

From Source to Sea: Canoeing the Missinaibi River from Dog Lake to James Bay

Lev Sugerman-Brozan, Ben Hanson-Kaplan, Owen Marchant, James Kuhns

Post-Trip Report

Itemized Budget

****All items are in USD****

ITEM	BUDGETED COST	PAID COST
Duluth pack rental	\$700	\$174.08
James flight	\$381.48	\$486.81
Owen flight	\$526.24	\$527.40
Lev flight	\$271.68	\$299.20
Chrismar Adventure Maps	\$56.10	\$56.95
Journey to the Northern Sky Book	\$137.93	\$46.98
Fuel canisters	\$76.45	\$75.20
Dr. Bronner's soap	\$19.80	\$19.13
Gear tape	\$8.75	\$7.52
Group train Moosonee-Cochrane	\$191.80	\$304.86
Bear spray	\$109.94	\$113.55
AquaMira	\$98.67	\$97.69
Repair Kit- total items minus gear tape	\$64.74	\$74.48
First Aid kit- total items	\$232.63	\$242.35
Poop trowels	\$32.69	\$31.24
Hand sanitizer	\$15.18	\$12.05
Spray sunscreen	\$33.04	\$26.50
Face sunscreen	\$31.11	\$46.72

Bug spray	\$34.98	\$33.96
Paracord	\$14.30	\$8.49
Rope (for lining)	\$8.76	\$12.72
Dish soap	\$15.54	\$10.61
Bleach tablets	\$14.29	\$9.55
Camp lighters	\$17.52	\$15.93
Waterproof matches	\$11.67	\$12.72
Ziplocs (gallon and quart)	\$10.20	\$17.73
Signal mirror	\$14.01	\$15.93
Group 2L water storage	\$51.91	\$28.79
Bug headnets	\$14.01	\$16.99
Neoprene gloves	\$46.68	\$44.26
Bug shelter	\$82.38	\$87.13
Climbing-rated carabiners	\$43.78	\$31.82
Phone dry bags + throw bags	\$0.00	\$61.18
Ontario outdoors cards x4	\$27.54	\$28.48
Fishing licenses x4	\$267.43	\$174.48
Shuttle to Mattice Dog Lake	\$1,042.38	\$969.30
Shuttle Cochrane to Mattice	\$410.95	\$381.94
Canoe rental	\$2,045.83	\$2,159
Waterproof map cases	\$0	\$14.32
Food cost to-date (5/11)	\$1,334.23	\$1,319.38
OE Rentals	\$462	\$444.70
Missinaibi Provincial Park Permits	\$654.04	\$622.20
Travel food	\$420	\$516.03
Gas	\$197.90	\$316.31
TOTAL	10230.56 **\$10,000 received from grant**	\$9,996.66

Food and Rationing

General Daily Meal Outline:

****For a more detailed menu, see our food document in our grant application- this is just an outline****

Breakfast: Oats, chocolate chips, brown sugar, honey, granola

Lunch 1: PB + J + tortilla

Lunch 2: Summer sausage + cheese + sauces

Lunch 3: Chicken Packet + cheese + sauces

Dinner 1: Dehydrated bolognese + spam + instant mashed potatoes

Dinner 2: Dehydrated Chicken pesto pasta

Dinner 3: Dehydrated beef chilli + summer sausage

Dinner 4: Ramen bombs

Dinner 5: Annie's mac and cheese + spam

Dinner 6: Dehydrated chicken casserole + instant mashed potatoes

Dinner 7: Dehydrated lentil stew + instant mashed potatoes

Snacks:

- Dot's pretzels
- Trail mix
- 2x protein bars per day
- Dried mango
- Goldfish
- Candy bars

- Peanut butter pretzels
- Oreos

Meal takeaways: The amount of food that we brought was certainly enough (maybe even too much). Our most major flaws for food were lack of variety in breakfast (oats every morning), and a sugar-heavy diet for lunch. Other than that, we were quite happy with what we did for food. All of the dehydrated meals were prepared months in advance, and everything else was bought in bulk. We were well fed yet still relatively light.

Equipment: Reference our full equipment list for a detailed overview of our gear. As with any trip, there were safety things that we brought that we thankfully didn't have to use, such as bear spray, throw bags, first aid kit and tow tethers. Overall, there wasn't really anything that we didn't have and wanted, though there were a few things that we had and didn't use. Things that we brought and didn't use were mostly minor- bleach tablets for dishwashing, neoprene gloves for paddling, rope for lining boats down rapids. Our gear systems overall worked quite well- we had two large dry bags for food, and we each had a personal large and small dry bag. All of these would go in the four Duluth packs that we rented when we were portaging, and this worked out nicely. The one thing we might have wanted was a system to attach paddles, PFDs and the fishing rod to the boats when portaging. These had to be carried in hand instead and were somewhat annoying. Additionally, organizing food dry bags would have been nice- everything was kind of a jumble in these dry bags and it was often hard to find things. Smaller stuff sacks or packing pods could have solved this issue. Lastly, extra padding on yokes for portaging boats (and maybe tump straps) may have been helpful. Other than this, our gear systems were nailed down by day 2 and worked for the whole trip.

Travel logistics

We had zero issues with travel. We all flew into Minneapolis and drove up to our put-in where we met our outfitter. It's important to note that our put-in changed pre-trip (communicated to Kate beforehand) due to washed-out gravel roads. This didn't affect anything other than our location. Our outfitter dropped off our canoes at our put-in, along with paddles and bailing buckets, and took our car back to their location in Mattice (halfway down the river). Halfway through our trip in Mattice, we met them on the river to resupply (the Missinaibi runs right through Mattice). They dropped off our pre-packed resupply boxes and we were on our way. At the end of the river in the town of Moosonee, Ontario, we got on a train called the Polar Bear Express, which took us down to Cochrane, Ontario, where our outfitter dropped off our car and picked up their canoes. Importantly, canoes required their own ticket to be loaded onto the train.

We met people who outfitted themselves and ran their own shuttles with two cars. Although this was probably slightly cheaper, it also probably added three days to their trip due to long driving

times. In our opinion, paying for an outfitter and shuttles is definitely worth it. It's also possible to take a train from Toronto up to the put-in, but this would be longer and more expensive. Our group and most other people agree that the way we did it is generally the way to go.

Permitting

Permitting is quite simple on the Missinaibi. Permits are required through Ontario Parks & Wildlife for the duration of the river. Though expensive (~\$600 USD), it's quite simple to book. We also elected to get fishing licenses, which were similarly simple and decently cheap. Everyone who wants to have a fishing/hunting license also needs an Ontario Outdoors Card (essentially just an ID with a number), which importantly must be done well in advance, as they require time to be mailed to the US.

Leadership/Group Dynamics

Our group had basically zero issues with this. Every decision was a group decision, and every voice was listened to during discussions. We always aired on the side of caution. We also often deferred to James who had the most extensive whitewater experience, but everyone was listened to. We had a rule that if anyone was uncomfortable with a rapid, we wouldn't run it.

Safety

Risk was successfully managed on-trip, as we had zero major incidents. The biggest hazard by far on the river are the rapids- we ran 63 named rapids, all CI and CII. There are also significant un-runable rapids on this river, which if not portaged around can be deadly. We took extreme care with navigation, as this is the most important thing you can do to stay safe and not miss important portages. We didn't run any CIII rapids, and often pulled off before we needed to before major portages (i.e., Thunderhouse Falls). We were *very* cautious, and as a result we never flipped a boat or even swamped once.

We generally didn't have any unexpected risks, but often overlooked ones include portages (steep/unmaintained trails), bugs, ticks, drinking water (FILTER! someone we knew on the river got giardia), kitchen accidents, cold water, wind, and weather. A few important things we did to stay safe from these were setting up the bug shelter, using bug spray and headnets, filtering all of our water, layering properly, getting weather forecasts via satellite, and wearing proper shoes when portaging.

When properly prepared, the Missinaibi is a fun river to navigate. However, carelessness and unpreparedness is dangerous in this remote of a location. We caution future groups against "river arrogance", risky decisions, and unpreparedness.

Route Notes

The most major unexpected things about this river were the rapid descriptions. A prepared paddler will find themselves purchasing *Missinaibi: Journey to the Northern Sky*, a guidebook by Hap Wilson. This is a fantastic guidebook, and MUCH more detailed than the related Chrismar Adventure Maps (better for navigation, worse for rapids). HOWEVER, Hap did the river in the 90's, and as such, many of the rapids are not the same. Many of his lines to run rapids were *certainly* not the best line- the biggest takeaway was to take his rapid descriptions with a grain of salt. He also has several campsites marked on his guide that do not exist- make sure to cross reference landmarks, campsites and rapids with the Chrismar maps. Nonetheless, the book was superbly helpful.

A specific but important note is that the portage around Thunderhouse Falls, the most major un-runnable feature on the river, is *unmarked*. There is a sign 500 meters before the portage, yet the actual portage trail itself is unmarked. A ride down this waterfall would be fatal- make sure to consult navigation and pull off *before* you need to.

Many of the portages were marked on the upper half of the river, but very few were on the lower half- use caution here as well. Additionally, below Bell's Bay, the river begins to be affected by tides. Gravel bar campsites that appear lovely during low tide may be underwater during high tides.

Lastly, the lower Missinaibi is frequently affected by mudslides and landslides. Never camp under a landslide! There were multiple marked campsites that had been partially or totally destroyed by a mudslide.

Daily Log

****See our trip itinerary in our proposal for a more detailed trip log****

Day 1 (June 2): Dog Lake to Crooked Lake

No rapids, 1 portage

Day 2 (June 3): Crooked Lake to Barclay Bay

No rapids, 1 portage

Day 3 (June 4): Barclay Bay to Long Rapids

Quittagene Rapids (CII); portaged, Cedar Rapids (CI), Long Rapids (CI)

Day 4 (June 5): Long Rapids to Wavy Rapids

Sun Rapids (CII); portaged, Barrel Rapids (CII), Swamp Rapids (CII), numerous unnamed CIs

Day 5 (June 6): Wavy Rapids to Split Rock Falls

Greenhill Rapids (CIII); portaged, Calf Rapids (CII), St. Peter Rapids (CII); portaged, Split Rock Falls (unrunnable); portaged

Day 6 (June 7): Split Rock Falls to Thunder Falls

Unnamed CI, Thunder Falls (unrunnable); portaged

Day 7 (June 8): Thunder Falls to Two Portage Falls

Thunder Rapids (CII), two unnamed CIs, Camp 95 Rapids (CI), Two Portage Falls (unrunnable); portaged

Day 8 (June 9): Two Portage Falls to unnamed CII Rapids

Pond Falls (unrunnable); portaged, Devil's Cap Falls (unrunnable); portaged, Devil's Shoepack Rapids (CII), unnamed CI, unnamed CII; portaged

Day 9 (June 10): unnamed CII Rapids to Big Beaver Rapids

Z-Drag Rapids (CII), Albany Rapids (CII), Big Beaver Rapids (CIV); portaged

Day 10 (June 11): Big Beaver Rapids to Glassy Falls

Little Beaver Rapids (CII), Sharp Rock Rapids (CIV); portaged, Glassy Falls (unrunnable); portaged

Day 11 (June 12): Glassy Falls to outside Mattice

No rapids, no portages

Day 12 (June 13): outside Mattice to Kettle Falls

Rock Island Rapids (CIII); portaged, unnamed CI, Beam Rapids (CII), Kettle Falls (unrunnable), portaged

Day 13 (June 14): Kettle Falls to Thunderhouse Falls

Numerous unnamed CIs, Thunderhouse Falls (unrunnable); portaged

Day 14 (June 15): Thunderhouse Falls rest day

No paddling!

Day 15 (June 16): Thunderhouse Falls to Bell's Bay

Thunderhouse Rapids (CI), Stone Rapids (CIV); portaged, unnamed CI, Hell's Gate Canyon (unrunnable); portaged, numerous unnamed CIs and CIIIs until Bell's Bay

Day 16 (June 17): Bell's Bay to unnamed island

Endless flatwater! Unnamed CI, no portaging

Day 17 (June 18): Unnamed island to gravel bar near Alice Island

Endless flatwater! Unnamed CIs, no portaging

Day 18 (June 19): Gravel bar near Alice Island to Moose River confluence

Endless flatwater! Deception Rapids (CII), no portaging

Day 19 (June 20): Moose River confluence to Wikikanishi Island

Endless flatwater! No rapids, no portaging

Day 20 (June 21): Wikikanishi Island to outside Moosonee

Endless flatwater! Kwetobohigan Rapids (CII-III), no portaging

Day 21 (June 22): outside Moosonee to Moosonee, Ontario

Flatwater, but with tides. No rapids, no portaging.

Photos











