

A Typical Day in the BWCA?

By Owen Secoy

The soft morning light filtering through the rain fly and tent beckoned the arrival of a fresh June morning in the Boundary Waters. Another day full of adventure and blessings in the outer reaches of the wilderness canoe waters. I laid there for a few moments musing over the events of the days since we had entered the Park and pondered what this new day might have in store for us. Undoubtedly, more adventurous memories would be added to our ever expanding list.

Slowly I extracted myself from the warm confines of my sleeping bag and slipped into my camp clothes. First call of the day is off to the biffy. The morning biffy run can get complicated and uncomfortable if the path is little used and overgrown and there happens to be heavy dew present. The prospect of getting cold and wet just trying to get to the biffy can often shorten the trek to just out of sight and hearing range of the tent pad.

A few pumps on the Coleman stove, a quick light and water was soon heating for coffee and/or hot chocolate. If it was to be a travel day, we would have a 'quick start' breakfast comprised of Pop Tarts or breakfast bars washed down with the beverage of choice. We would then break camp and hit the water as early as possible. On layover days, we will slow down the pace and lazily prepare a hot breakfast of scrambled eggs, pancakes, French toast, bacon, etc. This particular day was to be a layover day so the breakfast fare would be from the more enjoyable hot menu. The hot menu, of course, requires extra time for preparation and clean-up but is always worth the effort. The non essential personnel (not involved in breakfast prep) usually entertain themselves with a little bank fishing.

After breakfast clean-up, we busied ourselves with the activities of the day. Out-of- camp activities included fishing, exploring, photo ops, hiking, etc. In camp, we read, play cards, bank fish, nap, write in our journals, use the sun

shower, etc. Most of these, of course, are dependent on cooperative weather. On inclement weather days with high winds, rain, lightening or anything else that would keep us off the water, we would usually pass the time with a highly competitive game of Hearts. This day was shaping up to be beautiful so my bowman and I headed out to see if we could entice a few of Boundary Waters finest to accept our artificial lure offerings.

As on most BWCA lakes, the fish were not hard to find that morning. Sometimes though, it is easier to find them than it is to boat them. This was that sort of day. The fish would play with the surface lures, sometime slap them around, sometimes actually jump over them and once in a while get hooked so we would get to boat one. We had been spending most of our time casting to island points and drop-offs and were not being very productive so we decided to change our tactics and try a small 'fishy looking' cove.

On my first cast into the cove the water around the lure exploded prompting a reflex 'cross-his-eyes' jerk of my fishing rod. Of course, I had to dodge the lure as it came flying back at me. What ever was playing with the lure was obviously pretty big so I quickly tossed the lure back into the same area. On several casts the same thing happened; big swirls, lots of commotion but no hook-up. I reasoned one more cast; if I didn't hook it then I would try something different or go some place else.

As soon as the lure landed the long, lean body of a big northern came up out of the water and crashed down on my lure. My lure disappeared with the fish but I waited to feel his weight and set the hook. From then on, it was hang on with both hands and with just enough pressure on the line to keep him from stripping all the line off of the reel. After numerous long runs, I finally got him close enough to the canoe where we could see him and he could see us. His mouth was so big it looked like he could have swallowed a basketball. At first glimpse of us, off he went on another series of long runs that drug the canoe hither and yon and out into the main lake.

It became obvious that I was not going to be able to boat this lunker. Every time I got him close to the canoe it would renew his determination to free himself. It was also apparent that the small landing net we had with us would not be adequate for a fish of this size. My only option, if I wanted to land the fish, was to have my bowman slowly (so not to add more drag to my over-taxed fishing line) move the canoe to a spot ashore where I could step out. With this accomplished, I was able to slowly work the fish into the shallows where I got my hand under him and lifted him out of the water.

He was a magnificent fish (well over forty inches) and had put up a wonderful fight. Although I wanted to take time to admire this wonderful creature, I quickly removed the lure and placed him back into the water. He had expended every ounce of energy he had in his ply for freedom so I slowly moved him back and forth to allow water to pass through his gills. Once revived enough to swim away on his own he was gone. I don't know which made me feel better; being able to catch such a fine fish or being able to free him to fight again. Either way, as he swam off I blew him a kiss and I thanked him for a memory that was now solidly locked away in my list of great BWCA moments.

We headed back to camp to rejoin the rest of the group and to share morning 'war stories' and experiences and to 'break bread' together. Lunch consisted of hard salami and cheese sandwiches, cups of soup, beverages of choice and a candy bars. After lunch in camp can be one of the best times of the day. There is a freedom for everyone to do their own thing for awhile. Some took siestas, some wrote in journals, some tackled odd jobs (such as gathering fire wood) and I think all did a little bank fishing. Depending on the area, there is always a variety of things to see, places to go and things to do. It would be downright un-thinkable to get bored in the Boundary Waters.

After the various free time activities there came the necessary dinner time preparations activities. Water was pumped, necessary kitchen pots, pans and utensils assembled and menu items gathered. All tasks are now second

nature to the crew and were accomplished without undo comment. Hot dinner fare and fellowship was enjoyed by all. The dinner clean-up tasks were also dispatched with the same efficiency as was the preparation. Everyone knows that the sooner clean-up is complete, the sooner they can be out enjoying the evening fishing.

Fishing that evening started slow but got better as the last rays of sunlight disappeared below the horizon. Smallmouth bass and walleyes became plentiful and an occasional northern was netted to complete the trifecta. Lots of nice fish were netted but nothing of spectacular nature. We had a travel day coming the next day so the order of the evening was strictly catch and release. We had quite a busy and enjoyable couple of hours of quality fishing that evening.

Back at camp a late evening fire was started and we reminisced about the day's events while roasting a few marshmallows. Each crew member took time to share some of the memorable things that had impressed him that day. Soon, though, the coolness of the air coupled with tired muscles prompted the crew to one by one head to the tents and the warmth of their sleeping bags. I stayed with the fire for a while savoring and reliving my own experiences of the day. I thought of how typical the day had been, yet how even a typical day in the Boundary Waters can provide so many lasting memories. After I had doused the fire and was heading for my tent, the thought that came to mind about this typical day in the BWCA was that – I get to do it again tomorrow!!!? How great is that?

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