

Week-Long Trip Gives Life-Long Perspective

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ELY, Minn. — How would you like to spend a week without all the comforts of home? But not just way from home, but in the Boundary Waters Canoe area which snuggles in the upper corner of Minnesota and flops over into lower Manitoba? As much as you like the amenities of civilization, a week away from the usual surroundings and services might be refreshing and give you a new perspective on our culture. At least it did me. And provided a memorable experience for me and my (then 12-year-old) son, James.

Making Contact And Getting Started

From others who had spent time in the wild, I knew about an organization called Wilderness Wind. Contact with its board president, Virgil Breneman, Goshen, Indiana, lined us up with a group leaving the base camp in the later part of August. Virgil provided guidance and information from his

years of experience backpacking and from his work with the Mennonite Camping Association. He would help us prepare for the trip and provide transportation from his home in Goshen.

We could hardly wait for our week on the water.

Preparation for the journey included anticipating conditions without our usual features of civilization; shelter, running water, power. We had to choose carefully: Whatever we wanted with us in the canoe had to fit in what Virgil called a Duluth bag: Each of us would get one bag.

After making the size choices, making sure we kept essentials dry was the biggest concern: The canoe might tip over or we might encounter rain. Just in case, everything would be wrapped in at least one layer of plastic: Zip-lock bags for the smaller items; the sleeping bag went into a plastic garbage bag. Our extra clothes were all wool — it would dry quickly, even under primitive conditions.

A second concern was animals: During the short, northern feeding season, food attracts bear and mice. Make sure nothing in your gear smells like food, Virgil advised. A mouse could chew up a sleeping bag or be a unwelcome guest in the middle of the night.

In addition to the basics Virgil suggested, I included a few personal items in my pack — a camera, lenses, extra film and a note pad. With some anxiety, I chose one extra woolen shirt and then wondered: Would the pack be too heavy? Would it all fit in that mysterious Duluth bag? Would I be able to add some of James' load to mine, if needed?

In addition to the creature comforts question, there was a spiritual question: Would I be able to find a new appreciation for God and the creation?

In Goshen, Indiana, James and I met Virgil for the long drive to northern Minnesota. There we also met some of the others who would be our companions in the wilderness: Bruce, Steve; Glenford and Jeremy (another father and son pair). Later, we would meet Cheryl, our Wilderness Wind guide, and Lorne, a Mennonite pastor from Manitoba.

For a canoe trip on the United States side of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, we could have added one more for a maximum of 10 people in the group. Had we planned to cross over into Canada, our group was as large as allowed.

In Minnesota At Last

After the drive through Wisconsin's dairyland and the shipping port of Duluth, we arrived in one of the remote towns of the United States — Ely, Minnesota. With only one main road into the town, it is less than 20 miles from the Canadian border, and about 50 miles from Lake Superior.

We would, like thousands of others, launch our expedition through the gateway to the wilderness. Tim Lehman, founder of Wilderness Wind chuckled when I asked about the difference between his base camp service and the many others in town: "Price," he said.

When urged to explain more, Tim continued by saying that the Wilderness Wind base camp provides equipment at a much lower rate than the commercial establishments. But they don't provide just equipment. All trips are plan-



Few and far between: Fishing late in the season for us was not impressive. Here Steve fillets one of the few fish caught by anyone in our party. Photo by David Hiebert.

ned to provide a safe physical journey and a spiritual experience for each participant. The orientation before going on the water includes spiritual preparation and the guide for each group provides both spiritual and physical guidance for the journey.

A part of the first day of orientation, each person received some standard equipment: compass, stainless steel Sierra cup, spoon, water bottle and Duluth bag.

Community property (things we would all share) such as tents, food, first aid kits, cooking pots, paddles and canoes were also supplied by Wilderness Wind.

On The Water

When we launched on Monday morning, we understood the state conservation people's concern about group size. Though permits for groups are issued on a limited basis several months in advance, we experienced traffic congestion as we attempted to launch our canoes. Three or four groups were also getting their start at the same Boundary Waters entrance that we had chosen.

The concentration of other canoeists led Cheryl to push us

that first day — get as far as possible and put some space between us and the other groups. What she did not expect caused our first trouble: Rain.

As we were sorting out several things that first day, many sensations were rushing at me. Other than an occasional canoeist, there were no signs of civilization.

How did we know where to go? The map and the compass helped us sort it out — a small clearing or a tent on a shore correlated to a campsite on the map. With the compass we could get a general direction. There were no street signs or house numbers. In fact the only sign we saw (later in the trip) pointed some of us in the wrong direction!

For me, other sorting out that had to happen was getting the canoe to go straight. Though I'd had a weekend course in canoeing and water safety, and some practice, the slippery bottom canoe seemed to go its own way. The person in the rear of the canoe provided the steering element, the one ahead provided the most forward power. Virgil was helpful with paddling

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TRAVELLING GRASSHOPPER DESSERT

1 box pistachio pudding
12 sandwich cookies
makes 3 to 4 servings

Mix pudding with water and dried milk following package directions. Crush cookies and line bottom of bowl for a kind of crust (the rigors of a trip may have already prepared your cookies — so you may not have to expend much energy on crushing at this point)

Add pudding mix to bowl.



The leisure to watch a sunset: One of the special evenings during the week-long trip came as we took the entire evening to watch the sun slip slowly down the sky and slide silently past the horizon. Photo by David Hiebert.



Balancing a big load: The relatively small lakes made portages a part of each day's trips. Measured in rods (16.5 ft.) on the map, the longer ones gave us new appreciation for the heritage behind city names, like Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Here 12-year-old James Hiebert demonstrates use of a canoe's shoulder pads. Photo by David Hiebert.

Homestead Notes