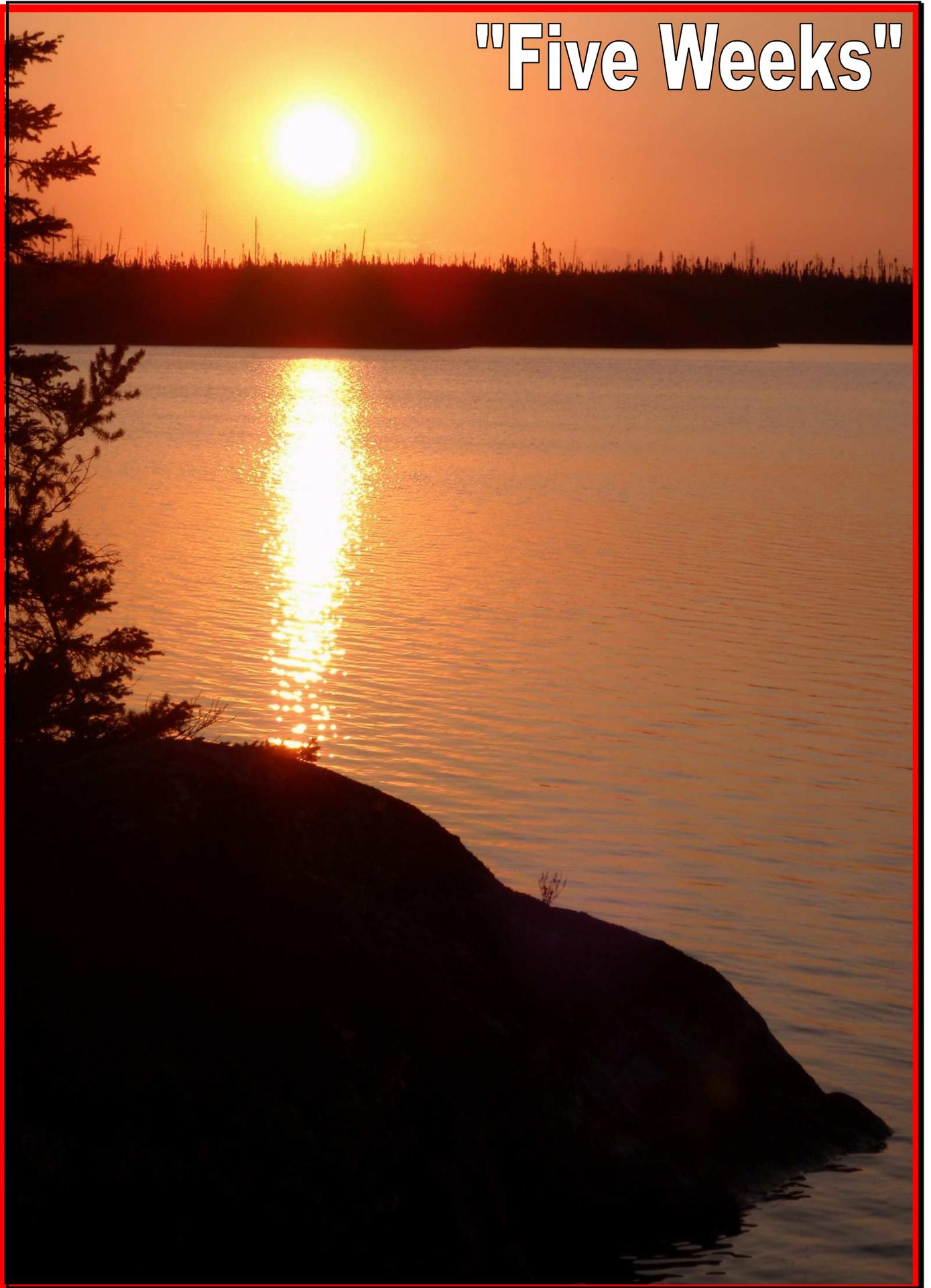


"Five Weeks"



# WOODLAND CARIBOU SOLO TRIP – 2009

## INTRODUCTION

It mostly started as a passing comment in the University of Idaho – River Reading and Whitewater Safety class that I teach each fall.... “When I retire, I will spend six weeks in September and October on a wilderness canoe camping trip.... Solo”. In the back of my mind, the Woodland Caribou in Ontario, Canada was where I was going to travel to explore. As I talked about this potential experience, I started to carry the Provincial Park map and readily shared possible routes with students, colleagues, friends and family. I may have even retired a year earlier than planned because I wanted so much to make my “dream” a reality. Lots of planning and lots of transition.

Did I mention that preparing for this excursion took lots of planning, lots of transition and lots of support from those close to me in my life?

The 1600 mile drive to the location that I considered the “put-in” at Wallace Lake in Manitoba, Canada is an ordeal in itself. I arrived at 3:30pm on August 30<sup>th</sup> and decided to start immediately... a day early. The thought of reaching Siderock Lake, set up a campsite and to get some needed rest was appealing. That decided... I was on the water by 4:00pm. I had received great advice from Jim Hegyi and Martin Kehoe to contact Lem Kelley to park my car in his back yard for the duration of my trip.

**WEEK ONE (31 Lakes including Wallace, Siderock, Crystal, Broken Arrow, Haggart, Mather, Irregular, Beamish, Welkin, Adventure, Haven, Gulch, Jigsaw, and Wrist)**

**August 30<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)** The Wallace Lake put-in is well used by motor boaters and fisherman, but sees little canoe access. With a slight tailwind, I paddled off across Wallace (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile) to the mouth of the Wanipigow River. I had not been in the We-no-nah Wilderness canoe since April.... perhaps waiting to savor the upcoming experience. I love paddling a canoe, even when it’s loaded with food and gear. The canoe is 15’4” long and weighs 31 pounds. Not a lot of room for what was needed to “survive” the multi-week trip.

Canoe with 2 paddles, yoke and attachments	36 lbs
Food pack (Breakfast – 13 lbs, Dinner – 23 lbs, Other – 2 lbs)	38 lbs
Cooking Gear (2 pots, fry pan, plate, 2 cups, cooking oil, grill)	11 lbs
Clothing and Camping (Clothes, tent, thermarest, tarp, water shoes, etc.)	28 lbs
Fishing Gear & Pelican (2 poles, 2 reels, camera, GPS, SPOT, Kindle, etc)	10 lbs
Miscellaneous (chair, saw, rope, maps, water containers, etc.)	6 lbs
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129 lbs</b>

The Wanipigow River was running high and had significant current. Of course, I had to paddle up stream, against the current. The river meandered constantly until it opened into Siderock Lake. It took more than two hours. Prior to launch, I had met a boater (named Greg) who had openly welcomed me to stop at his campsite up the Wanipigow. When my canoe entered Siderock, I spotted Greg fishing in a bay and decided to paddle over to see him. We talked briefly and he generously gave me three walleye for my first dinner on the trip. There was not much time left in the day to find a campsite as well as to prepare fresh fish. Eagles and loons were observed as the

# WEEK ONE



canoe headed off toward an island and an isolated spot that became my first “home” of the trip. I slept well and enjoyed coffee and oatmeal for breakfast as well as that special “fish fry” the evening before. I was on my way!

**August 31<sup>st</sup> (Monday)** I was excited to leave the Siderock Lake campsite to be able to move up river and to enter the Woodland Caribou Park where I believed that solitude and an appreciation for the outdoor environment would be enhanced. The Wanipigow River was more beautiful and challenging than I imagined. It must have taken five hours to navigate and portage six waterfalls while moving against the current. But finally.... Crystal Lake.... officially in the wilderness. As welcome a site as Crystal Lake might have been, there were still two more portages and a number of miles that needed to be completed to get to Broken Arrow Lake... my destination for the day. I will need to work on the packs and learn how to balance the canoe to make the portages easier and more tolerable. They were difficult that first day. I have been able to double pack which helps save time. It should get easier as the packs lighten and my technique improves. I did lose a bungee on one of the portages... must be more careful! What a welcome campsite that I found on an island near the northern end of Broken Arrow. There was still plenty of time to leisurely put up my tent and to head out fishing.... which produced another evening fish dinner. The last leg of the trip up to Broken Arrow involved a long, narrow passage up stream through grass lined, meandering path ways. The canoe doesn't maneuver as well as it will later in the trip when the load is reduced. However, I love to paddle and being on the water is what I enjoy most on these trips. Too much time of my life has been spent on solid ground. A couple pike, potatoes and gravy for dinner. A wonderful day! I will move tomorrow to take advantage of the weather and to spend more time in the canoe.

**September 1<sup>st</sup> (Tuesday)** Happy birthday mom! A continuous breeze from the west. No bugs. Warm. Great coffee and granola with a cup of blueberries. Breaking camp will be easy. I plan to paddle through Haggard Lake... six total portages.

It turned out to be quite the day. Broken Arrow Lake is a “dream come true” paddle on the north end. Numerous rock formations mold the shoreline into breath taking scenery. I fished along the way and by noon had caught and filleted dinner. Then the real paddling began. There was a southwest wind all day long.... and I happened to be paddling southwest. Still... the sun was shining, it was warm and I got to do what I enjoy most... paddle and route find and to be out in the wilderness for hours on end. I have been using the topographic maps extensively for navigation. I've got a fairly good sense of where I am and seem to anticipate a general direction to move. However, I did make two minor errors today that caused me to reassess my location and to make adjustments. Finding portage trails can be timely and difficult. My portage routine is already consistent. The food bag, pelican, fish pole, PFD and NRS bag first. Return! The canoe, paddles and camping/clothing bag second. All of the gear has its special place in the canoe and in turn in the water proof bags. Being organized is helpful and may prevent me from losing or breaking something. It was difficult locating a camping site on Mather Lake. I must have paddled to one side of the lake and then the other side three times and then.... the fire pit that I had read about in an article forwarded to me from Jim Hegyi.... *Howard's Solo*. It must have been his work. I had to hurry to pitch camp, gather firewood, and cook the stroganoff with the side dish of fish. I had a difficult time eating the entire meal. I've already picked a half cup of blueberries for my morning oatmeal. I'm tired and sore. Sleep will be a friend. As I finish this entry, the nearly full moon has risen and is twinkling a trail across Mather Lake that seems to be pointing to my campsite. I sit here in the dark wearing shorts and a short sleeve shirt. Very wonderful weather!

Each portage finds the traveler in a different lake or above/below what seems an impassible landform (rapids, rocks, hills, etc.). Most of the lakes are un-named. All have a sense of beauty and

ruggedness.... an isolation from all other bodies of water. I slowly paddle through these lakes looking from shoreline to shoreline.... observing.... listening. Not sure what it is that I'm looking for but a sense of "visual overload" takes place. During the last five miles, I have entered Jack Pine territory. The evidence of a past fire is everywhere with Jack Pine quick to rejuvenate the islands and shoreline. Little survives the fires. The view from the Mather campsite looks south for at least a mile of open water with shorelines not detecting any elevation. Still... I sit for an entire evening and a long restful morning and there is no sign of anything human.

**September 2<sup>nd</sup> (Wednesday)** Quite a day! Understatement! I must have spent three or more hours totally lost. The GPS didn't even seem to help. I will need to spend more time with this device! The southern end of Mather Lake is a mass of islands and peninsulas. The lake is massive.... miles long and wide. I got off track and couldn't back track or remember how I got to where I was. I found a small island with an old campfire ring.... laid out all of the maps. It just so happens that my location was somewhere on the "divide" between two maps and they didn't seem to coincide. I paddled and paddled and paddled... first west and then around a large island to the east. Surprise, surprise.... I began paddling southeast although I didn't quite know where I was on my maps. It's difficult to describe the feeling one has out on these lakes when where you think you are isn't where you are! The big lakes, especially in the burn areas don't seem to change from one place to another. Once I was on track again, the paddle was more enjoyable.... much less frustrating. The weather has been fantastic... warm with a slight breeze but not enough wind to cause breakers on the water. I've been paddling a lot of miles in a relatively short period of time. It seems as if I am taking advantage of the conditions.... or is it my "youthful" high energy? In the back of my mind, I project that there may be large lakes later in the trip that may require layovers. "Make hay while the weather is warm". Tomorrow I will travel to Beamish Lake. This requires an 825 meter portage. The following day will find me on Welkin which is where I wanted to be on Sunday.... already a full 2-3 days ahead of my tentative schedule. I had a "heck" of a time finding a campsite on Irregular Lake. I ended up exploring and scouting and fishing a major portion of the lake. I finally pulled the canoe out of the water on a west facing peninsula on the tip of an island in the northern portion of the lake... a nice but small site. No one has camped here before. Great dinner of Minestrone soup, pike and broth. I did see eight otters today and actually watched four of them slide down a steep embankment into the lake. I also had a beaver "tail slap" near the canoe. I'm sitting in my chair with my feet nearly dangling in the lake. I'm facing south and observing the billowy, cumulous clouds in the sky... favorable weather is predicted tomorrow.

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> (Thursday)** It's morning! It's been difficult to stay in the tent 8-9 hours per day. Sleep has been welcome. There is no hurry now-a-days. A small wood fire produces the awaited AM cup of coffee, one of my luxury items for the trip. I sit in my Sling-Light chair and take in the sunrise. Sometimes the only sound is the wood burning. Sometimes this is interrupted by a fish surfacing or loons calling (the way that only loons can sing). Or.... geese starting their migrations.... hundreds of them passing in formation overhead. There is peace and tranquility in the early morning hours. As I get older, I find myself tiring earlier and falling asleep at a time that young people might think too early. But the truth is that I am always excited and look forward to the next morning. I enjoy being awake, alive and active during the daylight hours. And this is one of those mornings.

If there was a day to take a "rookie" wilderness canoe camping.... today may have been it (minus the portages but I digress). I exited Irregular Lake around 8:30am. I am now camped in Welkin, and it's only 3:00pm. The lakes that I paddled through today were "glass".... no ripples, no waves.... just glass. Mile after mile of a mirror like surface of water. I didn't want to get out of the canoe until I realized what a toll the sun and heat are having on my body. It may seem strange to be

dehydrated while paddling on so much pristine and pure water. I drink as often as possible by dipping my water bottle directly into the middle of lakes. No filtering. Let me describe this day. I was camped immediately across from the 825 meter portage. It was the nastiest portage to date. It was easy to locate and the trail is well defined. It starts off with a small amount of "mud walking" and then climbs to a beautiful ridge. I stopped there with my heavy first load and returned for the canoe and clothes/gear pack. An 825 meter portage is the equivalent of walking 25 football fields when a paddler double packs. The last 150 meters was wet, sloppy, "shoe grabbing up to the thigh mud". There is nothing one can do to avoid it, especially when carrying the canoe. And on this day, there was nothing I could do but walk right down the middle of that energy sapping, frustrating muddy path. After the canoe was reloaded, I quickly headed to the nearest rock outlet. I secured the canoe and then walked into the lake until I was totally submerged. Whew! The paddle up the southeast end of Beamish Lake is at times spectacular... huge rock formations. I stopped to climb one such rock and was almost brave enough to jump the 35 feet to the lake... but common sense prevailed. As the rock formations diminished, the jack pine shoreline took over. But still... paddling on a smooth glassy lake is indescribable. Mile after mile. The only sounds are an occasional loon or geese in migration. In one of the bays, I observed hundreds of geese. They were apprehensive with my presence. As I neared them, I caught my second pike of the day which startled them and caused them to fly off immediately over my head. I may have been able to stand up and touch one but instead I landed the canoe on their piece of rock to fillet the pike for dinner. More glass paddling and soon I had portaged into Welkin Lake. The western side of the lake is narrow and supports old growth. At the junction that I will take to head north, the view is that of the remnants of the fire that passed through this area three years ago. I paddled a couple of miles east into Welkin and was breathless. There is green poking through the dead trees which still stand and what looks like the start of a new Jack Pine forest. I returned to the junction and paddled a mile north looking for a campsite only to return to the south end of the lake to the first camp area that I had observed. I required a site with shade. I needed to get out of the sun. The cumulous clouds offer occasional cover but it is trees with foliage that works best. I set up camp and decided to wash clothes and swim. I didn't bring along any extra shorts or t-shirts but it really didn't matter as I sit here writing in my journal while keeping an eye on my clothes drying. Navy bean soup, fish and blueberries for dinner tonight. This campsite supports a nice little berry patch that will also add to my morning granola.

**September 4<sup>th</sup> (Friday)** Red sky this morning.... I repeat... a very red sky this morning. A forewarning? And the winds were a factor on the big lakes with breaking waves and small troughs to paddle through. Leaving Welkin Lake with an AM tail wind was fine. I was much more preoccupied with: 1) a weather change, 2) the 825 meter portage and 3).... what I was really concerned about is that the camera battery went dead. I spent more than five hours with the solar charger hooked up to the camera..... on the water and at camp. It does not appear to be able to recharge. So.... maybe no pictures! My secondary concern is the Kindle (the electronic book reader). It is losing battery capabilities quickly. Time will tell. I very well may be without two of my major electronic devices. I realize that this trip is much more than those items.

The 825 meter portage was re-routed. It is a beautiful walk through the forest. Lots of ripe blueberries and a couple of very recent bear scat piles.... the bears seem to also be enjoying the abundance of berries. A short paddle through a beautiful un-named lake and the "dreaded" 350 meter portage that is indicated on the map as "wet". By now, I have a good idea what "wet" implies. But again I find a re-route. Another picturesque trail with ups and downs and more berries. The distance was further than indicated but high and dry beats the mud every time. A couple more miles and a very special 250 meter portage to Adventure Lake. The moss undergrowth in the woods was like walking on a soft, green carpet. I entered upper Adventure Lake but first "ran" a short grade I

rapid. The south end of Adventure Lake is beautiful. I even observed a great campsite on the west shore... but kept paddling because I was concerned with the high winds and the possible change in weather. Adventure Lake is a couple of miles long and nearly a mile wide. I let the tail wind carry me to the north end of the lake and I portaged into a long, skinny no-name lake where I had decided to set up camp. At this time of the day, I was tired but equally disappointed with this small lake. The shoreline was 99% burned. There was nowhere to camp. I ended up paddling the entire length of the lake (about three miles) and did find perhaps the only growth where I set up camp. On the way to this site, I did catch two nice walleye. I practiced erecting the tarp (in case of a storm), cooked chicken noodle and vegetable soup as well as fried fish. I was very tired that evening. I have been hoping for a layover day.... but it has to be on a lake with living old growth trees. These burned over lakes offer little excitement. Maybe tomorrow the terrain will change?

**September 5<sup>th</sup> (Saturday)** Some of my most reflective thoughts occur before sunrise as I sit by a small wood fire with my warm morning drink. Much contemplation. A time to sit and listen... listen to the sounds of the outdoors and to the thoughts racing through my mind. It seems at this point that it is easy to get caught up with "on water time"... the time spent with paddle in hand, the maps hanging on the thwart in front of me and the binoculars readily available to observe more closely that which I find myself drawn to. I have covered a lot of territory in six days. It hasn't been easy. I prepared for this trip more mentally than physically. At 62 years old (in two weeks), I am in very good health. Lots of time spent at my "retreat" home on Mica Mountain in Idaho. Could have before the trip began.... Could have practiced carrying the canoe and adjusting balance... could have worked more with the camera and solar charger... could have eliminated a few more pounds. I received great advice from Martin and Jim including detailed articles of their past experiences that they had encountered in their travel through the Woodland Caribou. This also included GPS information. Most of this material served as inspiration. I left that "stuff" home and decided to make this my trip. That is the Mike Kinziger way!

Today was another "marathon" day. I had wanted to paddle through Haven Lake and then over to Gulch Lake. Simple... two portages, two lakes. I could then sit back and breathe. But it wasn't that easy. It took two additional portages to get to this campsite... and they weren't easy. One portage was a 525 meters and the other was a muddy and very difficult 850 meter traverse into Wrist Lake. Why am I putting on so many miles so quickly? The answer is simple. I want to get to a lake with trees... real old growth trees. The view from the portage on Haven was devastating. A large white rock standing out there with nothing on it. This rock is the size of many small towns. It is evident that the Woodland personnel have worked on re-routing and "signing" portages with cairns and blaze marks through the burn areas. However, that being said ... the portage to Wrist starts off as if it's a joke. The landing is a bog that is floating and sinks as I set foot on it... sinks very deep into the lake. The first 150 meters are pure mud... up to your knees and attempting to pull your shoes off mud. I stopped along the way to scout a ridge thinking that perhaps I was on an old trail but quickly returned and found the rest of the trail better but still wet and long. Great blueberries, however! Handfuls of them. It was sad to paddle through Jigsaw Lake with all of the burn. I had decided to move from Gulch to Jigsaw Lake in my pursuit of trees... surely on one of the multitude of islands? Wrong! A very fun maze to maneuver through, at least on an average day. Today was not average. Constant southwest winds gusting with whitecaps in open areas of the lake. I am still not comfortable in the turbulence but there were times that there was little choice but to make the crossings. I crossed over into Wrist Lake and there were TREES! Yea! I paddled up a section of Wrist willing to take the first available campsite. Finding none, I paddle to the northwest corner and found my "home" for the evening. Plenty of room, flat area for sleeping, firewood, good fishing, trees and

shade. I am happy to be here. I will consider spending another day here. I have a layover day coming. "Darn good" chili for dinner. Life is good.

The wind did not abate until long after I was sleeping. The sound of the waves splashing against the rock walls near my camp area lulled me right to sleep.

The mornings have been the best part of the days. The view from this site is awesome. A couple of islands off to the southeast, a huge expanse of mirror like water in the south and a glorious red sun rising in the east. I have decided to move again today... just one lake away and a 100 meter portage. I will begin by paddling the perimeter of Wrist Lake hoping to take advantage of the light schedule with some quality fishing? Tonight, I want to set up camp early and wash... me and my clothing. The soot and ash from the burned out areas that I wandered through is everywhere. It's caked on my arms and legs. Walking through the burned out areas will leave a lasting impression on me of the impact that fire has on this type of environment. I can't imagine getting caught in such a fire. There is nowhere to go. I can't imagine how hot it was or how much smoke filled the air. Even more difficult to imagine is why it didn't burn more... why some lakes are totally unaffected?

### ***WEEK Two (23 Lakes including Wrist, Streak, Amber, Nutria, Mexican Hat, Glenn, Hansen, Rostoul, Gammon, Upper Gammon, Joey, and Lightning)***

**September 6<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)** A perfect day to paddle.... maybe too hot? I slowly paddled and fished Wrist Lake and landed three nice pike. I kept the 35 inch one and released the two 30 inchers. What a thrill to land good sized fish in a solo boat. The portage to Streak Lake was beautiful as was the lake itself. I paddled the full length of Streak west and then back east on glassy water. Along the way I caught three more fish that I released. It was early and Amber Lake was only 70 meters away. Once in Amber (and through Amber).... Nutria Lake became the next lake on route. But first, the portage to Nutria became the second most difficult one of the trip. Lots of "sucking" mud and slippery conditions. Almost not safe! There is nothing a traveler can do except walk through the mud and hope ones shoes don't disappear. There was a very interesting (and different) connectedness between Nutria Lake and Mexican Hat Lake.... a very narrow channel with weeds and two beaver dams to cross. A blue heron was particularly interested in me. He kept flying a hundred feet at a time in front of me while keeping a watchful eye on my progress. I also came across 30 mergansers that swam in front of me for nearly a half mile. They all seemed to be practicing the "wounded wing" routine. I ended up cornering them before they turned and "wounded wing" right by me. Interesting!

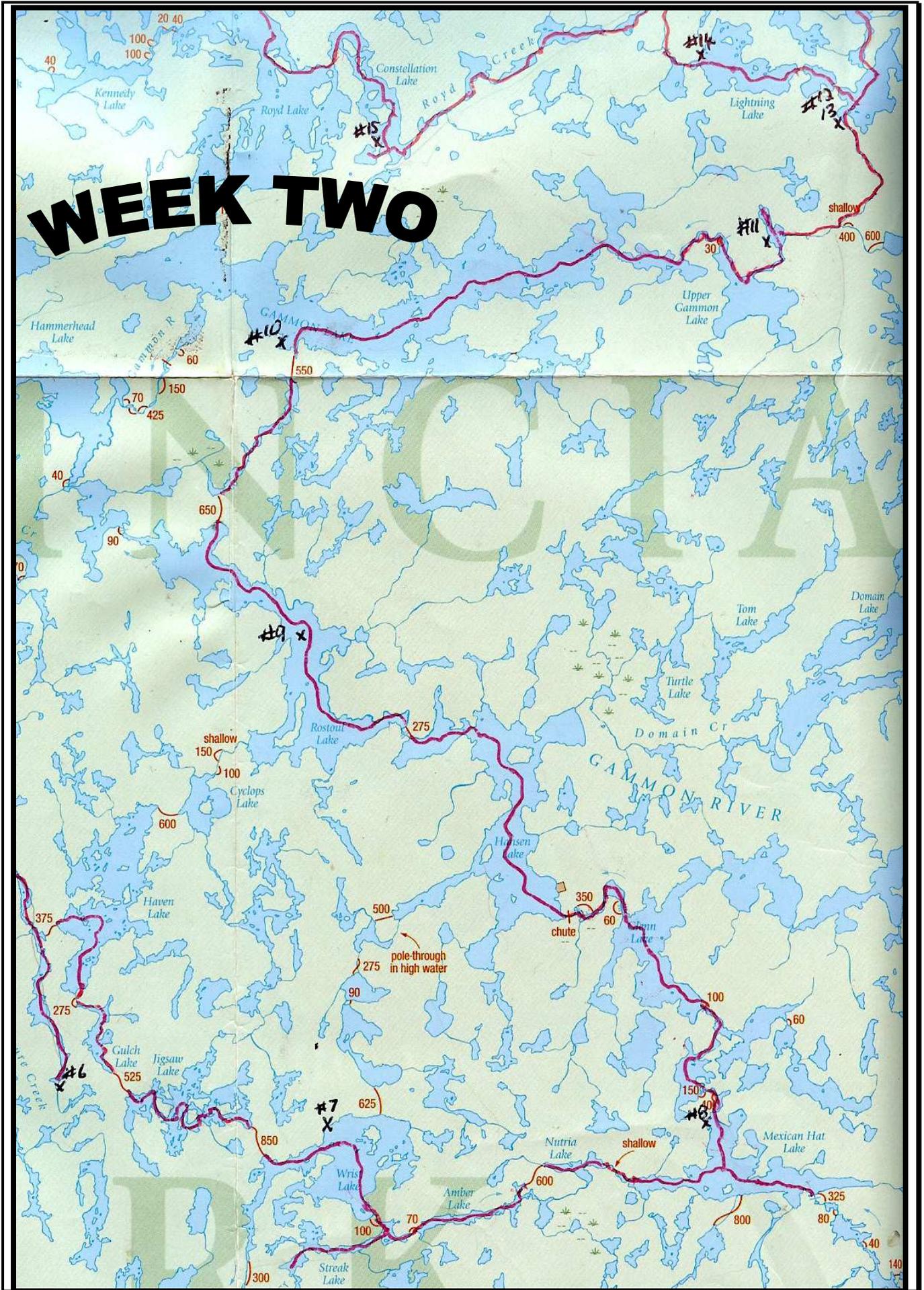
Mexican Hat Lake is spectacular. I'm so happy to be in the trees again. And I caught two nice walleye right before I got to a very well used campsite. There will be plenty of fish for dinner along with the rice and noodles. With the nice and dry conditions, I am choosing to eat the meals that require simmering time. The "one minute" meals can wait until I can use the stove.

**September 7<sup>th</sup> (Monday)** I lose about three minutes of daylight each day. That means that by the end of the trip, about 90 minutes of light will have been replaced by darkness. I'm used to getting up very early and retiring between 9:00 and 10:00pm. Out here a person almost has to retreat to mosquito proof shelter when the sun goes down. That gets earlier every day. I don't think it's possible for me to sleep for more than eight hours per day (I usually require five). That means that I have to find "tent time" things to do, i.e. writing in the journal, reading, reviewing the maps. Ninety more minutes will be a personal challenge.

I awoke this morning to fairly calm water. I decided to head in the opposite direction to visit a waterfall on Mexican Hat (east end of lake). It took a leisure hour to get to the falls. There is a campsite at the mouth of the falls that may be one of the best campsites in this wilderness. Great

place! I casted a lure ten times into the outflow and caught five fish.... and let them go... it's too early in the day. I then paddled back past my previous campsite and headed toward Glenn Lake with three short portages required to get there. I started looking for a campsite with the idea that I would get up early the next morning to paddle through the big lakes of Hansen and Rostoul while the lakes were relatively calm. Guess what? No campsites on Glenn, so I made the 275 meter portage to

# WEEK TWO



Hansen and paddled through a short but exciting rapid with some fun standing waves. Amazing whitewater to walk around! Immediately into Hansen Lake, a number of cabins came into view on the southeast end of the lake. The waves on Hansen were a concern but I did not want to stop with a view of "civilization". I paddled to the west shoreline and worked my way carefully to the north attempting to avoid the turmoil in the middle of the lake. Still no place to camp. On I paddled. Before I knew it I had reached the portage to Rostoul Lake. Efficiently, I completed the portage and immediately set out to find a home for the night. The waves on Rostoul made me uncomfortable. I hit my "challenge" limit but still could not find a place to camp. What seemed like miles later, I did find a nice little island site. Yea! What a relief. Not a fun afternoon. And I seem to be in a "race" to get around my loop. There is still no sign of rain, it's very warm. There must have been a mosquito hatch. I enjoyed a fine meal of mashed potatoes, gumbo gravy and fresh walleye. Quite a day!

**September 8<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday)** Happy birthday brother John. We are both 61 until September 25<sup>th</sup>. The wind was gusting when I got out of my sleeping bag at 6:15am. Thoughts of big wind and difficult paddling on Rostoul had stayed with me most of the night. I only had a mile to paddle and then I would enter a bay to be out of the big water conditions. My plan was to travel to Gammon Lake... another large body of water... with hopes of locating a campsite immediately and then cross through Gammon early the next morning. The weather slowly deteriorated. More wind, light rain and some thunder in the background. There were two portages along the way, a 650 meter and then a 550 meter that followed. The portages were well maintained through the big lakes. Actually, a nice hike if you can enjoy carrying the canoe and loads of gear. No mud! I've been experiencing pain in both feet from the rubbing of my shoes and my toes. Add this to a very sore and tender big toe on my left foot, especially on the descents.

There was good elevation today. I enjoyed the paddle on the three mile long no-name lake between Rostoul and Gammon. The winds were howling as I entered Gammon Lake and rain drops were beginning to fall. I refused to go out into the main body of water after looking for a camp area to the east and west. I climbed a rock close to the portage and decided that I would make it work as my camp spot for the night. It was only around noon. I am concerned for a few "widow makers" near my tent site but would rather take that chance then deal with the high winds. An afternoons rest will do me good. I have one nice pike that I will fry for dinner.... Not sure of the main dish yet.

**September 9<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)** It rained for nearly ten hours last night and into the early morning. I didn't sleep well. The throbbing pain in my left foot is almost intolerable.... extremely sensitive. At first light, I began packing and carrying gear down the steep, wet and slippery slope.... the pain in my left foot almost preventing me from walking. Before long, the boat was loaded (lots of wet gear) and I was off on Gammon Lake with the plan of paddling the four miles east up Gammon Lake before the winds picked up. A high pressure system had moved in. Clear skies, cooler temps and gusting wind. It was wise leaving so early. I headed off east and paddled into the sunrise. Choppy water but enjoyable. I caught five nice pike along the way and filleted two of them for dinner. I stopped at the end of Gammon Lake for a cup of coffee and oatmeal. It was a restful and needed stop. The paddling continued to be enjoyable in the channel between Gammon and Upper Gammon Lake. I entered Upper Gammon Lake after a 30 meter portage. I only had to paddle three fourth of a mile on Upper Gammon but was so distracted with the breaking waves on the lake that I over shot the channel heading north. My GPS helped me make the necessary correction. I located the channel and the rest of the day was special. I entered a no name lake nearly surrounded in marsh and set up camp early in the afternoon. It may be one of my favorite sites to date. Just enough room and it doesn't require me to walk around very much. A clothes line was erected and the drying process begun. I even indulged in an afternoon cup of coffee. There was some sewing to do on the tarp to keep the fabric

from “balling up” in the middle. I then carefully sat down with that sewing needle and lanced that area on my foot that was causing so much pain. It oozed and oozed and oozed. Within an hour I could walk much better.

The sun is still shining, the wind still blowing. The wind should not be a factor tomorrow because I begin to explore and paddle up a very small creek that flows to a no name lake that some people call Joey Lake. It's not a long paddle but I expect beaver dams and debris to be congesting up the stream. I'm excited to be where I am right now. There is almost no possibility that I will see anyone for the next few days... not that I've seen anyone so far.

**September 10<sup>th</sup> (Thursday)** A large beaver lingered outside my campsite and slapped down nearly a dozen times. Bird life seemed to come alive as the sun set and dusk prevailed. What an excellent place to camp. The morning brought hazy skies but comfortable conditions. I was slow getting packed and just wanted to enjoy my coffee and take pleasure in the morning. I have always enjoyed “saving the best for last” and today was a day that I had been looking forward to. A four or five mile jaunt upstream on a marshy creek. I located the outlet and immediately began the vicious cycle of 90 and 180 degree turns on this old age meandering stream. At the beginning, the stream was never wider than the canoe (15'4”). Back and forth, around and around... good thing I know and enjoy how to paddle. Lots of cross draws and sweeps with an occasional back draw. The current wasn't strong but it was still difficult keeping the bow facing the upstream direction. About one-third the way up the stream, the main channel headed east. There appeared to be a trickle of water flowing from the north. This was the way to Joey Lake. There is something magical paddling up a tiny stream with barely enough water to navigate or to make the extreme meanders. The creek narrowed to three to five feet wide in many places. There were also numerous beaver dams that I had to pull the canoe over and into the next pool. How many? Fifteen to twenty? There were times that I thought that the channel would end. I had to stand in the canoe a number of times to determine which direction to go. Mile after mile. This was not “how the crow flies” miles. Eventually, there were down trees... many down trees that required the paddler to get out and walk in the stream pulling the canoe behind him. And then there was the rocky rapid with little water but a mandatory portage. I walked up stream, in the water, to discover that about 30 meters upstream was a large beaver dam. I made three trips up to that beaver dam using the stream as my trail. It was worth it! I was in Joey Lake. It was early in the afternoon. I decided to paddle the southeast portion of the lake to look for a campsite. For the first time all day, I threw out the fishing line and before I could find a campsite, I had landed three nice walleye including one 30 inches long. Camp is set up.... a very nice view. I took a very well deserved swim, washed some clothes, charged some batteries and attended to camp. What a beautiful place! And to think that I may be the one of the first people to paddle all the way up this creek and perhaps only one of the few to ever visit this lake. Beef stew and walleye tonight.

**September 11<sup>th</sup> (Friday)** No loons, no geese.... But I did hear the distinct howl of a young wolf as it called out for nearly half an hour last night. It was so quiet that the wolf's howl and presence may have been much closer than I could tell. Some lightning and thunder last night and into the morning. The tent and tarp set up work well. Nice warm fire this morning.... not sure of the weather but it does seem threatening. I will prepare for rain. If the wind stays mild, I will circumnavigate Joey Lake and fish along the way. It's a big lake that is surrounded by numerous jack pine all attempting for eventual supremacy (lots of dead young trees).

I needed this lake. A lay over.... it can be a very good thing, especially for a body pushed hard for twelve days. It was also fun to spend a day in the canoe with no gear. The “Wilderness” is a fun and responsive boat. We (the canoe and I) left for a fishing and exploring trip. We accomplished both. About a half mile north on Joey, I diverted into a channel that led me first to a beaver dam and

second to a beautiful, narrow lake with high rock walls on the north end. Back on Joey to complete my clockwise paddle around the lake, I observed that the north end may have some of the best camping options. My exploring was interrupted 12 times by walleye with a few finding their way onto my stringer. About three fourth way around the lake, a light rain began to fall but it was not significant enough to alter the days plans. I did pull out on an island and stood under a tree looking back toward my campsite. So small! So distant! Today is "9-11". There was plenty of time to reflect on events that have happened in the world.... important events.... but out here the most immediate concern was staying dry, being well fed and the overwhelming feeling of awe for the view in front of me all day.

**September 12<sup>th</sup> (Saturday)** Morning... no sound, quiet, very quiet all night long. I emerge to "pea soup".... murky, foggy. I can't distinguish the shorelines that were so clear to me yesterday. Eerie.... That's what it is. The colors emitting from the campfire.... The reds and yellows stand in such stark contrast to the colors of the wilderness, like a little color TV compared to large screen black and white.

It's late afternoon. I've packed and moved. I've portaged and paddled to a camp on Lightning Lake. Not many miles traveled but many miles paddled. Exploring is like that. There is a slight tint of green in the distance but for the most part, the day has remained foggy and dreary. The wind has shifted to the north and it has cooled down considerably. The early portages were not long but with the humidity at 100%, perspiring is a problem. No fish today.... I did have a nice northern pike on line but couldn't get him in the boat. This will be my first evening without fish. The weather and wind direction changes must be factors. I located a trapper's cabin off in the woods. It was made of logs but had a secure tin roof. The varmints and rodents have found their way inside but a padlock kept me only looking through the small window at the interior. This certainly wouldn't have been my choice of a cabin location. It made me think more about isolation and solitude. Those early trappers were hardy men. Makes one wonder how they ended up on Lightning Lake in the middle of the Woodland Caribou?

The feet are healing. The big toe has stopped being infected. I've been attempting to take it easy and that seems to be working. Navy bean soup, broth and perhaps some hot jell-o for dinner.

### ***WEEK Three (26 Lakes including Lightning, Constellation, Royd, "Caribou", and Irvine)***

**September 13<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)** Very foggy again.... And then I spotted the whale... only it wasn't a whale, just a large rounded white rock in the lake in front of my campsite. I packed early but decided to wait until there was adequate visibility... didn't want to miss the portage. In the next no-name lake, the sun popped out and I threw out a lure and caught a pike in 30 seconds.... and then no sun or fish until late in the afternoon. The clouds were those cumulous type but they had a threatening dark lining. I stayed ready for rain all day... but it never came. The next stretch of land and water was exhilarating, challenging and frustrating. A short portage..... OK. Neat little narrow stream winding through a marsh with rock walls on one side.... fantastic! And then.... the stream sort of petered out causing the paddler (me) to pull the canoe through the marsh about 200 meters.... Very difficult! But finally it was a joy to paddle into the next no-name lake. The combination of the 15'4" Wilderness canoe and the heavier duty straight shaft paddle make this stretch a fairly good paddle. I can't imagine longer boats or tandem teams in some of the water that I have paddled. (Someone wouldn't be happy.) There were four more no-name lakes and eight portages between Joey and Constellation Lake. Today I was able to paddle a very special and beautiful section of country. After each corner I turn and each portage that I complete.... I can be almost 100% sure that I am the only one out here.

The electronic devices have been a source of frustration. They don't seem to be able to take a solar charge. The camera re-charges but only provides me with about ten photos before it needs recharging. The Kindle seems to be "belly-up". All is well. I still enjoy my own company each day.

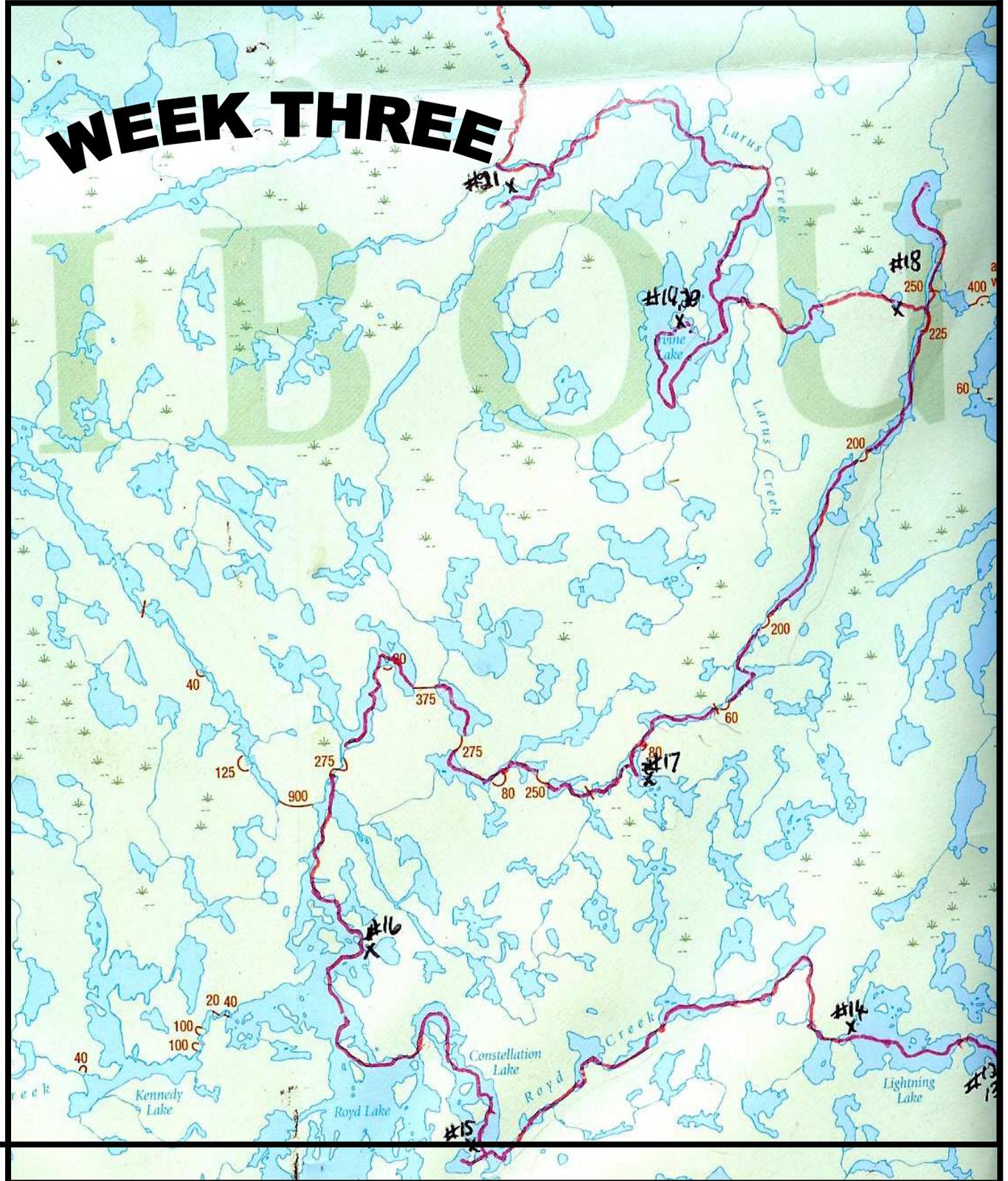
**September 14<sup>th</sup> (Monday)** There is a hint of autumn in the air. I observed it on the "marsh portage" where I dragged, pulled and pushed a 30 inch wide canoe down, over and around a 15 inch stream for a quarter of a mile. There was time to stand and look around the marsh. The tamaracks are beginning to change color. Lots of colors of green and yellows and I especially admire the smoky gold.

There are a number of concerns to be aware of when selecting a campsite. In this part of the world, there are few places where man has visited for an extended period of time and mostly just canoes pass through on their way to who knows where. In other words, one cannot count on locating a place where someone has been before. When I look for a campsite, there are three areas that must be present: 1) a flat sleeping area for the tent; 2) a tarp area... this requires trees and a flat area... the tent is usually close by or at times under the tarp, and 3) a kitchen area where the campfire and cooking and "warming the body" will take place. In addition, I prefer a campsite with morning sun as opposed to evening sun. I also need to be protected from the wind which usually is most severe from the north or west. Therefore, my choice campsite should have a southern or eastern exposure. A good canoe landing with easy access to water is preferred. In addition, a good firewood supply makes a site more desirable. I rate all of my campsites on a scale from "0" which is poor to "10" which is the best possible site. I have never camped in a "10" site preferring to believe that I will reach that "10" at the conclusion of my life. There is also the LNT (Leave No Trace" ethic). When I pack to leave a site, there should be little evidence that I intruded on the wilderness space. Fire rings are a concern. I remove them from most sites except the sites near portages or from the "established" sites with those monstrosity pits. There are times when completing a portage on the end of a large lake that a paddler prefers to set up camp rather than venture out into the big water. I leave those fire pits for future paddlers... for their possible emergency.

The sun was out in its full glory. I connected the Kindle to the charger and then set out on a paddle. I portaged over to a small but seldom visited lake. The surface was glass. I fished around the entire lake with no luck. I returned to Constellation and fished the entire south end of the lake... again with no luck. I returned to the campsite to discover that the Kindle appears not able to be charged. It's been in direct sunlight for 5-6 hours. I will have to accept the fact that there will be no reading material for the duration of the trip.

The weather and water were ideal for middle September. I decided to break camp and set up at the north end of Constellation. I zigged and zagged around numerous islands and approached the north shore but could not locate a suitable campsite. I quickly completed the 30 meter portage to Royd Lake. In a matter of thirty minutes, I had on the stringer two five pound pike and a nice three pound lake trout. To add to the excitement, I lost a very large lake trout when I could not land it into the canoe. I will eat well tonight. The campsite that I found is the best one yet. It sticks out on a bottleneck in Royd between the north and south ends of the lake. Two fire pits (one near the water and one more protected from the wind. Two great tent spots. Lots of firewood. It's only 3:00pm. Time ... trip time is becoming a concern. There are days, like today, that moving from one place to another is like a dream. I never seem to get too much "canoe time". I love the feeling of the paddle and the movement of the canoe through the water. I attempt to paddle as quietly as possible and get upset with myself when my paddle inadvertently "bangs" the side of the boat or when my canoe stroke is noisy. Today was a day to move and yet with all of my delay tactics (fishing and exploring near the old camp), I am still here at my new camp in mid afternoon... and still the water and canoe seem to be calling me for more. I am currently a week ahead of schedule. The weather that I have

experienced to date has been extraordinary.... much better than anticipated. I will paddle again this evening .... just for fun. When I planned for this trip, I never considered that my expected finishing time frame might not coincide with the completion of my route plan. I am not in a hurry. I've just been handed some of the nicest weather and paddle conditions possible.



**September 15<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday)** It's a very calm morning. No dew, which is usually a forewarning for inclement weather later in the day. I made coffee in the "on water" fire pit to maximize my early morning view. Again, at this hour, the lake is a mirror. The sun will not arrive for another hour due to my location. Not to worry, I will get plenty of sun today. I sit with binoculars at my side. The elusive moose, caribou and black bear have found a way to not show themselves as I travel through their environment. I remember an old saying...."for every animal that you see, fifty have seen you". I'm as quiet as possible (it's easy when you're on a solo). I see and hear plenty of loons but not always on some of the lakes that I expect to find them. They will be leaving soon for Mexico. Will it be after the next cold front? Eagles have been sparse since the first day on Siderock. They are totally absent on the burned out lakes and seem to avoid the new growth jack pine. The geese continue to migrate south; sometimes the sky is filled with multiple flocks honking as they pursue their winter destinations.

For now, I will enjoy the remaining time that I spend at this campsite, reorganize a few items, and perform some slight first aid..... but always in the back of my mind is the water and the canoe.... and with paddle in hand, it's a beckoning!

Upper Royd Lake is like a dream come true for a paddler. If "vision overload" is possible, today was one of those times. I slowly paddled around an intricate group of islands with attention-grabbing rock walls. The boat wove a haphazard pattern, as if it had no place to go. It seemed to get more stunning with each corner turned. The channel north leaving Royd Lake forms a connecting corridor to Murdock and Larus Lakes. It was possible to see people today. It didn't happen. I will return to Royd Lake again on a future trip. I traveled through seven no-name lakes today, each with a portage. Some were OK, some were muddy, and one.... the last one did not exist (or I couldn't find it). I ended up bushwhacking 300 meters through a boggy marsh with down trees and shoe sucking mud. I was exhausted and it was getting late. I had an idea of where I was going to camp and as I turned south toward that landform.... I spotted a mature woodland caribou swimming. I paddled closer as the caribou exited the lake. It stood broadside on a rock outcropping for me to observe. Paddler looking at caribou... caribou looking at paddler. Quite a sight. My campsite is 50 feet up a rock face looking west. The morning sun will arrive late, but that's alright. Caught a few fish today but they were small and quite honestly.... A night without fish will make me appreciate them more on another day. The chicken noodle soup, broth and jell-o will serve as dinner tonight.

**September 16<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)** Caribou Lake (that's my name).... It's morning. Just writing the name down on paper and thinking about spotting this elusive animal puts a smile on my face. Imagine.... the sixty-ninth lake that my boat has visited, the constant surveillance of shorelines and marshes.... and then.... what appears to be a large multi limbed branch moving quickly in the water? The antlers slowly appear as the animal emerges from the lake and the caribou stands broadside and watches us (the boat and I). Who knows, maybe over a breakfast of Labrador tea, the caribou is still in awe of us?

I've been alone but not lonely for seventeen days now. I'm good with this feeling. The one emotion that I do miss is laughter... the kind of laughter that has your eyes watering, your sides aching and your knees nearly buckling under. I have laughed. The sound of the loons, sometimes described as mimicking giggling girl scouts (no offense to the loons), that puts a smile on my face and happy feeling run through my body.

The paddle today went well and quickly... a gusty southwest wind helped me along as I traveled northeast. A couple of portages and then the most important decision of the trip. My travel plan included a trip on the "lost portages to Irvine Lake". The problem is that the portage route is not on the map and I could not locate it despite traveling up and down river for two hours. Eventually, I climbed a 45 foot high ridge and walked laterally to the river in hopes of locating the portage trail.

No luck. Decision time: 1) camp and look again the next day; 2) portage to the east to Murdock Lake and skip the Irvine Lake portion of the trip, or 3) bushwhack up over the ridge to find Irvine Lake the old fashion way. If you know anything about Mike Kinziger, you know that I decided on option #3. Let me set up the logistics for this action to be successful. Once over the ridge, there is a pond about a half mile to the west. That pond connects to a small lake further west by a small stream. The small lake then connects to a larger small lake by a stream about one half mile further west. And finally.... that larger small lake connects to Irvine Lake by a stream about three fourth of a mile further west. And so.... the adventure within the adventure began! Getting the canoe and gear to the top of the ridge was exhausting. Once on top, there were numerous ridges, most running north and south but occasionally a little west (west is where I needed to go). I began the search for the pond. I would carry as much as possible along the ridge, drop it off and go back for the canoe and the other pack (much like portaging). Every two or three stops I would check my GPS and compass. After awhile, I realized that I wasn't making significant progress. I was essentially going back and forth on the ridge where the walking was easy.... but here's the thing, this is what happened. Twice, not once, but twice, I "lost" my canoe or I "lost" my gear. I must have spent two hours wandering all over those ridges looking for my "stuff", often walking in circles. Very frustrating. I had no water. The small black flies were in my eyes and ears... everywhere. I was not making good decisions despite telling myself to make good decisions. And it was getting late in the afternoon. It did occur to me that I might have to camp up on the ridge with no water. I then changed my plan and started walking shorter distances between moves and I moved more directly west. Through trees, scrubs, and marsh.... west was my destination. Back and forth, back and forth. By then my legs were cramping up badly. I was certainly dehydrated. But finally I could see the pond. That last 100 meters was literally walking up to my mid thighs or waist, every step, until I reached the shoreline of that pond. Multiply that time two. It felt wonderful to be back in the canoe. I paddled to the middle of the pond and filled my water bottle. I must have "downed" two bottles full (I usually avoid taking water from a pond). The sun was nearly down. There was one rock on the shores of the pond. That rock became my home for the night. What would I have done without that rock? What would I have done if the weather had deteriorated? A quick refried beans meal and I was in the tent to sleep and recover. I slept well except for continuing leg cramps.

**September 17<sup>th</sup> (Thursday)** Confession.... I didn't really sleep very well. I kept waking and reviewing how I got to where I was and then the "what ifs" surfaced. Lots could go right, lots could go wrong. Two things for certain.... I do not want to make the same mistakes as yesterday and I'm determined to get to Irvine Lake. There was heavy dew on the tent when I crawled out of my sleeping bag.... that was a positive sign. A quick cup of coffee and oatmeal and that rock is possibly free of humans forever. I paddled to the outlet stream which was really a bunch of trickling water flowing through a thick alder swamp. So there I was, back to the shore and the woods carrying gear through some difficult terrain while attempting to parallel the marsh. It wasn't far but it took 1 ½ hours.... exhausting work. Up to the hips in water to put the canoe in the small lake and I was off to find the outlet stream. There was none! There was none! The next larger small lake was further away then all of the distance that I had covered since leaving the river the day before. It seemed as if attempting to parallel these marsh streams by "marching" through the woods was taking too much time (besides becoming frustrated when gear/canoe get lost). It was middle morning. Slightly less than one mile to get to the big small lake. Why not just pull the canoe through that marsh? That's what I did or started to do. But that proved too difficult. Pulling the canoe with the heaviest pack on my back and then going back for the second pack worked for awhile. But it was slow going and almost every step my feet would disappear knee to waist deep in the marsh. My GPS indicated that I was heading in the right direction but I was not making sufficient progress. Somehow, I dragged and

carried the canoe and gear back to the woods and ridges that paralleled the marsh. Back to plan one. Just keep moving. Don't stop. Small trips. Keep the red water proof bags elevated so they could be seen from a distance. Take a compass and GPS reading every two carries. It took all morning and a significant amount of time in the afternoon but I reached that larger small lake. My legs were virtually covered in blood from all of the cuts and bruises. I was exhausted in a way that I have not experienced in ages. On the positive side.... I remembered that this large small lake was supposed to be a connection lake for the lost portage route to Irvine. Sceptically, I paddled to the outlet stream realizing that I still had a mile to go. The outlet was small at first, about the width of my canoe but I was making progress. I dreaded the scenario of having to again pull the canoe and gear if this stream "dried up". Best news of the day.... the stream got wider and flowed into Irvine. It is difficult to describe what that felt like. I did it! I appreciate more every day out in this wilderness the ability to cover miles via the canoe. I paddled out into Irvine Lake. I dipped my water bottled in the lake. Irvine tasted wonderful. It was late afternoon. I paddled east and then south looking for a campsite. Along the way I caught two walleye and then spotted the best campsite of the trip.

As I look back, I am thankful for my persistence, for being able to remain relatively calm, for the compass and GPS and with the weather for cooperating with me. The first thing that I did when I arrived at camp (besides emptying the canoe) was to do laundry. All of the clothes that I had worn over the past two days needed cleaning. I soaked and scrubbed each item. I didn't bring soap on the trip. A clothesline was set up using my painter ropes from the canoe. I hung everything to dry. I set up my tent wearing only my dry camp shoes. I then took the empty canoe back out on the lake. It was relatively calm and I paddled about a mile along the shoreline and around an island. It's quite a stimulating feeling paddling naked out in the middle of this special wilderness. I even caught two more walleye for dinner. The fish and beef stew sure hit the spot.

**September 18<sup>th</sup> (Friday)** I slept as if I hadn't slept in days. Recollections of the past two days are becoming memories. I probably won't be complaining about established portages for the rest of the trip. My body needs to heal, especially my legs and feet. This wonderful campsite will be my home for another night. I plan to explore and fish today. There are a few items of gear that require repair.

The winds from the southwest were strong today and made on water time difficult. I did head out to the calmest shoreline, PFD securely on. My goal was to reach the southernmost portion of the lake. Before I could get there, I had a stringer full of fish.... three nice walleye and a ten pound northern pike, my largest fish of the trip. Fishing from a canoe is a challenge. I have a Yakima mount secured to the thwart in front of me with a "Scotty" fish pole holder attached. This allows me to fish while I paddle.... it's called trolling. When a fish takes the lure, I grab the pole and slowly work the fish to the canoe. I attempt to tire the fish out so I will have an easier time grabbing the fish when it nears the boat. I have no net. In the meantime, the canoe is quite vulnerable to the wind. On its own, it will turn sideways in the troughs which can easily capsize the boat. I tend to not fish in big water or big wind. I reach down with my right hand and must locate the gill slots on each side of the fish and squeeze tightly and lift the fish into the boat. The fish does not enjoy cooperating. Still holding the fish, I grab my pliers to remove the treble hooks. I then grab the stringer to attach the fish to a thwart. Towing a fish along the canoe impedes progress. I usually look for a landing with flat rocks. Once there, I use the fillet board attached to the inside of my canoe with Velcro. There is also a fish carrier bag attached in the canoe where I place the fillets until evening dinner. The fish carcass remains on the rocks as carrion for birds. With so many fish for dinner, I will supplement my meal with mashed potatoes and gravy. It will be a very filling meal.

**September 19<sup>th</sup> (Saturday)** The waves continued to collide with the rocky shoreline all night long. It seemed with every splash that the rain fly on my tent would rattle and made that sound that tarps

make when the wind is blowing. I didn't sleep well and was excited for morning light. My immediate concern was being able to launch the boat into the wind and be able safely paddle out of Irvine Lake. Once I reached the northern section of the lake, the wind slightly subsided and the walleye became very active. In fact, the waters in this lake seem to support a very vibrant walleye population. I ended up releasing quite a few fish.

The interconnectedness of all of these water venues: lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and marshes.... that interconnectedness sometimes overwhelms the paddler. Today was one of those days. Big lakes to bays to channels to small streams to no-name bodies of water.... on and on. It's mind baffling.... and along the way there are marshes and sheer rock walls. One never knows what to expect around the next bend.... but the canoe keeps moving and before you can adjust or prepare you're experiencing new terrain, new sights, new smells, and new sounds. It's sort of magic being out here alone... a dreamer's solitary confinement.

I found a nice little campsite just outside the start of the winding passage to Twin Lakes. The fire pit, tent area and canoe landing are all almost touching.... right on the banks of what I call Rhino Lake (it's really a no-name lake). I'm still healing from the bushwhack decision. I counted more than sixty cuts or scratches on my legs. My arms and hands also have scrapes and cuts. But on the positive side.... my feet seem to be healing.

#### **WEEK Four (10 Lakes including Irvine, Twin, and Larus)**

**September 20<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)** Happy birthday Deanna.... Happy birthday Cooper! It's easy to get melancholy thinking about those you love when there is so much time for thinking. I believe it was Aristotle who believed that the highest form of leisure was contemplation. To date, there has been considerable time to think and reflect on life. My favorite John Denver song, "Poems, Prayers and Promises" starts out with the line, "I've been lately thinking about my life time.....". There seem to be so many "triggers" that propel me back... a bird, a sound, a sight, the way the wind blows, the quiet, or sitting around the fire. I know that I am a visitor here but there is an attachment, a comfort, an inner peace, tranquility.... at least for the moment. I pen these words to these pages at dawn... maybe even before first light. A fire, coffee, a comfortable chair and a lake out before my eyes. I love the color of the morning... the shorelines with trees and rocks appear black, the water takes on a silvery white hue and the fire flickers alive with bright yellows and reds. And slowly, but surely the sun will rise and my body will feel its warmth from the glow. And so it is on this birthday day... the ones I love the most in life are connecting and talking and going about the day the way days tend to go.... except that there is a dad, a husband, a son and a grandpa spending a little more time today thinking about those that are special to him.... those who provide meaning, contentment and love in his life. Life is good!

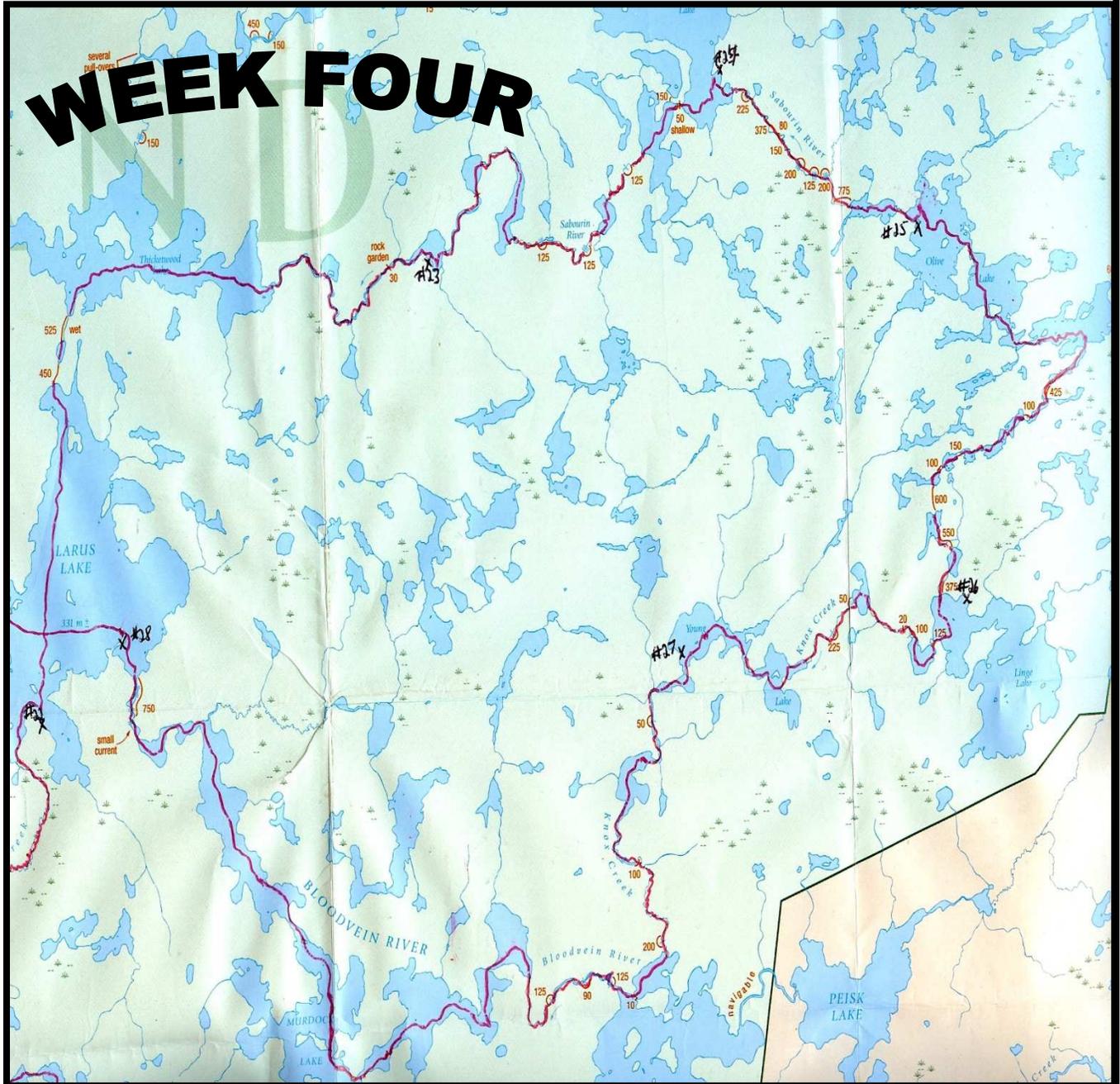
Late evening.... How can so much happen in one day? It was supposed to be a day to travel seven miles up and around a picturesque small creek. The wind and stream flow would be with me. That's the way it started. I savored every minute of it. And then a surprise... a cute little waterfall with a short portage. There were down trees on the portage path so I walked around the carnage only to create my own. One of my biggest fears on the trip were hornets or yellow jackets. Well.... I stepped on a nest and all hell broke loose. It didn't help that I was wearing shorts and a t-shirt. I dropped my pack right in the middle of that very active hive in my haste to "get the hell out of there". When all was retrieved and I was back in my water haven (the canoe), I counted seventeen stings... all on the back of my legs except for one on my left hand, which became swelled up and made it difficult to hold the paddle for part of the day. Bright side... it could have been worse! I continued up that beautiful stream with bird life, especially the ducks, in abundance. But the high pressure system followed me. It was the kind of wind that would have made a layover necessary on

most lakes. I did have to enter one lake and get into that “wind” situation briefly... but mostly I was in small water.

Visiting Twin Lakes and spending two days there was on my agenda. I found the outlet stream and attempted to paddle up that trickle of water to the lakes. I pulled and yanked and broke limbs and ripped out brush until I was stopped about 100 meters from the lake. I got out of the canoe and walked along the shoreline to the banks of Twin Lakes. Another decision time. There were two factors that weighed heavily in the action that followed: 1) I had learned a lesson from portaging gear and canoe through the woods and did not desire to do that again on the trip, and 2) the wind was so strong on the Twin Lakes that I would have not been able to get out on the lake until possibly late in the evening. So.... rather than wait out the wind or cross dry land, I paddled back to the main channel knowing full well that there were about seven more miles to paddle to get to Larus Lake. The stream that I paddled on to Larus was wonderful. I eventually entered Larus with the wind howling and blowing and making me very nervous. I grabbed the first rock with a flat spot that I could find and that became my camp. I used my camp stove for the first time to prepare mashed potatoes, gravy and a side dish of refried beans. And by the way.... Larus Lake is long and wide... perhaps five miles long by three miles wide, with very few islands. And I will need to cross it. I wonder how I will sleep tonight?

**September 21<sup>st</sup> (Monday)** Autumnal Equinox .... Days will start having less daylight and more darkness. This day turned out to be another day to remember. There are three parts to the story. The waves continued to hit the shoreline close to where I was attempting to sleep, although they did calm down considerably. I packed at 5:30am and left my camp by 6:00am. I needed to head north on Larus Lake.... about five miles as the crow flies. The surface of the lake was unpredictable. There was a little wind but the water was inconsistent.... like a bunch of toddlers splashing in a wading pool. It was a wise decision to leave early but one does get the feeling of being a bobber floating in a very big pond. I got to the north shore and celebrated with breakfast.... hot coffee and granola. Both portages out of Larus were long, over 500 meters each. The first one required the paddler to walk through 400 meters of that “shoe sucking”, ankle to knee deep mud. There was a brief paddle across a small lake to the next portage... and guess what? The map stated that the next portage was the wet portage. I had to shake my head and laugh. But... that portage wasn't as difficult as the first and it did get me to the next large lake that I had been worrying about.... Thicketwood Lake. What a beautiful lake! The first thing that I noticed was a small, rocky island in the bay. The shorelines were rock covered in all directions.... what a panorama! If the wind had been like it had been the past few days, I was prepared to camp and leave again early the next morning. But... clouds had rolled in and Thicketwood was relatively calm. Taking advantage of the conditions, I paddled east for almost five miles with plans of camping at the end of the lake. As I approached the far east end of the lake, I could see from a distance a float plane, a shoreline camp and a bunch of young and older people..... it may have been a church or scout group. Disappointed, but not deterred, I by-passed the crowd of campers and decided to paddle further east up the Sabourin River. Little did I know that the Sabourin was flowing toward me (I probably knew that) and most important, I didn't realize that this sweet little river didn't support camping, unless one was willing to camp in the marsh or the woods. So.... I paddled on through marshes and moving water, over numerous fallen trees, under tunnels of branches until I came to a 30 meter portage which by-passed a long grade I rapid. What I observed then made me loose by breath. A tornado that I had read about had blown through the park in July or August. There was a swath of destruction on both shorelines which made it impossible to walk through. I had no choice but to line my canoe up the rapid. Of more concern was the destruction. I have no idea how a tent, tarp or camper could survive in a condition like that. And here I sit writing in a journal barely one half mile from all of that chaos. And there seems to be a storm on the

horizon. The no-name lake where I camp possessed the first rock and first decent place to camp in the four miles upstream since I entered the Sabourin River. I am happy to be here but even more relieved that Larus and Thicketwood lakes are behind me.



**September 22<sup>nd</sup> (Tuesday)** A north wind blew through camp last night.... that's not a misprint. A high velocity north wind blew through camp last night. I was prepared. The tarp was erected to deflect a direct north wind. Dry firewood and all of my bags, gear and tent were under the tarp. The canoe was tied to a couple of trees. I awoke to cool air and the sounds of ducks. This was the first cool day of the trip. The heat in the form of fog was rising across the panorama of my view looking east. Spectacular! Hot coffee, a clear sky and the morning sunrise warmed this old and battered body. This has become a more respected campsite.

As I reflect back on the last week of travel, it seems certain that my chosen route is not frequently traveled. That is especially evident on the portages. It's been relatively dry for the past three weeks. Yet, on the portage trails, the only tracks are those of moose or caribou and of course .... me ... as I return to make a second portage trip. No human has walked these trails in September! The Sabourin River is becoming quite the challenge. The current seems to be getting more rapid. There are more and more down trees across the river that require the "balancing act". That's when the paddler pulls along side of a tree perched across the river, gets out of the canoe and stands on the tree and pulls the canoe up and over the obstacle while balancing on the deadfall. Most often the canoe cannot be pulled along the side of the tree which requires more balancing to move over the top of all of the gear to reach the log.... but you get the picture.... and it's fun for the first dozen times... but there is a limit! The scenery along the river has also changed since earlier in the trip. There are actually hard wood stands... places where the deciduous forest is more prominent than the pine. It's a great time of the year to view huge birch trees and small beech and even maple. The Sabourin River also starts to narrow as I reach the source, which I believe is Bigshell or Olive Lake. There were four portages today... easy compared to most that I have walked but each one today bypassed a clear and fast moving rapid. One in particular was spectacular.... It may even be called Sabourin Falls. I could hear it a mile away. A loud sounding rapid always gets my heart racing. I get extremely excited, especially when it gets into view. I realize how fortunate I am to be able to access places like this.

Bigshell Lake was my goal today. There are some sheer rock formations on the south end of the lake. I paddled immediately under them, thinking perhaps that there might be pictographs. I located a campsite on the east shore.... a very convenient place with most of the elements that I look for in a site. The weather was cooler today but I experienced another beautiful day and will sleep well again, especially after a dinner of Louisiana Gumbo and fresh walleye.

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> (Wednesday)** It's a chilly morning on Bigshell Lake. I even had to break out warm socks and long underwear to stay warm in my sleeping bag. I guess that is why I've been carrying the cool weather clothing mile after mile. And speaking of miles.... today will be a "work day". There are eight scheduled portages on the route to Olive Lake... and they are long ones. My estimate is that I will travel over land nearly 3 ½ miles today.... and the same fate awaits me tomorrow if I attempt to reach Linge Lake.

I arrived at Olive Lake a couple of hours ahead of my schedule. The portages today were the best of the trip.... high and dry.... and get this.... blueberries so thick on the vine that the berries are laying on the ground. I ate to my heart's content and picked a pint that I will save to eat on my birthday. I kind of wish I would have brought pancake flour for that occasion. The stream that I paddled today is a continuation of the Sabourin River, although it's hardly a river anymore. It's very narrow (canoe width), winding and still with good current..... it's a challenge. A person has to immensely enjoy canoeing to enjoy paddling upstream on the Sabourin.... or maybe it was a test? The good news is that eventually my route returns through Larus Lake. Ever since I portaged north out of Larus, I have been gaining elevation. The wind was blowing steadily as I entered Olive Lake. It

would have been a chore to paddle south. Almost immediately near the portage into Olive, I could see a well used campsite sticking out from the shoreline. It will be one of my favorite sites. To the far south there is evidence of a recent burn, but it's beautiful right here. I had time to do a few chores and even took a swim. As I was standing there air drying on the far end of a rock that juts out into the water, I realized that I didn't even check to see if there was anyone else in sight. It's been more than three weeks without seeing a canoe..... but that's one of the reasons that I am visiting the Woodland Caribou. I will enjoy this evening.

**September 24<sup>th</sup> (Thursday)** A perfect September morn. It was seasonably cool. The fire had hot water boiling in minutes. I sat by the fire warming but realized that the only sounds on this calm morning resonated from the crackling wood of the burning wood. With coffee and chair, I moved to the end of my peninsula and sipped and listened. Can one tire of the song of the loon? Or can one not be tempted to pick up the fish rod when fish rise in the glassy water? Do people ever just watch and listen to flocks of geese as they migrate? Can you hear the sun rise? I know you can feel it. There is a more permanent warmth that comes from the sun than from a fire or hot drink. Last evening in the twilight, a bull woodland caribou began the seasonal ritual of looking for mates with a bugling that went on for at least an hour. I could see him on the tip of another peninsula about 100 meters away. He thrashed and called and even splashed in the water. It was quite a performance. How fortunate to be able to experience these types of phenomenon's.

The wind picked up velocity quite early which resulted in a quick exit from camp. Olive Lake, at least the southern portion is a labyrinth of bays and peninsulas that require scrutinizing map and compass work.... but it's fun to paddle through... even the burned out sections. The last mile on Olive found the canoe heading a mile and a half into a fairly strong wind. The channel heading southwest was reached and calmer water prevailed. The rest of the day.... it was beautiful. It was spent paddling very narrow no-name lakes and portaging between them. Seven portages... slightly more than four miles carrying gear through woodland on some of the nicest trails that I have experienced to date. No wonder I'm tired.... that's more than eight miles of portaging in two days. I reached Linge Lake. It's large.... and it's forgettable .... nothing special. I may have found the only camping area .... at least on the north end of the lake. I did catch seven pike today. I released them all. My meals even without fish have been very good. I believe there is a spectrum of people who fall somewhere on the "Live to eat" vs "Eat to live". I eat to live but do enjoy fresh, non processed foods or foods fresh from the garden. Tonight it was Spanish rice and fish. As I reached in my dinner food sack to retrieve week five meals, I found a birthday card. Outside contact! The card sits in my tent waiting for this old paddler to turn 62 in the morning.

**September 25<sup>th</sup> (Friday)** Milestones..... my 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday.... This one spent alone in the Woodland Caribou wilderness. Other trip milestones have been reached over the past few days. On the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the trip, I reached the northern most point at my campsite on Bigshell Lake. On the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the trip near the end of Olive Lake, I completed a few sweep strokes and the canoe would not head any further east. When I looked at the map and realized that these two benchmarks had been reached, there was for the first time a feeling that, "I'm going home". I'm heading home!" That may be the reality, but navigating through this wilderness keeps me glued in the moment.... not the future. There is the map to read, portages to locate and cross, camps to find and set up. Everything I see and hear... everything.... I experience for the first time. This 62 year old body and mind cannot absorb it all. There is an overload.... an overload that occurs every few hours, every day, every week and for the entire month. And for the record..... the southernmost point was reached on the 5<sup>th</sup> day in Irregular Lake. The start and finish at Wallace Lake are the western milestones.

If Mike Kinziger could select any activity to perform on his birthday it would be canoeing.... and the canoeing today again was special. After saying good-bye to Linge Lake, the route entered Knox Creek. What a beautiful, small, clear and winding stream it is. There were portages (five) but most of the day was spent meandering downstream.... Back and forth, back and forth. The canoe moves so effortlessly... so smoothly, especially with a well placed cross draw and the current at my back. A great paddle on another perfect weather day.

Now get this. I am spending the night of the day that turned 62 on Young Lake....is there any irony there? I'll wake up on Young, drink Young, look Young? I'm perched about fifty feet up on a bald rock looking northeast. My tent is pitched on six inches of soft green moss. Three perfect size walleye were caught right in front of the camp. And.... the morning sun may be spectacular. Quite a birthday in 2009!

**September 26<sup>th</sup> (Saturday)** Clouds in the sky and a rather warm evening last night. This view, as the morning comes alive, is mesmerizing. My goal today is to arrive at Knox Lake..... the challenge.... lack of a topo map for the travel route. Ten Canadian topographic maps were acquired for the trip. Unfortunately, there are two sections of my route... perhaps ten to fifteen total miles that are not on the maps that I purchased. I will have to rely on the Provincial Park map and my GPS. The GPS Canadian map series was also purchased for the trip. Most of the travel today will be on Knox Creek, which makes route finding an easier task. Today is also the end of week four. The mind and body are holding up well. The only ailment is the swelling in the left foot big toe. I can't complain. So much could go wrong.... so many possible injuries.... sprained ankle, a serious burn, a poke in the eye, depression, or any number of bodily functions not working. I'll take the big toe!

Young Lake to Larus Lake! That's right, Young Lake to Larus Lake. Call it exuberance, opportunistic, safety or fear driven.... call it what you want, but call it a long, long day on the water. The scenario: threatening weather in early morning and ahead of me over the next two days..... two of the largest, longest, widest and potentially dangerous lakes where wind or severe weather could cause extended layovers. That thought sat in the back of my mind. This paddler prefers calmer water, smaller lakes and gentle breezes. Leaving Young Lake, with an eye on the sky. Knox Creek becomes clogged and weed chocked. ... good bird life but not a particularly good paddle. About two miles before Knox Lake, the creek gets narrow, fast and creates a challenge to maneuver around the numerous 90 degree bends. In short... the kind of paddling that I enjoy. I was ahead of schedule (remember ... no map) and there was a "calm" in the air. A calm of high clouds, very light breezes and excellent travel conditions. I had recently entered the infamous Bloodvein River. The Bloodvein eventually flows into Lake Winnipeg and is known for its challenging whitewater. The Bloodvein runs fast and clear. There are three rapids to portage before the Bloodvein flows into Murdock Lake. Each of those waterfalls are majestic, powerful, beautiful... the kind of waterfall that draws one to sit on the banks as close as possible to the falls to ponder river structure.... standing waves, holes, eddies, gradient, and all of the turbulence and chaos that allows the river to make the sound that is unique to each rapid. I suspect that much of the "upriver" paddling that I had endured up the Sabourin was lost quickly from the big gradient drops in these three rapids.

At the mouth of the Bloodvein, where it enters Murdock Lake, I was able to paddle to within 50 feet of my first moose on the trip. Unbelievable.... It took 28 days to see a moose. A bull and cow were together with the bull making grunting and deep throated mating calls.

Murdock Lake... perhaps nine miles of open water half of it heading west and half heading north.... the two directions where the wind can be most ferocious. With fairly calm winds, the canoe was pointed west, the compass was set up to assist staying on course and the paddling begun (as if I hadn't paddled far enough that day). About four miles later, the canoe turned north. Conditions were still excellent and five more miles were finished. Sigh of relief! Murdock done! At the end of

Murdock Lake, the search for a campsite began, with no luck. The lake ends by flowing into a swampy stream that flows for about a mile before it enters Larus Lake. Along that stretch, I was able to observe clear pictographs on a steep rock wall and two more moose, again about 50 feet away, but without the guttural sounds. Still hoping for a campsite, the last portage to Larus was reached. It was a long one.... 750 meters. It was getting late, weather still threatening. No choice! Another mile of paddling on Larus, still looking for a campsite and a “sort of” place to camp was found. It was vulnerable to a huge storm, but again, little choice. The tent went up, the headlamp went on, a cup of granola and that’s about as much energy as this old body could muster in one day. Young to Murdock to Larus... And now I will sleep thinking about the pending storm and the five mile crossing of Larus Lake. Never a dull moment.

**WEEK Five (50 Lakes including Larus, Thicketwood, Bigshell, Olive, Linge, Young, Murdock, Larus, North Simeon, South Simeon, Dunstan, Wanda, Terry, Carroll, Broken Arrow, Crystal, Siderock and Wallace)**

**September 27<sup>th</sup> (Sunday)** Restless night. Steady rain, but a quiet rain. Morning... something in the air. I could feel it but Larus Lake was calm. Leaving early worked once, so I was on the water by 6:45am with lots of wet “stuff”. The paddle west was steady. I am surprised how comfortable that I am getting on big water. The sun surfaced. Off to the west was an enormous cloud bank. There was distant thunder. It got very cold. The lake turned to glass. There was something going to happen. If only I could get past the last portage on the Bloodvein (which flows out of Larus to the west). Surely, there would be a place to set up a tarp? But for now... more glass paddling. The mind begins to imagine all types of disaster scenarios. What to do? Paddle faster! I completed the portage as the rain began to fall. The canoe raced to the shoreline and the tarp was set up quickly. Crash, thunder, boom! For about three hours, I thought that I might be blown away. As the storm subsided, out came my camp stove. Hot coffee. There was such a relief... not from the storm... there was relief that the big lakes: Larus, Thicketwood, Big Shell, Olive, Linge and Murdock were navigated safely. It’s difficult to describe the relief, but that cup of coffee and hot oatmeal tasted as good as anything on the trip.

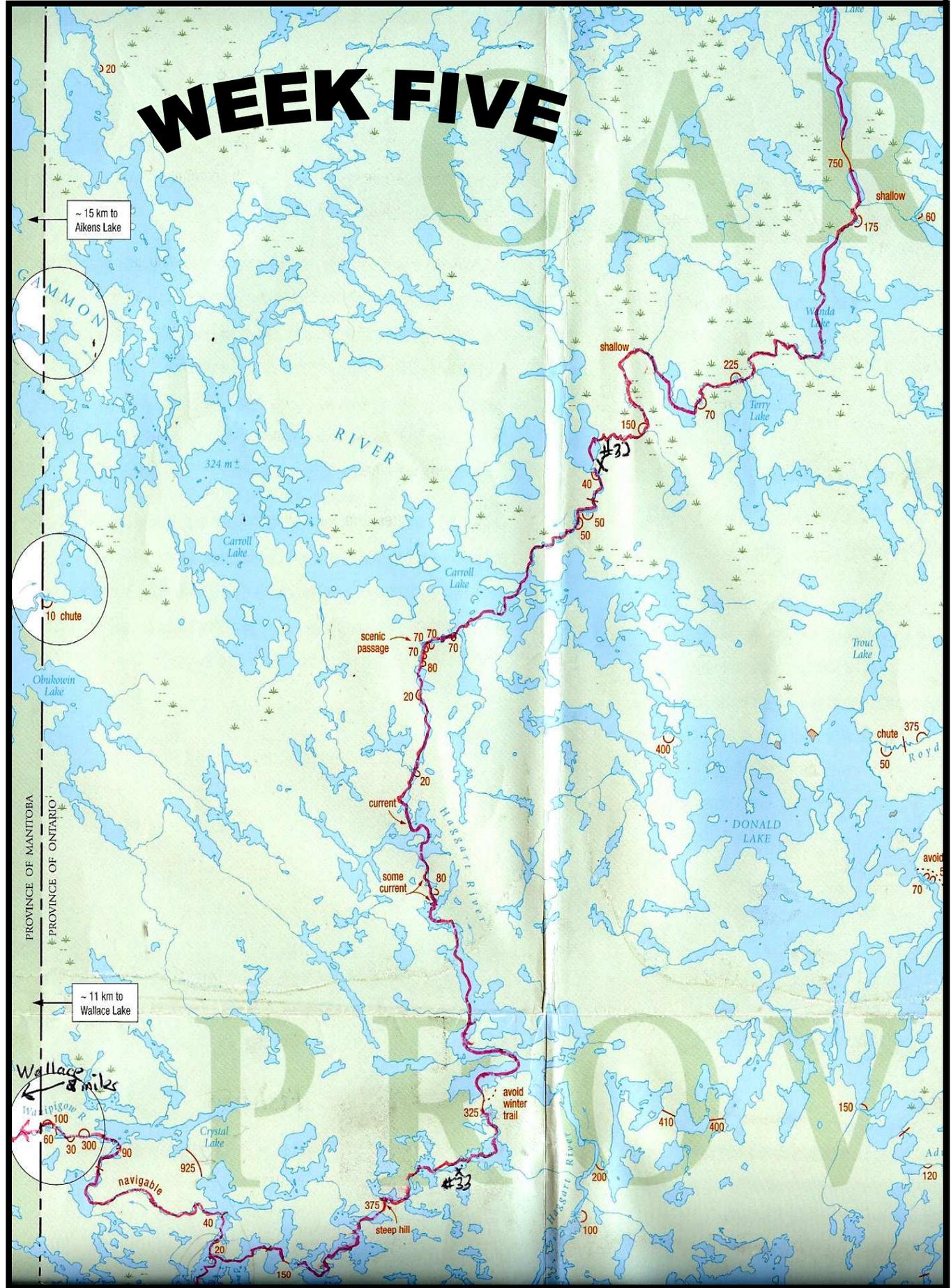
By early afternoon the storm had stopped and the canoe headed toward Simeon Lake. It was only a few more miles on the Bloodvein and then south. There were still huge clouds but there was also sun. The west wind was causing white caps on the water but the southerly direction provided some protection. I found a simple little spot out of the weather. I caught two walleye. I’m watching an eagle eye those carcasses that I placed on rock not far from my camp. It soars overhead and returns to the safety of its tree. I suspect that the eagle will have more patience than I, especially when I retire shortly.

**September 28<sup>th</sup> (Monday)** The paddler, boat and camp survived an air assault last evening. There was high velocity wind, rain, hail and light snow. The howling wind continues throughout the morning. Whitecaps break in the water just feet away from my fire pit. But this site is protected. It’s tucked away in a small bay. I sit comfortably with layers of clothing and an eye to the sky. I have been fortunate on this trip to not have experienced a day that has “locked me into camp”. This type of “weather from the north” is what I was deeply concerned about as I paddled through large lakes to get to this point in the trip. I am at peace sitting here. I have a nice fire, hot drinks and time to experiment with a late breakfast. The eagle, my eagle, found its way to the fish remains last night. That’s not a surprise. He is now perched in that same tree as yesterday seemingly keeping an eye on me. Every 20 – 30 minutes, he lights off and soars around the sky.... as if to entertain me. The

binoculars haven't been useful (for the most part) on this trip, except in camp. In the canoe, the binoculars tend to give me a sense of vertigo.... a sense that I'm about to fall in the lake. I am also not able to look over either shoulder as I paddle for the same reason. Perhaps a metaphor for my life...."Look ahead and not backward"!



# WEEK FIVE



It's late afternoon. The canoe is basking in the intermittent sunshine. It has not left its forest resting place. The wind has not abated. This small piece of property, however, has been kept protected by its south facing location. The temperature on the top of the hill, where the tent is pitched, is easily 20 degrees cooler than down near the shoreline. I've had to venture out of this protection on "water runs" to a rock in the direct line of wind. I come back reminding myself of how good a decision staying for the day has been. In many ways, not having a book or a book reading device has forced me to stay more in my own mind.... forced me to face my present and my future. I have spent countless hours recalling persons, places, and events in my life. There is no escaping the mind. I came on this trip to attempt to get in touch with myself through the interaction with the wilderness. I may just be starting to understand what it is, how it affects me, who I am, what is important in my life. Life's questions. Always the search for answers. Mostly though.... more and more questions. Contemplation!

I'm not surprised by the following observations, although others might be: 1) I haven't experienced fear.... fear of the challenge or fear of the unknown and 2) I haven't been lonely although I have been alone. Responsibility for nearly every element of my life in the Woodland Caribou rests with me. I'm OK with that. It's a welcome sensation.

**September 29<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday)** There was a solid piece of ice preventing me from opening my water bottle this morning. Cold, cold, cold. It was an uncomfortable night... wind blowing constantly and the frigid temperature. There is a limit as to how much time I can spend in a sleeping bag or tent. These shorter days with cold evenings and mornings are making the trip seem long. I sat close... real close to my wood fire as dawn arrived. There still were those ominous looking storm clouds, but the wind had subsided enough to allow me to pack and move on. This is one campsite that I am happy to finally leave.

Simeon Lake is a gorgeous lake with a good smattering of islands, bays and peninsulas. It requires some fine tuned navigation skills to get to the southern end of the lake. I did get slightly sidetracked (lost)... partly due to the snow flurries and the cold that wouldn't leave my body. Portages were difficult to locate today but I did eventually arrive at South Simeon Lake. Not much of a lake for camping or scenery but it was nice to catch a walleye and pike for dinner that evening. Further south, the canoe entered Simeon Creek. The first mile was beautiful... high rock walls and a narrow moving stream. The last two miles of the creek were shallow and boulder strewn. The canoe took as badly a beating from partially submerged rocks as at any time since the trip started. And there was nothing that I could do, despite what I consider an above average ability to read the water. I wonder quite often how a tandem canoe would fair in this terrain. Even the portages seem built for a solo canoe. On a positive note, the shallow water stretch warmed me up. It took most of the day.

Dunstan Lake could well be one of my favorite lakes. Lots of unique rock formations, potential campsites, small islands.... I like it.... I like the feel of this lake. I found a campsite with my required pre-requisites, southern exposure, possible morning sun and abundant firewood. I am writing in this journal in the dark with my headlamp and heat from the fire. At the pace that I am currently moving, barring any future storms, I may finish my planned route nearly a week ahead of my original estimated time. I think I'm ready to go home. I'm not in a hurry. I will continue to paddle and fish and explore. But.... It's getting time to go home. Each evening about this time, I activate my SPOT GPS. The SPOT relies on satellite triangulation to send one of three messages to designated people with computer access. The three possible messages: 1) I'm OK; 2) Help, and 3) 911. There is a fee for this service. The designated people receive the message and a GPS location that they can access on Google Earth or on the Canadian maps (if they have then loaded). It must be interesting for those that care about me to receive an update each day and to check and note my progress.

Sometimes I wish the opposite were happening, i.e., it would be nice to know that those I care about are also OK.

**September 30<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)** I'll be taking the 750 out of Dunstan this morning. That's the 750 meter portage. That can be good and bad. Good... It'll warm me up. Bad... wet, cold feet for the rest of the day. It was slightly warmer last night and I slept well, but it's still rather cool. The wind shifted to the south last night, which is usually welcomed, except when my campsite faces south. Lots of smoke and ash to deal with, as the campfire warms me before daylight. Before I pack, I will prepare potato pancakes and gravy. I'm trying to eat more for the past few days to provide my body with more calories so that I stay warmer.

It doesn't take much time to get packed and ready to leave. Soon, I will be on the lake and then the next lake and the adventure continues. I've come to the conclusion that I don't understand wind or maybe it's the wind conditions in September of 2009. How can it be so cold and windy with the wind blowing from the south east? How come the wind has been predominantly from the east when that is the direction that one expects little or no wind? So... with a southerly wind, I head south. Crossing lower Dunstan Lake was work but there is a special beauty in this lake. It is one that I would enjoy returning to. The portage at the end of Dunstan may be the most interesting stretch of trail encountered. It is flat and clear enough that it would be considered a beginner mountain bike single-track.... except for the 50 feet at the beginning and at the end. It is not uncommon to have to walk ankle to knee deep in mud or a watery bog to reach a lake.

This day was another dream day if you like to paddle. Simeon Creek flows slowly and is just wide enough for a canoe to maneuver through freely. There are grass lines banks and boulders in the stream to avoid. And then, almost in the middle of nowhere, there are a series of rocks that require a portage. The creek also meanders.... sometimes in the 90 – 180 degree range. I was startled a number of times today when after turning a bend in the river, the canoe would "spook" ducks, geese, beaver and a moose. My biggest surprise was coming up along side of a floating white object which turned out to be a swan when it raised its head out of the water. The canoe actually touched the swan before it panicked and flew to safety. I paddled south through Wanda Lake, where that south wind made it a "long haul". So here I am.... on a no-name lake with a nice fire to keep me warm. It's dark but calm. The wind has ceased, at least temporarily. I will sleep well again. Tomorrow I will enter another portion of the park where I have to rely on the Provincial Park map. I may be only two or three nights away from Wallace Lake. I have mixed feelings about finishing early. It doesn't seem nearly possible that I have been out here alone for nearly five weeks. As the days and hours tick away until the end of this grand adventure, I am filled with melancholy.

And on another note.... A caribou at the end of this lake has been entertaining me with his bugling. What a wonderful place!

**October 1<sup>st</sup> (Thursday)** Seldom in one's life does one work so hard under such adverse conditions to accomplish so little. There was a point today when I pulled the canoe up on shore, laid myself down on a flat rock and did not want to move for the rest of the day. But I'll get to that.

The last stretch of Simeon Creek (before it enters the Gammon River), about 3-4 miles, confronted the paddler with three portages and two "walk down the middle of the stream pulling your canoe over the rocks" challenges. In addition, there may have been ten beaver dams to walk over. It was still early when I arrived at Carroll Lake but already the southeast wind was problematic. After thirty days, my confidence in crossing white capped water with my paddling skill and the performance of my canoe has immensely increased and I headed out without hesitation. Locating the mouth of the Haggart River was my next test. Remember.... big water and no topo map. The Haggart River is unique to this area because it flows north. On this day, paddling the Haggart was not

as positive an experience as I would have expected. There are ten portages which are all situated near major waterfalls or rapids. There are a number of reasons for my less than positive experience: 1) the current was especially strong and I was paddling against it; 2) the wind... the wind was "capping and troughing" all day... so much so that at times it seemed as if the canoe was not moving at all despite my kneeling position and increased number of paddle strokes; 3) the portages are located in "dangerous" or difficult to reach places, especially when approached from the north, and 4) the Haggart is a difficult river to find your way around (without a map).

Early in the afternoon, I had to take a break and get off the river... the current and winds were too much! My goal for the day had been to reach a campsite far enough to the west that Siderock Lake would be possible to reach on the next evening.... which would become my last evening. I have to admit that I have the "I'm ready to go home" bug. Therefore, stopping was not an option. The GPS came in handy.... was crucial today... three times. I don't know how an "average" paddler can navigate these interconnected lakes, streams, creeks and bluffs without a compass, GPS (with Canadian maps) and the topographic maps (1:1:50,000 series). Well.... I found my way off the Haggart which means that I did get back in my canoe and paddled into the wind about four more miles.

Another unique campsite... on the banks of a narrow no-name lake with a view of a high bluff to the north... and no wind in camp. I'm very tired (fourteen portages and the wind today). The sky looks clear... that means cold but it may also let me begin paddling early in the morning. Who knows what adventure is in store for me tomorrow? Will I be going home after one more night or will the wind cause me to layover for a day or two?

**October 2<sup>nd</sup> (Friday)** The wind began at 5:00am... it was light at first but began to gust. I lay awake listening and thinking about the day about to begin. I was still tired and a bit "gun shy" from the difficulties that I had encountered the previous day. It was still dark as I packed. More wind! A couple of cups of that special morning coffee and walks down to the shoreline to determine when I could safely depart... that is, when I could see where I was going. I was dressed in my warmest clothing. The initial difficulty was the cold, icy mist that was attached to my glasses. With the wind blowing, there were also the watery eyes. I needed to "route find" my way to a 375 meter portage which the map indicated was "steep". It was an exciting couple of hours picking my way past islands and bays without getting too far north or south. The "steep" portage turned out to be one of the better trails that I walked and re-walked.... by this juncture of the trip, portaging has become instinctive.... automatic.... heavy pack and small stuff first, return, and food pack and canoe second. Always the same.... same hands, same place for paddles.... routine. Portaging has become easy.... almost restful... a time to stretch the legs.... a time to enjoy walking through the various terrains. It was still cold after the steep portage but there was no moisture.... just wind from the northeast and huge, threatening clouds. I decided to keep moving with an eye on the clouds.

My next short term goal was to reach Broken Arrow Lake, but first there two more jagged shaped lakes that needed to be carefully maneuvered through. I didn't want to get off track at this time, especially if there was any hope of reaching Siderock Lake by late afternoon. The Haggart River and the lakes in between that system on the way to Broken Arrow Lake may be some of the most beautiful lakes in the park. I will strongly consider returning and paddling this stretch in reverse order.... southwest to northeast).

A strange thing happened when I reached Broken Arrow Lake. But first.... Broken Arrow Lake is one of the few lakes on this trip that remotely sounds like it has a Native American name. When my canoe "hit" that point where five weeks earlier I had passed, I had finally completed the "loop". At that exact moment and for the first time all day, the sun popped out and then disappeared again for

the rest of the day. I could feel a type of closure.... a feeling that something special had just happened.... a very special moment in my life.

From Broken Arrow there was more paddling north into the wind and then west on the long, meandering stream that helps connect to the next lake on my way to Crystal Lake. A check of the time at Crystal Lake... 12:15pm. The campground at Wallace Lake was now about 8-10 miles away (including the meandering switchbacks on the Wanipigow River. There were also six more portages. The wind would become a tailwind.

One more personal goal on this strange day... there was an end in sight..... an end that seemed so distant and impossible only a day before. The body was strong, the mind determined. One more night or day in this wind was not desirable. One more night or day with the threatening weather was not desirable. I was off! It took four hours and forty-five minutes to reach the Wallace Lake take-out. I thought about stopping in Siderock Lake but kept moving. Along the way, I passed Greg (the first person that I had met at the start and the last person that I had contact with until now). More closure. Wallace Lake was white capping and surging, but was not impassible. I was finally in the company of people, automobiles, cabins.... civilization. I even had to have my car "jump started" because the battery was dead. Everything was loaded and I was on my way by 5:15pm.

It's a 1600 mile drive back to Idaho. I passed through customs by 9:45pm. None of the towns from there on had vacancies at their motels. Eventually at near midnight, I parked the car off the highway and crawled one more time into my sleeping bag and then drove eighteen hours straight the next day. On the way, I paralleled the Yellowstone River for 500 miles which brought back memories from 1985 when a partner and I set the long distance paddling record on this river..... but that's another story.

<b>FACTS AND FIGURES</b>	
<b>Total Length of the Trip in Days</b>	<b>36 Days</b>
<b>Length of Time without Human Contact</b>	<b>35 Days</b>
<b>Total Miles Covered on the Trip</b>	<b>275 or More Miles</b>
<b>Number of Lakes Visited (named and not named)</b>	<b>151 Lakes</b>
<b>Number of Portages on Trip</b>	<b>136 Portages</b>
<b>Total Miles of Portages</b>	<b>55 or More Miles</b>
<b>Total Number of Different Campsites</b>	<b>29 Sites</b>
<b>Total Weight of Food</b>	<b>38 Pounds</b>
<b>Number of Breakfast Meals Brought on Trip</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Number of Dinner Meals Brought on Trip</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Number of Snacks Brought on Trip</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Equipment and Gear Brought on the Trip</b>	<b>-----</b>
<b>Canoe and Canoe Accessories</b>	<b>6 Items</b>
<b>Cooking Equipment (includes 9 gas canisters)</b>	<b>22 Items</b>
<b>Clothing</b>	<b>24 Items</b>
<b>Camping Gear</b>	<b>11 Items</b>
<b>Fishing Gear (includes numerous lures and jigs)</b>	<b>16 Items</b>
<b>Personal Items</b>	<b>9 Items</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<b>11 Items</b>
<b>Total Miles to and from Wilderness Parking</b>	<b>3200 Miles</b>
<b>Weight at start of Trip</b>	<b>176 Pounds</b>

Weight at end of Trip	158 Pounds
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## WEATHER REPORT

August of 2009 may have been the rainiest, wettest month in Woodland Caribou history which resulted in high stream flows and very soggy, wet portages. September of 2009 set the record as the warmest and driest month in history in Woodland Caribou. Much of what this paddler experienced was directly related to these conditions.

## EPILOGUE

Upon my return to Wallace Lake and civilization, a reality hit me. There was no place left to go. The end of the trip was surreal. I've told people the essence of my trip. Most people seem or pretend to try to be interested, cordial. It didn't take long for the euphoria or the overwhelming sense of accomplishment to fade. After awhile, it seemed easy to believe that if I want something bad enough... that what I desire is no less than what I deserve. Mistaking passion for insight, I now realize that successfully completing this trip changed almost nothing. But I came to understand that the wilderness lakes and this Canadian environment make a poor vessel for dreams. Dreams are just dreams. But I live to tell the real story. And it is my story! It's a wonderful story. The fact that so little went wrong is largely a matter of chance.... the feeling of immortality may have something to do with it. Had I not returned or if some serious injury would have occurred, some people may have been quick to say that I had a death wish or that the aging process had progressed beyond my ability. I realize that if I suffer or am guilty of anything, it is exuberance, enthusiasm, confidence and trust in my ability to live in the moment. The most important moment is the one that I am living. There is only one moment. Only the moment has true value, for it is here. The moment is neither lost in yesterday nor does it long for tomorrow. I do not believe that one should try to find in the present the security of the past. I believe that they would soon discover that they are standing still and don't realize that to stand still is to move backward. I am not a person who stands still nor do I plan to!

**WOODLAND CARIBOU WEEKLY MENU - 2009**

<b>WEEK ONE</b>		<b>WEEK THREE</b>		<b>WEEK FIVE</b>	
Yukon Gold Potatoes	Granola	Yukon Gold Potatoes	Granola	Loaded Baked Potatoes	Granola
Vegetable Beef Soup	Granola	Refried Beans	Granola	Vegetable Beef	Granola
Beef Stroganoff	Granola	Chicken Noodle Soup	Granola	Refried Beans	Granola
Chicken Noodle Soup	Granola	Beef Stroganoff	Granola	Spanish Rice	Oatmeal
Mushroom Stuffing	Oatmeal	Louisiana Gumbo	Oatmeal	Chicken Noodle Soup	Oatmeal
Minestrone	Oatmeal	Beef Stew	Oatmeal	Louisiana Gumbo	Oatmeal
Navy Bean Soup	Oatmeal	Chicken Flavored Rice	Oatmeal	Darn Good Chili	Oatmeal
<b>WEEK TWO</b>		<b>WEEK FOUR</b>		<b>EMERGENCY</b>	
Roasted Garlic Potatoes	Granola	Roasted Garlic Potatoes	Granola	Roasted Garlic Potatoes	Granola
Beef Stew	Granola	Mushroom Stuffing	Granola	Yukon Gold Potatoes	Oatmeal
Chicken Rice & Pasta	Oatmeal	Chicken Fettuccini	Oatmeal	Butter & Herb Potatoes	Oatmeal
Navy Bean Soup	Oatmeal	Refried Beans	Oatmeal		
Spanish Rice	Oatmeal	Beef Stew	Oatmeal		
Darn Good Chili	Oatmeal	Minestrone	Oatmeal		
Refried Beans		Loaded Baked Potatoes			

**In Addition:**

- Beef or Chicken Bouillon (1-2 cups per day)
- Coffee: One Container per day (3-5 cups of coffee)
- Jell-O: Three cups per week
- Cooking Oil: 3 Tablespoons per day
- Stove Fuel: Two canisters per week (plan on using a stove 4-5 days a week especially when it rains)

**NOTE:** All dinner and breakfast meals were placed in zip lock bags and secured with a hair tie (rubber band). All of the dinners for each were then placed in a vacuum sealed "seal-a-meal" bag with a label taped to the front with the weekly menu information.

**Breakfasts:** All oatmeal and granola meals contained brown sugar, powdered milk and a handful of M & M's.

**Dinners:** All dinners also contained salt and pepper. In addition, most of the dinners also included about 3/4 to a cup of broken up angel hair spaghetti. The label and cooking directions were also included in each dinner bag.

## WOODLAND CARIBOU EQUIPMENT AND GEAR LIST - 2009

CANOE AND ACCESSORIES	COOKING GEAR	CAMPING GEAR
We-no-nah "Wilderness" canoe Black Jack carbon paddle Black Lite Straight Paddle Yoke 2 – Painter ropes Map Holder attached to thwart Provincial Park Map 8 – 1:50,000 topographic maps	Grate (9" by 11") Coffee or hot water pot Cook pan and lid Lexicon coffee mug with lid Coffee filter cup 1 spoon, 1 fork, one specula 1 leather glove 1 "shammy" towel for dishes 3 scrub pads 45 Vaseline soaked cotton balls 2 – Bic lighters 1 box of waterproof matches	MSR Hubba Hubba tent Go-lite tarp (10' by 12') 3 Tarp poles -duct tape on poles Sling-light chair Therma-rest Leatherman Tool 2 – Large NRS Bill's Bags 1 – Expedition Dri-Duffel 2 – NRS Tuff Sack – Medium 1 – Tuff Sack – Small 1 - Coleman Peak Stove 9 - Coleman Performance fuel 1 – small saw 1 – empty Gatorade bottle
CLOTHING	FISHING	PERSONAL ITEMS
River shorts Cargo pants/zip legs Polypropylene short sleeve shirt Ibex long sleeve shirt Polypropylene long sleeve shirt Rain Jacket Rain Pants Green Bay Packer baseball hat 4 – Pairs of wool socks 1 – Long underwear 1 – light weight pile pants 1 – Waterproof camp shoes 1 – NRS river shoes 1 – Wide brimmed rain hat 1 – Wool Hat 1 – Pile mittens 2 - Bandanas	Fish pole – Ugly Stick Fish Pole (collapsible) – backup Fish Reel Fish Reel – backup 15 Floating Rapalas – various types 12 – 6" to 12" leaders 20 - Swivels 5 – jig heads with jig bodies Extra spool of line (8 pound test) Fillet plastic board with Velcro Fillet knife Sharpening stone Fish stringer Hook extraction pliers Scoty pole holder	Toothbrush Hair brush Floss Nail clippers Scissors Ibuprofen Multi-vitamin Small clock Journal with two pens Sewing Kit (3 needles buttons, 2 thicknesses of thread, safety pins, misc. Small mirror 1 "shammy" towel - bathing 1 Roll of TP
FIRST AID ITEMS	ELECTRONIC OR BATTERY OPERATED	
Band-Aids (various sizes) Butterfly bandages 4 – antiseptic towelettes 2 gauze pads 1 roll of athletic tape 1 – Elastic bandage Super glue Second skin Tylenol & Benadryl tablets Cortisone Imodium Advanced Razor blade	Olympus waterproof camera Garmin E-trex (GPS) SPOT Kindle Book reader Brunton Solar charger Mammut XC-Zoom Headlamp Leupold Waterproof Binoculars	