

Mountain Biking and Hiking 2021 Season Recap

written by Chris Guibert | January 5, 2022

With nearly 15 feet of snow so far this season I thought it might be a good time to reflect back on “greener” times and review last year’s biking and hiking season at the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge. In the summer of 2020 we changed the “Pro Shop” to the Outdoor Activity Center (OAC). Hiking, biking, stargazing and golfing are all summer activities guests can take advantage of with the resources at the OAC. The year of 2021 had many advances to the program.

In 2021 the OAC staff had a well rounded group of passionate outdoors people. Chris Guibert, who was working part time at the Lodge, took over as “Lead” for all outdoor activities in the Spring of 2021. His background as a mountain bike guide, travel photographer and Keweenaw resident has been a driving force to push the program forward. Chris has been mountain biking for over three decades and in May he received his level 1 Professional Mountain Bike Coach certification in Brevard, North Carolina. The Lodge is pursuing a path to become a top destination for learning how to mountain bike in the Midwest.

Fun, joyous and adventuresome is the best way to describe the summer OAC staff. Naya Mueller, with her warm smile, returned for her third season and was eager to guide one of our Morning Miles hikes or set the shock pressure on one of our Trek rental bikes. Truman Jones joined the OAC for his first season, his easy going nature could easily make anyone laugh. Truman is a master tinkerer and helped build the OAC’s new bike mechanic workstation. Tom Oliver was born in the Upper Peninsula and worked as a biologist for the Michigan DNR. He traveled the

world as a teacher and helped push the educational component to our Morning Miles hikes and began working on a new interpretive nature trail on our property (possibly opening 2022!).



One of the biggest changes for 2021 to the OAC was the addition of a fleet of Trek full suspension mountain bike rentals. We chose the Fuel Ex 8's as the perfect bike to explore the Copper Harbor Trail System. These aluminum framed bikes boast 140mm travel in the front and 130mm of travel in the rear – perfect for rolling over the roots and rocks on the Red Trail. We were lucky to order our bikes in the summer of 2020 because it took nearly a year to receive some of them because of supply chain issues. Our rental fleet consists of 10 Trek Fuel Ex 8s in sizes from small to XL and 4 kids bikes; 2 Trek Roscoes and 2 Trek Precalibers.



Education and attention to details is a big part of what we do at the Outdoor Activity Center. We believe in taking the time to set our rental bikes up for each individual rider by setting the shock pressure to the rider's weight and making sure the seat height is at the proper length. We also spend the time explaining the workings of these modern mountain bikes to our guests. We go over how to work the dropper post and how a 1x drivetrain should be shifted. Our goal is for you to leave the OAC with an understanding of how to operate this high-tech fun machine. If our rental bikes seemed a little intimidating we invite our guests to join one of our free, instructional group rides.

Our group rides continued throughout the summer and fall of 2021. Riders aged 4 to 68 pedaled with us on these social, low stress excursions. The Friday evening "Happy Hour Ride" at 5:00 pm was perfect for people rolling into town and wanting to jump right on their bikes. These rides end with the group sitting on the picnic tables overlooking Brockway Mountain toasting their favorite beverage. On Saturdays two rides went out, a Beginner Ride at 10:00am and an Adventure Ride at 1:00pm. For 2021 the beginner ride morphed into a group lesson with "Coach Chris" sharing his passion for teaching basic MTB skills. Body position, braking and other fundamentals were practiced by the group. The Adventure Ride took adventurers across the trail

system in search of those “Zen” moments and a few cool off sessions in Lake Superior.



With the addition of the rental bike fleet we had to modify the inside of the OAC into a full on bike shop. We built a workbench, put up a pegboard for the tools and hung a helmet sanitizing bar. We also purchased a full kit of Park bike tools and stocked spare tires, brake pads, chains and derailleurs for repairs. This also gave the OAC a place to work on a guest's bike if it needed a quick adjustment. We also added some more cycling specific merchandise including custom Keweenaw Mountain Lodge jerseys and gloves from Giro sports that featured the iconic Brockway Mountain in their design.





2021 was also a year of multiple changes to the Copper Harbor Trail System. Some of the gravity trails on Brockway Mountain were closed throughout the summer as the Copper Harbor Trails Club worked on upgrading their insurance policy. Another change was that the Downtown trail closed because the bottom part of the trail sits on a piece of land that is private property and was sold in the Spring. And finally, the Here We Go, Stairway to Heaven and Der We Went trails became hiking only. These trails are close to the town of Copper Harbor and the land owner wanted to have more trails for just hiking. These three trails are ideal hikes because they climb and descend the major ridge right above town and provide interesting geology to explore. Many Lodge guests took advantage of using these routes to travel into town for the day.



Our Morning Miles Hikes went off every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00am. These free guided hikes give guests a chance to look for wildlife, explore new trails and have a social interaction with like minded people. Last summer the OAC staff created an

internal guide for our guides to help identify plants and commonly seen animals. Each of our hikes are an opportunity to educate guests from out of the area on the Boreal Forest that surrounds the Lodge. One of our most frequent hikes is down the Dancing Bear Trail and up the historic Red Trail. This 3 mile loop has some fascinating geology as it runs under some bedrock cliffs and along two different ridges. This loop can be extended to Manganese Falls, an interesting slot-canyon waterfall.



The Keweenaw Mountain Lodge hosted many outdoor oriented events in 2021. The Back 9 Endurance Run took place over Memorial Day weekend. This event was first offered in 2020 as a solo timed run due to Covid, this year participants were able to come out as teams and individuals and have a mass start. The race is a 3.5 mile loop around the Lodge property. Runners choose to run for 12 or 24 hours. In that time, they run as many laps as they can. Each lap started and ended at the gazebo next to the historic Lodge building. As runners completed each lap, they recorded their lap time, and then either head out for another lap or X out on the board and call it a race! Thirty One people participated in the run with Janelle Gomez taking top honors in the 24-hour solo race completing 72 miles (20 laps) and Kate McCloud completing 57.6 miles (16 laps) in the 12-hour solo.



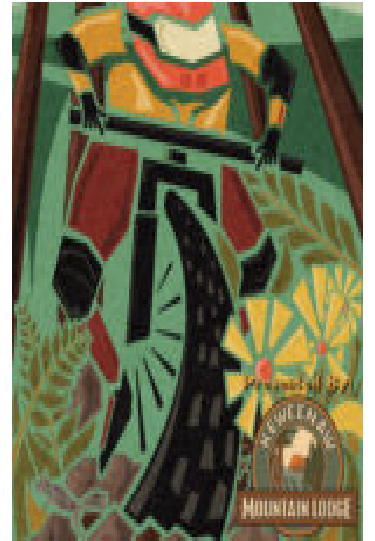
The Lodge was also the basecamp for the Copper Harbor Trails

Club's mountain bike instructional weekends, Women's Weekend and the Men's Big Boys Clinic. These clinics attract riders from across the Midwest for three days of instruction, adventure and fun. The tennis courts at the Lodge became homebase for organizing the groups and meeting for lunches. By providing a welcoming atmosphere for clinics like these we connect one of the core values: "be fearless and persistent in learning on a daily basis."



The biggest silent sports event in Copper Harbor is Trails Fest

held over the Labor Day weekend. In 2021 the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge became the title sponsor for this historic event. This will be a four year collaboration with the Copper Harbor Trails Club with the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge as title sponsor. Trails Fest is in its 28th year and brings bikers and trail runners from across the region for a weekend of racing and celebration. This year the festival had 508 unique registered participants in a variety of events including the classic mountain bike cross-country race. This is the original event from the very beginnings of the festival and over 200 people lined up for the mass start.



The most exciting event to watch is the mountain bike downhill

race. This race was held on a brand new trail called Citrus Tech, which was built last summer at the East Bluff Bike Park. Racers battled wet conditions and a new course for fastest time down the hill.



The Enduro is one of the more popular events at Trails Fest with 281 people participating in 2021. This event involves cycling with your friends to the top of various trails and then being timed on the downhill sections. One of the classic stages over the years of the event has been the Red Trail which starts on the Lodge's property. This trail is considered a legacy trail in the Copper Harbor trail system and was built by the National Youth Administration (NYA) in 1938 and 1939 as part of the Work Progress Administration (WPA). This rocky, technical descent is the perfect trail for racers to test their bike handling skills.



The 10k Trail Run had 56 participants on a course that can be described as "definitely not flat." The course comes onto the Lodge's property and uses segments of the Back 9 Trails and along the cliffs of the scenic Dancing Bear Trail.



The main event of Trails Fest that is based at the Lodge is the kids races. Our Junior XC races had 57 kids competing in 2021. It was great to see the smiles on their faces (and their parents) as these future mountain bike stars rounded each corner.







Last October we experienced an Indian summer. The average daily high temperature in Copper Harbor was almost 60 degrees (59.5). This extended the hiking and biking season and was a blessing for outdoor enthusiasts. Some Octobers we can get hit with multiple snow storms, last year we were still swimming in Lake Superior. Fall in the Upper Peninsula is a magic time with the trees changing color. People come from around the world to take in this beautiful spectacle and Fall 2021 did not disappoint.



Our last hoorah for the season was the return of the Keweenaw Cup Cyclocross Race. This two day event starts at the Trails End Campground for day 1 then moves up to the Lodge for day 2. Sixty-eight racers embraced the Halloween Spirit and donned costumes as they raced around the golf course and through the woods. Part of the course had racers riding through our golf cart storage barn and throwing golf balls with a fling stick at a giant Lake Superior sign! This was a fun filled event with live music and a taco dinner served in the Lodge's convention room.







2021 was an exciting year for hiking and biking at the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge. In person events returned and we added a fleet of high end rental-mountain bikes. For 2022 we plan to expand our offerings with group mtb lessons, a signed nature trail and building a new MTB skills loop. To learn more about the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge's outdoor activities please see our website: <https://keweenawmountainlodge.com/activities/>



[Chris Guibert](#)

Chris Guibert: I have a strong passion for all things outdoors and have worked as a tour guide and professional photographer for the last twenty five years. As the Lead of Outdoor Activities at the Mountain Lodge I want make sure you and your family have a great experience while staying and playing. Please feel free to ask me any questions about the trails, regional activities and local secrets.