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Canoeing  
Kayaking

### Trip Report.....August 2003



Home



Contacts



Newsletter



Events



White Water  
Festival



Lessons



Trip Reports



Trip Schedule



Links



Membership Forms



The "Broken Heartland"

A week long canoe trip on a local river.....several months in the planning. It started with discussions over coffee while there was still snow on the ground, let's start by blocking off the dates. Over the months there are guidebooks to read, talking with others who have travelled the route before, speaking with those who live along the river, studying the maps. As the date draws closer, there's menu planning, shuttle logistics to sort out, arranging for someone to take care

[Photo Gallery](#)[Yukon River](#)[BC Rivers Day](#)[Recipes](#)

of the dogs and to watch the place. The day for the trip to the put in is drawing closer and there's a feeling of anticipation.

But along with the advancing dry summer there's also something else consider. The low snowfall last winter and the lack of rainfall this summer mean that the water levels in the river are now really low. Too low, when you talk to those who know the river. Do we really want to go on a canoe trip that will involve endless lining and bouncing off of rocks? It's a tough decision but at the last minute, it clearly makes sense to try another route.....maybe a big lake.

Back to the guidebooks and sure enough, the ideal trip is found, three big lakes joined by two pretty good sized rivers. The shuttle logistics are arranged and we are talking about all of the advantages of the new route. There is excitement and anticipation about some of the things we are going to see, and it is going to be a great experience. We commend ourselves for being so flexible and plan to do that first river next year, only earlier in the season and with a couple of Coleman Ram X polyethylene canoes just in case.....it's good to have a sense of humour when things don't work out.

It's the night before leaving for the put-in. They have just evacuated the town of Barriere, part of Kamloops and there is talk of another fire in Falkland. The people of Armstrong have been put on alert for evacuation and there is a huge fire burning at Chilco Lake. There was a small fire adjacent to our rural property two weeks ago of unknown origin that the RapAttack Crew was able to extinguish and a larger one about a kilometre to the north in the smouldering burning pile of a woodlot. Anxiety replaces excitement.....it is still anticipation, but the uncomfortable kind. A late-night call with paddling partners and a discussion that we just don't feel comfortable heading off into the wilderness where we will be out of contact with everyone for at least five days, at a time when there are fires burning all around us and when the bush is tinder dry. Another change of plans.....let's paddle on local lakes, camp out every night, but arrange to get to a phone each day to call home to see how things are going.

We'll head south, someone had mentioned Spanish lake, just to the north of Quesnel lake, about a 25 minute drive from Likely. We can set up camp somewhere on one of the sandy beaches we heard about and it will be possible to drive into Likely to call home just to check in. Spanish lake is a beauty. There is a nice little Forestry Rec site with about six tables, two outhouses and a boat launch. The Rec Site is located in the middle of the south shore of this lake that runs east west and is about five miles long. It is beautifully forested and even though there has been a lot of logging in the area, it is not unsightly at all. This is a luxuriant mixed forest region, with some of the cedar that is normally found at Quesnel Lake. Unfortunately there is a bit of pine that the beetles have found, but the overall forest cover is beautiful. The real highlights of the lake however are the beautiful beaches and we made our way to a great spot on the north shore, about a 20 minute paddle from the Rec Site.

Two days of luxury. Bright, hot, luscious sunshine. Swimming on our doorstep, great fishing, many loons calling at all hours of the night and day, a wonderful encounter with a cow moose and her calf, too much great food and some wonderful paddling. The prevailing wind seems to be from the west, and on the second day we sailed our rafted canoes down the length of the lake and explored the east end as we paddled back to the campsite. It was possible to get out to Likely to call home after day one and it was reassuring to know that all was o.k. on the forest fire front. We didn't want to leave this place, it was idyllic and yet really only on our doorstep.....we are so fortunate to live where we do. We had two great 10 hour sleeps, we chose to leave the flies off of the tents which was a wonderful (and new) experience for us. Actually on the second night there was a brief 5 minute sprinkle of rain.....there we were, barefooted, flashlights in mouths, half asleep, rummaging around to find the tent flies. Ours went on upside down and back to front...and then it stopped sprinkling.

After the second night we decided it was time to move on to another lake. On the way through Likely we again called home and were relieved to know that all was still quiet at home. Throughout our stay at Spanish Lake we were conscious of forest fires as the view everywhere was hazy, there were large clouds of smoke and steam visible on the horizon to the east from the Barriere fire and every now and then there was a slight smell of smoke in the air.

Our destination was Suey Bay at the east end of Horsefly Lake. We drove via the Polley Lake Road along the south shore of the west arm of Quesnel Lake, a great back road with wonderful views of Quesnel Lake. We drove along the Horsefly river, past the old put-in at the flats, we noted how low the water level is in the Horsefly and wondered about the success of this year's salmon run. We enjoyed lunch along the Horsefly river at Horsefly, and observed the crew getting the spawning channel ready for the migrating salmon. From Horsefly we went along the Black Creek Road, then the 6500 Road and eventually ended up at Prairie Creek Rec Site, located on the south shore of Horsefly Lake, about in the middle of the lake. This Rec Site was well utilized, there seemed to be about five or six tables with a boat launch and an outhouse. There are a number of private cabins in this vicinity as well so it seemed a little more crowded. We wasted no time loading the canoes and pushing off for Suey Bay.

About an hour and a half later we ended up in paradise (yet again). The paddle down the lake was beautiful. As we approached Suey Bay we took the chance that what appeared to be a peninsula was really the island marked on the map....and it was. There was a passage between the island and the mainland just the width of two canoes. When we squeezed through, there was our destination in front of us.....a long sweeping sandy beach, with crystal clear water, a sandy bottom on the lake, a gorgeous mixed forest with tall fir, spruce, cedar, birch, hemlock and aspen. As a bonus, we found a picnic table and an outhouse at Suey Bay. The sun was beating down and all we wanted to do was jump

into the water for a cooling swim.....it was so refreshing. We set up camp on the beach and used the picnic table which was back in the trees as our kitchen area.....it worked out perfectly. You are all encouraged to visit this place, words are hard to find to describe how beautiful it is. This would be a great place for a club trip.

Let me take a minute to talk about Forestry Rec Sites. While Suey Bay is not a Rec Site, it was evident that over the years, the Ministry of Forests has invested some time and resources in making this a special place. There is a small shelter cabin at this spot and a proud sign above the door proclaimed that it was the work of a 1986 Forestry Rec Crew. We presumed that the much-appreciated outhouse and the picnic table were also the result of their efforts. But there is also an incredible hiking trail from Suey Bay, north to Slate Bay on the east arm of Quesnel Lake. As we hiked this trail, around Suey Lake, we found proudly notched into a large cedar stump another sign...."Forestry Rec Crew-1979". Sadly, at Suey Lake itself, the carved signboard which also invited guests to write down their comments and the date they visited, was laying on the ground, over twenty years of rot had taken their toll.

On this trip we continually saw the Forestry Rec Sites being heavily utilized, we saw the fruits of the work of the Forestry Rec Crews and yet we also saw the paper signs stapled to every outhouse door proclaiming that these sites were now "user maintained". The fact is, we are responsible campers and we did take out our garbage (and lots of other peoples' garbage as well, but outhouses decay and sag and tables rot and signs fall down and trails become overgrown. We must demand that the government recognize that these sites are a valuable resource that many of us enjoy more than we can express. It is essential that the government come to understand that they must invest resources to maintain these treasures. Is our club willing to take a stand on this issue? Can we join with other like-minded groups to bring this matter to the attention of decision makers? As paddlers and campers, we may be a minority and so we will have to work hard to be heard over the priorities of the thousands of people who live in big urban areas and could care less about these great Rec Sites.

The hike to Slate Bay and back is wonderful. It is a challenge for neophyte hikers with ill-fitting boots. The guidebooks say that it is a moderate hike (ya sure). It is a credit to the oldest member of our group that he was clearly the one who took the hike in stride and who was puffing the least when the return trip was all over (and he was carrying the heavy pack too). The swim which followed was actually medicinal, it was soothing and healing, never mind cooling and refreshing. We enjoyed an afternoon of reading, a great supper of dehydrated shepherd's pie (actually if I took the time to write out the menu for this trip you would all be drooling). We had a bit of rain at this point and we were glad, for we could still see the clouds of smoke from the Barriere fire. Tarps up, lots of joking and story telling.....it doesn't get any better.

Next morning we broke camp, this now day five and we were heading for one more destination, this time to paddle on the Cariboo River. We retraced our trip back to the Prairie Creek Rec Site and enroute we made an amazing and quite breathtaking discovery. As we made our way quietly along the shoreline, there in front of us was what the whole province has been looking for over the past months. Right there, in plain view was B.C.'s Heartland. We were stunned as we looked at it and were shocked when we realized that the Heart(land) was broken. But the shock didn't last long, for we knew that the Heart(land) might have a huge crack in it, but the spirits of those of us who enjoy this place were far from broken.

En route to the Cariboo River we stopped in Horsefly for gas and to call home to check on things. Shock is the only word to describe the reaction to the news. While we had been enjoying Suey Bay and the hike and the great meals and the swimming and the star-filled night sky, a D6 water bomber had been dropping fire retardant on our neighbour's and our property in an attempt to put out a forest fire that had broken out, apparently a few hours after we had called on day 3 of our trip. In the phone call we heard about the water bomber, the RapAttack crew that was flown in by helicopter, the big caterpillar tractor that was used to push a road into the fire site, the water truck from the Ministry of Forests, the involvement of the RCMP because of the suspicious nature of the fire. We decided that it was time to return home!

This is being written in part as a form of therapy. The whole experience has been unsettling and yet we have so much to be grateful for. Incredible, understanding, supportive friends and paddling partners. An absolutely unforgettable paddling experience, and the good fortune that the fire was detected (by a passing motorist) at an early stage and the remarkable skill of the firefighters that allowed any damage from the fire to be contained.

Isn't there an expression about the best laid plans of mice and men.....?

Jeffrey Dinsdale,

August 8/03

## **April Rec Centre Classes**

Submitted by Errin Evans

April's Pool Kayak Classes were a huge success. Each class was full, with at least six on the waiting list for the last one! Some sessions we had repeat students wanting to learn more. At the beginning of each class I always ask the students to get in the boat and flip over, to ensure that everyone can eject correctly. A few students looked at me like it seemed a daunting task, but everyone was pleasantly surprised at how easy it actually is to get out of the boat. (and how stable the boats are when purposely trying to over turn the boat) Students learned basics strokes like forward and reverse sweeps, forward and reverse propulsion strokes, low and high braces, straight draw and sculling draws, and some even started working on rolling techniques.

In March before the Course started, the Blackwater Paddlers used the pool on Wednesday nights to warm up paddling muscles for the season and perfect rolling techniques. There was a mix of canoes and kayaks, with the canoes sometimes crowding the little kayaks (just kidding John) I was busy trying to convert a few single bladers to the kayaking world, with some success. Mark Forsythe is now rolling on both sides and is the new owner of not one but two kayaks. Dougal Hines was a bit of a challenge while we tried to deprogram his canoe roll and turn it into a kayak roll. With help from Richard Dekker, I was able to start the deprogramming process. Justin Kempling mastered the paddle roll and a hand roll. I was also busy turning a few sea kayakers into river boaters as well, I think I almost have Bob and Theresa Williams convinced that the river is the way to go, let the current do all the work. It was great to see high numbers of paddlers out in the pool this year. Hopefully we will see everyone out in the river this summer.

## **Rec Centre Classes**

Submitted by Errin Evans

Graham and I showed up at the pool last night for our first pool session. Just like last year there was no one signed up for the first class. We decided to pull the boats out anyways and paddle around to see what interest we could drum up. Since the pool has to pay for our time we thought that we may as well get someone in the boats. As soon as our boats hit the deck, a group of hockey players in the weight room pressed their noses up against the glass. I pointed to the boat and signaled the number four. Immediately the weight room emptied and the guys eagerly hopped into the pool. Since these guys were a little more energetic than our usual classes we let them fool around without any guidance at first. When they started becoming a nuisance to the adjoining lane we stepped in and started them on rolling techniques.

At 9:00 the boys turned into pumpkins and left the pool to meet their curfew. We managed to wrangle up

some timid others. I think the rambunctious hockey players may have scared a few off because they seemed to really enjoy being upside down.

Hopefully on Thursday we will have classes back to normal. Everyone is welcome out to join us. See Events Page for details or email me at [mtncat@quesnelbc.com](mailto:mtncat@quesnelbc.com)

## Likely Paddlefest

Submitted by Errin Evans and Graham Gerry

From September 14th - 16th paddlers from all over BC met in Quesnel Forks for a great weekend of paddling. This event was formerly known as the Likely Paddlefest. This year William's Lake organizer's decided not to hire a band or sell t-shirts for the first time in order to eliminate any liability issues. The only organized event was a down river race, with the only enforced rule "No Kayaks". Two of the contenders were a wheelbarrow with bucket outriggers attached, and a child's inflatable pool. The winner was Mark Savard (aka Red Shred) in his cardboard box.

The weather was unbelievable for the entire weekend and the water, as always, was crystal clear offering great views of waves and haystacks forming off the bottom of the river. At this time of the year we could also see spawning salmon in most of the eddies and fighting the current along the length of the run.

On Saturday morning boaters mobbed the put-in wave on the Quesnel, 50 meters downstream of the bridge in Likely. I was a little shy there because I had the only boat that was longer than 8 ft and with a round hull. I brushed aside a few silly remarks and paddled anyway. Water levels were about average for September, a little low. The wave managed to claim one dry top and one helmet. Several groups separated into staggered trips for the rest of the run down to Quesnel Forks, to make sure that each play spot along the run did not experience the line ups of the put-in wave.

The Quesnel run starts out fairly mild until the section known as the *White Kilometer* begins. This section is littered with holes and fun, bouncy waves. The *White Kilometer* ends in the *Bullion Pit*. Here the river takes a 90 degree turn and creates big whirl pools and one great surf wave worth hiking back up for. Further along there are a few more surf waves and fun drops before the river narrows to 5 meters at the *Devils' Eyebrow*. The biggest hole, *Deep Throat* is the entrance rapid to the huge bouncy waves leading up to the *Eyebrow*. It appeared to be a worse river enemy than it really was. It was a huge surging hole almost the size of my car, but some boaters launched themselves into it sideways on purpose and were able to claim short rides before they were flushed out. The rest the boaters in my group bounced through without

incidence. The *Devil's Eyebrow* was a wonderful swirling mass as usual.

On Sunday I headed down the Cariboo. Thankfully there were a few longer and rounder boats hanging out on this run. The Lower Cariboo run is a fun class 2-3 section. The color of the water was a spectacular, emerald green. A couple of us took turns rescuing several open boaters that were hanging out at some of the play spots. Unfortunately the wave after the last drop was deceptive. It looked like a great ride but it was thrashy and difficult to catch. That wave was the entire reason I passed up the Quesnel run. I heard later, that there were several brave PG souls swimming through the Devil's Eyebrow. So I guess a lot of rescue beverages were earned over the course of the weekend.