

Quetico Trip – Fall 2011

Kawnipi Lake

August 31st – September 9th 2011

Day 1: Wednesday, August 31st, 2011 The Drive up

The Crew:

GeoFisher, Dave_B, SmallieSaver, Chms, GadgetMan, Kristen_E (AKA the Queen) and Cooper the dog. Collectively, this group has been on over 75 trips, with Dave_B having the most, followed by me, and then GadgetMan, Chms, SmallieSaver, and finally Kristen_E.

As with all my trips, this one would turn out to be one of the neatest I've ever done. This trip had some ups, had some downs, and had some definite milestones. I will get to those later in the report.

The trip started with me playing a joke on SmallieSaver. He's already wound up a little and with the hurricane that was pummeling the east coast, I decided it would be nice to play a joke on him and tell him that Dave_B's flight from Connecticut had been delayed, and rerouted, and that he'd be late.

So I called SmallySaver and told him Dave_B was being rerouted. At first I told him that he was being rerouted due to the hurricane.....then we talked some more, at which point I told him that the only reroute that was going to work for him was a reroute through Los Angeles. When he didn't realize that I was pulling his leg, I really poured it on.....I told him that I had just heard his flight went through a flock of Canadian geese, both engines were out, and they were landing in the Hudson. A few minutes later, he finally figured out that I was pulling his leg....Maybe it was the fact that Dave_B was sitting next to me and laughing his butt off the whole time. At any rate, it was funny, and a great way to start off the trip.

The drive up was pretty uneventful. Everyone arrived at my house by 7:30pm, and after some quick thinking and adjustments to the bracing for the 3rd canoe on the trailer, we were off. We left my house by 8:15pm which was almost a world record.

Twelve hours later, we stopped at Perkins in Superior, and Marine General for some last minute tackle.

Day 2: Thursday, September 1st, 2011 Voyageur Canoe Outfitters

The last few trips, we've started leaving in the evening and driving all night and half of the next day to get to the Boundary Waters.

We have tried every method known to man, including driving all night and putting in at first light and paddling all day. That leads to some serious sleep deprivation. I think leaving around 8:00pm and driving all night, stopping at Perkins in Superior, and taking our time in Duluth is the best method. Mostly because you're refreshed, and you can rest, stretch and take your time getting to the outfitters.

After taking our time around Duluth and an easy drive up the North Shore, we finally arrived in Grand Marais. We spent about an hour there, purchasing some last minute items and then headed up the Gunflint Trail. On the Gunflint, we stopped at the Gunflint Lodge to pick up fishing

licenses. We noticed the wind was howling and it was beginning to rain. I was really concerned that we were going to have poor weather. As usual the weather reports were spotty at best.

By the time we left the Gunflint Lodge, it was fast approaching 6:00pm. I knew VCO closed at 7:00pm and since we definitely wanted to check in and square up with Mike and Sue before our trip, we decided to go check in and then head to the trail center for dinner.

While checking in, Mike informed me that they were pretty full, and gave us the Riverside Cabin instead of bunkhouses. This was a great surprise, and I will definitely be reserving that particular cabin on future trips. I might even reserve it before and after my trips. It was a pretty nice change of pace from the normal bunkhouses that we rent. With a group of 6, the cost would be about double, which is easily doable.

Day 3: Friday, Sept 2nd 2011 Long day to Wet Lake

We discussed long and hard just how far we could make it in a day. Could we make it to Kawnipi, or would we have to layover somewhere and make the push to Kawnipi a two day affair. It was decided by the group to make it a two day affair. I'm glad we did.

During breakfast at the outfitters, SmallieSaver was given the name "Mr. Tea". Smallie doesn't drink coffee, so he asked if they had teabags so he could make some tea. The team lead for the outfitter dug through their cabinets and found what looked like a 400 year old dried up sawdust looking teabag. Imagine if you will, in your funkiest Mr T voice, this 40 something balding white guy grunting "Mr Tea says, I got me a teabag.....". "Mr Tea" would have a great time using his new found moniker. There were quite a few funny moments around camp when "Mr Tea" would emerge.

We didn't get out of the Outfitters until nearly 8:00am, and then ended up spending quite a bit of time at the Cache Bay ranger station. In fact, I don't believe we left there before 10:00am which put us a couple hours behind schedule...but hey, this is vacation, who cares.

The initial paddle into Cache Bay was not too bad, but as expected we had a headwind the entire paddle up into Cache Bay. Once we rounded the corner to the chute to Silver Falls, the wind changed direction and continued blowing in our face, as expected.

We portaged over Silver Falls. We had 3 different groups and 3 different methods of portaging. This really didn't lead to many issues but Dave_B and I were definitely the slowest.

Dave_B and I had 3 packs and the canoe, and a daypack. The packs each weighed about 45lbs. All paddles and rods were strapped into the canoe. No loose stuff was hand carried. We double portaged every portage. In most cases I carried the daypack and the canoe, and then doubled back for the next lightest pack.

GadgetMan and Kristen_E had 2 packs, each around 45lbs, and some loose stuff. I think they also had a day bag which Kristen_E carried. They did a hybrid single portage. GadgetMan single portaged the canoe and a pack, and Kristen_E pretty much double portaged.

Chms and SmallieSaver had 2 packs and a daypack. Chms carried the canoe and the daypack, and SmallieSaver would take the heaviest pack ½ ways over the portage, then double back for the other pack and carry it the entire portage. Chms would then come back ½ ways and take the pack that was dropped off. This was pretty cool. Dave_B and I probably could have done that, but I was really worried about pack weight versus number of carries. I'd hate to hurt myself on the first or second portage. Slow and Steady.....

At the end of Silver Falls, the wind changed directions once again. It was blowing in our face as expected.

With the low water, we had to portage the cut between the island and Dead Mans portage.

Note to Self: Always, always paddle around the dang island.

Smallie Saver fell while portaging with the canoe on the wet, slippery rock face about half way along Dead Man's. Luckily, the day pack took the brunt of the fall as he slipped and fell backwards and slid down the near vertical rock face about 10 ft. He commented that the canoe was undamaged, and he was unscathed besides a bruised wrist. New portage boots (looking at OTB) are on the horizon, as he used knee high Lacrosse rubber Alpha hunters, but they seem to be lacking good grip on wet rocks, which is a MUST on a trip with this many rocky portages.

By the time we were finished with Dead Mans portage, it was well past lunch time, and we were a few hours behind our "planned" schedule. I knew that when we left the ranger station, there was no chance that we would be able to even attempt a push to Kawnipi. Now, it was only a matter of where to stop. We had a few choices, and all collectively decided on the campsite at Bald Rock Falls.

We hit camp around 6:00pm. Everyone was pretty tired, but that didn't keep GadgetMan, Chms, and SmallieSaver from breaking out the fishing equipment. Dave_B and I chose not to fish, and not to break out the fishing gear until we hit Kawnipi Lake. No matter, since Dave_B and I were on meal duty tonight.

We setup a quick camp. No tarp, no gravity water filters, and no frills.

For meals, we had decided on community dinners, and then each pair would be responsible for their own breakfast, lunch and snacks. This worked out pretty good. For the community dinners, each pair was responsible for 2 community meals, meaning they had to carry all the food components necessary to prepare those two meals for everyone.

Along with the community meal idea, we had community gear. On most of my trips, I like to pack a community gear pack and community food packs. On this trip, each pair carried an equal portion of the community gear and the two community meals they were to prepare. This worked out pretty good, but it really lead to some initial trip anxiety for me. I'm really anal about the trip planning stuff, and this was really hard to let go. All in all, it worked out pretty good, and nothing was left out, or left on a campsite. I will probably pack this way again in the future.

For dinner.....Dave_B and I prepared Cheesy Enchilada/chicken helper. I added some zing by bringing chipotle Tabasco sauce, and jalapeno/cilantro wraps. To top it off, I packed in 2 packages of 4 cheese REAL cheese. This is a favorite of mine, and I got the idea from QPassage, another great friend of mine. For this particular meal, I was able to cut the cooking time by 75% by replacing the real rice with minute rice.

After dinner, we all pretty much collapsed.....Tomorrow, we would hit Kawnipi Lake early.

Day 4: Saturday, Sept 3rd, 2011 Kawnipi Lake

We were up and going pretty early. Everyone had a quick breakfast, and then we broke down camp. Dave_B had oatmeal and pop tarts. I had mountain house granola and blueberries. I'm not too sure what everyone else had.

By 9:00am, we were back on the water, and headed to what I considered to be the two worse portages on this trip.

For some reason, the portages from Wet to Kawnipi were not as bad as I remembered. Maybe that is because we had to do the high water portages the last time and this time we could do the low water portages. I'm not too sure. I definitely remember a sheer granite 45 degree wall we had to navigate, and this time it was not there. Maybe, that was the McEwen to Kenny portage. Oh well, it was definitely easier than in years past.

Maybe, it was the 80 flights of stairs I did every day for 80 weeks before the trip. I will tell you this...the working out thing before you have a serious trip is a very good idea. I felt better on this trip than any trip in the past. Some of it was because I had lost 30lbs before the trip, but most of it was because I had been working my butt off to get into some better shape. It also helps to be in the company of some of my very best friends.

After tackling the Koko Falls and Canyon Falls portages, and then the Kenny Lake portage, we were finally at our destination lake.....Kawnipi.

On the Koko Falls portage GadgetMan and Kristen_E found a full gallon of vodka that had either been lost or left on the portage. We don't know what or why, but it now belonged to US. Some of the vodka was drunk, but for the most part, it was used to sanitize stuff and to clean the table. It was especially good for removing pine tar, which would end up on everything at our Kawnipi campsite.

On the portage from Kenny to Kawnipi, we pulled out our maps and started making some decisions on where we wanted to camp, and how/if we were fishing up the lake.

We all decided on a cluster of 3-4 campsites due East of Rose Island. This would be our initial game plan for a campsite. With that in mind, each canoe set out in different directions, fishing our way up to the Rose Island area.

GadgetMan and Kristen_E headed to "gorilla bay"; a magic, ultra secret area where the smallies knife fight the northern for territory.....AND WIN.....

Chms and SmallieSaver headed to Atkins Bay, where they had heard good things about monster northern pike.....

Dave_B and I started fishing humps and channel breaks on Kawnipi headed in a general direction towards Rose Island.

Dave_B and I had planned on targeting and fishing for deeper, summer staging smallies. He started using his go to bait....white grub with a ¼ oz jig head. This worked well, and we managed to catch 10 or 15 or so smallies. We didn't catch any real big smallies, but we did manage some decent 2 or 3lb fish. I had 3 poles rigged up. One pole was rigged with a tube jig, another with a swim bait, and the final pole with a 5/16 oz shakey head. I managed to catch fish on all three baits, but the largest of the fish was caught on 4 inch long big hammer swim baits on a 3/8 oz jig head.

The swim bait would be the bait that Dave_B and I used most of the trip. In fact, I probably could have left 90% of my fishing gear at home and took 30 jig heads and 60 swim bait bodies, and caught more than enough fish.

Dave_B and I fished for a couple hours, and then found an area that looked like a perfect walleye spot. We setup for a perfect drift, put out my drift sock and started fishing.

This was the first year that I have ever used a drift sock. I've been told for years that a drift sock will definitely enhance your ability to fish a windswept bank but I really didn't put any faith in the discussions. Boy, I was wrong. By using a drift sock, Dave_B and I were able to slow our drift to about 1 mph. This was in a good 15mph wind. Talk about boat control. This made targeting this specific walleye reef a breeze. Dave_B quickly caught a nice eater sized walleye off the front of the reef.....He threw the fish in the bottom of the canoe and continued fishing. There was no time to break out the stringer, and we really didn't know if we'd catch more or not. As we drifted closer to the reef, I made a long cast to the back side of the reef. Immediately, I hooked up with a decent sized fish and I knew by the swagger that it was a walleye.

Since I was using a longer fishing rod...a 7ft 4 g.Loomis Bronzeback, I pulled the fish up to Dave_B to have him unhook it. At this time Dave_B figured we should get out a stringer. While he got out the stringer, and while we were still drifting at a GREAT slow drift, I made another cast, and immediately hooked up again. This was yet another better than average sized walleye. Again, Dave_B took it off the hook and put it on the stringer. While stringing it, I again made another long cast. This time I casted to the front of the reef, and worked the bait back a little faster, and up the reef. BOOM.....Another fish. Again, I caught another better than average sized walleye. We were definitely going to have walleye for dinner.

By this time, I was feeling a little bad, and waited for Dave_B to at least get a couple more casts. We had finally drifted past the reef far enough that I pulled in the drift sock and we made a couple more passes. Dave_B hooked up a couple more times, but we didn't manage to put any more walleye in the boat.

After a quick glance at the time, we both realized it was time to start heading towards where we wanted to camp. It was already 4:00pm and we had at least a 1 or 2 hr paddle into the wind to where we wanted to camp.

In the distance, I could see SmallieSaver and Chms, and I could also see what looked like Kristen_E and GadgetMan. We all met up at our reef and talked about our plans. SmallieSaver and Chms had caught a couple decent smallies and had kept them so we had more than enough fish for dinner.

Plans were made, and we started heading to our base camp destination campsite.

I knew of a few fantastic sites, and had heard of some others that were not so fantastic. We paddled past a couple 5 stars that were unoccupied, but the guys wanted to be higher up the lake. I grumbled a little and discussed with Dave_B the fact that we passed up some great sites.....NO matter. The sites directly across from Rose Island were supposed to be pretty good, so we continued paddling, and paddling.....and paddling.

By the time we reached our destination campsite we were beat. Well our destination site was far short of a respectable campsite. There were only 2 good tent pads and 1 that we'd have to make due. I made it clear to the rest of the group that I didn't paddle and portage 28 miles to camp at a craphole campsite, especially when we passed up some of the best campsites I have ever seen in the park. I've been to this area on multiple occasions, but some in this group had never been here. They had heard me talk about the fantastic 5 star campsites. This was not one of them.

My disgust with the campsite was obviously clear to Chms and GadgetMan. Fortunately for us, there were multiple campsites in this particular area. Chms and GadgetMan took off searching for another campsite. In a few minutes, they signaled that they found something that was marginally better.

They really played it up.....they said the site was barely better than what we had left but it at least had 3 tent pads, if you cut down a couple trees. Of course, they were kidding. The campsite they found was indeed a 5 star campsite. The landing was not as good as I would have

liked but there were easily 3 or 4 really nice and level tent pads. Not only that, but the site was setup perfectly to allow for a tarp. On top of this, someone had cut up and split at least 10-15 logs. Finally, if everything else was not enough, someone had taken the time and effort to create a really nice table out of logs and granite. This table was setup in the middle of the fire sitting logs. It was like having a coffee table in the middle of your living room with a couple sofas sitting around it.

Yes, this was indeed a fantastic site, and would be our home for the next 4 nights.

We started setting up camp. First the tents, then Dave_B and Chms headed down to filet and prepare the walleye and smallies that were caught for dinner. While this was going on, I got out the platypus gravity filters and started the first 8 liters of water. SmallieSaver worked on the fire, since we needed fire to grill the fish tonight.

Kristen_E was on dinner duty. Her plans called for fish tacos and chicken flavored couscous.

This is where the real food for the trip began. Kristen_E really worked on her meals and the things she created and planned for were obvious. The fish tacos included a special marinade that she had prepared at home, outside of the wet ingredients. She had also packed and vacuum sealed some onions that were done in a red wine vinaigrette. To wrap up all the goodies in a taco, she brought along corn tortillas that we warmed up in aluminum foil on the sides of the fire.

We ate like kings and it was good.

After dinner, and before it got too late, GadgetMan, Dave_B, Chms, and I setup and strung the tarp. While it was not completely over the sitting area, it worked perfectly. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on how you look at the situation, we did not need the tarp once on this trip. We only had sprinkles one day and that only lasted for 30 minutes or so.

As the sun set, we sat around the fire. It was starting to get a little cool, so polar fleece was brought out. Lots of bull was slung, and a few platyps were skinned.

Yes my friends, it was great to be back on Kawnipi. I felt good, and was sure this would turn out to be another memorable trip. I was not mistaken.

The best part about these fall trips is the fact that there are very few bugs this time of year. This trip would be no different.

As things wound down, plans were made for the next day. GadgetMan and Kristen_E were headed to the north end of the lake. They were going to try to get to the Cache River area. Chms and SmallieSaver were headed to the bay behind our island campsite in search of smallies. Dave_B and I were going to hit some deep reef areas I knew in and around the main lake and Rose Island areas. I finally broke out my fish finder, and check the batteries and connections in anticipation of using it in the morning.

Day 5: Sunday, Sept 4th, 2011 Rose Island Fishing

Sunday we woke up to the pitter patter of rain showers on the tent fly. This would be the only day that it rained the entire trip. The rain didn't last long, but along with it came a nasty and colder north wind. Kawnipi was angry. Not really, really angry, but none the less angry.

Dave_B and I were a little heavier than the other groups for a reason. We brought good food, and part of that good food was good breakfasts. We decided to have one of our two pancake

breakfasts. There is nothing like pancakes in the Boundary Waters. It doesn't matter if they are burned to a crisp, doughy and milky in the middle, thin like crepes, or thick like a slice of bread.....they all taste good. These were no different. Along with the pancakes, we also brought in some freeze dried eggs. While they were not bad, they certainly were not very good either. They didn't turn out as good as expected, but I think we cooked them a little too long, and they tasted a little rubbery.

Chms and SmallieSaver were already on the water. They were headed to the large bay behind our campsite so I knew they'd be leaving early. Kristen_E and GadgetMan were also already gone. They had left nearly 30 minutes earlier. Dave_B and I still planned to hit some spots in and around Rose Island.

Once on the water, Dave_B and I realized that our initial plan to hit the Rose Island area was not going to work. The wind simply was not going to cooperate. It was blowing quite hard by now, and some of the rogue waves were probably 2 ft high. I've been in worse, but this was bad and was probably not going to get any better.

We saw GadgetMan and Kristen_E and it was obvious that they were not going to make it to the Cache River area either. They were struggling with the wilderness canoe they were using, and Cooper didn't make it any easier. He is a good dog, but he was still overly excited about being in new surroundings, and he really wanted to explore. A fidgety dog in a canoe, in the middle of serious wind and waves is not a good thing. He nearly dumped them once or twice, but all in all everything turned out OK.

Dave_B and I were also not having an easy time of it.....about 1/3 the way up our chosen route to the top of Rose Island, Dave_B and I decided that we should punt and fish somewhere else. Since we were already nearly half way across the lake, we decided to continue on our way and fish behind Rose Island where the wind was not nearly as bad.

Dave_B and I were still on the fish deep, fish slow kick and thought we'd stick and catch some larger smallies by fishing for larger, summer pattern fish. I still wonder and think about this decision. Not that it was wrong, but we never really did find or catch those bigger, deep water fish. Granted every smallie that came out of 20 or 30ft of water was a 3lb or larger smallie, we really never did find enough numbers to justify that plan.

While fishing for smallies that way, we did manage to catch very good numbers of walleye. Even though Dave_B and I are primarily smallie fisherman, every time we found somewhere that looked like a decent walleye spot, we fished for walleye. This turned out to be a great plan, and we ended up catching our 4 walleye limit by 1 or 2 pm. We also managed to stick a few smallies, and northern pike but not in the quality or quantity I was accustomed to based on my other fall trips.

Dave and I fished for a couple more hours and then headed back to camp. On the way back we passed a great reef what would certainly hold walleye...we took note of this area. We didn't spend a whole lot of time checking it out though because the wind and waves were getting to be crazy scary. Behind Rose Island, we could tell that it was bad but we could not tell how bad. Once we were out in it, we immediately realized that this was going to take lots of concentration and paddling to get back to our campsite.

We ended up having to quarter into the wind for nearly ½ a mile above our campsite. Once we visually calculated where we could make the turn and float with the wind, we made a very coordinated turn between 3 ft swells. These waves were not the biggest waves I've paddled, but they were tricky. They were not all coming the same direction and the rogue waves would crash and flop over the side of the gunnels. Once we were turned with the wind, and the waves started pushing us, it was all I could do to keep the canoe tracking without turning sideways with the

swells. Between the swells, the waves would try to flop over the side gunnels. This was getting scary.

Once we finally made it to camp, we started talking about dinner and dinner plans. Fish was on the agenda, but No ONE brought fish back for dinner...No ONE except for Dave_B and me. Four walleye would not be enough though.

By this time, the wind and waves were calming down a little. Dave_B and I both thought about the walleye spot we saw while coming back to camp. We both figured we could catch a couple walleye there, so we headed back out. I prepped and tied the drift sock to the very back of the canoe, and then setup the fish finder. The water 100 ft off the reef was 95 ft deep. Wow, I knew the water was deep here but I didn't think it was that deep. As we came up the reef, I found and marked fish and baitfish in 35 ft of water. Dave_B and I pulled back off the spot, and lowered the drift sock. We were both armed with big hammer 4 inch swim baits, and 3/8 oz heads. Once we hit the magic spot we immediately started getting bit. I managed to hookup first with a very quality sized eater walleye. After that, Dave_B also hooked up with another nice eater sized walleye. Again, we pulled up on a spot and targeted walleye and managed to put eater sized walleye in the boat.

Smallie Saver and Chms caught really decent smallie all day long in their chosen bay, tucked in out of the wind which howled all day on the main lake. On one bank, they hooked and landed over 15 fish, all over 2 lbs., while never moving the boat. A real spring-like bite in September! The overcast skies and wind swept banks really turned on the smallies in this bay. Several pike, some up to 35 inches, were also caught in the back coves and immediately released.

We headed back to camp, where Dave_B and SmallieSaver cleaned the fish while Chms and I prepared the fire and sides for dinner.

Once the fish were all cleaned, we decided to prepare and cook the fish multiple ways. We fried 1/3 of it, blackened 1/3 of it using Bayou Blast and grilled 1/3 of it using pesto dressing that Kristen_E brought. Along with dinner, we had stove top stuffing and four cheese instant potatoes.

If that wasn't enough, I also baked a blueberry cheesecake mix using my new Omnia oven. Did I mention that we ate some really good food on this trip?

After dinner, some of the group smoked cigars and skinned some more platys. Spice rum and cocoa or apple cider is the BOMB.

Day 6: Monday, Sept 5th, 2011 Lake Trout on Keewatin

GadgetMan and Chms really wanted to travel to the north end of Kawnipi and hit the Poet Chain of lakes. They really wanted to have a smoke on Have a Smoke portage. Since Kristen_E wanted to try her luck at laker fishing, and SmallieSaver wanted to change his name to LakerSaver, we all collectively decided to head to a known and supposedly guaranteed laker lake. Dave_B and SmallieSaver would take one canoe, and Kristen_E and I would take the other. Keewatin was my idea, and since I've had quite a bit of luck targeting lakers in the past, I was put on the spot with regards to sticking and CATCHING some lakers. We would not be disappointed.

I had been to Keewatin before. One of my friends from one of the bulletin boards told me about Keewatin being a decent laker lake. We were able to catch them in Keewatin a few years ago, so I figured we would also be able to target and catch them again this year.

I told everyone in the group exactly what I was planning on using for lakers and how I planned on fishing them.....Trolling and bottom bouncing. I had some great husky jerk rapala crank baits and some 2 oz bottom bouncer hair jigs that I purchased just for laker fishing.

The paddle and portage to Keewatin was not too bad. The Portage is very rocky, but besides that, it is a pretty normal portage.

Once we were on Keewatin, Kristen_E and I setup both a bottom bouncer and a trolling rig for each of us. The crank baits were setup 1 oz lead weight followed by a swivel, and a 2 ft leader, and then the rapala husky jerk crank bait. This would get the crank bait down to the level the fish were located. We would troll at about 1 or 2 miles per hr.....We used the fish finder to locate and track lakers and baitfish in 70 ft of water. This was the magic depth.

It is a funny thing how electronics work. When Dave_B and SmallieSaver asked what depth we were at, I kept telling them I was finding fish suspended in 105 ft of water. These suspended fish were suspending in around 85 ft of water. This sounded exactly like what I had expected. Both Dave_B and SmallieSaver told me that my finder was wrong. According to their "back reel" and count the handle rotations, we were only in 65 ft of water. I called bullshit multiple times. Finally, I said "what, rely on my electronics or your count method.....personally I believe I will rely on my electronics". After a few minutes of discussion, I reached down and readjusted the transducer. It is amazing that a suction cup attached transducer can actually twist up just enough to allow the reading to be incorrect. After readjusting the transducer, I told the guys we're in 65 ft of water, JUST like I said.

Once the mess with just how deep the water was figured out, we continued fishing.

Kristen_E hooked up first. Initially she was not too sure that she had a fish, but once she had recovered 50 feet or so, she felt the difference between the pull and the drag of the lure. The laker did a death roll at the boat, but I was still able to get it into the boat and on the stringer. Fish one was hooked and on the stringer. NOT BAD.

Kristen_E and I would continue trolling back and forth over this area a few times. After the 4th or 5th pass, we switched to bottom bouncing. We had a couple bumps on the bottom bouncer rigs, but nothing that resulted in an actual caught fish.

This went on for an hour or so. We were both beginning to think it may be a lost cause. Dave_B and SmallieSaver were also having similar results. Two hours into our laker fishing experience we had exactly one laker in the boat, and only a few bites.

Kristen_E and I again switched from bottom bouncing back to trolling and dropped both of our rigs. On the first pass past the submerged reef on the northeast end of the lake, we both hooked up with lakers. I lost mine pretty quickly so I reeled in my trolling line to give Kristen_E a better chance of catching hers without getting tangled in my lines. As the laker got closer to the boat, her fishing rod made a couple really big bounces. Kristen_E kept saying how she thought this fish was not that big.....I kept saying "I don't think so...once this fish sees the boat, it is going to explode". Kristen_E followed my advice and backed off the drag by a few cranks. We all use fireline, which has virtually no stretch. Since it doesn't stretch, you'd better have some drag dialed in or you will break a rod or snap the line. We dialed in quite a bit of drag, and once the laker saw the boat it started ripping off drag. After a few minutes, it tired, and Kristen_E was able to recover the line.

To land the fish, I grabbed the fish behind the head, and flipped it into the canoe. At this point it went into a death spiral, throwing the trebles into my thumb. The razor sharp, partially barbed hooks penetrated my thumb, passed through the meaty portion of the inside of my thumb and then promptly pulled out. TALK about PAINFUL. It was a clean rip. Blood was everywhere.

Some of it was laker blood; some of it was Geo blood. I finally got the fish under control and added it to my stringer.

This would go on for a few more hours. We trolled and bottom bounced for 3 or 4 hours that afternoon. Kristen_E would go on to catch 4 lakera that day. One of the lakera was very, very small so we let it go. I would also catch 1 laker but it was also too small to keep.

Dave_B and SmallieSaver would not catch a laker, but they would have multiple opportunities that simply didn't pan out.

On our final pass through the lake, SmallieSaver and Dave_B called us over, and told us they caught a nice little laker. It was a pretty puny fish, and was much smaller than the other lakera that we had put on the stringer. They promptly came clean and told us the laker they had was the one that we threw back an hour earlier. It had died on top of the water, and was floating. Since it had died, we felt obligated to take it and cook it. It was pretty puny though.

Since Kristen_E was the only person to catch a laker that we kept, we dubbed her the "Queen of Keewatin". We ended up calling her the Queen the rest of the trip.....

Dinner had been planned for promptly at 7:00pm. This would give the guys coming from Have a Smoke portage and Dave_B and SmallieSaver plenty of time to get back to camp. Kristen_E and I headed back around 3:00 or 4:00, since I had fish to clean, and I thought they would keep better cleaned versus uncleaned.

Back at camp, I put the fish in the makeshift live well that was at the campsite. I left them here as long as I could before cleaning and preparing them.

We cooked the lakera 3 different ways, along with asparagus couscous, which was fantastic.

One laker was stuffed by Kristen_E and baked, one laker was drenched in butter and lemon pepper, and the final laker was marinated in an olive oil/Italian salad dressing mixture that SmallieSaver brought exclusively for lakera. All 3 methods were fantastic.

After dinner, there was some more platy skinning and cigar smoking. Did I mention that spiced rum is pretty tasty?

Day 7: Tuesday, Sept 6th, 2011 Fishing McVicar Bay

Dave_B really wanted to hit Kawa Bay and some of the magical areas of that part of the lake, but it simply would not be. Instead, Chms, SmallieSaver, Dave_B and I would head to McVicar Bay for some smallie action and GadgetMan and Kristen_E would head north in an attempt to visit the Cache River area. We would not make it to Kawa Bay because we decided to leave Kawnipi on Wednesday and try to make a long push out to at least silver falls. That way we would only need to break camp one more time. The thought was this would allow for more fishing Thursday and Friday, and in fact it did.

Dave_B and I had a not so quick breakfast of pancakes again. Did I mention pancakes in the Boundary Waters are better than pancakes anywhere else in the world? Dave_B and I figured that we had enough pancake mix for one more breakfast, and we'd do that the last morning we were on Kawnipi.

Once we reached McVicar Bay, Dave_B and I started fishing for smallies as we had all week. The bay turned out to be a great spring spawning bay, but not such a great fall feeding bay. We caught some smallies, but not nearly as many as expected, and Dave_B and I decided to once

again target some walleye. We used the standby white/black back Big Hammer 4 inch swim bait with a 3/8 oz jig head.

If you've ever fished for walleye, you know the specific areas where walleye should hang out. Dave and I found these spots. Choke points and slack areas behind windswept points were the best, as well as deep main lake points. We didn't catch a ton of walleye, but we did catch enough to make it fun. One thing to remember when fishing a swim bait is the fact that they hit the bait, and then eat it. If you fish like you normally would and set the hook on the hit, you'd almost always miss the fish. If you waited for the fish to eat the bait, and for the rod to start loading up the walleyes were literally swallowing the swim bait. Most of the good hooked walleye were really good and hooked. In many cases, the bait was 3 or 4 inches deep. These fish definitely were putting on the feedbag and loved the swim baits.

If I ever fish Kawnipi in the fall again, I will know certain spots that I will not even attempt to smallie fish. McVicar Bay is one of those spots. We ended up catching 5 or 6 smallies in McVicar Bay, but not many more. On a good point though, I did manage to stick the largest smallie for me of the trip. This fish was a good 3.8lb smallie. It was caught on a swim bait on a 35 ft drop-off. This particular drop-off was on the deep side of a submerged reef outside of McVicar Bay. Using the fish finder, I was able to locate baitfish stacked up along the point. These baitfish were being hammered by what I suspect were some big smallies. Catching the 3.8 kind of confirmed this, but it was the only fish we caught there.

After catching a few walleye and smallies off of reefs near the mouth of McVicar Bay, Dave_B and I decided to head across the lake to the mouth of McKenzie Bay. We found some great areas there that looked to be good for walleye fishing. We caught a few more smallies and a few more under sized walleye there. We finally ended up catching our limit and decided to head back to camp. While at the mouth of McKenzie bay, we met back up with Chms and SmallieSaver, and talked to them about what we had found and put them also on some fish. Chms and SmallieSaver ended up catching a couple walleye, which would definitely add to the catch. The walleye Dave_B and I caught were certainly not enough for 6 folks.

It didn't matter that we didn't catch a lot of walleye. This was supposed to be only a red beans and rice dinner, but we ended up adding baked walleye too. Nothing like red beans and rice AND baked walleye. On top of that, I had SmallieSaver bring some cornbread which I baked in my new Omnia oven.

Again, we ate like kings.....NOTHING but the best.....MM GOOD.

Cigars, and platys and talking some smack around the fire, and then we all headed to bed. Our plans were to be off the campsite tomorrow morning by 9:00am. We figured this would allow for a decent start in the morning.

Tomorrow would be the longest paddle and portage day I've ever done. A milestone that I didn't think was possible.

Day 8: Wednesday, Sept 7th, 2011 Leaving Kawnipi

Packing day for leaving Kawnipi was perfect. Dave_B and I were up early since I was determined to do pancakes again.

After boiling water for everyone, and then boiling some more water, Dave_B and I quickly put together our pancake breakfast. When you're only cooking for two, the pancake breakfasts go pretty fast. We were done with breakfast, coffee and had started packing our cook equipment within an hour or so.

Everyone contributed adequately to breaking camp, and once all the community gear was accounted for, it was distributed to those who brought it. GadgetMan and Kristen_E wanted to try to find the Kawa Bay pictographs so they went ahead and left. It would be another hour before we left the campsite.

After making a final walk around the campsite, Chms, SmallieSaver, Dave_B and I finally left the campsite.....I was sad. This was one of the best sites I have ever been on, and I really wanted to stay a couple more days. I commented to Chms that it felt like we just got here yesterday. He said that when you feel that way, you KNOW the trip has been a great trip. He was right. By this time in a trip I'm usually missing home, and ready for the trip to wind down. This was not the case this time.

For some reason, I really wanted to stay another day.

We made great time to the first couple of portages. Dave B and I had broke down our rods and were packing the same way we came in. Chms and SmallieSaver were fishing on the way out, which was fine. Since Dave_B and I were quite a bit slower over most portages, this afforded them the opportunity to fish above and below most falls.

After the second set of portages, Chms, SmallieSaver, Dave_B and I figured that we should discuss the idea of trying to make it to Cache Bay instead of below Dead Mans or Silver Falls as originally discussed the night before.

We were lighter, and we had a great tailwind pushing us the entire way. Once we caught up with Kristen_E and GadgetMan, we discussed with them and it was decided that we would call it by ear, but would definitely try a GREAT PUSH to get to Cache Bay. If we managed to make Cache Bay tonight, we'd have all day Thursday and all morning Friday to fish. That would add a good amount of fishing time to this particular trip.

It was decided.....

On a previous trip, Dan_S and I had been wind bound on Cache Bay and ended up having to create a camp on Cache Bay. I distinctly remembered passing at least two campsites along the east bank of Cache Bay, as soon as you left the chute and entered the bowl of Cache. I discussed this with the group, but there were serious issues with this plan. First, that was a long way. Second, there was not very much time for campsite searching if those didn't pan out. Third was the fact that neither of the campsites I remembered were on any map. I guaranteed the group that these in fact existed.

We all decided that if there was time, and if there was light, and if the weather cooperated, we would try for a push to Cache Bay.

Time management was pretty critical. Chms and SmallieSaver still planned on fishing out. Since they were faster than Dave_B and I, they took up the rear and would be the last canoe over the portages. By the time Dave and I had cleared our first trip over, Chms and SmallieSaver were at the landing unloading. This gave them 10 or 15 minutes below every fall. They would not fish above any fall the rest of the trip.

We were making fantastic time, and the pack management that Dave_B and I did to rebalance the loads made for even lighter packs. We still had 3 packs, but now they weighed much less. Dave_B's Kondos pack was still a little heavier than we wanted, but it needed to be so that it would "fill out". If it was not full, it was not as comfortable to carry.

At the top of Canyon Falls, GadgetMan and Kristen_E were taking a breather when we came over with our final load. GadgetMan had be wet footing the entire trip but for some reason, he decided that he no longer wanted to wet foot. I don't know the reasoning for this, and may never

know. What I do know is that is not a good thing to do mid trip. He was using 5/10 SAR boots, and simply fell in love with them. What he didn't like was the sealskin waterproof socks that had a failure and was leaking water in the sock. This led to some seriously STINKY feet. I believe he started dry footing to either save his last pair of dry socks or something of the fact.

No matter....when he attempted to enter the canoe from a dry foot position at the top of Canyon Falls, the canoe decided at an inopportune time to "drift" just a little away from him. Even though Dave_B was holding the back of the canoe, there was no way to control what was about to happen. In an instant Kristen_E was swimming. We helped them gather their gear, but you could tell Kristen_E was a little hot. Maybe the boiling water around her was the hint. Maybe the red face matching her red hair was the hint. No words were said, and I think everyone handled the situation pretty dang good. CRAP HAPPENS. Kristen had a pretty decent scrape and cut on her hand, which we were able to patch up a little. Her hand ended up hurting the rest of the trip, but none of us heard about it.....except for maybe GadgetMan.

At Bald Rock Falls, we all took a 30 minute break, ate lunch and calculated our exit plan. We still wanted to make it to Cache Bay, but weren't too sure about that prospect. Maps were taken out, and we again looked at possible exit points. There were two marked campsites past Silver Falls but before Cache Bay. I knew about these two campsites. I also knew that neither of them was very good, and I didn't think they could support two tent pads, let alone three.

"ARE YOU SURE about campsites on Cache Bay". My answer.....yea, they are there.

We pushed hard, making it to Saganagons and over Dead Mans portage by 6:30. We were all tired, and beginning to get at each other. This had been a long push, and it was only going to continue. We started to talk and discuss about the nice campsites we were passing up. Yea, there were some nice campsites. Yea we were passing them up. Now though, it was personal. I really wanted to make Cache Bay....mostly because I was the biggest doubter of even trying this push. I wanted to push myself and I wanted to see the results.

After some grumbling and as the sun moved closer towards the horizon, we pushed over the Silver Falls portage.

We quickly passed on the two campsites just past Silver Falls. They were very inadequate, and would have required us splitting up the group. These were not possible solutions. Now it was very clear that my magic, unmarked sites had better be exactly where I expected them.

After passing on the two sights and reaching the Indian burial grounds, we turned the corner and nothing looked like a campsite. DAMN. I knew they were here, but where. We looked for 30 minutes or so. It was now dusk, and getting darker.

Finally we found the first of the two campsites that I knew about. This was not much of a campsite but it looked like it had 3 tent pads. Problem solved, and Geo was not burned at the stake. I had second guessed myself multiple times but I knew they had to be here. Dan_S and I had these sites forever burned into our memory. The year we came out of Cache Bay was eerily similar to this trip. It was dark, it was getting late, and in our case, nothing was available. All the campsites on cache were occupied due to the wind that had been blowing 30 mph all day.

Fortunately for me, the campsite ended up being adequate and met our needs for two nights.

We were all dead tired, and we were setting up camp in the dark, but we were here, which was a good thing. Everyone pitched in and setup a quick camp. Water filters were hung, and the table was setup, as well as tents and pads, etc, etc. We did not hang the tarp, but everything else was done to make this a useable space for the next 2 days.

SmallieSaver and I quickly worked out a dinner plan. We would be eating read beans and rice again, making 2 packages and adding stable chicken and summer sausage. I also broke out my oven and baked some more corn bread.

After dinner, everyone went to bed. This was the longest travel day I have ever done. I believe it was the longest travel day any of us had ever done.

Day 9: Thursday, Sept 8th, 2011 Fishing Cache Bay

The push from Kawnipi was a very long day. Since it was such a long and hard day, everyone slept in for the morning.

Dave_B and I started moving sometime around 7:00am or so. We had a few different options for breakfast, and settled on Cache Bay biscuits and gravy. Along with this, we figured we'd have another stab at the freeze dried eggs. This time though, we cooked the eggs really quick, not letting them settle into the rubbery paste they did the previous time we attempted to cook them.

This was the second time I had used the Cache Bay biscuits and gravy, and this time was much better than the last. Dave_B had used them before and did a great job of cooking them. I believe I simply didn't get them done a few years ago. For the eggs, we let them set a little longer, and then I quick scrambled them with butter. A couple splashes of hot sauce and they were almost as good as eggs cooked at home.....Almost.

After breakfast we all went fishing...

I have fished the west side of Cache Bay quite a few times, having located and marked a few extra special places. Those places are known to some of the group, but only a few have ever fished them. Motts and I had pounded fish in one particular spot this past spring. It was the only spot we even had an opportunity to catch 100 fish on that particular trip.

Dave_B and I were working our way to those spots, fishing humps and reefs on the way into the area. That was when we ran into Chms and SmallieSaver and started talking about where they were headed. They had been told about a particular magical spot by some folks camping on the island behind the ranger station. It didn't take long for me to recognize and understand that my spot and the spot they were heading to were one in the same. Those particular spots are great for one canoe but two would be a little too much. Dave and I both agreed that we'd fish something else. I had some more spots but they were not nearly the caliber of the spots Chms and SmallieSaver were about to experience. I would find out later that they never left spot A, and ended up catching very good numbers and decent size for the fall. In fact, they said it was much more like spring fishing this week than fall. They ended up with around 60 smallies, all sizes, in this magical place, in the span of a few hours. Now THAT'S fishing!!

Dave_B and I once again fished for smallies for a while but then changed to something else. While fishing smallies, we also fished humps and reefs that should have also produced decent walleye. We were quickly finding out that Kawnipi is a special place, and even though we were targeting walleye in very similar areas and structure, they simply were not cooperating. Dave_B and I debated heading back towards the pictographs on Cache Bay, but the wind was beginning to howl a little and we really didn't want to get wind bound on Cache Bay. We found the up and over cut through and headed to what I thought was a magic laker spot that Janice had marked the previous spring.

Somehow Dave_B and I got completely turned around, because the magic laker spot was NO WHERE near where we were. The laker spot was supposed to be an island near lost bay, but we ended up fishing 90 feet of water behind Bell Island. This spot will definitely be added to my laker spots on Cache Bay. Man oh man. Whenever we found the "money spot" we found baitfish and

lakers stacked up. The fish finder was like a slot machine. We marked fish mostly suspended around 70 ft. Lots of fish and just as many bait fish. On multiple passes both Dave_B and I hooked up with lakers. Dave_B would break one off, and then I'd have one come unbuttoned.

Finally, after a few different passes bouncing and trolling, I hooked up with a serious laker on a chartreuse 2 oz bottom bouncing jig. This fish was serious. I fought it for 10 or 15 minutes, giving and taking line as needed to wear it out. When I finally thought it was done, I brought the fish up alongside the canoe and BOOM, it took off again. This fish was easily the largest laker I had ever hooked...maybe the largest one I've ever seen hooked. When Dave_B went to grab and land the fish, it made one final run and pulled out the snap swivel on the leader I was using.

DAMN, that was a nice fish. We ended up fishing for another hour so with no hookups.

It was well past mid day, so Dave_B and I decided to head back to camp. Since we were not even close to where we thought we were, and since we were already turned around it was very easy for us to head the wrong way. We paddled towards the point where we thought our campsite was located only to see the vast expanse of Saganaga.....DAMN, how did we do that. Not only did we have a compass, but we even took it out to look. I guess we should have believed when it said we were travelling southeast. Images of the upside down Garmin GPS danced in my head.

When we turned around and started heading back to where the campsite actually was located, we saw the ranger station. This is when a boat came blasting out from the back side of the island. We'd be having another discussion with Janice, the Cache Bay ranger. When she recognized us from earlier in the week she was bummed out. She really thought she was going to be busting some folks trying to sneak in. We told her about our long push from Kawnipi the day before, and where we were camped. She told us that particular campsite was over used, and that she'd been trying to keep folks off of it. I can understand her position, but at 8:00pm in the dark, we would have camped on a bare rock had there been 3 tent pads.

After our Janice run in, we headed back towards our campsite again. This time we knew where it should be. On the way, we checked out another campsite that Janice told us about. This was just around the corner from where we camped and was much better. This must have been the second campsite that I knew about in this area. Dave_B and I pulled the canoe up and explored the camp for a few minutes. After a while, we decided this was a much better place to take a siesta than our campsite. There were many shade trees, and plenty of places to crawl up and take a nap, which is just what we did.

We napped for what seemed like hours, but in reality it was only 30 or 40 minutes, being awoken by SmallieSaver screaming across Cache Bay. We noticed them, about half mile out from where we were located. We got back into the canoe and headed out; making sure everything was good with them.

When we were close enough to talk, SmallieSaver told us that Chms had hooked up with a nice laker. In fact he had. Obviously one laker was not going to be enough for dinner, so Dave_B and I headed back to Bell Island, in search for another one or two. Once we arrived at Bell Island, Dave_B and I both put out trolling rigs. I used an old standby and Dave_B tied on the rig that Kristen_E had used on Keewatin. We made one pass.....BOOM, I hooked up on a really nice 3 or 4 lb eater laker. Since we only needed a couple we kept the canoe in 80 ft or more and headed back to camp.

We caught no other lakers.

Back in camp we tried to figure out just what we'd have for dinner.....We had many options, and finally settled on a little of everything. We had 2 packages of red beans and rice, some banana

bread mix, some dehydrated hash browns and the lakers. We decided to bake the lakers, cook the red beans and rice as normal, bake the bread, and then cook the hash browns.

For the hash browns, we buttered my Omnia oven and then put the hash browns, and some dried jalapenos, along with salt and pepper into it, and slow baked the mess for about 30 minutes. This turned out to be one of the best sides I've ever done in the Boundary Waters. Not only that, but it opened up a ton of ideas for future meals.

We ate like kings once again.

After dinner, we sat around and finished off what was left of whatever booze we had. I had probably 1/3 a bottle of spiced rum. Everyone said I was drunk. I was clearly not drunk, but I sure felt good, although I did have to be lead by hand back to the tent. I only wished the tent would have stopped spinning sooner.

Day 10: Friday, Sept 9th, 2011 Going Home

Wow...time to go home. For the first time ever, I actually didn't want to go home. For the first time ever, I had not broken down my fishing equipment the day before. Maybe it was due to the slow smallie fishing, maybe it was something else. All I know is this.....This trip was a fantastic trip. Not only did it go well, and not only did we have great weather and eat like kings, but this was one of the only trips where there were no group issues.

This was in fact one of my best and favorite trips.

Everyone broke camp pretty quickly; Kristen_E and GadgetMan had not planned on doing any fishing the final day, so they went ahead to the ranger station. They would end up waiting a couple hours, since Chms, SmallieSaver, Dave_B and I were all going to fish out.

We made it to the ranger station by 9:30 or 10:00am. After talking with Janice and purchasing some stuff from the "Friends of Quetico", we asked Janice if she could contact VCO to see if we could get an earlier tow. Our initial tow was scheduled for 12:00pm. We changed it to 11:00am.

We reached Hook Island and only had to wait a few minutes before the towboats arrived. I still could not believe this trip was over.....it went so fast. This was still a pretty long trip, but for some reason I wanted to stay a couple more days. I guess I will just have to wait until next year.

Final Thoughts:

Man, what a GREAT trip. There were not too many issues on this trip. I didn't mention the dog Cooper too much because Cooper was fantastic and I would not have any issues bringing him again.

Everyone seemed to get along great. The weather all week was GREAT. According to Chms and SmallieSaver, the fall smallie fishing was GREAT. It helps to get lucky and pick the right spots to target, AND have trip partners that allow others to experience a known, guaranteed magic spot.

Dave_B and I had a fantastic trip. The food was GREAT.

I cannot wait until next year.