The canoe glides noiselessly through the water. Dense clusters of tall pine trees line the banks to left and right. Further on, the waterway widens and lush fields of green reeds along the river’s sides take the place of solid banks. A red-winged blackbird perches precariously atop a reed as it sways gently beneath the bird’s weight.

There are six of us in a large, open Canadian canoe. When all of us are paddling together, we move along swiftly enough, though as novices we take every bend of the river far too wide, not knowing who should be paddling on which side to turn the boat. Luckily the water is flat with no rapids to tip us over. We’re on a morning canoe trip in Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, about three and a half hours’ drive north of the city of Toronto. The park has a rather astonishing 10,000

Paddling her own canoe in Canada’s wilds, Yvonne Gordon finds moose, Ice wine and a famed Irishman

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Landing of ice and fire: Ever wanted to explore the land of the giants, hot springs and volcanos? Abbey Travel has three nights in Jungfraujoch from €535pp in October and November. Prices include direct flights, transfers and B&B in the three-star Hotel Gletscherhotel. Optional excursions include a jeep safari of the geological volcanic statistics, a Northern Lights and blue Lagoon, lunch, tour and horse riding. See abbeysweden.com or call 08106783906.

Great Escapes

Interconnecting lakes and rivers and no less than 500,000 of canoe trails. It’s also home to moose, muskrats and wolves – but it’s the white-tailed deer that catch the eye of visitors who come for kayaking, hiking, mountain biking and cross-country. The main aim of the menagerie becomes to try and get a picture of the deer, though on this rainy morning our guide George, who is meeting the boat from the back, says the moose are probably sheltering under the trees as their coats can get very wet. Apparently they don’t like strong sun either; they overheat. Suddenly they don’t seem like the hardy animals I had imagined in this northern wilderness. However, when we do arrive on the tram, I realise how enormous they are (much bigger than a deer) and how thoroughly impressive their antlers are.

We see a brown lodge along the water’s edge – a broad mound covered with snow and a water-like surface. The roof brings you back to the highlands – though it’s easy in Algonquin Outfitters later jokes “the roofs aren’t bad, they’re just fantastic.” Artemis is also enthusiastic – as he prepares some large pike at the outfitter’s shop – but agrees with moose’s antlers.

The outfitters also give lessons in canoeing and what is known as “pour-ter.” Because the park has so many connecting rivers and lakes, perhaps, the canoes cross a passage – gaining and losing water – an important part of every trip. So they make sure everything is as light weight as possible and cache plans routes where trails between two lakes or every river meets up.

We arrive at the Algonquin Visitor Centre, where park ranger David Leger walks through the displays of stuffed moose, deer, wolves, bears and various birds, telling us how they are used to seven moose in a single day. Just as he is saying this, someone starts writing on the Wildlife Sightings Board at one end of the room that they spotted a moose 20km away. I can’t help but notice the previous entry, too – that three black bears were recorded in the campsite at 4am.

If you are a wolf-watcher, you are covered, and that there’s a public wolf howling every Thursday in August. This involves hundreds of visitors lining the roads, all waiting to hear the extraordinarily call of the wolf. The fact that there’s no sound except the wolves and they howl back. ‘It’s just magical,’ says David. The guys go on my arm.”

This is a different world from that of the one we have just left. There were wolves and bears etc. A day or two of the high points of the city tightening – just imagined – was dinner at the 360 Restaurant in the CN Tower, overlooking Toronto in what is, or at least, one of the world’s gambling buildings.

We are panoramically views of the city and its architecture as well as the inner harbour of Lake Ontario and the Toronto Islands. The Toronto Inner Harbour was the setting for an early evening boat race when we were dining. The yachts with their white sails scattered around the lake for as great a view as thought, there wasn’t much wind – and when the restaurant had completed a full 360 degrees rotation and we came back around to the yacht about 2 hours later, they were still in the same position.

A boat cruise to the Toronto Islands made for relaxing ending to the day and, as well as seeing views on the CN Tower and the waterfront, we saw the decked out pens, circuses and bird conservatory on the car-free islands. These public areas, beaches and paths on the islands are a popular spot for fishing, too.

Canada has a million square kilometres, the province of Ontario is full of surprises. The way to Algonquin stopped off at Timmins, where the local famous wine – a sweet wine made from frozen grapes picked during the winter at 40°C. We also visited Niagara Falls, which while worth seeing was very busy with tourists.

But the biggest surprise of all was in the nearby town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, about half an hour’s drive from the falls. This pretty town with its heritage shops, fine wine and horse-drawn carriages hosts an annual George Bernard Shaw festival and attracts more than 600,000 people a year. It is so popular that it runs in four different languages. Townspeople are all dressed up in the period, including the famous “Shaw Cafe” and Shaw Wine Bar.

There’s also a statue of the Irish playwright in the town square, which is called the Shaw Cafe and Shaw Wine Bar. Even E.B. himself would have been surprised at it all...