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## **CANOE TRIPPER JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **The Forest... (The Big Picture)**

Canoe tripping is the quintessential Tamakwa activity. It gives a young person tools that they will carry all their lives, most notably: 1) the ability to get the most out of having very little, and 2) getting along with other people. Tripping skills and values embody everything Tamakwa can hope to offer: exposure to breathtakingly beautiful country, teamwork and bonding, outdoor living, adventure and challenge, resourcefulness, appreciation of nature, challenge, self-reliance, self-esteem, fun and memories. It is what young people remember most from their summer camp experience. And certainly our location provides us with easy access to perhaps the greatest canoe tripping facility in the world – Algonquin Park.

There is simply no better way to see Algonquin than by canoe. The two are synonymous. One of our highest priorities is that every camper experience a canoe trip, therefore cabin trips are mandatory. Parents and campers know this well in advance of arriving. Indeed, it is why many families choose Tamakwa. Among all the programs that Tamakwa ambitiously offers, the cabin group canoe trip takes priority.

### **The Trees... (The Little Picture)**

Cabin group unity is sacred in the scheme of Tamakwa's philosophy. Therefore, most trips are organized by cabin group. Algonquin Park regulations allow a maximum of 9 persons to a campsite, so a basic trip consists of one Senior Counselor, one Junior Counselor, six campers and you, the Tripper. Sometimes to accommodate larger cabin groups, it is necessary to divide the group into two trips traveling side by side, but camping separately.

You are the person in charge of the trip. You are responsible for every aspect of the trip: the planning, the implementation, the safety and health of the camper and staff, the handling of emergencies, the decision making, the teaching of skills and the excitement and fun.

### **The biggest distinction of the Tripper's role in the operation of camp is this:**

Canoe Tripping is the only activity that takes place outside of the constant supervision of the Camp Directors. Therefore, when on trip, you take an active part in the way Tamakwa is operated. Its philosophy, standards of safety and camper care, rules and reputation are all under your supervision. Because of this, the camp puts an incredible amount of trust in

those who lead Tamakwa canoe trips. They are a major part of the camp program and their impact – positive or negative – is felt long after the trip (and the summer) is over. That impact directly reflects on the on-going reputation of the camp.

## **PRE-CAMP ORIENTATION AND THE TRIPPERS TRIP**

During pre-camp orientation, trippers share in the general staff training and prepare the tripping equipment for the summer. Afterward, the trippers go together on a 3-day Tripper's Trip, an orientation led by the Trip Director. In the process, you learn the "Tamakwa way" of leading a trip, particularly procedures for safety, emergencies, hygiene, packing out and trip preparation, setting up and cleaning campsites, lake & river paddling with a group, crossing portages, loading a canoe, choosing tent sites, building cooking fires, drying clothes, chopping wood, cooking, leadership, counseling and basic camping skills. The fact that you are reading this means you are well versed in most of these skills. That being the case, the skills part of the trip should become more a comparison of techniques or exchange of ideas, rather than an instructional seminar. In any event, this is a chance for you to brush up on those skills, to get to know the other trippers and for the Trip Director to get to know you.

## **THE TRIP SCHEDULE**

Each tripper takes out 3 to 5 trips per month. Regularly scheduled cabin trips mostly range in duration from 3 to 5 days. At the end of each session, long trips are offered on a volunteer basis of 8 to 15 days in length. Generally, you will return from one trip, sometimes have a day off and then a pack-out day for your next cabin trip leaving the following day. When there are gaps in your trip schedule, sometimes you will help at an activity in camp or be part of our hiking/outdoor skills program.

## **EQUIPMENT**

You will be issued a full set of equipment and you will be responsible for its upkeep and condition throughout the summer. This includes tents, packs, canoes, pot set, cooking and eating utensils, first aid kit, tarps, rope, paddle and map. Trippers provide their own sleeping bag, PFD and appropriate personal gear (rain gear, good footwear, clothing, etc.). Some trippers, although rare, prefer using some of their own personal equipment (i.e. stove, paddle, tent, etc.) but camp does provide it.

## **TRIP PREPARATION**

A canoe trip begins long BEFORE actual departure. In anticipation of a trip, you meet with the Trip Director to discuss the group; their strengths, interests, tripping background and abilities. That will be relevant to planning the route and length of the trip along with the Trip Director who will arrange for your trip permit. Every trip in Algonquin Park must carry a trip permit.

The day before the trip is pack-out day. You get acquainted with the campers and staff, visit their cabin and join them for meals at their table. You talk about the trip: review the

route, food preferences, inquire about vegetarians, possible fears, allergies and any health problems or medications. You also visit the medical staff in the clinic to check the camper and staff medical records to know how to deal with any specific health concerns and to make sure medications are uninterrupted on trip.

You generate excitement about the upcoming trip. You may encounter a camper or two with reservations about going or with fears based on previous experiences. This is the opportunity to help them overcome those fears, get to feel comfortable with you and become willing to give it a new try. In these situations, there are a number of experienced resource people in camp that can help you. You will arrange a time to meet the group in their cabin to pack out. Learning the tricks of packing out is part of the trip – what to bring, what NOT to bring and how to physically pack. The tripper is always present when the cabin packs out as opposed to simply giving them a list of items to bring.

Packing out the food is your responsibility. You need to take into account vegetarians, food allergies and quantities that are ample but also minimize waste. The food pack-out room is adjacent to the kitchen and contains cupboards and bins for dry foods, freezers and refrigerators for fresh foods and access to the kitchen's walk-in fridge for produce. You bag and pack-out most foods the day before the trip, putting aside fresh and refrigerated foods for packing the morning of the trip.

## **DEPARTING ON THE TRIP**

On the morning of the trip you should be up early (7:00am) and have the canoes in the water, packed and ready to go well before breakfast, which is at 8:30am on a normal camp day. You make sure everyone is up, packed, at breakfast on time, ready and psyched for the trip. The only thing a camper and counselor should have to do the morning of departure is eat breakfast and pick up a paddle.

## **ON TRIP**

You are in charge. You make all decisions, direct the course of the trip, paddle behind the other canoes to make sure everyone is within your sight, teach paddling and portaging methods, enforce wearing of life jackets, make sure everyone safely crosses a portage, double back to carry other canoes or packs if someone is having trouble, assign tasks fairly on the campsite, instruct the proper ways of carrying out those tasks, teach the notion of teamwork, collect wood, prepare the fire, make sure the fire is extinguished, teach about camp craft and nature, generate singing and spirit, handle disputes among campers or staff and lead storytelling around the campfire. You also fulfill the traditional Tamakwa tripping motto that **we always leave a campsite cleaner than we found it.**

## **A WORD ABOUT EMERGENCIES**

Your orientation will deal in detail with emergency procedures. But as a brief preview, the Tamakwa attitude can be summed up this way: The best way to handle emergencies is to avoid them in the first place. By not paddling dangerous waters or in dangerous situations just to make a prescribed destination. By always being aware of oncoming stormy weather

conditions and being prepared to get off the lake in time. By always camping well before dark. By **not** trying to make up for lost time by traveling into darkness, but making it up with an early start the next day or modifying the route.

## **INTEGRITY OF A TAMAKWA CANOE TRIP**

In the grand scheme of a child's life, a canoe trip should be a step back to basics. It is a chance to face the elements and learn to use them in our favor (i.e. cooking from a wood fire and drying our clothes in the sun and breeze). A canoe trip is a timeout from our everyday lives, in which quality is usually measured by speed. Here, time is meant to stand still. What counts on a canoe trip is NOT how fast you can get from place to place but the quality of the time spent in between. Tamakwa trippers should live by the credo that **"it's the going, not the getting there, that's got to be good."**

A Tamakwa canoe trip is measured solely in terms of its impact on the campers. It is for **them** and according to **their** abilities that we trip. To a reasonable degree, it should test their strength; inner and physical. It is meant to bring out the best in them, to allow them to rise to a challenge and then to be rewarded by the sense of achievement that comes from completing the trip. They should come away with greater self-confidence and independence. All this can be realized only if the trip offers that challenge but not too much or more than they can handle.

In other words, the trip should achieve a balance, not be too easy, not too difficult. Camping out on a single campsite for a few days is **not** Tamakwa's idea of a canoe trip, nor is it allowed. Neither is a "push" trip that is intended to break some record. A trip should get an early start, include three nourishing meals a day, move at a steady pace, set up camp by 4-5 pm and allow time for cleaning up and some leisure at the campsite before a reasonable bedtime. And equally important, a trip should budget time during the day to stop along the way, watch a moose, have a swim, do a little fishing, take some photos, write in a journal, look at beautiful birds or peculiar trees, bring out a guitar, understand a bit about how things in nature got the way they are and whatever else allows the participants enjoy the process.

## **AMBASSADOR OF TAMAKWA**

You are more than simply leading a group of kids on a canoe trip in the bush, you represent Camp Tamakwa. We always refer to Algonquin as our backyard. Your trips may pass cottagers, the Portage Store, groups from neighboring camps and others for whom the park is also a backyard. All of them share not only a mutually healthy year-round relationship with Tamakwa but also a common interest in Algonquin. For the sake of those relationships and a basic sense of respect, we traverse the park under the following premise: that we are temporary visitors in a wilderness area, that we share the place and must be respectful of all its inhabitants, and that we do not have the right to impose ourselves on them in any way. In other words, we don't use loud, abrasive or foul language. We respect other park users and their right to peace and quiet and the use of anything that plays music or games is not allowed on trip anyway. We respect Algonquin's natural world and have no right to disrupt or deface it.

## **THE ROLE OF THE PORTAGE STORE**

The Portage Store is an outfitting post not far from Tamakwa. Besides supplies, it has a restaurant, souvenir shop, gas station, small marina, telephones and concession for purchasing trip permits. Because of its proximity to camp, it sometimes becomes an attractive stop for campers en route to or from a trip. The Tamakwa perspective is that the store should in no way become a destination or focal point for a canoe trip. Shopping at a store with a parking lot, tourists and souvenirs is NOT intended to be part of the canoe trip experience.

Sometimes, after a particularly difficult trip when the campers are particularly deserving of reward, a brief stop at the store may be justified for a quick ice cream or pop before returning to camp. But it's when that perk is dangled in front of the campers as "bribery" for good behavior that the store becomes the overall focus of a trip. At that point, a tripper has created his/her own monster. If and when you are there with a trip, the visit should be kept in perspective. The group must stay together, campers and staff, be mindful of all the points in the "Ambassador of Tamakwa" paragraph, must not go into the restaurant or souvenir shop and cannot use the telephones. Telephone use by campers is forbidden in or out of camp because of the setback it causes to homesickness and the alarm it causes to parents, who may hear just a recorded message or some other out-of-context message from their child. It's not that we're mean; we just have lots of experience.

## **THE TRIPPER AND THE COUNSELOR**

As tripper, you know the outdoors. The counselor knows the kids and many of them know the Park very well. The counselor will be an invaluable resource to you. After all, the counselor has an ongoing relationship with the campers, whereas you are there just for that brief, albeit very memorable, moment in their summer. You will rely on the counselor for his/her rapport with the campers and ability to deal more with their general needs, positive motivation and behavior. But, you bear the ultimate responsibility for judgments and decision making. On trip you become a team and by example you will all set the tone of the trip in terms of cooperative spirit. While you will be evaluating the counselors after the trip in writing, they will have the opportunity to evaluate you as well to their Section Head and/or the Trip Director.

## **THE TRIPPER-IN-TRAINING**

Years ago, Tamakwa began a Tripper-In-Training program to help groom our very own Tamakwa Canoe Trippers down the road. Not only for those growing up through their years at Tamakwa, but also for first-year Tamakwans, the program provides the opportunity to learn a huge variety of skills, including how to properly paddle, portage, navigate, cook on a campfire and most importantly how to lead a group of campers and staff on a fun and safe wilderness expedition. Most Trippers-In-Training become full-fledged Tamakwa Canoe Trippers the follow summer or once they turn 19 years old. Typically, our Trippers-In-Training are 17-18 years old and more interested in pursuing Canoe Tripping instead of

being a cabin counselor. This program is an amazing opportunity for young people interested in pursuing canoe trip leading and outdoor adventure.

Trippers-In-Training will have the opportunity to work closely with the Canoe Tripper in all aspects of the trip. This includes the opportunity to take charge during parts of the trip such as navigating, leading portages, setting up camp, building fires and cooking. They will be involved in all aspects of trip planning, decision-making and all preparations, as well as all post-trip responsibilities.

Trippers-In-Training are there to help, which should be welcomed with open arms, but they're also there to learn. They are essentially assistants to Canoe Trippers and involved in every aspect of the day-to-day life on trip, however, at the end of the day, the Canoe Tripper is in charge on trip and has the final say. For the most part, they have very similar duties as a Canoe Tripper but a little less overall responsibility.

Trippers-In-Training will likely have the opportunity to trip with multiple Canoe Trippers over the course of the summer. Typically, they will go on at least 4-6 canoe trips each summer and at least one long trip each summer of 8-15 days in length.

Canoe Trippers should debrief with Trippers-In-Training at least once each day. There should be no surprises on the post-trip Trip Report (a written review regarding the trip filled out at camp). A Tripper-In-Training is not just another staff member on trip but should be treated and used more like another Tripper. They should ask plenty of questions and take initiative, even more than counselors who are also expected to help the Tripper a lot.

A positive Canoe Tripper / Tripper-In-Training relationship is essential for the success of this program. Both will get a lot out of this unique learning experience and we are thrilled to continue this opportunity for the young outdoor enthusiasts at Tamakwa and to benefit the long term success of canoe tripping at Tamakwa.

## **WHAT A TRIP SHOULD BE**

It should be SAFE and FUN. It should be a positive experience, so kids will want to do it again. It should give the cabin a respite from the camp routine and a chance to bond and get along. In a situation of relative adversity, a trip should strive for comfort and a feeling of support. We know YOU love tripping, but the true test of a Tamakwa tripper is getting the campers to love tripping as well. The difference between being a capable canoe tripper yourself and being a Tamakwa tripper is that here, you are putting the needs and interests of the campers entirely above everything else. You're doing this for them.

## **WHAT A TRIP SHOULD NOT BE**

It should NOT be a situation in which kids ever feel threatened, pressured, ridiculed, denigrated, humiliated or punished. All the rules and values that we live by IN CAMP apply out on a canoe trip as well.

The camp's absolute rules forbidding alcohol and drugs are intact, as are rules forbidding smoking by campers or staff smoking in the presence of campers. Also intact are camp

values that govern the following: Modesty – our own modesty (being fully clothed in front of the opposite sex or strangers) and respecting the modesty of others; Separation of males and females in tents and sleeping arrangements; Selfishness (ALL staff are there for the campers, not vice versa. Campers don't paddle for the staff/CITs, eat after the staff/CITs or be put in any position of subservience to staff/CITs); Use of physical force or foul language; Inappropriate behavior of any kind with campers/CITs or other staff – whether in the form of games, stunts, punishments or pranks. "ON TRIP" and "IN CAMP" do NOT have different sets of standards; the standards are ONE and the SAME.

Remember, a trip is an alternative, back-to-the-basics and group experience for kids. Mechanical devices and sound equipment do not belong on trips. Anything that plays music or games, for example, are not only a hazard to safety; they are totally inconsistent with the reasons for being out on a canoe trip and strictly forbidden.

### **AFTER THE TRIP**

Trips are timed to return to camp at a specific time. In Tamakwa spirit, the trip will be welcomed home at the dock by the entire camp. As tripper, you put away all equipment, make sure the campers get all their gear and that all other gear is returned to its place. That afternoon, before any time off, you are required to complete a trip report: an evaluation of the trip itself, each staff and camper on the trip, report any incidents or noteworthy health related episodes or accidents, discipline issues, etc. This information becomes critical to the camp operation in numerous ways, even long after the summer is over.

### **MISCELLANEOUS DUTIES**

When in camp – like all staff – trippers may be called upon at various times to perform some other general tasks. It may be baggage movement, helping out on Visiting Day, preparing wood supplies at fire pits, telling a bedtime story, leading a hike, refereeing a sporting event, participating in a camp program, life guarding, and lots more.

### **AT THE END OF THE DAY**

**It all sounds like an awesome responsibility. It is, but it is also incredibly fun and rewarding. Like all camp positions, what you put into it comes back to you tenfold in terms of satisfaction and reward. Trippers in particular tend to be highly respected camp personalities, who can make an incredible impact on the experiences of young people and be remembered for a long long time.**

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