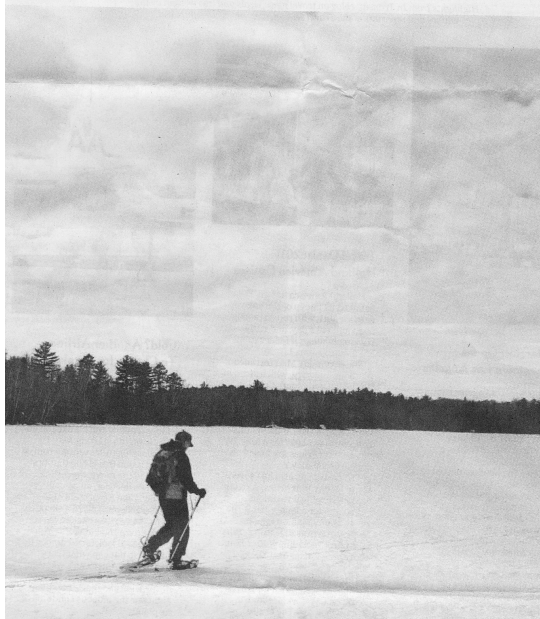


## Travel

The New York Times



ONLINE:  
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BELOW, FROM  
LEFT A map of  
the Boundary  
Waters Canoe  
Area Wilderness  
is a must. Steve,  
right, and Karen  
Lucas end a hike  
on the porch of a  
rented cabin near  
Ely, Minn. Karen  
Lucas in the  
kitchen, where a  
wood stove helps  
heat the cabin.

From First Travel Page

crossed the small lake in waning daylight to a log cabin on a rocky point. Dragging sleds up the shore, we stashed snowshoes and ski poles on the porch and gear in the cabin — warm clothes, mainly, and two coolers of steaks, vegetables, eggs and chorizo, a box of red wine, trail lunches and other essentials. Brian and Tom had already started the wood stove and hauled in drinking water in plastic jerrycans. They showed us how to light the auxiliary propane heater and gas lights, and then pointed out where they had drilled holes through the lake ice to draw wash water.

"See any wolves out here?" I asked Mr. Reis.

"I saw three on my lake," he said. "And when we came out this afternoon, we saw some tracks here on this lake."

The cabin was cozy, the logs expertly fitted against drafts. But apparently I had neglected to mention the lack of electricity and running water, and the outhouse down the hill. "Did you know this?" asked my wife in a way that begged something other than a simple yes or no. I had, I guess, but the details seemed unimportant. Clearly a mistake. Both Susan and Karen had brought blow dryers. Neither ran on

GREG BREINING's book "Paddle North: Canoeing the Boundary Waters — Quetico Wilderness" (with the photographer Layne Kennedy) will be published by Minnesota Historical Society Press this fall.

propane.

"The outhouse is kind of quaint," Karen said. She was being kind, though a sheet of insulating foam on the seat did keep the backside toasty.

The warmth of the wood stove and the orange glow of the lamps mellowed the mood a bit. To clean up after frying steaks and potatoes, I hiked down to the lake for water. The holes had already frozen over. I cleared the ice with a chisel and dipped water into a bucket for washing.

We had been stoking the wood-fired sauna since we arrived. By the time we finished dishes, the sauna house seemed ready to burst into flame. When Steve hit the stove rocks with a ladle of water, the vapor — the cloud of metaphysical importance the Finns call *löyly* — nearly raised blisters. Outside, we rinsed from an icy bucket and let our bodies steam in the biting cold, but only momentarily before we hurried to the warm cabin.

THE next morning we strapped on snowshoes, tromped down the hill onto our lake and headed east into a stinging wind.

Karen and Steve had done only a little snowshoeing. But a little was enough. If you can walk, you can snowshoe. Depending on conditions and how fast you're trying to go, just bend your knees a bit and do a kind of slow trot rather than walk fully upright. If the snow is deep and soft, lift your knees a bit. Compared with skis, snowshoes are easier to use if your hands and thoughts are occupied — whether you're a bird-

# Trekking With Wolves

Northern Minnesota is usually populated by canoeists. But in the winter, it becomes a lonelier place, a wilderness to explore on snowshoes, where the only company is often four-legged.

BY GREG BREINING

WINTER strips the wilderness of color: white snow, gray ice, the Dalmatian spots of paper birches. The somber green of pine and spruce and claret stems of red osier are vivid in comparison. Simple forms stand in high relief: a black pool of open water flanked by snow, daggers of ice plunging from slaty rocks, low sun, long shadows. The effect is striking, as austere and beautiful as an Ansel Adams print.

My wife, Susan, and I and our friends Steve and Karen Lucas had driven up from the Twin Cities to snowshoe and bushwhack the trails and lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota. We arrived in Ely, departure point to the wilderness, in late afternoon. Were it summer, cars and trucks carrying Kevlar canoes would have jammed Sheridan Street. Campers just arriving would be stalking Pragis Northwoods Company for maps, freeze-dried food and bargains in camp clothes. Canoeists on their way home would wait for a table at the Chocolate Moose. But in late January, tourists were few. Townsfolk scurried about on errands, bundled against raw, subfreezing weather.

We had rented a cabin on the edge of the wilderness area. We drove now through town to rendezvous with one of the owner's employees, Brian Klubben, and his friend Tom Reis. They led the way down the Fernberg Road and swung onto a snowy trail to Kempton Lake. We loaded gear onto plastic toboggans and

Continued on Page 8

THOMAS WEISBERG  
FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

watcher with trail guide and binoculars, a camper lugging a pack and breaking trail, or an ice fisherman towing sled and tackle to a nearby lake to catch trout. Strap on snowshoes with a task in mind, and suddenly you're out there with the restless spirits of Robert Service and Jack London, braving a savage land.

Susan and I have snowshoed for years on our old-style shoes with wooden frames and varnished rawhide webbing. Steve and Karen had some wooden shoes of their own but decided to rent small, modern snowshoes with tubular aluminum frames and plastic decks. The new shoes didn't have the looks or flotation of ours, but on three inches of wind-packed snow, they were the better choice.

"These are easier to walk on than our wood ones," Steve said. They were lighter, with sturdier bindings. Old or modern, the shoes carried us over the thin crust, preventing the sinking and backsliding that made walking without them tiring.

The beauty of snowshoeing is you can do it just about anywhere — over lake and stream, through the woods, on a trail or off. That is especially true in the million-acre Boundary Waters, better known, as its name makes clear, for canoeing. In summer, some quarter of a million canoe campers manage to disappear into the wilderness, paddling down the craggy lakes, carrying canoe and pack down portage trails.

The same network of waterways and portages, once frozen and blanketed with snow, provides a nearly infinite number of backcountry routes by

snowshoes or cross-country skis. Federal regulations require that you fill out a permit that you'll find at one of nearly 100 entry points on the perimeter of the wilderness. From there you can head down any lake, creek or trail that promises to lead to somewhere interesting. Because winter there is a serious event — temperatures often remain subzero for days — visitors number about 2,500, only 1 percent of the yearly total. A ca-

*Snowshoes are best used with a task in mind.*

noeist may wonder whether he can find an open campsite. A snowshoer or skier may wonder if he will ever see another human being.

And therein lies the appeal of backcountry snowshoeing in the Boundary Waters — to wander wherever you wish, in some measure of solitude. We had decided to navigate a loop of our own devising — into the wilderness area, down a broad and (we hoped) frozen river, and back by a different route to our cabin.

But for a coal-black raven in a pewter sky, the landscape was empty of people and wildlife. That any creatures lived here at all was evident only by the signs they left behind.

"This is so awesome," Karen exclaimed over the crunching of her shoes in the crusty snow.

Article excerpted from the New York Times Travel section. To view the entire article go to <http://travel.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/travel/21snowshoeing.html?pagewanted=1>

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