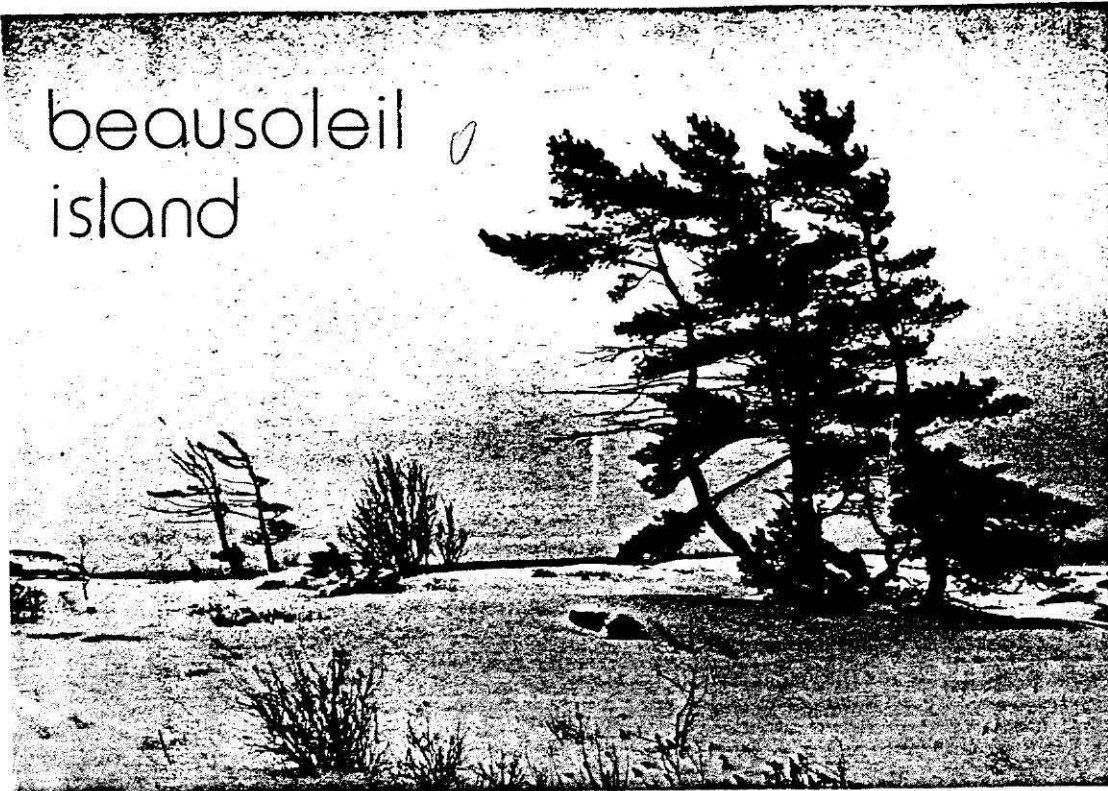


beausoleil island



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Photographs: Sandy Richardson

"... If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to
Put off sense and notion..."

T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

"...Leisure is not the attitude of mind of those who actively intervene, but of those who are open to everything; not of those who grab and grab hold, but of those who leave the reins loose and who are free and easy themselves — almost like a man falling asleep, for one can only fall asleep by 'letting oneself go'. No one who looks to leisure simply to restore his working powers will ever discover the fruit of leisure; he will never know the quickening that follows, almost as though from some deep sleep."

Josef Pieper, "Leisure, The
Basis of Culture"

The sun was shining, the air was brisk, and the snow lay all around: a huge white blanket — white, clean white, sparkling under the sun. We had set out from the shore and were out in the middle of Beausoleil Bay, the shoreline a distant haze and water lapping some centimeters under our feet. We plodded steadily on. "Plodded?" Well, would you call it "sking" under a thirty kilogram pack? (That is all of sixty-five pounds for those of you who are pre-metric graduates.)

Under the snow was a layer of ice, but just how thick we didn't know. Big Dog channel was not being used, and certainly no one was prepared to put their trust on the ice of the main channel. The sun shone, and patches of snow wettened into slush. We plodded on and on... and sweated and sweated...

"Keep to the marked route," they told us at the Park Headquarters, "you'll be alright there — but anywhere else, it's your own risk." A marked route across the bay? Yes, we were on it. Posts standing up in the ice stretched away into the distance. On top of the posts, flags fluttered and red reflectors glistened in the sunlight; and in case you might run off "the highway" in a white-out, along either boundary small evergreen trees and branches "greened" darkly here and there against the snow.

This was the ice highway running from the Park Headquarters at Honey Harbour to the main depot on Beausoleil Island. And traffic? Oh yes. From time to time snowmobilers thundered by, helmeted and visored, right hands raised in greeting, or in amazement at seeing people skiing out there. Usually in family groups, sometimes with trailers of kids, friends or grandparents, and occasionally on twin-track truck-size machines, the snowmobilers headed south to "snowmobile land"; the southern part of Beausoleil Island, one of the last refuges of the Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake and a snowmobiler's paradise.

We turned off north into Treasure Bay and up into the northern part of the island where peace and stillness reign. Here the trails are narrow and the brush closes in. Here the snowmobilers never come. Each to their own... We crossed the island and the sun still shone.

Do not be misled by the National Park map. Though useful, it's scale is inaccurate. The island itself is no more than nine kilometers from north to south — and we skied all of nine kilometers before settling on a campsite. "Is it sheltered enough?" "No, too exposed. Look at the lean of those trees away from the prevailing wind." "What about here under this tree?" "No, too far from the water." "WATER!?" So, melt snow." — the choice of a campsite always leads to some interesting discussions.

Well, there was water. Only a few feet away, right along the shoreline, which gave us pause to wonder just how thick the ice was over the bay. Anyway, after the tents were up and we had snacked, there seemed a lot more ice than water and off we skied, without those heavy packs, around and out into the bay, looking for all those "touristy" things to do like climbing-all-the-steps-to-the-top-of-the-lighthouse to see the-view-that-that-was-not-there-when-we-got-there. The clouds had come in and the sun had gone down.

With the sun down and the temperature dropping fast, supper of hot stew was pleasant ... and hot chocolate... and more hot chocolate. But what goes in has also to come out. The possibility of having to emerge from a sleeping bag at three o'clock in the morning out into a many-degrees-below-freezing temperature worried three of us, though not Sandy! He sat there drinking hot chocolate by the mugful as the clouds thickened up and the moon misted over. He had an edge on us — could it be the camera tripod with hollow legs...?