

BWCA - Canoeing Basswood Lake - 3

After our shuttle up Moose and Newfound Lakes, across Sucker Lake, and the truck tow across the Prairie Portage, we plan to zigzag west across Basswood to Basswood Falls and return over six days.

Basswood Lake is my favorite in the BWCA. Partly that is because the land around it is hilly and because it has many islands and bays. Partly that is because it was one of the main routes of the French Voyageurs. So, it has a lot of history. It straddles the border: half in the USA and half in Canada.

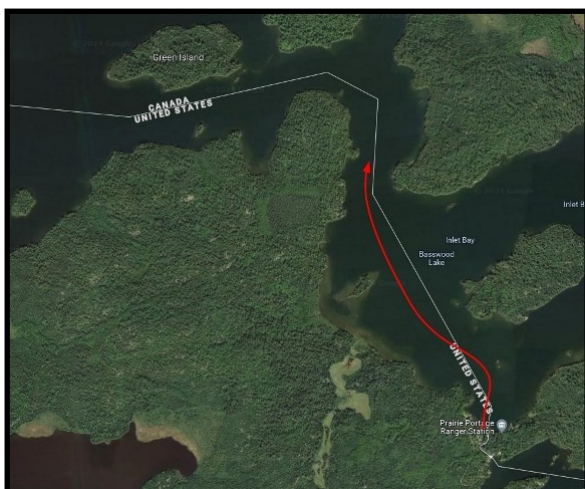
Basswood Falls is a series of three falls. The volume of water flowing over the falls is amazing. Since the route for the portage is obvious with little temptation to drift away from the most direct path, you know you are walking in the footsteps of the Voyagers two hundred years ago on the same path first used by indigenous peoples thousands of years ago.

The lake is large, spanning about 15 miles north to south and 10 miles east to west as the crow flies. Rather than one big lake, however, it has ten or eleven discrete areas and bays. It runs both north & south and east & west. Crows fly over both land and water. We can paddle a canoe only on water. Paddling, Basswood is about 15 miles north to south and 17 miles east to west by canoe.



[Basswood Lake](#)

The depth averages around 15 feet but it has many sharp drop-offs and depths up to 100 feet. The fishing is good. It has smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye, and lake trout. All of good size.



[Inlet Bay of Basswood Lake](#)

We paddled away from Prairie Portage and across the east bay on Basswood Lake named "Inlet Bay" at about 1 PM through choppy water and toward ominous clouds.

Inlet Bay is fairly small and we could hug the west shore sheltered from the northwesterly wind as we paddled north. But I knew, if the water was choppy on this small bay, we would hit strong wind and larger waves when we got to the big part of the lake.

As feared the wind picked up as we entered the larger part of Basswood Lake which is named Barley Bay. At first a large island named Green Island provided some shielding but beyond that it was pretty rough.

Wind will conform to the shape of a lake. In the channel between Green Island and the south shore the wind was directly in our face.



Paddling Bayley Bay

Leaving the partial shield of the island the wind increased.

We paddled on for a while but stopped to see a 1100 year old cedar tree.

The tree was a sprout in 924. In the hundred years of its youth, the Mississippian culture took hold in present day Southern United States, the Ancestral Puebloans thrived in the Southwest, and the Mayan civilization in Yucatan collapsed.

Europe was at the nadir of the dark ages.

We had lunch at the tree.

After our brief visit to the ancient cedar, Steve suggested it would be best to backtrack to a nice campsite rather than go on fighting the wind and waves.

It was only a short distance back to the campsite.



Our first order of business when we get into a campsite is to put up the tent and put our sleeping mattresses and sleeping bags into it in case of sudden rain.

Although the modern dome tents with their crisscross frame don't have to be staked to stand up, strong winds are not uncommon and I like to tie the tent down securely.



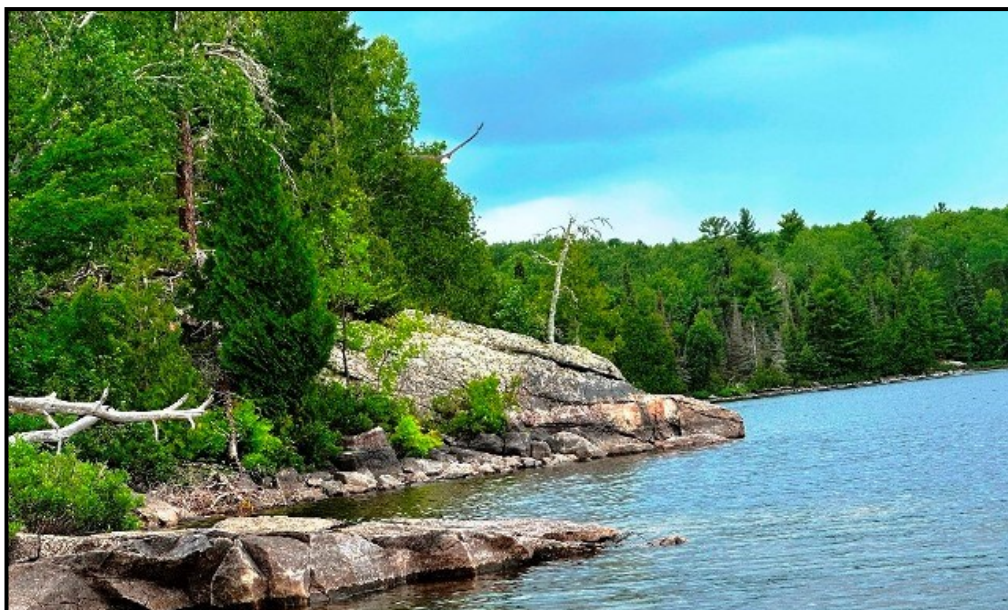
Anyone who has tried to drive a tent stake in the BWCA or Quetico has fought the Canadian Shield — and lost.

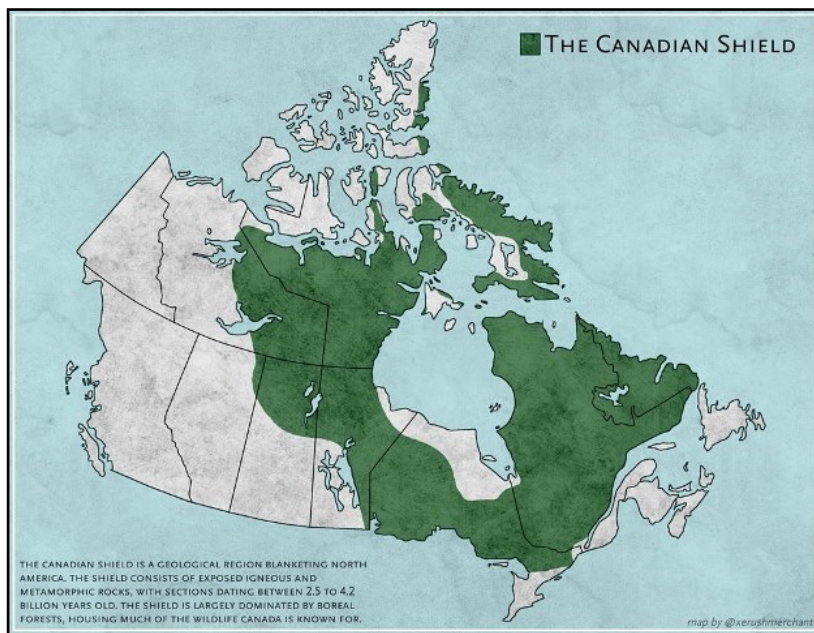
Some tent spots have enough soil that stakes can be driven but often the stake cord has to be tied to a rock, tree, or tree root.

Stubbornly trying to drive a stake only bends the stake.

The rock at the edge of the lake and the points where the soil has been worn off covers the entire area.

In most places there is little soil. Even where trees are growing the soil is seldom more than six inches thick.





That is the Canadian Shield. It is Precambrian igneous and high-grade metamorphic rock. It covers more than half of Canada and extends into Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New York.

The lakes (including The Great Lakes) were formed when the last ice sheet receded only 15,000 years ago.

The rock is among the oldest, and the lakes and forest areas among the youngest on earth.

Camping in BWCA is allowed only in official campsites. The presence of a forest service fire grate indicates a campsite. The Forest Service installs the grates. Campers put stones around the grate to shield the fire from wind and contain the heat. Flat rocks at the edge provide places to keep pots warm.

The grates are set far too high in my opinion. With them as high as they are it takes a big fire (and lots of firewood) to cook.



Steve also brought a two burner Coleman gasoline stove just like the one I had many years ago. Steve did most of the cooking on the stove rather than the fire.

Steve set up a tarp close to the fire grate. He uses a center pole to hold the tarp up.

I haven't used a center pole. Rather I have tied cord to the center, looped the cord over a close high branch, and tied the cord to a tree. That limits where the tarp can be and usually pulls the tarp one way or the other. Steve's pole works better.



Since we chose "full outfitting" and our route didn't have any carry portages our equipment included several luxury items that wouldn't be taken on a longer trip or a trip with many portages. These luxury items included more fresh food than normal, folding chairs, and tables.



The "more fresh food luxury items" meant steak, baked potatoes, and fresh carrots for our first dinner.

Another luxury was a fifth of Woodford Reserve.

Cheers.

Our greatest luxury was Steve doing the cooking and the cleanup.



One of my most favorite things on a BWCA or Quetico canoe trip is watching the sunset across the lake at the end of a marvelous day.



We enjoyed the beauty of the sunset.

Charlie

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[2012 Quetico Lake, Quetico Provincial Park, ON, Canada](#)

[2013 Quetico Lake, Quetico Provincial Park, ON, Canada](#)

[2019 Quetico Lake, Quetico Provincial Park, ON, Canada](#)

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