Canoeing Ontario's Rivers

ONTARIO IS CANOE COUNTRY. A network of pristine lakes and foaming rivers unrivalled in North America. The canoe is part of the heritage of this northern landscape, and no other craft is so ideally suited to exploring the hundreds of routes that crisscross the province. But how do you find the canoe trip that's ideal for you, that matches your level of skill, and that will bring you more fully in touch with the wilderness?

CANOEING ONTARIO'S RIVERS draws on its authors' fifteen years of canoeing experience to provide detailed descriptions of what to expect for a range of rivers. Each route includes first-hand descriptions and maps of rapids, portages, access arrangements and other vital information, along with references to topographic maps and useful documents.

RON REID AND JANET GRAND draw on their background in natural history to go much further. They believe each river has a story to tell. Users and armchair canoeists alike are greeted with chapters as diverse as the origin of Ontario's rocks, the romance of the fur trade and logging drives, and the fascination of wild plants and animals. CANOEING ONTARIO'S RIVERS tells the land's story in an attractive blend of fact and woodland lore.

Whether you are a novice seeking a gentle backwater in the pastoral setting of southern Ontario, or an expert wanting the challenge of a raging whitewater to the Arctic sea, this book provides the information needed to plan your trip and the knowledge of history and ecology to fully enjoy it.

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Ron Reid
Janet Grand
Canoeing Ontario's Rivers
Douglas & McIntyre

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Ron Reid and Janet Grand

The Lady Evelyn: Another Pretty Face

The Ojibway called it Ka-nah-nosing—"place of five little portages together." Where the cool trout waters of the Lady Evelyn River emptied into the lake, the Indian name changed to Monzkananing, or "haunt of the moose." But as European man planted his heavy foot on the north country, he chose to name this watershed after an English Lady. In all likelihood it was a staunch Orangeman touring or exploring in this country in the 1870s who pinned the name of the Earl of Erne's new daughter on these waters. You can be sure that the original Lady Evelyn never saw this rugged country, nor likely was even aware of her namesake. But we like to think that if the Lady were to visit now, she would approve, for it is hard to imagine a prettier piece of country than the green valley of the Lady Evelyn.

The foresters would tell you that this valley is near the northern edge of the pine belt. Its harsher climate and poor soils generally discourage the growth of giant red and white pine like those once so prevalent further south. But even here, large pine have been an important component of both the ecologic mosaic and economic history.

For canoeists Lady Evelyn is Temagami North, a natural extension of the canoe country centred around Temagami Lake. Indeed Lady Evelyn Lake serves as a second hub for routes in various directions. Detailed notes on route alternatives can be found in Hap Wilson's excellent book, *Temagami Canoe Routes*, which is available from Smoothwater Outfitters, Temagami, P0H 2H0.

The route covered here, down the Lady Evelyn River, is only one of many. However, it does give a general picture of the countryside, from which you can branch out to create your own route. The scenic falls along the river are often quite crowded in

mid-summer, so those seeking solitude are advised to search out the back routes away from the main river.

The 102-km route outlined here can be covered in about a week. Two-thirds of that distance lies within the newly-created Lady Evelyn–Smoothwater Wilderness Park. The route is canoeable any time during the season, but more rapids can be run during spring water levels. Even then, the Lady Evelyn is only a moderately good whitewater river. Most of those who visit are relatively new to wilderness tripping and willing to walk the numerous portages.

A Ride through the High Country

The Lady Evelyn passes between the two highest points in Ontario. To the west, the massive brooding ridge of Ishpatina tops the provincial list; to the north, the conical bulk of Maple Mountain produces the second highest point. We are near the height of land here—the Montreal River system, which includes the Lady Evelyn, is the most northerly tributary of the Ottawa.

The rock in these highlands is mostly sandstone, lightly metamorphosed and broken into great slab-sided hills. Fault lines control the course of the drainage in places, especially in the north-south orientation of Lady Evelyn Lake. Near the easterly end of our trip, faulting also allowed the intrusion of younger rocks, which sometimes brought minerals as well.

The glaciers left few traces of their passing here, although the upper river shows the rounded boulders and gravels of a valley train, where rushing glacial waters dropped their load of sediments. Along the south branch to Florence Lake and on the north shore of Lady Evelyn Lake, deeper pockets of sand have also been laid down.

The forests reflect the cool climate and poor soils, with a distinctly boreal feel. Especially near the upper end of the watershed, white spruce and balsam fir are common, and the maples and yellow birch typical of this mixed-wood region are scarce. Lady Evelyn is still within the pine belt, however, and fine stands of red, white and jack pine form an important part of the landscape. The pine stems partly from a repeated history of fire. Much of the watershed here was burned over only three-quarters of a century ago, no doubt delaying the push of the loggers back into the area.

In the wake of those burns, white-tailed deer occupied this country briefly, but now the deep snows and lack of browse prevent that animal's habitation. Moose are the dominant large ungulate, although the generally broken topography, with relatively few extensive lowlands, keeps their numbers down. Even the moose are relative newcomers. Older Temagami Indians recall that moose replaced woodland caribou in the time of their grandfathers around 1880.

The larger lakes to the east support good populations of pickerel and northern pike, and the river itself is home to a natural population of speckled trout. Just to the west of our starting point, a handful of small lakes formerly supported the Aurora trout, a close relative of the speckled but with even more colour and fight. The Aurora is thought to be extinct in its native lakes, the only place on the planet where it was found. Fortunately a few were airlifted from the lakes and are being carefully reared in a hatchery to ward off final extinction.

The culprit in this story is a now-familiar one—acid rain. The tiny lakes around Lady Evelyn, surrounded by weather-resistant bedrock and with little soil to provide buffering, are terribly vulnerable to the industrial poisons that arrive with every shower of rain. Downwind from the Inco stacks at Sudbury and from the emissions of the American midwest that drift northeasterly, Lady Evelyn country has been among the first areas to show the ravages of acid rain.

In headwater lakes such as Florence, much of the damage is already done, and can probably never be undone. In other, larger lakes, the inexorable process is just beginning. The water is beautifully clear, is still safe to swim in and likely to drink, but its spark of life is missing. The frogs and crayfish and tiny aquatic invertebrates are missing, so are the fish, and the loons and herons and mergansers and otters that depend on the fish no longer find food here. When you return home from Lady Evelyn, we hope you take a store of pleasant memories. But we hope you also carry home a sense of outrage, that we could have allowed this to happen and that we allow it to happen still.

A History along the Edge

Scattered traces of Indian use along the Lady Evelyn date back several thousand years, but the river itself has never been searched for major sites. Evidence of native use has been found on Florence Lake and on the Makobe system, just to the north of the Lady Evelyn. When Europeans first arrived here, they found two distinct bands of Algonquin and Ojibway lineage, one around Lake

Collecting the pine logs on large lakes and guiding it downriver was the role of pointer boats, with distinctive prows to ride up on floating logs. **Archives of Ontario/S.16200**

Temagami and the other on Timiskaming. The early river often saw the hunting canoes of these tribes.

French fur traders entered this area in the early 1600s, but again the focus of their trade and transport was elsewhere, especially along the Montreal River. Early logging endeavours followed the same pattern, stripping first the easily accessible stands along Lake Timiskaming and the Montreal River. It was not until 1905 that the first cutting reached Mowat's Landing, at the easterly end of our route.

The main push into the interior began in 1916, with the Conkey and Murphy Lumber Company's quest for large red and white pine. Camps sprang up along Lady Evelyn Lake, and a logging dam to improve navigation was soon constructed near Mowat's Landing.

Through the 1920s and '30s, each spring saw huge log drives down the lake, assisted by a steel-hulled "alligator" tug. These ingenious inventions would anchor solidly to bottom, let out a kilometre or more of cable to the log boom, and then winch it home, a tedious but sure process for getting the logs across large lakes. Alligators could also winch themselves across portages, and their slow and awkward progress on land likely was the origin of this reptilian name. Soon the pine would be sliding its way past Mattawapika Falls on the timber sluice, then would be herded downstream to the company mills near Latchford.

Water transport of logs is now a thing of the past: it has been replaced by the ubiquitous logging truck, probing into the heart of the Lady Evelyn from Elk Lake to the north. Wild river park status was intended to protect the river itself from adverse effects, but several bridges scar the wilderness experience, and in places only a thin screen of trees masks the clearcuts.

In 1972 a different kind of threat hung over Lady Evelyn, in the form of a government-sponsored recreation development planned for Maple Mountain. Extensive lobbying by conservation groups and concerned local citizens eventually halted the project and provided a focus for the alternative, the creation of a wilderness park. Finally, in 1983, Natural Resources Minister Alan Pope announced the creation of the park, covering the area west from Sucker Gut Lake. Unfortunately several conflicting activities, including the road, will remain, but at least the park should be secure from major new intrusions.

Exploring the River

The Lady Evelyn River can easily be paddled in either direction, especially in the summer months when most rapids must be portaged in any case. Our trip, from the upstream end, includes an optional 40-km side trip to Florence Lake in its 102 km length. As well, the Lady Evelyn can be combined with a large number of other routes to produce longer trips.

TO FLORENCE LAKE AND RETURN

Our starting point, on Gamble Lake, is located 32 km south of Longpoint Lake off Hwy. 560. The logging road is rough and dusty, and you will have to watch your map closely to avoid missing the access point. Unfortunately you are not allowed to leave cars here, so it is necessary to arrange with one of the local outfitters or friends to deliver you to Gamble Lake.

The river's first 8 km, down to the forks, are marshy and generally flat, for this is an area of abundant soil. Along with the spruce and fir typical of this countryside, swampy pockets of black ash line the river. Reeds and sedges help to maintain the cool temperatures necessary for speckled trout, as well as serving the needs of kingbirds and other insectivorous birds. Only a few shallow riffles over the gravel disturb the river's smooth flow. A logging bridge reminds you that we have not yet left civilization, for this is the most recent cutting area within the park.

These boreal woods are especially fine haunts for the diversity of warblers which so enliven our Canadian avifauna. As you learn to pick out each warbler by its song or its colourful plumage, keep in mind that each has its own special place in the forest as well. Those marshy edges, for example, are just right for the handsome yellowthroat, and for the noisy yellow warbler if there is a bit of brush about. A water-logged woods might ring with the call of a northern waterthrush instead, a bird easier to hear than see. Even in the drier mixed woods, each species will specialize. The Nashville warbler, which is common here, nests on the ground and spends much of its time low. The dark and exotic-looking black-throated blue prefers a small shrub for its hidden nest. But in the same woods, the yellow-rump warbler builds its nest much higher, usually in a conifer tree.

The 20-km paddle upstream to Florence Lake is alive with birds, for the stream meanders endlessly through rich sandy banks. Speckled alder, highbush cranberry and groves of tamarack are abundant here, and the small ponds along the way are a good place to watch for moose. In late summer progress can be slow because of the density of the underwater vegetation, but no portages are necessary along this interesting stretch.

Duff Lake is little more than a widening in the river, but the pine-clad cliffs to the east and the promise of speckled trout in its depths make it an attractive wilderness setting. Shortly thereafter, you veer to the right up a shallow tributary to reach Florence Lake. Watch along the right close to the entrance for an active osprey nest. On the far side of Florence Lake, originally called Skim-Ska-Djee-Ashing or "lake that bends in the middle," a massive shelf of sandstone makes an excellent campsite.

PAST THE FALLS OF THE LOWER RIVER

After returning to the main river, you soon begin to enter swifter water. The first set of three rapids may have to be at least partly lined in summer, although they are usually runnable earlier in the season. Another 2 km of marshy river brings you to a small falls, which you must portage. A longer portage on the left bypasses the rapids below as well, or experienced paddlers can run or line these in high water.

You now enter a triangular-shaped, marshy lake that usually shelters a few pair of goldeneye and black duck, and perhaps a bittern. American bittern are very difficult to spot, since their brown-and-beige striping blends so perfectly with the marsh.

The vertical stripes of the American bittern provide ideal camouflage among the cattails of its marshy habitat. **Hap Wilson**

Indians call them stick birds because of their habit of freezing in place like a stick. However, at night they are easy to hear, and you can identify the "pump-er-lunk" song that earned the bittern the nickname of "stakedriver."

Five short rapids take you to MacPherson Lake, of which only the central one can be run even in high water. The sandstone cliffs in this area are quite dramatic, and the last portage presents a pleasant rocky campsite close to the base of the waterfall.

MacPherson Lake is marshy and shallow, but staying to the left of the large islands will bring you past two rapids that can be lined or run, depending on water levels, and into Stonehenge Lake. This small lake is marked by columns of stone along its edge, not so impressive as those of its namesake but interesting nonetheless.

The end of Stonehenge brings you to Shangri La, Ontario-style. This particular Shangri La is another portage, and one with rough footing at that! However, the 525-m portage also features a good campsite overlooking a very pretty falls.

Two more short rapids will likely have to be lined to bring you into Divide or Katherine Lake. From here it is possible to head down the south branch of the Lady Evelyn, past places with such evocative names as Bridal Veil Falls and Fat Man's Portage. However, our route continues along the north branch, starting immediately past the lake with a pair of portages 250 and 360 m long.

Close on their heels, the river narrows again into a rocky gut leading to Helen Falls. This portage, while only 500 m, has to rank among the worst in our experience. The river drops over a sandstone shelf, producing a fine spectacle, but the portage trail, dropping over that same shelf, produces only loose, ankle-twisting rock and a steep, treeless slope. On a rainy day it is almost impossible.

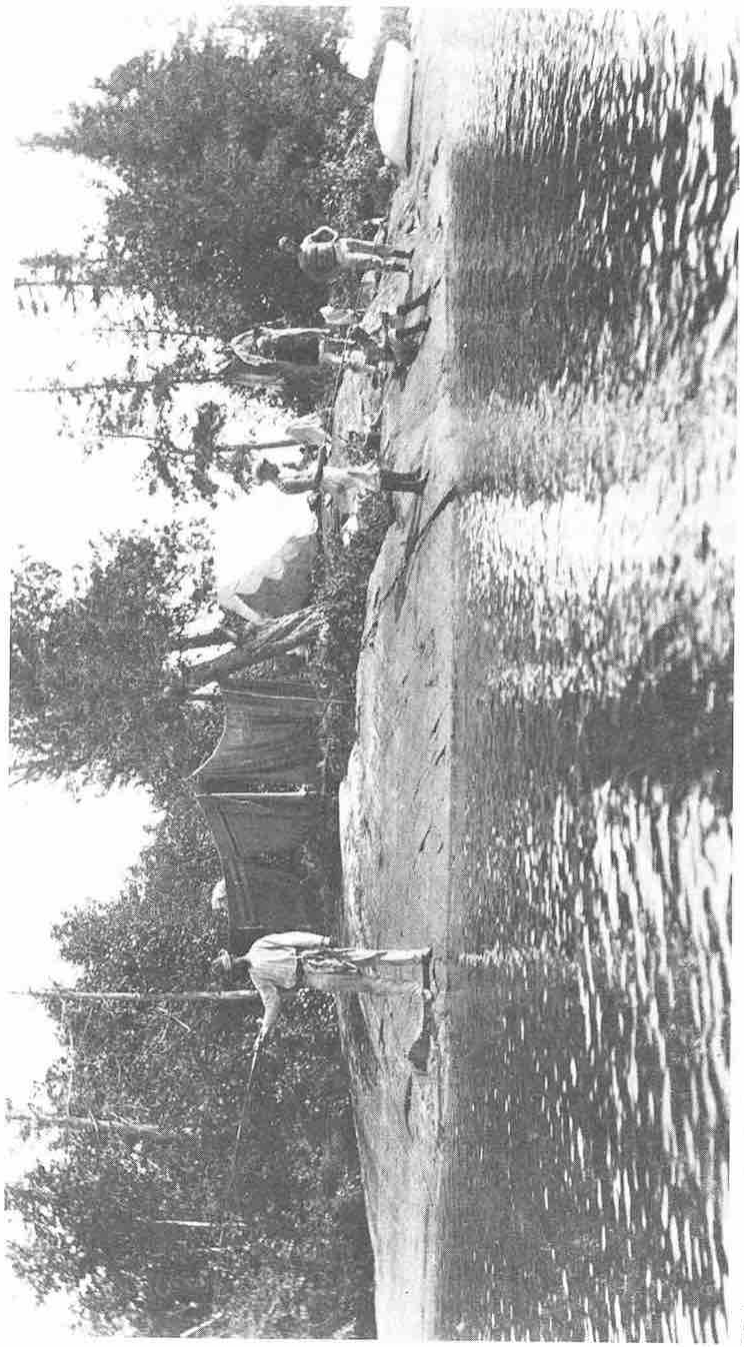
Past this obstacle, you can relax again for a moment, enjoy the scenery and listen to the busy melodies of the song sparrows. One of the commonest northern birds, this sparrow is easily identified by its boldly-striped breast, complete with a dark stickpin. Like all members of the finch family, the song sparrow thrives on seeds, and its thick bill is specially constructed for the task of extracting food from tough shells.

Your respite is short-lived, for after another short rapids comes Centre Falls, also affectionately known as the Golden Staircase. This 650-m ramble is laced with steep-sided ridges, most of them with steps just slightly higher than it is possible for most of us to reach comfortably. There are compensations, however. The setting is breathtaking, with scattered pines, smooth sculpted rocks and the falls themselves. Camping and swimming are excellent, with a natural water slide through the campsite. And the worst of the Staircase has been bridged by a wooden ramp, one of the few places where we have actually welcomed such an unnatural intrusion into the wilderness.

Finally, only one more short portage, past Frank Falls, takes you onto the start of Sucker Gut Lake.

SUCKER GUT LAKE TO MOWAT'S LANDING

Sucker Gut is hardly a charming name but in fact this rocky lake is a very attractive spot. Early in the summer the islands turn pink with the bloom of sheep laurel, a shrub sometimes called lambkill since it can be poisonous to livestock. This plant uses trickery to ensure its propagation, for its anthers spring out when an insect lands, dusting the intruder with a good dose of pollen to carry to the next flower.



This camp on Lady Evelyn Lake in 1897 was one indication of the growing popularity of this part of Ontario for early recreational canoeists.
Photo by Dr. W.H. Ellis/Public Archives Canada/ PA-121320

If you have the time and energy for more hiking, an 8-km detour up Hobart Lake into Tupper Lake will bring you to the Maple Mountain trail. Three km of steady climbing will earn you a magnificent view of the surrounding countryside from the bald top of this massive hill. This open area was created by an accidental burn several decades ago. It is interesting to note the stands of black spruce on top of the hill, created in part by the freshwater springs there but also by the harsh climate. This high land is known locally as Ghost Mountain.

Back on the lake, you will see pockets of dead trees, killed and left standing when Lady Evelyn Lake was dammed in the 1920s. These dead stubs are a good place to watch for woodpeckers, and you may be treated to a flight of the pretty blue-backed tree swallow here.

Lady Evelyn Lake is an excellent spot for watching loons, especially in the late summer when family groups gather on large water bodies, with flocks of 40–50 birds often occurring. You might even have a chance to see the loons "dancing"—splashing along the surface while calling wildly. Such displays are likely part of the courtship ritual in the spring, but their role in the autumn is less clear. Some researchers have suggested they are merely a result of increased hormone levels in the fall birds, produced as part of the preparation for migration.

Our course takes us across the northern end of Lady Evelyn Lake, a speedy trip if the winds are right. The lake squeezes along a fault line at Obisaga Narrows. A little further on, in the area of golden beaches, another Indian name is preserved in Obawanga Narrows, meaning "sandy narrows." Indeed this is a very special area, for the curious patterns of swamp and ridges along the south shore here are the remains of sand dunes. The finger-like projections were created long before the existing Hydro dam flooded the base of the dunes, and scientists think that these parabolic dunes may even be unique to Ontario.

As you enter the final narrows heading northward, you might notice that the rocks along the west shore have a different character from most of those we have seen. This dark rock is gabbro which intruded in liquid form into the sandstone at a much later date and hardened. In this area the gabbro has yielded samples of cobalt, copper, lead and zinc, but it does not seem to contain the valuable concentrations found in the mineral-rich areas to the east.

A final 270-m portage past the dam at Mattawapika Falls brings you onto the Montreal River. Mowat's Landing is just upstream,

but across the river on the west side is the old homestead of Charlie Mowat, a well known pioneer of the area. As loggers, farmers, guides and outdoorsmen, the Mowats saw the development of this area from their arrival before 1900 until the demise of the older generation a few years ago.

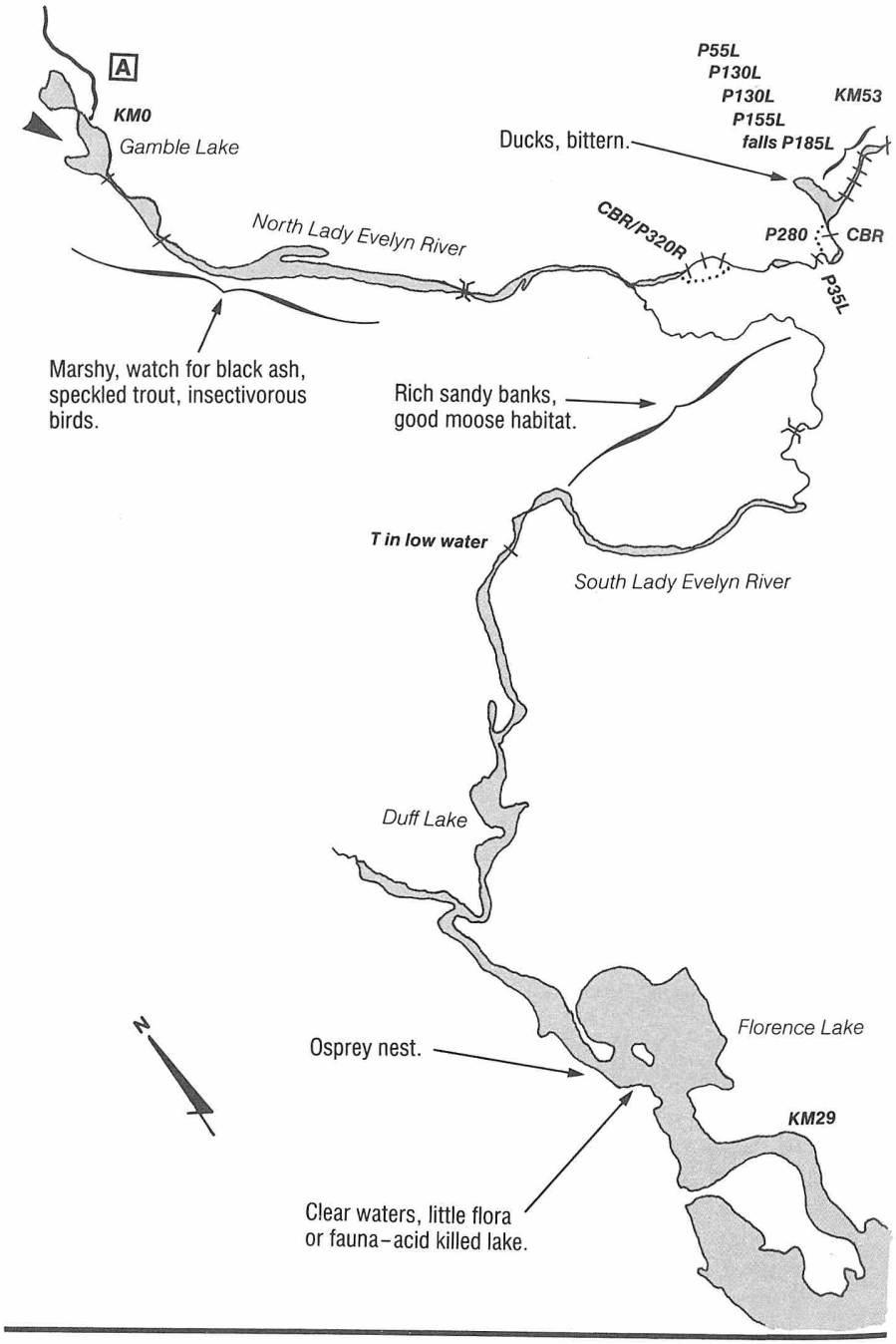
A well serviced access point brings you back into civilization via Hwy. 558 to Haileybury.

National Topographic System Maps
Scale 1:50,000: 41P/7, P/8, 31M/5

Ministry of Natural Resources Maps
Scale 1:126,720: Maple Mountain 41P/SE
Haileybury 31M/SW

Ministry of Natural Resources Office
P.O. Box 38, Temagami, P0H 2H0

Lady Evelyn River–Map 1



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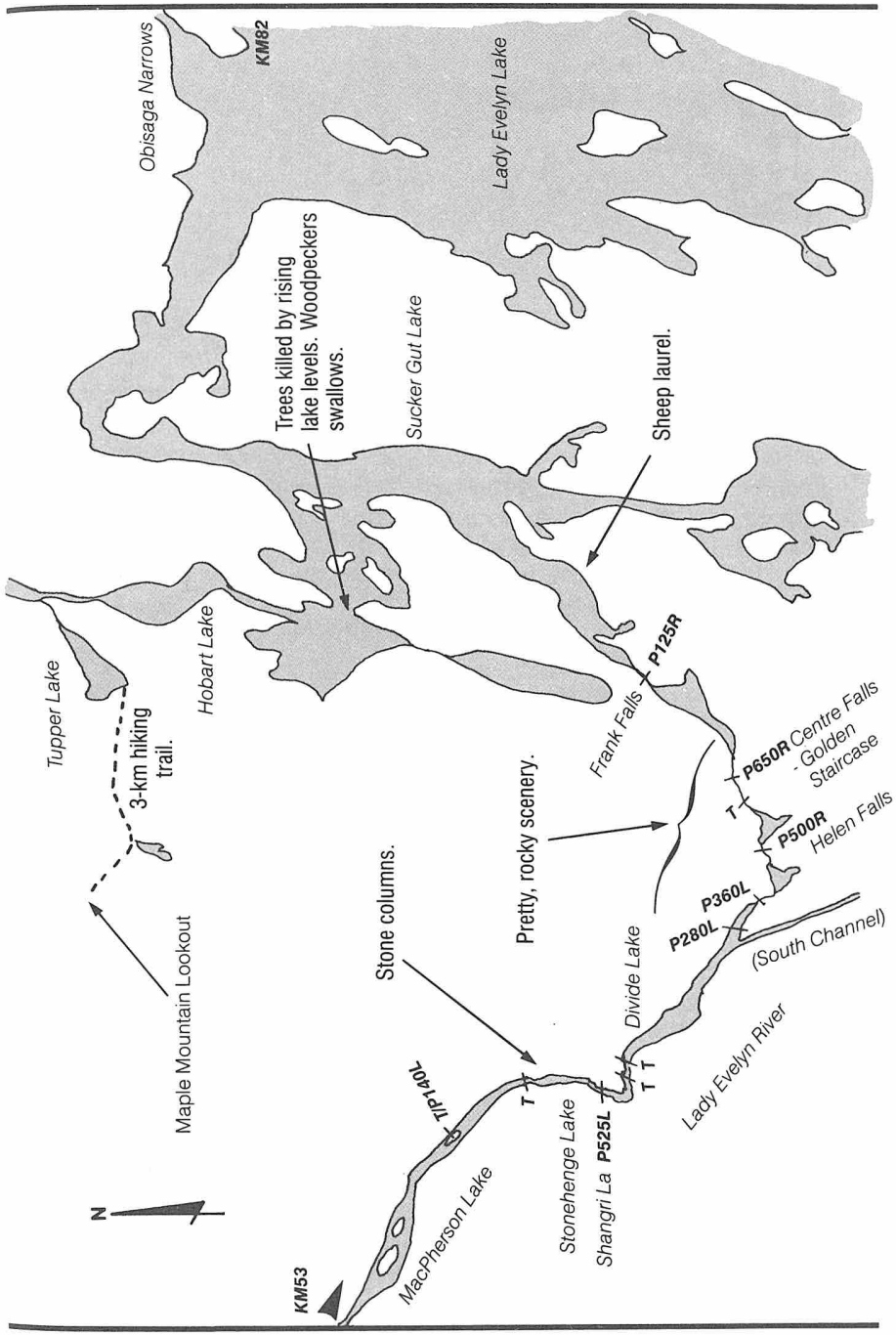
Lady Evelyn River–Map 2



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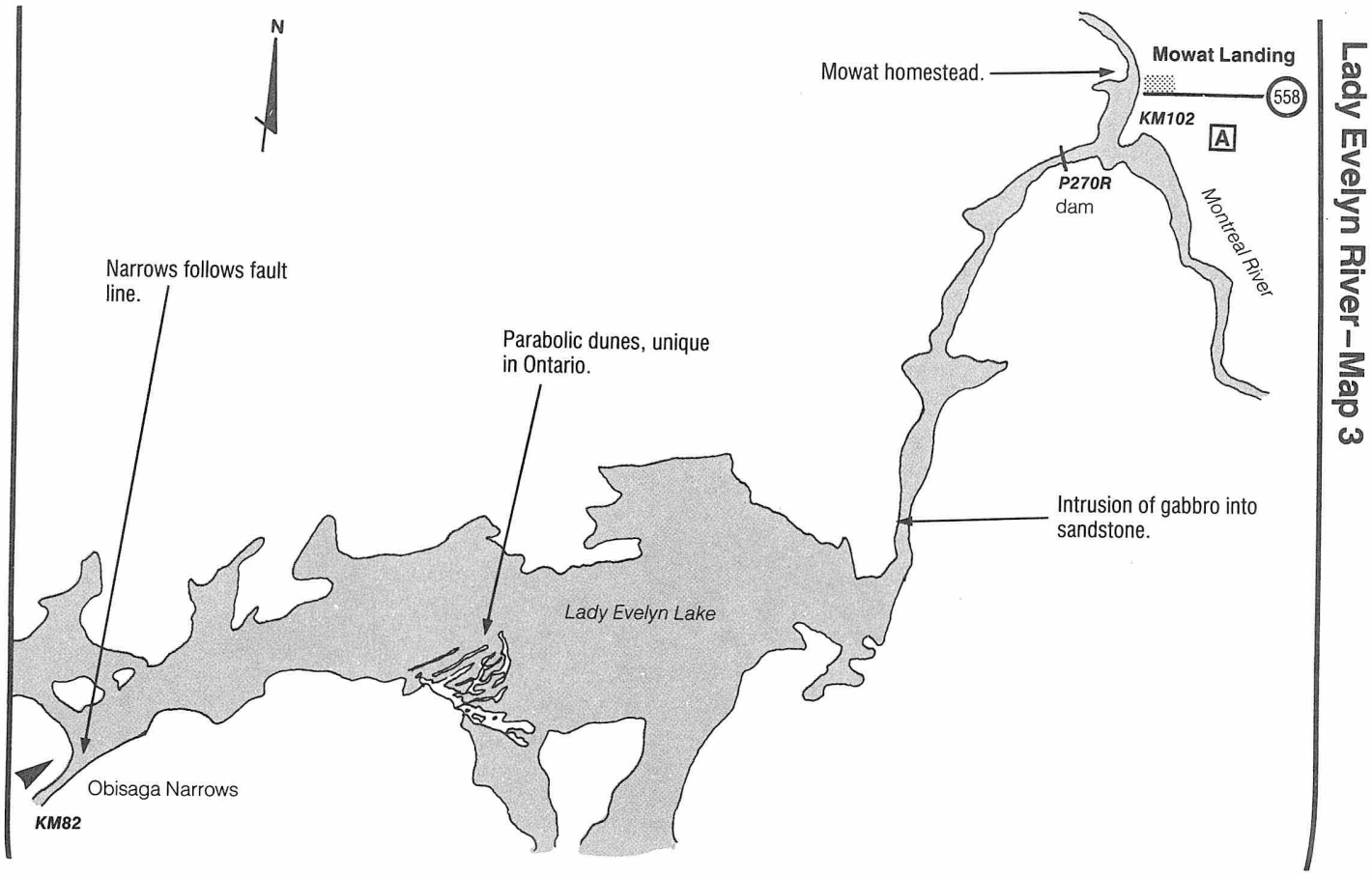

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Lady Evelyn River–Map 3