

WOLF'S EYE



Isle Royale Natural History Association

Summer 1997

Isle Royale 1996 Beaver Study

Douglas Smith, from the Yellowstone Center for Resources, has been conducting the beaver study on Isle Royale since 1990, when he inherited the study from Philip Shelton. Here is his report on this year's count:

Active beaver colonies and fresh sign were once again aerially counted island-wide October 24-26, 1996. I found 128 active beaver colonies and 15 sites with fresh sign, for a total of 143 active sites. Fresh sign includes sites where beavers exist but a lodge or food cache was not seen. These may not be beaver colonies, but rather beavers living alone or in pairs.

Notable about the 1996 survey was that harbor colonies, beavers living along the Lake Superior shoreline, increased from 1 in 1994 to 5 in 1996. (In 1992 there were no colonies found anywhere along the Lake Superior shoreline.) Amazingly, Passage Island, not considered good beaver habitat, had two beaver colonies! These visible beaver colonies on Passage, as well as other colonies along the Lake Superior shoreline are good places to watch the continuing saga of the Isle Royale beavers.

The Isle Royale Beaver Study, dating back to 1962, represents the longest running national park population count of beavers. Since 1962 beavers on Isle Royale have gone through two cycles of population expansion and decline. These population changes have reflected changes in the number of wolves on the island, since wolves prey on beavers extensively. One of the beaver's favorite foods is aspen, and once they have cut most of the aspen growing close to the water, they are forced to travel overland to cut more. At these times beavers are especially vulnerable to wolves. Declines in wolf populations have likely allowed

beavers to forage more successfully away from water.

The number of active beaver colonies was at an all-time high in 1974 when Philip Shelton counted 286 active colonies. The all-time low was only six years later in 1980 when Phil counted only 83 active colonies. This decline was likely due to the terrific population increase of wolves. Subsequently the wolf population declined and the beaver population bounced back to 204 active colonies in 1986, despite generally poor habitat conditions for beavers. Since 1986 the beaver population (as measured in our fall surveys by aerial counts) has been slowly declining, at a rate of approximately 5-10% every two years. This is likely because of declining habitat conditions, as the wolf population has been roughly stable in the last ten years.

This beaver story, important to understanding the Isle Royale ecosystem, has recently been partially funded by the Isle Royale Natural History Association. Because these surveys date back to 1962, and are really the only beaver work going on on the island, this support looms large in understanding the population biology of one of Isle Royale's key ingredients.

1997 Board Election

Charles Boyle has been elected to serve a three-year term on the IRNHA Board of Directors. Boyle is hardly new to IRNHA or the board -- He has been a life member for 23 years, and has previously served several terms on the board, twice as Board President. Boyle is a retired businessperson. He and his wife, Betsy, live in Marinette, Wisconsin.

Letter from the Superintendent

As I write this, the Ranger III is being loaded with a full compliment of freight and passengers. The weather is cool and calm, and the very busy period of the park's visitation is well underway. A comment from one of the staff prompts me to "put in a pitch" for more visitors to think about coming to this magnificent park in June, the first part of July, and September. You will find many fewer visitors sharing campsites, trails and docks. It is often truly quiet, and the sometimes austere, sometimes riotous, nature of the island is better felt.

We have experienced an apparent upswing in the wolf population again. Two packs have pups, and there may be as many as five in each pack. The immediate future of the populations appears to be assured. The moose population's decline in the winter of 95-96 has allowed a remarkable regeneration of moose browse; young herbaceous regrowth of many species of shrubs and trees is phenomenal. All signs point to a healthy moose herd.

The General Management Plan is progressing slightly behind schedule with release of the final product scheduled for June, 1998. Comments on the newsletters have been thoughtful, and a very high percentage of those receiving mailings have responded. The general consensus of respondents favored little change in overall management. Strong support is evident for some separation of user groups. The proposal to change the commercial services available at Rock Harbor (essentially to remove the motel units, expand the number of cabins, remove the American Plan and retain a grill) has received mixed reaction. This proposal is formulated to create a facility which could be sustainable commercially and

have a diminished impact on the resources of the island while not demanding that the park subsidize the operation from its limited budget. In 1997 the utility expense for the concession's operation has caused an additional price increase on all merchandise, food and services to allow cost recovery. Visitors this year have experienced a 20% surcharge at the concession facilities.

The Demonstration Fee Program authorized by Congress has this season seen the park charge a \$4 per person per day (season pass are available) user charge. In 1998 we intend to utilize this funding to improve our backlogged maintenance on the docks and trails. This will be a very small portion of what is needed to repair

Isle Royale Natural History Association
800 E. Lakeshore Drive
Houghton, MI 49931
Tel: 906-482-7860/800-678-6925
e-mail: irnha@portup.com

IRNHA is a non-profit membership organization that assists Isle Royale National Park by publishing and selling educational materials to park visitors. Gifts, bequests, memorials, and memberships are U.S. tax deductible.

Membership Categories

Individual.....\$15
Family.....\$20
Supporting.....\$50
Life Membership.....\$500*
Corporate Sponsor.....\$1000
Corporate Patron.....\$5000

* Life memberships may be paid in two annual installments.

Board of Directors

John Dunn, President, Charles Boyle, David Duchamp, Nancy Leonard, Bob Linn, Gary Pethe, Bill Rose, Doug Welker, Charles Zamzow.

Staff

Jill Burkland, Executive Director & Wolf's Eye Editor. Lori Honrath and Lauren Rastello, Mail Order and Membership Specialists.

the infrastructure of the park and hire the needed employees. Every dollar we can get, however, helps. Most of you have seen features on television and/or read articles about the deterioration of the National Park System due to insufficient funding. Isle Royale National Park is certainly no different in this respect from most of the rest of the 375 units comprising the system.

For many years I have said that the most important resource in our national parks in the decades to come may well be the gene pool which is protected within the various park units. A clear demonstration has occurred here recently. The Coaster Brook Trout has diminished dramatically in numbers in the Lake Superior Watershed. To attempt to assure that the species survives, eggs have been collected at Isle Royale from the native population and put into disease-free hatcheries for propagation. This year some of the offspring from this effort were planted at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore to reestablish a population there. An additional 500 fish were stocked in Siskiwit Bay at the park. An important step in species survival has been taken.

Douglas Barnard
Superintendent
Isle Royale National Park

IRNHA Annual Meeting 1997

Members of the Isle Royale Natural History Association, the IRNHA Board, National Park Service staff and life lessees met on Sunday July 13 in the Rock Harbor Auditorium for the annual meeting of the Isle Royale Natural History Association. Superintendent Doug Barnard gave a report on some of the highlights of the year, including updates on the wolf and moose populations and the General Management Plan. Guest speaker for the event was Donald Thurber, who is founder and historian of

the National Park Foundation. Thurber recounted some of the history of the Foundation and explained the role of the Foundation today in raising much-needed funds for the nation's National Parks. He spoke specifically about the project which he spearheaded and which is near completion: building new staff housing units on Isle Royale at Windigo and Amygdaloid, as well as a new visitor center at Windigo.

John Dunn, President of IRNHA, prepared a report outlining highlights of the Association's 1996/97 year. Highlights for the first quarter included the hiring of a new Executive Director and publication of a new edition of "101 Wildflowers of Isle Royale." During the winter quarter, IRNHA had a holiday open house and sale at the park's visitor center in Houghton and began the hard work of developing a strategic plan to guide IRNHA in its operations for the next 5 - 10 years. We also did a second printing of one of our most popular books, "The Diary of an Isle Royale School Teacher," and printed a new "Spirit of Isle Royale" poster designed by one of the park's artists-in-residence. IRNHA's Executive Director gave a presentation about IRNHA to the winter meeting of the Keweenaw National Park Board of Commissioners. This spring the board completed a strategic plan and participated in the General Management Plan process, through participation at public meetings held by the NPS.

IRNHA Treasurer Doug Welker prepared a financial summary comparing trends in revenues and expenses over the last two years. The association is financially sound, with resources of \$154,000 which is equivalent to what resources were at this time one year ago. Sales of products is down slightly since last year, but donations and membership dues are up. IRNHA donated just over \$19,000 to the park for Fiscal Year 1996.

Isle Royale Place Names Quiz

Isle Royale has a fascinating history and is loaded with interesting place names. I suspect that many of you, like us, have found yourselves on the island asking questions like "Why do you suppose that's called Menagerie Island?" or "Who is Duncan Bay named after?" In order to help answer some of these questions, IRNHA is planning to publish a book on the origins of Isle Royale place names. Doug Welker, from IRNHA's Board of Directors, and Smitty Parratt, Branch Chief of Environmental Education and Interpretation for the park, are researching the project together and they could use your help! Fred Dustin's 1946 article on Isle Royale names has information on about half the places we're looking for, but we are sure that our members have a wealth of knowledge about the island and its history and can help us out with the rest. This will be the first of several Wolf's Eye columns which will ask your help on some of the names we are having trouble finding. Also in each issue we will include a quiz--just for fun--to test you on your knowledge of Isle Royale history.

First, some mystery names. Do you know the origin for:

- Kjaringa Kjeft (southwest end of Belle Isle)
- Dead Horse Rocks (between Belle Isle Campground and Green Island)
- Starvation Point (across Rock Harbor from Mott Island)
- Lake Theresa (east of Chippewa Harbor campground)

If you know any of these, please share your knowledge by writing us at 800 E. Lakeshore Drive, Houghton, MI 49931 or sending e-mail to IRNHA@portup.com.

Now for this issue's quiz:

1. Lake Wagejo (off the Greenstone Ridge Trail west of Daisy Farm) received its name because
 - a. it's the Ojibway word for red squirrel.
 - b. an early explorer once lost track of a woodland caribou he'd shot and injured, and asked his friend, "Which ways she go?"
 - c. three guys named the lake, using parts of each of their names.
2. Menagerie Island is named because
 - a. a lighthouse keeper had lots of farm animals, pets, kids, etc. there.
 - b. it's a corruption of the Ojibway word for "island where canoe sank."
 - c. in the early resort days on Isle Royale, a circus was held there for residents of the Siskiwit Bay and Malone Bay area.

For answers see back page.

The IRNHA Board of Directors thanks all members who responded to the communication survey in the Spring issue of Wolf's Eye. Your responses have been reviewed by the board and, as a result, you will notice changes in future issues of this publication designed to make IRNHA communication more effective.

In our continuing effort to better serve association members, we'd like your responses to the few questions below concerning the annual membership meeting on Isle Royale. Please take a few moments to respond before putting this newsletter aside. Your input is important!

1. Have you ever attended an annual membership meeting on Isle Royale?
() Yes () No
2. Do you anticipate attending an annual membership meeting on Isle Royale in the future?
() Yes () No
3. Would you like to receive an annual report from IRNHA? (This report would summarize association business for the previous year.)
() Yes () No
4. Would you be interested in attending an annual meeting if held in Houghton?
() Yes () No

Please send your completed survey to: IRNHA, 800 E. Lakeshore Dr., Houghton, MI 49931

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

IRNHA depends very heavily on the volunteer work of our board members and other members who have spent endless hours over the years helping us with publication projects, interpretive activities and business help. We have a special need now for someone, outside our Board of Directors, who is qualified and willing to audit our financial books on an annual basis. The audit should take place some time after October 1 and before January 1 of each year. If you are interested in helping your association in this way, please give us a call at 906-482-7860, write us at 800 East Lakeshore Dr., Houghton, MI 49931, or send us an e-mail message at IRNHA@portup.com.

Isle Royale Memories

We hear every now and then from people who have fond memories or family histories on Isle Royale. We recently heard via the internet from Glenn Smith who was at Camp Siskiwit with the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1939. We heard, too, from the great granddaughter of Elling Andreas Seglem who fished on Isle Royale from 1915 to 1932.

We are interested in putting people in touch with others who have similar interests in the island and have information to share. We are interested, too in the possibility of publishing some of these stories either in the Wolf's Eye or maybe in book form like our Diary of An Isle Royale Schoolteacher

If you have historical stories to share, are tracing your genealogy or are just looking for information on Isle Royale, we encourage you to get in touch.

Thanks

....to new life member, David Connolly of Rockford, Illinois.

...to all of you who took the time to respond to our membership survey on the wolf's eye.

...to all of you who sent in your ballots for the recent board elections.

Quiz Answers

If you haven't tried the quiz yet on page 3, we suggest you give it a try before turning this page and checking the answers:

1. c. Named by Walter Koelz, George Stanley, and John Brumm.
2. a. The second lighthouse keeper of Isle Royale Light on Menagerie Island, John Malone, had a huge family, cows, etc. on the tiny island.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER



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