

How I Spent My MEA Weekend with My Dad and his Stupid Friend Al on Hegman Lake

Al Freeland, March 2009

Hi – my name is Emily!! I am 12 years old, and my Dad forced me to go on a stupid trip to some place called the Boundary Waters with his stupid friend Al!!! Here is how I spent my MEA weekend, when I could have been watching videos and listening to my IPOD!!!!!!

My Dad and I drove to Northfield early on Friday morning, October 17th – to a crazy friend of my Dad's, his name was Al Freeland – a real weirdo! I guess my Dad saved his life a couple of years ago by dragging him out of an ice hole he fell into on a lake up north while they were snowshoeing across a lake to go ice fishing. My Dad is cool!!!

We pulled up into Al's driveway and I knew we were in trouble right away – he came out as soon as we pulled into the drive with a smile on his face, chipper and happy, and I was tired, grumpy, had a cold, and had to go to the bathroom. We repacked all of our camping gear into his Jeep, and he gave his wife a kiss and away we went.

Al got his GPS all positioned, started talking non-stop all of the way to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) in northern Minnesota. The BWCA is a wilderness area that I have heard about for many, many years, but had never been there before. We drove and drove and drove! I had to ask Al to stop 10-20 times so I could go to the bathroom – I am sorry Al, I had to GOOOOO!

Our trip was taking us up to the town of Ely, on the edge of the BWCA. We then took the Echo Trail (an old logging trail that was now blacktopped) about 20-30 miles to the turn-off to our lake – Hegman Lake, entry point 77. I was excited because Hegman Lake was THE most famous lake for a special Indian art or something called a 'Pictograph'. It appears that the pictographs were

paintings by the ancient Chippewa or Ojibwa Indian tribes in this area about 500 years ago. They would find straight up and down, high cliffs, with a DEEP water drop off below the ledge. They would then paint pictures of animals, people, or canoes on the face of the cliff. It appears that the Indians would first offer a sacrifice of tobacco in the water, to their gods. The young Indian youths that wanted to prove they were a 'man' would climb to the top of the HIGH cliffs and jump off into the cold water below.

It seems that this crazy Al wanted to take us to see the rock drawings. He said that they are over 500 years old, still very beautiful even though they have been exposed to the weather for all of these years. Supposedly to this day, no one knows what they used to paint these pictographs!

Back to my story. We drove and drove and ended up in Ely first and drove around buying groceries, a sleeping pad for my Dad and me, and some wine for that stupid Al to drink. We actually bought our groceries at a store called Zups. Mr. Zup who owned the store was a famous artist who hand carved fish spearing lures I was told.

Once we got onto the Echo trail it was about an hour until we made a turn onto a dirt road that took us back to the Hegman Lake parking area. The parking lot was FILLED with cars. We were a little afraid that we would not find a camping site if all of those people were there fishing and camping for the weekend! We parked and took our canoe down an 80 rod portage (a rod is about 16 ½ feet – about the length of a canoe) and loaded up all of our camping and fishing gear. Al had an 18 ½ foot Souris River Kevlar canoe. It was really light weight, and very pretty.

The portage was lined with very pretty and very old pine trees. My Dad told me they were Red Pine, and something called 'Old Growth' or very old pine trees – maybe even 500 years old. They were little twigs when the Indians were painting the Pictographs! They were about 35-40 feet around.

We got in the water, and I had to sit in the 'duffer seat' or middle seat of the canoe. I paddled REALLY good. We FLEW across the water. That stupid Al told me that if it was windy we could have made a sail with some plastic tarps tied to two paddles and the wind would take you across the lake. He is so stupid!

We explored a couple of camp sites but found they were already filled. We found the sites by using a map, a lake map. It shows the lake and the camp sites. You have to find out where you are on the map, take a compass and move the map so the top of the map is North. You then look around and find out where to go.

The lake we were camping in was actually called South Hegman. Later we went to North Hegman by going across a short 5 rod portage, and it was there that we found the Pictographs. We then also went on to Trease Lake.

When we got to our campsite, we checked it out. It was beautiful. Al took a picture off the east shore of the camp, and it really looked just like one of those pictures you would see on a calendar – beautiful shore, reflection of the trees on the smooth water, and a lot of Fall color. We were afraid it was going to rain, so we set up the tent, a tarp and got a fire going for some grub!! My Dad showed us how to make Boy Scout Burgers. We took aluminum foil, put in a 1/3 lb. patty of hamburger, some onions, potato slices, carrots and seasoning – and threw them in the coals of the fire. They were GREAT!

We fished a little bit off shore but dummy Al threw out his line with a minnow on the hook, set it down on shore, and walked away. I looked up and started screaming, 'YOUR ROD JUST JUMPED INTO THE WATER!!!' I ran over to the shore and sure enough, a big olí monster muskie took the bait and jerked his entire rod and reel into the lake. Al ran over and took my rod and cast out real quickly. After about 10 minutes, he was really lucky and hooked the line from his rod in the lake! He brought it in, and it looked like the muskie had taken the lure, bit into the lead head of the jig, smashed the lead and bent the hook. It must have been a monster.

We sat around the campfire that night, and ate some more food, and dummy Al and my Dad drank a couple glasses of wine and we went to bed – we were tired. We all slept like a rock. I laughed real hard at Al in the morning. He complained that I pushed him off of his air mattress and into the side of the tent – all squished, cold and miserable, while my Dad and I were rested, comfortable and warm. HA HA AL 

That morning we explored the camp site, chopped wood, got a fire going and Dad showed us how to cook our breakfast on the campsite grill that the Forest Service supplies. He put aluminum foil on top of the grill, laid it flat and we cooked the entire meal on that. Bacon, eggs, and hash browns! YUM! We also had hot chocolate and coffee. Al drank wine for breakfast?? What is wrong with that guy?

That day the wind REALLY started blowing hard, and there were white caps on the lake. We turned on Alís short wave radio and heard that it was 26 degrees that night – BELOW FREEZING!! I SLEPT OUTDOORS ON THE GROUND WHEN IT WAS ONLY 26 DEGREES!! COOL!! But the bad news was that it sounded like we were in for some bad storms, wind, bitter cold and rain in this area. We decided go out in the boat and go fishing and go see the Pictographs.

We didnít have much luck fishing. Al said the cold front brought in bad fishing, so we took the 5 rod portage that took us into North Hegman. The lakes here are BEAUTIFUL and Al took a lot of pictures that I have in my scrap book. We saw quite a few animals. We saw some Canadian Jays, some bald eagles, but no loons! The loons must have flown to warmer climates. While we were on the portage I found the neatest beaver stick – all chewed clean by the beaver teeth. I kept it for my adventure collection at home and to show at school. I am in 6th grade and am very smart.

We paddled for about 1/2 mile and came to the area on our map marked with

a sign for the Pictographs. WOW! We found them! They were up about 20 feet on the side of a steep cliff. There were animal and Indians, and hands and symbols – all in red. Just think they were 500 years old and PERFECT and still bright red? Some think they used iron oxide that is found around this area plus human blood, drained from the artist body to prove how brave and great they were.

We decide to head back to camp. When we got here we checked the weather forecast again, and RATS – it was confirmed that it was supposed to be a bad storm. We decided to stay there as late in the day as possible, then break camp and head home. We fished a little, used the outside toilet provided as all BWCA camp sites, broke camp, packed up, cried a little out of sadness and paddled back to our cars.

When we got back to our car, the parking lot was now EMPTY, except for a motor cycle and one Missouri car. The guy from Missouri drove all the way up here to buy a new canoe, paddle a bit, and go back home. He wasn't even going to camp? Strange. The guy on the motorcycle had his backpack with him but no canoe? He was camping in the state campsite a little bit down the road.

We got everything packed back in the car and headed home. I had to pee!!! At least 10 times on the way home and Al was REALLY getting mad at me and kept trying to hit me in the back seat. He is really mean!!

On the way home Al said we needed to stop at one of the most famous rock cliffs on highway 1, just about when you are ready to turn south. It is the famous 'cut-through' that he said is in a lot of Geology textbooks. It is a whole cliff of exposed rock called Ely Greenstone. This is supposed to be the oldest exposed rock in the world – about 3.8 billion years old. And it REALLY is greenish in color. I have some pictures of my Dad and I standing in front of the Greenstone. Cool!

We finally got home, and I think I had a good MEA weekend trip. My Dad was talking with Al about going winter camping again this year. They actually went camping once when it was 17 degrees BELOW zero! I told them I wanted to go with them – and all that stupid Al did was grump and make a bunch of funny noises. Oh well, I hope we do go so I can bug Al some more 

THE END

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