

1-Minute Hike: Mount Qua Qua in Grenada

Difficulty: Strenuous. Mount Qua Qua Trail travels up and along a narrow ridge from Grand Etang Lake to the top of the Mount Qua Qua, which reaches just over 2,300 feet above sea level.



AISLINN SARNACKI

The unblazed trail is a narrow, well-used footpath that is almost entirely surfaced with slippery mud. Although you may want to avoid particularly mucky sections of the trail, it's important to stay the course because steep, dangerous slopes are hidden by thick vegetation on both sides. On average, the hike out and back takes three hours.

How to get there: Mount Qua Qua is located in the Grand Etang Forest Reserve in Grenada, a small island country in the southeast Caribbean Sea. To get there from our home in Maine, we drove to Boston, where we took a plane to New York, switched planes, then flew over the Atlantic to Grenada. There we rented a car and drove inland on windy, narrow roads to Grand Etang, making sure to stay on the left side of the road.

Information: Mount Qua Qua is one of the tallest mountains of Grenada, a Caribbean country known as the "Island of Spice" for its production of nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger and mace. Rising about 2,300 feet above sea level in the rainforest of Grand Etang Forest Preserve, the mountain's long ridge often is obscured by shifting rainclouds, but when the clouds clear the mountain offers spectacular views all the way to the sea.

To hike the mountain,

many people hire the help of local guides because the trail is fairly remote and can be dangerous for those unfamiliar with hiking in the area. Slippery mud, sudden rainstorms and steep slopes are among the challenges of this hike.

The Mount Qua Qua Trail begins at Grand Etang Crater Lake, a 35-acre lake formed by volcanic activity some 15,000 to 25,000 years ago, according to an informational sign at the nearby visitor center of Grand Etang Forest Reserve. Surrounded by lush forest, the lake is 1,740 feet above sea level and home to a variety of freshwater fish. People often visit the shore of the lake, where there's a small dock and a beautiful gazebo.

It costs 10 EC\$ (East Caribbean dollar) to park at a small parking area near the lake. The Mount Qua Qua Trail travels away from the lake, up a hill and past a few gazebos before reaching an intersection with the Shoreline Trail. Continue straight through the intersection, climbing gradually up over muddy steps that often are reinforced with wood boards and rebar.

Because of the abundance of mud on the trail, it's best to hike with a staff or hiking poles, which will help you maintain balance and gain traction. Waterproof hiking boots with high ankles also are recommended because the mud can be so deep in some areas that it will come up over the top of your boots.

While I couldn't find the origin of the mountain's name, I like to imagine that "qua qua" is an ancient word that translates roughly to "mud, muck or mire." Online, all I uncovered is that "qua qua" is defined as "the magical sound of mystical wizards"



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Raindrops bead on a wildflower beside Mount Qua Qua Trail in Grand Etang Forest Reserve of Grenada.

in the Urban Dictionary.

The trail soon reaches the mountain's narrow ridge, which it follows all the way to the mountain's highest point, marked with a large boulder and an old metal tripod. (I'm not sure what this structure was used for.) Along the way, the trail travels up and over bumps in the ridge, often on uneven clay steps.

Stay on trail and exercise caution. In many places along the ridge, the land drops off steeply to both sides. Ferns and other flora may disguise these dramatic slopes.

Not far from the summit of the mountain, the Mount Qua Qua Trail intersects with a trail leading to the nearby Concord Falls. Signs mark this intersection. You will veer right to continue on to the top of the mountain.

While you're hiking, keep an eye out for local wildlife, including the nine-banded armadillo, the mona monkey, the opossum and the tree boa. There are also a variety of birds and flowering tropical plants in the forest.

Mount Qua Qua Trail ends at the top of the mountain, which offers stunning



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From the ridge of Mount Qua Qua, hikers can see all the way down to Grand Etang Crater Lake in Grenada's Grand Etang Forest Reserve. Grenada is a small island country in the southeastern Caribbean Sea.

views of the island, including its seaside capital, St. George's. If you find yourself in a cloud at the top, you may want to wait a few minutes to see if the clouds clear before turning around and descending the mountain.

After the hike, consider purchasing a drink or food just up the road at the Grand Etang Forest Reserve visitor center. Established in 1906, the reserve covers an area of 3,816 acres and contains the source of the biggest river on the island: the Great River.

While visiting the reserve, it's important to keep in mind that fishing, camping and hunting is prohibited. Removal of any natu-

ral objects, including plants, also is prohibited.

Personal note: Choosing a place for our belated honeymoon was challenging, but after weeks of online research on the many tropical islands of the world, my husband Derek and I decided on Grenada. The small island country, northeast of the coast of Venezuela, is not one of the most popular tourist spots, but that's one reason we liked it so much. It isn't highly commercialized — yet. Plus, the island is full of fun things for active, outdoorsy people to do.

During our nine days on Grenada, the temperature fluctuated in the 80s, and one of the first things we did each day was cover our

skin with SPF 70 sunscreen. Then, we headed outside for a variety of adventures — some planned, others not.

Highlights of the trip include snorkeling at the world's first underwater sculpture park, sea kayaking with a group called Conservation Kayak, swimming in the pools of Seven Sisters Falls, and exploring orchards of cocoa, starfruit, mango and banana trees at the historic Belmont Estate. And, of course, we had to go on at least one hike while on the island.

Choosing a hike on Grenada was difficult because there isn't a great deal of information about the island available online or even in books. I ended up selecting Mount Qua Qua because it's located in a national reserve, can be explored by a public hiking trail and is one of the tallest mountains on the island. I also read the hike would take about 2.5 hours.

What I didn't know was that it would be so muddy. If I had known, I would have worn hiking boots — instead of closed-toed hiking sandals — and carried hiking poles, or at least a stick. As ill prepared as we were for the terrain, Derek and I managed to make it to the top of the mountain, albeit slowly, and back down. By the end, my feet and legs were plastered with reddish mud. Derek pointed out that we had managed to hike and get a mud pedicure at the same time.

Next week, I'll return to my regular Maine-based adventures. Grenada was great, but there's truly no place like home.

For more of Aislinn Sarnacki's adventures, visit her blog at actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com. Follow her on Twitter: @1minhikegirl.

Deer

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found a dozen videos on how to gut a deer, with or without skinning it. We started watching one. "You'll need a sharp knife," said the narrator, who sounded like he could do this in his sleep. My mind ranged to our knife rack, which holds what must surely be the duller collection of knives in Waldo County. I shut off the video. "I'll call Doug," my husband said, referencing our good neighbor who drives a big pickup and exudes a cheerful competence about life's practicalities. A few minutes later his truck growled into the dooryard. He left it idling, the low-beams shining into the back of the Volvo.

He had two passengers with him, a young couple, Josh and Hannah, who had just rented the house next to his. We hadn't met them yet, but I swear, they were like angels sent to us from heaven that night. Yes, they knew how to hang and gut a deer. It wasn't a big problem. They were glad to meet us and happy to help us, and they set right to work.

Within a few minutes the doe was hanging by her hind legs from a timber in the barn. Douglas spread a big sheet of plastic under her, and then rigged up some bright lights to illuminate the scene. Working with their own small, sharp knife, our new neighbors peeled away the deer's hide, neatly sliced open the torso and removed the innards. It took them a little over an hour, I think. They chatted quietly with us and each other throughout the process, explaining, problem-solving, reassuring.

My Douglas circulated with the lights and our neighbor Doug helped, tentatively, with the gutting, taking quiet direction from Josh and Hannah. I took pictures and tried to look busy.

I'll spare my gentle readers the details — it was a gutty, steamy, bloody business but skillfully accomplished and quite lovely to watch, in a visceral, anatomical way. At the end, the deer carcass hung from the beam like a side of beef — pure red muscle and white bone, almost no fat. The

head, the front legs and the hide were bundled on the floor beneath; the guts had been captured efficiently in our Rubbermaid trash can. The scene was surprisingly tidy, considering. We turned out the lights, closed up the barn doors and went inside to wash up and warm up. The next day, Douglas delivered the carcass to be butchered into steaks and ground meat for the freezer.

We're sorry the little doe died but grateful we can make good use of her healthy body. We're looking forward

to savoring some deer meat this winter and to sharing it with the neighbors who helped us.

But more than that, it was an amazement — a surprising opportunity that came up suddenly to see something fresh, to learn something new about each other, to ask for help and receive it, to strengthen an existing friendship and embark on a new one.

Life is full of surprises. Carpe diem, I say — and carpe Odocoileus, too. Seize the deer.

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