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Every so often Mother Nature does something wonderful and it happened on New Year's Eve. We saw an absolutely beautiful Blue Moon shining brilliantly over Moose Lake.



As many know, camping in the Boundary Waters is not limited to the summer months. Though spring, summer, and fall are the most popular seasons for visitors to enjoy northern Minnesota, the wintertime provides a unique opportunity for camping in the north woods when the number of visitors in the park has decreased dramatically. The sharp contrast between the remaining foliage of the area's conifers and the soft blanket of snow in the winter season provides a serene setting for an area many visitors only see during the green deciduous months of summer.

The use of motors in the BWCA in wintertime is prohibited and in previous newsletters you may have read of the accessibility that is afforded through access to a sled dog team—the fastest alternative to the prohibited snowmobile and an enjoyable way to fish or camp on the lakes in the frozen winter months. For those unable to gain access to a sled dog team for camping in the Boundary Waters, the area can also be accessed through several means of self-reliant travel. Some choose to go on foot, others with snow shoes, or in our case, skis.

Dragging our gear behind us in sleds, or what are sometimes referred to as “polks”, we departed from the public canoe landing on Moose Lake on our skis for two nights of fishing for northern pike on one of the areas premier hot spots for northern, Wind Lake.



With the small amount of snow accumulation that the Ely area has received this year the ski to the Wind Lake portage and the trek across were not that difficult. Along with the small amounts of snow, travel was made easier by the unseasonably high temperatures of early January with some of the afternoons reaching highs near 40 degrees Fahrenheit. With the favorable conditions we were able to make our desired campsite in less than two hours.



Camping in the winter can be approached in several different ways. Some choose to build quincys that are similar to igloos while other more resilient campers bundle themselves in the comfort of heavy sleeping bags and a tarp to sleep beneath the bright stars of our winter sky. We opted for a more comfortable method of lodging and packed in a canvas wall tent complete with a small woodstove to heat our modest shelter. This not only provided us with a warm repose in the evening but also a convenient place to cook our meals and dry our wet garments after a day of fishing.



Fishing on the trip was excellent. Using either a jigging pole or tip-up system that releases a small flag when the line is hit, we were able to catch more than enough fish to keep us occupied. For bait we used a local favorite of frozen pre-packaged ciscoes as well as some live shiners that we brought along for jigging; we primarily used the ciscoes for the set lines or tip-ups- until we ran out. Though there are reports and rumors of walleye in the lake, our catch was limited to northern pike that were no shorter than 30 inches.



Other fisherman and campers were not to be seen on this trip—only the beauty and solitude few come to enjoy in the Ely winters. Though we saw no other campers or fisherman, we were not entirely alone in each other's company. Sightings of wildlife were seldom but enjoyable with a few squirrels, crows, and ravens showing their faces in the balmy January weather. Though sightings of wildlife were limited, the signs of their passing were not. The fresh and untouched snow of the woods and lakes left signs of deer, mice, ruffed grouse, and even a set of timber wolf tracks that had crossed our own ski trail somewhere between our coming and going. The most interesting though were the rhythmic steps and slides of an otter that had passed our camp in the night and investigated our fishing holes.



If the picture doesn't illustrate the otter's movement well enough this video can help paint the picture:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x40EktRY1mc&feature=related>

The weather we encountered in these few days of January was far from typical, and the warm sunny days we enjoyed were more reminiscent of a late February or March afternoon. This is just one of the ways people can get out and enjoy the numerous diversions the Boundary Waters and surrounding areas that Ely has to offer.

On a different note, the lottery drawing for permits has come and gone. We did pretty well. We want to thank all of you for making the effort and taking the time to submit your applications. All of you did a wonderful job and we thank you.

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