

Ugjoktok River, Labrador, 1982

Aug 2 - Party consisting of Dick Irwin, Bob Davis, Bill Miller, and Stew Coffin assembled at Sept-Iles. Checked canoes in at railroad station and loaded them on baggage car (before 5 p.m.). Camped at Moisie River campground.

Aug 3 - Took 8 a.m. train to Schefferville. Train “runs” to Schefferville and Labrador City Tuesdays and Fridays. Passenger fare \$48.40, canoes \$60 each. Packs are thrown in (literally) with canoes at no extra charge. Train makes about 40 scheduled stops along the way, and will usually stop at other places if requested. Latest word is that the trains will probably continue even if the mines shut down. For schedules and information, write: Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway, Sept-Iles, Quebec. Arrived Schefferville 10 p.m. By luck, found someone at the station with pick-up willing to transport our party immediately over 15 miles of gravel road to Iron Arm. Gave him \$40. Arrived midnight and camped at landing.

Aug 4 - Pushed off across Attikamagen Lake with about 250 lbs food and 200 lbs other gear, three large packs per canoe, in Old Town Tripper and my slightly larger Big Dipper. Dragged up shallow rapid 50 yds to Mole Lake, portaged 100 yds out of Mole Lake, then 200 yds more into Fox Lake, following a route that is obvious on the 1:50,000 sheets. Camped at start of portage out of Fox Lake.

Aug 5 - Made short portage from camp to small lake, then 400-yd portage over height of land to Snowshoe Lake. This is an established route and trails are easy to follow, although evidently not much used. Started downstream, dragging and lifting in many places because of extremely low water. Easier going in p.m., and able to run most of them. Camped on gravel bar just above Lac Blenac. Black flies bad (as usual).

Aug 6 - Lifting over a few places in a.m., good going in p.m. Stopped to chat with man at sporting camp on Lac Jamin, only person we saw on the trip. At outlet of lake, portaged left 100 yds and started down Riv. de Pas. Ran many rapids. Camped on fine bluff near top of 23P/4 sheet.

Aug 7 - Estimated 500 cfs at camp. Ran many easy rapids. River soon doubles in volume. Camped at another nice spot where river runs southeast for a bit at 55°29' north.

Aug 8 - Ran strong rapid below camp, lifting around final drop. In ½-mile came to our turn-off, and started portaging up south side of steep mountain stream. Easy going at first over burnt hillside, but soon became brushier and swampier. Stayed close to stream, following caribou paths whenever possible. At day's end, rewarded for our considerable efforts by reaching shore of small lake at head of rapids. (Portage was 4 miles on map but probably more like 6 by meandering path we took, nine hours steady hauling, two loads per man, so overall about 1/2 mph—perhaps a useful figure to file away for future reference.)

Aug 9 - Made ½-mile portage over burnt country to next lake, and 1/3-mile to the next. Next portage of 1/3-mile was over height of land to small lake, then ½ mile to larger lake. Continuing downstream, found plenty of water so ran most rapids, lifting or wading a few places, with one carry of 15 yds. Late afternoon entered George River, went up it ¼ mile, and camped on splendid rock ledge on left.

Aug 10 - Slow going up George, using tracking lines to ascend the many rapids. Portaged ¼ mile right around one heavy rapid. Finally came to smooth water, but not for long, as rapids continue around many islands leading into Whitegull Lake. Camped on one of these islands in steady cold drizzle, which continued all night.

Aug 11 - Rapids continue above camp. Discovered 50-yd portage over an esker with 10-foot rise in elevation, saving some upstream work. Finally, after powering up many more rapids around islands, came into Whitegull. Paddled directly across in light winds with no problem. Saw many caribou here. Continuing upstream, waded up shallow rapids and found fine campsite on north shore of small lake.

Aug 12 - Paddled to head of lake, portaged ¾ mile to a pond, crossed it, and portaged 300 yds into Lac Rochereau. Continuing upstream, slowly made our way through rocky shoals, lifting over some, and finally came to deep water in Lac Chapiteau. Camped halfway down on north shore. Fine views from hills behind camp.

Aug 13 - At head of this lake, faced with choice of several routes, which we surveyed from a hilltop, decided to portage directly southward 2/3 mile over barren hillside to a small lake, then southward again 1/3 mile to another lake, from eastern end of which we made a short carry southwest over height of land into headwaters of the Ugjoktok. Here the party split, one team exploring a roundabout downstream route through a chain of ponds, the other portaging directly overland around them, which proved to be the better route because of the low water. Descended narrow stream and lifted the last of it into a lake, paddled 2 miles down it, lifted over a rapid connecting it to next lake, and camped at a fine wooded sandy beach on right just after entering this second lake.

Aug 14 - Paddled through narrows to next lake. Came to three short sets of rapids—ran the first two and portaged the third 200 yds. In another mile, came to Border Beacon, where there is a landing strip, buildings, and radio transmitter, evidently run either automatically or not at all. After passing through some lakes, came to impressive 100-foot falls, the river now much enlarged by tributaries. Made difficult ¼-mile portage right down steep terrain to foot of falls. Waded down two rapids, the first one short, the second one long and steep via a channel on the right. Camped just above next rapid.

Aug 15 - Estimated 1500 cfs. Lined the drop below camp. (This and many other rapids could probably have been easily run, but we are being cautious and conservative here because of the remoteness of our location.) Came to mile-long very heavy rapid, ran and lined, then portaged right ¼ mile over hillside to pool below. Smooth water for a few miles. Ran a few easy rapids, then came to spectacular deep, narrow gorge with overhanging walls, which we drifted through slowly in awe. A large tributary enters

from right with impressive waterfall. Ran a few miles of easy rapids, then a long continuous rapid leads dangerously to the portal of the Upper Gorge, which is 2 miles long and impassable. Landed cautiously on left and scouted north rim. Decided to follow chain of four little lakes to the north, then portage a mile or more over rough country back to north rim, this requiring four hours in all. Camped on an open hilltop with fine view of canyon.

Aug 16 - Spent most of morning exploring up the canyon and photographing it. Appeared to me that best portage route would have been directly along north rim, following various well-worn caribou paths, but my companions did not think so. Spent over an hour getting loads from camp down to the river, using ropes to lower canoes down steep hillside. Soon came to impassable drop and made difficult portage left 150 yds over steep slope of huge boulders. Soon came to yet another stopper, portaged right 200 yds over hillside to a pool, paddled cautiously a bit, tried carrying right along steep hillside which soon became very precarious, so hauled straight up to top of hill and down other side over rough terrain to pool at foot of gorge, where we made camp, having progressed a little under a mile for our valiant efforts on this day.

Aug 17 - Climbed back over the hill for the canoes, which had been left behind. Took only an hour to haul them up and over, by now having learned worst places to avoid. Lined and ran rapid just below camp. Then ran many miles fast current and easy rapids through scenic valley. Saw many good campsites. Then the river becomes rather more like a long narrow lake, which we cruised down with strong tailwinds. We have now entered the section covered by Parks Canada in their booklet: "Wild Rivers: Newfoundland and Labrador," Printing and Publishing, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, K1A 0S9, \$1.80. Camped at scenic spot on right above first rapid, which is near right-hand edge of Mistastin Lake sheet.

Aug 18 - Ran, lined, and portaged numerous rapids. Portaged left 300 yds around the first falls and gorge. Ran and lined more rapids. At next falls and gorge, portaged about 300 yds right over faintly blazed trail, which was OK if you could follow it, to easy put-in below the one mentioned in Parks Canada (see photo in booklet). Ran and lined more rapids. At impressive section that Parks Canada calls the "second water fall," one team made a long (3/4 mile?) portage on the right through the woods around the entire drop, while our other team worked their way down along the shore and found it tough going. Camped at foot of rapids. Climbed high hill in back of camp for view—a tough climb because the slopes were so brushy.

Aug 19 - Ran some easy rapids to third gorge, which we passed by difficult portage right over very rough terrain. The four remaining rapids below here we ran, lined, and portaged, bit by bit. A large tributary entering from left marks end of rapids. Cruised next 22 miles to mouth of Harp River in 3-1/2 hours. Finally located satisfactory campsite there on west side of a bay.

Aug 20 - Spent the morning tracking up to Harp Lake and exploring it. Our view of this impressive body of water was obscured by haze, evidently a storm brewing. Continuing

down Ugjoktok in p.m., negotiated one falls and several rapids as marked on map and noted in Parks Canada. (I made no field notes because of steady rain driven by strong headwinds that required constant attention with the paddle.) Camped at fair site after run of only 11 miles.

Aug 21 - The storm continues, but now with strong cold gusts out of the north. Believe we ran all or nearly all of the rapids marked, but again no field notes because fingers too numb, despite mitts. Camped on right where river forks, deep in the woods to escape the wind. Finally coaxed a fire into going. Hot soup—wow! Spent the evening trying to dry out, as most of us soaked to the skin. (Would have been hard to believe at the time, but later this storm later proved to be a lucky break.)

Aug 22 - Followed the recommended south fork 10 miles to mouth of river. Some of the most impressive drops on this river occur at tidewater, making it practically unique among rivers known to us. Passed these by series of four easy portages on right. We now had the extreme good fortune to enter Ugjoktok Bay under perfect conditions—clearing skies and gentle favorable winds, and riding the outgoing tide. (Note: As nearly as I can figure from tide tables, high tide here is about an hour ahead of Boston.) The scenery here is truly magnificent—the water is clear, and the colorations of the sea and rock are brilliant. Camped near the mouth of the bay.

Aug 23 - Under clear skies, paddled remaining 23 miles to Hopedale. Here we carried firewood and fresh water with us, but both proved unnecessary. For safety, we mapped out a fairly sheltered route up east side of Comma Island, and never more than a half-mile from land. In foul weather, some of our crossings might be unpleasant or even impossible, but under the conditions we experienced, this leg of our journey was truly idyllic. A very large whale surfaced off-shore near us at one point, almost too close for comfort. Huge icebergs far out in the Labrador Sea glowed pink in the late afternoon sun. We tied up to the dock at Hopedale at 5 p.m., at the end of our 20th day of paddling with two day's food remaining, plus two additional day's emergency rations. Bill lives in B.C. and was anxious to start home as soon as possible. One of the reasons for our fast pace, even during the storm, was so that he might catch the plane scheduled the following day. Persons standing on the dock when we arrived informed us that all schedules had been thrown off by the storm, and a plane was due that very moment. Within an hour, Bill was on his way homeward in a Labrador Airways Twin Otter float plane that normally flies Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturdays. Now the other three of us were faced with the prospect of a six-day wait for the coastal ferry, which normally calls at Hopedale southbound Sunday or early Monday. But lo, it too was held up by the storm and was expected in that very night. After a quick tour of the village, which featured the 200-year-old Moravian Mission House, said to be the last of

Aug 24-25 - This coastal ferry service serves not only as a useful transportation link for canoe trips ending (or starting) on the Labrador coast, but is also quite an experience in itself. This line is one of several operated in the Newfoundland area by the government. For information and schedules, write: CN Marine, Port aux Basques, Nfld. AOM 1CO. The Bonavista leaves Goose Bay approximately every Wednesday morning, early July to mid-November, wends her way slowly northward to Nain, which is now the northernmost outpost served on the coast, and then returns the same way, calling at Davis Inlet, Hopedale, Postville, Makkovik, Cape Harrison, Smoky, and Rigolet. At Cape Harrison and Smoky she anchors offshore, but at the other stops she docks, and supplies may be purchased. Our passage was \$35 each, and we paid another \$50 for the two canoes. We made the mistake of letting our packs be stowed in the hold, and had trouble retrieving them at Goose Bay. We should have just carried them aboard. Sleeping accommodations are available for \$13 extra, or one can sleep in the lounge or look for empty bunks as we did. Meals are fairly expensive, so we planned our own simple meals and brought them along. (Several hours after unloading at Goose Bay, we were hit with an additional \$12 charge—not sure what for. After waiting seven hours for our canoes simply to be unloaded from the deck to the dock by the surly crew, in exasperation we finally did it ourselves and were sternly told we were not supposed to. Would do it again, and beat it out of the dock area as fast as possible.

Aug 26-27 - From Goose Bay, the traveler has several options. One may return by scheduled airline, and ship the canoes back to Montreal. One may continue by ferry to Newfoundland and points south, especially if one has their vehicle with them. It is also said to be possible to return to Sept-Iles by boat, but the route is complicated and would probably take a week or more. One plan we had was to try hitchhiking to Esker, but we soon decided this was quite impractical, especially with the canoes. So then I went to the local radio station and got on the air for a few minutes to chat about our trip, with a hint thrown in that we would appreciate a lift from anyone headed to Esker, but nothing came of that. Finally, just as we were coming to the realization that we would probably have to hire a truck and pay a considerable sum, if indeed one could be found at all, we made the chance discovery at a gas station of a man headed to Esker that very moment with a nearly empty truck, who was glad to give us a lift. The gravel road from Goose Bay to Churchill Falls is hilly and rough, but said to be under improvement. Our truck made the 150-mile run in about eight hours, with us jouncing along in back with the canoes and getting completely covered with dust. We saw only about six other vehicles. We made camp off to the side of the road just before coming into town.

Next morning, went into town, which is owned and operated entirely by the power company: Churchill Falls (Labrador) Corporation, Ltd. Purchased some groceries at the store, and then went on a fascinating three-hour tour of the power installation covering every aspect of this gigantic project, which is given three times daily and free for the asking. Continuing on our way, stopped after crossing a bridge over the dry bed of what was once the Hamilton River, and took a 15-minute hike in to see Grand Falls, with now only a pathetic trickle of water going over it. The road from here to Esker is an excellent gravel road, well maintained, as it serves the power plant. Our driver is taking his time,

as he is taking the same train we are, so we stopped to make camp early near Gabbro Dam, and caught some pike for dinner.

Aug 28 - Arrived at Esker several hours ahead of the train, which was taking its time as usual. I gave our driver \$50. Sought refuge from blasts of cold wind and snow squalls by crowding into one of the railroad shacks, along with several other passengers including another canoeing party, until the train finally pulled in around noon. It runs southbound on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Fare was \$38.55, plus the usual \$60 per canoe. Arrived at Sept-Iles around 9 p.m. and headed for home.

This is a slightly revised version of my original 1982 report, made by scanning it with OCR and then making numerous corrections. I probably missed some. Much of the information, such as on transportation, is obviously long out of date.

Stewart Coffin, April 2008

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- Dumoine River, 1962
- Riv. du Chef, 1963
- Chibogamau, 1964
- Kazan River, 1966
- George River, 1967
- Kipawa-Dumoine, 1979
- Romaine River, 1980
- Ste. Marguerite River, 1981