

Time: Sunday November 11 2012 12:45 - 6:15 pm

Weather: Pr 0 mm; RH 54%; BP 102.4 kPa; SW 45 kmh; cloud/sun, T 17° C

Activity: By river to Moraviantown with Steve & Kee

This is the brief account of a trip by Kee & Steve down the Thames from Newport Forest to Moraviantown. We set out around 2 pm and immediately encountered very strong southwest winds blowing straight up the river into our teeth, so to speak. Paddling was hard and at one point I gasped to Steve, “We might as well be paddling upstream, with all the work we’re doing.” In the image



here you can see how the gusting wind has whipped the water into wavelets. Mares tails overhead foretell a change in the weather back to another low.

There were few birds along the way. At one point an immature Bald Eagle overflew us and on three other occasions, we flushed ducks from the shoreline:

Mallards on one occasion and possible Coots on another. Occasional distant rifle shots punctuated the wind. Deer season is in full swing. We soon came upon two hunters sitting on the bank, their canoe pulled up. We pulled in briefly for a chat.

Our only stop during the trip was a lunch break under the Bothwell Bridge. The bank was steep and treacherously slippery. Then along came the hunters who had decided to haul out at the bridge. Back in the water, we both noticed it right away. “What happened to that wind?” It had turned dead calm and, for the first time, we could actually enjoy the trip, paddling a bit, then drifting, yet still making almost a metre a second. Gradually the sun was sinking lower in the sky. On one side or the other there was always a high bank, reminding me of the unromantic name given to the river by early French explorers: “La Tranche.” Much of the area had been settled in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, mostly by Scottish immigrants. There were no roads, so how did people get around? By river!

We got to the Moraviantown bridge just in time for sundown, a gut-wrenching drag of the canoe up the 50’ rocky abutment, and the welcome sight of Steve’s wife Karen and daughter Desiree, who greeted us with Steve’s van. Later, after loading me up with venison and boiled potatoes, Steve drove me back to Newport Forest where my own van waited patiently under the stars.

Readers Write:

Virginia Abernathy of Vanderbilt University, was reminded of a strange experience after reading about our fungal adventures in the previous issue:

“My most dramatic mushroom experience: I gathered about 10 pounds of inky caps and cooked them in every possible way. I was well-fed on inky caps by the time, next day, that I had my 5 o'clock gin. The effects were terrible. I started tripping. Straight lines were wavy. I laughed at anything. Simply awful.”

A brief consultation with Mycologist Greg Thorn reminded us of the distinction between the Shaggy Mane (*Coprinus comatus*) and the Alcohol Inky (*Coprinopsis atramentaria*), both sometimes referred to as “inky Caps”. This mushroom has been called “Tippler’s Bane”, once used to treat alcoholism. Drinking alcohol after eating it may cause headache, nausea and other symptoms, perhaps including the effects reported by Dr Abernathy. In any case the Shaggy Mane is a choice edible, while the similar Alcohol Inky is also edible, but not with alcohol!

IMAGES:



Two hunters join us under the Bothwell Bridge. They had been sitting on the bank upstream game-spotting. Note the extreme mud in the foreground. Steve helps them pull their boat (powered by an electric motor hooked up to a car battery) out of the water. They carried their boat up to the road, where a friend would pick them up.



Close to sunset we near our goal -- the Moraviantown Bridge. It was exhausting to haul the canoe (an ultralight, already) up the steep abutment to the waiting van driven by Steve's wife, Karen.