

campsite savvy

Campsite Evaluations— Brent/ Conmee/ William



□ *by Dave Foley*

Brent Lake
Brent Lake's much-traveled twisting ten-mile length is a main canoe corridor through the south-central part of the Quetico. Moving through it, paddlers are only a portage away from Darky, Cone, McIntyre, Suzanette, Conmee and William Lakes. Rarely more than a half-mile wide and usually only a couple of hundred yards from shore to shore, Brent offers excellent shelter on windy days. Although serious anglers often pass it by

on their way to lakes like William, Conmee and Suzanette, Brent is a classic four species lake with trophy caliber fish.

Thirteen campsites were found along its shoreline, and only the smaller dead end bays were not visited. Four sites that do not appear as red dots on Fisher maps were also evaluated. All campsites were in good shape, most showing signs of recent use. Perhaps a few might be considered over-used as the living areas had

thin or no covering of pine duff on the dirt ground as well as no firewood near the site.

As we checked out campsites, we developed a bit of our own terminology which I will use in the evaluations.

"Canoe port" is where a canoe can be pulled into a narrow slot between rocks or between rock and land. This makes for easy unloading and loading as the canoe cannot be moved by waves from the lake and floats off the bottom. It is a great attribute to a site but not

BRIAN BORKHOLDER



The McKenzie/Fisher maps mark all BWCAW designated campsites with a red dot. Not so in Quetico. Most useable sites on the Canadian side are not marked on the maps. Here we offer BWJ readers in-depth campsite information on three more Quetico Lakes. (Near Ranger Bay - Basswood Lake)

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common.

"Wet foot landing" is where in order to keep the canoe from scraping bottom, passengers must get their boots wet to get to land. A "dry foot landing" is preferred. Oftentimes in the evening, I change into my campsite tennis shoes; it's nice to be able to get into the canoe and go fishing without getting my feet wet.

Campsite #1

Burned over, perhaps several years ago with a mix of dead pine skeletons standing beside living trees, while a new generation of conifers crowds the edges of the campsite. No shortage of firewood here and not much shade either. As my wife Cyndy pointed out, "This isn't a site I would want to choose to take shelter in a lightning and thunderstorm." Open space: nothing beyond living area **1.5**
Tent space: 1 good-sized tent

space and 1 slightly rocky small tent site, surface is dirt, 50 feet from water **2.5**
Fireplace amenities: 2 fire pits, 1 small one for cooking and 1 large one for campfires, no seats **3.0**
Canoe landing: landing is shallow with rocks, paddlers must exit into water **2.0**
Additional features: good views in three directions: east, south and west; no sitting rocks
OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **2.25**

Campsite #2

This is the second of two sites on the west end of Brent. Fisher maps show another site along the east shore bay, but we couldn't find it. What we did find is an unmarked (at least on Fisher maps) 5-Star site. Because it is somewhat hidden by a larger peninsula, this spot is hard to see unless you paddle into the bay. Take time to find it. It was so appeal-

ing that, after evaluating it, we decided to camp there. Being off the travel route and not marked on the maps gives visitors some privacy.

Red pine is predominant although there are some bushes. Thick pine duff on the ground minimizes vegetation so one can walk the length of the peninsula to large sitting rocks at the end of the land.

Open space: **5**

Tent space: 2 first-rate large tent sites and a third that is not level, all sites have soft layer of pine duff **5**

Fireplace amenities: the large fire pit has ample room for a grate and large flat counter-top rocks provide work space (or sitting space on cold nights), log seats are near the fire pit **5**
Canoe landing: a flat rock next to a water slot bounded by the near shore creates a canoe port, dry foot landing and ease of reaching into the length of the canoe makes transferring gear easy **5**

Additional features: nearby places for additional canoes to land

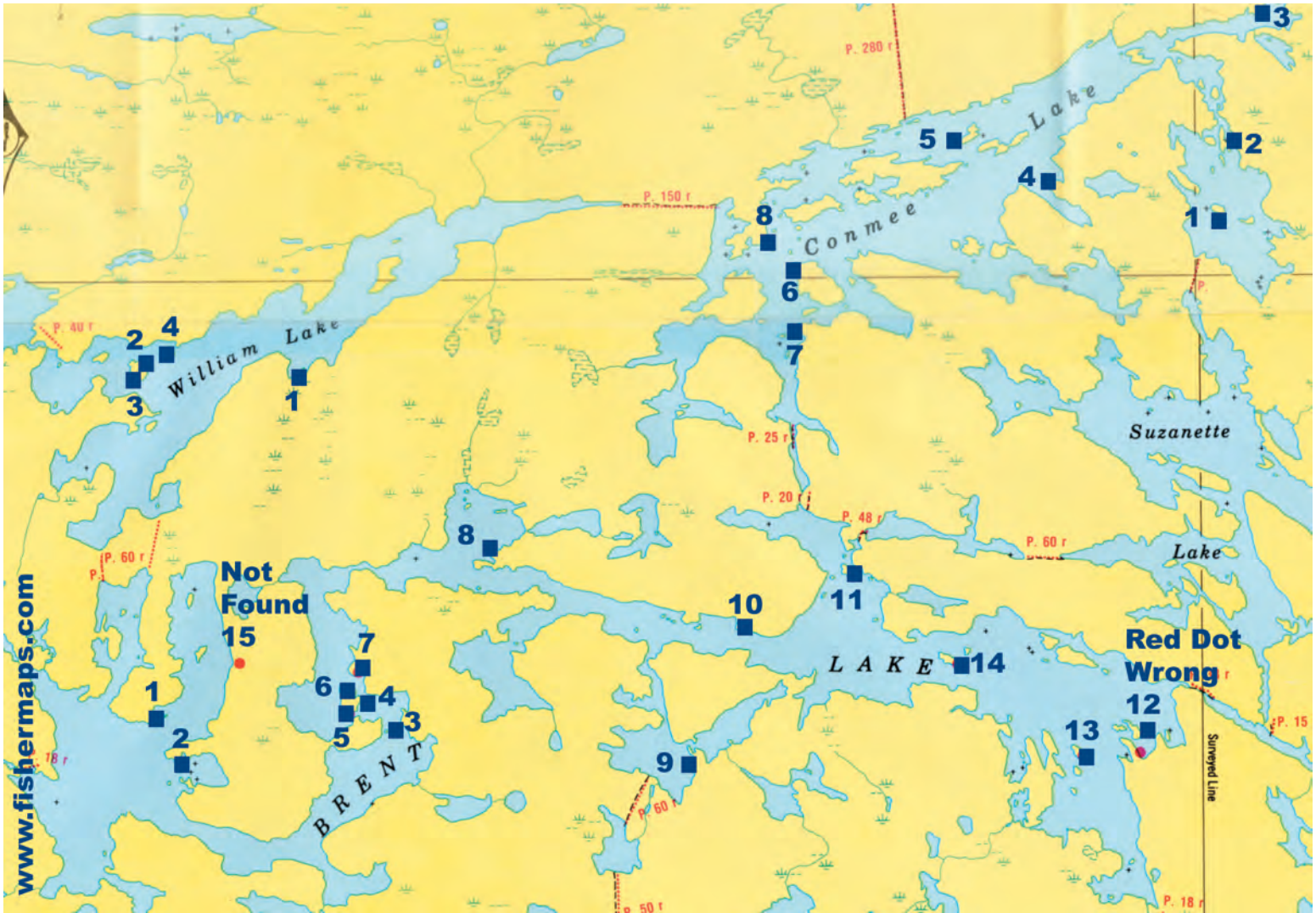
OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **5**

Campsite #3

The first and best of five sites you encounter as you travel east down Brent Lake, this island site is a classic, offering two camping environments. Open space: large pine trees leave the ground beneath covered with pine needles, many places to walk but much is up and down **5**

Tent space: tent sites near the canoe landing, enough flat pads for several tents, thin layer of pine duff, excellent for larger groups **5**

Fireplace amenities: the lower level located near the lake has an excellent cooking fire pit with log and stone seating, build an evening campfire in the fire pit on top of the rock platform 50 feet above the lake and take in a panoramic north-



ern view of Brent Lake 5
 Canoe landing: wet foot, shallow and rocky, the only blemish on an otherwise perfect site 2.5
 Additional features: the two camping environments are a plus

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4.5

Campsite #4

Desperate for a place to cook a meal and pitch a small tent, this will do. However, better sites are located on the ends of this island. This site is not marked with a red dot on Fisher maps.

Open space: only enough room to walk around the fire pit and to the tent pad, the forest and brush crowd this site 1

Tent space: 1 small, barely usable tent site 2
 Fireplace amenities: small but adequate for a single camper wanting a small fire, good sitting log bench, no food hanging trees 3

Canoe landing: rocky and difficult to find a place to drop gear as you unload 1

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 1.75

Campsite #5

This well-used site has a “lived-in” look with pine duff covering worn down to dirt in traffic areas. Suitable for groups. It is narrow enough from its center for views of the east and west. One of three sites (4, 5 & 6) on a good sized island; this one is located on

the south side. It is not readily seen as most canoe traffic goes around the north side of the island.

Open space: several paths lead into the island’s interior, probably routes used by those seeking firewood 4

Tent space: 3 flat tent pads although ground is dirt 4

Fireplace amenities: sturdy fireplace grate sits in the stone pit and log benches are available for seating 5

Canoe landing: rocky and shallow 2

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 3.75

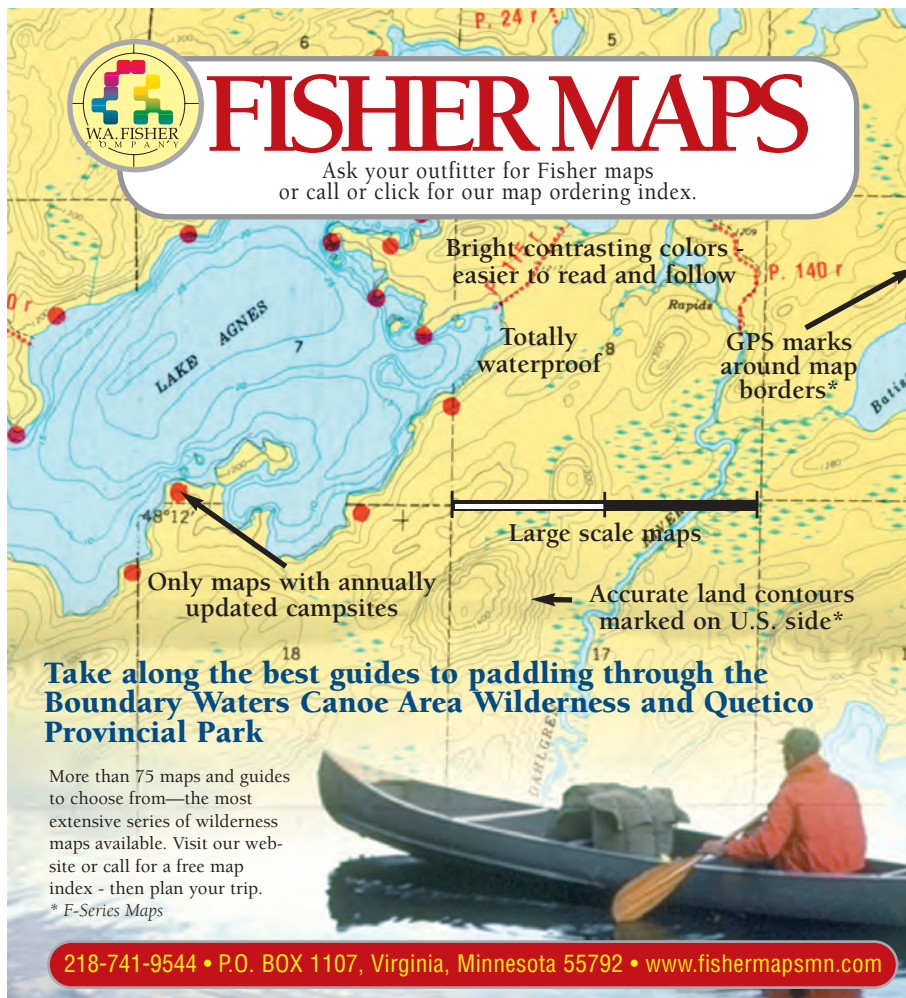
Campsite #6

A fallen brushy pine tree bisects this site, the same tree lay on the site when we



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camped here in 1999. A large sitting rock provides a fine sunset view of Brent Lake. Open space: basic camp area has walking room, trails lead into the woods, the area beyond the fallen pine could be used for protection from south or west winds (strong west winds forced us to cook here in 1999) **3.5**

Tent space: flat sites on pine duff but exposed to west wind **3.5**

Fireplace amenities: long seats in front of a well built fire pit create a serviceable kitchen area **4**

Canoe landing: a canoe port along a smooth flat rock with room along the shore provide good docking for several canoes **5**

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4

Campsite #7

If you can get to sites 3, 5 or 6 (all within 5 minutes paddling) camp at one of those. With a strong west wind, even #4 is an improvement. No one lingers at this site if they can help it, and judging by the condition of this site, very few camp here.

Open space: even the mice have to bushwhack on this site to move around **1**

Tent space: 1 decent site with a mossy sleeping pad, comfy, second tent pad is quite brushy and uneven **3**

Fireplace amenities: small but serviceable, those who gather around the fire pit will either be squatting or standing, no seats **2**

Canoe landing: a long low flat rock is fine for disembarking in dry weather, but on the rainy day we were there, it was treacherous and suitable only for gymnasts **2**

Additional features: no suitable trees for food hangs as all are either small or offer no open branches, no walk-around space

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 2

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Campsite #8

This unmarked site is the only camping spot within a three-mile stretch of Brent Lake and is off the main lake pathway. It is located on a small point of land at the top of a rounded hill. A nice vantage point for watching sunsets but no sitting rocks as campsite is on a hill.

Open space: limited but adequate walk-around space, pine trees predominate with little brush so ground has clean pine duff covering **4**

Tent space: although it would be small for a group site, a couple of tents could be set up on nice tent pads covered with pine duff **3**

Fireplace amenities: fire pit with ample room for grate and log seats provide good cooking and sitting **5**

Canoe landing: wet foot landing into shallow water with some rocks **3**

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **3.75**

Campsite #9

Well off the main canoe route, this unmarked site is located on a rocky knoll in a bay with portages leading to Earle Lake. Every trip from the camping area to the water means walking up and down a steep rock that is slippery when wet. No trees for a food pack hang.

Open space: too much open space, the site is located on one giant rock supporting only a few scraggly jack pines, one of the worst places to be on a hot sunny day, when it rains or the winds are strong **1**

Tent space: a mattress of lichen covers 1 good-sized tent pad, no shade for tent, some protection from wind provided by small jack pines **2**

Fireplace amenities: obviously an architect or builder camped here once as the fireplace is carefully crafted with flat counter-top rocks, a long bench with backrest sits in front of fire pit and a dry protected area

for firewood storage under the bench **5**

Canoe landing: located at base of monster rock so unloading is done onto a steep slanting rock and any water movement will grate canoe on bottom of rocks **1**

Additional features: From this site campers can see horizons to the north, south and east; one of the best places to see the stars and northern lights; one of the rare sites where you have no chance of being crushed by a falling tree

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **2.25**

Campsite #10

Sites like this don't offer much incentive to hang around camp. Lacking aesthetic appeal, yet providing the basics you need, it works well as a late afternoon stop with an anticipated early departure the next day.

Open space: 50 feet of level-ground walking will take you from your tent to the fire pit and down to the canoe landing **2.5**

Tent space: 2 tent pads, 1 large and 1 small, both level and covered with light vegetation make for comfortable sleeping **4**

Fireplace amenities: easily takes a grate and is well built, a round log seat is available **3**

Canoe landing: the shallow water has rocks so passengers will be dipping their feet into the water as they disembark **2.5**

Additional features: site is at water level which minimizes scenic views but makes it easy to haul gear to the cooking and sleeping areas, flat rocks along shore provide good sitting

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **3**

Campsite #11

The hike from the canoe landing to the camping area is uphill, but the trip is worth it. The spacious living area is more like a conference center than a campsite: it offers two

fireplaces, numerous tent sites and a network of trails all over the island. From the rocky promontory, 70 feet above the water, one can see for miles to the north, west and south down and across the widest part of Brent.

Open space: the pine trees in the camping area provide shade yet an open area in the camping and cooking space, paths snake off in several directions toward the wooded sections of the island **5**

Tent space: level flat sites in various places provide spots for half a dozen tents, heavy use in the traffic areas and on the tent sites has worn away the pine duff leaving a dirt surface **4.5**

Fireplace amenities: 2 fire pits, 1 for cooking and 1 at the overlook fill the needs of all visitors, good log seats at the cooking fire pit **5**

Canoe landing: a canoe port allows dry foot exits and an alternative site can accommodate additional boats, water is shallow at the second site and paddlers will get their boots wet **4.5**

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **4.75**

Campsite #12

Catch the rising sun as you cook breakfast at this site and then in the evening stretch out on the large rocks to watch the sunset. Between the two locations your tent sits shaded by the pines all around. Incorrectly marked on the Fisher map (it's actually on the next peninsula to the south) and located in the middle of the peninsula, this site is almost hidden and very hard to spot from the water.

Open space: the pine trees shading the camping area minimize the growth of underbrush, trails heading inland lead to ample amounts of firewood **4.5**

Tent space: 2 flat spots with a thin layer of pine duff mixed with dirt provide room for 2

large tents **4.5**

Fireplace amenities: the fire pit works well for cooking and has log seats nearby **4.5**

Canoe landing: an easy approach to shore and shallow gravel bottom makes loading and unloading easy **4.5**

Additional features: this narrow peninsula offers several environments, all within a small area, the cooking area is located near water level and close to the canoe landing with the tent sites close at hand, however the western facing sitting rocks are 20 feet above the water making it a more appealing location to look down the lake

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **4.5**

Campsite #13

Although lacking the dramatic high vistas of a classic 5-Star campsite, this island site excels in every category. We camped here after a day of doing campsite evaluations. With fire pit, tent areas and canoe landing all within 50 feet and near the water level, no extra steps are needed to perform camp area duties. The pine trees in the site provide shade, a carpet of needles and allow little brush to grow.

Open space: paths to the south lead to large sitting rocks offering a good view of the lake, paths continue along the island shore and inland **5**

Tent space: the spaces are flat and pine-needle soft **5**

Fireplace amenities: the fire pit is large enough for a grate, protected from the wind and has double-log benches arranged on three sides **5**

Canoe landing: a gunnel-high rock parallel to shore makes for an easy dry exit from the canoe **5**

Additional features: next to our tent was a large flat rock which was ideal for folding the tarp and tent

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **5.0**

Campsite #14

This island site appears as a red dot on Fisher maps, however a recent fire scorched the island obliterating all traces of the site.

Campsite #15

Although marked with a red dot on our map, we paddled right next to shore and could never find this site.

CONMEE AND WILLIAM LAKES

Conmee and William Lakes aren't known for their scenery. Notably absent from their shorelines are cliffs and large rocks. Most of the land near the water is relatively flat and heavily forested.

However, these waters are known as two of the better fishing lakes in Quetico, since good numbers of walleye, smallmouth bass and pike reside beneath chocolate or rust-colored waters. Anglers without depth finders are at a disadvantage; especially on overcast days, they will only be able to see a few feet into the depths.

Because Conmee and William lie beyond most of the standard paddling loops, they are visited less frequently. Consequently there are fewer campsites and most of them are less developed than ones found on more popular lakes.

In addition, no campsites on these lakes are marked on Fisher maps. With no red dots to point us to sites in order to do evaluations, we crisscrossed the lakes, circled islands, and went up/down peninsulas looking for fire pits. Other than a portion of the south shore of Conmee, which we checked with our binoculars, we got a good look at most of the lakeshore.

In our evaluations we paid special attention to canoe landings since stepping from a canoe onto a slanted rock may be easy when the surface is dry

but treacherous if the stone is wet. Furthermore, we favor landings where one can get in and out of the canoe without getting wet shoes. This enables us to wear tennis shoes and leave the boots in camp when going for an evening paddle tour or out fishing.

Conmee Lake

Campsite #1

Located just across from the Suzanette Lake portage, this site should only be considered by those who absolutely are too tired to paddle any farther.

Open space: a thick stand of pine and brush closes around the fire pit and tent site, it is almost claustrophobic **1**

Tent space: space for 3 tents but sleeping spaces are on the only ground not covered by woods or the cooking area, the large one has a spongy moss surface, one of the small pads is on gravel and the other is a mix of rock and moss **2**

Fireplace amenities: fire pit is too small for a grate and there are no seats **1**

Canoe landing: easy step-to-shore level rock is the best part of this site **5**

Additional features: despite the abundance of spruce, all of it is green so firewood is scarce, no places for pack hangs

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **2.25**

Campsite #2

This site is only a ten-minute paddle past the inferior #1 site.

Open space: located on a rocky tip, hemmed in by the woods, there isn't much room for walking around **1**

Tent space: afraid of sleeping in and missing the good fishing, this site with its sloping tent pad laced with roots sticking out of the soil will keep you alert most of the night **1**

Fireplace amenities: fire pit is excellent but log seat is primitive and uncomfortable **2**

Canoe landing: small rocks,

easy step off onto shallow rocks **3**

Additional features: no food pack hangs

OVERALL COMPOSITE

SCORE **2.25**

Campsite #3

If the Death March portages to Delahey Lake is part of your trip plan, you'll likely camp here as it is only a few hundred yards from these notorious portages.

Open space: hemmed by a thick stand of spruce, the site doesn't offer much walk-around room but the Death March trek should supply all the exercise anyone needs **2**
Tent space: room for 2 tents, 1 has a moss-bed sleeping surface and is protected from the wind, the other is exposed to wind and has a lichen covering **2.5**

Fireplace amenities: has ample room for a grate and flat rock seats are in close proximity **5**

Canoe landing: step directly from canoe onto level rock **5**

Additional features: site is located atop a large rock so cooking and sleeping areas are exposed to weather from the southwest, small trees growing close together will stymie those trying to hang food

OVERALL COMPOSITE

SCORE **3.75**

Campsite #4

Judging by the plants growing in the fire pit, this site can be yours whenever you want it.

Open space: camp area has too much open space, but the thick vegetation inland thwarts any attempts to walk about **1**

Tent space: exposed space and ground is gravel **1**

Fireplace amenities: fire pit is adequate and could handle a grate, log seats will accommodate only 2 people **4**

Canoe landing: abuts a slanting rock, treacherous when wet and offers no protection from the wind **1**

Additional features: a plus for stargazers the site is located on

top of a large rock and offers a view of nearly the entire sky, however, if the wind is coming from any direction but the east, campers will take the brunt of it, no large trees for hanging food packs

OVERALL COMPOSITE

SCORE **1.75**

Campsite #5

Located on an island, this site is hard to see. From the water all one can detect is a rock fish trap, a small path inland and the edge of a log table.

Open space: dozens of pine saplings crowd the area **1.5**

Tent space: pine trees offer protection for 2 flat tent sites on grass and moss surfaces **5**

Fireplace amenities: well-constructed fire pit with adjacent wood seats and a work table made from logs, this pit contains a metal grate **5**

Canoe landing: small rocks and shallow water allows dry-foot exits **4**

Additional features: once again lack of big trees makes food pack hangs unlikely

OVERALL COMPOSITE

SCORE **3.75**

Campsite #6

This site, sitting on top of a rock formation showed no signs of use during this year. The fire pit rocks had been knocked over and six-inch plants grew from the surface of the tent site. Only the ledge canoe landing was in good shape. Looking for food pack hang or walk-around space, forget it. To be usable this site needs some brush cutting.

OVERALL COMPOSITE

SCORE **1.0**

Campsite #7

This is the only site on the lake that campsite purists will like and may explain why the other three sites in the area are seldom used.

Open space: located on a gently sloping shoreline, among mature pines, with a network of trails going inland, there is more walk-around open space

here than in all the other Conmee sites combined **5**
Tent space: several level tent spots in different areas of the campsite offer some privacy and each has a pine duff sleeping surface **5**

Fireplace amenities: inviting log seats are arranged in front of the large fire pit, birch trees in the area offer an alternative to pine firewood **5**

Canoe landing: 2 landings, both offer a dry step to shore **5**

Additional features: this site faces west and is suitable for large groups

OVERALL COMPOSITE

SCORE **5**

Campsite #8

In 1996 we camped here. The ground was dirt, and the site was a haven for ticks. It was unrecognizable in 2007 as at some point the wind tore down most of the trees, destroying the fire pit and leaving no place for a tent. It is no longer a usable site.

William Lake

Campsite #1

Because most canoe traffic is taking the most direct way down the lake to the portage and island fishing areas, this site often gets passed by. However, this spot probably houses the largest fire pit in the Quetico.

Open space: located on a level space at the base of a hill, most of the walking space is along a trail on the hilltop **3**

Tent space: 1 tent site at the base of the hill is handy to the cooking area and canoe landing, but the lush green covering leads one to suspect it collects pools of water during heavy rains, the other site with comfy pine duff padding is a 30-foot climb from the base of the campsite, while protected from the wind, this spot still offered a good view of the night sky **3.5**

Fireplace amenities: with a rock pile almost as large as a

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Volkswagen, you could place a full-sized two-burner Coleman stove in the open campfire area, log seats complete with backrests are appealing **5**
Canoe landing: if you place your canoe carefully, an agile move can get you to shore without dipping a foot in the water, pay attention or you'll scrape rocks with the canoe **3**
Additional features: we camped on the upper tent site and it appealed to my wife who enjoys astronomy, good options for a tarp, getting a rope over an acceptable limb for a food hang will only be easy for former NFL quarterbacks, the site faces north and has a good sitting rock

OVERALL COMPOSITE
SCORE **3.75**

Campsite #2

Nothing special about this site. It sits on the west end of an island with a good view to the east which offers protection from the north, south and west—which tend to bring in the storms.

Open space: easy to move about the site but no real access to the interior **2**

Tent space: 3 tent sites available, with 2 offering a pine duff surface while the third is close to the fire and has a dirt/gravel base **4**

Fireplace amenities: fire pit is substantial with room for a grate, logs near the fire serve as seats **5**

Canoe landing: sloping surface becomes tough footing when rock is wet, some rocks will grate on canoe bottom **2**

Additional features: although good trees for tarps, most trees are missing limbs making it tough to hang food

OVERALL COMPOSITE
SCORE **3.25**

Campsite #3

A group was camped on this island, and they invited us ashore referring to their site as the "Hilton." Once we saw the site, we agreed it was like a 5-Star hotel.

Open space: located in a mix of pine and hardwoods, firewood is plentiful and so are the opportunities to walk about **5**

Tent space: ground cover is pine duff so the level tent surfaces are soft, 3 to 4 tent sites were easy to inspect because the group camped there slept in hammocks **5**

Fireplace amenities: an abundance of large flat stones had been used to construct flat counters by the fireplace perfect for cooking, a picnic table had been made with logs and then covered, benches and top, with the flat rocks, near the water a cairn of smooth flat stones had been piled to form a fish cleaning table, if I could rate this a 6.0 I would **5**

Canoe landing: sand and gravel abuts a grassy bank, easy to make a dry-foot landing (was probably the source of all the flat rocks) **5**

Additional features: a tarp was strung and food packs were in place, the site is at water level so scenic vistas aren't seen but everything is close at hand; this is certainly one of the most remarkable sites in Quetico

OVERALL COMPOSITE
SCORE **5**

Campsite #4

This island site isn't large; it is ideal for a single canoe but could accommodate larger parties.

Open space: the living area is at lake level and backs into forest **3**

Tent space: sites are layered in pine duff with room for 1 large tent and 1 smaller one **5**

Fireplace amenities: a log seat is located just in front of a well-built fully functional fire pit and cooking area **5**

Canoe landing: shallow with small rocks, easy to load and unload canoes here **4**

Additional features: pine trees spaced around the site allow for putting up a tarp or hanging food with no problems

OVERALL COMPOSITE
SCORE **4.25** □