

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Fiddlers on the Tobique (Part II)

Dinner over that evening, Mike suggested we head up to Tobique Valley Outfitters, borrow Dave's canoe and take a run up river. Show AJ and I a bit of the area fiddlers and canoes would take on the morrow. Great idea, except Dave's motor wouldn't idle down. Made for a somewhat white knuckle excursion as Mike, who'd known the river well since childhood kept the hammer down as we sailed from one bank to the other around gravel bars and deadwood. Adrenaline was well coursed as we pulled back to the dock.

"Okay Mike. Time to find some fiddle jammin!"

"Know just the place. We passed it on the way in."

This was what I was looking for. Found from bluegrass festivals, great music was located where twos and more had gathered to play. Intimate settings.

Mike introduced all around, we chatted a bit and George Boone, fiddler and guitarist from Nauwigewauk (pronounced 'naw we gee walk'), New Brunswick. Suggested "Temperance" (a tongue and cheek fitting title for the weekend) and with Neil Cameron, Mabel Colpins (who'd taken up fiddling at retirement) and Melissa Colpins they swung into full stroke. Something about being up close to really get that feeling of being swept along with the music. Melissa suggested "Saint Anne" with a slide into "Macavedees", which came off just a bit shaky at the slide but sounded great all the same.

We said thanks all around, promised to look for them on the river and headed back for the farm. Most of the fiddlers were at the big concert in Plaster Rock which we missed. Time to turn in for the big day followed after stopping at the homemade fries trailer for AJ to get her "potato fix".

Morning rolled in drizzle, fog and gloom. Glad to see daylight though. Bed I drew, mattress had worn away, or never was, to springs which were pain cold. Night middle I raided my pack basket, put on all I could, and finally got a few hours muscle stiffing sleep. Minor discrepancy.

With one of Mike's farm breakfasts of Creton (French head cheese), oatmeal, bacon, pancakes, eggs, toast shared with friends and relatives who now occupied the rooms and lawn outside with tents. Susie allowed AJ and I should come with her to Nigteau (6 miles away) where the fiddlers and other watercraft borne spectators would start the four-hour drift and disparate concert down river to finish up at Riley Brook. Done. Settling into her new "Partridge Seeker", we stopped first to meet Bill Miller and see his canoe shop. There we also met a few of the many guests who'd camped out on his lawn and then on up to the small launch areas at Nigteau. How the some 1400 watercraft would all get launched and vehicles parked still remains a complete logistical mystery to me.

At the “Fiddler’s Launch Area” I struck up a conversation with Jim Dickinson of Detroit, Maine and Barbara Stolt of St. Agatha Desmonts, Ontario. Jim was putting together a float and quickly asked if I’d like to have a spot on the float as pickpoler helping propel and guide the float down river. An offer I elected to pass as I’d been having some real shoulder problems. Talked with Barbara a bit about her fiddling experience when she told me about the fiddling camp/school the following week which itself had come out of the 15 year experience of “Fiddles on the Tobique”. The camp was now attracting fiddlers from all over the world both as students and instructors. Susan was attending this year as a student. She also had taken up the fiddle upon retirement five years previous.

Gloom and drizzle was beginning to retire back at the farm as we packed lunch and libation in coolers and picked our way through the traffic and human jams back up to Tobique Valley Lodge and a seat in the “viewing area”. Dave was setting up to barbecue burgers and dogs and icing down cases of great tasting Canadian beer. Amongst all the spectators and hubbub, Susie proceeded to catch and release several trout to great amusement and applause with sun finally breaking free.

Sometime around 3:30 the first canoes and fiddles began to appear. River was full. At times you could hop from one to another and hardly wet a foot. Fiddles playing, cloggers dancing, paddlers cheering and waving. Couple of canoes flipped, few swimmers floating alongside. Canoes by the hundreds. L.L. Beans a favorite.

Looking upriver, one mass of watercraft and paddlers. Music at this point had become a sidebar. One great party. Canoes still going by in strength after 5 o’clock as we worked back to the farm.

Canadian RCMP had now put up roadblocks for crowd control but we were soon back at the farm and I went out to the “Outback” for dry shoes and shirt. On the way back “Nana”, Susie’s spry 84-year-old mother was just leaving her cabin so we walked to the front porch together. There was a young couple, baby, and babysitter with the wife playing a fiddle. I mused “how thoughtful”, Susie had lined up a friend to play for cocktail hour. Come to find out the Mounties had set up a roadblock just after the farm. They’d spotted it, casually driven into the driveway, gotten out of the car with the fiddle, walked up to the porch and introduced themselves. With all their canoe gear, etc. They’d had no room for an infant seat and were scared of being picked up. Talk about quick thinking. We sure enjoyed about an hour of the mother’s fiddling till the Mounties moved the roadblock and someone in a pickemup truck ran interference as they cleared the yard, waving all the way. Susie in the meantime had prepared footbaths for anyone interested in a relaxing moment as I nodded off for a 15 minute nap, libation in hand, feet in bath.

That evening we took in an organized jam/concert/dance at the town hall and a few dooryard and campfire get-togethers. By 11 or 12 we’d had our limit. The Outback’s sleepers looked inviting.

The Canadians sure know how to party. Some of the most hospitable folks we’ve ever met.

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Now if this red tide gives up and the rain slacks off, I'm going to get a bucket of mussels with the visiting grandbabies and do up a mussel feed.

One of the grandbabies (now 7 and 10) favorite "Grump's" recipes, one we have to build whenever they're visiting, is a haddock recipe we used to serve at "The Moorings" restaurant during work the way through college years. Always a favorite. We sold plates of it. Obfuscation was in order, however, when anyone asked about the sauce. Combine "Miracle Whip" and mayonnaise equally, some chopped chives or spring onions and some grated mild cheddar cheese (new wrinkle from grandbabies). Often I mix in some fresh crabmeat. Butter a broiling pan, smear mixture over the haddock filets in the pan. Dot with a bit of butter and broil until fork tender. Make sure you fix plenty!

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur