



2021 Issue 3

Wolf's Eye

Newsletter for the Isle Royale & Keweenaw Parks Association

Keweenaw NHP Updates

Keweenaw NHP is pleased to announce that the Calumet Visitor Center will remain open during winter and spring 2021-2022 on Fridays and Saturdays, 10 am–3 pm, except for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. In addition, the park is pursuing ideas to increase summer hours to better serve the public.

This year, the park saw a return to pre-COVID vehicle traffic in its park areas, including the Dry House Ruins and Quincy Mine. Numerous heritage sites also reported an increase in visitation.

However, overall park visitation did not return to pre-COVID levels.



Dry House Ruins

The visitor center's opening was delayed until mid-May, at which point it was open four days a week. Visitation through August was just 9,153, as opposed to 14,803 visitors in 2019.

Two of Keweenaw NHP's long-time staff recently moved on to new opportunities. Kathleen Harter, Interpretation Program Manager, departed the park after 19 years to serve as the executive director for the Copper Country Senior Meals program. She says she's "excited to engage with the community in this new capacity as it closely aligns with my passions for food, health, community, service, and nonprofit work."

(Continued on page 2)

Exploring Isle Royale Down Under

by Captain Jacqueline Polomski

Isle Royale is known for spectacular views, reef studded shorelines, hiking, fishing, boating, and much more. But, to a small group of its visitors, the most intriguing part of Isle Royale lies below Lake Superior's surface—the shipwrecks!

There are ten major shipwrecks in the waters surrounding the island. Each is unique and has much to offer. My husband Ron and I made our first trip to the island in 1982 aboard a dive charter boat. Three years later we would become the owners of that dive operation and captains of its charter vessels. Over the next five years, one of Isle



Stern wheel of the *Kamloops* (Credit: RJ Polomski)

Royale's shipwrecks kept calling out to us with its siren song. The ship was the 250-foot package freighter *Kamloops*, which went missing in December of 1927 during a five day winter storm. She was discovered 50 years later, off the northwest side of Isle Royale. She lies on her starboard side, her stern against a rocky cliff at 180 feet, descending to 260 feet at the bow. These depths were far beyond recreational diving limits at that time.

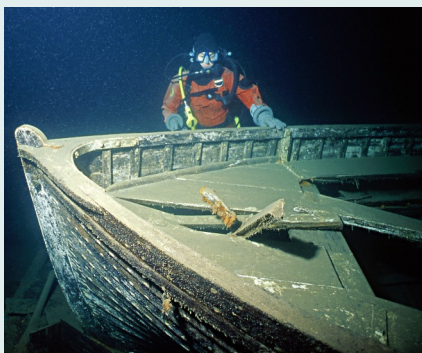
Our first dive on *Kamloops* in 1986 was deep, dark, cold and unsettling. We descended the mooring line to the port rail. The visibility was great as we swam along the stern to the propeller and rudder, which were clearly intact and undamaged. At that point, Ron began to have symptoms of a free flow. The mouthpiece of his regulator, a device that delivers air to a diver, started to pop and chunks of ice flowed into his mouth. This ice can cause the regulator to freeze open, causing a very rapid depletion of air. I, on the other hand, was feeling the effects of narcosis, or "rapture of the deep," as they call it. For me it was more "terror of the deep," as a severe case of paranoia had set in. We decided to return to the mooring line and ascend to the surface.

The next day we returned to *Kamloops* and again descended into the cold waters of Lake Superior wearing drysuits and double scuba cylinders with independent regulators. The deeper a diver goes, the more air they consume. In addition, a valve between the cylinders allows a diver to separate them in the case of the dreaded free flow.

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(Continued) Wearing a drysuit instead of a wetsuit helps prevent hypothermia in the 38 degree Lake Superior water. Visibility was great again as we made our way to the fantail, where an intact wheel, telegraph and compass binnacle greeted us. On future dives we explored the engine room, a dining area, a head, cargo holds (one still full of shoes) and much more.

Wanting to go deeper but trying to curtail the narcosis and the possibility of oxygen toxicity below 200 feet, we began using a different combination of gases to breath. We replaced some of the oxygen and nitrogen with helium, which is less narcotic. We added surface supplied lines of air and oxygen, which we switched to on our ascent.



Bow of *Kamloops'* Life Boat (RJ Polomski)

As a result, we could now explore the bow of *Kamloops*. We were a bit nervous as we descended to 250 feet, but we did indeed feel clear-headed. As we saw the structure coming into view, it was striking. We could distinguish the superstructure, stairways, a folded anchor, and a mast. One thing that stood out to us was a

pile of crates containing small packages, which, upon closer look, were none other than rolls of LifeSavers candy. And, to our amazement, right next to one of the crates was the builder's plaque. We could make out some of the letters, "S.S. Kaml.. built by Furness Shipbuild... Haverton Hill." This was truly a remarkable dive.

Another very memorable dive on the stern section was when we decided to drop over the side and swim to the bottom. Low and behold, there was the lifeboat we had heard so much about, intact at approximately 230 feet. It was phenomenal. We spent almost our entire dive examining it. We then followed the lake bottom, swimming near the stern, passing rolls of fencing, crates of canned goods, a crate of hammers, and more.

Ron and I dove *Kamloops* for over 20 years. It was like returning to your favorite museum, always more to discover and see. Along the way, we faced many risks and challenges, but for us the reward was well worth it. We often wonder what really happened to this remarkable ship. As little of the stern was damaged, was it due to a loss of power from a damaged smokestack or did the heavy ice from the storm cause her to flounder and tip? No one knows for sure, but perhaps in the future, the mystery of *Kamloops'* demise on that fateful day in December of 1927 will be solved.

*Jacqueline & Ronald Polomski are longtime IRKPA members.

IRKPA Crew Battles Invasive Species

In June, IRKPA members Alan West, Joanne Broady, Dianne Berry and Sandy Wilhoit volunteered for IRKPA's annual Invasive Species Removal service trip. In collaboration with park employees, they removed plants from Daisy Farm to Three Mile campground, in Rock Harbor, and even at Malone Bay and Wright Island. Sometimes the most visually appealing flowers are actually harmful to the environment, so their bags filled up with forget-me-nots, mountain bluets, and others such as St. John's wort and common mullein. Overall, this hardworking crew pulled several hundred invasive plants! **For the full article about this trip, or to join next year's team, visit: www.irkpa.org/page**



Photo: S. Wilhoit

Wolf's Eye editor Susanna Ausema will be moving to Maine this fall, as her park ranger husband has accepted a job at Acadia National Park. She says, "Isle Royale and the Keweenaw Peninsula will always hold a special place in our hearts, and fortunately our new home will have a lot in common with this region: rugged shorelines created by similar geologic processes, the boreal forest, and distinctive seasons, including brilliant autumn colors." We wish Susanna and her family a happy transition to life on the East Coast!



(Continued from "Keweenaw NHP Updates")

Valerie Tromp (Newman), Interpretation Specialist, also departed after having served the park for 10 years.

Two new staff joined the Keweenaw NHP team this spring. Welcome to Steve Hermanson, who stepped into the Facilities Manager position, and John Arnold, the park's new Historical Architect. Both have brought new energy and perspective to the team at Keweenaw NHP.

Where in Keweenaw NHP?



Are you looking for a fun way to get to know the Keweenaw Peninsula? Here's an idea—challenge yourself to visit a few, or ALL, of Keweenaw NHP's 22 Heritage Sites. If you do, THESE PICTURES will look familiar to you!

If you know where these pictures were taken, send an email to susanna@irkpa.org and include a personal story or memory about this place.

We'll print our favorite responses in the next edition of the *Wolf's Eye*.

Winning Answer to “Where on Isle Royale?”



IRKPA member John Heneghan was volunteering on Isle Royale in 2009 when he was given a spur of the moment opportunity to boat over to the **Passage Island Lighthouse**, shown here. He enjoyed seeing Devil's Club (a spiny plant, uncommon in the eastern US) and trying to imagine what life must have been like for the lighthouse keepers and their families.

Members John and Ann Mahan have a good idea of that lifestyle. They were able to explore Passage Island with Anna Hoge, whose father was the lighthouse keeper in the 1930s and early 40s. The Mahans shared details of that visit in the June, 1985 edition of *Lakeland Boating* magazine. “For Anna, it was an idyllic childhood. Her earliest memories are of climbing on the lichen-covered rocks that are irresistible to a child, “skinny-dipping” with her sister in Lake Superior’s chilly water, winding along a path through a lush “enchanted forest” of firs, ferns, and lichens hanging from the trees, and gazing out her bedroom window to watch the ships passing by.”

It wasn't always this peaceful, though. The Mahans related Anna's story about a stormy time, when “the keepers went out to bring in the survivors of a shipwreck. When they finally returned, they brought a group of wet, cold, hungry men with them. They ate with us and stayed in the lighthouse with us for days, until a boat could come for them.”

The Passage Island Lighthouse, referred to as “the most important” of Isle Royale’s lighthouses, is located four miles to the Northeast of mainland Isle Royale. The lighthouse is vital for the safety of Canadian ships traveling between Sault Saint Marie, Michigan, and Thunder Bay, Ontario. Construction of the lighthouse was completed in 1882 and it remains active today. During the summer months, Isle Royale’s visitors can take a concession-operated day trip to explore the island and see the exterior of the lighthouse.

October Board Meeting

You're invited to attend IRKPA's virtual membership meeting, on Saturday, October 23 at 1:00 p.m. EST (using the Zoom platform.) Representatives from Isle Royale will offer a presentation about the Minong Mine and its recent designation as a National Historic Landmark. An invitation will be sent through Mail Chimp to the email addresses we have on file one week prior to the meeting. If you want to make sure you're on our list, please email susanna@irkpa.org.

Isle Royale & Keweenaw Parks Association

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IRKPA is the membership-based nonprofit partner of Isle Royale National Park and Keweenaw National Historical Park. Gifts, bequests, memorials, and membership are U.S. tax deductible.

Membership Categories

Individual \$25	Household \$35	Supporting \$50
Sustaining \$100	Patron \$250	Life \$1,200

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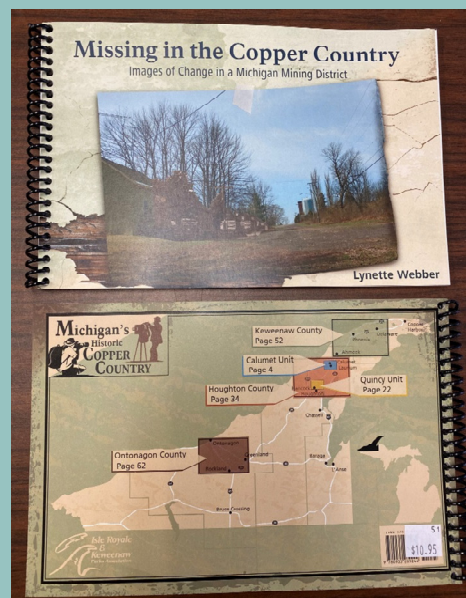
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Wolf's Eye Editor

IRKPA has collaborated with Keweenaw NHP Ranger Lynette Webber to publish "Missing in the Copper Country," a unique blend of historic and modern day photographs, highlighting the changes that have taken place in this area over time.

Accompanying text provides insights into the story behind each set of photographs. The book is available at park stores and online, at irkpa.org/shop.



EXPIRED

Memberships run through the calendar year, expiring December 31. Please be on the lookout for a renewal form in your mailbox. **We appreciate your membership!**

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