

Isle Royale Spring 2013 Trip Report

Let me start off by saying...I am only working off of the pictures from my camera, we have yet to combine our photos and journals.

PRELUDE

I was hesitant to go on this trip with 3 to 5 feet of snow still on the island and all the inland lakes and most docks still frozen. Our itinerary had to change 100%. Going in blind, so to speak. We were about half way to Grand Portage when Capt. Don called and gave us the option to cancel as everyone but the Wolf/Moose team had cancelled. The thought crossed my mind for a split second but I knew this was going to be a once in a lifetime experience

Thurs, May 2nd...

We left home (Port Sanilac, Michigan) and it was 80° and sunny. The island got 8 additional inches of snow.

Friday, May 3rd...

Not long after getting into the U.P. and Wisconsin, this is what we were driving in! Notice the icicles on the canoe! Our tie downs were frozen solid. It mostly melted while we were having lunch with Richard (fonixmunkee) in Superior. (I wish I would have gotten a picture of us three)



Parts of Wisconsin got up to 13 inches of snow!



Saturday, May 4th...

A lot of snow in Grand Portage!

It was the coldest boat ride I have ever had to the island. There was still quite a bit of ice on the decks, we had to hold on while walking out there. Mike put a GoPro camera on the front of the Voyageur and took time lapse pictures. He will be putting all that together, as a matter of fact, he's working on that right now as I type this. It is going to be a long tedious process.

It was strange going to Rock Harbor without going around the North Shore. Nothing about this trip was typical. Every trip to the island is unique, but this one was especially so.

Here we all are waiting to board the Voyageur II. Kirk was nice enough to shovel us a path.



After arriving in Rock Harbor, Ranger Rob gave us our “talk” but instead of it being the LNT talk, it was a bit different. He talked about hypothermia, snow shelves on the shore and sleeping with our water filters so they don’t freeze.

We then unloaded our gear and canoe. We were the only two getting off at Rock Harbor, and the only two “visitors”. Everyone else was with Rolf and Candy Peterson and got off at Daisy Farm. We were the only two people at Rock Harbor period! Not even a Ranger. Talk about a once in a lifetime experience. How often does that happen? Next to never.

The snow at the dock in Rock Harbor wasn’t too bad as they had plowed it, but the trail was a totally different story! The snow was up to my knees. I had to walk in Mike’s footsteps to keep from sinking. There was a gentleman there before us, (he kayaked in from Grand Portage and left off the Voyageur) he had left us footsteps to follow. It would have been difficult to make fresh tracks, that’s for sure. Had we have been backpacking instead of canoeing, we would have been stuck in Rock Harbor the whole time.

Here's our canoe in the snow...woulda been a great sled, but tooooo slippery!!



Here's the view at Shelter number one, it woulda been difficult to go much further.



It was wet and cold but bearable. With the trail having such deep snow, I was concerned about the rest of our trip. We had to completely change our itinerary due to snow and frozen lakes. We were winging it. Adventure, eh?

Sunday, May 5th...

It was clear skies and sunny, with little to no wind. The temps were in the low 40's so we decided to venture out to Tooker's Island. It was a very nice leisurely paddle. There was still quite a bit of snow on shore, but nothing like when we went by the day before. You couldn't even see the trail to the campground.

It was a warm day, we had a beautiful sunset. It was a great move! We would have still been wet and cold at Rock Harbor. The warm weather wasn't going to last long, but we sure enjoyed it while we had it!

Tooker's Island Dock



*There wasn't a lot of snow on Tooker's, it gets quite a bit of sun.
Mike took time lapse pictures of the snow melting.*



You can see how deep the snow is further up shore, it was thigh deep on Mike.



Monday, May 6th...

Another beautiful, warm day. We paddled around the island. We basked in the sun. A very relaxing, rejuvenating day. Enjoyed all the birds scratching all around looking for food.

We figured there would be a lot of activity at Rock Harbor, with the warm weather, getting it ready to open but none so far.

We went down to the dock to take pictures of another beautiful sunset.

Mike and Nancy T.



Tuesday, May 7th...

Not much to report. We stayed at Tooker's again and enjoyed the last nice day. Mike took advantage of the sun and kept busy charging all his camera batteries with his solar panels.

We walked the shoreline opposite of the dock. There was finally some activity at Rock Harbor.

Mike manning the charging station.



Wednesday, May 8th...

We headed out to Caribou Island. We knew the nice weather was going to be short lived, so we wanted to get there before it took a turn.

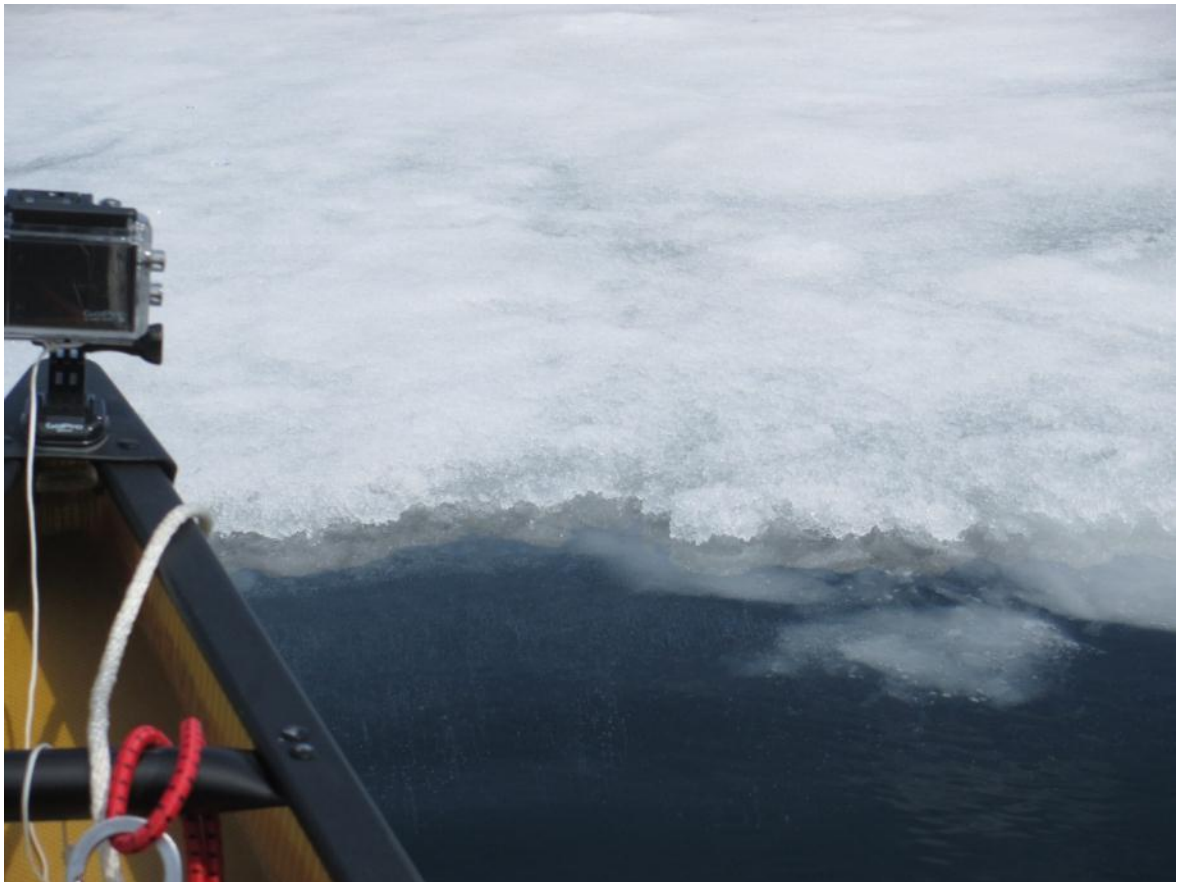
It was a very interesting paddle! We left Tooker's and just before Mott Island, we passed some ice that had broken up and was floating in the water. That's a first!

We were planning on paddling under the bridge that connects Mott Island to East Caribou Island, but this is what we found...



Shortly thereafter, on our way to Caribou...







It was a very nice paddle to Caribou. We landed without incident. The opposite side of the dock was iced in.



Later, the other side got iced in, but I didn't get any pictures of that. Mike may have.

The fire ring was covered in snow.



There was a little snow around our picnic table at shelter number one. The inside of the shelter was still very wet. The snow inside it hadn't been gone for very long.

Shortly after arriving, the sky clouded up and the wind came in. It's a very nasty cold wind coming off the lake at that time of year. We put the tarp up in the front of the shelter to block some of the wind. It was a life saver. This is what it looked like three out of the four days we were there.



We kept playing ring around the shelter with the picnic table to keep out of the wind. It kept hitting us from different directions at the same time.

We took a walk around the island and the opposing shoreline, it was getting quite cold. There was fresh evidence of moose, everywhere!!

We came back to camp, filtered our water and made our dinner. We were hunkered down in the shelter eating dinner as it was too windy at the picnic table. Just as we finished up, we heard hoof steps. A few seconds later, we had a cow moose and a yearling right outside our open door!! Of course, between the two of us and four cameras and a video camera, we didn't have one within reach! They saw us and got startled and wandered away. Mike got out to try to take a picture with the GoPro that was on the tripod, and discovered his Cannon with the telephoto was missing. Sooo, we headed out to retrace our steps to go find it. While doing so, the two moose were heading back to where they came from when we saw them first. I was trying like hell to get a good shot, but my camera is finicky at dusk, it can't focus correctly without the flash, and with the flash, the picture turns out crappy. There was also a little operator error going on as I was right in their path with nowhere to hide, and I had gloves on and kept hitting the wrong buttons. Here are a couple pictures that half turned out. If Mike had his Cannon, he'd have gotten awesome pictures...I'm no Mike!



Full Run



After that excitement, we finished retracing our steps and still no camera. Mike was in the shelter looking around and I went back down to where we landed and there it was, next to the canoe. Whew! That would be an expensive item to replace!

Thursday, May 9th...

When we woke up, it was very cloudy and very windy. Our tarp was in full parachute mode. It was so cold my pen ink wouldn't flow. We stayed hunkered down in the shelter until about 2pm. The sun came out and we moved the picnic table out of the wind but still in the sun.

We then went out on a moose hunt, armed with three cameras and the video camera, but came up empty.

We broke up downed branches in case the wind died down and we could have a fire. No such luck.

Friday, May 10th...

Absolutely freezing, coldest morning yet, wind horrible!! The biggest battle I had on Caribou was keeping warm. The only time I was warm was in my sleeping bag at night.

As we were getting our stuff together to head over to Edisen Fishery, Ranger Seth pulled up. He had a message for us from Capt. Don. Our return boat for Thursday, May 16th had been cancelled. We had two options. ONE: To go home early on the 12th or TWO: Stay a few extra days until the 19th. Well, we sure didn't want to go back early as we were planning on going to Malone and Hay Bay, but we couldn't really stay longer for several reasons.

After Ranger Seth left, we headed over to Edisen, with heavy hearts but we didn't let that damper our adventure, ok, my adventure as Mike has been there several times. Never having to bushwhack to the lighthouse due to snow though. Parts of the trail were clear enough to walk next to it but other times we had to be creative. It was well worth it though. It was so warm there!! I didn't take pictures from the canoe as the currents at Middle Island Passage were, well, interesting. Gotta love the Kevlar canoe, handled like a dream, even empty.

GoPro Man paddling through Middle Island Passage.



Snowy trail to Rock Harbor Lighthouse.

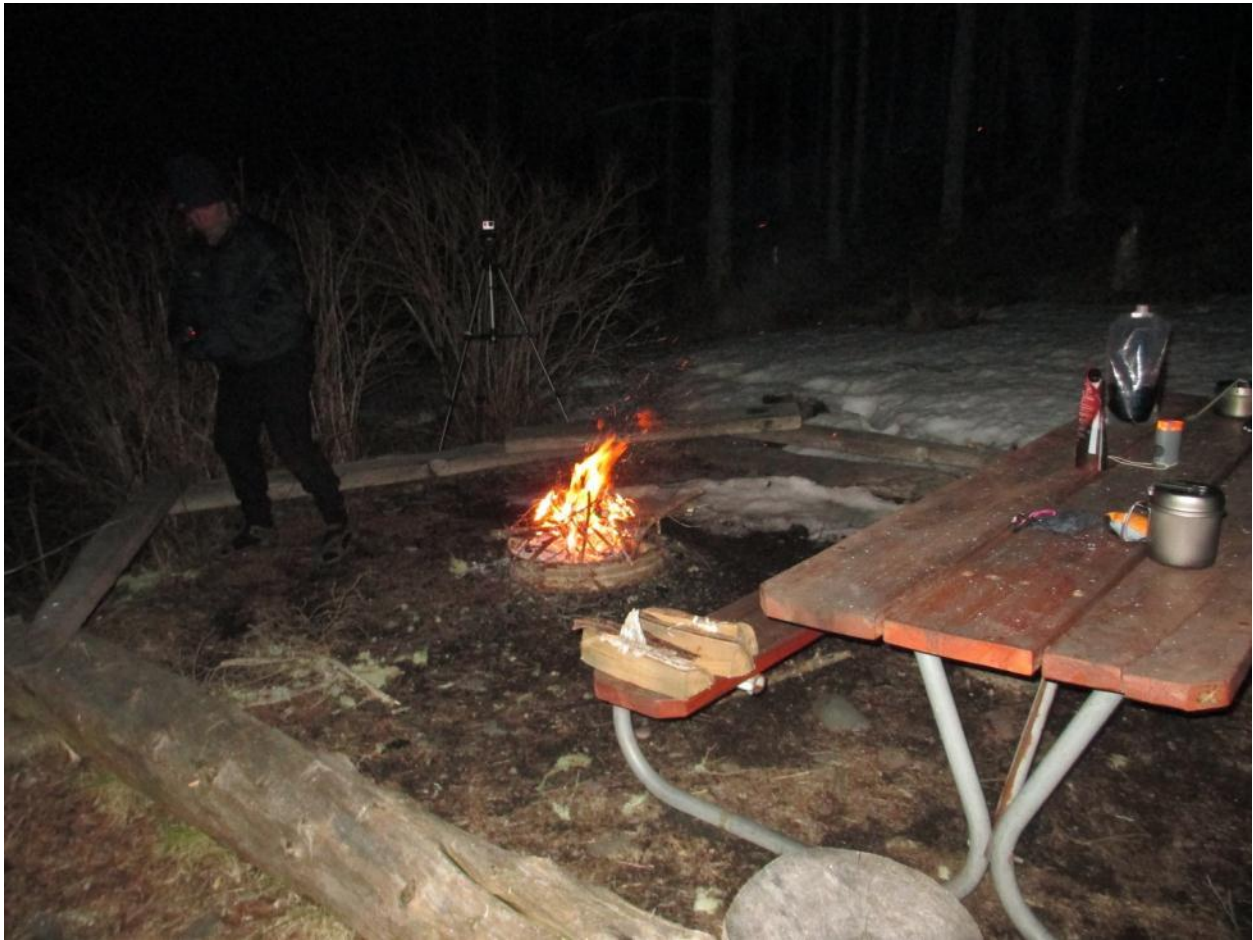


Mike on the bluff.



On our way back home to Caribou, we stopped at Cemetery Island. What an emotional place that was. Very spiritual. I didn't take pictures as Mike has a lot of them.

After we got home, the wind had finally died down enough to have a fire. It was fabulous! I was sooo toasty warm. I didn't think we'd ever be able to have a fire with how windy it had been. I guess it was meant to be after all of our hard work gathering firewood.



Saturday, May 11...

Our last day/night on the island, sniff sniff. Another cold and windy one, but not as cold as the day before. We decided to stay on Caribou and head to Daisy in the morning since the boat isn't coming until 1pm central time, so that's 2pm our time. The lake didn't look all that friendly for paddling anyway.

We just hung out, avoiding the wind, catching up in our journals. It was too windy that night to have a fire, so we hung out in the shelter, sitting on our canoe chairs. The tarp and canoe chairs have saved us on this trip!

Sunday, May 12...

And we are going to paddle in WHAT??? (That's Cemetery Island across the way)



We had rain, freezing rain, snow, you name it, we had it that morning. It did finally stop shortly before we had to load to canoe to head over to Daisy. We were planning on heading out at Noon our time and have plenty of time to paddle against the wind to get to Daisy with what should have been an hour to spare.

Just as we moved the canoe to the water, Rolf Peterson pulled up to tell us that the Voyageur was just around the corner. Talk about miscommunication. The Rangers on Mott told us 2pm our time and told Capt. Don that we would be at Rock Harbor.

So, we are paddling with all our might and don't seem to be going anywhere against the wind when we see the Voyageur approaching us. Thank Goodness he saw us cuz we were the only reason he was going to Rock Harbor and we were going to Daisy. After we were done B.S.ing, we about ran into the Voyageur, I had to push off with my paddle. You don't realize how big it is until your right next to it in a canoe.

We made it to the Daisy dock just as the Voyageur was being tied off. Candy and the rest of her group came down to help us with our gear. In two seconds, everything was on the dock and loaded. It was a lot warmer over there and the boat was warmer AND the sun was out! Woo Hoo!!

The only passenger on the boat coming TO the island was Robert Seeber (Bucket Bob). It was nice catching up with him. He offered us extra food if we had decided to get dropped off at Malone and stay until the 19th but things were more complicated than that. It woulda been nice to stay since the weather seemed to get better after that.

Us with Bob



To soften the blow of our trip being cut short, and since we didn't have to be home until Saturday, I suggested that we swing up to Copper Harbor on our way home so that Mike could get his ever favorite meal at Harbor Haus and I could pick up some Isle Royale souvenirs since Grand Portage doesn't have anything and the island stores are never open when we are there because we always take the first and last boat.

We got back to Grand Portage and all the snow was gone. We got our hot showers and went down to the dining room to get dinner. One advantage of coming back early was that I got a free Mother's Day buffet meal. I'm always on the island for Mother's Day so that was a nice treat and good too! (I'm kinda a picky eater....shut up Mike!!)

After dinner, we met Capt. Don in the lounge and talked for a while, then went to bed, on a real mattress, with heat! Actually, we had the air on because the room was so hot.

Monday, May 13th...

We headed out to Copper Harbor. When we arrived, hardly anything was open yet. Two motels, two restaurants. Slim pickin's. We went down to Harbor Haus, not open for the season yet. We found a place to stay. Drove down to the dock to see when the store would be open. Hmmm, not yet open for the season, damn! Went back to get something to eat, restaurant closed early. Ended up eating frozen pizza at the local bar. Yummy....NOT. Had a few brews and went to bed.

Tuesday, May 14th...

Had breakfast at the local diner, we were both famished. Then went to Minnetonka and the Laughing Loon, picked up a few things. We went down to the dock just on a chance that someone might let us into the store and low and behold, Miranda was there and let us in. I was like a kid in a candy store. I picked up some stuff for me and the women who took care of our critters while we

were gone. I am so thankful she let us in. Now I gotta call her and see if she'll take an order over the phone because there is a T-shirt that is very fitting for Mike and I this trip. "Isle Royale Survivor 2013". It wasn't always easy, but we survived!!

Ok, back on track, I'm really trying not to ramble too much. (Shut up Mike!)

After my shopping spree, we headed out of town via the Brockway Mountain. It wasn't passable two days prior but we figured we'd take our chances. We stopped at the first "lookout" and I'm not sure who scared who the most, but there were two deer on the other side of the rock wall. I caught one in midair.



Here's a pic of the Cascade Falls, I think.



Mike has better pictures as I am terrified of heights and couldn't get as close to the edge as he. We stopped at the Eagle Harbor Lighthouse, of course not open for the season, but we looked around. Then headed to Houghton, to stop at the Park Headquarters and to find a store that Mike had been to many years ago.

After that, we headed to Marquette as we always stay there on our way home and we just HAVE to go to "Touch of Finland".

Mike with the Lighthouse



So much for my short winded trip report. I hope ya'll enjoyed it. I took over 2,000 pictures, so be glad I spared you those. That's not counting Mike's pictures with both of the GoPros, his Cannon and the video camera and such.

My final words on the trip...

It was different, not necessarily in a bad way. I got to experience things that not a lot of people did, other than the wolf/moose people. I was cold, but it was so worth it. I also never ended up with all my layers on, so that says something. My new sleeping bag is the most wonderful thing I have ever purchased, next to waterproof socks. It was a once in a lifetime trip and I can't wait until September (Fall Trip to the Island)!!!!

I am sure Mike will have plenty to add to this, but I worked with what I had.

On a side note, as of when we left the island, the inland lakes were still frozen, Windigo was still iced in at the dock and most of the trails without sun were impassable. In Rock Harbor on the 11th, you couldn't get up to the group sites. I'm sure much has changed by now, just wanted to let you know the conditions as of when we left.

Happy Trailing!!!