



VOYAGEUR TRAIL NEWS

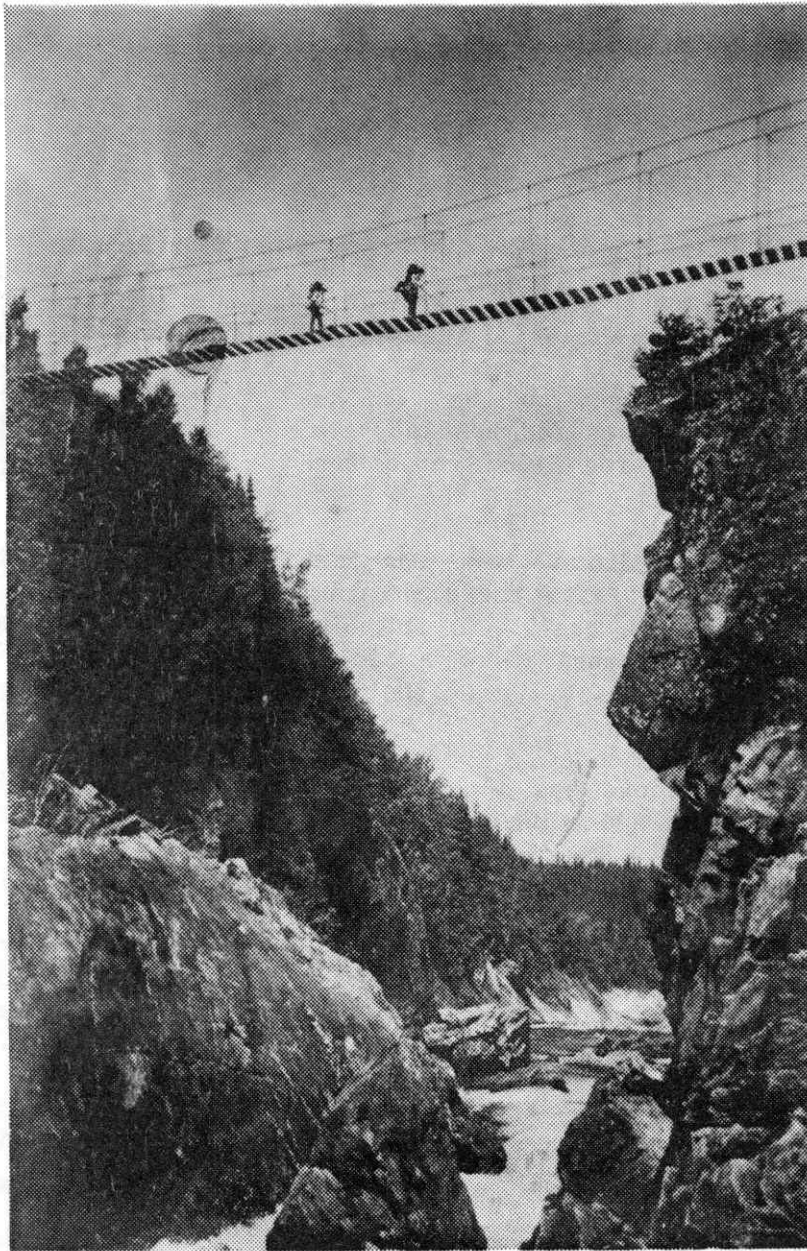
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HIKERS OVER THE WHITE RIVER IN PUKASKWA NATIONAL PARK

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, Eric 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

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