

## Riviere du Chef, Quebec, 1963

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

July 13. Drove to Amherst with my Carryall and picked up Chuck and Will. Picked up Hans in Norwich and proceeded to Quebec via routes 302, 27, and 1. Camped for the night just beyond Laurentide Park.

July 14. Drove around Roberval and St. Felicien seeking river information. Decided against flying in because of expense, about \$400. Could also have flown in to File-Axe Lake from Chibougamau for less cost because of shorter distance, but decided it would be more interesting to paddle in. No one we talked to had firsthand knowledge of Riv. du Chef, nor did they know anyone who did. Stopped at Golden Eagle gas station in St. Felicien, Roger Truchon proprietor, and obtained a driver, Dennis \_\_\_\_\_, who rode with us to Waconichi Lake and drove car back to St. Felicien. Paid him \$25. Put in at end of road at southern tip of Waconichi Lake. (Road now goes much farther.)

From previous experience, we expected a moderate amount of trouble obtaining all the necessary permits. As usual, a large amount of correspondence over this failed to produce any accurate information. The permit obtained at Chibougamau Reserve entrance is for driving through only, and is turned in at exit gate. Individual fishing licenses may be obtained at either gate for \$5.50. Individual travel permits are next obtained at Mistassini Reserve gate. When launching at Waconichi Lake, an attendant there advised us that those permits were likewise not valid for our trip, and we were directed to Mr. Robertson at Camp Waconichi, which is located nearby on a peninsula in the SW corner of the lake. Robertson issued a new permit and charged us each \$2 per day for time spent in the Reserve, which we insisted would be only 2 days. (Incidentally, I once ran across a magazine article, possibly in *Life*, about some legendary he-man of the North, who I believe was this same Robertson.)

We paddled 5 miles up the lake and camped in a poor spot in the bush on the east shore. We were told we were not allowed to camp anywhere on the lake except at the outlet, however this was impossible because of the time. We were also told that fishing was prohibited except for guests of Camp Waconichi.

July 15. Paddled 14 miles more through outlet to Foam Falls and portaged right ½ mile. Paddled up small bays and portaged right ¼ mile around steep rapids. Came to another short, steep rapid, portaged the gear right 50 yds and ran solo. Entered Baie du Post on Lake Mistassini and looked for way to HBC Post, made more difficult by low clouds and many small islands not shown on our rough map. (One of the maps we were using, which I still have, was provided by Canadian National Railways to accompany their route descriptions. Professional guides were usually employed back in those days, which might explain the lack of detail.) Camped on gravel spit of prominent narrow esker that extends SW into the Baie. (21 miles)

July 16. Another overcast day with intermittent light drizzle, so typical. Had hoped to cross esker and paddle to Post to see large assembly of Cree Indians and obtain travel info, but impossible because of strong wind. Instead, paddled NE along esker looking for route to File-Axe. Our knowledge of the route was vague, and we thought that Robertson had described the route as passing through Riv. Chaliflour and thence to File-Axe Lake by several short portages, which our map seemed to suggest. We started up large stream shown on map, found good portage trail left 100 yds around rapid, then several miles of easy upstream paddling. (Note: this stream later identified as Riv. a la Perche, which is now crossed by a road.) Portaged 250 yds left around second rapid, and at end of this portage found a trail running NW. Scouted this trail and found it led one mile to a marshy bay, possibly connecting to Chaliflour Lake and HBC Post. Continued up our stream, first NE, then E, then SE, to long rapid with portage trail on left. This trail ran SE over high hill for 2/3 mile through good timber. Our route was now toward File-Axe and away from Chaliflour over a blank section on our map. Started paying more attention to our compasses. Appeared to be main route and going in right direction, so decided to continue. Camped in portage trail. Warm and humid, perfect weather for mosquitoes, no-see-ums, and black flies. Portaged canoes.

July 17. Light rain, as usual. Portaged rest of gear to small lake. We had portaged around a long loop of rapids and were back on our stream again. Paddled east up lake to inlet and portaged right 1000 yds of good trail up rapids to another small lake. Could not find any portage out of this lake, so decided route must be up rapids. Dragged and paddled up 1/4 mile to a larger lake and paddled SE through this lake. Main inlet appeared to be at SE end of lake, and there we found a good trail left 400 yds around steep rapids to a small pond. We continued paddling and dragging upstream through small ponds, still traveling in generally SE, at one point portaging left 250 yds around rapids. In passing through a large marsh, we lost the route, which likely sent south into the next lake. Instead, we continued SE up a small obstructed stream and had lunch at one of several beaver dams. In another mile, our brook forked, and we took the larger branch to the right. Went 100 yds up, slow going. The struggle was looking ever more hopeless, when suddenly we emerged at the north end of a long lake, which we guessed (correctly) was the one shown on our map just NW of File-Axe Lake. Found a good portage trail east out of this lake, which brought us into File-Axe Lake. What a relief that was! Added to our good fortune, the late afternoon sun emerged brightly from the clouds, for one of the few times on the trip. Found a good campsite on small rocky island.

July 18. Another rainy day. Had trouble finding route out of File-Axe. Should have stayed close to west shore. Finally found correct bay and portaged 300 yds to a bay of Lac Carboneau. Paddled eastward and portaged over narrow bar into main lake. Paddled to outlet and ran a mile of easy rapids. Entered what we thought was Laganiere, and turned left but came to dead end. Turned out to be small lake not on map. Paddled back to south end, ran easy rapids, portaged left 25 yds around 4-foot falls, lined down another sharp drop, and ran more rapids into Lac Laganiere. Camped on left in poor site. Thunderstorm at night with heavy rain.

July 19. Followed east shore to avoid going into Canoe Lake, but got into it anyway. Finally found small passage with easy rapids opposite old Indian camp into lower Laganiere Lake. Below Laganiere, banks become rocky, with jack pine and good campsites. Rapids become stronger. Lifted right around 8-foot falls. Ran several miles moderate rapids and strong current. Camped on rocky bluff on right.

July 20. Ran several strong rapids just below camp. River now much larger, and high from all the rain, so now running close to shore. Lined down a few drops. Below mouth of Riv. Petite Meule, fewer rapids but strong current for several miles. Nearing lookout tower shown on map, ran two long rapids, very pretty. Did not see tower, and cabin at foot of mountain not used for years. Ran more rapids and camped at sandy bank on left.

July 31. Mostly smooth water with good current to mouth of Nestawkanaw River. More of same to 25-foot falls, portaged left 100 yds. Below here begin a series of very heavy rapids. First of these bypassed by side stream on right. Lifted around another. Yet another was bypassed by side stream on left. Camped at a small ledge on the right.

Aug. 1. In a.m. had mostly smooth water with good current, but lifted around one very heavy rapid. Final stretch of Riv. du Chef is through a beautiful valley with mountains on both sides. Two miles above mouth, ran long, broad rapid and lunched on large flat rock island below. Came to cabin on left and entered Ashuapmuchuan River, which is here smaller than its tributary. River is smooth for 14 miles, with unsightly logging road on right. Camped on right just beyond logging.

Aug. 2. Ran several long heavy rapids with fast current between. Three miles above mouth of Riv. Chigoubiche, portaged left 150 yds over good trail around rapids and had lunch at foot. In 3 miles, came to Chaudiere Falls, where the river drops 100 feet in 2 miles of rapids and chutes, with one great plunge at the end. Made two portages right of ¼-mile each and camped on smooth rock ledge that dominates this spectacular area.

Aug. 3. For 20 miles below the falls, the river races fast and deep between steep rocky banks, where one need only avoid the largest waves. Then the river abruptly enters a flat sandy plain and becomes broader and slower. A road appears on the left, and soon buildings on both sides. Approaching Big Bear Falls, it appears one could take out at a road on the right. There are heavy rapids above the falls, and we made slow progress lining, lifting, and running along the right shore. The three drops of the main falls we portaged right. Then mostly smooth to Salmon Falls, where we portaged two drops right. Next, at a railroad bridge, we portaged along the track. Put in below bridge in some strong rocky rapids. Easier rapids were run until the final rapids above the bridge at St. Felicienne, which we ran unloaded. Took out at the bridge, carried up to Golden Eagle station where my Carryall was parked, and headed home.

This is a much edited and condensed version of my original 1963 report. By now this is probably a well established canoe route. When we did it, it was anything but.

Stewart Coffin, April 2008