

Sept 11 - Today I learned to dance rice moderately well! After our morning meeting I parched two pans of rice, then danced one pit of rice and got some blisters before it was done. I haven't had a foot blister since I hiked the Appalachian Trail, which gave me permanent hiking boot calluses, but dancing rice in thin buckskin booties requires a whole different set of calluses! Luckily I am an expert at blister dressings and I stocked the med kit with plenty of moleskin and medical tape, so I fixed up my feet and danced 3 more pits in a row with no problems! By the last one I had the twist-from-the-hips motion down pretty well and my rice dancing times are half what they were yesterday. As a group we danced over 30 pits, which should make about 6 5-gallon buckets of rice. We need 48 buckets, plus one more that we will donate to the Eubridge Line 3 pipeline action camp. They are fighting a pipeline that will affect all of this area where we are living ~~at~~ the

land, that passes very near the lake ② we riced on. It crosses the Mississippi river twice, and has over 250 water crossings which affect the Mississippi, Hudson Bay, and Lake Superior watersheds. ~~the~~

When this pipeline leaks (and they always leak) it may well pollute these rice lakes.

Rice needs very clean water, so that would be the end of the wild rice that people on this land have depended on for around 10,000 years. Will the grandchildren of my generation get to do a trip like this? My biggest conflict about being on this trip is that I feel like I should be at the pipeline action camp as well! A visiting activist friend from Minneapolis gave us all the updates on the Line 3 struggle, and said that www.StopLine3.org is where people can go to make donations, get updates, and learn how to support or join the action camp. If you are able, consider donating to the brave souls who are at the frontlines of this struggle - it requires far more courage and fortitude than what we are doing, and could leave an invaluable legacy.

Sept 12 + 13 - Yikes! Crazy few days.

Yesterday during our morning meeting a big red diesel pickup truck pulled into our camp. It was Joe, the guy who turns out to own the land we've been living on - apparently we were over the boundary of the state land by 100 yards. Sara and Gemid were our diplomacy team, and explained about the Wild Food Year project. He said our project sounded ambitious and agreed to let us stay till the 20th (our goal was to leave by then anyway). Crisis averted! We processed 32 pits of rice that day.

This morning we got up early to put in a long work day, and were parching rice by 7:30 am. A little after 8 am someone announced "The police are here." I looked up from my parching pan to see two sheriff's trucks pulling into camp! The officers politely let us know that Joe had changed his mind and we needed to be out of here in a day or two. Crisis reinstated! We

already have way too much to do in the ③ next 7 days, and spending 2-3 days moving our entire rice processing station and all of camp would set us behind schedule immensely. Our departure date is pretty important because we need to be at our fish camp in the Boundary Waters by the time the Whitefish start to spawn. We danced the 6 pits of rice we'd been parching when the police came, then had no more will to keep working until a plan could be formulated. We came up with three possible alternative campsites, sent people to scout the closest one, and Gerrid went ~~in~~ to the gas station to ask around for Joe's phone number. The rest of us organized our things, winnowed our finished rice, and bagged up the rice we'd been drying in the field. When the scouts returned we decided to move to the next-furthest-away campsite option, but not to move anything until tomorrow, because Gerrid had left Joe a message and hoped for a call back.

It sounded like a long shot, and we ⁽³⁾ continued to pack up camp and load canoes. Then, just before dark, Joe called, and Gerrid got him to agree to let us stay until the 20th!!! We just have to go to the library tomorrow morning, print off a liability waiver, and all sign it. In great celebration we sat down to the feast Sara had prepared so that we could invite Joe and his wife to dinner (they didn't join us), and then unloaded all the canoes in the dark with high spirits. We lost a full day to all this crisis response, but it is still better than actually having to move camp tomorrow. I'm actually pretty proud of how our team pulled together under pressure, making sensible, measured decisions and working together to get everything done. Many of us have been feeling lonely here, and talking about how our team lacks cohesion. I've been counting on shared adversity to pull us together over time, and today I think it did! We also said goodbye to Zev, Ari,

and a supporter from Minneapolis today, all (4) of whom have put in many days of hard work to help our harvest (and Zev will rejoin us at Whitefish camp and then for the last 6 months of the trip). While it has been very tricky to be trying to form our group of 7 people amidst a larger rice camp of 12 to 19 folks (people come and go), the help we have received has been totally essential - we could never do this in the time we've allotted otherwise, not with half of us being brand new to ricing.

I am coming to understand just how variable wild food harvests are in a new way. The rice took longer to harvest this year because it was a poor year. There are bumper crops of plums and acorns, but we are scrambling for bear fat. Since none of us got a bear tag in the hunting lottery, we must get it from a game processor - but few bears are being shot this year (abundant acorns make them not tempted by bait hunters place) and those that have been shot are all lean. It will be a long winter indeed if we can't get fat!

Sept 14 - We processed rice all day today. We are down to just a few dancers and all of us are exhausted. We miss our helpful friends who have gone home. We might have just enough days + capacity, or we might not. I snuck off and read 5 pages of my Octavia Butler novel before dinner, but felt guilty that I was not dancing rice or cracking acorns. Please, Rice Gods, help us finish processing our rice in time!

Sept 15 - Morale is up. We got an ipod + speaker at the rice dancing pit and processed rice to Daft Punk and metal. 29 pits today, and a new count of the rice indicator that if we can dance 27 pits per day we will finish in time! Joe the landowner showed up with 4 Northern Pike for us in a cooler, right after Cop Man Dan tried to hassle us.* After dinner we all sat around the fire and gasped in revulsion as one of us lanced and squeezed their staph infection.


Wilderness TV! We have gone feral so fast...

* our liability waiver got us off his blacklist, and he switched to giving us advice about beaver trapping.

Sept 16 - Happy Birthday Andy! This is our third Virgo birthday since Rice Camp started, unless

you count our teammate who is in Europe until ③ March, in which case it the fourth. Our Expedition runs on Virgo power!

Rice processing feels very understaffed today. Happily, our person with a Staph infection has agreed to go to the clinic and get professional help. Another person has a swollen knee, yet another person has a large infected toe blister, and two folks have pre-existing knee issues. There are only ten folks in camp those days, and we are down to five people who are actually physically capable of dancing rice. We are also short on people who can parch rice for the dancers. As a result we stopped after dancing just 15 pits today.

Let me take a moment to describe the entire rice processing sequence. After you've thoroughly dried your rice in the sun, you make a fire under a large steel parching pan (ours are about 3 feet square). You put three very full 5-gallon buckets of raw rice into the pan, and stir it for about 45 minutes with basswood parching paddles - we made ours here in camp: . The rice cooks down to about 2/3rds of its original volume and turns a toasty golden color. You take this fragrant hot rice

and divide it ~~it~~ between 3 dancing pits ⁽³⁾
(about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a bucket per pit). The pits are dug
into the earth in a very specific concave
shape. Each pit is lined first with cotton canvas
and next with a tanned elk or moose hide
(membrane/flesh side up). Once the rice is in
the pit, you put on buckskin booties (we made
these ourselves too) and dance or "jig" the rice
for 20-90 minutes. Some people are faster dancers,
and thoroughly parched rice dances faster. You
use your feet to grind the hulls against the elk
hide so that the hull breaks and falls away, leaving
the rice grain exposed and free. The volume of
the rice reduces by half as the hulls are ground
into dust. When a small sample gets winnowed
and shows few or no intact hulls, you bag up
that pit and start another. We will winnow the
rice on windy days. Each pit started as 5 gallons
of raw rice and finishes up at about one gallon.
A gallon of rice should feed our group for about
a day and a ~~part~~ third of the next day.

My pits often take close to an hour, and I
usually dance 4 pits per day. Dancing is the
equivalent of jogging. So that's like jogging for

40-60 minutes 4 times per day. It is a lot of work!

Today I made lunch from the Northern Pike Joe brought us. Gernid had already filleted them, and I used Sara's fool-proof recipe.

- heat a cast iron skillet and melt some fat in it
- lay the fillets skin down and season. I used salt and lemon juice because that's what we had left in our rag-tag pantry. Sara uses salt, pepper, wild bergamot, and a dribble of maple syrup.
- cover and cook for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and serve.

This was the first time I've cooked fish in my life (I am handicapped by having been raised in two different vegetarian households), let alone over an open fire, but I did it totally alone and they came out perfectly! I got several compliments on the meal. Now I just need to learn to cook beaver and my anxiety about cooking for this group will be over. Every meal goes with wild rice - one large handful per person in a dutch oven, fill it with water, bring to a boil - then you can put a few sticks on the fire and stop tending it, it will cook perfectly as your fire dies down to coals.

Folks are winnowing rice to finish out the work day, but I think I'll be domestic and wash some dishes.