Keweenaw National Historical Park Opens Calumet Visitor Center

Keweenaw National Historical Park (NHP) celebrated the opening of the Calumet Visitor Center on Thursday, October 27, with Senator Carl Levin (D-Michigan) and National Park Service Midwest Regional Director Mike Reynolds performing the honors.

The Calumet Visitor Center is the first NPS-operated visitor facility at Keweenaw National Historical Park, which celebrated its nineteenth anniversary on October 27, as well. “The opening of this wonderful facility represents a major milestone for the park,” Keweenaw NHP Superintendent Mike Pflaum noted, “and it will be a treasure for the entire community for decades to come.” Visitor services have previously been provided by the park’s nineteen non-Federal Keweenaw Heritage Site partners, who will continue providing those valuable services for visitors to the Copper Country.

Grand Opening events included the ribbon cutting, with more than 500 in attendance. In his remarks, Sen. Levin observed that the facility is a remarkable asset and a fitting tribute to the Copper Country community that mounted a grassroots effort to establish this unique partnership-based national park.

“This is the story of immigrant families,” said NPS Regional Director Reynolds. Sen. Levin added, “The visitor center tells the story of a place and a people that changed the world. This was America in miniature.”

Following the ribbon cutting, nearly 200 people attended a moving...
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IRKPA had a very busy October preparing to open our new sales area at the Calumet Visitor Center. A committee of IRKPA staff and volunteers met numerous times with Keweenaw National Historical Park staff over the summer and fall to plan the retail space, select new sales items, and determine our role in the grand opening week events. Committee members included Anita Campbell, Susan Martin, Ed and Liz Sheridan, Bob Marr, Marilyn Cooper, Nancy Leonard, Danielle Savela, Lauren Rastello, and Kristine Bradof.

IRKPA volunteered to host a 1920 “period” dinner to celebrate the grand opening of the Calumet Visitor Center in the historic Union Building. The event also commemorated a 25th anniversary dinner held in 1920 for the Free and Accepted Masons Lodge 271 in the same room. More than 70 people took part in the festivities. The KNHP Advisory Commission sponsored a wine and punch social before the meal, and a number of speakers, including the park’s four past and present superintendents, offered remarks. KNHP staff member Brandon Sexton provided a keynote with insights from his master’s research at Michigan Tech on fraternal organizations, specifically the Masons.

Interested board and committee members gathered Saturday morning before the October board meeting to tour the Quincy smelter site directly across from Isle Royale National Park headquarters in Houghton. Leading the tour were KNHP Management Assistant Tom Baker and Superintendent Mike Pflaum, along with Franklin Township Treasurer and Quincy Smelter Association volunteer Judy Counts.

We were impressed by the site itself and by the progress made this year to stabilize many of the remaining structures in the Quincy Smelting Works, which operated from 1898 to 1971 and is the most complete 19th century copper smelter complex left in the world. One option under consideration for adaptive reuse of the site is the relocation of Isle Royale headquarters and a possible joint visitor center for both national parks.

The festivities concluded Friday evening with a celebratory “1920 period” dinner that IRKPA hosted for park partners who made the facility a reality, including the Keweenaw NHP Advisory Commission, the park’s three former superintendents, the current staff, several of the park’s founders, construction and exhibit contractors, and key supporters. “I thought there were some very moving moments and I felt privileged to be a part of the ceremonies,” said Commission Chair Kim Hoagland. “I am in awe of the magnitude of the event.”

IRKPA President Ron Eckoff, Calumet Village President Tony Bausano, and KNHP Superintendent Mike Pflaum stand in front of the stage during the 1920 period dinner in the Union Building. Photos by Bob Giuliani.

IRKPA members tour the Quincy smelter site.

If you haven’t renewed your membership for 2012, now’s the time!
Lake-level change, from p. 1

North Atlantic, ocean circulation can be disrupted, and weather on a global scale may change in just a few years. The first emergence of Isle Royale occurred at just such a period of rapid climate change.

As the planet slowly warmed at the end of the Pleistocene, there was a sudden global change in climate that was detected in ice cores, ocean sediments, and remains of ancient pollen. Northern latitudes became much colder and dryer, while the tropics became warmer and wetter. This period became known as the Younger Dryas, or YD (named for a species in the rose family that thrived in cold weather). Scientists have now shown that the YD began as glacial Lake Agassiz suddenly flowed down a new outlet, the present-day Mackenzie River (Murton 2010), affecting the circulation of the North Atlantic and triggering an abrupt change in climate. For the next 1,300 years, northern latitudes were plunged into the very cold YD period, and the giant Laurentide ice sheet, which had already retreated north of Lake Superior, readvanced to once again cover the entire Lake Superior basin. When the Earth’s climate reversed once more, about 11,500 years ago, and resumed its earlier pattern of warming, the ice sheet again began to retreat. It moved downhill, because the Earth’s crust had been depressed for tens of thousands of years by the weight of the ice. Meltwater lakes formed in the depressions next to the ice sheet, and these lakes sometimes drained catastrophically as new outlets opened to the ocean.

The largest of these lakes, Lake Agassiz, was to empty successively through at least six different outlets, including one that drained with great force into Lake Superior north of Isle Royale, through Black Bay and Nipigon Bay, leaving telltale, deep channels carved into bedrock on the bottom of these bays (Gary 2009).

We have trouble imagining the huge amounts of water involved, but something like 175 Niagara Falls poured into the lake north of Isle Royale. Yu and his coauthors, studying a more recent outflow event, speculated that a sudden outflow from Lake Superior, caused by the breaching of a natural dam at its end, might have lasted for a full year. By careful carbon-dating of sediments at the bottom of small lakes on both the north and south shores of Lake Superior, they measured a drop of 45 meters in the lake level. Their study focused on another “cold event” that followed the Younger Dryas but was much less dramatic, when a burst of fresh water again poured into the North Atlantic, and the Earth’s climate experienced another disruption that lasted for more than a century.

How did the water level change at Isle Royale during this turbulent period? When I stopped by Dr. Yu’s office in Duluth to ask him that very question, I found out the answer is complicated, because the relative levels of land and water both changed at the same time, often in different directions. Dr. Yu suspects that the level of Lake Superior 9,300 years ago would have been considerably lower than it is today, so evidence of rapid drainage would probably be on the submerged shoreline of Isle Royale. Perhaps more will be learned about this period through detailed mapping of the underwater portions of Isle Royale National Park, an effort begun in 2010 by Lara Hutto of the National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program.


Volunteer Opportunities: Historic Building Stabilization Service Trips on Isle Royale

Once again, in summer 2012, teams of volunteers will be needed for historic preservation and stabilization of buildings that support Isle Royale National Park’s Artist-in-Residence Program. The projects will take place in Tobin Harbor on the northeast end of Isle Royale from June 12-20 or June 19-27, 2012.

Desired skills include painting, roofing, carpentry, window glazing, cooking, and willing general labor. Volunteers must fill out an application, donate $100 (tax deductible) toward building materials and other project expenses, and pay $150 to cover their food costs for each nine-day service trip. Volunteers bring their own tents, sleeping gear, clothing, and personal items. The National Park Service provides round trip transportation to Isle Royale via the Ranger III and waives the national park day-use fee.

Last summer’s crews made improvements to the Dassler cabin, sleeping cabin, privy, and boat house; the Stack-Wolbrink cabin and “Wee Hoose”; the Siefert cabin; the former Tobin Harbor post office; and the Edisen Fishery’s log sleeping cabin. Over nineteen days in 2011, fifteen volunteers completed 844 hours of service benefitting the Artists in Residence, Isle Royale National Park, and advocates of historic preservation.

If you are interested in volunteering for a June 2012 service trip or want to learn more, contact leader John Dunn at jdadunn@gmail.com for an application and more information.
Last Chance: Michigan Community Foundation Tax Credit!

This December is the last chance for Michigan residents to support IRKPA's endowment before the Michigan Community Foundation Charitable Tax Credit expires! Through Dec. 31, single Michigan income tax filers who contribute up to $200 ($400 for joint filers) receive a 50% credit (e.g., $100 for a $200 donation). Donate by check or online to the Keweenaw Community Foundation and specify the Isle Royale & Keweenaw Parks Association fund. Planned giving options & Michigan Business Tax credits are also available. See http://keweenaw-community-foundation.org/giving.html, call 906-482-9673, or email the form at http://keweenaw-community-foundation.org/contact.html. In 2010 and 2011, $8,500 in endowment earnings have helped support IRKPA's operations.

Call for 2012 Artist-in-Residence Applications

Professional visual and performing artists, writers, and composers are invited to apply for Isle Royale National Park's 2012 Artist-in-Residence Program, cosponsored by IRKPA and the Copper Country Community Arts Council. All art forms are acceptable except those that manipulate or disturb the park's fragile environment.

Selected artists will have use of a canoe and rustic cabin during two- to three-week residencies from mid-June through early September. A panel of professionals from a variety of art disciplines and a park representative will select the artists based on artistic integrity, ability to live in a wilderness environment, willingness to donate a finished piece of artwork inspired by the island, and the artist's ability to relate and interpret the park through their medium.

Applications must be postmarked by February 16, 2012. The National Park Service will notify artists of their acceptance by May 1. For more information or an application packet, contact Artist-in-Residence Program, Isle Royale National Park, 800 E. Lakeshore Dr., Houghton, MI 49931-1869, call 906-482-0984 or email ISRO_parkinfo@nps.gov.

Oops! Due to a printer software compatibility glitch, the expiration dates printed on the October Wolf’s Eye were off by four years (e.g., 2011 printed as 2007). Sorry!