



# the BOUNDARY WATERS JOURNAL

SPRING 2019

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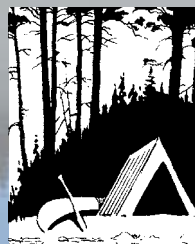
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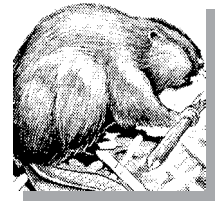
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# canoe country challenges



□ by Bob VandeBerg

**M**ack Creek: you'll find it flowing north out of its namesake, Mack Lake. Mack Lake lies just inside the eastern boundary of Quetico Provincial Park, not quite halfway up. Mack Creek isn't long by any means—a mile, maybe more, maybe less, before it mingles with the tannin-stained waters of the Wawiag River.

Mack Creek isn't particularly winding either. It doesn't have the kinks and bends of the Greenwood River. The Greenwood is so crooked that a canoe seventy-five yards ahead of you may be only five yards away by land after the river repeatedly doubles back on itself. We had paddled the Greenwood only a few hours earlier to reach the Wawiag.

Of course, Mack Creek leads to the Promised Land—Mack Lake. But beware that it can be deceptively shallow at times, which can make it impossible to traverse, even in a canoe. At least that was the condition on the ground that my brother Mark and I found on this fine mid-September afternoon.

Earlier that morning, Mark and I loaded our canoe and gear onto the outfitter's towboat off the Gunflint Trail and headed for the Chippewa Inn on the Canadian side of Saganaga Lake. Dick Powell, the owner of the Inn, came out and sat on a porch bench as we unloaded our gear onto his dock. What a treat it was to talk with Dick and his wife as they reminisced about the old days on Big Sag and Saganagons Lakes. Dick regaled us with stories about the magic of waking up to new ice on a fall morning or being evacuated by floatplane as flames burned to the opposite

## Knee Deep In Mack Creek

shore during the Ham Lake fire of 2007. Little did Mark and I suspect as we chatted that our own personal ordeal was about to begin.

It wasn't long before the distinct rumble of a radial engine announced the arrival of our next ride—a De Havilland Beaver floatplane from Atikokan Aero. The pilot settled the plane onto the water, cut the engine, and got to work strapping my Wenonah Minnesota II to the pontoon struts. Mark and I helped load our gear, hopped in, and strapped ourselves into our seats. We watched as the propeller rotated, the engine coughed a few puffs of blue smoke, and then came to life with a roar. We taxied away from the dock before the pilot pushed the throttle full forward and we scooted down the lake. What a rush! The plane leaned forward and our ears filled with noise as nine pistons fired in their air cooled cylinders and churned out 450 horsepower. The pontoons sent shudders up the struts, through the seats, and into our bodies as they hit the waves. On we went, and just as it felt like things might shake apart, the pilot pulled the yoke back and we floated gently skyward.

Mark and I settled in to enjoy the scenery during the fifteen-minute jaunt north to Clay Lake, which lies just outside the eastern boundary of Quetico Park. We had done this trip before, so we knew the routine. Because there are no lodges or docks on Clay Lake, the pilot unstrapped the canoe and put

it into the water. Next, Mark and I got out onto the pontoon and loaded our gear and ourselves into the canoe. Finally, as the sound of the plane's engine faded, we settled into the silence of fall in Quetico.

Midway along the north shoreline of Clay Lake, there's an old campsite that makes for a great lunch spot. We pulled in to eat and reload the canoe to our satisfaction before we headed for the Greenwood River. The Greenwood flows west out of Clay before it empties into the Wawiag.

Paddling the Greenwood became a primer on how to get an eighteen-and-a-half-foot speed canoe around one tight bend after another. The stern paddler can't do it alone. While Mark drew the bow to and fro, I pulled and cranked the stern from side to side until we came to our first beaver dam. Strange, I couldn't recall any beaver dams from the prior year's trip down the river. This year we came across at least half a dozen—it was as if an entire beaver colony had pulled up stakes and moved in. To make matters worse, if a beaver dam wasn't blocking our way, a tree snag was; the result of a dry 2018 summer and the lowest water levels we had ever experienced in the park.

On past outings, we floated over the snags, perhaps bumping slightly in the stern. Not this fall. Fortunately, both Mark and I, at sixty-two and fifty-eight years old, respectively, are nimble enough that



*Paddling small beaver creeks into the backcountry can be a blessing and a curse. (William Creek)*



we could step out onto the snag or dam and gently slide the canoe over without having to unload. Although not a wet foot best practice, it saved us a terrific amount of time and effort. We're careful, and the canoe, bought used from Canoe Country Outfitters in Ely years ago, doesn't owe us anything.

Last year, when we reached the large snag at the end of the Greenwood, we floated right over and paddled our merry way down the Wawiag. Not so this fall. Out came the packs for a twenty-yard portage before we reloaded and pushed on down the river. The Wawiag, if you haven't paddled it, winds gently with water the color of stout coffee. Deep enough to conceal its current, it is interrupted by only one rapids midway down its length. As fate would have it, we never made it to the rapids on this trip.

Pay attention as you paddle the Wawiag if you're looking

for Mack Creek. It's easy to mistake it for a slough and pass right on by. "There it is," Mark said. I nosed the canoe up the creek, whereupon we immediately grounded on the soft bottom. "Nothing unusual," we thought—it's always shallow at the mouth.

No way are we going to come this far and not make it to our beloved Mack Lake. So off came our boots and into the water we went. "Not too bad," Mark said, trying to sound encouraging as he sunk mid-calf into the soft muck. Not too good, we soon realized as we pushed through knee-deep water, weeds clinging to our legs. The creek was so choked with vegetation that we could shove the canoe only half-a-length before it slushed to a stop. Surely, we thought, the water would be deeper behind the two beaver dams that we knew lay farther up the creek. So on we went, soon to discover how wrong we were.

The day had started out mild with a slight breeze and temps that climbed into the mid-seventies and high humidity. Up the creek we slogged, slowed but with high spirits, until we reached the first beaver dam. The beavers must have joined those that packed up and moved to the Greenwood, because the dam wasn't being maintained. Rather than pool behind the dam, we could hear the water as it trickled softly beneath the jumble of sticks and mud, the creek just as shallow and weedy on the upstream side as it was below.

"A setback for sure," we told each other, "but we've come too far to turn back now."

We pulled the canoe over the dam and stepped into the soft muck on the other side only to sink up to our knees! As it turns out, any sediment that may be in the water settles out behind the dam, making the muck that much deeper on the upstream side. Not only did the



*When the going gets tough, the tough just get out and keep going. (Creek between Oriana and Hamburg Lakes)*



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muck come up to our knees, the water and weeds now came up to our crotches. To make matters worse, the mosquitos hadn't gotten the message that it was a dry fall and began to take unfair advantage of our predicament.

It was then we began to softly mutter about our circumstances and question our decision to make our way up to Mack Lake. The cotton pants I had put on that morning expecting cooler temps were so wet and heavy that I pulled them off along with my socks before we slogged on. We heaved the canoe forward as we hung on to the gunnels, since it was the only way we could get the leverage needed to pull our legs up and out of the muck.

"That second beaver dam has to be close," Mark told me as he rested while hanging onto the back of the canoe. I admired the cloud of mosquitos and gnats that formed a halo over his head. Silhouetted in the setting sun, he looked like some sort of Mack Creek deity. "Should be," I said, since the muck was getting shallower. Needing a rest break, we shoved the canoe to the creek bank where I inspected my bare legs and feet. Hmm—not too bad, I thought, as I scraped off about a half-dozen leeches, somewhat comforted by the fact that they don't carry diseases. Only one small round spot oozed a little blood. Mark watched, and being a more fastidious fellow than I, decided to keep his nylon pants and cotton socks on for the duration of our ordeal. How his socks stayed on in the muck I'll never know, but they did.

Figuring there had to be a better way; we tied fifty-feet of rope to the front of the canoe. One of us would pull from the creek bank while the other pushed from the back of the canoe. The creek bank itself was quite soft as it transitioned

to firmer ground covered with marsh grass. Sometimes we could get two canoe lengths to a push. But it was terribly hard on the person in the creek, since he didn't have the canoe to lean on for support until he caught up.

We reached the second beaver dam with the same dispiriting results; it wasn't being maintained, no pool! We abandoned the lining idea and both of us got back into the muck as the swamp gas bubbled up around our legs with each step.

After I scraped off a fresh batch of leeches, we tried to portage across the flat at a wide bend in the creek. What was usually sodden marsh was now dry terrain. But we found the roots of the grasses and shrubs formed hillocks that made the ground so uneven that we couldn't maintain our balance. After Mark fell three times with his pack on his back, we abandoned this idea. Back into the creek we went.

The tendons on the insides of our knees began to ache from the strain of pulling our legs up and out of the muck. We could only take three sucking steps before we had to stop and rest and we advanced at the rate of one canoe length per minute. A glance at the western horizon revealed that daylight was fading fast, and we had maybe a half hour of dusk before darkness set in. We drained the last of our water from our Nalgene bottles, felt the hunger pangs set in, and slogged on with the goal of making the next bend before stopping again.

As we rounded the bend, we could see another beaver dam ahead—a new one that appeared to be maintained. Our pace quickened as the muck got shallower and we neared the dam. Once we reached it, we peered over the top and found that it held water. Hallelujah! We slid the canoe over and paddled the last stretch of creek with an almost overwhelming sense of



relief.

We made the two short portages into Mack Lake and reached our campsite just as darkness set in. Fatigued to the point where it was difficult to stand, we set up the tent by the light of our headlamps and whipped up the fastest, easiest dinner we could think of: a one pot dish of macaroni and cheese with hot dogs sliced into it, absolutely divine after slogging two-and-a-half hours up Mack Creek.

As we jigged for walleyes on Mack Lake the next afternoon, we were befuddled to see a mid-sixties age couple paddle up the arm of the lake that leads to the portage to Mack Creek. "How in the world," we asked each other, "did they make it up the creek and stay so clean?" Was there a portage we had missed all these years?

They checked our campsite and moved on after finding it occupied, finally setting up camp on an island on the east side of Mack. As we lunched at camp the next day, they paddled past, again coming up the arm of the lake leading to the creek. It was then we surmised they had portaged into Mack from the south end of the lake the day before and scouted the creek before they set up camp on Mack. Their scouting trip would have revealed the water levels on Mack Creek looked fine from the last portage. But they found Mack Creek to be impassable beyond the first beaver dam and turned back. We figured they had to backtrack all the way to Saganagons (a day's worth of portaging and paddling) to continue on their way since we figured Munro Creek to Kenny Lake to also be impassable.

The ordeal of coming up Mack Creek made us rethink our originally planned route, which was to go back down Mack Creek to reach the Wawiag and then continue on to Kawnipi and up the Falls Chain to get back to Saganaga. Instead, we camped on Mack Lake for four glorious days of fall fishing, with all the walleyes and hefty small-mouth that we could hoist out of the water. Then we humped our way south out of Mack through Munro, Cullen, Ross, Bitchu, and Saganagons Lake, where we overnighted. The next day we paddled on to Big Sag Lake where we fished and overnighted in Cache Bay before meeting up with our tow boat at Hook Island the next morning. When we mentioned to the boat driver that Mack Creek was impassable, he said that word had started to get around the past few days.


Now that we are back at home and can ponder our ordeal in comfort, are we glad we slogged up Mack Creek rather than bypassing Mack Lake and continuing on down the Wawiag? Absolutely! We got into some of our best fall fishing ever. Would we do it again? Absolutely not! But what an adventure it was, that fine September afternoon we spent up Mack Creek without a paddle. 🐾

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□ by Nolan Simula

## April Encounter On The Sioux Hustler Trail

---

I met my friend, Abe, several years ago at church. Through conversations about our passion for adventure and the outdoors, he suggested a canoe trip to the Boundary Waters. Now, several trips later, he has become a good friend and rates as perhaps my most hardcore compadre when it comes to camping in adverse conditions. Where everyone else squirms at the thought of bitter cold, wet, miserable weather, where others back out or make excuses, Abe is always one to step up to the plate. He is a gear junkie, very technical, almost to a geeky degree, and is quirky in his own fashion. But with that said, he is always prepared for anything. One weekend with him in the backcountry, and you know you are in good company.

This past winter, Abe and I had plans to go winter camping between January and March. But then both of us went through the wringer with our families, creating postponement after postponement. We each have four kids. When one comes home with the sniffles, it can spread like wildfire. This past January and February, our family couldn't catch a break. Flu after flu. Strep throats. Then I ended up with paratonsillitis—I was hooked up to IV's for three days and missed a week of work. The month of March landed our daughter at the Mayo Clinic for other issues, so we just couldn't get a trip on the books. With a major warm up, the snow was suddenly gone and the lake ice began to weaken.

April seventh, with winter camping no longer an option due to dwindling snow and

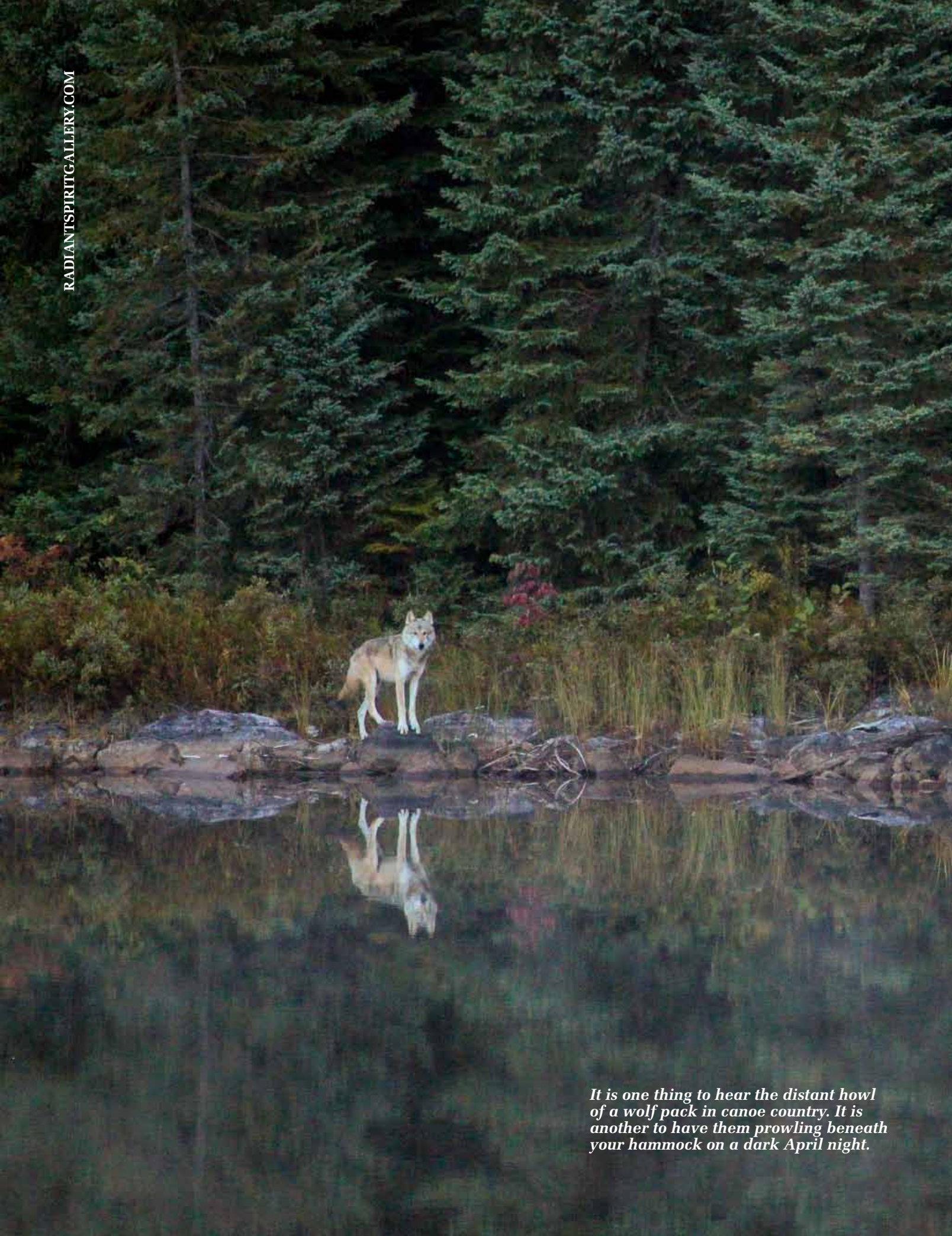
ice conditions, we opted to backpack the Sioux Hustler Trail. I'm more of a canoeist and haven't backpacked since the scouting days of my youth. Nonetheless, I was really looking forward to a weekend out in the sticks. We got a late start getting out of town and didn't arrive until nearly dark. Abe's son, Oliver, was also along and looking forward to his first backcountry experience.

After about twenty minutes of getting our gear ready, we hit the trail. We planned on hiking by headlamp for the first hour and then making camp at the first suitable spot. We were hammock camping, so a few nice trees along a water source were all we needed. With the sun setting quickly in the west, our evening began by slogging through long patches of snow and standing runoff water on the trail. We passed the first rock cairn, and the trail suddenly narrowed. We found a nice spot nestled in a stand of red pines and decided to hunker down here for the night. It was about 10:45 p.m. We were tired, and the temperature was falling fast. The weather forecast indicated snow during the overnight then switching to rain later in the morning.

I had never hammock camped before, so I wanted to be over a spot of dry, flat ground if I could not get comfortable in the hammock. I figured if all else fails, I could just throw a tarp on the ground and crash there for the remainder of the night. There

were several dead branches in the way, so I began breaking them off with the back of my hand. A larger one would not break, so as I have done since I was a kid, I broke the branch off with the bottom of my foot. But my karate-kick backfired, and I was struck by a splinter of wood in my left eye. It hit so hard that, visually, it looked like a firecracker went off in my face. Intense pain immediately surged after the flash, dropping me to the ground. I was immediately, bent over in the fetal position with my face buried in the pine needle duff. With my hands over my face, groaning and rocking back and forth, I worked through the initial shock. I slowly opened my eyes and stood up, feeling like I was going to vomit. To my surprise, though things were blurry, I could still see with my left eye. Abe asked if I was okay, and I said I think so, and went back to hanging my hammock and getting things out of my pack. Within minutes, I felt like I could feel significant pressure around my eyeball, and could tell something was swelling. I wiped my index finger across my eyelid, thinking maybe I was bleeding, but that turned out to be nothing.

Abe and Oliver continued to set up their hammocks about fifteen yards away. I walked over and asked Abe to shine his headlamp into my eyes, just to make sure everything looked okay. At this point, the shock was starting to go away, but the pressure around the backside of my eyeball was increasing. I expected some hilarious comment from Abe, who is



*It is one thing to hear the distant howl of a wolf pack in canoe country. It is another to have them prowling beneath your hammock on a dark April night.*

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usually quite the joker, a master of his own sarcasm. But instead, a soberness I had never seen came over Abe, “Nolan, we need to go. We need to go right now. I can see a chunk of your eye hanging out from your eyeball. A meaty chunk. We need to call it”. “Are you sure?” I asked.

I felt like I could see pretty well, all things considered. Maybe it wasn't as bad as he suspected. Could it wait until Sunday when we come out as planned and I could head to the walk-in clinic? Abe assured me that if this were Oliver's eye, he'd be bringing him into the ER right away. I kicked the ground, angry that after an entire winter of waiting, after only heading less than an hour up the trail, our trip would come to a screeching halt. I was already tired, and dreading turning around to drive the three hours back home. I was also dreading my three a.m.

visit to the Emergency Room. I had my rant, but in the end, I was reminded that this trip wasn't worth losing my vision over.

We got back to the car, and within the first ten minutes of driving back down the Echo Trail, the snow began to fall. Abe drove for me. I sat in the passenger seat and kept him awake. I opted to not call my wife and wake her up at this hour, as it wasn't a life threatening situation. We got back at 3:15 a.m. I headed to the emergency room, and Abe and Oliver headed back home. I apologized for my stupid move and for wasting our BWCAW trip. I walked myself into the ER. The doctor put dye in my eyes, and using a UV light, told me that coming out right away was a good decision. I had a large tear in the sclera of my eye, and was only millimeters away from my cornea. Fortunately, a bout

of antibiotics would heal the whole works, but had I waited, a serious infection could have set in and permanently damaged my eye.

The rest of the weekend went by, and surprisingly, my eye was healing up very quickly with no effects to my vision. In the early part of the following week, we decided we would make a second attempt at our adventure. Besides, we were still packed and completely ready to go from our first attempt! I half debated bringing my Great Pyrenees, Elsa, with us, but quickly killed that idea as I didn't want Oliver to have to suffer with a muddy dog in the back seat on the way home. In hindsight, considering how things would unfold, I am very glad I didn't.

The following Friday, I was able to cut out of work early and head north. There was only one other vehicle parked at the trailhead. The Sioux Hustler Trail actually begins as an old

logging road. After about a half-mile, you'll find the first rock cairn, and then the single lane tread begins. Our goal was to camp our first night at a rapids along the Little Indian Sioux River. We reached the rapids, hung our hammocks in a stand of cedars, and the gurgling river put us to sleep. The evening was cool, in the upper twenties. I had packed my fifteen-degree bag, so I was cozy in my little nook for the most part. In the middle of the night, I awoke startled by the feeling that something had brushed against the underside of my hammock. I sat up and looked around but saw nothing. I listened keenly, but heard only the rapids. I looked back behind me and could see Abe and Oliver asleep in their own hammock cocoons. It must have been a dream or my imagination. Slowly, I drifted off to sleep.

We awoke to a cold morning. Although protected from the wind, the warmth of the sun could not penetrate the thick stand of cedars surrounding our camp. The un-melted snowpack underneath our hammocks was a further curse of the ice box effect. We ate a simple breakfast of oatmeal and hot chocolate and got to packing up for the day. Abe and Oliver filtered water from the river, and within thirty minutes we were heading down the trail.

Heavy snows over the winter had bent lots of saplings and brush over into the open lane of the trail. It became a constant battle of slogging through this tangle, especially in open or swampy areas. Blown over balsams also littered the trail. In some spots, it seemed to be a never-ending obstacle course of going up, over, and around fallen trees. There were many wolf tracks in the patches of snow and mud, especially where the trail passed along the river or lakes. It was an absolutely beautiful spring day. The sun was out without a



NOLAN SIMULA

*A late ice-out in 2018 turned canoe trip plans into a backpack trip on the Sioux Hustler Trail. It would be an April hike to remember. (Sioux Hustler Trail)*

cloud in the sky. The daytime temperatures peaked at sixty degrees.

Between dragging through all the alder brush, crawling over downed trees, and splashing through patches of water and snow on the trail, we were not keeping the pace I expected. Oliver was using his mother's

sixty-five-liter backpack. She is very petite, but he was still having problems with his waist belt. I spent the morning getting about a quarter-mile ahead of Abe and Oliver, and would stop and wait for them. The advantage of this was getting all the first glances of wildlife on the trail. I saw several grouse,

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and even jumped six bedded deer. I also discovered a few old logging remnants along the trail.

With our slower pace, we opted to not hike all the way to our goal, a Heritage Lake campsite, deciding to make camp at Devil's Cascade. For those who have never seen Devil's Cascade, it is a beautiful area where Lower Pauness Lake flows north into Loon Lake. The river flows between two steep gorges and then over a waterfall. The campsite sits just off the portage between Lower Pauness and the Little Indian Sioux River. It is a beautiful campsite, high on a ridge. Just off the west side of the campsite, a cliff drops 250 feet to the bottom. Looking to the north, you get a beautiful view of the river meandering through the woods towards the distant Loon Lake.

Evidence at the campsite showed that a backpacker had been here a recently with a dog. We spent the remainder of

the afternoon hiking along the falls and taking photographs. We walked the entire length of the portage to Lower Pauness, which was still covered in very rotten ice. The ice was so black, only a good wind would blow it all off.

We found the latrine was full of water and unusable. Abe discovered a wolf kill from the past winter with deer hair and bones scattered everywhere. This was a neat find for Oliver to sort through. We spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing in a nook of rock that ended up being the perfect recliner. We soaked up the warm sun and catnapped while Abe read from his book, *Don'ts for Husbands* by Blanche Ebbutt. Lots of laughs.

Evening was soon creeping up on us. Dinner was rice, bacon, and Craisins with a touch of Pulki's seasoning beside a warm fire as the sun set. What a perfect spring day. As our evening around the fire wore on, low lying

clouds slowly crept in. To my disappointment, it started to mist. We hung up our tarps and decided to turn in early. Abe and Oliver situated their hammocks about fifteen yards away from me. The long day and fresh air took over, and I quickly drifted off to sleep.

"Nolan...Nolan!" I awoke to Abe's voice pulling me out of my REM sleep.

"What?" I called back, rather annoyed.

"We've got a wolf in camp."

"A wolf? Are you sure it's not a bear?"

"It's just standing here looking at me and it won't leave. I'm pretty sure I'm looking at a wolf."

In my disbelief, I told him I was getting up. He informed me it was walking away and heading south towards the river. Thirty seconds later, I heard a twig snap right behind me. I shined my light, and five yards away stood a large wolf looking at me. I yelled, "Hey!"

I thought the wolf would



*Wolf sightings are rare in the BWCAW but spring encounters with ruffed grouse, drumming out their territorial claims, are a common delight.*



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immediately bolt. Instead, it sauntered another five yards away and stood behind a small balsam peering at me, completely unafraid. I got out of my hammock, and it slowly retreated back towards the portage trail, angling back in Abe and Oliver's direction. I got on the trail that leads from the campsite back to the portage, shining my light and yelling a bit. I got back out to the portage and shone my light up and down the portage in both directions. I yelled once more. Thinking the issue was resolved, I began to walk back to camp.

Then I heard Abe call me once again. "Nolan."

"What?"

"It's standing over here, ten yards behind Oliver's head."

"Where's Oliver."

"He's still in his hammock."

I ran back. We began yelling again and throwing sticks and rocks. The wolf would not leave and paced in a semicircle

back and forth, staying about thirty yards distant. I still could not get over how completely unafraid this wolf was of us. We decided to get a roaring fire going with the hopes it would leave. At this point, I was wishing we had a tent, as I just couldn't imagine a wolf tearing through the wall of a tent. We discussed building a tent with my CCS tarp and Abe's Kelty tarps. An hour or so had gone by. I was finally feeling more secure in thinking the wolf had left. I headed over to my hammock to grab something out of my pack when I noticed the wolf again. It slowly paced off to my left, tongue hanging out and all. What was up with this wolf? Did it have mange? Had it been kicked out of its pack and was hungry? I have seen wolves from my deer stand, but I've never seen behavior like this. After another hour beside the comforting fire, we decided to go for a strength-in-numbers approach. We moved all our hammocks together, took our tarps, and made a wall around us, and then we piled some downed trees up around the corners. At this point, the wolf appeared to have left, and we slowly drifted back off to sleep.

We awoke to a picturesque sunny morning. The sun quickly beat back the cold. After a hearty breakfast and an abundance of coffee, we headed back down the trail for home. We had only slightly lighter loads, but for whatever reason, we set a record pace coming back out. It was on the final two miles of trail that I noticed something furry running on the trail ahead of me. A few more corners revealed a couple that had two dogs. They were taking a break near a rock cairn, so I introduced myself. They were grad students from Fargo. I asked if they had been camped at the Devil's Cascade site before our stay, but they had camped on Shell Lake. I told them about our close

encounter with the wolf, and I'm not too sure they believed me. They said there were wolves howling all night around them, but nothing out of the ordinary. Further conversation revealed they were veterans of this trail system. They had been in here several times and absolutely loved it. They must love it if they're willing to drive all the way from Fargo to stay for only one night!

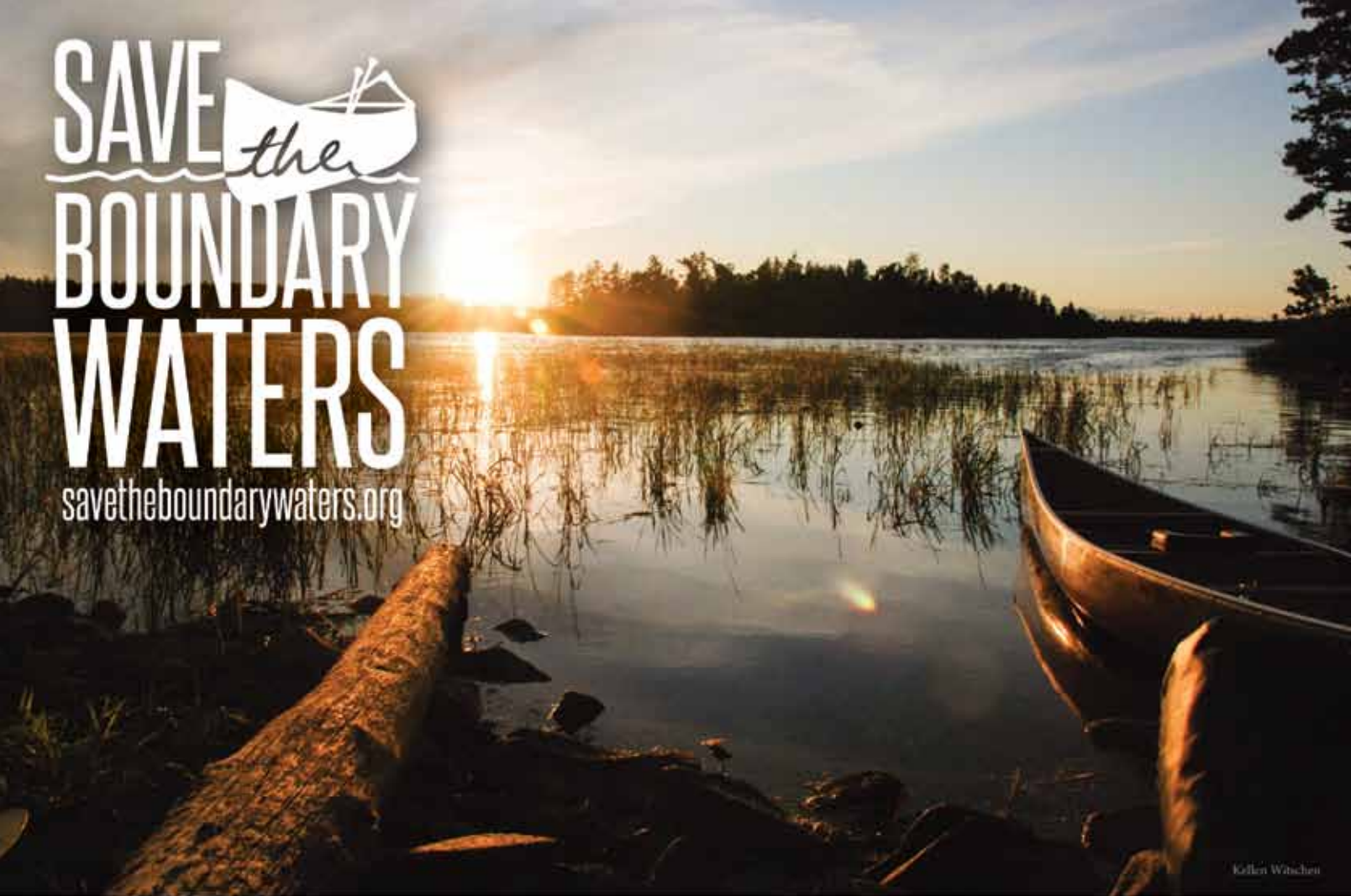
It felt good to be back at the vehicles, but there is always that bittersweet feeling whenever coming out, all of us wishing we had just one more day. Why is it that Sundays are the most beautiful days and those are the days we need to head home? It never fails! It felt good to get out of our boots. Abe revealed he needed a new pair of hiking boots after showing me his bloody toe.

On the drive home after every trip, there is always a conversation reviewing what has taken place. What did we think of the route? What should we have brought or left out of the packs? What would we do differently about meals or food? What should we have done or not done? We are continually trying to perfect our backcountry skills. I would never have the desire to backpack the Sioux Hustler in the middle of summer when the mosquitoes, deer flies, and black flies are at their peak. But in early spring or late fall, backpacking BWCAW trails gives a very different perspective than paddling trips. I suggest you give it a try. As for that unusual wolf behavior, I wouldn't say it freaked me out, but it definitely put us on edge. I have refrained from telling this story to others, fearing they would think I made it all up. Honestly, I would have a hard time believing a story like this myself. However, I can tell you for a fact that Oliver will never forget his first BWCAW experience on the Sioux Hustler Trail. 🐾



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□ by Darrel Brauer

*Editor's Note: Nobody I know of has caught and released more big canoe country pike than Darrel Brauer, so I asked him to write the definitive article on targeting BWCAW and Quetico trophy northern pike, except an interesting thing happened along the way. Turns out, Darrel has caught the majority of his gators inadvertently while targeting walleyes. Which is good news for all of us, because the take away here is that big pike can strike anytime out there, so you need to be ready with the right gear and skills.*

The Summer 2014 Issue of BWJ contains the northern pike entry in the Canoe Country Grand Slam Series of articles. I contributed to that article and highly recommend reviewing it as a comprehensive look at northern pike fishing in canoe country. At the end of that article, BWJ publisher, Stu Osthoff, shares a list of canoe country lakes with big pike reputations. I recommend starting your hunt for big pike with this list in hand.

What do we mean by “trophy pike?” How big does a northern pike need to be to be a trophy? The province of Manitoba has a Master Angler Awards program that requires a qualifying northern pike to be forty-one inches. That’s certainly a trophy that will get you recognized amongst your peers anywhere in North America. If you catch one that big in Manitoba and enter it in their program, they will send you an award. A northern pike over forty inches is estimated to be over twenty years old and reaching the end of life expectancy for a

## Be Ready For Big Pike

northern pike in Ontario. Even a pike that reaches thirty-five inches is a hefty fish that can weigh up to fifteen pounds. For most of us, a fish this size will be an angling thrill and is a reasonable goal on any canoe trip. For the purpose of this article, we will consider any pike over thirty-five inches to be on the low end of our trophy status.

The early days of my canoe fishing consisted of tossing in-line spinner baits along shorelines. I caught plenty of bass and pike, but I also lost a few huge fish because my tackle wasn’t very good. I even broke a rod battling a big pike from shore, losing a chance at a real monster. The truth is, I wasn’t really prepared to catch a trophy pike.

Both northern pike (*Esox Lucius*) and muskellunge (*Esox Masquinongy*) belong to the same family of fish and share many of the same characteristics, so many conclude adopting musky fishing tactics is the best way to catch big pike. The current trend among musky chasers is to employ rods over eight-feet long, reels that can hold eighty to hundred-pound braided line, baits that weigh several ounces and giant nets to capture and hold hooked fish as soon as possible. I suppose this is possible from the seat of a canoe, but for most of us this is not practical on a wilderness trip. So let’s consider a more reasonable strategy that might get us that trophy northern pike.

If you’ve read some of my past fishing advice in BWJ, you

know that I generally promote moderately priced fishing gear for a canoe trip. My reasoning is that paddling and portaging can be hard on fragile fishing equipment, and breakage is difficult to avoid. That said, I strongly urge you to avoid cheap, low quality equipment for tackling trophy caliber pike. Each piece of equipment that makes the cut on a canoe trip should be scrutinized for landing top end fish. Preventing equipment failure begins well before that “once in a lifetime fish” is hooked. My setup for canoe trips includes a Daiwa Revros 2500 reel, spooled with eight-pound Fireline Crystal paired with a Cabela’s Tourney Trail medium-action 6’6” rod. The other rig is a Daiwa Legalis 2500 reel, spooled with ten-pound Suffix 832 paired with a Berkeley Lightning 6’6” medium-heavy rod. These rigs sell for about a hundred dollars each and have proven capable of handling big canoe country pike and lake trout. I’ve hooked, landed, and released dozens of trophy class fish using these rod and reel setups. Extra heavy equipment is only necessary if one intends to throw extra-large baits—more on that later. It does not require a \$300 rod and reel to catch an occasional trophy or a meal of walleyes. However, if you can afford high priced equipment and are willing to provide a little extra effort to protect it, then by all means, go for it. High quality fishing gear casts better, is more sensitive to fish bites, and has the strength to



*Author, Darrel Brauer, catches a lot of top-end pike while fishing for walleyes. His take-home message is you can handle canoe country gators on walleye gear, so be ready when they strike.*

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in the leader. I tie my own twelve to fifteen-inch leaders using Knot2Kinky brand titanium-nickel wire, snaps, and swivels purchased at Bass Pro or Cabela's. Instructions for knots are included to tie your own leaders at whatever lengths you desire. Take the time to inspect the hooks on all your baits and ask yourself, will they land a twenty-five or thirty-pound pike? Generally the more you pay for a lure, the better the hooks will be. You can compensate for poor quality or even light wire hooks in two ways. Change the hooks to a better quality, paying attention not to affect the action of the lure too much, or loosen the drag on your reel. Huge fish can be landed on even light wire jig hooks if you let the drag on the reel do its job. If you do hook a monster on a lighter setup, do not be too eager to reel that fish in close to the canoe. Seeing the canoe spooks big fish, so the longer you can play them out away from the boat, the better. Allow the length of line, flex of the rod, and the reel's drag to absorb the headshakes and powerful runs of that big fish out thirty feet or more. On my YouTube channel (type "Darrel Brauer Pike" in the YouTube search box), I have videos of several pike battles, including three over forty inches. The biggest was a forty-six-inch fish and was caught on a #7 Flicker Shad with the rod and reel described above.

Except for very early spring when pike are spawning, often before the ice is even off many lakes, trophy pike are scattered loners. During their spawning ritual in mud bottomed shallow bays that warm up before deeper water, it is possible to sight numbers of large pike and tease them to bite with some spectacular

land those lunkers.

In the 2014 Grand Slam article mentioned earlier, Stu suggests having a spare rod ready and rigged with a large spinner. Keep your eyes open for large pike cruising around large cabbage beds. This might be where upsizing a rod and reel would be prudent, perhaps a sturdy bait caster spooled with twenty to thirty-pound super-braid. In my particular case, this is a Pflueger Trion bait casting reel spooled with twenty-pound Power Pro braid and paired with a seven-foot medium-heavy action Gander Guide series IM7 graphite rod. This, in fact, is my go-to setup when downsizing for musky. It's ideal for tossing the smaller Bulldawg rubber baits as well as Mepps #5 Aglia and Mepps Musky Killer or Magnum in-line spinners.

Six decades of fishing experience have taught me that trophies can happen at any

time. Today, I pay very close attention to details like the quality of terminal tackle, the size and strength of the hooks on whatever bait I'm using, and the condition of the line within twenty-four inches of the lure. Using a metal leader whenever possible is extremely important if you want to land that huge, toothy pike you've always dreamed of. Even that is no guarantee. One time on Suzanette Lake, my partner and I witnessed a giant pike that may gone four feet swoop and swallow the six-inch Reef Runner bait as well as the foot long leader ahead of it, cleanly cutting the super-braid line above the knot.

For terminal tackle, I use a twenty-five-pound light wire nickel-titanium leader with ball bearing snaps and swivels. Nickel-titanium wire is ultra-thin and extremely resistant to kinks. I've caught small pike and bass all day without a kink



*The typical bass/walleye net is undersized for “monstah” pike. Use a fish pliers to hold big pike for hook-removal and a quick photo. A 20-pound pike is 20 years old. Handle these fish with extreme care so they can thrill another angler someday. (Basswood Lake)*

hookups. Some fishermen target these lethargic logs with fly streamers and seductive plastic baits, but expect to test your patience most days. As the water warms near these same back bays and marshy areas, pike become significantly more active and more vulnerable to neutral buoyancy stick baits like Rapala Husky Jerks and Smithwick Ratlin Rogues. Unless spring is late in canoe country, most of the large female fish have moved out of these areas by the time many of us start our canoe trips.

As I think back on all the big pike I have caught, a few have come from open, deep water when targeting lake trout. These pike are likely cruising for pelagic cisco (tullibeas) and whitefish. A diet that consists of these fatty fish will produce some truly large, heavy pike. Using sonar electronics to find clouds of baitfish will make locating these random, roaming giants a little more productive. Targeting a trophy pike this way can be time consuming and difficult in a canoe, but worth the effort, especially considering that lake trout is frequently a bonus.

My first northern pike over forty inches was in early October in Wisconsin. Fall might be the best time to focus on catching a large pike. As the water cools, large schools of ciscos move to shallow, rocky shorelines to spawn, and big pike follow looking for a meal. Large pike may also visit rocky reefs, humps, or points, especially if these spots include some cabbage or other broad leaf vegetation. Bigger baits are more appropriate at this time of year than any other. Adult pike are fiercely territorial, and the biggest are widely scattered, so expect to keep moving when casting shorelines.

Although I do target pike when the situation presents itself or when my partner has a pike obsession, nearly all of the trophy fish I have caught or witnessed in canoe country have

been while fishing walleyes with walleye forage sized baits. I recall one canoe trip when a partner and I decided to take solo canoes but follow the same route and camp together each night. Fishing was to be the primary focus of this trip. My partner was intent on catching trophy pike, and his strategy was to use big baits and fish deep. He brought baits bigger than I would usually consider for a canoe trip, along with a bait caster capable of handling the big stuff. He is a highly skilled fisherman with more overall experience than me. I admire his commitment and dedication to the plan he had laid out. His plan was not a bad one, but it did restrict him to catching only the largest fish. It seemed sound, but he did not catch a single trophy that trip.

On the other hand, my plan was the usual for me. I always target walleyes by trolling proven search baits until I find either walleyes or another opportunity to exploit, be it a bed of cabbage or some top water bass action. But in each and every new lake, my fishing starts out with a search for walleye. At the end of that same trip, I had caught numerous walleyes, including one that went twenty-eight inches, and I landed a forty-one-inch pike. Was I lucky? Perhaps, but I like the strategy of finding any fish first, and then being prepared for that trophy. It is easier said than done, but I always strive to be prepared for a trophy. Trophies are old, rare fish that happen when they happen. My feeling is that many of these trophies are hooked and never landed because anglers are not prepared to handle the big ones.

Over the years, one notable big pike pattern has emerged. The components of this scenario include scattered weeds, the deeper outer edge of a marshy bay with an inlet flow, and the presence of schooled walleye in the thirteen to sixteen-inch

range, or panfish—especially perch. Big pike don't need quick access to deep water like big walleyes and smallmouth bass. Most of the biggest pike I have caught in canoe country have come while trolling for walleyes in areas described above. If the walleyes you're catching tend to be smaller and the area has the characteristics described above, that's a good time to give that extra pike rig a workout.

Throughout summer and fall, pike are voracious predators that will eat regardless of whether they are hungry or not. Their instinct to kill overrides their basic need for food. Stories abound of big pike with huge distended bellies still striking lures, pike attacking fish on a stringer at boat side, medium-sized pike choking to death on fish too big to fit down their throats, pike with ducklings or small mammals in their stomachs, and on and on. Ice fishermen know that pike will eat dead bait as well as live. Recently, in my area of Wisconsin, pike are being caught using hot dogs as bait. Yes, hot dogs! It might be easier to discuss what a pike won't eat rather than a list of favorite baits, but here goes:

Considering that pike are naturally programmed to attack regardless of hunger, loud, flashy lures seem well suited to triggering this response. The Mepps #5 Aglia French Spinner with the natural squirrel tail dressing and gold blade has caught more pike for me than any other lure. At half an ounce, this lure will cast a long ways and cover a lot of water with the spinning gear I use. When using heavier gear like my baitcaster, I may upsize to the Mepps Musky Killer, Giant Killer, or Magnum series of spinners. During those rare times when pike seem less aggressive, shallow running or neutral buoyancy stick baits



The authors top canoe country pike lures: upper left- 6" Bulldawgs by Musky Innovations, center- stickbaits by Rapala, Smithwick and Storm, upper right- Storm 6" Swim Shad, left- Spoons by Northland, Blue Fox and Daredevil, right- Inline Spinner by Mepps- Giant Killer, Magnum Musky Killer and Aglia #5, bottom- 9" Rapala Magnum

by Storm, Rapala, or Smithwick may be the ticket. The smaller versions of Musky Innovation's Bulldawg soft plastic lures or large plastic grubs or swim-shads are also worth a try. All of these lures are equipped with beefy big fish sized hooks. Stu's hot new favorite top water bass bait, the Whopper Plopper by River2Sea, is available in pike and musky calibers, so that is worth checking out for big canoe country pike. (Editor's note: we caught a lot of twenty-four to thirty-eight-inch pike on the Whopper Plopper size 90 and 110 last year, but nothing bigger yet).

In his poem "Pike," twentieth century English poet, Ted Hughes, describes the namesake creature with phrases like "The jaws' hooked clamp

and fangs/Not to be changed at this date;/A life subdued to its instrument;/The gills kneading quietly, and the pectorals." Also, "...perfect/ Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold./ Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin" and "...silhouette/Of submarine delicacy and horror". In Europe, the pike is so named due to its resemblance to the medieval weapon, and can grow to fifty pounds. There, it is an exalted prize for serious anglers, much like the prestige of the muskellunge in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ontario.

Two new lures developed specifically for pike fishing by Rapala are now available in Europe and can be purchased on Amazon if you are willing to wait a few weeks for delivery. Expect them to be in U.S.

bait shops soon. They are both hybrid lures that mate a hard body to a replaceable soft plastic tail. The Rapala X-Rap Peto comes with a spare soft plastic paddle tail, and the Rapala X-Rap Otus includes a spare soft plastic, grub style, curly tail. They both sell for about twenty-five dollars and just may be the secret bait to put you into a trophy pike photo.

Whatever lures you decide to use, and no matter what species you are primarily fishing for, always be prepared for the possibility of a "monstah" northern pike.

I always love hearing from fellow canoe country anglers out there about your experiences and suggestions. It might take a week or two, but I answer all messages. Reach me at [mrdb11@aol.com](mailto:mrdb11@aol.com) 

*passing it on*



## Surviving The Boundary Waters With Kids

□ by John Lundquist

“Dad, can you show me how to hang the tarp so when I come here on my own I’ll know how to do it?”

My daughter’s request warmed my heart on that cool day as we prepared to cook our dinner in the rain. She was beginning to imagine a future in which she would enjoy this place without me, and I was as proud as a parent could be.

I have been bringing my three daughters to the BWCAW every summer for the past ten years. It is not easy traveling canoe country with children, especially younger ones, but the rewards are great, and there is so much I have learned in that time. From the planning stages to the final portage back home, there are many decisions parents can make to enjoy a successful family adventure and return with enough sanity to do it all over again.

The first rule when traveling with kids is to keep the big picture in mind. You are preparing future generations of wilderness explorers and conservationists. These are the stewards of the land when we are gone and the people who will take us canoeing when our bodies can no longer lead the way. We want them to enjoy the experience. The trip you take with your three-year-old is going to be different than the trip with your thirteen-year-old, and will certainly be different than a trip with your college buddies. The good news is that things get progressively easier as time goes by, and the work you put in early pays off later on.

We all love to spread maps

out in the winter months and dream of effortless portages along dry trails and canoes gliding across glassy lakes to five-star camps. Planning that first trip with a child can be incredibly exciting. We finally get to share this beautiful pine scented part of the world with our own kids. Three short portages on day one may not seem like a big deal from the living room floor in January. But when making your third sweaty crossing with armfuls of gear in July while the kids whine about mosquitoes, you will surely curse yourself for planning such an ambitious route.

Two things to keep in mind while planning a trip with children: one, give yourself multiple route options, and two, don’t go at the busiest times. When choosing a route, target routes with short portages and campsites available at regular intervals. You don’t want kids melting down mid-portage on the Fourth of July with no campsites ahead. Even if you fancy your kids to be strong paddlers and solid Sherpas, a poorly timed thunderstorm can alter the best laid plans. In high summer, you may find yourself facing occupied campsites all along the first tier of lakes. If you do go during a busier time or in a more popular area, start early in the day to find an open campsite by three p.m. Setting up by mid-afternoon feels rewarding, and the kids will

thank you for the swim time.

Once your trip is planned, packing becomes the focus. No matter how old your kids are, get them carrying some type of pack on their own. I started my kids at age three. They had small backpacks filled with stuffed animals, toys, and a water bottle. Everything is sealed in plastic bags to keep dry. Each subsequent year, I added a little more to their load. A sleeping bag one year, a clothes bag the next, until they were able to have their whole outfit on their backs. The obvious benefit is that each year they carry more and you carry less. I have vivid memories of a trip through the Mudro entry point. The three portages to Fourtown didn’t look that challenging on paper, but after triple portaging the canoe and several heavy bags, I was more exhausted than I expected.

Packing is always a delicate balancing act. On one hand, anyone with kids is accustomed to traveling with a bag of stuff wherever you go. Whether it is diapers, clothes, snacks, toys, or books, you want to be prepared for all contingencies. On the other hand, you have to carry all this stuff, probably in knee deep mud and ninety-degree heat while mosquitoes devour your face. The single greatest piece of advice I can share is don’t forget extra toilet paper. And don’t forget to waterproof the toilet paper, especially if you





*Wilderness canoe tripping with a boatload of kids is no easy task, but the upside is priceless (South Lake)*

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have girls.

Food is a critical consideration for any trip with kids. You don't want to get several miles into the wilderness and discover the bag of your child's favorite snacks is in the car. And you don't want to run out of said snacks. I'm a big proponent of dehydrating my own meals. We can take normal, proven meals that everyone at our house loves and adapt them for camping. Dehydrated pasta sauce with meat is one of the greatest things you can bring. Kids never get tired of pasta, and you can put the sauce on eggs in the morning too. One of my proudest creations is "Sloppy Joe Crunch." It's simply dehydrated Sloppy Joes, but rather than reconstitute it, eat it as is. It is a crunchy, tasty, protein rich snack that is easy to eat on the go. For breakfast, we do instant oatmeal most days, and for lunch I like to put out the al fresco buffet, which is an assortment of trail mix, crackers, cheese, jerky, dried fruit, and the like. Everyone can graze, and there is minimal work involved.

Always have some sort of food readily available. If you are traveling, put some bars or trail mix in your daypack or at the top of your food pack. Last thing you need is a blood sugar crash to derail your momentum. This holds true for mom and dad too. You're doing extra work, so keep yourselves fueled. Having the kids collect up any wrappers is a great way to begin teaching the leave no trace principle.

I only have a few rules for camping. Wear your life jacket in the canoe and no eating in the tent. Many years ago, I had a raccoon tear through a tent wall for a granola bar. Imagine the joy of having a six-inch custom built mosquito portal added to your tent. Kids love cooking and eating outside. The novelty never seems to get old, and you can recruit their help in different ways. Don't forget to throw a bag of marshmallows in your food bag for a no fail happy end to the day.

Having a good waterproof tent is crucial, and with younger kids, having everyone together under one roof is the only way to go. For a larger tent, the REI Kingdom 6 has worked well for us. It holds five people comfortably and packs up into its own backpack. The first year I took my twins into the BWCAW, I did not have a good tent. It had a flat roof design, and water would pool up on the top when it rained. My daughter still reminds me of the night in that tent when I woke up to the feeling of something touching my cheek. Turns out it was the top of the tent drooping down from the weight of rainwater. I spent the next hour going out at five-minute intervals to shake the pools of water off. Test

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*One big canoe is the only way to go until the kids are old enough to man the bow. Meanwhile, it's just one big happy family.*

your tent with a hose in the yard before you go. It can be a fun game and better to troubleshoot there than in the wilderness. Nikwax makes a good waterproofing spray for tents if you find leaks. As kids get older, they may like to have their own shelters and having them carry and set up their own tents is good practice.

Everyone will be in a better mood if they sleep well. When I was a kid, I remember huddling in the bottom of my cotton sleeping bag on the floor of our wet canvas tent, shivering and praying for the merciful warmth of dawn. Getting a quality down bag was a game changer for my enjoyment of the outdoors. Do not buy your kids cheap sleeping bags. Having Minions on your sleeping bag may look cool, but shivering all night

long is not. Invest in a good down bag that will keep them warm and last for a long time. I've never bought a kid specific bag. I just bought my girls adult women's bags that they steadily grew into. A good sleeping pad will contribute to their warmth and comfort too. Just don't get one that crinkles and keeps everyone up all night. These are expensive investments early on, but they pay for themselves over time: Good gear lasts.

Bugs can ruin anyone's experience outside, especially sensitive kids whose faces balloon up after a couple of bites. Everyone has a different comfort level with sprays and insecticides. I personally only use them in extreme situations. There are many ways to reduce the impact of bugs. Going earlier or later in

the season can significantly reduce exposure to flies and mosquitoes. Go in June and you will likely have a swarm of flies around you all day and a horde of mosquitoes buzzing outside your tent all night. Waiting until August will still provide you with warm sunny weather without the itch attack. Another great investment for kids is a hammock with a bug net. I have been amazed at how much time my kids will spend in theirs. They rest, read, make up games, and swing much of the day away. A bug net will give them their own private refuge without sacrificing the outdoor experience. A head net takes up no space and can be a life-saver too, especially on swampy portages.

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because without it you won't get very far, is your canoe. Thankfully, we live in an age with many lightweight yet sturdy options. If you just have one kid, it makes sense to toss them in the middle of any old canoe you can get your hands on. Things get tricky when you have two kids who aren't old enough to paddle effectively. When I had twins, I knew I would need a whole new strategy. I was very fortunate to acquire a Bell Northshore canoe, which is now made by Northstar Canoes and called the Northwind 20. I can't stress enough how great this boat is. It is a twenty-one-foot vessel with four seats that handles like a regular seventeen-footer. I have even sat in the middle and paddled it as a solo canoe for fishing. In this magnificent canoe, I have packed myself, my three kids, my mother, my dog, and enough gear to camp for a week. We are quite the sight to see. We don't break any speed records, but this big canoe works beautifully and has safely delivered many great BWCAW trips for our family.

Once you have planned, packed, and are standing before the water at your entry point, its go time. You load and balance your canoe with everything you need for the duration. Everyone takes their seat, and you push off, watching the shore disappear behind you. You hit the open water, and in a few paddle strokes, you find your cadence. Maybe you see a loon or an eagle, and boy this is great. And then... it's always a fun contest to guess which will be uttered first. Will it be "I'm bored" or "I'm hungry" or my favorite, "I have to go to the bathroom?" Keeping kids occupied is not easy. Keeping kids occupied while paddling a canoe and reading a map is even harder, especially when they want to sit in your lap. I got lost on Seagull Lake about ten minutes after setting off and didn't realize what campsite we landed at until a day later. I like to blame it on the chaos of three small children, but those who know me can draw their own conclusions.

I remember visiting my daughter's kindergarten class and remarking at the frequency with which the teacher switched activities. She explained to me that the average attention span at that age was fifteen minutes. I was impressed with her fortitude in adapting to their rhythms and made a note to never become a kindergarten teacher. If you are canoeing for an extended period, which to a child may mean more than ten minutes, it's good to have a variety of ways to keep them engaged. The obvious option would be to have them paddle. Even if their contribution is having a negative impact on your forward momentum, I'd let the kids keep their paddles going. There

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are options for smaller sized paddles, and we used a Bending Branches Twig. I drilled a hole through the middle and tied a short length of paracord through it to the thwart, thus saving myself from the need to retrieve a dropped paddle. Other good options to occupy young canoeists are the game Twenty Questions, photography (make sure the camera is tethered to their wrist), snacks, and my favorite, weaving.

My kids love to check out campsites. There is risk of mutiny if we pass by an unoccupied site without investigating. I have learned that, at least for the time being, this is a part of our journey. It's a good way to break up the day and let the children direct exploration. Sometimes we move on right away, sometimes we stop for lunch, and sometimes we spend the night if we really like the site. Routes and maps don't mean a lot to a kid who just discovered a 5-star site and is ready to swim. Unless we have to complete a loop or keep on a schedule, I usually let them decide where we stay. Several years ago, we were on the Kawishiwi River and decided after three days at a site that we were ready for a change of scenery. In those days, I did most of the work, and it took about two hours to roll up sleeping bags, pack the tent, and load the canoe. Once on the water, I was excited to take in some new scenery and make some distance. Ten minutes later, I was unanimously outvoted to stop at the next site down river. I debated digging in my heels and moving on, but I realized that to them it didn't matter if we went ten miles or ten feet. We were now at a new location and things were fresh. I laughed at the time and effort I had invested in moving and setting up the new camp. Since then my kids have learned greater patience and are more willing to travel to escape the crowds.

On the portages, you have to be patient with kids. It's great when they are old enough to contribute in a meaningful way, but until then you're stuck doing most of the heavy lifting. My biggest piece of advice is to pace yourself. Don't take on too much distance in one day, and don't carry too many things on the first pass only to be completely out of gas for the second, third, and Lord help you, fourth laps. My kids have always been good either waiting for me or helping as much as possible. The one rule I am adamant about is keeping life jackets on by the lake. If I'm at the other side of the portage with a canoe on my shoulders, I cannot keep an eye on swimmers. If you have two or more adults, it's nice to have one stay on the far end to supervise. Another good strategy is bringing the food bag first and letting kids snack while they wait.



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Setting up camp is a wonderful way to involve kids. Asking them about where to place the tent can open up a whole conversation about widow maker trees and rainwater runoff. It is fun to watch their brains consider what the best and safest option is. Often with a larger tent, you become limited and have to go with the only open area. My REI tent held up well during the rainstorm that created a new lake around it. I spent a nice part of the storm with a pot bailing water away from the tent, but everyone inside stayed dry. I make sure everyone's clothes, towels, and sleeping gear is in dry bags. Even if we do have moisture come up through the floor, things stay dry, and I have yet to have anyone spend the night in a wet sleeping bag.

For cooking, I haul the tried and true Coleman two-burner suitcase. It's big. It's reliable.

It has two burners, so I can make pasta and sauce at the same time. And I don't have to worry about kids tipping it over or knocking the food off. Yes, it's a burden to carry, but its dependability outweighs the bulkiness. The only thing I don't like about it is the thin wire handle that leaves a divot in your palm after twenty rods. To remedy this, I ordered a nice soft suitcase handle from a luggage supply company and bolted it on the bottom. Works like a charm.

At camp, comfort is the key to success. That translates as warm, dry, well-fed kids who are kept engaged. In our younger years, there was a lot of My Little Pony forts built with twigs. These days there is more reading in the hammock and less toys, which is nice. Getting kids out to fish is fun but as anyone who has done it knows, it is a logistical powder keg. I often spend most of

the time untangling lines and baiting hooks, and the last thing anyone wants is a hook in their body. To circumvent this problem, I either space kids out along shore or bring them out individually. The reward is that if anyone does catch a fish, it's pretty much the most exciting thing ever.

All of this translates to a lot of work. You may be more exhausted after your trip than before you left. My first time out with three kids, including three-year-old twins, my mantra became "This is a lot of work but...I'm in the Boundary Waters!" I would repeat this to myself all day. Every time there was a cry for a missing swimsuit, a stubbed toe, a bruised ego, or an itchy ankle, I would look out at the amazing scenery, inhale the pine air, and remember that I am in my favorite place on earth with the people I love most. It doesn't get any better than that. 📷



□ by Stuart Osthoff & Rob Kesselring

**E**ditor's Note: This article is adapted from a presentation that Rob Kesselring and I just gave at the 2019 Canoecopia Show in Madison, WI. Longtime BWJ readers will recall Rob and I engaging in spirited debates about the merits of our respective wilderness canoe tripping styles. Our original clash some ten years ago generated more reader reaction than anything else we have published in the past thirty-two years. So fast forward to today: Rob and I are both busier than ever guiding wilderness canoe trips, Rob still paddling far, fast, and light, while I'm still paddling down the thrill and challenge of wilderness sportfishing. We have both learned some new lessons on the canoe trails in the past decade and agreed it was time for an update and a more compassionate effort. Here the focus is on drilling down deep into why we do what we do in canoe country with the goal of helping you find your own most rewarding canoe tripping style. So whether you are a pure paddler, pure angler, or something in between, we hope this inspires you to make the very most out of your own canoe country adventures.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR CANOE-TRIPPING STYLES**

**ROB:** Many canoeists develop a love for wilderness paddling as youngsters through scout, church, or Y camps. This wasn't the case for Stu or me. My passion for canoeing did not begin until college. As a freshman at the University of Colorado, I spent my weekends mountaineering in the Rockies, mostly rock climbing in the Boulder foothills. But my rock-climbing career came crashing down that spring when my brother-in-law was killed in a climbing accident in

## **Finding Your Own Wilderness Canoe Tripping Style**

the Grand Tetons. My mother had lost her son-in-law and did not want to lose her only son, so she insisted I give up climbing. I traded in my ice axe for a canoe paddle, and the rest is history. Within a few years, I completed a 1,000-mile canoe trip in the Canadian Arctic, the first of thirty-two trips north of the sixtieth parallel. I cut my paddling teeth on arctic rivers, sometimes accompanied by aboriginal inhabitants who knew the land in ways we can only imagine.

I did not discover the Boundary Waters until 1989. It did not take long for me to fall in love with the exquisite lakes and towering pines of the BWCAW and Quetico. I don't believe I have gone a year since without paddling in these splendid waters. Over the last thirty years, I have amassed over eighty trips up there by canoe, skis, snowshoes, or a dog team. Small potatoes compared to Stu's Boundary Waters resume but still notable. What distinguishes my paddling is my wanderlust. I have canoed, kayaked, or rafted over 150 rivers and archipelagos worldwide, including the Zambezi, Nahanni, and Futaleufu. A paddling friend remarked that I have run out of continents. True enough, but if Antarctica keeps melting who knows? Even so, when asked, "What are your top ten favorite paddling trips worldwide?" people are surprised to hear that two of them occurred in the Boundary Waters. Make no mistake, our two-million-acre wilder-

ness is a world class treasure and will always be one of my favorite paddling destinations.

When Stu and I were asked to speak at Canoecopia again this year, we had to check a box on our proposal if we were over thirty-five years old. I guess they want younger blood. Heck, I am close to twice that age, but they don't have to worry about me pontificating about the "good old days." 2019 is another big paddling year for me. By the time this issue of BWJ hits the mail, I will have completed a seven-day sea kayaking trip in Costa Rica's Golfo Dulce, two eight-day sea kayak trips in the Guna Yala (the San Blas islands off the coast of Panama), and two eight-day canoe trips through the fabled Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande on the Mexican border. I will be paddling Utah's Green River in April, co-guiding a May birding seminar in the BWCAW, then a ten-day Quetico loop in June followed by paddling for the entire month of July on the Noatak River in arctic Alaska. I am not sure what's next after that. All I know for certain is "have paddle, will travel".

Ever since my infamous, unrehearsed, fiery debate with Stu at Canoecopia almost a decade ago, participants have begged me for a rematch. They recall it as an epic clash of canoeing styles. But here is the thing: I believe the BWJ is the best paddling magazine out there. When I open this magazine, the first article I read is Stu's. I've learned a lot from his writing.



He has a few strange ideas, but as you will read in the next few paragraphs, I often agree with his techniques and his philosophy. He has earned that. I have no fire in my belly to debate with him. I admire him.

For a Boundary Waters canoe, I like a Savage River Deep Creek or a Northstar Polaris Starlight. Both have carbon rails and weigh in at thirty-six pounds. In the Boundary Waters, I single portage, so weight is paramount for me. Both these hulls are well designed, seaworthy, and maneuverable. The Deep Creek is a little lighter. The Polaris is a little more durable. But both these boats are expensive, and if it meant missing a season of canoeing because I had to work overtime to afford a carbon boat, I would instead paddle a second-hand seventy-pound Alumacraft. The going is more important than the how-ing.

My Boundary Waters canoes are shorter and slower than Stu's choices. I don't need to carry the loads he does. As for paddlers who want speed, does it make any difference if it takes me two minutes longer to traverse a lake? I will make up that time and more by single portaging. The ease of handling a canoe under seventeen-feet long at portage landings and over beaver dams more than makes up for a little less top-end hull speed.

For expedition whitewater river tripping, I like the Northstar B17, or if they have been stored inside, the old all-star Royalex boats such as Dagger Ventures, Old Town Trippers, Bell Alaskans, and Mad River Explorers. For freestyle solo boats, I love my Bell Wildfire. I can't say I've ever paddled a kayak that I like. I guess they have their place but not in the BWCAW.

The Bending Branches Expedition Plus is a tremendous all-around paddle. I like the

ROB KESSELRING



*Rob Kesselring, in all his white-water glory, Burnside River, Northwest Territories.*

big blade, the T-grip, the flex, and the strength. It's at its best in whitewater, but it makes an excellent lake paddle too. I have never broken one in the Boundary Waters or on the wildest of rivers. "Once a year" trippers may prefer one of Bending Branches' lighter models. For the loads I push,

a fifty-six-inch paddle moves the canoe smoothly and is easy on the shoulders. If I'm in a race, bent-shaft carbon, "hut," "hut." "hut." For freestyle I use a straight-shaft, custom carbon with a fillet-knife thin blade.

As rugged as the Expedition Plus is, I always carry a spare blade slipped down the back of

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my pack. It would take a little woodworking, but it would get me home. I do not carry anything loose in the canoe. A bailer and sponge lashed to the stern thwart, two PFDs, and two packs. That's it. For the same reasons as Stu, I use the J-stroke. Most canoeists say they J-stroke when they actually use a stern pry stroke, or what the Canadians call the "American" or "Goon" stroke. It is not much less efficient at maintaining a straight course than the J-stroke, but it's herky-jerky: The J-stroke is smooth.

I kneel in the canoe. It is more stable, more powerful, and more comfortable than sitting. I paddle on the right side but will acquiesce to a short stint on the left if my bow mate pesters me. In whitewater or freestyle paddling, always on the right.

I've done my share of double portages. I did an epic three-

mile triple portage on an arctic canoe trip ten years ago. That's fifteen miles of walking, nine miles of it under a heavy load. I have guided big groups in the BWCAW, done base camping, glamping, and even a couple dedicated fishing trips. But when I have my druthers, as I usually do in the Boundary Waters, I prefer just two people and single portaging. I like the flow of single portaging. It's smooth.

Here's how I do it. I use a blue barrel inside a CCS barrel pack. This is my food pack. It is rodent proof, bear resistant, and absolutely waterproof. The lid has a dozen uses. For example, if some camper loses control of their campfire, I have a ten-gallon water bucket. (By the way, I don't drink the Forest Service Kool-Aid regarding wildfires. The forest fires of this century have been too hot to be of benefit to anything and

have made too much of canoe country look like the moon). I can stand on a barrel and pitch the tarp high enough that it's not drooping over me. The top of the pack has a giant pocket, plenty of room for my rain jacket, sunglasses, a Power Bar, and anything else I may need during the day. This eliminates the need for a day pack. Give clients a day pack and it becomes an excuse to stuff in a bunch of cumbersome and unnecessary paraphernalia.

When I pull into a portage landing, my partner jumps out of the bow before the hull touches hard ground. I climb out of the stern into water, usually knee deep. My partner slips on a CCS Guide Pack that contains all of the gear sans food provisions. They take both paddles and head down the trail. I put on the grub pack, throw the ultralight canoe up on my shoulders, and chase



*Rob, knee-deep in a vain attempt to keep his Kevlar off the rocks.*

them down the trail. At the put-in, I wade into the water, carefully place the canoe on the water, and we drop in both the packs. Our paddles and packs never touch the ground. We are ready to roll. Obviously, this is on a trip for two. With bigger groups, single portaging is even easier, because no matter how large the group, you only need one of many gear items, like a full-sized axe or a STERI-pen. The trick with a big group is that you must go through everyone's packs in the parking lot with the scrutiny of a TSA agent. Chairs, solar showers, and pillows need to be confiscated and locked in the truck.

I only bring one set of footwear on a Boundary Waters trip—Chaco Z/1 sport sandals. They have better arch support than \$200 boots. They are quick to dry, never cause

blisters or stink. I've been known to wear my Chacos into October, but I never get cold feet. I am blessed with feet like a goose. Boots are for mountain climbing. Boots are never tall enough; they always eventually leak; they are heavy, hot, and look silly with shorts. I avoid them. People all over the world wear sandals around water. Last summer, I bumped into the "Barefoot Paddler" on Brule Lake. This cat wanders the BWCAW from May to November in a beat-up kayak, and he does not carry any shoes.

Here are some other ways I cut weight so I can single portage safely and comfortably: a Nemo Dagger 3-person tent, an ultralight Nemo sleeping pad, a CCS sil-nylon tarp, ultralight cookware and utensils, a lightweight down sleeping bag, minimal clothing, no towel, no rain pants, no bear spray,

no tent footprint, no stove, no fishing tackle, no books, no firearms, no big zonking flashlight, no lanterns, no forks, no underwear, no stereos, no to all the frilly stuff Madison Avenue touts you to purchase. I think paddlers a half-century ago, with their aluminum canoes and canvas tents, actually carried less weight than today's typical camper bogged down with gadgets and supposed "must haves". Suffice to say, I go into the wilderness not to barricade myself from nature but rather to embrace it.

I need to touch on hunting and fishing. There would be no Boundary Waters wilderness if it weren't for the efforts and finances of sportsmen—the hook and bullet crowd. The Boundary Waters would never have been set aside and given the kind of protection we now enjoy without their tire-

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less efforts. I unconditionally support people that want to fish and hunt in the BWCAW and fish in the Quetico. They have earned the right. That said, I just don't enjoy it. Fishing and hunting remind me of the reasons I want to escape civilization in the first place. The pressure to catch a fish or out-fish my partner. And all those inevitable monofilament tangles—I don't get it. At least, I don't get it anymore. I have done a fair bit of fishing and hunting in my life, and I hope to teach these traditions to my grandchildren someday. But for me, I've outgrown the thrill. A breaded walleye fillet or a grouse breast wrapped in bacon for dinner, sure, but catch and release fishing like Stu preaches, no way.

My nephew lives in Manhattan, if I want to relish a great meal, I visit him and go out to a New York City bistro. In canoe

country, food is fuel. I agree with Stu regarding commercial freeze-dried entrees, but there are satisfying, lightweight, and economical meals, like simple one-pot rehydrated chow you prepare at home or dried supermarket food like rice and beans. That's what keeps me going. Always oatmeal for breakfast, a mid-morning Power Bar, peanut butter on a biscuit, maybe some cheese and dry meat for a no-cook lunch, and then a variety of lightweight one-pot dinners followed by a dark chocolate bar for dessert. Minimum prep, minimum clean-up, and minimum weight. That's my formula. Chow is still the heaviest burden I carry, but it gets lighter every day.

**STU:** Like most of you, my own wilderness canoe tripping style has evolved over time. I had never laid eyes on a canoe until landing a summer

job with an Ely outfitter as a college freshman. On our rare days off, I selected likeminded coworkers, hungry to see as much of the country ASAP, like one-nighters around the Lake One/Alice/Ensign/Moose Lake route, or up to beautiful Robinson Lake and back. There were mad dash day trips up to Dorothy Molter's for a root beer or Louisa Falls for a swim. These trips didn't leave much time or energy for serious fishing, but all the while we were developing a passion for adventure, challenge, and wild country. So I do understand the "paddle maximum miles" mindset, I really do. Eventually, my trips became more about fishing with friends and family. Next came the family years. Our boys practically grew up on Bentpine Lake—so many great trips into here that I can't bear to return without them. Then it was back to fishing with the guys again. For the past eleven years now, all of my wilderness canoe trips have been about my Grand Slam Guide Service (GS2) clients. Most of these trips revolve around the challenge of getting my guys onto trophy canoe country fish. This is the type of trip I will be describing, defending, and championing here.

For 2019, I will again be guiding seven wilderness canoe trips all spanning eight to ten days. Five of these are pure fishing trips to Quetico for bass, walleye, lake trout, and pike. One is up to the Sutton River off Hudson Bay for trophy brook trout. And the seventh is the BWCAW Fall Color Trip in October. My standard M.O. for my GS2 Quetico fishing trips is five clients plus me, three 18'9" Northstar canoes, twelve big packs (six personal, four food, and two equipment), six day packs, paddles/rod cases/nets/lifejackets. That means four big packs per canoe plus each guy's daypack and rods. This

Northstar 18'9" canoe is the only tandem canoe I use anymore. I love their huge capacity, amazing stability both fully loaded and while empty out fishing, outstanding seaworthiness in big wind and waves, surprising maneuverability when turning on streams or fishing, impressive paddling speed when needed, and it carries well over the portages for a big boat, weighing in at only forty-eight pounds. In my view, the Northstar 18'9" is as close to the perfect all around tandem canoe as you can get for the BWCAW/Quetico. I just ordered up three new ones to replace the three that have served me so well over the past decade. Remember, my canoes see more use in two years than most see in ten years.

I paddle with a Bending Branches Expedition Plus, sixty-two-inch straight shaft. The BB Expedition Plus is the only paddle I own, use, or provide to my clients. I use and teach the J-stroke to command and control my canoes. I want a long paddle with a wide blade that can move a lot of water with long, full range of shoulder strokes. I despise switching sides (once every half hour is plenty) and the short, choppy strokes of the bent shaft "HUT" crowd. To me, paddling is a relaxing, subconscious act where my mind can drift and just take in nature. As much as I love wilderness paddling, if barking out "HUT" every five seconds was the only way, I would take up golf. Rob and I don't agree on much when it comes to canoe tripping, but we both swing a Bending Branches straight shaft Expedition Plus, and we do it without talking. That should tell you all you need to know about paddling. Learn the J-stroke. It can take you anywhere that canoes can go, in style.

Because most of my trips are into that same western half of

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Quetico, I rarely need to look at a map to navigate from lake to lake. For many years, I kept my trusty McKenzie maps right there in front of me, continuously following my progress and "staying found." Finally, I realized that I would never truly commit the waterways and portage locations to permanent memory until I stopped looking at the maps. But I still carry them for use by my crew, and once in a while I flare off into something new. I carry the Quetico Park map in my emergency kit just in case we ever need an overall view of the countryside. I leave my GPS home. Learning to cleanly navigate through the maze that is canoe country is part of the adventure and intrigue of wilderness travel.

So when it comes to the portages with what I call fifteen loads, twelve big packs and three canoes, three guys on the trip are looking at two trips per

portage and three guys at three trips per portage. It quickly becomes clear whom my best two Sherpa's are, so the three of us can usually make the three passes by the time the slower half finishes their second lap. So time wise, we are on par with the typical party who is double portaging. Not many serious backcountry anglers can go with a week's gear and food while single portaging. Doing so takes above average strength or serious limitations on food, camp comfort, and tackle options. My major point here is that on my eight to ten-day trips, we do penetrate the Quetico backcountry where the best fishing and overall wilderness experience awaits. Jean, Sturgeon, Antoine, Pooh Bah, Kawnipi, Conmee. We triple portage to wherever the big fish live. Others may get there faster by single portaging, but they will not be nearly as prepared to fish at the highest perfor-

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loading without abusing the canoes, three dry, level, and soft tent sites for our four-person tents (two people per four-person tent), a nice combination of open space for breezes and bug relief, and shade for hot days, a handy firepit with some log seating and rocks for counter space, an open space to rig up a rain tarp if needed, and maybe a swimming hole, blueberry patch, or loon music. The best fishing lakes seem to lack for true five-star sites, but I have a first choice plus a backup site on each lake that are pleasant camps. It matters that my clients are well rested, well fed, and comfortable in camp for that special wilderness camaraderie. Campsite amenities add a lot to my trips, so why would I settle for some rat hole campsite?

Speaking of being well fed, I have never packed a single meal of freeze dried camp food on my Grand Slam Guide Service trips. Not one. Freeze dried food is low in nutrition, energy, portion size, and taste, yet high in cost and preservatives. If dumping hot water into a plastic bag and calling it dinner is your style, well, go for it. I wouldn't think of serving this bland gruel to my clients night after night. I pack real food on ice with the BWJ Insulated food pack system. I place a one-gallon jug of ice in the bottom of what I call the freezer pack and pack in frozen homemade fajita meat, spaghetti sauce, chicken alfredo, chili, steaks, brats, and hot dishes (I allow one meal of walleye per trip). Also in here is real deli-meat for sandwiches for lunch and breakfast bacon and sausages. In the refrigerator pack, I keep real milk, real eggs, fresh fruits and vegetables, and cheese. I also have two dry food packs with cereal, oatmeal, bread, buns, trail mix, granola bars, cookies, rice, pasta, snacks, staples, etc.

mance level.

My biggest concern about portaging is not how many times I walk each trail—it is getting everybody over without injury. Serious injuries occur more on canoe country portages than on the water, so I have a few hard and fast rules.

1. Wear boots with good ankle support and traction. I will never be a wet boot canoeist, so I wear Schnee's Beartooth nine-inch leather waterproof boots. In sixty days on the canoe trails last summer, I never got one wet toe in these boots. Absolutely phenomenal performance. Their waterproof laminate is Out/Dry, not Gore-Tex. Yes, I do some fancy footwork around muck holes and loading/unloading the canoes without gouging them on the rocks, but the reward is dry feet all summer and safe footing on the rough, slippery trails where you are always one misstep

away from disaster.

2. No big packs on your chest that block your vision or impair safe foot placement. I admit to breaking this rule on especially smooth treads, but I strongly discourage it.

3. Take your load all the way over—no strewing gear along the trail. Place it into the canoe or over to the side out of the lane of traffic.

4. Be responsible for double checking the landing and your canoe to be sure all gear is accounted for. Life jackets, rod cases, and nets are our only loose items, and are most likely to be forgotten on a portage.

In my typical eight-day trip, I will make three or four different camps. We spend the bulk of each day out fishing, but we are in camp enough to make seeking out the best five-star sites worthwhile. Five-star sites have a smooth canoe landing that is safe for loading and un-



*It does take some fancy foot-work at times, but in hundreds of ankle-deep Quetico loadings last summer, my Schnee's Beartooth boots, kept me absolutely bone-dry. It can be done, without abusing Kevlar hulls. (Jesse Lake)*

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About day four, both cold packs are half-empty and the ice in the refrigerator pack is mostly gone, so I combine the cold foods all into the frozen pack, which keeps its ice until day seven with high temps in the 70s. I carefully manage my cooler packs out in the canoe, on portages, and in camp, but this extra effort is worth it come mealtime. My clients rave about the food on my trips, and the way I see it, I owe them the best gear and food I can deliver. I can't control the weather and fish behavior, but I can control the quality of my gear and food. Only the very best goes into my packs. Savoring real meat and potatoes in a wilderness setting is a treat we all look forward to after a long day out fishing.

The paddling, portaging, camp gear, and food all play an important role in enhancing our "fishin mission." On my GS2 fishing trips, everyone understands going in that who goes, when we go, where we go, what we do when we get there, what we pack, and the priceless memories we take home all revolve around the challenge and thrill of big fish. This is wilderness sport fishing, where the price to play is mostly sweat equity. There is no bass boat, cooler of beer, or hot shower at the end of the day, only your own paddle power, lake water Kool-Aid, and a jump in the lake. But there are no roads, no cabins, no motor boats. Just endless pristine waterways with trophy class smallmouth bass, walleye, lake trout, and pike. This is fishing the way it was meant to be. Wilderness canoe trip fishing has completely spoiled me to the point that I have very little interest in fishing more accessible waters. Quetico fishing is an ever changing, fascinating challenge of applying my lifetime of fishing experience to get my clients into big fish action day after day, trip after trip, year after year. Not every trip yields Grand Slam records to every angler, but the fish are always there, and that is all one can ask.

**WHY WE DO THE THINGS WE DO**

**ROB:** So how do I find my own special spiritual fulfillment in the Boundary Waters? As I pull the canoe down off the rack, I ask myself, "What will the forest, the water, the sky teach me this time?" I realize nature will not teach me anything if I don't put my hand in the mouth of the Lynx. If I don't get out there and push myself. If I don't challenge myself with new routes to paddle. If I don't collapse into a deep slumber after a full day of paddling, who am I? Others can swing in a hammock reading a book. I will be in the forest seeking truth. Sometimes I do need to force myself to be still. The lessons are there, all around me, but the rewards will only come if I am open to them. These revelations can come from charging forth like a Cape Buffalo or by patient scanning like a perched raptor.

When a pine marten invades a red squirrel's

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Rob scorns daypacks on his wilderness canoe trips. I live out of mine all summer. I'm only in/out of my big canoe pack four times during my typical 8-day Quetico trip with four camps. I am into my BWJ Guide Pack more than ten times a day for everything needed on the trail and out fishing: emergency kit, Iridium Satellite phone in waterproof Pelican hard case, two Petzel headlights in padded cases w/extra batteries, packets of Kleenex in Ziplock, Sea-To-Summit bug headnet, Leatherman multi-tool, lighter, Deep Woods Off spray can in Ziplock, two Hydro Flask bottles to keep drinks cold all day, L.L. Bean polarized sunglasses w/bifocal lens for tying fishing line, in padded case, Nikon D7200 camera in padded case and Cabela's Angler rain jacket and pants. (I would also have an L.L. Bean fleece jacket in here during early/late trips). Most of these items go inside a Sea-To-Summit roll-top dry bag into the main compartment of the BWJ Guide Pack. Also, shown are the aforementioned Schnee's Beartooth boots with Out/Dry (not Gore-Tex) which give me maximum traction and ankle support on the portages and keep me dry—period, something no other leather boot ever has. Also shown is my Stohlquist Drifter lifejacket. As a non-swimmer, I wear this thing religiously. On hot days, I unzip it for more air and use the waist-buckle to secure it for paddling or if I ever flip over. This pack is lashed w/carabiner to the canoe behind my stern seat so if we capsize and the big packs float off, if I can stay with the canoe, I will have the emergency gear I need to survive for a long time.

territory, the squirrel makes a peculiar alarm whistle. Not the routine chatter you hear when you tramp down the trail to the latrine. When I hear that alarm, if I stop, listen, and look, I may witness a chase, a drama, a lesson. That distinct musky scent along a portage tells me a mink has recently passed by. It does not necessarily mean I need to see the animal. Just sensing they are there puts me in their world. As much as I love mammals, bugs are far more common, and the more I study them, the more amazed I am by their evolutionary adaptations.

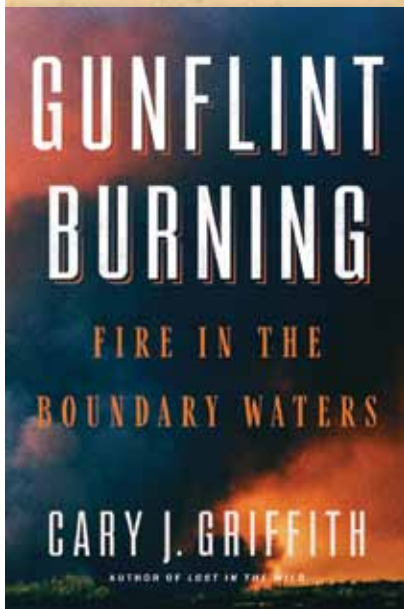
I believe after we humans implode ourselves into extinction, insects will rule the planet once again.

I don't get too excited about fish because as great as the Boundary Waters is, it's not exactly a coral reef where one can dive and observe marine life. I could wax on about plants because they really drive everything, and their subtle changes throughout paddling season are amazing, but that's another story. However...birds! The incredible thing about the Boundary Waters' birds is that most of them have the ability

and desire to escape northern winters. My birding mentor, Sue Plankis, is teaching me the language of birds. They are eager to communicate with you, and they know what's happening. Learn their language, and you are no longer an outsider; you have become a creature of the forest.

My life on the canoe trails is not always about learning; sometimes I like to embrace the simple pleasures of the wilderness—a naked swim on a deserted beach, an afternoon nap on a bed of red pine duff, intimacy with my partner

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**MINNESOTA**

while the wind sings through the trees. That’s living for me.

One pull of the Boundary Waters is solitude—an escape from the sounds of traffic that permeate life almost everywhere else. I like to swim naked and feel unchlorinated water slide unimpeded over my torso. I want to dry off in the sunlight untainted by car exhaust and industrial fumes. Sometimes on a windless night in the inky darkness, I will pick up my paddle, and it will be a paddle no more. It becomes a magic wand. I slide my canoe, a timeless watercraft, into the silky water and dance. Weaving the water, heeling the hull high on the gunwales, spinning, carving.

Sometimes too much is made of the “Leave No Trace” doctrine. One of my favorite activities in the Boundary Waters is the campfire. I enjoy the firewood quest, fire building, cooking over a fire, and having my bones warmed by its heat. Stoves are for stuffy urban apartments. They are as out of place in the wilderness as a stinky city bus. I like to hike back from the shoreline and find a nice standing dead tree. Dead enough to be dry, but not so dead as to be punky. Species counts big time, but no place for details here. Using an axe and saw, I like to fell the tree. Not haphazardly, but hopefully precisely where I plan. I want to limb the branches with an axe, carry or drag it to my canoe, balance it sideways on the gunwales like a tightrope walker holds a pole, and paddle it to my campsite. Back at camp, I buck it into rounds, splitting the rounds into cordwood while enjoying both the satisfying sounds, smells, and exertions of splitting and neatly stacking the sticks. As the afternoon cools, using only natural fire starters garnered from the forest and a single match, I nudge kindling into a blaze and eventually into a bed of coals. The sense of accomplishment is overpowering. To cook over fire links me to our ancestors. It is pure pleasure, and I get great satisfaction leaving a pile of firewood neatly stacked for the next camper. Who often, despite all the junk he is packing, neglects to bring an axe.

It’s more than phenology, accomplishments, and selfish indulgence that draw me to the Boundary Waters. It is a place where I can rebuild my confidence in the future. When I stand in the shadow of a giant white pine, a species that has withstood the assault of blister rust, chainsaws, wildfire, savage heat, drought, wind, lightning, deep frost, and years that dwarf my lifetime, I am inspired. Nature is tough. It has a spirit that cannot be subdued. White pines typify that spirit, and these towering giants make me optimistic for my grandchildren’s future. I need to drink that tonic occasionally and bathe in the grandeur of the present, to rebuild my hope for the future.

One last reason is something I share with Stu.

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*This shows the contents of my two BWJ Insulated Food Packs as I am loading up for an 8-day, 6-man Quetico trip. The pack at left I call the Refrigerator Pack, it holds a one-gallon ice jug, real milk, orange juice, fresh eggs in plastic cartons, "canned" vegetables repacked in Tupperware, cheese, butter, lard, Simply Potatoes, fresh apples & Halo's, candy bars and the first day's ready-made trail lunch. In the Freezer Pack is another one-gallon ice jug and six homemade dinners (thanks Michele)—beef fajitas, chicken alfredo, wild rice hot dish, spaghetti sauce, plus Zups steaks and brats (my 7th dinner entre' is walleye). All these dinners are frozen rock hard before driving to Crane Lake, early the morning of my trips. Also in here is frozen deli-meat for sandwiches plus two breakfasts of bacon/sausage. By day four, the ice in the fridge pack is melted-down and the contents of both cold packs are half-gone, so I combine all the remaining perishables into the Freezer pack, which typically holds its ice 6-7 days. That 8th day we just get up and bust out to the towboat without cooking anything. I also have two BWJ food boxes/packs of dry foods for my crews, one with bread, buns, bagels, cereal, oatmeal and cookies. The other has all the rest of our food supplies: rice, pasta, tortillas, GORP, granola bars, drink mixes, PB & J, staple items etc. The whole point is we eat real food all week and consider it a treat in this wilderness setting. This is canoeing not backpacking. My four food packs are sitting in the bottom of the canoe or in camp for 98% of the trip. I want my clients to be well-fed so they have the energy to fish hard all week.*

Taking people into the Boundary Waters can lift a curtain. It's about sharing an experience that people maybe didn't even know was possible. I am proud of my small role in inspiring others to enjoy, respect, and fall in love with canoe country. **STU:** If the goal on my canoe trips were to paddle, paddle, paddle, single portage, gag down a bag of Mountain House for supper, and camp hanging from a tree every night, I would have run out of water to explore a long time ago. If the rewards of wilderness canoe

tripping were commensurate with miles paddled, you can bet I would be traveling far, fast, and light too. Very few people have paddled more miles in the Quetico than I have, I really like paddling, but the actual canoeing on my canoe trips gets completely lost in the appeal of so many other wilderness values. I am talking about what Sigurd Olson called the "priceless intangibles." I love paddling and portaging into the backcountry as much as the next guy but once I get there, I slow down and fully

engage the wild. It's about the beauty, adventure, challenge, timelessness, solitude, and connecting with nature at the deepest possible personal level.

Once one discovers that these trips are less about escaping the stress of modern urban life and more about embracing wilderness values, it becomes clear that the best way to transcend the ordinary canoe trip is to tackle the wilderness sport fishing challenge. Wilderness fishing gives my canoe trips a tangible goal, but the results are never a given. Paddling

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from point A to point B holds little intrigue for me, as it is a foregone conclusion that it will happen. Not so with fishing. I have fished lakes like Argo, Sturgeon, Conmee, Elk, Crooked, and Wicksteed on over fifty trips, yet each visit has been different. You can't come to really know a particular lake by churning across it at full paddling power. Maybe it is just my competitive nature, but pure paddling trips are like playing a game where nobody keeps score. On my trips, the numbers of big fish are right there for everyone to see, count, and photograph. Wilderness angling is about that deep direct connection with these incredible big, bold, beautiful, wild fish. Fish that have beaten long odds to reach trophy age and size, fish that upon smashing your lure can bring both the agony of defeat and the thrill of victory. When my trips are long over and my clients look back on them, they won't recall the paddling. It will be the indelible encounters with big fish that they take to their grave.

As I alluded to from the top, canoe country fishing has unique appeal because of its wilderness setting. Catching a twenty-inch smallmouth on Mille Lacs is not the same as on Suzanette. Not even close. A lot of it has to do with paying the piper with that sweat equity to get to Suzanette. After a winter of preparation and anticipation plus two full days of paddle-burn, packsack backache, muck, bugs, and rain, well when that big ol' bronzeback explodes over your popper, that's when it becomes crystal clear why you are out here.

Once you take the bait and commit to transcending the ordinary canoe trip with a serious angling effort, there are many specific ways to support that "fishin' mission." As a canoe country fishing guide, I spend most of every day solo paddling the canoe, positioning my client in the bow to make the next cast to those big bass lairs. That straight shaft paddle I talked about allows me to command and control the canoe without having to switch sides. Plus, I can hook my rod under my left leg and troll for trout or walleye while J-stroking on the right side of the boat. When I get a strike, I can throw the paddle down, grab my rod, and when it is over, resume paddling without the one-way limitation of a bent shaft.

Back in college when I guided for an outfitter, real guides cooked over an open fire. But it didn't take long to figure out that collecting, hauling, sawing, and splitting firewood, then cooking with it and cleaning up the black pots was a huge negative on fishing success. I cook most of my meals on a Coleman Gladiator two-burner propane stove. I can heat the main course on one burner and the side dish on the other. It is fast, easy, and clean. I call it my most valuable piece

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*It is common for my crew to fish right till dark which means feeding the hungry bunch fast when we get back to camp amidst the crush of mosquitos. The Coleman Gladiator two-burner propane camp stove lets me heat up the main course and side dish simultaneously. I heat the hot water for dishes while we are eating then clean up and hit the sack by midnight. This stove is a huge advantage over cooking on wood when it comes to keeping my guys well fed and on the fish all week long.*

of fishing equipment because it is such a huge time saver around camp, leaving far more time and energy for casting, trolling, and catching. I will take the time to collect beaver wood driftwood while out fishing to cook steaks and brats over charcoal, but this usually happens after dark, after the prime evening hours of fishing action.

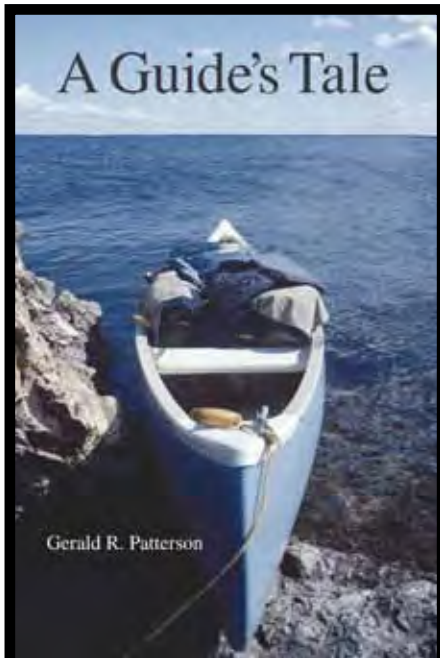
I have already made my case for packing and serving real food on my canoe trips. Keeping my clients well fed with the energy to hit it hard all day every day pays real dividends on our catch rate. But another big reason I went to fresh food on ice is that when given the choice between freeze dried fare and fresh walleye, guess what my guys will choose? I

fish canoe country for sport, not food. I believe big wilderness fish are worth a thousand times more when released to thrill another angler. I do appreciate the time honored tradition of a shore lunch or dinner of fresh caught walleye, but I limit this to one meal per trip. I am very proud of the role BWJ has played over the past thirty-two years to promote catch and release sport fishing in the Quetico and BWCAW. To all of you who release all bigger fish, thank you very much. Your catch and release conservation ethic is critical to preserving this priceless fishery.

I beg to differ with a lot of canoe country conventional wisdom: seventeen-foot canoes, bent shaft paddles, August trips, single portaging, water

shoes or sandals for wet foot loading and unloading, moving camp every day, freeze dried food, cooking on wood fires, short and easy trips for kids..... but the one that rankles me most is the myth that all you need to fish the canoe country is one little tackle box. If fishing is the number one priority on your BWCAW and Quetico trips, this ain't going to cut it. You need to become a BASS PRO preferred customer.

No matter what I tell all my clients to pack for fishing tackle, it is inevitable that some will need this, that, and the other thing. So I bring backup tackle for the whole crew. All told, it fills a BWJ Magnum Guide Pack and weighs about twenty-five pounds. I actually cram all I can into six differ-



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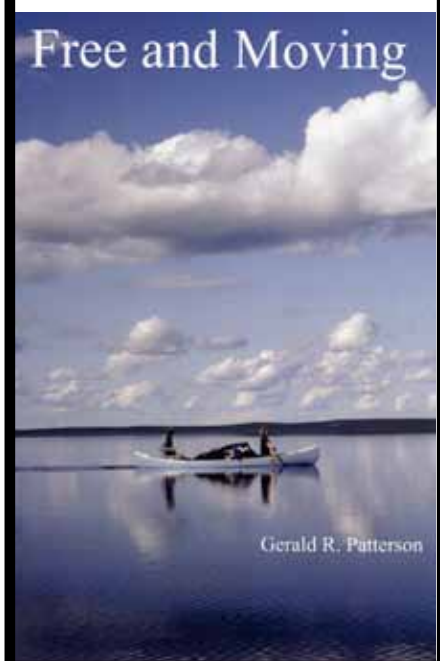
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ent tackle boxes. The topwater bass box (3x7x11") holds fifteen Whopper Ploppers (sizes 90 and 110) and five to ten each of Booh Yah Boss Pops, Rebel Pop R's, Rapala X-Rap Pops, and Heddon Torpedos. The beauty of topwater baits is you almost never snag or lose them... except to those bloody pike. Watch carefully when a pike breaks off your topwater bait. With surprising frequency, they float back up to fish another day. My dream trip is to have somebody paddle me into Quetico for the month of June and all I have for tackle is topwater bass plugs. I would hit a new lake every day. It would be topwater bass or bust. Meanwhile, my trips are about chasing the Grand Slam, so I gotta cover all the bases. My subsurface bass box holds Vibrax Spinners (Sizes 4 and 5), spinnerbaits, shallow running crankbaits, etc. The crankbait box (3x9x14") contains fifteen Rapala Jointed Shad Raps (Size 7), Reef Runners, Rapala Countdowns, Minnow Raps, Tail Dancers, etc. The lake trout box holds a dozen Dr. Spoons (Size 285), big Dardevle spoons, big Sebille crankbaits, Rapala Tail Dancer 30s, and Rippin Raps. A 2x5x9" walleye jig box contains twenty or so each of Northland Tackle jigs in 1/8, 1/4, and 3/8 ounces. I also have floating jigheads and special use jigs. In Quetico, these all get paired with soft plastics and Gulp or Impulse-type scented baits. The sixth tackle box is bass tube jigs. Last year, Northland Tackle came out with a pre-rigged tube jig (Mimic Minnow Tuff Tube), and the early results were eye opening for both smallmouth and walleye, so I look to go a lot more with these this year.

Also into the fishing pack go several large Ziplocs of soft plastics and scented baits. Then there is my padded reel case with two bass/walleye

reels (Shimano Stradic 2500) and a lake trout reel (Shimano Stradic-4000). Miscellaneous fishing gear includes extra spools of line (Spiderwire Invisibraid or Berkeley Fire-line Crystal), line cutters, fillet knife, two forceps for removing hooks, stringers, lure covers, sunglasses, etc. I never travel in a loaded canoe with rods outside of a rod case.

#### FUNDAMENTAL LAWS OF CANOE COUNTRY

*(Editor's note: Those attending our Canoecopia presentation were able to get Rob's take on these last two items, but he was too busy paddling far/fast/light down the Rio Grande to make the BWJ press deadline. I had to paddle solo for the rest of the way on this one).*

**STU:** Truth be told, hitting that sweet spot of your own best wilderness canoe tripping style is a moving target. There are many factors to consider. What is the experience level of the trip participants? Are there kids or seniors along? What time of year are you going? How many days do you have? What are the primary interests? Just to name a few. But no matter what canoe tripping style you choose to pursue for a given trip, there are a few canoe country absolutes.

*One:* planning matters. Researching and investing time, money, and effort into your trip route, gear, and primary interests will pay off. This is where Boundary Waters Journal can really help. We have thirty-two years of incredibly detailed articles by area experts on how, when, and where to plan great canoe trips. The sequence for putting a trip together should be who, what, when, where, and then how. Put your group together first, then identify and gain consensus on the main trip interests and goals. Next, select the dates that optimize achieving those goals. Fourth, select a route that has a high



*I typically make four camps during an 8-day trip so it pays to seek out those with 5\* amenities like a safe canoe landing, level tent sites, a fire ring with seating and tarp-rigging trees plus a balance of shade and open space for cool breezes and bug relief. (Sturgeon Lake)*

probability of delivering your trip objectives, and lock in your permit reservation. And finally, map out a game plan to make it all happen. Note, route selection is number four in this process. It is back-asswards to pick a route first and force feed trip mates to paddle it regardless of their skills and interests.

*Two:* don't fall for the myth that you must travel every day or basecamp. As I have already described, my eight-day Quetico fishing trips are a hybrid approach, paddle hard into the backcountry, camp and fish two nights, move, camp and fish two nights, move, camp and fish two nights, paddle hard back out to the trailhead. We get plenty of paddling, portaging, camping, photography, beautiful scenery, wildlife, and more on our fishing trips.

*Three:* there will be adversity out there, roll with it. The wind will howl, the rain will fall, the bugs will bite, you will slip off a log and sink thigh-deep into the muck, gear will break, you will lose lures to pike, you will get bit by pike, and you will curse every last pike in canoe country. But savvy wilderness trippers don't sweat this small stuff. Sweat the stuff that matters, like being super careful approaching and leaving portage landings that have current. Running rapids in the BWCAW or Quetico, where there is almost always a portage option, is just plain stupid. But people also die by inadvertently getting swept over a falls. Paddling in lightning or big wind is another risky behavior. Mother Nature can be unforgiving to those

who dismiss her power. I worry about the safety of my crew above all else.

*Four:* pursue your passion out there, and go all in. BWJ contributing photographer, Gary Fiedler, of RadiantSpiritGallery.com, spends over three months out at a crack, solo, in canoe country. He puts his heart and soul into getting the shot. He has so much gear, food, and bulky photography gear that he makes six or seven laps on every portage. He does what it takes to do what he loves out there. Others are canoe country history fans, paddling down all thirty-something pictograph sites. If you crave beauty and solitude out there, paddle in early October, canoe country's finest hour. Set your canoe country goals and go after them. You will never



*This 21" smallmouth with a 13" girth hit a Whopper Plopper 110 during a day trip into Antoine Lake. All the paddling, portaging, and camping we do on my Grand Slam Guide Service trips revolves around moments like this. Beauty, solitude, wildlife and adventure are important parts of my trips but the bottom line is they are about the thrill of big fish.*





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regret it.

*Five:* the more you put into this game, the more you will get back out of it. The payback won't come every day or every trip. But those who persevere through all that inherent adversity, those who embrace both the delights and dilemmas of this special place, will be gifted with a spiritual fulfillment that few things in this life can match.

#### OUR TAKES ON THE PADDLING LIFESTYLE

Perhaps the ultimate selection of a particular wilderness canoe tripping style is choosing to do it for a living. Both Rob and I made this decision mostly so we can be out on wilderness waters more, but of course this comes with a catch. Getting paid to guide wilderness trips means these are no longer your trips—they are all about customer satisfaction.

*STU:* As canoe country guides go, I actually have a very unique situation. I generate virtually all of my clients through my writing in BWJ. This means they know all about my style: paddle hard, portage hard, and fish hard. Consequently, with a few exceptions, my guys are prepared with the right gear and mindset to really get after the fish. I enjoy teaching my guys all I know about Quetico fishing, but at the end of the day, I can't catch these fish for them. They have to listen and learn fast to


realize their fishing dreams.

I have clients tell me up front about the significant sacrifices made to take a Grand Slam trip and that this will be their "fishing trip of a lifetime." Such expectations put me in the hot seat to perform, day after day, trip after trip, year after year. There is considerable disparity between the number of people who think they can guide wilderness anglers and those who can actually do it at the highest level over the long haul. You have to be super competitive and thrive on the challenge of cracking the code of a given species of fish on a given lake each day. On days when the weather and fish conspire against my best efforts, it can be tempting to envy Rob and his anti-fishing trips. But it is that pressure to produce big fish that keeps me engaged, that keeps the intensity high, that pushes me to give 100% for my guys. In a trip of 10,000 casts, achieving that "fishing trip of a lifetime," can come down to just one cast, the line is that fine. When we beat the odds and my clients feel the power and tenacity for life of these wild, trophy fish, there is no doubt we have transcended the ordinary canoe trip.

A good canoe country guide is like a coach. He quickly learns the strengths and weaknesses of each player and puts them into situations where they can flourish and be successful.

I try to bring our six or so fishers together as a team early on in the trip. Teamwork while paddling, portaging, doing camp chores, and out fishing builds that special wilderness camaraderie. I need the best out of each to deliver the kind of wilderness fishing trip that they could not have accomplished on their own.

Many of my clients sign up as singles and take the plunge into the wilderness with total strangers. I shed blood, sweat, and tears on the canoe trails, and most really appreciate my dedication to making this trip the best it can be. I know a trip is going well when they all start treating me like just one of the guys. The power of the wilderness experience to flush away all the differences in education, economic status, politics, etc. is amazing. None of that matters when the big bass are tearing up our Whopper Ploppers. By the end of these trips, we have come to know and respect each other, and while some will return, others I will never see again. I have learned to live with this because we have shared the priceless rewards of Quetico sport fishing, and big fish memories never die.

To read more about Rob's unparalleled lifetime of wilderness paddling experiences, purchase/read his three books at: [robkesselring.com](http://robkesselring.com) 

# wilderness adventure



## The Toadbusters Hit Quetico

□ by Randy Fondow

On August 6, 1984, four seventeen-foot Grumman's with ten people headed west on Seagull Lake. I steered in the lead canoe, thankful we faced only a slight breeze. A strong wind on this big lake would create serious problems for our seven greenhorn teenagers. The goal for the day was to paddle five miles to the west end of the lake and camp. All the boys had practiced reading maps and using a compass while training for this trip, but I took the lead to get us started in the right direction.

We had departed Green Bay at the unpopular hour of 3:00 a.m., and after ten hours of driving, checked into the Ranger Station in Grand Marais. From there we took the Gunflint Trail to Seagull. The two other adult leaders, Dennis and Al, were experienced canoeists. They manned the sterns in two of the canoes while Keith, fifteen, steered the fourth canoe. During our training sessions, Keith had shown he could keep his canoe headed in the right direction. One of my rules as a leader on these trips was to keep the canoes relatively close together. I knew big water could change from calm to whitecaps in a hurry, so the proximity of the canoes provided a measure of safety and ease of communication.

The first four trips I guided into the BWCAW occurred as a camp counselor for the Green Bay YMCA camp U-Nah-Li-Ya (Unie for short) from 1976-1978. (See BWJ Fall Issue of 2017 for an article on one of these trips). A few years had passed, but I felt confident in the wilderness leadership skills

I learned at Unie. Assisted by two other capable adults, I had no question that we could meet the challenges ahead. I experienced quite a few life changes from my carefree Unie days: a marriage in 1979, daughters born in 1980 and 1984, and a new job as a special education teacher in 1983. I hated the idea of leaving my wife with our three-year-old and a baby, but the opportunity to get paid while leading another Boundary Waters trip proved too much to pass up.

As a camp counselor, I led groups of adolescent boys who were very experienced in the skills of portaging, paddling, and wilderness camping. However, this group of seven teenage boys had less experience and was referred for this trip for two reasons: their county social worker thought they could benefit from learning wilderness skills, and they would be removed from the city environment where they had gotten into trouble. They were enrolled in the Wilderness Challenge program created by social worker Dennis Drosner, who had secured the necessary funding and support of Brown County Social Services to try a new form of therapy for adjudicated youth. The trip was originally planned for the previous summer with three county social workers as guides. Dennis, a former co-worker of mine, contacted me when that trip failed to move past the planning stage. He

asked me to help in making his proposal come to fruition. To assist us, I invited my friend Al Zagzebski. Al worked as a counselor in a local group home and had outstanding skills in connecting with youth. Also, at six-foot-two and a solid 220 pounds, he provided impressive portage and paddling skills.

I convinced the camp director at U-Nah-Li-Ya to form a partnership with Brown County Social Services and to hire me to lead this joint venture. This allowed us to use the Y's outfitting capabilities, and the merger provided some liability protection. We met the boys in early June and conducted day sessions for community service (to take care of some court assigned restitution) as well as practicing paddling, portaging, navigating, and general wilderness camping skills. The training also included two days of backpacking in the Nicolet Forest in northern Wisconsin followed by a three-day canoe trip down the Brule River on the border between Michigan and Wisconsin. The hit movie "Ghostbusters" had recently come out and these boys enjoyed catching toads during our training. Thus, Dennis declared that as a group, they would be known throughout the summer as the "Toadbusters."

For the most part, the boys did well paddling across Seagull. Although some of the conversations between canoes were spiced with crude



*As long as there are youth canoe trips, there will be kids in the water. (Beth Lake)*

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language and innuendos, I was pleased that they followed directions. In a couple of hours, we were looking for a campsite near the portage from Alpine to Seagull. Fishing would be a part of this trip, but one of the expectations we established was that rods would be packed away while we traveled to keep the group moving along. No trolling, casting, or jigging until we had free time at camp. Around 4:00, we discovered an island site with adequate tent space for our four-person tents. To set up camp, we divided into two groups of three and one of four, each led by an adult. One group set up tents while the other prepared dinner and the third gathered firewood and washed dishes. We rotated these camp responsibilities daily. Since I was the most experienced in cooking meals on an open fire, I assisted with all breakfasts and dinners.

Once camp was set up and chores done, the boys fished or swam. No one had success casting spoons or jigs from shore that night. I couldn't offer any advice since my fishing experience was limited to pan fishing or soaking a night crawler on Wisconsin trout streams. Dennis had more experience in that area. Nevertheless, I did point out to the boys that landing the lure in the water rather than the trees would increase their odds.

Since five of the boys smoked, we restricted smoking to around the fire pit to reduce the chances of starting a forest fire. Every evening, before heading to the tents, we would meet around the fire to air any grievances. The first night was a short session as everyone was tired from the long day. There was both excitement and worry for the fifteen-mile paddle and six portages of the day ahead. This would take us on down to the south arm of Knife Lake.

As I settled into my sleeping bag that evening, I reflected on the seven rookies that were off to a good start. Tim, the oldest at seventeen, had Boy Scout camping experience and could be relied on to tackle any chore without complaint. Keith was the only one I knew prior to the trip. In 1974, as a five year old, he was a regular at the park where I worked as a summer recreation leader. Frequently, he would show up carrying his catch of the day from a nearby polluted river. It wasn't unusual for him to leave a two-foot carp near the park's shelter house for my enjoyment. He would prove to be the most capable fisherman over the next week. Buddy, at fifteen, was slender, Native American, and impressed me as a strong bowman in Al's canoe. Robert, who was the smallest and usually, had a smile on his face, did not mind taking the duffer position in the middle of the canoe, and he helped out paddling when others needed a rest. Carl, tall and slender, said very little, but got along fine with everyone. Gary, the youngest at thirteen, also mixed

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*We can never measure the total positive influence these wilderness canoe trip experiences have on young people but every kid feels the impact in his heart. To all the counselors and youth group leaders out there who make these trips happen, well done. This is the "Toadbusters Crew" featured in this story, on their 1984 Boundary Waters trip.*

well with the entire group. They called him "Murdock" because of his resemblance to a popular TV character of the 80s. Scott, strong willed, with experience hunting and fishing, rounded out the group. Although physically capable, Scott would find some of the wilderness challenges particularly frustrating.

Our trip goal was to visit Dorothy Molter's island on day three, and after consuming mass quantities of root beer and candy bars, we would head east along the Border Lakes towards Northern Lights Lake of Canada. Instead of paddling into Quetico as I had on other trips, we decided to explore the area east of the park. At that time, there was no camping fee or reservation required for

Crown Land. This suited our tight budget.

As with most teen groups, it was difficult to get moving by 6:30. We had a simple breakfast of cocoa, oatmeal, and raisins and were on the water by 8:45. After a short paddle, we portaged 105 rods into Alpine Lake. Most of the group would single portage with the Duluth packs, and Al hefted the hundred-pound food pack. Keith, Tim, Dennis and I carried canoes. Other than a few complaints about the terrain and uncomfortable packs, we found ourselves on Jasper Lake in good shape with excellent sunny weather. Scott, who duffed in Al's canoe, indicated to me that he struggled with his pack on the portage because of the nasty

sunburn he sustained on day one. We had encouraged him to put on sunscreen but he ignored us and paid the price. Natural consequences are often the best teacher, but pain from the burn fueled Scott's frustration with each portage. Al used his sense of humor to distract Scott and encourage him to focus on the positive. We pushed on thru Jasper, Kingfisher, and into Ogishkemuncie. After a portage, I rewarded the group with a piece of hard candy. It surprised me how much the boys enjoyed this small treat.

We stopped halfway through Ogishkemuncie for lunch and a quick swim. Lunch options were either a cup of gorp or what I called trail lunch consisting of Rye-Krisp crackers, peanut butter, a cheese stick,

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slice of sausage, box of raisins, granola bar, and a small square of Baker's chocolate. In the 70's, my Unie groups drank straight from the lake, however, on this trip we treated our drinking water with iodine tablets and flavored it with Kool Aid. The kids rinsed out their lunch cups as they went for a swim. Buddy was required to wear an orange life jacket while canoeing, as he was a non-swimmer. He took it off for lunch, and while wading out from shore to wash his cup, he accidentally slipped into deeper water. Fortunately, Scott grabbed him and pulled him onto shore. With his sunburn and struggles carrying a pack, it had been a tough day for Scott. Pulling Buddy to safety was a big contribution to our team and made up for his complaining.

After an hour for lunch, we resumed our paddle towards the South Arm of Knife. The portages between the small lakes of Annie, Jenny, and Eddy were relatively short, but it became apparent most of the guys were tired and looking forward to setting up camp. The question of "how much further, Randy?" came at me from multiple directions. I wanted to be off the water by 3:30 p.m. because campsites were occupied early on this popular route. After an hour's paddle down Knife, we found a suitable home for that night. There were more than a few arguments and complaints from the group as we set up camp. Having two other adult leaders who were great at diffusing tensions made my job easier. The guys were starving and devoured our dinner of mac and cheese. Then to satisfy their huge appetites, Carl fried up bannock patties over perfect coals. The boys smothered the bannock with honey and Carl's cooking got rave reviews. After supper, Keith and Dennis tried

fishing from shore, with only Keith reporting a strike. A couple of the guys helped me organize our heavy food pack, and then we pulled it up over a sturdy tree limb about twenty feet off the ground. I had learned a valuable lesson about leaving food on the ground from a bear encounter in 1976 *BWJ Fall, 2017*.

Soon the entire group gathered around the campfire to process the day and dry off wet boots. It was apparent that some of the guys were handling the challenges better than others. As leaders, we tried to emphasize the positive—great weather, meeting our goals for miles traveled, and awesome swimming. We blamed the poor fishing on the sunny weather rather than our inexperience. I emphasized that the next day would involve only paddling and no portages. We would include a stop at Dorothy Molter's Isle of the Pines homestead. They could quench their thirst with her homemade root beer and get their fill of sugar with real candy bars.

Wednesday brought cloudy weather and a slight westerly wind. We rose early, and after breakfast, which included Jell-O we had prepped the night before, we headed west towards Dorothy's. So far I had not tested my new Daiwa fishing rod and reel. It was the cheapest combo available, and I would eventually learn that cheaper is not better when it comes to fishing. As the group leader, there were always things to do: organize the cooking area, make sure the camp set-up and takedown was done properly, watch the swimmers, etc. My fishing would have to wait.

The guys were excited about meeting this "lady of the wilderness." Dorothy was seventy-seven years old and the only inhabitant of the

BWCAW. This was my fifth trip to her island, and she was always one of the highlights for my Y camp groups. After a couple hours of paddling, we arrived at Isle of the Pines before lunch—perfect timing—except for the fact that Dorothy was not there. On her summer tent, a note indicated that she would return in a few days. I read the disappointment and frustration on the Toadbusters' faces. I explained this wasn't like the soda fountain shop back home that had regular hours. After stopping on four previous trips, I just assumed she would always be there. So instead of root beer and candy bars, we ate our granola lunch, drank Kool Aid, climbed back in our canoes, and headed east on Knife. I felt like I had a bulls-eye sewn on the back of my shirt after letting the crew down like this.

Paddling on Knife for three hours brought us to the next camp on the east end of this immense Border Lake. After setting up the tents, the boys wanted to take advantage of the twenty-foot rock face a short hike away. They enjoyed jumping from the rock wall and swimming in the clear, cool waters of Knife. A couple of them also tried casting for anything that would bite, but our swimming in close proximity probably scared away the fish.

While preparing supper, I noticed Scott arguing with Dennis over completing his camp chores. With colorful language, Scott announced he had had enough of the Boundary Waters and was going to hike out of the wilderness and hitchhike home. While a few of the guys thought this was funny, Dennis, Al, and I were alarmed as it was easy to get lost in the woods. Fortunately, Scott only wandered a hundred feet into the woods, where Al found

him and convinced him to rejoin our group. With five days left to our trip, I was concerned about future meltdowns.

That night after supper, I broke out our best dessert, bannock roasted on the thick-end of a whittled stick. This bannock formed a pocket that we filled with dehydrated berry filling. This was quite the process, as they had to find the right sized dead limb, about three-feet long with a two-inch diameter, and strip off the bark on one end. The bannock had to be the right consistency to avoid falling off the stick, and we smothered the whittled end in cooking oil to prevent sticking. Then each boy molded the bannock on the end of the stick and cooked it over the open fire. I noticed that the hungriest ones burnt their bannock in the flames instead of using the coals for a slower, browning effect. No matter the style, this dessert was a huge hit, and I sensed that perhaps the Toadbusters were beginning to forgive me for Dorothy not being home.

Although we had a few overnight showers, day four was gorgeous, sunny, and about eighty degrees. The winds from the southwest were perfect for us heading to the northeast. Our goal was fifteen miles of paddling with three easy portages. Things went smooth until Monument Portage where Robert tripped and injured his leg. From past experience, I considered this one of the safest portages in the BWCAW. However, there are no guarantees when working with a pack and slippery footing. "Doctor" Al declared it was just a bad bruise, and Robert was able to finish the eighty-rod portage while Al carried his pack. I was happy to see a smile return to Robert's face when he shouldered his pack through Swamp portage, our last portage of the day.

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It was early afternoon as we paddled into Saganaga and the winds had picked up. Conditions were perfect to try sailing. We gathered the canoes before American Point and I explained how we would sail towards Voyageurs Island on Sag. The plan involved two canoes held together by the middle duffer. The boys in the bows tied their paddles to opposite sides of a heavy-duty rain poncho. When they held their paddles up the poncho essentially became a sail. The stern people used their paddles as rudders. The group enthusiastically embraced this opportunity to take a rest from paddling and executed the sailing technique to perfection. Just imagine two catamarans skimming across Sag. In a little over an hour, we covered almost four miles, and I announced we should look for a campsite. We disassembled our sails and paddled to a site on the west side of Voyageurs Island. After setting up camp, a few of the guys tried their luck fishing and reported catching a couple of small "snakes." I hoped this would be a sign that our fishing fortunes would improve. I tried my first few casts and caught a couple of "tree bass."

On day five, we navigated through Sag and paddled to the dock at Canadian customs. Dennis and I took identification and appropriate documentation to the Canadian Customs officials while the rest of the group waited. We were cleared to enter Canada in short order, however, Dennis thought it would be fun to play a prank on two of the boys. As we approached the group, Dennis, with a serious tone, said that Scott and Carl needed to see the Custom agents for questioning. When I saw the look of fear on the boys' faces, I couldn't keep the ruse going, and I laughed to break the tension. Then we put our muscles to work and paddled towards Northern Lights Lake.

This was the first day we needed to wear rain ponchos. A light wind prevented any sailing, so we encouraged the group to paddle strong so we could traverse the fifteen miles in reasonable time. With a few days experience and a lighter food pack, our portages seemed easy. The highlight of the day occurred during a portage when Scott and Keith discovered the remains of a moose. Too bad this was our only moose sighting. Tim, Scott, and Keith, all hunters, commented on the impressive size of the remains. The guys wanted to grab the bones and haul some back like souvenirs until I reminded them we would have to carry everything over some difficult portages and that we should leave only footprints. Once again we set up camp in the late afternoon. Then we discovered a nice surprise.

Tim and Gary found a blueberry patch loaded with ripe berries near camp. The entire group

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gorged themselves and collected some to put in our evening bannock fry. The one-pot meals we prepared for supper were nothing special. However, the fried bannock that Carl crafted was always a hit.

Sitting by the campfire that evening, some of the Toadbusters let me know they were ready for a day of fun and fishing. I explained we wanted a better site than this one for our special layover day. We would have one more tough day of about sixteen miles of paddling and seven portages to reach Mowe Lake. The maps showed everything from lakes, rivers, creeks, and longer portages. Since I had never been in the area, I was hoping we would find a five-star site on Mowe. That was wishful thinking, since I anticipated arriving late and having to camp in any available space. On day six, we roused our team at six and were greeted with clear skies. After a hot chocolate and granola breakfast, we headed north. We arrived at our first marked portage, a short bypass of rapids, in a little over an hour. Soon after, we had to portage around some whitewater again. Then we headed north on Sleigh Creek. When it became too shallow, I told the group we should walk the canoes through the shallows rather than portage. Although the rocks were slippery, it was only ankle to knee deep, and the boys seemed to enjoy the opportunity to float their loads instead of carry them. Along this stretch of creek, I heard a yell from our lead canoe. When I looked up, I didn't see anything unusual, so I asked what the yelling was for. Gary and Keith explained they had just spooked a deer along the edge of the creek and it had leapt over their canoe to the other side. Gary indicated it

was almost close enough to touch with his paddle. Too bad we didn't get a picture of that.

Paddling, portaging, and walking the canoes meant a physically challenging morning, but we made it to Whitefish Lake (around eight miles) for lunch. From there we headed west and took our longest portage of the day into Plummes Lake. Although the portage distance wasn't marked on the map, it took us half an hour to complete. The boys indicated it was the toughest portage so far, and we still faced over six miles to paddle and one more portage to get into Mowe Lake. I could tell the boys were tired and ready to call it a day. We looked on Plummes for potential sites but couldn't find anything to fit our group. We had not seen another person since leaving Saganaga, so I didn't expect any competition for sites. The pace of our travel had slowed considerably as we portaged into Mowe and resumed looking for sites. I knew that the boys would settle for any old campsite, but I was secretly praying for at least a three-star location. After an hour of paddling, we did better than that with a site on a large island approximately two-thirds of the way down Mowe. On the west side of the island, we found a great canoe landing, plenty of tent space, and an awesome fire pit. It even had a roughly hewed picnic table and kitchen counter.

In spite of their fatigue, the Toadbusters did their best work in setting up the tents and helping with dinner. After we set up camp, Dennis tried a few casts off the rocks just north of us. Within the hour, he had two hefty smallmouth bass that would become part of our evening feast. This was our first fish meal in six days, and the guys were excited about tomorrow's fishing

possibilities. We had one of our best group discussions, talking about the physical and mental challenge they had successfully overcome that day.

The kids slept in until nine, and then enjoyed blueberry pancakes with Carl manning the griddle. Everyone appreciated the opportunity to fish, swim, or just be lazy in camp. Keith and Dennis had the most success fishing. Keith located a school of big northern pike that were feeding off a thirty-foot rock face 200 yards west of camp. He could see them in the crystal clear water around fifteen feet below the surface. For hours he jigged a Dardevle spoon and had a blast playing these great fighting fish. He kept two of the northern pikes, and Dennis filleted them for supper. I finally took the opportunity to try my hand at fishing. Buddy and I paddled out to an island, and I tried a yellow twister tail with a quarter-ounce jig head off a drop-off. I must have lost six jigheads that afternoon. My list of fishing problems included tying bad knots, unfamiliarity with the drag, lousy casts, tangled line, and failing to land any of the fish I had on. If anyone caught a large Pike on Mowe Lake in the late 1980s with six yellow twister tails hanging from its mouth, now you know the rest of the story. In spite of my fishing ineptness, it was another beautiful day on a lake we had all to ourselves. The boys shared stories that evening of their fishing and other adventures on Mowe.

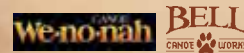
Day eight required three portages and a ten-mile paddle down Saganaga to our final campsite near Canadian Point. I let the guys sleep in until eight, and they traveled like seasoned explorers that day. The plan was to take out at Trails End very early on Wednesday so we could drive back to Green Bay



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by evening. I had scheduled my first cross country practice for Thursday, and as a new coach I figured I should be there. So we informed the Toadbusters that they had to roll out at three a.m. and be on the water by four.

The Toadbusters awoke on schedule. They packed up, ate some granola, and launched the canoes for our last day on the water. The lake was like glass, and the moon provided sufficient light, so I took a southwest compass bearing and paddled in that direction. It went well, for the most part. I recommend canoeing on calm waters in the dark to anyone interested in adding adventure to their trip. We were on Gull Lake by the time the sun started to come up. At one point, I was paying more attention to the compass bearing than the depth of the

water and we ran aground in the shallows. Scott, who was excited about heading home, jumped into the water and hauled the canoe to deeper water. By 7:30 a.m., the van was loaded and we headed home.

As we drove back to Green Bay, I looked over the Toadbusters all asleep in the van. They had successfully finished this wilderness challenge, all a little thinner with a few blisters and bruises. It was wonderful to observe that special sense of accomplishment in each of them, one that only wilderness travel can bring. We would meet monthly for the rest of the year to process how they were doing back home and to provide support for good decisions. The highlight had to be our August picnic to celebrate the trip with their

families. Besides watching them devour brats and burgers, I noticed the smiles on their faces and the pride of their family members as each received a gift. Buddy, who had paddled the entire trip, received a canoe paddle. Keith, our best fisherman, received a rod and reel to replace the rod he broke on a portage. Tim accepted a shovel, as he had dug the best latrines. Carl, our bannock specialist, smiled at his new fry pan and spatula. I felt good about the experience, and in evaluating the program with Dennis later that fall, we decided to try another Wilderness Challenge during the summer of 1985. Watch for the full story of this trip in an upcoming issue of The Boundary Waters Journal. That 1985 trip brought challenges unlike anything I had ever experienced. 



□ by *Tim King*

## The Doofus Awards

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Whenever I venture into the BWCAW or Quetico, I know there will be three certainties: I will work hard, fish hard, and laugh hard. From time to time, I take rookies so they can experience these pristine waterways, but the majority of my trips are with tried and true buddies. These dear friends all possess a great work ethic, optimistic spirit, and great sense of humor. They also have the fortitude to push deeply into the interior where there is more solitude and world class angling. Along with all the hours of paddling, portaging, and fishing, having a great time out there is very important on all of my trips.

During the long winter months, I often scour my maps and begin planning my next great adventures. It was during one of these reflective times that I came up with an idea to make our trips not only more memorable, but more fun too! This is when the “The Doofus Award” was born.

The Doofus Award is simply meant to lighten the mood on our trips while adding a good-natured laugh or two along the way. Every trip presents multiple opportunities to make mistakes. Over my fifty years of venturing into the BWCAW and Quetico, I have definitely made my share and then some. As long as these mistakes cause no serious injury, we can usually look back at them and have a good laugh, rolling our eyes at our stupidity. The cool thing about the contest is there is no rulebook. We get to make up the rules as we go along.

### Rules of the Game

The game is quite simple. Try not to mess up, thereby

getting Doofus Points. Alternatively, one can also acquire anti-Doofus points by doing something extraordinary or extremely helpful. Doofus points are assessed to participants for errors in judgment, blunders and screw-ups that occur throughout the trip. The person who collects the most Doofus points at the end of the trip is the winner and gets to don the infamous Doofus hat all the way back home to Lakeville, MN. This allows complete strangers to get a good look at the hat as we make stops for meals, gas, and lodging. The hat must also be worn for the entirety of the following year’s trip until it is duly awarded to the subsequent Doofus.

The rules of the game have morphed over time and continue to do so today. For example, initially one anti-Doofus point was awarded to whoever caught the first fish of each species. But I had to abolish this rule because I am usually in the stern focused on canoe control while my eager bow partner is frantically casting into all the prime spots before I even have my line in the water. We do award anti-Doofus points for the largest fish of each species caught each day. Two anti-Doofus points are awarded at trip’s end for the largest overall fish caught.

So in order to play the game, there must be at least two brave souls willing to be scored. The more the merrier! Once the players are set, let

the games begin!

### Point System

#### One Doofus point - (minor instances)

Examples: tripping on a root and falling in camp, dropping your dinner plate, getting your lure snagged a second time in the exact same spot, not landing a supper fish when you have it right at the boat, losing a game of cribbage, not zipping up the tent.

**Two Doofus points - (a tweener - in between a minor and a major)** Players of the game also call this a “Double.” Examples: going fishing but leaving rod in camp, casting into a tree, leaving the toilet paper out in the rain/ not in a Ziplock, not zipping up the tent and allowing rain in, getting skunked in cribbage.

**Anti-Doofus points** - These points negate Doofus points. They can be awarded for the number and size of fish caught. I even award anti-Doofus points when my partner frees himself from being snagged while I am battling the wind.

**Grand Pooh Bah Award - (major instances)** - This award is based upon the legendary Fred Flintstone. This one definitive act may cause the recipient to receive the trip’s Doofus status, resulting in “game, set, and match” all in one SHEEBANG. A “Grand Poo Bah” is an insurmountable Doofus tally.

Here is a classic real world example of a Grand Pooh Bah award-winner.

The year was 2012. Terry Lind and I were fishing on



*If you forget the camera back at camp  
and miss that priceless big fish moment,  
“You might be a Doofus”. (Antoine Lake)*

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Granite Lake in Wabakimi Park in northern Ontario. We drove up the Northshore into Thunder Bay and arrived in Armstrong four hours later. We loaded our canoe and gear onto a floatplane, landing on beautiful Granite Lake to set about our business of exploring and catching fish. The many caribou gazing at us from the water's edge as we silently paddled past were a highlight of this trip. This became a daily pleasure for us. However, the big lowlight of the trip came right out of the box.

Terry is a very easy going guy and will complete any task around camp without a grumble. The only knock I have on Terry is he only weighs in at a whopping 125 pounds. Therefore, he is not what one would call a pack mule on the portage-

es. Terry loves going with me because we get along great and I own all the necessary gear.

From past years, I regret that my dad never took any pictures on our BWCAW trips, so I make a concerted effort to do so for posterity's sake and great reminiscing during the long winter months. I gave Terry one and only one job for our Wabakimi adventure—trip photographer. I even gave him my camera to use: Point-and-shoot. Repeat. Simple.

So here we are, camp is set, lines are ready, and off we go. For some reason, I seem to adhere to the mantra that “the fishing is always better on the other end of the lake.” However, I spy an island about a half-mile south of our camp, so I decide we should start trolling there, as it looks to have some

promising structure. As we are nearing the island, I hook the first fish of the trip. For some reason, I was having difficulty reeling it in, and I thought my drag was all messed-up. I always re-spool with fresh line after each trip, so maybe something is amiss with that. We are dead in the water while I mess around with my reel for a few minutes and Terry asks, “Are we gonna sit here all day or are you planning to land this thing?” After multiple adjustments to my drag, I am positive that it is set correctly, yet my line is continually zinging out at record speed. It then dawns on me that not only is my reel fine, I have hooked the fish of a lifetime. I immediately realize I am about to have a major battle on my hands, and battle we did. After twenty-five minutes, I finally bring “Monstro” alongside the boat. We both are equally pooped, and I use the entire length of my paddle to measure him. This hog of a northern pike measures fifty-one inches. I can't believe the girth on this thing. Eagerly, I shout, “Terry, get ready to take a bunch of pictures of this guy.” Terry looks at me sheepishly and replies, “I left the camera in the tent.”

That, my friends, is the Mother of All Grand Pooh Bahs.

**Sidenote:** Safety is a major concern on any fishing trip, so I want to share one error from this ordeal I will never make again. I do not bring a net on my trips, as I try to keep the fish in the water as much as possible by grasping their lower jaw with plastic grippers and then releasing the hook. When I grasped Monsto on his mammoth-like lower jaw, the tired beast suddenly sprang to life, jumping and thrashing like an alligator on steroids. He thrashed so violently he nearly broke my wrist. Never again will I ever grasp a huge fish in that manner. I will paddle



*Everyone loses track of where they are on the map once in a while. But you get “Doofus Points” if you don’t stop, reconnoiter and get back on track before getting more lost. Looking for the infamous “Deadman’s Portage” on Saganagons Lake.*

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to shore, hop in the shallow water, and grab a gill cover instead. Live and learn.

Let me share a few examples of how the Doofus scoring can be fluid throughout the trip. Years ago, before I was wise enough to realize that all camping gear must be stored in packs, Terry, my ten-year-old son, Tyler, and I were getting a tow from Crane Lake to Twin Falls where we would paddle up the Maligne River and spend a week fishing Sturgeon Lake. Wanting to teach my young son that we all need to pitch in, I gave him smaller items to carry down from the vehicle to be loaded on the tow boat. Nets, paddles, and our tackle box were items given to Tyler's care. Well, a ten year old boy's curiosity sometimes gets the better of him, and he scampered off a bit chasing frogs down by the waterfront and set the tackle box off to the side. It wasn't until our first portage that I realized we would be without tackle for the entire week. I was furious! Not at Tyler, but at myself! Terry, ever the optimist, said, "This will work out fine. We will figure out how to make due. Maybe we can find lures around camp, in rocks near shore, etc." That burst of positivity helped some, yet I was still boiling over inside. This was to be a fishing trip! Not a camping trip!

Well, the fishing gods soon smiled upon us as we came upon a canoe exiting the park (the only canoe we encountered on the entire trip). After hearing my tale of woe, a camper named Gary graciously let me borrow some of his tackle. Now that is the true spirit of the Northland. We had a great trip, mailed the gear to Chicago with a handsome tip, and learned to adjust our packing procedures. Live and learn.

Now, had this been me or Terry who left the fishing gear behind, it would have been a "Grand Pooh Bah Moment." But my ten-year-old son was not in the contest, so I gave myself a self-inflicted Double. I felt that as I was the outfitter/guide, it was my responsibility to double-check our gear before exiting Crane Lake.

Not to be outdone, shortly thereafter, Terry received his first Double of the trip as well. For those of you who have paddled up the Maligne, you know there are some iffy spots to navigate, especially in June when the river flow is typically at its strongest. I noticed rapids ahead and figured we could paddle up it by stroking at full-power. This would be a big time saver by avoiding a portage. I prepped Terry, and we were ready to give "Warp-speed, Mr. Sulu." We dug in with our paddles, gained plenty of momentum, and

made it safely to the crest of the rapids. It was then that my paddling partner (AKA Doofus) raised his paddle in the air and yelled, "Woo-Hoo! We made it!" This of course left just me paddling and screaming my lungs out to get that paddle in the water before we returned from whence we came! Had we flipped the canoe, his Double would have become a Grand Pooh Bah.

Terry eventually won the Doofus Award for that trip and on the tow back to Crane Lake we were paired with a group from Illinois we had met the previous year. I was sharing trip highlights with Joe, and he happened to notice Terry's Doofus hat. Terry and I had taught together for many years, and he was currently my elementary principal. Joe gave Terry some good natured barbs asking what kind of schools we have in Lakeville where the principal was a Doofus. I stated I always show respect for authority, so I always refer to Terry as Mister Doofus when at school.

Earlier I mentioned that a Grand Pooh Bah is the pinnacle of all Doofus scores, and it just so happens that my favorite Grand Pooh Bah took place on Pooh Bah Lake.

Pooh Bah Lake gets my vote as the coolest name in the Quetico. It was for that reason that I took my maiden voy-



age to Pooh Bah with Terry in 2002. I have taken four trips there since, as Pooh Bah Lake offers the canoe country Grand Slam plus largemouth bass aplenty on a neighboring lake. Catching five species of fish on one trip is quite the treat!

The wind was really whipping the day we entered the park and we had an extremely rough tow across Lac La Croix. Tanner Lake was no treat either, as we faced a stiff headwind going in and the rain picked up as well. By the time we made it to Pooh Bah, we were wet, tired, and ready to set up camp. Before doing so, we needed to summon our last reserves of energy and make one final push toward the island grouping to the east. The rain was now blasting us almost horizontally, and we were forced to battle waves two to three feet high. Not taking any chances this late in the game, I knelt in the stern, lowered my head from the driving rain, and hoped for the best.

In the Quetico, you can camp anywhere you desire, so I knew we would find suitable lodging somewhere in the island grouping straight ahead. Once we were safely out of the wind and in amongst the islands, we zigged and zagged our way until we finally located a beautiful campsite to call home.

The following morning, we awoke to calm weather and peeks of blue sky. At the time, I did not know our exact location, so I decided to start our day by fishing around the island groupings in a clockwise manner until we arrived back at camp. This would allow us to check out the fishing action while getting the lay of the land. We were catching plenty of walleye and smallmouth bass on our initial jaunt, which slowed our progress around the islands. After two hours of fishing, we still had not reached our camp. I told Terry

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that I felt we should have been to camp by now, but if need be, we could reverse course and retrace our route back to camp. While we were deciding how best to proceed, I suggested we hop out and take a break to alleviate our boat-butt.

I hiked up a rise to inspect the scenery and looked down the other side. Lo and behold, there was our camp. It was right around the corner from where we pulled up for our stretch! I immediately started roaring with laughter and Terry sauntered over to ask what was so funny. I pointed down the rise and said, "Look for yourself."

Terry's totally, serious reply was, "Hey, they have a tent just like ours!" I am not ashamed to say I wet myself with hysterical laughter. That, my friends, constitutes as the first ever Pooh Bah: Grand Pooh Bah!

To this day, whenever Terry and I are hunting grouse and approach the vehicle at the end of a long day hiking through the woods, Terry will good naturedly reply, "Hey, they have a car just like ours!"

Two years later, I invited

Trevor Sheets, a fourth grade teacher, along to let him experience the great fishing that Pooh Bah has to offer. On the trip prior to ours, I was fishing in the BWCAW with some rookies. I kept reminding them to always stand the rods up against a tree so someone wouldn't step on them. It was after the third reminder that I heard the distinctive SNAP! and then an embarrassed, "Uh oh." Yep. My fishing rod was now renamed "Stubby." Now this, of course, is considered a Grand Pooh Bah, as it sure is tough to jig and cast for walleye with a foot of your rod tip missing. Stubby had served me well for many years, but it was now time to spend some extra money and upgrade to a better quality rod. I selected a \$150 St. Croix rod.

After bringing home my St. Croix rod, I was reminded of the time my dad bought a new Shimano rod and reel only to leave it on Pocket Lake at the conclusion of their first and last trip together. Some lucky camper inherited a beautiful new rig. Over the years, I too have found a host of items left

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behind on the portages and campsites. Life vests, rods and reels, stoves, tackle boxes, clothing...you name it. So, because the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, I decided to place an address label on my new St. Croix beauty, in case I ever left it behind.

Trevor thought the address label idea was hysterical and definitely worthy of a Doofus point. I felt it was debatable but went along with his scoring nonetheless. I did not mind gaining a Doofus point in order to ensure that if I were careless enough to leave my rod behind, some kind soul might get in touch with me and reunite us. Sadly, my wonderful working relationship with my brand new rod was extremely short lived.

So there we were just hammering twenty-two-inch wall-eyes one after another on Pooh Bah. Tim King, guide extraor-

dinaire, was really impressing Trevor. The day happened to be breezy (walleye chop times-two). I was paddling us into the stiff wind where the fish were holding fast. I was trolling a three-eighths-ounce jig out the back, and Trevor was casting a crankbait. We were both pulling in the walleye and smallies left and right. We were in the zone and having a blast! Then disaster struck.....

I was paddling us forward into the wind with lots of line out the back. My brand new St. Croix fast-action baby went flying out of the boat, zipping forward into the wind right past Trevor in the bow! Initially, I was dumbfounded. How could it be that we were moving forward and the rod was outpacing us? I yelled, "Trevor! Grab my rod!" (Lesson learned: I immediately purchased a rod holder after the trip) We both saw the cork-end of my rod

acting as a beacon, scooting along just under the surface. I throttled my stroke cadence to the max in order to gain on my precious rod. As Murphy's Law would have it, Trevor has just hooked a 20-inch smallie. These bad boys fight like the dickens so he was struggling to get it in the boat while I kept the "paddle (pedal) to the metal." After Trevor was able to land and release the bass, he happened to hook one of the crankbait trebles into his pants.

In fairness to Trevor, things were pretty chaotic at the time. With the combination of howling wind, rocking boat, and rod overboard, we seemed to have four storylines going at once. My rod, however, was still in sight, and instead of reaching for it, Trevor was fumbling with his situation. "Grab the rod!" I continued to bellow above the wind. Trevor obeyed my command and leaned



*When in camp, designate a tree, log or spot for all the fishing rods. Stepping on/breaking rods could find you wearing the notorious "Doofus Hat".*

forward, only to firmly hook himself to his padded seat with the other treble hook. "Argh!" I shouted. Needless to say, in the end, I could do nothing but watch my brand new rod sink into the depths of Pooh Bah Lake while my helpless partner was firmly ensnared in the bow.

However, always the optimist guide, I felt I should be able to drag the bottom and hook my rod or line. Not only would I get my rod and reel back, I would get a look at the monster that launched it out of the canoe in the first place. I grabbed my trolling rod, which already had a leader attached. I clasped three three-eighths-ounce jigs on the leader (with nothing attached), tossed the weighted rig out, and started dragging the bottom. Right away, I felt a "tug-tug-tug" on my line, and

I knew I had hooked my rod! I just knew it! My heart soared as I reeled it up only to find a twenty-five-inch walleye latched onto one of my plain hooks. That was probably the one and only time in my life where I was ticked off about catching a beautiful walleye. While methodically covering the area in a grid-like manner, I pulled in four more walleyes on my three-jig combo before I finally gave up my search and rescue, defeated.

I was really bummed, but Trevor was still howling over the entire situation. He wondered if after reading my address label, the fish would kindly Fed Ex it back to me. Trevor and I could not decide how to distribute Doofus points in this situation. There were arguments for both parties earning a boat load of points for

this one. Maybe BWJ readers out there, acting as impartial judges, can send in votes to break the impasse. (Share your votes on Facebook)

All I know is you need a sense of humor to overcome canoe country adversity, and trust me, said adversity will find you. Sooner or later it finds all of us out there. The question is, "How will you deal with it?" Whenever mishaps occur, they might be very disheartening at the time, but they sure do make for memorable moments and important learning lessons as well.

I hope you have enjoyed hearing about some of our Doofus moments. If you happen to be on a portage someday or at Tobies in Hinckley, MN, and notice a guy wearing a Doofus hat, please stop by and say, "Hello." Hopefully, his name won't be Tim King. 📷



□ by BWJ Field Editors

**E**ditor's Note: This is our forty-first edition of the BWJ Collective Wisdom column. Collective Wisdom has always been about a diverse group of experienced BWJ writers sharing what they know and love about canoe country. This issue, they share memorable mistakes, blunders, and screw-ups they have made in their canoe tripping careers. There is nothing quite like the school of hard knocks to make a lasting impression and enhance ones better judgment out there. Hopefully, we can save you all some grief on the canoe trails.

## Stuart Osthoff

In July of 2010, I was guiding a group of eight on a ten-day trip from Atikokan to Ely. My friend, Mike, was along to teach photography to a couple of the clients. We put in mid-afternoon, my first time ever on Nym Lake. I was aware of Nym's windy reputation, so I put sixteen-year-old Wyatt, who had never been in a canoe, in the bow of my Wenonah MN 2, the least seaworthy canoe of our four. As we cleared the first point and took on the full force of the west wind, the waves went from manageable to uh-oh in a heartbeat. I glanced over to confirm the others were all wearing lifejackets and gave thanks that at least the water was warm.

Keeping the bow straight into the waves seemed to be working for the three Bell Northwoods canoes, but the three-foot whitecaps were spilling right into Wyatt's lap. I was forced to turn and run with the waves or we would soon fill with water and roll over. My target was an island a quarter-mile ahead where we could duck out of the gale and re-group. Meanwhile, I couldn't even turn around to check on the others as my full attention was needed to command my own craft. Wyatt and I made it to the island, and using the wind shadow, continued on to the southwest. As we cleared the end of the island, we saw that Mike

## Canoe Country Blunders

and Jim had capsized, and Peter and Danny were towing Mike to the nearest shore. Turns out, Mike's lifejacket was subpar and not buoyant enough to keep his head above the tall rollers. He was really struggling when Peter and Danny came to the rescue, and he spit out a bunch of Nym Lake once up on shore. The staff from Voyageur Wilderness Camp saw our plight and boated out to collect the floating packs and canoe. We were fortunate this mishap occurred where it did, as these folks were awesome about letting us stay at their place that night to dry things out and collect our composure.

I don't mean to over dramatize this whole affair, but this is the closest I have come to a tragedy in over forty years of wilderness canoeing. I knew we would find some wind out on the open stretches of Nym, but from the landing it was impossible to appreciate the level of risk I was leading my crew into. After all, I had beaten back big wind on a thousand other lakes over the years. The bottom line here is we got lucky. If the water had been cold, if Mike hadn't been strong enough to overcome the limitations of his poor lifejacket, if Peter and Danny had not been able to bring Mike ashore, if the Voyageur staff had not raced out to help us out, if any one of these things had been different, the outcome could have been a disaster.


Experience and good judgment in the past only count for so much. You have to be ready, willing, and able to summon that sound judgment when conditions suddenly conspire to become dangerous. The more I play this game, the more I lean towards playing it safe whenever in doubt.

Ever since dodging this bullet, I provide all my clients with a high

quality Stohlquist Drifter paddling life jacket. They are the best I have seen for both paddling and fishing. They are comfortable to wear, so they actually are worn, not stashed under a canoe seat. How many of you are relying on a cheap discount store life jacket to save your life in big waves? From what I've seen out there, far too many.

I've had other paddling blunders. While working for the Ely outfitter, Canadian Waters, back in the early 1980s, Michele and I decided to take two coworkers on a day trip down the South Kawishiwi River. We put in at Lake One in the morning, planning to pullout late afternoon at the Highway 1 Bridge, then hustle back to town for the big annual softball game against arch rival Canoe Country Outfitters. I had only been down the Kawishiwi once before, but I figured all I had to do was follow the current south, down to the road. Why take a map? Long story short, we inadvertently veered west and nearly got swept over the rapids along the 210-rod portage below Conchu Lake. In the mad scramble to grab brush and bail out, the other boat lost a paddle, so I got to solo paddle the rest of the way. We made it to the game and won. Ironically, the traveling trophy for that game was a paddle. I could have used that earlier in the day. Moral of the story, unless you really know the water you are on, keep track of your position on a good map.

Many BWJ readers are amazed at the effort I expend to get my Grand Slam Guide Service clients onto big fish. I do whatever it takes within reason, but I can only put paying customers through so much. When it is just me out there, like solo paddling into the BWCAW to deer hunt in November, all bets are off. One year, I



*Current areas contribute to a lot of blunders in the BWCAW and Quetico. Whenever there is an established portage trail around a rapids, take it. When no trail, play it smart with everyone on full alert. You will need to make a judgement call between lining, wading or bushwhacking. (Boulder River)*

soloed into Little Gabbro with a sixteen-foot Old Town Camper and set up a camp on Bald Eagle to hunt out of for a few days. I noticed the nights were getting progressively colder, but there was enough wind out on the open basin of Bald Eagle to get around and hunt that country up around Gull and Pietro Lakes. I didn't see any shooter bucks that trip and headed out late one afternoon for the truck. But I hit serious ice in the channel between Gabbro and Little Gabbro, and it got dark before I had the bay with the 254-rod portage to the road in my sights. I thrashed, crashed, and cursed as the flat bottomed Camper kept sliding up on the ice shelf. This is my preferred canoe when solo paddling, and it's super stable, but with no bow paddler, it is not much of an ice-breaker. This was in the pre-GPS era, so I had to systematically beat my way in and out of several dead end bays to find the portage by process of elimination. At times, the water under the ice was only a few inches deep, and I was churning up more ice and muck than water. Suffice to say, the GPS has taken a lot of the guesswork and drama out of BWCAW deer hunting. If you go cross country into the BWCAW forest, where there are no waterway landmarks to locate your position on a map, the GPS is a pretty handy little item.

Speaking of the pre-GPS era, I had just finished setting up my luxury wall tent camp off the Echo Trail for the deer season, complete with my deer hunting day pack and survival gear sitting on my cot. I called up the dog, grabbed my shotgun, stuck a McKenzie Map and a compass in my bird vest, and hiked off to do a little speed scouting and grouse hunting. After a few hours of swinging to the south, I figured I had two hours of daylight left, plenty to head north to hit the Echo Trail. Except I went and went and it got dark, and I mean dark-dark, as in zero ambient light that night. I knew if I kept walking north, I would hit the Echo Trail, but I had no matches or light with which to see my compass or map. I crawled over blowdown and slogged through swamps, and finally decided to give it five more minutes before holing up for the night. I

had a fleece jacket, so with temps in the thirties, it would have been a long night, but I wouldn't have frozen to death. But then, miraculously, my feet struck gravel: now left or right? I went right and there was my tent. Several hours of stumbling through the woods in the dark, and my "dead reckoning" put me within fifty yards of my cozy goose down sleeping bag. Both the dog and I were happy campers that night. The moral of this one, never again will I head out into big woods without a lighter and a headlight. A few hour tour can suddenly morph into an all-nighter, where a light to read the compass or campfire to stay warm can save the day.

Paddling off out into the wind on Nym, down the Kawishiwi without a map, into Gabbro solo when freeze up was imminent, and hiking into the Little Indian Sioux River country without a light or matches—these were all conscious decisions. In retrospect, I would do them all differently, because they were not good decisions. Wilderness canoeing, camping, fishing, and hunting demand good judgment, or you will pay the piper. I think this is a big part of my fascination with the whole wilderness experience. Sometimes you are living on the edge, where you must summon all your physical, mental, and emotional strength. And, on rare occasion, you must rely on something more. Call it a sixth sense, intuition, savvy, call it whatever you want. It is really the totality of a lifetime outdoors and the conviction that you can prevail, even when the prospects look daunting. I am not talking about being careless out there or taking unnecessary risks. That is just plain foolish. I am talking about playing the game the right way, and when nature throws you a challenge, having the confidence and where-with-all to meet that challenge.

From my perspective as BWJ publisher and wilderness guide, the four most common major mistakes I see Boundary Waters paddlers making are as follows: **1.** Planning a trip route that does not get far enough into the backcountry: This compromises the wilderness experience from the get-go. It is possible but not probable to find solitude, wildlife, good fish-

ing, or open five-star camps close to the trailhead, and in my view, if disappointed with the whole affair, you got what you deserved. **2.** Ironically, right behind the biggest mistake of not paddling and portaging far enough, is traveling too fast, too far, and trying to do it all in too little time. It's far better to push into the backcountry then slow down, abandon your urban rat race pace, engage with nature and truly enjoy the beauty, solitude, wildlife, fishing, swimming, photography, etc. **3.** I see way too little respect for moving water, especially on the portages. Many canoe country landings have strong current right next to them. People die both landing and putting-in upstream of rapids and falls. You have to have your act together when approaching and leaving portage landings with current. There is no margin for error here. This is my biggest fear while guiding others, so I ride them hard at such tricky spots like on the Maligne River and Falls Chain. **4.** By far, more serious injuries happen on the ground than on the water in canoe country. Boots with good ankle support and traction are critical to safe portaging. Don't carry too much weight, too much loose stuff, or a large pack on your front that blocks your vision of your foot placement. One slip by one careless individual and everybody's trip comes to a screeching halt. There are 101 other ways to screw up in canoe country, but these are the big four that demand extra attention.

Many canoe country blunders are preventable. And it pays to learn from each of them. But you will find yourself in other jams that you had no way to anticipate or avoid. This is when your wilderness judgment will truly be tested.

#### **Jim Carrier**

I arrived in canoe country thirty years ago, very much a "trial and error" type of guy. I'd never seen a bent shaft paddle or handled a monster pike. Blundering along, I learned many lessons the hard way. Then I started reading BWJ and participating in online discussions and my knowledge took off. I still have misadventures, but not nearly as often. Perhaps in telling this particularly embarrassing tale, I can save a few BWJ readers some

anguish on the canoe trails.

It was mid-May 1996, ice out was one of the latest on record. Back home, my brother, Gary (Texas), and I (North Carolina at the time) had been paddling for months. We were forty-ish with only a few canoe trips under our belts. Neither one of us would ever admit our limitations, sibling rivalry and masculinity being very much in play. Even if we had concerns about the cold or late ice outs, neither of us mentioned anything about it. We should have! By the end of this trip, Mother Nature humbled us into a very different state of mind.

Our story begins as we are paddling down Trousers Lake that afternoon, bound for the infamous two-and-a-half-mile portage to Cache Lake. We met two trail worn guys just coming off said portage. They mentioned being in there when the ice came off Cache Lake. I wondered why but didn't ask. They looked pretty rough, suggesting the portage was going to be nasty. They shared a few words about fishing conditions then offered this bit of advice, "Allow plenty of time. Don't get caught on that portage with a canoe on your head after dark."

Arriving at "the beast" around 4:00, we figured we would complete the trail, set up camp, and sink our teeth into our day one steaks well before nightfall. With daylight till past 9:00, we even talked about trying our luck with lake trout before bedtime. Motivated and confident, we attacked the portage with vigor.

Ice and snow lingered in patches along the trail. We slogged our way through cold, wet slop. Gary carried the canoe plus a heavy pack. A bad leak in his boot grew worse with every sinking step, eliciting a steady stream of expletives. One messy mile later, we came to where the Cache River bisects the trail. This left a mile and a half of portage trail to Cache Lake: So far so good. There were no bugs tormenting us, and we were actually ahead of schedule. It was 5:15, plenty of daylight left.

In hindsight, we were too cocky. Throw in the fact that Gary's duct tape boot patch wasn't holding up, and maybe our subsequent decision can be better understood. In a burst of mid-life, macho-induced



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foolishness, I exclaimed, "Yo, Chief. Are you up for an adventure? How about trying a shortcut?"

The "shortcut" idea had bounced around in my head with each splash during that first mile of trail. The concept was simple (Gary would later say "simple-minded"). Why not forego the rest of this mess and take a joy ride? We could gently float down the stream to our ultimate destination, Cache Lake. The water level was extraordinarily high. Should have been a breeze, right? With at least four hours of daylight remaining, there was plenty of time...

Being conservative, my brother observed we could complete this tried and true portage in about an hour and a half if we simply kept marching. In retrospect, this would clearly have been the best decision. At the time, however, the lure of a navigable stream was too seductive. Despite initial protests, Gary took the bait. I hooked him by his cold wet foot. Thus we began our descent of the Cache River, a route that would take us to camp faster, easier, and a whole lot cleaner.

The folly of this blunder was not immediately apparent. Paddling deep into a marshy flood plain, we slowly meandered our way along, but forward progress was a battle. Our canoe proved too long to efficiently negotiate switchbacks and the narrow serpentine waterway. This meant frequent, time consuming lift overs. Worse yet, channels ran every which way, rendering our compass virtually useless. Gary grumbled references to "The African Queen." All the while, the sun sank towards the pines as we wandered willy-nilly in a marshland maze.

The further we paddled down the Cache River, returning to the forsaken portage became less and less feasible. So, we pushed on, hoping for Cache Lake around each bend. We speculated how these high floodwaters might even deposit us on the wrong lake! Even that, we agreed, would be preferable to this bog trot. Priority #1 quickly became finding solid ground for pitching our tent! We needed shelter, warmth, and nourishment, in that order. We could figure the rest out in the morning. A tree covered rocky ridge in the



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distance looked promising. We picked a channel that seemed to sweep us in that general direction and paddled on.

The channel narrowed, the current picked up, and the stream became unnavigable as we approached the hillside. We would have to blaze a portage across the ridge to continue. It was dusk, cold, and getting colder. Tempers were flaring. Gary's got worse when he back flipped into waist-deep water stepping out of the canoe.

Tree branches and tricky footing forced us away from the stream as we crossed the ridge. With the canoe on my shoulders, progress was slow through the thick brush. Gary got too far ahead and vanished into the darkness. Fear gripped me. I set the canoe down to look around. The gurgling stream, semi-circling the ridge, muffled my shouts. I dropped my gear and raced along Gary's most probable route. No luck, so I doubled back

to where I thought I had left the canoe and pack. Yikes! Where am I now? No Gary, no pack, and no canoe. Growing darkness made it difficult to pinpoint north. Where was my compass? Oh, yeah... right next to the flashlights in that lost pack, parked next to the lost canoe.

I panicked. Major alarms sounded off in my head. Backtracking as well as I could, I kept shouting. Forever and a day went by. Then, in a stroke of sheer luck, I heard a return shout, "Hey, Daniel Boone! Where the heck have you been?" We found each other.

Relief was short lived. Gary was a bit distressed to learn I had "misplaced" our canoe and the pack containing our tent, sleeping bags, and flashlights. The inky blackness and the absolute remoteness of this huge swamp forced us to get a grip on the situation. Gary's cold, wet condition made finding a place for the tent an urgent matter. It was time to stop, take a deep breath, and think. Haste would make matters worse.

We made several carefully planned forays into the darkness and, eventually, recovered all the lost gear. We quickly pitched our tent nearby in a rocky opening lined with tree roots. Jumping into our sleeping bags without supper, we called it a day and counted our blessings.

The next morning, our boots were frozen solid. We sucked it up and cooked those steaks. They made a fine breakfast. After another half day of bog busting, we eventually made it into Cache Lake. (It took a half hour of reconnaissance before we confirmed it was, indeed, Cache Lake).

There are plenty of morals to this story, including, stay on the portage trail: it exists for a reason! Also, be especially careful when making decisions while tired, wet, and cold. Being miserable, or worse yet, hypothermic, impairs judgment. Try to always respect Mother Nature, regardless of how tough you think you are. She is always in charge.

### Darrel Brauer

On one of my first trips, I made the mistake of gently placing the canoe onto a smooth rock at a campsite while we unloaded. There was an offshore wind, and when I turned around after haul-

ing a pack up the hill to camp, the canoe had left its perch and was slowly being blown away. Young and ambitious, I knew I could swim to catch it, but I didn't realize how hard pulling it back to shore would be against the wind.

When I was not so young and finishing a nine-day trip heading toward the Moose Lake landing, we tempted fate by crossing the lake just ahead of an approaching storm. I was shocked at how fast and intense the wind and waves blew up. I was lucky to be with an extremely strong paddling partner that day or we might not have made the opposite shore without swamping. We landed with about seven inches of forty-eight-degree water in the canoe. All this occurring within sight of our destination taught me a new respect for the speed and power of the weather.

The worst of the blunders encountered on my canoe trips could have had fatal consequences. Fortunately, no one was ever seriously hurt, and I am grateful for that. Twice I was caught without enough water and suffered serious dehydration leading to debilitating muscle cramps and mental confusion. How in God's name can that even happen in the canoe country? Well, it did.

I blame inexperience and the weather for the first time in happened. It was during a bushwhack to McKenzie Lake. My partner and I seriously underestimated the amount of hard work required to make the overland trek with all our gear to McKenzie Lake on a hot summer day. What is tragic about this is that we had an opportunity to restore our water supply mid-hike and simply thought we would be okay. I got lost for about an hour during that ordeal, but the worst of the effects of dehydration struck after we had stopped for the day to camp. Exhaustion, muscle cramps, and confusion made setting up camp and going to sleep very difficult. There was suffering, but no one was seriously hurt. The details of this episode are included in the story "The Hard Way to McKenzie" that appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of BWJ.

That incident should have taught me everything I needed to know about the importance of proper hydration. Two years later,





*After moving water, strong winds cause the most canoe country paddling mishaps. Breezy can turn into breakers-over-the-bow in a heartbeat, simply by rounding a point. Be mindful of your group's weakest paddlers when making go/no-go decisions into big wind/waves. Err on the safe side, especially during cold-water conditions.(Lake Agnes)*



I became lost and dehydrated in Woodland Caribou Park during a mile-and-a-half bushwhack into Irvine Lake. It was another hot, dry, windy day, and my group once again underestimated the amount of water needed. The resulting confusion and need for water dangerously separated the group for a time, but we all survived with no lasting physical damage. Please don't snicker and think "big deal, you hiked in the woods and got thirsty." In both of those situations, I was not prepared for the mental confusion that accompanied dehydration (much like hypothermia). In both of those situations, I got separated from my group in a very remote area barely able to think my way out. Since those two incidents, I now take ridiculous amounts of water when starting an overland hike or bushwhack in canoe country.

The third major blunder I have been involved with occurred on Kasakokwog Lake. For decades I traveled with a diabetic paddler who religiously monitored her condition to make wilderness canoe camping safe and enjoyable. I was always fully aware of her condition and did what I could to accommodate. We relied on a long history of no problems rather than honestly considering a worst-case scenario and preparing for it. We failed to ask ourselves "what if the worst happens?" Well, that day on Kas Lake, the worst did happen. She slipped into severe hypoglycemia, and being only semi-conscious, was unable to help herself. We struggled courageously to raise her blood sugar with bits of candy, but since she was barely conscious and mostly uncooperative, we had trouble

getting her to chew and swallow. Eventually, we coaxed enough sugar into her system to save her life. All of this could have been far less serious and a much simpler fix if we had brought along an injectable glucose kit, something I now consider an absolute necessity when traveling with a diabetic in my group. It may at times be an awkward conversation with all group members before a trip about the state of their health, but I think it is an important one.

There is value in blunders if we pay attention and learn from them, and sometimes I do!

#### **Rob Kesselring**

I don't want to appear condescending, because I have tremendous empathy for inexperienced canoe trippers. I can understand the anxiety of planning that first big Boundary Waters adventure. But for me, planning a BWCAW trip is routine now. Already in 2019, I have led five paddling trips in four countries. Although I feel safe wherever I travel, I feel super safe in the Boundary Waters. But it wasn't always that way. I can remember toting my Winchester 30-30 in my Mad River canoe. I slept cuddled up next to it in the tent. The chamber was empty, but a half dozen cartridges were lined up in the magazine. I am not sure why I was so jittery. Perhaps it was fear of bears, bandits, or night noises. Maybe it was just that I was out of my comfort zone, anxious. That was a long time ago. I feel safer now in the BWCAW than sleeping in my van in a Walmart parking lot.

Over twenty years ago, on one of my earliest trips to canoe country, I did have quite a fright. A female high school counselor and I had

brought a group of teenage students to the BWCAW at the end of the school year. It had been a late spring, and ugly weather dribbled into early June. We camped at Iron Lake, and not knowing any better, I decided with the cold rain, a layover day was in order. Still gloomy and cold, the rain stopped in the early afternoon. We were enjoying munching on the bannock I had baked beside the fire, but some students were getting restless. I suggested an afternoon side trip past Curtain Falls. Matt and Mandy jumped at the chance. Mandy wanted to paddle because she had blanched when I shared how much lard was in the bannock. She was a dancer with aspirations of going to the University of Kentucky on a dance scholarship, so every ounce of body fat was anathema. She wanted to burn off that lard. Matt volunteered likely because Mandy wanted to go.

We packed spare clothes and survival gear in a waterproof PVC pack and headed out. My Wenonah Minnesota II was brand new. The Kevlar layup without gelcoat made it twenty pounds lighter than most canoes at the time. The MN II is sleek and fast with zero rocker. We used some spare PFDs from the group to create a third seat. That canoe was a speedster, and with three blades pumping, we zipped across Iron Lake. Soon we were beating up the narrows toward the Falls. As I mentioned, it was a late, wet spring, and Basswood River was ripping. Just downstream of the portage, the current was especially strong. I later learned there is a notorious eddy line here that has dumped many a canoe. All I knew at the time was go, go, go, and we were fighting the current to get as close to the Falls as possible. The MN II has its virtues and fans, but it is an unforgiving hull. Just as we crossed that eddy line, Matt caught his blade under the bow, and we rolled. Suddenly, we were swept downstream like dice thrown from a cup. The current pushed us straight toward Canada. It was a kinder, gentler era, and even without passports, getting to land, any land, seemed prudent. We were in the water several minutes shepherding the canoe and gear before we finally straggled

onto Canadian Shield. Even in forty-five-degree water and forty-five-degree air, we were doing fine. Adrenaline fires up the metabolism. Our livers were burning sugar, and there was no danger of hypothermia, at least for the moment, but we were cold. (Editor's Note: We have warned of the perils of this spot below Curtain Falls many times in BWJ, but it bears repeating here. When approaching from Iron Lake, don't even mess with this current or try to do a second makeshift portage. The newer McKenzie and Fisher maps show a portage starting in the first bay to the south of where the Basswood River merges into Iron Lake. Paddle into this bay—there is a flat-rock campsite off to your right and a small island directly in front of you as the bay narrows down. You will find the portage behind this little island. Landing here, you will walk about a hundred yards before the trail merges with the traditional trail that leads up to Curtain Falls, and you will have avoided trying to power paddle up the tricky current that dumped Rob here. If you need more convincing, read Kim Young's account here as well: it is about the same infamous spot. By the way, as you portage on up to the top of Curtain Falls, there is a grassy landing at the brink of the Falls where most depart and put in. I play it safe and portage another 150 yards on the spur trail extending to the east out into Crooked Lake. Heading west from Crooked to Iron, I still take the long portage into the Iron Lake bay described above. While much easier to float downstream through this notorious trouble spot, I would rather portage a little further than expose my guys and gear to this unnecessary risk. If you choose to paddle up or down this precarious spot in any water level conditions, you can add your own artifacts to the treasure trove on the bottom of this chute.)

Even back then, I knew enough to appreciate that water pulls heat away from the human body thirty times faster than air. It was imperative to get out of our wet clothes while our fingers were still capable of undoing buttons and zippers. We all took our spare dry clothing and disappeared behind bushes. I made a loud admonition to take everything off and not to



make the underwear mistake. It was no time for modesty. Leaving dripping wet underwear on would diminish much of the benefit of putting on dry clothes.

I had a 3/4 Hudson Bay axe and a cheap folding saw. Even though it had been raining and sleeting for several days, the dead spruce branches attached to the lower trunks of the trees remained relatively dry. We sawed and hacked away until we had a giant pile. Just the action of sawing, chopping, and hauling kept the shivers away. I scrunched up some dead balsam and thin birch bark and flicked my Bic. The birch bark ignited the balsam, the balsam ignited the spruce, and in moments, we had a blaze four-feet tall. An hour and a lot of stoking later, we were warm, dry, and ready to paddle back to camp, happy and with a story to tell.

Almost thirty years later, it's still a vivid memory of my first and only, capsized in the Boundary Waters. We were prepared. We did not freak out. Nothing was lost. No one was hurt. Things are going to happen. Canoe country is not exempt from accidents. This one could have been avoided by not paddling so high in the eddy. But more importantly, everyone is going to make mistakes, and some weird mishaps are unavoidable. The question is, how do you respond? The way you react to an accident makes all the difference.

#### **Kim Young**

Everyone makes mistakes in life. Over the years, all the people I trip with have experienced a few blunders. Two major blunders required trips to the hospital, but the remainder we dealt with in

camp. In the wilderness, seemingly inconsequential events can turn into major problems.

Take rainwear. Not everyone can afford the best Gore-Tex rain suit on the market. On trips in the late 1970s, everyone wore cheap plastic ponchos. We were wet and cold as the rain dripped through the side snaps onto pants and into footwear. It was a common blunder at the time. A discussion ensued. If we were to continue to canoe camp, decent rainwear was needed. This was especially true with a duffer. Duffers get significantly colder because they aren't moving or expending much energy. After a five-day trip in the 1980s where it rained every day, every person started to see the value of purchasing superior rainwear.

On a trip in the 1990s, Deb bought and wore new lightweight water-resistant jacket and pants. The gear was also breathable. It rained moderately while we were traveling one day mid-trip. We stopped for lunch then had to make another stop a few hours later on a portage to have cup-a-soup and hot chocolate. Everyone was uncomfortably cold, especially Deb. Her rain gear was literally sticking to her body. She was on the verge of hypothermia.

Arriving at a campsite on Shade Lake a few hours later, there was a lull in the rainstorm. Tents were quickly set up in the usual places. At that point, one more storm rolled through. Lightning and heavy rain deluged the area, and there we were, stuck under our tarp either standing or sitting on our PFD's. Afterwards, one tent that had been set up in a low-lying





*This island fire was caused by lightning but letting your campfire escape into the surrounding forest should be your worst nightmare. Whenever you leave camp, make sure that fire is dead out. Dead out means drown it with water so there is NO CHANCE the wind can rekindle it after you're gone. (Wicksteed Lake)*



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area was flattened and soaked. Once again, we scrutinized our process, moved the tent to higher ground, and made dinner. Deb bought heavier raingear for the next trip. These blunders made for uncomfortable circumstances but were not life threatening.

This reminds me of a trip where five of us took the Memory Lane portages from PoohBah to Conmee Lake. It was a hot and humid four-hour journey where we didn't drink enough water between portages. Careless on our part. Arriving on Conmee, we had a short twenty-minute paddle to a campsite under a partly cloudy sky. After tying up our canoes, we literally leaped into the water, clothes and all. We were so hot and dirty that we simply couldn't wait until after lunch. Now, picture this. Here we are at a lovely, domed shaped campsite on a south-facing peninsula. Not five minutes after we jumped in, a loud crack of thunder filled the air. Looking towards the sky, not even a slight hint of a thunderstorm was apparent. I dejectedly climbed out of the water on the rocky shore and ran up the hillside to look westward. Once up on top, I saw a menacing black cloud, fast approaching. I spread the news to my crew mates, and we took action. Two of us set up a tarp while three others unloaded packs and lifted the canoes out of the water. We all put our raincoats on over our wet clothes. It was raining cats and dogs before we finished the job. The clothes we had on were soaking wet underneath our jackets. Suddenly, the storm encircled us, the tempera-

ture plummeted, and everyone was chilled. We added a side wall to stop the east wind and driving rain from extending under the tarp. We took turns changing into dry clothes, but our raincoats were still wet. When the heftiest man of the group started talking funny, soup, hot liquids, and lunch were prepared as soon as we could clear an area under the tarp. Another close case of hypothermia averted. Might we have avoided some of this had we not put our raincoats on over our dripping wet clothes? Most likely. Frank was also dehydrated. Hydration is super important on a hot, humid day.

My map reading skills have improved over the years, and I feel very confident now. At first though, it was a work in progress. The first time we were traveling through the Falls Chain area (1990), we dutifully listened to the Ranger talk about the eight falls and portages. People have died at every falls on this stretch over the last fifty years. The Ranger talked us through a meticulous orientation of the area and marked our maps. She said, "Safety is of utmost importance, so follow the directional arrows and take the earliest or first take outs on the map. The currents are stronger than you think."

We camped on Saganagons Lake that night after taking the first portage alongside the impressive mist filled Silver Falls. The allure of the Falls was powerful yet daunting as we sat around the campfire deciding who would paddle with whom the following day. Unfortunately, one person didn't like that everyone thought she wasn't a

strong stern paddler. Nevertheless, it affected all of us and demanded discussion.

Deadman's portage is a shortcut over the peninsula called Boundary Point, which takes you into an island-filled area on the north side of Saganagons. The Ranger said to head through the islands, look for the twenty-year-old pine trees on the north shore, and take a left. You will come across the Maligne River entrance shortly after that. Anyhow, we were so overly concerned and cautious that we came across a much smaller river on the north shore and turned into that. Ten minutes later, as the river narrowed, all agreed we took a wrong turn and backtracked. We scrutinized our map skills and agreed to keep paddling west. I was embarrassed and still am. Our group found the true entrance (the Maligne was much wider) along with an appropriate current, took all the precautions, and hours later arrived at Kawnipi Lake. Overall, it was a demanding day of paddling, extreme portaging, and intense map reading. The learning curve was huge! But all those directions given by the Ranger remain etched in my memory, and I've used them time and time again.

I've only capsized my canoe once. My husband and I were with another couple on a nine-day trip that took us to Argo, through Darcy, and onto PoohBah via the "Eat 'em Up Portages." I'd been on the route between Rebecca Falls and Curtain Falls but no one else had. On our first day after taking a tow to Bottle Portage, we stopped at Rebecca Falls to check out the magnificent "twin falls" on either end of the island. The fishing rods came out for a few casts. Unfortunately, Mark didn't tie them back into the canoe for our short paddle over to the Curtain Falls portage.

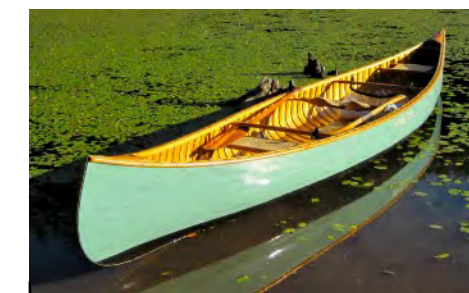
Mark was in the stern and I told him about the approaching current coming against us off a rock jutting out from the right shore. I told him to avoid being too close to the rock and to paddle to the left of it. We had to paddle hard and fast to make it through the current. I told him to go left with ample notice. He didn't. I said it again. He didn't. It happened in slow motion: we hit the current, the canoe turned sideways, and in

an instant, we were in the river. The other couple behind us was understandably upset. However, our life jackets were on, and our packs were floating. Only thing was, the fishing rods disappeared. I hung on to John and Jane's canoe, and they towed us to shore. Long story short, we should have tied the rods into the canoe, and I should have been in the stern since I knew the area. Mark did get two rods and reels donated to him on the Curtain Falls portage, so not all was lost.

Who hasn't set up their tent on a peninsula or slab of rock when eager and determined to keep the mosquitos away? Stakes can't be used to keep the tent in place, but you can tie ropes from the tent to heavy rocks, and it will do the trick. There's an excellent example of this at the campsite on the confluence of the Horse and Basswood Rivers. It was a humid afternoon with no wind. The peninsula site had two tent locations: one directly on the rock and another surrounded by trees. My tent mates thought we'd drawn the long straw. Except by morning, the rock slab funneled four inches or rain into the tent, and all contents were soaking wet (clothes, sleeping bags, Thermarests, personal items). One more night was slated for the trip, and if the sky was sunny and clear when we arrived on Horse Lake, we'd camp and dry out. Instead, the saturating rainfall left us drenched all the way to the Chainsaw Sisters parking lot.

A group of four of us women arrived at an island on Kawnipi Lake for lunch and a swim. My friend made a mistake by moving a few feet in one direction and dove into the dark colored water. She and I had actually slipped into the water right before that and checked for rocks. That action landed her with a deep gash in her shin from a pointed slime covered underwater rock. A few days later, she needed antibiotics as her calf was red, swollen, warm, and it hurt to the touch. Be extremely careful about diving and jumping into the water. Thoroughly assess the area and have clear boundaries. Her injury could have been considerably worse.

I'll end this report with one of the truly funny blunders from the past. It was a bright sunny morn-



**Alex Comb**

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ing on PoohBah Lake, and the four of us were preparing breakfast when we detected our mistake. Holly and I had brought a bag of whole-bean coffee instead of ground coffee for our five-day trip. I think it was Mike who said, "Put some beans in a Ziploc bag and use the back of the axe to grind it on a rock."

Pounding with the axe each morning, we drank fresh axe ground coffee. This quote from Josh Billings sums it up: "Success does not consist in never making blunders, but in never making the same one for a second time."

#### **Steve Volkening**

I've certainly made my share of mistakes out in canoe country. None of them involved serious trip ending injuries, so I am grateful about that. Most were "I can't believe I did that" moments, usually caused by a lapse in judgment or concentration. Old dogs and canoeists can learn new tricks, and I've been able to learn from my blunders, sometimes with a smile and sometimes with a groan.

While on the first night of a six-day tandem trip into Cherokee Lake, we found a good campsite and enjoyed our special first night's dinner. We looked forward to a gorgeous night of stargazing. In the rush to finish washing dishes and tidy up the camp, I failed to securely close the valve on my pocket rocket camp stove. It slowly leaked compressed fuel all night. When I tried to heat water for coffee the next morning, I discovered my one and only fuel canister was empty. We had to cook all the rest of our meals on a wood fire. This dumb mistake was simple to avoid in the future. Now I always remove the stove

head from the fuel bottle and store both in a Ziploc bag overnight to keep them dry. As a grandpa just starting to take my grandson on his first few camping trips, I often remind him about the importance of planning ahead, and the importance of considering consequences. When it came to the leaky camp stove, I should have followed my own advice.

About ten years ago, I went through a hammock camping phase. I liked the lighter weight and being able to hang it just about anywhere between two trees, even over rocky ground. On a Quetico trip through the Falls Chain, I forgot to use quick release knots when I tied the hammock lines around two large red pines. I slept like a baby, swinging in the gentle breeze. All night, my body weight tightened those sloppy knots. It was a real pain the next morning to untie them. I solved this problem with homemade hammock straps. I sewed loops at each end of two lengths of nylon webbing. I place the straps around the tree and then attach the loops to the hammock line with a heavy duty carabiner. No need to tie any knots anymore. I'm back to sleeping on the ground now in my solo backpacker's tent. Rather than using it as my primary shelter, the hammock now serves as a shady spot for naps while on base camping trips.

Probably my most stupid mistake occurred on a group trip to Saganagons Lake. It was a beautiful, balmy night with all gathered on a granite ledge facing the lake for an evening of star-watching. After a while, the PFD I was using as a camp chair became uncomfortable, and I shifted my posi-

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tion. I bumped the flashlight on the ground next to me. It started to slowly slide down the slope towards the water. I lunged to grab the light, and fell headfirst into the lake, right in front of the entire hysterically laughing group. Years later, some still tease me about my "flashlight rescue." There was no major lesson learned here, other than "that was sure stupid—don't do that again".

Another mistake happened on my very first Boundary Waters trip. Although I was already an experienced camper and backpacker, this was my first trip with a group of men from my church. I was forty-five years old, and the rest of the guys were close to retirement age. So I was the greenhorn, and some of the guys felt a need to constantly offer me advice about how to do things their way. One guy harped about not leaving any snacks or even toothpaste inside the tent at night, lest hungry bears rip it to shreds in search of an evening meal. We had a wonderful trip, and this started my twenty-five years of exploring the wonders of canoe country. For

that, I will be eternally grateful. Of course, not a single camp robber bear appeared that trip. But when we returned to Sea Gull Outfitters following our week in the woods, my bear paranoid tent mate discovered he had left a Snickers bar in his car, and the mice had spent the week shredding his new car's upholstery. So the moral of this story is when you go to the Boundary Waters, sweat the little things, not just the big ones. Or maybe it was just some kind of cosmic payback.

#### Dave Foley

I didn't have to wrack my brain too hard to recall a few canoe country blunders. I have had plenty. In 1973, I was a camp counselor leading a group on the Aubinadong River. Two of my campers were clashing as paddling partners, so I ended up getting into their canoe. I left my pack with my raingear in my original boat, and soon the drizzle blew into a monsoon. The storm continued for hours while I never had the opportunity to recover my raingear. Several times, we huddled on the portage trail under our

canoes waiting for the downpour to let up so we could get back on the river. By the end of the day, I was nearly hypothermic. Since then you can be sure that when I'm in the woods, my raingear is close at hand.

My wife Cyndy's, scariest moment occurred one evening while baking gingerbread on Pickerel Lake. The burner on the Whisper Lite stove was positioned too close to the gas can. As the baking continued, the plastic cap on the gas tank began to melt. She remembers seeing a tongue of flame leap from the container with a whooshing sound. Startled, she jumped back and screamed. When it cooled, I cleaned up the stove and replaced the melted gas cap. Luckily, the Whisper Lite worked for the rest of the trip and we were able to eat the gingerbread. Now we always make sure the fuel canister is well away from the burner when cooking.

Almost everyone can remember leaving gear at a campsite or portage. This happened to me on McAlpine Lake. It was a perfect day for paddling, blue sky over-





*I keep a 25' rope Bungee-Dealee-Bobbed to the bow of all my canoes. This secures it for portaging/fishing, but ready for lining the canoe or tying to a tree every night. Don't blunder and leave your only means of transport to the mercy of the wind.*

head and glassy, calm water. One crossing would have been enough, but my son Ben and I made three passes across McAlpine that morning. After breaking camp, we paddled to the portage, only to discover we had left our fishing rods back at the campsite. As leader of the group, I should have walked through the site and made a final check before departing. Had I done so, the rods would have been noticed and we would have saved ourselves an extra hour of paddling.

To reduce the odds of leaving gear on portages, make sure everyone carries the same loose items each time. I take the camera and the fishing rods on every portage. That way there's little chance they will be left behind. Since I am the last one to leave the portage landing, I take a final look around to make sure the landing is clear.

If gear is left behind at a portage or campsite, you can backtrack and recover it, unless the mistake is detected days later and going back for it is not feasible. If the

forgotten item remained at home, there's no going back. Working from a checklist insures everything needed gets packed. Cyndy and I split-up our packing checklist. I pack all the trip gear and Cyndy handles everything related to food—all the meals, pots, pans, dishes, and utensils. Except one time we had a problem with dish soap and pot scrubbers. I assumed that would be part of food planning. She thought it qualified as gear. You can guess what happened. Each of us thought the other was taking care of it. We only made that mistake once. Dish soap and scrubbers are now part of my camp gear list.

When dealing with weather, the stakes are high. Failure to respect the power of a storm or the wind can result in a swamped canoe or having your camp gear strewn all over a campsite. Heed the obvious signs. When the sky darkens and a layer of thunderheads appears on the horizon, head for cover. It's when the signs are less obvious that I've blundered.

In 1989, my second trip to Quetico, the weather was hot and sticky. Both the temp and humidity were in the 90s. We arrived at a campsite on Knife Lake and immediately took a swim to cool off. Cyndy and Renee set up their tent in the shade of the pines. My son Ben and I put our tent out on an exposed point, hoping to catch some breeze. Before dusk, a massive line of clouds was building to the west. It never occurred to me to move our tent into the woods. Shortly after dark, a ferocious storm hit and toppled trees near us. The wind completely destroyed our tent, so Ben and I sought refuge with Cyndy and Renee. On the surface, tenting in the open in a windstorm seems like a mistake, but is a tent located back in the woods really a better choice when trees are falling down all around? This is one of those tough calls where most veteran canoe campers agree that when conditions are right for a storm, set up the tents in the shelter of the woods, but when trees start com-

ing down, get out of the tent and into the open. Better wet and cold than crushed.

One morning, years ago, we loaded our canoes on the shore of McIntyre Lake. Stretching out ahead of us, the water appeared calm. Behind us was a high bluff. In retrospect, had I looked up, I would have noticed the tree-tops were shaking. Soon after we started paddling, we noticed the wind at our backs. What started as being pushed by a friendly breeze quickly turned into the bow slicing deep into big waves. We were close to swamping. Fortunately, we reached shore before taking on too much water. Remember, the wind can be a lot stronger out on the open lake than at the portage landing. Proceed with caution when heading out onto big water in windy conditions. Let one canoe go out and check things out while the other waits in the relative calm for the go-ahead.

I've made my share of backcountry blunders, and I'm sure I will make a few more in the future. In every case, I've learned a lesson and tried to avoid repeating that same mistake. Wilderness canoe tripping is a nearly continuous flow of important decisions. Some are a matter of comfort, some a matter of life and death. Make sure you give the latter due consideration out there.

#### **Heather Monthei**

We really had no excuse. It wasn't that we were inexperienced and didn't know any better. It wasn't because we were overly confident and getting cocky. And I can't blame the weather, faulty gear, or any other paddlers. The real problem stemmed from a few bad choices, lessons for which we would pay over the next fifteen hours.

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. We had chosen a familiar route, one we had traveled several times in previous years. Our entry point was Brant Lake on the Gunflint side of the BWCAW, and we would be traveling the loop through Gotter, Flying, Green, Bat, Gillis, Crooked, Tuscarora, and Missing Link Lakes doing campsite evaluations along the way. We looked forward to our usual challenging yet enjoyable trip, one that would end with a feeling of

satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

The challenging part came the first day and had nothing to do with the fact that I needed to carry our sixteen-year-old poodle over the portages or that this trip was during the Pagami Creek fire. Those tests and trials added another dimension to our already stressful circumstances, but it was the day-long detour that made this trip so unforgettable.

Under sunny skies, the trip was uneventful until we were portaging from Brant to Gotter. Cresting the hill that led to Gotter Lake, we faced the unexpected. The lake levels were unusually low, but Gotter just didn't look right. The sandy landing extended a hundred feet into a muddy flat where deadheads spiked through a wide expanse of sludge. Any navigable water was far out of reach, so we needed to find an alternate way. Trampled grass revealed a make-shift trail where other canoeists had portaged an extra thirty rods through the woods to a more suitable landing.

It was a relief to be on the water again, and we followed the narrow grass lined channel past dried, weedy hummocks. Even in this alien looking terrain, we thought we were on the right course until we met two other canoeists approaching from the opposite direction. One of the young men told us that the main route wasn't passable, and they had just spent two hours in waist-deep mud. A detour would be necessary, and they knew an easier way to reach the portage to Flying Lake. Our first blunder was to blindly follow them without consulting our own well-worn map.

Another faint trail of worn grass led across the dried-up bog, and we took each step with caution after slipping several times into the knee-high muck. Several wet spots were bridged with short pieces of logs, and our footprints weren't the first ones crossing this direction. Our balance was severely tested as we carefully tip toed through the challenging maze of mud and marsh. By the time we reached the rock wall at the assumed landing, it started to drizzle, and I huddled inside my rain jacket while waiting for Mar-

shall to arrive with our last load.

It wasn't until we completed the second portage and our gear was safely stowed in the canoe that we met up with the same two canoeists. Although this route was indeed legitimate, it led instead to Crag Lake, a dead-end lake with no campsites. These young men were returning to tell us the bad news but assured us that they now knew the best way to Flying Lake and that they would lead us there.

The drizzle had turned to light rain as we backtracked over the risky muskeg, stumbling over broken logs, and trying to steady ourselves in the boot sucking mud. The afternoon was waning, and the nearest campsite was three lakes away. I was already fearing the worst, that we would need to paddle and portage in the dark. It seemed that there was no light at the end of this proverbial dark tunnel, and I was not a happy camper.

I was shaking from exhaustion and fatigue by the time we reached the portage to Flying Lake. Hoisting our packs, Marshall took the lead with the canoe, and our friends followed with their heavy loads. All was going well until Marshall called out from in front. "The trail is gone! Where do I go?" Sure enough, a large pine had fallen over the path, blocking the trail. That was all we needed! Fortunately, I always pack my folding Fiskars saw in the top of my pack. After retrieving the saw and clearing some of the branches, the three men pushed the remaining trunk from the walkway. By the time we reached the landing, it was dark.

Our paddling companions felt responsible for having misled us and assured us they would help us get to a campsite. True to their word, they proceeded ahead of us on Green Lake and used their headlamps to guide us across the length of the lake. When the next muddy landing immobilized our canoe, one of the young men went so far as to wade in waist deep muck to pull us to dry land.

Scanning the shoreline with our flashlights, Marshall and I found a vacant campsite on Bat Lake while the two young men found a site on the opposite side. By the time we unloaded the canoe, the rain had

turned to sleet, the last straw from my weary perspective.

It was near midnight when we finally settled in our tent for the night. It was too cold to fix a camp stove meal, so a couple of granola bars sufficed. I had lost my appetite hours ago anyway.

It was too dark to find an adequate tree to hang the food pack, and we were too exhausted to care if a bear raided our camp. At the time, we were using a food barrel that we carried in a backpack, and we stuffed extra food around the barrel. Which brings us to our second blunder, one for which I take total blame.

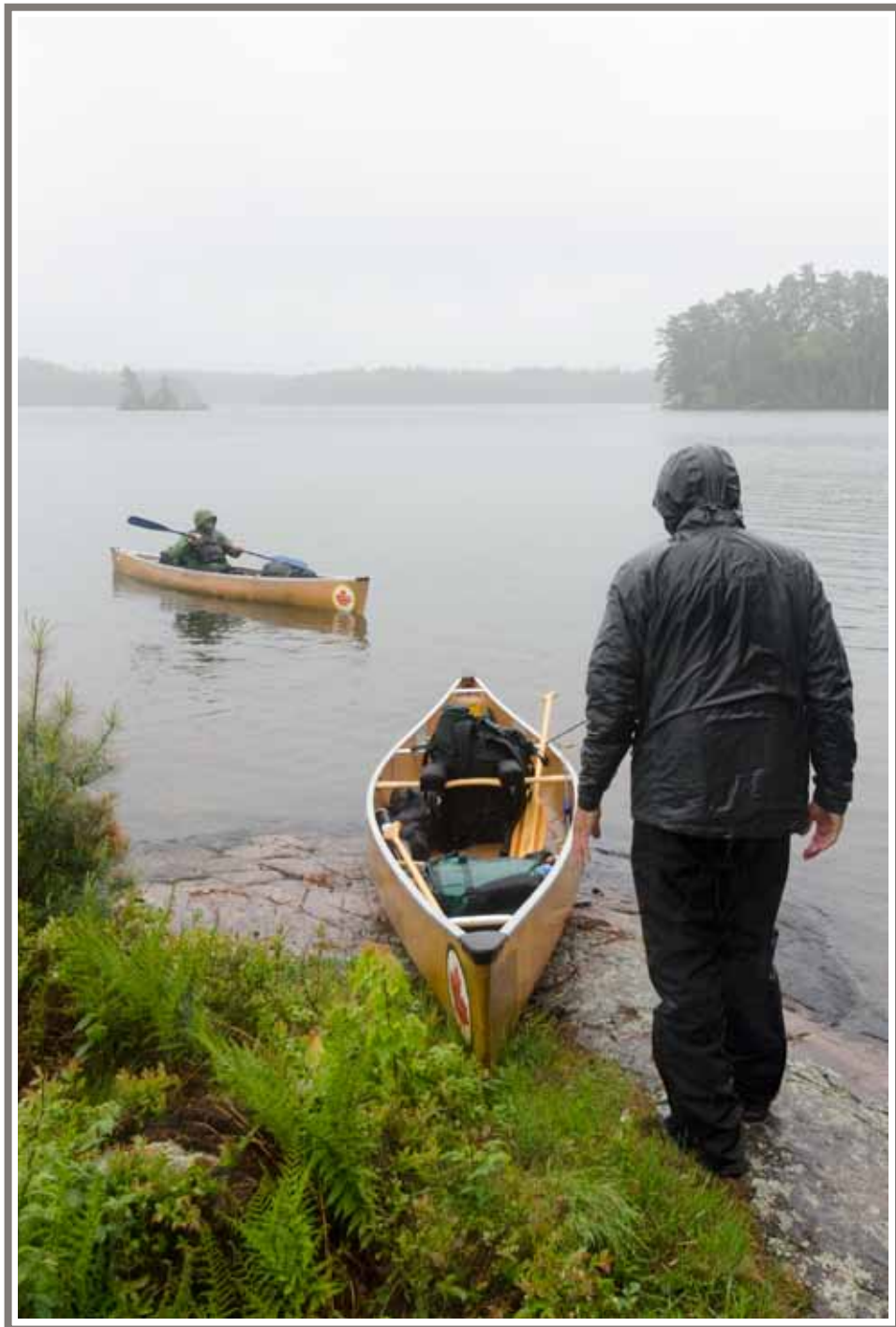
Yes, after more than forty years of camping, I know the number one rule is to never store food or eat in your tent. Well, this trip was one to test the never philosophy. After removing the barrel from the food pack, we placed the pack with the remaining food in the vestibule. After all, even as tired as we were, we would certainly hear if a bear got into the vestibule! And since it was sleeting outside and we hadn't strung up our tarp yet, we chose to eat our granola bars in the tent.

Well, no bears came, for which we were thankful. However, it's not the bears that cause most problems for canoe campers. It's those "mini-bears," those cute little rodents that scurry around the campsite looking for a handout. It wasn't until the following morning that I awoke to see two beady eyes staring at me from within an arm's reach of my sleeping bag. And just above him was his entrance, a tiny inch-long hole in the screen where he had chewed his way inside.

Mice not only have an extraordinary sense of smell, but they also have excellent memories. Even the following day after we had strung up the tarp and secured the food pack well behind camp, we entered the tent to find four more little holes where our little furry friend had returned in search of a treat. To this day, we have never placed food in the tent again!

The remainder of our trip went smoothly after having survived the challenges of that first day. We were able to complete our campsite evaluations with minimal issues, not knowing until later that our whole route had been evacuated because of the Pagami Creek forest

MARK TADE



*When paddling canoe country in May/June or October/November, only my lifejacket and boots are more important essentials than good rain gear. Without it, you might not live to tell about how cold, wet and miserable you were out there. (Argo Lake)*

fire on the Ely side of the BWCAW. It was the first day of our trip, however, that stands out as a lasting memory.

It isn't the first time Marshall and I have been lost in canoe country. I usually chalk it up as part of the wilderness experience, and we usually get ourselves out of our dilemma soon enough.

That's what maps are for, and it is usually wise to consult them first before making any rash decisions. In hindsight, we should have followed our own instincts rather than be distracted by another party's experience. But if nothing else, it taught the four of us the importance of sticking together in a challenging situation. 📄

















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□ by Michael Teach

## Zulu Magic Update

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I wrote the article “Zulu Magic” for the Spring 2008 issue of BWJ. I may not believe in magic, but back then, the Strike King Zulu was the closest thing I had seen to a magical fishing lure. A decade later, this soft plastic jerk bait rig is still my top producing lure for smallmouth bass. If you’re serious about catching big smallmouth on your BWCW/Quetico trips, the Zulu should be front and center in your tackle box.

The tremendous response to that BWJ article and subsequent website dialogue convinced me it was time to revisit my go to trophy smallmouth presentation. If this is a new concept for you, pay close attention. For those with some Zulu experience, I want to pass on some new tips about this amazing rig.

The first time I ever used this rig was on a small creek connecting two lakes in northern Quetico. My first four casts produced four smallmouth between seventeen and nineteen inches. I just barely moved the lure as the current brought it to life. The big smallmouth hit it with reckless abandon. Five years later, Mike Ray and I set ourselves up on shore about a hundred yards downstream from that very same smallie hotspot. It was late May, and we were at the end of the creek, where it met the colder lake water. We both had ZMAN ShadZ tied on, and what happened that morning is almost beyond belief. When we began casting towards the opposite shoreline. It quickly became apparent this hole was

stacked with smallmouth bass. There was a fish on every cast. If we had to twitch the lure more than twice, we started to wonder. We tried to count our doubles, but we lost count after fifty-something. There were times when only one of us was hooked up, but that was rare. These weren’t small fish either. They averaged in the sixteen to nineteen-inch range, with a handful of twenties thrown in. All were caught in a twenty-yard stretch of the lake. If I had not been there, I wouldn’t have believed it.

At one point, Mike had a big fish shake loose just off from shore. He retrieved his lure another six feet when that same smallmouth charged and inhaled his lure again, practically at his feet. This incredible fishing went on for hours until the action slowed. Mike guessed that collectively we had released 500 smallmouths. I figured it was closer to 350. Whatever the number, it was just unbelievable fishing.

There are only two brands of soft plastic jerk baits worth using when stringing together this rig: Strike King or ZMAN. In fact, they are the exact same lure. ZMAN is the manufacturer of both brands. These lures are superior to all other soft plastics I have tried. The plastic is made of ElaZtech, which is remarkably soft, pliable, and stronger than other soft plastics. With a couple drops of super glue, I have been able to catch upwards of a hundred

smallmouth on a single lure. You would be hard pressed to catch even a dozen on a traditional soft plastic lure. After the nose and back of the lure start to tear apart, a simple drop of super-glue on the nose and another on the back where the hook penetrates will extend the life of the lure.

The ZMAN single tail version is a StreakZ, and the dual tail is named ShadZ. Strike King resells these lures under the names Zulu for the single tail and Z-Too for the dual tail version. There are a variety of colors, but I prefer any variation of pearl for at least half the color of the lure. Blue/pearl, gray/pearl, and green/pearl all work well, but lately I have been partial to the “Red-bone” color, which is a gray/pearl with red flake.

Rigging the lure is really not that complicated. Use a thin wire 1/0 worm hook. I prefer to use Gamakatsu hooks. A quality, sharp, thin wire hook will work increasingly better than a thicker worm hook. The smaller hook runs flush with the lure, which allows the lure to move more naturally. Some fishermen use a 3 or 4/0 EWG worm hook, but this causes a keel effect, thus reducing the natural flow of the lure. To rig the bait onto the hook, first take the point of the hook and come down on top of the nose, running the lure to the top elbow part of the hook. Twist the lure around so the hook is now under the belly



*Mike Teach, big bass angler extraordinaire, with another "Zulu Magic" brute. The Strike King Zulu soft plastic jerk bait, (inset photo) is his number one trophy bronzeback presentation. Shown rigged with thin-wire 1/0 worm hook and short leader with ball-bearing swivel.*

of the lure, and press the hook point through the body until it lies flat on the back of the lure. The lure is now snag-less. To avoid line twist and add weight to the rig, use a size 3 or 4 quality two-way ball-bearing swivel. I prefer to use SPRO swivels. The swivel also acts as a small bait attractant. Small bait fish are drawn to the small swivel and increases the lure's presence. Tie the lure to about eight inches of line leader and then to the swivel. Tie the other side of the swivel to the line on the reel.

This method of fishing is called subsurface finesse because the presentation of the lure is just below the surface, unlike most finesse fishing, which targets the bottom area of a lake or river.

A major plus with subsurface finesse fishing is that you rarely snag. Another advantage is the ability to cast this set up all day long. It won't wear you out like a spinner or crank baits. Most importantly, there is only a single hook. After running a treble hook through my finger on a Quetico trip, I'm a little gun-shy about reaching down and lipping a smallmouth with a mouthful of treble hooks. A small net also helps.

A very slow, methodical twitch and pause retrieve is all you need to make this lure produce. After rigging the lure, cast it out a few feet and make a few gentle twitches. Generate a subsurface walk-the-dog retrieve. Try to simulate a dying, flutter action. Once you are confident the lure is working correctly, make a cast. When a smallmouth hits this lure, you will usually feel like a little tick, much like a jig hit. Give the fish a second, reel down any slack, and set the hook. I can't stress this point enough,

similar to top water hits; give the fish a second before setting the hook. Way too many fish have been missed with the Zulu or ShadZ by setting the hook too soon.

If the fish are deeper, a weighted worm hook, a standard weighted jig head, a split shot eighteen inches up the line, or a Carolina rig will drop this soft plastic lure down to your preferred depth. Walleyes have been known to strike a Zulu or ShadZ. I have personally fished walleyes side by side with fishing guides from Ely and out fished their live bait using my Zulus.


The following year after our smallmouth bass bonanza, we went back to the same spot hoping to repeat some of the previous year's success. We had a hard time finding a smallmouth in the old honey-hole because it was loaded with walleye. We didn't catch a walleye on every cast, but we did manage to catch over fifty on the ZMAN ShadZ while we were there. That's the incredible thing about fishing up in Quetico: you just never know what is going to happen.

If you are looking for a subtle top water approach, the ZMAN RaZor is the answer. The RaZor has a segmented, soft plastic, fish-like body with a forked tail and a bait fish profile. It has a thicker girth than the ShadZ and floats. Rig the RaZor the same as the ShadZ, except forget the swivel. The only difference is the worm hook: use a larger 2/0 (Gamakatsu) worm hook. The presentation is just a few slight twitches on the surface, followed by an extended pause. This is also a diving lure, so when the lure is twitched, it will do a little nose dive. There is no commotion, nothing but a slight ripple on the surface until a fish slurps the

offering. Wait a second like you would for any top water presentation before setting the hook. This lure strongly resembles a wounded cisco. It is the best presentation for a smallmouth bass looking for dying surface bait fish. I typically cast the RaZor in a cisco imitating color of "Bad Shad."

Smallmouth and walleye aren't the only species in the Boundary Waters that will attack a soft plastic jerk bait. Northern pike also have a big appetite for these lures. I have caught seven pike over 40 inches since I began using Zulu/ShadZ/RaZors. The amazing part is each of these fish was landed without the use of a metal leader. My fishing partner, Mike Ray, caught his personal best forty-three-inch pike on a Zulu mere minutes after I landed a forty-two-inch pike out of the same cove on Basswood Lake. My first ever Grand Slam on a ZMAN ShadZ happened last spring on Basswood Lake. Anglers I introduced to the Zulu rig report catching lake trout with this presentation, but it took me until last June to produce my first laker. It made for a fine shore lunch.

After having so many inquiries about the Zulu rig over the years, I felt the need to run this amazing big bass bait story past BWJ readers again. Not only does it produce fish, it produces quality fish of all four species, especially trophy bronzebacks. I would have loved to have known about this rig and presentation back in 1988. I spent my first eighteen years fishing the Boundary Waters while clueless about Zulu magic. On your next wilderness fishing excursion, pack along some ZMAN soft plastic jerk baits. You won't believe the results. It's like magic.

Follow Michael Teach on Instagram @queticomike 

# canoe country magic



## All About Hull Speed

□ by Hervey Evans

**Y**ou may or may not know this, but paddling a canoe well is difficult. Like golf or tennis, it's easy to be mediocre and very difficult to be good. It takes a certain finesse and understanding that people new to the BWCAW or Quetico may not grasp right away.

When a designer establishes the shape for a super tanker, a twelve-meter yacht, or a canoe, they balance a large number of variables: the length of the hull, the expected volume displaced by the cargo, the sea-

worthiness required (stability), and the location and forces of the engine or paddler. These are all independent variables the designer seeks to balance. One of the key results is the hull speed of the craft.

Every canoe has an optimum hull speed designed into the craft. That's the speed at which the canoe is designed to move most efficiently through the water with the least resistance. As a very general rule, the maximum speed of any displacement hull—commonly

called its hull speed—is governed by a simple formula: hull speed in knots equals 1.34 times the square root of the waterline length in feet ( $HS = 1.34 \times \sqrt{LWL}$ ).

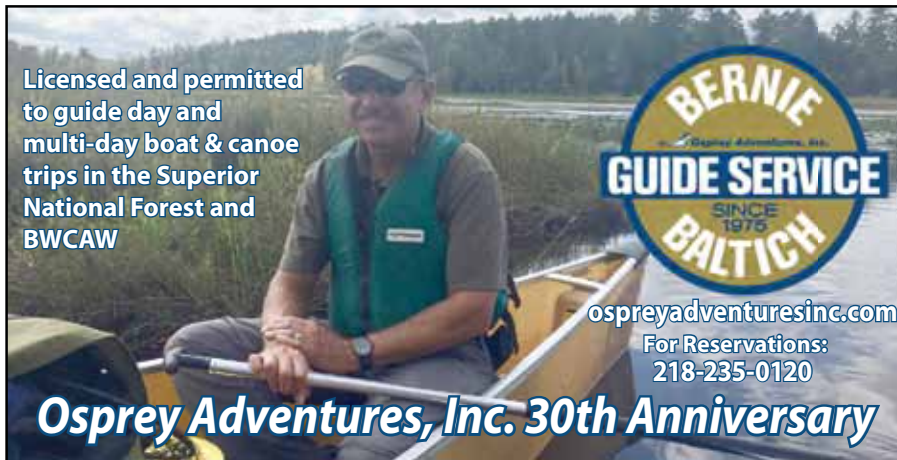
It is not the fastest speed that the canoe can go, but it is the speed at which the canoe will go through the water with the least energy lost to turbulence or other noise. There are racing canoes that are designed with very high hull speeds (they are very tippy and will barely carry a daypack) and to make them



BRENT REINITZ

Try explaining the hull speed formula the next time your bow paddler is dogging it. (John Lake)

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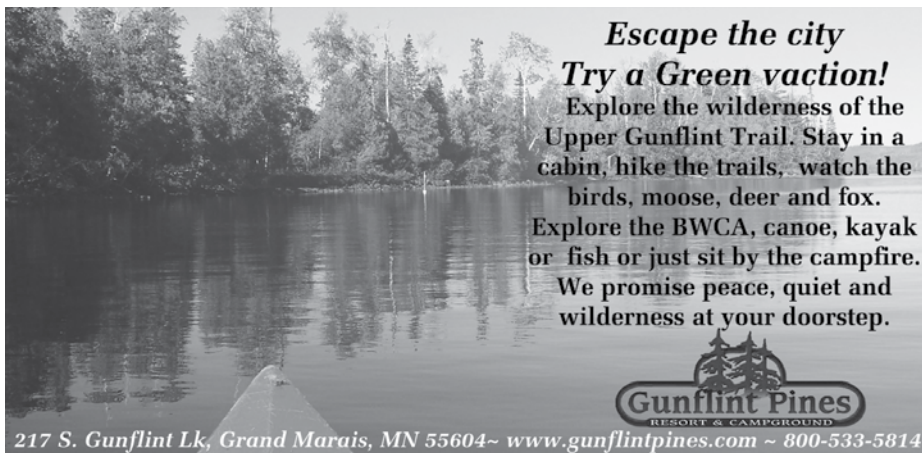


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go smoothly through the water, you have to expend a great deal of energy. But most of our canoes are designed for longer distances and some cargo capacity, and the best stroke is less than your max.

The hard part is finding the right pace.

I have an old seventeen-foot aluminum Grumman canoe that was retired from the Outward Bound fleet several years ago. After I got it, I banged out the dents with a rubber mallet, hefted its seventy-five pounds

onto my shoulders as I put it on the car, and took it for a test paddle on Lake Owasso in Shoreview. I sat in the canoe in the stern seat and watched the bow rise high into the air to catch the wind, then switched to sitting reversed in the bow seat to balance the weight. I began to paddle, softly and slowly, past the docks and suburban homes, listening to the canoe. After about half an hour, the little vibrations I had been modulating in the water fell away, and the boat and I sang

together through stroke after stroke.

Each canoe is different. It is difficult to listen to the intent of the designer of the canoe, to the canoe itself, for the speed at which it moves most cleanly, smoothly, and easily through the water. But if you take the time and seek the intention of the designer, it will come, and it is worth the trouble.

For I am here to tell you that it is Grace itself to find that magical level of effort and to step into the flow of a regular stroke of the paddle, watching the miles fly by, the eagles soar above, and the day reveal itself. Other boats with their “Hut, Hut, Switch” and their “Power 10 and switch,” techniques may pass you for a time, but your steady, faithful stroke will win the day.

To force a canoe to go faster than it is designed is something we all do from time to time, but paddling well in a canoe that you know is a meditative activity. The repetitive nature of the stroke makes time go away. The constant attention to the vibrations of the hull gradually fades into the background. The burn in your shoulders as the miles go by reminds you of your mortality. The silence that your thoughts can fill reasserts itself after a while, and magically the rise of a dragonfly or the ripple of the sun on the water comes on God’s own wings to remind you of your true place in creation.

This is all very well. But what happens when you find the hull speed of your canoe and melt into the flow of it for an afternoon, only to look up to the bow and find somebody else up there messing with your magic?

I was looking at kayaks the other day at REI and asked the salesperson about the tandem kayaks. “Yes,” he said, “they are pretty—but we call them ‘divorce boats.’ You better know what you’re doing before you get one of those.” I have seen



arguments and nasty fights between the bow and stern of a canoe, and I have seen smoldering resentment as the bow temporarily and vainly buckles under the will of the stern or vice versa. It is not an easy thing to learn how to do.

You are trying hard to feel for the proper hull speed of the canoe, holding on jealously to the strong memory of being in the flow, when the person in the bow is thrashing at the water like a banshee for four or five strokes before throwing a glare over their shoulder that says, "Well, come on! Let's get this tub moving!"

With two people in the boat, the problem has expanded geometrically. You now have to balance not two, but three ideas about how fast the boat should go: yours, your partner's, and that of the boat's designer. I know several married couples who refuse to canoe together.


Well, you can deal with another person in your boat, and you can find the flow together. But first you have to know how to paddle by yourself. You have to know how to recognize what you are reaching for, the flow and the proper hull speed, and both of you have to understand how to get to it.

When I was a young man, my uncle gave me two pieces of advice on marriage: "Always marry someone smarter," he said. "It improves the gene pool and promotes mutual respect." And later, he said, "Always take your intended camping before you make up your mind. You'll get to see how well you work out problems together. And you'll learn about forgiveness." Paddling with someone works like that too.

If you have ever thought it was impossible to learn to canoe with someone else, try something I learned last week.

My brother-in-law and I went out fishing several mornings at about 6:30. The first few mornings we struggled, passively fighting with each other and thrashing the water. The third day, as he rearranged his tackle and adjusted his rods and lures, he turned in the bow seat and faced me. As he settled his gear, he picked up his paddle and began to paddle backwards in the bow — but facing me. I couldn't get away with the little pry strokes and malicious glances anymore — and neither could he. It was a little awkward for him at first, but we got the rhythm of each other and the boat surprisingly quickly.

The magic came through, and after fifteen minutes, he turned in his seat, and we continued on as if we had been doing it all our lives.

And it is a beautiful thing to see an older couple coming off a portage as you approach, already deep into the familiar rhythms of the boat and the paddle and each other. It is graceful, strenuous, and effortless all at the same time. And you know they have found a way to forgive themselves and each other for their mere humanity. 

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# the right stuff



## Don't Leave Home Without It

□ by Dave Foley

Most Boundary Waters packing lists are pretty generic. We know what we need and are ever mindful that the more we take, the more we have to carry. Unless we deem something indispensable, it's not going in the pack. But over half a century of camping, my wife Cyndy and I have added a few items that have come to be considered essential gear. Here are ten items probably not on your current packing list.

Have you ever found yourself kneeling over a dying campfire, blowing air to coax the embers to flame? If so, you will love a fire tube, and they are easy to make. At a building supply store, purchase a forty-inch section of half-inch vinyl tubing and a one-foot section of copper tubing. Shove the copper piece into the vinyl tube and hammer the copper end somewhat flat to concentrate the airflow. For the cost of few dollars, you can nurse anemic fires to life without ever leaving your seat. We also carry a Ziploc bag to collect loose birch bark along the portages so we are never without tinder.

The overhead light in our tent is a Luci Inflatable Solar Lantern. Clip it on your pack while you travel or set it in the sun while out fishing for the day and it gives up to twelve hours of light. It's waterproof, folds down to the size of a wallet, and weighs only four ounces. Because it's small and lightweight, it is ideal for camp trips, and hanging the Luci lantern in the tent at night helps save the batteries in our headlights. It has three settings: bright, super bright, and flashing. It sells for twenty dollars. In the winter, we keep it in the house in case of power outages.

I can't imagine a wilderness canoe trip without a telescoping painter-pole. When we pitch a tarp, the painter-pole adds crucial support. Sometimes it lifts the center to facilitate drainage, and occasionally it serves as a side pole. When used in the center of the tarp, we put a sock or oven

mitt on the tip so it won't puncture or stress the tarp fabric. On portages, it can act like a trekking pole, giving added support through rough spots on the trail.

Waterproof tent floors keep water from seeping up from the ground. That's the good news. The bad news is any water that lands on the floor stays there. Get a few drops of liquid on a waterproof floor and it will slide around like mercury, wetting everything it touches. That's why we keep a small sponge in the tent to quickly mop up unwanted moisture.

Portages are brutal on fishing rods. Rod tubes offer the best protection, but I find them bulky and awkward to carry. Instead, I break down the rod and place a yardstick next to the rod-sections. The end of the yardstick should extend beyond the rod tip. Then I secure it with Velcro strips. This protects the tip, plus I have a way to measure fish. Instead of pumping or pouring water through a filtering system, we use Aquamira. I was introduced to this method of water treatment in a NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) course. Water was scarce, and we treated water where we could find it, including swamps and livestock drinking pools. Aquamira contains chlorine dioxide, which, according to the manufacturer, "has been shown to remove greater than 99.9% of bacteria, viruses, and cysts, including *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*." There is no discoloring or bad taste associated with the Aquamira treated water. It is so easy to mix and the one-ounce two-bottle kit is small, ideal for backcountry tripping.


We have a two-person summer weight sleeping bag, but when the weather heats up, it is too warm to sleep in. On these occasions, we lie atop the sleeping bag and cover up with a bed sheet. On mid-summer trips, a bed sheet often offers

a more comfortable sleep than a sleeping bag.

Most of our trips into the backcountry are miles beyond cellphone coverage. Our only way of communicating with the outside world is through our Spot Locator. It's a one-way connection enabling us to send an email to alert others that we are okay, and allows family to track our location through the GPS. Though we don't use those functions, we do like knowing that if we had a real emergency, we could press the red SOS/911 button, which would alert the appropriate agency to come to our rescue. Other devices can actually communicate the nature of the emergency and are even better.

In a small red stuff sack, is our repair kit containing bungee cords, rubber bands, safety pins, fabric repair tape, bootlaces, wire, duct tape, and Gorilla Glue. When packing, check the glue to make sure it is still viable. Examine the rubber bands, as they will deteriorate with age. In addition, we carry needles and stout thread. We take a Leatherman tool as well.

For some camp gear, one is not enough. That's why we pack replacement sunglasses, baseball caps, and a small Jetboil stove. Over the years, I have lost a hat in Sturgeon Lake, crushed my sunglasses, and had a stove fail to work. At the time of these mishaps, we were carrying no backups. That's when we realized that some items are important enough for spares.

When we started camping, we had just the basic camp gear. None of the items suggested here were on our list. But as we accumulated more canoe country savvy, we added this gear to our packs. Now we consider these ten items to be essential equipment for our canoe country outfitting. 



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I use two BWJ Insulated Food Packs for all my Grand Slam Guide Service trips. At left, the "Fridge Pack" holds a one-gallon jug of frozen water and fresh milk, juice, eggs, butter, cheese, fruits and veggies. At right, the "Freezer Pack" holds a similar one-gallon jug of ice and homemade pre-cooked entrees frozen in Ziplocks like spaghetti meat sauce, beef fajitas, chicken alfredo, beef and broccoli, wild rice hot dish, pot roast, soups, chili plus frozen steaks, burgers, brats, deli meats, bacon etc. My clients all rave about the food on my canoe trips. You can enjoy real food in canoe country too.



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**BWJ Removable Insulating Foam Liner:** Half-inch thick closed-cell foam, wraps completely around the inside of the BWJ Poly Food Box with separate pieces to fit over the bottom and top. Creates a double-insulation layer when combined with the BWJ Insulated Food Pack to maximize the effective cooling time for fresh foods. Easily removable for cleaning between trips. **\$37**

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**BWJ Wanderer Day Pack**  
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**BWJ STANDARD PACKS**

**BWJ Standard #3 Pack:** The original envelope design, performs well for personal gear, equipment or food, and fits BWJ Poly Food Box Specs: 29"W x 27"H - flat; 4500 cu capacity. Color: Green or Blue **\$139**

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Larger tarps available by special order, call for details.



**BWJ Tarp Bag:** When you have to break camp before that tarp can dry out, our waterproof pack cloth tarp bag with drawstring/cordlock closure keeps other gear next to the tarp dry. Fits 10' x 12' BWJ camp tarp. Green. **\$20**



**BWJ Canoe Pack Liners:** Super-tough, oversized poly bags allow multiple rollovers to waterproof all your canoe pack gear from rain and bilge water. I outfit these same heavy-duty 6 mil liners for all my Grand Slam Guide

Service trips. They last for many trips and keep our stuff bone dry. A must have for every canoe trip.

**Standard Canoe Pack Liner** (left): Fits BWJ Regular Ultimate Pack and most others (28" x 48") **\$5**

**Extra-Wide Canoe Pack Liner** (right): Fits BWJ Extra-Wide Pack & most #4's (22"W x 58"H x 16"D) **\$6**



**BWJ Nylon Canoe Pack Liner:** A tougher, more permanent solution than easily torn garbage bags for protecting the gear in your pack. Made from coated pack cloth with drawstring closure. Not as

waterproof as the BWJ Poly Canoe Pack Liners (left), but more supple/durable. Handy for hauling pack contents into the tent and leaving the wet, dirty pack outside. 28" x 36"- fits BWJ Ultimate or extra-wide Ultimate Packs. Green. **\$30**



**BWJ Cook Kit Bag:** Waterproof pack cloth bag with drawstring/cordlock closure- 12" x 15"- fits 4-6

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Medium: 9" x 19", 1200 cu in. Fits goose down or summer weight bags. Red **\$33.00**

Large: 10" x 21", 1850 cu in. Fits most 3-season synthetic bags. Green **\$34.00**



**BWJ Deluxe Bear Pack System:** Bear research experts and veteran paddlers consider hanging food packs a must, and this system is the best way to do it. Suspend up to 250 lbs of food packs, utilizing pulleys and handles for a 2:1 mechanical advantage. High quality solid braid nylon rope 5/16", single & double pulleys, and wooden handles. **\$75.00**



**BWJ Speed Pack Hanger:** Heavy-duty nylon rope with stainless steel center ring and strong brass snaps, quickly simplifies bear pack hanging and minimizes stress on pack. I leave one on all my packs for instantly lashing packs around a thwart/yoke when the wind picks up. **\$16.95**



**BWJ Utensil Rollup:** Organizes silverware for eight plus cooking utensils. Just tie around a tree near the campfire for

easy access to clean forks/knives/spoons/spatulas etc. Coated nylon pack cloth with reinforcement patches to prevent puncture from sharp utensils. Green. **\$25**



**BWJ Cast Aluminum Fry Pan:** More canoe country walleye fries have been cooked/served/savored with the original BWJ Fry Pan than anything else by far. High-grade cast aluminum absorbs campfire heat evenly for unmatched uniform cooking, just like the old cast iron pans, but with half the weight. At 12" x 12" x 2" deep, you'll fry up serious quantities of fish, potatoes, bacon and more. Great for pancakes too. Sturdy, positive grip metal handle is included (Also available separately-\$15). Pan seasons itself with every use, delivering a lifetime of special wilderness meals/memories. 3 1/2 lbs. **\$55**

**BWJ Fry Pan Cover:** Heavy-duty Cordura nylon cover with flap protects pack and other gear from campfire soot. 13" x 20" fits BWJ Cast Aluminum Fry Pan. Green **\$22**

# BWJ CANOE CAMPING GEAR

**BWJ Ultimate Camp Saw:** Trust me on this one, I have tested just about every camp saw on the market and my search, is over. I rely on the Boreal 21 for all my larger firewood cutting. It rips through 3-6" thick pine and beaverwood like a champ. The 18" blade swings out and locks down with a pivoting action, all in one motion. The unique design has zero loose parts to lose or assemble and the locking mechanism has such tight tolerances, the blade is held super-taut preventing all twisting and binding while sawing. All my Grand Slam Guide Service clients love this saw so much, I rarely get to use it. 17 oz. **\$68.95**



**BWJ Turbo Cut Camp Saw:** This incredible 7" saw with wicked-sharp teeth, is designed to cut on the pull of each stroke. Cleanly cuts through smaller 3 inch thick firewood without grabbing like the larger toothed Boreal 21 saw. I take both on all my GS2 trips- the Boreal 21 for bucking up larger diameter wood and the Turbo for de-limbing branches and chunking up kindling. Always wear leather gloves when sawing with either of these super-sharp saws. Together, canoe country firewood is no longer such an ordeal. Includes storage/carrying sheath. 9 oz. **\$55**



**Gerber CompleAT Tool:** Lightweight multi-tool with fork, spoon, spatula and tongs that all nest/ snap together. Always be ready to chow down come mealtime. 2.5 oz. **\$26.95**



**BWJ Camp Axe:** Every savvy canoe camper knows split wood ignites and burns hotter. I always quarter-up those 4" thick pine and beaverwood foot-long lengths with this lightweight but high performance camp axe. The 14" Lexan handle is nearly indestructible and the 2 3/4" x 4 3/4" steel blade is perfect for splitting cooking fire caliber wood. Includes nylon sheath. 1 1/2 lbs. **\$55**

## BWJ CANOEING ACCESSORIES



**BWJ Deluxe Yoke Pads:** After your canoe/paddle/lifejacket, the most important piece of equipment on any wilderness canoe trip is the carrying yoke. Our yoke pads are super-plush and comfortable with 3" thick closed cell foam to cushion shoulders over the longest, roughest portage

trails. Replace your old worn out model with the very best there is. Attaches to straight or curved yoke bars with adjustable aluminum plates to fit any shoulder width. No drilling required. Colors: Green, Brown. **\$95**



**Bending Branches Expedition Plus Paddle:** My one and only paddle for 200+ trips over the past 30 years, the only one I outfit all my clients with and the only one we sell. We are talking wilderness canoe tripping here, command and control of that canoe with the J-stroke is the single most important wilderness skill to master. The BB Expedition Plus features a long straight shaft with 20" long/8" wide blade and T-grip for trip after trip, rock-solid performance. Made from select basswood, maple and butternut, the Expedition Plus is lightweight, tough and beautiful. Blade and lower-shaft, reinforced with wraparound Rockguard protection. The BB Expedition Plus has gifted me with priceless wilderness adventure for three decades,

never once letting me down. Can your paddle say that? About 28 oz. Sizes: 52, 54, 56, 58, 60. (Most adult men should order a 58 or 60") **\$149.95**



**BWJ Canoe Seat Pad:** One inch-thick cushy seat pad takes the sting out of "canoe butt" on those long paddles across big water. Buckles/cinches tight so pad stays put while paddling/portaging. Fits any bench-style canoe seat- bow or stern. Specs: 10" x 14" x 1" thick. Green. **\$25**

**BWJ Canoe Seat Pack:** Handy, pack hangs under the canoe seat, keeping essential gear within reach but out of any bilge water. Buckles up snug to seat for portaging. Zippered main compartment with Velcro closure map pocket. 11"W x 19"L x 5"D. 600 cu in capacity. Green. **\$42**



**BWJ Canoe Anchor Bag:** Super-heavy duty nylon mesh bag, won't shred even after repeated grinding of your enclosed anchor rock with lake bottom boulders. Double loops secure anchor rope and prevent rocks from spilling out, a much better solution than tying directly to a rock. 16" x 16" Black **\$20**



**BWJ Map Case:** The secret to staying found in the labyrinth of canoe country waterways is always keeping that map right in front of you and properly oriented. Fastex buckles clip our 12" x 15" nylon case with heavy vinyl viewing window to a thwart or pack for continuous viewing and secure it from blowing/falling overboard. **\$26**



**BWJ Fishing Rod Case:** Born from years of frustration with other big name rod cases failing the demands of canoe country fishing, our rod case protects your valuable rods while paddling/portaging. Sturdy nylon covered tube has full interior lining and foam-padded ends. Zippered top has nylon security loop to lash into canoe. One-piece rods are the rage today but they are bad news in the BWCAW/Quetico. The 4" diameter/48" long, BWJ rod case holds up to four-6-7' two-piece rods. **\$50**

# CANOE COUNTRY MAPS



**BWJ Lure Wrap:** Quickly covers nasty treble hooks on extra rigged rods in the canoe or in camp. When moving camp, rods should be transported in the BWJ rod case. For day trips our lure wraps keep rods ready to go without tangling of hooks. Heavy-duty nylon with Velcro closure wraps tightly around rod/line/lure. Green, Black. **\$8**



**BWJ Wrap Straps:** Versatile stretch/Velcro utility straps are perfect for keeping the mated halves of your rods together inside the BWJ Rod Case. Also great for quickly bundling paddles and fishing nets on the portages. Pack of 8: two 12" and six 8" **\$15**



**Fry Pan Bread:** Enjoy hot, delicious bread at your campsite with only 5 minutes of frying. With five different varieties, they can add terrific flavor to any meal. Basic breads come in: Onion, Garlic, Dill, Italian, or Plain. **\$5**

**Specialty Dessert Fry Pan Bread:** Delicious fry bread with an extra kick of flavor to satisfy your sweet tooth, making for a great snack or dessert.

Breads come in: Cinnamon or Caramel. **\$8**

**Fry Pan Bread Blueberry Scones:** With real dried blueberries, these make a great anytime treat. **\$8**

**Fry Pan Biscuits and Gravy:** Baking powder biscuits and homestyle gravy packed with sausage flavor bits make for a great, easy breakfast. **\$7**

**Fry Pan Biscuits and Gravy:** Baking powder biscuits and homestyle gravy packed with sausage flavor bits make for a great, easy breakfast. **\$7**

**Creamy Fish Chowder:** Fish chowder is a delicious alternative to traditional fillet frying. With all the ingredients in one handy package, it's really easy to whip up a great meal in 15 minutes. **\$6**



**BWJ Logo Hats:** Highest quality structured ball cap featuring the logo of your favorite magazine. Durable cotton front with cool polyester mesh back and Velcro adjustment. No plastic junk mesh or straps. Red, White **\$24.95**



**Boundary Waters Soap:** Handmade from scratch at our Ely homestead by BWJ Publisher, Michele Osthoff. Natural, healthy ingredients, doesn't dry out skin like alcohol-based hand sanitizers. 15 varieties-details on website. 4.5oz **\$ 5/bar**



**McKenzie Maps:**

**McKenzie Maps:** With the largest scale of 2" = 1 mile and more BWCAW lakes with depth contour lines, McKenzie's are the favorite maps of serious backcountry anglers. Superior detail includes hill shading and pinpointing of smaller islands and bays not shown on smaller scale maps. McKenzie maps feature 5000 Meter UTM grids for GPS use. Easy to read black text on tan land and blue water, 20' BWCAW contour interval lines and 50' Quetico contours. Super-durable 20" x 30" sheets of waterproof plastic paper that even floats. Specify map number when ordering. **\$6.95 each**

## BWCAW

1. Pine, Greenwood, Mountain
2. East Bearskin, Clearwater, Alder
3. Ball Club, Winchell, Poplar
4. Gunflint, Loon, North
5. Magnetic, Gunflint, Northern Light
6. Saganaga, Sea Gull
7. Little Saganaga, Tuscarora, Sea Gull
8. Knife, Kekekabic, Thomas
9. Basswood, Snowbank, Sunday
10. Basswood, Crooked, Sarah
- 10A. Basswood Lake

Depth Contour Map (\$10.95)

11. Jackfish, Beartrap, Thursday
  12. Moose River, Stuart
  13. Lac La Croix
  113. Lac La Croix
- Depth Contour Map (\$10.95)
14. Loon, Wilkins, Little Indian Sioux
  15. Trout
  16. Burntside, Cummings
  17. Fall, Pipestone
  18. Lake One, Bald Eagle
  19. Isabella, Insula
  20. Alton, Perent
  21. Sawbill, Brule, Pipe

## QUETICO

25. Saganagons, Mack
26. This Man, Cache
27. Agnes, Kahshapiwi
28. Brent, Poobah, Conmee
29. Argo, Minn, William
30. Red Pine, Badwater, Snow
31. Lac La Croix, Wolseley, Namakan R
32. Thompson, David, Namakan R
33. Beaverhouse, Whalen, Factor
34. Quetico, Cirrus, McCauley
35. Sturgeon, Burntside, Jean
36. Keefer, Williams, Camel
37. Kawnipi
38. Powell, Obadinaw R, Wawiag R
41. Tilly, Windigoostigwan
42. McKenzie, Cache, Buckingham
43. Russel, Olifaunt, Maligne R
44. Soho, Kasakokwog, Oriana
45. Pickerel, Batchewaung, Nym
46. Pickerel, Eva, Baptism

**Fisher Maps:** These are the original yellow and blue maps that have guided thousands of paddlers to canoe country wilderness adventure for over 75 years. Scale is 1 1/2" = 1 mile with 20' BWCAW contour lines, no contours in Quetico. The advantage of the smaller scale Fisher Maps is that a larger land/lake area is covered by each map sheet so less maps are often needed to cover a given route. Each map is 22" x 28" on waterproof latex paper. Specify map number when ordering. **\$6.95**

## BWCAW

- F-1 W Vermilion, Trout, Lost
- F-4 One-Four, Bald Eagle, Insula
- F-5 Perent Kawishiwi, Sawbill
- F-6 Brule and Pike
- F-7 S Gunflint Tr, 2 Island, Devil Track
- F-8 Vermilion, Vermilion R, Trout
- F-9 Cummings, Big Moose, Fourtown
- F-10 Basswood, Fall, Moose
- F-11 Snowbank, Knife, Kekekabic
- F-12 Little Sag, Tuscarora, Temperance
- F-13 Gunflint, Bearskin
- F-14 Clearwater, Greenwood, Fowl
- F-15 Crane, Echo, Loon
- F-16 Loon, Lac La Croix, Nina Moose

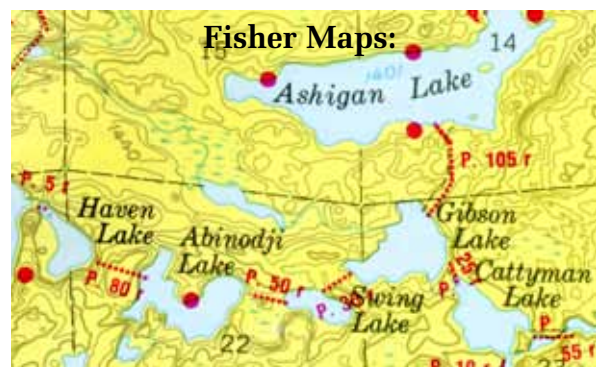
## QUETICO

- F-17 Crooked, Darky, Sarah
- F-18 Kahshapiwi, Agnes, Man Chain
- F-19 Saganaga, Seagull
- F-22 Sandpoint, Namakan
- F-23 Lac La Croix N
- F-24 Sturgeon, Poobah, Maligne
- F-25 Kawnipi, Russell
- F-26 McKenzie, Powell
- F-28 Beaverhouse, Cirrus, Quetico
- F-29 Jean, Batchewaung, W Pickerel
- F-30 E Pickerel, French, Cache

Large Area Maps (22 1/2" x 34 1/4")

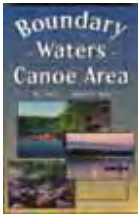
- F-31 Ely Area Entry Point Map
  - F-32 Seagull & Surrounding Lakes
- Large Area Maps \$8.95 each

**A-2 McKenzie Laminated BWCAW/Quetico Map:** 26" x 38" laminated color map gives a great overall view of the BWCAW/Quetico canoe country. Great for trip planning, documenting trips taken or hanging on the wall for unlimited daydreaming. Shipped rolled in tube. **\$24.95**

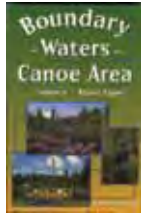


**Fisher Maps:**

# CANOE COUNTRY LIBRARY



**The Boundary Waters Canoe Area - Volume 1 Western Region** by Robert Beymer: Suggested route descriptions out of the 28 entry points between Crane Lake and Ely. A handy trip planning and field guide. (Softcover 200 pgs) **\$16.95**



**The Boundary Waters Canoe Area - Volume 2 Eastern Region** by Robert Beymer: Suggested route descriptions out of the 25 entry points off the Gunflint, Sawbill and Arrowhead Trails. Includes portage, campsite, and visitor use information. (Softcover 200 pgs) **\$16.95**



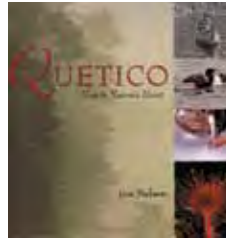
**A Paddler's Guide to Quetico Provincial Park** by Robert Beymer: A companion to the set on BWCAW routes, this book suggests circle routes from Quetico's access points. Descriptions of portages, natural & historical highlights, and campsites are helpful in planning trips. Includes a map locating some of the Quetico campsites. (Softcover 170 pgs) **\$15.95**



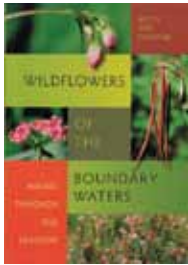
**New Boundary Waters & Quetico Fishing Guide** by Michael Furtman: The new edition of the canoe country fisherman's bible. Great "how to" info is organized by fish species. Includes complete index of what type of fish inhabit each lake in the BWCAW and Quetico. (Softcover 203 pgs) **\$14.95**



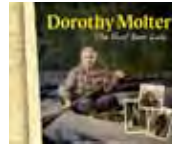
**Magic on the Rocks** by Michael Furtman: A comprehensive guide to the 49 pictograph sites in the BWCAW and Quetico. Detailed drawings and maps to guide your search. (Softcover 200 pgs) **\$14.95**



**Quetico: Near to Nature's Heart** by Jon Nelson: Jon worked as a park ranger in Quetico from 1976 to 1987. Here he combines his own extensive involvement in the park with thorough research to create an insightful look into Quetico's natural history. He examines the adaptations that have allowed moose, deer, wolves, and other mammals to survive. He also explores the designation of the park and the human history: the Ojibwa, trappers, loggers, miners, park rangers, and poachers. The result is a splendid tribute to a very unique place, enhanced throughout with exceptional photography. (Softcover 288 pgs) **\$35.00**



**Wildflowers of the Boundary Waters - Hiking Through the Seasons** by Betty Vos Hemstad: This beautiful wildflower guide is organized by season and then by color, offering views of 120 regional flowers shown throughout their life cycles, from bud to flower to seedpod, making it the perfect companion for a walk in the woods. Hikers, campers and anyone who loves the Boundary Waters will benefit from this useful guide. (Softcover 271 pgs) **\$22.95**



**Dorothy Molter The Root Beer Lady** by Sarah Guy-Levar and Terry Schocke: This is the biography of the Nightingale of the Wilderness, who fought the government for her land, whose life inspired a museum in her honor. This book features a fresh look at her life, new stories and long-forgotten photos, her famous Christmas letters and her very own root beer recipe. (Softcover 152 pgs) **\$16.95**

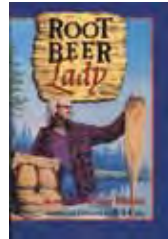
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**The Art of the Canoe with Joe Seliga** by Jerry Stelmok: Details how Joe Seliga earned his reputation as the preeminent wood/canvas canoe builder in North America. Detailed color photos illustrate the step-by-step construction of the very finest canoes. Joe's passion for canoe country and craftsmanship is an inspiration to all who appreciate wilderness paddling and the pursuit of excellence. (Hardcover 170 pgs) **\$34.95**



**A Wonderful Country-The Quetico - Superior Stories of Bill Magie** by David Olesen: Bill's stories offer canoe country travelers an invaluable and entertaining glimpse into the wilderness of bygone days. Bill was a guide and engineer on the first surveys of the MN-Ontario border. Reading this book is like sitting around a campfire listening to an oldtimer. (Hardcover 200 pgs) **\$22.95**



**Root Beer Lady: "The Story of Dorothy Molter"** by Bob Cary: From 1930-1986, Dorothy Molter lived a life in canoe country that the rest of us can only dream of. Bob Cary, Dorothy's long-time friend, captures the life of this northwoods legend. Dorothy's life is an amazing story, and nobody tells a story like Jackpine Bob. (Softcover 175 pgs) **\$15.95**

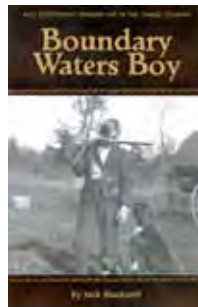


**Canoe Country Camping** by Michael Furtman: This book will sharpen the camping skills of veteran canoe country travelers. It is essential that each and every one of us practice the minimum impact camping techniques Furtman preaches if we are to preserve the wilderness character of canoe country. (Softcover 216 pgs) **\$16.95**



**GUNFLINT BURNING** by Gary J. Griffith: is the riveting tale of the 2007 Ham Lake fire that destroyed 144 structures/cabins/homes/businesses and over 75,000 acres of the BWCAW, Superior National Forest and Ontario forests. This is a

dramatic story you won't put down until finished with very important lessons for every wilderness canoe camper. (Hardcover 324 pgs) **\$25.95**



**BOUNDARY WATERS BOY** by Jack Blackwell After his father died, seventeen-year-old Jack Blackwell joined his grandfather, Alec Boostrom on his trapline in northern Minnesota's canoe country wilderness. Arriving on the steamship America at the Lake Superior village of Hovland in 1914, 14-year-old Boostrom embarked upon a life of wilderness adventure. From setting boundary markers along the Canadian border to outlaw beaver trapping, he found ways to make a living from the land.

Blackwell tells his grandfather's story and illuminates a way of life in a remote northern wilderness. (softcover 140pgs) **\$14.95**



**Back Country Kitchen** - by Teresa Marrone: A great book that blows the backpacker menu mentality out of the water for wilderness canoe trips. Prepare and truly enjoy delicious, easy to cook high energy "real food" on your next BWCAW/Quetico adventure. (Softcover 208 pgs) **\$14.95**



**Canoe Country Art-"Jackpine" Bob Cary Sketchbook Prints:** Created specifically for the Boundary Waters Journal by a canoe country legend, these prints are sure to add a bit of wilderness to your home, cabin or office. Prints are 11" x 17" and come on heavy semi-gloss paper suitable for framing. Please see our website for thumbnails of all prints. Print subjects include: black bear, lake trout, ruffed grouse, moose, pine marten, smallmouth, snowshoe hare, walleye, timber wolf, whitetail deer, wood duck, and mountain lion. **Single Print \$25, Four Prints \$85 (save \$15), Complete Set of 12 Prints \$250 (Save \$50)**



**The Boundary Waters Journal Magazine Binders:** These attractive blue binders are gold embossed with our name on the front and spine. BWJ articles retain their value as reference for future trips, so protect and organize yours by keeping each year in its own binder. Each binder holds four issues—a whole year of canoe country information and stories. **\$12.00 each, \$10.00 each if ordering four or more binders.**

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