Algonquin Park Essay, Research Paper

CHAPTER ONE:

TRIP OVERVIEW AND NAVIGATION

INTRODUCTION

Algonquin Park is the oldest and most famous provincial park in Ontario and one of the largest in Canada. It stretches across 7,725 kilometers of wild and beautiful lakes and forests, bogs and rivers, cliffs and beaches. This is why Algonquin is also known as a canoeist’s and camper’s paradise as far as the eye can see.

From August 27th to September 5th a group of university students mainly ranging between the ages of 22 to 25 will be experiencing the park first-hand. As far as the weather, this is an ideal time to experience Algonquin Park because “there are only a few lingering misquotes, the days are warm and the nights are cool” (Friends?, 1998). Within the group of approximately 60 people, the diversity of the individual’s outdoor recreation experience is varied. Some have camped, canoed and portaged a great deal while some will be experiencing “the great outdoors” for the first time. Although there will be both rookies and veterans the physical fitness level of all is fairly descent. Therefore, it was only up to the individual to do some informal physical training before the trip if they feel training was needed. However, formal training took place at Northern Edge Algonquin before the group headed into Algonquins interior. Activities such as paddling, orienteering, and first aid were addressed for the first two days of the trip.

ORIENTEERING

One of the first aspects of canoeing that must be addressed when finding one’s way through the wild is called orienteering. Orienteering is definitely essential when exploring Algonquin Park. The most important aids used in orienteering are a compass and map. “Compasses are useful for taking bearings and for orienting the map so that it is aligned with the terrain” (Williams, 1998). It is possible to complete a course quite easily and efficiently without a compass. However, this would be difficult to navigate flat areas poor in prominent features without a compass. The use of a compass is also effective for “selecting more direct routes and for following a route faster while maintaining contact with the map” (McNeill, Cory-Wright, and Renfrew, 1998).

Finding a good compass is important. “Good compasses have a fluid-filled housing” (Williams, 1998). This is essential because this fluid dampens the motion of the needle so that you can use the compass without holding it perfectly still. Therefore, it is a wise decision to avoid inexpensive compasses that do not have fluid-filled housings. The compass needle is painted in two colours. Assuming that the compass is held flat, the red end points to north, and the white end to south. An interesting detail is that there are northern and southern hemisphere compasses. “This has to do with the fact that the magnetic field lines to which a compass needle aligns, points into the earth at the north and south magnetic poles” (Williams, 1998). Therefore, if you use a northern hemisphere compass in the southern hemisphere, the south end of the magnet is pulled downwards by the magnetic field. This results in a needle that catches and drags on the bottom of the compass housing when the compass is held horizontal (Williams, 1998). A good compass will last a long time. However, some things can go wrong: the plastic components can break, or the housing can develop a leak. Also over time, “the fluid within the housing may turn an opaque blue-green, however, very rarely does the magnetization of the compass needle reverse” (Williams, 1998).

The two most popular types of compasses are the protractor compass and thumb compass. The protractor compass is beneficial because of its many additional features. These features include: a lanyard for attaching the compass to the wrist, scale bars for measuring map distances along one or more edges of the baseplate, a magnifying glass for reading fine detail, and templates of a circle and triangle for marking orienteering courses on the map (See Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Protractor Compass

The advantages of the thumb compass is that the map and compass are always read as a unit, the map is aligned more easily and quickly, plus one hand is left free (See Figure 1.2). Personal preference usually determines the type of compass used. To see how to use each of these types of compasses see Index 1.1.

Figure 1.2: Thumb Compass

The next piece of equipment needed to orient one’s self through the wilderness is a map. For this particular canoe trip, a detailed map showing Algonquin’s entire 7725 square kilometers, 1600 kilometers of portages and 1500 lakes can be purchased. The front side of this map displays the Park’s 29 access points as well as the Hwy. 60 corridor which boasts 8 campground. Portages and campsite within the interior as also clearly marked. This map is also beneficial to use because the reverse side answers general questions about the Park. There are useful tips and directions for canoeists as well as hints for the trip itself. Therefore, this map is essential for both orienteering and to truly enjoy Algonquin Provincial Park by canoe. (Friends of Algonquin Park, 1999)

Although a compass and map are very useful, navigating through the wilderness can also be done without these two pieces of equipment. It is still essential to be able to establish where north, south, east and west are, so you can estimate the direction you will be travelling. Knowing that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, one way of determining direction is by using the shadow method (See Index 2.1). Another way of determining direction is by using a watch (See Index 2.2).

Looking at how the stars move can also be a way of determining direction. If a star is observed over two fixed points for 15 minutes, it will be seen to move. In the Northern Hemisphere the following rules apply:

? If the star is rising, you will be facing due east.

? If the star is falling, you will facing due west.

? If the star is looping to the right, you will be facing south.

(Darman, 1996)

The last way to determine direction is by using natural signposts. Although this method is not as accurate as the others, these general rules apply:

? Trees: normally grow most of their foliage on their sunny side, which in the Northern Hemisphere is the southern side.

? Conifers and Willows: usually lean towards their sunny side (south).

? Felled Trees: their rings are widest on the northern side.

? Moss: tends to favour the dark and damp side of its host (north).

? Trees with a Grainy Bark: usually have a tighter grain on the northfacing side of the trunk.

(Darman, 1996)

The interior of Algonquin Park does not really have discrete canoe routes. Instead there is one vast interconnected canoe network which enables an explorer to have limitless possible routes. For this reason, learning orienteering skills before an Algonquin trip is a must. Knowing both where one’s been and where one is headed, will make for a much more safe and enjoyable journey through Algonquin Park.

INDEX

Index 2.1: Determining Direction by Shadow

? Place a stick or branch in the ground at a level spot. Mark the shadow tip with a stone.

? Wait 10-20 minutes until shadow tip moves a few centimeters. Mark the new position of the shadow tip with a stone.

? Draw a straight line through the two marks to obtain an appropriate east-west line (the sun rises is the east and sets in the west- the shadow moves in opposite direction).

? Draw a line at right angles to the east-west line to get an approximate north-south line.

? Inclining the stick does not impair the accuracy of the shadow tip method, thus you can use it on sloping ground.

(Darman, 1996)

Index 2.2: Determining Direction with a Watch:

? Point hour hands towards the sun.

? A south line can be found midway between the hour hand and 1200 hours. If in doubt as to which end of the line is north always remember that the sun is in the east before noon and in the west in the afternoon.

(Darman, 1996)

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