

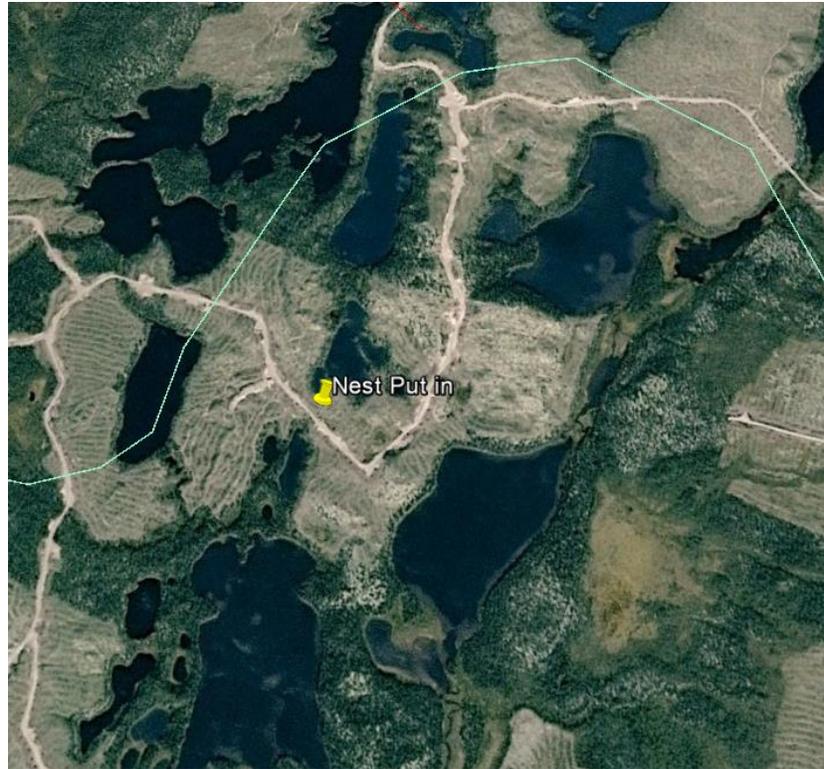
Wilderness Canoe Trip Journal  
Nestaocano/du Chef/Chamouchouane Rivers  
Summer, 2016  
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This trip began in the winter of 2016 as we began to think about a trip for the summer. A look at the map indicated that the Nestaocano was parallel to both the Tamiscamie River (flowing into Lac Albanal to the west) and the Mistassini River which flows east into Lac St. Jean. We had traveled these rivers and knew a bit about the topography we might expect. A careful review on Google Earth revealed some of the larger drops but also numerous logging roads near a clear-cut forest (Images from 2010 and 2013). Tracing the logging roads back to Route 167 on west of the river showed about a 22 mile drive to the headwaters if we could get in on the roads. The roads pretty much followed the height of land so we reasoned correctly that there would be no washouts except perhaps where the road crosses the river at a bridge. The bridge does not exist but from a trip report from 2003 it did mention a bridge. Plan B was to go to where the Sepanakosipi River crosses route 167 and paddle and portage upstream to the height of land. This would have involved lots of lining and a 700 meter portage. We placed a second vehicle on the Riviere Chamouchuane on road # L 203 where the river goes along the road (49 degrees, 12 minutes, 2.06 seconds and 73 degrees, 21 minutes, and 49.0 seconds.) This road has regular traffic from logging and is well maintained. We had the foresight to capture some images from Google Earth of the put-in route with coordinates and some of the major drops in the river so we could locate logging roads if we needed to get out or use the roads for portaging. Clear cuts parallel the river almost all the way down with lumber roads (many unused) from ¼ to a mile from the river.

In July, the trip came together and we drove 600 Miles north from Massachusetts to a campground in St. Felicien and met the other half of our party. Beer, stories, and memories flowed late into the night as we recounted trips we had done 49 years ago as young teens. We had two ABS canoes and too much gear but lots of enthusiasm.

**Day 1:** On July 29 we left a car on the Chamouchuane and traveled another 300 miles to the put-in. This turnoff from route 167 is about 2 miles north of the single lane bridge at coordinates 50 degrees, 41 minutes, 29 seconds and 73 degrees, 21 minutes, and 14 seconds. The gravel road to the put-in had been traveled this summer and was in good shape. We did not see anyone along the road and found ourselves at the aforementioned “bridge”. It was getting late in the day and the stream under the road was non-existent but 100 yards out through alders we could see open water. It was going to be tough slog to get there so we backtracked a mile and headed south on a road and found an area which was close to the water and according to the map, a small stream was to connect this 50 acre lake to the headwater lake of the Nestaocano. We left the truck on the side of the lumber road at coordinates 50 degrees, 41 minutes, 29 seconds and 73 degrees 3 minutes and 29 seconds.

The portage to the lake was only 30 yards so we headed thru the clear-cut brush to the water's edge and loaded the canoes with 10 days- worth of rations, maps, and some fresh food. At the end of the small lake it was evident that contrary to the maps, no small stream connecting the lakes existed at least in the last 100 years! One canoe followed the "stream route" for its portage while the other canoe ascended a hill, dragged a canoe through the clear-cut brush and plunged through the alders with the canoe riding on the crown of the alders to the lake shore. The race was on as both canoes tackled this 300 yard portage with no trails.



Of course we were not prepared for portaging yet and trip gear was not well-packed but we got it all over in about an hour battling blackflies and many trip hazards. One hour of canoeing through small lakes brought us to a tiny campsite about a mile down the Nestacano. The day was exciting and we looked forward to the days ahead over tortellini, chicken, hot dogs and two left-over beers. At that time, we determined that we may have left an ammo box at the portage during the race to beat the other canoe. The question was, do we return to get it in the morning or pick it up when we returned for the truck.

**Camping:** Close to put-in on Nestacano 50°, 39', 53"/ 73°, 4', 5.3" Small but good for 4-5 tents (more room in back) Nice site.

**Day 2:** It looked like rain would fall so Tom and Rod put on raingear and started back to retrieve the ammo box with the camera. It was a nice early morning paddle and canoe 2 was awake when we entered camp. Eggs and bacon for breakfast on a fire started with cardboard since we had not seen a birch tree for 75 miles. Despite the drought in the northeast of the USA, the water was high. Quite high, no shoreline was showing and the water met the vegetation. This was a welcome sight since it suggested that we could run most of the rapids on this small river. The skies brought intermittent light rain for most of the day. Boots were wet from the portage the day before and but we were off by 10:15 paddling some class I rapids on a stream 10 yards wide. At 2:00 pm we stopped for lunch on the right bank where a small stream entered the river. We ran a few more rapids, one of which was a class II, and then paddled a long stretch of lakes. We made camp at a beach campsite at 5:45 after turning down two other beach campsites on the lake. The weather started to clear. We were able to find tent sites off the beach, which was a relief. Dinner was rice and chili, and afterwards we dried clothing by the fire. Watched

some stars come out and turned in at about 9:30. According to the map, we would have rapids from class 1 to class 4 tomorrow.

**Camping:** Around the 102 km mark 50°, 24', 41"/ 73°, 8', 59.5" Beach site—tents sites behind beach. OK site, fireplace off the beach.

**Day 3:** Chilly night...awoke to partly cloudy skies. Oatmeal for breakfast, but no raisins. Tom thinks he packed some, but we couldn't find them. We broke camp by 8:15, as we anticipate a big day of rapids. We came across a very large rapid (class 4) and stopped to look for a portage trail. None could be found so we floundered along the bank through tall alders to see if we could line the rapid on river right. We crossed to the other shore and again looked for a portage trail. It did appear that perhaps at one time there had been a trail. We saw snippets of blue



surveyors tape but portaging through this route would have been extremely difficult. We lined all the way on the left with a carry-over right in the middle of it. There was lots of additional lining throughout the day. Basically, we ran all the class 1 and 2 rapids and would usually partially line/partially run the class 3 rapids. If we had spray decks, many of the class 3 rapids would be more runnable. One canoe swamped at the bottom of a class 2 after getting hung up on rocks above. Finding suitable campsites was difficult. Any site marked as a beach was underwater. If there were other sites they were very overgrown and largely unusable which led us to check out several flat areas above the river bank and finally settling for a "campsite" river right at 8:15. It had been a long day with lots of lining on slippery rocks. The campsite we chose was basically a jackpot – probably hadn't been used in a long time. Teaberry bushes were waist high and the climb to the site was steep. 30 yards back from the river the ground opened up some and we were able to pitch tents in an area that had been clear-cut years ago. We ate as darkness surrounded us and cleaned up in the dark. We were all exhausted. Lots of wood so we spent some time drying our clothes and shoes while listening to a pair of owls(?) making the strangest sound; not a hoot but a gravelly screech like two tree limbs rubbing together.

**Camping:** Around 79 km mark. 50°, 13', 37.8"/ 73°, 13', 36.9" Jackpot campsite. Lots of brush. Tent sites back in clear-cut area. No wood, steep bank. Lousy campsite.

**Day 4:** Another cold night last night (high 30's this morning), but due to our exhaustion, we had a leisurely start with pancakes and hit the water about 9:30 am expecting more rapids like the previous day. Pretty much rapids all day with lots of lining and running portions though nothing as big as the class 4 yesterday. A class 2 rapid under a bridge required some tricky maneuvering and one canoe got hung up on a rock near the bottom of the rapid. It was not long before the canoe filled and threatened to wrap around the rock. We unloaded the contents of the canoe into

the second canoe and three of us were strong enough to lift the stern and get the canoe afloat. Although items floated away, we did pick them up. The only axe we had plunged into the river. Quite to our surprise, it was resting just below the offending boulder and we were able to retrieve it. We stopped soon for lunch on a large rock in the middle of a class 3 rapid and were able to run the bottom. The weather was sunny and warm and since we were tired we paddle a few more miles and took the first campsite we saw.

**Camping:** Around the 62 km mark. 50°, 7', 58"/ 73°, 14', 19.7" River right, 4C campsite—small but nice. Tents on top of each other. Could camp at falls a few km farther down. Nice small sheltered site at top of portage around falls.

**Day 5:** The night was clear and cold and the temperature was about 40 degrees when we awoke. We have a big day today, with a big chute/falls to portage around in the morning and a bunch of class II's and III's to navigate. So we had a cold cereal breakfast and we were off by 7:50 am. We ran a few class 2s and a class 3 rapid and soon arrived at the big falls. Dead trees were jammed in the portage landing making unloading difficult. However the trees did keep the campsite at the top of the portage from eroding. This would have been a nice place to camp and the first real campsite we had seen since the first night. The portage trail looked good much to our surprise but midway along this ¼ mile trail were large deadfalls requiring us to make a loop around which took us off the high land and into the wet land below. If we had more time (and a chain saw) it would have been nice to clear this path to its former self. The path split off toward the river and we were able to view the falls. It was awesome; two channels coming together just like in our satellite image. To the west of the portage trail was more clear-cut forest and a lumber road that ended near the bottom of the falls. This was our fallback plan if the portage trail did not exist. We completed the portage quickly and then had the opportunity to tackle some rapids at the bottom of the falls which included lining parts. At this point we had the lining down. We knew that many rapids would call for lining for all or part and we would choose the appropriate side of the river, paddle as far as possible, line and paddle our way to the bottom. The rocks were very slippery and many of the shoreline boulders were big forcing us out into the current. It was not unusual for any of us to topple right over on the slippery rocks or descend into a deep hole while hanging onto the line. But the weather was good and the water was warm (about 65 degrees). We stopped on a small beach for lunch and all took a swim. We paddled for 3 more hours running class 1 and class 2 rapids and found a beautiful beach campsite at the 41 km mark. This was a huge beach where the river makes a sharp turn to the left. There were flat areas of the beach but also flat areas behind the beach. We swam and got rid of the grime we had accumulated. It was very hot in the sun with no shade. Firewood was scarce but we found a large tree a little distant and had plenty of wood. The beach was covered with moose and bear tracks—very recent as well as perhaps a dog or wolf tracks. We expected to see some wildlife given how



fresh the tracks were. We were rewarded the next morning when Chris and Mark spotted a bear about a mile below our campsite.

**Camping:** Around the 39 km mark. 49° 54', 31.9" / 73° 18', 47.2" BIG beach site. Tent sites behind beach or on beach. Wood scarce. Nice swimming.

**Day 6:** Tuesday, August 2

By 6:30 am it started to rain. It only continued for a half an hour, but somehow Mark's tent leaked at the edges. Both ends of my sleeping bag got wet. Oatmeal w/ raisins for breakfast (yes, Tom was right... he'd packed them and we found them when we re-organized the food bags 2 nights earlier) and we were on the river by 8:50 am. After just a couple of turns on the river Chris and I saw a bear cub on the river bank (presumably he/she goes with the author of the bear tracks we saw last night on the beach). There was no more rain, and by 10:30 it cleared into a fine, warm, sunny day. We ran a fun class III, at the top of which Rod and Tom got hung up on a rock. Chris and Mark barely squeezed between their stern and a rock to their right, but were able to get through. We pulled into an eddy and waited for Rod & Tom to dislodge their canoe. The rest of the rapid was fun, during which Chris and I managed to perform a lovely 360 degree pirouette. The rest of the morning was just easy river paddling. Just before lunch we made a short detour up a small tributary to a very pretty, 75-100 foot cascading falls. It's very unusual to see such a thing up here...it's something you'd be more likely to see in VT or NH. We had lunch on a beach and sunbathed for a bit before continuing. We ran a really fun class III in the afternoon with big haystacks at the bottom. Chris says they were the biggest he's ever paddled through. I'm not sure, but they were pretty big. Both canoes took in some water, but we were able to bail at the bottom. We passed by Club Nestaocano which was well maintained and had vehicles in the driveway. The rest of the afternoon consisted of uneventful paddling to the confluence of the Nestaocano with the Riviere du Chef. We camped on another beach (all three tents on the beach) across from the peninsula between the two rivers. Tom recalled a beautiful campsite there from a previous trip down the du Chef in 1987. Tom and Rod paddled over for wood but saw no sign of the campsite other than tall grass surrounded by dead trees. Time had either chopped off the end of the peninsula or allowed nature to take over the campsite. To the north was a substantial storm and we were fortunate to miss it but it looked like our streak of fine weather was over. Pasta for dinner with stewed apricots for dessert. It was an early night.

**Camping:** Confluence of Nestaocano and du Chef. 0 KM mark. 49° 37', 45.2" / 73° 27', 24.2" Big beach. Tents on beach. Perhaps a campsite at cabin a half mile up Nestaocano. Could make a campsite on peninsula. Nice swimming. Vulnerable to weather and rising water.

**Day 7:** No rain—we were lucky. We would have had a tough time putting up a rain tarp on the beach. As we got out of bed, we heard the sound of a 2-cycle motor on the north shore of the du Chef. As we ate breakfast we noticed two men clearing a path to the end of the peninsula. We reasoned that the path was probably for moose hunting. Our maps had shown many hunting spots which would just be an elevated blind at the river's edge. We learned not to expect a campsite beneath—they were overgrown and probably came in on snowmobiles from a cabin or road nearby. Most of the day turned out to be sunny and warm, and it was long and hard. We paddled to a falls on the du Chef and this required a short portage on a nice trail that had been

used recently. The end was a pile of trees washed over the falls and required fancy foot work to find a place to set the canoe. Shortly after the falls we encountered a huge chute with an island at the top. We took the small stream to the right and dragged and lifted our canoes over many boulders to deal with this 20 foot drop. Red paint on the rocks reinforced our belief that this was the easiest route. Tom had documented this route from his previous trip which was in much lower water. The rapids on the du Chef are different...longer and harder to line and the rocks seem slipperier (!?). We had a late lunch (1:30) on a big rock at the end of the second portage on river right which was a steep up and down to get around a chute. There was a mixture of paddling and rapid running/lining in the afternoon. We camped



about 7:00 pm on another beach about 2 miles below one of the most beautiful cabins in the woods and a few miles from the Chamouchuane. We got the tents up (again, all 3 of them on the beach) just in time before a heavy thunderstorm. The thunderstorm lasted 15 minutes but it was enough to soak everything in Mark's tent. There was plenty of driftwood and we easily made a fire with our birch bark which we found two days ago. We cooked up a big batch of chili and rice, and we ate it all. The skies are threatening again and we had a monster lightning show while watching the headlights and sounds of logging trucks headed north on a nearby road.

**Camping:** On the du Chef as it begins to turn south.  $49^{\circ}, 33', 45.5'' / 73^{\circ}, 23', 7.8''$  Widening of river. Sandy/grassy area. Shelter for fire under trees. Lots of driftwood. Road visible across from campsite.

**Day 8:** We were on the river by 8:35 with clear skies. We ran an easy rapid and then a couple of miles downstream we saw the du Chef bridge. This steel bridge carries a lot of logging traffic from the area to the east of where we have been paddling. A portage landing was to the right but it had a very steep slope and we elected to paddle to the top of the rapid and look it over. It was short, had big waves and we all agreed a spray deck would make it runnable on river left. We decided to use the cement footings for the bridge along with the boulders surrounding the footings as a portage/lift-over spot. The boulders were taller than a man. In scouting this strategy, Chris



topped off a boulder and fell among other boulders and landed on his side. Speculation was that

he probably cracked a few ribs. We completed this lift-over with all hands on canoes and were thankful that Chris's fall had not caused him to hit his head and that we were now about a day from our take-out.

We could have flagged down a truck on the road if we felt it necessary. Most of the rest of the day involved easy river paddling, with just one long, fun rapid at the end. The rapid probably went on for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile, and at the very end there was a big drop and some big waves. Both canoes got through OK, although both canoes shipped a lot of water...at least 4-5 inches. After bailing we paddled on to the confluence of the du Chef and the Chamouchouane. We made camp by 3 pm in a gorgeous campsite among the trees on what had been a small road leading to the river from L 203. The Chamouchouane is more heavily travelled than either the Nestaocano or the du Chef, and that many of the campsites on the river are of similar quality. We had bush hash and our first bannock tonight for dinner. Very tasty, although no one could finish the bannock. We discussed future plans over dinner. The original plan called for picking up the car, traveling back to the put in and shuttling one vehicle to the falls on the Chamouchouane to add an additional two days to the trip if we had time. We did have time, we went down the Nestaocano far faster than expected or even what may have been reasonable. Chris was experiencing extreme pain in his ribs so the plan was to retrieve the truck at the put-in and call an end to the trip.

**Camping:** At confluence of DuChef and Chamouchouane. 49°, 12', 2.2" / 73°, 21', 48.7" Nice campsite on old road, lots of tent sites. Wood is sparse and dead wood is wet. River right. Take-out or continue on down the Chamouchouane (It is a great river as well, few portages, nice rapids, another three days will take you to take out near Reserve Office. Great campsites. Beautiful falls (1+/- mile portage on road). Can put a car here and take out although bottom section has nice current and class 1-2 rapids until take-out.)

**Day 9:** We were up early and had a cold breakfast...on the river by 6:50, which was our earliest start of the trip. The current was strong in this part of the river, and we made very good time. We ran one pretty long class II rapid and covered the 12 miles to the take-out in just over 2  $\frac{1}{4}$  hours. We stashed the canoes and gear in the woods and took off for Chibougamau in Chris' car. Tom and Chris continued north in Chris's Jetta and Rod and Mark stayed in Chibougamau. A summer festival was in town and the local bars were doing great business. Tom and Chris didn't get back until close to 4:30, which was an hour later than we expected them. They had to drive through a torrential downpour and were in no mood to hang around Chibougamau with us. We got in our respective vehicles, drove to the take out spot on the Chamouchouane where we'd stashed the canoes and gear and arrived just as the torrential rains came to a stop. We loaded everything up, and proceeded to St. Felicien. Finding a room at a hotel was difficult but two hotels in town had a few rooms available. Dinner and beer at Mike's was tasty and we were in bed by 10.



**Day 10:**

We had breakfast at the hotel, and, after saying our goodbyes both cars were on the road by 8:30 for the 600 mile trip south.

**Afterthoughts:**

The Nestaocano is a nice river. It has many rapids and no portage trails except the one around the falls. Lower water would have made many beach campsites available on the lower part of the river. The northeast branch should be explored as a possible put-in as well. The drive in on the old roads was easy. These roads see little travel but they are used to ferry people and supplies into the many hunting blinds and cabins on the river. Time will tell which ones will remain open. The 2003 maps by Gautier Bouguin were accurate and easy to follow. With the exception of one mismarked campsite at a bridge on the upper Nestaocano, they were fine. We rated many of the rapids differently due to the very high water we experienced. Nearly every rapid was noted on these maps. We descended 80 or more rapids in the 125 mile trip with a vertical descent of 520 feet. The Google Earth views we took along added a little comfort in knowing where possible portages could be made. They also were very accurate when using coordinates to locate the put-in and places along the river. While we were able to negotiate the river in open ABS canoes (17 foot) without spray decks it would be best to have spray decks. Kevlar and fiberglass canoes would take an extreme beating on this river from all the lift-overs and dragging required. Lower water would have made this trip more enjoyable as many of the rapids would then be fully runnable. It would be fun to do this trip with light loads in canoes with floatation bags by taking out at the Club Nestaocano which is located about 15 km from the confluence with the du Chef. Opening up portages and campsites on this river, would make this a wonderful experience easily accessible to boaters.

*Mark Hinckley & Tom Addicks, Fall 2016*