

Wolf's Eye



Isle Royale & Keweenaw Parks Association

2014 No. 2

Copper Country Trail: The Byway in Our Backyard

America's Byways® are gateways to adventures where no two experiences are the same. The National Scenic Byways Program invites you to come closer to America's heart and soul....

—Federal Highway Administration

Did you know that the Copper Country Trail National Byway (CCTNB), stretching from the Portage Lake Lift Bridge to Copper Harbor, has been one of America's Byways® since 2005 and that the Isle Royale & Keweenaw Parks Association belongs to the committee overseeing it? The first 18 miles of the route from Central to Copper Harbor, where trees form a complete canopy over most of the road, were designated as a Michigan Scenic Heritage Route in 1994. The Heritage Route was extended southwest to Mohawk in 2002 and then to Houghton in the spring of 2004, necessary steps toward Byway designation. In May 2012, IRKPA signed a memorandum of intent with the CCTNB Committee "to participate in a collaborative

organization guiding the region in the stewardship of this vibrant four-season destination where land, people, and the stories of this place attract residents and visitors alike." Staff from Keweenaw National Historical Park serve as technical advisors to the group.

Although the Byway itself runs along US 41, the designation encompasses all connecting roads, such as M-26 and M-203—and has brought funding for a variety of enhancements. A notable example is the new interpretive signage and Copper Harbor overlook reconstruction on Brockway Mountain Drive. Another project produced a professional marketing plan with a redesigned website, hospitality training, and a suite of interpretive brochures on eight themes, also available at coppercountrytrail.org.

Grant awards approved in late 2011 allowed the Keweenaw National Historical Park Advisory Commission to complete a four-county historic resource inventory and preservation plan and is helping the Keweenaw Land Trust improve accessibility and interpretive opportunities at their Paavola Wetlands and Boston Pond Preserves in projects just getting under way. Both groups are also members of the CCTNB Committee's governing board. From 2005-2011, \$228,857 in matching funds leveraged \$902,530 in grant awards.

Unfortunately, all funding for the



National Scenic Byways Program was cut for FY2013 and FY2014, but the Byway designation will still be a plus for other potential funding.

America's Byways® include the National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads, a collection of 150 distinct and diverse roads designated by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation. Michigan's other two Byways are in the Lower Peninsula: River Road Scenic Byway along the Au Sable River in the Huron National Forest and the Woodward Avenue (M-1) Automotive Heritage Trail, an All-American Road from Detroit to Pontiac.

Learn more about the Copper Country Trail and the adventures it has to offer you at www.coppercountrytrail.org.



Copper Harbor overlook and interpretive signs, Brockway Mountain Drive.

The Island to Ourselves: A Memorable First Trip

by Scott Benson

Even before moving up to the North Shore of Lake Superior in 1978, this area has been a part of my life since the year that I was born. My mom and dad had been coming to Stonewall near Castle Danger ever since the early 1950s. This resort was named after John Stone, a retired fisherman who at that time ran a seasonal resort with six cabins close to the lake, a few miles up the shore from Two Harbors, Minnesota.

Growing up in North Minneapolis, we would travel to Stonewall twice a year. While in eighth grade, I came across a book in the school library on our national parks, the first time I had heard of Isle Royale. Reading the text and studying the map, I knew this was a place I had to explore! This was the North Shore of Minnesota multiplied! This huge island with no roads, miles of trails, moose, wolves, fishing camps and settlements, abandoned copper mines, lighthouses, and fire tower lookouts—I needed more information. And this is how I discovered the Isle Royale Natural History Association. I wanted to make a trip ASAP, but I needed to wait several years for my dad to have enough time (outside of our family vacations, and summer camp at Many Point Scout Camp).

During my sophomore year of high school in October of 1971, my wish finally came true, as my dad and I drove up from Minneapolis and departed from Grand Portage on the *Voyageur*, piloted by the legendary Roy Oberg. The *Voyageur* was still making a couple trips around the island each week to deliver and pick up mail and supplies and fish. We were the only passengers on the boat, and after several stops in Washington Harbor and at Windigo, we made our way around the north side of the island and were dropped off at McCargo Cove. We had the campground and (as Roy told us) just about the whole island to ourselves, as there were only three other hikers on the island! We spent all of

the next day exploring the area, as I was keen on finding the sites and remains of nearby copper mines and a stamp mill. We were also stood up by a bull moose, who was none too quick to leave the trail we were on. I had a heightened sense of awareness the remaining time on the island. And because of the rutting bull moose, the trail signs had already been taken down (at least in those days). My map and compass came in extra handy.

A long, rainy hike brought us to Daisy Farm. We were very glad for the shelter to set up our camp. Our hike ended at Rock Harbor with some time to explore before the *Voyageur* arrived to pick us up the next day. It was like we were in a ghost town as we wandered about all the buildings, looking in windows, and imagining what it was like during the busy summer.

There were more than a few fox to keep us company, along with the only other person on that end of the island. We startled a park ranger in our wanderings. He was not expecting any campers that late in the season. He was good enough to invite us to his cabin that evening, where we cooked our dinner on his stove and enjoyed a visit with some hot cocoa and coffee.

The *Voyageur* came that evening, and we checked in with Captain Oberg. Overnight the winds picked up from the southwest and we got word that we were grounded. The ranger told us not to wander far because the captain would be looking for a break. Late that afternoon,

we got word that Roy wanted to make a run for it. OK?! It was a wild ride, as the wind had not decreased that much. I discovered that I could get seasick and was amazed that Roy was enjoying a ham sandwich while piloting the boat in those rough seas. And rough they were, because we had to take refuge at Fisherman's Home cove around the corner from Siskiwit Bay. My dad had been in the navy and had sea legs, but I was sure happy to spend the night in a quiet cove. We spent the night on the boat and used the galley to cook dinner. I was also glad that I could eat again. We met Mr. and Mrs. Rude. They were the couple that called the cove home.

The wind was still howling the next day, as we enjoyed the Rudes' hospitality while the captain waited for a break. The chance to spend time with an Isle Royale fisherman and to be able to explore his homestead was a great bonus, along with missing an extra day of school! I was in no hurry. It seemed certain we would spend another night at the cove, and this time we could have the guest cabin. But that was not to be. At about 4 p.m. the captain thought it was a bit less windy and decided to make a break for Windigo, and hopefully Grand Portage.

It was still plenty wavy for me as the bucking bronco boat ride got under way, as did my seasickness. We picked up the only other hikers on the island at Washington Harbor and made a rare night run for Grand Portage. With a quick stop at the Rock of Ages Lighthouse to toss a few cartons of cigarettes to the lighthouse keeper, we arrived at 10:00 p.m. Dad drove through the night as I slept. We arrived home before dawn to a thankful mom and brother. I was back at school a few hours later with some tales to tell my friends, as I started thinking ahead to my next trip—with hopefully calmer seas.



Thanks to IRKPA member Scott Benson for sharing this remembrance.

Winter Study Results and Wolf Management Conundrums

Two story lines from the 2014 winter study research on the wolves and moose of Isle Royale reflected opposite impacts on the dwindling wolf population there. Early on, the researchers confirmed that two to three pups born last year had survived into their first winter, doubling 2013's West-end Trio into a six-member West Pack. The last pack of reproducing wolves was the Chippewa Harbor Pack (CHP), now a group of three, whose alpha male died in a mine pit with two other wolves in late 2011.

The other event was not the hoped-for migration of mainland wolves to the island across an increasingly rare ice bridge, but just the opposite. Followers of the 2013 winter study will remember Isabelle, the radio-collared female who had left the CHP and suffered repeated vicious attacks led by the West-end Trio's female. John Vucetich expressed amazement when she was first spotted on January 21 that she had survived on her own another year after that ordeal. Unfortunately, the next report on Isabelle came February 8 after she was found dead at age five on the Grand Portage shoreline.

A necropsy at the Colorado State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory determined that a shot between the ribs from a pellet gun had killed her. The lab returned her remains to the Michigan Tech researchers for further study. Her death and that of another lone wolf on the island left this year's winter wolf population at nine, one more than last year's all-time low for the 56-year study.

Another discovery described in the 2013-14 annual report came in the lab rather than the field. Analyses of more than 1,000 samples of wolf feces over the past 15 years have documented the degree of inbreeding in the population and its impact on reproduction and lifespan of individuals.

Prior to the 1997 arrival of a vigorous mainland wolf dubbed the "Old Grey Guy," the population had lost



about 32% of its genetic diversity since the wolves arrived on Isle Royale in the late 1940s. However, complete isolation from the infusion of new genes, a process known as gene flow, would have produced an expected 82% reduction in genetic diversity. This finding suggested that other wolves must have migrated to the island periodically via ice bridges, which have formed less frequently in recent years. A review of 40 years worth of field notes revealed likely instances when such migrations may have occurred, before genetic sampling began.

As for the impact of wolves on the island's moose population, the estimated annual predation rate, the percentage of moose (>9 months of age) that wolves killed in the last year, was 2.4%. Prior to 1980, that rate had averaged 10.7%, rising to 13.8% in 1996 and 1997, when a severe winter and genetic boost from the arrival of the Old Grey Guy combined to produce a sharp decline in moose numbers that bottomed out at 400 in 2007. The last three years saw the lowest rates of predation on record. During that time, the moose population doubled to about 1,050, an increase of

75 since last year. About 12% were calves, near the long-term average. Wolf predation hasn't limited moose numbers for the past three years, but winter severity has been a factor.

During moose population peaks, browsing pressure killed or stunted balsam fir trees, especially on the western side of the island, leaving only very old canopy trees as seed sources for regeneration. Lower numbers of moose in the late 1990s have allowed some firs to grow to heights nearly beyond browsing range. More moose will likely reduce that trend.

Of course, the biggest question is how the wolves, moose, and vegetation should be managed—or not managed—in designated wilderness and in light of climate change. Isle Royale National Park Superintendent Phyllis Green announced in April that ongoing discussions with wildlife managers and geneticists, along with public comments, will guide development of a management plan.

Current policy is that as long as island wolves remain capable of reproducing, no new wolves will be introduced. If the population becomes all male or all female and ice bridges no longer form to allow migration from the mainland, that policy could be revisited. In addition to the wolf-moose research now in its 56th year, a U.S. Geological Survey project will model the impact moose have on park vegetation. Scoping for the management plan is expected to begin in the fall.

To read more about topics related to wolf research and management, see www.nps.gov/isro/naturescience/wolf-management.htm and www.isleroyale-wolf.org. Print copies of *Ecological Studies of Wolves on Isle Royale 2013-2014* are available from IRKPA for \$4.95, along with many of the annual reports from past years for \$3.95. John Vucetich did not produce print copies of his Winter Study Notes from the Field blog this year, but they are posted at <http://www.isle-royalewolf.org/winter-study>.



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Annual Meeting July 25-26

Join us for IRKPA's annual meeting events in Rock Harbor, which will kick off Friday, July 25, with music from Ranger Emma Dlutkowski and her mom, Susan, followed by an evening program on the *Ranger III* with Capt. Bill Hanrahan.

Saturday morning, Nancy Johnson Stegman will lead a tour on the *M/V Sandy* to Chippewa Harbor, where her family fished and operated a store for many years. The tour will feature a stop at the Edisen Fishery, where Lou Mattson will join her in discussing their families' history at that location. Rock Harbor Lodge plans to charge about \$61.50 for the tour, but we hope to secure a block of prepaid seats at a lower price. To do that, interested members will need to contact Kristine by phone or email ASAP.

The annual membership meeting itself will take place later Saturday afternoon, followed by the picnic. If the marine forecast is unfavorable Saturday, the events will move to Sunday. Group hikes or other informal activities may be offered the other weekend day. Look for final times and details posted on IRKPA's new website and at the visitor centers, or give us a call!

Isle Royale Sweepstakes

Watch for IRKPA's board election mailing, which will also contain tickets for this year's sweepstakes. First prize is a round trip for two on the *Isle Royale Queen IV* and a 2-night stay at Rock Harbor Lodge. Second prize is a round trip for two on the *Ranger III*. Third prize is two IRKPA books. Joy Yambor won last year's first prize of a 2-night stay for two at Keweenaw Mountain Lodge. Bill Ribich won a Copper Harbor sunset cruise for two on the *Isle Royale Queen IV*. Barrett Warming won copies of *The Island Within Us* and *Island Life*. Thanks to Keweenaw Mountain Lodge (<http://atthelodge.com>) and The Isle Royale Line (www.isleroyale.com) for their generous prize donations!

New Website Launch!

If all goes well, by the time this newsletter reaches you, IRKPA's long-awaited redesigned website should be up and running! Check it out at www.irkpa.org.

Correction

Apologies to the Keweenaw NHP Advisory Commission, which was inadvertently omitted as a supporting member in the last newsletter's 2013 annual report.

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IRKPA is a nonprofit membership organization that assists Isle Royale National Park and Keweenaw National Historical Park with their interpretive, educational, historical, and scientific missions. Gifts, bequests, memorials, and memberships are U.S. tax deductible.

Membership Categories

Individual \$25	Household \$35
Supporting \$50	Sustaining \$100
Patron \$250	Life \$1,200*

*may be paid in four annual installments

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