

## Boundary/Boundry Waters Wilderness Portaging Made Fun By BWCAW Expert Canoe Trip Outfitter Sue Prom

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The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is famous for its drinking water fresh lakes, feisty fish, pine studded islands and many other reasons. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is infamous for one reason alone. Connecting these BWCA lakes are footpaths known in the Boundary Waters as portages. These portage trails allow wilderness canoe country campers to travel through some amazing BWCA routes. Each portage is as unique as each Boundary Waters lake. Carrying a canoe and gear across wilderness portages isn't an easy feat but it can be made more fun by following these five simple steps.

One way to make BWCA portages more fun is to make them a bit easier. By limiting the amount of weight and number of items you carry on portages the trek will be less difficult. The golden rule in BWCAW travel is to pack light. Unless you are a French Voyageur reincarnate, a Sherpa or a masochist it is difficult to look forward to carrying a 120-pound canoe, 3 five-gallon buckets, 2 coolers and 6 100-pound Duluth Packs across a Boundary Waters portage. Pack light and not only will your load be lighter but your outlook will be as well.

A positive mental attitude towards Boundary Waters portages will make them more fun. If you mentally prepare yourself in advance then you will be pleasantly surprised at the ease with which you will portage through the BWCA. Positive mental imagery does wonders not only for athletes but also for canoe country campers. Picture yourself breathing easily as you walk uphill through the forest with a fifty pound pack on your back. See yourself accepting the mosquitoes as they swarm around your face and picture yourself filled with pride as you approach the water at the end of a remote portage. Every task is made easier with a positive attitude and portaging in the Boundary Waters is no exception.

One way to keep a positive attitude about portaging the Boundary Waters is to offer a reward or incentive upon completion of a portage. There are all sorts of options from enjoying a swim break, a chance to wet a line or something good to snack on. Instead of dreading an upcoming portage you will be looking forward to it and the fun associated with it.

There are other reasons to look forward to BWCA portages and these reasons also make portaging the canoe country more fun. If you take time to smell the flowers, eat the berries or stand in awe of a towering pine tree then the portages will be much more enjoyable. Too many people rush through portages with their nose to a grindstone only to miss out on some of the best parts of the Boundary Waters. There are critters to watch, strange plants to inspect, a variety of shrubs and trees and birds and animals to listen for. If you rush through the portages then you won't be able to experience all a portage has to offer. Knowing the opportunity exists to see wildlife, eat a berry or gaze at a waterfall will make you look forward to the portage and the fun it can provide.

Realistic expectations will make portaging more fun. BWCA maps show the distance between the canoe country lakes in rods. A rod is 16.5 feet, the length of a standard canoe. While Boundary Waters maps show the distance of each portage they do not give you a narration of it. Rest assured each wilderness portage will most likely contain one if not all of these elements; an uphill climb, boulders, mud and mosquitoes. When you see a 20-rod portage on a BWCA map you may conclude, "Piece of cake, it's short." Do not fool yourself into believing a short portage will be an easy one or a long one will be difficult. There are some very short portages with knee deep mud to trudge through and some long ones that are a walk in the park. Be realistic when you are planning how difficult or how long it will take you to travel the portage. The time it takes will depend upon the level of difficulty, personal stamina and of course a positive attitude.

If you practice these five simple steps on your next BWCA canoe camping trip then you will have more fun than ever before on the portages. Packing light will make the job of portaging easier, but remember there's no such thing as an easy portage. Realistic expectations, taking time to eat the berries and offering yourself a reward or incentive upon the completion of a portage will instill happier thoughts of portages. These thoughts combined with a positive mental attitude will make portaging in the BWCA more fun.

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