

## George River, Quebec, 1967

This river description is from a canoe trip taken by: Don Barr and John Sharp of Boston; Kerck Kelsey and Don Peach of Glastonbury, Connecticut; Bob Hatton of Williamstown, Massachusetts; and Stewart Coffin of Lincoln, Massachusetts.

July 30. Assembled at Sept-Iles, and boarded 7:00 p.m. train for Schefferville (Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway). Train runs to and from Schefferville three times per week on a leisurely schedule known only unto itself. Canoes are handled as excess baggage.

July 31. Arrived Schefferville 4:00 a.m. Spent morning there; purchased fishing licenses and a few supplies. Local trucking service transported us 4 miles to Laurentian seaplane base on Squaw Lake (Laurentian Air Service, Schefferville P. Q.). We were flown to a small lake just downstream from outlet of Cabot Lake, headwaters of George River. Required three trips in Cessna 185. Camp was set up above a small sandy beach on east shore, in a small clearing in the woods.

August 1. Viewed outlet of Cabot Lake, a moderate rapid with 3-foot drop, shallow but runnable. Paddled two miles down small lake, and ran shallow broad rapid. In one mile, ran another rapid, slightly heavier than the first. For remainder of morning, ran several mild rapids, and lifted over one drop. Looked for good lunch spot, but found only brushy banks until reaching small clearing at prominent point on east shore, 11 miles from camp. Shortly after lunch, passed barren hills on both sides of small lake, with good campsites. Then banks become brushy and swampy again through Lac Lacasse and into Resolution Lake. Paddled late looking for good campsite. Finally stopped halfway down east shore of Resolution Lake and climbed through thick brush to top of bare hill to camp. Large pile of antlers here, indicating an old Indian camp. (Day's travel, 27 miles.)

August 2. Paddled 4 miles to outlet of Resolution Lake. This end of lake is very shallow, with many small islands and lurking submerged rocks. The river then flows swiftly for one mile to Advance Lake, which was also very shallow, with many channels and riffles around islands. Lunched on brushy island near north end of this lake. Did not see a single good campsite all morning. Two miles below Advance Lake, just before right turn in river, climbed prominent 300-foot hill on right for view of the countryside. Continuing down-river, soon came to series of moderate rapids. Ran two, and waded part way down a third. After small expansion, rapids continue as the river divides into many channels around islands. The rapids become heavier and the right-hand channel, which we were in, abruptly enters a gorge. Walked down left bank, and found gorge to be unrunnable, impossible to rope down, and 1/2-mile long. The terrain was rough, rather brushy, and carpeted with slippery reindeer moss. No sign of a trail. Right bank looked about the same. We scouted the next channel, about 1/4 mile to the left, and found that it was much smaller than the first, and could be run and lined easily, except for a short gorge at upper end. Canoes were dragged and paddled back upstream 100 yards, portaged around this short gorge 100 yards, and camp was made on a wooded rocky plateau covered with reindeer moss. (15 miles)

August 3. Ran 100 yards, lined 100 yards, and then ran remaining ¼ mile of very brisk rapids, at the end of which we joined the main stream again flowing swiftly from right to left. It appeared to have about doubled in volume, presumably by the augmentation of large tributary from the east (drainage of Whitegull Lake?). Our map was somewhat lacking in detail in this section. After canoeing another ¼ mile, came to large tributary on the left in a canyon, and explored up it about 100 yards to a falls. It appears likely that this is a third channel of the George River, to the left of the one we ran. Since all or most of the drop occurs abruptly, this may well be an easier route than the one we took, and might explain why we found no sign of a portage trail on our route. Continuing downstream, ran two or three deep, easy rapids and several miles of fast current. Five miles below the gorge, ran a mile-long heavy rapid with long island in the middle of it, and 3 miles farther stopped at sandy beach on left for lunch. In 4 miles, the river divides around an island and falls abruptly 25 feet. Portaged left 1/4 mile through dense brush. Faint signs of old trail here. In 3 miles the river broadens just above sandy islands, and becomes shallow and rapid. Ran several moderate rapids in next 5 miles. Then the river broadens again, and divides around countless rocky islands at Thousand Island Expansion. Camped on top of prominent rock island. (22 miles)

August 4. Ran many shallow rapids among the islands for 4 miles, and lifted over one drop. Then the channels join together again, and the river flows with strong current for 3 miles to three heavy rapids marked on map. Lined and lifted over portions of these rapids. Stopped at the second rapid and climbed prominent hill to the east for lunch. Presume this to be the hill climbed by Mrs. Hubbard, and said to rise 630 feet above the river. As the George River makes its gradual descent to the sea from an elevation of about 1400 feet at Cabot Lake, the surrounding hills become progressively higher and steeper, and the river valley narrower. The shores and hillsides are wooded with spruce and larch, but the upper slopes support only scrub growth, and many of the summits are bare rock. Continuing down-river, in one mile came to heavy, deep rapid between narrow rock walls. Appeared difficult to line down, so ran it cautiously. In 5 miles came to heavy rapid marked on map, and lined down on right. Then ran several easy rapids, and camped on high sandy bluff on right. (18 miles)

August 5. The rapid marked on map a little below camp was over a mile long, but broad and gradual, and not difficult to run even though total drop estimated to be about 50 feet. Then the river slackens and bends sharply left around a sandy hill. Ran one more short rapid, and then in 2 miles passed the mouth of Riviere de Pas. Paddled 13 miles more of mostly slack water, and camped on left in narrows at head of Indian House Lake. (20 miles)

August 7. Paddled 18 miles, and camped on left. Indian House Lake is roughly 50 to 60 miles long, depending on where its head is considered to lie, and varies in width from ¼ mile to 2 miles. There is good current in several narrow sections. The surrounding hills, which become progressively higher as one approaches the lake, here line both shores continuously, rising 500 feet and more above the water. Many small streams cascade

down their steep rocky slopes, indicating even higher land beyond in this vast wilderness, land that will forever remain *terra incognita* to us in our tunnel-vision view ahead.

August 8. Paddled 10 miles down the lake, to the point where it turns abruptly left, and climbed a hill on the left for lunch. In another 2 miles came to outlet rapid, long and heavy, but ran easily along right shore. Then crossed small lake to Henri Culos' fishing camp (George River Lodge) on west shore, and visited there briefly. Two miles below Culos', came to long, heavy rapid. Lined left around one boulder, then ran several miles heavy rapids. Cruised for several miles looking for a campsite among marsh and brush slopes. Finally chose a wet hillside high on left bank, where the river turns left at Hades Hills. (27 miles)

August 9. Ran fast current past Hades Hills, then mostly slower current for next 15 miles. Saw no good campsites in this entire section. High, rocky hills rise on both sides of the river. In late afternoon, a strong rapid led to 3-mile long expansion, at lower end of which we camped in large clearing above left bank. Evidently much used old Indian camp, judging from the many stone tent rings, cuttings, and caribou remains. (25 miles)

August 10. Nearly continuous rapids all day; average current 4 mph. Camped on open, sloping hillside on left shore after running 17 miles.

Terrain here becomes distinctly more alpine. In some spots, rock ledge extends down to water's edge, but for the most part the river banks consist of loose boulders pushed up by ice to height of 15-30 feet. Below Indian House Lake, as the country becomes more mountainous, level dry campsites are harder to find. The steep hillsides rising on both sides are lined along the shores with a belt of willow and alder, above which the forest of spruce and larch extends for several hundred yards. There are often good stands of spruce in the gullies, the largest trees being a foot in diameter but not very tall. Higher on the slopes a belt of sub-arctic scrub growth occurs. The summits are usually bare rock, with occasional patches of snow that glow brightly when struck by the slanting rays of the sun breaking through the low drifting clouds. At frequent intervals, mountain streams plunge down over ledges and into the valley. What a sight!

August 11. After running 8 miles of fast current and strong rapids, came to slack water at base of Pyramid Hills. Stopped on left at Arctic Anglers' Pyramid fishing and hunting camp, and chatted with Max Oertle, who was there with a few Eskimos getting camp ready for the first salmon fishing parties of the season, due the following week. The Pyramid Hills rise abruptly above the east shore, and stand out boldly on the skyline for some distance. The gullies and slopes have good stands of spruce here, and the Eskimos come up river as far as this to cut timber during the winter and float it to the coast during spring freshet. Below Pyramid, nearly continuous rapids and fast current all afternoon. At sharp right turn 15 miles below Pyramid, ran the heaviest rapid so far encountered. Rapids continue as the river valley becomes more canyon-like, with steeper slopes towering above. Five miles below the heavy rapid, the rapids cease and the river becomes unusually deep and swift (7 mph?), and the surface smooth and dark as it rushes for miles between shadowing hills. I believe this to be the section described so vividly by

Mrs. Hubbard and called Slanting Lake. If so, then Hades Hills are in the wrong place either on our map or in her description. We camped in this canyon on a small bluff on the right bank, overlooking the falls and pools of a cascading tributary, a pretty spot. (29 miles)

Blueberries, which were found scattered throughout the route, were abundant here. Also plentiful were arctic bilberries, which look and taste much like a large dark blueberry. Other edible berries found along the river were mountain cranberry and black crowberry or teaberry. Near Ungava Bay, baked apple or cloudberry became common.

August 12. After 2 more miles of swift smooth water, the river breaks into a moderate rapid and turns left. Good current and scattered rapids all morning. Lunched at foot of broad shallow rapid 15 miles from camp. Below here, river is mostly smooth for several miles as it bends eastward toward Bridgman Hills. The confining hills continue to become progressively higher and bolder, as they have done from the start. Below Indian House Lake, the highest peaks and largest tributaries are always on the east side. In late afternoon, came to strong rapids and current as we crossed 58th parallel. Camped on high bluff on left bank overlooking 2-mile long heavy rapid, one of the finest of the trip. The river is about ¼-mile wide here. The view from this campsite is truly spectacular. Sheer cliffs, about 12 in number, line the river to the eastward. Some are rust colored, others blue-gray. (See photo in *Black Spruce Journals*.) (31 miles)

August 13. A mile below camp, the river narrows and the rapid was run cautiously along the left bank. Then the river broadens considerably and the current slackens. Climbed summit on right with sheer rock face for lunch. Another hour's paddle brought us to rapids above Helen Falls. We first scouted these on foot along right shore; then ran and lined for 1/2 mile, until reaching a section that was too heavy to line down. From this point on the right shore, we could see the pool at the foot of the falls, a mile or more distant. Helen Falls consists of a series of very heavy drops over ledges. Near a fisherman's shack, we found a good trail that led through the woods 1-1/4 miles to the pool below. Crossed over at foot of falls and camped in small clearing on left. (17 miles)

August 14. Paddled 4 miles to Arctic Anglers fishing, camp, located on a high bluff on the right. Ran heavy chute in front of camp, and pulled into cove with long beach just below this rapid, where the camp keeps its plane and canoes. Chatted with proprietor Bob May, and obtained information on rapids, tides, and probable schedules of supply ships in Ungava Bay. The camp leases fishing rights upstream to head of Helen Falls. We had seen many guests fishing for salmon at the Falls, which they reach from camp by outboard canoe. Paddled 17 miles of slow to moderate current to next rapid. The first part of this rapid ends in shallow drop over boulders, and requires caution in low water. Second part was run with no difficulty just left of an island. We then paddled 9 miles of slow water looking for good place to camp. Finding none, we "camped" on a wet hillside on right, just above final rapid. (Bob and I could hear water gurgling underneath our tent.) A marked change of terrain occurs here as one reaches tidewater. A few small larch grow near the shore, but the hillsides are quite barren. A distinct high tide mark is seen along the shore, and we hauled the canoes well above it. (27 miles)

August 15. Final rapid is nearly a mile wide, and over a mile long at low tide. At high tide it disappears altogether and the current reverses. We were advised to paddle over it at high tide, and ride outgoing tide down the bay. At medium tide the rapid is said to be difficult to see from above, and must be approached cautiously. Due to misinformation on tide schedules, we shot it at low tide and found it to be a very sporty run. We just barely covered the 5 miles to Ilkalu Lodge on Ford Island before combination of incoming tide and headwinds made further progress impossible. The sportsmen's lodge here is owned and operated by Ungava Eskimos, first of its kind in northern Canada. The several hours wait for the tide to reverse was spent in the congenial company of proprietor Willie Imudluk and his family. The George River Hudson's Bay Post, shown on maps on east shore near Ford Island, no longer exists. Left Ford Island in mid-afternoon at high tide to complete the final 12 miles to George River Community Center (Port Nouveau Quebec). When halfway there, accepted lift by passing government boat. To reach the Center, on the east shore, one must cross 2 miles of open water here—dangerous or impossible in bad weather. The boat anchored offshore, and we were transported to the Center by Eskimos in outboard canoes. The beach here can be reached only at high tide. At low tide a mile of impassable mud flats and boulders are exposed. The Center is on the north side of a small bay, along the right shore near where it curves markedly to westward. It is protected on the west by a high ridge, and is not visible until one is well into the bay. (20 miles)

August 16. Spent the day looking over Community Center. It was established in 1962 by the Department of Northern Affairs as relief settlement for the starving Eskimos. Present population consists of about 150 Eskimos and their dogs, and three white families—those of the DNA administrator, engineer, and school teacher. There is a store run by Eskimos where a few supplies and handicrafts may be purchased. A radio message was sent to Laurentian Air for a plane.

August 17. A Laurentian Air Twin Beechcraft transported our party, plus one canoe, back to Schefferville. Other two canoes were left at the Center with instructions to be shipped by water to Montreal whenever a supply ship happened to call. Returned home from Schefferville by rail and auto. (Canoes arrived in Montreal early November.)

## NOTES

Distance: From outlet of Cabot Lake to Port Nouveau Quebec—340 miles; 15 days; average of 23 miles per day.

Canoes: Three 17-foot canoes were used, two aluminum and one fiberglass.

Water Height: The level of the northern Quebec lakes this summer was said to be the lowest in decades, due to lack of precipitation. Also, our trip was in August, when the rivers are normally lower. Consequently, other parties may find much higher water and canoeing conditions altogether different from those described here.

Weather: Evidently the end of the drought coincided with the start of our trip. It rained nearly every day—sometimes a prolonged storm, but more often brief squalls accompanied by high wind. Prevailing wind is northwest. We often encountered horrendous headwinds, slowing our progress considerably.

Insects: Mosquitoes were numerous throughout the trip. Black flies did not bother us much until reaching Helen Falls.

Fishing: Our limited fishing efforts yielded a plentiful supply of lake trout, plus a few speckled trout. The salmon run was late this year, and we did not catch any until last day on the river.

Permits: The two fishermen in our party were required to purchase salmon licenses at the office of the game warden in Schefferville, \$15.50 each. No mention was made here of the need for a forest travel permit, so we did not obtain one.

Maps: We used the following 8-mile-per-inch Mines and Technical Survey maps, which covered entire route: Dyke Lake 23NE, Indian House 24SE, George River 24NE. More detailed maps were not available. These maps were adequate, as the entire trip was down-river, and there were no large lakes or other navigational problems.

#### References:

*A Woman's Way Through Unknown Labrador*, by Mrs. Leonidas Hubbard, Jr. The McClure Co., 1908. Mrs. Hubbard's account of her exploration of Labrador interior and George River in 1905.

*The Long Labrador Trail*, by Dillon Wallace, Outing Publishing Co., 1906. Account of his journey over nearly same route as Mrs. Hubbard, also in 1905.

*The New People*, by Edith Iglauer, Doubleday and Co., 1966. Description of George River Eskimos, and rehabilitation projects sponsored by Department of Northern Affairs.

## Riviere de Pas

Our original plan was to start from Iron Arm, which is accessible by road from Schefferville, cross Attikamagen Lake, portage 1/2 mile over the height of land to Snowshoe Lake, and thence go down the Riviere de Pas and into the George River just south of Indian House Lake. But we were advised by both the game warden and Laurentian Air that the Riviere de Pas was too low to run, and so at the insistence of two in our party, we reluctantly changed our starting point to the outlet of Cabot Lake. When viewed from the air on our flight in, the Riviere de Pas appeared to have ample water for good canoeing. When we passed its mouth, I estimated its flow to be 5000 cfs. I therefore doubt that it was too low to run. I think the probable explanation is that when two inexperienced parties had attempted it in July, one party had swamped their canoe,

and the other party wrecked one canoe and had to be rescued, causing the authorities to look for some rationale for discouraging others from attempting it.

I typed the original version of this report in 1967 and made many photocopies for distribution to friends and fellow canoeists. Now, at long last, I have come around to making a computer version. This was done by scanning one of the barely legible old photocopies with OCR. I have tried to correct the hundreds of errors, but probably missed some. Obviously, much of the information, such as transportation, permits, and camps is totally obsolete. But I trust the river itself hasn't changed much. I will always look back on it as one of the most scenic trips in all my river travels.

Stewart Coffin, April 2008

Other transcribed reports now available:

- Timber Lake, 1962
- Dumoine River, 1962
- Riv. du Chef, 1963
- Chibougamau, 1964
- Kazan River, 1966
- Kipawa-Dumoine, 1979
- Romaine River, 1980
- St. Marguerite River, 1981
- Ugjoktok River, 1982