

Central Iowa Paddlers

Volume 12 Issue 3

August 2008



This newsletter is a publication of the Central Iowa Paddlers, an informal group of paddlesport enthusiasts. The mission of the club is to share information, promote recreation opportunities and paddlesport safety, and encourage care of our aquatic resources. The group includes new and experienced paddlers with canoes and kayaks of all kinds. Visit us on www.paddleiowa.org and pass the word!

MEANDERINGS

"You can never ride on the wave that came in and went out yesterday." -- John Wanamaker

"Superior," meaning Upper Lake. "Gichigami," meaning Big Water. The old joke is that if a Midwesterner had named Lake Superior, it would have been called "Lake Pretty Good." The joke, though reflective of Midwestern values, was obviously created by someone who had never been to the Big Lake. This fresh water ocean is too big for description, too vast for mere superlatives. And, it draws central Iowa paddlers like a magnet. During the time since the last CIP Newsletter, there have been several trips to Lake Superior by CIP members. From the biggest island on the biggest lake (Isle Royale), to the northern Ontario hideaway of Rossport, to the perennial favorite, the Apostle Islands, Lake Superior has challenged and thrilled many of our members. There were blind crossings in the fog and a two person capsized that required an open water rescue. But there were also peaceful paddles in the sun and the camaraderie of the camp fire. The articles and pictures in this issue, though well crafted, can't possibly tell the whole story. Lake Superior should be experienced. I want to throw down the challenge to our CIP readership to visit this Midwestern treasure. I recognize that many members are not equipped to challenge such a daunting body of water, but I also know that many who are capable and equipped have not yet made the trip, either from apathy or fear. Leverage your CIP membership and develop the skills to join us. The trip will be *superior!* - Steve Parrish, editor -

REPORTS

Our New Osprey



Central Iowa Paddlers and the Iowa Whitewater Coalition adopted (i.e. funded) one of the ospreys that the DNR is reintroducing to Iowa. According to the DNR news release:

"The 42-day-old birds were placed in July 14 -17 at release or "hack" structures, where they have matured for a couple weeks. The young fliers are released in a passive manner to ensure they do not imprint on people or bolt from the site. Where Ospreys learn to fly and catch fish on their own when fledging is where surviving adults return to nest at four to five years of age.

Volunteers are driving energy in this exciting project by fundraising for the birds, providing fish for Ospreys to eat, and monitoring their health while in hack boxes and upon release. The birds will be self-sufficient and catching fish on their own in a few weeks."

Diane Lowry took this photo of CIP/IWC's own osprey

Cleanup Effort of the Cedar River in the Cedar Rapids Area by Melisa Jacobsen

I've never had an opportunity to be involved with disaster work or cleanup outside of sandbagging and helping friends/neighbors with flooded basements. When United Way of the Quad Cities decided to send volunteers to Cedar Rapids, I was anxious to go along to help. We heard of the efforts of Living Lands and Waters (Chad Pregracke's crew) in the Cedar Rapids area working to cleanup the river and its banks of debris left behind by the devastating flood. After learning that the group was having a difficult time getting volunteers to come assist them in the efforts, my United Way decided to adopt/sponsor two days – providing a bus each day on July 8 and 10 for all the volunteers we could get signed up.

Personally, I am very active in river cleanup efforts in Iowa. I work on several throughout the year including a week-long river cleanup sponsored by Iowa DNR/IOWATER called Project AWARE, and coordinate a weekend-long cleanup myself on the Lower Wapsipinicon. None of this prepared me for what I encountered in Cedar Rapids.

You see, when you do a river cleanup, most times you are picking up discarded items – things left behind and forgotten – lots of cans and bottles, tires, broken fishing poles, parts from hunting blinds, styrofoam broken free from docks, lawn chairs, pieces of cars and old farm equipment. What struck me on this cleanup was the nature of what we were gathering.

Once we arrived and were welcomed, we were given the safety guidelines and an overview of the day. We were split into teams and taken by boat out to our work areas. All along the river are towering logjams, barrels upon barrels sealed with who-knows-what chemicals, a million pieces of anything and everything. As we are flying by in the boats you see items hanging from trees three-fourths of the way up their trunks which gives you a fleeting idea of the magnitude of the flood waters. Once we came to our destination we unloaded from the boats and stood facing an unimaginable mess strewn all over the ground, tangled in the logjams, and hanging from those trees. There was so much I was stunned with thinking how are we – a small group of 13 plus the 5 LL&W crew - ever going to clean this all up? Just like anything this big, you start with what is in front of you and keep on working your way through. This is when it hits you – as you start picking up the items and bagging them or dragging the large items to the shore edge – these aren't things left behind or forgotten. Yes there is trash galore, but mixed in there is a whole lot of something else. What you are picking up are things that were cherished or used every day and are now missed – a purse, a child's pool, a comfortable chair, a garden bench, pieces of new vehicles, a tricycle. The one that struck me the most was a handful of faded family pictures with a newspaper clipping on someone's 60th wedding anniversary. You are glimpsing at pieces of lives washed away with the raging waters.

Later in the day the Living Lands and Waters crew took us up river to see the collapsed bridges. After that, we landed and we were led up and over a dyke. The crew wanted to show us just a little bit of what the good folks of Cedar Rapids were trying to handle and how we were playing a part in helping them reclaim their community. As I came over the top of that dyke, we were looking down into a neighborhood. Everything in the papers or on the news didn't even begin to touch what I saw. When you think of a neighborhood you think of homes, cars, people, children playing outside, gardens, dogs in the yards, people coming and going. The desolation is difficult at best to describe - there was a void of normality. It was like going from color to black and white – it was stark and static. These homes were covered in pale brown river silt, emptied - their contents piled at the curb. No families were there, no cars coming and going, and there was hardly any movement. My heart sank in my chest for these people as I couldn't grasp the personal loss and the enormity of what they still face.

There are some dangers out there, but playing it smart will keep you safe. If you are going to work in a flood-affected area, wear vinyl gloves under your work gloves, long pants, and hiking boots or thick soled shoes to protect your feet, be mindful of keeping your hands away from your eyes and mouth, clean any cuts immediately, and other common sense hygiene practices

including washing up well when you are done! If you have a compromised immune system, if you have an illness or just getting over one, it is advised that you avoid volunteering for this work.

I'm amazed at the Living Lands and Waters crew – just a small handful of people going out every single day facing all this and tackling one piece at a time. What an incredible group of people. But what you should know is that they are just regular folks like you and I, and they could use your help. The crew is uncertain how long they will be in the area – depending on progress. I would like to encourage any groups, companies or individuals to consider volunteering – drive up yourself, carpool, or rent a bus. The crew is working every day, and has a base location that is very easy to find on the outside edge of Cedar Rapids. Every person that can help for a half-day or full day really does make a huge difference. To volunteer (you must be 18 years or older and very able-bodied) please contact Tammy Becker via email at tammy@livinglandsandwaters.org or by cell at 309-236-0725. Their website says “volunteers should expect to work hard, get hot and sweaty, pestered by mosquitoes, dirty and muddy, but feel really rewarded they assisted for such a worthy cause”. Cleaning the river will not only improve the safety for anyone using the river and the riverfront, but the health of the river has a direct impact on the health of the community it supports. For myself, I'm saddened by the overwhelming need, but thankful for the opportunity to be a small part of the help and the healing.

Safety: Out of the books and into Reality for a CIP member by Steve Parrish

I've been struggling with how to relate an important experience to my fellow CIP members. I was on an Apostle Island trip (Lake Superior) this month with three paddlers from Nebraska. Simply stated, we ended up in a paddling situation that could have proved fatal. In retrospect (and believe me, I've played the scene over and over in my mind), I'm convinced that all four of us made both some foolish mistakes and some wise decisions. I've been spared the agony of trying to impartially relate the story because James Keyes found a blog that tells the story from a third party perspective. Taken from <http://www.gitcheegumeequy.blogspot.com/>, this writeup is from some Minnesota paddlers we met while camping on Sand Island in the Apostles:



Saturday began innocuously enough but the wind began to build and then build some more out of the northeast. Small craft warnings were raised and the women decided it would be a good day to hike out to the lighthouse. Not all of the temporary residents of Sand Island made such a prudent choice. A father and his two sons, aged roughly 14 and 16 paddled out from Little Sand Bay in shorts and T shirts, day hatches stocked with Coke. One of the sons had gone over and was a bit chilly. Their plan was to paddle back after looking around the island a bit. And we wonder why some people

think kayakers are idiots. Four guys that that were camping next to the women decided it would be a good day to take a peek at the sea caves, a consequential decision with a northeast wind and the accompanying clapotis waves bouncing out of the caves. Two of the fellows were members of area paddle clubs; James was from the [Missouri River Valley Paddlers](#) and Steve was from the [Central Iowa Paddlers](#). A short time after they rounded Swallow Point a motorboat appeared carrying a kayak and one of the foursome. The third guy was being fished out of the lake by his two more experienced buddies, James and Steve. Their experience paid off big time with a northeast wind blowing into the sea caves and they executed the rescue under very difficult conditions. If a kayaker gets into the caves its like being in a washing machine, a situation which proved fatal to a kayaker a couple years back at exactly this time of year. It's an extremely dangerous situation and one in which a person needs to act quickly. It sounded like one of those situations where the rescuers and the rescued all learned something and came out better paddlers in the end.

If any CIP members want the details of the capsizes, the rescues and the lessons learned, email me. The bottom line is that four paddlers quickly became two paddles in and two paddlers out of boats. *Lack of practice* is probably what caused the incident in the first place and *safety practice* is probably what kept the situation from escalating. Practice, be smart, be safe! (picture by James Keyes)

TRIP REPORTS

Tac Hussey Float at Prospect Park in June

Some trips need no words!



Pictures by Valerie White

Big Sioux Adventures – July 18-20, 2008 by Robin Fortney

Five years ago I paddled the Big Sioux River with a group led by Nate Hoogeveen, and I decided to revisit the area in 2008.

I arrived at Newton Hills State Park, south of Canton, SD, on Friday night and the sign on the visitor center door said, "No camping sites available July 18-19." Fortunately, Dick Howard showed up just as I was discussing my camping options with the ranger, and she let me set up my tent on Dick's site.

We had some light rain in the night, and Saturday dawned partly cloudy and clear. We had breakfast and hung out at the visitor center while we waited for KJ Rebarcak. A campsite opened up and I reserved one for KJ. She showed up around 10 a.m. with her new 4-boat trailer, purchased from Al Donaldson. KJ said she's ready to take more of a leadership role and the new trailer will help her take new paddlers out on the water. Way to go, KJ!

As we shuttled cars, KJ happily noted, "This is the farthest west I've ever been!" We put in at Klondike Bridge, about 12 miles north of Canton. The Big Sioux is a prairie river and looks like a larger version of the Little Sioux, with rolling grass-covered hills, tree covered bluffs and ridges, and farm ground here and there. The water was higher than last time and muddy. We had an easy trip until we came to a section fully blocked by downed trees. There was no safe way through, but, at Dick's urging, we checked out a dry channel on river right. It was open, so we carried boats and gear to the lower end of the channel where there was some shallow water and access to the river.

The next hour or so was uneventful until we were near the Highway 18 Bridge. We passed a flotilla of scantily dressed teenaged tubers and then noticed the sky behind us had turned black and green. The air temperature dropped significantly and then a stiff wind picked up and lightning

rumbled. As rain let loose, we pulled up to shore and got our raincoats on. We hung out under tree cover while the chilly rain poured down. When it let up a bit, we ventured downstream until lightning cracked close by and heavy rain resumed. We again found cover under trees on a sand bar.

Finally, the sky lightened and the rain let up and we headed downstream again. As we passed an island, I saw a young woman sitting at the water's edge and crying. She called out, "Can you help us?" Her companion had collapsed as he tried to get into their canoe and he was unconscious and lying in the water. She apparently had sat with his head on her lap for at least a half hour during the thunderstorm, but didn't have the strength to get him onto shore or into the boat. Dick helped pull the man onto the sandbar, and KJ offered a space blanket to cover him up and gave her rain jacket to the woman. She called 911 and got through to a dispatcher. Thanks to the map in Nate's "Paddling Iowa" book, we were able to describe our approximate location to the emergency rescue team. We sat with the couple for about 20 minutes until the rescue team arrived by boat and took the man to a waiting ambulance. Dick and KJ took charge of my solo canoe, and I paddled the woman to the take-out in the couple's tandem canoe. She told us the man had drunk "more than a six-pack" that afternoon and was dealing with heart problems as well as cancer. Yikes! We were glad we happened by.

While I waited at the take-out above Canton's rubble dam for Dick and KJ to return with the shuttle vehicle, one of the rescue team members named Larry drove up to the boat ramp. It turns out that Larry is a paddler and he remembered me from the trip with Nate 5 years before. I invited him to paddle with us the next day.

KJ and I visited the local Dollar General store to pick up a rain jacket to replace the one she had given away and then we headed back to the park. Hot showers never felt so good.

On Sunday morning, we headed over to Gitchie Manitou State Preserve, located beside the Big Sioux River at the northwest tip of Iowa in Lyon County. We dropped a boat at the Lake Alvin Bridge and headed north. We passed a threshing bee and farm equipment swap meet in the hamlet of Granite near Bloody Run. Parked along the road was a red pickup with a yellow kayak and KJ said, "Why, he should be paddling with us!"

We no sooner had we parked at the entrance to the preserve when Larry drove up in his red pickup. We hiked a half mile into the preserve so the group could see the pink quartzite rock for which the preserve is known. The rock is believed to be 1.6 billion years old, and the outcrop at Gitchie Manitou is the only place in Iowa where the rock is visible. We then put our boats on the river at the south end of the preserve, and had a fine day of paddling. The sky was mostly clear, though the river had risen at least two feet from the day before. We stopped for a leisurely sandbar lunch, hunted for treasures in the gravel, and greeted a paddler that Larry knew who was smoking down the river in a racing canoe. Just last weekend in Des Moines, the guy won 5 gold medals for canoe racing at the Iowa Games!

The only other excitement was getting through a line of old train trestle pilings at a point where the river makes a 90 degree turn. We managed to get through the crazy current (my heart was beating extra hard), and then floated easily to the take-out.

By the time we parted company, Larry had agreed to join KJ for a run down the Rock River the next day. KJ's planning to paddle the East and West Nishnabotna Rivers in southwest Iowa in a couple of weeks, after which she'll be able to check off the T-shirt that lists all the rivers in Nate's "Paddling Iowa" book.

What a weekend!

Kayaking the South Fork of the Raccoon River by Jim Riggs

Our plan was to paddle the Middle Raccoon from Redfield to Pleasant Valley, but I've done that and the South Raccoon was not much farther away and it was a river I hadn't paddled very much of. So we dropped a car on Dexfield Road near the new monuments, one of which told the story of the nearby ambush of the Dalton Gang and the famous outlaws, Bonnie and Clyde by the local law.

My first step off the muddy boat ramp at Nation's Bridge Park into the water off the South Raccoon took me to my knee in quicksand and fearful of losing my river shoe. Luckily the mud was loose enough that it didn't claim my footwear. My kayak was used to being muddy, but my friend Gary Stone had to face a muddy boat even before he had paddled a river stroke in his beautiful and graceful new white kayak.

As is usually the case we were immediately immersed into a wilderness that rarely gave us a clue that there was civilized farm country only a few hundred yards away from our watertrail. We quickly cruised past thirty foot tall yellow sandstone cliffs with layers of black shale beneath. Rock bars were regular occurrences with flat slabs of gray-black shale, flat pieces of sandstone, and lots of rocky pebbles littering the beaches. We found many conglomerate rocks formed by pea-sized pebbles cemented together with clay. A leg bone in one rest stop could have been a cow but it also seemed to be extra heavy as if some of the bone had been replaced with rock over many years since the bone had held a buffalo off the ground. Later in the trip we found a couple of huge rocks that could have been shoulder blades from huge prehistoric animals – or they could have been just very smooth and interesting pieces of rock. I needed a geologist to clear up my mystery. Many of the numerous high yellow clay banks on this part of the South Raccoon sat on a ten foot deep bank of blue-gray clay.

We knew that this river would not be navigable in normal water conditions without a lot of walking. We also knew that the spring floods were past and that the river was high enough to be runnable. The chocolate colored water was not really appealing and we wondered about the amount of Iowa topsoil that was traveling down to the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico. We also wondered how much nitrogen fertilizer, hog and cow manure, and sewage bypasses from towns up river were affecting the quality of the water we were exposing ourselves to. I thought of my childhood when most farmers had a few hogs and cows who ate the corn raised on the land. The manure went back on the pasture land or was spread on that farmer's fields. Today, corn from a large area is sold to a big confinement and then waste is spread on nearby land giving a huge concentration of manure in a small area. Then the many field tiles we passed send the manure quickly into nearby streams.

We saw a lot of the typical wildlife that is seen on a float down an Iowa River. Great blue herons, wood ducks, cardinals, and some white-tailed deer added interest to our trip. Turkey vultures soared above us searching the skies for smells of carrion. The squeaky call of red-tailed hawks often called our attention to these hunting raptors and several barred owls took to the sky ahead of us. One of these beautiful birds flew on a diagonal path from a high bank on our right to the treetops even with our boats on the left as it showed off his beautiful bars and patterns less than a hundred feet in front of us. Most of the five bridges we drifted under had colonies of swallows nesting in orderly patterns that reminded me of housing developments in the 1960's. I wondered how the swallows could remember their nest and pick it out among all of the rest. There were some slight individual differences but the nests were all very much alike.

The last half of our twelve mile trip down the South Raccoon River took us through many rapids. I thought that if the water was lower we would have seen a number of rock dams. On this summer day the high water gained power and shot us over some interesting drops, one of which might have been as much as three feet. We were always glad to see the bows of our kayaks raise up out of the standing waves below many of those rapids. I lead the way through most of

the early rapids and then followed Gary through most of the tough drops on the last few miles of the strip. Gary did a fine job as he was initiated to river kayaking in a fairly challenging trip.

Nate's paddling book recommended getting out at McCammond Access Area but when we checked it out the park lane to the river was closed and neither of us was really excited about ending our trip with a quarter mile carry so we paddled on to the Highway F60 bridge and had a fairly easy climb to the road.

Our trip was satisfying and enjoyable. Running the South Raccoon in really low water conditions would not have been good, but next time I'd like it to be a few inches lower and a lot less chocolate colored. Give the South Raccoon a try. You will like the challenge and you will love the scenery.

A Lake Superior Journey, July 2008 by John Pearson

Twelve kayakers who often paddle together on Red Rock Lake in central Iowa (John Craun, Rick Dietz, Scott Evans, Jim Grace, Jerry Kemperman, Brian Lange, Diane Lowry, Deb McKnight, Rich McKnight, John Pearson, Jim Umbel, and Betsy Wallace) traveled to Rosspport, Ontario for an outing on the Canadian shoreline of Lake Superior from July 7-10. Eight of us circumnavigated Simpson and St. Ignace islands, which separate Nipigon Bay from Lake Superior. This area is contained within the newly established Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, representing some of the most pristine, remote, and scenic parts of Lake Superior in Canada: http://www.pc.gc.ca/amnc-nmca/on/super/visit/visit3a_e.asp

Monday. We launch from Rosspport Harbor and paddle into Wilson Channel, a bluewater boulevard to Lake Superior. Our twelve kayaks weave and bob like a pod of freshwater orcas as we progress to Battle Island, our first rest stop on a circumnavigation of the Simpson/St. Ignace island complex. The view from the lighthouse high on the western tip of the island reveals the strait between Battle and Simpson to be calm and inviting. We re-launch, but suddenly we are ten, no longer twelve, when Jerry and Betsy decide to stay on Battle Island. (They camped there and returned to Rosspport the next day, heeding a report of inclement weather to come.) We cross to the southeast corner of Simpson Island and press westward past tilted beds of basalt dipping toward the tectonic rift in the center of the lake, Precambrian tombstones for an inactive fault zone that once threatened to rip North America into two independent continents.

Superior waves crash freely onto an exposed, rocky shore dashed with brilliant orange splashes of sunburst lichen. My worry of an austere, campless shoreline eases as we bypass numerous cobble beaches pushed up by storm surges from the open lake; they promise a choice of dry, level campsites scattered along our route. We weave westward through a delightful archipelago of small wooded islands, crossing spacious bays, squeezing through narrow defiles, swooping over just-deep-enough shoals, and skirting the outer shorelines bordering the awesome expanse of Lake Superior.

Arriving at Moffat Strait at the southwest corner of Simpson Island, we encounter a grand natural intersection and a choice of routes: westward across the strait and along the south shore of St. Ignace Island or northward through the corridor between St. Ignace and Simpson. We hesitate like tourists at an unfamiliar street corner, bobbing indecisively as we contemplate our next move. We are tempted to camp on this beautiful shore but are ultimately seduced into paddling onward while the weather remains calm and strike across the broad mouth of the strait. Without a nearby shoreline to gauge to our progress, the six-mile crossing to St. Ignace seems endless, as if we are paddling in place on a giant watery treadmill. When we finally draw near the far shore, we are tired. We find a protected cove and set up camp on a narrow, pebbly beach, our tents and emptied kayaks forming a curvilinear series of brightly colored dots and dashes between the tannin-stained bay and the green boreal forest.

Tuesday. Fog possesses the morning landscape, rendering trees, bluffs, kayaks, and companions into half-seen shapes and muting bright colors into damp shades of gray. Camp disappears behind a veil of white as we paddle away on a mirror-calm lake through another archipelago. Gaps in the fog open and close, amorphous windows shifting in shape and size as they gently rotate and flow languorously past our tiny flotilla. We glimpse expanses of flat water, smooth granite domes on misty highlands, and rugged talus slopes on sweeping forested hillsides, appearing and fading like slowly swirling visions in a crystal ball. But we are inside the crystal looking out, not outside looking in.

We follow the coastline closely, reluctant to lose sight of land. Our course takes us over rocky shoals where black bedrock is injected with twisted bands of white quartzite, metamorphic memories of long-ago upheaval in the earth. Rounding a point, we hear a steady, hissing rumble emanating from a foggy cove and make our way to it, finding a cascade of whitewater flowing into the bay. Taking a break from the concentration of constant navigation, we take turns paddling a boat-length upstream into its boulder-strewn mouth and backsliding into the lake, giggling like kids at a free carnival ride.

The fog lifts as we round Bowman Island and approach the “CPR slip”, a small resort originally established by the Canadian Pacific Railroad on the southwest shore of St. Ignace Island. Our kayaks are dwarfed by big cabin cruisers and sailboats moored at tall wooden docks as we negotiate through the harbor to a grassy landing at the edge of a mowed lawn. Breaking for lunch, we relax on the warmth and stability of a spacious, sun-drenched dock. Several of us succumb to the dubious enjoyment of a hot, steamy sauna followed by a plunge off the end of the high dock into very cold water; onlookers boisterously encourage a hesitant, would-be swimmer to “jump, jump, jump!” and then laugh uproariously at his gasping emergence.

The weather deteriorates as we ready our kayaks for departure. Fog returns and slowly blots out the sunny landscape we enjoyed during our rest. A strong wind rises from the southwest and transforms the placid, blue water into choppy, gray waves. Just past the CRP slip, we pass the last sheltered shore of St. Ignace Island and enter the big, windswept bay beyond Newash Point. Wind and waves arriving from the open sea of Lake Superior suddenly surround us, committing us to finish the deed: no going back now. Our kayaks buck and rock as we struggle upwind, cresting over peaks and dipping into troughs. We make slow, steady progress through the wildness and then break into the lee of wind-blocking islands as we enter Blind Channel, a sheltered narrowing of the bay. The wind and waves vanish as abruptly as they appeared. Sunny, blue sky reappears as we land benignly on a quiet gravel beach.

A second splitting of our group here reduces our number to eight: John and Scott strike off on a new adventure, intending to skirt Black Bay Peninsula and Thunder Bay en route westward to Grand Portage while the rest of us complete the loop around St. Ignace Island and return eastward to Rosspoint. A widening gap forms between our routes as we paddle away from the beach; they gradually become dark specks on sparkling water and then are gone when I squint into the afternoon sun one last time. (When we next meet them, they will have exciting stories to share, but that is another telling.) We turn our attention to Nipigon Strait, the channel we are now following north. We begin searching for a campsite, but realize too late that the narrow strait is protected from beach-making storm surges and is consequently devoid of hospitable landings. Bluffs and swamps line the edges of the channel, no places for a camp. Brian recalls the sketchy allusion given by the keepers of the CPR slip to an old cabin site at “Caribou Cove” somewhere on the north shore of St. Ignace Island, but it is rife with disquieting disclaimers: “if I remember correctly”, “used to be”, “might still be there”, and “I don’t know”.

We search fruitlessly for campsites through the long length of the strait. Ahead we can see the widening expanse of Nipigon Bay, a gigantic embayment of Lake Superior. A new storm is brewing on its northwest horizon and is slowly creeping our way. The wind shifts to the northwest and gathers strength. Dark blue and dragging long, curved curtains of white rain, the storm comes into full view on the far side of Nipigon Bay when we finally reach the north end of the

strait and turn east. We are paddling along an unknown shore toward an unknown destination that we will reach at an unknown time, under pressure to find it before dark. Behind us, the sun is sinking toward the northwest horizon, source of the blustery wind agitating the lake into a pushy, following sea. Beneath its overhanging fringe of spruce, fir, cedar, and aspen, the cobbly shoreline is too narrow and washed with breaking waves to pitch a tent. It has been a long day and it is not yet over. We paddle onward, searching in the twilight.

It is beautiful. I love the wind, the waves, the long distance come, and our benign view of the storm, impressively near yet safely distant, migrating with us on a parallel track. This morning I loved the fog, the utter calm, the wet, slippery cobbles glistening on a remote rocky shore, the cascade debouching into the sea from a whitewater stream draining a distant, unseen lake, and the cluster of islands defining the maze of passages that we traced with our kayaks. In the afternoon, I loved the windblown bay rimmed with impenetrable boreal forest and the achingly empty horizon of Lake Superior. I even loved the stark, campless shoreline of the strait through which we doggedly pushed at the end of this long, lovely day: without its inhospitality, we never would have witnessed this storm or have been pushed to the camp at Caribou Cove.

Anxiety is prickling our minds and fatigue our bodies when a tiny islet in Caribou Cove slides into view just before sunset. It is almost too perfect: dry, flat, wooded, sheltered, and directly under the fragment of a rainbow in the darkening sky. On its lake-facing side, wind whips the waves into crashing breakers, but their anger dissipates as they wrap around the island like forgotten arguments. We glide into the quiet water of a lagoon framed by the lee shore of the island, the concave coast of a natural harbor, and a sandy tombolo connecting the two. A gentle beach greets us. Our chatter and laughter fill the air as we climb stiffly out of our cockpits, giddy with relief. Our colorful clutter of tents, jackets, cookware, and unloaded kayaks soon fills the void among a dilapidated wooden dock, a pair of old cabins, and a weathered totem pole erected by others who have sheltered here before.

Wednesday. In the morning, we are windbound. Strong northwest winds send unending ranks of tumultuous waves onto the north shore of our islet while a riot of whitecaps dances in the middle of Nipigon Bay. Shoreline trees rock and hiss under pressure of the gusting wind. The weather radio confirms the windy condition and predicts the surge will last all day. This is a problem for our intended timeline - no traveling today means a very long paddle tomorrow, over 30 miles back to Rosspport. The radio forebodes yet another setback: windy again tomorrow and shifting to the east, engendering a headwind. Despite the threat to our original plan by losing a day of paddling, we decide to remain in camp – it's just too dangerous to venture out now.

Today becomes an unplanned rest: lots of eating, sleeping, conversation, short hikes (our islet is about one acre in size), and nature study. We spot a pair of otters cavorting offshore, unfazed by the waves that have trapped us. Jim assembles a kite and flies it in the stiff breeze. I wander the islet identifying plants and lichens, finding shinleaf, mayflower, skullcap mint, beach pea, and soft rush among the former and pixie-cup, goldspeck, sunburst lichen, and rosette lichen among the latter. Story-telling brings past adventures to life, involving a diversity of collective elements: bears, storms, rivers, chainsaws, police, mountains, poetry. We listen to the weather radio, scan sky and water, and discuss options for departing the island, evaluating risks, routes, destinations, and timing. One scenario attracts our interest above all others: the wind may relent this evening and allow us to bolt from the island. But when the lull comes (if it comes at all), how far can we go, and where?

In late afternoon, the wind shifts from northwest to northeast and drops to a gentle breeze. It is the signal we have coveted, so we quickly break camp and paddle away from the island. With five hours of daylight remaining, we hope to run to the east end of St. Ignace Island and find a campsite in Moffat Strait, some thirteen miles away – a doable distance if we paddle until sunset, but yesterday's experience with Nipigon Strait raises doubt that we will find a campsite at all. "We'll figure something out," we declare and set out on a new adventure.

At a rest stop on a rocky point, we spot a beach across the bay and scan it with binoculars, scrutinizing its potential as a campsite. An odd brown dot in the center of the beach suddenly moves. *Moose!* With the glare of the late afternoon sun behind us, we are fortuitously hidden from the moose's view as we re-launch and paddle across the bay toward it. It remains unaware of our approach until we finally emerge from our camouflage of blinding reflections into plain view; finally alerted to our presence, it trots across a clearing and disappears into a thicket.

Although the beach would make an excellent campsite, we bypass it in favor of getting farther down the coastline while our break in the weather continues to hold. We resume paddling. As we progress down the long shore, the sunny afternoon dims into evening, dusk, and darkness. I pause to place a lantern on my deck and watch for lights from the other kayaks somewhere ahead of me in the night. I see none on the water, but spot several flashing from shore when I round a final point and enter the mouth of Moffat Strait. Paddling closer, I perceive shadowy figures climbing through brush to the top of a low bluff, scouting its summit for a campsite while others wait tiredly in a shoreline marsh, swatting mosquitoes and listening for a shouted verdict. "Good enough, it will have to do!" is the signal that sets us into motion. Wading through sedges, I pull ashore and bushwhack through a thicket of dogwood and wild rose into a commotion of camp-making. By headlamp, I make my way to an unclaimed clearing on a lichen-covered outcrop and erect my own tent on its hard, arched surface.

Afterward, we gather around the single, small flame of a candle serving as a simple campfire and hear stories from Jim's mountaineering career. It is midnight when we finally retire, tired but satisfied with our day.

Thursday. The morning is wet with rain and chilly with an east wind. Lingering on shore only makes us wetter, so we pack our soggy tents into the kayaks and begin the trip to RosSPORT. We plan to paddle to the northeast corner of Simpson Island and then make a three-mile crossing to Crow Point on the mainland, but when we arrive at the jump-off spot, we see whitecaps out in the middle of the channel. The course northward to Crow Point would also expose us to quartering waves pushed by the east wind, so we continue along the Simpson coast in search of a safer crossing. Once around its northeast tip, we are paddling directly into a headwind. Despite our exertion, the cool wind draws heat from our bodies faster than we can generate and we begin to feel chilled. After a slow, cold slog, we reach the east shore of Simpson and pull ashore on a narrow cobble beach. Here we rest, don additional layers, wolf candy bars, and study the crossing to Salter Island. Although this alternate route is as long as the crossing to Crow Point and requires paddling into oncoming wind and waves, it will be easier than struggling with a quartering sea. Warmed with energy foods and new layers of clothes, we renew our effort to reach RosSPORT Harbor. The wind and waves diminish as we draw closer to the lee of the Salter Island, where we finally pull ashore on a protected beach to enjoy a leisurely lunch.

Our final push to RosSPORT has one last complication: the direct line traverses a windblown bay while a protected, island-hopping course involves a meandering detour. "Seems like the closer we get, the longer it takes to get there", someone quips. Weary with out-of-distance paddling and perceiving a drop in the wind, we strike out on the direct crossing. As we begin, Jim breaks out into song, initiating a round of "Row, row, row your boat..." that draws the whole group into chorus. Following up with renditions of the Beatles and Elvis Presley, we scarcely notice the miles slipping past and soon we are paddling into RosSPORT Harbor under sunlit skies.

A bittersweet mood always overtakes me when our adventures end, and so it is again this time: happy to have enjoyed a beautiful journey with wonderful friends and sad to have ended a beautiful journey with wonderful friends. Floating at the tip of a wooden dock as I await my turn to pull out onto a concrete ramp, I am already reflecting on our experiences with wind, waves, fog, and humbling natural beauty. Stepping ashore for the final time, I lift my kayak – suddenly transformed from magic carpet to luggage – onto a car bound back to Iowa. We gather for a round of group photos and goodbyes, then begin our ways back home... and to future adventures.



The Superior Paddlers

Paddling Library continues as a valuable resource

The Paddling Library is a great success. We all appreciate what John Wenck has done to give us instant access to resources that are sometimes hard to find or downright unavailable. Here's how to access the library:

Go to www.paddlelibrary.org and click "enter library," read the rules and click "go to library". Once you find a resource you want to borrow, click on "borrow from library" and it will bring up an email format to John's email address. The subject reads "I want to borrow an item from the library". Type in what you want to borrow and then John will get back to you with the cost for shipping, usually around \$1.50 media rate.

Central Iowa Paddlers Membership

DUES: \$10 per year

Includes emails, Newsletters ...
And Fellowship!

Membership, Dues, Emails for CIP list

Lynn Aldridge

laldridg@uhl.uiowa.edu

(641) 363-4451

Central Iowa Paddlers

P.O Box 17

Des Moines, IA 50301-0017

Send: Dues, email announcements

Newsletter, Information, Questions

Steve Parrish

sbparrish@q.com *(note change)*

5138 Robertson Dr

Des Moines, IA 50312

515-284-6910

Send: Articles, pictures