

wannigan

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It's magic. What is a box which opens at the top, contains a kitchen, a first aid room, photographic equipment, dining essentials, bathroom paraphenalia and a larder laden with food for four days? It can be sat on, eaten off, used as a food preparation counter and, best of all, it can be carried over a kilometre, without stopping, by your wife. It is indeed, a wannigan. This article is being written on trip, the best place as the subject is present. The paper I am writing on stays flat and clean in the wannigan; Claire is passing an hour of a hot afternoon carving adventures on its lid. The advantages of it in camp are so overwhelming that one wonders why everyone doesn't have one even if they don't have a canoe.

The problem seems to be that people can't imagine carrying them or, having tried to once, have hated it so much that the mere mention makes them ache. As I said, Claire carries it.

There is only one way to move it any distance and that is with a tump line. The photograph illustrates how this is done and note should be taken that it is high on her back. Tump it too low and it bites you just above the buttocks. Claire claims that she prefers carrying it to the canoe pack as it is more 'alive'. It moves with the back and shoulders and lets you rock-hop without the sapping downward thumps of a heavy pack. (I find that the canoe is likewise easy to carry with its springy centre thwart and, even though it's a tubby 85-90 pounds when a bit damp, is preferable to the pack at 65 pounds.) The wannigan weighs 70 pounds when fully loaded.

Carrying with just a tump on the head requires a well developed set of neck muscles preferably of the shorter variety. This is why the serfs and peasants who carried things were always hanged and the nobility, who didn't, were properly beheaded. Carrying with a tump on the head is the most ancient and prevailing method of portering.

Consider etchings of nineteenth century explorers leading hundreds of porters burdened down with all the bizarre goods which were thought necessary to maintain elegant exploration. They remained comparatively



cheerful because they used their heads to overcome the angles of their unwieldy burdens which defied any other form of manual transportation. The incredible Sherpas of Nepal still carry base equipment up the mountains this way. If you're a peasant with the head of a 19th century native and the heart of Sherpa you will just love a wannigan.

As I said at the beginning, it's a box which opens at the top. A heavy duty cardboard carton, properly tumped up, would constitute a simple wannigan, but it would be a mere container compared to the convenient gem which careful design can produce. There is no such thing as the definitive wannigan but there is the ultimate one for you. We have tripped ours for five years and the only change we have made is to add 4 short aluminum poles for the top to sit on. These not only makes the table a better height but also allows forgotten items to be extracted without having to balance a laden top.

Here's a list of criteria which we followed when designing ours, along with the method of physical design. The creative process requires a good deal of even tempered compromise or the result can be splitting of the partnership, a visit to the divorce court or, worst of all, no wannigan.

LIST OF CRITERIA

- 1) With reference to proposed carrier, what is to be the maximum weight? (Ours is 70 lb.)
- 2) With reference to canoe, what is the maximum size? (Ours fits just in front of the stern thwart and is convenient to Claire who is both steering and in charge.)
- 3) With reference to the rigours of your usual trips, how strong does it have to be? (Claire once flipped ours right over head to the rocks and neither it nor the eggs were damaged. She was O.K. as well.)
- 4) What pieces of equipment would you like to get out of a soft pack and into a box?
- 5) Are you good at making things?
- 6) If answer to 5) is no, do you know anyone who is who owes you favour?
- 7) If the answer to 6) is no, can you afford to make your sketches and get one custom built?
- 8) If the answer to 7) is no, use a cardboard box until will have the opportunity to save my life and I'll make you one from gratitude. Claire might help me, or never forgive you.

