

## Go figure

When I signed up for the Allagash River trip, I hardly expected to be leading it, not least because I'd never been on the river before. But Doc C-, the original leader, decided to lead a group of girl scouts down the river a few days sooner, so I'm up.

Doc had made most of the arrangements already, including a float plane out of Allagash Village to drop us off at Telos Lake, so we could leave our cars at the trip end. There's also a road to Telos Landing on the lake, which meant that our first camp was at the edge of a large parking lot full of pickup trucks and cars. What with the rain that started as we landed, it seemed that the world was wet through and mostly red mud. Here I was, with nine equally miserable strangers. What the hell had I gotten myself into?

We pitched the tents quickly and got everything secure and as dry as possible and I excused myself to go to the outhouse, between the parking lot and campground, the only bit of privacy to be had.

Could I escape somehow? Saving face? I thought briefly of breaking something, my wrist, say, and getting a ride to a hospital with one of the people parked here. But that would hurt, and the outhouse seemed particularly unhygienic for such an implausible accident. So not lingering long, I returned to the group, saying "Let's set up the big tarp and make dinner in something a little less wet."

By morning the weather had improved (I think it would be a few days more before the mud dried). We set off down the river and gradually got to know one another better. It turned out to be a good trip – mushy spaghetti one night didn't spoil it, nor did the near panic when a solo after-dinner paddle went on long after dark.

At the end, back in Allagash Village, three people from the trip separately came up and told me, "You know, if you hadn't been so cheerful that first night, I would have looked for a way to go home."

Go figure ...

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