



Mountain Lake to Nameiben Lake via scenic Vale Creek

August 5 to 12, 2019

Dave McTeague with daughter Brianna McTeague

[Full route description follows this report.](#)

Prologue: Having been on four previous Wabakimi Project trips, I've touched this route so to speak twice before and then heard and read reports, so my curiosity was aroused. In 2016, our group traveled down Trail Lake Road (Clem Quenville's shuttle), then portaged down through Rocky Island Lake to Tunnel Lake (and through the tunnel) to a base camp. The next day, we scouted and flagged the portage to Mountain Lake. The following week Bill & Kris Pyle completed that portage with Bill catching a lake trout in Mountain Lake. In 2017, our group base camped on Rushbay Lake and then worked the ponds to the east culminating in the 641 meter portage to the Vale Creek section north of Alter Lake. (Dave McTeague is Board Chair of the Friends of Wabakimi-FOW, email: friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com)

This route is a **FOW Guidebook candidate** as a shorter and accessible Crown Land canoe route near Armstrong, Ontario and Mattice Lake. Although we indulged in a Beaver flight to Mountain Lake, this route could be accessed by Trail Lake Road (starting at either Rocky Island or Tunnel Lakes) from the North with two possible road takeouts near Hwy 527 to the South. Fortunately, Ray Tallent kindly shared his Wabakimi Project work reports from 2016. *Now that we're in the post Project era, our trip also served to assess the condition of the portages, that have seen little, if any use since.*

Day 1. After staying one night at the Mattice Outfitters McKenzie Lake cabin, Brianna and I boarded their Beaver for the short flight into Mountain Lake. The pilot Dave, flew us down to our end point on Nameiben Lake, and followed our route back up to Mountain Lake. (video to follow) We could see how scenic this route was, even though we could see the results of past logging near this route. (more logging is occurring in this general area). The Beaver dropped us off and we easily located the one campsite on the SE side of this lovely lake. A good landing and a fabulous fire ring with an awesome capstone greeted us along with alders growing near the remaining sitting log, certainly appearing the site had no recent use whatsoever.

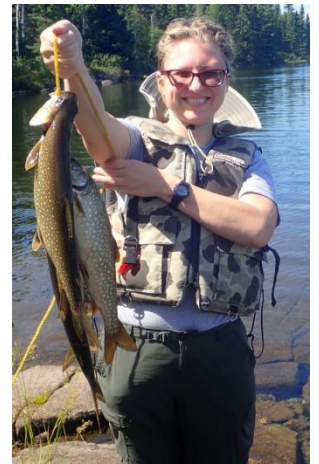


Mountain Lake



We explored north to find the portage into Tunnel Lake. We saw one stashed boat astride a beaver house with some blue plastic nearby. No evidence of recent use. After following a beguiling moose trail, we located the actual portage which proved to be choked with alders, so no further exploration was done. On the way back to camp, a downpour soaked us, which Brianna much enjoyed! (A veteran of BWCA & Quetico trips, Brianna has extensive training in biology/genetics & works for a major PNW timber company in their tree improvement program).

Day two. We first paddled to Mountain Lake's SW bay and after following several animal trails (where the map said the portage would be) we found the portage in the far corner of the bay behind some beaver runs. A clear blaze was obscured by branches. We scouted the "Mountain Portage" up and over, down the hill, into the creek bed (with a recent moose droppings), and most of the way down the hill. We were thankful for the blue ribbons left by the folks who rehabilitated this portage. There was No evidence of recent use and much overgrowth. We then fished various bays with no success, but following a line down the middle of this modest size lake with silver spoons, we caught several lake trout for a fabulous dinner. Our camp had a nice swimming area that we both enjoyed! Blueberries aplenty.



Day three. Nice weather, we again fished and caught more lake trout! Desiring to improve her wilderness skills, Brianna deftly cleaned them all! We found an ephemeral stream & beaver dam off a south bay and explored up a dry creek bed with many animal tracks. Crashing into the bush, she found some gnawed antler remains, and later we climbed a small hill nearby to find a secluded pond.



Day four. We broke camp and down the 485 meter Mountain Portage to the Vale Creek landing, where a Project group had camped and worked on the portages going North to Alter and Rushbay ponds. There were some steep sections where I took the canoe off and slid it down, as well as some difficult (for me anyway) step downs. A challenging portage, but not the worst. We canoed south and began our passage through several scenic ponds with impressive rock walls.



Finding the 212 meter portage river left was difficult, after fruitlessly exploring around the peninsula, we finally followed the left (or east)



channel, pulled over a small beaver obstruction (which did have a cut log), then through a rock garden, and there at the very end of the bay was the post with the survey marker. The next 482 meter portage to Vale Lake was on river left (called the Rock Portage on the outdated park map) was much more challenging; with blow down and overgrowth. Ray Tallent reported their 2016 work on this, ..."we had to wing it a bit to get to Vale, using old log cuts for clues, but also compass and GPS..." Luckily for us the crew left a series



of blue ribbons marking the way, as I'm sure, we were the first to travel through since 2016. The Vale Lake end is marked with a blaze and ribbons (we added to those) amidst a lot of blown down jack pines.

We canoed across Vale Lake to the one known campsite. I thought I saw something black moving on that site from a long distance...but maybe it was my imagination. A nice campsite with a gravelly beach and a stunning view awaited. An old Lund boat is cached there..no sign of recent use, and the fish cleaning table mentioned in Ray's report suffered from a collapsed jack pine.

Day five. As happened with the portage crew, we were winded in for one of those scenic relaxing days. Evening came and a short paddle produced a nice northern and good sized lake trout, both caught by Brianna. Vale Lake is fairly good sized and invites further exploration, which alas we didn't do. It was apparently, a destination for at least one group of determined paddlers coming up Vale Creek.

Day six. The 164 meter portage out of Vale Lake starts on river right and goes around some large blown down cedar roots at the start. We found a fishing rod and a few new log cuts indicating some recent use. A second short 43 meter portage on river left skirts the creek where we had lunch, is not indicated on the FOW map. Then there's a longer stretch of pools with some nice rock outcrops. Two good potential campsites were mapped in 2016. These sections include some wide and boulder areas...some really nice sections that call out to you. My planned YouTube video will include footage of these stretches. A river right 68 meter portage is followed by the last pool and the pleasant 178 meter portage into **Nameiben Lake** (and the Wabinoish River) starts in a grassy area on river left. We found the purported peninsula campsite indicated by a large rock cairn on the bluff; but no indication of any campsite use or fire ring. I chopped back vegetation while Brianna cut a trail from a mossy tent area down to the bluff and the sitting rock ledge that we used for stove cooking under our tarp.



Day seven. A beautiful sunny and windy day. First we paddled down through a rocky narrows and swift to find "Desperation Camp" (as Ray's group called it) on the south part of Nameiben Lake. We met up with two older fishermen in a Lund type motor boat on a fishing excursion. We learned they had driven up the 1.5 km logging road to the camp in their ATVs pulling the boat. We found the camp and checked this out as our extraction point for the following day. We paddled back to explore the scenic south arm of Nameiben Lake, catching one walleye. We found an old fire ring and possible camp on a rocky point mid way down the arm (west side) and stopped for lunch. We met a canoe couple from Thunder Bay who proceeded to land a nice lake trout in front of us. Their luck was much better, as they also had three walleyes and a pike as they went by on their way out. The couple also shared their conversation with the motor boat guys, who allowed, "It's sure getting crowded on this lake!" after meeting up with just two canoes.

Day eight. We made our way to Desperation Camp and called Mattice Lake Outfitters on the SAT phone. We portaged our gear up the 20 meters of rocky spur road to the logging road. An hour later Don Elliott (and his huge dog Otis) arrived in his Old pickup after terming this, “a shitty road.” The road was passable; but the overhanging alder made it a slow noisy ride out to Hwy 527. Had I known how “shitty” this road was, I would’ve taken the two more portages (53 & 216 meters with some swifts) down to more accessible Wabinoish River landing on the east side of Hwy 527.

Epilogue. This was one of my best trips ever; with my favorite paddling partner. Great fishing, inviting scenery, and two (out of three) nice camps. It’s an adventure exploring a scenic route that gets almost no use. Also this was my first Wabakimi trip without the benefit of others showing the way. Mountain and Vale Lakes are nice destinations all their own. Nameiben Lake is accessible as a great day trip, if you don’t mind a few scratches on your car. The Mountain to Vale Lake portages were passable but in need of some TLC, especially the one into Vale Lake. They are modestly better after we went through. Is this route adequately recognized and protected by the Ontario MNR? That’s my question as a FOW Board member. I can recommend this route as a good introduction to the Wabakimi area.

FOW Canoe Route Maps, Volume 5; Map 3, “Tunnel Lake to Waweig Lake via Vale Creek” provides detail for this route. Map 4 also shows the Rocky Island Lake section. Map 5 shows the Rushbay Lake to Mountain Portage route. Order form: http://wabakimi.org/maps/files/wabakimi_order_form_v8.pdf

Acknowledgements: *Inspired and directed by the late “Uncle” Phil Cotton, Wabakimi Project crews cleared these portages and surrounding Crown Land canoe routes in 2016. Participants included Barry Simon, Ray Tallent, John Sinclair, Cary Kellar, Amy Funk, Larry Power, Craig Charles, Debbie Doyle, Ken Babinchak, Bill and Kris Pyle. Also, John Holmes, Randy Trudeau and yours truly worked on the Rushbay Lake to Vale Creek portages.*



Wabakimi Project crew: Amy Funk, Craig Charles, Ray Tallent, Larry Power; Vale Lake to Wabinoish River, June 2016.

Rocky Island Lake to Tunnel, Mountain, Vale and Nameiben Lakes via scenic Vale Creek

A lovely scenic road accessible route near Armstrong, Ontario on Crown Lands that Wabakimi Project volunteers improved in 2016. By Wabakimi standards, this is a shorter route that could be explored in five to seven days. It features stunning scenery, good fishing (especially for lake trout) and is relatively untraveled. The lakes along this route are inviting for exploration and layover days. Although this is a working forest, the timber harvests in the general area are not seen and don't seem to affect the wilderness quality.

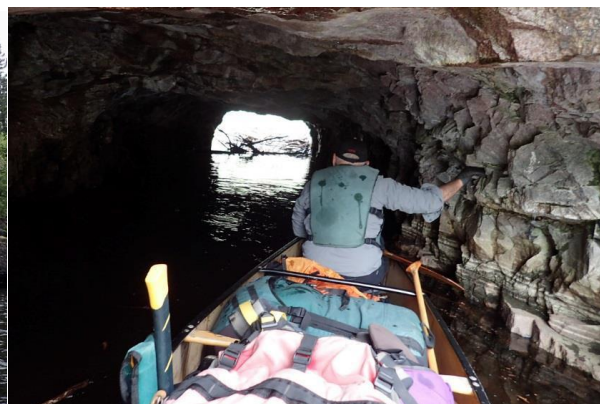
Starting point: Take Trail Lake Road west from Hwy 527 just south of Armstrong on the north side of the Canadian Pacific rail line. Trail Lake road becomes a challenging bush road that winds and snakes around several bodies of water; so a local outfitter road shuttle is recommended. (Of course if your budget allows, you can get a Beaver float plane flight to start your trip.)

For the purposes of this description, we start the route at Rocky Island Lake portage 27.7 km from Hwy 527. (where a portage also goes north to an unnamed lake). Take the relatively flat 610m portage south to a landing with Rocky Island Lake; the last 30 meters may be wet or under some water if its early in the season. A developed campsite exists at the end of the portage. Alternatively, there's Tunnel Lake access at the Wabinoish River bridge (19.5km from Hwy 527) or slightly further down at the lake trail access (19.6 km).

From Rocky Island Lake, there's a 230m portage into an unnamed lake with campsite on the west shore point, about 2/3 of the way down the lake. On the SE bay there are two choices on how to cross the CNR tracks into Tunnel Lake. A small channel to the SE takes you to a 91m portage up and over the rail line. Extreme care must be taken as this is a heavily used rail corridor. An alternative is to take the small bay to the south and negotiate the tunnel that has been cut through the granite under the rail line. There may be some beaver activity at either end. Take care with the 70cm drop over some boulders at the tunnel's south end.



North of Tunnel Lake



Tunnel under CNR tracks



There are two usable campsites on either side of Tunnel Lake (south of the rail line). The Project crew base camped at the west site. You'll certainly hear and likely see trains from this point. A lovely fire ring with capstone is located right at the lake. Going mostly due south, take the 429m portage to Mountain Lake at the very end of a narrow bay. The remains of wooden boat may still be there. The portage goes due south. (Have a hand saw handy as the alder grows in fast.) You may find a single cached aluminum boat at the Mountain Lake end. (There were two cached boats in 2016,

indicating some use mostly likely by local First Nation residents.)

(In the very SE Tunnel Lake bay is the Wabinoosh River outlet. In theory there could be a portage connection there; but it was not found or cleared in 2016.)

Lovely **Mountain Lake** has many bays.

There's an established campsite on the east shore across from the island featuring a nice fireplace with a large capstone. Tent space is limited, but trails on both sides could lead to other spaces. (purportedly there's a blaze indicating a second abandoned portage east to Tunnel Lake). An ephemeral stream enters a south bay showing signs of wildlife. A secluded pond nearby is just over the rise. Lake trout inhabit this lake. A silver spoon into the deeper sections could well find them!



The 485m "Mountain Portage" to Vale Creek is in far corner of the SW bay behind some beaver runs marked by a blaze. (not to be confused with the numerous animal trails along the bay's west side) The portage goes up and over, into a creek bed and down the hill to the Vale Creek landing. A blue few ribbons may still help guide the way. Take care on the steep downhill sections.



Vale Creek goes SE through a narrow passage into a long scenic pond with impressive rock walls to a 212 meter portage. Stay to river left at the peninsula, and then pull over any beaver obstruction and through a short rock garden. The portage entrance is near a post with a survey marker.



The next 482m portage on river left to **Vale Lake** (called the Rock Portage on the outdated park map) is challenging with some blow down and lots of overgrowth. There's still blue flagging tape and some newer red tape that helps mark the way as this portage has seen little use. The Vale Lake end is marked with a blaze and ribbons amidst a lot of blown down jack pines.



Follow the main body of Vale Lake past two good sized islands to the one established campsite on the SE shore with a gravelly beach. A cached aluminum boat and remains of a fish cleaning table there indicate past use. However, the likelihood of running into anybody is remote. Lovely sunsets can be enjoyed from here. Fishing is good for lake trout and northern pike.



However, it's easy to get wind bound at this camp.

The 164m portage out of Vale Lake starts on river right and goes around some large blown down cedar roots at the start. A second short 43m portage on river left skirts the creek is not indicated on the FOW map. Then there's a longer stretch of pools with some nice rock outcrops. Two good potential campsites were mapped in 2016. These sections include some wide and boulder areas. A river right 68m portage is followed by the last pool and a pleasant 178m portage into **Nameiben Lake**.

Around the point and past a marked campsite the Wabinoash River enters Nameiben Lake from the NE bay. There's an undeveloped campsite on the peninsula point just inside the south bay entrance marked by a rock cairn. A rocky bluff offers seating but no fire ring (as of 2019). A mossy area above provides tent space. The lake's south arm has an interesting rocky scenic shoreline and good fishing for pike, walleyes and lake trout. A fire ring and possible campsite can be found on the west side halfway down the south bay.

A passable rocky narrows and swift can be negotiated to lake's lower section to a camp and landing on the SE shore. A short rocky spur up to a logging road provides access about 1.5 km from Hwy 527. While accessible, this road has lot of alder overhang. You can end your trip here if your shuttle is willing to take a beating. Locals pulling a Lund boat and canoeists have entered here for day trips.

An alternative takeout can be found on the Wabinoash River just east of Hwy 527 from a short better traveled spur road. The SE bay narrows to a mild swift followed shortly by a swift/mild rapids hooking around to the south. This can be run or take the 53m portage. In a short distance a rapids over 100m long in a reverse S-shape ends up flowing SE. The 216m portage starts among big cedars on river left above the start of these rapids, but it cuts a bit away from the curving river at about the halfway point. At the end, the swift and culvert at Hwy 527 are visible.

Take care to make sure the culvert is passable (most likely, there's a rough fisherman's path as a possible alternative.) For your take out, canoe a few swifts to the grassy campsite on river left just east of Hwy 527. This site is at the terminus of the spur road that connects to Hwy 527 to the north. (The spur had a bridge over the river at one time, as the old rock cribs for footings are still evident.)

Notes: The spur to the Wabinoash River camp takeout off Hwy 527 is 13.8 km south of Mattice Lake Outfitters turnoff. The Nameiben Lake logging road that goes west off Hwy 527 is 13.1 km south of the Mattice Lake turnoff (just north of the Wabinoash River culvert). **FOW Canoe Route Maps, Volume 5;** Map 3, "Tunnel Lake to Waweig Lake via Vale Creek" provides detail for this route. Map 2 shows the

Rocky Island Lake section. Also, the two portages in particular that could benefit from volunteer improvement are Tunnel to Mountain, and the last portage south to Vale Lake. More information about the alternative Tunnel Lake access is needed.

Variations off this route: From the Collins River and Rushbay Lake, there are portages east to Vale Creek north of Alter Lake, then down some rugged and rocky portages to the Mountain Portage landing. There's a connecting nearby route of Mattice Lake down Badwater Creek to stunning Pillar Lake, but the Wabinoish River portage connections south to Nameiben Lake are unimproved and would require a bushwhack (see Map 6).