

REFLECTIONS ON PADDLING

WHY USE A QUARTER OF OUR THE CANOECOPIA SHOW GUIDE TO TELL STORIES?

Because I love stories. Customers tell me their stories not just about paddling, but about their lives. Rutabaga's motto is "We don't sell boats. We sell time on the water." It's not about the boat, it's about your experience using the boat.

We asked our friends and customers to share their stories with us, and we got so many replies. They're not professional writers. Their stories are straight from the heart. They just love paddling and want to share that love.

Stories connect people. I hope that one or two of the stories here will resonate with you. You'll learn something new about the writer, and likely, something new about yourself. Stories preserve cultures and build new ones. Stories make people real. They teach us compassion, empathy, and insight. They enthuse us. Every story here comes from a place of love.

At the end of the day, the stories we tell each other matter, because *people* are really all that matter.

Dana



Lessons / Vibes From Camp

Steven Carpenter reminisces about the benefits of being outside with friends, family, and the river

I'm not the kind of guy who remembers a hundred anecdotes of my childhood. However, I consider it a blessing that I never forget the "vibe" of how it was. Nor do I forget the experience of seeing the world with fresh eyes. That's how it is as I recall my canoe trips on the Bois Brule River in northern Wisconsin.

Above all, I recall the genuine feeling of adventure. As a kid it's something you most often experience second-hand through film, books, and your own imagination. But that wide-eyed experience where each paddle stroke takes you out of view of the boat launch and into the unknown was to me the truest adventure.

I recall feeling that the river had its own mysterious life and history. There was the massive Y-shaped tree, the old stone bridge, and the sounds of fish and birds splashing. Each sensation sparked the imagination. The narrative of the river was further enhanced by the stories of old river adventures so often told around the campfire by my childhood hero, Jim¹.

Since the very beginning, the trips to the Brule were an intergenerational experience. My dad, his high-school buddies, and one of their fathers started going up together in their senior year of high school. Once I entered the scene, my dad's friends and their children quickly became my role models and friends.

Alongside the adventure of canoeing the Brule came many lessons.

Chief among these was the value of communication and teamwork. In the front of the boat, you are the lookout. Failure to identify and

[these adults] weren't living on a distinct plane of existence called adulthood. In many ways they still were like me.

communicate a hazard to the adult in the stern of the boat will result in a tangible "thunk."

Having a real consequence is an incredible opportunity for a kid. It's an opportunity to contribute productively and as an equal in adult endeavor. I can't think of another comparable activity from my childhood.

Canoeing the Brule River both enlivened my young imagination and grounded me. For all the stimulus that is to be found on the water, it's also notable what is absent: the frenetic distractions of the digital age. Through periods of complete focus (like going through a tight turn) to moments of quiet tranquility (like drifting through wide stretch), canoeing was the closest to a meditative experience I had as a kid.

Another consequence of canoeing the Brule was a lifelong love of natural spaces. For my brother and me, this inspired us to join scouting. Eventually we both became Eagle Scouts. We continue to seek out experiences in nature and we both

wish to protect it. I wish every child had the opportunity to temporarily escape urban areas to experience natural spaces.

The most important consequence: these canoe trips strengthened my relationships with my parents, my brother, and the other members of the Brule Trip gang. As a kid, seeing my parents in their element—on the water alongside friends and family—led to a simple but surprising truth: they weren't living on a distinct plane of existence called adulthood. In many ways they still were like me.

I am truly fortunate to say the annual Brule River paddle trip is quite alive. My role in the adventure continues to change. After all, not even the river stays the same. However, the value we find in the journey, and our mutual company, is an established constant.

Steven Carpenter is a Jack of All Trades, provided those trades involve lasers and electrons at near zero Kelvin. He lives in Madison.



20 years ago at Brule

¹ I was pushing to be known as "Evil Uncle Jim" as I hoped it would gain me more river cred. -Ed

Allowing the River to Hold Space

Rafting along the Salmon River fulfilled and exceeded Jean Nielsen's childhood hopes

The Salmon River, flowing through Frank Church Wilderness, has always called to me. Growing up far away from Idaho on the east coast, it had always been this mythical place. It was the stuff of legends: wild, remote, and beautiful. People spoke about it with reverence, usually reserved for ancient temples or life-changing pilgrimages. I didn't understand the magic of it until I finally found myself on its banks, many years ago. From that trip on, everything changed.

There's something transformative about having nothing to do but raft, set up camp, and cook. It's a rhythm that strips life down to the essentials and reminds you what really matters. You wake up to the sound of water tumbling over rocks, the sun warming the canyon walls, and the smell of coffee bubbling in a percolator. The simplicity of it all creates a peace that feels almost impossible to find anywhere else.

One trip down the Middle Fork stands out above the rest. It was just my husband, our two dogs Lily and Sage, and me. It was fall, as the leaves were changing and the river was quiet in a way that felt sacred, like it was holding space just for us. We didn't see another soul the entire trip. The solitude gave everything deeper weight, from the light filtering through golden leaves to the sound of water lapping gently against the solo raft.

Evenings were simple and perfect. After amazing meals, we all snuggled into the tent and our sleeping bags as the canyon walls wrapped around us. One morning, we even watched a solar eclipse from the shore, the world dimming in this surreal and unforgettable way. It felt like the universe was giving us a show just for being there.

During the days, we stopped along the banks and hunted chukar. The dogs were in their element, tails wagging nonstop, noses to the ground, pure joy radiating from every movement. Lily, especially, seemed so full of life. She always loved these trips, but there was something about that one, maybe the quiet, the solitude, or just the beauty of the changing season that felt even more meaningful.

It was the last big trip we took with her before she unexpectedly passed from cancer, and now, the Middle Fork holds a piece of my heart that will always belong to her. Watching her happy in that wild, sacred place reminded me of how rivers teach us to let go. They remind you that life is ever-moving, ever-changing and that the best we can do is flow with it, savoring the moments while they last.

Every day on the river is a lesson in letting go. Your phone doesn't matter. Deadlines don't exist. The



boat becomes your world. It is a carefully organized chaos where you have everything you need and nothing more. That balance feels like freedom.

The Middle Fork and multi-day trips have taught me that the magic of paddling isn't just about the river itself, it's about what it gives you. It's connection. It's adventure. It's stripping away all the noise so you can hear what's been there all along: the tug of life's current and your own heartbeat keeping time with it all.

For me, rafting these wild rivers is the closest thing to a miracle I've ever known. And as I think of Lily and those golden canyon walls, I know it's one I'll keep chasing, one trip at a time.

Jean Nielsen has spent 15 years in paddlesports, proving she can handle both wild rapids and even wilder campfire debates about the best boat. When not on the water, she's smashing tennis balls and perfecting her talent for blaming the dog when snacks go missing.

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Canoes, Kayaks, and Community

Al Fairfield remembers the Door County Sea Kayak Symposium and looks forward to the new Camp Rutabaga

Somewhere around 2008 I landed at the Door County Sea Kayak Symposium and was asked by Terrie Cooper of the Door County Land Trust to lead a naturalist tour on the Mink River. With a borrowed boat, some nets and containers, and barely a plan, a group of us took off on our adventure. Immediately I was at ease as the instructors took charge of safety and kept us on schedule.



The participants on this tour were very engaged and had a real interest in learning more about the geology, biology, and ecology of the area.

We went upriver, pointing out interesting features and some of the local wildlife as we encountered various creatures. Further upriver, we landed on a small beach, and I invited participants to get into the water and collect aquatic invertebrates, frogs, and even a large fox snake. It was great fun to see the childlike enthusiasm and interest in discovery that they embraced. They were also very receptive to the message that this was a special place that was

more than just a nice place to paddle. Understanding the ecological importance and fragility of this place was taken to heart as they all contributed later to helping preserve it through the annual auction.

At that time I was not an instructor and I told Nancy Salsbury that I wanted to come back as an instructor. A short while later I was presented with an instructor's hat and told I was already an instructor. That really brought me into the Rutabaga family and their extensive paddling community. My skill set was not as a paddler but as an environmental educator whose contribution in the paddling community there mattered.

The symposium became an annual event and reunion for me and so many old and new friends. Most of my friends, including my wife Marsha, I met at the symposium. Every time I offered to help someone launch or move a boat I immediately made a new friend. I see this happen dozens of times a day and it becomes contagious with everyone there. It is a joyous event because everyone is genuinely helpful and caring. One of the great things about the paddling community is that everyone is inclusive and looks out for each other. Everyone cheers

accomplishments and helps each other succeed at their own pace.

Then tragedy struck when Rowleys Bay Resort suffered a catastrophic fire. So many of us were devastated at the loss not only of the venue, but at the impact to a community of paddlers that looked forward to being together every July. Many of us make reservations a year in advance to join our extended family there. It didn't take long for many of us to both mourn and plan an alternative gathering. Last summer a bunch of us gathered to paddle, hike, bike, share meals and campfires the weekend the symposium was typically held. We had a potluck dinner and continued the tradition of supporting the Door County Land Trust with generous donations from so many. It wasn't the same, but it demonstrated that the community would endure.

Shortly after that informal gathering Darren contacted me and asked me



what I thought of bringing that community to the Northwoods. I was absolutely thrilled at the prospect of bringing so many of my old and new friends into my neighborhood. Marsha and I immediately started checking out potential venues and ultimately concluded that Camp Manito-wish could host an event that size as well as offer some very attractive amenities. The Bush family vacations at Boulder Junction every summer. At last summer's family trip, arrangements were made to meet the staff at Camp Manito-wish and Darren could see for himself if this would be a good fit. We got an extensive tour and then were treated to an amazing meal. That definitely got the ball rolling, and we discussed the new opportunities to expand the

reach of the symposium community to other paddlers and the incredible variety of waters in the area. What an opportunity for the old guard to experience new adventures while creating greater inclusivity for a larger and more diverse group of paddlers.

Community is cultivated and contagious. It takes some effort, but with direction and willingness to participate, it propagates naturally. My experience with paddlers of any kind of paddle craft is that their love of water and beautiful places provides a tangible commonality. Usually this leads to friendships and future interactions that deepen these new friendships. Ultimately, community is founded on caring, and this paddling community exemplifies that.

I can't wait to see my paddling community at Canoecopia and in my own backyard next fall!

Al Fairfield is something of a wildlife photographer if you consider selfies of him with fish wildlife photography.



Sheree on the Kishwaukee

Ken Solofo talks about the joys of introducing paddling to someone dear

Excitedly, with a smile of anticipation, Sheree pulled her hat down a bit over her eyes and nodded: it was her very first time in a canoe. Maybe a bit nervous, she smiles at me.

Sheree does not really swim; water sports were not part of her urban youth. A canoe? Nope, likely never even saw one except on TV. I had always assumed *everyone* grew up on and around water, I never recall not knowing how to swim and maneuver a canoe. It is not a part of growing up for everyone. Fortunately, Sheree is willing and embraces the experience with a positive can-do attitude.

She asks again if the lifevest is fitting properly. I give it a tug to pull it over

her head, showing her it will not slip. “You’ll be fine. Keep your butt low, and as centered on the seat as you can. This canoe is very stable; we are safe, it will not tip.” Wading into the knee-deep water of the Kishwaukee River, I stabilize the canoe as she carefully steps in and grabs the paddle.

I show her how to grip the paddle and control the blade. “One other thing, babe; for the love of God and all we hold dear, please do not drag your paddle alongside the canoe with every stroke. Keep your butt low. Stay centered. This canoe is very

stable. You are safe.”

The Old Town Allagash I purchased years ago is a tank. Royalex construction, broad and nearly indestructible, weighing in at...well,

I’m thinking... is there anything in the world better than sharing something I love with someone I love?

let’s just say it’s not Kevlar. But it’s the perfect river-stable paddle craft. I love this canoe; it has served me well for years.

We were putting in on the delightful Kishwaukee River that winds its way lazily, mostly, through Northern Illinois, brushing against many urban areas. “The Kish” is generally fairly shallow, has a bunch of birdlife, clear with a few riffles here and there, sandbars scattered frequently to stretch canoe-weary legs, or maybe even enjoy a picnic, if one were prepared for such an event. As it turned out, I was prepared.

A paddler can see the bottom often below, perhaps 3’-5’ or so for much of the stretch we were to float that day; a perfect introductory river for a new paddler. July sun peeked through the trees as we launched. The Kish is a popular float for tubers, blow-up float animals, and other craft likely not intended for such use.

Paddling by a variety of groups of people on floating contraptions



Reflections on Paddling

enjoying the sunny day, we bask in the warmth. Sheree began to relax as she peers back at me. I see her smile start to widen and I can tell she is comfortable. Never been in a canoe prior to this, she is a sport. I appreciate her willingness to share adventures. I see her relax in the bow and often exclaim “This is really nice!” “Wow, what a terrific day!” “How have I not done this before?!” And, of course, “Where will we stop for our picnic?”

Stopping on a mid-river sandbar, I produce lawn chairs, a blanket, and a picnic worthy of royalty from the magic backpack as the warmth of the day washes over us. We smile and inhale the experience. A pair of ospreys occasionally glide overhead, and we see mergansers, mallards, geese in abundance, a bunch of plovers along river’s edge. Occasionally we see fish flash by in the clear waters. Although urban development surrounds us, The Kish gives the feeling of isolation as the trees embrace the river, covering overhead as sunlight filters easily through the canopy and offers the illusion of solitude.

Empty glasses and bottle returned to the magic backpack, I steady the canoe as Sheree settles back in, her hands on the gunwales.

I smile as I watch her skillfully settle back into her seat and adjust the backrest. She turns and smiles back at me as I move back to the stern and settle myself in, keeping my butt low. I grip my paddle and turn the canoe downriver.

The lower portion of the Kish we paddle on slows greatly, meandering among small islands and riffles, the **CANOECOPIA.COM**

river channel deepens and broadens, offering a bit more solitude. Many of the other river floaters exit upstream at one of the forest preserves that dot the river banks.

I see our take-out up ahead. I tell her we will be done soon. Sheree half-turns to me and says “This is *the best!* I *loved* this, and really look forward to sharing this again.” I’m thinking *is there anything in the world better than sharing something I love with someone I love?*”

Nope. No, no there isn’t. I’m smiling as I remember the warmth of the sun, the day we shared, and the glow of connection afforded by a canoe, and a really sweet little river called the Kishwaukee.



Ken grumbled and griped about forced labor and unwillingly did yardwork at 10 years old under his father’s supervision and discipline. The reward for this? An 18-foot Grumman canoe. Currently Ken sells manufacturing equipment used to make canoes, boats, and other useful items- and still owns that Grumman canoe from nearly 55 years ago.

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photo: Chris Mayne

I'm Good at Canoes

There are a lot of things people can be good at. Whitney Bush is uniquely good at Canoes.

This past December I hosted a Christmas party with two other friends in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. We were in a room full of professional women in their 30s, some of us knew each other, some did not. In an effort to get to know each other a little better but avoid the excruciating nonsense that are most icebreaker questions, someone proposed the question “what is something you know more about than anyone else in the room?”

That was a very tricky question considering about half of us were meeting for the first time that night. I immediately started sifting through the filing cabinets of my brain, examining books I'd read recently, lessons I'd taught my 7th grade science class, niche interests I had. And then suddenly I remembered who I was, and where I was. “Canoes!” I said confidently. Someone asked for clarification, so I elaborated “I can paddle a canoe, solo or tandem, I can tie it on your car, I can portage it from lake to lake, I can plan a canoe trip for you, picking routes and menus

items, I can sell you one and I can teach you how to paddle it.”

Living in New York City, where I find myself more often in a subway car going over the Manhattan Bridge with a library book in hand than in a canoe, it's hard to feel like I'm still a paddler. I bike along rivers and ride my scooter past Prospect Park Lake and I'm always finding the water towers in the skyline, but that's the most I usually interact with water during the ten months a year that I teach middle school science in Brooklyn. It's true, you can rent canoes on the Gowanus Canal, and they have free kayaks available at a few piers on the Hudson River, and I'm happy anytime anyone gets to



restaurants. The paddler part of my identity dehydrates over the year, but it doesn't change the fact that I could paddle a solo canoe years before I could ride a bike. On a cellular level, it's not easily forgotten.

What is something you know more about than anyone else in the room?... Then suddenly I remembered who I was, and where I was. Canoes!

Which is why I've come to treasure trips to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness all the

more. I love living in New York City, but I also love that every summer I get to come back and spend at least a month in the paddling Mecca that is Wisconsin and Minnesota. I'll hit a river or two with my dad, be that the Wisconsin, Sugar or Kickapoo, and as a family we'll hop around the lakes of Vilas County for a week. Then the stars align and I spend a week or so with friends totally off the grid somewhere past the Gunflint Trail.

My first BWCA trip happened the summer I turned four years old. I remember vividly being propped up as a duffer between my parents



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Reflections on Paddling

in our Wenonah Minnesota II, eyes tracing the shorelines, looking out for eagles, beavers, bears, and moose. I don't remember what I spotted besides the leech between two of my toes, but I remember being awash in the wildness of it all, proud to be in charge of my own Sierra cup with my Tilley hat tight under my chin, knowing I didn't need anything else to be happy.

Now it's one of my favorite things to take new friends to this old, magical place. And nothing makes me happier than when we pass other groups of women and girls on the water. It baffles my mind that the wilderness isn't seen as a place where everyone belongs. Maybe somewhere along the line, we got confused. Women



have forever been tasked with the unpaid labor of keeping our world running, but that doesn't mean we aren't just as capable and adapted to taking on adventures in the natural world. Just because men have had the time doesn't mean they are somehow more suited to the task. Having seen enough dysfunctional scouting groups attempt a portage, I know that there isn't anything related to paddling on the Y-chromosome. After one particularly jarring encounter when we crossed paths with a group of bossy middle-aged men and ambivalent teenage boys, we paddled out and I turned to my friends and jokingly said "I don't think men thrive in this environment."

I wish everyone could experience the utopia that is an all-female canoe campsite deep in the BWCA. It takes essentially no time for everyone to find their role. We set up camp and in no time at all, the bear bag rope is hung, water is filtering, the Danger Bag (our orange TP/hand sanitizer drybag) is placed on the path to the

toilet, tents and hammocks are up, and a plan for dinner has been made; who's cooking, who's cleaning, and what treat should we end the night with. Then there is swimming and reading and napping and chatting, and everything feels easy. Everyone says thank you, everyone shares what they need, and the loon calls across the lake are the cherry on top.

My Brooklyn life is splattered with artifacts that expose my paddler roots; a beaver chew stick that I use in my classroom to hang noise-canceling headphones for my students, watercolors painted of my favorite BWCA lakes, a matching loon tattoo with my dad. The paddler in me is always there, waiting for her powers to be needed and activated.

Whitney Bush received a custom solo canoe for her 4th birthday and hasn't looked back since. She loves beavers, her red-eared pond slider Rocco, and is a rabid WNBA New York Liberty fan.



Frank of Frank Lake

Investigative reporter Darren Bush discusses Warden Frank J. Long and the beautiful lake named after him

Saturday, we arrived at the cabin we rent for a week every summer with my family. It's a few miles south of Boulder Junction, Wisconsin, and it is the best kind of cabin; someone else's. I get it for a week, and have no responsibility after I leave the key on the kitchen table and close the door. Septic goes volcanic? See ya next year.

Barely an hour later, I climbed in my truck with a canoe on top and headed north to a small road off of County Highway M. I really don't want to tell you the name of my destination.

It's Frank Lake. I'm heading to Frank Lake. Vilas County.



There, now I've done it. I guess if I'm going to tell a bunch of people where one of my favorite lakes is, it might as well be y'all.

John Bates wrote a book that has become one of my nightstand favorites: Wisconsin's Wild Lakes. John selected 55 of his favorite lakes that meet his criteria as to what is wild: a lack of development, a certain size, ownership of the land around the lake so it's unlikely to be developed, and some sort of special feature that distinguishes it from a standard, run-of-the-mill northwoods lake.

While I love my family, and I love spending time with them, I also love my alone time. I discussed my idea with Stephanie of a possible solo overnighter while we were up there on vacation, and she was entirely supportive. But as we approached the date to drive up to Mann Lake, the logistics of putting together gear for a single overnighter as well as getting all the rest of the gear together was too much work, as I was already working right up until we pulled out of the driveway, pulling a trailer with four canoes plus two on top of the truck.

I decided to get the most out of a long day

alone, paddling back to spend the evening with the kids after dark. That saved time getting all my stuff together for sleeping and shelter. Instead, I put together a quick pack with books, a camp chair, and cooking gear, and threw in a few freeze-dried meals that I was supposed to try to see if I liked them enough to sell them in the store.

A plaque on a large granite boulder shows that Frank Lake was named for Frank J. Long, State Forest Ranger and Game Warden from 1911 until his death in 1937 while on duty on snowshoes in the Star Lake area.

I had to dig hard to find anything else about Frank J. Long. A 1910 census tells me that he was born on February 15, 1873, and his father was a Civil War veteran. A later census told me he was married and had three at least kids.

I dug through newspaper archives and went down the State Historical Society rabbit hole. In the newspaper archives, I found a short mention, page 8, in the Rhinelander Daily News, March 1937:

Frank Long, Sayner, one of the oldest game wardens in the state, died suddenly of heart trouble Sunday evening in the woods near Sayner. His son, Melvin, was with him at the time. Mr. Long will be buried at Sayner Wednesday afternoon.

When I saw that Frank died in March and on snowshoes, my first thought was that he went through some rotten ice. Frankly, I was re-

lieved to learn it was a heart attack. The thought of going through ice with giant snowshoes is petrifying,



so I'm glad he didn't drown, even worse, drown alone. I wondered why his son would be with him; turns out he was a game warden too. Just two game wardens out on a Sunday looking for people not in compliance with game laws. March snow can be heavy, and I can imagine slogging through that could put a strain on the heart.

Frank Lake is not a big one, only 147 acres. If you hurry, you can circumnavigate the lake in half an hour. Or, you can take your time and make it last. That's how I do it. I sometimes play a game where I try to paddle exactly a boat length from the shore with as much precision as I can. It's a good way to slow down and practice skills at the same time.

Frank Lake has two small islands on it. The larger one is an oval and measures 60 by 80 feet. A large sign says STATE OWNED ISLAND - No Camping. But there's a small cluster of rocks that functions as a fire ring, and a spot that's large enough for a person to sit, read, cook, and enjoy the breezes blowing through the white pines. I stopped there.

If you paddle slowly around Frank Lake, you'll find a lot of the sort of wood that's perfect for a twig fire. I try to get wood with a diameter about the same as a Sharpie, sometimes bigger, but it'll snap off the trunk without a saw or axe. It's bone dry and burns hot and without smoke. Because it burns so hot it leaves almost no ash either.

Sometimes you'll find some old beaver chew, the bark neatly removed by precise incisors, leaving little rows showing where they surgically snipped away the nutritious cambium. I saw no beavers, but there's a lodge, so my guess is they're around. Beaver chew burns great too.

I paddled past Frank's memorial boulder and plaque to the right and followed the shore for ten minutes, snapping off twigs and branches. Soon the bow of my canoe was filled with all the wood

I'd need to boil water for food and a hot drink.

The grave marker at Plum Lake Cemetery shows both Frank and his wife Della, who lived five years after Frank died. It's simple; grey granite with names, dates, and the titles Father and Mother. His son Melvin is buried there too, the one that was with him when he died. Unfortunately Melvin died in 1977, and his children wouldn't know their grandfather. So the full story of Frank J. Long is somewhat sparse.

I like it that someone in charge of something thought Frank deserved his own lake. I spent hours looking for old maps of Vilas County, and I finally found one showing the names of lakes in 1930. Sure enough, the old Starrett Lake was renamed Frank Lake, and the heretofore unnamed lake to the west of it was rechristened Starrett Lake.



I set up my camp chair and lit the baby fire, moved a few rocks so a slight breeze blew on it, so I had hot water in just a few minutes, before I was even ready for it. The envelopes were cracked open and filled with boiling water. Let sit for fifteen minutes, say the instructions. In the meantime I tried to read my book, but I couldn't

focus. There were loons calling on the water. The sunset was gorgeous. I just sat there, let my eyes glaze over and tried to feel everything around me.

The breeze. The whistle of wind in white pines is one of my favorite sounds in the world, like nature's white noise machine. Wind sounds good through all trees, but for whatever reason, white pines produce a softer, smoother sound. Whatever it is, it'll put me to sleep if I stay there long enough, but I can't. The sign says day use only, so I have limited time there.

I could find no archival pictures anywhere of Frank J. Long. I called a gentleman who owns an art gallery up there who had the last name of Long. Turns out Frank was his great-grandfather, and we talked for a good half an hour. Family lore was that Frank was chasing down poachers when he had a heart attack. Art was unaware that Melvin was with him at the time and Art was happy to learn that. We each had information the other didn't, and he invited me to come see him at his studio next summer.

In the meantime, Art found a picture of Frank in his files, and his wife took a picture of it and sent it to me. Not the best quality, but enough to see that Frank was a mountain of a man, with a jaw so square he probably could bite through a logging chain.

I have adopted Frank J. Long, and I am clinging to his story like a pit bull

with tetanus. I am not likely to let go of this until I am satisfied I have everything I want to know. Frank did good service to the county of Vilas. I found a document showing the arrest and citation records for all the conservation wardens in the state. He was successful in catching his share of violators.

Art told me that Frank was an expert tracker and could sniff out trespassers and poachers. A good warden is an ambassador first, law enforcement second. Frank probably knew a large majority of the people he encountered. Besides, hiding from Frank would be a stupid idea, since he worked for years as a logger in that same area before becoming a warden. Frank knew his territory. And if he caught you, a stern talking to would be the minimum punishment.

The fire burned itself out quickly and the ash scattered with a few puffs of wind, which was starting to die down. I will not name the brand of food I tried, but they batted .500. The stew was edible. The dessert was awful. Like not-edible-awful. This follows my general rule in pretty much anything: just because you can doesn't mean you should. Bananas

Foster belongs in a large chef's pan with butter, brown sugar, bananas, and rum lit on fire, not in a foil pouch. I should have known better, but I promised I'd try it. Promise kept, feedback will be suitably

provided. Three words: don't eat this.

As darkness settled, it was time to pack up. I wanted to get back to the family after a lovely afternoon and evening. I felt renewed just from half a day of paddling and sitting and doing nothing; just me and Frank.

I paddled past Frank's memorial plaque on the way to the take-out,

paused and placed my palm against the bronze. It's hard to read because of corrosion, and I make a mental note to bring some vinegar, some Brasso, 600 grit wet/dry sandpaper, and a fine wire brush on my next visit to see Frank of Frank Lake.

Darren Bush is the Chief Paddling Evangelist of Rutabaga Paddlesports. He's also a writer for newspapers and magazines when he's not paddling one of his eleven, no, twelve canoes. His wife Stephanie's business card says Wrangler.



Lento vs. Presto

Jeremy Vore discusses the value of matching the tempi of your paddling experience to the needs of the moment

There exists a peculiar prejudice in the world of paddling—a notion that speed and appreciation exist in inverse proportions to one another. According to this mythology, the faster you paddle the less you see. That notion, passed down through generations of leisurely paddlers, contains a drop of truth, but misses the variety of experience that different paddling tempos offer.

Consider the single blade of a canoe paddle. At any speed, it performs the same fundamental actions: catch, power, exit, recovery, and repeat. The difference between fast and slow lies not in the basic mechanics, but

in the frequency and efficiency of execution. Like a metronome marking time, each stroke sets the rhythm for your dance on the water.

At five to six miles per hour, the water doesn't blur into incomprehensibility and the shoreline isn't an indistinct smear. Instead, this velocity gives me the opportunity to see twice as much of the world in a single outing. The riverbanks unfold like slowly turning scrolls, revealing themselves in continuous, fluid motion. Rather than a diminished and rapidfire observation of the world, my view is expanded as I witness more of the water's story in a given

amount of precious time.

A slow paddle might be compared to viewing individual photographs, lingering on each one and immersing yourself in the experience of their static, beautiful details. A faster tempo is like seeing the same sights in a movie, where movement and meaning emerge from the flow of images. Both approaches have their merits, and neither holds a monopoly on appreciation, understanding, or beauty.

The efficiency required for sustained, up-tempo paddling demands a deep engagement with technique. Each stroke must be refined, precise, and purposeful. There's an art to achieving the cleanest entry and exit of the blade; to maintaining the perfect alignment of body, shaft, and blade through the power phase; to the staccato cadence of 60 strokes per minute.

For some paddlers, that's tedium, but for others it's poetry of motion. The rhythmic movement, the steady breathing, and the continuous connection between muscle and water working in harmony create a meditation of movement. In that repetition, I find a state of flow that, paradoxically, leads to heightened awareness of my surroundings.

There's also a practical dimension to quick and efficient paddling. It allows you to explore further, reach more remote areas, and unlock a different level of independence in

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Reflections on Paddling

wilderness travel. When weather threatens or daylight wanes, a brisk pace can deliver you to shore ahead of a storm front or before night settles. Spotting the put-in and take-out on a river is no longer a challenge when you can paddle upstream with the same ease that you paddle down, unlocking the simplicity of up-and-back loops.

But, perhaps most importantly, different paddling tempos represent different ways of conversing with the water. A slower pace can be a leisurely chat with an old friend, while a faster tempo mirrors an engaged debate or energetic dance. Neither is inherently more meaningful or appreciative than the other; they're simply different dialogues, different ways of listening to and experiencing the story of water.

The true art of paddling is not found in adherence to a particular speed, but in matching your cadence to the moment. Some days call for contemplative drifting, others for a brisk pace. The fortunate paddler develops fluency in multiple tempos, learning to read the water, weather, and their own inclinations to choose the most fulfilling rhythm for each journey.

So when someone suggests that paddling faster means seeing less, breathe deeply and offer a knowing smile. For those who have found their flow at higher tempos, the experience isn't about seeing less—it's about seeing differently. It's about engaging with the water in a way that combines physical mastery,

mental focus, and environmental appreciation in a singular, fully-present dance. The beauty of paddling lies not in how fast or slow you go, but in how fully you engage with each stroke, each moment, each mile of water behind your blade.

A faster tempo is like seeing the same sights in a movie, where movement and meaning emerge from the flow of images.

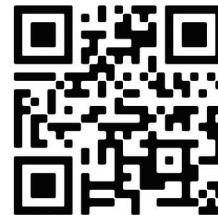
Jeremy Vore is a long-distance canoe racer, former test pilot of high performance aircraft, gear designer, and owner and sewing machine operator at Red Leaf Designs. He lives with his family near Marquette, Michigan.

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Camp Dog

Dorothy Gause and the tale of the pooch that never quite was the water dog she hoped for

With three school age kids, a large heavy canoe, umpteen kayaks and a ten-year-old second-hand pop-up trailer, we wanted our ensemble complete with a water dog, one that loved being on the river as much as we did. Having done zero research on what kind of dog would suit, we adopted a “used” puppy, a return from a family whose



children were really too young to have a bouncy, barking, active, and rather anxious mid-sized dog. Alas, Tucker, a beagle German Shepherd mix (we don't ask how that came to be), was decidedly NOT a water dog. He loved sticks and balls and being with us and eating bits of hot dog and chasing bunnies and barking and anything really smelly, but he definitely did not love being wet.

To a dog who lacked a disgust-meter, not all wet was an anathema. Mud, slime, snow and ice did not count. Snowballs were for catching despite bursting upon impact. Goey, foul-smelling things were for rolling

in. Dirty puddles were apparently for drinking, something we endeavored to avoid with a potentially expensive vet bill in mind.

Only water in streams, lakes, and especially, most especially, bathtubs were to be avoided. Not that we didn't try to transform our anxiety ridden, but enthusiastic pup into the river mutt we thought would fit us. Tucker loved fetch, to the loss of all else. Building on that knowledge, we would throw a stick in the water thinking he would immediately go after it, but he would stretch his neck out as far as possible to try to retrieve it without actually getting any hydration on his toes, barking at the stick to float a little closer.

We thought maybe he might chase a Lab into the water. Nope. Tucker raced after the other, bigger dog as hard and as fast as he could on his shorter legs, but when the Lab dove into the water, Tucker cartoonishly reared back on all four paws, literally skidding to a halt just at the edge of the river.

Conceding that perhaps he wasn't going to jump into the river, Tucker just hung out with us at the campsite most of the time, begging treats and fetch games often, and of course protecting us from any rogue squirrels. However, there were times we had to bring him with us on a canoe run because everyone was leaving the campsite. Tucker sat in between my legs at the bow of the boat alternately barking, looking around

and occasionally cowering. I did my best to comfort him and counter the constant weight shifting with my

To a dog who did not have a disgust-meter, not all wetness was an anathema. Mud, slime, snow and ice did not count.

own rear end, praying he would at least hold still-ish through the class III rapid on the Winneboujou run. Generally, he did, whether out of interest or terror, I guess I'll never know, although he was quite happy to spring out of the boat at the landing.

There was another occasion when we forgot to close the roof vent on our pop-up and it rained in the night. Tucker slept on the fold out dinette right below it and got drenched. I remember a cold, wet dog sheepishly climbing up next to my sleeping bag. I felt so sorry for him that I couldn't object to his shared damp.

Our sweet, barky, silly pooch, lived almost ten years. He was a fun camp dog, but not a water dog. But we loved him anyway. He wasn't the easiest dog we ever had, but he certainly had the most personality. And left us with memories and a lot of stories to entertain ever after.

Dorothy Gause believes the best way to get a boring work job done is to do something fun in the middle of it. That's probably why she's always planning a camping & canoeing trip.

Invasive Species Action Network

A Public Service Announcement from our friends at the ISAN

Most of us think that freshwater invasive species are limited to Eurasian milfoil and other stuff hanging off fishing boat trailers. Those are the easy ones to see. The fact is that some of the bigger problems are the ones you can't see, and paddlers can carry them.

Let's take just one example: the spiny water flea. They sound sorta cute, just a little flea swimming around, but they're anything but harmless. Think of the spiny water flea as a microscopic velociraptor. They feed on daphnia, another water flea genus that's almost cuddly. They live their lives munching on algae, like little cows grazing on a field of clover. That keeps the algae blooms under control, but when they are indiscriminately slaughtered, that's bad. To make it worse, perch can't eat spiny water fleas because they're, well, spiny.

Then there's the zebra mussels. These fingernail-sized mussels first arrived in the Great Lakes region via ballast water from cargo ships from Eurasia, and quickly spread to larger bodies of water. They are a nuisance in a number of ways; attaching to native mussels and incapacitating them, growing on water inlets and outlets and restricting water flow (and burning out motors), and filtering out food that native fish and invertebrates need to survive.

So how do paddlers help? Just as power boats and other craft that move from body of water to body of water, follow the rules of cleaned, drained, and dry.

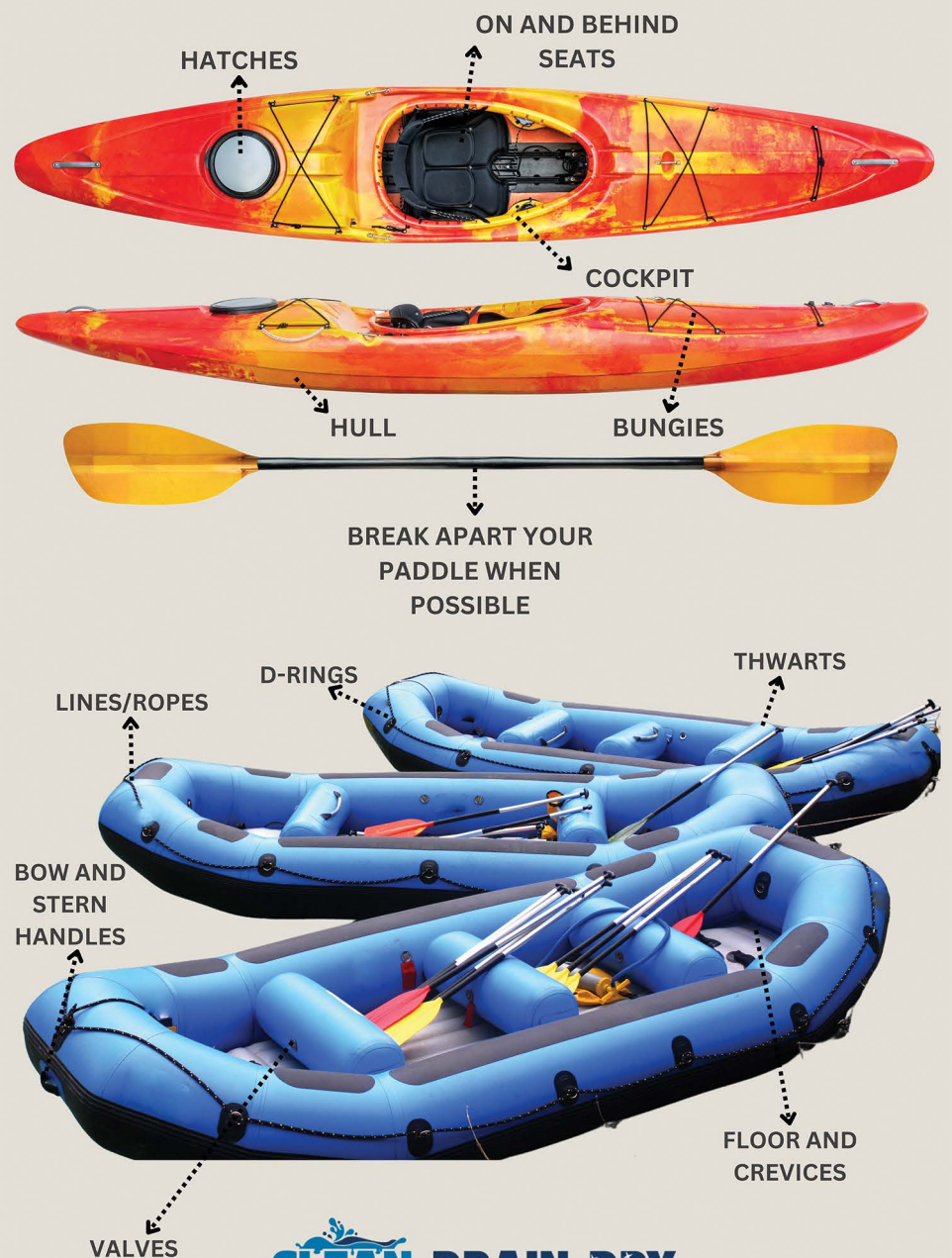
But, you say, it's only a little canoe. True. But think of where water can hide. Ever pick up your canoe and water runs out of the end cap and sometimes down your arm? Some species can live five days in those few cups of water. Invasive plants can stick to your hull and fall off on the next river over.

Let us paddlers do our part to contain the invasive species we have in our waterways. It just takes a few minutes and will keep your favorite lakes clear from trip-ruining pests.

Where Do Aquatic Invasive Species Hide?



Aquatic invasive species can hide and cling to the nooks and crannies of our paddling boats and gear. When leaving the water, always **CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY** by checking these areas of your boat for mud, debris, plants, and standing water. When you see watercraft inspection stations, always stop and get inspected.



CLEAN. DRAIN. DRY.

Learn more at www.cleanboater.org

Take Classes. Keep Learning

Jim Pippitt and the value of education

I've been really lucky to work at Rutabaga. I've been able to work on so many different things: coding, network admin, and this Show Guide. I've also been the staff photographer for years. That meant I got to have a front-line seat to our instructors teaching students how to paddle. For years, I got to audit their classes. I learned that paddlesports isn't *difficult* but it isn't *obvious* either. Think of paddling as a skill, like chopping vegetables for dinner. You could just grab any sharp implement and whack away, or you could learn how to pick the right tool for the right job and how to use it more effectively and more safely. In most circumstances, few would notice the difference.

You might notice it though. Use the wrong knife for the job and the knife may break or chip. Worse, you might cut yourself.

Paddling is much the same. In most cases, folks can just grab a boat and get out there. Paddling isn't generally dangerous (yeah, pipe down you in the back) but it can be quite unforgiving.

Come to Canoeconia and attend our speaker sessions. Even better, enroll in a class or take a private lesson. Learn where you are at skill-wise and how to paddle safely. Turn those 'unknown unknowns' into 'things to pay attention to,' perhaps even *avoid*. As much as it pains me to say it, getting out of a pickle may yield some fantastic camp stories,

but avoiding it altogether is probably the better play.

I got a chance to use the skills I learned through osmosis last year. One of our party flipped his boat. Thanks to the teaching I got at Rutabaga I was able to solve the situation with minimal drama. The rest of the party looked on with awe as I walked him through the rescue, holding on to his boat as I'd seen the instructors do before. (I did not tell them that my wife and I had practised this beforehand. Everyone assumed it was "just something I magically knew" and, well, I decided I wasn't technically lying to them. I was just *not telling the full story*.) Still... the day went a lot better because of the lessons I took, even if I never actually signed up for any of the classes myself. Stay safe, y'all. Take a class (or two) yourself. See page 52 for more information.

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Dan Cooke (February 25, 1956 - July 1, 2024)

Darren Bush remembers one of the great paddlesport independent gear builders

Dan was the founder of Cooke Custom Sewing. He will be known for his genius making outdoor gear, especially for paddlers, of course. His packs, tarps, and tents have been tested and used in the most extreme conditions without failing.

The year before he died he designed a cover to fit my “dog boat,” by Northstar Pearl, set up as a solo for me and Lucy. He didn’t have to take the time to do it; he was plenty busy. Somehow he found time to make the cover when he didn’t have a lot of time to give. He was a kind, generous, and deeply

spiritual man, and would drop what he was doing to help a friend. I am honored to call myself one of them.

Of all the cool bits of gear I’ve got in my garage, the cover may not be my favorite, but I can assure you it is Lucy’s.

Dan was a husband, father, godfather, uncle, and friend to countless people. He will be missed greatly by all who knew him.



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We miss you, Dan



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Photo by Bryan Hansel



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The Horton River

– A journey through a mysterious northern tundra landscape



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The Nahanni River

– An epic adventure, dramatic canyons and iconic Virginia Falls



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