

ST. PETERS ISLAND

EXPEDITION TO ST. PETER'S ISLAND

The gods were smiling favorably on a small group which recently ventured forth on a cross country ski expedition to St. Peter's Island. The sun shone with a warmth that reminded us of warmer days ahead, as five skiers converged upon Rice Point on February 1 for a second annual winter outing to St. Peter's Island. The weather was in definite contrast to the first annual trip during which participants experienced very limited visibility on the ice of Northumberland Strait.

St. Peter's Island is a 400 acre island lying approximately 2 kilometers southeast of Rice Point on P.E.I.'s south shore. The remains of an old embankment can be seen leading to the island. Probably this was once a log road which connected St. Peter's Island to the mainland so that horses and carts could traverse the relatively shallow waters in summer.

The minutes book of the original Natural History Society reveals their first annual outing to have been a boat trip to St. Peter's Island (August 13, 1890). The island at that time was divided into four farms owned by William Taylor, Thomas Lund, William Hewson and James Taylor. Apparently eighteen people attended that first outing. "A sudden squall" necessitated the early return of everyone except Francis Bain, his son, and Lawrence Watson who were later driven across by one of the farmers. The reason they delayed crossing was probably due to the discovery on the beach of several fossils from the Carboniferous Period. P.E.I. was formed during the later Permian Period, according to Francis Bain, and the discovery of Carboniferous fossils supported his opinion that a coal seam underlying P.E.I. came close to the surface at various points.

St. Peter's Island appears to have supported fishermen as well as farmers. On the accompanying map Lane's Fish Stage can be seen on the southeastern tip. A lighthouse was located on the southern shore. It still stands today accompanied by a modern light atop a tower. Nearby is an old root cellar reminding us of past days when a lighthouse keeper and his family would have lived nearby.

Our exploration of St. Peter's Island included the heronry at the western tip. About 35 nests (about half of which were in very poor shape) were observed in the spruce trees. Skiing around the perimeter of the island led us to the lighthouse from which open water was observed to the east in Hillsborough Bay. The visibility was such that Point Prim could be seen with the naked eye. We visited the site of a dilapidated building and consumed a much anticipated picnic lunch before proceeding to our starting point. Several tracks were in evidence including fox, mice and hare prints. One set of tracks led to two muskrat lodges (distinguished from beaver lodges by their construction from cattails and not branches). Unfortunately the occupants were not to be viewed.