

# Interpreter

A Publication of The Sugarloaf Interpretive Center Association  
31 W. Superior Street, Suite 401  
Duluth, MN 55802

## A Day at the Cove

Sugarloaf Cove, August 21, 1999.

The sun was bright in the hazy late-summer sky. Lake Superior was serenely calm—her surface reflecting the colors of the endless sky. Loons laughed in the distance, while mosquitoes lurked in the shady green forest.

After a hearty lunch of rubaboo, cornbread, and raspberry leaf tea, the people—decorated with bits and pieces of skins, beaver pelts, and handwoven fabrics—climbed into the voyageur canoe. To the rhythm of French paddling songs, the heavy canoe skimmed gracefully across the glassy water of the Cove and out onto the big lake.

The crystal clear water revealed hidden secrets never seen before by the usually land-bound explorers. Fascinated by the scene that unfolded on the lake bottom below, the geologists could be heard to cry out “underwater ridges!”

As the canoeists returned reluctantly to the cobble beach, the celebration wound down. Removing their voyageur trinkets and returning slowly to the 20th century, the people knew they had been part of a very special day at Sugarloaf Cove.

To each and every person who has contributed in any way—large or small—to the preservation of Sugarloaf Cove, all of us say “Thank you!” Without your help, this special day would not have been possible. If your membership has lapsed, we invite you to join us once again.

And to those of you who are not yet members of SICA, we offer you an invitation to become members and help direct the future of Sugarloaf Cove.



John Green

This unusual gathering was the annual meeting of the Sugarloaf Interpretive Center Association. Each of the 45 people at Sugarloaf Cove that day had contributed in some way to protecting the Cove. This was their opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the land and the lake and to celebrate what they had accomplished.

Included with this newsletter you will find a copy of SICA’s annual report, which summarizes some of those accomplishments and lays out the organization’s plans for the next year.

Although SICA’s first goal of preserving Sugarloaf Cove has been accomplished, much remains to be done.

Please visit Sugarloaf Cove often. Enjoy the enchantment of this beautiful piece of Lake Superior shoreline, and know that your contribution, whether in dollars or personal energy, will help to preserve Sugarloaf Cove and keep it open for all to enjoy.

*Our very special thanks go to Dan Roberts of Gunflint Canoe Company for generously providing use of his 25-foot voyageur canoe at the annual meeting. Thanks also go to the hard-working voyageurs who prepared and served the delicious lunch.*

*SICA’s VISION is a healthy Minnesota North Shore of Lake Superior where an informed citizenry takes personal and group responsibility to ensure that natural and ecological systems and human economic and social systems coexist in a fashion sustainable into the future.*

# In Memoriam: Merlin Berg

*written by Steve Pihlaja*

SICA and the North Shore lost a good friend when Merlin Berg passed away in August. Every SICA member knew Merlin through the pages of the Sugarloaf Interpreter, where he was the editor, lead writer, promoter, proof-reader, chief of distribution and guiding force until just last year.

As a civil engineer, Merlin served with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for many years. His professional career began with the construction of the lock and dam system on the Mississippi River. After his retirement he established his own consulting company.

Merlin was an environmentalist before the word came into common usage. He organized the River Ramble in Minneapolis to draw attention to the degradation of the Mississippi River and helped with clean-up efforts, while also serving on the city's historic preservation commission.

He had a long-standing love of Lake Superior and the North Shore. After years of visiting the shore and hoping to protect their daughter from the polio epidemic that was

sweeping the city, he and his wife Olga purchased land near Grand Marais in the early 1950s. There they designed and built a summer home and grew prize-winning flowers. Their land is crossed by the original John Beargrease trail, and Merlin delighted in the incongruity of driving his Cadillac along the trail to gather firewood and diamond willow walking sticks.

When illness forced Merlin to give up the reins of the Interpreter last year, he began work on his autobiography. His daughter has promised SICA a copy of the manuscript, and it is certain to be fascinating reading.

Merlin's intellect and sense of history helped to create SICA. His precise engineer's viewpoints and questions were always an important addition to the SICA board meetings, helping to provide a solid base for our often idealistic goals. His engineering credentials were also an invaluable asset in the evaluation of the harbor of refuge program and helped convince the DNR that a harbor should not be built at Sugarloaf Cove. He was a friend to all, and we will all miss him.



## Sugarloaf Landing Oral History Project

SICA recently received a grant of \$10,000 from Consolidated Papers, Inc., to conduct interviews and gather information from individuals who worked at Consolidated's Sugarloaf Landing facility. The results of the project will provide a look at life on the North Shore for loggers and their families from the 1940s to the 1970s. Contractor Don Auger has

been hired by SICA to conduct the interviews; Auger is also working with SICA on the Grand Portage Oral History Project.

If you have stories and/or photos of Sugarloaf Landing that you would like to share, please contact Executive Director Terri Port at 218-733-9938 or [tport@duluth.infi.net](mailto:tport@duluth.infi.net).



## Upland Restoration Project

The Department of Natural Resources recently approved grant funding for a restoration project on the SICA-owned land at Sugarloaf Cove. The project will include removing exotic and invasive plant species and re-introducing native plant species in several areas, including the former building sites, the main parking area, and under the power line. Executive Director

Terri Port is currently assembling a Task Force of people who are interested in both planning and planting for the Upland Restoration Project. Planning meetings will take place during the winter, and work days at the Cove will begin in the spring. To become a member of the Task Force, contact Terri Port at 218-733-9938 or [tport@duluth.infi.net](mailto:tport@duluth.infi.net).

# Cove



John Green

## Sugarloaf Cove Morning

*Always the water.*

*Earth water,  
relentless, steady,  
swirling, curling colors of  
gray, green and foam  
drowning out all but the loudest trucks.*

*Sky water,  
rock gray, slate blue,  
quartz white.  
Coming in mist or drops,  
hanging low, flowing over the ridge.*

*Web water,  
outlining patient, ancient  
labor of firm purpose.  
Trimming blade and leaf;  
balanced between earth and sky.*

*Everywhere the water.*

MANDI HUDSON  
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

## Governor Elmer Andersen's Birthday

SICA's Founding Director, Elmer L. Andersen, turned 90 this year, and he did so with style!

A wonderful birthday celebration in honor of Governor Andersen was held on June 26, 1999 at the St. Paul Radisson. Approximately 560 people joined together to reflect on Governor Andersen's long, rich life and his many contributions to the State of Minnesota, including his very significant role in the creation of Voyageur National Park.

Mr. Wheelock Whitney and Mr. Tom Swain paid a touching tribute to both Governor Andersen and his wife Eleanor, demonstrating that love can last a very long time and can contribute to the creation of a strong family and an extensive network of wonderful friends.

It was also announced at the party that the new University of Minnesota library will be named the "Elmer L. Andersen Library" in honor of Governor Andersen's many contributions to the University.

The party would not have been complete without a rousing and motivating talk by Governor Andersen, which left most of us feeling like we could solve the world's problems! Many SICA members attended the party, including Executive Director Terri Port, and Board members B.J. Smith Kohlstedt, Steve Pihlaja, Archie Chelseth, Howard Olson, and Barb Liukkonen.



## Grampa Woo

Sixty friends of Sugarloaf Cove recently enjoyed a very special trip on the Grampa Woo, a 115-foot passenger vessel that cruises the North Shore of Lake Superior. On Saturday afternoon, August 28, the Grampa Woo sailed from her harbor in Beaver Bay and carried passengers all the way to Sugarloaf Cove. The weather couldn't have been better—it was a warm, sunny day, with just a gentle breeze. After enjoying a delicious dinner of fresh Lake Superior trout and a brief talk about the history of Sugarloaf Cove, everyone on board thoroughly enjoyed the breathtaking views of the Lake Superior shoreline as the Grampa Woo slowly worked her way back to Beaver Bay. Thanks to Captain Dana Kollars and crew for this wonderful experience, and thanks to everyone on board the Grampa Woo for their support of Sugarloaf Cove.



# A Partnership in Preservation and Education

## The Partnership



Sugarloaf Cove is a 35-acre tract of land that includes Sugarloaf beach, cove, and point on Minnesota's North Shore of Lake Superior. The Sugarloaf Interpretive Center Association (SICA) owns approximately 27.5 of those acres. The other 7.5 acres belong to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and are designated as a state Scientific and Natural Area (SNA).

SICA was organized for the purpose of preserving and protecting Sugarloaf Cove. But just what does preservation and protection mean?

The SICA Board of Directors decided a long time ago that preservation and protection does not mean that we simply leave the site untouched. Nor does it mean that we erect a fence around the site to keep out undesirable plants, animals, or people. Rather, SICA strives for something in between these two extremes.

For SICA, preservation and protection at Sugarloaf Cove means encouraging restoration of the property to its pre-industrialized condition, promoting the quiet appreciation of Sugarloaf Cove, and providing ongoing educational programs that interpret the natural and cultural history of Sugarloaf Cove and the North Shore of Lake Superior.

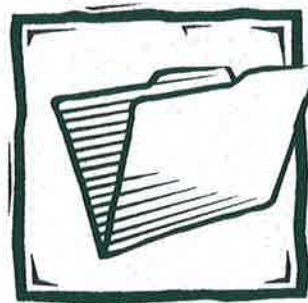
In addition, the DNR has its own goals and its own set of rules for the Sugarloaf Cove SNA. All State Scientific and Natural Areas are established for the purpose of preserving, protecting, and managing lands or waters that possess inherent natural value. Sugarloaf Cove was designated as an SNA because of its unique geological features and because a "Species of Special Concern" in Minnesota, the native flower Hudson Bay Eyebright (*Euphrasia hudsoniana*), grows at Sugarloaf Cove. One of the primary goals for the DNR is to make sure that these geological features are protected and the habitat for the Hudson Bay Eyebright is maintained. But the Sugarloaf Cove SNA is a "public use" SNA, which

means that it is open to the public for nature observation and general educational and research activities. So while protecting the site's unique natural features, the DNR must also provide opportunities for public education and research.

So how do we preserve, protect, interpret, and manage the area—and at the same time allow people to use the land? And how do we make sure that SICA activities and DNR activities complement each other?

One useful way to answer these questions is to prepare a management plan—a document that will guide future activities at Sugarloaf Cove.

## Management Plan



In addition to being a useful tool, a management plan is a requirement for every SNA. Because the SNA land at Sugarloaf Cove is integrally tied to the SICA

land, the DNR and SICA have agreed to prepare a joint management plan. And in the spirit of the continuing partnership between SICA and the DNR, SICA was selected to write the plan. This makes the Sugarloaf Cove SNA management plan doubly unique—not only is the plan being drafted by a private organization, it will also address the use of private as well as public land.

SICA Executive Director Terri Port is currently working on the first draft of this management plan, which will include information about why the area was designated as an SNA, what types of uses are prohibited, how the property will be monitored, what research is required to better understand the site, what physical structures are required (e.g., signs), and what alterations will be made to the management plan in the event that detrimental impacts are identified.

In order to coordinate the management and educational goals of the DNR and SICA, the

management plan will combine the regulations developed and implemented by the DNR under the Outdoor Recreation Act with the conservation easement currently held on the SICA-owned property.

## Wetlands Restoration Project



Long-term management goals for both SICA and the DNR include restoration work at Sugarloaf Cove. This will involve projects like removing invasive and nonnative

plants, removing buildings and roads, and restoring native plant communities.

One of the first major restoration projects to be undertaken at Sugarloaf Cove is currently underway. Earlier this summer, the DNR selected a consultant to carry out a project to restore wetland communities that previously existed in the low area behind the cobble beach—the area known to scientists as the “tombolo.” The restoration project has been undertaken jointly by Peterson Environmental Consulting, Booming Native Plants, and Stevens Drilling and Environmental.

When Sugarloaf Cove was owned by Consolidated Papers (1942-1971), gravel fill material was placed in the tombolo so that it could be used as part of the pulpwood operation. At that time the area was known as the “lower landing,” and it was covered by numerous buildings and roads. The buildings are all gone now, but the fill material remains.

This fill material is several feet thick, well-compacted, and contains very little organic material, making for harsh and nearly sterile growing conditions. After the buildings were removed, alder colonized most of the area because it is one of the few plants that can survive in the difficult growing conditions. Such a monoculture lacks diversity in both plant and animal life. If the area were left alone, it is possible that little more than alder would ever grow there. By attempting to “restore” some of

this area, diversity will be increased in the landscape of the tombolo.

In mid-September, under the supervision of a hydrologist and a soil scientist from Peterson Environmental, fill material was excavated from about 1/2 acre of the tombolo. The fill material was carefully removed down to a buried layer of organic material, which was probably the ground surface before the area was filled. Following this buried soil layer resulted in an excavation that varies in depth from 1-3 feet.

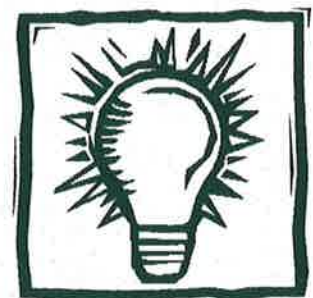
Native vegetation will be planted in the excavated area in order to encourage the development of a more diverse plant community similar to what might have existed on the site before the area was filled. This fall, locally-collected seeds from native plants (such as fireweed and aster) will be spread over the site. Next spring, additional seeds and some seedlings will be added.

The material that was removed from the tombolo was used to fill the roadbed on the lower part of the hill (below the site where the new interpretive center will be constructed) and bring it up to grade. Approximately 125 truckloads (1600 cubic yards) of fill were placed on the roadbed, which was then covered and mulched with chipped alder.

As part of the restoration project, additional site cleanup was completed. Large slabs of concrete and the remnants of building foundations were removed from the lower landing. Compacted soil in former building locations was turned over and seeded. Alder and other vegetation that had been cut to facilitate removal of the former Consolidated office building was chipped and used as mulch.

## How You Can Help

Restoration and management will be ongoing activities at Sugarloaf Cove. If you have any ideas or suggestions regarding the Sugarloaf Cove Management Plan, or if you would like to be a part of the Management Plan review team, please contact Terri Port at (218)733-9938 or [tport@duluth.infi.net](mailto:tport@duluth.infi.net).



## SICA People

August was a time of changes for the SICA Board of Directors. In addition to the expiration of terms and the election of new directors, long-time Board member and former newsletter editor Merlin Berg passed away on August 9 (see page 2).

Our thanks go to retiring Board members Nelson French, Greg Koschinska, and Richard Ojakangas for their many contributions to SICA.

We also thank Board members Carrie Anderson, Chel Anderson, Gene Clark, Art Fenstad, Pat Maus, and Andrea Peterson who have all agreed to serve another term on the SICA Board of Directors. And we welcome new Board members Tom Duffus and Barb Liukkonen.

**Tom Duffus** came to Duluth about a year ago to develop a new program and office for The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in northeastern Minnesota. TNC has a long history in this area, but recently committed to a local presence because the work to protect biologically significant habitats and landscapes is most effective when it is community-based and in partnership with others. Tom moved here from the Adirondack Mountains in northern New York State with his family—wife Eleanor (now on the

Board of the Minnesota Project) and children Iain and Bridget. Tom has been with TNC for nearly 12 years. He was formerly the Director of Conservation Programs for the Adirondack Chapter and was primarily responsible for conservation real estate transactions. He has a Master of Forest Science degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Tom says he joined the SICA Board because environmental education and community involvement in special places like Sugarloaf Cove is an important aspect of environmental protection and one that complements the mission of TNC.

**Barb Liukkonen** was a member of the original SICA Board of Directors, serving for 6 years before taking a hiatus. She is now delighted to rejoin the Board and hopes to contribute to programming and outreach efforts as well as to restoration work at the site. Barb's background is in water resources, and she currently works for the University Extension Service and Minnesota Sea Grant Program in St. Paul. Barb says, "Being back on the SICA Board will help me reconnect with the Shore and help me escape from the Cities more often."



photo was taken in late winter, and judges felt that it captured an unusually striking combination of light and shadow. Wendy lives

## Photo Contest Winner Announced!

SICA member Wendy Strombeck is the winner of the Sugarloaf Cove First Annual Photo Contest. Wendy's winning

photo was taken in late winter, and judges felt that it captured an unusually striking combination of light and shadow. Wendy lives in the Twin Cities area, but she visits Sugarloaf Cove often when spending time at her Bluefin Bay townhome.

Thank you to everyone who submitted photos for this first photo contest. Watch for details about next year's contest in future newsletters.

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*"...WE WILL NOT COME TO ANY DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF OUR PLACE IN NATURE EXCEPT AS WE DELVE INTO ITS BASIC DOCUMENTS, AND THESE DOCUMENTS ARE OUR WILD PLACES."*

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*Paul Gruchow from The Necessity of Empty Places*

## SICA ACTIVITIES

OCTOBER 16

**Shoreland Restoration.** Join Terri Port for a look at some of the critical issues involved in preserving and restoring shoreland property. In addition to being SICA's Executive Director, Terri is a Master Gardener in Carlton County, and she is a leader in the county's shoreland restoration program. Learn about the steps that are required to determine how to maintain or restore your shoreline property so that erosion is minimized, run-off is reduced, habitat is improved, and water quality is protected. Watch for a postcard in the mail announcing the location and time for this presentation.

NOVEMBER 13

**Interpretive Hike at Sugarloaf Cove.** SICA Board members will lead an interpretive hike at Sugarloaf Cove to point out some of the unique physical and biological characteristics that make the site so special. Meet at 10 am in the parking lot at Sugarloaf Cove. Bring a lunch, binoculars, camera, and warm clothes.

NOVEMBER 20

**Sugarloaf Board of Directors meeting** at 10 am in the third-floor Conference Room of the DeWitt Seitz Building, located in Duluth's Canal Park. The Executive Committee will meet at 9 am in the same location. All members are welcome.

## SICA Calendar

Thanks to the many photographers who submitted photos for the contest, we are able to put together the first-ever calendar of Sugarloaf Cove. Welcome in the new century with twelve beautiful pictures of Sugarloaf Cove to remind you of what environmental preservation, restoration, and interpretation are all about!

Order your calendars now! Send \$12 per calendar, which includes shipping and handling, to SICA, 31 West Superior Street, Suite 401, Duluth, MN 55802. Calendars will be mailed to you as soon as they are available. Any proceeds from calendar sales will be used for SICA operating expenses.



## SICA Sweatshirts

Looking for something warm and cozy for yourself, or a great Christmas present for friends or family? How about a Sugarloaf Cove sweatshirt? These high-quality sweatshirts, with a simple embroidered wave logo and the words "Sugarloaf Cove," are made in Cloquet by Carol Gist of Innovative Embroidery.

These are long-sleeved, crew-neck sweatshirts in your choice of pine green or denim blue. Available in adult sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL, and XXXL. To order, send \$30 (per sweatshirt) plus \$5 shipping (per order) to SICA, 31 West Superior Street, Suite 401, Duluth, MN 55802. Orders must be received by November 15 for Christmas delivery.

## FISHBOIL A SUCCESS!



The second annual Celebrate Lake Superior Day fishboil at Sugarloaf Cove was a success, with wonderful weather, good stories, and great food provided by Jack and Genea Picchota. Colleen Keough, from the University of Southern California, won the drawing for the book *Once Upon An Isle: The Story of Fishing Families on Isle Royale*, with paintings and companion stories by Howard Sivertson. Colleen and husband Randy Lake are long time members of SICA and spend time each summer on the North Shore.

Sugarloaf Interpretive Center Association  
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SICA OFFICERS

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**B.J. Smith Kohlstedt**

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**John C. Green**

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**Carrie Anderson**

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**vacant post**

Executive Director

**Terri Port**

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**membership**  
APPLICATION

Please enroll me as a member of the Sugarloaf Interpretive Center Association in the category I have indicated.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBERSHIP  
CATEGORIES

- \$ 25 Contributing
- \$ 50 Supporting
- \$ 100 Sustaining
- \$ 500 Patron
- \$ 1000 Benefactor
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Other

- New
- Renew

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THANK YOU!