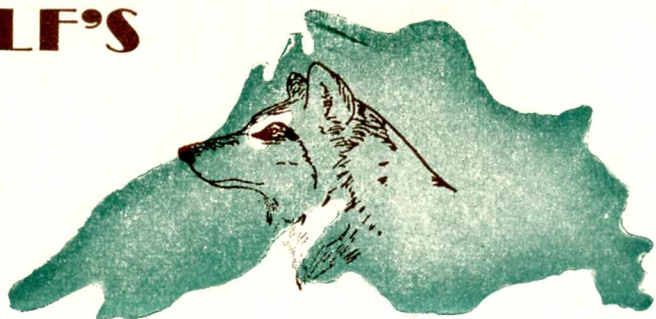


WOLF'S



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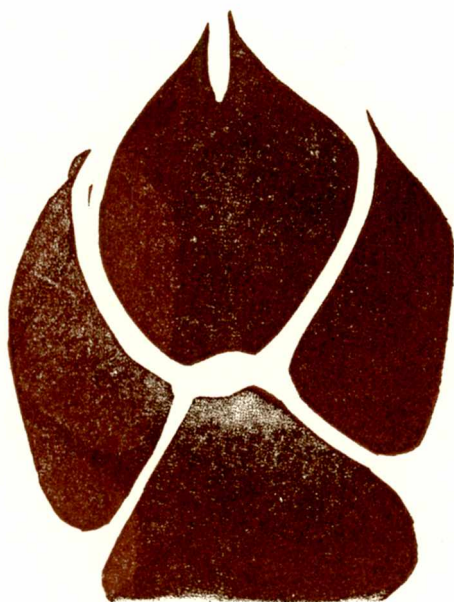
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IDLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK, HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN

March 1958

Concluding --

Winter Trail



Here we are on the 29th of the month and we're just getting started with the typing on the March WOLF'S EYE. Many apologies but no excuses will clear our conscience so we can proceed with the issue at hand. Must be the spring fever up here in the Copper Country these days....excuses, excuses!

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Continued from last month and completed in this issue:

WINTER TRAIL

The ancient beach line that marks the southern boundary of Big Siskiwit Valley came into view as we emerged from the black spruce and white cedar forests. The trail to Feldtmann Tower runs along the top edge of this beach line and the entire area is second growth forest which has evolved since the 1936 fire. It's places like this in winter that really show what has happened since 1936 compared to near-by areas which have not burned for much longer periods of time.

In one large expanse are young birches, aspens, willows and alders each growing in a habitat made possible by a combination of heredity and chance. The birches and aspens have grown the tallest -- up to 25 feet or so where they happen to have escaped moose browsing. Quite often these young trees seem to be growing in large "clumps" in which the center trees have escaped browsing with the trees at the periphery of the clump having had considerable attention from moose. We reasoned that if a moose REALLY wanted to feast on those center trees he could do it, but apparently none had been hungry enough to bother with it.

Just slightly to our left as we faced the ancient beach line from the valley was a stand of birch and aspen that had somehow escaped the '36 fire. The trees had grown to about 50 feet and covered an area of only about 3 acres. We remembered passing through this bit of forest on our way to Feldtmann Tower some days ago, but we had ^{not} seen it then with the perspective that came to us now. The tall aspens and birches are bare of leaf and stand there as mere colorless whips

against the winter sky. Under these are many white spruce trees -- maybe 50 feet high -- making the entire area under the aspen and birches a very pleasant green. The spruce will one day reach maturity and the aspen and birch will die out leaving only the spruce....this takes quite awhile, however, and probably neither Jim nor I will ever see it.

We found a suitable log -- one lying nearly horizontal with the top edge about 2 feet above the snow and about 6 inches between the snow and the log in several places. This we sat on, using the occasional 6-inch spaces underneath to stick the tails of our snowshoes through. Lunch-time had arrived and with a small pot of tea brewed over a hastily built fire and our rolled-up pancakes from breakfast we thoroughly enjoyed a rest from our half day travel. This was one of the few times during the day when we could relax and "philosophize" over what we had observed and make plans for the rest of the day. This afternoon we would work our way around the southwest end of Lake Malloran and proceed as best we could to the higher parts of Feldtmann Ridge.

There's a ridge that lies between the Feldtmann trail and Lake Malloran -- not a very large ridge and it's more or less flatish on top. Its steepest slope faces Lake Malloran with an almost imperceptible slope northward to the Feldtmann trail -- and, then, of course, the rather steep descent northward from the trail into Big Siskiyou Valley. It's here that sharp tail grouse are often seen -- winter and summer both -- and, sure enough, tracks were seen everywhere as we began crossing the ridge. The birds created especial disturbance whenever a tuft of gone-to-seed grass appeared -- thousands of tracks and droppings littered the snow.

There's probably no such thing as "typical", but this ridge area does present an excellent site for the observation of moose. And upon discovering a set of moose tracks we began to follow -- just to see what this particular moose was up to. She (we think it was a she) was "wandering" like moose do when not disturbed by anything. She would wander along then stop at

a willow or aspen and stand there for some time, sometimes moving around to the other side of the tree or shrub, nipping-off buds and branchlets until her mouth was filled. For no reason to be read from the tracks, she then wandered off again, probably chewing the mouthful she had gathered. When she wandered she'd follow the path of least resistance which would take her through any open area available at the time. After noting this "least resistance" technique for some time it was not surprising to us that moose often follow man made trails during the winter -- not because they follow the little red-orange trail markers, but because the trails are clear and offer no obstacles. After more wandering and chewing as she wandered, she stopped again -- this time by a clump of chewed-up mountain ash. There wasn't much for her to eat, but she just LOVED mountain ash and would get whatever there was left. The big mountain ash buds were just the most delicious things -- next to balsam and yew, that is. Ahead was a young white spruce about 20 feet tall with large heavy limbs near the base. The cow made her way over to the spruce and lay down as near to it as she could. Her body heat and weight had created quite a sizeable depression and there was an icy crust where she lay in heaviest contact with the snow...shoulders and rump. This was a "night" bed, Jim decided, because the size of the depression indicated she had stayed there for some time...last night. When she arose this morning she deposited pellets in the bed which at this time of year are composed almost solely of "sawdust" manufactured from the numerous twigs eaten. Never is there a bed found without pellets having been deposited upon arising. On occasion, a moose will have used the same bed over and over in which case the bed becomes entirely lined with the sawdust pellets. This is a distinct advantage to the moose because of the insulation provided.

We continued following the tracks which the cow had made just this same morning and the pattern of wandering-chewing alternated with browsing just as on the day before. There seemed to be no very special preference toward the species upon which she would browse and we figured that when she had completely chewed her cud she'd stop at whatever shrub or tree

happened to be near. There are exceptions, of course -- she wouldn't touch thimbleberry; she'd shy away from, but not completely eliminate alder; she wouldn't ever care about spruce at all; and if she had a choice of equally convenient browse she'd choose galsam over anything, mountain ash buds and twigs over most things, and aspen, birch and willow she'd savour with approximately equal feelings. Finally we came upon another bed -- a smaller one, not so deep and not so iced-up. This was her "day" bed which she used to rest awhile while chewing her cud -- probably similar to our lunch hour. At this point we left the tracks, having gotten a good idea of the cow's activities.

We found ourselves on the southfacing slope of the Lake Halloran ridge just southwest of Lake Halloran. There's the remains of an old lumber road leading southwestward from this point along the edge of the black spruce swamp forest that lays in the Halloran valley. Not far southwestward we came to a peculiar "roadway" that swings abruptly to the southeast and crosses the swamp. We started over this "roadway" with a quizzicle uneasiness as to how it got there in the first place -- was this a part of the lumber road? -- no, it was different. There are a few trees -- not many -- on this "roadway", but the entire aspect is one of barrenness. Halfway across I blurted out with "oh, so that's what this thing is!" There before us was what had looked like an ordinary aspen, but now at closer range, I could tell it was balm-of-gilead -- very closely related to aspen belonging to the same genus (Populus). Glancing from one side of the "roadway" to the other into the swamp that lay on both sides I was more convinced than ever -- this was an old beach, similar in most every respect with the present beach at the head of Siskiwit Bay. Balm-of-gilead on Isle Royale is nearly always found growing only on present or ancient beach lines. For example, there are several trees growing on the shoreline at Pete and Laura Edisen's place, there's a few trees northeast of the Daisy Farm growing on the present beach and extending inland a little way onto what is known as the

"Algoma beaches" which are only slightly higher than the present beach; there are balm-of-gilead on an ancient beach near the Minong Mine and some more on an ancient beach just north of Camp Siskiwit.

Southward from this old beach line, Feldtmann Ridge rises to a respectable height. We climbed the ridge and looked down on the area we had just traversed. It could easily be seen how the old beach line must have looked a thousand or so years ago. A distinct valley, partially occupied by Lake Halloran, extends all the way from Francis Point on the south side of Siskiwit Bay well up into the ridges that combine to form Feldtmann Ridge. The valley is bounded on the north by the ridge running all the way from Feldtmann to Francis Point (the one directly back of Camp Siskiwit), and is bounded on the south by Houghton Ridge and Point and the southwestward continuation of Houghton Ridge ending up as another part of Feldtmann Ridge. This entire valley, it was easy to see, was completely filled by Lake Superior waters during ancient times and the sand and gravel that washed up on the beach formed a sort of bar -- this is what we had just crossed and was visible from this vantage point because of the snow on its otherwise barren surface.

A rapid and very loud drumming sound caught our ear as we sat on the ridge viewing the panorama before us. It came from the black spruce forest down in the valley near Lake Halloran. Then from further up the valley came a repeat -- only louder because it was closer to us. There's only one creature on Isle Royale with enough strength for that loud tap-drumming we thought, and that's the Pileated. Back and forth they'd tap in answer to one another filling the entire valley with their tremendous resonance. Just the day before we'd seen the result of one of the pileated woodpeckers -- a hole about 5-inches in diameter in the base of a large cedar with chips that looked like the work of a man with an axe lying on the ground beneath it. Nature created a real chisler, I thought.

It was mid-afternoon and Jim suggested we'd better head toward camp. Much earlier the snow had become heavy and sticky and the going was real effort because about 5 lbs of snow would stick to our shoes at every step. We were both carrying a stick which we'd use to wack the sticky snow off every step or two. The most minute and obscure leg muscles were making their presence felt. We began our trek toward the south side of Lake Halloran and we came upon a number of tracks -- wolf tracks -- leading from the lake up toward Feldtmann. There must have been a whole family, Jim noted, let's give chase for a few minutes. It wasn't long before the wolves made themselves known by the tracks they left and by the tracks left by some sharp-tails. Apparently the birds were busy feeding when the timbers snuck-up on them. They were quick, though, and flew off to another feeding about 100 feet further up the ridge. The adult male wolf was in the lead and behind him and to his right were the female and two cubs. There was a small rocky outcrop between the wolf family and the sharp-tails which the adult male approached with great caution. He swung around to the left of the outcrop, crouching and raising only his ears, nose, and eyes over the edge of the rocks while his family stood motionless several feet behind. Again the birds flew off and the family of wolves moved-up another notch. A clever animal, we thought, but they may never get those birds.

Back in camp we began our evening meal -- it was going to be large because we'd worked-up quite an appetite. When the time came for our radio contact, we pushed the familiar button, repeated the phrase "all OK at Siskiwiit Bay" several times, and received the familiar crackling sound we'd heard so many times before. We ate heartily -- steak that we sliced from a frozen chunk we had brought with us last month. After dinner, two cots received two tired souls who had ended another day on Isle Royale.

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The above narration, continued from last month's WE, is true except for the sequence of events. The two folks

involved are Jim Cole and Bob Lima, the time was February and March 1968, on Isle Royale.

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From, about and for THE ISLE ROYALTY - - - - -

Addressed from Las Palmas, Grand Canaria (our International department says this is the Canary Islands), Tom Smith writes on February 16th: "My buddy and I fell into a wonderful "deal". We were offered an opportunity to work our passage across the Atlantic on this (a photo card was included) 70-foot cat. We sailed from Gibraltar three weeks ago and ran into bad weather which blew us two hundred miles off course to the Isle of Madeira. We sail today for the West Indies. The crossing is expected to take about twenty five days. I have not been able to have my mail forwarded on to me...." Tom's address when he reached the West Indies was c/o V. E. P. Nicholson, Post Box 103, St. Johns, Antigua, B.W.I. We're not sure at this time whether this address is still correct....for all we know, Tom's probably half way across the Pacific by now.

Superintendent Lewis was in Philadelphia recently and just about got snowed under --- physically. The storm that hit the east coast must have really been something from all ~~reaching~~ reaching us. Right in the midst of a very busy project, ~~only~~ about 25% of the Regional office folks were able to reach the office. Things must have done some real switching around because Houghton has had almost NO cloudy days in nearly a month. The snow is just about gone in many places here now. This is really unusual for this area at this time of year.

Speaking of weather, the ice in the canal here by the Service dock is melting fast...is open water by the bridge, but there's still some doubt about how long it will take before Ranger II steams out to the big lake. Most of us have our hands wait.

Plans for the Ranger III are moving along at an ever more rapid rate. The Hull of the ship itself is just about completed at the present time (at least, it looks completed). The interior decorating is being given very complete attention because it will serve not only to beautify the interior, but also will aid in the interpretation of the park to passengers aboard. Mr. H. Clifford Burroughes, Marine Interior Designer, who has done outstanding work for some of the major ocean liners, is working on Ranger III's interior....we're honored, and look forward to a really beautiful ship as well as a functional one. We plan to give extensive treatment to the progress on Ranger III in the next issue of WOLF'S EYE.

One reason (excuses again) that this issue is quite late is the birth of Christopher Eric Linn, who has put a slight crimp in the style of your Editor and his wife. All three seem to be surviving, however, and a period of normalcy has just about arrived. (CEL born March 6th)

From Two Harbors, Minnesota: Here's the news of the Wedding we spoke about last month.....Sharon Maki and Frank Johnson were married on Friday evening, March 23. A reception followed the wedding ceremony and after a brief stay in Duluth, the couple are living at 424 6th Ave., Two Harbors until they return to Crystal Cove, Isle Royale. Very heartiest congratulations to Sharon and Frank and best wishes for many happy years ahead.

We're very happy to report that Joe Klebuchar is back on the Job after a lengthy stay in the Hospital for a burst appendix. Joe's a little thinner, but has good color and is jumping around here full of life.

One out and one in....Gretchen Meuhlenhaupt had her appendix removed last week. You can't keep a good gal down, though, and she's up and about already.

