

WOLF'S



EYE

Vol. 1 No. 12

ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK, HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN

December 15, 1957

MERRY



CHRISTMAS

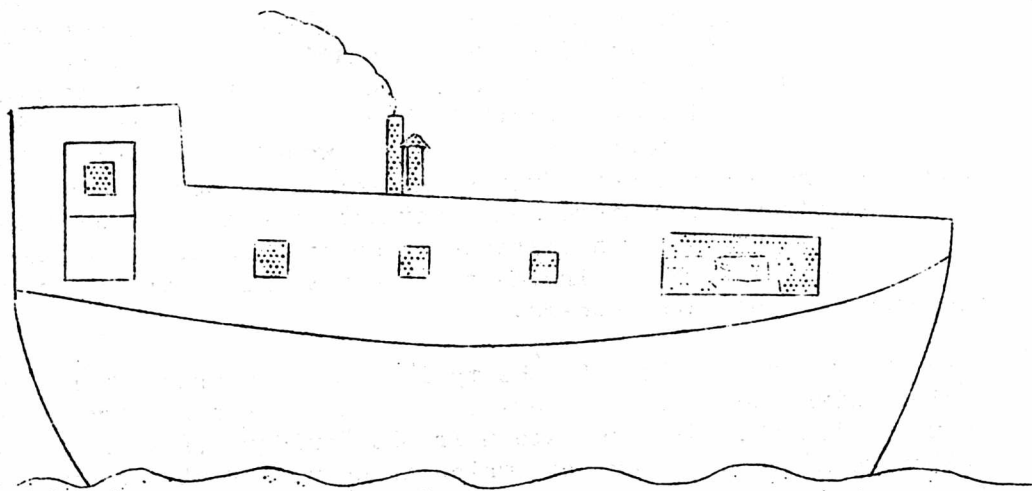
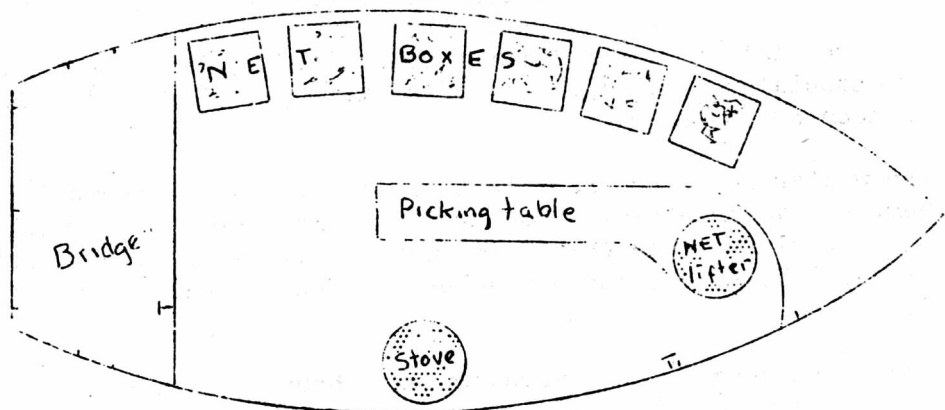
COMMERCIAL FISHING IN THE WINTER

Fishing for Lake Superior herring is one of the many occupations resorted to be the commercial fisherman segment of the Isle Royalty during winter. The major herring "run" takes place from late November through to about Christmas and is happily associated with that period of time just before ice forms over much of the Lake.

The writer was fortunate to stumble upon an opportunity to accompany a commercial fishing operation for one day working out of Duluth. The operators were well known Isle Royalty: Milford, Bob, Frank, and Ken Johnson. The date: November 30, 1957.

The alarm rang at the unreasonable hour of 5am and somehow six men managed to get out of bed, eat breakfast, pile into the car and drive off to Duluth -- arriving there just as the sun was beginning to make a vague impression on the new day. "Frost-smoke," a type of black fog resulting from a very cold night, little or no wind and unfrozen Lake Superior, hovered over every square inch of Duluth harbor. This made navigation completely unsafe without radar -- which wasn't available. The four men (the other 2 were just along for the ride) made a fire in the boat's heating stove and eventually the heat reached the men grouped around at a distance of about 2 feet. In an hour or so it was warm enough inside to encourage more attention to equipment and objects onboard.

The boat itself is of the typical Lake Superior fish boat variety with decked-over interior. It is somewhere around 37 feet in length. Near the stern is the "bridge" (for lack of a better term), the floor of which is about 3 feet higher than the working area forward. On the starboard side of the work area is a coal burning stove about 5 feet high. Forward from the stove is the net lifter (a large mechanism looking like an elaborated half-sized oil drum) next to a hatchway and stretching down the center of the work area from this mechanism is a long work table -- called a "picking table" in the parlance of the trade. At the very stern is a hatchway which completely opens the stern. The engine is located beneath the picking table.

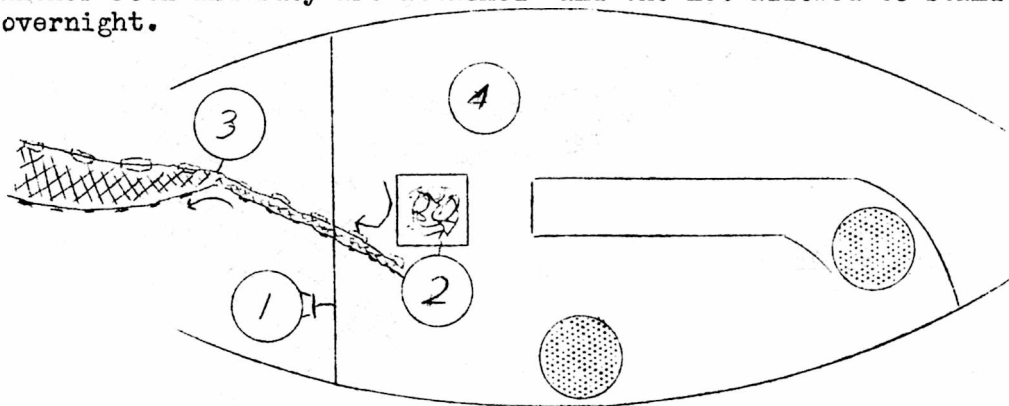


There are several major operations involved in fishing for herring -- all rather obvious when you stop to think about it:

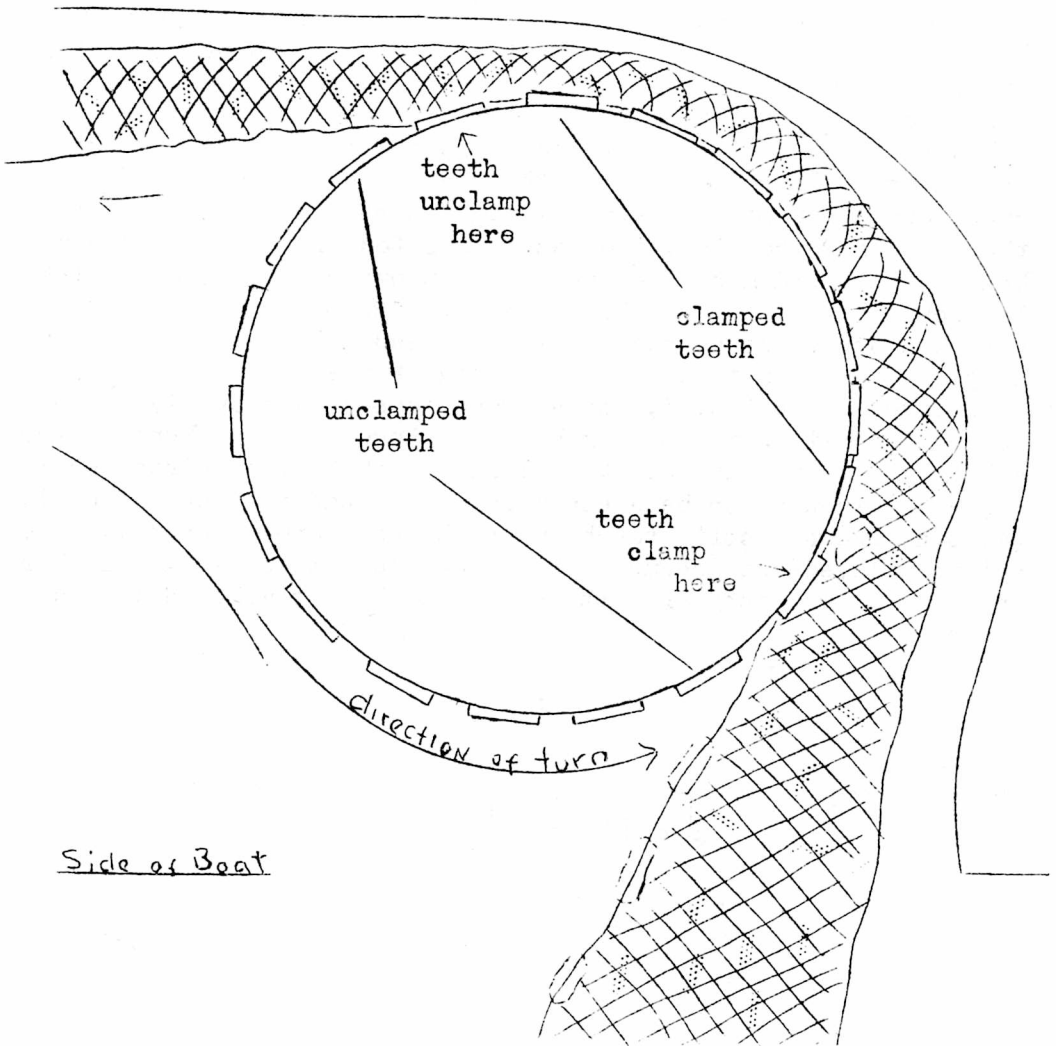
1. Nets must be placed in the water
2. Nets, with fish therein, must be picked-up again
3. Herring must be extracted from the nets and placed in boxes
4. Repeat the process.

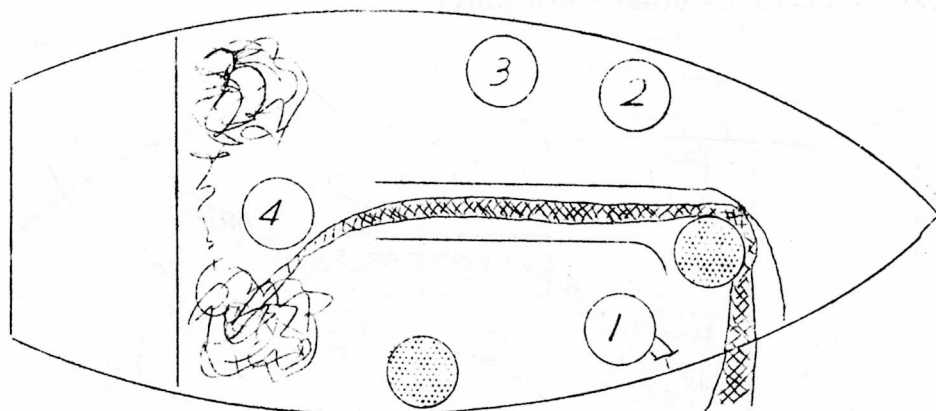
With the aid of some diagrammatic sketches, here's how these operations were carried out on November 30th.

By compass, the boat is directed to the site of operations and the chore of laying nets begins. Nets are in boxes and are everywhere aboard the boat. The first box of nets is placed just forward of the bridge, the anchor rock and float are attached to one end of the net and handed to a man on the bridge who starts laying the net through the stern hatch. In this case, one man kept the boat going at the proper speed and in the proper direction, the second man fed the net from the net box to the third man feeding the net out of the stern hatch. The fourth man kept new boxes of nets supplied to man #2 and got the empty boxes out of his way; and helped tie the beginnings of each net to the tail end of the one which has just been layed. Men # 2, 3, and 4 trade jobs occassionally so that #2 and 3 won't completely rub their fingers to the bone on the cold, rasping net lines. Man #1 has a job that requires continuity of thought so he doesn't get in on the trading-off deal. (also he knows a soft touch when he sees one.) When all the net is played-out (seems like a couple miles long) another anchor rock and buoy are attached and the net allowed to stand overnight.



Now to pick-up the nets layed on the previous day. The buoy is located and hauled bodily into the boat along with the anchor rock. One edge of the net is affixed to the net lifter and the lifting begins. This is accomplished by virtue of a series of teeth-like clamps on the lifter which grab the net as it comes into the boat. The teeth then release the net edge to allow the net to be pulled to the stern of the boat.



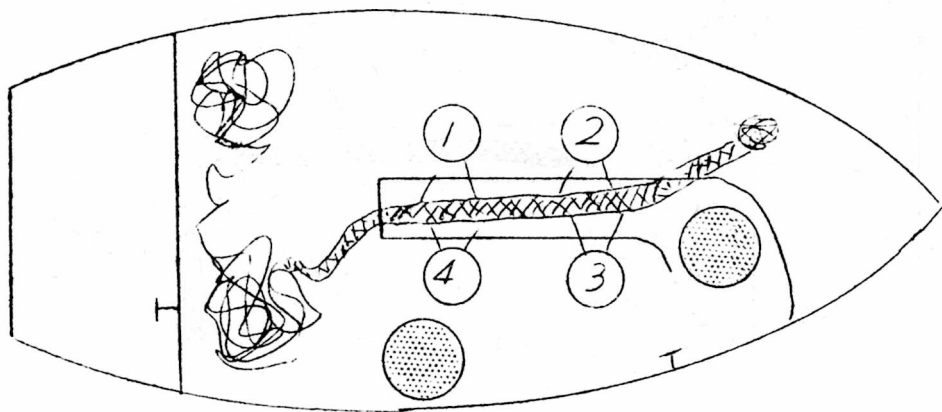


In the preceding diagram, #1 man is steering the boat and tending the net lifter -- adjusting speed and undoing occasional snarls, etc. As the net first came in, men #2 and 3 each received one net length which they now proceed to "pick" -- that is, extract the herring from the mesh and place them in boxes. The rest of the net is pulled to the stern section over the top of the picking table by man #4 and piled-up, herring and all.

The net being all aboard, #1 man in Figure 2 returns to the bridge and directs the boat back to port -- men #2,3,4 also retire to the bridge to have a well-deserved break (with coffee if any remains and a cigarette or two).

Back in port the fun begins. All that net, with herring entangled therein, has to be picked. After trying in vain and with utter despair to "help" in the process, the writer finally received some instruction on how to do this. Normally, the fish will have entered the mesh just far enough so that his gills prevent backing out. To pull him out backwards is almost futile, so you simply force him through the rest of the way -- using a corkscrew-twist motion. Sometimes the herring is too large for this in which case you use your best judgement. Due

to the lack of trout which feed upon herring, herring are larger these days, too. Also, sometimes the herring is completely twisted up in the net -- again in which case the "best judgement" technique comes into play.



As shown in the diagram, the men gather at the picking table and feed the net past them from the stern area where it was piled-up. The herring are extracted and placed in boxes and the empty nets are piled-up in the boxes whence they came. Tomorrow the process will be repeated -- and so every day, 7 days a week during the short season.

There are probably many variations on the process described here, depending on circumstances such as the number of men carrying on the operation, type and size of boat, etc.

ONWARD, CONSTRUCTION

Looking toward next summer, we can report the construction of the new deep water dock at Rock Harbor. The Roen Salvage Company of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, was the low bidder and they have been awarded the contract.

Of special interest to everyone, a "Notice to Proceed" covering the construction of the Ranger III was issued to the Christy Corporation of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on November 29, 1957. The contract calls for delivery of the vessel in 240 working days.

FROM ONE ISLE TO....ANOTHER

We were certainly surprised the other day when we received greetings from Elizabeth Kemmer who is wintering in Hawaii. She wrote that she visited with Mrs. Stack and also saw the Wolbrink's. We know you'll enjoy your trip, Elizabeth, and we hope, too, you'll visit Hawaii National Park while there and deliver Isle Royale greetings to former Chief Ranger Henderson and his family.

OVERCOATS, ATTENTION!

The huge array of tarps and wood frames is back again. It was December 11th after several days of wind and snow that the crew did the job. Ranger II is now well protected (we hope) from all that old man winter is expected to deliver. Some of us die-hards took a long time to drag out the overcoats, boots tire chains, and shovels, but we finally gave in and won't put them away for some time yet.

JOE COLOMBE

As a sequel to last month's story on the life and retirement of Joe Colombe, we thought it would be appropriate to briefly describe "the party". Joe decided to leave for Florida on Tuesday, November 26, which started some gears turning rather rapidly on the 22nd when we found out about it. The retirement dinner was held on Sunday evening (November 24) at the Douglass House in Houghton. Places were set with name cards (alphabet soup letters stuck to graham crackers and "life savers" with

the word "Tonawanda" -- courtesy Margaret and Louise) and a few mock menus listing "Starvation Point roast Moose...", "Lake Halloran" juice appetizers, and "Alkaseltzer" and "Pall Malls" for dessert. After the moose and "Alkaseltzer" had been eaten, a bound volume of testimonial letters was presented to Joe from his many friends. Following this, a gold Croton wrist watch was presented on behalf of the NPS personnel, the Isle Royale Recreation Association, and others who contributed to the gift fund. The tail-end of the affair found Joe autographing WOLF'S EYE covers which had been distributed at the close of the ceremony -- mostly for the ladies in attendance. Now that Joe's in Florida for the winter, us males may get a little more attention from the wimminfolk...but lookout, you guys, down in Ft. Myers.

Hmmmmmm?

On a gentleman's agreement with Ed Holte, we won't say a word about the black ey.....oh, oh!

MILWAUKEE.....CITY OF....WILDLIFE

John Lewis and Bob Linn were in Milwaukee last week to attend the Midwest Wildlife Conference.....fish and game, that is. This is an annual meeting of wildlife scientists and conservation men from the midwest states. Papers dealing with the latest research topics were given and many bull-session-type huddles went on behind a hundred or so hotel doors. Some "top-level" discussions were held on future Isle Royale wildlife studies and research programs.

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