

### Trip Summary

Entry-Exit Lake/River	Entry: Shawanabis Lake (fly-in)	Exit: Bukamega Lake(vehicle pick-up)
Length Of Trip	93km total, 76.3km paddling,16.6km portaging (According to Paddle Planner & not including detours)	
Trip Dates/# Days	09 / 06 / 2021 - 09 / 14 / 2021 / 9 days	
Trip Leader Name	Rob Klavins	
Number Of Paddlers	1 - Solo	
Portages	18	
Portage Length Range	50m to 1200m per Wabakimi Outfitter maps	
Topo Maps Used Other Maps Used	<p>For planning, I referenced the FOW maps, but primarily relied on the outfitter maps..</p> <p>On my trip, I used Wabakimi Outfitter maps and Garmin InReach</p>	
Access Points	Flew from Wabakimi Outfitters (Mattice Lake) to Shawanabis Lake. I was picked up at Bukamega Lake by car and driven back to Wabakimi Outfitters.	
Route followed (provide map if possible)	<p>Shawanabis Lake Outpost up Onamakawash Lake and Lookout River to "Sunrise Falls" campsite on unnamed lake.</p> <p>Backtracked through Shawanabis to Boulder Lake.</p> <p>Upstream on Kopka River to W. End of Hook Lake.</p> <p>Backtracked downstream on Kopka River to Kenakskaniss Lake and Wigwasan Lake. Took out at Bukamega Lake.</p>	

Trip Arrangement Details

<b>Route description</b>	<p>One way with some sidetrip/backtracking and basecamping</p> <p>Shawanabis Lake Outpost North to Onamakawash Lake and Lookout River to “Sunrise Falls” campsite on unnamed lake.</p> <p>Backtracked through Shawanabis to Boulder Lake.</p> <p>Upstream on Kopka River to W. End of Hook Lake (one day layover here).</p> <p>Backtracked downstream on Kopka River to Kenakskaniss Lake, and Wigwasan Lake. Took out at Bukamega Lake.</p>
<b>Average distance traveled each day</b>	10.3km/day including layover day. 11.6km on travel days per Paddle Planner and without counting detours.
<b>Source of non-resident Crown land camping permit or provincial park interior (backcountry) camping permit</b>	Wabakimi Outfitters
<b>Outfitter/provider used</b>	Bruce/Margaret Hyer, Wabakimi Outfitters, Mattice Lake, Armstrong, ON.
<b>Outfitter services provided</b> (lodging, canoe rental, outfitting, licenses, permits, shuttles, flight)	2 nights lodging (one on each side of the trip), full outfitting less food. Included canoe, equipment, and transportation.
<b>Mode of shuttle to entry/from exit</b> (road, rail, float planes)	Fly-in to Shawanabis Lake Outpost. Drive-out from Bukamega Lake
<b>Location of vehicle left behind</b>	N/A
<b>Primary road used, if any, to access Wabakimi Area</b> (Hwy 527, Hwy 599, Graham Road)	Hwy 527
<b>Secondary road(s) used, if any, for access/egress to/from your trip insertion/extraction locations</b>	Outfitter did a pick-up at Bukamega Lake. Not certain what road that was, but easily discoverable on a map.

**Day \_0\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

**SUMMARY:**

*Traveled from Enterprise, Oregon to Wabakimi Outfitters in Armstrong seeing a wolf along the way. Easy border crossing.*

**DETAILS:**

I initially planned to do a Boundary Waters trip, but sought out other options after fire closures. With additional closures also in the Quetico and WCPP, I was turned on to Wabakimi Outfitters by Albert of Goldseekers in Red Lake. I also serendipitously connected with fellow Oregonian, Dave McTeague of Friends of Wabakimi, who gave me some welcome guidance. The Boundary Waters opened a few days before my trip, but I stuck to the Wabakimi Plan. I am very glad I did so.

I flew from Pendleton, Oregon to Duluth by way of Portland and Chicago before spending an uncomfortable night in a downtown hostel (too old for that, and also didn't feel great during a pandemic, but that was all that was available at a reasonable price on Labor Day Weekend). I travelled to Thunder Bay with little fanfare. The border crossing required proof of Covid vaccination and a negative PCR test in the previous 72 hours.

I made sure to check out Kakabeka Falls and bought the last of my supplies. I drove to Armstrong the next day, and saw a wolf on the road about 25km south of Mattice Lake. Apparently, there had been a number of recent sightings in recent days.

Everything in Armstrong was closed when I arrived, so I returned to Wabakimi Outfitters. There, I met other friendly travelers, had dinner, planned the route with Bruce Hyer, got my gear, packed, and set up my InReach.

In the off chance he reads this, thank you to Wild Bob of Wabakimi for the pike lure. It was great. If I get the chance, I'll try to pay it forward some day!

The place felt busy with a group of 5 or 6 coming back a day early and several of us going in the next day. I enjoyed getting to know fellow travelers who were coming and going. Bruce put together a promising trip that incorporated some of Dave's advice, and Vince helped me trouble shoot the InReach. I heard some sandhill cranes and caught a walleye off the dock before getting a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed.

**Day \_1\_****Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration (include highlights, hazards and gems):****SUMMARY:**

*Flew from Mattice Lake to Shawanabis Lake. Somewhat challenging portage into Onamakawash Lake which needs some attention. Made a navigation error that I can't imagine others will make. Great fishing and campsite at Sunset Rapids (Lookout River).*

**NARRATIVE:**

Breakfast at Wabakimi Outfitters hit the spot before we headed down to the dock at 8am. I Shared the plan with three folks heading in to the Shawanabis Outpost for a week and a lovely couple from Michigan's UP who were heading down the Kopka River for 5 days.



I would first go north before following in their wake. I spoke with them later and they reported they felt they should have taken more time and that the portages were a little too much for them. For context, they seemed fit and I would estimate they were in their mid- to late-60's. I agreed with the timing (I was glad to be able to go slow and linger in places). Being reasonably fit and a regular backcountry hiker in my early 40's I found the portages challenging, but doable

Forty-five minutes later, our Otter arrived and flew us about 15-minutes to the outpost. Seeing ongoing clearcut operations was a little heartbreaking, but the flight was fun and otherwise uneventful.



We arrived in light rain. The Shawanabis Outpost is spartan, but would be a fun place to stay! I realized I had not been given a campstove and took my new friends up on their offer to give me some fire starters. It was a good reminder to triple check your gear and not to be shy about advocating for yourself when getting set up by any outfitter.





I traveled north up Shawanabis Lake to the railroad causeway. It was steep and rocky, not particularly romantic, and it certainly winded me, but it wasn't too bad. Be aware, there is a trail that can be followed up the rocks, and is easier than most of the free-scrambling options. There is a stashed (or abandoned?) boat on the south side of the causeway.

On the north side of the causeway, there was a large beaver-downed birch tree at just the right height to make it challenging and too big to saw up with a handsaw. Bruce is aware of it and said he plans to take care of it. On the West side of the causeway there is a tunnel that apparently can be paddled in high water. Make sure you've got your headlamp if you try it. The water was way too low for me.

I cast a few jigs on the north side of the causeway and caught two nice eater-sized walleye. I was surprised at the number of cabins just north of the causeway (about half a dozen). None seemed to be in use, or have seen much use recently.

I Paddled up Onamakawash Lake and caught another nice walleye trolling a jig long the Eastern shore. The first portage (200m according to Wabakimi Outfitter maps) was fine. There were a few down trees across the trail, but nothing significant or surprising.

I still don't know how I managed to do it, but rather than continue NE along the Lookout River, to Sunrise Falls, I ended up going SE a long distance until I reached what I hoped was the next portage. It didn't feel right, so I checked the InReach map, sure enough I'd gotten it wrong.

I got back on track and headed to the next Portage (Sunrise Falls) which, in the low water levels, was a long broad falls. I had planned to go to the next falls/portage which Bruce calls Walleye Kitchen, but with my detour, I'd gone far enough on day 1 and made camp there.





I made camp, made dinner, and then did a little fishing. At the downstream side of the falls, I caught two of the biggest pike I've caught in my life with minimal effort before calling it a night.

Notably, there are some additional campfire rings and tent pads beyond the most obvious spots.

It rained all night. And holy cow...I felt my muscles *scream* every time I woke up that night!

- **Evidence of recent human activity**
  - Nothing unexpected
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
  - Down tree on N. side of Shawanabis Causeway Portage (sounds like Bruce Hyer plans to remove it) and a very few small trees down on the 200m Portage between Shawanabis Lake and the Lookout River
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
  - None
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
  - S. Side of Shawanabis Causeway Portage. May be abandoned.
- **Number and location of campsites**
  - Several potential sites at "Sunrise falls" as described above. Did not note any that were not on the map.
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
  - Parted ways with 5 others at Shawanabis Outpost
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on maps**
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***



**Day 2****Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):****SUMMARY:**

*A windy and rainy day as I backtracked and then headed south on Shawanabis Lake. Favorable winds allowed me to cover more distance than expected. Notably, the train crossing has the potential to be more perilous than expected. A large animal made its presence know at the great group campsite on the south/southeast part of Shawanabis Lake.*

**NARRATIVE:**

It rained all night and into the morning. It broke just long enough to break camp, dry out the tent fly, and pack back up. I got a late start paddling and it didn't take long for the rain to start again. The entire day it rained (at times lightly, at other times in deluges) and was windy most of the day as well. Thankfully, the wind was favorable.

I returned the way I had come, and, with the winds, made it to the Shawanabis Causeway portage much sooner than expected. Bruce had said to me "don't get hit by the train". I thought it was a joke. However, I was surprised just how easily it could have happened.

As I hiked my second time up the North causeway with my canoe, I heard the train in the distance and wondered if I might have to wait for it on my final trip. Thankfully, as I got to the top, I looked left and, in eerie near silence, saw the train speeding around the corner. Once it was where I was, it was, of course, very loud, but its approach was stunningly quiet.

Look both ways before crossing the tracks! No joke.

I hollered for my friends as I passed the outpost dock, but they didn't seem to hear me through the wind and rain. Either that, I figured, or they didn't want to get out of their warm dry cabin! Eager, to get dry myself, I paddled on. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile down the way, I heard a whistle, looked back and saw them on the dock. I gave them a paddle wave and continued on my way. I wouldn't see another person until I took out.

I continued down to the campsite in the Southeastish part of Shawanabis Lake just south of the long portage to Collins Lake. There were numerous stashed boats there. On Bruce's map it is described as "world class". And it's pretty great. There is a nice beach to land the canoe. You have to climb up a little sandy bluff where you come across a very nice open forest with a number of good tent sites and a good fire ring.





The wind howled and the rain poured, so, after a little exploration, I ate a cold dinner and retired early. Thanks to the favorable wind, I was way ahead of where I expected to be. During the night, I heard a large animal near my tent with three individual sounds of large wood breaking. I assume it was a moose? I made my presence known and fell back asleep.

- **Evidence of recent human activity**
  - Nothing unexpected
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
  - See Day 1 re: Shawanabis Causeway
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
  - Cached boat on southside of Shawanabis/Onamakawash causeway
  - numerous cached boats on Shawanabis side of portage to Collins Lake
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
  - Large animal heard at night at campsite
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
  - Saw guests on the dock at Shawanabis outpost
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on maps**
  - Numerous campsites are shown on outfitter map that do not occur on FOW map
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***



**Day \_3\_****Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):****SUMMARY:**

*Another rainy day as I paddled just a little ways from Shawanabis lake to Boulder Lake and a peaceful campsite. Low water conditions made the first part of a long portage a challenge to find, and I bushwacked. That may have been user error, and it sounds like it may be addressed in the coming year.*

**NARRATIVE:**

It continued to rain all night and I slept in again, but was far less sore. The sun came out in the late morning while the wind persisted. I was extremely grateful for whoever had come before me and covered some small kindling in the fire pit making a hot breakfast a possibility. I dried some additional tinder in the sun and packed it up.



The wind was strong most of the day and, again, thankfully, at my back.



The portage from Shawanabis Lake to Boulder Lake was a bit of a challenge. Wabakimi Outfitter maps shows two portages with the first saying “Portage in low water”. FOW map also shows an early portage with a broken line that says “beaver dam”. The water made it too low to go across the beaver dam and paddle the creek. I found a few possible beginnings to portage trails, but they all fizzled out quickly. I finally chose to bushwhack. Along the way, I found an abandoned snowshoe frame which was fun. The hike though, was a wet slog.



Eventually, I found a clear portage trail which I presume is the second portage noted in both maps (747m on FOW and 700m on Outfitters). It was just south of where a small creek entered from the East. I ate lunch and returned to get the rest of my stuff. This time, my bushwhack shot me out closer to the creek and, at least in these low water conditions, I found it much easier to go through the sedges rather than the woods.



I noted the portage confusion to Bruce Hyer and it sounded like he may try to improve it next year.

There were lots of moose tracks and one large feline track that I'd guess was a lynx (seemed bigger than what I'm used to seeing in bobcat country and definitely not big enough to be a cougar).

It began to pour again. There was lots of water on the second part of the portage. In some places it was legitimately flowing and I wonder if this could cause problematic incising in the future. With the exception of a few small down trees, it was otherwise in good shape.

With no campstove and everything drenched, I made a point of collecting birch bark and pine sap along the way. I began making a habit of that and was very glad I did so.

I caught a little pike in the narrows between the northernmost pool of Boulder lake and the main lake. One has to respect a predator willing to take prey (in this case my lure) that is larger than it! I made camp in the little bay on the main pool of Boulder Lake. This would end up tied for my favorite campsite of the trip. It's another campsite to explore a bit before determining which firepit and tentpad you want to use. I'm pretty sure there's no wrong answer!



The wind died down and the rain stopped as the sun set. I experienced the first profound calm and quiet of the trip.

With a little weedy bay all to myself, I couldn't have been happier. I spend a fair bit of time in Wilderness areas in Oregon. Growing up in the American Midwest, those once seemed big to me. However, I've grown spoiled and accustomed to them. Now that I was finally mostly out of earshot of the train, it hit me that there was another level of Wilderness here...the *vast* Wilderness. And I love it!

I made friends with a savvy vole who managed to find his way into my bear canister, caught a couple smallish pike, and went to bed content as ever, with a few sprinkles coming down.

- **Evidence of recent human activity**
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
  - It may have been user error, but I was unable to find the first portage (marked "beaver dam" on FOW maps and "P in Low H2O" on outfitter map) and bushwacked. This was noted to Bruce Hyer who indicated intent to address it. The second (southern) portage was in very good shape. However, it did have running water in it and I wonder if this could create a future maintenance need.
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
  - Probably doesn't really qualify, but old snowshoe frame in the moss on bushwack portage at the south end of Shawanabis Lake. I can't imagine it's super old or will last an awfully long time.
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
  - Feline (lynx or bobcat) tracks at portage at south end of Shawanabis Lake to Boulder Lake
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps***
  - Outfitter map includes campsites not on FOW map.
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***
  - See portage note above.



**Day \_4\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

**SUMMARY:**

*The rain abated, but the wind was persistent as I made my way down from Boulder Lake to the Kopka River where I went upstream to the far end of Hook Lake. There was a fair bit of portaging, but all trails were in good shape. Low water levels and a beaver dam required some wading and lifting, but nothing major. There are some pretty creeks and rapids along the way. The campsite at the West end of Hook Lake was wonderful.*

**NARRATIVE**

Despite some distant train noise, it was a wonderful place! The rain had let up, and I got an earlier start, but the wind kicked back up. Thankfully, it was at my back for the early going.

I caught a couple pike in the narrows before the next (and biggest) pool of Boulder Lake, but decided I didn't want to keep torturing fish until it was time to eat one. The Outfitter map notes an old trappers shack near what is marked as the Boulder Creek/Rock Garden portage. I saw no evidence of it.

My favorite bit of paddling on the entire trip was through the sedge meadow creek that was a bit of a maze before having to portage the last little bit.





The next portage shows as 857m on the FOW map and 900m on the outfitter map which also shows an old alternate trail. I saw no sign of any alternate route, and the main trail was in very good condition.

Prior to the next portage (325m on FOW map, and much longer than I had expected based on the outfitter map), the outfitter map suggest that it is rocky and requires a lift-over just West of the Channel. It was a bit rocky, but even in the low water, I found no need to do a lift-over. There was a small beaver dam that required a lift over after a short paddle past that portage. That maneuver essentially got you onto the Kopka River.



I chose to go upstream on the Kopka which required me to wade/line the canoe just upstream from that spot. In the lower water, the choice was easy. The current would have made it a real challenge, but it was just about knee deep with good footing. At this point, I left Volume 3 of the FOW map.

The next portage was marked 440m on the outfitter map, and the rapid was marked as “unrunnable” with a skull and bones driving home the point. Indeed, I would not have been tempted. It was a beautiful portage along the rapids with a small campsite a little ways up. The campsite didn’t appear to have been used in years. A few of the rocks surprised me and nearly made me tumble. The pool below this rapid looks like a tremendous fishing spot, and might even be a worthwhile detour - even for those not going that direction.



After a short paddle, the next portage was a short one along what is supposed to be a Class 2-3 rapid. It seemed unnavigable in the low water. I saw my first beaver here.



The wind began to kick up a bit, and for the first time was in my face. There is a long narrows before turning north to get onto Hook Lake. I hugged the south shore before crossing over and hugging the north shore until I got to the end of Hook Lake and found the campsite that tied for my favorite. It's on river right (southernmost) of the series of falls/rapids that come in.

I assume it would be substantially different in higher water, but the series of waterways, little islands, and even the trees were almost comically well-placed from an aesthetic point of view.





I caught a few pike on the upper side of the falls and enjoyed a fantastic sunset. My favorite moment was a whirligig crossed the dark water. As insignificant as that was, it was significant enough to create a tiny wake that caught the purple glow of the sunset and created a marvelous streak across the water. It's the sort of thing one would almost certainly never even notice in a different setting.



- **Evidence of recent human activity**
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
  - Lat 50.167761, Lon -89.526321
  - Lat 50.167418, Lon -89.513429
  - Lat 50.159214, Lon -89.475814
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
  - Outfitter map notes an “old trapper shack” at the south end of Boulder Lake. I did not see it.
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
  - Beaver at 50 meter portage at the East entrance to Hook Lake
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps***
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***



**Day \_5\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

**SUMMARY:**

*A nice layover day of fishing, exploring, and reading at the wonderful Hook Lake campsite.*

**NARRATIVE:**

I decided to spend a layover day at this camp. I'm not really sure what I did all day, but I sure know I had a nice time! I finished reading Sigurd Olson's Reflections of the North Country. It's another experience that's just better while backcountry paddling. It simply makes more sense.

There was enough wind, that I didn't paddle much, but I did catch a few pike below the falls. I was hoping to catch a walleye for dinner, but didn't succeed. I think it was too bright out, and in the low water, that wasn't a good recipe for walleye. If you told me I caught the same 25" snakelike pike 5 or 6 times over, I'd believe you.

I felt like I needed to eat at least one fish this trip, so I went ahead and kept one. I did better than I've ever done at filleting a pike with minimal bones. That is to say, a couple pieces were bone free, but a few had...All. The. Bones. A big toad hung around and brought a little companionship.

I also really enjoyed exploring the area around the campsite. There were plenty of little trails leading to different views of the water to cast a line and/or simply enjoy the scenery.

There were a few mosquitoes around, and it occurred to me that they were remarkably easy to kill. I wonder if there is some natural selection at work here. Likely very few mosquitoes here are killed by people. Is it possible that there is selective pressure in the front country where easily squishable mosquitoes are sufficiently less likely to pass on their genes?

These are the things one thinks about on day 5 of their first-ever solo paddling trip.

After dinner, I cast another line and sure enough, the walleye were biting again.

**Day \_6\_**

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

**SUMMARY:**

*Back down Hook Lake and the Kopka River to a nice campsite on Kenakskaniss Lake. I capsized my canoe while putting in and destroyed my camera (phone), but otherwise escaped with only wounded pride. It was a very windy day and I had a nice encounter with an otter. The only portage was a repeat from two days before.*

**NARRATIVE:**

I got up early again which, given the short days, made everything better. It was windy again all day. As I left Hook Lake, I checked out a sign on the north shore and discovered an abandoned fly-in post with the words "Hook Lake Fly-In" on it. The cabins and other infrastructure looked beyond reclamation, but as though that was a relatively recent development.



The wind was in my favor again. I was looking forward to fishing the pool after the 440m (per outfitter map) portage / rapid. It was here that I got a nice lesson in humility. I put my canoe in the water backwards and loaded it up before really noticing. There were logs upstream and downstream that prevented me from simply turning it around. Rather than unpack the canoe and turn it around, I chose to climb over my gear. I made it most of the way before something shifted. I came tantalizingly close to recovering before I fully capsized the canoe.

The water was well above my head, and part of me and the canoe were in the current. In the end, all was well as I was able to push the canoe back to shore with all contents still in it. However, I was reminded that even in a seemingly benign situation, things can go wrong fast, that by myself in the wilderness, small mistakes can have big consequences, and that help is a long way away. Unfortunately, my phone (which I had been using as a camera) was a casualty.

I am happy to report that I was able to recover the photos I had already taken, and when I returned home, I connected with the folks who had gone before me. They were gracious enough to share their photos, so I have some visual memory triggers to remember the trip by.

I don't know that I have their permission to share them publicly, so there are no more photos in this report. However, if you'd like to see them, feel free to reach out. Some of them are stunning. Additionally, some of the photos you'll find via google image search do a nice job too.

I tried to fish the pool below the rapid and I have to imagine it's a fantastic spot, however it was really sunny. Additionally, the wind made it challenging, and, given my recent lesson in humility, I chose to move on before I caught anything.

I met up with my old path, turned right, ran a few little swifts and found myself in Kenakskaniss Lake. I hugged the West shore and saw a few bald eagles and a periscoping otter along the way.

I was unable to spot the "Chimney Rock Fire Pit" shown on the outfitter map, but pulled up for a snack on a beach where there was another small lake just west of Kenakskaniss Lake. There were moose tracks that perplexed me. The only explanation was that a moose had swam ashore, taken a few steps along the beach and then gone swimming again.

As wonderful and wild as this place was, I was disappointed to later look at satellite imagery and see a backcountry airstrip here. I went on to learn it was an airstrip for aerial spraying operations. The reach of human greed and destruction, it turns out, is never far enough away. And the need for those of us who love these places to be advocates for them was driven home yet again. Lines on maps don't happen by accident. And they do matter.

I switched shores at the narrows and took the campsite Bruce had called "World Class" on the south side of the peninsula. It was nice and would be a very good one for a large group. It appears there are sites on the south and north side of the peninsula, but only one is marked on the FOW map.

I chose not to go further or explore more in the canoe as the winds continued to howl until sunset. Some combination of being windbound, not having the option to take photos, and perhaps, it being the 6<sup>th</sup> day in the wilderness, I found myself calmer than I'd been all trip. That sense of peace increased the next few days, and stuck with me for a few weeks after I came home.

I also realized here that while I love the drama and energy of running water, rapids, and falls, I prefer the quiet of campsites without that sound.

It seemed like the fishing here should be great. I didn't catch anything, but didn't really put in a lot of effort. I enjoyed the sunset, did some first aid on a cut on the bottom of my foot, and began reading Barry Lopez's Horizons.



- **Evidence of recent human activity**
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
  - Abandoned fly-in lodge on Hook Lake at Lat 50.167418, Lon -89.513429
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
  - Bald Eagles and otter on west shore of Kenaskaniss Lake
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps***
  - Some discrepancies between outfitter and FOW maps.
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***

**Day \_7\_****Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):****SUMMARY:**

*Down Kenakskaniss Lake to the famed Kopka River waterfalls. A long portage would have been very challenging in wet weather. The Mink Bridge Portage Campsite appears to have been damaged. That portage was very steep. After a two short paddles around a short portage, the last portage included a ladder and a steep, but manageable section. The falls all lived up to the hype and I camped on the lake below the third set of falls (from west to east). There are a number of great campsites and the geology is stunning.*

**NARRATIVE:**

The morning was a little windy again, but also favorable. Folks who watched YouTube videos told me this would be “portage hell” and Bruce had made it sound like the next two days were the reason to do the Kopka. I was excited.

My continuation down the Kopka took me off Volume Three of FOW maps for good and I didn’t have the Kopka Volume.

As I approached the first big portage (labeled 650m and “careful boulders bad in rain!”), I also had to take the mapmakers advice and wade through a boulder field before getting to the takeout. There had been recent cougar sightings and tracks here. I didn’t see any sign, but it sure looked like a good place to be a big cat!

The portage was challenging, but not as hard as I had feared (I sure like it when the map overstates rather than understates the difficulty). It did require some balance on a couple rocky sections (mainly near the beginning and end), and indeed, it would have been very challenging if it were wet and slippery.

There was a busted old canoe at the bottom of the portage that looked like the bottom had been opened by a can opener. Once upon a time, someone had a bad day there! There was a nice campsite on the lake.

I arrived at the end of the lake and the next big portage where I believe the second marked campsite should be. I’m not totally sure that was the campsite, but there was a fire ring, and it appeared the wind had blown down a number of trees very recently. I reported this to Bruce.

The next portage showed as 300 meters on the outfitter map. It wasn’t too bad, but it seemed I’d gone nearly the full 300 meters, and yet the water was still a very long way down. It turned out that analysis was right. The end of the portage was nearly straight down a boulder field. In the low water, there was a nice place to put the canoe in, but I bet in higher water that part is also a bit of a challenge.

Once I had my gear moved, I enjoyed the series of waterfalls and some nice overlooks on portage side trails I had passed by. I confess, that I had poo-pooed the idea that I’d find the waterfalls all that exciting. I live in Oregon after all. However, they hadn’t been oversold! Having them to myself made it all the more special. I paddled back to see the falls from below before continuing on. They were incredible. It’d be really interesting to see them in higher water.



The paddle to the next portage was very short. I took no notes on that portage which was followed by another small paddle.

On River Right, the next portage was marked on the outfitter map as 175 meters and said “ladder?” The answer to that question is, “yes.” There is a ladder. There is a rock face against which lays a jack pine ladder held together by rope. Using a ladder on a portage was a new experience. I’m glad it was there. I’m not sure how one would get around it otherwise!

I went down to the next large pool where I had to paddle about 10 meters to get to my campsite below the falls. There was a nice campsite overlooking the falls itself with a formidable fire pit. There’s some great video of it on YouTube where it gets rave reviews from the couple that runs the Explore the Backcountry channel. The site even came with a complimentary Cabellas skillet.

The falls was stellar and the lake was unique and impressive. There are big canyon walls that descend straight into the dark water below. It almost has the feel of a quarry. There’s a large fault (?) just past the campsite (which had room for multiple tents) that was narrow, deep, and kind of unnerving. In fact, I felt the whole place gave off some strange vibes. I explored the lake and scouted the next day’s portage. I explored some small falls that enter the lake and fished in the pool below the big falls. I caught a few small walleye. As ever on this trip, the timing of my desire to fish, to eat fish, and being where fish were when they were biting didn’t line up. Nonetheless, it was a spectacular place unlike anything I’ve ever experienced on a canoe trip.

I understood all the fuss about the Kopka Waterfalls. As the sun set, I enjoyed watching a beaver set out for a hard nights work. Looking at the coming weather, I chose to pull out a day early. The next two nights were set to be rainy with my last day being little more than a paddle to the take out. Added to that the need to get a new phone before heading home (not something one wants to think about in the Wilderness...lesson learned, get a waterproof camera), and it seemed like the right call.

Despite the feeling that the crack in the ground near my campsite was probably home to a Wendigo, I found myself feeling a level of internal peace that I had not experienced in a long time.

- **Evidence of recent human activity**
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
  - Campsite at Mink River Bridge portage may have been damaged by windfall trees as per report.
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
  - Damaged aluminum canoe at Lat 50.108659, Lon -89.404688
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
  - Beaver at campsite
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps***
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***

**Day \_8\_****Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):****SUMMARY:**

*The last of the big portages was a very real challenge and folks should be sure they are capable before taking it on. For those who are able, it's absolutely worth it. The last falls were as spectacular as the rest. Even an allergic reaction to some bug bites didn't spoil the fun. There were some great looking fishing holes along my way to the fun island campsite on Wigawasan Lake.*

**NARRATIVE:**

I woke up from a terrible night's sleep. On my arms, shoulders, wrists, ankles, and the small of my back, I had a series of painful, weepy, blistering, bruising, welts that didn't just itch, but legitimately hurt and started bleeding once the puss had drained. They weren't mosquito bites, and the best guess we came up with afterwards was that I had an allergic reaction to midges or some other sort of bug that was lingering into the fall. I was relieved to hear that neither Bruce nor his staff had ever seen anything like it before. So don't be dissuaded.

I got up early to the wonderful sight of steam rising off the water in a slight breeze. It didn't dissuade me from my thoughts of Wendigo, but it was gorgeous.

The outfitter map shows two choices on the portage. The one on river left says "140m Steep. I took the one on river right that gave no distance but said "Less Steep (still steep!)". Looking at other trip reports and videos, it appears the river left portage includes a series of cliffs and some roping up. The one I took was just steep. Not long after getting off the water, it's basically just straight down a boulder field. Other than simply adding distance, I can't imagine a portage being much harder and still passable. Make no mistake, it was worth it, but it was challenging, and probably isn't for first-timers or those who aren't sure footed.

In low water, the bottom of the portage required walking a ways into what is usually probably shallow water on boulders. In low water, I found the put-in to be challenging, but maybe it's better with more water.

I know people do it, but I'd be disinclined to go *up* these portages. I suppose the benefit would be getting the hardest work out of the way first, but my inclination would be to go downstream, as I did.

I encountered a friendly group of 5 mergansers as I paddled a little but upstream to check out the falls from below. It's pretty incredible to be in a place of such power and beauty with no other humans around. It's something I wish everyone who wants it could experience. The campsite here is world class, and I'd highly recommend it. At the time it seemed silly to only travel such a short distance in a day, but looking back, maybe I should have stayed there anyway.

That was the last of the big falls and I felt sufficiently rewarded for all the work! The lake to my penultimate portage was dramatic and very different from most of the places I have paddled.



Clouds started to move in, and it occurred to me that the clouds here always seemed to hang very low. That could have been unique to the time I was there, but I noticed it in some other photos and videos. If anyone's got an explanation for the phenomenon or the feeling, I'd sure be interested.

The 150m portage into Wigawasan Lake was labeled "Scout - Perhaps Line on Left Channel". Even in the low water, that worked out pretty well. I lined the boat about halfway down and then rode out the last rapid. The water below looked like a spectacular fishing spot. I donated a few jigs to the rocks below, but didn't have any luck.

I headed towards the island campsite on Wigawasan. Like all the paddles on the day, it felt longer than I had anticipated. Other than the greedy little red squirrel, it was a fun campsite. Truth be told, the greedy little red squirrel made it even more fun, and maybe I broke protocol by dropping a few almonds on the ground by accident on purpose. I mean winter was coming...

There are two landings with the main campsite being on the South/Southeast side of the island and a path between them. A beautiful sunset made it hard to choose which vista to soak in. I carved a message in the sand before calling it a night.

The site has plenty of areas to pitch tents, and while firewood was plentiful, I chose to get some on the lakeshore rather than on the island itself so it would stay that way. As I found myself fully dialed in, at peace, and treated to a final remarkable sunset, I was sorry this was my last night, but extremely content.

- **Evidence of recent human activity**
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
  - Wigawasan Lake Portage, Lat 50.111651, Lon -89.312067
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps***
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***

Day 9+

**Narrative of daily travel/activities, overnight stays and exploration  
(include highlights, hazards and gems):**

**SUMMARY:**

*The last day was a windy and wet one as I paddled my way uneventfully to the takeout on Bukamega Lake with only one very well used portage to navigate. Sadly, the campsites near the portage were pretty trashed. There is a small assemblage of campers at the takeout site and the person I met there was very friendly. A shower and dinner at the outfitter was welcome before I headed back into "the real world" the following day. It was a wonderful trip. I learned some lessons, and, I plan to return.*

**NARRATIVE:**

The rain started not long after dark and continued through the night. Between that and the festering bites, I felt good about my decision to head out a day early. When the idea of a warm shower hit me about halfway across Wigawasan, I actually giggled out loud.

The rain intensified as I approached the 440m portage to Bukamega Lake. The portage appeared heavily used with campsites on both ends. They were both pretty trashed and heavily used, so, barring emergency, I'd look elsewhere. There were some steep and slippery rocks at the East End that required caution in the rain. I paddled across Bukamega and was surprised how quickly I got to the takeout. My map shows pictographs just north of the parking area. I didn't manage to see them, but have no doubt they are there.

There is a small group of campers at the takeout and I enjoyed speaking with an indigenous man from Thunder Bay who owned one of them while I awaited my pick up which came a few minutes early. I was cold and wet enough that I didn't take Vince up on his offer of a soda or beer.

Not long after, I had unpacked and was taking advantage of that hot shower at the lodge. That was followed by some comradery and a nice hot meal.

The next day's border crossing was comical. So few cars were going through that what I initially thought was a strange interrogation clarified itself as nothing more than a bored (and very friendly) customs agent simply trying to make conversation!

I hustled down to Duluth to get that new phone. What a thing it was to so quickly go from the Wilderness to the maze of mini-malls and parking lots in the suburbs. I'm not sure that what we've created for ourselves in "the real world" is really making us happy, but that's for a philosophy book, not trip notes.

Getting the phone out of the way, I enjoyed an extra day exploring Minnesota's North Shore before returning home. I can't wait to go back!



A few lessons learned from this trip:

- Bring more snacks and always keep them accessible.
- When you put wood under a tarp to keep it dry, make sure it's in a high spot
- It feels nice to have something in your vestibule to bang on if you want to scare something off in the night. Even if you never use it.
- I like to go light, but big vestibules are wonderful things on canoe trips!
- I much prefer the bear barrel to a bear hang.
- I love the beauty and drama of falls and rapids, but I prefer the quiet of other campsites.
- Bring a camp stove. Even if you can start fires in wet conditions, it gets old after a while.
- Triple check your packs with a fully vetted list and advocate for yourself when being outfitted.
- Pine pitch coupled with birch bark is great for starting fires.
- Don't skimp on bandaids and sterile wipes in the first aid kit.
- Bring less variety of lures, and more of the ones you think will work (a couple spoons, jigs, and rapalas). I preferred the heavier jigs.
- There is absolutely no need to bring live bait (and it's potentially very harmful to bring worms).
- An InReach (or similar) is a great comfort
- I think I'd prefer a solo canoe for a solo trip.
- Bring a waterproof camera.
- Bring bug dope and sunscreen no matter what.
- Attach your InReach or other device to your life jacket so it's on you whenever you're on the water.

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- **Evidence of recent human activity**
  - There's a lot of trash (especially at the ends of) the portage between Wigawasan and Bukamega Lakes
- **Location(s) of portages or campsites in need of attention**
  - Lots of trash at campsites at the ends of, and along, portage between Wigawasan and Bukamega Lakes.
- **Location(s) of sites (not portages or campsites) in need of attention**
- **Location(s) of cached boats**
  - 9 boats stashed on the Wigawasan side of the portage between it and Bukamega Lake. Lat 50.113061, Lon -89.248927
- **Number and location of campsites**
- **Locations of sites of natural, cultural, or historical interest**
- **Locations & details of wildlife sightings**
- **Locations & details of human encounters**
  - Small group of trailers at Bukamega Parking area. Friendly encounter.
- **Location(s) of campsite(s) not currently shown on *maps***
- **Errors/omissions on current *Wabakimi Canoe Route maps***