

Canoe Trip Reflection

Koko Lee

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Even a week later I feel like I am still digesting everything I saw and heard and felt on this trip. It started at Macalester, where we met at a brutal 9:30am with all our gear in tow. Jon Lurie, from the non-profit org Healthy Nations, met us there. In time we loaded up into a huge 15-seater van and an extra blue van and headed out. First we stopped at the Minneapolis American Indian Center (1530 East Franklin Ave) where we met LaMoine LaPoint. LaMoine is of the Sicangu Lakota, and has been with the center for many years. Then Jon and LaMoine's wife drove us to the Upper Sioux Reservation. We stopped at the Upper Sioux Agency State Park between the Yellow Medicine and Minnesota Rivers, where an American Indian activist, Waziyatawin, met us and spoke to us about Dakota, Lakota and Nakota history in the area. Her talk was long and very impassioned, and I was moved by what she said, especially considering the injustices that the indigenous people are still going through.

Just as she was talking about animosity and hostility held toward her and what she has to say, we were interrupted by a car of trucks that pulled up full of bulging Americans who



wanted us to get off their campsite and quick. The tension in the air was incredible, and something I am definitely not used to experiencing unprovoked.

That wrapped up that meeting, and we headed out to the campsite after that. It was a beautiful area, in the area just where river meets plains. On one side was fields and hills of dry yellow brush, and on the other was greenery, trees, and thousands of frogs.



We set up our tents and made dinner. The food was delicious and everyone was quiet at first, savoring the food and the air and the change in scenery.

After dinner LaMoine told us his story. It was a

long story, full of what we would normally call heartbreak. At times I nearly cried, he had been through so many sad situations, from seeing a friend commit suicide, to losing a son to a gang member. But LaMoine did not talk about these things as if he was still sad, though he had definitely gone through a hard time. He seemed, through his own spirituality and his mission (for lack of a better term) in life, to have made it through a stronger and incredibly insightful person. He had a way of talking that was completely engaging and told us these long stories where every detail was important.

After LaMoine's story we lightened the mood with some ghost stories and s'mores, and Jon and LaMoine left to leave the truck at the last campsite. Meanwhile some of us stayed up late that night, talking, about writing and the trip in general and anything else running through our minds. We went to sleep cold and wet but inspired.

The second day, August 30, we returned to the park site from the previous day. Before we left we went to see the ruins of the beginning of the 1862 Dakota-US War, where after being denied rations and food for so long, some of the Dakota people finally decided to strike back. It was an interesting sensation, to stand on grasses and gravel on the ruins of a warehouse and to think of all the people who had died and fought there

more than 100 years ago. We read sign posts that gave a biased view of the history, reminding us that all history is biased, and we can't just read it and take it as fact.

Then we set out on the river. I was in a boat with LaMoine's wife, and we soon took the lead because we were both vigorous in our paddling. About ten miles in though I was really hurting all over. The trip down the river was beautiful though. While paddling its hard to look and really absorb everything you are seeing, but there was a blue heron ahead of us, who ever 100 feet or so would take off again and fly to a point farther down the river, and he did it all day long. We also saw some bald eagles and golden eagles at different times, and several fish jumping. And once we saw a turtle with its head out of the water.

By the end of that day I was so tired, sunburned, and sore I wanted to go to sleep immediately. I sat in kind of a stupor while dinner was prepared and we were joined by another member of the Dakota's, a man who calls himself a Dakota historian. He is a man who claims to have been the first to call for Indian gambling, and whether this is true or not, he was a captivating speaker because he felt so passionately about what he had to say. He talked for a long long time about the injustices and the lands and the history. Originally they were not called "Indians" he told us, but "in Deus" or "gods" because the indigenous peoples had perfected a way of life that had very little impact on the environment and on each other. He referred to white people as "pigmentally challenged" and had a lot of controversial things to say. Although I found some of his words hard to take, I did sympathize with him. As the fire died down and shone on the lenses of his glasses I thought he looked like a big, hunched eagle, constantly tilting its head and staring intently at each of us.

The third day we rose early despite our aching bodies and packed up our tents. I was in enough pain that I was given the opportunity to ride in a three-person boat, which meant I barely had to paddle at all. I was with Harlan and Jon, and we had a really fun time paddling down the river. We saw the bald eagle tree at the end and were good and tanned by the time we reached the end point near to the Lower Sioux Reservation.

There we met two brothers who performed a cleansing ceremony for a sample of water brought back from the dead waters in New Orleans. We emptied a bit into the Minnesota, praying for its health and recovery. Then we drove up to the casino to have

dinner. At the casino we sat in a huge dining room and stuffed ourselves on buffet food, kind of an odd but also logical end to this trip through the history of the Minnesota River.

The drive back that night was long and a little bit frightening, since it was so late and there were few lights on the road. We played music off Sennet's ipod and watched for the Twin Cities to come into view. I couldn't really think about anything there, in the dark, waiting to get home. It was like dead space. When we got back to Macalester I wondered at the well-lit campus and the people running around still in shorts on the grass, making protest signs for the RNC. I felt out of place in my sweaty, smelly clothes, and I headed home.

