

Big Trout Revisited After 40+ Years

By Randy Born

This a trip log is about our (Randy Born and Robert McRae) 7 day trip from August 23 to 29, 2017. The trip started at Opeongo Lake and took us to Hogan/LaMuir and Red Pine Bay with its return through Longer/Big Trout/Merchant and Happy Isle.

We started planning this trip in June 2017, after our May interior mini trip. We had planned it as a mid-September trip (better fishing), but other issues and events caused us to do the trip in late August.

By our choice in camp slippers (purchased en-route), some might think this trip was turning into a GLAMPING trip, but let me assure you, this trip was not GLAMPING, despite the camp slippers!



Day 1 (August 23)

At 2 pm we boarded the water taxi to the Proulx portage. We started the 1395 metre portage at 2:30 pm .. and this one we did to the end, back to start, and then to the end again (e.g. X 3).

We then started our paddle to that night's campsite (3:30 to 7 pm) traversing Proulx Lake, Crow River and Little Crow Lake to the campsite on Big Crow that was nearest to the out portage that we would do the next day. We only saw 2 other occupied campsites, respectively .. on Proulx Lake and Big Crow Lake.

For supper we ate some Yummy Costco hamburgers that were fried on our hand held toaster wrapped in tin foil over coals, that thankfully we were able to get only by looking hard and far for enough dry wood to start a fire and create some coals.

The campsite was extremely damp and wet from the torrential rain the day before But as we were only there for the night, it was OK for one night. Bedtime cocktail for the night was scotch and we even had some ice remaining in the mini cooler for the first scotch. The night was rather quiet and we called it a night at 11 pm.

Day 2 (August 24)



We were up at 7 am. After a breakfast of coffee, porridge and bagels with peanut butter and honey, we packed up and were on the water by 10 am. We were soon on the 3750 metre portage to Hogan.

Our portage rate tends to be 20 minutes for 1000 metres so off we went figuring half way would take about 40 minutes. The first 1/3 of portage was great as it's a cart trail. Then the decision to go right on cart trail or straight for the portage was made.

We went straight and quickly earned our billy goat legs award that day There was nowhere to readily stop at the 40 minute mark ($\frac{1}{2}$ way), so we walked to where the portage meets the cart trail again (this IMHO was $\frac{3}{4}$ point of the portage). I left the heavy pack and returned to the start for the other gear, while Rob was to take the canoe to the end and come back for the pack.

I indicated that I would try the cart trail as it was likely easier than the portage mountain trail we'd just done. It was an easy walk back to the start and with the remaining gear on or in my backpack, I headed off to complete the final leg of the portage. I met Rob on the cart trail and he was convinced that I must of gotten lost or fallen as he has been

looking for me on the last part of the cart trail. I was elated because I figured that the end was in sight if he got the canoe to the end, returned and took the pack and now was able to search for me.

Well the mystery was soon solved, in that he had not taken the pack (he suggested it was too heavy to lift by himself) and had just walked back and rested/waited for me but had then started looking for me.

Soon we were at the end and ready to load canoe, when Rob said "Where is my yellow life jacket?"

"Oh my" (or words to that effect were expressed). We knew that his life jacket had been bungie-corded onto the pack. But the bungie-cord was missing, as was the jacket. It was easily deduced that the jacket could be on the portage or the cart trail. So we decided that Rob was more rested and that he would do the search, while I loaded the canoe and got us ready to depart hoping it was lost on the closer part of the portage/cart trail.

It turned out that I had ample time to pack/load canoe .. and to even launch the canoe. I then headed back with some freshly filtered water knowing that Rob might be thirsty as he'd left without water. Good news was that Rob found the life jacket ... bad news is that was at the very start of the portage.

Summary... What a VERY LONG portage the Big Crow to Hogan portage (3750 meters) turned out to be! Not only for us, but also for a father-daughter team who'd got separated on the portage/cart trail. They also finally found each other, after also likely traveling the portage at least 3 times.

I met Rob at the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark of the portage. I could tell he was thirsty and actually sweating. He was thankful for the freshly filtered water. Hoping that the bad karma was behind us, we walked the rest of the portage and launched only for me to discover that my prescription glasses had slipped off my shirt and were missing. Hoping that they were at the launch point, where I last remembered having them, we did a quick search and found nothing. These glasses were a old spare pair from a previous prescription and I can see adequate without them. So we gave up searching after 10 minutes. I was not about to again do the 3750 meter portage, specially knowing that the glasses could be anywhere and they would be a lot harder to find than a yellow life jacket.

The wind on Hogan was in our face and it tested our mettle as we slowly crawled towards the island campsite. The father/daughter team we'd met earlier had indicated that the island site was awesome and that they had left adequate firewood for the night.

Well, that was our desired site. However, there are three island sites and we had to check out all three. While the 1st and 2nd site were adequate, and even had some wood, we decided to check out the third one. Good thing we did, as it was, IMHO, a "Shangri-La" campsite. Soon we had landed, unloaded the gear and were looking forward to lunch, now that it was 4 pm and we were starving. We quickly decided to each have a 500 ml plastic bottle of beer with a great sandwich-sub purchased as part of our meal plan. Even better was that we ate on a sunny beach, Rob went swimming, I sponge

bathed and the sun was so refreshing we decided to each have another beer and a little nap in the sun.



Note: we had packed 6 x 500 ml beer planning to share one a day for lunch. Well, at the island campsite on Hogan, we consumed 4 days worth of beer but it was worth it as the pack load was made lighter. We deserved a treat after the Hogan portage mishaps and the sunny beach was just the place for such a treat!

Supper that night was 3 x hot dogs each plus tea and some cookies.

Bedtime cocktail was a Screw-driver and 10:30 pm saw us in bed for the night.

Day 3 (August 25)



We awoke at 8 am. It was Roberts birthday and I had promised him awesome meals for the day including a guaranteed fish supper .. but definitely no birthday cake. Breakfast was an awesome toasted bacon bunwich, served with coffee and porridge plus an Apple Granola bar for dessert.

After breakfast we quickly packed and were on the water by 10:15 heading towards LaMuir and then Red Pine Bay. A slight head-wind made progress slower than hoped for. The "Buggy Portage" description on Jeff's map is 200 % correct for the Hogan to LaMuir 685 metre portage. The wide catwalk at the Lamuir end of the portage is a sight for sore eyes after such a buggy portage.

The wind was still in our face and we paddled till 1:30, when we decided to break for lunch at the last campsite before the exit portage. A shared beer and another awesome sub-sandwich plus a chocolate bar for dessert refueled our bodies and by 2 pm we were on the water again.

Soon we were on Red Pine Bay and we hoped to get a campsite near the exit portage to Longer Lake. We checked out the three south shore campsites but were not impressed and headed back to the island site in the entrance to Burntroot Lake. This island campsite was perfect for our needs and came with at least 3 days of very dry driftwood and beaver logs. They made for an awesome fire that night. Supper as promised was fish based. But sadly, Tuna was the selection as the hour of fishing we did from 7-8 pm yielded only weeds and 4 clams. Tuna-helper saved the day along with a foil package of tuna to make an awesome supper complete with tea and cookies, plus a few night caps of scotch . Bedtime was 11:15 pm and the next day would see us at Big Trout for a well-deserved 2 night rest.

Day 4 (August 26)



We awoke at 7:30 am and were on the water by 9:45, with a tail wind that assisted early progress. The portages to Longer Lake were short (75 m and 40 m), but the first portage start was inaccessible as the current didn't let us get close to the landing, despite two or three tries of paddling like stink. Eventually, we landed down-stream from the landing and bush-whacked our way back to the landing.

This bush-whack trek earned us a second billy goat legs award. Later my called-out alert of "Watch Out... STEEP decline ahead" to Rob did prevent him from obtaining the gymnast award as well after nearly cart-wheeling over a fallen tree at the end of a STEEP decline.

Longer Lake is well named as the paddle through it seemed endless, with a slight head wind to make it seem longer. But soon the portage to Big Trout was under our feet.

That day we met a few other canoeists at the start of the portage, as well as at the end. The portage was a horrible muddy portage, with lots of bugs as well. But it was soon behind us and we started looking for a campsite to have lunch on Big Trout, seeing it was almost 1:30 pm.. We hoped to eat lunch on the campsite at the end of the bay that has a direct portage to LaMuir.

This campsite was the first campsite in Algonquin Park that I had ever camped on with my brother Bob in the 60's. Rob and I had made a few other trips to this site from Canoe Lake in the 70's as well. Sadly, that campsite was occupied by a family of five so we continued looking for a lunch site, finally settling on another point site nearer to the exit portage. This site turned out to be an awesome choice and we ended up camping here for the next two days. The weather was awesome again and we both actually went swimming.

Knowing we had the next day to fish Big Trout, we just bobber-fished and relaxed with a cocktail before supper. Supper later that night was Shepherds pie made from dehydrated ingredients and it was a great success and will be part of our menu for future trips. Once again tea and cookies finished off the meal and a few scotches that night saw us almost last till midnight. But we tired quickly and were in the tent by 11:45 pm.

Day 5 (August 27)



Woo Hoo! A day of rest and relaxation was in store. We slept in till 8:45 and had a leisurely breakfast of bagels, porridge and coffee. We left camp to fish Big Trout at 10 and trolled for the next 3 hours.

We were able to have lunch at the previous desired point campsite, as the family had moved on and memories of past times made for a pleasant lunch. Lunch consisted of Mr Noodles soup, packaged Crackers&Cheese plus a chocolate bar or granola bar. After lunch we fished another two hours, but decided the fish Gods were not smiling on us. So, we called it quits at 4 pm and headed back to camp.

I had another pre-dinner drink while bobber-fishing passed the time to supper. Supper was kraft dinner and hot-dogs that somehow had not yet turned green. Any concerns about hot-dog quality was quickly resolved with a few scotch beverages and a campfire that lasted till 11 pm, when we ran out of wood and energy.

The day turned out to be an extraordinary one also because some weird condition or Divine Intervention provided 3 bars of cellular signal at this campsite. I had awoken earlier that day concerned about a few things at home left undone and was almost considering praying for rain to exit earlier. I had taken my cell phone as a camera and as well as a FM receiver to listen to weather, morning and night, to get a heads up on the next days weather. CBC from Sudbury came in strong and clear again but then I also happened to see 1 bar of cellular signal. After moving three feet towards the lake, I saw three bars. I was able to text and get confirmation that the things I was worried about were taken care of. And Robert tried to confirm the pickup time of the out-bound water taxi by making a phone call to Algonquin Outfitters. But sadly, the number called was the Huntsville location and the phone battery was dangerously low. In fact after two more texts, the cell phone shut down due to low power. We hoped this was a sign that a huge fish would be caught while trolling out of Big Trout the next day, with no way to prove it except for our honesty and perhaps some campfire chatter that might grow the size of any caught fish without photo proof.

We had some free time and re-arranged the stones around the firepit to create an awesome stone bench for two, that made fireside chat easy and comfortable.



Day 6 (August 28)

We were awake by 7:30 and on the water by 9:45. About 5 minutes later I realized I had left my sunglasses at the campsite. Rob lent me a spare pair he had after I had lost my photo-gray glasses earlier in the trip. We quickly turned around, I found the glasses on the rock point where I had filtered some water that morning. Thankful that I had remembered early, we lost little time starting out again towards Merchant and then Happy Isle for the planned night campsite.

The paddle through the creek from Big Trout to Merchant Lake was long and under full sun. Little relief from the overhead breeze was found in the high marsh grass. Finally we reached the portage and were happy to be off the winding creek egress from Big Trout to Merchant.

Arriving at Merchant Lake, we were faced with a gale-force head-wind. We managed to load the canoe without swamping it and quickly planned our route to take advantage of the lee side of some islands and points ahead of us.

Half way down the lake the wind lessened. We were almost exhausted when we pulled into the last campsite on the east side for lunch at 2 pm. Another lunch of Mr Noddles, packaged Crackers&Cheese plus a chocolate bar refueled our bodies and we set off for the last portage of the day to Happy Isle, where we would spend our last night in the park.

Rob found a perfectly good (his words) pair of socks at our lunch campsite. They were obviously cleaner and smelled better than his present socks, since he wore these new-found socks for the remainder of the portaging and paddling. We planned to once again choose a campsite close to the exit portage. However, we found the closest campsite too small for our liking.

So instead, we back-tracked to the island campsite we'd passed earlier. This island campsite had been our refuge during a previous rainy trip and we knew it would serve our purpose, albeit farther from the exit portage.

This island campsite (there actually are three on the island), closest to the exit portage, is excellent IMHO, except that firewood could be an issue for campfires. Such was not our case, as there were some dead falls and some MNR-cut trees from earlier in the year. They provided just enough wood for our last campfire this trip.

Supper was Chili on Basmati Rice. The Chili was another successful dehydrated meal and the rice was boil-in-bag rice that made supper preparations a snap. This dehydrated meal was awesome and it too will be in the menu for future trips. Our bedtime cocktails, after cookies and tea, was Vodka and Tang followed by some Scotch to see us to bed by 11 pm... mostly due to lack of wood.

Day 7 (August 29)

We awoke at 7:30 and had a leisurely breakfast, knowing our out taxi was either at 3 pm or 3:30 pm in the afternoon. There was only a ½ hour paddle to the last portage and it was a 2.2 km portage that would take maybe an hour or so by our calculations.

By 9:30 we had eaten breakfast and had packed our gear, leaving us about 3 hours to fish. It was calm and we were able to troll the entire lake twice. We met another group of guys that we had passed on one of the previous day portages that were also fishing. They had had better luck. They also told us the fish were deep (below 30 ft) and likely our spinning tackle was just not up to the job in these August water temperatures. Try as we may with sinkers, I guess we did not get deep enough for the trout or we didn't have the right lures. But I'm sure we entertained a few fish and at least our lures got a good washing.

Noon came quickly and after a quick lunch of Mr Noodles, packaged Crackers&Cheese plus a chocolate bar, we headed off for our last paddle and portage. The portage was not too bad compared to previous Hilly Goat hill portages. But it was still uphill both ways. We arrived at Opeongo Lake about 2:30 pm, hoping to catch an earlier water taxi. But sadly, it was fully booked and no room was available. This allowed a brief rest/nap on the dock, Soon our water taxi arrived and we were headed back to the Algonquin Outfitters dock from where we'd started.



All in all, the seven days of tripping were awesome but tiring. Lessons learned were that we need to not be so ambitious in a days travel plan and also that building in 2 days at one lake more often gives the body time to heal.

Now our planning for 2018 tripping can begin in earnest, as that will likely be our next trip. However there is always a possibility for a Post-Turkey mini-trip depending on the timing, weather and previous commitments.

I will use a famous quote by ***Katharine Hepburn*** to finish this trip log ...

*“As one goes through life,
one learns that if you don't paddle your own canoe,
you don't move.”*