



Discover North Manitou Island

A Pocket Guide for Visitors

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore



ManitouIslandsArchives.Org acknowledges with gratitude the cooperation of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the National Park Service in the preparation of this visitor's guide.

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Manitou Island Transit

207 West River Street

Leland, MI 49654

Ph: 231-256-9061

Internet: <https://manitoutransit.com>

Cellular Service

Wireless service on the Island is spotty and unreliable. Phone-charging stations are not available.

911 Emergency Service

Not available. Rangers are equipped for direct communications with the mainland.

Island Ranger Station

Island headquarters are located at the Old Coast Guard Station in the village area by the dock.

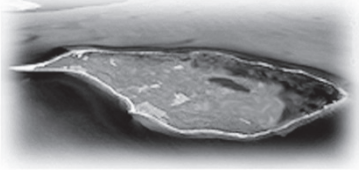
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... A Wilderness Adventure

Viewed from high atop the giant Sleeping Bear dunes or Pyramid Point, this mysterious wilderness rises out of the indigo depths of the Manitou Passage, daring the adventurous to come.

... "I dare you to
experience my solitude
... I dare you to abandon
your comforts."



Lakeshore visitors don't always know that the Manitou Islands are part of the National Park. But you are indeed welcome to come to North Manitou. Two- or three-day backpacking/camping trips to the island are always educational, enjoyable and memorable.

The *Manitou Isle*, the intrepid island ferry, leaves Leland's historic and picturesque Fishtown Dock early every morning during the season. If you've never sailed on the open sea, you'll enjoy 60-minutes of beauty and adventure as you voyage across the Manitou Passage.

The Passage is fickle; sometimes placid, sometimes playful, sometimes bullyish, occasionally mean ... and it's disposed to rapid mood-swings! An important, but risky, shortcut for early sailing ships and steamers, many ended up on the bottom here. You might think to doff your cap as you pass over their long-forgotten remains.

But no need to worry about the *Manitou Isle* when the wind's up! Just remember to bring dry clothes, then enjoy the excitement as she braves the waves, and experience the fun as she dives into the occasional "Queen" wave.¹

¹ Queen waves are the bluest and strongest – sometimes said to be every seventh wave.

Geology Lesson

North and South Manitou Islands are the southern-most of a group of islands that extends from here, north to the Straits of Mackinac. North Manitou is the second largest of these fourteen islands. The islands consist of a ridge of tilted layers of limestone, buried under a blanket of glacial debris. Glaciers carved out the Lake Michigan basin. When the basin filled with water, the peaks along the ridge remained exposed as islands. During post-glacial times, winds blowing on the high, sandy bluffs on the west side of the Manitou Islands moved sand inland, forming perched dunes.

That's the scientists' version of it. Another story², supposedly from an Indian legend, explains the islands this way ...

Long ago a great famine had spread over the land. Longingly, a mother bear wishing to save her two famished cubs urged them into the water on the Wisconsin shore, to swim across the great lake to Michigan, which in those days was the land of plenty. As they approached the Michigan shores, one of the cubs began to falter, and the mother's heart was rent as she saw the babe sink and drown. With the remaining cub she struggled on, but after only two more miles the second cub also perished.

Reaching the Michigan beach all alone, the mother crept sadly to a resting-place where she lay down facing the restless waters that covered her lost cubs, hoping against hope they might somehow reach the beach after all. As she gazed at the lake, two beautiful islands slowly rose to mark the graves of her little ones ... created by the Great Spirit Manitou to commemorate their bravery. Saddened and exhausted, the mother closed her eyes for the last time, and where she lay a great solitary dune arose to honor her courage and faithfulness.



² Adapted from a version provided online by MSU Department of Geography

History Thumbnail

The Manitou Islands were once the center of civilization and commerce in the Manitou Passage. In fact, settlement in the area began on South Manitou. Its protected, natural deep-water harbor made it the perfect refuge from bad weather. The islands were densely forested, so when steamers began to sail the Great Lakes, their strategic location between the Straits and Chicago made this the best place to take on firewood for their boilers. Back then, when the "wooding" business was going great guns, a little "boom town" developed on the shores of South Manitou's bay.

With the success of that operation and as a result of the rapid growth in maritime traffic, other wooding stations began to appear, including on North Manitou Island. Having no protected natural harbor, the North Island never became a popular stop.



However, to encourage business, wooding docks were built on both the east and west side of the island, making stops possible, regardless of wind conditions.

One thing led to another. First it was the "wooders" ... the young woodchoppers and various support people needed to run that kind of operation. The employment opportunities brought people to the island, who then decided to stay as immigrant farmers and fishermen. Life was good here, so brother enticed brother to come, then close friends, and soon there was a community of North Manitou islanders also.

As Chicago grew, travel between there and Buffalo resulted in heavy traffic on the lower Great Lakes. Long before automobiles and paved roads, passengers and freight traveled from New York's harbor to Chicago by barge and boat. Early sailors quickly discovered that the Great Lakes, and especially Lake Michigan, were different than the ocean, being capable of

kicking up treacherously angry seas without notice. As the disasters increased and the Lake Michigan shoreline became a graveyard for ships, the government launched an ambitious program to build lighthouses and establish lifesaving stations. That brought lightkeepers and surfmen to North Manitou, the site of the first such government installations in the Manitou Passage.



As the steamboats grew larger, safer, more efficient and propeller-driven, coal became more commonly available and wood increasingly expensive. The importance of wooding stations then declined and the Island's wooders began to disappear.

Without the frequent and regular arrivals and departures of ferries and freighters, the cost of shipping fish and agricultural products became prohibitive, and one-by-one families abandoned their island homes and farmsteads for a better life on the mainland.

But then came a new community, comprised of wealthy summer resorters from Chicago. They came to the island to escape the big city's grime and summer heat, and they built what is now called "Cottage Row," a comparatively luxurious settlement just south of the Lifesaving Station. The heavy traffic through the Manitou Passage made commuting back and forth between the islands and the big cities, mainly Milwaukee and Chicago, easy to arrange, and quite inexpensive.

As time marched on, steel hulls and electronic navigation equipment turned lighthouses and foghorn stations into curious monuments to a simpler time. More out of sentiment than need, lighthouses were automated rather than closed, and after some 150-years of service the U.S. Lighthouse Service was merged into the U.S. Coast Guard. The days of the Surfman and the Lightkeeper were over. In the early 1930's the government built "the crib," an offshore light station perched at the end of the North Manitou Shoal, retired the lightship that had formerly occupied that spot, and closed the old lighthouse on the southern tip of the island, called "Dimmick's Point." Soon thereafter, the

flag at the island's lifesaving station came down for the last time, and its men were transferred elsewhere.

As they finally left, most islanders simply locked their doors and departed with little more than a few of their most treasured personal things, the rest of their possessions not being worth the cost of



shipping to the mainland. The few who remained faced increasing pressure to leave, at the hands of a newcomer known as Mr. W.R. Angell. He came to the island in the early 1920's, fell in love with the place, and decided it would be perfect as a private retreat and game preserve for himself and his associates. As head of Continental Motors Corporation, William R. Angell became a very well-connected and influential businessman during the WW-II years, and brought other men of that ilk, and notable male celebrities, to North Manitou Island.

Mr. Angell's *Manitou Island Association* syndicate gradually took possession of almost the entire island, closed it to the public, and it remained in their hands until it was finally acquired by the government as part of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.



Visiting North Manitou

Unfortunately, day trips are not offered for those wishing to visit North Manitou Island. The island is managed as *wilderness*, and is available for backcountry hiking and camping only. But if you are up to roughing it for two or three days, you will have the privilege of enjoying rare scenic vistas, engaging points of historic and cultural interest, and an opportunity to experience the morning sunrise, breathtakingly beautiful evening sunsets and the awesome splendor of the Milky Way on a moonless night.

North Manitou is the place to go if you value seclusion, beauty, peace and quiet, and are willing to give up the amenities of modern living as a trade-off for the privilege of enjoying that kind of retreat. It is probably not an ideal outing for families with young children, or stag outings looking to have a good time in a place that lends itself to boisterous festivity.

Although hiking trails on North Manitou Island are not extremely rigorous, trail distances can become tiresome to those who are not in good physical condition. Moreover, emergency medical assistance is not available on the island; a consideration for those with health conditions that might become an issue.

Camping Arrangements

Camping is permitted at any secluded location, the intent being to preserve the wilderness experience for everyone on the island. Choose your camp site away from the shores of lakes or streams, including the Lake Michigan beach, away from trails, and not within sight of visitors to the island's landmarks and points of interest. There is also a designated camping area at the village, near the dock for the convenience of departing visitors.

Low impact camping is the rule. Please plan on packing out everything you pack in. For sanitary reasons, bring your "entrenching tool." There is no transportation for camp gear so you must pack it in yourself. Food should be stored in hard containers or hung from a line to thwart island predators, such as the "microbears" (chipmunks.)

Individual camp sites are limited to 4 persons and 2 tents. You'll need a Backcountry Use Permit before camping. Permits for groups of up to ten are also available (see page 30). Passes and permits are available at the Fishtown dock in Leland during the season, and at Park Headquarters in Empire year-around. Advance arrangements and ferry reservations are recommended.

If you arrive on the *Manitou Isle* (fees do not include the cost

of ferry transportation,) a park ranger will meet you at the dock to complete your registration and to help you plan your visit. Otherwise, check in at the Ranger Station office.

Getting There

Getting to North Manitou involves a boat ride. You can either take your own, or take advantage of the passenger ferry service provided in cooperation with the Lakeshore. The dock at North Manitou is 11-miles from Leland. A regular park pass is required for visits to the island.

If you're planning on making the voyage yourself, be mindful of the Passage's penchant for kicking up rough seas on short notice. Squalls and passing weather fronts can create damaging wave conditions. Emergency assistance comes from the Coast Guard Air Station in Traverse City. Cellular service is spotty at best in the passage, and should not be relied upon for emergency use. There are no marina, docking or fueling facilities on the island. The National Park's dock may be used to land passengers and equipment at the Ranger Station, but docking is limited to 20 minutes. Plan on anchoring offshore, and set your anchor(s) with wind shifts in mind.



The passenger ferry *Manitou Isle* makes the trip once most days during the visitor season, sailing from Leland's historic and charming Fishtown Docks. The boat sails promptly on schedule, departing Leland at 10:00 AM and arriving at the Island at

11:00 AM, the crossing ordinarily taking one hour. The boat departs from the island immediately following its exchange of arriving and departing passengers; nominally at 11:00 AM.

Advance ticketing is recommended. Make your arrangements directly with Manitou Island Transit (see page i and page 30). Arrive early to avoid the hectic last-minute rush on the dock, discharging your passengers and their equipment, and checking in at least 30-minutes prior to your scheduled departure. MIT personnel will direct you to a secure off-dock parking area for your vehicle, and provide you with a parking permit. The parking area is a five-minute walk back to the dock.

Whether sailing on the ferry or private watercraft, dress for

the cooler climate you'll encounter out in the Passage. Conditions can change rapidly, so when the weather seems unsettled bring rain gear. Wave conditions can also become quite threatening. Although the ferry can be relied upon to safely negotiate high seas, those subject to seasickness should be prepared for the possibility of discomfort. Candied ginger sometimes helps.

Amenities

When you come to the island, don't look for hotels and restaurants. There are no stores or inns on the island ... no food, shelter, no emergency medical assistance. Cellular telephones are often useless, and should not be relied upon for emergency use. (Rangers are equipped for direct communication with Lakeshore headquarters.)

The Lakeshore provides toilets and drinking water at the ranger station, and a nearby camping area which is intended mostly as a convenience for campers planning to depart the following morning. The rest you'll need to figure out for yourself.

Hazards and Nuisances

The island has, for the most part, no unique natural hazards. Prudence and good judgment used anywhere else keep visitors safe and secure on the Island.

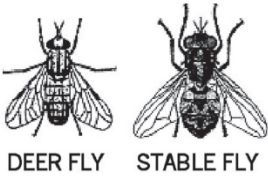
One exception:

Toxicodendron Rydbergii
(formerly *Rhus radicans*) is

common on the island. Commonly called "eastern poison ivy", this native but invasive pest favors disturbed habitats such as edges of trails, fence lines, old fields, and logged forests. Until eventually replaced by natural vegetation, it serves to stabilize the soil and provide food and habitat for wildlife. To humans, it can cause rashes that itch severely.

Susceptibility varies from one person to another, and even from time to time for the same person. The best "remedy" for poison ivy is to avoid it. Having failed that, the irritating Urushiol oil is water soluble and can easily be washed off, if done before infection is established, else a doctor may be needed to treat it. Liberal applications of very hot water (as hot as can be tolerated) sometimes helps release histamine, the substance in the cells of the skin which causes the intense itching, giving several hours of relief.





DEER FLY

STABLE FLY

Insects can also be a nuisance. Stable flies and female deer flies are vicious, painful biters. "Fly season" is four to five weeks during June and July for deer flies and all warm summer months for stable flies. Keeping windward of

forests and marshes is a good way to avoid these pests.

Commercial insect repellents are also effective in preventing their painful and itchy bites. Once bitten, medicated anti-itch creams usually provide relief.

Something that North Manitou has to offer which isn't rivaled by its smaller neighboring island to the south, is the very pesky little creature known as *Orchestia agilis*, more commonly known as "sand fleas" or "no-see-ums."

As you can see from this picture, sand fleas are not flying insects, but actually very tiny crustaceans. In their adult form, they seldom exceed a tenth of an inch in length, and their bodies are often light colored and somewhat translucent, so they are not as easily noticed as the much larger flies and mosquitoes. Instead of flying, sand fleas jump. By bending their segmented bodies, then suddenly popping open, they can spring up to 40cm or more (two inches), hence the "agilis" part of their name. Since they live in the sand, their very irritating bites are usually found only on feet and ankles.



Sand fleas normally feed on rotting seaweed or other wet organic material near the water's edge, so this is a nuisance you'll encounter only in sandy areas near lakes, streams and wetlands. Since they seldom stray more than 100-yards from their breeding area, if you are being bothered by these little critters, one solution is simply to move.



The squeamish will not be happy to learn that the island abounds with snakes, and unusually large centipedes. Centipedes are harmless, of course. The serpents are mostly all *Thamnophis sirtalis*, otherwise known as the common Garter Snake. They're easy to

catch, and tend to be placid and sometimes even cute and seemingly friendly. They rarely bite, and if they do, their bite is harmless. Your bigger risk, if you upset one, is that you might get pee'd on with a somewhat offensive-smelling secretion which they generate for defensive purposes.

Another thing North Manitou has that is not found on South is coyotes. The coyote's normal fare consists of rodents and very small mammals. They are not known for their courage, and will avoid big game, such as adult humans. If you hear them at night, there's no need to be fearful; enjoy that part of the island's ambiance.

There are about 200 deer on North Manitou. Deer are mainly nocturnal and tend to be extremely reclusive. They're also very sneaky and stealthy. Even if you should somehow manage to surprise one, you'll probably never know about it, since it will get up and move off so quietly you won't hear a sound or notice any movement.

The Lakeshore is also said to have bobcats and cougars. Bobcats, a smallish predator, are indigenous, although rarely seen. According to the conspiracy theorists, cougars have been secretly introduced into Michigan by the Department of Natural Resources as a means of regulating the too-rapidly expanding deer herd. Some claim to have seen a big cat within the National Park, but thus far there have been no professionally verified sightings, and none whatsoever on the Manitou Islands. In any case, bobcats and cougars do not like humans, so confrontations are rare.

Whether it's poison ivy, flies, or fleas, sensible attire is always a good idea. Exposed skin, especially legs and feet, might seem macho or sexy, but is apt to result in discomforts that impair the richness of your wilderness adventure. If you don't like using chemicals to repel insect nuisances, petroleum jelly or baby oil usually works, especially for sand fleas. Or make your own

all-natural bug repellent by combining two parts olive or coconut oil with one part citronella oil, and add a dash of lemon oil.

As mentioned elsewhere, some of the island's larger little critters will be happy to eat your lunch if you let them. Sealed containers are a good preventive measure. The chipmunks



are not good climbers, so when you leave your campsite for hikes, hang your edibles high off the ground in a nearby tree.



Ruins of the old Crescent City dock

Visitor Check List

Experienced campers probably won't need this advice. Others might make their visit more pleasant by considering the items on the following list.

1. Check the weather forecast and plan to dress accordingly. Conditions out in the Passage are likely to be windy and much cooler than on the mainland. If rain is a possibility, line your knapsack with a plastic bag to keep things dry ... and bring your raingear.
2. Hiking boots or favorite walking shoes. Sandals are not recommended because of poison ivy and sand fleas. Jeans or slacks and long-sleeves might prove more appropriate than shorts and tee shirts during fly season.
3. There is no food service of any kind on the island, and the one source of drinking water is at the ranger station near the dock. Bring as much food and water as you think you'll need. Since you'll be packing it all in, keep your "needs" simple.
4. Fires are not allowed anywhere on the island, except in the fire pit in the camping area near the ranger station. If needed, bring your own cook stove.
5. Camera and film or extra memory, and batteries.
6. If you bring your cell phone, also bring a solar-enabled portable charger (e.g., DuraHub, etc.). There is no electricity available on the island.
7. Swim suits and towels.
8. Sun block. (Balding? A cap might be a good idea.)
9. Insect repellent and medicated anti-itch cream (e.g., hydrocortisone cream).
10. Entrenching tool.
11. Do not bring the dog (or cat, bird, monkey or any other pets.) Pets are not allowed on the island.
12. Advance ferry reservations - ensure there'll be room for you and your party.

Walking Around the Village

There were a couple settlement areas on North Manitou, the first being on the east side, towards the island's southern end where logging operations began. Another was on the west side, where a village called "Crescent" developed; again, as a result of logging operations. Both of these have long since disappeared.

A third settlement developed when the U.S. government established a Life Saving Station on the island's northeast shore. This proved to be the most enduring settlement site. It is presently the location of the National Park Service dock and Ranger Station. Except for the architecturally significant Bournique's homestead near the old southeast settlement site, this is the only area of the island where historic and architecturally significant structures are being preserved to some extent.

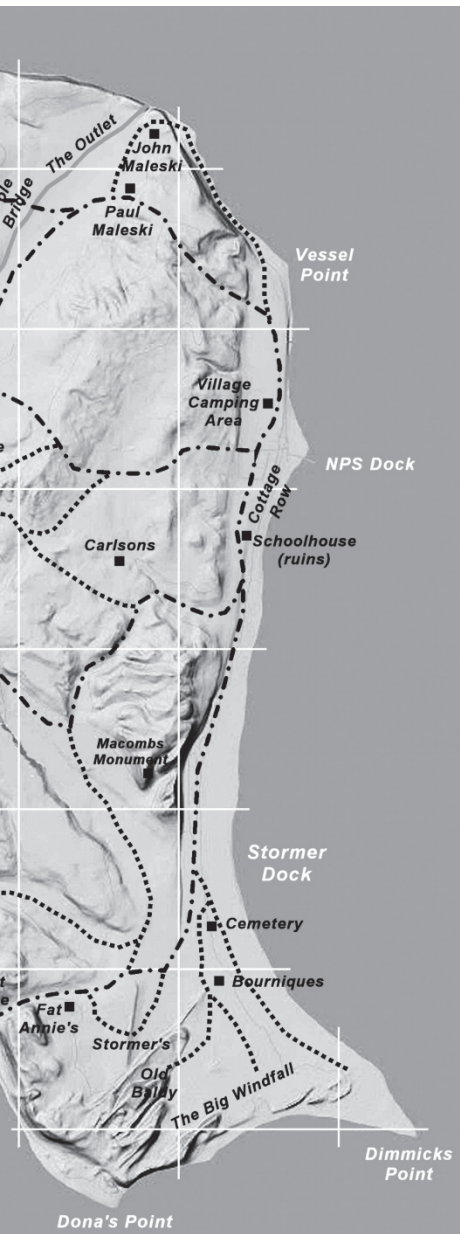
The village area includes the Life Saving Station complex, a strip of nineteenth-century summer residences known as "Cottage Row," and some structures built by W.R. Angell's Manitou Island Association during the period that they controlled the island. All this makes for an interesting stroll not far from the dock, so perhaps you'll choose to treat yourself to this self-guided tour on your final morning while waiting for the *Manitou Isle* to arrive.

As you walk in from the NPS dock, the Life Saving Service complex, now the Ranger Station, is on your left, or south of the roadway leading to the dock. You might notice Cottage Row on the rise behind the Life Saving station, and extending southward.

Most of what was built by the Manitou Island Association is on your right, or north of the roadway leading to the dock. Besides being a retreat for wealthy businessmen, politicians and celebrities, the MIA was invested in agricultural activities, most of which involved orchards. Some of the curious structures found in this area are a little stone building, which was the MIA business office, and a miniature "gas station."







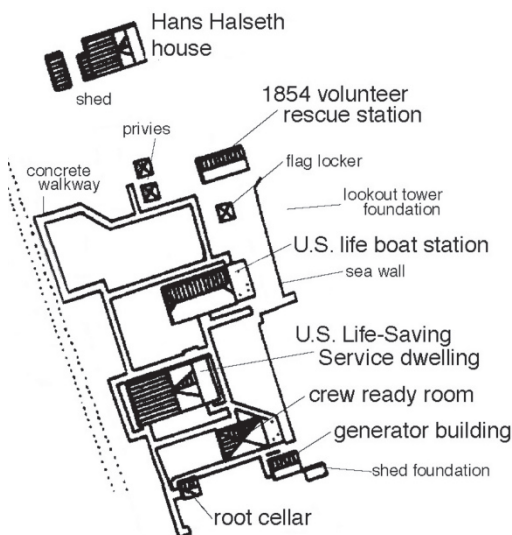


The Life Saving Station

The life-saving station on North Manitou Island was the first of three stations established along the Manitou Passage. As shipping traffic grew, the Manitou Passage became a busy place because the route shortened the distance to Milwaukee and Chicago, and the islands provided shelter from storms. But the Passage was also a dangerous place. Its rocky shoals and shallows claimed many a ship that strayed off course in a storm or fog.

In 1854, the government approved islander Nicholas Pickard's petition for one of the nineteen surfboats Congress had newly authorized for use by volunteer rescue crews on the Great Lakes. Pickard, a wooding station operator, built a boathouse here for the new boat and equipment, and it became a volunteer Life-Saving Station. This is the only one of its kind remaining from the 1854 federal appropriation for the Atlantic Seaboard and

Great Lakes. It was built strictly according to written specifications provided by the government, as a 1½ story front-gabled building, with a heavy timber frame and walls sheathed with cedar boards.



Twenty years later, in 1874, an official U.S. Life-Saving Service Station was established here, with a new facility constructed and placed into service by 1877, again with an all-volunteer crew consisting of a Keeper and six-Surfmen. Crew members boarded with the Keeper, or one of the other residents in the village area. A new lifeboat building was built; a one-story boathouse with a clipped gable roof and a watch tower on the roof. A new watch tower was eventually built next to the boathouse, but for some time both existed. After being acquired by the Manitou Island Association in the 1930s through 1950s, its large boat door was replaced with a new door and windows, and its distinctive watch tower was removed from the roof.

A new USLSS station was built in 1877, which served as the residence or the Keeper, his family and the crew. Thought to be architecturally unique, as such stations go, this two-story structure is approximately square, with a steep gabled roof and large central cross gable. The U.S. Coast Guard, successor to the old U.S. Life Saving Service in 1915, remodeled the station in

1932, and the Manitou Island Association altered it further during their tenure, using it as quarters for its employees and a lodge for their island guests.

The simple nearby houses near the station were built over the years by USLSS and USCG crew members, as residences for their families. The first of these, a simple wood-framed, side-gabled house, was built in 1890, just north of the original Rescue Station Boathouse.

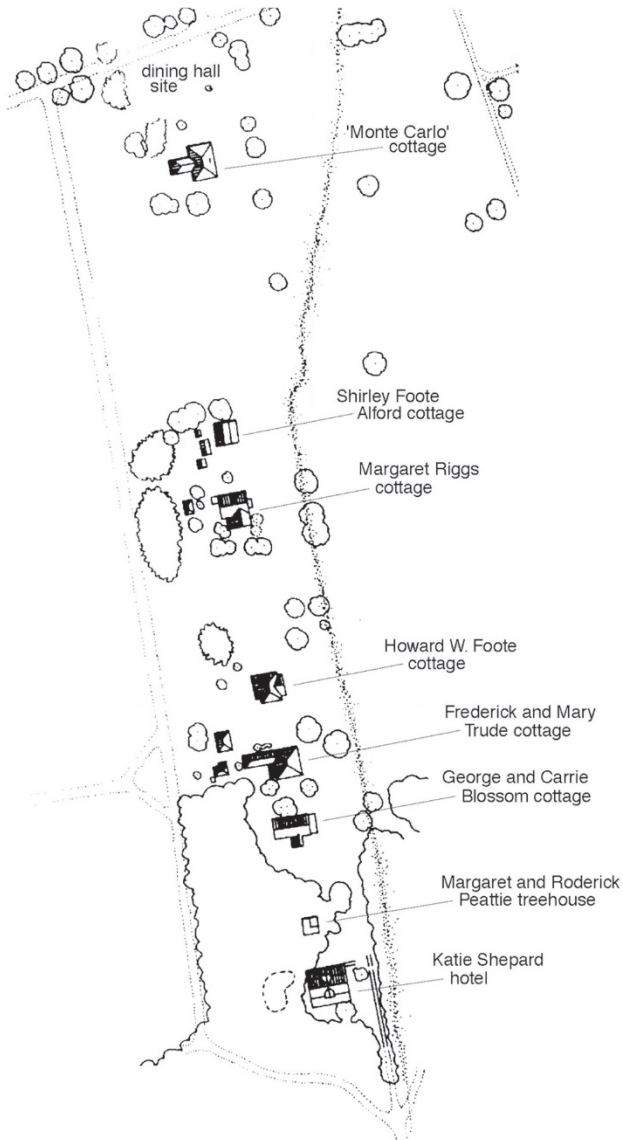


The U.S. Coast guard finally closed the North Manitou Island Station in 1938, eventually selling it off to the Manitou Island Association.

Cottage Row

Behind the Life Saving Station complex and extending southward along the rise referred to as the "beach ridge" is the site where wealthy Chicagoans developed a row of private summer residences. These fine cottages were built overlooking the Manitou Passage which, in addition to its scenic attributes, was always bustling with maritime activity. A boardwalk, complete with park benches and gas lights, was built along the edge of the ridge, running from the "dining hall" at the north end of what became known as "Cottage Row" to the "Katie Shepard Hotel" on its south end.





Resorters ordinarily took their meals at the dining hall, since their cottages were built for pleasure, and did not include a kitchen and dining room. Unfortunately, this building was destroyed by fire in 1953, so the first place presently found on the north end is the "Monte Carlo" cottage, probably the first of the several homes built along the ridge (left in the 1930 picture below.) This type of cottage, known as a "dog-trot bungalow" because of its interior organization, which features a central breezeway, is more often found in the southern states, especially along the Gulf Coast. For whatever reason, the design of this particular cottage is often attributed to the Frank Lloyd Wright architectural firm of Chicago. During his time at the island, W.R. Angell used this cottage as his personal residence.

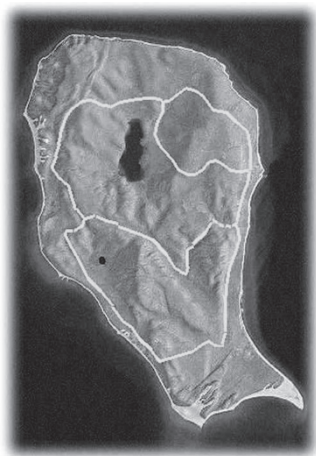


As you walk along the rise, you will discover ...



... that many of these lovely old cottages have now been lost to the ravages of the seasons, and those that are left are well into the moldering process.

Hiking Trails, Landmarks and Points of Interest



Routes on North Manitou consist of the main hiking trails, which loosely form a figure eight, some side-trip trails, and a variety of lesser traveled trails and pathways. Junctions along the main trails are marked with sign posts indicating what the trails lead to, and the distance to those destinations. The "figure eight" trail, formerly two-track roadways, has a north loop and a south loop, which share a common center trail crossing the middle of the island. An alternative route in

the north loop goes west from village the area near the dock and Ranger Station, towards the island's Lake Manitou, then northward to join the main trail above the north end of the lake.

Because most of the island is officially designated as wilderness, it must be managed as required by the Wilderness Act. Accordingly, relics of previous human activity in most areas outside the village are not maintained, and will be allowed to molder until they collapse and/or are reclaimed by the encroaching natural environment. Much has already disappeared, but what remains is often of special interest, and is always useful as landmarks.

The island is about 7-3/4 miles long and 4-1/4 miles wide. There are some twenty-two miles of designated trails with helpful signs giving distances and directions, and many other old undocumented trails and pathways. These will take you variously through verdant forest areas, pleasant clearings that were once farm fields, past the placid and beautiful Lake Manitou, and across the rugged sand dunes at the southern end of the island. The island has some hilly terrain, but for the most part is fairly level, its trails easily found and followed.

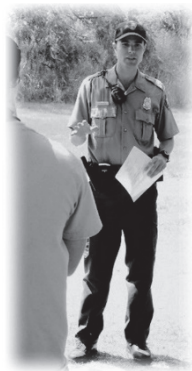
Historic activity outside the village area consisted mostly of logging and farming, and the relics you will discover are the remnants of those activities. Logging operations began here in the 1850's, with farming operations popping up soon thereafter. The 1860 Census indicated about a dozen families on farms, with a total of some 269 people living on the island. That was the highest population ever recorded here. By the 1920's most of the island had become privately owned, bringing an end to family farming and private logging operations. So, the relics you will find out in the interior are mostly all over 100-years old.

You might spot some whitetail deer at the edges of clearings in the late afternoon or early evening. You will most certainly make friends with the garter snakes and chipmunks. These creatures abound, because they have virtually no natural predators on the island. All are harmless.

The island Ranger will meet you upon arrival at the dock, and conduct you to the little Visitors' Center for a brief, but helpful, orientation. That is your opportunity to obtain detailed hiking maps, get first-hand, up-to-the minute information and advice, and to decide upon an itinerary that makes sense for you and your party, given your physical condition and the intended length of your stay.

There are some rules, but only enough to ensure that you and other visitors will safely enjoy a rich experience here. These include a ban on all fires other than in the community fire ring at the Village Campground. Whatever you bring to the island must leave with you when you depart. Stool must be buried. You may camp anywhere on the island except, within sight or sound of a building, major trail, or another camper, or within 300 feet of a lake or stream, or on the beach along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

If you have no firm plan of your own, the Ranger will probably offer you the classic adventure, which begins with a hike to the west side of the island where you can make camp for two or three days in some of the most scenic backcountry in Michigan. From those locations you will be able to explore other areas of the island without the burden of a backpack. This itinerary will take you out of the village area and over to Lake



Manitou on the first day, which is only about a 2½-mile hike, then on to the old Crescent village area and the Frederickson Place on the southwest side of the island, which involves a trek of about five miles. To ensure that you'll be aboard the ferry on your scheduled day of departure, you might elect to spend your last night on the island at the designated camping area near the village.

The Classic Itinerary

On Arrival: From the NPS dock, head into the Village area. The ranger station is the former Life Saving Station, where you will find a water faucet and a nearby pair of vault toilets. Just to the south is the original boathouse, built in the 1870's, and the oldest building on the island. On the north side of the path, you will find another water faucet, some trash containers, and a small Visitors' Center where rangers hold their camper orientation.

Just beyond that point is a crossroads. The road to the right (north) leads to the village camping area, which has eight numbered sites, two community fire rings, and a toilet, and the north loop trail. The road going south (left) goes to the south loop trail and eventually Frederickson's a little over five miles away.

To Lake Manitou

The road going straight ahead (west) is the trail to Lake Manitou and the loop that joins the north loop trail above the lake. The trail begins with a gentle climb across the old airstrip and then enters the woods. About a mile from the dock, it passes an old apple orchard, one of the many found scattered across the island.

Just beyond the orchard the trail enters the woods again and passes a side trail on the left that goes southwest to the bottom of the lake, to a landmark called the *Boathouse*.

The main trail continues on to the right (northwest) from the Boathouse junction, and in another mile arrives at a clearing that was once the site of the Frederick Benham homestead.

There is a little side-trail



that goes west from there to the shore of Lake Manitou, through another little clearing near the lake known as the Fiske place. You might choose to make camp at either clearing, Benhams or Fiskes, then spend the rest of the afternoon in this area. There is a little trail along the shoreline.

The hundred-year-old structure you'll find at the south end of the lake actually looks like more of a duplex privy than a boathouse, and indeed that's what it originally was before being moved here and converted to a beach house. It was originally a Styles-type privy; a partitioned "eight holer," located at Cottage Row. It wound up being used by residents for storage of outboard motors, oars, life jackets, fishing gear, etc. There was formerly a large, picturesque boathouse here; hence the name.



On to the West Side

Continuing on the main trail, heading north from the Benham clearing, in about 1-1/4 mile you'll come to a junction called the "Pole Bridge." This used to be a pole bridge of sorts, back in the day, but is now actually a culvert. It crosses the stream known as "the outlet" and a large swampy area. From this point, the trail to the right (north) loops back to the Village area. The other trail heads west (left) and is marked "West Side."

Choose the "West Side" trail, and within a little over a half mile you'll arrive at a place called the "Stormer Camps", the site of a logging operation. Here along the edge of the grassy clearing you'll discover what lumbermen abandoned when their operations here were suspended in the early 1950's; including the rusting hulks of some old vehicles and old wagon wheels.



The Stormers were a German family who came to the island in 1859 as farmers, but moved over to the mainland just five years later. In 1908 their oldest son, Peter, returned to North Manitou as a logger, building a home at the south end of the island.

Continuing on, the trail remains fairly flat for another half mile, at which point you'll reach another lumbering camp, this being the site of the former Davenport Camps. From here the trail begins a steady uphill grade.

When you reach the top, you'll find a side trail that leads off to the right (north), and to the northwest corner of the island. If you take that little side-trip, there's a great view of the lake from the



high ground at the island's northwest corner, and on a clear day you'll see the Fox Islands off in the distance. Also in this area, you will find "the Pot Holes"; three surprisingly deep, now forested, blow-outs in the sandy bluff.

From here the main trail turns southward (left), and from this point you'll pass through the island's most rugged terrain. This is actually a hundred-year-old railroad grade used by the loggers, running through the hills to a settlement that became known as "Crescent City." The railroad grade descends rapidly, for about 250-feet, and comes out in a long, narrow clearing. At the south end of the clearing, you'll briefly pass through a woods, and then discover a huge field known as the "Swenson's place."

Swenson's field is a little over a half mile long, and is a good spot to spend the night. You'll catch glimpses of Lake Michigan from the trail, but cut across the field to the bluffs above the beach and you'll have a breath-taking view of the lake, including South Manitou Island and the perched dunes on its west side.

Near the middle of the clearing, you'll find a "West Side" marker. At the south end you'll discover what is left of the



Swenson's farm. If you are fortunate enough to be visiting at the right time of the season, you'll also find wild strawberries all around, and raspberry patches here and there. The large red barn, built around 1925, was not Swenson's, but rather part of a MIA cattle operation. From here

you can enjoy a very pleasant afternoon on the Lake Michigan beach, hiking north to view the awesome bluffs at the island's northwest corner, and perhaps climbing the dunes.

Onward to Frederickson's

Returning to the main trail, you'll find that it enters the woods just north of the Swenson barn. From here it heads south along the raised bed of another old railroad line, coming to another posted junction in about a half-mile. The trail going to the left (east) is the "Centerline Trail." It cuts across the middle of the island going over to the east side, and eventually back up to the Ranger Station, a trek of a little over five miles.

If you continue on to southwest (right), the trail soon turns to the south, and you'll come to an unmarked junction in about a quarter mile, with two side trails which head to the east. These go to Tamarack Lake, a small lake that is sometimes hard to find because it is more of a wetland than an open lake. From here, the main trail continues on to the south and is easy to follow. In another half mile or so you'll begin to enjoy views of Lake Michigan between the trees, and soon the trail begins to run along a bluff high above the beach. It then gradually descends to a small clearing known as "the Johnson Place." Nothing remains of the Johnson homestead but the remnants of an old apple orchard, but the small clearing has easy access to the lakeshore, making this another good place to camp.

The main trail continues on into the woods at the other side of this small clearing, alongside a hill where the sand dunes are gradually burying the forest. It then turns inland a bit, continuing on to "the Frederickson's Place."

There are also no buildings at the former Frederickson homestead, which was settled in the 1840s. But here again there are some great places to set up camp, such as the grassy bluff high above the lakeshore, overlooking South Manitou Island and the mainland. From here you can also enjoy a side trip, hiking south along the beach to "Dona's Point", stopping along the way to climb "Old Baldy," which rises upwards of 140 feet above the lakeshore.



Homeward Bound

If you spend the night at Frederickson's, you'll need to be up bright and early to make the boat at 11:00 a.m., else you'll be spending another day or two on the island. The boat will not wait for tardy passengers. It is just a little over five miles from the Frederickson Place to the dock. The terrain is fairly gentle so the hiking is easy, but you should probably allow at least three hours for the trek to the Village.

As you leave the Frederickson Place, the trail makes a short climb to a clearing called "the Cat Hole." and then gently descends to another little clearing called "Fat Annie's." From there the trail levels off, and in a little over 1-1/4 miles you'll reach the junction where another trail heads south to Dimmick's Point. This trail also goes to the cemetery, and to the "Bournique



Place." There are twenty-two graves in the cemetery, the oldest headstone dating back to 1885 and the newest only to 2005. A half mile beyond the cemetery is Bournique Place, a picturesque farmstead that is being preserved by the National Park Service because of its rather unique architecture.

As an alternative to hiking in from

Frederickson's on your last morning, you might choose to spend your last night at the Village camping area. Then you won't have to concern yourself about getting up early to make a long hike, and you might enjoy an



opportunity to interact with other island visitors. You'll also have time to explore the nearby Life Saving Complex and Cottage Row and, if you still wish to get up early, you can hike southward along the island's eastern shoreline, to have a look at the island cemetery, the unique old Bournique Place, and Dimmicks Point, the islands southeastern-most point.

At the posted junction to Dimmicks Point, the main trail bares to the left (north), turning into a wide path towards going to the Village, which is just a little over three miles away. From here, the walk through the forest is delightfully level, even though it skirts the base of a seventy-foot to 300-foot-high ridges.

It then makes a short rise just before breaking out of the forest, and passes through an old cherry orchard where a few of the old trees can still be seen.

Just beyond the orchard, the trail swings slightly to the west (left) where you'll encounter the last posted junction, which marks the east end of the Centerline Trail. It is only a little over a mile from here to the dock. A half mile farther north you'll break out of the woods into the clearing near the south end of Cottage Row.





The West Side

Fares and Fees³

Park Passes

7-Day Pass: \$25.00*

Annual Park Pass: \$45.00

Camping/Backcountry Use Permit: \$10.00

America the Beautiful Pass: \$80.00

Military Pass: free

Lifetime Senior Pass: \$80.00

Park passes include everyone in your vehicle. Backcountry camping permits are for groups up to 10 people. Passes otherwise include yourself, your spouse, your children and your parents. Alternative \$15 Per Person pass available for individual hikers and cyclists. Weekly and Annual Passes for SLBE only. America the Beautiful Pass is for all national parks and most other federal agencies. Passes for Americans with disabilities are free. Passes are available at any park charging entrance fees.

Island Ferry

Manitou Island Transit

(Manitou Isle)

Round Trip Rates

Adults: \$45.00

Children (12-under): \$23.00

Tickets are available at the MIT office on the Fishtown dock in Leland, or by telephone using credit cards. Advance reservations recommended. Cancellation policy is 2-days for an 80% refund. Fares include transportation, and space for personal equipment and supplies. Children two and under ride free. Motor tour on South Manitou is \$12 for adults and \$7 for children 12-under. Parking is available for \$3 per day.

³ As of Summer 2022

About ManitouIslandsArchives.Org

The ManitouIslandsArchives.Org website is privately financed and operated by volunteers as a not-for-profit enterprise.

The website's mission is to help preserve the history and cultural traditions of Michigan's Manitou Islands, archive information useful to genealogical researchers, provide educational and interpretive materials and resources, and support the Park Service in cultivating interest in, and disseminating information about, the Islands.

We Want You

Financial contributions are neither solicited nor accepted by ManitouIslandsArchives.Org. The sharing of material of historic, cultural, or genealogical significance is encouraged. If you are in possession of such material, please contact us about adding it to the online collection.

America has so many beautiful places and points of historic significance. Our National Parks are treasures that we all own, and have proudly passed on from one generation to the next.



North and South Manitou Islands are the southern-most in a group of islands that extends north to the Straits of Mackinac. North Manitou is the second largest of these fourteen islands.



The Manitous became important to the westward settlement of the country during the 1800s, when water was the predominate mode of travel into the interior ... mainly the rapidly-developing cities of Chicago and Milwaukee. They first provided a refuge for sailing vessels, then wooding stations for steamboats, and finally became a source of agricultural produce and lumber.

In the late 20th century, they became part of a national park, the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, and a favorite hiking and camping venue for the park's more adventurous visitors. This pocket booklet contains a little geological and historical information, plus some notes on the island's former cultural traditions and favorite hiking trails ... all with the aim of helping make your visit to North Manitou Island more richly rewarding.