

Canoeing the Mighty Missinaibi River

Second Place Amory Adventure Award Winners

by the 1st Orillia Venturer Company

Picture four kilometers of mud up to your knees in some places, with fallen logs strewn like matchsticks across your trail, and know that you have to carry all your gear and your canoes over this portage before you can continue your journey. Now add driving rain and that's what faced the 1st Orillia Venturer Company on day 5 of their Missinaibi River Canoe Trip.

It all started on August 17, 2009. Well actually, that's when the trip began – planning for the trip started in December 2008. A trip this large, 320 kilometres over a waterway with rapids, winds and chancy weather, requires technical canoeing skills, up-to-date First Aid training and very careful planning. Each Venturer Scout took on a role to ensure that nothing was left to chance.

Challenges of the Mighty Missinaibi River

Starting in Mattice, ON, we canoed nine days along the Missinaibi River, a historically significant waterway that was once the main safe passage for the Hudson Bay Company traders into Ontario, ending near the small town of Moosonee. Six Venturers encountered windstorms, rapids, technical water and many other testing situations. Through amazing teamwork we turned each new challenge into an unforgettable experience that none of us will ever forget.

Challenge 1 was getting to Mattice. It was an interminable long drive, broken only by even longer periods of road construction. We kept our spirits up by sleeping and making plans for when we would be on the water.

Challenge 2. Due to the wet summer, the water was higher than expected. This turned what should have been swifts into rocky rapids, and flooded the Gypsum Caves so we couldn't to explore them. On the plus side, higher water meant faster water and sometimes allowed us to canoe up a portage or two a little further before needing to disembark.

Challenge 3 was weather. We expected to experience a variety of weather, and weren't disappointed! Starting with pouring, never-ending rain, add in high winds, and then rapidly dropping temperatures at night – it's a good thing we were prepared for it. One night we were forced to camp on a sand spit (the better site was already taken by other canoeists). The wind was so strong it blew our tent pegs out of the sand. By placing large rocks on the pegs, they stayed in the ground, but the pressure of the wind was so great that the tent poles either snapped or bent. One tent actually ripped and blew apart.



Photos: 1st Orillia Venturer Company



Using Venturer ingenuity, we moved five canoes into position. Three formed a windbreak, to which we tied a tarp to them to create a shelter. The fourth canoe was placed perpendicular to the wind, in an effort to block some of the wind from coming in around the tarp. The fifth canoe created a windblock so that we could use the stove. It definitely blocked the wind, but not the sand, which drifted like fine pepper over our supper. Because this sand spit resembled the Sahara Desert in our minds, we named it "The Moosahara Desert".

Sometimes the wind was our friend. When it was a tail wind, we would lash our canoes together and sail with very little effort. In the middle canoe, Brittany tied her paddle so it stood vertically in the bow. One end of each of the two hammocks was tied to her paddle. The other ends of each of the hammocks were tied to similar masts (paddles) on the two outside



canoes. This seemed to catch the wind quite effectively, allowing the lashed canoes to travel in excess of 8 km per hour. The person in the stern of the center canoe served as a rudder to steer the contraption.

Highlights

As soon as we left Mattice, all of the scenery was untouched by humans. Other than one tepee, one trapper's cabin and two sets of hydro poles, we never saw another sign of civilization in the next eight days. Wildlife abounded – with sightings of bear, moose, bald eagles, osprey and bobcat. The fishing was great at Thunderhouse Falls – we feasted on fresh bass for supper that day. Our float plan worked well; each day's planned canoe route allowed us to reach our campsite with time to set up, cook meals and rest. We had three days of sun, and usually after the rain, there was enough sun to dry out our



gear again. The landscape was beautiful, with trees lining the hills like walls on both sides of the river, sprinkled with waterfalls.

Our Missinaibi trip was absolutely invaluable in terms of experience gained. We took what we were given; made the best of it, and learned from it. Not only that, but we enjoyed the whole process, which is the essence of finding adventure outdoors. This trip provided rich experience to each member, which will not only make us stronger as individuals, but also stronger as a group. X

— 1st Orillia Venturer Company

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