

MATAGAMON HIGH ADVENTURE CANOE TRIP

July 24-August 1, 2010

In July 2010 6 Scouts and 3 Adults participated in a true wilderness experience in the Maine north woods. Based out of Matagamon High Adventure Base (near Patten, ME), the crew spent a week canoeing and sailing lakes, running rapids and portaging gear/canoes 5 times over difficult terrain.

Trip photos can be found on kodakgallery.com at <http://tinyurl.com/2g2xgqe>

Participants: Sam W. (Crew Leader), Cole O., Justin K., Patrick F., Ian D., Toby B. Will Leavitt (Adult Leader), Mike Ames, Meg Bonnell-Bradley

Pre Trip Preparation

Planning for the trip started 2 years before we went—we had originally planned to go in the Summer 2009 and had put a \$500 deposit down. We had difficulty getting a full crew together and Matagamon “rolled over” our deposit so we could go in 2010. In general preparation could be started 1 year prior to the trip.

Careful reading of their information on the website/brochure is essential as there are age limitations and various deadlines for payments. Specifically there can be additional charges due to transportation costs depending on the trip itinerary and those and other costs need to be figured into the over all cost.

Our budget was as follows:

Base cost/person/night	\$521.00
Extra transportation costs	100.00
Crew T-Shirt	15.00
Camping Fee Day #1	25.00
Gas/Food	<u>50.00</u>
	\$711.00

Liz Foley became our treasurer (extremely helpful to the coordinator!) and a deposit and 3 installments were collected in order to pay Matagamon High Adventure (MHA). Over all costs for this trip are always an estimate because the specific trip planning is not done until you arrive at the base.

For example if you choose to canoe on the Allagash, there are campsite fees and transportation fees. Due to the trip itinerary that we chose, there were \$0.00 costs for either transportation or campsites.

We had 3 pre-trip meetings, 2 of which were shakedowns. Our first shakedown involved fire building skills and cooking over an open fire, making a meal from dehydrated food. All of the dinners on the trip use dehydrated food and water is boiled over an open fire. Our second shakedown was on the Old Res in canoes—reviewing canoe strokes, doing T rescues, etc. Throughout both shakedowns, review of knots was covered.

A full gear review was done at the 2nd shakedown. Personnel gear is very limited on this trip—however we all felt adequately supplied. Two people pack in one large frame backpack including clothes, sleeping bag and pad. It is helpful to have a box that mimics the square inches that will be available for packing (2600 cu inches/person). Sleeping bags tend to be the most bulky items—we all had lightweight synthetic bags that were often packed in compression stuff sacks.

Will L. designed a Class B T shirt for the crew that was worn nearly every day of the trip!!

Trip Day #1:

Arrived at St. Brigids at 8:30am for a 9am departure. Only troop gear needed was a pair of leather gloves used for cooking and fire starters (which were not used during trip).

The first night is usually spent near MHA—either at Matagamon Wilderness Campground or Mt. Chase Logde. We arrived at Matagamon Wilderness Campground around 5pm (ran into hour traffic jam on I-295). Usual travel time would be about 7 hours with stops.

They supply a dinner (pizza), walled tents with platforms and pads, and a pancake breakfast with bacon and sausage---all for \$22.00/person. Their campground is on the East Branch of the Penobscot River and only 5 minutes from the Landing on Matagamon Lake where you meet your MHA guide the following morning. This is also your last stop for fishing licenses.

Trip Day #2 (MHA Day 1)

At 8am we met Will (Head Guide at MHA) at the Landing, just inside Baxter State Park, where we got our first glimpse of Matagamon Lake.

We quickly loaded our gear onto the ferry, shuttled our cars back to the Matagamon Wilderness Campground, and rode the short ferry across to the MHA Base.

First Day procedures are as follows:

- tour of the base
- gear review and repacking into frame packs
- checking out gear from the commissary—paddles, life jackets, helmets, packs, poles, cook kit
- swim test and T-rescue drill on the lake
- adult leader meeting to review Tour Permit, Insurance Info, Medical Forms and

- review finances. We added 2 participants to our official roster—the payment for them was due up front. At the end of the trip you pay any additional fees if needed (damaged equipment, transportation and campsite fees).
- map room for an overview of the 3 watersheds that are located near Matagamon and for the crew to decide on priorities for the trip
- pack food bags
- store extra gear and valuables in a locker on base
- back to the map room where they present 3 different trip options.

The first trip was based on the Allagash Waterway, would have required a 3-4 hour van ride to the put in and we would have seen quite a few other people during the trip especially at campsites which are often set up as a pod of 4 sites. The second trip had the most whitewater on the east branch of the Penobscot River. We would run into few or no people however it required 5 portages. The third trip was also a 3-4 hour van ride and would take us into an even more remote area of the North Woods, mostly lake paddling and more portages. The Scouts unanimously choose the second trip. Will reminded them they were strong enough for the portages and that portaging is more about the mental outlook rather than physical toughness.

We then practiced our first portage by carrying all equipment to our first campsite about 1/3 mile to Trailbound—a beautiful lake side campsite. Our guide for the trip, Doug Farrell then went through the steps of setting up camp---first rain fly, then tents, preparing dinner, etc. The adult leaders got to loaf. After dinner there was time for cliff jumping and watching the sun set. The cry of loons accompanied our dreams that night.

Trip Day #3 (MHA Day #2)

Trailbound to Big Logan: 3 miles

Our usual wake up time was 6:30am. After a cold breakfast we set off into the headwinds on Matagamon Lake. Our planned route would have taken us into Second Lake to do some rumpbumping (floating without canoes through rapids with one life jacket worn normally and one on your rump) however the wind was fierce, we had our first spill of the trip (luckily near a rocky sandbar), and we only made 3 miles to the campsite at Big Logan. We were all happy to be out of the wind, easy afternoon, dried things out and enjoyed the islands that were right across from our site.

Trip Day #4 (MHA Day #3)

Big Logan to Oxbow: 9 miles, 1 portage

Bright, sunny and still windy but going in our direction!!

The main event today was the incredible thrill of sailing down Matagamon Lake under blustery conditions (Doug said it was as extreme as it could get without going under).

Water poured over the bows as we tried to keep up with bailing and shifting weight to the stern. As we approached the dam that separated the lake from the river, we were still going at quite a clip and the scouts had some difficulty getting the sail down. Just as we neared the dock, the poles were lifted from the bow. We had sailed across Matagamon Lake in record time.

After a short ¼ mile portage around the dam we started our journey down the East Branch of the Penobscot which was to be our home for the remainder of the trip. We had our first gentle whitewater before pulling into our campsite at Oxbow around 12:30pm.

Another restful afternoon as we explored the oxbow, played water games, fished and tried our hand at poleing after a short tutorial from Doug. This was a prime area for moose---but no moose were seen. Will found fresh water mussels which were boiled and tried by some of the crew.

We reviewed some of the requirements for Whitewater Merit Badge with Doug's help. Ian caught the first fish of the trip after dinner—not a keeper but exciting nonetheless.

Trip Day #5 (MHA Day #4)

Oxbow to Grand Pitch: 7 miles, 2.5 portages

Whitewater: Micklics I, II, III; Stair Falls

Dry, warm and sunny day. Stopped to scout several rapids today including one which was a set of ledges. Smaller whitewater in between larger rapids. Ended day at Grand Pitch which is a spectacular wide waterfall. Portaged canoes over after dinner and transported gear the following morning. No moose!

Trip Day #6 (MHA Day #5)

Grand Pitch to Forestry 7: 12 miles, 1.5 portages

Another beautiful day on the river—chased Bald Eagles down river all day.

Lunch on a sandbar and then campsite in the pines, perched above the Penobscot.

Our last portage of the trip was today---a longer (¾ mile), more difficult trek but we chose to line the canoes down the river part way. I'm not sure it saved time but it was more fun than carrying them.

Trip Day #7 (MHA Day #6)

Forestry 7 to Whetsone: 9 miles

Steady paddle downriver today with no significant rapids. More eagles and blue herons. Arrived at campsite around 1pm. Hot lunch of tortillas with summer sausage and cheese grilled in the Kamper Kitchun (a rectangular heavy duty aluminum pan that was used often during the trip, especially for baked goods but also for pancakes, eggs, hashbrowns, etc).

Another outstanding campsite above Whetsone rapids with large ledges jutting into the water. Lots of fishing activity with quite a bit of success using the Micmic minnows (grey and blue). Cinnamon crumb cake in the Kamper Kitchun after a spaghetti dinner. Still no moose!

Trip Day #8 (MHA Day #7)

Whetsone----Homebound: 11 miles

Up at 4:30am to get on the river by 5:45 with the early morning mist rising and a tranquil paddle to our take out near the town of Haystack by 10:30am. Meg "caught" the last fish of the trip here—one flopped into the canoe and hit me on the leg. Sadly, that was the

only fish I caught! Transported by van back to the Landing for our last 2 mile paddle across Matagamon Lake and to the Base. Check out procedures took most of the afternoon but ended with a BBQ and beans that were cooked in a Dutch oven underground which was the old fashion way during logging times.

There was a post trip conference with the adult leaders and Crew Leader. As our trip departed from the Base and our transportation costs did not exceed their limit, we were not charged any additional fees.

Trip Day #9

We decided to get an early start and so wake up time was 5:30 for a 6am ferry shuttle across the lake. Retrieved cars, thanked our guides and was on the road in good time. Travel time back to Lexington was about 6.5-7 hours with stops for food along the way. We were tempted to stop in Old Town to see about a tour of the factory but Lexington was a stronger tug and so to home we went.

Miscellaneous and Random Comments on the Trip

The staff at MHA were extremely flexible regarding our trip and made every effort to accommodate our wishes. They have recently lower the age limit for trips. However it should be noted that the packs (especially the kettle pack) are heavy and younger scouts would not be capable of handling this weight. Will and Mike took the Kettle Pack on all portages—even lifting it in and out of canoes usually took 2 people. I don't think any scout could have portaged the kettle pack.

The food packs are also very heavy.

The Participant Manual that they provide supplies abundant information that should be taken seriously. For example, footwear is very important—you need sturdy, supportive water shoes even if you don't portage because the access to campsites can be steep or rocky. A good supportive pair of sneakers with good traction are sufficient, but 'water socks' lack the necessary support and traction for walking on the shore with any weight (packs or canoes) I would recommend full footwear in camp because of the amount of foraging for wood and walking around rough terrain. As on many longer trips, if you injure your feet your trip will be much less pleasant.

Your feet are frequently wet all day until you get into camp and change into your dry shoes. For many of the scouts, their wet shoes rarely dried out and we had sunny, dry weather. Others of us and our guide had a small daily ritual of removing our wet shoes, drying our feet well (with some application of foot powder) and then laying out or hanging our wet shoes and socks to dry in the sun. Hiking shoes are not needed for a canoe trip. The only thing I would change on the packing list is to increase the socks to 3 or 4 and increase the T shirts to 3. Bandanas, knives, eyeglass straps, caps with visors are all important. Our weather was extremely mild and we ran into very few insects—it was a low insect year and our trip occurred later in the summer. A small paperback would be a nice addition to pass the time.

I would not advise taking your own tent because the tents are packed into the cooking pots and can get dirty. They provided a 2 person tent for me and a 3 person tent for Will and Mike. The scouts had nice Eureka 4 person tents.

The spices and the baked goods we brought were a nice addition: gingerbread, brownies, cinnamon cake; spices included cumin, curry, Tabasco, Italian seasoning, chili, chipotle, and red pepper flakes. We thought the food was good to excellent—the amount of food was correct. Doug (who otherwise packed very sparingly) had a good size bottle of BBQ sauce with him — this may be a nice addition for other crews.

It was terrific to have 3 adult leaders—it provides peace of mind before the trip in case any one needs to drop out. We also had a lot of fun!! The best approach is to form a preliminary Crew Roster with fewer people—then when you arrive, you turn in your Final Roster and settle the account. We arrived with 1 extra scout and 1 extra adult leader and they had no problem accommodating us. It's much more difficult to drop people from the roster rather than add them.

As noted in the report above, the entire trip lasted 9 days but only 7 of those were “MHA Days”. Trips can be planned that are shorter or longer. Rest days can be planned as well however none of the days were particularly long (from the adult's point of view)---they were probably just the right length for the scouts.

We wanted to paddle 50 miles and that can be mentioned in the planning stages in the Map Room. In order to get the 50 miler award the crew will participate in 10 hours of conservation work. Some of this could be done at MHA but we did not have time.

Preparation for High Adventure trips is key and shakedown are very helpful. Knots are particularly difficult to master unless you are using them every day:

Bowline, lark's head, taut line hitch, are the knots that were used every day to set up the rain fly.

Our crew was very interested in whitewater and they offered a trip geared towards that goal. However, before offering that they wanted to see strong swim tests and fairly good canoe skills. One mild critique of the trip is that we probably would have enjoyed more time “playing” the whitewater—our guide was experienced and knowledgeable to help us in that regard. Having said that, the crew seemed to enjoy the “down” time in camp and had fun playing in the water, fishing, cooking, whittling, etc.

See additional comments by Mike and Will below as well as the final Financial Statement.

General comments from Mike Ames:

The Maine High Adventure program provides an exceptional experience for both scouts and scouters. This was a true wilderness trip — we probably saw more bald eagles than people (even including the staff at the base camp). It was amazingly worthwhile (and

considerably less expensive, and I imagine, more remote feeling than the nation high adventure sites). We should have a crew going to MHA semi-regularly.

The staff referred to a week at the MHA as graduate school for scouting, and this is a pretty good description. There were no outposts or canned entertainment events. Fundamental scouting skills and ideals are really put into practice when all you have on a remote river is your crew and whatever you've packed in your boats.

As with our usual summer camp experience, the combination of beautiful settings and excellent staff combined for an excellent adventure. Because of the small number of crews that go through the MHA (we were the only crew the week we were there), the staff can provide an extraordinary amount of personal attention to each crew and scout. Our guide Doug received one of the highest honors from our crew — they wrote a song about him and sang it to the rest of the staff at the base camp.

Doug commented that our crew was not “a group of super-scouts”, but they learned the skills needed, worked together well, overcame difficulties, were enthusiastic, and knew how to enjoy themselves both during the active and relaxed portions of the trip.

A few specific items:

We brought a water purification system which was really useful but the filter became clogged after several days. If we were to bring a system on such a long trip again, we should select one that is field cleanable. MHA supplied a couple of bottles of iodine treatment crystals that we used for the end of the trip.

We should have the scouts from this trip teach the rest of the troop the lessons they learned about equipment (packing light), packing to prevent your gear getting soaked, setting up camp, their procedures for gathering and purifying water, fire building, cooking, cleaning, sanitation, etc.



Desperados hanging out at Grand Pitch

Final Budget:

MHA Price per person:	\$4347.00	(\$483.00/person)
Transportation costs:	0	
Camp Site costs	0	
1 st night camping cost:	198.00	(\$22.00/person)
12 Class B Tshirts	210.00	(\$23.33/person)
Kamper Kitchun	70.00	(\$7.78/person)
Guide Tip	150.00	(\$16.67/person)
Gas (504 mi round trip)		
Vehicle #1	?	
Vehicle #2	?	
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	\$4975.00	(\$552.78/person without gas expenses)

The above did not include the following: fast food on road trip and souvenirs purchased at the MHA Store on the Base. It was suggested that each scout bring about \$35-\$40 to cover these expenses.



Last morning on the river, paddling to the take out.