

## Big Trout Trip, May 2008

I was still in South Padre Island (Texas ) when my buddy Rob sent me an email asking if we could still somehow fit in a spring Algonquin Park interior canoe trip.

It was early April 2008 when he asked and I was not really prepared for this spring trip thinking since I was still on vacation mode ( Texas style) . But I quickly put down my Sasporila and indicated that I would think seriously about the possibility and that I could be back in Canada starting the second week of May if we decided it was a go.

I had not really planned on this spring trip, especially to Big T, due to ice out issues this year. I had been thinking instead that a Sept 2008 Big Trout venture would be more likely to happen in 2008.

Anyways, Big T was reason enough to ensure I was back in Canada earlier and that way we could still get in a 4-5 day interior trip. Rob took care of the planning and booking and then we met up Wednesday night at my cottage for the traditional triage of gear. Required food was made or purchased by both Rob and I and supplies were augmented with some last minute purchases in Eganville . This year Robert insisted we stop for Gourmet coffee at a neat main street Bistro ☺ he had discovered the year before when traveling between Deep River and Muskoka .

This coffee stop in now definitely another essential part of any future Algonquin Hwy 60 area canoe trip start.

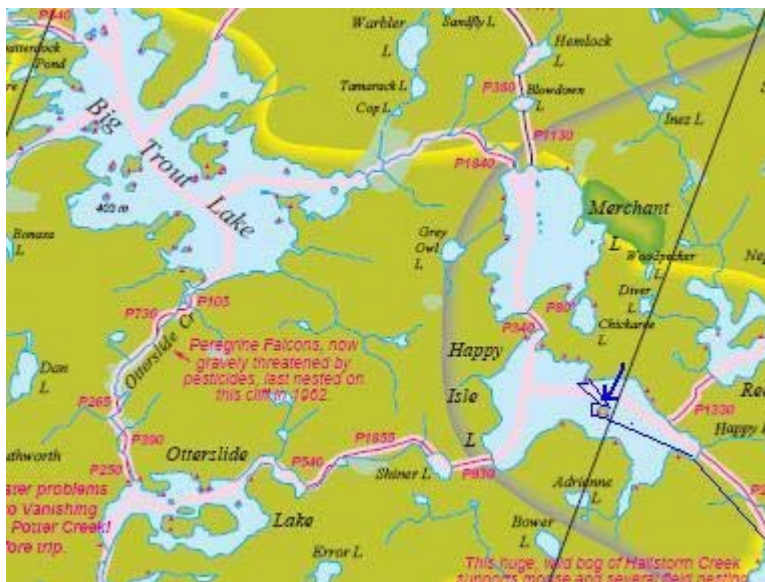
### Day 1

We had left the cottage around 8am and with only a few stops we found ourselves at the Opeongo docks before noon and were soon loading gear and canoe into the water taxi. The weather was very overcast but only occasional rain drops were apparent.

*I must say I had my doubts and I didn't pack the rain gear too deep within the packs. But it sure looked like the Gods were thinking of smiling on us as we ventured forth to return to the waters of Big Trout after a 30+ year absence. The last time we were at Big Trout was in the late 70's and now we were on the way back. How could anything go wrong ?*



Our planned island campsite on Happy Isle was clearly in sight as we departed the put in. Soon we were circling the island and checking out the three available island campsites. I was quite content to stay on the third one we checked out, as it was the larger/flatter and better of the three but Rob was concerned about firewood and the campsites openness to the south should the wind pick up.



Rob said he had seen an east side, shore based campsite just up the lake and thought we should check it out. Back we went into the rain and soon discovered that the shore campsite was rather poor for our needs and that the island site was a 7 or 8 star campsite in comparison. A long 20 minutes later, cold and really, really wet... we landed back at the island and unloaded. We quickly set up a tarp, scrounged around the area for dryish firewood and concurrently heated up some water to get something warm to drink and warm up. Rob started a fire (under the tarp) and I set up the tent. The clothing dry pack was moved into the tent and this was when we discovered we had perhaps triaged out too much of the extra clothes the night before when the forecast was for dry/warm weather.. The only extra dry clothes we now had, consisted of long johns, change of socks/underwear and a couple of T-Shirts for each plus two "dollar store" ponchos that I had decided to bring (Just in Case). These thin, clear, easily torn 2 mil plastic ponchos were used to keep our new dry and damp outer jacket dry and also to act as a personal wind breaker.

One had to be really careful of ones distance to the fire wearing the poncho but soon some additional clothes were somewhat dried and quickly used for additional warmth. The rain suits were totally soaked still and thankfully these ponchos did the trick. Our tarp, we had now discovered, was more of a sieve than a roof.



*Note to Self :*

*It is seriously recommended "NOT" to use a tarp for the Spring Algonquin trip that was used to cover the hot tub during the winter. I guess the Chlorine from the Hot Tub must of broke down the tarps water shedding ability in select portions of the tarp. Fortunately the tarp was still able to provide some resistance to the rain quickly getting to our ponchos or to the fire and it was therefore definitely better than nothing.*

**Day 2**

It had rained all thru the night. We had stayed up until 2 am at the fire, We stayed up late drying essential warm clothes as well as ensuring our bodies had adequate calories to offset the chills. I think we ate and drank enough calories between 8 pm and 2 am that night that the packs had lost half their weight. Thankfully we had brought adequate extras and would not have to ration remaining supplies.

I got up at noon ☺.. The sun was shining and the wind was gently blowing. Robert was up a bit earlier and had coffee waiting for me and soon breakfast was being cooked. Toasted English muffins with jam and instant porridge with raisins and peanuts did the trick and soon we were ready to depart.



We also had a visitor that morning, a solitary Sea Gull. We took the gull as a good sign. The Gull was expecting us to feed him fish, hence fish must exist in the area.



There was still some overcast in the eastern sky so we decided to just do Merchant Lake today (seeing it was now 1 pm). We were shortly on the water and by 3 pm were fishing the waters of Merchant. We, (well Robert did catch all the fish that day) caught three 14"-15" Lake trout that day and Rob only lost three lures to the fish Gods. We only kept one lake trout to eat as it was too badly hooked to catch&release. We headed back to base camp around 8 pm and during the paddle back we discussed supper preparation and the next days plans.



*Today was definitely a better day than the day before. We headed back to base camp, content in knowing that Big Trout Lake was on the agenda for the following day. We had checked out the portage while on Merchant and we now knew that it was BigT or Bust the next day.*



*A great meal/feast:  
Surf and Turf supper the second day*

### **Day 3**

A much earlier bedtime the night before had us up before 8 am. Breakfast today was toasted bagel with cream cheese and of course Instant Oatmeal with raisins and nuts. We set off by 9 am. A full day was ahead of us if we were to eat lunch on Big Trout and yet have plenty of time to fish Happy Isle, Merchant and Big Trout.

We decided enroute to not fish Happy Isle on the way to Big T and would decide on Merchant when we got there. A fair head wind had presented itself this morning and it took both of us paddling to make a decent rate of progress. We both readily agreed once we reached Merchant that we would just portage/paddle to Big T and that if time allowed we could fish Merchant/Happy Isle on the way back. Having left at 9 am we finally got to the Big Trout at 1 pm. we Trolled a bit of the shore line sheltered water by the large island enroute to our previous 1970 campsite but soon the head wind became noticeable and we both had to pick up paddles to reach our destination for lunch.

As we approach the entrance to the bay past the Big Island we noticed that our former base camp was occupied. Sadly we continued down the bay and had to be content to eat our lunch at the next campsite. We did some bobber fishing from shore and as well some

spin casting. Around 4 PM we decided that we must leave if we planned to be back at base camp on Happy Isle before dusk. Nobody appeared to actually be there physically on the campsite as we paddled past . It was very tempting to go ashore and check out the “Spring water” source that had been a great find during our previous 70’s trips but time was short and it was starting to cloud over .

We had a slight tail wind and we were able to troll most of Big Trout. Just past the big island I got stuck and ended up donating one of my favorite lures to the fish gods. Shortly after that, I was sure I was stuck again and as I attempted to get unstuck I found I had latched on to a lake trout. My light test gear with 4 lb mono was put to the test ( this time the drag was properly set ) and about 10 minutes later we had the trout in the net. Photo was taken and then the lake trout was returned to grow bigger and smarter.



After that catch we decided to stash the fishing gear and head home as we still had a long way to go and it was now past 6:45 pm. The trip back was uneventful except for mother nature deciding to give us a slight head wind of Merchant which would of made fishing impossible as we both had to paddle to overcome the wind. We reached the far end of Merchant just past 8 pm. The shadows were getting longer and the portage trail was done in short time as we hustled since it was much darker on the trail and was getting darker by the minute.

We got to Happy Isle at 8:30 pm and happily the western clouds had opened up abit and we had the remnants of the sunset to light of paddle back to base camp.



Tired but content after our Big T day, we unloaded the canoe and started the fire we had laid out in advance ( we knew it would be a late return.)

Tonight we had two pre dinner drinks in celebration and then we ate a great meal of wild rice and sausages washed down with some really delicious red wine. Dessert was IMP pears and/or peaches and then few nice Scotch and water to sip by the fire side. Tiredness overcame us before the bottle was dry and sleep was quickly in order as the long day had taken its toll and soon we were fast asleep

#### **Day 4**

We awoke early , 6:30 am, and once again I was handed my hot coffee as I stepped out of the tent. We had an easy day ahead but we also had an appointment at 12:30 pm with the water taxi. Breakfast was toasted bagels and coffee with a beige liquid sweetener. The sun was shining and no wind was to be seen or felt. We had the camp packed up by 9 and ready to leave. We even had adequate time to ensure that a fire was ready for the next camper.



We fished Happy Isle in earnest as this was the only lake so far that we had fished without success. At last we had to call it quits as it was going on 10:30 and we still do the out portage to Opeongo. We land at the portage and quickly decided that a quick bite to eat was in order to refuel the body for the trek ahead. Quick hotdogs washed down with the last of our beer was quickly cooked and eaten . We decided to do the portage the proper double way, as time was running out ( it was now just past 11 am)

Rob carried the canoe to the end and came back to pick up my load left at the half way estimate. I returned to get the last packs and met another father and son just landing and heading out. They asked what time it was and I answered that it was 11:40. They looked surprised and hastened their pace at my answer as they had a 12 o'clock pickup.

The final portage walk was occupied with my taking numerous pictures of the many boardwalks . My favorite is the one with the passing lane .



There also were three canoe rests on the way and these too are sturdy and a welcome sight when carrying the canoe. Half way was easily measured by stopping at the second canoe rest where I found Rob taking a break



We made the end of the portage doing a double in exactly 70 minutes. The Opeongo Outfitter water taxi was there early and waiting for his pickup. We had a great chat with him and had explained that his pickup was just about 30 minutes behind us.

No sweat he said... We always come early

His party did arrive about 15 minutes later and they sure looked tired as they had single carried the whole way with only one small rest.



We watched them load up and just as they left at 12:30 we saw our water taxi coming into the bay. This was a welcome sight and soon we were loaded up and headed home.



This was a great trip and we are already making plans for doing the next trip with a base camp on Big Trout for at least 2 or 3 days ☺

Big Trout has captured our attention again and we shall return soon. We are looking forward to exploring Longer/LaMuir and as well hopefully Burntroot and even Robinson/Whiskyjack the next time.

We also plan to bring lots of lures for the fish gods as well.

