay and Agnes Lake can be a busy spot at times. And the Louisa Falls bathtub is an extremely popular destination for paddlers (we were quite surprised to have the Jacuzzi to ourselves actually). But once Andy and I began paddling northeast across Louisa Lake we knew that crowds wouldn't be an issue. Louisa is a very large and scenic lake and may be a destination lake for some paddlers, but the route that follows is barely used by canoeists. The first portage, measuring 520 meters (103 rods) and leading out of the far northeast end, was overgrown and had seen little traffic. It also happens to be all up hill. We missed the 60 meter (12 rod) portage to Star Lake completely. It was supposed to be somewhere in a bay to the left. Instead we found a rarely used 60 meter (12 rod) trail to the left of the creek flowing out of Star Lake, paddled through a twisting channel through the center of a marshy area, and then lifted 20 meters (4 rods) over and through a giant patch of poison ivy to Star Lake. The third, 270 meters (54 rods) into Fauquier, could only be reached by getting out and pulling the canoe up a small creek surrounded by muskeg. It also had a few blow downs blocking the path, but was at least downhill all the way.

From Fauquier to Dumas Lake, a spot where the flow of water changes direction, the going got worse. The 360 meter (72 rod) portage was rocky, narrow and wet. Most of the time we were hugging the edge of an abrupt crevasse, walking through sections of the creek, or dodging patches of poison ivy. The small brook, however, was gorgeous. Crystal clear water flushed over medium-sized boulders covered in vibrant colored moss; the entire section had a fairly-land experience to it and was a highlight of the day. Then, from the eastern inlet of Dumas there was more creek paddling then lakes, and even the lakes themselves were mere ponds, all with a character of their own. Again, it was extremely rewarding. The center of the creek bed was lined with lime-green angle hair, flowing back and forth with the gentle current, and the edges were lined with thick patches of white and yellow lilies, pitcher plants, and the occasional Calypso orchids. We also witnessed a wolf preying on a raven while we rounded the first bend in the creek after Dumas Lake, which was definitely the best wildlife sighting of the trip.

Andy and I heard the commotion first - two ravens were screaming uncontrollably – and we slowed the progress of the canoe just before the crook in the waterway. As we drifted around the corner, a large, beige timber wolf was in the midst of snatching onto one raven's wing while the other bird repeatedly dive-bombed the prowler. The wind wasn't in our favor, but the wolf was so preoccupied with both ravens that we were able to float darn close to the action. It was like watching a nature documentary

unfolding right in front of us; that is until I decided to reach for my camera. Just one slight moment was all it took for the wolf to look up, spot us only a couple canoe lengths away, and then give up on the two birds to escape into the thick brush. The wounded bird took refuge halfway up an alder patch alongside the creek while his buddy continued to harass the wolf in the backwoods. It was obvious that the wolf was patiently waiting for us to continue on. So we did just that, and a few minutes downstream Andy and I took notice that only one raven was now calling out. I guess the wolf got its meal for the day.

We took on a short 40 meter (8 rod) portage along the right bank of McEwen Creek shortly after leaving the wolf incident; between Rod and Edge Lake there was another short 80 meter portage to the left, complete with an awkward takeout spot; from Edge to Turn Lakes Andy and I first considered walking the next section of shallow rapids rather than taking a 40 meter (8 rod) portage to the left. The take-out was covered in poison ivy. But fallen trees on the far side made the idea impossible. So we tip-toed our way through the poison ivy, walked alongside the creek, and then climbed up and over a slab of granite, trudging on until the waterway deepened enough to make the canoe navigable again. The next 70 meter (14 rod) portage – found to the right of the creek and leading directly into Turn Lake – was one of the easiest en route. It had recently been blocked by a number of fallen trees but thankfully was cleared by who ever had gone through before us.

The creek became even more weed choked from here but we managed to find a way to Glacier Lake by keeping to the center and making use of two more portages to take us around two sections of swift water, the first being an easy 30 meter (6 rod) trail to the right and the second being a 50 meter (10 rod) trail also to the right, with the take-out hidden by a large boulder.

Our plan was to reach McKewen Lake at the end of the day, which we could have done by taking on two more portages – a 50 meter (10 rod) trail to the left, which splits after the take-out and either takes you up and over a steep mound of rock or keeps you tangibly close to the creek itself, and a 110 meter (22 rod) trail to the right of a shallow and rock-bound rapid (you could actually lined down this one rather than portage) – followed by a couple more miles (a kilometer-and-a-half) of the ever-twisting McEwen Creek. Glacier Lake, however, was too perfect to pass up. It was a clear, deep lake surrounded by cliffs and loaded with feisty smallmouth bass. And best of all, no one was there. The lake was so perfect that Andy and I made the campsite east of the island, directly in front of a granite bluff, our home for two solid days.

Having a rest day during an extensive trip is a must for all canoe trippers, with the half-way point being the best time to plan for it. You're too much in a hurry in the beginning, and way too much in a hurry at the end of your trip to stay at a campsite for two nights. But by the midway point your body and your mind are in need of it. You're into a routine; the days become less purposeful or directed; you stop looking at your watch or reading the map every five minutes; and your taste for comforts back home, like the luxury of a drive-thru restaurant or a cold can of soda, become lost from your senses. Our time off was spent brewing two pots of coffee in the morning rather than just one, cooking up extra bannock for lunch, and then went exploring to an unnamed lake to the northeast of Turn Lake, a lake which is off the regular canoe route and had more bass than one could ever imagine.



### **Atikokan Christmas Parade Float**

*In support of our Canadian troops in Afghanistan, builder Dorinda Kora (left) designed our float for the Christmas Parade. Shown with her are Souris River Canoes co-owner Arlene Robinson, and summer worker Jamie Kora.*

### **The best of the season to you from the folks at Souris River Canoes**

Whether you celebrate Christmas or Hanukah or another festival, the winter solstice is a time for family and friends to gather, share memories and build new ones. We hope your hearth is warm and your hearts warmer.

### **Keep in touch!**

Have a paddling story that might suit our newsletter or our website? Let us know. We'd love to share your paddling photos as well. E-mail your material or queries to [admin@sourisriver.com](mailto:admin@sourisriver.com)

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