

Outers 2018-19: Ojibwa Campground trail builders

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"It's amazing what nineteen sets of hands can do in one day," said Quetico Park superintendent Trevor Gibb last week. He was referring to the service day work of the Outers at the Ojibwa campground.

On October 20 the Outers, along with director Brad Gascoigne and teacher Sherri Dragan (and Gibb and Chris Stromberg from the Park)

undertook an ambitious project: re-establishing a couple of beach access trails at the campground. This involved installing wooden water bars and stops as erosion controls, and hauling in and placing a half truckload of gravel.

"They were in pretty poor shape," said Gascoigne. "We spent a full Saturday in there and by the end of the day we had some nice trails. And we actually had fun."

"The transformation was amazing," said Gibb.

Quetico Park is a valued partner in the Outers program, and a usual beneficiary of the service day portion of the program.

Fall program

Although this year's group of Outers is a small one - two four-boy brigades and two girl brigades (one of five, one of six) - the school has made some minor accommodations and the program has moved ahead

smoothly.

"Water levels were a real concern at the start of the fall program," said Gascoigne, who is in his second year as director.

It meant the boys could not do their traditional opening paddle up the Atikokan River (no cookies at the Sarah Haw's, for just the second time in memory); instead they went in at Stanton Bay, and followed a route that included the Racers' Portage into Nym Lake.

The T-rescue exercise was a real challenge for the small boys' brigades, but they did succeed.

The navigation exercise, a course set as usual by teacher David Williams, was completed in good order by all four brigades.

"It was a wet day and they managed very well," said Gascoigne. "We had one minor hiccup, where the boys were a little late getting to one meet-up point."

The first overnight trip (September 26) "provided both groups with real team-building opportunities".

That bit of Outers-speak means the conditions for an overnight camp were far from ideal. Specifically, it was cold and windy.

"It was a nasty west wind, really whipping into camp," said Gascoigne, a wind too strong to allow for either tarps or a fire. He led the girls trip, with teacher Dragan taking on cook duties for the first time. Also notable on this trip was the first real portage challenge for the girls brigades, a challenge they met in fine style.

Glenna Kehl led the boys trip with Mike Krassey. They were most concerned about water levels on their trip, but found Jackfish Creek was passable and that with just a few minor extra portages so was McAlpine.

For the double overnight October 3-4, Gascoigne and Kehl switched roles, and Lana Puumala joined Gascoigne and Dragan on the boys trip.

The story of this trip was the absolutely hellacious windstorm on the night of October 3.

"The noise of the wind was like a jet engine," said Gascoigne. "The tents were blowing flat, and safety was a real concern. We were out checking everything around us right through the night. It was a long, intense night."

Everyone came through in good shape and woke to a fine layer of snow Thursday morning.

"We've had snow before on the fall double overnight, but not a lot

of Outers can say they've had it that early."

The boys had camped that first night on Cirrus Lake and decided to make a very long (30 km plus) paddle through Quetico and Oriana Lakes into Jesse on day two. That proved to be a very ambitious plan. By the time they reached Jesse night had fallen ("It was pitch black."), and Gascoigne had to intervene to get them safely into a camp site.

"It was a good opportunity for them to live through their decision," he said.

The issue was a centrepiece of the post-trip evaluation, and the Outers recognized the decision to push on was not a great one.

That said, being on Jesse meant the trip home was a short one, and they were in in good time.



THE PAYOFF The trip to the beach for Ojibwa campers and paddlers will be a much easier one next season, courtesy of the 2018-19 Outers (AHS PHOTOS)