



**WABAKIMI - A 23 DAY
WILDERNESS SOLO CANOE
ADVENTURE**

By: Mike Kinziger

WABAKIMI SOLO CANOE ADVENTURE – 2011

TRIP FACTS	
3468 miles	Driving distance: Idaho to Trail head (Savant Lake, Ontario, Canada) & Return
23 days	Days spent in the wilderness (solo)
210 miles	Total miles traveled during the canoe portion of the trip
87	Total number of lakes, rivers, streams or creeks traveled on during the trip
114	Total number of portages completed during the trip
48 miles, 167 yards	*** Total distance walked on portages
14 pounds	Weight lost on trip

*** Conversion: Portage distances are measured in meters. One hundred meters is slightly longer than a football field (100 yards). One thousand meters is about 6/10 of a mile: 1 double portage: heavy backpack, small duffle, Pelican and fishing rod on the first trip.... a return walk.... and then the food pack and canoe. Therefore, every portage is equal to three times the map distance as stated in meters.

Example #1: A 500 meter portage = 15 football fields or slightly less than one mile

Example #2: A 2400 meter portage = 72 football fields or slightly less than 4.4 miles

WEIGHT CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TRIP	POUNDS
Canoe with 2 paddles, yoke and attachments	35
Food pack (27-Breakfasts – 11 lbs, 27 Dinners – 16 lbs, Other – 2 lbs)	27
Cooking Gear (2 pots, fry pan, plate, 2 cups, cooking oil, grill)	8
Clothing and Camping (Clothes, tent, thermarest, tarp, water shoes, etc.)	27
Fishing Gear & Pelican (2 poles, 2 reels, camera, GPS, SPOT, Kindle, etc)	10
Miscellaneous (chair, rope, maps, water containers, etc.)	5
Note: Complete equipment and gear list at back of journal	TOTAL
	112 Pounds

Anticipation and preparation. There is only one achievement so remarkable that even the most sophisticated machine cannot pretend to have accomplished it, and that achievement is conscious experience. The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real, and it is this ability that allows us to think about the future. The human being is the only “animal” that thinks about the future. We think about the future in a way that no other animal can, does, or ever has, and this simple, ubiquitous, ordinary act is the defining feature of our humanity. A new location in Canada. I garnered information about Wabakimi at Canoecopia in Madison, Wisconsin in March 2010. I met with “uncle” Phil Cotton (the Wabakimi Project) and conversed with him in April to get information on a possible route. It gets easier to prepare for each solo. This is year three. Gear, food, clothing and shelter remain constant. There were a lot more logistics to organize for this trip... much more dependency on outside parties. Wabakimi project maps (to supplement the topos), Canadian Railroad arrangements to store the canoe and gear in a boxcar, permits and fishing license..... but it all came together.

The 1700 mile trip to the trailhead was not without its rewards. A night spent in North Dakota at a ranch with great people, stewards of their land. The highway parallels the Clarks Fork and Yellowstone Rivers as well as crossing the Madison and Blackfoot Rivers.... rivers that I have paddled before. So many landscapes and ecosystems along the way.... mountains, deserts, plains, farm land, small lakes, forests and many towns.... although it was wonderful to finally arrive. Savant Lake is not Ely or Red Lake or any of those tourist type communities that border highly used recreation areas. I didn’t even see a lake? There may be 25 people living in or around Savant Lake. It does have a motel,



restaurant, and store (all owned by the same family). I stayed at the Four Winds Motel mostly because of its proximity to the rail line and because they assisted me with required permits and securely parked my car.

8-24 The train was supposed to arrive at 7:30am. It was the last piece of the puzzle and it kept me a little anxious worrying if it would arrive, if it would stop and if it would drop me off at my desired location. There is no train station. A gravel road ends at the tracks. One must be their waiting and waving hands for the train to stop. I'm happy to report that the train worked out with no glitches. The conductor told me that my drop off point, Redhead Lake, was an unusual stop on the line..... in fact, he told me that I was the first person that he ever dropped off at Redhead Lake in eleven years. Good news for me!

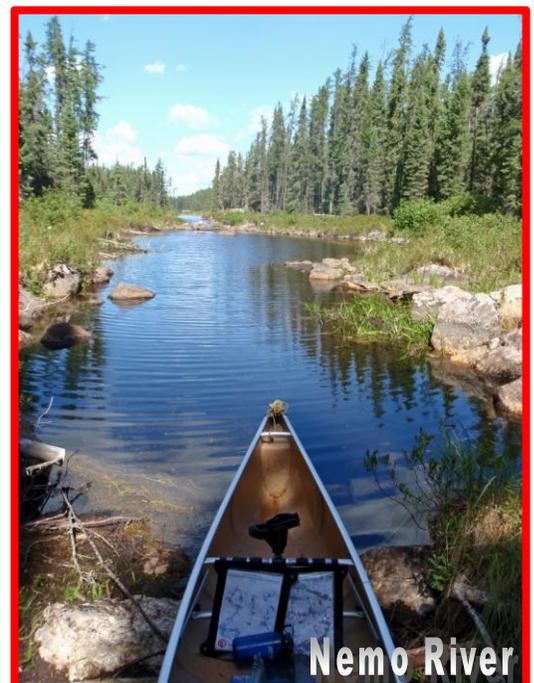


It rained and drizzled most of the day. I kept waiting for the skies to open up, but it seemed we were in a holding pattern. Maybe tonight? The lakes and streams are low. It's been a dry summer. The portages also seem dry. Lots of rocks. It's been difficult getting the canoe in and out of lakes because shorelines have receded. I paddled through three large lakes today (Redhead, Solitude and Osprey). Portages were easy to find and were in good shape. The shorelines are not particularly scenic. They are rocky with little elevation. Not much for camping either. I paddled through some nice whitecaps to reach the north end of Osprey Lake to camp on a small sandy beach. I'm relieved to get out of the wind. I sincerely love being out here. I even caught more than enough fish for my first dinner.

8-25 "Overly ambitious!" Those were the words that "uncle" Phil Cotton used to describe the route that I selected to paddle this year. Time will tell. If all goes according to plan, this adventure will last for three weeks. I've packed enough food for four. It seems inevitable that there will be layover days over the course of time.

I arose this morning feeling like a stranger. There is a transition from the "civilized" world to the wilderness. It may take a few days. I suspect that re-entry will be much the same. Early mornings are remarkable. Calm water, the sun rise, the chill slowly evaporating and a hot drink.... words cannot describe the peacefulness and serenity.

The beauty of the Nemo River is its connectedness to the lakes and ponds as it runs north. At points, it looks like a small lake and then it narrows into a rocky ten foot wide water path. It's slow going having to dodge boulders and at times having to drag the canoe over shallow stretches. These might be record low conditions. And there were many portages ... long ones considering it's only the second day. The fishing was



extraordinary the pike are too large and challenging to get into a canoe. I may have located the best campsite on Eagle Lake. I'm sitting three feet from the water's edge on a unique, flat rock. The sun has set and I don't want to move.

8-26 Light rain throughout the night. Didn't sleep well. The body is still adjusting. Need to hydrate more. Strong winds and dark clouds. It is interesting to note the contrast of weather patterns in an attempt to "predict" the conditions for the day. A lull in the rain and I was off. After two long portages, more severe weather.... huge wind gusts. The low water is becoming more of a concern. I had to drag my canoe over a mile through a two foot wide connector stream. Fortunately, the stream bed was mostly rock and solid. I don't remember in the past experiencing so many rock gardens. Each one requires portaging the gear and canoe.... even if only for fifteen feet. The canoe will take a beating if I am not diligent.



8-27 Locating a campsite this time of year can be a challenge. The sites I prefer tend to be east facing with shelter from the north and west. That gets the paddler out of the sun and wind in the evening and can provide morning sun



(heat) and possibly dry out the tent and gear. My campsite on Brennan Lake accomplished all of those considerations. The excessive wind from yesterday has died down. All day long there was the piercing "whistle" of the wind and the lapping sound of water breaking against the shorelines. In the morning I could actually hear the sound of Brennan Falls (two miles away) as well as the sound of loons, geese and sandhill cranes. I watched with wonder.... why do birds sometimes fly so close to the water? It seems as if their wings are touching the lake as they make their downward thrusts. Why not fly a couple of feet higher?

Wilderness travel is an emotional experience. One has to be careful, however, not to let emotion get in the way of logic or action. Emotion usually comes first, not action. For example, a person would scream or run if they saw a bear.... Not see a bear and then scream or run. One has to be careful to not let emotion get in the way of action.

My mantra on these trips continues to be, "Make good decisions, make good decisions"! I say this over and over. There is so much that can go wrong.... No sense contributing to that end.

An exhausting day, today. Sixteen miles, eight portages, a couple of beaver dams and a half mile of dragging the canoe up shallow water. Upper Granite Lake and McWade Lake are "straight as an arrow" paddles. One can almost see where they start and where they end. I'm reminded of my epiphany which took place in 1963. John Kennedy suggested that people walk 50 miles in one day (as part of a fitness trend). As a 15 year old, I jumped at the chance. Since that time, I have come to realize that the only way to get anywhere is to keep taking one step at a time. Paddling is like that.... one stroke at a time. It



doesn't do one much good to attempt to see the end point.... It can be so far off that it's overwhelming. One stroke at a time, one day at a time, one class at a time.... and before you know it, you reach the end. There will be days on this trip that I will have to paddle 10,000 or more strokes on one side to get across rough water.... one stroke at a time. I had difficulty finding a campsite and ended up paddling into lower Wabakimi Lake only to discover that it was recently burned off. I ended up bushwhacking on a small island. It was a picturesque day. Brennan Falls, narrow streams and long, narrow lakes.

8-28 Today of all days could have been a disaster. I was anxiously dreading the three big lakes that I had to pass through today (Lower and Main Wabakimi and Kenoji Lakes). They are the largest lakes on my chosen route. They have the potential to layover a paddler for a day or longer. Perhaps that is why I worked so hard yesterday to get to Lower Wabakimi. I was up at first light and on the water as soon as the packing was completed. No breakfast.... No coffee. What transpired was nothing short of miraculous luck. The lakes were glass..... smooth! I felt as if I was floating.... time and distance lost. And.... I located my best campsite to date on Upper Kenoji. Along the way, I paddled directly below perched eagles and even saw my first bear in three years. It was close. I got a good look at him. He was about my size, good looking and athletic, too.



I perhaps let my emotion get in the way of logic or action today. The connecting river between River Bay and Kenoji is called the Ogoki River. (All rivers seem to flow north or south to the Ogoki.) This river has major rapids and all of those rapids are supposed to be portaged. But.... with water levels more manageable, I ran the entire stretch stopping only once to scout. A couple of miles of Grade II rapids. *I didn't see the rapids and then run them; I ran the rapids because I saw them.* The Ogoki was wide enough to pick discernable chutes and to bypass the largest standing waves. Exhilarating! Perhaps not my wisest decision. Totally fun! What a day.



8-29 Where did that storm come from? One can feel quite helpless in electrical storms and powerful winds. The difference.... one can usually get totally out of the wind. There was a "light show" in my tent most of the night. Spectacular! Loud!

Routine. Routine. Regardless of weather, one goes about camp preparing for the perils of weather that don't seem to exist. Secure the tent with rain fly, packs all buckled shut, firewood for the morning tucked away under the canoe. It paid off this morning before it got nice. I sat out on a rock outcropping with my feet inches from the lake. In that position, I felt almost as if I was in the canoe.... the lake out front of me, clouds moving, ripples of water passing me by. That feeling is one of the reasons that I return to this environment as often as possible. By the way... it is not necessary to hang food to keep bears away. This area is so seldom paddled that bears do not yet associate humans with food.



I can see in the distance that I will be traveling today through what looks like a fresh burn area. There appeared to be smoke still rising and sure enough as I entered Little Scrag Lake there was still fresh evidence of the fire that swept through this section of Wabakimi in early August. The view was devastating in places. There were acre upon acre of scare crow like trees..... blackened with their dead, frail limbs extended. And there was also acre upon acre of ash.... total burn... not even a stump remained. What kind of heat is required to annihilate healthy, growing trees? There is something that doesn't feel right when observing the "real picture" of what this interconnected wilderness looks like when stripped away of the "green". It's too much information.... like knowing that humans have brains but not really interested in seeing the inside of one up close.



The park fire crews have been busy not only containing the fire but also opening up the portage trails. Still... it's tramping on soot and ash. Dirty! With the strong winds, the legs and clothes become saturated with the inferno residue. And the air has a decided burnt smell to it. Decision time..... sort of. There was little or no possibility of camping in those conditions. The plan.... "Go for the Green"! Little Scrag Lake all burned. Big Scrag Lake burned completely on the south end but I could glimpse green to the north. I forced myself to cross some open water that was heavily capping....on a couple of stretches, it felt like I was

paddling in place. Whenever possible, I hugged the shoreline and eventually reached the "green" and a very welcome campsite. Picture Popeye the Sailor with a treble hook stuck in his left forearm. Only it was me. I was lucky it was my left arm. It's surprising how calm one can be when



paddling in place. Whenever possible, I hugged the shoreline and eventually reached the "green" and a very welcome campsite. Picture Popeye the Sailor with a treble hook stuck in his left forearm. Only it was me. I was lucky it was my left arm. It's surprising how calm one can be when

pushing a treble hook through more skin in order to snip off the barb. It's also remarkable how quickly this type of wound heals.

8-30 Who takes the time in this age to sit quietly along a river bank and gaze at the early morning fog slowly lift and swirl across the surface of the water? There is an autumn chill in the air. It's "oh so quiet" with only the occasional song of the loon. And there's nowhere to go and everywhere to go. Right now I'm enjoying this moment.

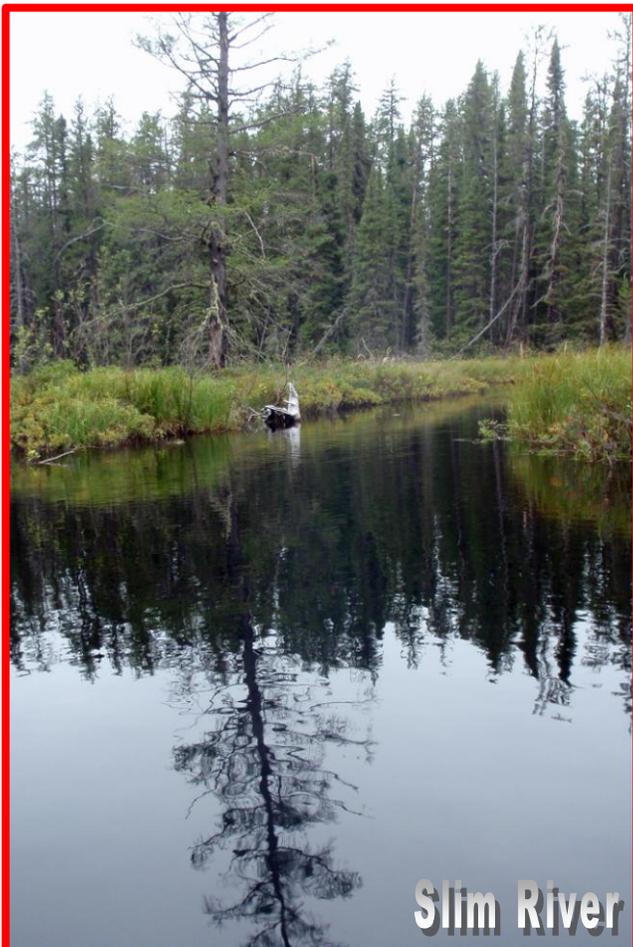
Exhausting day. It wasn't supposed to be that way. My goal was Arril Lake. I arrived early to discover that the fire had destroyed any chance of camping near here. That meant moving forward to Dawn Lake and ten more portages.... through "impossible" burned out areas. The first couple portages were obliterated. The creek I was traveling on had numerous down

trees.... trees that had been burned and had fallen into the stream. What a mess! What a lot of work to get through it (or around or over it). And then there was the challenge of finding the portage. The burn was so intense in some places that

there was nothing left but ash.... for acres... green trees burned to oblivion. Somehow I got lucky and found key connecting links. Not sure what I would have done otherwise? Eventually, the green started to reappear in spots but it was difficult enjoying Dawn Creek with the low water levels and all ten portages. I earned a good night's rest!

8-31 Slept well despite my anxiety over this campsite. Pitching a tent on thick reindeer moss can have an advantage but can also be a detriment in the case of rain. And moisture feels and looks like it's on the way. Decision... move or make this site work? I've decided to spend a layover day on this lake. Therefore, the tarp has been erected, the tent moved, and firewood gathered and placed under the tarp. It will be a joy to paddle and fish across Dawn Lake and north into Finton Lake. The canoe will not be loaded down and it will seem like it is floating across this beautiful star shaped lake.

Regret. Most people don't regret what they have done. They regret what they didn't do.... pursue a love interest, go to college, have more adventure in their lives. I could have relaxed around camp today but instead explored and paddled about twelve miles of wilderness lakes. It's difficult to regret what you don't know is out there but I would have missed seeing my first moose, the dilapidated trappers cabin and catching a bunch of

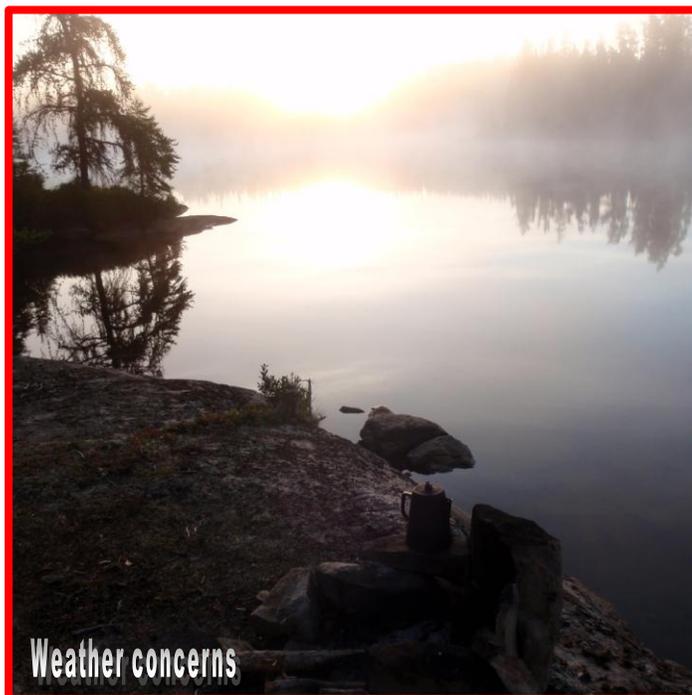
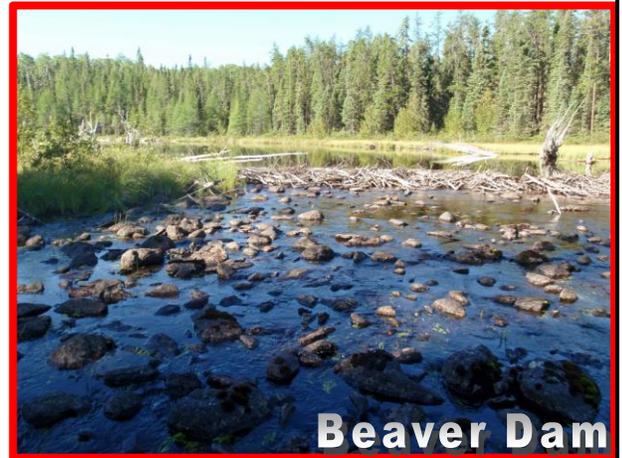


large walleye. And like so many other days in my life.... No regrets.

My major concern for the immediate future is that I'll be heading back south on the Slim River. That section of land is only a couple of miles west of the major burn area. Will I be able to find the green again? How much of this wilderness actually burned? There is no way to discover that without continuing on my route. And at this point, I must stay on course because of the maps that I brought to navigate. Tomorrow.... two of the longest portages to date (more than two miles) and perhaps back into the burn. How would you like to sleep on that?

9-1 Stop the press! News alert! My streak is over at 59 days... a few better than Joe DiMaggio (56). My benchmark... over. Call it divine intervention. A plane came out of "nowhere" and landed near me as I paddled south. Three guys in uniforms checking for park permits and fishing license. All was in order.... but this is the first human contact I've experienced in three years of tripping in Ontario. Seems like an expensive way to interrupt ones wilderness experience? I guess a new streak begins today. A moral victory.... I do tend to select routes that other paddlers seem to avoid. Go figure... a plane!

There are many times on these excursions that I feel "way out there".... alone.... in the middle of a vast interconnected water ecosystem. Today, however, while walking the miles of long portages, the feeling of being "way out there" really hit home. The trails were easy to follow. They passed through boreal forest.... an area so large that it is bigger than the Amazon rain forest. Mature black fir and white birch rise above the sphagnum and reindeer moss. Every so often there were patches of wintergreen with its bright red berries. Absolutely beautiful. I even had an encounter with a black bear. It was an "Oh, shit" moment. The small bear appeared on the trail about fifty feet in front of me. We saw each other. I reached up



and banged the kevlar canoe and the bear scampered away. End of story... not very exciting. What was exciting was reaching the upper end of the Slim River. Not more than ten feet wide, deep and black. It meandered for a number of miles through thick grass. There were five beaver dams that I had to pull the canoe over. When I finally reached the main channel, the wind was blowing straight at me. That's when the plane arrived. I paddled on into a headwind eventually re-entering a section of wilderness that had been burned. The new challenge finding a place to camp midst all of the ash, soot and burned ground.

Happy birthday mom! Ninety! Not much quality of life on the dementia floor of the nursing home! But ninety is cause for celebration. I've thought about my mom throughout this trip, especially when I stopped to pick and eat blueberries. She was the best berry picker that any of us ever knew. Love you mom!



9-2 Sky watching. Light rain on and off most of the night. Temperature dropped thirty degrees. Storm clouds high in the sky and the wind is already strong. My concern.... If I leave and the storm breaks, will I be able to find a camp spot given all of the burn? My indecision resulted in a late start. Determined to begin the trek northwest towards Redman Lake hoping to find a "sort of" camp spot that was green along the way.... maybe an island? The info gathered from the plane had told me that Redman Lake was where the last firefighting front was held by firefighters. And it would take two days to get past Redman. I found a camp site in a little bay.... It was relatively untouched, but the views were disappointing. What I could see from my camp

was 360 degrees of burn. There was smoke and occasional flames in areas close by. What was strange was the fishing. I couldn't seem to paddle any length of time without quickly hooking and landing a fish. I kept a couple of smaller walleye but released five large pike.... all over ten pounds and very difficult to land in a little canoe in the wind.

People have asked me what I do and think about day after day and hour after hour on these trips. Most of the time is spent on a general awareness of place and navigation. Awareness can be thought of as a kind of experience of our own experience. The topographic map sits in front of me as I paddle. I attempt to clearly identify land forms as I travel (bays, ridges, streams, places where water gets wider or narrows). I feel that I must know where I am at all times! I am also mesmerized by the scenery. I travel near shorelines as often as possible to get a deeper look into the trees and rock formations. I like to stay positive.... to think about things like

happiness, confidence, life, connections and possibilities.

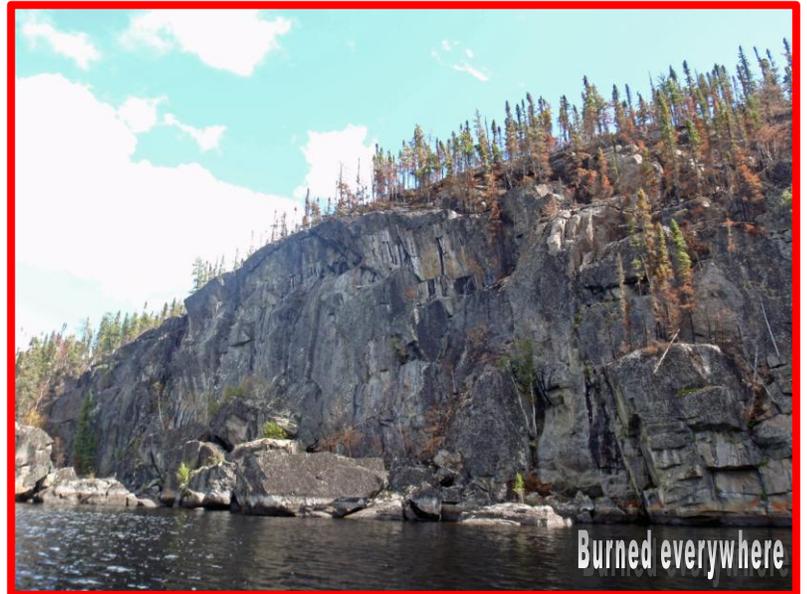


Certain places trigger memories of people (friends, family, students.... perhaps you). I wish there was time (or that I took time) to place on paper many of my thoughts because by the time I get around to it.... the thoughts are gone or don't seem as profound.

Each lake tastes a little different from the others. I don't filter my water but rather dip from the middle of lakes. The burnt lakes have a decided charcoal flavor. Deeper lakes taste best and provide the coolest drink. Some lakes don't taste well at all. The water I get near shore is always boiled for a hot drink or for cooking meals. One negative this time of year is that the drinking water tends to be warm.... but that too will change.



9-3 I should have known that a wet weather pattern was moving in. Perhaps I did. No dew or fog in the morning.... almost too peaceful. That sense of peace did not last long. It began to rain shortly after my first portage of the day.... and there were eight more to go. The next portage was probably one of the most difficult to date or that I would experience. A major burn area with no discernable path. I ended up bushwhacking through ash and severely burned trees. Everything I touched turned black. If you have ever stepped on soggy, wet ash.... you would know that it kind of oozes a kind of guck... and that's what each step felt like. Its one thing to haul the pack on a portage.... it's another to carry the canoe. I spent a lot of time clearing a route for the canoe.... as the rain continued..... very dirty work! The portages on this "Webster Creek" section were almost back to back. After the fifth one, it began to rain so hard that I ended up propping my canoe in the crotch of a tree and sitting under it for shelter. The rain did not subside. And I started to get very chilled. What to do? I needed to get to Redman Lake to look for a green campsite. So on I went.... wet and cold.



The maps have these lines across narrow passages. They are called "swifts". A swift is another name for a short, rocky rapid. Sometimes a canoe can be maneuvered through a swift. Sometimes it's best to walk the canoe through a swift which requires walking in water up to ones waist. Most often on this trip, with the low water conditions, getting around a swift involved portaging the gear and canoe by leaping from boulder to boulder until navigable water is reached. Swifts were fun at first but quickly became less fun as they became longer due to low water and they were never navigable. As I walked through the last of five swifts on this stretch, there was resounding thunder in the air (lightning is a major concern). I needed to get off the water.... immediately. I was surprised to discover that Redman Lake was not burned.... and then even more surprised to see a dock extending from the shoreline a short distance away. I raced that storm to the dilapidated dock and pulled up to "dry" land. I yelled, "Hello!" And there was no answer. The



mooring area was a mess. I walked up to the cabin. It wasn't much. It appeared that no one had stayed there for a few years. The door was open. This place at one time had been a fly-in fishing destination. One large room with six bunks with foam mattresses. A kitchen table and a sheltered deck. A good place to wait out the storm which seemed to be increasing in intensity. I hauled my gear up to the deck and waited. I hung my wet clothes to dry. I waited. I listened. It didn't take long for the rain to soak everything even more thoroughly. Lightning, thunder.... a huge storm. Probably just what this fire ravaged area needed most. This rain

should put an end to the fires and help begin the succession of growth that is a natural phenomenon in these wilderness areas.

High and dry..... I prepared a delicious supper and with guilt, decided to stay out of the rain and quarter myself in the cabin. There were a couple of luxuries that I didn't expect. The foam bed and a solar light over a table. I fell asleep with rain pelting the tin roof..... PS Did I mention that the cabin also had a small functioning wood stove?

9-4 It rained all night long.... sometimes with great force. The temperature had dropped to around forty degrees. A cold, wet and worst of all, a very windy morning. And yet, here I was warm and dry. It's rare.... but sometimes a person gets a break like this. It would have been miserable out there last night. No way to get a fire burning. It's lightly raining this morning but the wind has already created white cap swells across the lake. If I have to wait out this weather pattern, this cabin is one lucky break for this aging camper. I've never been very good with "sitting around" but compared to a wet and cramped tent, I have struck gold.

Late morning. Wind still blowing and a steady rain seems to make this "trespassing" experience a wise choice. Late afternoon. Cabin fever. I have been experiencing some personal disappointment due to staying in a cabin while on a wilderness trip. But I have no regrets. The opportunity and resource presented itself at the precise moment when all other factors played into the making of the decision. I was near hypothermic, soaking wet and attempting to get out of a storm. Perhaps one needed to be present to fully understand. And I will leave in the morning. Nearly half of the trip is still ahead of me. I'm excited to be out of the burn areas and to be heading into new lakes and challenges.

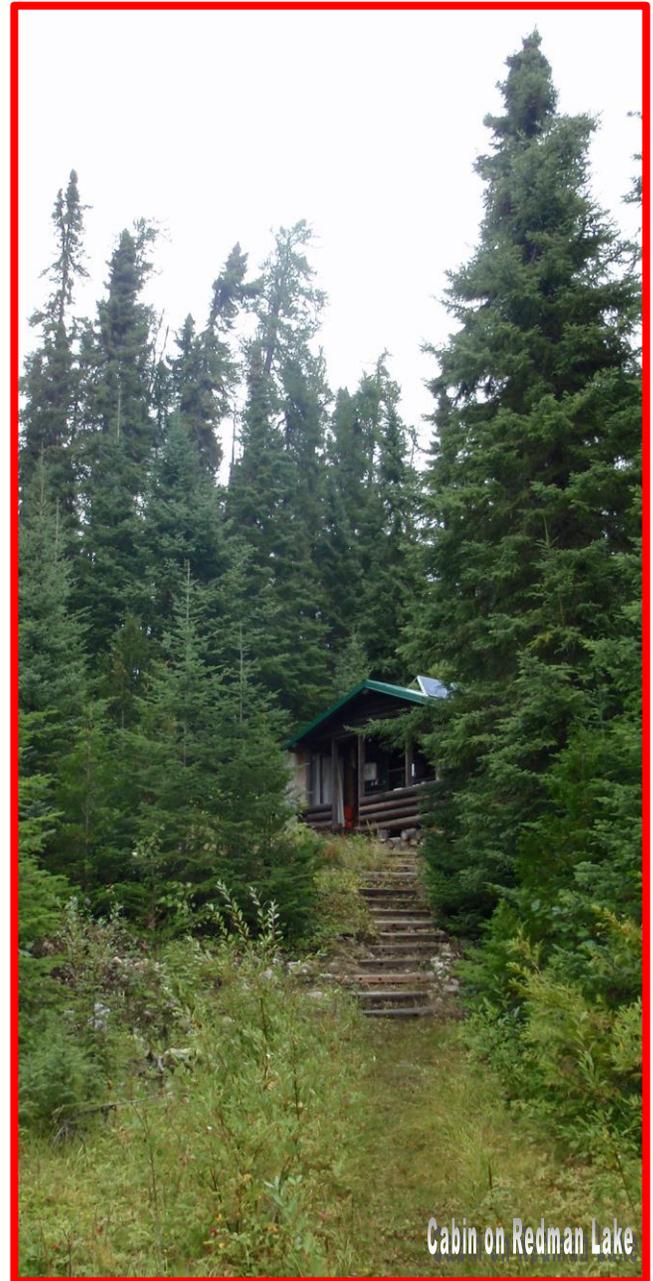
I wrote a note and posted it in the cabin (near many of the other notes bragging about fish caught in years past). It said,

"Not a guest..... a trespasser! Entered the lake from the east in a severe rain storm.... Lightning and thunder chasing me. Saw the cabin and took refuge. No one here. No one has been here for some time. Decided to wait out the storm. Day turned to night. Night to morning. No letup with rain or wind. Decided that this was a better place to layover than a tent. Spent considerable time cleaning, organizing and making the cabin more desirable for the next guests. Small payback but thanks."

A solo tripper.... September 2011

PS Cleaned and swept as much as I could. The kitchen sink and counters were too disgusting.... Sorry

19-5 I love to paddle a canoe. Can't think of anything I like to do more. There doesn't seem to be enough hours in a day when the paddling is good. The feeling I experience may have been said best by Sigurd Olson, ***"The movement of a canoe is like a reed in the wind. Silence is part of it, and the sounds of lapping water, bird songs, and wind in the trees. It is part of the medium through which it floats, the sky, the water, the shores....There is magic in the feel of a paddle and the movement of a canoe, a magic compounded of distance, adventure, solitude, and peace. The way of a canoe is the way of the wilderness, and of***



Cabin on Redman Lake

a freedom almost forgotten. It is an antidote to insecurity, the open door to waterways of ages past and a way of life with profound and abiding satisfactions. When a man is part of his canoe, he is part of all that canoes have ever known.

Today was one of those days.... at least until I reached the "suck" water. Suck water is very shallow water, two feet or less deep that seems to "suck" the canoe down and makes travel (momentum) very slow. Webster Creek has been extremely shallow, rocky and low for this time of year. There is barely enough water to travel on.... Barely!

My goal today was Late Lake. I arrived late in the afternoon. It was too windy to fish until I reached Late Lake. It's hard to believe but I ended up catching two large walleye in five minutes. There is so much "meat" that fish will have to be my dinner.

I am currently watching a young gull...not fifteen feet from my camp diving for the skins and carcass of the fish I just filleted. Can't ask for any better entertainment.

9-6 Mornings are the best, especially with a warm fire, hot coffee and the morning sun. The quiet and fog covered lake seems to be waiting for the sun to fully rise and to dry the dew laden landscape. Sounds reverberate, especially the call of the loon and the numerous bird species. Seeing the wilderness (or anywhere for that matter) is much different than experiencing it. While truly experiencing it, one

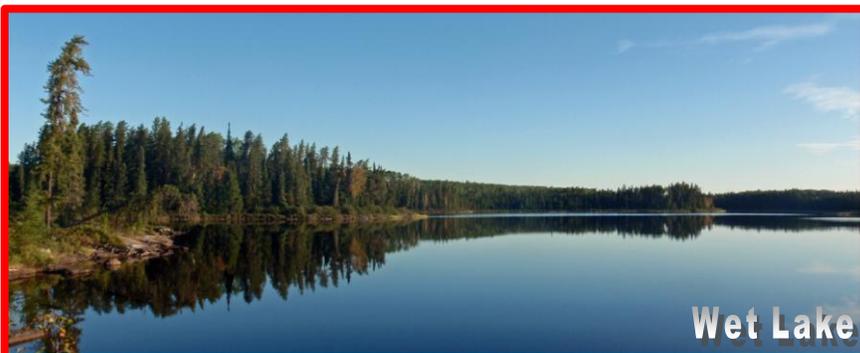
becomes part of the land and the environment taking what it gives and adapting it to daily routine. **Walleye Fillets**

I'm in no hurry today. I start with a 1100 meter portage. That equates into walking with gear, food and canoe the length of thirty-three football fields.... through what appears to be a marsh. But first I will head out to explore and to see if I can catch a few more of those "monster" walleye.

I'm beginning to really get the message that there are not a lot (if any) people traveling these routes. The only tracks I've seen since I started have been of moose and bear. I expect to see more wildlife than people. Up to now, I have only seen one moose and two bear. The old saying goes, *"For every animal that you've seen, fifty have seen you!"* I also like the quote, *"When a leaf falls from a tree.... a hawk sees it, a deer hears it and a bear smells it!"*

Today I sort of got trapped between lakes. I completed the long portage and paddled to the north end of Wet

Lake. There are eight portages from that point to the next lake. I decided to wait until the next day to move. There is a reason that this lake is called "Wet". Finding a campsite seemed near impossible. I settled on a spot with just enough room for a tent and a fire pit. Great view. No one will probably ever camp here again. That's one of the nice things about



being a solo camper and visiting places where man does not tread often.

9-7 Reflecting at sunrise. How quickly one puts in the past or forgets places that one has been.... places once imperative in moving along the route. There is such intensity in the moment to know exactly where one is... how the contours of the map line up cognitively with the reality of the moment. When one is navigating a river, creek or lake or any of the interconnected labyrinths of water to water passageways.... one must live intensely in the moment. The past quickly slips into a different part of the brain... often times seemed forgotten over the course of days and weeks. Little thought to the future because the future can't seem to happen without minute by minute introspection. The future, it



seems, is only as far as the visual eye can see. On a couple of occasions I have found myself in a strange bay looking for a portage trail. None found, I begin the search. Canoe grounded, I walk a semi-circle over an area where my intuition tells me there is a trail. None found? Back to the map. Perhaps a wrong location? How can that happen? Back track? Water ways don't look the same going in the opposite direction. One needs to keep the mind open for different possibilities. There will be no outside assistance. Most likely, no one will be by this location for the rest of the year. A sort of "panic" sets in. Alone! Alone! Make good decisions. It's no wonder why such concentration on the moment quickly leaves the past so distant. And once a trail is discovered, a sigh of relief and I start the process all over again. There were 114 episodes similar to this on the trip. And on I go on this three week wilderness solo quest.

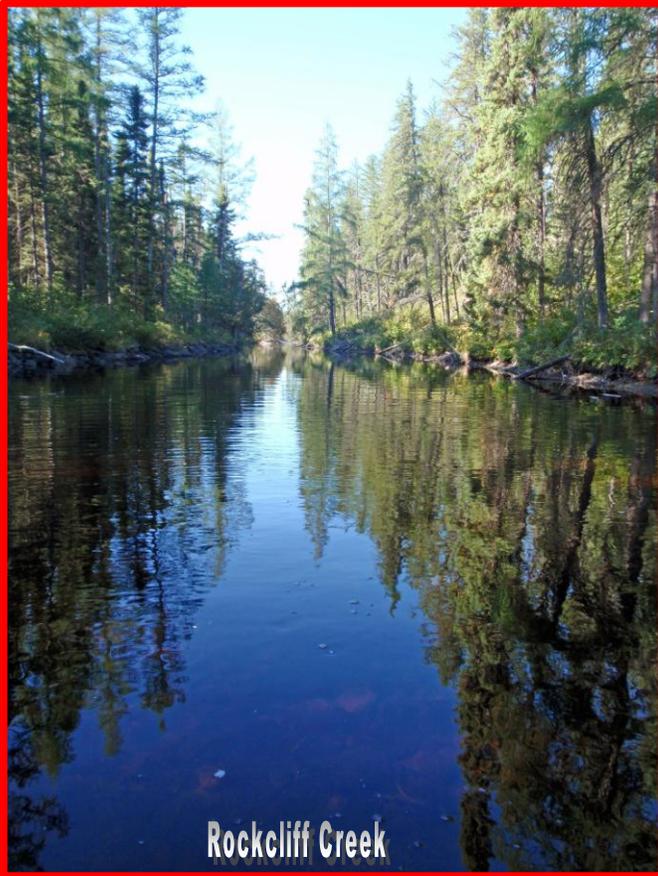
Got quite bloody today.... at least the legs and hands. I feel like a wilderness warrior. The portages were in



disrepair. Lots of down trees. I must have stepped or climbed over two hundred trees. On my return trips, I broke branches and attempted to make the trails more passable. But here I am in a dandy little campsite on the Misehkov River just upstream from the forth swift that I walked up today.

What a beautiful and secluded place. I passed my third cardinal milepost today.

When I completed the 924 meter portage from Coles Lake, had reached the furthest north that I will travel. My start at Redhead Lake was the southernmost point and when I paddled through Arril Lake a few days ago, I passed the eastern most point. I will finish this trip at the western milepost.



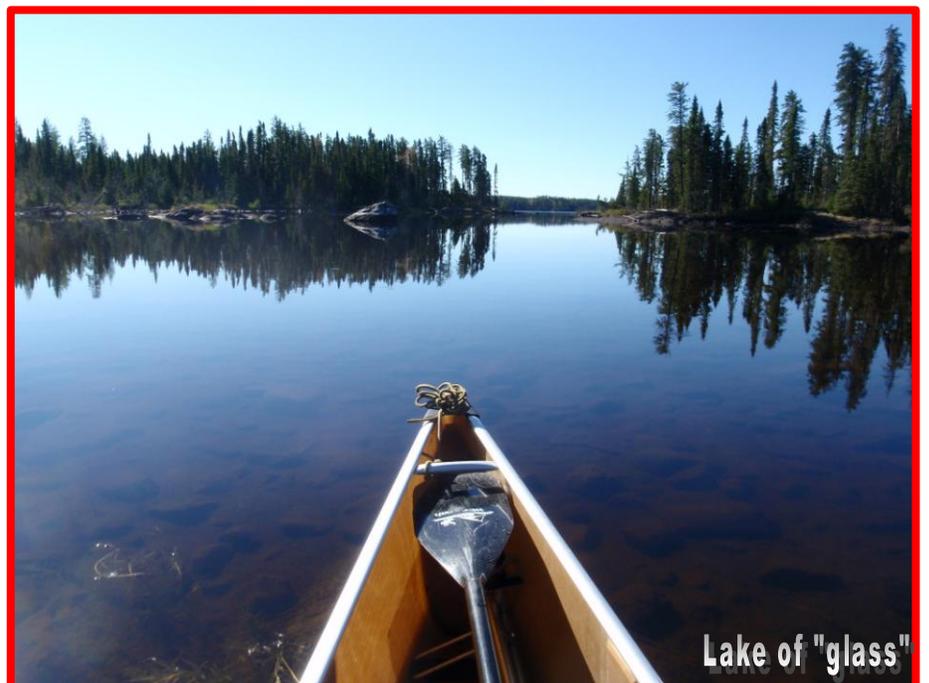
9-8 I could have lived a life like this.... at least in the short term. I'm not sure if this is an escape or if the real escape is living/existing in the "civilized" world. One thing that a journey like this reinforces is the value of simplicity. In ones quest for happiness, it seems, we complicate most of the core values that truly bring us peace, tranquility and contentment. I find enjoyment in contemplation... my thoughts, reflections and dreams. Solitude and silence are part of it. The sounds of the wilderness....loons, osprey, the wind and the rapids. On a few of the key portages, after spotting fresh bear scat, I will yell out loud.... surprised at the sound of my own voice but very conscious of it. When I paddle, I avoid splashing or touching the canoe with the paddle (and become annoyed if I do make unnecessary sounds). I enjoy the quiet especially considering the "noise" that I will again confront in a few short days.

A tale of two days in one (morning and afternoon). Shortly after leaving camp, I entered Rockcliff Creek....the clearest moving water that I have encountered in this back country. The creek is narrow and shallow. The banks were combinations of overhanging cedar and fully mature black fir. I began the "walking upstream" portion of the day. There must have been fifty swifts and all had to be walked. My canoe

enjoyed the journey. The stream was never more than thigh deep and walking was actually enjoyable although quite tiresome. The stretch also had a twenty foot cascading waterfall.... absolutely beautiful. It took a long time to finally enter Rockcliff Lake. True to its name, the lake is unique for the steep rock bluffs that line its entire length on both sides. Picture a lake 100 to 150 meters wide and nine miles long..... and you could almost see end to end. Unfortunately, the wind was again in my face and progress was slow.... perhaps one to one and a half miles per hour.... grueling at times.

The clear, hot sunny day didn't help either. I was exhausted by the time I found a camp... and a wonderful camp site I did find. I could easily layover there but will travel on tomorrow to take advantage of cooperative weather. I rest now as an eagle circles overhead with its sight on a fish carcass I placed on a rock in front of my camp. Very fun to watch.

9-9 The days are getting shorter.... about six minutes a day. Less daylight. I tend to be an early riser. One can't make the sun rise. Down in this lake valley; the sun slowly descends the tall firs. The leaves on the birch trees have already



turned color and are falling with more regularity. The tamaracks are turning their smoky gold color. A great start of the day for a September morn. And the fish carcass has disappeared over night.



Indian summer! No clouds in the sky for the past two days. Very warm. Today was the story of the ecstasy and the agony.

The ecstasy..... paddling for four hours on “glass”. Not a ripple. Words cannot describe the “dream come true” feeling of stroking a canoe down the middle of huge lakes when the water surface is like a mirror. Lower Rockcliff was gorgeous. The last quarter mile skirted more wild rice than I had ever seen. Davies Lake produced more “glass”. I could have paddled all day in conditions like this.

The agony... the connector stream between Takeoff Lake and Redmond Lake was essentially dry. A muck pit. I tried to paddle but could make no progress. I stepped out of the canoe thinking that I could walk through the muck and pull the canoe to deeper water..... a big mistake! I was immediately up to my neck in “quicksand” like mud. No bottom! Somehow, I crawled back into the canoe and worked my way to shore. So began the mile long portage from hell. Exhausting. No trail. A marsh bushwhack. But eventually I did arrive at Redmond Lake.... finally! I paddled to the lower end of the lake hoping to complete a 800 meter portage before camping. I spent the remainder of the daylight hours attempting to locate the portage. I even broke through a floating

bog and soaked myself completely and felt lucky to come back up through the hole in the bog that I had fallen through.

Lots of marsh and woods crossed in my search. No luck! So here I sit at an emergency campsite....not bad.... deciding what to do. There are only two options: 1) go back through the “agony” stretch and attempt to find another way out or 2) this is serious..... attempt to walk the edge of the marsh with compass in hand and slowly push through to the next lake. I choose option #2. I could feel myself “losing it” at the end of the day.... getting clumsy... a little panicked. I need to rest and regain my strength and momentum. Stay positive. Enjoy the moment.

9-10 A night of anxiety. I arose early, focused. If there was a “make or break” day on this trip, today was

it. Clear skies, small flocks of geese migrating south, loon calls, an owl off in the distance... this sure is beautiful and remote country. If all goes relatively well, I should enter the Little Savant River later today. Not sure what to expect given the nature of low water on connector streams but perhaps I will be on more established routes? My new concern will be navigating the labyrinth of open lakes, islands and bays while staying on course. But first, a portage into the unknown. Perhaps just another link through this interconnected quagmire of waterways. Time will tell!

How do I begin to describe this day? Let’s say that if today was your first day of traveling through canoe country wilderness, it would probably also be your last. It was difficult (understatement)! The early morning portage turned out to be one of the easier tasks. I located the original trail after thirty minutes of bushwhacking.... It was extremely muddy





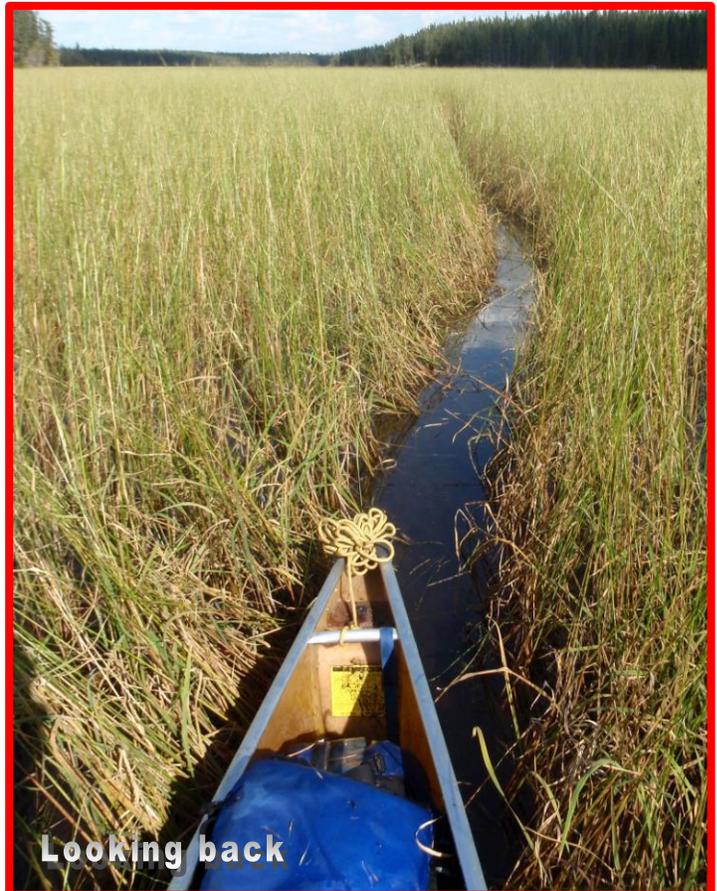
Wild rice lakes

but the trail was clear to the next lake. The Little Savant River is no friend of mine! It's interesting.... a savant is defined as someone (an expert) recognized for their skill and for making wise decisions.... a person with extensive knowledge, ability and experience. The Little Savant River truly tested my mental and physical prowess. It started with the very low water... lots of mud.... literally mud. Long, long stretches of mud. Paddling but moving a few inches at a time. And then the mud turned into wild rice bogs. Miles and miles of wild rice. I did learn how to harvest the stuff. Each time I switched sides to paddle, rice would inadvertently fall into the boat. The further I went, the thicker and higher the rice plants became.... sometimes three feet high. And as the plants became

higher, the lakes became shallower and the wind picked up and curtailed most of the momentum that I was making. There was one stretch nearly a mile long where I had to kneel in the bottom of the canoe and reach out with my hands and grab the rice plants.... one plant after another.... keep grabbing rice plants and pulling the canoe forward.... sometimes only an inch at a time.... and eventually a swift. The Little Savant River has a pattern: a long stretch of shallow wild rice followed by a rocky swift that must be portaged. This continued all day... eleven portages. This was the first day



A mile of wild rice to paddle through



Looking back

on the trip that I did not attempt to fish. There was never enough water. It seemed like an "all work and no play" kind of day. I did find a camp... not bad.... no one's been here for a few years.

I start tomorrow with more Little Savant River. Maybe it will surprise me and be a river with water that flows into a lake.... maybe!

9-11 An ominous day.... in history... and it seems in front of my campsite. So many warning signs... red sky, no dew, fire smoke hovering at ground level, and already a slight breeze. Traveler beware!

It was a Good, Bad, and Ugly kind of day.

Good- It was mostly good. Got an early start up the Little Savant... it was navigable water. An old and full antlered bull moose swam across the stream in front of me. Otters played alongside my canoe. The lakes I passed through had good water.... which was essential because I haven't dared to drink directly from the shallow lakes that I recently crossed (except hot drinks). My navigational skills impressed me while navigating through extremely difficult topography. And I may have walked over the most unique switchback on a portage in my life.

Bad- Wind.... lots of wind with dangerous whitecaps. The weather has held but the black clouds are portentous. Hopefully they will rain themselves out by morning. And another day with no fishing. Lots of work and an evening meal short on calories.

Ugly- Finding the portages. They seem well marked once I begin walking them but trying to locate them from the water is extremely frustrating. I spent more than two hours scouting the woods, marshes and shorelines. It's a panic type of feeling.... having come so far and not being able to move on. I took a very nasty spill today on some rocks. Thought I broke my arm. There will be a bruise that will take some time to heal.

I'm starting to get the sensation that I'm heading home. A couple of more days with good weather. I'm currently not that far from the take-out but I still have five and a half miles of portaging yet to complete. This is unquestionably a very strenuous and challenging route.

9-12 The wrath of the storm! All of the signs have been there. One sensed that it was coming. I almost didn't leave this morning... but leave I did. Got a couple of portages and a few miles out of the way.... and then lightning, thunder and rain. I quickly pulled to shore and set up my tarp. After a couple of hours there was a reprieve. I hit the water again and

paddled more miles and another set of portages. Just as I was entering Seldom Lake, the "real" storm began. Scary thunder! A camping place a quarter of a mile away. I paddled for all I was worth. Lucky... no lightning... yet. Up went the tarp. I was soaked and cold. I was able to get my tent erected next to the tarp so that one door of the tent opened into a sort of extended vestibule. And that's when the brunt of the storm hit. Three foot swells on the lake... the wind howling. I could hear trees blowing over. Scary! And the temperature dropped more than thirty degrees. I could see my breath. I guess Wabakimi wants me to stay an extra day (or two). I made a hot drink, put on all of my warm clothes and sat in my tent wrapped up in my sleeping bag. What an



experience! What a storm. And... what if it gets worse?



Did you ever have a sustained feeling or thought that what you were doing.... canoe camping, your job, going to school, raising a family... didn't measure up to the performance of the people around you? It seems like those other people are the best canoe campers, employees, students or parents.... but then you realize that what you are doing or have done measures up equally or better than those who seemed to give the impression about how successful they were. It's called the "imposter syndrome". One can be immensely successful but still feel like an imposter. Solo wilderness canoeing is like that for me. I scan the blogs and read

web pages and attend conferences sponsored by the "experts". It's humbling sometimes. But then I recognize that without all of the "talk" I do the "walk".... and probably do it with just as much style and success. Perhaps, and I emphasize perhaps.... many of those supposed successful people are really the imposters. Perhaps we live in a world with more imposters than we ever imagined and we need to be more proud of our own accomplishments that we do in our own way.

9-13 Woke up cold.... damp. A very red sky but the wind had slowed overnight. A quick hot fire while packing... a hot drink and then.... why not head west and finish the trip, especially with such poor weather conditions. I did have concerns: Would the storm hold off? Was I making one of those decisions based on emotion rather than good judgment? Only three miles of portages and seven miles to the landing.

Dress warm. Keep the rain gear in reach. Paddle, walk and carry..... paddle, walk and carry. And that's what I did. There were long portages but I found them quickly. One shallow stream and one more time up to my chest in mud.... but I'm good at this by now. Across Neverfreeze Lake and then Shallow Lake....and that's when the rain started. I completed the last portage in pouring rain with only three miles of open water between me and the landing. That's when the real rain really began to fall. With a major headwind and nearly zero visibility, I put my head down and focused on the compass. I could barely make out the front of the canoe! Paddle west until I reach land. Trust the compass. Keep paddling! Hopefully the canoe would not fill up with rain water and sink.... but more importantly..... do not get caught out there in lightning!

The rain let up a little when I reached the shore. I quickly put on dry pants and a pile



shirt and walked a mile to Highway 599 to hitchhike to my car (30 miles away). It took an hour and more rain but I was able to flag down a car (the only one that came by) and beg a ride to Savant Lake. I returned with my vehicle. It does seem weird moving so fast after spending three weeks traveling no faster than a couple of miles per hour.

All the gear was packed into the car, the canoe secured on top, a photo taken and I was on my way back to Idaho. I only got about ten miles down the road before I had to pull over to the side of the highway. I'm not sure what happened but I lost control. Tears flowed from my eyes. I sobbed! I was overcome with emotion. Was it relief from the ordeal? Was it a feeling of accomplishment? Was it a reaction to being alone for twenty-two days? Whatever it was... it was one of the more emotional reactions that I have experienced in my life.

And for the next few days, I will experience the emotions of re-entry..... Thank you Wabakimi!

Final Thoughts

With my return to civilization, a reality hit me. The ordeal is over. The end of the trip was surreal. I've spent the first week telling people who will listen the essence of my trip. Most people seem or pretend to try to be interested, cordial. The feeling of euphoria and a sense of accomplishment is slow to fade. After awhile, it seems easy to believe that if I want something bad enough... that what I desire is no less than what I deserve. But I came to understand that the wilderness lakes and this Canadian environment challenge more than a man's skill or desire... they challenge his essence. I now move on and can tell the real story. And it is my story! It's a wonderful story. And if you read the entire story.... I thank you. It seems difficult in this day and age of twitter and text messaging to get people to read more than the 400 or so "characters" allotted.

And in case you are wondering..... I celebrate my 64th birthday on September 25th.

LAKES, RIVERS AND STREAMS VISITED ON THE JOURNEY

1	Rocky river	23	Lower Wabakimi	45	Slim lake	67	Redmond Lake
2	Redhead lake	24	Wabakimi lake	46	Palisade River	68	No Name Lake
3	No Name Lake	25	McWade Creek	47	Webster Creek	69	Velos Lake
4	Nemo river	26	River Bay	48	Redman Lake	70	Little Savant River
5	Solution lake	27	Ogoki River	49	Hastie Lake	71	No Name Lake
6	Osprey Lake	28	Kenoji lake	50	No Name Lake	72	No Name Lake
7	Smoke Lake	29	Palisade River	51	Webster Lake	73	No Name Lake
8	No Name Lake	30	No Name Lake	52	Upper Webster	74	Compass Lake
9	No Name Lake	31	Little Scrag Lake	53	Early lake	75	Little Savant River
10	Beaver lake	32	No Name Lake	54	Late Lake	76	No Name Lake
11	Eagle lake	33	Scrag Lake	55	Wet Lake	77	North Arm Savant
12	No Name Lake	34	Grayson river	56	Coles Creek	78	Savant River
13	Daggar Lake	35	No Name Lake	57	No Name Lake	79	Neverfreeze Bay
14	Change Lake	36	Arril Lake	58	Coles Lake	80	Little Savant Lake
15	Change River	37	Dawn Creek	59	August creek	81	Elwood Lake
16	No Name Lake	38	No Name Lake	60	Musehkov river	82	Brenner Lake
17	Jeep lake	39	Dawn Lake	61	Rockcliff Creek	83	Seldom Lake
18	No Name Lake	40	Finton Creek	62	Rockcliff Lake	84	Neverfreeze lake
19	Brennan Lake	41	No Name Lake	63	Davies Lake	85	Shallow lake
20	Granite Lake	42	Finton Lake	64	Davies Creek	86	Solitude Lake
21	Alan Water River	43	Slim River	65	Redmond Creek	87	Fitchie Lake
22	McWade Lake	44	No Name Lake	66	No Name Lake		

WABAKIMI MEAL MENU - 2011

PACK ONE		PACK THREE		PACK FIVE	
Darn Good Chili	Granola	Minestrone	Granola	Minestrone	Granola
Teriyaki Noodle	Granola	Darn Good Chili	Granola	Beef Vegetable	Granola
Beef Vegetable	Granola	Chicken Noodle Soup	Granola	Darn Good Chili	Granola
Garlic & Olive Vermicell	Granola	Louisiana Gumbo	Granola	Garlic & Olive Vermicelli	Granola
Minestrone	Oatmeal	Sante Fe Beans & Rice	Oatmeal	Cheddar Broccoli	Oatmeal

PACK TWO		PACK FOUR		PACK SIX	
Minestrone	Granola	Darn Good Chili	Granola	Darn Good Chili	Granola
Beef Vegetable	Granola	Sante Fe Beans & Rice	Granola	Parmesan Pasta	Granola
Parmesan Pasta	Granola	Chicken Noodle Soup	Granola	Beef Stew	Granola
Cheddar Broccoli	Oatmeal	Beef Stew	Oatmeal	Beef Stroganoff	Oatmeal
Darn Good Chili	Oatmeal	Minestrone	Oatmeal	Vegetable Beef	Oatmeal

In Addition:

Coffee: One Container per day (3-5 cups of coffee)

Cooking Oil: 3 Table spoons per day

Stove Fuel: Two canisters per week (4-5 days)

WABAKIMI EQUIPMENT AND GEAR LIST - 2011

CANOE AND ACCESSORIES	COOKING GEAR	CAMPING GEAR
We-no-nah "Wilderness" canoe Black Jack carbon paddle Black Lite Straight Paddle Yoke 2 – Painter ropes Map Holder attached to thwart 18 - Copies of Wabakimi Project Maps 6 – 1:50,000 topographic maps	Grate (8" by 10") Coffee or hot water pot Cook pan and lid Lexicon coffee mug with lid Coffee filter cup 1 spoon, 1 fork, one specula 1 leather glove 1 "shammy" towel for dishes 3 scrub pads 3 – Bic lighters	MSR Hubba Hubba tent 32 Degree down sleeping bag Go-lite tarp (10' by 12') 2 Tarp poles -duct tape on poles Sling-light chair Therma-rest Leatherman Tool 2 – Large NRS Bill's Bags 1 – Expedition Dri-Duffel 2 – NRS Tuff Sack – Medium 1 - Coleman Peak Stove 4 - Coleman Performance fuel
CLOTHING	FISHING	PERSONAL ITEMS
River shorts Cargo pants/zip legs Polypropylene short sleeve shirt Ibex long sleeve shirt Light weight pile "hoodie" Rain Jacket & Rain Pants Green Bay Packer baseball hat 2 – Pairs of wool socks 1 – Waterproof camp shoes 1 – NRS expedition river shoes 1 – Wide brimmed rain hat 2 - Bandanas	Fish pole – Ugly Stick Fish Pole (collapsible) – backup Fish Reel Fish Reel – backup 12 Floating Rapalas – various types 12 – 6" to 12" leaders & 20 - Swivels Extra spool of line (8 pound test) Fillet plastic board with Velcro Fillet knife & Sharpening stone Fish stringer Hook extraction pliers Scotty pole holder	Toothbrush Hair brush Insect repellent - 2 Nail clippers Scissors Ibuprofen Multi-vitamin Small clock Journal with two pens Sewing Kit Small mirror 1 Roll of TP
FIRST AID ITEMS	ELECTRONIC OR BATTERY OPERATED	
Band-Aids (various sizes) Butterfly bandages 4 – antiseptic towelettes 2 gauze pads 1 roll of athletic tape 1 – Elastic bandage Super glue & Second skin Tylenol & Benadryl tablets Cortisone & Imodium Advanced	Olympus waterproof camera Garmin E-trex (GPS) SPOT Kindle Book reader Mammut XC-Zoom Headlamp	