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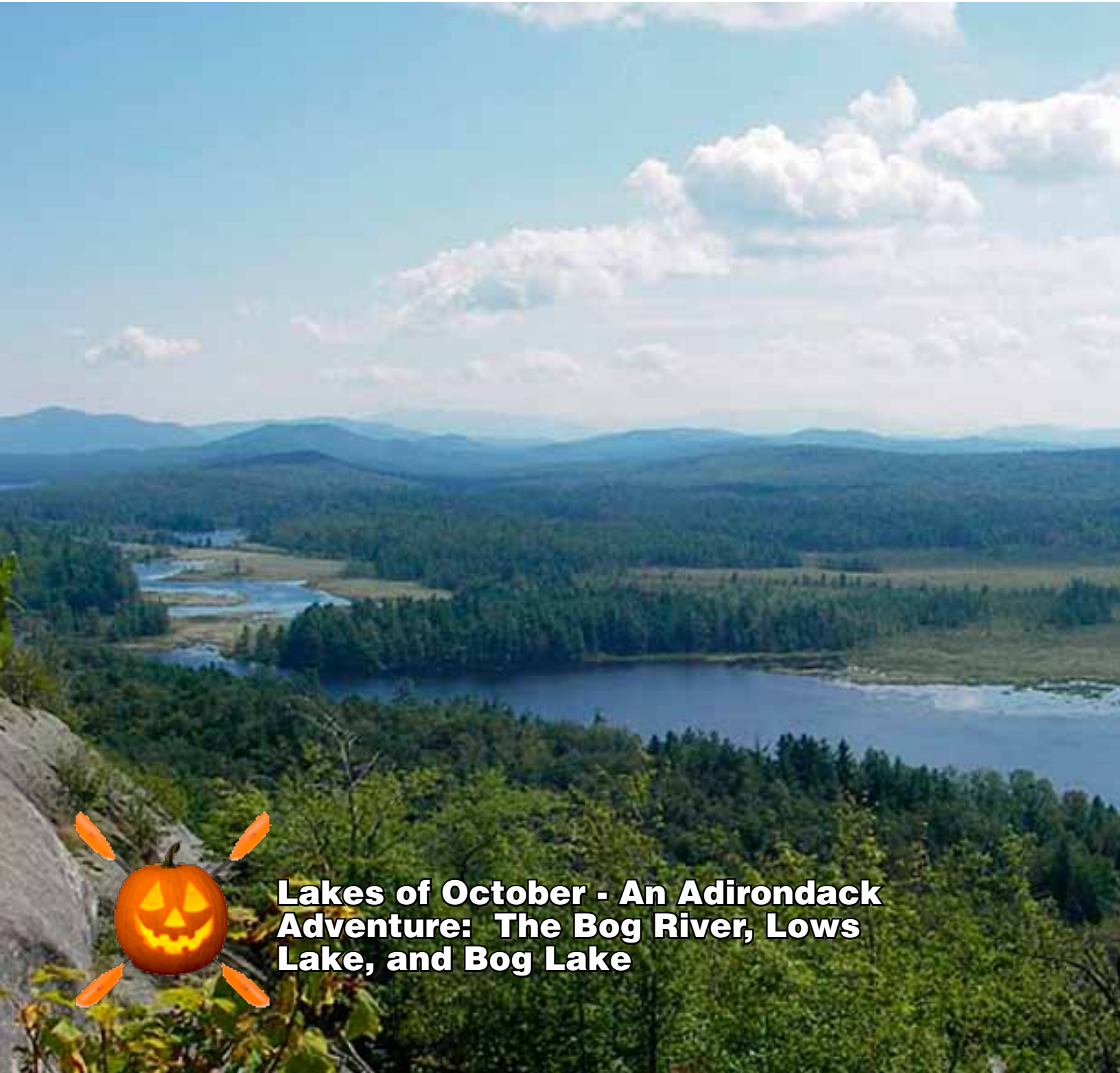
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**Lakes of October - An Adirondack
Adventure: The Bog River, Lows
Lake, and Bog Lake**

Lakes of October: An Adirondack Adventure

The Bog River, Lows Lake, and Bog Lake

Story by Ralph Heimlich



Lunch Stop on Bog Lake. Photo by Jim Allen.

A group of us decided to abandon the steamy Chesapeake Bay in August and head for the cooler climes of the Adirondacks. Several had day paddled this area on previous Loons of the Adirondack's trips, so we decided to head for the Bog River Flow and Lows Lake, in the north central part of the Park.

We convened at the NY Department of Natural Resources' Eaton Lake Campground for our first night because of the 8-10 hour drive from the Washington metro area (not a good idea to try and drive and paddle into the back country on the same day). Dave Isbell, Dick Rock and I had driven up in the big white truck with two canoes and large kayak on top on Saturday, arriving about 4:30 PM after a pleas-

ant, low-pressure drive up I-83, I-81, I-88, and NY 8 through Utica to NY 28 and NY 30 (487 miles, 8 hours 49 minutes driving time).

We found Jim Allen and Al Larsen already there and set up, and quickly set up our own camps. One of the interesting (daunting) things about the Lake Eaton Campground is its active recycling program, operated out of a small garage where garbage, cans, bottles, and plastic are separated and crushed for reuse. The daunting part is the two-strand electric "girdle" around the entire building necessitated because a hungry bear tore off the garage door the year before. You can bet we took our trash down right after dinner! Walking around camp, however, many "city" camp-

ers with ice chests and frying bacon seemed destined for an ursine visit at some time.

Sunday morning we packed up and pulled out of Lake Eaton for the back country, after first arranging for a campsite for that Friday when we would come out of the



Swimming Loon. Photo by Jim Allen.



Al, Dick, Dave, and Jim loading up at Lows Lower Dam. Photo by Ralph Heimlich.

woods again (Do this in advance because the park can't take your reservation on site, only through the website or by phone to its contractor). We drove north on NY 30 nearly to Tupper Lake, then turned left on 421 to Horseshoe Lake and the put-in at Lows Lower Dam, about a mile above the Bog River Falls at the point where the Bog enters Tupper Lake. This parking area is very small, and the area is very popular, so we started encountering cars a half-mile down the road to the dam. However, going in on Sunday was a good choice. We got parking right at the end of the road next to the dam, as people shy of the rainy forecast headed

home from the weekend early. We had a variety of boats on the trip, mixing kayaks and canoes, Greenland and Euro paddles for the kayaks, and canoe paddles and kayak paddles on the canoes. After about a half hour of unloading boats and gear and squeezing everything in, and signing out at the backcountry register, we were paddling up the Bog River from the dam, through a narrow, heavily wooded and rocky gap.

The Bog River Flow is a beautiful Adirondack river whose flow is slowed down considerably because of the dam, which raises the water level and floods out the former gorge. Paul Jamieson, the dean of Ad-

irondack guide book authors, writes of the Bog River: "All of them [old-time Adirondack guides] agree that going up the Bog, with its many tough carries, its crooks and turns, was a test of physical stamina. Poet and N.Y. State Librarian Alfred B. Street's guide, Harvey Moody, called it one of 'the confoundest crookedest consarns in the woods.' More, once at the headwaters, it became a test of spiritual fortitude. Street, Hammond, Headley, and Wallace could not find language strong enough to express their revulsion at the 'dismal scenery' around Mud Lake [as it was then called]. It was 'the gloomiest sheet the wilderness contains' where 'each member of the insect tribe holds high carnival.' The vast bottomland was of 'indescribable loneliness' and 'weighed on the spirit.' Once having been there, you never want to go back, says Hammond". (Paul Jamieson, *Adirondack Canoe Waters, North Flow*, 2nd Edition, ADK, 1981). A.A. Low built the lower and upper dams in the 1890's to generate electricity and facilitate running logs out of the backcountry, but the transformation of the Bog River Flow and Mud Lake into Lows and Bog Lake is all to the plus side for recreationists today.

Wildlife abounds. We saw three eagles on the way in, including what was probably an immature with two parents, and a mature eagle setting on a fish on the river bank. Wildflowers abounded at this season, especially many species of aster, blue or purple gentian, carnivorous pitcher plants, and white puffs of bog flowers. A pair of up-turned roots from fallen trees looked like giant wagon wheels, and resembled the rustic furniture made by local artisans. We passed about six parties of canoeists heading out, and gammed about what campsite they used and the merits of each. The loads in their canoes, stacked over the gunwales with ice chests, furniture, etc. was truly impressive.

We passed under the railroad trestle bridge into Hitchens Pond and arrived at Lows Upper Dam, the only real portage on our route. Dave and I paddled up the small creek leading from the spillway and unloaded, while Dick, Jim, and Al opted for the

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Portaging the floating bog. Photo by Dave Isbell.

beach, a slightly farther carry (but they had carts). The Upper Dam was the location of A.A. Low's forest empire, and the location of his fieldstone bunkhouse and other buildings, the foundations of which remain today. Interpretive sign boards showed fish and deer catches of those long ago days, how the buildings looked in their prime, and the sad story of the Great Fire of 1908, which burned A.A. out, leaving him to die nearly penniless four years later. Several loads later, we had all the boats and gear above the dam and prepared to relaunch.

The Bog bends west here and narrows down, skirting a long, sinuous glacial esker laid down 10,000 years ago when the last great ice sheet melted north. This area has long had a floating bog, that wanders around the flow, but usually admits canoeists with a narrow channel to one side. Alas, strong winds had fractured the bog and jammed it, like a cork into the neck of the Bog River's bottle. We snuck over the 12-foot bog "drag" on the left and snaked around the remains of the channel to open water again.

Several islands formed from the eskers and rocks litter the eastern end of Lows Lake where it enters the Bog River Flow, and we chose one and paddled down it into the wind off the larger lake. Clouds had

gathered and rain threatened, so we were looking for a campsite pronto. Turning left into the lake, we settled on site number 18 at the eastern end, which had been recommended by several outgoing campers and was close at hand. Pulling into the large beach, we found a spacious site and set up our tents (and hammock), and the Noah 16 tarp over a pair of downed logs serving as kitchen, table, and bench. Like many of the sites in this area, site 18 has a privy (just a box seat in the woods, no shelter) but we had to find a place to hang our food bags, and selected a "bear grove" and spent a while heaving lines to get the comestibles up above the bruins' heads. Separating the privy and "bear grove" from camp was a large cutover meadow of blueberry and blackberry bushes—a veritable bear cafeteria. Just after we finished setting up, Ranger Dawn paddled up in a kayak with a shovel and bucket, finishing her rounds of cleaning campsites. We had been introduced to Ranger Dawn from Chip Walsh's 2005 trip report (she seemed surprised to be "famous") and asked her about the bears, which hadn't struck recently. She seemed reassured by our gear (tarp and tents) and when we told her we had hung our food.

Shortly after Ranger Dawn left and we



Breakfast by Ralph. Photo by Dave Isbell.

finished dinner, the rain commenced and poured down with a vengeance for about an hour. Thanks to the tarp, we could sit, digest, and watch the rain come down, but after dusk, the mosquitos drove us to our sleeping bags, as loons cried mournfully in the rainy night.

Monday morning dawned clear, if not very bright. After a quick breakfast, we loaded up for an exploration under cloudy skies. We paddled out toward the west on the lake, passing a large contingent of Boy Scouts paddling to the camp. Dave took us up into a sheltered channel at the far north end of the lake, where we had to carry (empty boats) over a ridge to continue paddling into Grass Pond, on the north side of the Lake. Rain started to gently fall as we finished the carry, but we paddled on, circling into Grass Pond for a view of the starkly steep cliffs of Grass Pond Mountain, rising another 150 meters above the lake. Peregrine falcons nest on those cliffs, and we thought we saw some flying over camp a day later. We passed the carry that follows Chair Rock Creek up to Cranberry Lake, about 3.2 miles. The constant rain let up just as we recircled to the mouth of Grass Pond, so we ducked into (empty) site 29 for late lunch and dried off a little.

We turned right out of Grass Pond and explored the west end of the lake, passing the carry into Big Deer Pond, which continues over to the Oswagatchie River more than six miles away. I stopped to see a through passage behind an island, and then joined the rest as we paddled back to camp under gray skies with the wind in the east and in our teeth.

Rain again in the afternoon, and it was beginning to get on the nerves of this hammock camper. Hammocks are ok to keep the rain off (especially with my bigger tarp over the hammock itself), but just walking around camp and getting into gear gets everything damp or wet after a while. After a long rainy night, Tuesday broke pretty dry, with just the drips off the trees remaining. We breakfasted and set out to explore the rest of the Bog River, and Bog Lake, to the south of Lows Lake. The Bog River was broad after we passed through another floating bog choking the mouth into Lows Lake. Just below a causeway below site 37 (cut off to preclude vehicle traffic on the Sabatis Road), the river was choked with a permanent bog and diverged into left and right channels. We tried the right channel first, but dead ended at a massive beaver dam after about half a mile. Back tracking, we tried the left channel and snaked around meanders through the bog, hauling over a small beaver dam and eventually paddling into Bog Lake. We searched for the entrance to Clear Pond (one of about 1,000 in the Adirondacks by that name), but couldn't find a channel through to it. Jim found a landing for a carry, while the others saw a campsite high above a steep bank. Both paths led to the same campsite on the carry, which winds around to a road and Clear Pond. We lunched at the campsite high on the bluff, enjoying the breeze off the lake and warming temperatures as the sun emerged. After lunch, we continued west on the south shore of Bog Lake, speaking with a pair of fisherman in a rowing skiff they'd trucked in. A loud drone announced yet another landing by a float plane over on Lows Lake, service to a small piece of private inholding within the Wil-



Jim and Dick on the Bog River. Photo by Ralph Heimlich.



Intricate channels offer a contrast to the wide-open lakes. Photo by Ralph Heimlich.

liam C. Whitney Wilderness Area, which

enfolds Lows Lake and the Bog River. After circumnavigating the lake, we paddled back through the Bog River and back out onto Lows Lake as another plane was landing, then taking off. The others made the correct shortcut back to the lake, but I missed the turn and paddled nearly a mile to get back to the lake, around a floating bog. Being alone, with a west wind, I set my downwind triangular sail and took the

lubber's way back to camp. The little 12-foot Pack Canoe wanted to weathercock, so it wasn't all smooth sailing, but I enjoyed the envious stares of other paddlers, having to do with muscle power alone.

Tuesday night was our clearest star night, and having the broad beach beside campsite 18 gave us as much scope for sky-watching as we could have. When the moon (about half) rose, it washed out the best of the star show, but it was impressive for a



In the narrows on the Bog River. Photo by Jim Allen.

while, especially with rafts of loons calling and conversing in the night.

Wednesday morning was a moving day. In the Adirondacks, you don't need to get a permit for a paddle-in campsite unless you spend more than three days or have a party larger than ten persons, so we were set to move to a new campsite back closer to the upper dam. Because it would be a house-keeping day, we slept late and I volunteered to make pancakes. I'd brought a thin aluminum baking sheet, and we built a support of blocky logs so the sheet could be held over two backpacker stoves. The setup worked pretty well and we had several hotcakes each. I also brought a six inch dutch oven Brent gave me and used it several nights for biscuits and for dump cakes (brownie mix and canned fruit). Just enough to know you'd had a treat.

We packed everything up and headed out of site 18 and Lows Lake into the Bog River, following the esker back toward the east. We settled on site 12, a spacious pine-needle carpeted site on the north bank about half way back to the dam. This site also had a privy, way up on the hill, which we referred to as "consulting the old man of the mountain," and "penthouse" rise overlooking the river that Al and Dick moved into. After we set up, everyone took off to explore the other side of the esker by boat, but I stayed around camp and pattered and read.

On Thursday, Al Larsen had to pack up and leave to meet family near Boston, so we went with him out to the Upper Dam. When we got there, we dragged the boats out on the west side into the grass and decided to climb the Hitchen's Pond overlook, a rocky ridge about 1.5 miles from the dam. It was a pleasant uphill walk that brought us out on above tree line on glacial-scarred granite slabs a few hundred feet above the dam, Bog River and Hitchens Pond. From there, we had glorious views to the east of all the high peaks, and to all the surrounding lakes. Since the weather was fine, it was like looking at a huge map spread out around us.

Hiking down, we helped Al complete his portage, then wave him goodbye and paddled on up the Bog back to site 12, just four now. The rest of Thursday was lazy day, swimming in the 80 degree temps and reading. At evening, a huge thunderhead reared up somewhere over Utica and rose thousands of feet into the sky, reddening in the sunset and then turning ashen and lit by lightening flashes as darkness descended. It is always rather comforting to watch someone else getting a royal belting while all is calm and dry around you. We did get a little shower later in the night, but all was over by morning.

This was our last day. As we packed up and got ready to move out, Ranger Dawn paddled up and was surprised to see us still

hanging around. She said she was paddling out to the Lower Dam since all the sites were full on this Friday morning and many more paddlers were likely to be heading in. We bid her goodbye, finished packing and launched down the Bog River, alternatively sailing and paddling slowly as more and more canoes and kayaks headed up into the backcountry.

After negotiating the bog drag once again and portaging the Upper Dam, we launched into Hitchen's Pond for the last hour's paddle down to the Lower Dam and "civilization." Ranger Dawn was at the landing and we were able to give a couple of incoming paddler choice parking spaces. We drove out and stopped at the edge of Horseshoe Pond for a leisurely lunch before heading down to Lake Eaton Campground to check in for our last night.

We enjoyed the bright lights after being in the backcountry, stopping to shop at Hoss's General Store and Trading Post (a good place to get any last minute items and maps and guidebooks for future adventures). Then we headed to Quackenbush's Restaurant for a feast. We stuffed ourselves back to training weight, but left enough room to stop at the Soft Serve for giant swirly cones, which tasted great in the Adirondack afternoon.

One more sleep at Lake Eaton, and we packed up and headed back to Washington, taking a leisurely course down out of the mountains. We had to stop at Mountainman Outdoor Supply Company (<http://www.mountainmanoutdoors.com/>) in Old Forge, which has one of the largest inventories of canoes and kayaks anywhere. It was a treat looking at all the shiny new lightweight canoes and kayaks, and checking out the store. Then it was back in the truck and home.

If you go, check out these maps:

Lake Eaton: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/24464.html>

Bog River and Lows Lake: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/38963.html>

Also check out our photos at picasa-web.google.com, users ja657258 and 101178211036772879744.