

Canoeing Northern Tier Activity Guide

Goals

- Experience a high adventure canoe trip in the boundary waters of the U.S. and Canada.

Achievements Satisfied

This activity satisfies the following achievements.

- Canoeing merit badge.

Materials

- Jungle Boots. These boots allow water to drain after swampy portages. The quality of the BSA recommended source has declined and the glued-on soles tend to separate. Try XXX instead.
- Canoes (rented). Consider upgrading to Kevlar canoes, especially for younger groups: the \$30/canoe/day upgrade saves about 30 pounds and is much easier to portage.
- Northern Tier Expedition Planning Guide (www.ntier.org). Contains lots of essential planning information.
- PFD (optional). The ones provided by BSA are sometimes a little skanky.
- Power sled (optional). A kite attached to the canoe can be fun when the wind is at your back. Some are light and cheap (\$25 at <http://www.windpowersports.com>).

Tips

- There are three Northern Tier bases: Ely, Bissett, and Atikokan. Each has something unique to offer. Ely is the most accessible, and offers OA, Forest Corps, and Lone Voyager programs. Bissett is the remote and challenging, with numerous tough swampy portages, and is best for older scouts and those interested in fishing. It does not offer lightweight canoes. Atikokan offers fishing expeditions and kayak treks in addition to traditional canoeing.
- When it comes to the common gear provided by BSA, “trust but verify”, and have a backup. Groups have gotten to their first camp only to discover the match container was not refilled and they have four matches for the week.
- There can be high wind and 3-foot waves in the afternoon, and occasional bad weather. Good canoeing skills are essential, and you may want to canoe on the fair-weather days and save short days or a layover day for bad weather.
- The normal put-in point at Atikokan is exposed and not good for windy days. There is an alternate.

Contributors

- Mike Bergman