

EASTMAIN RIVER -- 1977
Journal of Bill Green

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Days 1-2-3

Long truck ride to Lac Alanel -- 18 hours pulling in at 12:00 to a nice tent platform. Left the next morning, moving five miles up Alanel, becoming windbound there for the night. Bushed a site -- your typical "adequate for a night site." Off the next day at 7:30, heading for Mistissini. Three portages, 50-900-1200, were time consuming with the heavy loads and rain. Arrived on Mistissini in the middle of the afternoon, making camp at 4:00 on a fair site just before the first crossing. Awoke the next day to rain and wind; windbound again, so we slept in. A slow, chilly, cloudy day -- a good day to move, but we're at the mercy of the elements now. Three days with rain so far.

Days 4-5

Up at 3:45 for the Big Crossing. It started out shaky -- a bit windy and threatening, but soon calmed down and we made it all the way across Mistassini by 8:30. Camped at the mouth of the Wabissinon River and declared the rest of the day a rest day. Thus, pancakes, and Hardy's new trip food, grits, were in order. Fishing filled in the afternoon, with Ron and Dave getting pike, webs, a (20 inch) speckled, and Andy a thirty inch lake trout. Four fish fed the whole section that night in a HUGE fish & chips meal. A very memorable day. Off at 7:30 the next day, in the rain and cold, crossing three short portages and about 12-15 miles upstream on the Wabissinon, pulling in to a site for a half day. The skies cleared in the afternoon, allowing for a VERY cool

swim, reading, sleeping, fishing, etc.

Days 6-7-8

Off to cold, cloudy weather again. A full day upstream, combining pull-ups, upstream paddling, and a light scotch mist to make it a fairly tough day. Made camp at 4:30 on the portage into Badeau Creek. Off the next day with a headwind again. Five portages, a bit of rain, a late lunch, and 12 hours later we pulled into a beach halfway up Badeau Lake, bushing out a site. Fought a very stiff headwind for the last 2-3 miles, and having no luck finding a supposed campsite, the beach was in order. A late night, with a show of northern lights and a superb pineapple upside-down bannock. Followed by a rest day -- late sleep, pancakes, grits, split pea & ham soup, apple cobbler, fudge. Perfect weather for the Section sunbathers, as the entire day was spent on the beach. This is by far one of the prettiest lakes I've ever canoed, with 2500 foot mountains on the east shore that stretch back as far as one can see -- the perfect spot for a cabin.

Day 9

Woke to cloudy but calm skies and got on the water at 7:00. Paddled the rest of Lac Badeau in a nice tailwind and beautiful mountainous surroundings. Entered the Shigami River and paddled five miles of deadwater before the first rapids. All went well on the first two sets but the third took its toll. Quite a rude awakening, telling me (and the rest of the Section) to sharpen up, to concentrate, to recognize the forces with which we're dealing. It's a cold way to learn a lesson, especially with the rain that was falling as we paddled to the site. We pushed it into a half day, hitting the site at 1:00, giving Andy and myself time to dry things out. The clouds broke by nightfall; and it seems the Section jells with each day. They really seem to enjoy the hours around the campfire at night.

Days 10-11-12

Day 10 was a cold and wet half day consisting of more rapids and short portages. Camp was made at an Indian site that was well supplied with wood, drying racks, tent frames, etc. The afternoon was spent in sleeping bags -- by far the best place to be that day. Next day proved to be LONG -- all the way to the Eastmain, pulling in at 7:00. Rain on and off all day, but some superb rapids made the day. Completed the Shigami in three days and found it to be, in spite of the weather, a thoroughly enjoyable river, reminiscent in some ways of the Otokwin.

First day on the Eastmain brought our first day of perfect weather. Did about 25 miles of the river, shooting only one major rapid -- just a taste of things to come. Hardy baked bread --

enough for dessert, and enough for lunch tomorrow. The effect of the weather on the psyche of a section has always been interesting, as this day proved. People more relaxed, smiling more -- never fails.

Days 13-14-15

Another day of good weather on the Eastmain -- 20-25 miles of river and two portages in hot sunshine -- the first one (1200 yards) up a hill reminiscent of the Indian. A slow, relaxing afternoon as we tried to sail down river; camped at 5:00. Next day consisted of five rapids on the way to Prosper Gorge. The water is low, but the rapids had enough water to keep it interesting. Made it to Prosper by 11:00 and cooked lunch during a violent thunderstorm. The afternoon, with on and off rain, was one for sleep. Rest Day the next -- a perfect one with blue sky and cool temps. Repacked wannigans, washed clothes, repaired canoes, etc.

The Gorge is very impressive. The whole river is channeled into the turn and then falls through a rock gorge about 30 yards wide. Rapids continue below for a few miles. Perfect rest day spot.

Days 16-17

A long 12 hour day from Prosper Gorge, fighting a vicious headwind the whole way. After an early lunch we fought the wind for about 16 miles, approaching Bauerman Falls at 6:00. The route around the falls was slow, shooting a rapid and then inching down the shoreline to the lip of the falls to unload -- quite hairy. A misreading of the trip report left us without a campsite, so we bushed one at 7:30 above the next rapid. A VERY long and tiring day. Off the next day at 7:15, shooting 1 - 2 miles of big river rapids and then paddling 16 miles to a site on the portage into Village Lakes -- the cut-off around the Great Bend. A welcome half day, with fishing and sleeping in the afternoon.

Days 18-19-20

A three quarter day to Lichteneger Lake, fighting the worst headwind so far to the campsite. The lake was hit by a burn 2-3 years ago and we camped in the midst of it -- black trees, ground, etc. Enjoyed some good sailing on the way to Lichteneger. Next day to Clarkie Lake -- an easy half day with a couple of rapids and some walking. Fished and slept in the afternoon; Ron caught two after dinner. Woke to rain and ugly skies but got off at 7:15 the next day, with a light Scotch mist falling all morning. Shot some nice rapids on the Clearwater River, did some walking, and had lunch at the forty chain portage -- our supposed campsite. Pushed on after lunch -- 4 more portages in rapid succession, making six for the day, with a few horse-races thrown in. Camped

at 4:00 at a decent site on a 250 yard portage.

Days 21-22

Second day on the Clearwater was very enjoyable -- a few short portages and some excellent rapids -- two were shot instead of walked -- lots of water and good sized swells. Made it to the Great Bend on the Eastmain by 3:00, thus finishing the Clearwater in two days instead of three. A beautiful sight as the Eastmain makes a final turn of the Bend -- rapids in front of the site and a falls right above. Ron caught four walleye at night; rain moved in as we went to bed, providing for a COLD rest day the next. Usual rest day breakfast -- pancakes, grits, and Ron's fish as a bonus. Cooked 300 donuts in the afternoon, with about 50 munchkins thrown in -- helped keep us warm, as the donuts need about 6-7 people on various jobs. Bay weather has moved back in -- cold, west wind; we're only about 130 miles away now, and two days ahead of ourselves on the itinerary.

Days 23-24

Left the Great Bend in freezing cold and a headwind, shooting a few rapids with frozen hands. One huge rapid that just about flipped all canoes in the eddy in the bottom -- with 3-4 foot stacks in the middle. Skies cleared in the afternoon as we made our way to a 15 chain portage before the dam. Sounds of trucks all night, planes and choppers flying over. Slept late the next day, getting to the town at 10:00, where we received royal treatment. Hardy and I hit the post office then joined the section at the huge, brand new grocery store. Then, led by our guide and driver, on to the cafeteria where club sandwiches and hamburgers were devoured. People were curious and very friendly and we learned a lot about the dam. It will flood east and north to provide water for the LaGrande. We passed the spot where the river is being re-routed in order to build the dam -- 50 ton trucks dumping gravel, pickups driving all over -- activity everywhere. 800-900 people live there during the summer, with more to move in soon.

Paddled in the first STEADY rain of the summer to the First Chute and camped on the end of the portage -- everything soaked, two people sick, and spirits a bit low.

Days 25-26

Came from the First Chute through the next four Chutes -- all short portages, done in VERY cold and miserable weather. Got to the beginning of Conglomerate by 12:30, looked for a while for the portage and had a cold lunch at the beginning of the portage, after climbing a steep bank at the unloading spot. Skies cleared as we walked the portage; two and a quarter miles, good trail,

with a good descent at the end. Camped on the spur road 600 yards short of the end and walked the road to view the Gorge. Walked to the bridge after dinner for a full view of the Gorge, realizing how much closer we felt to the Gorge and the river than the people who merely drive by; how great a sense of accomplishment we feel when viewing such a spectacle.

Finished the portage the next day as rain returned. Shot the rapid below the gorge in very cold rain and paddled 12 miles to an old surveyor site. By far the coldest and most miserable day of the trip, with people sprinting down the shore at rest stops to keep warm; of course, with our friendly west wind. The site was a relief: tent poles, wood, and plenty of room -- a late half day, hopefully one to soon be forgotten.

Days 27-8

Another cold day, this one to Clouston Gorge -- straight paddle, one rapid, with the usual headwind. Decided to camp at the beginning of the Clouston portage (two and a quarter miles) and took canoes over after lunch. Skies finally broke and we all went to view the gorge -- a gorgeous cascade of water running through rock. Hardy and I walked back all the way along the gorge, finding some spots where the river is five yards wide with 20-30 foot rock cliffs and water running through at 20-30 mph. Took two and a half hours to walk back that way. Finished the portage the next morning after sleeping a bit late due to freezing cold, and paddled to Island Rapids for yet another half day -- this time in perfect weather. Took the afternoon to swim, wash clothes, bake whole wheat bread and cinnamon-yeast buns. Our first day of good weather since the rest day at Prosper Gorge.

Days 29-30

Yet another half day -- to Talking Rapids. A mile with some rapids, a 1.5 mile portage (with bowmen taking halfway loads about 1.25 miles), a VERY HAIRY ledge to shoot right above the falls, with large stacks and a good 3-4 foot drop, and then the site. Set up camp before the rains came, and the rains lasted all afternoon, all night, and all the morning of the next day -- causing us to call an unscheduled rest day. A day for reading and staying dry, with two bannocks, two cheese-cakes (pre-packaged, bought at the town) and apple cobbler.

One has mixed feelings at this point -- a desire to see the end, take the train, get mail, etc., mixed with a realization of how fast it's gone and how quickly we will miss this life. It's easy to feel like the trip is over since we're one portage and 20 miles from the Bay -- but some of the trickiest rapids of the trip come in two days and as we saw last year, being close does not mean being safely done.

Pitsy's line has some meaning for this trip: "To travel is better than to arrive." Our arrival is exciting but is often more like the icing on the cake.

Days 31-32

Left Talking Rapids in very thick mist, shooting out from the campsite and paddling eight miles to Basil Gorge. The skies cleared as we took the portage -- 2.75 miles as it turned out, and also a bowman's portage. Four bowmen made it the distance, and all 12 complained of the length of the walk -- much longer than we had planned. Also a VERY steep 75 yard hill at the end. Beautiful weather in the afternoon and also in the morning when we woke. Left the site late and proceeded to the best rapid stretch of the trip. A crossing to the right shore, followed by three miles of huge Eastmain rapids. Shoot down, pull into an eddy, scout, shoot some more. Lots of water and very powerful, but all went smoothly -- river order was followed perfectly. It was the kind of situation that you want to freeze to hold onto forever, to realize at that very instant and any instant in the future the intensity, concentration and teamwork of the moment. A culmination.

A stand-up rendition of "Oh Canada" followed, and then six canoes went tearing in six directions for geese. Came up with four. The afternoon was spent cooking geese and collecting wood for Eastmain. Final bush dinner: spaghetti and meatballs, green beans, marble cake with vanilla icing, and fresh poultry. A truly superb day.

Days 33-34

A cold, rainy headwind for the 12 mile paddle to Eastmain House -- and a very long paddle it was. Rounding the last corner and seeing the Bay and town, our enthusiasm was a bit dampened by the freezing wind. Received a warm welcome at the village -- we were given the vacant 2-story RC Mission to stay in. As we moved in, so did the Elders in the community who sat down and watched our antics. An invitation to play ball and attend a square dance was warmly received -- this is the friendliest town we've hit on the Bay. Organized gear and visited HBC in the afternoon and started the ball game at 7:30. A 7 inning affair, lasting well into the dark, with the team USA coming out ahead. Then into the dance hall, where Jon accepted a small trophy and we listened to the tuning of a guitar and fiddle for 1.5 hours. Five of us left early and others stayed for two dances. Up the next morning to find out the planes wouldn't be in till after lunch, so pancakes were in order. All in all, a very fortunate situation -- a nice house to stay in, friendly people all around, and a tight feeling of camaraderie in the section.

Well, one plane came in at 4:30 -- could only fit 6 -- so 6 of us stayed behind, and made the most of a tough situation. A good dinner, then we tried to sing songs that we all know as I played the organ, then charades, then a vigorous game of spoons. Hoping to fly out early in the morning. A

frustrating though memorable day.

typed 31 OCT 08 jbe