

# North Shore backpacking nirvana

My breathing was the problem. Every time I exhaled, steam from my breath reflected the light from my headlamp, preventing me from seeing the path. (All I could think of was Amy Grant singing, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet," but I couldn't see my feet!)

Not seeing my feet was worse than usual on this path. Unlike the main Superior Hiking Trail, which is very well maintained, this little thousand-foot offshoot to our campsite along Palisade Creek featured assorted mud holes due to spring water running across the path.

Eventually I figured out that if I held my breath while approaching a puddle, I could safely navigate around it before exhaling.

Concentrating on this task dampened the normal exuberance of the 20 Boy Scouts and leaders around me last Sunday morning. Or maybe it was the dark and cold — after all, it was only 5:15 a.m.

How do you get teenage boys to get up well before dawn, you ask?

Easy: It was their idea!

In all my self-propelled trips — canoeing, backpacking, bicycling — I long ago discovered the benefits of getting a very early start. You not only get a chunk of travel out of the way and position yourself for either a big day or finding a great campsite early, but you get to enjoy the unique ambiance of early morning in the woods.

But as a grownup, I would never be able to convince a bunch of adolescents to get up early. Fortunately, one of the Scouts suggested it, and it was debated for a while in the Patrol Leaders' Council (PLC). Boys in the PLC make all the decisions for the troop; it is made up of the Senior Patrol Leader (SPL), his assistant, and all the patrol leaders.

The PLC thought it would be really cool to wake up at 4:45 a.m., quickly break camp, and hike in the dark using headlamps to arrive at the top of Mt. Trudee in time to



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watch the sun rise over Lake Superior.

It was a dream come true for this Scoutmaster!

Our patrol menus for breakfast had included oatmeal and hot chocolate, but we knew there would be no water at the top of the hill. So we swapped our breakfast and lunch that day.

We were sitting on the mountain top by 6 a.m., munching on our "dry" lunches. The Turtle Patrol (the adult leaders) enjoyed Hudson Bay "bread" we made from a recipe from Northern Tier in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, where they explained it was a common food that sustained voyagers of old. Topped with peanut butter and preserves, it makes for a simple but hearty meal.

We enjoyed an awe-inspiring sunrise over the world's greatest lake. Another backpacker also taking it in said he had seen a moose the previous night on the other side of the mountain.

By 7 a.m., when the boys would normally just be getting up, we were already on our second leg of the day's journey, having food in our bellies and an hour's rest to boot. I love getting an early start!

The day kept getting better and better. One of our younger adult leaders, Jarrod Thornton, summed it up while we were looking at a breathtaking view of some interior "mountain" lakes: "I think I'm in heaven."

One of the Scouts chimed in, "Except for the sweat."

"No," Jarrod said, "including the sweat."

Working hard is part of the great experience of a backpack trip. You actually start to enjoy feeling your heart pounding away while climbing up a hill with 50 pounds on your back.

Jarrod had never been to the

## PHOTOGRAPHS

To see photos of Tom's trip, go to [www.troop72.com](http://www.troop72.com).

Superior Hiking Trail, and could not believe that a place this magnificent even existed only four hours from Chippewa Falls.

Our troop had hiked the SHT several times before, but it was always the southern section, around Gooseberry Falls and Split Rock Creek. This is the first time we ventured farther north, hiking from Silver Bay to Tettegouche State Park.

That third day of the trip ended even more spectacularly than we had expected, as we stumbled upon the state's largest water falls, where the Baptism River crashes down on its way to the great lake.

After crossing a swaying footbridge, we unloaded our backpacks on the north side of the roaring river. We decided to use that as a gathering place to let the slower hikers catch up. (A couple of 11-year-olds made the cut and did a good job, but just weren't strong enough to keep up with the high-schoolers.)

It was only 10 a.m., but it was already four hours since our lunch-for-breakfast, so we thought it was time for breakfast-for-lunch. We scooped up a potful of water from the river, put it on the little stove, and in a few minutes we were enjoying hot chocolate and oatmeal graced with fresh-picked wild blueberries.

Fine food, wonderful weather, stunning scenery, and missing mosquitoes — I think this may have been the greatest camping trip I've ever been a part of. I love this Scouting stuff!

And yes, we went to bed early that night.

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