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Turner Tours Ltd or Open boat Expedition to Canada 2009

Wednesday 12 August

We arrived in Toronto and stayed at the Backpackers Hostel in the centre of town. As we arrived outside, there was a film crew shooting a scene, so we were now extras in a Canadian soap! O-O-Duck met François*, whilst we spent some time drinking (revolting) hazelnut coffee. This hostel is cheap and cheerful and can be recommended. Later we ventured down to the Mountain Equipment Co-op to take advantage of the relatively good exchange rate. Numerous paddles and outdoor items were secured using Ian's membership card. Later we sampled some Canadian cuisine before returning to our rooms to prepare for the drive up to Chapleau.

*(Double O – Duck is our James Bond Style daredevil mascot who's been on many expeditions and François is the carved wooden Backpackers Bear)



The Plan was to paddle the Chapleau and Nemogosenda Rivers in a circuit which included some grade 1-3 rapids and some 25 portages. The expedition proved challenging and remote (at times we were more than 3 days travel from any road or habitation).

Thursday 13 August

We left the Backpackers hostel early and missed breakfast, which was promised to be a large pile of pancakes. With a fond farewell and going the wrong way up a one-way street the intrepid explorers set off on their adventure. We drove to Chapleau saw deer and a bear and a wolf by roadside near Chapleau. Whilst on the journey some of the group got a taste for "Wendy Burgers" which was fortunate as there was very little choice when it came to finding food on the 12 hour journey. After some discussion we eventually found the park road and slowly travelled the 20-odd km up a dirt track to campsite and outfitters.

We arrived at the campsite to find little more than a few cabins and a camp shop. The Outfitters were away collecting another group and were several hours away from base. Fortunately the campsite people found us our tents and some cooking equipment. Evening meal was put together by Alison & Lynn and was a sign of things to come.

Day 1, Friday 14 August - Start at Missinaibi Headwaters Outfitters on Racine Lake to unmarked campsite on right hand side of Chapleau River just before the 'three swifts'.



Matt and Erin brought our food barrels across in the morning and fitted us out with boats and paddles, supplemented by a few words of advice and a very laid-back approach. We got a little carried away with asking for extra equipment (two tarps, two fire grids, two coffee pots etc) but this seemed to insignificant compared to the three food barrels which were incredibly heavy, weighing over 80 kg each! (Probably closer to 40kg really.)

Before setting off we agreed the pickup for 2pm at Westover lake, Feeling confident, (because we were British paddlers), we again discussed the possibility of extending the journey to include a return to the campsite. Matt seemed a little amused by this.

We paddled out across Racine Lake, past a few rocky outcrops and onto Racine creek, which headed off to the left. We paused a while for a lunch of smoked salmon and cream cheese bagels with lovely juicy peaches.

We had been warned of the log jams at the end of the lake but the first proved little problem. Feeling confident, we stormed onwards through the second. In hindsight we should have scouted it first as part way through, and past the point of no return, it became impassable forcing us to create a new "portage path"!



Some of our team lounged around (without choice) in the water, while the other, more active members hauled kit and boats over logs, up banks and through trees until we met the main portage path. It was at this point that it hit home exactly what we'd let ourselves in for: If we strayed-off the very poorly defined path for more than a couple of metres, then it was almost impossible to find it again. Yes, this was at the extreme end of remote!

The weather so far had been calm winds with temps into the mid 20's. The physical effort required to hump the kit made for thirsty work. At one point it felt we were in danger of draining the lake

such was the amount of water being filtered for drinking.

The end of the portage path led down a steep rocky slope covered in bear poop to the River Chapleau. A short paddle continued to our first campsite. Tents pitched, fire lit and meal of steak and potatoes cooked, we relaxed by taking a swim in the cool river. Katie was the first one to open her leech collecting account giving Chris his first opportunity to poke her with a burning stick.

A measly 13km completed on Day 1, but more than a day's worth of work had been done with the tough portage. Lesson learned, we retired to bed early with the promise to scout the obstacles in future.

Day 2, Saturday 15 August - Unmarked campsite on right-hand side of Chapleau river just before the 'three swifts' to campsite just after 225m portage at Small Falls (just before Narrow Lake).



Day 2 consisted of a variety of paddling, portaging and rapid-running. The temperature and humidity sapped our energy and made physical exertion very tiring. Only 9km of river was paddled today, but we'd spent a lot of time portaging. Our second night's campsite was similar to the first being perched high on a rock. Kevin had by this time cultivated a reputation as our resident pyromaniac. More swimming and sock-washing ensued. It was getting a little disturbing how enthusiastically Chris and his smoking stick appeared whenever the "Leech!" shout went up. He did however, redeem himself by cooking-up some tasty bannock despite much coaching and instruction from the collective cheffesses!

Fully refuelled, we

enjoyed an evening swim followed by round 2 of the leech collecting competition.

Meanwhile in Sarah and Katie's tent, the girls had developed the emerging sport of Mosquito Tennis into a variation called Toilet Roll Tennis where the toilet rolls were launched with increasing ferocity towards the Mosquitoes. Can't help thinking a rolled-up Echo would have been more effective. After all, you don't see Labradors advertising the Liverpool Echo and preaching about its softness and delicacy, do you?



Following the marathon portage of the day before & several portages throughout Day 2 it became apparent that we may have underestimated the physical & mental effort it was going to take to complete the trip. By midday it was apparent to all of the group that any thought of returning to the lake was ridiculous and just finishing at Westover Lake on time may be a challenge in itself. Discussions throughout the day confirmed this and Sarah spoke for the group when she “made it very clear” that Westover Lake was the end of the trip.

Day 3, Sunday 16 August - Campsite just after 225m portage at Small Falls (just before Narrow Lake) to Campsite at South end of Shewabik Lake.



Day 3 started with the descriptively named Narrow Lake. (Was it a river? Was it a lake?) Here we spotted some wildlife in the form of a couple of guys in a fishing boat who waved and wished us well as the wind freshened from astern and pushed us on our way.

There was much deliberation between the more-experienced (- ie gung-ho...) team-members as to the strategy for Island Rapids. All things considered, they decided discretion was the better part of valour and a further portage took place; a forest track allowing the first use of our trolleys for part of it.

River levels dictated that the Temple of Doom would have to be lined. Flow and rocks proved an exhausting combination for some: Height of team-member and depth of water combined such

that it rapidly (!) varied between ankle and chest depth!

Chris's route notes seemed to be different to everyone else's as the “Temple of Doom” translated for him as “Place to remove skin from left shin”. Lining is easy. Staying on your feet amongst stones & unseen strainers is not.



After almost completing the full length of the Temple of Doom lining, Lynn stumbled in the water as the boulders rolled away smacking her shin on a rock. The thought of it brings tears to the eyes even now. Pain and exhaustion had her on the point of giving up until she saw her knight in shining armour wading back upstream to help. - Ian, she needed that helping hand.

Exhausted after about 27km, we made camp, cooked chicken and vegetables and collapsed into bed...but not before the usual bear-proofing activities.

Day 4, Monday 17 August - Campsite at South end of Shewabik Lake to Campsite just after 270m portage on

Chapleau River.

The trip continued on Day 4 with several more portaging/paddling combinations. Some people were happy to run the rapids whilst others preferred to walk the paths. In 2's of course as there was the ever-present bear threat. Alison and Lynn lost sight and sound contact with the river and it was at this point that one of the most disturbing things of the whole trip happened. They started singing. LOUDLY. “Who's Afraid Of The Big Bad Wolf?” and “We're Going On A Bear Hunt” All wildlife in the surrounding area ran for cover.

Apart from the ever-increasing leech-count, the nearest we'd got to wildlife was the bumbling, rustling, grunty moo of an unseen moose from within the bushes. Sounded just like the snoring from many of us during the night!



Island Portage proved to be a bit of fun with us lining the boats down with Alison and Lynn somehow managing to get stranded on the portage path on the island. Foolishly someone gave them a boat to make their escape. OK, so who thought lining would be a good idea? - Stay on the right hand side that's all we had to do, IAN!! "5-Star stuff this is", he told the novice of the group! So off we all went with Keith leading the way down successfully. The next two decided to follow but make it a little more interesting and visit Lynn and Alison on the way... and flood the boat in the process. Sarah's first and maybe last experience of lining after that little escapade!



Although filled with dread for yet another forthcoming portage Lynn was distracted by a furry black moving object (it was a Bear and her cub) Lynn subtly went into stealth mode - she had to see the bear. Lynn paddled with all the fury and determination of a Dragon boater, Kevin was left at the back of the canoe just steering as there was no way for him to keep up with Lynn's stroke rate. If she had maintained it on the whole trip we would have been finished in 3 days.

The appearance of the Bear & cub was a welcome release and it lifted the mood of the group considerably taking peoples minds off the portages etc. The Bears walked along the

shore through the reeds and onto a rocky outcrop to have a good look at us giving us great views of them before disappearing to make porridge or whatever it is that bears do

One of the best meals of the trip this evening with an enormous pan of Thunderhouse Chilli becoming our own personal ballast for the following day's travels.

Day 5, Tuesday 18 August - Campsite just after 270m portage on Chapleau River to Beach campsite on southern end of Kapuskasing Lake.

Good sections of rapids this day made progress easy. Elsas in distance marking the northerly part of the trip.

Day 5, August 18th. Past Hemp's Camp, a collection of fishing lodges, we entered the end of Kapuskasing Lake. The camp approach was indicated by a collection of marker buoys that defined the local runway for the floatplanes. A short 2km hop across the lake led us what proved to be our 5* campsite. Situated on a flat beach with a picturesque northerly outlook across the lake. Top tucker of spaghetti and pesto sauce followed by hot buttered popcorn was again provided by the girlies cooked on the fire fuelled by Ian's collection of driftwood.



Without really knowing we enjoyed our last swim, Lynn may think she had seen the first chipmunk of the trip a day earlier but Kev and Chris in their Speedos don't quite make it! More Chipmunk than Chippendale.

Day 6, Wednesday 19 August - Beach campsite on southern end of Kapuskasing Lake to Gilligan's island (Pine Lake).

Heading north up the lake, in the distance we counted 107 rail cars on the train as it headed East.

A floatplane buzzed us quite low as we continued towards the railway bridge. It would have made a great sight to have seen it land, but these things are notorious for ignoring errant paddlers and the shallows of the lake may well have seen us washed overboard.



The railway bridge at the top of Kapuskasing Lake marked the most northerly point of our trip as we cut through the channel to the Nemegosenda River and headed upstream and south. In the distance we heard another train and raced the best part of 2km towards the second bridge to try and catch it on camera. We failed, but only just. Pausing to climb the embankment. (Don't do this at home, kids), we admired the workmanship of the railway construction team and marvelled at the perspective of the lines as they disappeared towards the horizon.

Kevin and Katie collected discarded nails as a souvenir from the 2nd railway bridge.

We continued up the winding Nemegosenda River looking

for a campsite. Our first choice looked good until, on closer inspection we found.....

.....burrowing spiders and ants. As we left we also observed the toilet upstream from a fishing lodge, so back to the island. Not much room to camp with the tents split between the rocky beach and the hill top (penthouse suite) for Kevin and the ladies. Terraced tents upstairs, detached downstairs, with stunning views of the sunset from the upstairs bedroom. Another 30km.

Unbelievably Sarah assumed the role of head chef for the night and cooked up the falafel that was surprisingly tasty. Mum would be so proud!

Need to remember that by this time people would eat virtually anything put in front of them. And 6 days without a Wendy burger was beginning to tell on some people.



Day 7, Thursday 20 August - Gilligan's island (Pine Lake) to Campsite at end of 3rd portage (45m) on Nemegosenda River.



Shortly after setting-off, the rain started and within 20mins we were donning waterproofs for the first time.

There was torrential rain as we headed upstream towards the impressive 20-foot falls. We took advantage of fishing lodge wood-store as shelter for our lunch.

Who'd have thought 5 Bean Soup and Beef Jerky could have tasted soooo good!

Food choice was now being dictated by what was still fresh or too heavy to carry. By now we were a slick professional team when it came to portage time, knocking them off in quick, efficient succession.

The monotony of the long and winding river was broken when we saw a beaver drawing her family towards her and the safety of the lodge. The youngsters could be heard inside and frequently re-appeared whilst mother attempted to entice us away. This scene played out for maybe 15mins but photographing them is not easy.

Camp-time saw us erect the tents under the shelter of 2 tarps before moving them out into the torrential rain. The rain and tarps made collection of water very easy. The campsite area



was small and overgrown requiring a degree of landscape gardening before use.

After an evening meal we retired early and the more junior members drifted off to sleep dreaming of giant Wendy Burgers and Beer.

Day 8, Friday 21 August - Campsite at end of 3rd portage (45m) on Nemegosenda River to Camp on southern end of Alcorn Lake.

Day 8 proved to be the low point of the trip with nothing of great note to report. Windy rivers, slogging into a headwind and no wildlife to speak of other than the occasional black fly. The girls occupied their time by discussing that if Katie was Snow White, then which of us would be Dopey, Grumpy, Sneezzy etc (... answers on a post-card, please). Highlights of the day proved to be the GORP*-stops. Although one sandy beach we stopped at had an intriguing collection of fresh footprints of both bear and moose. The silence of the trip only



punctuated by the incessant woosh-shush-woosh-shush-woosh-shush of paddling in waterproofs. After 19k of that the novelty wore off! Having been officially awarded his “Fire-lighting Badge” the night before, Kevin took his eye off the ball and failed to get a fire going. Best efforts with the soaking wet wood only producing a sad smoky smoulder so we resorted to using the stoves to cook the evening meal. With little shelter and even less enthusiasm, the dream of further Wendies beckoned us all to bed at the ridiculously early time of 8:30pm.

*GORP – Good Old Raisins and Peanuts. We had bags and bags of the stuff for on the move snacks.

Day 9, Saturday 22 August - Camp on southern end of Alcorn Lake to Borden River (end of portage).

Mercifully, the gods smiled on us and turned the wind around 180 degrees to provide a welcome tail wind for the 9km crossing of Nemegosenda Lake. After reaching the lake, the paddling seemed to go on forever. With winds increasing we rafted up 3 canoes and put up a sail and with Lynn holding the canoes together, Kev put his life on the line as he straddled all three. Sail aloft, we breezed along at the rate of ...oooh about 2 knots - if you're lucky!

At the south end of the lake we lifted the boats over a beaver dam and searched the reed-beds for the exit route. This proved to be the easy part as we had a much more difficult and long-winded search for the L-O-N-G



portage that followed! With a path found we made a mistake and took the easy option after thinking somebody had made a new trail. This was a wrong decision and resulted in us returning to the start point. The second option was the correct one which included mud, streams, logs, climbs & descents - What a killer. All in all, the 1km portage took us in excess of 3 hours, although



that did include some very welcome macaroni and cheese. It was another hour's paddle before we set camp, but only after yet more landscape gardening. (Note to Self – Take a machete next time!)

The steep slope of the portage took a victim in the form of Katie (who else!) who slipped and injured her foot. Lynn's latent St. John's Ambulance skills came to the fore as she switched into Nurse-mode. Severe pain

dictated strong medication from our resident drug-dealer combined with cooling water to reduce any potential swelling. Katie however was more concerned with increasing her leech count.

Small campsite tonight after such a long portage, Alison decided to share a tent with Sarah and Katie. We're still not sure if she has recovered from the contagious fits of giggles that came from the tent.

The team members reverted to type with the girlies retiring early and the boys spending time around the fire. The giggles from the tents were complemented by all the male bonding as we burned the rubbish and struggled to set Sarah's knickers on fire.

Day 10, Sunday 23 August - Borden river (end of portage) to finish at end of Westover Lake.

Chris woke and got everybody up with the offer of coffee. Sarah yet again was the voice of the group as she expressed her feelings towards the early start. Katie appeared with one eye closed and a severe lump on her head, apparently something had bitten her in the night, Alison & Sarah denied any involvement. By 06:45hrs we were on the water and heading home.



It had to be an early start today as we still had an 8-hour paddle including two portages. We paddled swiftly against the current, ducking under the numerous fallen trees taking only one and a half hours to reach Mate Lake. Breakfast (a Nutrigrain bar) was taken at the site of the campsite at the end of a long esker splitting Mate Lake in two. The portage proved to be much longer than the reported 450m and was split in two by an unmarked forest road. (Look for the cairns and marker tape).

This proved to be the third hardest portage of the trip.

Another steeply

climbing portage trail rose up the side of the valley. Katie soldiered-on like a true professional but it was plain to see that she was struggling and was much worse than she made out. Kevin piggy-backed her up the hill, much to the relief of both as she's much lighter than one of the tent-packs.

Waweya Lake was clear and only a short hop across to our final portage. We cooked lunch (hummus on pita bread) while Keith explored several routes through the now very overgrown undergrowth. Paddle and pack were left along the route to mark the way. Eventually a new track was found which, although not direct, was a lot quicker and allowed the use of the portage trolleys for only the second time. Keith spent the next 45 minutes trying to locate the pack in the dense undergrowth!



The final 3kms down the middle of Westover Lake was a happy affair, as we all knew that we would finish on time and could hear the occasional vehicle on highway 101 not far away.

After over 200km of paddling and ~25km of portaging, we were elated to be on target. We pulled the boats on to the road at 13:55hrs got changed and then started the wait for our lift. By 15:45hrs we were beginning to



wonder if we would be setting another camp. At just before 16:00hrs a typically laid back Matt appeared with truck, trailer and car to collect us. In Canada it would appear 2hrs late is not really late. As a precaution we dropped Katie & Alison off at the hospital to get Katie checked over whilst the others went to get the other car. 2 hrs later and we were checking into the best motel in town, Aux Trois Moulin. It was the only one people recommended.

You'd have thought we'd been roughing it or something. We'd never been so excited to have a bed, hot water and a toilet that flushed. It's those little things you never really appreciate till it's too late. Lynn was also made up, as all her hard work of paddling had paid off when she realised that the clean clothes she'd brought no longer fitted. Well done Lynn - Britney eat your heart out.

Chris spent 15 minutes trying to remove dirt from his feet until he realised that the dirt was bruise that covered most of his left foot.

Only once we had finished did we start to count the cost to our bodies.

Clean and changed we made our way to the restaurant for a "proper" meal. Although the food that had been supplied by the outfitters was tasty and varied, Alison & Lynn adapted the menu to our tastes. They had help with some of the cooking from the men but they did us proud in the camp kitchen.

The last two days in Toronto. The next day, after a welcome night's rest we set off on the 11 hour drive back to Toronto where we booked in for two nights at the Holiday Inn. We stopped on the way to buy souvenirs and snacks along with the much-anticipated Wendies for the girls. We nearly had an unscheduled stop on the way

when Chris and Kevin's car ran almost too low on fuel. Chris was starting to sweat a bit when we passed the third closed gas-station!

The following day we took the drive to Niagara Falls for a spot of sight-seeing. Keith and Ian spent a long while discussing lines through the Grade 6 rapids below the falls! Apparently the last person to successfully negotiate the rapids was in 1984. There's now a \$10,000 fine for attempting to paddle them. After a full day at Niagara we drove back to Toronto for the last night and spent a couple of hours on the final morning wandering in downtown Toronto.



Chris (Dad) Turner, Sarah (Spokesman) Green, Katie (Fearless) Halls, Kevin (Fire-Starter) Donnelly, Lynn (Pharmacist) Donnelly, Keith (Navigator) Steer, Alison (Head Chef) Bell and Ian (White Knight) Bell