

Great Lakes Sea Kayaking Association

Stewardship Project, Eastern Georgian Bay

Summer 2008



SUMMARY

The summer of 2008 was the third year of the Great Lakes Sea Kayaking Association's stewardship work on the islands of Eastern Georgian Bay. This year our two stewards kayaked over 500 km around Franklin and surrounding islands, visiting campsites, talking to campers, boaters and paddlers in an informal way about good camping practises that will help avoid or at least mitigate the damage that can be caused to these beautiful but fragile environments.

Our hope is that talking, setting a good example and the helpful pamphlets we distribute, will help reduce the damage in the future. But the stewards did not just talk – most of their work consisted of clean-up and campsite remediation. Over the course of the summer armed only with heavy-duty gloves, garbage bags and a really positive attitude they cleaned up excrement-covered ground, resited privies, rebuilt and reduced the size and number of stone fireplaces in campsites and disposed of literally tons of garbage ranging from old lawn chairs to decrepit refrigerators.

These efforts were made possible by of the financial aid, equipment and training, and logistical support given us by

the agencies and individuals who share our concern and want something to be done.

This report provides a brief description of what we were able to do with the help of our supporters. But it ends on a sombre note.

We believe we made a difference, but the task remains large and after three years our club's funds are exhausted. Our set-aside and donations for the work are larger than the budget for all the other activities of the club combined, and the cost of the 12 week program easily exceeds our total membership fees for the year. Our ability to put stewards on the islands next summer therefore depends entirely on our ability to replenish our funds. This report should be read both as an account of work done and an appeal for help.

WHAT'S THE BIG PROBLEM?

Over six million people live within a two hour drive of the shores of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. With its easy access, thousands of islands and large holdings of public land the Bay is rightly regarded as one of the best places in the western hemisphere for cottaging, camping paddling and boating. All of these uses are expanding, but the Bay remains finite and its rocky and thin-soiled environments are fragile and slow to recover from abusive use. And abusive use there is – the picture gallery at the end of this report gives just a glimpse of what we find each summer on Crown land. If the situation continues to deteriorate, restrictions on access and use will be imposed – many user groups are recognizing this and taking action to help. As one of the largest kayaking associations in the province, GLSKA members love and value the Bay and its freedom to paddle and camp. We like to think that most kayakers are not part of the problem, but be that as it may, it's in our own interest to be part of the solution.

WHAT DO WE DO?

For three years now we have recruited two people with energy, kayaking ability and commitment to work throughout the summer on the islands of Eastern Georgian Bay. Our stewards have no uniforms and of course no powers, other than those of gentle persuasion and good example. We pay them a wage which is better than the minimum, but not that much, give them training, kayaks and camping equipment and send them out to be the janitors of 1,000 square kilometres. This year our stewards were Melissa and Chris Hachkowski, a sister and brother team whose home is on the Bay.

Their summer started with our team polishing their kayaking skills and making a visit to the White Squall Paddling Centre in Nobel, where Tim Dyer and his staff outfitted them with a kayak and gear for Chris, some clean-up equipment and lots of good advice. We equipped them with a GPS for navigation and recording the locations of the backwoods privies (“thunderboxes”) GLSKA installs and maintains. And finally, for handing out, a supply of our backwoods toilet kits and helpful leaflets. They also met with Eric McIntyre of the MNR for a series of workshops

which provided useful information on the state of the fishery in the Bay and invasive and endangered species. And then they were off to work.

A good idea of their challenges and accomplishments is provided by the following extracts from their daily log reports:

“ Friday, June 11

Until this point of our summer work, we thought we had it made – just a few minor cleanups, packed with lots of paddling in between. That was until we started to explore Black Bay, located behind the Cunningham Islands. Originally, we thought we’d spend just a couple of hours in this bay and then move onto the Churchills by noon. We spent the entire day launching, landing and cleaning, and still this location will be on our list of places to return to for further cleanup. Simply stated there were campsites in every corner we turned, with fire pits and accompanying garbage everywhere. We found plastic pails, tin cans, plastic bags, fridges, gas cans, metal containers etc. We also found two separate campsites that looked as if someone had used 3-ply, printed paper towels as toilet paper. After just a little sweat, we condensed the large metal objects into one central location for pickup later in the season. We also decided to burn the paper towels after burying the human fecal matter, as I wouldn’t want to guess how long it might take these to decompose.

As we worked in this area, we were careful, as the group from Montreal had told us that a bear was living on Cunningham Island in between the cottage at the north end and the campsite of the south end that is

frequently visited. They reported that they always hung their food, kept a clean campsite and the animal always ran away when talked to.

We chatted briefly with a group of 5 kayakers who were camped on a central island. There were also 3 very large power boats and sail boats who had anchored in the bay to enjoy the stunning scenery. Finally on our way, we spotted a blue heron, painted turtle and numerous piles of bear scat. We decided that it would be beneficial to install about three thunder boxes in this area, and are currently investigating this.

Departing from the Cunninghams at about 5 p.m., the water was calm and we took advantage of this as we cut straight across to the south end of Champlain Island for our next night of camping.

“August 2:

Today we left Snake Island with a light tail wind and landed on Cathcart Island. We set up camp and moved onto Stapley Island. Upon our approach we noticed many large tents, tarps and two canoes on the shore. We left the island with garbage, metal tent poles, tarps and a decaying tent and landed on Lally Island to have lunch. On our way back to camp we stopped at the Rumble Island campsite and picked up bits of discarded metal, we noticed a thunderbox in the trees and upon investigation it needed to be moved. This box did not have a hole dug underneath so all deposits sat on the rock. We dug small holes around and buried the deposits as we could not just fill it in like previous thunderboxes.

Here is Melissa's summary account of places visited, kilometres paddled and garbage removed:

“Crap Trappers, Packaging Packers, You Again? and Island Stewards” were just a few of the great titles we earned this summer while working on Georgian Bay. Throughout the twenty nine days we spent on Georgian Bay, we logged approximately 509km of paddling distance as we collected 41 plastic shopping bags full of plastic bottles, tin cans and paper, 8 lbs of well aged maggot infested and rotten beef, 1 rusty old iron bumper, 8 oven racks, 11 empty white gas cans, 3 olive oil cans, 2 retro '70's style holey canvas tents, 2 refrigerators, 1 broken up wood stove, 4 broken lawn chairs, 4 empty automobile gas cans, 2 empty oil drums... but no partridge nor a pear tree!

A large part of our time was spent maintaining established campsites and talking with guests to the area. The GLSKA Stewardship program had previously installed 12 thunder boxes on the islands beyond Franklin Island that we continued the maintenance of. Additionally, Chris and I transported, built and installed two new facilities in the area north of Byng Inlet. With all of those thunder boxes on Georgian Bay, it really baffled our minds to explain why anyone would choose to leave used toiled paper scattered around eight different campsites; three of which had thunder boxes on site.

Cleaning up the islands ...



Freshly-installed thunder box



Instructions on how to use it, and what to do if you can't find one!



Toilet paper and human waste, Cunningham Island



More human waste, assembled for collection



Finally, a special thanks to those whose generous donations in cash or kind made our work possible:

- ❖ Carling Township (financial & logistical support)
- ❖ East Georgian Bay Stewardship Association (logistical support)
- ❖ Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (donation)
- ❖ Georgian Bay Land Trust (donation)
- ❖ GLSKA members (donations and volunteer time)
- ❖ Mountain Equipment Co-op (funding for sanitation kits)
- ❖ Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (financial & logistical support)
- ❖ Ontario Trillium Foundation (funding for design & printing of educational materials)
- ❖ White Squall Paddling Centre (equipment and training)

For more information on GLSKA's Bay Stewards program please email or call:
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