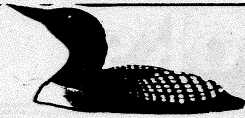


North Country Notebook



George Vukelich

"The first time I met Bud Jordahl," the man who looks like Tom Bosley of "Happy Days" was saying, "was in the Everglades when he came down for a fishing trip."

The man who looks like Tom Bosley is Pat Miller, superintendent of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, and Bud figured—because of his continuing concern for my continuing education—that we should meet.

Bud Jordahl was one of the prime movers in Gaylord Nelson's environmental band that got the Apostles declared a National Lakeshore in the first place, and Pat Miller has been charged with running the sprawling Lake Superior park for the last eight years.

He tries to run it with the knowledge that the late Aldo Leopold was absolutely right when he observed that unless you were careful and set down some rules about using our natural resources, people could "love it to death."

The Apostle Islands were visited by 100,000 people last year, and as is the case with all of the natural resources it holds in stewardship, the United States Government has set down some rules.

"We've recognized," Pat Miller says, "that if we have increasing numbers of people coming, the pressure increases on the resource, the Islands, and we have to protect the resource. From us."

The sandspits of the islands are particularly vulnerable, so the government is putting in small docks to handle the boat traffic, saving wear and tear on the sandspits.

The traffic is mostly sailboats. Pat Miller says the majority are owned by people from the Twin Cities.

"Twin Cities is only a four- or five-hour drive from us," he notes. "They're closer to us than Madison or Milwaukee."

It's the combination of big water, "pretty water" and available ports that makes for ideal sailing conditions in the Apostles region.

"Well, you've got two marinas at Bayfield," he points out, "a marina on Madeline

Island, small marinas at Red Cliff and Red Cliff Bay, a few at Cornucopia. Plus the fact that sailboats are available for rent or lease here. It's ideal."

There is also a sports fishery, and it's not as crowded as Lake Michigan.

"It's mostly trolling," Pat Miller says, "for lake trout, some salmon, some browns.... I don't really do much. I fished a lot in the Everglades. Snook. Tarpon. Weakfish. Snapper."

As a government professional, he worked at Everglades National Park after earning a masters degree in wildlife from Oklahoma State in 1967. In sequence, he was then posted at Glacier National Park, Western Colorado and Black Canyon National Monument, Rocky Mountain National Park, the Everglades, Fort Jefferson National Monument and then, before the Apostles, the Omaha regional office.

Pat Miller says the reason National Parks are established is that they're "unique," and on that basis the Apostle Islands rate high. The islands have some scientific value and some recreational potential.

He thinks the reason the Apostles aren't well known, let alone famous, is because they came into the National Park System "kind of late." Most of the Great Lakes "came in late" and people just don't have a handle on their immensity.

"The Great Lakes are big," he emphasizes, "and people aren't used to comprehending bigness. The Grand Canyon isn't just another canyon. Niagara Falls isn't just another waterfall. Well, Lake Superior isn't just another lake. It's not that definable. It's just big. To call it 'a lake' is like defining Australia as 'an island.'"

He agrees with Gaylord Nelson—the "father of the Apostle Islands"—that if the government hadn't stepped in to preserve them, they would be well along the road to private exploitation and overcommercialization by now.

"I couldn't improve on Gaylord's

philosophy," he insists. "The National Parks are designed to accommodate a use that tends to preserve a natural environment."

Thus, he says, because of seagull and cormorant nesting sites, the Federal government is leaving untouched three of the Apostle Islands—Gull, Eagle and North Twin—and could very well restrict access.

It is at this point that he harks back to Aldo Leopold's observation about loving a resource to death, and the crying need for some rules about using it. That's why, Pat Miller says, he disagrees with Henry David Thoreau.

"I'm not a Thoreau scholar," he says, "but I'm not a great admirer. I think he lived in a different era, and his philosophy is not as acceptable today. It seems that a lot of his writing is antagonistic to government control—yet it's precisely the government that is doing so much to preserve the natural

resources. Without government control, there is no Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Without governmental control, there is no National Park System. Period."

If you are talking resource management, Pat Miller says, you are talking controls. You are talking restrictions.

"If there were only five deer hunters in the state of Wisconsin," he says, "we wouldn't need laws for them. When there are five hundred thousand, we need laws."

How do you take 850,000 visitors through Abe Lincoln's house, he asks, without wearing out the house? If you don't know and would like a brochure of the Apostles to boot, write:

The Superintendent
Route 1, Box 152
Bayfield, WI 54814

If you do know, you're too smart to be reading this.