

Pettiford Creek August 30, 2002

Gary Scruggs and I met at Captain Ed's restaurant on Route 58 at about 4:00 in the afternoon.

Heavy rains had made the creek rise to a level we had not seen before. We thought it would be canoe able from Millis Road in Croatan Forest on down.

We hit several blow-downs. Some we went over and some we could paddle around. We came upon a gauge which apparently was installed by Croatan. It measured at 1.50.

We continued on down hitting more blow-downs frequently. One had a hollowed out log on the end and in it was a snake with its mouth wide open and two fangs on either side topside. The inside of the mouth was snow white. He did not look friendly. See picture #428.

I think he is a non-venomous Carolina Water Snake. Gary thinks it is a Water Mocassin. I will go to the library and see if I can identify this boy. He did not offer to move. I held my camera to my eye. I wish I had pushed it closer to him with my hands to get a better shot.

When I edged my canoe prow up closer to him he decided to take off and that was the last we saw of him.

The camera flash went off when I took the picture. That is when we realized it was getting dark. We also realized we were not going to get off the river before dark. It was drizzling a little and the darkness came on fast.

We let the current take us as we could not see where the river went. We climbed over blowdowns by feel. After about an hour or more of this the clouds cleared and the moon came up and it was beautiful and we could see again.

We paddled on, climbed on and waded on. The river seemed to split which cut down on our water now and then.

We got into swamps where the river flowed through tall grass. We could even paddle through this until we hit another blow-down.

The clouds came back. Thunder rumbled in the distance. The moon disappeared and it was pitch black dark again.

We had called home and told our folks not to expect us for a while. We agreed with them that we would turn off our cell phones so we would have battery power should we need it later. We also told them we might be spending the night.

We had alternate periods of darkness and moon light and rain. We caught glances in the lightning flashes (nothing close) of high pines off to the right. We knew this meant high ground and we headed in that direction. As the water became shallow and we approached the bank the undergrowth was so thick "one could not even fall down" let alone making a way through it

dragging a canoe.

So we retraced our steps back to deep water. The deep water told us we were in the stream bed.

Beavers had backed it up and there was very little flow and a lot of tall grass. We followed the stream by walking and staying in deep water. There were many under water obstructions of logs and branches etc.

When a pool of water opened up we floated a plastic bottle we had picked up below Millis Road Bridge. That piece of litter showed us which way the water was flowing and we would head into the tall grasses wherever the bottle hit the grass.

Cattails started to show up. We both thought this was an encouraging sign. And it really was as I thought I began to recognize waters I had paddled on before coming upstream.

As we continued on our progress became easier and faster and soon I recognized the long beaver dam and last one we had to climb over coming upstream to get to the huge beaver lodge. Never saw the large beaver lodge. Probably thought it was just another uprooted tree stump in the dark.

We paddled along this large beaver dam following the open channels through the grasses. In the dark it was very difficult to locate the place to go over this dam. Water was running over it along its entire length and making the sounds of rapids.

We were very careful trying not to go over it in the wrong place and end up in an impenetrable swamp. We paddled back and forth many times and finally decided on the right spot fortunately.

When we poked our canoe through the brush growing on the dam and a thorny wild rose bush, we knew we were on the main river itself and we shot down the rapids in a chute. We must have dropped two to three feet right quick and then shot out into the river for twenty to thirty feet more.

It was a real thrill and a welcome sight. All good things happened at once. Light was appearing. Darkness was fading.

We had a very swift paddle down to our shuttle vehicle below the old dam. Gary left me off at Millis Road Bridge and headed home to Havelock. I went back to get my canoe and head home.

I went to bed in the spare room at 9:30. Florence woke me at 2:30.

Conclusion: Pettiford Creek is not canoeable above the large beaver lodge at the gauge level of 1.50 unless the snags are removed. If the river rises to 3.00 we might try it again but we will start out in the morning!

It was an experience we are glad to have behind us but do feel good about rising to the challenge and completing the trip.

(Saved Pettiford Adventure)