

Boy Scouts of America
Northern Tier
Atikokan Base
Quetico National Park Ontario
August 3-13, 2006

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Written by Mr. Biggs, edited by Mr. Roberts.

Thursday, August 3, 2006

We had to get an early start due to the planned departure time (6:05 AM) of our Newark to Minneapolis flight. We agreed to meet in the Point Pleasant Stop-n-Shop parking lot at 3 AM and consolidate into the few cars we would take to the airport. It was hot already (it had been over 100° the previous few days). When I arrived there were already a few cars there with sleepy parents and excited kids. Oddly, Mr. Roberts (our driver) was late... turns out he had set his alarm clock for 3 PM! Good thing Emil called to ask him if we were wearing Class A or B uniforms for the trip. He showed up just about when we were going to sequentially start bombarding him with phone calls. We stuffed his suburban to the roof with gear, and then stood around and said our good-byes to those we were leaving behind, and shortly later we were off. When we arrived at the airport and parked we found that the monorail was not operational. None of the staff could tell us what was going on, most spoke no English. Fortunately about the time it was looking like we were going to have to walk, the monorail came back in service, and we did not have to carry all our gear to the bus stop and wait there. We got to the Northwest ticket counter after a wrong turn and found the other two crews had beat us (not surprising considering they were dropped off at the door).

After waiting through the queue of Troop 6 scouts and their fathers along on the trip, we progressed through security (ug, I won't recant that story) down to the gate to await our flight. We should have suspected that something else would go wrong. After waiting for the first hour (we were still plenty early), a North West Airlines (NWA) representative informed the people in the waiting area that our flight crew was late. Later we heard a variety of stories regarding the circumstances of their late arrival. The one I heard from the flight crew member was the van that was to pick them up had accidentally been canceled by a dispatcher. The dispatcher had intended on canceling the van that was to pick up a different crew from a different hotel that had had their inbound flight canceled the night before. Other versions of the story were that they stayed at a party too long, or were short on their layover hours and we were delayed as a result. The end result was the plane took off over two hours late.

It was Ambrose Coopers' birthday (and my wife's) so we got flight crew to announce it to the airplane. They did it shortly before landing in Minneapolis. I am not sure how many people noticed, but we did give Ambrose a cheer. When we got to Minneapolis we found that the plane for the other 15 members of the troop who were going to Ely had been held for them. Our plane, to International Falls, had left long before (with Mr. McGuire on board since he was traveling from the National Order of the Arrow event and was on a different flight to Minneapolis). The NWA representative initially lead us to believe we had a chance of getting on as standby passengers on the 2:30 flight (4 hours away), but a different representative told us that was highly unlikely. There were seats on the evening flight for us but that would not be leaving for 12 hours and we would have a two hour ride upon arrival from International Falls to Atikokan. The decision was to rent a van, drive to International Falls (6 hours away), drop the van, and go the last 2 hours using the driver we had originally planned on using. While Mr. Roberts and Mr. Nauerz dealt with that, I watched our carry on luggage and the scouts decided to get a quick lunch. We then rejoined in a baggage area, waiting for NWA to pull our luggage so we could get started on our drive. Mr. Roberts wisely did not commit to paying for the car till we picked it up from the car rental lot. While we were sitting waiting an interminable interval for our luggage to get pulled (it had to be over an hour, we weren't a priority for NWA), a crew of Ventures from Troop 130, in Golden, Colorado, walked by, and "Robert" stopped to introduce himself. Emil asked where they were headed, and the answer was Atikokan, Steve commented that was where we were headed, and I (fortunately) asked how they were getting there. The response was by bus. After some hasty negotiations we found that they were willing to have us tag along (as long as we didn't hold them up, and the bus driver agreed, and there were seats for us). A quick call to Mr. Roberts let him know that we may have an alternative route to Atikokan and a quick check with Mr. Nauerz and the scouts to ask if they wanted to go the bus route was made. Well, I found the bus and there was room for us, the driver agreed we could pile in, and that left getting the rest of my crew to where the bus was. So I called Emil and asked if our luggage was available, Emil said "yes," and my heart did a fist pumping "YES!" since something had finally gone our way for the first time that day. I ran back and found the crew, and lead them back to where the bus was. We chunked our stuff in the lower storage area and started an 8-hour bus ride direct to Atikokan (that was much better than arriving at 2 am; as it was we got there around 9 pm and we did not have to drive).

That part of our adventure behind us, we issued a round of thanks to our saviors, and then we got comfortable on the bus, made some new friends and settled in for a long ride. Some folks managed to catch a few z's as the early start was catching up to them. One wound up sleeping with a cracker hanging from his mouth. We stopped for lunch after about 2-3 hours of riding. Lunch was at Pizza Hut, McDonalds or a Save On food store (good chicken – a dozen legs for \$4.99)! The scouts were miffed when we called them back to make sure everyone knew where each other was headed. That put them at the end of the line ad Micky D's instead of the front... Sorry guys, I apologize. The adults ate at the food store since the bus driver told us there was a deli in the store. After a half hour lunch break (doesn't that make two lunches for the scouts?) we were on the road again. The ventures remembered they had brought some movies and we watched "*Pirates of the Caribbean*" and "*Office Space*". After a long ride (about 3 more hours) we crossed the

border into Canada. The agent at the border stepped onto the bus and asked a few questions about who we were, if we had the requisite paper work, and how many kids and adults were on board. He then went back to his booth and after a few minutes came back and said that since he was going off duty in about 10 minutes he wasn't going to check the paperwork, and he wished us well on our trek. The bus was fairly well behaved for this encounter (in my youth someone I was with mouthed off, and we spend 4 hours with the border patrol having everything opened up and examined). We then got rolling again and finished off the "Office Space" tape.

After a bit further the kids on the bus became very restless, and we stopped at a trading post in Canada and took advantage of the rest room, and the parking lot to stretch our legs, along with dropping quite a few dollars on junk food in the store. There were some rather strange exchange rates applied to our transactions (\$1.60 American for a 16oz soda, and 40 cents Canadian change?). Well it turns out the exchange rate was about \$1.00 to 0.91 so the exchange rate wasn't too bad, but \$1.60 for a soda!).

After we were on the road again, the bus driver asked if we had seen anything interesting along the roadside. After a bit we figured out he was referring to the rock piles on various outcroppings. Our interpreter later told us that they were native Inuit "Inukshuk" which translates to "this is the way." It took about another hour to get to the base camp at Atikokan. Along this stretch of road we saw the only moose we would see standing on a dirt side road. When we reached the base camp, we gladly piled out of the bus. Most of us met Brian McFeeters, our interpreter, for the first time (Mr. McGuire had been with him all day) and then we pulled our gear off the bus and dumped it in the cabins Mr. McGuire pointed us to (yes he had spent the entire afternoon getting acquainted with the camp as well). We then trooped into the cafeteria for a dinner of ham salad and tuna salad sandwiches, yum yum! After dinner we unpacked what we needed to sleep in, and got some further instructions about what was going on the next day. By then the mosquitoes started biting so the adults headed to the map room to acquaint ourselves with possible routes Mr. McGuire had reviewed earlier, and discussed some possible notable destinations along the route and then it was off to bed. It was hot in the cabins and there was a fan in each one droning a steady song, and I was quickly snoozing. In the middle of the night I woke up to nature's call, and while outdoors looked up to see an amazing display of stars. I should have taken more time to enjoy it, because most subsequent nights had some overcast or haze that prevented such a bright showing.

Friday, August 4, 2006

I got up at 6 am because I wanted to stretch out, and grab some pictures. A quick run up the road was sufficient to get the kinks out of my legs and get the blood flowing, then I got the pictures of the Northern Tier Atikokan signs, and the fog on the lake and then it was back to the base lodge for a 7 am breakfast.

Breakfast was pancakes, bacon, cold milk, and apple something. From there we trooped through reviewing our food stuffs, getting our gear (PFDs, packs, tent, cooking, paddles, etc), a review of the satellite phone and when to use it, and safety equipment. We went

through the cooking gear and left a good 5 lbs of it behind. Once we were done at the quartermaster, we went back to the cabins and packed our personal gear in the packs, and separated out our return clothes and other personal gear for storage. Then the adults went to the map room to finalize a route. Once that was done, we headed out for an orientation slide show and from there went to vespers. Afterward these activities we put the personal gear in storage and put the passports and wallets in safe keeping. We took the lightweight canoes off the racks and carried them up to the trailer, and brought all the packs up to where the buses were waiting. Mr. Nauerz left with the canoe trailer so he could sit and watch the canoes till we arrived by bus. Fiberglass canoes are expensive and too much of a temptation when left sitting unattended.

The school bus took our crew and one of the venture crews and left at approximately noon. We had a 45+ minute bus ride to where we dropped the ventures, and then had another 30 minute ride to the Quetico national park ranger station. Along this ride we ate our lunch of deli sandwiches (ok white bread, sliced meat, cheese, and single serving mayonnaise, mustard and catsup), a snack bar and fruit (well Brian remembered the fruit later). At the ranger station Mr. Roberts purchased camping and fishing permits for our trip. From there it was a short hop to where the canoes were. We quickly pulled our gear off the bus, said our goodbyes to the driver and humped the gear down to the canoes. Mr. Nauerz reported he had gotten quite bored waiting for us since his ride was direct from the base camp he had been there for more than an hour. We were all eager to get going so we quickly stowed the gear in the canoes and got on the water. It was around 3 PM when we got going, putting in on French Lake. Shortly afterward we entered a stream that connected two lakes and a light rain began falling. Once on the second lake, Pickerel Lake, the rain had ended we paddled for another hour and found a campsite on a small island in Pickerel Lake – it was about 5 pm. We setup camp fairly quickly. As Mr. McGuire was finishing staking his tent, he suddenly shouted “Bees! Bees! Bees everywhere!” After a moment we figured out he had disturbed a ground nest of yellow jackets while setting up his tent and they had attacked him. This phrase became one of the signature lines of the trip.

Once camp was setup, the scouts went fishing and the rest of us did a variety of tasks. I took on hanging the ropes for the bear bags. Unfortunately trees in that area of Canada apparently don't have branches ... or at least any that you can reach. After a long period of trying to find two trees 20-25 feet apart with branches approximately 15 feet off the ground, Mr. Roberts came and helped me by showing how to hang the bags off a dead fall. Once the rope was hung I returned to the cooking area and tried to help out. After dinner we did some more fishing. Except for Mr. Nauerz 2' pike, nothing was getting caught but the rocks on the bottom and underwater snags. Brian taught us how to use the iodine crystals to purify our drinking water, and we had a brief discussion about how much of a lake you would kill if you dropped an open bottle into a lake. Fortunately, we did not have this happen to us as I would not want to have the environmental impact hanging over my head. We finished the day with the vesper service, and a bit of mosquito slapping as it had gotten dark on us. The moon was just rising and nearly full. It shone over the water and lit our campsite with a cool glow that Mother Nature provides so well. We had a discussion about taking advantage of the upcoming full moon to paddle by

moonlight, which sounded like fun, so long as you did not wind up confused about where you were.

Saturday, August 5, 2006 – A full day on the water at last.

Mr. McGuire had called for a 6 AM wakeup so we could get on the water by 8 AM. Some folks got a slow start to the 6 AM wakeup, though a few (Mr. Nauerz and Mr. Biggs) rose earlier to test the fishing. By the time our granola (were those cranberries?) breakfast was over and two pots of coffee were brewed, it was 7:45 by the time we put onto the water. Our goal for the day was to see Olifaunt Lake falls and camp near Russell Rapids.

An hour and a half later we came to our first portage. This was around a concrete dam. The dam had railroad tracks across the top of it which did not continue on either side of the dam. Open iron grates allowed one to look down at the spillway. The tracks were probably for some type of hoist used to change out the dam boards. Interesting!

Back on the water again after a few hundred feet of ground travel, we were on Bisk Lake and saw our first sighting of bald eagles. After a short portage onto Beg Lake, another bald eagle was sighted. Brian found a small bottle of iodine crystals on this portage. The wind picked up and made the going progressively more difficult. At approximately 1 PM we stopped for lunch on an island in Fern Lake, where more eagles were spotted. The lee side of the island had a fairly nice little cove where we stashed the canoes and we sat in the sun on a rock face out of the wind and ate our lunch. Some of the scouts made seats out of where one rock face met another and we rested for a bit before continuing on. I walked up to the top of the hill on the island and found that there was a nice campsite with views of the lake in all directions. John Roberts managed to catch a frog that I got some close up pictures of. With winds still very strong, probably in excess of 25 mph, we decided to try to make it to Olifaunt Lake Falls and call it a day.

Just before 4 PM we reached the campsite for the night. On one side was a nice cataract, on the other some fairly old evidence of a bear. The putout was difficult due to the high wind and waves. John Roberts and Mr. Roberts stood in hip deep water to assist getting canoes and equipment out without getting anyone hurt. They were joined progressively by others as the canoes made landfall. While carrying the food pack up to the cooking area, I tripped on a root and fell on one knee on a large rock. For a moment I was worried because I hit fairly hard and with 80+ pounds of food on your back you don't fall gracefully. Fortunately, after a moment I shrugged out of the pack and got to my feet. My knee still worked and aside from some scrapes and a tear in the pants I was OK.

Below the cataract was a nice fishing area, so most people set to work trying to catch some fish for dinner. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Nauerz took a canoe around the rapids and had some luck with a 30" pike, John Roberts caught a couple of bass of varying sizes but everyone else just lost lures to the stream.

I had another difficult bear rope hanging experience. Ultimately, it was determined the ropes I hung were too low and we had to restring the bags after it had become fairly dark. We had lots of help to raise the bags, which helped because they were quite heavy.

The few fish that were caught added to our evening meal nicely and Connor made a dish of chocolate pudding, which I believe he ate about half of. After cleanup and evening vespers most of us got ready for bed. Connor and I set our tent were near the shoreline, and that night we listened to the waves lap up on the shore and the breeze kept any mosquitoes away from our tent. I recall it being muggy and tossing and turning for quite some time. I finally decided it was going to rain, and pulled in our laundry line, and put the rain fly over our tent and settled down. Later on it did rain fairly hard and cooled things down. By morning the rain had stopped and all that remained was wet spots on the tent.

Sunday, August 6, 2006 – Swamp-a-canoe

Camp rose a little later today, about 6:15 am and we hurried to break camp before 8 am to beat the wind that was already picking up. Connor and I forgot to fill our water bottles the night before so we had limited water to eat breakfast with. Connor's oatmeal turned to a glue paste in the package and he had quite a time choking it down. It was windy before we even left and it looked like there would be some plan changes as a result. We had wanted to get to a particular waterfall, but due to the wind if we chose to do that we would find ourselves either paddling back a long way against the wind or detouring to a different route which had some nasty portages in it to get to our destination. In the morning we had a couple of portages that were fairly straightforward. The most strenuous leg was a paddle up a swift current near Russell Rapids. After making it up this current we stopped at a small island to reassess our destination for the day. Just as we were about to leave this group of three islands, a park ranger came around the corner and checked our paper work. What a surprise! It took Mr. Roberts a few minutes to find the right (pink) piece of paper, but ultimately he did and the rangers and our crew went our separate ways. Apparently the two rangers spend 8 day stints out in the wilderness trying to keep wilderness travelers honest. It was interesting to note that while all of us had our PFDs on I did not even see one in the ranger's canoe.

Once that was behind us, we decided to make Chatterton Falls our target for lunch. We started the last leg for the day across the lake to Chatterton Falls, a cataract that filled the lake. Based on the flow of water leaving the lake we were hopeful the cataract would be worth our efforts. This leg was again mostly into the wind, and a strong one at that, and given the size of Russell Lake some fairly good-sized waves were getting kicked up.

Two canoes took a path fairly straight across the lake, and Mr. Roberts, his son and Steve kept to the shoreline. As it turned out the shoreline route had larger waves where they encountered the current from the rapids, and bounced off a rock wall back into the lake. When this crew hit that confluence, some larger waves started to fill the canoe. Mr. Roberts bailed in efforts to lighten the load, seconds later John Roberts starting bailing as well, though the canoe was filled with water Steve kept paddling. Once all three were out

of the canoe, they started swimming it to shore, with 2' - 3' waves impeding their progress. Meanwhile Connor, Brian and Mr. Biggs had reached the shoreline and pulled the equipment out of the canoe so we could pull it onto the rocks. Just as we were finishing that, Mr. Biggs looked up to check the position of the other two canoes. All I saw as a canoe in the center of the lake and three heads in the water near the shoreline. I shouted to Brian that they had swamped, and he and I took off to try to assist leaving Connor with the gear. After a 5 minute full power paddle to where they were, we found a spot where we could lift our canoe up on the rocks and hurried up the shore line to assist them. They had swum their canoe to a point where they could stand. We waded in and helped them unload it, and dump the water out. By then the third canoe had made it to shore emptied their gear and returned to help. We put one gear bag in that canoe and the others in the canoe that had swamped and everyone set off for the campsite again. It turns out that when the canoe swamped, Steve lost his fishing rod.

At Chatterton Falls, off Russell Lake we took off our wet cloths, and ate a lunch. It was only 11:30, but given our adventure that morning and the wind, it was decided that we would stay the day at the cataract. People fanned out to setup camp and then scattered to fish and explore the rapids. This particular rapid was quite visually beautiful. It stepped at least three major drops that we explored. Unfortunately, the fishing again was poor; perhaps due to the wind, or just the number of visitors. John Roberts and Mr. Nauerz had minimal luck, but nothing of consequence. My attempt at fly fishing was met with only small fry for my efforts. Brian decided to jump in the current that entered the lake from the cataract. He was swept out probably 100 yards off shore. However he swam back and did it again. Later most of the crew was jumping in the current of the second cataract and letting it sweep them down stream. It was a fairly easy exit before you were caught in the current to the lowest cataract. Connor and I were up stream fishing while a Brian, Mr. Nauerz, Emil, and John Roberts were doing this so when we got back I talked Mr. Nauerz into doing it with Connor and I so we could enjoy the activity. It was a thrill but a little spooky due to the chance of heading for the bottom cataract.

After exhausting ourselves doing this, Mr. Nauerz showed us a pool on the far side that you could just float in. While it was lacking a waitress to bring us some mixed drinks, this was a nice rest. When we'd finished playing we returned to camp and got into dry cloths and helped with dinner. I began collecting firewood and found a nice stash at a nearby campsite. There were at least four separate campsites right in this area.

We found that one of the food bags had taken on some water and two of the lunches had gotten a little wet. We put that in the sun to dry as best we could. It looked like some of the Hudson Bay Bread would get moldy if we did not modify our lunch schedule, so we opted to eat what was wet at the next meal.

At dinnertime (another hearty pasta dish) Steve pointed out an Asian long horned beetle crawling on his and Emil's tent. We took pictures of it due to its long antenna and Brian told us its name and that it was an invading species. It was decimating the forests in Canada by boring into the trees and ultimately causing their demise. After we learned this, we turned this specimen into compost. We setup the cooking area behind a huge

bolder well back from the shoreline, due to the wind which had to be blowing over 25 MPH.

I had found another campsite closer to the cataract with a nice fire area, and we went up there for evening vespers and a campfire. We ate through a bag of marshmallows fairly quickly while we enjoyed the fire that Steve built. I took some pictures of the sunset and then made a few casts to try to hook a fish, but was unsuccessful. By 9 pm I was ready for bed, and given the sheltering of the campfire site, the mosquitoes had found us, so Connor and I turned in. Connor and my tent was perched 50 feet above the water on top of a boulder with a nice view of the lake on a nice cushiony blanket of mosses and small plants. We slumbered easily off to sleep with the sound of the rapids in the background.

Monday, August 8, 2006 - The Portage of the Lilies.

We got up at 5 am in an attempt to beat the wind. We had a long trip across the lake to accomplish and if it was into a headwind like we had seen the day before we would have a difficult go of it. We were ready to leave before 7 am and got some (rather dark) pictures of the group in front of the cataract. Since this was my first use of the camera's timer, you can see me scrambling across the rocks to get with the group in my first attempt.

Fortunately, we did not have winds as strong as the day before and the trip across the lake was not near as rough as it would have been the day before. We passed a rock bleached white with bird droppings and crept up on a sea gull sitting on it. As we were paddling along it seemed that every second time I looked, Mr. Nauerz would begin to put his paddle down and fish. Mr. Roberts bequeathed him with the nickname, "Idle Paddle", we all had some laughs and he quickly responded by bequeathing Mr. Roberts with the nickname "Swamp the Canoe". More laughs and these nicknames stayed with them throughout the rest of the trip. About ½ way into Heron Bay we saw another bald eagle.

By 11 am we had reached the beginning of Allan Creek, a stream we were to follow for the next four hours, after which Mr. Roberts appropriately nicknamed this journey the "Portage of the Lilies". The progress got progressively more difficult with water plants grabbing at the paddles, and pulling on the canoes. The stream shallowed, the bottom was mud, and there was less and less clearance on the sides and below the bottom of the canoe. Trees had fallen across the stream and necessitated climbing out of the canoe and balancing on the wet slippery log while the lead person pulled the canoe up till the middle person could join him. The two pulled again till the person in the bow could climb back in over the gear and onto their seat. The rear person climbed out and helped finish pulling the canoe over the log. Everyone then climbed back in and it was another short distance to the next log. This went on and on. Someone suggested just walking the canoes in the stream, and to test the theory that we could get out and walk, I sank a paddle all the way to the handle without meeting much resistance. I figured if we put our weight on the streambed we might just sink out of sight. When it wasn't a log we had to get out for, it was a beaver dam. Most all of us ran out of drinking water before this adventure was half over. The valley we were in had little or no wind. It was a battle every foot of the way.

After two hours of this we came to a meadow (marshy swamp) where the stream was too shallow to continue in. Apparently a man made pond had filled in with muck. We had just portaged around this man made dam. We stopped for a break and to assess the situation. Nobody said a word about going back, but going forward did not look too tantalizing either.

Bryan went into his pack and pulled out a cache of Snickers bars and passed them out. While people were munching on the candy bars, Brian noticed that there were blackberries growing in the marsh, and for a bit we were distracted by picking and eating them. This pacified the crew and after a bit we decided it was time to start the hike across the marsh. I gave Connor my Snickers bar for a favor to be named later, since I'm no fan of peanuts, and peanut butter.

Let me stress there was no longer a trail. We were bushwhacking across these wetlands. You would step forward and test your weight on the next clump of grass you were going to trust your safety to and shift on to it. Regularly they collapsed under your weight. If you were lucky you caught yourself. When unlucky you sank, usually to your hip. With the weight of the pack or canoe, you needed someone else to help to pull you out. I was up front with John Roberts trying to make a path around the small input streams (creating a 3-4 foot gully 3+ feet across). After a long time we finally made it past this obstacle, and found ourselves with enough water to paddle again (although it was disappointing we were not past the lilies and into open lake). After crossing a few beaver dams we re-entered another fallen tree obstacle course. There was one tree that wasn't sunken and was easily 1-2 feet above the water. Passing this required pulling the packs out of the canoe, balancing them on the log and hoisting the canoe over. While we were crossing this obstacle, the thought crossed my mind that it was a great place to encounter a bee's nest. Fortunately this was not the case. I don't know how we would have navigated around it if we had encountered bees without just enduring the stings. Once this was behind us, we paddled another 100 feet to a portage. Normally portages were not something you looked forward to, but walking on semi solid ground was something of a blessing on that day. This portage turned out to be fairly long, but what a blessing to see navigable water at the end of it. Once I finished the portage, I turned to walk back along the trail to see if Connor needed any help, and found he was just 20 feet up the trail. He told me he could finish by himself, so I walked further back along the trail and told the last few crewmembers that it was only a hundred steps to the lake. Someone told me later those words were what they needed to finish. This was definitely the hardest we worked the whole week. I was proud of Connor since I thought this experience would teach him some good lessons and he had come through it without a single complaint.

We all took a long soak in the water when we got there. It was cool and wet, but not something we were willing to trust drinking. Connor got to find out what leaches looked like since there were many in the water. John Roberts picked a juicy one on off Mr. Roberts' leg. After a 20-30 minute rest we pushed out into the lake looking for a campsite. We spread out to investigate a variety of camping sites we saw and fortunately the crew I was with found one first so we did not have to paddle further to get to a site.

The Portage of the Lilies had taken most of my energy supply for the day. It was about 3:30 when we set up camp on Allan Lake.

A butterfly showed up and began to sip nutrients off the shoulder pads of the canoes where those carrying them had sweated into them. We set up camp. Connor and I found a large boulder overlooking the lake crowned with mosses, with a clear view. It was a nice site. With everything setup, Mr. Nauerz, Connor and I took a canoe out to do some fishing. We spent two hours paddling around trying promising looking spots and did not get a single bite. Since this was a remote lake that it looked like nobody had been at that summer it was depressing. We returned to camp and ate our re-hydrated fare with the rest of our compatriots. Connor and I realized we had lost a spork at some point during the day and figured it was back at our previous campsite. We shared the one we had that evening. I spent a short while collecting firewood since there was quite a large supply in easy access.

That evening it was clear and a full moon rose over the lake. We built a fire and rested beside it. It was beautiful. Unfortunately the strenuous effort during the day had left us tired, sore and ready for bed. To the best of my knowledge nobody stayed up very late looking at the moon.

Tuesday, August 8, 2006

The next dawned with an allowance to sleep in till 7 AM! This was met with most of us being up earlier. I tried to make a spoon out of some driftwood I found, but it was a bit of a dismal attempt. During breakfast, Steve took pity on me and loaned me a spare spoon he had brought (thanks Steve! – next time I'll hump along a spare). After breakfast was over, there was a massive pow-wow to choose a route to our next destination. Brian's route was selected (another trip down a small stream that could have been another "Portage of the Lilies" if we were unlucky).

We started out at 8:00 by crossing the lake and investigating a strange hole in the rock that Mr. McGuire, Mr. Nauerz and Emil had noticed the day before. The hole was about 4-5 feet in diameter, and about 5-6 feet deep. It was almost perfectly round. My father in law says he has seen similar holes in Alaska and the guides told him they are provision caches. They are typically on notable outcroppings of rock (as was this one), which would be findable even in bad weather. After looking at this hole for a short period we began paddling across Allan Lake to our first portage. During this trek Mr. Nauerz AKA Idle Paddle caught a nice bass that came along with us for the remainder of the day.

The second portage of the day turned out to be a long hike into Poohbah Lake. It looked like two short portages with a lake in between on the map, but turned out to be one continuous hike. It was during this hike that my back started acting up (I had hurt it on July 4, pulling weeds out of the garden, but after a week of pain it had cleared up). When we got to the lake at the end of the portage it looked like the fish (Bill as I recall Steve naming it) had expired. Brian did some resuscitation activity and after a bit Bill rejoined

the living. The lake in this area had a nice sandy bottom and sloped away from the shore line gently so we enjoyed a cool refreshing swim for a bit.

We got back under way and traveled down a long slowly moving branch of Poohbah Lake for a period. We ate lunch at a point along the river. Connor caught a nice bass at this stop, and while he was doing so I noticed a ground hornet just 5 feet behind him. Fortunately, we did not stir it up before we left. There were also numerous fresh water clams in the water. At this lunch there was one extra beef stick, ten instead of the normal nine. A lively conversation about how to split it up amongst those who wouldn't relinquish a claim to a piece of it took place. I forget what the ultimate outcome of the beef stick was, but was a sign our calorie intake was not matching our burn rate.

After lunch we got back on the river and were entertained by a loon who seemed to do some sort of courting dance. Perhaps it was done to scare us away from its child that was swimming nearby, or perhaps some other reason. We saw a very strange looking duck. Perhaps it was deformed, or it just naturally had a very strange looking chest. Pushing on we came to where the river met Poohbah Creek which we were to follow to our next destination. Initially the going was slow, with beaver dams blocking our way. After 3 or 4 dams we got onto an open area that had a small stream feeding it. We were able to wade the first riffles, but shortly had to portage around the next. Once we were back in the water we were paddling through lilies and other water plants for the next hour. Fallen trees again impeded our progress from time to time. We finally exited Poohbah Creek and were on Tanner Lake where the Maligne river fed into it. We turned for the nearest campsite on our maps and headed for it. Unfortunately, it was occupied. But the next site along that route was empty and we quickly setup camp. Since we were close to a rapid we (Mr. Roberts, Connor and I) took a canoe out and started fishing. We were at least getting bites, and after a bit Connor landed a 22+ inch walleye. I caught a much smaller one (~14") shortly later. As we were drifting around I had gotten a nice bite in a lagoon near this one fallen tree. A while later we drifted back through the lagoon I encouraged Connor to cast into the same spot. Sure enough he got a massive chomp from what was probably the same fish. After a good fight, he pulled a 24 inch pike out of the water. We decided to head back to camp with our fish. Brian, Steve and Mr. Nauerz had left before us and gone further upstream to fish and did not return till nearly 7 pm. Connor, John Roberts and I went back to the bottom of the riffles with a canoe again and fished for a while longer but only lost lures. The other group caught a nice stringer of bass and pike, but no walleye.

We had too much fish that night to supplement our dinner; in total I believe 4 Pike, 6 Bass and 2 Walleye. There was little breeze that evening and there were a few bothersome mosquitoes but nothing that stopped us from staying out and enjoying a few stars and a good campfire. John Roberts found a frog along the riverbank and tossed it out away from the riverbank. On his second toss a massive pike came and took the frog in an enormous splash. I took to wearing a bandanna to keep my hair from flying around, and getting caught by branches on portages.

Wednesday, August 9, 2006

We again arose at an early hour, 6 am, fixed our breakfast, and broke camp. When I got up at 5:50, I watched some beaver slowly swim past our campsite. A short time later another came by. We were on the water by 7:30 am. We backtracked for the first mile or so of the stream. Shortly after starting we passed a massive beaver lodge. Note that there were lodges all along our route, this one in particular looked to be the culmination of years of work by its inhabitants. It was perhaps 12 feet high and 30 feet in diameter above the water Brian spotted a bald eagle on the far shore, and our canoe paddled our canoe over to get a close look as all of the previous eagles we had spotted were 1000+ feet away. Connor was taking pictures as we crept up on it. We got within 100 feet before it flew off. Idle Paddle (Mr. Nauerz) took the opportunity to take a few casts while they waited on us.

By 9 am we had done our first portage, a very short trip around a man made dam of rock. Brian told us that when the area was logged many such dams had been built to help float the logs out. We paddled on and noticed an Inuit (well you never know who put them there do you?) rock tower indicating, "this is the way". It was the first we had seen since the ones the bus driver had pointed out. We continued on along this river till we found the connecting stream we were looking for. Fortunately, there was adequate water to avoid another "Portage of the Lilies." We spotted many turtles in this area.

We spied a large group of other campers at the first place we were thinking about taking lunch. So we pressed on another mile or so, and found a nice peninsula in the sun to eat at. Lunch was taken on top of a large dome of rock that ended a peninsula jutting out in Minn Lake. We swam in the waters around this rock, and tried to call in some loons. I noticed a spoon in the water, and dove down for it. While a bit dirty, it did the job of replacing the spork that had been lost.

After lunch we found that our first target campsite was occupied. It was right beside a wide rapid that dropped 10 or so feet. Given there were tents at the site we forged onward. The map watchers were getting concerned that we were getting very close to our pickup point and we were still 3 full days away from our pickup. Brian spotted a potential campsite on his maps below the next set of rapids. Our crew forged on and got to the portage 5+ minutes before the next canoe. Connor and I pulled out our gear and had done the portage before the other crews had arrived at the starting point. Connor and I sat and waited and waited for the others to come down. After a long wait (~15 minutes), Swamp the Canoe (Mr. Roberts), Mr. McGuire and Brian came down with a canoe but no gear. They scouted the area and found a campsite on a point just past the rapids. We decided to spend the night there. As it turns out this was our last portage. I went back up the portage and left Connor taking a nap on the rocks. I tried to take Brian's pack but he did not want to give anyone the appearance of needing any help, so I snapped a few pictures of him in all his portage finery at the head end of the rapids. That evening we ate fish we caught in the area. John Roberts spent part of the afternoon rebuilding the fireplace. I helped by bringing up the largest flat rock I could carry to make a shelf beside the fireplace to work and put pots on.

Thursday, August 10, 2006 - A day of great fishing!

The day dawned overcast and cool. Most people wore an extra layer for most of the morning. By evening it was partly cloudy and had warmed up.

The crew got up at various times since we had decided to spend a full day at this camp site. We spent the day fishing at various places. John Roberts managed to hook and land an 18" bass, Connor, Steve and Emil caught a reasonable mess of 15-16" bass. Those that weren't fishing with the rest of us moseyed around the area where we were camping. A few pike were hooked and released.

A couple of individuals from the great state of Alabama came down to the bottom of the rapids, and John Roberts spoke with them. He picked up some great quotes (without the accent these just don't have the impact they do when spoken) "Ain't no walleye 'round here" and "Caught a 6 pound bass, but we had to toss it back cause we had a portage". Turns out that these two were part of a group who were fishing the upper end of the rapids and that group pulled out 6-9 walleye from just in front of the falls. We were unable to catch any walleye the whole time we stayed in the area.

Connor and I spent an hour trying to get a good picture of a bald eagle that was eyeing the remains of the cleaned fish from the day before. I took a snooze on the rocks in the sun for a while.

I think this was the day Brian volunteered to clean all the fish and we sure took advantage of his generosity. That evening we gorged ourselves on the fish and Brian's cooking.

At some point along the trip Brian and I had a conversation about the rocks that make up the Canadian Shield. I thought what we were looking at were granites and could not remember what rock granites were prior to metamorphosis. While we were at this camp, Brian offered a \$1 Canadian bet that the shield was not granite. Mr. McGuire and I took him up on the bet. Mr. McGuire made a second bet with Brian that Mr. McGuire lost, but we both won the bet about the makeup of the shield. Mr. McGuire found a statement on a map of Quetico that stated the rocks were of granitic content and ultimately Brian conceded he had it wrong. It turns out that granites are metamorphic igneous rocks by the way. In case it turns up in conversation or your next trip to Jeopardy!

The seagulls watched the fish cleaning activity and then fought over the remains. We took a vote that evening regarding moving on, or staying put. There were 5 votes for staying put, so that is what we did. That night we had a good campfire, and there was a conversation I won't go into the details of but the youth thought it was a gas.

Friday, August 11, 2006

Today was declared as a sleep as late as you want day, and our interpreter took advantage of it to snooze till 10 am! Emil on the other hand had gotten up at 4:30 and by the time I got up at 6:30 had caught three nice bass.

Around 10 am, Brian prepared breakfast. The pancakes he made were a real hit. I believe Connor got sixths.

A canoe expedition went back to the previous set of rapids to fish for a while. Connor and I chased two bald eagles trying to get a good picture. While the fishing wasn't delivering the big ones, we still did respectable and augmented our dinner with more bass. I spent four hours fishing the rapids with a brass spoon with some hair on it, and caught over 50 small bass. The fishing was fun but with that many catches, it became almost boring.

Early in afternoon, Connor and went fishing in a canoe trying to catch something in the current past the rapids. After a while of not catching anything we started chasing a bald eagle around. At one stop along the shoreline I filled the canoe with driftwood from the far bank and brought it back to camp since we were depleting the fallen fuel in the area where we were camped. And we were keeping a fire going all day for some reason. Connor and I chased two bald eagles around the area trying to get a good picture of one in flight but weren't but so successful.

Late in the afternoon we traveled down stream and fished with two canoes. One group with Emil, Steve and Brian went further downstream, while Connor and I stopped at the first set of fast water. I pulled a good sized bass out of an eddy, but not much else was biting that was big enough to keep. Steve and the rest of the group in the other canoe came back to report they had caught a number of pike, and Steve had broken the rod he was using (his dad's) fighting one.

At 6 pm Brian called in to the base camp to check on our pickup for the following day and learned that it was delayed from 11 am to 2:30 pm. At the time this was disappointing, in retrospect it allowed for a much slower paced Saturday journey to the pickup. But it was still good we arrived early because the plane got there well before 2:30.

Mr. Nauerz took an afternoon nap that lasted till dinnertime, but then again he was up at 4:30 am! – some life huh!

Saturday, August 12, 2006

We rose at 7 am since knew we were fairly close to our pick up spot weren't in a rush to leave. I was up earlier and saw a mother and two young otters or beaver go past. It was fun watching the two youngins play around their mom. I took some pictures of the sunrise. By 9:50 we were packed up and ready to depart. I got a few pictures of the crew standing around the canoes in the water. Seems most all of us had all gotten past getting our feet wet first thing in the morning.

We got past the fast water that we had fished around the previous evening and noticed small baitfish jumping on the surface. We cast around them for about 20 minutes but were unable to get a strike from what ever was chasing them up to the surface. We forged



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on. As we rounded one point we saw the most bedraggled bald eagle sitting in a dead tree. It was quite disheveled. A sorry looking bird if we had ever seen one. As we came to Hilly Island, Brian turned to the right and we navigated around the island counter clockwise looking for the ranger station where our pickup was supposed to be. As it turned out we paddled from 6 o'clock around to 9 o'clock before we found the ranger station. It was on a long sandy beach in a deep cove. This trip added a mile or two to our total distance. Even with the extra distance we got to the ranger station about an hour after we left our previous camp.

Since we thought we had a 3 hour wait, we pulled out the cooking gear and began cleaning it in the sand. After about 30 minutes worth of some serious elbow grease we had some of the cleanest looking pots we had ever seen, probably better than when we had picked them up from the quartermaster. Around 11:30 we ate our lunch, and at 12:20 the first plane showed up. We helped load the canoes and the lightweight gear. We stopped to take a group picture (which turned out great I might add) and 5 of us (Connor, John Roberts, Mr. Roberts, Steve and I) piled in with the pilot.

The flight back was over territory similar to what we had been canoeing through, but since there were no over flights of Quetico, the first few pictures are in the direction of the areas we paddled through, but the remainder just of interesting country and places that looked like some of the marshes we enjoyed.

Some of the youth took the opportunity to catch a few Z's. The flight lasted about an hour and we landed right in front of the main Atikokan Northern Tier base camp. The second plane landed about 45 minutes after ours. And I got pictures of our plane taking off and the other landing. Right about here the camera batteries were indicating that they were completely drained (I had brought three) We spent the remainder of the day washing the camp's gear we had used, taking our showers and getting into clean clothes, putting out stuff out to dry and repacking for our return trip. A trip through the camp's store did not turn up any items Connor and I couldn't live without, so we waited for the dinner bell. I remembered I had brought Oreos and some hard candy along and pulled it out for the crew to enjoy. It would seem that Connor made a meal out of it.

We were told of the arrests in London three days before where a terrorist group was in the final planning stages to smuggle liquid explosives onto 5 planes. This had changed the allowed carry on baggage and we needed to make allowances for this in what we packed. Mr. Roberts called and verified our flights and the pickup for the following day.

We played a spirited game of volleyball for about an hour, and the tee shirts came off as we started sweating. Fortunately, we stopped keeping score till the very end. The team with the fewer players wound up with the lower score when we got serious again. All in all nobody got hurt and we burned off a lot of energy. It was clear that the female staff thought Brian was one of the better looking interpreters there.

When dinnertime came, Connor ate sparingly (for the first time all week!) in contrast Steve tried to eat an entire 50 lb bag of potatoes by himself. After dinner there was a

campfire. Steve hastily planned a spoof on our interpreter Brian. I am not sure where the punch line came from ("Brian" volunteered to gather firewood and then picked up the X's we had each placed over our cat holes), but it was mostly about how Brian's accent (he claims he doesn't have one), foods, pastimes and pursuits are different from those in coastal New Jersey.

Since Connor and I were leaving early the next morning (7 am), we said our good byes to Brian in case we missed him the following day. It started raining about dusk and everyone turned in.

Sunday, August 13, 2006

Connor and I got a 6:20 am start on our day. After we got up we went and had a hot breakfast thanks to the cooking crew. Pancakes, bacon really hit the spot. Then we carried our gear down to the parking lot area and waited for Rick (our driver to International Falls) to show. A light rain began falling and we hid under the awning of the building. At about 7:04 we heard Rick's van coming up the driveway. We chucked our gear in the back, said our goodbyes to our crewmates and hopped in the van. Rick was an engaging person to talk with and we traveled along in light to hard rain. Rick pointed out the highlights along the road to us.

At the boarder crossing the official quizzed us about where we were, what we did, how the fishing was. He looked in the back and opened one gear bag. Far more than what had gone on when we were north bound. After 5 minutes he let us go on and in just another 10 minutes we were at the airport. It was nearly deserted, and there was nobody at the check in desk so we found a seat and waited. The TV blared endlessly about the events in England. After a half hour, an agent came and checked us in. I had brought some peanut butter along and asked about bringing it on the plane. The agent said she would find out, but as it turns out nobody stopped us from bringing it on. Once we were checked in we waited another hour and a half for the plane to leave. About 40 minutes before the flight left most of the people on the plane showed up. It appears they know the routine at the airport better than we did. Once settled on the plane they wound up and took off. Since it was still raining we quickly entered the clouds and could see almost nothing up till we landed in Minneapolis. I tracked down an agent for the airline our next hop was on and they told us there was no way to travel on sooner so we were resigned to a 5 hour lay over.

Connor and I tracked down lunch at a Friday's and then wandered the shops in the airport. We found a bookstore and got Connor a nice book on dragons and a copy of Tom Sawyer. I encouraged him to finish reading his assigned books for school. Our flight out was 5 hours after we landed so we had a long walk through the airport, and then sat at the gate for about two hours. I tried to get Connor to learn to navigate through an airport but he was not interested in learning. After a bit of pressure, he did ok using the overheads and the maps at the kiosks.

We hopped on the Minneapolis to Charlotte flight and the person at the gate asked Connor his age. I thought it was odd. We took our seats and found we were in the emergency exit row. After going through all the preflight stuff, a flight attendant asked Connor's age. It turned out that you have to be 15 or older to sit in an exit row. A rather foolish way to impose a restriction IMHO, so we changed seats and suffered with the cramped legroom. Connor managed to finish *The Communist Manifesto* on the flight (what an awful collection of ranting; I had read it in the airport in International Falls and on the first flight just so I could discuss it with him). When we arrived in Charlotte there was time for a quick dinner at Burger King in the airport.

We found our gate, and some seats. Connor started reading Tom Sawyer and I continued to whittle away at *Les Misérables*. There was a slight departure delay due to a mechanical problem (no oxygen in the pilot's cabin) which cost us about 40 minutes. I called Kurdy and let her know about the delay. About 11:30 pm we landed in Myrtle Beach, and proceeded to wait 40 minutes for our luggage (I was wondering if the ground crew had gone home). We got to the beach house at Sunset Beach at 1 am. Oddly Connor stayed awake in the car the whole way there.

The other members of our crew did not fair so well. When they arrived at the airport they found their flight was canceled. The reason: there was construction on the long runway and their jet could not land (Connor and my flight was a turboprop). It would seem that NWA knew about the construction long before the passengers got there. Another poor job by the airline. They should have been able to tell the day before when Mr. Roberts called to check on the flight that there would be an issue. They were put on a bus to Bemidji, Minnesota some 2 hours away, and flew from there to Minneapolis. By the time they arrived in Minneapolis they were so late they had missed their connecting flight. They opted to go to the Mall of the Americas for while, which was closed except for a few restaurants, and then had a good dinner. When they got back to the airport at 11 pm they spent the night in the chairs because their flight out left early in the morning. NWA did offer some blankets, how accommodating! They got back to New Jersey around noon the following day (about 12 hours later than planned).

In closing I'd like to thank Brian. He was a good guy, as quiet as I am and nice to be around. His eagle eyes found lots of wildlife to point out when we were traveling. He put up with Connor and I in the canoe every day except for the first when we traveled with Mr. McGuire. He never had a cross word for anyone, and only asked Connor to keep paddling once (when we went up the fast water going into Poobah Lake). I'd also like to thank Dr. John who repeatedly cracked my back after about the 4th day. It relieved the pressure that had built up which made walking, standing, sitting, and lying down painful. Swamp the Canoe (Mr. Roberts) put a massive amount of effort into planning the trip, organizing things, getting money, permits, etc. Everyone involved should thank him at least twice. Idle Paddle (Mr. Nauerz), Swamp the Canoe (Mr. Roberts) and Brian carried the canoes the entire trip. I am not sure I could have survived a day's worth of carrying if I had been asked. My thanks to them! Thanks also to Mr. McGuire for carrying the other food pack. With the day pack and a food pack your load was quite heavy, not something I would look forward to doing again. The remaining crew Emil and Steve were fun to be

with and helpful at every turn. Quite a good group to travel with and Atikokan is great place to go!