

Michigan's Isle Royale | Trip Report

Aug. 29 – Sept. 3, 2019 | Written by Dodie Logue



With Guides Dodie Logue & Dave Mehlman, and participants Don, Anna, Peter, Carol, Holly, Tom, Cathy, Phil, Austin, Gay.





Thursday, August 29th

Northern Minnesota in early fall – crisp, sunny, and breezy! Many of the group had arrived the previous day – we gathered in the lobby of the Hampton Inn on Canal Park at 1 p.m. to head off for Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory. Some of the group did a bit of hiking here, and some stayed by the raptor counters, while the other folks were getting picked up at the airport and joined the others at Hawk Ridge. Around 3:30 p.m., one of the Hawk Ridge bird specialists gave us a talk about migration, Hawk Ridge, raptors, etc. Migrating raptors picked up slightly later in the afternoon, and we were able to be on the counting platform. We ended up seeing Broad-winged Hawk, Bald Eagle, Common Nighthawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Merlin, Osprey, as well as many migrating Cliff Swallow.

Around 4:30 p.m. we made our way back to the Hampton Inn. We had an early dinner at the Duluth Grill – where the portions are ample and the food local and unique – an early night called after traveling!



Friday, August 30th

Most of us were up for early birding at Park Point, meeting in the lobby at 7:30 a.m. Park Point is a thin strip of land that juts out towards a sister strip of land from neighboring Wisconsin. Migrating birds land here after crossing Lake Superior, drawn to the stands of old trees and shoreline. We crossed the lift bridge and went way down to the ball field area. We saw Baird's Sandpiper on the shore, Mallard, Canada Goose, and Double-crested Cormorant on the water, and as the sun started warming up the foliage, we saw a good number of confusing fall warblers, including Wilson's, American Redstart, Yellow-rumped, Nashville, Yellow, and Common Yellowthroat. The wind had died down, and it was mild, sunny, and lovely along the shore. Many of the group were coming from hotter southern climates and we all were enjoying the cooler temperature.



We stopped back at our hotel to pack up and were on the road along the shore just after 10 a.m. Our first stop was Two Harbors, where we parked by the lighthouse and walked out along the basalt rocky shore before heading into a wooded area for a loop walk. Dragonflies were migrating in full force, and we saw quite a few butterflies, including painted lady, red admiral, and various white cabbage. After a leisurely walk, we loaded up and we were on the road before noon, heading to Tettegouche State Park for a picnic lunch. The fare we picked up at Amazing Grace cafe was abundant, and we all needed a walk afterwards! There were American Goldfinch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Purple Finch at the feeders, and many of us walked along the trails to some overlooks that were along the shore.



It was after 1 p.m. when we loaded up and moved on up the shore, next stop at Cascade Falls State Park. Here many of us walked up along the river, stopping at various precarious overlooks and feeling the fine mist of the waterfalls. We went as far as the bridge where we crossed and did the trail on the other side on the way down, making a loop back to the vans.

It was now late afternoon, and we made a brief half-hour stop in Grand Marais for a bit of shopping before driving the last leg to Grand Portage Lodge and Casino, on the reservation. We arrived at our nights lodging just before 6 p.m., checked in, and met up again for dinner at 7 p.m. The local beer and Walleye were popular dinner choices. We were all beat and were in our rooms by 8:30 p.m. – we also had an early morning departure the next day.

Saturday, August 31st

Today was a very early start. We met in the lobby, picked up our sack lunches, and loaded the vans at 6 a.m. We made a brief stop at the “Trading Post” for breakfast and were at the Grand Portage Isle Royale ferry loading zone by 6:40 a.m. After unloading and parking the vans, we had our breakfast “al fresco” while waiting to load the ferry, *Voyageur II*. Our group loaded first since we were getting off last, and we got good seats for the ride over to the island. It was sunny, mild, and a pretty calm ride. We slept, ate, hung out on all decks, watched the various hikers embark and disembark, and looked for plenty of birds. The ferry stopped at Windigo Ranger station on the south end, then made its way up the west side, stopping at two more spots before ending up in Rock Harbor at 4 (now on Eastern time!). We got into our rooms and had a bit of time to rest, explore, unpack, before our 6:30 p.m. dinner.

Sunday, September 1st

We met up for breakfast at 7:30 a.m., and then headed out for a bird walk and get to know the area walk. We checked out the information center and gift store, then walked down to Tobin harbor and the float plane landing. Along the way we saw Red squirrels, many mushrooms and lichen, and a few birds, including Red-



breasted Nuthatch and the incredibly tame Lesser Yellowlegs which we saw several days right by the restaurant. We did some short walks along the Rock Harbor Trail, then headed back to our lodging to regroup. Lunch was at 12:30 p.m., and we met up afterwards to do a longer hike up the Stoll trail to Scoville Point. The path followed along the shore heading north, at times giving us nice rocky overlooks to view the lake. We saw some old Indian copper mines rem and had to walk along quite a few boardwalks over boggy areas. Some of us turned back after the first mile to take the loop cut off – this lucky group saw our first moose! A big beautiful Bull aka “Bruce,” and good photo ops were had.

The rest of the group continued on along the shore, enjoying the cool weather. At the second loop turn off, three more headed back along the back-loop trail, and three of us continued on to the end of Scoville Point. We could see Passage Island lighthouse from here, and there was a lone Common Goldeneye in the small bay there. The artist in residence cabins could be seen from the point as well. It was getting late and the group headed back along the back trail. Our main sight was the sub-species red squirrel that would usually scold at us as we passed. Dinner was at 6:30 p.m., Phil headed off to the ranger lecture on shipwrecks at 7 p.m. Some met in the common room to do the checklist for the past few days.

Monday, September 2nd

This morning some of the group did their own thing, and some went off to hike the loop on the Rock Harbor Trail. Again, we started off on the east side, this time heading south. We saw Snowshoe Hare, a Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and chatty Red-breasted Nuthatch. It was nearly 2 miles to the cut across and Suzy’s Cave, then we made our way along the Tobin Harbor side back up to the lodge – just in time for lunch. We had a short bit of time after lunch before meeting at the dock for our first Sandy excursion. The Sandy is the aqua colored work horse of a tour boat, that makes the daily trips out to various of the smaller islands for day excursions. The weather was great, and we had an easy hour ride out to Passage Island, before disembarking we went to the far end where captain Mark said they had been seeing eagles – and sure enough there was an adult Bald Eagle sitting on the rocky outcropping!



The trail to the light house was a mile one way and a bit of a scramble, but well worth it. Early on we saw the unusual Devils Club, and a stand of beautiful purple-blue monks hood in full bloom. The trail started out fairly level and gentle, but soon became rocky and muddy with a steep climb. Some stayed back while some continued on to the lighthouse. It was surprisingly calm and there were a few birds around, including Blackpoll Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged Blackbird, and Song Sparrow. After a short visit to the lighthouse area we hiked back, loaded onto the Sandy, and made it back to Rock Harbor by 6:30 p.m. We went right to dinner and some went on to the ranger lecture about copper mining on the island.

Tuesday September 3rd

Some of us had a nice treat this morning – a moose was seen right before breakfast! After breakfast and before the rain started, we walked for an hour or so, seeing a few birds including Golden-crowned Kinglet, Winter Wren, and Chipping Sparrow. Some took this time to do some laundry or catch up on internet. After lunch it started raining in earnest, and we all had the afternoon off. We napped, read, caught up on news, sat by the fire in the common room. I will admit to having a wonderful nap! Some went to a “dock Talk” by a ranger, on the history of Isle Royale becoming a park, which was held inside due to the weather.

Some of us met in the bar for an early drink and conversation, then all met for dinner. Back in our rooms afterwards, still the sound of crashing waves... hoping for a better dawn!

Wednesday September 4

Sun – A beautiful day! We all met for our usual 7:30 a.m. breakfast, then two went off kayaking in Tobin Harbor. The water was calm, and the paddlers were joined by a young loon with one parent. The youngster was quite inquisitive, diving back and forth under the kayak, at one time even pecking at a paddle. Many of the remainder walked a bit of the Stoll trail, seeing Gray Jay, and Yellow-rumped Warbler; Dave caught a quick glimpse of a Red Fox running across the trail. We all enjoyed the sun!

Lunch was at 12:30 p.m., then we had a 2:30 p.m. departure for Edisen Fishery. We had a short boat ride to the point where Rock Harbor Lighthouse, the Edisen Fishery, and the wolf



research cabin all were located. Here we met Rolf and Candy Peterson, who have been doing wolf research for nearly 40 years! Visiting their historic cabin was a real highlight. They were open to answering our questions,



and around the “yard” were many Moose antlers, skulls, and other bones for research. We were invited in to see their cabin and living conditions, offered fresh baked zucchini bread, and had interesting conversations. I think most of us would have stayed all afternoon! But we wanted to see the Lighthouse, and fishery, so we moved on and were soon back on the Sandy headed to our lodgings. The captain positioned the boat so we could get good photos of the light house on the way out.

Dinner was at 6:30 p.m., quick as many of us wanted to get to a talk on loons by a ranger. This was our last meal on the island!

Thursday September 5

Today, there was a beautiful sunrise. We had a 7 a.m. breakfast, and our bags were packed and picked up by 8 a.m. We had our looks at the Rock Harbor area.

Departure was at 9 a.m., back to Grand Portage on the Voyageur II. There was a Red-necked Grebe on the water as we left the harbor! We passed by the lighthouse again, and Edisen fishery. We were greeted by a surprise visit from Rolf and Candy at the Daisy Farm dock; we had to pick up some folks and they met us there to give Phil and Cathy one of each of their books – awesome!

The ferry made its way down the southwest of the island, once again stopping at Windigo to pick up hikers. As we watched the island get smaller and smaller, the mainland got bigger and bigger. We got into the harbor around 2:30 p.m. and were at Grand Portage National Monument before 3 p.m. Here we toured the buildings and fort with a guide, Dave and Phil got an informal talk on how to make a birch-bark canoe, and afterwards most of us spent time in the visitor center, watching the short film or making purchases from the gift shop.

Around 4:30 p.m. we were back in the vans heading to Naniboujou historic lodge. We had our last night here on the shore of Lake Superior, and many of us started with drinks in the solarium. We moved into the dining room with an amazing painted ceiling and huge stone fireplace for our last dinner of the trip. We were all pretty tired from our long travel day, so we all had an early bedtime.

Some of us were up for coffee and shore walking by 7 a.m. There were a few birds around, including some migrating Sharp-shinned Hawk, one Semi-palmated Plover, and a single Buff-breasted Sandpiper along the shore. The water was very calm and mild. We got great looks at various birds including Warblers, Wood Duck, Pine Siskin, and Blue Jay. We had a leisurely, delicious breakfast, then finished packing, by 10 a.m. we were on the road. We made a stop at Tettegouche Visitor Center for a bathroom break and final goodbyes, as the vans

split up into the airport group and the overnighiting in Duluth group. This latter group was able to make one final stop at Hawk Ridge. The birds were flying quite high, but still we saw Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and an American Kestrel hawking for dragonflies.

Thank you all for joining us and helping make this a great trip!

Photo Credits:

Bald Eagle, Hugh Simmons (HUSI); MIIR Group, Dodie Logue (DOLO); Red-tailed Squirrel, Carlos Sanchez (CASA); Red-necked Grebe, Peg Abbott (PEAB); Semi-palmated Plover, Bob Hill (BOHI); Red-eyed Vireo, Nigel Lallsingh (NILA); Nashville Warbler, Doug Greenberg (DOGR); Osprey, CASA; Carol, DOLO; Isle Royale, DOLO; Blackpoll Warbler, PEAB; Scoville Point, DOLO; Red-breasted Nuthatch, DOGR; Phil and Rolf, DOLO; Moose Skulls, DOLO; Wolf Research, DOLO; American Kestrel, Greg Smith (GRSM); Buff-breasted Sandpiper, NILA.