

Rowing the Allagash

A DOC Wolfgang Schlitz Adventure Fund Proposal

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The Adventure:

This summer I will be spending 24 days rowing 135 miles of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, 92 miles of which is a protected wilderness waterway. The area is known as a wild, uninhabited area where Thoreau paddled in 1857, and bald eagle sightings are common there.

I would be traveling about 10 miles a day, taking time to fish and cook dinner, and taking a few days to explore the remnants of the railroad that used to cut through the wilderness area there. The Allagash is mainly connected lakes, meandering flatwater, few small rapids, four portages, two of them lifts around old dams.

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway is a popular waterway for canoeists and kayakers. What would make my trip different is my boat. My boat is an Alden Ocean Shell, called a “Tubby,” because of its chunky, sturdy build and wide bottom which makes it hard to flip, that has a molded polyethylene hull—this is different than most crew shells which are fiberglass hulled and very fragile. The “Tubby” is a beast. It weighs 70 lbs, more than most shells, but can be picked up and carried by one person. I’ve carried it half a mile quite easily. The longest portage on this trip is a mile and a half, which I am allowing myself a full day to do. I want to use this boat because it’s a hybrid between a crew shell and a canoe. It has a non-fixed seat allowing me to use my legs (making it go faster than a canoe) but also has the storage and most important, the durability of a canoe, allowing me to land at portage sites that may be shallow without damaging the hull.

Why rowing? Because rowing is awesome, it lets you use your legs, your whole body to move over water, and while canoes are more durable than crew shells, I think rowing is a great way to travel through wilderness areas because it is quicker and more efficient stroke-wise than paddling.

While the majority of this trip is on flatwater, I do expect some chop depending on the wind conditions particularly on the larger lakes such as Churchill lake. This boat handles chop better than a crew shell because of its more canoe-like walls.

The boat choice is also important because it needs to be able to carry a lot of food. The boat can hold about 235 lbs before it rides too low in the water, this means I can carry roughly 100 lbs of gear, and 70 lbs of that can be food.

This is the boat I plan to use, an Alden ocean rowing single that I row on the Connecticut



Itinerary

6/20/05 Put-in at Intersection between St. John and Allagash, accessible by several major highways, 1/2 mile below Casey Rapids

Travel 5 miles before take out before Twin Brooks Rapids

6/21/05 10 miles down the Allagash

Take out before Allagash Falls

6/22/05 Mile portage

6/23/05 10 miles on Allagash

6/24/05 7 miles to Round Pond

6/25/05 Travel 10 miles before reaching Long Lake

6/26/05 Travel 10 miles Long Lake before reaching Umbaskis Lake (Hunting camp on Northern side of Lake)

6/27/05 Travel 10 miles on Umbaskis lake before reaching Churchill lake

6/28-6/29 Travel 12 miles on Churchill Lake before reaching Eagle Lake

6/30 Travel 10 miles on Eagle Lake before reaching Farm Island, South eastern portion of lake

7/1 Rest day, Camp on Farm Island for night

7/2 Travel 10 miles around eastern side of Pilsbury Island

7/3-7/5 Opens onto Chamberlain Lake, row 2 miles north on lake to reach beginning of train tracks. Camp between Little Round Pond and Pilsbury Island, spend next 2 days walking and exploring 15 miles of abandoned train tracks

7/6-7/7 Travel 15 miles south down Chamberlain Lake

Pass seaport on right

7/8 5 miles down Chamberlain lake, pass popular take out point at Round Pond Bridge

7/9-7/10 7 miles Telos Lake

Take out before dam, portage is mile and quarter

7/11 5 miles travel on Lake 891

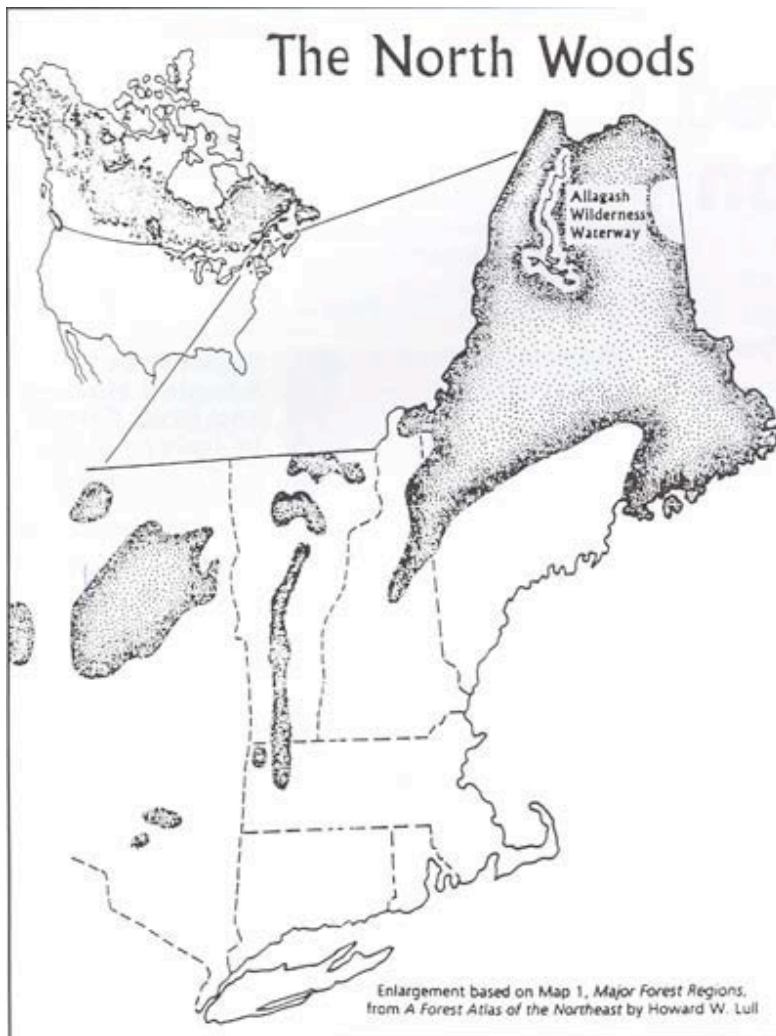
7/12 8 miles travel on Webster to East Branch Penobscot

7/13 5 miles travel southwest on Grand Lake Matagaman (populated area)

take out at southwestern edge of Grand Lake Matagaman, where light duty unimproved road meets lake. This is pick up point, 5 miles on road from Route 159 by Sugarloaf Mountain.

Total river mileage 135 miles

Total hiking mileage, 2 portages =2.5 miles, + 15 miles day hiking (without boat!)



Benefit to the DOC:

I would like to give the DOC a slideshow presentation during Fall term 05. The slideshow would be of photographs taken during my trip, and would focus both on the beauty of the Allagash and importance of preservation of wilderness waterways, but also on wilderness rowing as a mode of traveling. I've done a lot of canoeing and kayaking through the DOC, from kayaking classes to Sophomores from the Source. And I row everyday with the crew team, but what I would really like to share is how you can combine these two seemingly different activities. Canoeing and rowing are both amazing methods of travel, and I would love to show people how accessible wilderness rowing is by offering a workshop showing how to pack a boat like the one I have, and letting people try it on the water...showing die hard canoe fans what they're missing!

Risk Assessment

The major risks encountered will be the risks posed by any wilderness area. There are bears in the area, and will bring bear spray, but precautionary measures will be most effective. I have done many camping trips in Maine with my dad and am very experienced with bear camping techniques.

Additionally, though my boat is very wide bottomed, and could flip, I am minimizing this risk by portaging around a number of rapids (all mentioned in my itinerary) and plan to portage around anything else I encounter that could flip the boat. I will be wearing a life preserver but am also a strong swimmer and worked as a lifeguard before.

Running into rocks and damaging the boat is always a risk, however the boat has a polyethylene hull and I have run into logs in the Connecticut river before and have yet to damage the boat. It is very sturdy. I will be carrying a small repair kit in case the oarlock breaks and can easily replace it.

Another risk is bodily injury in a wilderness setting. Traveling alone increases this risk. My plan to manage this risk is to carry a cell phone and also a Satellite phone (rental) and to leave a highly detailed copy of my itinerary and maps with several people, one of them my dad, who lives in Maine and is experienced with the Allagash area. There are a number of 4 wheel drive roads which follow the river, and a number of hunting camps along the river as well. Previous experience canoeing there assures that you see at least 5 other boaters on a given day, so I would not be entirely isolated. An injury which required evacuation would be possible, though would probably require assistance as it is usually several miles along unimproved roads to a major road. What I can do to minimize this risk is practice common sense, and prevent injuries from occurring by being cautious and planning for anticipated risks. Additionally I am Wilderness First Responder Certified and have experience with wilderness injuries.

My qualifications, (or What Makes Me So Sure I Can Do This) include previous experience canoeing, kayaking, and rowing, from DOC whitewater canoeing classes to canoeing 10 days in the Allagash with my dad in high school, familiarity with parts of (though not all of) the Allagash, familiarity with bears and bear camping, Wilderness First Responder Certification, a semester long NOLS course which included 3 weeks of hiking and fly fishing, skill at map and compass reading, previous lifeguard certification, several canoe trips up and down the Connecticut, among them Ledyard trips such as Sophomores from The Source, plus a number of multiday trips on my own up the Connecticut, and general common sense.

Budget:

Travel: \$100 transportation of boat

Food: DOC allotment is normally \$10/day, but because of the high level of activity I am estimating \$14/day. $\$14/\text{day} \times 24 \text{ days} = \336

Maine Non-resident Fishing License: \$53

Satellite Phone Rental: \$50 (may be \$100)

Total cost: \$539

Sources of Funding

I am applying to the Schlitz Fund for \$300, and plan to pay the additional cost myself

2.12.06 This is how the boat looked fully loaded:

