

The Heart And Soul Of Moosewatch

The following are responses to the question “Why you do Moosewatch?”, but realize that sometimes that question morphed into “How did you hear about Moosewatch?” or just “Tell me something?”. Taken together, what we ended up with is a small window into the lives of a few people that come together and find each other amid a bunch of bones on Isle Royale. These are generally in the person’s own words with nothing edited out. I’ve generally included the little niceties of “Hi Ron”, “Let me know if...”, “I still owe you 20 bucks.” etc... just because I felt it made the whole thing more “human”. I hope you see a little bit of who each of these people are, and who we are as a whole in the wonderful words that follow. I appreciate every word of what was written.

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From LynnAnn Vesper

Hi Ron,

That is great! I would love to hear the results of your information gathering.

I guide canoe and dogsledding trips in the Boundary Waters. Sometimes we find a bone or, more commonly in the winter, a carcass or a full skeleton, of what? As the guide, sometimes people look to me as the fount of all knowledge, and I try to be as knowledgeable as possible about the animals that live here. So Moosewatch is a great way for me to “bone up” on my bone identification skills. Just the other day I came across a skull with the cervical vertebrae attached, and I was glad I could identify it as a deer.



I could go on, but hopefully this can add a perspective to the other stories you are collecting?

Let me know if you want more material. I am on a short break between guiding canoe trips and graduate school.

LynnAnn

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From Ken Lemieux

Hi Ron!

What did I get out of Moosewatch?

- A better understanding of ISRO.
- A better understanding of Moosewatch.
- I learned how to process a moose's remains, which is pretty cool.
- Perhaps a few new friendships.
- Upped my backpacking skills. Seven days without resupply is no joke!

Why did I do it?

- Interested in the program for a few years.
- Interested in wolves and have read several books on them. Rolf is amazing!
- I love Isle Royale, orienteering, and backpacking. This was right up my alley.
- Sounded like a challenge.
- I selected the first expedition to get more experience on the island's west side.
- Meet some like-minded folks (hopefully).



I've been riding a lot this summer but believe it or not, I'm heading back up to Isle Royale in 15 days. I've got the vacation time and my kids are all in sports so another family vacation is out, so why not!

I'm giving a presentation on Moosewatch to the School of Outdoor Leadership Adventure and Recreation (SOLAR) at the end of September. My presentation will be based on a rookie's perspective.

Call or text if you have more questions.

Ken

My interjection: Ken also added this in a second email:

I would add that I also wanted to see ISRO when there were few others there and in the spring. And it was great, we didn't see anyone else until the 4th day and I'm pretty sure we were the first people on the Greenstone all year.

Ken

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From Adrienne Detanico:

Hello!

Apologies for the delay. I've been all over the place this summer.

I was turned onto the study by Hal Hanson. He found me alone on the Voyageur II in September 2019. I was on a solo backpacking trip.

I am so glad our spirits collided. I think those of us who have a love for the Island have an unspoken connection, and we will find each other.

I can't explain my love for Isle Royale. That would be a much longer explanation. But I will use any excuse to visit.

Moosewatch allows me to be part of a team and a history.

The moose make the island what it is now, whether good or challenging. The absence and reintroduction of wolves make the island what it will be, with such hope for the future. To be part of that feels like a gift and privilege.

More than all the above, what shocked me was the human connections I made. My first Moosewatch, I was looking forward to getting deep into the island and the science of it all. I was blown away by the camaraderie and community of my team.



In 2021, it was Mike George as our team lead, Anne Matzen, Peter Wegner, and the always amazing Shannon brothers. I was blown away by the affection I felt for all of them.

2022 I was on an elite team of Mike and the Shannon brothers. We had specific instructions, to wade into a cedar swamp and recover one kill. We left with three, and found more on the way on and out of the swamp.

It is the most magical, profound, and life-affirming week of my life every year.

I still owe you 20 bucks. I have not forgotten.

Best,
Adrienne

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From Julie Weist:

Hello - here's my "why Moosewatch":

When I first heard about Moosewatch in 2018, I was in dire need of a mental/physical/spiritual journey. I love the outdoors and had been testing myself a bit more with backpacking solo, and after hearing about the program previously at the Quiet Water Symposium, I was determined to check it out first hand. After completing my first Moosewatch in 2018, it was beyond my expectations. After the experience in the backcountry on the remote island, I had never felt so grounded, so grateful, so strong and confident in myself. The program has since been a great way to reflect on what I enjoy the most - being outside while having a unique mission at hand. It encapsulates all that I love; backpacking, scouring the earth for clues for a large puzzle devoted to the ecolog around us - the predators and prey and how they're intermingled, and enjoying a unique landscape.

I have since made it a goal of mine to visit the island once a year. The island certainly holds a special place in my heart. It serves as a great grounding/"clean the slate" experience that I look forward to each year.

Sincerely,

Julie Ann Weist, MSA

And Julie added this at a later date...

Here's what I have generated to add to my prior submission for "why Moosewatch".

The first time I ever stepped on Isle Royale, I felt reconnected to my ancestors. It felt like déjà vu; like I was here [on Isle Royale] before, likely in another life. That feeling keeps drawing me back to the island. I have felt this unique drive before in other places around Lake Superior, but it's on an entirely different level when it comes to Isle Royale; it's an internal force that I can't ignore.

Moosewatch allows for us to have a glimpse into the ecology on the island. We're able to briefly live within that connection, as my ancestors have.

Sincerely,

Julie Ann Weist, MSA



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From Loreen Niewenhuis

Hey Ron,

Sorry for the delay in answering, but I was in Iceland for a couple weeks. Amazing country!!

MOOSEWATCH! I've done 8 expeditions now, and was team leader on last 3. I keep returning because it is a place that keeps calling me back. I've done two weeks of hiking there unrelated to Moosewatch. One was a week when Moosewatch was cancelled due to Covid. Another time I just wanted to see the island in the fall.

The Moosewatch Expeditions are unique because we get to hike off-trail and contribute to a scientific study. The people involved (both hikers and scientists) are friendly and knowledgeable. I have been a solo hiker most of the time, but I love the



team aspect on Isle Royale. I've made lifelong friends on the island and I've honed my skill set for other adventures (like Iceland).

Finding moose bones on that wild island is a thrill that never gets old for me. I plan to return annually for as long as I am able.

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 Hope that helps! Take care,
 -Reen.

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From Larry Fuerst

Dear Ron,

Yes, thanks, I did get the pictures. Thanks for putting all that together! Sorry to take so long to acknowledge your email, but the days just get away from me. It's great to share the photos with Sue, so that she gets the feel of what we do and love.

I've been trying to collect my thoughts on Moosewatch, and it's hard to put into words. Did you go to Michigan State? As Sue, my wife, would say,.... Yay, Go Green!! Retirees. Retired from MSU faculty, retired from jobs after the education that taught them the needed skills, or just retirees from life work, that are at a MSU sponsored fun evening ??? Just curious. Anyway....



I'm an outdoors person. I love to hike, to camp, and just generally be outdoors all day long doing whatever. The chance to camp on a pristine island with no traffic, no pavement, no fast food outlets, is a dream come true.

Add to that, I spend the week with like minded individuals that feel the same way.

And, the exciting part of the research, is that what we do is important to the university and the programs that need our contributions. They have the microscopes, and test tubes, and notebooks full of data, but we are the boots on the ground to find, gather, and carry back the skulls and bones to the cabin to be categorized and registered into the huge data base that the researchers have painstakingly added to for all these many years.

I enjoy waking up at first light to the call of the loons (really?), setting out on a trek to our coordinates to find a carcass through the swamps and heavy forest, registering all of the parts of the find, and then being back at our camp for a dinner and conversation with friends that have been in my life for 5,8,10 years. Wow!! I've actually been involved with this for 15 years!!! Watching the sun come up, watching it go down, listening to birds call and eagles screech, hearing the wind through the trees, seeing a seiche happen.....all of the miracles that are Nature are exciting, and I treasure the opportunity to see them, to live in them for a week, and take some of that peace back

to real life with me. We are lucky to live in the country, but our road is now paved (unfortunately), there is traffic out there, and some neighbors have obnoxious yard lights. Isle Royale is without all that, and it is also not just down the road from our camps.

Moosewatch is not easy. We all have long days' voyages to get to Copper Harbor or Grand Portage, then there is the boat ride (with or without dramamine), then the trek to the camps, then the setting up of the camps, then making our first meal...and then, ahh, peace. Listen to the birds going to nest for the night. Absorb the colors in the sky. Smell the pines. All of your senses are alive to it. It just doesn't get any better that that!

Thanks for your request to write my thoughts. It's not something that I've ever considered doing. Nice to put them on paper!! I think I'll keep a copy of this. Let me know if any of this is of value to you. I'd be interested in what others had to say, and what you decide to use in your presentation. Thanks for getting back to me.

Have good weeks in these last days of summer. Before we know it, it will be time to rake!!!!

Take care, friend.
Larry

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From Erik Freeman:

Greetings from Bangsund Cabin!

I've recently completed MooseWatch Team-4 -- my 46th expedition!!! Aside from the bugs, it was excellent!!

Obviously, there is no simple answer to the simple question, "Why MooseWatch?". But in short: It's a week of wilderness backpacking; which obviously isn't for everyone, but I enjoy it. It's a treasure hunt! It's not for gold or jewels, and I can't keep any of the things that I find, but it's still fun to find them. It's the people: Both the good friends that I've made MooseWatch-ing over the past 17 years, as well as the folks that are doing it for the first time (if this is what they've chosen to do with their vacation time, I like them already!) It's the pursuit of understanding. Even a relatively simple, relatively isolated ecosystem is a challenge to figure out, and even the small part that I've played in that over the years gives me a sense of accomplishment.

I hope that you find these few quick thoughts helpful. Gotta get back to winnowing down my Team-4 photographs now, before heading back to Houghton on Wednesday!

Erik!



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From Chris Woeltje:

I first started doing moose watch because I had an interest in wolves since I was 14. Isle Royale was like this magical place that I always wanted to go to. When I first met Tim and I learned of moose watch through him, I was in awe of his stories from there. Then it happen! Tim offered to pay my way to go with him on moose watch!!! We drove up together long into the night until we stopped to camp. The next day was the leisurely drive along the north shore until we arrived at grand portage.

I had never back packed before, used snow shoes before, or done anything remotely close to moose watch. Hiking around off trail, with show shoes was amazing. But the thing that really made me hooked for life, was being a top the tower with the radio telemetry gear looking for the wolves. At that moment, looking out across the snow covered island, I knew I would always be back. Not to mention the people! It's like gaining a second family that you look forward to seeing. Maybe not every year, 5 years may go by, but when I see some of you, it's like no time has passed at all.



Thanks Ron!

My interjection: Given Chris' mention of snowshoes above, note that 2013 was an unusual year. We still had three feet of snow over most of the island and spent almost the entire time on snowshoes.

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From Annette Matzen:

Hi Ron,

Very nice to hear from you.

Not an unfair question at all. I love going to Isle Royale on the Moosewatch trip for many reasons.

First, it makes me feel like a kid again. I grew up spending a lot of my free time in the woods in S. California where my family had a cabin at Lake Arrowhead. My parents believed that children should spend most of their time outdoors and that I did. There were no deer ticks or reasons to be afraid of tromping through the woods for hours on end. Isle Royale is the same – I can ramble through the woods without worry and I can even play 'hide and seek' with our targets. What could be more fun?!

Second, I love the beauty of nature and being on the island in the Spring time especially, it is gorgeous and undisturbed and safe.

Third, I greatly enjoy the other people that like to do this expedition the same that I do and yet we typically come from many different backgrounds. I would never have a chance to meet you and the other wonderful people who enjoy this experience as much as I do.

Fourth, I like being a small part of something important. The predator-prey study is fascinating to learn about and support in a way that is more than just money.

Fifth, and maybe most important, it is an opportunity to be in the 'real world'. My first Moosewatch trip was with Karen Bacula and I remember one evening talking after dinner with the team and someone lamenting having to go 'back to the real world' when the trip was over. Karen said 'THIS is the real world' and that is exactly what I feel about Isle Royale and its unspoiled wilderness.



I hope you are doing well! I am getting ready to travel to Singapore and then Borneo with my son for a month of jungle trekking and scuba diving. I couldn't be more excited and figure my trekking in Isle Royale is good preparation, although we have to wear Leech Socks instead of Gaiters, Yikes!

Please keep in touch and let me know how your MSU retirees speech goes.

Kindest Regards,
Annette

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From Sophie Busch:

Hi Ron,

I chose to do Moosewatch because one of my mom's friends told me about it (she did it last summer). She thought I would like it because I had loved my previous trip on Isle Royale and I am a pretty adventurous person. I enjoyed Moosewatch a lot and out of it I got new friends, a lot of new knowledge about moose anatomy, confidence in my backpacking skills & ability to do hard things and try new things, and most importantly, I had a relaxing and fun time.



I hope you're doing well.

Best,
Sophie

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From Peter Wegner

Why I participate in Moose watch.

Moosewatch is an opportunity to learn so much. I've learned a lot about moose bones and moose lives. I've learned about plants, birds, mushrooms, wolves camping and hiking. I've learned about teammates' loves, lives, losses and joys. I have been warmed by their stories and laughter. I am welcomed when I arrive and told, "see you soon!" When I leave. I am pushed to manage discomfort and celebrate the strength of my body and learn its limits. I get to know myself and make new friends. I love moosewatch because I feel I am contributing to something noble. I love moosewatch because it I gives me so much too.



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From Mike Kaszyca

Ron,

Good to hear from you. Below are my thoughts. I appreciate you reaching out; please let me know if there is anything else I can do to help.

Thanks,

Mike

As for the “why,” my fascination with Isle Royale began in August 2014 when my wife and I took a 5-day backpacking trip on the Island. Taking the Isle Royale Queen IV out of Copper Harbor, crossing Lake Superior, and being on the Island in late August was spectacular! While we were on the Island, we saw plenty of wildlife, including several moose. Experiencing moose in the wild is epic; their size and beauty is truly unique! We were also very fortunate to hear Candy Peterson speak one night (she paddled up in a canoe to an area where we were camping) about the research she, Rolf, and others

have done on the island for so many years. There is a certain mystique about Isle Royale, especially with the ebbs and flows of the wolf and moose populations over the years. I've seen plenty of wolves (never on Isle Royale) and plenty of moose (both on Isle Royale and in places like Glacier National Park). Being able to support the study of these amazing animals was very intriguing to me and having the ability to volunteer for such an expedition was of great interest to me.

As for the “what,” the word that comes to mind is “satisfaction.” Satisfaction that I was able to support such a long-term study and contribute to the scientific integrity of that study, especially as a novice “citizen scientist.” Satisfaction that I was able to bond with so many people over the course of those 10 days, both within our 5-person team and with the expedition as a whole. Satisfaction knowing there are so many people, of various demographics, willing to take time out of their lives (vacation time in many instances!), be dropped off on a remote island, crap in the woods, and handle dead moose remains for 10 days!



One of my biggest takeaways from the trip was the camaraderie that was exhibited not only by the folks who have done it for so many years, but within each of the teams as we completed our journeys. In the case of my team (led by Clay), 5 complete strangers bonded in the backcountry over the course of the trip. Our ages ranged from early 20's to mid 50's, and aside from varying levels of soreness, it never felt that we were so different in age. We did just about everything as a team, and rarely exhibited any tension (even after walking miles through backcountry swamps). How often does that happen in our society anymore?!

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From Velda Hammerbacher

Hi Ron,

How are you? Hope you're enjoying the summer. It goes by too fast.

Your question is not unfair; I don't see anything wrong with it. Many times while out there in the bush, I've asked myself "What the hell am I'm doing out here?" :)

I'm an MSU alumna, and I first heard about Moosewatch in the alumni magazine. I thought way back then that it would be an adventure. Sure, moose are cool and all, but what appealed to me most was being able to do something that few other people on IR get to do, namely go off trail. That held a certain cache for me. I read and re-read on the application the description of the experience, how difficult it was going to be, and took that to heart. I got in shape, lost 15 lbs, and survived my first moosewatch, blisters and blackflies notwithstanding.

Fast forward to recent years, and I have since gotten into the field of pathology. So now there was an added interest to the trips due to that, but I was also getting older, and thus the physical challenge increased. I used Moosewatch as an incentive to get in shape, and took from the experiences of previous trips to be more prepared. I upgraded my equipment, fine-tuned my kit to bring just what I needed, etc...And so the whole preparation has been fun, too.



All the preparation obviously can make things easier out in the bush, but you're still out in the middle of nowhere in a sense. And this is another reason why I do Moosewatch. When I'm out there, I appreciate little things like.... a chair....a light switch. I take so much for granted, and these trips help re-set my appreciation meter, so to speak.

So that is about it for me. I know folks will give you answers about all the great people they've met, and that is true for me as well. Some team members I've really enjoyed and would love to have them over for a drink or two. Other team members, not so much. :) Each trip has been different, but all have been fulfilling.

I hope this treatise helps you in some way. Good luck on your speech; I think that is cool!

Take care and thanks for asking.

Velda

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From Ron Eckoff

Hi Ron,

Here are my rambling thoughts, use whatever you want.

I first went on an Earthwatch trip to Isle Royale in 1989 when I was 51 years old. I had not had any backpacking experience and would probably not be accepted today. My wife had seen an Earthwatch magazine in a doctor's office and I was vaguely aware of Isle Royale and even more vaguely aware of the study. I had an excellent leader, Dan Fehringer, an undergraduate student. The other 3 volunteers were just as green (unexperienced) as I was. I signed up again in 1992, Had an excellent leader in Tim Laske and we found 21 moose, including 4 fairly fresh ones. We also collected data regarding small fir trees and seed fir trees from randomly selected spots which brought in another aspect of the study. Then I returned in 1994 with Doug Smith as a leader

(need I say more?). We again gathered fir data. In both 1992 and 1994 we went to the West Desor lick and saw lots of moose activity. By that point I think I was hooked.

I had learned enough about the study and Rolf and Candy to be fascinated and was starting to accumulate books and articles about the study. If I wasn't already hooked, May 1996 finished setting the hook. That was a challenging, but exciting and interesting experience. I then committed to going every year. Every year is different, but always fascinating. I sometimes wondered half way through a trip, why am I doing this and when will the week be over, but always as Candy's song says, "my memories are pleasant by the next year."



So why did I do it 26 times?

1. I found the basic study very interesting. And when you add on the special studies that are possible to do with the collected moose bones, like arthritis and air pollution it is even more interesting. (When I have given talks to older audiences I usually say I not going to ask for a show of hands, but I will assume some in the audience have had hip replacement and talk about and show pictures of hip sockets - I have never gotten as much reaction to that as I anticipated)
2. I have gotten to know Rolf and Candy very well, and John and Leah reasonably well and have so much respect for what they do. The connection with so many repeat leaders and volunteers has also been great.
3. I like to think I have contributed a little bit to the study.
4. Before I retired I worked at primarily a desk job doing administrative work. There are times when you are not certain exactly what you are accomplishing. In the long run I like to think I accomplished some things in my career, but day to day it may not be as clear. On a week in the field on Isle Royale you know at the end of the week what you have done. You may be very pleased or maybe a bit disappointed in what you did, but it is pretty clear.
5. There is probably just a little bit of being able to talk (maybe brag) about doing something most people wouldn't want to do.

Those are some thoughts. I hope they are of some use to you. Let me know if you have questions.

Stay cool!

Ron

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From Dick Murray

Ron,

Yes, I dropped from Facebook after it seemed to me that social media had become more of a negative than a positive.

I am a non-hiking participant in Moosewatch now. Last summer I cleaned moose bones at the end of the season to make them easier to transport and store. I sat outside the Bangsund cabin for 6 hours a day for about a week and scraped off flesh.

When I was a hiking member I enjoyed the company of the other participants, and exploring off-trail parts of the island that I hadn't seen before. In general I find walking in the woods revives me so long as the weather and bugs aren't too bad, and I don't have to climb over too many fallen trees.

As a non-hiking member I enjoyed the company of Rolf and Candy. I got to hear the questions asked by visitors as well as the answers they received so it was sitting in on a seminar.

In both places the hiking and non-hiking roles, I enjoyed making a contribution to what I think is a worthwhile scientific effort.

I hope this helps.
Dick

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From Wayne Shannon

I'm assuming that you go through Iowa on Interstate 80. I live about 45 minutes north of I80, so I could drive down to meet you somewhere along the line. If that is the case, the Iowa City area would be ideal for me. Depending on the time of day, we could just meet, or if it is meal time we could meet at a restaurant. A few Saturdays are busy with Iowa Hawkeye football. We have season tickets which takes us to Iowa City on those times.

My reasons for doing Moosewatch are two fold. At one point in my life, I thought that my perfect occupation would be helicoptering around the Rocky Mountains tranquilizing Grizzly Bears, checking their health and radio collaring to follow their movements. This was after college. When I learned of the Mooswatch purpose, I thought that it followed along those same lines so it should satisfy my interests.



Another reason was for my personal capabilities. Would I be tough enough to handle life in the wilderness for over a week?. I have always loved the out of doors which included camping and canoeing but this Moosewatch research would test my outdoor skills a little farther.

Wayne

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From Bob Bollinger

Ron, for several years I would ask MooseWatchers on the ferry on the way back two questions:

1. Why did you do it the first time?
2. Why do you keep doing it?

I probably asked you this once. I wrote down the answers, had intended on making a compilation of it someday, and wish I had kept it up, but I didn't. If I only had the time to pull out those rough notes, it would be a goldmine for you, but alas I don't. But I do want you to know that a fascinating thing is the differences between those two answers.

And I'm a good example of how that changes. However, I'm a bit of an exception in that I was a pretty serious backpacker for decades before MooseWatch. In fact, it was a 15 day backpack on IR that led to me running into Rolf and Candy.



#1: Two reasons, one very selfish. The selfish one is the chance to hike off trail in the wilderness on this island and the excitement that comes for me as a backpacker doing that. It's possible to get a wilderness permit, which I did before MooseWatch, but it's a bit of a pain and confines you to only one sector per permit. The other reason is to help accomplish a scientific study. I have a degree in Zoology, knew of the study from college days, and jumped at the chance to help it.

#2: Now, this one to me contains a surprise I never saw coming. Normally I never go to the same place twice. The world is just too big and too exciting for that. That's why I've explored 49 states, all of the Canadian provinces except 3, and countries in central and South America, including 12 days on Easter Island which is a bit off the normal track. I've also been to some countries in the other hemisphere as well. Yet, I've done MooseWatch 10-11 times and plan on continuing. I think it's now half the camaraderie and half the wilderness work/scientific study. It's such a strange feeling to count you and many others as friends, even though we only see each other once/year. But I really enjoy seeing my friends again and sharing this unique experience with them. Also,

seeing the excitement of the first timers. There are many threats to biosphere Earth. In small moments on the trail, working the kills, around camp, I take advantage and quietly proselytize about the threats, especially habitat destruction, that is harming so many species. So I'd like to think that I'm making a tiny yet not insignificant difference for the cause.

But there is also a new and selfish reason I keep coming back. This is my 51st year of being a backpacker. I've seen several quantum leaps in gear during that time, including: Velcro, Gortex, titanium, carbon fiber, LEDs and there are two others. One of the others is the placement of all those satellites in geosynchronous orbit and the devices carried to communicate with them. Hearing the electronic beeps and seeing the displays of these devices bothers me as I like to rely only on a tiny needles of metal floating on some oil that orients itself with the earth's magnetic field. So in that way I'm a dinosaur. But the last one, cellular phones being carried in the wilderness, just arouses so much resentment to me. Thank God Isle Royale has almost no cellphone coverage. So that's another reason why I continue to do MooseWatch—to get away from cellphones in the wilderness! We all have different definitions of wilderness. One of mine is the controversial one of having one's life at risk when entering it. Without that, it's not wilderness to me. Admittedly, I'm in the tiny minority on that.

Feel free to edit for any reason. I appreciate you so much and am so glad to know you!

Bob J. Bollinger, CFP®

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From Clay Ecklund

Hello Ron,

I guess I do Moosewatch mainly because I love visiting Isle Royale, and I like the fact that I am contributing to an incredible research project. And as a team leader, I get to help others enjoy the island, and learn more about the the study. For me it is a yearly adventure.

I hope this was helpful.

Cheers, Clay

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From April Wilbur

Hi Ron,

Always nice to hear from you - hope you and your family are well.

Yes as you said it's difficult to describe the draw to Moosewatch - I will attempt to put the essence into words, so feel free to add your eloquence as you prepare your remarks.

I have always felt it is important to make a contribution to the world - which is why I was drawn to work the past 34 years in the nonprofit sector. Not to get rich or produce a product - but to try do good in the world.

Over the years I have seen time and again that a volunteer is someone whose heart is pure - they show up because they believe in the cause. Not because they are paid or feel some sense of obligation, but because they truly want to be there and make a contribution.



That's how Moosewatch is for me. I wholeheartedly believe in the unique research being done in this decades-long study that is unique to Isle Royale. I find great personal satisfaction in being the boots on the ground, searching for buried treasure, that will help to tell the story of the moose, the wolves, and the changing environment.

Rolf, Candy, John, Leah, and Sarah are fantastic people - the way they interact with one another and the teams speaks highly of their character. The last thing Candy tells us as we leave camp is to take good care of each other. Their excitement in welcoming us back to camp and in seeing what we found is palpable. That human element is a big part of what draws me back each year.

Knowing that each bone, tooth, and data point our team can find will help the research team, drives me forward, even on the difficult days when the weather is terrible and my body is aching. There is a wonderful camaraderie in the field. It may sound cliché, but it's a labor of love. I talk to the bones that I find. I ask them questions...what they saw, what their life experience must have been like, guestimating how long they were there, and if it was a good death. By bringing the bones back, I help the animal tell their piece of the story. Some will think these words are crazy (perhaps they are), but that's me. :)

What a glorious place to spend time with like-minded backpackers, challenging ourselves personally, and getting to know ourselves just a little better than before. It is one of the most physically demanding things I do, and also one of the most rewarding.

I hope this helps, Ron. Let me know if other thoughts would be helpful

April

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From Joe Olenik

Ron,

I finally got an “office day” to catch up on billing, correspondence, etc. Here are my ramblings about why I go to Isle Royale and participate in MooseWatch – the paragraph in **bold** gets to the heart of the matter, but feel free to use part, all or none of what’s included.

Let me know what you think of what I sent.

Thanks,
Joe

WHY I DO MOOSEWATCH

I first heard of Isle Royale in the late 1970’s in an Ecology class at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. I’ve always loved the outdoors and wilderness camping, and by 1980 I made my first backpacking trip to the island, hiking from Windigo to Rock Harbor along the Minong Ridge Trail and parts of the Greenstone Ridge. After those first 11 days on the island, I was hooked! I’ve always found peace and a true sense of reverence for nature in the woods, away from other people, electronic devices and schedules, and it’s no exaggeration to say that Isle Royale was, from that moment on, in my blood. I knew I would be back. Fishing has always been a passion for me, and after two more backpacking trips to the island in 1982 and 1983, I transitioned to paddlecraft in 1989 and started portaging into the interior lakes and exploring the many bays and inlets on the Lake Superior shore. In those days, wolf tracks were everywhere – in the mud and soft ground along the trails, and on most sandy beaches in the inland lakes. Moose were everywhere and we would always hear the wolves howling at night at some point on each trip. As a budding wildlife biologist, my interest in the wolf/moose dynamic of Isle Royale continued to grow, and it wasn’t long before I purchased Durward Allen’s “Wolves of Minong”. Sometime in the early 1990’s, while kayaking from Moskey Basin to Rock Harbor, I happened upon what I soon discovered was Bangsund Cabin, and came face to face with Rolf Peterson, who I had admired and followed for years. I guess you could say I was a little star struck. Rolf was very cordial (I was basically speechless to be in his presence), and showed us around the moose skulls and other points of interest at Bangsund. I asked if there was a way to become involved with the research effort and he directed me to the Earth Watch volunteer program that was running at the time. The \$1200 price tag – remember, this was 30 years ago – was a little more than a young guy just starting a family could justify, so I continued bringing my family on kayak trips to the island, as the three of us could



spend 11 days there for less than half that amount. Rolf asked about our kayaks that day, and I gave him the name of the dealer in Wisconsin where we had purchased them. I found out years later that he had, in fact, contacted the guy and acquired two boats for his sons Jeremy and Trevor. On a kayak trip in 2009, again paddling from Moskey Basin to Rock Harbor, I stopped to see Rolf and Candy. Candy advised me of two things: Rolf was giving a presentation in Rock Harbor that night, and they had taken over the volunteer program, re-branding it MooseWatch and lowering the cost to \$450. I went to the program that night and bought one of Rolf's books. When I went up after the talk to get it autographed, Rolf said "Oh, you're the kayak guy." I was floored that he actually remembered me, and went on my first MooseWatch expedition the following year.

But I digress.....

The topic is Why I Do MooseWatch, right? OK, to begin with, my first team leader was Rolf's son, Trevor. Trevor was awesome, and is truly a chip of the ol' block. We found lots of bones, and I finally got to go into the "backcountry" of Isle Royale, which was a real thrill! No trails, no campgrounds, this was really living! Two more trips with Wayne Shannon as team leader and I began to see that there is like this "family" of folks who come every year to be in the woods, look for bones, and share each other's company. The camaraderie was so apparent. By the fourth year, I procrastinated in getting my application in, and Rolf advised me that there were no openings but he had enough volunteers for a third group on Team 3; all he needed was a leader, so stay tuned. I was devastated. I really, really needed to be on Isle Royale as part of a MooseWatch expedition. A few days later I emailed him asking if he would consider me as a team leader. I had no idea what that all entailed, but I'd been to the island 12 times, knew how to use a compass, and had been primitive camping since I was 10. I figured it couldn't hurt to ask. Rolf got back to me that same night, and I led my first MooseWatch expedition a few months later. I've been coming back ever since, until covid in 2020.

Why do I do MooseWatch? There are so many reasons. First, I absolutely LOVE Isle Royale and everything about it. Since my first trip in 1980, I've been back over 20 times, including 11 or 12 MooseWatch expeditions (I can't remember). Second, Rolf and Candy are two of the most amazing people I've ever had the honor to know and be around, and I would do anything for them. Third, I love spending time in the woods, getting back to nature and being away from cell phones, traffic, noise, schedules, and all the other stresses of society and civilization. There's something calming and rejuvenating about it. Therapeutic, you could say. But most of all, I've come to cherish the band of "regulars" that show up every year – in particular, the folks on Team 1. I've learned so much from all of you, and truly enjoy spending time in your company. It's like homecoming when we all meet up in the dining room at the casino, and start gathering at the dock the next morning. It's always exciting to see who you're going to be spending the week with once Rolf assigns us to our teams, and I can't wait to see what part of the island we're going to be visiting this time. (Rolf always tries to make sure I get to a lake with fish in it.) Then, when we all get back and compare our bone booty and stories of our adventures during the past 7 days, it's just a big family

gathering. I start counting the days till the next trip as soon as we pull out of the parking lot at the dock.

Having missed out on the last two years has been difficult beyond words, especially this year. I miss the group terribly, and seeing the video you all made literally brought me to tears. I desperately need to be back with my family in 2023!

My interjection: There were multiple reasons Joe missed two years in a row and Team 1 of 2022 made a video “get well soon” card for him — because that’s what family does.

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From Mike George

Ron,

In answer to your question about why I do Moosewatch I have tried to explain below.

First, before Moosewatch I was just fascinated by going to Isle Royale, My first trip was back in 1983 and that hooked me! I also have a keen interest in natural history, having a background in wildlife biology and conservation. I was very interested in the boreal forest ecosystem as an undergrad and pursued a career in wildlife, particularly that related to this type of ecosystem.



This interest led me into some field work as a grad student, but eventually I got hooked on teaching nature history, working in a career as a naturalist/interpreter. I first met Rolf and Candy while doing interpretive programs at Isle Royale back in 2006 for the National Park Service. While visiting with them I learned about Moosewatch (it was Earthwatch at that time) and first participated in 2007. Except for a few years, when career got in the way, I have been coming ever since. Moosewatch allowed me to, once again, participate in field research, something I always enjoyed.

Since then, and one of the reasons I still pursue this, is being around Rolf, Candy, John, Leah and Sarah. Second to that is the camaraderie of others that I look forward to seeing each year. Add to that meeting and being with “new moosewatcher’s” has always been rewarding.

Moosewatch satisfies my interest in field work, being around people that like this type of experience and gaining a greater perspective on this unique project. Ancillary to all of this was a desire to give back to a place that has become a touchstone for me. I have met wonderful individuals along the way, many that have become good friends.

I hope this helps Ron!

Take care and I wish you the very best in your presentation.

Mike

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From Leta Landucci

As a Moosewatch expedition volunteer We spent most of the week backpacking off-trail, which was slow-going at times. The forest was incredibly dense, we spent extensive time navigating through cedar and alder swamps, sliding over massive fallen trees, often in the pouring rain. All of this was amazing. Partaking in moosewatch was an incredible opportunity to experience the interior of a national park, off trail, and to see a new side to this space.



It was incredibly exciting whenever we found a bone – we'd be searching for hours at a time, mistaking countless curls of birch bark for ribs, so when we actually stumbled across a bone, it was very exhilarating! It was honestly so neat to see evidence of predation by wolves, visible everywhere. There was one day when we were headed to the next ping cluster, walking along a beach shoreline, and we found ourselves following a streamlined highway of other critters tracks: sandhill cranes, otter, moose, fox, and more prevalent than any of the others, wolves. The tracks of these wolves were massive. I remember placing my hand next to a paw print and was awed by the near match in size.

What did I get out of Moosewatch and why did I do it? It was a wonderful experience to be out with such passionate volunteers doing interesting work to contribute to data collection for these longstanding research projects. It was amazing to see citizen engagement with this project. Volunteers were SO passionate about this work, and felt a real sense of purpose being out in the swamps and bogs. We felt like we were contributing to something vital. That was an amazing lens through which to experience a new area of science. I had sought out Moosewatch after having travelled to the island on several occasions with my family. It was incredible to learn that there were opportunities to engage with the island in greater depth, not merely as a visitor, but as a contributor.

I hope this helps!

Best of luck!!

Leta

My interjection: The “Ping” she mentions relates to radio collar signals from moose or wolves. The location information gathered from these pings may indicate things like a place where wolves are on a “kill” or where a moose gave birth.

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From Ron Porritt

For my first Moosewatch, I’d say it was a matter of wanting to give something back to the world around me — I was retiring, so it just seemed like something I should do.

But after that introduction to the plight of the wolves, and what the moose could do to the Isle Royale ecosystem, Isle Royale became my gateway into the subject of “How we should be taking care of wilderness.” Since then I have studied the subject of wilderness and written letters in support of the need to take an active role in the preservation of wilderness — but with a great deal of caution related to what we do, and do not, “touch”. Moosewatch is my “hands-on experience with the science of wilderness” and it is very rewarding to see so many citizen scientists, in Moosewatch, being hands-on with wilderness. We need the public to want wilderness, or we will lose it.



I go because I need to go, because it feels right, and because it matters.