

Canoe Adventure Trip Planning

— As Easy as Falling into the Water



by Chris Blanchette and David Gilbert

Photos by David Gilbert

Most adventure trips start as an idea. “Wouldn’t it be great to...?”

Our troop had done their fair share of camping, and we wondered if they would be receptive to an interior park canoeing and camping adventure. At one of the first meetings of the year, we introduced the idea by talking about canoeing, and inquiring about their swimming levels and comfort around water.

At the next meeting, we watched a movie about interior park canoeing. Afterwards, we talked about compass work, navigation and planning of a canoe route. Each patrol was given a map of Algonquin Park, some string to measure distances and rules on how much distance could be covered in a day. The patrols were challenged to:

- F plan a canoe route with the tools and knowledge they had gained in compass and map reading over the last two years
- F list the directions, lakes and rivers they would travel per day in the order they would be encountered
- F include the length of the portages by measuring the distances with the string and then converting into portage length using the scale on the map
- F start and finish at the same point for a five day canoe trip.

This worked well, but it took a couple of meetings to complete instead of the one we had planned. (See the sidebar on the next page for a meeting plan.)

Were the Scouts ready for a major canoe trip, along with learning all the necessary skills for such a challenge, by the end of the Scouting year? The interest was high enough to accept the challenge as we worked toward preparing for the adventure. On to the next steps!

Where to Go?

We would have to put together a fairly organized plan in order to “sell” the activity to the parents. The first one the parents rejected because the travel to the park was too long; the second was not safe enough because there was a lot of moving water in high water season. After more research, we were able to identify a trip that was not only close enough, but offered a moderate challenge that could be changed upon encountering bad weather or unforeseen circumstances.

The park chosen for the adventure was no less than Massasauga Provincial Park, located on the eastern shores of Georgian Bay just south of Parry Sound, ON. Features of the park that lent itself well for this trip were:

- F Easy access (close to a major highway)
- F All flat water (no worries of changing water levels or currents)
- F Short, mostly flat, portages (easy to make multiple trips)
- F Less than a day’s travel from anywhere in the park to get out
- F Marine Emergency Radio services with a Coastguard helicopter close by
- F Campsites maintained, easily accessible and identified from the water
- F Less than a six hour drive from home base.

Editor’s Note: Attention all Troop Scouters

Are you aware of the Turnbull Family Adventure Challenge? If your application is accepted, and you meet all the criteria, you can receive a monetary reward of up to \$2500.00 – just for doing what you most likely are already doing!! For all the requirements and application, go to Scouts Canada’s web site and click on: <http://www.scouts.ca/media/documents/TurnbullAwardRequirements.pdf>

Equipment and Costs

Before making our presentation to the parents, we needed to determine a ballpark cost of the trip. This was done by identifying camp and park fees, fuel, food, canoe and trailer rentals. Do your homework when costing out canoe and trailer rentals. Check with the park, outdoor outfitters and even your own Scout council for rental prices.

What equipment would the troop need to purchase in order to do a lightweight canoe trip? Would fundraising be necessary to purchase the equipment? What gear did we or the Scout group already own? (See sidebar for details on Equipment.)

Risk Management Strategies

With the adventure approved by the parents and group committee, we were ready to design a plan to develop the necessary skills to safely do the trip with proper risk management strategies. Four goals were organized as follows:

1. Identify program goals and assign tasks to complete goals by end of program year.

- Canoe trip at end of year
- Determine Scouts Canada's requirements (B.P.&P. Section 10000)
- Calculate costs
- Identify gear
- Review canoe skills and swimming abilities
- Arrange for canoe and First Aid training
- Determine who has lifeguard qualifications.

2. Determine what other badges and awards could be achieved through preparing for this adventure.

- F We worked on the Paddling Badge and the Swimming Badge as part of the preparation requirements. A large part of the Outdoor Skills in both Voyageur and Pathfinder sections were also covered.

3. Familiarize the Scouts with the equipment/gear.

This took two to three meetings. Not only did we cover all the requirements in both the above badges, but we also covered:

- F Stern Paddler: Primary steering and power strokes. Directs the paddling activity.
- F Bow Paddler: Primary water reading and power strokes. Steering help on occasion.
- F Middle Paddler: Helps with power strokes and draw strokes.
- F How to load gear in a canoe.
- F How to get in and out of a canoe, with and without gear.
- F Getting gear in and out of a canoe.
- F Three ways to carry a canoe (one person overhead, two persons on either side in the middle, or two persons opposite sides front and back).
- F How to do a portage (who carries what, and when).
- F How to waterproof a standard backpack and use waterproof backpacks.
- F How to pack a pack.
- F What type of shoes (water and hiking) should be worn and when.
- F What kind of tent (lightweight, preferably under 11 lbs) and equipment is required.
- F How to get clean water (filters, purification pills, boiling).
- F What kind of food to eat.
- F What kind of equipment (stove, bedding) is required.
- F Preparing for rain.
- F Safest place to paddle (near shore if possible).
- F How to prepare and store food properly in the wilderness (no food in or near tents; hang in trees).
- F Where you go to the bathroom.
- F A typical day.
- F What kind of animals might we see.
- F What to do if a canoe tips over (stay with the canoe).
- F What to do if someone gets hurt.

Orienteering Exercise Meeting Plan

(Planning a Canoe Trip Route)

Understanding Paddling and Portage Capabilities, contributes toward Water Tripping Badge.

- F An adult in good physical condition can paddle 15 to 25 kms in a day.
- F Because we are a large group and are at varying levels, we will plan on eight kms per day.
- F Plan on one hour for a 500 metre portage and an additional 20 minutes for every additional 250 metres.
- F Plan on one hour for lunch at one of the portage points, or on a nice island.
- F Give yourself two hours in the morning to prepare and eat breakfast, tear down camp and start paddling.
- F Give yourself two hours before dark to set up camp, prepare and eat dinner.
- F Plot a there and back trip.
- F Plot a loop trip. (See more, but not always possible)
- F Show example (How to use strings for distance)
- F Break into patrols, hand out Algonquin Park canoe maps. Designate a different entry point for each patrol. Challenge to route a five day canoe trip.

Being prepared to meet all of the challenges of a canoe trip made it all that more enjoyable.





4. Conduct a series of water-based activities at a local pool based on swimming and water safety rules as well as canoeing skills.

Although there was not much room in the pool to effectively practice the strokes, the Scouts learned the basics. More importantly, they learned to feel comfortable with being in and out of the canoe.

Because safety preparation was one of the most important items in the risk assessment, we insisted that each Scout had their own certified PFD, properly fitted and in good condition. They also were required to attend a minimum of four out of the five pool sessions in order to attend the canoe adventure.

We planned a lightweight, pre-canoe trip camp when the weather got better so we could practice our canoe strokes, portaging, setup and use of the lightweight gear. Each canoe carried two Scouts and one leader, with first year Scouts in the middle. Third year, Chief Scout candidates were allowed to be paired together. Our Chief Scout candidates all had certified first aid and CPR training before we went on the trip as part of the risk management planning.

What's to Eat?

Food is always important, as anyone who has camped can testify. Some foods worked out well, while others not so well. Here's a list of what worked and what didn't.

Yummy:

Breakfast: instant oatmeal, Harvest Quaker Crunch Cereal™ (cold), dried mango slices (big hit with the kids). Lunch: peanut butter and jam tortilla wraps (another big hit with the kids), Protean™ bars, Cheese Whiz™ on tortilla wraps.

Supper: pasta with tomato sauce, Mr. Noodle™ soups, pre-cooked chicken (used on first day).

Snacks: beef jerky, trailmix, apples, mango slices
Drinks: water (filtered by kids) with Gatorade™ crystals, hot chocolate, orange juice crystals, powdered milk.

Yucky:

Scalloped potatoes: too difficult to keep from burning/charring while cooking on the small lightweight stoves.
Pre-made frozen pancakes: these fell apart (Day 2 breakfast) when the Scouts were trying to heat them up over the fire.

A Trip of a Lifetime

This trip turned out to be an awesome experience for everyone. We had done our research, completed our planning, and practiced our canoeing and lightweight camping skills, so that we were well prepared. Everyone pitched in with enthusiasm, and together we achieved an awesome trip — one to live forever in all our memories. ^

— Scouter Dave Gilbert, 60th LaSalle Scout Troop, ON, had no experience in canoeing or interior camping...but had a ton of fun being the resident photo bug and video man. Credit must go to the other Scouters who made this trip possible: Troop Scouter Chris Blanchette, and Scouters: Jon Rae, Lisa Blain, Ed Beaulieu, and Dan Bjorkman.

Equipment Lists and More

For additional information on the 60th LaSalle Scout Troop's equipment lists and notes to parents, please go to the *May 2008 Leader Magazine Archives* on Scouts Canada's web site. Don't forget to consult your *Fieldbook for Canadian Scouting* when planning outdoor adventures. Sold in Scout Shops, it is jam-packed with advice and suggestions for all kinds of camping.



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