

BWCA/Quetico Trip 2004

Friday, June 4th, 2004

The Drive up

The players for this trip were mostly experienced trippers. We had Alan, BassMan, Dan, and of course...me...GeoFisher. Dan had only been on one other trip, but he is an experienced woodsman, and I'd been fishing and camping with him numerous times in the past.

Once again, our group decided to try another method of handling the LONG drive to Minnesota. In the past, our various groups have left at different times. Sometimes we'd opt to use the bunkhouse, while others, we simply drove all night, loaded the canoes at the outfitter, and then paddled ALL day. That generally led to a really tough first day. I'm so worn out from the drive and the first day of paddling, I usually have to take the next day off simply to rest. Not a good way to start the trip.

This year, we tried something different. Our method of driving was similar to what we used last year, but we had much better results this time around. Instead of leaving our house on Wednesday evening, we opted to leave Thursday morning. We left my house around 4:00am. This allowed us to drive ALL day.

Driving during the daylight hours, in my opinion, is simply the BEST method that I have used over the past 12 trips. You can talk or BS, take in the scenery, or rest. Best of all, EVERYONE seemed to be less grouchy once we arrive at our outfitter.

One of the major reasons we chose to drive during the day instead of through the night was because we had only 3 drivers. BassMan had decided to do back to back trips this year. His first trip was about to end. We would pick him up at American Point, and head into the bush again for an additional 10 days. He is definitely a Boundary Waters WILDMAN.

Day 1: Saturday, June 5th, 2004

American Point, Cache Bay and Saganagons

We were anxious to meet up with GadgetMan, Chms, Chris, and BassMan. They had been in the previous week, and we wanted to get a heads up on the fishing. Part of the deal with BassMan doing 2 trips was that our group would bring additional fuel, food, and clean clothes for him, and he would leave for the second trip from American Point. No shower, No rest, and no downtime. He was in for a really, really tough day.

Once we met up with the other group, I knew something was up. After grilling Chris for a couple minutes, I realized what was the problem. Chris had NO idea what to expect. I actually think we didn't explain the portages too well, and the fact that the portages were not paved didn't go over too well either. Actually, I'm joking here, but I think he really had no idea what to expect.

Chris is in GREAT shape, runs about a billion miles a week and is a regular at the fitness center, but he simply was not prepared in the lower body, and the shoulders for the type of workout he

received in the Boundary Waters. We talked for a little while, but it was apparent that he felt like a PACK MULE for the past 10 days.

We discussed fishing options, were they caught fish, and what the bite was like. This was the first week in June, and they had actually found some lakes where the smallies had already spawned out. This was a GOOD sign. We figured the areas around Saganagons would be rocking. GAME ON.

Last year's trip to Saganagons, and McEwen was so FANTASTIC; we decided to plan another trip around the eastern end of Saganagons. This trip was a fishing trip. Our group had decided early in our planning sessions that Saganagons needed some SERIOUS attention, and we were just the group to give it.

Since we knew ahead from the previous weeks reports what the fishing was like, we had a little heads up of some places to try. Also, we had scheduled a later Tow to American Point because the other guys from group 1 needed some time to get from Kawnipi to American Point. We met them at 10:30AM, which would be the latest that I have ever started across Cache Bay.

Cache Bay really was not too bad. We made it across with minimal effort, and only a little rain. We checked in with the ranger, and headed to Silver Falls. Silver Falls had some water running, but not nearly like 3 years prior, when GadgetMan and I nearly sunk a canoe there. Still, the flow was enough to keep you on your toes. Dan commented about how he LOVED the [portage pads](#) we were using. These are the clamp on pads for Chosen Valley. You know.....Rags company. At any rate, this is the first time they were actually used in the Quetico, and I can tell you this.....They are the BEST pads I have ever used.

On the other side of Silver Falls, Dan and I had a quick lunch. Since we knew we were going to be paddling and portaging most of the day, we decided to pack in MRE's for this lunch. The MRE's were pretty good, added a lot of calories, and were hot. They weighed a little more than I'd like, but that was OK. I usually like to take 2 MRE's on each trip. If I'm going to be paddling a TON of distance, and portaging a lot, the MRE's are perfect. I also like them on days when I know it is going to be cold and rainy. There is nothing like a warm meal at lunchtime.....especially when on the water.

We had planned to camp around the Boundary Point area. We especially wanted the island campsite directly to the southeast, but were told by the rangers that an aggressive bear was camped on that particular island. Our group decided that we would camp on the same site we used last year. The site was pretty good, with better than average tent pads, a fairly decent fire ring. Best of all, the site had GREAT access to most of the top of Saganagons.

We fished for a while around the Boundary Point area, and fished up to where we had planned on camping. By now, it was getting late.....nearly 5:00pm, so we decided to kick can, and head to the campsite. The site was available, so we took it.

We had a quick meal of Zatarains Dirty Rice, and packaged hamburger. After dinner, we sat around the fire, talked about the game plan for the next day and where we would be fishing. It was a tossup between "the RAT", and the top of the lake. As a group, we decided the top of the lake was the call.

Day 2: Sunday, June 6th, 2004

Eastern end of Saganagons

Day 2 would start bright and early. I told Dan and Alan about the time BassMan and I had last year at the top of the lake, the patterns, and the simply FANTASTIC fishing. We all decided to get up before sunrise, and head up to the top of the lake.

Now for a major change.....On this trip, Dan and I planned to actually eat some better food. Alan and BassMan planned their meals together, and Dan and I planned our meals together. It was apparent after about 2 days that Dan and I were eating SIGNIFICANTLY better than Alan and BassMan. Dan and I decided to take it easy, and actually enjoy some of the food. We packed in oil, pancake mix, syrup, jelly, and some other goodies. We really wanted to have some good eats on this trip.

I figured that my food pack gained an additional 20 or 25 pounds for this year. I also packed in ALL the cocoa, ALL the apple cider mix, ALL the tang drink mix, and ALL other EXTRAS that people in my groups traditionally expect. I also packed in 3-4 desserts, which would be shared by all 4 members of the group. This would be something that DEFINITELY changes in future trips. If everyone is going to share the items, then EVERYONE should be involved in packing it in. I could have had Alan and BassMan carry ½ of this stuff. That would have made my packing and portaging a little easier.

Dan and I decided that we would start off right, but having some pancakes and bacon for breakfast. BassMan and Alan had oatmeal and breakfast bars. Definitely not quite the same.

I've always been under the impression that cooking in the morning was a waste of time, but for the first time in a LONG time, I actually cooked in the morning. Dan and I were able to cook bacon and pancakes, boil water for cocoa, and clean up our entire mess in about 30 minutes. It was DEFINITELY worth the extra 20 minutes we spent making a GREAT breakfast, versus oatmeal, which I had eaten for EVERY breakfast on past trips.

Alan and BassMan left for the top of the lake about 30 minutes before we did. When Dan and I finally put a paddle in the water, it was around 6:30am, and you couldn't see 30 feet in front of you due to the fog.

Since my map reading skills are sub-par to most everyone else I have met, I let Dan do 90% of our navigation. Dan managed to keep us on course through the entire trip. I don't think we were lost 1 time.

On our way up to the top of the lake, Dan and I decided to take the deep side, and try our luck trolling. We trolled on and off for about 1 hour, catching a couple bass, and a couple northerns, but having no luck with walleye or lakers. I'm actually beginning to think Saganagons does not hold lakers, and trolling for walleye is a "special" art that I have yet to master.

Once we were to a place that I recognized, the North shore of the VERY top of the lake, Dan and I started to fish. We immediately figured out a pattern, and managed to catch some really decent fish. Dan was fishing with a smoke red pepper craw tube, and I was using a burnt orange ¼ oz jig, with a zoom trailer. The fog was burning off, and the sun was beginning to poke through the clouds.

It was around 9:00am when I realized that we had not seen Alan or BassMan yet. Dan and I were still having some GREAT luck fishing the jig when we finally saw Alan and BassMan. They were fishing down the bank we just fished. Once they reached us, Dan and I both realized they had NOT been to the top of the lake, and had actually gotten turned around, and had fished RAT bay all morning instead. Once the fog lifted, they realized their error, and headed to where we had originally decided to fish. While fishing the north shoreline of Saganagons, Dan and I managed to boat 37 smallies in 4 hours of fishing. Seven of these fish were over 4 lbs, with some pushing 4.5lbs. We also caught 20 that were near, or over 3lbs, and Dan caught the fish of the week.....a 4.7lbs PIG of a smallmouth. Talk about a GREAT start to a fishing trip.

By this time, it was around 11:00am, and Dan and I decided to explore some of the far eastern shore. Along some of the campsites near the top of the lake, Dan and I met a group of campers that were base camping on an island. They told us they had taken the 530-rod portage from Saganaga to Saganagons. Dan and I headed to a little beach area that I know about.

Another thing Dan and I talked about was taking some time out of our fishing schedule to actually sit down, and cook lunch. He really likes Ramen noodles. I decided that I could stomach them for a couple days. We opted to take chicken flavor. To add some additional texture and flavor, I brought along a small shaker of Wylers chicken bullion, and a few packets of the Sue Bee shelf stable chicken. The chicken and Ramen went over pretty good. I actually liked the combination, and will probably use them in the future for additional lunches. Dan and I also had some gorp and a payday candy bar to fill out our lunch.

After POUNDING the smallmouth for most of the morning, Dan and I decided we would try to troll for some walleye, or some lakers. Since I'm a total rookie at trolling, I decided to start with a rapala.

Long story short.....Dan and I trolled for about 3 hours. During this time, we caught a couple smallmouth, and a few northerns, but no walleye, and certainly no lakers.

Since we were having no luck trolling, we decided to bounce some 1 oz jigs off the bottom, trying once again for some lakers. Once again, we tried this for at least 1 hour.

Essentially, we wasted 4 perfectly good hours trying to catch lakers and walleye.

The evening meal was supposed to be fish, so Dan and I put up the laker and walleye stuff, and started fishing for smallmouth again. Walleye are ALWAYS the more favorable choice for food, but I will take smallies or northern if necessary.

After catching a couple fish for dinner, we headed back to camp.

We had also decided that morning that it would also be a dessert night, so I started preparing the Jell-O No-Bake Cheesecake. I've used these in the past, and they are PERFECT for a quick and easy dessert. Nothing like cherry cheesecake to make you feel like you're at home.

Alan and BassMan arrived in camp a couple hours later. BassMan quickly cleaned our 2 smallies and their 4 walleye. We would, in fact, have some walleye that evening. We fried the fish using KFC fry mix. This was really, really good. Along with dinner, we had Idahoan instant potatoes with shelf stable ham.

We ate like KINGS. We followed up the "feast" with the cherry cheesecake, which had been setting up for the last couple hours.

It was now nearing 9:00pm, and we were all pretty tired. Collectively, we decided to tackle Moose Bay and some of those areas the next morning.

Day 3: Monday, June 7th, 2004

Moose Bay

The day started out wet.....really, really wet. It had rained through the night. Dan and I stayed pretty dry, but Alan and BassMan...well that was a different story.

Over the years, I have learned many techniques for staying dry. Of these techniques, I think the most important deals with the area you decide to pitch your tent. Dan and I had picked a fairly good area, with good drainage, and a pretty decent tent pad. Alan and BassMan had not picked as well. Their site was at the bottom of a rather large ridge. Sure, the site was clear of rocks and roots, but you could CLEARLY see the path the water was taking during previous rains. Dan and I had vetoed this site, and BassMan and I had vetoed it the previous year. Too bad BassMan did not realize the error in this choice.

When Alan and BassMan woke up, their tent had quite a bit of water in it. Not only was water in it, but water was also under it. Fortunately, they had a decent water barrier. They were using Tyvek, which kept most of the water under the tent at bay. Personally, I like a simple piece of three-mil plastic, which has always worked for me in the past.

Dan and I decided to have a quick breakfast of oatmeal. While I started water for cocoa and oatmeal, and started a pot of coffee, Dan helped Alan and BassMan with some of their wet stuff. They had to get all the gear out of the tent, dry the inside, and drain the standing water under their Tyvek ground tarp.

After cleaning up camp, and hanging wet stuff out to dry, we all headed to Moose Bay. We had fished Moose Bay in the past, so we knew basically where we wanted to start.

The weather was perfect. A little rain, and overcast. The wind was not too bad, but was noticeable. Since the fish were pre-spawn, Dan and I started fishing the western shore. This shore was the shallow portion of the lake. We started off using jerk baits, spinner baits, and some top water. This proved not to be the pattern. We fished for 2-3 hours, having just "normal" luck catching fish. No walleye, and only a few decent smallies.

At the creek that fed into another lake, Dan and I met up with BassMan and Alan. They were having much better luck fishing the deeper side of the lake. They were still fishing for the pre-spawners, but had decided to back off the bank, and were pitching tubes and jigs. Alan and BassMan were fishing the staging areas.....mostly points, in 12-15ft of water, and were catching some dandy smallies. They even managed to catch a few walleye.

On the other side of the creek, we decided to change sides, Dan and I would take the east bank, and Alan and BassMan would take the west bank. On this little body of water, we found the EXACT opposite pattern. These fish were actually on the nest. The west bank was barren of fish. There were only a couple shallow spawning spots. The fish may have been there, but we could not find them. Alan and BassMan, on the other hand, were tearing them up using top water, and tubes. They managed to catch nearly 30 fish down that bank.

About ½ way down the lake, Dan, BassMan, Alan, and I met in the middle of the lake for a quick lunch. Dan and I had peanut butter and jelly on a flour tortilla, which was EXCELLENT. We also had a couple slim jims, and a candy bar. Quick, good, and easy.....that is how I like my mid day meals in the Boundary Waters.

After lunch, Dan and I continued down the deep bank, catching a few fish, but not many. A creek was flowing into the lake at the far end. We fished this area for nearly 1 hour, catching numerous smallies, but nothing of great size.

By now, it was nearing 2:00pm, and we decided to head back to camp. Alan and BassMan continued fishing the area, and left a couple hours later.

Back at camp, Dan and I did some camp chores, went over to another island to gather a ton of firewood, and started a fire. Nothing like a nice, roaring fire to warm you up. The temps were not

too bad, but it was noticeably cooler than the day before. We were all thinking a cold front was pushing into the area.

Dan and I sat around the fire, soaking up the day. The sun started poking out a little, so I decided it was time for a bath. Man, that water sure was COLD. I'm thinking it was upper 50's or low 60's, but not much warmer than that. It was definitely refreshing, but was 1 or 2 days early for me.....

We again had a quick and easy dinner. Dinner was Zatarains Jambalaya with stable ham, and summer sausage.

After Dinner, Dan Alan, BassMan, and I sat around, simply in amazement of the area. The sunset was brilliant. The colors up there continue to amaze me. We talked about past trips, the food, and even started planning our next trip. We were not even through this trip, and were planning our next summer's trip. Dan and I both really wanted Chris to be with us on this trip. Chris is not only our boss, but also a good friend who had been along with us on a few fishing and camping trips, and we thought it would be GREAT to have him along on a Boundary Waters trip. I hope his first experience in the Boundary Waters is not his last experience.

The night was DEFINITELY cooler than previous nights. I dug into the vittles vault, and found the cocoa, and spiced cider. Instant spiced cider and cocoa always make the nights in the Boundary Waters a little more special.

After another hour of talking, we all went to bed. Tomorrow, we would be tackling Smally Lake, and Bitchu Bay.

Day 4: Tuesday, June 8th, 2004

Smally Lake and Bitchu Bay

Since our group was mainly smallmouth fisherman, we had decided there was NO way we were going to leave the area without fishing Smally Lake. The day was also going to be a rather easy day, so we decided it would also be nice to have a really good breakfast.

Dan and I had brought pancakes and bacon for 3 days. Alan and BassMan were really not interested in spending the extra time to cook pancakes and bacon, so they opted for oatmeal. As Dan and I started preparing our breakfast, the other guys realized that it didn't take that much longer to cook pancakes versus boiling water for oatmeal and coffee. By the time they were ready to leave, and head out to Smally Lake, Dan and I were starting round 2 of the pancakes.

The other guys must have smelled our pancakes, or something because they were waiting around for the leftovers.

Dan and I stuffed ourselves...we had 2 or 3 pancakes each, and had plenty of mix left over for 2 or 3 more. After Dan and I ate, I asked the other guys if they wanted some pancakes. I knew the obvious answer, but I had to ask.

Funny thing.....BassMan and Alan stayed around for 30 minutes.....This was 30 minutes AFTER they had already loaded their canoe. I guess the aroma of fresh, Boundary Waters pancakes was too overwhelming...even to these diehard smallmouth fishermen.

After cleaning up from breakfast, and doing the dishes, we headed to Smally Lake. The portage into Smally Lake was not too bad. It basically was a meandering creek, with an up and over

beaver dam at the end. We were able to crash the canoe into the dam, and Dan was able to get out and pull the canoe over. Neither one of us had to get wet on this portage. I'm not too sure this would be practical in low water conditions, or a Kevlar canoe.

Smally lake is off the northeast shore of Saganagons at the north end of Rat Bay. The lake was hit hard during the 1995 fire. The burn is definitely evident. On the South ridge, there are only a few trees standing. Those that are standing have been charred, and wind blown since the forest fire and blow down.

Once again, Dan and I picked the WRONG bank. The wind was blowing from the East, at about 3 billion miles an hour. The wind was actually blowing around 20 mph. Still pretty stiff, but manageable.

We took the south bank, while BassMan and Alan took the north bank. We took the south because it looked like there were more options and a better chance of catching some spawners. Little did we know.....The north bank had a GREAT submerged reef that ran about half the length of the lake. This proved to be an EXCELLENT spot for really decent smallies and some good sized walleye.

Don't get me wrong.....The south bank was pretty good too. It yielded some MONSTER northernns. These northernns were lurking around the blown down treetops. I used a ¼ oz titanium spinner bait to coax these fish into biting. Talk about fun.....Dan and I caught about 20 northernns that were pushing the 5lb mark. A couple were heavier.

I also caught a couple decent smallies using a jig, but nothing to brag about, and certainly nothing even resembling the size or quantity that we had caught the second day. Smally Lake is a tanic lake, meaning the water was not a clear as most other lakes we had fished. The smallies that came from this particular lake had a much darker colorization. They were all a really dark brown in color.

We fished Smally Lake for about 2 hours. The wind started picking up. By this time, the wind was still blowing pretty dang hard.....and was gusting to probably 30mph. Remember, this was an EAST to WEST wind, and Saganagons is an EAST to WEST Lake. I was getting a little worried about the water conditions on Rat Bay.

Dan and I decided that we wanted to paddle up into Bitchu Bay, and then into Bemar Lake. Alan and BassMan were not interested in our exploring, so they decided to fish "The RAT" and another area they named "The Ferret".

The paddle into Bitchu bay was pretty cool. It was a creek with some swift water. The creek was flowing north to south, so we had to dig really hard to get up into Bitchu Bay. On the east shore of the creek, directly across from the portage into Smally Lake, there was an old aluminum canoe chained to a tree. I suspect the canoe is owned by one of the fly in outposts, and is available to anyone that wants to use it. I also suspect that it was used to gain illegal access into Quetico. This is only my assumption, but I'm thinking...who'd know.

Once we were in Bitchu Bay, the wind seemed to calm down a little. Actually the wind was still blowing like a banshee, but we were being sheltered by a large tree line. On the far northwest shore of the lake, on a fairly decent hill, Dan and I found the remnants of a large base camp. Since Bitchu Bay is out of the park, we figured this was a camp that is probably used by locals or the fly in posts on Bemar Lake.

It was approaching lunchtime, so Dan and I decided to park the canoe, and eat lunch at that site. The site had an interesting setup. An A-frame structure was built from downed timber. We both figured a LARGE tarp was placed over this structure, staked on to the ground on the north side, and held up with posts on the south side. You could tell this would make a PERFECT windbreak

and a great place to get out of the weather. The “campsite” had 4 decent tent pads, and a really good canoe landing. The rock ridge on the site could make a GREAT place to lay out equipment to dry, or to simply sit, and soak up the area. The only downside to the site was all the GARBAGE that we found. We found bottles, cans, and other junk that was carelessly left in the fire pit. I regret that we didn’t clean some of that junk up, but it was out of the park, and I really didn’t want to be carrying that junk around for the next 4-5 days.

For lunch, Dan and I had our traditional staple on this trip.....peanut butter and jelly on flour tortilla wraps, a handful of gorp, a payday candy bar, and a couple Slim Jims.

After lunch, Dan and I decided to head up into Bemar Lake. We were really pushing the envelope. We were already out of the park, but we couldn’t help ourselves. We wanted to see if we could actually paddle to where the outpost cabins were located.

The portage from Bitchu Bay into Bemar Lake is also a small stream heading due east out of Bitchu Bay. We paddled this stream for about 30 minutes. Once again, we were paddling into a stiff wind. Once we made in onto Bemar Lake, it was apparent that we were not going to paddle too far. The wind was now blowing close to 30mph, with gusts probably pushing 40mph. Definitely NOT good paddling weather. The whitecaps were not too bad, but we had not made it to the main lake yet.

Dan and I paddled to an island that separates the “creek” area from the main lake. Once we were past the island, we decided to turn around, and head back. This part of the exploration was over. We had spent nearly 2 hours getting here, and we needed to give ourselves at least 3 hours to get back to camp.

We paddled back down to the mouth of Bitchu Bay, where the creek flows back into Rat Bay. Here, we ran into a “local”...at least I think he was a local. He was wearing chest waders, so I’m thinking he may have walked through some swampy areas to get to this area. I don’t know where he came from, or how he got there. He was throwing crank bait in the fast water, searching for anything that would bite. I still wonder where he came from, and how he managed to get to that particular spot. I didn’t see any modes of transportation, and the canoe was still chained to the tree. One can only wonder.

Once we paddled back into Rat Bay, Dan and I ran into a group of boy scouts. These scouts were headed to the north western end of Saganagons, near the Falls Chain. They were waiting out the wind, as it was still blowing nearly 30mph. Dan and I waited for about 30 minutes and then decided to push on.

Once we reached the middle of Rat Bay, the wind really started to blow us around. I’m not too sure it was a good idea to venture out in the “RAT”, but we did. We quartered the wind, allowing the wind to mostly push us to the main body of Saganagons. On Saganagons, the wind really showed her might. The waves were much worse than I had expected, and Dan and I had to really struggle to keep it together. We were still quartering, and I had to rudder constantly to keep us on track. I’m certain that if we had gotten sideways to those monster waves, we would have been swimming to the nearest shore.

We aimed for the nearest plot of land on Boundary Point. Once there, we start paddling up the shore, towards the tip of Boundary Point. Dan and I knew that we were planning fish for dinner, and we had not kept any of the fish that we caught earlier, so we decided that it was time to start catching dinner. We fished for about 2 hours, Within those two hours, we did not catch a SINGLE fish for dinner. I knew a cold front was pushing in, but these fish really shut down. We could not even get the small buck bass, or northerns to bite. We fished until the wind started to lie down, and then headed back to camp. The wind really never did die down that day, but we still managed.

At camp, I started digging out something else for dinner. I really wanted fish, but we had not caught anything. We could see Alan and BassMan returning from "The Rat". Dan was preparing a fire, while I helped Alan and BassMan unload their canoe. That is when I saw the stringer of walleye they had caught in Rat Bay. They had been fishing Rat Bay the whole time. The wind was really blowing HARD, but they had figured out a pattern and were using it. They had been fishing with the wind, throwing tubes. Evidently the walleye were feeding on baitfish, and were hammering the tube. Alan and BassMan had caught numerous walleye, and brought 4 or 6 back with them for dinner. That night, there were plenty of walleye fillets to go around.

I also decided to make another dessert. We had a great Jell-O no bake peanut butter and chocolate dessert.

Once again, we sat around the fire, and talked about past trips, fishing, future trips, and other stuff. After an hour or so, we all hit the hay. We decided that we had fished this part of the lake pretty thoroughly, and we would head to the northwestern end tomorrow. We wanted to fish around the area where Saganagons and the Falls Chain converge. We also wanted to fish as many of the islands and humps around the northwestern end as possible.

Day 5: Wednesday, June 9th, 2004

Northwestern Saganagons Area

We had all decided to have a quick breakfast, break camp, and move to the northwestern Saganagons area as quickly as possible. After I woke up, I packed my sleeping gear, my dirty clothes, and most of my gear. Afterwards, I started boiling water for oatmeal and cocoa. Once again, I noticed a definite chill in the air that had been missing the previous few days. A cold front had started pushing in the day before. What we were left with was high clouds, bluebird skies, and a bone chilling east wind. The wind was GREAT for paddling to the northwestern end of the lake, but terrible for fishing.

We fished from Boundary Point to the northwestern end of Saganagons, catching a few fish, but nothing spectacular.

At the end of the "chute" we ran into the boy scouts from the day before. They were a LARGE group, and were obviously not up to date on the park rules. I counted at least 12 members. They were outfitted from a Gunflint outfitter, and were DEFINITELY breaking some rules. I only wonder if the outfitter knew they would be breaking the camping rules BEFORE they actually set out on their trip. They were a nice enough group though.

I talked to them a little, and found out they were pounding the walleye with leaches...I didn't even ask about where they purchased the leaches. But I'm expecting they were non-Canadian leaches. Being the HARD ASS that I am, I discussed the rules with them, and told them the infractions could keep them from EVER coming back to the park. They didn't seem to be too concerned.

We paddled past them, and continued fishing. The blue skies that had settled in earlier were now turning into angry skies. Dan and I put on our raingear, as Mother Nature pounded us with a cold, steady rainstorm. There were no thunderclaps with this storm, only rain. We continued paddling for what seemed like forever. We finally started looking for a campsite.

If you know this area of Saganagons, you know there is a direct, and an indirect route to the Falls Chain. If you try really hard, you can find some pretty decent campsites in the area. We managed to find such a site. I could tell the site had been used recently, but it was DEFINITELY not one of those worn down campsites you normally expect to find on heavily traveled routes.

The site had better than average tent pads. A bonus was the GREAT fire ring, with some large logs placed in a semi-circle around its perimeter.

Dan and I quickly setup camp, got our fishing gear together, and headed out. We found a lake on the far western end of the Saganagons that had looked promising. This lake had a small creek flowing into it. We figured we might be able to float into the lake, and that there just might be some smallies there. We floated the small creek, but there was no portage, and no one in our group was willing to create a "bushwhack" to the next lake. Since no one was willing to bushwhack, we settled on fishing the humps around this part of the lake. Dan and I took the north shore, which looked like prime spawning habitat, while Alan and BassMan took the south shore. The wind was still blowing pretty well, but had died down quite a bit.

Dan hadn't quite mastered the techniques necessary for fishing really windy days in the boundary waters. We had some day where we simply didn't fish. This was OK by me, but I hated hearing the other guys talk about the MONSTERS they were catching. These fish were being caught on the windiest days of the trip.

Since Dan was having trouble fishing, he offered to paddle, and let me fish. I took advantage of his offer, and quickly found the fish, catching some decent 2-3 lb smallies. These were prespawn fish. I think they were probably just coming up. I also think the previous days of cold fronts had shut these fish down, and caused them to move off the nest. The fishing was nothing like the first day at the eastern end of Saganagons, but it was nice to hammer some smallies. We fished for a couple hours and then decided that we would head back in and get some dinner.

For dinner, I made some quick red beans and rice. This was once again, one of the Zatarains meals. I added stable ham, and summer sausage to add some meat and texture. We also had a couple of the tortilla wraps that we brought along for lunches. I'm beginning to become a REAL fan of the Zatarains stuff. Not only do I eat the mixes in the Boundary Waters, but I also like to take them on fishing trips back home, and even sometimes, fix them for a quick and easy dinner for the wife and kids.

The other guys arrived back at camp around dark. They were really running low on food, so I looked into my food barrel, and gave them my "spare" meals. I usually pack 1 extra meal, and a couple extra sides. Good thing because, they were nearly dry.

After they made their dinner, we sat around the campfire, sipping cocoa, coffee, and spiced cider.

Dan and I had both decided to take a "non fishing" day tomorrow. We were planning on heading up the Falls Chain on a day trip. Dan had never been in this area, and I had only been to Wet, so this would be a good adventure for both of us. Since the day was going to be a LONG, HARD, daytrip, Dan and I knocked off pretty early.

Day 6: Thursday, June 10th, 2004

Falls Chain

Dan and I woke pretty early, and had a quick oatmeal breakfast. We also had one of our packs of shelf stable bacon. We knew we would be traveling a LONG distance, and wanted to give ourselves pretty much ALL day to make the trip.

With the long day in mind, I actually left all my fishing gear back at camp. On this daytrip, I took my daypack, filled with our MRE lunches, a couple bags of gorp, and my emergency kit. My emergency kit has my water pump, waterproof fire starting stuff, 2 emergency rescue blankets, whistle, first aid kit, and some other stuff, essential if we would have to spend the night at a cold camp.

The wind was once again, beginning to pick up.

Dan and I paddled and portaged to Kenny Lake without having any real issues. The paddling was pretty good, and the portages were not as bad as I had expected.

On the portage into Kenny Lake, we met a portage crew. The crew was made up of a young lady, and an older man. I wondered if they were father/daughter, but we never did find out. I did talk to the young woman for a couple minutes, and offered her some water. I found out that she was from St. Paul and was working on a forestry internship. I thought that was pretty cool.

Dan and I also ran into a group from Wisconsin. I normally don't want to hear, or CARE about any news from the outside world, but one of the guys asked if I wanted to hear any headlines. I did, and he told me about the death of one of my favorite people.....Ronald Reagan. I felt sad for a little while, but then realized that he had a pretty decent life, other than being shot by a DERANGED madman. I would later find out that my wife, knowing that I was a HUGE fan of President Reagan, had taped most of the TV coverage surrounding his death.

None of the portages on the Falls Chain were really that bad. I only remember the last one, and that is because the guys from Wisconsin had told us about the high and low water portages that existed. Dan and I took note. Once we arrived at the portage, we looked at the high water area, and decided the current was way too swift for these two rookies. We lugged our canoe and the other gear up to the low water, "wimp" portage. This portage was much more to our speed.

Once on Kenny Lake, Dan and I had a decision to make. It was about 1:00pm, and had taken us about 4 hours to get this far...did we want to try to make it into Kawnipi. After all, that would be one HELL of a day trip. We tied up on an island on the western shore on Kenny, had lunch, and thought about it before making a decision. The island we tied up to had been recently burned. I wonder if a fire got out of control, or if this was leftover from the 1995 burn, or if it was actually part of a prescribed burn. I don't know.

After eating lunch, we both decided that we should head back. We stowed the garbage from our MRE's, put on our life vests, and headed back the way we came.

Looking into the rapids at Canyon Falls, we could tell the current was running pretty strong. We thought about trying to get to the high water portage to shave off some of the portage, but decided that was a bad idea. Once we started heading that way, we must have lost our bearing a little, because before we knew it, we were right in the middle of that STRONG current, headed to the high water portage. We started to get into trouble when the canoe basically stopped mid stream, and started turning into the current. I don't know how I managed to muster the strength, but I dug as HARD as I could and turned the nose back into the current. From here, we started heading towards the far right-hand shore. We were paddling with all our might, against the current, and were only inching along. Finally, we came to a spot with a low hanging tree. Dan leaned one way, and I leaned the same way...DAMN what a BAD mistake. If we would have been loaded, we would have been in the water. The only way I could correct was to GRAB the tree, which I did. This righted the canoe, but in the process Dan dropped his paddle. My heart was POUNDING out of my chest. Once again, I don't know how, but I managed to hold onto the tree, and grabbed the paddle with my free hand. I don't even want to think about what it would have taken to get that paddle if it had gotten past me.

Dan and I stayed at that tree for about 3 or 4 minutes, but it felt like an eternity. Finally, we continued to paddle the next 40 or 50 feet to the high water portage. At the portage, we gathered our gear, thought about how lucky we really were, and headed back to Saganagons.

The portages back into Saganagons were all pretty good except for the last one. The portage was really not too bad, but the current running into the Falls Chain was good and strong. Dan

and I took a look and decided the best course of action was the right side. The paddling up that side was extremely tough. I'm not too sure we would have been successful had we been loaded. I guess this is where most other parties would get out and "line" their canoes. I had never done that, so we continued paddling. We inched along for about 5 minutes. Finally, we reached some slack water, where we were able to rest for a couple minutes, before tackling the final "push". The final push was really hard. We could see the current running over some of the rocks, and it was really clipping. This time, we decided to tackle the current on the left side of the chute. This seemed to work much better. After about 10 more minutes, we finally managed to clear the entrance to the Falls Chain. We were both BEAT. Talk about a ton of work. Like I said earlier, I'm not too sure we would have been able to make this, had we been loaded.

Dan and I took our time getting back to camp. Once at camp, we both decided it was time for another dip in the water. The sun was shining, the temps were in the upper 60's, and we were extremely hot from the trip into the Falls Chain. A quick dip in the water was definitely needed.

The island campsite we were at had a really good area to take a dip. Not too sandy, but there was a perfect ledge rock that you could sit on, get acclimated to the water, and the simply slide off into deeper water. Perfect.

After our dip in the water, it was time for dinner. It was getting late, and we were really, really hungry. As Dan and I started getting dinner stuff together, we both noticed Alan, and BassMan were returning from their day of fishing. The day turned out to be a perfect day for fishing, but they had not really done as good as I thought they would. The area was really good, but it seems the fish had already spawned, and were early into a post spawn pattern. The fish had lockjaw. They did manage to catch some buck bass, but hardly any spawners, or any other females. This was there assessment. I still think they fish were still coming up, and they had caught only a few of the early spawners.

For Dinner, Dan and I had prepared chicken enchiladas. These were based on a recipe that QPassage had shared with me. This was probably the single best meal of the trip. We used Chicken Helper enchilada mix, some shelf stable Bumble Bee chicken, and Mannies tortilla wraps. The enchilada mix even included a small packet of dried white cheese. We reconstituted the cheese, and added it to the top. To top things off, I had brought a small bottle of Red Hot sauce. This definitely made the meal. Before Dan and I had finished, the other guys wanted some of the grub. Being the nice guy that I am, and knowing that they were STARVING, I offered to share, and they readily accepted.

After dinner, we made our final dessert. This was a no-bake Oreo Cheesecake. Once again, it was FANTASTIC. We were eating like kings. Dan and I were stuffed, but since the other guys were half starved, they could use all the calories they could get. Actually, I think they were doing pretty good, but they knew early on in the trip that they had not planned their meals adequately. BassMan is an eating machine. He could eat the rations of 4 people, and not put on a pound. Actually he would probably lose weight.

After dinner, we sat around the fire, and talked about Friday, our final full day in the park.

I had told the next group coming in that we would meet them at Silver Falls, and I would let them have some of our left over food, our empty vittles vault, extra fishing gear, and whatever extra fuel we had. All this gear was non essential to their trip, so it didn't matter if we met them or not. It was set.... Alan and BassMan would stay at this site, and try to hookup with us on Friday, but if we managed to miss each other, we would all meet up at Hook Island or American Point around 8:00am Saturday for our tow back to the outfitter.

Dan and I, with our plans for the next day, cleaned up our area of the camp, and headed to bed. This day was a really tough day, and we were both pretty tired.

Day 7: Friday, June 11th, 2004

Meeting at Silver Falls

Dan and I had made plans to meet SmallieSaver and his group at noon on the island on the Saganagons side of Silver Falls. This was a perfect place for us to meet up with them and share some of our gear.

We woke up early as usual, made a pancake breakfast, packed our gear, and headed out. The wind was still blowing, like it had been all week. The wind was blowing out of the northeast, and was noticeably stronger than it had been the past couple of days.. We made it to the 80 rod portage without any real problems. This portage cuts off about ½ day paddling around Boundary Point, so we obviously decided to take it. The portage was a little rocky, and the recent rains had made it a little wet, but it was not too bad.

At the other end of the portage, the wind was definitely apparent. White caps were forming on the lake, and we knew it would be a tough paddle to Silver Falls. Fortunately, the wind was at our back, but it still required us to quarter the waves. Once we reached the southern shore of the lake, Dan and I decided we'd try to fish a little. That was a mistake. The wind was still too bad. One of us could fish, but the other had to really work to keep the canoe off the rocks. We both decided to put the fishing gear down, and headed to the island meeting place.

The current from Silver Falls, through the chute between Hunter Island and the southern most shoreline was pretty strong. Dan and I had to work pretty hard paddling up stream into that current.

Once we made it through the chute, Dan and I rested on the point of land just north of Silver Falls. This was a good area to take a break, before actually tackling the current created by the falls.

Once again, we hugged the far left bank, and managed to get through the current of Silver Falls without any real problems. We made it to the island, and decided to make some lunch. It was around 11:30am, and we figured the other guys would be showing up any minute. 30 minutes went by...then 60...then 90.....the 2 hours. At 2 ½ hours, we decided they had some problems. By this time, the wind was REALLY howling. Again, it was probably blowing around 30 mph. Dan and I could hear trees falling in the woods around Silver Falls. We decided to head across the portage, and start making our way to a campsite, any campsite. It was now approaching 5:00pm.

On the other side of the Silver Falls portage, the Cache Bay side, we immediately found out what the problem was.... They were most likely wind bound. There were 3-4 groups waiting for the wind to die down. Some were on their way out, but most were simply waiting out the wind. Dan and I stayed there for about 30 minutes and then decided to head out. If the wind was too bad, we could always take one of the campsites on the chute to Silver Falls. I knew of at least 2 decent sites, so I was not too concerned.

Once Dan and I started, we realized the wind and the waves were much tougher than we had expected. It took us nearly 1 hour to paddle what should have taken no more than 20-30 minutes. We decided that it would be in our best interest to take one of the campsites on the ridge on the right side of the chute. For those who have been in this area, you know there are only 3 campsites along this chute, and they are all on the right side. This is when we noticed tow boats coming up into the chute to take groups back to the outfitters. Most were from Tuscarora, or Seagull, but there were others. These boats were coming up to the Silver Falls portage to pick up groups. Evidently, the wind on the main lake was really, really, bad.

Dan and I parked the canoe, and climbed to the top of the ridge to take a look at Saganaga. The lake was getting pounded with MONSTER whitecaps. These were HUGE. One of the tow drivers said the waves on the main lake were 6-7 feet tall. I'm not too sure I believed him, but who was I to argue. On top of the ridge, Dan and I met 2 groups who were waiting for tows. I think most of the guys were from Wisconsin. They had talked about how poor the fishing was. I shared the "Magic Bait" with them, swearing them to secrecy. About 30 minutes later, two tow boats from Tuscarora showed up, and towed them back to civilization.

Dan and I decided to try to wait out the wind as long as possible, and if we still had some daylight left once it died down, we would head out in Cache Bay to find a campsite. Since we were going to be waiting for at least an hour, we decided to have dinner. This day had been a cold, wet, nasty day, so it was only fitting that we would have a GOOD meal. I made some Zatarains Red Beans and Rice, with summer sausage, and stable ham. This was VERY good, and really hit the spot.

After what seemed like hours...it actually was only about 45 minutes...Dan and I decided to tackle Cache Bay. This was a HUGE mistake. We had thought the waves and wind had calmed down enough to make a dash for a campsite, but we were DEAD wrong. Once we turned the corner and were on Cache Bay, we immediately knew that we were in trouble. The waves were HUGE. We were taking some water in the front, but what was even scarier was the fact that we really could not turn in ANY direction without facing a strong possibility that we'd be swimming. We hugged the bank and paddled in huge swells for about 1 hour.

Every campsite we came across was taken. We finally decided that we would have to make our own campsite. By this time, it was getting pretty late. It was nearing 9:00pm, and we had still not found an adequate place to camp. We were hugging the far northeast shore of Cache Bay when we found a little clearing on an island. I got out of the canoe and went to take a look. Initially what looked to a manageable site quickly became an unusable site. I would have used the site if absolutely necessary, but it would have definitely torn up my tent. Dejected, we started looking for another site. From the island, I spotted another clearing, directly across from us, on the north shore of Cache Bay. This site could not be seen from the water, but looked good from the island.

Dan and I headed to the opposite shoreline. Once we arrived there, I inspected the site. We decided that it would do, and pitched the tent on a soft bed of moss. Since we had already had dinner, we really just pitched the tent, got some basic gear together, and went to bed.

Since the wind was so strong, and had been blowing for the last couple days, we both decided to get up and head to American Point at sun up.

Day 8: Saturday, June 12th, 2004

Last Day

When Dan and I woke up Saturday morning, the wind was calm, and the lake looked like glass. We lounged around a little, and then broke down our makeshift camp. Paddling across Cache Bay proved to be uneventful. When we made it to American Point, we took an earlier tow into the outfitter.

Quick showers, and we were on our way back home.

All in all, the entire trip was a success. I didn't fish as much as I would have liked to, and I tried to troll for walleye and lakers way too much. I think 1/3 of our fishing time was spent trying to catch

walleye and lakers using methods that I really had no confidence in using. On past trips I had caught some lakers and walleyes, but this trip would be a bust. It was a good trip, but it would go down in my book as the windiest trip I have ever taken. The wind definitely caused some issues.

Trip Prologue:

From this trip, I learned quite a few things.....mostly, I learned that it is not a crime to take a day off and simply smell the roses, or take an extended day trip, or whatever. On past trips, I was so worn out from the fishing, that it was nearly impossible to handle the drive back home. This year, it was quite different. Dan and I took at least 2 afternoons off from fishing, and kicked back enough to actually say the trip was relaxing. We also took the extended daytrip up the Falls Chain. I will definitely schedule trips in the future where I try to get 1 or 2 days of rest while up there. After all...it is VACATION.

Some highlights from this year:

- Had a Killer day on Saganagons. 7 smallies over 4lbs. That is unbelievable.
- Tried different techniques for the smallies. I may have actually replaced the Magic Bait
- Great friends in a really cool place. Good conversation.
- Fantastic food this year. Yes, it was a little heavier, but it was well worth it.
- First year being actually wind bound...we were wind bound more than a couple times on this trip.
- First year with a TOTALLY Non Fishing day. That was pretty cool. Had a great time on the Falls Chain.
- Nearly tipped the canoe on the Falls Chain.
- Made a poor decision to tackle Cache Bay. Not only was it dangerous, but unnecessary.

Man, I cannot wait until next year.....