

The Isle Royale Journals

A Documentation of Trips to Isle Royale National Park
In Words and Photos

The Feldtmann Ridge Trail

Spring 2010

Mike and Nancy Tremblay





“James Thurber once sat by his window watching men clear trees for a site in which to confine people who had been driven insane by the clearing of trees...”



Dedicated to us, like the trees...

Table of Contents

About these Journals	3
Prologue	4
Day One: Saturday	5
Grand Portage	5
Windigo	6
Grace Creek	6
Old Dead Birch	8
Silence	9
Day Two: Sunday	10
Feldtmann Lake Campground	11
Day Three: Monday	12
Day Four: Tuesday	17
The World on My Back (Not Yours)	19
Coyote Ridge	20
Day Five: Wednesday	22
Siskiwit Bay Campground	23
<i>Eyes Closed (Ears Open)</i>	24
Rings of Joy (Across Generations #1)	25
Rings of Joy (Across Generations #2)	26
Rings of Joy (Across Generations #3)	27
Paul Said.....	27
We Are Ruining the World Even If You Don't Know It	28
Inside the Shelter Door	28
Day Six: Thursday.....	29
<i>His Grandmother's Ring</i>	31
I'll Always Think of You	36
Everything in Place	37
Day Seven: Friday	39
Island Mine Campground	41
Day Eight: Saturday.....	42
The Last Time I Saw People.....	44
Washington Creek Campground	46
In The Desert with Jesus.....	48
Watching the Stars Move Is Cool.....	50
Old Friends	50
Day Nine: Sunday.....	51
The Last Walk.....	52
<i>Pulling Away From the Island</i>	53
Grand Portage	53
<i>Through Walls</i>	54
The Trip Home	55
The Seeney Stretch	57
Summaries	59

Reflections	60
Wounded Senses	60
<i>The Island</i>	62
Letters	63
<i>My Mike and Me</i>	64
Empty No More	64

About these Journals

The Isle Royale Journals are the notes that we took while visiting Isle Royale National Park. They are taken directly from the journals that we maintained while on the island. As part of my journal, I record details on the trails or water routes, campsites and other details. These, for the most part, are not included in this journal. They are used in the document, "A Comprehensive Guide to Isle Royale National Park". For complete detailed descriptions of trails, campsites, places and basically everything you need to know about the park, this is the document you need to get. It is available through my website at: www.isleroyale.info.

This journal contains both of our notes and writings. Mike's are in "plain-Georgia font" and Nancy's are in "*italic-Georgia font*". They are put in the order of the time stamps we each put in our journals. Both of us occasionally write about things that happened earlier, because we have not had time to catch up at the same time. We have, to some degree, tried to match them up as close as possible, that being said, we do not want to take away the essence of our journals, so you will have to bear with us.

This PDF file contains links on all of the pictures that will load the full size picture. If you received only this PDF file, the pictures will not load. If you have received the complete disc, the link on each picture will load the full size picture. In addition, if you load the first picture, you can slideshow to the next, and the pictures will follow the same order as the journal.

Some notes on the details:

I record the weather conditions during the trip. When on the island, this is one of the important things in your day as you settle into the "wilderness state of mind". Ever since I have started bringing a barometer, I have found it to be a useful tool in predicting the weather. The temperature gives you some idea of the conditions during the trip and the time of year. All the temperature and barometer reading are based on my watch, a Suunto "Vector". My watch records the barometer over the past 6 hours and records in two sections. The first one is for the last 3-6 hours and the second the last 0-3 hours. These are shown in this document with arrows. → indicates steady, ↑ rising, ↓ falling. Of course, when on my wrist, the temperature is inaccurate and I do not record it. Also, while moving, the barometer changes due to changes in elevation. So I wait until both "settle out" before recording them.

The mileages are based on my GPS readings, which is a Garmen Etrex, which tracks four satellites, so they are plus or minus a certain amount depending on the signal at the time. I am also usually moving and I do not stand around waiting for the signal to become strong.

Written by Mike and Nancy Tremblay
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Prologue

Feldtmann Lake, Siskiwit Bay, Island Mine Washington Creek – May 8 thru 16, 2010

We left from Grand Portage, Minnesota on the first boat of the year. On this trip was my girlfriend, Nancy Hudson and myself. This was her first trip to the island and her first backpacking trip. It was my 15th trip to the island and my 3rd time walking this route. Our plan was to walk the Feldtmann Ridge Trail to the Island Mine Trail and around to Windigo.



Our route in black

[\(Click HERE for a full park map\)](#)

(Mike's font)

This trip did not get off to a good start in terms of my health. I had a cold that progressed into my lungs. Trying to get everything done at work and in preparation, I did not have a lot of free time, thus I did not take care of it. Finally, it got bad enough that I went to the doctor, on the morning of the day before we were supposed to leave. I was diagnosed with pneumonia, given a shot of steroids, an antibiotic and lung ventilation. I was also given an antibiotic in pill form to take and a rescue inhaler just in case I needed it. Then, on our way up, just outside of Marquette, Michigan, I had a coughing attack that bruised and/or fractured the ribs on my right side. This just about knocked me unconscious while I was driving, but I got through it. I did not let Nancy know what had happened until we were on the island. The night before going to Grand Portage, staying in Marquette, I spent sleeping on a "lazy boy" type chair and using a lung ventilation treatment our friend Tami had lent us (thanks Tami!) and had one of the most uncomfortable nights of sleeping I can remember. I do remember Nancy by my side nursing me in any way she could.

As a result, I did not think I was going to be able to walk and figured we might be spending at least the first couple of days in Windigo.

(Nancy's font)

Leading up to this trip, I was excited, yet terrified. I had never been backpacking before. I hadn't even been hiking before. I had never slept in a tent until I met Mike. I had to be completely dependent on someone else. That doesn't come easy for me. So, "out of my element", is an understatement. But, this is something that is Mike's passion and I guess I just had to see for myself what the big deal was.

Mike being sick was a huge concern for me, even though I didn't know the whole extent of it until we were already on the island. I didn't think we'd be able to hike much, but as you will read, we did. He's a trooper.

I figured this trip was a "deal breaker", if I couldn't hack it on the island, then he'd figure we weren't meant to be. You will have to continue reading to find out what happens...

Day One: Saturday

Grand Portage

≈ 9:20 a.m. On the boat

The boat left the dock at 8:35 a.m. It was completely full. We did not get to the dock until 8:20 a.m., but it was no big deal this time, as we had no canoes to deal with this trip. When we walked up, Jasper was just about to take a group photo of everyone going on the boat. Jasper is on the first boat most years and he brings a cake in recognition of it. This year, he was unable to go and just drove up to drop off a cake and take pictures. We decided not to jump into the picture and stood and talked to Captain Don instead. On the boat is the Wolf/Moose study teams, including Candy and Rolf Peterson. The teams were all at dinner, in the lodge last night, when Nancy and I ate. I did not say "Hi" or anything as I did not want to interrupt them. Plus, I doubt Rolf would remember me without an explanation of who I was.

Last night, after dinner, we went and got our drink coupons (buy one get one free), our free coffee cups, \$5 in gambling credits and our room discount coupon. We then went to the bar to use our drink vouchers ☺. While we were there, Don, the owner of the Voyageur, came in and we bought him a beer. We then grabbed our beers and went to use up our \$5 "free" tokens. I have not done that in years. It turns out you have to spend \$1 of your money, before it loads your card with the credits. We sat and used their money, plus our dollar then went to the bar, each got another beer and went up to our room. We finished some last minute things and went to bed around 1 a.m. We woke up this morning around 7 a.m., we both took showers and as I said, got to the dock at 8:20 a.m. I slept great last night. I will go into more details on my illness later, or when I write this up. But right now, I have only coughed twice today (knock on wood), and my breathing is not terrible. It isn't good by any means, but it isn't terrible. Walking is very doubtful though. I do not think I will have the lung capacity.

≈ 9:37 a.m.

I just finished writing the previous. The boat is rocking pretty well. You definitely have to be seated or hanging on tight. I would guess the waves to be about 4-8 footers. In the best count I can do sitting here, there are 40-42 people on board counting the captain and the mate.

The new engines are not any quieter that I can tell, but they do not vibrate as much. The first mate said they found the engines on "Craig's List" and I verified that with Don (who was on the boat). There are new engine covers, which are larger and not carpeted. I am sitting on one now with my coat under me. I am sitting next to Nancy rolling with the waves. She seems very happy. She is smiling and staring out the window. Oh, by the way, they also got a new coffee pot, which I am going to use, along with the bathroom.



≈ 10:05 a.m.

It has gotten pretty rough on the lake. The waves are rolling though, and not choppy. I have seen two people get sick on the stern so far. That is the most I have ever seen get sick on this boat that I recall, and definitely the most on the first boat. Jasper dropped off his cake, but we have not had it yet. It is too hard to move around. Going to the bathroom was a real workout. My ribs are sore just from doing that. I have never come to the island in worse shape. I have not told Nancy, but when I did my big cough just outside of Marquette (I will explain later), I heard a pop, felt a pain and believe I have fractured a rib or two. It took my breath away while I was driving. It is in the same area I broke them in the past and it feels the same. At the hotel in Marquette, I slept in a reclining chair because it hurt too bad and was hard to breathe when I laid down. I am also at my highest weight ever in my whole life. 200 pounds! Also, I would guess my lung capacity is at about 60-65% at best. It feels like around 50% actually, but I am not sure that is possible without pure oxygen. So I am very prepared for a 9-10 mile hike today. Not!

≈ 12:08 p.m.

We are leaving the pavilion in Windigo by the dock.

Windigo

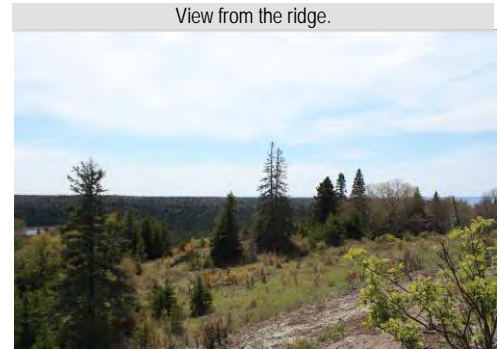
The trail before starting up the first ridge



Just about to climb the ridge



View from the ridge.



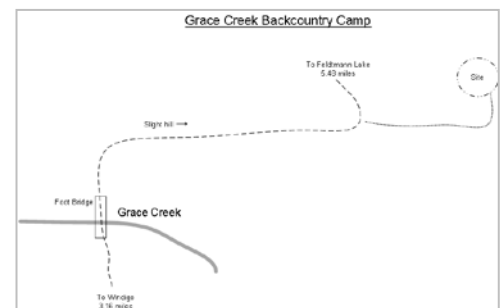
Grace Creek

≈ 5:50 p.m., 55°, 29.30" (both are still settling out after walking)

We are at a backcountry camp near Grace Creek.

First of all, I did not think I was going to be able to walk. I figured we would take off, I would be hurting too bad and we would have to stay in Washington Creek Campground. So I am glad we were able to go. It hurt badly, my breathing was labored and we made a lot of stops, but we traveled.

We arrived at Grace Creek at 3:28 p.m. after walking a total of 3.16 miles and decided to stay here. Once we arrived at Grace Creek, we sat on the west side of the creek while Nancy tended to her feet. Then I decided to meander around looking for sites. We decided to stay and I eventually picked a site passed where we were sitting, up a slight hill. The trail turns west and our camp was straight



into the woods where the trail turns. We are not quite the required quarter mile from a trail, but we are over an eighth of a mile and well out of site from the trail.

As of now, we are all setup and just finished pumping our water.

≈ 6:48 p.m., 48°, 29.35"

No sooner than 3 minutes after I wrote the previous, I looked again and it said 52°. Anyway, I have changed into my comfy clothes, fixed a cocktail and that is what the temperature says now. I believe it is accurate temperature wise, but the pressure still possibly has to settle out.

~ 7:38 p.m.

My first entry!! The word that has come to my mind the most today was...WOW!! This is the end of our first day, and yes, I've survived thus far!! ☺

I don't even know where to begin, so I guess I'll start at the beginning. We arrived to the boat on time (imagine that)! The boat ride was fantastic. It was very windy and the water was rough. I loved every minute of it, with the exception of trying to go to the bathroom. Have you ever tried tucking in your shirt while being bounced from wall to wall? Next time, I think I'll wait for calmer waters!

We arrived to the island (Mike has the time), it was cold and windy, but bearable. Mike was having a difficult time due to pneumonia and a fractured rib, (that he neglected to tell me until 6:30 this evening!) SHITHEAD!!! We got our permit. That took a while, as it was a full boat this time. That usually isn't the case, this time of year, but the Wolf/Moose team was on the first boat.

We got our packs ready, I didn't think we'd be able to go very far, if anywhere at all, but Mike said we'd try it and see how it goes. It was a rough start for him. He was hurting and having a hard time breathing, but persevered. We took a few breaks, which seemed to help him. I thought I'd be in tears after the first mile, but I wasn't. I was feeling great! My allergies aren't acting up, so I'm breathing okay. My pack is giving me a little trouble on my shoulders, but I think I can handle it. Right before we stopped here, my blisters popped up, but some super glue and Band-Aids and I should be good to go.

We are camping at a back country camp this evening, as neither of us felt we could make the full trip to Feldtmann Lake today. It is wonderful back here! It's funny how the things I thought I'd miss the most, are the things I don't miss at all. I have food, water, shelter and most of all, I have my Mike and a sense of peace that I've been longing for, for a very long time. The scenery here is just awesome. I know now, that when I get stressed, when we are back at home, I'll think of this and relax. I never could have imagined, even after reading Mike's Journals, how tranquil this is.

Mike just made our dinner, it's in our sleeping bags "cooking". We are both writing in our journals. This trip is either going to make us or break us and thus far, I think it's going to bring us the closest

Nancy tending her blisters near Grace Creek



On the birch at camp



At the Windigo Pavilion before taking off down the trail



Writing on the birch at camp



we've ever been. I can't wait until "forever" with him! It appears to me, that I have finally found my soul mate. He is so perfect for me. Even in ways that I couldn't even fathom.

Journals and pictures cannot even begin to describe this place. I think that everyone should come here at least once in their lifetime. We'd have a lot happier, more appreciative people in the world!!

≈ 7:39 p.m., 46°, 29.35"

I believe things have settled out temperature and pressure wise. We put our food in the oven at 7:30 p.m. We are now sitting next to each other on a fallen birch log, on our sleeping pads, both writing in our journals. The sun is just visible above the trees, the birds are singing their evening song, and an owl is hooting in the distance. There is nowhere else I would rather be. This is a dream come true.

Old Dead Birch



Thank you
For letting us sit here
For providing a place
To sit way out here

Although you gave your life
And your time has gone by

You provided us
With so much

A place to sit
A place to write
A place to cook
A place to be
Side by side

You are still alive
In my eyes

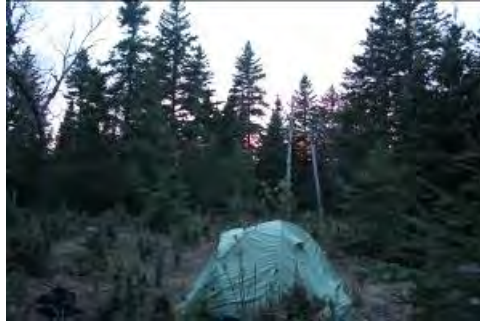
You are still giving
To living life

I hope one day
I can do the same

≈ 8:07 p.m., 45°, 29.40"

I think the pressure is indeed rising. We shall see. The watch has been sitting for a while though. It would make sense. If it starts falling, we have to watch it.

Silence



There never, truly is, silence.
In "silence".

I can still hear the wind blowing.

Or, better yet,
The water evaporating,
The dirt settling,
The earth breathing.

In "silence".

You hear the earth breathing.
You can still hear the earth breathing.

It is always breathing,
We just cannot hear it.

You hear the clouds pass by.
You can hear the clouds pass by.

You can hear them breathing.
You can feel them moving.

In "silence".

Until you are in silence,
you cannot hear the breathing.

Hanging out on Grace Creek Bridge



Grace Creek back country sunset



≈ 9:36 p.m., 36°, 29.40"

We just came back from the creek. How wonderful it was! It is time to eat dinner. Our food has been in the oven two hours. We will eat our dinner and gather stuff up. We had a wonderful evening. It was a beautiful sunset.

Day Two: Sunday

~ 8:40 a.m.

Good Morning!! The sun is shining, it is a beautiful day! It's cold, but there isn't a lot of wind.

My Hunny is snoring next to me. I can hear the creek, the birds, and the squirrels. It's kind of cool waking up to this. What a relaxing way to start the day. ☺

I woke up at 5:30 a.m., and couldn't go back to sleep. It felt good laying here nice and warm next to My Hunny. I slept well though.

The morning window view



≈ 9:15 a.m., 50° in tent, 29.55" →→

I've been napping off and on waiting for the sun to get over the tree line to warm things up, which is happening now. I woke up at 6:30 a.m. and it was 30° in the tent! I went to the bathroom then and the tent and everything around was covered in a solid white frost. After the bathroom, I went back to sleep and pretty much napped for an hour, then woke up, then back to sleep. It was too cold to do anything. My ribs were really hurting too.

Last night we went into the tent at 11:00 p.m., right after eating. Nancy fixed up a heat thing on my ribs and I fell asleep right away. I do not remember anything until I had to go to the bathroom sometime in the night. I would guess between 3 and 4 a.m. When I went, the sky was totally clear with billions of stars.

Right now, the sky is blue with puffy white clouds. The pressure has been rising since we got here and seems to have settled out overnight in this high. I hope it lasts all week! Ok, time to fix coffee and take a Motrin.

Our campsite



≈ 10:05 a.m., 29.60" →↑

Ah, the first cup of coffee! The sun is warming the tent up nicely as we talk and sip coffee.

~ **10:27 a.m.**

I just about finished my first cup of coffee. Boy was it good!! Sometimes it's the little things that give us the most pleasure. Mmmm!

I didn't finish writing last night, as we were too tired after we ate dinner. Dinner was excellent (beef and taters). While dinner was in the "oven", Mike and I walked down to the bridge over Grace Creek. We had a lot of fun. It's nice just being us with no one else around. We had a couple of cocktails, relaxed, talked, laughed and sat in silence. It was wonderful! We came back to camp, ate our dinners, put all our stuff away and crashed. What a day!

Back to present time...It has warmed up some. It's going to be a great day for walking, providing Mike feels okay. I'm feeling good today, aside from my shoulders. My legs and feet don't hurt. Now's a time that I am glad I'm always walking at work, it's kept my legs in shape.

We are taking our time this morning. That is one of the advantages of it just being us and nature. We can do what WE want, within reason. We do have to make it to our destination eventually though. I'm sure I'll be saying this a lot on this trip, but I absolutely love it here. At this moment, with Mike, there is no place else I'd rather be. This is the closest thing to Heaven here on Earth.

≈ **10:37 a.m., 46° just outside the tent, 29.60"**

≈ **10:54 a.m.**

Last night for dinner, I had beef stroganoff with noodles (aka. "I love you caboodles") that I had left over from my fall, 2009 trip. Nancy had beef and potatoes with onions, which, she was surprised, were very good.

Time for the second pot of coffee!

≈ **11:30 a.m.**

We just finished up our coffee and we are going to start changing and packing up. We are both going to skip breakfast and maybe we will have spam on the trail. I brought spam and smoked oysters to stash at Windigo for the last night, but we forgot our summer sausage and cheese in the hotel room fridge, so we decided to carry them with us as a treat.

≈ **1:21 p.m., 68°, 29.60"**

I do not trust the temperature. It is hard to find a shady spot because it is all sun and perfectly blue sky. I am guessing it is about 55°. We are all packed and ready to go. Next time I write will be at Feldtmann Lake Campground, hopefully.

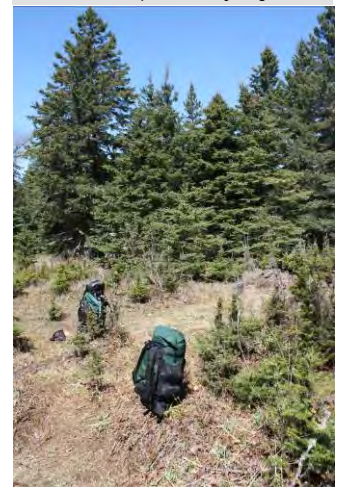
≈ **1:44 p.m.**

Left camp and started walking.

At Grace Creek Bridge the night before



Packed up and ready to go



Along the trail passed Grace Creek



Feldtmann Lake Campground