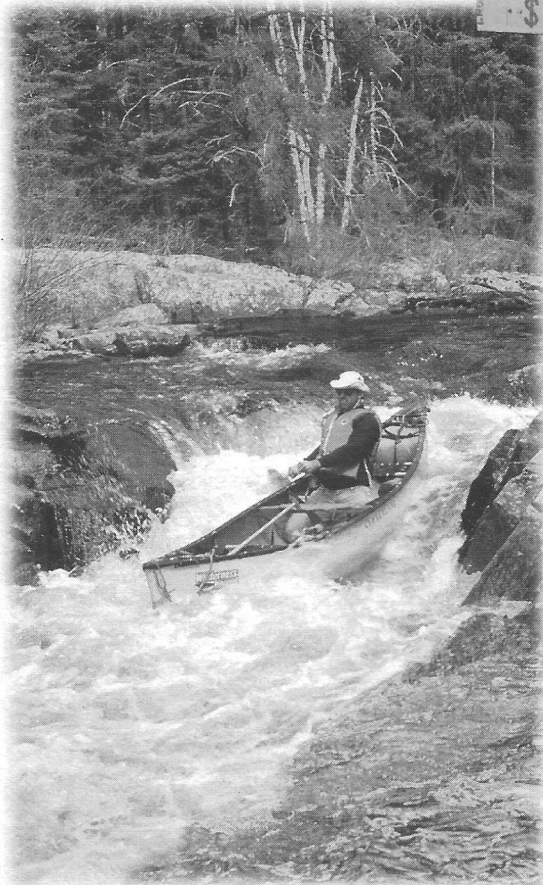


PUKASKWA RIVER CANOE GUIDE

950



The Friends of Pukaskwa

BY
George Drought

MAPPING BY
Arie Snelleman



Canadian Heritage
Parks Canada

Patrimoine canadien
Parcs Canada

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DISCLAIMER

Every degree of accuracy possible has been put into this work by the author. It is emphasized, however, that subtle changes occur in topography year by year and that major changes can occur on a daily basis in water levels and conditions on rivers everywhere. The running of rapids, white-water, or moving water, by people in canoes, kayaks or rafts can be considered a high risk activity and therefore the author cannot be held responsible for errors in judgement leading to injuries or fatalities. Persons attempting to paddle any river must accept personal responsibility for their actions and must be warned that there is no substitution for personal scouting or inspection of every rapid being attempted.

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover – George Drought
P. 1, 6, 8, 38 – Parks Canada
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STOP – DANGER AHEAD – DO NOT PROCEED

Paddle held horizontally above the head in both hands

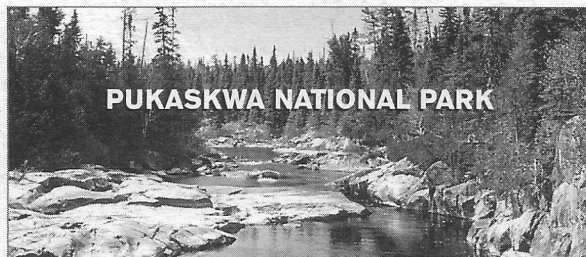
The Universal Distress Signal, which should only be used in cases of real emergency, is to do your signal in groups of three.

e.g. 3 Whistle blasts
 3 Light flashes
 3 Fires
 3 Paddles or sticks held up
 etc.

If you should see any series of three signals, go and help immediately.

A whistle attached to your Personal Floatation Device can be an effective signalling device when visual contact is not possible. Be sure to clarify signals in advance.

When canoeing the Pukaskwa or any other wilderness river, personal safety is the responsibility of the visitor. For more information, refer to page 1.



PUKASKWA NATIONAL PARK

Pukaskwa protects 1878 sq. km of Canadian Shield wilderness, comprised of boreal forest and Lake Superior coastline. Pukaskwa National Park is situated where the Canadian Shield meets Lake Superior, the largest fresh-water lake by area in the world.

The park portrays a typical boreal forest dominated by black spruce, jack pine, and white birch, where large animals such as the moose, wolf, black bear, and woodland caribou live virtually free from human activity.

The park is characterized by heavily eroded mountain landscapes scoured by continental glaciers, which left a drainage system of swift, flowing rivers cutting through steep-sided valleys.

The route is rich in history. The country has been trapped in the past, prospected with no success and some logging was carried out there for awhile in the 1920s. Today the river sees few visitors and provides one of the best canoeing experiences in the province.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Superintendent
Pukaskwa National Park
Highway 627, Hattie Cove
Heron Bay, Ontario P0T 1R0
(807) 229-0801

"The Friends of Pukaskwa" is a non-profit, incorporated group of volunteers who support the preservation of Pukaskwa National Park as a wilderness region.

PUKASKWA RIVER

High on the north shore of Lake Superior, between Wawa and Marathon, lies one of the most remote parks in Ontario, Pukaskwa National Park, and in the park is a small turbulent river called the Pukaskwa. It does not have the historical significance of rivers like the Ottawa or Missinaibi, but it is a superb wilderness river in the truest meaning of the word. It is rugged, wild and beautiful, and access is extremely difficult. The river starts at Gibson Lake, just east of the park boundary, but a substantial distance west of Highway 17. It then literally cascades its way through rugged and heavily forested hills to Lake Superior. The country has been trapped in the past, prospected with no success and some logging was carried out there for a while in the 1920s. Today the river sees few visitors and provides one of the best canoeing experiences in the province.

The headwaters of the river are tough going. It is a small stream cascading through dense forest with many log jams and beaver dams to compound the situation. After reaching the hydro line on the eastern boundary, the river opens up almost immediately and the paddling becomes easier. From here, there are some flat stretches, many swifts over gravel pans, and fine whitewater when the water is high. If the water is low, then there can be a great deal of dragging and boulder dodging. Further down, the river starts dropping more dramatically, with a number of falls and gorges that require careful scouting and running, or portaging. Finally, a day from the coast, there is the challenge and beauty of Ringham's Gorge which ends with a 10-metre falls. The alternative to running Ringham's (something to consider in high water), is the "Two Pants Portage", an old scarcely-visible tote road running around the gorge. The coast is reached after portaging 1100 metres around Schist Falls.

There are a few rivers as remote as the Pukaskwa, but not many, and anyone considering a trip there should take this into account. Prospective trippers

1 Point: Self-rescue in mild whitewater

2 Points: Self-rescue in Class 3; can assist others in mild whitewater

3 Points: Can assist others in heavy whitewater

14. ROLLING ABILITY

0 Points: Can only roll in pool

1 Point: Can roll 3 out of 4 times in Class 2 whitewater

3 Points: Can roll 4 out of 5 times in Class 3 and 4 whitewater

Add up your points from item 2 through 14. Then compare your score with the "Total Points" in order to determine your skill level, and the class of rapids that you may consider attempting.

River Class	Total Points Required	Skill Required
1	0-7	Practiced Beginner
2	8-14	Intermediate
3	15-21	Experienced
4	22-28	Highly Skilled
5	29-35	Working w/Team of Experts
6	36-42	Team of Experts w/every precaution

RIVER SIGNALS

There are three signals that every river paddler should learn that pertain specifically to running rapids. There is also one universal distress signal that everyone should know before going into any wilderness.

ALL CLEAR – PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Paddle extended vertically above the head in one hand.

CHANNEL CLEAR IN DIRECTION OF PADDLE BLADE – PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Paddle held horizontally above the head in one hand, with blade pointing either right or left.

10. WATER READING

0 Points: Often in error

1 Point: Can plan route in short rapid with several well-spaced obstacles

2 Points: Can confidently run lead in continuous Class 2; can predict the effects of waves and holes on boat

3 Points: Can confidently run lead in continuous Class 3; has knowledge to predict and handle the effects of big hydraulics, side currents, and turning drops (eddies well below the level of the main current)

11. JUDGMENT

0 Points: Often in error

1 Point: Has average ability to analyze difficulty of rapids

2 Points: Has good ability to analyze difficulty of rapids and make independent judgments as to which should not be run

3 Points: Has the ability to assist fellow paddlers in evaluating the difficulty of rapids, can explain subtleties to paddlers with less experience

12. BRACING

0 Points: Has difficulty bracing in Class 2 rivers

1 Point: Can correctly execute bracing strokes in Class 2 water

2 Points: Can correctly brace in intermittent whitewater with medium waves and vertical drops of 1 metre or less

3 Points: Can brace effectively in continuous whitewater with large waves and large vertical drops (1.3 metres and up)

13. RESCUE ABILITY

0 Points: Self-rescue in flatwater

should be certain of both their backcountry and whitewater skills.

The Pukaskwa's watershed is small, with a hard granite base. The water level can change rapidly with snow melt or rain fall. Generally, the best paddling is from early May to the beginning of June, with paddling changing to wading and walking later in June.

Further information on the Pukaskwa River or other aspects of holidaying in Pukaskwa National Park can be obtained by writing to:

The Friends of Pukaskwa
General Delivery

Heron Bay, Ontario P0T 1R0
or by telephoning: (807) 229-0801

NOTE: Anyone canoeing the Pukaskwa River must register both in and out of the park by calling this number immediately before and after their trip (refer to page 5 for further details).

ACCESS TO THE PUKASKWA RIVER

Hwy 17. Access to the Pukaskwa may be gained from Hwy 17. Paddle down the White River from the put-in on Hwy 17 at Sagina Lake and then up to Pokei Lake. This part is easy. Next paddle and portage up Pokei Creek to Soulier Lake. This will take a full day, as the old portages are no longer in existence and heavy bushwhacking is required to get through. From Soulier Lake, portage into Gibson Lake and the headwaters of the Pukaskwa. If this is the route attempted, it can take two to three days to get through to Beaver Lake, which is the second lake down from Gibson Lake.

Fly-in. It is also possible to fly into Gibson, Jarvey or Beaver Lakes. Beaver Lake is the lowest point at which access to the Pukaskwa can be gained by conventional winged aircraft. Air Charter Services are available from White River Air, Hwy 631. (807) 822-2222 (summer), (705) 856-2753 (winter);

Wiebenair, Pays Platt Bay, (807) 824-2159; or Hawk Airways Inc., Wawa, (705) 949-8947.

No planes are permitted to land in Pukaskwa National Park except with the permission of the Park Superintendent.

LAKE SUPERIOR (Take out)

There are three ways of getting off the Pukaskwa River after reaching the lake: by charter boat, by air, or by canoe. All options depend upon Lake Superior weather and wind conditions. Paddlers are well advised to plan extra food for one or two days and buffer time to return home.

Charter Boat. Boat charter services are available through: Horst Anderson, Michipicoten Harbour, Wawa, (705) 856-4835; Buck Fisheries and Marina, Michipicoten Mission, Wawa, (705) 856-4488; K.T. McCuaig & Sons Ltd., Heron Bay, Ontario, Bus: (807) 229-0605, Home: (807) 229-0259, Attn: Bruce McCuaig.

Air Charter. There is only one place in Pukaskwa National Park where private aircraft are allowed to land – at Otter Cove (permission of the Park Superintendent is required in advance). At least a half day's paddle, and up to one day may be required to reach the cove. Again, if the wind and waves are up on the lake, paddlers may not be able to move. Think twice about adopting this option. There are no phones by which to contact your charter flight.

Canoeing Lake Superior. It is approximately 90 km to either Michipicoten Harbour to the south, or Heron Bay to the north. Allow at least three or four days to do this paddle and be prepared to be windbound for at least one day. Lake Superior is the largest freshwater lake in the world, and huge waves can develop on it. It is also a very cold lake year round. Never paddle far from land and make sure that there is always some sheltered area in sight to scoot into if the weather changes quickly. It is a good idea to equip your canoes with spray skirts on this lake. For more information on coastal paddling, write to the Friends of Pukaskwa, as noted in the introduction.

6. BOAT CONTROL

0 Points: Can keep boat fairly straight

1 Point: Can manoeuvre in moving water; can avoid big obstacles

2 Points: Can manoeuvre in heavy water; knows how to work with the current

3 Points: Finesse in boat placement in all types of water, uses current to maximum advantage

7. AGGRESSIVENESS

0 Points: Does not play or work river at all

1 Point: Timid, plays a little on familiar streams

2 Points: Plays a lot, works most rivers hard

3 Points: Plays in heavy water with grace and confidence

8. EDDY TURNS

0 Points: Has difficulty making eddy turns from moderate current

1 Point: Can make eddy turns in either direction from moderate current; can enter moderate current from eddy

2 Points: Can catch medium eddies in either direction from heavy current; can enter very swift current from eddy

3 Points: Can catch small eddies in heavy current

9. FERRYING

0 Points: Cannot ferry

1 Point: Can ferry upstream and downstream in moderate current

2 Points: Can ferry upstream in heavy current; can ferry downstream in moderate current

3 Points: Can ferry upstream and downstream in heavy current

Class 3 rapids X 3 = _____

Class 4 rapids X 4 = _____

Class 5 rapids X 5 = _____

Preliminary Points Subtotal _____

Number of years paddling
experience X subtotal = _____

Total Preliminary Points _____

CONVERSION TABLE

Preliminary Points	Final Points
0-20	0
21-60	1
61-100	2
101-200	3
201-300	4
301-up	5

Note: This is the only evaluation item where it is possible to accrue more than 3 points.

3. SWIMMING

0 Points: Cannot swim

1 Point: Weak swimmer

2 Points: Average swimmer

3 Points: Strong swimmer
(competition level of skin diver)

4. STAMINA

0 Points: Cannot run mile in less
than 10 Minutes

1 Point: Can run a mile in 7 to 10 Minutes

2 points: Can run a mile in less than 7 Minutes

5. UPPER BODY STRENGTH

0 Points: Cannot do 15 push-ups

1 Point: Can do 16 to 25 push-ups

2 Points: Can do more than 25 push-ups

SAFETY

In essence, there are two ingredients to safety: common sense and respect for the natural elements.

One of the rewards of a canoe trip is that it takes us far from civilization. The kilometres we paddle also separate us from help. Proper research and preparation for any canoe trip will help you avoid potential hazards or mishaps during the trip. This can be a hostile terrain for those who are not prepared.

All portage lengths and other measures of distances in this guide are in metric units:

1 metre = 3.3 feet

1 kilometre = 0.625 miles

Natural forces may alter trail conditions. Portions of a portage may be obstructed by fallen trees, flooding due to beaver activity, high water levels, or erosion. You may need to detour these obstacles. Portages may be wet and slippery. Use caution near rapids and waterfalls.

Rapids are dangerous. Use the portages. Portage routes along the way have existed for hundreds of years for a very good reason - no one has ever drowned on a portage.

In addition to fulfilling the park's mandatory requirements for pre-registration, for your own safety, we suggest that you also leave a trip plan with family and friends.

REGISTRATION

Pukaskwa National Park has a mandatory visitor registration and a backcountry user fee system. Canoeists who plan to canoe the Pukaskwa River must register by calling: 807-229-0801. Please do so immediately before your departure.

There is a check point booth at the head of the portage around Schist Falls. Signing in helps us to monitor river usage and locate people should the need arise.

Upon completion of your trip, you must register out with the park. You must either phone in your return registration or visit the park office.



length for solo and have bow and stern painters (ropes).

2 Points: Whitewater canoe. Strong rocker design, full bow, full depth amidships, no keel; meets or exceeds minimum length requirements as described under "1 Point"; made of hand-laid fibreglass, Kevlar, ABS Royalex, or Rotomolded Polyethylene; has bow and stern painters and is equipped with grab loops. Canoe as described under "1 Point" but with extra floatation.

3 Points: Canoe as described under "2 Points" but with extra floatation.

b. Decked Boat

0 Points: Any decked boat lacking full floatation, spray skirt, or foot braces.

1 Point: Any fully equipped, decked boat with a wooden frame.

2 Points: Decked boat with full floatation, spray skirt and foot braces; has grab loops; made of hand-laid fibreglass, Kevlar or Rotomolded Polyethylene.

3 Points: Decked boat with foam wall reinforcement and split floatation (air bags down both sides of foam wall), Neoprene spray skirts, knee braces, foot braces, and grab loops, made of hand-laid fibreglass, Kevlar or Rotomolded Polyethylene.

2. EXPERIENCE:

Compute the following to determine preliminary points, then convert the preliminary points to final points according to the conversion table.

Number of days spent paddling each year:

Class 1 rapids X 1 = _____

Class 2 rapids X 2 = _____

RATING THE PADDLER

The International River Rating system described earlier attempts to rate the difficulty of rapids and help whitewater paddlers make rational decisions about whether or not to shoot them. Unfortunately, the scheme does not evaluate the other major determinant of a successful run, namely the skill of the paddler.

The following paddler rating system has been tested by some canoeists and found to be fairly reliable. There are some prerequisite skills, however. The paddler should:

- a. Have some swimming ability.
- b. Be able to paddle instinctively on non-moving water (lake). (This presumes knowledge of basic strokes - J stoke.) bow stoke, draws, pries and sweeps.)
- c. Be able to guide and control the canoe from either side without changing paddling sides.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the following charts, carefully and honestly appraise your skills, experience and equipment and award yourself points accordingly. All items except "Rolling Ability" apply to both open and decked boats. Rate open and decked boat skills separately.

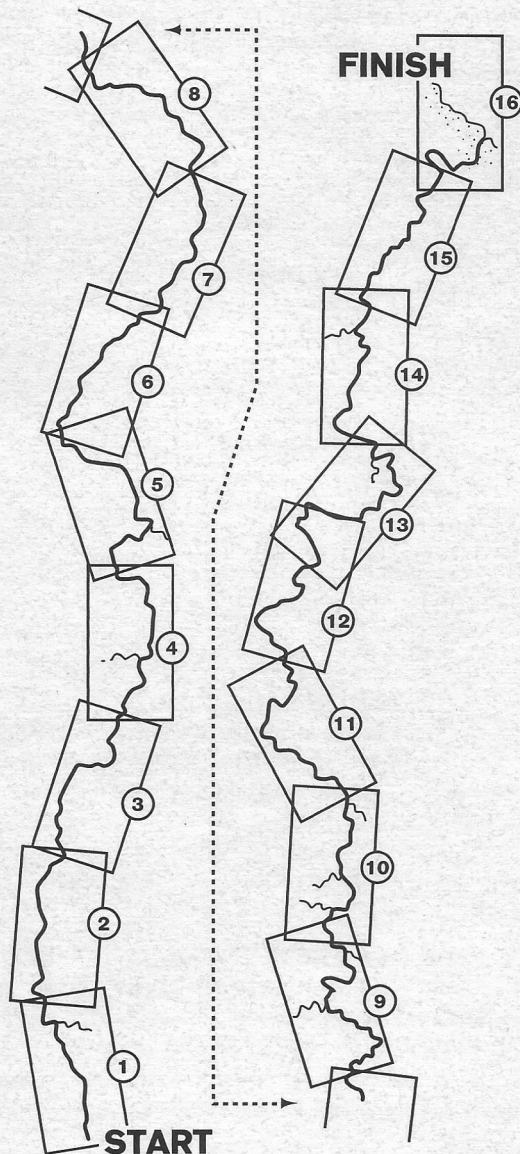
1. EQUIPMENT

Award points on the suitability of your equipment to whitewater. Do not award points for both open canoe and decked boat.

a. Open Canoe

0 Points: Any canoe less than 4.5 metres (15') for two paddlers (tandem); any canoe less than 4.25 metres (14') for solo.

1 Point: Canoe with moderate rocker 5 to 8 cm (2" to 3"), full depth 40 cm (15"); 4.5 metres (15') or more in length for tandem and 4.25 metres (14') or more in



DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RAPIDS

Regardless of the following descriptions, all rapids must be scouted before attempting to run them (this is not a substitute for skill, knowledge and experience).



Legend

LW	–	Low Water
MW	–	Medium Water
HW	–	High Water
GR	–	Grade
L	–	Left
R	–	Right

TOUGH SLOG RAPID

River	Rapid	Minimum Self-Rating
Condition	Rating	Points Suggested

Portage R	LW	GR 1	0 - 7
-----------	----	------	-------

1210 m	MW	GR 2	8 - 14
--------	----	------	--------

(If you can find it)	HW	GR 2	8 - 14
----------------------	----	------	--------

As it leaves Beaver Lake, the river is really only a small stream, dropping steeply in a very narrow and rocky bed. As shown above, although the river is small, in MW and HW it can be very tricky and difficult. In addition to the steepness and rocks, there are both log jams and beaver dams. Good luck, and be careful!

mishap. Ability to do the Eskimo roll is essential for kayaks and closed canoes.

GRADE 6

Difficulties of Grade 5 carried to the extreme of navigability. Nearly impossible and very dangerous, these rapids are for teams of experts only, after close study, with all precautions taken.

RATING YOUR OWN RIVER PADDLING SKILLS

BASIC WHITEWATER SKILLS

It is presupposed in this guide that the paddler using it has acquired the skills necessary to run whitewater. The best way to do this is to take a practical course from a competent instructor.

You should also be keenly aware that to run rapids, you must know how to do certain basic paddle strokes required even for flatwater paddling situations. Specific to these essential strokes are the J-stroke, stern pry, stern draw, bow draw, cross-bow draw, reverse paddle, reverse J, low brace and high brace. If you don't know what all these strokes are and you are not capable of doing them, then you are not ready for whitewater.

But, even if you do know all these strokes, you must also be familiar with and capable of doing the following additional manoeuvres that only come into play in rapids and are required for their successful negotiation. First are the eddy turns, moves that allow you to turn into or exit from eddies, the havens of calm of back-flowing water found behind rocks and other river obstructions. Second are the ferries, both upstream and downstream, by which a canoe, angled to the current, may be moved across the river flow either to a suitable take-out spot or to a favourable position for the resumption of further downstream progress. Again, you must know how to accomplish these manoeuvres before you contemplate running rapids.

INTERNATIONAL RIVER RATING SCALE

Central to the rating of rapids and hence rivers, is the International River Rating Scale. It should however, be treated with caution as it can be very subjective and does not take into account such factors as remoteness, air temperature and most importantly, water temperature. In addition, a paddler's individual skill is not taken into account.

SWIFT

Though not technically included in the International Scale, the category of "swift" is a useful one that will be referred to frequently in this guide. A swift is fast water with some small waves, but almost no manoeuvring required. It is generally easier than Grade 1.

GRADE 1

Moving water with a few riffles and small waves; few or no obstructions.

GRADE 2

Easy rapids with waves up to one metre high and wide; clear channels that are obvious without scouting. Some manoeuvring is required.

GRADE 3

Rapids with high, irregular waves, often capable of swamping an open canoe; narrow passages that often require complex manoeuvring. May require scouting from shore.

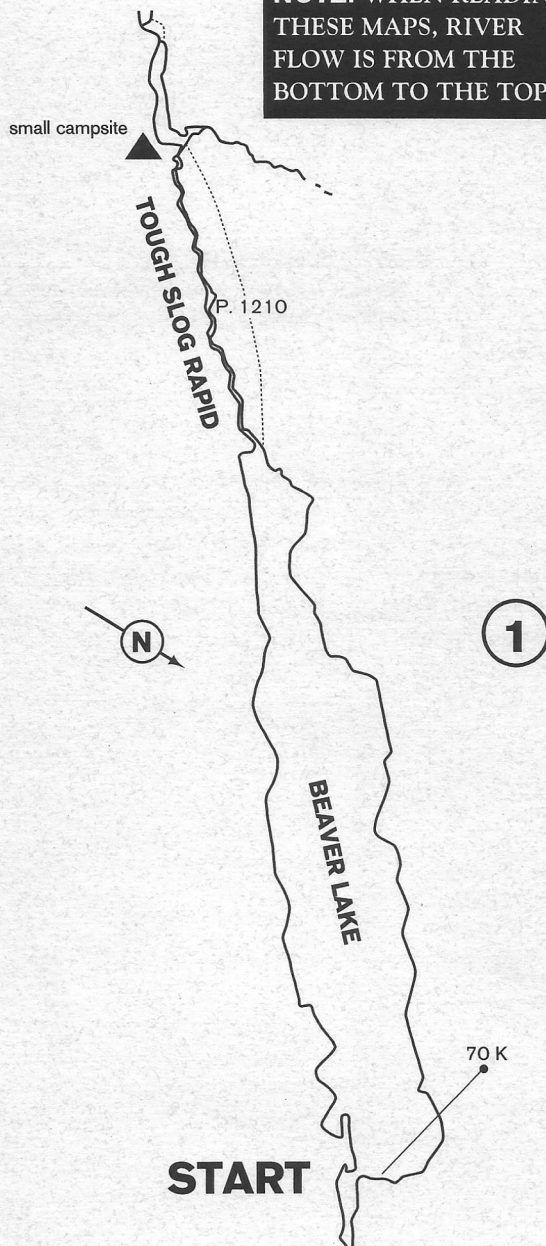
GRADE 4

Long, difficult rapids with constricted passages that often require precise manoeuvring in very turbulent waters. Scouting from shore is often necessary and conditions make rescue difficult. These are generally not possible for open canoes. Paddlers in covered canoes and kayaks should be able to do the Eskimo roll.

GRADE 5

Extremely difficult, long and very violent rapids, with highly congested routes which nearly always must be scouted from shore. Rescue conditions are difficult and there is significant hazard to life in the event of a

NOTE: WHEN READING THESE MAPS, RIVER FLOW IS FROM THE BOTTOM TO THE TOP



BROKEN NECK RAPID

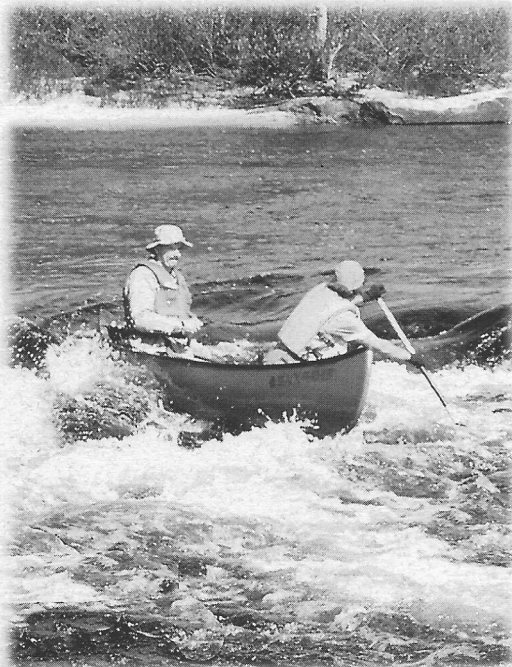
River	Rapid	Minimum	Self-Rating
Condition	Rating	Points	Suggested

Portage R	LW	GR 1	0 - 7
1210 m	MW	GR 2	8 - 14
	HW	GR 2	8 - 14

This is a very short but steep rapid which in LW is easy but in HW can be very dangerous because of low hanging cedar branches over the L side of the river. There is little or no manoeuvring room, and it is necessary to keep your head and back very low as you go by the cedars.



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SCHIST RAPID

	River Condition	Rapid Rating	Minimum Self-Rating Points Suggested
No Portage	LW	GR 2	8 - 14
	MW	GR 3	15 - 21
	HW	GR 3	15 - 21

This would be an excellent rapid to run, if it were not for the fact that at the end is a major falls. Put in below the first of Schist Falls and paddle to the head of the rapid. Then take care that you turn into every eddy on the L coming down. The last eddy above the second falls is fairly long but no mistake must be made. Take out at river L!

