

TRIP REPORT, CARIBOO RIVER, AUGUST 8 – 9, 2015

This is the same Cariboo River that we all navigate when we are paddling around the Bowron Chain once we leave McLeary Lake, it's headwaters are in the Cariboo Mountains to the east, just behind Freddy Becker's McLeary Lake cabin. On the Bowron Chain this river flows through Lanezi Lake then through Sandy Lake before it is joined by Babcock Creek where most of us leave the Cariboo River and head east over the Babcock Creek portage. You are probably wondering what happens to those paddlers that do not take the Babcock Creek portage route? Well these folks paddle just a little bit further on the Cariboo River and take the turn on river left into Unna Lake before they eventually return back upriver to the portage. You see, it is at this point that the Cariboo River turns south, tumbles over the Cariboo falls, before being joined by the Mathew River, it then opens up wide enough to form what is known as Kimball Lake, all of this before it runs under the bridge at kilometer 3140 on the 3100 Road (also known as the Cunningham Pass Road). This bridge marks our put-in for the incredibly pleasant overnight trip down to the take-out at Ladies Creek forestry campsite on Cariboo Lake.

This Cariboo River paddling route, from the 3100 Road to Cariboo Lake actually runs through a Provincial Park (Cariboo River Provincial Park) that is separate from Bowron Lake Provincial Park and Cariboo Mountains Provincial Park although the three almost touch each other at a point on the slopes of Ishpa Mountain. Cariboo River Provincial Park was created to safeguard the moose habitat that exists in abundance along this waterway, although we saw no moose or any other large mammals on this trip.

The put-in consists of a somewhat muddy trail leading down to the river, west of the bridge. It is only wide enough for one vehicle at a time, there is only limited open area to park vehicles once the canoes and gear have been unloaded. Vehicles sometimes park on the 3100 Road itself, across this road there is a rustic "moose hunters" campsite where it would be possible to park a few vehicles, there is also another campsite a very short distance further along the 3100 Road beside Kimball Creek. It strikes this writer that it would be an excellent project for the Blackwater Paddlers to approach Parks about upgrading this put-in area. Few would complain if an outhouse was included in the upgrade plans.

Any paddler who has lived in this area for even a brief period of time has probably heard other paddlers refer to "THE SHUTTLE FROM HELL"well this is where it all unfolded. Successful completion of this trip requires a shuttle. It is necessary to transport vehicles to the take-out on Cariboo Lake so that once the overnight paddling trip is completed, it will be possible to transport everything (gear, boats and people) back to the put-in. The return shuttle itself takes about 2.5 hours and it is over reasonably rough roads. Highlights of the trip include the (closed) Comet Creek Resort and the Chocolate Moose Café (offering cheesecake and pizza...who would have thunk it?). The route travels over a height of land, past the access road to Ghost Lake, the take-off point for the Cameron Ridge hiking trail, the now deactivated "Z" road leading to the North Arm of Quesnel Lake and past Maeford Lake. This was the home territory of the late Betty Frank who for years was a guide outfitter in the area. It is a picturesque drive but as I said, it can be a

rough one. In one section there is a lot of shale/rock and if the road has been recently graded, it is possible that the sharp shale can be very hard on tires. Somewhere around the half-way point, the road becomes the 8400 Road as the responsibility for road maintenance shifts to Willilams Lake.

The Ladies Creek Recreation Site on Cariboo Lake (the take-out) is quite large and it seems to be well used. It is wise to park shuttle vehicles on the roadways in a manner that does not interfere with access to the several campsites. There are outdoor toilets at this campsite, the access to the lake shore for vehicles is excellent. As for the "Shuttle From Hell", I'll save that story for some dark and very stormy night.

We left Quesnel at 8:00 a.m., we were at the Cariboo River by 9:30 a.m. We unloaded our gear and the shuttle drivers did take 2.5 hours to complete the trip while the others set up a mini-lounge by the river and enjoyed a very pleasant morning. Once everyone was back together we had lunch and we were on the water by about 1:15 p.m. There were nine of us in four tandem canoes (one with mom and dad and their 7 year old son)we had one dog along as well.

The river was moving along at a good clip, its silty green colour betraying its origins in the Cariboo Mountains. This is class 1,2 moving water, there is really no whitewater to worry about. It is wise to have some moving water experience for there are strainers and other hazards on some of the corners and in places right in the centre of the river. These require being able to move/ferry from side to side. It is also helpful to be able to back paddle around some of the corners. The river meanders, the scenery is splendid, it is encouraging to see just how the 30+ year old seedlings in the clear cuts are obviously growing well. There are several rock faces that have this writer wondering just how good this area would be for those interested in rock climbing. We saw lots of golden eagles and bald eagles as well as other raptors gliding in the wind currents along the rock faces.

After 2 ½ hours we reached what is probably the most beautiful campsite in the Cariboo. Located at a spot where a gurgling creek enters the river, a spot where gravel and sand have built up over decades to produce a large, terraced, dry, open, alluvial fan campsite, capable of housing several tents. This spot has become known as The Bend In The River named after a refreshingly fruity bottle of 2006 imported Reisling that was the product of a winery located on a bend in the River Rhine.

This spot is peaceful and tranquil, the view is open and it is indeed on a bend in the river. Beavers live here, there were signs of moose and wolves, there are lots of birds. None of us were fishers, but this location is known to be a hot spot along the Cariboo River. The fact is that as beautiful as this campsite is, there are several more that are just as appealing both before and after this one.

We were setting up camp by 4:00 p.m. and soon were very comfortable. We had all brought folding chairs and enjoyed the relaxed conversation that transitioned into a

great supper and then some time around the fire (the fire ban east of the Fraser River had been lifted but we used our firebox to be doubly safe).

There was a soft relaxing rain during the night which was like icing on top of the cake (tent). There was no wind and it remained warm. We all enjoyed a great sleep, breakfast included coffee and eggs with ham and salsa sauce, camp was broken in a leisurely way and we were on the water by about 9:30 a.m. It took us about 1 ½ hours to reach the take-out. As the river enters Cariboo Lake there was no headwind, the view is fantastic, to the right there is evidence of past gold mining activity in the form of a very large scar on the hillside, the result of significant hydraulic mining activity many years ago. The take-out is on the left shore and was clearly visible as we entered the lake. We had lunch once the canoes and gear was loaded and then made our way back to the put-in.

We had two vehicles capable of carrying all seven people, four canoes, the dog and all of the gear. We had used a third vehicle to transport the drivers back to the put-in when we completed the original shuttle. We stopped at the bridge to re-arrange gear for the third vehicle when we reached the put-in and were back at the Barkerville turn-off by about 3:00 p.m. Some of us took a side trip to Bowron Lake to look at some canoes that were for sale and were back in Wells just in time to take advantage of the 4:30 p.m. opening of the Bears Paw Restaurant.