

Moffatt Creek - summer 2010

To the Edge of Night

The Ontario Provincial Police arrived at our cottage around 10:30 p.m. There were five of them, four guys, one lady and a laptop. They bustled around inside our 8ft square kitchen before Katherine hustled them into the living room and cleared off the table for them work on. I'd left a marked map of my route which came as a surprise to them. They pulled up a map on their screen and zoomed into the cottages on Taylor Bay. There were a few black dots missing. Starting at our cottage they traced out a search path of my planned route, West to Moffatt Creek. They asked for a recent photograph, identifying marks, checked the top shelf in the bedroom for my wallet (Kath can't reach that high), the match container and then went outside to see if the Scott canoe was actually missing.

Past 1 a.m. and 16 pages of questions, Kath asked one of them to help make up the bed on the porch and excused herself from the fray. The OPP team headed out a few minutes later to follow my three kilometre portage to Moffatt Creek. They found the parallel tracks of my tote wheels in the sand and mud, and the cut of the keel as I'd finally shoved off into smooth water.

Around 2 a.m. the police were knocking on the door of the Muir cabin some 2km downstream to ask if I'd been seen there. A bit of string on the map shows this stretch to be at least twice that. They shot their guns off twice to see if there was any response. There wasn't.

Thursday 29th July 2010

Long before there were any roads into New Liskeard Katherine's Grandmother arrived by steamer on Lake Temiskaming. Lake Temiskaming feeds the Ottawa River which has The Mississippi as a tributary. This means it's possible to paddle from New Liskeard to our home in Carleton Place. Murray and Vicky Muir wrote a book on Northern trails, one of these is Moffatt Creek which runs from Le Moyne Lake all the way to New Liskeard. If I could portage over to the Moffatt, theoretically I could paddle all the way to Carleton Place. This is the story of the start of that adventure even though Cousin Bruce said it couldn't be done.

At 7 a.m. I left our cottage on Twin Lakes hauling my green canoe and gear to portage the 2km to the Moffatt. I was stopped by a very muddy trail churned up by ATV tracks. Turning back to the main trail I tied red tape to a branch and headed further West for another kilometre. There I'd meet the main channel heading North from Le Moyne Lake. Unfortunately ATVs leave too small a gap between ruts. My tote wheels were guaranteed to fall into one or the other so sometimes I just had to take them off and drag the canoe through the puddles. It was 10 p.m. before I reached the water, a three hour portage to start the day. The GPS battery was already dead, it had lasted 2.75hr!

A few minutes after launching into flat water I faced my first beaver dam sticking 2ft out of the water on the high side. There were at least seven recorded obstructions in the next hour, some just dead fall with bush driven against it. Where I could, I cut through, under or over. My kit included a hand axe, swede saw and garden cutters.

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After two hours of 'paddling' I reached Pine Falls Camp near Saw Mill Road, at the start of what the map calls rapids. There I pulled out to portage and eat lunch. The road was good enough to use my tote wheels but still 1 km long so it was 1:30 p.m. before I was back on the water. Later, I was told by one OPP officer, they found my footprints in the sand were covered by moose prints. Murray and Vicki Muir live near the rapids and wrote a book called "Discovering Wild Temiskaming". They have a chapter on the Moffatt Creek but they paddled upstream and even that they no longer recommend.

Upon reflection this would have been a very good time to quit considering I'd only managed 2km on the map in three and a half hours (ignoring all the wiggly bits). The next stretch to Highland Road was at least 5km as the crow flies, and so far I'd only seen one duck. The calculation I neglected to make at the time shows an ETA at Highland of 9 p.m. Calculations weren't in the cards as I battled more dams and dead-falls. There were so many I stopped recording them in the log. There was big stuff and small stuff, one spruce so low that having cut my way underneath, the now higher stern snagged it. I had to crawl backwards to level the canoe off and clear the trunk. Pulling the canoe over one beaver dam, my right foot slipped into the downstream water, I toppled backwards onto the muddy bank with my left foot still on the top of the dam under the canoe. Carefully balanced on another double dead-fall I deftly pulled the canoe all the way over and promptly slipped off the log into three feet of water. Yes! I was wearing a life-jacket.

Supper time came and went, until around 8 p.m. thinking I must be nearing Highland Park Road, one last bend brought me to a complete stop. The creek turned sharp left into a small gully where dead-falls had been tossed like a box of matches, except they were mostly 6" in diameter. I couldn't see getting over or around any time soon and Kath was expecting a call by 9 p.m. The map showed logging roads to the East so I made the decision to hike out leaving the canoe at the creek. Whatever storm or beavers put so many trees across the creek, they were nothing compared to the carnage at the top of the bank. The fallen trees up there were at least 18" in diameter and lying on top of one another like a giant rustic fence. It was a struggle climbing over them carrying two small packs, a saw and paddle. With the compass set at 100 I did my best to keep a straight line East having selected some not too distant tree sticking up above the bush. In places the bush was so thick that I couldn't see the tree until I came up to the trunk. Saplings were so close I had to force my way through using the paddle to hold them back. Every step was a fight and somewhere back there a twig caught the swede handle and cleverly removed the blade! I didn't go to look.

Around 9 p.m. with still no sign of a road, I followed an animal trail through a raspberry patch right up to the edge of a swamp. It ran North/South, as far as I could see. I left a red tag marked "DW North" and headed off that way into the bush which was now pitch black. Dusk was over and I was now on the edge of night with sunset at 8:58. There were flattened areas in the grass around the swamp but my first choice of a bed seemed a little too damp so I moved further away from the water. It wasn't a good spot to be wandering around in the dark because the beaver had made lots of radiating channels some of which were two feet deep.

My supplies consisted of a little water, one peanut butter sandwich and a bit of cheese. I had candles but no matches, they weren't on my 32 item list. Neither was duct tape, rain pants, toilet paper or gloves. I had stuffed gloves in my pocket on the way out the door and brought a roll of

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toilet paper which I couldn't find when I needed it. One problem with these small black backpacks that have a dozen zippers you can't see in the dark.

My moisture gradient went a mainly dry shirt to definitely wet feet, with damp parts in between. Later in the night I stripped to the waist and put on a dry T-shirt before pulling back on my shirt, rain top and bug shirt. If I bent my legs they cramped. The beaver seemed to be busy all night long, slapping their tails so loud it echoed from the far shore. There was something larger running through the water, maybe trying to catch a late supper. The mosquitoes were mainly after my hands and face both of which were covered by the bug shirt but even so I had to put on a bit of repellent to hold them back. If I slept I don't remember. There were many sessions of shivering as I waited for morning.

Friday 30th July 2010 - Rescue

Sunrise was 5:58. The dawn chorus erupted and a band of crimson crept across the Eastern sky and by 6:10 I was already heading North. About the same time Kath received a call from the OPP asking how she was doing and telling her the search was on. My early hike was made a little easier by finding an animal trail skirting the swamp. I followed this until I faced the rising sun and then peeled off North again across an old bed of rotten timbers. I came across several of these in my travels, the footing they provide wasn't very safe. There was no thought as to whether I should switch back to East but that might have been another wise move. Again the bush was thick but I also hit several rocky outcrops which I climbed up to get a better view. Their edges could be so steep it was hard to get up onto them or climb down in the direction I wanted to go. Even so they made for easy sighting of the next tree and grabbing a few berries before diving back down into the bush.

There was an aircraft about, probably looking for me but way over to the South West. The echoes often made it sound like there were two of them. At 9:56 a.m after nearly three more hours in the bush I saw a helicopter to the West of me heading South behind a line of trees. There was no point in remaining invisible if they were looking for me so I turned back to the last rock and tied my life jacket to the tallest sapling I could bend over. The engine sound kept cutting through the woods and I'd jump up and shake the tree; all to no avail as the sound faded again.

Finally at 10:19 the helicopter swung over to the West of me and then circled overhead before landing to my East but out of sight. Two OPP officers made their way through the bush towards me, calling for directions and yelling for me not to move. Finally they appeared out of the bush and climbed up on my rock. I was very happy to see them. These guys had been in the air since dawn and up most of the night before searching my trail.

"How did you land in all of this?" I asked. "We're on a road", I was told. So much for staying North when a 100m jog East would have put me on a logging road! I'd been nearly home but not near enough.

They carried my gear and walked me out to the road. By 10:53 I was in the helicopter and heading to the 'command post' set up on a diamond drilling road near the Twin Lakes old fire tower.

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A short drive and we were at our laneway which they walked me down to make sure I made it into the cottage. Kath said "I can hear David." and for a moment there a visiting friend thought Kath was having a premonition, but there I was standing at the door. We gave our thanks to the OPP as our friend walked the two of them up the lane to their truck. She was one of several neighbours who had offered support to Kath through the morning. I'd survived with a few bruises to my shins, a large blister on my right foot and a severely dented ego. As the song goes "Mad dogs and Englishmen..."

Monday 2nd August, 2010 - Search

At the Twin Lakes Regatta on Sunday I talked Peter Bowman, Peter Taylor and Bruce McKee into joining me on the Moffatt to search for my canoe. We left around 8 a.m. on the Monday with two canoes jammed into the back of Peter T's truck followed by Bruce's Burbon. Even though rain was forecast, it was a nice enough morning if a little overcast.

We were soon at the Highland Road turnoff heading West across Wabi Pit line and down to the Moffatt bridge with room this side to park the two vehicles. Below the bridge was deep water but a large tree spanned the upstream side so we decided to launch from the South East and get behind it. A small overgrown gully ran down from the road so we followed that to the lip where the clay bank fell eight feet to the water. Other than a couple of fallen trees it wasn't difficult to get the canoes down the gully and into the creek. Our first obstacle was a row of boulders which we readily skirted. Around the bend we met the second obstacle, a rock garden as far as the eye could see. There was no water to paddle in so we picked up the canoes and carried them upstream. The odd puddle offered us some reprieve but it was hardly worth getting into the canoe to cross them.

Soon enough we left one canoe on the rocks and carried on with the other should we be faced with deep water. The stream bed was mostly flat rocks with the occasional round stone and the odd boulder. It was hard walking especially on the return journey after it had rained. Some slabs were up to five feet across and some boulders up to three feet but still there was little water. After much more of this we dropped the second canoe and carried on by foot, rarely being forced off the creek bed.

The creek bed then opened up into a wide sloping rock bed up to fifty feet across. The East side maintained a gentle slope holding the water against a rock wall on the left hand side. In places the wall was broken out into huge cubes of rock, maybe six foot on each side. Much of the slope was covered in lush green moss and several transverse ledges made for a pretty series of small falls. After the struggle through the boulder garden it was a magical slice through the wilderness, mostly washed clear of the small stuff and very unlike my earlier paddle.

One bend too many and our easy walk came to an end with a beaver dam across the rocks holding back a nice wide pond. Peter B. was still holding on to his paddle but we were now without a canoe. We were now forced off the creek and into the bush keeping the water on our right and following the many pond fingers in and out as we skirted the waters edge. Stepping across one such finger Bruce disturbed a nest of bees, they were most upset and took it out on his bare legs. I froze as Father always instructed us to do but even so one stung my left hand. The remainder

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of our trip was basically bush whacking, sometimes down at the water's edge but mainly climbing higher to make the going easier. We passed the two hour decision time and the three hour decision time but finally around 12:30 with no canoe insight and the start of a steady drizzle we turned back.

Even with four guys pushing through the bush there were places with very little to show for it. We crisscrossed our trail in several times but managed to keep finding it and were soon back at the rock basin again. Unfortunately the rain had made the gentle mossy slope quite treacherous and Bruce fell near one of the ledges and hurt his left arm. Nothing broken so he had to grin and bear it. Slowly we descended the basin until we reached the rock garden and our first canoe. Bruce and I carried and lined that for a while before the two Peter's took over. Soon enough we picked up the second canoe and then all of us were carrying and lining until we reached the clear water. From there it was only a paddle around the bend, past the rocks and up to the foot of our clay cliff. Peter B. discovered wet clay is particularly slippery and being first out was soon first in. Now rather wet he and Bruce gave up on that approach decided to tackle the unknown West bank. Undaunted by their antics Peter T. and I scaled the East clay bank which, for my part, involved clutching onto whatever was available. In this case a raspberry bush, bristles and all. Fortunately I'd not let go of the bow rope so once at the top of the bank I didn't have to go down again to get the canoe. Slowly I pulled it out of the water and already had hold of the bow when Peter came over to grab the rope and take the strain while I manhandled the gunwales. At 45 degrees everything loose in the canoe had now slid down to the stern but we persevered and it was soon up and out of the water. Two last dead-falls and we were parked behind the canoe ready to load up.

Meanwhile Bruce and Peter B. were having a similar struggle on the West bank, first fighting their way up through thick bush and then over a heap of rubble. We crossed the bridge to help. After a quick nibble of leftover sandwiches and cookies we loaded up the gear and drove across the bridge to where it was easier to turn around in an old farm lane. We never did find my canoe but with so many yards spent away from the shore there was the slight possibility we'd missed it. Our furthest view of the creek however did not look familiar to me and I definitely hadn't ended on a beaver pond so there was the possibility the 'target' was further South than the N47 34.9' we'd reached today. A pity really because I felt I was much closer to Highland than that, although subsequent events would prove otherwise.

Sunday 5th September, 2010 - Recovery

Early September Kath and I headed back up to the cottage where I hoped to meet up with Tudor and recover our green Scott canoe. Not that I knew where the canoe was, only that it was on the East bank between Saw Mill and Highland Road. To help in that regard we found an envelope stuffed in the door from the OPP in answer to my request for the location where they found me. Better than that I was given a map of the area showing the flight of the helicopter including the double loop it did over my head with grid location 83051 69385. This was nearly a kilometre South of Uno park and made my likely pullout much closer to Morrow Road. Out here of course these two are just lines in the 'sand', only Highland and Saw Mill actually cross the creek.

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Before Tudor arrived on the Saturday I called the Moir's to ask about their hiking trails along the creek. Their son John told me he and his Uncle Rob had hiked much of the creek during August but never found the canoe. I was then of course able to give him the helicopter data which would put the canoe as close as one kilometre from their home on Saw Mill Road. Rob said if it stopped raining he'd have another go after lunch and I was welcome to come along. The next telephone call I received was not to invite me over but to say he'd already found it and it was only half an hour from the bridge. This changed our plans because we now knew we could hike to the canoe and paddle it out rather than search for it by following my earlier trip.

Tudor and I are up at 6 a.m. for an early breakfast to be out of door by 7. We're hoping to meet up with Rob Muir by 8 p.m at his home on Saw Mill Road. We've put most of our gear into his backpack but are still carrying two paddles, an emergency pack and a Swede saw. It takes 40 minutes to reach Rob's, and even going at a crawl along Saw Mill Road Tudor manages to bottom his car (three more times on the way out).

Rob meets us at the cottage and tells us to park down at the bridge while he finishes his cup of tea. We zip down to the "parking lot" and unload our gear. Compared to my earlier trip, Moffatt Creek is extremely high, covering completely the sand spit where I'd launched with later moose prints covering my own footprints. The height of water proved very helpful on our paddle back.

Rob and the family dog Peg soon turn up and at 7:45 a.m. they lead us East of the creek and North up the Lloyd's Shortcut trail. Rob set's a fast pace (for me), with Tudor in the middle and me tagging along at the end trying to record notes and waypoints. Hanging from my neck I have a map, whistle, compass, GPS and Digital Recorder; I'm pushing buttons like crazy and following Tudor as best I can under the circumstances. Wack!. Meanwhile Peg is running fore to aft, zipping under our feet, onto a log, off into the bush before coming up behind again. What a joyful companion to have along. Stuff is flashing past too fast and you need to watch your step especially over fallen trees and steep banks. The beavers have been pretty busy all along this shore.

It's 8:45 and just as I'm calling to Tudor that 'we' might need to slow down a bit we find ourselves in a clearing with a big green canoe. It was rolled over leaning on a fallen tree with all the 'condiments' hanging or leaning on a nearby tree. When Rob found it on Saturday the canoe was right side up and full of water. Raccoons or some such had chewed away some of the foam covering the seats and all of the foam on the yoke. Something a little larger had turned it over, probably looking for a raccoon! Other than the foam there was no damage done and the rope, garden cutters, tote wheels were all safe. Rob had even collected the remains of the blue yoke pad which we took with us. After a long chat and several tales of previous bush adventures Rob and Peg headed for home and Tudor and I loaded up the canoe and launched into the swollen creek. The only thing left at the site was a blue tape which I initialed and dated as to my earlier adventure. The original red tape I'd left overhanging the creek was nearly underwater.

For most of the paddle home Tudor and I had deep water and never really touched a sandbank. This isn't to say there weren't dozens of jams and the odd beaver dam to overcome but we generally paddled right up to them. Many of the branches I'd cut on my way down were now underwater, however being higher in the creek, what I'd previously snook under were now obstacles.

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Several times Tudor stood up in the bow, stepped over a fallen tree and paddled on. Back in the stern I dove into the belly of the beast and hoped nothing caught my rear end as we slipped beneath. One triple trunk hazard was so slippery we had to walk the shallows while we hauled the canoe over. At a few sharp bends we gave up on the tangle of branches and portaged over the point, some only a few feet wide. I'm not sure how much of some of the tangles I was responsible for. Strangely enough while I'd told Rob he'd see cut the branches as evidence of my passing, we saw very few cuts as we paddled back. They were visible on one log where I'd cut through a swath of branches on top to pull my canoe over but on another where I'd cut a 'tunnel' underneath the evidence was hidden.

With so many higher branches now in reach we sometimes found it easier to stow the paddles and pull our way through. There were lots of low branches tickling their way along the gunwales ready to lift an idle paddle into the water if you weren't looking. It happened to me going downstream where the paddle followed me, this time it happened to Tudor in the bow but I managed to snag it before it escaped.

At 11:10 we finally rounded the last sharp bend and found ourselves below the Saw Mill Road bridge. A couple of photographs and we pulled out on the bank to unload our soggy gear. Peg was there to greet us telling all and sundry we'd arrived. Rob came down on his bike to collect the maps we'd promised him and John was there to check all went well.

After an invitation from Rob to do it again and the promise of much better water North of where I'd quit, the Muir's headed home and Tudor and I loaded up ready for the short but bumpy ride to the cottage on Twin Lakes in time for pancakes.

RETROSPECTIVE

This second part of my original paddle took me 6.5 hours to complete, I'd quit at 8 p.m. Most of the time was obviously spent cutting branches. It took us one hour to walk it and only two hours to paddle back. A GPS recording of our recovery shows the distance along the creek to be over 1.5 km. We hiked the bush at about 1km/hr, we paddled back around 0.75km/hr. My solo paddle speed was more like 0.23 km/hr or over 4 hr per km.

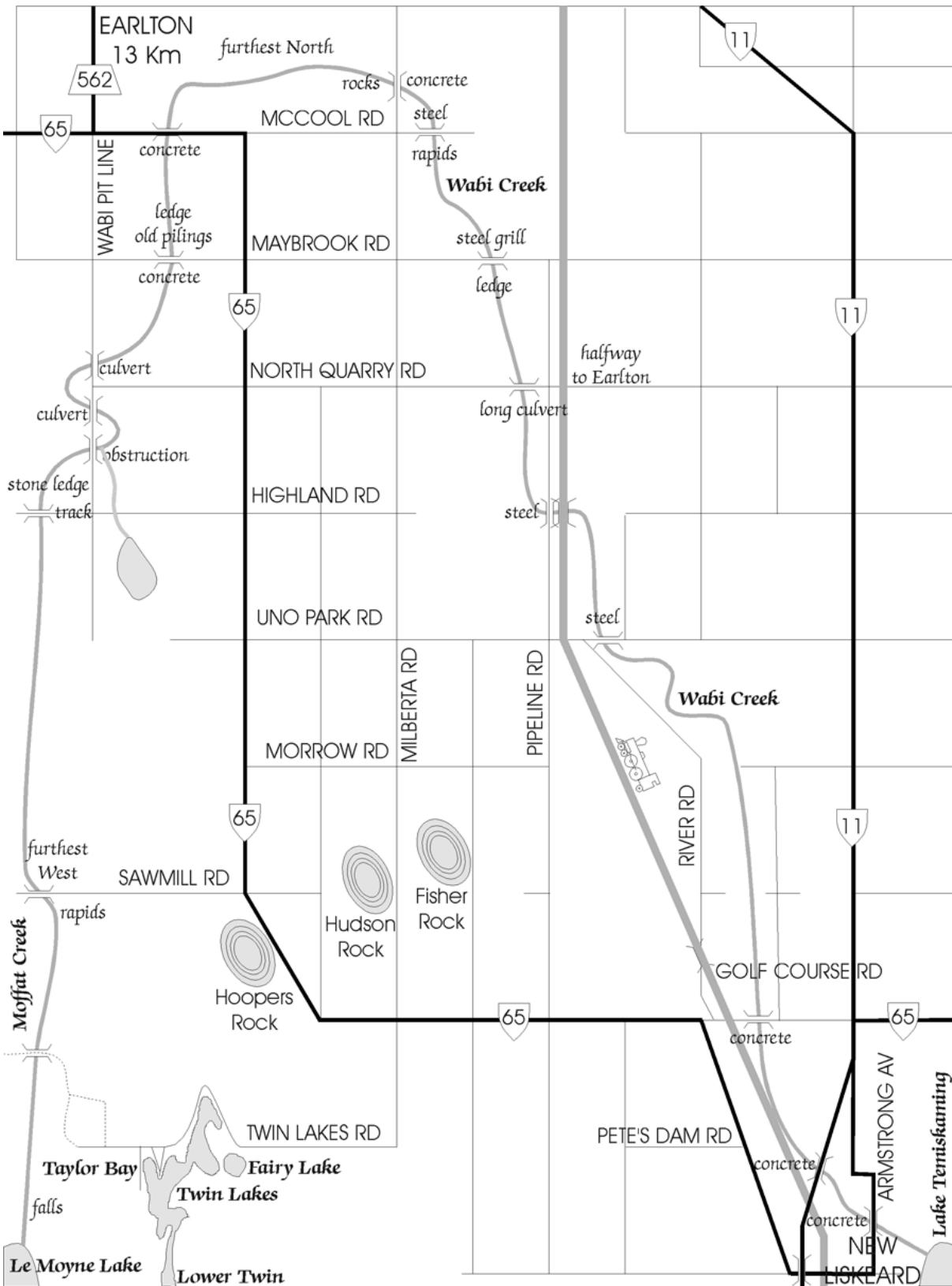
As the crow flies it is three miles between Saw Mill and Highland Roads this might be equivalent of 7.2 km of creek. Having set off from Saw Mill at 1:30 p.m. and paddling at 0.23 km/hr, I might have made it to Highland in 31.3 hours or around 8:45 p.m. the 'next' day. This could be considered fortuitous because sunset is listed as 8:59 p.m. for the night I spent in the bush!

The location of the canoe was N47 33.777' W79 54.287'. This makes the Thursday night hike to the swamp all of ½ km in a little under an hour. The helicopter found me at grid reference 83051 69385 or N47 34.36" W79 53.82" which makes my Friday morning hike only 1 km in around 3 hrs, a tad slower. I don't remember the bush being that thick!

In reality the scale of my adventure was so small, a few kilometres in an area covered in bush, swamp and the odd logging road. I likely crossed one 'road' twice, each time at a log bed. Where I thought I'd paddled most of the 7 km to Highland Road I had just covered the first. As it

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was, on the second leg, I bushwhacked about the same distance as I paddled, just in the wrong direction. One hour South I'd have reached the Muir's home.



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LIST - no particular order

Sharpie	Marker Tape	Food – 2 meals	Water – 2L
Axe	Saw	Cutters	Floats
Canoe	Emergency bag	Bug repellent	Shorts
Long pants	Boots	Compass	GPS – Garmin
Rain top	Hat	Life jacket	Phone notes
Pencils	Pad	Whistle	Plastic rule
Tote wheels	Bungee cords	Rope	Paddles - 2
Card	Glasses and tie		

MISSING - no good reason (* still managed to bring)

Duct tape	Matches	Gloves *
Rain pants	Toilet paper *	

REFERNCES

Discovering Wild Temiskaming, One Day Adventures and Beyond. Murray and Vicky Muir, ISBN 0-9731204-X

"you must have patience. If you don't, the bush will teach you"

Map - 31 M/12W New Liskeard, Temiskaming District, Ontario, Scale 1:50.000,
Canada Map Office or online.

Garmin 750 User Manual – mobile, only suitable for short trips given the battery life.
Garmin GPS-72H User Manual – handheld, batteries replaceable.