

## Quetico Provincial Park French Lake Access



Participants: Janice and Bill

Total Distance: 164 Km (202 Km with searching for sites, fishing and sight seeing) 17,178m in 32 portages.

Bill: Normally I have a comment at the end but in this case I would like to mention some things at the start. Our trip plan was different than what we actually did. We discussed it with the park ranger before we left and we altered our intended route. Some days were good for canoeing and others weren't, so if you are using this trip for a planning reference, be sure to know that Quetico controls you and that it is not the other way around. Be flexible and give yourself lots of time to enjoy the nature. We spent a lot more time looking for camp sites and portages than usual so our time for getting to the next site may be longer than if you knew where you were going to camp. You might want to give yourself some extra time to wash the mud off your clothes. For me it was a great trip and Janice took the challenge in stride.

Janice: Sat. July 24, 1999. We are leaving Bayfield at 4:00 pm. It is a beautiful sunny day. We are going to Sarnia to cross into Port Huron. Supper in Saginaw. We drove through a bad storm south of here. Went over the Mackinac Bridge for \$1.50 US at 10:15 pm. It is 11:30 and we are in Sault Ste.. Marie. The duty free shop is not open 24 hrs. a day.

Sun. July 25, 1999. We arrived at Quetico at 2:00 pm. our time, 1:00 pm their time. We gained an hour and are switching over to their time. We did some shopping on the way and spent some time at Kakabeka Falls. I have lots of tourist info on the area. We had grilled steak and potatoes, carrots and onions in tinfoil. We are camped in Chippewa Campground on #14. Nice site on French Lake. We'll leave from here tomorrow.

Bill: Mon. July 26, 1999. Should have left our watches on the old time since we were up at 5 am. and it was light out. Too early! The hydro went out last night and they locked up the washroom since there would be no water. They were still locked in the morning so we missed our shower and my shave. Had our last bacon and eggs breakfast for a while. At 9:00 am. I soloed from the site to where Janice parked the van in the parking lot. It was very windy and I had to tell some stranded kids in the bay to shift some of their weight toward the front so their canoe would stay straight to come out of the bay. After some hard paddling myself, I picked up Janice. It is a lot better with two in the canoe. We wound our way down Pickerel R. and when we came to the Pines on Pickerel L., we were faced with white caps and tremendous wind. We decided to do the north side and after the first bay we stopped and had lunch at 11:30 am. It was very hard going with 3 ft. waves and wind. Janice had to sit on the pack behind the seat to make the bow lighter. Braces helped out too. We did the next bay and were met with 4 ft. waves at the next point. We had another break and when there was a lull in the wind we went around and into the next bay. We were met with the same thing at the next point so since it was a camp site, we made camp at 1:30 pm. It is the first time we were ever wind bound, but it made no sense to work that hard to move so slowly. We had a nice relaxing afternoon and had Sloppy Joe on tortillas for supper. We hung our food packs by balancing them from a limb. You have to be careful to hang on to the rope when untying the first bag or the other one will drop in an instant. Look out! We went to bed at 9:00 pm. just when the

sun went down.

Janice: Tues. July 27, 1999. We woke at 4 am. and decided to get up and move. The wind was still there but not nearly as strong, so we thought it was a good idea. It took longer to pack because we had to fight off mosquitoes. They were out, hundreds of them and hungry. We got on the water at 5:30 am. We crossed Pickerel L. ( the waves were half as high as yesterday). We had a relaxed breakfast at the old dam at 8:00 am. We were there for about an hour. It was nice. We did the 450m into Bisk L. and then the 140m portage (around 3m falls) into Beg L. There is supposed to be an osprey nest here but we forgot to look. This lake was to be our first nights stay. Oh well. The portage into Beg L. was more of a good lift 28m. We debated on running the rapids and decided not to but when we were on the other side of it we figured we easily could have. Bud L. was nice. The 180m portage into Fern L. is around an impressive rapid. We had lunch here on the campsite by the falls. There is supposed to be an eagles nest on the lake but we couldn't find one. We canoed over to the right shore and did the portage. The portage on the left we managed to avoid and canoed the easy rapid. We paddled down the river and met 2 gentlemen at the start of the portage. They informed us that the trail was rocky and had many tree roots which made the 1160m portage hard. They told us to stop and enjoy the view though because it was superb. They were right. We did half the portage in one carry and finished the other half in a 2 carry. We have been going a long time and we are getting tired. We need to eat this food so our packs are lighter. They are very heavy now. We paddled into Olifaunt L. The wind has whipped up and the sky is threatening.

Bill: We headed for the farthest bare rock that looked like a campsite. Janice finally saw a Bald Eagle flying in the sky. The wind was pretty much in our face all day and we didn't have a break from it. We reached the campsite at 3:45 pm. and set up a tarp right away because it was raining. It stopped long enough to put up the tent and then it rained some more. We had a really good curry supper but it was a little on the hot side. I got to eat some of Janices'. We picked blueberries and each had a cup of them with sugar sprinkled on top. I had a swim and we hit the hay at 9:00 pm. We had another thunderstorm roll through again.

Janice: Wed. July 28, 1999. It was a good thunderstorm we had. Everything was very wet in the morning. We woke about 4:00 am. and decided it was too early so we rolled over and went back to sleep. Up at 6:15 am. We picked more blue berries for our cereal in the morning. The blue berries are huge here and sooo plentiful. After drying some of our stuff and our tent out we began packing and headed off at 9:30 am. toward the 380m portage into Sturgeon L. We made a slight miscalculation here because we figured we had checked the maps and it wouldn't be hard to find the portage. A lesson well learned. The portage into Sturgeon L. was ankle deep in mud in most places and running with a stream of water at the end. We washed our boots after that. Sturgeon L. is pretty. We stopped by Blueberry Island for a break and picked up a whole bunch of biting flies that we couldn't shake until the next portage. The narrow part into Russell L. has a portage, but we ferried and ferried and slowly worked our way upstream to Russell L. We both sighed when we finished that. Russell L. is nice. There are tall skinny spruce trees growing amongst the pines and deciduous trees. We had lunch on the large island and took a picture at 12:15 pm. It is very hot today and we have reapplied the sunscreen. The lakes have been lovely and smooth only a soft ripple to them. There are two portages into Chatterton L.; a trail along the Grand Rapids and Chatterton Falls or a 410m portage. We decided to do the trail along the rapids. The rapids and falls are spectacular, a sight you should see, but... It is a trail that some people have traveled and a few moose have trudged across, but it must have been made for a Mountain Goat! It took us 2 to 2 1/2 hrs. to do this trail. There are boulders to contend with, much poison ivy, fallen trees and steep ups and downs. We lost the trail more than once or twice. We ended up doing this portage in 2 trips and it was only about 650m. We slid the canoe down a steep embankment and Bill struggled with the packs at the put in. Hard trail, but the best view you will ever have. We paddled south on Chatterton L. and are on a cute campsite on a point across from the big island. There is room for 3 small tents here.

We got here at 4:00 pm. As I was washing my hair Bill pointed out a duck and about 16 babies swimming by. Neat. We had a nice dip and a good broccoli noodle supper, complete with chocolate pudding. There are many ants here and for some reason the flies are biting like mad. Does that mean rain? At about 8:00 pm. I want to hit the hay because of the mosquitoes. They do like me. They ate Bill tonight as well. There is a loon calling. There seems to be a pair on every lake. Well it's been a long day and the woods are singing with mosquitoes, a frog croaks and we're off to sleep at 9:30 pm. Night all.

Bill: Thurs. July 29, 1999. This morning we were up at 5:15 am. Cream of Wheat for breakfast and on the water at 7:30. The 420m portage at Split Rock Falls was a hill but it wasn't too bad. In Keats L. the view was beautiful as we paddled up to Snake Falls. We met a solo canoeist on the 300m Have a Smoke portage and he was in a hurry. It's no wonder people complain of ticks because you are always brushing up against the underbrush. (The portages are narrow) In Shelley L. we saw a burned area of the bush silhouetted by the sun. It looked eerie. There were pretty sounding birds here. The start of the 55m portage into Montgomery L. was a picture perfect lilly pond with falls in the background. The 470m portage from Montgomery L. to Kawnipi L. was a climb and then down and only a few muddy spots. The wind was finally at our backs now and we made good time in Kawnipi L. We saw another bald eagle, this time being chased by a sea gull. We had lunch at 12:30 pm. on the point just before Kasie Island. The trees are different here giving the landscape light and dark green patches. We ended up camping at 2:00 pm. at the island just past Rose Island. It is a nice sunny day and we had a swim and lazed around. One thing I did notice on this trip is a definite lack of people. We had a good supper of turkey soup and dumplings. We have the fire place ready to make breakfast and are in bed by 9:00 pm.

Janice: Fri. July 30, 1999. We awoke at 5:15 am. This is such a lovely campsite and the view from the tent is gorgeous. Nice just to lie here and look. Well time to move. We made pancakes on a rock. Bill picked some blueberries to go with them. This is quite a fire place. It is built against a large rock and it serves to cut the wind nicely. We left camp at 9:00 am. The wind was against us. We headed south and did the 390m portage into Keewatin L. It was full of mosquitoes and rocky but the portage itself was wider. We resorted to our bug gear after that. The 340m portage was nice and wide too and so was the next 310m portage. More people must use this route. We saw an osprey in the unnamed lake. We had lunch on the campsite on the point across from the island in Agnes L. Nice site and a nice one across from it. We headed 150 degrees across the top of Agnes L. to turn northward up Agnes R. It is another really hot day and I feel draggy. The air has turned heavy and the sky overcast. We portaged 500m into Bird L. We saw another bird that might have been a young osprey. This portage is also well used. Bird L. has a lot of marsh at the start but opens up to a nice lake. We are camped on the small island at 3:00 pm. There is an elaborate fireplace with patio stones. Nice site, lots of flies and ants though. We fished and enjoyed the day. We prepared for a storm that looked like we were going to get, but all we got was some sprinkles. It is still overcast and it's now 9:30 pm. and dark out.

Bill: Sat. July 31, 1999. Woke at 6:30 am. I guess we slept in. We saw 3 otters swim by the site. We watched a loon brawl out on the water. When they were done there was a family of 5 left. They chased the other 2 away. Had oatmeal for breakfast and on the water at 8:30 am. The 360m portage into Anubis L. took us through the burn area. It was a good trail and open with no mosquitoes. We did the 260m portage to the pond and then the 170m to McVicar Bay of Kawnipi L. by 10:00 am. We saw moose tracks on the portage and ruffled up a grouse on the trail (scared the heck out of Janice). We saw a big black heron fly away also. We traveled up Mc Vicar Bay and turned east to go to Atkins Bay at 11:00 am. It was so windy we decided not to paddle. Without one stroke we were at the end of Atkins Bay by 12:30 pm. That was 7 Kms. We didn't find much for campsites and there is burned area all over here. We checked out the lake to the SW. and there were none in there either. There were 2 noisy ospreys and a nest there though. We decided to go to Kenny L. and are camped on the island at 3:30 pm. We frightened a big garter snake that was sunning on the 150m trail into Kenny L. It was windy and we had to change the fire pit. There are more people in this area. We had chili and bannock for supper and are in

the tent at 9:30 pm.

Janice: Sun. Aug. 1, 1999. Woke at 6:00 am. and dozed and lazed around till 6:45 am. We are not moving camp today so we thought sleeping in was just what we deserved. We had a bit of a lazy morning and we did some fishing around the site. Saw 5 loons, 4 geese?, and 2 seagulls in this lake. At 10:30 am. we took off and went up to view Canyon Falls, Koko Falls and Little Falls. They are all very nice. The Canyon Falls is exceptionally impressive. We saw a lot of people today. We met a MNR group of girls on a cleanup trip around the park. The one girl pointed out a large garter snake on the portage. Bill talked to a scout leader from Illinois, a nice fellow, he was with his son and friends. We ate huge blueberries on the canyon trail and took a few pictures. It was nice. Too bad this area was part of the burn of 1995. Green campsites are hard to find. It's funny how the fire burns most of the forest and yet leaves green bits standing and untouched. The portages are well used and have many trees across them that have been cut for us to walk through. It looks like a lot of these weaker trees came down in the bad wind storm we had 2 or 3 weeks ago. We paddled back and are on our campsite at 12:30 pm. With lunch over we set off to go fishing in the lake off Kenny L. There was no channel to it so we decided to fish Kenny L. I caught a big walleye and a baby pike and Bill caught a small mouth bass and a large mouth. We kept and cleaned the walleye on a rock across from our site and when we were getting ready to cook it, 2 bald eagles and 2 seagulls were out for the remains; well you know who won, the bald eagles of course. It was great to see one so close. There is a huge basket nest across the lake close to there, I wonder if they own it? We ate supper and got ready for tomorrow. It's been another windy day and we hope to leave in the morning calm. In bed early at 8:45 pm.

Bill: Mon. Aug. 2, 1999. Woke at 4:30 am. and got up so we could beat the wind. Had 8 grain cereal for breakfast, packed and on the water at 6:00 am. There was little wind so it was a perfect morning. We saw an otter swimming. It stopped, stood half way up in the water and then dove away. We backtracked to Kawnipi L. and checked out the pictographs at the corner of Kawa Bay, but only found the one set on the E. side. We stopped at a campsite and had a break and picked blueberries at 10:00 am. and then we went on up McKenzie Bay. We are back into green trees again and the wind is picking up. It is coming across us so it is helping us along. We made good time and had lunch on a little island campsite before the portage into McKenzie L. The 680m portage was about 75 ft. to the left of the rocks that you would think was the landing. The climb was steep at the start but leveled out to a nice dry path. There was a birch tree across the put in which we put the canoe under. Crack bang crash! What was that? Falling trees do make a loud noise when they fall even though we weren't in the forest when we heard it. We saw a big stick nest on an island and several bald eagles along the way. We found the 2 pictographs in the middle of McKenzie L. and then went off to find a campsite. We went past an island site and then went back to it because there didn't appear to be any up ahead. We were there at 3:30 and set up camp. Had scalloped potatoes with ham for supper. It is a small campsite but it is all we need. We are going to bed at 8:30 pm. after a long day on the water. We traveled 32 Km. but had the wind with us so we made good use of it and did 2 days in 1. Tomorrow we will stay and fish.

Janice: Tues. Aug. 3, 1999. A cloudless sky at 7:30 am. when we finally rolled out of bed. I am lazy today. We had breakie with blueberries. We had showers and a swim today. The fish were not biting around our island so we had a snack of dried oranges and chocolate instead of fish. A humming bird flew right up to us and then flew away. We saw one solo canoeist way across the lake who we never saw again. It looks like it is raining all around us. We set up the rain tarp and are having a rest in the tent while we wait out the wind and drizzle. Funny weather. Cold wind.

Bill: Well the rest turned out to be a snooze. It cleared up and we started supper. The wind picked up and it began to pour. We ate supper and did dishes under the tarp. It was a delicious cabbage roll meal. It cleared up after that and we had a fire because it was cooler out. We got ready for bed and hit the hay at 8:45 pm.

Wed. Aug. 4, 1999. Woke at 5:15 am. to a thunder storm. Watched the tent light up every time the lightning struck, luckily somewhere else. Rolled out of bed at 6:30 am. and the rain had quit. Had to dry stuff out in the wind as best we could in the short time we broke camp. Red river cereal for breakfast and on the water at 9:30 am. We did the short steep portage into Lindsay L. We surprised an otter at the mouth of the creak. It splashed down and later popped up, looked at us, sputtered and snorted and then he was gone. We were ready to do the 3,300m portage at 11:15 am. after paddling around to find it. We emerged at Cache L. at 2:00 pm. after quite a journey. It started off well with only a few muddy places and then the trail turned into a muddy creek. It was at the first one of these that I fell up to my waist in mud. We decided to drag the canoe through it rather than carry it. We came across a large birch with a pine tree on top blocking the trail and had quite a time bushwhacking around it. Then came another muddy creek and we put into a pond. We had some beef jerky for a snack and then continued on. We came to another muddy spot and then it started raining but it didn't last long. We began going down hill and at the end was another muddy spot. Only 25m from Cache L., after Janice had done the whole thing with only getting her boots and feet wet, she fell into the mud up to her waist. She had to drop her pack and hang on to me to get her feet out of the muck. It was raining gently for half the portage so the leaves, trees and us were wet. It took us an hour and 20 min. to do the 3 Km portage in Killarney, but this one took us 2 hours and 45 min. It was easy enough to follow, but we consider this a tough one. It might have been wetter than normal because of the rain. Bug jackets are a must this time of year. We paddled around Cache L. looking for a good campsite and ended up on a sandy beach site at 4:20 pm. We set up camp and rinsed all the clothes we wore to get the swamp smell off. We had split pea soup with ham for supper and it hit the spot. At 7:50 pm. 2 canoes with 5 guys were out on the lake looking for a campsite. They came by and we told them of the ones we saw. They had just spent 7 hours coming from Trousers L. He said never again in high water. Well, were not sure what we are in for because we are doing that one tomorrow. We hit the hay at 9:30 pm. and the mosquitoes were buzzing outside.

Thur. Aug. 5, 1999. Woke up through the night because it was cold. We were up at 5:30 am. and had cream of wheat for breakfast. The mist was covering the lake. We packed and were on the water at 8:30 am. We saw a tent on the island so the 5 guys must have made it to there. We are ready to do the portage at 9:20 am. We followed fresh moose tracks for the whole portage. It was muddy at first and then OK. There were lots of rocks and logs and roots to get past the wet spots till after the river. We had to pull the canoe for a bit but it wasn't as bad as yesterday. No one fell in and we only got muddy to our ankles. It was wet after the river and then at the end it was dry as we went down the hill to Trousers L. It only drizzled today. We were there at 11:45 am. so it took us 2 hours and 25 min. to do the 3200m portage. We ate gorp and drank the rest of our juice and then started to look for a campsite. The island site was taken so we paddled around the whole lake to find another. We traveled each leg of Trousers L. and only found a couple more sites on the islands that weren't very good. We decided to camp up on the high one at 3:30 pm. Shortly after 4:00 pm. we had a bad thunderstorm with high winds. We had brought our stuff up the hill, stowed the canoe and put up a tarp because we could tell something was coming. Janice had just started to put up the tent when it hit so we collapsed it and put it under the tarp. It was still raining at 5:15 pm. when we saw 2 canoes with 4 people go by. They looked cold and tired and must have done the portage we did. We had turkey soup with dumplings for supper and looked for moose before we went to bed at 9:30 pm.

Janice: Fri. Aug. 6, 1999. We woke before 6:30 am. but we didn't rush out of the tent until 7:30 because there were sooo many mosquitoes outside and there was a heavy fog blanketing everything. Breakfast finished and packing done we set off to find a new site at 9:30 am. The main island campsite was vacated so we took it. I had thought I heard a canoe when we were packing and I was right. The couple must have left early. We set up camp, had a snack for lunch, and took off to pick blueberries and clean campsites on Trousers L. First we went back to the portage but we didn't find many blueberries there and neither one of us wanted to go back on the trail very far, so the rest of our berries came from the sites. We did the adopt a lake program. We found 6 campsites and 1 lunch site. Bill cleaned and fixed

the fire rings and I helped get rid of the excess rocks and looked for garbage. You really have to look to find the sites; some you wouldn't even know they were there unless you spent some time looking for them. We had our supper for lunch at 4:15 pm. and bannock later on. We made extra bannock for lunch tomorrow. We only saw one couple all day, who told us they did both of those grueling portages neck to neck. They also agreed that the first one was the worst and the second one took them 2 1/2 hours. They said they saw the couple that had stayed on our island and they did the portage in 4 hours and said never again. Good luck to them. It's now 9:30 pm. and I am signing off. Have a good night all.

Sat. Aug. 7, 1999. We had quite a thunderstorm in the night. We woke at 3:00 am. to wind and thunder and lightning. It rained heavily for quite a long time. It was hard to sleep after that. We got up at 6:00 am. this morning and were on the water by 8:00 am. The couple we saw the night before were packing and getting ready to leave. It's cool today and we don't mind wearing our bug jackets for the dual purpose of warmth and mosquitoes. They were a terrible nuisance this morning. There is quite a rocky landing at the end of Trousers L. It was difficult to get out and stay dry, but we did it by log walking and then lining the canoe in. It is a short well traveled portage around a little rapid. Baptism L. is pretty. It looks like most of the campsites would be on the islands or maybe in the big bay. All of the next portages are around rocky rapids and a pretty waterfall. The 400m portage was really wet today in places. We picked blueberries at the second short portage. There were many. The last part of Baptism Creek is narrow and very windy with grassy shores. It widens out after the French River comes into it. This takes a bit of time to paddle. We met 2 canoes and 6 guys heading in. I'm glad I'm paddling out because the current is flowing with us. We canoed under an old logging trail bridge and the hiking trail bridge. We went NE. at the mouth of the river and arrived at the parking lot at 2:00 pm. We went to have a shower but a whole crew of guys had just came off the water and beat us there. We went to the other camp ground and had a great shower. We said hello to the couple from this morning; they were in the parking lot as we left. Stopped at the office to hand in our Adopt-a-Lake info and looked around. We left the park at 4:30 pm. their time, 5:30 pm. ours. We arrived home 12:30 pm. our time on Sunday. We had a relaxing drive home from Sarnia, it was nice.

It was a worthwhile trip; harder than some, that's for sure. Apparently they have had more wind up there lately and the hydro was out again earlier in the morning the day we arrived back. People say that this is a very bad year for mosquitoes up north, maybe it's because their water levels are higher than normal. Ours are a lot lower than normal. Good trip!

THE END