

MIDWEST ADVENTURE TRAVELERS SOCIETY



Table of Contents

MATS What is MATS? Who are we?..... 2

Canoe Adventures in Your Backyard..... 3

Maureen Kolkka Talks About Volunteer Adventure Travel..... 4

Trip Photo Page..... 5

John Czerepinski Talks About MATS' Annual Canoe Trip to the Boundary Waters.6 to 8

Visit our Website at www.midwestats.org or travel.meetup.com/515/

MATS What is MATS? Who are we?

We are ordinary folks who think life itself is an adventure. We're eager to try new experiences, and just as eager to repeat the rewarding experiences we have had before. Take a spontaneous weekend trip to Brussels, to Prague or to Mexico City? We've done it! Try a new restaurant? We do it at least once a month.

We've been canoeing on the Chicago River on a lovely summer evening, on the Des Plaines River on a Saturday in April and many places farther away. We go camping in Wisconsin, and white-water rafting in Kentucky. Trips could be for a few hours, or a week or more. A trip to Peru, to hike the Inca Trail, has been on the schedule almost every year since the group was formed. We've gone to numerous national parks in the US. And here at home, an evening at the movies or a concert in Grant Park is an adventure too. Some of our get-togethers may have only a handful of participants, while other activities may involve dozens of people.

Although we enjoy our own in-person experiences, we also enjoy hearing about places where others have traveled, as presentations at our regular monthly meetings.

Our membership includes people from age 21 on up to folks of . 50? 60? (hey - who cares!?)

We hold our monthly meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, Our most recent meeting place has been at Dave & Busters, in Chicago, but it's a good idea to check our website, to be sure of the time and place of the meeting, because we sometimes do something different (it's that adventure thing again). In August, our regular meeting will be held in Grant Park, to enjoy a movie together near the lake. (Check our Meetup website for details) If you sign up as a member, in our site on <http://travel.meetup.com/515> you may elect to receive email notifications of regular meetings as well as notice of new, spontaneously-planned events.

At year-end we have a holiday party, which usually features a photo contest and games; and may also include an auction of donated travel-related items (proceeds of past auctions have been given to a charity selected by the Board and members).

For details of our past, present, and future activities, to see photo galleries, and to find out how to join us (for a single event, or a full membership) check our websites at <http://travel.meetup.com/515> and our older website at <http://www.midwestats.org>

MATS is the acronym for: Midwest Adventure Travelers Society, Inc., an Illinois not-for-profit company. Almost all of our activities are organized and run by members, on a voluntary basis.

MIDWEST ADVENTURE TRAVELERS SOCIETY

Not Always Traveling...

But Always an Adventure!



We may be traveling to some far off place...



Or canoeing down some local river...



Or sitting back and taking it easy!

Canoe Adventures in Your Backyard

by Helen Tartakoff

In April of this year, 19 of us spent a day enjoying the wilderness in Chicago, from a vantage point a few feet above the surface of the DesPlaines river. But we weren't suspended in hammocks over the water, nor laying in the grass on the riverbank. We were paddling along in canoes.

Having gathered in a forest preserve parking lot off of West Irving Park Road at about 10am, we car-pooled to the put-in spot up-river, where the canoes were waiting for us. Experienced paddlers were paired up with those who had paddled less; we reviewed safety rules and a few paddling techniques, and made sure everyone knew about the few places where we would have to portage around dams. Then – we were on the water. It was peaceful. Serenegreen too. Spring had brought forth new leaves on the trees, and lush growth on the ground. We paddled on smooth water beneath sunny skies, and birds flittering overhead catching their buggy-breakfast.

The DesPlaines River meanders through forest preserves, which absorb the sounds of traffic and the city, giving one the impression that the city was far away. The impression of wilderness is so complete, that sounds of traffic are a surprise in the few places that the river passes near the road. Since it was springtime, and there had been recent rains, we were able to glide over a few places where the dams were so far submerged, that they were visible only as straight-across-the-river lines of ripples. However, we paid for this high-water free-pass, by being subject to running into fallen trees, which we would have easily passed under, if the water had been lower. Some of the group "paid" a bit more than others in this respect, by getting a tad wet, as their canoes went sideways into the branches, and tipped the paddlers out.

Getting wet, and having to dump water from a canoe isn't too bad, on a warm spring day, with companions nearby, willing and ready to help set things right. Portaging isn't bad either, when you have a group of folks willing to lift and carry to share the weight of the canoes.

We saw beavers and herons and ducks Oh My! However, I didn't see fish leaping from the water, as I had, two years ago, when we kayaked on the Chicago River. Does that mean DesPlaines fish are lazier? Or does it mean that Chicago River fish are trying to escape from the water?

We stopped for a lunch break, casual conversation, and a few group photos at about 1pm, then resumed our trip and arrived back at our original gathering spot at about 4pm, delighted by our day in the wilderness, within the city of Chicago.

To my delight, I didn't have achy muscles, even after so many hours on the river, but, to my dismay, the tops of my feet were bright red with sunburn, for the entire next week.



< Lunch on the river



Dave navigating Dam # 2 >

For more photos of this trip go to:
<http://travel.meetup.com/515/photos/?photoAlbumId=155509>

MATS Member Maureen Kolcka Talks About Volunteer Adventure Travel

Over the years I've made a habit of traveling globally during my vacations. I feel fortunate for the wonderful experiences I have had venturing to over 45 countries. This year I decided it was about time I "give back".

The not-for-profit group Global Volunteers provided me with the opportunity to work at an orphanage in Lima, Peru. The orphanage, Puertocultorio Perez Anibar, is the largest facility in South America. It provides a safe haven for 600 children.

My "work" involved providing hugs and entertainment to toddlers each morning and teaching English to the pre-teens & teens in the afternoon. My special project was a tiny toddler named Carlita. She was abandoned at the orphanage as a result of a horrendous baby selling scandal in Lima. She was initially sullen and isolated.

Being trained as an engineer and not a psychologist, I wondered what possible consequence could I have. However, I found that one-on-one attention did wonders. By the end of the two weeks she would laugh uncontrollably with each "ride" down a 3-foot plastic yard slide and giggle when I would make up silly songs about Carlita. I realized that my mission may have been to "give back", but I received so much from the love and appreciation of these children. I look forward to my next volunteer trip. Where that may be.



Maureen volunteering at an orphanage in Lima, Peru



Carlita smiling back at Maureen

Trip Photo Page



Two Night Stay at the Historic Trempealeau Hotel on the Mississippi River
For more photos of this trip go to:
<http://travel.meetup.com/515/photos/?photoAlbumId=169044&photoId=1493800>



Mammoth Cave Road Trip

For more photos of this trip go to:
<http://travel.meetup.com/515/photos/?photoAlbumId=169073>



Chicago Blues Tour

For more photos of this trip go to:
<http://travel.meetup.com/515/photos/?photoAlbumId=123245&photoId=955227>



John Czerepinski Talks About MATS' Annual Canoe Trip to the Boundary Waters

Two inches of rain in a day, two days later, ten inches in a 27 hour period was just part of the fun I had on this year's eight day trip into canoe country. Why, I have been asked by the sane, do I travel eight hours north, pay to go on a trip where one can be challenged by bugs, bears, weather, terrain and my own body being able to make it through another tough portage and enjoy it so much? I guess I have a hard time answering that simply, but with any lemon I've ever been dealt on a trip into the wilderness, I've always found is so easy to squeeze the lemon into filtered water, a bit of sweetener find the Absolute Vodka and have a great trip. If I'm not dealt a lemon, I make sure Ed has included some Country Time Lemonade in his packing. Cans and bottles are not allowed in either the American Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWAC) or the adjacent 1.2 million acre Canadian Quetico, so any beverages must be in plastic containers, I filled two, one bottle with Vodka and the other Captain Morgan's, purely for medicinal purposes of course. I feel to properly honor the spirit of the Ojibwa that once traversed these lands and waters, taking spirits along in several forms is most appropriate.

This year's trip started at an outfitter (Williams and Hall) on Moose Lake, where we slept in a very nice old timber log bunkhouse, to be towed roughly 10 miles to the Canadian border early Saturday morning of Labor Day weekend. This year was a very small group consisting of Ed our fearless leader, Michael my former canoe partner who traded up for a much better partner to be with his friend Chris. This was Chris's first trip, she was a trooper from the get go and a very nice addition to the trip.

About a month earlier we had received our remote border crossing permits. We still had to go through a rural customs in the middle of no where, Prairie Portage Customs and Ranger Station, which is accessible only by boat, on foot or emergency float plane, to check in prior to paddling into even more remote wilderness. Our first day with ten portages, and paddling around 12 miles on waters that flow north into the Arctic watershed via the Hudson Bay quickly put us into areas all to ourselves. By 10:00 Saturday morning, we wouldn't see another human outside our group for four days when we started heading back towards the border. Ed is always detailed and thoughtful on his planning and on day one reminded me of my Basic Training in the Army, break everyone down so they're too worn out to complain, so hungry whatever served tastes like food from a five star restaurant and 10:00 is a stretch to stay up to being so tired. This is mostly in jest so I do want to point out though that the porterhouse steaks, four meals of fresh fish, unbroken eggs, fresh veggies along with hamburgers, turkey breast, beef stroganoff, Polish sausage, were all outstanding. I'd have to flip a coin between the cherry cheesecake and pumpkin pie for best dessert; both were great, as were all the meals and desserts.

Virtually NO MOSQUITOS!



One of the differences between the Quetico and the BWCA is that pit toilets are NOT provided in the Quetico so we took along a metal garden trowel to bury our feces. The Provincial Park has asked that toilet paper either be burned or carried out due to past improper burying. Speaking selfishly for myself and digging deeply, I feel what happens in the Quetico stays in the Quetico. Another difference is when fishing in the Quetico, one must use barbless hooks, which makes it more likely the fish that don't end up in the frying pan will swim away only with a slightly sore jaw to fight again.

On our second day, Michael, our main mule pack, became ill, so we cut that day short on paddling and portages, set up camp and Ed deftly changed our route to keep us closer to the border in case we needed to head back early. Ed also brought a satellite phone in the case of emergency, but fortunately we didn't need it. Michael did partially recover, but never was hitting on all cylinders, which I was sad for him and hope by now he's recovered.

It was pretty amazing to me, having worn Buzz Off Clothing from head to toe, never having Deet touch my skin; there were virtually NO MOSQUITOS, which to me made the trip an instant success. When we left Ely Minnesota the BWCA had a burning ban on and the Quetico was a day from putting on the ban due to the extreme draught. Eight days in the wilderness I received one bite from a mosquito and another from a fly. When I returned home, between my driveway and garage door I was swarmed by mosquitoes and bitten several times.

My highlights are hard to list in any particular order, here are some of the reasons I feel so good in the wilderness and a partial explanation of why I feel the draw that keeps pulling me back. Sleeping outside twice under the stars with no bugs, the sky is one's High Definition TV screen, enjoying several shooting stars, watching the glow from the northern lights, the Milky Way, trying to decide if the pristine water was clearer or the sky, listening to the periodic late night mournful and eerie call of the loon was high on the list. Portaging or in the canoe hearing, almost feeling the deep bass rumble of the distant thunder echoing and heading our way, as we all instinctively quickened our pace on portages and strengthened our paddling strokes. Being drenched from head to toe in sweat the first two days. Slogging through portages carrying a canoe and feeling lucky not to have slipped, enduring the mile portages and feeling so satisfied when the next lake finally appeared from under the canoe. Stopping off for a lunch adjacent to a cascading water falls, spending an entire rainy day under a tarp talking to Ed about everything in life like kids, feeling outcast in teen years, lost loves, missed friends, death, sophomore pranks, sports, academic challenges, dreams, goals, politics, fishing, cooking.....the list goes on of the simple pleasures in life I enjoyed on this trip, maybe it was feeling like I was getting into "Quetico shape" after several days of paddle and portaging, and losing a few pounds, maybe it's the smell of the jack pine or cedar cooking dinner. Bushwhacking with Ed and a compass onto trails not shown on the maps into no name lakes seeing land and water that few have seen. Having a grouse explode from under my next step. Observing bald eagle mastery of the sky and the top of the water. Watching busy beavers swimming towards their next dam knowing who they remind me of. Canoeing solo using my rod on one side and having borrowed Ed's for the other not being able to keep up with the smallies hitting, but still landing several in a paddle around an island. Listening to Ed's tenor voice belting out another rendition of Danny Boy. Meeting up with a physician and his wife from Rhinelander who in the last 30 years have chronicled on video almost a year's time spend in the BWCA/Quetico. Picking Labrador tealeaves. Walking through a sedge meadow and dry marsh that should have had a moose waiting for us that was so peaceful, almost poetic. Talking to a group from Ohio, another from Pittsburg, Kentucky, North Dakota, Indiana and Florida that have been coming up every year for an average over 25 years, several probably retired, but not close to retiring from return trips, knowing with them what a gem, some say the premier canoe area in the world, we have so relatively close. While dreaming in the Quetico, my dreams seemed much clearer with brighter colors, very vivid every one was nice. I remember sleeping not knowing if the stars were in my dreams, or I was awake looking up and had to wake up to notice the different alignment of stars to know I was having a great sleep. As in years past my heart, body and soul seemed to be like the water we filtered, cleansed and pure, ready to hesitantly return to civilization thinking of the next trip. Realistically I won't be able to make it back into the BWCA/Quetico 1000 times before I die, but in my head and heart, I'll be there many more times than that in spirit.

Thanks Michael and Chris, and especially Ed for orchestrating another great trip and allowing me to come out again whole and cleansed, feeling especially refreshed after the long shower in Voyageur Motel, the delectable dinner at the Ely Steak House, karaoke far enough away that know one knew me and with more memories of a piece of Quetico heaven.

John Czerepinski is a long time MATS member who lives and works in Madison Wisconsin. When John not canoeing he may be found fishing at his cottage in Westfield Wisconsin or biking across one of the many trails in central Wisconsin.