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Photo: Sandy Richardson

Like skunk oil, a little cold, rainy weather can go along way, but in small doses it brings pleasant miseries. There's the soothing drumming on the tent fly as the rain pours steadily down, and the need for hot, warming meals.

They're cooked on your little, single burner gas stove, or through some feat of ingenuity, over an open fire. Survival in style. Aren't you the one?

You'll mind-talk to yourself a lot. It's natural.

"That's the first white cedar I've seen. How did it get here?"

"Stupid beaver. Gave up trying to cut that one poplar; then has started on an even bigger one three feet away."

"To shoot or line? That is the question. Whether 'tis nobler to risk a dumping than a hernia..."

"How can that white pine be growing out of that crack in the rock?"

"If I were portage around that log jam, where would I be?"

"Those turkey vultures that keep circling directly overhead...Do they know something I don't?"

"That's not an over-sized squirrel. By golly, it's got to be a marten. Fisher are bigger and mink are smaller. I've seen a marten."

"Wind...How come — no matter what direction I paddle — you always manage to blow toward me?"

"Those bear and wolf droppings..., Looks like those beasts use portages same as humans. Maybe they made them first before the Indians and voyageurs. Makes sense."

"There has to be an end to this portage...doesn't there?"

As noted earlier, your mind will never be more alive than in harmony. Such is your sense of wonder, it couldn't be otherwise.

Surely you'll fish. You must play your role as a predator. Should you land a bragging lunger, you'll regret there's no one to commend your prowess, and most likely you'll return it unharmed. It, too, is a part of you, and anyway, you couldn't have eaten it all, and smaller fish are tastier. Now if you can just catch one of them.

However much food there is in your pack, you convince yourself you need to catch fish to supplement your diet with fresh meat. You're fishing for subsistence — not just recreation, and this gives your fishing another dimension and importance.

Make your solo trip the first one of the season. Use it to shake down and test old and new equipment and try new packaged foods and recipes, in preparation for future trips with friends or family.

Select a loop or circle route unless you can arrange for transportation back to your vehicle. Avoid trips on big water that can easily whitecap waves.

Sheltered waters should be your choice. Not only is your paddling speed considerably decreased when stroking alone, but wind and waves that would only be an inconvenience for two paddlers, can be a tiring challenge for the solo tripper.

A short trip, covered in easy stages over five days, is sufficient for your first solo. One of these should be a non-tripping day to allow for fishing, exploring, fiddling around, or just swaying in the breeze in your net hammock. Then again, it might be the day you have to remain ashore because of high wind.

No need here for a list of equipment and supplies. If you're truly ready to head out alone, you'll know exactly what you'll need for the trip. If you don't, stay home. You're not ready.

With a wife, husband or friend, leave a copy of your route and the phone number of the locale's nearest Ministry of Natural Resources office. Have them call there should you not return within a day or two of your promised arrival.

Necessary insurance. Pray you don't have to submit a claim.

For the cautious, experienced outdoorsman, the dangers of going alone are minimal. Indeed, anywhere you're apt to trip in Ontario is only near-wilderness that is regularly overflowed by bush planes which can be signalled if you run into real trouble.

When you're sure you're ready, do trips alone. There are the rewards of self-knowledge and a renewed sense of wonder to be claimed, and the magnificent gift of harmony to be received.

They can all be yours — when you're ready.