

Adventures on Lake of the Woods *(work in progress)*

Our family grew up spending our summers at our parent's island on Lake of the Woods, Ontario, Canada, but now we're fortunate enough to at least get a couple weeks up there each year. As of 2007, I have only missed four summers total, and Kelin has missed 3 out of 12 summers. It is a beautiful place full of adventures! And there have been many over the years!

Lake of the Woods is located just north of Minnesota close to the Manitoba/Ontario border. Part of Lake of the Woods comes down into Minnesota, which is Big Traverse Bay. It is about a 2 hour drive east of Winnipeg, and the main city is Kenora. There were once a lot of mines in the area, and more gold was pulled out of there than all of the Gold Rush. It is a very popular fishing location for fishermen all over the world. It has over 14,000 islands, but even with that many and looking at a map of the entire lake, it is easy to spot the island (just look for the fish head). My parent's island is located on a large body of water called Ptarmigan Bay. The bay is large and somewhat remote in comparison to other areas. When we first started going there, if you heard a boat, it was usually coming to visit. Now there are more boats, especially on the weekends, but we can still water-ski without boat obstacles or lots of extra boat waves. Most boats are about a half mile away. Since the bay is large, it can get some very large waves building up. When it's calm and the wind starts to pick up, it's rare for it to not continue to build. But there are also a lot of calm days.



The island is 60 acres and is longer than it is wide. It contains a large bay, beach and point at one end (where our cabins are located), and a meadow and marsh at the other end. The back side of the island is weedy and usually great for Pickerel (Walleye) fishing. It is located just south of Corkscrew Island (a 1000 acre island) and just west of the Northern Peninsula. There is a narrow uninhabited island to the south-west on our end and a small circular inhabited island separated by a sandbar toward the other end of the island. The area between our island and the uninhabited island we call Camel Island contains a reef that many boaters have crashed on – including the tax assessor which saved us money, because he didn't complete his inspection of the island.

The closest public road access is 7.5 miles by boat. For many years we parked at Sugar Bay in the Clearwater Bay area, but later joined Wertz and Ronald to use the Gravel Pit in Rush Bay, off the Rush Bay Road.

We started going up to Lake of the Woods in 1972 to visit close family friends, the Wertz'. We liked it so much that we continued to go up there every year after that. My parents purchased the island with one cabin, one dock, a generator shed and a tool shed in 1975. They purchased it with a doctor they had met, and sold off the second half. Dr. Ronald's family had a place on an island at the other end of the lake and did not intend to build here. Our families became friends over the years and still do things together often. The Wertz' island is also at the other end near Ronald's. A couple parcels on the back side of the island were also sold, but a verbal mistake caused some additional sub-dividing to occur, creating more cottages than desired. Although there are now many cottages on the island, the nearest one we can see is about a quarter mile away and we seldom see or hear anyone else.



There are no electric utilities in this area of the lake - for many years the source of electric power came from an on-demand generator system powered by propane. The generator is still used, but the primary source of electric now comes from an impressive solar electric system that my dad built. When we first got to the island, there was an old Lister generator powered by gas that we would have to start by hand cranking the large flywheel. Water is pumped directly from the lake and filtered. For many years it was gravity fed from a storage tank on a tower, but now it is pressurized. There was a time when you could drink the water straight out of the lake. Although, the water is still fairly clean, there is more algae and other pollution and should be filtered well for drinking. Drainage goes into various leaching pits that we dug over the years. And human waste goes into outhouses that we have dug, or in recent years there are now a few solar toilets and a solar outhouse. All appliances are powered by propane and the phone is a radio phone that is limited to a half hour at one time.

Wildlife is abundant out there, so we usually see a lot of different animals and birds. The most common are Bald Eagles - they are everywhere. They quite often sit in a big tree on Camel Island next to us. Many islands have nests, and there's a small island nearby that we had designated "Eagle Island", because it has three Bald Eagle nests. Friends on a nearby island have a nest right next to their deck, and they get to watch baby Eagles grow up and learn to fly! Deer are also very common and currently our island has too many, according to my dad.

They are eating all the undergrowth on the island and get into his vegetable garden. He solved that by building an electric fence around the garden area. Bear are also abundant, and we have seen many over the years. They are powerful swimmers and have in the past swum to our island - sometimes just to hop to another island or sometimes to stay awhile. My parents usually see more in the fall. There are a lot of Great Blue Herons - usually on the back side of the island. A couple birds that we used to see ALOT of were Pelicans and Cormorants, but for some reason there seem to be less over recent years. At least Loons are still abundant, and you can hear their calls across the lake on a calm day (especially early in the morning or evening). Other animals that we have seen are beavers, otters, moose, elk and fox. And of course we can't forget fish. The common fish caught are Walleye, Smallmouth Bass, Northern Pike (Jack), Lake Trout, and Muskie.



Being on an island means that there is and has been a lot of work put in. I couldn't possibly list all the projects, as virtually everything on the island had to be built by hand. From the two docks and their cribs, and the rebuilding of them, to the rock wall, the trails, the outhouses, the water tower, the boathouse, the guest cabin and the recent re-roofing, the wash shed, the old deck and all the improvements to the old main cabin, burring of all the water and propane lines, drainage ditches and leaching pits, the hot tub, opening and closing for the season, and of course all the general maintenance, repairs, improvements, etc. But the biggest and most impressive project is the new main cabin. I was not there for a lot of the construction on that one, but a lot of hands were put to use to build it. It took many summers to complete, but my dad designed an awesome place that is large, airy and comfortable, and has a great 180 degree view of the lake and the sunrise and sunset. The building is an octagon with two bedroom wings. It has eight sliding glass doors, a tall open-beam ceiling, a fireplace, back deck and large open kitchen. In 2007 a large front deck will be built. But for all these projects and more, all the materials must somehow get to the island. People that live in the area year round sometimes use the highways created on the ice in the winter to drive materials to their islands. In our case, we had to use the water, and although we never tried it, I don't think driving across the water will work very well. We had a couple different barges that would carry a lot of supplies, along with the smaller boats. Of course we had to hand load it all at one end and then unload on the island. There were a couple cases where a commercial barge brought the materials, but we still had to unload. It's sometimes a lot of work, but worth it in the end.

Where did all the hands that helped with the projects come from? There have been many, many guests to the island and many friends around the lake. And as we were growing up, there were many kids around to play with. The other end of our island had a few families that we got together with often. Wertz and Ronald's have islands 7 miles west in Rush Bay and we get together often. We've gotten to know many other people on surrounding islands and down at Rush Bay, where Church on the Lawn is also held. It's a great community of people out there, willing to help each other out and socialize with!

Spending that many summers on the island, creates many adventures. The following are some of the adventures I will tell about. The dates of when they each occurred are not clear.

Keywords are temporary to help me remember what I was thinking until I write the story.

- Seagull Island – small boat, seagulls, island, yellow, dive bomb, mom
- Burma Road – first trip, aunt/cousins, missed road, stuck, dark
- Pot Belly Stove Mystery – old stove, hidden, island, gone
- Pontoon Plane Rides – Ronalds, plane, rides
- Cookie Werewolf – Gram, tents, cookies, deck
- Bear on the Island – bear, trails, shot, bones, bear song, tether ball, tree
- Indian Boy Mystery – boy, cottage, gone
- Stranded on the Lake – date, engine failure, waves, search crew, dark
- Flipped Out of Jinxed Boat – thrown out, crash, swim, broke ski, theft, landing
- Loaded Boat Flipped – lumber from Rush Bay, camera, boat wave
- Canoe Lake Canoe Trips – fishing trip, adventures, spaghetti island
- Exploration and Lake Discovery – portage, lakes, motor boats, fishing, Parth, Fox
- Dean's Hospital Trip – inner tube, concrete, head, jumps
- Wave for Help – Mark, logs, pull cord, oars, island
- Big Waves Small Boat – whitecaps, yellow boat, fishing, wet
- Storms – waves, boat dive-in, midnight boat walks, sunk
- Tornados – tail-end, Duffy's, boathouses
- Island Trail Building – main trail, findings, help
- Giant Turtle in Labrinth – fishing, tortoise, smart, watchful, hide, eat fish
- Pets – kittens, puppies, mr. stubbs, cat died, rescue cat and scratch
- Rock Hauling – rock wall, cribs, boats, sizes
- I Smell Propane – Jason, chop wood, yellow ribbon, dig hole, missing parts
- Practical Jokes – u. george, mouse, frozen clothes, traps, airport, Ron and Rabson
- Morning Runs – 7am, hwy, distance, bear, fox, hill, island trail
- Break-in and Theft – theft, neighbors, cabin, boat, police
- Trick Skiing – P&J, disk, paddle, backward, barefoot, spraying
- Island Regattas – contests, watermelon fights, fishing
- Scavenger Hunts – boats, clues, Kennedy's, prizes

Canoe Lake Canoe Trips

1982 – 1985

Four of us – Dean Wertz, Mark Doner, Dean Doner, and Brian Doner – went on an annual canoeing and fishing trip to Canoe Lake four years in a row. Each trip was two days and two nights and entailed the four of us in two canoes to canoe 4.7 miles with all our gear from Wertz Island, through Echo Bay to the other side. At that point we had to portage the canoes and all the gear on a trail about 525 feet. Then get back in to canoe about a mile to our campsite. We would fish and hike for 48 hours before canoeing back to Wertz Island. Total canoeing distance is estimated around 15 to 20 miles. We cooked 5 meals including 2 fish dinners. The trips were always a blast and always different with new adventures! All the trips have been told in more detail in a separate document, so this story is only a summary.

While we were out on our trip to Canoe Lake, at least one year the girls – Becky Wertz, Gail Doner, and either Vicky Ronald or Virginia Gail would camp. They went to the small island in front of Wertz' and stayed there overnight. One time they had a spaghetti dinner and dropped some spaghetti on the ground, so after that they called the island Spaghetti Island.

Practical Jokes

A good harmless practical joke is usually fun for all. There were two practical jokes that stand out over the years.

Around 1982, Mark, Dean and Brian were out fishing one evening. We had caught a stringer full of mostly Walleye, so we decided to stop by Ron Neufeld to show him. Ron's family has a cabin on the other side of our island, and he likes to fish. But before we went there, we replaced all our current lures with goofy lures that had never caught anything. Then we laid the fishing poles with the lures across the seats in the small boat and went to his dock. We showed him all the fish and he was excited! He then asked what we caught them on, and looked at the poles and said "oh wow, you caught them on **those** lures"? Of course, next he asked where we had caught them. We told him at Lawrence Rabson Picnic Park, which is a small park on a nearby island that has an old dock and rocks in the bay. It was never known to have fish. His response was something like "wow, I didn't know that was a good fishing spot". We went home shortly after to fillet the fish, leaving Ron with that information. Early the next morning we got up to go running on the trail in the meadow at the other end of the island. As we were running, we could hear a boat coming around the end of the island and then saw Ron as he turned and headed for Lawrence Rabson Picnic Park! Of course he never caught a single fish there, and when we got together later, we all had a good laugh after he found out the truth!