

First Canoe Trip by Gary D. Moore
Copyright © 2005 All rights reserved.
May be printed with permission.

The senior scouts separated the more than twenty scouts into groups. Non-swimmers were restricted to canoes with First Class Scouts, or good swimmers. Jerry and I were experienced canoeists and swimmers. We were assigned a canoe and two passengers. It was a privilege. Eight canoes launched from the flats north of town. Paddling was a necessity because the Black River flowed like molasses.

As the canoes passed the cement bridge, it was a shock to see, hear, and smell water cascade from someone flushing a toilet...complete with white toilet paper. Uck! We would not swim near there. Fortunately, the rope swing was further downstream.

Our paddles stroked deeper and faster to get away from the odor and possible floaters. Within a few minutes, we cruised past Turtle Island where my oldest brother spent a lot of time looking at aquatic life in the shallow water among water lilies. There were too many slimy critters and the bottom was too mucky for swimming at Turtle Island. A ravine South of Turtle Island was a better place to cool off during Michigan's hot sultry Summer days.

The senior scouts barked orders to keep strokes even and steady. Our famous swinging bridge was too tempting not to touch as we passed under it. Jerry and I scared the guys in our canoe when we boldly stood up to touch the boards of the wooden cable bridge. The senior scouts yelled at us.

The next section of the outing took us under the red bridge, and then languidly paddling the calm backwaters of the small city dam. Senior scouts did not listen when Jerry and I protested about the portage site. It was much easier to carry the canoes on the West side of the river. However, only a couple scouts got wet as we scrambled up the steep bank on the island separating two dams.

The time for our proposed trip took longer than the senior scouts expected. Our group was less than half way to our destination after noon. The senior scouts decided to pull off behind a friend's farm, and set up camp for lunch. Two senior scouts hiked to Ryan's farm to retrieve the canoe trailer and pickup. The Fall sky clouded up and threatened rain. Most of the scouts did not care. This was fun!

Jerry and I lit a campfire with one match (and dry tender). Other scouts gathered dry limbs. Our fire fed others who had a more difficult time. No big deal.

My mother packed her favorite skillet for my burger. A senior scout shared his bar of soap so that the fire would not blacken mom's pan. Soap would be on my list thereafter...along with a lighter pan. Several of us cooked our lunch around the blaze. My burger cooked fast, but not before mishap.

Boom! One of the new scouts put a can of beans in our fire. He did not punch a hole to allow expansion. The can exploded. Bean residue was everywhere. Although it frightened us, we ignored the incident (except jokingly). The scout whose can exploded did not have lunch, so I shared my burger. He did not like mustard, but ate his portion of the tasty burger anyway. Others also shared with him. Next time, we would collaborate and plan lunch together.

A tractor and wagon arrived as we cleaned up the portage site, and extinguished the fires. We loaded canoes and gear. Those who could not sit on the wagon, walked behind. Jerry, Gale, and I decided to walk home rather than await a ride. It was dark by the time I arrived home. My first real canoe trip was a memorable and educational experience. Many, many memorable outings followed.