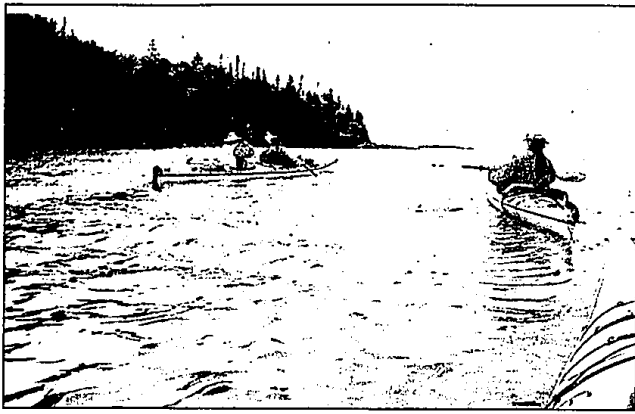


TRAVEL



Beautiful: Kayakers enjoy the magnificent waters during a trip to Lake Superior in northern Ontario.

Call of the wild beckons kayaker to Lake Superior

JON SCHECTER
SPECIAL WRITER

Tracks of a lone wolf in moist sand were the first things I saw after wiggling out of my sea kayak cockpit in a most undignified manner and stumbling ashore onto an uninhabited forested island in northern Ontario.

Wilderness guides Cindy and Kate were amused by my grubbly contortions of emergence that delivered me from choppy waters to terra firma. Politely, they refrained from comment. No, the babbling naturalist, now a wilderness sea kayak client, near speechless with pleasure in the wilds of Ontario's Lake Superior Archipelago.

Although only a few hours paddle from our starting point, the century old Rossport Inn, and 200 kilometers from Thunder Bay, as far as I was concerned, I was light years from Detroit.

I felt like hugging my guides, but remained restrained. Well, for a while.

"This is great!" is all I could manage to mumble as I knelt in sand and placed my hand over a fresh wolf print, near moose tracks mind you, and inhaled air sweet with spruce and cedar scent. In an hour camp was set, celebratory coffee consumed.

An expert kayaker I am not; none of our small group, except for the guides were. But you do not need to be a pro to go on a guided wilderness adventure if you select outfitters with care.

Let's wonder, previous kayaking or canoeing experience is a great asset and you should be in good physical shape, for northern Ontario, no matter how easy it may be to reach by air, is wilderness, and wilderness and cold Lake Superior can be unforgiving. Be honest when you book a journey and you'll have the best time.

At that moment of first wolf track encounter I realized that if you want to feel the excitement of kayaking in the greatest body of Canadian freshwater that snuggles up to Michigan, then you'll do well to contact what the Ontario Tourism Industry calls an "Inbound Receptive Tour Operator for Outdoor Adventure and Eco-Tourism for Northern Ontario."

Follow this little hint - you really should - and you will be immersed in an experience that extends beyond the paddle's splash. A world awash with a rainbow of rocks and human and natural history unlike any park you might find at home beckons.

Sea kayaking, using long sleek craft that are 16 to 18 feet long and designed for oceans and the Great Lakes, unlike shorter recreational kayaks, is the doorway of discovery for this great archipelago.

Keeping promises

Blue Loon Adventures, an eco-tourism organizer that works closely with Tourism Thunder Bay, kept promises. All of them. Everything Blue Loon managing director Tanya Wheeler promised during e-mail planning stages came true among the islands of dreams.

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Tanya is also a skilled and respected wildlife biologist. Her contacts allow for true adventures. Red-necked grebe observations, meteorite impact sites and woodland caribou can be on kayak itineraries.

Or how about encounters with First Nation communities? This was not a "just get your paddle wet" excursion.

Kayaking along the northern fringe of the Great Lakes, a system that holds a fifth of the world's supply of fresh water, presents a rugged, yet intimate look at the constant battle between the land and the water.

During the Precambrian era, towering mountain ranges rose up as the Earth's crust buckled and formed what is now the northern border of our biggest Great Lake, Superior. And that is where you paddle; through rocky arches, dip into sea caves millions of years old and just perhaps forget about cell phones.

Kayaking is the perfect way for the "waterside" look at these spectacular glacially scarraped peaks of rugged beauty, impossible to view trailside, where pioneering bright orange lichens cling to barren rocks.

Senior guide Kate Freeman explained how gulls perched on rocks added natural nutrients to the process. But it's hard to pay attention when Bald Eagle soars over evidence of tremendous upheavals and fierce storms.

Just beyond the dramatic shoreline lies the boreal forest that cradles much of the 3,800 kilometer long Great Lakes Heritage Coast, a magnificent region focused on ecosystem protection and made up of Crown land, provincial parks, protected areas and conservation reserves, and has the involvement of 24 First Nation communities.

A land of black bear, moose, aromatic cedar woods, trembling aspen that dance to the lightest breeze, beaver and bobcat. Some say cougars stalk the woods. And I know ravens and spirits watch all travelers.

Eco-travel is education

Morning coffee with my ever-smiling guide Cindy Collins, who turned out to be a fellow outdoor recreation major, gleaned me a survival tidbit in the unlikely event of a black bear attack.

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Incredibly clear secluded bays provided front-row seating to watch the fiery orange sun extinguish herself in Lake Superior. And when the loons sang on our final night, and their haunting melody drifted through that mystical curtain of darkness, I know my eyes were wet with moisture that had nothing to do with the veil of evening island fog.

Northern Ontario is a sweet temptress, even if you never hear the howl of a wolf.

Jon Schechter is a West Bloomfield resident and writes travel stories for the Observer & Eccentricist Newspapers.

Northern Ontario Sea Kayaking Adventure

GETTING THERE

Air Canada offers convenient flights from Detroit to Thunder Bay through Toronto. Be sure to bring a passport or photo I.D. with an original or certified birth certificate and check exact location of Detroit Metro departure terminal for Air Canada. Location varies. Call (888) 247-2262 or visit www.aircanada.ca

NORTHERN ONTARIO ADVENTURE PLANNER

Blue Loon Adventures, RR#7, 4398 Highway 61, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7C 5V5, Canada
E-mail: tuckercr@tbaytel.net, www.blueloon.baynet.net, call (888) 846-0067, or fax (807)964-2823

Blue Loon Adventures specializes in "Outdoor Adventure and Tour Packages for Northwestern Ontario" including magnificent provincial and national parks, polar bear viewing, red-necked grebe research field trips, birding, catch and release fly fishing, dog sledding, historical sites and fascinating First Nation Lands.

TOURISM IN THUNDER BAY

For information on eco-tourism and outdoor adventure, parks, camping, hotels, and Northern Ontario destinations contact Tourism Thunder Bay, (800) MOST-FUN or www.VisitThunderBay.com

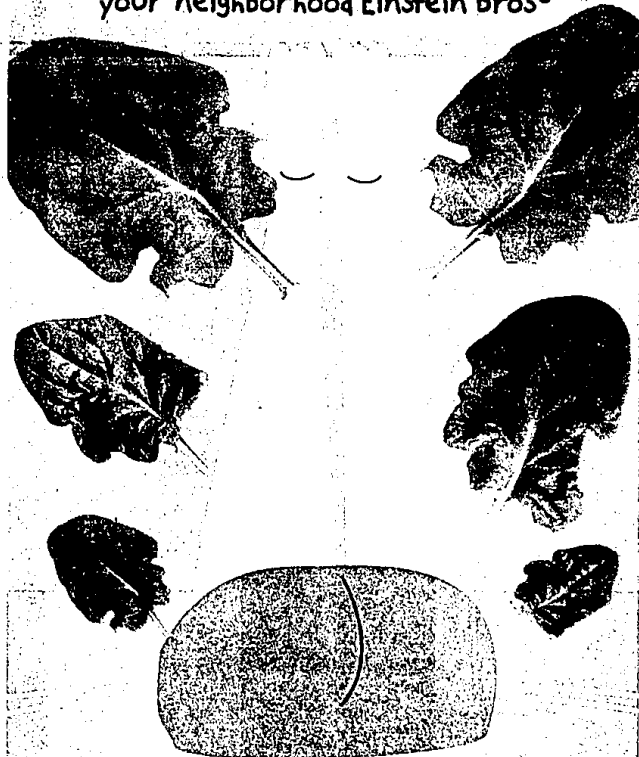
THE ROSSPORT INN:

Overlooking Lake Superior and the Rossport Islands, and nestled in the pristine Canadian wilderness, the Rossport Inn is the oldest hotel on the north shore. Built in 1884 to accommodate passengers on the Canadian Pacific Railway, the inn maintains its charm. Call (877) 824-4032 or visit www.rossportinn.on.ca for information.

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