

## 5 NATURAL HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

*Walking or bicycle, 1 to 2 1/2 hours*

The natural history of Mackinac Island has attracted visitors for hundreds of years. Unusual limestone formations, caves, scenic vistas overlooking Lakes Huron and Michigan, natural forests of pine, cedar, spruce, maple and oak brightened by clumps of trillium, lady slippers, asters and forget-me-nots are largely undisturbed by modernity. Mackinac's first visitors, the Indians, found spiritual inspiration for their legends in its physical attractions. Many visitors agree with English writer Helen Martineau, who exclaimed in 1836 that the island was "the wildest and tenderest little piece of beauty that I have yet seen on God's earth."

### VISITOR'S CENTER TO TOP OF FORT HILL

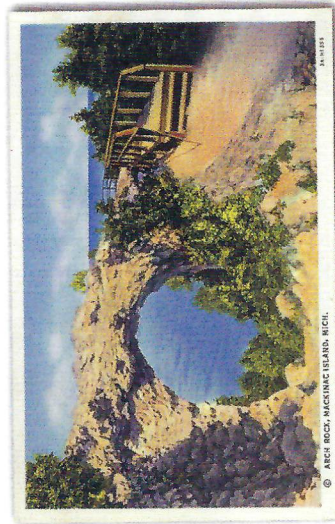
Walk up Fort Street from the Visitor's Center to the top of the hill. **Marquette Park** is on the right and **Trinity Church** is on the left (see Tours 3 and 4). Further up the hill is a good view of the Grand Hotel golf course, which in the nineteenth century was the village pasture for cows and horses. At the top of the hill is the state-owned **Governor's Summer Residence**, constructed in 1902 as a private summer cottage. The residence is open to the public for guided tours from 9:30 a.m.- 11:30 a.m. on Wednesdays during the summer. Turn right. You are now on Huron Road at the top of the bluff, and the traveling gets easier.

### TO ARCH ROCK VIA THE EAST BLUFF

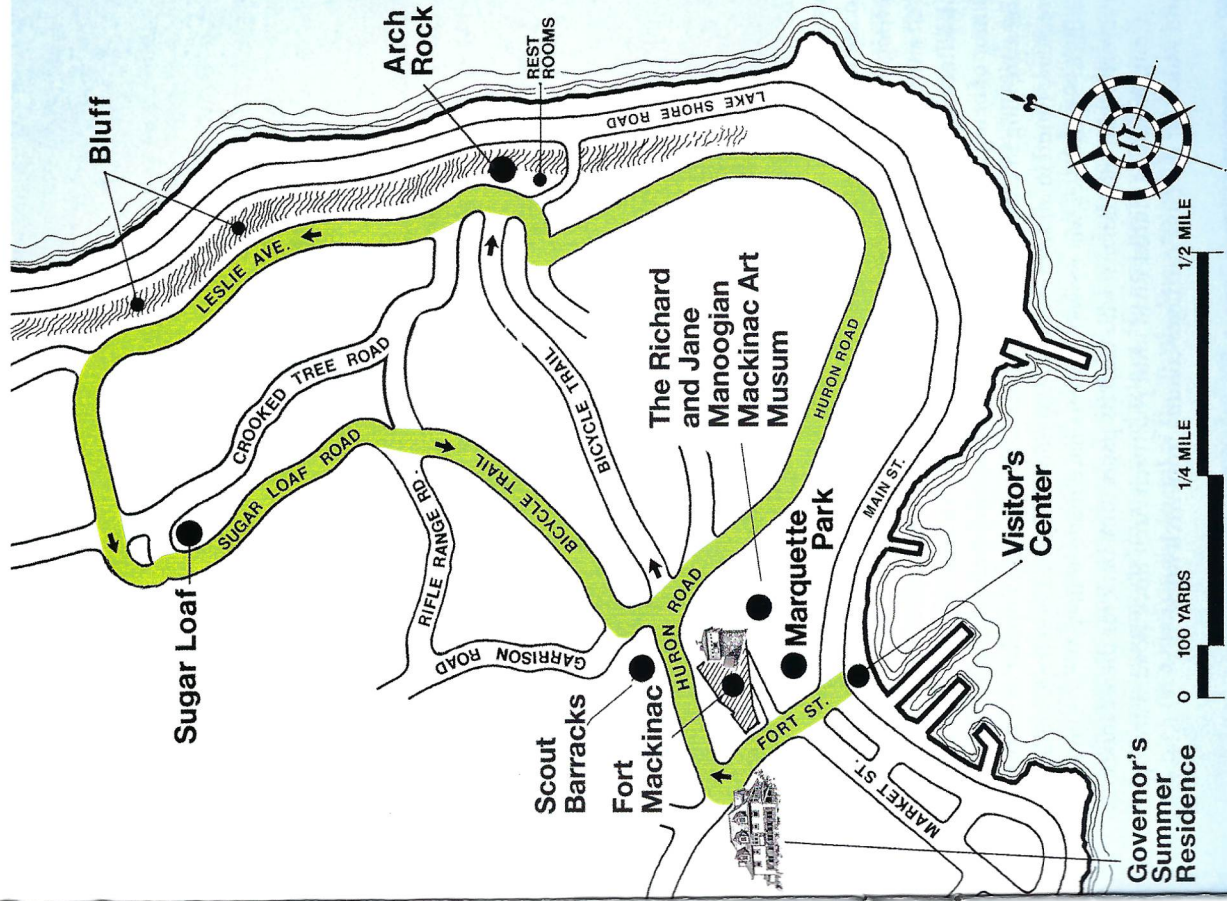
On the right is Fort Mackinac (*Historical Marker*) with an entrance at the Avenue of Flags (See Tour 1.) To the left are State Park service buildings.

Beyond the open field is the **Scout Barracks** (see Tour 6) and the beginning of the paved bicycle and pedestrian path for a direct route to Arch Rock.

Our tour continues by bearing to the right and continuing on Huron Road to the East Bluff. At the top of the hill you will see **Cass Monument**, a large bronze memorial which recalls the distinguished career of Lewis Cass who served as governor of Michigan Territory, U.S. Secretary of War, Secretary of State and U.S. Senator from Michigan.



To the left of the monument is a set of stairs leading to the village and a dirt path which leads to **Anne's Tablet**. This attractive memorial to the novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson was erected in 1916 in a lovely shaded area on the brow of the bluff overlooking the town and harbor. Woolson summered on Mackinac Island beginning in 1855 and several of her fictional works, including the novel *Anne*, were set on the island.





As you travel down the East Bluff you will see a row of large summer cottages reflecting a variety of Victorian styles. Most of the cottages were built during a brief 15-year flurry of construction between 1885 and 1900. Use extreme caution riding down this hill. To the right you will see the town, harbor and Straits of Mackinac. The small island across from Mackinac is Round Island which is uninhabited and part of Hiawatha National Forest. On the far northwestern point you will see the Round Island Lighthouse which was built in 1895 to safely guide ships through this narrow, dangerous passage. It served as a guiding beacon until 1948 when the Coast Guard constructed the modern red and white light.

Abandoned and buffeted by the elements, the Round Island Lighthouse nearly collapsed in the early 1970s. Preservation efforts saved the lighthouse and it remains one of the Straits of Mackinac's best known landmarks.

At the top of Mission Hill bear to the left, staying on Huron Road, which will lead you past the rest of the East Bluff cottages and into the forest towards Arch Rock.

Most island trees were cut for firewood during the early military period, so the stands of today date from the late nineteenth century. In this part of the forest, white cedar dominates, although spruce and white and red pine are also found. The forest is left in a natural state. You have the opportunity to see what happens as dead and dying trees provide humus for younger and stronger plants. You do not have to be a forester to enjoy the variety of trees. Tall and stately white pines are limbless for the first ten feet and have clusters of delicate needles. They provide the best construction wood and have the honor of being Michigan's state tree. The tall, thin, straight, flat-needled trees growing in clusters are white cedars. Spruce, long popular as Christmas trees, are found in all sizes. Some of the smooth-barked beech are riddled with fist-sized holes where woodpeckers have made homes. White birch was a favorite with the Indians, who used its paper-thin bark for their canoes.

Continue along Huron Road until you reach Arch Rock Road. Turn right and watch for the large carriages coming from Arch Rock.



## ARCH ROCK

Rising 146 feet above the water, Arch Rock is a natural curiosity which spans fifty feet at its widest point. Geologists explain that the arch was formed over thousands of years by wind and water eroding soft rock below, leaving only the hard breccia rock which forms the arch.

An Indian legend tells a different story of how Arch Rock was formed. A long time ago, a beautiful young Indian woman named Ne-daw-niss (She-who-walks-like-the-mist), while gathering wild rice, met a handsome young man who was the son of a sky spirit. They fell in love, but she was forbidden to marry the non-mortal by her cruel father. He beat her and tied her on a rock high on a bluff on the Island of the Turtle. She wept softly for her lover.

A recent study of photographs taken in the past century reveals that the arch has changed very little.

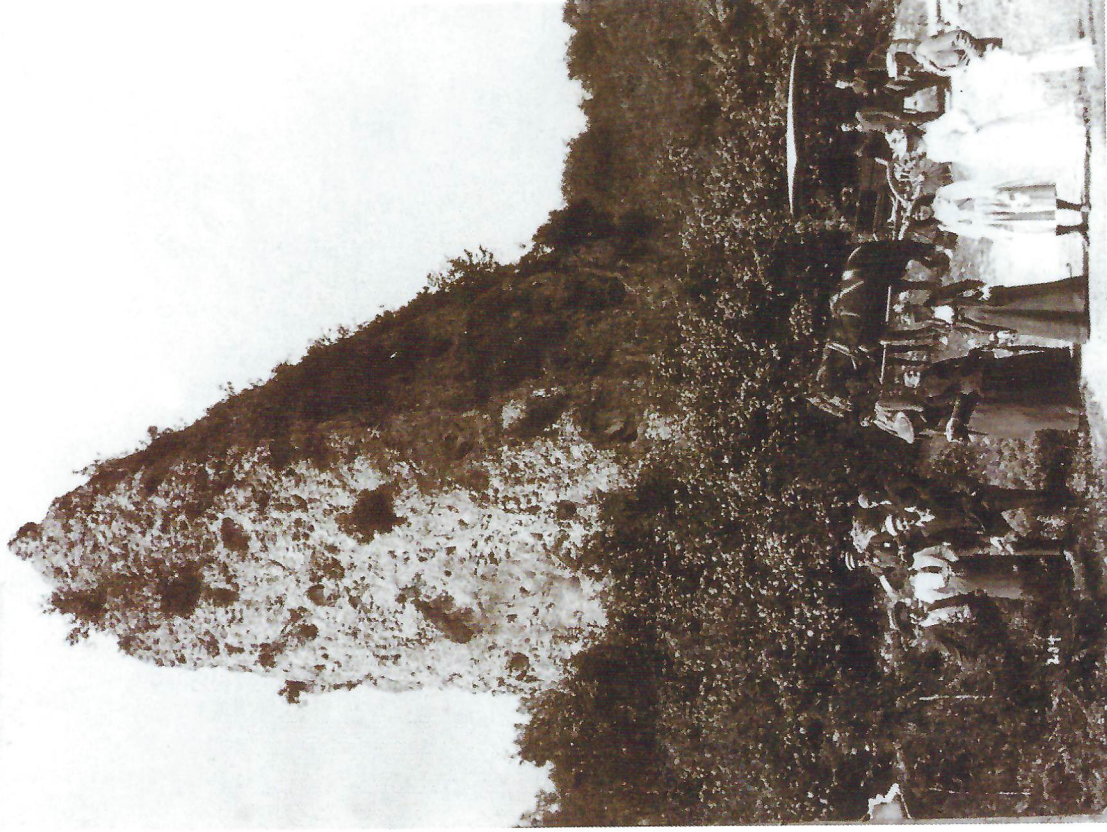
As you approach Arch Rock use extreme caution as the path is very steep. Public **restrooms** are near the viewing area. To the right is Spring Trail, which leads to the shore and the base of the Arch.

### TO SUGAR LOAF

Take the bicycle trail north of the Arch Rock circle. The path goes north along the bluff for about ½ mile and then doubles back to Sugar Loaf. Vistas cut through the trees enable you to see Lake Huron and, if the day is clear, all the way to the Les Cheneaux Islands fifteen miles away. Ore boats are either up-bound empty to Sault Ste. Marie and Lake Superior, or downbound loaded with iron ore for lower Lake Michigan and steel mills.

Sugar Loaf is another famous natural formation. The dramatic breccia mass rises 75 feet above the ground and is the largest of Mackinac Island's many limestone stacks. Centuries ago a huge lake that geologists call Lake Algonquin covered all but the center of Mackinac Island, Sugar Loaf was then a small, eroding island cut off from the surrounding land area. When the water receded, the stack was left standing as a tower of rock. Indian legends abound concerning Sugar Loaf. One claims the rock was filled with honey and was the home of Manibozo, the Great Spirit.

The trail joins Sugar Loaf Road to return to the junction of Garrison Road near the Scout Barracks.



*Sugar Loaf Rock, ca. 1895*

Tears flowing down the bluff washed away the stone and formed the arch. In time the young man returned, untied her and took her in his arms. Together they returned to the home of his sky people.

It is not surprising that the earliest accounts we have from Mackinac Island visitors mention Arch Rock, and many speculate on its formation and permanence. J.A. Van Fleet wrote a history of the island in 1874, stating that the fragile arch "cannot for a long period resist the action of rain and frost."

