

Day One, Friday, August 1, 2008

The bunk beds were hard as rocks, Cathy and I on one side of the room and Allan and Chris on the other side. I tossed and turned as light snores filled the room. I missed my sleep number 35! But the night passed and I was the first one up eager to take advantage of one last hot shower before we headed into the wilderness. I had the shower house to myself this early in the morning, only about 5:30 am. After I finished, I took a walk around the outfitters, but the mosquitoes sent me back to the picnic table with the Thermacell fired up. The rest of the gang got up at 6:30 and after a breakfast of pancakes and some strange meat they called sausage, we packed all of our gear into the backpacks. I think we are all a little nervous about how much gear we are hauling and I sense that everyone seems to be just a little on edge. We met Adam, the young man who would tow us to Hook Island. As he loaded us up he cheerfully said, "Oh, I've seen groups with way more stuff than this!" I thanked him and told him he knew just the right thing to say to make us feel better. I cannot imagine anyone taking more gear than we have.

The USA outfitters are not allowed to go into Canada, so we get towed to Hook Island, which is in a large lake called Saganaga, and then we paddle into Cache Bay to check in at the ranger's station. As we are being towed Adam and Allan are in the back of the boat chatting away. Cathy, Chris and I are sitting in the middle taking in the sites a little anxious and a little excited. This tow has saved us about 2 ½ hours or 6 ½ miles of paddling. All of a sudden, about 25 minutes later, we are pulling up to a quiet bay. We have begun our journey officially. Adam pulls out and waves goodbye. I gulped; we loaded up the canoes, we are on our own. I am grateful that Allan has made so many trips and is such an accomplished guide. I have complete confidence in his ability to lead us through the lakes dotted with islands and inlets and bays, with all of the scenery looking the same. He has a sixth sense to getting us around. Compasses are often no help up here.

We paddled hard into the wind and in about 2 hours we were pulling up to the dock of the ranger station. We sat for about an hour resting and waiting our turn. There were two groups ahead of us. Janice is the ranger, she has been working at this spot for 24 years, but she is not here today. Her replacement is a very friendly pretty woman who smiles all the time; she seems to love her job. She was very thorough as she went through all of the paperwork and gave us a short flip chart presentation of things to do and not to do. Details completed, it was about 12:30. After leaving the rangers station, we took her recommendation about which way to go. It was still really windy and there were white caps on the lake. The waves were so high they were splashing into the canoe. I was glad I had my life jacket on. Our sponges were stuck away in our packs---inaccessible. We were hungry and our plan was to paddle to a place to have lunch, then paddle some more to find a camp site close to Silver Falls portage where we would rest for the night and get an early and fresh start to make the portage. We chose a tiny island – translation – a big boulder poking out of the water, for our lunch. There was a sea gull sitting on the spot so Allan dubbed the island, Gull Island.

It was a nice spot to eat our ham and cheese sandwiches, fresh juicy apples and cookies. Cathy said never before had an apple tasted so good. Chris told me that I brought his favorite peanut butter cookies. How lucky, but really after our hard paddle we were so hungry, anything would have been delicious. I had volunteered to plan, shop and pack all of our food for the trip. It was a project that I

really enjoyed. I shopped at the camping stores and online backpackers web sites and sampled some food, before making final selections. Dehydrated food has really come a long way, most of it now really tasty. Allan gave me some good tips about wrapping masking tape around each days meals and labeling the packages for each day and meal.

After lunch, we continued across the choppy water and wind. Thankfully it eased up a bit; we had crossed the worst of the high water. We found an open campground and called it a day. Unloading the canoe went smoothly. Our camping site for the night was simple and adequate; we were staying only a short time so it did not have to be great. The common camp area for the fire and cooking was low and right on the water. Higher up a little hill we found two grassy patches for our tents. Along the path to the tents, we got a delightful surprise; blueberries were growing wildly and in peak season. They were a delicious snack, small in size but tasty and sweet.

I did not know how to put up the tent, so I asked Chris if he would help me and Cathy, then we'd help him with his. Turned out, Cathy knew exactly how it went together and in no time at all we had our portable bedrooms set up. We brought tents that are considered four to five person tents. I can't imagine five people crammed in though, everyone would have been elbows to rear ends. As it is, Cathy and I each have a twin sized air mattress and there is about 8 inches down the middle of the tent to maneuver. This was my splurge item for the trip, my Intex air mattress and battery operated air pump. Now, I do not need a lot of luxury, obviously, or I wouldn't be here in the wilderness, but the plush air mattress and sleeping bags are definitely worth the weight and bulk - as good as the Hilton.

Chris gathered wood and started the fire and we cooked up some delicious rib eye steaks and garlic mashed potatoes. After dinner Chris spent a lot of time rigging up his mosquito net, he decided to sleep out under the stars. We are all hoping to see the northern lights and promise each other that if anyone ever sees the lights, we must immediately wake up everyone to see them also. I am tired and as much as I would like to enjoy the evening and the camp fire, I head up the hill to our tent. I am sleeping soundly in no time at all. At morning tide Chris showed up at Allan's tent with his bedroll. He spent the night under the stars, but a host of mosquitoes found their way inside his netting. Seems like they crawled through the grass and under the netting.

