

## **The Home of the Northern Woodsmen**

by Clyde S. "Sandy" Bridges

In the slightly faded memories of my early Scouting days (the early 1950's) I can very clearly see a door on a room in the staff quarters at Camp Quapaw. Camp Quapaw was located on the Saline River between Little Rock and Hot Springs, Arkansas. For several years it was my second home. There was a map of the canoe country on that door and a crude sign that read "Home of the Northern Woodsmen." To live in that room you had to have been on a canoe trip to the canoe base in Ely.

Later that summer our camp had Scout visitors from Sweden. You should have seen them! Their uniforms were different, they had sleeping bags filled with crushed foam that rolled up about the size of a football, packs that were really neat and fancy sheath knives.

Well, that did it. I had two quests. One was to somehow get to the Canoe Base so I could live in that room! The other was to someday meet other international Scouts. Those quests, however, seemed similar to wanting to see the dark side of the moon. Or so I thought.

The year 1956 was a big one for me. I became an Eagle Scout and was elected Lodge Chief for the Order of the Arrow. The biggest thrill that year was having the chance to serve as an assistant leader on a trip to the Canoe Country. When I returned, I also had the opportunity to attend the National Order of the Arrow conference in Bloomington, Indiana. At the conference I got the chance to meet Dr. Goodman, the founder, and attend a special program called "Lite Pack Camping." It was a project of Ernie Schmidt, BSA National Camping Service, and focused on camping with lightweight equipment especially for canoe trips.

The trip to Ely was really fantastic. Our guide, Paul Johnson -- called the "little Swede" -- took us to Kawnipi where we caught some of the largest fish I had ever seen. I was one of the largest in the group so I was picked as a canoe carrier. Our canoe was an Old Town so I got a taste of portaging early on. On the way home there was a bad storm on Agnes, and much to my distress, I lost my glasses. When I got home I vowed to someday return to see what I had missed.

The turkey dinner in the dining hall in the Lodge was great. I had also enjoyed the "beans and wieners" before we went out. The wieners were actually polish sausage, and they were much better than the "hot dogs" I was used to. The last evening on the Base when we were presented with the emblem of the Indian in the canoe and we sang the Canoe Base song we felt that we had "arrived." We all had really been awed by the experience.

The men in charge - Oren Felton, Parley Tuttle and Henry Bradlich - all seemed as though they were true Paul Bunyans. The guides were very special, with names like "Cherokee" and "Swede." They all had knives with beautiful handmade sheaths; a couple even had sheaths made from the tail of a snapping turtle. Each guide also had a leather sheath to hold a small pair of "side-cutting" pliers and a pouch for their pocket knife (no self-respecting guide would carry their pocket knife in a pocket). On the other side of their belt they had a hank of cord to use for the food bags. They were our idea of what real Scouts were all about. They were more confident than anyone I had ever met.

I had spent many summers at Quapaw but what a difference to be at an Explorer Canoe Base. When I returned to camp it took me almost a week to find a pair of "side-cutters" and to have a pouch on my belt for it and my "pocket" knife.

The summer of 1957 was my last at Camp Quapaw. I had just graduated from high school and had a National Guard commitment for August, so traveling anywhere else was out of the question. A close friend, Jim McDaniel, who had been on a previous trip to Ely, applied at the Canoe Base and was accepted. I am sure my envy showed. Later that summer I was presented with the Vigil award in the Order of the Arrow. During the all-

night vigil, my thoughts turned toward two things. First, to those that helped me through my early days of Scouting, and second, to the experience of the canoe trip - the real highlight of my Scouting days.

I finally applied for a position at the Base in 1959 and, to my surprise, was accepted. I was now one of those "guides." I couldn't believe it. During our training, one of the main things that was emphasized was "tradition." The staff members at the Base were very proud of the long tradition of canoeing in the northwoods and what it meant to be a "guide." They emphasized how important it was for us to pass on these traditions to the crews that we would take out. They said that as soon as possible, we should choose a totem and paint it on our paddle. At the end of the "guides trip" they branded our paddles with the Region Ten "X" and dipped the tip in red paint. Like it or not - we were committed! We even had official Canadian Guides Licenses to prove it.

They spoke of Carl Chase and Hod Ludlow as if they were saints. Years later when I finally met Hod, I guess I would have to agree; he was really something special and his vision and wisdom were so important in the early days.

During the summer I mentioned to Henry that I would really like to see what the canoe country looked like in the winter. His comment was "come on up - I'll show you!" So Mick Hedrick and I decided to go on a snowshoe trip. Henry and Jane were fantastic hosts when I arrived in Eveleth (with more clothes on than I had ever owned before). Henry and Bill took me to Ely and out to the Base the next day. Wouldn't you know it, it rained and rained, so there was no snowshoe trip but a delightful opportunity to be hosted in Ely by Sig and Elizabeth Olson - something I still cherish. I suppose the seeds for OKPIK were planted that day.

In 1960, I was fortunate to return again. But in 1961, the Russians decided to build a wall in Berlin, so my summer experience was at a Fort run by our Uncle in Washington. During my Army days, reminiscing about the canoe country helped me to stay focused. I wrote and sent canoe country sketches to Sig and Mr. Randall (I had carried a Randall knife on my trips). They both wrote back and were very supportive. I began to see that if you wanted something, the first step was to just get out and do it.

I returned to the Base for a winter trip in December of 1962. This time I did get to go snowshoeing. I took a solo trip from Deer Trail Lodge on Twin Lake to visit my friends, Canadian Ranger and his wife, Rod and Lee Salchert, at Cabin 16 on Basswood. A real experience and one I will never forget. I had a US Air Force survival kit with me. Much to my surprise, at below zero temperatures, nothing much worked! The paulin (tarp) came out in pieces, all the plastics were cracked, etc. The temperature the first morning had been below minus forty, the plastic on my steering wheel drew up around the metal frame leaving a gap of about one inch on each side. I once again traveled to Minnesota in the late winter (1963) to spend a year at the Base. I never returned to the "Sunny South."

In 1970 Cherie and I were married in the Lodge. On the first of September, I became the Base Director. What a change. What responsibilities! Just upholding the traditions of the Base was awesome. I needed help, and I got it. I had many talks with people I had known at the Base and those from St. Paul who were the professional people responsible. I, of course, had spent a great deal of time with Henry. He was my ideal of what we were all about. One of my closest contacts and a real mentor for me was George Hedrick.

George had three sons who had worked at the Base. His oldest son, Robert, had been a guide but had been killed during a college outing. I had been on the staff with both Mick and Dave. George had never been the Director (actually he always joked and said that he had served for a month or so at one time) but his dedication was legendary. He impressed on me how important it was to be a steward of a successful program, to innovate where I could, but to preserve the things in the program that had been so successful. He also spoke of men like Carl Chase and Hod Ludlow with real reverence. He told me that when I needed support to just go to the Lodge, that all of the things that had ever happened were still there, you just had to listen for them. Now that George is gone, I hope that he is pleased that the Robert Hedrick Library, thanks to the dedication of the Alumni Association, is in the Lodge; looking over that sacred past and preparing for the future.

Region Ten had been the parents, but now in 1972 the National Council merged the twelve regions into six and the Canoe Base became a National Base. Because of many factors it looked as though there were going to be major changes in the BWCAW and the Quetico so I took the advice George had given and began canoeing programs at Atikokan and Bissett. OKPIK, the cold weather camping program was off the ground as well.

Cherie was a very strong partner and sensitive to world Scouting. She encouraged me to consider having International Camp Staff. In 1974, Jack and Mary Osborn sponsored our first two young Scouts from Scotland. It was one of our finest hours. The international program was to become a major influence for the next few years. The friends we, the staff, and participants have made are now scattered all over the world. The visions and traditions of the Base are carried to the far reaches of the world of Scouting. Having staff from so many different cultures has been a positive influence that would be hard to duplicate. In 1961, I had to spend a summer with the Army because of the Cold War threat. In 1995, we had a staff member from the former Soviet Union. What a difference! What a change - I was so pleased that I could be a part of it.

Not only had my second quest been met but I was also able to travel to Scandinavia and enjoy Scouting in other countries. Adventures North was a program with Scouts from Europe, Canada, and the United States taking a canoe trip in the Boundary Waters and then a cold weather trip in Arctic Norway, Sweden and Finland. What an experience!

The association with Scouts Canada is also very special. The future looks bright and as we continue to move ahead, Scouts Canada staff will play a greater and greater role. Just think, a truly international program. This is something that I would have never dreamed of in my early days.

The support given me has been absolutely tremendous. My family has been a reward I could have only dreamed of. As I leave, I know that each of you, in your own way, will remember and enjoy your days "on the trail." Keep a lofty goal for your program as you seek to be stewards of one of the greatest programs Scouting has ever offered.

As the Water Rat said to the Mole in *Wind in the Willows* ... "there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."