



# VOYAGEUR TRAIL NEWS



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## CONQUERING MOUNT GWYNNE by Gayle Phillips

It started simply enough, with a glimpse of a few photos in a trail audit of the Casque Isles section of the Voyageur Hiking Trail, but I was hooked. Mount Gwynne became my personal goal!

When you work five days a week sitting on your duff pushing around a computer mouse, anything named "Mount" is an achievement, believe me!

In the Voyageur Trail Association outing schedule, a week was set aside in August to visit the Terrace Bay/Schreiber/Rosspport area to hike the entire Casque Isles section (including...Mount Gwynne).

I love the drive along the north shore of Lake Superior. From my home in Sault Ste. Marie to Wawa you follow the coastline of Lake Superior closely with many spectacular vistas over the lake. I never tire of those views. At Wawa, you turn inland and skirt around Pukaskwa National Park. Being a "Lake Superior snob", I never really enjoyed this section of driving, but a 20+ kilometre forest fire just west of White River a few years ago has made this section a valuable lesson in how Mother Nature reforests burns. It is a testament to nature as she strives to clean up a man-made mess.



*Our first day looking out over Rosspport's islands (Casque Isles)*

Seven of us, anxious to begin our week of hiking, spent that Sunday hiking the Coastal Trail in Pukaskwa to the White River suspension bridge. Crossing that jiggling bridge fifty feet over the crashing white water below is enough to make you thankful to place your feet on solid ground again. A taste of God's country to begin our week.

Sunday evening, we moved our campsites to Rainbow Falls Provincial Park on Whitesand Lake near Schreiber. Upon arrival, we found Duncan MacKay, Voyageur Trail Association Vice-President of the Western Section already registered. Duncan graciously offered to lead us on the five day hikes that it would take to cover the 52.4-kilometre Casque Isles Trail, and we were lucky to have him!

The weather couldn't have been better for our week—sunny and warm.



*The inevitable "lunch shot" on a beautiful beach.*

We began our week of day hikes with the section from Rosspport to Rainbow Falls Park. I noticed a few differences from our trails in the Sault Ste. Marie area. On the Casque Isles section, they have blue back-ground/white hiker blazes, similar to the parks. For access points

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## CONQUERING MT. GWYNNE

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or lookout trails, blazes have a white background with a blue hiker. Blazes were scarce compared to Sault trails, but somehow the paths stay on the ground here and are easy to follow. I wondered if the absence of maple saplings had anything to do with this, or if it was the type of shallow, sandy soil.

We came across the first of many raised cobble beaches on that day. These beaches were the shoreline of Lake Superior as the last ice age receded. It is amazing how far away from today's shoreline they are.

Lookouts over the islands of Rosspoint were wonderful and full of plump, juicy blueberries (until we got at them)!

The second day was spent doing the section from Schreiber to Rainbow Falls Park. Along the route, we found (to our surprise) that a backpacker from Thunder Bay had come to join us, but no one from our group had decided to backpack, we were doing strictly day hikes. I found it interesting to follow this fellow's progress by reading the notes he left in the sign-in boxes located along the trail.

Wednesday was *Mount Gwynne!* Four more hikers had joined our group by this time and everyone was really excited about doing this section in particular. We started at



Ian Graham perched atop Mt. Gwynne overlooking Schreiber way down below!

Worthington Bay, the site of an old gold mine and some ancient pictographs. Then the climb began! It was a struggle for me but when you reach the top, you forget your aching muscles. The 360 degree lookout is intoxicating. It seems as if the entire world is at your feet! All the islands along the shoreline, from Thunder Bay to Pukaskwa, are laid out for you. Fishing boats look like ants pushing their way through the lake. We marvelled in the views, posed



for pictures, picked blueberries, had lunch, and visited the plaque honouring Tom McGrath (who was instrumental in building the



The Conquerers at the top of Mount Gwynne!

trail in this area) before making the inevitable descent.

Thursday was the "Death Valley" section. After conquering Mount Gwynne, I was cocky enough to think that Death Valley would be a piece of cake! It was a tough trail. There were a few steep climbs. But when you broke through the trees on to a peaceful, beautiful sand beach like Les Ecrits, you thought you were in heaven! Breathtaking lookouts and white, sandy beaches were the order of the day...more than worth the tired muscles. I was pleased to read in the registration book that our backpacker enjoyed it too!

On the last day we were joined by two more hikers from the Nipigon area. We did the section between Hydro Bay and Aquasabon Gorge. As an added bonus, Duncan showed us where he would like to extend the trail in the near future to include three more beautiful beaches near the town of Terrace Bay.

The whole week was an absolute joy with superb guiding by Duncan (including many, many stories of the area), wonderful companionship and conversation with friends from Ottawa, Nipigon, Spragge, Gravenhurst, Terrace Bay, Rosspoint and Sault Ste. Marie, fantastic scenery, excellent weather, and memories to last a lifetime, or at least until my holidays next year! Now that I have climbed Mt. Gwynne, maybe I should look into the Swiss Alps... :-)



Happy Casque  
Isles Section  
end-to-enders:  
(l to r):  
Ila Aho,  
Duncan  
McKay and  
Marge  
Kelland.  
Congrats to  
all!

