

THUNDER BAY ADVENTURE

LAKE SUPERIOR

By Brad Bowins

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In Objibwe it is known as Gitchigumi meaning Great Water or Great Lake.



LAKE SUPERIOR
FROM THE SLEEPING
GIANT

AN UNDERSOLD DESTINATION IF THERE EVER WAS ONE

Thunder Bay Ontario, a destination with amazing natural offerings to both adventure seekers and those appreciating nature without the adventure component.

Compared to several other countries I have visited that oversell sites, in typical modest Canadian fashion we often do not fully promote what our country offers. An example of this occurrence is Thunder Bay Ontario, a destination with amazing natural offerings to both adventure seekers and those appreciating nature without the adventure component. My eldest daughter accompanied

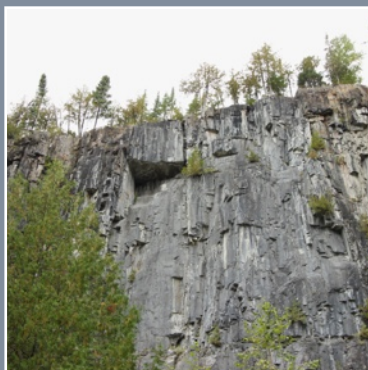
me for a brief trip in early September, and after having just hiked for a month in British Columbia, she was still very impressed by what Thunder Bay offers. The experiences are for the most part warmer weather ones running from approximately mid-May to mid-October, and for hikes I suggest later summer or autumn to minimize black flies and other biting pests.



QUIMET CANYON

One of the most unique geological and biological phenomenon anywhere!

NATURAL SCULPTURES



Sites close to Thunder Bay

Quimet Canyon

Shoreline of Lake Superior

Sea Lion just off the trail to the Sleeping Giant

The volcanic origins provide for amazing natural structures

Thunder Bay sits on the north shore of Lake Superior, the largest freshwater lake in the world. In Objibwe it is known as Gitchigumi meaning Great Water or Great Lake, an accurate depiction given its size and depth, with it containing an eighth of the fresh water on the planet! It is so large that it generates its own weather system, that can entail massive storms typically starting in November, when as the famous singer and songwriter, Gordon Lightfoot, wrote, "The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead when the skies of November turn gloomy." He put these words in the haunting song, The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, dedicated to the entire crew of 29 that perished on November 10, 1975, when a

massive storm broke the huge boat in half! The lake is unique compared to others in the region, in that it formed countless years ago from volcanic activity, producing a rift that filled with water when glaciers melted. The volcanic origins have also created unique geological formations such as the Sleeping Giant, the most life-like large scale natural rock sculpture in the world: the peninsula that creates the bay has a giant on his back, with head, neck, massive chest and arms folded over it, body and legs, all clearly visible. We stayed at the Port Arthur Hotel in a lake-side room providing a very memorable view of the giant, a sight hard to tire of. In addition to providing unique scenery the giant protects Thunder bay from storms and those massive waves.



Sleeping Giant from Port Arthur Hotel

Geology and history all in one destination

Even if geology is not an interest, you will be captivated by what the combination of hard volcanic rock and softer rock has sculpted over time, given how collapse and wearing of the softer rock has created valleys and unique shapes such as the Sleeping Giant. This process has left Thunder Bay with several very striking natural structures, and all within an easy hour long drive at most. We will now look at what this Lake Superior destination has to offer.

FORT WILLIAM

The two-hour flight from Toronto landed at lunch time and before going to Thunder Bay we visited a re-creation of a fur trading post a very short drive from the airport.

The original location of Fort William was on the other side of Thunder Bay, both on rivers as waterways were the highways of the past. Aboriginal fur trappers, coureur de bois, and company representatives congregated to conduct business. The word “fort” is not exactly accurate, as it is so far north there were no real threats; it was all about the fur trading business that characterized early Canada. Our very informative guide provided a clear sense of what life was like for these hardy people, and various rooms contain samples of furs, goods that were available for purchase, and birch bark canoes. During the summer, it is possible to tour without a guide, but I recommend a tour as it gives a real sense of what life was like and how the fur trade operated.



FORT WILLIAM



An important part of history

Raised building to limit mold

Dining room

Aboriginals of the region were the fur trappers



A place for young and old

My eldest daughter Emma accompanied me for a brief trip in early September, and after having just hiked for a month in British Columbia, she was still very impressed by what Thunder Bay offers.



SLEEPING GIANT PROVINCIAL PARK

We were fortunate to have an ideal day to hike the giant, the skies clear and temperature not too hot. Sleeping Giant Provincial Park is a scenic hour drive east of Thunder Bay. A park pass must be purchased prior to hiking, and even though the vast majority of visitors come for a day hike of the Sleeping Giant, there are several trails in the park, as well as overnight camping options. The Sleeping Giant trail involves three sections, with the first a long 7.5-kilometer flat walk along the Kabeyun Trail. Near the start of the trail is a short diversion to the Sea Lion, an arch on a very scenic part of the Lake Superior shoreline where waves carved a hole in softer rock leaving the body of what looks like a sea lion, although the head fell off about a hundred years ago. This short trail is well worth the effort. Returning to the Kabeyun Trail be prepared for a long and not so thrilling walk with the trail covered by foliage, helping to cool it but limiting views to a couple of places offering easy access to the shoreline. Loose rocks necessitate

Hiking the Giant

watching your step, what I refer to as worm counting walks, as opposed to looking upwards, bird counting excursions. A suggestion is to rent mountain bikes, making sure to have a rental vehicle able to carry these bikes, and bike ride along this section; remember that you will be returning this way as well! Bike racks are located at the start of the next steeper section.

A short half-kilometer uphill hike along part of the Talus Lake Trail connects with the 2.7-kilometer steep Top of the Giant Trail. This latter section really gets the heart working and is a dramatic shift from the long flat initial walk. Be careful of roots as my foot got snagged on one not easily visible, and I fell although without injury beyond bruised ribs. At the top, you arrive at the Sleeping Giant's knees where softer rock has eroded away leaving vertical drops of about 300 meters (1,000 ft.) and panoramic views of Lake Superior. From this vantage point the lake stretches to infinity, underscoring its majesty. Both sides of the knees can

Softer rock giving away from harder rock has created these sites

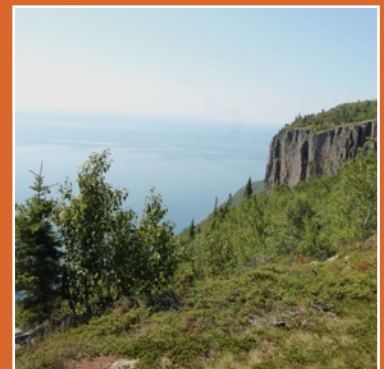
be walked to and each offer very different perspectives, with the furthest side providing the views seen in most photographs. Another word of caution, while it might be fashionable to take those “crazy” selfies for social media, I strongly advise not getting too close to the edge as nothing is worth the very long fall! Recall that what makes the area so unique is softer rock giving way from solid rock. Focusing on the views, the top is a great place for lunch or at least a relaxing break before the return journey. The total hike is about 7 hours, but for those clever people who bike the Kabeyun Trail section, the time can be almost halved.

QUIMET CANYON

On our third day, we headed back east to a couple of destinations 10 minutes from one another—Quimet Canyon and Eagle Ridge. Quimet Canyon is one of the most unique geological and biological phenomenon anywhere, in that do to collapse and/or erosion of softer rock a very steep sided 100-meter deep canyon formed, with the bottom largely sheltered from the sun. This geological event resulted in the canyon floor being so much cooler than the surrounding area that plants only found a 1,000-kilometers north thrive in it, and certain sections have ice even in the summer! A well-maintained kilometer long trail with a couple of viewing platforms extending over the edge reveal the canyon; walks in the canyon itself are not allowed



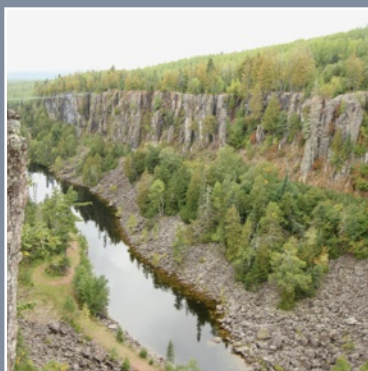
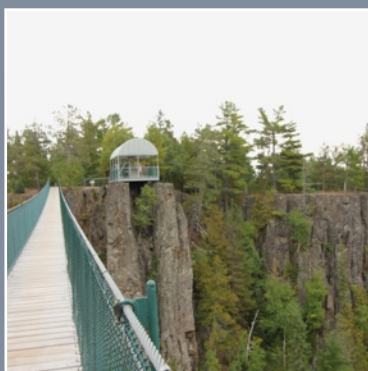
TOP OF THE GIANT VIEWS



From the Giant's knees

Both sides of the knees can be walked to, with the furthest (top 2) offering the views seen in most photographs.

CANYON VIEW



2 very different canyons

Author and photographer at Quimet Canyon

Suspension bridge and start of zip line Eagle Canyon Adventures

Eagle Canyon with stream. Temperatures top to bottom are the same, in contrast to Quimet Canyon where it so much colder plants found a 1,000 kilometers north thrive at the base!

due to the fragile ecosystem and constant risk of rock falls. We visited about 9:30 in the morning and had the trail to ourselves, but I am sure that summer would see far more visitors.

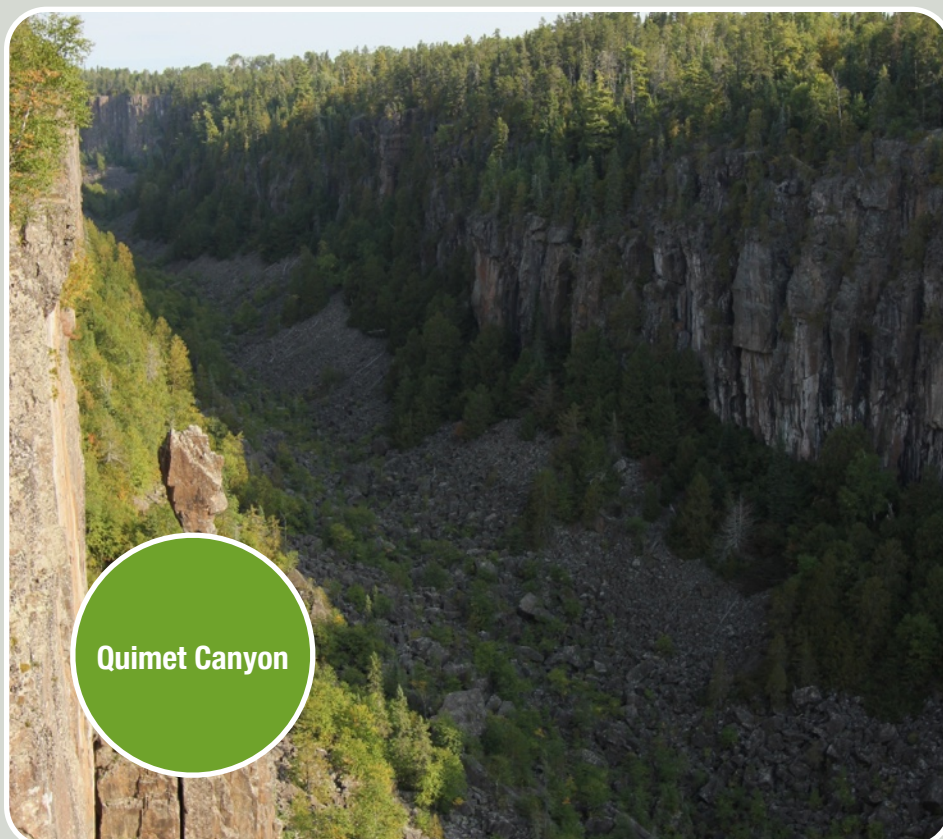
EAGLE CANYON ADVENTURES

Boasting 100-meter high suspension bridges and Canada's longest at 182 meters, plus the longest, highest, and fastest zip-line in Canada, this private setting is well worth a visit. Both of us braved the zip-line that starts from the top of a rock pinnacle, flying you through the canyon above its stream for a full minute! I doubt you will ever get a more eagle-eye perspective on a canyon than this. On a more sedate note, Eagle Canyon resembles Quimet for the height, steep sides, and clear

evidence of rock slides, but differs in having a stream and temperatures similar to the surrounding area, based on how it is positioned relative to the sun. A short hike along the stream is recommended and grounds you after the zip-line.

MOUNT MCKAY

A short drive to the west brought us to Mount McKay on our fourth and last day, the site being on Objibwe land. The relatively short trail is very steep, and near vertical at sections, but is quite well maintained. The top affords views of Thunder Bay and Lake Superior not to be missed, and this hike is often suggested in guide books and posts, although apparently, few make the trek compared to the Sleeping Giant hike. An advantage of this destination is its proximity



to Kakabeka Falls, our last stop.

KAKABEKA FALLS

A short drive from Mount McKay to the north brought us to the most pleasantly surprising site of the trip —Kakabeka Falls. In researching what Thunder Bay offers I barely noted this option, that turned out to be one of the most scenic waterfalls I have seen, and almost as high as Niagara Falls! The falls split in half due to a rocky outcropping adding to the beauty. Also adding to the experience, is an easy trail to viewing points on both sides of the falls, and a trail used by coureur de bois to portage those heavy canoes and supplies around the falls so many years ago. The undersold nature of this stunning waterfall highlights my initial point about Canadians being far too modest about what Canada has to

offer, as these falls would be vastly more promoted in any other country.

THUNDER BAY

We found Thunder Bay itself to be easy to navigate, and the location of Port Arthur Hotel ideal, as the best restaurants are only a block away. Furthermore, a pedestrian bridge from the hotel crosses the road to the waterfront where nice paths are to be found. What turned out to be our favorite restaurant—Bight—is on the waterfront by the large silver Christmas like decorations, with an inviting outdoor patio. This waterfront experience capped off the trip to what must be one of the most understated travel destinations there is and right at home if you live in Canada!



MORE GREAT VIEWS



An understated destination

Mt. McKay from the base

Kakabeka Falls has paths on both sides providing different perspectives

Christmas tree decorations
Thunder Bay waterfront

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