

campsite savvy



Fourtown Lake

□ by Stuart Osthoff

Over the past 20 years, many of the *BWJ* “Routes Through Canoe Country” articles have given specific information about particular campsites. Savvy readers took note of the good/bad for future reference. While *BWJ* articles will continue to provide this in-depth information, it’s become apparent a more comprehensive/retrievable approach would help the typical reader.

The goal of our new Campsite Savvy/Campsite Evaluation

feature, is to help you find/choose a preferred campsite. These preferences will vary with individual interests, time of year, weather conditions and other whims of nature. I believe having accurate campsite information in hand during the trip planning stage is a positive overall for both canoe campers and the canoe country. On the other hand, there exists the possibility of a downside; so please, let’s come to an understanding about a few things.

In the BWCAW—due to the

designated campsite regulation with firegrate and latrine provided—we know where **all** the sites are and know they are at least functional. They have room for at least a couple of tents; you can get by for a night on any BWCAW site because the USFS has made them suitable for camping. The real value of the new *BWJ* Campsite Evaluation for the BWCAW will be helping you choose the best, say 4 or 5, sites out of the 16 on Fourtown Lake. You’ll be able to see the subjective



BRIAN BORKHOLDER

A good campsite has a safe canoe landing, level tent sites, campfire/sitting area, and some open space for a cool breeze to keep the bugs tolerable. (Jean Lake)

Campsite #8

Open space: grass, pine needles, open big area
5.0

Tent space: lots of room for many tents 5.0

Fireplace amenities: 3 logs, 10 yds to water,
grassy 5.0

Canoe landing: flat ledge 5.0

Additional features: isolated, big site, view to N,
clean, shallow drop off for kids, sitting rocks,
cedar

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 5.0

Campsite #9

Open space: very good, minimal brush 4.0

Tent space: 3+ tent pads, good level ground 4.0

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, grassy 4.0

Canoe landing: flat rock ledge 5.0

Additional features: pack trees, good views, W
breeze

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4.5

Campsite #10

Open space: some under pines 3.0

Tent space: 2 tent pads 3.0

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, 10 ft from water 3.0

Canoe landing: poor 2.0

Additional features: view ok to S, pack trees,
trails along shore connect to #8, #9 & #10

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 3.0

Campsite #11

Open space: good, ledge, pine needle duff 4.0

Tent space: 3+ tent pads, level 5.0

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, 10 yds to water, good
view, W breeze 4.0

Canoe landing: flat, good 5.0

Additional features: pack trees, mature pines,
beaver dropping aspens back of site

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4.5

Campsite #12

Open space: good, walking trails along lake 4.0

Tent space: 3+ tent pads, good soil 5.0

Fireplace amenities: rocky & grassy, 20 ft to
water, 2 logs 5.0

Canoe landing: flat rock, protected cove 5.0

Additional features: safe & good swimming, pack
trees, nice view to N, trail to #13

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4.5

Campsite #13

Open space: no brush, big open areas 5.0

Tent space: 2+ with good soil, other on flat rock
4.0

Fireplace amenities: big logs, clean-no dirt,
grassy, 15 ft from water 5.0

Canoe landing: flat rocks, safe, big easy harbor
5.0

Additional features: pack trees, huge flat rocks,
shallow drop off for kids, great swimming, trails
along shore, sitting rocks, good views

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 5.0

Campsite #14

Open space: grassy, rocks, steeper point 4.0

Tent space: 2+ tent pads, level 4.0

Fireplace amenities: logs, grassy 3.5

Canoe landing: small but flat 3.0

Additional features: isolated, good view to N, no
breeze, protected, sitting rocks

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4.0

Campsite #15

Open space: good grass, flat ledge rock 4.0

Tent space: 3+ tent pads, flat, pine needle duff
3.5

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, 20 ft to water 3.5

Canoe landing: poor, not flat 2.0

Additional features: big white pines, no breeze,
no dirt, isolated, pack trees

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 3.5

Campsite #16

Open space: open, trails along shore for 200 yds
4.0

Tent space: 4+ tent pads, grassy 5.0

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, nice rocks, 15 ft to
water 4.5

Canoe landing: small but flat in 2 spots 3.0

Additional features: nice white pines, grassy,
pack trees, isolated

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE 4.5

So we have the overall composite scores for the
16 sites breaking down as follows:

3.0	#3, #10
3.5	#4, #15
3.75	#2, #7
4.0	#1, #5, #6, #14
4.5	#9, #11, #12, #16
5.0	#8, #13

Even double portaging and solo paddling, it
took me less than two hours to go from the truck to
Fourtown Lake. For an easy access lake, it is a
very nice place to camp and enjoy the BWCAW.
Fourtown has many places where you can get out
of the canoe and hike up into the woods without
fighting a lot of brush. Day trips up to the Bass-
wood River pictographs or to fish Boot Lake or
Horse Lake are good options too. □

Editor's Note:

*In order to fit Bob Cary's final story into BWJ
in a timely manner (See page 63), I'm holding
our Sharing The Passion column on favorite
canoe/camping accessories/equipment/
apparel over to the next issue. That means
you have til August to send or e-mail your
gear advice. Cover brand/model and why you
like it/how you use it.*

Please keep it to five items max.

Boundary Waters Journal

9396 Rocky Ledge Rd

Ely, MN 55731

www.boundarywatersjournal.com

country and fellow paddlers.

I wanted to set the tone for our new Campsite Evaluation feature by personally visiting/reviewing our first destination. To minimize disturbing other campers it makes sense to conduct most of these surveys early and late in the paddling season. When our ice went out 10+ days earlier than the average, opportunity was knocking.

On April 19th I pull into the Chainsaw Sisters at 8:30 a.m., becoming their first paying customer for 2006. I didn't have the nerve to ask anyone to paddle me from site to site and wait while I took notes, so I'm paddling solo. I'm only packing 60 lbs of gear for the overnight trip to Fourtown, still I split it into two packs placed in the front of the 16-foot Old Town Camper. I can paddle this canoe pretty well from the stern seat without switching sides with my regular canoe paddle.

I flush six bald eagles before reaching Fourtown, plus see two deer, one fox, four loons, two grouse, three beaver and two pairs of mergansers. A few remnants of ice cling to shady cliffs in the woods, but the water only feels ice cold. The eagles are waiting for the suckers to run up into the creeks, but I didn't see them in there yet.

I don't rush from site to site. I can't resist a few antler shed-hunting detours. It takes all day to record my observations on Fourtown Lake's 16 designated campsites. Having camped on perhaps half a dozen of these, I know Fourtown is blessed with above-average quality for BWCAW campsites. That's why I chose it to start this column off. It will set the standard; one most BWCAW lakes will fail to match.

On each lake we evaluate, the sites will be numbered starting at the northernmost camp and going around the lake clockwise. The numbers 1 through 16 are for location/reference only, not a ranking. See the following individual listings of each Fourtown Lake site for composite scores.

Campsite #1

Open space: good view to S and W, decent SW breeze **4.0**

Tent space: room for 3-4 tents, soil good **4.5**

Fireplace amenities: 3 logs with ledge rock, minimal dirt **3.5**

Canoe landing: serviceable terrain **3.5**

Additional features: red/white pine, pack hanging trees, close to site #3, furthest from typical S end approach, good sitting rocks, some shade and sun.

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **4.0**

Campsite #2

Open space: nice, open, ledge rock/grass, medium size **4.0**

Tent space: 2+ tent pads, grass/soil **3.5**

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, grassy, limited water view **3.5**

Canoe landing: wide, flat ledge to land on **5.0**

Additional features: pack trees, shallow drop for kids, trail from sites #1 to #2, #3 visible nearby.

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **3.75**

Campsite #3

Open space: limited, mature red/white pine on entire point **3.0**

Tent space: 2+ tent pads **3.0**

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, view of bay only, 15 ft fire to water **3.0**

Canoe landing: small but ok, flat **3.5**

Additional features: close to site #1 & #2, limited view, good W breeze

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **3.0+**

Campsite #4

Open space: mostly wooded, cedar, walk to two points **2.5**

Tent space: 3+ smaller tent pads, close to fire **3.5**

Fireplace amenities: 3 logs, 10 yds to water, good view to W, W breeze **3.5**

Canoe landing: several small spots **3.5**

Additional features: pack trees, some dirt around fire, sitting rocks, long view of water to W

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **3.5**

Campsite #5 (My camp 4/19/06)

Open space: red pine dominant forest **3.5**

Tent space: 3 small tent pads, some sloped, muddy in April **2.75**

Fireplace amenities: 3 big logs, 10 ft to water, up on a rock above lake, no dirt **5.0**

Canoe landing: several flat small areas **3.75**

Additional features: pack trees, great view of sunset to W, clean ground, good W breeze, privacy.

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **4.0+**

Campsite #6

Open space: red pine canopy entire site, no brush **4.0**

Tent space: pine needle duff, lots of tent space **4.0**

Fireplace amenities: limited view, 40 yds from water, 2 logs **3.5**

Canoe landing: good **4.0**

Additional features: sitting rocks along shore, clean ground, good view

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **4.0**

Campsite #7

Open space: only open around fire ring **3.0**

Tent space: 3+ tents, good soil, flat **4.0**

Fireplace amenities: 2 logs, open view of bay to N, close to rapids **3.5**

Canoe landing: good, sandy spots **4.0**

Additional features: rapids running fast in April through site, but if low people will be portaging through your camp, protected site, good for spring/fall, trail from site #6 to #7

OVERALL COMPOSITE SCORE **3.75**

McKenzie Maps

The Toughest, Most Complete True Guide in the Canoe Country. Now With a New Look!

COMPLETE CONTOURS WITH HILLSHADING ON ALL MAPS, INCLUDING CANADIAN SIDE!

UTM GRIDS FOR IMPROVED NAVIGATION AND GPS USE!

CLEARLY SHOW TRAILS, PORTAGES, & CAMPSITES!

MORE DEPTH CONTOURS, ON MORE LAKES, THAN ANY OTHER BWCAW MAPS!

Now with even MORE detail and navigation information, **McKenzie Maps** has put all the accurate information you really need on the same 100% waterproof, extremely tough plastic paper. Practically indestructible! At 2"= 1 Mile, **McKenzie Maps** help you navigate the BWCAW and Quetico with more detail than any other map! The larger scale greatly improves your navigation by showing you all the many small islands that the other small scale maps can't and don't show! The UTM Grids make GPS use much easier than using latitude & longitude. These are the most complete maps you can get!

In addition to the BWCAW and Quetico maps, **McKenzie Maps** publishes maps of Voyageurs National Park, Isle Royale National Park, Apostle Island National Lakeshore, Superior National Forest, and the North Shore of Lake Superior with the Superior Hiking Trail from near Two Harbors to the Canadian Border. All of these maps have the same fine detail and all maps are reviewed annually for accuracy by the U.S. Forest Service, DNR, Park officials, and experienced professional guides and outfitters.

Make sure you plan your next wilderness adventure with the best, and most complete **McKenzie Maps**. Even though our maps are the least expensive piece of equipment you take, what is more important for a successful trip? Look for our maps at leading outfitters, catalog and outdoor stores. To order direct with fast service and delivery, you can order on line at our secure website, <http://www.bwcamaps.com>. For questions, or to order by phone or fax, use the numbers or address below.

Contact: McKenzie Products - 8479 E. Frye Rd. - Minong, WI 54859 - Fax 715-466-5443
Call Toll Free - 800-749-2113 - Visit our website - <http://www.bwcamaps.com>

there might be six good established camps.

Letting you all know the location and number of “established campsites” on Quetico lakes is the main reason we have added this feature to *BWJ*. When our writers go in and evaluate a given lake, they may not find every single place that has been camped on, but we will have located/evaluated everything a reasonable search could find.

I know first hand the anxiety of heading into a lake like Bentpine, Conmee or Woodside, good-sized water, with kids in tow with precious few campsites and dark coming on. It’s not a good situation. Bivouacking in desperation is not good for the resource and no fun for the homeless.

Those who want the mystery of not knowing what they’ll find for campsites are still free to disregard this information. That’s fine. But for those who don’t want to do a paddle search of every new lake, this will really help. Hopefully, it will give many the confidence to push on and explore new routes/water.

For years the most common editorial request to *BWJ* has been to include a map with route stories, to help the reader follow along. Until recently, reproducing a color map was cost prohibitive to us. We felt the color expense was better invested in photography of the area. Also,

most common loop routes require more than one page to show enough detail to be of any real value. Scanners have reduced the cost of printing maps, but I still feel a small scale locator map without enough detail to show portages, camps, etc. is next to worthless. Better to pull out a “real” map to follow/record the details of a story.

However, by focusing on the campsites of a particular lake or cluster of lakes, a detailed map is both necessary and feasible. Now when you are planning a trip to Lake X you can go back and get the detailed campsite information you need.

While we get this up and running, I’m sure we’ll discover things we hadn’t considered. It may take an issue or two to fine tune our approach.

A final plea: I would like to see you all use the Campsite Evaluations as a trip planning resource. Use it to mark your preferred sites on your full-scale Fisher/McKenzie tripping maps. As always, common courtesy and outdoor ethics are in order when finding/selecting a site. Like it or not, we now live in the information age. There is a right way and a wrong way to use information. I trust *BWJ* readers to use this Campsite Savvy with respect for the canoe

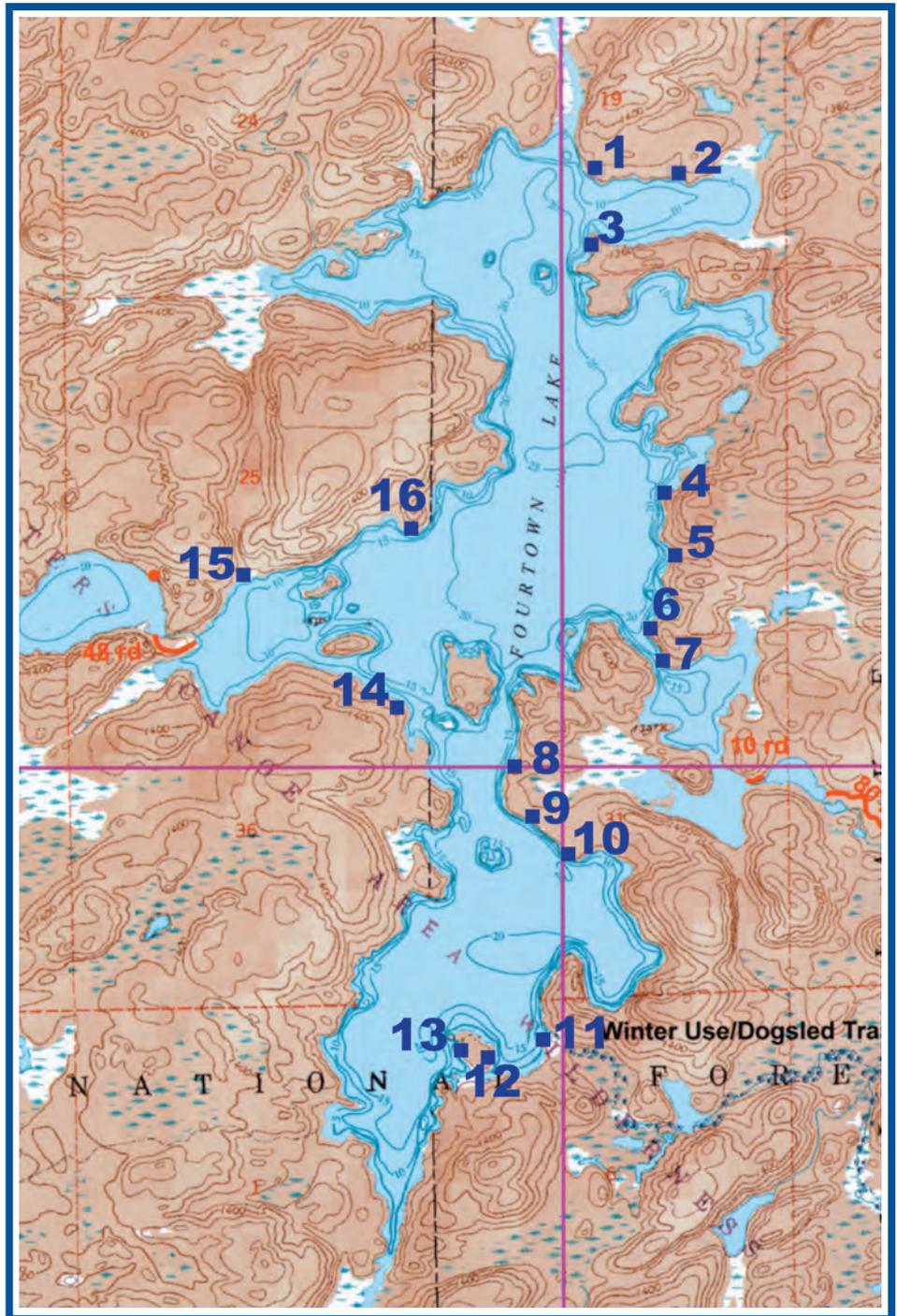
ranking of the evaluator for 5 categories for each site and compare the overall score of each camp to others on the lake. The comments are also going to be helpful.

We all know the reality of mid-summer traffic can create a situation where there is “competition” for campsites. Increasing the intensity of this competition is the last thing I want to do. The wilderness experience should be about competing with yourself and nature, not other people. While these campsite rankings are inherently subjective, I’m confident readers will quickly come to find they can be trusted to steer them to the best sites. If these sites are taken, that’s the way it goes. Move on, as always. If you’re fortunate to find one open, enjoy your turn. And leave it spotless for the next group.

In the Quetico, we have a more delicate situation. Quetico has no plans to designate campsites like the BWCAW. I, for one, wish they would. The BWCAW fireplace grates are easier to cook on and safer as far as preventing forest fires. And BWCAW latrines contain human waste in one suitable location. Many Quetico sites have serious human sanitation problems. But... Quetico prefers a more “wilderness” approach, putting no man-made features on the landscape. It’s more natural and less to maintain. We must deal with this reality.

With no official designation/maintenance of campsites in Quetico, these are de facto only sites. That is: most of the best places to camp on Quetico lakes already have rock piles/fire rings and areas cleared for tents. While it is legal to camp “anywhere” in Quetico, as a practical matter, nearly everyone camps at these “established” sites. The terrain/

MCKENZIE MAP CO. WWW.BWCAMAPS.COM



The campsite evaluations in this article refer to the 16 sites labeled on this map—starting on the north end and going around the lake clockwise.

blowdown simply doesn’t allow for camping in most places. Also, it’s better for the area if camping impacts are confined to a few areas rather than spread all over.

Despite Quetico’s reluctance to designate/locate their sites, both Fisher and McKenzie have

started marking some Quetico campsites on their maps. *BWJ* simply wants to change this to showing all known established sites. Because some, not all, of the established sites are shown on the maps, many people are led to believe a lake has only two “sites” when, in actuality,