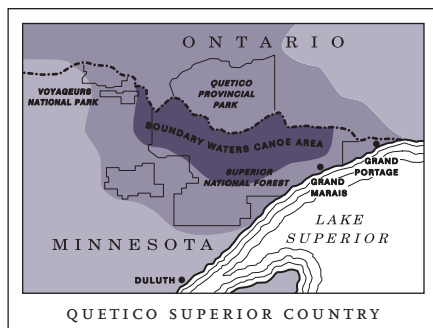


# Wilderness News

FROM THE QUETICO SUPERIOR FOUNDATION FALL-WINTER 2010



The Quetico Superior Foundation, established in 1946, encourages and supports the protection of the ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Quetico-Superior region.

## Wilderness Preservation

No task is more important, for the wilderness we save today will provide moral and spiritual strength and balance in a world of technology and frenzied speed. Only in the natural environment can man thrive, an environment where there are still places of beauty to go to. The effort to protect man's living space from further desecration is one of the greatest challenges of this age. Wilderness is more than camping and hiking, it is a symbol of a way of life that can nourish the spirit.

— Sigurd F. Olson  
*Living Wilderness, Spring 1968*

## Wilderness News

Published by the Quetico Superior Foundation  
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Front row left to right: Carol Stephenson, Barbara Gilmore and Sue Williams. Standing left to right: Sally Lewis, Patricia Monroe, and Sue Haiselmaier. (All photos courtesy Barbara Gilmore).

## Women in the Wilderness

*"We can do it. We can do it without a guide."*

By Rob Kesselring Wilderness News Contributor

**It started with a dare in 1986. Seven female volunteers at a nature center thirty miles northwest of Milwaukee were contemplating signing up for a guided BWCAW trip. And then one said, "We don't need to sign up for a sponsored Boundary Waters trip, we women can do it ourselves!" That first step was the beginning of a quarter century of wilderness adventure.**

They were not beginners to camping, a few had even been to the Boundary Waters before, but this time it was different. This time they were in control. The result was so empowering that it became an annual ritual. Not every woman in the group has made the journey every year but two have, and a few more have just missed a couple trips.

It is tempting at this stage in the article to identify and describe the paddlers, but their story is not unique. Every year more and more groups of women ply the BWCAW on their own. By keeping the members of this group almost nameless, the

adventures, motivations and excitement of these women may seamlessly weave together with other women that have discovered a similar exquisite blend of solace and camaraderie in the Quetico-Superior wilderness.

There is never a leader. All decisions are made by consensus and that is the way it has always been. Even when a stubborn bear refused to vacate their campsite the women took the time to share their feelings and agree, before they made a hasty retreat across the lake.

These hardy women also share in the excitement of exploration. Not content to merely camp on the periphery of the wilderness. Their travels include portages over a mile, white-capped lake crossings and complicated routes deep into the Boundary Waters. To this day, they navigate only with compass and map. In twenty-five years of travels their routes have crisscrossed and they do have a few favorite campsites and cherished swimming holes, but every year it has been a different route and a fresh adventure.

*continued on page 2*





*continued from page 1*

They value the little things: the fragrances of tiny flowers, the touch of granite and the antics of songbirds, which they have learned to identify by call and habitat. They also revel in the big sky, prolonged summer sunsets and the thrill of a thunderstorm pounding across a wilderness lake.

Carrying packs and canoes past a group of men half their age the women stand a little taller and laugh their way over the boggy trails. Simplicity is another theme and the group has learned that less is more. Their dinners are one-pot affairs and they discovered, in year two, that if you were discreet, even swimsuits were unnecessary. A few years ago when one new paddler pulled a beach towel from her Duluth Pack, she was teased and told in no uncertain terms that a bandana is the only towel you need in the wilderness.

Barbara Gilmore, one of the seven women who have never missed a year, shared that many years ago the group even quit bringing fishing gear. As much as they enjoyed a fish dinner, the pursuit of fish with all the paraphernalia and hassles was more bother than it was worth and stole time from what was paramount to their wilderness experience. Although there are women who enjoy fishing, this group's attitude about fishing may resonate with many female voyagers. Smiles of mirth appear on their faces as they pass groups of men encumbered with tackle boxes and rod cases and as they overhear the men complain about poor fishing or boast about the size or quantity of their daily catch. Karen Kelley, another avid BWCAW canoeist, put it this way; "Women tend to do a lot of things for others, and are conditioned to always place others' needs in front of their own. When we get away, we are freed of this role, and it gives us more space to think about who WE are, what WE think, and what WE want. The last thing we want to do is muck up this freedom by competing with each other over something as silly as a fish."



This does not mean women go into the wilderness afraid to step out of their comfort zones, quite the contrary. Many of this group's trips over the past 25

years have included arduous routes and tough portages frequently shunned by all but the most seasoned canoeists. Leaving civilization behind is a big part of the journey. This freedom keeps surfacing as a theme that draws the women back again and again to the land beyond the road and beyond the trappings of material civilization and the constraints of cultural stereotypes. They feel free to try new things and make mistakes without having it "count" too much. For example, the women delight in knowing that no one is going to yell at them or be disappointed if you are not the greatest stern paddler right out of the box. They are going to let you learn by doing and laugh with you at your mistakes. And no one is going to push you out of the way and just do it themselves.



These paddling partners have come to treasure their time together in the wilderness. The connection with nature and the separation from home life and societal expectations enables them to connect with each other on a deep level. When asked about the complexity of planning and packing for a

week alone in the wilderness the women laugh. Accustomed to the bottomless list of support roles women take on in modern life they find wilderness living extremely liberating. Their passion for skinny-dipping is a metaphor for that freedom. On a more serious level, not shouldering the expectation that they need to take care of countless others is very freeing. They can be the "big thinkers" because they are not tied down to the responsibility of minding all the myriad details. In the spirit of this freedom and candor, defenses are left at the put-in point and these annual adventures have become opportunities for essential conversations about family, love and the wisdom that is gleaned from life's hardships and triumphs.

This past August "the trip" began at Sawbill Lake. Twenty-five years had passed since that first declaration that "we can do it." and "we can do it without a guide." The oldest paddler was now 69, the youngest 57. With new words to an old tune they paddled up Sawbill Lake in unison, singing their own song.

*I walk the shores of Sawbill Lake and hear her music ringing.*

*It sounds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?*

*We paddle strong in rain and snow, through Sawbill's waters, shimmering.*

*Then worn with toil, we heed her call: How can we keep from swimming?*

*The moonlight shines across the lake; we hear the loons' night singing.*

*Our supper's done, the food bag's hung...How can we keep from swimming?*

*Friendships renewed, cares float away, our hearts with joy are brimming.*

*Past years: this year; years to come...How can we keep from swimming?*

Rob Kesselring's books: *River Stories* and *Daughter, Father, Canoe, Coming of Age in the Sub-Arctic*, are available at [www.shopcanoeing.com](http://www.shopcanoeing.com)



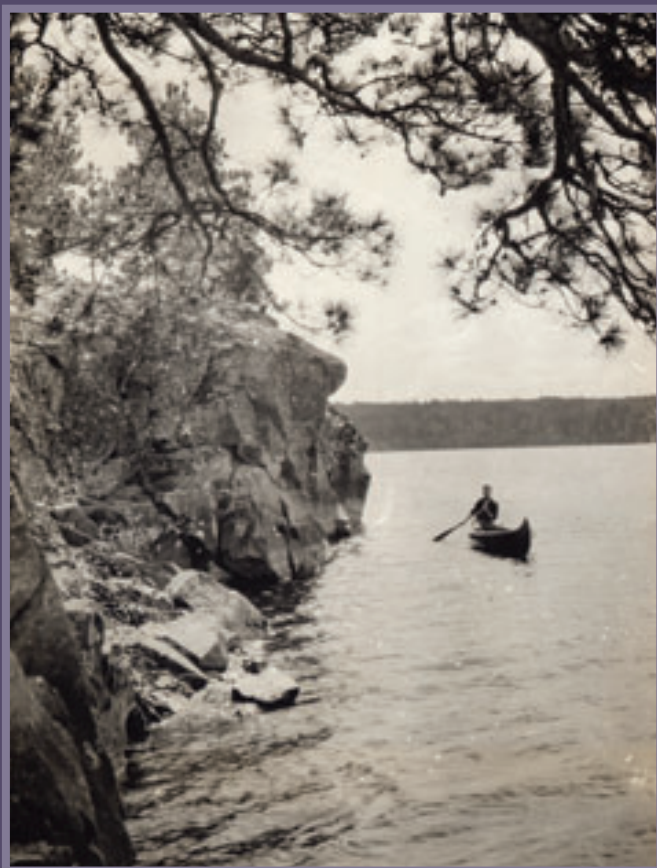




Channel in Little Saganaga.



Making the portage. White Iron Rapids.



Canoeing on White Iron Lake.



Charles Boostrom's team en route for his resort on Clearwater (or Emby) Lake.



Seagull Lake with typical stand of timber in the background.



Looking through a channel in Lake Insula.

These photographs were found in a U.S. Forest Service photo album, circa 1940. At the time the region was known as the roadless area of the Superior National Forest. Each photo in the album was accompanied by a type-written note, which we have reprinted with each image. Unfortunately, the name of the photographer and the person/s pictured have been lost over time. Our thanks to Barbara Wenstrom Shank and William P. Wenstrom for sharing these images.





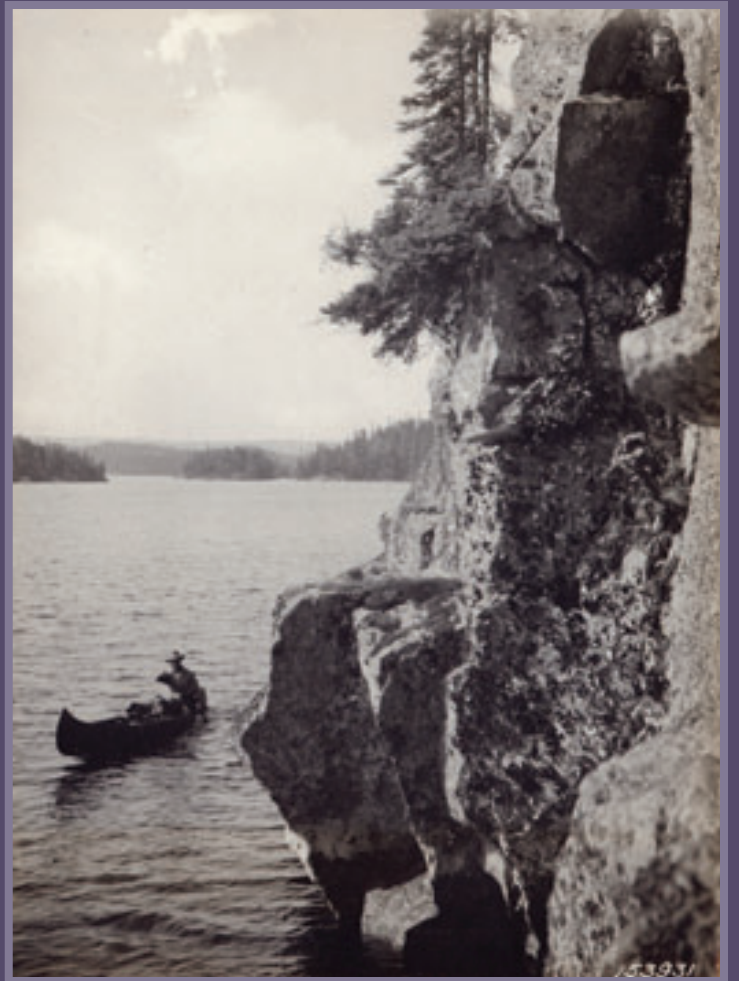
Along the Boundary Route. Little Saganaga.



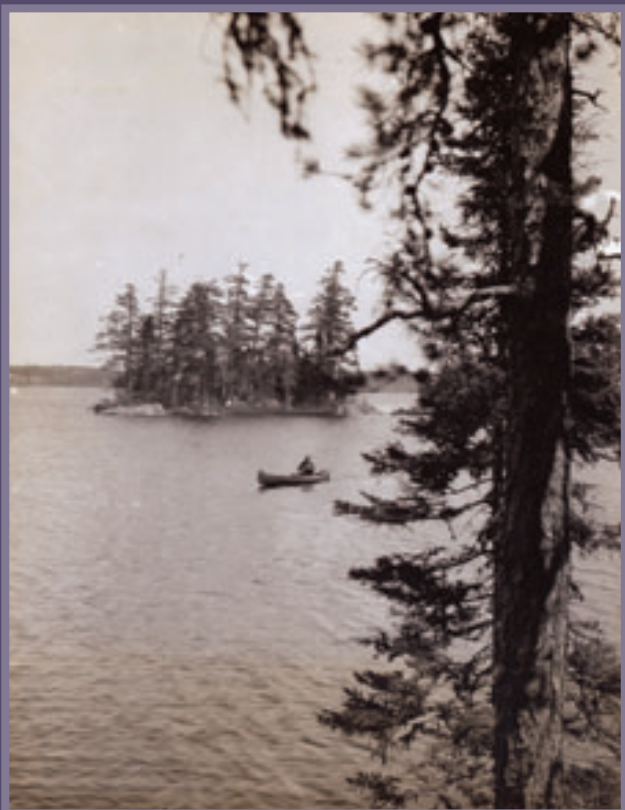
Portage overlooking Everett Lake.



A bay in Lake Hudson, looking towards main lake.



Rock Cliffs on Crooked Lake.



A typical island on Clear Lake.



Camping on an island in Lake Insula.







Andy, Shelby, Sue and Daniel Ahrendt

## Andy and Sue Ahrendt What it truly means to be a 'Boundary Waters Family'

The Ahrendt's personal histories are steeped in the Boundary Waters experience. Having spent summers as staff at a local camp, they were bitten by "the bug," and eventually moved to the Gunflint Trail as a couple. Now, as owners of Tuscarora Lodge and Outfitters and in their eighth season of operation, the Ahrendts seek to affect a love of wilderness upon the next generation. And likely, at least a few generations after that.

*Andy Wright/Wilderness News interviewed the Ahrendts in the fall of 2010.*

**WN: How did you come to live and work at Tuscarora; what is your story?**

**Sue:** During College, we worked as guide/counselors at Wilderness Canoe Base on Seagull Lake. We met; we fell in love with each other and the woods.

We started our family in Minneapolis, but spent all the time we could remaining connected with the [Boundary Waters] area. We also dreamed and schemed so when Tuscarora went up for sale, we were ready and the timing was right. We went for it.

**WN: As an outfitting business, what do you feel makes Tuscarora unique?**

**Sue:** We have a great location, on Round Lake, at the edge of the BWCAW...so pristine that the first night in the bunkhouse is already part of the BWCAW vacation. We were lucky enough to buy a business that was ridiculously clean and well maintained. But really, it's the people that make it so special here. We have been lucky to have such a fabulous staff/guest community in which to live and raise our kids. It's an incredible atmosphere. Our guests, our staff – all are loyal stewards to the BWCAW as well.

**WN: In the eyes of many nature lovers, you're 'living the dream.' Any affirming moments over the years that stand out and remind you of why you do what you do?**

**Sue:** Crossing from our house to the office on a sunny summer morning while people quietly pack and prepare to take off. I listen to screen doors, to loons, and to the laughter in the kitchen as the staff members prepare breakfast. I love the business of helping people learn about and plan vacations, and then to witness the flow that comes with it.

**WN: How did "Becoming a Boundary Waters Family" – as a book and a greater initiative – come to be?**

**Sue:** In 2008 some of the outfitters of the Gunflint Trail got together to plan this initiative. We have all chosen to raise our kids here. We believe that these woods hold great value in the development of kids' emotional, physical, and cognitive well-being.

So to make it easy for families [to come here] – we started with a website, seminars, and 'woods wisdom' that flowed naturally from those of us living here. We partnered with the U.S. Forest Service and with the Greater Minneapolis Kinship program. And, of course, we compiled the book.

**WN: A growing concern nowadays is "nature deficit disorder" – the fallout resulting from tech-savvy kids who make little or no contact with the outdoors. In contrast, your everyday life is spent in the open. What wisdom might you have to share about this problem?**

**Sue:** We get caught up in it too – in the off-season, as our kids participate in sports, have access to Facebook, etc. We've just been lucky that out our back door, the focus is on outdoor experiences. We're all out of balance as we figure out how to adapt to all the appealing things that compete for families' time. Technology isn't inherently bad, but obviously if the imbalance continues, kids are paying the price.

**Andy:** On the whole, I think 'technology people' enjoy forcing themselves to unplug. Our culture will learn how to manage technology, but it's important not to lose those connections to nature.

**WN: Results from a recent Quetico Superior Foundation poll suggest a trend towards smaller trips and shorter itineraries among campers. Are you seeing this behavior as a good thing? A bad thing?**

**Sue:** I'm glad that they are still finding time to carve out room for BWCAW vacations. I'm heartened by the traditions, the stories people bring. It's a valuable experience. Nothing is changing that.

**Andy:** One time, a family with two kids actually did return a day early from their trip. The weather had been so rainy; they'd spent most of their time inside the tent. But the dad reported overhearing his kids say, "We didn't even know Daddy could laugh that hard."

There are whole new levels of connection that families make with each other. When you're out there, it's real living; and when people come off the trails, they're happy.

**Sue:** The woods change; the nature of people's lives ebb and flow, and we're glad to adjust to that. We just want to continue to make those opportunities available. I had these opportunities, and I want my kids and their generation to have them too.

**WN: And what do you hope those outdoor opportunities will mean for young families, and the wilderness itself?**

**Sue:** People take care of what they know and love, and it is our hope that the children who visit the BWCAW will grow up to become the guardians of this land.

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[www.queticosuperior.org](http://www.queticosuperior.org)

### Book Review

## Paddle North: Canoeing the Boundary Waters— Quetico Wilderness

By Greg Breining and Layne Kennedy  
Published by Minnesota Historical Society Press  
2010, 138 pages, \$29.95 hardcover

Reviewed by Michael Kelberer

**Paddle North is a collection of essays by Greg Breining on the essence of the Up North wilderness experience, essays whose meaning is beautifully portrayed in images by photographer Layne Kennedy. It's well worth reading, and a worthy gift.**

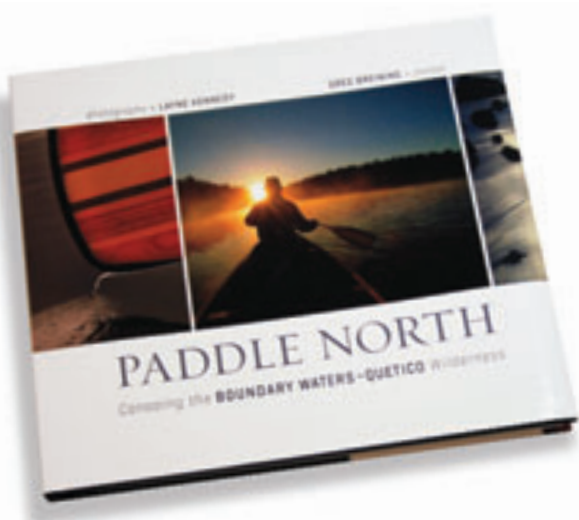
If there's a theme that ties the various sections together, it might be that the Boundary Waters-Quetico "wilderness" shouldn't be idealized as some pre-human Eden that should remain untouched by human hands. Humans have touched, and have been touched by, this land since its creation after the last Ice Age.

Each essay explores a facet of that wilderness, from the grandeur of the land (its geology, wildlife and climate), to the means of its enjoyment (canoe types, the art of portaging, and the region's memorable people).

Breining's writing is elegant and very readable, and his subject matter is always not just informative, but interesting. Befitting the theme, he approaches his material at the scale of human interaction: What does it look like? How does it feel?

Similarly, Kennedy's photographs, beautiful as always, continue the theme of humans as "a part of," not "apart from," the wilderness. Along with the picturesque panoramas you'd expect in a book like this, it's a rare image that doesn't have a person in it somewhere.

Through this book's words and images, you can easily imagine that *you* are that person, and you just might find yourself putting the book down and dreaming of an early spring.



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- Lawsuit Aims to Loosen Wild Rice Water Standards
- Copper Mining Firms to Merge
- PolyMet Seeks \$4 Million Loan from State
- 2011 BWCAW Permit Lottery Now Open
- Easement Conserves 76,000 Forest Acres
- Endocrine Disruptors Found in Kabetogama

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