

Spanish River East Branch, Duke Lake to Agnew Lake



Participants: Bill and Janice

Total Distance: 145 Km. with 300m in 2 portages, 1 lift over and lots of walking and lining.

Fri. Aug. 11/06: *Janice:* We left Goderich at 3:30pm and took the back way up through Tara to Tobermory arriving at 6:15. We ate supper and looked around. The ferry was scheduled to leave at 7:30, but it was late, even though the lake was smooth. We saw a couple of porcupines along the road (one was dead) and a fox. We arrived at Agnew Lake Lodge at 11:45pm; no one was up, so we slept in the car.

Sat. Aug 12/06: 16.5 Km. Bill was up at 6 and I was up at 7am. We left Agnew Lake at 8:30. Gary was going to shuttle our car. We had breakfast enroute and gassed up the car. We drove down Duke Lake Road to the end, unloaded the car, thanked Gary and watched as he drove off. We loaded up the canoe and Bill helped push a motor boat off a trailer into the lake. He came out plucking leaches off of his legs. We paddled south on Duke Lake at 12:30. The lake is smooth and the sun bright. *Bill:* The canoe is sluggish with all the gear, but once we got it moving it keep going pretty good. We saw lots of fishing boats with people fishing. We had lunch at 1:30pm as we drifted the last bit of Duke Lake. We saw the pictographs in 9th Lake in the bay off to the east, right after you enter the lake. We tried to see the campsites along the way, but we did not see the one on the point on 7th Lake. We could hear the falls on the right shore after that, but it was more like a trickle and we couldn't see it for all the leaves on the trees. The campsite on the east as we went from 6th Lake to 5th Lake had about 4 fishing boats at it and they had a chain saw going to cut all the wood they could see. We picked the small campsite after that on the west side in 5th Lake. They stopped making noise shortly after. There is no real level spot here and it is not overly used, but it was 4:45 and we didn't want to paddle any further. As it was we went 16km and we are going to have to slow down to make the trip last a week. We set up camp after having some snacks and we had a mushroom rice meal with hamburg and carrots. Saw some moose tracks along the edge of the water. We had a small fire and watched shooting stars down by the water's edge. Bed at 11:00.

Sun. Aug. 13/06: 15 Km. Slept great last night! Woke up once because I was cold; covered up and slept in till 8:30am. There were a lot of baby toads here hopping all over. Oatmeal and raisins for breakfast and we were on the water at 11:30am. Paddled to the camp site at 3rd lake on the east side and had lunch at 12:10. Nice site. After lunch we had a head wind. We noticed a campsite at the bend after 3rd Lake that was not on the Chrismar Adventure Map. We went under the bridge of the Marquette Logging Road.

The swifts were shallow and we just skimmed over top. At 1st Lake we looked at Snake Rapids coming in on the right, but it didn't look like there was much water coming in from there. There is another site marked but not on the map at the point just ahead of the one marked on the west side of 1st Lake. We paddled, walked, and lined Drive Road Rapids which Kevin Callan's book called Scenic Rapids. It is a boulder garden and no good routes through it at this water level. Didn't see the broken canoe on the rocks, but we did see a crunched aluminium row boat up on the rocks. We camped on the 1st campsite on the east side of Expanse Lake at 3:30. Nice site with flat places for tents. We had a wade in the shallow water and had a good rinse to cool off. No toads here. Two beavers kept busy out in the lake after we had supper. It has clouded over and it is trying to rain, but nothing hard yet. We are in the tent at 9:30pm.

Mon. Aug. 14/06: 17 Km. *Janice:* We woke to an overcast day and as we were getting ready and packing it began to rain, sometimes hard and sometimes just a drizzle, just enough to be a bother. We heard what sounded like a beaver cub crying just off the point when we were packing up, but there was no sign of it when I peeked out of the tent. We left the site at 9:45 am. it was still drizzling and raining off and on and continued to do so until about noon. I couldn't help but think about poor Bill as I was paddling along; the guy somersaulted right out of the hammock last night. I heard a really funny noise and a big thud. He was a little slow moving after that, but he now says it did his back wonders. We stopped and took a few pictures of the falls ½way down the right shore on Expanse Lake. We started with a calm lake, but we have picked up a head wind. I thought the lake would have whipped up some waves, but it wasn't bad. We stopped and had lunch at 12pm, just after the first swift at the end of the lake. The Kingfisher Swifts would have been a lot more fun if we had more water; 3 inches would have been lots. We ran some; ground over some; and walked some. We checked out the site on the island at the Forks; too many mosquitoes! We noted the railway tracks and thought about the train we've heard for almost the whole trip so far. We ran the first set of swifts and were delighted to see water in the river! We ran Upper Athlone Rapids and got out at the top of the Lower set to discover the campsite is at the end of the portage...so, we ran these too. We are camped here at 3pm. We carried up to the site and when we hauled the canoe out of the river, there were 3 leeches stuck on the bottom of it. The weather has cleared and we have had a good afternoon and evening on a lovely site by the rapids. It's been nice. It almost seems like when we started the water level was up. It was right up to the grass line and we feel like our levels have dropped a lot since we started. I hope the levels don't get any lower, it won't be as fun.

Tues. Aug. 15/06: 36 Km. *Bill:* We were up at 7:50 and a little slow getting on the water because we had to deal with the rain. We had 4 men portage past our campsite and then a half an hour later a young couple and an older couple and a dog. We were on the water at 10:30 and we had drizzle and rain and then nice weather throughout the day...so we kept dressing up and dressing down. The river was fun to do today and we only scrapped the bottom in a few places. About 3 places we had to walk our canoe over gravel bars. We stopped and took a picture of the Pogamasing Creek. There was small falls cascading into the river and we happened to notice a broken boat on the creek-right halfway down the falls. Next we ran Railway Rapids. There were a lot of places close by the railroad tracks that there were piles of rocks in the middle of the river and we wondered if they were anchors for the log booms in the old days. We saw a crew working on the rail road tracks

and they stopped and moved on so the train traffic could go again. At the place where there are 2 tracks (just before Pogamasing), there was a large group that is starting their trip. I don't know if they were with them, but we passed another 2 canoes that had 3 girls in one canoe with the center girl sitting in the center thwart and a guy in the other canoe with a sealine bag wide open. They are going to the Elbow for Thurs. We saw an orange marker on shore and behind that a tree with a square hole cut out at the base of it. We figured it might be for someone's stash or cache. It was quite a change to see so many canoes today, but we ended up passing everybody at one time or another. We passed the Barrie Canoe Club at the Cliff Rapids campsite where we had hoped to stay, so we ended up in Spanish Lake at the first campsite on the north end. We were here at 5:30pm and set up camp and hurried with our camp chores to end up in the tent at 9:30pm. It was nice to be in the tent with no mosquitoes. It is like they had a fresh hatch of them and they were hungry.

Wed. Aug.16/06: 15 Km. *Janice:* We woke to a misty morning and watched the birds playing and the fish jumping out in the lake. As we packed the last few things and got ready to leave the family in the blue canoes went by our site. I could hear someone trying to decide if they were in Spanish Lake or not. The marshy bit before the lake is not the same as the map; it has grown in and changed somewhat. We left at 9:45 and the sun is out and the day is perfect for paddling. We checked out Zig Zag Rapids and decided to go for it. This is where we passed the blue canoes again. The water is a bit low, but we canoed all of the rapids and swifts. It was fun running from one side of the river to the other. There were lots of gravel bars, but we picked the deeper channels. It was fun! We had lunch at 12 at the Elbow and as we were leaving the blue canoe family arrived. We had a chat and left them loading their vehicle. We did the first part of Graveyard Rapids and portaged the next set. There was a drop at the end. Next came a swift and then a 100m portage RL around Big Graveyard Rapids. There are 3 sites here; one at the rapids, and one RR (nicer), and one at the Cascades. We carried up to this site rather than doing the lift-over. The rocks in the Cascades are very hollowed into rounded pockets. There was a break in the ledge on RR, could we have snuck through there? Yes. This break was only visible when you got closer to have a look see. The site is rock and pines. The rocks are tiered with only 2 tent sites up top. We did our chores and made biscuits for tomorrow's lunch. Into the tent at 9pm. Mosquitoes!

Thurs. Aug.17/06: 38.5 Km. *Bill:* Up at 5:45 and on the water at 7:40am. It was clearer when we first got up than now but canoeing through the rising mist gives you a magical timeless feeling. That feeling quickly left as we entered the Agnes Rapids. It was a boulder garden and we waded and lined the canoe down through the top 2 sets. My leg got stuck between some boulders and I thought that was a good way to break a leg. I lifted it straight up to get out and all was fine. Janice was on her own and had to wade through one spot almost crotch deep. We met the 2 guys that passed at 6:30pm yesterday at the end of these rapids. There were more rapids after this that weren't marked on the map. The rest of the rapids were all runnable, but we had to get out and wade over some gravel bars and ledges. We were at Reynolds Creek at 12:30 and had lunch. We had planned to camp there but we felt it was too early to stop. We had more shallow water down to Wakonassin River and we checked out the site there. It had a platform and frame there to pull a tarp over for a camp. There was poison ivy on the trail going up the hill to this site, so we chose to keep going. The rest of the campsites on the way out to Agnew

Lake were either too rustic or grassy which meant lots of mosquitoes. The best one was taken by a couple with a motor boat. We ended up on the last campsite at the narrows where the log booms were anchored. No thunder-box or good tree to hang a bear bag, but the site is nice and open on a point with fewer mosquitoes. We were here at 4:40pm. We had a pleasant evening and were in the tent at 9pm a little after the mosquitoes came out.

Fri, Aug.18/06: 7.5 Km. *Janice:* We awoke to heavy fog which was lifted by the time we left at 10am. We paddled up to Picnic Point and up the easterly side of Sutherland Island rather than out in the larger part of the lake. We had a break and watched some fishermen at the island. We took a picture of the ½ of an aluminium canoe tied to a birch on Sutherland Island's south end. We paddled across The Big Bend and landed at Agnew Lake Lodge at 11:45am. It was a great trip. We would have liked higher water levels. We were told by the people at Agnew Lodge that these levels were higher than last year. We saw beavers, a little brown snake, loons, mergansers, kingfishers, a bald eagle, and many other birds. We caught the occasional glimpse of pieces of a broken green canoe. There was a lot of red, green, silver, blue, and yellow left on the rocks and gravel bars. The trip did not take us as long as we planned. We did it in 6 & ½ days and we didn't push ourselves too hard.

Bill: Nice river trip. Would like to go back and do it again when there is more water and start at Biscotasi Lake. Next year it will cost a lot more because the province will be charging fees which means we would have had to pay another \$124.00 including a reservation fee. I hope that the money they raise goes directly to the protection of this area and that I may be able to enjoy doing that return trip some day.