Ypsi Alehouse
Isle Royale Amber Ale
Ypsilanti, MI
ypsialehouse.com

Among all U.S. national parks, Isle Royale National Park holds a very unique distinction; it is the least-visited national park in the contiguous 48 states. But before passing any judgment on the nearly 900 square miles of preserved parkland, it is important to note that it also has the highest rate of return visitors of any national park in the country. Usually seeing less than 30,000 visitors per year (compared with Great Smoky Mountain NP which brings in over 11 million), Isle Royale's isolated location and lack of modern facilities are often credited with keeping many visitors at bay, but also the reason why many others continually come back.

Isle Royale is a part of Michigan but it is actually located closer to Minnesota and Ontario, Canada. Found in Lake Superior, it is the largest island in any of the Great Lakes and it is about 60 miles northwest of Copper Harbor, MI, the northernmost point of the Upper Peninsula. Native Americans discovered the island at least 5,000 years ago and used it for hunting, fishing and copper mining. Ojibwe Indians called the island *Menong* and had at least a 13-mile canoe trip to reach the shores. "*Menong*" roughly translates to "the good place" and was likely a reference to its abundant copper resources. The copper they mined was traded with tribes as far away as present-day New York.

The first mention of the island by a European came from a missionary named Claude Dablon who in 1670 also praised it for its vast copper reserves. Isle Royale became a part of the United States after the signing of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War but it remained under British control until after the War of 1812 when it was then claimed by the Ojibwe Indians. With the signing the Treaty of LaPointe in 1842 and the Isle Royale Agreement in 1844, the Ojibwe officially ceded the island to the U.S.

Photographs by Jesse Lincoln

Isle Royale was prime copper mining territory for U.S. settlers, especially since many mines had already been started by Native Americans. In the 1840s, a copper-mining boom covered the island and many hundreds of thousands of pounds of copper were stripped away in addition to much of the island's timber but the isolated location of the mines made the copper difficult to ship and ultimately caused the copper boom to be short lived. In 1940, with the island already heavily deforested, Isle Royale was declared a National Park and all industrial work was halted. The few residents, mostly Scandinavian fishermen, were removed from the area and to this day there are no permanent residents on Isle Royale.

Wolves and moose are found on the 45-mile long by 9-mile wide island and have been the focus of detailed studies for over 55 years. The isolated conditions of the island offer a very unique setting for examining the predator-prey relationship and during the time that they have been studied, the animals' populations have continued to rise and fall, never finding a comfortable balance. Moose populations have fluctuated between 500 and 2,500 while wolf populations have been as high as 50 and as low as one, partly due to genetic spinal problems resulting from inbreeding. In 2018, with only two wolves remaining and for the first time ever, outside wolves were introduced to the island by humans. The wolf-moose study is the longest running of its type in the U.S. and offers insight rarely found in any natural setting. Other animal occupants include foxes, beavers, squirrels, rabbits, snakes, turtles, frogs, salamanders and minks. Caribou, lynx and coyotes once lived on the island too but disappeared long ago.

The high return visitation rate indicates that there must be something worth seeing at Isle Royale National Park. Visitors to the island can find more than 165 miles of hiking trails including both day hikes and longer backcountry journeys. Camping sites are available but a variety of cottages and lodges can be found too. Kayaking, canoeing, boating, fishing and even scuba diving are other common activities. The island must be accessed by boat or by plane and it is the only national park in the country that completely shuts down in the winter.

Isle Royale National Park may not be well known but it is a particular point of pride for many who live in the "Great Lakes State", including those far to the south in Ypsilanti. It might take a full day of adventures just to travel from the Ypsi Alehouse all the way to Isle Royale but the staff at the brewery can tell you it's definitely worth it. In fact, they love the place so much, they named their Amber Ale in honor of one of America's most unique national parks.

From the Brewer: Isle Royale is a toasty amber ale with flavorful aromas from an international blend of malts from the US, Belgium, England and Germany. Cascade, Centennial and Chinook hops produce a subdued bitterness that allows the malt flavors to come forward. Isle Royale is named after the Isle Royale Island and National Park located in Lake Superior. ABV 6%, IBU 32
David Roberts - Owner, Ted Badgerow - Owner & Head Brewer, Tim Woolworth - Brewer