

Keweenaw National Historical Park: Nationally Significant or a "Slab of Pork"? A Rebuttal to *National Parks Compromised*

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IN HIS RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOK RECOUNTING HIS TENURE as director of the U.S. National Park Service, *National Parks Compromised: Pork Barrel Politics and America's Treasures* (ICS Books, Merrillville, Indiana, 242 pp.), James M. Ridenour gives a grossly inaccurate account of the creation of Keweenaw National Historical Park. Since there is a good chance this book will never be reprinted in a revised form, and since books with a false telling of history tend to resurface over and over in future decades, gaining credence through the ignorance of the true circumstances of the historic period, it is appropriate that Ridenour's account be firmly challenged at an early point.

The only explanation I can think of for Ridenour's account is that of exceedingly poor standards of scholarship on his part and that of his publisher. He makes serious charges of behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing. He ignores not only an extensive legislative history, but testimony he himself gave before the Congress.

The following is Ridenour's account of the creation of Keweenaw National Historical Park. Certain phrases and sentences have been placed in bold type to facilitate later analysis and commentary about them.

Congressman Bob Davis, with late support from Senator Carl Levin, added another slab of pork to the parks when he backed the addition of Keweenaw National Historical Park on the northern peninsula of Michigan. This park was established with the purpose of honoring the heritage of its copper mining industry. It has a lot of charm but I didn't think we should be adding it to the NPS list while we were hanging on by a shoestring.

Congressman Davis had been trying to get this area added into the NPS stable for a number of years, I finally agreed to visit the area to unveil the plaques placing the town of Quincy and the world's largest steam hoist, as well as the town of Calumet, the site of one of the most productive copper mines in the world, on the **National Register of Historic Places**.

It was hard for me to be less than supportive of this project as the people of the area were so enthusiastic about the possibility of having the area under park status.

There were a number of problems. **The biggest was whether or not the area was sufficiently nationally significant to warrant park status.** Some would say that if an area is granted **National Historic Landmark status**, then it automatically passes the significance test for becoming a national park.

I don't agree. I believe the area or building must be eligible for **national register status** to qualify it for park consideration, but I don't think being on the na-

tional register automatically qualifies a candidate for park status.

Another problem was that there are acres of old mine tailings in the area that are draining into a small lake near Quincy. I had visions of our accepting this park and then being commanded by the Environmental Protection Agency to spend millions and millions of dollars to clean up the environmental problems of the past.

The old mine shaft was dug on a slant that ran more than 600 feet under the surface. It was really an interesting place to see and to imagine what it was like in its heyday. I don't think I would have wanted to climb into those wooden cars that lowered those miners in the shaft day after day.

Quincy itself was a company town and a good example of what company towns were like in this country. It is still a very pleasant and interesting town that would make a nice tourist trip for those on an adventure to northern Michigan.

I don't know how Congressman Davis got support for this project. **This is one that went right over my head and, like Congressman (Joe) McDade's Steamtown, was moved along to national park status before going through the proper authorization channels in Congress.**

These things happen. I once had a congressman ask me how one of his colleagues got support from the Office of Management and Budget for a particular park project. I told him that I had heard a rumor that the congressman had given the administration support on an issue of great importance to the White House.

"Darn," the congressman replied. "I only got two tickets to the Kennedy Center in exchange for my vote."

I will guarantee that you will enjoy a trip to Michigan's upper peninsula if you work it into your vacation plans. When you visit Quincy and learn of the history of mining in the area, you can also work in a trip to Isle Royale, an existing, first-class national park just off the coast of the peninsula. The people will be glad to see you, and you will have an interesting look into the mining history of our country, but I still have doubts as to the national park stature of the copper country on the Keweenaw Peninsula.

When Ridenour came to the Keweenaw, he presented plaques designating the Quincy and Calumet areas as National Historic Landmarks, not their listing on the National Register. Yet in his book he says the biggest problem "was whether or not the area was sufficiently nationally significant to warrant park status."

Ridenour seems completely confused about the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks program, using the terms interchangeably. They are two very different levels of recognition. The National Register contains listings of places which may have national, regional or local significance. It is an extensive program, which normally relies on the states to decide whether it is appropriate to add a place to the list. Since many historic places listed on the National Register are only of local significance, it is obvious that National Register listing is not presumptive of eligibility for the National Park System.

The National Historic Landmark program has much more restrictive standards and procedures. Only those places which are found to have national significance—great importance to the heritage of all Americans—are eligible for designation as a National Historic Land-

mark. Landmark proposals are reviewed by a distinguished national advisory council, and upon their recommendation, designated by the Secretary of the Interior. Because they have clearly passed the test of national significance and professional review, National Historic Landmarks are considered to have automatically met the test of national significance for inclusion in the National Park System. Questions of the feasibility of protection and operation by the National Park Service still have to be addressed before the Congress decides to add a new unit, but the question of national significance has already been determined.

Ridenour relates the legitimate concerns he and the Park Service had regarding potential problems of hazardous wastes at these sites. He failed to note that the Congress asked EPA to review the proposed park area and to give it a report on potential environmental problems, before the Congress would give further consideration to the park proposal.

He also failed to note that on the same day he testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to offer the Service's position on the proposed park, that Mr. Norman Niedergang of EPA gave testimony which indicated there were no unacceptable health risks associated with designating the area a unit of the National Park System.

Ridenour then wrote, "I don't know how Congressman Davis got support for this project. This is one that went right over my head and, like Congressman (Joe) McDade's Steamtown, was moved along to national park status before going through the proper authorization channels in Congress."

This is the most egregious of his gross misrepresentations of the facts. Keweenaw National Historical Park

went through more detailed review and scrutiny by the Administration and the Congress than has been customary with most new units of the National Park System in recent decades. First was a feasibility study, done by the Park Service, but funded by local organizations. That study indicated that there were indeed nationally significant stories to be told in the Keweenaw. That study also led to actions to designate the Calumet and Quincy areas as National Historic Landmarks. After the first study was submitted to the Congress, the Congress directed and funded an additional study of alternatives for the management and protection of these nationally significant resources, and directed the EPA to complete its report on health and safety concerns before proceeding.

During the period, several bills proposing the establishment of the park were introduced in the Congress. After the study of alternatives and EPA report had been submitted, Ridenour was called to testify before the Senate parks subcommittee regarding the latest Senate version of the bill. On March 26, 1992, he testified that the Park Service could not support the bill as proposed, but would support an alternative bill he submitted. Most of the Park Service's discomfort with the proposed bill was quite technical in its nature, dealing with designation and powers of an advisory or operating commission, operation of an historic preservation grants program, and making specific decisions better left to the planning process.

In his testimony, Ridenour said:

At the request of certain Members of the Michigan Congressional delegation and with funding assistance from local interests, the National Park Service initiated a study of alternatives in January, 1990 to provide Congress and the Administration information about the es-

tablishment of a national historical park on the Keweenaw Peninsula in northern Michigan. Earlier, in August, 1989, the Calumet and Quincy districts on which this legislation focuses were found to possess national significance in illustrating the development of the U.S. copper mining industry from the mid-1800's through the early 1900's.

The study of alternatives revealed evidence of not only the early mining industry of this area but the ethnographic conglomerate that resulted from the influx of immigrant laborers and their families from western and central Europe. S. 1664 seeks to celebrate this rich heritage through the establishment of a unit of the National Park System. We want to join in that effort; however we have serious concerns about how that should be accomplished.

Based on the legislative record and his own testimony, it strains credulity when Ridenour writes that he believes this park went right over his head and was moved to park status before going through the proper steps. Perhaps this is the key phrase in the passages quoted. It seems the entire process—a basic knowledge of the operations of the USNPS, the studies, the proposed bills, his own testimony of record—truly did simply go over his head.

In December 1994 the author sent Ridenour a letter detailing this allegedly wrongful depiction of the creation of Keweenaw National Historical Park. In a letter dated December 15, Ridenour responded to this criticism:

I will argue that my book is not grossly inaccurate as you describe. You are looking at the issue from your point of view and not from the vantage point I had in Washington.

No, I don't confuse the National Register with the National Historic Landmarks program. You may not know that I was a State Historic Preservation Officer for 8 years so I know the difference. I admit, as I re-read that paragraph it is confusing. My intention was to say that a site does not necessarily qualify as a park site by being on the national register or the historic landmarks list.

I don't back away from that statement. I believed it then and I believe it now. In fact, a major fight erupted over the National Natural Landmarks program when private landowners became concerned that gaining landmark status was the first step to having their lands taken away from them to become national park sites.

That is a dangerous jump to a conclusion. Fortunately, so far, it has only destroyed the natural landmarks program but I wouldn't be surprised to see it spread to the historical landmarks program.

You fairly accurately depict the "public" process that we went through with the Keweenaw site. What you don't know is what went on behind the scenes.

To this I can testify personally. The NPS was not supporting the addition of Keweenaw to the system. The support for this project was coming from above our level—probably the credit must go to Mr. Davis and some deal he had cut with O.M.B. [the Office of Management and Budget].

I questioned how the item got in our budget as we hadn't asked for it. My supposition is that it was put in by the O.M.B., for what reason I do not know....

Something was traded for something—that has been the congressional way and that is what gave birth to Keweenaw. I testified as a member of the ad-

ministration—not on my own beliefs or the professional opinion of many park professionals who advised me.

Actually, Keweenaw is not nearly so bad a project as others I could name. I thought I was pretty kind in my remarks to the area. The people are super and there is lots of enthusiasm but that doesn't make the area a national park site.

We were scrambling to try to find a way to make Congressman Davis and his constituents happy without having the area become a park site. There was some thought that gaining the landmark status might be enough but it obviously wasn't. I still believe that the local enthusiasm for the area is built on tourism and economic development which they hope park status will bring. That is not a good enough reason for me to support it. I don't object to that. I just object to paying for it....

As it is, Keweenaw will get more publicity than it ever received before—and that is what many of the area leaders are hoping for.

Ridenour's comments seem to clarify his belief that the Keweenaw proposal had a strong political "air" to it. If he had merely stated these opinions in his book, he would have accurately portrayed his recollections and personal beliefs and the issue would be closed. However, he chose instead to say that Keweenaw "was moved along to national park status before going through the proper authorization channels in Congress." That is a false statement. In a climate of fiscal constraint and "park closure" efforts, such a false statement can have very damaging effects. Thus, this detailed rebuttal has been prepared in an attempt to set the record straight.

Some minor, additional points. The story of copper mining in the

Keweenaw is one that goes back more than 7,000 years. There really is no village named Quincy. There are several scattered mining housing areas within that unit of the park. The Quincy unit concentrates on the process and technology of mining, with the Quincy Smelter and the Quincy #2 Steam Hoist and associated buildings. There were numerous mine shafts. Quincy #2 went down over 9,000 feet, well beyond the 600-foot depth Ridenour relates. The village of Calumet and its environs portray the social impacts of the mining heritage, corporate paternalism, labor-management interactions, the rich ethnic heritage of the area and much more. Together, these two units, combined with a dozen Cooperating Sites spanning over 100 miles of the Keweenaw Peninsula, tell a number of stories which are important to the heritage of all Americans. They make a first-rate unit of the National Park System. This park is a prototype for national parks of the new century. Through an extensive partnership effort, key resources will be protected and managed to portray a true living landscape. The role of the National Park Service is that of a skilled partner, not the driver of some sort of money wagon.

It is also appropriate to comment on Ridenour's oft-repeated criticism of Keweenaw and other new units of the National Park System as "thinning of the blood." America's great National Park System has continued to grow and diversify over the nearly century and a quarter since the creation of Yellowstone. His argument equates newness with insignificance, believing that new units suck off the resources desperately needed to operate older units.

Each unit of our Park System was once "new." And each new crop of parks has sparked criticism inside and outside the Service similar to Ridenour's "thinning of the blood" argument. The designation of the first National Monuments, in the

early years of this century, prompted criticism from the old line, "real parks." The addition of historic sites and battlefields prompted heated criticism about diluting the true mission of the Service. The addition of the great eastern National Parks—Acadia, Shenandoah and Isle Royale—prompted the same criticism. The addition of the National Seashores and Lakeshores triggered the same old complaints. Would the System be better if it had stayed as limited as it was at the close of the nineteenth century? We have a good procedure for assuring the integrity and worth of new units of the System. Yes, that procedure has occasionally been circumvented. However, Keweenaw National Historical Park went through all the steps of that procedure—it is an important, proper unit of America's National Park System.

Ridenour has joined others in recent years in decrying the pariah-like taint of economic stimulus in USNPS activities. Now, more than ever, we must never lose sight of the fact that there is no guarantee of permanence for the protection of

the national parks. There is nothing in the Constitution which says national parks are forever, despite the brash, misguided beliefs of some folks inside and outside the Park Service. For the national parks to be preserved into the indefinite future we, their stewards, must constantly strive to assure that the national parks are important to the people who pay for them. The economic value of the national parks thus becomes critical to their very preservation. There is nothing evil in acknowledging this basic fact of life. Especially in the area of cultural resource management, finding ways to have heritage preservation make money for people is finding ways to assure that those resources are preserved for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

One of Ridenour's predecessors, Newton Drury, once asked rhetorically, to the effect, "Are we as a nation so poor we cannot afford to protect these national treasures? Are we as a nation so rich we can afford not to?" I commend these questions to your careful deliberation.

(Ed. note: William O. Fink, the superintendent of Keweenaw National Historical Park, is writing here in his capacity as a private citizen.)

