

## Paradise and Beyond

By MooseTrack

The biggest northern pike, biggest smallmouth bass, biggest walleye and yes, the biggest lake trout ever caught in his life. To say the least, Lundy was more than satisfied with the fishing we experienced on our fall trip into the Quetico. For Lundy this wilderness canoe trip was an unforgettable fishing experience and not to mention an enduring physical challenge. As for me, it was an opportunity to return to an area that has a special place in my heart, rejuvenate after a long season and to develop a friendship with my new canoe partner.

Bring your shorts, tee shirts, sunglasses and oh yeah, do not forget your winter clothes and sunscreen. This was the last conversation I had with Lundy before he made his way from Tennessee to the great Northwoods to join me on a fall canoe trip adventure. I warned him that he needed to be prepared for what ever Mother Nature threw at us. Blowing snow, finger chilling rain, arm tiring wind, and if we were lucky some shorts and tee-shirt weather can be expected on an October canoe trip.

It was that time of year when the hustle and bustle of a 24-7 resort and outfitting operation was quieting down, fall colors were almost peaking, and to leave behind the stresses of ever day life and head into the Quetico for my annual fall get-a-way. This trip was even more special because if you had read my previous articles, my life has been a bit hectic and not to mention stressful. Unfortunately, some of life's new adventures have resulted in my inability to partake in a fall Quetico trip for the last two years. Last year I did manage to "sneak" away for a short five day trip into the BW, but nothing compares to busting deep into the interior of the Quetico for 12 memorable days. I was pumped for this trip and all I could think about was returning to places that my heart yearned for...crystal clear lakes, rumbling water falls, beautiful fall colors and of course, excellent fall fishing.

With the last water pipe drained, boat flipped over and cabin door locked it was time to set out on our 12 day adventure deep into the Quetico interior. Our destination and itinerary were vague, but we knew where we would enter and what day we needed to exit. That is all that mattered to us. Twelve days of nothing except each others company, great food, old Reddog, and over 2 million acres of wilderness filled with lots of hungry fish, challenging portages, blood red sunsets, starry nights and breath taking scenery. It does not get any better than that!

This was Lundy's first extended wilderness canoe trip, so as he gazed wide-eyed at the pile of gear and food, he was concerned as to how we would fit 4 packs, fishing gear, odds and ends and not to mention Ruby into our canoe. Granted we were traveling a bit heavy because we wanted to eat well, have a few evening cocktails and fish, fish, fish, however I assured him we were not over loaded and everything would fit nicely into the

canoe. If everything is packed correctly it is amazing what a canoe can safely carry.

Paddle, paddle, portage...paddle, paddle, portage. Our first day was typical for one of my fall personal trips. Lots of shoulder searing paddling and disk slipping portages in order to reach the first leg of our journey. Our goal was to bust in as far as possible, feed our growling bellies, and rest our weary bodies to prepare for tomorrow's portage.

Nicknamed "The Portage From Hell", it is an unmarked, unused, game trail that leads up a long, often narrow ravine and into what I refer to as paradise. I had warned Lundy about the challenges of joining me on a fall excursion, but I am not sure he knew my definition of excursion. The Voyagers and their ability to travel great distances with backbreaking heavy loads have always inspired me. I sometimes wonder if my blood runs thick with the echoes of these feisty French travelers. To me, portages are just part of the overall experience and a necessity to travel from one breathtaking lake to another. Some are longer and more challenging, while others are just a hop and a pull. To put it simply, I love portages.

The white head of a majestic Bald eagle glowed with the setting sun as we approached the campsite and I wondered if he was signaling it's location and to welcome me back to where I belong. The Wilderness. I took a deep breath of the cool evening air and thanked the spirits above for allowing me the opportunity to return to this wonderful place and asked for our safe travel.

Dawn brought a belly-busting breakfast, a significant drop in temperature, and ominous gray clouds which were sure to bring precipitation. What kind we would soon find out. Quickly packing our dry tents, we prepared for the days journey. I knew what laid ahead and only hoped the "short-cut" still existed and had not been clogged full of blow-downs and grown over by eye poking brush.

Paddling as fast as we could, we headed to a near-by island to cover our bodies in a protective layer of Gore-Tex. The sky broke loose with an interesting mix of precipitation. Not quite snow, rain, or even sleet. Just giant pellets of frozen stuff that bounced off of us like marbles on a trampoline. We referred to it as "bouncing rain." "Wow that came in quick" said Lundy. "Yeah, we could be in for some interesting weather" I replied. If only we knew how interesting.

"Bouncing rain" turned to hand stinging sleet then to snow and back to bouncing rain followed by increasing winds from the north. Interesting weather, to say the least. With increasing northerly winds, we made our way across a large body of water, waves bucking us like a wild bronco and snow, sleet and bouncing rain pelting our exposed faces. The portage from hell was within our sights.

We beached the canoe at the beaver dam which as I remembered was the "entrance" to the body breaking portage and separated the traveled routes from those areas only a few people visit each year. Paradise I call it. Following a exploratory mission up the

ravine, I found what I remembered as the portage. A leg lifting, brush busting, mud mucking, log slipping, and rock strewn walk through the woods. Did I mention it was over 320 rods? Upon my return, I informed Lundy that the "trail" existed, however it was very hard to follow, and it was up to him if we wanted to attempt it. Never doing a portage of this magnitude I knew it would be a very challenging bushwhack and did not want to make this a miserable experience. I was also concerned about Ol' Reddog's ability to accomplish this feat. She is now 12 years old and is not quite as limber as she used to be. Still has the heart, but jumping over blow-downs are becoming more and more difficult.

The decision was made. We would take our time crossing the portage from hell (after all we had the rest of the day), work our way north into paradise and be warming by a cracking campfire at our campsite by dusk. The burning pain in my shoulders and legs reminded me that I was not as young as I used to be, but I cinched my straps, sucked some air and plowed forward following the game trail up the ravine. Lundy was bringing up the rear and I could hear him periodically releasing gut grunting growls and language only allowed deep in the wilderness and away from listening ears. We finally reached the end of the bushwhack, only to have to return for another load and do the whole portage again. I enjoyed the hike back through the ravine crossing beaver dams, the smell of fall in the air, steep banks covered with maples ablaze in blood red leaves and moose tracks indicating we were not the only crazy creatures using this portage.

Lundy asked if I had ever taken paying customers on the so-called portage. I informed him only a select few and that it is not for the faint hearted. "Faint hearted? you have to be nuts to do this portage" he bellowed. I told you it was challenging and would probably be the toughest thing you have ever done. He could not wait to return to Tennessee to inform his spandex wearing tread mill TV watchers that this is the ultimate work out. I told him I was working on my new video called Jack Pine Jim's Wilderness Workout.

Tired and a bit beaten-up, we made our way across a no name lake and headed into one of my favorite lake with only one campsite. The "interesting" weather had subsided, but the north wind continued to blow and it was a sight for sore eyes (and body) to see the smoke swirling and smell it's sweetness as we approached the campsite. As planned earlier in the week, we had planned to meet my good friend and fellow guide Aaron for a "welcome" back to the Quetico reunion. He had entered 4 days earlier and worked his way from the north into this Quetico gemstone. Our plan was to spend a few days together in search of some mouth watering lake trout and exchange some good old guide stories which I was sure Lundy would enjoy listening to. Following a quick dinner and some evening cheer, we headed off to our tents and were lulled to sleep by more bouncing rain and the roar of a chilly wind.

Zip, zip, zip... I poked my foggy head out the tent, rubbed my blurry eyes and to my surprise the ground was covered with an early September blanket of snow. Brrrr... back in the bag I crawled for some quality bag time. No need to hurry. After all I was on

vacation and enjoyed the silence of the wilderness. No phone, people, problem, cars, lights...nothing but the sound of 20 mile per hour north winds. But, that was okay. Today we would lay over and enjoy some campfire camaraderie, relaxation, and maybe even some fishing.

White caps continued to roll across the lake and snow flakes the size of dimes turned into the largest one all of us have ever seen. It was as if the heavens had opened up and were dropping sheets of tissue paper. Floating gently to earth they began accumulate, covering Aaron's long red beard like a north-woods Santa Clause. The only thing missing was the big belly, but it was still worth a photo opportunity.

To say the least, fishing was limited to thoughts and memories of past fishing trips to this pristine lake tucked away deep in the Quetico. Maybe tomorrow would bring sunny stable weather making it easier to fish. As evening approached, our hopes faded as old man winter was knocking on the door and brought stronger winds and falling temperatures. Not to mention more snow.

Fluttering tent flaps awakened me, and it was obvious the relentless north wind was not going to subside and we needed to develop a new plan. It was time for Aaron to head back out of the wilderness and we need to find a campsite with more protection. An exposed campsite in July is wonderful to keep the bugs at bay and to provide a cooling breeze, but if the north wind blows hard in October it can be down right miserable. We needed protection!

Shaking the ice and snow off our frozen tents and tarps we began to break camp for the bust out of our wind blown site. Aaron headed south where as we headed north to some lakes I had visited, however never had the opportunity to learn and fish them hard. I was looking forward to the possibility of hooking into some big walleyes, but first we had another long day ahead. Especially in the wind.

Paddle, paddle, and portage. Paddle, paddle, and portage. Sometimes it felt more like portage, portage, and portage, but we continued to head north as the sun began to fall quickly in the autumn sky. As dusk nipped at our stern we found a beautiful south facing island campsite protecting us from the Gore-Tex penetrating wind. Relief at last. A big bone warming and sock drying evening campfire along with a few sips of Grandma's (Polish blackberry brandy used for medicinal purposes only) was sure to lift our spirits. Tomorrow we would explore the depths of this lake in search of elusive and hungry fish.

Fish On! It was not long until we had enough fish for dinner, although the wind made it tough to keep the canoe in position. Located off a long point and between a small island we located a spot we referred to as "The Honey Hole." Every time we drifted through it we caught walleye, northern or smallmouth bass. It was one of guaranteed dinner spots.

The next 3 days were filled full of fabulous fishing and improving weather. It was

enjoyable exploring unknown waters, testing my knowledge of fall fishing patterns and watching Lundy catch more fish than he knew ever existed in one lake.

Thump! His rod tip bent over like a wet noodle as we made a drift over "The Honey Hole." Setting the hook deep into the fishes mouth it took off for the depths of this wilderness lake. From the look in Lundy's eyes and bend in the rod, I knew it was a big fish. He was about to do battle with either a 10 pound walleye or a big gator. Time would tell. The fight was on and by the line screaming runs it was obvious Lundy had latched on to a big pike. Fighting the giant with great finesse, he tired it enough for us to get a good look at it. When it surfaced we were able to see that is was a monster and I knew we could not land it into the canoe. We needed to finish the fight from shore. Joking with Lundy, I told him not to lose it while I snapped a few pictures and gradually paddled towards shore. Landing this fish was not as important or rewarding as doing battle with it and Lundy kept telling the pike not to worry because he would soon be set free. Following a few pictures and assuring the near 40 inch pike was revived, we watched as he headed back to its hunting grounds. What a great battle to have witnessed.

After spending 4 days on what we called "Lac Lundy", we encountered clear blue skies, a great ball of fire and to my surprise, no wind. What a wonderful day it was to be alive. It was time for us to work our way south wearing sunglasses and in our tee-shirts and shorts. We were disappointed we had to leave "The Honey Hole" and head back towards our home country, but grateful to leave behind lots of fish and bring home memories of Paradise and Beyond.

**Jim Blauch**  
**Moose Track Adventures**



<http://www.quietjourney.com/>