

## **A Biffy Fit For A Queen**

By Owen Secoy

As a youth I had been given the enjoyable privilege of experiencing the wonders of canoe camping in the Canadian wilderness. Those trips fashioned in me a life-long love for the activity. Events and circumstances, though, had a profound way of changing my priorities and putting aside my passion for paddling wilderness waters.

After graduation from high school I was offered incentives to continue my education in Texas. It was a long, long way from the Boundary Waters but education and career wise, it was an offer that I couldn't turn down. My priorities, by necessity, had to change and thoughts of wilderness canoe trips sadly had to be put on the proverbial "back burner."

Over the next decade or two I graduated from college, landed a highly respectable job, got married and settled down. I can't put a time or place when it happened but something stirred my long-put-away passion for paddling the quiet, forested lakes of the North Country. I dug out all my maps, canoeing information, old trip reports, trip photos, etc. in an effort to pacify the thoughts stirring around in my finite human mind. It didn't work. They just brought back a flood of enjoyable memories and added pressure to again dip a paddle in the dark waters of the BWCA/Quetico. How great it would be to be able to share similar experiences with my new life partner.

Planning a trip would not be a problem. Equipping and costs didn't pose any substantial problems. I did anticipate one major obstacle to the endeavor — convincing my Texas wife to do some things that would be very, very foreign to her. Such things as getting in and paddling a canoe across wilderness lakes, carrying all our gear across forest paths, sleeping on the ground and personal hygiene in the bush were all going to push her comfort zone. Those were going to be the major items I would need to conquer.

I came up with a nice logical plan that would slowly indoctrinate her into the whole aspect of canoeing and camping and hopefully build an enjoyable basis for the sport. The first step was to suggest that we do some weekend car camping in some of the many Texas State Parks that were available to us. This initiated camping dialog and at the same time got her used to sleeping in a tent and preparing food over a fire pit or Coleman stove. The state parks were rather well equipped with such things as hot and cold running water, showers, toilets and electrical hook ups, if needed. These didn't lend themselves to the thought of wilderness camping, but I didn't want to overstate my intentions or move too quickly. The weekend camping trips proved to go over very well, so I decided to move on to the next phase of my master plan.

For several summers we took week-long camping trips to the New Mexico and Colorado mountains. We camped in various Nation Forest Campgrounds and thoroughly enjoyed those trips. The trout fishing and backpacking hikes were good precursors to chasing elusive walleyes and hoofing it across rugged portage trails. The wide variation in weather also produced a "take what we get and rejoice in it" attitude that has served us well through the years.

The next step was to introduce her to canoe travel. We ventured to several nearby rivers, rented canoes from river canoe liveries and floated the rather docile rivers. The float trips seemed to go well, and my new bow paddler acclimated quickly to the fundamentals of paddling, so I purchased a canoe and we did some weekend paddling on local lakes. My plan had taken a while, but I had been patient and was prepared to do whatever it took to get us to the next and final step. It was time to suggest that we take a wilderness canoe trip.

I carefully planned and prepared for just the right moment to make the suggestion. I thought I was well prepared. But, I was married to a Native Texan, an intelligent female that had only been out of the State a small number of times and that was to contiguous states. Her questions came much too fast for my level of preparedness and much too fast for me to come up with reasonable answers. "Isn't that a long way to go to camp? What would we need? Would we have to sleep on the ground? What about wild animals? What would we eat? How would we prepare the food?" The questions came fast and furious.

Then she suddenly stopped with a real concerned look on her face. "What about toilet and bathing facilities?" I tried valiantly to be patient and answer all of her questions and concerns. She listened intently to my every word and rolled every answer over in her mind. If a clarification was needed, she would ask for it. Over all, she was receptive to most of the word pictures that I presented.

A couple of things caused her some real misgivings. One, she did not like the prospect of sleeping on the ground. A sleeping pad or air mattress didn't suggest a good compromise so, to get by this obstacle I promised to carry along the lightweight camping cot that she used on our car camping trips. I chuckle now at the interesting looks we got paddling across a lake with that cot sticking up above the canoe's gunnel or passing another group on a portage with a cot under my arm. I am sure the experienced campers must have thought we were rank armatures. But, like I've said before, —Do whatever it takes

— She sure enjoyed her cozy bed off the ground and it proved a valuable asset on that first trip.

The other major concern was about toilet and bathing procedures. I could tell by the anguished look on her face that she was not going to take my suggestion "to go behind the nearest bush" as a reasonable solution. She asked, "Won't other campers see me behind the bush?" My response that it was wilderness and there wouldn't be any one within miles of us seemed to be acceptable but I could see she was still deep in thought. After a couple moments of contemplation she asked, "What if wild animals see me?" The memory of her asking me that question still has me rolling on the carpet in great hilarity.

To put her mind at ease, in the area of privacy concerning certain bodily functions, I came up with a rather novel solution. She was going to have the most elaborate toilet and bathing facilities ever to grace the North Woods. We packed in a toilet seat ring, a goodly number of burlap bags, extra rope and a few assorted items I thought would be needed. Once we got to our basecamp site, the area near camp was searched until we found two perfectly spaced large boulders. Then a downed log was sawed to proper width and the ends tapered so it could be wedged between the two boulders at the proper seat

height.

A hand axe was used to fashion a notch in the top of the log for the toilet ring to wedge into and securely hold it in place. Under the seat was placed a bucket with a generous supply of pine needles handy to cover any "deposit." Dead limbs were stripped of branches and used as posts to surround the two boulders. Cord supported burlap bags were then strung on the posts to provide the required privacy. A forked stick pushed into the soft dirt provided a handy place to hold a roll of TP and a piece of reading material. What a master piece of wilderness camping ingenuity, she couldn't have more pleased. It was, indeed, a biffy fit for a queen!

For bathing it was a similar fix. A sun shower bag was hung on a convenient tree limb and with the use of some ingenious roping to surround the "shower" area with more burlap bags, a shower stall was created. The privacy part was put in place to get past her concerns but we all enjoyed the hot showers. How great is a hot shower after a "hard day" of fishing or exploring.

We still laugh when we look at the old photos or when someone or something reminds us about that first trip. Great lengths were taken to pull it off and to entice a certain "flat lander" to participate. It was worth every bit of the time and effort put forth. Succeeding trips did not need all of the "bells and whistles" because the first one had proved so meaningful and successful. All of her concerns had been addressed to her satisfaction. She went, she enjoyed it and she was hooked.

So, take heart, do whatever you need to do to make your plans happen. Your planning, hard work, extra effort and even a little ingenuity will add to the enjoyment of your accomplishment. If you want something bad enough, you need to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

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