

La Vase Portage : Mattawa River to French River, North Bay, Ontario

Introduction

This 10 km route traverses the height of land between the Ottawa Valley watershed and the Great Lakes basin. It once was a key link in Canada's fur trade. More specifically, it is near North Bay, Ontario, and it connects Trout Lake, headwaters of the Mattawa river, to Lake Nipissing, headwaters of the French river, that runs down to Georgian Bay on Lake Huron. This route implies some portages. It had a miserable reputation (La Vase refers to muddy terrain) then, and was even considered as being the worst portage on the whole route from Montreal to Thunder Bay, but today it's not bad at all... as long as you know the way !!!

Topographic Maps (1 : 50000)

31L/07 Mattawa
31L/06 North Bay
31L/03 Powassan

Route Description

1) N 46.30224°, W 79.38466°

Coming from the Trout Lake, Put-in beside Highway 17, at the historical plaque and parking lot beside Brandy Lake. Paddle to the lake's south end and start portaging at the base of two large spruce trees. Carry for 484m to pond.

2) N 46.2978°, W 79.38778°

There, you may paddle across or, at low water, carry for 665m through the woods and over a rocky ridge to join the next portage trail. Both GPS tracks (water as well as land) are indicated on the map.

3) N 46.29542°, W 79.38849°

Portage 620m to the long lake. About 2/3 along, you will cross a field that hides a buried pipeline.

4) N 46.29098°, W 79.39152°

The portage ends at a muddy creek. At high water, put in there and paddle to beaver dam which spans the lake there and lift/slide over on left side. At low water, carry over creek and over low hill to put in below beaver dam. Paddle the length of the swamp/lake for 1 km.

5) N 46.28201°, W 79.38711°

About 30m from its end, take out on right shore and enter the forest for the 1800m portage to the LaVase river. The historic portage was located on the east side of the creek but was obliterated in the early 1970's. A full-scale quarry operation sits directly on the trail today. Today, the route goes through about 300m of alder bushes before a vague trail reappears. Do not attempt to re-enter the creek at the road as the area is off-limits due to federal restrictions around the chemical plant's perimeter

6) N 46.27709°, W 79.38523°

About 700m into the portage, it crosses a quarry road at right angle, then heads SW, goes across a beaver pond/dam, rises up over a granite hill and drops down towards the railway line. In most of this section, the trail is hard to make out, and the GPS will come in handy.

7) N 46.27108°, W 79.38625°

Cross railway tracks (extreme caution, the rail line is in heavy use. Let your partner look out for trains while you carry the canoe across the tracks) and launch on the LaVase River. You are now on a small lake beside the Fabrene Plant (labeled "Pumping Station" on the topo map), just above the railway bridge.

8) N 46.26832°, W 79.39284 °

Continue underneath railway bridge and two highway bridges before coming to a sharp bend to the left. This was the start of the third historic portage, now hidden beneath a subdivision and driving range. Modern travelers should keep to the river and run (high water), wade or portage the two or three shallow swifts leading to Lakeshore Drive.

9) N 46.26312°, W 79.39522 °

There, take out before the bridge on the left side at a small parkette and portage 190M across the road, down a steep embankment and along the left side of the rapids to a put in.

10) N 46.26072°, W 79.39553 °

A short distance downstream is a ledge that can be run in high water or lifted over later in the season. Immediately around the corner is another small set of rapids that can be run in high water but will require portaging throughout most of the season. The river now turns lazy, with cottages and homes mostly on the left shore. You nearly made: it's only another 3.5km to Lake Nipissing and the take-out in Champlain Park.

N 5121930 m, 17 621822 m

N 46.24199°, W 79.41986 °

Realisation - Distribution

Description: Erhard Kraus, Nov. 2001

Packaging: Charles Leduc, Dec 2003

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