Drummond Island

Off the eastern end of Michigan's upper peninsula lies the “Gem of Lake Huron”, Drummond Island. Any destination can be described as “unique” but, this hidden treasure really can be designated as a unique paradise. Even the short list is impressive: 150 miles of shoreline, 30 bays and coves, 34 inland lakes (ooh fishing), 100 miles of ORV trails comprising one of the largest closed loop trail systems for off road - ATV / ORV exploration in the U.S., 70 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, more than a dozen shipwrecks, 58 neighboring islands, a lighthouse and a ferry ride.

Beyond the short list there are the championship golf courses, loads of hiking and birding trails, there is even one called the Rainbow Trail. The Maxton Plains are home to a rare alvar formation, perhaps the largest in the world and then, there are the fossil ledges. On top of all this, the Harbor Island National Wildlife Refuge is just across the way.

The history of the island goes back centuries and is preserved at the Historical Museum. Unusual shops, great places to eat and a whole range of lodging choices combine to ensure that this is a 3 Day Michigan Getaway that will have you coming back from season to season.

Day -1- Ferry Ride – The ride to the island affords a great view of the DeTour Reef Lighthouse which marks the mouth of the St. Mary's River. The lighthouse was originally constructed in the 1800's and is available for tours. Plan your visit to the lighthouse while you wander the downtown shops, visit the Historical Museum, enjoy the rare wildflowers and gasp at one of the amazing sunsets for which the island is famous. The Historical Museum has exhibits of indian artifacts dating back to 200 B.C. It also maintains extensive exhibits devoted to the Finnish colony that thrived during the homesteading and lumbering era. In addition, there are geological oddities, historical maps, photos of early settlers, cemetery lists and more.

Day - 2 – Unique Places – This island has a few natural wonders that are found in few other places anywhere. - Fossil Ledges – Maxton Plains – Blue Heron Heronry

Rock hounds and collectors will want to take the time to visit the Fossil Ledges. You will need specific directions to get to the ledges. They are north and east of the Four Corners in the same general direction as the Maxton Plains. From the Interpretive Signs for the Maxton Plains to the Ledges involves about 45 minutes of travel. After crossing a swamp and traveling an old two track, one reaches the parking area. Now all that is left is a very short hike to the shoreline.
The beach is easily walk-able for about a mile. There is a large limestone outcropping near the trail where there are several orange salt water fossils. Picking up the broken stones along the shoreline will reveal all kinds plant and animal fossils, all salt water species. The lake is beautiful here but remember that it drops off to a depth of more than 60 feet. Many varieties of wildlife can be found on the drive to the ledges and back. Some folks have even reported spotting a bear or two.

Another very rare natural feature on Drummond Island is an area called the Maxton Plains. This flatland area is a unique grassland, called an alvar. Alvars are extremely rare plant communities existing on limestone bedrock. Alvars are only found in parts of Canada, the United States and Sweden. These plains are grasslands growing on very thin soil consisting of bulrush sedge and ragwort, prairie dropseed, prairie smoke, and Indian paintbrush. There are even fields of Prairie Smoke sprouting up through the cracks in the rocks. The Maxton Plains on Drummond Island are some of the largest remaining in North America at about 2 miles by 4 miles. The interpretive signs will enrich the experience.

There are several islands out in the bay. If you boat out to Cedar Island there is a Blue Heron Heronry high in the trees on the north side. Here the Blue Herons gather to breed in the spring and early summer. This is quite a ways from the mainland so keep alert for changing weather conditions.

**Day - 3 – Nature Day – Rainbow Trail – Harbor Island – Bird Watching**

Getting to the natural wonders on and around the island can be accomplished on a hike, skiing, a kayak or canoe and even sailing. Here are three favorites from among the variety of nature areas to enjoy. A few yards south of the intersection of Maxton Cross Road and Maxton Road is the trailhead for the Rainbow Trail. The trail is about five miles long with a number of loops that afford shorter hikes. It goes through stands of trees over mostly even or gently rolling ground. That makes it excellent for cross country skiing in the winter. The most unusual feature of this trail is the frequency of rainbows, hence the name.

The Harbor Island National Wildlife Refuge is northwest of Drummond Island in Potagannissing Bay. This island truly is a pristine wilderness as it has never been timbered or dredged. At nearly 700 acres in size there are several distinct ecosystems and there are old-growth stands of trees to admire. There is a large marsh that runs around the main harbor and on the east side across from Bald Island there is a rare stand of mature White Pines. Harbor Island is open for day use only, no fires and no camping.

No matter how you get around the island, this is a bird watchers paradise. The forests and shorelines are home to several species of woodpeckers, the ruby-throated
hummingbird, lots of finch species, sparrows, blackbirds, crows, ravens, owls, hawks, osprey and eagles as well as several kinds of water birds. With more than a dozen distinct ecosystems, this list is just the beginning of the bird species that visit the island or make it their home. Expect to find raptors, herons, flickers, warblers, thrushes, vireos singing their beautiful songs, and flycatchers.

**Winter Fun** – If you snowmobile you can come directly out to the island to explore the miles of trails. Cross country skiing and snow shoe hiking are favorite activities on the trails that crisscross the island. For those arriving by car or snowmobile, a 32-vehicle car ferry, the Drummond Islander IV operates throughout the winter months via a channel that is kept open.

**Along The Way** – Two other special activities are available. There are more than a dozen shipwrecks to explore, including the *Mystery Shipwreck*. There is a vessel is sitting nearly upright in 50 feet of water. It appears to be a barge and is more than 60 feet long. The identity and history of the wreck unknown. With all of this natural splendor, Drummond Island has become a favorite destination for a Fall Color Getaway. The unique habitat and ecosystems produce such fantastic color that the island has an annual *Fall Color Festival*.

**Getting There** - The ferry departs at least once every hour, year round.

**Back Roads Lodging** – Choices range from cabins, B&B's to Golf Resorts. Visit the Tourism Association to check availability.