

RIDE of a Lifetime

PWC ADVENTURE ON THE OTTAWA RIVER WATERWAY

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In 1613, Samuel de Champlain made his way up the Ottawa River in a birch bark canoe. To commemorate the 400th anniversary of this historic journey, 14 riders on 11 personal watercraft (PWC) made our own four-day voyage of discovery last summer. We travelled faster and likely had more fun than Champlain, but we shared the spirit of mystique, magic and wonder that the Ottawa River Waterway still invokes for all who adventure there.

Little did Champlain know when he was looking to expand France's fur trade, that he was also opening a major gateway for logging, mining and other commerce. It would make the Ottawa River one of Canada's premier waterways—and a popular, unique playground for recreational boating. So read on—we did our ride by PWC, but it's also a remarkable excursion for anyone with a runabout or small cruiser.

With Ontario on one side and Québec on the other, upper Ottawa River through to Lake Temiskaming can best be described as “God's Country” (Temiskaming appears to be the accepted Ontario spelling; Témiscaming in Québec). We were certainly in awe cruising by majestic shores, largely uninhabited and

bounded by breathtaking hills, imposing rock faces and dense forests right down to the waterline. This navigable river is deep and wide, sweeping in gentle curves through the same beautiful wilderness that Champlain experienced four centuries ago. I swear the ghosts of voyageurs were paddling along beside us!

We trailered to Pembroke, ON and staged out of the Best Western Pembroke Inn and Conference Centre. Located just five minutes from the river, this hotel is an ideal base, with indoor pool and hot tub, onsite Westwinds restaurant, ample parking for trucks and trailers, and a gas station across the road. The sheltered Pembroke Marina offers a double concrete launch ramp, transient docking, fuel, washrooms and



➤ The Ottawa River is a PWC paradise.

a huge parking lot—where we left our vehicles for the duration.

Three dams at the towns of Rapides des Joachims (Swisha), Mattawa and Témiscaming interrupted our 668-kilometre round trip from Pembroke to Temiskaming Shores, ON (the amalgamation of Dymond, Haileybury and New Liskeard). Transfers around these dams, along with boat launches (for boats up to 32') are available at both Swisha and Mattawa. We called ahead to make arrangements and confirm arrival times (see contact list).

Depending on the number of PWCs, completing the transfer of all boats at any one location can take from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. While our Sea-Doo watercraft were on the transfer trailer, we tanked up at gas

stations on nearby streets. Although Témiscaming offers both good ramps and docks, I'm not aware of any transfer service there.

This leaves PWC riders with two options. One is to ride only from Pembroke up to Témiscaming and back. Two is to follow our lead: we went all the way by taking a support vehicle and empty PWC trailer, so we were able to transfer on our own where necessary.

Ideally, you would have six riders and five would always be on the water, with one driver for each leg of the journey. Since the ride is up river and back again, every rider gets to experience each section at least one way. Other advantages of a support vehicle are that it carried our luggage and any extra gear. We also had a trailer handy if any unit



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were to have a problem—plus, we could trailer a spare PWC if needed.

From Pembroke to our first overnight at Mattawa was 165 kilometres, with fuel stops at Deep River (65 kilometres from Pembroke) and Swisha (90 kilometres from Pembroke, near Rolphton, ON). We carried box lunches purchased at breakfast each morning and ate during downtime at the transfers. During this first day, we passed Oiseau Rock (see Sidebar), the Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories and the sandy beaches on the Québec side across from Deep River, a good spot for a quick dip.

On this entire journey, we found only two locations where water depth was a concern. The first detour from the main channel happened between Swisha and Deux Rivières near the hamlet of Bisset Creek (Ontario) because of a shallow spot with rocks. As we came along the river, it looked like we could proceed straight ahead,

but that's a no-no. Instead, we followed markers to the west (Ontario) side and went around the inside of Rocher Capitaine Island, where we followed alongside Highway 17 briefly before swinging back into the main channel on the other side of the rocks.

In historic Mattawa, home of the annual Voyageur Days (last weekend in July), we stayed at the Valois Motel and Restaurant. Located right at the water's edge, the Valois has its own docks and boat ramp, house-keeping motel rooms and on-site restaurant with home cooked meals. There are two choices for fuel: Past the massive railway bridge that spans the river is the Mattawa Marina (only a few steps from downtown), alternatively, we stopped at a regular gas station in town while our boats were on the transfer trailer.

Day two, we rode 162 kilometres from Mattawa to Temiskaming Shores. First up is the transfer around the

massive Otto Holden dam, and then it's 56 kilometres to the final up-river transfer at Témiscaming. This is where the only other detour from the main channel occurs. With this Québec town in sight and Highway 63 running beside the river, we spotted a shallow spot with stumps directly ahead. The detour is on the east side of the river, where marker buoys indicate a channel between two small islands.

From Témiscaming, it was an 83-kilometre run, past the hydro installation at the Montreal River and the old fort guarding the narrows at the southern entrance to Lake Temiskaming, to our next gas at the marina at Ville Marie, QC. Lake Temiskaming is 26 kilometres long and over 700' deep in many places, so there is no worry about scraping bottom here!

After fuelling, we made a beeline west across to the Ontario side to take in the magnificent cliff face that is Devil's Rock. Then we headed north ▶

Approaching
Oiseau Rock



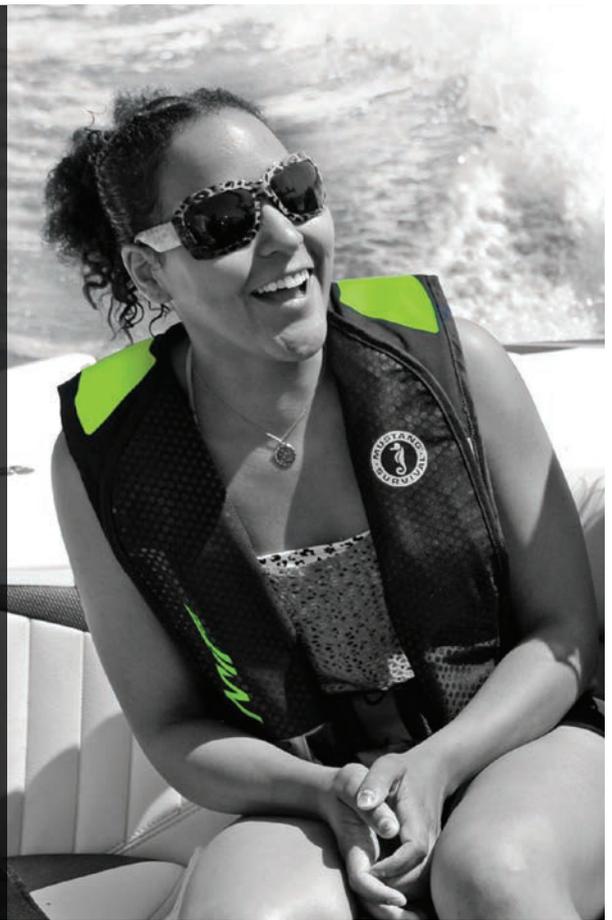
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Tourism Contacts:

Mattawa: www.visitmattawa.travel
Ottawa Valley Tourism: www.ottawavalley.travel
Ottawa River Waterway:
www.ottawariverwaterway.com
Temiskaming Shores:
www.temiskamingshores.ca

Lodging Contacts:

Best Western Pembroke:
www.bestwesternpembroke.com
Presidents' Suites: www.presidentssuites.com
Valois Motel & Restaurant: www.valoisotel.com

Transfer Contacts:

Dumoine River Expeditions: dumoine-exp.ca
Mattawa Marine & Sport:
www.mattawasports.com

Fuel Contacts:

Deep River Marina: (613) 584-1258
Haileybury Marina: (705) 672-5889
Mattawa Marina: (705) 744-1475
Pembroke Marina: (613) 735-6963
Swisha Esso: (613) 586-2692
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PWC Rental Contact:

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to the Haileybury Marina to dock overnight. A quick call to our mansion-style accommodations at the Presidents' Suites provided a shuttle service to this charming bed and breakfast with house-keeping facilities. It wasn't long before we were relaxing in their outdoor hot tub. Presidents' Suites is a combination inn and B&B: the owners live off-site from this stately home and a sumptuous breakfast was included with our stay.

You may want to take time at the start of day three to do a loop around Lake Temiskaming and its three main islands. The lake's northwest corner is

anchored by what used to be known as New Liskeard, while Notre-Dame-du-Nord (Québec), can be found in the northeast. Just be sure to gas up again at Ville Marie before leaving Lake Temiskaming to travel down river again.

Day three took us back through both transfers at Témiscaming and Mattawa to stay at the Valois Motel and Restaurant once more. We got away early on day four, made it easily through the last transfer at Swisha and were back into Pembroke by mid-afternoon. If you're ahead of schedule, this is a good day to explore seven kilometres or so up

the Dumoine River (east side of Ottawa where it widens into Lac Holden, just upstream from Swisha) or slot in a climb to the top of Oiseau Rock.

Each one of our 14 riders was absolutely floored by our ride. It's a truly amazing four days of PWC riding that could easily be stretched into a week-long boating vacation or shortened into any of the component sections for a shorter weekend getaway. Whatever your choice, the Ottawa River Waterway will live on in your memory as the boating adventure of a lifetime! ■



➤ Down the path to the beach where boats anchor.
➤ A refreshing dip after the climb to the top.

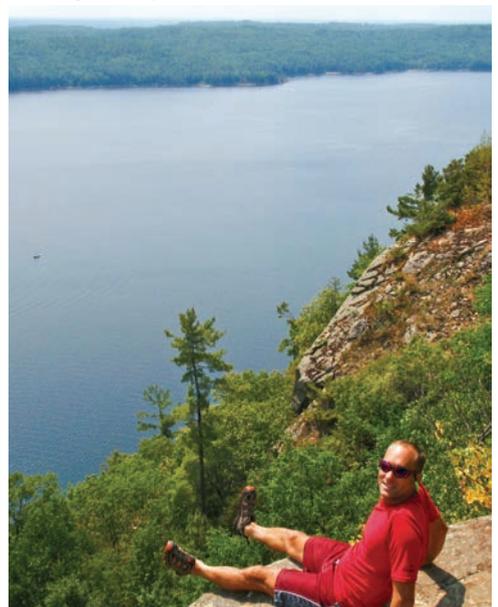


DOING THE BIRD

About 30 kilometres upstream from Pembroke, a 150-metre cliff known as Oiseau Rock (Bird Rock) towers over the Ottawa River on the Québec side. A popular boater's destination, Oiseau Rock is not visible to those approaching from the south until they round Oiseau Point. Then suddenly, the rock appears as a massive monolith, rising straight out of the water to a dizzying height. Boaters can cruise right up the rock to touch its face and view ancient pictographs.

Although Oiseau Rock is inaccessible by road, boats can anchor on the sandy beach on the south side of Oiseau Point. In a protected bay, you'll find picnic tables, garbage cans and an outhouse, plus a well-worn but steep path from the beach that climbs to the top for a spectacular view of the river. A small spring-fed lake at the summit offers a chance to cool off with a quick dip while doing the bird!

➤ Sitting at the top of Oiseau Rock





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