



The Canoe Trip of a Lifetime

First Place Winners of the Turnbull Family Scout Challenge

BY DON FORD

After a three day trip to Massasauga Park, Ontario in 2007, the 2nd Bramalea Scout Troop wanted a bigger challenge in 2008. The end result was a 30 km, four day expedition through eight lakes and across 13 portages. Meetings were held to discuss packing lists,

Leader and youth skills were checked to make sure that we had the right people in the right place at the right time with the right equipment (BP&P, Section 10000). In preparation for this expedition, a shorter trip was held in July, 2008, to test equipment, check some of the portages, and train the younger Scouts in canoeing skills. With carpooling arranged to take us from Bramalea to our troop leader's cottage on Three-Legged Lake, planning for the big adventure was complete.

Wilson, Wildlife and Water

On the morning of August 15, we were out of our sleeping bags at 7:00 am, enjoyed "Scout breakfast" (hash browns, turkey bacon and eggs all cooked together), and made our lunches. Loading our gear into four canoes, we paddled off.

A critical component of our gear was our mascot – "Wilson", a discarded pool

noodle discovered by one of the Scouts. The noodle fell into the lake, and began to float away. Another Scout, who had seen the movie "Cast Away" one too many times, shouted out "WILSON!!!", and thus, Wilson got his name.

Our first stop was the portage to McCoy Lake, where we also enjoyed lunch. A brief series of short portages and small lakes led us to Canoe Lake, where our first campsite was located.

By the time we set up camp, a sprinkling of rain became a downpour. We set up a small tarp for shelter, and broke into teams for purifying water, wood, and tent setup. The system worked well, and we soon had our chicken dinner warming on the stove. Eventually the rain slowed and we were able to light a small fire.

One of the Scouts discovered three northern water snakes (almost stepping on one), along with a bumper

trip routing, and menu planning. Our overall objectives were to inventory the plants and animals we found on our journey and look for evidence of past human activity. These objectives also met the requirements for the Turnbull Family Scout Challenge Award.

crop of blueberries on a small shoal off our campsite. After taking some pictures, the youth swam back to shore, and headed off for some well-deserved rest.

Canoeing = Portaging

Waking to a sunny morning, we devoured a quick breakfast of oatmeal, hot chocolate, juice and cold cereal. A short paddle brought us to the first portage of the day — 520 m, some of it through ankle-deep mud. At the Vicary Lake portage we saw our first signs of past human activity — an old flooded mine shaft. This shaft was sunk in the 1800s, by miners looking for copper. After a short break, we hauled our gear across the 720 m portage. One more short portage and we were at our second campsite on Vicary Lake, tired and hungry. A nourishing dinner of freshly caught fish with macaroni and cheese, and fresh blueberry sauce put

smiles on our faces again. We headed off to our tents after a refreshing swim in the lake.

A Fish Tale

We woke up to a beautiful sunrise. Another quick breakfast and we packed up for the gruelling portages back to Spider Lake that we had just traversed the day before. Being much more efficient in our packing, we made it in two trips, and were able to have a short break by the old copper mine, before our long paddle through Spider Lake.

After lunch on a small, rocky island, two short paddles with two more portages led us into Clear Lake. A large snapping turtle and a much smaller, but friendlier, painted turtle, welcomed us. We quickly paddled to our third campsite, setting up our tents at the nicest location of our journey. While Brian was fishing, a large creature took a swipe at his lure. Shortly after, a very large snapping

turtle appeared, possibly the creature that had grabbed for Brian's lure. Snapping turtles have become a problem in Massasauga because of all the fishermen feeding them, and the park staff discourages this practice (as do leave-no-trace principles).

Being our last full day in the park, we cooked a feast of chili, chicken stew, beef stroganoff, and two different types of scalloped potatoes. Three Scouts and our troop Scouter then set off for a little fishing expedition. At one point, in water that was less than 1m deep, Scouter Don hooked a large smallmouth bass. After a short battle, the line snapped, and the fish disappeared. A moment later, the fish jumped clear out of the water close to Brian's canoe,

shook its head, and threw the lure back. Now that's a fish tale! Alas, no more fish were tempted by our offerings, and we came back to camp empty-handed.

A five-lined skink was spotted by one Scout on our "bush box" privy. This endangered species is Ontario's only reptile. Other than a fleeting look at another on Three-Legged Lake, this would be our only glimpse of this special Massasauga resident.

The Last Leg

The day began as before, but with sweet sorrow that this was the last day. All the fishing and campfires were in the past. We packed up and hit the water. After what felt like hours of persistent paddling and portaging, we

finally reached the last leg of the trip. A quick visit with other campers and a snack gave us the energy to portage the final 300 metres. Now the race was on — first one back to the cottage wins! Everyone gave their all, paddling as hard as they could. According to our GPS, we reached speeds of over 8 km/hr! Brian and Thomas came in first. What a terrific morning!

A visit to the Aspen Valley Wildlife Centre, where they look after wild animals that have been injured, occupied the afternoon. Some, like an albino raccoon, or a great grey owl with a broken wing can't be cured, and become permanent residents. Most, however, are healed then released back into the wild. After thanking our tour guide,

we returned to the cottage to meet up with the parents who had arrived to drive us home.

Looking Forward

All in all, it was a very successful trip. In terms of species, we recorded 15 birds, two turtles, four frogs, a snake, a reptile, and a bear, plus many species of trees and plants. Our Scouts honed their lightweight camping skills, and discovered some muscles they didn't know they had. We look forward to another adventure in 2009! *— Don Ford is one of the Scouters with the 2nd Bramalea Scout Troop, ON. This trip held August 14-18, 2008, won First Place in the Turnbull Family Scout Challenge Award.*



What is the Turnbull Family Scout Challenge?

The Turnbull Family Scout Challenge rewards troops that demonstrate initiative in conceiving an adventure, organizational skills in planning the adventure, and small team skills in completing the adventure. Two troops will be awarded up to \$2500.00 each. For more details, check out the Scout page in the Youth Section on Scouts Canada's web site at www.scouts.ca. Start planning your next adventure now!