

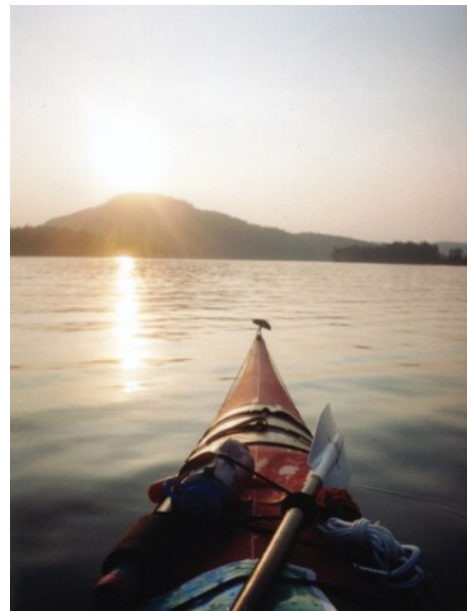
# Chapter 4

## Recreational Values

The Ottawa River's rich combination of human history, natural beauty and ease of access means that it supports a wide variety of recreational activities. Opportunities for recreation and education for communities along its shores and visitors from outside the region are numerous, diverse and high-quality. Activities include visiting museums, participating in festivals, fishing, boating, paddling, camping, hiking, cycling and skiing. These diverse activities cater to different tastes, and offer something for all seasons.

The Ottawa River and its tributaries afford opportunities for outdoor and sporting activities based on the natural features of the river, its valley and wildlife. The quality of these natural features greatly contributes to the enjoyment of these recreational activities. Many of these outdoor activities follow routes or use techniques that echo the early explorers, fur-traders and First Nations Peoples that preceded them, adding an exciting historical dimension to the experience. The many festivals, museums, historical tours and plaques demonstrate a strong interest in the human and cultural history of the river valley, and are based on an extraordinary history that contributes to growing cultural tourism along the Ottawa. The river's northern stretches provide a rugged wilderness experience, whereas its lower stretches offer more structured recreational opportunities.

**Figure 4.1 Sea Kayaking**



Source : Christian Guimond

### 4.1 Watersports

#### 4.1.1 Boating and Paddling

The Ottawa River provides significant opportunities for travel, nature enjoyment and sport through boating. A long tradition of boating as a means of travel, trade and exploration along the Ottawa River dates back to the era of the canoe, followed by the steamboat. Today, boating on the Ottawa River is recreational, and the boating industry, including power boating, rafting, kayaking, canoeing and sailing, is an important contributor to the economies of both Quebec and Ontario. The industry directly creates employment in pleasure craft construction (Quebec is a leader in this sector), marinas and the paddling industry. Complementary services associated with the recreational boating industry generate additional employment.

## Paddling

The Ottawa River is well known for its excellent paddling opportunities. Every year, paddlers are drawn to the river in search of adventure, connecting to nature, retracing Canada's history and spiritual renewal. Popular paddle sports along the river include rafting, canoeing and kayaking. Several paddling clubs and youth organizations provide opportunities for recreation and leadership on the river. Many of the Ottawa River paddlers sense a connection between the health of the river and their own well-being (Ottawa Riverkeeper: "Canoeing").

The natural setting and hydrology of the Ottawa River provide the ingredients for a high quality eco-tourism product that has been developed by local entrepreneurs and communities. Today, the river has become one of the world's most important paddling-based adventure and eco-tourism destinations. The famous Rocher Fendu whitewater section, located around Beachburg, Ontario and Davidson, Quebec, is home to at least five major whitewater rafting companies and four kayaking and canoeing instruction centres (Ottawa Riverkeeper: "Canoeing"). Several paddling tourism companies have operations on either shore of the river, from Lake Temiskaming to the confluence with the St. Lawrence. The *Fédération québécoise du canot et du kayak* has produced a paddling map-guide of both the Upper and Lower Ottawa River.

Paddling and rafting businesses directly employ over a thousand people. Thousands more are employed in the travel, outdoors equipment, and other related businesses, making paddling and rafting businesses a major employer in the Ottawa Valley. Paddling-based businesses rely on a sustainably-managed river and watershed.

## Rafting and Whitewater Kayaking

The same rapids that once proved a dangerous obstacle to European explorers and fur traders now provide an excellent opportunity for rafting and whitewater kayaking. Every summer, tens of thousands of paddlers descend the rapids of the world-famous, 12-kilometre stretch of whitewater known as the Rocher Fendu section, meaning split rock in French.

**Figure 4.3 Rafting in Big Waters**



Source: Benoit Chailleur

**Figure 4.2 A Long History of Recreation**



Source: Library and Archives Canada

The Rocher Fendu section boasts warm water and high-volume, relatively safe rapids, giving it the well-deserved reputation as one of the world's top whitewater destinations. In this section, the river flows through a complex maze of islands and channels and is largely untouched by dams and diversions. The two most popular

channels in this section offer paddlers the choice between the higher volume rapids on the Main Channel, and the more technical, lower-volume rapids on the Middle Channel, often appropriate for novices or family rafting. Both channels feature pool-drop rapids separated by lakes, with some continuous sections. The Rocher Fendu section attracts the world's top paddling experts, yet can be enjoyed by beginning paddlers if accompanied by a paddling school or rafting company.

### The Ottawa River Rodeo

Every Labour Day weekend since the early 1990s, North America's top freestyle paddlers (kayakers and decked canoeists) gather at McCoy's Chute, the first rapid of the Rocher Fendu section, to compete at the Ottawa River Rodeo. This event is part of a nation-wide circuit of freestyle paddling competitions facilitated by the National Organization of Whitewater Rodeos (Kayak International). Recently, the event has been expanded to include vendors and off-river events, and has been renamed the Ottawa River Festival.

Whitewater rafting is an important component of the Ottawa Valley's ecotourism sector, with several major whitewater rafting companies concentrated in the Rocher Fendu section alone, initiating tens of thousands of clients to rafting every summer. Whitewater kayaking on the Rocher Fendu section experienced a major boom in the 1990s, resulting in the development of a number of paddling schools in the region. In 1980 the whitewater sector was already generating \$2.5 million (Hydro Québec: Bassin inférieur 5-1). Despite the significance of the paddling sector to the economy of the Ottawa Valley, there is a lack of recent studies evaluating its impact.

Rapids at the Champlain Bridge in Ottawa provide city paddlers with accessible paddling opportunities and are often the site of a spring rodeo competition. Slalom paddlers, including Canada's National Team, practice and compete at an artificial course at a small diversion from the Ottawa River at the Pumphouse rapids at the LeBreton Flats in Ottawa.

### Canoeing and Recreational Kayaking

For over eight thousand years the canoe has been one of the primary methods of transportation for people living in the Ottawa Valley. Originally built and used by Aboriginal traders, the canoe later became pivotal in the exploration and development of the Canadian wilderness by European explorers, settlers, and industrialists. Today, canoes are treasured by

Figure 4.4 Rafting on the Ottawa River



Source : Esprit Rafting

Figure 4.5 Running the Rapids



Source : Picturessque Canada

countless people looking for a relaxing way to explore the Ottawa River.

A canoe route links Lake Outaouais with Lake Temiskaming on the upper section of the river, although wind is an impediment to canoeing on the upper reservoirs. Below Rapides-des-Joachims, the canoe route is considered easy, with a portage at Bryson.

Many of the Ottawa's tributaries are particularly suitable for backcountry whitewater and flatwater canoe tripping, including the famous Dumoine River, and the Petawawa River flowing through Algonquin Park. Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario's oldest park, offers over 2000 kilometres of canoe routes through its thousands of lakes, ponds and streams. Four major gateways to the interior of the Park are located in the Ottawa River basin: near Whitney, Pembroke, Deux-Rivières and Mattawa (Friends of Algonquin Park).

**Figure 4.6 Paddling in Downtown Ottawa, Rivers Day 2005**



### **Power Boating and the Ottawa River Waterway**

Power boating is another way to explore and experience the natural and human communities of the Ottawa River, and also contributes to the local economy. In the Ottawa-Gatineau region, 14,000 pleasure craft have been noted annually. Some boaters still navigate along the historic military and shipping route, "The Blue Triangle" by connecting the Ottawa River, the Rideau Canal and the St. Lawrence River.

Numerous wharves and ramps along the Ottawa between Fort Coulonge and the Argenteuil MRC exist. In the Carillon reservoir, there are 10 federal wharves, 14 public ramps and 5 marinas. Above Chats-Falls, there are 2 federal wharves, both with a boat ramp. Upstream of Bryson there are 2 federal wharves, 6 boat ramps and one marina. The "Pontiac Princess" offers a boat cruise on the Ottawa departing from Bryson (Hydro Québec: Bassin inférieur 5-1).

Every summer, between 400 and 500 pleasure craft frequent Lake Temiskaming, mostly from the surrounding regions. Lakes Quinze and Temiskaming have federal wharves as well as private and public wharves, boat ramps and one marina each. Powerboating upstream of Quinze Lake is less common and is linked to fishing and hunting. There are two boat ramps near Bourque dam in the Dozois reservoir (Hydro Québec: Bassin supérieur 5-1).

### The Ottawa River Waterway

Since 1993, a recreational waterway from Notre-Dame-du-Nord (upstream of New Liskeard) to Arnprior has offered boaters almost 500 kilometres of chartered routes flowing past mountains, waterfalls and sandy beaches. Previously known as the Temiskawa Waterway, the Ottawa River Waterway allows boaters to experience much of the pristine wilderness that was familiar to some of Canada's earliest explorers.

A series of hydraulic trailers exists along the entire length of the Waterway, safely transporting boats beyond each of the Waterway's dams and rapids. The trailers are designed to lift boats of up to 10 metres in length and weighing up to 6,800 kg (Destination Ontario). This simple by-pass system allows boaters to enjoy one of Canada's most scenic wilderness waterways, without going through the treacherous portages and rapids faced by the river's early traders and voyageurs (Town of Petawawa).

Pleasure boaters can plan day-trips or week-long journeys along the waterway. Marinas along the route allow boaters to enjoy local culture and community flavour (Real Ontario). To assist boaters with the planning of this adventure, the Ottawa River Waterway has developed a cruising guide featuring three routes: the Pioneer, the Voyageur and the Trader Routes (Ottawa River Waterway).

#### Other Pleasure Boating

Sailing and pleasure boating are popular in the capital region, particularly from Lac Deschênes to the Chats Falls dam, a distance of 47 kilometres (McGoldrick). Located in Ottawa on the river, the Ottawa

**Figure 4.7 Cruise on the Ottawa River**



Source : Benoit Chailleur

Rowing Club is the oldest in Canada (founded in 1867). The Rideau Canal provides additional opportunities for boating and fishing in Ottawa. Upstream of Montreal, the Lake of Two Mountains is used for an array of nautical activities. This natural broadening of the Ottawa River is up to 6 kilometres wide, and runs a distance of over 33 kilometres from the dam at Carillon to the Grand-Moulin rapids in Laval. Along this same stretch of river, Oka National Park provides opportunities to swim, cycle, hike, windsurf, sail, and rent pedalos and dinghies (Boucher). Sailing is also popular on Lake

Temiskaming.

#### 4.1.2 Swimming

The water quality of the Ottawa River and its main tributaries improved significantly in recent years; this has resulted in the growth of both boating and swimming. Sand beaches on the many islands of the Ottawa River make swimming a popular summertime activity. The Lower Ottawa River offers some 34 swimming beaches (Hydro Québec: Bassin inférieur 5-1).

The shores of the Ottawa River are home to the Parc des Cèdres beach, the YMCA Camp beach, Britannia Beach, Westboro Beach, Moussette Beach and Lake Leamy Beach. Less-known beaches can be found on the Finlay Islands between Waltham and Fort Coulonge. There are many island beaches between Allumette Island and Rapides-des-Joachims. Some swimming spots are only accessible by boat or trail, whereas others can be reached by car, including those at Sandy Bay, Norway Bay, Rocher Fendu Park, Fort William, Fort Coulonge and Bryson. On the Upper Ottawa River, swimming is popular at Ville-Marie, Latulipe, Laforce, Saint-Eugène-de-Guigues, Guérin and Rouyn-Noranda. There are three beaches along Lake Temiskaming, one at the small reservoir des Quinze, three at the Quinze and Simard lakes and three at Dozois reservoir (Hydro Québec: Bassin supérieur 5-1).

Two of the beaches on the urban section of the Ottawa River - the Parc des Cèdres and Moussette beaches - are monitored by the Quebec Minister of the Environment (MENV) through the program called *Environment-Plage*. In addition, the NCC monitors the water at its own beaches. The quality of the swimming water on the two beaches is generally rated excellent. MENV monitors the bacteriological quality of the water over a five-year period (Ottawa River Integrated Development Plan 35).