

WOLF'S



EYE

Vol. 2 No. 2

ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK, HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN

February 1958

SECOND OF THE SERIES

Isle Royale Fishes -- the Siscowit

BEGINNING

Winter Trail

THE SISCOWIT (a second in the series on Isle Royale Fishes by Stanley Sivertson, Washington Harbor, Isle Royale)

The Siscowit is in the trout family, but is such a fat fish that its flesh cannot be fried or broiled. When heated in the frying pan or broiler, a genuine Siscowit will turn into a liquid oil except for skin, bones, and fins.

The Siscowit often weighs as much as 35 lbs., and spends some time each year in the same strata of water as the lean trout, although much of the time is spent in deeper water than the regular trout. The Siscowit will live a great part of his life in waters as deep as 700 feet, with heaviest concentrations at about 400 to 600 feet.

Despite the fact that the Siscowit is regarded as a very deep water fish, they will rise to the surface occasionally during June and July to feed on bugs, moths, flies, etc. When on the bottom of the lake in deep water, they feed on stonerollers, small shiners, ciscoes, and blcats.

Because its flesh is so extremely fat, the Siscowit does not have a large stomach cavity comparable to a lean trout, and therefore apparently does not feed on the large herring or ciscoes, but seems to be content eating the smaller fish of these species.

Siscowits are rarely caught on troll, probably because they are not as fast or as gamey a fish as the lean Lake Trout. Should an angler be successful in catching a large Siscowit, he would have a nice trophy for mounting, but a very poor meal for his table, unless he were to salt and smoke it in a special manner.

The large fat Siscowit is sought after by certain nationalities in the eastern United States, mostly in the New York area. There they have a process for smoking this fat fish, which evidently makes it quite tasty; however, I have as yet to find anyone who knows just what kind of smoking process this fish is put through.

The Siscowit spawns in deeper water than the lean trout, usually around the 200 to 300 foot depth, during the last two weeks in November, which is about a month later than the lean trout.

There are certain fish that are a cross between a lean lake trout and a Siscowit, known as half breeds, or breeds, to the fishermen. These fish can be fried, broiled or boiled and are preferred by people who enjoy oily foods; however, they do not compare favorably with lean trout as a table food.

Siscowits are usually caught on the bottom of the lake in about 100 fathoms of water, and a blue clay bottom seems to produce the best catches. Occasionally clay is found in the stomachs of the Siscowit, indicating that perhaps clay makes up a small part of their diet also.

The large Siscowit in the Isle Royale area has not suffered lamprey attacks as much as the lean trout. The large mature Siscowit seems to have about a 25% rate of lamprey scars to the large lean trout's rate of about 90%.

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FROM THE ISLE ROYALTY

"And now for some big news -- it snowed in Waco! A whole 1/16 of an inch! It was kind of funny to watch the pitiful efforts of some of the boys when they tried to make snowballs out of such a little tiny bit of snow, but gosh, it was such a novelty! Our quarterly exams are coming up at Baylor in just one week, and after those are over, our glee club will be going on annual tour. This year, we're going to west Texas and New Mexico.....we've had lots more winter weather than when I last wrote--in fact, we've all been freezing, which I suppose I shouldn't admit, since I know that sounds as if us Southerners have water in our veins or something!"

Cynthia Baine

".....especially enjoyed Stanley Sivertson's article on lake trout."

Jim Cole, Biologist, Rocky Mtn. Nat'l. Pk.

"Having a little better weather now...hope it keeps up. Regards to all"

Joe Colombe, Central Hotel, Ft. Myers, Florida

Address: Cpl. Gordon T. Stimson, Delta Co., 2nd Marine Division, Camp LeJeune, North Carolina.

"This last week of cold weather has really put a cover on much of the Lake along the north shore anyhow. There is ice along most of the lake from Duluth to the Canadian border and probably farther on. Quite a few fishermen have started to set nets under the ice between Duluth and Two Harbors..."

Stanley Sivertson

"The men quit fishing last week (November 8th - 9th)"

Ruby Johnson

"Congratulations are in order for Mary Anderson, daughter of Emil and Elma Anderson, Belle Isle...she was married December 27th"

Elinor Otto

(Will await further news from the Anderson's in Duluth to discover the new name which Mary now owns.....Ed.)

* * * * *

Due to arrive sometime in the next few months is Isle Royale's new Chief Ranger, Ben Zerby. Ben is currently at Saguaro National Monument and was to have been here by about March 1st. However, a series of mild strokes suffered by Superintendent Herschler of Saguaro NM has prevented Ben from leaving as planned. We'll have more on Ben later when we can talk to him personally.

* * * * *

NEW MANAGER -- ROCK HARBOR LODGE: J. Wellington Young, simply called "Jay" by all who know him, will be at Rock Harbor Lodge this coming season filling that all-important post of manager. We welcome Jay heartily and wish him much success and enjoyment in his new adventure. Some will remember Jay from last summer when he spent some time at Rock Harbor Lodge as a photographer for NPC. We've seen some of the excellent results, too.

Upon the retirement of Mr. and Mrs. Sanborn, Mr. Garner Hanson is the new President and General Manager of National Park Concessions, Inc. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Sanborn for your many years of thoughtful and personal devotion to a fine organization and ideal.

Several of the Isle Royalty no doubt remember Garner Hanson from 1953 when he was manager at Rock Harbor Lodge. We think Garner is a fine choice and are looking forward to many years of association with him.

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T H E C L I N I C

There are times when...nothing seems to go right nohow! Such is the case with two of the Isle Royalty during the past month:

First, while Superintendent John Lewis was in Philadelphia at the end of January, daughter Jeanette went for a tobogan ride near St. Paul with relatives. Next thing we knew Jeanette was in the hospital....the first reports were all confused and she had anything from two broken pelvis bones to fractured vertebrae. Finally, it was learned that two vertebrae were damaged. On Sunday (February 16) Jeanette got back to Houghton wearing one of the fanciest casts you ever saw. This will be off fairly soon, though, we understand.

Second, Joe Klobuchar who started with us last fall (see October issue, page 5) woke up one morning with a burst appendix. Joe was rushed to the hospital (Memorial Hospital in Laurium) and has been there ever since. The appendix was burst in three pieces, the Doctor said, and Joe only recently has begun to come out of the serious illness that followed the rupture. We all wish our very best for a speedy recovery.

* * * * *

There are rumors...of a wedding...about to occur sometime before spring...in Two Harbors, Minn....More later on this.

R A N G E R I I I

About midway between publication dates, a news-release came into the office from the Christy Corporation, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. Attached was a photograph showing the keel of the new craft being laid -- the first step toward Ranger III. If it were possible we'd like to print the photo here, of course, but the photo does appear in the Saturday Green Sheet of the Daily Mining Gazette, dated February 15, 1958. Some pertinent information of interest to WOLF'S EYE readers is the following -- also from the Green Sheet: "Christy was awarded the contract for construction on November 12 for the amount of \$1,159,680.00. The bids were opened in Houghton before Superintendent John G. Lewis of the park service. The contract plans and specifications for the vessel were prepared by R. A. Stern, naval architect of Sturgeon Bay. He will be the resident inspector during construction. Christy officials indicate that the schedule calls for completion of the ship in middle summer. The ship will be 165 feet in length, 34 feet wide, 15 feet deep, have 15 miles per hour speed, 100 passengers capacity and 100 tons freight capacity. It may make daily trips to the Isle if the traffic warrants."

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WINTER TRAIL - - -

It was a crisp, clear morning in late February. The night before Jim and I had stood outside the cabin door watching the aurora; it always made us reflect on things -- the world, the universe, the purpose of things in general, and the nature of that ephemeral dancer in the Heavens. But, now, the sun had appeared and we knew if we didn't hurry, showshoeing would be a pretty sticky business before we could reach our destination.

The radio receiver was just as crackly as the morning was crisp. With the mic button depressed, we called "all OK at Siskiwit Bay" over and over again -- never a reply. It left us eternally wondering if some catastrophic happening had demolished everything except Isle Royale. Breakfast was under way. Bacon assumed the desired perfect crispness automatically in the oven, eggs and pancakes sent their aromas from the top of the stove, coffee was

boiling-up to a wonderful winery goodness. What pancakes we didn't eat, we rolled up with cheese, jelly, meat, cake frosting, or whatever suited our fancy. These became our lunch that we would eat at some distant point.

The first time we heard that crinkling-cracking sound, we thought -- well, we didn't know what to think. This morning, however, we knew when we stepped out of our cabin that "the Bay" was working hard. Swells from out in the lake were coming in and out, cracking the surface ice with at once thunderous booming and tinkling bell-like sounds. As Jim and I approached the Bay we could see cracks appearing in giant concentric lines all the way from Senter Point to Camp Siskiwit dock. By afternoon it might break-up all the ice that formed last night.

Along the shore -- or what was shore before winter set-in -- were high mounds of ice formed by wind, snow, and blowing ice and water. Maybe they were 15 feet high. A single set of tracks threaded their way along the shore, over and around the ice mounds. The tracks were not too large and Jim guessed they were probably those of a female -- wolf, that is. She had headed north toward Senter Point and she hadn't stopped often. She stayed as near the shore as possible, as if there might have been something -- maybe a fish -- tossed up on the shelf ice for her to eat. This was a sort of wolf patrol stunt we finally decided, but we also knew -- or thought we knew -- another angle in wolf logic....cunning, and very intelligent logic.

Big Siskiwit River was still flowing -- betwixt, between, around and under large folded blankets of snow and ice between shore and where the river widens out a hundred feet upstream. The trinkling waters then disappeared under the shelf of ice that had recently reformed itself just off-shore. The widened estuary of the river had completely frozen over and as we approached it, we saw a "winter highway" -- a highway leading inland for wolves, coyote, rabbit, moose....especially the wolves. We followed the highway until Big Siskiwit River became too narrow and winding to make the going practical and emerged into that large area burned over in 1936. Little black spruce trees

showed their tops above the snow all through the area and where the fire had not reached were heavy stands of mature black spruce.

The black spruce swamplands of the Big Siskiwit River Valley were terribly fascinating, I thought, much to the dismay of Jim. Here was one place it was virtually impossible to travel during the summer, but now, with snowshoes, a person could stand well above the undependable water-logged forest floor. There were hardly any signs of life at all...no tracks, no sounds. That is, until we reached the very edge of the spruce stand where fresh moose tracks appeared. Jim reasoned that nothing existed in this dense forest to attract anything in the way of animals.

After a brief journey across another burn area we entered a cedar swamp. The snow in this dense tangle of trees was the real soft, fluffy kind that the snowshoes would sink well down into and we were never quite sure whether with the next step we'd find one of those holes just covered over lightly and looking like anything else. Here, the sun rarely shown through all the evergreen branches with the result that a snow crust never formed. Jim predicted that a moose could handle the stuff pretty well, but certainly a wolf would just waddle up to his ears and get nowhere. This was more or less substantiated by many cow and calf tracks leading into and out of the cedar swamp -- but never a wolf track.

As I remember I was in the lead when we first saw it. All over the ground in an area about 10 feet across were thousands of pieces of cedar branchlets mingled with a million or more (so it seemed) rabbit tracks. We both stood there trying to decide whether a rabbit had actually climbed the cedar tree to cut all the green branchlets????or had an obliging squirrel subcontracted for the job????? Twice more we saw this same remarkable happening and we still haven't decided just what, how, why; but after talking it over with several wildlife men, snowshoe hares DO climb trees, they say, if there's enough angle to the trunk!

****This narrative will be completed in the MARCH issue.

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