

Third Day in Minnesota, First Day on the Trail

by Chris Thurman

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After working on the Base for two days, fixing tents, weed eating, counting buckets, and doing the daily duty, I am finally going on my Swamper training trip. The summer is just about to start for me; this is why I flew from Georgia to work here, to canoe. The official canoe season started up about a week ago, but there are a few new interpreters who came late because of school like myself. In total, there are eight new "Charlie Guides" going on this training trip, this Swamper. Our instructor, a guy from Iowa named Dan, seems very confident that we will have a good trip.

We started up this morning learning what foods we would be taking on our trips and how to pack it. I did not realize how long this activity would take, but it involves about 2-3 hours of preparation. The weight of the packs is unreal, but they will get lighter as the trip rolls on. I am really surprised at the kinds of food that we will take: good veggies, meats, tasty cakes. The food is not as bland as I thought it might be. Food wise, this summer's meals should be very good. Next, we went to the Bay Post and packed our equipment (kettle) pack. Then it was off to the canoe yard to pick out three canoes. At the canoe yard, Dan showed us how to pick up and carry a canoe. After each one of us tried it, we were ready to start the trip. However, we did not get to dip our paddles right away. Dan told us we would start our trip by portaging to Flash Lake. A little disappointed, yes. The group divvied up the packs and canoes so that each of us had one thing to carry. I was carrying the kettle pack. Once everyone had something to carry, we headed for Flash Lake.

The trail to Flash Lake seemed to get longer and longer as we hiked. Once we entered the woods, the bugs started their attack on us, which made the trail seem longer. Some of the group were in better shape than others, and were quickly out of sight. In fact, I soon found myself walking alone. There were six folks ahead of me, and two somewhere behind me. I told myself not to worry, to just relax and keep walking at a steady pace. However, the trail just got longer and the pack heavier.

I had been walking for about ten minutes when I realized I was not alone. I noticed some movement out the corner of my right eye, so I stopped to see what it was. The vegetation around me was fairly thick, but I did see a black blur coming at me. "What could that be", I thought. "A dog?" Now I'm from south Georgia, and it is not uncommon to see a dog running around in the woods. However, when my "dog" jumped over a bush I realized that the black blur was not a dog, but a black bear. I froze. I was in shock, but was unaware that I was in shock at the time. Here I was a boy just out of my first year at West Georgia College, all alone, staring at an animal that I had only seen in zoos. But this one was running at me. What was I going to do?

I've hiked the Appalachian Trail near the Smokies, and they say there are a few black bears out there. I recall being told by my Scoutmaster to never run from a black bear, because it might think you are food and continue to chase you. He told me that black bears sometimes false charge (bluff) but that if a person doesn't move, then the bear would think that the person was more of a threat to it than the it is to the person, and it would retreat. Somehow I remembered that, but even if I had not, I was not going anywhere. I could not. I froze still. Then something inside me told me to speak. I don't know why, as there was nobody around to hear me, but I had to say something, so I did. The only words that would come from my mouth were "Damn, a bear." I did not yell that, just spoke in a loud tone. When the bear heard me, she stopped running at me. Only about 30 yards and some brush separated us. She stood up on her back legs, looked at me, and yawned. I knew that she was a female, because just as she stood up, I noticed two cubs climbing a tree about 20 yards behind her. After she yawned, she turned and went over to the tree that her cubs were in and climbed it as well. That's when I came to. I took a deep breath and gave a sigh of relief. Then I remembered the two guys behind me. I had to wait for them so that nothing would happen to them. I only had to wait a couple minutes for them to come along. I told them there was a bear nearby and we should quickly leave, so we did. It did not take us long after that to reach

the lake and the rest of the group. I told the others my story and made it clear that we would be camping on the other side of the lake...

- from the 1994 Northern Tier Diary of Christopher Thurman