



# VOYAGEUR TRAIL NEWS

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## INSIDE

- Ernie Pringle Tribute... 2
- Santorini..... 3
- Web Site Redesign..... 4
- Outing Schedules.....5/6
- Is It Possible?..... 7
- New Trails..... 8
- And much, much more!

## WELCOME! WELCOME!

Our welcome mat is out to the brand new Nipigon/Thunder Bay Voyageur Trail Club! Watch for further good news from the western end of Lake Superior. In the meantime, Connie Nelson has graciously volunteered to be contact person for this welcome addition to our family. Connie can be reached at 807-343-8447 or e-mail to: [connie.nelson@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:connie.nelson@lakeheadu.ca)



## THE VOYAGEUR TRAIL CHALLENGE by Cheryl Landmark

It wasn't quite the Borneo Eco-Challenge, but it came close!

The premise was enticing. The reality was a little more challenging than expected.

Eight intrepid hikers decided to backpack from Elliot Lake, Ontario to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario on the Voyageur Trail, a distance of approximately 208 kilometres, and to perform GPS readings of the trail at the same time. The idea was to complete the trip in ten days, with an overnight stop in Iron Bridge after four or five days for the re-provisioning of supplies for the second leg of the journey.

On May 7, 2001, two hikers from Sault Ste. Marie (along with their faithful pooch, Misty), four hikers from Elliot Lake, and two hikers from Nova Scotia began the trek at the Highway 108 access of the Coureurs de Bois section of the Voyageur Trail. The day started out on a promising note with bright sunshine and warm temperatures and no flies. The schedule called for us to backpack to McGivern Lake, a distance of approximately fifteen kilometres, and camp there for the night. However, by mid-afternoon, the skies had clouded up and rain began to fall. The trail was fairly rugged and the moss and rocks became slippery and challenging to negotiate. By mutual consent, the group decided to camp beside Turtle Lake, approximately six kilometres from McGivern Lake. Fortunately, the rain stopped while we were setting up our tents and the evening was fairly pleasant (aside from tired muscles and a few blisters!).

The next day again started out relatively nicely, but the black flies and mosquitoes began to make their appearance known in unpleasant ways. The trail was rugged, with the hikers having to negotiate narrow, wet beaver dams and steep climbs up and down hills. The scenic lookouts from the top of the hills were fantastic, but the trip up and down the steep elevations was not quite as enjoyable with backpacks! Some of the group began to experience equipment problems and two others, who were recovering from bad colds and asthma, began to find the challenging hike taking a toll on them. Our original plan had been to camp that evening at Intersect Lake, but, again, we stopped several kilometres short of our goal on the banks of a small creek. By now, the flies had become a downright nuisance. A short dousing of rain occurred just after we set up the tents, and then the skies cleared up and we were able to enjoy a pleasant evening around the campfire. After some discussion, it was decided that, due to the equipment problems, the health problems and the increasing annoyance of the black flies and mosquitoes that we were experiencing, we would continue on to Blind River the next day and end our backpacking trip there, instead of pushing on to Sault Ste. Marie as originally planned for the next week. The couple from Nova Scotia expressed an interest to continue on as far as Iron Bridge and we bid them good luck early next morning.

The third day was quite warm and sunny and the trail began to



(Continued on page 2)

The Voyageur Trail Association sadly announces that we lost another long time member recently, Ernie Pringle. Ernie was instrumental in building trail in and around the Sault Ste. Marie area. Our condolences go out to Ernie's family and friends.

### TRAVELS WITH ERNIE

by Dieter Ropke

Where would the VTA be today without the input of that intrepid duo, Tom Allinson and Ernie Pringle? They worked together on the trail until Ernie's knees gave out. Since Ernie was somewhat vociferous at night, Tom would park his tent as far away as possible and urge us to do the same. Meanwhile, Ernie claimed that Tom was the loud one. I think they both were.

We hiked Isle Royale together, end to end. Ernie saved the day with his Coleman Peak I, which had just come out. Water filters were in their infancy then. Due to the interaction of moose and wolf, there was a nasty organism in the water, forcing us to boil all water. As soon as we reached our campsite - it was hot that May - Ernie would fire up his stove and boil water, batch after batch since we were dehydrated. By the time my Optimus 8R had decided to light after all, Ernie had already boiled two batches. We dayhiked the Porcupine Mountains together and had a good time.

Ernie hailed from New Brunswick and, while he made a living in Sault Ste. Marie, his heart was back home, and his stories were always interesting, since they covered the early lumbering days, long forgotten by most, and considered a myth by the very young.

Ernie became a bit of a convert and preached Shaklee products. His earnest postulations were something to behold. But I loved his chuckle most, it was spontaneous and with much joy.

Ernie was a faithful friend and always good company. I will miss his earthy pioneer spirit.



### Mother's Day Hike...



Photo courtesy Dieter Ropke

Isn't that what Mother's Day is all about? Helping mom do a standing long jump over a stream!



### THE VOYAGEUR TRAIL CHALLENGE

(Continued from page 1)

flatten out a little as we trudged towards Blind River, although there were still a few hills to negotiate. By mid-afternoon, we reached Birch Lodge on Highway 555, fifteen kilometres from Blind River. This was the closest access point to Blind River for the Voyageur Trail. Arrangements were made for us to be picked up and returned to Elliot Lake. Meanwhile, the proprietors of Birch Lodge were very friendly and allowed us to enjoy their hospitality and the beautiful scenery of their lodge on Granary Lake.

Two days later, the backpackers from Nova Scotia completed their trip in Iron Bridge and were returned to civilization.

Four of the eight backpackers decided to hike some of the beautiful trails in Lake Superior Provincial Park two days later, after we had rested up a little from the Elliot Lake trip. The Coastal Trail from Sand River to the Agawa Pictographs (approximately eleven kilometres) was hiked on a gorgeous sunny day with a bit of an offshore breeze that kept the pesky flies and mosquitoes at bay. The young couple from Nova Scotia remained in Lake Superior Park for the next two days and backpacked the scenic, but challenging, Towab trail.

All in all, the backpacking adventure on the Voyageur Trail did not turn out quite the way it was originally planned, but valuable lessons were learned nevertheless and, hopefully, future outings of this nature will be more successful.



### NIPIGON-THUNDER BAY VOYAGEUR TRAIL CLUB

by Connie Nelson

The brand new Nipigon-Thunder Bay Voyageur Trail ClubHikers (*the name is not final yet...*) have been busy. They were joined by the Thunder Bay Hiking Association members for ahike at both Cavers and Dog's Head. Among the hikers at Cavers was a visiting professor from south China. His longer term research is to study the use of microrhizae for its potential as an alternative to the use of herbicides in replanting forest areas.

In July, they joined the Casques Isles Club for a hike up Mt. Gwynn as part of the Schreiber Annual Heritage days. A few members of the Nipigon Club took Thunder Bay photography club representatives on a hike on upper Kama to get acquainted with the trails for future photography. They were especially interested in the old growth cedar forest and the magnificent vistas of Lake Superior. Now that's networking!

You're invited to catch up to this active group. Join us on our fall hikes (*see page 6*). I look forward to some wonderful hikes, good company, great photo opportunities, good laughs and some challenging exercise.



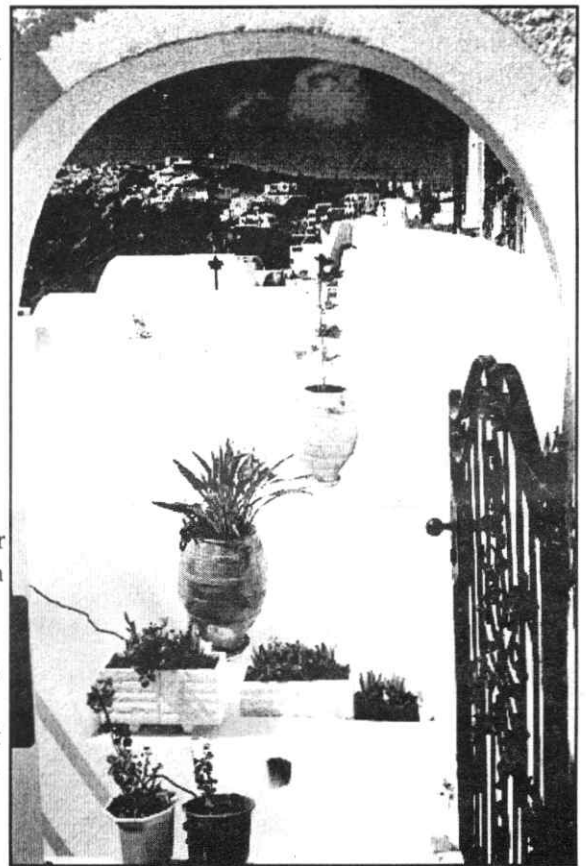
## BLOWN AWAY BY SANTORINI *by Dieter Ropke*

This gem of Greek Islands (*often shown by its ancient name Thira*) shares its history with that of Crete in that the massive volcanic action of circa 1650 BC originating near Santorini created tidal waves and destruction, which are thought to have led to the demise of the Minoan civilization at Knossos. We arrived by sea on a turbulent day. The 400 m cliffs were topped by two spectacular villages clinging to the top like an icecap and suggesting a swallow's nest, white droppings on the edge. The view from the sea was awesome (*you'd miss it if you arrived by air*). The waves were bashing the base of the cliffs. Before the island was really discovered by tourists, donkeys would take people up to the top via cobbled switchbacks.

When we arrived there, the ferry captain announced that 'we will attempt a landing'. Since the sea (*crater*) is some 400 m deep here, you cannot anchor. At a controlled engine thrust, we backed into the quay, the large steel landing platform was lowered and, as huge waves battered the pier, we rushed off the ferry. A bus took us up to the village of Fira, scaling the cliffs by way of serpentine switchbacks. The two villages perched on the edge of the precipitous face are Fira and Oia (*silent O*). Most of the habitations and shops pasted to the cliffs are whitewashed and many have domed roofs to facilitate runoff and minimize heat absorption. The architecture is a feast to the eye with colour accents, weathered and new window frames and doors, exquisite shops full of fine jewellery and art objects, the bulk of which is of excellent quality and uniquely Greek. In particular, we saw some very attractive paintings and very artistic pottery. In fact with the architecture, angles, colours, shops, people, one does not know where to look, it is an absolute visual delight unlike anything I have ever experienced.

One afternoon, we hiked the crest between Fira and Oia. The vistas were mind-blowing. Much of the crest was overlain by huge deposits of sand-coloured ash with rounded black stones ranging from a few cm to some 30 cm in size. These were embedded in this finer material. Due to temperature differences on exposed cuts, the black stones would loosen over time and fall out, leaving interesting cavities. We saw this pattern incorporated in the architecture of villages on all four islands we visited with equally pleasing effect. In other places, there were successive thin layers, which weathered and oxidized into a range of spectacular colours from sulphur, ocher and gold to rust red and magenta. What a magnificent exhibit of nature's fury, beautiful to look at and yet testimony of an enormous catastrophe. Temperatures that day were about 21 degrees and yet it was impossible to dress properly. There were clefts and gullies where the wind whistled up from the sea, picking up momentum as it went up the crest, where we bore the brunt of gale force winds, and it seemed to me that, in addition to being blown away by Santorini, we came close to being blown off Santorini. Mary Poppins

would have been fine with an umbrella the size of a loony. At the westerly end of Oia, we had some Ouzo served with a glass of cold water and a dish of peanuts. We wanted to wait for the sunset but it was just too windy to be comfortable, and we found a more sheltered outside restaurant where we had a great dinner, finishing off with yogurt and local honey. The 8 km hike on the crest of that spectacular geology was the highlight of our 15 days hiking on four Greek Islands.



If you go: go light – carry-on bag and daypack – off season only April-May, Sept.-Oct., fly to Athens, take the airport bus into town, and here you find lots of accommodations with a short walk to the old city – Plaka – and the Akropolis. The subway runs all the way to Peiraias for the ferries to the islands. The ferries are seaworthy, modern and clean and a bargain at circa \$20 for the 5 to 7 hour passage to Santorini. At twice the cost, the Flying Dolphins take you there in one half the time. If you go off season, you need not book ahead and you'll have much more fun that way.



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