

Minnesota Events Primer - by BeaV

This is a brief synopsis for paddlers looking at participating in one of the Minnesota Border Route Challenges and not familiar with the events, area, or logistics.

WaterTribe- The group called WaterTribe first organized the MN Voyageurs Challenge in 2015 and then added a longer route called the MN Kruger/Waddell Challenge and a shorter route called the MN Moose Lake Challenge in 2017. Because of the time constraint, self-reliance requirements, and vast distances to be covered these are true Adventure Challenges with potential danger. Before you read any further, you should familiarize yourself with the WaterTribe Warning found here:

<http://www.watertribe.com/PDF/MustRead/WaterTribeWarning.pdf>

Specific event information and much more is found on the WaterTribe website here:

<http://www.watertribe.com/Default.aspx>

Cost- There is no “registration fee” for these Challenges. Participants will be responsible for their share of any group costs.

Location- We meet in Ely, Minnesota (pronounced “ee-lee” and is known as the “Canoe Capital of the World”) the day before the Challenges are scheduled to start. Ely is approximately 4 ½ hour drive and 260 miles from the heart of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area. There are no feasible public transportation options from the Metro area to Ely so plan accordingly. Your arrival the day or two before the Challenges start will allow time to rent or purchase any gear you need and don’t have, meet other challengers, and do final packing

Captain’s Meeting - We will gather for an informal “Captain’s Meeting” at a local restaurant for dinner the evening before the Challenges start. After dinner, you will need to get all your gear packed and ready for an **early** start the next morning. Options for lodging that night include a hotel, motels, outfitter lodges, campgrounds, or your vehicle. Check out the Ely tourism website for options and much more local information at www.ely.org/lodging/motels

Travel Permits –Each group will need to acquire a United States Forest Service (USFS) BWCAW travel permit well in advance of the Challenge. Each BWCA entry point has a specific number of permits issued per day. Travelers must enter the BWCA at the entry point and on the date for which their permit is issued. Permit groups can be up to a maximum of 4 canoes and 9 people. Permit groups must camp together during the entire Challenge. Permit reservations become available starting the last Wednesday in January. Permit reservations, BWCA rules and regulations and other helpful information is available at: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/233396> The permit process has changes for 2019 and is not always clear. Feel free to contact Chief, and experienced Kruger/Waddell Challenge paddler or our Challenge Manager for information, help or suggestions.

Shuttling- Shuttle arrangements will be prearranged for you to get yourself, gear, and canoes to your starting location. All participants will meet at Piragis Outfitting early in the morning to catch the shuttle to our start locations. Shuttles vans with canoe trailers will leave from Piragis Outfitting in Ely. As part of this service, your personal vehicles can be parked at their business. **Come ready to throw your canoe packs into the shuttle van and go. There is no time to be checking gear or packing.**

Return shuttles will depart from Grand Portage the morning of the Finish Deadline as described in the WaterTribe Schedule and bring us back to Piragis. This makes renting any needed gear really easy if you

rent from Piragis (they will load and unload your canoes). Rental gear with pricing can be found on their website: www.piragis.com/partial-outfitting/canoe-rental-partial-outfitting

Route- Open **Google Earth** and from your chosen start location, just follow the international boundary line that is shown there separating the United State from Canada- this is basically the route. The only required deviation from the international border is near the finish. The Pigeon River from Fort Charlotte to Lake Superior is unnavigable so a trail called the “Grand Portage” was established hundreds of years ago and is still the way to go to get to the Grand Portage Fort on Lake Superior. There are some shortcuts along the border that can be taken, if you chose, but don’t wander into Canadian territory (unless you’re a Canadian citizen). If you do the longest challenge called the Kruger/Waddell Challenge, there will be about 40 lakes, 6 rivers, and 40 portages to traverse. What’s a “portage”?- It’s an established trail where you will have to carry your canoe and gear to avoid unnavigable areas. Portages on canoeing maps are measured in “rods”. A rod is 16.5 feet long, so a mile-long portage is 320 rods.

Portaging Technique- Efficient portaging is important to completing one of these challenges! It is easiest to do by traveling in tandem canoes that will allow 2 people to share the load. The goal is to walk each portage only once (called single portaging). If you have too much gear/weight, you will have to go back to carry a second load (called double-portaging) and this will slow you down and wear you out. So- for a tandem team, each person would carry a small daypack, one would carry the canoe, and the other would carry the big canoe pack with the food and camping equipment in it. You will need to figure out who is carrying the canoe pack and how much weight they can handle on rough terrain. The difference between an easy portage versus a hard portage is largely determined by the amount of weight you’re carrying. If need be, the person carrying the canoe could also carry a second canoe pack, but this will make the going tougher. Oh, and the canoe is carried on your shoulders upside down using a padded yoke on the center thwart.

Cell Phone Coverage- Ely is good, everywhere else is poor or not available. Coverage will vary greatly with carrier. At Grand Portage – cell phones and computers will hook up to the Casino Wi-Fi in your room or in the lobby.

Gear- Nothing too unusual here other than packing light. Pack only the necessary paddling gear, camping gear, and all the food you will need for the length of your trip. There is nowhere to resupply without adding significant miles and time to your trip. Gear needs to be packed into “canoe packs” for efficient portaging. Packs need some type of water proofing, either having a plastic liner or made of a water proof material. The canoe pack needs to slip easily in and out of the canoe and ride low in the boat to help keep a low center of gravity.

Water- Fresh drinking water is everywhere around you. Only carry what you need for the next few hours. But know how to prevent ingesting Giardia bacteria that are everywhere in our world. Filter or boil all water is the safest bet. Some people drink straight from the lake if you are out in the middle of a big lake- don’t blame me if you get beaver fever.

Navigation- Obtain paper maps for the length of your route. For the portion of the route through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA), use maps produced from McKenzie or Fisher. These maps show the lakes, rivers, land contour elevations, designated campsites, and portage locations. These maps when combined with a compass will be sufficient to keep you on track. GPS is a good backup if your map skills are uncertain and for night-time travel. Voyageur Maps has online canoe maps that can be viewed at www.voyageurmaps.com for planning purposes.

Land Ownership/Governmental Restrictions- Brief summary of where we will travel and who controls it.

Voyageur's National Park- For Kruger/Waddell participants only. Starting at International Falls going approximately 60 miles to Little Vermilion Lake is within the Voyageur's National Park. The Park is open to motorized boat traffic and attracts fishing boats and big slow moving house boats. No entry pass needed but camping is at designated, pre-reserved campsites only. These sites are well developed for motor boats and include a dock, tent pads, latrine, picnic table, and bear proof containers to store food. If you intend to camp you will need to reserve a campsite before the Challenge starts.

Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA)- For all participants. Starting at Little Vermilion Lake and going all the way to the Fort Charlotte on the Pigeon River you will be with the BWCA and/or the less restrictive Superior National Forest. Most of these lakes are non-motorized. A permit called an Entry Permit is required to enter the BWCA. These must be obtained well in advance but cannot be picked up until the day of or the day before your planned entry date. When obtaining the Entry Permit, designate Piragis as the location you will pick up the permit. Other notable rules for this area are- maximum of 4 canoes and 9 people in a group, must camp at designated campsites (no need to reserve), no disposable food cans or glass bottles, and no portage wheels or sails or mechanical assistance allowed. This is a man-made wilderness, however, it is fairly wild and vast with limited places to exit or get help.

Grand Portage National Monument- The Grand Portage including Fort Charlotte to Lake Superior is a narrow strip of land managed as a national monument due to its huge historical importance. Outside this strip of land is Grand Portage Indian Reservation lands. There are 2 large group campsites available at Fort Charlotte (this is the beginning of the Grand Portage) and should be reserved from the Park Service in advance (no fee for camping).

At the finish- All the Challenges finish at National Park Service Grand Portage Historic Fort on Lake Superior. Hit your final Spot "I'm OK" message when you walk through the fort entrance gate. You have now finished the Challenge but you still need to get to where you will rest/sleep/celebrate. We store our canoes at the nearby marina located ½ mile south. You can paddle the Lake Superior shoreline, portage along a road, or maybe some helpful WaterTriber will drive you there. Beav-established tradition says you should paddle but beware of the big lake and respect it- you still could die.

This is a remote area within the Grand Portage Indian Reservation. Except for the historic fort, everything here is owned by the tribe. Everything includes the lands, a casino, a hotel, a marina, laundry facilities, and a convenience/liquor store. Most participants will hang out here together, cheering on other finishers, and waiting for the shuttle back to Ely on the last day. Accommodations available include RV and tent camping at the marina or hotel rooms in the casino. The casino has a restaurant and bar. Other than these improvements, there is nothing else for civilization for miles around- nice!!!! If you want to stay in a hotel room, reservations are recommended. Their website is: www.grandportage.com

Awards and Dinner-On the final evening of the Challenges, there will be a dinner and awards ceremony. Those that complete either the entire Kruger/Waddell or Voyageur Challenge will receive the coveted bear claw necklace. This means completing the miles of waterway, portages and finally walking the total 9 miles of the Grand Portage. The next morning the group will return to Ely via shuttle- **don't be late!**