

# Quetico Trip – Spring 2010

## Basswood Lake

May 21<sup>st</sup> – May 29<sup>th</sup> 2010

**Day 1: Friday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010 Headed to Cigar Island**

The Crew:

GeoFisher, GadgetMan, Eddie\_M, John\_H, Wayne\_E, Caleb\_E.

After years of listening to theBassMan30, ProffittMan, and GadgetMan talk about the FANTASTIC fishing in and around the Basswood Lake area, I decided to put a trip together. In reality, I had been talking to GadgetMan, Eddie, and John\_H about a trip for a few years, and this year was a perfect time to try to do it.

MadNat, my normal partner over the past 5 trips could not go, so this was an opportunity for me to try my best at robo fishing once again.

Our initial plan was to enter the park on Saturday. Those plans started to change once we hit Superior, WI. At breakfast, GadgetMan started talking about entering the park early. I really didn't like the idea, and also didn't think we'd be able to get our permits changed. Not only that, but our outfitter was not expecting us until the next day.

After spending an hour or so on the phone, Canadian Border Outfitters (CBO), our outfitter thought they could work us into the afternoon schedule. They even offered to call the ranger for us and get our permits changed.

So, after 5 or 6 phone calls to CBO, everything was arranged. They were able to secure a new permit, get the rental Penobscot 17 ready and secure tow drivers. CBO is a GREAT outfitter.

We thought that if we could leave CBO no later than 2:00pm or 3:00pm, we would have plenty of time to get through the ranger station and paddle to North Bay, our destination for our Base Camp.

We loaded up and headed to Prairie Portage around 2:00pm and were checking in at the Ranger Station by 3:15pm. Part of the deal with changing our plans was that we would have to wait for a while at Prairie Portage for the tow drivers returning from Lincoln Island. This worked out pretty well, but the wait at Prairie Portage was longer than I had expected.

The tow to Lincoln Island was a lot longer than I had expected. Once we arrived there, I was glad we decided to hit the water early. The wind was blowing around 6mph from the south, and it pushed us to Cigar Island.

At Cigar Island, we started setting up camp. I was not too keen with picking this site initially, but by the end of the week, I had decided that this was in fact a pretty good, centrally located site, and it allowed us to make good fishing decisions all week, including multiple daytrips to various other lakes.

On most trips, the first night in the park is reserved for "MONSTER STEAK" night. Well, the steaks were still frozen, so we opted for something else. Instead of steaks, I made cheesy enchiladas. The meal is a chicken helper meal that I changed a little by replacing the rice with

minute rice. Instead of 25 – 30 minutes of cook time I can generally get this done in 10 minutes. These are served wrapped in a flour tortilla, with a glob of nacho cheese and a couple splashes of chipotle Tabasco sauce. This is one of my favorite meals in the Boundary Waters.

**Day 2: Saturday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 Fishing North Bay**

Saturday started off bright and early. Actually, it was not too early. In years past, we'd be up by 4:00am and on the water by 5:00am. This year, that would not be the case. While I did get up pretty early every morning, it took nearly an hour to get our stuff together, brew a few pots of coffee, and have breakfast before we were ready to go fishing. This was completely fine by me. I'm no longer a robo fisherman.....I'm a camper, and I'm completely content with being a camper.

On this trip, we also planned the food a little differently. Everyone was responsible for their own breakfasts, lunches and snacks. The exception was 2 group breakfasts of pancakes and bacon.

For breakfast, most in the group brought really simple stuff. I did too.

I'm not too keen on cooking every morning for breakfast, and I'm also not too keen on eating breakfast bars. For that reason, I brought along some Mountain House freeze dried eggs with red and green peppers, and ham. This was much better than I expected, and I will definitely be taking it in the future.

For lunches and snacks, I also chose to be very simple. My lunches and snacks consisted of the following for each day: 1 cup of peanut m & m's, 4 small Slim Jim snacks, 2 Clif Bars, and 1 payday bar. Even with those slim pickings for snacks and lunch, I still had food left over.

Most of the other members of the crew took a variety of meals, including stable tuna, cheese and summer sausage, bagels, peanut butter and jelly, and various other items. Caleb\_E even brought a loaf of bread, which travelled pretty well in the vittles vault.

Fishing for the day started out pretty good, but it was apparent that the majority of smallmouth bass had already started their spawning ritual. We did manage to catch quite a few fish, including lots of northern pike a few largemouth bass, a ton of smallmouth bass, and a couple whitefish. We even managed to catch a couple early trip walleye.

Everyone made it back to camp around 6:00pm, and since the steaks were still frozen we decided to have walleye for dinner. Earlier in the day, we decided as a group that if anyone caught a walleye, they should bring it back for dinner. Dave caught a really decent 4 or 5lb walleye and the other guys brought back a couple smallmouth bass.

So for dinner, instead of steaks, we had blackened smallmouth and walleye, 4 cheese instant potatoes, and cornbread stovetop stuffing. As an added bonus, we had a peanut butter/chocolate dessert, with a crust made from Oreo cookies. Talk about GOOD EATS.

After dinner we sat around the campfire for an hour or so, had some cigars, and started making plans for the next day.

**Day 3: Sunday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010**

**Fishing Neil Island/Nest Lake**

After fishing around the eastern shore of North Bay, we decided to hit the areas around Neil Island and potentially portage a couple lakes, looking for better fishing. While the northern bite had been pretty good, the smallmouth bass were running a little small, and we wanted to try to pattern some larger fish.

Sunday was one of our planned pancake breakfast days. While the guys were anxiously waiting to hit the water, I believe they really liked pancakes in the Boundary Waters. Eddie\_M also figured out that if you use some oil to fry the stable bacon, you can make it feel, taste, and look EXACTLY like real bacon. This definitely jazzes up the stable stuff, making it really crispy.

After breakfast, we headed out fishing. Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E went to bed after breakfast, and ended up fishing around North Bay, but not until a little later. I think they said they got up and going around 10 or 11 am. By that time, we had already caught 30 or 40 smallmouth.

On the backside of Neil Island, there are many areas where you can catch some serious smallmouth bass. We also caught some serious northern pike and some largemouth bass.

We knew we'd have to eat the monster steaks tonight, so we decided to not catch and keep any walleye. We did manage to catch some eyes, and they would have been fantastic in the oil, but the steaks would not wait another night.

After fishing half the day around Neil Island, we decided to portage into a no name lake and then into Nest lake. The no name lake was sterile. I don't believe there are any fish there, because the lake is pretty shallow. If there are any fish in the lake, I suspect they are small. We did manage to see some fry, but nothing to write home about.

After completing the 18 and 20 rod portages into Nest Lake, we started fishing the area. GadgetMan and I took one bank, while John\_H and Eddie\_M took the other bank. We fished the area for about 1 hour and determined the lake really was not the type of lake that we needed to be targeting for smallmouth bass. GadgetMan and I fished half way down the lake and then started paddling across the lake to meet up with Eddie\_M and John\_H. After meeting up with them and eating a quick snack, we all decided to head back to North Bay.

Once in North Bay, Eddie\_M and John\_H went back to their "honey hole" and managed to catch a few additional smallmouth bass to pad the numbers. GadgetMan and I headed back to camp to get a fire going and start preparing our steak feast.

When GadgetMan and I reached camp, Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E were already building a fire using the cedar logs we had found the night before. The steaks were prepared using my "secret spices" and set aside to allow the spices to work their magic. While the steaks were marinating, I prepared the vegetables we also brought for dinner.

In years past, I've taken potatoes and onions and baked them in the fire. This year, I wanted to do something different, so I purchased 2 different packages of frozen medley vegetables from Schwann's. These packages included potatoes, broccoli, zucchini, celery, squash, carrots, and onions. The veggies were already seasoned. All I added to the mix was a healthy amount of olive oil to keep them moist.

After Eddie\_M and John\_H made it back to camp, we put the veggies on the grill, which had to also be packed in because grills are not provided in the park. I grilled the veggies for 10 minutes

on each side, pulled them to the side of the fire, and then completely covered the grill with the 8 pounds of rib eye steaks we packed into the park.

I think the guys will all agree that steaks in the Boundary Waters are fantastic. I've thought about not bringing them because of the hassle factor, but I'm glad I do. By bringing frozen vegetables, I've eliminated some of that hassle.

After dinner, most of the guys sat around the fire smoking cigars. Eddie\_M smoked a cigar and worked on a "fix" for his broken fly rod. A solution was found and he was able to use it the rest of the trip.....I don't believe he caught a single fish using the fly rod.

The food coma lasted well into the next morning.

## **Day 4:            Monday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010            Lost Bay**

Around the fire the previous night, we decided to head to Lost Bay to fish. It was also decided that we should be up early to try for the non-existent early bite. This would be the earliest start we'd get all week.

I got up around 5:00am and started the 2 pots of coffee which we made every morning.

Coffee on this trip was done a little differently than I've done in the past. If I was planning a deep looping type trip, I'd never pack it the way I did on this trip, but since it was a base camp type trip, I opted for real perk coffee pots and real coffee.

We packed in two perk coffee pots, and I used 4 cup filter packets to perk the coffee. In the smaller 8 cup pot, we used 2 filter packs, and in the 10 cup pot, we used 3 filter packs. Since we didn't have a fire ban, the filter packs were burned with the evening fire. This is by far the best way I've done coffee up there, but it takes some time, and the filter packs take some room. If you're willing to pack it in and take the time to perk, it produces a great cup of coffee.

I think everyone thought we'd run out of coffee, including me. I brought enough of the prepackaged coffee to make 3 pots a day, with 2 extra pots. GadgetMan also brought a pound of coffee that he used in his coffee press, and I believe Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E also packed in a pound of coffee. When it was all said and done, I believe GadgetMan packed out at least half a pound of coffee, I packed out enough coffee for 10 pots, and Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E didn't even open the pound of coffee they packed into the park. With all the coffee drinking going on, I also packed 1 extra 20 oz bottle of white gas and 2 iso-butane bottles that can be used for my lantern or as a backup fuel system for my stoves.

After brewing coffee, I used the spare stove to fire up a pot of boiling water. Most everyone had oatmeal for breakfast, while I had another Mountain House freeze dried egg meal. I think those will definitely be making trips in the future. I normally don't like most freeze dried stuff, but the eggs worked well. On future trips, I may take some flour tortilla wraps, and make a breakfast burrito with a shot of chipotle to get it going. Also, I think 1 pack is enough for 2 people.

After breakfast, we hit the lake. It looked like we were going to get some rain, and we actually put on our raingear before getting into the canoes. Once in the canoes and paddling we started seeing lightening and heard some thunder. We paddled over to the closest shore, and hugged it for a few minutes, as the storm passed to the south. Normally, we'd get out of the canoes and head to shore, but this small cell passed quickly. After this particular cell passed, we didn't have any other rain for the day. It did stay partly cloudy for most of the morning, and that led to some spectacular fishing.

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at 6:31am.....fish time....GadgetMan caught a 5lb smallmouth bass off a submerged point. That particular fish would be 1 of 2 confirmed 5lb smallmouth bass that GadgetMan has caught in the park.

There have been other 5lb smallmouth bass caught, some confirmed, some not. This fish was confirmed on 2 different digital scales. It simply amazes me to hear stories of multiple 5lb smallmouth bass that are caught in the park, only to learn the 5lb mark was determined by a formula. No formula works.

I've been going to the Boundary Waters and Quetico for over 10 years and have caught a ton of fish up there. And I've never caught a 5lb smallmouth bass in the Boundary Waters. I have caught at least 100 fish over 4lbs and quite a few over 4.5lbs, but none over 5. They are special.

Fishing turned out to be better than average, and we managed to catch nearly 80 fish for the day.

Everyone was catching fish. Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E were not fishing nearly as much as the other 4, but they were still catching serious numbers. Eddie\_M and John\_H were also catching some serious numbers of fish. Smallmouth bass, northern pike and largemouth bass were being caught by everyone.

This day was a planned fish meal, so everyone needed to bring back a fish or 2 for dinner.

Everyone caught fish all day, and Lost Bay was loaded with largemouth bass. GadgetMan and I could have easily caught well over 100 fish in Lost Bay, but I had some serious problems sealing the deal.

I don't know if I was tired, or if it was the hook or the tube or what, but I missed at least 30 fish in a row. I was sick and getting frustrated. I really think I simply was tired, and not getting a good hook set.

After 2 hours of missing fish, I finally got back in the game and caught a couple fish. Needless to say, GadgetMan cleaned my clock on that particular day. Most other days, I kept up with him fishing, but Lost Bay put a whipping on me.

We continued to fish hard all day and started keeping fish around 5:00pm for dinner.

We managed to catch a few for dinner and then headed back to camp.

When we rounded the point of the island, I noticed another canoe at the campsite. The rangers were visiting. I've never been checked by the Canadian rangers, so this was a first for me. The only potential violation had to deal with fish. GadgetMan and I had 4 fish on our stringer. We were not legal, but based on the spirit of the law, we were OK. Basically, Eddie\_M and John\_H were having problems catching a couple smallmouth bass for dinner. GadgetMan and I caught our 2 fish and then caught 2 more and put them on our stringer. In reality we should have given them to Eddie\_M and John\_H and put them on their stringer.....better yet, we could have let them starve.....That is a mistake I'm not going to make in the future. A game violation in Quetico pretty much means you're never going to get a permit again. Rules are rules, and in this case I broke the rule. Enough said.

When we got up to camp the rangers check our permits, and our fishing licenses, asked about cans and bottles, etc, etc.

The rangers were a little flustered, mostly because the female in the group was nearly half naked when she came around the corner. I was not there when they paddled up to our camp, but I suspect they didn't expect to find a camp there. Well they did. This was one of the hottest trips

I've been on in long time, and it was evident by the ranger having her shirt off and paddling in her sports bra.....OOPS.....

After they left, we cleaned the fish, prepared the sides of stovetop and potatoes, and then Eddie\_M and I fried and blackened the smallmouth bass. After dinner, I fired up my Old Scout reflector oven, and baked some banana nut bread.

## **Day 5:            Tuesday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010            Switching Fishing Partners**

Even though pretty much everyone on the trip was able to catch fish, and all members and fishing partners were doing pretty good, GadgetMan and I, being the most experienced of the 6 in the Boundary Waters decided to split up and take Eddie\_M and John\_H out fishing to show them some additional techniques. Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E stayed together and went back to the Lost Bay area to stick some more of those angry largemouth bass.

We didn't start as early as we did the day previous but we were still on the water by around 7:00am. I don't remember a whole lot about the fishing, but I do remember this.....almost immediately, GadgetMan caught a serious walleye. It was probably 6 or 7lbs, but no one will know since we didn't weigh it and we didn't ever clean it. We had planned on cleaning the fish, but it was too early in the day and too hot through the week to take the fish, and drag it around all day and then clean it at the end of the day. We decided to "deep 6" the fish. We tied a long rope to the stringer and put the fish off a point that dropped into 30-40 of water. We figured that would keep the fish alive and allow us to clean it later. That would never happen.

John\_H and I still managed to catch 30 or 40 fish, while Eddie\_M and Dave hammered them on the rocky shores of North Bay.

Did I mention that Basswood is pretty much covered with fantastic smallmouth habitat? I've fished a lot of areas around the eastern end of the park.....Saganaga, Saganagons, the Falls Chain, Ester, Hanson, Fish, Gift, Link, Ottertrack, and many other lakes. By far, Basswood Lake beats those areas hands down for serious smallmouth habitat.

John\_H and I fished hard until about 1:00 or 2:00 pm and then went back to camp for a few hours of much needed rest. After a few hours of rest, and while the other guys were still out fishing, John\_H and I decided to head back out.

The weather didn't look too bad.....some clouds were forming, but nothing to get worried about.

John\_H and I paddled across from the island, about half a mile away, and hit the northern passage around Neil Island. We only planned on fishing until dark, so this was a quick and easy spot to fish for the evening.

Our plans were quickly spoiled when I noticed some ugly dark blue/black clouds coming from the north east. This looked like a small cell and we figured it would blow through the area. It started to sprinkle.....then it started to rain.....then it started to pour. John\_H and I managed to get our rain gear on but not before we were thoroughly soaked. Not only was it pouring down rain, the wind started to pick up.

John\_H and I could not feel the full force of the blow because we were tucked in pretty good. From what I understand though, it was pretty bad. Fortunately we were tucked into a small cove and the worst part of the wind could not get to use. This was mainly due to the way the channel behind Neil Island is situated.

The rain slowed down a little and John\_H and I decided that we should start to head back. Indecision set in. I was not too sure that the storm cell was really a small cell, and I could not see past the hills to see exactly what was coming.

We started paddling back towards the chute and were immediately hit with straight line winds that were pretty hard to paddle in. Instead of continuing up the chute, we found a small, protected cut with some overhanging trees. We put the canoe sideways into the cut and held onto the trees for about 20 minutes.

After 20 minutes, the wind died down and we decided we needed to make a run for it. John\_H got his GPS out and determined that we were 6 tenths of a mile from camp. We figured we could make that in about 10 minutes, and had a good opportunity to make it back to camp in this "calm before the storm".

We paddled the chute, and then hit the open water of North Bay. This area is the half mile expanse between Cigar Island and Neil Island. The wind had completely died down. After a few minutes of paddling and half way across the expanse, it started to thunder and lightening all around us. I'm not talking about a little. It was CRACKING all around. I've been scared before but this scared the living crap out of me.

John\_H and I dug in for 10 solid minutes, paddling like hell to get to Cigar Island. We made it and neither of us was cooked so I feel good about that.

In camp, the others described the serious nature of the storm we had just missed. All the guys in camp felt the full brunt of the storm. GadgetMan told me later that this was the worse wind blow he had ever experienced in the Boundary Waters. They estimated 50 or 60 mile winds. The worse part was the fact that had John\_H and I left when I initially thought we should have, we would have been hit by the 50-60 mph wind that shifted and shot directly south east. Broadside to where we were paddling. We surely would have been hammered, and most likely would have been in a serious situation. I'm glad we didn't.

At this point I have to give kudos to the Cooke Custom Sewing Tundra Tarp that I purchased just for this trip. All the guys figured my tarp was toast, but it held up like a champ. It took the brunt of the wind. A couple of the tie down ropes broke but the tarp never ripped, and no tie down points pulled out. If this is not a testament to how great these tarps are.....nothing is. Not only that, we didn't lose any gear off the campsite.

Since the weather was really bad, no one the group went over to the point to get the walleye that we had caught earlier. We all agreed that it would be fine for the next day, and we'd get it for dinner tomorrow.

For dinner, I whipped up a quick pot of red beans and rice. We used the leftover tortilla wraps and flatbread to go along with the meal. Afterwards, I made a cherry cheesecake for dessert.

For the next few hours after dinner.....we all sat around the fire, talking about fishing, the area, and plans for the next day. All the other guys also enjoyed cigars.....I opted out.

## **Day 6:            Wednesday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010            South and West Lakes**

Since GadgetMan had made a few trips into this area over the last couple years, he was calling the shots on where we would daytrip. On Wednesday, we decided to head to South and West Lakes. While GadgetMan had never been to those particular lakes in the past, you really never know what these little gems will hold. Most people paddling through North Bay are doing just that.....paddling. Rarely, will you find folks taking enough time to seriously fish anywhere. This

is almost always the case if you pick an area that is on a loop, or a common route. South and West Lake are portage lakes into Shade, which is a common destination lake.

Breakfast was quick and dirty again. I brewed the standard 2 pots of coffee, and boiled some water for anyone who needed it. Most had a breakfast bar or oatmeal. I ate another of my Mountain House freeze dried egg meals. As I stated before, I will definitely be taking these on future trips.

We were on the water by 7:00am, and fishing towards the northernmost corner of North Bay. We had a great wind pushing us slowly down the bank. We found a perfect drift.

When fishing in the Boundary Waters, it is really important to eliminate water that may not be productive. Yea, you might catch a 5lb smallmouth in a particular cut, but if the odds are against it, you're probably wasting your time. Our trips are primarily fishing trips, and my group generally has a good idea of where we plan on fishing the entire trip. On all trips, this can change, and in fact it usually does, but if you have a pretty decent fishing strategy in place before you ever reach the park, you can amplify your fishing success significantly.

While the "perfect" drift was pushing us down the eastern bank, heading towards the portages, this particular bank was not that great for fishing. There were many decent fishing spots, but not for 2 or 3 canoes. We basically drifted for a while, fished a hole, and then paddled past Wayne\_E and Eddie\_M and drifted the next spot. When they were done fishing their particular hole, they would then paddle past us to the next hole.

Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E decided to kick back a little again in camp and planned on meeting us at 12:00pm for lunch near the portage into South Lake.

Using the leapfrog method of fishing the key spots in North Bay, it took us about 3-4 hours to fish down to the portage. We fished around the campsites and islands before the portage, and then decided to go ahead and paddle up the creek to South Lake.

At the creek into South Lake, we met up with Eddie\_M and John. This is where I first learned that Eddie\_M had "deep-sixed" his new g. Loomis rod and reel. There is not much you can say about that. It sucks. REALLY SUCKS. I've been there, done that. Fortunately, he had another spare rod, which he would guard with his life the rest of the trip.

The creek leading into the South Lake was loaded with pretty decent bluegills. It would have been a perfect place to tie on something small and load the boat with slab sized gills. Since we wanted to fish both South and West Lake, we chose to paddle past the area and continue on our way.

Midway up the creek, we had to cross 2 beaver dams. These were not too big, and we were able to up and over the canoes. I didn't see any portages around the dams, and we all speculated that travelling through this area in the summer would be very challenging. I suspect with the low water levels, this creek will be pretty much dried up by late June or early July.

We managed to navigate the beaver dams fine, and dispatched the 14 rod portage into South Lake using the "up and over" method. "Up and over" is the method we use when daytrip fishing and the portage is less than 30 rods. I put my daypack on my back and we grab the front and back of the canoe and "two-man" carry the canoe over these small type portages. In most cases, this is much easier than unloading the canoe, flipping it over, and reloading it on the other end.

The canoe is a little heavier this way, and it sometimes can be cumbersome, but it works for us.



On the other side of the South Lake portage, I casted a tube out to the landing and immediately caught a largemouth bass. There were a ton of largemouth and smallmouth bass in this portage cove. I also saw some serious bluegills, but again, we chose not to fish for them.

We caught quite a few fish in South Lake, but they were mostly smaller than average. We did manage to catch some of the biggest largemouth bass of the trip in South Lake but the average was a lot smaller than other places we had already fished. We also didn't catch any northern pike in South Lake, and I wonder if there are any in it.

We fished passed the portage, mostly because the wind was still blowing us perfectly down the lake, and it made for a great fishing drift. Eddie\_M and John\_H also had a pretty good drift down the lake, and they actually beat us to the area we thought would be the "magic cove". The cove was really not too magical but we did manage to catch a number of 1.5 – 2lb largemouth bass, which are always pretty fun.

It was getting late in the day so we quickly portaged into West Lake and started fishing.

Again, we caught a few fish quickly at the portage. West Lake is a long, narrow lake. You could paddle down the middle of the lake and fish both sides easily. Again, the wind was just right to push us gently down the bank, which we used to our advantage. We caught a few smallmouth bass, a couple northern pike, and I caught a bonus walleye. This might have been my first walleye on a tube jig. As usual, every walleye gets put on a stringer, because we eat EVERY ONE we manage to catch. We also had a couple walleye still on a stringer off a deep point near our campsite.....At least we thought we still had some walleye on a stringer.

We had been in the canoe for nearly 13 hours and still had at least 1 more to go to get back to camp. We were still catching fish but at this time, I was done. GadgetMan and I headed over to the point where the walleye were stashed the day before, only to find the rope leading off into the woods. Gadget followed the rope up into the woods and found a carcass of what used to be a decent walleye. Something had gotten to the fish. It was probably an otter or an eagle. Whatever it was, it basically eliminated any possibility of having walleye for dinner.

Back at camp no one else brought any fish back. I was not going out again, so GadgetMan and Eddie\_M went back out to catch some more fish for dinner. They were successful, which is not always the case when pressured to catch fish for food.

Once Eddie\_M and GadgetMan came back to camp with some fish, Eddie\_M and I quickly cleaned them, and prepped them for baking.

I always bring a few different types of spice for baking fish, and this trip was no different. We baked some fish using blackening seasoning, and baked some other fish using olive oil and Italian seasoning, and baked some more using olive oil and lemon pepper. As with all of our fish dinners, I also made stove top stuffing, and instant mashed potatoes.

After dinner, we started making plans for the next day. I boycotted and told GadgetMan that I really didn't feel like doing a monster day trip to Ranger Bay. Wayne\_E also boycotted, so it was decided that Wayne\_E and I would stay around North Bay and try to catch some lake trout, and the other guys would take a long daytrip to Ranger Bay.

**Day 7:            Thursday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010            Ranger Bay/Laker Fishing**

The Ranger Bay crew was up and ready by 5:00am and left the camp by 6:00am. I didn't get up and make coffee. Fortunately, Eddie\_M had used the stoves enough to get them primed and made the 2 pots of coffee for the group.

Eddie\_M, John\_H, GadgetMan and Caleb\_E all went to Ranger Bay. Wayne\_E and I slept in.

Somewhere around 10:00am, I woke up.....Yelled over to Wayne\_E to see if he was awake, and asked him if he wanted some breakfast. I always pack too much food and this trip was no different. We had half a bottle of extra syrup and about half a bag of pancake mix. Since it was extra, and since I didn't want to pack it out, Wayne\_E and I decided to have a nice pancake breakfast.

After breakfast, Wayne\_E went back to his tent and took a nap. I tried, but it was too hot. Instead, I went out and gathered some firewood.....Lots of firewood.

Wayne\_E woke up around noon and we decided we should go out and try to catch some lake trout. I got out my fish finder, and made sure it was ready to go, and then looked at a map to find a couple areas that should produce some lake trout. I found 3 spots that looked really promising, and two of them were around our campsite.

The first spot we tried was literally 50 yards off the front of Cigar Island. This area is the second deepest spot I could find on my map. The deepest spot that I could find was in front of White Island. After locating some spots, I started digging through my bag to find my laker baits. I hooked up two poles for myself and 1 for Wayne. For Wayne, I gave him my favorite 2 oz hair jig. This jig is a chartreuse hair that is beat up so bad I painted the jig head with some glow in the dark fingernail polish. On the two poles I setup for myself, I tied on a white 2oz hair jig, and on the other fishing pole, I tied on a clown colored crank bait.

Once ready, we headed out to the first spot we decided to try. After about 5 minutes of fishing, I realized I forgot my life vest. Since the wind was blowing pretty hard, and I really didn't want to go swimming without a vest, we decided to head back to camp to get it.

In camp, I also realized that I had broken the tip off my favorite fishing rod. DAMN.....I got out my extra rod, quickly changed the reel, and was ready to head back out in a couple minutes.

Wayne\_E and I headed back to the deep hole in front of Cigar Island.

Once I got the finder setup the way I wanted, I started marking smaller schools of baitfish. Then, I started marking larger schools of baitfish. All of the baitfish schools were on the bottom, which was not expected. I thought we would find suspending baitfish and lakers following the baitfish. Instead, we found them deep. I was still trolling a crank bait, but there was no way I was going to get it deep enough to entice anything if they were on the bottom in 90 ft of water.

Every time the fish finder would mark baitfish on the bottom the fish finder would also beep, locating what I suspected were lake trout. All of these fish were 1 foot off the bottom. I showed Wayne\_E how to bottom jig for the lakers.

We did this for about 2 hours. We were just about ready to call it and the bam.....Wayne\_E hooked up. He was not even sure he had a fish, but I was pretty sure he had a laker. In all the excitement, I told him to swing the fish into the boat. That was a big mistake.....mid swing, the laker, which was about 5lbs flipped off the hook. I was bummed out, but I figured we might have another chance.

We continued paddling around trying to locate the baitfish. Every time the fish finder would beep, Wayne\_E or I would get a hit. I managed to get 2-3 hits, but didn't catch any fish.

Wayne\_E on the other hand, caught a nice 3lb laker, and then caught a nice 8.5lb laker.

I figured the two lakers would be plenty lake trout for all of us, so we headed back into camp. I explained to Wayne\_E that fishing for lakers this time of year, when they are that deep really isn't very ethical. I'm not a big fishing ethics kind of guy, but when you know the fish species you're targeting will die if you catch one, you need to make decisions on all aspects of fishing for them.

Wayne\_E and I had succeeded in catching the most elusive fish in the park. Not many in our group have caught a lake trout, and those that have are among the elite of the elite of our fishing group.

Since it was still early in the day, Wayne\_E and I decided to try to keep the fish viable by sinking it deep of the front of the island. We did this for 4 or so hours, but then finally had to clean them because I was afraid they would go bad. In reality, I think they would have been good for a few more hours, but this was one of the hottest trips I've ever been on.

While Wayne\_E and I were catching lakers, Eddie\_M and John, and GadgetMan and Caleb\_E were having a banner fishing day in Ranger Bay. They fished there all day. Around 7:00pm we saw them coming through the cut, heading back to the campsite. When they arrived, they told us of the magical day they had over in Ranger Bay. All told, GadgetMan and Caleb\_E caught over 150 smallmouth bass. On top of the smallmouth bass, they also caught quite a few northern pike, a few largemouth and a couple walleye.

GadgetMan told me that Eddie\_M and John\_H were close to breaking the hundred fish barrier, and were going to stay until they did. About 30 minutes later, we saw them coming around the Neil Island cut. The wind that had been blowing earlier had completely died down, and they were fishing across the bay. I yelled over to them, that dinner would be ready in 20-30 minutes.

Once they arrived in camp, I prepped the lakers for baking. This time I only used lemon pepper and olive oil. No sense in messing up lake trout with anything else. As with all other fish meals, I made some more Stove Top stuffing, and 4 cheese mashed potatoes. As an added bonus, I baked a couple loaves of banana bread.

This trip was definitely turning into one of my BEST trips ever.

Everyone did what they wanted to do, and I was refreshed and ready to do some easy fishing Friday, our last full day of fishing in the park.

After dinner, we all decided that Friday, our last full day in the park, would be our last pancake breakfast and we'd take it easy fishing around North Bay.

## **Day 8:            Friday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010                    North Bay Water Rescue**

I usually like to take it easy on the last day of a trip. I mostly do this because I want to wind down a little and don't want to be so tired going back home. This trip would be no different.

We were all up and going around 7:00am. As normal, I started the 2 pots of coffee. After the coffee was done, I started getting the stuff together to have pancakes and bacon.

On trips with 6 or 8 guys, it is really important to have more than 1 cook. On this trip Eddie\_M helped me cook whenever we were trying to knock stuff out quickly. Every time we cooked pancakes or had fried or blackened fish, Eddie\_M was there to help. That always makes it

easier. Not only easier, but it saves on fuel, and allows you to finish up the cooking in 20-30 minutes versus 50-60 minutes. I've cooked for 6 by myself before and it is no fun.

After breakfast, we all picked various different routes to fish. Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E headed to their honey hole near the Lost Bay area. Dave and I chose to float down the western shore, fishing the reefs, and post spawn areas that we found earlier in the week. Eddie\_M and John\_H headed to their "honey hole" around the Neil Island area.

It was a nice, calm day, and the drift was perfect to fish the western bank. Dave and I drifted this area, and caught quite a few nice smallmouth bass. Under the average for the week in size and numbers, but we still caught quite a few fish.

Around 1:00pm, we decided to start heading back to camp. By now, it was getting pretty hot. There was very little wind, no cloud cover, and the sun was baking us. Back at camp, we could at least find some shade.

Normally, when it is cooler, I'm usually wearing my life jacket. On this trip, I wore it when the wind was up and we were crossing large expanses of water. I was not wearing my life jacket when we started paddling back to camp.

After about 10 minutes of paddling, the wind started to pick up a little. Not too much. It was just about enough to make you feel the cooling effects, which was definitely welcomed. After a few more minutes, the wind picked up a little more. Still it was nothing to be concerned about and certainly nothing to make me want to put on my life jacket.

That would all change within a couple minutes. In a blink of the eye, the wind shifted ever so slightly and started blowing very, very hard. It was probably blowing 20-30 mph. As soon as it started, GadgetMan and I knew we were in for a fight. Every time I thought about quickly dropping my paddle and putting on my life jacket, I was reminded by the wind just how bad it was. Every time I thought I could get a quick break and put my on my life jacket, the wind would gust 10 mph harder. We were quartering the waves, which were now about 2ft high and building. Every time we'd get just a little off track, I'd get hammered by a rogue 3 footer, and a gallon or two of water would splash over the side and into my lap.

To say I was a little scared is an understatement. I've been in worse, but not without my life jacket ON MY BODY. It was a foolish mistake to not put it on earlier. We continued to try to quarter the waves, and were about 500 yards from the island, when I saw Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E coming directly across the bay. Both of us were looking at their canoe and would lose it in the waves, and then see it again. By now the waves were easily 3ft and in some cases, maybe bigger. It was crazy. GadgetMan and I both knew they were taking a poor angle across the bay and would probably end up in the water.

Initially, they did pretty well, but after a few minutes, as they came closer to the island, the waves started getting bigger. This was mostly due to the water getting shallower due to a reef, but it seems like the wind was also blowing a lot harder too. As soon as they hit that shallower water, they dumped the canoe. Some of their gear was floating, but most of it now belongs to the lakers at the bottom of North Bay.

Neither of them had on their life vests. Fortunately they were close by and they both were able to get them on pretty easily. By this time they had drifted within yelling distance. Caleb\_E was swimming towards shore, but I yelled at him to stay with the canoe. GadgetMan and I new we'd have to help them get their canoe and get gear. I thought about trying to get some of there stuff now since it was close to us, but the waves were still pounding us, and we were not sure that we would not end up in the water. GadgetMan and I yelled over to both of them to make sure they were OK and not injured, etc, etc. They were fine and were joking about how warm the water

was. I'm GLAD the water was warm, and not the 45-50 degrees we were expecting this time of year.

Gadget and I made an executive decision, and turned the canoe nearly sideways to the waves. Probably not the greatest idea, but we figured if we got turned just a little the wind would push us faster than we could paddle. It worked as expected, and we were able to finally get out of the wind. We had been paddling nonstop for about 30 minutes and I was wore out.

Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E were still floating with the canoe about 300 yards from shore. GadgetMan and I quickly paddled to the nearest point, unloaded our fishing gear and then went out after them. As we paddled out towards them, we were able to pick up a couple items, but for the most part, we could not find any of their stuff.

Once we got to them and the swamped canoe, I told the guys what was necessary to right the canoe. Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E helped to get the front of the canoe across our gunnels. Once it was there, I had Wayne\_E get to the other side of the canoe and help balance it. The last thing we needed was two water filled canoes. Caleb\_E is a pretty strong young man, having worked on a dairy farm all his life. He was able to lift and drain the canoe while his dad helped pull it across our gunnels. Once it was up and drained, GadgetMan flipped the canoe and put it back in the water. That was the easy part.

Now that the canoe was in the water, we needed to get Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E back into the canoe. Normally, getting in the canoe from the water is a tough thing to do. And it is really tough for us bigger guys. GadgetMan and I held the canoe against ours, and had Caleb\_E climb in the other side. He was able to get in the canoe pretty easily. After that, getting Wayne\_E into the canoe was not too difficult. GadgetMan and I continued holding the canoe next to our canoe, while Caleb\_E helped pull his dad into the canoe. After a few minutes, they were both in the canoe. Exhausted, but they were both in the canoe.

By this time, the microburst of wind that had flipped them was gone. The wind hand completely died down and was a non issue. While Wayne\_E and Caleb\_E rested in the bottom of the canoe, GadgetMan and I went to gather their paddles, and what other gear we could find. Unfortunately, that would not be too much. They both lost their rain gear. They also lost a fishing knife, a fishing rod, and some loose items in the bottom of the canoe. It could have been a lot worse.

Back in camp, we got a roaring fire going, the other guys were already there, and we talked about what had just happened. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

No one wanted to go back out so we sat around under the tarp and talked about the trip.

For dinner, I made smothered chicken.

## **Day 9:            Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010            Going Home**

As with all my trips, I could easily stay another week, but I was ready to leave. On base camp type trips, we setup a ton of gear, and have a ton of gear to take down. The more you can dismantle and pack up the night before, the easier it is to leave it the morning. As usual, I didn't break down anything the night before.

I was up bright and early, probably around 5:00am, and got the two pots of coffee going quickly. I also made sure all the dishes and pans were in one area, and were all accounted for. As with most mornings, everyone was responsible for their own breakfast. This morning was no different.

I did have everyone make sure they cleaned whatever they used, and put it back where they got it. This way everything in that part of camp was accounted for.

Breakdown took about an hour or so. And we were on the water by 7:30am.

It took us about 2 hours to paddle to Washington Island for our pickup.

Since we were about 3 hours early, we decided to have a little fishing tourney. No one really knows who won that particular event, but it was not the two seasoned paddlers.

Our tow arrived on time and we headed back to CBO, where a nice cold beer and a warm shower are always welcomed. It took us a little longer getting stuff packed back on the trailer and hitting the road, but that was also expected.

Around 6:00pm we left CBO, and headed into Ely for dinner at the Chocolate Moose, and some shopping around the local shops. After a few hours of shopping, we were on the road by 8:00pm. A few hours down the road, we stopped in Superior to get a couple 6 packs of Moose Drool beer....One for me, and one for a friend back in Louisville.

This is where I usually say the drive home was long and uneventful. Well this time, the drive home was very long and event filled.

At around 2:00am, we blew a tire near Madison Wisconsin. Upon further inspection, it was determined by the engineers in our crew that the blown tire was the least of our worries. After removing the tire, we found that not only had we blown the tire, but we also broke a leaf spring. The spring was completely broke in half and there was no way this trailer was going anywhere without a replacement.

We jacked up the trailer, removed the wheel and the broken leaf spring and headed into Madison. Nothing was open so we had to wait nearly 8 hours until some shops would start to open. Understand it was Sunday, Memorial Day weekend. The chances of finding anyone open were slim to none.

We found many stores open but none that had a replacement spring, or the parts to fix it. On a suggestion from a guy at Harbor Freight, we headed to Farm Fleet. At Farm Fleet we found a leaf spring, but didn't think it would work. We also found the parts we thought could be used to fix the trailer, but we still were not 100% sure that would work. Also, we found a store in Milwaukee that made the trailer and had the springs that should work on the trailer. The guy I talked to in Milwaukee was 90% sure he had the right parts. 90% and 150 miles round trip didn't sound like a good choice.

At Farm Fleet a friend of a friend in another department knew a guy whose uncle built trailers. To make a long story short....we found that guy, got his phone number, made some arrangements, and went to his shop to get the spring fixed. His place in Verona, WI is named Double D Services.

At his shop he took a single leaf spring and used it to bolt together our broken leaf spring. Not the greatest fix, but something that should work. This is also the fix we had thought about doing while we were at Farm Fleet, but we had no tools to even try to pull that off.

We paid the man.....\$50 bucks, and were back on our way to fix the trailer, which was on the highway 30 miles down the road.

At the trailer, we put the broken leaf spring and tire back on the trailer. At this time, the leaf on the other side broke. Not completely, but it broke enough to make us think twice about driving

600 miles on it. We made a quick call back to Double D, and it was suggested that we limp the trailer back to his shop, where he would meet us again and fix the other leaf spring.

We drove the trailer back to his shop.

Once we arrived at Double D Services, he decided to replace both leaf springs with new springs. That was a better solution than trying to fix two broken springs, and risking another breakdown.

All told, we spent about 250 bucks on the trailer. By 8:00pm EST, we were back on the road, and headed to Louisville.

## **Final Thoughts:**

This was yet another GREAT trip.

Everyone got along good, there were no blowups, and pretty much everyone helped out around camp.

Camp life is so much better when the camp chores are shared. Everyone enjoys the food, everyone enjoys the fire, and everyone enjoys having water at camp all the time.

All of those things take planning and effort to pull off. When one person is doing it all, it makes for a painful camp life.

On this trip, even though 4 guys were rookies and really had not been on this type of trip before, all the camp chores were shared across the group.

Things I learned this trip:

- These guys are GREAT to be around and will be invited again.
- Base Camp water filters are GREAT.
- Mountain House veggies and eggs are GREAT
- Fry the bacon in a little oil.
- Frozen Steaks and Veggies will keep for 3 days in a cooler in the shade
- Go with the flow. SHIT happens. Broken rods, broken trailers, and flat tires.....whatever.
- I'm no longer a Robo-fisherman. I'm a Camper. And I'm fine with that.
- You can never have too much food.