

Quetico Fall Trip 2006

Falls Chain to Kawnipi Lake

Day 1: Thursday August 31st, 2006 The Drive Up

The Crew:

GeoFisher, Mark, Chms, Dave, Dan, and Chris.

I've spent many years in the Boundary Waters and Quetico, had have had a great time doing it. Every year, the trip is usually better than the last. This past fall, I took a trip with Mark, Chms, Dave, Dan and Chris to Kawnipi Lake via the Falls Chain. This trip almost didn't happen, but I'm glad it did, and I'm glad I went with the guys mentioned above. It was by far.....one of the BEST trips I've taken in Quetico or the Boundary Waters.

SmallieSaver was supposed to be my trip partner, but he had to back out 1 week before the trip, so I asked Mark if he could fill in, and guess what.....as usual, he was game. So it was set. Mark, who had fantastic fishing that previous spring in an area not to be mentioned, would be my partner. We'd gone on a couple trips in the past together, so I had no issues with him being my trip partner.

The drive up was pretty uneventful, and as usual was stopped at the Trail Center for dinner, before heading to Superior North and the bunkhouses.

Day 2: Friday, September 1st, 2006 Cache Bay to Wet Lake

Weather was perfect for traveling. There was NO wind, and we managed to get the first tow to Hook Island. Things were definitely looking good for this trip.

I had been through Cache Bay, over Silver Falls, and into the Falls Chain on a couple of other trips, so I knew what to expect. The only thing that bothered me was our canoe. Instead of renting a lighter Kevlar canoe, Mark and I chose to use my Old Towne Penobscot canoe. The canoe worked flawlessly, and thankfully, Mark is a portage hound, and took the canoe on most of the portages.

As a group, we decided to carry food separately, so I had all the food for Mark and me, and 1/3 of the community food. This made for a pretty heavy food pack, which would fall on my shoulders.

On this trip, we decided to take it easy going in, and had planned on camping on Wet Lake. This would split the trip to Kawnipi Lake into a two day affair. Our plans included MONSTER steaks, baked potatoes, and baked onions, as we have done on most of our past trips. I have never taken MONSTER steaks this far into the park, and am not sure I will do it again, but they were fantastic that first night.

We chose the campsite just before the wet lake portage. I would have much rather taken the campsite right next to the falls, but we figured finding wood for a fire would be tough. We had also heard from the ranger that they have had bear issues in the past. We decided the Wet Lake portage campsite was the better choice. The campsite was probably a 1 star campsite, if that. This site was ugly, with no real good tent pads, and was pretty much rocky everywhere.

We quickly setup camp, started a "white man's fire" and started prepping the steaks, potatoes and onions.

After dinner, a couple of the guys went fishing, but I chose to hit the hay a little early, as I was dog tired, and knew tomorrow would be a tough day also.

Day 3: Saturday, September 2nd, 2006 Wet Lake to Kawnipi

Again, weather was picture perfect. Low humidity, no wind, and temps in the upper 60's and low 70's. And most of all.....NO BUGS. This was another perfect day for traveling in Quetico. By this time, Mark, Dave, and Chms all had their fishing gear out and ready to go. My gear was still packed, as I did not plan on fishing until I arrived on Kawnipi. This was to be the theme for my trip the entire week. I was taking it easy. I was not counting the fish I caught. I was not weighing the fish I caught.....unless I thought it was over 3lbs. I was not in any competition with anyone. Numbers did not matter to me. This was going to be a different type of trip for me. For once, I wanted to leave the park feeling better than I arrived.

The portages up the Fall Chain are not too bad. A couple long portages, and the portage around Canyon Falls is kind of ugly, but for the most part all were quite manageable.

Mark and Dave fished all around the water falls on the Falls Chain going in. They managed to catch some fish, but most were small smallmouth bass.

We reached Kawnipi Lake by Noon, and started fishing towards our campsite. This is where I got out my fishing gear and started fishing. This was a first for me.....normally my stuff is out, rigged, and ready to go. Again, I was taking it easy, so there was no hurry.

By the time I had geared up my equipment Mark had already caught a couple nice smallies and a few walleye. Fishing was starting out good, and the fact that we were catching walleye would mean this was going to be a good eating trip, if nothing else.

After a few hours of fishing.....we decided we'd better get to the area we planned on base camping for the remainder of the week. The first campsite, a 5 star site, was taken. We went to our second choice, which was another 5 star campsite on an island. Someone on www.canoeconomy.com had told us about this site, and it was in fact a 5 star campsite.

The island campsite we had chose, had 3 different levels, with 3 different fire rings, and many tent pads. The tent pads we used, were on top of a hill on the island, and laid out pretty good. All the pads were covered with pine needles, which made sleeping much more comfortable, but that was NOT an issue for me. On this trip, I was trying out my new Big Agnes Air Core mattress, and it is by FAR the best pad I have ever used. The mattress is super light, super comfortable, and SUPER easy to setup. Time will tell if I continue to use it though, as it seems to be more fragile than my thermarest.

The campsite also was laid out pretty good around the main fire ring. There were lots of sitting logs, and a great windbreak for the fire. The fire pit was built up like an oven, with sides that were perfect for laying a wire grate over. This would be great for grilling fish later in the week. Also, within the "kitchen area" there were "shelves" built out of the rock for storing stoves, utensils, etc, etc, and the final touch were granite tables for prep and cooking. This was INDEAD a 5 star campsite, and would be our home for the next 5 days.

For dinner, we had BWCA pizzas, which QPASSAGE had told me how to make. Man, were they good. To make them, simply brown a flour tortilla, add some pizza sauce, throw on some mozzarella string cheese, pepperoni, and Italian seasoning, and fold in half. Once the cheese melts, they are done. We ended up making 15 or so of these, using up 3 bags of pizza sauce,

and 60 pieces of pepperoni. I'm fairly sure they were a hit with the guys, and will be making trips in the future.

After dinner, we sat around a nice bug-less fire. The fall is definitely the best time of year to have this type of trip. In fact, I'm thinking it may be the best time of year to have ANY trip. You can run into some cooler weather, but on all the fall trips I've been on, I have not run into any bug issues. If you don't like the bugs, then the fall is the time for you.

Day 4: Sunday, September 3rd, 2006 In search of Lakers

The day started with a quick breakfast. Most everyone had oatmeal, as that is a staple for us. Mark and I had Raisin Bran Crunch cereal, with whole instant milk. The whole instant milk is pretty good, and worked well with cereal. I don't think I would take it on trips in the summer, but for fall or early spring trips, were you can get some cold water, this is a great addition, and adds some variety to the breakfast plans.

I had talked to Dan, Chris, and Mark about trying to catch some Lake Trout on this trip. Everyone agreed, and we figured this would be the day to do it. I had heard of a fantastic Lake Trout lake 1 portage off of Kawnipi, so that is where we figured we'd find them. I had also heard the cut around Rose Island was good for catching Lake Trout, but that would have to wait for another time.

I was certain the Lake Trout lake I had heard about was Anubis Lake.....so after breakfast, we headed to Anubis in search of the mighty tasty Lake Trout.

The portage into Anubis Lake was an easy, but rocky 80 rod, flat portage. On the Anubis side of the lake, Mark, mentioned that the lake didn't look like any Lake Trout lake he had ever seen. This would be the case. We looked for a deep hole in this lake for a couple hours. We did manage to catch lots of smallies, a couple walleye, and some northern pike, but obviously, this was not a Lake Trout lake.

CRAP.....what a busted trip. I was totally bummed out. Not only that, I'd lead these guys on a wild goose chase, with nothing to show.

Tempers flared, cooler heads prevailed, and we headed back to camp. Since this was going to be a fish eating night, we now had to catch a couple fish for dinner, and this would prove to be no easy task.....You can NEVER catch them when you need to. We did manage to catch a couple smallies to clean, and Dan and Chris also caught a couple, so as long as Dave and Chms brought back some fish for themselves, we'd be set.

Dave and Chms did, in fact manage to catch some fish. They brought back 4 really nice, eater sized walleye. Chms and Mark cleaned all the fish, while Chris and Dan started working on a nice fire for the night. We were about to have a feast of stove top stuffing, mashed potatoes with country ham, and smallmouth bass and walleye. AND we did have a TON of fish.

I always worry about catching too much fish, and wasting it, which I thought was going to happen this night. Instead, Mark and I decided to fry it ALL up, and eat some of it the next day for lunch. The night time lows were getting down to upper 30's to lower 40's so we didn't fear it keeping through the night. We used the KFC frying mix to finish up the fish, and I will tell you now, that was one of the BEST lunches I've had in the boundary waters. Instead of peanut butter and jelly for lunch, we had fish nuggets, which were fantastic.

Day 5: Monday, September 4th, 2006 Kawa Bay

On day 5, we decided to spend the ENTIRE day going to Kawa Bay.

The morning started off with a nice blueberry pancake and bacon breakfast. It was nice eating some decent food. Over the past 3 or 4 trips, I've started taking MUCH better food into the park. After all.....this is vacation. The food DEFINITELY added some significant weight to our packs, but all in all, I think having good food was worth the extra weight.

As stated earlier.....my whole plan for this trip was to kick back, search out the pictographs, fish for some Lake Trout, and take it easy. While we paddled all day, and pretty much spent only a little time, fishing, it was a great idea. I was looking for some sign of where the old Indian village would have been, and could only imagine what it would have been like 100 or 200 years ago.

We did manage fishing some on this daytrip, and I used my fish finder quite a few times to find humps, and cuts in the bays. Every time Mark and I found one of these spots, we fished it, looking for a MONSTER smallie or walleye.

Kawnipi Lake is huge, and there are tons of spots to catch fish. Smallies, Walleye and Northern are abundant in the lake. I also hear you can catch Lake Trout up around the Rose Island area, but I'm not too sure about that. Mark and I hit some of the areas he had fished the previous spring. We had limited success on jerk baits, and better success on jigs and tubes. While Mark and I fished tube jigs and bitsy bug jigs all week, Chris and Dan stayed with jerk baits, and Chms and Dave fished a combination of both.

Mark and I fished the rest of the day, finding some decent areas, and catching 20 or 30 smallmouth bass in the 1 to 2 lb range. We also caught a few walleye, and some northern pike, but not many.

Everyone arrived back in camp around 6:00 or 7:00pm, and we started dinner. Dinner would be cheesy chicken enchiladas, with a healthy dousing of nacho cheese, and chipotle Tabasco sauce. After dinner, we hung around the fire, talked about the fishing, and planned for the next day.

Day 6: Tuesday, September 5th, 2006 Easy Day on Kawnipi

The weather was still FANTASTIC. We had only a couple sprinkles so far for the week. Mark and I had been busting it pretty hard the last couple days, so it was decided that we would stay close to the campsite and use the fish finder to fish humps, islands, etc, etc. Mark was pretty good about this all week, and I really appreciated it. He is an AVID fisherman, and would fish 18 hours a day if anyone would go with him. I really needed a day to wind down, so we pretty much took it easy.

We started the day with a quick breakfast of oatmeal and coffee.

After breakfast, we looked at the maps, and picked a couple places around the islands to fish. We were really planning on using the fish finder. I wanted to try to mark humps, and ridgelines, and try to find submerged reefs.

Everywhere we found some submerged stuff, we caught fish. In a couple places, we started figuring out some patterns, and determined the fish were suspending around 12 ft, in depths of 15 – 18 ft. After figuring this out, we targeted those types of areas, and managed to catch some pretty decent fish.

Along a grass line with access to deep water, we found a submerged reef, and managed to catch some of the larger smallies for the week.

After doing this for 4-5 hours, we headed back to camp for lunch. Lunch today was to be chicken quesadillas. As I was prepping lunch, Dan and Chris arrived, and I asked them if they wanted to join us. Chris had some extra Tyson chicken, which we added to the pot.

If you've never done the quesadillas in the boundary waters, you really need to try them. They are fantastic. To make them, you use 2 packages of foil chicken and 1 pack of chicken fajihita mix, some nacho cheese, and some flour tortilla shells. Cook the chicken and fajihita mix, until it is warm, then simply brown a tortilla, and add the mix to 1 side of the tortilla, add nacho cheese, and fold over. Top it all off with some Tabasco sauce.

After lunch, I took a nap.

When I woke up, it was time for dinner. Imagine that.

For dinner, we had red beans and rice, with country ham, and summer sausage. In the past, we used the shelf stable ham, which you can find with the foil pouch chicken, but for some reason, they stopped making it. We figured country ham would be just as good. After trying it, we realized it was not. We ended up packing out about 8 lbs of country ham, which is STILL, 9 months later.....in my cupboard.

After dinner, we sat around the fire, talking about the day, making plans for the next day, smoking cigars, and MOSTLY, enjoying the lack of mosquitoes.

Mark and I broke out the maps. After looking closely it was decided, that we needed to search for Lake Trout again. Dan, Chris, Mark, and I would try to catch some Lake Trout and Dave and Chms were headed to McKenzie Lake on a daytrip. On the maps I brought, we found a small lake called Keewatin Lake. This lake is up near Rose Island, and had to be the lake Yellowbird, and others on www.canoecountry.com had told me about. Plans were made, and I went to bed. I was TIRED.

Day 7: Wednesday, September 6th, 2006 In search of Lakers - Remix

Since we were planning a long day, we had a quick breakfast of oatmeal, and headed out. Again, weather was perfect. Light winds would help push us to Rose Island. This is always a good thing.

Keewatin was going to be at least a 2 hour paddle from our campsite, so we decided to get an early start. The plan was to bust it to Keewatin, fish for some Lake Trout, and then bust it back.

Well, it really didn't work out that way. Mark and I fished lots of main lake points, and trolled a little around Rose Island. We managed to catch some smallies, and a couple walleye trolling crank baits, but no Lake Trout. I had heard you could catch Lake Trout between Rose Island, and the West shore of Kawnipi, but we had no success.

Fishing our way up to Rose Island, and trolling the backside took about 4 hours. We ran into Dan and Chris on the back side of Rose island, and decided to eat lunch. They told us about the bear the saw on the shore. The bear was foraging in a log maybe looking for honey, which was pretty cool. After lunch, we decided to hit the portage, and get into Keewatin, in search of some Lake Trout.

The portage into Keewatin is not too bad, but rocky. I would say it was an average 80 rod portage for the park.

Keewatin definitely looks like a Lake Trout lake. I gave Chris and Dan some lures I figured would work for Lake Trout, and Mark used a Hair Jig bounced off the bottom. This is where my fish finder really paid off. While I think we would have still caught fish without it, we DEFINITELY found very specific areas that held concentrations of lake trout. Mark hooked up first, but I fumbled the landing, and let a nice 4-5 lb trout get away. Then I hooked up while trolling a crank bait. Since I had the fish finder, and had located a really nice submerged reef, I pointed out the area to Dan and Chris, and they trolled the area, looking for trout.

After 20 or 30 minutes, or so, Dan hooked up with a MONSTER trout, probably 10 pounds or bigger. When the trout saw the canoe, it made a run, and that was that. Everyone hooked up with trout, and after 1 or 2 hours of trout fishing, we had 3 eater sized trout. Not a ton of fish, but enough to have a nice trout dinner. On the way back to the portage, I trolled past the reef 1 last time, and hooked up with a NICE 5 or 6lb trout. Now, we DEFINITELY had enough fish for all 6 of us.

Officially, I think I was breaking some laws. Dan and Chris had given their fish to me because we were going to clean and dress them before heading back. While they had caught fish, and we had caught fish, I was carrying ALL the fish. If a ranger had checked us, I'm not too sure I would have been able to talk myself out of a ticket. This is definitely something to think about in the future. I'd hate to get a game violation and risk getting permits in the future over a simple misunderstanding like this.

While I started getting our stuff ready, Mark cleaned and gutted the lake trout. It was this time that I realized the wind had shifted, and was now blowing from the north east. We would be fighting a headwind back to camp. Not only had the wind changed, but the temperature started to drop. It had dropped nearly 10 degrees in an hour, and was still dropping. A quick glance at the clouds made me realize we were in for a FUN paddle back. Mark and I paddled nonstop, at about a 4 mph pace to get back to camp. It was a tough paddle back to camp, but well worth the trip.

Back at camp, Dan and Chris had started a nice fire, which would be used to bake the lake trout. Everyone started working together to get dinner ready, as we only had 30 or 40 minutes before the rains would start. Chms and I prepared the trout, seasoning some with blackening, and others with lemon pepper, and then squirting olive oil butter inside and out, and then finally wrapping in tin foil.

For side dishes, we added stove top stuffing, and mashed potatoes. By this time, all the potatoes were made without the ham, as the ham was being blamed for some intestinal issues with ALL members of the trip.....OOPS.

Dinner around the campfire was GREAT. The rains held out, which was good, because everyone wanted to sit around the campfire and talk, which we did. Cigars were smoked, platys were skinned, and lies were told. Everyone was in agreement though. This was one of the BEST trips ever. Too bad, it was coming to an end. This was our last night on Kawnipi. He had planned on spending 2 days getting out of Kawnipi just like we had coming in.

This was the only night that it really rained all week. While it was not a huge storm, it did rain throughout the night.

Day 8: Thursday, September 7th, 2006 Leaving Kawnipi

For the third morning on this trip.....we ate like kings, and had blueberry pancakes and bacon for breakfast. Like I said earlier, we had GOOD food, on this trip. Sure, it weighed a TON,

and SURE, we were packing some out, namely 5 or 6 pounds of country ham. Bottom line though, I don't think anyone complained about the food. It was good, and worth the extra weight. And now, it was all gone.

Chms and Dave had decided to fish back to Saganagons. Dan, Chris, Mark, and I would also fish back, but not a lot. We fished the falls, and some of the running water on the way back, but for the most part, we wanted to get to Saganagons to setup our 1 day campsite.

This was definitely the coolest day we'd had on the trip so far. But we were in for MUCH cooler weather for the next couple days. In the morning, the highs were in the mid to upper 40's and I don't think the temp for the day got much above 70. The weather was definitely shifting, the fishing was shutting down, and I was satisfied with what we had accomplished. Even though there was not as much fishing, and I had caught many, MANY more fish on other trips, this was a fantastic trip.

We arrived at the Saganagons campsite around 5:00pm. Dan and I stayed in camp, while Chris and Mark went out fishing. They caught some fish, but not many. The tide was changing, and changing for the worse. The temps had fallen off some more, and now it was probably mid 50's to low 60's if THAT. Dan, Mark, Alan, and I had used this campsite a couple years prior, and we felt it was the best one of the island campsites on the Falls Chain side of Saganagons.

Dave and John found their way to our campsite by around 6:00 or 7:00pm, and I started dinner. For dinner, we had Cheesy Jambalaya, with summer sausage.

As the weather changed, we were all thankful there was no fire ban. Again, after dinner, we all sat around the fire, talking about the trip, lying about those MONSTER smallies we caught, and listening to Mark talk about that magical place.....#####.

Day 9: Friday, September 8th, 2006 Leaving Saganagons

Now, it was getting COLD. When we got up Friday morning, the weather had definitely shifted into fall, and not the summer-like pattern we had experienced all week. We were headed to our First Bay campsite for today. This would again, be a very leisurely day for us. The fishing was done, our trip was done, and I was done.....

After a quick breakfast of oatmeal, we broke camp, and headed to Saganaga. We only had 2 portages left for the trip. Unfortunately, they were 2 of the longest of the trip. The Dead Man's portage from upper Saganagons to Lower Saganagons, is an easy 80 rod portage, and cuts off 5 or 6 hours of paddling. The last portage is Silver Falls. While Silver Falls is not really a HARD portage, it is long, and has some fairly complex rock structures that can be tough, especially when wet. Fortunately, it was not raining.

Crossing the portages was uneventful, and the paddle out the chute to Cache Bay was also calm. And for once.....the wind was not blowing, Cache Bay was not rocking with 3 ft rollers, there were no whitecaps.....tow boats were not running up to Silver Falls to pick up clients. For the first time in MANY years, our paddle out of Cache Bay would be an easy paddle.

We like to use the First Bay campsite on Saganaga as an ending point because it is only an hour paddle to the pickup spot, and if you need to get some final fishing in, you can find LOTS of spots in First, Second, and Third Bay. All these spots can hold quality fish. This is why the area is one of my favorites.

At the First Bay campsite, I scrounged through the food pack, and found a box of red beans and rice and a box of cheesy jambalaya. We fired up both stoves, and cooked both. AND it was GOOD.

While I was prepping dinner, Mark and Chris went out to try some fishing. They, along with Dave and Chms, had very little luck. The fishing had turned for the worse, and the smallies, and everything else in the lake had lockjaw. When you cannot even tempt a northern, you know the fishing is DONE.

Another cold front was pushing in, and this one was DEFINITELY from the North. The temp dropped 20 degrees within an hour, and we were all looking forward to building a fire. Unfortunately, there would be NO fire this night. Chris, Mark, Dan and I had stopped by the Cache Bay ranger station to get souvenirs for the kids. While talking to the ranger, we were told they had enacted a fire ban the night before.

Day 10: Saturday, September 9th, 2006 Going Home

We woke up the 30 degrees, and one of the coldest mornings I have spent in the park. There was a layer of ice in my nalgene bottle.....proof of how cold it had gotten the night before. I was thankful, that I had a decent sleeping bag, and an insulated sleeping pad.

We had a quick breakfast of pop tarts, multigrain bars, and anything else we could find. Most of the food was gone. There were a couple packs of potatoes and about 5 pounds of country ham. Other than that.....the food was gone. We quickly broke camp, packed our gear, and headed to Hook Island for our pickup.

Our pickup, as ALWAYS, was on time, and we made it back to Superior North by 9:30am. After some quick showers, and packing of the trailer, we were on the road, headed to Grand Marais, and back home by 11:00am.

Another successful Quetico trip was added to the list.

Final Thoughts:

This was again, one of my favorite trips. I was blessed to take my wife and kids on a cabin trip in the spring, and that was a GREAT success. Then, to take a fall trip with 5 other GREAT guys, and to have just as much success, and fun is really pretty good.

I've known all the guys in this group for at least 5 or 6 years, and have been on trips with Dave and Chms on and off for the past 10 years. Dan and Chris and I all work together.....and all of us have worked for Chms at one time or another. Needless to say, we all know each other rather well.

I truly enjoyed this trip, the friendships, the fishing, the food, and the area more the any other trip that I have taken into Quetico. I think finding a group that works, and UNDERSTANDING why that group works is a key to having successful trips.

I will go with ANY of these guys in the future, and I'm sure they feel the same. I cannot wait until the next time.

