

MUSQUODOBOIT RIVER CANOE RUN

- by Bernie McKenna

Date: Saturday, Aug. 2nd 2025

Place: Musquodoboit River

Weather: Beautiful, sunny, 23C, slight breeze

Leader: Bernie McKenna

Participants: 9



This outing was the eventual replacement for the cancelled Cole Harbour Marsh trip which had been slated for mid-July. With the woods ban on (a good call) and the extreme low water conditions, selecting a new site was not easy, options were thin, and it made the selecting a bit of a chore. On initially checking the Musquodoboit at Elderbank, I was not encouraged with the very low water level and the number of normally hidden rocks that were now showing. However, with some timely advice from Dusan Soudek of the Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia Club, it proved an excellent location. He suggested we launch just above Crawford Bridge on Hwy 357 and paddle upstream about 6 to 7 km to the River Oaks Golf Club, and then reverse direction

and return to our launch site. This thinking had two advantages: one, it removed the need to leave vehicles to shuttle drivers back to the launch site, and two, it made for a good depth of paddling water the whole way.



The plan was for everyone to meet at the Tim Horton's parking lot in Musquodoboit Harbour at 10:00 am and travel as a group up Hwy 357 to the bridge. As often with plans, even the best of plans: there was a glitch: in that we didn't have confirmation that another five people were coming, so consequently when the 4 expected people arrived, we figured we had everyone. After we topped up on coffee, and had introductions all around, we set out on Hwy 357 to Crawford Bridge. The launch site had good parking and other than the muddy shore, it made for decent launching. The river was wide, slow, and despite the low water had plenty of depth the whole way. Thanks again, Dusan! It was more like a stillwater than a flowing river. A good part of the way up we had enough width for the one canoe and two kayaks to travel abreast, and this made for ease of conversation and enjoyable paddling. The entire way we marvelled at the beauty of the day, the river, the bird life and the vegetation lining both shores. This being the middle of the day we saw no animals, other than birds; however, we gave up counting the number of active and abandoned beaver bank dens. Yet their workings were very evident everywhere with cuttings, chew sticks, feeding stations, and trails a constant sight. There was no

need for dams here, the depth and width of the river made food abundantly available and close at hand all year. Most likely if we had gone up some of the small brooks and trickles that flowed into the river, we'd have found the familiar dams and houses. My paddle is 5'5" long and I could not touch bottom in mid-stream, and this depth was consistent almost to the shore.

One interesting find from days past were three abutments from a long-ago washed-out, bridge. While the bridge deck itself was gone, the abutments were standing proud and weathering the ravages of time, with one standing on each shore and one in mid-stream. Judging by the narrow dimensions of the abutments I suspect this bridge had seen mostly horse-drawn traffic in its day. The only wildlife we saw or heard were the following birds: Blue Jays, Belted Kingfishers, Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, Grackles, Gold Finches, Yellow Warblers, a Northern Harrier (Marsh Hawk), a Bald Eagle passing over, and Red-eyed Vireos. Of them all, the vireos were the most plentiful, but I confess it was Merlin that identified most of these. Merlin has much better ears than I do!

Both sides of the river were lined with trees the entire way, most of the hardwoods were Red Oaks, Red Maples, White Birch and countless alders, the latter often had stumps where the beavers had taken a trunk or two. A number of the birch stood out for both their height and trunk size, days past they may have made for canoe work. The variety of softwoods was a bit limited too: cedars, White Pine, White Spruce, and some Balsam Fir made up the most of them. Most standing snags, especially the softwoods, were draped in Old Man's Beard Lichens, often for up to 15 feet in height. On the lesser plant side there were several species of ferns, Pickerel Weed, waterlilies, and any number of grasses. The Pickerel Weed which would rather have wet roots than dry, was stranded a foot or more above the water level, yet was in full bloom and appeared to be doing fine. The waterlilies were content to anchor themselves in the slower flowing back eddies along the shore. There were two particular plants which we found by sheer accident when we stopped for a snack, a rest and a swim for two of us. As we were getting ready to launch again, we saw Poison Ivy and another plant no one knew. With the use of the SEEK app it was identified as American Groundnut, a native legume; it is botanically identical to the peanut, (*Arachis hypogaea*). While one of our members is very allergic to Poison Ivy, we were lucky and none of us suffered any adverse effects from it.



Nearing our destination and turn-around point, we met up with the previously mentioned five members who had missed us at Tim's and had gone further up river past River Oaks Golf Club to launch. They then travelled down stream and waited for us just below the golf club. After discussing their options, they decided to come down river with us to where we had left our vehicles, instead of going back upstream to their vehicles. The way down made for relaxed paddling and an opportunity to see the different water levels of the river, everything from

spring freshets, normal summer levels, to today's very low water levels, were evidenced by the different colourations showing on the large shoreline rocks we passed. I always find it amazing how different a river can look when going in the opposite direction than you just travelled.

Arriving back at our starting point, now with the full crew of nine people, and seven craft instead of the original three, it took a bit of effort to get all seven and our gear off of the water and up the bank. While this was happening, three people were driven back up river to their vehicles. Once they had returned, the last loading was done, good-byes were said, and it was time to head home. We had about as perfect a day as one could ask for on the Musquodoboit, all due to the weather, the river, the company, and some very timely advice.