

Wandering in the Whiteshell

By Doris Ames

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Midsummer is a fine time to discover the beauty of the park. Along Hwy #1-east, Blazing Star and Sunflowers are competing with Milkweed to attract butterflies. Red Maltese Cross and Purple Vervain are at their best now, while the velvet-leaved Mulleins are just starting to sport their buttery-yellow flower spikes. Delicate pink blankets of Fireweed are spread out along the edges of the ditch. Along the #307, Asters and the papery-white blossoms of Pearly Everlasting mix with the Tansy's spicy, yellow buttons.

On July 11th, we hiked the McGillivray Falls trail just off Hwy#44 near Caddy Lake. The water levels are low this year and the falls were dry but the walk was still interesting. Those same dry conditions meant there were no bugs and we didn't need to wear rubber footwear. This was welcome because the 2.8km hike over steep rocks is fairly strenuous in hot weather. We enjoyed the refreshing breeze as we climbed higher and we eventually came to the overlook where we could see McGillivray Lake in the distance. We rested there and started to take pictures of the white Yarrow blossoms. Suddenly I came across a single plant with pink flowers - no doubt an expression of some long forgotten genetic trait. Dainty Pink Corydalis grew everywhere on the rocks. We decided to take the short loop back at that point but hiking enthusiasts can carry on through the Black Spruce Bog and on to McGillivray Lake itself.

Coming back we saw a single Slender Ladies'-tresses orchid growing in a crack in the rock along with Polypody Fern and moss. The climb down to the parking lot involved a drop of about 100' and the trail was slippery and wet in places. You have to watch carefully where you step. In a wet area along the path almost hidden by undergrowth was a beautiful white Coral Fungus. I recommend this trail for people in reasonably good physical condition. It takes approximately two hours to complete.

On July 29th, another hot and humid day, we decided to visit the area around White, Betula and Nutimik Lakes. Our first stop was Rainbow Falls on White Lake. Normally this waterfall is 50 to 60 feet wide but due to low lake levels it is now only about 10 feet wide. Children sat on the rock ledge enjoying the gentle shower of silvery water.

After viewing the falls we had a nice lunch at the restaurant in White Lake and then much refreshed, decided to tackle the Forester's trail off Hwy#307 near Betula Lake. At the trailhead we saw Graceful Cinquefoil (*Potentilla gracilis*) and white Three-toothed Cinquefoil. I was surprised to see Graceful Cinquefoil at the start of the trail in such abundance because I understand it is on the rare plant list. However it seems to be withstanding repeated mowing

just becoming a lower plant as a result but blooming anyway. Maybe I misidentified it so you botanists out there (you know who you are) please take a look and let me know. Ripe Blueberries and Pearly Everlasting lined the path as we walked through the aspen grove on the site of an old clear-cut. Bluebead lily sported its namesake shiny, blue, berries which were rivalled only by the red fruit of the Bunchberry. Cow Wheat was in bloom along the trail as we neared the Jackpine Ridge.

We found a few Moccasin-flowers at one spot but unfortunately the flowers had been picked and there were no seedpods. As we climbed up over the gently sloping flat rock we saw beautiful Juniper trees covered with dark blue berries. Further along, Smooth Sumac and Polypody fern competed with Meadowsweet for our attention.

The breeze was cool and there wasn't a sign of a bug but we could hear the rumbling of thunder in the distance. Harebells nodded sleepily as we stopped to admire the wide veins of pink granite and quartz that crossed the flat rock in several places. A young Blue Jay raised a fuss about the oncoming storm and Ravens wheeled overhead enjoying the swirling breezes. We hurried down the last part of the trail and we reached the car just as it started to rain. The 2.4km hike had taken us one hour to complete. There is a nice picnic site at the end and I would recommend this trail to almost anyone including families with children.

Because of the rain we headed straight for the Whiteshell Museum in Nutimik. We passed both the trail to Pine Point Rapids and the Bannock Petroform site. The petroform site is something not to be missed if you haven't already seen it. Viewed as a doorway to another world by the Ojibway, these arrangements of stones into figures, animals and other shapes are a very important part of their spiritual beliefs.

We stopped in to see the exhibits in the museum including the interesting display on the endangered Sturgeon. My personal favourite is the display relating to the Petroform Site. The history and culture of the aboriginal people in the area is fascinating.

Many interesting interpretive programs are run out of this site in the summer, including crafts and activities for children. This little natural history museum is a jewel that shouldn't be missed.

When you are wandering through the Whiteshell, especially on the hiking trails, remember to bring sunscreen, bugspray, water and trailmix in your backpack and wear a hat. Wear sensible shoes or hiking boots with good grips when climbing on rocks. It wouldn't hurt to bring a compass and a map or trail brochure either. The trails are fairly well marked but sometimes signposts are missing. This was particularly noticeable on the McGillivray Falls trail and created some confusion for us. It would be helpful if the midway point and the shorter loops were clearly indicated on the trails and in the brochures. Please do not pick wildflowers. Take photographs instead and enjoy the Whiteshell!



Maltese Cross July20



Pearly Everlasting Forester's Trail July29



Pink-coloured Yarrow McGillvray Falls July11



Purple Vervain - ForestryRd#4 - July12 2003.



Common Juniper - Forester's Trail - July29 2003.