

On the Origins of the Camp Echo Adventure Trip Program

Rob Grierson ... June 1, 2009



Chapter 1: The Early Years of Camp Echo, and the YMCA's Canadian Canoe Trip

From 1899 to 1901 Evanston boys attended the Milwaukee YMCA's Camp Hope on Phantom Lake near Mukwonago, Wisconsin. Camp Echo began on June 12, 1902 at Black Lake near Holland, Michigan, when a group of Evanston boys "planted their flag and named the place Camp Echo." From 1906 to 1910 the camp was held on Bear Lake near Muskegon, Michigan. Camp Echo moved to Portage Lake near Onekama, Michigan in 1911. In the ensuing years the camp shared that site with a Chicago YMCA camp, and then moved to Diamond Lake.

In the early 1920s, Evanston YMCA Board Member and Boys' Work Committee chairman F. P. Davis, Sr., Boys Work Secretary Freeman, General Secretary James Bixby, and Mr. Chester Cook, Board and Committee member, began looking for a permanent home for Camp Echo. After rejecting sites at Town Line Lake and another nearby lake, they arrived at the south end of Ryerson Long Lake and were "electrified by what they saw – a beautiful lake with a peninsula in the middle cleared except for trees around the edge and a real forest of trees in the distance." They negotiated the purchase of the property and Camp Echo moved to the site in 1923.

Norm Weston, Camp Echo Director in 1925, initiated river canoe trips out of Camp Echo. Over the next sixty years, a number of nearby Michigan waters became reliable sites for Camp Echo river trips – including the Pine, the Pere Marquette, the Little Manistee, and the Big Manistee.

In 1932, Weston began leading a Canadian Canoe Trip with boys from the Evanston YMCA. These trips were not connected with Camp Echo; an Evanston YMCA staff member always organized and led them. In 1954, Roth Holtz took over the leadership of the Canadian Canoe Trip for boys and Eileen Wasson began leading a Canadian Canoe Trip for girls. Roth Holtz led the boys' trip for over 20 years; Kent Smith led the boys' trip from 1977 until 1981.

Over the years, several hundred boys and girls went on the YMCA's Canadian Canoe trips.

Chapter 2: Concepts from Camp Speers are incorporated into the Camp Echo program

Rob Grierson, who had attended YMCA Camp Speers in Dingman's Ferry Pennsylvania as a camper and staff member, joined the Evanston YMCA staff as a part-time youth worker in the early 1970s when he enrolled at Northwestern University. In the summer of 1976, Rob signed on as the Boys Camp Program Director at Camp Echo. Starting in the summer of 1977, the concepts of a camping progression, derived from Camp Speers, were incorporated into Camp Echo – adding the grade-level names Pathfinders (4th & 5th grade), Trailblazers (6th grade), Pioneers (7th grade), Voyageurs (8th grade), and Senior Voyageurs (9th grade). The name “Adventurers” was attached to the groups living at Outpost (10th and 11th grade), and those groups were encouraged to go on “an extended four or five day camping trip.” The descriptions from the 1977 Camp Echo brochure are reproduced below. (The grade-level names stuck until at least 1979, were abandoned for about 20 years, and then returned with slight adjustments starting in 2003.)

Camp Programs

PATHFINDERS – An introductory unit for 9-10 year olds in the fourth or fifth grade, utilizing basic in-camp facilities. Fun games, nature, swimming, and other learning programs are emphasized. Lodges take a one night overnight.

TRAILBLAZERS – For youths entering sixth grade in the fall. Learning programs such as archery, riflery, and swimming are continued, while campers learn more about exploring the outdoors and also take longer overnight trips on camp property.

PIONEERS – Seventh graders participate in a program with emphasis on perfection of skills in canoeing, sailing, and other camp activity areas, while campcraft, outdoor living, and camping out take on special importance. Lodge groups often take a one or two night camping trip or a river trip off camp property, on the Pere Marquette River.

VOYAGEURS – For youths entering the eighth grade. Campers utilize all in-camp facilities during their stay, and, in addition, focus on an overnight river trip or hike off camp property, on the Pine River or Manistee Trail.

SR. VOYAGEURS – The oldest main campers, entering the ninth grade, make extensive use of both in-camp and out of camp facilities. Groups will live and eat in main camp, but will operate as a decentralized group, planning their own daily program. Highlight of their camping experience will be preparation for, planning of, and carrying out a two or three night camping trip – rafting, canoeing, hiking, or bicycling.

Discover The Great Outdoors

ADVENTURERS AT CAMP ECHO

ADVENTURERS is a camping unit for tenth and eleventh grade boys and girls who enjoy living and taking trips in the out-of-doors.

Two select groups of high school aged youth live in a primitive tent unit, set away from main camp. All meals are cooked out; groups use their own, separate waterfront and make use of in-camp activity areas only for special programs.

ADVENTURER groups spend the first portion of their stay at Echo planning and preparing for an extended, four or five day camping trip. Training in canoe skills or bicycle repair prior to such trips is emphasized. After their long trip, the groups complete their Echo experience with programs and activities related to their camping interests.

ADVENTURER trips extend boys or girls to their fullest in energy, stamina, judgement, and character. The demands are great . . . but so are the rewards – **ADVENTURERS** learn self reliance, respect for others, discover the **GREAT** outdoors, and with it all, have a fantastic time.

Enrollment limited to 20 boys or girls per period.

In fact, though, none of Outpost's trips ever went beyond basic canoe trips within Michigan.

Chapter 3: First Attempt to Add “True” Adventure Trips to the Camp Echo Program

On March 15, 1977 Grierson was considering a full-time job at the Evanston YMCA, involving both school-year youth work and summer camp work, after his graduation from Northwestern. He presented a memo to then-Evanston YMCA Executive Director Doug Monahan suggesting that the Canadian Canoe Trip ought to be a part of Camp Echo. Monahan asked for clarification, and Grierson responded with his belief that teens at Camp Echo needed challenging “Adventure Trips” and that having a separate Canadian Canoe Trip run by the YMCA made little sense. The text of those memos is on the next page. Grierson took a teaching job at King Lab School in Evanston, but remained involved with the Evanston YMCA as a volunteer Y Club counselor.

YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION



DOUGLAS MONAHAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

1000 GROVE STREET
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS 60201

March 15, 1977

Dear Mr. Monahan,

The enclosed sheets detail the type of Boys Department structure under which I feel I would be able to operate, if I were to be considered for the job of Boys Director/Camp Director.

We, of course, need to discuss this proposal at length, but I'd like to make several points now:

1. As Camp Director, I would not be able to run the SAC. In addition, I feel that the Canadian Canoe Trip, also a summer program, ought to be included as a part of the Camp Echo Adventurer Program.

MR. MONAHAN'S QUESTIONS

1. Enlarge on tying Canadian Canoe into Echo.

MY RESPONSES

- 1 Echo must abandon its former "risky dirt" emphasis on camping where an overnight sleepout is the greatest challenge. Canadian Canoe Trips — Upper peninsula Canoe Trips — Cross County Bicycle Trips — Mountain Climbing and extensive backpacking — all should be a part of Camp Echo as an Adventure Program. By having a separate program, we compete with ourselves.

Chapter 4: Second Attempt to Add “True” Adventure Trips to the Camp Echo Program

Bill Geiger was named Camp Echo Director for the 1980 season. One of Geiger’s major changes was the introduction of coed camping to Camp Echo: The summer of 1981 featured four weeks of Girls Camp (as it had been for over 25 years), followed by four weeks of Boys Camp (down from 6 weeks) – followed by Camp Echo’s first-ever 2-week session of coed overnight camping.

Geiger left the Y for another career in late 1981, and Muriel Brunger (who had come to Echo from Camp Speers with Grierson in 1976) was hired as an interim Camp Echo Director – for Camp Echo’s first-ever all-coed summer, assisted by Program Director Marie Roche. Kent Smith was also leaving the Evanston YMCA, and there was nobody at the Y to lead the Canadian Canoe Trip. With more people “on board” with the idea of Camp Echo Adventure Trips, Don Bos, an Evanston schoolteacher, was hired to plan and run high school trips at Camp Echo. The 1982 Camp Echo brochure offered a new Leadership Training program, and high school trips:

CAMPING PROGRAMS

MAIN CAMP - Campers entering grades 4 - 8 in the Fall of 1982. Campers live in cabin groups of ten with a college-age Senior Counselor and an Assistant Counselor. Mornings include a learning experience in an area of their choice and swim instruction. Afternoons include instruction, cabin group activities, all camp program and free choice time. Staff carefully supervise all activities and assist campers in selecting challenging, fun activities. Cabin groups join together in unit activities which are age appropriate.

New

L.E.A.D. - Leadership Training for campers entering grades 9 & 10. A two week leadership experience under the direction of Laura McKibbin. Each camper will:

- A) Receive training in CPR and Lifesaving or First Aid with certification as a goal.
- B) Receive group work, values and wellness training.
- C) Select specific areas in camp in which to be involved in training and assisting activities.
- D) Work with other L.E.A.D. campers to plan programs and activities for main campers.
- E) Have unscheduled time for a choice of activities.

New

HIGH SCHOOL TRIPS - For campers entering grades 9 - 12. Leadership Development and Wilderness Challenge, Don Bos - Director. Don has extensive experience organizing and leading high school trips.

GREAT LAKES BICYCLE TRIP	June 16 - 28
ISLE ROYALE BACKPACK TRIP	June 28 - July 11
COLORADO - "THE 3 R's"	July 21 - Aug. 5
BOYS CANADIAN CANOE TRIP	July 27 - Aug. 9
GIRLS CANADIAN CANOE TRIP	August 12 - 25

For more information about
L.E.A.D.
and
HIGH SCHOOL TRIPS
Call
The Camp Echo Office for a Brochure
475-7400

In spite of the great publicity, none of the trips had enough enrollment – and none went out!

Chapter 5: Third Time's a Charm – Jon Brenner Brings Adventure Trips to Camp Echo

Jon Brenner came to the Evanston YMCA in the early 1980s to work in the Aquatic Department as a lifeguard. Jon had long been a part of YMCA Camp Martin Johnson, out of the Hyde Park YMCA, culminating in the summer of 1979 as their Program Director. Sadly, Martin Johnson closed down on May 21, 1980. Jon was talking with another lifeguard – Camp Echo staff member Bill Dean – about Martin Johnson and his passion for leading extended camping trips. Dean spoke highly of Camp Echo and the new high school trip program, and convinced Brenner to apply and work at Echo for the summer of 1982. Jon's introductory summer at Echo was somewhat of a personal disappointment when the hoped-for adventure trips never materialized.

Seeking a camp where extended camping trips were a part of the program, Brenner spent the summer of 1983 at the Frost Valley YMCA Camps in the Catskills. Camp Echo, meanwhile, had a new Director – Fred Brown – whose new idea for Echo was Pioneer Village, a site for teen wilderness living even more remote than Outpost. No Echo adventure trips were offered in 1983.

Upon Brenner's return to the Evanston YMCA in the fall of 1983, Brown convinced Brenner to give Echo another try – with the mission of planning and implementing a tripping program. The 1984 Camp Echo brochure invited teens to sign up for a new set of Echo Adventure Trips:

<p>PIONEER VILLAGE</p> <p>A co-ed program for high school youth who would like to learn about and share a simpler and more self-reliant life style. Pioneers will live in hogans and plan and prepare all meals.</p> <p>Activities will include log cabin building, gardening, animal care, spinning and weaving, woodworking, canoe and horse travel plus many more. Pioneers also swim, ski, sail, windsurf and participate in other Main Camp activities.</p> <p>LEAD</p> <p>The LEAD program is a leadership training experience for youth entering the 10th grade. LEAD campers will learn staff responsibility, gain valuable leadership skills and mature in their attitudes and values. LEADS also participate in resident camp activities both as leaders and planners. Personal skill development opportunities are available each day for the LEAD camper.</p> <p>LEAD II</p> <p>The LEAD II program is a volunteer experience where participants serve in staff positions. These positions include program, kitchen, maintenance and barn. LEAD II participants through on-</p>	<p>the-job training will take active roles in camp leadership with direction and appraisal of performance happening frequently.</p> <p>The LEAD II program is by selection only. Interested individuals should contact the Echo office for application and interview.</p> <p>MICHIGAN CANOE TRIP</p> <p>Adventure awaits you this summer on the Pine River in Western Michigan! This four day canoe trip is ideal for the canoeist looking for challenge and fulfillment. The small group of 8-10 trippers arrives at Camp Echo to prepare for the trip and learn basic canoe skills. Participants will develop a special sense of community as they live in tents, prepare meals and share singing and stories over the campfire.</p> <p>CANADIAN CANOE ADVENTURE</p> <p>A wilderness experience that will highlight the memories of any youth! The call of loon and the cry of a timber wolf. Water so clean you drink it straight from the lake. Nothing around but water, trees, and fish. Hopefully, lots of fish. This exciting trip will set out from YMCA Camp Menogyn on the Gunflint Trail outside of Grand Marais, Minne-</p>	<p>sota. Canoeing in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, participants will help plan and select daily routes. Canoe trippers will experience 8 days on the water in some of the most unspoiled and beautiful terrain that exists in Northern America.</p> <p>ONE DAY CANOE FLOAT</p> <p>A one day Saturday canoe adventure on a Chicago area river that will delight any young person whether they are an experienced canoeist or not. Led by the Grosse Pointe Voyageur Brigade, this springtime experience will be educational as well as fun. For dates and cost, contact Tracy Alden at the Evanston YMCA Youth Department.</p> <p>TRAILBLAZERS</p> <p>This experience at Camp Echo is for the 8th grade boy or girl who wants greater challenges than what resident camp can offer. Trailblazers will participate in programs emphasizing outdoor living skills, cooking most of their own meals, canoeing, backpacking, repelling, tubing and other activities designed to challenge the older boy or girl. Trailblazers will live in platform tents. The highlight of each session requires each camper to employ their new skills in an expedition out of camp.</p>
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A summer 1984 newsletter mailed to YMCA members touted the trip program and quoted Brenner's thoughts on a camping progression. Brown stated that, "Jon is the spark that is making Echo's tripping program shine this summer." Brenner listed the planned trips and said, "We are laying the foundation to offer a full range of teenage adventure trips in the coming years."

TRIPPING: An important part of the ECHO Program

Under the leadership of Program Director Jon Brenner, Camp Echo is making a major commitment to updating and expanding our tripping program. Jon is the spark that is making Echo's tripping program shine this summer. Jon explains, "Cabin group trips help campers to develop knowledge of campcraft skills as well as to experience the outdoors with greater depth and intensity."

The Echo tripping program is designed to offer a progression of skill levels ranging from the overnight trip in camp for the youngest kids to our Canadian canoe trip for 13 days for the older campers. Other trips going out this summer include tubing adventures; 1, 2, and 3 day canoe trips, horseback overnights, and backpacking in the Porcupine mountains. Jon continues, "We are laying the foundation to offer a full range of teenage adventure trips in the coming years."

One step taken this year includes a major purchase of new camping equipment and gear; from tents down to smallest camping needs. Brenner believes firmly, "Quality equipment is essential in order to offer campers the best possible experience while they are away from camp."

Jon sees this year's program as a tremendous success in getting almost every camper out of camp on a trip.

Through Brenner's efforts, and led by Judy Gendlin, the first group of Camp Echo Adventure trippers went backpacking in the Porcupine Mountains at the end of the summer of 1984.

Brenner returned to Echo in 1985, Fred Brown's last summer as Director. The 1985 Camp Echo brochure listed a number of Adventure Trips. Records show that at least three went out: the Great Lakes Biker, the Kipawa Wilderness (Canadian) Canoe Trip, and – oddly absent from the printed brochure – the first of what we now know as the Boys Trailblazer trips.

TRIPPING - YOUTH AND ADULTS

TRIPPING

As you can see by the trips listed here, there is an Echo trip for everyone in the summer of '85. All start with a few days of training and fun at 'Home Base' on Long Lake and return to Camp Echo in time for a welcome-home banquet and the closing campfire.

PORCUPINE MOUNTAINS BACKPACKER

Grades 6-8, Co-ed
9-day trip

The summer of '84 saw the inaugural voyage of our Porcupine Mountains Backpacker. Located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the Porcupine Mountain Wilderness Area on the Lake Superior coastline is a dramatic, unspoiled natural area. No previous backpacking experience is necessary for campers to enjoy the hike and the inspiring views of this wilderness area.

KIPAWA WILDERNESS CANOE TRIP

Grades 9-12, Co-ed
14-day experience

The Kipawa wilderness canoe trip is a chance for the high school adventurer to travel deep into the Canadian back country. After two days of training and packing at camp and the long drive North, the group will embark from the small French-speaking village of Kipawa.

Campers will rapidly leave civilization behind as they paddle, swim, fish and explore the countless lakes in the Kipawa Provincial Park for nine days.



MICHIGAN CANOEING FOR FAMILIES

Families
Weekend trips - Fall and Spring

In '85 Echo will offer two Family Weekend canoe trips, one in the Spring and one in the Fall. Families will receive a warm welcome at Camp Echo on Friday evening and spend the night in the cabin of their choice. Early Saturday we'll leave camp for a full day's paddle on the scenic Pere Marquette River. Trippers will return to camp Saturday evening to enjoy a hearty banquet and to recount the day's adventures around the campfire.

WENEBEGON RIVER CANOE TRIP

Grades 9-12, Co-ed
14-day trip

The unparalleled thrill of white water awaits you on the Wenebagon River canoe trip. Campers will learn the skills of wilderness living, river running and portaging in two days of fun and learning at Camp Echo, before traveling North to Ontario to the wilderness and the turbulent waters of the Wenebagon. The river's many grades of rapids provide the experience of a lifetime, as each mile provides a new set of challenges.



CANOE CERTIFICATION COURSE

9th Grade and up, Co-ed
Weekend experience

This is a fast-paced and action-packed canoeing weekend for high school and college people desiring certification in canoeing. Expert instruction by Jon Brenner and Judy Gandlin on two Michigan rivers will build canoeing abilities and confidence.

Canoeists will depart from Camp Echo early on Saturday and return to the Echo site Sunday afternoon. Saturday evening participants will stay overnight at a campsite. This certification weekend is perfect for summer camp staff and those enrolled in summer camp leadership training programs.

GREAT LAKES BIKER

Grades 9-12, Co-ed
14-day experience

Biking enthusiasts will be challenged by this Great Lakes experience. Bikers begin their adventure at Camp Echo packing, making final route adjustments and learning bike maintenance. Then, it's off across the state to Lake Superior. Beautiful scenery, sand dunes, refreshing swims in the Great Lakes and visits to many small villages and towns along the way are all part of the two-week journey.

Campers provide own bike and Echo provides the fun.

WOMEN'S CANADIAN CANOE TRIP

Women, 18 and older
10-day trip

A special time for women together in the wilderness is the goal of our Women's Canadian canoe trip. All trip members will share in the planning and preparation of the trip from creating the menu to plotting the specific route. Set in the pristine waters of Kipawa Provincial Park in Quebec, this trip will provide a lasting bond between its participants and the spectacular wilderness.

Brenner continued at Echo under interim Director Rob Grierson (1986-1987) and under Sally Donohue Courtney (1988-1991), developing new trips and leading many of them himself. Here's another sample, from the 1986 Camp Echo brochure:

TRIPPING

**CAMP ECHO
ADVENTURE TRIPS**

Adventure trips in 1986 offer both junior and senior high youth challenging opportunities with canoeing, backpacking and biking. Jon Brenner returns to Echo as Off-Site Program Director responsible for all high adventure tripping.


Canoe Certification Weekend
9th Grade and Up, Coed
May 23-26

This weekend course is basic and intermediate river canoeing is aimed at high schoolers and young adults interested in either leading or participating in extended canoe trips.

Kipawa Wilderness Canoe Trip
Grades 9-12, Coed
Session 2, June 23-July 6

An exciting two-week adventure set in the pristine waters of Quebec's Lake Kipawa Provincial Park. This secluded wilderness offers the Echo adventurer numerous lakes to paddle, swim, fish and explore.

Trailblazers for Boys and Girls
Grades 7 - 8
Girls Only:
Session 3, July 6 - July 19



Boys Only:
Session 4, July 19 - August 1

A program geared for first time adventurers looking for an introductory tripping experience. Outdoor living skills are taught during the two-three day in-camp training period. A 6-7 day backpacking and canoe trip in Michigan's Upper Peninsula will provide the adventure.

Great Lakes Biker
Grades 9 - 12, Coed
Session 5, August 3 - August 16

Enjoy the special feeling of bike touring through the beautiful Great Lakes territory. Biking mileage will be moderate and the trip includes visits to beautiful beaches, and many historic and scenic sites. Campers provide their own bike.

Canadian Rivers Canoe Trip
Grades 9 - 12, Co-ed
Session 4, July 19 - August 1

A safe introduction to the incredible thrill of whitewater canoeing in incomparable Canadian wilderness.

Porkies Backpacking Trip
Grades 9 - 12, Coed
Session 5, August 3 - August 15

Michigan's Upper Peninsula Porcupine Mountains provide rugged and spectacular backpacking experiences for high school youth.

FEES	YMCA Member	Non Member
Canoe Certification		
Weekend	\$ 50	\$ 60
All Other Trips	\$365	\$390

Not all trips enrolled enough participants to go. Records document the Great Lakes Biker and a Wenebagon River (Canadian) Canoe Trip in 1986; a Canadian Canoe Trip, Boys Trailblazers, and a first Girls Trailblazers in 1987; and the Great Lakes Biker and Girls Trailblazers in 1988.

For nearly a decade, Jon Brenner and Judy Gendlin fostered the Camp Echo Adventure Trip program and mentored a group of trip guides, both as trip participants and as co-staff, who took the trip program into the 1990s. Like generations of family members, each era of trip guides handed down, to the next era, the lore and knowledge that continue to make Echo trips special.

Under Camp Director Chris Hart (1992-1996), Echo's trip program continued to flourish, as many new trips were scouted and many new trip guides were brought into the fold. Each and every guide, from Brenner forward, has put their mark on the program and in one way or another contributed to the **Guiding Principles** that now define Camp Echo's Adventure Trip Program.