

Chibougamau, Quebec, 1964

The party: Chuck Longworth and Hans Carroll, Will Richards and Stew Coffin

Aug. 11. We placed Will's car at Obatogamau Lake, which is reached by a side road off the main highway at mile 119, sign "Gagnon." Then we went to the lumber company depot on Nikabau Lake and obtained travel permits. Put in at Nikabau Lake and paddled southwest across the lake to find mouth of stream that drains Finbar Lake. The shape of the lake did not appear to match the map we were using, which was Chibougamau, Quebec, 1:250,000, 52G, Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys. In all other respects, however, this map proved to be accurate. Possibly the trouble here was caused by raising the level of the lake. We were looking for a definite stream mouth, but instead entered a flooded swamp with no current. We never did see Riv. Normandin entering on the left, but by keeping to the right shore and continuing SW, we decided we must be on the correct stream. Looked in vain for a good campsite, and finally camped in a poor spot on the right bank in thickening weather. It rained hard during the night. For the remainder of the trip, the skies were overcast, with intermittent rain, mist and fog. The temperature remained between 44 and 46 degrees.

Aug. 12. We awoke to find puddles of water all around our tents. Paddled upstream to a 4-foot falls, which we portaged right 50 yards. Shortly came to an old dam and portaged right 100 yards. Our stream was generally narrow with little current. At one point we huddled in the rain, discussing whether to continue on via Finbar Lake or via Lac Rohault. Finally chose Finbar. (I have since talked with a man who has been via Rohault. He described the Lac Rohault to Nemenjish Lake portage as being long and unpleasant. He did not know how the Lac Rohault to Lac Gabriel portage was, but it looks long on the map.) One mile beyond the junction, portaged left 50 yards around a rapid. In 2 more miles came into Finbar Lake. Camped on the north end of a prominent narrow bar at north end of lake.

Aug. 13. Did not break camp because it was raining so hard. To pass the time, paddled to south end of Finbar Lake and found good portage trail, not shown on map, running west out of the lake.

Aug. 14. Took said portage trail for ½ mile, then paddled through two small lakes and into Lac Feuquieres. Camped in a poor spot on the left bank at a small rapid at the outlet of Lac Feuquieres.

Aug. 15. Paddled through Lac Robert and ran a moderate rapid at the outlet. In one mile, portaged left 100 yards around a strong rapid and entered Lac Gabriel. Camped at a fair site on the north end of a narrow peninsula..

Aug. 16. Did not break camp because of steady rain.

Aug. 17. About 2 miles north of camp, saw a good campsite on the west bank, worth noting because good sites so few. In another mile came to the mouth of Riv. Cawcot.

Paddled up it a short ways just to see if it was navigable. Seemed to be. Could hear rapids upstream. Continued up Lac Gabriel. Turning west toward the outlet, saw a prominent grave on the north bank. Entering the Opawica River, ran an easy rapid, then passed through an expansion called Lac des Deux-Iles. Then ran about a mile of moderate rapids, one mile of deadwater, a few more short rapids, and came to an 8-foot falls. Camped in the portage trail on the left.

Aug. 18. Our plan had been to go down to Lac Caopatina, over to Surprise Lake, up Roy River, and down Riv. Cawcot. But because of slow progress caused by rain, with no sign of change, decided to revise plans. Went back up the Opawica River to Lac des Deux-Iles, then turned northeast up a small stream and portaged 1/2 mile to a small lake that led to Nemenjish Lake. Paddled around Nemenjish Lake a while but didn't find much of interest. (Wonder what we were expecting?) Entered the Nemenjish River and in 2 miles camped on the left in a large clearing that looked much used.

Aug. 19. Continuing down the Nemenjish River, portaged right 1/2 mile around falls. Ran some sharp rapids, made possible only because of high water. (Would have been hard work going upstream.) Finally reached Obatogamau Lake and paddled to Will's car at an ice-house at the east end of the lake.

In summary, this was an easy route to canoe. The rapids were few, there were no large lakes, and the few portages were short and clear. But the country was not very interesting, and good campsites were scarce. Fishing was good. There seem to be a great variety of interconnecting canoe routes in this area, making possible a trip of almost any desired length and style. Camp Capitachouane runs trips through this area. One of their routes goes north to Chibougamau Lake, and another goes down the Opawica River. Above all, this trip will long be remembered as the one on which it rained and rained.

This is a much revised version of my original 1964 report.

Stewart Coffin, April 2008

Other transcribed reports now available:

- Timber Lake, 1962
- Dumoine River, 1962
- Riv. du Chef, 1963
- Kazan River, 1966
- George River, 1967
- Kipawa-Dumoine, 1979
- Romaine River, 1980
- Ste. Marguerite River, 1981
- Ugjoktok River, 1982