

The Bowron Canoe Circuit

The Bowron Canoe Circuit is a 70 mile route of lakes and rivers with portages between. The first and longest portage being about a mile and a half with elevation gain of around 140 feet. The second portage is a mile and a half with elevation gain of 100 feet. If you weren't careful with the weight of your gear you could be carrying heavy packs.



To do this, we used canoe carts strapped to bottom of the boat and rolled the canoes along the trail. Park service weights the gear to be carried and tags those items as *in the boat* with a limit of 60 pounds during portage, the rest is on your back or you make multiple trips. Food caches are provided at each portage and camp site on the circuit. I carry right at 120 pounds in the canoe, so during portage I carry the rest in my pack.



This image was taken on a different trip with the boat fully loaded.

I make rip-stop nylon skirts to cover the ends leaving the middle open for paddler. All my gear fits under the skirts and below the gunwales. Except for the wheels and camp chair which ride bungeed on top of the skirts. The skirts help to minimize the amount of rain that gets in and provide a small amount of protection for your legs.

Camp Chair??

I thought you traveled light?

Well, the Bowron Circuit has nothing but firewood tree rounds that the rangers leave in the wood lots. I could have made a fortune selling camp chairs on the circuit. You can't imagine how good a chair feels after a day in the boat. One group pooled all their money to see if they had enough money to buy our chairs. We barely escaped with gear intact! We were referred to as "the guys in wood boats with chairs".

Our trips have all been in the fall and Moose are beginning their Rut and can become aggressive if they decide you are in **their** site. Moose, this time of year, are more dangerous than bears. The bears in the area are usually small black bears and have never posed a problem to us. Close encounter with bears once along the shore and a couple times on the dirt road on the way to the circuit and ran into a bear on the road at night in the rain. The bear was dazed by the glancing blow from my plastic fender flair and wandered away into the forest leaving a bit of black hair behind.



One of our trips to the Bowron we were confronted by a moose at the end of a portage trail. We just wanted to get into the water and continue our trip but the moose wanted to cross the trail to get to the water grasses on the other side. Which meant he would walk right through our boats. My little Moc 14 wouldn't stand up to a 1000 lb. moose hoof. When another party arrived the moose ran back into the woods and went around us to get to his intended spot along the lake shore.



Whew! That was close!

One other incident with moose occurred while traveling the glacial Cariboo River between lakes. Glacial sediment causes the river to silt-up and become milky in that you can't see anything below the surface only the effect of what is below. Upon rounding a curve a moose was standing less than 100 feet away, in the river, on the side I was traveling. Drifting farther around the curve and trying to move sideways to avoid going through the moose's legs, when I realized the mama moose was on the bank and this was her calf!! She was watching me from about two leaps away as I tried to become a bit of river debris in hope of sneaking by unscathed.

My intended path was along that bank where it was deepest which would put me between mother and child. I was in that position because I was avoiding a sweeper I had observed in my intended path around the curve. The current, as recorded by GPS, was running around 4 mph so I am pretty much just steering the boat down river, trying to anticipate what's coming next. In conditions like this you need a boat that will respond when quick action is required. The boat behind me remarked how effortless I made it look to zig zag back and forth across the river

avoiding hazards. The boat was easy to control when it mattered. Loaded to near capacity it feels stable and handles river current quite well.

Every couple years I build a Moccasin 14 and take it on the trips I mention here. Each boat has a little different rocker, and/or longitudinal curve of the sides and bottom, none, except my Moccasin 12 had a keel.

I tend to favor a boat with less rocker and a more rounded bottom. You lose some initial stability but it doesn't matter once the boat is loaded.

Personal preference I guess.



Fly fishing upstream Murtle River

This next is a pictorial record of our passage through the CHUTE at the end of Isaac Lake. So named because the outlet is narrow with many rocks. Once you start down the chute you are committed. I stopped at the top of the flow where the water is only six or eight inches but moving fast and chose my way through the passage. There is a narrow path of about 3 feet through the flow avoiding the rocks that rise above your boat as you flash past. There is no correcting if you judged wrong. The danger is the waves created by the two rocks on either side of your path. If your timing is off you will get a boat full of water, it will just come in over the side. My first trip through the chute filled my boat in the blink of an eye. I made it to shore and bailed it out. Wet butt, wet pants, nothing more.



Holding at the top of the chute, my paddle is slowing progress so I can find my path through.



No turning back now



Almost through, no water in boat.



That was exciting!

Continued downstream until we had to portage around a waterfall. We reentered the river a couple hundred yards later encountering a group of paddlers making their way down river.



Groups tend to travel slower so we catch up to them. This group had started two days before us.



Reentering the Isaac River after the waterfall

Once again we had to portage around a logjam and arrived at the put-in to McLeary Lake.



Preparing the boats to launch into McLeary Lake.

McLeary Lake empties into the glacial Cariboo River and continues for three and a quarter miles before emptying into Lanezi then Sandy Lake.

Continuing from Sandy Lake onto the Cariboo River until it flows left over another waterfall as we turn right and portage into Babcock Lake then Spectacle Lake and finally to Bowron Lake where our trip began 7 days ago.