

Wolf's Eye



Isle Royale Natural History Association

SPRING 1999

Letter from the Superintendent

As I write this the snow is melting (finally) and some hopeful spring birds are returning. This always heightens the anticipation of returning to the island portion of the park. What has been happening in the meantime?

The winter study at Isle Royale revealed that the wolves have rebounded dramatically from last year. There are now 25 wolves on the island. The population includes six pups in each of the middle and east packs. The moose population is starting to include more calves and older moose. Consequently, the wolves are generally having an easier time pulling down moose for food. The moose population is approximately 750. The crew at winter study reported that there was ice from Daisy Farm into Moskey Basin in Rock Harbor, and from Beaver Island into Windigo. With that small amount of ice and not much snow we anticipate no significant problems with the spring opening.

The Ranger III came back from Sturgeon Bay, WI on April 13, in time for the opening boat to Mott Island on April 28. The ship returns with new engines, a bow thruster, and many other improvements including a handicapped accessible restroom, and more speed!

The General Management Plan is progressing through the process. A second 30 day comment period ends April 26. After that date the Regional Director will issue a Record of Decision on the plan. If he approves the plan it will become effective. The park does not anticipate implementing any of the provisions in 1999. We will educate and interpret the plan and look forward to implementation in 2000.

On the island this summer look for the old ranger station at Windigo to be removed (we are into the new one!), the dock at Raspberry Island will be replaced, as will the dock at Beaver Island if time permits. There will be a major construction project at Snug

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THE BEAVERS OF ISLE ROYALE

by Douglas W. Smith, Yellowstone Center for Resources

The beavers of Isle Royale continued their population decline in 1998. An aerial survey conducted on 19 and 20 October 1998 indicated an 18% decline in active colonies since October 1996. This was the largest decline between two surveys since 1978 - 1980. The average rate of decline between surveys this decade was 5 to 10%. Habitat exhaustion was the likely cause, as the island has experienced no widespread forest disturbance to rejuvenate aspen and birch — the beavers' main winter food.

This was the thirteenth beaver population count on Isle Royale. Philip Shelton began the census in 1962 and it has continued until today at two-year intervals. This is remarkable and easily the longest-running survey of its kind in the National Park Service.

Similar to 1990, the 1998 survey used a DeHaviland Beaver as the count aircraft. The Beaver is a larger plane than the Husky used in the 1992, 1994, and 1996 surveys. Since the Beaver is larger it flies slightly faster and makes slightly larger circles. The result was less flying time in 1998 and probably a slightly higher error rate (i.e., missed colonies).

The results of the 1998 count found 91 active colonies with a food cache. Beaver families are referred to as colonies, and they almost always store food overwinter in a structure called a cache. The presence or absence of a cache is the best way to determine if beavers occupy the site as there are numerous beaver ponds with houses that have no beavers occupying them. We actually spend as much time looking for caches as we do the beaver house. Another telltale sign of beaver activity from the air is ponds brimming with water. Beavers always repair their dams in the fall creating maximum

water levels, and the sign of work, mud on the dam, is usually visible aerially. If we're really on the mark that day, we'll spot white, freshly peeled sticks gleaming in the water, another sure sign that a beaver or beavers are around. I look for any one of these pieces of beaver evidence, and it is

always best to look for all of them.

Besides active colonies, there were 26 other sites that had beaver sign without a food cache. These were probably areas where only a couple beavers were liv-

ing and did not make a cache, or they were areas where we did not see the cache from our high level perspective. Hence, there were 117 active beaver sites found on Isle Royale in 1998 representing an 18% decline. Active colonies declined even more, from 128 in 1996 to 91 in 1998, a 29% decline.

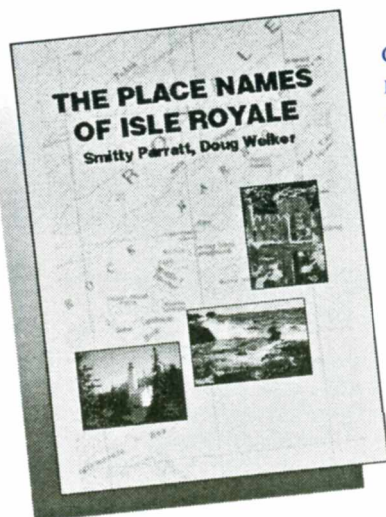
Not all of this decline can be attributed to the change in survey aircraft. Habitat conditions for beavers on Isle Royale have been steadily deteriorating over the years. Their prime foods like aspen, and to some degree birch, are getting used up, and if they exist are far from water. Beavers will make the trek to harvest these trees, especially aspen, and it is on this trip they are exposed and vulnerable to wolf predation. We don't know how many beavers succumb to wolves, or if it is important to the beaver population, but this no doubt happens and beaver populations over the years have correlated inversely with the wolf population. I saw two areas in 1998 where beavers were cutting aspen and both of them were well over 100 meters from the pond's edge—a bad place to be for a clumsy, slow moving aquatic mammal.

The most stable beaver habitat on the island is the large inland lakes. Colonies there fluctuate survey to survey the least. This is probably because water levels on the

More on the next page . . .



PLACE NAMES OF ISLE ROYALE NOW AVAILABLE



Did you know that Isle Royale's Barnum Island was named after George Barnum, a grain merchant from Duluth? That Bottle Island is so named because it is shaped like a bottle lying on its side? Or that Lea Cove was once called Lucky Bay?

IRNHA's new book *Place Names of Isle Royale*, now in print, is full of information on over 250 of the places that you have come to know on Isle Royale. Each entry includes the current name and the origin of that name, names used in the past, some interesting historical or scientific facts about the site, and its location. It's a fascinating book to read, full of little-known bits of information gleaned from written records, oral histories, and personal interviews—a sort of history of Isle Royale in itself. Authors of the book are Smitty Parratt, IRNP Chief of Interpretation, and IRNHA Board Member Doug Welker. They were assisted in their search for information by many of you who responded to our requests for information in past issues of the *Wolf's Eye*. Although, we didn't find the origins of each and every site on Isle Royale, we've made a good start, and we think you'll enjoy the book.

THE BEAVERS OF ISLE ROYALE, *continued*

by Douglas W. Smith, Yellowstone Center for Resources

large lakes are reliable, in other words not subject to drying or flooding, and the greater size of lakes allows beavers to move safely over a huge area to forage. Beaver colonies on lakes like Chickenbone, Sargent, and Richie are

remarkably stable — Richie usually has an active beaver colony in each arm. Sargent is always a beaver hub: This year it had four active colonies and typically has three. Island-wide the number of colonies on the large lakes has averaged 23 colonies over 36 years. The all-time high was 30 in 1988, and the all-time low was 17 in 1980 and 1984.

In contrast to inland lake colonies, beaver colonies on Lake Superior, or what we call harbor colonies, have taken a nose-dive. In 1962 there were 15 colonies in Lake Superior. This year there were 2. Since 1990 there have been no more than 5, and in 1992 there were none. The only real lake Superior stronghold anymore is Passage Island. There is a colony out there that seems to hang on in the large protected bay. In 1996 we even recorded two colonies out there. Recently another outpost has been Duncan Bay, one colony seems to be hanging on there over a six-year period.

In the end what is interesting is just thinking about the beavers. Trying to figure out what they will do next, where they'll show up, how they'll respond to the habitat slide. Beavers are hardy critters, among the hardiest, so our predictions about what will happen may need a grain of salt. Perusing the places they show up over the years has proven me wrong innumerable times. I've grown to appreciate their humbling qualities. But, as important is that there are still people out there who care about beavers, who prohibit them from being overshadowed by the sexier flora and fauna. Beavers after all have been successful by being dull. Their dullness is their savior though, and in the end they will probably outlast most things. Fortunately, the Isle Royale Natural History Association still cares about beavers and has kept the interest and surveys alive. Hats off to them and the dullness that makes beavers one of our most vital Isle Royale inhabitants. ■

Letter from the Superintendent

... Continued from the last page

Harbor with the first three finger piers and the fuel system piping being replaced. Safety of the visitors will be a major concern in construction areas. Trails will be receiving increased attention as will docks, due to the available funding provided by the daily user fee.

The park has prepared an analysis of the General Management Plan that answers the most misunderstood aspects of the plan. There are a lot of misconceptions and wrong information available about the plan. If you want the FACTS of the plan, write me at: Superintendent, Isle Royale National Park, 800 East Lakeshore Drive, Houghton, Mi., 49931. You can access the park's website at: <http://www.nps.gov/isro/> and access the final GMP at: www.nps.gov/planning/current.htm.

Doug Barnard
Superintendent

Fundraising/Grant-Writing

Some of you probably groan at the thought of those activities, but some of you may actually perk up. If you are part of that second group your association needs your help! As we become more and more involved in publishing and as we search for ways to increase our support for the interpretive programs of Isle Royale and Keweenaw parks, it is essential that we look for better ways to money.

We are looking for three or four interested IRNHA members to join with the executive director and members of the board on a newly formed fund-raising committee. This committee will be charged with mapping out plans for a variety of sources including foundations, corporations and individuals. ■

1999 Election of Board Members

Following is information excerpted from letters from the three persons who have been nominated to stand for election this year. All members of IRNHA are eligible to vote in this election. Please select from the following TWO individuals you believe will best serve on our Board of Directors for a proposed three-year term.

To vote, please use the ballot included below. To be valid ballots must be postmarked by May 22.

SARA BASSO

(Okemos, Michigan)

- Executive Reviewer for outsourcing services, State of Michigan
- Past experience in private law practice and business owner/manager
- BA—Humanistic Studies
- Juris Doctorate in Law

The personal experiences I consider most relevant to election to the IRNHA Board of Directors are my own experiences at Isle Royale. First, as a child I stayed at the old lodge (now employee housing) with my family. Later, I returned with my own children and utilized a housekeeping unit as our "base of operations." In more recent years, I have paddled the inland waterways, backpacked, camped, and have had some limited experiences boating with other family members.

My personal experiences at Isle Royale have taught me about recreational diversity. Service as a director of other organizations has provided me with the background necessary to plan, prioritize, and accomplish goals. My professional experience has taught me the negotiating skills essential to dispute resolution.

Our exploratory approaches to Isle

Royale are varied but our spiritual experiences are amazingly similar. Our common need for beauty and tranquillity are fulfilled at the same beautiful location. I propose we work together to protect and maintain this precious jewel for posterity.

DAVID DUCHAMP

(Kalamazoo, Michigan)

- Retired, part-time Consultant and Scientific Software Engineer
- Past experience as Executive Director of Information Technology Services for R&D, Pharmacia & Upjohn
- Ph.D.—Physical Chemistry

Before joining the IRNHA board in 1996, I had visited Isle Royale many times and knew that Isle Royale National Park is a unique treasure in our national park system. In my three years on the board I have learned a lot more about what it takes to keep Isle Royale that way. In managing Isle Royale, the National Park Service must engage in a constant balancing act between making Isle Royale accessible to people like us and preserving the natural and historical features which make Isle Royale so valuable. As the cooperating organization for Isle Royale National park, IRNHA plays a very important role by publishing and distributing interpretive materials and providing other aid to enrich public understanding and appreciation of Isle Royale. Recently IRNHA has become the cooperating association for Keweenaw National Historical Park, adding new responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities to its menu of future activities. I have enjoyed my three years on the board, and hopefully have made positive

contributions to its activities. If IRNHA members decide to re-elect me for another term, I will continue to participate enthusiastically in the valuable work of the IRNHA board. The current Board of Directors has done an excellent job, but there is much more that can be done to make IRNHA even more effective as we move into the 21st century.

CHARLIE ZAMZOW

(Battle Creek, Michigan)

- Senior Database Administrator, Spartan Stores, Inc.,
- BS—Business Administration
- MBA—Management

The Isle Royale Natural History Association needs experienced board members who are dedicated to the organization's mission. Isle Royale National Park and Keweenaw National Historical Park need an experienced cooperating association that will actively promote the public's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of these two different yet related parks. The parks we serve are unique within the National Park Service. As a current member of the IRNHA Board of Directors, I serve on the Strategic Planning Committee and chair the Personnel Committee. I have also undertaken an independent project to re-write and simplify the Association's By Laws. I have thoroughly enjoyed representing the Association and serving on the Board of Directors for the last three years. The Association has made tremendous progress during that time and I would appreciate the opportunity to continue to serve and build toward a secure future. ■

A REMINDER...

IRNHA's general membership meetings will be held in two locations this summer. With the addition of the Keweenaw National Historical Park to our organization, we have decided to hold meetings in the Calumet area, as well as on Isle Royale. On Thursday, July 15 we will meet in the Calumet Theatre with KNHP Supt. Frank Fiala and on Friday, July 16 we will meet on the Ranger III in Rock Harbor with IRNP Supt. Doug Barnard. Both meetings will begin at 7:30 p.m. We hope to see many of you there.



ISLE ROYALE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

1999 ELECTION BALLOT

Vote for No More Than 2

Please check your choices below:

- ☐ Sara Basso—Okemos MI
- ☐ David Duchamp—Kalamazoo MI
- ☐ Charlie Zamzow—Battle Creek MI

Please mail your ballot to IRNHA, 800 East Lakeshore Dr.,
Houghton MI 49931

Ballots must be postmarked by May 30, 1999.

Isle Royale Natural History Association
800 E. Lakeshore Drive
Houghton, MI 49931-1895

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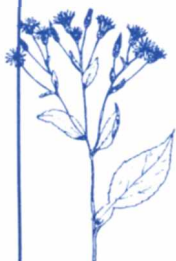
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1999 ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE SELECTED

Three photographers, a writer, and a composer have been selected to participate in this year's Artist-in-Residence program on Isle Royale. Each artist will spend between two and three weeks in the Dassler cabin in Tobin Harbor working on their art and giving talks and demonstrations for park visitors in Rock Harbor. Participants for 1999 are:



- June 15-30: Photographer Gary Kolb from Carbondale, Illinois.
- July 2-21: Writer and musician Ann McCutchan from Bastrop, Texas.
- July 23-August 14: Photographer Barbara Yoshida from New York.
- August 17-September 1: Composer and violist Libby Meyer from Chicago.
- September 3-16: Photographer Kent Bowser from Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Isle Royale's Artist-in-Residence program, in its ninth year, is one of the longest-running programs in the country. It is supported with contributions from individuals and IRNHA.



Isle Royale Natural History Association

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Tel: 906-482-7860 or 800-678-6925

e-mail: irnha@portup.com

website: www.portup.com/irnha

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
Household	\$25
Supporting	\$50
Sustaining	\$100
Life Membership	\$500*
Corporate Sponsor	\$1,000
Corporate Patron	\$5,000

**Life memberships may be paid
in 5 annual installments.*

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ISLE ROYALE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

1999 ELECTION BALLOT

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Houghton MI 49931

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