

A Devil of a River

Even before the trails and railways, it was the rivers that allowed newcomers to penetrate into the land and colonize the townships of Salaberry and Grandison.

Well before the arrival of the first settlers, Algonquians hunted and fished in the region, particularly the Maconce and Commandant families. They frequently traveled up the Outaouais (Ottawa), Rouge and Diable Rivers as far as Lac Tremblant. Incidentally, the last Algonquian Commandant rests on one of the islands of Lac Tremblant, in the municipality of Lac-Tremblant-Nord.

After the Indigenous peoples, it was the forest industry which took advantage of the river's water power, in this case to move wood out of the forests. The trees were cut into 12-foot or even four-foot logs, commonly called *pitounes*. This wood was transported on horse-drawn sleds and dropped onto a snow road created on the river itself or on one of its tributaries. With the thaw, logs and *pitounes* were carried along by the current and guided by skilled wood drivers to the various sawmills.

In addition to providing service to the forest industry companies, the Diable – also called the Devil's River – contributed to the wellbeing of those who lived close to it. Those whose land bordered it used it as a refrigerator to keep foods, particularly milk, cold. Others called upon the services of men such as Édouard Brisebois. In the winter, he cut the river ice into big, two- by three-foot chunks and placed them in ice storage structures or ice houses filled with sawdust. The following summer, he sold them to businesses and individuals for their household or commercial iceboxes. In fact, every week, after having removed some of the sawdust from the storage structure, he cut – using a *godendard*, a two-man crosscut saw – several of these ice blocks into six or eight pieces. He then delivered his merchandise from door to door in the region. Early in the twentieth century, a piece of ice sold for 25 cents and could last a week in the household icebox...depending on the summer temperature, of course!

The Diable played an important role in the economy of the early settlers, but over the years its role has become more recreational and tourist-oriented. It permits activities such as canoeing or kayaking up and down the river, fly-fishing and swimming, to name just a few. A source of beauty and of life, the river continues to be an integral part of the surroundings and of daily activities.

Research and writing: Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC, heritage society
Translation: Anne Johnston

Where does the name, "the Devil's River" come from?

There are two stories....

One story has it that Indigenous peoples believed Mont Tremblant (the mountain) to be possessed by spirits. When the spirits became angry they made the mountain shake, and the river became turbulent. The pioneers associated this legend with the geomorphology of the river, whose many S-shaped curves reminded them of the devil's tail.

The other story has it that the name Diable was adopted by the river log drivers who risked their lives braving the difficult rapids and curves of this river. The job is highly dangerous and requires great agility and skill. As a result, the log drivers called it “a devil of a river”. The name stuck, and you will still hear locals using the term to refer to this watercourse.



Legend: Wood cut by the forest industry companies and stored on the river, awaiting the thaw.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: Ice harvesting by Paul-Émile Charbonneau and his family.
Source: collection of Gérard Charbonneau



Legend: Ice storage structure, property of Édouard Brisebois.
Source: collection of Pierre Brisebois



Legend: Delivery of ice by Édouard and Pierre Brisebois.
Source: *collection of Pierre Brisebois*