

SECTION EIGHT: Portages

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Overview:

The canoe portages on Isle Royale vary in difficulty and length. Like the trails, they are always harder going north to south than going east to west. They are all well marked and the trails are all well-worn. The posts for portages, though marked with a post, can be hard to see when on the lake due to surrounding foliage, especially if it is foggy or rainy, but they are all located pretty much as indicated on the Trails Illustrated map (except Pickerel Cove). Before leaving on a trip where you need to find a portage, review the map carefully, as it can be hard to do when you are paddling, especially if the water is rough. GPS coordinates are available in **Section Twelve: Reference Charts**. If the portage crosses a trail, there is typically a post marking where it crosses on the main trail.

At the beginning of each portage description is a chart with details of the portage as described below. There is a complete chart for all of the portage available in **Section Twelve: Reference Charts** under "Chart of the Portages".

Post marking a portage on the water.



About My Descriptions:

Rating: Portage difficulty is based on a scale of 1-10, a 1 difficulty being a walk on a paved flat road, to a 10 difficulty being the portage between Tobin Harbor and Duncan Bay, in the rain. I consider this the most difficult portage on the island. I consider the most difficult, in terms of length, to be Malone Bay to Lake Richie. Difficulty will vary based on the season and the weather conditions.

Map Miles: Map miles are from the 1994 Trails Illustrated topographic map, which is based on USGS topographic maps modified and revised by Trails Illustrated.

GPS Miles: Are based on my actually walking the trail and usually averaged based on multiple readings.

Maximum (Max) and Minimum (Min) Elevation in feet: These are calculated based on various sources based on the trail and the data I have accumulated. This data comes from my GPS, Suunto Watch, Maps, MyTopo Terrain Navigator™ and Google Earth™. This data has been analyzed and presented as my best guess.

Gain / Loss: Total amount of feet gained and lost over the duration of the trail. This has been calculated from MyTopo Terrain Navigator™ and/or Google Earth™ based on my tracks.

Elevation Difference: The difference between the Gain and Loss. This is, in effect, the amount of feet going up versus going down. If positive, there are more ascents than descents and, if negative, vice-versa.

Percent Maximum (% Max.) Grade: The maximum grade going up or down. A positive number represents uphill and the negative downhill. This has been calculated from MyTopo Terrain Navigator™ and/or Google Earth™ based on my tracks.

Percent Average (% Avg.) Grade: The average grade going up or down. The positive number represents uphill and the negative downhill. This has been calculated from MyTopo Terrain Navigator™ and/or Google Earth™ based on my tracks.

Profile: Based on my tracks and transferred to Google Earth™ then captured.

Overview: The general description of the portage.

Key Points: The highlights and/or landmarks on the trail.

Details: A detailed description of the trail with elevations, grade and miles.

Relative Campgrounds: A listing of the adjacent campgrounds to go to or come from.

Greenstone: The miles, elevation change and comment from The Greenstone Newspaper.

Post marking where a portage crosses a trail.



Detail Maps: The detail maps are captured from maps at 1:24,000 scale and reduced to 60%, unless they are watermarked with "2x". In that case they are captured at double magnification and reduced 60%. When the larger linked map is opened, it is the same, but not reduced in size.

Google Earth™ View (if listed): Will link to a captured view of varying scale.

Chickenbone Lake to McCargoe Cove

South to North

Rating		Miles		Max Elev.	Min Elev.	Gain	Loss	Elev. Diff.	% Max Grade	% Avg. Grade
Direction	Reverse	Map	GPS							
7	8	1.2	1.13	712'	610'	178'	-233'	-55'	35.7/-21.4	6.8/-6.4



Overview: This trail is part of the Indian Portage Trail. The lake level at McCargoe Cove is 60' lower than at Chickenbone Lake. This portage was originally shorter, as it ended south of McCargoe Cove campground where you could put in the water. This made it a distance of 0.7 miles. As of fall, 2011, this portage was still closed with a sign saying not to use it. I was told this was due to loons needing the area for nesting. This is a long term closure and the recent Greenstone newspapers reflect the longer portage. My profile and miles reflect the current portage.

This trail is very hilly, especially at the beginning, as it runs south to north, but none of them are very long and it begins to mellow out after the first third of the trail. It basically follows the drainage from Chickenbone Lake to McCargoe Cove the entire way.

Key Points:

- 0.00 - Chickenbone Lake
- 0.63 - Chickenbone East Trail junction
- 0.74 - Closed portage from McCargoe Cove
- 1.13 - McCargoe Cove dock

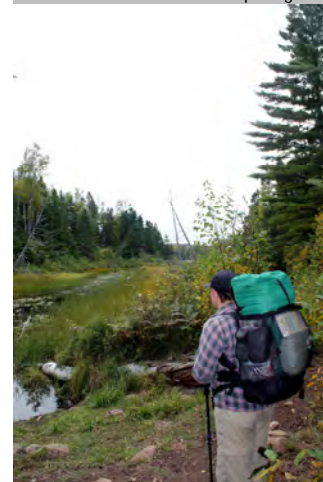
Details: Leaving the lake the trail begins a series of hills gaining and losing between 15' and 50' at grades between 15% and 60% until dropping down a final 60' to a creek with boards at 0.35 miles. The trail then stays relatively level until dropping down 20' and coming to the junction with Chickenbone East Trail at 0.63 miles. From there it climbs a slight hill then descends 20' to the closed portage to McCargoe Cove at 0.74 miles. There is a sign posted there. The trail levels out here and comes to a creek with boards at 0.78 miles, before beginning a short climb of 30' at a 10% grade turning to the west and immediately going back down to the east dropping 40' at another 10% grade until leveling off and coming to a wet area at 0.94 miles. It stays in this wet area and passes the sign for the group sites just before starting a small hill at 1.05 miles, ascending 20' and passing shelters then going down to the community fire ring, picnic tables and dock at 1.13 miles.



Closed McCargoe side of portage, 2011



Chickenbone Lake side of portage.



Relevant Campgrounds: Chickenbone West, McCargoe Cove

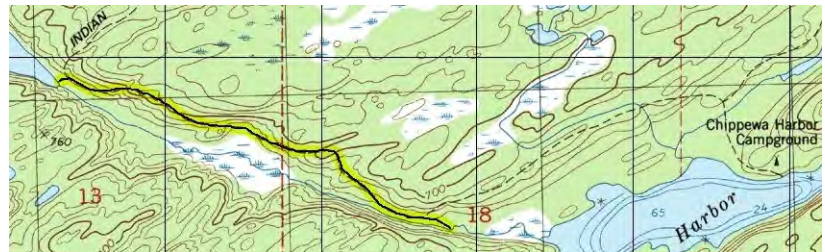
Greenstone: Miles: 1.2 / Elevation Change: 80' / Comment: "hilly"

Chippewa Harbor to Lake Richie*South to North*

Rating		Miles		Max Elev.	Min Elev.	Gain	Loss	Elev. Diff.	% Max Grade	% Avg. Grade
Direction	Reverse	Map	GPS							
8	8	1.2	1.31	734'	604'	243'	-214'	-26'	19.5/-27.5	6.4/-7.1



Overview: The lake level at Lake Richie is about 25' higher than in Chippewa Harbor. This is a long portage with quite a few climbs and descents, but the trail is relatively straight, so there are no quick turns. The scenery is very nice and it is worth taking your time and resting along the way.



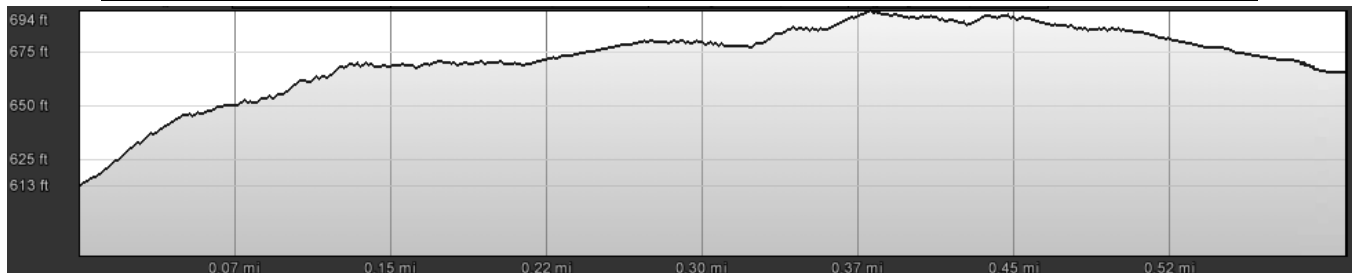
Details: Leaving the water the trail heads up slightly before coming to the Indian Portage Trail where it is level until 1200', when it climbs 40' at a 10% grade until 0.38 miles, when it levels out with a lake and/or wetlands to the south and stays relatively level with no more than 15' change in elevation until 0.73 miles, when it begins a 25' climb at 10% grade before leveling out and starting down at 0.86 miles. It then descends 75' at a 10% grade until coming to the fork that cuts off the main trail and leads down to the lake at 1.31 miles.

Relevant Campgrounds: Chippewa Harbor, Lake Richie Canoe, Lake Richie

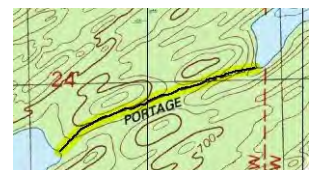
Greenstone: Miles: 1.2 / Elevation Change: 160' / Comment: "hilly"

Chippewa Harbor to Lake Whittlesey*East to West*

Rating		Miles		Max Elev.	Min Elev.	Gain	Loss	Elev. Diff.	% Max Grade	% Avg. Grade
Direction	Reverse	Map	GPS							
8	7	0.6	0.63	694'	613'	146'	-93'	53'	18.6/-12.2	6.1/-3.6



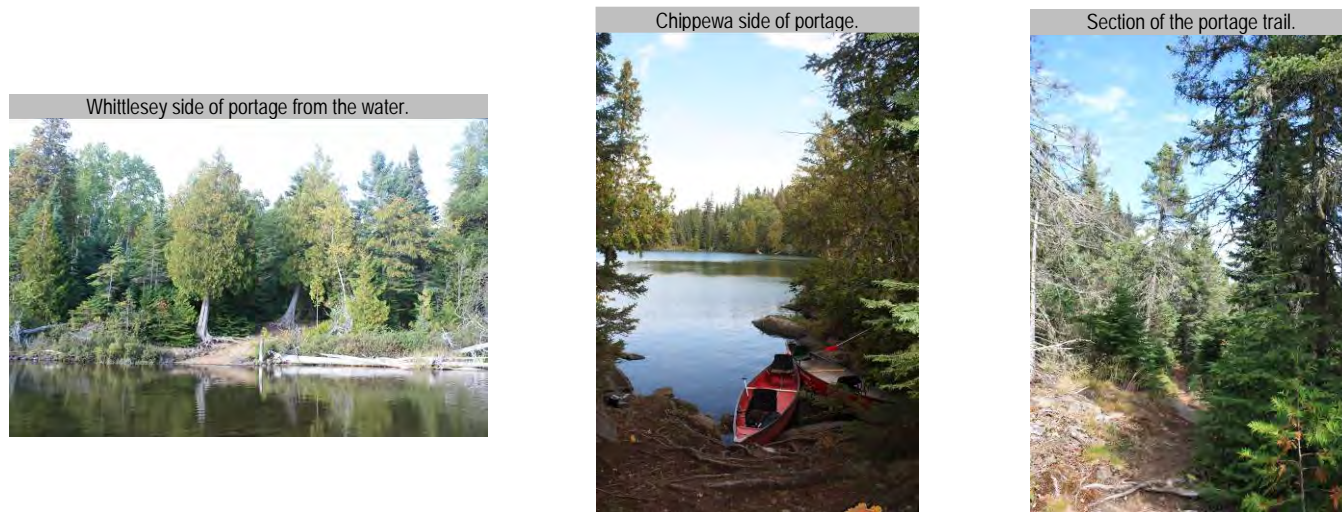
Overview: The lake level at Lake Whittlesey is 69' higher than Chippewa Harbor. This portage is relatively short, but it is hard due to quite a few rock steps, roots and just enough turns to make it where you have to keep your head up. None of the elevation changes are that steep, but it is almost always either going up or down. However, it is a lovely trail and well worth the work to get to Lake Whittlesey, and the wilderness feeling of it.



Details: Leaving the lake, the trail ascends 90' over the first 0.10 miles of trail at a 15% to 25% grade before leveling out then dropping slightly until 0.22 miles, when it begins a gradual uphill gaining 30' until 0.27 miles. It then stays relatively level to slightly up gaining no more than 10' until 0.47 miles, when it descends 50' at a 10% to 20% grade and coming to the shore of Lake Whittlesey at 0.63 miles.

Relative Campgrounds: Lake Whittlesey, Chippewa Harbor

Greenstone: Miles: 0.6 / Elevation Change: 140' / Comment: "steep grades and rocky"

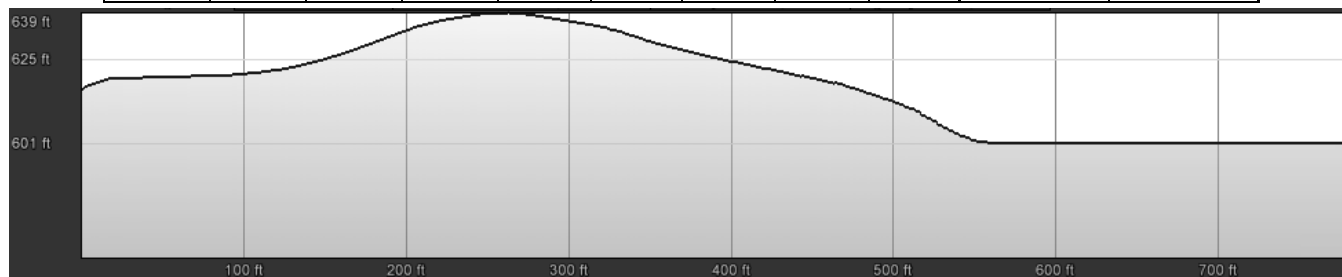


[Google Earth™ View](#)

Duncan Bay to Five Finger Bay

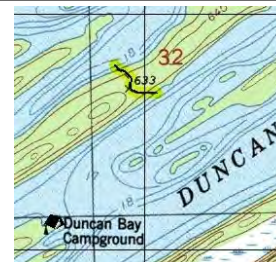
South to North

Rating		Miles		Max Elev.	Min Elev.	Gain	Loss	Elev. Diff.	% Max Grade	% Avg. Grade
Direction	Reverse	Map	GPS							
4	4.5	0.2	0.12	639'	601'	23'	-38'	-15'	32.5/-26.3	4.7/-11.7



Overview: This portage is from Lake Superior to the same, so there is no elevation change between the two. It is a very easy portage. I measured only a 43' rise total over the entire way. The side on Five Fingers has a nice landing area. The Duncan side is not great, but much better than the one at Duncan from the Tobin portage.

Details: Leaving Duncan Bay the trail begins an ascent of 30' at 30% grade for the first 150' before becoming a 6% grade and gaining another 10' until 0.7 miles. From there, it begins a gradual descent of 40' with a grade from 5% to 15% at the end when it comes to Five Finger bay at 0.12 miles.



Relative Campgrounds: Duncan Bay, Duncan Narrows, Lane Cove, Belle Isle

Greenstone: Miles: 0.2 / Elevation Change: 8' / Comment: "short and sweet"

[Google Earth™ View](#)