

Saugeen River, Walkerton to Denny's Dam



April 18-20/03
Participants: Bill and Janice.
Distance: 82 Km.

Fri. Apr. 18/03, Good Friday: *Janice:* We left Walkerton at 11:00 am. The water level is 8" down from the top of the solid dock. It is fairly high and running fast. A lot of the rapids that we normally see in the late spring and summer are nonexistent and most of the rock gardens are not showing. It is raining and cold, 4 degrees C., hopefully the weather will improve. There were lots of standing waves and rapids around the high sand bluffs on the right hand side in the 3rd concession after Walkerton. This is farm country and you can smell the aroma of the land, so we have brought extra water for cold drinks and we are filtering and boiling. There is a lot of turbidity in the river from the run-off. Our showers seemed to have turned out to be an all day rain. We stopped under the first bridge after Walkerton for lunch at 1:00 pm. I am soaked (my raincoat is leaking) and we spend some time to get me into some dry clothes. Boy did I need that! We leave at 2:20. Oh by the way, someone has done a really nice job at this access point. There is a nice parking lot here and steps built into the bank for easy access. There are signs on the bridges to help you know how many miles to the next place. I believe it was 11 miles to McBeath from here. The twistier part of the river between here and McBeath is slower and flatter. Three more bridges and then McBeath Conservation Campground. We stopped at the bridge before McBeath and checked out the access for future reference. We arrived at McBeath on the north side of the river at 4:45 pm. We have camped here before, but never alone. We checked out the whole area, had supper and hit the tent about 9:15. We didn't bother with a fire as everything was wet. There is a vault toilet here and it is "user pay by donation". Hopefully the people who come will support it. It certainly is worthwhile. Bill enjoyed cooking at a picnic table and some of the fire pits have grates. We have seen much bird life today. An osprey flew for miles ahead of us with a fish dangling in his talons. We seen turkey vultures, kingfishers, mallards, Canada geese, mergansers, robins, and flickers to name a few. There are muskrats, groundhogs, and signs of beavers. It stopped raining and misted at about 2:45 pm. It is now trying to drizzle. We hope tomorrow the sun is out and we can dry out some stuff.

Sat. Apr. 19/03: Woke early, but never bothered moving. We packed and had breakie and sat and enjoyed the morning view of the river. There are tons of birds singing away. We watched some mergansers and our groundhog. Two commerants were surprised when they popped up and seen us. They weren't long taking off. We were on the water at 10:45. We had a nice paddle to Paisley. There was some fast water just after McBeath, but for the rest, it was mostly flat and lots of volume. We stopped for lunch in Paisley at the rest stop on the left side just before the bridge at 11:50. You could go and check out the town here, but we decided to push on. We left at 12:40 pm. There are some interesting cottages and trailers along the river. As we paddled under the bridge, a couple were getting ready to put in. There appears to be a parking lot there. We stopped and checked out a sandy beach and the couple caught up to us. We let them go by and paddled through the 2 rapids marked on the topo map. These rapids are now haystacks and the rocks marked on the map are under water. They make a nice hard pillow. We passed the couple and bombed on to Saugeen Bluffs, 1:50. We were pulling out as the couple went past and a big ker-splash with a thud sounded in the water between us. It must have been a beaver. We are camped on canoe site C4. There are 4 nice sites on the river's edge for people like us. We walked all the way up to the gatehouse (what a hill!) twice to pay. It is off season, so it is

"honour pay" and we didn't have the correct change or a pen to write out a check. The drinking water isn't on yet, but water is available at the store (water boil in effect). The main washroom is closed, but there are vault toilets. It's peaceful here this time of year and we are the only ones on the canoe sites. Nice. We made soup and biscuits for supper and have a nice fire burning. There was lots of life on the water, lots of birds; great herons, seagulls, commerants, kingfishers, more muskrats and groundhogs. It didn't rain today and the sun came out in the afternoon. It has been a pleasant day.

Sun. Apr. 20/03, Easter: The animals were out last night. It sounded like a dog and some coons fighting in the evening across the river. We heard that ker-splash sound again. The beaver was out and about. Bill woke at 3:00 am. to raccoons fighting. They were loud and not too far away. Busy night. We are on the water at 9:30. It is cloudy and overcast, but not too cold, with a nice tail wind. We had lots of haystacks as we headed towards the bridge. They are building a new bridge beside the old one, there will be a built up road on each side of the bridge. After the bridge there are many islands to slip alongside. This run is lots of fun , even better with less water. We had a gorp break on an island on the left hand side. The second bridge (really 2 bridges, a new one and an old one) has a good access. The river is twistier in this section and our tail wind became a head wind at times. The third bridge has an access area. We paddled for another 20 min. and then stopped for lunch on the right hand side of the river. There is an ATV trail along the river where we checked out some neat trees (wild cherry, ash, cedar, hickory, and poplar to name a few). A beaver has been busy here working on a some pretty big poplar trees. We seen a couple beavers today, one had 2 dogs chasing him through some rapids. The dogs took off as we canoed by. The banks change from sand to clay as we near Denny's Dam. The water begins to slow and pools. Make sure to get off on the river left at Denny's Dam. There is less character to the river when it is high and fast like this. There are still some pretty good haystacks though and the water is cold. Lots more bird sightings today. There is still some snow along the hillsides. We have traveled this river before when the levels were lower and it took more time to do. The Saugeen River Canoe Route pamphlet suggests it will take 16 to 22 hours. We did it in 13 hours and 22 minutes. Nice trip!