

OUTDOORS

WEEKEND

'A YEAR IN THE WILDERNESS' THE FREEMANS IN THE BWCA



Photos by DAVE AND AMY FREEMAN

As with most evenings, Dave and Amy Freeman settled into camp routine on a sublime night in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.



Dakota pheasants he did see on high

The meaning of Christmas Day has included several late-season excursions.

By TORI J. MCCORMICK
Special to the Star Tribune

My sister was incredulous. "Who hunts on Christmas?" she barked. "What's wrong with you?"

We were on the phone, but I swear I could see her icy gaze through the fiber optics. She was disgusted that I had planned an impromptu late-season pheasant excursion to South Dakota, forgoing a day of family merriment on Jesus' birthday. Her Irish hackles were up and on full display.

A bit terrified, I didn't say a word, observing at least for the moment an old proverb: "Do not speak unless you can improve the silence." I couldn't, so I didn't.

Over the years, I've used the holidays (and the time off that comes with them) to hunt in South Dakota, forgoing family and food for the Lord of the Prairie: the gaudy ringnecked pheasant. It started in the middle 1990s with Thanksgiving, when it suddenly occurred to me that getting four consecutive days off work without having to take vacation was a rare, good thing. Eventually, it became my annual tradition.

One year I conned my cousin Scott into going with me. More accurately, he conned his wife into letting him go. Well before Thanksgiving, I gave him some marital advice: "Start priming the pump now. Mention that you have this great opportunity to hunt in the pheasant capital of the world for the first time in your life, and see how she reacts. Lay it on thick."

Scott's wife, Kaye, is no dummy. She quickly deduced that I was the behind-the-scenes puppet master — a role I've exploited over the years with her husband. The upshot: Scott made the perfect pitch (OK, he begged like a small child), and we had a great time. Thanks, Kaye.

Around 2002, South Dakota lengthened its pheasant season into January. I immediately had visions of flushing ringneck pheasants dancing in my head. But skipping out on Christmas would be a See **PHEASANTS** on OW2 ▶

CLASS IS BACK IN SESSION

If Minnesota adventurers' journey looks idyllic, that is the point: They're determined to show what's at stake.

By SARAH BARKER
Special to the Star Tribune

We've seen adventurers Amy and Dave Freeman dancing on a frozen lake (in Sorels!). We've seen ice-coated branches, the sky getting rosy in the east, wolf tracks in the snow.

Maybe, too, those following online have experienced the small — a pine martin dashing after a snowshoe hare — and the grand — fuchsia sky reflected in black water — as if we've been with them in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA).

That's the whole idea. Instead of escaping to the wilderness, the two are sharing every portage, every Technicolor sunset to show house-dwellers the stunning legacy belonging to Minnesotans and what they see threatened by



Tethered to their gear-laden canoe, Dave and Amy Freeman hauled it across Vera and Ensign lakes recently. Wrote Dave Freeman on Instagram: "We stopped often to chop a hole in the ice to check the thickness of the ice. ... We cautiously moved along the shoreline."

the prospect of copper-nickel mining. Those last words fall with an awkward clunk amid this talk of natural beauty, but irreparable harm is the high-stakes back story to the Freeman's seemingly idyllic adventure. Their "Year In The Wilderness" is not just an adventure; it's adventure advocacy to them. They partnered with the Ely, Minn.-based Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters to maximize the impact of the message: Their mind-boggling pictures and captivating real-time stories draw followers right to their campsite.

The couple has made a career of sharing the wilderness with others, either literally, as guides for canoe and dog sled trips in the BWCA, or virtually through their Wilderness Classroom school partnerships, podcasts and blog See **FREEMANS** on OW4 ▶

FOLLOW THE FREEMANS

Podcast (via WTIP)
bit.ly/bounpod

Twitter
@FreemanExplore

Facebook
Facebook.com/freemanexplore

Instagram
@freemanexplore

Online
freemanexplore.com

MY OUTDOOR LIFE T.C. WORLEY, CINEMATOGRAPHER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Always out, on the move

Working life takes photographer into environments he is happily in sync with.

By MACKENZIE LOBBY HAVEY • Special to the Star Tribune

As far as jobs go, it's hard to beat T.C. Worley's. A Minneapolis-based cinematographer and stills photographer, Worley specializes in capturing people on the move. He shoots everyone from mountain bikers shredding urban single-track in Minneapolis and adventure racers in Patagonia, Chile, to climbers in the Swiss Alps and ultra trail runners on the alpine ridgelines of Big Sky, Mont.

When he's not behind a camera, Worley often leaps into these varied adventures himself.

"I don't ever sit still," he said. "If I'm outside, I'm fist-pumping."

From brand marketing jobs to more hard-hitting projects for outlets such as the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times, Worley, 37, is a visual storyteller at heart.

In a recent interview fresh off a camping trip in northern Minnesota, Worley discussed his career and what he loves about working out of doors. Here are edited excerpts from the interview:

See **WORLEY** on OW3 ▶



T.C. WORLEY

The photographer, center, in a self-portrait with his children. Worley said he is trying to instill his love of the outdoors in the boys, even through simple things outside their Minneapolis home.

FREEMANS IN THE BWCA

Class is back in session

◀ **FREEMANS** from OWI posts. They've paddled the Amazon and Lake Superior, and spent three years crossing the North American continent, to name a few expeditions, all with an environmental education/activism agenda. Earlier this month, the Freemans were reached for an interview on day 80 of their full year embedded. They were in their tent on Ensign Lake. Here are edited excerpts from the interview:

It's crazy warm here in St. Paul. What's it doing there?

Yeah, we've had rain for the last 24 hours, then last night we got a light dusting of snow. There have been a lot of days 15 to 20 degrees above average. We expected to be frozen in by now, and it hasn't happened.

You're not traveling as much?

This extended freeze-up period, when there's too much ice to paddle but it's not reliable enough to travel across, has been really interesting for us. For one thing, we haven't been in the Boundary Waters much at this shoulder time of year because it's not conducive to canoe or dog-sled trips. We'd planned to move our campsite every couple nights, but we've been kind of stuck. There's a rule that you can't camp in any one spot more than 14 days, so we paddled over to Ensign Lake, which is shallower and froze earlier. We were able to walk on the ice, but if we get more rain, I don't know. ...

The warm weather has affected our resupply schedule, too. Our original plan was to meet the volunteers from Sustainable Ely, who bring in our food and supplies, but the ice has been unsafe. Typically in the winter, we'll get resupplied every two weeks, but we knew travel would be sort of tricky now, so we had them pack a lot of food last time, Nov. 8, so we could stretch it to about six weeks. We're hoping they'll be able to get in on Dec. 19 or 20. Depends on the ice. We'll hand over our canoes, paddles and any garbage we've produced, and they'll bring two big toboggans, skis, snowshoes. We're also borrowing three sled dogs for the winter from a musher we know.

Is this weather throwing off your itinerary? Wait, do you have an itinerary?

That's the big difference between our past expeditions and this year in the wilderness. We haven't been trying to get from point A to point B. We don't have this mind-set that we must travel 20 miles today like we have in the past. We have time to slow down and observe small things, like watching a squirrel stash nuts. And with the partially frozen lakes, we've gotten to slow down even more and experience the place where we are. This time for reflection has been amazing for us, really valuable and memorable. That said, once it's frozen, we'll travel more. There are over 300 lakes and we'd like to get to as many as possible.

What's a typical day like?

They're not super structured. We get up about 7, put wood in the stove, and start heating water for our breakfast. We get all our water from lakes and, in the winter, usually boil it just because we want hot food. But you could drink it right out of the lake. If we're moving, we pack up camp and are in the canoes or skiing by 9 or 10 a.m., and stop about an hour before it gets dark. We stay in registered campsites with a fire grate and a latrine. Now that the days are really short, we use our headlamps a lot. If we're staying put, we'll visit lakes close by to document what we see and do water quality testing. Since we haven't been traveling as much lately, we've been doing a lot of writing — blog posts for Save the Boundary Waters, daily posts for Wilderness Classroom, a weekly podcast for Canoe and Kayak maga-



SNAPSHOT

Clockwise from left: Dave Freeman went for a swim Dec. 10 — and had the wood stove stoked in the tent; ice luminaria to mark winter solstice; wolves' tracks frozen in the slush; dancing on Vera Lake's ice at sunset; a warm day and a trek for firewood; a day spent inside was a good day for journal entries.

Photos by DAVE and AMY FREEMAN



zine, for National Geographic Adventure. In the summer, it takes about 45 minutes to set up camp and start cooking dinner. In the winter, you have to gather firewood and chop it, feed the dogs — it takes about an hour and a half. We read, sometimes aloud, and go to sleep at 9 or 10 p.m. That's our daily rhythm.

It might be easy to mistake this as a relaxing camping trip, a getaway, but in fact, the stakes are quite high.

Right, there's a lot at risk. A quarter-million people per year visit the Boundary Waters; it's the most popular wilderness area in the country, and a vital part of the economy in the region. Our overarching goal is to protect the Boundary Waters watershed from sulfide-ore copper mines. By constantly sharing photos and posts, we can inspire people to learn more about the issues and encourage them to take action. We're giving a voice to the wilderness. It's not just trying to stop Twin Metals, but about pausing the process altogether. The EPA has called this type of mining the most-toxic industry. The southern edge of the BWCA is vulnerable, and

prospecting is occurring along this edge, within the BWCA watershed. No-mining zones already exist along the Gunflint, Fernberg and Echo Trails. The best possible outcome would be if the (government created) a similar no-mining zone along the southern edge of the BWCA.

You've been leading trips in the BWCA for the last 15 years; what changes do you notice?

The decline of the moose population. We used to see signs of them on portage trails and actually see moose somewhat regularly. Now a moose sighting is quite rare. In our 80 days, we've seen two. Rusty crayfish, an invasive species, is beating out the native population, and winters are shrinking. Since 1999, the reliable dogsled season is shorter by a week at the beginning and at the end.

What does your home look like?

We have a tipi-shaped tent with a center pole that's 8 feet high and 14 feet in diameter at the ground, and a collapsible wood stove with a chimney pipe. It keeps it warm in here. We cook on top of it and bake

underneath it. Half the tent has our sleeping bags, pads and clothing, and the other half has food, pots and pans, and electronics. When bears are active, we're really careful to hang our food and cook outside, but by the end of October they're hibernating. Kind of a cool luxury item for us are these folding chairs — well worth the extra few pounds. We use solar panels on sunny days to charge our battery packs, and the battery packs for our phones, camera, iPad, Kindle, a keyboard. We have a laptop computer, but we use the keyboard to type on our phones sometimes because it uses less power. We're very conscious of energy use — we usually write our first draft with pen and paper, then type it quick on the keyboard or computer.

What about bathing, bathroom, laundry?

There's a trail from each campsite to a latrine back in the woods. It's not enclosed — OK, it's a toilet seat in the woods. Doing laundry is kind of new for us. On previous trips, every three to six weeks we'd come to a town and do laundry. We've been using this thing called a Scrubba. It's a

bag with a washboard inside it. It's small, you can't wash much at a time. You put in the clothes, some biodegradable soap and maybe two liters of water, scrub it through the bag, go back into the woods and dump it out. Then fill it again to rinse. You wring out the clothes, hang them up outside for about two days, then bring them into the warm tent to finish drying. As far as bathing goes, in the summer, we swim. In winter, we use these things called Wilderness Wipes — they're like Wet Wipes, but they smell better. An occasional sponge bath in the tent, but we actually don't bathe that much.

What about a paycheck?

Our expenses are fairly low; we're not buying a lot of stuff. We get a stipend from Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, and we're writing for a range of publications.

Got any plans for the holidays?

Before Thanksgiving, we were really looking forward to things we were going to make. Now we're thinking about some special treats for Christmas. I asked the resupply team to bring the ingredients and

the molds for those Norwegian sandbakkels [cookies]. I thought about making ice luminarias — you fill balloons with water and freeze them. The folks at Sustainable Ely who coordinate our resupplies had a potluck on Dec. 9. They froze or dehydrated some of that food for us, so that will be a special treat.

(Volunteers brought the Freemans fresh supplies Dec. 16. They wrote: "My taste buds nearly exploded when I ate my first apple in about 6 weeks. Other friends sent in homemade fudge, venison chili, fish cakes, and a whole mess of treats. Christmas is still over a week away, but today really feels like Christmas thanks to all of the wonderful gifts and much needed food supplies.")

What are you reading?

(They laugh.) We're getting in the mood for winter by reading Will Steger's book about crossing Antarctica in 100-below windchills! Also, "The Sixth Extinction," about how we're in the middle of a man-made mass extinction. Not too much escapism!

Sarah Barker is a freelance writer from St. Paul.

"We have time to slow down and observe small things."

Dave and Amy Freeman