

August 2 through August 12, 2009 - 142 mile kayak trip to circumnavigate Isle Royale

For complete Photographic Story see www.pinewateradventures.com (click on Isle Royale)

Trip summary

- Day 1 – August 2 – 24.1 miles: Paddle from Grand Portage to Huginnin Cove Isle Royale (22 mile open water crossing)
- Day 2 – August 3- 18.6 miles: Huginnin Cove to Todd Harbor
- Day 3 – August 4 - 15.9 miles.. Todd Harbor to Pickerel Cove (include side trip into McCargo Cove)
- Day 4 – August 5 - Rest Day (0 miles) - Enjoy Pickerel Cove
- Day 5 – August 6 - 12.6 miles.. Pickerel Cove around Blake Point to Merritt Lane
- Day 6 – August 7 - 13.3 miles.. Merritt Lane to Rock Harbor to Daisy Farm
- Day 7 – August 8 - 16.5 miles.. Daisy Farm to Chippewa Harbor to Malone Bay
- Day 8 – August 9 - 7.5 miles.. Malone Bay to Hay Bay
- Day 9 – August 10 - 15.1 miles.. Hay Bay Cross Siskiwitt Bay to Point Houghton to Long Point
- Day 10 – August 11 - 14.3 miles.. Long Point to Grace Island, on to Agate Bay to complete circumnavigation, back to Grace Island for night.
- Day 11 – August 12 - 4.2 miles.. Grace Island to Windigo - Take Wenonah to Grand Portage (3 hour trip and approximately 24 miles)

A 142 mile (22 mile crossing + 120 mile circumnavigation of Island) solo kayak trip in 11 days on Lake Superior completes the solo circumnavigation of Isle Royale by Leonard Minnesota adventurer Daniel Larson. Isle Royale has always been a destination for me and now that I have been there I will return, it was absolutely amazing. The trip was planned and prepared for in about a month which included updating much of the custom on-board solar charging equipment he had developed for previous trips. I am referring to this trip to Isle Royale as a “shake down” trip to get me back into the expedition kayaking scene once again after being away from it for about ten years.

Isle Royale History (basic facts)

Isle Royale is an Island both literally and metaphorically. Isle Royale, the largest island in Lake Superior, is over 45 miles in length and 9 miles wide at its widest point. The island and the 400 surrounding smaller islands and waters make up Isle Royale National Park which was originally established on April 3, 1940, then made into a wilderness area in 1976. Accessible only by boat or float plane, Isle Royal has no roads, but hosts 165 miles of hiking trails. Getting to the Island is more of a challenge than driving to Yellowstone; for example, one must either schedule a ferry trip from Minnesota or Michigan and plan on a 3-6 hour ride one way to the island where you are dropped off at one of the two main visitor reception areas, Windigo or Rock Harbor, or come in by chartered float plane. Rock Harbor does have lodging available and most of the visitors plan to hike and camp. In prospective, there are about 20,000 annual visitors to Isle Royale far fewer than the average 500,000 we get at our Itasca State Park.

It has been said that Isle Royals is an island of wilderness as it is the home of wolves and moose. Although not known for sure the Moose were thought to have crossed to Isle Royale from Canada in the early 1900's probably by swimming. During the exceptionally cold winter of 1948-49 an ice bridge formed between Canada and the island, and a small pack of Eastern timber wolves crossed over to Isle Royale. The wolves became integral to maintaining a healthy moose population on Isle Royale. The wolves, the moose, and their interactions have been studied continuously and intensively since 1958 with the longest study of any predator-prey system in the world. Dr. Rolf Peterson has been with this study for the last 40 years and spends the summers on Isle Royale and returns in the winter as well. According to Peterson, there are 24 wolves and 530 moose on the Island. The wolves are genetically inbred and have lost close to half of their genetic variability according to Rolf. The wolf study is concerned that the Wolf population may eventually die out and since the moose and wolf are so interdependent one will surely affect the other.



The history of the island goes back thousands of years See web site for more...

As Howard Siverston put it in his book titled, Once upon an Isle, "Islands have always held a fascination for people - and none more than Isle Royale in Lake Superior. Born of fire and lava and shaped by faults and flowing ice, this cluster of rocks first appeared during a glacial retreat 11,000 years ago."

Pre-Trip Activities

Preparing for the kayak trip to circumnavigate Isle Royale involved about a month of work including; kayak repairs, equipment organization, photography and video equipment upgrades, new electronic charging capabilities researched and developed, Isle Royale research, logistic research, permits, food preparation, kayak repairs, GPS and Marine radio, navigation. Test new Global tracking device that mapped my progress every 10 minutes. See web site for images.

Actual Trip Detailed Daily Journal

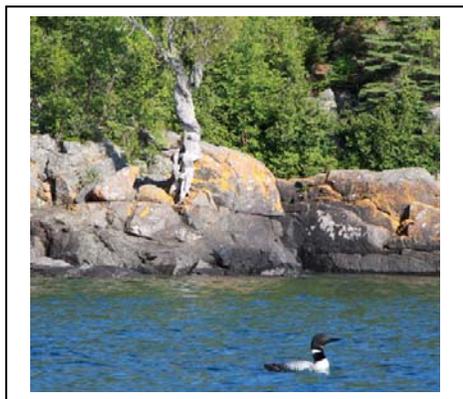
Day 1 – August 2 – 24.1 miles: Paddle from Grand Portage to Huginnin Cove Isle

On August 2, 2009 at approximately 7:40 AM, Daniel Larson of Leonard Minnesota placed himself and his trust in his red kevlar kayak and proceeded to paddle out of the protected bay of Grand Portage on Lake Superior. Posing for a quick snap shot, Daniel sits confidently in his custom kevlar kayak made by the late Verlen Kruger, next to the Wenonah, a 65 foot twin engine steel hull vessel that travels daily between Grand Portage, MN and, Isle Royale.

Paddling on Lake Superior is considered serious even by the professionals as the water temperature average is 40° F and the water conditions often go from calm to treacherous in a short time, if that was not enough one must include the common occurrence of fog that can set in and visibility can go from 20 miles to 15 feet in less than 5 minutes and you have a very serious undertaking. Today the 65 foot passenger ship was not on my agenda as I prepared to make the 22 mile open water crossing to Isle Royale in my kayak and solo.

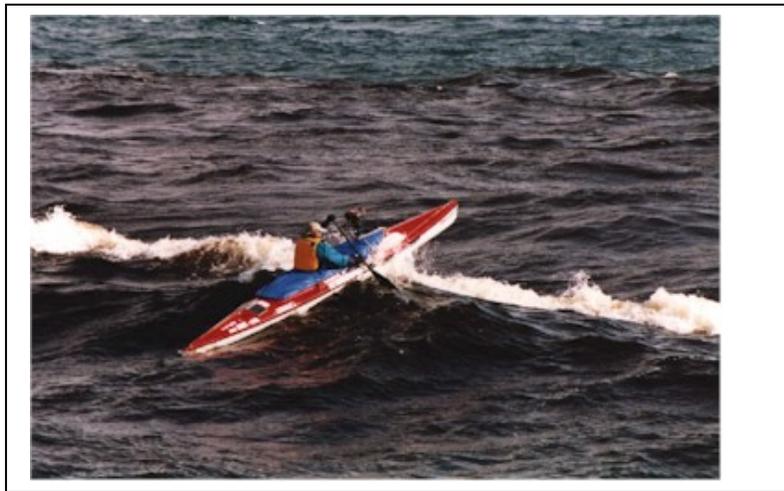


Before making the crossing there is one item that “MUST” be done, and that is the visit to the “Little Cedar Spirit Tree” that is 300-400 years old and sits on the north side of Hat Point. This tree has special meaning and travelers as far back as the fur trade era and beyond have paid homage to this very tree. Being greeted by the loon as I silently approached the Little Cedar Spirit Tree gave me a calm awareness of this spiritual encounter and of the many that have paid their respect at this very sacred place for hundreds of years.



Why do a trip like this? Seems to be a natural question... The answer is simple, it happens a little at a time. No one just jumps in a kayak and becomes a serious paddler; it happens one trip at a time. On each subsequent trip one gets more experienced, and manages to push their limits and then set new ones. Often times an adventurer will find them self in an un-planned situation that is beyond their confidence or abilities, they have to push through as often there are no options and once they succeed their abilities take on this newly acquired level. This has happened to me on many occasions. Today I will make my longest open water crossing as I paddle to Isle Royale.

As I left the little Cedar Spirit Tree I paddled northwest to get off the path of the main shipping lane just in case the fog would come I did not want to be in the path of the main boating traffic. While crossing to Isle Royale I encountered 3-5 foot waves mid day calming to 2-4 foot as I approached the Island a short 8 hours after starting my trip. I reflected on my accomplishment as I achieved a new level of kayaking proficiency both mentally and physically and was pleased to have made the crossing maintaining a relative low level of anxiety. When people think of adrenalin they think the stuff that gives you strength, which is true but if left high on adrenalin for extend periods one will soon break down. I have been learning to embrace and control my stress and am keenly aware of the anxiety and found it interesting that I could mentally almost (but not completely) eliminate it. On this particular day I seemed to fluctuate at about 20% of full adrenalin for the average of the 8 hour crossing, next time the same conditions may only be 5%, you see it is mostly mental.



Now at the Island with the 22 mile crossing behind me I wonder if this is why the Ojibwe named this island *Minong* meaning, “a good place to be”. That was certainly my first thought as I paddled a little further north and glided into the calm and picturesque Huginnin Cove at about 5:30 pm. I feel blessed that I am able to be here right now, tired, and sore, I earned it. I take a look at my GPS and see I have traveled 24.1 miles today, not bad I say to myself since I am hauling 171 lbs of gear, with 60 lbs being camera and video related equipment. In total I have 256 lbs of gear to propel including the kayak, much heavier than normal due to the camera mounts and solar charging capability. As I step out of the kayak I nearly fall as my legs wobble and they barely support my weight. In the kayaking world we call these “sea legs”. In a few minutes my brain teaches my legs to work again and I begin to unload the kayak. Setting up camp for the first night was inefficient but I had plenty of time so I did not feel rushed. I knew the routine so well, but the first unpacking and set up on any trip always takes the longest.

Preparing supper and taking a few photographs before dark was on my mind and it is always exciting. At about 9:30 pm with my chores complete I settle in to my tent for the night and I realize I am tired, I mention this only to emphasize that one must be diligent and keep track of their physical and mental well being. Keeping in good mental shape is important because one makes many decisions each day and poor decisions can turn out bad. Keeping in good physical shape is important so when you do make a bad decision you have the endurance to deal with it. I felt a strain in my right arm and realized I may have pushed too hard but I would not know until the morning. Keeping my arm forced in a straight position helps the healing of a paddling strain.

Day 2 – August 3- 18.6 miles: Huginnin Cove to Todd Harbor

I awoke and took a stroll to the point and looked over Lake Superior back towards mainland Minnesota and let my mind drift, what would I see on this island, more importantly what would I learn. The first morning of any serious trip is usually slow as the time to prepare a breakfast meal, deal with equipment and gear, and finally break camp is new and tends to be longer. On the water at approximately 10:30 am reflecting on the open water crossing yesterday and looking forward to my first day of actual circumnavigation; I feel fresh and alive (and free) with an open itinerary and 12-15 days available. I set my pace to a comfortable 2 1/2 miles per hour as I feel the need to take my time to get synchronized with the "lady" called Gichi Gumi. The north side of the island is known for its beautiful cliffs and rugged shoreline which has few places to get off the lake in the event of wind and waves. Although the official printed material from the National Park Service and in books and articles speaks of this stretch of the island as extremely dangerous due to limited places to land in case of stormy weather. I feel comfortable as there are landing places but one must have an eye to spot them and some skill to use them but they are there in an emergency.

After paddling a mile or so, I approached an interesting cave formation. The result of pounding water for thousands of years has sculpted this cave and the rugged coastline I am blessed to be able to paddle near. It is always worth the time to stop for a minute and really connect with a place like this. At this point the distractions of the modern world cease to exist and for now I am all alone with the wonderment of a child and feel a comfort I can only begin to describe. Am I the only person on the planet? These are the conditions needed in order me to begin the process of connecting to this great place. With the Canadian shore appearing hazily 16-20 miles to my left and the rocky shore of Isle Royale on my right leave the cave I discovered refreshed and ready to take on the world, my pace quickens but I barely notice the effort as I pull my 14 once carbon fiber paddle through the ice cold water of Superior.

It is 5:00 pm and I find myself tiring as I near Little Todd harbor; I must decide, do I stay here or move on? My muscles say yes, but my intuition tells me to work my muscles beyond comfort and continue the extra 6 miles to Todd Harbor. Staying over at Todd harbor will offer me the benefit of being camped near the Pittsburg and Isle Royale Mines; meaning I can visit them before setting off tomorrow. This strategic decision will save me about 2 hours time and wasted energy meaning more time to explore later. As I round Wilson Point and look towards Todd Harbor campground I see the public dock with 2 large boats (fishermen) moored and human activity on shore. Although the north shore is not heavily traveled there are occasionally fishermen there when the south winds make the other side of the island too rough. I approach the dock tired and hoping to avoid a full scale question answer session. One of the fishermen meets me as I glide up next to the dock and offers to help. I have gotten better at being polite but

as usual the ever so helpful assume you need their assistance and grab your boat and hold the bow. Unfortunately to a kayaker this is not what we want or need. The rule is, you never touch a kayak unless the paddler tells you to. It's not being rude it's a simple matter that the kayak is an extension of our body, and any unwelcome force that is foreign can cause an upset. More people tip in kayaks near shore or docking than at any time else. At any rate I push off a little as this helpful fisherman bends down and suddenly has nothing to grab. I have learned to stay off the dock a minute or two so everyone realizes there is no need to help. After a minute of small talk I asked if he could take my camera and shoot a couple of photos. Reaching out to the dock and handing a total stranger a 2600.00 camera takes some faith, but it's insured, and yes I specifically have "total stranger drops my camera in Lake Superior coverage" but have never needed it yet. After I visit for a couple of minutes I head towards the actual camp site 100 yards away to get as close as possible to a site.

Pulling up on shore and getting my sea legs back operational, I was ready to unload, haul gear, set up camp, cook supper, clean up, and just before sunset take some photos of some amazing silhouettes of the small island out in front of my camp site.

I will sleep well tonight, anxious to explore the Pittsburg mine tomorrow morning.

Day 3 – August 4 - 15.9 miles.. Todd Harbor to Pickerel Cove (include side trip into McCargo Cove)

Up at 7:00 am and I eat a morning meal of my staple oat meal, then take the leisurely 100 yard hike to the Pittsburg and Isle Royale mine ruins. As I explore the mine ruins, which consist of a 25 year old cedar fence around a hole in the ground and filled in with debris, I notice a new view of the small island that I took silhouette photos of last night. I set up my tripod and got a couple of nice images. I sit here on the shore for ten minutes and contemplate my trip and this island. 20 feet behind me was an open pit that humans have mined copper from at five different periods in the last 4,000 years. The first miners were prehistoric Native Americans that extracted copper seasonally from the island for over 1,000 years. While it is unknown who these groups were, it is clear that their mining was extensive and its products highly valued. There are over 1,000 mining pits on the island from this period, and copper artifacts originating from the Lake Superior region were traded as far away as the southeastern United States and the Great Plains. I walked back to my camp in wonderment. The very path I walked on had been in use for thousands of years.

By 9:00 am and with the kayak finally loaded I paddle out of Todd Harbor and encounter the 1-3 foot waves as promised by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) broadcasted on the marine band radio I carry. I head straight towards Kamloops Island which I can clearly see but is a good 2 ½ miles away. As I paddle with the waves building to 3 ft quartering from my left, I imagine the Kamloops ship wreck which I will paddle directly over in an hour from now. I have read some interesting accounts of the Kamloops and wonder how it will feel to be there, floating in a 17' kayak 270 feet above the wreck. As I round the outside of the small island known as Kamloops I see what appears to be a large fishing boat about a mile further, just about where I estimated the Kamloops wreck to lie. They were in fact diving the wreck, which is reserved for serious professionals as the ship is located 180 to 270 feet deep. Paddling closer I recognize that this boat was the one docked at Grand Portage the night before I launched and was owned by Blackdog Diving of Frost Minnesota. With divers obviously below the surface I asked if I could approach, they nodded and I coasted closer to take a few images of the divers as they surfaced and got back aboard the Blackdog. They appeared involved with

their activities and I opted to observe for a minute before paddling on. The *Kamloops* has been described as one of the Ghost Ships of the Great Lakes -- lost in December of 1927 with all hands and few or no traces. It was discovered 50 years later in 1977, in almost perfect condition, but what caused it to sink is still a mystery. The recent novel by Nevada Barr called *A Superior Death* centers on Isle Royale and the Kamloops Shipwreck.

After another 5 miles of beautiful shoreline I paddle into the famous McCargoe Cove, and although no problem for a kayak with a 2 inch draft the orientation of ridges and the tricky navigation of its mouth conspire to make McCargoe Cove fairly inaccessible for larger ships, especially during a storm. This protection has served some well, most notably Robert McCargoe, for whom the cove is named. McCargoe, a well-known British lake captain, did not want his ship captured by the Americans in the War of 1812. He sailed into the cove to hide the ship until the end of the war. Even though Lake Superior was well traveled at this time, and Isle Royale was familiar to American lake navigators, the near-inaccessibility of the cove made his gamble a pretty sure bet.

As I paddle the protected 2 miles of McCargoe Cove towards the center of the island the cove narrows until it finally ends at a large dock and trail head. As I approach the dock and look for a good landing spot I cannot help but smile as I notice the two groups occupying the large dock; on one end there were 6 young college age females sunbathing and on the other end was a larger group of boy scouts. The young boy scouts all seemed to be performing various acrobatic maneuvers as they jumped off the dock into the cold water, apparently showing off to the young ladies. I remember when I was that age, rather than try to talk to a girl I would act oblivious to their presence while trying to show off. I see things haven't changed much. Both groups were hiking the island, and one of the scout masters greeted me as I slid up on shore and said he remembered me from the Grand Portage Dock the day we both departed, he and his troop on the 65 foot *Wenonah* and me in my 17 foot kayak.

I was excited to hike to the Minong mine. Gathering my day pack and camera equipment I set off on the .8 mile hike to the mine. The path was well worn as it is part of the main trail system so finding the mine would be easy. I marveled at the changing forest as I progressed inland, first encountering smaller pines similar to our jack pine, then a beautiful white poplar forest with wild flowers covering the floor, on to a more mature white and red pine grove, and changing again to a medium sized mixed pine with poplar when I finally arrived at the Mine. The Minong Mine was the site of the largest and most significant mine on Isle Royale. Staked out in 1872, all mining operations ended in 1885. Today, the Minong site provides the best place to see artifacts and ruins that the miners left behind. I entered the mine from the north entrance and exited out the other side. Being somewhat cautious I knew I had plenty of time to look things over before setting up some shots, both video and still. According to the history, miners sank two shafts along the ridge, one over 300 feet deep, but most of the mines were of the open pit type. I walked all over the site and continued to find more remains of the mining operation such as small rails used to support the carts, wheels, gears and other items. At the height of the mining in 1875 a town on the south end of McCargoe Cove, contained over two dozen buildings, including a boarding house, a school, a store, a doctor's office, and houses for the workers and their families. Even though it eventually played out, the Minong mine was the most prosperous on the island, producing more than twice as much as any other of the island's mines. After spending an hour or more exploring the mine area I started back for the cove. I marveled all over

again (in reverse order) at the change in forest as I descended back to the water taking pictures all along the way.



Back at the Cove I made a hot meal of rice dinner on my trusty single burner camp stove and rested while I soaked in the sun and continued to watch the various people at this spot where 3 hiking trails converge. Obviously a favorite camping spot for the hikers, I knew I would be off and by myself again soon. I visited with a few people occasionally if they inquired about my trip, but mostly kept to myself as I loaded back into the kayak to get on the water. As I left the Cove I encountered a Loon which is not so unique except I was able to video the mother feeding her young a small fish she had apparently just caught. They appeared to tolerate my presence although the park service asks the visitors not to be too intrusive into the loons range and at the first sign of distress leave.

Backtracking the 2 miles out of McCargoe Cove I rounded Indian Point and was back on the rougher waters of Superior heading up the coast towards my destination 1.5 miles to Herring Bay. Paddling to the narrow strip of land, which I could throw a rock across and have it splash in the other side, was Pickerel Cove. The portage between Herring Bay and Pickerel Cove is the shortest portage in the park and historical as it was originally used to roll barrels of herring caught in Pickerel Cove to Ships waiting in the deeper waters of Herring Bay. I stepped out of the kayak anticipating this camping spot. As I walked over the rise I saw what I expected, one of the most spectacular sites so far, easily matching the beauty of the Boundary Waters. A large rock outcropping that dropped into the lake and across the narrow protected cove the forest rose towards Greenstone Ridge. The camping site rests high on the bluff overlooking the cove and was open to the cove but protected from all other sides. After a few days on the exposed north shore this site feels like a safety net. I decided right then and there that I would stay here for two nights. This is a rare place and I want to spend some time relaxing. I was sure I earned it. Packing all my gear, including the kayak, up the rise to the bluff overlooking the cove and setting up camp was a pleasure with such a wonderful site to be at, and all to myself.

I was on a high just being there, planning what photo shots to set up for as the sun set. I soon realized I would have both a moon rise to my east and a sun set to my west. I felt giddy with excitement as I was planning the last light photo shots. I truly enjoyed being here, but before the sunset photo session I needed a bath. If you have ever bathed in 45 degree Lake Superior you would understand it's not for the faint of heart. It took considerable determination to jump in, soap up and rinse off but I knew how good I would feel afterward. After recovering from the shock of the bath I decided I would not need one for quite a while, maybe a month or so. The sun set and moon rose as expected and was all I hoped for. I had time to experiment with some different exposure settings. In Bed by 10:00 pm and sleep... good night.

Day 4 – August 5 - Rest Day (0 miles) - Enjoy Pickerel Cove

Waking up at pickerel cove knowing I would spend the day relaxing, exploring, doing some photo & video, and hopefully some reflecting on the beautiful surroundings I am blessed to be in. I looked out my tent door and see that the rising sun had not crested the thick pine ridge across pickerel cove just yet, but I knew it would at any second. Without even getting dressed I stepped out of the tent into the brisk morning air and hurriedly set up my tripod hoping to get the shot I wanted, the one where the light is so telling that something great is about to happen. Then a sliver of sun edged over the tree line. Sitting back for the next 10 minutes watching the sun fully expose itself I could tell the day would be bright.



Considered part of the five finger area on the east end of Isle Royale, Pickerel Cove and the remaining fiords make up this exciting waterway. The five fingers consist of a collection of long narrow channels formed from the steep ridges that create the harbors and secluded coves and are in my opinion the jewel of the island. The portage between Herring Bay and Pickerel Cove is the shortest portage in the park and was originally used to roll barrels of herring caught in Pickerel cove to Ships waiting in the deeper Herring Bay.

Today was a rare day for me as I decided to stay and relax without pushing ahead. I seemed ready for the break, but would a full day be too much? My day of rest included lounging, exploring, shooting video, fishing, and making a couple of big meals. I seemed to be comfortable with the day off until about 4:00 pm when I started to get restless and had that tug in my gut, the same one I feel when it seems like I have not been pushing ahead hard enough. I actually laughed out loud when I realized I cannot even sit a full day without feeling the need to make miles. I knew I was staying until tomorrow, but I also realized that two nights in the same place is about all I can take. Was this my traveling mode? I asked myself, and further questioned if I had any other mode. Struggling with this quandary and trying to determine if my need to keep paddling around the next corner is a positive attribute or a hindrance. Furthermore, I wondered if this was hard wired in my psyche or something that has evolved. With only a partial resolution to my self-reflection, I did feel comfortable that I wrestled with the notion. I have decided that when my 3 year old daughter Madeline gets old enough to travel with me (maybe next summer) I will feel that slowing down is the right pace. I cannot wait to spend more time teaching her the ways of the wilderness, and have decided that a trip around Isle Royale should be in her future. Until she is older we will stick to short trips in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, hopefully next summer. My wife Rebecca is a wonderful mother who canoes and kayaks with me on shorter trips, but this one was for me and we thought was good timing since next year we are planning to start taking Madeline with us. We have paddled together; Rebecca in her own kayak and Madeline and me in mine on ½ day trips since she was 6 months old, but we are

excited to go as a family for a 2 to 3 day trip next summer. My day off Lake Superior gave me some rest and catch up time to wrestle with some internal conflicts.

Around 7:00 pm as I look out into the windy waters of Hearing Bay I see two kayaks approaching towards my private oasis; my heart sank a little as I felt that my solitude would be broken. I have not seen another kayak on this side of the island so I wondered where they may have come from. I greeted them as they approached and verified for them where they were. A husband and wife, appearing to be in their early 50's but fit. We talked for a few minutes as they held steady in the waves just off shore. I sensed they were just a skosh beyond their comfort level as the 3-4 ft waves were bouncing them around and darkness was only 2 hours away. There was no option; I told them there was a nice pad on this side for a tent if they wanted to stay here. My guess is they were sizing me up, but after a couple of exchanges I could see they decided this would have to do. We visited for a few minutes as I showed them around then they hurriedly went to work setting up their camp. Only a ridge and 50 feet separated our two camp sites, but it turned out they were what we say in Minnesota, "good people". Dianne and Don were their names; we visited and quickly got to know each other.

I shot photos on both sides of the ridge as the lighting of the setting sun and rising moon made the trees and water take on a life of their own. I managed to be in bed by 10:00 am and ready, (really ready) to be back on the water tomorrow.

Day 5 – August 6 - 12.6 miles.. Pickerel Cove around Blake Point to Merritt Lane

Awake at 5:30 am, I was ready to be on the move again. One full day of rest was almost more than I could stand although I was able to get some nice lighting for my video as the morning sun peeked over the horizon. Had my normal breakfast of a peanut butter & honey and oatmeal. I decided today would be the day to video breaking camp and loading the kayak. Typically I try to get video of setting up camp and taking down at least once on a trip, but usually no more due to the extra time and effort to set up and film. Doing all of your own photography adds at least 30% more work and up to 100% more work to the trip. This means that when the normal paddler feels totally wiped out after a day, they need to add at least another 30% or more and that is what doing a self supported documentary requires. This is the reason you may hear me speak of "efficiency" as I am always evaluating my activities knowing that the video and photography require the extra time and energy.

I finally step into my kayak at 8:15am having completed my morning videography. Paddling out of Pickerel cove was a magical time as the sun was shining on me and the narrow passage felt like a river valley with the tall Greenstone Ridge to my right rising to an elevation of 1000 feet, which is 400 feet above where I sit on the water. To my left is a narrow piece of land which separates me from Robinson Bay. It seems peaceful here and I sense the protection that many others have enjoyed for thousands of years. My mind begins to wander to the time in history only 80 years earlier when commercial fisherman lived on and this island. Today my 6th sense directs me to commercial fisherman.

After paddling the 1 ½ mile Pickerel Cove I skirt the south shore of Clay Island and spot a fisherman's cabin build from logs that was abandoned long ago. Tying up to a small limb sticking out of the rocky shore and leaving the kayak for a minute would be safe, I hoped. I tested my cat like reflexes and half climbed half walked up the wooded hill to the cabin for a

closer look. I exploring the cabin site while keeping an eye on the kayak down below, which I knew I should have secured better. The roof had caved in long ago and the walls were covered in moss giving me the feeling of an old cabin I once found in an old ghost town in Washington. Being on the south side of Clay it would have been protected from the lake, yet close enough to be ready for fishing. Still anxious and knowing I was just lazy for not tying up the kayak better I needed to get back before it floated away. Note: Being lazy is the same as being reckless, I knew I should have been more careful.

Back in the kayak I paddled around Clay Island and spotted a dock and a modern boat tied up at Johnson Island. It was obvious there were people on the island so I approached slowly allowing anyone on the island a chance to spot me before I arrived on their shore. I was greeted by onlookers long before I got to the dock (preferred) and we exchanged good morning greetings then both parties (the islanders and myself) began to realize something familiar about the other. Sure enough this turned out to be the group I met briefly in Grand Portage the night before I launched. They had told me they were following the ferry out the next day to go to their island and I told them I was paddling to the island. I was quickly invited onto their "Johnson Island" and received a warm and friendly tour. I spoke mostly with a lady named Carla whom was the 3th generation and she introduced me to her father who was the 2nd generation and the actual lifetime lease holder of the island. I was given a very nice history lesson about this island and a grand tour of the buildings. It was obvious to me that this island held a special place with Carla and her father as she began showing me the photos on the wall of her great grandfather whom homesteaded here. What struck me most profoundly was Carla's story of her great grandmother whom lost a son to drowning and how she coped with this loss and stayed on the island as this was how their family made its livelihood. Life was tough and I was being told some of the history and how tough this life on the island could be, the human side. We spoke of the National Park Service (NPS) and how that bureaucracy operates. Carla did have a glimmer of hope when she explained to me that the NPS is considering extending the lifetime leases to next generations in order to better preserve the history of the island. I was learning about the real cultural history and I trusted Carla to be a more appropriate gatekeeper than the NPS. I hope that comes true, for everyone's benefit as I know Carla will take better care of this island and preserve the history for future generations. Time will tell. We took a couple of group photos and then I was off.

After leaving Johnson Island I could see Belle Isle to the west and the site of the American Fur Companies first fishing station on Isle Royale in 1837. Belle Isle also hosted a resort built in 1915 by Fred Schofield that catered to the grand lake steamers at the time. Continuing on I weaved in and out of a few smaller islands staying on the lee side and taking in the beauty of the wildflowers and yellow lichens that adorn the sides of the rock often next to a small cedar tree growing right out the side and then reaching upwards as if saying, I defy this inhospitable place. Knowing I would soon be leaving the protected waters and be back out onto the lake, I took the time to grab a quick snack and then proceeded to dig in and paddle. I paddled past Hill Point, what is known as one of the five finger bay's then to Locke Point. From Locke Point I could clearly see the tip of Isle Royale called Blake Point. I rounded Blake point at approximately 2:30 PM and felt accomplishment; the north shore was behind me and a new chapter, (and more populated) was before me.

A half mile or so after rounding Blake Point I pulled my kayak up on shore at Merritt Lane campground greeted by people. I had been preparing myself, knowing that most likely I would camp with other people tonight so I was trying to be on my best social behavior. There were 4

young men staying in the shelter, turns out they are Michigan Tech students and were interesting to visit with. We talked about the earth's magnetic field and the formation of oxygen from the algae called Stromatolites. When I inquired if they thought we might have another magnetic pole shift I really sparked their interest and conversation ensued. An hour later my friends Don and Diane from Pickerel Cove arrived, and just before dark 2 more elderly, but experienced sea kayakers arrived. We had a full house, too full for me, but it turned out fine. Don and Diane made an extra helping of spaghetti and I joined them, I brought some venison jerky and found out Diane was a vegetarian, but apparently Don was not as he scarfed it down while I sensed a hidden look from Diane. We shared food for the feast; this eased my burden of one night food preparation which helps me as well. I have begun to realize that this island is so difficult to get to that it is sort of a pre-screener and all the people I met were "good people". The 4 college students were extremely respectful and courteous and could carry on an intelligent conversation; every-one else seemed to work around each other like they had been friends for years. I wondered to myself, what were the odds if I was camping next to 4 college students in a campground accessible by car, would the outcome be as pleasant? So I surmised that statistically speaking most of the people I would meet on the island would be "good people". With that thought, I was off to sleep.

Day 6 – August 7 - 13.3 miles.. Merritt Lane to Rock Harbor to Daisy Farm

I woke around 5:40 am, opened my tent door and was greeted by a sunrise that was vigorously burning away the fog and revealing a special light on the water that was as smooth as glass reflecting the rise and the trees across the channel.

After taking a few early morning images I busily began the ritual of breakfast and breaking camp. Everyone in camp was in the same mode as they were all up shortly after I finished my photography. I left the Merritt Lane campground at 8:05 am and headed into the protected waters amongst the small islands just off Merritt Lane. I paddle southward with Third Island and Long Island on my right and North Government Island and Edwards Island on my left. Paddling and resting amongst these rock outcroppings I knew this short period was a captivating time due to the early morning light, the calm waters of Superior, and my fresh attitude of beginning my adventure anew on the south shore of Isle Royale.

In about 2 miles I entered Tobin Harbor, which has been populated throughout history beginning with the mining, then fishing and finally the summer vacation cottages which are still left standing while their respective lifetime leases expire. I spent about an hour paddling around the little islands that dot Tobin Harbor; some were occupied and others not, and my mind began to wander to the era when one could actually own land here. What it must have been like for these people who legally obtained their land, built a cabin, and often times passed it down through generations just to have it taken from them by an act of congress. Sure there was the token life time lease, but that was just to appease the ones that were harder to bully and does not transfer to any new generations. There is talk by the NPS of extending the leases in order to preserve the history, (as in the NPS can-not afford the upkeep of the cabins) so why not let the rightful owner do so. Time will tell.

After completing my short interlude into Tobin Harbor I paddled out around Scoville Point and continued the remaining 2 miles to Rock Harbor. I timed it well as to land at Rock Harbor around noon to eat lunch at the restaurant and update my itinerary at the ranger station. I had a

burger and one (1) beer then went shopping at the gift store for my 3 year old daughter and wife, both of whom I was beginning to miss greatly. I picked out a small wooden cedar box with a print of an Isle Royale wolf on it for my daughter and I planned to place in it the rocks and driftwood piece I found on the island. Rock Harbor has a hotel, housekeeping cabins, a campground, boat rentals, charters, and sightseeing cruises. Rock Harbor is a drop off point for the 100 passenger ship the Isle Royale Queen which ferries visitors from Copper Harbor Michigan to the Island, and this ship was just arriving when I was paddling out of Rock Harbor after my 2 hour stay.

Rock Harbor is actually the result of the nearly 8 miles of small islands that parallel Isle Royale about a ½ mile off shore which provide the protection from the 60 miles of Lake Superior to the south. The wind is picking up so I cut across to Smithwich and Shaw Island and continue weaving in and out of the small islands as I make my way towards Daisy Farm campground. I pass by Tookers Island wondering if the T could have been replaced with an H, but after laughing at the thought I realized I have been away from home for over a week. Passing by Mott Island I paddle by the Park Headquarters and continue on and stop at Cemetery Island. Deciding to get out of the Kayak and explore I tie to a tall dock and “precariously” step / jump out onto shore, I am sure glad I still have my “cat like reflexes”. Not knowing what I will find as I walk up the path I soon understand why the island has its name. I find an archipelago similar to a rain forest with moss hanging on the spruce trees. The place has a somber tone as I approach the grave sites; like nothing I have ever seen. At least 6 family burial sites each separated with weathered picket fence enclosing about 8 foot by 8 feet. Most of the family sites had multiple grave markers and they all were constructed similar in nature out of wood markers shaped like a cathedral dome. The dates were in the mid to late 1800’s. There were spruce trees 10” and larger in diameter growing right out of a few of the graves and the entire forest floor was covered with a thick green leafy underbrush like ferns that one could walk through but not see the ground underfoot. I found myself pushing the ferns aside to see the footing before taking a step as the thought of falling into a hole occurred to me. I felt a unique peace while standing amongst these sacred resting places of people’s that were true Isle Royale residents. I hoped my thoughts admiring their perseverance were felt by them.

After precariously getting back into my kayak I paddled onward the short distance to the Rock Harbor Light house and passed by the Historic Edison Fishery. It was 4:30 pm and I decided to paddle the remaining ½ mile left to Daisy Farm and find a camp site and set up, eat and then return to do my exploring.

As planned, I found a suitable site at Daisy Farm, and decided to stay in one of the Shelters. After unloading and getting dinner I jumped in my kayak with only photography equipment and headed across the bay to see the Edison Fishery. I was amazed how fast I could paddle with most of my gear back at the camp site. By 6:00 pm I was stepping out at the Historic Edison Fishery which is literally a time capsule capturing the life of Pete and Laura Edison and a very representative account of a fishing camp. This site is manned by a resident historian but as I arrived I noticed a well worn sign in his resident quarter’s window that read “please do not disturb, after hours”. I knew I could have knocked and soon been old friends, but I chose to explore on my own as the site is designed to be a self walk through. So many things to photograph, my mind was spinning knowing I only had a couple of hours. The buildings still had the fishing nets and tools just like they were still in use. The old boats were pulled on shore and blocked up and the bunkhouses for the hired men were decorated just like it was 1940.

From the Edison Fishery it is only a short .3 mile circle hike that goes to the Rock Harbor Light House. When I arrived I found a full museum, it was open “self serve style” and the stairway to the lighthouse was open as well. The sign on the door read, “please respect this place” and I was grateful that the contemporary security measures were not necessary here, apparently everyone did show respect and nothing seemed out of place. I took photos and video here and felt truly privileged to be able to witness this place at my own pace with no other sole around, (except for the caretaker back at the Edison, whom I never did see).



Headed back the short paddle to Daisy Farm at about 8:30 pm, I thought to myself, wow I spent 2 ½ hours here and didn't even realize it. Thoughts of paddling south to the summer residence of Dr. Rolf Peterson the wolf researcher was tugging at my mind. Should I, or Shouldn't I? I was soo tired and I thought better of it and would do so tomorrow on my way out. I justified the decision from experience knowing people are more accepting of intrusions in the morning and my chances of Dr Perterson having a little time for me might be better, so I convinced myself, I was really too tired. Back at Daisy Farm I crashed by 10:00 pm.

Day 7 – August 8 - 16.5 miles.. Daisy Farm to Chippewa Harbor to Malone Bay

Up at 7:00 ish, looks like fog and overcast today and the wind picking up from the south this early means it might get rough out there later. On the water at 8:30 am and I struggle with the decision of paddling to Dr. Rolf Peterson cabin or continuing on, for a number of reasons, including the wind picking up and the fog coming in I opted to get going. Today is my first fog day on superior and I am excited. For me the fog adds to the paddling experience with an exhilaration I can only describe as a result of a heightened level of concentration. As I paddled from Daisy farm towards the Rock Harbor Lighthouse the wind continued to increase out of the east so I was heading right into it, but I knew when I got past the lighthouse and through Middle Island Passage and started back south west I would have the wind somewhat to my back helping me. I stopped and took some photos of the lighthouse from the water and felt the importance of the lighthouse as the fog was continuing to increase. I paddled out into the big waters and somewhere near Tonkin Bay I noticed a canoe with two paddlers come around the lee side of Caribou Island and start towards the Light House. My first thought was that they must plan to look at the light house and turn around since the wind was picking up more now and they surely were not following me out into the Lake. I looked back again when I was at Conglomerate Bay and it looked like they were heading out into the lake, couldn't be I thought. Looking back again when I was at Mine Point I could see them both paddling hard, heads down, and yes, heading

right towards me. By now the waves were all of 3 feet and the wind was continuing to increase. The fog was thickening and the canoe was about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile behind me. About this time the Isle Royale Queen ship was heading into Rock Harbor through the Middle Island passage and I was already $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from shore myself. I thought again about the canoe behind me and that they must be experienced so I just started to dig in and paddle. Somewhere near Saginaw Point I realized the fog was really setting in and I could barely see the canoe. This canoe on Lake Superior in increasing waves and fog just did not register as normal for me so I decided to slow down a little and see what they did; if they came my way I would know they were in trouble. Sure enough they were closing the gap and heading right towards me. As they approached the fog continued to thicken and being a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from shore (where I normally paddle) the shore disappeared in the fog and the canoe was barely visible $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away. As the canoe finally caught up to me the fog fully set in and visibility was about 100 feet and the waves were easily 3-4 feet with the random roller. I could not believe what I saw; a man in his late 30's in the rear and a boy maybe 12 years old in the front. The canoe was being thrown up and to the starboard from the quartering wind, but I was impressed at how well the man was handling the canoe. With the canoe only 30 feet to my side I could clearly see that neither the father nor the son were wearing life jackets, 4 foot waves, over $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from shore, 100 foot visibility, in a canoe, and no life jackets. I thought for a moment what should I say. First I asked where they were going and they said, Chippewa Harbor, then I asked why they were not wearing life jackets and the father said they had them in the boat. I said, get you life jackets on NOW; and continues to explain that the problem with a capsize is that the instant you hit the water you will gasp due to the cold and likely get disoriented and swallow water and that is when you need the life jacket the most. After hearing what I just said, the father told the boy to put on his life jacket, but the father still never did himself. Now I was worried; if they would capsize I would have a hard time helping them especially the father. I told them if anything goes wrong and they capsize that I would throw them a rope and drag them the $\frac{1}{2}$ mile into shore which would take about 10 minutes, they would abandon their canoe and live, but under no circumstances should they touch my kayak. If they grabbed my kayak in their panicked state and tipped me over we would all die. So I told the father again to put on his life jacket, he seemed glossy eyed and ignored me and I was not sure if he was in shock or not. I asked them if they wanted me to guide them into Chippewa Harbor and the father just stared. I said OK, just follow behind me, we will paddle at a regular pace so you can concentrate on your canoe and I will guide you right into the harbor. I was using my GPS and new exactly where I was, but without it there would not have been any way to find the inlet to the harbor. Paddling another 2 miles to the mouth of the harbor took us about a $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. Once in the harbor the waves calmed and the shore closed in on us from both sides making the visibility seem better but it was actually the same. I padded right up to the Chippewa Harbor dock and pulled ashore, right behind me the canoe came and I pulled them up. The father looked in shock and the boy was chattering a mile a minute, telling me he threw up his breakfast. I decided not to give them the ass chewing they deserved and just sat on shore while they got out of the canoe. I suggested they set up camp here and stay off the lake. Apparently this advice met with approval as the father headed off to find a campsite. There were 2 sail boats tied to the dock and a number of canoe / kayak campers waiting out the weather. The sail boat captains asked me where we came from and I told the story of the canoe rescue. About this time the NPS search and rescue boat pulled up and tied to the dock. The ranger stepped out and came to me and asked if I was the red kayak with the canoe because the captain from the Isle Royale Queen ship radioed that a canoe and kayak were way off shore and he thought they might be in danger. I acknowledged that yes I was, but we were not traveling together, I just came across them and guided them in with my GPS. The ranger went ashore and talked with the father then came back

to the dock and told me he confirmed my story and the father admitted he was in over his head. The ranger then quizzed me about my skill level and plans. I told him I would be paddling back out and heading to Malone Bay after I had a little lunch and that these wave conditions were not a problem and I actually would still be on the lake if those knuckle heads in the canoe had not needed help. Apparently news spread fast and others came to the dock to get the story. The two seasoned sail boat captains were beyond words at how foolish that act was. As I was sitting in my kayak getting ready to leave there was a group forming on the dock, including the Park Ranger, the other campers, and the father and son came down. Not even a thank you from the father. I looked at the boy and asked his name, at this point everyone was listening, the boy told me and I said "well I hope you have a safe rest of your trip" I saw eyes role and I got the feeling from the look of the 2 sail boat captains standing there that they were going to have a word or two with the father. The park ranger just smiled and the father still had the blank glassy eye stare. I was off heading back out onto Lake Superior to paddle another 8 miles to Malone bay. As I paddled out of the bay I thought that maybe this was the reason why I did not take the time to stop and see Dr. Rolf Peterson, was this fate or not?

Back out on the lake was exhilarating as I paddled in the fog and "Felt" the water as I progressed towards Malone Bay. Although the wind did not lessen the fog started to lift a ½ hour later and I could see the shore. I decided to paddle between Rodd and Hat Island which in calm weather is a great idea but with 4 foot rollers the 5-7 foot depth can be a problem. About at the point of no return I saw the bottom of the lake rise to what seemed like a couple of feet while I was riding up and down on the waves I wondered how lucky I was today. My pucker factor registered about a 5 as I paddled around the places that frothed knowing a rock was just below the surface. The wind was carrying me into shore and I realized that a capsized at this point would only be inconvenient rather than deadly. Once through the narrow passage between the islands I could see the dock at Malone Bay.

Landing at Malone Bay I searched out a campsite and carried my gear to the shelter. After setting up camp I gathered up my photo equipment and took the .3 mile portage to Siskiwit Lake. There is a gorgeous stream that flows from the lake (Siskiwit) which is inside an island (Isle Royale) which is in a lake (Lake Superior) I videoed and photographed. I also got a photo of Ryan Island which is the largest island on the largest lake that is in the largest island on the largest lake in the world. (got it?)

Hiking back to camp I finished setting up and made a big meal and did some organizing. I was stopped by a camper back at Malone who asked if I was the one that rescued the canoers? I wondered, how word traveled that fast, it was only 6 hours ago. I also learned that my friends Don and Diane were staying at the shelter next to me and were on Siskiwit Lake for an overnight, They arrived back at camp about 8:00 pm and we visited while they made supper.

Day 8 – August 9 - 7.5 miles.. Malone Bay to Hay Bay

Up before 8:00 am I am taking a leisure morning getting ready with no specific time in my mind to start paddling. I eat breakfast and do some organizing and before I realize it the time is close to 10:00 am. Remembering my cold bath at Pickerel Cove I decided to hike back to Siskiwit and take a bath before I leave Malone Bay. Hiking over to Siskiwit was quick and the water was at least 20 degree warmer than Superior so the process of taking a bath is not quite so disturbing. The water was clear and the bottom was covered with small fist size rocks making it hard to walk

on. Back at the camp I haul everything to the water and load the kayak and was off and paddling by 11:00 am or so. The wind would be against me today but I chose to head out and take what miles I could get hoping that the wind might change directions some time during the day.

Not sure where I was heading I considered trying to make it to Point Houghton or maybe just Hay Bay, but I would have to see how things played out and I knew I was getting a late start so I tried not to put any pressure on myself. Not far out of Malone Bay I realized today would be tough paddling; it turned out to be the hardest stretch of the trip against the wind. It can be rather discouraging when you are pulling for all your worth and it feels like you are standing still. I had many miles like this paddling up the shore of Superior in 1998 and learned that you have to look at the distant shore and horizon and ignore the waves next to the boat as they make it look like you are going slower than you are. The miles per hour tell the story whether against the wind or with it. I tried to hug the shore closely to take advantage of each piece of cover that slowed the wind.

I stopped for a rest behind Crow Point then headed out for the next mile to Butterfield Point where I finally had to stop to wait out the wind. I pulled on a nice sandy beach completely protected from the wind and made a lunch, took a nap, and explored inland. My inland exploration yielded “moose sign”; moose beds, droppings, scrapes, but no moose. I was not exactly sure I wanted to see a moose in the thick spruce and small openings with tall grasses. Sneaking up and startling a moose can be dangerous to your health especially in such heavy cover so I went slow and always tried to keep alert. Usually if they do not feel threatened they will just observe you and then lumber away. Cow calf combinations can be more problematic although I have come across a cow calf on numerous occasions and the key is to move slowly and give them their distance. Note: if you are being chased do not move slowly.

After spending 2 hours wind bound on Butterfield Point it appeared that the wind was going down so I headed out. As I headed towards Point Hay I had to decide if I was going to make the 2 mile crossing across Siskiwit Bay and camp on Point Houghton or paddle into Hay Bay campground. It was close to 6:00 pm and the wind was dying down so I wrestled with the decision. I was tired and the 2 mile crossing would lead me to Point Houghton where I would have to camp with no cross country permit, and so far my sense of the NPS is they are a little overly zealous in their enforcement of even the least important rules. Knowing it was unlikely I would be bothered I still did not like the idea of the extra work a remote camp site could involve at this late time of the day, in addition to my weary state. I opted to paddle the extra mile into Hay Bay campground.

Arriving at Hay Bay I was welcomed by a large dock and an empty campground, great. This was a remote site and relatively small, but the layout of everything gave me pause, just a little gut feeling, something eerie. Although Isle Royale is a safe place to be as I mentioned before only “good people” seem to be here, I have spent allot of time in the Western US and other places both camping and hiking where one must be somewhat cautious of the human animal causing harm. Unfortunately it is a reality, and not often talked about, but when asleep in a remote area one is exceptionally vulnerable and every year there are dozens of cases nationwide of incidents ranging from simple harassment to murder. Being alone is actually comforting to me and I will take more risks by myself, but I did take the time to take a walk outside the perimeter of the campground to decide if the inner voice was on to something or if this was just a

unique setting that my mind had associated with another place or time. At any rate I decided there was nothing to be concerned of here and set up camp.

It was exactly 7:56 pm when the sun set over the Red Oak Ridge as I looked to the west. The sight was absolutely captivating as the narrow waters of Hay Bay were as calm as glass. I saw a flotilla of fledgling ducks swim by the dock, but there was no mother, perplexed I made a mental note wondering what may have happened. About ten minutes later I saw a bald eagle land in a tree across the bay, that is probably what happened I thought. I wondered if the ducks could survive without the training from a mother, I decided not likely. I ate my supper with my feet dangling off the end of the dock looking at the remains of the light from the setting sun as twilight began to take over. What a beautiful place, tucked in a narrow bay and protected from the wrath of the lady just around the corner. In my tent 9:00pm and still excited to be on Isle Royale, but I was starting to miss my family back home and visualized about the day when I would be accompanied by my wife and young daughter. I think next summer; Madeline will be 4 and will be ready for a trip into the boundary waters. Off to sleep I go....

Day 9 – August 10 - 15.1 miles.. Hay Bay Cross Siskiwit Bay to Point Houghton to Long Point

I planned to be up and on the water as early as possible as there was wind in the forecast for later in the day so I wanted to make some miles before the wind, unfortunately I did not rise until 5:45 am due to my watch alarm not working. Looking up the hillside to the north at Red Oak Ridge I can see fog littered in the low areas. Still early enough to get a jump on the wind I decided to cancel breakfast and make peanut butter & honey sandwiches to eat on the water. As I was loading the kayak I saw the same flotilla of ducklings swim by again, still no mother, I am sure they are on their own. I was on the water by 6:40 am, roughly one hour from the time I awoke. Traveling with all of my gear seems to take extra time; I often wonder what it would be like to travel light, would I enjoy my time more or less. I usually decide it is worth it as I can share the experience in the form of photography and video and I am sure when my daughter looks at the images it will be worth the extra load.

On the water and backtracking the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to Point Hay I ready myself for the crossing. I feel the fog rolling in quickly and am excited with anticipation, a combination of caution and recklessness knowing I must press myself forward. As I mentioned before, the fog creates a sense of the island and today I will have my opportunity to paddle in what we call “pea soup”. With the kayak resting motionless just off Point Hay I look 2 miles across Siskiwit Bay towards where Houghton Point should be, it was there yesterday so I know it must be there today, but the fog blocks my view of the point that I will be paddling towards. If I overshoot the point I will be paddling out into Lake Superior towards Michigan. My waypoints are set in the GPS and I feel confident with a compass and map as a backup; I really have nothing to be concerned about. I am glad the water is calm and the air still so I can hear any oncoming boat traffic. I have been lugging along this small air horn just for this occasion and have it tucked next to me just in case I hear a boat motoring towards me I can blow the horn. Sitting so low in the water I will not show up on larger boats radar, unless of course I wear a tin foil hat and unfortunately I forgot the tin foil. I sit and contemplate in the calm water and for a moment it appears that I can barely make out the green trees high on Houghton Ridge then it’s gone again. Finally I make the first paddle stroke and off I go, leaving Point Hay behind me and paddle into what feels like a snowstorm. The sensation of not seeing is ever present and I am tending to paddle slowly, I just cannot seem

to make myself paddle a normal pace. Watching my GPS carefully I correct as needed and wonder if this could be done with no compass or GPS, not likely. I test myself and paddle in a couple of circles and then rest and try to guess my bearings, usually I am within 90 degrees accuracy when I check the GPS, not good enough. I eat one of my sandwiches somewhere about half way across the bay then continue on. As I approach the waypoint on my GPS telling me I should be at the tip of Houghton Point I can see no land so I paddle a little further and the GPS tells me I am moving away so I back up to the waypoint and still no land. Having been lost (what we woodsman call temporarily disoriented☺) a few times before I know that you need to proceed slowly and move outwards from the known point. I take a moment to look at the map and line it up with the compass and know generally which way to go; but am I sure? Sitting there with nothing but the white of the fog in all directions I hear a distant ding of a bell behind me. I have to think about it for a minute and then look at the map, there it is a designated shipping channel and the ding must be the floating boyee. Then I hear a seagull in front of me. Putting the new information together I deduct that land must be towards the seagull and since the channel marker is behind me that idea seems logical; land must be ahead. I paddle no more than 100 feet toward the seagull sound and Houghton Point begins to take shape and there it is, it was there the whole time only a 100 feet out of my view due to the fog. Wow, so close but without navigation abilities it could have been 100 mile away. This was another paddling accomplishment and a nugget of knowledge to add to the years of others. Some people may consider this little venture across 2 miles in the fog no big deal and hardly worth noting, and to others I am called crazy. What can I say “it is all relative, you get crazy a little bit at a time, so you never really know it’s happening” another way to describe it is with practice and confidence one does not feel unsafe, it is all in the mind.

Now that I am at Houghton Point I plan to hug the shore close enough to keep it in sight as I wind my way down the island not sure where I will camp this evening. In the first mile after rounding Houghton point I wind my way between a row of small rock islands and the main island. The fog is so thick I must stay close to shore as I cautiously make my way the ¾ mile following the shore to a small cove called *Fishermans Home Cove*. At about 8:40 I enter the narrow cove and paddle 400 yards or so and find the historic site that is in the fishing history going back well over a hundred years. I first see a boat house precariously hanging over the edge of the water with the name SAM RUDE hanging above the door into the building. Next to that was another sign stating UNSAFE DOCK. From the water I can see a number of buildings that were build long ago with board and batten type construction and tar paper covering. There were 2 modern boats tied to the dock and I was hoping someone might be out and about and step down to the shore for a visit, but 8:45 am might be too early. I understand that Mark Rude, the son of Sam Rude is the lifetime lease holder and maintains his family historical fishing homestead. I chose not to come ashore and bother whoever was there as I am sure they want their privacy too. In general, I have learned that the homes of the fishermen varied a great deal. Some were basic shacks of wood and tarpaper, with a stove, homemade table, bed and cupboards made of soap boxes and orange crates, others were set up as family homes, with good furniture, decorated with photographs and paintings, nets, or relics of shipwrecks. Wood burning stoves were universally used, and the shores of the island furnished an inexhaustible supply of fuel.

As I paddled out of Fisherman’s Home Cove and started down the shore the fog began to lessen and visibility increased steadily but the wind was also increasing making progress slower. The shoreline was straight and afforded me no protection but the gradual slope and open areas looking to my right towards Feldtmann Ridge were captivating with their open meadows

surrounded by stands of spruce and towering poplars. I reached Attwood Beach at about 10:40 am and not any too soon as the wind was driving me to an almost stand still at times. I rested here completely protected from the wind and waves which I could see frothing just off the point of land I was hiding behind. I decided to explore the point of land and soon found moose sign but no moose. With the wind still howling away I decided to make lunch and rest awhile. After Lunch I set out to paddle further but only made it a ¼ mile as I was met by such heavy winds and waves; it was not worth the energy expended so I turned around and headed back to Atwood beach and set up my sleeping pad, took a nap, and read. About 2 hours later the sky grew black and I wondered if I would get rained on so I put away my sleeping pad and packed up the kayak as there was no doubt I was going to see rain. I walked up the beach to the edge of the wood line and picked a nice spruce to hunker under while the quick down pour came and went. I realized this was the only rain I had encountered so far while on Isle Royale.

It was nearly 3:00 pm before I left Attwood Beach for the 2nd time; paddling was much more productive since the wind had lessened. Another 5 miles and I landed at a spot about 1 mile east of Long Point. This place was so unique it was just incredible. When the kayak first landed on shore all I could see was a beach with small cedars and driftwood, but after I pulled up and walked only 50 feet inland I found the lake that is shown on the map. At the crest of this narrow patch of beach running parallel to the entire inland lake you can see both bodies of water. There is one place where it is evident that during high water the small lake drains into Superior forming a temporary river. As I begin my initial look around I see wolf prints in the sand and lots of them. I walked about 1000 feet up the shore with the small lake to my left and Superior to my right and was astounded by all the wolf activity. It appears that a pack of wolves have used this beach and upon further exploration I understand why. The small lake is prime moose habitat; shallow with vegetation and marshy willows surrounding it on the back side where I found tremendous moose sign. On Isle Royale where there are moose there are wolves. I took some photographs before my activity would blot out the wolf tracks and then I set my tent at a carefully picked place so I could see both the small un-named lake and Superior, only 25 feet from each. This place was like a postcard with the bent and knarled cedar trees growing in the sand and large driftwood logs littering the shore with my camp nestled amongst it all. It was nearing 7:00 pm now so Superior was calming down as I busily made my evening meal, I needed calories tonight. After Supper I was ready for the sun set that I would witness over Feldmann Ridge and took some camp photos as well. I explored the lake and found even more moose and wolf sign including tracks, scat and droppings, and eaten willow branches. This seemed like a great place and my tent was set up right on the trail the wolves had left the day before. Would I see or hear something tonight? After final sunset photos and camp chores I turned on my marine radio and learned that the wind was going to be out of the south west by mid morning and fog early. Looking at the map I determined I should get up and on the water early so I could be around Cumberland Point before the wind was too strong then I would be traveling with the wind.



Day 10 – August 11 - 14.3 miles.. Long Point to Grace Island, on to Agate Bay to complete circumnavigation, back to Grace Island for the night.

Up early. 6:00 am, the air seemed thick and visibility low. Took a walk down the beach hoping to catch a glimpse of wolf or moose, did not see either but was not disappointed as this place is captivating with the remoteness and the fog lends itself to the island appeal. I made a quick breakfast of my normal oatmeal and sandwich then broke camp. Loading the kayak was easy as it was literally only a few feet from my camp and due to the fine sand I can pull the loaded kayak the rest of the way to the water. I feel a breeze just starting and I feel rushed to get going. With the breeze came the fog and only a minute ago I could see the tip of Long Point now it has disappeared. As I begin paddling I tease the fog and paddle in and out of out of sight of shore, eventually I determine to head directly the remaining ½ mile to Long Point leaving the sight of shore until I reach the point. Depending on how long the fog lasts I may need to hug the shore on the south and west end of the island to be on the safe side due to the heavy boat traffic. The fog is getting less dense as I round the Head and I can see Rainbow Point a mile away. By the time I get to rainbow point I can see much further and decide to make the open 2 mile crossing to Cumberland Point which puts me about a mile off shore in the middle of the crossing. The wind is increasing and the waves are approaching 2 feet but I have timed things well and ease into Cumberland Point, but there is certain danger as I have to pass over Cumberland Reef where boulders the size of a small car lie just under the surface and the water is so clear I can see each one as I rise up and down on the waves. On the bright side, if I were to upset I will only be a 5 minute cold swim from shore which could be deadly only if I cannot get a fire going to warm my body which will have dropped its core temperature to the pre hypothermic stage. Not a problem I think to myself, I have practiced starting fires with only my magnesium stick. I am past the reef in no time and any thought of the what if's are gone.

After rounding Cumberland Point I enter Grace Harbor and can see Grace Island only 2 miles away; now with the wind at my back and I am nearing the end of my trip and can feel the excitement. The boat traffic has been heavy since the fog lifted and I have seen 26 to 50 foot private boats going into and out of Grace Harbor most of them I assume they are coming from the Windigo Ranger Station. I paddle a steady cadence towards Grace Island and can see the historic radio tower on Washington Island to my left.

As I round Grace Island it calms on the lee side and I find the dock with 2 camp shelters, (no tents allowed). The only sign of people is a NPS maintenance boat that is tied up at the dock so I think my chances are good that at least one of the shelters is open. To my surprise both are so I choose the one that has the closest access to the water and not the one closest to the dock as I know a fishing camper would prefer that one. I just got my gear unloaded and carried the short 30 feet to my shelter when a 19 foot fully decked out aluminum fishing boat roared up to the dock. I went out to make my consulting services ☺ available and sure enough they asked, “are any shelters open” just the question I had the answer to. I replied; yes this one right here close to the dock. There were two men in their early 60's and one young boy about 10 years old. Shortly after they tied up to the dock we made introductions; Bob Zieka the boat owner and trip coordinator who lives by Pike Bay near Tower MN, William Durbin an accomplished author from Cook MN, and Bob's Grandson Kyle, who would later be known as the “snake catcher”. They looked relieved that there was an open shelter and I hoped they would invite me for a fish dinner for being so helpful. After they put their gear in the shelter and set up their camp I could

see they were anxious to get on the water fishing and I was anxious for them as well, for if they had success I may eat fish tonight☺.

My goal of this trip was to go completely around the Island so at 2:30 pm, more symbolic than anything, I set off to complete the last 3 miles of my circumnavigation of Isle Royale. I loaded up my photo gear in the kayak and paddled away from Grace Island past Washington Harbor and through the North Gap to Agate Beach; the place I started the circumnavigation 10 days ago after crossing from Grand Portage. The wind was still strong out of the SW so I had easy going to Agate Beach but was more difficult on the way back. On the way back to Grace Island from Agate Beach I located the 1928 Shipwreck the *America*. The SS *America*, was a passenger and freight vessel built in 1898. It operated for 30 years transporting people and goods before it struck a reef outside Washington Harbor on Isle Royale, on June 6, 1928. When I floated over the wreck the first time I had tingles in my stomach, looking down through the clear water at the bow of the ship only 2 feet under the water and the stern sinking away into the darkness to a depth of 85 feet. Floating over it a dozen times with my video camera under the water was a fascinating experience.

Paddling back to Grace Island feeling the accomplishment of my trip I saw that my neighbors were back at the dock, I hoped they caught fish ☺. As I approached the dock I was greeted by Kyle the young boy who stood on the dock excited about something. When I pulled up closer he told me he was trying to catch a garden snake and almost got it. I pulled my kayak up on shore by my trail to the shelter and unloaded. William and Bob came over and informed me they made a catch and would have plenty of fish for supper if I wanted to join them. After 10 days of camp food I could hardly hold my excitement when I answered, ABSOLUTELY!! I asked if I could bring anything and it was decided that a skillet to cook the potatoes and my famous rice dinner would add to the feast. I cooked my famous rice dinner, (which I could not even eat any more) and walked the 40 feet to my neighbor's camp table and we had a feast. While eating dinner we got to know each other and I told Kyle that he was a lucky young man for having a grandpa that took him camping and fishing like this, Kyle didn't really understand but he will someday. William, who goes by Bill, told me about the young adult books he writes and I was interested and quizzed him about writing as much as I dared without wearing him out. Bill writes books focused on young adult readers with titles that include; *The Broken Blade* and *Wintering*, both around the fur trade era. Bill has written ten books and as we converse over supper he tells me that Isle Royale has all the makings of a great book following the young adult theme, and I agree as we discuss a couple of story line threads. After dinner I volunteered to do the dishes and proceeded to take the pots, pans, and dishes to the lake and do my normal sand washing; apparently Bob was not familiar with this approach as I returned with the clean dinner ware he was boiling water for dishes. Bob was amazed at the effectiveness of using sand to scour and clean the dishes, but he still did a final wash rinse in hot soap and water, probably a good idea.

Happy to have shared the evening with Bob, Bill, and Kyle I said good night and headed to my shelter and settled in for the night. I was a little anxious about the next day since there was not a guaranteed spot on the Wenonah for my return trip home. I needed to be back teaching college in a couple of days, any idea what my excuse would be if I could not get back to the mainland?

**Day 11 – August 12 - 4.2 miles.. Grace Island to Windigo - Take Winona to Grand Portage
(aprox 24 miles)**

Up before 6:00 am I was able to catch the sun rising over the island. I made breakfast and started organizing to get ready for my last day on Isle Royale (weather permitting). I would paddle the 4 miles into Windigo Station and be ready to board the Wenonah at 1:00 pm and be transported back to Grand Portage. I decided not to paddle the 24 miles back to Grand Portage with South and West winds predicted for the next few days. I was a little apprehensive as passage on the Windigo was not a guarantee since I had no reservations so there would need to be extra room aboard. I had talked with Don, the owner of the boat 11 days ago when I left and he assured me that there should be room. Taking my time breaking camp was bitter sweet as today would be my last day on the island. I visited with Bob and Bill, and helped Kyle catch a snake by telling him where I saw it last and suggesting how to grab it. We took a group photo of the 4 of us next to the Grace Island sign with Kyle proudly holding his new pet snake.

On the water by about 9:30 am heading towards Windigo, fully loaded and packed for the last day on the water. Deciding to take one last look at the sunken America I crossed Washington Harbor and floated above the bow of the ship and took a few more images. I then begin the trip NE into Washington Harbor to my destination of Windigo. Paddling around the south side of Beaver Island I see the Dock and the NPS station. There are two large sail boats tied up and a fuel station dock. As I approach I cannot find any place to land where I can unload the kayak. The shore is too steep and the main dock is too high off the water. I paddle a little further down and find a small dock that is obviously used to tie up the NPS craft since it has a sign that says “no docking NPS only”. No boats were tied up so I pull up beside and walk ashore. I find a small rolling cart used to haul gear so I decide to unload all my gear on the small dock. If I move quickly I can be unloaded and off the dock in 5 minutes. With my gear on the dock I hoist the kayak out of the water and portage it the 45 feet to the main dock and return to get my gear. Loading all my gear in the cart I pull the cart up to my kayak and unload. Mission accomplished and just in time as a NPS boat pulls up and docks where I was just unloading. I am not sure why there are not better accommodations for kayaks entering and leaving, but apparently everyone finds a way.

It is about 11:00 am and I am sitting with all my gear on the main dock when I see the 65 foot Wenonah coming around the North side of Beaver Island and heading towards the dock. It is scheduled to leave again and return to Grand Portage at 1:00 pm so I have a couple of hours to organize and get a little lunch at the gift shop up the hill. I take a quick tour of the Park Service visitor center which has an information counter and attending park service personnel to provide visitors with park permits and information on hiking trails. I inquired with the service counter to see if there was room on the Wenonah for the return trip. The park ranger radioed the Wenonah office in Grand Portage and I could hear she was talking to Don the owner of the boat. It was confirmed that only 60 or so people would be returning to Grand Portage so there would be room for me. In addition to park service administration there is a book store with regional books of interest which included the full Siverston set with the wonderful illustrations and history of the island during the height of the commercial fishing days. This building also houses a small area that displays a model of the sunken America and the Fresnel lens from the Rock of Ages Lighthouse, the largest used on the Great Lakes. This lense was removed and relocated to the Windigo Station in 1985 when the Coast Guard installed a new battery-powered solar beacon in

its place. After touring the visitor center and getting my permit updated I headed to the gift shop to grab a sandwich and coke. Windigo, Like Rock Harbor the only other visitor center, has free evening programs in the summer featuring the island's natural and human history, which I would not be able to participate in on this trip.

Back at my dock with the lunch I just purchased I sit down next to my kayak and sprawling gear and begin to eat and look at all the activity at this drop off point due to the 85 persons that just departed the Wenonah. There were hikers of all shapes and sizes, some looked experienced and others just terrified. There were larger groups and single individuals, but the average seems to be pairs. Once the incoming persons were off the dock then the outgoing people began to migrate onto the dock to be ready to load when called. It would be another hour wait, but the next opportunity would not be for two days so my guess is no one wanted to “miss the boat” (no pun intended). While resting and waiting I had a number of people approach me inquisitively as I was the only one with a fully loaded kayak with video camera and solar panels around. I always try to answer questions and converse when approached and for most of the trip I have been encouraging people to contact me through my web site and consider contributing photo's or video of unique park activities. I have received a few so far, but I forgot my business cards to hand out when I met people so I am sure that I have missed a few.



When the Wenonah was ready to load I was patiently waiting at the far end of the dock and the line of hikers formed right on past me. The deck hand yelled out over the wind instructing me to pull my kayak up to the front of the line and we handed in all my packs and cases then they hoisted the kayak up to the top and tied it down. The group watched then they started boarding the rest of those in line. While I waited for everyone to board I was approached by one of the sailboat captains who introduced himself and told me he had gotten a couple of good photo's of me paddling in the fog over by Chippewa Harbor. Boy I wish I had my business cards, but I asked him to write my web site down and e-mail me when he got home.

The 65 foot Wenonah was now fully loaded. All passengers safely aboard, and the engines warming up, the ropes were untied and we were off and moving. I looked at my watch and it was 2:12 pm. The next 24 miles by boat to Grand Portage would take about 3 hours. I was pleased as we took an unexpected diversion into the cove behind Barnum Island and the captain told us the history of the site of the last operating commercial fishing site and the old weathered building that once was a flourishing hotel; what a treat. I did not know this was here, less than a mile from my camp site on Grace Island, I could have paddled there myself. Back under way we were treated to another tour as the Wenonah motored by the historic “Rock of Ages” lighthouse and we stopped for photo opportunities. The captain pointed to the top row of windows on the light house and told us that in big storms the water crashes that high, unbelievable, 30 plus feet, wow. After the Rock of Ages Lighthouse we corrected our course directly to Grand Portage and

the remaining 2 ½ hour trip was under way. The trip to Grand Portage allowed a nice warm down period as I walked around the boat and looked from the many vantage points. We arrived at Grand Portage safely and smoothly at 5:10 pm and I went to get my pickup and wait for the mass to disembark, by 5:20 the boat was empty. I backed down to the dock as they were unloading my kayak and had all of my gear neatly stacked next on the dock. It only took me about 5 minutes to load my gear and tie down the kayak. After going to the office and settling up with Don for the ferry ride to Grand Portage I jumped in my rig and headed south, wanting to make it at least as far as Duluth tonight.

After Trip thoughts

I was home again on August 13, reunited with my wife and daughter and happy to give Madeline the present I paddled 142 miles to get her. She was curious as we read about Isle Royale and talked about my trip.



I believe that we must maintain our connection to the time and place in our human history when the untamed wilderness was a part of our being and our skills and knowledge of survival essential. This is why I paddle and explore and I hope to share that with others through my writing, photography, and video.

I would like to thank my equipment sponsors and most importantly; I would like to Thank my wife Rebecca, for without her help this trip could not have happened. She did all of the food preparation and helped to coordinate and complete many activities including much gear preparation to get ready for the trip.

In a few short years when I visit Isle Royale again, I hope to have the company of my young aspiring paddler Madeline, who I suspect, will teach me more that I can teach her, for the heart of a child is as wise. *Minong – a good place to be*