



NEWSLETTER



Friends of Wabakimi members are outdoor enthusiasts who cherish every day spent in the wilderness. They demonstrate support for our volunteer conservation initiatives with their gifts, donations and membership subscriptions. These initiatives include, promote the Wabakimi Area as a world-class outdoor recreation destination; produce printed and electronic materials to further public awareness, understanding and appreciation of the Wabakimi Area; participate in land management planning process to advocate sustainable use of the natural, cultural and historical resources of the Wabakimi Area; maintain, document and preserve canoe routes and other outdoor recreational opportunities within the Wabakimi Area; and assist visitors to safely plan and successfully execute self-propelled recreational activities within the Wabakimi Area.

Friends of Wabakimi

www.friendsofwabakimi.org.

Find us on

www.facebook.com/friendsofwabakimi



Phil Cotton, affectionately known as “Uncle Phil”, passed away peacefully at home in his sleep on May 6, 2018 at the age of 77.

One of Phil’s passions was the promotion and protection of the Wabakimi Area as a world class canoeing destination. To further these goals, he created **The Wabakimi Project** during his retirement.

Between 2004 and 2018 under Phil’s leadership, **The Wabakimi Project** conducted reconnaissance expeditions to explore and map canoe routes in the Wabakimi Area. Phil and **244** volunteer trip leaders and participants from North America, New Zealand and Europe collectively spent a total of **1,256 days** on **153 trips**, travelled **5,363.5km** (3,333miles), cleaned and inventoried **1,035 campsites** and rehabilitated **1,081 portages** whose total lengths measured **269,876m** (295,139 yards or 53,662 rods). In 2014 Phil established the **Friends of Wabakimi** to carry on this legacy of documentation, conservation and promotion of the Wabakimi Area.

Phil’s vision and legacy continues with the support of the **Friends of Wabakimi** members, participants and contributors. On behalf of Phil and the **Friends of Wabakimi**, we thank you.

“We came, we saw, we sawed”

See his obituary at:

<https://www.tbnewswatch.com/obituaries/philip-james-cotton-9225>

Give me a good canoe, a pair of Jibway snowshoes, my beaver, my family and 10,000 square miles of wilderness and I am happy.

Archibald Belaney

Wabakimi Area

Online Survey coming! Where do we go from here?

By Dave McTeague (aka Oregon Dave)

Organized by “Uncle” Phil Cotton, the Wabakimi Project worked on finding and clearing historic traditional canoe routes for fourteen years. I was lucky to participate the last four years. Drawn by



adventure to see the Canadian “Little North” I experienced the boreal forest (different from BWCA/Quetico), caught juicy walleyes (aka pickerel), labored on portages, and made great friends. ***I saw a woodland caribou swimming.*** (John Holmes photo). I was part of something important. Policy work that I am, I learned from Phil about the area’s habitat and conservation issues. (See Oregon Dave YouTube interviews with Phil Cotton. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DYLDstPVgk>)

The Friends of Wabakimi (FOW) was established to carry on the Phil’s vision and the work of the Project. My trips were mostly on the Crown land canoe routes or routes that fed into the Provincial Park. Phil talked about showing those documented canoe routes to the forest land managers (for the five adjacent Crown Land forests) as published in Volumes I-V. While recognized canoe routes would have some protection from logging or other uses; it wasn’t clear they would always be accepted....a very bureaucratic and political process that needs persistent participation.

Now in our post Phil and Project era, we’re sorting out what the Friends of Wabakimi can and should do. We’re the one organized group dedicated to this enormous canoe wilderness. We have important work to do. Where do we go from here? **We’ll be asking You to give us your thoughts in our upcoming Online Strategic Planning Survey.**



We’d all like to see the greater Wabakimi area preserved and protected in its natural state for current and future generations. How best to do this? Having folks visit and enjoy the wilderness offers them a unique experience while building a supportive constituency. The five map volumes resulting from fourteen years of project trips backed by Phil’s research helps provides explorers a foundation of critical information. As does the large area FOW Planning Map now available. I know that when I make it back to Wabakimi, I’d like to **paddle with a purpose**. What would that mean? Likely less intense than Wabakimi Project trips, but more than your standard canoe trip.

It could mean minor portage clearing, informative trip reports, video reports, postings to bulletin boards, or simply checking in to let us know how it went and any problems/issues the park or FOW should know about. Would you want “paddle with a purpose?”

One reality is folks will have to do self outfitted & organized trips, since we don't have Phil's home base or his gear. One model is the Friends of Temagami Adopt A Canoe Route program (<http://www.friendsoftemagami.org/canoe-route-maintenance/>). Another idea is to create a Guide to the Top Ten (or more) routes with essential information. (What route would you suggest?) Also, Phil said once, “a third of the boreal forest is on its side any one time..” so the need for some clearing of existing routes will be there, particularly on Crown Lands (there's two two-person First Nation crews that work inside the park).

As a volunteer group, Friends of Wabakimi needs to focus our efforts. We need to hear from FOW members, past Project participants & other stakeholders who care about this resource. What do our members (and friends who have not yet joined) want or need? Can you help in some way?

We need board directors and volunteers for various tasks, membership recruitment, trip advice, outdoor shows. Others may wish to organize and lead trips. We really need to collaborate with the Provincial Park(s) manager and the forest land managers of the MNR. We need to build positive relationship with other stakeholders, be it timber companies, outfitters, shuttle services, guides, and First Nations communities. We can learn from them as well.

Soon after this newsletter is published, we'll email the **FOW Online Strategic Planning Survey**. This is a SurveyMonkey survey. Please please please help out by responding right away. It is super easy. It will help the FOW Board or Directors chart our path forward.



Sugar Ceremony

OK, this requires an explanation...

A week before our trip (2018 Trip One), the man who conceived, organized and led the 14+ year Wabakimi Project, Phil Cotton, passed away in his sleep at home in Thunder Bay. We were the first participants this year to head into the bush without Phil as our sat phone contact. Our supplies included a pound of sugar cubes which Phil mandated to be included. (He would put 5 cubes with coffee mate creamer in his cup of tea on the trips he led, though no one else used it.) We held

a "memorial ceremony" each week, tossing Phil's cubes into the lake in his memory. We thought of him often during the trip. It felt like he was with us, and this seemed like a fitting offering to his spirit. (left to right: Dave McTeague, Bill Pyle, John Holmes, comments by Jim Kerler, also with us for two weeks)

A Nine Day Paddle to Remember

By Chuck Clise



In July 2018, my group canoed in Wabakimi Provincial Park from Allanwater Bridge to Little Caribou Lake. It was a distance of 88 miles on the water. There were 36 portages for a total 3.6 miles of portage. The trip began with a ride on the Canadian National from Armstrong to Allanwater Bridge. We paddled down Allan Water River to Granite Lake then to Mc Wade Lake and Little Wabakimi Lake. East from Little Wabakimi Lake to Smoothrock Lake and up the Caribou River to Caribou and Little Caribou Lakes. At the end of the trip, Mattice Lake Outfitters picked us up for a ride back to the car. It was one

the most traveled routes in the Wabakimi Provincial Park, yet to our group it was quite memorable.

There were four people in the group. All had intermediate level paddle skills and all are backpackers so we had good wilderness skills. Two people are friends of mine and one is my granddaughter. My granddaughter has been backpacking with her father and me since she was seven years old. She now attends college.

We saw 36 bald eagles, three bears and one moose. For nine days we didn't see a bridge, power line or a road. The only structures we saw were cabins for fly in fishing. One morning we saw four canoes on the other side of Granite Lake heading north. On the last morning of the trip, we met a single out bound canoe on Little Caribou. We were surprised by how few canoes there were.

Particularly memorable was a still, quiet evening on Brennan Lake with a spectacular sunset and colorful afterglow. The loons that evening were having a territory battle about a mile and half to the west. It was so quiet that we could hear their wings slapping the water as they tried to settle the matter. Another spectacular sunset was on Grundy Island on Smoothrock Lake. The island was complete with a picnic table. Someone in the group pulled out a table cover and there were four backpackers having dinner and thinking they never had it so good.

A cold windy storm blew in about first light when we camped on an island on Little Wabakimi Lake. It was called the rollover morning.... Roll over and go back to sleep. We were able to paddle that afternoon. There was an afternoon when my granddaughter was navigating by compass and map to pick a way through the islands on Smoothrock Lake... The GPS was not allowed. She did fine.

I encourage you to plan your own canoe trip to the Wabakimi area. It is a beautiful wilderness and a great place to make memories. Wabakimi is a special place.

Ottertooth River Trip Report

Trip Dates: July 1 - 11, 2018
 Nearest City: Armstrong, Ontario
 Put in: Sparkling Lake
 Take out: Obonga Lake
 Distance: 56.78 miles
 Water level: Low
 Boat: Northwind by Bell Canoe Works (16'6" Royalex)
 Outfitter: Mattice Lake Outfitters (www.walleye.ca)
 Paddlers: Dave Fish, Winsor Heights, Iowa and Vern Fish, Waterloo, Iowa
 Difficulty: Challenging – Because of the severe topography, low water, lack of campsites and non-existent portages, this trip was a physical challenge.
 Submitted by: Vern Fish, vernfish@aol.com



Vern Fish will be presenting at the **2019 Canoeopia** on his 2018 trip on Ottertooth River. The trip was an effort to document a canoe route of historic significance in the Wabakimi area.

Below are excerpts of Vern's trip report. A more complete report is posted at <http://canoeing.com/ottertooth-river-trip-report/>

Come to Canoeopia on Saturday, March 9 to meet Vern Fish and hear this presentation.

Obonga/Ottertooth Provincial Park

"The park offers challenging, and remote canoeing opportunities. The route, which passes through Ottertooth Creek canyon, presents the canoeist with severe travel obstacles and minimal campsites. However, one is rewarded with unusual and spectacular scenery of rapids, waterfalls, talus boulders and steep canyons. Few people travel this area." Park management plan (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/obonga-ottertooth-provincial-park-management-statement>)

I was "encouraged" to paddle the Ottertooth by Phil Cotton, the founder of the Friends of Wabakimi. The Ottertooth canoe route forms the southern boundary of the Wabakimi Area. The Wabakimi Area includes over 6 million acres of Crown land that embraces Wabakimi and several other provincial parks and conservation areas. The Friends of Wabakimi was created to rehabilitate and document historic canoe routes in the Wabakimi Area. The Ottertooth is one of the last waterways in the Wabakimi Area to be surveyed and documented by the Friends of Wabakimi.

In 1784 Ed Umfreville was hired by the North West Company to find a canoe route that would by-pass the Grand Portage route across Northern Minnesota. Under the 1783 Treaty of Paris, the Grand Portage route became the property of the Americans. Umfreville avoided the Grand Portage route by paddling from Lake Nipigon to Winnipeg by going up the Ottertooth drainage to the height-of-land and then down the Kashishibog River.

Upper Ottertooth Canyon

Phil Cotton wanted someone to explore and document this historic waterway. The management plan points out that there are two undocumented pictograph sites in the Ottertooth Creek system. Thus, the purpose of this trip was threefold. Document the status of Ottertooth canoe route, try to find evidence of the 1784 route pioneered by Umfreville and find the pictograph sites.

Trip Summary

Our experience reflects what was stated in the park management plan. This route is rarely traveled and presents the paddler with severe travel obstacles and minimal places to camp. The portages have disappeared into the forest and are physically challenging. However, Ottertooth Canyon is spectacular and Ottertooth Lake is magical. The Canyon reminded me of hiking through the side canyons of Lake Powell. Hopefully this trip report will prepare the adventuresome paddler to tackle this remote wilderness.



A Trip Northwest Across the Park

David and Edith Foster, Wabakimi Canoe trip, July-August 2018

We drove to Armstrong ON, with our canoe, and stayed at Mattice Outfitters in Armstrong for one night; the next morning they drove us a few miles to Little Caribou Lake, where we began our trip. From there we paddled for four or five days on big lakes: from Caribou Lake to Smooth Rock Lake to Wabakimi Lake to Kenoji Lake. From Kenoji Lake we crossed a height of land, paddling up the Palisade River. We stayed two days at Burnt Rock Lake. Between Burnt Rock Lake and Davies Lake we had long portages and shallow lakes to cross. We then took a northward turn onto Rock Cliff Lake and the Misehkw River. Because of the low water, it took us more than three days to make it down the Misehkw River to the Albany. Once we reached the Albany, we canoed eastward; we did not quite reach Fort Hope before we had to be shuttled back to Mattice in a Beaver.



We were on the water for three weeks; during that time it almost never rained and there were forest fires in other parts of the park, which we could smell, but which did not affect us. To our surprise, the weather was mostly very warm, and there hardly any mosquitoes!

Trip highlights:

Big Lakes: The big lakes are very beautiful: typical rocky, forested shores, much warmer water, at least this year, than in some other parts of Ontario, very quiet and serene canoeing, and we found nice campsites easily. We met a few parties canoeing, and also some fisherman, especially on Kenoji Lake.

Height of Land with Palisade River. This was much narrower water; there were long sections of burnt forest at all different stages of recovery; great blueberries, we also saw a number of bears. On the Palisade, the water was occasionally so shallow and mucky that it exerted a sucking effect on the canoe and made forward travel very strenuous. Crossing the height of land, we passed very shallow lakes, full of bladders that we dubbed the 'methane beings', since they smelled of methane. Since there was not very much water up there, the portages were long and dry (they might not be dry every year). Surrounding these lakes, however, is an entirely different ecosystem, with different scrub bushes and trees; also, there are some peat bogs. We saw large numbers of bright red pitcher plants and many other species of flowers and brush.

The Misehkw River

Once we reached the Misehkw, the weather turned positively hot. It was literally steamy and tropical. The water was low; lots of walking and lift-overs were required, since there was sometimes not even an inch of water over the stones. There were a lot of moose, we saw a woodland caribou, lots of nesting birds (swans, geese) there was a superabundance of otters, in general a very rich environment. The river twists and turns endlessly past eskers; there are lots of larches and other beautiful trees: the soil seems to be very rich, we also passed dense marshes.

The Albany River

The Albany is a much larger river, but the low water affected us even here. We still had to get out of the canoe regularly and walk it along. What in high water would have been a dangerous rapid, was now a matter of getting around the stones. At Lake Miminiska we saw people again, in the distance. There are several very well kept portages on the Albany River the big rapids and waterfalls.

Despite the low water, this was a fantastic trip; it was extremely various in every way, and the bugless, hot weather, while sometime trying, was also often very comfortable! Since we are used to canoeing on Lake Superior, i.e. to being cold all the time, this was a nice change



Notice: Annual Meeting of the members Friends of Wabakimi

The FOW annual meeting of the members will be held in conjunction with the Canoecopia on Sunday March 10, at 9:15am sharp.

The meeting will be held in the Voyageur Room of the Clarion Suites at the Alliant Energy Center, 2110 Rimrock Road, Madison, Wisconsin.

Eligibility to Vote

The only members entitled to vote in person or by proxy at an annual meeting of the members are those who have been in good standing for a minimum of forty-five (45) days prior to the meeting.

