

LOG OF NORTHERN MINNESOTA
AND CANADIAN CANOE TRIP

The following is an account of a canoe trip taken by Troop Four, sponsored by the Trinity Lutheran Church of Rapid City, South Dakota. The trip was made through the CHARLES L. SOMMERS CANOE BASE on Moose Lake - 22 miles northeast of Ely, Minnesota, which is operated by Region Ten, Boy Scouts of America. Scoutmaster Verne Barnett and 13 Explorers made the trip, leaving Rapid City on Sunday, June 24 and returning home again Sunday, July 8, 1956. The account of their trip to and from the Base is a story in itself - so it is not included in this log.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27

We got into the camp about 4 p.m. and were assigned to our tenting area. As soon as we were settled we met our guide, his name is Lee Higelow and he is a Texan! We also were lucky enough to get a swamper, he is Chester Saylor from the cold, cold city of Superior, Wisconsin. We went into the dining hall for the business portion which consisted of: reading the camp and trail rules, making out Canadian fishing licenses, and the cooks made out the menus and the amounts of each food we would need on the trail.

Dinner was served at six o'clock but we were a little late because we had to change our clothes after capsizing our canoes. After a supper of hot dogs and beans most of us went to the trading post to buy our last minute fishing tackle, ditty bags and lemon drops. Later that night there was an assembly where the guides and leaders introduced themselves. They also gave a skit on all the parts of canoeing, including the do's and don'ts. Then it was time to go to bed.

THURSDAY, JUNE 28

At about 6:30 a.m. today we woke up. The waiters had to leave when the bell rang at 7:00. The day was just beginning and I mean just beginning. We had a breakfast of cereal, scrambled eggs and oranges, with cocoa to drink.

As soon as breakfast was over most of us went down to the Bay Post to assist Lee and Chester in weighing out and packing all our food for the trip. When that was done we went to our tents and arranged our equipment all over our beds. About 10 o'clock Lee and Chester came up and checked and inspected everyone's equipment. He also told us what we would and wouldn't need.

An hour later Lee returned with all his gear packed and we were ready to launch our canoes. From this moment on, or until at least Saturday or the Sunday returning home, no one had boots or pants that were completely dry, and usually everything was at least damp.

Having planned our trip the night before, the course called for us to travel the first day through Moose Lake, New Found Lake, Found Lake, Sucker Lake, Prairie Portage, Canadian Customs and as it turned out Bayley Bay. After taking Prairie Portage and clearing Canadian Customs we stopped for lunch. We continued through Bayley Bay and took a "dilly" of a portage into Sunday Lake. The portage was about a half-mile long, but really rugged. The first night's camp was made on a little island about a fourth of the way up Sunday Lake. As soon as camp was set up everyone, except the cook and guides, went fishing. Although the lake was calm and the time perfect, the fish weren't to be found - we were skunked the first day out.

Lee and the cook, Lee Ytreeide, fixed a good supper and everyone was full or almost full anyhow. A few of us, including myself, went for a twilight swim and bath combination.

It was the end of the first day, everyone had eaten all the lemon drops they had brought for the whole trip. We all ached from the shoulders and neck to our feet. By this time we had found out what we should have brought and everyone except the guide was wondering if he could live through eight more days of this!

FRIDAY, JUNE 29

Today we really got off to a very slow start. It was practically eleven a.m. before we were off and paddling.

The itinerary for the day routed us through Agnes Lake for the main part. Although we did have plenty of time to stop at Louisa Falls for a "bath", and later to look at a few Indian paintings on the cliffs along the lake. We stopped to eat lunch at Louisa Falls, where we met two other crews that were going to Louisa Lake.

Verne trolled with wire line as we were paddling and caught two, two pound lake trout. That night we camped in a bay with an amazingly sandy beach. Since the wind had been blowing at a good clip all afternoon, we really appreciated this calm water in the bay. After seeing Verne catch those two "beauts" all the fishermen were regenerated with fishing fever. Most of them left at about five and a few didn't return until 9:30 that night. The catch for the day added up to this - seven lake trout and two very delicious Walleyes. Chester caught one small Northern also. The fish averaged from about two to three pounds for the Lake Trout and a little less for the Walleyes. Bud Saxton had caught a real nice Walleye at breakfast just before camp breaking, but we had to throw him back because we were afraid it would spoil before supper.

We stayed up pretty late waiting for some of our fishermen who wouldn't give up. Right after hearing all the tales of the big ones that got away, we went to bed.

SATURDAY, JUNE 30

At five this morning no one was up, nor at six, or seven, but at eight someone finally made it out of bed. So as was quite customary for the last three days, we got a very slow start!

For breakfast we had fruit soup and so much fish from the night before that, as Verne said, "two tall Indians couldn't shake hands over the pile."

We started out this morning as a very happy crew and we were loaded with ambition, even though we knew we had nine portages. Lee had told us that all of them would only be about 100 yards long. That fibber!!!

We made only three portages, but those three! The first one was about a mile and so was the second, but they were through the wilderness of all wildernesses, swamps, creeks, up hills and down rocky slopes, over waist-high fallen logs and through trees and brush that were so dense you could hardly turn your 90 pound canoes. All of these were on the West Branch of the Agnes River.

Besides all of the obstacles, the swamps were infested with mosquitoes and flies - they were so thick you could hardly see. Lee told us later that it was his first trip over that route and it was hardly ever used. Brother, we all know why now. As we look back on it I don't know how we ever made it. In one spot at the end of the first portage we had to lift our canoes over trees that were about twenty feet high in order to get them into the water. The trees were all dead and mangled and had fallen into the water so we climbed up on them and handed the canoes from one to another. When the canoes were in the water there was only room for one canoe and one person at a time, so we carried our packs in our arms and waded waist-deep in water - under the brush to the canoes. The canoes were maneuvered out of the mangled trees by one Scout who stayed in the water and led them out against the current. Just as we were all ready to paddle again after going through the second portage, which was similar to the first, it started to pour down in buckets. Since we couldn't paddle in the rain very well the canoes were drawn up close together and we ate soggy peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the rain.

We paddled for about three hours before we came to a campsite on an island in the Kawnipies. This was by far the hardest and longest of all the days so far. However, the fishing was good and most of the fishermen were happy. George Hankins was by far the happiest though, as he took the lead in our fishing contest with a five pound, thirty inch Northern Pike.

We had a very good supper of Spanish rice and everyone enjoyed it very much. Lee, our guide, told us that the table in the campsite on which we were camping was made by one of his South Dakota crews last year. Of course it was the best campsite we had stopped at so far!

Just after setting up camp I noticed smoke coming from the timber on the opposite shore. I told Lee about it and about then we saw and heard some of our fishermen yelling "fire." Four of us hopped into one canoe and off we went. I imagine it must have looked like an old Viking war boat with all of us paddling. We had all the cooking kettles, water buckets, axes and shovels in the bottom of the canoe also. When we got there we found that Jerry Inel, our crew chief, had already put the flames out. It had been a lightning strike on an old dead tree. Jerry chopped it down and we thoroughly doused it with water.

That night a few of us stayed up and waited for George and Chester to come in from fishing, and then we had a fish fry of all the afternoon's and evening's catch.

- SUNDAY, JULY 1 -

As usual this morning everyone seemed to be evading the idea that you shouldn't sleep good on hard ground, for it was quite late when we finally climbed out of our nice warm sleeping bags. So far we have made it a habit to oversleep. Of course, paddling, portaging, and staying up all night doesn't have anything to do with it! We only made one portage today and that was only about 75 yards into Kenny Lake, where we made our campsite for the day.

Our fishermen caught a few Walleyes while trolling on the way up. Since Verne had said that anyone who didn't make the trip from Kawnipies to Kenny Lake in an hour was a "pansy," a boy's and a Scoutmaster's word for a sissy, we opened up a florist shop. By the way, we had to stop and wait for Verne about every half hour and even then he was the last one to the portage.

We camped right next to some falls this time, and it was pretty fair fishing. I know, since I was one of those who tasted the fish from the fish fry we had that afternoon.

It rained about half an inch off and on during the afternoon and evening. A few of us washed our clothes as soon as we got into camp and all of our clothes got wetter than they were before. Everyone laughed at us until it started to rain - then it was a different story because their clothes were just as wet and still dirty.

Pier Simpson and Clarence Kuster made a table for food supplies. They were working on their Camping Merit Badges and that was what Verne had suggested for that part of the requirements.

As soon as it stopped raining for awhile, a few of the guys went swimming to work up an appetite for a supper of fried Spam and potatoes, with coffee to drink. I think everyone has gained ten to fifteen pounds on this trip, both because of Lee's wonderful cooking and the amount we ate - also the solidness in our muscles from this strenuous type of fun.

After supper we had a church service being it was Sunday. The service lasted about half an hour and it consisted mainly of singing and Scripture readings.

Everyone "hit the hay" like wet gunny sacks that night and even though there was the roar from the falls, not a peep was heard, except the usual rock 'n roll from our Elvis Presley boys, Dale Sparks and Lee Ytreeide, who were making up and practicing songs for the Friday night campfire at the return to the Canoe Base.

MONDAY, JULY 2

Today was the time of a near miracle since everyone had eaten, "washed" and launched their canoe by 7:30 a.m. Of course the hardest part was getting up as usual, and that took a few of the sleepy heads 45 minutes. I was a con-founded dishwasher and had to get up and wash some of last night's kettles before even beginning breakfast.

The total amount of distance traveled yesterday was only about six miles. Of course the reason was we had to paddle against rapids most of the way and we had nine portages ranging from about 200 feet to three-quarters of a mile, and most of them were over heavily wooded and rocky-mountained terrain. We've had experiences that most crews never had a chance at. We've been through rapids almost under waterfalls and over portages that are hardly ever used.

After crossing the last portage we paddled for nearly three miles. After which we circled around the many little islands of the Saganagons. We inspected four possible campsites and finally selected the last one. The reason we wanted to make our campsite was because we needed four more hours of work to complete the Fifty Miler Award.

The area we chose was a very suitable spot for a campsite. It was located on a point so there was just enough wind to drive the bugs away. A huge flat sloping rock made a perfect place to beach all of our canoes and plenty of room for all our firewood and two fires. Right beside the rock was a perfect swimming and washing area, with an additional sloping rock. We built a fire-place, cleared a space free of trees and shrubs and then completely spruced up the area.

As soon as everything was completed on the camping agenda, Clarence Kuster and I began to make ground beds for the tents. This was for the Camping Merit Badge. The ground was covered with moss about a foot deep to start with, so when we finished the ground beds were about two feet deep.

Most of us went swimming but there are always those who just couldn't get rid of that fishing fever. However, most of them have lost most of their earlier interest.

Supper consisted of a meal fit for a king and enough to feed an army. For the main course we had six and a half pounds of beans, dry weight, and bacon with coffee or tea to drink. Afterwards we had a dessert of apple pie, a fourth of a pie apiece, and does Lee ever know how to fix them.

When we came up here most of us dreaded the thought of eating dehydrated foods, but I don't think anyone has complained at all. In fact, by the way the food sacks have been raided, I'd say we liked them.

After supper there was a riot and jam session in cell block - rather tent number 35. That tent consisting of Lee Ytreide, the booming base; Bud Saxton, the Nemo cowboy; Jim Esades, the bear; Otto Kahn, noisy; Buster Sparks, our Elvis Pelvis; and Jerry Inel, the chicken - who along with the rest of us couldn't stand the racket.

TUESDAY, JULY 3

O BOY! what a life. Today we had what is known as a free day. So our guide wasn't to wake us up before 10 a.m. Am I ever a party pooper, I woke up at seven.

Clarence and I began work on our Forestry Merit Badges in measuring trees and clearing 150 feet of all the dead trees and debris.

We had a delicious brunch of all the pancakes and cocoa we could eat or drink. Everyone had at least ten, just soaking with butter and syrup. Right after brunch Verne began to cook our fish from the day before. He had caught the big one of the bunch, that is why he was nominated to cook all of them. All the worried mothers who read or hear about our eating ought to be pleased to know that their little darlings are all eating at least ten times as much as they would at home. We figure if we are going to carry it we might just as well eat it. Besides, the more we eat the less we have to carry the next day.

At about 3 p.m. everyone began passing their Canoeing Merit Badge. This took plenty of time since only two could go out at one time. It was so cold when we got out of the water that we had Donnie hauling firewood by the cord. But we sure had a hot bonfire. We wrung out our clothes as dry as possible and then got them warm enough to climb into, after that our body temperatures kept up warm enough.

As usual, we had another terrific supper of spaghetti, macaroni, Salami, cheese, tomato paste and bacon, all in one. Heinz 57 Special! There was so much of it, just like the beans, that we couldn't get but three-fourths of it into our biggest kettle, and that's pretty big. For dessert we had some real sweet rice with raisins. This was one of Lee's new recipes. Yum!

As soon as supper was over we all went to our tents to swat mosquitoes, and I'm not kidding, they are as big and thick as thieves.

It seemed as though I had gone to bed only an hour ago. Verne let go at exactly a quarter to five this morning with a mighty yell known by us as reveille. An hour and a half later the breakfast was cooked and ready to be served. It consisted of oatmeal, fruit soup and cocoa. This sure fit the bill since it was cold and damp this morning. We left the campsite just two hours after the first call, and that is really something for our crew.

We knew it was the fourth of July, but it didn't do much good to celebrate without any fireworks. Besides, we were in Canada where the Independence Day is not celebrated on the fourth.

Although it was windy all day long, we didn't have too much trouble. The only difficult part was coming across Cashe Bay, but even there the wind was dead ahead so we didn't have to do any tacking. There were four very rugged portages besides the wind.

We stopped just off Cashe Bay for lunch. A passing crew, headed for the Saganagons stopped and we talked to them. They had left the Base about a week later than we did.

Paddle, paddle, paddle until finally we reached the border portage. This portage, although five blocks long, was just like a paved highway compared to the ones we had been over. After crossing the portage we felt so good we thought we would paddle on until four o'clock. The campsite we finally, and I mean finally, found was only three-quarters of a mile from the Little Knife Portage. By that time we were really pooped! Our camp was on Cypress Lake, which is one of the long narrow lakes together with the Knife Chain that makes up the Voyageur's Highway.

Most of us crowded around the fire to try to ward off the chill. About that time the cooks had a fit. George was so hungry that he thought he would help to get supper ready. He ended up kicking ashes and birchbark into the cornbread. O well, it was good seasoning! Chester's plier's slipped as he was taking the rice off the fire and he spilled the night's rice all over the fire, ground, and the poor, innocent cornbread. At 7:30 p.m. we finally ate a supper contrived from potatoes, pork and gravy. It was very good as usual, and we salvaged enough rice to have a desert of rice, syrup and cornbread - all in a mush!

As soon as supper was over everyone went straight to bed. That night was the quietest night of the whole trip. If course, if you had paddled and portaged fifteen and a half miles after loafing the day before, you would be tired too. But without fail there was just one small detail that perturbed me. It seems that the ground in our tent was a rock garden. I also was sleeping almost on top of a tree that was inside our tent.

THURSDAY, JULY 5

From recent calculations we found that today we had 18 miles to travel. If we made the mileage then our next night's campsite would be on Birch Lake.

Our dear, dear Scoutmaster and Guide - we all like them so well when they get us up at five in the morning - overslept a bit and we didn't have to get up until five-thirty.

For breakfast we had oatmeal with lots of raisins and hot cocoa. This morning everyone seemed to have lost their case of "spills" because everything went according to plan. We also made it out of the camping area by 7:30 a.m.

I take back what I said about the case of "spills" and "goofs" because navigator (Dale Sparks) got lost and we had to back track nearly two miles. The urge to kill! The first portage was a short one so the smaller guys got to carry the canoes. We paddled on until about 11 o'clock. The wind was really bad - and were we tired. We spotted a big rock campsite and Lee said that it would be a good place to rest. We had a very unusual lunch today. It was something we had never eaten before on the whole trip. I believe you call them peanut butter and jelly sandwiches - plus our daily WHOLE-RYE.

As lunch was over it started to rain, and boy did it come down. It rained all day as we know now, and we can all see why the terrain in Canada is so green. When it rains up there it really rains.

At about two o'clock we reached the long awaited Trading Post. Everyone pooled their money together and we all got a candy bar apiece. Verne also got some pipe tobacco. He was getting worried because his supply was almost gone. We were teasing him and kept reminding that he would have to start smoking birchbark.

The lady in the Trading Post was very nice and she told us all about the history of the post and area. She also showed us a write up that appeared in the SATURDAY EVENING POST called "The Loneliest Woman in America." Just before we left she gave us all another candy bar. We really appreciated this, especially when she told us that she had to carry her supplies over four portages.

Afterwards we made four quite short portages, about two or three blocks each. One the last portage Lee, Jerry and I had a race. Of course that Texan won. We paddled until about 4 o'clock, finally we found a campsite on a small island just three-quarters of a mile from Canadian Customs.

We started three fires just as soon as we got there. These were to try to warm up our thoroughly soaked clothing. For supper we had, and we figured it out, 189 pieces of french toast. That is almost a half a loaf apiece. We also had cornbread and syrup for desert.

After supper Verne and Lee went up to clear us with the Canadian Customs. Everyone went straight to bed after cleaning up the camp. Even our "bee bopsters" didn't have a jam session - so you can guess they were tired.

FRIDAY, JULY 6

This morning was a paradise, we got to sleep until almost 7 o'clock. Our breakfast consisted of Farina and cocoa. Since we knew we would get into the Base that afternoon everyone was dreaming up what they would do first.

The kettles, pots and pans all had to be really scrubbed. This time with soap, water, Bon-Ami and lots of elbow grease. We all pitched in and helped make our own lunch. The sandwiches were packed so that we could have our lunch on the water.

After most of the work was done we all went for a little swim. Later we started our last leg of the journey. Everyone wanted to go home and see civilization, yet it was so hard to leave the magnificent splendor of this country. You didn't know whether it was worth leaving.

We saw more people today than on the whole trip. We stopped for lunch on Found Lake. After paddling along behind some Y.W.C.A. girls most of the afternoon, we discovered they had a camp right near ours. There we also saw two other crews that were on their way to the Canoe Base. I wonder what those two crews were doing at that Y.W.C.A. camp!?!?

After lunch we started on our way again, this time with all the other crews behind us. It looked as if the whole Pacific fleet had disembarked. We arrived at the Base at approximately 2 o'clock and immediately started to scrub out our canoes. After which we placed them on racks to dry so they would be ready to sand. Then we took all our personal gear to our tents. We checked in the packs and gear - then went to our assigned duties. These included chopping wood for the sauna, checking in equipment and sanding the canoes.

When our chores were finished we prepared to take the sauna (a Finnish steam bath). The fire hadn't been burning well enough, so it wasn't as hot as it should have been, but it was still quite warm. We stayed in the bath for about 20 minutes, then some of us ran down into the cold lake water. Wang!! what a temperature change, but it really made you feel wonderful.

Supper was served at about six o'clock and what a meal! After being on the trails for almost nine days, that delicious food really tasted good, especially the meat, since the only thing we had on the trail was bacon. We all had one piece of turkey that was about two and a half pounds worth. For vegetables there were sweet potatoes, corn and string beans. We also had a salad and real milk. For desert we had ginger cake with thick frosting.

When supper was over all those who didn't have details ran to the Trading Post, (the camp store) to buy all those last minute items, besides their paddles.

At 7:30 we had a campfire and it was a dilly. All the crews gave a rundown on what had happened on their trips and where they had gone. They also told what, if anything, they had done as work on the Fifty Miler Award. There were several skits - with our's being the best of course! Our skit consisted of Lee Ytreeide and Dale Sparks singing two songs we had made up on the canoe trails. The songs were "Sixteen Miles" and "Orange Crate Canoe." They were made up to the tunes of "Sixteen Tons" and "Blue Suede Shoes." I'm sure none of us will ever forget the skits and some of the explanations for their trips.

After the campfire a few of the Explorers including myself went for a moonlight hike down the road in search of an "off the grapevine" trading post. Our store was completely sold out of candy. We chased fireflies all the way back to camp - after not finding the store. As soon as we got to our tents and got "things" arranged for in the morning, we went to bed. Sleep - sleep - sleep.

SATURDAY, JULY 7

Breakfast was served at 7 a.m., although everyone in our area and most of the camp was up at 5 o'clock. Packing, cleaning, and getting the camp ready for

the next crews were the main jobs. A few of us who had already served our dining hall duty went down to the truck and cleaned it out. Candy wrappers, gum, orange peelings, whittlings, dirt, dishtowels, pop bottles, and socks were all over the place. Finally, however, it was pretty well cleaned and ready to have all the gear packed away again.

"I want my sleeping bag out", "don't put my stuff on the bottom", "keep this part for the cooking gear" and "put my suitcase up front", were some of the many commands.

We all hurried through a breakfast of scrambled eggs, cereal, oranges and milk so we could get into Ely, Minnesota. Just as we were about to back the truck out onto the road, we noticed that two of the tires were quite low. So we borrowed a pump from one of the other crews and each one of us got 25 strokes at each tire.

By this time we were really excited because in just a few minutes we would be able to run loose and buy anything we wanted in Ely. We sang every song we knew on those next 22 miles. Verne stopped on the outskirts of Ely and cleared us with American Customs.

Then W H O O P E E! We stopped to get the tires filled, and the truck greased and gased. We had forty minutes and boy did we make use of every minute of it. Everybody in our bunch bought two boxes of cookies, between a pint and a quart of ice cream, some candy, and a quart to a half-gallon of pop. Then we headed back to the truck. There we found that some of the other guys had bought potato chips, doughnuts and malts. As you can see - everyone made pigs of themselves. All the things we had gone without for ten days were made up for in less than an hour. We didn't stop again the whole morning. Who wanted to?

SUNDAY, JULY 8

We arrived at the church at 6 p.m. and was everybody glad to be home. This was one trip I know I'll never forget and I'm sure none of the other guys will either.

Thanks a lot Verne, we really appreciated all you did for us, and for making it possible for us to go the way we did.

The preceding account was written by Terry Dake, Keeper of the Log for Crew 627D.

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