

Summer 2019 Canoe

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Vermont Sections:

- Nulhegan + Connecticut Rivers
- Quebec

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Day 50, Aug 10

22 mi, ■ Belknap Campsite

Fern and I left Hunter's Hollow at 6am to drive to the confluence of The Nulhegan and Connecticut Rivers. We put in our canoe, convinced Lyra the dog to jump aboard too, and set off down the Connecticut River just as the first raindrops began to fall. The day cycled through a fast alternation of cold rain and hot sun, and we talked for hours about our summers. The 20 miles on the Connecticut river sped by as we wound our way through New England farmland, spotting eagles, geese, mergansers, and a green heron along the way. The last two miles paddling upstream

on the ~~Andros~~ Ammonoosuc were harder than I expected, with sections of current that were too strong for us to paddle up. I jumped out and ~~paddled~~ pulled the canoe along by hand in those sections, so that Fern didn't have to risk her recently sprained ankle on the slippery underwater rocks. We finally reached the Normandeau campsite (where my last leg of the trip ended) and loaded up the canoe on her car. We camped back at the confluence where we'd started, worn out from a long day, but not too tired to make some offerings and say some prayers to the burbling waters of the Nulhegan.

Day 51, Aug 11

18 mi, Nulhegan/Connecticut Confluence
In the morning Fern drove me and

the canoe to the headwaters of the Nulhegan river. We found a wild blueberry patch that was bursting with delicious berries, and picked a bunch to eat with our breakfast of leftover chili rice. Then Fern and Lyra headed home, and I launched ~~the~~ solo for my run down the Nulhegan. This weekend we've been paddling an ~~an~~ old 14 foot Old Town roydex canoe that I nabbed off craigslist for an extremely low price last week, and I've been excited to see how it would handle solo.

The top of the Nulhegan is a magical labyrinth of alder swamp, bursting with wildflowers and fresh beaver sign. The vegetation grows so close ~~that it~~ to the narrow channel that often the alder branches were touching the sides of my canoe on both sides at once! There seemed to be a Great Blue Heron around

every bend. The recent rains had raised the water level so that sometimes I had to get out of the canoe to haul it over beaver dams, but other times I could just accelerate to "ramming speed" and slide right over the top! So fun.

After a while the river widened out, and then dropped into some very rocky Class III rapids. These Vermont river rapids are so much steeper than the rivers in Maine! At one point I got stuck, jumped in the river to free the canoe, then tipped it over jumping back in! Well, lessons learned - this new canoe has minimal secondary stability, so I can't go around treating it like the sweet solo canoe I borrowed for the Allagash.

I portaged around a dangerous class IV chute. Some fool moved the portage thwart back so the canoe doesn't balance well for a

sole carry, so I hung my daypack from the stern to balance it out.

This worked okay, but as I was putting the boat down, the ~~thwart~~ Thwart brake! Well, it was probably a 40-year-old thwart, so there you go. I had no choice but to paddle on without one, but the canoe still seemed pretty stable.

With no thwart and no wheels, I decided to "line" the next section of class III + IV rapids, about one mile long. I hopped from boulder to boulder, guiding the canoe through the rapids with the bow and stern lines. It was fun for a while, but slow going, and I began to feel pretty tired. About halfway through, I looked up, and my heart skipped a beat: there in the rushing water lay a dead deer. "Oh, you beauty!" I blurted out, amazed to see her graceful body

laid out before me. I pulled over my canoe, got out my offering herbs, and sang a death song over her. Her hind hip had been smashed, indicating a collision with a car on the nearby road. She'd clearly been dead for at least a few days, but her body was "refridgerated" in the rushing water and showed no signs of spoilage.

I stood there for a few minutes, trying to figure out how to help and listening for prompts from her spirit. If I were on a longer leg of the trip I would have harvested some meat, but I was heading home in a few hours and didn't have time for extended butchering or a way to keep the meat cool. After a minute an answer clicked into my head: I dragged her to the side of the river and up onto a sandy bank, and slit open her belly: a feast for the coyotes and crows. I got the sense she did not want her flesh

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to go to waste. It felt right. When you walk in the world as a death priestess, duty calls at the most unexpected times. I thanked her for pulling me into a deeper spirit-consciousness and letting me serve her passing, then washed my knife in the river and continued on my way.

I eventually made my way past the rapids and was able to paddle the last few miles with relative ease. I loaded my thwartless canoe on the car and headed home. Next up: Quebec!

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