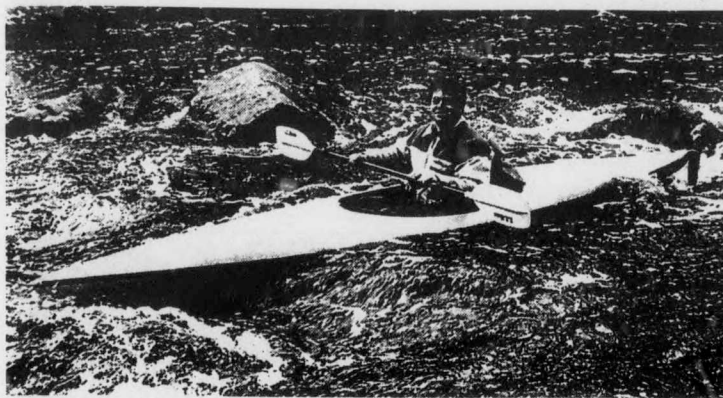


STEPPING OUT

WITH MARK ROBICHAUD

Kejimikujik National in November



"Now this is Caesar weather." Rick Robichaud, 1995.

My brother and I share a similar sense of humour, except he's much better at remembering corny jokes than I am. We share some other traits as well: incredibly good looks, vast IQ's, razor wit, you know - nineties guys. Kidding aside, we do share one valuable characteristic and that is a true love for the outdoors.

Over the remembrance Day weekend I went paddling with my brother Rick and a good friend of ours, Mike. I got to try some new things on our trip: I had an opportunity to try kayaking, we explored a part of the Maritimes I've never been to, and this was my first three day canoe trip.

Kejimikujik National Park in south/central Nova Scotia is the beautiful place that we paddled through for three days. We travelled along the Big Dam/Frozen Ocean Lake canoe route; it's a relatively easy twenty-six kilometre paddle in the northwest corner of the park. It's made up of three main lakes and several beautiful waterways running between them.

Big Dam Lake is amazing, it changes between clear spring fed waters to dark rusty-brown; the dark water comes from the many swamps and bogs that line the northeast section of the lake. The Big Dam/Frozen Ocean route is a mix of running river, stillwater and lake travel. The passages between the main bodies of water are lined with grass marshes and bogs. Along the lakes we paddled beneath the heavy green boughs of enormous Hemlock stands. My favourite part of the trip was the narrow Channel Lake stillwater, my paddle cut the water silently and grasses glowed golden in the late afternoon light.

We pushed off late Friday afternoon and paddled the length of Big Dam lake, ending our day in the dark and camping at the beginning of our first portage. Friday evening was highlighted by scrumptious steaks cooked to perfection.

Saturday began a little late, we all agreed that this was due to the Caesar weather that some

of us experienced the night before.

The last day of the week has been my favourite of the seven for quite some time; I believe our Saturday on the water was another testament to that. We portaged our gear and boats down to Still Brook, setting off in fine weather and noble spirits - the day was huge in front of us. The second portage (through to Frozen Ocean Lake) was

perfect - we didn't lift our craft from the cool water; Mike led the way in his kayak and announced a thumbs up, Rick and I paddled through, only bumping a couple of rocks.

The next section was along the south shore of Frozen Ocean, this took us about an hour and was great - the sun broke through the clouds sending streams of light across the water. We travelled on through to the end of the lake and opted on riding through the next portage.

Usually the portage sections are impassable but due to the heaps of rain the Maritimes have been getting this fall we could paddle through three out of the usual five on

Colt Cigar; except this time the water was a little quicker and he didn't have a skirt for his kayak - he got a wee bit damp. Rick and I portaged the gear about four hundred metres and then hopped in the canoe for the ride down. What a blast! The white water was cooking along, rushing over rocks and creating a couple of drop-offs; we succeeded with only one technicality - a 180 and we rode about a quarter of this section backwards, but with style and grace (remember we're nineties guys.)

The rest of the afternoon was easy paddling along the Channel Lake Stillwater. I had an opportunity to paddle Mike's kayak through this part, quite different from the canoe and great for taking photos, not so great for keeping your photo gear dry - as I found out on Sunday. What I really liked about the kayak was the low center of gravity and how close the paddler is to the water.

We camped at the end of Channel Lake and enjoyed some of Mike's stew, I had to admit that I was sceptical while we watched the chef ply his trade, but the end result was a super supper. The things you can do with four onions, beef and K.D.; I think his secret had something to do with repeatedly burning himself, but I'm not entirely sure.

Sunday morning began earlier than the one before - now we had a clock to beat. The Digby Ferry leaves its birth at two-thirty sharp, it doesn't wait for water logged paddlers. We missed it. Anyway, we lugged our much lighter packs from our campsite, along the trail to Little River and set off to rendezvous with the van. The first part of our day went fairly well; we were peppered with some strong wind gusts and I ran out of film

when the Great Horned Owl that had been flying in front of us finally decided to stop on a tree.

Our last portage was a treat, a beautiful buck romped through the forest to show us his impressive rack. After a couple of snorts and a huff he was off to find something more interesting.

Jeremys Bay is where we put in after meeting the deer. Things went down hill from there. Paddling along the much larger Kejimikujik Lake, we found the winds strong and getting stronger. By noon we pretty much knew we wouldn't make the ferry. Both the canoe and kayak were swamped by white caps and by one o'clock we had only covered about two clicks, we called it quits shortly afterwards. Luckily, we were in the main part of the park and the shore ran along the popular day-use area. Mike was the hero and paddled his kayak for the last stretch (minus gear) to Jakes Landing and the van, while Rick and I hauled the canoe and stuff up to the road in Jeremys Bay.

We solved the two vehicle problem by bringing a bike with us and hiding it in the woods at Big Dam Lake. On Friday Mike dropped his van off at Jakes Landing and rode back to meet us. On Sunday, we hoped in the van and before leaving grabbed the bike from Big Dam.

Seven hours later (after driving all the way around) we were in Saint John.

The best route to Kejimikujik National Park from Fredericton is to zip down to Saint John and hop on the Digby Ferry. In the fall the ferry has two crossings, one at ten o'clock from Saint John Harbour and one at two thirty from Digby. The

crossing cost the three of us ninety bucks. When arriving in Digby, take the provincial highway #101 north to local highway #8 and it will take you to the park headquarters, it's about an hour from Digby to the park.

Although Kejimikujiks most pristine parts can be reached via canoe (the least travelled are in the southern portion of the park), there are many hiking trails and day trips waiting for people like you and me.

We had a fabulous time, I am willing to admit that I've been bitten by the paddling bug. Actually Rick and I have been talking about a seven day canoe trip in Maine for next fall.



the Big Dam/Frozen Ocean route. Mike led the way through again, bravely brandishing his trusty

