



# VOYAGEUR TRAIL NEWS

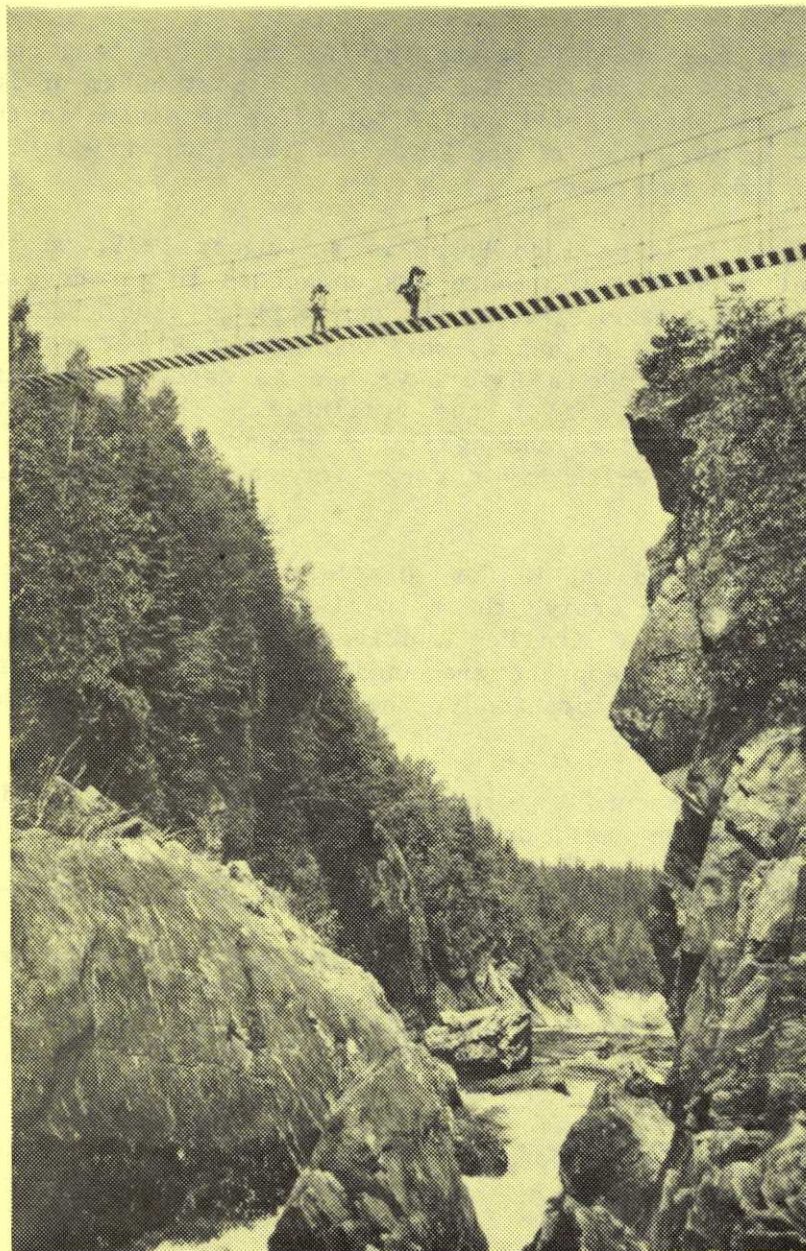
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HIKERS OVER THE WHITE RIVER IN PUKASKWA NATIONAL PARK

## BACKPACKING THE COASTAL TRAIL IN PUKASKWA NATIONAL PARK \*

With an area of 1880 square km and a shoreline 95 km long, Pukaskwa is the largest remaining wilderness along the shores of the Great Lakes. Parks Canada goes on with its description: "'On the north shore of Lake Superior...a wild rocky rugged place whose grandeur and mystery drew men to commune with the spirits of the sea. A remote and unyielding wilderness where man is and forever will be only a visitor'. This is...an ancient land wrinkled and worn through endless eons. Its terrain is rough and riddled with tiny lakes in rock-rimmed basins and clothed in shallow soils. The Superior coastline is the most notable feature of Pukaskwa, with its protected bays, massive exposed headlands, islands and islets, shoals, sand beaches, boulder beaches and coves...The land makes travel difficult...It is hiking country. Foot travel has been the traditional means of getting about and hiking will be a major activity in Pukaskwa National Park."

In keeping with that goal, a coastal hiking trail has been constructed in the park. Presently, it winds on and off the coast for almost 60 km of its 95 km length. The last and most distant segment will not be built for some time in the future. When completed, it will be on the route of the Voyageur Trail, which will follow the entire Canadian shoreline of Lake Superior.

On an earlier expedition into Pukaskwa in August 1979, we saw only a small part of the park, but on that trip, there was no access to nor development at Hattie cove like there is now. Another group from our outings club (Tad Smith, Henry and Chuck Welch, and leaders Sue Welsh and I) were completely on our own. Even though our trip went only as far as the White River, we had to canoe ourselves and our packs across the Pic River just to get to the trailhead. The thrill of discovery was intense as we explored the beaches and headlands around Hattie Cove, which was still wild, and later crossed the White River gorge for the first time on the suspension bridge.

Today, the area around Hattie Cove has been tamed. A bridge across the Pic River and a road allow you to arrive there in minutes, whereas only a few years ago, it took hours by canoe and foot trail. A drive in campground with modern restrooms replaces our primitive beach campsite and an interpretive centre stands on the spot where we had begun our first exploration of the cove. This time, we used Hattie Cove merely as our jumping off point.

Our group on this second and much more ambitious trip consisted of the two Pukaskwa "veterans" Tad Smith and I and three eager first timers, Paul Jackson, Mike Motcheck, and Shawn Morehouse. These kids, all between 13 and 16 years of age, were all members of the Great Lakes Camp and Trail Association, an outing club for kids.

We hired a fishing boat to take us from Hattie Cove all the way down the coast to the end of the trail at the North Swallow River. This lake trip took about 3 1/2 hours. Once there, our plan was to backpack the entire trail, a distance of almost 60 km, from trail's end in the south back to the beginning at Hattie Cove. Our route and campsites are shown on the map. Beginning at the North Swallow River, we proceeded in a northerly direction on a trip that took five days. It's not easy to describe a trip like this with words alone. One photo has been included; the cover photo showing Tad Smith and Chuck Welch backpacking across the suspension bridge over the White River gorge on our 1979 trip.

It was mostly cloudy when we arrived at the trailhead near the North Swallow River. As we watched the boat disappear up the lake, our feelings of being alone in this vast wilderness had just begun. We had a little difficulty finding the trail at

\* MAP IN NEXT ISSUE

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first. Then came the mosquitoes, which were a nuisance here, but really didn't bother us anywhere else on the trail. Our perception of how isolated and far away we were from the rest of mankind was intensified by rain, which began lightly enough not to impede us, but soon turned into a drenching thunderstorm. The expressions on the kid's faces didn't need to be put into words as we huddled beneath the tent fly and got wet anyway. The situation was both comical and pathetic.

No sooner had we gotten underway again when we lost the trail at the edge of a marsh. It took some looking, but we picked it up after more than a little exasperation. We finally made our way to the campsite at Hideaway Lake after walking or searching for the trail for most of the afternoon. Half a day's journey yielded a meager 4 km of hard won distance. Was the rest of the trail to be like this? We set up camp and built a fire to dry out by. The next morning, the clouds parted and dawn brought the sun, and the Hideaway Lake area was revealed in all its glory.

As we ascended, beautiful scenic vistas widened out before us until we could overlook the coast in both directions with Hideaway Lake to the south and Simons Harbour far to the north. The trail became more distinct at Simons Harbour and was easily followed for most of the remaining distance back to Hatti e cove. The sun would stay with us for the next two days. Luckily as it turned out, much of the trail's spectacular scenery occurred at this time. Simons Harbour has a rugged rocky shoreline which proved so interesting at its northern end that we stopped there for a lunch break. Paul, Mike, and Shawn were lured out through the cold water by a rock islet where they had their picnic.

As we made our way up the coast, we soon came upon a cozy little harbour without a name at the outlet of the White Spruce River. It would be remembered as one of the nicest places we visited. The bay was sandy and shallow and the water was warm. We spent a couple of hours there just relaxing. We waded out to a small island in the bay through crystal clear water and were treated to yet another fine view out toward the mouth of the harbour.

As we approached the White Gravel River, it became obvious where the river got its name. Most of the shoreline consists of bright white pebbles and cobbles, a real experience to walk on with a heavy pack as the rounded rocks roll underfoot. We made camp close to the mouth of the river at a place where the rocks gave way to sand. We found the water so clear when we went swimming that we could see a long way underwater in either direction as we floated in the river.

This day was backpacking at its best. It included good weather, great views, interesting places to explore, pleasant places to relax, varied terrain, a comfortable distance to travel (10 km), a nice campsite, a great lake, and fine people to enjoy it all with.

The next day we crossed mountainous country all morning. The trail stayed inland the whole way and water was not to be had anywhere except from our canteens so we had to ration our supplies. This section gave us a taste of Pukaskwa's rugged uplands and a test of us rugged backpackers. There was quite a bit of going up and down, and it was work. Even though we were high up in the hills, there were only a few views from mountain balds.

Finally, about midday, we came down to the shore at Fisherman's cove. The cool refreshing waters of Lake Superior were a welcome relief. The cove was another beautiful spot which we would later claim as one of our favourites. Again, for a couple of hours, we rested, ate our lunch, swam, and enjoyed the scenery. Fisherman's Cove and the harbour at White Spruce River impressed us as being naturally attractive

for canoe camping. Someday, when we return to travel Pukaskwa's coast by water rather than by land, we'll camp at both places.

Larry Lemanski  
(to be continued next issue)

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTE

Nineteen Eighty Four has brought anything but a Holocaust to the foundation of our association. Total membership has risen slightly over the past year. Notably, membership in the Michipicoten Club has increased considerably. Congratulations and keep up the good work! It is hoped that this trend will continue in 1985. You can help by being an active member and/or by spreading the good word around. Bring a friend to a hike.

Copies of the 1984 membership list are now available. You will receive a copy when you renew for 1985. I have a few copies of our constitution. Should you wish one, just note it on the membership renewal form.

Steve Dominy

NEEDED

POSITIONS

The Saulteaux club is currently trying to fill three volunteer positions that have come open as the result of active members leaving the area. These are;

- 1) Publicity Coordinator-Involves notifying media of upcoming events.
- 2) Social Coordinator-Organizing social events such as the annual dinner meeting and one or two other post-hike or post-work party get-togethers.
- 3) Telephone Committee Coordinator-When needed, this committee will notify members of major club events.

These positions individually do not require much work, and usually, there are other people willing to help out, but they help take the load off of the president and they are essential to a smoothly running club. It should be noted that one person previously held two positions.

Hiking Pukaskwa in 1984

Another backpacking trip has reached a successful conclusion. This effort was made feasible by joining forces with the Bruce Trail Club. On Aug. 15, Tom Allinson and I accompanied 6 Bruce Trailers on a tug boat ride-of-your-life down the Superior coast of Pukaskwa National Park. A third VTA member, Dorothy Buskard (who just happened to be camping in the park) came along for the boat ride. Tom and I were both grateful to be let off at Simon's Harbour after 3 full hours on the choppy waters (no, being from the east coast does not mean you are born with sea legs). The diligent southerners continued on to the North Swallow River, never to be seen again by us (as of 5 days later).

What were we doing 52 km from the trailhead? We were spending our hard earned week's holiday exploring the rugged shoreline and interior of Canada's newest national park. The Coastal Hiking Trail has been completed as far as the North Swallow, a distance of some 58 km. Tom and I were to spend the next five days hiking the 52 km back from Simon's Harbour.

We had lunch and I managed to drag Tom away from the bountiful blueberries in time for us to reach the White Spruce River, a few km north. Our campsite was a lovely sand beach and cushiony forest floor. Hiking in this area was strenuous, but the uphill climbs were always rewarded by the awe-inspiring view and the abundant blueberries.

About lunchtime the following day we reached the White Gravel River and were greeted by sounds of civilization. Two fellows had canoed down the coast with all the accouterments of luxury living, including a ghetto blaster and plenty of beer. Tom and I were not at all prepared for this scene with another 45 km of hiking ahead of us, so we quickly pushed on after short acknowledgements. We had to ford the river here as the bridge had been washed out. We turned only a pale blue from the exercise. About 3:30 p.m. we reached a lovely beach nestled between two high cliffs at Fisherman's Cove. Tom suggested camping there, but I thought that the cove over the next hill might offer better shelter. I don't think Tom has forgiven me yet for that night spent being battered by the wind on a concave bed of lichens.

Our third day of hiking took us through Oiseau Bay, where we traversed two km of wide sand beach. Here we had our second encounter with other humans, chatting briefly with a kayaker and a hiker. That evening we reached Fish Harbour under threat of rain (which didn't amount to more than a sprinkle). We knew we were nearing civilization now, as we shared our campsite with four canoeists. Actually, we welcomed the opportunity to exchange wilderness tales. One fellow and his son took me around to see the cave in Cave Harbour, which is visible only from the water.

On the fourth day, Tom and I suffered through another few km of Superior coastline, braved the suspension bridge over the Willow River, and camped at a secluded, bouldery beach. After dinner, I tested my rock climbing abilities along the shore while Tom finished reading the latest edition of Backpacker. I joined him for tea and to watch the sun drown in the Lake.

We journeyed the remaining 14 km on the 5th day. This section of trail took us through a magnificent fault valley before crossing the White River suspension bridge. Tom and I had both hiked this section before, and I certainly had no qualms about seeing it again. I did discern some muffled groans from Tom as we struggled up another hill. Tom informed me that he had previously dubbed this one 'Cardiac Arrest', and that the next one was named 'Heartbreak Ridge'. Fortunately, neither of us suffered heart problems, and Tom even consented that the hills didn't seem as steep today as they did when he first encountered them. I was about to explain to him the process of erosion, when...suddenly there appeared in the distance the Visitor's Centre, a welcome site for two weary, but jovial hikers. There, we enjoyed showers before heading for the Voyageur Restaurant (where else would two Voyageur Trailers eat?) for apple pie and ice cream and other non-dehydrated delectables.

As Tom and I were dozing off on our sand covered tent pad that night, I heard Tom shout 'Steve, give me a rock - the sand here is too flat!' I guess I don't have to tell you that Tom is a seasoned veteran to the wilds of Pukaskwa and I have been sold on them too.

Steve Dominy

#### Bushwhacking in Lake Superior Park

If you study a topographical map of the area west of Rabbit Blanket Lake Campground in Lake Superior Provincial Park, you will notice that the coastline from Bushy

Bay south to Cape Challon protrudes into the Lake in a great semi-circle. If you take a closer look at the map, you will notice that inland, there is a fault valley running north-south from Bushy Bay to the Red Rock River. In May of 1984, four of us thought that it might be nice to bushwack from the Peat Mountain trailhead at Foam Lake to the trailhead at Indian Harbour and then to Highway 17 by trail and road. The game plan was to head toward Bushy Bay and then to cut south along the fault valley until we picked up the Red Rock River. We would then follow the river to Lake Superior and make our way south along the shore to Indian Harbour.

On day one, we met the morning plane from Toronto and picked up the fourth member of our group. We then drove to Rabbit Blanket Lake, stopping for lunch at Agawa and dropping a car at the Gargantua Road. At Rabbit Blanket, we loaded up and headed out along the Peat Mountain Trail. This trail terminates at Foam Lake, our last trail for four days. We bushwacked to the end of Foam Lake and made camp beside a stream that flows out of the lake. We spent a peaceful night and were entertained, from time to time, by the call of an owl.

Day two saw us off and 'running' at about 9:00 a.m. The day was cool and we actually had a few snow flurries. After about an hour of hiking, we got a glimpse of Lake Superior in the distance. It was not our intent however to push on to the lake at this point, in fact, it was several days later before we reached the shore.

Our direction of travel was to be mainly south and west, but we digressed a little from time to time in order to keep to some old logging roads. These "roads" were overgrown and in poor shape but travelling them was easier than hacking through the jungle. After an hour or two, we were forced to leave them in order to maintain our desired direction. We picked up another stream in the afternoon and followed it until it tumbled over a cliff that I estimate was 16 to 20 meters high. As it was now about six p.m., we decided to make camp a few hundred feet upstream from the cliff edge.

Day three saw us on the trail about 9:30 a.m. On the first two days, we had hit a couple of lakes dead centre which meant an arduous detour around them. Day three was no exception when we hit Gravel Lake at the top end and had to make our way around it. We finally made the Red Rock River about mid afternoon and started downstream. The river along this section widens and there are many deep dark pools and small waterfalls. I began to regret not having fishing equipment but I must admit that the hike was demanding enough so that one had enough to do just "surviving". One didn't need a hobby. Further downstream, the river enter a small lake from the west and empties out of it to the south.

We made camp just after six p.m. It's surprising how comfortable one can be sleeping in the "jungle". You don't really need a campground. I carry a folding saw. It only weighs a pound and is useful when one must clear out the odd sapling. Tents were set up and supper was started.

We usually bring our own breakfasts and lunches and go together on supper. The big meal of the day usually consists of soup (Knorr or Maggi), a package of freeze dried food for every two people (sweet and sour is yummy), and instant pudding. Soup seems to hit the spot even in hot weather. It's usually salty and one needs this and the extra fluid.

By day four, we were heading for Lake Superior. It was now Wednesday and after being buried since Sunday in "jungle", we were anxious to get to the big water. If anyone were to have hurt themselves while we were inland, it would have been really serious. Somehow, I suppose, someone would have to take them to the shore of a lake where they could be picked up by plane.