



## **Part One - Background**

The experience of a canoe trip in Canada includes an awareness of one of the last great wilderness areas, the history of the people and the land, and the plants and animals that are part of the North Woods. When combined with the skills of wilderness travel and experiences gained, a Canadian canoe trip becomes a special experience that cannot be explained easily to others, and is difficult to photograph. In this primer, I will try to describe some of the background of the land, the people and their history, along with some useful tips for making a wilderness canoe trip all the more fun.



### **The Natural History**

The land that makes up the Quetico Provincial Park in Canada and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in the United States was formed in the last great Ice Age, a little more than 10,000 years ago. The area is part of the Canadian Shield, a massive crust of granite that is the oldest rock formation in North America. During the Ice Age, this land was covered with a thick mass of ice that extended into mid-Ohio (Chillicothe, Ohio was as far south as the ice sheet came). At the end of the ice age, extremely heavy rains caused the ice to retreat. As the ice melted, the river systems of North America were changed, hills were eroded, and valleys were formed. As the ice retreated, it caused lakes to form where they were not before and distributed enormous deposits of rocks and boulders throughout the northern parts of North America. In northern Minnesota and Ontario thousands of lakes were carved out of the Canadian Shield that were filled with rocks and boulders. As the retreat of the ice continued, a complex drainage system was formed that is now canoe country. The thousands of lakes across this area are quite close to each other. Travel from one lake to the next is accomplished by paddling down a stream or carrying one's gear across a short trail that is usually about a quarter mile (sometimes longer).

Little has changed in this large area since the lakes were formed. As the lakes have aged, they have become marshy at the ends where wild rice, lily pads, and beaver are commonly found. Moose are attracted to these marshy areas because food is plentiful. Bass, northern pike and occasionally walleye are found near the marshy areas for the same reason. The presence of the fish brings other predators such as the otter, mink, osprey, bald eagle, great blue heron and raccoon. The marshes are also prime areas for insects, the most well known are the black fly, mosquito, gnat (no-see-um), and deer fly. Out on the open water, the water is clear and clean. Seeing to a depth of 30 - 40 feet is common. All the water on the larger lakes is clean to drink without water treatment. On every lake, at least one pair of loons is to be seen. They are known as the great divers and are the oldest species of birds in North America. Their cries and calls are heard especially at nightfall and early morning. They are called the great divers because they can swim below the surface for over a minute at a time looking for food.



Where loons are spotted, there are usually fish in the area. Once heard in the wild, the call of the loon lives in one's memory forever.

### **The Natural Environment**

Most lakes also have a nest of herring gulls, some call them seagulls. These birds usually nest on isolated rocks in the middle of a lake and are very protective of their nests. A canoe that ventures too close is certain to be attacked by the adult birds from the nest and from other nearby nests. Wise canoe travelers avoid nests of herring gulls. They are expert fliers that feed on fish and fish remains. They can out fly an eagle and will chase an eagle away from any food that the gull prefers to eat. Along with the gulls are several varieties of ducks. Black ducks, mallards, and mergansers are most common but canvasbacks and other more unusual ducks are typical. On the shores of the lakes, kingfishers can be spotted by their high pitched chattering and high speed dives into the water.

Other birds common to canoe country include redwing blackbirds, pileated woodpeckers, and blue jays. A frequent visitor at meal time is the Canadian jay. This bird is as noisy as the blue jay but is very bold. It will attempt to steal food no matter how close people are, which explains the origin of its nickname "camp robber." Throughout canoe country are owls. Much like East Tennessee, the barred owl and great horned owl are most common. However, the grey owl, the snowy owl and the boreal owl are also to be found. Sightings of owls are rare, although I have seen a snowy owl in the middle of the day. Along the trails between campsites nest ruffed grouse and the spruce grouse. Disturbing a ruffed grouse results in an enormous amount of noise and commotion. The spruce

grouse, however, allows people to get extremely close without being disturbed. Some call the spruce grouse the "fool hen" because of this trait. It is easy food for predators but is not regarded as being as tasty as a ruffed grouse by hunters.

The land is populated by deer. On my last trip a six-point buck with velvet on its antlers came within ten feet of our campsite. The animals in the Quetico Park are comparatively tame because hunting is prohibited. Also present are black bear. They are larger than the black bear found in the Smoky Mountains and they have the same interest in eating anything that smells good. All canoeists take every precaution to not attract bears to their campsites. This includes putting all food and garbage in packs that are suspended between two trees away from the tents each night. The woods are also populated with red squirrels that are larger than our grey squirrels. Flying squirrels are night time visitors that make quite a bit of noise when they decide to visit. Chipmunks are sure to be seen. Avoid these seemingly innocent campsite clowns they have a nasty tendency to bite and they like to eat into food packs. Rarely seen, except for their tracks are the martin, bobcat, Canadian lynx, and porcupines.



The fishing in Quetico Park is some of the best in North America. Fish that are common are the walleye, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, and lake trout. Later on I'll try to give some tips on catching these fish. The fish grow slower in canoe country because it gets so cold during the winter months. The fishing is so good because there are very few people who fish the remote lakes in the park. Large fish are usually a part of a canoe trip. The waters are also populated with turtles - some of which are quite large. Frogs are frequent in the marshy areas. In shallow waters, crayfish can be found that provide a neat snack to add to the menu after being boiled.

I have not mentioned snakes. That is because there aren't very many. The weather is so severe during the winter that snakes have a hard time surviving. There are no poisonous snakes and about the only snake I have ever seen is a tiny garter snake that was quick to leave.

The hills in canoe country are covered with trees, mostly pine. The common species are jack pine, Norway pine, white pine, balsam fir, and blue spruce. An unusual tree is the white cedar, once a very sought after tree by loggers. In the marshy areas are white birch and yellow aspen. White birch is a primary food for beaver and was used by American Indians to make canoes. Peeling bark from a live white birch tree is now against the law. All of the previous discussion is an attempt to give you a clue of what the countryside is like. The seemingly endless sequences of lakes, creeks, and marshes that are surrounded by hills with large rock faces make up the Quetico Park. Nearly all of these naturally formed lakes

have islands which are often wonderful campsites. Within the park, no campsites are marked and neither are any of the trails used for getting from one lake to the next. There are no signs, no roads, no buildings, no cars, no logging, no mining, no hunting, no motorboats, and no trapping. Campsites offer nothing beyond a clearing in the trees suitable for pitching a tent or two. Some campsites may have a rock pile used for a fireplace or a burn pit used by previous campers. There are no latrines. Quite simply, man's influence on this wilderness area is hardly noticeable and the Province of Ontario intends to keep it that way.

### **The Historical View**

Given a primitive wilderness setting, such as I have described, how can canoe trips be fun? Before we get to that, consider some of those who have lived there in the past. The area has been home to the Creek Ojibwa, Chippewa, Algonquin, Sioux, and Huron Indians. With the coming of the white man, the area was the home for the voyageurs, who trapped, fished, and explored the area for more than 200 years. The voyageurs were French speaking pioneers, primarily from the shores of the Saint Lawrence River in present day Quebec, Canada. More than any other people, they were responsible for settling the upper Midwest from western Ontario to the Rocky Mountains and from the Arctic Circle to as far south as Illinois and Iowa. Let's consider each of these peoples.

The Chippewa, Algonquin, Sioux and Huron Indians were short time residents of the area, so best as the information we have indicates. The Algonquin and Huron found living further east to be easier and they did not have to deal with the more fearsome Chippewa and Ojibwa. The Sioux were not very successful at living on the water and found their best success on the western prairie. It is interesting that the Sioux later concluded that people that ate fish instead of buffalo were weaker. Perhaps, that is because the Sioux were weaker when they were dependent on fish for food.

The primary residents of the Quetico area were the Ojibwa. They kept the Chippewa to their south and the Cree to their north. The Cree posed few threats in that they were an arctic tribe who preferred the ice and snow to the heat of the south. Their primary meat was caribou that were more abundant in the north. The caribou are now gone from the Quetico; the reasons are not well understood. However, caribou are rarely found in areas where deer are abundant, as they are in the Quetico. The Ojibwa left their markings on the 500-700 feet tall rock faces along the lakes and rivers by painting pictographs. The locations of the pictographs are well known and were painted on the rocks about 1500 A.D. They show primitive pictures of canoes, moose, bear and other images of the life of the Ojibwa. When



you plan your crew's itinerary, you may select your route to include viewing some pictographs.

The voyageurs were the white settlers of the area who came in search of furs. The "Mennes du Nord" were voyageurs who lived year round in the interior of the country trapping and trading with the Indians. They stayed alone in the woods trapping and sought refuge in forts established throughout the interior of the continent by the two major fur companies - The Hudson's Bay Company of England and the North West Company of France. These two companies were in fierce competition with each other. The Hudson's Bay Company had their headquarters on Hudson's Bay where they would exchange furs for goods and supplies. One of their most famous goods was the Hudson's Bay Blanket, still available today. This wool blanket could be purchased for beaver skins. The marks on the side of the Hudson's Bay blanket indicated how many beaver skins were needed to buy the blanket. Costing nearly \$200 today, they are as highly valued today as they were back in the days of the voyageur.

The North West Company was headquartered in Montreal. Each year, they would send a large number of voyageurs from Montreal up the Ottawa River, up the Mattawa River, across Lake Nipissing, down the French River across Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, through the Sault (French for rapids) at Sault St. Marie, and across Lake Superior to Grand Portage at the eastern tip of Minnesota to rendezvous with the "Mennes du Nord." They would leave Montreal as soon as the ice melted in early April and arrive at Grand Portage by the end of June. They would return to Montreal before winter set in. Take a look at a map of Canada and you will see that they covered an amazing amount of territory each year - all of it by canoe.

The purpose for this amazing annual trip was to exchange the goods they left Montreal with for furs brought to Grand Portage by the voyageurs who lived in the continental interior. Voyageurs would paddle 15 to 18 hours a day with five minute breaks each hour for a smoke on their pipes. They covered up to 80 miles a day through rapids, around falls, over heavy waves, and through storms. Their diet was porridge made of beans, corn, and salt pork cooked until it was stiff enough to hold a spoon erect. Few of these voyageurs knew how to swim and the most common cause of death was drowning. They carried packets of goods weighing 90 lbs. each, and no voyageur carried less than two packets. Some carried three at the same time. These fellows were short, over 5'6" disqualified you as a voyageur, and weighed about 150 lbs. Consider a 150 lb. man carrying 270 lbs. over rocks and unmarked trail! Or, consider them carrying their canoe which weighed 600 lbs.

This sounds like a horrible life, but those who were voyageurs loved it and could not imagine any other way to live. Their birchbark canoes were constantly in need of repair from the thrashing that they would take in the heavy waves of the Great Lakes or the rapids on the rivers. They merely fixed their canoes with the



native materials at their disposal and pressed on with the trip. They were great singers and sang songs all the day as they were paddling at the pace of 120 strokes per minute. Indeed, they were a mighty lot of people and surprisingly are all but missing in our history books. But look at a map of the lands they traveled across. To this day, there are French named towns across the Midwest. Nearly all of these were outposts for the voyageurs of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

The "Mennes du Nord" (men of the north) typically paddled solo or with one other voyageur in their canoes. Their canoes were smaller than those that traveled from Montreal and only weighed 300 lbs. They lived a very isolated life being in the wilderness for months at a time. When they went to the outposts for supplies or to trade furs for supplies, they could often pick up some extra supplies by carrying a load from one outpost to the next. They were the forerunners of the Pony Express but did all their traveling by canoe. They were prepared for anything, survived nature's meanest tricks, and boasted of their skills. In the summer, they would travel from the interior to Grand Portage for the rendezvous.

This meeting of the men of the north with the men of the lakes was a festive event that lasted nearly a month each year. After much celebration, song, games, stories, eating, and quarreling between those who lived in the interior with those who had the "easy life" traveling the Great Lakes, they would depart, the men of the lakes to return to Montreal, and the men of the north to return to the interior for the winter.

This unrecognized page of history in North America came to a close toward the end of the 19th century, because the demand for fur had declined and the supply of furs in the interior had also declined. The Hudson's Bay Company bought out the North West Company and the annual trek of the voyageurs stopped. The voyageurs themselves became settlers and farmers, while some returned to the St. Lawrence River Valley to live. In traveling to Quetico, you will have a chance to relive, in a small way, the life of these wilderness adventurers of the past, and maybe understand why they thought being a voyageur was the best sort of life that a man could live.

## **Part Two - Canoeing**

*"In a canoe a man changes, and the life he has lived seems strangely remote. Time is no longer of the moment, for he has become part of space and freedom. What matters is that he is heading down the misty trail of explorers and voyageurs, with a fair wind and a chance for a good camp somewhere ahead. The future is other lakes, countless rapids and the sound of them, portages through muskeg and over the ledges. "*

*Sigurd Olson, 1972*

## The Canoe

Experiencing the lakes of the North Woods is accomplished by canoe, the most versatile and useful watercraft ever devised. The number of shapes, designs, materials, and applications directed toward the canoe is greater than for any other boat known. After canoeing for some time, reverence for the inventors of this most useful of boats is natural. While in the wilderness, reverence for the canoe is essential, because the canoe is the only way to return to wherever you began, or to get to wherever you are going to go.

Those with a limited familiarity with canoes think of the aluminum clad craft most commonly found at Scout camps that weighs about 80 lbs. This canoe is versatile, well suited to flat water, durable, and relatively inexpensive. It is the boat that will be supplied at the Charles L. Sommers National High Adventure Canoe Base. Other choices abound. You may see canoes made of fiberglass, Kevlar, cedar and canvas, plastic, or wood being used by other canoe outfitters and canoe parties. These days, the Kevlar canoe is regarded very highly because it is light (40 lbs.) and strong. Kevlar's disadvantages are its comparative fragility and high cost (at least twice as expensive as aluminum). Neither aluminum nor Kevlar canoes are the best choices for white water canoeing. Consequently, we will not be doing white water canoeing while in Quetico Provincial Park.

Canoes were originally made by digging out the inside of logs. These dugout canoes were heavy, hard to maneuver, unstable, and had a small cargo capacity, but they kept the water out of the boat and were useful. The development of the birchbark canoe by the Iroquois Indians was a major advance. They were lighter, and could be built to any size. They were relatively easy to repair, maneuverable and stable, and had a large cargo capacity. However, they were easily damaged and sometimes prone to leaking. Up until the 19th century, they were the choice when it came to canoes. Canvas, aluminum, rubber, fiberglass, plastic, and Kevlar have changed all that so that now a canoeist has a choice of preferred boats for every application. While the choices may be diverse for an individual who wants to own or rent a canoe, we will be using aluminum canoes. They are rugged as long as some care is taken. If they are in good repair when we depart from canoe base, they will serve us well throughout the experience.

## **The Paddle**

The other important part of a canoe is the paddle. Again the choices and applications are stunning. Each application of canoeing has a best paddle. At the Charles L. Sommers National High Adventure Canoe Base, they provide the "Carlyle" straight shaft canoe paddle. This is the same paddle that is used at Camp Buck Toms, because it is durable and relatively inexpensive. Paddles were originally made of wood and the best ones still are. The choice of woods has changed. In the early days, paddles were made of spruce, ash, or maple. Now

days, paddle blades are made of fir, basswood, cedar, or another light wood that is laminated with fiberglass for strength. The shafts are made of a light wood reinforced with fiberglass to provide strength. Maple and ash are strong but heavy. With the development of fiberglass laminated woods, maple and ash are rarely used because of their weight. Spruce is too weak when compared to fiberglass reinforced fir or fruitwood. Naturally, these crafted canoe paddles are more expensive than the "Carlyle" paddle.

Canoe paddles have different grips and many are now available with bent shafts. The old-time palm grip of canoe paddles has been supplemented with the T-grip. For white water paddling, the T-grip is the preferred choice. For flatwater paddling, the choice depends on which type is more comfortable. The bent shaft paddle is a relatively new idea in paddle design that is used by flatwater paddlers. The paddle blade is bent forward so the blade tends to press down on the water at the beginning of the stroke, and the blade is nearly vertical at the end of the stroke. The idea is a bent shaft paddle allows the paddler to expend less effort in lifting water at the end of the stroke and apply more effort at the beginning of a stroke to move the boat forward. The increase in efficiency is valued on long trips. However, the bent shaft paddle requires significant paddling skill and is not considered a good choice for beginner or intermediate paddlers. You can bring your own paddle, if you have one, but there is no need for you to buy a paddle for the trip.

### **The Personal Floatation Device (PFD)**

Canoeing requires one other important piece of equipment, a personal floatation device (PFD), or life-vest. Venturing onto a lake without a PFD is fundamentally stupid. Lake waters, especially in Canada, can be cold, which reduces the best of swimmers to non-swimmers. On one lake in the Canadian wilderness stands a memorial to a member of the Canadian Olympic swim team who drowned after a storm came up while he was fishing without a PFD. He drowned even though he was less than 400 yds. from shore. As a result, you will be required to have a properly worn PFD on you whenever you get in a canoe. Styles of PFDs are nearly as varied as canoes and paddles. The "Type III" PFD is required for canoeing (This is not the "May West" style used at Camp Buck Toms, which is a "Type 11" PFD). At Charles L. Sommers, they provide a PFD manufactured by Stearns. It is fully adjustable and is comfortable. If you happen to own a "Type III" PFD that you like, you can take it along, but there is no need to buy one for yourself for the trip.

### **Paddle Strokes**

Once in a canoe, with a paddle and a PFD, the primary task is to make the canoe go where it is supposed to go. In Canoeing Merit Badge, you probably learned to paddle with an empty canoe (no gear and only two paddlers). At Charles L.

Sommers, you will have the canoe loaded with 160 lbs. of gear and an additional passenger, totaling about 300 lbs. of additional weight. Naturally, the canoe will be much lower in the water and more difficult to maneuver. To paddle a canoe that is lower in the water requires more skill in paddling. When out in open water with winds, the waves on the water can make paddling very difficult. To respond to the challenge of the wilderness requires that every participant do his best to become as skilled as possible in paddling. To be a skilled paddler is not easy and can become a lifelong pursuit. As a minimum, you need to become skilled in using the forward stroke and the J-stroke. These two strokes need to be mastered by every participant.

The forward stroke is the primary stroke for the bow paddler (see figures attached). More than 95% of a bow paddler's strokes are forward strokes on flat water. The forward stroke is used by the stern paddler for about 75% of his strokes. The remaining 25% of the strokes by the stern paddler are steering strokes, to keep the boat going straight. Done correctly, a canoeist can paddle for hours at a time and not get tired. Done incorrectly, a canoeist is exhausted in a few hours. There is no trick, but much practice is required.

The first step is to realize that the strongest muscles on the body are on your back - these are the muscles you want to paddle with. If you paddle with your arms, they will fatigue in no time. So how do you use your back to move a paddle? It's rather complicated, but you need to know the answer to the question if you want to be able to paddle for any length of time. I'll try to explain what it takes in order to have the necessary technique to be an efficient paddler.

Paddling technique generally involves efficiency in three separate areas, which are;

#### ✿ Body Movement

##### ◆ Placement of the Paddle in the Water

##### ◆ Placement of the Boat on the Water

Efficient body movement means learning to use the larger muscles of the body to move the boat. In paddling, the arms are connectors to the real source of power which is the torso. The torso is your upper body including your chest, back, and shoulders. The rotation of the torso around the spine provides the power for all strokes rather than the push-pull motion of the arms. The power from the torso is transferred to the boat through the contact points of the feet, knees, and hips with the canoe. That is why competitive paddlers always kneel in the canoe so as to increase the contact with the canoe and the body. The use of the whole body, which emphasizes the larger muscle groups of the shoulders, back, and thighs, gives the paddler more energy to accomplish paddling strokes. The paddler's energy is focused tiring movements are minimized, and paddling is more

enjoyable. The point here is to use rotation of the torso to move the paddle. Looking at an efficient paddler from shore, you would see the paddle not really moving at all - it's the boat that moves, not the paddle. That's hard to tell when you are in the boat, but that is what really happens, because the resistance to movement by the paddle is greater than the resistance to movement by the boat. However, the paddle must be placed in the water correctly for the paddle stroke to be efficient. The correct entry angle for the paddle into the water is with the paddle shaft being vertical, and with the blade perpendicular to the water. The shaft should remain as vertical as possible throughout the stroke, and parallel to the side of the canoe throughout the stroke. To do this, your left and right hands need to stay in the same vertical plane at all times. Naturally, some variation in the angle of the paddle shaft happens, but the more vertical the paddle shaft, the more efficient the stroke. To help make the entry angle close to vertical, the paddle should enter the water close to the gunwale of the boat. Placing the paddle in the water at some distance from the gunwale reduces the effectiveness of each stroke, but the paddler expends the same amount of energy. As a result, poor paddle placement in the water leads to weak paddle strokes and tired paddlers.

The last part of efficient paddling is proper placement of the boat in the water. This means keeping the boat headed in the correct direction. The correct direction is not necessarily a straight line from where you are to where you want to go. Waves on the water from the wind or just the wind itself modifies the idea of a straight line. To get an idea of what the proper direction is between two places takes experience, you will gain this experience in the wilderness. Once the correct direction is set, the idea is to stay on course. Weaving or changing directions can increase the amount of paddling necessary to get from one place to another by a substantial amount, making for tired paddlers. While the primary responsibility for steering is with the stern paddler, the bow paddler contributes when sharp turning or technical maneuvers are required, such as, landing at a portage or heavy waves.

### [The Forward Stroke](#)

As I mentioned earlier, the forward stroke is the stroke used most commonly by paddlers in both the bow and stern. To accomplish the forward stroke, hold the paddle by the grip and the shaft, lean forward, dip the full length of the blade vertically into the water, close to the gunwale. Now, rotate the torso about the spine so as to move the paddle toward the stern of the boat. As this rotation occurs, the lean of your torso shifts toward the stern of the boat. Throughout the motion, the paddle should be kept vertical and close to the gunwale of the boat. As the paddle comes out of the water, flip the blade sideways, or feather it, so it will cut through the wind as you swing it forward to begin the next stroke. The forward stroke is the same if you are in the bow or stern of the boat. In the stern of the boat, the forward stroke will tend to rotate the boat, because the stroke moves toward the end of the boat rather than toward the center. Strokes that end

at the ends of the boat tend to rotate the boat, while strokes that end at the center of the boat tend to keep the boat going straight. To correct for this effect, the stern paddler must use a steering stroke to maintain the proper position of the boat on the water.

The most commonly used stroke for steering by the stern paddler is the J-stroke. An efficient pair of paddlers, who work well together, will cause the stern paddler to use the J-stroke on every third or fourth stroke on flat water. An alternative to the J-stroke is the hut stroke. The hut stroke has the bow and stern paddlers using the forward stroke for all strokes, but changing sides every four to five strokes on the command of "hut." The hut stroke is an advanced stroke that requires extremely good teamwork to be done efficiently. Do not consider the hut stroke until the J-stroke is mastered, and you are well developed as a team of bow and stern paddlers.

### [The J-Stroke](#)

Doing the J-stroke correctly will make steering easy and will not tire the stern paddler. Done incorrectly, both the bow and stern paddlers will waste their energy and have difficulty maintaining a straight course on the water. The J-stroke begins just like the forward stroke but as the paddle comes even with the hip of the stern paddler, the paddle is rotated so that the edge of the blade closest to the boat is turned toward the back of the boat. This turning of the paddle results in the thumb of the hand on the grip being turned down - which is uncomfortable at first. Once the paddle is turned, so that the blade is parallel to the gunwale, the blade is moved away from the boat by rocking the shaft of the paddle against the gunwale. The amount of this motion is dependent on the water conditions, but it is done only to the extent necessary to reestablish the proper direction of the boat. As you would expect, this stroke takes some practice before a paddler is efficient in its execution.

Other paddling strokes that are used for steering are the sweep, backstroke, drawstroke and prystroke. They can be used by the bow and stern paddlers. Done efficiently, the canoe seems to effortlessly move across and around the water. Done incorrectly, both paddlers seem to be at war with the canoe, the canoe barely moves across the water, and the canoe seems to collide with every object in sight. All of these strokes are accomplished with the bow and stern paddlers paddling on opposite sides of the boat. Changing sides from time to time allows the paddlers to work different muscles and not tire so quickly. The key is to have the bow and stern paddler work together as a team in moving the canoe. At first, this is a challenge, but is easily overcome if the two paddlers are intent on being efficient.

As a final note, not all canoeists are familiar with the importance of body rotation in paddling. You will have to trust me that it works the best. After you learn to paddle with body rotation, you will always paddle with body rotation, because it

is easier and more effective. Watch any competitive paddler in either a canoe or a kayak - they all use body rotation BIG TIME as they paddle.

## **Portaging a Canoe**

There is more to canoeing in the wilderness than simply paddling. Portaging, loading and unloading a canoe are other important skills that are needed for enjoyable wilderness travel. Portaging is the skill of transporting the canoe and its contents from one lake to the next over a trail: Portaging is not fun or easy. However, if you know what you are doing, it can be done quickly and you can be back on the water again where things are more pleasant. Properly loading and unloading a canoe isn't that tough, but done incorrectly things get really tough real fast. I will try to explain a little of what is involved in each of these skills.

Anyone who enjoys portaging is either a liar or a fool. The first step in portaging after unloading the boat is to get things organized. If you are properly packed, you will have two 80 lb. packs, the canoe, and three paddles to take across the portage. In some boats, other loose "stuff" seems to appear that needs to be portaged as well. This "stuff," such as cameras, cups, maps, fishing gear, etc., should be minimized to as close to nothing as possible. Tying "stuff" onto the boat or keeping it in the packs is much better. Back to where portaging begins, the two packs, the three paddles, and any "stuff" are handled by two of the paddlers in the boat. Usually, this is accomplished by the two designated to carry the packs helping each other get loaded with their respective gear. That leaves one paddler to carry the canoe. Each canoe is outfitted with a yoke. This is a rather neat device that takes the place of the center thwart in the canoe. The yoke has two pads mounted to a bar at the balance point of the canoe. An 80 lb. canoe can be flipped over by one person and hoisted onto his shoulders. Once upside down and on the shoulders, the balance of the canoe is maintained by extending the arms forward on the gunwales of the boat. This is all easier said than done. For most boys, getting the canoe on the shoulders of the paddler designated to carry the canoe is done by having two people flip the canoe over. One of the paddlers holds the bow end of the canoe up in the air with the tip of the stern end on the ground. The paddler carrying the canoe gets underneath the canoe and gets comfortable in the yoke. The holder releases the boat and then goes after the packs.

All this will be made clearer at the training event. But the basic idea of having each paddler in a boat carry either a pack or the canoe leads to crossing a portage in one pass. If a crew is not well organized, some of the members of the boat will have to return after the first pass to get what is left. This means that the portage will take three times as long (think about why this is true). The advantage of single portaging over double portaging is that it maximizes the time spent on the water and minimizes the time spent portaging. Since portaging is unpleasant, a plan to minimize time on the portage makes the wilderness trip all the more fun. Once loaded with packs, paddles, "stuff," and canoe, the party takes off on the

trail to the next lake.

Most portages do not have large areas to get packs and the canoe on the shoulders of each of the paddlers. Since each crew will be made up of three boats, working together as a crew is necessary to get on the trail quickly. Portages are also areas where the mosquitoes abound. The mosquitoes tend to hurry people along. Traveling across a portage is sometimes difficult. The terrain may be steep or swampy. This makes the walking hard, especially with 80 lbs. on your back. Resting while carrying a pack is easy to understand, but if you take the pack off your back, getting it back on your back is no simple task. Resting while carrying a canoe is accomplished by balancing the bow on a branch of a tree and putting the stern on the ground. Eventually, the other side of the portage appears and the next lake is always a welcome sight to the weary. At the end of the portage, the fellows carrying the packs take them off their backs, but the fellow with the canoe keeps on walking right into the lake. This can be difficult because most lakes have rocks on the bottom that make the footing treacherous. Once into the lake at about knee depth, the canoe is turned right side up and GENTLY PLACED ON THE WATER. I emphasize "gently placed" because even though aluminum canoes are rugged, no sane wilderness traveler wants his canoe to be damaged by handling it roughly. I also emphasize "on the water" because the rocks that are found near a portage in the shallow water sometimes stick out of the water. Putting a canoe down on rocks risks damaging the canoe.

As a final note about portaging, it is best to lather up with mosquito repellent prior to landing at a portage. This saves time in the commotion that is typical in getting off the water and on the trail. Portages all have different personalities. Some start out easy and get difficult, some are easy, some are difficult, some start difficult and get easy. Most portages have some swampy areas on them. That is where mosquitoes are unbelievable. Failure to lather up with mosquito repellent prior to taking off on the portage can lead to you becoming lunchmeat for insects. If you lather up with repellent beforehand, the bugs are merely a nuisance.

### **Loading and Unloading a Canoe**

Loading the canoe is done on the water. This means you have to wade into the lake and put the packs into the boat, but not into the lake. One pack is placed toward the stern and the other is placed toward the bow so as to keep the load balanced. The packs also have to be placed in the center of the boat so the boat is balanced side to side. Once the packs, paddles and stuff are in the boat, the paddlers get in one at a time with one paddler steadying the boat at all times. The bow man usually enters first by walking along the center of the boat, keeping his weight low, holding onto the gunwales, and crawling over the packs. The garbage man gets in next and sits down on the bottom of the canoe, between the two packs, making himself comfortable for the free ride across the lake. Finally, the stern paddler pushes the canoe into the main body of the lake while

climbing aboard. This is instinctive after a few portages, but pretty ragged on the first few portages.

Unloading the boat is the reverse process. The bow paddler usually gets out of the boat first and steadies the boat in knee deep water. Then the garbage man gets out by walking toward the bow and exiting. Finally, the stern paddler gets out. The packs, paddles and stuff are removed from the boat, hopefully, without dipping them in the lake. Once the boat is emptied of its contents, the boat is brought ashore. By doing it this way, the bottom of the boat doesn't even get scratched - this is good. Scraping the boat along the bottom while loading or unloading is merely inviting disaster.

In reading over this discussion of canoeing, to those that are not familiar with canoeing, it could sound like an impossible task to be expert at canoeing. In a very real sense this is correct. To be expert at canoeing takes an enormous amount of practice and experience. Literally, a lifetime of practice and experience is needed to be an expert. However, wilderness trips have been accomplished for hundreds of years by those who are less than expert, and I am one of them - even though I have spent more than two months canoeing in the Quetico area. Appreciate the difficulty in canoeing and work toward becoming an expert. If you do, you will long to return to canoe country regularly to better develop your skills and enjoy the marvels of the wilderness. In the next parts, I will get to the matters of fishing, packing, and canoe camping. Much of each of these skills is part of getting to First Class, but there are special skills that are appropriate for canoeing.

### **Part Three - Fishing**

A fisherman was asked after a day of fishing, "Was the fishing good?" He replied, "The fishing is always good, especially when you catch fish." This applies to all fishing anywhere, anytime, but is even more true in canoe country, where the fishing is some of the best in North America. In the case of canoe country, not only is the fishing good, but catching fish, and sometimes big fish, is a reasonable expectation.

A wilderness trip in canoe country starts early in the morning just as the sun rises. Breakfast is prepared and the campsite is cleaned up as preparations are made for the day. On most days, the day includes several miles of canoeing with some portaging, only to find a new campsite toward the late afternoon. The hours between the end of a day's travel and supper are consumed by setting up camp for the night and enjoying what is known as "kickback time." A few hours each day are spent enjoying the wilderness, which is one of the special treats of a wilderness adventure. Oftentimes, these hours can be spent trying to catch fish for supper. Your trip in the wilderness may include a layover day where your crew spends a day at the same campsite and elects not to travel. These days are wonderful for fishing. Some crews elect to fish while they are traveling. Fishing

while canoeing tends to slow down travel, and the number of fish caught are usually less than if the crew is trying to fish only. The possibilities for fishing are endless, and fishing is high on the list of things to do for many wilderness travelers.

### **Fishing Licenses**

Fishing in Canada requires an Ontario fishing license. Licenses are available for purchase at the Quetico Park Ranger Station on the Canadian border. All crews are required to stop there to pay usage fees for the park and fishing licenses can be purchased at that time. The cost for a license is not that high, but it always changes at the last minute. In 1995, the cost was \$4.00 Canadian for youth under the age of 18, providing one adult in the crew has a fishing license. If a youth under the age of 18 is accompanied by an adult who has a fishing license, the youth does not require a license. Adult licenses are \$15.00 Canadian for a 7-day non-resident conservation license (reduced limit), and \$30.00 Canadian for a 7-day non-resident license with no limit. More will be available later on the costs for a license. Do not fish if you do not have a license. If you are caught without a license in Ontario, the penalties are extremely severe and include mandatory jail time. All fishing in Quetico Provincial Park is done on artificial lures, except for the addition of leeches.

### **Fishing in Canoe Country**

The waters of the Quetico have the gamefish of Northern pike, walleye, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and lake trout. When caught and prepared for supper, they are a delight. Opinions differ as to which fish is the best to eat. I like walleye the best, but there are strongly held views that trout and bass are the best. Most people agree that pike are not the best of the four gamefish for eating, but they are the best fighting fish to be found in canoe country with their sharp teeth that easily bite through monofilament line. My suggestion is not to get hung up on which fish is the best. Enjoy them all. Whatever the fish, they are excellent eating, and they are a terrific addition to supper. I have never heard of leftover fish in the wilderness.

The first thing to understand about fishing in canoe country is the nature of the waters. Next to most of the massive outcrops of granite are deep pools. Across any lake can be found ledges and associated pools. Except in the swampy areas near the edges of lakes, the bottoms of the lakes are covered with rocks. These rocks, some big and some small, have astounding appetites for fishing lures. Maps of the bottoms of the lakes, fish finders, and other high tech fishing equipment are not at hand. Fishing is much more like the old sport that once was, and not the hunt that is undertaken with today's fishing from bass boats and the like. Figuring out where the fish might be is not easy, and some keen observation is required. With the waters as clear as they are, you can get some idea of what the waters look like. Some scouting of the waters is often useful in

figuring out how to fish them. In the following paragraphs, I will try to discuss how the various types of fish are caught, using my experiences and some of the writings that I have accumulated.

## **Northern Pike**

Pike inhabit most of the lakes in canoe country. Higher than average numbers are typically present in the dark-stained bog drainage lakes (few campsites are on these lakes). Larger lakes have smaller numbers, but the fish are often larger. Typical of this type of lake is Basswood Lake in the southern part of Quetico. Pike prefer cooler water and often are found at depth, but they rise to the surface to feed, especially around sunset where they can be seen skimming along the top water with their mouth open looking for food. Pike feed on fish. Any kind of fish is tasty as far as they are concerned. Hence, the best baits are fish-like plugs such as Rapala or Rebel that are cast or trolled near the surface at feeding times. Large spoons with a seductive side-to-side wobble are popular pike lures. The other popular lure is the bass-type spinner bait. During the time we will be there, oversized spinner baits with chartreuse or fire-orange bodies with a silver blade are suggested.

Lures need to be tied to a steel leader. Otherwise, pike will bite through the line. Lures should be cast in shallow weedy waters at two to three feet. Retrieve the bait so that it barely ripples the surface, forming a tiny V behind the lure. Once pike strike a plug and the hook is set, they put up a long, powerful fight that requires setting the drag and keeping tension on the line. They will try to go under a canoe, which can lead to breaking of the line. A net is really helpful in getting a fish in the boat, but a net is very cumbersome in canoe travel. If a pike is netted, it will flop around in the net and hopelessly entangle itself in the net. Pike have Y-bones like catfish and are extremely difficult to fillet without having a host of bones. The easier way to prepare pike is to prepare them as fish steaks and carefully weed out the Y-bones that extend laterally from the backbone.

## **Lake Trout**

These fish are tasty, but when they are hooked, they are not much in the way of providing a fight. My own long time favorite lure for them is the red-eye, which is a silver spoon with two red eyes toward the head of the spoon. The trout tend to get snagged by this lure more than they strike the lure, so care in maintaining line tension is important. Lake trout prefer cold water. By the end of July, the majority of them will be at a depth of 50-75 ft. To get to them, you need weight and heavy line. This works as long as you are sure the water is really deep - otherwise you will lose your lure to the rocks. [Trolling](#) is best because it gives some action to the lure. Too much speed and the lure won't stay down. The alleged hot bait for lakers is a 3/4-ounce silver/blue Cicada, a metal vibrating lure. This lure is supposed to be fished on a tight line, pumping the rod with

short wrist flicks to get the bait to dance, pausing between pumps with a few jiggles. Overworking the bait is not recommended. Trout fillet nicely and taste great. There are some native trout to be caught. These fish are distinguished by their flesh being pink. Some say they taste better than the trout with white flesh. I think they both taste great.

## **Walleye**

Walleye are very popular these days in canoe country, probably because they taste great. They do not put up much of a fight, until they are really close to the boat. The boat seems to get them excited. Having a loose line as a hooked fish nears the boat leads to a lost fish. They are a mid-depth fish (25 ft) that are best caught while trolling along rock ledges or rock faces. Trolling should be done at a slow, steady speed, just fast enough to give the lure some action. Once hooked, walleye feel like a snag - then they will move around a bit giving you a clue that you have a fish. You can still-fish for walleye using a steady retrieve. Walleye like to come up to the bait, so fishing along ledges is often the most productive. For walleye, being at the right depth is really important. Once somebody finds the depth that the fish are at, many more can be caught, because they tend to be in schools.

The hottest bait for walleye is a leech added to a lure. Leeches are ugly critters encountered on portages, in and around beaver ponds, or other boggy areas. When added to a lead head jiggle bait, great success is reported. If you can find the depth that the fish are at, bobbers are useful. Walleye are notoriously selective in striking bait. Patience is sometimes the best virtue. Casting works for walleyes, if the fish are in water that is 15 ft. or less. Crank baits such as float-diving lipped models work well. Perch or crayfish colors are best. Jig fishing is done by some, but is best left for the cooler spring and fall months. Some artificial lures that are popular are: lead head jiggle baits in yellow, white, or chartreuse, a pumpkin colored Berkeley Power-Grub (scent impregnated), perch Wally Diver, Mann's 10+ Deep Diver, Bagley Bitty B. Rebel thin minnow, and Rapala minnow. Walleye are also easily filleted. A special bonus with the walleye is the cheek, an oyster-sized chunk of meat behind the eye socket that is coveted by some.

## **Bass**

Bass fishing has become a fine art in the Southland and all skills, tricks, lures and techniques are equally as valuable in canoe country. Again, leeches are especially popular when put on a lead head. Putting a leech on a 3/8 oz. lead head with a slip bobber and dragging it along is an easy way to catch a bass. For fishing reefs in 15 ft. of water or less, the Rebel Deep Wee R or Magnum Wiggle Wart are popular, particularly in metallic or crayfish finishes. For shallower water, the Rat-L-Trap or Rattlin' Rap or Countdown Rapala are popular. Casting with these

plugs should be done with a steady retrieve. You can try other sorts of retrieves, but the steady retrieve seems to be the most effective. The bass in canoe country are a bit less lively than their southern cousins, but they taste just as good, if not better, given the pristine waters they grow up in.

## **Fishing Rods and Tackle**

So there is a quick review of the top four gamefish and some tips on catching them. However, you need to consider your fishing gear. First, consider your rod. A 5 1/2 to 6 1/2 foot rod is fine. If the rod is not a backpacking rod that breaks down into a small case, you could have a problem with damage to the rod while traveling. Have some way to protect your rod from damage. Full length rod cases can be tied to the canoe, but just having a loose rod tied to the canoe is asking for trouble. You will also need some way to protect your reel from damage while it is in your pack. A reel crushed within a pack tends to not perform very well. For your reel, six to eight pound test line is the most common. If you haven't used your reel in a while, go down to the fishing store and get it rewound with some new line - unless you like dealing with tangled line all the time. Practice your fishing knots. See the [attached drawing](#) for a good fishing knot. Tying fishing knots in a canoe is a bit more challenging than on land. If you are not good with your knots on land, you will spend a lot of time tying knots, lose several lures, and may lose your best fish. Attached is a drawing of some rigging that seems to be effective for catching fish.

As a final note about fishing, select the lures, sinkers, bobbers, stringers, nets, pliers, leaders, hooks, fillet knives, etc. carefully. Unlike a day on the lake, you can't bring all of the fishing gear you can get your hands on. Work together with your crew. You won't need a net for every crew member or eight sets of pliers or eight stringers, or 15 lbs. of sinkers. By working together, you can have enough fishing gear for all, without having your valuable pack space consumed with fishing gear. If this trip to Canada is your first experience fishing, don't worry. In fishing, beginners' luck happens. You could have a spectacular week fishing. If all these names for lures and other fishing terms are new to you, but you want to fish, don't let it bother you. Go to a good fishing store and explain your situation. They will be glad to help.

Summarizing, fishing is a fun thing to do in the wilderness. To many, it is the reason that they are going to the wilderness. To others, they can take it or leave it. For those who do not like to fish, there are plenty of other things to see, do, think about, and enjoy in the wilderness. However, you will find it hard to resist a serving of fish at supper time. In the next part, I hope to cover canoe camping and packing. In so doing, many of the equipment needs will become clear, and the temptation to overpack will, hopefully, be reduced.

## Part Four- Canoe Camping

Canoe camping in the wilderness is the ultimate in living in the outdoors. Whatever gear you have with you is all you will have, except for your skill in using the natural resources available to you. The waters you paddle across will separate you from civilization. With the others in your crew, you will experience the patrol method as Baden Powell conceived it in the first days of Boy Scouts. Canoe camping in the wilderness is unlike any other camping experience, because it is made up of only you, your crew, your gear, and nature. You might think that canoe camping is nothing more than camping with a different twist. If that is as far as you and your crew get with canoe camping, you will be missing one of the great joys of going to the wilderness, much like the old adage, "Not being able to see the forest for the trees." I am going to try to give you a flavor of what canoe camping in the wilderness is all about and why I feel so motivated to do it over and over again.

To start with, all the foods necessary to make an extended stay in the wilderness must be in the boats at the time of departure. There are no stores or outposts and fish cannot be guaranteed to jump at the bait presented to them. This means that after the first day or so, fresh foods are not part of the menu formally. However, if you are good at wilderness camping, know your plants, and can catch fish, all sorts of delicacies are available. Wild blueberries and raspberries are just delicious. Wild rice has a really terrific flavor. Cattail root adds a different flavor to starchy foods. Of course, fish are always welcome. Crayfish are excellent, especially if you have some butter and spices. These foods and plenty more can make the menu, but only if you recognize them and know what to do with them when you see them. The Boy Scout Handbook and Fieldbook have a great deal of information on edible plants. Knowing what is in these resources can make eating all the better.

In the wilderness, there are no outside distractions. What is outside is your entertainment and not a distraction. Wildlife is there but doesn't jump out in front of you on command. Again, you have to know the signs to look for. The aurora borealis (Northern Lights) is nature's grandest light show - but only if you look for it at the right time and the right place. Bald eagle nests are easy to spot, providing you know what they look like and where they are likely to be. Bear sign, moose sign, deer sign, and beaver sign are abundant, providing you know what to look for. There are no signs or friendly guides to tell you where or when to look, because it is all wilderness.

Each campsite is different. At some campsites, you might be able to sleep on a thick bed of lichen - that makes for comfortable sleeping. However, you need to know how to stake out a tent on solid rock so that it can withstand a heavy wind. At a different campsite, you might have a sandy beach with tenting on solid rock. A third campsite might be in the shade of tall pines with a thick bed of pine needles, but no easy place to land or store canoes. There are no tables, tent platforms, bolos, wash stands, fire rings,

shelters, or benches at campsites. The shortcomings of campsites can be overcome easily, or they can make camping unpleasant. It all depends on how skilled you and your crew are at canoe camping. When you can overcome the shortcomings of a campsite, with what you have, and enjoy the features of a campsite, then you can feel comfortable that you have become truly skilled in canoe camping.

### **A Typical Day of Canoe Camping**

Let's start from the beginning, the moment that the crew has identified a campsite for a night. The first thing to do is to check out the campsite to see if there is enough room for two, four-man tents and a clear spot for the interpreter to sleep. Having enough room for tents, the next item to check on is whether there is a spot suitable for setting up a kitchen. Assume that the first site has all these essential features. If it doesn't, you move onto the next site. The next step is to unload the canoes and immediately bring one canoe into the campsite in the area to be used as a kitchen. The canoe is turned upside down, leveled, and supported with logs and rocks. *Voila*, a table is made and the food packs are brought into the kitchen area. The next thing to happen is to unpack the tents and set them up. The quartermaster for the crew opens the gear pack (called the kettle pack) containing the tents and takes them out, and the crew divides itself so that the tents are set up quickly. Next, the personal gear packs are unloaded of sleeping bags and sleeping pads, and they are placed in the tents. Once this is done, the mosquito net is zipped tight.

The cooks for the crew set up the kitchen stoves and cooking gear for supper while a few other members of the crew set up the rigging for the bear bag to be lofted into the trees (The bear bag is the food pack arrangement for lifting the food packs into the trees and out of the reach of bears). With a good crew, all these setup chores are done quickly and without a great deal of fussing - in fact, largely in silence, with each crew member working as fast as possible. Now, it is "kickback time." This is time to fish, take pictures, check out the campsite area for blueberries and raspberries, relax, write the events of the day in your trip log, swim, dry out your wet gear, or enjoy the wilderness in whatever way seems natural.

Somewhere around 5:00, the cooks start supper. After supper is prepared, the food is blessed and fine food is enjoyed by all, including a cooked desert. The cleanup crew members do the dishes and the food packs are hoisted into the trees using the bear bag gear that was set up earlier by other crew members. Now, there is time for some more fishing, swapping tales, viewing the sites, and enjoying the wilderness, including a Canadian sunset. At sunset, the mosquitoes come out in force. Many choose to go to sleep depending on how hard the travel was that day. Some may plan to arise later for the Northern Lights. However it goes; the day ends and sleep begins.

At the crack of dawn, the crew arises, food is retrieved from the bear bag rig, and breakfast is prepared by the cooks. Meanwhile, the others are packing up the personal packs, taking down the tents, and getting ready to travel for the day that is ahead. The breakfast food is blessed and enjoyed by all, including a warm drink to knock off the chill in the morning air. Dishes are done by the crew members assigned to cleanup, and the campsite takedown is completed, including a thorough cleanup of the campsite by the rest of the crew. All garbage is packed out, including any trash that may have been left by previous crews. The boats are loaded up and the travel for the day begins.

### **Crew Leadership and Organization**

All that I have described is easy, and gets done in a relatively short amount of time when a crew works together, enabling a crew to leave by 8:00 in the morning. Done correctly, the canoe in the kitchen area provides a spacious surface for preparing foods and cleaning up. Every person has a place to sit, when it comes to eating, and a comfortable place to sleep the night. Several hours are available for resting and enjoying the wilderness, and all the crew members are ready for the next day of traveling. With each member of the crew having a job for the day, the work load is shared and not too burdensome to any individual. The crew leader makes sure that everything gets done and pitches in to help wherever needed. You might be thinking you have heard something like this before, but never have had any campout go as smoothly as I have described. As I said at the beginning, canoe camping is a different experience in camping.

To make wilderness camps work like I have described, some basic organization and an understanding of the tasks to be accomplished are required, with every crew member doing his job. Each crew has a crew leader. In some crews, the crew leader may be the crew leader for the entire trip. In other crews, the crew leader is a rotating job, so that each crew member gets a chance at being the crew leader. Additional positions in the crew are cook, cooks' assistant, quartermaster, cleanup, and cleanup assistant. In all crews, these jobs are rotated each day so no crew member has to do the same job for the entire trip. As you all know, just having a title doesn't mean that an individual does the job. This is the part of canoe camping that is totally different. In the wilderness, if someone doesn't do their job, the whole crew suffers. You may have heard this before from your Scoutmaster some time or another, but in the wilderness it is a fact. Remember, in the wilderness the only things you have with you are you, your crew, your gear, and nature.

Now the sticky part, how do you make what I have described happen? I hope you want to know the answer to this question, because it makes the difference between a sensational experience and a good experience. My experiences have all been sensational and I would rather they continue to be that way. The answer to

the question begins at the training weekend when your crew first gets a chance to get together. When you meet those in your crew, you have to be part of a crew decision to make your crew a crew that will make canoe camping work the way that I described earlier. If you and your crew agree, you will have made a group decision to have a sensational experience in Canada, and furthermore, if you stick with your agreement, you will have a sensational experience in Canada.

The next steps toward making it happen are for you to work on your camping skills, so that you are skilled in all that you need to do. These skills are all part of First Class, but you may need to work on your skills to make sure that they are as good as they can be. The skills you need to have are, cooking, campsite set-up, campsite takedown, stoves and their use, fires and their use, personal and camp cleanliness, nature, map and compass, first aid, and swimming. In a nutshell, this means you need to know your scoutcraft, and you need to be willing to work together with everyone else as a crew. For every participant, this is a challenge of the highest order, that is why it's called high adventure. In the discussion that follows, I will not discuss all of these skills, but I will highlight a few of them deserving your special attention.

### **Cooking in Canoe Country**

Cooking in the wilderness can be done with a fire or stoves. In the middle of summer, things can be dry, which results in a fire ban placed on all visitors to Quetico Park. To practice low-impact camping, stoves are used for cooking. The stoves that are most commonly used are the Coleman Peak I stoves, because of their durability and capability to operate over a broad range of heating. Knowing how to light, operate, and fill a Peak I stove is useful. The rules for the safe use of a Peak 1 stove are especially important to know. A menu for a wilderness trip at canoe base is attached, and ours will probably be similar. Most of the meals that need to be cooked are one pot meals with dried ingredients. The one thing that is not included on the menu is fish. You ought to know how to clean, prepare and cook fish. Fish is one of those foods that if prepared correctly is excellent. However, if fish is undercooked or overcooked, it is dreadful. A good idea is to practice before you leave. Learning to clean, prepare, and cook fish in the kitchen is much easier than in the wilderness. As a postscript on fish - he who catches the fish gets to clean the fish!

### **Campsite Selection**

Selecting campsites, setting up camp, and taking camp down is supposed to be something that all are skilled at. The most difficult part is the selection of campsites. Most campsites are adequate, but a few are not. Making that judgement is important, but you can't be too picky. This is one of those decisions that is best made by more than one person, so that several people get a chance to contribute to the decision. What you need to know are the important features for

a suitable campsite so that you can make positive contributions to the decision. A review of the Boy Scout Handbook and Fieldbook along with the training weekend will be helpful for you to be ready to be part of the decision making.

### **Personal and Camp Cleanliness**

When it comes to personal cleanliness that is a matter deserving attention. Taking care of personal cleanliness is your own responsibility. If not done with care, you might cause yourself unnecessary discomfort. You will be required to wear your boots at all times in the water. This requirement is imposed to reduce the possibility of ankle injuries, which used to be a major problem with the rocky bottoms of the lakes. With the landing and loading of canoes each day, along with portaging, you will have wet boots for the entire trip.

Failing to take care of your feet at the end of a day's travel could lead to blisters or rashes that would make walking unpleasant. Two things need to be kept in mind. First, is the proper selection of socks. One pair of polypropylene liner socks with a pair of wool socks seem to work the best. At the end of a day of travel, you can take off your boots and the wool socks and put on your camp moccasins. This will allow your feet to dry. If your feet are especially tender, the second thing to do is to dry your feet and apply foot powder to restore dry feet. Take care of your feet and they will take care of you.

Another area of personal cleanliness is bathing. Taking a bath with soap in the lake is prohibited. A bath with soap is a sponge bath on shore. After rinsing off from the sponge bath, you take a plunge into the lake with your boots on to remove any residue. Often the lake water will be cool so that prolonged stays in the lake are not likely to happen. For the most part, forgetting the soap part works well. A good

plunge into the lake with a serious attempt to remove the day's dirt works well. Failing to bathe gives rise to unwanted problems, such as skin infections and rashes.

The matter of camp cleanliness is important to every member of the crew. Water that is used for cooking is taken from the lakes. The water is clean and does not require treatment, as long as the water is drawn from the lake away from shore and from deep parts of the lake. This approach means that waters from small lakes, beaver ponds, or running creeks should not be used for cooking or drinking without water treatment. An associated matter of camp cleanliness is the washing and rinsing of dishes. Dishes need to be thoroughly cleaned and well rinsed in sanitizing agent away from the lake. Failing to do this procedure carefully could result in the whole crew getting sick - not good.

The final matter of camp cleanliness is the matter of latrines. There are no latrines, as I mentioned earlier. Catholes are used that are dug 200 ft. away from the water to a depth of 8-12 inches with the shovel that is included in the equipment provided by the canoe base. Once used, the cathole and toilet paper

are covered with the soil dug from the hole. Compacting the soil after filling the cathole is appropriate. Finding a site for a cathole is not always easy, and is often difficult on island campsites, where soil deposits are thin and sufficient distances from water may not be available - a trip to another site may be necessary to answer nature's call (this is part of selecting good campsites).

## **Orienteering**

Map and compass skills are used every day in the wilderness - you will need to know them. There are no signs to tell you where you are and getting lost is a very real possibility, if you don't know how to read a map and use a compass. To find a portage, you need to be in the right place. Shorelines that look straight on the map are not so straight on the water. Bays that look easy to spot on the map are not so easy to spot on the water. The key to not getting lost is to work together as a crew and to review where you are on the map frequently. *All* of your decisions concerning the direction of travel are best made after consulting with the rest of the crew. This approach to map and compass compensates for one person making a mistake. The whole crew needs to understand where you are going, and all crew members need to constantly look for confirming signs that you are going where you think you are going. Checking your map often and knowing how to read it really makes a difference.

## **First Aid and Safety**

Each crew will be equipped with a first aid kit that will be adequate to cover nearly all situations. Should you, or one of the members of your crew, experience a medical emergency beyond the capabilities of a first aid kit, the interpreter will call on a radio for a helicopter rescue of the injured person. Obviously, a helicopter rescue of a crew member will ruin the trip. Knowing how to avoid an injury is as important, if not more important, as knowing how to treat an injury. Each member of the crew needs to know first aid, and how to avoid a first aid situation. Common concerns include ankle sprains, slips and falls, heat exhaustion, hypothermia, and cuts or lacerations. All of these first aid situations, and most others, can be avoided completely by exercising care and caution while in the wilderness. An old outdoorsman adage is, "You are your own worst enemy in the woods." Take this old adage to heart and you shouldn't have to worry about using your first aid skills.

## **Swimming**

Every participant will have swimming merit badge but that does not mean that any participant can relax when it comes to swimming. Two aspects of swimming are different in Canada. One is that you swim with your boots on. The other is that the water is not as warm as you are accustomed to in East Tennessee. Both of these factors make swimming considerably more difficult. Consequently, your

ability to swim long distances will be diminished significantly. The many rock bluffs look like wonderful places to dive into the water. However, beneath the water's surface are rocks that pose significant dangers to divers. Careful scouting of the water needs to be performed before anyone attempts to dive, and only feet first dives should be attempted. If you would want to try to swim like you never have before, try sitting under a waterfall. Somewhere on a trip in Quetico Park you are likely to come upon a waterfall. Sitting under a waterfall is refreshing and exciting, and you don't even have to know any swimming strokes to do it! Even when it comes to waterfalls, the buddy system is the only way to do it. Like everything else in wilderness canoeing, doing it together as a crew makes it better and more fun for all.

All of the skills needed for canoe camping can't be summarized in a few pages, and just like canoeing, years of practice make things perfect. If a crew works together, many, if not all, of the shortcomings in skills can be overcome easily. For most of you, you will not know all of the members of your crew. This sounds like it could make things more difficult, but experience has shown that crews learn to work together better when everyone doesn't know each other. That's right, when you don't know each other, but you have to depend on each other, you learn to work together better. After a canoe trip with several people that you did not know to begin with, you will have several new friends who will be amongst the best friends that you will ever have. Sounds like an adventure, doesn't it?

In the next and last part of **A Voyageur's Primer**, I will discuss gear and packing. This is not very difficult, but it requires a little careful planning in order to be organized.

### **Northern Tier High Adventure - Typical Trail Menu**

Day 1

SUPPER - Arrive early afternoon, evening meal in the dining hall.

Day 2

BREAKFAST - All you can eat pancakes in the dining hall.

LUNCH - Fresh lunch meat and cheese with bread and fresh fruit with bug juice.

SUPPER - Boundary stew with fresh vegetables, fresh rolls, bug juice, dessert

Day 3

BREAKFAST - Scrambled eggs with meat, hash brown potatoes, bug juice, hot chocolate.

LUNCH - Hudson Bay Bread, Peanut Butter, Jam, Trail Mix, bug juice

SUPPER - "Kraft" walleye, vegetable, bug juice, dessert

Day 4

BREAKFAST - Granola cereal with milk, bug juice, hot chocolate, Granola Bar

LUNCH - Cheese, summer sausage, crackers, Trail Mix, bug juice  
SUPPER - Kashapiwi Rice (Beef and Rice), Vegetable, bug juice, dessert

Day 5

BREAKFAST - Oatmeal with milk and fruit sauce, bug juice, hot chocolate

LUNCH - Hudson Bay Bread, Peanut Butter, jam, Trail Mix, bug juice

SUPPER - Pooh Bah Burgoo (Turkey and Noodles), Vegetable, bug juice, dessert

Day 6

BREAKFAST - Scrambled eggs with meat, hash browns, bug juice, hot chocolate

LUNCH - Cheese, Summer sausage, crackers, Trail Mix, bug juice

SUPPER - Kekekabic Supreme (Potatoes and Beef), vegetable, bug juice, dessert

Day 7

BREAKFAST - Granola cereal with milk, bug juice, hot chocolate, granola bar

LUNCH - Hudson Bay Bread, peanut butter, jam, Trail Mix, bug juice

SUPPER - Chicken and Rice, vegetable, bug juice, dessert

Day 8

BREAKFAST - Oatmeal with milk and fruit sauce, bug juice hot chocolate

LUNCH - Cheese, summer sausage, crackers, Trail Mix, bug juice

SUPPER - Beef Stroganoff with noodles and sour cream sauce, vegetable, bug juice, dessert

Day 9

BREAKFAST - Scrambled eggs with meat, hash browns, bug juice, hot chocolate

LUNCH - Hudson Bay Bread, Peanut Butter, jam, Trail Mix, bug juice

SUPPER - Welcome back supper in the dining hall

Day 10

BREAKFAST - All you can eat in the dining hall, depart for home

## **Part Five - Gear and Packing**

A canoe trip in the wilderness is an experience that lasts in one's memory for a lifetime. A very small number of people each year attempt such a wilderness experience. As a result, the knowledge of what is needed and what is best to take on a wilderness canoe trip is shared primarily among those who have experienced the wilderness. That makes preparing for a trip tough for those who are venturing on their first trip. In this last part of **A Voyageur's Primer**, I will discuss the gear and packing techniques that I use when going to the wilderness. Each time I have gone north, they have changed a little and will probably always change as I learn more and more of the wonders of the North Woods.

There are five separate groups of gear that you need to consider as you prepare to travel to the Charles L. Sommers National High Adventure Base. They are; (1) The gear that you will need on the bus trip to canoe base, (2) The gear you will need at the base prior to going into the wilderness, (3) The gear you will need while you are canoeing, (4) The gear you will need once you return to the canoe base, and (5) The gear you will need on the return bus trip. Once you have developed your own list for each of these groups, you can begin to reduce the list

so that you aren't traveling with a lifetime supply of gear. Let's look at each of these groups of gear and see what is really needed.

### **Gear for the Trip to Canoe Base**

The gear you will need on the bus trip to canoe base will be with you on the bus. The bus trip is quite long and will last for about 26 hours. While on the bus, you will need a pillow for sleeping. It need not be as large as your pillow at home, but large enough to use when leaning against a window or another seat. There is a VCR on the bus, so there will be movies to watch, but you might like to consider some other amusement like a deck of cards or a book. The bus will be stopping every few hours for a relief stop and for eating. You will need to have your own money for food. On the bus, you will wear your Scout shorts and socks with a Scout T-shirt. When we get off the bus, you also will wear your Boy Scout Uniform Shirt. Once we get back on the bus, you can take off your uniform shirt. A coat hanger for your shirt to keep it neat is not a bad idea to carry along.

### **Gear at Canoe Base**

Once we get to the base, you will want to clean up from the long trip. This is the second group of gear that you will need. Having some toiletries at ready access to accomplish this is handy. When we arrive at the base, you will wear your uniform. After the bus is unloaded, we will go about packing for the trip to the wilderness. This will cause you to change out of your uniform into the clothes that you will be wearing while canoeing. After supper, we will load the bus with all of your stuff that you will not be using on the canoe trip, including your uniform. The bus will be locked so you will not have to worry about someone stealing your stuff during the week. By the time you go to sleep after arriving at canoe base, you will have no access to your stuff until you return from your trip in the wilderness.

### **Gear for Canoeing**

When thinking about the gear you will need to take with you, most of your attention is probably on the gear you will need while traveling in the canoes. The guidebook provided to you gives you a complete list. There are a few important points to emphasize. Only wear pants that are made of cotton/polyester. *Blue jeans are not good. They will never dry out. Make sure you have a rain suit - not a poncho.* Ponchos are treacherous in a canoe and can lead to drowning. Make sure you include a hat. Your face will be glad. When it comes to your warm shirt, take a wool shirt, if you have one. Wool will keep you dry even if it is wet. You can use your rain jacket to keep the wind away, if necessary. The space you have available for your gear will limit the amount of extra stuff you can take along. If you keep your list short, you won't have to leave some of your stuff behind. On one trip, a Scout didn't quite understand this idea and brought 12 pairs of socks.

There was not enough room in the pack for his socks and his moccasins, so he left his moccasins behind! His 11 extra pairs of socks turned out to be poor substitutes for moccasins. On another trip, a Scout took a pair of shorts along, because he was sure he needed them. He never used them, and they took up valuable space in his pack. He also had three extra changes of shirts and underclothes. They took up a bunch of space that would have been better used for a pair of moccasins.

### **Gear for Returning to Canoe Base**

When we return to canoe base, we will get a chance to clean up, shower and sauna. For this you will need to have a complete change of clothes, some dry shoes or boots, a clean towel, some soap, and other toiletries. You will be wearing your uniform when we return to the canoe base. It is your choice if you want to wear the same Scout shorts you wore on the trip up to canoe base, but you will be glad to wear a clean pair of Scout socks. Pack along a plastic garbage bag for putting all of your wet, smelly canoe clothes into before you put your canoe clothes in your duffle pack. When you return to canoe base, you will probably spend some money at the trading post. Make sure there is some room in your pack for stowing all of these valuable patches, pins, books, etc.

### **Gear for the Return Trip**

On the return trip to Knoxville, we will be doing about the same thing as we did on the bus trip to canoe base. You will need to make sure you save some money for food on the return trip and don't spend it all at the trading post. On the return trip, you will again find your pillow, a book, and a deck of cards useful. We, hopefully, will have plenty of movies to watch on the VCR on the bus. As a footnote on the bus travel, you do not need to bring a radio. There are few radio stations to listen to for most of the trip. Additionally, nobody else needs to listen to your choice of music. If you *must* listen to music, it *must be* done with earphones so as not to disturb others. This concept also applies to hand held video games. If you insist on packing these games, they must be capable of having a "without noise" operating mode. Otherwise, you will be asked to put them up until we return home.

### **Packing for the Trip**

A list of the gear for you to consider for each of the five parts of the trip is attached. Once you have your list put together, you need to figure out how to pack the gear into two packs. One pack is on the bus (packed in a day pack) and the other pack is in the luggage area of the bus (packed in a duffle type bag). This is where a little thought will go a long way. For example, if you wanted to play cards on the bus, but the cards are in the luggage area of the bus, you are out of luck. Similarly, if you leave your wallet in the luggage area of the bus, you are

going to get really hungry. Once we get to canoe base, you want to be able to separate easily the gear that you will be taking into the wilderness from the gear that you will want to access when we return from the wilderness (like that nice clean towel and change of clothes).

All the gear you intend to take into the wilderness needs to be packed in plastic zip-lock bags to keep them dry. Use the heaviest plastic bags you can find (freezer bags). Once you put your stuff in the plastic bags, make sure that all of the air is squeezed out before you lock the zip-lock bag. You should also consider packing your sleeping bag carefully. If your stuff sack is not waterproof (very few are), put a garbage bag inside your stuffsack and stuff your sleeping bag into the garbage bag inside your stuffsack. Also, you may consider a compression sack for your sleeping bag to make the sleeping bag even smaller than the stuff sack. Many of the other questions regarding gear to be taken into the wilderness are addressed in the guide book that you have been provided. If you have any questions on gear and packing, don't keep them to yourself, ask your crew advisor.

This concludes **A Voyageur's Primer**. I hope you have found it to be useful in preparing for the forthcoming canoe trip into the wilderness. I also hope you are looking forward to this adventure in the wilderness of Canada as much as I am, while having the sense of adventure that goes along with any trip to the wilderness. I am sure you will have a good time, and the memories from this trip will last with you as among the best in Scouting.

## Gear for Canada

### Part One - The Trip to Canoe Base

What you are wearing	What you pack on the bus
Scout Shorts	Wallet - with money
Scout Socks	Book to read
Shoes	Deck of cards
Scout T-shirt	Pillow
Belt	Coat hanger
Scout Uniform Shirt	-

## Part Two - At Canoe Base

<b>What you will need</b>	<b>What you will change into</b>
Soap	Cotton/Poly Pants
Towel	T-shirt
Toothbrush and Toothpaste	Warm Shirt
Sleeping Bag	Clean underclothes
Sleeping Pad	Wool Socks
- Boots	Polypropelene Socks
- Bandana	Hat

## Part Three - In the Wilderness

See Northern Tier Guide Book

## Part Four - Return to Canoe Base

<b>What you will change into</b>	<b>What you will need</b>
Clean underclothes	Garbage Bag for canoe clothes
Clean Scout T-shirt	Soap
Clean Scout Socks	Toothbrush and toothpaste
Scout Shorts	Clean towel
Scout Uniform Shirt	Sleeping Bag
Shoes	Sleeping Pad
Belt	Wallet for Trading Post

## Part Five - Return to Knoxville

<b>What you are wearing</b>	<b>What you pack on the bus</b>
Scout T-shirt	Copy of Birth Certificate

Scout Socks	Wallet with money
Scout Shorts	Pillow
Scout Uniform Shirt	Coat hanger
Shoes	Deck of Cards
Belt	Book to read