

Pathfinder and The Cedar Canvas Canoe  
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Bill Mason once said of our beloved wood canoes, "A cedar canvas prospector should be on the endangered species list. They belong in a museum. It has become a means of venturing back, into what is left of the natural world."

That was thirty years ago. I wonder now what Mason would say if he saw our fleet of classic canoes gliding through the Park every summer? In fact, our masterpieces are in a museum. A living museum, where the masterpieces are still in use for the reason they were created: to travel in the classic style that yields a connection to the Park otherwise impossible. It is up to us to share the magic of the wood canoe with the Campers.

It begins with canoemanship and trip training, right at the Canoe Dock. These days, Canoeing involves five achievement levels of solo, doubles and whitewater paddling. Besides the basic strokes, we teach all the tricks of the trade, and one day a Camper may be able to gunwale bounce, throw a solo running jam, and flip up a trip canoe.

Year after year our boys load up the red canoes and embark on trips easily recognized by trippers of decades ago. For certain, there are some changes. Part of the outfit has changed, for the better. Trip tents and packs are no longer made from canvas, food cans no longer burden us. Rain jackets now repel some rain. Still, our canoes and their routes have stayed the same. So have the experiences in store for our trippers.

Paddling a big, open lake in the hot summer sun, you smell the varnish and watch the water with a gorgeous bow deck in the foreground. You come to the realization that what you are doing is magical, that you're tripping the right way.

They might be "outdated", heavy after a few days of tripping in the interior, but they are our canoes. Those Pathfinder red canoes personify the tradition of Pathfinder canoe tripping. They have become our means to venturing back into the natural world, a world few others can know in the same way. And they absolutely belong in a museum – ours – where we honor them with their original function, traditional Pathfinder canoe tripping.