

INTRODUCTION

A Sense of the Place

The Leelanau Peninsula is one of those places that visitors love because it conforms so readily to their idea of it. It is a place to resort, to recreate, to escape the pace of city life, to find solitude and seek tranquility. In the slapdash language of travel magazines it is both a destination and a state of mind; a Mecca for nature lovers; a precious gem awaiting discovery; the Riviera of the North and the Cape Cod of the Great Lakes

Such designations mean nothing, of course. A place can't be captured in easy phrases. To understand Leelanau you must spend time there. To know the place – any place – you must invest yourself in it, dig into it with your hands and feet, bury your face in it, get a noseful, an earful, a mouthful.

It feels like home to me. I worked here summers when I was a kid, and year-round as a young man, and have lived most of my life within a few miles of it. I've hiked, fished, hunted, biked, camped, skied here; have returned for family reunions, graduations, weddings, and funerals. My mother and her sisters and brother were born in Glen Arbor and spent much of their early lives exploring the dunes, the woods, and the Lake Michigan shore. My father's family bought acreage in the southern portion of the county in the 1940s and established the original Sleeping Bear Farms, where they grew cherries and made maple syrup and raised palominos. Several

dozen of my cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and shirtsleeve relatives on both sides live here or are buried here.

So when Dianne Foster at Petunia Press asked if I would contribute some words about Leelanau to accompany a book of photographs by Ken Scott, I jumped at the opportunity. And not only because I care about Leelanau. I've admired Ken's photographs for years and was eager to work with him. I've felt an affinity for his work, just as I have for Glenn Wolff's, whose art has been integral to most of my books.

At our first meeting, Ken made a suggestion that became central to our collaboration. The conventional way to approach the project would have been to produce text illustrated by photos, or photos supported by text. But convention does not suit Ken. He suggested that we work independently, trusting that the results would be complementary.

With that in mind, trusting to serendipity, we set off to encounter Leelanau in our own ways. Mine involved a lot of hiking and driving and discussions about family history with my parents and grandmother. I took notes for a few months, then wrote most of the text in a house a few miles south of Leland. Every day for six weeks I composed longhand at a desk in front of sliding glass doors with a view of Pyramid Point across Good Harbor Bay. I wrote also at the dining room table, on the couch, at the kitchen counter, in the bathroom, in my truck, and on the beach. It was a rich and productive time. Already I miss it.

Ken's approach was very different. His photographs for this book are the result of several years of effort and much winnowing and sorting. They're the work of an artist who has achieved creative and technical mastery, and who knows his subject well, yet always finds new ways to look at it. I admire the world-view represented. To my eye, Ken's work is clear-headed,

sensuously rich but never sentimental, unmuddied by ego or preconception, joyous and honest – qualities that apply also to Ken. He lives in Leelanau, in a house bright with colors and decorated with unusual art and an astonishing assortment of found objects. The downstairs studio has crept up the stairs to infiltrate the living space, and cats are everywhere. In his life and in his photographs, Ken reveals himself to be a man alert to the physical world, in touch with the wild, moved by beauty, and deeply enamored with light and movement.

The images do not come easily. To find them, Ken patrols the beach at dawn, springs across fields in pursuit of thunderclouds, climbs hills at midnight to time-lapse the cosmos. He routinely slips through cracks in the world and enters the backcountry of the ordinary. When he returns he brings images that most of us can glimpse only in our most remarkable moments. They show deep feelings and great depths. We can see deeply into them – no easy accomplishment in a two-dimensional medium – making us realize that there is more to the surface of things than we suspected. They make a portrait of a place that must be appreciated at many levels to be understood.

Ask anyone from Michigan's Lower Peninsula where they live and they immediately hold up their right hand and point to a spot on the palm or fingers. Leelanau is the end of the little finger. It is bounded on the west and north by Lake Michigan and on the east by Grand Traverse Bay. The peninsula measures approximately twenty miles wide at the base, where it is widest, and is thirty miles from south to north. Its shoreline is among the most interesting on Lake Michigan, with many miles of sand beach, occasional jumbles of rock, and some of the largest freshwater dunes in the

world. The dunes, thirty-five miles of shoreline, and South and North Manitou Islands are included in 72,000-acre Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, which is the primary tourist magnet in Leelanau, drawing some 1.3 million visitors each year. Inland are rolling hills and forests, interspersed with farms and orchards and many lakes, most notably North and South Leelanau and Big and Little Glen.

Most of the perimeter is traced by M-22, certainly among the most scenic highways in Michigan. Within the county are a dozen villages and a combined population of fewer than twenty thousand people. Perhaps the most revealing facts about Leelanau are that it contains no mini-malls or strip-malls or malls of any kind, and that in all the county there is but one fast-food restaurant and one traffic light – and both are in Greilickville, on the outskirts of booming Traverse City.

People who live in Leelanau or have been visiting for years can be ferocious in their determination to protect it. In a world of rapid change and frenetic lifestyles, Leelanau remains quiet and rural and slow to change, and thus increasingly important to our collective well being. It is one of the last good places. I hope this book does honor to it.

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