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IN BOUNDS

It's Good to Get Away

By JACK MacKENZIE, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club
Editor

480 rods, slightly undulating with marsh on the left and a bit of open water in the middle; long, well-traveled with few direct hazards, my son Tyler and I gave the hike a handicap of 4. Certainly not the most difficult traverse between lakes, its length jacking up the difficulty, but nowhere near as tricky as the number one handicap; a relatively short 80 rod carry through a bog, over beaver fallen timber under gnat infested skies. By far the hardest portage we experienced while we adventured in the remote reaches of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota on vacation in late May.

It is funny how our profession can easily sneak its way into the most unusual of circumstances. Here we were, two men supposedly on leisure time, battling the elements with freeze-dried food (*okay, steak the first night in*), light gear to eliminate the need to double portage, fishing gear to capture a few 'smallies' and clothing that would soon attain an interesting odor combination of smoke, bug repellent and perspiration. We joked, farted, fished, laughed, swore (*at the rain*) and marveled at the beauty of our great wilderness.

Our days were filled with the companionship of toughing out large lakes and longer portages; watching for and seeing a tremendous variety of birds, jack rabbits, river otter, deer and a

moose up close; smelling the clean air distinctly aromatic with the fragrance we will always recall as "up north," hearing loons, distant thunder, a strong blow, the crack of a beaver tail, and splash of some denizen of the deep; tasting the sweet/salty flavor of Spam and maple syrup for breakfast, gorp on the trail, dried jerky for lunch, oddly dehydrated vegetables with our dinners and a Havana Honey relaxing, our backs against giant boulders our fronts facing a small but warm fire, just prior to nestling into our sleeping bags and tent for a welcoming night's slumber.

A long way from home physically and mentally; soon after the outward experience began we started to rate each portage as if it were a golf hole, an integral part of our daily vocations. Length of carry, terrain, direct and indirect hazards, portagability, tightness, deception, perception and change in elevation all came into our rating game. Some short carries were very, very difficult with steep crevasses, loose impediments and fallen debris (*too large to move*). Others were long, straight, well traveled and so mundane they left little to the imagination, definite 18s.

With keen hindsight I reflect our trip was predisposed to be interrelated to our industry. During the mandatory movie required to view in order to obtain the entry permit allowing

"Now I realize my time away from work has left me recharged and ready to take on the challenges..."

access to the BWCAW three words were mentioned repeatedly, "Leave no trace." Tyler and I thought the phrase emulated the desire we have for the golfers who enjoy playing at any of the many courses across our state. Leave no trace; no foot prints in the bunkers, no divots left un-replaced, no ball marks un-repaired, no litter at a tee box and no excessive wear patterns along green sites. In essence, leave behind no trace that they were even there. (*What an idea, but then again, isn't it our jobs to maintain behind them after they have thoroughly enjoyed the efforts of our labor?*)

After a tough spring of recovery, one that Mother Nature still seems to have a tenacious hold upon, it was very good to get away for a respite. At one point I strongly felt the need to stick around the course as though my presence would make the over-seeded areas "pop" faster, winter weakened greens heal quicker and thin fairway areas fill in sooner. Now I realize my time away from work has left me recharged and ready to take on the challenges sure to be presented later in the season, probably at a time when a vacation wouldn't be as timely as late spring.

It is good to get away. Perhaps not to the rugged interior of our nation's largest canoe wilderness area, but away from the job physically so it isn't accessible to distract your relaxation and mentally so far that you appreciate there is nothing you can do about it anyway. And then really, really let it go. I didn't think about the course as my son pulled in a trophy small mouth bass, my crew and their chores weren't at the top of my thoughts as we silently paddled up to a moose munching a mid day meal along the lakeshore, and you can bet I wasn't concerned about the daily tee sheet while trying to pull my soaked through boot out of a peat bog, my body weight increased one hundred pounds under the weight of a gear pack and canoe (*that was a 2 handicap!*)

When we got home the course was still there. A little greener and a bit more healed. There were emails to answer and phone calls to return; decisions to make and schedules to revise. But more importantly I was there, too, rested and ready to perform my job to the best of my abilities. Now, if only the weather would fall in my favor will I be a truly 'happy camper'!



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