

Oct 15 - We got a little sunshine in the morning and afternoon today, and a pretty dusting of snow decorated the forest when we awoke. We spent the first two hours of the day battling our way up the last quarter mile of rapids, which took all the strength and skill we could muster. Incredibly relieved to be back on calmer water (although still facing a strong floodwater current) we paddled up to a railway bridge, where a couple people walked up the railroad to a little post office to send some mail and charge a cell phone. The rest of us made a fire and rested. It is too cold to sit still without making a fire! We finished the day by paddling a few more miles and portaging around a dam, making camp in a stand of pine and fir. We had rice and stew made from a few old bones we are still re-boiling, ~~the~~ wild cherul leaves, ramps, evening primrose root, wild ginger root, and one chopped up garter snake that we encountered at the railroad tracks. From our camp we could hear the hum of the Taconite Mine, and the whistles of the trains that carry its pellets of iron ore to Duluth, where they are shipped to far-off places. That ore will probably travel further in a few days than we will on this entire 5-week paddle.

Oct 16 - Got out of camp early and pushed hard to make 13 miles up the big river to the confluence where we turn North on a much smaller waterway. The water is much calmer above the dam, but ~~the~~ paddling upstream for so many miles in below-freezing temperatures with a cold

wind is still exhausting. By the time we reached the ⁽³⁾ confluence, turned North, and found a campsite, I was getting mildly hypothermic. I'd been eating and drinking regularly all day, and paddling steadily, but a combination of general exhaustion and not putting on more layers when the evening chill set in snuck up on me. My toes had gone numb and I found my fingers were so fumbly that it was hard to operate zippers as I tried to put on more layers. The group looked after me really well, and after carrying some heavy things up the bank, drinking some hot water, and warming myself by the fire I felt a lot better. We had acorn ramp pilaf again tonight, and it's amazing how filling and satisfying acorns are when we don't have meat. I'm so glad I took the time to leach the acorns we are carrying during our layover days - they have to be boiled at least three times to get the tannins out before you can eat them. One of the essential tensions of our trip is that we can either make a lot of miles in a day, or focus on acquiring some meat, but it is hard to do both things at once. Hunting and trapping require their own time and focus. We have some nuisance permits to trap beaver on parts of this smaller river, and hope to have more meat in our diet soon.

Oct 17 - Jack left us temporarily today, headed home for a week to acquire new glasses to replace the ones that, as he puts it, "fell into the drink." We will miss him. Now we are down to six people. Jack stashed his canoe before heading out to Duluth, and we had to consolidate all the group gear he was carrying into the other three canoes. Our already heavy

canoes are now absolutely barges, stacked high and riding low. This little river is full of winding oxbow turns and we are still paddling up stream against flooded currents. Our steering becomes quite clumsy. I am paddling with scogin now that Jack is gone, and today we saw a whitetailed deer very close to the shore and un-alarmed by our approach until we were quite near. It was nearly in bow range, but there was too much brush between us for a clear shot. Venison would be so welcome right now! Also, it was sunny all day (for only the second time in 21 days of paddling!)

Oct 18 - We had decided to have a morning of rest, so I got up before dawn, strung my bow, and finally went deer hunting! The soft sand and pine needles in the red pine plantation we were camping in was very quiet to walk on, and I got quite close to a beautiful doe. She saw me and bounded off, but then circled back in curiosity, trying to determine what I was. I stood utterly still as she pranced around nervously, snorting and flicking her tail, staring right at me. She was just out of my effective range, but when she turned broadside at 30 yards I would have been sorely tempted to try a shot anyway if I could have gotten to full draw without her seeing me move. Our hunger for meat makes it tempting to push my limits, and I was flooded with a deep visceral understanding of how hunting ethics would be different in a subsistence culture. This is hunting, when ~~my~~ my body cries out for the protein and fat in

front of me, causing me to pray to this deer ⁽⁴⁾
"Come to me, come to me, come to me! We need you!"
as she stares into my eyes. And it seemed as though
she thought about it pretty hard for 5 whole minutes as
she danced just out of range - I even had my bow
~~at~~ at half draw at one point, inner voices inside me debating:
"She's beyond your 20-yard effective range with this
recurve bow, you can't ethically take a shot!" and the
hungry voice that insisted "Shoot! Just try! It might work!"
Then she made up her mind and bounded away gracefully
through the scrub willow underbrush. My heart had been
pounding and my whole body trembling with the
excitement of the moment, and as she left me I wished
her well. I slowly circled around to where I thought
she might have headed, but did not see her again. That is the
closest I have ever come to shooting a deer with a bow,
and it has given me much to think about. With a rifle or
even with my compound bow, I would have had her.
With my recurve I could have made a bold, reckless attempt,
but chose to see if she would choose us, and come a few
steps closer so I could make a confident ethical shot.
I think my choice was a good and responsible one, and the
experience also leaves me with a glimpse of a much more
ancient hunting ethic, from before hunting was a "sport".
It rings of a deeply animal truth that sings to the untamed
edges of my soul. I wonder what I will choose next
time?

I returned to the warm wall tent to tell my tale,⁵ eat a hot breakfast, and finally play a second session of Dungeons and Dragons with Anty, Scogin, and Hanlon. It was a truly happy morning, enjoyable in all its parts. The sun was out all day and in the afternoon we canoed in tank tops thanks to the sudden bizarre warmth. We didn't even put up a shelter that night, we just slept under some spruce trees in the middle of a hazel thicket. Hanlon and I curled up under a spruce tree that had a little cup of grassy space just big enough for the two of us and very soft. The contentment of the day felt disorienting after all the bad weather and struggle we have endured.

Oct 19 - We finally got to some lakes today! Paddling over the beautiful flat water, I remembered that I actually like canoeing when it is not a constant slog against a stiff current. We passed lots of vacation homes, did two short portages around rapids, went under a railroad berm through a coal tunnel, and navigated a bridge passage and an old dam chute by pulling our canoes through with ropes. People got a little frustrated with each other by the end of the day, and around the campfire we had a really engaging discussion about gendered communication styles. There is a lot of "one man striking purposefully and silently into the woods to solve the problem by himself" going on, and several of us (including all

the women) want a more collaborative and ⑥
inclusive problem-solving style. In my life at
home I don't encounter this dynamic very often
at all, and the amount of work it is taking to
address it here feels frustrating to me. I'm glad
we are talking about it though. It is getting cold
again.

Oct 20 - It snowed on us last night, a swirling windy
snow that snuck under our tarp shelter and
covered all our sleeping bags with snow in the night.
Demoralized by the return of bitter cold, it took
us a while to get going in the morning. We have
been making good time in general, and it is plausible
that we will get to our Whitefish Camp by our goal
of Nov 1st, which once felt very unlikely. However,
the dates of the 3-week Whitefish season vary every
year based on water temperature, and are announced
with only 2 days notice. Today we finally decided to
call the DNR to check the dates, and found out that
Whitefish season begins today ... 11 days earlier than
usual. We are still at least 10 days away from the
lake where our nets are stashed. Fishing for only
half the season could drastically change our winter
calorie stash ... to the point where we could run out
of meat if beaver trapping goes poorly. Having no fat
source in our diet in deep winter will mean being pretty cold!
So this matter is fairly high stakes. We caused up two

lakes to our next portage, made camp, and had a ^⑦ meeting: Do we keep paddling North, get there late, hope the fish are still running, and try to get 1,000 fish netted at the end of the season? Or do we get in cars, drive up there now, and have the whole 3-week season to stock up on fish and set ourselves up for success this winter?

This question pushed us to define two different perspectives on this trip:

#1 Let's "try until we fail" - stick to our principles of only wild food, only human-powered travel, and caring for each other until we either run out of food or complete the yearlong expedition. If we run out of food early, we will likely disperse rather than buying food from a store to continue.

#2 Let's "set ourselves up for success" - bend our rules now as unforeseen circumstances arise so that we can be certain we can complete the 12 months. Usually this involves getting in cars, as we did after the hailstorm destroyed the rice harvest at rice camp.

Our group seems to have a strong leaning toward the "Try until we fail" approach. I personally find that approach much more compelling and grand. At the end of the night we decided to keep canoeing north and get there when we get there. May the gods send us gentle weather, abundant game, patience with ourselves and each other, and a multitude of fish to greet our arrival at Whitefish Camp!

Oct 21 - We spent the whole day portaging, canoeing across a very small pond, and then pushing the boats up a short stretch of rapids. Magically, it was sunny and relatively warm, which boosted everyone's mood significantly. Yesterday I managed to find the time to organize, consolidate and label all the wild food we are carrying with us, and it feels really good to know what is in our floating larder - 12 gallons of rice, one gallon of acorns, 20 gallons of apples, 4 gallons of high bush cranberries, 12 gallons of ramps, just over a gallon of nanny berries and of rosehips, and smaller quantities of hawthorn haws, wild ginger root, sweet fern, whitegreen, dried mint, and dried apples. All this we have harvested this year! Plus we have 2 gallons of maple sugar from last spring. All this is quite heavy to portage, plus our heavy wild-food-related equipment - 4 cast iron pans, several large stock pots, a meat grinder (for beaver burgers), a food mill, harvesting bags and buckets, 3 guns, 2 bows + their arrows, 4 fishing poles + tackle, 15 traps ("330" body-grip traps, quite heavy)... Portaging all this is quite a production! We only have one really long portage left, about 6 miles. We should hit it in a few days. We have portage wheels stashed there, so hopefully we can roll the boats along with some of the gear still in them to save some trips.

In the evening we had a sharing circle based on the question, "How did your parents fuck you up?" It generated a lot of insights! ~~and~~ (we love you, parents!)