



TOP: A view of Porcupine Mountain State Park in the Western Upper Peninsula from Summit Peak Tower. LEFT: Don Fitch of Escanaba carefully crosses the Little Carp River. ABOVE TOP: An Oxeye Daisy along the Little Carp River. ABOVE: A Fowler's Toad blends into the forest underbrush near Mirror Lake. RIGHT: How cool is it to find a porcupine at Porcupine Mountains? One scampers up a Hemlock along the Big Carp River Trail.

# Backpacking the PORKIES



Photography and Text by CRAIG WOERPEL

Standing at the top of Summit Peak Tower at Porcupine Mountain State Park, Don Fitch pointed out to the boys backpacking with him the trail they had walked among the rolling hills and trees spread out before them. They were amazed they had come so far in just a few days.

At 60,000 acres, the “Porkies” is one of the few large wilderness areas left in the Midwest. The park borders Lake Superior and has rivers, overlooks, large trees and wildlife for hikers to enjoy.

The week before his trek with Boy Scouts from Escanaba, Don turned 73 years old. He knows he is lucky to be able to continue backpacking. He loves the challenge of traversing rivers and climbing steep hills to get from one campsite to the next.

He carries a stick cut years ago near his home to help balance himself on rocky trails or clear brush from the path in front of him. An internal frame backpack carries his clothes, food, tent, stove and cooking utensils. He likes to pause on the trail to look at the trees, wildflowers and occasional wildlife.

The teenage boys along on the trip work to keep up with him, yet, Don says the boys are the ones that



LEFT: Sunset on Lake Superior. ABOVE TOP: Don Fitch (right), Tom Conine, Patty Woerpel and Mike Williams watch the Lake Superior sunset. ABOVE: Andrew Fitch, Don's grandson, explores a stream. BELOW: Lake of the Clouds on a hazy morning. OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: Water falls around a rock on the Little Carp River. OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: Old growth White Pine near Mirror Lake. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Greg Williams fishes on Mirror Lake.



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stimulate him. “They’re always eager to go on the trail. Keeps you young,” he says.

One of the boys on the trip is Don’s grandson. He enjoys being able to backpack with him just as he did with his three sons years ago. He gives all of the boys advice on packing their backpacks, cooking their meals and pitching their tents.

Don says anyone can backpack as long as they are in shape. He suggests getting good equipment and starting with shorter hikes. The younger boys on this trip have been on several shorter hikes to prepare for the trek at Porcupine Mountains.

What Don likes most about backpacking the Porkies are the waterfalls.

“The waterfalls are gorgeous,” he says. “I could spend hours going up the rivers and looking at each one. We tend to hike by them much too quickly and not enjoy the beauty of the them. Sometime, I’d like to go there and just spend twice the length of time going up the Big Carp River because the waterfalls there are special.” 🐿️