

Rapid Bashing on Groundhog River

by Susan Mackie



Just east of Kapuskasing, ON, runs the Groundhog River, a challenging stretch of fast water made up of rapids, steep descents and seven waterfalls. It's a route for only the boldest and most daring canoeists.

For its many challenges, this was the course chosen by Venturers from the 85th Old Mill Company (Greater Toronto Region). They spent eight days in their canoes, in an attempt to conquer this remote, wild, water highway – an undertaking few dare to try.

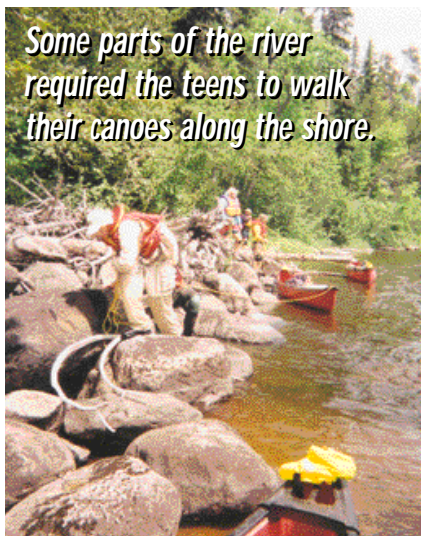
The Venturers didn't recklessly approach the river. Led by an experienced instructor who had travelled this route before, the team prepared both physically and mentally for their upcoming trial by water. They practiced whitewater techniques on the Credit River, and completed two practice portages complete with gear to make certain each team member would be ready for the demands of the Groundhog River. Finally, when the teens and their advisor felt they were ready for this adventure, they packed up their gear and headed for the trailhead.

Bitter-Sweet Paddling

Anticipation and excitement soon turned to frustration. The weather worked against the Venturers for most of their trip. Driving rain made for some miserable times, waking up to cold, soaked clothing, and having

to fight the choppy swell of waves. But they kept on.

The teens struggled through 18 portages – some with deep, sticky mud holes, and trails blocked by deadfalls. Many portages were overgrown by twisted trees and plants. Seven waterfalls blocked their path; four required upstream exits in fast-running water. The most difficult, adrenalin-pumping spots were Six Mile Rapids and Ten Mile Rapids, which delighted the Venturers with unexpected tracts of standing waves.



Some parts of the river required the teens to walk their canoes along the shore.

In the middle of their journey the Venturers faced a section of river referred to as a "boulder field" – a stretch of whitewater consisting of boulders both above and below the water line. It required the teens to walk their canoes along the shore, and took a lot of manoeuvring, using

stern and bow lines to get the canoes around the sharp rocks.

I Wouldn't Have "Moosed" that for the World

One of the most fascinating scenes of the entire trip came after making a sharp bend in the river. The Venturers were treated to the sight of two moose (a cow and her calf) grazing in the shallows. Immediately, the mother moose swam downriver from the canoeists, undoubtedly to lead them away from her baby. The calf remained rooted to the spot. As the youths quietly and slowly approached, the baby lowered itself into the concealing vegetation.

Bugs were a frequent and miserable problem throughout the trip. In spite of taking precautions such as wearing bug shirts, bug hats and lots of repellent, at the end of each day the intrepid canoeists had to treat their swollen bodies after relentless attacks by mosquitoes, blackflies and midges.

In spite of the bugs and rain, the trip proved a smashing success – an adventure in endurance and whitewater skill. As one Venturer put it, "This trip was a blast. Even though the bugs were harsh and the weather wasn't always great, I'd still do the trip again!"

Plan several spring canoe trips for your Cubs and Scouts. They'll love the outdoor adventure. X

— Susan Mackie works in the National Office.



The Venturers faced their trial by water and were stronger for it.



The group relaxes and reflects on a successful adventure. Would they do it again? You bet!