

The Ontario Solo Canoe Rendezvous (The “OSCR”) Brings the Paddling Community Together in Peterborough

By Tom Connell (ORCKA Instructor and WCHA member)

Peterborough, Ontario, proved to be the perfect home for the inaugural Ontario Solo Canoe Rendezvous (The “OSCR”), held June 19–21, 2026. A weekend gathering became a celebration of canoeing heritage, artisanship, skill development, and friendship. Organized through the collaboration of [Ontario Recreational Canoe and Kayak Association](#) (ORCKA), [Paddle Canada](#), and the [Northern Lakes Chapter](#) of the [Wooden Canoe Heritage Association](#) (WCHA), the event drew paddlers from across Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, and Ohio, all eager to share their passion for canoeing. The theme of the gathering was **share-play-learn** – and that’s just what happened!



The weekend activities were held on the shores of Little Lake. Group social activities took place at [Beavermead Campground](#) and Beavermead Park, and a full day of paddling clinics and on-land exhibits were organized just to the north at Rogers Cove Park. It was more than a coincidence that the world-famous [Canadian Canoe Museum](#) (CCM) sits right between the two areas.

Many campers arrived at Beavermead and set up on Friday in time for the afternoon tour of the CCM

[Collection Hall](#). The group was welcomed by Executive Director Carolyn Hyslop and was given a

Photo 1: Jeremy Ward tells a story for each boat on the Collection Hall Tour. Photo: Robin Rivison



restoration details.

private guided tour by Curator Jeremy Ward (**Photo 1**). There was no shortage of questions and comments from the group, many of whom were seasoned canoe restorers themselves. Following the tour, WCHA’s annual [Assembly](#) tradition of a “paddle-by” – an on-water parade of each canoe, with a master of ceremonies describing them for the audience -- became a “walk-by” because of 40 kmh winds. Vintage canoes brought for the weekend were lined up on the lawn and the proud owners regaled the group with the boats’ histories and

On Friday evening, participants gathered for a potluck dinner at Beavermead Park and improvised to wind-proof the picnic shelter from the increasingly energetic breezes coming off Little Lake (40 kmh gusting to 60 kmh!). The group adapted to the wind, and enjoyed a smorgasbord of home-made food offerings, followed by two presentations. The first was an overview by John Etches of his recently published book on paddling strategies to deal with windy conditions ([Fighting Strong Winds in a Canoe](#) -- how appropriate!) (Photos 2,3). The second presentation was by Reid McLachlan on his extraordinary project to recreate the legendary Peterborough cedar-rib canoe, a pinnacle of canoe artisanship (Photos 4,5). It was

Photo 2: The screen vibrates as John Etches talks about his new book, *Fighting Strong Winds in a Canoe*. Photo: Emily Guthro



readily agreed that Reid's work did full justice to the Peterborough master-builders of a century ago. It was featured on the cover of the spring 2026 issue of *Wooden Canoe*, WCHA's quarterly journal.

Photo 3: Available at Amazon.ca

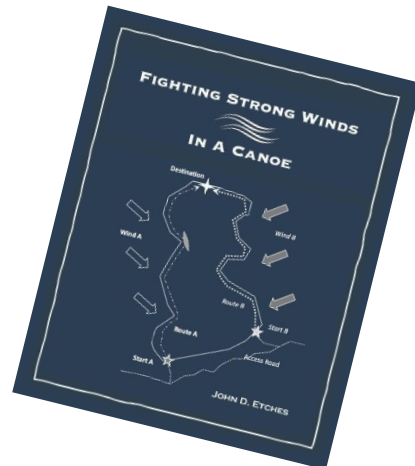
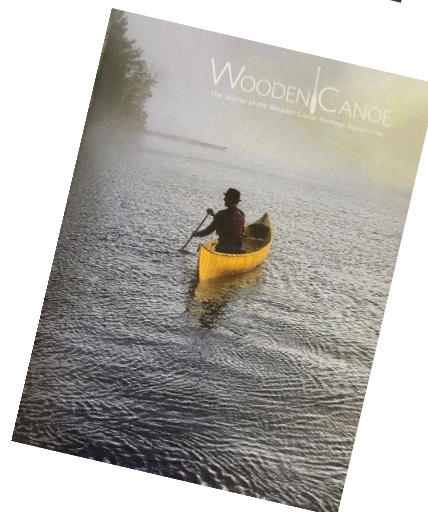


Photo 4: Reid McLachlan tells the story of reinventing the building of a vertical rib (cedar rib) canoe by hand. Photo: Emily Guthro



Photo 5 (right): The full story of Reid's canoe appears as "Building a Mystery - The Peterborough Cedar Rib Recreated" in *Wooden Canoe*, Spring 2026.



The big winds provoked some consternation for planning the next day's solo paddling workshops, since Canadian-style paddling is best suited to mill-pond conditions. Happily, participants woke up on Saturday to significantly reduced winds and converged on Rogers Cove Park for the day's activities (Photo 6).

Photo 6: Saturday's relatively calm water. Photo: Joshua Kubinec



The extensive lawn at Rogers Cove accommodated a number of different exhibitors. The Wooden Canoe Heritage Association had exhibits, artifacts, and mementoes shared by club members, as well as a live ongoing demonstration of installation of new canvas on a 14-foot Huron solo canoe (Photos 7,8).

Photo 7: WCHA members recanvassing a 14' Huron canoe. Photo: Alex Guthro



Photo 8: WCHA artisan Murat Vardar's historically accurate paddle reproductions. Photo: Joshua Kubinec



Other exhibits showcased the latest products from [Haliburton Paddle Shop](#), [CampKitchen](#), [Spirit Tree Paddle Company](#), and demo [Nova Craft](#) canoes provided by [Wild Rock](#) outfitters and [H2O canoes](#) from [Kawartha Adventure Rentals](#).

Photo 9: Sponsoring exhibitors included CampKitchen. Photo: Alex Guthro



The centrepiece of the day included three hours of on-water solo paddling clinics. A moderate but gusty breeze deprived us of the cherished mill-pond conditions, but Rogers Cove itself created a bay with some shelter from the prevailing north-west wind (Photo 10).

The “curriculum” was presented by a group of Paddle Canada and ORCKA instructors, led by Canadian-style paddling legend Becky Mason. Participants were divided into three groups (Peterboroughs, Chestnuts, and Pals) (Photo 11) and rotated through three different sets of skill clinics focusing on Canadian-style solo paddling. Participants worked on pivots, sideslips, landings, running pries, and various ways to make canoes go both forward and backwards. The hallmark of Canadian-style paddling is to carry out precise manoeuvres with the utmost finesse and effortless style; all participants made great strides towards meeting these aspirations.

Photo 10: Calm water in the lee of the public boat launch. Photo: Emily Guthro



Photo 11: OSCR-clinic paddler groups named after iconic canoes (by Tom Connell)



A mid-day break allowed the paddlers to spend time with the exhibitors, and also to participate in a hands-on workshop with wind-paddling author John Etches (Photo 12).

Photo 12: John Etches' workshop on altering routes in strong winds. Photo: Emily Guthro



Another highlight of the day was a visit by paddle-making legend Ray Kettlewell. Kettlewell paddles are well

known and appreciated by paddlers across Ontario and beyond, featuring the distinct black logo of a goose braking as it touches down. In his 90s, Ray has retired from paddle making but supervises canoe-building projects from time to time (Photos 13a,b,c). Many participants proudly brought along their own *Kettlewells* to show Ray and to share the stories connected with each paddle.



Photo 13a (left top): Kettlewell paddles. Photo: Kim Switzer.



Photo 13b (left, bottom): Kim Switzer's yellow canoe, made with Ray in 2026. Photo: Alex Guthro.

Photo 13c: Becky Mason trying the yellow canoe, with Ray, Kim Switzer & partner Brad Archer. Photo: Lee Benson.



The Saturday evening program highlighted WCHA research by Murat Vardar on Chestnut Canoe decals over the years (Photo 14). On the face of it an arcane topic, but in fact it provided a window into the history of a major Canadian canoe manufacturer, and practical clues for the identification of vintage canoes from different eras. Along with canoe restoration, WCHA members make a significant historiographic contribution with their extensive research on the canoe-making industry in Canada and the U.S. In the late 1800s and 1900s canoe manufacturing was of great economic significance with the canoe's more prominent role in transportation and economic development, in contrast to the present day's recreational focus.

Photo 14: Chestnut Canoes Decal Timeline. Compilation: Dick Persson of [Buckhorn Canoe Company](#)



The weekend finished on Sunday morning with a low-key social paddle up the [Trent Severn Waterway](#). The canal leaves Little Lake close to the CCM, at Lock 20. The flotilla of two dozen boats portaged around Lock 20, and proceeded less than one kilometer

Photo 15: Lock 21 - Peterborough Lift Lock. Photo: Parks Canada



north, to Lock 21 – the big one – the [Peterborough Lift Lock!](#)

(Photo 15).

This lock, completed in 1904, is the largest hydraulic lift lock in the world. It is monumental in scale, and boaters find being raised and/or lowered effortlessly in its giant tub to be quite a novelty as the hydraulics do their

magic (Photos 16a,b).

Photo 16a (below, left): In the giant tub. Photo: Andrea Jacob

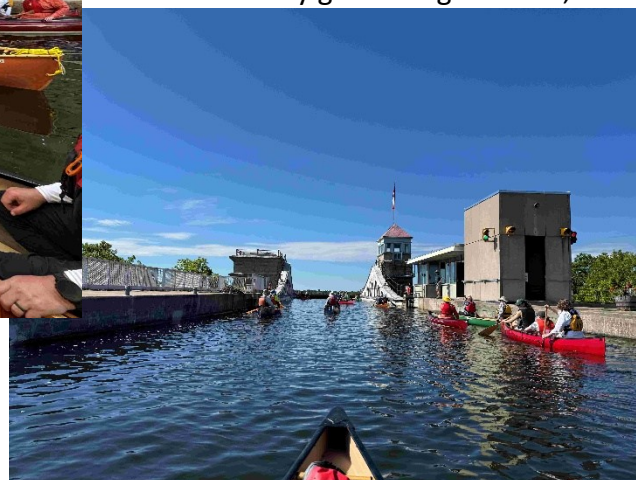
Photo 16b: Having a look at the view before floating down. Photo: Andrea Jacob

(or road) is an added bonus. For the OSCRC weekend participants, it was opportunity for a relaxing paddle while setting the world to rights with new and old paddling friends.

While the CCM is a sufficiently good reason for a trip to Peterborough, a visit to the lift lock, just up the canal



Returning from the lift-lock adventure, the paddlers dispersed back home, many grabbing a quick snack at the CCM's Silver Bean café for the road. By general agreement,



the OSCR weekend was a great success. Many thanks to the organizers – Lee Benson, Murat Vardar, and Robin Rivison – for all their efforts leading up to the wonderful weekend (Photo 17) and the OSCR's fabulous sponsors (Photo 18).

Photo 17: Ray shares stories with OSCR organizers Robin Rivison, Lee Benson, & Murat Vardar



Photo 18: The OSCR's fabulous sponsors

For more photos, see the WCHA Northern Lakes Chapter album at

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/vP2tonoAp8BJ1yBp7>

